

CONNECTED TO THE GAME: EXPLORING THE DIGITAL MARKETING APPROACHES THAT SHAPE GENSHIN IMPACT CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN INDONESIA*TERHUBUNG DENGAN PERMAINAN: MENJELAJAHI PENDEKATAN PEMASARAN DIGITAL YANG MEMBENTUK KETERLIBATAN PELANGGAN GENSHIN IMPACT DI INDONESIA*

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Abstract: This study explores how digital marketing strategies shape customer engagement in Genshin Impact among Indonesian players. Using a qualitative approach with 18 informants, the research identifies how drip marketing, social media content, and in-game events drive emotional (e.g., excitement, FOMO), cognitive (e.g., strategizing, research), and behavioral (e.g., daily logins, purchases) engagement. The findings introduce the Integrated Engagement Loop Model, showing how marketing triggers a continuous cycle of engagement. The study contributes to marketing theory by linking player behavior with concepts such as Flow, Self-Determination, and Experiential Consumption, offering insights for game developers and marketers seeking to build long-term player retention.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Customer Engagement, Genshin Impact, Indonesia, Drip Marketing, Integrated Engagement Loop.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana strategi pemasaran digital membentuk keterlibatan pelanggan dalam Genshin Impact di kalangan pemain Indonesia. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan 18 informan, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi bagaimana drip marketing, konten media sosial, dan event dalam game mendorong keterlibatan emosional (misalnya: antusiasme, FOMO), kognitif (misalnya: strategi, pencarian informasi), dan perilaku (misalnya: login harian, pembelian). Temuan penelitian memperkenalkan Integrated Engagement Loop Model, yang menunjukkan bagaimana pemasaran memicu siklus keterlibatan yang berkelanjutan. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap teori pemasaran dengan mengaitkan perilaku pemain dengan konsep seperti Flow, Self-Determination, dan Experiential Consumption, serta menawarkan wawasan bagi pengembang dan pemasar game dalam membangun retensi pemain jangka panjang.

Kata Kunci: Pemasaran Digital, Keterlibatan Pelanggan, Genshin Impact, Indonesia, Drip Marketing, Integrated Engagement Loop.

INTRODUCTION

Research Background

Digital marketing has been essential in maintaining relationships between online games and their audience members, and its potential continues to expand. This has resulted in a phenomenon in which people spend hours playing games and engaging with the advertising efforts behind them. A popular instance is Genshin Impact, which has effectively used digital marketing to keep players engaged. Genshin Impact, a free-to-play action role-playing game developed by HoYoverse. Since its release, the game has gained immense popularity in Indonesia due to its immersive storytelling, visually stunning aesthetics, and diverse cast of characters. What distinguishes Genshin Impact from other games is not only its gameplay but also its highly strategic and emotionally engaging digital marketing approaches.

The action role-playing game, which has received recognition for its excellent production qualities, is set in an anime fantasy universe. The game was made and released by Shanghai-based miHoYo, a publisher of video

games, and can be played on PlayStation, PC, and smartphones. Genshin Impact is a free-to-play game (F2P) that primarily makes money from the gacha system, which allows users to buy additional characters and weaponry. In addition, the game offers subscriptions for premium money and a battle pass with two tiers: free and paid. Players can spend their in-game cash to wish for new, high-tier characters or weapons in a game of chance on many time-limited character banners that appear in the game every few weeks. Using the games as a service concept, Genshin Impact is regularly extended through updates and updated versions. Genshin Impact may be identified as a live service game by its yearly region changes and constant stream of in-game events. Though fewer than in the first two years of its introduction,

Genshin's form of digital marketing mainly focuses on content, email, in-game events, and social media marketing that showed high results and feedback from its player engagement. For an online game to not only sustain the active player but also accumulate high numbers of new players for the past year is amazing considering the form of marketing that majorly focuses and relies on online marketing. It shows Genshin Impact's success in their customer engagement or player retention. Players are no longer passive consumers; they are active informants in a dynamic marketing ecosystem. From in-game teasers and character banners to YouTube trailers, Twitter updates, TikTok, and real-world collaborations like themed cafés and merchandise, Genshin Impact's marketing strategy spans across online and offline touchpoints. These efforts have contributed to what is known as hybrid engagement where players emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally interact with the brand across various media. One unique element in Genshin Impact's marketing approach is the use of drip marketing. It's a method where information is gradually released to build anticipation and sustained interest. This strategy is effective in capturing the attention of players over time and encouraging continuous involvement, such as saving premium currency (primogems), sharing teasers with peers, and speculating on upcoming updates.

Ultimately, it begs the question behind that fact, does Genshin Impact's primary marketing strategy which is digital marketing, play a significant role in shaping player engagement within online games? If so, which specific digital marketing approaches most effectively influence players' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement, and how do they contribute to sustaining that engagement over time? This study seeks to answer these questions by exploring how drip marketing, social media campaigns, in-game events, and even emotional-driven content interact with players' experiences. Through qualitative analysis, this research aims to uncover the specific mechanisms through which digital marketing approaches foster meaningful customer engagement, offering new insights into how online games can strategically leverage digital platforms to build and maintain loyal player communities, especially among players in Indonesia, where online communities and fandom culture are thriving.

