

New interactive advertising formats on television. A proposal for their analysis and classification

Laura Aymerich

■ *This article investigates the area of interactive advertising on television, an emerging phenomenon that has not been extensively explored by the literature and with significant potential for development. The findings provided are based on those obtained as part of the research entitled “New advertising formats on interactive television” (Aymerich 2007), developing and validating a number of parameters to analyse the products of interactive advertising on television, as well as a proposal for classifying the main formats of interactive advertising on television in today’s market. By applying these parameters, we can classify the different products of interactive advertising within this typology. Both the analysis and the typology proposed become useful instruments that are applicable to research into interactive advertising products on television. Finally, the main supports are investigated, as well as the placement of interactive advertising and also its key marketing goals.*

Keywords

Interactive advertising, interactive television, interactivity, advertising formats

Laura Aymerich

Researcher with grant from GRISS (Research Group in Image, Sound and Synthesis) from the Department of Audiovisual Communication and Advertising of the UAB and FI grant from the Generalitat de Catalunya.

Introduction

The progressive digitalisation of the television system involves a series of gradual transformations in the industry. Interactive television, with its corresponding applications, is one of the most remarkable and promising advances of this new panorama that is currently being configured.

The possibilities of dialogue between transmitter and user and the enhanced participation facilitated by this new concept of television are also reflected in advertising, which attempts to encourage closer, more individualised and participative advertising through developing interactive applications.

The development of interactive advertising is recent and mostly concentrated on the internet. However, thanks to the implementation of digital systems such as cable, satellite and TDT, among others, this new concept of participative advertising is showing increasing interest in being implemented in the area of television as well. Platforms such as Sky in the United Kingdom have shown great interest in strengthening new types of interactive advertising. We only need to mention, by way of example, that in January 2005 the interactive campaigns broadcast on Sky broke the record for platform presence, accounting for close to 10% of all advertising campaigns broadcast on this platform (Skymedia 2007).

This article proposes, firstly, to contribute to clarifying the main concepts related to interactive advertising in the area of television through their definition. The transformations occurring in the field of television over the last few years have helped, at the same time and subsequently, to the proliferation of new concepts related to these new systems, applications and ways of relating to television and advertising, and have often led to significant confusion. One of the main difficulties involved in classifying the non-conventional

advertising on television, which includes interactive advertising, is the lack of any clear differentiation between formats, the lack of terminological definition for these types of advertising and the existence of terminology exempt from systematic scientific criteria (Farré and Fernández 2005).

Secondly, the article also proposes a series of analytical parameters applicable to an analysis of the products of interactive advertising present on today's market, which might be of great use in carrying out related research. The parameters presented were previously tested and validated as part of the research entitled "New advertising formats in interactive television" (Aymerich 2007).

These parameters allow us to classify the different products within a typology that is made up of the main formats of interactive advertising present on the market. This typology, which establishes four different formats according to whether the products have certain characteristics deriving from these parameters, is described at the end of the article. The typology presented takes as its reference the products of interactive advertising developed on the English market, one of the leading countries in developing and implementing this kind of applications in Europe. The typology was also established and validated during the aforementioned research (Aymerich 2007).

The concept of interactivity

The mass media have traditionally been associated with a vertical, unidirectional and hierarchical broadcasting model (Prado *et al.* 2006). The inversion of these structures via a balancing between transmitter and receiver is reflected in the concept of interactivity, and the strengthening of horizontal communication and user participation in the communication process can also be attributed to this.

The perspective of communication defines interactivity as the reciprocal relationship produced between two different poles that take part in the communicative process. The user can start a process of interaction either with the system, the services, content or applications or it can be interaction, via the system, between different users or between the transmitter and receiver.

When we apply the adjective 'interactive' to a medium, our aim is fundamentally to emphasise the possibility of two-

directional communication and therefore the receiver's possibility to participate and act within the communicative process, something which supposes a change in role, obtaining a more active function in the communication process and which, in the specific area of television, goes from being a mere TV viewer to a user. This increasingly important role that must be assumed by the receiver, and which is made clear in the name of "interactive media" applied to the new digital media, is one of the most important characteristics of the new television era.

