

## **EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF BRAND ENGAGEMENT ON BRAND EQUITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ADVERGAME**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this paper is to study the relationship between brand equity and brand engagement in context of advergaming. It tests; brand equity is significant on Brand Engagement and the impact of brand engagement on brand equity.

The paper presents a survey of youngsters of Gujarat under descriptive- cross sectional design. The statistical tools like factor analysis, MANOVA, and multiple regressions have been used. Brand equity is found significant on brand engagement. It is significant for emotional attachment and rational attachment wherein emotional attachment positively impacts on brand equity. The paper will be of value to those interested in advergaming and branding in advergaming. It is suitable for academics and practitioners alike.

**Keywords:** Brand Engagement, Brand Equity, Advergaming.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Game playing is always creating fun and entertainment for any group of people. Platform of digital game has become one of the most money-making and emerging platform in the world of marketing and gaming. The world of Marketing is shifting from conventional approaches to the unconventional approaches to build brand awareness and drive action for the Brand. It is now basically the consumers driven marketing strategy.

Most of Indians spend over two-and-a-half hours on their smartphone everyday and less than a quarter of that time is spent on voice calls and SMS. The phone is becoming the second screen for these users as they spend almost two hours a day on browsing, watching videos, and playing games and catching up on social networking sites.<sup>i</sup>

Compared to traditional advertising, which is a passively consumed, advergame achieves in connecting with the consumer as it allows users to engross completely in a game. Mobiles are extremely personal devices challenging severe and total attention of users. This emotional involvement of the consumer and their game can create opportunity to the brands.

In broad-spectrum, advergame is a simple video game used for advertisement purposes; as a rule they intricate on popular game genres such as puzzles, racing, or platform games; they make effortless use of technologies i.e. Adobe Flash and they are broadly available and easy to coordinate for the public image of brand which they promote (Fuchs et al., 2015). The main aims of advergames are to deliver a powerful message for the advertised brand and to achieve higher traffic on brand websites. Advergames are “computer games specifically created to function as advertisements to promote brands, where the entertainment content mimics traditional game forms” (Kretchmer, 2005).

Advergames are mostly casual games (Redonaldo, 2012). Advergame allows playing in short break as well as long break as it is easily played during short breaks in the day, such as waiting times, on tablets, or on smartphones. Advergame has become fairly ubiquitous in nature (Lee et al., 2009; Moore and Rideout, 2007; Quillian et al., 2011). Advergames are created around a specific brand and often have a clear rhetoric in order to transfer specific brand information (Thomson, 2010).

Advergame means games that can be played on the web and on the mobile devices. Yüksel (2007) said that they are interactive games, mainly played online and contain marketing messages of the brand, the product or any identifiable characteristic of them located at the center of the game. He continues that, because of the industry’s evolving process, advergame is a multidimensional concept.

Consumers often differentiate in an instinctive way between advergames, conventional advertisements, video games, linear narratives, and other everyday practices (Bogost, 2007; Cauberghe and De Pelsmacker, 2010; Smith and Just, 2009; IAB Game Committee, 2010) without elaborating on their specific differences.

Advergames constitute part of the smallest & fastest growing segment of branded entertainment marketing efforts. The tremendous growth in the number of brands that include advergames as part of their advertising strategy which have been attributed to a desire to engage youth and young adults who are increasingly choosing online, interactive media over traditional media.<sup>ii</sup>

Ghirvu (2011) approaches the advergame as a marketing communication tool, and doing so the characteristics like promoted brand personality were discussed, the profiles of the target group, Environment characteristics, in this case the internet characteristics, strategic objectives of the communication campaign, Image of the company.

The industry defines brand engagement as “a spectrum of consumer advertising activities and experiences—cognitive, emotional and physical—that will have a positive impact on a brand” (Shirley & Cole, 2014).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

Building a strong brand in the market is the prominent aim of organization as it has many benefits over period of time i.e. larger margins, less vulnerability to the competitive marketing strategy, brand extension opportunities.

Aaker (1991) defines brand equity as the set of brand assets and liabilities linked to the brand- its name and symbols- that add value to, or subtract value from, a product or service.