Research Objectives

To analyze how digital marketing approaches impact the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement of Genshin Impact players in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing

Kotler and Armstrong (2008) assert that "Marketing is a process in which companies establish strong relationships with consumers and generate value for consumers, with the objective of capturing customer value as an imbalance."

Customer Engagement

Customer engagement is the outcome of the customer's voluntary and motivational investment of operand resources (such as equipment) and focal operand resources (such as behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and social knowledge and skills) into brand interactions in service systems, as per Hollebeek and Solem (2017). Van Doorn et al. (2010) interpret it as customer behavioural manifestations towards the brand or firm, beyond purchase, while Brodie et al. (2011) characterise it as a "psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships."

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach

A qualitative, phenomenological case-study approach is used to probe the player experience of *Genshin's* marketing. A qualitative case study is appropriate because it explores complex social phenomena in real-life contexts

(Yin, 2009), making it well suited for analyzing player engagement in the dynamic environment of Genshin Impact. This study employs a phenomenological approach to understand how players experience and interpret the game's digital marketing strategies. Phenomenology focuses on individuals' lived experiences and how they interpret those experiences. It seeks to understand how people perceive and make sense of aspects of their lives by exploring the deeper meanings behind their experiences. This approach aligns with the research objectives to explore players' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement. Eighteen informants (Indonesian *Genshin* players) participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews.

Informant and Sampling Technique

Purposive and snowball sampling are used to recruit players who were highly experienced (each had played *Genshin* for more than a year) and aware of its marketing campaigns. The planned sample size was 12–20 informants, consistent with qualitative norms for phenomenological studies (Guest et al., 2006; Creswell, 2013). In practice, 18 informants were interviewed. Data saturation was assessed as interviews progressed. By the 15th interview, recurring patterns and themes (e.g., emotional responses to marketing, behavioral changes due to game updates, habitual game-checking) had emerged repeatedly. Three additional interviews were conducted to confirm saturation. No new significant insights appeared, indicating that thematic saturation was reached with 18 informants. Thus, the final sample size (18 informants) was both methodologically sound and justified for the scope and depth of this study.

Type of Data and Source

This study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through interviews with informants. Secondary data were obtained by gathering relevant information from online Genshin Impact communities and social media platforms. For example, the researcher reviewed public discussions, forum posts, and official game promotional materials to complement the interview data. Using both primary and secondary sources enabled methodological triangulation and provided a richer understanding of how the game's marketing content is distributed and discussed.

Data Collection Method

Primary data were collected via semi-structured in-depth interviews. This approach provides flexibility to explore informants' experiences while ensuring that key topics are covered. An interview guide was prepared based on the literature and theoretical framework, with open-ended questions and prompts. The guide focused on themes such as: Player perceptions of Genshin Impact's digital marketing strategies, Emotional responses to marketing content, and Cognitive and behavioral aspects of engagement. Interviews were conducted online (via Zoom or Google Meet) and on-site according to each informant's availability. Each interview was conducted in Indonesian, audio-recorded with the informant's informed consent, and later transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then translated into English for analysis. Recording and transcription followed best practices (Sutton and Austin, 2015) to ensure accuracy. All study procedures were explained to informants beforehand, and each informant confirmed consent to be recorded.

Data Analysis Method

All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy (Busetto, 2020). Transcripts were then coded and analyzed using thematic analysis. Using thematic analysis, we coded the transcripts around the dimensions of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement (following Hollebeek et al., 2016). Codes were iteratively grouped into themes (for example, "nostalgic emotional trigger" or "resource-saving behavior") by comparing across interviews. We then interpreted these themes through the lens of the theories above (Flow, SDT, TPB, etc.). The analysis followed a structured process:

1. Familiarization with the data: The researcher read each transcript multiple times to become deeply familiar with the content.
2. Generating initial codes: Segments of text were labeled with codes that corresponded to concepts of interest, particularly focusing on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement.
3. Searching for patterns: Codes were examined across all transcripts to identify patterns, relationships, and overarching themes.
4. Reviewing and refining themes: Preliminary themes were reviewed for consistency and coherence. Related codes were grouped, and themes were split or combined as needed based on their recurrence and significance.
5. Defining and naming themes: Final themes were clearly defined, and each was given a descriptive name. Each theme captured a distinct aspect of how digital marketing influenced engagement.

6. Compiling the analysis into a narrative: The themes were organized into a coherent narrative that was linked back to the theoretical framework (e.g., Flow Theory, FOMO). Relevant quotations from informants were selected to illustrate each theme.

