

## SENIORS IN ADVERTISING

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**ABSTRACT.** The complexity of human life has contributed not only to the development of the service sector but also to the more nuanced and refined delineation of the stages of human life. For example, the definition of seniors is determined not only by age, biological, or sociological criteria, but also by psychological aspects and life cycle stage. At the same time, it remains a fact that the discussion, approach, and representation of ageing raises numerous questions, thereby making communication with seniors a real challenge for marketers. The present study examines the role of seniors in advertising in order to gain a better understanding of how such commercials are received and evaluated from the perspective of those who express their opinions.

**Keywords:** advertising, seniors, message, challenges

**JEL classification:** M31, M37

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### Introduction and Review of Literature

According to the literature, most brands target young people as their main segment, since if they succeed in persuading them, the likelihood is greater that they will remain loyal consumers of the brand in later stages of life

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as well. Furthermore, there exists the concept of brand inheritance (Törőcsik, 2006): a phenomenon that likewise represents added value for brands. However, the struggle to win over young consumers can cause brands to overlook other life stages that may also prove profitable (Kotler & Keller, 2006), meaning they could be value-creating segments if addressed with appropriate communication. At the same time, communicating with this age group is difficult, because:

- (1) some seniors have difficulty identifying with their own age and therefore expect models in commercials to be younger than their real age (Duduciuc, 2016a), while
- (2) some senior women want to see models in commercials that represent their actual age (Phillips, 2022), and
- (3) seniors define themselves as “not too old but no longer young” (Rosenthal *et al.*, 2021, 569).

Although some studies argue that:

- the representation of seniors in advertising is underrepresented (Hiemstra *et al.*, 1983; Swayne & Greco, 1987; Prieler *et al.*, 2011; Hofmeister-Tóth & Neulinger, 2021; Eisend, 2022; Prieler, 2024; Ocokoljić, 2024), and even more so with gender: older women appear even less frequently in advertising than men (Lee *et al.*, 2007; Prieler *et al.*, 2017; Simcock & Lynn, 2006),
- seniors often appear only as secondary characters in commercials, usually in domestic settings alongside other generations (Swayne & Greco, 1987; Prieler, 2024),
- television advertising is often not adequately tailored to the perspectives of the “silver age” (Csizmadia *et al.*, 2015),
- perceptions of older people “depend on whether the images in the commercials are positive or negative” (Robinson & Umphrey, 2006, 159),
- it is up to marketers to ensure that the representation of seniors in advertising is not stereotypical (Carrigan & Szmigin, 2000).

The literature also notes significant shifts in the portrayal of seniors in advertising:

- seniors, both women and men, are appearing more frequently in ads, and moreover they are being depicted as happy, active, and physically strong (Sudbury-Riley & Idris, 2016),
- nearly one-third of Super Bowl commercials feature seniors, and these representations are positive (Brooks *et al.*, 2016), and
- a 2016 study (Duduciuc, 2016b) showed that most young people associate the senior stage of life with positive notions such as happiness and health.

Considering the above and the fact that the size and purchasing power of the senior population is becoming increasingly significant (Eisend, 2022), it is necessary to reinterpret advertising communication aimed at elderly consumers (Meiners, 2025). However, the effectiveness of advertising targeting senior citizens depends on whether old age is presented from the perspective of senior citizens (Bourcier-Béquaert *et al.*, 2025), and therefore it is highly justified to involve seniors in every stage of advertising design (Butson & Wright, 2025). Research on the subject has also shown that the frequency of advertisements, the social perception of celebrities appearing in advertisements, and their civic responsibility can be defined as determining factors in the success of advertisements (Chan & Fan, 2022).

Despite the fact that the gradual aging of developed countries (Colombo *et al.*, 2023) would justify more in-depth research on the elderly generation, the number of studies conducted in this area suggests that advertising scholars have lost interest in this topic (Eisend, 2022). At the same time, the Revista Internacional de Comunicación Audiovisual (Castelló-Martínez *et al.*, 2024) and the International Journal of Advertising (Cheah & Ferguson, 2025) have issued calls to researchers that would somewhat compensate for the lack of literature (the current research gap).

## Material and Method(s)

The analysis included commercials that met the following criteria: (1) seniors played the main role, (2) the ads demonstrated national diversity: thus the pillars of the research were represented by one commercial each from Romania, Hungary, and Germany, (2) they represented both the secondary (automotive industry) and various branches of the tertiary sector (trade, communication), (3) they included available viewer comments, (4) either a male or female senior was cast as the main protagonist, (5) no more than 15 months passed between their publication dates.

