PERCEPTIONS OF ADVERGAMING AS AN ADVERTISING TOOL IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The use of games to communicate messages is not new; however the evolution of the digital environment has opened up opportunities for brand communicators to use games as a means to communicate with audiences in ways that were previously impossible. In South Africa, so-called advergaming currently does not reach a mass audience because of the low number of Internet users and the high cost of Internet access. However, as a brand communication tool, advergaming has the potential to be used as a viral marketing tactic. The article analyses the perceptions of advertising agencies about the use of advergaming in the South African context.

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INTRODUCTION

The study of video games as communicators of messages that influence behaviour has traditionally focused on the potential negative impact such games may have particularly on children (Griffiths 1998; Lavender 2006). However, digital games are able to communicate messages with a variety of purposes and to different effects depending on the type of game. This has particular implications for brand communicators.

The Internet seemed like a tool to create new communication forms and draw new audiences. Advertisers quickly realised the appeal of online communication, but the promise remains unfulfilled. An analysis of traditional methods to reach specific audiences online has showed that less than one percent of users actually clicks on banner ads, let alone end up making a purchase as a result of a banner ad. The average click-through rate for banner ads in 2011 was 0.09% (Google 2011).

This study focuses on digital games, played either on a personal computer, a gaming console or a mobile device, and more specifically on advergames, which are digital games created to promote a brand, product, service or issue. It thus draws on a variety of theories ranging from game studies, media studies and narratology to marketing and communication studies.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

A national survey by questionnaire of advertising agencies in South Africa was used to determine how advergames are currently being used and what the industry identified as the primary obstacles to widespread use of advergaming as a communication technique in South Africa.

The sample was drawn from the BizCommunity database (www.bizcommunity.com) of advertising agencies, which is the largest South African marketing and advertising community online, currently listing 662 advertising agencies of which 431 had working email addresses. A response rate of 22.505 per cent was achieved, with 97 survey responses having been obtained.

The survey was distributed through email with a link to the eSurveys Pro site which hosted the survey. The survey by questionnaire was live for a period of four months, from September to December 2010. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A was used to determine the nature of the advertising agency in terms of its activity in the online and mobile advertising space. Section B focused on the advertising executive's opinion about advergaming and its use as a communication tool in South Africa. It also requested the participant to indicate URLs to any advergames their agency had created or used. One open-ended question was used to determine the respondents' opinion about what needs to be done to make advergaming a viable option as a brand communication tool in

South Africa. Statements on a Likert scale were also used. The data was then coded according to the identified categories and an analysis of the data to extrapolate descriptive statistics was conducted.

Ethical clearance for this study was approved by the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University RTI Higher Degrees sub-committee of the Faculty of Arts Research, Technology and Innovation Committee. The ethics clearance reference number for this study is H10- ART-JMS-001.

The advertising agencies are not identified by name. A detailed introduction was included with the questionnaire to ensure that respondents were aware of the nature of the research and their role in it. The information represents the opinion and experience of the advertising agency as a whole rather than that of the individual.

UNDERSTANDING THE APPEAL OF GAMES

Gaming theory as a body of academic research enjoys a fractured theoretical framework. On the one hand, literary theorists and media studies proponents advocate the exploration of narrative through narratology as the focus of game studies. On the other hand, ludology, which views games as simulations, is championed by others working in the field. The core difference is that ludology proposes that the focus of video games is the game-play itself and that the gamer derives pleasure from that game-play, while narratologists believe that the pleasure is derived from the story told within the game.

However, Murray (2005) says an either/or approach may be too simplistic. She adds, "[b]ecause the game essentialists want to privilege formalistic approaches above all others, they are willing to dismiss many salient aspects of the game experience, such as the feeling of immersion, the enactment of violent or sexual events, the performative dimension of game-play, and even the personal experience of winning and losing" (Murray 2005: 1-2).