Coding was done manually. Recurring patterns (such as dimensions of engagement or marketing influence) were grouped under the broader themes identified. The coding process and theme development were documented in coding tables, showing how many informants mentioned each theme. These thematic tables (presented in Chapter 4) help summarize the distribution and frequency of themes across interviews. Throughout the analysis, the researcher followed recommendations for qualitative rigor (Busetto, 2020; Sutton and Austin, 2015), ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in the data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Informant Backgrounds

Distribution of informants by the year they started playing Genshin Impact. The majority began in 2020 or 2021 (39% each), with fewer joining in 2022 (17%) and only one informant (6%) starting in 2023. This shows a mix of early adopters and newer players in the sample. The presence of many early players (2020–2021) suggests that a large portion of the informants have long-term experience with the game's evolving content and marketing, while those joining later contribute fresh perspectives. These background characteristics ensure that findings consider both the engagement of long-standing community members and relatively newer entrants. Having outlined who the informants are and when they joined the game, it now turns to what initially attracted them to Genshin Impact. Understanding the attraction phase is key to seeing how the groundwork for engagement is laid before marketing efforts come into play.

Attraction to Genshin Impact

Character Design and overall Visual Appeal stand out as the most pervasive initial draws (mentioned by 18 and 17 informants respectively). A significant number also appreciated the game's World-Building (7) and Immersiveness (6), highlighting the value of narrative depth and atmosphere. Friend Influence (3) was less common but still notable, indicating that peer recommendations contributed for some. This distribution shows that aesthetic and content qualities of Genshin Impact were the key hooks for most players, with social influence as a supplementary factor. Therefore, the attraction phase is driven by Genshin Impact's aesthetic quality, compelling characters, and rich world-building, complemented by peer influence. These factors effectively initiate an emotional and cognitive hook in players. The findings show that Genshin's visual and narrative appeal lays a strong foundation for ongoing engagement, priming players to be receptive to the game's marketing efforts. With this strong first impression established, the stage is set for examining how players subsequently encounter and engage with digital marketing content, as discussed in the next section.

Exposure to Digital Marketing

The dominant exposure sources were YouTube (ads/trailers, 9 informants) and TikTok (6), reflecting the popularity of video content. Twitter was also a key channel (5 informants) for updates and news, while Instagram/Facebook campaigns and the official HoYoLAB app provided additional touchpoints (5 and 3 respectively). A few informants noted seeing offline ads (billboards) (3). This spread demonstrates the game's omnipresence: Genshin Impact's marketing reaches players through a combination of social media, video platforms, community apps, and even real-world advertising. The consistent multi-platform visibility builds familiarity and keeps players engaged with the game's news and promotions on a regular basis. Informants' continuous exposure to Genshin's marketing content indicates a successful omnichannel strategy by the game's publishers. This constant visibility builds anticipation for new content and maintains Genshin's relevance among both casual and veteran players. Even when not actively playing, players are reminded of the game through these channels, which primes their emotional readiness for deeper engagement. In line with integrated marketing principles, the synergy of multiple platforms ensures that Genshin Impact stays in the collective consciousness of its audience. Therefore, exposure is the foundation upon which further engagement builds: it sparks initial curiosity, drives players to check out updates or events, and eventually contributes to loyalty. With a clear picture of how widely players encounter Genshin's marketing, we next explore which channels they prefer or find most engaging, as not all channels are equally valued by the audience.

Preferred Marketing Channels

Among the variety of channels, YouTube and Instagram emerged as the most preferred platforms due to their visual richness and accessibility. Players reported frequently encountering content passively (e.g., on the YouTube homepage or Instagram reels) as well as actively seeking out trailers and drip marketing reveals on these platforms. Twitter and TikTok were also highlighted, especially for fast news and community reactions. YouTube Trailers and In-game Events are the top preferred channels (each noted by 8 informants) for receiving Genshin Impact updates and promotions, showing the importance of both external media and in-game content delivery. Patch Livestreams on platforms like Twitch/YouTube have a moderate following (4 informants), appreciated for direct communication of new content. Community Channels such as Discord or Forum (3 informants) serve those who seek peer discussions and leaks. Social Media Campaigns (5 informants) such as trending hashtags, challenges, or multi-platform promotions are also effectively engaging players, particularly by creating buzz that spills into their everyday social media use. Ultimately, informants prefer marketing through channels that integrate smoothly into their media consumption patterns and gaming routine. YouTube, TikTok, and Discord (among others) stand out because they provide the kind of content players actively seek whether it's trailers that entertain, announcements that inform, or social spaces that connect. This insight underscores that effective digital marketing is not just about being present everywhere (as established in the exposure section), but also about matching the message to the medium for maximum resonance. Having examined where players like to get their Genshin news and promos, the discussion now moves into the forms of engagement these marketing efforts cultivate, starting with cognitive engagement.

