

# MASTER THESIS



The use of advergames in creating online consumer engagement

A case study of LEGO

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## **Abstract**

The title of the study is “The use of advergames in creating online consumer engagement. A case study of LEGO.” In this study the concept of using advergames in creation of online consumer engagement will be explored. In order to narrow the scope of the study two research questions were established: What are the elements of advergames that drive online consumer engagement?; How are advergames currently used by the market leading company in its marketing campaigns in order to create online consumer engagement? The outcome of the research can help deepen the current knowledge of scholars and practitioners in their communication and brand building evolving advergames and the creation of customer engagement in this area.

In order to gain more knowledge of online consumer engagement and advergames, numerous literary sources were used such as: papers, articles, books, and annual reports of LEGO. The collected data is supported by a vary of interviews with employees of LEGO from different departments.

After analysis of the collected data and linking it to the theoretical framework numerous conclusions can be drawn to answer the initial research questions. First, the attributes that stimulate advergames in creating online consumer engagement are the Unique Selling Proposition (technical features such as: the technical platform, game type, dimensions, genre, prominence of advertising and congruity of brand and game) and the Emotional Selling Proposition (representation elements such as audiovisual style, narration, procedural rhetoric).

Currently, LEGO integrates digital games in their integrated marketing approach, linking them tightly connected to certain real life products. On the other hand, the importance of advergames is growing as the study has identified that more and more company’s target customers (children) are moving towards digital entertainment specifically related to mobile technologies. For this, the company tries to create engagement and awareness by using advergames. The company tries to reach the light user group through storytelling and the middle to heavy user group through advanced technical elements of the games.

The limitations of the study is in particular the fact that the cases were taken from one company, one product market and one target consumer group means that the results of the study should be considered carefully when applying for other companies, product markets and consumer groups. Secondly, the qualitative method of research means that it is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researchers and more easily influenced by the researchers’ personal biases and peculiarity.

**Keywords: Advergames, Online consumer engagement, Case study, Integrated marketing campaign**

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# 1 Introduction

*The first chapter will provide an introduction and set as a background of the current research. Also the problem and purpose of the research project will be discussed. In conclusion an overview of the layout of the report will be presented and briefly explained.*

## 1.1. Background

In modern society advertising has proven to be a complex business and with the enhancement of influence from internet technology, the industry landscape is changing more rapidly than in the past (Kerin et al., 2012). Newly discovered communication tools and public targeting, incorporate research for enhancing knowledge of customer characteristics and the understanding of their attitudes in order to better facilitate the needs and wants of consumers. In recent years, more interest has come from the academic world and researchers to better comprehend the customer and their buying process. Due to the increased interest extensive research has been done in the area of developing strategies used to influence the consumer buying process and how to do this in the most efficient way possible (Blackwell et al., 2001).

Playing games has always been important to humankind. With the development of our society into a digital one, it seems logical that digital games are on rise and their dissemination continues to grow. Digital games have evolved into a mass medium that helps marketer to reach millions of people. Though games are typically designed toward youngsters, a substantial number of gamers are found at all age groups (Lenhart et al., 2008). According to the Entertainment Software Association (ESA, 2012), the average game player in the United States is 30 years old and has been playing games for 12 years. Advergaming is thought to be particularly effective with children as they have been shown to be especially susceptible to affective communication (Van Reijmersdal, 2009). The specific popularity of advergaming among children and teenagers qualifies them as a main target audience for this medium.

The playing of digital games is also no longer a male-dominated phenomenon, as 47% of all game players are women (Terlutter & Capella, 2013). Interestingly, the reasons for playing digital games depend on the gender. The main reason of women is to relieve or eliminate stress, while men are attracted by the competitive factor of Internet gaming. Women prefer word and puzzle games, while men are more interested in sport, combat or casino games (Gurău, 2008).

Advergaming can be broadly defined as the use of gaming interactive technology to deliver marketing messages to the public (Dobrow 2004, Thomases 2001). These are interactive games that are developed around a specific product, brand or character associated to a brand or product. Due to the fact that the games are developed around the brands and products they are blended in the game itself by association or more demonstrative methods. The need for these new online tools such as advergaming is a result from the swift deterioration of media advertising in the 1990s (Chen & Ringel 2001, Yuan et al. 1998). According to Visiongain's report (2010), in 2010 the advergaming industry had revenues in excess of \$3 billion globally, while in 2004 they reached only \$83.6 million.

The interactivity and unique involvement of advergaming differs them from more convenient online advertising forms such as banner and pop-up advertising, whose initial promise as advertising vehicles has not been fulfilled (Deal, 2005).

Advergaming allow different levels of brand promotion, from passive product placement in background scenes to the product being an integral part of the game itself, as in car racing games in which the cars are fully branded and shown in accurate detail (Chen & Ringel, 2001).

Strong brands such as Coca-Cola, Honda, Burger King and Gillette have already invested in advergaming (Shields, 2006). Preliminary efficiency of the Burger King advergaming, for instance, showed an increase of 40% in the company's profits (Wilson, 2007). The advergaming made by Dunkin Donut persuaded the visitors of the company's Web-site to stay for additional 4 minutes in average (Cauberghe & De Pelsmacker, 2010). All these facts can be seen as the evidence of growing power of advergaming in marketing communication.

The rise of the Internet has led to a fundamental shift in the way businesses engage with their clients. Online consumer engagement is used in relation to online consumer behavior in the business and academic circles. However the use of the term is interpreted in different manners when applying it to the online domain. While the practitioners mainly put emphasis on sharing (Gillin, 2007; Swedowsky, 2009; Wong, 2009), academics have concentrated their energy on capturing the attention, mind or energy (Douglas & Hargadon, 2001; Guthrie et al., 2004; Mollen & Wilson, 2010; O'Brien & Toms, 2008, 2010; O'Brien, 2010). The use of advergaming in this sphere is seen as particularly interesting.

## **1.2. Research problem**

Although the advergaming topic is widely discussed in the academic world, the lack of studies from the companies' point of view in this case can be determined as a research problem for this study. Advergaming create a fast growing, controversial and hardly understood form of marketing communication. Additionally, there is a lack of integrated theoretically-grounded research regarding the effects and effectiveness of advergaming in engaging customers.

Results of the present study contributes to the digital and engagement marketing literature by deepening the understanding of how advergaming are used in modern marketing campaigns in order to create customer engagement. The paper is designed to help academics in their further research on the subject, as well as to facilitate relevant company specialists, such as digital marketing managers and game designers, in their marketing communication and brand building. This paper can help them to understand better the way advergaming work and explain the elements that could be used for engaging consumers and raising their awareness about the company and products.

## **1.3. Research purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore the concept of using advergaming in creation of online consumer engagement.

## **1.4. Research questions**

Thus, the following questions are asked in this paper:

1. What are the elements of advergaming that drive online consumer engagement?;
2. How are advergaming currently used by the market leading company in its marketing campaigns in order to create online consumer engagement?

## 1.5. Delimitations

This study will examine online consumer engagement from the companies' point of view but not from the customers' one due to the availability of research on the latter subject in academic literature. Therefore, this study will not focus on individual and social factors that can influence the engagement process.

Additionally, the proposed conceptual framework is situated within the stimulus – organism – response (S-O-R) model adopted from Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) environmental psychology model. This model suggests that specific features of an environment provoke an individual's emotional state, which causes a behavioral reaction (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). For this study the S-O-R model is applied within the consumer behavior literature. Other theories on online consumer engagement are not used at all or used very broadly in the current study, which can be determined as another delimitation.

## 1.6. Thesis structure

The thesis structure is outlined in Figure 1 as can be seen below. It can be seen, noticed, that chapter six contains the summary of the research. Readers who would like to have a concise brief overview of the research result are recommended to move to chapter six.

The *first chapter* will supply the reader with a small background to the research problem. A justification of the research purpose and topic will be provided together with the research questions, and delimitation of the research will also be put forward.

In *chapter two* the research design will be introduced. In this chapter accounts and justifications will be provided in the research method chosen.

The *third chapter* will focus on the establishing of a theoretical framework, based in the field of in-game advertisement with a focus on advergaming. Especially the literature on engagement, in-game advertisement, and advergaming will be instrumental to the framework. Multiple notions will be explored regarding their definition, relevance and their effect on each other. At the end of the chapter a preliminary engagement model based on the theoretical findings will be presented.

*Chapter four* will provide comprehension of the empirical findings framing the research.

The *fifth chapter* will provide an account of the empirical study. The chapter will start with a detailed explanation in which the chosen course of action will be described. In *chapter five* the empirical findings are combined and linked to the theoretical findings from the third chapter in order to verify the framework.

At last in *chapter six* the study is summarized and the research contributions are explored. Also the limitations are mentioned and propositions for further research will be made.

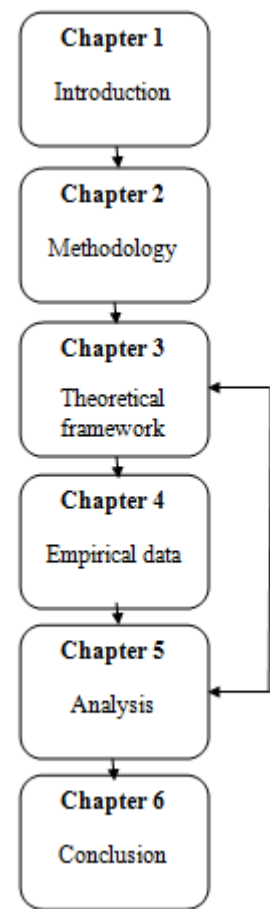


Image 1 Thesis Structure

### **3 Theoretical framework**

*In this chapter relevant literature is reviewed. First a background of advergames and consumer engagement will be provided, in order to create a clear general understanding of the concepts. This will be followed by the presentation of the theoretical model that was created by the authors. After the theoretical framework the different aspects of the model will be discussed more in depth afterwards.*

#### **3.1 Background**

##### **3.1.1 Advergames**

According to Purswani (2010), advergames are interactive video games whose purpose is to advertise where players take the role of a character in completing certain objectives. They are usually hosted on the Internet, however, during the recent years there have been a substantial move towards mobile (Advertising Education Forum, 2012).

Advergaming is defined as the use of gaming interactive technology to deliver marketing messages to the public (Dobrow 2004; Thomases 2001). Due to the fact that these games are developed around the brands and products they are incorporated as part of an advergaming execution which is produced specifically for the sponsoring brand, in essence making the game itself the brand message (Chen & Ringel 2001; Deal 2005).

Advergames are mostly free of charge, downloadable from or playable on the brand's website, easy and fun to play, and offer quick rewards. They are mostly casual games (Redondo, 2012). Advergames are usually designed for short playing periods as well as for longer play periods in order to be easily played during short breaks in the day, such as waiting times, on tablets, or smartphones. (Terlutter & Capella, 2013)

The ancestors of advergames were mail-order Atari cartridge games used to advertise products, however, the concept has not altered significantly. These mail-order advertising games were rare and largely ignored back in the 1980s, unlike the contemporary advergames (Bogost, 2007).

Modern advergames started simply as online games that incorporate marketing content. In the beginning, many businesses have placed their brand logos in the computer games virtual environment created by specialized gaming firms. However, this form of advergaming is rather static and ineffective as the player is concentrated on the task required by the game and might not acknowledge the brand image displayed in the background. This limitation has encouraged the companies to launch their own advergames, which are developed around a theme or a character directly related with their products and/or brands. To ensure a large diffusion of these games, they were designed to be freely available on the Internet. The facilities offered by the Internet platform have increased the level of interactivity of the game, and have added a viral marketing possibility (Călin, 2010).

The overall production quality of advergames continues to increase every year. Today, many advergames have larger budgets than casual games, and are reaching a level of complexity and polish equal to or greater than other parts of the game industry. These games may incorporate video, prerendered 3D graphics, or even Xbox 360 console games (Antonsson, & Games, 2009).

## Industry perspective

Originally, the need for new online tools such as advergaming is a result from the swift deterioration of media advertising in the 1990s (Chen & Ringel, 2001). According to Fernandez et al. (2006), online games are the future of the interactive entertainment industry, seeing the convergence between the traditional media, and entertainment industry, and the gaming industry in an effort to develop new and sustainable business models and revenue streams in an increasingly online world.

Businesses consider the attractive features of advergaming are: the easy adjustability, cost-effectiveness and the viral marketing component (Ipe, 2008). Advergaming are easily built around the product, for example, flash games are not especially difficult to create, and these games offer variety to consumers (Purswani, 2010).

The advergaming medium can be comparably cheap for companies to use, and for consumers to play. Further, advergaming offer many advantages over other channels. Customers, faced with repetitive and obtrusive advertisements, will usually react with irritation and experience negative feelings towards the product (Ipe, 2008).

The development of effective advergaming is one of the most challenging tasks for online marketers these days. Chen and Ringel (2001) provide some guidelines for the development of efficient digital gaming campaigns that are founded on the principles of website development (Lazar, 2001) and marketing strategies:

- advergaming must be developed to a baseline specification which enables it to work effectively on standard browsers, operating systems, mobile platforms and hardware,
- advergaming works within the context of a media campaign whereby users are led from one medium to another (e.g., from television advertisements or printed material to online games),
- market research goals should be incorporated into the interactive environment such that requests for information from players provide valuable information,
- advergaming are most successful when targeted at those most likely to enjoy online game playing (i.e., 2-13 and 18-49 year olds),
- games should be kept simple, as complex games may deter continued interaction.

Advergaming seem to have evolved in response to low click-through rates for conventional web advertisements such as banner ads because of growing cynicism about banner advertisements as well as the advantage of having the product in the background or as part of the main character in the interactive game (Kretchmer, 2004; Deal, 2005). Displaying advertisements in the background during certain games is more accepted than other occurrences of advertising, since consumers feel it advertisements to the realism of the game (Ipe, 2008). The average amount of time spent on advergaming is 7 to 30 minutes, longer than television advertisements (Ipe, 2008).

The product and brand name placement in films or TV-shows is a relatively old technique, but the advergaming format present a few distinct features that can eventually enhance their marketing effect (Călin, 2010):

- the advergaming are selected by the player himself/herself and are not forced upon an unwilling user,
- the player interacts with advergaming adopting an active stance, in comparison with the passive attitude of the TV audience,

- advergaming incite the players to share the gaming experience with their friends or family. According to Ipe (2008), firms can use advergaming as a viral form of advertisement, with in-built features allowing players to pass on the game to their friends. 86% of internet users pass on viral content to one friend, and 49% pass them on to three friends.

Campaign planners tend to recognize this value. According to Visiongain's report (2010), in 2010 the advergaming industry had revenues in excess of \$3 billion globally, while in 2004 they reached only \$83.6 million.

Users can access advergaming at any time at the Internet, and the retentive nature of the games helps to prolong the time people are exposed to the ad, and keeps them coming back. Unlike other forms of advertising, advergaming can create telepresence and this involvement in the goals of the game and the fate of the character can help ingrain the brand into the user's memory and experiences (Purwani, 2010).

Recent studies also state that the advergaming format can be distinguished from just in-game advertising (Caugher & De Pelsmacker, 2010). The difference is that the latter closely represents traditional product placement within a game, whereas advergaming are specially made to promote the brand. Advergaming are also usually less complex and advanced than "real" games with "in-game" advertisements; they have simpler design, rules and shorter playing time. Therefore, advergaming can be easily constructed and promoted through different platforms, such as on Web-sites, via email, on cell phones and on interactive digital video resources (Caugher & De Pelsmacker, 2010).