Brand equity also considers as a relational market-based asset because it exists outside the firm and resides in the relationships of final users with brands (Falkenberg, 1996; Hooley et al., 2005; Srivastava et al., 1998, 2001). With the help of advergaming, higher rate of brand recall can be generated (Aided & Unaided recall) in compare to banner ad which help to build up a strong brand equity (Deal, 2005)

Raney et al (2003) suggested that the emotional arousal created by a branded interactive format can generate a positive attitude toward the advertisement of an individual which they have exposed. The higher the interactivity with the advertisement can create higher levels of appreciation both for the ad and the website on which it was deployed. Most of advergaming are very interactive and it creates an advantage of special features of leaving the actual marketing message (typically a brand logo) in the background as a peripheral stimuli.

Winkler & Buckner (2006) suggested in their research results that players of advergaming are very receptive to the advertising message or at least to the product or company that is displayed within the game. It is also evident that players remember quite a lot of details, such as the different locations of the logo. It suggested that advergaming should be used for known brand to the players to enhance brand impressions rather than to create a brand awareness of new product to the target audience.

The literature review of Brand Engagement explains that how the brand engagement has become an intriguing part of marketing activities as the marketing activities are being shifted from brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand recall to brand Engagement. Globally marketers are looking for to connect with consumers, there is discussion in advertising and research circles of the meaning and measurement of 'Engagement'. Keller (2001) makes brand engagement a key component of his Customer-Based Brand Equity model.

The association of National Advertisers (ANA), the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) and the Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) came together to define engagement in 2006 as: "Turning on a prospect to a brand idea enhanced by the surrounding context" (Capture the turned on part here via stimulating co-creation, more personal, deeper brand meaning).

"Engagement is about connecting consumers and brands in a way that allows for a two-way experience. This 'new' model of communications is based upon a simple human truth that consumers' time and attention must be earned and rewarded."<sup>iii</sup>

MSI (2010) proposes the most specific definition, describing engagement as a "customer's behavioral manifestation toward a brand or firm beyond purchase". Another definition of brand engagement is that as "behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers", implying that engagement can be positive or negative, and "may be targeted to much broader network actors including other current and potential customers, suppliers, the general public, regulators, and firm employees" (van Doorn et al., 2010). The term 'Brand Engagement' has been described many ways by different authors in relations to the brand. In a website context, online engagement has been described in terms of "a cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand" (Mollen & Wilson, 2010) while some has taken a different approach to describe engagement as "a collection of experiences" (Calder et al., 2009).

Nelson & Michelle (2002) has discussed in his research that the ways brands appear in background of the game in the integrated game design. How the players felt about the brand placed in the games, keeping in mind that whether players thought it was deceptive and added to realism of the game, or interrupted or impaired the game-playing experience. Game players responded fairly positively.

Antin et al. (2011) has studied standard practice in online gaming. Awarding badge has also become a key ingredient in "Gamifying" experiences to engage and motivate users.

Turlutter et al. (2013) studied distinguish between characteristic of game as well as of the advertising that lead to psychological responses toward the game and the brand embeded in the game. Researchers had taken individual factors of the players and social factors of the players in the envireonment.

Gura & Gura (2016) studied on mobile game as it is new trend in digital era. The study reveals that effective advergaming with all its characteristics manages to engage the brand recognition and help in customer relationship management; a good design of a game helps to improve different functions of the

company i.e. social responsibility, measuring campaign in short time as well as the creation of a database available for different uses in the future.

Zajonc & Markus (1982) presented in their research work that the recurring nature of a branded form of entertainment will expose the individual to the brand stimulus i.e. logo, brand mark and so on. Gradually, it will convert to build up a sense of familiarity. Familiarity itself, in turn, results in a positive affective reaction to subsequent exposures to that brand. In this matter, continuous and repeated exposure possible through the advergame format that could give these advertisements a distinct advantage over other forms of advertising.

### **LITERATURE GAP:**

Many studies show the importance of advergame usage as an interactive tool of innovative marketing. An article by Winkler & Buckner (2006) reveals that it would be worth extending the research to investigate whether advergame are more effective and efficient in promoting already known brands rather than supporting the introduction of new brands or brands that are new to the target audience.

Tran, G. A., Strutton, D. (2013) expressed in the current study stakes no claims that a comprehensive list of factors influencing attitudes toward IGA has been identified. Future studies could extend this model by incorporating other factors that may affect gamers' attitudes toward In-Game Advertising (IGA) or advergame.