Emotional Engagement

Digital marketing content, particularly character demos, live streams, and promotional trailers, elicited strong emotional responses among players. Many described feeling excitement, hype, nostalgia, sadness, and admiration especially when content portrayed deep lore, music, and emotional narratives. This emotional connection often translated into a deeper investment in the game. Storyline's impact was slightly the most cited (8 informants) as it's reflecting how plot revelations and quests (often promoted through trailers or patch story teasers) emotionally invest players. Character Sympathy/Attachment (7 informants) shows that many players developed strong feelings for characters, partly through narrative-focused marketing that highlights character backstories. Trailer Emotion (emotional reactions to promotional videos) was reported by 5 players, underlining the role of marketing media in stirring excitement or even tears. Nostalgia Factor (3 informants), while less common, indicates a subset of players whose engagement is deepened by the game's resonance with their personal past experiences. These emotional hooks demonstrate that Genshin Impact's marketing and content don't just inform players as they move them on a personal level. Having explored the cognitive and emotional layers of engagement, the next section examines behavioral engagement which shows how marketing influences actual player behaviors and actions in and around the game.

Cognitive Engagement

Marketing content stimulated players' cognitive processes through speculation, analysis, and planning. Drip marketing where characters or updates are teased in small doses over time, plays a central role in activating players' minds to anticipate, strategize, and engage with speculative discussions within online communities. Players reported analyzing character abilities, saving primogems, and adjusting their strategies based on revealed information to stay informed about the game's evolving landscape. Character Builds/Optimization was a major focus (14 informants), indicating that many players dive into strategy and planning for their characters after consuming marketing or community content. Strategic Guides (8 informants) highlight the role of tutorials, tips, and walkthroughs (often spurred by updates or new content announcements) in engaging players' analytical side. Update Awareness (8 informants) shows that a good portion of players closely follow patch news, events, and banner schedules whereas much of which is communicated through marketing channels. Together, these illustrate how marketing content transforms into knowledge-driven player activities: players read, calculate, and strategize as a result of being informed about game updates. Ultimately, Genshin Impact's digital marketing significantly contributes to cognitive engagement by keeping players informed and providing stimuli for analysis and planning. Whether through official channels (like livestreams and update posts) or community content sparked by official reveals, players are routinely thinking about the game in a systematic way. This mental investment encourages sustained participation such as players who plan and strategize are likely to stick around to see their plans come to fruition. Having looked at the intellectual side of engagement, it now turns to the emotional dimension as how marketing stirs feelings and attachments among players.

Behavioral Engagement

The marketing strategies successfully influenced players' behavioral engagement. Actions ranged from logging in daily and sharing content on social media to participating in fan art creation and making in-game purchases. Informants frequently described how character teasers or update trailers motivated them to save or spend in-game currency or real money, influenced by emotional resonance and perceived value. Behavioral changes/actions influenced by marketing and the number of informants noting each. The most prevalent behavior was Resource saving (12 informants) such as saving in-game currencies (primogems, etc.) and materials in anticipation of upcoming characters or events that are marketed beforehand. Event Participation (9 informants) was also high, showing that marketing successfully drives players to log in and take part in limited-time events. Purchase Motivation (8 informants) indicates that for many, seeing enticing marketing (new characters, skins, deals) leads to spending real money on the game. Urgency/Obsession (4 informants) captures those who reported extreme measures (like altering sleep or meal schedules) due to fear of missing out on content. Friend Coordination (3 informants) reflects how marketing prompts group planning (friends syncing their play or pulls). Collectively, these behaviors demonstrate that digital marketing can convert player interest into concrete action, both in-game and in terms of monetization and community activity. Ultimately players' behaviors are measurably and directly shaped by Genshin Impact's marketing campaigns. From how they manage resources and schedule their play, to their spending habits and social gaming activities, marketing acts as a driving force converting engagement into action. These actions are often rational (planning and saving) but can also be impulsive (spending due to excitement) and socially reinforced (joining friends in events). The data underscores the power of well-timed and well-crafted marketing to not just entertain or inform an audience, but to change what they do. Having examined these personal and social behavior changes, next consider a specific marketing approach Genshin uses such as the use drip marketing strategy and its impact on sustaining player interest and activity.

Impact of the Drip Marketing Strategy

Drip marketing was identified as a powerful approach in maintaining long-term player engagement. Informants highlighted how regular teasers, roadmap reveals, and limited-time character banners built anticipation and kept them consistently engaged with the game—even outside of gameplay. This slow-release strategy cultivated community speculation, discussions, and emotional hype cycles around upcoming updates. Four main impacts were identified: Heightened Curiosity (6 informants) whereas players become intensely curious and pay close attention to every teaser drop. Daily Engagement Rise (6 informants) in many log in or check news more frequently when drip feeds are ongoing, integrating the game more into their daily routine. Pre-release Emotional Attachment (4 informants) which players develop feelings (excitement, fondness) for upcoming content even before using it in-game, due to the narrative/visual buildup and Community Discussion (4 informants) which are the teaser campaigns lead to lots of chatter, theory-crafting, and shared excitement in the community (forums, social media). These effects illustrate how drip marketing prolongs and amplifies the engagement cycle, making the anticipation phase almost as engaging as the content release itself. Overall, the impact of drip marketing on Genshin Impact's audience is overwhelmingly positive in terms of engagement: it builds sustained curiosity, emotional investment, and community interaction. Each teaser becomes an event in its own right. Having explored how marketing approaches influence players within the game cycle, the final findings section will look at how Genshin Impact's marketing and engagement extend beyond the game into real-world areas.

