

The Impact of Utilising Video Games in Media Plans: Case Study of Private Sector Companies in Bahrain

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of utilising advergames as a communication tool within the media strategies of private-sector companies in the Kingdom of Bahrain. It adopts a qualitative case-study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of organisational contexts and professional practices associated with the integration of interactive media into corporate communication by exploring how they conceptualise, design, and implement game-based communication initiatives. The study population consists of private companies in Bahrain that have utilised video games in their communication campaigns. A purposive sample was selected, including communication and marketing professionals directly involved in planning or managing these initiatives, as well as Bahraini game developers with hands-on experience in producing advergames. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews designed to elicit detailed descriptions of professional experiences and to identify motivations, strategies, and challenges related to the adoption of game-based communication tools. The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, which involved coding responses and identifying recurring patterns and conceptual themes. The results revealed that audiences demonstrate strong acceptance of video-game content, particularly when reward systems are incorporated; integrating advergames with other media channels enhances their impact; mobile platforms are the most suitable for developing such games in the Bahraini context; and advergames strengthen brand identity, audience engagement, and institutional visibility, although they show limited direct influence on short-term profit generation. It further highlights opportunities to expand game-based strategies in the private sector and offers practical recommendations for integrating advergames into future media plans.

Keywords: video games, media planning, advergames, gamification, digital marketing, advertising, creative technologies

1. Introduction

Recent technological advancements have driven significant developments in traditional fields, including marketing and communications. One notable development that emerged in this field is gamification, which uses video game elements in non-gaming contexts (Sharma et Al., 2023). Video games are known for providing a joyful, interactive experience. It can attract different age segments; both adults and children use it to a similar extent (Farzinnejad et al., 2024). Many countries began investing in this field, boosting their economies through its growth, which led to the creation of new types of video games and to its expanded use in education, training, tourism, marketing, and advertising (Cormio et al., 2024). Organisations noticed the growth of this technology and its potential to reach broader audiences, engage, boost brand loyalty, and drive growth. They began incorporating it into their media and marketing plans because it's their way of communicating and interacting with their audience in an innovative way (Jami et al., 2023). Therefore, advergames have emerged in the field and significantly advanced in many digital marketing initiatives by combining entertainment and advertising in a game (Sharma, 2020).

Advergames, a dynamic and distinct category of video games, have emerged as a powerful strategic tool, commanding significant attention from organisations due to their inherently innovative nature, deeply engaging interactivity, vast creative potential, and universally accessible design (Ciampa et al., 2024). Organisations are increasingly and effectively deploying these platforms not only to captivate audiences with novel, immersive experiences but also to

proactively cultivate a robust, positive corporate image and solidify an unassailable brand reputation- (Shamim et al., 2024). These strategic engagements are demonstrably instrumental in driving substantial, multifaceted organisational success, manifesting as a significant enhancement in market share, a marked increase in profitability, superior sales performance, and a clear leadership position in competitive markets (Zhang et al., 2024).

Although this technology has been practised by many organisations globally, few organisations in Bahrain have used it in their media and marketing activities. Some existing studies have examined its effects on audiences, using it for advertising, in-game marketing, and the development of advergames solely for marketing purposes. However, no studies have examined the effectiveness of this practice on a larger scale, including its impact on brand image, reputation, sales, client relations, and goal achievement.

This study explores how organisations (companies) utilise advergames in their media plans alongside other mass media and marketing activities, the purposes and goals they seek to achieve through this utilisation, and the effectiveness and impact on client relations, brand image, reputation, and sales. It strives to enrich this research field, especially in the Gulf region, and to discover the potential benefits of investing in this technology. The insights and recommendations outlined in this study provide an introductory perspective on how to improve the use of advergames, plan, develop, and publish them effectively in the future to achieve communication and marketing goals, and explore different strategies and methods for applying them.

Even with global interest in advergames and their benefits, there is a lack of large-scale research examining their use and effects in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly in Bahrain. This study aims to contribute to this novel area of research by exploring the extent and effectiveness of utilising advergames in media plans, and their role in achieving goals related to brand image and attitude. To investigate the effectiveness of utilising video games in media plans of private sector organisations in Bahrain, this study will pose the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: How do organisations plan their media activities, and how do they utilise advergames in their plans?

