

Advergaming: Assessing the Presence of Branded Content in Video Games

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Abstract

Advergaming is a technique that has emerged as a way to engage consumers. It involves the integration of an advertising message, brand logo or other brand related content into video games or online games. These games amuse players while simultaneously subtly increasing brand recall, engagement, and recognition. The objective of this paper is to comprehend the various parameters of advergaming and evaluate the impact on brand recall and recognition through customer engagement. To verify the impact of advergaming a questionnaire survey with 180 respondents was undertaken. The convenient sampling method was adopted, and the respondents were mostly graduate students from Delhi NCR region, ranging in age from 20-35. The study reveals advergaming encourages consumers to consider buying the brands, but they also seek out additional information from other sources. It describes how different factors of the game's nature, experience, brand prominence and game-product relevancy affect the degree of engagement and recall level. The paper concludes that advergaming should prioritise entertainment to capture consumers interest before moving on to build brand awareness and recall. Advergaming have been connected to positive brand attitude and an increase in purchase intent.

Keywords: Advergaming; Advertising; Branded entertainment; Product placement; Video games.

Introduction

Advertising is a marketing communication with a non- personal message to promote a product, service, or cause through various media. It is the strongest approach that brands utilize to inform connect, influence, and remind prospective customers of the existence of their products and services. These days advertisements can be found almost everywhere, from nearby surrounding to Facebook page. In current scenario advertisers

uses every possible media to communicate their message to the target audience as today consumers are not as receptive as they were twenty years back. The advertising industry has gone through various changes over the years and technology is one of the key reasons behind this. With the development of technology and digitization, advertisers and brands find it difficult to connect with the target audience effectively and influence their buying behavior. TV and print were formerly the primary modes of advertising, but this has evolved, and now an array of new media are used to connect with consumers. The usage of advergames, which portrayed video games as an advertising has a lot of potential in this complex digital world.

Advergames is a blend of two words advertising and gaming. It is the integration of advertising message, brand logo or other information about the brand in online games or video games (Sharma, 2014). Advergames also described as a category of hybrid messages that encompasses all paid attempts to persuade audiences for commercial gain through the use of communications that appear to be of a non-commercial nature (Aldas-Manzano, Joaquin, et al, 2014). According to the 'India Gaming Report FY 2022', the gaming market in India, which was valued at \$2.6 billion in 2022, is predicted to increase at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 27% to \$8.6 billion by 2027. There were 507 million gamers in India in 2022, up from 450 million in 2021. This growth is stimulated by rise in young population, launching of new gaming genres, increase in smartphone and tablet users and the mass internet revolution. These figures absolutely shed light on the level of growth and potential of gaming industry in India.

The gaming sector has a lot of potential, making it possible to use it as a media of advertising to reach consumers and this open the doors for advergames. When compared to other forms of communication, these games have a high degree of engagement since 10-15 minutes of playing a game is likely to have a bigger impact than a 15-second radio or television advertisement. The purpose of this research paper is to present a theoretical foundation for advergames. The study also investigates how consumers respond to advergames and determine its impact on brand recall and recognition.

Literature-Review

Advergames are video or online games created to advertise a certain company, brand or product. The brand or message for the related product is

intended to be integrated throughout the whole experience. Advergaming are undoubtedly an alluring approach for marketers to cut through the noise and connect with a captive, targeted audience. However, advertisers frequently collaborate closely with developers to conceptually and visually rebrand their brands into well-known casual games. Advergaming which are essentially a combination of advertising and games, first appeared in January 2000 after Anthony Giallourakis purchased the domain names 'advergames.com' and 'adverplay.com'. The term advergame was first used in Wired Magazine TM's Jargon Watch in October 2001, which defined it as a downloadable or web-based game created only to accommodate product placements (Smith, Sun, Sutherland & Mackie, 2014).

Advergame is an online game that uses content marketing. Initially, a lot of companies placed their logos in the virtual settings of video games that were created by game development companies. This form of advergaming was rather ineffective and unsuccessful as the player was too preoccupied with the game to notice the brand logo or product that was displayed in the background. Due to this barrier, companies began to develop their own advergaming, which were designed around a brand or certain character that was closely associated with their products and services. By making it accessible online, they can achieve mass distribution. Their level of interaction has increased because of the features provided by the internet platform, and this brought a new aspect of viral marketing (Calin, 2009). Online games are used in advergaming, which combines interactive marketing and product placement to allow marketers to target certain demographic groups. Players spend an average of five to seven minutes on an advertisement-supported gaming website as opposed to a 30-second television commercial. Advertising using video games is a versatile and cost-effective approach to reach consumers. Brand centered games improve realism and strengthen the link between brand perceptions and social characteristics (Solomon, 2010).

