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Playful Persuasion

The Rhetorical Potential of Advergames

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Abstract

The use of video games for advertising purposes is persuasive communication which directly involves the recipient in the construction of an argument. This form is becoming increasingly common, and the present article explores the phenomenon of game-based advertising. We begin by discussing the increased reliance on participatory and digital rhetoric. We then proceed to examine game-based persuasion in light of rhetorical theory, and we propose an analytical model for such games which is applied to three sample games. The analytical model takes into account the degree to which the game makes a self-contained argument, the degree to which the product or service is integrated into the game, and whether the game goal and learning goal overlap. Finally, we discuss perspectives for the integration of communication studies and game studies.

Keywords: video games, rhetoric, advertising, persuasion

Introduction

The use of video games for "serious" purposes such as education and advertising is not an entirely new phenomenon.[1] However, compared to the present proliferation of video games in non-entertainment contexts, earlier usage seems sporadic. In recent years, video games have been used to recruit soldiers[2], to criticize the workings of multinational corporations[3], to question the War on Terror[4], to swing votes[5], and to sell Internet banking services[6]. Meanwhile, the literature on the topic is growing at an equal speed, with recent work on serious game design (e.g., Bergeron 2006; Iuppa & Borst 2006), games for educational purposes (e.g., Gee 2003; Squire 2004; Egenfeldt-Nielsen 2005; Shaffer 2007), and more general perspectives on games as means of persuasion (e.g., Frasca 2007; Bogost 2007).

On this quickly expanding background, we focus on a particular issue, namely the use of video games for marketing purposes, so-called advergames. We seek to understand how, why and with what (possible) effects advergames are being used. We do so by proposing a model for analysis of the persuasive capabilities of games on the basis of a theoretical discussion of the rhetorical potential of games. To illustrate the analytical model, we conduct three case studies of (Danish) advergames. Finally, we discuss future perspectives for the study of communication as related to game studies.

Some Definitions and Examples

A game, in the careful formulation of Salen and Zimmerman, is "a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome" (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 80) (and a video game is a game that runs on a computer). Thus, a game is a structure in which the player is presented with a (more or less clearly defined) goal while being obstructed by challenges from easily reaching this goal. It is a common game design assumption that players accept a game's goals as worth striving for and act in a way that is most likely to help them reach this goal or increase their score (Smith 2006). Striving to achieve a game goal entails two important things. First, by accepting the goal, a player is acting in accordance with a particular agenda, which may range from the fully abstract (connect the dots) to the very concrete (kill all terrorists). Second, progressing in a game means learning how to overcome the challenges of the game, thus acquiring or improving skills. Again, these skills may be fairly abstract (stacking blocks in a particular order) or strongly connected to concrete experiences (parking a car).

For the purposes of the present article, an advergame is a game whose main purpose is to boost sales of a product or service, whether through increased brand recognition, increased liking or other methods. In other words, it is a game that, ultimately, is meant to influence post-play behavior. In research contexts, advergames are often subsumed under the more general heading of "serious games", a category typically including games made for educational or persuasive purposes (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith, & Tosca 2008).

In a Danish context, an early advergame accompanied the breakfast cereal Guldkorn (Eng.: Honey Puffs) in 1991 (see Figure 1.)

Figure 1. *"Guldkorn Ekspressen" MS DOS version*

Source: Silverrock Productions, 1991.

In "Guldkorn Ekspressen", the player controls the Honey Monster and a friendly bee who are out to collect Honey Puffs in train wagons. Thus, the player is encouraged (at

least in the context of the game) to identify with the Honey Monster and to view Honey Puffs as attractive. By current standards, the game controls are rather complex; this may be due to the fact that the game would have to offer a fairly nuanced experience to tempt the player to actually run it (as opposed to today's online games, which require very little effort to run). In later years, many other food manufacturers have followed suit. Arla Foods, producers of milk-based food products, offers several simple games, usually aimed at young target groups. For instance, "The Little Brother Game" lets players control "little brother", a character known from a range of children's cheeses, as he milks a cow (using two keyboard keys only) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. *"The Little Brother Game"*

Source: Arla Foods.

Both games are relatively simple, but it is worth mentioning that, in terms of recruiting players, web-based games (and almost all current advergames are web-based) have much smaller barriers to entry than do games requiring installation from discs and similar storage media.

