3.  Advergames’ History

Abstract
Advergames’ precedents and evolution is an unexplored topic. The only text that I could find on this subject, written by the advertising scholar Ilya Vedrashko in 2006, remains unpublished. This chapter gathers the information collected by Vedrashko and enhances and updates it with new data, providing a complete historical overview of the concept of advergames. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate that, despite the fact that technology has rapidly evolved and has given rise to many different forms of advergames, each one of them with characteristics that can be exploited to enhance branded experiences, these features are not always exploited and are sometimes incorrectly utilized because of a lack of understanding of the medium.

Keywords: historical overview, advergames, advertising, advergames’ precedents, future of advergaming

Although technology has significantly progressed since the inception of advergames, the ways in which digital games have been used to convey advertising messages have not evolved as quickly and, to a certain extent, remain mired in the past. I claim that this stagnation might be caused by a lack of understanding of the medium. The exploration of advergames’ precedents and evolution in history presented in this chapter will enhance our cognizance of this lack of understanding of the persuasive potential of digital games.

Advergames’ Precedents

Although the term advergame was coined in 2000 by Giallourakis (Buckleitner, 2008, p. 46), the origin of this marketing strategy dates back to the early 1980s, and it is even possible to find some precedents from the 1930s.
The first precedent I have found is a paper game from Planters Peanuts published on the cover of the 5 April 1930 issue of the American magazine *Saturday Evening Post*. *Planters* (Party Virginia, 1930) is a roll-and-move game featuring Mr. Peanut, the famous mascot of the brand. The game also shows two bags of Planters Pennant salty peanuts.

Another early precedent found by the game scholar Ilya Vedrashko is *Mustang* (Chicago Coin, 1983), a pinball machine launched by Chicago Coin in 1964, which included images of the Ford model. Vedrashko explains that it is not clear whether Ford just authorized the image or paid for the image to appear, but the Mustang sports car present in the game was launched in April that year (2006b, p. 5).

The second example unearthed by Vedrashko is *Lunar Lander* (Burness, 1969), a game with multiple versions, which was first launched in 1969 (Vedrashko, 2006b, p. 6). The goal of this game was to portion a limited amount of fuel to land on the moon without crashing. In one of the later versions from 1972, a specific landing site offered was a McDonald's restaurant. Upon landing successfully near the restaurant, an astronaut would walk over to get lunch. Crashing into the restaurant destroyed it permanently (until the program was reloaded) and displayed an amusingly sarcastic message berating the player: “Boy, are you inept!” This inclusion was just a joke from an anonymous designer, and not a paid-for inclusion by McDonald's, but it is probably one of the first examples of in-game brand integration.

In his book *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (2007), Ian Bogost refers to *Datsun 280 Zzzap* (Midway, 1976) as the earliest digital game “with authorized branding in support of a product” (2007, p. 200). Obviously inspired by Atari's *Night Driver* (Atari, 1976), the game was a driving simulation in which nothing but the name was tied to the vehicle.

From the analysis of these four early precedents, we can see that, from the inception of this practice, brands have been embedded within games in a variety of ways. Whereas in the *Datsun 280 Zzzap* (Midway, 1976) the brand was present only in the name of the game, Ford and Planters showed images of their products in *Mustang* (Chicago Coin, 1983) and *Planters* (Party Virginia, 1930) respectively. Furthermore, Planters’ game also features the brand’s famous mascot. However, in *Lunar Lander* (Burness, 1969) the designer opts for a deeper intrusion of the brand into the gameplay, in which a McDonald’s restaurant becomes part of the game space as one of the landing sites of the game. Moreover, McDonalds’ products become a reward in the game, since a successful landing allowed an astronaut to walk over to the restaurant to get lunch.
Nevertheless, the Planters and Ford examples cannot be considered advergames due to their non-digital nature. The McDonald’s game can also not be considered an advergame because the brand did not authorize its appearance. And in the case of Datsun 280 Zzzap (Midway, 1976), it is also unclear whether it is an advergame or a branded game. Let us proceed with the analysis of early advergames to gain more insight into the evolution of this practice.

