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**TARGETING THE WEAK: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF
VIOLENCE IN ADVERGAMES**

by

Arshak Papazyan

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree**

of

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in

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Targeting the Weak:
A Content Analysis of Violence in Advergaming

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Abstract

With a rising trend of targeting children using various means of advertisement, the popularity of advergaming has significantly increased. Although previous research suggests that negative content in advergaming results in less favorable attitudes toward the game (Waiguny, et al., 2013), the presence of violence in advergaming targeted to children aged three to ten years is significantly high. Despite the growing concern regarding violence in advergaming and other means of advertisement targeted to children, research has not yet investigated the actual amount of violence in advergaming. To shed light on this important issue, the present research discusses results of a descriptive study along with a literature review of previously conducted studies.

This research by no means is exhaustive, but does give a glimpse into the world of advergaming and the possible negative effects associated with its content. The results of this study indicate, that roughly 38% of the advergaming that were analyzed and discussed in this paper contain violence of some degree. These findings suggest parents should closely monitor their child's online game type especially as it relates to advergaming.

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Honors Thesis

Introduction

Online gaming is the number one activity for children, ages of 6 to 11; in a recent survey, a majority (78.1%) of the children who went online in the thirty days prior to the survey (65.9% of all respondents) have played online games, compared to a roughly 34 percent of those who did school related activities (Mediamark Research and Intelligence, 2007). Such high Internet usage rates by kids made the advergaming industry a 207 million dollar sector in 2007 (Campanelli, 2008). Advergaming is a relatively new form of advertising that has the sole purpose of promoting a brand or a product, compared to in-game advertising means, which mostly use traditional product placements methods. The games are usually designed to be simple, and last for minutes rather than hours per game (Bellman, Kemp, Haddad Hanadi, & Varan, 2014). A study conducted in Australia found that advergaming is as effective as 30 second TV commercials in promoting content (Bellman et al., 2014).

Despite the benefits that advergaming provides to marketers, the violent content found in advergaming could pose a problem for those consuming this form of entertainment. Understanding how the content of the advertisement influences the brand is vital for marketers. McCarthy et al. suggests, that the advergaming content, similar to product integration in films where the plot or the story line focuses on the brand or the product, may allow the targeted audience to make presumptions about the brand based on the storyline (Shrum, 2012). Although previous research found that negative content in advergaming resulted in less favorable attitudes toward the game and the unfamiliar brand attitudes (Waiguny, Nelson, & Marko, 2013), the presence of violence is still present in current research studies

Previous research and a recent literature review has revealed several fundamental ethical, legal, and social concerns with the use of this medium of advertisement (Bath Institute for Policy Research, 2014; Waiguny et al., 2013; Rozendaal, Slot, Van Reijmersdal, & Buijzen, 2013), research has not yet

investigated the actual amount of violence found in advergames. The following research is aimed to fill this gap through primary research and a literature review of previously conducted studies.

After an introduction to advergames and an explanation of terms used in this paper, several issues associated with advergames that have been revealed through previously conducted studies will be addressed, followed by the analyzation of findings of this research that are aimed to find the level of violence contained in advergames.

Advergames

Advergames are a type of Internet based video game specifically designed and created to promote a company, brand, product, or service. These games are aimed to deliver a message for the brand that is being advertised, as well as to generate higher traffic on brand websites (Terlutter & Capella, 2013). While previous video games specialized in standard but virtual product placement, advergames create a cumulative entertainment experience around the brand or product that is being advertised (Kretchmer, 2004). Kretchmer (2004) suggests, that through the creation of an engaging experience, rather than passive experience, advergames help build relationships between the product and the consumers by transferring the positive emotion of game to the brand. Advergames are mostly casual games and typically allow for short playing time (Terlutter & Capella, 2013).