Within this context it is important to look at advergames from both perspectives, as simulation but also as narrative. From a ludological perspective, one of the primary appeals of advergaming lies in its ability to immerse the user in a simulated environment in which the issue or brand is at the forefront. This simulation draws on ludology, which proposes that the user relates to the simulation, is immersed in the game environment and therefore engages with the game at a different level than more passive pursuits such as television. However, as mentioned previously, in traditional academic study games are seen as merely interactive narratives, procedural stories or remediated cinema (Eskelinen 2001).

Gaming is growing in popularity worldwide. Research by the Entertainment Merchant's Association (EMA) showed that 68% of all American households are now playing video games (Brightman 2009). There was a 19% total industry sales jump to almost USD$23 billion in 2008, and video game rentals increased eight percent for 2008 to USD$541 million (Brightman 2009). In America, the average gamer is 35 years old and has been playing for 12 years (Entertainment Software Association 2009). Gamers have traditionally been thought of as male, but the number of female gamers is growing (The NPD Group 2009). Women prefer word and puzzle games, while men are more interested in sport, combat or casino games (Gurău 2008).

The South African gaming industry (GFK 2011) surpassed the R1.7 billion mark in 2011, which translates into a total of 3.86 million physical games sold in 2011, up from 3.48 million in 2010. Exact statistics on the number of South African gamers are not available. The AGASA Gamers League, which calls itself the largest competitive gaming league in South Africa, has 7702 players, 934 teams and 742 clans competing in over 30 games and disciplines (AGASA 2009). A search of Google South Africa lists at least six other gaming leagues, including Do Gaming League, USO Clan, LeagueofLegends, MyGaming and Intel Annihilator League.

Personal uses of games

Both Blumler and Katz (1974) and McQuail (1983) proposed that media users select specific media on the basis of their specific needs and that the media fulfil a specific role for media users. A study of adolescent gamers by Raney, Smith and Baker (2006) identified four main psychological appeals of video games, namely pleasure and enjoyment; excitation and arousal; mood enhancement; and management and mastering the challenge. Raney *et al*. (2006) also linked game content, most specifically interactivity and violent content with these appeals, and also explored the social experience of game playing.

Advergaming may fulfil two primary needs: the need for entertaining relaxation and the need to compete as theorised above. Most advergames include a "challenge a friend" and/ or high score list aspect, which may appeal to users' need to prove themselves superior to others (Moore 2006). Forty-five per cent of the games offered multiple levels of play, 69% awarded game points and 40% incorporated time limits of some sort to increase the challenge aspect of the advergame (Moore 2006).

Stafford and Faber (2004) identified escapism, relief of boredom, competition, fun and curiosity as being the primary uses and gratification motivations for playing advergames. The results of their study found that the first four identified motivations correlated with a positive attitude towards an advergame, while

the last motivation, curiosity, correlated with a negative attitude towards the game (Stafford & Faber 2004). It further indicated that the pleasure a player experiences during game-play may transfer to the positive feeling towards the site and relationship with the brand (*ibid*.). They also identified a number of reasons why players did not play advergames. Interestingly, although the study pointed to an indirect relationship between favourable attitude towards the advergame and purchase intention, it did not test this relationship.

Falstein (2004) links the fun element of a game to the survival needs of humankind's Palaeolithic ancestors, a theory he calls Natural Funativity. Falstein (2004) says that the technology behind video games has in effect "made possible a concentrated, particularly potent play experience that is both very new in its expression and very old in its origins". He looks at games as a specialised form of play and draws an analogy with the way young animals use play to learn survival skills.

The BuzzCity Mobile Gaming Survey found that South African mobile gamers play mainly to pass the time (45%), to learn something new (30%) and to get the most out of their phones (17%) (BuzzCity 2010).

Games as persuasion

The question becomes how do games persuade? Dahl *et al*. (2009) posit that according to the Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad & Wright 1984), consumers process messages clearly marked as persuasive content differently to those that are not clearly marked. Within this context, drawing on the work of Raney *et al*. (2006), they argue that if gamers are unaware of the embedded brand message within the game they will process those messages differently and may therefore be more susceptible to the persuasion attempt (Dahl *et al*. 2009).

Studies on the effectiveness of advergames are limited, but there is some evidence that companies, particularly those in the automotive and energy drink markets, have seen awareness move to trial and actual purchase as a result of exposure through advergames (Dahl *et al*. 2009).

