

# CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS IN SUPER BOWL ADVERTISING DURING THE PERIOD 2021–2025

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**Abstract:** The Super Bowl is the final game of the American football season, attended live by tens of thousands of fans every year, and is a mega sports event that is arguably similarly as important as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games. Moreover, this event is very significant in terms of the worldwide television audience and boasts the most expensive 30-second ad slots in the advertising realm. While doing an academic literature review about Super Bowl commercials, we noticed that many studies emphasize that celebrity endorsement has a positive impact on ad likeability and therefore, consumers' positive attitude towards the brand. This prompted us to conduct our own research to investigate how many advertisers at the Super Bowl use a celebrity endorsement strategy to differentiate themselves and get the attention of the target audience. The first step of our research involved an in-depth review of all Super Bowl-related media assets from the last five years (found in a database on the site Ads of The World) with the aim of evaluating the celebrity presence. A subsequent statistical analysis helped us calculate the share of ads containing celebrity endorsers in the researched time period (2021-2025). Our results showed that every year, more than half of the Super Bowl ads had some form of celebrity presence, with the highest share being 63.08% in 2024. In the second phase of the research, we sorted all identified celebrities by their vocation and the figures showed that companies most commonly chose athletes, actors, and musicians as their endorsers. These findings reaffirmed that celebrity endorsement is an important strategic element in advertising, thereby opening avenues for future research which could go in three directions: calculating the prevalence of celebrity endorsers by product category; exploring which celebrity vocations consumers see as most credible and influential; and examining how traditional celebrities compare with emerging influencers made famous through digital media.

**Keywords:** Super Bowl, advertising, celebrity endorsement, influencer marketing, media strategy.

**Field:** Social sciences

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary American culture is so closely tied to the Super Bowl that this sporting event consistently holds the title of the most-watched television broadcast in the U.S. (Tomkovick et al., 2001), boasting not only its sky-high ratings but also other impressive statistics. According to Marketing Charts, an industry analytics site that specializes in providing media and advertising related data, the last edition of the Super Bowl, number LIX, held in February 2025 in New Orleans, was seen by over 127 million U.S. viewers and organizers valued their 30 second ad slots at as high as 8 million U.S. dollars (MarketingCharts, 2025).

Such a ludicrous advertising price comes as no surprise given the fact that, as O'Reilly et al. (2008) put it, the Super Bowl is well known for being the main place where new and interesting television ads are first shown to a big audience, a large part of which is drawn to the messages delivered during the breaks as much as to the game itself. Another advantage of the Super Bowl is that it offers advertising companies opportunities to communicate with the audience not just via ads shown during the game, but also through the accompanying fan event, the NFL Experience, television and newspaper ads and many other public relations opportunities (O'Reilly et al., 2008). The Internet offers yet more potential opportunities for connecting brands with possible consumers, as Super Bowl ads, once uploaded to social media and video platforms, can be viewed again and again, extending their reach to a much broader audience as time goes on, an effect that is further amplified by today's widespread use of mobile devices with online access (Kim et al., 2013). The power of the Super Bowl is such that it prompts real time online engagement already during the broadcast itself: 78% of the audience are active on social networks while the game is on and 65% of them tend to engage with brands in that timeframe (Bharadwaj et al., 2020). Given that the Super Bowl is the largest televised media event in the U.S. and a significant cultural touchstone, advertising during its broadcast is believed to have a significantly greater public impact than advertising in different media contexts (Jeong et al., 2024), especially because many of the Super Bowl ads, beyond the aesthetic value, underscore the strong ties between American culture, capitalist values

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and consumerism (Dubinsky, 2023).

Hiring celebrity endorsers is one of the strategies most commonly used by Super Bowl ad creators. Li and Chan (2025) point out that Super Bowl advertisers strategically rely on endorsements by public figures, largely because of the belief that their star power immediately captures the audience's attention. Before we review the existing academic perspectives on this topic, we must look at how researchers have defined the term "celebrity". The very first definition, coined by Friedman & Friedman (1979), explains a celebrity as an individual known to the public for achievements unrelated to the category of product they promote. Building on this, McCracken (1989) expanded this definition by adding that a celebrity, in the context of endorsement, is someone who uses their recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement.