RQ2: What results have the organisations achieved through utilising advergames in their plans?

RQ3: How effectively have organisations achieved their goals of utilising advergames in their media plans?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Advergame Mechanism and Consumer Engagement

Previous literature on utilising advergames for marketing and communication purposes has extensively explored the methods, mediums, techniques, and their effects on consumers. Furthermore, studies have also discussed the impacts of this marketing approach on the organisations that employ it.

Recent studies shed light on advergame users' behaviours and how they reflect on brands that utilise it. To understand its role in attracting consumers' attention and increasing engagement with brands, Pour et Al. (2023) examined users' attitudes and attention to advergames. The researchers conducted a comprehensive literature review and semi-structured interviews with 15 participants, and proposed a model based on the technology acceptance model (TAM), which was subsequently validated through a survey of 102 participants who played advergames. The findings show that users develop a positive attitude towards advergames if the games are easy to use, have clear elements and content, are enjoyable and fulfil their needs or interests. These factors lead to engaging with the brand. The study recommended integrating advertising plans with engaging game elements, considering target audience characteristics and preferences, and presenting the brand message within the game. The findings of an experiment by Sarkar et Al. (2023) examining how enjoyable advergame experiences lead to brand loyalty and preference revealed that fantasy stories or elements in advergames positively affect brand connection, whereas reality-based stories or elements do not. It also revealed that rewarding users for playing advergames yields better outcomes for the brand and can significantly strengthen the relationship between users and brands.

Some studies examined the communicative aspects of advergames. Munaretto's (2021) study aimed to test the capacity of advergames to influence and modify consumers' perspectives by studying the visual signs of the organization within the advergame including logos, typography, shapes or patterns, images and designs by conducting a comprehensive analysis of 40 advergames developed between 1992 and 2019 for media outlets, food and beverage, stores, and car brands along with analyzing 5 videos related to advergames on YouTube. The findings showed that including the organisational logo and achieving cohesive alignment between the game's elements and the brand identity are significant factors in influencing persuasion. Moreover, complementing the advergame with integrated activities across other platforms can maximise the outcomes. The study recommended highlighting and incorporating the advergame's services and features to achieve better outcomes. Furthermore, integrating gaming elements into advertising strategies can generate positive emotions, fostering deeper connections between consumers and products or services and ultimately influencing purchasing decisions (Bautista et al., 2025).

Along the same lines, Turafy (2021) addressed the design of advergames for awareness campaigns in Egypt. The study examined the effectiveness of advergames in increasing awareness of bullying in schools by planning and designing an awareness advergame and testing its effects through surveys of elementary school students in Egypt, technology specialists and professionals, and interviews with psychiatrists. The study found that advergames can be effective tools for raising awareness due to their interactivity. It mentioned 3 successful factors: gaming experience, engagement, and virtual reality; these factors affect interaction, engagement levels, and outcomes in real life, where users become advocates for raising awareness. Advergames effectively engage brands when designed for ease of use, clarity, enjoyability, and alignment with user needs or interests. Research indicates that fantasy-based narratives and player rewards significantly enhance brand connection, loyalty, and preference. Moreover, strategic integration of organisational logos and cohesive alignment between game elements and brand identity are crucial for persuasive outcomes. Consequently, advergames emerge as potent marketing and promotion tools, expanding audience reach, fostering organisational promotion, and cultivating brand loyalty, primarily because users demonstrate increased receptivity to advertising messages when focused and entertained during gameplay (BAŞEV, 2024).

According to Elsayeh (2020), utilising creative technologies in tourism marketing can positively influence consumers' engagement and perceptions. In her study, 33 participants were surveyed, and 5 specialists (designers, programmers, developers) were interviewed to examine the effectiveness of Egyptian travel agencies' advergames. It revealed that advergames serve as an effective marketing and promotional tool for reaching wider audiences, promoting the organisation, building brand loyalty, and supporting data collection. These findings were reported in a previous study by Ayada et Al. (2012) as potential benefits of advergames, leading consumers to interact with and trust the brand. A key finding in this study indicated that users are more likely to accept advertising messages within advergames because they are focused and exposed to the game. It also mentioned that entertaining gameplay is a key factor in advergames' success. This result was supported by Elshoubashy's (2020) study, which found that positive interaction with an advergame affects users' attitudes toward the organisation. This suggests that while advergames can effectively convey brand messages, their success depends heavily on both intrinsic game design elements that promote enjoyment and immersion and extrinsic factors such as prior brand familiarity and positive user experiences (Farzinnejad et al., 2024). These studies collectively suggest that the effectiveness of advergames depends on the psychological engagement mechanisms inherent to the gaming experience.