Evans, et al suggest, that the heavy integration of the brand and the absence of external advertising breaks, such as jingles, that usually occur in television advertising, hide the persuasive and commercial nature of the message that is being communicated to the child. Children also have less developed persuasion knowledge, cognitive abilities, and resistance, making it difficult for them to recognize the commercial purposes of in-game advertising and product placement (Nathaniel, Carlson, & Grubbs, 2013). A study conducted by Amsterdam School of Communication Research found, that children's understanding of advertisers tactics increase progressively between ages 8 to 9 (Rozendaal,

Slot, Van Reijmersdal, & Buijzen, 2013). Recognizing this rising trend, the Children's Advertising Review Unit (CARU), a self-regulatory program established by the National Advertising Review Council (NARC) that promotes responsible children's advertising, introduced a new section specifically addressing the "Blurring of Advertising and Editorial/Program Content" in its 2006 guideline revision. The section specifies, "Advertising should not be presented in a manner that blurs the distinction between advertising and program/editorial content in ways that would be misleading to children" (Children's Advertising Review Unit).

Another group that is concerned with the rising trend of various channels used to advertise to children are the parents. They believe that advertisement has the power to directly modify children's behavior unless parents set certain restrictions to their children's online use (Livingstone & Bober, 2006). Research suggests that parents supervise their children's usage of Internet more closely compared to television, but greatly overestimate their child's time spent online. With the purpose of understanding parent's level of control while accessing advergaming online, this study will also evaluate the presence of disclaimers and controls found in the analyzed websites and games.

Violence

The World Health Organization defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation". As a result of self-inflicted, interpersonal, or collective violence, over a million people lose their lives each year. WHO reports that violence is among the leading causes of death worldwide for people ages 15-44 years (World Health Organization, 2002).

In this study we examine two types of violence found in advergaming: physical and verbal. The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define physical violence as the "intentional

use of physical force with the potential for causing death, disability, injury, or harm. Physical violence includes, but is not limited to, scratching; pushing; shoving; throwing; grabbing; biting; choking; shaking; aggressive hair pulling; slapping; punching; hitting; burning; use of a weapon; and use of restraints or one's body, size, or strength against another person" (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). Verbal violence is defined as the excessive use of language to undermine someone's dignity and security through insults or humiliation, in a sudden or repeated manner (Prevention of Violence, n.d.).

Children and Media Violence

Violence refers to extreme forms of aggression, including physical assault and murder. Violent media are those that contain visual portrayals of an individual inflicting harm on others (Anderson & Bushman, 2001). Another form of television content violence is commercial violence, which includes intentional attempts by actors to harm others (Brocato, Gentile, Laczniak, Maier, & Ji-Song, 2010). The definitions suggest that a portrayal of the violent act may be animated or live action, real or scripted, and an individual can be a real person, a nonhuman cartoon character, or anything that falls in between these. The definition of violence specifies that the intended harm be targeted towards someone who would be motivated to avoid it if possible (Brocato, et al., 2010).

The General Aggression Model (GAM), developed by DeWall, Anderson, and Bushman (2011), suggests that repeated exposures to media violence lead children to formulate aggressive perceptions and thoughts, which reinforce their existing knowledge structures regarding aggression. They further report, that once these knowledge structures become more solidified, they become faster to access and act on. The authors predict that even a brief exposure to violent content during a 30 second commercial can lead to the formulation of aggressive cognitions (DeWall, Anderson, & Bushman, 2011)

Method

In order to study the presence of violence in advergames a content analysis of various advergames targeted to children were gathered and analyzed.

Data Collection

Before beginning the initial data collection, several key word searches in Google Scholar and EBSCO Host were conducted to find related previous studies. The key words included 'Advergimes AND Violence', 'Advergimes AND Violence AND Children', 'Advergimes AND Kids', 'Violence in Advergimes AND Children'. The initial step of the data collection was done through an extensive web search for advergimes that are currently placed in sponsor's websites. A Google engine search for images was done to locate the advergimes using the key word 'advergimes'. Based on the image results, each advergime was found on either the sponsor's website, or a third party website that hosts various types of video games. Other search key words in search engines were used to find advergimes. These included: 'advergame list', 'play advergimes', 'play advergimes online', and 'best advergimes of all times'. The search results lead to third party websites that have a list of games based on category.

