Super Bowl advertisers seek buzz on social media

Yinka Adegoke, Reuters

In the age of Twitter and Facebook, many Super Bowl viewers will use the commercial breaks to go online and see what people are saying about the game. This year, advertisers want them to tweet about their favorite commercials as well.

Having spent record-breaking sums to secure the most valuable television slots in advertising, global brands from Coca-Cola to Volkwagen are looking to leverage social media to extend the buzz and reach of their ads.

According to executives from Comcast Corp's NBC television network, which will broadcast the February 5 football game, a 30-second commercial slot cost $3.5 million on average this year, up from $3 million for last year's Super Bowl, which was on News Corp's Fox station.

"The social media conversation has put more value on a Super Bowl ad, fans will discuss your ads on Twitter and Facebook and then go to YouTube to watch it on demand over and over again," said Brad Adgate, senior vice president of research at Horizon Media.

This year's Super Bowl will take place in Indianapolis, with the New York Giants and New England Patriots battling it out for the National Football League Championship. An expected 100 million people will watch the game, which is among a dwindling number of TV programs that still draw big live audiences.

NFL games are so valuable to advertisers that the league recently secured hefty pay increases that will bring in about $6 billion a year from Walt Disney Co's ESPN, broadcast networks and satellite TV provider DirecTV for rights to air games and sell the advertising time.

The average price of Super Bowl ads have risen more than 50 percent in the last 10 years, defying economic downturns and secular industry issues. NBC sold out all 70 spots around this year's game shortly after Thanksgiving weekend in November and reached a new high with one slot selling for around $4 million.

The game, including lower priced halftime slots, could easily generate over a quarter of a billion dollars in ad sales.

"The overall demand for Super Bowl spots is very high this year," said Tim Calkins, marketing professor at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management. "Prices are high. Demand is high. I think that's a very positive sign for the economy."

Consumer research forecasts that 60 percent of fans watching the Super Bowl will also be tied into a second screen such as a smartphone or tablet.

COKE Vs PEPSI ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Anheuser-Busch, which typically buys exclusivity as the only beer advertiser during recent Super Bowls, is again the biggest spender, according to industry sources.

Not unlike past Super Bowls, Coca Cola Co and PepsiCo Inc will face-off for soda supremacy. Both beverage makers have come up with campaigns that attempt to leverage social media after their commercials air.

Coca-Cola's TV commercials, which will air during the first-and second-quarter breaks, will center around its computer-generated Arctic polar bears watching the game. The bears will then be brought to life on Twitter, Facebook and on a dedicated Website doing such things as responding to fans and commenting on the game. They will even have their own Twitter hashtag --#GameDayPolarBears -- for fans to follow.

"We wanted to interact with consumers in the most simple and organic way so they would have nothing to do other than what they usually do," said Pio Schunker, Coca Cola senior vice president of integrated marketing platforms.

Fans who catch Pepsi's commercial with "X Factor USA" winner Melanie Amaro performing the Otis Redding song "Respect" will be able to download a free video of the performance by using the Shazam app on their phones to capture audio from the commercial.

There are also partnerships with online radio service Pandora Media Inc and social TV specialist GetGlue centered around the game and other free content.

"Our philosophy now is nothing happens in isolation," said Shiv Singh, global head of digital for Pepsico Beverages. "Social TV is a massive phenomenon and a critical element of our Super Bowl campaigns."

AUTOS SPEND BIG AGAIN

The biggest spender by category is the autos industry, which made a big comeback last year and was noted for one of the most memorable spots -- Volkswagen AG's ad with a young child dressed in a Darth Vader outfit believing he can control the Passat car's lights.

This year, Volkswagen's Audi is hoping to win more creative kudos with a spot that taps into the "Twilight" teen vampire pop culture phenomenon. The 60-second spot, which will air during the first break in the game, will highlight the new 2013 Audi S7 and its LED headlight technology, which has unfortunate consequences for a party of young vampires.

Audi hopes to continue the conversation about the ad via the Twitter hashtag #SoLongVampires.

NBC executives say the auto makers are leading a trend toward long-form

campaigns of 60 seconds or more, allowing high-end creative concepts to be fleshed out in the commercial's narrative rather than just going for a quick gag and punchline.

Chrysler Group LLC, Toyota Motor Co, Honda Motor Co Ltd, Hyundai Motor Co, and other automakers will also be advertising during the game.

General Motors Co's mainstream Chevy brand will run seven TV commercials before, during and after the game, for instance. It will also center its overall campaign heavily around Web-based partnerships with NBC, Twitter and Facebook.

SOCIAL MEDIA HELPS SELL

With the conventional wisdom being that consumers are more likely to make a purchase if recommended by a friend or family member, chief marketing officers are keen to insert themselves in a Facebook or Twitter conversation about the products and services they sell.

Bluefin Labs, a start-up company that aggregates and analyzes TV viewer data and comments on Twitter and Facebook, has been hired by several advertising agencies with Super Bowl campaigns to help understand how football fans react to the commercials during the game.

"Advertisers don't think about the TV campaign alone anymore but as a way to reach eyeballs and then stimulate conversations about their brands," said Bluefin executive Tom Thai.

While advertisers are eager to experiment with social media during a big-ticket event like the Super Bowl, there are still questions on how they measure its impact with a consistent, industry-accepted method, said Alex Iskold, founder of GetGlue, which lets TV fans share their viewing experiences by 'checking-in' in exchange for online rewards.

"Social TV engagement hasn't been fully priced yet," Iskold said. "We are collectively working to figure out the value to the advertisers. "It took years for the traditional display ad model to solidify; I don't think it will take us that long to price social TV."

(Reporting By Yinka Adegoke in New York,; additional reporting by Lisa Richwine in Los Angeles,; editing by Peter Lauria)

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