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Entering the World of Advergaming. Polish Consumers' Attitude Towards Advergames

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1. Introduction

In the current state of the advertising markets, advertisers no longer have the luxury of customers' undivided attention during the time people are tuning in for the newest episode of the TV series. Tracy Strokes (2013) provides Forrester Research's data that outlines that 42% of online adults from the US and 37% from Europe access the Internet many times during a day from multiple locations from at least 3 devices. The change of media usage habits that not so long ago was ahead of us currently is in its full force. More and more people across the globe are choosing the Internet in favour of TV. Meanwhile, the same author highlights that only 8% of the online adults from Europe trust banner ads that are embedded on websites or branded text messages. Those facts force marketers to shift their media budgets onto the branded content, which is defined by eMarketer (2011) as anything that is created on behalf of the brand that consumer authentically wants to engage with and pass along to other people. Few examples include YouTube videos, online games, social media pages or mobile apps. The largest utility of the customised branded content is the ability to keep constantly current dialogue with consumers. Even though branded content easily can be widespread through traditional media, it is, in particular, prevalent through the Internet (Grigorovici and Constantin, 2004; Hudson and Hudson, 2006). Branded content is a relatively new concept and therefore little academic research on the case has been conducted.

The approach that especially fits the concept of branded content is Stephenson's (1967) play theory which highlights that based on an assumption that the audience is actively and voluntarily participating in the mass communication process, an analogy between play and mass communication can be formed. Notwithstanding Stephenson's theory has been rejected due to the fact that traditional media as TV, radio and print at that time lacked interactivity. However with the current rise of the Internet as mass communication tool, Stephenson's theory reclaimed its significance and due to the interactive content of this medium theory needs to be updated.

Branded content can be used in various forms on the Internet and one of them is the fusion of advertising and games. This combination is a common and popular strategy for marketers to communicate with the brands' customers. Games that are in particular designed and created in order to promote a brand, product, service or idea are called advergames. The following term was coined by Tony Giallourakis in January 2000 and used by marketers and researchers ever since then (Culp, Bell and Cassady, 2010). Advergames' main objective is to deliver a specific and powerful message to the consumer as well as to increase the traffic on brand's website or fan page in social media. Moreover, these advertising tools are predominantly free of any charges, playable or downloadable from brand's website and easy to play (Turlutter and Capella, 2013). These types of games are considered as a fun, relaxing and low-involvement leisure activity. Advergames differ from in-game advertising (IGA) which can be described as the integration of product or brand within the game. These types of games are prevalent in order to entertain the player not to promote the brand. In-game advertising operates in a similar way to product placement in the movies. Game providers are offering a certain slot for the marketers who can include their product or service in the game (Yang et al., 2006). What else differs in-game advertising from advergames is that they are dependent on ad placement for the compact playing experience whereas advergames are the type of branded content; created on behalf of the brand or company.

Many marketers claim that advergame is the extension of the brand that is suited to enhance and/or alter present brand impression (Winkler and Buckner, 2006) and accordingly the categorization theory advocates that once the customer confronts a brand extension, the effect connected with the original brand is shifted towards the newly extended product categories (Aaker and Keller, 2010). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984) may elucidate that due to the characteristic and features of the advergame, advergaming affects an individual's processing of brand information (such as the degree of accuracy between the game and the brand) through peripheral paths. These paths are being used at the time when the receiver (in this case player) has little or no interest for the subject. Due to this fact, player most likely will assess the extent to which the brand and the game have been integrated. According to Lee and Faber (2007) the level of integration between the game and the brand is assessed as the extent to which (1) the brand is recognized as a central body that has been used in the advergame, (2) the link of the lifestyle presented in the advergame fits the lifestyle that is associated with the brand, (3) perceived brand's image contributes to the theme of the advergame, (4) brand's category is adequate to the theme of the advergame. As a result, the integration between the characteristic of the game and the brand should imply the positive affect transfer towards the brand recognition. Okazaki and Yague (2012) found the strong correlation between attitude toward the advergame and attitude toward the brand integrated.

