

ARG Technology as a Method to Promote Goods and Services

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Abstract: Under declining efficiency of traditional types of advertising the issue of alternative technologies able to provoke the consumer's interest is ever more urgent. The use of ARG technologies to promote various goods and services makes it possible to maintain the interest in already existing products or promote a new product or service on the market. By identifying the target audience, a potential developer of commercial ARG is able to understand the sales potential of this technology in Kemerovo region.

Keywords: *marketing communications, advertising, marketing, Kemerovo region, Alternate Reality Games (ARG), promotion*

I. INTRODUCTION

At present, it is not that easy to attract the interest of consumers in certain goods. Standard methods of product promotion do not give the required effect. Consumers became more careful and sometimes ignore standard advertising completely. Mass media do not anymore act as a major driver that influences the consciousness of consumers due to increased advertising pressure. Such advertising overload leads to the phenomenon called 'a banner blindness' when the consumer does not notice the advertising around. This 'disease' became a marketing problem due to the decreased influence of various advertising on consumers. Besides, the situation is aggravated by advertising circumvention: channel switching during TV advertising; special software in the browser designed as AddBlock. For these reasons, standard advertising promptly loses its efficiency despite the soaring

cost [1-4].

In the conditions of Internet technologies and keen interest of youth in virtual space and augmented reality, the development of new creative communication sources for diverse target audience is still relevant for the promotion of various types of products.

The purpose of this work is to study the interest of the target audience in new forms of communication and to identify the most promising areas.

The subject is relevant due to imminent changes in the Russian advertising market, which includes the growing number of traditional advertising alongside with simultaneous loss of efficiency caused by consumers' disregard, development of protection measures against advertising, and cost increase of traditional advertising.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A new advertising technology – adver gaming that includes Alternate Reality Games (ARG) – is gaining its popularity these days. Alternate Reality Games, as a new area of product promotion, is able to overcome factors leading to ad rejection by the consumer. The efficiency of this technology is non-intrusive promotion of goods or brands by attracting consumers using the entertaining content. The Alternate Reality Games is well studied in the western market and is successfully put into practice. While in the Russian market this method did not find its commercial application.

Today there is an urgent need to introduce the Alternate

Reality Games into the list of modern tools used for product promotion in Russia, in particular in Kemerovo region, as well as to expand knowledge on the matter.

This pilot study represents an attempt to consider the use of the Alternate Reality Games in the market of Kemerovo region and to evaluate its advantages.

The Alternate Reality Games (ARG) can be divided into two big groups: commercial projects; noncommercial projects.

It is clear from the name that the first are intended to engage the buyers and to promote goods, as well as to search or assess the professional knowledge of employees. Some organizations abroad use ARG to collect public opinion or assess the society.

Well-designed ARG serve the impetus for product recognition. They are traditionally launched prior to the introduction of any new or updated product to the market. The game participants constantly face these goods thus making them recognizable through associations.

It is important to understand that it is impossible to launch commercial ARG only to introduce a new candy bar. Since it is quite an expensive project, there is no sense in doing the enormous work just to advertise food. However, a new food item may be a part of a clue encountered by players throughout the game thus ensuring product recognition.

Since on average thousands of players are engaged into ARG at once it is a good way to advertise your product. Hence, you can advertise anything.

The advertising takes place within a game. For example, key information needed to move to the next stage of a game can be found in product description or its composition; or on a website devoted to any product. ARG are used not only for entertainment or for advertising. There are a few projects aimed at employee search and training for various companies.

Hence, ARG perform the following functions: education, entertainment and promotion.

In turn, the educational function is divided into training and search. Training takes place by completing tasks in the project with a topic related to a certain position. Besides, the training projects are launched to broaden the horizon and increase the interest in a topic used in ARG. Projects on employee search are usually launched by IT companies. Such organizations value unconventional approach to the solution of a set task, and hence the game tasks will have multiple, sometimes unlimited solutions.

The entertainment projects are mainly noncommercial. If the game simply contains a set of certain tasks not connected by a plot, it will not attract the attention of players. Therefore, a lot of time and effort is devoted in ARG projects to constructing a plot.

Promotion may concern any product as long as it fits within a plot and meets the interests of the target audience. It is not efficient to advertise household appliances to a teenager since he will not be interested. The games are traditionally designed for male players from 14 to 40 years old. It will be more interesting for such people to see any gaming product in a plot – a carbonated drink, a device or a candy bar.

There are five basic principles of ARG projects, without

which a game is unable to function.

1. The concept of collective mind – the community of players' potential to pass the stages of a project. There are some moments in a game when it is impossible to solve a rebus/puzzle alone or in a group of three people.

2. The narration structure is not linear, but chaotic and interrelated – the game plot can adjust or change under the rate of development of a game process. Often the players cannot solve some problem, and then the initiator throws a hint to proceed with the game. Or, when a game gains momentum and there is a risk that the project will end ahead of time the initiator or the screenwriter can suspend the progress by introducing changes into the plot.

3. If you want to hide something, leave it in sight – the entry to a game may serve the most striking example of this principle. The majority of projects use a key, a code or a symbol to enter the game, which is located on the foreground (advertising banner, website, groups in social networks).

