# Scoring Touchdowns with Super Bowl Advertising – The Impact of Uniqueness and Consistency on Buzz

**Alexander Mafael**
Freie Universität Berlin
**Sascha Raithel**
Freie Universität Berlin
**Charles Taylor**
Villanova University
**David Stewart**
Loyola Marymount University

Cite as:
Mafael Alexander, Raithel Sascha, Taylor Charles, Stewart David (2019), Scoring Touchdowns with Super Bowl Advertising – The Impact of Uniqueness and Consistency on Buzz. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 48th, (8552)

Paper presented at the 48th Annual EMAC Conference, Hamburg, May 24-27, 2019.

# Scoring Touchdowns with Super Bowl Advertising

# –

# The Impact of Uniqueness and Consistency on Buzz


## Abstract

Researchers and practitioners direct much attention at ads that "go viral" and generate buzz for brands. Research suggests two factors to stimulate buzz with advertising: uniqueness and consistency of the advertising content. This study examines the separate and joined effects of both attributes on brand buzz empirically using unique observational data. By categorizing 566 Super Bowl ads from 2008-2017 on 31 executional content cues, we can compute similarity scores to measure uniqueness and consistency for each advertising brand. For a subset of 118 observations, we obtain data on brand buzz before and after the Super Bowl event. This research provides evidence that judging uniqueness and consistency requires the consideration of the ad's position within a group of other ads that consumers view concurrently and over time. We show that balancing uniqueness and consistency in a dynamic advertising environment is difficult to achieve but paramount for generating consumer buzz.



## Keywords

*advertising uniqueness, advertising consistency, consumer buzz*

## Track

*Advertising and Marketing Communications*

## 1. Introduction

Building word-of mouth via interpersonal communication is a common objective of advertising. Consistent with this trend, much attention is directed at ads that "go viral" on social media and generate buzz for the advertising brand. In this research, we investigate the ability of advertising to stimulate brand buzz. Research suggests two routes to stimulate buzz with content. First, content that creates interest because it deviates from other content, i.e. unique content (Akpinar & Berger 2017). Second, content that accesses existing associations, i.e. consistent content (Berger & Schwartz 2011). We study the separate and joint impact of these different content strategies in the context of Super Bowl advertising. In particular, we examine whether uniqueness, consistency, or a combination of both has a greater impact on subsequent brand buzz. On the one hand, the belief that unique ads that 'stand out from the crowd' are paramount to achieving success is often stated (Forbes 2017) and the concept of uniqueness has generated considerable interest in academic research. However, a systematic understanding of the impact of uniqueness on an ad's effectiveness is lacking (Sasser & Koslow 2008). On the other hand, the brand building literature suggests that content for a given brand should not strive for uniqueness, but rather be consistent with consumer expectations to be accessible (e.g., Keller). Recent research in advertising supports this argument, as consumers are more likely to relate to an ad when the content cues in the ad correspond with their concept of the brand (Becker, Wiegand & Reinartz 2018). Based on these perspectives it seems plausible that uniqueness and consistency may both contribute to consumer buzz.

We examine this question empirically in a quantitative study of ten years of Super Bowl ads. Our empirical approach is three-fold. First, we categorize 566 Super Bowl ads from 2008-2017 on a variety of executional content cues. Second, we use this database to compute uniqueness and consistency scores. Finally, we model the relationship between these measures and the changes of brand buzz in the days following the Super Bowl using data on consumer buzz from a large-scale daily brand perception panel. This research contributes to the literature in four ways. First, at a theoretical level, we explore two important components of advertising: uniqueness and consistency. Our second contribution relates to the development of an empirical method to identify similarities between ads. Third, we provide evidence that judging uniqueness and consistency requires the consideration of the ad's position within a group of other ads that consumers view concurrently. Fourth, our results have implications for managers. This study

provides deep insight into the degree to which developing an ad that is unique from other ads increases buzz. We show that balancing uniqueness and consistency in advertising content is difficult but key for generating consumer buzz.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### *2.1. Advertising and Consumer Buzz*

