Super Bowl ads this year will say: Don't just sit there, tweet something

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For Divya Sukumar, Sunday's Super Bowl is much more about the commercials than it is about the match-up between the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Green Bay Packers.

"I'm not really a big football fan, but I watch the Super Bowl every year for the ads," said Sukumar of Wellington. "It's always interesting to see what the companies come up with and what celebrity endorsements they have."

Every Super Bowl, advertisers roll out their best, most creative commercials to the largest audience of the year. This time, they're asking for something in return; for you to get out of your seat and interact back with them.

Super Bowl XLV advertisers are not stopping at 30- or 60-second spots; they're drumming up interest in their commercials in advance through social media, and are using their big game air time to persuade people to join Facebook groups or play online games.

"This year, a 30-second ad is well north of $3 million," said Jim Riordan, director of the MBA in sports management program at Florida Atlantic University. "Thanks to the advent of twitter and Facebook and other social media, advertisers are getting added value on their commercial expense than just the brief time it's shown during the game."

Advertisers bought up practically all of the commercial time on Fox's broadcast by October this year, spending quickly in hopes of getting their brand out there to the 110 million people expected to tune in Sunday.

But they didn't stop there, extending their big game blitz into social media campaigns that include a car race powered by twitter mentions, online contests and a Facebook promotion that empowers users to "unlock" a Super Bowl commercial by correctly guessing the plot line of other Super Bowl commercials.

"In the Super Bowl, ads are stars in their own rights," said Carey O'Donnell of the O'Donnell Agency in West Palm Beach. "Advertisers are finding out how to really leverage that using social media."
O'Donnell said at least 60 percent of the Super Bowl ads this year will have a social media component to them, at least double to what was seen during last year's big game.

Just as people still remember Marcus Allen's historic run and touchdown in Super Bowl XV, so do people remember commercials such as Apple's "1984" or Budweiser's talking frogs or "Mean" Joe Greene drinking a young fan's Coca-Cola.

But experts say that, while we will still see creative advertisements at the Super Bowl, they won't be the same as some of the classics we remember.

"The whole ad model has changed," O'Donnell said. She said she still vividly remembers Coca Cola's "Mean" Joe Greene commercial, calling it "beautiful" and "emotional," but said that the ad was a one-way conversation with viewers.

"Now... it's not just about the brand talking to you," she said. "This year, ad agencies made giant strides in the use of social media."

Brian Steinberg, television editor at Advertising Age, said he thinks we'll see fewer and fewer Super Bowl ads that "are just beautiful and dazzle you, the way Apple's '1984' ad did."

Instead, he says ads will focus more on a direct response, on triggering the viewer to do something. For instance, Go Daddy's Super Bowl ad has in the past asked viewers to go to the company's website in order to watch the rest of its commercial featuring scantily-clad women.

"It's more of a process than a single burst. It's meant to get people off their butt," Steinberg said. He said he thinks that artistic elements in ads will become "cheaper" and will appeal more to consumers' baser instincts.

Steinberg noted that another trend is that consumers are increasingly able to watch Super Bowl commercials whenever they want, which again gives advertisers more brand exposure.

Regardless, FAU's Riordan said that watching Super Bowl ads during the game will continue to be a major cultural phenomenon.

"The commercials are what makes the Super Bowl so unique and attention-grabbing," Riordan said. "There are watch parties simply for the commercials. People want to watch, because you never know when you could see a commercial that becomes historical."