



## ENJOYABLE OR HUMDRUM ADVERGAMES: THE EFFECTS OF BRAND CONGRUITY LEVEL ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS ADVERGAMES

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### Abstract

*Unlike advertising in traditional media tools or traditional forms of on-line marketing, advergame that one of the fastest growing part of the advertising model around the world is an online video game that promotes a particular brand, product, or marketing message by integrating it into the game. The aims of this study are to briefly describe the advergame phenomenon, determine the attitudes of young consumers towards advergames by comparing the attributes of four advergames (Eti Product Matching, Magnum Pleasure Hunt 2, M&M Dark Movies, Dido Fast Pen) in Turkey and compare with attitudes towards advergames and assessments concerning brand congruity level in the advergame. By being used descriptive research model, the research data were collected from 406 students who study at Faculty of Economics and Business Administrative Sciences of Dumlupinar University, Turkey and the findings indicate the importance of factors regarding to perceived quality of the advergames in order to be able to compare those advergame. The results of this research exposed that advergame of Magnum Pleasure Hunt 2 perceived as more enjoyable, pleasant, dynamic, attractive and appealing than others and brand congruity level did not significantly affect the attitudes towards selected advergames. The results of the study are expected to benefits both scholars and practitioners in the field of advergame.*

**Keywords:** Advergame, brand congruity, Turkey, young consumer, marketing communication, on-line game

### INTRODUCTION

Existent Digital Age has uncovered lots of concepts such as “advergame” via the movement of gamification of every effort. The game and video game are not new phenomenon in our life but newly considered by marketers the realization of effects in the virtual-on line area. In this context, video games are games were played once at least by almost everyone among young people and enjoyed while playing them. In recent decades, many companies has launched several advergames as a relatively new advertising model in order to realize plenty of aims by taking advantage of possibilities of Internet. On the other hand, the role of advergames in marketing efforts has still been underexplored in spite of year after year increasing the number of advergames and its increasing importance, (Okazaki and Yagüe, 2012). In other words, advergames which a popular form of non-conventional marketing are not able to fully addressed the various impacts to advertising strategies of firms.

Basically, there are two fundamental ways to deliver message of brand by means of “game”:

To take part in a game (In game advertising) and to design a game around a brand (advergame). Dating from early 1980s, many company started to product placements in existing video games as an immature type of advergames and then they developed and launched by and by their own specific games for a certain brand. Advergames are certain type of online game where brands are not just part of the game but play crucial role in the game (Toth and Nagy, 2011) whereas in-game advertising is made product placement in space background within an existing game.

The term “advergames” was first appeared in January 2000 by Tony Giallourakis, and later mentioned by [Wired](#)'s “Jargon Watch” column in 2001. There are a lot of definition about advergame. Some of them are:

- The advergames are fun, appealing, and create a context for associating the brand with positive sentiments (Culp et al. 2010).
- Advergame is a brand-rich environment that merges a video game with advertising (Culp et al., 2010).



- Advergame is internet promotional method containing advertising messages (Hernandez et al., 2005).
- Advergames are interactive advertisements that merge online games with product placement (Fattah and Paul, 2002)
- Advergames are the online games designed for the specific purpose of marketing a single brand or product (Winkler and Buckner, 2006).

First of all, advergames are designed by taking into account of strategic and tactic aims of companies consisted of the personality of the advertised brand, the profile of the targeted audience, the characteristics of the stage (Internet), the strategic objectives of the communication campaign and finally the corporate image of the company (Calin, 2010). When investigated the various definitions about advergames, it could be seen that fundamental attributes of advergames are being that included persuasive messages and embedded commercial messages, centralized around the brand, free to play, played on-line, usually located on the brand web sites or game organization sites and branded products or services are being integral component of the game, packaged message reduced resistance by the consumer, more suitable for viral marketing than other forms of media (Culp et al., 2010; Toth and Nagy, 2011; Dahl et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2009; Millinckrodt and Mizerski, 2007; Nelson, 2002; Nicovich, 2005; Sukoco and Wu, 2011; Chen and Ringel, 2001). Comparing other marketing communication tools, the fundamental advantage of advergames are:

- Advergames promise a longer exposure to brands (up to 30 minutes) (Snider, 2002; Hernandez and Minor, 2011)
- Advergames bear a message by entertaining consumers
- Advergames are the brand message (Chen and Ringel, 2001) even they do not include any message concerning a specific brand
- Advergames are free to play and are located on the web site of brand (Toth and Nagy, 2011)
- Advergames offer virtual interaction with a brand name (Arnold, 2004)
- Advergames provide interactivity and elective involvement (Dahl et al., 2008; Deal, 2005)
- Advergames are more suitable for viral marketing than other forms of media (Sukoco and Wu, 2011). For example the

players who enjoyed the advergame can invite their friends to game playing via facebook or e-mail.