Advergames are frequently used by marketers. According to Interbrand (2011) nine out of ten most valuable global brands are supporting their communication by embedding the advergame on brand's website or by providing the advergame for mobile applications. Weber, Story and Harnack (2006) analysed the content of food and beverage brand websites. Researchers chose 40 best-selling brands from food and beverages categories based on annual sales report from Brandweek magazine's annual "Superbrand" report and in almost two third (63%) of the brands' websites advergames were present. Further research conducted by Henry and Story (2009) contained, even more, food and beverage brands chosen from "Superbrand" report. It examined the content of the brands' websites and the results show that the majority of the websites (85%) featured advergaming. Another proof that nowadays advergames are gaining popularity as the brand communication tool is an eMarketer report that predicted that corporate investments in advergaming were expected to reach $350 million in 2012 (Campanelli, 2008). Radd (2007) states that many companies are creating those games due to the current fashion of branded advergames but at the same time it seems that not all of them are able to design games that devote to brand's image, values and positioning. This means that creation of effective advergame can be a challenge for marketers considering it is fundamental to shift the brand's key attributes to the advergame and only under this circumstance the advertising game can contribute to the brand's communication goals and, what should follow, improving the purchasing behaviour and attitude towards the brand.

Even though it may seem that digital games are mostly targeted toward younger gamers, notable numbers of players are found at throughout all ages (Lenhart, Jones and Rankin Macgill, 2008). Entertainment Software Association (ESA 2012) provides the data that average player in the United States is 30 years old and has been playing games for 12 years. Additionally, ESA is providing the data that outlines that digital games are no longer the male-dominated phenomena due to the fact that 47% of all players are women (ESA 2012). Given the fact that approximately two-third of the gamers play with others, either in person or via the Internet (ESA 2012), digital game-playing may be considered as social phenomena as well.

Based on the information presented, marketers are seeing the potential in investing money in branded content, especially prevalent through the Internet. One of the possible ways of interacting with the brand's consumers is through advergames which are currently gaining the popularity worldwide. There is an obvious gap in the knowledge of current status of advergaming in Poland due to the fact that to the best knowledge of the article's author no research on Poles' attitudes towards the advergaming has been made. To commence the research in this field, the aim of this article is to present the current status of the research on the topic of advergames, but also to exhibit Poles attitude towards advergames. In order to expand the study, several conceptual frameworks will be further referenced to present the current state of research on the advergaming as well as existing studies on worldwide and Poles' attitude towards advertising. Further, based on the presented framework the results of the qualitative and quantitative studies will be exhibited and discussed.

2. Current framework on the topic of advergaming and attitude towards advertising

2.1. Advergaming

Over the last few years, numerous of studies have been conducted on advergaming and in-game advertising as part of brand's marketing strategies. Several pieces of research have examined advergames' influence on the recall and recognition of the embedded brand or product (Gross, 2010; Winkler and Buckner, 2006). Due to the potential effectiveness of games various articles highlight the problem of children's persuasion through advertising with or within games (An and Stern, 2011; Mallinckrodt and Mizerski, 2007; van Reijmersdal, Rozendaal and Buijzen, 2012; Waiguny, Tertlutter and Zaglia, 2011) and some of them address that advergames may not be recognised by children as a form of advertising (Ann, Jim and Park, 2014). Studies that have been conducted so far examined the possibility of the impact of advergames on the attitude toward the communicated and embedded brand and the results suggest that playing advergame may improve players' attitude towards the brand (Cauberghe and de Pelsmacker, 2010; van Reijmersdal, Rozendaal and Buijzen, 2012; Wise et al., 2008). Moreover, researchers have investigated whether the manner in which the brand was integrated into the game as well as the congruity of the game with the product or brand have a significant impact in the context of the advergame (Cauberghe and de Pelsmacker 2010; Gross, 2010; Winkler and Buckner, 2006; Wise et al., 2008). Overall positive influence of playing the advergame on brand attitudes has been found (Cauberghe and de Pelsmacker, 2010; Redondo, 2012; van Reijmersdal et al., 2010; Waiguny, Nelson and Terlutter, 2012; Waiguny, Terlutter and Zaglia, 2011).

