Erciyes İletişim Dergisi / Journal of Erciyes Communication
e-ISSN: 2667-5811 | ISSN: 1308-3198

Research Article

Advertising in Digital Games: A Review from the Perspective of Children and Parents

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Date Received: 18.03.2020
Date Accepted: 03.07.2020
Date Published: 24.07.2020
https://doi.org/10.17680/erciyesiletisim.706046

Abstract

The problem of this study, which is based on understanding the interactions of children with the brands in digital games, is to understand children's recognition of the brands in digital games with the variables of the type of advertisement, in-game factors and screen time. In this qualitative study, a two-session focus group interview was conducted with the children and their mothers separately. Children are important for this study due to their age, because on the one hand, they go through the consumer socialization process, and on the other hand, since they do not have the ability to separate media content from commercial content, they are exposed to ads. As a result of the study, it is observed that parents were in conflict with their children regarding screen time management and they interfere with their children's screen time. However, a significant part of the parents is not aware of the ads in digital games and do not consider in-game advertising as a risk factor for their children. Additionally, it is seen that the high prevalence of unhealthy food advertisements in digital games causes children to make unreasonable demands and this is considered as a serious issue in a process they learn to be a consumer.

Keywords: Advertising, İn-Game Advertising, Children, Zula, Brand Awareness.

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e-ISSN: 2667-5811 | ISSN: 1308-3198

Araştırma Makalesi

Dijital Oyunlarda Reklam: Çocuk ve Ebeveyn Perspektifinden Bir İnceleme

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Başvuru Tarihi: 18.03.2020
Yayına Kabul Tarihi: 03.07.2020
Yayınlanma Tarihi: 24.07.2020
https://doi.org/10.17680/erciyesiletisim.706046

Öz

Çocukların dijital oyunlarda yer alan markalarla etkileşimlerini anlamak üzerine kurgulanmış olan bu çalışmanın problemi dijital oyunlarda yer alan markaların çocuklar tarafından tanınma durumlarının reklam türü, oyun içi faktörler ve ekran süresi değişkenleriyle anlaşılmasıdır. Nitel bir tasarıma sahip bu çalışmada iki oturumlu odak görüşme yapılarak çocuklarla ayrı anneleriyle ayrı görüşme yapılmıştır. Çocuklar, yaşları itibariyle bir taraftan tüketici toplumsallaşma sürecinden geçmeleri diğer taraftan medya içeriğini ticari içerikten ayırma becerisine sahip olmadıklarından reklamlar karşısında korunmasız konumda bulunmaları gerekçeleri itibariyle bu çalışma için önem arz etmektedir. Çalışma neticesinde örneklem alınan Zula 'da önemli bir bölümü gıda markalarını içeren çok sayıda oyuniçi reklam olduğu gözlenmiştir. Çalışmaya katılan ebeveynlerin çocukları ile ekran süresi yönetmi hususunda çatışma yaşadığı ve ekran süresine müdahale ettikleri görülmektedir. Buna ek olarak, sağlıksız gıda ürünlerine ait reklamların oyun içerisinde yaygın şekilde bulunmasının çocukların akli olmayan taleplerde bulunmasına neden olduğu görülmektedir ve bu durum çocukların tüketici olmayı öğrendikleri bir süreçte oldukça ciddi bir meseledir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital Oyun, Oyun-İçi Reklam, Çocuklar, Zula, Marka Farkındalığı.

Introduction

Accessing the information needed in the age of infobesity we live in is likened to looking for a needle in a haystack. So much so that information is in huge amounts and everywhere. Moreover, media content consists of fake news, distorted texts, commercial content and advertorials embedded in media content. While reading a news or watching a TV series, it is difficult to determine why it was created and who it serves to, or to distinguish how much of the media material is advertising and how much of it is media content. For this reason, it requires digital literacy skills such as information literacy, data literacy and media literacy. While these new literacies are largely aimed at building critical assessment skills on content, they all have a common point in managing screen time. The issue of managing screen time is not a new phenomenon either for adults or for children. That television passivates and benumbs people and interrupts family members' face to face communication has been a matter of debate for decades. With the proliferation of digital technologies, devices such as tablets, smartphones, computers were added to television watching period and the screen time was extended to include almost all of the time spent awake. Concerns regarding this situation started to include physical and psychological health problems, interpersonal communication problems and both academic and professional performances of individuals. On the other hand, many parents run these technologies as virtual caregivers, especially since their young children demand less attention from them during their time with the technologies mentioned. There is even a widespread belief that it is not possible to raise children without tablets and phones. Situations such as having an area in baby feeding chairs where tablets can be placed; forming video contents aimed at keeping children entertained for a long time; designing sites and platforms containing digital games for children are evidences of "digital technologies as a caregiver." On the other hand, parents do not commonly follow their children's digital activities and digital content that they are exposed to. Children's attention, which is a limited resource, focuses on digital screens for hours and can be managed by content producers. In such a context, digital channels are worth investing in for advertisers in targeting and reaching child consumers. This is why websites consisting of content aimed at children mostly contain advertisements of products such as snacks, candies and soft drinks. This situation marks an obesogenic environment. Digital games encourage a sedentary life by passivating the players for hours and food producers fulfill the second condition for obesity by placing ads in these games. Individuals lacking physical activity but consuming energy-intensive foods are unlikely to be healthy (World Health Organization, 2016, pp. 2-4). In addition, children who do not have digital literacy skills are directed to make purchases that are mostly irrational in learning about brands and consumption with the advertisements they see. This is much more meaningful considering the following data that among all European countries, children with the lowest internet usage skills are in Turkey (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009).However, parents do not see this situation as a risky factor. Parents interfere with their child's screen time because they are worried about their academic achievement or because they do not want them to be exposed to (physical) violence. This emphasizes the importance of digital literacy not only for children but also for adults.

In the first part of this study, screen time in the context of attention economy, in the second part, the position and role of the child as a consumer and in the third part, literature on childhood obesity is discussed in the context of screen usage. Then, the findings obtained from the study are presented in the light of current literature.

