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DOCTORAL FIELD: **MARKETING**

CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARDS ADVERTISING IN VIDEO GAMES

- PH.D THESYS SUMMARY -

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KEYWORDS

Online advertising, advergames, in-game advertising, hierarchy or effects models, online video games, consumer attitude

INTRODUCTION

New opportunities for communication, information and recreation of the online entail significant changes in people's consumption and how they intend to use the technology. The new possibilities of communication, information and relaxation offered by the online environment. The new exchange relations are characterized by a much wider diversity of supply and demand due to rising expectations from consumers who have become interested to carry out activities in the online environment (Purcell, 2012). Communication patterns that result from these changes have provided new possibilities for companies to reach their customers and promote their brands and products.

Marketers interested in finding alternatives to traditional media felt that video games have a great potential to transmit the advertisement in a form that has a stronger effect on online consumers (Dawidowska, 2002). In the last decade, combining new technologies with online video games have given rise to new opportunities for interaction between brand and client become a practice increasingly used internationally (Gao *et al.*, 2011). Joint promotion techniques with video gaming technology has led to the two forms of online advertising: advergames and in-game advertising.

An advergame is a video game built around a product or brand that orders or sponsors that game, serving to promote that particular brand or product (Winkler & Buckner, 2006). The advergaming concept can be understood as a form of interactive technology which uses video games with specific embedded advertising messages in order to develop long lasting relationships with consumers (Chen & Ringel, 2001). Advergame-Boying can be classified as an unconventional form of marketing communication which integrates the principles of advertising directly into computer games (Řehoř, 2008). Also, it is an advertising concept that uses Internet technology to implement viral marketing campaigns (Gurău, 2010).

In-game advertising represents inserting a brand into a story already built of a stand-alone game created by a firm with the main purpose to entertain the user (Vedrashko, 2006). In this way, advertisers can deliver messages through static or dynamic images and have the opportunity to interact with their potential customers through the virtual image of the products, through sound and image (Kempton, 2009). These inserts can take a static form, as in the case of simple logos, billboards, banners and posters in the game, or a dynamic form, like interactive panels, tools and weapons in the game, avatars or clothing for characters (Wise *et al.*, 2008).

Static in-game advertising is integrated into the computer or video game before start selling it and does not allow further amendments (Grigorovici & Constantin, 2004). In contrast, the dynamic in-game advertising is characterized by the fact that it can be renewed each time the game is accessed from a PC or a console that is connected to the Internet (Mau *et al.*, 2008).

Previous studies consider in-game advertising as a form of product placement (Vedrashko, 2006; Winkler & Buckner, 2006; Wise *et al.*, 2008) or sponsorship (Cianfrone & Zhang, 2009).

Researchers tend to believe that in-game advertising is an extended form of product placement, where the desired meaning transfer occurs when consumers associate a conditioned stimulus given by the brand with an unconditioned stimulus, given by the video game (Winkler & Buckner, 2006). In this way, the combination of positive feelings during the game transfer to the sponsor brand, resulting in a positive attitude towards that brand.

Sponsorships in-game are met more often if the sports-themed video games, with a high popularity because of the way in which visual effects that the action menus very similar to how it is presented by television commercials dedicated to sports (Cianfrone & Zhang, 2009).

Many authors have found that video games are a medium through which the advertisement may be more easily accepted by users, bringing numerous advantages (van Reijmersdal *et al.*, 2010). For brands promoted in this way benefits include developing a long-term customer relationships (Chen & Ringel, 2001), a greater satisfaction for the customer (Šimberová, 2010), recall and recognition of the brand met in a game (Nelson, 2002, 2005; Grigorovici & Constantin, 2004; Mallinckrodt & Mizerski, 2007; Wise *et al.*, 2008), favourable attitudes towards the brand (Mau *et al.*, 2010; van Reijmersdal *et al.*, 2010) and purchase intentions (Burns, 2005; Lee *et al.*, 2009).

Being a new field, there are few studies to address the issue of advertising in video games online in Romania. Most of the companies operating on this market are using mostly traditional methods of promotion.

The use promotion through advergame and in-game inserts is little used in Romania, and there are few issues that are known about the reactions and attitudes of consumers about these types of brand messages. To adopt methods of promotion based on video games, advertisers must first understand what are the issues that influence consumer attitudes towards

this type of promotion and that can cause them to agree to receive such messages from a brand.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RELEVANCE

The thesis highlights current trends of developed promotion techniques used at global level and modern techniques used in advertising. The need to adopt the advertising techniques used in local landscape with those used at international level shows the importance they have in the current economy, characterized by diversification in brand communication and innovation of techniques used.

Development of economic landscape and numerous promotional techniques led to the need to study new types of communication channels used for brand messages. In this context, the relevance of implementing an innovative communication system in client-firm relationship using interactive technology for transmitting advertising messages is a widespread practice of marketing actions of advertisers worldwide.

The aim of this thesis is to bring a better understanding of embedded advertising in online video games and attitudes that consumers have towards them. The information provided can support companies that are searching for new and more effective ways of promotion than traditional media, and assist managers in making decisions on the allocation of budgets for promotion and use channels of communication with the public. Also, this information may be useful for advertisers who want to better understand the value of this kind of games for their marketing purposes. Finally, the information provided in the present thesis can be useful for consumers that having access to more information about this new technique may express their preference regarding the brand message delivery.

This paper aims to contribute to the information on promotion practices based on new technology and media and to provide information necessary to the construction, funding and implementation of new marketing strategies in brand communication. This paper extends the work done so far on the formation of attitudes and make contributions to the understanding of the consumer response to marketing communications. Based on these general considerations, research conducted in this thesis follows three main directions:

1. Bibliographical study on the new context of online communication, interactive technologies and promotion techniques based on video games technology is needed to identify several issues of interest in this paper;

2. Development of two types of economic models used in advertising is necessary in theory to explain the internal mechanisms of functional processes and type advergaming advertising and in-game

3. Empirical research by qualitative and quantitative methods is to explain certain aspects of consumer attitudes towards online gaming technology.

The thesis deals with a specific topic in the field of marketing communication, aiming at the establishment of the link between particular aspects of online gaming and interactive media and consumer attitudes towards advertising based on online gaming technology. To achieve this objective we have established four main secondary endpoints, defined as:

- Identify specific aspects of interactive media and how to integrate them into the brand promotion plan;
- Identify the specific aspects of online video games that offer advertisers new opportunities to achieve marketing goals;
- Identify the specific aspects of environment and interactive online games that have influence on consumer attitudes;
- Highlighting the particular aspects of online video games with advertising elements that can be used to understand the effects of advertising on consumers and decision making regarding online video game advertising.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PH.D THESYS CHAPTERS

The thesis is divided into six chapters where the researched subject is addressed both theoretically and in practice. In the first three chapters we present a theoretical perspective on the particularities of the online environment, the attitude of consumers in this environment, the video game market as a whole and the concepts on advertising in online games and forms that it takes, advergaming and in-game advertising. Chapter 4 presents at conceptual level a number of models that describe the operation of online video game advertisements on consumer attitudes, and Chapter 5 presents the methodology and the research conducted by

the author. Finally, in a separate chapter we present the conclusions, implications of the research and future research directions in the form of Chapter 6.

Chapter 1 – “Communication in the online advertising and consumer behavior” as introductory chapter, is an overview of the main concepts that we are working throughout the thesis regarding online advertising, the Internet and the particularities of consumer attitudes shaped by the interactive environment.

This chapter aims at defining the concepts related to the online environment, focusing on the advantages and limitations of this environment and facilities it offers compared to other advertising media such as television and outdoor or print advertising. Defining attitude in online environment and new-media communication has the purpose to shape the context where occurs the online interaction between advertisers and their customers and to create a theoretical framework for the research conducted in this thesis.