The benefits of this medium are the interactivity, retention and entertainment value offered; this can offset the natural decay experienced by all advertisements. Advergaming create a positive emotional investment in the player using telepresence, ingrain their brand in the consumer's memory that is considered as the most complex reason that are an effective medium to make a product stand out with (Purwani, 2010).

### **Academic perspective**

The substantial potential of advergaming as a new form of interactive advertising provides proprietary research directions that evaluate the effectiveness of advergaming, however, little academic research gives the potential to offer theoretically grounded insights into the power of specific features of advergaming on desired communication effects (Wise et al., 2008).

While more scientists are turning their attention toward advergaming, the majority of studies are related to content analyses (Moore, 2006), the effects of advergaming on children (Advertising Education Forum 2012; Mallinckrodt & Mizerski 2007) or consider social policy regulations (Hawkes, 2006). Moreover, most writings on in-game advertising focus on traditional product placements in online and console games rather than advergaming (Wise et al., 2008).

From a marketing point of view, advergaming attempt to capture the attention of players, and then to transmit to them, in an indirect way, suggestions that aim to influence their perceptions regarding a company, brand or product (Călin, 2010). The psychological basis of this process is the inducement and the use of so-called 'state of flow'. This concept is used by psychologists to explain a mental state in which the attention is highly concentrated on a particular process, the environmental information is screened out, and the person experiences a harmonious flow of its present experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). This state of flow can be induced by any activity that is highly interesting for a person: watching a movie, reading a book or playing a game. In

fact, the playing activity is considered as one of the best inducers of the flow state for children, and often for adults as well.

Although advergames as product placement fits in the broadest sense, the scientists argue that seeing these as integrated marketing communications better explains their role in an on-going, interactive, synergistic marketing campaign. Integrated marketing communications is the process of managing all sources of information about a product/service to which a customer or prospect is exposed which behaviorally moves the consumer toward a sale and maintains customer loyalty (Schultz, 1996). Any theory aiming to explain the influence of advergames must therefore account for their place in wider, on-going campaigns, and how they tie in with other aspects of them (Advertising Education Forum, 2012).

Terlutter and Capella (2013) state that the user's perception of advertising in digital games can be explained through four theoretical models: persuasion knowledge model, social cognitive theory, limited-capacity model of mediated message processing, and the concept of flow.

The persuasion knowledge model says that customers develop an understanding over time about the intentions of marketing and the tactics employed by marketers to achieve desired outcomes. So while the user grows up and matures his or her ability to approach advertisements with both skepticism and rationality develops (An & Stern, 2011). As children often have underdeveloped abilities to recognize the persuasive intent of an advergame, the confusion between program and advertising content is exacerbated by the lack of explicit advertising cues within the game (An & Stern 2011; Terlutter & Capella 2013).

The second model - social cognitive theory, suggested by Bandura (1977; 2001) – is based on behavior defined as interaction of personal factors, behavior and environment. These interactions in turn influence the way participants respond to what they learn and observe in a game. The implication for advergames is that learning can take place in this medium (Cicchirillo & Lin, 2011).

The limited-capacity model of mediated message processing (Lang, 2000) has a lot of importance for understanding of the effectiveness of brand and product placement in advergames. It suggests that users' capacities to process activities through encoding, storing, and retrieval are limited and if they are oversaturated with stimulus their recall capabilities diminish (Cicchirillo & Lin 2011). According to Piaget and Inhelder (1969), while children mature they go through several stages of cognitive processing, so as advergames connect advertisements with fun interactive content it result in children's inability to distinguish the persuasive intent within a game (Terlutter & Capella, 2013). Further research suggests that prominent brand placements can capture a player's attention and aid in better brand recall (d'Astous and Chartier 2000; Lee and Faber 2007) .

The concept of flow describes a "state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Advergames create exceptional opportunities for the user to enter the flow state, and some studies have described the role that flow or its antecedents have through the efficiency of advertising in digital games (e.g., Nelson, Yaros, & Keum 2006; Schneider & Cornwell 2005).

Besides marketing, the particular attention of the academic research of advergames is being paid to children and adolescents as they are seen as a particularly vulnerable group to persuasive messages due to their lack of cognitive skills (Moore 2006; Roedder-John 1999). In addition,

children traditionally have high level of access to electronic media (Clarke, 2010). The use of advergames targeting children is noticeably the immersive digital marketing technique that attracts most comment from academic literature (Advertising Education Forum 2012; Moore 2006; Turnipseed and Rask 2007). In this case, most authors argue to what extent the use of advergames in marketing communication is ethic and allowable as in the majority of countries there is a lack of legal regulations in this sphere compared to the traditional advertising mediums (Advertising Education Forum 2012; Hawkes 2006).

Another direction of research is the possibility of using advergames in education. From the early days of advergaming there was a discrepancy between advergames which used the opportunity to educate and those which did not. It can also be seen that advergames were produced cheaply and did not directly compete with full-priced retail games. This trend continues in contemporary times as most advergames are being flash games played on the internet and created relatively cheaply (Purswani, 2010).

Further, there is also a technical academic interest in advergaming. Some research was dedicated to clarify the advergames creation mechanics from the technology point of view, such as: budget and design issues, conceptual and goal oriented issues, production and distribution models, technology choice, development and testing, etc. (Antonsson, & Games, 2009).

Although there are a lot of writings on this particular medium, it is still a new area of research, and the academics are still debating how to explain the use, purpose and effect of advergames (Advertising Education Forum 2012; Turnipseed & Rask 2007). Partially, this is due to the fact that this sphere is constantly changing and developing.

### **3.1.2 Online Consumer Engagement**

In the following section the engagement concept is examined from the industry and academic point of view. After presentation of both views and their interpretation of definition of consumer engagement. The study will establish a definition that builds on both views, to be the point of reference necessary to serve as the foundation of the framework.

The term “engagement” can have multiple definitions. The most well known meaning is the duration of an agreement to get married (Oxford dictionary of English, 2012), but also it can mean the agreement to do something or go somewhere at a specific time, or a fight or battle between armed forces (Oxford dictionary of English, 2012). By illustrating the different meaning of the word engagement it can be seen to which degree the definition varies.

In the business and academic field engagement is used in relation to online consumer behaviour. However the use of the term is interpreted in different manners when applying it to the online domain. While the practitioners mainly put emphasis on sharing (Gillin, 2007; Swedowsky, 2009; Wong, 2009), academics have concentrated their energy on capturing the attention, mind or energy (Douglas & Hargadon, 2001; Guthrie et al., 2004; Mollen & Wilson, 2010; O’Brien & Toms, 2008, 2010; O’Brien, 2010). By illustrating the industry and academic point of views on the term engagement, attempt is made to find and overcome the different perspectives and to establish a new definition of the engagement concept.

#### **Industry Perspective**

The current online landscape has changed significantly over the last decade, with the increasing popularity of social media mediums such as: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter but also online



games. This shift has caused a change in the way that the industry now approach their customers and how the customers can reply back to the companies. This means that marketing is not longer a one way street of communication towards the consumers that is controlled by the company, and instead of this monologue approach. If companies want to be successful in the current communication environment the need to change a interactive to two-way communication approach where the power is spread between company and consumer (Evans and McKee, 2013).

The most important objective according to author Evans and McKee (2013) is that the companies should try to engage consumers by using the web. In the book “Engage: The Complete Guide for Brands and Businesses to Build, Cultivate, and Measure Success in the New Web,” mentions that companies should either participate or not do it all to use web marketing (Solis, 2010).

In a blog of the Harvard Business Review, Principal analysis and Chief executive officer of Constellation Research, Wang (2011) suggest that engagement can provide customers with a voice. Practitioners are convinced that the best to give consumer a voice is give them the tools to allow them to participate (Evans & McKee, 2013; Harden & Heyman, 2009; Wang; Solis, 2010). By engaging consumers they become more than just viewers, they become actively involved which means they will feel more closely involved with the company (Evans & McKee, 2013). Also the authors mention that engagement can be divined as the active participation of consumer within the web, trying to push consumer beyond the initial stage of consumption and let them be interactive with the company can lead to a firms success (Evans & McKee, 2013). Comparably, Atherley (2013) explains the engagement process as being as a active way of participation, in which engaged customers can interact with the companies. Davey (2012) raises the question that engagement is created by using a game to substitute real experience in order to create engagement with the consumers.

Online consumer engagement can emerge in many different forms such as downloading, reading, watching or playing content provided by a firm. Customers also have the opportunity to assess or grade the firms content ( Evans & McKee, 2013). Besides these points customers also have the opportunity to interactively respond to company and different customers. More specifically advergates let the customers be acquainted with firm advertising by using a video game platform. The game makes the player be the very important person, chief and an authority simultaneously. By understanding the importance of using a virtual gaming environment for the consumer the firm is one step closer to being able to create customer engagement. It can be assumed that the marketing team viewpoint of engagement by using the online world can be considered a specific point of focus (Evans & McKee, 2013). But, it can be seen that this meaning is deepens by also adding a cognitive and affective view to the engagement definition.

In spite of the fact that industry related studies regard cognitive and affective engagement behaviour as closely linked, most firms still consider engagement as being customers being participants in the virtual world. The scholars furthermore consider too, affective and cognitive behaviours as being part of the engagement process, but they suggest to also include the behaviour perspective. In the following paragraphs a more detailed outline of the scholarly perspective on engagement and online engagement is provided.

### **Academic Perspective**

The engagement concept has been reviewed by multiple different academic areas Apart from these different between the definition of engagement in the different research areas, the view of the scholar is also influenced by the usage of one-dimensional perspective, which uses only one

of the proposed engagement behaviours (cognitive, affective, or participation). Meanwhile the multidimensional view aims to use all three or two of the previously mentioned engagement behaviour attributes. In the academic areas that are considered not marketing related the usage of the one-dimensional view is most often used (Brodie, Hollebeek, 2011). This use of a unidimensional can lead to less rich research.

## **Computer Science**

The engagement phenomenon has also been examined and studied in literature on computer conveyed interaction with as main focus point to exceed the usability, but instead aim for experiences (Hassenzahl&Tractinsky, 2006; Jacques, Preece, & Carey, 1995; Laurel, 1993). Within this frame of reference engagement is regarded as a necessary human reply to computer conveyed activities Laurel, 1993).

Notable authors in the field of computer science in the engagement area are O'Brien and Toms who published many studies and books. They state that computer system and applications need to enrich their thinking from functionality and technicality to system engagement (O'Brien & Toms, 2008). To research the engagement inside the range of computer systems they spread out their finding over different studies and articles. In the first study they conducted an exploratory study that used multidisciplinary literature, combining the play theory (Rieber, 1996; Woszczyński, 2002), flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), aesthetics theory (Jennings, 2000) and the interactive (Schneiderman, 1997) to underline the user experience. By combining the relevant parts of the four theories that were in closest relation to online engagement they developed six attributes of user engagement which are: perceived usability, aesthetics, focused attention, felt involvement, novelty and endurably. Authors O'Brien and Toms (2008) also proposed four stages of online engagement. The first stage is the point of engagement which can be seen as the moment when users invest more in the interaction and beyond their normal routine (Norman et al., 2003). Second stage is the period of sustained engagement during this point the user feels participant in the interaction, because the intention and system is understood (O'Brien & Toms, 2008). A different stage that can occur is disengagement in that case the users return to the routine (O'Brien & Toms, 2008). The last stage is the reengagement and as the name indicates it is concerned with the reengagement of the user (O'Brien & Toms, 2008).

Authors Pagani and Mirabello (2011) and Calder, Malthouse, and Tambane (2007) perceive engagement to be the qualitative experiences such as: emotions, activities and evaluations that happen during the experience. Finally, Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel (2009) conclude that engagement can be either personal or social. They include the users' values, state of mind and cognition and affect as personal engagement. According to Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel (2009) social interactive engagement is considered to be more behavioural, due to the fact that users can socialize and actively interactively participate.

## **Advertising**

In contradiction to the view of Douglas and Hargadon (2001) which is mainly focused on the cognitive aspect in relation to engagement. Author Heath (2007) reviews engagement as an instinctively emotional form that can be seen as different than attention. Attention is a cognitive response, since it can be defined as the process of thinking associated with the advertisement (Heath, 2007). Engagement is, according to Heath (2007), the subconscious feeling and emotions involved when the advertisement is processed.

A different approach by using neuro-psychology was used by Marci (2006) that suggested a biological approach to measure out the audience engagement created with advertisement. In the perspective of Marci (2006) engagement is a mix of audience synchrony and intensity (e.g. the cognitive attention and the emotional affect). The study proposed a new method to compute the emotional engagement. The study was conducted by analysing the biological responses of the participants such as hear rate, breathing, motion and level of transpiration. The outcome of the study showed that the level of engagement is dependent on the context in which it is shown.

As mentioned in the book *New developments in online marketing* (Tag et al., 2013) advertisement is not as simple as anymore as interruption and repetition, instead advertisement is now more focused on relevance. Rappaport (2007) proposes a model that can be used by marketing in order to built relationships with customers by using an engagement model that combines both cognitive, affective and participation. The proposed model used the presumption that the development of an emotional connection between consumer and brand is a necessity. Furthermore it can be concluded that the emotional bond is built on the experience, sharing and identification of the brand of the customer. With this in mind the author (Rappaport, 2007) suggest the industry to use Edelman (2007) idea that engagement is about engaging people with experiences that can inform, educate and entertain to blur the line of what the consumer thinks is impossible and possible. Additionally, it is suggested that engagement is closely related to the social settings making it important for the industry to create customer experiences that encourage conversation, in order to influence the level of engagement (Rappaport, 2007).

## **Marketing**

The engagement concept is rapidly appearing marketing literature, as with the previously mentioned research area also in this field of research there are multiple definitions for the term engagement. Also the research method varies from one dimensional to the use of more than one dimension. By approaching engagement from a unidimensional perspective it is solely focused on the behaviour of the consumer towards the brand (van Doorn et al., 2010). In accordance with this the Marketing Science Institution (2010) considers engagement as the manifestation of the behaviour of the customer toward the brand. In addition to this Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan (2011) perceive also the engagement as a behavioural form that is concentrating on the effort the consumer puts in the firm and brand. Pham and Avnet (2009) recognizes engagement from the cognitive point of view meaning that the engagement is related to the participation and disengagement of a consumer in the brand.

Due to the complexity of the concept the scholars have proposed to use a multidimensional perspective to deepen the richness of the study this means that mostly the cognitive and affective perspective are considered. However Hollebeek (2011) describes engagement as the “the level of customer’s motivational, brand-related, and context dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions” (p. 6). Although this definition includes three dimension it does not include the interaction between brands and the customer making the presumption fail to reach full impact. To link a model to the engagement construct Mollen and Wilson (2010) propose the usage of the Stimulus-Organish-Response (S-O-R) model (Mehrabian&Russel, 1974) to capture the online customer experience. Mollen and Wilson (2010) perceive engagement a particular form of connection with a brand that focuses on the satisfaction of the mind (cognitive) and the experience (affective). Engagement can be considered as a more dynamic then the more passive involvement. This is

due to the fact that an engaged customer will make commitments to the brand cognitively, as well as actively. Meanwhile the involvement part will let the customer be cognitively involved, but maybe not actively (Mollen & Wilson, 2010). In addition involvement can also possibly involve affective elements (Zaichkowsky, 1985), nevertheless most of the times only the cognitive perspective is used for the involvement concept (Thomson et al., 2005). The study conducted by Mollen and Wilson combines both cognitive as affect and also makes attempt to include the participation view, which is not used in involvement theories.

