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GAMES ON SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THE PROMOTION WITHIN*

Summary: Social networks are undoubtedly a phenomenon of current electronic and social communication. Their interactive nature in digital environment allows the use of both traditional and new marketing tools, such as online marketing, viral marketing and advergaming. Playing computer games via social networks has just become a very popular activity because it combines some advantages of computer games with communicability of social networks. The aim of the study is to determine the extent of advergaming on social networks and its importance as an interactive marketing tool, using a questionnaire about advergaming on Facebook, that belongs to the most widely used social networks not only in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, but also worldwide.

Keywords: social networks, computer (video) games, gamer, advergaming, genderisation.

Introduction

Social networks are a phenomenon of our age. Their digital (virtual) nature provides a suitable environment for development of the gaming culture and also the advertising related with it. As suggested in dividing of social media according to J. Sterne [2010], social games exist within social networks as a subcategory, i.e. a separate social media.

Social games are games designed to be played with friends [Rossi, 2010]. First social games were simple games for two players, followed by multiplayer modes of classical computer (video) games and massive multiplayer online games (MMOGs) as result of the internet development. That means the factor of social interaction is a defining feature and an integral part of social games at the same time. But in our study we use a term games on social networks because we

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agree with S. Björk [2010], not all games on social networks are social. According to that we consider games on social networks as computer (video) games purposefully designed for social networking and based on interactions between their users.

The fact that advergaming has been already integrated also into games on social networks shows the importance of this kind of promotion in marketing communication. Its range and effectiveness within social networks we investigated by means of users' (gamers') evaluation.

1. Social network gaming

The factor of social interaction has always been a part of computer (video) games in some form. Before creation of multiplayer modes and LAN/online playing, programmed game characters (including bots) had become a substitute (a simulation) of real persons in process of social interaction. Role-playing games (RPGs) could be even called pseudo-social games because during playing, gamers enter into social interaction with other game characters to such an extent, when we could talk about building relationships. In the game *Mass Effect 2* [BioWare, 2011], main character (played by gamer) can establish a romantic relationship with several characters; it depends on the gender and the way of conducting a dialogue with each character. But the need for social interaction with real persons in computer (video) games has been gradually increasing since the new millennium, what confirms the rapid development of online playing and MMOGs, e.g. *World of Warcraft* [Blizzard Entertainment, 2004], which were primarily designed to be played with other people from all over the world.

Based on the factor analysis, N. Yee [2006, pp. 773-774] found out that social factor was one of three main components of motivation for online playing. This social component included three subcomponents: socialising (having an interest in helping and chatting with other players), relationship (the desire to form long-term meaningful relationships with others) and teamwork (deriving satisfaction from being a part of a group effort). However, male and female gamers scored significantly higher on different components and thus results seem to confirm stereotyped genderisation of on-line gaming sphere, considering the reached score on social component it can be said that both genders socialise themselves, but they are looking for different things in such relationships.

The development of social interaction in computer (video) games and their move to the on-line environment could be understood as an attempt to make some social media. Social media allows anybody to communicate with everybody, in other words, consumer-generated content distributed through easy-to-

access online tools [Sterne, 2010, p. XVII]. Social networks are one of such media and have even common history with gaming sphere. An example is Second Life [Linden Research, 2003], a hybrid of computer (video) game and social network, where users could socialize themselves, buy and sell virtual goods for virtual currency and marketers had a variety of techniques at their disposal [Zarrella, 2010].

Current games on social networks are the type of on-line game, which are played through social networks. They have many common features with flash games and browser-based games and are characterised by “social gameplay, along with asynchronous play patterns and a virtual-goods business model that has been shaped by market forces” [Radoff, 2010]. ‘The big players’ in the social networks gaming space are Playfish, Zynga, King and SGN; most of Zynga and Playfish games are permanently in top charts of Facebook or MySpace [Chen, 2009]. According to the report of Casual Games Association [2012], social network gaming market is fast growing sphere that could reach 8.64 billion USD before 2014. There is no surprise that advergaming started to be used also within social networks.