In-Game and Real-World Integration

Genshin Impact marketing extended beyond digital screens into real-life integration. Informants expressed engagement through offline purchases of merchandise, cosplay, and themed events. The branding was described as "aesthetic and emotional," with its digital marketing fostering a lifestyle affinity. Several players noted how the game had become part of their daily routine and identity, further reinforcing long-term attachment. Merchandise Purchases (4 informants) show a portion of the audience invests financially in real-world products related to the game, often influenced by marketing of those products. Themed Venue Visits (3 informants) demonstrate that special marketing events or collabs (like cafes, exhibitions) successfully draw players to partake in real-life experiences. Social Media Expression (3 informants) indicates players curate and engage with Genshin-themed content in their personal social media, effectively becoming part of the game's extended marketing as fan ambassadors. Real-life Slang/ Culture (4 informants) highlights that Genshin has permeated everyday communication for some, with game terms and jokes being shared among friends. Together, these points illustrate a hybrid engagement: players carry their passion from the digital realm into tangible actions and social identity. Ultimately, Genshin Impact's influence on engaged players extends well beyond screen time. The digital marketing approaches successfully foster a community and culture that

players participate in both online and offline. The game's world spills into the real world through merchandise, events, social interactions, and personal identity. This kind of 360-degree engagement where a person's entertainment, social life, and consumer behavior all intertwine around the game – is a testament to the effectiveness of Genshin's marketing in creating a brand experience rather than just a product. Having detailed the various findings, from initial attractions and multi-channel exposure to cognitive/ emotional involvement, behavioral changes, and real-life integration, the next section will synthesize these insights.

The Development of The Integrated Engagement Loop Model

Bringing together the insights which detailed the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral facets of player engagement, this study proposes an Integrated Engagement Loop Model as an original framework emerging from informant insights and cross-case thematic analysis. The model is developed to synthesize how emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement dimensions interact in a continuous, self-reinforcing cycle under the influence of Genshin Impact's digital marketing efforts. In essence, the Integrated Engagement Loop Model offers a unifying explanation of the patterns observed in earlier findings which are from initial attraction and channel exposure to sustained in-game and real-world involvement, by illustrating how these facets of engagement feed into each other dynamically. A key reason for developing this new model was to address the limitations of traditional linear frameworks like the Hierarchy of Effects (HOE) model. The HOE is a classic marketing theory that describes a consumer's journey in sequential stages (typically moving from awareness and knowledge to liking, preference, conviction, and finally purchase). While useful as a basic outline of cognitive-affective-behavioral progression, the HOE's one-way linearity proved inadequate for characterizing Genshin Impact players' engagement. Critics of the HOE model have long noted that it oversimplifies decision processes and fails to account for *non-linear* or iterative behavior. Indeed, the findings show that Indonesian players do not experience marketing influences as a single pass through a funnel; rather, their engagement is cyclical, with each marketing touchpoint reactivating interest and leading to repeat behaviors. The Hierarchy of Effects assumes a one-off progression ending in a conversion, but Genshin Impact's ongoing content updates and community interactions mean that engagement doesn't "end" at a purchase or one action – it continually loops as new content rekindles both emotional excitement and rational consideration in players.

Table 1. The Development of The Integrated Engagement Loop Model

Aspect	Hierarchy of Effects	Integrated Engagement Loop Model
Structure	Linear (Awareness → Knowledge → Liking → Preference → Conviction → Purchase)	Circular loop (Stimulus → Emotion → Cognition → Behavior → Feedback)
Directionality	One-way, with end at purchase (action)	Continuous cycle with no fixed endpoint
Feedback mechanism	Absent or implicit	Explicit: post-engagement responses restart the loop
Temporal dynamics	One-time progression	Ongoing process across events, updates, and campaigns
Player experience alignment	General marketing-consumer behavior	Specific to live-service games and digital-native players
Original contribution	Based on classic advertising model (1961)	Developed from grounded findings in Indonesian Genshin Impact players

The reason why it is a loop, as The Integrated Engagement Loop Model reconceptualizes the engagement process as an iterative loop instead of a linear path. In this model, every marketing stimulus (such as a drip marketing teaser, a social media post, or an in-game banner) triggers an interplay of emotional reactions (excitement, FOMO, nostalgia), cognitive responses (curiosity, strategizing, information seeking), and behavioral outcomes (logging in, sharing content, making in-game purchases). These outcomes, in turn, feed back into the player's overall experience and emotional satisfaction, thereby increasing their receptivity to the next marketing stimulus.

