**[Budweiser Whassup Commercial (1999)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=60&v=ikkg4NobV_w&feature=emb_title)**

An unforgettable commercial, the Budweiser Whassup Ad is one of advertising’s most persuasive ads.

**The Ad**

This ad is quite simple. It features a group of friends talking on the phone. They throw around the catchphrase casually, asking about each other and what they are doing.

It is, however, an ad that one must watch to understand. In a way, it is a simple idea, rendered with great creativity.

**The History Behind It**

This ad first aired during ESPN’s Monday Night Football on December 20, 1999. Interestingly, it was based on a [short film](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXdJq3tkCRI) which made the rounds in the film festival circuit, before being turned into an ad.

It won several prizes, including the Cannes Grand Prix and the Grand Clio. In 2006, it was finally included in the Clio Hall of Fame. It has been extensively parodied in popular culture. August Busch IV, CEO of Anheuser-Busch (producers of Budweiser) [states](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2016/03/31/1999-budweiser-airs-its-wassup-commercial-1999): “In our lifetimes, we’ll never see so much value created from a single idea.”

**Analysis**

The Whassup ad deserves a special place amongst persuasive ads. It exemplifies the need for great copy and particularly for words/slogans that may become memes in themselves. Let us try to explore this further.

Good copy sticks in an audience’s mind. Eventually, such copy may acquire such an effect on the culture that it could rightfully be called a ‘meme’. Vinny [Warren](https://melmagazine.com/en-us/story/budweiser-whassup-commercial-campaign-super-bowl-history), who found the original short film while working at DDB tries to make sense of the ad’s success:

“The other thing that struck me about the phrase was that it is physically pleasing to shout the phrase Whasssssuuuuuup!!! It was cathartic to say it. A little bit of nervous energy leaves your body when you shout it. Much like when you say Borat’s ‘Niiiiice!’ catchphrase. Both are exclamatory and require energy to say. You have to commit.”

Warren is quite right. The word ‘Whassup’ is very much like Borat’s ‘Nice’. There is more that can be articulated here though. It is a great example of terrific copy, for sure, but is also an example of a meme.

**Meme Theory**

Memes are an essential idea and tool worth exploring in advertising. We all know memes, or rather, we think we know. For the most part, we identify memes as the funny little pictures we send each other on Whatsapp. There is a bit more to learn about memes though, and how they may relate to advertising.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary [defines memes](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meme) as “an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture”. Alternatively, it also defines meme as “an amusing or interesting item (such as a captioned picture of video) or genre of items that is spread widely online especially through social media.” Richard Dawkins, who coined the term ‘meme’, [explains](https://www.stadiumtalk.com/s/hilarious-sports-memes-9ffaa3183e064dc6): “Memes (discrete units of knowledge, gossip, jokes and so on) are to culture what genes are to life. Just as biological evolution is driven by the survival of the fittest genes in the gene pool, cultural evolution may be driven by the most successful memes.”

When we talk about a funny grumpy cat picture and call it a ‘meme’, we are correct. There is, however, more to memes than just that. An advertising copywriter should strive to write copy so memorable, that it reaches the cultural impact of a meme. In a sense, good copy should become a meme, just like Budweiser’s “Whassup” or Borat’s “Nice”. This is a good way to achieve persuasive ads that stick in the imagination of the public.