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Impact of Advergaming on Children

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Abstract:

Advergaming is a new form of advertisements in which, the products are positioned within games offered online. The products are positioned in the events of the game, in the game scenes and on the bodies of the characters.

This paper studies the effectiveness of Advergaming on young children in India in relation to the modified hierarchy of effects model. The sample consisted of 84 children in the age group of 8-12 years who could use internet and could also respond to simple paper and pencil surveys. A survey was conducted over young children immediately after they played a select online game to identify their response with regard to attention, recognition, liking, preference, intention and choice.

After a stipulated gap certain questions were asked and to identify the effect of Advergaming on the young minds and to test the recognition and recall of the brand. It was observed that Advergaming is very effective in influencing children buying behavior as majority of them were able to retain the character showed in the game and they preferred Pepsi to other brands. Their awareness of the brand Pepsi increased and they could recognize the brand among other competitors thus giving a competitive advantage to the brand.

1. Introduction

Advergaming is the use of gaming technology to convey advertising messages creatively to the masses. It is the next generation advertising methodology, which is becoming an extremely popular way of modern-day advertising. Anthony Giallourakis coined the term Advergaming in the year 2000.

Internet revolution has brought forth video games which are more visible and in vogue. They inform, persuade, teach as well as entertain the consumers while forming positive attitude towards the brand too.

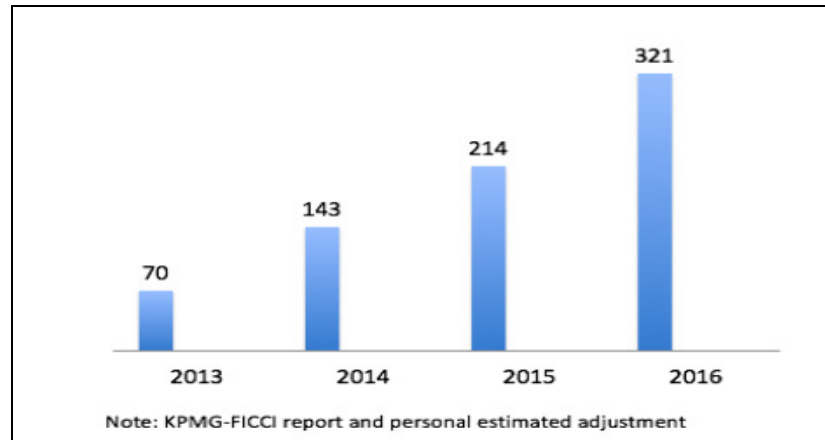
Products can be positioned on the body of game characters, so that each time the player plays the game, he indirectly comes under the influence of the product/brand emphasized in the game repeatedly. This helps in building the brand awareness among players. In modern day games, logos of famous brands are placed on skateboard, a car a truck, a vending machine, or a billboard inside the game. For instance, automobile brand like Mercedes' logo is placed on the steering wheel of racing cars; therefore, each time a player plays the game, he gets the brand registered in his mind. In this way, the game becomes a medium to carry the brand message. In addition, in 2006, Engage positioned some real restaurants in a famous shooting game called "Counter Strike". Following this many global companies have used this strategy and have come out with Advergaming specific to their brands/products like Coca-Cola, BurgerKing, McDonalds etc.

1.1. The Indian Gaming Industry: Market and Growth

Earlier games were played from company's gaming systems, with television as their primary median; or on a personal computer, with software being uploaded. But, today choices are endless as several advanced platforms have been made to play games on, be it Mobile Phones, MP3 Players, and other handheld devices. With a boom in the video game industry around the globe the games are becoming the easiest and the most cost-effective vehicles of entertainment.

In the recent years, India's digital ecosystem has witnessed rapid and dramatic changes with technology companies increasing their focus on gaming. It has been observed that gaming sector is one of the important sectors that contribute to the digital economy in India, as it does in China.

1.2. Indian Game Market Revenue (Unit: Million \$)



The gaming market looks promising with 100% growth witnessed in the years 2013 to 2014. Google MD Rajan Anandam quoted that “in India, there is shortage of entertainment avenues”, increasing the possibility of video gaming being the alternative source of entertainment.

1.3. Advergaming in India

Gaming Industry has a very bright scope in the present Indian scenario. Prakash Ahuja, C.E.O. – Gameshastra Inc., believes that the Indian gaming industry has reached an inflection point and will see exponential growth on all platforms reaching a critical level in the next 18- 24 months and will be driven by 3G-4G. The penetration of smart phones and tablets will also provide a rich user experience.

Mr. Rohit Sharma, C.E.O. – Reliance Entertainment – Digital Business, points that the online gaming industry in India will definitely witness meteoric growth with the advent of new access devices like tablets; smartphones, netbooks etc. Growth in social media has also resulted in proliferation of Social Gaming which is the latest trend in online gaming. More than 40% of Indian users on Facebook, play social games and this number will only grow. He prophesies that India will be amongst the top five countries in the world in the next three years in online gaming.

