

# The Concept of Timelessness Applied to Advergames

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Zdenko Mago as a professional deals with interconnections of games studies and marketing communication, particularly focusing on advergaming. He is an author of the scientific monography *World of Advergaming: Digitálne hry ako nástroje reklamy* (*World of Advergaming: Digital games as advertising tools*). In 2014 and 2017, he was a program committee member of the international scientific conference *Central and Eastern European Games Studies*. At beginning of 2018, he acted as a visiting researcher at the Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan. Currently he is editor-in-chief of the scientific journal *Acta Ludologica*.

## ABSTRACT:

Advergames have been appearing alongside digital games since the very beginning. Although they had been originally created as marketing tools, their gaming nature has made from them an important part of digital-gaming industry heritage. At the same time, advergames, which persisted over time, may represent significant advantages for the brands they promote. The aim of the study is an examination of advergames' timelessness based on a theoretical framework and a qualitative-quantitative content analysis of advergames released across their history up to 2000, taking into account aspects of both digital games' and advertising timelessness. Besides general popularity, archetypal character, current playability and preservation, the analysis also focuses on the advergence design and brand implementation forms.

## KEY WORDS:

advergames, digital games, iconicity, history, participation, preservation, timelessness.

## Introduction

Within the history of digital games,<sup>1</sup> there exists a group of titles, which have had a great impact on the whole development of the digital-gaming industry, and the remarkable popularity of which is not dependent of time. Based on these characteristics, we might consider them as timeless, an attribute associated for example with important artworks.

Advertising games, *advergames* or *adgames* are "specifically designed digital games funded by a client (an advertiser), primarily serving to reach the advertiser's marketing goal either as a standalone communication tool or as a part of an advertising campaign. Simply put, advergames are digital games which were primarily designed for promotional purposes".<sup>2</sup> Although, G. Marolf refers only to the interactive method of reaching online consumers, limiting so advergames to simple games, which can be downloaded from the internet or directly played through it,<sup>3</sup> advergames have started appearing alongside 'ordinary' digital games, even releasing on physical media, since the very beginning of the digital-gaming industry. Some of those older advergames surprisingly belong to very favourite games within the gamers' community, which attributes to them a significant collector's value. Even though they are actually ads, many of them are today still played on original platforms or through various online emulators, because of the contained challenge or just for entertainment.

As an already integrated part of the gaming sector, advergames can be actually considered as a part of the heritage of both game and popular culture as well. This fact means that just as we can think about digital games within the scope of timelessness, we can think also about advergames within the same scope. However, in this case, it would not be only their gaming importance, but also their potential long-term promotional effects,

1 Remark by the author: In the entire study, term 'digital games' (as well as the digital-gaming industry and sector) is used in the sense of general meaning, including games for all kinds of platforms.

2 MAGO, Z.: *World of Advergaming: Digitálne hry ako nástroje reklamy*. Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, 2016, p. 17.

3 MAROLF, G.: *Advergaming and In-Game Advertising: An Approach to the next Generation of Advertising*. Saarbrücken : VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2007, p. 45-46.

persisting over time, which could represent significant marketing benefits. The aim of the study is therefore a comprehensive examination of advergaming's timelessness, and possibly to identify advergaming in digital-gaming history that could be considered as timeless.

# Theoretical Concept of Advergaming's Timelessness

Applying the timelessness concept to advergaming seems to be slightly complicated. Advergaming is digital games and marketing tools at the same time, therefore both game and advertising aspects potentially influencing timelessness need to be taken into account. In addition, according to E. Aarseth, "games are both object and process",<sup>4</sup> thus a product as well as an activity.

A timeless product is characterized by having an important place within its own sector, and its meaning, utility and value are independent of time and space. Although, its material value can gradually increase. A typical example that is used to associate with timelessness are artworks, among which we can definitively include also digital games. Regarding the activity, C. Mainemelis defines timelessness as "a complex experience associated with an intense state of consciousness in which total involvement in the task at hand results in loss of self-consciousness and loss of the sense of time", and states that some elements of a flow such as balance between skills and challenges, intrinsic task motivation, etc., are proximal contextual conditions of timelessness.<sup>5</sup> M. Csikszentmihalyi characterizes flow as the sense of presence that we experience as a unified flow of moments, while feeling in control of our actions.<sup>6</sup> The flow within digital games similarly represents certain equilibrium between game challenge and gamers' abilities, and players experience it when they are immersed in games and losing track of time.<sup>7</sup> A timeless digital game therefore could be defined as a game that represents an important milestone due to being a unique asset for the entire digital-gaming industry, the playing of which provides an experience independent of time.

Such outstanding games belong, to the most successful within the market and the most popular among players, who usually mark them as iconic. The game *iconicity* thus seems to be a relevant factor for basic consideration about digital games' timelessness, or at least as its integral part. However, the iconicity does not consist only of popularity. This concept is more comprehensive and, besides popularity, reflects also reaching the status, when a game becomes an archetype, and aspects of games' playability and their preservation (see Table 1).

