

Beyond Monopoly: Enhancing SME Branding Knowledge through Board Game Experiences

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ABSTRACT

In the era of rapid technological advancements and ever-changing consumer behaviors, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) face the challenge of keeping up with the complexities of branding in the competitive market landscape. This study delves into the innovative use of board games as an educational tool to enhance SMEs' understanding of branding concepts, mainly targeting entrepreneurs with limited formal education.

Drawing on experiential learning and gamification principles, the research investigates the impact of board games designed specifically for SMEs. These games, tailored to address businesses' unique challenges with limited educational resources, provide entrepreneurs with a dynamic and interactive platform to explore branding strategies, brand identity development, and customer engagement techniques.

Through workshops and in-depth case studies, the research assesses the effectiveness of board games in facilitating active learning and knowledge retention among SME owners and managers. Preliminary findings reveal that the immersive and engaging nature simplifies complex branding concepts and fosters a collaborative learning environment, enabling participants to experiment with diverse strategies in a risk-free setting.

This research advocates integrating gamified learning strategies into formal and informal SME training programs. The findings underscore the potential of innovative, interactive methods in democratizing access to branding knowledge and nurturing the growth of SMEs in competitive markets. By bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, board games emerge as a promising instrument for enhancing the branding capabilities of SMEs, thereby promoting their sustainable growth and competitiveness in the market.

Keywords: gamified education, SME branding, board game experiences, experiential learning, innovative training methods

INTRODUCTION

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) face the ongoing problem of managing branding in competitive marketplaces due to fast technical changes and evolving consumer behaviors. SMEs, especially entrepreneurs with less formal education, need help understanding and applying successful branding techniques to differentiate their products. In their research, (Muhonen et al., 2017) stated that brand performance could significantly impact an SME's financial performance, as a businessman owner has high hopes of obtaining good economic results. Therefore, brands are essential for SMEs' success when facing market problems.

Brand strategy is a critical factor in the success of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) across various operational aspects. Research has shown that a brand-oriented strategy can positively impact SMEs' financial performance by enhancing brand awareness and credibility ((Anees-ur-Rehman et al., 2018). Therefore, SMEs' understanding of brand strategy is vital to supporting brand performance, which ultimately helps the business develop. The importance of branding for SME success is often underestimated due to their smaller scale and size (Tewary & Mehta, 2021).

Studies have also indicated that integrating brand, quality, and corporate social responsibility management can improve agricultural SMEs' financial performance (Fan, 2023) Moreover, the interaction between entrepreneurial orientation and brand strategy significantly influences brand equity and value in SMEs (Alanazi, 2018). Employer branding is highlighted as essential for SMEs in effectively managing human resources, aiding in talent attraction and retention (Monteiro et al., 2020). Aligning the brand with the personal characteristics and values of the owner-manager is emphasized to maintain authenticity and core values (Centeno et al., 2019). This causes the increasing importance of SMEs in developing the company brand so that not only the owner's branding is formed but also the business brand is known in the market. By forming personal branding and product/company brands, SMEs can compete and have differentiators that help them gain market share.

Additionally, research emphasizes the significance of branding capabilities, both internal and external, in positively impacting SME performance (Odoom et al., 2017). SMEs can enhance their brand image in the digital era by utilizing digital platforms such as social media and websites (Suryani et al., 2021). Innovative branding strategies, including customer-based brand equity and integrated marketing communication, can significantly influence SME growth and brand recognition (Setiawan, 2021). In conclusion, recent research underscores the multifaceted benefits of brand strategy for SMEs, including improvements in financial performance, talent attraction and retention, brand authenticity, and digital brand image enhancement. These findings highlight the critical role that strategic brand management plays in the overall success and sustainability of Small and Medium Enterprises.

The fact that branding and marketing skills are so crucial to the success and growth of small and medium-sized businesses shows how important they are for SME owners. Small business owners need to know much about branding and marketing to build and run strong brands, leading to brand value and business success (Tewary & Mehta, 2021). SME entrepreneurs play a crucial role in the brand development and establishment of identity, underscoring the importance of their influence over the brand's perception and image (Spence & Essoussi, 2010). In addition, it has been determined that entrepreneurial marketing poses the most significant obstacle for SME entrepreneurs, underscoring the critical importance of marketing expertise in guaranteeing the longevity and expansion of their enterprises (Amjad et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted SMEs' branding, emphasizing the necessity for resilience and flexibility in branding strategy. Furthermore, the entrepreneur's brand orientation has been identified as a significant aspect of the success of SME branding, emphasizing entrepreneurs' influential role in influencing brand positioning and perception (Ogunsanya et al., 2022). The significance of digital literacy in creating business and marketing networks reinforces the necessity of skills and knowledge in exploiting digital platforms for branding and marketing reasons (Sariwulan et al., 2020).