This creates a self-reinforcing cycle: for example, a new character trailer might spark joy and anticipation (emotion) which leads a player to research the character's abilities (cognitive engagement) and then participate in the event or make a purchase (behavior). The positive experience from that participation (e.g. enjoyment of gameplay

or social recognition from fellow players) then reinforces the player's emotional bond with the game, making them more likely to engage with future marketing content. In contrast, the HOE model would view the same scenario as a straight line where marketing causes awareness and then, stage by stage, a purchase which misses the reality that players often re-enter the cycle with each update or campaign. As marketing theory is evolving, there is growing recognition that the old linear "funnel" must give way to models of ongoing interaction. Modern consumers (especially gamers) engage with brands in a non-linear, dynamic way, moving back and forth between stages and *constantly re-engaging* rather than following a rigid sequence. The Integrated Engagement Loop aligns with this perspective by explicitly capturing the *fluid, recursive nature* of engagement in a games-as-a-service context. The Integrated Engagement Loop Model extends the HOE framework by adding dynamic feedback and real-world engagement cycles, making it better suited for explaining how digital marketing in modern games like Genshin Impact maintains long-term, evolving customer engagement.

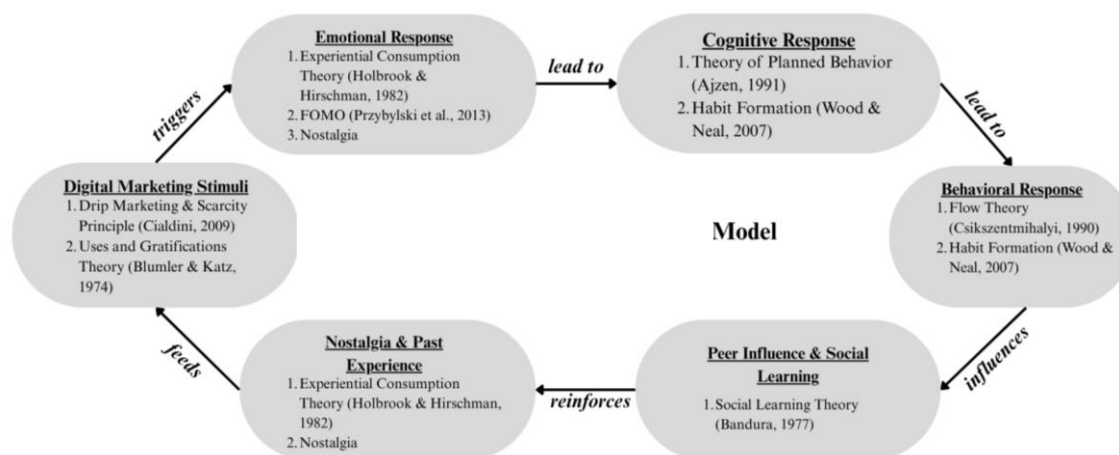


Figure 1. Integrated Loop Model

Source: Wala, 2025

Together, those dimensions form an Integrated Engagement Loop. Emotional excitement from a trailer leads to cognitive planning ("I want that new character"), which triggers behaviors (farming primogems, logging in) that then feed back into emotional anticipation of future releases. Each stage reinforces the next. Conceptually, this loop satisfies SDT needs and sustains flow: for example, successfully pulling a character (behavioral outcome) boosts competence, which makes the next round of challenge (another banner) more absorbing. The loop also leverages scarcity and anticipation at each turn which then players continually feel a "next drip" is coming, so they stay engaged. In effect, Genshin's marketing is not peripheral but core to the player experience: it transforms routine updates into emotional events and knowledge quests. This finding is encapsulated in our model, which shows Genshin's marketing cues (drip reveals, story trailers, events) igniting a self-perpetuating cycle of engagement. These insights extend theory in digital marketing: unlike one-shot ads, Genshin's marketing co-creates the entertainment value. It demonstrates the power of interactive, experience-driven marketing (akin to Kotler's Marketing 6.0 focus on immersive experience) in provoking intrinsic motivation. The loop model contributes a new perspective by explicitly linking marketing inputs to the three facets of engagement, grounded in established theories (Flow, SDT, TPB) and emerging marketing concepts (FOMO, scarcity). Practically, this suggests that live-service game marketers should design campaigns that simultaneously trigger emotion, empower player agency, and prompt action in a timed sequence.

Discussion

Multidimensional Engagement Through Marketing

The evidence confirms that Genshin Impact's marketing influences players emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally, highlighting the multidimensional nature of customer engagement. This aligns with Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) experiential consumption theory, which posits that consumption involves affective, cognitive, and conative (action-driven) responses. This is clearly evident: players were emotionally drawn in by storylines and characters (emotional branding), intellectually engaged by strategic content (cognitive stimulation), and behaviorally driven to participate in events and spending behaviors (explained by TPB and FOMO frameworks). Marketing serves as both the catalyst and sustainer of these forms of engagement.

Attraction and Initial Engagement

Genshin Impact's visual aesthetics, compelling narratives, and immersive world-building are primary attractions. Marketing amplifies these qualities through high-production trailers, music, and promotional art, validating Kotler and Keller's (2016) concept of emotional branding. The emergence of the Halo Effect further supports this, as many informants formed favorable impressions of the game based solely on its visuals which demonstrate how aesthetic excellence can shape perceptions of quality and value before gameplay is even experienced. Peer influence also plays a strong role, as informants reported being drawn in through friends, illustrating Bandura's Social Learning Theory. In practice, social media visibility and word-of-mouth turn players themselves into organic marketing vectors. This initial attraction is driven by aesthetics, emotion, and social cues as it lays the psychological foundation for deeper engagement within the Integrated Engagement Loop.

