

A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Character Presence in Advergaming and Its Impact on Brand Outcomes

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the cross-cultural impact of character presence in advertising games on brand outcomes. The study was quantitative in nature and selected 500 participants through snow-ball sampling technique. The participants were Saudis and Malaysians. A questionnaire was created to collect data from the survey sample. The data collected was then analyzed using the Social Sciences Statistics Package version 23.0 (SPSS). Descriptive statistical analysis using standard deviation, mean, and frequencies were applied. Pearson Correlation was applied to identify the relation among the variables. The study found no significant correlation between brand outcome and character presence in advergaming where a significant correlation was found in culture and character presence in advergaming. The study concluded that humanoid characters in advergaming should be operated attentively because interesting or engaging game characters affect the player's attitude in a different way depending upon the classification of the brand and its target market's ethnic traditions and history.

Keywords: brand outcomes, character presence, cross-cultural aspect, advergaming, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia

1. Introduction

Recently, businesses have started employing advertising games to market both their new and existing goods and services. To spread awareness and strengthen brand connection, marketers use their companies in engaging tools like games. Advergaming is a combination of two words namely, advertising and games. It comprises of product associated messages from the organizations which are incorporated in the form of game pieces, hidden assets and other game elements (Choi, 2019). They are custom-built games specially made to uplift a brand, and their importance has increased and have become an integral part of branding for some companies. Previous studies states that the games which are designed to promote a specific brand have got potential to be more influential and engaging rather than the games which are not based to uplift a brand, advergaming are able to grab the attention of the consumers, drive brand awareness, entertainment and can be customized (Aktan & Koçak, 2020). One of the main advantages of using this platform is that the advertisers can have an easy access to global consumers with customized, engaging agents like cartoonic spokes-characters (Choi et al., 2015). To take maximized advantage of advergaming, the brands need to be well informed of the ongoing trends and components that increase the success of advergaming through this gateway. Some studies from the recent past suggest that an increased level of compatibility among the game and the brand advertised escorts to a greater acceptance of promotion through a game (McKay-Nesbitt & Yoon, 2015). This is a free of charge platform where users can play as well as explore. Several researches have looked into how well characters work in emotive advertising. Marzouk et al. (2021) but not many have explored the influence of character presence on brand outcomes in advergaming from cross-cultural aspect. By conducting an empirical study to determine the character presence in advertising video games and its impact on brand outcome from a cross-cultural point of view, this study solves the aforementioned gap. This study brings in the cross-cultural aspect to determine the effect of character presence in advergaming and its impact on brand outcome.

In line with this, take an example of, the North American cultures like America and Canada, the influential impact of others on the thoughts and behaviours of individuals is a socially pertinent variable (Choi et al., 2015). Studies have identified that during social communication, North Americans are more likely to use Aristotle's formal logic than East Asians. In North American culture, a social gathering may prompt a person to assess

another's persuasive strategies. In situations like these, where the person is socially active and prepared, they will show more different and intense reactions to persuasive attempts (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). By considering this thought in relation with advergaming, a comparison between the product of the brand and the character of the game would make a North American player to think that coercion makes sense, nonetheless a repercussion may arise if the player finds a mismatch. In cases such as these, an inadequate setting of advergence may alert the customers to rely on persuasion information and as an outcome of it, may face a reduction while gaming. On the other hand, in East Asian region like in Korea, China and Japan, people are used to the constant presence of others in their surroundings. This lets a person observe or explore different people's attitudes and values in what is called constructive passive monitoring (Nelson et al., 2004). Therefore, in East Asian countries, individuals adjust themselves to monitor by other society members. In this situation, an inadequate setting of advergaming does not have a chance to grow persuasion knowledge of players and minimizes their better gaming experience. In other words, the presence or lack of a human-like figure in a game may cause Americans but not Koreans to react differently to an advertisement game's persuasive goals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Hofstede, 1996; Yoon et al., 2010; Triandis, 2018). Furthermore, Zajonc (1965) defines that the presence of other individuals yields increase in the stages of arousal. For instance, the presence of others enhances performance for similar tasks but presents obstacles for innovative or difficult tasks. By applying this argument to a virtual environment, Park and Catrambone (2007) hypothesized that even when performing an easy task, performance in the presence of a virtual human character was better than in the condition where the player was all alone, while performance in the virtual human condition was worse than the alone condition for difficult tasks. When considering these two study findings together, it makes sense to assume that playing an advertisement game with a character would be similar to using a publicly accessible product, but not that it would be similar to using a privately accessible product. Therefore, the presence of tokens can improve the performance of publicly consumed products, but can worsen the performance of privately consumed products.

Previous studies have shown that values and traditions influence logic and thinking processes, as East Asians and North Americans have different thinking styles. For instance, East Asians pay more attention to the background information while North Americans use more of the focal points (Masuda & Nisbett, 2001). In regard to advergaming, a player's attention to a particular object in a game is influenced by both its placement and their cultural tendencies. Because the Koreans are more influenced by backdrop pictures than the Americans are, it is believed that the Americans will be more affected by fictitious entertainment like gaming. In this scenario, the presence of the character will have a significant impact on how well the game performs among Koreans, but it will have less of an impact for Americans when the character appears in the background image.

Different people may have different experiences and different attitudes and perceptions. For instance, compared to females, male college students were shown to be much more likely to play video games for two or more hours per day, which interfered with their sleep and study time (Ogletree & Drake, 2007). According to a research by Yang et al. (2006) on brand placement and recall, college students had poor levels of explicit memory for brands but had implicit memory for the names of the brands featured in the games. After being introduced to the goods, this kind of conduct influences the consumer's intention to buy it. After a particular amount of time and after the customer has committed to memory important facts on the choice to purchase, the likelihood that the consumer intends to acquire the brand or the product is established (Rossantny et al., 2018). Based on the above literature, the study formulates the below hypotheses:

H1: Culture and Character presence are significantly correlated

H2: Character Presence and Brand Outcomes are significantly correlated.