Screen Time in the Digital World

In the information age we live in, information is accessible for everyone, in anywhere, at any time. The assumption that the accessibility of the information high in number will contribute to the economic consciousness, which is designed as an information society ideal renders the issue of information quality visible (Baytar, 2013, p. 36). While the sustainability of democracy is possible with the conscious preferences of knowledgeable people, since the information society emphasizes the quantity of information, it is characterized by a structure in which the minds of individuals are filled with countless unqualified information (Yüksel, 2012, p. 36). For this reason, information is considered as a critical input in agricultural societies, a solution in industrial societies and a problem in information societies (Tonta, 2009).

Information is what consumes the attention of the consumer, and therefore the wealth of information creates a shortage of attention (Simon, 1971, p. 40). The most important evidence of this prediction, which dates back to 50 years ago may be that the number of those diagnosed with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have been gradually increasing and that the sales of the drugs used in the treatment of the disorder has increased ninefold since 1990 (Davenport & Beck, 2010, pp. 15-19). Attention, which is a scarce resource in the information age we are in, has become an area that must be managed by both the producers of the message and the consumers who are the recipients of the message. While consumers want to reach the information, they need in the shortest way, content producers strive to get a share of the consumers' attention. This process, which is referred to as the attention economy is based on the principle of converting the attention period, which is offered free in exchange for consumers' attention and the value of which has been gradually increasing into gain by the actors of the advertising process and is grounded on the time spent in front of the screen.

Screen time, which includes the total time spent for activities such as watching television, online browsing, playing digital games (Christodoulou, Majmundar, Chou, & Pentz, 2020, p. 24), messaging, watching online videos, using smartphones and tablets (Baiden, Tadeo, & Peters, 2019), has become a field that needs to be managed today. So much so that, considering the studies in the literature, the relationship between many areas such as students 'academic performances (Aust, Bockman, & Hermansen-Kobulnicky, 2019; Faught, et al., 2019; Kalenkoski & Pabilonia, 2012), individuals' social lives (Bond, 2020; Richards, McGee, & Williams, 2010), possible health problems (Ge, et al., 2020; Baiden, Tadeo, & Peters, 2019; Davies, Vandelanott, Duncan, & van Uffelen, 2012; Hardy, Denney-Wilson, Thrift, Okely, & Baur, 2010) and managing screen time is considered worthy of studying by researchers from different disciplines.

Digital games, which constitute one of the most important dimensions of the screen processes, turn into an area worth investing in terms of brands in the attention economy. It has been revealed in various research reports that the average weekly digital game playing time is over 11 hours in 2015 (Twenge, 2018; Twentify, 2018; Ofcom, 2019) and Twentify (2018, p. 6) shows that the time spent to the game is not limited only to the playing time. According to the report, besides playing games, the players spend a considerable amount of time watching game-related videos that half of the players spend 0-1 hours a day; 21.5% spend 1 hour and 20.3% spend 2 hours. Moreover, it was revealed that the average duration was higher in the Z generation where this study was conducted, too. Twenge (2018, pp. 239-252) states that young people do not enjoy studying and do not tend to study compared to previous generations. In addition, as a result of a study

he conducted with young people who are not working, he questioned whether they played computer games because they did not work or did not work because they played computer games. While this situation draws attention to the importance of managing screen time both for children and adults, Ertemel and Aydın (2018, pp. 667-671) state that digital games contain elements that will strengthen addiction with excessive play time. These elements are expressed as lack of stop sign, fear of missing developments (FOMO), variable awards and habit cycle.

Such a context creates a conflict between the parent and the child regarding screen time, making things difficult for parents (Toran, Ulusoy, Aydın, Deveci, & Akbulut, 2016). Parents and educators who are on the other side of the coin tend to approach the issue of digital games as an alarming and time-wasting activity. The results of the research entitled *EU Kids Online* (Haddon, Livingtone, & EU Kids Online Network, 2012) by considering children's digital literacy skills in accordance with countries reveal that this is not a rootless concern. Among all European countries, children with the lowest internet usage skills are in Turkey. So much so that whereas the Europe average is 4.2, the average of children from Turkey is 2.6.

According to the Steam data of 2018[1] , it was revealed that *PUBG* was played by 3 million individual players within 1 hour (Twentify, 2018, p. 18). Since the meaning of this data in the attention economy is to manage the attention of 3 million people in 1 hour, it renders the media attractive for the advertiser. When it is combined with the information that rules of the game regulate the in-game behaviors of players (Samur & Özkan, 2019, p. 417) and success in the game requires high attention, it means that the attention is directed in the desired direction during the game. According to the insights in the report of the *Ekrandan Arenaya Espor Araştırması*, the young and digitally focused eGamer audience in Turkey is very valuable for brands and has the potential to achieve significant success by reaching a unique audience with an accurate storytelling (Twentify, 2018, p. 105).

Although digital games are seen as meaningless by parents, with the rise of eSpor, digital games have become a business. Such that universities started to provide scholarships (Bahçeşehir University, 2017); online success has begun to be rewarded with real life's medium of exchange; game related video production has started to be commercially valuable thing (Akcan & Gençyürek Erdoğan, 2019, p. 37). For all these reasons, digital games function as an online career area for many children and adolescents Based on the assumption that digital games are considered an area that should be taken seriously by children, their place in attention economy and the potential to create brand awareness arising from this position are expected to be quite high. For this reason, advertising and commercial elements in digital games were shown among the online risks equivalent to the least violence, values and aggression with the EU Kids Online Report[2] (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009, p. 10).

Child as a Consumer

Many researchers agree that children's direct and indirect roles in purchases have been transformed over time and their impact on family spending has increased (Atkin, 1978; Jenkins, 1979; McNeal, 1992; Calvert, Children as Consumers: Advertising and Marketing., 2008; de la Ville, Brougére, & Boireau, 2010; Nørgaard & Brunsø, 2011; Haselhoff, Faupel, & Holzmüller, 2014). Early studies, children who are not studied as a consumer group in the family's purchasing and consumption patterns are seen as a consumer segment that should be targeted in recent years and are at the hearth of the campaigns.

There are basically three reasons why children are an important market targeted by marketing and advertising professionals: children are significant primary market that spend money on their own for their needs and desires; since children develop brand loyalty and brand attitude at early ages, they are significant market that requires investment for the future; finally, children form a market that has a capacity of impact on the household purchase decisions (McNeal, 1992). Children have a huge impact not only on their daily consumption of snacks, sweets, breakfast cereals, etc., but also on their parents' holiday planning, car selection and dietary styles (Calvert, Children as Consumers: Advertising and Marketing., 2008, p. 207).

