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**VIRTUAL FORMS OF PROMOTION IN COMPUTER  
GAMES. QUALITATIVE STUDY AMONGST POLISH  
USERS**

**WIRTUALNE FORMY PROMOCJI W GRACH  
KOMPUTEROWYCH. BADANIA JAKOŚCIOWE  
WŚRÓD POLSKICH UŻYTKOWNIKÓW**

**Abstract:** Increasing migration of audiences from television to playing console and computer games as well as greater results in reception of brand placed inside the games than traditional media attracted attentions of scholars and marketers toward this promotional tool. Aver-

age game offer a various ways to convey brand message. The purpose of the research was to identify and describe forms of promotion in virtual worlds of computer games utilized by contemporary organizations. To meet the assumed goals, the author carried out 20 in-depth interviews amongst polish players. Research sample includes a user's of chosen three computer games, namely The Sims, Second Life and Euro Truck Simulator 2. Results show that respondents most often listed brands featured with using direct marketing. Majority of those brand appeared as a branded product that can be used by players inside the game but companies also establish virtual headquarters or shops. Second position took advertising which looks similar like in real life and frequently takes forms of virtual billboards or paintings on cars. Public relations contain various virtual events, shows, conferences or branded places built on entertainment purposes. The least numerous groups of brands are personal selling, sales promotion and other forms of promotion (ambient advertising and word of mouth communication).

**Keywords:** forms of promotion, promotion in games, Second Life, Euro Truck Simulator 2, The Sims

**Streszczenie:** Zmiany w sposobach spędzania wolnego czasu, a w tym rezygnacja z oglądania telewizji na rzecz grania w gry konsolowe i komputerowe, jak również korzystniejsze wyniki w zakresie odbioru marek umieszczanych w grach niż w mediach tradycyjnych, przyciągnęły uwagę naukowców i praktyków do tego narzędzia promocyjnego. Przeciętna gra komputerowa oferuje zróżnicowany zakres sposobów promowania marki. Niniejszy artykuł prezentuje wyniki przeprowadzonych 20 wywiadów pogłębionych wśród polskich graczy. Celem wywiadów była identyfikacja i charakterystyka wirtualnych form promocji stosowanych w grach komputerowych. Próba badawcza składała się z użytkowników trzech wybranych gier komputerowych, a mianowicie The Sims, Second Life i Euro Truck Simulator 2. Wyniki pokazały, że respondenci najczęściej mieli kontakt z markami umieszczonymi z wykorzystaniem marketingu bezpośredniego. Większość z tych marek pojawiła się jako wirtualny produkt markowy, który mógł być wykorzystywany przez użytkowników wewnątrz gry, jednak firmy również zakładają swoje wirtualne siedziby lub sklepy. Drugie miejsce zajęła wirtualna reklama, która wewnątrz wirtualnego świata wygląda podobnie jak w prawdziwym życiu i często przybiera formy wirtualnych billboardów czy reklam na samochodach. Public relations zawiera różne wirtualne wydarzenia, pokazy, konferencje lub „markowe” miejsca zbudowane w celach rynkowych. Najmniej liczne grupy marek zakwalifikowano do sprzedaży osobistej, promocji sprzedaży oraz niestandardowych form promocji (reklama ambientowa i komunikacja nieformalna).

**Słowa kluczowe:** formy promocji, promocja w grach, Second Life, Euro Truck Simulator 2, The Sims

## Introduction

Last decades, it can be witnessed the increasing migration of audiences from television to playing console and computer game<sup>1</sup>. Yet in 2013, 68% of American house-

<sup>1</sup> B. Lewis, L. Porter, *In-game advertising effects: Examining player perceptions of advertising schema congruity in a massively multiplayer online role-playing game*, "Journal of Interactive Advertising" 2010, 10(2), p. 46.

holds played video and online games. This is not only a trend observed amongst young people but incorporates nearly each group of age, regardless of gender<sup>2</sup>. In short period of time, computer games began to be seen as a marketing communication channel with growing ranks of companies that feature their brands or products inside virtual environment<sup>3</sup>. Marketers' attention towards computer games is driven by research results regarding the effectiveness of various forms of advertising. For example, in the Hansen and Scotwin research on the effectiveness of traditional billboards, the sponsored brands during the match football were poorly remembered. Amongst the 14 brands appearing on billboards, 4 were not noticed by anyone at all, and the best result was obtained by brand remembered by only 17% of viewers. For comparison, Chaney, Lin and Chaney investigated the effectiveness of billboards placed in computer games. Result showed that half players remember at least one advertising brand on the billboard in the game, and the effectiveness increase if the billboards connect graphic elements with the text<sup>4</sup>. According to research made in 2012 amongst polish users, advertising in computer games are better perceive then in traditional media. Significant part of players seems to have positive attitude toward brand placed inside the games and shared opinions that those brands increase realism of the game<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, consumers are agile in traditional advertising avoidance, especially when it comes to television and switching the channel when commercial starts<sup>6</sup>. Similar behaviors emerge in the field of on-line marketing communication because Internet users are increasingly concern about their privacy<sup>7</sup>. A typical game provides multiple channels for a brand message, from traditional display in various sizes and different locations, to much more sophisticated forms of brand placement<sup>8</sup>. The aim of present paper is to represent a result of qualitative research in which the author try to identified the virtual forms of promotion inside computer games. The author carried out a 20 in-depth interviews amongst polish players of three chosen computer games that simulate real life, namely The Sims, Second Life and Euro Truck Simulator 2.

