

Entertainment or Distraction: Qualitative Content Analysis of Dynamic in-Game advertising

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Abstract— The current investigation aimed to identify the attitude of users towards dynamic in-game advertising with the help of qualitative content analysis. The resulting consequences of in-game advertising on its users have been identified through Ducoffe's advertising value model. The stated model facilitates the discovery of three outcome values of advertisements: entertainment, informativeness, and irritation. Further, an extensive review of the literature has been performed to find the association between these three outcome values of advertisements and the attitude of users. Twenty-five respondents have been selected as a sample for the study through snowball sampling. Their responses have been collected with the help of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, and lastly, qualitative content analyses have been opted for analysing the collected responses. The analysed responses were thematically interpreted and presented in the present study. A total of eight sub-themes have been identified from the three key themes of the study. The study carries implications for marketers, parents, and government.

Index Terms— Dynamic in-game advertisement, attitude, qualitative analysis, Ducoffe's advertising value model.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the recognition of "e-Sports as part of multi-sports events" of the Country (The Times of India, 28 December 2022, p 20), the digital game has already started attracting marketers to consider and target this industry with high growth potential. As a result, every marketer will try to benefit from such industry changes and find innovative ways to attract, engage and retain customers. Digitisation has brought a remarkable transformation in the entertainment industry [1]. Games on digital platforms are one example of customers' engagement with digital technology, influencing approximately 164 million adolescents in video gaming [2]. In today's era, online games have become an essential part of our lives. People of all ages are attracted to and engaged with online games [1, 2, 9, 41]. As a result, advertisers are targeting these sites to promote their offerings. These advertisements on online game sites are stated as "in-game advertising" in the literature [33]. These in-game advertisements combine "Structure, content, and socialisation" [45]. Furthermore, these advertisements are being floated with two purposes: "the inclusion of advertising material" and "the placement of products and brands" [41]. This in-game advertising has emerged as an innovative and influential mode of promotion, with customized choices per the players' demographics and behavioral characteristics. Studies have defined in-game ads as "advertising products/services within the game's environment" [41] and "the inclusion of products or brands within a digital game" [44]. Furthermore, the interaction within the game generates two levels of interactivity: Cosmetic Placements and Integrated Placements. The cosmetic placement is "usually added for authenticity and

to enhance realism,” whereas Integrated Placements “allow player interaction that could be linked to game progression” [41]. In-game advertising has originated with the aim of entertainment and information providers to enhance the recall ability towards the advertised brand [14, 15, 44, 45], but it ends up with the cause of irritation for its users [15]. Moreover, it is being suggested that these ads should be positioned to benefit the marketers and not create any hindrance in the game of players [14, 45]. With the help of a detailed review of the literature, two kinds of two kinds of in-game advertisements have surfaced: static ads and dynamic ads. Static ads are those advertisements which are incorporated at the time of development of the game and can only be modified with a new or latest version of the game, whereas, in the case of dynamic advertising, advertisements can be changed or altered as per the liking of players, need for introducing new brand and product [41]. Furthermore, in-game advertising also comprises advergames. Advergames are more of a traditional mode of advertising by placing products in the games. These advergames are “the process by which the advertising message, logo or other brand information is incorporated into online or offline video games” [39]. Various studies have explored and investigated the impact of different advertisements in mobile-based games on players’ attitudes, arousing their intentions towards the purchase [1, 10, 24, 35]. However, as far as the researcher's knowledge is concerned, none have focused on users' attitude towards dynamic in-game advertising, specifically in the Indian context, using the qualitative content method. Thus, it would be interesting to see the results in different contexts.

To fill the existing gap in the literature, the present research explores the dynamic kind of in-game advertising. It intends to identify users' attitude towards dynamic in-game advertising during online games. A qualitative content analysis approach has been used to identify whether dynamic in-game advertisements are being perceived as a source of entertainment or distraction by their users. As far as the structure of the paper is concerned, it starts with an introduction, theoretical framework, and literature review, followed by the presentation of content analysis results. Finally, the paper is concluded, and the implications, limitations, and future research agenda have been explained in separate heads.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DUCOFFE’S ADVERTISING VALUE MODEL