Branding literature offers grounds for the assertion that the potential for brands to play a self-defining role can be viewed as adding to perceptions of brand value, which is much like a nonattribute component of a brand equity (Keller, 1993). This additional equity may direct to increased brand loyalty and more inelastic demand (Kapferer, 2008; Keller, 1998).

The study of Brand Engagement in the branding area is not flourish. Generalized individual difference has been carried out to measure brand engagement in Self Concept (Sprott et al., 2009). The lack of research in the area of brand engagement in context of advergame gives an opportunity to researchers to carry out the research in this field.

### **STUDY OBJECTIVE:**

The broad aim of the proposed study is to know that whether there is a significant difference between brand equity and brand engagement in context of the advergame. Researchers believe that there is the impact of brand engagement on brand equity. The research would also like to explore the categories of brand engagement on which brand equity differs. Secondly, the study also aims to identify the impact of brand engagement on brand equity in context of advergame. For better understanding the following hypothesis have been derived.

### **HYPOTHESIS:**

**H1:** Brand equity is significant on brand engagement.

**H1a:** Brand equity is significant on emotional attachment.

**H1b:** Brand equity is significant on rational attachment.

**H2:** Brand engagement has impact on brand equity.

**H2a:** Emotional attachment has impact on brand equity.

**H2b:** Rational attachment has impact on brand equity.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

#### **Research Design:**

This research begins with exploratory research design as its immediate purpose is to develop hypothesis and questions for further research (Cooper & Schindler, 2007, pp 139-140). The formal study begins after the exploration leaves off.

For making the study conclusive after exploratory research, descriptive research design is used. Under descriptive research, Cross sectional design is used, means information from the sample of population element is collected only once (Malhotra & Dash, 2007, pp 84).

Researcher has used Pre-experimental research design in which One Shot Case Study has been used. Pre-experimental designs do not employ randomisation procedures to control for extraneous factors (Malhotra, N. & Birks, D.F., 2006, pp.268). A Pre-experimental design in which a single group of test units is exposed to a treatment X, and then a single measurement of the dependent variable is taken (Malhotra, N. & Birks, D.F., 2006, pp.269). As treatment, all the respondents were instructed to play a game for 12-15 minute, and then fill up the questionnaire. The respondents were given clear instruction to attempt each and every question very carefully and compulsory. The advergAMES from FMCG Industry were chosen as Experiment stimuli. While selecting the brand, it was kept in the mind that both advergAMES have more or less same Game play Level, Cognitive Task & Game Design. The data were collected for two different FMCG brands i.e. Kitkat & Bingo.

### **RESEARCH INSTRUMENT:**

A self-administered questionnaire was developed. The data are based on a survey done in a region of Ahmedabad city in Gujarat state. Researchers have taken brand equity scale & brand engagement Scale. Brand equity was measured with four item 5-point Likert scale (1 is “Strongly Disagree” & 5 is “Strongly Agree”) developed by Yoo and Donthu (2001) which is in line with the definition of brand equity Proposed by Keller (1993). Brand engagement scale was measured with nine items anchored by “Strongly Disagree” (1) and “Strongly Agree” (7) developed by Sprott et al. (2009). Original statements of brand engagement have been modified as per the need of this research objective.

### **SAMPLING:**

In this case it is difficult to get time of respondents to play a game and fill up the questionnaire, so it is decided to go with non-probability convenience sampling method. It is believed that the carefully controlled non probability sample often seems to give acceptable results (Cooper & Schindler, 2007, pp 423). 290 respondents were taken for both the games whereas 136 for Bingo brand and 154 for Kitkat brand. A sample was drawn from a university student population.

Sampling techniques that do not use chance selection procedures but rather rely on the personal judgment of the researcher (Malhotra, N. & Birks, D.F., 2006, pp.362). For the study of this research, researcher has used Causal Experimentation. Causality applies when the occurrence of X increases the probability of the occurrence of Y (Malhotra & Dash, 2007, pp 165). ‘Youth’ was defined a person of age between 13-35 years, but in the current Policy Document, the youth age-group is defined as 15-29 years with a view to have a more focused approach<sup>iv</sup>. Thus, researchers kept age group between 18-35 years. The motivation for this selection was that respondents were thought to be an appropriate sample since young adults are more enthralled towards game playing.