<sup>2</sup> J. Babb, N. Terry, *Comparing video game sales by gaming platform*, "Southwestern Economic Review" 2013, 40, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> G. Mau, G. Silberer, C. Constien, *Communicating brands playfully: Effects of in-game advertising for familiar and unfamiliar brands*, "International Journal of Advertising" 2008, 27 p. 827-828.

<sup>4</sup> M. Mitreęa, *Advergaming jako rozwijająca się forma komunikacji marketingowej*, „Studia Ekonomiczne” 2013, 140, p. 134.

<sup>5</sup> M. Mitreęa, *Reklama w grach komputerowych – wstępne badanie postaw graczy w Polsce*, „Marketing i Rynek” 2012, 6, p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> S. Dix, I. Phau, *Television advertising avoidance: Advancing research methodology*, "Journal of Promotion Management" 2010, 16(1-2), p. 114.

<sup>7</sup> M. Mitreęa, *Advergaming jako rozwijająca się forma...*, p. 133.

<sup>8</sup> F.E. Dardis, M. Schmierbach, A.M. Limperos, *The impact of game customization and control mechanisms on recall of integral and peripheral brand placements in videogames*, "Journal of Interactive Advertising" 2012, 12(2), p. 1.

The paper is organized as follows. At first, the forms of promotion are presented, especially fundamental Kotler's forms of traditional promotional activities, and an examples of non-traditional instruments. Second part contains research method and description of the sample. Third section constitutes the results of 20 in-depth interviews made amongst polish players. The paper is ended with conclusions.

## 1. Forms of promotion

In order to meet an objectives assumed in promotion strategy, an appropriate promotional mix must be composed<sup>9</sup>. Kotler distinguishes five following instruments: advertising, sales promotions, public relations, direct marketing and direct selling<sup>10</sup>. All marketing activities should be conducted in an informed manner and suitable order<sup>11</sup>. Integrated marketing communication element are presented on figure 1.

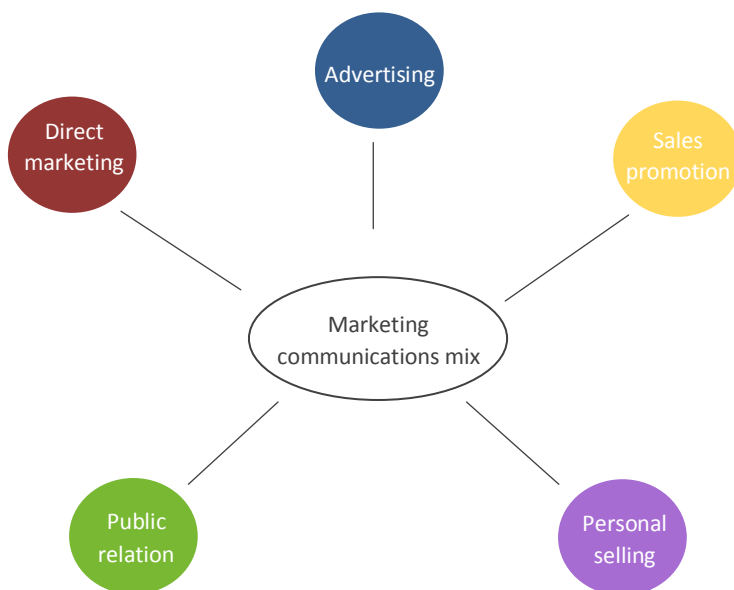


Figure 1. Marketing communication element.

Rysunek 1. Elementy komunikacji marketingowej

Source: G. Todorova, *Marketing communication mix*, "Trakia Journal of Sciences" 2015, 13(1), p. 369.

<sup>9</sup> J. Rowley, *Promotion and marketing communications in the information marketplace*, "Library Review" 1998, 47(8), p. 384.

<sup>10</sup> P. Kotler, *Marketing...*, p. 589.

<sup>11</sup> G. Todorova, *Marketing communication mix*, "Trakia Journal of Sciences" 2015, 13(1), p. 369.