Chapter 2 – “Video games as a tool for online advertising” includes an overview of the concepts used regarding video games, interactive media games, advergames and in-game advertisements. To highlight the promotion technique based on online gaming technology, we carry out a review of the characteristics, benefits, opportunities and risks of each method of promotion based on video game technology as a tool in brand communication, decision making strategic promotional mix and budget allocation, as well as advertising goals. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a clear delineation of the concepts used and brings more understanding of promotional techniques described. The concepts of advergame and in-game are presented in the context of international market of video games, and are described in the online context, taking into account the specificities related to the formation of attitudes in the interactive environment.

To create an appropriate context for the research started in this work, in this chapter we make a synthesis of information on the video game industry and interactive online market size globally and in Europe, focusing on online gaming market realities in Romania. This information provides a broad perspective on the dynamics and scale of the industry and underlines the importance of research about advertising in video games and the purposes that they can take in brand communication. The concepts presented highlight the interplay between this market and advertising, which resulted in two major forms of video games that contain advertising: advergames and in-game inserts. Detailed description of these new forms

of promotion is to highlight the global context in which they arose and developed, and the economic and advertising importance that this type of games have got it in recent years.

Chapter 3 – “The influence of video games online advertisements on consumer attitudes”, we summarize the elements that determine, shape and influence the formation of attitudes in online and virtual environment and we focus on those specific items specific for online gaming environment that have influence on consumer attitudes, based on the information that the selected from secondary literature.

In this chapter we identified, based on the documentation of the literature in the field, two types of studies. The first category addresses studies that have identified aspects which influence consumer attitudes toward online promotion through video games addressing both the construction and the particular game and online environment. The results of these studies are grouped to form six categories of elements: interactivity, informative features, recreation and relaxation characteristics, the level of intrusiveness of advertising, viral characteristics and credibility of games as a support for brand message.

The second category of studies analyzed the direction of consumer attitudes toward video games that have advertising content. Depending on the results obtained by the authors, we have grouped these studies in three study groups.

Studies in the *first group* showed that in general people have a positive attitude towards inserting advertisements in video games (Nelson, 2002; Nelson *et al.*, 2004, Chaney *et al.*, 2004).

These results were supported by numerous other studies that followed (Lu, 2010; Wise *et al.*, 2008). Positive attitudes result from the integration of advertising into the game, which is more acceptable than other traditional forms of promotion (Ipe, 2008). Also, information provided by an advergaming influence consumers' perception of the product, and they may find it more attractive compared to the offer of the competition (Saadeghvaziri & Hosseini, 2011).

The *second group* of studies have contradicted these findings, arguing that in fact, people have a negative attitude on commercials presented in games (Lehu, 2006). Many studies have found that the presence of products in video games, especially when you do not fit in the context of the game (Herandez *et al.*, 2004; Küster *et al.*, 2010) is considered an intrusive advertising practices leading to generally negative attitudes from users (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Nebenzahl & Jaffe, 1998; Mau *et al.*, 2008).

The third group of studies, less numerous, believes that people adopt a passive attitude towards advertising in online games, and they are not particularly interested in or affected by the advertisement received in this way (Martí – Parreño *et al.*, 2013; Matteo, 2008).

Chapter 4 – “Economic models used to understand the effects of advertising on consumers and decision making of video game advertising online”, combines elements determined in the previous chapter into theoretical attitudinal models that explain the functionality and design of video games with advertising content. The first part explains the formation of attitudes through advergaming using as examples three models of hierarchy of effects, and the second part describes the functioning of in-game advertising based on a model of advertising competition inspired by Game Theory.

Throughout this chapter, based on the study of literature we have identified two classes of economic models used to understand the effects of advertising on consumers and decision making regarding advertising in online video game. Of these models, we selected two types of models through which we aim to explain how advertising works in video games: the hierarchy of effects models (Preston, 1982; Strong, 1925; Petty & Cacioppo, 1983; Laczniak *et al.*, 1989; Zaichkowsky, 1994; Andrew *et al.*, 1990) and mathematical models (Leitmann & Schmitendorf, 1978; Sethi, 1977; Ferstman, 1984; Jorjensen, 1999; Perloff, 2008).

In this context, we managed to capture the complexity of the attitudinal construct and the multitude of factors that influence the formation of attitudes, realizing this based on three theoretical models of hierarchy of effects, AIDA (attention-interest-desire-action) DAGMAR (Defining Advertising Goals for Measured Advertising Results) and ELM (Elaborated Likelihood model) and a mathematical model derived from Game Theory.

In the AIDA model we explained in theory a sequence of four mental steps that a consumer gets through from the moment he meets a brand for the first time in an advergaming and until when, after the virtual experience with the product during the game, he buys that brand. The model explains how, using appropriate techniques based on specific characteristics of the video game, advertisers can help consumers get through all four stages of communication and finally buy the product met into an online game.

A more advanced version of this model and more complete is given by DAGMAR Model (defining advertising goals for measuring advertising results) which, in addition to the mental steps that the consumer gets through, it has another two phases: a preliminary phase

when are established the advertising goals (*defining advertising goals*) and a closing phase (measuring advertising results) in which it is measured the effectiveness of the advertising campaign based on online gaming technology, starting from the objectives established initially.

In the ELM model (*Elaborate Likelihood Model*) we have illustrated the formation of attitudes towards brand based on two cognitive routes by which the advertising message transmitted using an online video game is processed: the central route, which deals with the analytical processing of information and is based on reason and logical arguments, and peripheral route, which deals with emotional processing and is based on intuition.

With the proposed mathematical model based on Cournot oligopolistic competition, we explained how brands present in the virtual environment of a video game need to adjust the volume of advertising inserts used, according to the total volume of publicity in the game and the number of competing brands present in the same game. The proposed model shows that in a dynamic competition brands that are present in the same video game can get optimum benefit if they reach an equilibrium point where the number of advertising inserts does not exceed the saturation level of the mind of the consumer, and in the competition are not more than three brands.

In the Chapter 5 – “Romania consumer attitude towards advertising online video games ” we bring the personal contribution to knowledge by carrying out a research structured in two main studies which investigated through qualitative and quantitative methods the representativeness of elements which have influence on consumer attitudes, identified in the documentation analysis, on consumers in Romania. These studies are detailed in the next section of this summary.

PhD thesis concludes with **Chapter 6** – “Conclusions, limitations and new research directions” where summarized results and presented theoretical and managerial implications of the work. Also, new research directions are proposed for the enrichment studies regarding marketing communication based on online gaming technology, taking into account the limits of current research.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The essence of the work is the Chapter 5 which analyzes the elements that influence the formation of consumer attitudes toward advertising based on Internet technology and online video gaming. For a proper analysis of the subject studied we carried out two main studies where we used both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Using videogames in advertising is a relatively new practice. Previous studies conducted by researchers from the international scientific community have shown that this type of promotional campaigns are effective when advertisers acts on certain aspects of game design that they can control. These issues can be grouped into six categories of items and refers to the level of interactivity of the game, information about the brand, creating a good and relaxing storyline, level of intrusion of commercials shown in the game, the game viral features and games credibility as a support for brand message.

Based on these considerations, the qualitative study aim to check if the six elements identified in the literature regarding the influence on consumer attitudes can be found at the consumer level in Romania. The main objective of this study is therefore:

Objective: Identify the extent to which the six elements identified in the international literature that influence consumer attitudes toward advertising in online video games can be found in the population of Romania.

From the research point of view of the approach used in this study is based on the exploratory inductive structure. This approach is needed for a more precise determination of the problem and of the key variables for investigating in the following studie in this thesis.