The Kaizer Family Foundation study (Moore 2006; Gurău 2008), which looked at the marketing methods embedded into food advergames that targeted children, identified characteristics of advergames that encouraged repeat playing. These included a membership opportunity for children aged 12 or under, such as registering or joining a club to get access to special activities or secret games and incentives to get the user to buy more food so he or she can collect points, which can then be exchanged for new games, brand-related clothing or other products. The study also found that 13% of the sites include polls or quizzes, which were

used to ask personal opinions about products and nearly half the sites included a movie or TV tie-in (Gurău 2008).

Gurău (2008) investigated the way advergames may persuade by using the concept of flow and the advertising principle of AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire and Action). He draws a correlation between the capability of the game player and the difficulty of the game and suggests that these two need to be in equilibrium in order for the player to reach a state of flow rather than frustration or boredom. This, Gurău (2008) says, counters Chen and Ringel's (2001) earlier assertion that advergames should be kept simple.

Gurău (2008) conducted a study of 200 first-year students between the ages of 20 and 24 and found a clear statistical relation between the capacity of the advergame to induce the state of flow, and a change in the buying behaviour of players. Those who experienced a state of flow were also more inclined to pass the game and/or brand message on as a viral message to more people. The study sample was too small to be generalisable, however.

An analysis (Moore 2006) of 431 advergames on food-related websites found that the most common types of advergames in use were arcade, sports and adventure games, which seemed to have been chosen because they are not very complicated and the rules of play are generally simple. The study also found that the vast majority of games were animated, and about 90 percent incorporated lively music or sound effects.

The clear emphasis throughout the games is entertainment and brand reinforcement (Moore 2006). Although this focused on children, the issues are applicable to young adults as well.

Advergames as advertising

Lee and Youn (2008) conducted a content analysis of the websites of the top 100 companies in the United States, ranked by advertising expenditure in ten major media, to determine how advergames were being used by advertisers. The study found that only 26 of the 100 companies examined used advergames as an advertising tool on their websites, but that those 26 offered a total of 294 advergames between them (Lee & Youn 2008). The most prevalent genres of the advergames examined in the study were arcades, puzzles, and quizzes/trivia. Lee and Youn (2008) also analysed the fit between the brand and the game as part of their study and found that most of the advergames fit well with the product being advertised in terms of lifestyle and image fit.

In addition to lifestyle and image congruity, Lee and Youn also look at functional congruity, drawing on the work of Gwinner and Eaton (1999). Functional congruity occurs when the product category being advertised in the game is a

central object typically used in the content of the game, such as in the case of cars in racing games (Gwinner & Eaton 1999). The Lee and Youn (2008) study found that 59% of the advergames analysed demonstrated low levels of functional congruity with the product, 29% showed high congruity, and 12% had moderate levels of functional congruity.

Congruity was considered an important aspect of positive attitude creation among gamers, with a study by Hernandez *et al*. (2004) showing that brands that were incongruent with the game play were perceived as more intrusive than congruent product placement. Wise *et al*. (2008) also revealed a stronger positive relationship between attitude toward the advergame and attitude toward the brand when participants play games with a high thematic connection to the brand's product.

The effectiveness of advergames

Advertising effectiveness in traditional models has focused on the relationship between attitude toward the advertisement and attitude toward the brand and this could be used as a method to determine the effectiveness of advergames, but Wise *et al*. (2008) argue that these scholars have not specified production features of interactive forms of advertising that might moderate the relationship between attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand.

It is difficult to equate the relationship towards the game with the relationship towards the brand as little evidence exists to support this. However, gamers seem open to the use of advertising messages within games.

Linking advergames to overall brand messages has merit, as evidenced by the receptiveness study conducted by Winkler and Buckner (2006). The study found that those who play are receptive to the advertising message, or at least to the product or company that is displayed within the game, and, further, that players recall many of the details of the brand integration within the game such as the location of the logo (Winkler & Buckner 2006).