Buzz refers to the positive and negative ways in which consumers discuss content with others and captures consumers' engagement with an information element (Luo & Zhang 2013). Buzz does not require actual product experience and often arises because of contact with brand or product information that has generated consumer interest. Buzz encompasses purchase-related and non-purchase related information, corresponds with increased awareness, and may result in further information search about the brand. Buzz therefore serves as a means to amplify marketing efforts (Karniouchina 2011). There is widespread agreement that buzz generated via advertising is an important driver of many purchase decisions, and, as a result, it is a common goal for advertisers to design content that creates buzz (Akpinar & Berger 2017). Due to the unique attention directed towards Super Bowl ads, this event is an effective platform to generate buzz (Siefert et al. 2009). However, not all brands manage to create buzz with Super Bowl ads, despite the large financial investment. Indeed, the ability of the ad to generate buzz may be a deciding factor in whether a Super Bowl provides sufficient return on investment. While the link between generating buzz around an ad and the positive impact on firm- or customer-level outcomes has received some attention (Klapper & Hartmann 2017), less is known about what firms can do to generate buzz. More specifically, when do ads during such major advertising events create more buzz? We draw on two streams of literature to develop our conceptual framework. First, we turn to the literature on advertising creativity to identify the impact of uniqueness on buzz. Second, we discuss the brand building literature to highlight the role of consistency.

### *2.2. Uniqueness of Advertising Content*

In the industry press, uniqueness is a principle heralded as a major source for advertising buzz. Standing out from the crowd and delivering ads that make an impression on viewers is important for both the advertising brands, as well as the agencies who develop the ads. Not

surprisingly, industry awards recognize ads that display novelty and originality. In spite of this popular wisdom, relatively little research evidence is available in terms of how important it is for an ad to be unique compared to other ads. The advertising literature recognizes uniqueness as a key dimension of advertising creativity (Sasser & Koslow 2008). Uniqueness refers to the divergence, i.e., the extent to which an ad contains elements that are novel, different from other ads, or unusual (Yang & Smith, 2009). Hence, in order to be unique, an ad has to diverge from established schemas. Research on divergence shows that high levels of divergence will lead to significantly more attention (Smith & Yang 2004), partly because such ads trigger cognitive processing (Yang & Smith 2009). Research using physiological attention measures corroborate these effects. For example, Pieters, Warlop and Wedel (2002) document that unique ads draw more attention to the advertised brand. In sum, while most of the research on the role of uniqueness in ads shows that it has a positive impact on prerequisites of buzz such as awareness or attention, how uniqueness actually translates onto consumer buzz is unclear. Moreover, the current body of research focuses on subjective measurements of divergence that are costly to extend to larger samples of ads. However, when studying the relative effects of uniqueness, i.e., how one ad differs from another, it is necessary to analyze uniqueness relative to a large set of ads. This is particularly relevant because advertising is prone to follow trends (Zinkhan & Watson 1996) and advertisers may quickly adapt to what is unique.

### *2.3. Consistency of Advertising Content*

Most of the branding literature argues that constructing a coherent narrative about the brand ensures a strong and favorable brand image (e.g., Madhavaram et al. 2005). The congruence of brand associations, i.e., the degree to which different attributes share similar meaning and content, affects how easily this association is recalled and how easily additional associations are linked to the brand in the consumer's mind (Keller 1993). Therefore, any new brand message that is consistent in meaning with existing beliefs about the brand should assimilate more easily. Marketing actions, such as advertising, are an important instrument to create, maintain, and expand brand image. For example, establishing a consistent advertising slogan or jingle generates strong brand associations. Such associations create a precise brand image and position the brand (Yalch 1991). Brands often rely on advertising to create consistent brand associations through repeated use of executional cues that consumers can identify as authentic to the brand (Becker et al. 2018). Thus, consistent use of content cues is important because strong associations between

certain cues and the advertised brand render brand information as more accessible (Berger & Schwartz 2011). Consumers may therefore be more likely to recall an ad for a brand that they associate with the content cues used in the ad and more likely to talk about the ad.

*2.3. Conceptual Framework*

Uniqueness and consistency both seem likely to stimulate consumer buzz for the following reasons. Unique ads diverge from other ads by using content cues that stand out. For example, consider E*Trade's use of babies in their ads. E*Trade is an investment platform that allows consumers to make investments through a navigable platform. The use of babies that posed as traders introduced a new content cue that consumers had not seen before. Further, no other brand used a similar cue to market their products accordingly. As a result, consumers may develop interest in the ad and might be more likely to share the ad with others (Berger & Schwartz 2011) ($H_1$). However, diverging from what consumers already know about E*Trade might have created confusion and interferences with existing brand associations. Budweiser's consistent use of different dogs as part of their commercials has led to a strong association of this content cue with the brand. Activating these associations repeatedly may therefore increase the likelihood that consumers will talk about the ad because it is more accessible than other ads ($H_2$).