Based on the six categories of factors that influence consumer attitudes towards advertising in online video games that we identified in the documentation, we conducted two complementary research studies. In these studies have sought to identify both qualitative and quantitative methods, to what extent these elements are representative for the consumers in Romania.

In the qualitative study, primary data were collected through in-depth interview method, based on a semidirectiv questionnaire. The results of analysis of 10 interviews and triangulation manual decoding process, I found the six factors and to consumers of Romania, the data can be summarized as follows:

1. *Interactivity*: The possibilities in creating unique and attractive messages offered by online games causes many consumers to prefer this type of message presentation compared to traditional promoting (5 of the 10 respondents);
2. *Information*: Games that can bring relevant information about a product are suitable for promotion (4 of 10 respondents); Most of those who know about the promotion through online games believes that the most appropriate information about a product is through an advergame (6 of 10 respondents);
3. *Relaxation*: Some respondents said that online games provide opportunities for fun and relaxation stronger than other types of media (6 of 10 respondents), while others felt that current technology offers possibilities for fun at a level that can not be matched by other forms of media (4 of 10 respondents);
4. *Intrusion*: Most of the respondents believe that they would be disturbed by the presence of advertising in online games (8 of 10 respondents), but if the commercials would be presented in a way that does not interrupt the game, the advertisements would may be more easily accepted (4 of the 10 people interviewed);
5. *Viral characteristics*: This aspect is poorly represented; only a few respondents said they were willing to share their experience of a video game with friends or family (3 of the 10 respondents);
6. *Credibility*: Interviewees believe that online games are suitable for promoting a brand; advertisements found in games are as compelling as those in traditional formats (6 of the 10 respondents).

Because of the qualitative nature of the study, this information can not be generalized to consumers in Romania. As a result, we used a quantitative research to bring empirical evidence on the representativeness of the six dimensions investigated.

Based on the literature review in quantitative research we wanted to identify the type of relationship that is established between the six dimensions highlighted by previous literature and consumer attitudes towards advertising in online video games, and the meaning and intensity of this relation. This study seeks to ascertain whether the six characteristics that influence consumer attitudes towards advertising in online games identified in the literature and traced in the qualitative research can also be quantitatively found for consumers in Romania. Based on this, the objective of this study can be described as follows:

Objective: Identify the relationships between elements related to the construction and features of the online game and consumer attitudes towards advertising in online video games as well as their meaning and intensity.

In terms of the research approach used in this study we used a quantitative research method based on a descriptive and conclusive structure of deductive type. For primary data collection we used the method of online survey based on self-administered questionnaire using a convenience sample selected for which respondents were contacted directly via e-mail.

Contacting participants was done by following the approach proposed by Dillman *et al.* (2009) who believes that sending personalized invitations to participate in the study and contacting respondents repeatedly lead to a high rate of response, and invited people will be more willing to participate in the investigation.

The questionnaire was constructed based on 20 statements about which respondents were invited to express their opinion based on a Likert scale with seven points, where 1 represents total disagreement, and 7 total agreement. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistical techniques and factor analysis with SPSS (v.20).

For data analysis were performed using three types of statistical investigations:

1. Descriptive analysis of the data (20 items) aims to better understand attitudinal characteristics of consumers, using for this purpose the mean, standard deviation, coefficient of variation of standard deviation, absolute, relative and cumulative frequencies, and skewness and kurtosis values;

2. Factor analysis of the data and:

- Preliminary analysis to verify the adequacy of the data to perform factor analysis.

For this we calculated the internal consistency using Cronbach alpha coefficient and the sampling adequacy coefficient with Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity.

- The actual factor analysis: we used the procedure „main components” in order to identify the complete variable, which may be removed from the analysis and to reduce the information that is analyzed, the factors being rotated through Varimax procedure.

3. Hypothesis testing

- Testing the relationship between variables was performed using Pearson and Spearman correlation tests to identify the existence and the intensity of the correlation

between the observed data of two categories of variables whose values are normally distributed.

- To identify the factors that influence consumer attitudes toward games with advertising content we formulated six sets of statistical hypotheses which were tested using linear regression, t-test and ANOVA.

Descriptive analysis of the data revealed several aspects of consumer attitudes towards the six main aspects investigated: interactivity, information, relaxation, intrusion, viral characteristics and credibility support. Globally, consumer attitudes towards advertising in video games is favorable (score = 4.49)

Consumer attitude towards interactivity aspects of games that have advertising content is generally favorable (score = 4.76). This shows that consumers generally assigned greater importance related to game design elements relating to the construction of interfaces to virtual characters and virtual objects in space, and a small importance to aspects related to the game story.

Consumer attitude towards aspects of informative character of a game that contains elements of advertising is generally neutral (score = 4.16). The results show that in general consumers find it relevant that a game that has advertising content to provide information about the advertised product, but this method is not very suitable for promotion to receive such information. However, this type of promotion would not cause the consumer to buy the product.

Consumer attitude to aspects of recreation and leisure opportunities offered by an online game that contains elements of advertising is generally positive (score = 5.01).

Consumer attitude to issues related to the integration of advertising and its perceived level of intrusion of advertising into the virtual environment of the game is positive (score = 5.94). This aspect shows that in general consumers consider it is important that the advertisement does not distract the player from the game action, not to interrupt the normal conduct of the game, and the product shown to have a strong thematic connection to the game.

Regarding the viral nature of an online game that has advertising content, there are both people who have a positive attitude and negative attitude; the results can not be synthesized as an indicator expressing the global attitude (score unrepresentative). Similarly, there were consumers who felt that games can be a credible support for the message of the brand, and consumers that found that this method of presentation has low credibility. In this

case, the results could be summarized in the form of an indicator showing the overall attitude level (score not representative).

Hypothesis testing was performed using linear regression test, T-test and ANOVA, and the existence of the link between the tested variables was examined using Pearson (r) and Spearman (r_s) correlation coefficients.

The results highlighted several aspects:

- Interactive properties of a video game has an average influence on consumer attitudes towards advertising in video games; consumer perception on this issue is different among both men and women and people from different age groups.

- Consumer attitudes towards advertising online video games is influenced to a small extent by the quality of information related to a particular brand or product that is presented in such a game; consumers' perception on this issue is different among both women and men and people of different age groups.

- Consumer attitudes is influenced to a small extent by the possibilities of relaxation and leisure offered by an online game that has advertising content:

- Attitude is influenced in a small measure of entertainment possibilities offered by an online game that has advertising content; there are different attitudes among both men and women and people from different age groups.

- Attitude is influenced in a small measure by the properties of a game to be easy to play and accessible; in this respect there is no difference in the perception of women and men, but there are significant differences among people of different age groups.

- Consumer attitudes is influenced in a large measure by the intrusion of an advertisement in an online video game that has advertising content; consumer perception on this issue is different among both women and men, but not among people in groups of different age.

- The attitude of consumers is influenced to a small extent by the viral character of an online video game that has advertising content; consumer perception on this issue is different among both men and women and people from different age groups.

- The attitude of consumers is influenced by the credibility of online games as a support for brand messages; consumer perception on this issue is different among both men and women and people from different age groups.

The results of this study show that the six dimensions identified in the literature and in the previous qualitative study, are also representative at quantitative level. These elements have influence on romanian consumer attitudes on advertising through online video games. Consumer attitude to advertising in online video games is generally favorable and is influenced by aspects of construction and features of the online game like interactivity, quality of information, opportunities for relaxation and recreation, the intrusive nature of the advertisement, viral and credibility support. We also identified the existence of differences in perception of these elements due to demographic issues, such as gender or age group which includes consumer.