The Earliest Advergames

Brands began developing their own promotional digital games in 1983. It was a moment of growth after the first crisis of the video games industry in 1977. The ‘Japanese Invasion’ from 1978 brought not only technical, but also content-related innovations. Space Invaders (Taito, 1978) and Pac-Man (Namco, 1980) were some of the successful titles arriving from Japan at that time (Malliet & De Meyer, 2005, pp. 28-29). And it was also a Japanese designer who introduced one of the most important figures of the history of computer games, Mario, initially called Jumpman in his first appearance in Donkey Kong (Miyamoto, 1981).

The early examples of advergames were simple games that were sent to players for free via direct mail following a request. The first of this kind of game was Tooth Protectors (Johnson & Johnson, 1983), an advergame released to promote Johnson & Johnson hygiene products (Bogost, 2007, p. 201). In the game, the player was responsible for controlling T.P. (the Tooth Protector) to secure a row of teeth against a bacterial attack performed by a ‘snack attacker’. If the player failed, and a pellet reached a tooth, it would start flashing indicating possible decay. In order to prevent the disaster, the player had to press the joystick button, initializing teeth cleaning, including brushing, flossing, and mouthwash. That was the moment when the products of Johnson & Johnson came into play. Players had to do their best to protect the teeth from the snack attacker because the cleaning process could be deployed only three times in each level.

Tooth Protectors makes use of game mechanics to convey a message about the importance of maintaining good oral hygiene. The goal is to boost dental care among players and make them link that habit to Johnson & Johnson products. The game doesn’t provide arguments for choosing Johnson & Johnson’s products over other brands; however, in order to get the Atari game, it was necessary to collect proof-of-purchase symbols from Johnson & Johnson’s products and mail them to UPC. Thus, it can be assumed that
the game’s target audience was Johnson & Johnson’s consumers and the objective of the campaign was to increase loyalty and revenue.

In the same year, Ralston Purina, a pet food company, used a famous mascot from its TV adverts as the main character in the advergame *Chase the Chuck Wagon* (Spectravision, 1983), which was developed for the Atari 2600 (Vedrashko, 2006b, p. 6). The goal of the player was to guide a dog out of a maze, where it would find the Purina Chuck Wagon. Whereas the game mechanics are slightly related to the communication message – helping the dog to find the Purina Chuck Wagon may imply that dogs like Purina food and are looking for it – the remarkable thing about this advergame is the incorporation of the mascot. In this case, however, the Purina mascot is a passive character, waiting for the dog controlled by the player to arrive.

Another game based upon a television commercial character was *Kool-Aid Man* (Atari, 1983). Kool-Aid Man is the mascot of Kool-Aid, a brand of a flavored drink mix (Méndiz Noguero, 2010, p. 48). The character is a gigantic pitcher with a smiley face, filled with the red drink. The objective of the game is to help Kool-Aid Man to save a pool whose water is being drunk by the ‘thirsties’, who are the enemies in the game. The player controls Kool-Aid and his mission is to quench the ‘thirsties’ while they are drinking the water from the pool – the moment when they are vulnerable – and save the pool. What is innovative is the use of the commercial character as the main character of the game. However, the poor graphics of the game hinder the recognition of the mascot and even the storyline. Players understand the story and recognize the mascot only if they read the manual that accompanies the game.

The same year, Coca-Cola published a very limited edition of *Pepsi Invaders* (Atari), which was given away to the 125 sales executives attending the brand’s annual convention (Vedrashko, 2006b, p. 6). The game is a remake of the original *Space Invaders* (Taito, 1978) in which each row of six aliens was replaced by the letters ‘P E P S I’ followed by one alien. In addition, the game includes a special enemy in the form of a Pepsi logo that sometimes flies through the top of the screen. If players hit the Pepsi logo they receive bonus points. This game is a playful metaphor on the commercial battle between Pepsi and Coca-Cola, in which Pepsi is represented as the enemy. This metaphor is reinforced with a message visible at the beginning of the game: ‘Coke Wins’. It is important to point out that the target audience of this advergame was not Coca-Cola consumers but the brand’s executives. Therefore, the aim of the brand in creating the game was to appeal to its executives’ competitive spirit.

