



Online Interactive through Branded Entertainment Games as Marketing Communication Activities in the Digital Era

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Abstract.

One-way advertising messages no longer get the attention of the entire audience because of the presence of new technology. Human tendency to reject the message of advertising because his presence appears in the middle of the fun that is being done. Marketers need to think of new ways to keep advertising by getting into the excitement, creating interactions, and spreading messages in an integrated way. Online interactive with the concept of branded entertainment games becomes an effort by marketers to make targets become captive audiences. This research is a qualitative study with an analysis of literature study discourse on online interaction and branding studies. The need for the process of Analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation through the concept of ADDIE in interactive online activities through branded entertainment games. The integration of messages needs to be reflected in the product, namely the games themselves, the design of the integration of marketing communication messages and the integration of messages in online interactive. The integration of messages is necessary to make the audience will receive the same message so that it is easy to recognize the brand through marketing communication activities. Marketers need to evaluate each of their marketing activities because digital conditions are fast becoming obsolete with the presence of a newness that appears.

Key Word: *Branded Entertainment, Game, Digital Marketing, Marketing Communications, Online Interactive*

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1. INTRODUCTION

This research is motivated by the phenomenon of the digital presence through the penetration and adoption of the internet in marketing communication activities. Initially, internet access was limited and primarily available through service providers such as internet cafes. The evolution of internet accessibility has undergone significant changes, allowing for access from homes (home access). The current use of the internet extends into personal domains and has the capability to generate income, ranging from household businesses to corporate ventures. Based on survey data, the number of internet users over the past 10 years (2013-2023) has reached 213 million individuals as of January 2023. This figure represents 77% of Indonesia's total population, which stands at 276.4 million people at the beginning of this year. (Mutia Annur, 2023).

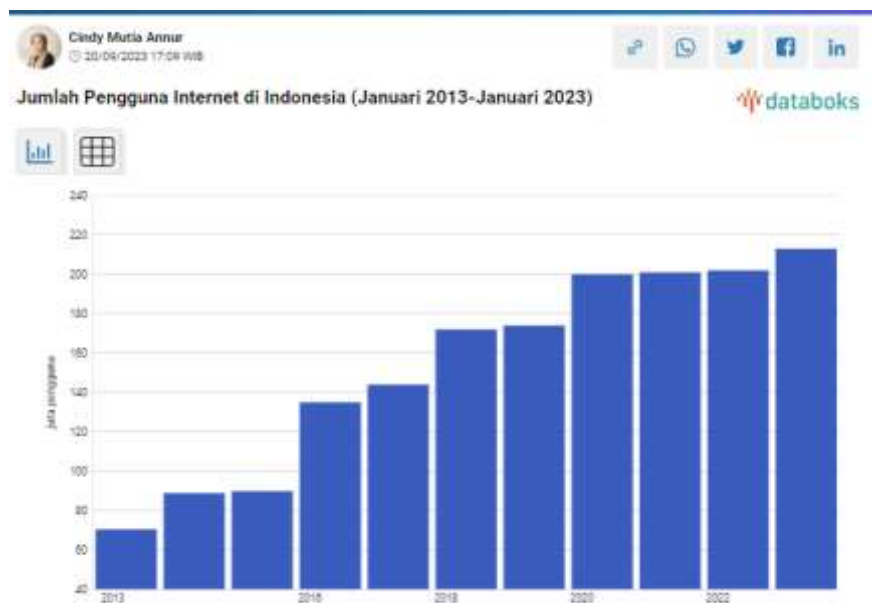


Figure 1 Internet User Survey By Databoks
Source: (Mutia Annur, 2023)

The ubiquity of the internet has spurred businesses to competitively engage with the personal and emotional aspects through digital interactive communication. Games have emerged as a medium utilized to foster integrated interactions with other marketing communication activities. Currently, 88% of online game enthusiasts can access games through their mobile devices. Games have transcended mere entertainment and have the capacity to create interactions among users while also generating revenue. Based on statistical data, it is revealed that 54.7 million individuals access mobile games, positioning Indonesia as the foremost contributor to online game downloads in Southeast Asia. (Yudhistira, 2021).