Existing Research

Here we will briefly summarize the more recent research on the topic of advergaming (for broader perspectives on serious games, see references cited above). In an influential attempt to conceptualize advergames, Jane Chen and Matthew Ringel distinguish between three levels of product-game integration (from low to high): associative, illustrative and demonstrative (Chen & Ringel 2001). Associative integration occurs when a brand is simply "attached" to a game without any in-game function (a logo is displayed with non-related, or only conceptually related, game content). We see illustrative integration when the product is actually an in-game object, but only one whose properties do not mirror those of the real-world product (a player must collect boxes of breakfast

cereal, but cannot eat the cereal). Finally, demonstrative integration occurs when the game allows for meaningful interaction with the product (a racing game lets the player drive a model, which reflects characteristics of a real-world car). We will return to these categories below.

Working empirically, Winkler and Buckner (Winkler & Buckner 2006) suggest that advergames work best when the brand is already known and the level of recall is relatively high. The latter result is contrasted to the low recall reported by Chaney, Lin and Chaney in their study of in-game billboards (Chaney, Lin, & Chaney 2004). Winkler and Buckner suggest that this lower recall may be explained by the more complex games studied by Chaney, Lin and Chaney. This complexity might leave less cognitive capacity for in-game ads. Deal (Deal 2005) attempts to compare the difference in recall between banner ads and advergames. In this study, the respondents showed recall levels that were close to four times better for the game than for the banner.

While the empirical questions of whether or not advergames work, and whether they work more efficiently than other formats, are obviously interesting, they are not our main concern here. Instead, we attempt to establish a theory and analytical model of how advergames may work rhetorically. Our approach builds on the important work of game scholar Ian Bogost (Bogost 2005; Bogost 2007). Besides surveying the field of "persuasive games", Bogost has argued that the truly important feature of these games is their ability to employ "procedural rhetoric", understood as "the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures" (Bogost 2007: ix). The ability to mount procedural arguments is a feature unknown to previous media (and thus, previous types of rhetoric) and, Bogost argues, one that merits special attention. In the following, we will discuss Bogost's claims concerning the persuasive power of games.

The Procedural Rhetoric of Games

Ian Bogost suggests that games are not only rhetorical, but that they should be counted among the most persuasive of rhetorical forms. Games, Bogost claims, hold a particular power because they represent human or material processes with digital processes (Bogost 2007: 14).

Bogost's argument is that the persuasive potential of video games lies in their procedural form; that is, games are neither verbal, written nor visual rhetorical utterances, but a type of rhetoric that makes "…claims about how things work" (Bogost 2007: 29). The game does not present the player with explicit claims and arguments, but sets up the procedure for playing, and by following this procedure the player comes to enact the claim of the game. Procedural rhetoric positions the player as an active participant in the construction of the argument, which is built up through the course of the game, rather than as the passive recipient of a proposition that is constructed and substantiated by the sender of the message for the benefit of the audience. Instead of telling the player what the point is, the game lets him or her experience it (Bogost 2007: 35).

The underlying premise of Bogost's argument on the persuasiveness of procedurality holds great immediate appeal: If you participate actively in the process of persuasion, you are more likely to be persuaded than if you are the passive recipient of the persuasive effort of others. Or put more simply, self-persuasion is stronger than other-persuasion.

Although we do not object to the basic truth of this premise, we doubt that the procedural or self-persuasive feature is as unique to video games as Bogost seems to think.

Bogost bases his argument concerning the unique character of the procedural rhetoric of games on several observations. His most important observation has to do with the very definition of procedurality. Games are different from other types of rhetoric in that they do not present substantial claims and arguments, but create processes that allow players to enact the meaning of the game rather than to receive it passively. It must be granted that procedurality constitutes a difference in form, but its persuasive function is not unique to the procedural mode. In fact, Bogost himself seems to make this point on several occasions. For one thing, he grants that procedural representation is still representation (Bogost 2007: 35); enacting an argument is not equivalent to being convinced by it. Thus, the procedural rhetoric of games may in many instances offer more vivid and exciting representations of claims than does the average verbal persuasive attempt (Bogost 2007: 34-35). That does not mean, however, that spoken and written utterances do not hold any potential for vividness; on the contrary, some utterances have the ability of bringing their subjects to life. Hence, the verbal mode of persuasion as such may hold a potential that is not always fully realized, just as Bogost claims is the case for procedural rhetoric (Bogost 2007: 44). Furthermore, vivid representations are not inherently different from other persuasive forms. In all instances, the difference between being presented with a claim and actually being persuaded by it has to be overcome, and sometimes an abstract rational argument may actually be better suited to overcoming this difference than is a vivid illustration.