According to Kotler, advertising includes all forms of non-personal presentation and promotes the idea, goods or services by a particular sponsor with the use of print media (newspapers and magazines), telecommunications (radio and television), network communications (telephone, cable, satellite, wireless), electronic media (audio-tape, videotape, videodisk, CD-ROM, web page), and display media (billboards, signs, posters)<sup>12</sup>. The first association is that advertiser is a company but it can be also another kind of organization such as museum, charity and government agency, which want to send a message to particular market. From a financial perspective advertising is a paid form of dissemination of information, regardless of its purpose. Advertisement most often represents product and company's offer<sup>13</sup> and play diversified functions, namely inform, persuade and create additional utility. Certain products and brands look more upscale and stylish. Expensive and risky products obtains additional value<sup>14</sup>. People behave in different ways after receiving the same advertising message and make decisions about spending their available resources<sup>15</sup>. Additional advantage of advertisement is that it can reach successfully to geographically dispersed consumers and build long term image of product or brand<sup>16</sup>.

Sales promotions includes some activities aimed on persuading customer to purchase product or service in short-term. This promotional instrument add some value to particular product or service at a certain time, for example by price reduction, coupons, in-store demonstrations. Sales promotion influence on consumers through three different factors, economic, informative and affective. The economic factor refers to the economic benefit associated with a product purchase, the informative factor is related to beliefs about a brand or industry, affective factor involve consumers' feelings and emotions toward the product or brand<sup>17</sup>. Sales promotion consist of three areas of activity: consumer promotions, trade promotions, and personnel motivation. Consumer promotions is often geared on pull techniques and stimulation final demand by using price reduction or price promotion. Trade promotions help sellers push products through the channel towards the consumer by offering special incentives such as discounts, increased margins on sales, dealer competitions, exhibitions, provision of demonstrators and free holidays. Personnel motivation is related to the salesforce, distributors or retailers and most often

<sup>12</sup> P. Kotler, *Marketing...*, p. 590; G. Todorova, *Marketing communication...*, p. 370.

<sup>13</sup> P. Kotler, *Marketing...*, p. 590, 600.

<sup>14</sup> G. Todorova, *Marketing communication...*, p. 370.

<sup>15</sup> O.I. Oladepo, O.S. Abimbola, *The influence of brand image and promotional mix on consumer buying decision-a study of beverage consumers in Lagos State, Nigeria*, "British Journal of Marketing Studies" 2015, 3(4), p. 100.

<sup>16</sup> P. Kotler, *Marketing...*, p. 589-590, 600.

<sup>17</sup> Y. Köksal, O. Spahiu, *The efficiency of monetary and non-monetary sales promotions on brand preference: A case of albanian GSM companies\*/Parasal ve parasal olmayan satis promosyonlarinin marka tercihi üzerindeki etkisi: Arnavutluk GSM firmalari örneği*, "İstanbul Üniversitesi İşletme Fakültesi Dergisi" 2014, 43(2), p. 320.

takes forms of sales incentives scheme<sup>18</sup>. Sales promotions result immediately but for short period of time<sup>19</sup>.

Public relations (PR) focus on dealing with the organization's image in public opinion and develop communications strategies aimed on building strong relationship with them. Effective public relations help managers to develop and maintain a positive reputation of a companies, even a budget or number of staff are limited<sup>20</sup>. Public relations activities encompass establishing and maintaining contacts with the press with presenting news about the company in the best light, popularizing the company's products, popularizing the company's activities and advises managers on all aspects related to public issue and company's image<sup>21</sup>.

Direct marketing has its origins in companies that sell their products from catalogue (or mail-order)<sup>22</sup> as a direct channel that allow to avoid intermediary companies. Amongst this channel can be listed post, catalogues, telemarketing, interactive television or websites. The primary aim of direct marketing is to gain customers' orders<sup>23</sup>. Direct marketing include looking for new customers and keeping those who company already have. Marketers create databases and usually utilize customer relationship management (CRM) programmes. Gathered information's about customers allow to personalize products, pricing and promotions to better meet their needs. This kind of activities are implement in order to make customer loyal to the product and company<sup>24</sup>. New technology and prevalence of Internet led to emergence new attractive forms of direct marketing like web marketing, web seminars, advertising flyers or catalogs<sup>25</sup>.

Direct selling (personal selling) have the most important role in the later stage of purchase process, when customers' preferences are shaped and persuading them to action<sup>26</sup>. Direct selling can be defined as a method of distribution of consumer goods and services through personal contact between seller and buyer<sup>27</sup>. Personal sales is based on two-way communication which the seller persuades and helps the buyer makes a decision about purchase<sup>28</sup>. In this definition special attention should be paid in necessity of face-to-face contact between seller and customer. Direct sell-

<sup>18</sup> O.I. Oladepo, O.S. Abimbola, *The influence of brand image and promotional mix...*, p. 100.

<sup>19</sup> P. Kotler, *Marketing...*, p. 590.

<sup>20</sup> D. Jerman, G. Vukovic, B. Zavrsnik, *How public relations impact on a company's effectiveness*, Organizacija 2008, 41(3), p. 91; J.K. Springston, R.A. Weaver Lariscy, *Public Relations Effectiveness in Public Health Institutions*, "Journal of Health and Human Services Administration" 2005, 28(1), p. 220, 227.