Games are a human activity capable of creating interactions among their users. They involve a combination of skills, luck, and enjoyment (Miller, 2020). This shift in habits introduces a new embryonic market that marketers need to pay attention to in their communication efforts. Marketers must now bridge this new market through digital marketing activities (Correia et al., 2016). They must acknowledge the fact that there is a shift in the behavior of the target market with the advent of a new generation in the digital era. Marketers in the digital era must strive to connect with the millennial generation in innovative ways that align with their personalities. Traditional marketing is no longer considered entirely effective in capturing the attention of this digital native group (Munsch, 2021).

Online interactive platforms need to pay attention to the element of storytelling in conveying their messages. Previous research identifies dimensions in storytelling: relevance, antithesis,

concreteness, and positive values of the story (Manrai, 2019). This condition is also applicable to games, which are currently utilized by marketers for engagement purposes. Marketers are no longer confined to sales activities alone but are also required to communicate for their brand. Brand communication is carried out through marketing communication activities. The evolution of branding activities now places a greater emphasis on entertainment. Fundamentally, many people reject advertising messages; thus, messages are now packaged to captivate the audience (Lehu, 2007).

The strength of the brand entertainment concept lies in its ability to break through commercial clutter. Traditional advertising has lost its capacity to capture attention. Brand entertainment has the potential to connect with the target audience by enhancing the brand experience. This brand experience is packaged in the form of entertainment, information, or education. Brand entertainment can tactically build impressions and strong emotional relationships with the target audience. The concept of brand entertainment can achieve resonance for strategically building a brand. (van Loggarenberg et al., 2021).

The development of digital media enables the brand entertainment concept to grow twice as fast as traditional advertising. This condition presents new opportunities for brand aliases and marketers to gain more control over the production and distribution of content. Presentation style is another execution factor that can influence consumers' ability to process and integrate branded entertainment content. The time interval between the focus on a brand presentation and one or more object brands can either enhance or inhibit consumers' ability to transfer meaning from one brand to another. The necessity for alignment between brand alliance exclusivity and presentation style can enhance the credibility of unfamiliar brands and ultimately result in more favorable brand evaluations (Bang et al., 2020).

Brand entertainment has evolved, particularly within the video game industry, and has the potential to engage in advertising activities within it. Brand messages are expanding in various formats, such as in-game billboards and product placements. Marketers are actively seeking innovative ways to convey their brand messages. Marketers now recognize that game developers have shaped the gaming environment to incorporate branded products that exist in the real world. Brand placements are frequently positioned within and around the video game environment. This condition emphasizes the need for marketers to have an understanding of the effects of external brand placement (E. Kim & Eastin, 2015).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research constitutes a qualitative study employing discourse analysis based on a literature review, which involves an examination of previous books and journals (Basarah, 2019). The researcher interprets the findings from the literature related to marketing communication activities in the digital era through games as a tool of promotion. The aim of this research is to examine the advancement of knowledge and the application of marketing communication activities in the digital era. The study will specifically focus on the interactions conducted by brands through the concept of brand entertainment within games as a form of interactive communication.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Digital Marketing

The presence of digital technology has redefined the language of communication with its unique capabilities (Deighton & Sorrell, 1996), including in marketing communication activities (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). In marketing communication activities, digital endeavors encompass interactivity, measurement, customer engagement, customization, accessibility, and managing vast informational resources (Stankovska et al., 2016). Marketers are now becoming aware of the need to engage in communication activities that are more personalized (Gay et al., 2007), to attract, inform, and influence compromise-prone consumers (Dahiya & Gayatri, 2018). In the effort to

activate brands through digital marketing activities, marketers need to design an instructional model using the ADDIE model, which is an acronym for (P. C. Campbell, 2014) : Analysis, the process of determining or defining a condition such as the situation, stakeholders, competitors, the gap in the use of gaming technology in the digital market. [2] Design, the process of determining how the analysis is learned through the process of discovering technology and information that is suitable for the skill level of the target market regarding games and their communication.