The nature of the game is a very important attention factor compared to other factors of advergaming. The steering speed, the speed at which game objects move, the type of game task, the level of difficulty, the number of game levels and players who can play the game all contribute to the nature of the game (Vashisht & Sreejesh, 2015). The Atari Video Computer System 2600 console introduced this concept of advergaming in 1980s. The first advergame was probably the arcade game Datsun 280 Zzap, which was launched in 1976 to advertise the Datsun 280 Z. Other early examples are Pepsi Invaders, launched in 1983 for Coca-Cola Company sales executives, Chase the Chuckwagon, developed in 1982 for Ralston-Purina,

and Tooth Protectors, designed in 1982 for Johnson & Johnson (Wallace, Margaret & Robbins, 2006).

Advergaming has been utilized by several prominent companies to spread their message or increase brand recognition. In 1999 released popular racing game Crazy Taxi, the player takes on the role of a taxi driver who earns money by transporting customers while pulling spectacular stunts. In their map design, the designers have incorporated well-known brands like KFC, Levi's and Pizza Hut. Crazy Taxi includes a precise model and design of every store, in contrast to other advertising games that mostly focus on the brand. The brand Mars has developed a number of entertaining and interactive advergaming that feature vibrant M&M candies. Not only does it offer in-game advertising for all those brands, but the developers also successfully incorporated the advertisements into the gameplay by giving the game a more authentic feel.

There are various types of advergaming based on the extent of brand inclusion. Brand messages may be inserted into video games in three different ways, associative, illustrative, and demonstrative.

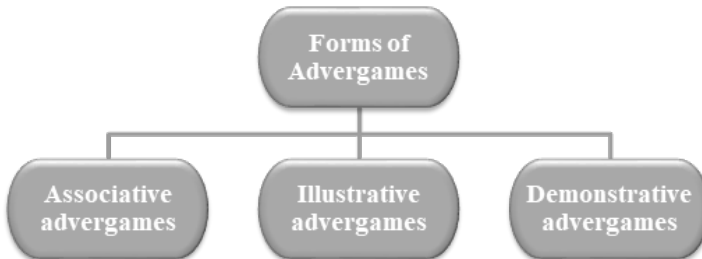


Figure1: Forms of advergaming (Source: Own illustration)

- **Associative advergaming:** These games associate the product with the lifestyle or activity to create brand awareness. Generally, in these game advertisements of product, logo, packaging of the brand is set on the backgrounds like on billboards or banners and they don't create interruptions in the game. In associative advergaming product or brand appears to be attached with a specific activity like sports or a leisure activity displayed in the advergaming (Aldas-Manzano, Joaquin, et al, 2014).
- **Illustrative advergaming:** In this type of advergaming, brand or

product is prominently featured in the game. The objective of these advergaming is to convince the potential customer to buy the product and for this the whole game is built around the product itself.

- **Demonstrative advergaming:** These advergaming allow the consumer to experience the product within the virtual boundaries of the gaming space. They are specifically designed for the brand or product to enhance the advertising message effectiveness by attracting customers to interact with the brand. They have a huge impact as they let consumer to try out the product on internet prior to purchase. An example of demonstrative advergaming is Nike Shox, a basketball advergaming by Nike which enabled players to customize their avatar's shoe and then see the different performance features of it throughout the game.

Advergaming has evolved and come a long way, earlier this trend is implemented in many sectors like Sports, Food and beverages, Travel and Tourism, Entertainment, FMCG, Lifestyle and so on. Now Indian film industry has also begun to promote their movies through video games. Many Bollywood movies launch video games with their characters, storyline, and interesting levels to allure the audience and promote movies in an innovative way. The first Bollywood movie to be adapted into a 3D video game was *Ghajini* (2008). The popular movie *Dhoom 3* was promoted by launching its video game instead of releasing songs or movie scenes. Other highly appreciated video games are Krrish and Ra.One- The Game based on superheroes.