<sup>21</sup> P. Kotler, *Marketing...*, p. 628.

<sup>22</sup> S. Harridge-March, *Direct marketing and relationships*, "Direct Marketing" 2008, 2(4), p. 193.

<sup>23</sup> P. Kotler, *Marketing...*, p. 632.

<sup>24</sup> S. Harridge-March, *Direct marketing...*, p. 193, 195.

<sup>25</sup> G. Todorova, *Marketing communication...*, p. 372.

<sup>26</sup> P. Kotler, *Marketing...*, p. 590.

<sup>27</sup> R.A. Peterson, T.R. Wotruba, *What is direct selling?—Definition, perspectives, and research agenda*, "Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management" 1996, 16(4), p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> G. Todorova, *Marketing communication...*, p. 371.

ing is condition by personal communication and direct interactions<sup>29</sup>. A few scholars emphasize in definitions of direct selling that process of selling take place away from a fixed retail location, e.g. Baker, Hart and Stapleton, Peterson and Wotruba<sup>30</sup>. A customers' sense of saturation with traditional forms of promotion led to increase in companies' interest in various non-traditional instruments. Amongst non-standard marketing activities, can be notice the ambient media, described as an alternative medium, different from commonly known press, television, radio or Internet<sup>31</sup>. Luxton and Drummond propose following definition of ambient advertising: "The placement of advertising in unusual and unexpected places (location) often with unconventional methods (execution) and being first or only ad execution to do so (temporal)"<sup>32</sup>. Ambient advertising contains reaching out to the customer when he traveling (e. g. advertising on tickets or postcards), when he is enjoying himself (e. g. advertising on beer stands), reaching out to parents and children (e. g. advertisement on textbooks), getting to the customer near the shop where he is shopping (e. g. advertising on buses, advertising on receipts), and other (e. g. advertising on lids)<sup>33</sup>.

Practitioners started to employ product placement as a solution of avoiding traditional advertisement<sup>34</sup>. Product placement can be describe as a paid, intentional and inconspicuous message about the branded product embedded in a movie or TV program<sup>35</sup>. It can be distinguished five types of product placement: generic placement, utility placement, brand placement, corporate placement and organization placement. Generic placement take place when the product category is featured, without any information about brand or producer. Utility placement shows the ways how the product should be utilized. Brand placement is when the brand or/and product is showed. Corporate placement can be describe by company name or brand of product featured on the billboards, neon signs or the others advertising medium. Organization placement take place when organization or company is embedded in the plot<sup>36</sup>.

One of the oldest and prevalent type of communication between consumers is word-of-mouth (WOM)<sup>37</sup>. Word of mouth can be simply define as "the informal

<sup>29</sup> O.I. Oladepo, O.S. Abimbola, *The influence of brand image and promotional mix...*, p. 100.

<sup>30</sup> R.A. Peterson, T.R. Wotruba, *What is direct selling...*, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> N. Hatańska, *Niestandardowe formy promocji*, „Marketing i Rynek” 2002, 11(09), p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> S. Luxton, L. Drummond, *What is this thing called 'Ambient Advertising'?* In Proceedings of ANZMAC, 2000, p. 735.

<sup>33</sup> N. Hatańska, *Niestandardowe formy...*, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> C.R. Patel, P.V. Patel, *Brand Recall for Product Placement in Hindi Movies*, “Global Journal of Management and Business Research” 2015, 15(7), p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> J. Kramolis, M. Kopecková, *Product Placement: A Smart Marketing Tool Shifting a Company to the Next Competitive Level*, “Journal of Competitiveness” 2013, Vol. 5, p. 100.

<sup>36</sup> M. Hofman-Kohlmeyer, *The role of product placement in brand management on the example of Second Life game*. Zarządzanie społeczno-ekonomiczne wobec wyzwań XXI wieku, Wydawnictwo Sophia, Katowice 2017, p. 166.

<sup>37</sup> J. Ahrens, J.R. Coyle, M.A. Strahilevitz, *Electronic word of mouth: The effects of incentives on e-referrals by senders and receivers*, “European Journal of Marketing” 2013, 47(7), p. 1035-1036.



transmission of ideas, comments, opinions and information between two or more individuals, neither one of which is a marketer". Consumers exchange the knowledge (about company and products), provide information about the offered values, attitudes towards them and the intentions of buying. Consumers share positive as well as negative opinions and they can encourage the others to buy some products or to choose the competitor's offer<sup>38</sup>. In comparison to advertisement, information's proliferated between friends and family are perceived as more credible by people. Using word-of-mouth communication in promotional strategy is much cheaper than traditional advertising for example in television<sup>39</sup>.

