A Content Analysis of Advertising Appeal in Mobile Game Ads Free-to-Play

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ABSTRAK

The share of Free-to-Play (F2P) mobile games in the United States has increased in-game advertising to 94%. Entering the heyday of mobile games, many game developers are competing in this market. The emergence of intense competition suppresses the high use of hype and provocative advertising appeals, so advertising broadcasting in the realm of free mobile games is considered to have experienced a decline. This study aims to reveal the reality of F2P mobile game advertisements through empirical glasses. Using quantitative description content analysis methods, researchers collect F2P mobile game advertisements from 2017-2021 of casual, puzzle, simulation, action, and strategy types. The results found that 79.69% of the 100 samples used emotional appeal, consisting of 45.73% positive and 33.96% negative, with the use of attraction containing provocative messages 62.40%, as well as the use of rational appeal as much as 20.31%.

1. Introduction

Advertising media moves dynamically to accompany the development of the dimensions of global community life. This phenomenon is a factor in advertising tools and approaches (Campbell, 2019). For example, the trend in contemporary society from the use of conventional mobile phones that are not integrated with the internet to integrated smartphones also affects the advertising media. The use of smartphones in the United States, with the help of digital games on mobile and tablet devices in the community, directly contributed to the global advertising market revenue reaching US$128.683 billion in 2019. The portion of Free-to-Play (F2P) mobile games is said to be the cause of advertising in-game advertising (in-game advertising) grew to 94% in the same year. Seeing a significant traction opportunity, many developers compete for a share of the mobile game market, and game developers use tactics to attract audience focus according to market share segments.

Ad appeal becomes a feature and power to attract the attention and interest of the target audience. In addition, as said by Raza et al. (2018), the attractiveness of advertising provides positive acceptance and evaluation of the advertisements that have been made. However, with intense competition, the practice of advertising dominance in F2P mobile games has violated consumer rights. This allegedly took place in 2017 (Sinclair, 2020). So, netizens think that F2P advertising has experienced a setback from previous years. One opinion came from the YouTube account Savantics with an upload entitled "Mobile Ads Have Gotten Even Worse" he said in his description, "Every day, mobile game ads continue to get worse. When will it stop? Will it ever stop? Probably not." (Savantics, 2021). On the same platform, Optimus's upload with the title "Mobile Game Ads Are Out of Control" highlights the use of sexual attraction, advertisements that look hype but are not as

accurate as the content provided, and F2P advertisements that trigger anxiety for the audience (Optimus, 2020).

Public unrest is also genuine if it is traced through keywords: mobile game ads on social media, especially YouTube, where many videos are showing F2P advertisements with keywords: cringe, horrible, and awful. The intense competition for free mobile games seems to have broken through the value of truth in the product selling the mobile game itself. From this massive abuse, a wave of action came through the 12,000 signing of the petition "Stop False Mobile Game Advertising" against developers Playrix and its advertisements on the Change.org platform, which was promoted by Adam Hughes ("Sign Petition," 2019). In addition to prosecuting inaccurate advertising claims, the signatories also highlighted the excessive use of sexuality and provocative messages. Based on this problem, the researcher then wants to find out the trend of using advertising appeal in F2P mobile games based on five popular types of games: casual, puzzle, simulation, action, and strategy, as well as getting inferences from the actual reality through empirical studies. Hopefully, this research can add to the quantitative research literature on communication science, especially with the content analysis method on the object of F2P mobile game advertisements.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Approach

This research uses a quantitative descriptive analysis method. The use of quantitative descriptive help understands phenomena considered attractive regarding patterns in the population of interest. Besides identifying recent problems, the quantitative descriptive analysis also serves to understand patterns in the data in response to related questions: who, what, where, when, and to what extent. In simple terms, descriptive analysis simplifies the data (Loeb et al., 2017). Researchers can also use descriptive quantitative research to draw conclusions based on numerical data from related data. Findings should reflect the study's numerical analysis and context (Albers, 2017). Albers explained that the findings of the data analyzed were not simply the results of statistical tests but that researchers must first study these results and apply them to a situational context to draw reasonable conclusions (Albers, 2017).