Although in the marketing field of study no universal definition exists there are a couple of themes that have similarities detectable. The first commonality is that engagement is a intricate concept that demands: focus, on going attention, absorption and consideration (Douglas & Hargadon, 2001; Guthrie et al., 2004; Herrington, Oliver, & Reeves, 2003; Jones, 1998; Kearsley&Schneiderman, 1998; Marci, 2006; Mathwick&Ridgon, 2004; Mollen & Wilson, 2010; O'Brien & Toms, 2008, 2010; O'Brien, 2010; Shih, 1998). Second, engagement covers an affective part that entails the linkage of the customer with the brand (Heath, 2007; Marci; O'Brien & Toms, 2008, 2010; O'Brien, 2010; Rapport, 2007; Wang 2006), emotional compatibility (Douglas & Hargadon, 2000, 2001; Mollen & Wilson). Finally, engagement is concerned with participating, stimulate the development of experiences (Burns, 2010; Evans & McKee, 2010; Harden & Heyman, 2009; Lusch&Vargo, 2010; Wang, 2011; Solis, 2010).

By combining the industry and academic perspectives the following thoughts can be proposed: engagement needs to be seen from the most multidimensional perspective to enrich the information gathered in the studies, for this reason usage is made of cognition, affective and participation perspective.

## **3.2 Consumer engagement theory for advergames**

### **3.2.1 Proposed theoretical model**

Figure 2 suggests a framework model that helps to organize the appropriate variables and relationships for analysis to build on the understanding of how advergames run the customer engagement. The model summarizes areas and elements that have been researched by the scholars during the past decades, however, it cannot be considered ultimately “complete” as not all elements that may exert influence on advergames effectiveness are included. The focus is set on those elements that have been frequently mentioned by scholars in the related researches. The framework integrates theories from website and game design, psychology, communication, marketing and consumer behavior.

The following framework model for this study draws from the one proposed by Terlutter and Capella (2013). The proposed advergames characteristics will be discussed first (type of game, technical platform, dimension, game genre, congruity of brand and game, prominence of advertising, dynamic advertisement, representation elements) followed by the components of consumers' psychological responses to advergame with an emphasis on the three components comprising online consumer engagement (cognitive, affective, and participative). Lastly, the behavioral outcomes of consumer engagement through advergames (loyalty and (re)purchase intent) will be presented.

The foundation of the proposed conceptual framework is situated within the **stimulus – organism – response (S-O-R) model** adopted from Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) environmental psychology model. The S-O-R model suggests that specific features of an

environment provoke an individual’s emotional state, which causes a behavioral reaction (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982).

For this study the S-O-R model is applied within the consumer behavior literature. Scholars in this field look for understanding of consumer behavior “by viewing a consumer as an organism capable of processing information” (Verma, 2012). Donovan and Rossiter (1982) stated that the S-O-R model must consider three elements: taxonomy of stimulus, organism, and taxonomy of responses (Reitz, 2012).

The stimulus portion of the model stands for the set of environmental characteristics that affect the individual’s internal state (Baker et al. 1992). In our case, the stimulus is the advergame characteristics.

Further, the organism is the emotional and cognitive state of the consumer (player) (Loureiro & Riberio, 2011). Once a consumer has experienced the environmental stimuli, the consumer processes the stimuli into meaningful information to help him/her understand the environment before making a decision (Koo & Ju, 2010). The consumers’ psychological responses to advergame consisting of three components of online consumer engagement (cognitive, affective, and participation) represent the organism portion in the following model.

Following Reitz (2012), the last stage of the S-O-R model is the response. The satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the consumer (player) experience is reflected in the consumer’s response. (McKinney, 2004) The response can be approach behaviors (e.g., purchasing, using, and positively communicating with others) or avoidance behaviors (e.g., no intention of returning/purchasing, negative word-of-mouth) (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). Loureiro and Riberio (2011), state that the response can be both behavioral and attitudinal. Therefore, the current study considers loyalty and (re)purchase intentions as responses to online consumer engagement on an advergame.

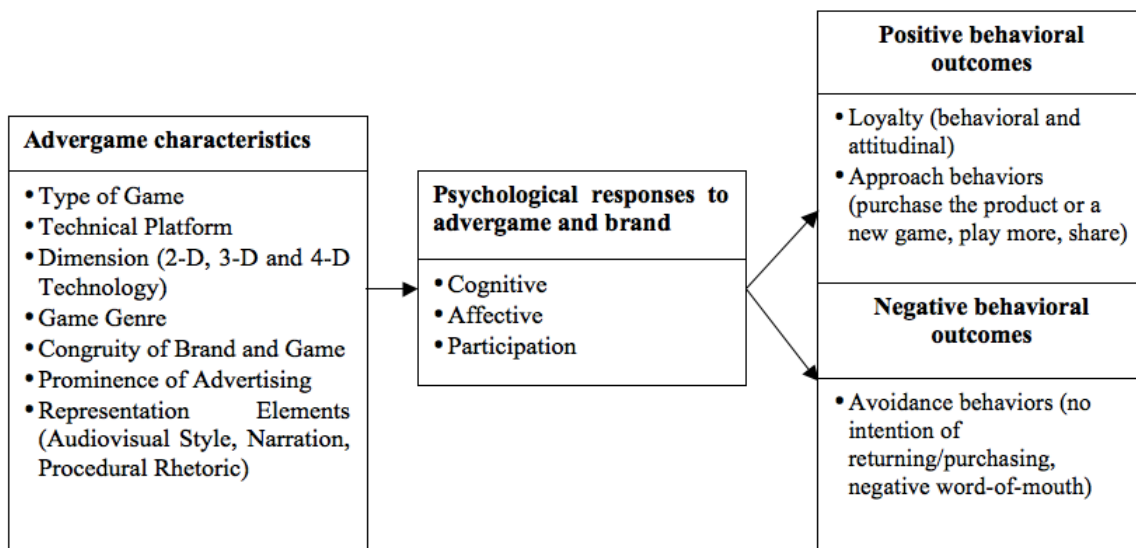


Image 2 Adapted customer engagement model for advergames

### **3.3 Advergame characteristics**

#### **3.3.1 Type of Game**

The first general distinction regarding the game type is whether it is a single-player or multiple-player game. In the latter case, the classification can be developed further by whether a game is played with only a few, typically well known others or with a large number of people (for example, online social network games called MMOGs—massively multiplayer online games). If the game allows a multiplayer mode or encourages social interactions among players, it is highly interesting to analyze how this issue influences advertising outcome. (Terlutter & Capella, 2013) For instance, the player's engagement and advertising vulnerability can be affected by referent others. (Bearden & Etzel, 1982)

Digital games are often classified as either casual or hardcore. While there are no strict definitions of each of these terms, the subject is wide spread in the academic discussion. Definitions mainly focus on defining a casual game as one that is easy to learn, simple to play and offers quick rewards with forgiving gameplay, which all turns into a fun experience. (Kuittinen et al., 2007) Casual games are more often affiliated with advergames, internet games and mobile applications. The subject of "casual games" is mainly used as a reference to a casual player who can pick up and play casual games easily without great effort. (Millis & Robbins, 2005) The International Game Developers Association's characterization (Wallace & Robbins, 2006) states that: "hardcore gamers play games that are extremely competitive and require greater degree of involvement and casual gamers play games with gentle learning curves that do not require much involvement." As the majority of advergames are actually casual, it is particularly important to remember that this type of games shows a positive affect transfer from game to brand for children, teens and women but does not have such a strong affect on adult men auditory. (Redondo, 2012)

#### **3.3.2 Technical Platform**

There is a variety of different technical platforms on which the advergames can be played (e.g., PCs, tablets, smartphones, specific game consoles such as Nintendo 3DS, Nintendo Wii, Sony PlayStation, and Microsoft Xbox). Some games are designed to be played with a standard keyboard; other use a mouse or joystick. Some are for stationary use; others are portable and allow for mobile gaming. Quite limited research is available about how the technical platform of the game influences response to advertised brands. Mobile gaming platforms are especially under researched area in the field of adver gaming. (Terlutter & Capella, 2013)

During the past decade there have been developed powerful smartphones that have high computing power, storage capacity, and graphical and audio capabilities. Furthermore, there are tons of mobile applications (apps) available that allow gaming (Taylor, Voelker, and Pentina, 2011). Hundreds of millions of users have deep personal attachment to their smartphones (Feijoo et al., 2012) and use them to have a specific lifestyle. The reasons why consumers engage in mobile gaming are different, including: intrinsic enjoyment, escapism, efficiency, economic value, visual appeal, perceived novelty, and perceived safety (Okazaki, 2008).

Mobile gaming is likely to be described by higher playing frequency but shorter playing times with more interruptions and more distractions (e.g., in public transportation) (Choi, Lee and Li, 2013). Due to the fact that mobile adver gaming is likely to be susceptible to less parental control,

this could have far-reaching impacts on effectiveness of brand advertising for children and adolescents. (Terlutter & Capella, 2013)

### **3.3.3 Dimension (2-D, 3-D and 4-D Technology)**

Dimension affects strongly the experience which game provides, especially the sense of environment, i.e. being in another place. (Järvinen, 2002) 2D computer graphics is the computer-based generation of digital images—mostly from two-dimensional models (such as 2-D geometric models, text, and digital images) and by techniques specific to them. The word may stand for the branch of computer science that comprises such techniques, or for the models themselves. 2-D computer graphics are mainly used in applications that were originally developed upon traditional printing and drawing technologies, such as typography, cartography, technical drawing, advertising, etc. (Van Dam et al., 1994)

The 3-D technology refers to a form of enriched broadcasting that conveys a perceived depth perception to audience members by involving particular techniques such as multiview or stereoscopic display, 2-D plus depth, or some other form of 3-D display, as compared to 2-D, which solely allows for broadcasting visual and auditory stimuli. (Terlutter & Capella, 2013) 3-D technology has shown a significant boost in many areas of home entertainment, such as in the television and cinema industry and also in the gaming industry. Research on advertising in 3-D games is very limited, even though all major game devices now enable 3-D technology. (Gregorovici & Constantin 2004; Terlutter & Capella 2013).

4-D technology in digital games combines a 3-D game with additional physical effects that are presented in synchronization with the actual game. Such effects in 4-D digital games may include ambient light, vibration, air flow, or even scents or rain. (Terlutter & Capella, 2013) Yet it is a question to answer of whether advertising in advergames wins from the additional sophisticated technological features or whether it suffers, and why. From the example of placements in movies, Terlutter et al. (2013) investigated how the modes of classic 2-D compared to 3-D or 4-D (e.g., 3-D plus scent) influence recall and recognition of brands placed in prominent or subtle way and founded that the subtle brand placements were negatively affected by the advancement of 3-D or 4-D, comparing with 2-D movies. Further, additional findings revealed that a prominent brand placement in the movie benefited from 3-D technology but not from 4-D technology. (Terlutter & Capella, 2013) The relevance of these findings for the advergame industry is a question for the future research.

### **3.3.4 Game Genre**

There is a wide spectrum of genres of advergames, such as action games, shooter games, strategy games, role-playing games, and sports games, with substantially different game contents. Many players tend to play two or more genres of digital game (Juul, 2010). Though no accepted formal definitions for video game genres exist, they are typically categorized based on their gameplay interaction rather than on visual or narrative differences (Apperley, 2006). For example, a shooter game can be created in a cartoon world or in a highly realistic world; it still remains a shooter game. This is different from other media categories, such as films. It is very likely that advertising outcome is closely related to game genre. (Terlutter & Capella, 2013) For example, a player may typically welcome advertising in a car racing game because it enhances the sense of realism (Nelson, 2002), whereas he or she may find it inappropriate in a strategy game.

Academic studies are usually carried out using only one game genre, questioning the generalizability of findings for other game genres. (Terlutter & Capella, 2013)

### **3.3.5 Congruity of Brand and Game**

Nelson (2002) found that in the advergaming context it is crucial for players that the context of the game comes close to reality. For instance, as ads exist in real-life settings such as sports or racing, ads in this type of game genre expected to contribute positively to the game-play experience. Similarly, Hernandez et al. (2004) found lack of congruence led to intrusiveness in one of their advergaming studies that had strongly influenced negative attitude toward advergaming. Research by Lee and Faber (2007) also showed that the degree of congruity between the product category of a brand and game content plays an important role.

On the other hand, incongruity leads to higher attention to the brand, resulting in improved memory for the brand. (Terlutter & Capella, 2013) Findings by Gross (2010) indicated that the highly congruent advergaming led to superior memory but to more negative attitudes toward the brand. According to the persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994), it is argued that a high-level of congruity between game and brand for low-involvement products makes consumers more strongly understand the game as being an ad (Terlutter & Capella, 2013). Lewis and Porter's (2010) writings in an MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role-playing game) shows that though moderately incongruent advertising can trigger high awareness rates, extremely incongruent in-game advertising can reduce a game's perceived sense of realism and annoy players if not coordinated appropriately with the game environment.

These results indicate that a high level of congruence of placed brand and game leads to higher acceptance of advertising in the advergaming. However, contrary to expectations, Peters and Leshner (2013) found that a slightly incongruent game condition can produce the optimal results as well. (Terlutter & Capella, 2013)

### **3.3.6 Prominence of Advertising**

According to Terlutter and Capella (2013), the prominence of the brands placed in digital games varies significantly. If a brand is put in the focal area of viewing or is included in the central game play, it is featured prominently. If a brand is placed in the background or in a peripheral area, it is considered to be a subtle placement (Gangadharbatla, Bradley & Wise, 2013). Van Reijmersdal (2009) summarizes the effect of prominent brand placements in audiovisual media (film, television, and games) and says that "it affects memory positively, but affects attitudes negatively when audiences are involved with the medium vehicle, when they like the medium vehicle, or when they become aware of a deliberate brand placement (selling attempt)." If users are aware of the commercial content and selling attempt of ad placements in games, they may have a negative attitude toward the brand advertised. (Terlutter & Capella, 2013) Positive relationships of brand prominence on brand memory in video games are reported numerous authors (e.g., Nelson 2002; Schneider and Cornwell 2005). Whereas the relationship between brand placement prominence and memory is apparent, the relationship between brand prominence and brand attitudes is obviously a much more complex issue. (Terlutter & Capella, 2013) For example, if a persuasive attempt is understood by players, thus activating their cognitive defenses (Friestad and Wright, 1994), this can cause negative effects on brand attitudes.



### 3.3.7 Representation Elements (Audiovisual Appearance, Narration, Procedural Rhetoric)

The last but probably the most important characterization of advergames is a representation elements category. This includes the elements of audiovisual style, narration and procedural rhetoric.

Three elements can be discerned from all computer and video games: 1) space/environment (a football field, for instance), 2) different objects (characters, items etc.), and 3) symbols (point counters, health meters, descriptions, help texts etc.). Game designers decide how to implement and mix these elements to create a particular audiovisual appearance. (Järvinen, 2002) According to the audiovisual appearance of a particular game it belongs to a certain audiovisual style. The audiovisual styles of computer and video games can be different. According to Järvinen (2002), this term can be used to name and categorize games from an aesthetic perspective – in a similar manner the field of visual arts has been categorized into different historical stylistic periods, such as impressionism, realism, cubism, and so on. Further, Järvinen (2002) suggests the following game audiovisual styles: photorealism, caricaturism and abstractionism. Audiovisual elements and styles are about being able to describe different games' audiovisual form in theoretical terms. Audiovisual appearance also includes advertising-related design elements, such as strong imagery, billboards, colors, brand logos, character and interface design, etc.