## 2. Research method

The purpose of the research was to identify and describe forms of promotion in virtual worlds of computer games utilized by contemporary organizations. In order to reach the assumed goals, the author carried out a 20 in-depth interviews amongst polish players. Interviews took place between 2018 August 21 and 2018 December 5. The participants of the study were adult users of computer games based on simulation of real life and strolling virtual world, namely The Sims, Second Life and Euro Truck Simulator 2. Second Life is a diversified space divided into regions<sup>40</sup>, containing geographic forms from the real world such as islands, buildings or institutions<sup>41</sup>. The players takes the form of an avatars and<sup>42</sup> can communicate with others via chat, chat voice and video conferences<sup>43</sup>. Euro Truck Simulator 2 allow players to impersonate a truck driver and the game environment reflects the real world in way that the player has the impression that he really moves with the truck on the real roads of Europe<sup>44</sup>. The Sims is real life simulation and users can create and control virtual people, place them in the houses they have designed and lead a life in the Sim community, residents of the virtual world<sup>45</sup>.

Respondents need to had contact with game at least six months before the research. They were invited to study from social groups created on social networking site Facebook by game's fans. Before the study, the composition of the respondents'

<sup>38</sup> M. Mitreġa, A. Dewalska-Opitek, (2018). *Word-of-mouth jako wymiar zachowań obywatelskich – wyniki badań eksploracyjnych*, „Organizacja i Kierowanie” 2018, 2, p. 206.

<sup>39</sup> J. Ahrens, J.R. Coyle, M.A. Strahilevitz, *Electronic word of mouth...*, p. 1035-1036.

<sup>40</sup> J. Laskowska-Witek, M. Mitreġa, *Brand Promotion Throught Computer Games on the Example of Second Life*, „Studia Ekonomiczne” 2014, p. 36-37.

<sup>41</sup> L. Dethridge, B. Quinn, *Realtime emergency communication in virtual worlds*, „International Journal of Disaster Resilience in the Built Environment” 2016, 7(1), p. 32.

<sup>42</sup> S. Papagiannidis, M. Bourlakis, F. Li, *Making real money in virtual worlds: MMORPGs and emerging business opportunities, challenges and ethical implications in metaverses*, „Technological Forecasting and Social Change” 2008, 75(5), p. 612.

<sup>43</sup> J. Laskowska-Witek, M. Mitreġa, *Brand Promotion...*, p. 38-39.

<sup>44</sup> [www.eurotrucksimulator2.com](http://www.eurotrucksimulator2.com), retrieved 6.01.2019.

<sup>45</sup> [www.thesims.com](http://www.thesims.com), 4.04.2017.



group was not known yet. Participants were invited systematically depending on which player was needed.

The majority of participants were men (12 players), had higher education (12 players) and belonged to the age range between 20 and 30 (17 players). Age structure is presented on figure 2.

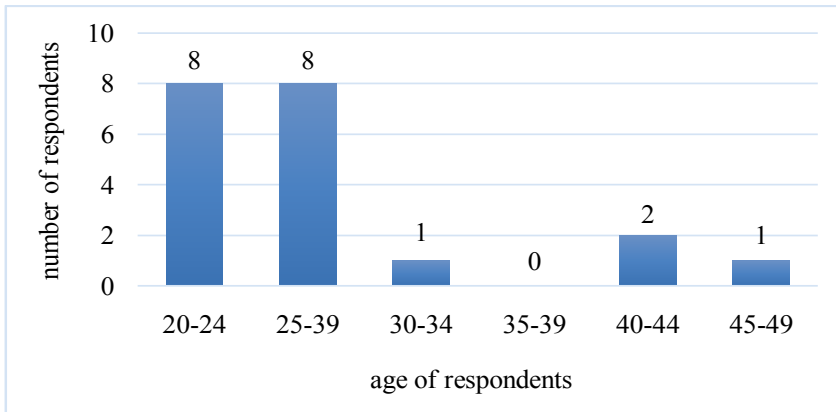


Figure 2. Age of respondents

Rysunek 2. Wiek respondentów

Source: own elaboration.

Large variations can be seen in the respondents' place of residence (figure 3) and occupations. Among the 20 participants, were residents of small and large cities, blue-collar workers (e. g. production worker, mechanic), white-collar workers (e. g. IT specialists) as well as students.

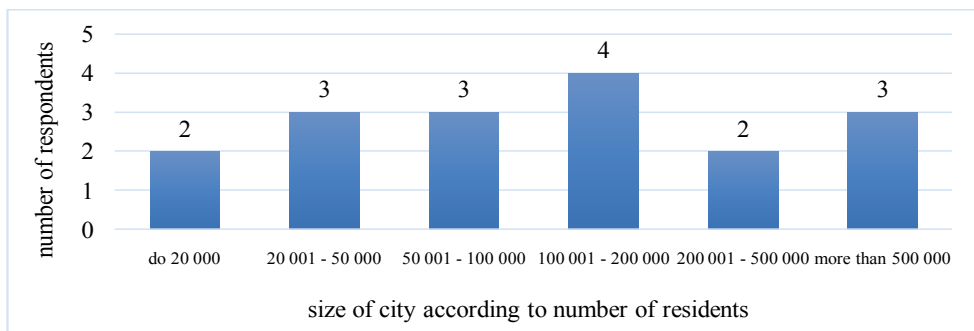


Figure 3. Place of residence of respondents

Rysunek 3. Miejsce zamieszkania respondentów

Source: own elaboration.

