

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the Research Object

1.1.1 Mobile Legends: Bang Bang



Picture 1.1 Mobile Legends: Bang Bang Logo

Source: Moonton

Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) is a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game developed and published by Moonton, a technology company headquartered in Shanghai, China. Since its release in 2016, the game has emerged as one of the most popular mobile esports titles globally, particularly in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia (Moonton, 2025).

The game is played in a 5-versus-5 format on a battlefield known as the Land of Dawn. Players can choose from a roster of over 100 unique heroes, each with distinct abilities and roles, such as Tanks who absorb damage, Fighters who engage in close combat, Assassins who execute rapid attacks,

Marksmen who deal ranged damage, Mages who wield magical powers, and Supports who assist teammates. Each hero possesses one passive skill and three active skills that can be utilized to defeat opponents (Moonton, 2025).

The primary objective in an MLBB match is to destroy the opposing team's turrets and ultimately their base. Players can accumulate gold and experience points by defeating minions, jungle monsters, and enemy heroes. Gold is used to purchase items that enhance a hero's attributes, while experience allows heroes to level up and strengthen their abilities.

MLBB offers a variety of game modes, including Classic, Ranked, Brawl, Arcade, and special modes introduced during limited-time events. The Ranked mode is the primary focus for competitive players, featuring a tiered ranking system ranging from Warrior to Mythical Glory. The matchmaking system is designed to pair players of similar skill levels to ensure balanced and competitive gameplay.

The success of MLBB can be attributed in part to its ability to run efficiently on mid- to low-specification mobile devices, making it accessible in developing countries. The game features controls optimized for touchscreen interfaces, including a virtual joystick and quick-cast abilities, enabling players to respond swiftly during high-intensity team battles.

Social features also contribute significantly to MLBB appeal, with systems such as guilds, in-game chat, and the ability to play cooperatively with friends. Moonton regularly organizes major tournaments, such as the Mobile Legends Professional League (MPL) and the Mobile Legends World Championship (M-Series), offering prize pools that reach into the millions of

dollars further cementing the game's status as a serious esports title (MPL, 2024).

From a monetization standpoint, MLBB employs a free-to-play model supported by in-app purchases, which include hero skins, visual effects, and other cosmetic items. While these purchases do not provide direct gameplay advantages, they are highly popular among players seeking to personalize their gaming experience.

The presence of MLBB has had a substantial impact on the mobile gaming industry and the esports culture, particularly in Southeast Asia. It has evolved beyond entertainment to become a platform for professional careers, content creation, and a rapidly growing gaming community. With a reported monthly active user base of approximately 100 million players, MLBB continues to solidify its position as one of the most influential mobile games of the past decade (Turnip & Hukom, 2023).

1.1.2 Virtual Items in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang

Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) offers a wide array of virtual items that players can purchase using both in-game currency and real-world money. These items constitute a central component of Moonton's monetization strategy, reflecting the game's adherence to a free-to-play business model. Below is an overview of the main types of virtual items available for purchase in MLBB.

One of the most popular virtual items in the game is Hero Skins, which alter the visual appearance of heroes without affecting their base statistics or abilities. Skins are categorized based on their quality and uniqueness, ranging from Normal, Elite, Special, Epic, Legendary, to the premium Collector and Mythical tiers. Each tier features varying levels of design complexity, special effects, and animations. Legendary and Mythical skins often include unique spawn animations, modified skill effects, and exclusive voice lines. These skins can be purchased using Diamonds, the game's premium currency that must be acquired through real-money transactions (Moonton, 2025).

Diamonds serve as the primary premium currency in MLBB and are used to acquire a wide range of virtual items, including skins, new heroes, recall effects, and other cosmetic enhancements. Pricing for Diamonds varies depending on the quantity purchased, and Moonton frequently provides bonus incentives for bulk purchases (Moonton, 2025).

In addition to skins, MLBB offers a variety of cosmetic items, including Emotes (used to express emotions during matches), Recall Effects (custom animations when a hero returns to base), Spawn Animations (visual effects when a hero enters the battlefield), Kill Notifications (customized kill announcement visuals), Sacred Statues (available in Mayhem mode), and Avatar Borders (used to decorate player profile photos) (Moonton, 2025).

