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 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 advergame design and brand implementation forms.

KEY WORDS:
advergames, digital games, iconicity, history, participation, preservation, timelessness.

Introduction

Within the history of digital games, 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.” 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, 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.
persisting over time, which could represent significant marketing benefits. The aim of the study is therefore a comprehensive examination of advergames’ timelessness, and possibly to identify advergames in digital gaming history that could be considered as timeless.

**Theoretical Concept of Advergames’ Timelessness**

Applying the timelessness concept to advergames seems to be slightly complicated. Advergames are 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”, 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. 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. 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. 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Iconicity of digital games</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aspect</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Popularity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent of playing (global)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likeability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming an archetype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre founding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Versions, variations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequels, prequels, spin-offs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remake, retrofit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-/trans-media transfer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participatory culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playability</td>
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<td>Emulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participatory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archiving</td>
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<tr>
<td>Museology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 creativity – 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.

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similarity (mechanics, audio-visual elements, etc.) to the pioneer game Doom. Game archetypes also provide a remarkable space for gamers’ participation (modding, skinning, let’s play, speedrun, etc.).

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 part of both pop-culture and the history of the digital-gaming industry. Here it is appropriate to games are digital games as well, thus they should be also worthy of preservation as a collecting and archiving games, and their accumulation for museological purposes. Another 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 formal obstacles and play them in available versions.

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. Advergames 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 use game archetypes (mechanics, audio-visual elements, etc.) 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 is independent of time, the same as advergame availability.

Advergames in The Scope of Timelessness: Methodology

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

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, advergames, meeting criteria of digital games’ iconicity, could be still considered just as a timeless digital game, not as a timeless advergame. 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. 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 advergames. 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.

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. 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 advergame 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 (mechanics, audio-visual elements) 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 is independent of time, the same as advergame availability.
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,19 the real branded games’ era started in 1976 with the arcade game Datsun 280 ZZAP.20 Nevertheless, we start selecting research material from this point, Datsun 280 ZZAP 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 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 able to show 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,21 one of the world’s first ever games made specifically to promote a food product,22 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?23 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

Pepsi Invaders24 with gameplay based on the undoubtedly timeless arcade game Space Invaders.25 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.26 In 2005, one copy was sold on eBay for $1825 USD.27 That year, Atari created a game Tooth Protectors28 exclusively available only via mail order from the Johnson & Johnson company. The player’s task was to defend teeth against ‘tooth decay’ bombardments.29 Although, the gameplay is similar to the game Kaboom!,30 the utilized mechanics are more innovative, based on bouncing from screen borders. Later this mechanics became a core of the legendary Arkanoid31. Tooth Protectors belongs to very rare and hard-to-find group of games “that commands a premium in the collector’s market”.32 Even though it is an arcade game, 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.33 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. Kids34 in 1992, imitating Super Mario Bros. 33rd gameplay with two characters for two players, and a year later McDonald’s Treasure Land Adventure,35 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.36 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,37 although the game’s goal was to stop his own super-evil twin, Mr. Green.38 This time, gameplay was only an edited version of the Japanese game Kamen no Ninja Hanamaru,39 and the included pizza-eating contest mechanics were inspired by the game Wagan Land.40 A fan-made sequel of Yo! Noid was created during New Jam City 2017 as freeware.

Spot: The Video Game41 was the first game that featured the character Spot, the current mascot of the soft-drink brand 7up visually represented by a personified red circular shape with ‘cool’ moving. The gameplay was inspired by the board game Reversi, already used in the game Ataxx.42 Two years later, 7up transformed their advergames into more popular genres – a classic Nintendo style jumping-based platform game. Spot: The Cool

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34 DATA EAST: Donald Land [digital game]. Sugarni: Data East, 1988.
Super Mario Bros.

...gaining extra lives for the player's character that has been used in many games including games which have continued since 1993. 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. Nevertheless, both gameplayes 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. The game's fans also produced several fan-made sequels such as Return of the Chex Warrior and Chex Quest Project Z.

Zool: Ninja of the Nth Dimension 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. There are obvious similarities in gameplay 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 Chester, has appeared in game Chester Cheetah: Too Cool to Fool in 1992. According to I. Bogost, the Chesteros 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. The game was released only in North America, the same as its sequel Chester Cheetah: Wild Wild Quest from 1993 that is generally more known among gamers. Perhaps, the reason for its popularity might be related to the game design considerably inspired by Super Mario World. Coca-Cola released an ordinary advergame in 1994 exclusively in Japan, called Coca-Cola Kid according to the previous advergame. This time, the advergame is a side-scrolling fighting game, which is contained besides Coca-Cola power-ups, rather associative brand implementations. 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 1995, Digital Café created an advergame for Chex cereals called Chex Quest 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.

60 Ibidem.
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).

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Table 2: Results of advergames’ analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advergame</th>
<th>Advertiser</th>
<th>Major brand integration</th>
<th>Title used as inspiration</th>
<th>Rel.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kool-Aid Man</td>
<td>Kool-Aid</td>
<td>mascot</td>
<td>avatar</td>
<td>indirect -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chase the Chuck Wagon</td>
<td>Purina</td>
<td>CI visuals</td>
<td>environment</td>
<td>indirect -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepsi Invaders</td>
<td>Coca-Cola*</td>
<td>CI visuals</td>
<td>environment</td>
<td>Space Invaders 1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tooth Protectors</td>
<td>Johnson &amp; Johnson*</td>
<td>CI visuals</td>
<td>environment</td>
<td>Kaboom! 1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald Land</td>
<td>McDonald’s</td>
<td>mascot</td>
<td>avatar</td>
<td>indirect -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid the Noid</td>
<td>Domino’s Pizza</td>
<td>mascot</td>
<td>NPC</td>
<td>indirect -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo! Noid</td>
<td>Domino’s Pizza</td>
<td>mascot</td>
<td>avatar</td>
<td>Kamen no Ninja Akakage 1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spot: The Video Game</td>
<td>7up</td>
<td>mascot</td>
<td>avatar</td>
<td>Ataxx 1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.C. Kids</td>
<td>McDonald’s*</td>
<td>CI visuals</td>
<td>environment</td>
<td>Super Mario Bros. 3 1988</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 seems 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

* The brand belongs to 100 best global brands 2018. [66]
Source: own processing

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long term. Paraphrasing A. Patterson, Y. Khogeer and J. Hodgson, mascots are unforget-table 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. 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. 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. 7up 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 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-ized by high level of recall, recognition and likeability. Concurrently, experience of playing advergames as well as a positive perception (acceptance) of their advertising side is not dependent on time, same as with the availability of advergames.

The research examination of advergames’ timelessness in practice was focused on the question, if there is any advergame in digital-gaming history that can be considered as timeless, and partial goals were to investigate approaches towards advergames’ design and ways of integrating brands within them. Results of qualitative-quantitative content analysis on advergames released until 2000 show that advergames’ design is highly inspired by already commercially successful games and genres. Simple gameplay is 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 advergame. Nevertheless, many analysed advergames 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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