Amongst respondents, 6 persons play less than 5 years, 7 persons at least five years but less than 10, and 7 persons play more than 10 years. Respondents they were asked why they decided to join virtual worlds. They most frequently mentioned consecutively: curiosity (caused by TV series, TV programme, newspaper or advertisement), interact with others, interest in topic of a game, enjoyment from playing, opportunity to see or do things unattainable in real life, exploring virtual world, spending free time.

Interviews were carried out according to a previously prepared scenario. Participants were asked what real life brands they met inside the game environment, where the bands were placed and how can be use inside the game. Participants need to listed the names of the brands that they met inside the game. Then an interviewer asked further questions that led to decryption of particular brand appearance (e. g. when and where the brand was met, if was possible to interact with the branded product).

### 3. Results

Respondents indicated various well-known brands that they met inside the game. Those brands were divided on groups and assigned to particular forms of promotion according to their definitions. As a result, the author identified forms of promotion used in computer games and obtained information's which are best remembered by the players (figure 4).

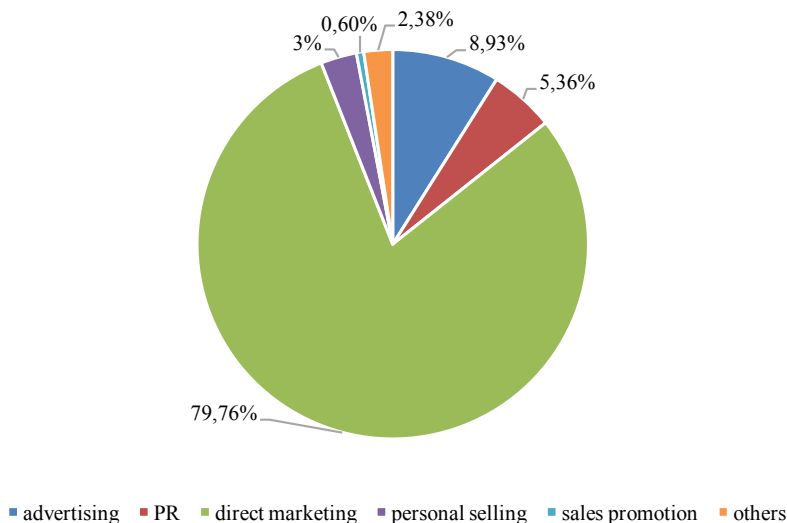


Figure 4. Virtual forms of promotion  
 Rysunek 4. Wirtualne formy promocji  
 Source: own elaboration.

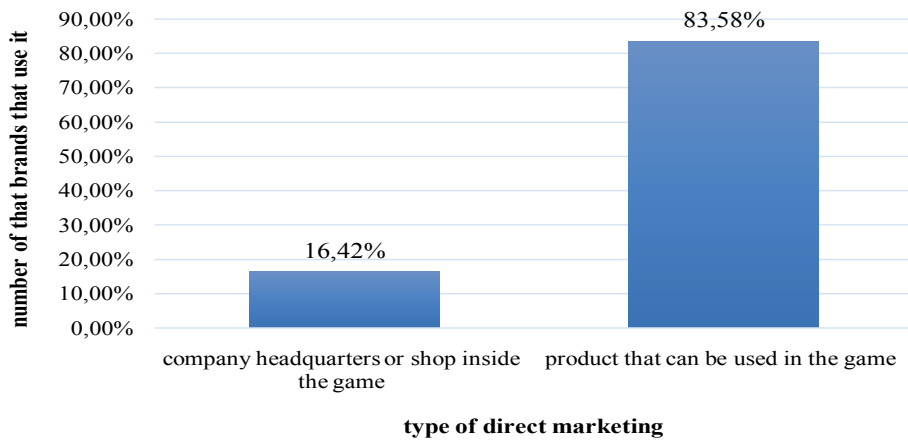


Figure 5. Direct marketing

Rysunek 5. Marketing bezpośredni

Source: own elaboration.