It is of even greater importance to the present discussion that Bogost likens procedural rhetoric to the enthymematic argument. The Aristotelian enthymeme, on Bogost's account, is an argumentative form in which one premise remains implicit; the recipient of the enthymeme is actively involved in providing the missing piece of the argument and thus participates in the creation of meaning. The procedural rhetoric of games, Bogost goes on to claim, functions in the same way, inviting the player to interactively fill in the argumentative blanks by following the offered procedure (Bogost 2007: 43). In spite of the fact that rhetorical scholars have argued that the implicitness of one part is not the crucial defining feature of the enthymeme as Aristotle perceives it (see inter alia Bitzer 1959; Conley 1984), Bogost's argument shows exactly why the persuasive nature of games is not fundamentally different from that of other forms of rhetoric. Participation is not unique to procedural rhetoric, but inherent in the process of persuasion as such.

The procedural rhetoric of computer games, then, is not a totally unique mode of persuasion, but games do hold a persuasive potential that remains to be explored; they should be studied rhetorically. Moreover, the specific rhetorical techniques of games are different from those of other utterances. While the theory of persuasion which may explain the rhetorical function of games does not differ radically from a general theory of rhetoric, the actual persuasive aspects of games, the forms and strategies of games as persuasive utterances, are clearly different from those of other forms of persuasion – be they speeches in the classical sense or closer digital relatives such as weblogs and chatrooms. Hence, it is necessary to set up a special analytical model for the rhetorical study of games, and it is to this task that we now turn.

Bogost's often interesting and insightful analyses demonstrate the potential of his approach. However, he does not present an actual analytical model for the study of procedural persuasive strategies. We will attempt to create such a model, or a set of specific analytical concepts, that may explain procedural persuasion, but does not make any a priori judgments as to the power of this persuasive form.

The analytical model, which we believe may best explain the persuasive strategies and evaluate the persuasive potential of games, is built around three specific conceptual tools: autonomy, integration, and goal. These concepts are both more descriptive and specific than such notions as vividness and interactivity. They may thus be used to uncover and explain how procedurality functions persuasively in a particular game. In the following, we will define the three concepts, show how they may be applied analytically, and discuss how they may help reveal and explain the persuasive potential of games.

The first concept, autonomy, deals with the degree to which the dialectical or argumentative potential is realized in and through the game. Are the rhetorical purpose (the claim) and the substantiation of it (the premises) inherent in the game, or does the game demand additional (textual) information or (contextual) knowledge in order to make sense? Thus, the degree of autonomy of a game may be positioned along a continuum, which runs from fully autonomous and, hence, self-explanatory to reliant on information that is not present in the game itself but is externally explained. Establishing the game's degree of autonomy is important to the determination of whether or not the game functions as a persuasive unity or forms part of a larger persuasive complex or chain of rhetorical utterances. Does the game as such seek to persuade the player of a unique proposition, or does the persuasive purpose of the game only appear in relation to other artifacts? Thus, autonomy points to two different persuasive modes – the game as persuasive in and of itself and the game as persuasive in combination with other rhetorical performances. Although it may be tempting to make the theoretical point that highly autonomous games are also more persuasive, we will maintain that this claim cannot be made on a general basis. We are dealing with two different persuasive modes either of which may be more persuasive depending on the specific purpose and context of the game.

Integration, the second concept on which we propose to base the analysis, is somewhat related to autonomy, but whereas autonomy deals with the relationship between the game and its context, integration concerns the abstractness of the argument. It is a measure of how directly (or indirectly) the virtues of the product are advertised. Or seen from a game design perspective: It is a measure of how much the gameplay depends on the specifics of the product. In the case of full integration, the game could not meaningfully be used to advertise other products.