Advergaming can be a brilliant approach to connect with target audience while providing them with something enjoyable, cost-free and worthy of their time. The brand is reintroduced to the user each time they open and play the game, therefore the more distinctive the game, the greater the brand awareness (Çeltek , 2010).

Research Methodology

Age Group	Respondents (%)
20 years- 25 years	60
26 years- 30 years	28

31 years- 35 years	12
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The main goal of this paper is to examine the impact of advergames on consumer engagement and brand recall and recognition. In order to verify this a self-administrated questionnaire survey is carried out with 180 respondents through convenient sampling technique. Most of the respondents were graduate students from Delhi NCR region, ranging in age from 20-35.

Analysis and Results

The analysis is performed by employing percentage method. The statistics support the assertion that the gaming sector is expanding rapidly given the majority of respondents were enthusiastic video game players (Refer Table 1).

Table 1: Video Game Playing Frequency

Particulars	Respondents (%)
Rarely	14
Often	57
Regularly	19
Never	10

From the above table it is clear that video games are played frequently by many people but still 10% respondents were not playing video games. The major reason behind this was that they were too preoccupied to engage in enjoyable activities and secondly, they disliked playing video games. This can be reduced if industry can design some games that can attract and focus the working professionals (Refer Table 2).

Table 2: Reason for not playing Video Games

Particulars	Respondents (%)
Lacks source for gaming access	14
Do not like videos games	32

Do not have time to play videogames	54
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Table 3: Type of Video Games most liked by individuals

(Respondents could choose multiple options)

Particulars	Respondents (%)
Riddle	12
Action	42
Car Racing	40
Adventure	35
Role Play Game	12
Strategy	22
Sports	11

Car racing (E.g. Forza Horizon), Action (E.g. Star Wars) and Adventure (E.g. Marvel's Spider-Man) video games are most popular among the respondents (Refer Table 3).

Table 4: Type of Products noticed while playing video games

(Respondents could choose multiple options)

Particulars	Respondents (%)
Accessories	32
Apparel	18
Footwear	22
Electronics	29
Food and Beverages	19

Computers and Peripherals	15
Mobiles	35
Sports Related	37

When asked if respondents had ever seen a brand in a video game, 63% said yes, while 37% said no. The respondents mostly observed the brands related to product category of sports, mobiles, and accessories.

Table 5: Does brand awareness and brand recall enhanced by advergaming?

Particulars	Respondents (%)
Yes	74
No	26

A large percentage of respondents believed that advergaming enhances consumer brand awareness and recall. The respondents accepted that placing the brands in video games distinguishes them, make them attractive and subconsciously affect the player. The respondents who disagree with the assumption, however, cite various arguments, including the failure of the game affect the brand, the player's focus on video game gets brands overlooked, the brand placement becomes ineffective if video games are boring and the fact that video games are meant for enjoyment rather than advertising.

The aforementioned information makes it clear that the respondents believe advergaming is a reliable strategy for building brand recognition and awareness.

Recommendations

- The primary goal of an advergaming is to raise brand recognition, thus there should be consistency between the game's content and product, or service offered by the company. There should not be any contain any inaccurate or deceptive information in it.
- In some advergaming many brands have been placed in one game,

this reduces customers brand memory and should be avoided.

- The first priority of playing game is to have fun so for a successful advergaming company should create content that give their brand message along with entertainment.
- Marketers should do publicity of the advergaming so that it can reach maximum potential customers.
- The functionality of advergaming should be clear and easy to understand as complications in the game lead to failure of the project.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the extensive scope of video games as an advertising medium. Since the gaming industry is booming, companies have a great opportunity to establish their brands and raise awareness via advergaming strategies. Despite the fact that this intriguing trend is still in its developing stage and that only a limited number of brands use it as a platform for advertising, but due to the level of entertainment and engagement it offers, it has the potential to become a significant marketing tool. The main purpose of advergaming should be entertainment and indulgence, with brand retention and consumer interaction as secondary goals.

After conducting this study, it was discovered that majority of respondents had a favorable opinion of branded content being conveyed through video games. The main finding of this research paper is that advergaming is created to immerse players in an enjoyable setting with the right amount of challenge. Slow-paced entertainment has been shown to have a greater brand recall rate and may be a more effective media strategy alternative than a fast-paced advergaming. Advertising experts and game developers must thus take into account the nature of the game and the relevance of brand inclusion in it when designing and producing advergaming. In terms of brand visibility and recall, this media has considerable potential.

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