2.2 Data Collection

Researchers took 100 advertising publications on YouTube running from 2017-2021 on the five most popular types of F2P: casual, puzzle, simulation, action/action, and strategy ("Top Grossing Games Apps | INDONESIA | Top App Store Rankings for iOS | SensorTower," 2021; "Top Grossing Apps Ranking - Most Popular Apps in Indonesia | Similarweb," 2021). The number of research objects is obtained by calculating the Lemeshow formula. The Lemeshow procedure is used to determine the sample in the number of known and unknown populations. A total of 100 pieces is rounded off from n=96.04. Meanwhile, the data collection technique in this study used non-probability sampling. Each population element does not get the same opportunity because the researcher selects the sample based on subjective assessments. So, with the non-probability sampling technique, the researcher applied the purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling or judgmental methods determine pieces based on categories or considerations that the researcher has made. Data collection uses the results of observations that involve object analysis by observing advertisements for a predetermined period, then entering them according to categories into the coding sheet table so that researchers can assess the application of attractiveness used in each game advertisement. So, through this formula, 20 ad samples were collected from each category of F2P games, bringing the total to 100.

This study uses the assessment of three coders with three separate coding sheets to minimize the influence of subjectivity in coding. As Machamara (2018) explains:

The use of multiple coders refers to the post-structuralist notion of inter-subjectivity, i.e., the argument that humans cannot be 100 percent objective but arrive at a shared subjectivity, i.e., agreement or consensus (Macnamara, 2018).

After agreeing on the indicators and assessment instruments, the researchers then conducted a training session so that each coder first understood the technicalities of the content analysis assessment method for the assessment scheme on the coding sheet. Coders at separate places and timescales analyzed existing samples. Each unit of analysis is marked with agreeing (1) if the unit of analysis contains 13 elements of the characteristics of the advertising attractiveness approach (PDTI) formulated or disagree (0) if there are no elements of PDTI at all. The researcher uses the Krippendorff Alpha formula to calculate the reliability of the study to avoid subjectivity. Figuring the reliability requires calculations or comparisons that assess: 1) agreement and 2) variation.

Research chose Krippendorff Alpha because it has a flexible instrument that assesses reliability between more than two raters/coders. Despite all limitations, the Krippendorff Alpha coefficient is the only indicator among the Inter-rater Reliability (IRR) indices; it calculates agreement among raters (Shabankhani et al., 2020). One of the advantages is that Krippendorff Alpha can apply it by measuring agreement using nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio data; it is also possible to measure reliability with missing codes. This method can be used when more than two coders encode the data and minimize the effect of coincidence in agreement with the code (Nili et al., 2017). This method can simultaneously calculate disagreements among coders instead of correcting how much deal the coders have. The SPSS statistical software macro, KALPHA, was then used to run the reliability calculations of Krippendorff Alpha. While the general agreement on the value of the instrument, which is said to be reliable, is if the result of the measure of the importance of at > 0.823 the agreement is considered good, 0.667 0.823 is considered 'suitable' and acceptable, < 0.667 is unacceptable (Shabankhani et al., 2020).

3. Findings and Discussion

After calculating the reliability between the three coders using the Krippendorff Alpha formula, the results were found as follows:

Tabel 1. Value of Inter-Coder Agreement

No.	Coder	Agreement
1	Coder 1 – Coder 2	0,6661
2	Coder 1 – Coder 3	0,9071
3	Coder 2 – Coder 3	0,6699
	Agreement between Coder 1 – Coder 2 – Coder 3	0,7433

The total agreement of the three coders shows =0.7433, which means that this study is reliable and can support the content analysis results. Likewise, the agreement value between coder 1 and coder 2, coder 1 with coder 3, and coder 2 with coder 3 is at the safe point, namely <0.667.