The next acronym is [3] Development, the process of creating and developing games as a digital marketing tool that aligns with the target audience. [4] Implementation, the process of integrating games as a new medium into technologies that support digital marketing activities. [5] Evaluation, the process of evaluating marketing activities through the implementation of game usage that has been carried out. Marketers need to be aware of the current conditions of digital marketing channels to understand their placement in their marketing media. Marketers need to understand the current state of digital marketing channels to comprehend their placement in marketing media. Marketers need to understand that technological changes demand innovation in marketing channel activities. Digital marketing channels function very similarly to traditional marketing channels (Pride et al., 2017), thus necessitating a review of seven conditions of digital marketing channels (Key, 2017).

Firstly, Internet System, The internet system has the capability to simultaneously create, promote, and deliver value from producers to consumers through digital networks. This internet system will support the execution process while the game is being played. Secondly, Commoditization of Information and Transactions , The internet has introduced new efficiencies in the commoditization of information in transactions that frequently occur between consumers and companies. This pertains to up-to-date information related to promotions, and/or for downloading research samples, entertainment, or other relevant materials such as games. Thirdly, Sharing Economy, In the sharing scenario, the term sharing economy refers to a larger phenomenon of an economic model involving transactions of personal resources. Researchers observe the creation of engagement among audiences, turning them into consumers, particularly through the use of referral codes. If a consumer can attract new consumers (gamers) through a referral code, the existing consumer will receive certain benefits. Fourth, Massive Growth in Time Period , massive growth in a compressed time period has characterized several companies in the sharing economy. Overall, the sharing economy has grown faster than the combined growth of Yahoo, Google, and Facebook.

Fifth, Digital Platform Business Model, less-explored contributors to the growth and success of the sharing economy involve significant changes in marketing channels. These changes, when combined with genuinely innovative products and services, enable unprecedented scale growth in history. Sixth, Marketing Channel, the most common and widely used digital marketing channels in the sharing economy are presented and categorized into three domains: email, social media, and search engine marketing (SEM). Finally, Branded Mobile Application, mobile applications refer to specifically designed software that users can download to their mobile devices for the purpose of branded engagement with companies through entertainment, such as games, information, and/or marketplace transactions.

It is crucial for marketers to thoroughly master digital marketing channels, particularly in relation to the execution process when undertaking the branding activities they are promoting. Marketers are now presented with numerous options, underscoring the need to comprehend channel strategies in the post-digital era. Email, social media, and SEM, which encompass search engine optimization (SEO) and pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, offer countless tactical choices in varied forms. Ironically, new social media platforms are introduced and become outdated in the digital landscape almost every week. Marketers now need to understand the spectrum of decision-making in digital marketing, as illustrated in Figure 2 (Key, 2017).

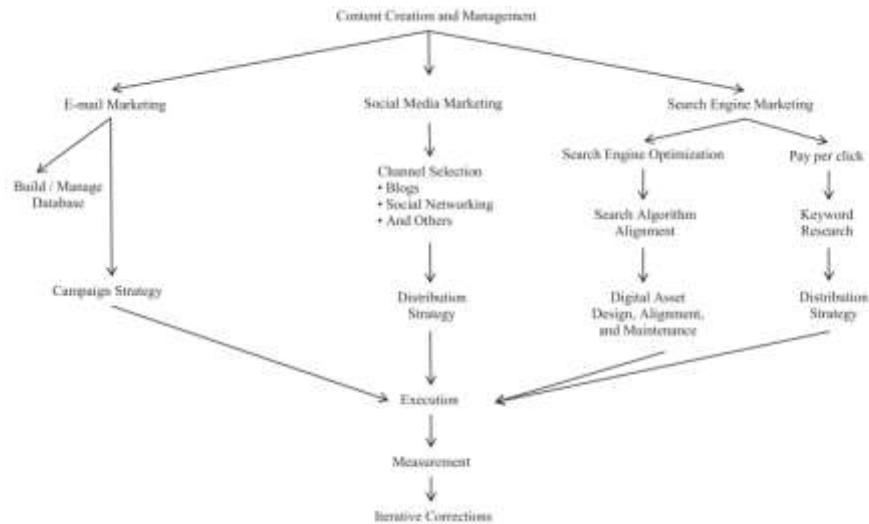


Figure 2. Digital Marketing Channel Decision Spektrum
 Source : (Key, 2017)