However, being unique and consistent do not preclude each other. While using talking babies was a novel content cue when E*Trade introduced the ad in 2008, the consistent use of this cue over time helped E*Trade build its brand. Similarly, when Budweiser introduced a Labrador in a series of commercials, the use of this content cue was unique relative to other ads aired during Super Bowl XLVIII. However, the brand had used dogs in their ads before. Evidently, predicting the interactive effect between uniqueness and consistency is more complex. It may be beneficial for a brand to stand out from other ads but it may also be beneficial for the same brand to stay consistent in their use of content cues when they design a new ad. This suggests a temporary component. Specifically, uniqueness compared to ads aired in the same program is more likely to increase consumer buzz. Over time, consistency will become more relevant, such that ads that use content cues that are consistent with their prior ads will receive more buzz. This suggests a delicate balance: Brands should strive to create ads that are unique in their use of content cues, but stay consistent over time ($H_3$). See figure 1 for a summary of our conceptual framework.

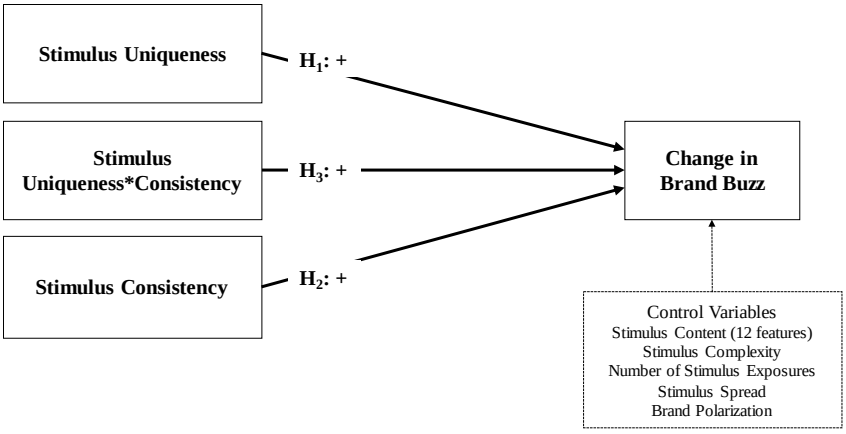


*Figure 1. Conceptual framework*

## 3. Empirical Study

### *3.1. Super Bowl advertising*

Few advertising venues capture public attention like the Super Bowl. Indeed, Super Bowl advertising has become as much of a media event as the game itself. In 2018, the average audience viewing the game was more than 103 million, accounting for more than 170 million social media hits and advertising spending is close to $385 million yearly (Forbes 2018). The Super Bowl therefore provides a useful context in which to examine the effects of major event advertising for three reasons. First, it is a discrete advertising event, which enables better identification of effects as compared to longer-running campaigns and events. Second, compared to regular advertising, viewers pay close attention to individual ads, making it indicative of the buzz a brand can generate. Third, it involves variation of brands over time, which enables comparisons across brands and years.

### *3.2. Data*

*Brand Buzz.* To capture buzz, we use the brand buzz indicator from YouGov's BrandIndex (e.g., Hewett et al. 2016). YouGov monitors consumer perceptions of more than 1,000 brands by surveying a representative daily sample of 5,000 people from a panel of 1,500,000 U.S. consumers. The brand buzz measure is an aggregate index calculated as the percentage of respondents who heard or saw something positive or negative about a brand in the past two weeks and ranges between -1 and 1. To measure the impact of Super Bowl ads on Brand Buzz, we calculate ΔBrandBuzz as the difference of the average five-day post-Superbowl$_{\text{BrandBuzz}}$ [t+1;

t+5] and the average five-day pre-Superbowl$_{\text{BrandBuzz}}$ [t-5; t-1] .