Exposure and Channel Engagement

Informants' experiences confirm Genshin's omnichannel marketing strategy. Content surfaced across YouTube, TikTok, Twitter, HoYoLAB, and even offline media like billboards, demonstrating broad and consistent presence. This reflects Uses and Gratifications Theory, as players engaged with Genshin Impact's marketing across different platforms based on their individual motivations such as seeking entertainment, information, or social interaction which collectively reinforced brand familiarity and ongoing engagement. The use of diverse platforms also aligns with Uses and Gratifications Theory: players selectively engaged with platforms that fulfilled specific needs. YouTube and TikTok offered entertainment and social connection (hedonic/social gratifications), while in-game announcements and patch notes provided informational value. The synergy of meeting different user desires across platforms created a rich engagement loop whereas players not only encountered marketing but welcomed it on their preferred channels.

Emotional Engagement: Building Bonds

Emotional responses emerged as a central theme. Players reported crying during cutscenes, feeling nostalgic from music, and experiencing joy during trailer drops which has been demonstrating the potency of emotional storytelling. Genshin's audiovisual marketing such as trailers and event themes which deepens emotional connections between players and the game's characters and storylines. This aligns with Experiential Consumption Theory, which emphasizes how affective responses and symbolic meanings contribute to consumer engagement. The emotional impact of these experiences can foster loyalty and encourage word-of-mouth sharing. Additionally, many informants associated the game's music, visuals, and themes with past memories of anime, earlier games, or childhood moments, underscoring the role of nostalgia in shaping emotional engagement. This nostalgic resonance enhances the symbolic richness of the experience and strengthens the bond between players and the game. Flow Theory also appears in how players describe getting "lost" in the game which suggests that marketing, by highlighting immersive aspects, indirectly invites players into a state of focused absorption and emotional investment.

Cognitive Engagement as Empowerment

Genshin Impact's marketing does more than promote whereas it educates and empowers. Informants frequently cited how trailers, patch notes, and influencer content led to research strategies, builds, and gameplay mechanics. This reflects Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, where competence and autonomy drive intrinsic motivation. Informational marketing helps players feel more capable and self-directed, reinforcing voluntary engagement and deeper commitment. Behaviors like pre-planning banners, using spreadsheets, or consuming how-to content demonstrate intellectual investment, not just casual interest.

Behavioral Engagement: From Intention to Action

Marketing's impact is most visibly reflected in player behaviors such as increased logins, strategic saving, event participation, and in some cases, monetary spending. The influence of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) was apparent, as time-limited events and banners created urgency that led players to rearrange daily routines or even skip meals to complete content. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provides a strong framework to understand these actions. Marketing shaped: Attitudes ("This new character is awesome, I want it"), Subjective norms ("Everyone's doing this event, I should too"), and Perceived behavioral control ("I've saved resources; I can succeed"). These perceptions translated into concrete behaviors such as saving Primogems, purchasing Welkin/Battle Passes, and

coordinating with friends, while demonstrating that marketing messages influenced both individual intention and collective participation.

Drip Marketing: Sustaining the Hype

Informants consistently identified drip marketing such as gradual character or content reveals, as a key strategy for sustaining long-term interest. These slow “leaks” or official teasers sparked curiosity, excitement, and even anxiety as deadlines approached. Players described how they began farming, saving, or checking social media more frequently as the build-up intensified. This aligns with Flow Theory and Experiential Consumption Theory, which view engagement as a continuous emotional and cognitive experience. Genshin’s episodic release structure transformed patch cycles into narrative events. Instead of dropping all content at once, the staggered reveals kept players engaged, speculative, and emotionally involved. Combined with limited-time banners and event durations, this strategy leveraged the principle of scarcity, creating urgency and reinforcing the sense that players had to act quickly or miss out. As seen through FOMO and TPB, this approach drove both individual planning and social coordination, highlighting that engagement is not a single moment, but a sustained process influenced by anticipation and limited availability.

Real-World Integration: Beyond the Game

Finally, the most advanced form of engagement observed was cultural integration such as when Genshin transcended the game and became part of daily life. Informants mentioned attending themed cafés, collecting merchandise, using in-game slang with friends, and tagging peers in promotional posts. These behaviors align with goals of experiential marketing, where the product becomes embedded in personal identity and lifestyle. Marketing campaigns that encourage user-generated content (UGC), real-world collaborations, and community events (e.g., concerts, brand partnerships) played a role in this bleed-over effect. When players become informal ambassadors, introducing the game to others through their own enthusiasm as it extends the brand’s reach far beyond paid channels.