At that moment, marketers were also attracted by the arcade industry. *Pac-Man* (Namco, 1980), using a feel-good atmosphere, was “the first game
that managed to draw the female population into arcades" (Malliet & De Meyer, 2005, p. 29) and was able to collect four billion quarters in its first fifteen months of existence. Midway took advantage of this popularity by releasing a peculiar sequel under the name *Pac-Man Plus* (Midway, 1982). In this sequel, one of the power-up fruits was replaced with a red can that looked suspiciously like a can of Coca-Cola, with the trademark wave on it (Vedrashko, 2006b, p. 7), one of the first strong examples of product placement in digital games.

The trend for integrating brands into popular video games came to a halt, however, with the so-called Video Game Crash of 1983. In 1982, when the industry was at its peak of popularity and profitability, and able to bring in $3 billion worth of games in one year, many companies rushed to open video games divisions to capitalize on the tidal wave. They flooded the market with poor quality games, resulting in sales dropping to $2 billion in 1983, $800 million in 1984, and $100 million in 1985 (Malliet & De Meyer, 2005, p. 34). From the analysis of the most salient advergames at this stage of advergames' history, I can conclude that companies were using different and innovative techniques to embed their brands, products, and advertising messages within digital games. Moreover, at least in the examples analyzed here, it seems that there was a concern to choose game concepts that helped to convey the advertising message or that facilitated the integration of the brand or the product advertised.

**Innovations in the Industry**

**Console advergames**

After the Crash of 1983, companies understood that they needed to focus on developing more attractive games, with improved content and graphics. This new phase opened new possibilities for brand integration within video games, but, in fact, the titles from the immediate post-crash period were ad-free (Malliet & De Meyer, 2005, p. 34). It took until 1986 for the industry to stabilize again and Nintendo became the market leader. The release of *Mario Bros* (Miyamoto, 1983) introduced Nintendo's figurehead, Mario, who soon became the main character of one of “the most essential platform games ever” (2005, p. 35), *Super Mario Bros* (Miyamoto, 1985). The arrival of the Nintendo NES accompanied by the game in 1986 managed to revive the industry. And finally, the increasing reach of Nintendo's console rekindled advertisers' interest in the medium.
At that time, the return of advergames was marked by initiatives such as *The Ford Simulator* (The Ford Motor Company, 1987), a first-person driving advergame for DOS that includes detailed information on Ford’s 1987 model line, a buyer’s guide, and an order form (Méndiz Noguero, 2010, p. 49). The game allows the user to drive any of the sixteen 1987 models and to choose between four test tracks in which different features of the cars are illustrated. After each of the test tracks, the simulator includes an interactive info-center that contains technical information related to the features tested on each of the tracks, such as the aerodynamics, the fuel injection, the suspension, or the air-bag system. This simulator is of special interest in the history of advergames because it shows an interactive and playful way to present a large amount of encyclopedic information about a product, making use of the combination of multiple techniques that can be used within a digital game.

From that moment, more advertisers took the initiative and started releasing games under their brands. Some of them, such as *Pepsi Challenge* (Topo Soft, 1988), were just variations of popular games but featuring a brand logo. Progressively, other advertisers bet on more original ideas, which integrated the advertised product in different ways into the gameplay and demonstrated new ways of brand integration. An example of this is *Avoid the Noid* (ShareData, 1989), released by Domino’s Pizza, in which the main character is a pizza delivery boy who has to avoid a pizza-destroying Noid. A similar strategy was followed by *The California Raisins* (Box Office, 1988), in which the player controls one of the members of a fictional music band, present in other advertising campaigns of the brand, trying to rescue his colleagues captured in a cereal factory (Vedrashko, 2006b, p. 11).

Soon, Nintendo’s *Super Mario* influence became apparent, and many platform console advergames started showing up in the early 1990s (Ibid., p. 12). *M.C.Kids* (Virgin Games, 1992), available for the Nintendo NES, was a quest to find Ronald McDonald’s bag of magic bricks stolen by Hamburglar, the villain of the game. The game features two children that venture into the McDonald’s fantasy world, McDonaldland, and have to go through seven different worlds. Golden arches in the shape of the McDonald’s ‘M’ can be collected for extra points and can unlock bonus rounds. The gameplay presented obvious similarities with *Super Mario*’s gameplay.