Consumer identities of children are important both scholarly and industrially. According to Wand (Kaur & Singh, 2006, p. 12), the consumer socialization process that consumers learn to become consumers goes back to the fetal period. In this period, children accompany their parents and exposed to various marketing stimuli. In the continuation of this process, children start to demand the products they want in the first two years, when they are around the age of 5, they make purchases with the help of their parents or grandparents, and around the age of 8, they can make independent purchases and become a consumer entirely (Kaur & Singh, 2006, pp. 12-13). Although there is no consensus in the literature about the age or development period in which brand awareness definitely developed, in the research of Valkenburg and Buijzen (2005), where when and how brand awareness including active and passive information regarding the brand is seen in early childhood and how environmental factors such as parents and peers affect brand awareness in early childhood are investigated, children between the ages of 2 and 8 were shown 12 brand logos and afterwards children were asked the names of the brands. While 2-3 years old children could recall 1 out of 12 brands, they recognized 8 out of 12 brands.

Macklin (1996, pp. 251-252) underlines that developmental memory studies show that young children are generally worse in remembering words compared to older children, and as a verifier, she indicates that while 11 year old children remember 54% of words, this has a percentage of 29% with 7 year old children. It was also seen that when visual signs previously associated in children's memory structures were presented in addition to the brand name, children remembered brand names better.

Both recognition and recall are individually important in purchasing decisions. While recognition which involves distinguishing it from the likes is sufficient when entering a store, recalling is required for decision making in a different context because various alternatives are not present at the time (Valkenburg & Buijzen, 2005, p. 457).

In today's social formation, children who spend almost most of their time in front of the screen and lay the foundations of their brand ties when they become adults are the clear target of advertising. Moreover, they are developmentally vulnerable to advertising.

Wilcox et al (2004, p. 5) underlines that two important data processing skills are necessary for any individual in conceptualizing advertising messages. They describe the first of these as distinguishing commercial content from non-commercial content, that is, distinguishing the advertising from the media content, and the second as recognizing the persuasion intention behind the advertising and using this information in processing the advertising message. They also say that studies reveal that children under 4-5 years of age cannot consistently differentiate the program from advertising content, and when children reach 4-5 years of age, they can categorically distinguish between ads and program content as emotional (ads are more fun) or conceptual (ads are shorter).

Considering that the age of meeting with the screen coincides with the first six months of life in our country, this information is quite striking. According to the report of the World Health Organization (2016, pp. 4-6), along with globalization and urbanization, that children from all socio-economic groups living both in high and middle-income countries have limited physical activity opportunities at school and out of school, that games and transportation do not require physical activity and that all the processes are conducted motionlessly, tied to the screen promotes a sedentary life, creates an energy imbalance[3] and involves children among groups at risk of obesity. In such a context, the physical health of children who are under the attack of on-screen ads is also under threat. Undoubtedly, it is not only public health researchers who are aware of this situation. So much so that television, whereas ads targeting children are aimed at selling obesogenic[4], energy-intensive foods Harrison, Moorman, Peralta, & Fayhee (2017, p. 329), it is not surprising that 100% of the biggest advertising investments in movie theaters, videos and video games targeting the same group are from the snack product category (Federal Trade Commission, 2012, pp. 21-22).

Screen Time, Ads, and Childhood Obesity

Many authors agree that those with longer screen time will be more familiar with obesogenic products and brand awareness will take shape (Brody, Stoneman, Lane, & Sanders, 1981; Chamberlain, Wang, & Robinson, 2006; Nguyen, 2008; Nørgaard & Brunsø, 2011; Dalton, et al., 2017; Smith, et al., 2019). Although the screens that children use intensively over the years have changed, the result has deteriorated dramatically. Brody, Stoneman, Lane, & Sanders (1981)'s result that children exposed to television advertisements will try to convince their families more about purchasing the products and services they see in commercials, and Smith et al. (2019)' s result that they consider marketing activities aimed at unhealthy foods and beverages as the most important component of the environment that promotes obesity and as the number of advertisements that children are exposed to increases, the tendency to consume such products will also increase concretes this situation. The only thing that has changed over the past 39 years is the increase in the rates of childhood obesity. According to World Health Organization (2016, pp. 2-5), it is estimated that there are 41 million children affected by obesity at the age of 5 and below, and the number of obese children in Africa has doubled since 1990, reaching from 5.4 million to 10.3 million. On the other hand, these data are also suitable to be interpreted in the way that media literacy skills have not changed positively over the years. According to the research of Brody, Stoneman, Lane, & Sanders (1981), children who watch the commercials on television together with their mothers both want to purchase the product or service advertised more and think that they will be more successful in persuading their mothers because she is exposed to the same advertisement, too. As a verifier of this situation, (Nørgaard & Brunsø, 2011) state that today's families do not always make healthy choices for their children, and that they comply with their children's demands and ensure that they consume products containing high amounts of sugar and fat.

Although the two devices most commonly used by today's children are TVs and tablets, watching TV content from TV is gradually decreasing (Ofcom, 2019, p. 1). The study of Culp, Bell, & Study (2010, p. 199), who stated that the marketing efforts of food ads aimed at children conducted in integrated form based on the convergence between the traditional and online revealed that food ads on television channels related to children advertise and direct to visit the web sites sponsored by food companies producing

snacks including high amounts of sugar and fat. When it is evaluated together with the report of Ofcom (2019), this effort is meaningful because children increasingly tend to consume television content from channels other than television. This is both a clue to the transformation of the watching activity and the leisure time of the children, and presents a multi-dimensional picture. On the one hand, while the watching as a passive action continues, on the other hand, the tablet, which is identified with the game and is also a passive action, constitutes an important area in the children lives. In the report of Ofcom (2019, p. 13), it is stated that a significant portion of the children between the ages of 8-15 take their tablets and smartphones to their bed. As revealed by Baiden, Tadeo, & Peters (2019, p. 5), while sleep is vital to be mentally and physically healthy, the time spent in front of digital screens reduces the quality of sleep in both children and adults. Likewise, the baby feeding chairs in our country are designed in a way that enables placing tablet on them. In this way, the phenomena of food and play creates a grift structure. However, similar to the expression "there is no play with food" in our culture, French authors de la Ville, Brougére, & Boireau (2010, p. 117) state that the expression "*do not play with your food,"* which is a popular expression generally aimed at children indicates that there is a distinction between the fun aspect of game activities and the seriousness of food intake. This situation creates a new problem area between digital games and nutrition. Considering that children are seen as a significant market, food companies that want to take a share from this market are expanding their television ads and carrying them to online channels to create brand loyalty for children (Culp, Bell, & Cassady, 2010, p. 197) and also the food industry builds games using some foods by qualifying them as entertaining foods (de la Ville, Brougére, & Boireau, 2010, p. 117)[5].