Belch and Belch (1995) emphasized the qualities of celebrities, describing them as people able to share objective information like knowledge, experience, skills and trust. Turner's (2014) definition of a celebrity goes in a whole new direction, describing the term as people who are more famous for their private lives than their work, thus leaving out their personal qualities or achievements.

The author Rojek (2001) goes a step further by identifying three distinct paths to celebrity status: ascribed greatness (inherited, as seen with royalty), achieved renown (earned through talent or skill) and attributed glory (granted by media attention, typical of reality television figures).

Brooks et al. (2021) noticed that existing definitions rarely address where recognition comes from and how individuals build celebrity capital, instead perceiving the celebrity as someone who is already widely recognized, as well as trying to define who counts as a celebrity and who doesn't.

Leveraging star power is a strategy often used by marketing professionals willing to invest millions of dollars annually on endorsements from famous individuals, hoping that their personal likeability will somehow be transferred to the ads they appear on and brands they promote (Li & Chan, 2025). This reasoning is justified as the public tends to perceive celebrities as figures with strong social standing and associates them with qualities like honesty, reliability, kindness, and trustworthiness (Hussain et al., 2020). The term "celebrity trustworthiness" refers to how honest, believable, and sincere a celebrity appears to audiences when endorsing a product. (Hussain et al., 2020)

Overall, perspectives on celebrity hiring seem to take three main approaches. The first asserts that celebrity endorsers have a strong effect on ad likeability and consumer attitudes. The results of an analysis by Wang and Close Scheinbaum (2017) show that when consumers think a celebrity endorser is attractive and trustworthy, it will positively impact their attitude toward the brand, enhance brand credibility, and result in higher purchase intention toward the endorsed product. These findings are backed up by Spry et al. (2011), whose research reveals that celebrity endorsement improves brand recognition and recall, ad effectiveness and also consumer purchase intention and action. The same study also shows that though celebrity endorsers should optimally be individuals who are perceived as having credibility based on their attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise, even someone with less than credible expertise can help the brand grow (Spry et al., 2011). Eisend and Langner (2010) state that the attractiveness of a celebrity primarily enhances immediate attention and initial positive attitudes toward an ad, while their expertise has a stronger influence on sustaining a positive attitude over time. Li & Watanabe (2022) found, precisely in the context of Super Bowl advertising, that ads increase consumers' online search activity for advertised brands, with ad likability playing a key role in driving post-exposure search volume.

The second perspective argues that the celebrity endorser's impact on how positively ads are viewed is either weak or limited and may only occur in conjunction with other factors that may have a simultaneous impact. Yelkur et al. (2013) argue that the celebrity by itself will not increase ad likeability, but if there is useful product information present, the celebrity endorser may contribute to the overall positive effect. However, many other aspects of Super Bowl advertisements serve as better predictors of likeability than celebrities, for instance: humour, length, product category type and presence of animals (Tomkovick et al., 2001). In other words, in cases when the Super Bowl audience is already eager to watch the ads, celebrity endorsers probably don't cause people to like the message any more (Tomkovick et al., 2001).

The third line of thought states that celebrity endorsement has little (if any) impact on ad likeability and interest in the product. Knoll & Matthes (2017) show that celebrity endorsements have no overall effect on the consumers' responses and that they tend to be less effective than other forms of endorsement, such as quality seals and awards.