- Advergames blend gaming dynamics with a commercial message (Evans and Hoy, 2011)
- Advergames may serve to educate consumers about the features and benefits of the product (brand) (Lee and Youn, 2008).
- Advergames are cheaper to develop and the expense of hosting them on websites is minimal, especially in comparison to commercial airtime (Grossman, 2005)
- Advergames provide a feedback for companies to determine the needs and desire of consumers.

On the other hand, unlike traditional video games such as Need For Speed or Travian, advergames are generally inchoate because of involving basic animation, music and resolution (Grossman, 2005). At the same time, considering the advergames which launched by firms in Turkey, there has been a noticeable lack of strategies that conceive ways of increasing the level of pleasure by improving loading speed, animation, type of music, creativity of advergames.

It is very difficult to balance the attributes of the advergame as there are fine lines between the high and low degree. For example, let us consider "the degree of difficulty". In terms of players, if the advergame is perceived as a difficult game to play, in other words capability of player < difficulty of advergame, the situation will cause "frustration"; where as the situation will cause "boredom" if the advergame is perceived as a easy game to play (Calin, 2010). Designing a success advergame for a specific brand is very important to reach a wide range of players. Well then, what are the ways to be success for advergames? Considering the result of past studies with regard to advergame and comments of players on the form sites, in order to be seem success among the others, advergames must be enjoyable, partially difficult, mysterious, funny, freely available on the Internet, integrated social network websites, theme and content of the advergame must be compatible with the main message of the brand, contain high-level virtual prosperity, having a different concept and not intensive in terms of brand message.

Attitudes towards advergames state that an effective construct assessing favorable or unfavorable consumer predisposition toward the advergame (Hernandez et al., 2004). There are various factor affect the positive attitudes towards a



advergame. In this study, the brand congruity level is selected to determine the effects on attitudes towards advergames. Wise et al. (2008) examined the relationship between attitude toward advergame and attitude toward the brand. They found that a positive relationship between attitude toward the advergame and attitude toward the brand occurs only when the thematic connection was high. On the contrary, Gross (2010) found high game-brand congruity resulted in lower advergame attitude degree than low game-brand congruity. In the study, the basic notion was that high level of brand congruity gived birth to be game found humdrum and low level of brand congruity brought with more positive attitudes towards advergames. Thus, this hypothesis was asserted:

*H1: The advergame with high advergame-brand congruity cause lower level of game attitude relative to the advergame with low advergame-brand congruity.*

**METHOD**

The aims of this study are to briefly describe the advergame phenomenon, determine the attitudes of young consumers towards advergames

by comparing the attributes of four advergames in Turkey and compare with attitudes towards advergame and assessment concerning brand congruity level in the advergame. Advergames selection criteria are being belonging low involvement product, national/international brand and including intensive/non-intensive marketing message (table.1). Selected advergames are *Eti Product Matching*, *Magnum Pleasure Hunt 2*, *M&M Dark Movies*, *Dido Fast Pen*. In M&M dark movies advergame (Fig.1), you have to find the title of 50 dark [movies](#) using riddles in a Hieronymus Bosch-like painting. *Magnum Pleasure Hunt 2* advergame (Fig.2) is the game brings a new dimension to the Hunt for Pleasure. In the game, you can run through the bustling streets of New York City, drive a vespa on Pont Neuf in Paris or surf the waves of Rio de Janerio within the Bing Maps Streetside View interface. The experience also includes blinged-out tribute versions of Arcade games like Frogger and California Games. In *Eti Product Matching* advergame (Fig.3), you must match the about 15 sub-brand of Eti by turning back the cards. In *Dido Fast Pen* advergame (Fig.4), you must fastly write the specific words as soon as possible when the teacher gives lecture.

Advergames	Involvement Level	National/International	Marketing Message
<i>Eti Product Matching</i>	Low	National	Intensive
<i>Dido Fast Pen</i>	Low	National	Non-Intensive
<i>Magnum Pleasure Hunt 2</i>	Low	International	Intensive
<i>M&amp;M Dark Movies</i>	Low	International	Non-Intensive

**Table 1. Selection Criteria of Advergames**

Considering the result of past studies, child and young people create an important target market for companies which bring advergames into use. Advergames are a particularly effective way for marketers to reach young people and hold their attention because children (and the young) are spending more time on the Internet and playing video games (Grossman, 2005). Besides, the young consumers are exposed to an ever-growing number of commercial messages in the electronic media, and especially the internet (Toth and Nagy, 2011). So, young people are determined as an universe of the study.