Even though there have been plentiful of research conducted on the topic of advergames, many of them are focusing on the subject of advergame impact on embedded brand. Currently, there is little research on this topic in Poland and therefore, this gap has to be filled as many marketers are more and more frequently using this tool.

2.2. Attitudes towards advertising

An attitude can be defined as an enduring evaluation of people, objects or ideas that can be assessed as the positive or negative reaction to something due to the fact that people are constant evaluators of what they see (Aronson, 2001). Attitudes consist of three components: (1) an affective component that is made up of the emotional reaction towards the object; (2) a cognitive component that is made up of the thoughts and beliefs about the object, and (3) behavioural component made up of actions or observable behaviour towards the object.

Nielsen, world's leading global information and measurement company, has been conducting several studies on the attitude towards the advertising around the globe. The results of 2013 survey (Nielsen, 2013) reveal that customers tend to trust marketers more than they did several years ago (Table 1). The most influential way of advertising is still the word-of-mouth recommendation from friends or family – 84% of the global survey participants claim that this source is the most trustworthy. A second most trusted form of advertising in 2013 is the brand website – over 69% of respondents trust content that is being posted on those sites. 68% percent of survey respondents specified that they trust consumer opinions posted online, which ranked third in 2013, up 7 percentage points from 2007. Previously not examined editorial content is at fourth position with 67% of participants claiming they trust this form of advertising.

Table 1. Nielsen Global Survey on Trust in Advertising. Percentage of completely/somewhat trust

Form of advertising	2013	2007	Difference 2013 vs 2007
Recommendation from people I know	84%	78%	6%
Branded website	69%	60%	9%
Consumers opinion posted online	68%	61%	7%
Editorial content (such as newspaper articles)	67%	n/a	n/a
Ads on TV	62%	56%	6%
Brand sponsorships	61%	49%	12%
Ads in newspapers	61%	63%	–2%
Ads in magazines	60%	56%	4%
Billboards and other outdoor advertising	57%	n/a	n/a
Ads on radio	57%	54%	3%
Emails I signed up for	56%	49%	7%
Ads before movies	56%	38%	18%
TV program product placement	55%	n/a	n/a
Ads served in search engine results	48%	34%	14%
Online video ads	48%	n/a	n/a
Ads on social networks	48%	n/a	n/a
Display ads on mobile devices	45%	n/a	n/a
Online banner ads	42%	26%	16%
Text ads on mobile phones	37%	18	19%

Source: Nielsen Global Survey of Trust in Advertising (2013), Q3 2007 and Q1 2013 Table 1.

Among the paid media, TV ads are remaining one of the most trusted forms of advertising with 62%, following by brand sponsorships (61%), ads in newspapers (61%), in magazines (60%), outdoor advertising (57%), radio ads (57%), ads before movies (56%) and product placement in TV programmes (55%).

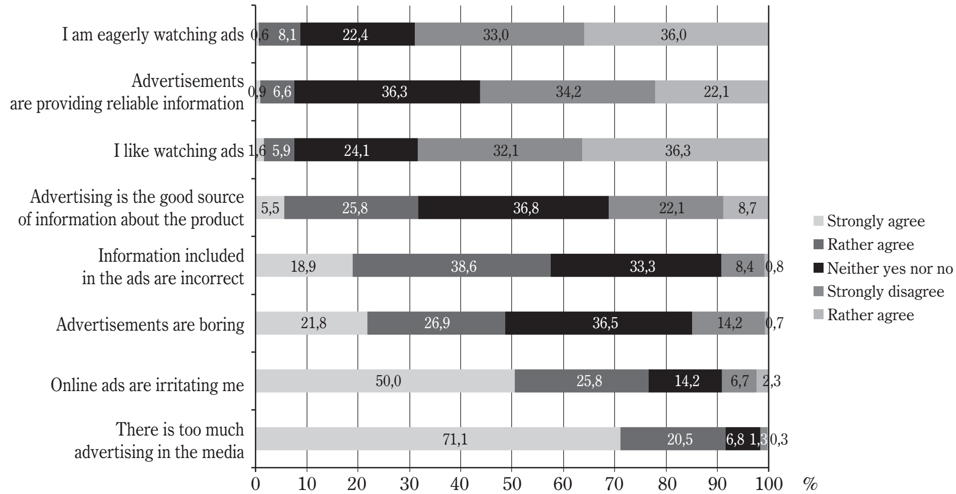
Survey participants are still hesitant towards digital advertising. 56% of the respondents trust email newsletters, up 7 percentage points from 2007. Nearly half (48%) believe that ads in search engines results are credible (up 14 percentage points from 2007). Similar results have online video ads and ads on social networks; both reached 48% in trust survey even though were not examined earlier. Trust in online banner ads increased by 16 percentage points from 26% in 2007 to 42% in 2013. Similar growth was noted in mobile phone text ads – up 19 percentage points from 18% in 2007 to 37% in 2013.