The *Popularity* of digital games itself basically reflects general awareness about the game among gamers as well as the global extent of its playing, but largely depends on the subjective perception of the game by gamers, influenced by game creativity and overall likeability. Creativity of game processing can be simply described through criteria

creativity<sup>8</sup> – originality and novelty of the game in comparison with other already existing titles, usability and value of game attributes (multiplayer, eSport, education, etc.).

*Likeability* is more about the impression from the game, consisting of attributes such as game immersion, the presence of an adequate challenge, and a motivation to beat the game, thus reaching mastery of it. C. Mainemelis included immersion and mastery to dimensions to describe manifestations of timelessness.<sup>9</sup>

Table 1: Iconicity of digital games

Aspect	Manifestation	
Popularity	General awareness	
	Extent of playing (global)	
	Creativity	Originality, novelty
		Usability, value
	Likeability	Immersion
Challenge		
Mastering		
Becoming an archetype	Genre founding	Mechanics
		Audio-visual elements
		Narratives
	Versions, variations	
	Sequels, prequels, spin-offs	
	Remake, retake	
	Cross-/trans-media transfer	
Participatory culture		
Playability	Original title / retro gaming	
	Remastered title	
	Emulation	Commercial
		Institutional
Participatory		
Preservation	Collecting	
	Archiving	
	Museology	

Source: own processing

When a game popularity reaches a level, that it starts to influence the games market, it might become a model, *an archetype*, giving rise to more games based on it. Besides expected sequels, spin-offs or later remakes, there may appear various versions and variations of the original game, which are trying to capitalize on its success. Cross- and trans-media transfers like movie adaptations are not exceptions as well. The game as an archetype often defines new genres or subgenres, named according to it. A typical example is a subgenre of FPS games called 'doom-like games' due to the principal

4 AARSETH, E.: Computer Game Studies, Year One. In *Game Studies*, 2001, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1. [online]. [2018-05-12]. Available at: <<http://gamestudies.org/0101/editorial.html>>.

5 MAINEMELIS, C., DIONYSIOU, D. D.: Play, Flow, and Timelessness. In SHALLEY, C. E., HITT, M. A., ZHOU, J. (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Creativity, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 136.

6 CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, M.: Play and intrinsic rewards. In *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 1975, Vol. 15, No. 3, p. 43.

7 CHEN, J.: Flow in games (and everything else). In *Communications of the ACM*, 2007, Vol. 50, No. 4, p. 32.

8 FICHNOVÁ, K.: *Psychology of creativity for marketing communication*. Noailles: Association Amitié Franco-Slovaque, 2013, p. 21-25.

9 MAINEMELIS, C.: When the muse takes it all: A model for the experience of timelessness in organizations. In *Academy of Management Review*, 2001, Vol. 26, No. 4, p. 554.

similarity (mechanics, audio-visual elements, etc.) to the pioneer game *Doom*.<sup>10</sup> Game archetypes also provide a remarkable space for gamers' participation (modding, skinning, let's play, speedrun, etc.).<sup>11</sup>

The next important aspect is *playability*. Numerous original versions of digital games (whether popular or not) are playable only on 'obsolete technologies', for which they were developed. J. Newman and I. Simons call such games inevitable and natural victims of the market.<sup>12</sup> Still functioning original platforms (mostly preserved by their owner or available as second-hand goods) are able to provide the experience with originally released games and are quite uncommon, but the demand for them has been increasing, since retro gaming came into fashion. Game companies try to partially meet market needs by developing remastered versions of their own popular games. For example, in 2017, Sony published *Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy*<sup>13</sup> for PS4 containing all three original Crash Bandicoot games with new graphics.

Emulation currently belongs to common practises, solving problems of obsolescence and incompatibility. Although, D. McFerran argues that emulation (including formal) might ruin digital games' preservation efforts,<sup>14</sup> games' creators, owners, even gamers themselves inserted a considerable emotional investment in them, thus there is a high motivation to spend their own resources (money, time, skills, etc.) to keep those games still playable and played (although, often it is particularly about popular titles). An example of commercial emulation is the backward compatibility of the Xbox One that enables playing some Xbox 360 games through the built-in emulation system. Another one is the Nintendo Classic Mini released by the Nintendo Company in November 2016. This miniaturized version of the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES) is compatible with modern technologies, thus original iconic Nintendo games can be played even on HD televisions. In order for formal digital games' preservation, several organizations tend to provide also the 'institutional' emulation of games, including online (e.g. Archive.org). Unlike previously, gamers are characterised by a lack of patience, therefore they overcome the ravages of time using their very own, often 'unofficial' ways in their favourite games. For example, the portable PC version of the advergaming *Pepsiman* with built-in automatic PS emulator can be found on the web.