### 1. Analyzed Commercials

#### **Profi: Noua aplicație Profi e aici! [The new Profi app is here!]**

- ü The content analysis was based on the Profi commercial *Noua aplicație Profi e aici!* [The new Profi app is here!]:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hs5qFfMDgo>
- ü Viewer comments were collected via YouTube as well:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFKAFdnjz8&t=422s>, *Am apărut la TV cu bunica. Cum a fost la filmări?* [I was on TV with Grandmother. How filming has been like?]

- ü The behind-the-scenes video about the making of the commercial - where viewer opinions were structured - was uploaded on April 17, 2022.
- ü The analyzed commercial had: 320,833 views on March 29, 2025, 321,136 views on May 12, 2025, and 321,422 views on July 5, 2025.<sup>4</sup>
- ü A total of 907 comments were written about this ad.

**Telekom HU: *Minden törődéssel többek leszünk!* [With all the care, we'll be more!] - 2021**

- ü The information necessary for content analysis and viewer opinion analysis was also provided by the promotional video on the YouTube video sharing website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwbil00Fj1sc>
- ü This commercial was published on November 22, 2021, on the YouTube video sharing platform.
- ü The commercial had 1,353,797 views on March 29, 2025, 1,353,926 views on May 12, 2025, and 1,354,148 views on July 5, 2025.
- ü There were 127 comments written about the commercial.

**Volkswagen: *Bring back the energy* - 2022**

- ü Both content analysis and audience opinion analysis are based on commercials and comments found on the YouTube video sharing site: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyJvd876Uic&list=LL&index=5>
- ü The commercial appeared on the YouTube video sharing platform on December 21, 2022.
- ü The given commercial had 820,906 views on April 1, 2025. However, by May 12, 2025, the number of views had already reached 837,947, and by July 5, 2025, it had jumped to 860,597.
- ü A total of 522 opinions were expressed regarding this commercial.

**2. *The data collection was characterized by the following workflow***

- ü As a first step, viewers' opinions were arranged in chronological order, then archived with the help of screenshots in an Excel file – in order to ensure transparency of the opinions.
- ü As a second step, the comments were read through to identify the variables along which the opinions would be structured and analyzed.

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<sup>4</sup> We considered it important to record the number of views at different times in order to illustrate the topicality of the analyzed videos, i.e., that the passage of time cannot be identified as a determining variable in the case of commercials found in the online space.

**3. The structuring of viewers' opinions was carried out according to the following variables**

- (a) positive aspects of the commercials,
- (b) negative aspects of the commercials,

The parts of the comments referring to either the positive or negative elements of the ad were assigned to the first and second categories. These could relate to the characters featured in the commercial, the way communication took place between them, the ad's credibility, its legitimacy, the background music, the message of the commercial, etc.

- (c) viewers' attitudes.

In order to ensure good transparency, it was necessary to create a structured system with regard to viewer attitudes. Consequently, the terms used by those expressing their opinions were systematized according to the five attitude groups<sup>5</sup> found in the literature (Appendix, Table 1 - 3).

Based on the points noted in this subsection, the following three research questions form the foundation of the present study:

**Q<sub>1</sub>:** Which positive aspects determine those commercials in which seniors play the main role?

**Q<sub>2</sub>:** Which negative aspects characterize those commercials in which seniors play the main role?

**Q<sub>3</sub>:** Which attitude groups can be distinguished in commercials that focus on seniors?

**4. To avoid distortion of data:**

- (a) Comments that could be interpreted from multiple perspectives (e.g., in the case of the Volkswagen commercial: remarks such as "the decline of old values" or "it would be good to return to old values" were not clearly attributable to the content of the ad, the model featured in the ad, or the brand itself); likewise, in both the Profi and Volkswagen commercials, the term "funny" and its synonyms were not considered in the analysis of attitudes, since it was not evident to which attitude group they could be assigned. Moreover, in our opinion, the categorization of this descriptor may also vary depending on the product/service being advertised.

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<sup>5</sup> Enthusiastic, positive, neutral, negative, hostile.

Comments of this type, as well as those whose content was irrelevant to the research, or those that contained no written text (only emojis), were excluded from the analysis.

