ADVERGAMES: AN EFFECTIVE MARKETING TOOL IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract:

As more and more consumers gather online for shopping, entertainment, research and other purposes, traditional marketing tactics such as banner ads are purposefully being side-stepped by the prospective clients. Advergaming, a powerful marketing tool, is increasingly becoming engaging and winning legitimate eyeballs - and for good reasons. Advergaming incorporates the advertising message, logo of company or other information about the brand with online games or video game. It has evolved as an acceptable and engaging platform which the consumers willingly appear attracted to with the rising social media presence. By integrating a game into social platforms it allows users to spread the games virally, through fixed as well as mobile devices.

According to a study carried out by the Interactive Software Federation of Europe (2012), one in four gamers uses a smartphone to play video games, and 83% of gamers play online using free apps or downloads. This has led to a change in the way content is consumed and distributed. There is now a wider range of video games available, the genres have evolved, the consumer profile has been transformed, and the age of gamers has increased.

Advergaming has attracted the attention of academician, researchers and industrialist but very few researches have yet been conducted in this field. The purpose of the current research is to investigate the significance of Advergames as an effective interactive marketing tool.

Keywords: Advergames, advergaming, interactive marketing, effective advertising

Introduction:

Advergames, or branded games, as a marketing platform, has been around for many years. With the growth of gamers in Asia, four out of every five smartphone owners have played a game on their device, and 46% play games on a daily basis – this marketing tool has become a more creative and effective way to promote the brand. In the past, due to prohibitive development costs, only the largest global brands could afford to develop and roll out advergames. This perhaps led to the stunted and disjointed progress of utilizing advergames as a tool in rolling out new campaigns.

The growth and development of smartphones with internet connectivity means that many users are now employing free or low-cost downloads to access advertising content developed by various brands in the form of video games.

Video games have become one of the platforms most used by advertisers seeking new ways of getting their message across effectively, which is logical considering the efficiency rates reported by some studies. New advertising techniques experience a

greater acceptance among users—a public that is tired of the lack of originality of older methods and that demands greater personalization of messages.

Advergaming was coined in January 2000 by Anthony Giallourakis, and later stated by Wired's "Jargon Watch" in 2001. Presence of advergaming was since 1980 when Kool-Aid and Pepsi developed Atari 2600 games featuring their products and distributed the game cartridges as promotions. American Home Foods also had a video game that promoted Chef Boyardee that was distributed on floppy disk. In 1998, NVision Design (now Blockdot) construct company recognition campaign, through game named "Good Willie Hunting" and the game was a huge success and brought more attention to this new promotional method. Due to internet evolution, popularity of video game are unexpectedly becoming much more visible and in practice. In making pace with daily reality of life, this virtual world of gaming is gaining momentum.

An Advergames offer services by establishing integration and interactivity (Dobrow, 2004). It is said that advergames induce to educate consumers about the benefits, specialties and identity features of the products in general. An advergame represents an exclusive form of branded entertainment as in adverdgaming the game incorporated as part of it main focus is to make the game medium to carry brand message (Deal, 2005). A game can create interaction and involvement with brands. A game is the technique to build brand on top of mind of consumers (Dahl, 2006). Most of research was conducted focusing American market and especially in food industry for children segment. But slowly it realized that now gaming is not limited to children only.

Importance and Effectiveness of Advergaming

A recent study on advergaming was done in the year 2012 designed by Territorial Creative on the Twenty social network for Open bank, the Santander Group's online bank. The game consisted in identifying elements belonging to English culture in the least amount of time possible from four categories: history and geography, sports, language and literature, and art and entertainment. Users were able to play in stages in any of the categories, had to face different levels of difficulty, improve their scores, and compete against their friends. The top 20 players won a year-long online English course ("Acción de advergaming," 2012).

The latest trends try to take advantage of social networks by using original games and designs. The internet has provided brands with a platform in which to develop custom games. For example, Unilever advertised Magnum ice cream via social networks. The campaign consisted of a simple game, Pleasure Hunt, integrated into the internet browser, which attracted sufficient attention and was entertaining enough to go viral. In the game, players had to control a young woman as she traveled through the internet while collecting chocolate sweets. Enormous exposure was achieved, and the game received traffic from 12 markets (Microsoft Advertising, 2013).

A study carried out by Media brix on the effectiveness of all advertising formats in video games found that these types of games achieve an average effectiveness rate of 20%, and social gamers claim to positively accept the advertising, especially if they receive something in exchange. These findings encourage brands to incorporate advergaming into their social media strategy ("La publicidad online," 2013). Méndiz

(2010), explains that as an advertising format, advergaming provides advertisers with some very interesting advantages (pp.44-45):

1. <u>High brand exposure</u>: A motorway billboard, a magazine advertisement or a webpage pop-up barely manages to hold attention for one or two seconds and a TV spot for up to 30 seconds. A video game user can spend hours playing with a brand.
2. <u>Maximum user attention</u>: Advergames potentially offers advertisers direct brand interaction with the consumer. This contact can be produced in three different ways: associative, illustrative, and demonstrative.
3. <u>More appealing to the consumer</u>: The interactivity and elective involvement make them a more appealing form of advertising in comparison to banner or pop-up advertising. Games educate users about the brand in a much active way instead of passive learning used in advertising.
4. <u>Increased brand recall</u>: Full focused advergames helps to gain high brand recognition and recall of brands.

Myths related to advergames
- Only large, global brands can afford to develop an advergame
- My industry doesn't use games in its marketing"
- We need an App
- Advergames don't really generate leads

Conclusion

Advergaming industry have wider scope in current scenario as videos gaming industry is on doom in India as a result companies have greater opportunity to place their brands in market as well as to spread brand awareness by implementing advergaming technique. Primary objective of adverdgaming should be amusement and gratification and secondary should be brand recall or sales in order to retain the interests of customers.

Digital marketing and expectations of users are constantly changing. Digital marketing spending averaged one quarter of total marketing budgets in 2016 hence marketers need to innovate and be on the lookout for solutions that will provide them with effective marketing and deeper engagement with their target consumers,.

In-game advertising and Advergames are forecast to reach over US$2.67 billion by the year 2017. Advergames are set to grow in Asia which is a very strong market – with gaming accounting for 13% of total mobile ad spend. . This according to industry analysts is expected to only grow at an estimated 19% year- on-year in Asia. The effectiveness, the ubiquity of technology and the cost benefits make Advergames a very compelling proposition that marketers should consider.

Myths about Advergames can prevent marketers from exploring and working with a platform that can be very effective in promoting their brands. Advergames deliver significant cost savings and provide greater returns in terms of engagement and sharing. The future of advergaming as an advertising tool looks promising, although it remains a terrain yet to be exploited, and rarely forms part of strategic planning in the case of most advertisers.

The key to success for advergaming lies in knowing how to make the most of technological trends while creating an experience that engages the gamer. There remains much to be done but research suggests that the conditions are ripe for advergaming to become an economically successful venture for advertisers and brands.

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