Digital games, unlike traditional games, mark a context in which physical movement is limited and the time spent inactive is mostly accompanied by the activity of eating in terms of the period of time they occupy. Undoubtedly, the form of eating and drinking that complies with the nature of this activities consist of snacks, candies, fast food and carbonated and fizzy drinks. So much so that, according to the research of Twentify (2018, p. 5), while the most common form of snack consumption during the game is chips, nuts, fruits and biscuits, the most commonly consumed beverage is coke, coffee, tea, soda and energy drink. In the WHO (2016, p. V)'s report, unhealthy foods are defined as foods containing high levels of saturated fat, trans fatty acids, sugar and salt. Accordingly, in recent years, there have been a considerable number of international studies (Rey-López, Vicente-Rodríguez, Biosca, & Moreno, 2008; Rizzo, Belinda , Evan, & Bolas, 2011; Staiano & Calvert, 2012; Costigan, Barnett, Plotnikoff, & Lubans, 2013; Calvert, Staiano, & Bond, 2013; Marsh, Mhurchu, & Maddison, 2013; Smith, et al., 2019) focusing on the relationship between digital games and obesity, type II diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

Web sites or game platforms aimed at children also contribute to the obesogenic environment and contain a large number of ads, most of which are aimed at snack products (Alvy & Calvert, 2007, p. 711). These advertisements take place in two forms: advergame and in-game advertising. While creating a branded game environment by a company or its sponsor in the advergame practice, in-game advertising is based on placing branded products or services in an already existing game environment (Smith, et al., 2019, p. 2). The interactive nature of in-game advertising increases children's familiarity with and sympathy towards the brand they are exposed to (Culp, Bell, & Cassady, 2010, p. 200). Owen, Lewis, Auty, & Buijzen (2013, pp. 195-198) investigated the situation of children in understanding the advertisement through traditional and non-traditional

ads, and emphasized that embedded advertising practices such as product placement constitute the most difficult type to be understood by children, that children have limited information regarding alternative marketing strategies and therefore lack the cognitive ability to critically evaluate them. They state that it would be pointless to expect children to develop an understanding of advertising as a persuasive tool, as the advertising-related schemes and embedded forms of advertising do not match. As a verifier of this, in Smith et al. (2019)'s study, the results of which are quite striking, children were asked to play a game with an unknown test confectionery brand placed for 4 minutes and then to choose a confectionery from the various alternatives offered. Children exposed to the award-winning video ad of the tested brand chose the brand that was tested more than other children. This situation can be interpreted that the brand seen in the game has influence on demand, whether this influence is recognition or recall.

Methodology

This study is based on understanding brand interactions of children in digital games. The problem of the study is to understand how placed brands within the digital games are identified by children in consideration of type of ad, in-game factors, and screen time variables.

When the literature is reviewed, there is no study about the interaction of children with advertisements in the game in Turkey. Studies in the field of health focus on screen time and the potential effects of games on physical and mental health; studies in the field of educational science associate academic achievement with games; and studies in the field of marketing and advertising mostly reveal children's recognition and recall levels of brands descriptively with a quantitative design. This study is important as it is foreseen to fill this kind of gap in the literature.

As a requirement of the study problem, a qualitative framework was designed as a case study and an interview was conducted with 11 children aged 10-11 studying at Esentepe College in Konya and 6 parents of them. The sample was taken with the opportunistic sample technique non-probabilistically. A children's party was held on April 7, 2019, and one of the researchers interviewed the children before the activity, while the other researcher held a focus group interview with the parents. Before the research, informed consents were given to parents, including information about the study, and their approval for participation was obtained. Since interviews were not conducted in a structured manner, no predefined questionnaire form was used. The categories and sub-categories that constitute the source of the interview plan were determined as a result of the studies in the literature. All of the children sampled have been playing MMOPFS[6] type *Zula* for at least five days a week for at least one year. *Zula* was deemed functional for the study sample because it is a game that originated in Turkey, is interactive online and completely Turkish, the brands in the game are locally widespread and accessible for children. In line with the problem of the study, qualitative content analysis technique was utilized to analyze the in-game elements.

That only children studying at a school are included is considered as an important limitation of this study. Therefore, comparisons between variables such as socio-economic status, device ownership, amount used in in-game purchases could not be made. In future studies, it is recommended to examine children from different socio-economic status groups.

Results

In-game observation and interview technique were used together for the purposes of the study. In this section, the findings of this research will be presented in the thematic categories obtained by the studies in the related literature.

Factors That Increase Screen Time

When the FPS type game named Zula is analyzed, it is seen that the game rewards being in the game at certain times determined by the game but sometimes these times are times players must be at work or at school. For example, a post shared on social media and a case that will provide additional in-game benefits to those who go live can be evaluated in this context. In addition, the cases, decks, materials and in-game extras that provide in-game benefits are offered to players in return for logging in to the game every day. For this, it is enough to just log in to the game and get the rewards to the bag. It is not compulsory to enter any game mode, but the gifts given are mostly valid for 24 hours. In other words, it encourages playing, although it does not necessitate it. On the other hand, playing games of certain lengths is also the awarded in-game behavior pattern. For example, playing 60-90-120 minutes the game is awarded by the prize determined for that week with Zula Pass. In addition, time management is controlled not only by reward but also by penalty. In some game modes such as competition, in case of leaving the game without completing the game, including mandatory cases such as internet interruption, access to the game is prevented for a specified period. One of the parents interviewed states that she is aware of the application of screen time management by penalty as follows:

> *"Sometimes, when I say quit right away, s/he says "If I quit now, there will be a punishment."" Indeed, the game does not accept the player immediately, the next time s/he wants to play. It makes him/her wait for a while*" (What is meant is not being able to enter the competition mode again in Zula.)"- P4

This expression can be interpreted that Zula contains elements that encourage screen time to be extended.