At present, games' persistence over time culminates in the process of their *preservation*, considering them as an important part of cultural heritage. It takes the form of collecting and archiving games, and their accumulation for museological purposes. Advergaming are digital games as well, thus they should be also worthy of preservation as a part of both pop-culture and the history of the digital-gaming industry. Here it is appropriate to note that iconic digital games actually form brands, which tend to persist over time by themselves. According to A. V. Vedpurisvar, timelessness is an element of each star brand, meaning built for eternity.<sup>15</sup> The development of iconic advergaming is much more difficult, particularly due to limited budgets. It is rational to suppose that marketers will

10 ID SOFTWARE: *Doom*. [digital game]. New York : GT Interactive, 1993.

11 ZÁHORA, Z.: Participativní marketing v kontextu digitálních her. In BÁRTEK, T., BUČEK, D. (eds.): *Herní Studia. Sborník z CONference 2013*. Brno : Flow, 2014, p. 113-114.

12 NEWMAN, J., SIMONS, I.: Make Videogames History: Game preservation and The National Videogame Archive. In *DiGRA '09 – Proceedings of the 2009 DiGRA International Conference: Breaking New Ground: Innovation in Games, Play, Practice and Theory*, London : Brunel University, 2009, p. 4.

13 NAUGHTY DOG: *Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy*. [digital game]. San Mateo, CA : Sony Computer Entertainment, 2017.

14 MCFERRAN, D.: *The retro gaming industry could be killing video game preservation*. Released on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2018. [online]. [2018-04-25]. Available at: <<https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2018-02-09-the-retro-gaming-industry-could-be-killing-video-game-preservation>>.

15 VEDPURISVAR, A. V.: Managing Marketing Risks. In RAJU, M. S., XARDEL, D. (eds.): *Marketing Management. International Perspectives*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New Delhi : Tata McGraw-Hill Education Private Limited, 2009, p. 120.

rather rely on the model of iconic games, keeping popular genres or even existing designs. A step towards overall timelessness then might lie in creativity during the integration of advertising elements into games. However, advergaming, meeting criteria of digital games' iconicity, could be still considered just as a timeless digital game, not as a timeless advergaming. There remains to consider the component of advertising timelessness, ultimately representing notable benefits for involved brands in the long-term.

The essence of *advertising timelessness* lies in the fact that recipients generally accept ads very positively and its original purpose is not tied to time and place. M. Schudson states that such advertising becomes highly abstracted and self-contained.<sup>16</sup> In practice, it is characterized by the high degree of originality and relevance, best focused around a well-known brand that has the biggest chance to persist over time, and possible appearance changes (not radical) which would have minimal impact on their easy identification or value. Focus on a brand, not a product, is crucial particularly regarding advergaming. They can be played for very long time, so promoted products could become outdated and unavailable. A similar principle is maintained even by static in-game advertising.<sup>17</sup> Another aspect is advertising effectiveness. However, the initial impact on sales of promoted products is probably not an applicable indicator, because it shows just the short-term results of the reporting period. Regarding the long-term point of view, relevant indicators seem to be recall, recognition, and mainly likeability of the ad. *Likeability* reflects recipients' enjoyment, opinion, attitude towards the ad. Factor analyses of commercials showed that likeability consists of such attributes as meaningfulness, believability, ingenuity, entertainment, etc.<sup>18</sup> It allows the timeless ad to be repeatedly and long-term published in the media (e.g. every Christmas) without increasing irritating effects on recipients, and should be always available upon recipients' demand, e.g. on social networks like YouTube.

Summarizing the stated theoretical framework, an advergaming can be considered as timeless when its design meets criteria of digital games' iconicity (alternatively it is based on iconic game genres and existing game designs), and it includes promotional components (most optimally) focused on the star brand, which are characterized by high levels of recall, recognition and likeability. At the same time, the experience of playing it and positive perception (acceptance) of advertising are independent of time, the same as advergaming availability.

## Advergaming in The Scope of Timelessness: Methodology

To be able to examine the timelessness of advergaming in practice, it is logical to focus on their historical development. The research question is: Is there any advergaming in digital-gaming history that can be considered as timeless? Regarding this issue, the partial goals are to investigate approaches towards advergaming's design and to determine optimal (possibly the most optimal) ways of integrating brands within advergaming.

16 SCHUDSON, M.: *Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion: It's Dubious Impact on American Society*. New York : Basic Books, Inc., 1984, p. 209-212.

17 MAGO, Z.: *World of Advergaming: Digitálne hry ako nástroje reklamy*. Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, 2016, p. 40-41.

18 FAM, K. S., WALLER, D.: Identifying likeable attributes: a qualitative study of television advertisements in Asia. In *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 2006, Vol. 9, No 1, p. 40-43.

In order to reach the stated goals, we apply a qualitative-quantitative content analysis on selected advergames released up to 2000. The main criteria for the research material selection are individual advergames' references within both scholars' and gamers' published texts (books, studies, blogs, etc.), which we might therefore consider as the most important advergames of the digital-gaming industry. Although in general, the history of advergames started back in the 70's with games inspired by Hollywood movies,<sup>19</sup> the real branded games' era started in 1976 with the arcade game *Datsun 280 ZZZAP*.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, we start selecting research material from this point, *Datsun 280 ZZZAP* will not be included, because it was an arcade machine, not dedicated for sale to end users. The selection period is limited to the year 2000, because exponential growth of the internet after this year caused also the change in advergames development approach – almost sole online publishing. The research material then consists of advergames developed and released on various physical mediums (depends on the type of gaming device) around the world.