This study explores how board games can be used as a tool to help small and medium-sized enterprises better understand branding principles. Exploring how board games help entrepreneurs with limited educational resources learn via experience. The study investigates the impact of specially designed board games created to address SMEs' branding difficulties. These board games provide entrepreneurs with a dynamic and interactive platform to delve into important aspects of branding, such as brand positioning development tactics and customer interaction techniques.

We intend to assess the effectiveness of these board games in encouraging active learning and knowledge retention among SME owners and managers using a combination of workshops and in-depth case studies. Preliminary findings indicate that board games' immersive and engaging nature simplifies complex branding concepts, enabling a collaborative learning environment where participants can experiment with various techniques in risk-free settings.

Furthermore, this study supports the incorporation of gamified learning tactics into official and informal SME training programs, acknowledging the potential for such methodologies to democratize access to branding expertise. By bridging the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application, board games emerge as a promising avenue for strengthening SMEs' branding capabilities, fostering long-term growth, and increasing competitiveness in the market. Hopefully, this study can make a clear result about the effectiveness of gamification, which is using board games as a learning method for SME owners to understand branding and its components as well as marketing skills.

This study emphasizes the importance of creative, interactive learning methods in empowering SMEs by testing user satisfaction after trying to play it. It highlights the transformative potential of gamified experiences in supporting establishing and consolidating brands within competitive markets. Finally, by democratizing access to branding expertise and encouraging practical application, board games emerge as a catalyst for supporting SMEs' growth and resilience in an ever-changing business landscape. The user responses and satisfaction can be compared

to the more traditional methods such as Workshops and seminars that the government provides to these SMEs.

RESEARCH METHOD

A mixed-methods approach incorporating qualitative and quantitative methodologies is valuable in this research. The development of interactive board games is Strategically crafted to elucidate fundamental branding concepts such as brand positioning, target audience identification, and message consistency. These immersive, hands-on games enable SME owners and managers to engage with branding principles in a stimulating and collaborative environment. Through a structured experimental design and qualitative analysis of participant feedback, we evaluate the impact of these board game experiences on branding knowledge acquisition and application.

This research uses a qualitative approach through interviews supported by a questionnaire to determine respondents' satisfaction with the branding board game they play. For the respondents this research focuses on 100 SMEs owner and teams, with an age range of 19-27, either male or female who have run their SMEs Business for more than one year, the SMEs can be from various industries, the SMEs selected is from the Universitas Ciputra partners.

This was done to find out the respondents' experience in playing board games and to see an increase in their understanding of branding. In the initial stage, SME owners were asked questions through a short interview before playing the board game to determine their knowledge of branding skills. In the second stage, they were invited to play a branding board game that had been prepared previously. In the third stage, they were asked to complete a questionnaire to determine their comfort in playing board games. In the final stage, they were interviewed to determine their understanding of branding. The questionnaire data was processed to determine their comfort in playing board games, where the data was processed using SPSS. Interviews via FGD per group were chosen to obtain an overview of the respondents' knowledge.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) entrepreneurs who possess limited formal education frequently encounter more formidable obstacles in grappling with the intense competition of the contemporary business environment due to a multitude of factors:

1. **Lack of Business Knowledge:** Although formal education generally imparts fundamental understanding in domains such as marketing, finance, and management—all critical for a prosperous business—this lack of business knowledge persists. Lack of this information may impede the ability of SME proprietors to comprehend market dynamics, make well-informed decisions, and efficiently administer their resources (Massimino & Turner, 2018).
2. **Limited Access to Resources:** Compared to their more erudite counterparts, entrepreneurs with a lower level of education may need help accessing financial resources, mentorship opportunities, and networks. This may impede their capacity to solicit counsel, obtain financial support, and capitalize on prospects for development and expansion.
3. **Technological Barriers:** In the contemporary era of digitalization, the ability to operate effectively in the digital realm is becoming progressively critical for achieving business objectives. Limited-educated SME proprietors might need help implementing and adapting to new technologies, which could impede their capacity to streamline operations, acquire new clients, and maintain market competitiveness (Bachtiar et al., 2021).
4. **Complex Regulatory Environment:** Succeeding in business ownership's legal and regulatory facets necessitates a specific degree of comprehension and adherence to regulations. Less educated SME proprietors need help navigating these intricacies, potentially encountering sanctions, legal disputes, or regulatory impediments that disrupt their business activities.