Marketers in the digital era need to emphasize the content they will present to the audience through effective management. Figure 2 represents the spectrum of partial decisions based on the three most established areas of digital marketing channels (Key, 2017): [1] Email Marketing, marketers can use email as a direct access provider to consumers or audiences in disseminating their marketing content. Email marketing usage can reach a broader, measurable audience, and real-time information updates can be performed. [2] Social Media Marketing, marketers can leverage social media to share their content with interconnected user groups. Content can take the form of text, photos, or videos depending on the social media platform used. [3] Search Engine Marketing, marketers can utilize search engine optimization (SEO) as a long-term and continuous step in disseminating content. The content distributed by marketers is targeted to rank highest in audience searches on search engines.

Marketers can execute a holistic approach in digital marketing activities. When marketers create a game, it needs to be communicated through email to inform consumers about a new game introduced by a brand and simultaneously serve as a registration medium. Social media can also be a platform to inform users about a new game associated with a brand. If the audience hears about a new game from a brand, they will seek information from search engines. Audiences and consumers may search for information about game tutorials promoted by a brand. The integration of digital marketing serves as the foundation for marketers to engage in Branded Entertainment activities through games. Upon executing branding through games, it is essential for marketers to measure the success of their activities. Measurement involves using specific metrics that provide various analytical insights. Analytical measurement can be based on specific goals and objectives for the strategic use of channels. This is useful for ongoing marketing actions related to what needs to be developed from the use of brand entertainment. Marketers can analytically see who is engaging with the brand through games. This condition makes measurement steps crucial and is considered a necessity for real-time information updates. Digital marketing needs to pay attention to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in integrated marketing communication activities through games.

3.2. Integrated Marketing Communications

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is the coordination of all marketing communication tools in a unified program that maximizes impact on the target audience. Marketers achieve integration through marketing communication tools aligned with their target market, as reflected in Figure 3. In this figure, various communication forms are present: advertising, direct response communication, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, event marketing, and

digital interactive (Tuckwell, 2008). This integration is bridged by a single integrated message known as the selling idea (Watono & Watono, 2011).



Figure 3. Integrated Marketing Communications
Source : (Tuckwell, 2008)

The researchers observe that many brands still have weaknesses in creating a selling idea. The selling idea is crucial for the target market to receive the same message across all marketing communication tools. The selling idea should facilitate the target market in understanding the marketing message. The author presents one brand considered to integrate its message very well, namely Pocari Sweat. People immediately recognize its brand name when they hear the word "ION." All activities of this brand incorporate the word "ION" in every marketing communication activity, as shown in Figure 4. This condition will make it easier for people to recognize brand awareness for this brand, indicating the success of marketing communication activities.



Figure 4. Selling Idea Pocari Sweat
Google Image (2024)

The digital revolution requires communication activities to undergo significant changes, becoming hybrid or conducted both online and offline. Offline communication refers to communication managed through physical touchpoints and traditional media, such as traditional television and print materials like newspapers. Online communication, on the other hand, is communication managed through digital touchpoints, for instance, social networks and display advertising (Vernuccio et al., 2021). The essence of integrated communication lies in marketing orchestration while maintaining a unified selling idea. This is evident in the discussion in this research, specifically focusing on interactive communications integrated with other marketing communication tools. Interactive communication activities need to be executed in an integrated manner through the same selling idea.

3.3. Interactive Communications

Marketers need to comprehend interactive media and its impact on marketing activities. There are three classification categorizes interactive media into three parts: [1] Low interactivity, includes traditional media such as television, radio, magazines, and films. [2] Medium interactivity, involves interactive television, teleconferencing, and email. [3] High interactivity, encompasses video games, the internet, and multi-user domains (MUDs). At a high level of interactivity, individuals actively engage in real-time with the media (Siemens et al., 2015; Steuer et al., 1995). Technological advancements bring changes and developments to marketing communication activities. Marketing, which initially occurred in a one-way direction, can now evolve into interactive marketing communication. The existence of the internet serves as a medium, demanding marketers to convey marketing communication messages online. Marketers need to pay attention to the planning process in online and interactive communication, as reflected in Figure 5. This figure illustrates that interactive communication activities need to commence with an integrated marketing plan. There is a need for clarity regarding the objectives of the interactive activities to be carried out by marketers.

