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Abstract. The article is an attempt to systematize and describe ways to reach out with the marketing message to children through games. Based on a review of the literature, the attempts to organize forms of advertising in digital games (advergaming) were made. The paper also tries to identify the research areas arising from the use of these advertising activities for a specific subsegment of the market of young consumers – children.

Introduction

Marketing communication on the Internet is a relatively new area of research. Its development in the practical sphere – diversity of forms and action models – makes the Internet an integral part of integrated communication activities, and Internet users are now customers of many Internet-based marketing techniques. One of the most attractive target groups are young consumers, especially due to their large experience in the use of the Internet, resulting from both the frequency of staying online and range of online activities. Despite the common characteristics of the representatives of this segment, such as experience in the use of new technologies and the Internet, one should be aware of the diversity resulting from development conditions. The specific subsegment are children who are exposed to the increasing number of marketing messages targeted at them in the elec-

tronic media, especially the Internet (Hofmeister-Tóth, Nagy, 2011). The activities addressed to them include a series of forms and tools, including interactive games, competitions, or websites with attractive graphics (Hofmeister-Tóth, Nagy, 2011; Budzanowska-Drzewiecka, 2015). The development of forms of advertising in new media creates different opportunities to target children, including the fact that games have become an important channel of communication.

Advergaming represents a rapidly evolving sector comprising of embedded commercial messages within the content of retail-accessible video games and online electronic games. As emphasized by the authors of report *Game Industry Trends: Kids 2014* (2014), children's games are not the most profitable segment of virtual entertainment, but very important due to the nature of the target group. It stems from their intellectual and emotional immaturity, which is the direct cause of ethical concerns associated with addressing ads to them, placed in the characteristic communication channel.

The study based on the literature of the subject attempts to systematize issues connected with using games as a medium of advertising aimed at children. Based on the available literature, the author indicated the main areas and directions that require further exploration.

Conditions of attractiveness of games as a medium of advertising

The proliferation of online games has given advertisers a new format to reach consumers with marketing messages (Lee, Park, Wise, 2013). Computer games have now become a channel of communication through which one can reach a wide range of players. The use of advertising activities in the games constitutes a dynamic field of marketing communications (Mitręga, 2013). Although for a long time they were considered entertainment for younger players (especially boys), one can find people with very different social characteristics among players. While the perception is that games are the domain of children and teenagers, their scope is significantly wider, also on the Polish market. According to the research report *Game Industry Trends. Electronic entertainment market in Poland*, players can be found in every social group, regardless of age, education, or place of residence (Draszanowska, Sroka, 2013). Poles frequently benefit from traditional video games, although the significance of this form decreases in comparison to the results of previous studies. More and more Poles are turning to games on tablets and social networking sites. These preferences are related to the gender of the respondents – men prefer traditional video games. According to the results described in the report, players are aware of the placement of advertising in games. In all demographic groups surveyed, they declared that they very often encounter ads. Perhaps their excess

can explain the negative feedback on them. The majority of the players declared that it was annoying and unnecessary. A negative attitude to advertising in games was declared by a smaller proportion of respondents, as compared to earlier studies (Draszanowska, Sroka, 2013). Approximately $^2/_5$ of players can also see the positive aspects of the placement of ads in games, which, in their opinion, translates into a lower price, and does not disturb the game. $^1/_4$ of the respondents even think that advertising in games makes the game more attractive. The more favourable attitude is the characteristic of men and younger people involved in the study (15–18 year olds).

Games are also played by the youngest participants of the market, both boys (58%) and girls (42%), regardless of age (*Game…*, 2014). According to the research results, the older the child the more often they play computer games. 12% of parents play games together with their children aged 7 to 12 years. This percentage is reduced to 7 in the case of the children from 13 to 16 years of age, and then to 2% in the group of children aged from 17 to 18 years. It means that in the case of school children, parents in most cases do not control the advertising message addressed to them in this communication channel. Children often decide to purchase a game, and are invited to its selection by the peer group.

In addition to reaching out to a diverse group of customers using computer games, including children, other factors also contribute to their attractiveness as a channel for marketing communication. One of them is the increasing number of messages addressed to recipients in the traditional media, but also on the Internet, which definitely makes it difficult to attract their attention. What makes the game stand out as a communication channel, is its interactivity and elective involvement of the recipients of the message. Advergames in particular – as a type of interactive advertising – generate interactivity between brands and games through consumers'active participation, and, additionally, combine a branded message with an entertainment message (Lee, Choi, Quilliam, Cole, 2009; Lee et al., 2013). The player is often heavily involved in the course of the game, so as Mitręga (2013) writes, the player does not only engage attention, but there are also emotions that should support the reception of the advertising message, if it is properly placed in the game.