*Uniqueness and consistency.* We compile advertising data on all Super Bowl ads from 2008 to 2017. The database included 566 ads that took place during the regular in-game commercial breaks and the half-time show. We excluded all ads from the National Football League, as well as movie and video game ads. Two coders watched all ads and coded different content and executional cues using an established coding scheme for TV ads (Stewart & Furse 1986). For all content cues, we calculated intercoder reliabilities using percentage agreement and Cohen's kappa. Agreement between both coders was substantial, with Kappa values between 0.6 and 0.9. We transformed the content data into 31 binary variables (e.g., principal actor is male, principal actor is female, music is major element, sexual appeal, humorous appeal) and calculated similarity scores for each ad. To measure *consistency*, we calculated for each year, the (average) similarity score between a brand's ad(s) and all prior year ad(s) of the same brand, given the brand had an ad in the prior year. We measure *uniqueness* twice*:* we calculated for each year, the (average) similarity score (multiplied by -1) between (1) a brand's ad(s) and all same year ads of all other brands and (2) a brand's ad(s) and all prior year ads of all other brands. Since different measures for similarity calculation exist, we applied 18 different measures[1] and combined these similarity measures into a composite score (alpha>.9, AVE>80%).

*Control variables*. We use 16 variables to control for the content features, ad complexity (number of content features in an ad), ad exposure (# of ads of a brand in a year), ad spread (TV rating), and pre-exposure brand polarization. Since the data has a panel structure, we include brand fixed effects to control for unobserved within brand heterogeneity.

*Matching*. We identify 36 brands that advertised in consecutive years and for which buzz data is available. Several of the brands advertised repeatedly which leads to a sample of N = 118.

### *3.3. Model*

We estimate these relationships using the following panel regression model:

$$\Delta Brand\ Buzz_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot Uniqueness\ (vs.same\ year)_{it} + \beta_2 \cdot Uniqueness\ (vs.prior\ year)_{it} + \beta_3 \cdot Consistency_{it} + \beta_4 \cdot Uniquenss * Consistency + (\mathbf{Controls}_{it}) \cdot \boldsymbol{\gamma} + \mu_i + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

To avoid multicollinearity, we estimate separate interaction models for *uniqueness (same*

[1] e.g., Russel & Rao, Yule's Q. Due to space restrictions, we do not detail our similarity calculation approach here. Further information on this approach is available from the authors.

*year)* × *consistency* and *uniqueness (prior year)* × *consistency*. Cluster-robust standard errors adjust for heteroscedasticity and within brand serial correlation.

## 4. Results and Discussion

| | *(Exp. sign)* | ***Change in Buzz (post- minus pre-exposure)*** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Main Effects*** | | **(1)** | **(2)** | **(3)** | **(4)** |
| *Stimulus Uniqueness (vs. same year)* | H1 (+) | | -.003 (.003) | -.004 (.003) | -.003 (.003) |
| *Stimulus Uniqueness (vs. prior year)* | H1 (+) | | .008** (.003) | .008** (.004) | .008** (.003) |
| *Stimulus Consistency* | H2 (+) | | .005*** (.001) | .006*** (.001) | .006*** (.001) |
| ***Interaction Effects*** | | | | | |
| *Stimulus Consistency*Uniqueness (vs. same year)* | H3 (+) | | | .001** (.000) | |
| *Stimulus Consistency*Uniqueness (vs. prior year)* | H3 (+) | | | | .001** (.000) |
| ***Control variables*** | | | | | |
| *C01_ProminencePrimeActorFemale* | | .006 (.014) | -.003 (.014) | .004 (.017) | .000 (.015) |
| *C02_ProminenceChild* | | .002 (.023) | -.020 (.023) | -.017 (.023) | -.017 (.022) |
| *C03_ProminenceMinority* | | .003 (.013) | -.003 (.015) | -.006 (.015) | -.005 (.015) |
| *C04_ProminenceCelebrity* | | .007 (.020) | -.003 (.027) | .003 (.025) | -.002 (.025) |
| *C05_ProminenceAnimal* | | -.019 (.017) | -.015 (.022) | -.014 (.020) | -.017 (.020) |
| *C06_SexualAppeal* | | -.104*** (.026) | -.153*** (.038) | -.169*** (.037) | -.167*** (.035) |
| *C07_HumorousAppeal* | | -.009 (.021) | -.014 (.023) | -.011 (.021) | -.010 (.021) |
| *C08_ProminenceMusic* | | -.023 (.019) | -.028 (.024) | -.025 (.022) | -.026 (.023) |
| *C09_ProminenceEmotionalMessage* | | .027 (.016) | .056** (.021) | .049** (.020) | .051** (.020) |
| *C10_BrandDiffMessage* | | .017 (.026) | .037 (.026) | .040* (.022) | .042* (.024) |
| *C11_ProminenceProduct* | | .002 (.012) | .001 (.011) | .007 (.012) | .003 (.012) |
| *C12_ProminenceCSR* | | -.009 (.009) | -.026** (.012) | -.027** (.012) | -.026* (.013) |
| *Stimulus Complexity (# of features)* | | .001 (.012) | .010 (.016) | .007 (.017) | .009 (.016) |
| *Number of Stimulus Exposures (# of ads)* | | .017* (.009) | .018* (.010) | .016* (.008) | .017* (.009) |
| *Stimulus Spread (TV Rating)* | | -.006 (.005) | -.003 (.004) | -.002 (.004) | -.002 (.004) |
| *Pre-Exposure Brand Polarization* | | -.006 (.007) | -.007 (.008) | -.004 (.008) | -.005 (.007) |
| *Intercept* | | .048 (.033) | .047 (.037) | .048 (.036) | .049 (.035) |
| *Brand fixed effects* | | YES | YES | YES | YES |
| **Model fit** | | | | | |
| within-$R^2$ | | .197 | .315 | .351 | .341 |
| adjusted within-$R^2$ | | .070 | .183 | .218 | .205 |
| F-test (p-value) | | 20.472 (.000) | 44.677 (.000) | 82.323 (.000) | 50.906 (.000) |
| N | | 118 | 118 | 118 | 118 |