For the needs of advergames' content analysis audiovisual style basically means the brand appearance in audiovisual game environment. Regarding narration, beyond narrative, it is about the way that the brand contributes and influences the narration of the game. (Theodorou & Sirmakessis, 2009)

**Narrative** can be defined as the methods by which the story materials are demonstrated to the audience. (Dansky, 2007) This is about the methods or styles used to tell the story of the game. The story includes the plots prewritten by game writers and developers and created by players in the course of playing the games. (Qin et al., 2009) Without narrative, the existence of the game world and characters is meaningless (Taylor, 2002).

Although video games share some of the features of narrative (character, plot, setting, events) with traditional media, they have some important differences as a game narrative is rather based not on representation but on simulation (Frasca, 2000). Video games are interactive (the story line can be changed according to the gamer's performance) and immersive (they involve players in the context mentally and emotionally). (Qin et al., 2009) The same applies for advergames as well, defining the unique engagement outcome.

Another important representation element is **procedural rhetoric**, which is defined as the "way of creating, explaining or understanding processes," and processes as the "methods, techniques and logics that drive the operation of systems". (Bogost, 2007) Thus, procedural rhetoric stands for to the power of computational systems to make persuasive arguments. Advergames are a type of persuasive digital games, so they "mount procedural rhetoric's effectively". (Bogost, 2007) This particular quality of advergames help in attracting and retain the players' attention and creating the awareness of a specific brand, in a way that traditional media is unable to do. (Ghirvu, 2013)

### **3.4 Consumer psychological responses to advergames**

The construct used in this study is multidimensional and includes cognitive, affective and participation dimensions. To engage customers online they need to cognitively and affectively attend but also need to feel actively involved in order to feel part and create an emotional linkage. The next paragraphs will discuss the three dimensions.

#### **3.4.1 Cognitive**

The concept of online consumer engagement in relation to the cognitive state of the consumer is related to the environment. Consumers that experience online engagement are exceedingly absorbed in the practice of searching, understanding, examining and synthesizing the information found in the online environment, because of this submerging they lose sight that they are using media specially targeted for them by firms. In addition unconsciously the customer is tempted to get to know more about the company, brand and products.

Prior studies have shown that when consumers are involved on a cognitive level they will experience a stronger feeling of brand loyalty. (Howard & Sheth, 1969; Tyebjee, 1977). When cognitively involved a customer will more likely their knowledge and acquired knowledge about the brand will significantly increase (Shang et al., 2006).

#### **3.4.2 Affective**

Online consumer engagement from the affective perspective can be described as creating consumer gratification by being actively and effectively present to create an emotional bond with the consumer. Previous research has studied the possible relationship between loyalty and affect. According to the proposition of authors Dick and Basu (1994) there is a possibility of a relationship between positive affective feelings in direct linkage with the higher level of customer loyalty. Fellow researchers Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) tested this proposition in their study, and found indeed a positive connection between loyalty and affect. Different scholars such as Matzler et al. (2008) discovered also a positive relationship with brand affect, described as being the emotional reaction towards a brand and the loyalty.

#### **3.4.3 Participation**

Participation in relation to online consumer engagement is concerned with the level of involvement in an event (Barki & Hartwick, 1989, 1994; Vroom & Jago, 1988). In the online environment this means interactivity with the content with the firm or consumers. In the online world participation is one of the most important attributes to the forming of sustainability (Casalo et al., 2007).

In the current research field lots of studies have identified a positive linkage between participation and loyalty (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Muñiz & O'Guinn). Author Algesheimer et al. (2005) proposes that this is due to the participation of consumers in the online environment dedicated to brands or products results in a higher level of commitment which in a later stage can result in loyalty.

### **3.5 Outcomes of engagement**

According to some scholars (Donovan & Rossiter 1982. Loureiro & Riberio, 2011), the behavioral outcome of consumer experience can be either positive (approach behaviors) or negative

(avoidance behaviors). Approach behaviors lead to customer loyalty, (re)purchase intent and positive word-of-mouth, while avoidance behaviors mean the opposite effects (e.g., no intention of returning/purchasing, negative word-of-mouth). (Reitz, 2012)

The focus of this research in this section will be set on positive behavioral outcome as these intentions are the ones that represent the marketers' goals. (Reitz, 2012) Loyalty and (re)purchase intent are considered as important consumer behavioral outcomes of companies' online marketing efforts and so are considered outcomes to consumers engaged through an advergaming. This section explains the proposed positive outcomes of advergaming consumer engagement – loyalty and (re)purchase intent.

### **3.5.1 Loyalty**

Loyalty is considered to be a crucial factor in achieving company success and long-term sustainability because research findings found that loyalty leads to growth of word-of-mouth (Hallowell, 1996), lower price sensibility (Lynch & Ariely, 2000), higher company stability and larger profits (Knox & Denison, 2000), decreased marketing costs (Griffin, 2002), and reduced levels of clients switching to competitors (Yi & La, 2004). Srinivasan et al. (2002) found that it costs approximately five times more to acquire a new customer than to retain an old one.

Loyalty has been generally considered from two different perspectives: behavioral (refers to consumers' repeat purchase intentions) and attitudinal (a positive attitude toward a company that exists based on an internal evaluation due to high switching costs). (Reitz, 2012)

Modern digital technologies extend the traditional context of loyalty to online consumer behavior, suggesting the concept of online loyalty or e-loyalty within an online context (Fuentes-Blasco et al., 2010). E-loyalty is considered in both behavioral and attitudinal dimensions, just like traditional loyalty. (Reitz, 2012) From the behavioral perspective, online loyalty is defined as a "customer's intention to buy" from website and that users will not switch to other sites (Cyr, 2008). In the advergaming context, this theory should include the possibility to access the web-store directly from the application (e.g., on smartphone or playing console). E-loyalty from a behavioral perspective can also be considered as the intention to revisit the site, replay and share the game or the intention to (re)purchase from the site in the future (Cyr, Bonanni, Bowes, & Ilsever, 2005; Cyr, 2008). Online loyalty from an attitudinal perspective is a positive attitude toward the companies' web entity (Srinivasan et al., 2002) that fosters a sense of commitment and attachment to the brand. It is important to remember that e-loyalty and traditional loyalty are working simultaneously, so the mentioned behavioral and attitudinal intentions go far beyond online commerce (for example, a satisfied player can follow the company's website, social network or mobile applications account and become a brand advocate that will share the positive brand attitude with other people).

Reitz (2012) concluded that "loyalty helps build relationships with consumers," which may lead to additional behavioral intentions such as repeat purchases.

### **3.5.2 Repurchase intent**

The notion of repeat(re)purchase intent has been traditionally associated with loyalty. Shukla (2009) suggested that brand loyalty has a significant influence on consumers' purchase decisions. (Re)purchase intent can be defined as a consumer's intentions to buy from a specific brand in the future whether that be a first time purchase or a repeat purchase. (Reitz, 2012)

Griffin (2002) stated that a consumer willing to repurchase from a company is more profitable to the company compared to a consumer who is not, as companies can hereby benefit from reduced marketing costs, lower transaction costs, reduced customer turnover expenses, increased cross-selling success, and reduced failure costs. Griffin explains that companies should seek out, court, serve, and nurture clients who consistently purchase repeatedly.

According to Sashi's (2012) customer engagement matrix, two out of four categories of satisfied customers – loyal customers and fans – are the most desirable types of customers for brands. Sashi stated that these clients are on the top of the customer engagement ladder, giving the biggest benefits to brands.

Reitz (2012) wrote that consumers with favorable attachments (i.e., loyalty) toward a brand, will most likely purchase from that brand in the future. Therefore, there is no doubt that obtaining customers' loyalty and (re)purchase intents are the key objectives for digital marketing campaigns that include advergaming.

## **4 Methodology**

*This chapter is concerned with the methodology of this dissertation. It will describe and discuss the major methodological assumptions related to the data collection decisions made for this thesis, also a discussion around the reliability of the data collection will take place. This is followed by a summary of the choices made by the authors in the methodology chapter.*

### **4.1 Research purpose**

Academic literature on methodological process for the research field of business encourage scholars to use a structured organized process to write an academic study (Bonoma, 1985; Moore, 2006; Saunders et al., 2007). By taking in mind this recommendation, decision has been made to make our entire research process decisions by keeping in mind the thesis purpose, which is to explore the usage of advergames and mobile platforms in relation to customer engagement, and by establishing a customer engagement model that links especially to advergames and mobile platforms.

Research purposes often categorized in three varieties: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory (Saunders et al., 2009). One study may use more than one type of variety (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009), and it can also change during the duration of the research (Robson, 2002). An exploratory research is used when trying to illuminate the nature of a study or problem (Saunders et al., 2009). According to Robson (2002) a exploratory research should be used when a research tries to uncover new insights or want to explore what happens. When using a exploratory research it is necessary to be flexible to changes throughout the study, this does not indicate that the research has no clear focus, but rather indicates that throughout the research process the research funnel will become more narrow (Saunders et al., 2009).

The descriptive types of research aim to present a accurate and detailed account of particular events, persons or situations (Robson, 2002). According to Saunders et al. (2009) it essential to have a open mind when studying a particular phenomenon by using a descriptive approach. As the research field of customer engagement is already research quite extensively and is present in lots of academic literature books such as *Marketing Management* (Keller et al., 2013) and *International Marketing Strategy* (Doole & Lowe, 2012). In the case of this study it evidently meets the preconditions to be qualified as a descriptive research. However there is limited amount of research done in customer engagement in the field of advergames and mobile platform, for this reason this study can contribute to academic literature by linking and combining existing knowledge and theories and applying it to a relatively unknown research field.

### **4.2 Research approach**

The research approach this thesis has chosen was based on two decisions, which were the choice between inductive or deductive, and secondly, if a qualitative or quantitative approach should be used. In the following paragraphs the decisions will be presented, and justification for the chosen approaches will be provided.

### **4.3 Deductive**

In the field of research there are two most commonly used approaches to connect empirical data to theory, these are the inductive and deductive approach (Bryman & Bell, 2011). According to Saunders et al. (2009) an inductive approach is used when the data collection process is done before the establishment of a theory, so this means the theory will be developed after the data collection. Scholars and researchers that use the inductive approach take more interest in the circumstances surrounding an event (Saunders et al., 2009).

The deductive approach method uses established theories in a specific field of research to uncover if assumptions are met or not. The difference between the inductive and deductive approach is that the inductive structures conclusion is build on the information based trough observation, meanwhile the deductive structure build there conclusions on theory and logic. The logic is originating from previous statements and research outcomes to create valid affirmations (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

According to Bryman and Bell, 2011) it is not possible to see the deductive and inductive approaches as significantly different approaches since they also share similarities. To declare that a research is solely deductive or inductive can possibly be misleading, since they share similar traits (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saunders et al., 2009). For this reason Bryman and Bell (2011) suggest that the approach is more a stronger direction towards one of the two approaches instead of merely having one approach. In this thesis makes use of non-numerical data, which can be categorized as qualitative research, this type of research commonly used inductive approach. However for this thesis, since there is an exuberance of sources on customer engagement literature, this has enabled this thesis to use a deductive approach. This approach was used in the creation of the model based on existing literature, but this thesis also contains inductive elements, in the extension of the model by adding new elements after the empirical data collection.

### **4.4 Qualitative**

Two often used methods for research is qualitative research and quantitative research. A qualitative research is concerned with words, meanwhile quantitative is more focused on the use of numbers in the data collection process (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The meaning of qualitative research is that it concerns with the uncovering of experiences, causal mechanisms and process by using distinctive methods. The data that is collected, stems from the perception of the participants that can express opinions and provide explanations of experiences by using their own words, so in short the research method provides the participants with their own 'voice' (Bluhm et al., 2011). According to authors Bryman and Bell (2011), there is no required design structure before the research starts, this provides the researcher with flexibility and liberty. By using a qualitative study the researcher tries to get to the bottom of a problem by collecting rich and extensive data about the studied topic. Some of the data collection methods used in qualitative research are: focus groups, observation, and qualitative interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Some of the drawbacks that can occur when using qualitative research are: because of the hands on data collection and the contact with the participants the objectivity of the researcher and the study can be affected and/or influenced; The interpretation of the collected

data by the researcher is subjective to the view of the researcher, which can possibly lead to distortion of the data; Qualitative research can take a long time making it a time consuming task. (Bryman&Bell, 2011; Bluhm et al., 2011)

Quantitative research is in comparison to qualitative research more focused on numbers and statistics, in the usage of this research method the researcher can have more distance with the participants making the study more measurable and general. The research that used the quantitative approach will transform the collected data into statistics and can base there generalizations on this. The most commonly used data collection method for quantitative research is the use of a questionnaire. (Bryman& Bell, 2011; Bluhm et al., 2011. Some of the pitfalls of using quantitative research are: Quantitative research overlooks the natural setting and lack to discuss the meaning of matters; The research lacks to capture the feelings, emotions, intentions, views, and opinions of the participants; To achieve a statistical justifiable result, the research needs a large, population representable, sample. (Bryman & Bell, 2011)

The choice of research approach is depending on the aim of the research, the research questions, research design and achievement the researcher want to attain (Bluhm et al., 2011). For this study the choice has been made to use qualitative research, because the research want to get in-depth knowledge to understand the customer engagement on advergimes and mobile platforms from a company perspective.

#### **4.5 Research strategy**

Research strategy should help the researcher to gain enough knowledge to answer the research questions and stated objectives of the study (Saunders et al., 2009).For this reason the chosen strategy should connected to the study, the strategies available as suggested by Saunders et al.(2009) are: experiment, survey, case study, grounded theory, ethnography, archival research and action research.

Due to the nature of this study, by having a more descriptive purpose and using qualitative research not all the research strategies as suggested by Saunders et al. (2009) can be used in this study, to collect enough valuable data to answer all the research aims and objectives. One of the strategies that is relevant for this study is the use of case study, since this aims to provide a deeper understanding of a subject (Morris & Wood, 1991). Within the case study at least three semi-structured interviews with different departments of LEGO where held to triangulate the data and increase the validity of the collected data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). According to Saunders et al. (2009) case studies are more common for exploratory research, however this study validates there choice by agreeing with the perspective of Wood (1991) who states that case studies are the best strategy to gain in-depth knowledge to answer the research questions of this descriptive research.

Author Yin (2009) suggest that there are single and multiple case studies that can be subdivided in holistic and embedded cases. For this study choice has been made to use the single case strategy since the case studied can be seen as one of the leading companies in using advergimes and mobile platforms to create customer engagement making it an unique case. For this research choice is made to distinguish different sub-units, target groups, within the brand by doing this, Yin (2009) considers this case study as being embedded.

## 4.6 Case selection and sampling

Sampling is one of the most important parts of the market research, which concerns with the collecting, analyzing and interpreting data collection (Chisnall, 1997). To obtain the right information regarding the population characteristics or constraints, a population should be delimited in order to study a particular survey (Malhotra, 1999); (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). In qualitative research, the sampling population might be less important than in quantitative research, since a case analyzed in depth, is the most important aspect of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This thesis presents the sampling of two advergaming cases created by LEGO.