Ever growing Gaming market in India will strengthen the future of Advergaming as it will lead to better engagement with consumers. These games are usually played by users for about 5-10 minutes, and this level of engagement is likely to be seen as more impactful than a 10 second advertisement on television/radio.

Gaming is the most engaging platform for the young. Brands who do advergaming can reach their end users in a non-intrusive way where a target gets the brand’s message in a fun-filled and interesting way. All the major brands are gaming around to become a hit among customers specially among children. Children are considered to be the “customers for life”, thus Advergaming helps in building a stronger base for brands among children.

In India, Advergaming came into vogue with Zapak leading the way in 2006, Zapak has developed games for over 450 plus brands in the last 6 years which also included a puzzle contest for Mentos titled “Circuit Challenge” available both online as well as on mobile. The other examples in the past years include Paddlepop Gaming League (HUL) & Mahindra Great Escape – Thar Edition (Mahindra&Mahindra).

According to Sandeep Singh Arora, Executive Vice President Marketing, PepsiCo said, “You fish where the fish are. Consumers are going for games, which are highly engaging and a unique opportunity to show brand values. If consumers are spending time on games, you have to integrate yourself there.”

In India, Advergaming became a hit when several movie production houses took to advergaming some of the leading ones being “Ektha Tiger”, “Himmatwala”, “Krissh” and “Ra-One”. Some selected brands have gained extensively by launching interactive campaigns through challenging games, while others have gained by positioning their products within the scenes of popular games.

2. Literature Review

Camy (2005) pointed that the players like the virtual reality world in Advergaming and hence the products and brands need to be carefully integrated with the same virtual reality environment in which, the game plot and storyline has been designed. The players will not compromise their virtual experience, excitement, challenges and a fictional environment. They will recognize a brand and its product only if they perceive it to be a part of the virtual gaming environment. Islam (2005) from his survey on children interested in Advergaming concluded that children were able to recall brands positioned in both high and low intensity games and find them highly exciting and pleasurable.

Dahl, Eagle and Fernandez (2006) explained that the designers of Advergaming try to make it as entertaining as possible so that the players develop an emotional attachment with the brands and their products. Most of the gamers interested in Advergaming are of less than 18 years. Advergaming is considered as a persuasion technology used to target the non-conscious cognitive processing of children. His research revealed that online gaming has immense potential for marketers to position products and services. He believes

that Advergaming is an excellent platform to promote good practices, habits, behaviors and morals. Winkler and Buckner (2006) suggest that Advergaming work best when the product is already known and then the level of recall is relatively high.

D' Andrade (2007) analyzed that the gamers possessed high brand recall in exploratory games. However, he found that gamers could not recall the brands positioned on rapidly moving objects (like a train). Lee & Faber (2007) studied that various factors influence brand awareness with product placement in video games. The position of visual placements in the game plays a very important role in attracting the notice of the gamer. Ho and Yang (2008) revealed that gamers interested in Advergaming possessed very high intrinsic affinity and association with the brands and associative placements with existing products positioned in Advergaming, which affects the purchasing decisions by the gamers. These findings tally with the findings by van Reijmersdal, Jansz, Peters and van Noort (2010). They studied 2453 girls, aged between 11 and 17 years and found that they demonstrated highly favorable behavioral intentions and affinity towards the brand images positioned in Advergaming on the characters or objects most loved by them. Bati and Atici (2010) in a study conducted in Turkey among adolescents and youth found that the attitudes toward brands in Advergaming are linked directly with level of entertainment and the overall theme of the game.

Advergaming are new and emerging tool of Digital marketing used to entice adults and children to play in branded environments. There has been only very limited study exclusively on the emerging concept of Advergaming in India and children responses to playing Advergaming in the Indian context.

2.1. Objective of the Study

The primary objective of the study is to determine the effectiveness of Advergaming on young children. The current study uses a modified Hierarchy of effects model (Lavidge and Steiner 1961) to know the effectiveness of Advergaming on young children and how their responses differ at various stages of the model i.e Attention, Recognition, Association, Liking, Preference, Intention and Choice.

3. Research Methodology

The sample consisted of 84 children in the age group of 8-11 years who could use internet and could also respond to simple paper and pencil surveys. The sampling technique was convenience sampling.

The sample Advergame that was taken was Pepsi's action Advergame known as Pepsi man (1999). Children were made to play the Advergame for a maximum of 8 minutes.

This Advergame was used because display of the Pepsi logo and the product throughout the game, like the Pepsi cans, trucks with Pepsi written on it, on the costume of the action hero- the Pepsi man etc is widely seen. So, children are exposed to the brand on numerous occasions during the game playing session.