2.2 Advergames and Brand–Consumer Relationships

Several studies have discussed the effects of advergames on brand-consumer relations. In a comprehensive literature review of advergame effectiveness on brand recognition, Rathee et Al. (2018) identified five significant factors that affect brand recognition: reputation and fame, gameplay, immersiveness and engagement, persuasiveness, and alignment to the organisation's field of work. According to the study, renowned brands that integrate their logos or names into advergames have greater recall. Additionally, advergames with fun gameplay and brand-related elements that align with the brand's specialisation help the brand stand out and become embedded in users' minds. These factors were shown to be valid in a study by Hanna (2022), which found that they, especially gameplay and related elements, have a positive impact on users. Another study by Jalil et Al. (2022) indicated that users' amusement levels, along with their prior experience and brand interaction, affect how they interact with the messages within the advergame. This perspective is further supported by findings indicating a strong positive relationship between the enjoyment derived from an advergame and consumers' attitudes toward the advertised brand (Zagni et al., 2025).

Another study by Szyska (2019) examined how factors influence the intention to engage and brand attitude when using advergames. It gathered data from 1096 participants who use Dualing in 6 languages, through a survey that covered expected amusement, expected intentions, expected usability and brand attitude. The results showed that gamified experiences positively influence brand engagement. It is recommended that marketing planners understand what motivates their audience, link it to their needs, and present it in a fun, playful way. This was also discussed in a study by Al-Solaiman (2020), which found that a positive gaming experience creates positive brand images and influences consumers' decisions and brand recognition. Al-Meshal (2020) also mentioned that consumers' attitudes toward the advergame message impact the brand's mental image through their engagement, satisfaction, and entertainment. Furthermore, the efficacy of advergames is significantly bolstered when the thematic connection between the game's content and the brand is strong, leading to a more positive correlation between attitude toward the game and attitude toward the brand (Punwatkarn & Verghese, 2025).

Additionally, Gura et Al. (2018) examined the relationship between advergames and brand loyalty by surveying 600 Albanian Vodafone customers aged 14-35. To compare the effects, 50% of the study sample played the advergame, while the others did not. The study found that advergames are effective in enhancing brand loyalty and satisfaction. It indicated that satisfaction is achieved through a pleasing gaming experience, as mentioned in Rathee et al.'s (2018) study, and that this leads to recommending the game and engaging with the organisation. Moreover, the results showed

that participants below 24 years old were more affected by the game. This finding was supported by a study by Berlo et Al. (2021), which found that this tool is effective for engaging younger consumers.

Similarly, Juma and Alsridi (2025) investigated the use of advergames in media planning at institutions. They found that video games can enhance audience engagement and build brand awareness through entertaining, engaging experiences that encourage participation and exposure to messages. The studies above indicate that advergames can significantly impact brand perception, engagement, and loyalty when designed to deliver enjoyable user experiences.

2.3 Cultural and Contextual Aspects of Advergames

To date, few studies have examined the cultural aspects of advergames. Hanbazazah et Al. (2022) tested the relationship between cultural aspects of advergames and brand perceptions, and how this relationship helps achieve brand goals, by comparing the interactions of 482 Saudi and British consumers with advergames. The study indicated that incorporating cultural elements into advergames offers a strategic advantage by aligning with brand goals and engagement. However, it is crucial to offer consumers an entertaining, gameful experience for successful incorporation. A previous study by Vieira (2017) also found that incorporating cultural elements into advergames positively impacts brand awareness, attitudes, and relationships. In contrast, Elshoubashy (2020) found that elements and game design have no significant impact on the experience and outcomes. This suggests that the efficacy of cultural integration in advergames may be highly dependent on specific design choices and the target audience's pre-existing cultural familiarity with the incorporated elements, rather than a universal positive effect (BAŞEV, 2024).

