Digital Gaming and the Advertising Landscape

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Preface

I am part of the first generation of digital natives, which means that I grew up as digital technology was introduced into our daily lives. Although it is difficult to admit, I am officially a Millennial. I was also incredibly lucky to have a father who wanted me to experience that process first hand. I can clearly remember our first computer without hard drive, my neighbor Nacho teaching me to write MS-DOS commands, and the first day I saw Windows running at my friend Eva's house. However, what is meaningful here is the reason why I approached each of these new technologies that came into our home – digital games.

Before I was ten years old I was already spending many hours playing MS-DOS games such as The Secret of Money Island (LucasArts, 1990), Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis (LucasArts, 1989), and Maniac Mansion (LucasArts, 1987). My first console, a Nintendo Nes, was a present from my grandfather. In fact, it was a present for all his grandchildren, so we had the opportunity to play with it only when we were at his home in Madrid (Spain), far away from Palma de Mallorca, the city where I was living at that time. When my cousins and I were at my grandparents’ for Christmas or other occasions, we used to spend the whole day playing Super Mario Bros. (Miyamoto, 1985) and Tetris (Pajitnov, 1985).

Fortunately, my father understood that we needed to have one of those machines and, cleverly, he one day came home with a Computer Video Game, a pirate version of the Nintendo NES with more than 300 hundred games on its hard drive! My brother and I then spent whole afternoons and weekends playing games such as Mario Bros (Miyamoto, 1983), The Legend of Zelda (Nintendo, 1986), Burger Time (Data East, 1987), or Circus Charlie (Konami, 1984). Many other consoles and games came later into our home without our mother’s consent.

Until I was in my late teens, I always had a computer game or console game, or maybe both, which I played avidly. The last games I remember playing at that time are Super Mario 64 (Nintendo, 1996) and The Sims (Electronic Arts, 2000). Furthermore, I remember playing Sophie’s World (Learn Technologies, 1997), an educational game that taught me a lot about philosophy. Despite digital games being so meaningful to me during my childhood, however, at one point I simply stopped playing them regularly. I used to think that this break occurred because I had started college and my leisure time had almost disappeared. Over the years, I have realized
that, in fact, it was because it became difficult to find games that satisfied me as much as those I had played before.

Telling this story is important to me because it was precisely an advergame that brought digital games back into my daily life, a few years later, in 2005. The advergame in question is *20 Lives* (Nokia, 2005), an audiovisual online adventure game designed to advertise Nokia mobile phones. In the game, players are invited to participate in a twenty-day game show in which they had 24 hours to face each of the games’ twenty challenges. Information provided within the twenty challenges and related to Nokia devices was necessary to pass a final test. I remember that there was a text at the beginning of every life warning the player that it was a “broadband event” and “it might take a while” to load the scene. I had a really poor connection at that time, but I did not care about waiting every day to be able to play the game because it was worth the time and effort. *20 Lives* became so significant to me that it reignited my interest in digital games and since then, they have become not only part of my leisure time, but also my field of academic research.

Years later, when I started writing this book, I noticed that although technology had evolved a lot since *20 Lives* was launched, I was not able to perceive the same evolution in the way digital games were being used to convey advertising messages. The several advergames that I have analyzed since then and the multiple interviews that I have done with professionals working in the advergames industry, led me to conclude that there is a lack of understanding about how digital games can be used to convey advertising messages. I noticed that this lack of understanding produced advergames that were not taking advantage of the potential of digital games to convey advertising messages. I concluded that a better understanding of the potential of digital games to convey advertising messages could help to improve the design of advergames. This book aims to shed light on this field not only for academic purposes, but also to advance the advergames industry. In the following pages, the reader will find the result of a long journey of study and writing, which is my contribution to the understanding of a vast field that it is still not fully explored.

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