- (b) Comments appearing during Replay were not included in the analysis, as they were characterized by the exchange of personal information.
- (c) If the commercial was defined using multiple terms to express an opinion, only one term was selected in order to avoid overrepresentation. For example, (1) if the commenter used two adjectives to describe the commercial, which could be classified into the same attitude group, then the first adjective was taken into account, and (2) if the commenter used more than one concept to comment on the commercial: the most positive concept was included in the attitude mapping.

## Results and Discussions

### *Content analysis of Profi's advertising and evaluation of viewers' opinions*

The Profi company's television commercial is only 30 seconds long, focusing on the AIDA model, which is presented as follows (Figure1):

- The character of Grandmother attracts *Attention*, as her appearance and style of communication are unusual.
- The *Interest* comes from the grandson (Mircea Bravo) and not the other way around, even though, overall, young people are more tech-savvy. In fact, it is the grandmother who draws her grandson's attention to the 'list of offers' provided by the Profi app.
- When he reaches the checkout, the grandson (Mircea Bravo<sup>6</sup>) develops a *Desire* to add products to his shopping cart that he would receive for free (chocolate, shopping bag) through the app. However, the app is on Grandma's phone, so the ad also arouses a desire for the app. At the same time, it is important to note that Grandma's character draws attention to conscious shopping and the substitutability of products.
- The commercial ends with a Call to action, which encourages *Action*. Furthermore, it refers to the name of the grandchild's character, BRAVO, but also features an encouraging, motivational slogan: *Bravo că ești profi la cumpărături!* [Well done for being a pro at shopping!]

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<sup>6</sup> Mircea Popa's stage name, who also works in advertising film production.



Attention



Interest



Desire



Action

**Figure 1.** Content analysis of the Profi commercial  
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hs5qFfMDgo>

The message of the commercial is short and clear: the new Profi application is so easy to use that it requires no expertise, as anyone can learn how to use it, regardless of age. The communication between the grandchild and the grandmother is characterized by constant misunderstanding. The grandmother determines and limits the purchasing process, as she is the one who decides what can and cannot be purchased. Consequently, the message of the commercial places the relationship between the grandchild and the grandmother in a different dimension, as it is well known that in most cases it is the grandmother who fulfills the wishes of her grandchildren (even when they are already adults), and not the other way around.

The lighting and lights in the commercial are powerful. The colors of the commercial are mainly red, green, and natural colors. The color red appears in the Profi logo, and in the phone application. The basic elements of the Profi brand image are clearly visible in the commercial. The logo and the color red appear in almost every mosaic of the commercial. The characters' clothing resonates well with Profi's interior design. Both the grandson and the grandmother wear pale green, cream, and earth-colored clothing. The grandson's minimalist clothing suggests his urban lifestyle, while the grandmother's traditional clothing suggests a rural lifestyle.

Overall, the commercial clearly conveys the message that customers can make significant savings by shopping at Profi and using the new app. Grandma uses the Profi app on her smartphone to take advantage of promotions she has earned from her purchases in the future. The commercial also has an educational aspect, as Grandma only allows the purchase of products that are absolutely necessary. Consequently, the commercial highlights the opportunity for intergenerational learning. In addition, the commercial provides an excellent illustration of the typology of purchasing decisions at the level of the two generations. While Grandma only wants to buy essential items, her grandson would make impulsive purchases. Grandma contradicts stereotypes about seniors, as she is open to learning about modern technologies: it is a fact that they must have real benefits and realistic returns, such as the possibility of saving money. Saving money is one of the characteristic traits of seniors. What's more, senior shoppers have special needs when it comes to the shopping process. These needs may include, for example, comfort, rejection of unnecessary things, ease of use, trust, and simple decision-making (Törőcsik & Szűcs, 2021). At the same time, the analyzed commercial also features a very unique form of humor.

Positive opinions expressed about the commercial:

- The character of the Grandmother won the majority of the audience's approval, as she is very distinctive and powerful: the Grandmother's professionalism, acting skills, talent, distinctive humor, kindness, authenticity, energy, and charisma can be defined as added value. The main character's outfit also contributed to the positive reception of the commercial, as it was unusual and unconventional, and was intended to promote tradition.
- Although the success of the commercial is primarily due to the character of the grandmother, viewers also mention the supporting character of the grandchild, who proves to be crucial, as they can only function well together. Viewer opinions also highlight the importance of spending time together, based on their own experiences. In the same context, it should be noted that the grandmother-grandchild relationship is very unique, which evokes nostalgic feelings in most viewers: nostalgia has a well-defined role in consumer behavior.
- The commercial features ordinary people in real-life situations, performing their tasks with heart and soul, which also contributes to the strength of the commercial.