We utilize two analytical categories both determined within theoretical frameworks. The *category of the game iconicity* represents aspects of digital games' timelessness, including the sub-categories of popularity (qualitative evaluation of awareness, likeability and impact; assessment of originality based on comparison with existing game designs), archetypal character (potential impact on next games development), playability (current availability), and preservation (significant market and historical values). The *category of the advertising timelessness* takes into account the rating of advertised brands as well as an overall assessment of brands and games integration. A part of the analysis is to find out the frequency of brands' integration types into game (both advertising and gaming form) with present brands' corporate identity (CI) visual elements as units of analysis. The first part of the research procedure is based on a qualitative (descriptive and discursive) analysis of each advergame of the research sample within the stated analytical categories. Besides determining the frequency of brands' integration types, the following part is also represented by the quantification of qualitative analysis sub-categories, which are related to external factors of investigated advergames (popularity, playability, preservation, inspiration by existing designs).

## Qualitative Analysis

In 1983, the Mattel company released an advergame *Kool-Aid Man*,<sup>21</sup> one of the world's first ever games made specifically to promote a food product,<sup>22</sup> in this case by the Kool-Aid mascot – an anthropomorphic pitcher of drink representing the brand since 1954. The game was released for Atari 2600 and Intellivision, but the gameplay and visuals of both versions were entirely different. Another one, *Chase the Chuck Wagon*<sup>23</sup> was an advergame in which a dog moved through a maze chasing a wagon branded by Purina, a pet food company. The Coca-Cola Company also introduced the anti-advergame

- 19 BOGOST, I.: *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*. Cambridge, MA : The MIT Press, 2007, p. 199-205.
- 20 DAVE NUTTING ASSOCIATES: *Datsun 280 ZZZAP*. [digital game]. Chicago, IL : Midway Manufacturing, 1976.
- 21 MATTEL: *Kool-Aid Man*. [digital game]. Segundo, CA : M Network, 1983.
- 22 TALJONICK, R.: *Snack attack: The most egregious junk food advergames*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2012. [online]. [2018-06-03]. Available at: <<https://www.gamesradar.com/snack-attack-most-egregious-junk-food-advergames/>>.
- 23 ICOM/TMQ: *Chase the Chuck Wagon*. [digital game]. Fremont, CA : Spectravideo, 1983.

*Pepsi Invaders*<sup>24</sup> with gameplay based on the undoubtedly timeless arcade game *Space Invaders*,<sup>25</sup> but the letters and logo of Pepsi replaced the original alien spaceships. Due to the short run and considerably limited production, this game is very rare among collectors.<sup>26</sup> In 2005, one copy was sold on eBay for 1825 USD.<sup>27</sup> That year, Atari created a game *Tooth Protectors*<sup>28</sup> exclusively available only via mail order from the Johnson & Johnson company. The player's task was to defend teeth against 'tooth decay' bombardments.<sup>29</sup> Although, the gameplay is similar to the game *Kaboom!*,<sup>30</sup> the utilized mechanics are more innovative, based on bouncing from screen borders. Later this mechanics became a core of the legendary *Arkanoid*<sup>31</sup>. *Tooth Protectors* belongs to very rare and hard-to-find group of games "that commands a premium in the collector's market".<sup>32</sup> Even though it is an advergame, its current price on eBay (from June 2018) moves around 450 USD.

In 1988, McDonald's also joined the group of companies, which uses games for promotion, by the game *Donald Land*.<sup>33</sup> A simply platformer game featured the mascot Ronald McDonald collecting hamburgers through the game. The world's famous fast-food company released more similar platformer games in the following years. *M.C. Kids*<sup>34</sup> in 1992, imitating *Super Mario Bros. 3*<sup>35</sup> gameplay with two characters for two players, and a year later *McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure*,<sup>36</sup> again with Ronald McDonald as a main character. Domino Pizza's mascot Noid (looking like clothed rabbit) had a quite unconventional role in the game *Avoid the Noid*.<sup>37</sup> Within the original gameplay design, players had to avoid him while he was delivering pizza to the top floor of a building. Noid himself became 'a promo-hero' until the sequel *Yo! Noid*,<sup>38</sup> although the game's goal was to stop his own super-evil twin, Mr. Green.<sup>39</sup> This time, gameplay was only an edited version of the Japanese game *Kamen no Ninja Hanamaru*.<sup>40</sup> and the included pizza-eating contest mechanics were inspired by the game *Wagan Land*.<sup>41</sup> A fan-made sequel of *Yo! Noid* was created during New Jam City 2017 as freeware.