Interactive television

Classifying television as interactive is a way of showing a qualitative difference to traditional television. Interactive television should not be interpreted as in opposition to traditional television but as an added value to the television we know.

The early experiences of television interactivity were carried out on analogue TV. However, the switchover to digital is expected to enhance the medium's interactive capacity, fundamentally by implementing a return path for receivers.

Interactive television is therefore television that offers users the chance to act on the system or on the content with the aim of establishing a dialogue that involves carrying out actions on the part of the two poles involved in the communicative process. In practice, this mutual action is translated into an alteration of the normal flow of television on the part of the viewer, either by modifying the content (for example by modifying the camera angle in a football game) or in an exchange of information (for example, pushing the red button during a game show that offers this possibility); or, outside the television flow, by accessing applications for interactive services (for example, consulting the electronic programme guide, accessing a 'walled garden' or playing an interactive game).

Going back to the essence of dialogue proposed in our definition of interactivity, we can state that television becomes interactive when it allows the user to maintain a reciprocal relationship or one of dialogue.

The main characteristics presented by interactive television can be summarised as follows:

- It adds value to traditional television.
- It produces a relationship of dialogue between the two poles (transmitter and receiver) and the medium's hierarchical relationship is softened.
- During the process of interaction, the TV viewer adopts an active role, in contrast to the passive role assumed when consuming this medium.
- The active role adopted by TV viewers turns them into real "users".
- Users acquire more power of decision and control over the communicative process.
- Interaction is produced at an individual level, involving a higher degree of personalisation in consuming television.

We should point out that these facets are only revealed during the process of interaction, since "interactivity does not eliminate passive reception entirely but arranges, at a variable pace, active moments (choice, performances) and passive moments (viewing)" (Prado 1987). However, although we must admit that, right now, the possibilities of interaction expected of television are still very small and we are therefore referring to a medium that continues to be fundamentally one-directional, as the capacities of the television system improve, its two-directional nature is likely to get stronger or, put another way, television will become more interactive.

Interactive advertising on television

The appearance of interactive advertising on television can be interpreted as the result of the coming together and contribution of two industries:

- Conventional **television** advertising, principally TV spots, which have taken on new interactive applications with optional access.
- **Internet** advertising, especial integrated formats. The incorporation into television of advertising formats that are normally used on the internet, such as banners, results largely in what we recognise as interactive advertising on television.

The new applications of interactive advertising for television combine the strong points of both media – TV and

internet – integrating the wide range, relevance and impact of television on the one hand, with the direct and focused response of internet advertising on the other (Gawlinski 2003).

In general, we can describe interactive advertising as that which offers users the possibility but does not force them to establish a dialogue with the advertiser. We should note that, in this case, the concept of advertiser is used by extension, in order to emphasise the concept of user that interacts with an organisation that is promoting its product or service. However, we must point out that interaction really occurs with the application of interactive advertising and that only in a few cases does this process end with interaction with the advertiser per se, mostly tending to offer a response indirectly and *a posteriori*.

Interactive advertising on television establishes a kind of information that is more specific, focused and personalised than advertising in its traditional form (TV commercials) and facilitates the exchange of information between user and advertiser, be it through response mechanisms provided by the application (e.g. the user can ask for more information and receives a response *a posteriori*), by consulting the material contained in an application (e.g. the user can ask to see a video of the product included in the application) or in those cases where the advertiser can extract information from the interaction process followed by the user while consulting the advertising application (e.g. recording the internet surfing carried out by the user during the interaction).

Criteria to analyse products of interactive advertising on television

Our proposal analyses the products of interactive advertising based on four broad dimensions that reflect, on the one hand, the characteristics of the object as an interactive product (dimensions and degree of interactivity) and, on the other hand, the characteristics of this as an advertising product (key marketing goals and conceptual and design elements), these aspects being the most relevant for an analysis in order to subsequently classify the different products by format type.