Parental Intervention to Screen Time

As a result of the interviews with the parents, it was seen that all of the parents were disturbed from screen time and attempts were made to control the time spent for the game. Some important statements obtained from the interviews on this matter are as follows:

> *"Online game duration gets a little longer every day. I finally have to remove the computer from his/her room. But then I'm concerned about how s/he will do his/her computer-aided homework"*-P6
>
> *"There is one in our children's room but we do not let them use it. We only allow it to be used on Fridays. We don't let him/her open it on other days."*- P2
>
> *"Ours is in the living room, s/he has to bring it to the table in the living room when s/he wants to use it"* -P3
>
> *"Setting up such a rule will break our ties with the child at home (...) (her child) says that s/he can regulate him/herself. As such, I feel bad"*-P5

As is seen, some parents make a rule-based intervention such as imposing a restriction on the basis of day and hour. Some parents make physical interventions such as lifting the computer, turning off the internet, and positioning the computer outside the children's room. Another important issue obtained as a result of the interview is that today, education materials are mostly based on digital resources and therefore

parents are undecided about how to approach the computer since it is used not only for games but also for different purposes. Another important point is the concerns that families have about the deterioration of their relationships as a result of their conflicts with their children.

In the interviews made with children, while some of them stated that their families did not interfere with the screen time, a remarkable part of them expressed their complaint regarding the intervention of their families. An important point is that all children believe that if their families do not interfere, they can adjust the screen time themselves. Some statements obtained from the interviews on this matter are as follows:

> *"My mom is angry at me when I play games. I have the right to play for 1 hour after doing my homework, but when my time has not expired, she says "let's close now, time is up". (...) For example, if I play for 2 hours, it will be enough for me".* C2
>
> "I can only play on the weekends. *But I wish I could play every day. I can arrange it myself but my mom shuts down the internet in the middle of the game".* C3
>
> *"My parents never interfere. (...) my computer is in my room (...) I get bored when I play for a few hours anyway".* C6
>
> *"My mother, not my father, does not allow. She says we will consider it when you do your homework, but she usually does not allow it".* C7
>
> *"I can play as much as I want on Fridays (...); since I cannot enter on other days, I cannot get the rewards my friends can get. (...) she does not let me enter the game even to get the rewards."* C10

It was observed that the role of intervening children's screen time was undertaken by the mother and that parents grounded the determination of the time spent during the day and screen time on homework and school-related tasks. In addition, the reasons for families' intervening in the screen time is only school success' being negatively affected. The potential physical and psychological effects of the game have not been expressed by any parent.

How In-Game Ads Work

Since Zula is not an advergame but a MMOFPS game, only in-game ads are considered. When the game is analyzed in terms of its commercial content, it is observed that the ads take place in two basic ways, passive and interactive. Passive ads include product placement applications that are not included in the script in the narrative of the game, where players do not interact directly with the brand and it is not definite whether they are included in the flow of the game in order to add reality to the scene or for a commercial purpose. Passive ads in Zula are seen in two forms as placement of real brands and associative brand placement. Interactive ads, on the other hand, include active advertising practices that require players to interact with the brand both as a game scenario and as a non-game element.

When Zula is analyzed in terms of its commercial content, it is seen that the real brands placed in passive form are those of Vodafone *Free Zone, Pool Elite, Paycell,* the movie entitled *"Semt Bizim, Ev Kira," Red Crescent* and *AFAD*. Associative brands are practices where the visual signs of the brand are kept same but the brand name is manipulated at the word level, but the brand can be easily recognized. These brands are *Hamidiye, Erikli, Lipton Ice Tea, Algida, Ace, Marc, Çerezza, Lays, Ruffles, Michelin, Skoda, Renault, Mercedes, BMW, Audi, Ford, Scania, Ofçay, Castrol, Mobil, Doğanay, Sütaş, Cappy, Coca- Cola, Ataturk Orman Ciftligi (AOC), Apple (Macbook), Kale Anahtar, Vatan Computer, Kahve Dunyasi* and *Pimapen*. Interactive ads, on the other hand, are practices that compel users to interact

with the brand and integrate into the game narrative. Interactive ads in Zula are either providing additional in-game benefits in exchange for sharing personal information with the brand, or providing additional benefits in-game by proving the purchase of the branded product or service. The additional benefits provided in both ways can also be obtained through real-life mediums of exchange (in-game purchases) if there is no interaction with the brand. Here, it is clear that the interaction with the brand becomes the medium of exchange itself. The interactive brands in *Zula* are *Vodafone Free Zone, Paycell*[7]*, Gillette, Pepsi* and *Roko*. *Paycell* gives between 2000 and 20,000 Zula Gold (ZG) in exchange for virtual card creation[8] ; moreover, *Vodafone* gives 25.000 ZG in return for its current subscribers' purchasing a monthly gamer package for TRY 18 or 5.000 ZG in return for their entering the code provided to them in Zula's panel if they purchase a weekly gamer package for TRY 10. On the other hand, a new SIM Card application can be made within minutes with an URL created for those who are not Vodafone subscribers.[9] *Gillette*[10]*,* offers players a case containing 250 ZP in return for their completion of the questionnaire. Finally, Pepsi and Roko reward them with the Pepsi Case and the Roko Case in return for the purchase of the products mentioned and entering the code included in the packaging in the Zula panel.