The contrasting studies suggest that the effectiveness of advergame design elements may be dependent on contextual factors.

Previous research has examined various aspects of advergames' use for communication and marketing purposes. However, most studies on advergames as marketing tools have focused on consumer attitudes, levels of engagement, or brand perceptions. Little research has been done on the strategic integration of advergames with the overall media strategy or the organisational media mix. Furthermore, most studies on the effectiveness of advergames have relied on traditional marketing metrics, whereas digital games are normally evaluated using engagement-based metrics. In addition, little research has been done on the application of advergames in the Middle East and North Africa region.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case-study approach to explore the integration of advergames into the media plans of four private-sector organisations in Bahrain. It falls within the case study matrix, as it explores the use of advergames across 4 private-sector organisations. Case study research can examine and observe issues, focus on the present, and address them at the time of the study (Creswell, J. W. (2018)- The rationale for the choice of study design is that it enables comparison of the media planning approaches of the organisations and identifies similarities and differences in the integration of advergame technology into their organisational communication strategies.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to identify and investigate the effectiveness of utilising advergames in media plans for 2 samples:

- *Marketing and communication specialists:* To gain insight into the organisation's media and marketing plans and activities, the mediums, organisational structure and the purpose of using an advergame and how effectively it achieved the objectives and its impact on the sales and reputation.
- *Video game experts:* These experts were involved in developing advergames, and data was collected from them to understand the types of advergames they developed, the process, challenges, and the outcomes of utilising this technology in the future.

The study's population consisted of 4 private sector organisations in Bahrain that used advergames in their media and marketing plans at the time of the study. The study focused on private-sector companies in Bahrain because they have greater flexibility in planning their media plans than governmental organisations. The organisations are:

- *Ila Bank:* A digital bank in the Middle East based in Bahrain, affiliated with ABC Bank. The bank developed "Coin Rush", an advergame within its application -meaning the players are the bank's customers who downloaded the app- where users can control a car and collect local coins (100 fils) along the road and win monetary prizes if they achieve the highest score.
- *Dr Haifa Eye Hospital:* The first private ophthalmology hospital in Bahrain, established in 2012. The hospital launched a marketing campaign to raise awareness of the importance of eye tests and developed "Eye Escape", a web-based advergame hosted on a separate webpage from the official website to allow a large number of users to experience it. In the game, users navigate an eye to avoid crushing into harmful electronics (TV, Mobile, Laptop screens). The top 20 scorers win various prizes including free surgeries, discounts, free tests and shopping vouchers.
- *Americana:* A fast-food restaurant operator that includes a variety of brands (Hardee's, KFC, and Pizza Hut). It utilised

augmented reality in advergames twice. The first game was used to promote Pizza Hut's "My Box" meal. Customers who ordered the meal can scan a code to go to the game's page and play, similar to "Pac-Man". Activating the rear camera is necessary to control the character through movement. The second game was part of Hardee's Ramadan campaign. Users can use an Instagram filter to play the game and answer questions by moving their heads toward the correct answer. To win prizes (PlayStation 5, Samsung Watch, and Samsung Buds), users need to share the video in their Instagram story and mention the restaurant to enter the raffle, as 3 random users had a chance to win.

- *Jahez*: A Saudi app developed by Jahez Group for food delivery with a branch in Bahrain. The app features "Jahez Runner" advergame used to entertain users while they wait for their orders. Users can choose a character and customise it to collect coins while delivering an order, avoiding obstacles along the way. The game was developed as part of the app's launch campaigns with prizes to the top scorers. The advergame is still available for users to play.

These four organisations belong to the private sector and have utilised this technology in their media and marketing activities and have so far been more prevalent than in the governmental sector, since the use of advergame technology is still at an early stage in Bahrain. Additionally, the private sector was more accessible for obtaining data than the government sector, which requires lengthy administrative procedures, approvals, and permits.

The study sample consisted of 9 specialists: 4 media and marketing specialists and 5 professionals who developed advergames for private-sector institutions in Bahrain and used them in their media plans. The provided insights into the organisational communication strategies and objectives of the campaigns, while the developers provided perspectives relevant to the design and implementation of the advergames. The sample was representative with respect to gender, age, education level and occupation.