In turn, these dimensions are subdivided into specific characteristics applicable particularly to the analysis of

interactive advertising products. The four dimensions with their respective subdivisions are applicable to any product of these characteristics, while the specific characteristics can be modified as the market evolves.

In this way, we obtain the following general parameters, subdivisions and practical applications of the analysis for products of interactive advertising on television:

1. DIMENSIONS OF INTERACTIVITY

Determined by the following factors:

- a) **Capacity to manipulate the product**
 - i) The user is allowed to modify content or production
 - ii) It's not possible to modify content or product
- b) **Extent of surfing**
 - i) Quantity of options on a screen
 - (1) There is a screen menu
 - (2) There is no menu
 - ii) Quantity of screens
 - (1) No screens (only boxes)
 - (2) From one to three
 - (3) More than three
 - iii) Type of surfing
 - (1) Lineal
 - (2) Non-lineal
- c) **Exchange of information**
 - i) Degree of information that can be entered by users into the system via the application
 - (1) Data entry
 - ii) System's or transmitter's capacity to respond to users
 - (1) Immediate response via the same system
 - (2) Response *a posteriori*
 - (a) Via the same system
 - (b) Via other means (telephone, email, etc.)
- d) **Degree of immersion**
 - i) Exit the television flow
 - ii) Partial/total continuity
 - (1) Image contact is maintained
 - (2) Sound contact is maintained
 - (3) Image and sound contact is maintained
- e) **Degree of personalisation** (determined according to capacity to manipulate the product and broadcaster's response capacity):
 - i) High (manipulation and immediate exchange of information)

- ii) Medium (manipulation or immediate exchange of information)
- iii) Low (response *a posteriori*)

2. TYPE OF INTERACTIVITY

- a) **Real interactivity**
- b) **Perceived interactivity**
 - i) Local interaction
 - ii) Interaction with the broadcaster's platform

3. KEY MARKETING GOALS

- a) **Provide information about the product or service**
- b) **Raise awareness of or remind about a brand**
- c) **Persuade potential consumers**
- d) **Branding**
- e) **Response capacity**

4. CONCEPTUAL AND DESIGN ELEMENTS

- a) **Constitutive elements**
 - i) Text
 - ii) Graphics
 - iii) Static image
 - iv) Audio
 - v) Video
- b) **RCD displacement mechanisms (*Remote Control Device*)**
 - i) Arrows
 - ii) Colours
 - iii) Numbers
 - iv) Other buttons (*back up, select...*)

Applying these analytical parameters to an interactive advertising product on the market should allow us to classify it within one of the four main formats of interactive advertising presented in the next section.

Main formats of interactive advertising on television

The products of interactive advertising currently found in the digital television market can be classified into four broad formats:

- **DAL** (*dedicated advertiser location*)
- **Mini-DAL**
- **Microsite**
- **Impulse response**

The classification proposed takes as its reference the products of interactive advertising currently seen on the English market. The defining characteristics of each of these formats are determined according to the analytical dimensions described in the previous section and that establish, on the one hand, a series of common characteristics and, on the other, a series of distinctive features.¹

Common characteristics

It should be noted that the state of development of these applications is still quite embryonic. The interactive possibilities are small and, although there is a certain exchange of information between transmitter and receiver (all the formats usually contain the possibility of the user entering data), there is little room for manipulation or action for the user. Moreover, the response does not occur in real time but involves either preconceived or *a posteriori* responses. Interactivity is also of a perceived type (not real), in interaction with the broadcasting platform. In all cases, the device used to interact with the product is the remote control and most displacements are made via the arrows, colours and other buttons (OK, etc.); the letters and numbers on the control are also used to complete the boxes on the request for information.