These results are consistent with other similar studies in the literature which have highlighted the importance of interactive properties (van den Hoogen *et al.*, 2008; van Reijmersdal *et al.*, 2010), the quality of the information offered (Wise *et al.*, 2008; Pardun & McKee, 2000), opportunities for recreation and entertainment (Youn & Lee, 2005; Taylor, 2009; Martí – Parreño *et al.*, 2013), intrusion level (Scharl *et al.*, 2005; Klein, 2003), viral aspect (Gurău, 2008; Waiguny *et al.*, 2010) and video games credibility as a way of transmitting the brand message (Fiore *et al.*, 2005; Ipe, 2008; Shih, 1998).

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

This research extends the work done so far on attitude formation and make contributions to the understanding of the consumer's reaction and response to marketing communications. The central point of interest is the impact that brand message conveyed to the public through interactive games online, *advergame* type and *in-game*, has on consumer attitudes toward the brand.

The purpose of this work is as a whole, to bring more knowledge regarding this new technique of promoting, by detailing the elements, characteristics, features, advantages and disadvantages of online video games to achieve communication goals. This was achieved through exposure made in **Chapter 1** and **Chapter 2** of the thesis, which explains the concepts of *advergame* and *in-game* in the context of international video games market in connection with the online environment and considering the particularities of consumer behavior on the training attitude in the interactive environment.

The second aim of this thesis was to assist in a better understanding of the functioning of the promotion campaigns based on video games by describing mechanisms, specific components and the relationship that is established between them. This has been achieved in *Chapter 3*, where have been identified six important elements in determining the attitude towards this type of promotion: computer components, source credibility, fun and relaxation incorporated and irritability viral component and interactivity. These components are important to understand the factors that influence the context of using online games and who can act to influence this attitude.

In *Chapter 4* of the paper we were able to capture the complexity and multiplicity of factors that influence attitude formation, making it the basis of three theoretical models of hierarchy of effects, AIDA (Alert interest-desire-action) DAGMAR (Defining Advertising goals for measuring advertising results) and ELM (Elaboration Likelihood model) and a mathematical model derived from Game Theory.

Based on the problems identified in the analysis of the documentation in the field, the nature of consumer attitudes toward advertising in online games research *Chapter 5* presents two complementary studies investigating consumer attitudes towards this type of games.

Given the state of knowledge in the field of advertising in video games online in Romania, research results make important contributions to enriching the education spectrum advertising and the opening of new opportunities for future research. However, these results can be used in future studies to substantiate our area and to improve promotion strategies of firms in search of alternative communication campaigns.

Research implications

This paper addresses a relatively new problem in the field of marketing practices, especially in brand communication, is an area of interest for both academia and business. In this context, the results obtained in this paper presents several theoretical and practical implications. They can be used in the future to substantiate new studies in the field and to improve companies promotion plans in search of alternative communication campaigns. Information provided contributes in many areas of scientific research in the disciplines of marketing communication and those investigating consumer behavior. The research results

have important implications both for using online games as an communication tool , and for influencing consumer attitudes.

Theoretical Implications

The results obtained in this paper has several theoretical and practical implications, this thesis making a significant contribution to the literature on consumer attitudes in Romania to online video games that have advertising content.

The research makes significant contributions in three areas of knowledge. First, in the marketing communications field the study makes contributions about advertising communication through online video games, helping for a better understanding of the strategies that can influence consumers' attitudes towards this promotion practice the brands twho use it. Also, it brings contribution to the extent to which consumers seem willing to accept this kind of advertising as an alternative way of receiving information about a particular product or service.

Secondly, the paper brings a contribution to social sciences that are investigating consumer behavior and has implication on theorie regarding attitude formation in interactive environment.

In the end, the study contributes to the literature on interactive media, providing information regarding the construction of online games and their particular characteristics, such as telepresence and interactive online mediation.

This work has implications for both advertisers and other parties working in the field of online advertising-based video game. The information provided may also be useful for organizations that deal with other forms of media, seeking to supplement their more efficient message delivery mode to compete with this new form of media promotion.

The three models of hierarchy of effects presented in this thesis, AIDA (*Alert Interest-Desire-Action*) DAGMAR (*Defining Advertising Goals for Measuring Advertising Results*) and ELM (*Elaboration Likelihood Model*) make an important theoretical contribution and creates a context suitable for future research exploring how the use of brand communication through online games are influential in shaping and changing consumer attitudes.

Proposed mathematical model inspired by game theory has important implications for the strategic planning process; a company should choose a video game that contains a small

number of advertisements or use an exclusive presence in a video game, for example in an *advergame* or exclusive sponsorship of a video game using the method *in-game* promotion.

Managerial Implications

Previous literature has noted that two of the fundamental objectives of using online games with advertising content are to positively influence consumers' attitudes toward the brand and towards company image (Avery & Ferraro, 2000). Results from this study have shown that to achieve these two primary objectives is necessary to incorporate a mix of elements that address issues such as interactive properties, relevant information content, issues involving recreation, low level of intrusiveness given by a subtle integration of the advertisement into the game environment, aspects which enhance viral effects and elements that help increasing the credibility of video games as a support for brand message.

Attitude towards this type of promotion has proven to be generally positive, consumers with a favorable attitude toward aspects of interactivity, information, relaxation and intrusive advertising. On matters such as viral characteristics and reliability of games that support the message of the brand results were uncertain. However, the results confirmed a significant links between these elements and consumer attitudes, but of medium intensity. The results also indicated that the attitude to these matters is different for women and men, but also among people belonging to different age groups.

These issues have managerial implications of several categories of people involved in brand communication processes through video games. First, the results have direct relevance for those involved in the creation of these games (Galician & Bourdeau, 2004 La Ferla & Edwards, 2006), and the relationship between them and the advertisers. For those producing the games, advertising agencies and rating services, the results indicate the need for a change in how they work together to deliver games that incorporate content that will please users and at the same time provide relevant brand information. Future strategies should cover all these categories acting on the market and to benefit each participant.

Promoting the advantages of online video games depends on the ability to find advertisers mix of these elements make the best value of the presented product. Considering, however, that these issues affect a small proportion of consumer attitudes, advertisers in Romania should use video games to introduce a new product or service in a way that complements an extensive promotion campaigns.

Limitations and future research

In general, empirical research implicitly involve a series of limitations, which is also the case of this work. The results characterize people who were part of the sample and therefore can not be extrapolated to the statistical population investigated, which in this case are persons of Romanian nationality aged 15 to 45 years.

Folowing, we discussed the limitation of the selected research methodology and data analysis methods used in the research field being offered proposals for future research.

A first limitation of the research carried out is given by the use of a non-probability sampling method, which in this case was the convenience sampling based on the „snowball method”. Besides this, another limitation of the study is given by the using of the online questionnaire as the main tool for data collection. This instrument has by its nature a number of limitations, such as not allowing the investigator can provide further explanation of the participants. Future studies may investigate the matter by using different kind of tools to gather data and to make comparisons between results obtained.

Another limitation of this research is given by the fact that the phenomena studied were addressed in a cross-static which limits the angle from which the problem can be understood. Future studies could address the dynamic methods to study consumer attitudes regular short periods of time and focus on observing attitude differences arising on amendment of the controllable factors. Hence an important future research direction that can address the problem studied in a longitudinal manner, such as through the questionnaire at regular intervals of time and observing the changes in consumer attitudes on brands that are promoted in online games.

Another limitation comes from the fact that the results reflect the particular views of respondents who were included in the study, which are subjectivity and their sincerity, aspects that can not be measured or controlled.

The thesis addresses a new research topic, little explored by researchers in Romania, but may become a central theme of interest in academic research and practical approaches.