Overall, Nielsen's study reveals that even though digital forms of advertising are growing, people may be still hesitant towards them. Survey participants declare that traditional media as TV, radio and newspapers' ads are more credible. However, the data discloses that trust in digital forms is rapidly rising.

To the best knowledge of the article's author, there was no such a detailed survey conducted on the Polish market. However, several studies report less-detailed data on Poles attitude towards the advertising. The Figure 1 is showing the results of the online survey. According to the research conducted by Centrum Badań Nad Zachowaniami Ekonomicznymi (2010), nearly 92% of the survey participants strongly agree or rather agree with the statement that there is too much advertising in the media. Over three-fourth of respondents strongly agree or rather agree with the comment that online ads are irritating and over half of them thinks that advertisements are boring. Poles do not trust ads as well. Nearly two third of the survey participants strongly agree or rather agree with ascertainment that information included in the ads are incorrect; only one-third of them claim that advertising is the good source of information about the product and little over 7% of respondents strongly agree or agree with the statement that advertisements are providing reliable information. Nearly 70% strongly disagree or rather disagree with statements that they like watching ads and they are eagerly watching ads.

Reassuming, Polish consumers' attitude towards advertising may differ from Nielsen worldwide data. The study referenced in the article acknowledges that Polish people are more hesitant to trust advertisement. The current lack of academic research on Polish consumers' attitude towards advergames has to be filled and described based on three components of attitude – affective, behavioural and cognitive.

Figure 1. Poles attitude towards the advertising
(adapted from study from Centrum Badań Nad Zachowaniami Ekonomicznymi)



Source: Centrum Badań Nad Zachowaniami Ekonomicznymi. (2010). *Decyzje zakupowe Polaków: reklama mało wiarygodna*.

3. Research method

In order to examine Polish consumers' attitude towards advergaming both quantitative and qualitative research have been conducted. Both types of research have been chosen in order to deliver not only quantitative data but also extend them based on qualitative research. Thanks to this approach exhibited attitude towards advergames will be more accurate.

3.1. Quantitative research

The quantitative research has been conducted in the period of July–August 2014 among 110 Polish Internet users. Survey participant were recruited through social media sites, e.g. Facebook.com, nk.pl, in order to reach people that are experienced with the Internet, online games and especially with advergames.