Differential characteristics and description of the formats

- **DAL and mini-DAL:** exclusive advertising spaces, which you must exit the television flow to access. Generally, they are accessed optionally from a TV commercial including the DAL/mini-DAL as an annex. The application is accessed by pressing the interactive button on the control when an interaction icon appears on the screen. A DAL can also be accessed from a banner on an interactive service. The appearance of these applications is similar to that of a DVD menu, where the user surfs via the remote control.
 - **DAL:** the DAL is a format with extensive surfing possibilities, whose most relevant characteristics are the inclusion of a menu with different onscreen options, allowing non-lineal surfing and a very high

degree of immersion, as the user must leave the television flow during the query. With regard to the conceptual and design elements, in addition to text, graphics and images, this format also supports quarter screen video material and animation. As well as consulting information on the product, users can also see trailers, play games, listen to music... and they can change it into the only format that allows the exchange of information via the same system and immediately (although at a very elementary level), and can therefore offer a level of personalisation that is slightly higher than the rest of the formats. This system also allows the gathering of user data in order to offer more information, brochures, etc. The DAL is the most complex format to produce and the most costly, especially in broadcasting terms.

- **Mini-DAL:** the mini-DAL is a reduced version of the DAL. It is different from the DAL insofar as the surfing is less extensive: no menu, with a lower number of screens and lineal surfing. Mini-DALs do not usually allow the exchange of information with an immediate response via the same system. Neither do they have the possibility to include video material.
- **Microsite and impulse response:** these last two formats are characterised by allowing continuity (visual and aural) with the television flow while the interaction lasts. They are simple formats, aimed principally at encouraging a response from the user and with an absolutely lineal type of surfing. The response mechanisms can even include the entry of new data that ask the user for information. As in the case of the mini-DAL, these are formats in which the advertiser's response is exclusively *a posteriori*.
 - **Microsite:** the space of a microsite has quite a limited range of surfing. Generally, a background is presented that allows the integration of text and graphics, occupying three quarters of the screen (with the television programme remaining on the other quarter). This background functions as a poster with the brand's logo and a description of the product in question, and remains while the surfing lasts, during

¹ For a more detailed view of the characteristics of the different formats, consult table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the main formats of TV interactive advertising (I)

CHARACTERISTICS			FORMAT			
DIMENSION OF INTERACTIVITY	Capacity to manipulate the product	Users can modify or produce content	DAL	Mini-DAL	Microsite	Impulse response
Degree of surfing	There is a menu or different options on screen	Quantity of screens	X			
						X
	Type of surfing					
	Information exchange					
Degree of immersion						
Degree of personalisation						

Source: Aymerich, 2007.

Table 1. Characteristics of the main formats of TV interactive advertising (II)

CHARACTERISTICS			FORMAT			
TYPE OF INTERACTIVITY	Real interactivity		DAL	Mini-DAL	Microsite	Impulse response
KEY MARKETING OBJECTIVES	Perceived interactivity	Local interaction				
		Interaction with the broadcasting platform	X	X	X	X
	Provide information about product or service		X	X	X	X
	Raise awareness of or remind about a brand		X	X	X	X
	Persuade potential consumer		X	X	X	X
CONCEPTUAL AND DESIGN ELEMENTS	Branding		XX X	XX	X	X
	Response capacity		X	X	XX	XX X
	Constitutive elements	Text	X	X	X	X
		Graphics	X	X	X	
		Static image	X	X	X	
		Audio	X	X		
		Video	X			
	Elements of the remote control used during the interaction process	Arrows	X	X	X	X
		Colours	X	X		
		Letters and/or numbers	X	X	X	X
		Other buttons (OK, back up, etc.)	X	X	X	X

Source: Aymerich, 2007.

which time the user provides different data in order to receive future information. Access to this space is by pressing the interactive button on the remote control, at the time when the interactive icon appears while a commercial is being broadcast. One evolved variant of the microsite is the 'enhanced microsite' (Channel4Sales 2007). This format is different from the microsite in that a menu can be included of up to four options, enabling the user to move around the screen and therefore surf non-linearly.

- **Impulse response:** this is a relatively simple and economical advertising format to produce, without screens and only with textual elements, superimposed over the television programme in such a way that, due to its small size, users can continue their normal viewing while the interaction lasts, the TV programme continuing on the complete screen. This is essentially a response mechanism. By pressing the red button when the interaction icon appears in the commercial, the user can ask for samples, information, brochures, etc., providing the advertiser with his or her data (e.g. email address). It is quite normal for this format to also include some questions related to the consumer's habits or interests, asked at the time when the user requests a sample or additional information.