*Cool Spot* (Virgin Interactive, 1993), a game featuring 7up’s mascot Spot as its main character, was launched on the Mega Drive, Sega’s answer to the Nintendo Entertainment System (Vedrashko, 2006b, p. 12). In this platform game, the player controls Cool Spot, who can attack by firing soda bubbles. In each level the player must collect spots in order to rescue other Cool Spots in a game mechanics that again resembles *Super Mario* or Sonic.
In the bonus stages, it is also possible to collect hidden letters that, when combined, spell “UNCOLA”, 7up’s slogan.

Nintendo’s reaction to the Mega Drive came with its new model Super NES launched in 1990 (Malliet & De Meyer, 2005, p. 35). A prominent platform advergame launched for this console and for its rival Mega Drive was Chester Cheetah: Too Cool to Fool (Kaneko, 1992) with Frito-Lay’s Chester Cheetah as the protagonist and Cheetos snacks as collectible items (Vedrashko, 2006b, p. 12). The game presents, once again, obvious similarities with Super Mario’s gameplay.

This review of the console advergames from the 1990s discloses that it was not an innovative period for marketing strategies. Most of the advergames designed during this stage were games inspired by successful commercial games, which featured brands’ mascots as main characters and brands’ products as collectible items. However, during the 1990s, an important shift occurred in marketers’ attitude toward games, as they started to see them as a viable advertising medium in their own right. A consequence of this was the emergence of new companies exclusively dedicated to advergame development. BrandGames, established in New York in 1995, claimed to be “the first company to specialize in leveraging computer game technology in business communications” (1995), and they worked for many powerful clients such as Coca-Cola, General Mills, Taco Bell, GAP, and Reebok.

**Online advergames**

In parallel to the console and computer games evolution, another phenomenon marked the game industry: the popularization of casual games. Casual games are defined in the Casual Games Association 2007 Market Report as “video games developed for the mass consumer, even those who would not normally regard themselves as a ‘gamer’”, and are characterized as being “fun, quick to access, easy to learn and requiring no previous special video game skills, expertise or regular time commitment to play” (2007, p. 3; cf. Juul, 2010).

The evolution of casual games is connected with the emergence of internet technologies such as Flash and Java, which triggered a high increase in internet use in the 1990s (Woolley, 1994). The development of new technologies enabled digital games to be played online, providing a new platform for casual and networked games. At that time, the ease of online distribution, combined with the uncomplicated gameplay of casual games, started to attract non-traditional gaming audiences to digital games, giving rise to what Jesper Juul has dubbed the Casual Revolution, “a breakthrough moment in
the history of video games” (2010, p. 2). The author defines this revolution as a process in which digital games have become normal for three reasons: casual games do not ask players to readjust their schedules; they do not require players to spend hours to get somewhere in a game; and they “fit the social contexts in which people are already spending their time” (Ibid., p. 1).1

In order to define player experience, Juul refers to the concept of ‘pull’ as a feeling of “looking at a game and wanting to play it” (Ibid., p. 2). In digital games, this feeling comes when the player can see what has to be done in the game; can understand, more and less, how to do it; and wants to do it. Juul states that casual games solved a problem related to the missing ‘pull’ by fitting game sessions into people’s lives.

Online games provide a series of advantages to advertising media compared with computer or console games. Being available online, advergames don’t have geographical or time limitations, this means that they are available 24/7 worldwide and practically anyone with an internet connection can access them. Therefore, these initiatives can aspire to reach broader audiences. Furthermore, their presence online makes them networked environments, which, as previously explained, is a powerful property for increasing player acquisition, retention, and virality, three terms directly related to advergames’ effectiveness.

Furthermore, if framed as casual games, advergames can claim a series of traits associated with the former: “emotionally positive fictions”; “usable design”; “interruptibility”; “juiciness”; and “lenient punishments” (Ibid., p. 50). These traits, described by Juul to explain how casual games are able to attract non-traditional gaming audiences, can be useful for advergames, which can employ them to aim at diverse target audiences.

Advergames can be emotionally positive fictions designed to associate the game with positive emotions and be perceived as pleasant and attractive environments (Ibid., p. 31). In addition, advergames can enable usable designs that do not require previous knowledge of digital game conventions, which will help users to rapidly understand how to play them (Ibid., p. 33). Moreover, advergames can be designed to be played for short periods of time or in brief bursts, which will facilitate access for busy players by providing flexibility in the time invested in the game session (Ibid., p. 36).

