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*Do women and men see advergames in a different way?*

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## What are advergames ?

“Advergame” refers to an online game aimed at promoting a product or a brand, increasing brand awareness and getting information on existing or prospective clients<sup>1</sup>. It is not a product placement in that it is explicitly designed for a brand<sup>2</sup>. Although “advergame” is the most commonly used word to describe that tool, “propagaming”, “adgame” and “gamevertising”<sup>3</sup> are also employed. The term would have first appeared in *Wired*'s “Jargon Watch” column where it was still defined as a product placement: “a downloadable or web-based game created solely to enable product placements”<sup>4</sup>.

However, advergaming is not a product placement. Two features distinguish advergames from product placements, their nature and their advertising strategy: in advergames, the brand or product has a central position in the game, whereas in in-game advertising, the brand or product is often incorporated into the scenery<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, while advergames are ordered by marketing departments to promote a specific product, in-game advertisements are coordinated by independent companies, like Massive Inc.<sup>6</sup>.

By nature, advergames have similar advantages to games so that they hold the gamer/consumer's attention. The first advantage is the interaction between gamer and tool (computer), as well as between the gamer and the game's content (product or brand)<sup>7</sup>. A message is all the more effective when it is central and arouses involvement (See ELM model<sup>8</sup>). The second advantage is the enjoyment felt in playing (because of its complexity, universe, etc.). If gamers like the advergame, their positive perception can be transferred from the game to the brand that is present in the game<sup>9</sup>. They will also recommend it more to their acquaintances.

## Do women and men see advergames in a different way?

Many surveys about advertising have focussed on showing differences between men and women regarding how they process information<sup>10</sup> and react to advertising<sup>11</sup>. Belief, attitude and behaviour can also vary a lot<sup>12</sup>. Based on those surveys (See also following endnotes), it was possible to venture the following hypotheses:

H1: Women have an overall negative assessment of advergames<sup>13</sup>.

H2: Men have an overall positive assessment of advergames.

H3: Men prefer competitive advergames<sup>14 15</sup>.

H4: Women prefer puzzle games.

H5: The amount of viral circulation differs between men and women<sup>16</sup>.

## Methodology

Because the purpose of the professional thesis was to compare behaviour towards online games and the perception of incorporated advertising, we chose to carry out the survey with an online

questionnaire. This type of tool allows us to take into account perception of online advertising as well as habits of using the web.

The questionnaire consisted of two principal parts:

- 1° Questions were aimed at specifying the differences between men and women regarding their way of playing online games and how they perceive online advertising. The questionnaire was thus subdivided into four sections: 1-Present and future enjoyment, 2-Viral circulation, 3-Brand's presence in the game, 4-ID (sex & age) and habits regarding the use of online games.
- 2° Two games, one a puzzle ("Dyson Playgame"), the other a competitive ("Don't Slow Down"), had been tested in order to verify if men effectively prefer competitive games and women puzzle games. To guarantee a certain objectivity, the people polled didn't know at first which game they would play.

## **Results**

Quite a lot of people answered the questionnaire during the three weeks of online access: 131 questionnaires were filled in, of those 13 could not be taken into account because they were sent empty (it was not possible to define the option). Finally, we dealt with 118 questionnaires.

Starting from the hypothesis that there are differences between women and men regarding how they play advergaming, the present survey isolated three variables, sex, type of game and brand, in order to understand the influence of each one. Observations could have been drawn from each variable as well as from their mutual influence on each other:

Online games are played periodically, which is confirmed by the relatively short time that the people who were polled spent on the two advergaming.

The advertising game's concept is not well known, and the presence of brands doesn't bother gamers a lot. In addition, people liked the two games and have circulated them amongst their acquaintances.

The way the brand is incorporated into the game is very important, determining how it will be perceived.

Men play more online games, enjoy and play more advergaming, irrespective of what type of advergaming it is (H1 and H2 validated). Women prefer puzzle advergaming and play and replay them more (H3 and H4 validated). Viral circulation is nevertheless similar: women and men circulated games in the same proportions (H5 invalidated).

Women are also more sensitive to the presence of brands and to the peripheral mode of integrating them into the game, without liking the game more or less, whereas men enjoy the games less once they notice they are promoting a brand or a product.

## **Limits and future research**

Results of this study must be considered carefully:

The sample of polled people, although bigger than expected, remains small (118 valid questionnaires). The vast majority of respondents were between 20 and 29 years old, which is very far from being representative of the net surfers, even if this age range seems to better fit the target sought by advergaming.

Our conclusions illustrated differences between puzzle advergaming and competitive advergaming, but our results were only based on one puzzle advergaming and one competitive advergaming. A future study could take into account more advergaming of the two types.

Regarding the way the brand is integrated, it is more dependent on strategic choices (ostentatious and repetitive in “Don’t Slow Down”, peripheral and discreet in “Dyson Playgame”) than on the nature of the game, the difficulty being to find one puzzle game and one competitive game with the same way of integrating the brand. Incidentally, it could be interesting to confirm or disprove the results showing that women are more sensitive to the peripheral message of the game.

Finally, future studies will explore if women and men have a different assessment of more subtle advertising games.

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