



The effects of happiness types and happiness congruity on game app advertising and environments



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ABSTRACT

While gameplay experience is a multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept depending on game genres and players, one of the major motivations to play is the pursuit of happiness. This study distinguishes games of different happiness types and explores the advertising effects on young adults that resulted from multiple sources. They include: the happiness expected from advertised game apps; the happiness experienced when playing games with embedded ads; and the happiness congruity between game app advertising and environments. The effects of ad background colors and promotional incentives are also examined. Experimental results reveal that: advertising excited-happiness game apps and ads embedded in calm-happiness game app environments lead to better advertising effects; happiness incongruity generates higher intention to play the experimental game again; ad background colors and the presence of promotional incentives moderate happiness congruity effects; and red backgrounds (versus gray and blue) and incentives generate better attitudinal responses and click intentions.

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1. Introduction

People engage in games for challenge and competition, reduction of aggressive feelings, social interaction, passing time and for fun and pleasure (Boyle et al., 2012; Mehroof and Griffiths, 2010; Przybylski et al., 2010). Pleasure, characterized by feelings of happiness (Floyd, 1997), is a particularly important predictor of playing time and motivation to play across different game genres, such as race and shooter games, and even serious games can make players happy (Peeters et al., 2016; Poels et al., 2012). Happiness derived from play has its own intrinsic value (Chou and Ting, 2003). The pursuit of happiness is also an important driver for human behavior (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Waterman et al., 2008). Mogilner et al. (2012) differentiated two types of happiness, calm happiness and excited happiness, to examine how the definition of happiness may affect consumers' choices. However, few studies have distinguished between games eliciting these two types of happiness and compared consumers' responses toward different happiness types of advertised games. Further, the effects of ads embedded in game environments featuring different types of happiness are under-investigated.

The mobile game industry continues to grow across the globe. In 2015, total revenues for the mobile platform were \$25.1 billion,

and mobile game sales grew 10.5% in the first month of 2016 (DiChristopher, 2016). As consumers spend more and more time playing games on their smart devices, mobile game ad revenues have also experienced rapid growth. In-game advertising increases purchase intention, brand recommendation, and overall brand rating by 24%, 23%, and 32% respectively (Sivaramakrishnan, 2014). In particular, interstitial ads overlaid on mobile game apps are the most used monetization method among the types of in-game mobile ad formats (Koetsier, 2014).

Interstitials in game apps are usually full-page ads displayed in-between the flow of gaming sessions, forcing players to view the ad for some time before forwarding them to the next session. Interstitials are more intrusive than small-sized pop-up ads and may well interrupt consumers' cognitive processes; however, small-sized pop-ups risk being neglected (Ying et al., 2009). Interstitials in game apps have unique characteristics and may trigger different advertising effects from interstitials in traditional websites. For example, unlike during web browsing, in which users take full control of what to read, interstitials can be more intrusive in the game app environment when gameplay is highly interactive (Huang and Yang, 2012), and players tend to be more focused on the task, scenario, and screen. Ads that interrupt a primary task an individual is engaged in can result in cognitive overload and irritation, leading to avoidance strategies (Acquisti and Spiekermann, 2011). Game apps are characterized by high frequency of use and a short life cycle (Valvi and West, 2015), which may also affect

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consumers' tolerance of embedded ads. However, little academic attention has been paid to deriving design principles and clarifying the effects of such interruption-based ads (Chan et al., 2010), especially in the game app context.

A consumer's reaction to interruption-based ads depends on the content similarity and congruity between the interruption and primary task (Moore et al., 2005). Previous studies have examined the effects of game-product congruity on physical products or branded products (e.g., Gross, 2010; Huang and Yang, 2012; Peters and Leshner, 2013; Wise et al., 2008) in advergames and in-game advertising. Less is known about the congruity effects on virtual games featured in interstitial ads during mobile game sessions. However, most app advertisers come from the game industry (Candoo Strategic Marketing, 2013), and how to effectively promote game apps is a critical issue for practitioners. In addition, little research on congruity effects has examined congruity with respect to happiness and the possible factors that may moderate congruity effects. Accordingly, this study explores the influence of happiness types of advertised game apps in interstitials and the ad-exposure context (i.e., game app played) on advertising responses of young adults, a major gameplay group (Chuan, 2015), and the effects of congruity of happiness types between advertised game apps and game apps played (hereafter referred to as happiness congruity).