1 The Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry report reveals that in 2011, 65% of North American gamers played games with other gamers in person – figures show a 64% increase in 2010 and 62% in 2009 – and that 45% of parents play computer and video games with their children at least once a week, a 36% increase over 2007 (Entertainment Software Association, 2011).
Another component of casual game design that can be used in advergames is the balance between high difficulty and lenient punishment. Advergames can be designed to be easy to play but difficult to master, to easily attract players to the game and maintain their interest in keeping playing by challenging their skills. The high level of difficulty can be balanced with lenient punishment of players’ fails in order to avoid stagnation (Ibid., p. 42). Finally, advergames can employ positive feedback to reward players’ successful action. Juicy interfaces provide a pleasurable experience that makes players feel competent when playing a game (Ibid., p. 45).

All these advantages of online casual games were perceived by marketers and, since then, advergames have proliferated online. Evidence of this connection can be seen in the fact that when the term advergame was coined by the entrepreneur Giallourakis it was associated with online casual gaming. Nowadays, online advergames are distributed in multiple forms; they are placed on microsites, embedded in brands’ official websites, distributed through gaming portals, presented in the form of banners, or launched on social media. The next chapters review many examples of online advergames in which the reader will find detailed information about the various techniques used to embed advertising messages through online casual games.

Social advergames

Social game design is focused on creating interesting interaction among players (Ibid., p. 21). This interaction is generated by providing players with features that allow them to compete, socialize, collaborate, or connect through different forms of online communication (Gerhard, 2009, p. 13). Thus, the ‘pull’ of social games is closely related to whom one is playing with (Juul, 2010).

Social games’ evolution was marked by the inception of social networking with MySpace in 2003. Facebook, which has become the most used social networking service worldwide since 2009, is also the social network where games applications have had the hugest impact, although many others, such as MySpace or Bebo, have contributed to the popularization of social casual games. Although not all Facebook games have been designed as social games, all of them include the social aspect because of the environment

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2 "Stagnation occurs when players are playing a game and reach a point where they appear to be stuck, with no way to go on" (Rollings & Adams, 2003, p. 271).

3 MySpace is a social networking service with a strong emphasis on music.
in which they are framed. Among the 208 applications listed as the ‘most popular games’ on Facebook in 2009, 100 (44 per cent) could be defined as social casual games (Di Loreto & Gouaïch, 2010, pp. 1-2).

The first Facebook application to achieve a mass audience was a social game released in 2007, *Lexulous* (Kolkata, 2007), based on the commercial board game *Scrabble* (Mosher Butts, 1938) and combined with an online chat (Roebuck, 2012, p. 71). Its success resides in its asynchronous and social gameplay. Players play the game in turns, thus they don’t need to be playing at the same time. The concept of ‘asynchronous multiplay’ was introduced by Bogost to designate situations in which players play a game “in sequence, rather than simultaneously”, and breaks in the game are a way to accommodate demands of the physical world and game expectations (2004, p. 1).

The social network game genre has dramatically evolved since *Lexulous*’ success. The release of *FarmVille* (Zynga, 2009) in early 2010 achieved an astonishing breakthrough, and McDonald’s was one of the first advertisers to recognize the importance of this phenomenon. In October 2010, the world’s largest chain of hamburger fast-food restaurants started an exceptional action on Facebook by installing a branded farm on *FarmVille* (Rietveld, 2010). For one day only, *FarmVille* players had the opportunity to interact with the McDonald’s farm to earn virtual rewards. One of the virtual rewards was a McDonald’s hot-air balloon to decorate their farms, a smart way to ensure the presence of the brand in the game after the campaign.

There are a series of elements within the Facebook context that can work as incentives or as reinforcers to play from which advergames can benefit (Di Loreto & Gouaïch, 2010, p. 5). These features can be grouped by the purpose for which players use them: communication, competition, or collaboration. Whereas the usefulness of these features deserves an in-depth analysis that will be carried out in chapter 6, I will list some examples here that will help to illustrate how advergames can take advantage of these elements. Facebook has the potential to display a list of friends using an application. This feature has a communication purpose and can be used by advergames as an incentive to attract new players to the game. Another Facebook feature allows players to challenge their friends within the advergame. This element, which has a competition purpose, can be useful for

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4 *FarmVille* is a farm management simulation Facebook game.