*Spot: The Video Game*<sup>42</sup> was the first game that featured the character Spot, the current mascot of the soft-drink brand 7up visually represented by a personified red circle with 'cool' moving. The gameplay was inspired by the board game Reversi, already used in the game *Ataxx*.<sup>43</sup> Two years later, 7up transformed their advergames into more popular genres – a classic Nintendo style jumping-based platform game. *Spot: The Cool*

- 24 ATARI: *Pepsi Invaders*. [digital game]. Atlanta, GA : The Coca-Cola Company, 1983.
- 25 TAITO: *Space Invaders*. [digital game]. Shinjuku, Chicago, IL : Taito, Midway, 1978.
- 26 BOGOST, I.: *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*. Cambridge, MA : The MIT Press, 2007, p. 276.
- 27 QUILTY-HARPER, C.: *Atari game sells for \$2,000 on eBay*. Released on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2005. [online]. [2018-06-03]. Available at: <<https://www.engadget.com/2005/10/18/atari-game-sells-for-2-000-on-ebay/>>.
- 28 DSD/CAMELOT: *Tooth Protectors*. [digital game]. New Jersey : Johnson & Johnson, 1983.
- 29 BOGOST, I.: *How To Do Things With Videogames*. Minneapolis, MN, London : University of Minnesota Press, 2011, p. 68.; EDERY, D., MOLLICK, E.: *Changing The Game: How Video Games are Transforming the Future of Business*. New Jersey : Pearson Education, Inc., 2009, p. 66.
- 30 ACTIVISION: *Kaboom!*. [digital game]. Santa Monica, CA : Activision, 1981.
- 31 TAITO: *Arkanoid*. [digital game]. Shinjuku : Taito, 1986.
- 32 WEISS, B.: *Classic Home Video Games, 1972–1984: A Complete Reference Guide*. Jefferson, NC, London : McFarland & Company, Ins., 2007, p. 125.
- 33 DATA EAST: *Donald Land*. [digital game]. Suginami : Data East, 1988.
- 34 VIRGIN CONCEPTS: *M.C. Kids*. [digital game]. London : Virgin Games, 1992.
- 35 NINTENDO R&D4: *Super Mario Bros. 3*. [digital game]. Kyoto : Nintendo, 1988.
- 36 TREASURE: *McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Sega, 1993.
- 37 BLUESKY SOFTWARE: *Avoid the Noid*. [digital game]. ShareData, 1989.
- 38 NOW PRODUCTION: *Yo! Noid*. [digital game]. Osaka : Capcom, 1990.
- 39 TALJONICK, R.: *Snack attack: The most egregious junk food advergames*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2012. [online]. [2018-06-03]. Available at: <<https://www.gamesradar.com/snack-attack-most-egregious-junk-food-advergames/>>.
- 40 NOW PRODUCTION: *Kamen no Ninja Hanamaru*. [digital game]. Osaka : Capcom, 1990.
- 41 NAMCO: *Wagan Land*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Namco, 1989.
- 42 VIRGIN MASTERTRONIC: *Spot: The Video Game*. [digital game]. London : Virgin Mastertronic, 1990.
- 43 THE LELAND CORPORATION: *Ataxx*. [digital game]. Osaka : Capcom, 1988.

*Adventure*<sup>44</sup>, based on *Super Mario 2*<sup>45</sup> design, was released exclusively for GameBoy. Genre change has proven to be the right answer to market demands, because the next multiplatform release, *Cool Spot*,<sup>46</sup> became one of the most famous advergames in history. In this remake, 7up promotion has been already integrated into the gameplay in various ways, e.g. rotating 7up logo (in SNES version) granted players extra percents to their total coolness. It is worth mentioning that the logo is visually very similar to '1up', meaning gaining extra lives for the player's character that has been used in many games including *Super Mario Bros.*<sup>47</sup> The logo of the Virgin company appeared in *Cool Spot* (e.g. in Amiga version) as well. In 1995, the sequel *Spot Goes to Hollywood*<sup>48</sup> was created, using isometric perspective instead of side-scrolling. The game was also released for PlayStation (PS) in 1996.

*Zool: Ninja of the Nth Dimension*<sup>49</sup> was created in 1992 in association with Chupa Chups, the worldwide brand of lollipops, as a rival to the iconic game, and later famous game series, *Sonic the Hedgehog*.<sup>50</sup> There are obvious similarities in gameplays of both games, particularly regarding the characters' appearance and moveability. The popularity of *Zool: Ninja of the Nth Dimension* caused its re-releasing to several other platforms and a sequel was created in 1993, still interconnected with Chupa Chups.

Another official mascot, this time the mascot of cheese-favoured snacks Cheetos, has appeared in game *Chester Cheetah: Too Cool to Fool*<sup>51</sup> in 1992. According to I. Bogost, the Cheetos provide incremental advantage in reaching the game's goal by regaining players' life, although the instrumental value of the cheese snacks remains abstract, which suggests that even instrumental power-ups often provide only incremental demonstrative advantages over archetypal ones.<sup>52</sup> The game was released only in North America, the same as its sequel *Chester Cheetah: Wild Wild Quest*<sup>53</sup> from 1993 that is generally more known among gamers. Perhaps, the reason for its popularity might be related to the gameplay design considerably inspired by *Super Mario World*.<sup>54</sup> Coca-Cola released an ordinary advergame in 1994 exclusively in Japan, called *Coca-Cola Kid*<sup>55</sup> according to the local soft-drink mascot. This side-scrolling fighting game contained besides Coca-Cola power ups, rather associative brand implementations.<sup>56</sup> For the first time, the advergame was also sold in a bundle version with game consoles, in this case, the Coca-Cola thematic red Sega Game Gear.