Through this process, it was found that many advergimes are no longer present in the sponsor's websites. This does not necessarily mean that the advergime was not a success; most advergimes analyzed were temporary, aimed to advertise a certain product or campaign that the brand offers for a given period of time. For the purpose of this study the advergimes that are no longer present in the sponsor's website were identified in third party websites (Spil Games, 2015; Flash Game, 2015; One Online Games, 2015; XYGames, 2012; Game Oldies, 2015; Y8, 2015; 8C, 2015). In order to ensure that the advergimes were created by the sponsors that are being advertised, extensive search was conducted to identify the original link (most of which are no longer active). The search yielded in an

additional eight advergimes. Overall, the game collection process resulted in a sample of 52 advergimes from 20 company sponsors.

Content Analytic Procedure

The content analytics process consisted of both emergent and a priori coding approaches (Stemler, 2001). Three coders independently evaluated all a priori advergame characteristics (i.e. game name, company sponsor, parent disclaimer, parental controls). These characteristics were then entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet in order to better organize the data for further analysis. Following the a priori coding, the 52 advergimes were individually evaluated by two coders in order to investigate the emerging characteristics of violence in the games. The advergimes were divided into groups based on the presence of violence, and presence of parent disclaimers and parental controls. The two coders had almost 100% agreement on both the a priori and emergent codes. Any disagreements were further discussed until a consensus was reached. The data was later analyzed by a third coder for accuracy and external validity.

Findings

Advergimes from 20 company sponsors were used for this study. A complete list of the sponsors and the number of games from each sponsor brand is listed below:

Company Sponsor	# of Games
Cartoon Network	9
Change Your World UK	8
Chupa Chups	7
Coca Cola	5
Comedy Central	4
Disney	2
Dr. Pepper	2
Frito Lay	2
Happy Tree Friends	2
History Channel	1
J2O	1
Jaguar	1
Kellogg's	1
Kraft Foods	1
Lego	1
McDonald's	1
Nickelodeon	1
Nissan	1
Pepsi	1
PETA	1

Target Age Range

It is not surprising that advergimes are heavily targeted to children; Bath institute for policy research suggests, that children as old as 15 do not recognize that advergimes are a form of advertisement (Bath Institute for Policy Research, 2014). Furthermore, according to a recent report by Common Sense Media, teens in the United States spend about nine hours using media for their enjoyment on any given day (Common Sense Media, Inc., 2015) Based on the emergent coding approach

our findings suggest that the games were targeted to children as young as three years old. Some advergaming were more complex than others, targeting older children.

Target Age Range
3-6: 48/52- 92%
7-10: 4/52- 8%

The vast majority of the games that were analyzed for this study were targeted to children between 3 to 5 years of age. For the games that had no age range specified in the web page, the target age range was determined based on the difficulty and the complexity of the game.

Disclaimers and Controls

During the data collection process disclaimers and controls for the websites were analyzed. Merriam-Webster defines disclaimer as a statement that is intended to prevent an incorrect Control is defined as the power to direct the behavior, the actions, or function of someone or something (Merriam-Webster Inc. , 2015). Such disclaimers are used to prevent usage of rated content by certain groups of individuals. Most websites that have "R" rated content will prompt the user to specify age before entering the website.

In 1993 Sega of America introduced the Videogame Rating Council, which was aimed to rate all games that were released for sale in the U.S on Sega game console and some computer games. These ratings had to appear both on the front of the package, as well as on all the advertisements of the game (Sega Retro, 2015). The rating system was not widely adopted until the establishment of the Entertainment Software Association's Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) in 1994. The ESRB is a non-profit, self-regulatory body that assigns ratings for video games and applications for parents and

legal guardians (ESRB, 2015). There are three parts to the ESRB rating: rating categories, content descriptors, and interactive elements.

During the data collection process it was discovered, that none of the analyzed games contained any disclaimers, controls, or ratings. Two advergimes that were originally available for the Sega Genesis console were found online via third party advergime websites. Despite the presence of the Videogame Rating Council at the time of the release of these games, no disclaimers, controls, or ratings were identified for these games either.

Violence in Advergimes

Violence is associated with negative attributes and it has been shown to cause negative feelings. Waiguny et al. (2013) suggests, that negative media content has been shown to negatively impact embedded brands. They further report that if the consumer is unfamiliar with the brand, than the new associations gained as a result of the game environment are likely to become associated with the brand (Waiguny, et al., 2013). Advergimes are targeted to children; most of who associate with the brand for the first time through the advergime, so the effectiveness of the use of violent content is questionable. With an aim to observe the amount of violent context in advergimes, the 52 games were divided into two groups. Twenty games contained violence, roughly 38.5% of the total games.