3.2. Qualitative research

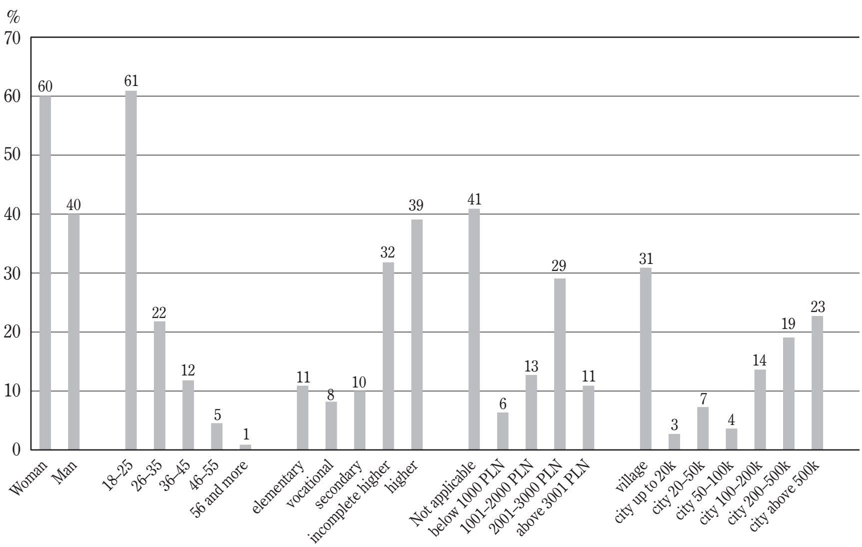
The qualitative research has been conducted during period June-July 2014 on ten Polish consumers who previously had experience with advergaming. Participants were recruited through Facebook. During the individual in-depth interviews, participants were asked questions concerning their experience with advergames, their evaluation of advergames, brand recall, their attitude towards advergaming in comparison to other forms of advertising. Moreover, qualitative research participants were asked to complete one projective task in which they were asked to link 8 pictures of different people to a form of advertising as follows: TV ad, radio ad, press ad, outdoor ad, leaflets, pop-up banners, online branded videos posted on either brand's social media fanpage or brand's website and advergames. After task completion, participants were asked to choose one person who they would think would be most successful as a salesman. The projective task main objective was to compare advergaming with other forms of advertising and to examine whether people may intend to change their purchase behaviour after playing the advergame. Interviews were audio recorded.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative research

The survey consisted of 20 questions (7 preliminary questions about the Internet usage, 7 questions about the attitude towards advergaming, 1 question about respondents' preferences towards different forms of advertising and 5 questions about respondents' demographic profile).

Figure 2. Respondents' profile



Source: own research.

In accordance to the Figure 2, there is a slight overrepresentation of women that participated in the quantitative research. Over 80% of survey participants are aged 18–35 and over 70% are enrolled in universities or already with the university diploma. 60% of people that has participated in the research declare that they have net income below 2000 PLN or no income at all. Over half of interviewees are stating that they are living in cities with 100 000 residents or more.

The first 7 preliminary questions have meant to exclude people that were inexperienced with advergaming. Table 2 shows the results of the questions regarding the Internet usage and frequency. Nearly 90% of the sample declares that they are using The Internet in order to search for the information about brands or products. Over 80% of those respondents are claiming that were searching for it few times a week or more often. More than two third of those people are stating that has been using the content that is provided by brands on the Internet (e.g. online videos, games etc.). Those respondents are acknowledging the less frequent usage of this type of content; over 50% are using it few times a month or even less often. Among those interviewees 96% are disclosing that have been playing games online; more than 50% are playing few times a week or more regularly. Amidst those people, 55 declare that have played advergame, which is exactly 50% of the sample.

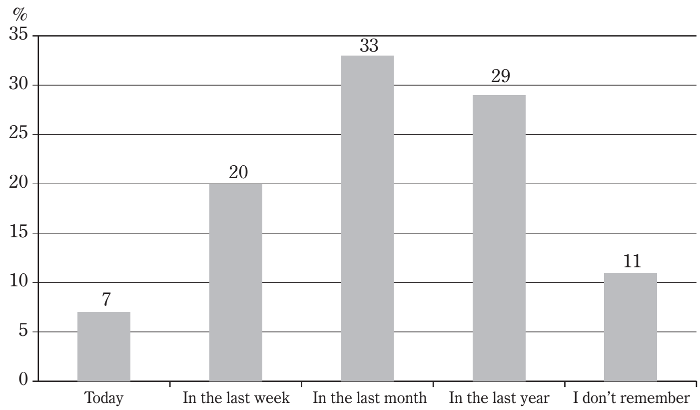
Table 2. Internet usage among the participants

	Usage			**Frequency among users**			
	Yes	**No**	**Hard to say**	**Everyday**	**Few times a week**	**Few times a month**	**Few times a year**
Searching for information about brands or products on the Internet	89%	11%	0%	38%	46%	10%	6%
Using the content provided by brand or product on the Internet (e.g. games, online videos)	68%	27%	5%	10%	33%	50%	7%
Playing online games	96%	4%	0%	20%	35%	38%	7%

Source: own research.