Respondents most often (79,76%) listed brands featured with using direct marketing (figure 5). Near 84% of those brands appeared as a branded product that can be used by players inside the game. Much less (16,42%) of brands decided to set up a virtual headquarters or shop inside the game. An example of products that can be used inside the game are clothes, mainly dedicated to avatars. Respondents indicated many brands of virtual clothes for avatars such as Diesel in *The Sims* („Yes, you could wear Diesel pants and have them all the time”, Respondent number 17) or Katy Perry line (“the whole series of accessories signed Katy Perry (...) characteristic things like her, such as clothes for Sims, just like she wears on stage, that for example she had such a sweet fairy-tale, sweet fairy-tale outfit, that today, for example, some cupcake on the head or some... cherry dress”, R15). Another examples comes from *Second Life* game. Respondent (R9) met beverages of Pepsi, Coca Cola and Fanta placed in similar way that it can be found in real life: “After clicking on such a machine, a menu appears asking what we would like and you can receive a can for free”. In virtual worlds people do not feel a hunger and thirst, but food products also fulfill certain functions (“Or a purely decorative factor. O, a can in your hand”. Beverages of Pepsi, Coca Cola and Fanta can be found in places where residents spend their free time: “There are also clubs with music (...) Cafes and yes, one of them was a drinks machine” (figure 6).



Figure 6. Brands of beverages in Second Life

Rysunek 6. Marki napojów w Second Life

Source: own elaboration.

In Euro Truck Simulator 2 players can move by trucks of real life brands: „Yes, trucks of seven brands are available in the game (...) All of them are European brands. It are successively Volvo, Scania, Das, Man, Mercedes, Iveco and Reno” (R9), „Only these trucks, you can move them, you can drive them, they are, they are branded” (R19). Players inside The Sims also could use branded furniture: „Yes, we also had in The Sims IKEA decorates the house, on the same principles as H&M” (R15). “IKEA decorates the house” is the name of add-on created around the IKEA brand. This add-on contain various elements depicted real life product of this company: “there were furniture, wall coverings and it really was furniture just like in IKEA, that they had just the same names as in IKEA, it were the most iconic armchairs, the most iconic IKEA sofas, some small tables, and what’s interesting, in this game was the cheapest furniture which could have suggested that IKEA is ... so affordable” (R15), „Well, I think that IKEA products. Fore sure was a heart-shaped pillow with handles, I remember. Such a red furniture, such a cabinet. (...) I also think that these were IKEA’s flagship products for that time” (R17). The product can be also used in virtual as in real world (“You could buy for the home, sit in it, on these furniture”, R15).

An example of setting up virtual company’s headquarters is Peugeot embedded inside virtual world of Second Life (“And when it comes to this Peugeot, Peugeot has made an island, built, advertising island, where only the Peugeots were”, “That was the car track on the whole island made, around this island. You could ride in such car”, R20). Peugeot decided to show players virtual representations of real life models of cars: “You could see the cars virtually. There were models that they normally offer in the real world”, “Peugeot showed up, showed his models, photos... sports, racing, in this way he advertised” (R20). Similarly in The Sims appeared products of H&M: „with all the accessories all means came to create this store, or hangers with clothes, wares are the H&M logo, some such white and red colors characteristic for the brand, yes, these are H&M colors. It also was in... I do not know, covering walls in such colors, etc. That this store really looked like H&M” (R15). H&M represents an example of

in-game store but also an example of product that can be used by players inside the game (clothes for avatars).

Second position took advertising (8,93%). Virtual advertising looks similar like in real world. An example of such advertising described Second Life residents: „When it comes to advertising inside Second Life, there are plenty of them. You can meet them at every step. Ads of places, products”, “They look like billboards, just like the graphic with shoes only located somewhere in the world of Second Life” (R6). Wide range of advertising could be find in Euro Truck Simulator 2: „and if it comes to some real ads, then maybe some billboards appear, but the billboards usually appear as if you add such an add-on, but in total for single player game”, “Good additions are maps of Poland, where there are even advertisements of Biedronka, Lidl, there is quite a lot of it there” (R16). Aside from billboards near to the roads, players mentioned about advertising placed on trucks: „on trailers, for example, there are a lot of real brands, there is Lidl, Biedronka, there is also CCC”, “you can even download Jacek Daniels, because there is really a lot of it” (R16). An examples of advertising on trucks in Euro Truck Simulator 2 represent figure 7.



Figure 7. Biedronka and Jack Daniels on trucks

Rysunek 7. Biedronka i Jack Daniels na ciężarówkach

Source: [ets2mods.lt/euro-truck-simulator-2-mods/trailer-chereau-jack-daniels-ownable-1-33-x/](https://ets2mods.lt/euro-truck-simulator-2-mods/trailer-chereau-jack-daniels-ownable-1-33-x/), retrieved 7.07.2019.