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BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
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DOCTORAL FIELD: **MARKETING**

CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARDS ADVERTISING IN VIDEO GAMES

- PH.D THESYS SUMMARY -

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KEYWORDS

Online advertising, advergames, in-game advertising, hierarchy or effects models, online video games, consumer attitude

INTRODUCTION

New opportunities for communication, information and recreation of the online entail significant changes in people's consumption and how they intend to use the technology. The new possibilities of communication, information and relaxation offered by the online environment. The new exchange relations are characterized by a much wider diversity of supply and demand due to rising expectations from consumers who have become interested to carry out activities in the online environment (Purcell, 2012). Communication patterns that result from these changes have provided new possibilities for companies to reach their customers and promote their brands and products.

Marketers interested in finding alternatives to traditional media felt that video games have a great potential to transmit the advertisement in a form that has a stronger effect on online consumers (Dawidowska, 2002). In the last decade, combining new technologies with online video games have given rise to new opportunities for interaction between brand and client become a practice increasingly used internationally (Gao *et al.*, 2011). Joint promotion techniques with video gaming technology has led to the two forms of online advertising: advergaming and in-game advertising.

An advergaming is a video game built around a product or brand that orders or sponsors that game, serving to promote that particular brand or product (Winkler & Buckner, 2006). The advergaming concept can be understood as a form of interactive technology which uses video games with specific embedded advertising messages in order to develop long lasting relationships with consumers (Chen & Ringel, 2001). Advergaming-Boying can be classified as an unconventional form of marketing communication which integrates the principles of advertising directly into computer games (Řehoř, 2008). Also, it is an advertising concept that uses Internet technology to implement viral marketing campaigns (Gurău, 2010).

In-game advertising represents inserting a brand into a story already built of a stand-alone game created by a firm with the main purpose to entertain the user (Vedrashko, 2006). In this way, advertisers can deliver messages through static or dynamic images and have the opportunity to interact with their potential customers through the virtual image of the products, through sound and image (Kempt, 2009). These inserts can take a static form, as in the case of simple logos, billboards, banners and posters in the game, or a dynamic form, like interactive panels, tools and weapons in the game, avatars or clothing for characters (Wise *et al.*, 2008).

Static in-game advertising is integrated into the computer or video game before start selling it and does not allow further amendments (Grigorovici & Constantin, 2004). In contrast, the dynamic in-game advertising is characterized by the fact that it can be renewed each time the game is accessed from a PC or a console that is connected to the Internet (Mau *et al.*, 2008).

Previous studies consider in-game advertising as a form of product placement (Vedrashko, 2006; Winkler & Buckner, 2006; Wise *et al.*, 2008) or sponsorship (Cianfrone & Zhang, 2009).

Researchers tend to believe that in-game advertising is an extended form of product placement, where the desired meaning transfer occurs when consumers associate a conditioned stimulus given by the brand with an unconditioned stimulus, given by the video game (Winkler & Buckner, 2006). In this way, the combination of positive feelings during the game transfer to the sponsor brand, resulting in a positive attitude towards that brand.

Sponsorships in-game are met more often if the sports-themed video games, with a high popularity because of the way in which visual effects that the action menus very similar to how it is presented by television commercials dedicated to sports (Cianfrone & Zhang, 2009).

Many authors have found that video games are a medium through which the advertisement may be more easily accepted by users, bringing numerous advantages (van Reijmersdal *et al.*, 2010). For brands promoted in this way benefits include developing a long-term customer relationships (Chen & Ringel, 2001), a greater satisfaction for the customer (Šimberová, 2010), recall and recognition of the brand met in a game (Nelson, 2002, 2005; Grigorovici & Constantin, 2004; Mallinckrodt & Mizerski, 2007; Wise *et al.*, 2008), favourable attitudes towards the brand (Mau *et al.*, 2010; van Reijmersdal *et al.*, 2010) and purchase intentions (Burns, 2005; Lee *et al.*, 2009).

Being a new field, there are few studies to address the issue of advertising in video games online in Romania. Most of the companies operating on this market are using mostly traditional methods of promotion.

The use promotion through advergame and in-game inserts is little used in Romania, and there are few issues that are known about the reactions and attitudes of consumers about these types of brand messages. To adopt methods of promotion based on video games, advertisers must first understand what are the issues that influence consumer attitudes towards

this type of promotion and that can cause them to agree to receive such messages from a brand.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RELEVANCE

The thesis highlights current trends of developed promotion techniques used at global level and modern techniques used in advertising. The need to adopt the advertising techniques used in local landscape with those used at international level shows the importance they have in the current economy, characterized by diversification in brand communication and innovation of techniques used.

Development of economic landscape and numerous promotional techniques led to the need to study new types of communication channels used for brand messages. In this context, the relevance of implementing an innovative communication system in client-firm relationship using interactive technology for transmitting advertising messages is a widespread practice of marketing actions of advertisers worldwide.

The aim of this thesis is to bring a better understanding of embedded advertising in online video games and attitudes that consumers have towards them. The information provided can support companies that are searching for new and more effective ways of promotion than traditional media, and assist managers in making decisions on the allocation of budgets for promotion and use channels of communication with the public. Also, this information may be useful for advertisers who want to better understand the value of this kind of games for their marketing purposes. Finally, the information provided in the present thesis can be useful for consumers that having access to more information about this new technique may express their preference regarding the brand message delivery.

This paper aims to contribute to the information on promotion practices based on new technology and media and to provide information necessary to the construction, funding and implementation of new marketing strategies in brand communication. This paper extends the work done so far on the formation of attitudes and make contributions to the understanding of the consumer response to marketing communications. Based on these general considerations, research conducted in this thesis follows three main directions:

1. Bibliographical study on the new context of online communication, interactive technologies and promotion techniques based on video games technology is needed to identify several issues of interest in this paper;

2. Development of two types of economic models used in advertising is necessary in theory to explain the internal mechanisms of functional processes and type advergaming advertising and in-game

3. Empirical research by qualitative and quantitative methods is to explain certain aspects of consumer attitudes towards online gaming technology.

The thesis deals with a specific topic in the field of marketing communication, aiming at the establishment of the link between particular aspects of online gaming and interactive media and consumer attitudes towards advertising based on online gaming technology. To achieve this objective we have established four main secondary endpoints, defined as:

- Identify specific aspects of interactive media and how to integrate them into the brand promotion plan;
- Identify the specific aspects of online video games that offer advertisers new opportunities to achieve marketing goals;
- Identify the specific aspects of environment and interactive online games that have influence on consumer attitudes;
- Highlighting the particular aspects of online video games with advertising elements that can be used to understand the effects of advertising on consumers and decision making regarding online video game advertising.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PH.D THESYS CHAPTERS

The thesis is divided into six chapters where the researched subject is addressed both theoretically and in practice. In the first three chapters we present a theoretical perspective on the particularities of the online environment, the attitude of consumers in this environment, the video game market as a whole and the concepts on advertising in online games and forms that it takes, advergaming and in-game advertising. Chapter 4 presents at conceptual level a number of models that describe the operation of online video game advertisements on consumer attitudes, and Chapter 5 presents the methodology and the research conducted by

the author. Finally, in a separate chapter we present the conclusions, implications of the research and future research directions in the form of Chapter 6.

Chapter 1 – “Communication in the online advertising and consumer behavior” as introductory chapter, is an overview of the main concepts that we are working throughout the thesis regarding online advertising, the Internet and the particularities of consumer attitudes shaped by the interactive environment.

This chapter aims at defining the concepts related to the online environment, focusing on the advantages and limitations of this environment and facilities it offers compared to other advertising media such as television and outdoor or print advertising. Defining attitude in online environment and new-media communication has the purpose to shape the context where occurs the online interaction between advertisers and their customers and to create a theoretical framework for the research conducted in this thesis.