The negligible negative opinions of viewers (7 people):

- the physical appearance (inappropriate makeup), loudness, and
- 'comments' of the Grandmother character were criticized.

Viewers' opinions about the commercial can be grouped into four attitudes:

- 83 people had an enthusiastic attitude,
- 56 had a positive attitude that shaped their opinion, while
- 2 people had a neutral attitude and 3 commenters had a negative attitude toward the analyzed commercial (Appendix 1, Table 1).

Most of the comments examined were enthusiastic and positive, with only a few commentators expressing a negative attitude towards the commercial. This result suggests that the character of the senior lady appearing in Profi's commercial was overwhelmingly well received by viewers.

### ***Content analysis of Telekom's advertising and evaluation of viewers' opinions***

Telekom's (HU) *Minden törődéssel többek leszünk!* [With all the care, we'll be more!] commercial is 1 minute and 30 seconds long and focuses on emotionality. The message of the commercial is complex. Although the primary message of the commercial is not new (the greatest gift at Christmas is being able to celebrate with your family), the commercial also has a secondary message: expressing an opinion should not be premature, but should only be done when the picture is complete. In other words, it is only justified to take a position if the background to the story is fully known (the grandchild asks for a bigger gift so that he can stand on it and hug his grandfather, not because he is insatiable in terms of the size of the gift).

The colors are used in a restrained manner. Various shades of brown, green, cream, blue, gray and white form the basic color scheme of the commercial, with a more subdued shade of pink also appearing, which harmonizes well with the mood of the commercial and is also an element of Telekom's brand image. The outfits of the characters in the commercial are defined by comfort and restraint, further emphasizing the true message of Christmas. The atmosphere of the commercial is fundamentally determined by the background music, the character of Grandpa, performed by one of Hungary's popular actors, as well as the calmness and balanced quietness of the early evening (Figure 2).

The communication between the grandchild and the grandfather is one-sided, as only the grandchild verbally expresses his dissatisfaction with the size/greatness of the gift. The grandfather accepts the criticism and takes action. At the end of the commercial, the following brand elements appear: the brand logo, the brand's characteristic pink color, and its slogan: *Együtt. Veled* [Together. With you].

The commercial clearly aims to illustrate the relationship between the grandchild and the grandfather, drawing attention to the orientation family (the family into which we are born), but also to the observant and supportive role of our own family.



**Figure 2.** Content analysis of Telekom commercials  
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwbil00Fj1sc>

#### Positive aspects:

- the human-centeredness of the commercial,
- the history of the commercial, that is, its message,
- the commercial conveys emotions, i.e., it can evoke emotions,
- based on most viewers' opinions: choosing the actor Róbert Koltai was a good decision, since the role of grandfather suits him well, he has a good sense of humor, he is aging gracefully, and it feels good to see him,
- the commercial evokes nostalgia,
- the background music of the commercial.

At the same time, there were also opinions expressing dissatisfaction with the actor's participation, arguing that his appearance in the analyzed commercial deprives the art he represents of its value, and that his participation in the commercial is motivated by financial gain. Furthermore, the execution of the commercial's message, the staging of the commercial, and the lack of attention to detail also contribute to the negative aspects of the commercial.

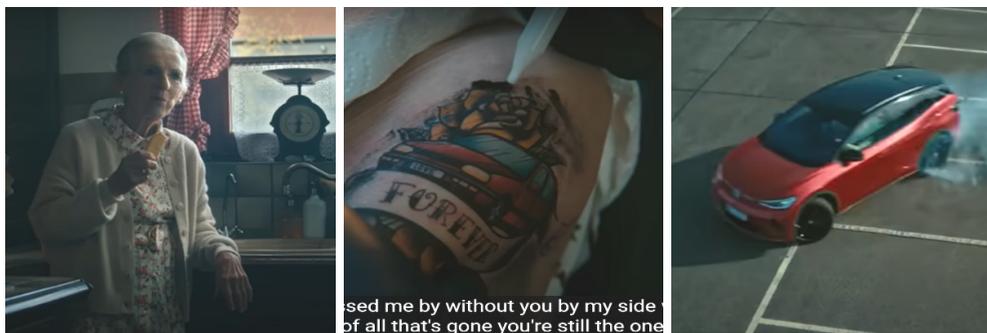
Based on viewer opinions, enthusiastic (16) and positive (7) attitudes outnumbered neutral (1), negative (1), and hostile (3) attitudes overall (Appendix, Table 2).