Technological invasion has motivated the game developers to infuse advertisements of various brands in the game environment, specifically in the “free-to-play game environments” [21]. This kind of advertising is proving to be an effective medium for generating awareness, promoting product features, and facilitating the way to pursue [38]. However, it also resulted in various kinds of hindrances. To identify such hinderances, present study has taken help from Ducoffe’s advertising value model [15]. According to this model, “the consumer engages with stimuli and products that provide them with something they desire” [2]. Due to its applicability in the psychological assessment of the real value of any advertising campaign, various researchers have employed this model in different contexts, for example, instant messages [20] and mobile advertising [46]. Besides, understanding impact of ads on social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter have also been analyzed with the help of this model [23, 36]. However, in the present study, the Ducoffe’s advertising value model has been employed to assess the impact of dynamic in-game ads on the attitude of users. As per the model, advertisements generate three values: i.e. entertainment, informativeness, and irritation. Following these three factors, we have qualitatively analysed the responses collected from frequent users of online games.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Entertainment and attitude

Aesthetic appeal, escapism, emotional release, and distraction are the determining factors to access the value of advertisements [2]. It has been identified that advertisements meant for entertainment, along with hilarious messages, can help advertisers by generating a favourable attitude among the users [16, 26]. Although numerous research has tried to identify the positive impact of advertisements in form of entertainment [30, 32, 47], a very few have observed their values in online games [2, 9]. To prove the same notion, the present research considered entertainment as an outcome value of advertisements.

Informativeness and attitude

Informativeness as the outcome value of advertisement has been defined as “the measure of how helpful, accurate, and resourceful information provided through ads is perceived to be” [16]. As the definition suggests, an advertisement has to have the above-mentioned attributes to make it more influential. Previous studies have also confirmed the role of informativeness in creating a positive attitude of the user [3, 4, 29]. With the help of such

findings in the existing literature, the present study qualitatively analysed the informative values generated from dynamic in-game advertisements.

Irritation and attitude

The extensive literature review helped find the positive and negative impacts of advertisements on the user's attitude. While Informativeness and entertainment value generate a positive impact, irritation is another outcome value of advertisements which results in annoyance and disruption [16, 13, 43]. Moreover, users are very well aware that they cannot avoid such advertisements in online games as they are part of the freemium pricing strategy. As a cost of free gaming experience, they found themselves pushed towards in-game advertisements. Following these outcomes of advertisements, the present study tries to identify the negative impact of dynamic in-game advertisements on the attitude of users.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study aimed to capture the consumer's attitude toward dynamic in-game advertisements, a qualitative research design was developed with in-depth interviews and focus groups as data collection methods. The depth interview was chosen for the following reasons: (1) it captures the experience of users while playing the game, (2) it contributes to the theory building, and (3) focus groups provide validation for depth interviews.

Sample Selection

The snowball sampling method was used for depth interviews and focus group participants [27]. 25 users were chosen based on their interests and time spent in online gaming; these users are then grouped into four focus groups of six participants per group. 5-6 participants in groups for FGDs are considered adequate [6]. Males play computer games for a significantly longer time than females, The Majority of the participants considered are in the age group of 18-25 years, as they are the group play games [19]. It has been found that women like to play computer games significantly less than men [18].

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted with users interested in online gaming, who spent approximately 3-4 hours playing games. The basic objective here was to understand users' behavior and attitude while playing a game. The questions ranged from why they play the game to the reasons for using any game, and the factors that annoy or motivate them while playing. Each in-depth interview lasted about 12-15 minutes, and the focus group lasted approximately 35-40 minutes. The sessions were audiotaped with participants' consent and then transcribed for accuracy and analysis.

The main questions asked to the respondents were:

Q1: When you play any game, what is your general view on moving advertisements?

Q2: Do you find these moving advertisements valuable?

Q3: Do you feel like watching these advertisements?

Q4: Do you feel these advertisements spoil your game or are the reason to annoy you?

Q5: Have you had any experience where these advertisements brought more interest in the game?"or are the reason to annoy you? Any experience where these advertisements bring more interest in the game?

