Super Bowl LVI: The Tease Progresses on the Multicultural Ad Front

The road to Superbowl LVI was quite the tease, the adrenaline-packed game delivered. The Rams and Bengals with equal season points, high-powered offenses, and NFLs best quarterbacks vs. man and zone coverage was a very good tease. Like the playoff games, the Superbowl came down to the wire and ironically turned into a defensive battle packed with emotion. Aaron Donald and Von Miller shut down the Bengals drive, while Stafford and Kupp's tenacious last dance got the win at the very end. That's as good as a tease gets. Anticipation and expectations for the Superbowl ads were an equal tease with records in spend, $6.5M ad cost, projected viewership, pre-game brand teaser ads and social buzz, coupled with demand for authenticity, and the DEI and Census spotlight on Multiculturals.

Superbowl is the ultimate tease for brands, the opportunity to reach 100M Americans, and challenge to get it right to a diverse audience, 45M Multiculturals and 55M Whites. Multiculturals' impact has forever changed America to a diverse, heterogeneous consumer base with varied needs, demands, tastes, and cultural lens in play. 80% of Blacks and 69% of Hispanics are NFL fans, now higher than Whites (66%). It is increasingly important for brands to resonate across diverse segments as it impacts brand perceptions, affinity, and sales, and showcase meaningful representation on a global scale. With that lens as a multicultural marketer, my Superbowl ads critique will undoubtedly be different from the mainstream trades. (And that is no tease.)

2021 reference: Despite diversity still lacking, brands were keenly conscious of Multicultural appeal and consideration in the heat of Covid and social justice. Last year's overriding brand themes of unity, family, community, inspiration, moments of joy, hope and connection made the ads deeper, more inclusive, and resonant – as they underscored those values that Multiculturals always prioritize, and also touched consumers universally.

2022 verdict: A real tease with strong Black inclusion yet lacking in depth and breadth. If diversity ads are evaluated by BIPOC blended casting, POC pairings, or celebrities that happen to be African American, then 40% of the ads did that. If effectiveness is finding a truth or situation transcending ethnicity, then 10% succeeded. If diversity means meaningful ads that reflect our multi-cultural complexity and grounded in human insight, then it was 1%. Perhaps that's due to the lack of minority or women ad agencies and directors in the big game, which might lead to broader inclusion and more authentic perspectives for the people.

Brands teased us with a celebratory spirit and digital acuity spot-on for Superbowl and near-end Covid, cross both the mainstay and tech, e-commerce, and crypto newcomers. The usual suspects included automotive, retail, QSR, telecom, CPG, and beverages. Brands like Bud Light, Coke and Little Caesars came back, as did a flock of newcomers like Vroom, FTX, Crypto.com, eToro, UberEats, Squarespace, DraftKings, Carvana, Wallbox, Vrbo, Rakuten, Greenlight, Meta, and Caesars Sportsbook. This befits our digital lives, experiential technologies, and our people, purpose, sharing and contactless economy with conscious convenience. And these newcomers appeal to

Multiculturals, who lead all digital trends, the wave of digital creators, shopstreaming, and the use of crypto, NFTs and the Metaverse.

Brands took star power to the next level with celebrity pairs, 3D action, humor and IRL. They leveraged wit, banter, off-the-wall situations, weddings, singing, dancing, and AR/VR for people to escape home isolation, get out in nature or travel, and push beyond boundaries. The innovation winners go to Avocados from Mexico's 3D 'House of Goodness' with QR code e-commerce links, and FTX's FOMO-fueled bitcoin giveaway. Greenlight's app empowered parents to raise financially-smart kids, Wallbox and Alexa reassured us there's nothing to be afraid of – smart in uncertain times. Some brands opted to just participate on the digital front, like State Farm's TikTok challenge, Miller Lite's metaverse bar, and Snoop Dogg's gin line IG Superbowl ticket sweepstakes. And we forgive Pepsi's cheesy, overtly promotional 'Road to the Superbowl' with the Manning's and football greats because, hey it's the NFL and Pepsi.

