ARTICLE IN PRESS

Australasian Marketing Journal ■■ (2016) ■■–■■

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Australasian Marketing Journal

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/amj

The persuasive power of advergames: A content analysis focusing on persuasive mechanisms in advergames

Johanna Roettl [a,*], Martin Waiguny [b], Ralf Terlutter [a]

[a] *Alpen-Adria-Universitaet Klagenfurt, Universitaetsstrasse 65–67, 9020 Klagenfurt, Austria*
[b] *IMC University of Applied Sciences, Campus Krems, Trakt G, 3500 Krems, Austria*

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 21 January 2016
Accepted 26 October 2016
Available online

Keywords:
Advergames
Content analysis
Advertising
Persuasive mechanisms
Persuasion
Product placement

ABSTRACT

This paper's purpose is to analyze how persuasion mechanisms are applied in current advergames. The study's rationale is that brand position and integration, the autonomy of the brand message in the game and the game-goal–message-goal overlap, entertainment as well as word-of-mouth and social integration are essential persuasive mechanisms of advergames. A sample of 195 advergames was taken from several popular advergames sites and was analyzed by two independent coders for the identified persuasive mechanisms using a developed coding manual. The content analysis revealed that advergames in general apply all six persuasive mechanisms. Logos are shown and used more often than products. Additionally, results suggest a high autonomy of the message (e.g. most applied placement tactics displayed the logo and product name as well as showing corporate colors). Furthermore, a high congruence of logos and products with the game content was observed. The results reveal that more than a third of games were well liked and included several mechanisms to increase competition. Word-of-mouth and social aspects were integrated to a small extent. The results are useful for researchers, game developers and companies, as well as for gamers. Implications for consumer researchers as well as industry professionals are provided.

© 2016 Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In recent years, advergames have gained a lot of attention from practitioners and researchers alike. Branded entertainment activities are seen as a valuable extension to engage with consumers within larger campaigns (Kretchmer, 2004). Advergames are custom-made for the advertiser, differentiating them from in-game advertising, which is more likely to resemble product placements in terms of the effects (Terlutter and Capella, 2013; Waiguny et al., 2012). According to Wallace and Robbins (2006), advergames can be defined as "A web or downloadable game where the primary objective of building is to deliver advertising messages, drive traffic to web sites and build brand awareness." (p. 26). Călin (2010) defined advergames as "…online games that incorporate marketing content" (p. 726), which means that advergames can be a promising tool for conveying specific brand messages (Kretchmer, 2004) and usually reference one specific brand or product (Grossman, 2005).

In terms of the uses and gratification (U&G) approach of motives of media use (Katz et al., 1973), escapism, competition, fun and curiosity are central motives for playing advergames (Lee and Youn, 2008). Advergames are played for fun, they are played voluntarily and players typically access the website hosting the advergame deliberately. Hence, the contact of the individual with the advertising message in an advergame is based on greater levels of voluntariness than is the case in most other forms of advertising.

The custom-made nature of advergames also allows the exertion of influence and the use of persuasion within the game. Various researchers in the disciplines of advertising, marketing and game design studies have investigated the mechanisms, particularly with regard to how the games persuade (for an overview on the research see, e.g. Terlutter and Capella, 2013; Waiguny et al., 2012; Youn et al., 2012).

2. Previous content analyses of advergames

Only a few studies have analyzed the prevalence of advergames and they have done so from very different perspectives. Most of the recent analyses of advergames were embedded in the content analysis of food and toy manufacturers' websites (Culp et al., 2010; Weber et al., 2006) as well as popular children's websites (Alvy and Calvert, 2008) and merely considered counting the available advergames. All studies indicated that advergames are already a common form of communication addressed to children in the U.S. (Culp et al., 2010; Moore and Rideout, 2007; Weber et al., 2006). Hofmeister-Tóth and Nagy (2011) pointed out that advergames are a successful tool to promote strategies and to reinforce and generate brand

---

[*] Corresponding author. Fax: +43 463 2700 99 4041.
E-mail address: johanna.roettl@aau.at (J. Roettl).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ausmj.2016.10.001
1441-3582/© 2016 Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Please cite this article in press as: Johanna Roettl, Martin Waiguny, Ralf Terlutter, The persuasive power of advergames: A content analysis focusing on persuasive mechanisms in advergames, Australasian Marketing Journal (2016), doi: 10.1016/j.ausmj.2016.10.001

recognition as well as positive associations toward the advertised products. Thus, a considerable body of research has elaborated on what makes advergames persuasive and discusses different processes and mechanisms (for more details see Appendix A).

The studies answered important questions about different forms of brand integration and viral behavior related to advergames. However, a systematic, empirical overview detailing which persuasion mechanisms are currently applied in a large number of advergames is missing. Hence, by means of content analysis, this paper investigates a large number of current advergames and analyzes which and how persuasion mechanisms derived from scientific evidence are applied in the advergames. Therefore, the purpose of our paper is to answer the following research question: *How are persuasion mechanisms and principles applied in current advergames?*

We contribute to existing literature and practice by, first, providing a comprehensive framework of persuasion mechanisms and principles which are derived from an evidence-based literature review. By doing so, we demonstrate how many suggestions from academia are applied in current advergames. Second, we investigated which of the principles and mechanisms are applied. Practitioners might find the paper interesting to identify possibilities to increase the persuasive power of the advergames.

