Do Super Bowl ads change minds?

I only watched the first part of Super Bowl 50, and halfheartedly at that. I am not a football fan, and I had no reason to root for either the Broncos or the Panthers. Also, I wasn't at a Super Bowl party. The only part that I was paying some attention to was the commercials.

I have always been interested in Super Bowl advertising from a professional standpoint, ever since my first job as a media buyer at a now defunct Boston ad agency. While I was there, one of the media directors gave a presentation about why it had been worth it to spend $1 million (this was in the 1990s) to run one 30-second spot for a small, up to then unknown, company:

- He said it increased national **brand recognition** dramatically
- And also, perhaps even more important strategically, made this company **look like a big player**, since the other Super Bowl advertisers are generally well established (well funded) brands such as Budweiser and Coca Cola.

Today, Super Bowl ads cost close to $5 million for each 30-second spot. And then there are the other costs: advertising agency fees, production, talent (and famous talent ain't cheap), which probably tack on another $1-2 million, making it a huge chunk of the company's marketing budget.

Is it worth it?

Clearly, advertisers think Super Bowl advertising is worth it. And since we don't know what their objectives are (brand recognition, sales, image bolstering), it is hard to say whether these are achieved.

(You can check out who the advertisers were on Super Bowl 50 and link to all the spots in this AdAge article Super Bowl 50 Complete Ad Chart.)

In my opinion, one of the best ads of the night was the Bud Light commercial featuring Seth Rogen and Amy Schumer.

It was genuinely clever and funny. And packed a whole lot of celebrity punch. But, are you going to start drinking Bud Light? I bet that if you already drink Bud, perhaps you will feel more secure about your choice. This is called **social proof,** which means that we believe behavior (drinking Bud Light) is cool if other people (Seth Rogen! Amy Schumer!) think it is.

But, on the other hand, if you are like me, you will never, ever, drink Bud Light. No amount of cute or smart or funny commercials are going to make me choose Bud Light the next time I am at a bar, restaurant or liquor store. I just don't like it.

I have a **hardened opinion**, and it is very hard to change this type of view. By the way, the same goes for my opinion of several other big Super Bowl advertisers including Doritos (don't eat them), Taco Bell (just not going there), and Mountain Dew (really, a monkey-baby nightmare?).

But, on issues where people don't have an opinion or don't have enough information, a Super Bowl commercial can really make a difference. Another ad that was not only funny but very effective was this one for the Amazon Echo, featuring Alec Baldwin, Jason Schwartzman, Dan Marino and Missy Elliot:

This introduced a product and also piqued interest. I'd be curious to know how Echo sales do after this, but just based on Twitter, there was a lot of chatter about it (brand

recognition, check!).

In sum, Super Bowl advertising expenditure is somewhat overblown for brands with strong brand recognition but can be worth it for new products or brands.

What do you think? If you watched the Super Bowl, did you focus on the commercials? Did any make you think differently about a product or brand? Let me know in the comments.