4. The room is placed in the same communication environment similar to daily surrounding – for discussion or joint run-through the players are not limited in the choice of communication channels. These may include social networks, forums, messengers or communication in real life.

5. TINAG – (from English *This is not a game*). This principle implies that a game does not behave as a game. Each element in the game (website, phone number) shall be functioning.

ARG have specific terminology, the knowledge of which provides for simpler familiarization with this method of promotion/entertainment. Such terms are often met: 'rabbit holes' – the entrance to a game represented by any reference to a banner/leaflet/website; 'puppeteers/initiators' are the people responsible for the course of a game, etc.

The advantage of ARG projects, as well as all other projects related to adver gaming, is the fact that they entertain the audience, and the virus rate of these projects allows them quickly gaining the popularity with little effort since the non-standard way of promotion is better than the standard advertising in media. The disadvantages include the cost of these projects; the risk that the target audience may not like a game; possible critical defects in game elements (invalid phone number, website); information leakage on the game course.

The Alternate Reality Games are not so difficult to understand. This method is interesting because the consumer is involved in a game process. In this state the consumer can introduce the non-intrusive advertising of something. He will recognize a product through associative criteria. Taking into account the history of origin of this method it is possible to tell with confidence that the potential of Alternate Reality Games is almost boundless [5-9].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study conducted by the Forrester Research (Cambridge) [1] confirmed that over 25% of virtual space users show a lot of interest in games (Figure 1).

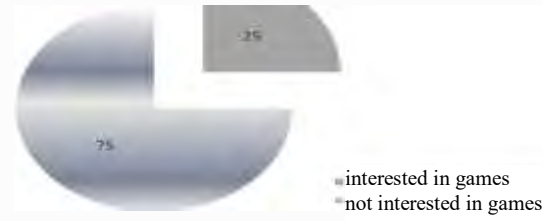


Fig. 1. Ratio of Internet users interested in games

The study revealed that 42% of gamers spend most of their free time playing games, while 18% of respondents said that the advergaming helps them to take in the situation in the world of modern goods and services and to make the right choice (Figure 2) [1].

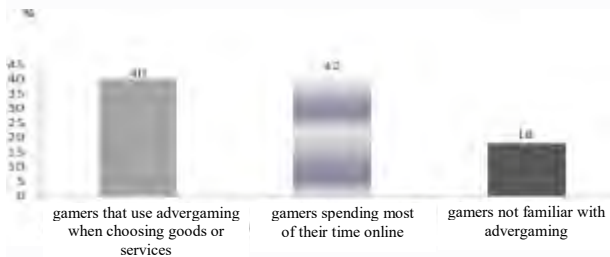


Fig. 2. Ratio of advergaming users

Experts studying advergaming say that it is one of the most promising methods of product promotion due to the combination of such aspects as communicativeness, attraction, ability to capture the attention of the target audience, which help the target audience to remember the advertised brand and highlight it with confidence among other competitive proposals [9].

According to the study, the popularity of the advergaming types is as follows: ATL – 47%; BTL – 38%; TTL – 15% from which 8% is accounted for ARG (Figures 3, 4).

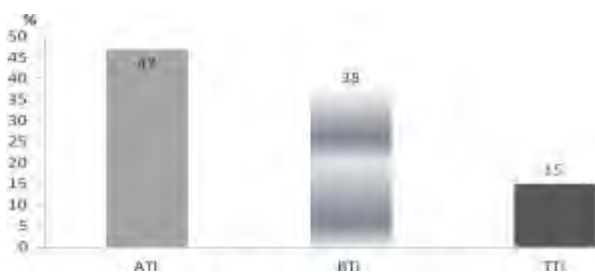


Fig. 3. Popularity of advergaming types



Fig. 4. Popularity of ARG among other advergaming types

It is caused by the fact that ARG projects are complicated and usually require enormous investments. Considering its relatively small disadvantages this type of projects has the lowest popularity as a type of product promotion.

According to the statistics, the ARG projects are mainly launched not on the local market but on the market of a country or countries. However, considering the immense territory of Russia, it is also possible to talk about local (regional) projects.

The given study concerned the interest of consumers in Kemerovo region in Alternate Reality Games. The survey included questions reflecting the attitude of respondents to the method of Alternate Reality Games. The survey was conducted on an interview basis through various social networks (VKontakte, Instagram, What'sUP, Telegram, Steam, Skype, Discord), as well as via direct contact with the respondents. The survey covered 400 people of different age groups: 1st group – from 15 to 20 (100 people), the 2nd group – from 21 to 30 (200 people), 3rd group – from 31 to 40 (100 people). The below figures show the results of the survey.