In marketing research there are some techniques to identify the sampling, the probability sample and non-probability sample (Chisnall, 1997). In the probability sample a population is known and might be equal for all cases, meaning that the characteristic of a population is statistically delineated (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). In the non-probability sample relies to the researcher judgment about which elements should be included in the sample, since there is no way or statistically technique to determine the probability of selected elements (Malhotra, 1999). In this context, no pre-defined and suitable sampling frame for Chinese companies was defined. Consequently, the non-probability sampling was selected as is more frequently used when adopting a case study strategy (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). In more detail, in order to answer the research question and the research objectives, the sampling technique purposive or judgmental has been applied and enhanced by convenience sampling (Malhotra, 1999); (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). The purposive or judgmental sampling has normally an unknown frame and the sampling procedure is not well specified (Aaker, Kumar, Leone, & Day, 2013). In this context, a number of criteria to purposefully select an appropriate sample were applied, which were as follows:

LEGO company is a leading toy manufacturer with a global presence and growth market share. It is paying particular attention to the new ways of engaging with its target consumer group – children and youth. This group has shown to be especially susceptible to affective communication through advergaming. (Van Reijmersdal, 2009)

After defining the company which is appropriate to be researched, the research subjects were qualified. In this context, knowledge about the LEGO marketing strategy as well as about the previous processes and experience in advergaming creation and promotion was considered as important and relevant.

Therefore, three different professionals in these positions were considered as best persons to contact, aiming to pursue the purpose of this thesis. After the initial contact through e-mail with all research subjects in this study, a conversation on Skype or face to face with three different people were headed, considering that all interviewees were in Denmark.

In order to clarify the information about the interviews and its interviewees, follow a table:

Tabel 1 Interview schedule

| <b>Interviewer</b>     | <b>Position</b>         | <b>Date</b>           | <b>Type</b>      |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Sten Funder<br>Lysdahl | Senior Creative Manager | Feb. 19,<br>March 26, | Face to<br>face, |



|                                |                               |                      |       |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|-------|
|                                |                               | Apr. 9               | Skype |
| <i>Stefan Stokkebaek</i>       | Digital Project Manager       | Feb. 19,<br>March 26 | Skype |
| Sigurður Hjaltalín<br>Þórisson | Digital Experience<br>Manager | May 12               | Skype |

The interviews were conducted as a face to face meeting with one interviewee and video-conferences with all three interviewees and took from 30 minutes to 3 hours each, in order to answer all the questions and formulate a discussion. The interviewees freely answered all the same questions and the answers were recorded through an audio recorder. The interviews deeply provided strong information, enabling the development of the subjects and answering the research questions.

#### **4.7 Data collection methods**

There are two ways to collect data for a research. The first is primary data collection and the second is called secondary data collection. The following paragraphs will describe what they entail, and how this study used them.

##### **4.7.1 Primary data collection**

Information that is gathered by using different research method such as surveys, observations and interviews is called primary data, this means that the researcher accumulates the data directly from the primary source (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A benefit of primary research is that the collected data is tailored to the study, since the researcher has control in the data collection process. A negative aspect of primary data is that it demands the researcher to have enough knowledge to compile the correct data (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

To choose the right research method, the purpose of the study is significantly importance (Yin, 2009). The research method of qualitative interview gives researchers the opportunity to gather high value in-depth data of the interested topic (Saunders et al., 2009). This is caused by the interviews that allow the researcher to gain insight in the interviewee and the elements that influenced that person in his answers, and if something is unclear or too shallow the interviewer has the opportunity to go deeper by asking more questions (Saunders et al., 2009).

For qualitative research there are multiple ways to conduct interviews the major types are: Structured interview, semi-structured and unstructured interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As authors Bryman and Bell (2011) mention that by using a unstructured interview approach there is no clear focus yet but only a general sense. The structured interview is quite the opposite and has a clear opinion of where to go. For this research a semi-structured interview method will be used, since there is a clear interview guide and general view of the information needed, but since we cannot foresee the answers of our participants matching exactly with our interview guide, we want to preserve some form of flexibility (Bryman & Bell, 2011). To structure the interview guide choice was made to take the main categories from the framework that was developed in the theory part, and to use those categories as themes. These themes worked as a red line throughout the interview guides. For every theme we then prepared five to ten question that used different question methods (e.g. open questions, and structured questions), also back up questions were

established in case the interviewee would not elaborate enough and follow up questions were needed to make sure enough relevant data was collected in relation to the purpose of the study. If necessary also alternative questions to the interview guide were asked in order to gain the finest primary data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). By using a combination of different question methods, the study used inductive components in their deductive approach.

Authors Bryman and Bell (2011) suggest that for the interviews a quiet, secluded space is preferred to eliminate the chance of interruptions during the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011) For this reason the decision has been made to conduct the interviews through skype and to visit the LEGO office in Copenhagen as it is the most convenient and efficient way. For the purpose of accuracy the interviews will be recorded. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) this can contribute to examination of what people say, can eliminate any questions about the validity and help the researchers to uncover other information that was initially not picked up by the interviewer (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Bechhofer, Elliott, and McCrone (1984) as cited in Bryman and Bell (2011) claim that there are certain advantages to having more than one interviewer to interview each respondent. The use of multiple interviewers also contributed to a more informal atmosphere, akin to a discussion between three people rather than an exchange between two persons. Accordingly, our interview will be conducted by two interviewers per each interviewee.

#### **4.7.2 Secondary data collection**

Secondary data consists out of existing information that is linked to the field of interest and is gathered through previous studies. The aim of secondary data is to create understanding of a specific research area, in order to create basic comprehension. The benefit of using secondary data is that it is more easily obtainable and makes it more easier to generalize. However the researcher should be aware that research can always lack objectivity or be biased (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

For this study secondary data was obtained by visiting the Halmstad University Library and the Halmstad City Library to search for academic books that could provide the authors with the basic knowledge of customer engagement. To gain specific in-depth knowledge about customer engagement in relation to the online communication tools and to create the model academic articles were used. To access the academic article multiple databases such as: Google Scholar, JSTOR, Libris and Emerald were used.

#### **4.8 Data analysis**

Data analysis consists of two main approaches, which are analytic induction and grounded theory. Both these approaches can be described not only as strategies of analysis, but also can be viewed as strategies for the further data collection (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Qualitative data deriving from interviews or participant observation typically take the form of a large corpus of unstructured textual material, so they are not straightforward to analyze. Moreover, unlike quantitative data analysis, clear-cut rules about how qualitative data analysis should be carried out have not been developed (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The first step in order to analyse the collected data was to transcribe the recorded interviews, in order to select the most relevant data from the interviews in order to establish the empirical presentation (Saunders et al., 2009). Since the interview will be held in English which is not the native language of the interviewers and the interviewees the authors were aware of the possible

misinterpretations, this problem was cautiously taken in consideration to avoid any subjectivity or loss of data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). To use the empirical findings in their most raw form the authors used direct quotes from the interviews to illustrate their empirical findings.

The collected data will be analysed by using pattern matching and using the firm or organizational logic model, which can also be categorized as a type of pattern model (Yin, 2009). Pattern matching models compare the patterns comprised from the collected data with the predicted patterns, this approach can help to improve the internal validity of the study (Yin, 2009). The firm or organizational logic model looks at the differences between the expected data and the differences in the data collected. By using both cases it is possible to display the findings in comparison to the theory, but also by analysing the differences in perception within the firm. This approach will assist the reader to see the relationship between the different elements more easily. The analysis used the same structure as was established in the theory part in order to make the findings generated from the collected data more clear.

## **4.9 Research criteria**

Quality criteria is concerned with the conditions reliability and validity. Those conditions are defined as the reliability, strictness and quality of the qualitative research (Bryman & Bell 2011). The dependability of a measure of concept is referred to as the reliability, while the validity measures if the concept really is measured. Validity can be divided into three types: content-, construct-, and external- validity (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In the following paragraphs the quality criteria will be discussed.

### **4.9.1 Content validity**

Content validity is often referred to as face validity, and entails how skilfully the measurement of a establish construct actually represents that construct. This can be examined by using a external authority in the field of the study, who can judge if the measurement is suitable for the purpose. It is suggested this is done before the researcher has started the data collection process (Bryman & Bell, 2011)

To strengthen the content validity, the authors enquired their thesis supervisor, a specialist in the field of the research, advise to make sure the themes and established measurements were relevant to the research. Also relatives and friends were used to asses if the questions were understood as they were intended to, although the relatives and friends were no experts in the field, and in some case did not have any experience in the research field. The authors found it significant to do this to minimize the uncertainties in the question that can possibly occur when not speaking face-to-face (e.g. trough Skype or telephone).

### **4.9.2 Construct validity**

Construct validity is concerned with to which extend the operationalization solely measures the relevant concept (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). To measure this extend, the researcher can use multiple tools such as triangulation, recording or the use of an interview guide, so that if necessary it can proof the validity of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

To attain a high level of construct validity, a interview guide was used based on the established themes in the theoretical part, this to make sure the interviewees would keep their answers relatively related to the subject area. Also the guide helped to keep the interviewers alert to

collect the data needed for the study. Another tool was to record the interviews to make sure no important information was missed or misinterpreted, also the names of the interviewees were recorded during the interview to make sure the interview was referenced correctly.

### 4.9.3 External validity

External validity relates to the distinction of the study of the research area and if it can also be used in different fields of research. In line with quantitative research in which the research is based on statistical principles, qualitative is more concerned with generalizations based on analytical conclusions. Researcher that use a qualitative study, aim to apply the results of their research to a more universal theory. To asses this the researcher can use replication logic, by using multiple cases and to analyse if the results are still constant, this to spot the opportunities of what part can be generalized (Yin, 2009).

To increase the external validity for this research, the authors used a multiple case study by studying not only one target group of LEGO but multiple. To do this the study results can be generalized in relation to the establish theoretical framework. Due to time and resource constrains the authors were not able to use replication logic.

### 4.9.4 Reliability

The term reliability applies is concerned with the question whether a research can be repeated with the same results. The aim of reliability is to make sure that a researcher uses the same methods as could be used by a different researcher and they will both achieve the same results (Yin, 2009). In order to asses this the research could be repeated or multiple case studies could be used (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

To have a strong reliability, the study includes detailed description of the how the data collection process was conducted and how it was analysed. Due to the time constrains it was not a option to let another researcher repeat the research.

## 4.10 Summary

Table 2 contains the summary of the methodology part of the study.

Tabel2 Summary Methodology

| Method Part            | Chosen approaches   |
|------------------------|---|
| Research Approach      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deductive</li> <li>• Qualitative</li> </ul>  |
| Research Strategy      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single Case (Embedded)</li> </ul>  |
| Data Collection Method | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary data               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Semi-constructed interview</li> <li>○ Triad interview</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Secondary data</li> </ul> |
| Sampling               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• non-probability sampling</li> </ul>  |

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Data Collection Instrument | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interview Guide</li></ul>  |
| Data Analysis Method       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pattern Matching</li><li>• Firm or organizational logic model</li></ul>  |
| Quality Criteria           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Validity<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Content</li><li>○ Construct</li><li>○ External</li></ul></li><li>• Reliability</li></ul> |

## 5 Empirical Data

*This chapter contains the empirical data that is acquired from semi-structured interviews with different LEGO employees operating in Marketing and Digital games divisions, as well as from the last LEGO annual responsibility report. The interviews were carried out with Interviewee 1, Senior creative manager of LEGO digital games; Interviewee 2, Digital experience manager; and Interviewee 3, Digital Project Manager. In the following, the results of these interviews are presented.*

### 5.1 Background

The name 'LEGO' is an abbreviation of the two Danish words "leg godt", meaning "play well". The name is not only a name, it represents the deep **rooted nature of this company**. The LEGO Group was established in 1932 by Ole Kirk Kristiansen. The company has been a family company and have been passed on from father to son from the beginning. Nowadays it is owned by Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen, a grandchild of the founder. Throughout the the past eighty years LEGO has grown from a small carpenter workshop to a modern, global enterprise.

LEGO is one of world's largest toy manufacturer. The company claims to have a deep understanding of the children needs and markets and combines its European roots with innovation and teaching spirit. The company focuses on the demand side and offers rule-breaking strategies and product in the toy industry. LEGO used to operate on different product markets besides toys (for example, in cloth manufacturing, attractions park and cinema businesses) but due to the risk of bankruptcy decided to concentrate on its core products – toys – in the early 2000s.

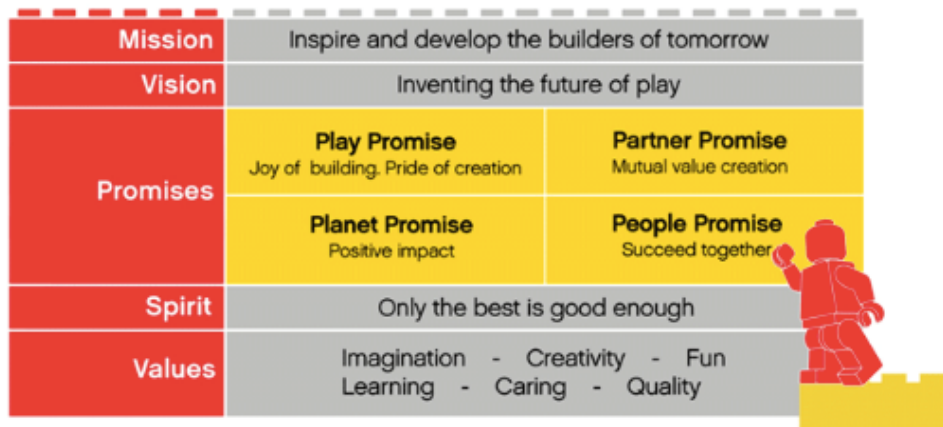


Image 3 LEGO brand and framework

The mission of the company is to 'Inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow' this can be seen as a direct translation of the firms primary message that it believes that learning in a playful manner and through play in a society, for children especially. When playing the brand assumes that children can acquire the skills to develop their creativity and unfold valuable skills that are important for the development of the child. It is believed that playing and learning are interconnected with each other. As an outcome of this the brand tries to develop products that consist out of these traits. (Vestberg, 2014)

The company's annual responsibility report (2013) clearly indicates that play has a profound impact on children's cognitive, social, developmental and academic skills. The company believes that it stimulates their learning abilities by fostering creativity, which supports critical thinking, sparks curiosity, and facilitates learning by doing. LEGO states that there is a strong scientific basis for believing in the power of play: when playing people relax, allowing them to drop into the state, known as 'flow'. This state of mind is believed to be the most efficient and engaging for learning processes.

LEGO takes a comprehensive approach to ensuring that its marketing materials and communication to children are ethical and legally compliant. The company continuously updates its corporate standards on marketing to children and ensure that its guidelines and policies are anchored throughout the business and supported by an annual review process. The company is also working with international organisations and standards to ensure they are compliant with international best practices. The LEGO Group believes children should only be exposed to appropriate and fair commercial communication. (The LEGO Group, 2013)

The company pays particular attention to its integrated marketing approach, so it seems like LEGO is a content powerhouse, at times even more closely resembling a media company than a toy company. The following are just some of the most remarkable elements of its integrated marketing program for each product line (McDermott, 2011):

- *LEGO Magazine*,
- *LEGOLAND* (a theme park),
- movies and mini-movies (for each new storyline LEGO produces a serial-style video and this year *TheLEGO Movie* was shown in cinemas all over the world),
- *LEGO Click* (a community platform for fans and fanatics),
- *DESIGNbyME* (a product extension which allows customers to create their own LEGO design and packaging using the company's Digital Designer software),
- *My LEGO Network* (a social network for children),
- *LEGO Universe* (a multi-player online game),
- LEGO microsites (each LEGO storyline has a special microsite with plot and character explanations, online games, movies, forums, etc.),
- digital games (available on PC and portable devices).