In 1996, Digital Café created an advergame for Chex cereals called *Chex Quest*<sup>57</sup> and it was the first software inserted in a cereal box ever. The game development was quite risky, because the creators decided to parody the concept of the iconic *Doom*, controversial for its violent nature, particularly after extensive discussions about violence in digital

games which have continued since 1993.<sup>58</sup> The main difference lay in fact that the resulting advergame was a non-violent first-person shooter. The game hero Chex Warrior, a personified giant cereal flake, was zapping gooey enemies with Zorcher, a gun that teleports, not kills.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, both gameplays look considerably similar, except for the background colour of the HUD (see Fig. 1). *Chex Quest* became one of the most successful and effective advergames. It acquired the Golden EFFIE Award for Advertising Effectiveness in 1996 and the Golden Reggie award for Promotional Achievement in 1998, because Chex cereal sales increased by over 248%. Official sequels were released in 1997 and 2008, as enhanced completed beta versions of the 1998 game.<sup>60</sup> The game's fans also produced several fan-made sequels such as *Return of the Chex Warrior* and *Chex Quest Project Z*.



Picture 1: *Chex Quest* and *Doom* gameplays visual comparison

Source: ID SOFTWARE: *Doom*. [digital game]. New York, NY : GT Interactive, 1993, screenshot.; DIGITAL CAFÉ: *Chex Quest*. [digital game]. Saint Paul, MN : Digital Café, 1996, screenshot.

*Pepsiman*,<sup>61</sup> the famous Pepsi Cola advergame, was released for PS in Japan in 1999. Within this pioneer of 3D endless running advergames (however, the game has actually got an end), gamers control a running soft-drink mascot and try to avoid obstacles. The game features the most extensive integrations of brand and game. Besides the mascot himself, there are Pepsi logos, placed products (cans, crates, vending machines, marquees, shops, etc.), ads (e.g. billboards) and branded obstacles (giant cans, trucks, etc.). Although, the gameplay was partially inspired by *Crash Bandicoot*,<sup>62</sup> *Pepsiman* has provided the fun and hard challenge typical for the current popular genre of endless running games, and that means it is still played even today. It has its own leaderboard on Speedrun.com (last record added in July 2018)<sup>63</sup> and was also one of games played at Summer Games Done Quick 2016. The new century brought another *Crash Bandicoot*-like advergame *M&M's: The Lost Formulas*,<sup>64</sup> in which players controlled a personified yellow candy through a stylish cartoonish aesthetic world.<sup>65</sup> In the following nine years a total of seven other M&M's themed games were published.

44 VISUAL CONCEPTS: *Spot: The Cool Adventure*. [digital game]. London : Virgin Games, 1992.

45 NINTENDO R&D4: *Super Mario Bros. 2*. [digital game]. Kyoto : Nintendo, 1988.

46 VIRGIN GAMES: *Cool Spot*. [digital game]. London : Virgin Interactive, 1993.

47 NINTENDO R&D4: *Super Mario Bros.* [digital game]. Kyoto : Nintendo, 1985.

48 EUROCOM: *Spot Goes to Hollywood*. [digital game]. London : Virgin Interactive, 1995.

49 GREMLIN GRAPHICS: *Zool: Ninja of the Nth Dimension*. [digital game]. Sheffield : Gremlin Interactive, 1992.

50 SONIC TEAM: *Sonic the Hedgehog*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Sega, 1991.

51 SYSTEM VISION: *Chester Cheetah: Too Cool to Fool* [digital game]. Tokyo : Kaneko, 1992.

52 BOGOST, I.: *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*. Cambridge, MA : The MIT Press, 2007, p. 161.

53 KANEKO: *Chester Cheetah: Wild Wild Quest*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Kaneko, 1993.

54 NINTENDO EAD: *Super Mario World*. [digital game]. Kyoto : Nintendo, 1990.

55 ASPECT CO.: *Coca-Cola Kid*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Sega, 1994.

56 MAGO, Z.: Self- and cross-promotion within digital games. In PETRANOVA, D., MATUŠ, J., MENDELOVA, D. (eds.): *Marketing Identity: Brands we love – part I.: Conference Proceedings from International Scientific Conference 8th – 9th November 2016*. Trnava : Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, 2016, p. 341-343.

57 DIGITAL CAFÉ: *Chex Quest*. [digital game]. Saint Paul, MN : Digital Café, 1996.

58 KENT, S. L.: *The Ultimate History of Video Games*. New York : Three Rivers Press, 2001, p. 466-478.

59 SMITH, K. A.: *Selling Your Soul for Fun and Profit: The 10 Best Advergimes*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2011. [online]. [2018-06-25]. Available at: <<https://www.pastemagazine.com/blogs/lists/2011/10/selling-your-soul-for-fun-and-profit-the-10-best-advergimes.html>>.