5 Incentives can be positive or negative and are anticipated consequences of players’ performance, which help to motivate a specific behavior. Furthermore, reinforcers are consequences of behavior that reward expected behavior or punish undesirable behavior, teaching players how to perform (Di Loreto & Gouaïch, 2010, p. 5).
both attracting new players and retaining active players. Furthermore, the advergame can implement the possibility of allowing users to send gifts to their friends, which is a collaboration feature. These gifts can be related to the communication message, with the product or with the brand advertised in the game, as in the case of the McDonald’s hot-air balloon. In conclusion, if designed with persuasive intentions, social features of advergames can be used to enhance meaningful experiences.

By January 2010, many companies had begun to be active in the social media world, and activity levels were relatively high for companies in all regions, particularly on Twitter, as reported by the public relations and communications firm Burson-Marsteller (2010, pp. 2-6). This increasing presence of companies in the social media world led to an interest in taking advantage of the potential of social casual games. Since then, social casual advergames have proliferated on Facebook. The following chapters analyze some examples and the reader will find detailed information about several techniques that benefit from social features.

Nowadays, the combination of mobile and social games indicates a shift away from Facebook and a search for alternatives that use Facebook’s single sign-in, which allows for the collection of consumer data. Games for mobile devices are obviously different from games for desktops, and already serious innovations in social-game design are emerging that take advantage of the possibility to integrate location-based elements.

**Mobile advergames**

In 1994, a mobile version of *Tetris* (Pajitnov, 1985) became the first game pre-installed on a mobile phone, the Hagenuk MT-2000 device. Three years later, the very successful *Snake* (Nokia, 1997) arrived, becoming the most popular mobile game ever, embedded in more than 350 million devices worldwide (Parini & Sannicolò, 2012, p. 1). Mobile devices then became a new platform suited to casual games and, by extension, for advergames. As previously stated, casual games are, by definition, usable and interruptible, which means that they are quick to access and are designed to be played for short periods of time or in brief bursts. This facilitates access for players by providing flexibility in the time invested in the game session (Juul, 2010, p. 50). These two traits make casual advergames suitable for playing on mobile devices.

In the early 2000s, advances in wireless communications and the rapid growth of users aroused the interest of marketers in mobile advergames (Roto & Kaikkonen, 2003, p. 205). Furthermore, at that time, mobile phones
with large color displays became the norm and enabled advergames to exploit two other traits of casual games: the design of emotionally positive fictions and the juiciness. In 2006, Coca-Cola released in India *Thumbs Up Everest Challenge* (2006), one of the first mobile advergames to be used as part of a brand-promotion campaign.6

Moreover, other characteristics of mobiles drew marketers’ attention at the time. Firstly, they are carried everywhere, which means people have access to mobile advergames in situations where they do not have access to other devices such as computers. A study conducted by the Nokia Research Center revealed that participants who reported playing mobile games at home do it from places like bed before going to sleep or on the couch while watching TV (Koivisto, 2007, p. 4). Secondly, mobile applications run on full screen, which, in the context of an advergame, serves to transmit advertising messages without competing for user attention. In addition, mobile devices are location-aware, which can provide customized experiences including location-based advergames, which will be discussed in next section.

Smartphone adoption has increased mobile data usage. iPhone and Android operating systems offer app stores that stimulate data usage (Parini & Sannicolò, 2012, p. 1). *Angry Birds* (Rovio Mobile, 2009), with its combination of addictive gameplay, comical style, and low price, is a nice example of a game that has performed well on both mobile operating systems, with one billion downloads by May 2012.7 The incursion of brands into this phenomenon was natural and even expected by consumers. In 2009, the son of a senior Volkswagen executive asked his father: “Why hasn’t Volkswagen got anything on iPhone?” That is how Fishlabs got its deal to develop the mobile advergame *Volkswagen Polo Challenge* (Fishlabs, 2009), a racing game with 350,000 copies downloaded in the first five days.8

It follows that mobile devices have become a suitable platform for mobile advergames, as they can be accessed everywhere and can benefit from the advantages of casual gaming. Furthermore, the introduction of GPRS and 3G technologies to mobile devices have facilitated the incorporation of spatial parameters in the gameplay, such as the location of players, their orientation, or the speed of their movements (Winter et al., 2011, p. 2). These changes have led to the proliferation of pervasive mobile advergames.

