Digital Gaming and the Advertising Landscape

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Published by Amsterdam University Press

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Conclusions

This book was aimed to determine how digital games can be used to convey advertising messages that are meaningful from both the brand's and the player's perspectives. One of the most significant contributions of this volume has been the development of a new theoretical model for the study of how persuasive messages can be conveyed through digital games. This theoretical model can identify specific aspects of advergames' persuasiveness that might not be obvious at first glance by giving them order and conferring on them intelligibility. Through this model I have structured important theories from different fields and explained how these theories can be used to convey persuasive messages through digital games.

In the second chapter a critical review of previous definitions proposed by other scholars for the term advergame has shown that there was not a clear understanding of the concept. Therefore, I proposed my own definition for the term in which I state that an advergame is a digital game specifically designed for a brand with the aim of conveying an advertising message. This new definition for the term serves first to acknowledge that as digital games, advergames are procedural, spatial, interactive, encyclopedic, and networked environments. Thus, these features can be used to convey meaningful branded experiences through digital games.

Furthermore, the new definition serves to differentiate advergames from commercial digital games in which advertising techniques are used to promote products or services. In the definition I specify that advergames are specifically designed for a brand, which implies that the whole experience can be designed with the purpose of conveying the advertising message. This suggests that it is important to acknowledge how a whole digital game can be designed with such a purpose. In this regard, I pointed out that due to the interactive nature of digital games, in advergames the communication process is bidirectional and that players are co-authors of the advertising discourse. We must therefore take into consideration that players' performance can have an important role in the way they interpret the meaning authored into the game.

DOI 10.5117/9789462987159_intro
With a clear definition of the concept of advergames and after having established the differences between this kind of game and other digital games with advertising intentions, in the third chapter I carried out an analytical review of advergames’ history. In this critical review I showed that while the first advergames designed in the early 1980s used innovative techniques to embed advertising messages, the 1990s was not an innovative time for this marketing strategy. Furthermore, despite the rapid development of technology since then, giving rise to many different forms of advergames with characteristics that could convey advertising messages, these new features are in many cases not always exploited or properly used. The results of this analytical review of advergames’ history suggest that these features are not always exploited and are sometimes poorly utilized because of a lack of understanding of the medium. It follows that this book can serve to enhance the quality of future advergames.

In chapter 4 I identified five recurrent criteria considered by professionals when measuring advertising effectiveness: the campaign objectives, the background situation, the creative strategy, the media strategy and the evidence of the results of the campaign. Of the five criteria in which advertisers can work to improve advergames’ effectiveness, the creative strategy is the one that differs most in comparison with other media. The creative strategy determines what the advertising message will say and how the strategy will be executed. In order to decide how the creative strategy will be executed when using a digital game as a medium for advertising, it is necessary to understand the medium and to acknowledge which of its elements can be designed to convey the advertising message.

In the fourth chapter I conducted a critical literature review around Bogost’s arguments in which I used the shortcomings found by other scholars to evidence that procedural rhetoric should not be seen as a communicative revolution and the unique persuasive domain available within digital games but as a strategic option that could be useful for some purposes, but not for others, and like other persuasive forms, it may hold a potential that is not always fully realized. Furthermore, this critical review has shown that Bogost’s (2007) approach neglects players’ creativity and forgets that player choices can lead to a manipulation of the dominant rhetoric intended by the game designer.

The main contribution of this chapter is the suggestion of a new approach to study how persuasive messages can be conveyed through digital games. I suggest that the study of how persuasive messages can be conveyed through digital games should be addressed by taking into consideration that multiple persuasive dimensions can be used within digital games to persuade players.
Furthermore, I claim that the use of multiple persuasive dimensions can facilitate the design of persuasive games that respect players’ creativity and provide freedom to the player to experience unique and unrepeatable experiences as a result of their own performance. Accordingly, I have proposed defining persuasive games as digital games that aim to shape, reinforce or change the perceptions, emotions, beliefs, behavioral intentions and behaviors of players.

In the sixth chapter of this book I presented a theoretical model for explaining how persuasive messages can be conveyed through digital games. This theoretical model relies on Salen and Zimmerman’s (2004) statements to explain how digital games can convey meaning through three different levels of persuasion: (1) the signs embedded within the game, (2) the system that allows players to interact with the signs of the game and (3) the context in which games are played. I claim that within these three levels of persuasion it is possible to situate multiple persuasive dimensions related to all the questions discussed above. Another important contribution of this chapter is the identification of eleven persuasive dimensions that can be used to persuade players through digital games. The identification of these persuasive dimensions and the description of how these persuasive dimensions can be used within advergames to convey advertising messages are of special relevance to understanding how digital games can be used to convey advertising messages.

The contribution of the seventh chapter was the identification of six factors that should be taken into consideration when designing an advertising strategy to be implemented within a digital game: goals, product integration, target, visibility, credibility and playability. This chapter provides the necessary knowledge for the study and conceptualization of advertising strategies for advergames. The value of this contribution is related to my claim that advergames have special characteristics that differentiate them from other types of persuasive games. It follows that an understanding of these traits that differentiate advergames from other types of persuasive games is necessary to choose the advertising message to be conveyed and how to integrate it within a digital game, which relates to advergames’ effectiveness.

In the eighth chapter, I applied the theoretical model proposed in this book to an analysis of the advergame *Tem de Tank* (DDB Amsterdam & Flavour, 2010). This analysis has shown the usefulness of the theoretical method. It can be concluded that this case study shows that a detailed analysis of each of the persuasive dimensions and of the persuasive structure of an advergame can identify flaws in the use of the different persuasive dimensions of the
game that might have otherwise gone unnoticed. Consequently, this analysis serves also as an illustration of how a lack of understanding of how digital games can be used to persuade players can result in an advergame that, despite having everything to become effective in terms of persuasion, may become meaningless for many players who have played it.

Hence it can be concluded that this volume has contributed to better understanding the connections between the basic properties of digital games and the multiplicity of advertising techniques that can be implemented within them. The understanding of this connections is relevant for different questions that move from facilitating the process of designing advergames or providing tools for the study of the effectiveness of these games, to the regulation of how, when and why these games can be designed.

This book shows that digital games offer multiple possibilities to persuade players. Through the examples examined in this volume, it has been made clear that persuasion through digital games can in many cases remain unnoticed by players, question that becomes especially sensitive if these games are designed to influence the attitude and behavior of young target audiences. For this reasons, the regulation of this practice seems to be of special relevance. Although the knowledge provided within this volume is obviously useful for the design of even more subtle and pervasive advergames, a better understanding of how persuasion works within digital games can also contribute to a better the regulation of this practice. If we need to decide when, how and why digital games are used for persuasive purposes, it is necessary to understand first how they can be used for such purposes.

References


DDB Amsterdam, & Flavour (2010). *Tem de Tank* [Digital Game].