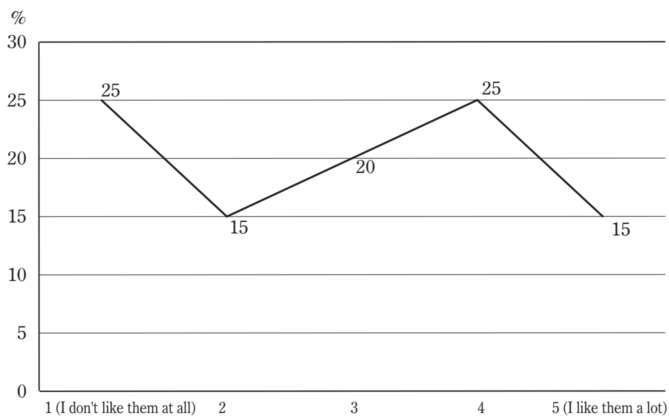
Figure 3 shows the frequency of playing advergames by the participants. It can be stated that respondents do not deal with this type of advertising very often – over 70% claim they have played in the last month, less frequent or they could not remember. It may mean that advergaming is still in the early stages of the development in Poland. According to Figure 4, surveyed are rather indifferent towards advergames as 40% of them are rating them unfavourably, 40% favourable and 20% are apathetic to branded games.

Figure 3. Respondent's statements regarding the last time they played the advergame



Source: own research.

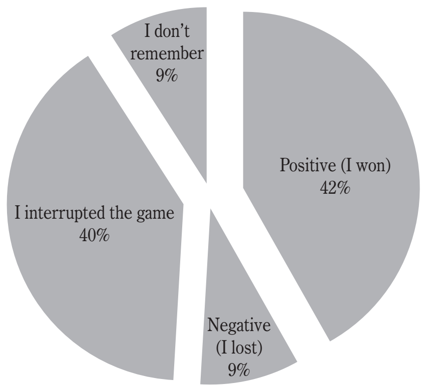
Figure 4. Respondents' assessment of the advergames



Source: own research.

Figure 5 shows the respondents' declared the outcome of the advergame. In accordance to this data, only 9% have lost the game, 42% have won and 40% have interrupted it. The results may suggest that the advergames may be too easy for the participants and it is further discussed during in-depth interviews during the qualitative study.

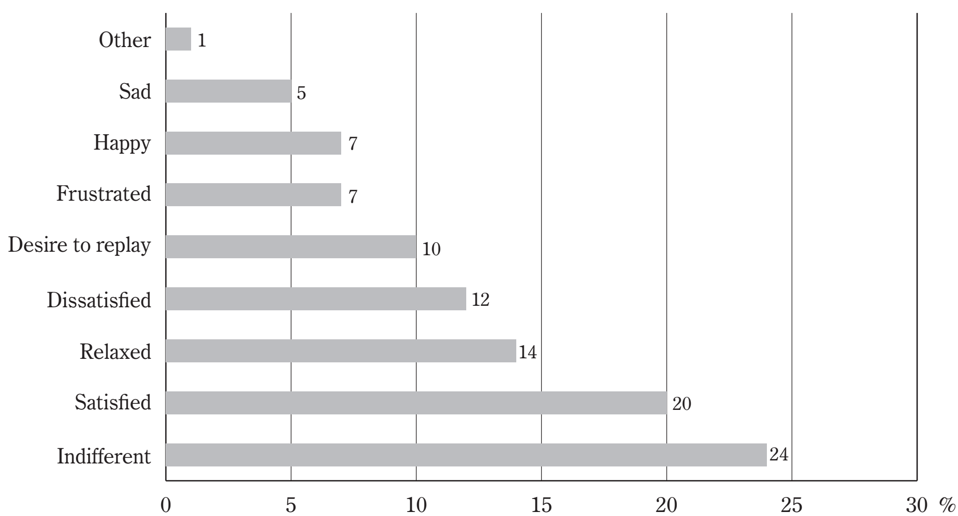
Figure 5. Respondents' outcome of the game



Source: own research.