Data analysis

All the responses were first recorded and then transcribed. User were first asked to give an idea about their online gaming experience briefly and then elaborate on their attitude towards dynamic in-game advertisements. The organisation of the in-depth interview and focus group data were first categorizations, with the three chosen themes that are Ducoffe's value dimensions, i.e. informativeness, irritation, and entertainment [40]. The method used for the analysis is inductive content analysis (Figure 1). In this process, open coding is done, followed by category creation [6]. The coding is done where each line is read and reread and given a heading and then grouped on the aspect of the content [14]. The list of categories have been grouped post open coding. The motive behind data grouping was to condense the number of categories by employing inductive content analysis. This will help in interpreting the belongingness of group with the categories [16].

V. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Descriptive Information of Respondents

A total of 25 users were selected and requested to respond for conducting the study, among which 80 percent were male players and only 20 percent were female. The age of these players was in the range of 18- 25 years. When asked about their playing hours, 40 percent of players mentioned 1-2 hours, 48 percent mentioned 3-4 hours, and lastly, 12 percent of players mentioned 5-6 hours a day. Following is the tabular presentation of the respondent's demographic profile:

TABLE I: PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Variables	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	20	80
	Female	5	20
Age	18-20	15	60
	21-23	7	28
	24-25	3	12
Hours of playing (Per day)			
	1-2 Hours	10	40
	3-4 Hours	12	48
	5-6 Hours	3	12

Qualitative Content analysis

The verbatims were divided into several themes that emerged, which were grouped together according to [15] themes that are entertainment, informativeness and irritation. The verbatim was then checked with the frequency of words used and sorted based on these three themes and grouped together. Like stoppage, distortion is grouped under irritation, whereas happy, pleasure is grouped with entertainment, thought, meaningful, information, knowledge is grouped with informativeness. Following the results of qualitative content analyses:

1) Informativeness

Informativeness is found to be the most important function of advertising by many consumers [11, 31]. Apart from information, the role of advertisement is also seen in fulfilling all needs of the owing brand, which in turn is the kind of information users are looking for [5, 39]. Many times, relevant advertisements helped them in registering for some events or courses, which in turn acted as a source of information for them (Figure 2).

“Sometime during games have noticed advertisement and I get to know about some new product which is actually very good.”

“The good part is during the game I can experience & see the benefit, that product can offer.”

“I also get Information about some application forms & events.”

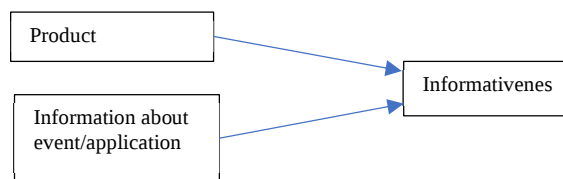


Fig. 1 Sub-themes of Informativeness

2) Irritation

Previous studies have identified several factors affecting attitudes toward dynamic in-game advertisement, and the concept of hindrance/ obstruction emerged as a factor affecting attitudes toward dynamic in-game advertising [5]. Evidence suggests that when in-app advertisements obstruct the game experience, it can lead to irritation or annoyance. Based on the framework from Ducoffe's value advertising Model [42], this factor refers to advertising content and format that annoy or manipulate the consumers, thereby eliciting negative attitudes [28, 42]. It is also noticed that the concept of obstruction is more related to the level of stoppage and distraction that ads cause to users while playing game [37]. The intervention between the advertisement and the individual's goal towards the game obstructs the processing of the information and hence results in a negative attitude towards the advertisement [34]. Three themes have been generated from qualitative investigation (Figure 3).

“I don't mind small ads, like 5 seconds or less, but longer ads cause me a distraction & annoyance”

“Ads that are relevant to the context (here gaming) aren’t that obstructive. Sometimes they are just helping you buy some rewards, guns, or skins. They even show gaming gear from amazon sometimes.”

“Short and interesting ads aren’t much of an issue, especially in-between different levels of the game”

“Long duration, delay, unskippable engagement, not relevant, frequent, redirected to web page creates hindrances while playing.”