With the vision of the brand, the company wants to uncover new ways to play, the materials to play, and business models to play. By doing this they attempt to even the globalization and digitalization process. (Vestberg, 2014)

## **5.2 The LEGO Development Process model**

LEGO had developed special scheme for development and incorporation of all its product and marketing innovations which is called The LEGO Development Process (LDP) model. This model aims to rationalize the company's activities in order to fit the following key pillars (Ganderton, 2009):

- speed (to minimize the time from the idea generation to introduction to the market)
- focus (build on strategic company priorities)
- relevance (clear outside-in perspective)
- responsiveness (process flexibility and unbundled decision points and process gates)
- transparency (meticulous planning, clear responsibilities and continuous follow-up)

It is usually a three years long plan of the company's activities that are scheduled and summarized in seven core phases. The advergaming creation and development are considered by the first two phases of the LDP model. Several company departments are involved here and their activities are controlled by the core team of LEGO specialists, such as marketing and design lead specialists, project manager and strategic planner. The strategic planner is usually a person that connects all departments' activities on different stages in order to meet the LDP pillars and the decided strategy goals.

The first phase is related to Product ("P-phase") milestone overview and usually starts two years before the product launch and finishes one year prior the launch. On this stage the overall strategy of the product portfolio is decided and the selected concepts are identified and "frozen". The strategic part of the development of the product portfolio is the key feature here and the P-phase is also described as a preparation for the actual start of the campaign.

The second phase is related to Marketing ("M-phase") and runs until the product launch. On this stage the project team is finally established, communication channels and the assortment of products are identified and set, the procurement details such as supply chain are determined.

### **5.3 LEGO Digital Games**

Physical and digital play is increasingly coming together in new, innovative ways, and the LEGO Group is exploring how we best provide children with a safe and fun play experience. The LEGO Group develops a wide range of digital play experiences that provide more opportunities for children to have fun and explore the stories in its product lines.

It takes minimum 6 months for LEGO to create a new advergaming and this process involves work of both the company's internal on-site employees and the off-site partner game development studios. All processes are controlled by the core team of responsible LEGO specialists.

Slowly, the move of the digital component design is going to the initial design stage "P-phase" of the LDP model. However, it is still more common for the brand to make the linkage to the digital component on the later "M-phase" when marketing communications channels are decided.

LEGO play experiences reach very high marks in 2013. (The LEGO Group, 2013) The company believes that the key to success is in listening and acting on rapidly changing consumer needs and interests. Feedback from LEGO.com visitors, both children and adults, enables the company to meet the rapidly changing interests and expectations of visitors.

The majority of LEGO activities in the area of digital games are focused on the mobile platforms. As one of the interviewees explained: "We want to be where kids are." This can be understood through the statistics as last year LEGO had generated more than 100 millions of user



playing experiences with mobile applications and only 20 million through Web-based games during the same period.

#### **5.4 NINJAGO The Final Battle and NINJAGO Rebooted**

*LEGO NINJAGO Masters of Spinjitzu* is a current line of toy sets produced by LEGO. It is based on elements from the previous LEGO Ninja series and enhanced by numerous changes in story and design. These include such sophisticated features as the Nindroids, the Skeleton Army and the Dragons. Also noticeable is the inclusion of vehicles which imply a more modern setting than the feudal Japan setting of the previous incarnation. Ninjago is one of the most successful toy set lines ever produced by LEGO and is designed for the target group of boys and youth between six and seventeen years old.

For this study two Ninjago digital games were taken as the examples. The popularity of these games was not affected by such factor as story franchise because the whole series was created by LEGO. The company spent around \$80,000 on creation of each Ninjago digital game.

The first generation of this series was called *Ninjago The Final Battle* and launched in March of 2013. As described by the interviewee it could be considered as an uncomplicated name with a focus point: “good vs. bad”. This game was not so successful as it was expected so it was later redesigned and *Ninjago Rebooted* was conceived. The latter game was intuitively different and was more complex than the first one, especially in the game mechanics.

The point of *Ninjago The Final Battle* is to fight against enemies named Lloyd, Jay, Cole, Zane, and Kai who are LEGO ninjas. All characters are taken from the actual LEGO Ninjago toy sets and the storyline is relevant as well. *Ninjago The Final Battle* is a single-player casual game available for IOS smartphones and tablet devices, as well as for playing in the Internet-browser on PC.

The layout of this game is similar to the classic fighter games. There are six levels to unlock and play as a player runs across each one, collecting different kinds of power-ups. Some power-ups allow to throw fire and others allow to blast beams. There are also power-ups that will increase energy. The controls are quite simple as a player can just run, jump, and attack enemies. Whenever a player kills an enemy or an enemy kills a player, he or she gets to see the classic LEGO death where the toy bricks and pieces will all break apart in slow motion. (LEGO Ninjago, 2013)

The challenging aspect keeps the game fun and exciting. One of the interviewees mentioned that the level of difficulty is a highly important feature for the game success, as a very easy game can be boring for players while a difficult one would make them frustrated. As the target audience consists of children in the age of 6-17 years, both Ninjago games were tested on special focus groups of children.

Each time a player kills a certain amount of enemies he or she will gain points to put toward the character’s statistics, making him stronger and faster during the game process. The ultimate goal of the game is to become the Golden Ninja or a sensei. The completion of each level unlocks the next one.

The graphics of *Ninjago The Final Battle* are high-quality and impressive, the colours are bright. The splash screens are drawn in 2-D and are visually appealing, keeping to the oriental theme of the game. The gameplay graphics such as characters themselves are made in 3-D. A special

music theme is played during the game process and there are also several sounds for different player's actions.

There is no purchase the product button or direct advertising in the game, except of the LEGO logo in the starting and loading animations. However, the game characters, story line and environment are similar to the real LEGO toy sets, so they make the product remarkable and desirable for the players.



Image 4 Ninjago the Final Battle screenshot

The game was promoted through the company's own specialized websites (Ninjago.com and LEGO.com), as well as through the Apple store and some third-party resources (such as gaming magazines).

***NINJAGO Rebooted*** was launched in January of 2014 as a second digital game in this line. It is a single-player arcade and runner-action game, available for IOS, Android and Kindle devices and for the PC Internet-browsers. Although it can also be called a casual game just as the previous one, it has much more sophisticated game mechanics set. As one of the interviewees mentioned: "the richer game environment leads to higher engagement which is considered to be a second-level type of outcome, preceded by awareness and followed by retention."

The characters are also taken from the real LEGO Ninjago toy sets but the plot is sufficiently different. This time the players will "help the Ninjas of Ninjago to fight against the evil forces of the Overlord as they make their way to the top of the great Borg Tower." (LEGO Ninjago, 2013)

Users can choose to play any of the ninjas Kai, Jay, Cole or Zane. There are two available game modes: Story Mode (which gives 12 stages of either wall climbing gameplay or side scrolling gameplay) and Endless Mode (where a player can develop his or her playing skills, earn points and compare the performance to the other players' statistics).

As it was mentioned, there are two types of gameplay (vertical wall climbing and horizontal side scrolling) that have different tasks, features and mechanics. These gameplays follows each other

during the game completion. There are plenty of enemies and obstacles to kill and avoid, as well as power-ups to give an extra edge. Gaining power-ups comes from collecting the various colored LEGO bricks, when the character runs through them.

The graphical elements are qualitative as well, the music theme is even more motivating than the one from the previous game. The storyline is described in 2-D animated comics that appear between the levels of the game. The gameplays are made in three dimensions and the difficulty level grows up while a player completes the game.

Just as in the previous game, *Ninjago Rebooted* doesn't have any purchase the product button or direct advertising, except of the logo in the loading animations, but the users can check the product sets inside the application.



Image 5 Ninjago Rebooted screenshot

The game was promoted through the company's own specialized websites (Ninjago.com and LEGO.com), through the Apple store and Google Play Market, and through some third-party resources (such as gaming magazines).

### 5.5 Psychological responses

Talking about the customer satisfaction, it appeared to be impossible to separate the cognitive and affective dimension as these constructions are highly theoretic.

With its digital games LEGO tries to trigger the target customer group (children) in two ways: through telling engaging stories and creating bright positive emotions.

By comparing the Ninjago games to the initial mission and values it can be seen that they do not link exactly and that for these games the decision has been made to do not focus on the learning aspect. As one of the interviewees explained, learning was not the main case in these games, the main accent was put towards coolness and participation, associated with interesting stories and positive emotional feedback.

With regards to the legal regulations, LEGO deliberately works on creation of customer awareness about its brand, products and the company through advergaming. This is mostly represented by recommendation of other LEGO sets and games to the players.

Although LEGO is a FMCG company it still wants to build a strong relationship to its consumers, therefore, its aim is not about the “one sell” but about selling the LEGO experience throughout the customer's childhood – starting with *DUPLO*, via *CITY* to *STAR WARS sets* and ending with *Technic* or *Mindstorms*. The company wants to sell several sets, hence, engage the consumers with the brand and create a life-long relationship.

Unique development is currently happening in the *DUPLO* line of the brand. *DUPLO* is designed for children within the age group 0-2. Currently this entails that the target group of *DUPLO* consists out a generation that is also known like the ‘tablet generation’, so children that will be raised in an environment where tablets, smartphones and laptops are ordinary and this will be the first completely digital generation. The company possesses the knowledge that most of the parents download applications for their children. The company tries to create awareness by linking different applications to each other.

As one of the interviewees explained, a good story is the key element of creation of strong connection between the product and the customer. For advergaming this means that the story forms the core of the game which is supported by digitalization.

## 5.6 Behavioral outcomes

In 2013 the company has seen high engagement among its loyal fans with 4.8 million LEGO Club members, more than six million likes to the LEGO Facebook page, over 250,000 subscribers to the LEGO channel on YouTube and over 14.5 million visitors to Adult Fans of LEGO community events. In addition to consumer satisfaction and loyalty, the LEGO Group wants to monitor how the company is perceived by the general public. The corporate reputation is monitored once a year. In 2013, the LEGO Group's corporate reputation ranked number ten in the world. (The LEGO Group, 2013)

From March 2013 to May 2014 more than 6.5 million people played *Ninjago The Final Battle* on their IOS devices and personal computers. The median daily session frequency reached the point of 1.9, which means that the players have been opening the game approximately 1.9 times per day. The users rated the game for 4.05 points out of 5 and LEGO evaluates these results as “quite satisfactory” because the company's goal here was to reach minimum 4 points.

During 4 months (from January till May of 2014) more than 7 million people played *Ninjago Rebooted* on their IOS, Android and Kindle devices, as well as on personal computers. The median daily session frequency reached the point of 2.0 and the users rated the game for 4.16 points out of 5. Based on these results, LEGO considers this game is much more successful than the previous one.

In general, the first priority of LEGO digital games is to produce successful campaigns of real-life products and create user awareness and engagement. Therefore, the games are usually created to be free of charge. The secondary target is to link it to the online environment as the company believes that nowadays children playing performance is constantly moving towards digital scale.

The company works with different models to explain the strategies they use. LEGO has created its own theory for digital games called Brand House Model. Every campaign needs to possess different elements to make the game successful. The foundation of the campaign is based on the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) and the Emotional Selling Proposition (ESP). The USP is concerned with the technical features that make the game extraordinary such as the technical platform, game type, dimensions, genre, prominence of advertising and congruity of brand and game. The ESP has another aim and that is the one of the story and the characters of the story, such as all representation elements (audiovisual style, narration, procedural rhetoric).

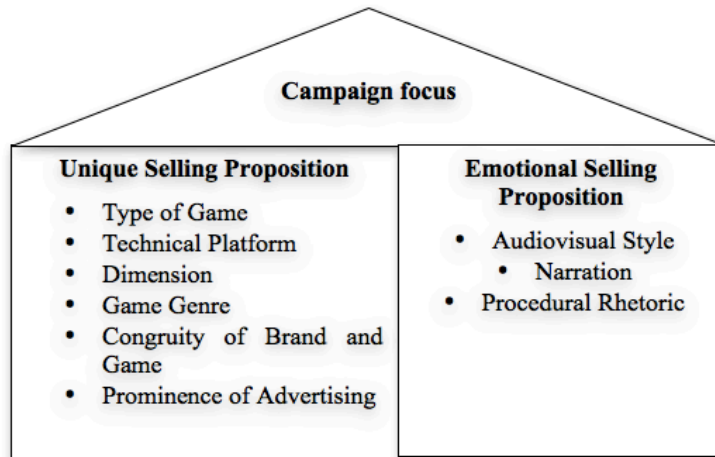


Image 6 The LEGO brand house model

The brand has identified that “light users engage through the story, meanwhile middle to heavy users are more triggered through the technical elements of the games and related innovations.” The interviewee described this classification as the following: “the light users are those who had not made any single purchase during a year, the middle had made three purchases and the heavy had bought LEGO products more than six times during a year.”

Based on a recent research done by LEGO it can be identified that twenty three per cent of the players of *NinjagoRebooted* had never purchased LEGO products before but would have liked to do it in future. This indicates a huge potential of new digital media in creating awareness about the company’s actual toy products. The company believes that the LEGO minifigures characters are a valuable trigger in creating the users’ emotional connection with the brand.

The company has no real feedback function towards its customers inside advergames but it has a message board on a portal that gives people the opportunity to express themselves. This feedback has been used to review the old versions of the games. Due to the nature of the target group, young children, there is a fine balance for the amount of interactivity and contact that is possible, due to legislation to protect the youngsters. The company also tries to get feedback on their digital products while asking customers in stores and working with focus groups of clients. Consumer call rate is monitored in the LEGO Group to give a temperature check on how the quality is perceived by consumers.

## 6 Analysis

*The following chapter will consist out of an analysis of the collected data. In the end of the analysis the revised theoretical framework will be presented.*

Advergaming are interactive video games whose purpose is to advertise where players take the role of a character in completing certain objectives. (Purswani, 2010) These games are mostly casual, free of charge, downloadable from or playable on the brand's website, easy and fun to play, and offer quick rewards. (Redondo, 2012) Both Ninjago games match these characteristics perfectly. They have not been designed as payable because LEGO perceives that their goal is to create successful campaigns of real-life products and create user awareness and engagement.

Although advergaming are not comparably difficult to create (Purswani 2010; Cauberghe & De Pelsmacker 2010), LEGO outsources their production to its' partner game studios because the company's experience shows that owning such additional activities can cause a lot of negative side effects, such as losing the focus of the core business idea and values. However, in order to keep the games related to LEGO's product lines marketing campaigns, the LEGO employees form the core of the production group. Further, it takes minimum six months for LEGO to create an advergaming, so the mentioned statement about the ease of their production can be criticized.

### 6.1 Integrated marketing campaign

Several authors (Chen and Ringel 2001; Deal 2005) wrote that most advergaming are incorporated as part of an advergaming execution which is produced specifically for the sponsoring brand, in essence making the game itself the brand message. As it was mentioned before, advergaming as product placement fits in the broadest sense, the scientists argue that seeing these as integrated marketing communications better explains their role in an on-going, interactive, synergistic marketing campaign. (Schultz 1996; Advertising Education Forum 2012) These statements are confirmed by the used cases as LEGO uses digital games as an element of its integrated marketing approach, making them tightly connected to certain toy sets.