Forms of advertising in digital games

Companies are increasingly using advertising in digital games in their marketing communication strategy. This trend started in the eighties, when marketers started to embedded product placements in video games as an early type of advergaming (Aarnoutse, Peursum, Dalpiaz, 2014). However, the term 'advergame'

(advertising game) was introduced to marketing literature by Tony Giallourakis in 2000 (Kiraci, 2014). According to researchers, it is still poorly understood (e.g. Mitręga, 2013; Terlutter, Capella, 2013; Dahl, Eagle, Báez, 2009). Dahl et al. (2009) underline the lack of integrated theoretically-grounded research regarding the effects and effectiveness of forms of advergaming on any target group. The knowledge based on the results of the research is still fragmented, and the problems with comparability of the results for advergaming are associated with a non-uniform definition of forms of advertising in digital games.

In the literature, there are many typologies of activities known as advergaming. For example, Purswani (2010) distinguishes 'advergames' (interactive video games with brand logo as a part of the character, or visible in the background), 'sponsorship of events' (e.g. tickets to real life events via the game), and 'adverworlds' (interactive worlds designed to inform consumers about their products). However, the division into 'advergames' and 'in-game advertising' (IGA) is the most popular (e.g. Winkler, Buckner, 2006; Hofmeister-Tóth, Nagy, 2011). IGA occurs in the games created independently of the built-in ads (Lee et al., 2013). It can be compared to the product placement in standard, non-interactive media, which distinguishes it from advertising games. Advergames are custom online games designed specifically for a brand, in which the brand often plays a central role. Advergames are an evolved form of product placement where the game itself is centralized around the brand rather than the brand placed in the game (Hofmeister-Tóth, Nagy, 2011).

Terlutter and Capella (2013) complement the categorization further by distinguishing 'advertising in social network games' as a third form of action, especially important for young audiences. The proposed division is associated directly with the nature of the game. However, it does not fully explain the possibilities of placing ads in their content. Research on advertising in digital games has focused on IGA and advergames with only scarce attention devoted to advertising in social network games (Terlutter, Capella, 2013). Advertising in social network games is the most recent but growing form of advertising in games (Terlutter, Capella, 2013). What sets them apart is the fact that they are played on social networks, which can be connected with specific reasons for playing them. Terlutter and Capella (2013) citing Yee (2006) emphasize that through them players might want to build relationships with friends. Moreover, the reasons may be teamwork and/or competitive play, role-play identity, and escape from reality.

In the case of IGA, the content about the brand can be placed in a game in a subtle or in a prominent manner, or may be visible during loading times of the game (Terlutter, Capella, 2013). The advertising content can be static (static IGA) or dynamic (dynamic IGA), which is associated with their different features.

Static ads, due to the fact that they are a permanent element of the game, do not require a continuous access to the Internet, but also allow for modifications after the game has been launched (Terlutter, Capella, 2013). Dynamic advertising allows periodic introduction of advertising to the game chosen, or planning advertisement in a certain game group, e.g. directed to a similar segment of buyers (Mitręga, 2013).

Although in the literature there are various definitions of advergames, their review allows for identification of the most important attributes. They:

– are free online games located on the brand website, because their job is to achieve higher traffic on brand websites (Terlutter, Capella, 2013),
– contain persuasive messages relating to the offer (brand or/and product), which is the integral component of the game (Kiraci, 2014),
– are funny, highly enjoyable, and create a context for associating the brand with positive semantic features,
– are easy and offer quick rewards, typically allow for short playing time.

Therefore, they seem to be a good way for marketers to target children (Hofmeister-Tóth, Nagy, 2011). Children may play an online advergame as many times as they want to, and, therefore, are exposed to the brand multiple times (Mallinckrodt, Mizerski, 2007).

The interactivity and elective involvement of advergames makes them different from many other forms of advertising (Dahl et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2013). According to Winkler and Buckner (2006), advertising of brand/product can be integrated into a game to various degrees of immersion: associative, illustrative, and demonstrative (Table 1).

Table 1

Types of advergames based on the levels of integration of the brand/product with game

Forms of advergames		
Associative	Illustrative	Demonstrative
advertising is not associated with the game mechanics advertising is simply displayed in the background lack of interaction	advertising associated with the game mechanics brand exposure is not related to any brand/product characteristics players interact with the advertising embedded in the advergame	advertising associated with the game mechanics advertising (brand/product) appears in natural context players can interact with the brand's features

Source: based on Chen, Ringel, 2001 as cited in Lee, Park, Wise, 2013; Winkler, Buckner, 2006.

Depending on the degree of interactivity of the advertising elements presented, it is possible to achieve a variety of purposes, even though the earlier studies by

Buckner and Winkler (2006) reported that the use of advergames is more effective in the case of the previously known players of the brand. Presenting the brand by means of illustrative or demonstrative elements of the game may result in the increase of awareness of the new brand among consumers. The use of the above advergames by companies allows for achieving diverse goals. Illustrative or demonstrative advergames raise the awareness of the new brand among consumers (Ho, Lin, Yang, 2011). In contrast, associative advergames can strengthen the desire to buy a product of the advertised brand.