Figure 6 exhibits the respondents' feelings towards advergames. Participants are asked to choose three statements that best described the game after-feeling. Among the three most frequently chosen adjectives two are positive and one neutral – 24% were indifferent, 20% were satisfied and 14% relaxed. Only 10% of the respondents claim they have a need to replay the game. Amidst the people who have experience with advergame, more than half (62%) recalled the brand that was embedded in the game.

Figure 6. Respondents' feelings after the advergame



Source: own research.

Table 3 presents the declared advergames' impact on respondents' purchases behaviour. 18% of all surveyed claim that they have considered buying the product that has been embedded in the game and 15% stated that they have actually bought it.

Table 3. Advergames' impact on respondents' purchases behaviour

	Yes	**No**	**Hard to say**
Considered buying the brand or product that was present in the advergame	18%	71%	11%
Bought the brand or product that was present in the advergame	15%	76%	9%

Source: own research.

Lastly, respondents are asked about their advertising forms preferences. Table 4 exhibits the arithmetic mean of the results. According to the surveyed, advergames are the most favourably rated form of advertising while pop-up advertising is the least preferable. Even though both forms are online ads, the advergame may seem less intrusive and, therefore, it may be the reason of the difference in the rating of those two online forms of advertising. The pop-ups standard deviation is the smallest from all advertising forms.

Table 4. Arithmetic mean and standard deviation of the respondents' rates for advertising forms

Advertising form	**Arithmetic mean**	**Standard Deviation**
TV ads	2.29	1.27
Press ads	2.64	1.13
Radio ads	2.14	1.16
OOH ads	1.96	1.14
Leaflets	1.85	1.04
Pop-ups	1.74	0.89
Online branded videos	2.51	1.36
Advergames	2.91	1.52

Source: own research.

4.2. Qualitative research

Participants have been asked during the conversation about their attitude towards branded games on the basis of three components – affective, cognitive and behavioural.

Firstly, the interviewees have been asked few questions regarding their Internet usage. All of them declared that they are sometimes using it in order to search for information about the brands from several sectors including FMCG, telecoms, IT and apparel and all of them declared that they have used some kind of branded content on the Internet. Apart from advergames, few people have mentioned using branded website with recipes such as przepisy.pl (a website that belongs to Unilever brand from savoury category – Knorr) and kuchnialidla.pl (a website that belongs to Lidl – one of the biggest discounter chains in Poland). Amidst people that participated in the research, eight out of ten admits that are playing more frequently games online rather than offline stating that it is "a perfect 5-minute interlude" or "a way to de-stress". Social media sites are declared to be a way of dissemination of online games and among the examples Facebook and nk.pl (Polish social media website). Participants admit that they "see that their friends are playing those games and it is their incentive to play them as well". Every interviewee recalls the brand that have been embedded in the game; the most frequently recalled one was Danone's yogurt brand Danio (4 mentions) and Unilever's ice-cream brand Big Milk (2 mentions), the others are Orange Warsaw Festival, McDonald's, Tymbark – Polish beverages brand, Unilever's haircare brand Clear and Chipita's croissant brand Chipicao. Nine out of ten assess advergames either indifferently or positively and the same number states that they trust this form of advertising. All of the research participants state that advergames are way too easy and that "it is not the stuff they are looking for in the Internet but once they find them they usually try to play"; additionally, some of the interviewees are using expressions like "reductive", "way too easy to keep me playing again" or "treat the man like a fool" in order to describe their feelings towards the advergames. Nevertheless, all of them are stated to be "a perfect time-killer" which is why most of the people claim to like them. Seven out of ten people do not find the embedded brands to be intrusive; five out of ten states that they have been considering the purchase after playing the advergame. Regarding the purchase impact one of the participants shared the story about how one used to play Zozole (candy brand) branded game during the childhood and after the play one used to buy this candy brand. Therefore, there is no wonder why some of the participants mention that this type of games may be "a bit dangerous form of advertising to kids".