Supports and placement of interactive advertising

Interactive television enables a wider range to place advertising than the one we are familiar with for conventional television. In addition to TV commercials, the interactive advertising formats can also be placed in various applications. The main media for interactive advertising applications on television are:

- **TV commercials:** When a commercial or spot includes the possibility of accessing an advertising application, it becomes an interactive advertisement. Interactive commercials can be consumed either traditionally, i.e. via lineal consumption, or interactively by accessing an interactive application designed especially for this purpose. People are normally made aware of the existence of the interactive application by an interaction icon

superimposed over the images, which remains until the end of the commercial. This invites users to press the interactive button on the remote control in order to access the interactive application, which takes the form of one of the advertising formats described previously.

- **Interactive sponsoring for programmes:** A television programme can have interactive sponsorship by, for example, superimposing an interaction icon at some time in the programme which leads to an interactive advertising application.
- **Electronic Programme Guides or EPGs:** EPGs are one of the interactive applications most widely employed by users. EPGs can include banners or active buttons to access the interactive advertising application.
- **Digital teletext services:** Some platforms have opted to maintain this service, a modernised version of the classic teletext. These services usually offer the chance to insert banners, which lead to an interactive application placed in a text page. On the Sky platform (Skyinteractive 2007), the advertising modality known as 'jump to text' leads to a teletext page when the interactive button is pressed. Digital teletext also allows page sponsorships.
- **Walled garden:** These are groups of interactive services from different companies provided by the operator. These interactive pages basically include two kinds of interactive advertising: banners and buttons, which lead to an interactive advertising application, and interstitials, also known as 'splash screens', a format mostly present on the internet consisting of a full-page advert that appears when you go from one page to another, without it having to be requested by the user. Advertising on these spaces can also be presented by sponsoring a page or section.
- **Other interactive applications:** Interactive services such as **games** pages are often used as a medium to insert advertising, either in the form of a banner or, very often, via sponsorship.
- **Video on demand (VOD):** VOD is a medium with a lot of potential for developing highly personalised advertising of particularly long duration (telescoping ads, films produced by the advertiser, etc.) which the user requests voluntarily.

The objectives of interactive advertising

Interactive advertising allows much deeper communication between advertiser and user. The fact that a TV viewer opts to interact with an advertiser already supposes a more prolonged contact with the brand than that achieved with a conventional TV commercial. This deepening, moreover, is achieved in a way that is not imposed, as it is the viewers themselves who choose to press the red button or not, something which supposes that contact is only established between receiver and advertiser when there is real interest in the product or service on the part of the potential consumer.

In addition to the objectives of traditional advertising, namely:

- provide information on a product or service
- raise brand awareness
- persuade potential consumers

Interactive advertising also aims to achieve two further marketing goals (Interactive Digital Sales 2007):

- branding
- response capacity

By branding we mean the process of creating value for the brand. The more prolonged relationship established by the user with the advertiser while surfing through an interactive spot familiarises the user with the brand and brings him or her closer to the product or service by providing the user with more complete information than what would normally be obtained via a conventional commercial. DAL and, to a lesser extent, mini-DAL are the two formats aimed principally at achieving this goal. DAL is a format that allows extensive and detailed information to be provided on the product or service. In addition to including sections with information on the product or service and video demos, it often includes added value services such as the chance to request a test car, to get the CD of an ad's soundtrack, take part in a short interactive game, etc. with the aim of giving the brand a good image. The main purpose of DALs is therefore not to gather information and data on the user but to enhance the brand's value.

With regard to response capacity, interactive advertisements make it possible for the advertiser and potential consumer to interact. Interactive advertising formats contain

simple question-answer mechanisms so that users can request, for example, information on the product or service via the interactive advertisement. These mechanisms are not usually of the immediate response type. The most usual process is that users provide their personal details (email, address, telephone number, etc.) so that the advertiser can contact them afterwards. Microsites and impulse response principally aim to achieve this objective. They are formats designed basically as mechanisms to exchange information and data between the advertiser and the user. The advertiser uses the hook of a free sample, providing a brochure, etc. to obtain information on the user's profile and interests.