2. Promotion in games on social networks

According to Casual Games Association [2012], social network games revenue stream consists of advertising (20%), offers (20%) and virtual goods (60%). Advergaming (advergaming and in-game advertising) affects all these three components. It represents an effective way how to increase the budget of games on social networks and offers to companies creative solutions of commercial and non-commercial promotion.

Besides advertising side banners placed around the allocated space of game, there are several types of advergaming used within social networks. Advergaming are short term games (possibly applications), made for specific promotional purposes, e.g. LIDL Man of Steel in June 2013. In-game advertising can be found in few forms:

1. Advertising in news (highlights).
2. Sponsored tasks, e.g. UL (global independent safety scientific company) in Marvel: Avengers Alliance [Playdom, 2012].
3. Placed products (brands), which are static or possible to use in game, e.g. Toyota, Dove, Adidas, WWF in The Sims Social [Playfish, 2011].

Unlike classical computer (video) games, solely online character of games on social networks enable very fast and operational changes of content and social networks also link more tools, which multiply the impact of advergaming.

The most powerful such a tool is the sharing. Not only games and companies of advertised product or services can share their content and present it to gamers, but also gamers themselves can share their game progress or gained items in game. It could be said that paid marketing from side of advertiser is supplemented by generated marketing from side of gamers, like ‘digital worth-of-mouth’ [Evans and McKee, 2010, p. 5]. Several studies proved that purchase likelihood increases 51% after a customer clicks the ‘like’ button, 70% trust reviews from people they do not know and Facebook fans of a brand spend twice as much as those who are not Facebook fans [Funk, 2013, p. 2]. Some companies offer special items to be used in games after clicking the ‘like’ button on their fan pages, e.g. Samsung (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Virtual Samsung Smart TV as free exclusive stuff into the game The Sims Social

Source: https://www.facebook.com/SamsungTVUSA/app_564251213600938 (retrieved 13.12.2012).

3. Survey of advergaming effectiveness on Facebook

During the analysis of promotion in games on social networks, we focused especially on Facebook that is still actively used by more than half of the world’s online population, what is twice as much as second Google+ [Richter, 2013], and it is also the most popular social network in Slovakia and the Czech

Republic [Veštic, 2012; Appeltauerová et al., 2011]. We were interested in the extent of adver gaming on social networks and its impact on Slovak and Czech gamers, based on evaluation of gamers themselves.

3.1. Method, procedure and limits

Considering the impossibility of applying a more precise method, e.g. Nielsen's GamePlay Metrics that was made just for data collecting from computer (video) games (including content analysis), we decide to realise the survey using a questionnaire. The electronic questionnaire was focused on facts about playing on social networks, remembering of promotion in already played games and gamers' attitude to this kind of advertising.

We placed the prepared questionnaire on web site and Facebook page of Indian, TV show about computer (video) games that is broadcasted in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Participants were selected by self-selection. The survey was realised in August 2013 (one month). Simultaneously we placed the English version of the questionnaire to fun pages of the most popular games on Facebook in order to include the world population and more age groups into the analysis, but due to the very low response rate, these data could not be used.

Therefore the biggest limitation of the survey consists in focusing on the specific age group as result of placing the questionnaire. It means that results of survey could not be generalised on the whole population, even within Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

3.2. Results

186 gamers participated in the survey, including 158 (84.9%) men and 28 (15.1%) women. The mean age of participants was 16.54 years (standard deviation = 5.2, range = 56), but 11 participants were even younger than 13 years, what is the age limit to create a Facebook account, and one woman was 65 year old pensioner. Even 91.9% of participants were pupils/students. The main reasons of playing games on social networks were the boredom (47.3%), passion in playing games (21%), curiosity (11.8%) and possibility of playing with friends (9.1%). Most gamers were just playing on Facebook only one game (46.2%), but 31.2% was playing 2 to 3 games at the same time. The significant part of participants has already played on Facebook 4 and more games (69.9%) and spent less than hour a day with playing (75.3%). Even 96.8% plays games only within Facebook. Besides playing games on social networks, most of participants play online games (70.4%) on computer (74.7%).