Table 1. Sample Distribution by Gender, Age and Educational Level

	Gender		Age			Educational Level		
	Male	Female	26 - 30	31 - 35	36 - 40	Diploma	Bachelor's	Masters
Media & Marketing Specialists	3	1	2	1	1	1	3	-
Video Game Professionals	4	1	2	2	1	-	3	2

To ensure research rigour and the alignment of claims with evidence, the following methodological framework was implemented:

- The data collection for this study has been obtained from a purposive sample of nine experts, who included 4 marketing professionals and 5 game developers. To add to the study's credibility, data triangulation has been employed, with interview data cross-referenced against secondary data from campaign documents, digital engagement figures, and organisational reports.
- The collected data have been analysed using MAXQDA software by following a systematic coding approach. The initial steps involved familiarisation, which was done by repeatedly reviewing the interview data to identify initial patterns. Then, initial coding was conducted to identify the primary codes for motivations, strategies, and challenges associated with advergame use. Further, the initial codes have been grouped into themes, which have been continually compared with the original data to ensure an accurate representation of the participants' views.
- A structured codebook was also established to ensure consistency in the thematic analysis. This is because it helps in organising the themes, sub-themes, and their operational definitions. A summary of the coding framework and evidence gathered from the interview data is presented in Table 2.
- To enhance the reliability and credibility of the findings, several steps were incorporated. Firstly, double coding was used to enhance consistency in part of the interview findings. Secondly, an audit trail was included, covering the whole process, including coding, analysis, and the incorporation of methodological changes. Finally, elements of member checking were included to ensure consistency between the findings and the participants.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis Codebook

Main Theme	Sub-themes			Operational Evidence
Integration Techniques	Corporate Reality (AR)	Apps,	Augmented	Technical methods used to host games (e.g., Jahez App, Hardee's AR).
Strategic Motivations	Entertainment, Reach	Data	Collection,	Primary drivers for adoption, participants reported entertainment as the core motive.
Success Metrics	Platform Engagement	Activity,	User	How effectiveness is perceived, with a focus on website visits and social media followers.
Challenges	Budget, Technology Fear, Planning			Factors hinder adoption; it is perceived as a "risky" practice due to its novelty.

4. Results

4.1 Operational Definition of Effectiveness

In the context of the current study, the effectiveness of advergames is operationally described as a multi-dimensional outcome. It is associated with digital reach, as measured by quantified increases in website traffic, application downloads, or social media followers during campaign periods. It is also associated with cognitive engagement, as evidenced by the game's ability to enhance brand recall and brand familiarity regarding organisational services. Lastly, it is associated with behavioural conversion, as the game motivates users to take certain actions, such as opening a bank account or scheduling a medical appointment.

4.2 Major Themes and Findings

4.2.1 Strategic Drivers and Integration Approaches

From a technical standpoint, participants reported that advergames are delivered via corporate applications and augmented reality, with smartphones as the most commonly used access device. They revealed that advergames are often used in marketing campaigns through competitions to encourage participation and often function as complementary tools for other communication and marketing strategies. From a strategic standpoint, participants reported that the primary motivation for using advergames is entertainment. Other motivations revealed by the interview participants include expanding audience reach, obtaining user data, promoting services, and adopting new technologies.

The interviews also revealed different perspectives among various professions. The communication and marketing professionals revealed the strategic and promotional value of advergames, while the game developers revealed the entertainment, educational, and technological experimentation value of advergames. Participants also reported that, while video games are recognised as innovative, they are currently used as "complementary hooks" rather than as core strategic pillars. Integration usually happens as a secondary layer to social media campaigns. Additionally, the participants suggested that organisations can improve the effectiveness of advergames by diversifying their implementation methods, including combining advergames with new technologies, increasing advergame duration, and linking advergames to contests and prizes to broaden their appeal.

"Certainly, and this is what we learned from our first experience. Without prizes, we wouldn't attract players or participants, and the game wouldn't gain traction." (Participant 1 / Marketing Specialist)

"Prizes motivate the audience and help the organisation reach a broader audience." (Participant 9 / Game Developer)

4.2.2 User Experience and the Incentive-Driven Engagement

The results suggest that the games' incentive-based elements significantly influence user experience and engagement with advergames. The participants agreed that the most salient aspects of advergames, which are typically used in media planning strategies, were the competitiveness and incentives, followed by ease of use. Other aspects of the advergame, such as the alignment with the organisation's field, cultural appropriateness, appropriateness for diverse age groups, and aesthetic appeal, were rated as less significant.