A. Ad Attractiveness

The researcher took the positive and negative emotional attractiveness approach and the rational attraction approach, which was used in previous studies as an indicator of assessment in this study. From a total of 100 samples of F2P mobile game advertisements published on YouTube channels in 2017-2021, it is known that the assessment scores between the three coders against the unit of analysis are as follows:

Tabel 2. Percentage of Ad Attractive Usage

Attractiveness	Nature	Type	Percentage
Emotional Appeal	Positive 45,73%	Humor	18,67%
		Adventure	15,91%

	Joy, Compassion, and Love	1,38%
	Sexual	9,77%
	Pride	0,00%
	Celebrity Endorsement	0,00%
	Guilt & Sadness	18,17%
Negative 33,96%	FOMO	0,13%
	Violence & Fear	15,66%
Total		**79,69%**
	Product Features Appeal	19,55%
Rational Appeal	Differences in Products or Services	0,13%
	Product/Service Popularity	0,63%
	Testimony	0,00%
Total		**20,31%**

Through the percentage table above, it is known that emotional attraction is the dominant attraction approach used by F2P mobile game advertisers to attract their audience's interest. A total of 79.69% of the total 100 samples used the type of emotional attraction, with details: 18.67% the practice of using humor appeal, 18.17% guilt/sadness, 15.91% adventure, followed by violence/fear 15,66%, sexual 9.77%, joy/affection 1.38%, and FOMO 0.13%. Meanwhile, researchers did not find the types of celebrity/ endorsement emotional attractiveness and pride in the research sample. Meanwhile, the frequency of using the overall rational appeal in the unit of analysis is 20.31%. This attraction has elements: information about the product/service, quality, function, material, time, place of purchase/installation, details of the product/service offered, and the characteristics of attractiveness and appeal of the product's features. Other rational appeals, product popularity, and product/service differences are 0.63% and 0.13%, respectively. However, this research did not find the use of testimonial appeal in the study sample.

The low use of rational appeals compared to emotional appeals is understandable because the use of rational appeals tends to be attached to products/services with high involvement, where consideration of a product with a high level of risk is required. The risk here will increase according to the high price of the product/service and the duration/period of use, such as the consideration of using insurance or buying a car, which is not merely routine shopping for products. Thus, the recipient of the message or potential buyer will be careful in considering and evaluating the content of the message to decide on the purchase or use of goods and services. For that reason, a rational appeal is more authentic to the product, goods, or usefulness of high value because this attraction encourages the reasoning or logic of the target audience to buy the advertised product.

Rational appeal explains the product by telling the target consumer and audience about the reality and essential information of the product; the information provided focuses more on the use and description of a product (Zhang et al., 2020). Meanwhile, emotional appeal is often used in low-involvement products because it can lift commodities from the level of similarity and position them differently in customers' minds (Panda et al., 2013).
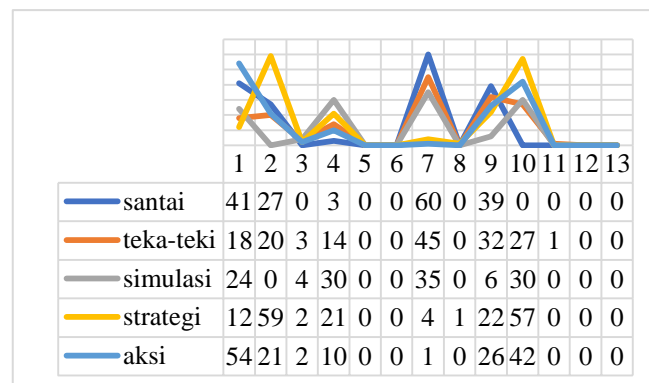
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
santai	41	27	0	3	0	0	60	0	39	0	0	0	0
teka-teki	18	20	3	14	0	0	45	0	32	27	1	0	0
simulasi	24	0	4	30	0	0	35	0	6	30	0	0	0
strategi	12	59	2	21	0	0	4	1	22	57	0	0	0
aksi	54	21	2	10	0	0	1	0	26	42	0	0	0