In the gaming environment, players tend to focus on the current tasks, while advertisers face the challenge of attracting a player's attention to task-irrelevant details such as ads appearing during a gameplay session. To capture and sustain viewers' attention, Diao and Sundar (2004) suggested that many visual and auditory cues, such as larger ad sizes, brighter colors, animations, and music, could be used in the design of the ads that appear in the game environment. Besides attracting attention, colors carry an important meaning that can impact individuals' affect, cognition, and behaviors (Elliot and Maier, 2014). However, more studies are necessary to comprehend the multifaceted effects of color in ads (Panigyrakis and Kyrousi, 2015). Additionally, incentives may affect consumers' acceptance and attitudinal responses toward mobile ads (Barwise and Strong, 2002; Drossos et al., 2007; Hanley et al., 2006). Therefore, this study also examines the effects of in-app ads with different background colors, with/without promotional incentives, and the possible moderation of colors and incentives on happiness congruity effects to further clarify the functional scope of congruity effects.¹

This study investigates consumers' ad attention, the common objective of advertisers in practice (Kuisma et al., 2010), as well as two of the most frequently used psychological measures of advertising effects, attitude and intention (Bart et al., 2014), to understand young adults' responses toward the interstitial ads appearing during mobile game sessions. Based on the studies of mobile advertising effects (Ketelaar et al., 2015; Kim and Han, 2015), five indices of advertising effects, including ad attention, ad attitude, product attitude (i.e., attitude toward the advertised game app), click intention, and download intention, were assessed. The findings contribute to app ad research and practice.

2. Literature review

2.1. Mobile app advertising and its effects

Mobile advertising is growing rapidly, but the effect of ads in mobile apps is still an under-researched topic. As consumers'

¹ Fogg's (2003) principles of persuasive technology design have shown that message content and its packaging strategy (e.g., tone and personalization design) have a great impact on the effects of persuasive messages. Ad background colors and promotional incentives may be considered content-packaging and content-related factors in app advertised messages, which further justifies the selection of these two variables to be examined in this study.

general attitudes toward in-app ads tend to be negative (Raines, 2013), it is particularly important to understand factors that may effectively improve in-app ad effects. Previous research has identified irritation and entertainment as the central drivers in attitude formation toward in-app advertising (Raines, 2013). Peng et al. (2014) analyzed the user data collected from a mobile advertising company and found that types of apps, mobile operators, scrolling frequency, and users' regional income level significantly influence the likelihood of whether users would click on ads. Through in-depth interviews with marketing and advertising executives, Valvi and West (2015) suggested that using entertainment apps, as compared to game apps, utility apps, and failure apps, for advertising was more effective for the advertised brand; however, no specific effect index was discussed. Lim et al. (2013) explored how to effectively incorporate ads in mobile apps for the tourism industry through a case study and found that image (versus text) banner ads lead to better recall, but none of the participants clicked these ads due to their low relevance to the tasks. Through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, Bhave et al. (2013) found that the engagement of the apps negatively influences users' perception of the advertisements, and ads appearing during gameplay are more irritating than ads displayed in music or news apps.

To date, not many factors have been found to effectively affect consumers' reactions toward in-app ads. Experimental studies that systematically manipulate and control possible factors of the advertising effects in the mobile game app context are still lacking in general; the promotional incentives and social-psychological factors that affect mobile game players' attitudes toward advertising in mobile apps are particularly underexplored.

2.2. Emotions and happiness

Emotions are biologically based action dispositions that are central to human behavior and experience. The dimensional theory of emotion, which conceptualizes emotional states, focuses on two-dimensional space: valence and arousal (Fontaine et al., 2007; Russell, 1980). The valence dimension ranges from unpleasant to pleasant, whereas the arousal dimension ranges from very calm to very excited. Enhancing pleasures and positive moods in daily life is one way to achieve happiness (Kringelbach and Berridge, 2009).

According to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (2009), happiness is "a state of well-being and contentment, a pleasurable or satisfying experience;" it is also a subjective well-being that encompasses life satisfaction and positive feelings (Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2011). Happiness can be perceived in multiple ways, by way of feelings as divergent as excitement and calm. The former, more aligned with feeling excited, elated, and enthusiastic, is high in arousal, while the latter, more aligned with feeling calm, peaceful, and serene, is low in arousal (Mogilner et al., 2012). Culture (Tsai et al., 2006), age (Mogilner et al., 2011), and individual temporal focus (Mogilner et al., 2012) may affect the type of happiness that people pursue.

Although more researchers have started to explore consumer happiness in recent years, such as cross-group differences in happiness (Heffetz and Rabin, 2013), the determinants of happiness (e.g., Etkin and Mogilner, 2014; Thomas and Millar, 2013), and the moderation effect of happiness in relationship marketing (Belanche et al., 2013), most studies examine happiness within the dimension of unhappy to very happy, rather than distinguish between different types of happiness and clarify the meanings and importance of each type.

2.3. Congruity effects and schemata theory

Cognitive psychologists suggest that all knowledge is formed into units, and within these units of knowledge is stored

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