Target Age Range (Games with Violence)
3-6: 19/20- 95%
7-10: 1/20- 5%

The above chart shows the distribution of games that contained violence based on the targeted age ranges. A total of 48 games were targeted to children aged three to six, 19 of which contained violence. From the four games that were targeted to children aged seven to ten, one advergime

contained violence. The violence types differed from game to game: while some games contained one to two acts of violence in total during one game period, some others had continuous violent acts throughout the game. Further paragraphs discuss the severity and types of violence that were found.

Blood and Gore

The presence of blood and gore in the analyzed games that contained violence was also identified while analyzing the data. Blood and gore is found in all of today's top played video games. The emerging Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) games such as League of Legends, Dota 2, Heroes of Newerth, Strife and many more, all contain blood and gore. Our data showed, that 40% of the 20 advergAMES containing violence had graphic blood and gore content, meaning that 15% of the total 52 games that were analyzed contained bloody scenes.

Game Name	Company sponsor	Target Age Range
Dumb Ways To Die	Happy Tree Friends	3+
Crazy Disco	Happy Tree Friends	4+
Flippy Attack	Happy Tree Friends	4+
Cooking Mama- Mama Kills Animals	Peta	5+
Splendid's First Flight	Happy Tree Friends	5+
Soak It	Comedy Central	5+
Jurassic Fight Club	History Channel	6+
Dark Horizons	Nickelodeon	6+

Happy tree friends is an American flash cartoon that first aired in 1999. The cartoon is rated TV-14 based on the Television Parental Guidance. TV-14 rated movies and animations contain some material that many parents would find unsuitable for children under 14 years of age, such as intense violence, intense sexual situations, strong coarse language, or intensely suggestive dialogue (FCC, 2012). While the content of the cartoon is rated, no ratings or parental controls were found in *Happy Tree Friends Games* official website (Happy Tree Friends, 2012). The People of Ethical Treatment of Animals

(PETA) game, promoting better treatment of animals, contained continuous blood scenes while “teaching” how to stuff and cook a turkey. Based on the simplicity of the game it was determined that the game is targeted to children aged 5 and up (PETA, 2015).

Amount of Violence

The story and the content of the advergame are likely to prime associations with the brand (Waiguny, et al., 2013). Research concerning advergame and video game context has shown that violence is related to a stronger arousal and engagement of the game player (Jeong, Bohil, & Biocca, 2011). Using the affect transfer and associative-propositional evaluation models for testing the influence of game content on implicit and explicit brand attitudes, Waiguny et al. (2013) conclude, that beyond relevance and arousal, the content itself or the violence from the content may become associated with the embedded brand. In order to measure the violent acts in the games, number of violent acts for one round of play was recorded by three coders. The range of the number represents the minimum and maximum number of violence recorded by the coders.

Game Name	Company sponsor	Target Age Range	Number of violent acts for 1 round of play
Battle of the Futurebots	Nickelodeon	3+	Continuous
Dumb Ways To Die	Happy Tree Friends	3+	4
Zool	Chupa Chups	4+	2- 3
Agent P Rebel Spy	Disney	4+	5 - 7
Crazy Disco	Happy Tree Friends	4+	4 -5
Flippy Attack	Happy Tree Friends	4+	Continuous
Super Brawl 4	Nickelodeon	5+	Continuous
The Halls of the Goblin King	Lego	5+	10 - 15
Cooking Mama- Mama Kills Animals	Peta	5+	Continuous
Splendid's First Flight	Happy Tree Friends	5+	1
Soak It	Comedy Central	5+	Continuous
Ultimate Rebel	Lego	5+	10 - 15
Warriors	History Channel	6+	Continuous
Jurassic Fight Club	History Channel	6+	Continuous

Game Name	Company sponsor	Target Age Range	Number of violent acts for 1 round of play
Team Up	Lego	6+	Continuous
Dark Horizons	Nickelodeon	6+	Continuous
Dino Charge: Unleash The Power!	Nickelodeon	6+	Continuous
Frozen - Double Trouble	Disney	6+	1
McDonald's Video Game	McDonald's	8+	3+

The game players start to create, change, or strengthen associations with the embedded brand automatically and incidentally via conditioning (Waiguny, et al., 2013). The effectiveness of an advergame with large amounts of violent content is questionable; even if a violent advergame positively influences brand attitudes through fun and entertainment, the violence may also lead to other negative associations, which can incidentally become attached to the embedded brand via conditioning process (De Houwer, Thomas, & Baeyens, 2001).