Chapter 2 – “Video games as a tool for online advertising” includes an overview of the concepts used regarding video games, interactive media games, advergames and in-game advertisements. To highlight the promotion technique based on online gaming technology, we carry out a review of the characteristics, benefits, opportunities and risks of each method of promotion based on video game technology as a tool in brand communication, decision making strategic promotional mix and budget allocation, as well as advertising goals. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a clear delineation of the concepts used and brings more understanding of promotional techniques described. The concepts of advergame and in-game are presented in the context of international market of video games, and are described in the online context, taking into account the specificities related to the formation of attitudes in the interactive environment.

To create an appropriate context for the research started in this work, in this chapter we make a synthesis of information on the video game industry and interactive online market size globally and in Europe, focusing on online gaming market realities in Romania. This information provides a broad perspective on the dynamics and scale of the industry and underlines the importance of research about advertising in video games and the purposes that they can take in brand communication. The concepts presented highlight the interplay between this market and advertising, which resulted in two major forms of video games that contain advertising: advergames and in-game inserts. Detailed description of these new forms

of promotion is to highlight the global context in which they arose and developed, and the economic and advertising importance that this type of games have got it in recent years.

Chapter 3 – “The influence of video games online advertisements on consumer attitudes”, we summarize the elements that determine, shape and influence the formation of attitudes in online and virtual environment and we focus on those specific items specific for online gaming environment that have influence on consumer attitudes, based on the information that the selected from secondary literature.

In this chapter we identified, based on the documentation of the literature in the field, two types of studies. The first category addresses studies that have identified aspects which influence consumer attitudes toward online promotion through video games addressing both the construction and the particular game and online environment. The results of these studies are grouped to form six categories of elements: interactivity, informative features, recreation and relaxation characteristics, the level of intrusiveness of advertising, viral characteristics and credibility of games as a support for brand message.

The second category of studies analyzed the direction of consumer attitudes toward video games that have advertising content. Depending on the results obtained by the authors, we have grouped these studies in three study groups.

Studies in the *first group* showed that in general people have a positive attitude towards inserting advertisements in video games (Nelson, 2002; Nelson *et al.*, 2004, Chaney *et al.*, 2004).

These results were supported by numerous other studies that followed (Lu, 2010; Wise *et al.*, 2008). Positive attitudes result from the integration of advertising into the game, which is more acceptable than other traditional forms of promotion (Ipe, 2008). Also, information provided by an advergaming influence consumers' perception of the product, and they may find it more attractive compared to the offer of the competition (Saadeghvaziri & Hosseini, 2011).

The *second group* of studies have contradicted these findings, arguing that in fact, people have a negative attitude on commercials presented in games (Lehu, 2006). Many studies have found that the presence of products in video games, especially when you do not fit in the context of the game (Herandez *et al.*, 2004; Küster *et al.*, 2010) is considered an intrusive advertising practices leading to generally negative attitudes from users (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Nebenzahl & Jaffe, 1998; Mau *et al.*, 2008).

The third group of studies, less numerous, believes that people adopt a passive attitude towards advertising in online games, and they are not particularly interested in or affected by the advertisement received in this way (Martí – Parreño *et al.*, 2013; Matteo, 2008).

Chapter 4 – “Economic models used to understand the effects of advertising on consumers and decision making of video game advertising online”, combines elements determined in the previous chapter into theoretical attitudinal models that explain the functionality and design of video games with advertising content. The first part explains the formation of attitudes through advergaming using as examples three models of hierarchy of effects, and the second part describes the functioning of in-game advertising based on a model of advertising competition inspired by Game Theory.

Throughout this chapter, based on the study of literature we have identified two classes of economic models used to understand the effects of advertising on consumers and decision making regarding advertising in online video game. Of these models, we selected two types of models through which we aim to explain how advertising works in video games: the hierarchy of effects models (Preston, 1982; Strong, 1925; Petty & Cacioppo, 1983; Laczniak *et al.*, 1989; Zaichkowsky, 1994; Andrew *et al.*, 1990) and mathematical models (Leitmann & Schmitendorf, 1978; Sethi, 1977; Ferstman, 1984; Jorjensen, 1999; Perloff, 2008).

In this context, we managed to capture the complexity of the attitudinal construct and the multitude of factors that influence the formation of attitudes, realizing this based on three theoretical models of hierarchy of effects, AIDA (attention-interest-desire-action) DAGMAR (Defining Advertising Goals for Measured Advertising Results) and ELM (Elaborated Likelihood model) and a mathematical model derived from Game Theory.

In the AIDA model we explained in theory a sequence of four mental steps that a consumer gets through from the moment he meets a brand for the first time in an advergaming and until when, after the virtual experience with the product during the game, he buys that brand. The model explains how, using appropriate techniques based on specific characteristics of the video game, advertisers can help consumers get through all four stages of communication and finally buy the product met into an online game.

A more advanced version of this model and more complete is given by DAGMAR Model (defining advertising goals for measuring advertising results) which, in addition to the mental steps that the consumer gets through, it has another two phases: a preliminary phase

when are established the advertising goals (*defining advertising goals*) and a closing phase (measuring advertising results) in which it is measured the effectiveness of the advertising campaign based on online gaming technology, starting from the objectives established initially.

In the ELM model (*Elaborate Likelihood Model*) we have illustrated the formation of attitudes towards brand based on two cognitive routes by which the advertising message transmitted using an online video game is processed: the central route, which deals with the analytical processing of information and is based on reason and logical arguments, and peripheral route, which deals with emotional processing and is based on intuition.

With the proposed mathematical model based on Cournot oligopolistic competition, we explained how brands present in the virtual environment of a video game need to adjust the volume of advertising inserts used, according to the total volume of publicity in the game and the number of competing brands present in the same game. The proposed model shows that in a dynamic competition brands that are present in the same video game can get optimum benefit if they reach an equilibrium point where the number of advertising inserts does not exceed the saturation level of the mind of the consumer, and in the competition are not more than three brands.

In the Chapter 5 – “Romania consumer attitude towards advertising online video games ” we bring the personal contribution to knowledge by carrying out a research structured in two main studies which investigated through qualitative and quantitative methods the representativeness of elements which have influence on consumer attitudes, identified in the documentation analysis, on consumers in Romania. These studies are detailed in the next section of this summary.

PhD thesis concludes with **Chapter 6** – “Conclusions, limitations and new research directions” where summarized results and presented theoretical and managerial implications of the work. Also, new research directions are proposed for the enrichment studies regarding marketing communication based on online gaming technology, taking into account the limits of current research.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The essence of the work is the Chapter 5 which analyzes the elements that influence the formation of consumer attitudes toward advertising based on Internet technology and online video gaming. For a proper analysis of the subject studied we carried out two main studies where we used both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Using videogames in advertising is a relatively new practice. Previous studies conducted by researchers from the international scientific community have shown that this type of promotional campaigns are effective when advertisers acts on certain aspects of game design that they can control. These issues can be grouped into six categories of items and refers to the level of interactivity of the game, information about the brand, creating a good and relaxing storyline, level of intrusion of commercials shown in the game, the game viral features and games credibility as a support for brand message.

Based on these considerations, the qualitative study aim to check if the six elements identified in the literature regarding the influence on consumer attitudes can be found at the consumer level in Romania. The main objective of this study is therefore:

Objective: Identify the extent to which the six elements identified in the international literature that influence consumer attitudes toward advertising in online video games can be found in the population of Romania.

From the research point of view of the approach used in this study is based on the exploratory inductive structure. This approach is needed for a more precise determination of the problem and of the key variables for investigating in the following studie in this thesis.