Public relations (5,36%) contain various virtual events, shows, conferences or branded places built on entertainment purposes. A few residents of Second Life mentioned about polish example of Play island: „There was a club opened, the music was supposed to be, some social center, that Polish society would come there, to advertise services to buy mobile services” (R5), “Generally, Play was supposed to be a meeting place, yes, avatars met, there they sat and talked ... it was supposed to be this way. And by the way, it was a nice and purplish place, in Play’s own colors” (R20). In terms of virtual events, one respondent (R9) remembered charity organization „Relay for Life w Second Life. In real life American Cancer Society”. American Cancer Society expanded its activities by joining virtual world: “A few years ago, a charity event, playing for the disabled people for 3 days and 3 nights without a break. (...) fundraising for people with cancer”, “Those so-called Relay For Life takes place cyclically” (R9). The

polish example were concerts of The Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity (WOŚP) that took place in Second Life: *"Amongst charity events the WOŚ was certainly happened. There were also fundraisers, I do not know how exactly it was, who did it, and who transferred the money after that, but I know that WOŚPs were. (...) It seems to me that everyone, really everyone who went somewhere there, he left some small change at least"* (R11), *"It was in Krakow that, as I say, all these concerts were organized"* (R20).

To personal selling can be assigned only 3% brands listed by respondents. Although in virtual worlds (especially in Second Life) can be found numbers of virtual stores, those stores are deprived of salespersons. There are not interactions between buyer and seller. To personal selling activity can be assigned American Cancer Society (Relay for Life) because during the charity events, virtual volunteers (representatives of organization) interact with avatars (players)<sup>46</sup>. Also WOŚP had own staff in Second Life<sup>47</sup>: *"Various events were organized, I do not know if you heard that there was the WOŚP Charity in Second Life. (...) All virtual money was transferred, later turned into real money and transferred"* (R20).

Sales promotion constitutes the smallest collection of assigned brands (0,6%). An example provided user of Second Life: *"It was possible to buy them for virtual currency, but sometimes these companies gave away, for example, it was yet a happy hour and they distributed it for free, they made a promotion", „for example, they would give information to the group, that in an hour, those shoes will be for 5 Lindens, or even they were giving the shoes for free, only for one hour. Who knew, he benefited it"* (R20). Adidas shoes were available in special offer during fixed period of time.

When it comes to other forms of promotion (2,38%) respondents of Euro Truck Simulator 2 indicated an examples of ambient advertising: *"We also have a cup with the logo of the studio, which produces games, and which can also be purchased from them in their shop on the website of the game's producer"* (R10). Inside the truck players could find a cup with logotype of SCS Software, game producer. Another untraditional form of promotion is word of mouth communication between players. Word of mouth appeared in the case of above mentioned Adidas shoes. Respondent number 20 said: *"they would give information to the group, that in an hour, those shoes will be for 5 Lindens, or even they were giving the shoes for free"* (Second Life). Companies use the virtual social groups to spread information's amongst its users. Not only a companies but also an organization non-profit utilized this form of communication, for instance American Cancer Society, known as Relay for Life amongst Second Life users. Respondents number 9 learned about events related to American Cancer Society from virtual social group (*"but to know about them You need to belong to groups, which send notifications"*).

<sup>46</sup> [www.secondlife.com/destination/american-cancer-society](http://www.secondlife.com/destination/american-cancer-society), retrieved 2.07.2019.

<sup>47</sup> [www.sl-pomagamy.blogspot.com](http://www.sl-pomagamy.blogspot.com), retrieved 2.07.2019.



Presented research was aimed to identify and describe virtual promotional instruments applied in virtual worlds of computer games by organizations. During the interviews participants listed numbers of brands that they met inside the game. The author tried to divide gathered brands according to forms of promotion. Application of Kotler's typology in virtual worlds turned out to be not obvious and can rise some doubts. The line between particular virtual forms of promotion are blurred especially when it comes to direct marketing and personal selling. The result allowed identify virtual forms of promotion and describe them. It provides information's which forms of promotion are better remembered but it cannot be assumed that numbers are related to frequency of using promotional instruments by organizations. The research does not provide information about which brands were available inside the games at the time when participants played them. So it cannot be inferred what forms of promotion are the most popular inside computer games.

## **Conclusions**

Increasing migration of audiences from television to playing console and computer games as well as greater results in reception of brand placed inside the games than traditional media attracted attentions of scholars and marketers toward this promotional tool. Average game offers various ways to convey brand message. The purpose of the research was to identify and describe forms of promotion in virtual worlds of computer games utilized by contemporary organizations. The author carried out a 20 in-depth interviews amongst Polish players. Research sample contains a user's of chosen three following computer games: *The Sims*, *Second Life* and *Euro Truck Simulator 2*.

Respondents indicated various real life brands that they remembered from the game. Gathered brands were assigned to particular forms of promotion according to their definitions. Respondents most often (79,76%) listed brands featured with using direct marketing. Majority of those brands appeared as a branded product that can be used by players inside the game but companies also establish virtual headquarters or shops. Second position took advertising (8,93%) which looks similar like in real life and frequently takes forms of virtual billboards or paintings on cars. Public relations (5,36%) contain various virtual events, shows, conferences or branded places built on entertainment purposes. To personal selling can be assigned only 3% brands listed by respondents. Sales promotion constitutes the smallest collection of assigned brands (0,6%). When it comes to other forms of promotion (2,38%) identified an ambient advertising and word of mouth communication.



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