In the interview with the children, they were asked whether they saw ads in the game and they all said that they saw the ads. Then, *"Which brands do you remember?" was asked* , all of the children recalled *Pepsi, Paycell, Vodafone, Roko* and *Gillette* among the interactive brands, *Lipton Ice Tea, Algida, Çerezza, Lays, Ruffles, Cappy, Kahve Dunyasi, Mercedes* and *BMW* among the passive associative brands and none of the passive real brands were recalled. It is observed that interactive brands are recalled by children; among the passive brands, those that are food producers and also aim at children were recalled. Other passive placements were also recognized. Some remarkable statements in the interviews about interactive brands are as follows:

> *"Of course, I opened the Gillette case (...) you don't have to give the correct information to the survey"* -C4
>
> *"My mom and dad don't let me when I say I'll buy something from the game* (in-game purchase is meant). *(...) I opened a lot of gold cases with the code on the stick with Roko (...) "*- C8
>
> *"I don't have my own phone, but my father's is Vodafone. Sometimes he allows me to purchase a weekly case"* C9
>
> *"I like the taste of Coca-Cola more, but I always ensure my parents buy Pepsi (...) Because Pepsi gives a Pepsi case"*-C11

Considering the findings obtained from the interviews, it is seen that *Pepsi* and *Roko* are food brands that directly aim at children and create an irrational demand for the brand. Based on the statements of the children, almost none of the parents sympathize with the issue of in-game purchasing and do not consider game as a field worth spending money. However, as a way to overcome this, interactive advertising practices of food brands are called out. While the in-game purchase requests of children are not satisfied mostly, their ice cream or soft drink requests are satisfied completely although their excessive consumption is risky in terms of their health. Although this situation is a way to overcome the conflict between parents and children, it promotes the risk of obesity by promoting excessive consumption of such products. It was observed that the viewpoint regarding in-game purchasing is not independent from the state of playing. Only one of the parents interviewed said that she was also playing digital games, and this parent stated that she made in-game purchases both for her child and for her own game in the words:

> *"Also, when we play a game called Roblox* (she states that she occasionally plays, but she mainly refers to her younger child), *we purchase the accessories and clothes (like wings, T-shirts, hats) worn in the game via credit card or mobile code card we purchase from Apple Store."* -P1

On the other hand, children request such products and their families do not know that the in-game purchase will be made with the products purchased while satisfying their request. So much so, the expression of the parent of a child who makes an in-game purchase with Roko is as follows:

> *"There was nothing that s/he directly saw in the game and request. So, I'm not worried"*-P2

Among the recalled associative brands, those except for Mercedes and BMW directly aim at the child consumer. Considering that the foundation of the brand attitude of the future is laid at the moment and brand awareness is formed, the game acts as an effective medium in creating brand awareness.

When screenshots of scenes with associative brands which cannot be recalled were shown to the children, they express all the brands with their real brand names. In other words, all children used the *"Hamidiye"* expression for the water brand whose visual marks were protected but whose brand name was shown as *"Hemidiye"* in the game scenes. From this point of view, even if the verbal elements of the brand are manipulated, it is clear that the brand is not perceived differently than the original when the visual signs are kept same.

When parents were asked if they had any information about the ads in digital games, only two parents noticed and the rest expressed that they did not.

> *"I once saw Ariel's ad"* -P3[11]
>
> *"I saw a lot of ads in other games."* - P1

Parents interviewed as part of the study, other than one parent, do not have a digital game experience. Since the game has a function of socializing with other gamers, children mostly play the game by talking to their friends through *Discord* or other software. Since they do not always want to involve their families in these digital conversations, they prefer to be alone in the area where they play the game. For this reason, it is almost impossible for a parent without a game experience to control the game played by her child.

> *"It is not quite possible to control because we cannot enter their rooms while they are playing the game"* -P5

Therefore, it is expected that parents are not informed about the advertisements that their children are exposed to in the game. Another important aspect of this situation is that they are not able to control not only the ads but also the risks involved the game playing process and the communication of their children with other players. Whether parents consider advertising in the games as a risky element or not was asked through the risks they identified regarding the games. No parent was found to consider the ads as a risky element. Parents have not considered anything other than physical violence and sexual content as risky.

Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, *Zula*, a national FPS, is discussed and analyzed in terms of advertising. It was revealed that increasing screen time cannot be solely explained with individual factors such as addiction because there are elements that makes the screen time longer in *Zula.* Parents were found to be in an imperceptible conflict with their children. While

parents have difficulty in managing the process since they have a widespread belief that establishing strict rules will harm their relationship with their children, children think that they will be able to control the screen times themselves if their families do not interfere. Since playing digital games is not common among parents, children's relationship with the game is incomprehensible to them. Therefore, they do not have sufficient information about the ads children are exposed to in the game, how children use the game in socializing and the extent of in-game purchases. Since the facts that many brands are placed both interactively and passively in Zula, and a considerable part of the brands are made up of unhealthy food products indicate that the attention directed by children to the game is managed by the advertiser, this renders them the commodities of the economy. That children recall all of the interactive brands and recognize the passive brands can be shown as a proof of this. Families' strict attitude towards in-game purchases leads children to in-game purchases by purchasing unhealthy products in interactive campaigns and introducing the code included in the package to the game. Although purchasing an ice cream or soft drink requested by the child from the market seems less harmful than the in-game benefits purchased by using the real life's exchange tool at first, it both promotes irrational purchases at the age of brand awareness and encourages more in-game benefits by consuming more unhealthy products. Looking at the big picture, this situation can be considered as a serious threat in terms of public health. The personal data requested by the interactive brand campaigns for the in-game benefits provided to the players and unconditionally shared by all children refers to another risky situation. So much so that these brands allow children to apply for a SIM Card before they are 18 years old, create a virtual card and spend on it, and participate in surveys that reveal their identity, such as their Turkish Republic identity number. Moreover, this picture becomes much more dangerous because parents do not have knowledge about in-game processes, children see the game as reliable and do not see information sharing process as a risky situation.

It is almost impossible for parents to know about the content and process of the games without playing these games that their children play regularly. Therefore, parents can only benefit their children by playing and analyzing the mentioned games with a critical view. The in-game purchases of children cannot be prevented without providing credit or virtual card information, because children can also earn in-game money by selling their personal information to the advertiser with interactive ads. On the other hand, this also renders unconscious purchases rational. So much so that children tend to buy the soft drink which provides additional in-game benefits instead the soft drink they find delicious. It is vital that not only parents, but also teachers should increase their digital literacy skills regarding this issue. As a result of the study, it is recommended that educational program developers accept the fact that games have great importance in children's lives and include modules aimed at bringing in digital literacy skills in training programs. Legislators are required to introduce inclusive regulations aimed at digital games as a medium.