5. **Limited Branding and Marketing Skills:** Establishing a robust brand and proficiently promoting offerings are indispensable for enticing clientele and distinguishing oneself within the marketplace. Limited-educated SME proprietors might be more capable of formulating persuasive branding strategies and marketing campaigns, impeding their ability to contend with better-established rivals or possess more significant resources.
6. **Adaptability and Innovation:** Due to the ever-changing nature of the business environment, SME proprietors must be able to innovate and adjust to shifting consumer preferences, market trends, and industry disruptions. Limited-educated individuals might encounter difficulties when attempting to innovate, adapt, or pivot their businesses amid emergent opportunities and challenges, placing them at a competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis more agile rivals.

With the board game, the SME owner/manager is challenged to compete in a restaurant-themed competition. The player who successfully builds their brand reputation and attracts more customers wins the game. To achieve this, they will learn about various aspects of business strategy, marketing, production, customer satisfaction, and their relation to brand building. Players can even 'play dirty' by using action cards to recruit or steal other players' cards. This type of activity allows them to apply the concepts they've just learned, and competing with others makes it more enjoyable and similar to real-world business competition.

The making of the board game to help SME owners/managers understand branding and brand strategy in gaining market share has gone through the stages below:

1. Development of Board Game Prototypes
2. Participant Selection
3. Workshops and Case Studies
4. Surveys and Questionnaires
5. Interviews and Focus Groups:

After going through these stages, a satisfaction test was carried out with this branding board game by adapting the satisfaction questionnaire (Doll & Torkzadeh, 1988). Table 1 below is The Five Dimensions of End User Computing Satisfaction, adapted to measure user satisfaction with the board game created. Satisfaction focuses on content, accuracy, format, timeliness, and ease of use.

Dimension	Items
Content	1. The system provides the precise Information you Need
	2. The Information content of the system meets your needs
	3. The system provides reports that seem to be just about exactly what you need
	4. The system provides sufficient information
Accuracy	1. The system is accurate
	2. You are satisfied with the accuracy of the system
Format	1. The output of the system is presented in a useful format
	2. The system information is clear
Timeliness	1. You get the information you need from the system at a suitable time
	2. The system provides up-to-date information
Easy to Use	3. The system is user friendly
	4. The system is easy to use

Table 1 The Five Dimensions of End-User Computing Satisfaction
 Source: adapted from Doll et.al. (2004)

Result

Researchers interviewed numerous respondents while testing the card game to triangulate their thoughts on the instruments utilized. Most respondents said this board game was fun and made them understand branding and brand strategy.

Respondent A said “*Saya merasa game-nya seru, kalau memahami kemauan pasar, membentuk brand maka konsumen datang. Ini saya suka karena saya menang ini* (I feel that the game is amazing, when I understand what the market want, build the brand then the customer come. I love it because I won it)”

Another respondent said even though they did not win the game, because of this game, they understood the importance of understanding what customers think to build a brand and its strategy. These techniques generally assist SME owners in thinking logically and systematically when they enjoy the game. (Alejandria et al., 2023) They found in their study that individuals feel excited, happy, and nervous while playing the board game, but they can be more motivated to learn more because they want to win the game. The board game motivates them to learn. (Wicaksana & Mangundjaya, 2022) Also, support this finding. Our study also found that the respondents wished to learn more after they played the game.

Respondent B said “*Saya kalah, tapi karena kalah maka saya harus menang hahahaha* (I lose but because I lost, I must win)”

Respondent C said “*Saya cek kembali kenapa saya bisa kalah, kenapa konsumen bisa diambil dia* (I check again why I lose, why may consument became his/her)”

Respondents from other groups who played this game also felt the same way. Respondents who lost generally remained excited, which motivated them to learn how to improve their brand and brand strategy through this game so that consumers could choose them.

The most significant feature of this card game is that it encourages users to think in line with the framework and the proper order when creating a brand. Most SME owners are not accustomed to reading books; therefore, providing tools with theoretical explanations helps them understand more about branding, which eventually aids in brand growth. SME owners and managers unknowingly develop their knowledge and skills about the brand's strategy through this game. How can they get market share from their competitors so that after they play this board game, they can apply their skills and knowledge to their business?

Based on interviews in the form of FGDs, this board game helps stimulate and motivate SME business owners and managers to develop their understanding of brand and brand strategy. Based on their reactions, they enjoy the game, and this game motivates them to understand more about brand and brand strategy because they also want to compete and win the game.

To understand whether the card game can satisfy all the respondents, all respondents are given an End User Computing Satisfaction Questionnaire adapted from (Doll & Torkzadeh, 1988) to gauge their opinion on the card game they utilize using a 1-7 Likert scale. The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out more about whether, according to respondents who played this board game, it is acceptable or not.