On the one hand, a game may directly demonstrate the advantages of a particular product, while on the other hand, it may merely associate the product logo with a pleasurable experience. When examining integration, we rely on the division of persuasive forms into demonstration, illustration, and association (Chen & Ringel 2001; see also Svahn 2005: 188). Whereas a demonstrative game allows the player to experience an argument (e.g., a particular car is pleasant to drive), an illustrative game shows a product as an in-game object (e.g., the player character can wear a certain brand of clothes, but with no particular effect), and an associative game merely associates the product

with the game (e.g., by displaying a logo). A demonstrative game is more procedural in Bogost's sense, and he claims that such games are more persuasive than illustrative and associative games; their point is literally and vividly played out (Bogost 2007: 35). However, we do not wish to make such claims theoretically; instead we will analyze how demonstration, illustration, and association are used in individual games to explain these strategies and evaluate how well they are suited to the particular purpose of the game.

Our final analytical category, goal, is linked to integration, but deals with the internal integration between the learning goal and the game goal. That is, is being successful in the game equivalent to making the persuasive point of the game, overlap, or are the two goals detached from each other, distinction? A perfect overlap may be found in educational games, where the player can only pass from one level to the next by solving a set of tasks; when one succeeds in the goal one has also learnt the lesson, which was the point of the game (e.g., that 2+2=4). In such cases, playing the game successfully is the same as realizing the point of the game; it may be seen as the perfect form of procedural self-persuasion[7]. Bogost provides several examples of the opposite situation in which the game goal and the learning or persuasive goal of a game are distinct; such games typically borrow the gameplay of well-known games, but do not use these to mount any procedural arguments (Bogost 2007: 50).

Bogost claims that overlap between the game goal and the learning goal – or the internal and external goals of the game – is more persuasive than distinction, a claim that seems plausible based on the example of the educational game, but ignores a basic difference between educational and advocative games. The player may not be able to succeed in a game, which aims to teach math or spelling, without actually having learnt the point. However, one may conform to the procedural rules of a game, which aims to change one's attitudes or actions, in order to be successful in the game, but without being convinced of the game's proposition, that is, without changing one's behavior in life.

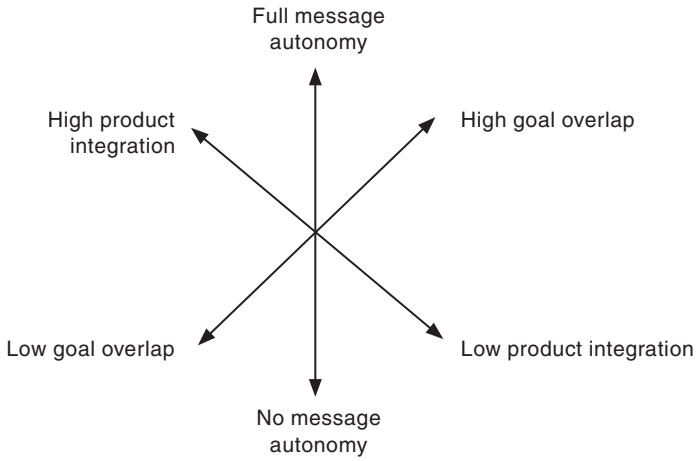
Furthermore, it is quite difficult to imagine that a game that aims to change the attitude or behavior of the player will have quite the same form of learning goal and game goal integration as a game that aims to teach the player basic math. Bogost mentions the game Crazy World in which the game goal is to avoid toxic clouds of smoke and the persuasive goal is that people should not smoke (Bogost 2007: 49). Here, the overlap is almost perfect, but the point also seems so banal that we wonder whether players might find this game more laughable than persuasive. That is, games in which the overlap between the game goal and the persuasive goal is not so strong – or at least is made in a more sophisticated manner – may in some cases be more persuasive than games that have perfect overlap and thus are expressions of pure procedural persuasion. Again, we do not wish to settle this argument theoretically, but will instead study how game goals and persuasive goals of actual games interrelate in order to discuss whether or not the chosen strategies are pertinent to the purposes of the game.