60 Ibidem.

61 KID: *Pepsiman*. [digital game]. Tokyo : KID, 1999.

62 NAUGHTY DOG: *Crash Bandicoot*. [digital game]. San Mateo, CA : Sony Computer Entertainment, 1996.

63 *Pepsiman*. [online]. [2018-07-26]. Available at: <<https://www.speedrun.com/Pepsiman>>.

64 BOSTON ANIMATION, INC.: *M&M's: The Lost Formulas*. [digital game]. New York : Simon & Schuster Interactive, 2000.

65 TALJONICK, R.: *Snack attack: The most egregious junk food advergimes*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2012. [online]. [2018-06-03]. Available at: <<https://www.gamesradar.com/snack-attack-most-egregious-junk-food-advergimes/>>.

# Results

The content analysis consisted of 21 advergames in total (see Table 2). The research sample selection itself has already assumed some level of awareness, but based on the amount and frequency of references, advergames Pepsi Invaders, Zool: Ninja of the Nth Dimension, Cool Spot, Chex Quest and Pepsiman belong to the most popular. Seven of the analysed advergames have got at least one sequel and six of such sequels are even a part of the research sample. All the analysed advergames are still playable (emulated) through several online channels. Regarding their preservative and collector's value, it seems that more valuable advergames are those released on limited types of platform like Kool-Aid Man, Chase the Chuck Wagon, Pepsi Invaders, Tooth Protectors, Chex Quest as well as those released exclusively for certain regions, e.g. Pepsiman and Coca-Cola Kid in Japan.

The design of 12 (57.1 %) advergames was obviously inspired by already existing and commercially successful games (e.g. Super Mario Bros., Sonic the Hedgehog, Doom, Crash Bandicoot); in other cases, the design could not be directly associated with designs of existing games, but these advergames mostly belonged to the most popular and dominant genres of that time (e.g. platform games). Within the analysis of brand integration into games, we took into account only the most prevalent implementations, omitting minority ones. Mascots were the most frequent, even 14 (66.6 %), 6 (28.6 %) were CI visuals, especially brand logos, and 1 product (4.8 %), the anthropomorphic nature of which (Chex Warrior) is comparable with characteristics of mascots. On the other hand, 13 mascots and one product together figured as player's avatars (66.6 %) and 1 mascot (4.8 %) acted as a non-playable character (NPC). All CI visuals (28.6 %) were a part of the game environment (textures, items).

Table 2: Results of advergames' analysis

Advergame		Advertiser		Major brand integration		Gameplay design originality	
Title	Rel.		Ad	Game	Title used as inspiration	Rel.	
Kool-Aid Man	1983	Kool-Aid	mascot	avatar	indirect	-	
Chase the Chuck Wagon	1983	Purina	CI visuals	environment	indirect	-	
Pepsi Invaders	1983	Coca-Cola*	CI visuals	environment	Space Invaders	1978	
Tooth Protectors	1983	Johnson & Johnson*	CI visuals	environment	Kaboom!	1981	
Donald Land	1988	McDonald's*	mascot	avatar	indirect	-	
Avoid the Noid	1989	Domino's Pizza	mascot	NPC	indirect	-	
Yo! Noid	1990	Domino's Pizza	mascot	avatar	Kamen no Ninja Akakage	1988	
Spot: The Video Game	1990	7up	mascot	avatar	Ataxx	1988	
M.C. Kids	1992	McDonald's*	CI visuals	environment	Super Mario Bros. 3	1988	

Spot: The Cool Adventure	1992	7up	mascot	avatar	Super Mario Bros. 2	1988
Zool: Ninja of the Nth Dimension	1992	Chupa Chups	CI visuals	environment	Sonic the Hedgehog	1991
Chester Cheetah: Too Cool to Fool	1992	Cheetos	mascot	avatar	indirect	-
Zool 2	1993	Chupa Chups	CI visuals	environment	Sonic the Hedgehog	1991
Chester Cheetah: Wild Wild Quest	1993	Cheetos	mascot	avatar	Super Mario World	1990
McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure	1993	McDonald's*	mascot	avatar	Sonic the Hedgehog 2	1992
Cool Spot	1993	7up	mascot	avatar	indirect	-
Coca-Cola Kid	1994	Coca-Cola*	mascot	avatar	indirect	-
Spot Goes to Hollywood	1995	7up	mascot	avatar	indirect	-
Chex Quest	1996	Chex	product	avatar	Doom	1993
Pepsiman	1999	Pepsi*	mascot	avatar	Crash Bandicoot	1996
M&M's: The Lost Formulas	2000	M&M's	mascot	avatar	indirect	-

\* The brand belongs to 100 best global brands 2018.<sup>66</sup>

Source: own processing

## Discussion

Whereas conditions of advergames' general awareness and popularity have been already reflected by the selection of research material, as well as subsequently found evidence of both their formal (commercial, institutional) and participatory preservation, the analysis itself could focus on other timeless criteria related to game design and brand integration. The fact that the design of more than half of the analysed advergames was based on (or directly adapted from) other already commercially successful games and genres indicates that their developers, as well as involved brands, wanted to minimize risk and capitalize on verified game formats by market. In general, simple gameplay with adequate challenges presented in game represented the basic principle for advergames development. Paradoxically, efforts to make their gameplay/design original and so diversify themselves were almost solely tied to the integration of brands into games. Most likely, it was an attempt to generate fun based on the idea of playing with the brand in familiar game contexts.