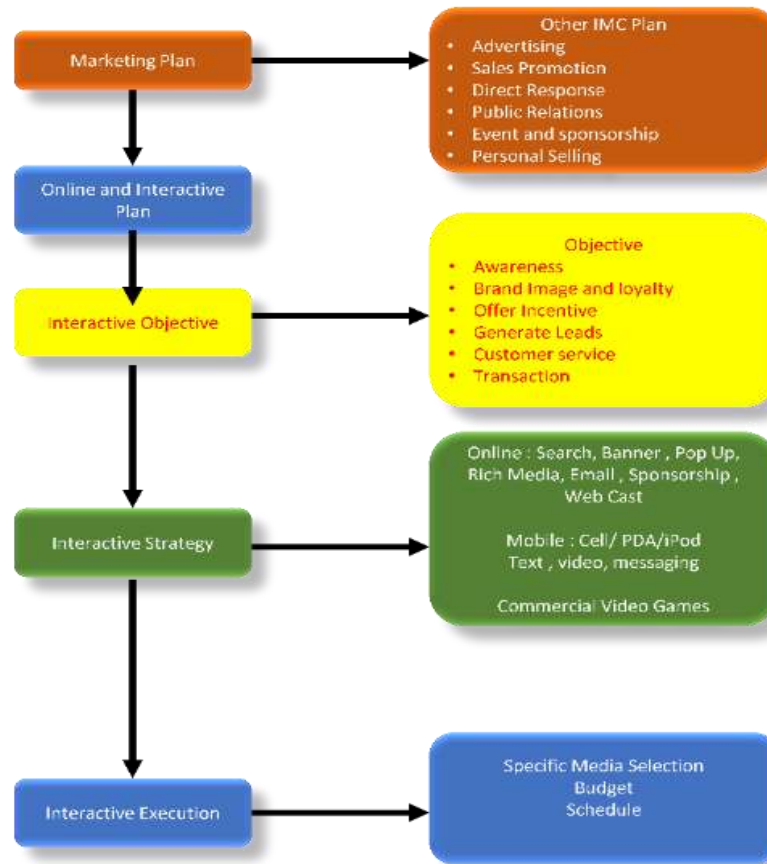


Figure 5. The Online and Interactive Communication Planning
 Source : (Tuckwell, 2008)

Marketers need to understand the issues and conditions of a brand to determine the objectives of the interactive communication activities to be carried out. Marketers must define interactive strategies, one of which may involve commercial video games. In the end, marketers will assess the results of the executed plan (Tuckwell, 2008). One tool in interactive communications is commercials through video games. Message integration becomes crucial through the agreed-upon selling idea in the implementation process. The integration of marketing messages through advertising is essential. The explanation in the sub-chapter on integrated marketing communications takes the example of the brand Pocari Sweat. The selling idea of this brand lies in its "ION" word, so the application of this word must appear in every marketing communication activity. The application of the word "ION" appears in interactive communication activities through games on digital platforms, as shown in Figure 6. Pocari Sweat organizes online soccer games where there is interaction between the brand and its users. This is also known as game advertising, where marketers conduct branding within a digital gaming platform (Lehu, 2007).



Figure 6. Interactive Games Brand Pocari Sweat
 Source : (Games, 2012)

3.4. Games Branded Entertainment

Marketing activities through advertising in games have been present since the 1980s. The penetration and adoption of the internet did not exist on a massive scale until reaching home connections. Initially, game advertising appeared in games like Play Station. Marketers branded a game through the concept determined by the game's manufacturer. Advertising activities began as banners in video games and evolved to become part of the gameplay objects. Brands that first appeared in the inception of this concept were related to automotive products such as engine oil, as shown in Figure 7. Brands in the food and beverage category, like Starbucks, also appeared in a London Taxi game scene in 2005 (Marc Lehu, 2007). This allows for potential saturation and rejection of traditionally delivered advertisements (Tuckwell, 2008). The rejection of ads occurs because they are considered disruptive to one's enjoyment. When people are enjoying television shows, they tend to switch channels when ads appear. This condition is not only related to consumer behavior issues but also stems from an individual's mindset. Video games are one of the most interactive forms of media as they require a high level of engagement and place the player in the role of decision-maker (Siemens et al., 2015).