### ***Content analysis of Volkswagen's advertising and evaluation of viewers' opinions***

Volkswagen's *Bring back the energy* commercial is 1 minute and 28 seconds long and focuses on emotionality. Although attachment to objects is characteristic of the older generation, the commercial draws attention to the fact that letting go is necessary even for seniors. For the elderly lady (who is also the main character), letting go is a complex process that is symbolized by a colorful tattoo with the word 'forever'. Shades of white, gray, red, and brown give the ad its contours (Figure 3).

The background music perfectly matches the atmosphere of the commercial and the dynamics of the events. At the beginning, the commercial has a melancholic tone and slow tempo, but as events unfold, it becomes increasingly energetic and cheerful. In the first half of the commercial, the main character engages in activities that are generally characteristic of senior women (baking cakes, drinking tea with friends). The elderly lady's outfit and the design of her home (exterior and interior) can also be considered typical, but her nonverbal communication, metacommunication, and the final frames of the commercial suggest that she is not a passive, dull old woman. Consequently, in this commercial, the senior female protagonist can be classified, according to psychological categorization (Törőcsik, 2006), as belonging to the feel-age group (how old she feels), who is an active, flexible, young-at-heart retiree.

The commercial logo appears in the opening and closing frames of the commercial. However, the brand name also appears in the closing frames.



**Figure 3.** Content analysis of Volkswagen advertising  
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyJvd876UIc>

The following positive aspects can be mentioned:

- the message of the commercial: affirmation of life,
- the senior lady featured in the commercial: confident and balanced, beautiful, a hero, a legend, ideal, influential,
- the storyline of the commercial is better than that of some Netflix series,
- the commercial evokes nostalgia,
- the nature/character of the commercial,
- the brand's emotional sensitivity/awareness, since it recognized that nowadays seniors form a viable segment, as they have remarkable income. In addition, they possess new skills (driving style), their age does not limit their activities (grandparents can also do silly things, they can have fun),
- the background music of the commercial.

The aspects that can be interpreted as negative are as follows:

- there is disharmony between the brand, the type/model of the vehicle, and the targeted segment (considering the characteristics of seniors, the old model suits them better: too much time is required for charging the vehicle, a grandmother would not buy an electric car as she can be defined as a representative of the 'old school', and there should even be an age limit for driving SUV models); moreover, targeting retirees shows desperation,
- the commercial is not authentic: questions arise regarding the feasibility of the stunts shown in the ad, since they (1) have a stunt-like nature, (2) are not achievable with an electric vehicle, and (3) there is disharmony between safe driving and the stunts presented,
- the video was generated by AI,
- the commercial deceives the consumer: it is not honest, as it cannot deliver on its promises (quality issues),
- the original was much better, there is still room for improvement,
- the message of the commercial is (1) irresponsible, as it promotes dangerous driving, (2) not valid: one cannot compensate for past losses with a car,
- the story is very sad.

Based on the structured viewers' opinions:

- a total of 61 people displayed an enthusiastic attitude,
- 15 people expressed a positive attitude,
- 6 people expressed a negative attitude, and
- 3 people displayed a hostile attitude.

Overall, the reception of the commercial was more than positive (Appendix, Table 3).

## Conclusions

In Profi's commercial, the Grandmother accepts her age, does not try to appear younger than she is, and does not sugarcoat reality. At the same time, she preserves traditional values, yet does not distance herself from the achievements of the present age, on the contrary, she takes advantage of the opportunities they offer. She embodies the image of a Grandmother living in the imagination of the viewers who shared their opinions: someone to learn from, someone who shapes her grandchild's (consumer) behavior. In Telekom's commercial, the Grandfather is the typical grandpa who fulfills his grandchild's requests, who does not lecture but quietly, from the background, observes and meets the expectations of his grandchild. In Volkswagen's commercial, the senior lady displays characteristics typical of the classic senior, yet her character is also defined by several traits belonging to the modern senior.