It is interesting that the most frequent way of brand integration into games was in the form of a mascot, but on the other hand, it seem to be quite a smart idea, particularly regarding the utilization of digital games. Mascots are very useful in the process of brand personifying, develop a good brand image and affect customer perception in the

<sup>66</sup> INTERBRAND: *Best Global Brands 2018 Rankings*. [online]. [2018-09-10]. Available at: <<https://www.interbrand.com/best-brands/best-global-brands/2018/ranking/>>.

long term.<sup>67</sup> Paraphrasing A. Patterson, Y. Khogeer and J. Hodgson, mascots are unforgettable characters created by the marketing industry that function as brand advocates and are equal, if not superior, to the very best that popular culture offers.<sup>68</sup> It follows that mascots are ideal game characters, and in addition, their implementation as player's avatars ensure the highest connection of gamers with brands through immersion. Practically it means that players experience gameplay identified with interactive personification of brand attributes, without the need to overcrowd the game environment by associative elements of brand visuals. Applying in-game advertising principles, such plot integration has the potential to generate premium advertising effects.<sup>69</sup> As stated, the brand mascot as the player's avatar seems to be the most optimal and perspective way of brand integration within advergames in general.

Although, the carried out quantitative analysis followed only the most obvious and major brand integrations, we should mention that some secondary (supportive) implementations had slightly more important roles in games as well. For example the logo of Pepsi as the enemy boss in Pepsi Invaders; McDonald's restaurant and products as stats (power ups) increasing items in Donald Land; Cheetos snacks and 7up logo as life increasing items in Chester Cheetah and Cool Spot games; Pepsi cans as collectible items in Pepsiman. Based on a theoretical framework, interpretation of content analysis results, and taking into account also the global reach of brands, a clear long-term attributability of the mascot to brand (e.g. 7 up mascot Spot has a rather obscure contemporary meaning), and presence of playing motivation aspects (fun, adequate or even more demanding challenge), as representative examples of really timeless advergames, we may definitely note Pepsiman.

There are two research limitations, which need to be mentioned. The overall analysis was realized by one researcher, so results might be affected by his subjective attitudes, even with the maximum effort to maintain scientific objectivity. The second limitation lies in the fact that some aspects of digital games' iconicity (e. g. popularity) as well as constancy of experience from playing advergames (timelessness of process/activity) were determined based on indirect indicators, not primary data obtained from relevantly focused research.

## Conclusion

Advergames have belonged in the digital-gaming industry since its very beginning, and therefore currently they are a part of both game and popular cultural heritage. In this context, we are able to apply the theoretical concept of timelessness to advergames. Reflecting on the dual nature of advergames, this process is slightly complicated, because at first it is necessary to take into account aspects of both digital games' and advertising timelessness, then also the fact that games are products and process at the same time. It seems that advergames could be considered as timeless when their design meets the criteria of digital games' iconicity (popularity, becoming an archetype, playability, preservation), and its promotional features are focused around star brands, character-

67 MOHANTY, S. S.: Growing Importance of Mascot & their Impact on Brand Awareness – A Study of Young Adults in Bhubaneswar City. In *International Journal of Computational Engineering & Management*, 2014, Vol. 17, No. 6, p. 44.

68 PATTERSON, A., KHOGEER, Y., HODGSON, J.: How to create an influential anthropomorphic mascot: Literary musings on marketing, make-believe, and meerkats. In *Journal of Marketing Management*, 2013, Vol. 29, No. 1-2, p. 69.

69 MAROLF, G.: *Advergaming and In-Game Advertising: An Approach to the next Generation of Advertising*. Saarbrücken : VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2007, p. 97-98.

ized by high level of recall, recognition and likeability. Concurrently, experience of playing advergimes as well as a positive perception (acceptance) of their advertising side is not dependent on time, same as with the availability of advergimes.

The research examination of advergimes' timelessness in practice was focus on the question, if there is any advergime in digital-gaming history that can be considered as timeless, and partial goals were to investigate approaches towards advergimes' design and ways of integrating brands within them. Results of qualitative-quantitative content analysis on advergimes released until 2000 show that advergimes' design is highly inspired by already commercially successful games and genres. Simple gameplays are accompanied by adequate challenges in order to increase motivation for playing them. Finally, the originality factor represents the implementation of brand features to generate fun based on the idea of playing with the brand in familiar game contexts. Brand mascots in the form of player's avatars then seems to be the most optimal brand integration from the long-term point of view. Based on these results, we may definitely note Pepsiman as a representative example of a timeless advergime. Nevertheless, many analysed advergimes actually met timelessness criteria set by the theoretical framework just partially, they are important parts of both digital-gaming and advertising sectors, therefore in a certain more liberal sense we could consider most of them as timeless.

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