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6 www.jumpgames.com/games.php?categoryid=126&SubCategoryID=64
8 Data retrieved from a presentation given by Michael Schade, CEO of Fishlabs, at the Casual Connect Europe, February 2010. The presentation is available online at: www.casualconnect.org/lectures/2010-europe-lectures/case-study-ad-funded-games/.
Pervasive advergames

The concept of pervasive games is problematized as ‘the magic circle’, a term coined by the historian Johan Huizinga in his book *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* to describe the boundaries that define a game in time and in space (1949, p. 10). The term was borrowed by Salen and Zimmerman, who applied it to digital games, claiming that playing a game “means entering into a magic circle, or perhaps creating one as a game begins” (2004, p. 95). Markus Montola, a game scholar and co-author of the book *Pervasive Games: Theory and Design*, makes use of this concept to define pervasive games as games that have “one or more salient features that expand the contractual magic circle of play spatially, temporally, or socially” (2009, p. 7).

The term ‘pervasive game’ was coined in 2001 when the advances in communication technologies – in particular the adoption of the internet, mobile communication, and positioning technologies – opened new design spaces for pervasive play (Montola et al., 2009, preface xix). The incorporation of GPRS and 3G technologies into mobile devices has allowed them to become the most common gaming platform for this category of games (Ibid., p. 179). Pervasive mobile games incorporate spatial parameters into the gameplay, such as the location of players, their orientation, or the speed of their movements (Winter et al., 2011, p. 2). When playing the game, players travel in the physical world communicating, competing, and collaborating with other people in the game (Han, Cho, & Choi, 2005, p. 4).

As advergames’ objective goes beyond the magic circle, given that advergames are designed to influence players’ real-life attitudes or impressions of a brand, the properties of pervasive games have become of special interest for marketers. Pervasive advergames have been expanding the contractual magic circle of play spatially, temporally, and socially to deploy experiences that enhance interaction with the physical world. As a result, they have allowed players to interact with products in their natural environments and have also allowed players to transfer their game experiences into attitudes toward the brand in the physical world.

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9 It must be noted that pervasive mobile phone games can be divided into two categories: pervasive games played with mobile phones and mobile phone games with pervasive features. I am interested in the latter, because, as previously argued, I consider the nature of advergames to be digital.


11 Several examples of this are analyzed in chapter 6.
Unlike non-pervasive games, which have a spatial design that isolates players from their surroundings, pervasive games embrace their environments and inhabit a game world that is present within the physical world, expanding the contractual magic circle of play spatially (Montola et al., 2009, p. 12). MyTown (Booyah, 2009) is an example of how advergames can take advantage of this characteristic of pervasive games to establish a magical relationship between physical world and game world. This pervasive mobile game is a special version of Monopoly in which the player can buy or sell physical world properties. The game uses geo-location technologies to determine players’ positions, which allows them to check-in on physical properties that they will be able to buy or sell. Physical products are also integrated into the gameplay. Players can enter stores and buy products virtually through barcode scanning, which can unlock virtual goods and manufacturer promotions. Logos, buildings, and products can all be incorporated into the gaming environment through barcode scanning, image recognition, or GPS. Therefore, the ability of pervasive games to inhabit a game world that is present within a physical world can help brands to design experiences that enable users to have contact with products and brands in the physical world.

Furthermore, in non-pervasive games, game sessions are distinguished from other activities, even if they overlap (Montola et al., 2009, p. 14). Game sessions in Facebook games such as FarmVille can be micro-sessions that overlap with other activities in the social network, for example; but, even though sessions can be quite short, they can be clearly distinguished from other activities. By contrast, in pervasive games, ordinary life merges with a gameplay session, expanding the contractual magic circle of play temporally (Ibid., p. 14). Going back to the case of MyTown (Booyah, 2009), it is not possible to define clear boundaries between the game time and real time because every place the players visit in their ordinary lives can incite an action in the game. Moreover, players can decide to visit a specific place because of the game. Players visiting a store to scan products that they want to use in the game can actually decide to buy the items in the physical world. Furthermore, it can also happen that players who visit a place in their ordinary lives find products there that allow them to unlock virtual goods, for instance. This overlap between game life and the physical world allows brands to smoothly meddle in players’ lives without any perceptible intrusion.