From the results, it is evident that the audience's engagement with advergames is typically limited to the short term, mainly during campaigns and promotions. Regarding user demographics, the interview results suggest that youth and teenagers are the most engaged groups, followed by adults, university students, males, and children, who were rated as moderately engaged. Moreover, the findings suggest that the success of the advergame integration is often measured by quantified parameters, such as increased sales, the level of activity generated through digital media, including website and social media traffic, and the extent of consumer interaction and feedback generated through the advergame.

"It makes the fun and continuity of the game specific, meaning it ends as soon as the winners are announced, and the competition concludes." (Participant 5 / Game Developer)

"The game became very popular during that period, and although the hospital is well-known in Bahrain, the game helped introduce the hospital to younger audiences. Even those familiar with the hospital became aware of the services and technology available at the hospital." (Participant 2 / Marketing Specialist)

4.2.3 Structural Barriers and Implementation Challenges

The findings suggest that the main challenges include budget constraints, the fear of new technology, and organisational planning. The participants characterised advergames as a new and costly practice in the local market, which makes some organisations reluctant to invest in such activities. Additionally, the experts indicated that the lack of organisational knowledge regarding the technological and planning aspects of advergames can make the process too slow, leading to project cancellations.

Despite the challenges, they indicated that the use of advergames in the future could be enhanced by improving the organisational marketing strategies, such as working with influencers, reaching specific audience groups, and creating characters associated with the organisation. However, some experts were reluctant to use advergames in the future due to organisational policies and the failure of the projects to reach their goals.

"Their awareness of the capabilities and requirements of these technologies is limited, as is the client's understanding of the goals for using this technology." (Participant 6/ Game Developer)

"Next time, we will collaborate with an influencer to share their gaming experience, as this will help the game reach a larger audience and effectively showcase the gameplay to convince potential players further." (Participant 2 / Marketing Specialist)

4.3 Case Analysis: Within-Case vs Cross-Case Contrast

To enhance the rigour of the findings, several key contrasts emerging from the interview analysis were identified and are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. A Comparative Analysis of Within-Case and Cross-Case Contrast

Feature	Within-Case Analysis	Cross-Case Contrast
Hosting Platform	Ila Bank focused exclusively on in-app integration to serve existing and potential account holders directly.	Contrast: Service-based firms (Banking/Delivery) prefer in-app hosting, whereas retail firms (Americana) prefer social media AR filters for broader reach.
Communication Goal	Dr Haifa Hospital prioritised "Health Awareness" over direct sales, using a simple browser game to educate.	Contrast: Despite varying goals (Education vs Sales), all cases converged on the use of "Prizes" as the primary engagement engine.
Engagement Cycle	Americana utilised highly seasonal, short-term games tied specifically to promotional events.	Contrast: Most Bahraini cases reported that advergames are used as temporary initiatives that end at the end of the campaign period. However, Jahez App represents an exception, where the game remains permanently available within the application.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of how advergames are integrated into the media plans of Bahraini private-sector companies. By aligning the empirical data with existing literature, several key theoretical and practical implications emerge.

5.1 The Paradox of Engagement: Entertainment vs Incentives

While previous studies emphasise the intrinsic entertainment value of advergames as a key driver of audience engagement (Turafy, 2021), the findings of this study suggest a stronger reliance on incentive-based participation within organisational media plans. Participants frequently cited entertainment as an important reason for incorporating advergames; however, empirical evidence indicates that competitions and prize-based rewards play a more decisive role in sustaining user engagement. In many cases, audience engagement increased significantly during promotional campaigns that offered contests and rewards, but declined rapidly once the campaign period ended. This pattern reflects a short-term engagement cycle, in which interaction is closely tied to the duration of the promotional activity rather than to the game's intrinsic appeal. Such dynamics are consistent with Theben's (2021) observations that reward mechanisms in online games can strongly influence user behaviour and often become the primary driver of continued participation. Despite the temporary nature of this engagement, advergames were still found to be particularly effective in attracting younger audiences, especially youth and teenagers who tend to respond more positively to interactive and playful communication formats.