For future studies, it will be beneficial to investigate children's digital literacy skills and gaming experiences in the context of their physical health, academic achievement and relationships with their environment, to reveal causal relationships. In addition, studying the advertising recall and brand learning states of children of different age groups by the developmental psychologists will contribute to the educational operations and social responsibility campaigns to be developed.

Notlar

1 Steam is a platform that provides a wide range of gaming services such as game development, game distribution, game publishing, gaming, player and player community communication. For more information, the address https://store.steampowered.com/about/ can be visited. (Access Date: February 2, 2020)

2 In the report, risks are conceptualized in three dimensions being content, contact and conduct. Due to the scope of this study, only the content dimension has been examined.

3 It is used to express the imbalance between the energy taken into the body and the energy spent.

4 The World Health Organization (2016: 4) defines environments that are characterized by high energy intake and low physical activity that promote weight gain and obesity in children as obesogenic.

5 An example of this from our country is the potato chips that Cheetos designed to play rock paper scissors game and the soft candy that Haribo designed as different animal figures.

6 It stands for massively multiple online first-person shooter and was translated into Turkish as "devasa çok oyunculu çevrimiçi birinci şahıs nişancı oyunu".

7 Vodafone and Paycell have been repeated in both categories since they have both brand placement and interactive ad form practices.

8 The currency used in the game is Zula Money (ZM), Zula Gold (ZG) and Gift Money (GM). Among these, Zula Gold (ZG) is the medium, which has the highest value and the possession of which is possible with real life's mediums of exchange. The approximate purchase value of 20,000 Zula Gold is TRY 35.

9 SIM Card application is made online and the SIM Card is delivered by courier.

10 Gillette's advertising practice is highly controversial ethically. Although it is written "Choose the best e-sports team of the year and win the Gillette Case" on the screen that invites the gamers to the questionnaire, when the link is clicked, the players are asked to answer a questionnaire about their shaving habits, and the question "who is the best e-sports team of the year?" is asked as the last question of the questionnaire. This practice functions as an element of violence, both because it provides false preliminary information and requests a lot of personal information without gamers' consent. Although none of the children have shaving experience due to their age, the knowledge that all of them open the Gillette case and fill in the questionnaire aims at the consumer of the future and takes the aim behind the advertisement to a controversial point.

11 When the game was analyzed, no Ariel ad was found but there were ads of some other cleaning products.

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Dijital Oyunlarda Reklam: Çocuk ve Ebeveyn Perspektifinden Bir İnceleme

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Genişletilmiş Özet

İçinde bulunduğumuz enformasyon çağında kıt bir kaynak olan dikkat hem mesajın üreticileri hem mesajın alıcısı olan tüketiciler tarafından yönetilmesi gereken bir alana dönüşmüştür. Dijital oyunlar, dikkat ekonomisinde oldukça önemli bir alanı işaretlemektedir. Öyle ki, 2018 yılı Steam verisine göre PUBG adlı oyunun 1 saat içerisinde 3 milyon tekil oyuncu tarafından oynandığı ortaya konmuştur (Twentify, 2018, p. 18). Bu verinin dikkat ekonomisindeki anlamı 1 saatte 3 milyon kişinin dikkatini yönetmek olduğundan mecrayı reklamveren için cazip ve yatırım yapmaya değer bir hale getirmektedir.

Oyunlar, çocuklar ve genç yetişkinler için sadece bir boş zaman edimi değil ciddiye alınması gereken çevrimiçi kariyer alanına dönüşmektedir. Öyle ki, eSpor'un yükselişi ile üniversiteler burs vermeye başlamış; çevrimiçi oyun başarısı gerçek yaşamın değişim aracıyla ödüllendirilen bir iş alanı haline gelmiş, oyun videosu üretimi ticari değere sahip olmuştur (Akcan & Gençyürek Erdoğan, 2019, p. 37). Ancak sözü edilen oyunlar ebeveyn tarafından önemsiz ve zaman kaybı olarak görüldüğünden ebeveyn ile çocuklar arasında bir çatışma alanı oluşturmaktadır.

Dijital oyunların, çocuklar tarafından ciddiye alınmasından hareketle dikkat ekonomisindeki yeri ve bundan kaynaklı marka farkındalığı yaratma potansiyelinin oldukça yüksek olması beklenmektedir. Bu yüzdendir ki, dijital oyunlarda reklam ve ticari unsurlar Livingtone ve Haddon (2009, p. 10)'un yürütücüsü olduğu EU Kids Online Report'da en az şiddet, değerler ve saldırganlığa denk çevrimiçi riskler arasında tanımlanmıştır. Literatürde marka farkındalığının kesin olarak geliştiği yaş veya gelişim dönemine ilişkin bir fikir birliği bulunmamaktadır. Ancak bir markaya ilişkin aktif ve pasif bilgileri içeren marka farkındalığının erken çocuklukta ne zaman ve nasıl görüldüğü ve geliştiğinin irdelendiği Valkenburg ve Buijzen (2005)'in araştırmasında 2 ila 8 yaş arası çocuklara 12 marka logosu gösterilmiş ve bunun ardından çocuklara markaların isimleri sorulmuştur. 2-3 yaşındakiler 12 markadan 1 'ini yardımsız hatırlarken 12 markanın 8'ini tanımış, yardımlı olarak hatırlamışlardır. Macklin (1996, pp. 251-252), gelişimsel hafıza araştırmalarının küçük çocukların sözcükleri hatırlamada daha büyük çocuklara göre genellikle daha kötü olduklarını gösterdiğinin altını çizmekte ve bunun bir doğrulayıcısı olarak 11 yaşındaki çocukların sözcüklerin %54'ünü hatırlamasına karşın 7 yaşındaki çocuklarda bunun %29 oranında olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca, çocukların hafıza yapılarında önceden ilişkilendirilmiş görsel işaretler marka ismine ek olarak sunulduğunda çocukların marka isimlerini daha iyi hatırladıklarını görülmüştür. Ekran süresi uzun olanların obezojenik ürünlere daha fazla aşina olacağı ve marka farkındalığının şekilleneceği konusunda pek çok yazar fikir birliğindedir (Brody, Stoneman, Lane, & Sanders, 1981; Chamberlain, Wang, & Robinson, 2006; Nguyen, 2008; Nørgaard & Brunsø, 2011; Dalton, et al., 2017; Smith, et al., 2019)

Bu çalışma çocukların dijital oyunlarda yer alan marka etkileşimlerini anlama üzerine kurgulanmış olup çalışmanın problemi dijital oyunlarda yer alan markaların çocuklar tarafından tanınma ve hatırlanma durumlarının reklam türü, oyun içi faktörler, ekran süresi değişkenleri ile anlaşılmasıdır. Çalışma, nitel bir yaklaşımla tasarlanmış ve veri toplama tekniği olarak görüşme ve içerik analizi tekniklerinden yararlanılmıştır. Zula adlı FPS oyun, Türkiye menşeili, çevrimiçi etkileşimli ve tamamen Türkçe olması ve oyunda yer alan markaların yerelde yaygın ve çocuklar tarafından erişilebilir olması nedenleriyle örneklem olarak alınmıştır.