Based on the six categories of factors that influence consumer attitudes towards advertising in online video games that we identified in the documentation, we conducted two complementary research studies. In these studies have sought to identify both qualitative and quantitative methods, to what extent these elements are representative for the consumers in Romania.

In the qualitative study, primary data were collected through in-depth interview method, based on a semidirectiv questionnaire. The results of analysis of 10 interviews and triangulation manual decoding process, I found the six factors and to consumers of Romania, the data can be summarized as follows:

1. *Interactivity*: The possibilities in creating unique and attractive messages offered by online games causes many consumers to prefer this type of message presentation compared to traditional promoting (5 of the 10 respondents);
2. *Information*: Games that can bring relevant information about a product are suitable for promotion (4 of 10 respondents); Most of those who know about the promotion through online games believes that the most appropriate information about a product is through an advergame (6 of 10 respondents);
3. *Relaxation*: Some respondents said that online games provide opportunities for fun and relaxation stronger than other types of media (6 of 10 respondents), while others felt that current technology offers possibilities for fun at a level that can not be matched by other forms of media (4 of 10 respondents);
4. *Intrusion*: Most of the respondents believe that they would be disturbed by the presence of advertising in online games (8 of 10 respondents), but if the commercials would be presented in a way that does not interrupt the game, the advertisements would may be more easily accepted (4 of the 10 people interviewed);
5. *Viral characteristics*: This aspect is poorly represented; only a few respondents said they were willing to share their experience of a video game with friends or family (3 of the 10 respondents);
6. *Credibility*: Interviewees believe that online games are suitable for promoting a brand; advertisements found in games are as compelling as those in traditional formats (6 of the 10 respondents).

Because of the qualitative nature of the study, this information can not be generalized to consumers in Romania. As a result, we used a quantitative research to bring empirical evidence on the representativeness of the six dimensions investigated.

Based on the literature review in quantitative research we wanted to identify the type of relationship that is established between the six dimensions highlighted by previous literature and consumer attitudes towards advertising in online video games, and the meaning and intensity of this relation. This study seeks to ascertain whether the six characteristics that influence consumer attitudes towards advertising in online games identified in the literature and traced in the qualitative research can also be quantitatively found for consumers in Romania. Based on this, the objective of this study can be described as follows:

Objective: Identify the relationships between elements related to the construction and features of the online game and consumer attitudes towards advertising in online video games as well as their meaning and intensity.

In terms of the research approach used in this study we used a quantitative research method based on a descriptive and conclusive structure of deductive type. For primary data collection we used the method of online survey based on self-administered questionnaire using a convenience sample selected for which respondents were contacted directly via e-mail.

Contacting participants was done by following the approach proposed by Dillman *et al.* (2009) who believes that sending personalized invitations to participate in the study and contacting respondents repeatedly lead to a high rate of response, and invited people will be more willing to participate in the investigation.

The questionnaire was constructed based on 20 statements about which respondents were invited to express their opinion based on a Likert scale with seven points, where 1 represents total disagreement, and 7 total agreement. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistical techniques and factor analysis with SPSS (v.20).

For data analysis were performed using three types of statistical investigations:

1. Descriptive analysis of the data (20 items) aims to better understand attitudinal characteristics of consumers, using for this purpose the mean, standard deviation, coefficient of variation of standard deviation, absolute, relative and cumulative frequencies, and skewness and kurtosis values;

2. Factor analysis of the data and:

- Preliminary analysis to verify the adequacy of the data to perform factor analysis.

For this we calculated the internal consistency using Cronbach alpha coefficient and the sampling adequacy coefficient with Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity.

- The actual factor analysis: we used the procedure „main components” in order to identify the complete variable, which may be removed from the analysis and to reduce the information that is analyzed, the factors being rotated through Varimax procedure.

3. Hypothesis testing

- Testing the relationship between variables was performed using Pearson and Spearman correlation tests to identify the existence and the intensity of the correlation

between the observed data of two categories of variables whose values are normally distributed.

- To identify the factors that influence consumer attitudes toward games with advertising content we formulated six sets of statistical hypotheses which were tested using linear regression, t-test and ANOVA.

Descriptive analysis of the data revealed several aspects of consumer attitudes towards the six main aspects investigated: interactivity, information, relaxation, intrusion, viral characteristics and credibility support. Globally, consumer attitudes towards advertising in video games is favorable (score = 4.49)

Consumer attitude towards interactivity aspects of games that have advertising content is generally favorable (score = 4.76). This shows that consumers generally assigned greater importance related to game design elements relating to the construction of interfaces to virtual characters and virtual objects in space, and a small importance to aspects related to the game story.

Consumer attitude towards aspects of informative character of a game that contains elements of advertising is generally neutral (score = 4.16). The results show that in general consumers find it relevant that a game that has advertising content to provide information about the advertised product, but this method is not very suitable for promotion to receive such information. However, this type of promotion would not cause the consumer to buy the product.

Consumer attitude to aspects of recreation and leisure opportunities offered by an online game that contains elements of advertising is generally positive (score = 5.01).

Consumer attitude to issues related to the integration of advertising and its perceived level of intrusion of advertising into the virtual environment of the game is positive (score = 5.94). This aspect shows that in general consumers consider it is important that the advertisement does not distract the player from the game action, not to interrupt the normal conduct of the game, and the product shown to have a strong thematic connection to the game.

Regarding the viral nature of an online game that has advertising content, there are both people who have a positive attitude and negative attitude; the results can not be synthesized as an indicator expressing the global attitude (score unrepresentative). Similarly, there were consumers who felt that games can be a credible support for the message of the brand, and consumers that found that this method of presentation has low credibility. In this

case, the results could be summarized in the form of an indicator showing the overall attitude level (score not representative).

Hypothesis testing was performed using linear regression test, T-test and ANOVA, and the existence of the link between the tested variables was examined using Pearson (r) and Spearman (r_s) correlation coefficients.

The results highlighted several aspects:

- Interactive properties of a video game has an average influence on consumer attitudes towards advertising in video games; consumer perception on this issue is different among both men and women and people from different age groups.

- Consumer attitudes towards advertising online video games is influenced to a small extent by the quality of information related to a particular brand or product that is presented in such a game; consumers' perception on this issue is different among both women and men and people of different age groups.

- Consumer attitudes is influenced to a small extent by the possibilities of relaxation and leisure offered by an online game that has advertising content:

- Attitude is influenced in a small measure of entertainment possibilities offered by an online game that has advertising content; there are different attitudes among both men and women and people from different age groups.

- Attitude is influenced in a small measure by the properties of a game to be easy to play and accessible; in this respect there is no difference in the perception of women and men, but there are significant differences among people of different age groups.

- Consumer attitudes is influenced in a large measure by the intrusion of an advertisement in an online video game that has advertising content; consumer perception on this issue is different among both women and men, but not among people in groups of different age.

- The attitude of consumers is influenced to a small extent by the viral character of an online video game that has advertising content; consumer perception on this issue is different among both men and women and people from different age groups.

- The attitude of consumers is influenced by the credibility of online games as a support for brand messages; consumer perception on this issue is different among both men and women and people from different age groups.

The results of this study show that the six dimensions identified in the literature and in the previous qualitative study, are also representative at quantitative level. These elements have influence on romanian consumer attitudes on advertising through online video games. Consumer attitude to advertising in online video games is generally favorable and is influenced by aspects of construction and features of the online game like interactivity, quality of information, opportunities for relaxation and recreation, the intrusive nature of the advertisement, viral and credibility support. We also identified the existence of differences in perception of these elements due to demographic issues, such as gender or age group which includes consumer.