Figure 1. Frequency of Use of Ad Attractiveness in F2p Mobile Game Ads by Game Type

From the figure above, it shows that the frequency of attraction of guilt and sadness appears more often in free mobile games with relaxing types (60) and puzzles (45); the use of adventure appeal (59) followed by embedding product feature appeal (57) in strategy type games, and the use of humor in action games (54). Although the use of rational appeal reached a percentage of 20.31%, the use of rational appeal was not the primary use of advertising appeal in 100 F2P mobile game advertisements. This study uses rational attraction as a filler attraction in collaboration with emotional attraction. The use of product feature appeals is marked: a description of the availability of the F2P mobile game application on the App Store and Google Play, a description of the number of mobile game users, and the number of reviews for the mobile game are only placed in the closing scene of the advertisement.

B. Free-To-Play Mobile Game Model

Skobeltcyn and Shen describe the F2P model as follows:

"The F2P model refers to a business model that gives players free access to most games and allows them to subsequently purchase virtual items if they wish to enhance their gaming experience or display advertisements (Skobeltcyn and SHEN, 2018)."

F2P mobile games are popular among types: action/action, casino, simulation, adventure, arcade, racing, sports, trivia, role-playing, casual, and card; Mobile Legends is one of the most popular in Asia (NIKO Partners, 2020). Mobile game advertisements also often appear on social media and become public attention, especially on the YouTube platform; experts understand the practice of using these advertisements as one of the developers' effective strategies to generate click and download profits for F2P mobile games. Greenberg, IronSource's Chief Design Officer, calls it an "indirect effect" that drives keyword enhancements to the game (Fishman, 2020). In other words, highlighting sexuality-related game advertisements—as the background of this research concerns— is intended to arouse the audience's memory and allow the game to become viral in cyberspace. This also applies to the function of using positive and negative emotional stimuli as a result of the use of emotional appeal, especially to the provocative approach to emotional attraction. Therefore, according to Jonathan Fishman, Marketing Director of Storemaven,

"Ads will directly result in app installations. Some of the installs are converted to revenue-generating users (either through in-app purchases or advertising" (Fishman, 2020).

Thus, launching advertisements with provocative appeals to consumers is considered a quick strategy to generate profits (attracting audiences and profits) rather than creating new game products (Anderson, 2019).

The message is meant to appear unethical, unfair, and "hard," which includes a tragic fate. The researcher grouped the attractiveness of advertising messages, categorized as provocative, into five types: humor, sexual, guilt, sadness, FOMO, violence, and fear. Thus, from this grouping, it was found that the attractiveness of advertisements containing provocative messages in F2P mobile

game advertisements was 62.40%, dominated using humor (18.67%), guilt and sadness (18.17%), and violence and fear (15.66%).

Tabel 3. Provocative Messages on F2P Mobile Game Ads

Pesan Provokatif	Persentase
Humor	18,67%
Sexual	9,77%
Guilt and sadness	18,17%
FOMO	0,13%
Violence and fear	15,66%

4. Penutup

This study describes the practice of using advertising appeals based on 100 samples of F2P mobile game advertisements with five popular types of games, namely: casual, puzzle, simulation, strategy, and action. Researchers found that 79.69% used emotional appeals containing provocative messages, 62.40% and F2P mobile game advertisements containing rational appeals by 20.31%. The magnitude of the findings of using provocative messages in F2P mobile game advertisements represents the controversial reality of implementing advertising attractiveness in F2P mobile game advertisements today. The provocative message sparked reactions and criticism from various parties on the internet. However, the multiple responses and popularity are the purpose of using provocative messages deliberately embedded by advertisers. Fishman also emphasized that the "indirect effect," intended to encourage keyword increases for the game in question, succeeded in spurring application installations (Fishman, 2020). Thus, it is hoped that this research can provide an understanding and awareness of using F2P mobile game advertising appeals and open opportunities for future research related to the effects of advertising attractiveness in the realm of free-to-play mobile games on audience attitudes and behavior.

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