Winkler and Buckner propose that this might be because even though most advergames are engrossing and keep players immersed in the game experience, they are generally simple and straightforward. Consequently, the player can subconsciously focus better on the advertising messages communicated through the game (Winkler & Buckner 2006).

However, cognisance should be taken of the fact that younger generations, especially the Digital Natives born after 1978, tend to have a photographic memory in the visual environment but not necessarily a conceptual memory, and learn differently compared with past generations. Prensky (2001) describes Digital Natives as being used to receiving information really fast. "They like to parallel process and multitask. They prefer their graphics before their text rather than the

opposite. They prefer random access (like hypertext). They function best when networked. They thrive on instant gratification and frequent rewards. They prefer games to 'serious' work" (Prensky 2001). It can therefore be proposed that Digital Natives are more receptive to messages communicated through games. However, memory alone does not indicate comprehension or indeed positive perception of a message.

Also significant for South African advertisers is these researchers' (Winkler & Buckner 2006) finding that suggests that advergames might work more effectively for brands that are already known to the game player in some way, indicating that advergames may be more suitable to enhance and alter the brand impression instead of building brand awareness for a product that is new to the target audience. Thus, the current strategy of using advergames as part of a broader marketing campaign makes sense.

Length of play and repeated game use seem to have an effect on recall of the brand advertising as evidenced in a study by Constantin and Grigorovici (2004), the results of which suggested that 30% of in-game ads are recalled in the short term and 18% in the longer term.

Coulard (2007) looked at the differences between the way men and women perceive advergames. He found that men tended to play games more than women and that women preferred advergames which required some sort of reflection. Women tended to be more sensitive to the presence of the brand in the advergame, but men tended to enjoy the game less once they noticed the branding (Coulard 2007).

Kretchmar (2004: 49), citing Pintak (2001) and Rodgers (2002), claims that advergames offer "retention rates 10 times greater than for broadcast commercials, 16-45% of recipients play games received via promotional e-mail for an average of 25 minutes, 400% viral compounding with 90% of those who receive the pass-along e-mail responding". She adds that advergames transfer the emotion of the game to the brand that is powering it, creating an engaging, rather than passive, experience (Kretchmar 2004).

Mobile gaming

Literature on gaming and advergaming seems to point towards it as a useful tool for communicating brand messages, but it has only been used in a limited way in the South African context. In order to reach the broader South African audience and make advergaming a viable tool in advertising in South Africa, it needs to make the move to the mobile environment which enjoys a larger number of users than the traditional wired infrastructure of the PC and Internet connection.

Mobile use in South Africa is high. According to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU 2007), mobile users represent 90.1% of the total

telephone subscribers in South Africa, reaching 87.08% of the adult population. The BuzzCity Mobile Gaming Survey 2010 provided a picture of the average South African mobile gamer. She (53% were female) is between 25 and 30 years old (25%), in the service industry and downloads games on average once a week (36%) and plays games daily (44%) or at least whenever she can (32%) (BuzzCity 2010). The report also found that board/ brain/ puzzle games are the most popular among South African mobile gamers, with 22% listing them as their favourite (BuzzCity 2010). Fifty-five per cent of South Africans surveyed in the TNS Mobile Life study indicated that they played games on their mobile phones (TNS Research Surveys 2011).

The Mobility 2011 study (World Wide Worx 2011) found that mobile Internet usage among South Africans above the age of 16 had increased substantially, with 39% of urban South Africans and 27% of rural users now browsing the Internet on their phones. There are approximately six million mobile Internet users in South Africa, of which 4.5 million also have access to a computer (World Wide Worx 2011).

If translated to mobile, advergaming could leverage the concept of viral marketing. Viral marketing, as a concept, has evolved from a traditional marketing term, Word of Mouth (WOM), which refers to "oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator which the receiver perceives as a non-commercial message, regarding a brand, product or service" (Wiedemann 2007).

Many online advergames are small enough to be emailed from user to user, thus spreading the game and the brand message quickly and with greater credibility. According to Gurău (2008), 81% of players will email their friends to try a good game and this should extend to the mobile environment as well.