Characters

Companies use interactive customized agents, such as animated spokes characters, to generate favorable online experience with the advertised brand. Study suggests, that customization of game avatars can affect both psychophysiological indicators of emotion and subjective feelings of presence during the gameplay (Bailey, Wise, & Bolls, 2009). This may result in a more enjoyable gaming experience, due to these connections between the player and the game. Previous research suggests, that when an avatar in a video game is controlled by a human, three "bodies" are present: the physical body, which is the observable body of the player; the virtual body, or the representation of the user inside the virtual environment; and the body schema, which is the user's mental representation of his/her body (Biocca, 1997). Choi and Lee argue, that the presence of animated spokes-characters is one possible factor that influences the effectiveness of advergames (Choi & Lee, 2012).

Two types of characters were identified in the games during the data collection process, with four possible choices per game: human, animal, both, or none. All animated non-human characters were listed under the "Animal" category, and some games had no characters (i.e., Pepsi Max Breakout, where the player controls the pad using the mouse). A total of 7 human characters were identified in the 52 games, 2 of which contained violence directly associated with the human characters. Animal characters were identified in 41 games 17 of them containing scenes of violence. Three Advergames used no characters and contained no violence, and one game (Disney's Frozen game) containing both human and animal characters had violent scenes in it.

Game Difficulty

Marketers challenge is to capture the attention of the players, in order to indirectly transmit suggestions that are aimed to change or advance the player's perceptions regarding the embedded brand, product, or service. In his book "Flow" Csikszentmihalyi suggests, that during the 'state of flow' mental state, the attention of the player is highly concentrated on a specific process, the indirect information is screened out, and the player experiences a balanced flow of its present

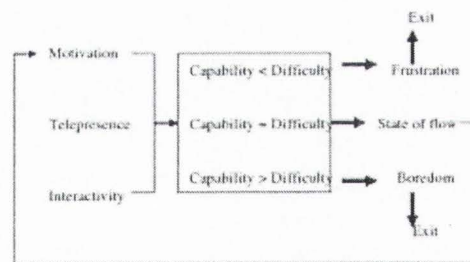


Figure 1: The Inducement of the State of Flow Online

experience (Calin, 2006). Research suggests, that the state of flow is associated with a state of well-being and increased learning capacity, and can be generated by very interesting activities for a person, such as reading books, watching movies, and playing games. The combination of user motivation, user telepresence, and interactivity in the application create the state of flow online (Figure 1). Understanding and adjusting accordingly the target age range, the player's capabilities, and the difficulty of the game is also vital in order to induce state of flow (Calin, 2006). With an aim to understand the effectiveness of the advergames that contained

violence, difficulty of the games was also recorded during the data analysis. All three coders divided the games into three categories: Hard, Average, and Easy. The table below lists the advergames with violent content along with the target age range and game difficulty.

Game Name	Company sponsor	Target Age Range	Difficulty of game: Hard (H), Average (A), or Easy (E)
Battle of the Futurebots	Nickelodeon	3+	A
Dumb Ways To Die	Happy Tree Friends	3+	E
Zool	Chupa Chups	4+	E
Agent P Rebel Spy	Disney	4+	A
Crazy Disco	Happy Tree Friends	4+	A
Flippy Attack	Happy Tree Friends	4+	E
Super Brawl 4	Nickelodeon	5+	A
The Halls of the Goblin King	Lego	5+	A
Cooking Mama- Mama Kills Animals	Peta	5+	E
Splendid's First Flight	Happy Tree Friends	5+	A
Soak It	Comedy Central	5+	A
Ultimate Rebel	Lego	5+	E
Warriors	History Channel	6+	A
Jurassic Fight Club	History Channel	6+	A
Mask Of Creation	Lego	6+	A
Team Up	Lego	6+	A
Dark Horizons	Nickelodeon	6+	A
Dino Charge: Unleash The Power!	Nickelodeon	6+	A
Frozen - Double Trouble	Disney	6+	A
McDonald's Video Game	McDonald's	8+	A