### **DATA ANALYSIS:**

#### **Reliability Analysis:**

The strength of scale used for measuring the impact of brand engagement on brand equity was assessed by examining its reliability. In reliability analysis, internal consistency was computed by calculating cronbach alpha coefficient ( $\alpha$ ). It was found to be 0.864 for brand engagement & 0.517 for brand equity (Nunnally, 1978.) (Table1).

**Table 1: Reliability Analysis**

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Brand Engagement	0.864	9
Brand Equity	0.517	4

### EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS (EFA):

To identify impact of brand engagement on brand equity, an exploratory factor analysis was carried out. EFA is a technique aimed to identify number of latent constructs form set of interrelated variables. Principal component analysis method was used to extract the factors. The KMO Measure of sampling Adequacy was 0.881 indicating analysis results are meritorious (Kaiser, 1970). Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at 0.000\* levels demonstrating that a high elevated degree of correlation between the variables exists (Hair et al., 1998) (Table 2).

**Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and Significant level**

<b>KMO and Bartlett's Test</b>		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.881
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1000.374
	df	36
	Sig.	.000*

\*significant at 0.001 level

In total, there were Nine (09) variables in the data. Varimax rotation method was used with factors extraction with Eigen value over 1. It resulted into extraction of two factors, which explained 60.781 per cent of variance. The minimum factor loading observed was 0.549 and the maximum loading was seen to be 0.821. The factors, their respective items with the numbers and their corresponding factor loading are given in Table 3 and 4.

**Table 3: Description of Factors**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>% of Variance</b>	<b>Cumulative %</b>
Emotional Attachment	Connect with feelings & Personality of the Brand	49.039	49.039
Rational Attachment	Connect to know more information & learn about the Brand	11.742	60.781

**Table 4: Composition of Each Factor Identified In Factor Analysis**

<b>Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup></b>		
<b>Factors</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Factor Loadings</b>
Emotional Attachment	Would Pay premium Price for Visualized Brand (V7)	0.770
	Feel a Personal Connection with Visualized Brand (V8)	0.758
	VB Links with My Persona (V9)	0.739
	Follow news about Visualized Brand (V5)	0.694
	Recommend Visualized Brand (V6)	0.672
Rational Attachment	Prefer to visit Visualized Brand Website (V1)	0.821
	Look around News/Information on Visualized Brand (V2)	0.805
	Like to talk about Visualized Brand (V3)	0.621
	Interested in Learning more about Visualized Brand (V4)	0.549

After the determination of the most prominent factors for the study through the factor analysis, these variables were used as independent variables in the subsequent analysis in order to avoid the possibility of multicollinearity. The factor scores were calculated for each respondent based on an average score for each statement loading onto that factor for brand engagement.

### RELATING BRAND EQUITY TO BRAND ENGAGEMENT:

The major objective of this research paper is to establish the relationship between brand equity and brand engagement in context of advergaming. Considering this, brand equity is taken as independent variable while brand engagement is dependent variable. For this, MANOVA is administered because MANOVA is a multivariate extension of the univariate techniques used for measuring the differences between group means. As stated by Hair et al. (1998, p.14), MANOVA ‘...is a statistical technique that can be used to simultaneously explore the relationship between several categorical independent variables (usually referred to as treatments) and two or more metric variables.’

To measure significant difference related to the independent variables, one Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) test with repeated measures were conducted. The MANOVA and subsequent ANOVA results are shown in Table 5, and it was found that there is statistically significant difference between brand equity for the two dependent variables of brand engagement i.e. emotional attachment and rational attachment (Wilk's Lambda = 0.865; Significance:  $p = 0.0000 < 0.05$ ).

**Table 5: MANOVA results for Brand Equity to Brand Engagement (OVERALL)**

Effect		Value	F	Significance
Multivariate Tests				
Brand Equity	Pillai's Trace	0.135	5.167	0.000003*
	Wilks' Lambda	0.865	5.339 <sup>b</sup>	0.000002*
	Hotelling's Trace	0.156	5.510	0.000001*
	Roy's Largest Root	0.154	10.964 <sup>c</sup>	0.000000*
ANOVA Tests				
Emotional Attachment	-----		9.115	0.000*
Rational Attachment	-----		2.091	0.009*