Currently advergaming as an advertising tactic is being used to complement existing marketing campaigns in South Africa. Advergames, which are thus just one small part of the whole spectrum, ultimately aim at increasing brand awareness and reinforcing existing brand associations. Advergames therefore need to be understood within the context of their broader marketing environment and in relation to the overall brand message being communicated.

As discussed above, advergaming is currently used in South African marketing campaigns on a limited basis to reach a clearly defined niche audience of affluent users. The reason for this, it could be argued, is that advergaming is an online strategy and wired Internet access within South Africa is relatively low (Goldstuck 2012).

This research focuses on the following barriers to the use of advergaming to reach a mass audience: access, mobility, cost and education. This study set out

to investigate the perceptions that South African advertising agencies have about advergaming in South Africa.

RESULTS

Ninety-seven (97) of the 431 advertising agencies contacted completed the survey, representing a response rate of 22.505%. The first part of the survey focused on information about the advertising agencies themselves. The majority (46.67%) had been existence for ten years or more. Almost 74% of respondents indicated that they had a dedicated online division responsible for digital and online advertising initiatives such as website banner advertising and more than 88% stated that they provide online advertising services to clients such as the creation and distribution of banner adverts. Just over 76% provide mobile advertising services to clients such as the design and implementation of SMS advertising campaigns.

Most of the respondents (73.33%) had heard of advergaming prior to the survey and 57.33% had played an advergame. As expected, use of advergames in marketing campaigns in South Africa was relatively low with just under 30 percent (28%) saying they had made use of an advergame as part of an online campaign for a client.

There was mixed opinion about the challenges to widespread adoption of advergaming as a brand communication tool in South Africa, with almost equal numbers of respondents citing access, cost, education and lack of interest as the core obstacles.

**FIGURE 1:   CHALLENGES TO WIDESPREAD USE OF ADVERGAMING
IN SA (expressed in percentages)**
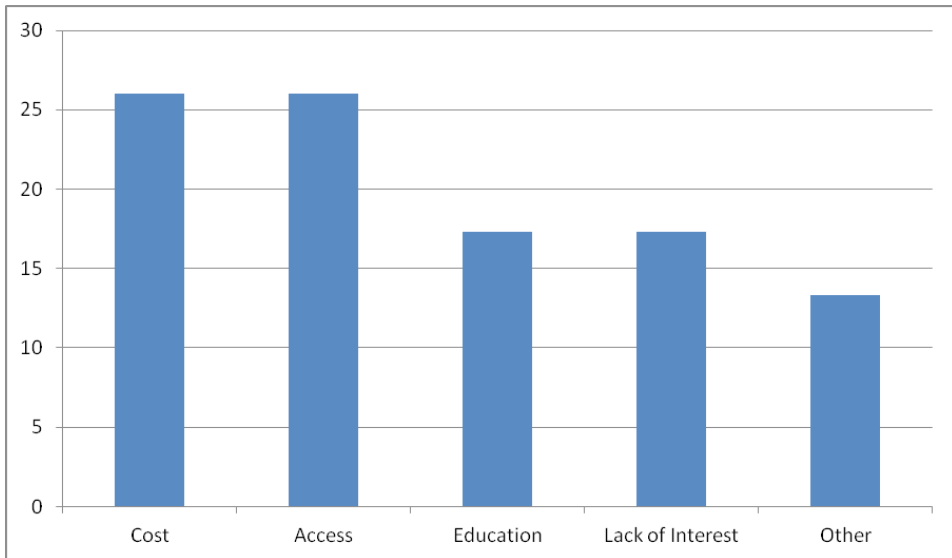
Those that indicated "other" as their response to this question were asked to elaborate. The responses were intriguing, with a number of those surveyed indicating that the mind set of marketers needed to change in order for advergaming to become more accepted and used more widely.

Respondent 1, for example, said "not cost, as very simple and cost effective solutions abound. And mobile is making Access not a problem either. I think the main challenge is the mind set of marketers – it's far easier to run a radio add than to conceptualise a successful online media campaign, even though online will always be cheaper" (*all responses verbatim*). Another respondent said, "Clients are very reluctant to invest in stuff that isn't tried and tested." The respondents also linked this to the need for demonstrated Return on Investment (RoI). The challenge is "defined ROI. Marketers simply don't know enough about the medium, so they lump this into the risk basket, along with most digital offerings," one respondent said. This was echoed by at least one other respondent.