Finally, pervasive games can expand the contractual magic circle of play socially by involving outsiders, which is a direct consequence of their temporal and spatial configuration (Ibid., p. 14). In the case of MyTown,
for example, the game can motivate a player to visit a specific location, an action that can attract other people not involved in the game to the same location. Let’s say that players want to visit a café: they might call a friend to meet at that location. This characteristic of pervasive games can be useful for engaging other customers in the branded experience even if they are not actual players of the game.

Although the three features described above are more characteristic of pervasive mobile games, other types of pervasive games can also benefit from them. Mobile phones are the most common gaming device for pervasive games, but it is possible to find many online advergames that use pervasive techniques to persuade consumers. The *Nokia Game Series* (played from 1999 to 2003 and again in 2005) is an early example of pervasive online advergames used to market Nokia models. The games were designed to encourage people to buy the phones and to teach them how to use the devices to their full potential. During the gameplay, players received phone calls and text messages with information that was necessary to follow the storyline, which spatially expanded the contractual magic circle of play beyond the computer screen. Furthermore, players had to look for clues in advertisements on television and in newspapers, thereby expanding the contractual magic circle of play not only spatially beyond the computer screen, but also temporally by maintaining players’ engagement with the game during their ordinary lives.

The future of advergaming: Virtual reality, augmented reality and artificial intelligence

Virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and artificial intelligence (AI) are no longer technologies of the future. They are already present in our daily lives in many different ways and are also exploited by the game industry. Today, we can see children playing with social robots such as *Tega*, individuals exploring cities to capture new Pokémon species, and *Grand Theft Auto* (GTA) lovers exploring a new level of immersion by playing *GTA 5* (Houser, 2013) in VR.

Since these technologies have become more accessible and popular, marketers have been implementing their use in their communication strategies (De Gauquier et al. 2018). VR technologies allow users to interact with games in a way that goes beyond simple mouse clicks or complicated key combinations, providing them with the opportunity to interact with environments in a way that is closer to our experiences in the physical world. AR provides a new dimension to pervasive games, and is being used
to design games that allow users to explore spaces from a new perspective. And AI allows games to adapt to players’ performance and profile in a sophisticated way. Brands have seen the potential of these technologies to present new products to customers. These technologies not only present new opportunities for in-game advertising (Li 2018), but also new possibilities for the design of advergames in the form of VR advergames, AR advergames, or advergames in which AI changes the way players interact with these virtual environments.

These are all new applications and, to date, we cannot speak of numerous advergames using these technologies; but, there are already some cases in which we can see the combination of these technologies with games for marketing and advertising purposes. AT&T AUDIENCE Network (2018), for example, has created a VR escape advergame for the new Mr. Mercedes, in which the player is put in the shoes of one of the characters in the show to discover clues and find a way to escape.

An example taking advantage of what AI has to offer advergames is Crackables (OnePlus, Google ZOO, & Unit 9, 2018), a series of crypto puzzles, both digital and physical. In the game, the player communicates with an AI bot in real time that helps them complete challenges. Only the fastest 1000 players who completed the first three challenges were able to continue to the next round. Those 1000 gamers were each sent a real-world microcontroller that they had to use to crack various audiocodes in order to be one of the top six winners who got a special prize.

A contrasting application of AR can be found in the advergame Honeyway Train (Saatchi & Saatchi, & Boffswana, 2010) in which players are encouraged to use a box of Cheerios cereal as a wheel controller.

A review of the evolution of advergames over the years illustrates that the exploitation of the potential of digital games to convey advertising messages depends not only on technological innovations, but also on the understanding of the medium. The earliest advergames designed in the early 1980s used innovative techniques to embed their brands, products, and advertising messages within digital games. In the 1990s, however, even though there were great technological advances, an analysis of the most salient advergames of that period shows that it was not an innovative moment for this marketing strategy. Since then, technology has rapidly evolved, giving rise to many different forms of advergames, each with characteristics that can be exploited to enhance branded experiences. However, as will be illustrated in chapter 8, these features are not always exploited and are sometimes incorrectly utilized because of a lack of understanding of the medium.
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