

Super Bowl Ads Go Epic

MAE ANDERSON, The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Super Bowl ads this year morphed into mini soap operas.

Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson shrugged off aliens so he could get more milk for his kids in a Super Bowl spot for the Milk Processor Education Program. Anheuser-Busch's commercial told the story of a baby Clydesdale growing up and returning to his owner for a heartfelt hug years later. And a Jeep ad portrayed the trials and triumphs of families waiting for their return of family members.

The reason for all the drama off the field? With 30-second spots going for as much as \$4 million and more than 111 million viewers expected to tune in, marketers are constantly looking for ways to make their ads stand out. And it's increasingly difficult to captivate viewers with short-form plots involving babies, celebrities, sex and humor — unless there's a compelling story attached.

"A lot of advertisers are running long commercials to tell these stories that engage people often in a very emotional way," said Tim Calkins, clinical professor of marketing at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern. "These spots that tell stories really stand out in the clutter."

TEAR-JERKING MINI EPICS

Chrysler started the long-format commercial trend last year, with a two-minute spot starring Clint Eastwood that became very popular.

This year, Chrysler led the trend again with its two-minute salute to troops and their families. The ad featured Oprah Winfrey reading a letter from the Jeep brand to encourage families to stay hopeful.

Wendy Ochoa, a high school teacher who lives in Novi, Mich., said the ad was very emotional. "It tugs on your heartstrings," Ochoa, 44, said. "How can it not?"

Anheuser-Busch also pulled at heartstrings with a spot about a baby Clydesdale growing up and moving away from his farm and his trainer. Years later, the horse remembered the trainer after returning for a parade. He raced down a street to hug him.

"The Budweiser commercial with the Clydesdale made me cry," said Wendy Ponzo, 49, who was watching the game in Pont Pleasant, N.J.

USER-INSPIRED TALES

Lincoln's 90-second ad was inspired by tweets by fans about road trips. The company asked people to send their stories, and Jimmy Fallon, host of NBC's "Late

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Night with Jimmy Fallon," decided on which tales would be used.

The ad, which was based on more than 6,000 tweets from fans, shows adventures during a fictional road trip. A woman picks up a German hitchhiker, and they go to an alpaca farm, get stopped by turtles crossing the road, and drive through a movie set.

Rap pioneer Joseph "Rev Run" Simmons and Wil Wheaton, who acted in "Star Trek: The Next Generation," made cameos in the spot.

Coca-Cola created an ad based on an online campaign that pit three groups — a troupe of showgirls, biker style badlanders and cowboys — against each other in a race through a desert for a Coke.

Starting Jan. 23 and continuing through the end of the Super Bowl, viewers voted online for their favorite group. The group with the most votes — the showgirls — were revealed when the Super Bowl ended.

Audi also went with an ad that told a story — and was inspired by viewers. The company's 60-second ad featured an ending that was voted on by viewers prior to the game.

In the ad, a boy gains confidence from driving his father's Audi to the prom, kisses the prom queen once he arrives at the dance and gets decked by the prom king. In the end, he drives back home with a smile on his face.

The Audi mini-epic was a favorite of Super Bowl viewer Stephanie Bice, 39, a business development director in Oklahoma City.

"It was fun and whimsical," Bice said.

COMEDY GOES LONG

Not all of the storytelling ads were dramatic, though.

Samsung's two-minute ad showed Seth Rogen ("The Guilt Trip") and Paul Rudd ("Role Models") getting called in to do a "Next Big Thing" ad for Samsung. But they're agitated once they realize that they're sharing the spotlight. LeBron James, an NBA basketball player for the Miami Heat, makes a cameo, appearing on the screen of a tablet.

The ad won over some fans in the ad world.

"I could watch the Samsung ad over and over again," said David Berkowitz, vice president at digital marketing agency 360i. "It's as good as any Seth Rogen movie."

Budweiser, a long-time Super Bowl advertiser, also told a continuing story in two of its ads. One showed rival 49ers and Ravens fans each creating a voodoo doll for the other team with the help of R&B legend Stevie Wonder. In the other ad, fans go to

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great lengths to curse a rival fan's "lucky chair."

"It's only weird if it doesn't work," the words in the ad read.

Mercedes-Benz's 90-second ad had a Faustian plot.

A devilish Willem Dafoe ("Spider-Man") shows a man everything that comes with a Mercedes-Benz CLX: A date with supermodel Kate Upton, dancing with Usher, driving around with beautiful girls, getting on the cover of magazines including Vanity Fair and GQ, getting to drive on a racetrack.

The man almost signs his soul away for the car. But then he sees a billboard that says the car starts at \$29,900, and doesn't sign.

NOT EVERY AD TELLS A STORY

Although many advertisers tried to pull people in with lengthy story lines, there were a few that stuck with short, quirky spots with no particular plot.

GoDaddy.com's ad was one of them. It showed a close up, extended kiss between supermodel Bar Refaeli and a nerdy guy wearing glasses to illustrate GoDaddy's combo of "sexy" and "smart."

Some viewers thought the ad was too explicit for the Super Bowl.

"I don't care who wins the game. I just don't want to see that commercial again, ever," said Stephen G. Smith, 63, an editor at The Washington Times in Washington, D.C.

Stephanie Malone from DeKalb, Ill., agreed: "GoDaddy should be ashamed."

Striking a less controversial note, Best Buy's 30-second ad in the first quarter starred Amy Poehler, of NBC's "Parks and Recreation," asking a Best Buy employee endless questions about electronics.

"Will this one read '50 Shades of Grey' to me in a sexy voice?" Poehler asks about an e-book reader. Then, when the staffer says no she asks, "Will you?"

M&M's spot showed its red spokescharacter singing Meatloaf's "I Would Do Anything For Love," and wooing beautiful women. But the M&M stopped short when the women try to eat him.

And Oreo's ad featured a showdown in a library between people fighting over whether the cookie or the cream is the best part of the cookie. The punch-line? The fight escalates into thrown chairs and other destruction, but because the fight is in a library, everyone still has to whisper.

The ad directed users to follow Oreo on Instagram photo-sharing site, where they could continue the "cookie vs. cream" debate. Meanwhile, Oreo was quick to

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capitalize on the blackout that hit the game for about 30 minutes in the third quarter. It tweeted a picture of an Oreo in the half-dark with the words: "You can still dunk in the dark."

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