Notes: *** p < .01 ** p < .05 * p < .10 (cluster-robust standard errors in parenthesis)

Table 1. Results for change in brand buzz

Table 1 shows the results. Model (1) without *uniqueness* and *consistency* explains about 19.7% of within-brand variation of the change in *Brand Buzz*. Model (2) with *Uniqueness* and *Consistency* explains 31.5% of the variation, which represents a considerable increase in explanatory power. Models (3) and (4) include the interaction terms and explain 35.1% and 34.1% of variation respectively. Surprisingly, the two *uniqueness* measures have different effects: the effect of *uniqueness (vs. prior year ads)* is positive ($\beta$ =.008, p < .05) whereas the effect of *uniqueness (vs. same year ads)* is not significant (p > .10). *Consistency* has a positive effect on *Brand Buzz* ($\beta$ =.005, respectively .006, p < .01). The magnitude of this effect is about one third smaller compared to *uniqueness (vs. prior year ads)*. The interactions provide a consistent picture. The effect of *uniqueness* × *consistency* is positive ($\beta$=.001, p < .05). Figure 2 illustrates

the interaction effects of *uniqueness* × *consistency*. Generally, the best performing ads show high *uniqueness* and high *consistency* scores. The interaction plots provide much more nuanced insights when the brand is not able to score high on both dimensions. For *uniqueness (vs. prior year ads)*× *consistency* (right chart), the strong positive effect of consistency (dashed line) is mitigated if prior year *uniqueness* is low (solid line). For *uniqueness (vs. same year ads)*× *consistency* (left chart), the positive effect of *consistency* (dashed line) is reversed if the prior year *uniqueness* is low (solid line). While the combination of high *Uniqueness (vs. same year ads)* and low *consistency* is a harmful combination, brands can increase *Brand Buzz* even when *consistency* is low when the ad's *uniqueness* is also low.