Other challenges identified included the stickiness of the game – that is, its ability to keep the user playing – time for development and testing, the dearth of free content available on the web and the mobile web, quality of advergames, advertising depth and diversity, and the feeling that "people with the skills are not briefed far enough in advance, they should be involved in the creative strategy upfront to determine what is possible or not".

Sixty-three respondents provided suggestions as a response to the open-ended question, "What do you think needs to be done to make advergaming a viable option as a brand communication tool in South Africa?" These responses are discussed under the following themes:

Theme 1: Education

One of the most prevalent themes in this section was the need to educate the market both from an industry and a consumer point of view with 20 of the 63 respondents indicating this should be addressed to improve the viability of advergaming in South Africa. Six of the relevant responses are included in Table 1, which indicates that education was an important theme among the respondents of the survey.

TABLE 1: RESPONSES RELATING TO EDUCATION

Respondent No.	Statement
17	We need to educate the general populace on the fun aspects, and to play the game with an open mind. Also, since 80% of SA internet users access the world wide web on their phones, we need to be focussing on mobi games more, especially when a game is designed to promote a brand.
19	Train more design and communication professionals in the technology, to be able to design and build the games. But mostly, to educate / introduce to 'older' production managers and creative directors, to show them how this medium can be an effective tool. I think many of the decision makers in the industry / agencies a) simply do not know about this medium, b) do not trust it as an effective investment of time and resource, c) see it as more expensive and time consuming than it actually is.
32	Corporates and brands need to be educated on the value they offer. Online is still a 'mystery' to many executives, who think it – and advergaming – is merely a 'fad' that young people are going through!
40	Advergaming itself needs to be advertised to become a better known media channel option for advertising agencies to use, as Advertising Managers and Media Strategists need to see the benefits of this form of a brand communication tool. Successful advergaming (with stats attached) should be promoted with PR to create hype about it.

44	Rich and creative advertising games will draw consumer's attention in a new and exciting way, but there is still a lot that needs to be done to help marketers, agencies and publishers understand what they can do/achieve in the digital space. They need to understand how it works and what it can do for their and their clients' brands. Lack of knowledge and understanding mean that a lot of marketers, agencies and publishers are ignoring digital media all together. Access to the internet, high costs and slow bandwidth speeds all play a huge role here as well. For rich media and tactics like advergaming to be adopted all of these areas will need to be addressed (which all the new cables will hopefully achieve sooner rather than later).
56	Educating ad agencies on all the possibilities and specific ways to integrate an advergame into their 'normal' campaigns. It seems that everyone wants to make games, but as soon as you ask them on what platform or which devices, they lose interest because they did not plan properly or they can't spend the time in research. TV, print and radio is proven, 'easy' and don't require too much resources. Clients need to know that their main audience all have mobile phones, most (if not all) spend oodles of time in social media and that they actually like to choose which brands to interact with and not being force fed by traditional media.

Theme 2: Mobile Networks

The need to explore mobile possibilities and further to improve mobile offerings through network service providers was highlighted by eight of the respondents. "If you could develop advergaming on social platforms and allow it to gain popularity via social media or on mobile phones. Traditional gaming (PSP, Nintendo Wii, XBox ...) is too expensive for the vast majority of South Africans and that limits the number of people who will view such integrated ads," one respondent explained.

Other concerns

The issue of bandwidth was also highlighted as a possible area that requires attention, as was cost of development and the need to ensure that advergames are engaging as well as meeting the requirements of the client. As one respondent said, "Advergaming is not the total solution in and of itself. It must be within an overarching digital and brand strategy that has support throughout the year, on-going commitment from client budgets, new features, active community development and management, on-going and constant advertising, and a medium to long term approach. Short term approaches do not produce results. Client objects also need to be clear... Is it data capture? Driving sales? Loyalty? Etc."