Celebrity endorsements offer a number of benefits, but they also involve certain disadvantages. For example, when advertisers use celebrities, there is concern that the audience may focus on the celebrity alone and, thus, fail to recognize the brand (Knoll & Matthes, 2017). Another disadvantage is that the celebrity could potentially lose their relevance or become too overexposed to the target audience

(Tomkovick et al., 2001). While some celebrity endorsers can be great for getting attention, they often do little to help establish themselves as credible professionals (Bharadwaj et al., 2020). Another of the often-heard disadvantages, particularly related to the Super Bowl, is that there is still no specific evidence that advertising expenditures provide returns on investment. (Lee & Ko, 2021)

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of our research was to assess Super Bowl advertisers' attitudes toward including celebrity endorsement in their commercials. Thus, we focused on a five-year period from 2021-2025, which is recent enough to capture contemporary advertisers' attitudes and broad enough to allow for meaningful analysis.

The first research phase examined how often advertisers employed celebrity endorsers in their Super Bowl advertisements. This was achieved by methodically reviewing every media asset that aired during the specified period. Our original intent was to use the USA Today's Ad Meter ([www.admeter.usatoday.com](http://www.admeter.usatoday.com)), which has long been a reference point for Super Bowl-related studies, but due to the redesign of the website, which now only gives access to the yearly favourite ads, this source was no longer useful. Hence, we settled on using Ads of the World ([www.adsoftheworld.com](http://www.adsoftheworld.com)) media database that has not been widely used in high-impact academic research studies but has been cited in other relevant papers such as Lapchick & Sanders (2015), Alčaković (2023) and Chandrasekaran et al. (2018).

In total, 258 campaigns matched our timeline and many of them submitted more than one media asset (the main ad plus various teasers and trailers). For every campaign, we reviewed all available content to find out if a celebrity was featured or not. In cases of uncertainty, we used additional methods such as reverse image searching, using facial recognition tools, and checking other credible media sources to verify who was in the ad and whether they were publicly known.

For this research project, the parameters for identifying a celebrity were based on an established and previously mentioned definition: a celebrity endorser is a publicly recognizable name that is already well-known for the achievements unrelated to the product or service they are endorsing. That said, we established additional criteria to ensure more accurate research, thus only counting appearances where the celebrity clearly appeared on screen. Our approach hence excluded celebrity voiceovers, short cameos that were hard to recognize, as well as puppet and cartoon characters with previously gained celebrity status.

In the second phase of the research, the identified celebrities were categorized, based on what they're famous for, to discover possible patterns or preferences among Super Bowl advertising strategists.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of phase 1 of our research were presented in Table 1, showing the total number of ads that aired during each edition of the Super Bowl between 2021 and 2025, as well as the number and percentage of ads featuring celebrity endorsers.

Table 1 - Overview of the Presence of Celebrity Endorsers in Super Bowl Ads (2021–2025)

Year	Total number of campaigns	Number of campaigns featuring celebrity endorsers	Percentage of campaigns featuring celebrity endorsers
2021	51	29	56,86%
2022	30	16	53,33%
2023	48	30	62,50%
2024	65	41	63,08%
2025	64	37	57,81%

Source: Authors research

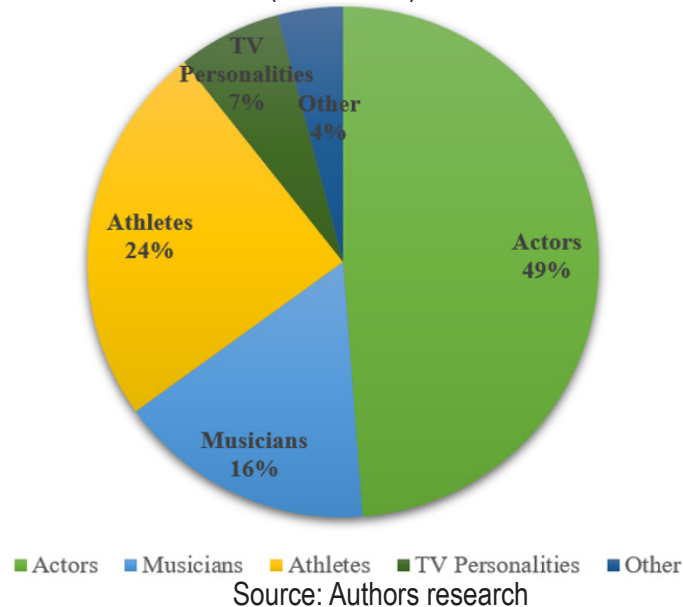
From the figures, it was clear that the percentage of ads featuring celebrities declined between 2021 and 2022, rose between 2022 and 2024, and dropped again between 2024 and 2025. However, the fluctuations were minor, and the overall presence of celebrity endorsers remained consistently high, making up more than half of the ads each year and peaking at 63.08% in 2024.

