

Chapter 38

Acceptance of Branded Video Games (Advergames): A Cross-Cultural Study Spain–USA

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ABSTRACT

Advergames are free, branded video games used by advertisers to target audiences with marketing communications in a playful, interactive, and engaging way. Despite their advantages for consumers (i.e., free entertainment content), advergames can also cause concern in consumers (i.e., advertising clutter), making it necessary to explore consumers' attitudes that lead to acceptance of advergames. This chapter analyses the factors that lead consumers to accept advergames as an advertising format analyzing three variables related to consumer-media relationships: 1) consumer attitude toward advertising, 2) consumer attitude toward the presence of brands in video games, and 3) previous experience with video games. The moderating role of culture is also analyzed. To do so, an empirical research study involving American and Spanish students was developed. Findings suggest that attitude towards advertising is the primary factor affecting advergence acceptance for the Spanish sample, while attitude towards product placement in advergames is the primary factor affecting advergence acceptance for the American sample. These results suggest cultural differences related to advergence acceptance.

INTRODUCTION

Branded entertainment is the insertion of a brand within an entertainment property in such a way that the line between entertainment and

advertising becomes blurred (Moore, 2006). In an increasingly convergent environment in which editorial content and advertising content are blended (Shrum, 2004) brand entertainment is gaining momentum as a promising marketing

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communications tool to engage consumers with brand messages. Branded entertainment includes branded events, branded films, and branded video games –advergames- among other formats. This branded entertainment is used to achieve marketing communication goals within an entertaining experience. Among branded entertainment formats advergames are playing an increasingly important role in marketing communication plans as a way to target and engage with young audiences (Terlutter & Capella, 2013). Advertisers' interest in advergames – the use of advergames in marketing communications – is reflected in a growing expenditure on advergames in marketing communication budgets (DCF Intelligence, 2011) and the expectation is for a continued expansion of these efforts going forward (Yeu et al., 2013). Scholars' interest in advergames is also increasing as proven by the *Journal of Advertising* devoting a special issue to the topic in 2013.

Advergimes have been defined as “a video-game designed around a brand” (Wise et al., 2008) and deserve special attention within branded entertainment formats. The growing interest of advertisers and advertising agencies in advergames is fueled by their capability to engage not only teenagers but also young adults (Peters & Leshner, 2013). Some estimates suggest that players can spend 25 minutes playing games delivered through email (Kretchmer, 2003) and visitors can spend an average of 5-7 minutes playing an advergame (Fattah & Paul, 2002). Others argue that this time could even be higher, by up to 17 minutes (Hein, 2006). The interest of important players in the advertising market such as Young & Rubicam and Starcom Media on advergames is big enough to have their own advergaming division (IGDA, 2008). Advertising in video games will reach \$7.2 billion by 2016 while advergames are expected to account for about 78% of total game advertising revenue (DCF Intelligence, 2011).

While advergames' effects on consumers' memory and attitude toward the brand placed in the video game have been studied (Reijmersdal,

Rozendaal, & Buijzen, 2012; Cauberghe & De Pelsmacker, 2010; Marti et al., 2013) little attention has been paid to consumers' acceptance of advergames as an advertising format (Hernández et al., 2004). Furthermore, there is a scarcity of literature comparing consumers regarding this promotional tool on a cultural basis.

The chapter aims to present an in-depth study of the factors that lead consumers to accept advergames as an advertising format analyzing three variables related to consumer-media relationships:

1. Consumer attitude toward advertising,
2. Consumer attitude toward the presence of brands in video games, and
3. Previous experience with video games.

Differences and common trends between Spain and the USA are observed with clear indication of marketing strategy to be deployed by the advertisers.

The chapter's specific goals are to:

1. Provide a conceptual approach to advergames as hybrid messages.
2. Provide a holistic view of how consumer-media relationships (attitude towards advertising, attitude towards the presence of brands in video games and previous experience) encourage consumers to accept advergames.
3. Provide empirical research on the Spanish and the USA markets with managerial implications for advertisers regarding how to maximize the effectiveness of the use of advergames in their marketing communications.

VIDEO GAMES AND MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Video games have long been used to target marketing communications. From Pac-Man (Namco: 1980) to Mario Bros. (Nintendo: 1983), video

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