As indicated, the three concepts of autonomy, integration and goal are interrelated, and the analysis of them all is connected to the categorization of the game as either persuasive in and of itself or part of a persuasive set of utterances. We may establish a category of self-explanatory and demonstrative games with complete game goal-persuasive goal integration – that is the most procedurally persuasive type of game – and a category of externally explained associative games with little overlap between the two goals, which relies on persuasive forms that are not inherent in the procedurality of the

game. Nevertheless, we do not wish to make any theoretical judgments as to which of the two opposed types of games are more persuasive. Furthermore, we do not wish to suggest that there are only these two types of games; rather an indeterminable number of combinations of the specific appearance of each concept are in principle possible, and it is an important analytical task to establish the specific articulations and combinations of autonomy, integration and goal of the studied games.

Although clear analytical distinctions can be useful, they are also, in this case, reductive. Games, as we will see, do not always fall conveniently into categories and we therefore find it more useful to think of our three analytical perspectives as three continua. Thus, message autonomy can be seen as ranging from full to none, while product integration and goal overlap range from high to low (see Figure 3.).

Figure 3. *The Three Analytical Perspectives as Continua. A Game Maps Into a Point on Each of the Three Arrows*



The analysis of the persuasive potential of the three sample games to which we now turn falls in two main parts: an introduction to the format and purpose of each game, and the application of the concepts of autonomy, integration and goal to the games. As a whole, the analysis aims to explain how the games persuade and to evaluate whether or not the games are well-suited to their purposes, whether or not they realize their persuasive potential.

Three Examples: Toms Chokolade, Dansk Retursystem, and Danske Bank

To illustrate current approaches to the use of advergames and to demonstrate the potential of our model, we analyze three games: "Penalty Shot" from Toms Chokolade, "The Revenge of the Can" from Dansk Retursystem, and "The Parking Game" from Danske Bank. These games are fairly common representatives of the genre and they illustrate differences in design that are relevant to our analytical perspective. As mentioned, we will give a brief presentation of each game, followed by a more formal analysis based on our analytical model.

Penalty Shot

In "Penalty Shot" ("Straffekast") (see Figure 4.) by the chocolate manufacturer Toms Chokolade the player takes handball penalty shots to score points. There is a total time limit of one minute and missing three shots ends the game. If one scores enough points to make the high score list, one has the chance of winning a prize.

Figure 4. *"Penalty Shot" from Toms Chokolade*

The player may choose the horizontal direction and vertical placement of the ball in an attempt to shoot past the goalkeeper who moves around randomly. In the tradition of many sports games, implementing one's choice correctly requires hand-eye coordination as one must click at an exact time.

Handball, and thereby the game of "Penalty Shot", is associated with Toms Chokolade because the company is the official sponsor of the ladies' handball league in Denmark. The game is linked to the products of Toms Chokolade in so far as the characters of the game are products of the company. These characters are not only known as particular pieces of candy, but also as the 'stars' of a series of commercials. In the game as well as in the commercials, the various products are brought to life metonymically; the products by the name of Turtle and Gold bar, the main characters of the commercials, are played by actors, who are dressed up as the actual products. The connection between these two characters and the game of handball is made in one particular commercial in which Rikke Hørlykke, a well-known Danish handball player, attempts to teach them how to dribble the ball. Turtle and Gold bar are also central in "Penalty Shot;" in the style of a first person shooter, the player controls the character of Turtle and has to get the ball past Gold bar who acts as goalkeeper.

Now, let us examine "Penalty Shot" through the lens of our analytical model. In terms of autonomy, the game has virtually none. The game does not, in itself, make an argument for the particular qualities of Toms sweets, and the connection between handball and the product is an arbitrary one. Even if one understands the connection between Toms and handball, no argument is made (except for the branding "argument" that Toms is associated with funny characters and handball, and one has to know of

both the commercials and the sponsorship in advance of playing the game in order to make that connection).

Integration is also quite low. The candy products (in the shape of the two game characters) are illustrated but only in an indirect fashion in which the player must map the two characters onto the actual products. Thus, the argument is both indirect and entirely unprocedural in Bogost's sense.

The goal of the game, to score as many goals as possible, is also entirely unrelated to the persuasive goal of having the player increase his/her liking for Toms or, in fact, increase his/her desire to buy the products. Thus, there is absolute goal distinction.