This result was not surprising considering that the Super Bowl is considered to be a media spectacle whose viewers are always being overstimulated not only by the events on the field and halftime performances but also by a flood of high-end commercials. Advertisers who chose to opt for celebrity endorser strategies clearly believed that they could successfully attract audiences' attention despite

oversaturation with fun advertising content, and potentially also hoped that celebrities' personal credibility could lead to a long-term increase in positive brand perception.

Graph 1 presented a percentage-based classification of celebrity endorsers' occupations in Super Bowl ads from 2021 to 2025, summarizing the results of the second phase of our research.

Graph 1 – Percentage-Based Classification of Celebrity Endorsers' Occupations in Super Bowl Ads (2021–2025)



Across 153 ads that featured public figures, we identified a total of 412 individuals that we classified as celebrity endorsers. Notably, most of them (49%) were actors, a group that consisted of movie or television stars, as well as comedians. Athletes from a variety of sports occupied second place with 24%, and their group also included retired athletes currently active in areas of coaching or commentary. Musicians, regardless of the genre they perform, were grouped together and ranked third in representation (16%). Considerably lower (7%) was the representation of non-acting TV personalities (including reality program stars, hosts, and all other individuals regularly appearing on television). The remaining 4% consisted of other professionals, including activists and content creators.

There are several possible discussion points for this data distribution. First, the Super Bowl is an event that invariably features a very high number of commercials, thus creating a high potential for each individual ad to go wholly unnoticed. Moreover, by using the most universally recognizable celebrities – actors, athletes, and musicians – advertisers clearly tried to stand out and make the public remember their product. Another plausible point could be that the advertisers intended to use globally popular individuals as a way to get attention from the international audience, particularly those living in places where Super Bowl ads can only be accessed online. Also, the great representation of actors might be explained by the fact that they possess the skills to naturally interpret a wide range of scenarios.

This research has several limitations which we recognized throughout the study.

First, our findings were based on media assets located on the Ads of the World website, and if that database did not include everything (in other words, if some ads were missing), the findings might not reflect a fully accurate picture. In our opinion, the likelihood of such variation is negligible, particularly because a substantial number of media assets were examined for each year included in this research.

Secondly, in developing our dataset, we applied clear selection criteria that excluded certain types of celebrity appearances in advertisements, such as brief cameos or voiceovers. Furthermore, our classification of active dual-career celebrities was based on the area in which they were currently more prominent or successful. While we believe this was a reasonable way to ensure consistency, it may have caused some minor distribution biases across occupational categories.

Finally, while we believe we reviewed and classified all relevant media assets with care, the possibility that some celebrities may have been unintentionally omitted as endorsers cannot be fully ruled out.



## 4. CONCLUSIONS

Our research shows that the majority of Super Bowl advertisers firmly believe in the value of celebrity endorsements, as evidenced by a high percentage of ads featuring public figures across the past five editions of the event. Our analysis of ads broadcast from 2021 to 2025 also suggests a clear imbalance in how different celebrity professions are represented in Super Bowl ads, with some being chosen far more frequently.

This research could help generate a number of potential future research opportunities. Scholars could investigate whether celebrity endorsements are more predominant in certain product categories, as well as which celebrity professions consumers see as most credible and impactful. A separate area of research could investigate how traditional celebrities compare to emerging influencers who gained notoriety in digital spaces.

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