Calin (2006) suggests that state of flow existence and the maintenance is a dynamic process, and that it is dependable on the relation of the advergame player and the level of difficulty of the game. Our data suggests, that easy and simple advergames are more common than difficult and challenging ones. Two games were grouped as 'hard' by the coders, neither containing violence. Twenty-four games were grouped as 'easy', five of which were also grouped under the violent games. Average games were the majority in the data; 26 games were marked average, with 15 violent games. It should be noted, that the

games that were marked as 'easy' by all three coders are targeted to younger children (ages 3 to 5), and 'average' games were mostly targeted to children aged 5 and above.

Discussion

The main goal of this study was to measure the amount of violence present in advergames. Our results indicate, that roughly 38% of the analyzed advergames contain violence of some degree. Previous research suggests, that the relationship between content and explicit attitude toward the brand is arbitrated by attitude toward the game, and that negative content in advergames resulted in less favorable attitudes toward the game (Waiguny, et al., 2013). This makes the effectiveness of advergames containing violence questionable. Violence was found across all age groups and from this sample seemed to focus on the very young consumer. Different types of violence were also observed throughout the sample. Finally, there appeared to not be any parental controls to warn parents of the content contained in the advergames. These finding suggest parents should closely monitor their child's online game type especially as it relates to advergames. This content analysis shows the perils of easy access to online content.

Future Research and Limitations

This exploratory research provides an initial look at advergaming violence. This research by no means is exhaustive, but does give a glimpse into the world of advergaming and the possible negative effects associated with its content. Future research should continue to explore the role violence plays in advergaming and how this violence affects young users. A future study could explore the role of violence affecting the brand attitudes of the targeted content. It is also important to understand the brand associations that children make after playing these games. For example, does the violence lead to more heightened awareness of the brand and if so does the violence create negative associations with the brand? These studies could be conducted in an experiment where the level of violence is controlled and the outcomes are measured.

As with all research there are limitations. One of the main limitations of our research procedure was the limited amount of advergaming that are currently present online. Using advergaming for certain campaigns and promotions is a common practice for marketers, which makes the availability of the advergaming online limited to a certain period of time depending on the length of campaign or promotion. Although some promotional advergaming were identified and analyzed through third party websites, not all 'expired' advergaming are available online (i.e. Fanta's King of the Park Advergaming). Unavailability of such games limited the desired sampling number for this research. Another concern is the generalizability of the results. The exploratory nature of this study is a starting point to investigate the prevalence of violent content in advergaming. This research provides an initial look at the actual violent content contained in these games, as such it should be used as a starting point for future research.

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Author Bio

Arshak Papazyan, a Marketing and Business Administration international student, comes from Yerevan, Armenia and will graduate from the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business in December, 2015. The opportunity of earning a degree at USU was given to Arshak through the generosity of the Huntsman Family: he was one of the 10 Armenian students who received the Huntsman for Armenia full ride scholarship in 2012. As an incoming international student majoring in Business Administration, he took an entry level marketing course, which rose his passion towards the marketing field. Arshak was accepted into the Huntsman Scholars Program of the Business School his sophomore year, and completed the rigorous Scholar semester in Fall 2014. Throughout his academic career Arshak served as the International Vice President for the Business Council, Vice President of the Global Affairs Committee club, and was a member of The Society for the Advancement of Ethical Leadership (SAEL), Society for International Business and Economic Development (SIBED), and Women in Business Association (WEBA) clubs at the Huntsman School of Business. He has been noted on the Dean's List throughout his college career, and received multiple scholarships including the *Huntsman for Armenia* full ride scholarship.

Upon graduation Arshak plans to pursue a career experience in corporate property acquisitions, and aims to earn his Executive MBA graduate degree from USC Marshall School of Business in the near future. Any questions or comments can be sent to arshakpapazyan@gmail.com.