3. Literature review: persuasion principles and mechanisms

"Persuasion refers to the power of persons to alter attitudes and behavior through information" (Cacioppo et al., 1991, p. 799). Therefore, persuasion represents an essential aspect of human communication and can be defined as the attempt to use communication to influence, i.e. to either change or maintain attitudes, beliefs and, ultimately, behavior. Cialdini (2007) demonstrates six key principles of persuasion, which explain how to use marketing tools to influence the decisions of others. The first principle, "reciprocity", states that a request, which is preceded by an unexpected gift (e.g. free samples, positive experience or information), has a higher capability to convince potential subjects. The second principle, "commitment and consistency", is characterized by the fact that people want their beliefs to be consistent with their preexisting values, actions and attitudes. Marketers use this persuasive principle to achieve, for instance, higher conversion rates (e.g. creating an account, filling out a form, clicking on something). The third principle, "social proof", is about getting evidence or social proof, if people are uncertain when making decisions. People tend to observe others to obtain guidance in their decision or action making processes (e.g. through recommendations or rankings on websites or postings of other users). The fourth principle, "liking", provides the explanation that people are influenced more by people they like or people who are physically attractive or similar to themselves. For example, the more attractive a website is, the higher the increase of the conversion rate that can be obtained. The fifth principle, "authority", delineates that people tend to obey authority figures and want to follow experts' or professionals' opinions. The sixth and last principle, "scarcity", relates to supply and demand, which means that things are more attractive if they are scarce or limited in their availability, e.g. if a product is sold and only a few items are left, people are even more interested in buying this product (Cialdini, 1993, 2007; Jaeggi, n.d.). Advergames address some of these principles, for instance; as they are usually actively sought and consumed, the players already show a commitment. Furthermore, the incorporation of elements in the game addressing the players' peers relates to the principle of social proof. The choice of characters in the game fosters liking and studies have found that e.g. customizable avatars, which are more similar to the actual person, further increase liking (Trepte and Reinecke, 2010).

Besides the principles of persuasion, one has to take the level and depth of processing into account, which are commonly explained by dual processing theories of persuasion. One of the most cited models is the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), which describes the impact of persuasive messages on the recipients in relation to his/her attitude toward the subject of the message. The ELM proposes two different ways of processing the message and their respective outcomes on the change of attitudes: (1) the central route and (2) the peripheral route. Following the central route, the recipient considers the information and compares the information with already existing knowledge actively, carefully and thoughtfully. The person is cognitively highly involved in the message elaboration. On this basis, arguments are either adopted or rejected. The attitude change will be relatively resistant and enduring over time. On the other hand, taking the peripheral route, arguments and their quality are secondary and less important for the recipient. The subject's persuasion arises from peripheral positive or negative cues (e.g. attractiveness, competence or prominence, credibility, the length or the communication). The attitude change is weak and unsettled. The model proposes that with an increase of the central information processing, the peripheral information processing decreases (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Attitudes, which are based on usefulness considerations, can be changed more easily through rational arguments, whereas attitudes, which are based on emotions, can be changed through emotional messages (Petty, 1999). Many models, such as the ELM, are used to describe the persuasive influence of messages, by engagement with the narrative or the identification with the character and by reducing counterarguments (Dahlstrom, 2013). Emotions play an important role in research on persuasion (Dillard and Nabi, 2006; Dillard and Seo, 2013). One way to generate emotions is by employing narratives. According to Hoeken and Sinkeldam (2014), the use of persuasion and narrative is called "narrative persuasion", which is based on evoking images and is often used for entertainment purposes by pursuing real world topics. Identification with a character, which means that the subject takes the character's goals into account as their own, can be a mechanism of narrative persuasion. The extent to which subjects identify themselves with a character can influence the experience of emotions and further the attitude. If a character is limited or regulated in attaining the goals, negative feelings and thus, a negative attitude toward these factors will occur. Narration in advergames can help to reduce the player's awareness of the advergames' persuasive intention (Hoeken and Sinkeldam, 2014). Advergames clearly are more peripherally processed, particularly the actual brand messages, as the player focuses on the gameplay, thus, the narrative story gains even more importance. Yet, to apply these basic persuasion principles and mechanisms, it is important to relate them to design principles, which can be integrated into games. Hence, the next chapter addresses the persuasive elements which can be integrated into advergames.

4. Characteristics of advergames and persuasion

Bogost (2007) calls persuasion occurring from games "procedural rhetoric", which is the "art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions, rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures" (p. ix) and "the art of using processes persuasively" (p. 3). Furthermore, Bogost (2007) claims that games can use narratives and simulation to convey messages and make people learn. "Instead of telling the player what the point is, the game lets him or her experience it." (p. 35). The power of narratives in persuasion via games is a topic of growing interest, especially among communications scientists (e.g. Hoeken and Sinkeldam, 2014; Thomson, 2010) as well as computer scientists and game design researchers (e.g. Bogost, 2007; Fogg, 2003; Juul, 2005; Khaled et al., 2007; Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2002) that has applicability beyond educational games. Based on the "homo

Please cite this article in press as: Johanna Roettl, Martin Waiguny, Ralf Terlutter, The persuasive power of advergames: A content analysis focusing on persuasive mechanisms in advergames, Australasian Marketing Journal (2016), doi: 10.1016/j.ausmj.2016.10.001

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5110991

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/5110991

Daneshyari.com