2. Methods

2.1 Study Design and Setting

This research is quantitative in nature and is carried out in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. The scope of the study includes brand outcomes, character presence, cross-culture and advergaming. Character presence mediates between culture and advergaming.

2.2 Study Participants and Sampling Technique

Participants in the study were selected from Malaysia and Saudi Arabia through an online study that included gamers. The study participants were contacted and asked whether they play games or not. If yes, then they were asked to proceed by clicking the link which led to the online questionnaire. Those who did not play games were asked to refer friends or people they know were avid players. Therefore, a snow-ball sampling technique was applied to recruit more study participants. In this manner, a total of 500 participants who agreed to take part in

the study were chosen. Moreover, the aim of the study was explained and a written consent form was signed by each one of them before the commencement of the study. The required sample size, with a 95 percent confidence level and a 5 percent error margin, was 260, according to the Raosoft online calculator. Furthermore, the participants of the study were contacted through emails based on suggestions from friends of authors and other study participants.

2.3 Study Instrument

A survey questionnaire was constructed on Google form. The questionnaire consisted of two sections, the first section was dedicated to the demographic details of the participants whereas the second part comprised of items based on brand outcomes, culture, character presence and advergaming. All these items were based on 7 Point-Likert Scale where 1—Strongly Agree, 2—Agree, 3—Strongly Disagree, 4—Disagree, 5—Partially Agree, 6—Partially Disagree, and 7—Neutral.

2.4 Data Collection and Analysis

A total of 800 forms were emailed to the participants. Out of 800 only 550 forms were received and even out of them only 500 were selected whereas 50 of them were discarded as they were comprised of missing information. So the final sample size of the study was 500. Statistical Package of Social Sciences version 23.0 was used to further analyse the collected data and extract the results (SPSS). Descriptive statistical analysis was applied using means, standard deviation and frequencies of the items in the questionnaire. Moreover, to check the hypotheses a regression analysis using SEM was applied.

3. Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistical analysis of items given in the questionnaire of all the responses from the study participants. It shows brand outcomes, character presence and culture. The mean and the standard deviation values for each variable lies close to other thus showing a significant association between them.

Table 1. Descriptive statistical analysis

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Frequency
Character Presence	0.77	0.64	45%
Culture	0.86	0.75	57%
Brand Outcomes	0.85	0.76	55%

Table 2 shows the influence of brand outcomes, character presence and cross-culture on advergaming design. All these variables show a significant impact on gamer's perspective and attitude towards advergaming settings.

Table 2. Influence of brand outcome, character presence and cross-culture

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig	95.0% Confidence level for Beta	
	Beta	Std error				Lower Boundary	Upper Boundary
Brand outcomes	87.84	6.385	0.45	13.45	0.000	65.155	99.506
Character Presence	0.118	0.32	0.55	8.877	0.000	0.182	0.544
Cross-Cultural	0.164	0.632	0.32	0.577	0.000	0.301	0.542

Table 3 shows the Factor loadings Average Variance and Composite reliability all the values are above 0.7 which shows that all the items in the questionnaire were considered to be good.

Table 3. Factor loading AVE and CR

Items	Standardized Factor Loading	AVE	CR
Character Presence	0.76	0.71	0.83
Brand Outcome	0.81	0.75	0.78
Culture	0.80	0.70	0.82

Table 4 shows the hypotheses testing, the estimated values for H1 was <0.001 which reflects that the hypothesis was supported where H2 was rejected.

Table 4. Hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	Estimate	Remarks
Culture →Character Presence	0.61***	Supported
Character Presence →Brand Outcome	0.04	Rejected

Note. ***<0.001.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The study aimed to bring in the cross-cultural aspect to determine the effect of character presence in advergames and its impact on brand outcome. The findings of the study suggested that character presence and cultural aspect are significantly related to each other. This finding is consistent with those of Marzouk et al. (2021), who claim that character presence is crucial for effective advertising using advergames in order to have a favourable impact on the brand outcomes while taking the cultural factor into consideration. Also, this finding is similar to the results of Masuda and Nisbett (2001) as they state that culture impacts the perceptual processes like East Asians and North Americans have different perceiving and thinking style. Therefore, character presence may result in greater performance for products intended for public consumption but worse performance for those intended for private use. In contrast, the study discovered no connection between character appearance and brand outcome in advertising games. Even though the study did demonstrate a favourable relationship between brand outcome and brand attitude, the inclusion of characters had no effect on players' attention when it came to remembering the brand in advertising games. This could be because of the games character's role was measured without taking into consideration its existence in the game without noticing its role for promoting the product or the brand. The current study contributes to the role of character presence in advergames and its impact on brand outcome from cross-cultural point of view. Some studies have focused on the impact of character presence on brand outcome but not from cross-culture aspect. This issue was addressed by the current study empirically. Academically, the relationship between brand outcomes and advergaming has been researched but how in the presence of character and the aspect of culture in advergames in order to develop interactive communication was not there. Therefore, this study adds to the literature pertaining to advergames. The sample for the study was drawn from the researcher's friend list due to time restrictions, which is one of the study's drawbacks. Secondly, the study did not identify the genre of game to experimentally test its effect on brand outcome and intention to purchase. Lastly, no impact was found by this study about character presence and brand outcome in advergaming. Therefore, future reseachers are recommended to investigate the effects of spokes-characters on other factors that will help to determine the success of advergame advertising strategy.

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