The item about the most favorite game on Facebook brought an interesting result. 186 participants stated overall 70 games. Only Texas HoldEm Poker [Zynga, 2007] (10.8%) and FarmVille [Zynga, 2009] (5.9%) had bigger share, both developed by Zynga.

Following part of survey was focused on the promotion within games and the attitude of participants to it. Almost third of gamers (29%) has sometimes noticed a product, a brand or an advertisement directly placed inside game on Facebook, but only 2.7% has paid them attention (Fig. 2).

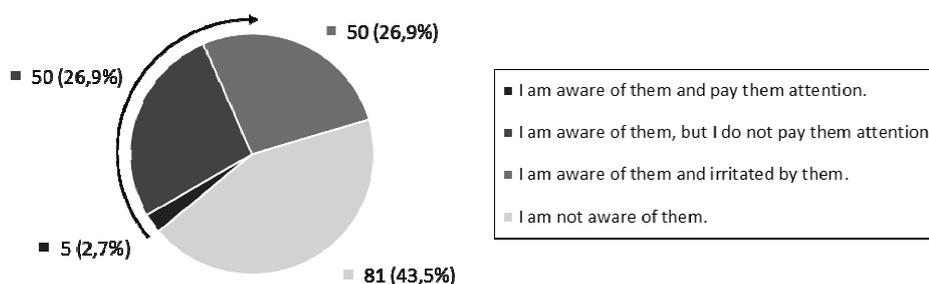


Fig. 2. Reactions of gamers on advertisements in Facebook games (N = 186)

Nevertheless, they could recall some in-game advertising in specific games: Cornetto from Algida, Samsung Galaxy SIII, brands Adidas, Dove, Toyota, Dunkin' Donuts, Diesel and Starbucks, all of them in The Sims Social [Playfish, 2011]; brands Mercedes, Toyota, Dunkin' Donuts, Diesel, 21st Century and advertisements for other EA games including The Sims 3 [The Sims Studio, 2009] in SimCity Social [Maxis, 2012]; brand Samsung in Mall World [50Cubes, 2010]; brand California Milk in FarmVille 2 [Zynga, 2012]; advertisement for SimCity v Diamond Dash [Wooga, 2011]; advertisement for Social Wars [Social Point 2011] in Dragon City [Social Point, 2012]; advertisement for FarmVille [Zynga, 2009] and CityVille [Zynga, 2010] in Tetris Blitz [Electronic Arts, 2013]. Rest of participants has been aware of advertisements in games, but has not paid them attention (26.9%), or has been irritated by them (26.9%), or has not been aware of them (43.5%). Only 2 participants (1.1%) have sometimes bought the product advertised in game.

3.3. Discussion

However, according to the survey of M. Velšic [2012, p. 5] and L. Appel-tauerová [et al., 2011], the proportion of men and women using social networks in Slovakia and the Czech Republic is almost equal, our survey of playing games

on social networks shows on the stereotyped genderization that has always been typical for Slovak and Czech gaming sphere, while there are slightly more female gamers on social networks in USA and United Kingdom [ISG, 2010, p. 5]. On the other hand, results about the age and the economic status of social network gamers correspond with statistics of M. Vešić [2012] and L. Appeltauerová [et al., 2011]. It means only gender was a demographic indicator that did not correspond. We suppose that reason is different motivation for playing of men and women, similar to the finding of N. Yee [2006].