“Sometimes you have a goal and in between you see advertisement and your goal gets obstructed”

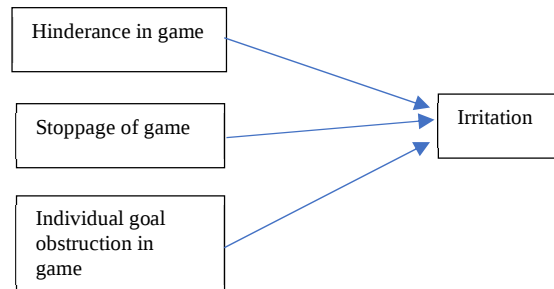


Fig 2 Sub-themes of Irritation

3) Entertainment

Pleasant and likable advertising does not disturb the main intent, which is the playing experience; the brand's presence brings a realistic feel to the game, so it adds to the pleasure [31]. Games are played for fun and entertainment. The gaming environment and engagement of users in the game is very much affected by the fun or entertaining element [19]. The feeling of engagement and presence in the game, in turn, makes it more entertaining for users [25]. The cognitive engagement while seeing “dynamic game advertisements during the game gives them a feeling of disconnection from their actual environment, which becomes the reason for hedonic satisfaction users. This implies that players might not play any game if they did not enjoy the experience. Enjoyment can be understood as a dimension as well as a result of the gaming experience (Figure 4).

“Actually, the experience of gaming increased when I see the brands on roads which I actually see in daily life and it adds more pleasure to me.”

“Advertisement sometime give adverline rush I remember I saw an energy drink advertisement and just by seeing the advertisement I felt energized and played well so advertisement comes as a mood enhancer or challenge your gaming spirit”.

“Sometime it’s a good change to drive in a place which is your dream location like driving in Dubai or New York.”

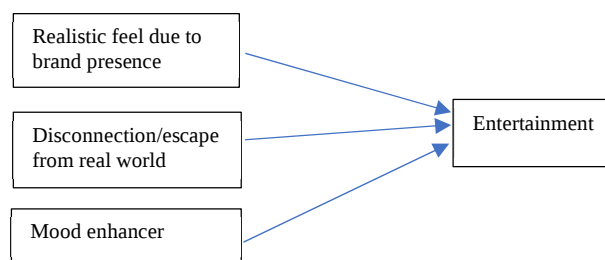


Fig 3. Sub-themes of Entertainment

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has employed the qualitative content analysis approach to examine players' attitude towards dynamic in-game advertisements. Thematic interpretation of the collected responses has confirmed the role of entertainment, informativeness, and irritation effects of dynamic in-game advertising in determining players' attitudes. Eight sub-themes have been identified with help of qualitative content analysis. Product information and information about events/applications were recognized as sub-themes of informativeness. Further, hinderance in the game, stoppage of the game, and individual goad obstruction in the game had been cited as sub-themes of irritation. Lastly, realistic feel due to brand presence, disconnection/escape from real world, and mood change if losing the game were reported as sub-themes of entertainment. It has been observed from the findings of the current

investigation that the cognitive simulation, which players observe during in-game advertising, enhances their informative content. Further, entertainment is also identified as connected with enjoyment, power and experience, providing a better sense of engagement and facilitating hedonic pleasure in the game. Moreover, duration, timing, link, and distraction have been quoted as a prime reason for irritation. Previous research emphasises the irritating outcome of in-game advertising; however, it has been observed during interaction with the players that dynamic kinds of in-game advertisements not only provide hedonic benefits through entertainment but also stimulate users' cognitive processes by providing information related to the advertised product/brand. In brief, the present study tried seeing the general experience of dynamic in-game advertisement, whether it is added to entertainment /information or more coming as a distraction. Such findings of present study are expected to contribute to the academic knowledge in the field of dynamic in-game advertising.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study can be useful for marketers to understand the attitudinal aspect of users towards dynamic in-game advertisement, which in turn can help while designing the advertisement content, time duration etc. It can also be useful for policymakers to keep the limitation on the timing of the advertisement. At the same time, this study can also be useful for game developers with dynamic in-game advertisement. As users spend a good amount of time in the games, dynamic game advertisements can pass on important social messages for the user group. That way, a social implication of the study is also noticed.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

The present study is limited to the qualitative method, so future studies can be explored with more consumers, larger data sets, and the quantitative method or mixed method as technology. The present study only used dynamic in-game advertising, so the study is limited to only one aspect of advertising. Future studies can be done on the attitudes of different kinds of players with different age groups and the time they spend on online gaming. Future studies on built-in advertisement, advergames and dynamic advertisement can be compared and checked for effectiveness.

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