Children were made to play the advergame and were asked questions in first test through a simple easy to understand pictorial questionnaire, gauging their attention, recognition, association, liking, preference, intention and choice. They were again contacted after two days and were asked a few questions from the same game in order to check their brand recall and recognition. Further, after the collection of the data at both the stages inferences and interpretations were drawn. Percentage method was used.

4. Research Findings

The present study highlights the impact of Children on Advergaming and studies children's preferences with respect to modified Hierarchy of Effects Model.

Among the total respondents, 64% were girls and 36% were boys. The age group taken for the study was between 8 to 11 years of age. The sample distribution was as follows: Children aged 10 years were 43% of the total sample. 26% children were of 11 years, 19% were 9 years old whereas only 12% children were of 8 years.

4.1. Stage-I: The Study revealed

4.1.1. Attention

Children were asked to choose the colour of the hero's costume, they just saw during game play. 90% of the children successfully gave the answer showing their attentiveness.

Throughout the game, the player had to collect Pepsi cans through the hero, increasing the frequency of brand exposure throughout the game playing period. The children were asked which hero gained points in the game. Around 90% children were able to give this answer correctly showing their attentiveness and the attention gaining power of the game.

In the game, there is constant music in the background with the repetition of the word "Pepsi man" which makes the child remember which game he is playing. Around 88% of children were able to identify the song right among several options thus showing their attentiveness and the successful effect of the song in engaging the children.

4.1.2. Recognition

- Character Recognition: 86% of them recognized the Pepsi man very easily because of repeated exposure, as it was visible throughout the gaming.
- Product Recognition: 90% were able to recognize the product they saw during the game play due to the repeated exposure in the game. In the game, the player had to collect Pepsi cans in order to ensure the hero gains points. Repeated exposure increases the recognition and recall chances in children.

- Brand Recognition:79% were able to recognize the brand logo.

4.1.3. Association

- Product-Character association: Children were asked to match the product with the character through a pictorial chart consisting of different products and different characters associated with them. 86% were able to associate the character with the product i.e. Pepsi man with the Pepsi.
- Brand logo- Brand name association: Children were shown the logo of the brand Pepsi and were asked to identify the symbol. Initially, it was observed that children were unable to associate with the logo of Pepsi but after playing the game 81 % children answered it right.
- Child-Brand association:48% preferred Pepsi as an energy booster drink that will make them a hero as compared to 43% who said drinking milk will make them a hero. 9% said drinking juice will give them energy to become a hero and run fast.
- Product Preference: Children were asked to select the brand from various options that they drink, 72% just after playing the game wanted to drink Pepsi over the other options available to them like Glucon orange juice, Coca-cola, or milk after being exposed to Pepsi advergaming for over a period of 14 minutes.
- Intention and final choice: Children were asked to select the brand of their choice from various brands.72% of children selected Pepsi over other brands.

However, in the end when asked what drink you would like me to bring for you right now, 78% said that they want to consume.

4.2. Stage-II

After two days, certain questions were asked again to check for the brand recognition and recall. To check the extent of exposure of the game, they were asked if they have played the game again in past two days. Approximately 60% children played Pepsi man again and an equal number downloaded to play again. 60% of the children who played the game found the game to be very interesting. This speaks about the success of the advergaming, in gaining the attention of the children.

Approximately 76% children were able to recognize the drink seen during the game play that is Pepsi.

Around 76% children recognized the logo instantly during the game play. The percentage of logo recognition just decreased by 3% from Stage-I after the two-day time span thus depicting that when they play the game on the regular basis, they can easily form a permanent brand image in their mind.

Approximately 71% children could easily associate brand logo with the brand name. Around 69% children were able to name the game they played correctly. It was also found that 67% of children went on to consume the product and stated they would consume it in future too.

5. Conclusion

Indian society is changing and children have a larger say in the buying process especially in the purchase of convenience goods. The upcoming scenario of nuclear families or families having single child has given a position of power to children. Children with both parents working get more leverage in the form of their personal mobile phones or personal computers or tabs with network connectivity. They are tech savvy and constantly need new ways to engage themselves. Advergaming become a good alternative for them as the marketers will be able to create awareness about the product and finally ensure purchase of the product, enabling them to attract these “customers for life”.

Advergaming are getting popular around the globe even in India among children and adolescents because of their characters, thrills and storyline. The children and adolescents possess high brand recalls, especially from the interesting scenes of the games.

The current study also depicted that children were able to recognize the product framed in the game and were eager to purchase the product too. Also, in the second stage it was observed that the children were able to recognize and recall instantaneously because of constant exposure to the game even after 2 days. When the children are constantly exposed to these games it helps increase the purchase of the product and build loyalty.

In the age of cut throat competition with little difference being observed in the products, promotional tools play a important role and through advergaming the marketers can catch the IGeneration early.

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