Next logical assumption was that gender can affect the perception of in-game advertising, but during comparison we found out the ratio was the same (2:5) for both genders, despite the significant difference in the number of male and female participants. It follows that gender should not affect the perception of the promotion within games on social networks.

In global scale, the age of gamers on social networks and their main reason for playing were also different from statistics of other countries. In comparison with USA, average player of social network games is 40 year old [Casual Games Association, 2012] and his main reason for playing is fun and excitement [ISG, 2010, p. 20]. But surprisingly, other preferences within social networks gaming were almost identical. The comparison is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of facts about gaming on social network

<i>Survey</i>	<i>ISG, 2010</i>	<i>Mago, 2013</i>
Preferred social network for playing	Facebook	Facebook
Number of hours spent by playing on social networks	less than 1 hour a day	less than 1 hour a day
Number of different games played on social networks	3 – 5	4 and more
Most played games	Jeweled Blitz, FarmVille, Mafia Wars, Texas HoldEm Poker	Texas HoldEm Poker, FarmVille

P. Frühaufová [2014] made the similar survey with 502 participants in the Czech Republic in 2014, but it was not focused directly on gamers. As results, most games were played on Facebook (16.53%), but very irregularly (not during each log in), only as a form of relaxing or just for fun. The most played games were FarmVille 2 [Zynga, 2012] (36.08%) and Candy Crush Saga [King, 2012] (31.96%). Texas HoldEm Poker [Zynga, 2007], common game for both compared surveys (Table 1), was placed eighth (15,46 %).

Anyway, considering the online character of social networks and the fact that more than a half of participants were aware of advertisement in social net-

work games (even when gamers were irritated by them), advergaming could reach the enormous audience not only in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, but also all over the world at the same time. Of course, our survey was realised only on small sample, therefore it would be necessary to repeat it on a representative sample to be able to generalise results on the whole population.

Conclusions

Considering the increasing need for social interaction with real persons in computer (video) games, it was logical to create some games within social networks. This combination is very advantageous for marketing communication because it can use marketing tools of social networks (sharing, 'like' buttons, etc.) and computer (video) games at the same time. One of such tools used within computer (video) games is advergaming. There is possible to find it on social networks in the form of advergaming, advertising in games' news, sponsored tasks and placed products or brands (in-game advertising).

Results of our survey show that average Slovak and Czech gamer of games on Facebook is male, 16 year old student, who prefers to play on-line on computer and plays games on social networks because he is bored. He plays less than hour a day and has already played more than 4 games on Facebook, but he plays only one game at the same time.

Despite the fact a half of Slovak and Czech gamers of games on Facebook are aware of the promotion in such games, only 1% has bought a promoted product. An interesting finding is that although the survey confirmed stereotypes about genderization of gaming sphere in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the gender did not affect the perception of advergaming. In future, we recommend repeating this survey on a representative sample.

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PROMOCJA W GRACH ROZGRYWANYCH W SIECIACH SPOŁECZNOŚCIOWYCH

Streszczenie: Sieci społecznościowe to niewątpliwie fenomen współczesnej komunikacji elektronicznej i społecznej. Ich interaktywny charakter pozwala wykorzystywać zarówno tradycyjne, jak i nowoczesne narzędzia marketingowe, takie jak marketing on-line, marketing wirusowy czy advergaming. Granie w gry komputerowe za pośrednictwem sieci społecznościowych stało się ostatnio niezwykle popularnym zajęciem, ponieważ łączy w sobie zalety gier komputerowych z komunikatywnością sieci społecznościowych. Celem artykułu jest określenie roli advergamingu w sieciach społecznościowych oraz znaczenia tego zjawiska jako interaktywnego narzędzia marketingowego. W badaniach zastosowano kwestionariusz poświęcony advergamingowi na Facebooku, który jest jedną z najpopularniejszych sieci społecznościowych na świecie.

Słowa kluczowe: sieci społecznościowe, gry komputerowe (wideo), gracz, advergaming, genderyzacja.