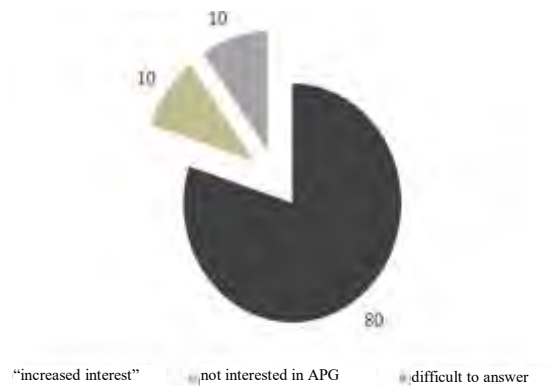


Fig. 5. Analysis of consumer interest in ARG (1st group)

The vast majority of the 1st group respondents were included into the category 'increased interest', i.e. 80% of the total number of respondents showed their interest in such projects. This may indicate that the ARG method is interesting

to people aged 15-20 years old. Only 10% of respondents got into the 'no' category.

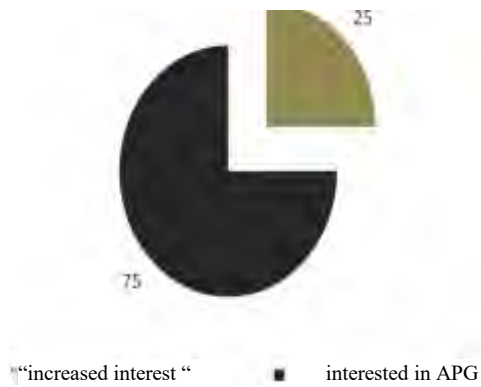


Fig. 6. Analysis of consumer interest in ARG (2nd group)

Only 25% of the 2nd group respondents got into the 'increased interest' category, while 75% showed their interest in ARG. This may indicate that people from 21 to 30 years old are interested in such projects, but they will most likely act as viewers rather than players.

The analysis of the 3rd group demonstrates that people from 31 to 35 years old are interested in ARG projects, but to a lesser extent than other groups. It is possible to conclude that the third group will be that audience that will occasionally follow the game course.

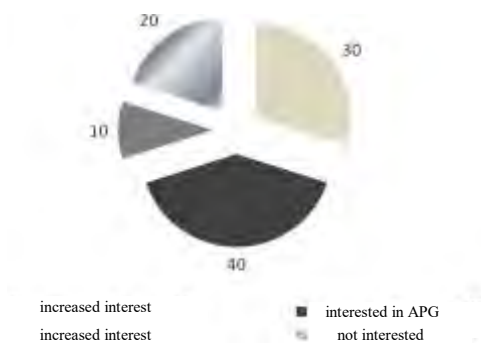


Fig. 7. Analysis of consumer interest in ARG (3rd group)

Thus, the survey revealed that 41% of respondents showed increased interest, 39% of respondents were interested, 17% of respondents were 'indifferent' and 3% of respondents referred to 'no' category (Figure 8).

The first and the second groups showed the greatest interest. There were no considerable gender differences. Hence, the target audience of Alternate Reality Games in Kemerovo region shall mainly include people from 15 to 30 years old.

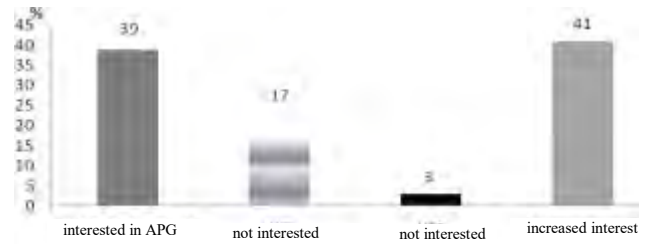


Fig. 8. Analysis of consumer interest in ARG in all groups in total

These results provide the potential developer of a commercial ARG project with information on what goods can be integrated into the project based on the interests of the target audience, alongside with the future plot of a game [10-15].

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study showed that this technology is necessary as a new communication technology in commercial and noncommercial projects for the development in the market of Kemerovo region.

The use of ARG technology for the promotion of various goods and services to potential consumers and stimulation of demand will allow maintaining the interest in already existing product or possibly promoting a new product or service on the market.

ARG can be aimed to maintain the interest in a new type of product or service and may be carried out between seasons.

As a rule, ARG does not require any payment. All game expenses are covered by a product advertising payout within the ARG framework.

At the same time, contrary to commonly held misconception that only men are interested in games, today the majority of advergammers are women of the senior age group. In this regard the use of ARG technology will allow attracting the audience that 'is poorly attracted' to other communication channels since most of the purchases are made by women.

The common trend noted by various experts is the fact that traditional marketing methods do not produce the desirable effect. A strict classical marketing strategy was dissolved in a digital space: 'product – target audience – advertising medium' and is replaced with a new concept: 'person – gadget – digital search engine – purchase'. The ARG technologies may replace traditional advertising (media) in the future. The main reason for this is that often the target audience is already presented by active users of communicative processes. Today their direct participation is ensured through personal digital devices, using which they obtain information with sufficient content and distribute it further, i.e. implement personal marketing actions in the information space.

The ARG technology allows attracting the greatest number of potential consumers thus connecting them with the corresponding daily needs. If virtual and material realities are

connected, then such alliance can demonstrate the real favorable impact on consumers. In certain cases, people personally deal with a brand, and hence it is possible that they will be the followers and adherents of this brand.

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