Another respondent added, "It is a viable option, but it doesn't always deliver on the objectives of the task and therefore may not be included in the plan. Cost is variable – depending on the development required. But so often brands to not promote the game once it has been created. Mobile games are very popular –

games should be developed with mobile in mind – the cost however increases when you make it accessible to more phone users (optimised for various phones)".

Regulation was also a concern, as one respondent indicated that stricter mechanisms need to be put in place to regulate the mobile environment. "CPA (consumer protection act) and POPI (protection of personal information) will aid this, but abuse of online and mobile marketing is the biggest enemy of campaigns that do no harm and operate as a value-add to the consumer. Subscriptions services should be completely eradicated in my opinion and better practices to disallow spam need to be adhered to."

Another respondent suggested that the industry should "publish engines and build-your-own-game solutions to let the market create their own". Such a solution already exists with SkillPod Media's Advergame Creator site (www. advergamecreator.com), which provides companies with a selection of existing games which they can customise with their own logo. The site allows advertisers to name the games, add logos and products to the various game screens and change the colour schemes (game specific). Advertisers are able to access reports, which detail the number of game plays by each player, clicks on banners, high scores logged and user registrations. The solution also provides distribution code and a simple user registration feature. Users of each game can log their high scores and the top 10 scores are displayed within the game. Games include Popper, Tritris and a DriftRacing game.

Perceptions of advergaming in South Africa

The next part of the survey listed statements with which the respondents needed to indicate their agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

More than 60% of respondents either agreed (41%) or strongly agreed (21%) that they were positioned to offer advergaming as a potential medium for brand communication to clients. Twenty-two percent neither agreed nor disagreed, while six percent disagreed and a further eight percent strongly disagreed.

Respectively 37% and 49% strongly agreed and agreed with the statement, "Advergaming has the potential to provide a rich, interactive experience of a brand to consumers." Six percent indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed, while only six percent combined indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Almost 75% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that "Advergaming in South Africa cannot work", while only three percent combined agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Twenty-one percent were neutral. Despite this, close to 55% of respondents felt that advergaming

can only appeal to a small percentage of South African consumers. Twenty-one percent disagreed and eight percent strongly disagreed while 16% were neutral.

Similarly, 30% and 46% strongly agreed and agreed respectively that advergaming will remain a complement to other advertising strategies rather than a core advertising medium in South Africa. Eight per cent disagreed and 14% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Advergaming was almost unanimously thought to be a viral marketing tool with 41% and 50% strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement. Five percent were neutral and only two percent disagreed.

The survey also sought to determine the perceptions about how advergames should be structured in order to be successful. The statement, "In order for an advergame to work, there must be some kind of narrative or story to the game", saw the majority (26% and 29% respectively) strongly agree or agree with 28% remaining neutral. Two percent strongly disagreed that narrative was necessary for an advergame to succeed and 13% disagreed.

The majority of advertising executives surveyed disagreed (42%) or strongly disagreed (26%) that merely adding a logo to an existing game was enough to create an advergame. Seventeen percent neither agreed nor disagreed and eight percent and five percent agreed or strongly agreed respectively.

The opportunity for the player to engage with the product, service or brand in a manner similar to real-life was highlighted as an important aspect of advergaming with the majority of respondents either strongly agreeing (25%) or agreeing (40%) and 22% remaining neutral.

Close to 85% of respondents recognised advergaming's ability to communicate educational messages about issues such as HIV/Aids, examples of which have been implemented in India. ZMQ created the Freedom HIV/Aids initiative which comprises four mobile games targeting different mind sets and psychologies of mobile users. "There have been effective download of 10.3 million game sessions in 15 months from its launch. As reported, more games have been downloaded in smaller cities and towns in India. The prime reason of this phenomenon is that these areas are media dark areas and have very less access (*sic*) to information. People here preferred to download free mobile games to know more about HIV/Aids" (ZMQ 2008).

Advergaming is an area that has not yet been explored in depth in terms of health communication in South Africa, but there seems to be consensus among the advertisers surveyed that it could provide valuable opportunities for health communicators.