Figure 7. Game Branding dalam Game
Source (Sniper, 2024)

The researchers associate this case with Stephanie Diamond's thoughts in her book "The Visual Marketing Revolution" (2015). The book explains that the human brain consists of three parts : [1] Cortex Brain, this brain functions to create reasoning and solve problems.[2] Middle Part Brain, this brain is related to a person's emotional functions. [3] Lizard Brain , this brain reacts without thinking, and this part assists a person in making decisions in dangerous situations (Diamond, 2013, 2015). The presence of advertising has the potential to be seen as a threat that disrupts pleasure on the Lizard Brain side. Someone becomes annoyed when enjoying content on platforms like YouTube, and they quickly skip ads. This situation poses a new challenge for marketers to incorporate advertising into entertainment without causing irritation. Marketers now need to enhance their creativity so that the audience can be exposed to ads without feeling imposed. In the gaming platform, the experience differs when viewers have to watch separate ads compared to ads integrated as part of the game content.

Interactive communication through games has evolved with the advent of the internet. The inclusion of storytelling in games immerses individuals in the world of imagination. The storytelling approach can be utilized by marketers to educate the brand being promoted. Storytelling in digital activities is integrated into interactive activities through its platform. Participants in interactive

entertainment benefit from two advantages: choice and control. They can choose what to see and do in interactive tasks, and their decisions impact the narrative (Miller, 2020) through games.

One chocolate brand named Chocki-Chocki created a virtual reality game featuring the Boboboy character. Customer would receive a card inside the product packaging and play the game on their smartphones. This game provides an experience for users not only during gameplay but also indirectly raises awareness that the game is associated with a specific brand. This situation is integrated with other IMC activities, namely sales promotion. Consumers can purchase the brand with a bonus card in an in-pack promotion, as shown in figure 8.



Figure 8. Game Chocki-Chocki
Source : (Indo, 2017)

Games used for brand promotion have been considered a crucial determinant of a brand's success through advertising activities (D. H. Kim et al., 2019; Wise et al., 2008), employing characters within games (Holzwarth et al., 2006; D. H. Kim et al., 2019). Characters serve as persuasive tools but can, on the other hand, either be congruent or incongruent with the promoted brand. Referring to Figure 8, the Choki-Choki brand does not use its own character but utilizes the character of a young hero named Boboboy. Some researchers explain that the mismatch between the brand and the use of game tools for consumer dance purposes (Gross, 2010; D. H. Kim et al., 2019), can occur because consumers tend to lean towards cognitive processing despite the mismatch (D. H. Kim et al., 2019; Srull & Wyer, 1989). Some marketers see this as an effort to build cognition through characters already known (D. H. Kim et al., 2019) by the children's market, which is the target market for the *Choki-Choki* brand.

Gameplay yields significant and positive outcomes for brand recall, recognition, attitude, and purchase intention for a brand. The brand needs to be familiarized with its target audience to have a positive effect on brand awareness. An individual's ability to play games will demonstrate cognitive effects on a brand. People will learn about the brand through repeated gameplay, making the advertising effect more effective. Numerous studies have provided evidence that repetitive advertising has an impact on cognitive structure elements such as beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral intentions (M. C. Campbell & Keller, 2003; Y. Kim & Leng, 2017). This is an effort in persuasion (Jennings, 2019; Yen, 2017) by marketers to their target audience through two routes: [1] central, used for brand placement with the goal of enhancing memory, and [2] peripheral, the use of games not as part of the game, focusing only on a positive and enjoyable experience (Dardis et al., 2016; Peters & Leshner, 2013). It is crucial for marketers to pay attention to affective placement through the brand content itself (Dardis et al., 2016; Peters & Leshner, 2013) in a game.

The most common delivery of brand messages or advertisements in video games is through: [1] Advergaming, defined as games specifically designed to promote a particular brand or product by combining branding and entertainment elements. This approach makes advergaming rarely feature more than one brand. Researchers add an example is the games created by the E-Commerce

company Shopee, as shown in Figure 9. Shopee creates games that enhance interaction with its customers. Customers can choose games and earn coins that can later be redeemed for shopping. This game involves the audience and is integrated with other marketing communication tools, namely sales promotion. The author analyzes the presence of Shopee's games, which can increase the purchase intention of consumers through their e-commerce platform.



