

Not 'super-bowled' over - A stage this big deserves better

By [Eoin Welsh](#), issued by [Havas Johannesburg](#)

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First off, in the spirit of full disclosure, I haven't the first clue how American Football works. To lapse into Americana, I'm more of a "soccer" guy myself. So let me use an appropriate analogy for the advertising aspect of the Super Bowl.

For me, watching the Super Bowl ads is a bit like being an Arsenal fan (which, for better or worse, I am). I start out with positive thoughts of excitement, only to end up underwhelmed. Overall it was much of what I'd come to expect, not so much of what I'd hoped for.

1. Why even bother?

First, there are the ones that don't even try. Your standard run-of-the-mill work that's hard to watch on any day, let alone Super Bowl Sunday. It's really unforgiveable – your brand gets given possibly the biggest stage in the world, walks on, shrugs and then walks off. [Alfa Romeo](#) – car porn? Really? In this era, on this platform? Go park in the corner and think about what you've done.



2. OTT - Over the top

Then there are the ones that try too hard. Desperately trying to be funny, or quirky, or profound and generally failing dismally. Even heavy hitters like [Old Spice](#) and [Skittles](#) didn't hit the heady heights you'd expect (although to be fair, Old Spice's line "Don't Smell Yourself Short" is kind of genius). Others, like Snickers, rely too much on "doing something different" – in their case flying an ad live – which comes across simply as gimmicky.

3. So near, yet so far

Next come the "nearly, but not quite" brigade. John Malkovich for [Squarespace](#) - funny, engaging, well scripted – but let down by over-egging the pudding. Having John Malkovich deal with his domain name being taken, is funny and relevant. Creating an epic back-story involving his new clothing line is needless and overdone.

Ditto to "Illuminati" for [Avocados from Mexico](#). It's beautifully scripted, features great comic performances and as a stand-alone comedy sketch would be great. But as a commercial for avos, it's just all too much. As a friend of mine says, a long walk for a ham sandwich. Or at least an avo one.

4. Precious gems are to be treasured

Happily, there were a few gems among the mass of costume jewellery. And they all had one thing in common – they were topical. They used the biggest ad stage in the world to put forward a powerful, relevant message on where they stand with regard to where the USA, and the world, finds itself right now.

"It's a 10" Haircare used sassy humour, declaring that since the US has four years of bad hair ahead of it, the least its citizens can do is have good hair. [Airbnb](#) made a point about acceptance, [Audi](#) about equal pay for women, and vitally, both in the context of what their brands stand for. [Hyundai](#) threw its support behind the US Armed Forces, not in a patronising or jingoistic way, but by simply doing a nice thing for the troops.

But the bravest of the brave were [Budweiser](#) and [84lumber](#). Through a simple, beautiful film, Budweiser subtly and gently made the point that this most all-American of brands was created by two immigrants. And (for me anyway), best of all was

84lumber, who straight-up took on the issue of Trump's wall in a poignant and powerful story, that literally punches a hole in the wall before it's even built.

These are big all-American brands who have the guts to blatantly challenge their own president through their advertising – a president who was probably supported and voted for by a considerable chunk of their target market.

They stood proudly on the Super Bowl stage – and fully earned the right to be there, with work that lived up to the occasion. Brave work indeed.

And isn't that what we revere and reward in our industry? Here's to more of it in 2018.

All the Super Bowl 2017 adverts can be found [here](#). To stay in touch with us, join the conversation and log on to www.za.havas.com or like our [Facebook](#) page and follow us on [Twitter](#).

ABOUT EOIN WELSH

Born in Dublin, Ireland, and bred in Johannesburg, Eoin began his career writing property brochures. From these humble beginnings he has risen through the ranks to creative director at such esteemed agencies as Draft FCB, King James, Metropolitan Republic, Lowe & Partners (both in South African and Europe) and now is the chief creative officer executive creative director of the Havas Group of Companies in Southern Africa...

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