In summary, "Penalty Shot" is a striking example of an advergame with no argumentative autonomy, limited (mainly illustrative) product integration and no game/persuasion goal overlap. There is little reason to assume that the game works persuasively in any direct and narrow sense. This is not to say, of course, that the game is necessarily without positive effects. In a branding perspective, the game may strengthen the association between Toms and the handball league as well as underline Toms' somewhat quirky, playful image as established and maintained by their larger advertising campaign.

The Revenge of the Can

"The Revenge of the Can" ("Dåsens Hævn") (see Figure 5.) makes use of some of the same strategies as "Penalty Shot": the link between the game and a broader campaign and the possibility of winning prizes through one's playing of the game. "The Revenge of the Can" is part of a campaign by Dansk Retursystem (the Danish agency in charge of the recycling of bottles and cans), and the game supplements and refers to a television commercial in which cans are hurled back in the face of a young woman, who has discarded them into the garbage chute of her building. In the game, the player performs the "revenge of the cans" by shooting garbage at "environmental pigs", people who do not recycle.

The player's only action is to fire cans upwards through the chutes from the basement so as to make them explode through the hatches. If this is timed with the presence of an "environmental pig", the player scores points.

The game has several levels to which the player may progress if he or she scores enough points within a time limit, and the multi-level gameplay means that although the action, which the player may perform, is quite simple, there is a sense of progression in the game (as one reaches new levels, one gains control over more garbage chutes).

"The Revenge of the Can" then serves to create awareness about the issue of recycling by adding the game as an extra dimension to a more traditional information campaign. Through the excitement of the game as such and the possibility of winning a prize, Dansk Retursystem invites players to spend time on an activity that may create a relationship between player and organization. Furthermore, the game in itself presents the player with an argument about the vices of not recycling. This argument is completely implicit, yet clearly recognizable as an underlying structure of the game, and the player helps construct the argument by enacting actual punishment of non-recyclers. In doing so, the player is invited to identify with the view that not recycling is a punishable act; if this identification is achieved, the position could

Figure 5. *"The Revenge of the Can" from Dansk Retursystem*

be transferred to real life and induce the player to take up recycling as his or her own course of action.

In the terminology of our model, the game's argument does rely on contextual knowledge (e.g., that one can recycle cans), but it is fairly autonomous as all elements of the argument do exist within the game.

The game does not advertise a product but rather attempts to persuade the player to adopt a certain value (non-recycling is bad/recycling is good). A value or a principle does not lend itself as easily as do products to demonstrative integration. Nevertheless, demonstration can be achieved through the mechanism of player choice by which a player may experience the advantages of acting in accordance with a particular principle (e.g., recycling) as opposed to the disadvantages of choosing another strategy (e.g., throwing away recyclable garbage with abandon). In "The Revenge of the Can", the player will experience that punishment is better than non-punishment, and thus the game can be said to demonstrate the meta-value that punishing those who do not recycle is good. This is a curiously indirect way of indicating that recycling is good, and it is unlikely that Dansk Retursystem would literally advocate direct punishment of transgressors.

In terms of goals, there is high overlap between the game goal (hit as many transgressors as possible) and the persuasion goal that "punishing non-recyclers is good". The goal of convincing players that "recycling is good", which is arguably the main proposition of Dansk Retursystem, does not follow as directly from the punishment mo-

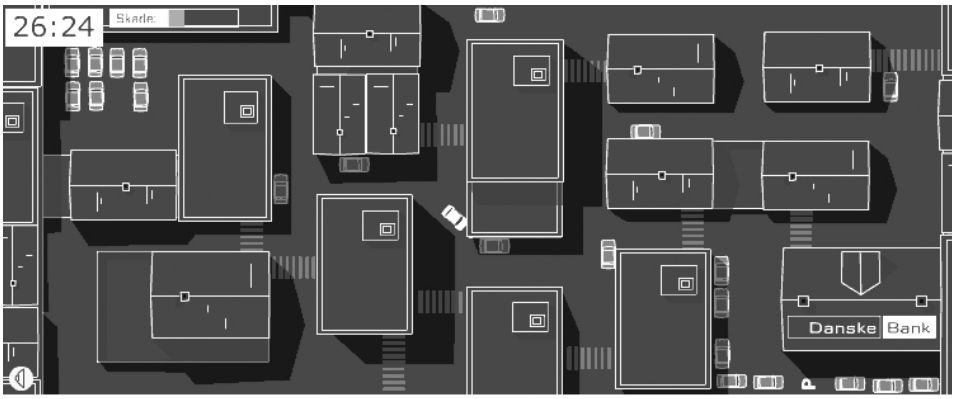
tive of the game goal, but it is present in the same roundabout way as it is demonstrated in the game.