These results are consistent with other similar studies in the literature which have highlighted the importance of interactive properties (van den Hoogen *et al.*, 2008; van Reijmersdal *et al.*, 2010), the quality of the information offered (Wise *et al.*, 2008; Pardun & McKee, 2000), opportunities for recreation and entertainment (Youn & Lee, 2005; Taylor, 2009; Martí – Parreño *et al.*, 2013), intrusion level (Scharl *et al.*, 2005; Klein, 2003), viral aspect (Gurău, 2008; Waiguny *et al.*, 2010) and video games credibility as a way of transmitting the brand message (Fiore *et al.*, 2005; Ipe, 2008; Shih, 1998).

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

This research extends the work done so far on attitude formation and make contributions to the understanding of the consumer's reaction and response to marketing communications. The central point of interest is the impact that brand message conveyed to the public through interactive games online, *advergame* type and *in-game*, has on consumer attitudes toward the brand.

The purpose of this work is as a whole, to bring more knowledge regarding this new technique of promoting, by detailing the elements, characteristics, features, advantages and disadvantages of online video games to achieve communication goals. This was achieved through exposure made in **Chapter 1** and **Chapter 2** of the thesis, which explains the concepts of *advergame* and *in-game* in the context of international video games market in connection with the online environment and considering the particularities of consumer behavior on the training attitude in the interactive environment.

The second aim of this thesis was to assist in a better understanding of the functioning of the promotion campaigns based on video games by describing mechanisms, specific components and the relationship that is established between them. This has been achieved in *Chapter 3*, where have been identified six important elements in determining the attitude towards this type of promotion: computer components, source credibility, fun and relaxation incorporated and irritability viral component and interactivity. These components are important to understand the factors that influence the context of using online games and who can act to influence this attitude.

In *Chapter 4* of the paper we were able to capture the complexity and multiplicity of factors that influence attitude formation, making it the basis of three theoretical models of hierarchy of effects, AIDA (Alert interest-desire-action) DAGMAR (Defining Advertising goals for measuring advertising results) and ELM (Elaboration Likelihood model) and a mathematical model derived from Game Theory.

Based on the problems identified in the analysis of the documentation in the field, the nature of consumer attitudes toward advertising in online games research *Chapter 5* presents two complementary studies investigating consumer attitudes towards this type of games.

Given the state of knowledge in the field of advertising in video games online in Romania, research results make important contributions to enriching the education spectrum advertising and the opening of new opportunities for future research. However, these results can be used in future studies to substantiate our area and to improve promotion strategies of firms in search of alternative communication campaigns.

Research implications

This paper addresses a relatively new problem in the field of marketing practices, especially in brand communication, is an area of interest for both academia and business. In this context, the results obtained in this paper presents several theoretical and practical implications. They can be used in the future to substantiate new studies in the field and to improve companies promotion plans in search of alternative communication campaigns. Information provided contributes in many areas of scientific research in the disciplines of marketing communication and those investigating consumer behavior. The research results

have important implications both for using online games as an communication tool , and for influencing consumer attitudes.

Theoretical Implications

The results obtained in this paper has several theoretical and practical implications, this thesis making a significant contribution to the literature on consumer attitudes in Romania to online video games that have advertising content.

The research makes significant contributions in three areas of knowledge. First, in the marketing communications field the study makes contributions about advertising communication through online video games, helping for a better understanding of the strategies that can influence consumers' attitudes towards this promotion practice the brands twho use it. Also, it brings contribution to the extent to which consumers seem willing to accept this kind of advertising as an alternative way of receiving information about a particular product or service.

Secondly, the paper brings a contribution to social sciences that are investigating consumer behavior and has implication on theorie regarding attitude formation in interactive environment.

In the end, the study contributes to the literature on interactive media, providing information regarding the construction of online games and their particular characteristics, such as telepresence and interactive online mediation.

This work has implications for both advertisers and other parties working in the field of online advertising-based video game. The information provided may also be useful for organizations that deal with other forms of media, seeking to supplement their more efficient message delivery mode to compete with this new form of media promotion.

The three models of hierarchy of effects presented in this thesis, AIDA (*Alert Interest-Desire-Action*) DAGMAR (*Defining Advertising Goals for Measuring Advertising Results*) and ELM (*Elaboration Likelihood Model*) make an important theoretical contribution and creates a context suitable for future research exploring how the use of brand communication through online games are influential in shaping and changing consumer attitudes.

Proposed mathematical model inspired by game theory has important implications for the strategic planning process; a company should choose a video game that contains a small

number of advertisements or use an exclusive presence in a video game, for example in an *advergame* or exclusive sponsorship of a video game using the method *in-game* promotion.

Managerial Implications

Previous literature has noted that two of the fundamental objectives of using online games with advertising content are to positively influence consumers' attitudes toward the brand and towards company image (Avery & Ferraro, 2000). Results from this study have shown that to achieve these two primary objectives is necessary to incorporate a mix of elements that address issues such as interactive properties, relevant information content, issues involving recreation, low level of intrusiveness given by a subtle integration of the advertisement into the game environment, aspects which enhance viral effects and elements that help increasing the credibility of video games as a support for brand message.

Attitude towards this type of promotion has proven to be generally positive, consumers with a favorable attitude toward aspects of interactivity, information, relaxation and intrusive advertising. On matters such as viral characteristics and reliability of games that support the message of the brand results were uncertain. However, the results confirmed a significant links between these elements and consumer attitudes, but of medium intensity. The results also indicated that the attitude to these matters is different for women and men, but also among people belonging to different age groups.

These issues have managerial implications of several categories of people involved in brand communication processes through video games. First, the results have direct relevance for those involved in the creation of these games (Galician & Bourdeau, 2004 La Ferla & Edwards, 2006), and the relationship between them and the advertisers. For those producing the games, advertising agencies and rating services, the results indicate the need for a change in how they work together to deliver games that incorporate content that will please users and at the same time provide relevant brand information. Future strategies should cover all these categories acting on the market and to benefit each participant.

Promoting the advantages of online video games depends on the ability to find advertisers mix of these elements make the best value of the presented product. Considering, however, that these issues affect a small proportion of consumer attitudes, advertisers in Romania should use video games to introduce a new product or service in a way that complements an extensive promotion campaigns.

Limitations and future research

In general, empirical research implicitly involve a series of limitations, which is also the case of this work. The results characterize people who were part of the sample and therefore can not be extrapolated to the statistical population investigated, which in this case are persons of Romanian nationality aged 15 to 45 years.

Folowing, we discussed the limitation of the selected research methodology and data analysis methods used in the research field being offered proposals for future research.

A first limitation of the research carried out is given by the use of a non-probability sampling method, which in this case was the convenience sampling based on the „snowball method”. Besides this, another limitation of the study is given by the using of the online questionnaire as the main tool for data collection. This instrument has by its nature a number of limitations, such as not allowing the investigator can provide further explanation of the participants. Future studies may investigate the matter by using different kind of tools to gather data and to make comparisons between results obtained.

Another limitation of this research is given by the fact that the phenomena studied were addressed in a cross-static which limits the angle from which the problem can be understood. Future studies could address the dynamic methods to study consumer attitudes regular short periods of time and focus on observing attitude differences arising on amendment of the controllable factors. Hence an important future research direction that can address the problem studied in a longitudinal manner, such as through the questionnaire at regular intervals of time and observing the changes in consumer attitudes on brands that are promoted in online games.

Another limitation comes from the fact that the results reflect the particular views of respondents who were included in the study, which are subjectivity and their sincerity, aspects that can not be measured or controlled.

The thesis addresses a new research topic, little explored by researchers in Romania, but may become a central theme of interest in academic research and practical approaches.

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