Çalışma neticesinde oyun bağımlılığı veya planlanandan uzun süren oyun süresinin sadece bireysel faktörlerle açıklanamayacağı görülmüş Zula'nın ekran süresinin uzamasını teşvik eden unsurlar içerdiği bulgulanmıştır. Ekran süresi hem ödülle hem cezayla kontrol edilmektedir. Ödül kapsamında işleyiş oyuna her gün giriş yapılması durumunda ve belli sürelerde oynama karşılığında verilen değişken ödüllerdir. Ceza kapsamında işleyiş ise zorunlu haller (internet kesintisi vb.) de dahil olmak üzere bir nedenle oyundan çıkıldığında yeniden oynamak için oyunda belirli bir süre geçirmenin şart koşulmasıdır.

Çalışmaya katılan annelerin çocukları ile ince bir çatışma içerisinde olduğu yapılan görüşmeler neticesinde ulaşılan sonuçlar arasındadır. Anneler, sert kurallar koymanın çocuklarıyla ilişkilerine zarar vereceğine ilişkin yaygın bir inanca sahip olduğundan süreci yönetmekte zorlanırken çocuklar anne ve babaları onlara müdahale etmezse ekran sürelerini kendileri kontrol edebileceklerini düşünmektedir.

Çalışmaya katılan anneler arasında oyun oynama yaygın bir davranış olmadığından çocuklarının oyun ile ilişkileri onlar için anlaşılmaz olmaktadır. Bu nedenle çocuklarının oyunda maruz kaldıkları reklamlar, çocukların oyunu sosyalleşmede nasıl kullandığı, oyun-içi satın alımlar konusunda yeterli düzeyde bilgi sahibi olamamaktadırlar. Zula'da çok sayıda markanın hem etkileşimli hem durağan reklamlarının yer alması, markaların dikkate değer bir kısmının sağlıksız gıda ürünlerinden oluşması çocukların oyuna yönelttikleri dikkatin reklamveren tarafından yönetilmesi anlamına geldiğinden çocukları dikkat ekonomisinin metaları haline getirmektedir. Bunun bir kanıtı olarak çocukların etkileşimli markaların tamamını yardımsız hatırlaması, durağan markaların da tanınması (recognition) gösterilebilmektedir. Oyun-içi satın alımlar karşısında ailelerin katı tutuma sahip olması çocukları etkileşimli kampanyalarda yer alan sağlıksız ürünleri satın alıp ambalajda yer alan kodu oyuna tanıtarak oyun-içi satın alıma yöneltmektedir. Çocuğun talep ettiği bir dondurma ya da meşrubatı marketten satın almak başta kredi kartı kullanarak satın alınan oyun-içi faydalardan daha az zararlı görünse de hem marka bilincinin oluştuğu yaşlarda akıl dışı satın alımları teşvik etmekte hem de daha fazla sağlıksız ürün tüketerek daha fazla oyun-içi fayda elde etmeyi teşvik etmektedir. Büyük resme bakıldığında bu durum halk sağlığı açısından da ciddi bir tehdit olarak değerlendirilebilir niteliktedir. Etkileşimli markaların oyunculara sağladığı oyun-içi yararlar karşılığında talep ettiği ve bütün çocukların koşulsuz şekilde paylaştığı kişisel veriler bir başka riskli durumu işaretlemektedir. Öyle ki bu markalar çocukların henüz 18 yaşında olmadan hat başvurusunda bulunmalarına, sanal kart oluşturup bu karttan harcama yapabilmelerine, kimlik numarası gibi kimliklerini açık eden anketlere katılmalarına izin vermektedir. Üstelik bu tablo, ebeveynlerin oyun-içi süreçlerle ilgili bilgi sahibi olmamaları, çocukların ise oyunu güvenilir görmeleri, paylaştıkları bilgilerde riskli bir durum görmemeleri ile çok daha tehlikeli bir hal almaktadır.

Ebeveynin, çocuklarının oynadığı oyunları oynamadan oyunların içeriği ve işleyişiyle ilgili bilgi sahibi olmaları imkansızdır. Bu sebeple ebeveynin, çocuklarını koruması ancak ve ancak sözü edilen oyunları eleştirel bir bakış ile oynayarak ve analiz ederek mümkün olabilmektedir. Çocukların oyun-içi satın alım yapması kredi kartı ya da sanal kart bilgisini vermeden engellenememektedir çünkü çocuklar etkileşimli reklamlarla reklamverene kişisel bilgilerini satarak da oyuniçi para elde edebilmektedir. Öte yandan bu durum bilinçdışı satın alımları da aklileştirmektedir. Öyle ki; çocuklar tadını sevdiği meşrubatı değil oyun-içi ek yarar sağlayan meşrubatı satın alma eğilimi göstermektedir. Bu konuda sadece ebeveynlerin değil öğretmenlerin de dijital okuryazarlık becerileri kazanması yaşamsal önemde olmaktadır. Çalışma sonucunda eğitim programı geliştiricilerin oyunların çocukların hayatında büyük öneme sahip olduğu gerçeğini kabul etmeleri ve eğitim programlarına dijital okuryazarlık becerileri kazandırmaya yönelik modüller dahil etmeleri önerilmektedir. Tüm bunlara ek olarak, yasayapıcıların bir mecra olarak dijital oyunlara yönelik kapsayıcı düzenlemeler getirmesi gerekliliği ortadadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital Oyun, Oyun-İçi Reklam, Çocuklar, Zula, Marka Farkındalığı.