Thus, "The Revenge of the Can" is an advergame with high argumentative autonomy, which, if we take the argument to be that transgressors should be punished, uses demonstrative integration and a high degree of goal overlap. At a glance, we should think that the game has more direct persuasive potential than the far more abstractly argumentative "Penalty Shot".

The Parking Game

"The Parking Game" ("Parkeringsspillet") (see Figure 6.) by the major banking institution Danske Bank functions like "The Revenge of the Can" in the sense that the player participates in the construction of an argument in and through the playing of the game. "The Parking Game" is also linked to a broader campaign, but does not offer the player the possibility of winning a prize. In the game, the player must maneuver a car through a city and park it outside a bank in less than one minute.

Figure 6. *"The Parking Game" from Danske Bank*



The challenge consists of exiting a parking lot, moving quickly through the city, and parking in the one free parking slot outside the bank (marked by a "P" in the lower right corner of Figure 6.). This is done by using the arrow keys on one's keyboard. One cannot drive entirely recklessly, as sustaining too much damage will end the game. In the case of failure, the player is presented with a caption reading "Having difficulty making it to the bank?" and is invited to either access information about the possibility of Internet banking or to sign up for this banking option. In the case of success, the player is told "Well done! You made it this time. But is it as easy in real life?" and offered the same options of learning about or signing up for net banking as in the case of failure. The game draws on classical arcade game aesthetics with its hectic time-limited gameplay, simple goal and control scheme.

In terms of our model, "The Parking Game" has high autonomy as the argument does not rely on much external knowledge, but the argumentation is non-procedural as it relies heavily on the game's end caption. Arguably, one has experienced the frustration mentioned in the caption if one has failed to make it to the bank in time, and in this case the game may function as an explanatory whole. For the successful player, however, the

game provides no backing for the claim of the caption, and in that case the argument relies fully on the player's non-game experience.

The game is indirectly demonstrative in that it demonstrates the disadvantages of the alternative to Internet banking: being unable to conduct one's banking. In this case, text (the end caption) is used to inform the player that he or she has just experienced the unpleasantness of not signing up for the Internet bank. Of course, the game does not actually let the player experience the virtues of Internet banking and, thus, is not demonstrative in the strict sense. Like "The Revenge of the Can", which demonstrates that non-recycling is bad rather than that re-cycling is good, "The Parking Game" seems to demonstrate the opposite of its actual point – that using physical banks is a hassle, not that Internet banking is easy.

Regarding goals, the game illustrates an important point. We mentioned above how actually winning the game (i.e., parking in time) may undermine the argument that Internet banking is essential to being able to conduct one's banking. While this implies absolute goal distinction (even complete goal contrast), we can distinguish between the game's end goal and its more proximate challenges. These challenges will often be what the player actually interacts with while the end goal functions as an ultimate possibility of reward. In "The Parking Game", reaching the actual end goal undermines the argument, but if the typical player is unable to reach this goal, then the argument will still be made in most play sessions. Thus, while "The Parking Game" shows goal distinction, it also points to the fact that whether or not such a distinction is problematic may depend on other aspects of the game's design.

In "The Parking Game", the experience of playing the game serves as a metaphor for the real life experience of not being able to make it to the bank. The player, moreover, is offered relief from the frustration, which the game invites the player to transfer from the game to his or her real life situation, by using Internet banking. Thus, "The Parking Game" and "The Revenge of the Can" rely on two different forms of procedural rhetoric; the latter argument is constructed in and through the game, whereas the former relies on the feeling that playing the game arouses in the player. However, the two are alike in that the player participates in making an argument through his or her act of playing the game. "Penalty Shot", on the contrary, does seek to create a connection between the player and the company, but does not pose a specific claim, let alone involve the player in the process of substantiating the argument.

