

Player's performance in video games can steer attitudes about brands

September 29 2015

A company's brand may crash and burn if video game players perform poorly when they use branded products as part of the game, according to a team of researchers.

In a study, the performance of players in a racecar [video game](#) influenced their attitude about the actual [brand](#) of the car they used in the game, said Frank Dardis, associate professor of advertising and [public relations](#), Penn State.

"The easier the game, or the better the people did, the more they remembered the brand they used in the game and the more their attitudes changed in a positive direction toward the brand," Dardis said. "But, the people who had the more difficult game or had a bad experience—by crashing too much, for example—remembered the brand less and had a negative attitude change toward the brand."

The researchers, who released their findings in a recent issue of the *Journal of Promotion Management*, asked players to use a car that featured a VW logo during a video game. Then they measured the number of both the laps completed and the times they crashed to determine player performance. Unknown to the participants, the researchers also adjusted the car's handling features to increase the level of difficulty.

In a survey after the game, players who completed more laps and wrecked less tended to better recall the brand of car and have a more

[favorable attitude](#) toward the company. Players that had a negative experience during the game had a significantly lower recall and opinion of the brand.

In another wrinkle, while the players' experience with the VW-branded car tended to influence their attitude about the company, the players mostly ignored other brands that advertised on the virtual billboards that appeared during the game.

"The recall of the traditional in-game ads that appeared on the virtual billboards of the race track during the game was very low," said Dardis. "What this may show is that in an integrated ad, the attention gets focused on the branded product in the game and not on other, more peripheral ads."

Advertising and branded advertising in video games is a recent, but growing form of marketing that is expected to increase to more than \$1 billion in 2015, according to Dardis. The research suggests that businesses cannot be guaranteed positive results just by advertising in a game, he added.

"On the face of it, it might sound like a great idea for, in this case, a car company to say 'there's a great new game out, let's make sure people can drive one of our cars,'" said Dardis. "However, depending on a lot of player choices and things that can happen during the game, the car might not perform well and that could affect their attitudes toward the real-world brand."

A total of 85 participants took part in the study, of those, 59 were female and 26 were male. Only four of the participants had played the game before the session. The [players](#) were then randomly assigned to either an easy version or a difficult version of the [game](#).

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: Player's performance in video games can steer attitudes about brands (2015, September 29) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-09-player-video-games-attitudes-brands.html>

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