After each interview, the surveyed have completed the projective task which had been described earlier in the article. From eight pictures of different people the following figures have been chosen as the ones that represents the advergames the most precisely: two people have chosen woman with mobile phone in her hand (stating it represents the mobility of this form of advertising and possibility of playing even when one is out of home), four people have chosen middle-aged man dressed colourful (stating he is funny and entertaining just like the game), three people have chosen man in his forties standing outside the car parking with cigarette in his mouth (stating he may be associated with action games and he is looking to be "dodger") and one person has chosen young elegant man with suit sitting in front of the desk (stating that he is young and, therefore, he may be associated with advergames). The projective task exhibits that all of the participants have rather positive associations with advergames. Moreover, two out of ten people have chosen the people that they previously have chosen as best representing advergame as the best salesman, which is the best outcome for any of the form of advertising that has been used in the task.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In order to commence the research on the topic of advergames, the aim of this article was to present the current state of research on the subject, but also examine Polish consumers' attitude towards advergames. Both aims have been successfully accomplished. Based on the conducted qualitative and quantitative pieces of research the conclusion can be exhibited.

Based on the referenced framework, three components of consumers' attitude towards advergaming can be distinguished from the studies – an affective component that is made up of the emotional reaction towards the advergames; a cognitive component that is made up of the thoughts and beliefs about the advergames, and behavioural component made up of actions or observable behaviour towards the advergames.

In accordance to the research, Polish consumers are either positively or indifferently assessing the branded games. Therefore, both studies exhibit that consumers tend to claim that they are relaxed and satisfied after playing the games even though they usually find the game itself boring or way too easy. During the qualitative study, participants have stated that it is "a perfect time-killer" but at the same time "it is not something that they are looking on the Internet". Frequently it was named as a nice interlude between doing other things and that is why there is no wonder that during quantitative study one of the most frequently chosen words to describe interviewees' after-feeling was adjective 'relaxed'. The vast majority of studies participants tend to remember the brand that has been embedded in the game and at the same time it is not intrusive for them – it has been described as something natural for them during the qualitative research. Such a result is consistent with the previously referenced studies (Gross 2010; Winkler and Buckner 2006). During in-depth interviews, respondents have been raising opinions about the advergames that the quality of the game and the level of complexity should be raised in order to maintain customers' interest for longer and so that potential customer would be willing to play the game again. Naturally it has been raised by many respondents during the qualitative study that an advergame is an interesting form of advertising due to the fact that it mostly depends on the customer whether to play it or not and it is not an obtrusive form of advertising. That may be the reason why during the quantitative survey, advergames have received the best scores among different forms of advertising and during qualitative study most of the participants claimed that is a trustworthy form of advertising as it is not invasive and it is up to the decision of the Internet user whether one would like to play it. Finally, during both studies some, the respondents have claimed that they have been considering the purchase after playing the advergame. Throughout the qualitative study, many interviewees have been discussing the possible advergames' huge impact on children with one of the participants sharing the history from his childhood with digital branded game that had impacted the purchase intent. That history is in line with the previously exhibited framework (An and Stern, 2011; Mallinckrodt and Mizerski, 2007; van Reijmersdal, Rozendaal and Buijzen, 2012; Waiguny, Tertlutter and Zaglia, 2011).

The studies on online branded content and advergames should be continued and further developed in Poland, as it has been mentioned, due the raising marketers' interests in less intrusive forms of advertising. Definitely, there is an evident trend of shifting the media budgets onto the digital forms of advertising and due to the fact that many types of research indicate that some of the online ads (e.g. pop-ups) are less likeable than offline ads, marketers are seeking different, less obtrusive forms of brand's existence in the digital world and for some products, especially from FMCG sector, advergames seem as a natural choice. Due to the studies time constraints, the conducted research could not contain some of the issues regarding the attitude towards advergames. The further discussion and studies on advergames should be focused on the possible advergames' impact on children purchase intent in Eastern Europe, advergames impact on Polish consumers' brand's attitude (depending on the different level of difficulty and advergames' congruity with the brand) and purchase intent.

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