

Research on consumer attitude and effectiveness of advertising in computer and video games

(Summary)

Zhana Belcheva

Master program "Advertising Management", New Bulgarian University, Bulgaria

In a world where attracting consumer's attention is becoming more and more difficult, marketers are forced to search and experiment with new channels and formats of brand communication. The changes in the way people spend their leisure time, consume media content and the filters that they have created for traditional advertising are just some of the reasons why advertising in computer and video games is gaining popularity year after year.

In the U.S. alone, revenues of the gaming industry in 2006 reached 10.5 billion dollars, with a growth of 19%, exceeding the revenue of sales of books, music, cinema tickets and video tapes rental altogether, which reported zero growth; according to a report on EFA in 2009 more Americans played video games than went to the movies.¹² Following the consumer is a logical move for marketers and it is not a surprise that budgets for advertising in video games grow rapidly; in the U.S. alone reaching 875 million USD in 2012 and forecasted to reach 1 billion USD in 2014.³⁴

Despite the numerous hypotheses in favour of this marketing tool, there is limited data from academic research on its effectiveness and the consumer attitude on a global level as well as on the Bulgarian market. In 2002, Nelson first examined the players' attitude and found them to be positive, as existing brands add realism to the game. Lee and Faber (Lee and Faber, 2007) found that if a logical connection between the game and the product category exists, advertising is received even better. Constantine and

¹ IAB , " GAME ADVERTISING", accessed on 20.09.2012 from http://www.iab.net/media/file/IAB-Games-PSR-Update_0913.pdf

² Sadler, Kelly and Rhind (2008). „Advertising and video games”, MC Insight

³ Yankee Group, accessed on 20.09.2012 from http://www.yankeegroup.com/ResearchDocument.do?id=16395#_Toc171417702

⁴ IAB , " GAME ADVERTISING", accessed on 20.09.2012 from http://www.iab.net/media/file/IAB-Games-PSR-Update_0913.pdf

Grigorovici (Constantine and Grigorovici, 2004) found that 3D content enhances the positive attitude better than 2D content. Several studies explored the brand recall as well. Results indicated that immediately after playing the game advertised brands are perceived more positively than competitive ones. Other studies show that the outcome of the game also plays a role. The winners are in a better mood, rate the game higher and rate advertised brands more positively than losers.

However, most of previous research has been conducted primarily in the U.S. market and does not take into consideration cultural differences, variety of games and platforms. The current study aims to contribute to the development of advertising in computer and video games on the Bulgarian market and seeks answers to the following research questions:

- What is the consumer attitude towards advertising in computer and video games?
- To what extent players recall brands and messages?
- Is there a difference in the effectiveness and the ability to recall a familiar and unfamiliar brand?
- Does advertising in games influence consumer behavior and purchase intention?
- Does the attitude toward the advertised brand change after playing the game?

To lay foundations for future studies and create hypotheses on factors influencing effectiveness, a qualitative study was carried among 20 regular players of computer and video games. 13 men and 7 women were selected based on a screening question whether they play games regularly. A mix of casual and core gamers, age 20-32, from 3 major cities in Bulgaria were interviewed in a span of 2 weeks.

In order to eliminate bias between respondents, a personal in-depth interview approach was selected; 5 respondents were interviewed in person and 15 through an online web-enabled interview platform. The online methodology was found to be less intrusive and elicited more honest response.

The questionnaire was a mix of open-ended questions and recall tests using two real games. The first game included a variety of in-game ad formats and the second game was advergame:

The first part gathered information on general opinion towards traditional advertising, examining the attitudes of respondents to game advertising and their views regarding appropriate and inappropriate uses.

The second part of the interview tested the ability of respondents to recall messages and brands. Each participant was shown video footage of the racing game- Test Drive Unlimited 2; the game was chosen because ads in sports games are well perceived and the plot allowed greater concentration of advertising messages in a variety of forms. The next set of questions examined the effectiveness of advertising of a brand unfamiliar to the respondents. They played an advergame type computer game where the brand was new to the Bulgarian market dairy product. It was specially selected so that players always win, regardless of how well they perform. This was done in order to not transfer negative feelings towards the advertised brand and to eliminate bias.

The third and final part examined to what extent the ads in computer and video games affect consumer behavior and buying decisions, and whether attitude towards the brand changes after seeing the ad. In addition general opinion was collected on the topic.

The results show that the consumer attitude towards advertising in video games is positive provided that they are thematically related to the game and therefore perceived as natural and less obtrusive. The audience perceives them well and even expects them if they add something to the experience. This conclusion is in line with previous research on the topic. No local specifics were found for the Bulgarian market.

During the second part of the interview, all respondents were asked to watch a 4 minute video clip of actual gameplay of the racing game Test Drive Unlimited 2. The game consisted of ads of well known global brands in various formats – name, product, logo or retail center. After viewing the clip, all respondents recalled between 4 to 9 brands. The top three brands were presented through interactive ads; the least efficient brand ads were the text only ones. The results are in line with the study of Ho, Lin, Young (Ho, Lin, Young, 2010) who concluded that demonstrative placement has the highest impact on explicit memory.

To check whether the effectiveness changes when advertising familiar and unfamiliar brands, the respondents were asked to play an advergame of a dairy product new to the Bulgarian market and then answer a set of questions. Most respondents failed to recall the advertised brand despite the fact it was visible in various formats for more than 2 minutes compared to their recollection of between 4 to 9 well known brands from the racing game which were visible for less than 15 seconds in each instance. A hypothesis was formed that ads of familiar brands are more effective and require significantly less display time while new brands require more display time to be remembered; this hypothesis is in line with the principles of media planning. Additional qualitative research needs to be conducted to prove its validity.

The next part of the interview explored whether ads in games would influence the respondents' buying behaviour. Advertising in games provokes interest and curiosity in most respondents but responses varied for different product categories; dairy products and gas were more likely to be purchased by the respondents after seeing ads in enjoyable games whilst car ads did not affect their decision. A hypothesis has been formed that the degree of consumer involvement in combination with the overall opinion of the game influences the buying decision. Additional qualitative and quantitative study needs to be conducted to measure the effectiveness for each product category.

The last set of questions examined whether the attitude towards the brand changes after playing a game. The results indisputably show that it does not change, but rather gets reinforced; negative feelings towards a brand cannot be changed even if advertised in a favourite game.

As a conclusion, the consumer attitude towards advertising in computer and video games varies based on the use and form. The audience is positive if the ad is unobtrusive and contributes to the gaming experience. The study determined that a number of factors influence the effectiveness of an advertisement:

- the ad format – ranking highest to lowest: interactive, visual or text placement
- the familiarity of the brand – with unfamiliar brands requiring longer display time
- the player's attitude towards the brand - opinion of a brand cannot be changed but positive feelings get reinforced
- product category – purchasing behavior is more likely to be influenced for low-involvement products

The current study has certain limitations and the conclusions should not be generalised; it tests only one game genre – sports games. An interesting topic for future research would be other genres and more specifically the popular among both genders social games, mobile games and simulations. Another limitation is that the tests were conducted only on three ad types – advergaming, static in-game and product placement; future more detailed research can include other ad formats such as game advertising, additional branded content, micro transactions and sponsorships.

Despite those limitations, the current study contributes to a sparsely researched field on the Bulgarian market. As one of just a few papers, it does not provide sufficient data for firm conclusions but gives a good starting point for future qualitative and quantitative research on effectiveness of different ad formats on different product categories, game types and genres and hardware platforms.

Reference List

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