Anthemic empowering ads and bigger family, unity, and community messages were less than desired, but the brands who did it were great. While most automotive focused on tech and sustainability (BMW, Nissan, GM, Kia), Toyota inspired us with 'belief in mobility for all', highlighting two brothers challenging journey to victory. Vrbo's 'A Place for Together' stressed family time, Cox connected us with hugs, and Bud Light Next with zero carbs touted zero in the way of possibility. Google's Pixel 6's 'Real tone tech' had diversity at its core with Lizzo's vocals advocating 'Everyone deserves to be seen as they truly are'. Bud was my personal favorite with the injured Clydesdale's dog pal and savior underscoring 'In the home of the brave, down never means out'. I felt it personified people's journeys in our country the past few years evoking themes of strength, resilience, and optimism. And I love dogs.

Black representation was strong, so no longer a tease, but not yet fully authentic. These ads included Jerod Mayo and Hellman's mayo tackling food waste, Idris Elba (Booking.com), Ice T (Cheerios), Lizzo (Google), Megan Thee Stallion (Frito Lay's Flaming Hot), Rashida Jones with people named Jones (Toyota), Kevin Hart (Sam's Club's), and Dennis Rodman (Planet Fitness). The winner ads: Uber Eats ads including Trevor Noah hilariously punctuated all that you can now order for delivery – 'even if you can't eat it', Snoop Dogg and Martha Stewart's brilliant pairing for Bic, and Hologic's ad with Mary Blige showed the importance of self-care, a powerful insight particularly for women, of any race or color.

The worst tease was the under-representation of Hispanics and Asians, especially with Superbowl in LA where the majority is Multicultural and over 50% Hispanic. Hispanics featured included Zendaya who 'shills Squarespace by the seashore', the family in Cox 'hugs', Salma Hayek as Hara to Arnold's Zeus for BMW, Danny Trejo in Planet Fitness, and the star couple in "Pringles Stuck In" ad which had inherent diversity as a mainstream and Hispanic agency collaboration. Asian representation was feeble, Ken Jeong paired with Joel McHale inspired me for insightful banter in #Plantersallorone, while Dave Bautista helped turn Nissan into a comedic action movie trailer that was a yawn.

Vroom's 'Flake the Musical', albeit average, brought its reliability benefit to life with a diverse cast dancing in the streets shot in LA. Michelob Ultra's star line-up included Serena Williams, Jimmy Butler and Nneka Ogwumike. It also featured World Cup

champion, Alex Morgan but really, any Hispanic soccer champion was the obvious more inclusive choice. Pepsi's LA hip-hop legends half-time show was action-packed and commendably showed diversity even in ability with two deaf rappers. However, it would have become brilliant if they added a Snoop Dogg and Mexican BandaMS collaboration, Bad Bunny and/or other top Latin hip-hop artists.

While some hit the mark, others failed to resonate across cultures, with many over-ridden by celebrities, tech effects, and that mainstream cheekiness and guffaw. Ads with universal appeal: Crypto.com 'Fortune favors the brave' with Matt Damon, T-Mobile's 'Do it for the phones' with Dolly and Miley, Scarlett and Colin (Alexa), AT&T Fiber's 'GIGzillionaires' with Mila and Demi, Zac Efron's AR adventure, and Bud Light Seltzer's Land of Loud Flavors (if you like Guy Fieri). Besides the aforementioned ads, many ads lacked nuanced insights for diverse appeal in situations, humor, references, or context. And many celebrities, pairings and casts just did not translate in relevance to Multiculturals. It's all in the way the ads come to life that determines its authenticity and relatability. And many celebrity ads blurred together without strong inherent brand linkage, and If I wasn't writing this article, I'd be remiss to remember.

Our cultural lens affects values, preferences, the ways we process ideas, information, situations, humor, influencers, and respond to brands. Each segment's access to unique cultural media, people, experiences, codes, and references sets them apart. This impacts their identity, family tenets, needs, purchase triggers, and inflection points. Knowledge-based strategies weigh all the diverse consumers' factors and identify the differences that matter to drive that segment's affinity, sales, and loyalty – as well as find universal insights and context that resonate and impact across segments for the Superbowl stage. Or even showcase ethnic stories that underscore how diversity brings us all to richest definition of who Americans are.

I look forward to when brands go beyond box-checking to bar-setting where Multiculturals are properly understood, represented, portrayed, and marketed to in a manner that delivers an authentic, meaningful connection. **The day when the perennial Multicultural tease actually becomes the real thing. And the game is the only tease.**