Advertising in digital games targeted to children – areas for further research

Advertising in digital games is rapidly growing, but is also a controversial (particularly in the case of targeting children) form of marketing communication. Because of the fact that it is a new and constantly evolving form of marketing communication, as an area of research, it needs further exploration allowing not only for the search of the general conditions of its effectiveness, but also for formulating the conditions of its use in reaching out to specific target groups.

The specific group of recipients of advergaming are children. Reaching out to them through this channel of communication requires not only an analysis of its efficacy as an advertising tool, but preventing its potentially harmful effect on children (Aarnoutse et al., 2014; Budzanowska-Drzewiecka, 2015). The studies on the in-game advertising targeted to children are often focused on advergames. The researchers focused on analyzing the content of advertising games, rarely on the perception of their commercial context by children (An, Jin, Park, 2014; Rozendaal, Buijzen, Valkenburg, 2012; Mallinckrodt, Mizerski, 2007). This is an important area since due to the specific development conditions – the lack of cognitive or critical thinking skills – children may not have the competence to properly identify the intention of placing ads in games. According to the Persuasion Knowledge Model, the players who are not aware of the advertising embedded within the games, are more vulnerable to the effects of persuasive messages contained in them (Dahl et al., 2009), which can lead to disorderly perception of specific product categories by children. As indicated by the results of the research, emphasizing the advertising nature of the game does not raise persuasiveness, but produces a more negative attitude to the game in children (Panic, Cauberghe, de Pelsmacker, 2013). This is confirmed by the specific characteristics of advertising games, which can be a contribution to comparisons with other forms of advertising. In addition, it is important to refine the analysis by referring to specific forms of advergaming. In one of the first studies carried out on children (aged 9 to 12) focusing on advertising in social network games, it was shown that despite fairly good knowledge of the advertising, they yet

held uncritical attitudes toward it, and the most important predictors of children's desire for the advertised brands in these games were a low critical attitude and high peer influence susceptibility (Rozendaal, Slot, van Reijmersdal, Buijzen, 2013).

The area that needs a further analysis is the specification of the diversity of involvement in the game, and thus the effectiveness of advertising in games depending on the age and sex of the child. The researchers showed that the effects of advergaming are moderated by the age of the child. In the case of gender, the results suggest that girls are likely to stop playing video games at the beginning of early adolescence, whereas most boys continue. The games which are attractive to girls even after the age of 12 are 'pink games.' One study explaining the involvement of girls in pink games, found that identification with the characters of the game is important in explaining their motivation to play (van Reijmersdal, Jansz, Peters, van Noort, 2013). It also showed that the age of the girl affects identification negatively, but it is not related to the most important motive in playing pink games − social interaction (van Reijmersdal et al., 2013).

Some children play games under the supervision of parents. Thus their attitudes and knowledge can be both the limitation and factor increasing the efficiency of the use of advergaming.

Conclusion

The research on the conditions and the effects of advergaming aimed at children is one of the more recent research areas related to online communication, due to their potential social consequences. The overview of the research results confirmed the need for further exploration, although the proposed suggestions for further research indicate only the fundamental issues that can be a contribution to further research (Table 2).

Table 2

Basic groups of conditions in the study of advergaming targeted to children

Characteristics of ads in games	Characteristics of children	Characteristics of parents
type of advertising in digital game degree of prominence degree of interactivity degree of congruence (brand/game)	age and gender cognitive capabilities level of advertising literacy susceptibility to peer influence experience in playing	attitudes of parents towards games knowledge of advertising in digital games the level of control of the content of games that children play engaging in interactions with children while playing

Source: own elaboration.

They are not the exhaustive analyses of the subject. They show that it is still not entirely clear what effects of in-game advertising are on children, especially in comparison to other forms of marketing communication. It seems reasonable to deepen the analysis taking into account the specific forms of advergaming. Bearing in mind that children as a segment are a diverse group, the next accented area is the analysis of the impact of in-game advertising depending on the specific individual circumstances, including age, sex of the child, and their knowledge of advertising and its persuasive character. What is also important when analysing the effectiveness and possible consequences of in-game advertising aimed at children, are the attitudes of parents.

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Działania reklamowe w grach komputerowych skierowane do dzieci

Słowa kluczowe: *advergaming*, reklama w grach komputerowych, dzieci, reklama w grach

Streszczenie. Artykuł jest próbą systematyzacji i opisu sposobów docierania z komunikatem marketingowym do dzieci przez gry komputerowe. Na podstawie przeglądu literatury podjęto próbę uporządkowania form reklam umieszczanych w grach (*advergaming*). Starano się zidentyfikować obszary badawcze wynikające ze stosowania tych działań reklamowych do konkretnego subsegmentu rynku młodych konsumentów – dzieci.