However, before distributing the EUCS questionnaire, each of the question items (Information Quality, System Excellence, System User Characteristics, Overall Satisfaction) in the questionnaire was pilot-tested to measure the reliability and validity of whether the tool used in the research is correct and consistent when used in other similar research. When the Cronbach Alpha value exceeds 0.7, the item's questions are said to be reliable (Wong, 2024), and the questionnaire is considered valid if the Pearson correlation value from the results of the correlation test exceeds 0.5 and is significant if the sig value is less than 0.05 (Rainey et al., 2021).

The reliability measurements show that Information quality has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.934, system excellence has a value of 0.829, user characteristics has a result of 0.936, and overall satisfaction has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.936. Therefore, all items in the questionnaire are reliable and can be used to measure. The validity test of the statement items in information quality, system excellence, system user characteristics, and overall satisfaction is also more than the threshold.

Therefore, all statement items in the questionnaire are valid for measuring respondent satisfaction. The questionnaire is accurate and valid. Hence, the items in the questionnaire can be used to measure the satisfaction of respondents who

take part in a simulation using a board game to understand branding and brand strategy.

Description	Mean
Average Quality of Information	5.06
Average System Benefits	5.10
Average Characteristics of System	
Users	5.17
Average Overall Satisfaction	5.19

Table 2 Mean Respondents' Answers about Satisfaction with Boardgames
source: author's documentation

The questionnaire was then delivered to all respondents who played the board game; each indicator's satisfaction was rated on a scale of 1 (extremely unsatisfied) to 7. Although the average figure is not a perfect score, the trend of user satisfaction tools is positive because it is more significant than 3.5, which is the threshold between satisfaction and discontent. Table 2 shows that overall, respondents were satisfied with the board games they played.

The statements that emerged were "I feel this board game has fulfilled information management" and "I am satisfied with this board game," which obtained an average score of 5.19, meaning that most respondents were satisfied with the board game they played. The number of respondents who fall into the dissatisfied category is 20%, so even though the majority fall into the satisfied category, this board game can be improved further to achieve the objectives of using the board game.

The lowest average result was for information quality, namely 5.06, meaning that respondents felt the quality of information related to explanations and rules for playing this board game could be improved. However, respondents understood the explanation and rules of this board game, considering that the limit was quite satisfied at 3.5. The number of respondents who felt that the quality of information

was in the less understandable category was 19%, which was less than the overall satisfaction results. Still, from the mean, it was found that of those who chose the "quite satisfied" to "very satisfied" category, more were in "very satisfied" and "very satisfied" compared to those in information quality, namely, on average choosing the "understand" category. This causes the quality of information to have an average value smaller than overall satisfaction.

Based on the average system benefit and average user characteristics, this board game helps them understand the brand and is easy to use and learn. Therefore, it can be concluded that overall, according to respondents who have tried playing it, the results are satisfactory to them.

The results of the questionnaire support the FGD that was carried out. Respondents were satisfied and excited and felt that this board game made learning about brands and brand strategy fun. The results of the FGD also show that even though respondents lost playing this game, they felt challenged to learn further to win the game. Respondents motivated to learn further can improve their skills and knowledge about brands and branding strategy.

As a result, the owner believes that using the card game allows them to work more efficiently because it helps them understand the bigger picture and leads them to work sequentially. After they play and learn, they feel that their understanding has increased, which, of course, can help them develop their brand, develop their business, and compete in the market.

CONCLUSION

The board game designed to teach branding strategies to SME owners and managers proved to be a highly effective educational tool. By transforming complex branding concepts into an engaging and interactive format, the game motivated participants to learn more and think critically about their business strategies. Respondents, even those who lost the game, found the experience both enjoyable and educational, illustrating the power of gamification in business learning.

The study showed that using a competitive, game-based approach helps participants apply branding theories in a practical context, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application. Many respondents felt that their understanding of branding and customer engagement improved through the game, leading them to think more strategically about their businesses. The positive feedback from both the focus group discussions (FGDs) and the EUCS questionnaire further supports the idea that board games can be a valuable tool in SME training programs.

However, while the overall response was positive, the study also identified areas for improvement. The clarity of the game's instructions was one aspect that could be enhanced to improve the overall learning experience. Addressing these gaps could further optimize the game's effectiveness in future iterations.

In its development, different tests can be carried out before and after respondents play this board game to learn more about the benefits of board games in formal and non-formal learning processes. Further research can also be carried out to explore the benefit of using board games as an informal education tool to reach those who have limitations of time and education capabilities in different contexts, such as financial management, communication and promotion strategies, or even addressing mental health issues.

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