The results obtained suggest that featuring seniors in commercials was received with enthusiasm and evaluated positively. The common and, at the same time, most beautiful outcome of the analyzed commercials - based on viewers' opinions - is none other than the nostalgia and remembrance of Grandmothers and Grandfathers.

It must be noted, however, that representing seniors in commercials continues to pose challenges, since (1) it matters in which industry the brand is present, (2) which values define the receiving audience, that is, which characteristics play an important role in expectations regarding seniors, and (3) the depiction of seniors in commercials should not be perceived by members of society as a form of social pressure.

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\*\*\* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hs5qFfMDgo>

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## Appendix

**Table 1.** Classification of viewer attitudes based on the terms used by those stating their opinions - *Am apărut la TV cu bunica. Cum a fost la filmări?* [I was on TV with Grandmother. How filming has been like?] – 2022

<b>Enthusiastic attitude</b>	<b>Positive attitude</b>	<b>Neutral attitude</b>
Very nice (12), too nice (1),	Congrats (16)	OK commercial (2)
Very good (4), too good (1), so good (1), really good (1)	Appreciated (3)	<b>Negative attitude</b>
Super (17)	Good commercial (6)	Not liked (2)
Wonderful (5)	Better advert than TV commercials (1)	Not so interesting (1)
Cool (8), very cool (9), the coolest (2)	Paying tribute (3)	
Perfect (1)	Interesting (1)	
Genius (1)	Enjoyable (2)	
Likes very much (2)	Good wish (1)	
Sensational (1)	Can be watched joyfully (2), can be watched with pleasure (2), not nerve-wrecking (1), good to be watched (1), does not skip (2), watchable till the end (4), not boring (6)	
The best (7)	Joyful (1)	
Beautiful commercial (1), most beautiful (2)	Like (1)	
10* (1)	Sympathetic (1)	
Very successful (1)	Charming (2)	
Very sympathetic (1), Most sympathetic (1)		
Exemplary (1)		
Phenomenal (1)		
Favorite (1)		

Source: own <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFKAFdnjz8&t=422s>

**Table 2.** Classification of viewer attitudes based on the terms used by those stating their opinions - *Telekom HU: Minden törődéssel többek leszünk!* [With all the care, we'll be more!] – 2021

<b>Enthusiastic attitude</b>	<b>Positive attitude</b>	<b>Neutral attitude</b>
World's best commercial (1)	More pleasant than Coca-Cola (1)	Not impressed (1)
5* (1)	Good commercial (1)	
Have not seen such a good commercial (1)	Happy with this commercial (1)	<b>Negative attitude</b>
Professional (2)	Congrats (1)	Clichéd (1)
It evokes the most beautiful emotions (1)	Original (1)	<b>Hostile attitude</b>
Wonderful (1)	Liked the commercial (1)	Disgusting (2)
The best (1)	The improvement is visible (1)	Outrageous because it is manipulative (1)
Adores (3)		
Genius (1)		
Beautiful (3)		
Bravo (1)		

Source: own <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwbil00Fj1sc>

**Table 3.** Classification of viewer attitudes based on the terms used by those stating their opinions - *Volkswagen: Bring back the energy* – 2022

<b>Enthusiastic attitude</b>	<b>Positive attitude</b>	<b>Negative attitude</b>
Perfect (1)	Good (5)	Lame (1)
Very good (1), really good commercial (3)	Liked (1)	Old fashioned (1)
Cool (1), cooled (1), very cool (2)	Well done (1)	Stupid (1)
Fantastic (3)	Thanks (1)	Badly reviewed (1)
Great (7), how great (1)	Nice (4)	False (1)
Super (3)	Kind (1)	Ruined video (1)
Beautiful (4), very beautiful (1)	Interesting (2)	<b>Hostile attitude</b>
Wonderful (3)		Very bad (1)
Top (1)		Scary (1)
Best (2), best commercial ever (5)		Terrible (1)
Excellent (4)		
Amazing (1)		
Favorite (1)		
Epic (2)		

<b>Enthusiastic attitude</b>	<b>Positive attitude</b>	<b>Negative attitude</b>
Awesome (4), totally awesome (1)		
Magnificent (1)		
Mad respect (1)		
Very nice (1)		
Loved (6)		

Source: own <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyJvd876UIc&list=LL&index=5>