Chapter 6
Towards Better Understanding of Children's Relationships With Online Games and Advergames

Ali Ben Yahia
LIGUE, Tunis, Tunisia

Sihem Ben Saad
(iD) https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3034-9206
Carthage Business School, Université Tunis Carthage, Tunisia

Fatma Choura Abida
Institute of Computer Science of Tunis, Tunisia

ABSTRACT

Since the child is at the heart of current managerial and ethical challenges imposed by digitalization, digital marketing to children is henceforth calling for new territories of studies in connection with the phenomenon of "gaming" in particular. This chapter favors an in-depth understanding of the child's relation with this phenomenon through an exploratory qualitative approach. Focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted with children and their parents. Findings suggest that psychological states of users during navigation and playing are the feeling of pride, the state of flow, the experience of tele-presence and the feeling of socialization. Given the specificities of this form of communication and the ethical implications, the relationship with the advergame has also been investigated.

INTRODUCTION

Children represent an important target for companies (Fusaro & Hildgen 2013; Capella & Terlutter 2013; Chen et al., 2010; Dessart et al., 2015; Chen & Leung 2016). They are considered as "multi-taskers, risk-takers, explorers, early adopters of new technologies" (Capella & Terlutter, 2013; Chen et al., 2010, Dessart et al., 2015; Chen & Leung, 2016). Companies are aware of the potential of this target (Fusaro

& Hildgen, 2013) and are increasingly using experts such as psychologists and anthropologists to study behaviors of those young consumers. With the proliferation of technologies, access to children through direct communication is becoming easier. In fact, screens occupy a significant part of children's leisure time, a phenomenon that is amplified with mobile telephony, social networks and the advergame (Chester & Montgomery, 2008; Chen et al., 2010; Dessart et al., 2015; Chen & Leung, 2016; Vashisht & Sreejesh, 2017). Similarly, the influx of brands in social networks promotes direct communication with the target population on these virtual platforms that allow an important and extremely fast dissemination of information and interaction possibilities, developed through the advergame (Capella & Terlutter, 2013; Vashisht & Sreejesh, 2017).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a better understanding of children behaviour and perceptions towards games and advergames on the Internet as a digital servicescape. As one of the most significant sectors in the global gaming market, online games continue to experience a substantial increase in popularity. Indeed, the number of online gamers worldwide has surged from 20 million in 2010 to 250 million in 2018, representing an average growth of over 20% per year1. Being one of the children's favourite online activities (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010), online games have become an advertising medium with great potentials for companies whose advertisements are targeted at children to influence their choices.

Compared to adults, children are much more vulnerable to marketing techniques, which explains why they are the main target of ads for unhealthy and non-nutritious products. Internet represents a digital servicescape in which children are exposed to a wide variety of stimuli and particularly to advergames that are gamification tools. Moreover, when they are inside this servicescape, children may lose themselves and be affected by an important flow. So, their capacity initially limited to analyze advertising may become more limited in the digital environment when they are exposed to advergames.

The persuasive dimension of advertising associated with online games can be very effective when young children are the target. Indeed, children are very susceptible to advertisements because they do not always understand its persuasive dimension (Kapferer 1985; Chen & Leung, 2016). A child is affected by the pleasure of online gaming (Vashisht & Sreejesh, 2017). In addition, the large share of children in household expenses, the degree of interactivity of the child with the family, the influence of social and individual factors, the degree of parental control, the degree of involvement of the child in this digital world, his state of flow, his feeling of socialization, his telepresence experience are all variables that can influence his relationship with the Internet (Yadav et al. 2013; Pelet, Ettis & Cowart, 2014; Chen & Leung, 2016; Vashisht & Sreejesh, 2017). These findings led to an all-out reflection on children's relationship with online games and advergames (Hamari et al. 2014; Huotari & Hamari, 2017; Vashisht et al., 2019). Using the exploratory approach, this chapter aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the advanced problem. The target chosen is directly concerned by the questions raised, the children and their parents in this case.

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows: Next section discusses the theoretical framework of gamification on the Internet as a digital servicescape and the psychological states that may be induced in this environment. It also debates the ethical dimension of marketing targeting children on the Internet. Methodological details about the empirical process, sample and tools used to collect requested information are then developed. The main results are developed in the last section. Finally, a discussion of findings, implications and new perspectives of research concludes the chapter.

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