Brand Equity	F1	F2
Strongly Disagree (N=35)	3.40	3.77
Disagree (N=70)	4.07	4.00
Neither Agree nor Disagree (N=89)	4.15	4.02
Agree (N=78)	4.40	4.04
Strongly Agree (N=17)	4.53	4.06

**Note:** \*  $p < 0.05$

As indicated in Table 5, the univariate F-ratios were also significant for the two dependent variables i.e. emotional attachment ( $F=9.115$ , Sign. = 0.000), rational attachment ( $F=2.091$ , Sign. = 0.009) and In addition to this, the means score of all the two dimensions of brand engagement (aggregate score) were checked and it was found that brand equity has more importance to emotional attachment compared to rational attachment. Henceforth, overall results support *H1, H1a, H1b, H2, H2a, and H2b* (Table 5). Furthermore, the results of the preliminary analysis of correlations indicated that brand engagement variables emotional attachment & rational attachment were significantly correlated with brand equity as shown in table 6.

**Table 6: Correlations matrix for brand equity & brand engagement variables**

Correlations	Brand Equity	F1	F2
Brand Equity	1.0000		
Emotional Attachment	0.355*	1.0000	
Rational Attachment	0.183*	0.621*	1.000

**Note:** \*  $p < 0.05$

**Table 7: Multiple regression analysis on Brand Equity**

Variables	B <sup>a</sup>	$\beta^b$	Sig.(p-Value)	VIF
F1	0.233	0.394	0.000	1.627
F2	-0.039	-0.062	0.379	1.627
R <sup>2</sup>	0.129			
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.123			
F	21.173			

**Note:** a Standardized coefficients, b Unstandardised coefficients. \*p < 0.05

To further understand the contribution of brand engagement on brand equity, a regression analysis was conducted. Table 7 provides the standardized ( $\beta$ ) and unstandardized (B) regression coefficients with their respective contribution and predictive power of each variable. In this study, Enter method was used.

The model was significant,  $R^2 = 0.129$ ,  $F(2, 287) = 21.173$ ,  $p < 0.000$ . The VIF value of the regression model is 1.627 for both factors, which were below 10, so there was no “collinearity” in this regression model (Hair et al., 1998).

Rational attachment did not play significant role in explaining variation in dependent variable i.e. the brand equity (**H2b** not supported). Overall Results support **H1**, **H1a**, **H1b**, as emotional attachment had statistically significant contribution in explaining the impact of Brand Equity (sig. = 0.000;  $t = 5.601$ ;  $\beta = 0.394$ ) and Rational attachment had statistically significant contribution on the impact of brand equity (sig. = 0.379;  $t = -0.881$ ;  $\beta = -0.062$ ) (**H2**, **H2a** Supported but **H2b** Not supported) (Table 7). The result shows that emotional attachment explains higher variation in comparison to rational Attachment.

## DISCUSSION:

As it was found that there is statistically significant relation between brand equity and brand engagement, it is also been proved that this relation lies in the case of emotional attachment not rational attachment. Emotional attachment has positive impact on brand equity which denotes the positive brand engagement.

In fact, rational attachment is lesser impactful than emotional attachment (Nelson & Michelle, 2002). The emotional attachment to the brand can form if exposure to brand given regularly to the players (Zajonc & Markus, 1982).

Theoretically it is believed that Impact of brand engagement on brand equity is positive. Qualitative studies (Maehle et al., 2011) suggest that the human-like characteristics marketers influence their brands which lead to emotional bonds with consumers. In this experimental study, it is proven that emotional attachment can create positive impact on brand equity.

## LIMITATIONS:

There are three limitations of this study. First, the survey has been conducted in Gujarat only so the results may not be applicable to country wide. Second, Causal experimentation method is used for sampling method as Causality applies when the occurrence of X increases the probability of the occurrence of Y; in that case we cannot judge the respondent's response as they were given treatment only for once. Third, only FMCG products were used as research stimuli. So, there may be huge scope in the other product category as well as demographic variable for the future research.

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<sup>i</sup>FICCI-KPMG Indian Media Entertainment Industry Report.

<sup>ii</sup> Business Wire Report, 2008.

<sup>iii</sup> TNS Media Intelligence. Retrieved from <http://www.tnsglobal.com/corporate/Doc/0/EV24JGKKLP14F6P75GDR492J52/050308%20-%20TNS%20MI%202004%20Recap%20Final.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> National Youth Policy Report, 2014.