The research data were collected from 406 students who study at Faculty of Economics and Business Administration(FEBA) of Dumlupinar University, Turkey by being used descriptive and connective research model. At the beginning of the study, undergraduate students from FEBA were selected as a sample of the study and then asked for

participating in four online gaming study held in computer lab on campus. At first, the participants were told this was a scientific study about video games. The participants were asked for playing each game for about five minutes. Advergames were played in random order. Following playing the advergames, all participants filled out the questionnaire form.

The questionnaire form had three fundamental scales. The scales which attitude towards advergame (ATA) used by Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Sukoco and Wu, 2011, attributes of an advergame (AFA) used by Yoon et.al, 1998; Gross, 2010 and brand congruity scale (BCS) composed by Lee and Faber (2007) were measured by using a seven-point Likert type scale. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was computed to determine the internal consistency reliability of both scales and it was determined that alpha value for ATA was 0.83 and 0.88-0.93 for AFA and 0.82-

0.86 for BCS for each advergame. Considering the results of the reliability analysis, it could be stated that reliability of those scales was in high level.

Brand congruity level was examined by means of four question describing four dimensional view of congruity; functional, lifestyle, image and advertising. Those question were: Was the brand perceived to be a central object along the game playing? Did the lifestyle associated with the brand match the lifestyle associated with the content of the game? Was the brand image perceived to contribute to the theme of the game? Was the product category of the brand suitable for the theme of the game?



Fig.3. Eti Product Matching



Fig.1. M&M Dark Movies

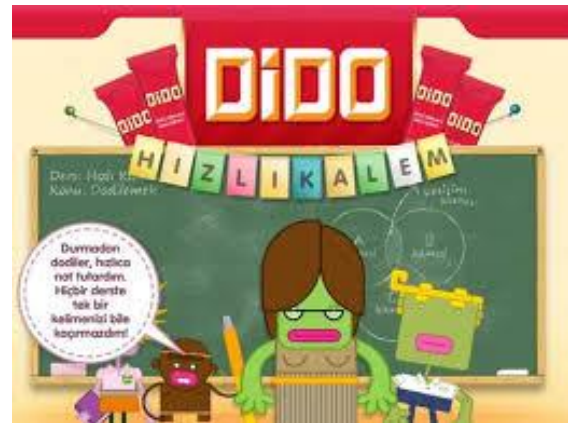


Fig.4. Dido Fast Pen



Fig.2. Magnum Pleasure Hunt 2

## RESULTS

Sample characteristics of the study were presented in table 2. It was found that most of participants were female students (62,1%), large majority of participants (%92,6) hadn't played an advergame before. About 47% of respondent had played online, computer-based or console game more than once in a week. In addition, only 9,4% of respondents had played video games once in a month and 43,3% had never (hardly ever) played a video game

Sex	F	%	Have you ever played any advergame?	F	%
Male	154	37,9	Yes	30	7,4
Female	252	62,1	No	376	92,6
Total	406	100	Total	406	100
Departments	F	%	How often do you play a video game?	F	%
Business Administration	104	25,6	Every day	34	8,4
Economics	85	20,9	Nearly every day	88	21,7
Public Finance	112	27,6	Once in a week	70	17,2
Public Administration	77	19,0	Once in a month	38	9,4
Political Sciences	28	6,9	Hardly or never	176	43,3