Figure 9. Shopee games

Source : <https://shopee.co.id/m/dailygames>

Brand messages in games under [2] In-game advertising (non-branded games), involves embedding or integrating a brand into existing games, which often also feature other products, as shown in Figure 10. A brand can sponsor and become part of the content within a game. Brands may become part of games but will be mixed with other brands. This type of game is typically produced and managed by the game's owning company. (Dardis et al., 2016; Nelson & Waiguny, 2012).



Gambar 10. In-Game Advertising

Source : (Horsey, 2010)

Previous researchers have explored the use of the Limited Capacity Model (LCM) discussing how consumers, acting as players, process information (Lang, 2000, 2006; Yoo & Eastin, 2017) amid the constraints of information absorption, requiring cognitive engagement (Yoo & Eastin, 2017)) to absorb brand messages. On the other hand, the primary focus in games is the

game itself, with advertising messages as a secondary focus (Lee & Faber, 2007; Yoo & Eastin, 2017). Marketers must understand that ads are processed with cognitive resources not used for the main tasks in a game. Games involve automatic and controlled allocation of cognitive resources. This concerns the memory trace for secondary information (ads) that might not be strong enough during memory retrieval (Annie & Basil, 1998; Yoo & Eastin, 2017) to receive advertising messages. Researchers observe that many games are created with diverse concepts, and their presence relates to different mental resources. Most games involve highly stimulating audiovisual sensory information (e.g., alarm sounds, bonus points, aggressive enemy avatars, and powerful weapons)

On the other hand, games are created to direct users to participate in battles, win rewards, or be killed by enemies. This condition brings positive and negative evaluations of video games when dynamically manipulated for entertainment value. This is based on the value provided through game features that can bring pleasure, joy, tension, excitement, or relief (Bryant & Vorderer, 2013; E. Kim & Eastin, 2015; Yoo & Eastin, 2017). This relates to the emotional aspect of games so that brand messages can be stored in memory through a certain cost that must be invested (LaBar & Cabeza, 2006; Yoo & Eastin, 2017). Marketers are now starting to pay attention to the concept of branded entertainment because it can build customer-based brand resonance (Keller, 2009; van Loggerenberg et al., 2021), but is considered by some practitioners to still fail to support marketing communication campaigns (Mescall, 2013; van Loggerenberg et al., 2021). Researchers suggest marketing communication practitioners observe and conduct deeper research before marketers collaborate with providers of branded entertainment concepts, such as game companies. On the other hand, a brand needs to build relationships through interactive content and efforts to create experiences (Baumann, 2015; Riskos et al., 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review conducted by the researcher, conclusions were drawn from various sources related to the interactive process. The interactive process needs to be understood by marketers through stages that need to be carried out. The researcher created a scheme as shown in Figure 11 to find integration starting from situational analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation in the concept of branded entertainment games. The essence of marketing communication activities is an integrated message to facilitate someone in getting to know a brand. Marketers need to consider the Lizard Brain or the part of the brain that acts without thinking, and this can apply to ads in a traditional way often overlooked by the audience. Advertising with the concept of branded entertainment seeks to make people unaware that they are being advertised to captive audience.