The assessment of the extent of the use of advergames by advertising agencies shows that only 20% (10% and 10% respectively) of respondents are currently

using advergaming as part of their advertising campaigns to clients, while 53% indicated that they were not. Thirty-five percent of those surveyed indicated that they were currently investigating using advergaming as part of their advertising campaigns and 29% were neutral. An almost equal number (34%) of respondents disagreed that they were investigating using advergaming in their campaigns.

There were mixed opinions about whether or not advergaming will become an important part of advertising in South Africa, with 13% and 20% strongly agreeing and agreeing respectively, 49% remaining neutral and 14% and 2% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

However, the respondents showed far more consensus in terms of the statement, "The mobile platform can provide a means to reach a wider audience with advergaming". Ninety-two percent of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed and eight percent were neutral.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusions and recommendations can be extrapolated from the literature and the findings from the survey.

It is evident from the study that education about the possibilities of advergaming as a form of message communication needs to take place both at industry and at consumer level to broaden the appeal of the advergame within the South African context and to create platforms for innovation within this domain. The general lack of awareness about advergaming among respondents is indicative of the need for this type of education, a need echoed by the advertising agencies surveyed.

Although there is evidence of the use of advergaming in the South African advertising industry, the research found that advergaming in its traditional wired form cannot reach a mass audience in South Africa at this time, due to the lack of access to the Internet among the majority of the population and other barriers such as cost of access and cost of ownership. The study has explored those barriers and concludes that the mobile environment has the potential to overcome those barriers and enable advergaming to reach a larger mass audience. Despite this there is evidence that both advertising agencies and potential consumers are interested in the possibilities of advergaming as a means to reach the South African audience in a unique and engaging manner. Already there is some evidence to show that mobile gaming and mobile advergaming is starting to be explored in South Africa.

In addition to the need to take cognisance of ease of use and challenge of skill in advergames, respondents indicated that advergame developers and their clients need to look at the technical aspects of their games to ensure a smooth game playing experience and to lessen the frustration of game players. There is also evidence to support the need for advergame developers and their clients to identify

potential technical difficulties that players may experience and to design games around these technical restrictions, such as bandwidth, connection speed and device compatibility. Access to the Internet, whether fixed line or mobile, does not necessarily translate into the ability to access and play games as the device and connection used have an impact on this. Users also have different levels of sophistication in terms of the use of their devices. Developers need to look to device-independent games standards as a means to expand the reach of mobile games within the current context and to cater to all levels of user sophistication.

Once the game-play is defined, it is important to investigate the dissemination and promotion of an advergame in order to ensure its success. Viral marketing is an accepted tactic in online brand communication and has a demonstrated effectiveness as evidenced by the literature explored earlier.

Advergames seem set to remain a complement to other branding and communication tools, rather than a central strategy in itself. Therefore, advertisers and game developers need to focus on the ways in which advergames can be used as part of the broader communication strategy and interlink the various components of the strategy to drive traffic across all platforms, including advergames.

While the commercial potential of advergames is important, it is equally vital to consider applications beyond advertising and marketing. From the survey of advertising agencies it was clear that the majority believed that mobile gaming could provide the ideal platform for extending the reach of games for communication, whether advergames or so-called serious games. The survey also demonstrated that there was widespread support for the idea that games can be used as educational and issue dissemination media for HIV/Aids, environmental consciousness and so on. This is especially significant in the South African context where social, health and environmental issues continue to impact on the well-being of society. Drawing on international examples such as that of India, the South African government and non-profit organisations could explore the possibility of creating games to communicate messages through mobile phones as part of their broader educational and awareness campaigns.

It is clear from the data collected and the literature cited that games offer more than just an entertainment experience and that they can be used in a variety of ways to communicate messages to niche and mass audiences. In South Africa, advergaming is slowly growing as a complement to existing brand strategies and could potentially be used to reach citizens with messages regarding health, social ills, education and environmental conservation among others. As proposed in an earlier article (Wright 2011), the mobile platform seems ideal for overcoming the obstacles to the use of advergames to reach a mass audience.

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