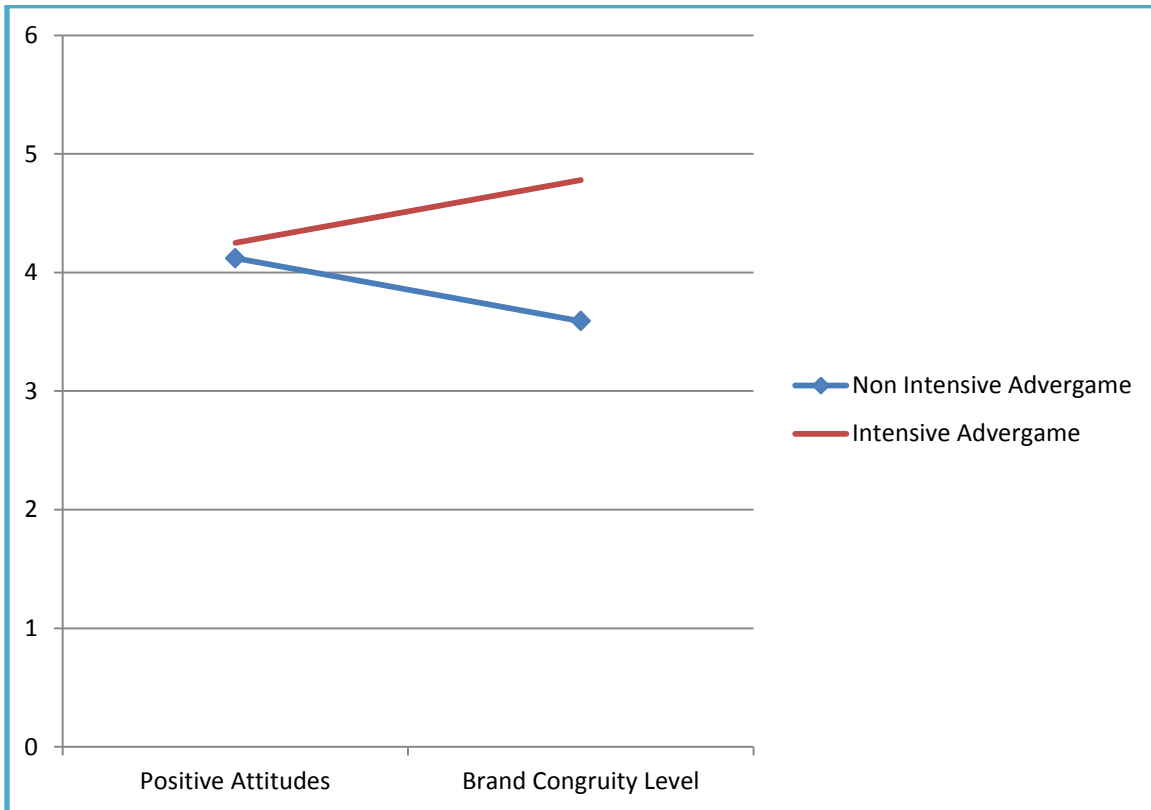


Figure 5. Positioning of Two Type of Advergames

## DISCUSSION

In order to persuade more efficient the consumer, new media solutions such as in-game advertising or advergame appearing every last day. Persuasive messages is delivered to the consumer of a specific brand by means of designing a success advergame. The aims of this study were to describe the advergame phenomenon, determine the level of attitudes of young consumers towards advergames by comparing the attributes of four advergames (*Eti Product Matching, Magnum Pleasure Hunt 2, M&M Dark Chocolate, Dido Fast Pen*) in Turkey and compare with attitudes towards advergame and assessment concerning brand congruity level in the advergame. Four advergame was selected belonging two international and two national brand, two including intensive marketing message and two including non-intensive marketing message, and all of the advergames was belonging to brands which were in low-involvement product category. As

mentioned before, the findings indicate the importance of factors regarding to perceived quality of the advergames in order to be able to compare those advergame. To measure enjoyment evoked by playing an advergame, five criteria of asesment were used in the study. The findings with regard to attributes of selected advergames also indicate that participants of the study found the advergame of “*Magnum Pleasure Hunt 2*” more enjoyable than others.

Advergames are very important advertising model because advergames are an effective vehicle for driving brand awareness. In last years, a lot of advergames put into practice in Turkey but more effective and appealing advergames being developed probably can affect to raise the frequency of playing those advergames. Because, participants of the study found appealing advergames with 5,02 mean score. As for scores of being appealing of selected advergames, it could be seen that scores vary from 4.22 to 4,88.



Past research stated that advergaming players are most receptive to advertising in games if the brand is passively located in the background. In Eti and Magnum advergaming, the brand was an active and central part of the game and the players stated that they liked those advergaming more than Dido and M&M. This study demonstrated that two advergaming which intensive with regard to marketing message were liked more than two advergaming which non intensive in point of marketing message. In this sense, there is no evidence to suggest that the advergaming with high advergaming-brand congruity cause lower level of game attitude relative to the advergaming with low advergaming-brand congruity. Moreover, the advergaming of Magnum Pleasure Hunt II presents an evidence relating to an advergaming which including intensive marketing message could be liked by players more than other advergaming. If we excluded the advergaming of Magnum Pleasure Hunt II from selected advergaming and we analyze three selected advergaming we would come through by using t-test that findings and results to support  $H_1(M^{\text{intensive-game}} = 3,84; M^{\text{non-intensive games}} = 4,12; p < 0,05)$ .

The study has four suggestion for future research. First, we have chosen only undergraduate students as a sample of the study. Future research may conduct on different segment of young people in order to significantly distinguish responses of the young to advergaming and generalize the results. Second, based on the findings of present study respect to attributes of advergaming, one might expect assessment of participants concerning attributes of advergaming may become correlate with perceived component of brands. Future research may focus on testing that assumption. We selected only four advergaming to examine the attributes of advergaming and one might readily argue that the results of the study cannot be generalized to all advergaming. Finally, it could be said as a epilog that more research is needed to confirm the findings and results of present study.

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