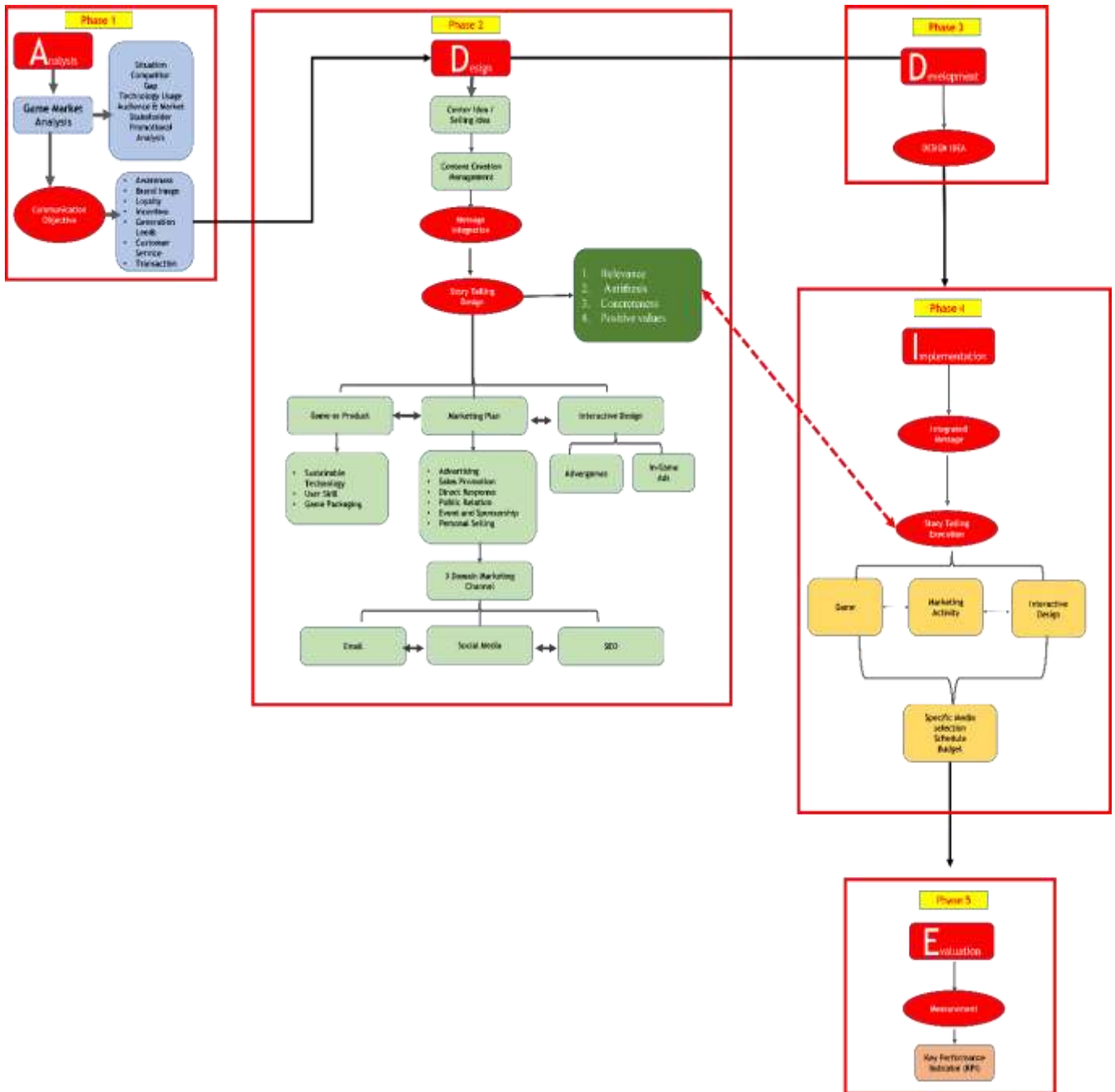


Figure 11. Interactive Communication Process through Games Branded Entertainment
 Source : (Reasearchers, 2024)

It is essential for marketers to understand the steps before engaging in interactive communications through branded entertainment games. The process can be carried out through five stages using the ADDIE concept as the implementation foundation. In the Attention stage, marketers can analyze the market situation as the basis for determining communication goals and as a reference for the subsequent stages. In the Design stage, marketers need to create a selling or central idea as the core message to be integrated across various channels. The message should be directed towards the concept of storytelling with relevance, antithesis, concreteness, and positive value for message integration. Message integration will be reflected in every action taken by marketers in product, marketing activities, and game design. The next stage is Development, the expansion of what has been previously designed. Marketers can develop ideas that will be continued in the implementation stage. In the Implementation stage, marketers need to observe how message

integration is reflected in the game, especially in storytelling as the message, marketing communication actions, and its interactive process. The implementation stage is based on media selection, scheduling, and budgeting. The Evaluation stage needs to be conducted as the basis for development and the next steps in marketing activities through branded entertainment games.

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