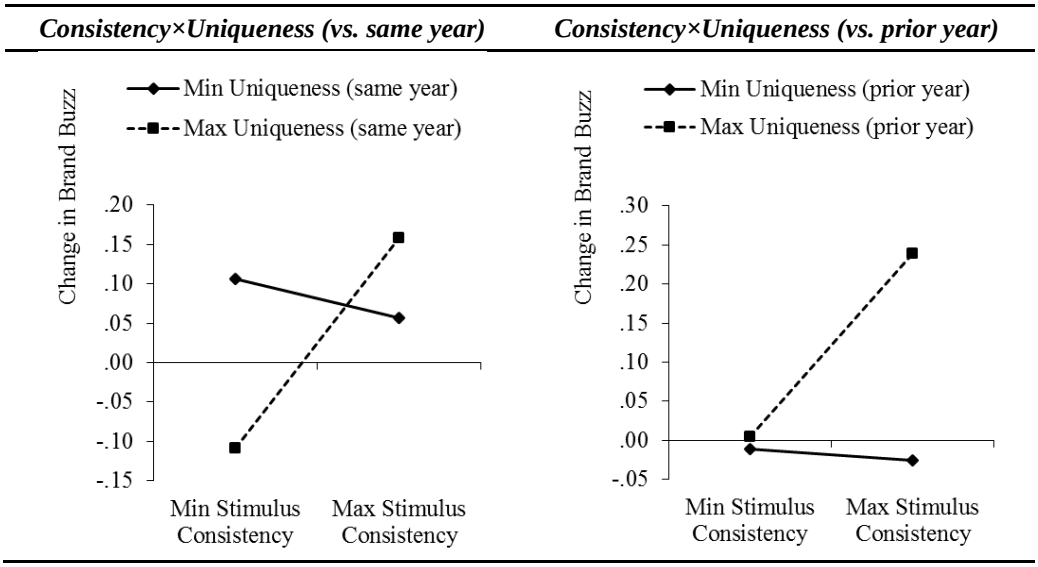


*Figure 2. Interaction plots for change in brand buzz*

In practice, managers must deal with tradeoffs. This implies that our findings reveal some surprising complexity regarding the balance of unique content and consistent brand cues. First, managers can easily observe prior year ads and design their ad for the current year to achieve high uniqueness vs. prior year ads. However, they can only *anticipate* uniqueness vs. same year ads. Second, their decisions are restricted by consistency: although many changes can improve uniqueness vs. prior year ads, any change decreases consistency with previous content cues and counters the uniqueness effect. Third, since managers cannot control their competitors' ads, who might design their ads in a similar way, they are forced to implement changes for the next year to again achieve high uniqueness. As our results show, they must be careful when changing existing content cues and should avoid becoming too inconsistent. Fourth, managers might have

strategically decided to reposition their brands, which goes along with low consistency of the brand message from one year to the next. Our findings show that managers must be careful and should then avoid creating very unique ads. One reason is that high inconsistency and high uniqueness might expose consumers to many new cues, create confusion, and reduce their ability to decode the advertising message in way that it translates onto positive brand buzz. Given the high attention that the Super Bowl event receives in public, our findings and recommendations should provide some empirically informed guidance on the intricate balance between unique ads and consistent branding.

**References**


Akpinar, E., & Berger, J. (2017). Valuable virality. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 54(2).

Becker, M., Wiegand, N., & Reinartz, W. (2018). Does it pay to be real? Understanding authenticity in TV advertising. *Journal of Marketing*, forthcoming.

Berger, J., & Schwartz, E.M. (2011). What drives immediate and ongoing word-of-mouth? *Journal of Marketing Research*, 48(5).

Forbes (2018). The power of Super Bowl advertising. *Forbes Online*, retrieved December 4th, 2018 at https://tinyurl.com/y7xcwv9w

Karniouchina, E. (2011). Impact of star and movie buzz on motion picture distribution and box office revenue. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 28(1).

Keller, K.L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1).

Klapper, D., & Hartmann, W.R. (2017). Super Bowlads. *Marketing Science*, 37(1).

Luo, X., & Zhang, J. (2013). How do consumer buzz and traffic in social media marketing predict the value of the firm? *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 30(2).

Madhavaram, S., Badrinarayanan, V., & McDonald, R.E. (2005). Integrated marketing communications and brand identity as critical components of brand equity strategy. *Journal of Advertising*, 34(4).

Pieters, R., Warlop, L., & Wedel, M. (2002). Breaking through the clutter. *Management Science*, 48(6)

Sasser, S.L., & Koslow, S. (2008). Desperately seeking advertising creatitivity: Engaging an imaginative "3Ps" research agenda. *Journal of Advertising*, 37(4).

Siefert, C.J., Kothuri, R., Jacobs, D.B., Levine, B., Plummer, J., & Marci, C.D. (2009). Winning the Super "Buzz" Bowl. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 49(3).

Smith, R.E., & Yang X. Toward a general theory of creativity in advertising: Examining the role of divergence. *Marketing Theory*, 4(1/2).

Stewart, D.W., & Furse, D.H. (1986). Effective television advertising: A study of 1000 commercials. Lexington, MA:

Yalch, R.F. (1991). Memory in a jingle jungle. Music as mnemonic device in communicating advertising slogans. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 76(2).

Yang, Y., & Smith, R.E. (2009). Beyond attention effects: Modeling the persuasive and emotional effects of advertising creativity. *Marketing Science*, 28(5).