The company pays particular attention to its integrated marketing approach, so it seems like LEGO is a content powerhouse, at times even more closely resembling a media company than a toy company. The company's activities are incorporated into The LEGO Development Process (LDP) model which is typically designed as a three years plan and aims to rationalize them in order to make the processes fast, focused, relevant, responsive and transparent.

The advergaming creation and development are considered by the first two phases of the LDP model and are run under the supervision of several company departments and the core team of LEGO specialists. The first phase is related to Product milestone overview and here the overall product portfolio strategy is defined and selected concepts are decided. Although it is a relatively new practice, the advergaming concept planning takes place on this stage as a part of the integrated product portfolio. As one of the interviewees explained, this is due to the fact that digital games became the essential part of children entertainment and learning these days and LEGO "wants to be where kids are." The second phase is related to Marketing and runs until the product launch. On this stage the project team is finally established, communication channels and the assortment of products are identified and set, the procurement details such as supply chain are determined. The advergaming physical creation processes take place on this stage. The creation of an advergaming usually takes approximately six months for LEGO.

## 6.2 Advergaming characteristics

Advergaming characteristics were classified in this study as parts of either Unique Selling Proposition (USP) or Emotional Selling Proposition (ESP) to make the revised model closer connected to the LEGO perspective of the case. The USP is concerned with the technical features that make the game extraordinary such as the technical platform, game type, dimensions, genre, prominence of advertising and congruity of brand and game. The ESP has another aim and that is the one of the story and the characters of the story, such as all representation elements (audiovisual style, narration, procedural rhetoric). The analysis of these advergaming characteristics is presented below.

Both researched games are designed to be played by a single user, the multiple-player mode has not been used due to its complexity and the genre specifics. However, the second game – *Ninjago Rebooted* - was enhanced by the so-called endless mode, which allows users to share the results of their performance with other players, and therefore, to compete with them. The fact that this game resulted in a much more successful way can be possibly related to this implication. At least, some scholars assumed so. (Terlutter & Capella 2013; Bearden & Etzel 1982)

Further, *Ninjago The Final Battle* and *Ninjago Rebooted* appeared to fit the Chen's and Ringel's (2001) principles for the development of efficient digital gaming campaigns, such as: they work effectively on standard browsers, operating systems, mobile platforms and hardware; the market research goals were incorporated into the interactive environment as the company used its customers' feedback to review the games; the games are targeting children and youth in the age of 6-17 years who are the biggest fans of online game playing these days; the games are casual and their mechanics are simple.

Although a casual game is mostly defined as one that is easy to learn, simple to play and offers quick rewards with forgiving gameplay, which all turns into a fun experience (Kuittinen et al. 2007; Millis & Robbins 2005), the suggested cases indicate that the game complicity is an important issue as well. As one of the interviewees said, a very easy game can be boring for players while a difficult one would make them frustrated. Additionally, in both games the difficulty level grows up while a player completes the game. Both *Ninjago* games were tested on special focus groups of children. According to Redondo (2012), casual games have a positive affect transfer from game to brand for children, teens and women but does not have such a strong affect on adult men auditory. As adult men are not the target group for LEGO it can be suggested that it is enough for the company to create relatively simple casual digital games in the future and not switch to the so-called hardcore games.

Both games are available for playing on PC or portable devices. In the first case the keyboard is the only device users need to use in order to play. Advertising Education Forum (2012) materials stated that during the last years there was a serious move towards mobile technology in the advergaming sphere. This is proved by the LEGO *Ninjago* cases as only 20 millions of users had played these games on PC in 2013 while the number of mobile players was five times bigger. These tendencies are also supported by a number of researchers (Taylor, Voelker, and Pentina 2011; Terlutter & Capella 2013; Feijoo et al. 2012) Interestingly, while the first game was available only for IOS mobile platform, the second one was adapted to Android and Kindle devices as well. The reasons why consumers engage in mobile gaming are different, including: intrinsic enjoyment, escapism, efficiency, economic value, visual appeal, perceived novelty, and perceived safety (Okazaki, 2008). The current study suggests those who want to create an

advergame to pay particular attention to different mobile platforms as from the all mentioned above the conclusion can be made that these technologies have the biggest potential for engaging customers through advergames. This is especially relevant for targeting children as mobile advergaming is likely to be susceptible to less parental control. (Terlutter & Capella, 2013) As mobile gaming is likely to be described by higher playing frequency but shorter playing times (Choi, Lee and Li, 2013), it should be the best platform for relatively simple casual games.

In both researched games a 3-D technology has been used for designing the gameplay while the loading animations were made in two dimensions. Additionally, in *Ninjago Rebooted*, the newly introduced storyline comics animation between the levels was drawn in 2-D as well, which is good for keeping to the oriental theme of the game. As two dimensions remind players traditional printing and drawing technologies (Van Dam et al., 1994) and do not overwhelm their attention, whereas 3-D technologies appeared to enrich the perceived depth perception (Terlutter & Capella, 2013), this study suggests that the following combination is perfect for brand placement and gameplay design respectively. A 4-D technology has not been used in Ninjago games, so the efficiency of its usage in advergaming for creation remains questionable.

Terlutter and Capella (2013) stated that advertising outcome is closely related to game genre. *Ninjago The Final Battle* is a classic fighter game with single game genre while *Ninjago Rebooted* was designed as an arcade and runner-action game, connecting two different genres (through vertical wall climbing gameplay and horizontal side scrolling gameplay). As many players tend to play two or more genres of digital game (Juul, 2010), the current study suggests that the success of *Ninjago Rebooted* can be explained with this advancement, among others.

The prominent brand advertising can enhance the sense of realism while the inappropriate is typically perceived negatively by players. (Nelson, 2002) Scientists also found that in the advergame context it is crucial for players that the context of the game comes close to reality and that the degree of congruity between the product category of a brand and game content plays an important role. (Nelson 2002; Hernandez et al. 2004; Lee and Faber 2007) The Ninjago games are both congruent to the LEGO brand as all characters are taken from the actual LEGO Ninjago toy sets and the storyline is relevant as well. According to the persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994), it is argued that a high-level of congruity between game and brand for low-involvement products makes consumers more strongly understand the game as being an ad (Terlutter & Capella, 2013). Due to the fact that the actual LEGO products are toy sets as well, it can not be stated that the researched games contain too much congruity between the product category of a brand and game content, so this feature is considered to be implemented perfectly.

If a brand is put in the focal area of viewing or is included in the central game play, it is featured prominently. (Terlutter & Capella, 2013) Positive relationships of brand prominence on brand memory in video games are reported numerous authors (e.g., Nelson 2002; Schneider and Cornwell 2005). In both Ninjago games LEGO the brand is incorporated through the gameplay elements, firstly, through the characters minifigures. Purswani (2010) mentioned that unlike other forms of advertising, advergames can create telepresence and this involvement in the goals of the game and the fate of the character can help ingrain the brand into the user's memory and experiences. LEGO minifigures characters are believed to be a valuable trigger in creating the users' emotional connection with the brand. The LEGO logo is presented only in loading and starting animations, so the advertisement is prominent but not overwhelming. There are no purchase the product buttons or direct advertising in both Ninjago games.



A particular audiovisual appearance of the game is decided by designers through implementation of a mix of three elements: space/environment, objects and symbols. (Järvinen, 2002) Audiovisual elements and styles are about being able to describe different games' audiovisual form in theoretical terms. Audiovisual appearance also includes advertising-related design elements, such as strong imagery, billboards, colors, brand logos, character and interface design, etc. Both Ninjago games have strong imagery, colorful animation and rich character and interface design. As it was mentioned, the logo of LEGO is presented only in loading and starting animations. According to the audiovisual appearance of a particular game it belongs to a certain audiovisual style. Järvinen (2002) suggests the following game audiovisual styles: photorealism, caricaturism and abstractionism. As the researched games run on realistic design that is similar to real LEGO toy sets (the game characters, story lines and environments are similar to the real LEGO toy sets), the current study suggests that the audiovisual style of these games can be described and protorealistic. For example, in both Ninjago games, when a player kills an enemy or an enemy kills a player, he or she gets to see the classic LEGO death where the toy bricks and pieces will all break apart in slow motion.

Narrative can be defined as the methods by which the story materials are demonstrated to the audience. (Dansky, 2007) This is about the methods or styles used to tell the story of the game. The story includes the plots prewritten by game writers and developers and created by players in the course of playing the games. (Qin et al., 2009) Another important representation element is procedural rhetoric, which is defined as the "way of creating, explaining or understanding processes," and processes as the "methods, techniques and logics that drive the operation of systems". (Bogost, 2007) This is the practice of using processes persuasively through interaction. Both games' narratives are not traditionally interactive which means that the players can not change the game plot substantially. However, *Ninjago Rebooted* is much more advanced in this point as well, as players can choose to play one of several ninja characters and play the Story mode, which makes the game environment much more sophisticated and easy to understand. In this game players can become acquainted with the story line behind the product. As one of the interviewees mentioned, a good story is the key element of creation of strong connection between the product and the customer. For advergames this means that the story forms the core of the game which is supported by digitalization.

### **6.3 Psychological responses**

According to various authors (Călin2010; Nelson, Yaros, and Keum 2006; Schneider and Cornwell 2005), advergames attempt to capture the attention of players, and then to transmit to them, in an indirect way, suggestions that aim to influence their perceptions regarding a company, brand or product. This can be explained through the so-called 'state of flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991), which is used by psychologists to explain a mental state in which the attention is highly concentrated on a particular process, the environmental information is screened out, and the person experiences a harmonious flow of its present experience. LEGO's annual responsibility report (2013) clearly indicates that the company understands this point and perceives the profound impact of playing on children's cognitive, social, developmental and academic skills. The company believes that the "flowing" state of mind the most efficient and engaging for learning and engaging processes.

Children and youth – the target audience of Ninjago advergames – are the most vulnerable consumer groups for this marketing communications medium. (Moore 2006; Roedder-John

1999)The persuasion knowledge model (An and Stern 2011; Terlutter & Capella 2013)says that customers develop an understanding over time about the intentions of marketing and the tactics employed by marketers to achieve desired outcomes. LEGO builds all its digital gaming campaigns responsibly according to the current legal regulations but admits that the company's goal is to create a life-long relationship with customers. This is working through the LEGO experience starting from the customers childhood –with *DUPLO*, via *CITY* to *STAR WARS sets* and ending with *Technic* or *Mindstorms*. The players engage with LEGO and continue to explore its products over time through recommendations from one game line to another.

This can be also explained with the limited-capacity model of mediated message processing. (Lang, 2000) As Piaget and Inhelder (1969) wrote, while children mature they go through several stages of cognitive processing, so as advergimes connect advertisements with fun interactive content it result in children's inability to distinguish the persuasive intent within a game.

Although some authors tried to implicate the social cognitive theory (Bandura 1977; 2001) to the subject and stated that learning can take place in advergimes (Cicchirillo and Lin, 2011), this study showed that LEGO was not thinking about it on the first place. As one of the interviewees explained, learning was not the main case in these games, the main accent was put towards coolness and participation, associated with interesting stories and positive emotional feedback.

The revised theoretical model suggests that the recognized qualities of an application can have an influence on the online consumer engagement, which is defined as cognitive, affective and participation. The model then shows that there are two possible behavioural outcomes either positive or negative. A key to create a multidimensional view was to separate the psychological responses to identify three online consumer engagement dimensions in a separate manner. For example, the perceived quality of information in advergime can positively forecast the affective attributes of online consumer engagement.

However, when gathering the empirical data it appeared that there was no real ability to separate the cognition and affect dimension, when talking about customer satisfaction. This would indicate that the two factors need to be combined.

Previous research has indicated that both affect and cognition can forecast satisfaction (Homburg, Koschate, & Hoyer, 2006). More specific author Oliver (1997) indicates that affect “coexists alongside various cognitive judgments in producing satisfaction,” also the central apprehension of understanding the consumption of customers. Authors Homburg et al. (2006) give an explanation for this by adding that scholars cannot comprehend satisfaction without combining both cognition and affect due to the “dynamic nature of the phenomenon”.

By moving beyond this, assessing online consumer engagement and than in particularly satisfaction in relation to the advergimes, are possibly so similar to each other due to the intertwines of cognition and affect that research in this case need to see them as a joint construction. Alike, considering the advergimes on which the study was centered it is challenging to identify these two elements unconnected.

An advergime includes different attributes that due to their nature are able to mentally involve people, and at the meantime are able to learn about the company in an unconscious way and experiencing a positive and satisfactory involvement. The combination of both information and visual stimulation can make the experience for people both cognitively and affectively extremely engaging, this can explain the complexity of separating the thoughts and feelings of the firm.

O'Brien (2010) mentions that the conditions of the practicalities and take notice are submerged in the system to encapsulate cognitive and affective experiences.

The empirical data indicates that in the case of advergaming the distinction between cognition and affect can be neglected, and instead should be researched as one element to deepen the academic knowledge of online consumer engagement focusing on advergaming. It is uncovering from the empirical data that indeed online consumer engagement needs to be examined as multidimensional since it has multiple facets.

As defined by previous scholars (Barki & Hartwick, 1989, 1994; Vroom & Jago, 1988) participation included the interaction of consumers and company or creating of the feeling of being part of a experience. Based on the empirical data it can be seen that the company has limited interaction possibilities the consumers can use. They do have message boards that allows the consumer to respond and interact with the company and each other. However it need to be noted that due to the young age of the target group the participation, is not considered as much important as the cognitive and affective responses.

#### **6.4 Behavioral outcomes**

The behavioral outcome of consumer experience can be either positive (approach behaviors) or negative (avoidance behaviors). (Donovan & Rossiter 1982. Loureiro & Riberio, 2011) Approach behaviors lead to customer loyalty, (re)purchase intent and positive word-of-mouth, while avoidance behaviors mean the opposite effects (e.g., no intention of returning/purchasing, negative word-of-mouth). (Reitz, 2012) In addition to consumer satisfaction and loyalty, the LEGO Group wants to monitor how the company is perceived by the general public, so the corporate reputation is being monitored once a year. In 2013, the LEGO Group's corporate reputation ranked number ten in the world.

Loyalty and (re)purchase intent are considered as important consumer behavioral outcomes of companies' online marketing efforts and so are considered outcomes to consumers engaged through the advergaming. (Reitz, 2012) Further, Griffin (2002) stated that a consumer willing to repurchase from a company is more valuable for the company compared to a consumer who is not, as companies can hereby benefit from reduced marketing costs, lower transaction costs, reduced customer turnover expenses, increased cross-selling success, and reduced failure costs.

With its' advergaming LEGO wants to create user awareness and engagement. On the one hand, the company aims to increase the awareness of so-called light users ("who had not made any single purchase during a year") about its' brand, values and products. LEGO sees the point of advergaming instrument for more acquainted users in its engaging power. The company tries to reach the first user group through storytelling and the second group through advanced technical elements of the games. Therefore, the LEGO Brand House Model, which was mentioned earlier, incorporated in the revised theoretical model suggested by this study, explains the way LEGO gets positive behavioral outcomes of its' advergaming campaigns, such as loyalty and (re)purchase intents. Although both storytelling (as a part of Emotional Selling Proposition) and technical elements (Unique Selling Proposition) are crucial for the game success, this paper suggests that companies should pay particular attention to one of these features accordingly to the campaign targets (to raise the user' product and company awareness or to engage current users).