The above analysis does not, of course, ultimately settle the question about the actual persuasive successes of the three games. But it is intended to exemplify an analysis based on a theoretically coherent model of how games persuade, and thus to serve as possible inspiration for future work, whether analytical or practical.

Conclusions

Video games are increasingly used in attempts to affect the post-play behavior of players. This usually happens without any solid empirical reassurance of the comparative advantages of games, and it happens without any detailed knowledge of how games may function persuasively. In this article, we have examined claims of the persuasive powers of games from a theoretical as well as an analytical perspective. Systematic thinking on procedural rhetoric is still a young field; therefore, we do not discount the possibility of

a more fruitful merging of theory and game design in the future. However, we conclude that the persuasive advantages of video games should be seen not as a communicative revolution but simply as giving the communicator more strategic options, which are useful in certain circumstances, less useful in others.

Also, we conclude that procedural rhetoric is only one of several persuasive forms that may be applied in advergames. Although the procedural form is what distinguishes games most clearly from other forms of persuasion, it is not necessarily the most adequate form of game rhetoric. Thus, our analysis of the three games showed "The Revenge of the Can" and "The Parking Game" to be more procedural than "Penalty Shot". From a theoretical perspective, this may mean that the former two games are more interesting, but from a practical point of view, "Penalty Shot" may be as well-suited to its purposes as are the other two games. That is, Dansk Retursystem advocates an opinion rather than a product and Danske Bank seeks to make a point about the advantages of a new product, and both of these purposes may be well-suited to procedural representation. Toms Chokolade, however, is seeking to cast its products in a positive light, a purpose that does not lend itself as easily to procedural rhetoric as the other two. Here, the game merely serves as an add-on to the traditional marketing campaign, whereas the games have a stronger place and a more independent purpose in the other two examples. Thus, we may conclude that there is no reason for marketers to use advergames in all instances, and that, when games are used, the most procedural strategy is not necessarily the best.

In the present article, we have attempted to show the theoretical and analytical potential of studying advergames from a rhetorical perspective. The study of advergames, and persuasive games more generally, will surely be continued within the already relatively well-established field of "game studies". To date, game studies have drawn heavily on fields such as comparative literature (e.g., Tosca 2003; Aarseth 2004), cultural studies (e.g., Kennedy & Giddings 2005) and sociology (e.g., Taylor 2006; Lin & Sun 2005), while the interest of communication scholars (with a few exceptions[8]) has been relatively sparse. We believe that enhanced cooperation between game studies and communication studies would be to the advantage of both fields, especially as regards the continued development of theoretical and analytical tools for the study of persuasive games.

We also believe that communication models may fruitfully be applied to video games, for instance to further develop the notion of games as imbued with "messages". Communication scholars may also contribute to the study of player behavior, for instance by aiming well-developed methods at player communication on anything from the smallest (e.g., same room console play) to the largest (e.g., huge corpuses of online game chat) scale, and assist in relating this behavior to the specifics of game form. Moreover, a great deal of work in game studies is relevant to communication studies in that it deals with one of the most interactive of interactive media and seeks to understand interaction between people mediated by a highly goal-directed activity. Thus, in cooperation, the two fields may be well-equipped to answer pertinent questions related to the explosively growing proliferation of non-work-oriented interactive media.

Notes

1. In 1970, Charles B. Abt published the book Serious Games attempting to frame games as powerful learning tools (Abt 1970); and in the following decades, various attempts were made to harness the alleged instructive and persuasive powers of games.
2. See America's Army, a recruitment tool produced by the US army: http://www.americasarmy.com/.
3. See Molleindustria's McDonald's Video Game: http://www.mcvideogame.com/.
4. See Newsgaming.com's September 12th: http://www.newsgaming.com/games/index12.htm.
5. See Persuasive Games' Howard Dean for Iowa Game, http://www.deanforamericagame.com/, and Powerful Robot Games' Cambiemos: http://www.powerfulrobot.com/web/index_alternate.html.
6. See Virgin Money's Anger management game: http://www.loseyouranger.com/.
7. Depending on the concrete design of the game. A math game that simply allowed players to make an unlimited number of guesses would not ensure that success equalled mastery of algebra.
8. E.g., Williams (2003); Tychsen, Smith, Hitchens, & Tosca (2006).

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