Integrated Engagement Loop Model: The Emerging Loop

One of the key theoretical contributions of this research is the introduction of an emergent concept termed the Integrated Engagement Loop Model. This model emerged inductively from the study’s interview data and thematic analysis, offering a novel conceptual lens grounded in empirical findings. In contrast to conventional linear frameworks (e.g. awareness → interest → action), the Integrated Engagement Loop portrays player engagement as an iterative, self-reinforcing cycle. Under this framework, each marketing stimulus (such as a character teaser or event announcement) elicits emotional excitement and cognitive involvement in the player, which then leads to behavioral responses (for example, logging in, discussing content with friends, or making in-game purchases). The outcomes of these behaviors which are enjoyment from gameplay, rewards earned, and social recognition – circle back to reinforce the player’s initial excitement and interest. In other words, marketing cues do not trigger one-off actions; they initiate an ongoing loop of engagement. This emergent framework is firmly rooted in the study’s findings and represents a new way of understanding how digital game content sustains player involvement.

Importantly, the Integrated Engagement Loop explicitly incorporates emotional and social drivers that are often implicit or missing in traditional models. For example, excitement about a new character or storyline can spark a strong sense of FOMO (fear of missing out), creating urgency to participate. Similarly, nostalgia for past game experiences – triggered by returning events or fan-favorite content – can pull lapsed players back into the cycle by evoking positive memories. Social influences act as powerful amplifiers: peer discussions, community hype, and word-of-mouth excitement around updates heighten individual players’ desire to re-engage. Each of these factors feeds into the loop. When friends share enthusiasm for an upcoming event, it increases a player’s emotional motivation; if a marketing drop reminds a player of why they loved the game before, it deepens their attachment. Together, these emotional and social cues create a compounding feedback system: marketing stimulus → heightened emotions and thoughts → gameplay and sharing → positive experience and memory → renewed interest. By explicitly embedding FOMO, nostalgia, and peer influence into the model, the Integrated Engagement Loop moves beyond a simple cause-and-effect view and acknowledges the rich psychological and social context of gaming engagement.

From a theoretical perspective, the Integrated Engagement Loop Model makes several contributions to marketing and engagement theory. First, it synthesizes elements from established theories into a cohesive framework tailored to games-as-a-service. For example, it aligns with Flow Theory by recognizing how immersive experiences sustain focus, incorporates Self-Determination Theory by showing how marketing content can satisfy players’ needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and echoes Experiential Consumption by emphasizing the role of

emotional storytelling. It also integrates persuasion principles (such as scarcity and social proof) by illustrating how limited-time events and community hype drive behavior. By framing marketing touchpoints as part of a continuous loop rather than isolated triggers, the model supports emerging views that the classic marketing funnel is evolving into a circular process of ongoing interaction. In doing so, it explains why periodic content releases and drip campaigns can build long-term loyalty: each marketing moment not only sparks immediate engagement but also lays the groundwork for the next wave of involvement.

Ultimately, the Integrated Engagement Loop Model enriches academic theory by providing a fresh conceptual lens for examining player engagement in digital gaming. It reveals how emotional excitement, cognitive anticipation, and social dynamics interact dynamically to sustain engagement over time. This insight offers scholars a deeper understanding of digital engagement processes and suggests new avenues for research (for instance, empirically testing the loop's dynamics or exploring similar loops in other entertainment contexts). At the same time, the model has practical relevance: it guides game developers and marketers to design content and campaigns that intentionally feed this engagement loop, fostering enduring player loyalty. In summary, the Integrated Engagement Loop Model represents an innovative theoretical contribution that bridges and extends existing concepts, providing both a richer explanation of Genshin Impact's player engagement and a useful framework for future work in gaming and digital marketing.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

1. The findings reveal that digital marketing is not a separate or supporting element as it is deeply embedded in the player experience, influencing how players feel, think, and act across every stage of their engagement with Genshin Impact
2. This research conceptualizes customer engagement as a multi-dimensional construct comprising emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement.
3. Emotional Engagement was triggered by trailers, storytelling, music, and time-limited events. Informants expressed excitement, nostalgia, and even tears—showing how emotional storytelling and audiovisual cues deepen attachment. This aligns with Experiential Consumption Theory, and FOMO was frequently cited as a driver of urgency and emotional involvement.
4. Cognitive Engagement emerged as players actively consumed patch notes, watched guides, analyzed gameplay mechanics, and planned character pulls. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory (players seeking autonomy and competence) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (players choosing platforms based on specific informational and entertainment needs). Flow Theory was also evident as players described losing track of time while immersed in the game.
5. Behavioral Engagement was seen in repeated gameplay, daily logins, saving resources, and purchasing in-game items. Marketing touchpoints like drip marketing, limited-time offers, and teaser reveals played a direct role in shaping these behaviors. The urgency created by scarcity and countdown-based events sparked both individual actions and peer-group coordination, supported by the Theory of Planned Behavior.

Recommendations

1. Future research should test and refine the integrated engagement loop model in gaming. Larger-scale surveys or experiments could examine how FOMO, flow, and SDT needs interact over time. Other researchers should also explore cross-cultural comparisons (e.g. do Indonesian and Western players differ in response to FOMO or social rewards?). Measuring actual in-game behavior (logins, playtime, spending) alongside surveys would validate self-reported engagement. Finally, examining potential negative effects (e.g. stress from FOMO) would provide a more balanced theoretical view of these marketing practices.

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