Conclusions

Interactive advertising on television is an emerging phenomenon in the TV market with significant potential resulting from the digital switchover of the medium.

The newness of the object of study requires, on the one hand, a typology that allows us to classify the different products of interactive advertising currently on the market and, on the other hand, analytical parameters to determine the characteristics that go to make up these products. The aim throughout this article has been to answer these essential questions.

The analytical proposal presented has five broad dimensions or parameters that go to make up a television advertising product with interactive characteristics. These parameters are: *a)* dimensions of interactivity, *b)* type of interactivity, *c)* key marketing objectives, *d)* advertising formats of influence and *e)* conceptual and design elements. The application of these dimensions, broken down into verifiable characteristics for the different products found in interactive advertising, results in a series of characteristics common to all products (which help define the concept of advertising format on TV) and a series of aspects inherent to each of the formats (which help to define its specific profile).

We need to remember that we are studying an object that is constantly transforming and is still at a highly embryonic stage. For this reason, the parameters proposed are flexible and adaptable depending on the natural evolution of these products.

The article proposes a typology for the products of interactive advertising that differentiates between four main formats: DAL, mini-DAL, microsite and impulse response. The different products of interactive advertising present on the current TV market can be classified according to this typology with the help of the analytical parameters proposed.

These interactive advertising products have broad possibilities with regard to access and media placement. In addition to being accessible from traditional commercials with this potential, links to these applications can also be found via the interactive sponsorship of programmes, an electronic programme guide (EPG), in walled gardens, games and via video on demand (VOD), among the main options.

On the other hand, this kind of interactive advertising application is aimed particularly at contributing to two marketing objectives: branding and response capacity. In addition to pursuing the traditional objectives of advertising, advertisers also hope to strengthen these two facets of marketing in particular by using some kind of interactive advertising. Branding is achieved with the more prolonged relationship between user and brand and by offering added value services. And response capacity, understood as the creation of dialogue between user and advertiser to achieve greater personalisation and brand proximity, is possible in most applications of this type.

Interactive advertising on television is a phenomenon that, today, is in an embryonic state. However, the desire for constant innovation that characterises advertising, as well as the facilities provided by the switchover to digital television, are enough to revolutionise the panorama of television advertising in the near future. This article hopes to have contributed to the study of a phenomenon that requires greater attention on the part of the academic world, and also hopes that the typology and analytical parameters proposed are useful and applicable as a basis for future research.

Bibliography

AYMERICH FRANCH, L. "Nous formats publicitaris en televisió interactiva". PRADO, E.; DELGADO, M. (dir.) Bellaterra, 2007. [online link: http://www.griss.org/curriculums/aymerich/tr_lauraymerich.pdf]

CHANNEL 4 SALES [online] <<http://www.channel4sales.com>> [Consulted: September 2007]

FARRÉ COMA, J.; FERNÁNDEZ CAVIA, J. "La publicitat no convencional a la televisió generalista". In: *Quaderns del CAC*. Barcelona: Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya, 2005. No. 22.

GAWLINSKI, M. *Interactive Television Production*. Oxford: Focal, 2003

INTERACTIVE DIGITAL SALES [online] <<http://www.idigitalsales.co.uk>> [Consulted: September 2007]

PRADO, E. "¿Hacia un nuevo ecosistema comunicativo? Promesas y realidades de las fibras ópticas". In: *Telos*, Madrid: Fundesco, 1987. No. 10, p. 111-120.

PRADO, E.; FRANQUET, R.; RIBES, X.; SOTO, M.; FERNÁNDEZ, D. *Televisió interactiva. Simbiosi tecnològica i sistemes d'interacció amb la televisió*. Barcelona: Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya, 2006.

SKYINTERACTIVE [online] <<http://www.skyinteractive.com>> [Consulted: September 2007]

SKYMEDIA [online] <<http://www.skymedia.co.uk>> [Consulted: September 2007]