5.2 The Paradox of Engagement: Entertainment vs Incentives

Operational effectiveness in the use of advergames within organisational media plans appears to be primarily reflected through indicators related to reach, visibility, and brand awareness rather than immediate behavioural conversion. Participants frequently associated the success of advergames with measurable increases in digital activity, including higher website traffic, increased social media engagement, and greater audience participation during campaign periods. In several cases, organisations also reported improvements in brand recognition, particularly among younger audiences who became more familiar with the organisation's services through the gaming experience. These observations support previous research suggesting that advergames are particularly effective for cognitive brand placement rather than for direct sales generation (Sharma, 2020). By embedding promotional messages within an interactive environment, organisations can expose audiences to their services in a more engaging and memorable way than through traditional

advertising formats. In this sense, the effectiveness of advergames extends beyond immediate transactional outcomes to include broader communication objectives such as strengthening brand familiarity and reshaping organisational image. This is particularly relevant in sectors where services may seem complex or distant to younger audiences, as the playful, accessible nature of advergames can help simplify and humanise the organisation's public image.

5.3 Structural Barriers and the Digital Divide

Despite the recognised potential of advergames as innovative communication tools, their integration into organisational media plans remains constrained by several structural barriers. Participants frequently highlighted budget limitations, organisational hesitation toward adopting unfamiliar technologies, and weaknesses in strategic planning as the most significant obstacles. In many cases, advergames were perceived as financially demanding initiatives that require specialised expertise and technological infrastructure, which some organisations considered risky within the local market context. This cautious approach reflects broader concerns about technological adoption and organisational readiness, particularly in environments where digital experimentation is still in its early stages. Similar observations have been noted in previous research on emerging marketing technologies, suggesting that organisations often approach innovative tools with caution due to uncertainty about costs, expertise, and measurable returns (Vieira, 2017). While global trends increasingly point toward immersive digital environments and advanced gamified experiences, many organisations in Bahrain continue to treat advergames as complementary communication tools rather than central strategic instruments. This cautious stance highlights a form of digital divide not only in technological infrastructure but also in organisational culture and digital literacy. As a result, the potential of advergames is recognised conceptually, yet their implementation often remains limited to experimental or short-term initiatives.

5.4 Bridging the Gap: Developers vs Marketers

Another important insight emerging from the findings is the difference in perspectives between game developers and professionals responsible for organisational communication and marketing strategies. Marketing-oriented perspectives tend to view advergames primarily as tools to expand audience reach, strengthen brand visibility, and stimulate engagement through entertainment and reward mechanisms. Developers, in contrast, often approach advergames from a technical and creative standpoint, focusing on gameplay mechanics, interactive design, and technological experimentation. This divergence reflects a broader tension between communication objectives and game design priorities. While marketing professionals emphasise measurable outcomes such as audience reach and campaign engagement, developers focus more on gameplay quality and user experience. Similar observations have been highlighted in research on gamified marketing strategies, which emphasises the importance of aligning gameplay mechanics with communication objectives to ensure the effectiveness of branded games (Jalil et al., 2022). Bridging this gap, therefore, requires closer collaboration between developers and marketing teams so that game design and communication strategy function as complementary elements within organisational media planning.

6. Declaration/Acknowledgements

6.1 Ethics Statement

To ensure the integrity of the research and the protection of all participants, this study was conducted in strict adherence to ethical research guidelines. The following measures were implemented:

6.2 Informed Consent

Prior to the commencement of the semi-structured interviews, all participants (marketing specialists and game developers) were provided with a clear explanation of the study's aims, procedures, and the nature of their involvement. Verbal informed consent was obtained from each participant.

6.3 Confidentiality and Anonymisation

To protect the identity of the informants, all personal data was rigorously anonymised. Participants are referred to throughout the study using generic identifiers (e.g., "Participant1") rather than their names. While specific company names (e.g., Ila Bank, Americana) are mentioned in the context of public marketing campaigns.

6.4 Conflict of Interest Disclosure

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships with the organisations or individuals mentioned in this study that could inappropriately influence or bias the research findings. The study was conducted for purely academic purposes, and no funding or incentives were received from the private sector companies featured in the case studies.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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