The company understands that nowadays children playing performance is constantly moving towards digital scale, so it tries to link its products to the online environment. Both Ninjago digital games are created as parts of integrated marketing campaigns for LEGO's real-life products. The fact that twenty-three per cent of the players of *Ninjago Rebooted* had never purchased LEGO products before but would have liked to do it in future indicates the potential power of advergames in obtaining new customers. As Srinivasan et al.(2002) wrote, online loyalty fosters a sense of commitment and attachment to the brand.

Although there is a possibility to find a web-store on the Ninjago website, LEGO does not place any purchase buttons in its digital games due to the legal regulations of children-related content. Therefore, this study considers that the previous definition of online loyalty from the behavioral perspective as the "customer's intention to buy" from the website and the intention to stay at the website (Cyr, 2008) should be expanded to the real life stores as well and connected to the traditional concept of loyalty.

*Ninjago the Final Battle* is considered to be less successful than *Ninjago Rebooted* because of the higher median playing session frequency, user acquisition growth and the users rating score of the latter game. The current study suggests that the mentioned indicators can be used by companies for evaluation of the efficiency of their advergame campaigns.

Image 7 suggests the **revised theoretical model** that helps to organize the appropriate variables and relationships for analysis to build on the understanding of how advergames run the customer engagement. The revised research model was modified from the originally proposed research model due to several implications of the Ninjago games cases, such as:

- the preparation phase of advergame creation was added in order to explain the effect of integrated marketing campaign,
- advergame characteristics were classified as either Unique Selling Proposition or Emotional Selling Proposition,
- the cognitive and affective factors of online consumer engagement were being collapsed into one factor (Cognitive + Affective).

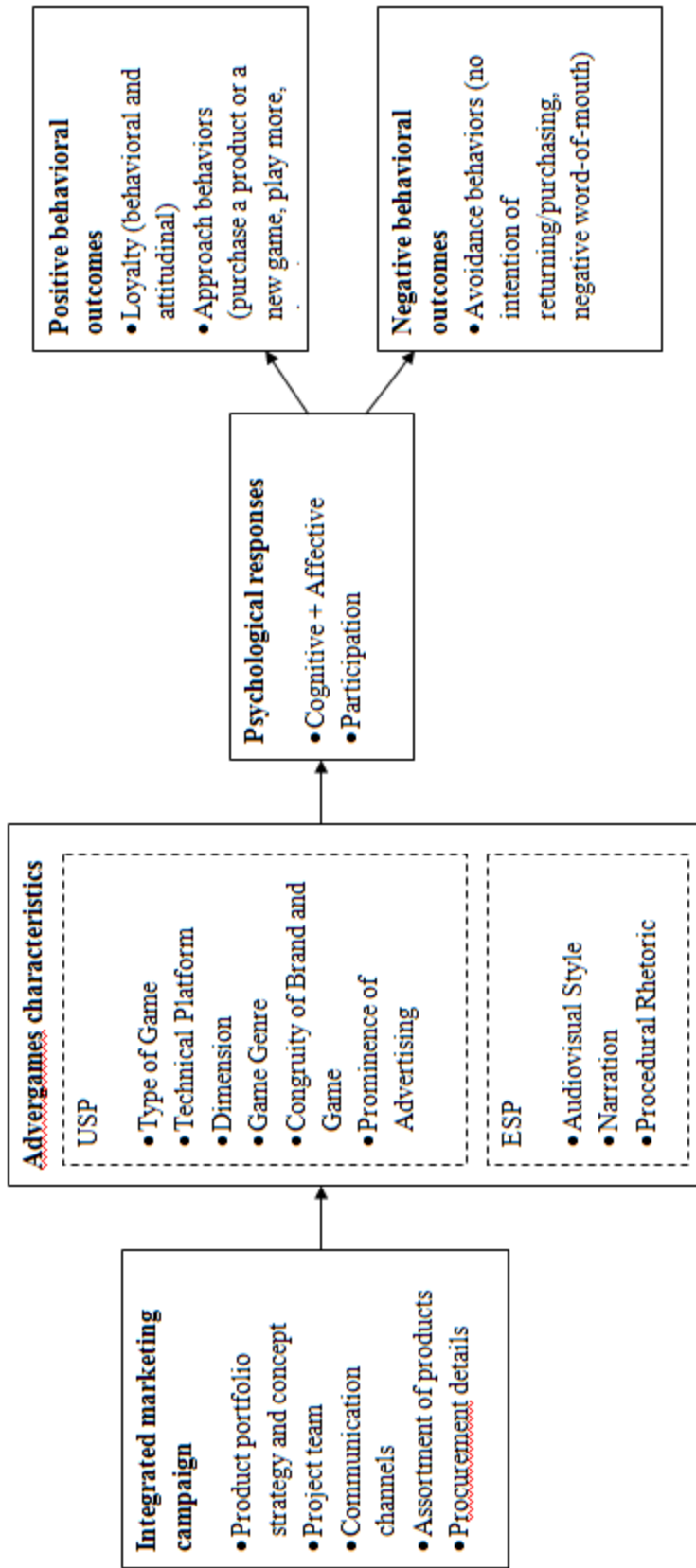


Image 7 Revised theoretical framework

## 7 Conclusion

*In this chapter the final conclusions are drawn from the case studied in this thesis. In this context, the research question is answered, implications for theory and practice are elaborated and starting points for further research proposed.*

The study was set out to explore the concept of using advergames in creation of online consumer engagement. It has identified the way advergames work, described the elements of advergames that could be used for engaging consumers and raising their awareness about the company and its products. The study has also sought to know what kinds of psychological responses and behavioral outcomes do advergame users have during and after the playing process.

The general theoretical literature on this subject and specifically in the context of advergames is inconclusive on several vital questions due to the lack of research from the companies' point of view on consumer involvement. The study sought to answer these two questions:

1. What are the elements of advergames that drive online consumer engagement?;
2. How are advergames currently used by the market leading company in its marketing campaigns in order to create online consumer engagement?

The thesis included the overview of the history of advergames, as well as the industry and academic perspective on the subject. Advergames are interactive games that are developed around a specific product, brand or character associated to a brand or product. (Chen and Ringel 2001, Yuan et al., 1998) Their purpose is to advertise where players take the role of a character in completing certain objectives. (Purswani, 2010) Due to the fact that these games are developed around brands and products they are incorporated as a part of advergame execution which is produced specifically for the sponsoring brand, in essence making the game itself the brand message. (Deal 2005)

Advergames started simply as in-game advertisement. (Călin, 2010) However, due to the fact that this form of advergame is rather static and ineffective as the player may be too concentrated on the game itself without recognizing the brand image, companies were encouraged to start producing their own advergames around a theme or a character directly related with their products and/or brands. Fernandez et al. (2006) wrote that online games are the future of the interactive entertainment industry, seeing the convergence between the traditional media, and entertainment industry, and the gaming industry in an effort to develop new and sustainable business models and revenue streams in an increasingly online world. The current study agrees with this statement.

Although advergames have usually been hosted on the Internet (Advertising Education Forum, 2012), the current study supported the statement that during the recent years there have been a substantial move towards mobile technologies. These games are mostly casual, free of charge, downloadable from or playable on the brand's website, easy and fun to play, and offer quick rewards. (Redondo, 2012)

The substantial potential of advergames as a new form of interactive advertising provides proprietary research directions that evaluate the effectiveness of advergames, however, little academic research gives the potential to offer theoretically grounded insights into the power of specific features of advergames on desired communication effects. (Wise et al., 2008) This point

was one of the major motives of the current thesis as it basically asks the same issue as the first research question of this study.

Terlutter and Capella (2013) state that the user's perception of advertising in digital games can be explained through four theoretical models: persuasion knowledge model, social cognitive theory, limited-capacity model of mediated message processing, and the concept of flow.

The definition of online consumer engagement was provided by the current study from the industry and academic points of view. The latter point included such related spheres as: computer science, advertising and marketing. By combining the industry and academic perspectives the following thoughts were proposed: engagement needs to be seen from the most multidimensional perspective to enrich the information gathered in the studies, for this reason usage is made of cognition, affective and participation perspective. However, the latter analysis identified that there is no possibility to take the concepts of cognitive and affective engagement separately, so these issues should be considered together as a theoretical construction.

The current thesis proposed a framework model to organize the appropriate variables and relationships for analysis to build on the understanding of how advergames run the customer engagement. The foundation of the proposed conceptual framework was situated within the stimulus – organism – response (S-O-R) model adopted from Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) environmental psychology model. The S-O-R model suggests that specific features of an environment provoke an individual's emotional state, which causes a behavioral reaction (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982).

The cases of two advergames made by The LEGO Group (*Ninjago The Final Battle* and *NINJAGO Rebooted*) were taken as the empirical data for this thesis. After the analysis has been made, the current research suggested to use such framework to build on the understanding of how advergames run the customer engagement:

- the stimulus portion was presented by the advergame characteristics ((the Unique Selling Proposition (technical features such as: the technical platform, game type, dimensions, genre, prominence of advertising and congruity of brand and game) and the Emotional Selling Proposition (representation elements such as audiovisual style, narration, procedural rhetoric));
- the organism portion was presented by two components of consumers' psychological responses to advergame (cognitive + affective and participation);
- finally, the response portion was presented by the positive approach (e.g., purchasing, using, and positively communicating with others) or negative avoidance behaviors (e.g., no intention of returning/purchasing, negative word-of-mouth) of online consumer engagement in an advergame;
- also, the preparation phase of advergames creation was added in order to explain the effect of integrated marketing campaigns.

The revised theoretical model synthesized the empirical findings to answer the study's two research questions. The elements of advergames that drive online consumer engagement are grouped as the Unique Selling Proposition (technical features such as: the technical platform, game type, dimensions, genre, prominence of advertising and congruity of brand and game) and the Emotional Selling Proposition (representation elements such as audiovisual style, narration, procedural rhetoric).

The current study also identified or supported the previous statements that the following advergaming elements can lead to bigger success in online customer engagement and awareness creation: richer multiple-player environments; better availability of an advergaming on different technical platforms (especially mobile); simpler and balanced game casualty; the combination of 3-D and 2-D graphics, as well as of two game genres; the limited congruity between the product category of a game content; prominent but not overwhelming advertisement placement; and a good game story.

The second research question considers the way advergaming are currently used by the market leading company in its marketing campaigns. LEGO uses digital games as an element of its integrated marketing approach, making them tightly connected to certain real life products. On the other hand, the importance of advergaming is growing as the study has identified that more and more company's target customers (children) are moving towards digital entertainment specifically related to mobile technologies. Therefore, with its advergaming the company aims to create user awareness and engagement. On the one hand, the company aims to increase the awareness of so-called light users ("who had not made any single purchase during a year") about its' brand, values and products. LEGO sees the point of advergaming instrument for more acquainted users in its engaging power. The company tries to reach the first user group through storytelling and the second group through advanced technical elements of the games.

## **7.1 Contributions**

Results of the present study can contribute to the digital and engagement marketing literature by deepening the understanding of how advergaming are used in modern marketing campaigns in order to create customer engagement. The paper can help academics in their further research on the subject, as well as to facilitate relevant company specialists, such as digital marketing managers and game designers, in their marketing communication. This paper can help them to understand better the way advergaming work and explain the elements that could be used for engaging consumers and raising their awareness about the company and products. The suggested model can help provide them with further clarification on the subject.

## **7.2 Limitations**

The thesis has offered a qualitative perspective on the companies' point of view on the use of advergaming in creating online consumer engagement and was conducted through two case studies taken from one market leading company. As a direct consequence of this methodology, the study encountered a number of limitations, which need to be considered. Particularly, the fact that the cases were taken from one company, one product market and one target consumer group means that the results of the study should be considered carefully when applying for other companies, product markets and consumer groups. Secondly, the qualitative method of research means that it is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researchers and more easily influenced by the researchers' personal biases and idiosyncrasies.

## **7.3 Further research**

The future exploration of the following research directions can be suggested for the further research: the quantitative and qualitative research should be conducted applying the results of this study to other/different product and geographical markets, consumer groups and companies; the further evaluation of the role of advergaming in the overall success of integrated marketing



communications should be done; the difference between short-term versus long-term effects of users' engagement through advergames should be explored; the role of social and individual factors of players in the online consumer engagement process can be researched.

Both previous theoretical researches and the results of the current study identify the growing power of advergames as a marketing medium in creating online consumer engagement. Further exploration and implication of this issue should be valuable for both marketing practitioners and academic scholars in their work.

#### **7.4 Recommendations for LEGO**

First of all, it has to be admitted that LEGO had done great work in order to follow its customers where they are and turn advergaming into the powerful instrument of consumer engagement creation. This study identified several suggestions for this company to make its activities in this sphere even more successful.

The company should continue the shift towards mobile technologies and its advergames should be created for as much different multimedia platforms as possible, for example, for different smartphone operation systems and portable consoles.

Further, it should be understood that nowadays richer multiplayer environments lead to greater consumer engagement, so another direction for improvements can be set towards the multiplayer modes and richer social interaction inside and outside of the game environment.

LEGO should continue focusing on simple and casual games using balanced combination of 3-D and 2-D graphic technologies and implication of several types of game genres/mechanics within one single game.

It is highly important to stick the advergames to the goals of particular integrated marketing campaigns through the congruity between the product category of a game content; prominent but not overwhelming advertisement placement and a good game story taken from the original LEGO toy sets.

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## **Appendix 1 – Interview guide (English)**

### **General information**

**Name:** Sten Funder Lysdahl

**Position:** Senior Creative Manager

**Name:** Stefan Stokkebaek

**Position:** Digital Project Manager

**Name:** Sigurður Hjaltalín Þórisson

**Position:** Digital Experience Manager

### **General Questions**

1. The LEGO Group development process
2. Discussion of differences between the chosen two games. Why do you think one was more successful than another?

### **Advergame characteristics**

1. How did you decide which type of game would you create (single/multiple player, casual/hardcore)?
2. How did you choose a technical platform? Why mobile technologies are so important to LEGO in this case?
3. Who and how was making a decision concerning game genre, dimensions and representation elements (audiovisual style, narrative, procedural rhetoric)?
4. To what extent should a game be congruent (corresponding) to the LEGO brand? How did you control this issue?
5. How did you place the advertisement inside these games? How did you evaluate the outcome of the advertisement?

### **Psychological responses to advergame and brand**

1. From a company's perspective how would you describe customer engagement?
2. Do you perceive the customer engagement to involve cognitive, affective and participative attributes?
3. Does LEGO try to unconsciously tempt the customer to get to know more about the company, brand and products?
4. Does LEGO try to create consumer gratification by being actively and effectively present to create an emotional bond with the consumer?
5. Does LEGO try to create interactivity with the content with the firm or consumers?

### **Behavioral outcomes**

1. What is the main final goal by letting customers take part of the games (buy the real product, get familiar with the product, establish loyalty?)

2. What customer behavior is desirable after playing an advergaming?
3. What are the positive and negative behavioral outcomes of player's engagement in advergaming?
4. What kind of purchase behavior (positive/negative) and word-of-mouth had been caused by these games? How did you evaluate such outcomes in these games' cases?
5. How many times did the players replay these games in average?
6. How did these games influence brand loyalty?



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