Reflective Writing

Introduction

The opportunity of becoming an honors graduate with a capstone process was given to me through the Business School's Huntsman Scholars Honors Program. Although the process was rather challenging and I failed multiple times in various ways, I am very proud of what I've been able to accomplish. For the purposes of this reflective writing, I divided my capstone completion process into four stages, which I labeled as the promise stage, the data collection stage, the writing stage, and the presentation stage. This capstone project was one of the most challenging, yet most educational and rewarding experiences of my life; besides its use in marketing and future research, it is intended to inspire and help future students who attempt to pursue a capstone experience.

The Promise Stage

One of the biggest challenges for me was the final decision to complete a capstone thesis. Upon being accepted to the Huntsman Scholars Program my sophomore year and completing the Huntsman Scholar semester, I qualified to graduate with honors dependent on completing a capstone project. The program has given me countless opportunities, and completion of a capstone project was yet another invaluable opportunity that would further enhance my experience at USU. The introduction of the Huntsman Scholars Program as part of the USU Honors program in 2014 was an initiative which presented opportunities and challenges for students at almost every turn. Towards the end of Spring 2015 semester it was time for me to decide to do a thesis in spite of my other commitments.

As soon as I learned that doing a capstone project was all that was in the way of my graduating with honors, I knew I had to finish it regardless of my already hectic upcoming semester. When I decided

to work on my thesis I was a full time student with 19 credit hours, a resident assistant for Utah State University's Housing and Residence Life, a member of various clubs and organizations of USUSA, and was spending a considerable amount of time job-hunting. I had the strong desire to accomplish this task, but little knowledge as to the time that one takes if attempted in as little as one semester. My advice to future students considering an honors capstone would be to evaluate their current situation and measure how compatible doing a capstone project would be with their schedule.

Once I made the final decision to do a thesis, my next step was to decide what I wanted to study and who I wanted to study with. I wanted to work along someone who would challenge my knowledge and guide me through this process. After discussing several ideas and mentor prospects with Huntsman Scholars Program director Dr. Shannon Peterson, I was certain that working with Dr. Deanne Brocato would be a perfect fit. Dr. Brocato accepted my request to mentor me through this process, along with Dr. Sterling Bone and Dr. Shannon Peterson as committee members. The initial topic idea was generated by Dr. Brocato and I, which we further defined along the way. My committee members were incredible to work with during each step of the process. Choosing strong and professional advisors who are eager to see their students succeed is another advice for future students.

The Data Collection Stage

After securing my team and idea to pursue, we set a deadline for the data collection process. We wanted to do a descriptive study in a field that is relatively new. My lack of expertise and the lack of extended literature in the field made the process painfully challenging, yet very exciting and promising.

Structuring the data collection process and the research design was a major triumph for us, which would not be possible without Dr. Brocato's support. Over the following months I spent several hours per day playing advergAMES and recording my findings. The due date of completing the data

collection process was set as the first week of Fall 2015 semester. Initial correspondence between Dr. Brocato and I happened mostly through email, since we were both spending the summer out-of-state.

The Writing Stage

Our goal was to use our primary research along with a content analysis of previously conducted studies to measure the amount of violence present in advergaming. The lack of previous research and relevant literature in the advergaming sector especially backfired during the writing stage. My committee members and I were able to identify and access the limited amount of studies that have been published.

Being one of the most time consuming stages, the writing stage became quite stressful and unenjoyable at times. Now, after countless sleepless nights and large amounts of caffeine, I look back at my capstone project without a single regret. However, I strongly encourage future students to finish the project's main writing section earlier in the semester to avoid the necessity of working at nights.

The Presentation Stage

The presentation stage of my capstone process not only included the oral presentation that I presented to my committee and to some Huntsman students, but also the struggle to present my ideas and findings on paper as well. The oral presentation was a success; Dr. Brocato, Dr. Bone, and I set a goal to present our findings at a conference in the near future.

Followed by the oral presentation of our findings, the next step of the process involved presenting my research in written form. After multiple drafts and excellent editors, I consider my written thesis a triumph after all the hesitations and challenges we faced. I am proud of the work that I have accomplished and very thankful for the extensive help I received along the way. I hope that my experience and advice can make the experience of future business students a little easier and less stressful.