MLBB also features Bundles, which are packages containing multiple virtual items offered at a discounted price compared to individual purchases. These bundles are often released during special events or alongside the launch of new skins.

MLBB's monetization system also includes paid events, in which players can purchase entry tickets to participate in limited-time events that offer exclusive rewards. Notable examples include the Transformers, King of Fighters (KOF), and Star Wars events, collaborations with well-known global franchises (Moonton, 2025).

Although the majority of virtual items in MLBB are purely cosmetic and do not provide gameplay advantages, Moonton has strategically designed these items to appeal to players seeking to express their individual style and identity within the game. The sales strategy—featuring items with varying levels of rarity and accessibility, from widely available to highly exclusive, effectively drives repeat purchases and sustains a robust virtual economy within the MLBB ecosystem.

1.2 Research Background

The global esports industry has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past two decades, evolving from casual gaming competitions into a multibillion-dollar industry supported by a well-established professional ecosystem. In 2023, the global esports market was valued at approximately \$1.87 billion and is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 20.7% between 2023 and 2028 (Newzoo, 2023).

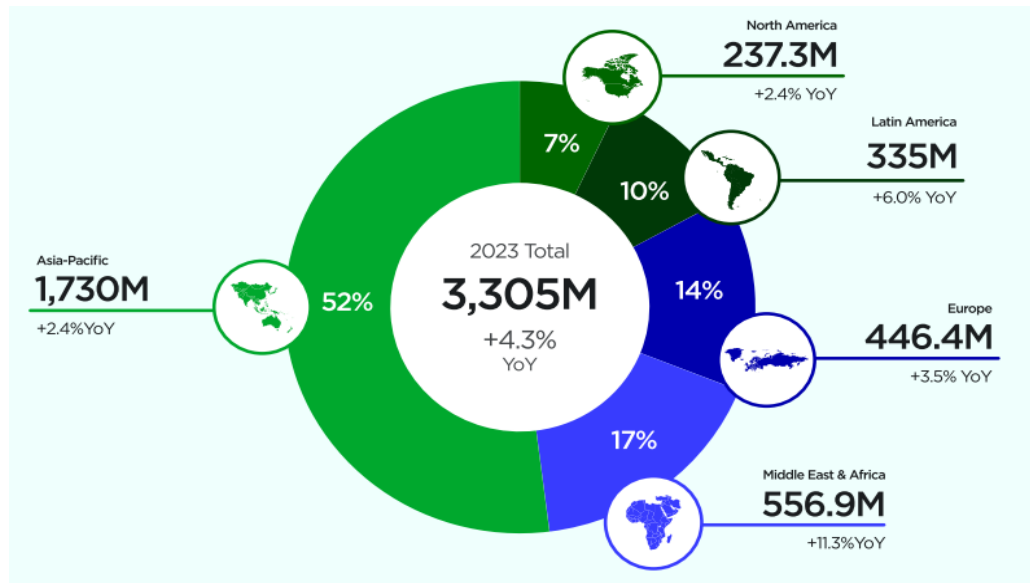


Figure 1.2 Global Esports Player Per Region (2023)

Source: Newzoo

According to the chart above, there were an estimated 3.3 billion esports players worldwide in 2023, with the Asia-Pacific region accounting for the largest share, approximately 52%, or 1.7 billion players. This represents a 4.3% increase from the previous year. Several key factors have contributed to this growth: expanding internet penetration and increasing access to gaming devices have opened digital competition to a broader global audience. Streaming platforms such as Twitch and YouTube Gaming have played a crucial role in popularizing esports by enabling professional players to broadcast their matches to millions of viewers around the world (Newzoo, 2023).

High-profile tournaments with substantial prize pools have become a staple of the global esports ecosystem. The International for Dota 2, for instance, regularly features prize pools exceeding \$30 million, while the League of Legends World Championship draws viewership of over 100 million globally. Moreover, major

investors, including Fortune 500 companies, celebrities, and traditional sports franchises, have increasingly entered the esports space, making significant investments in teams, leagues, and supporting infrastructure (Goodstats, 2024).

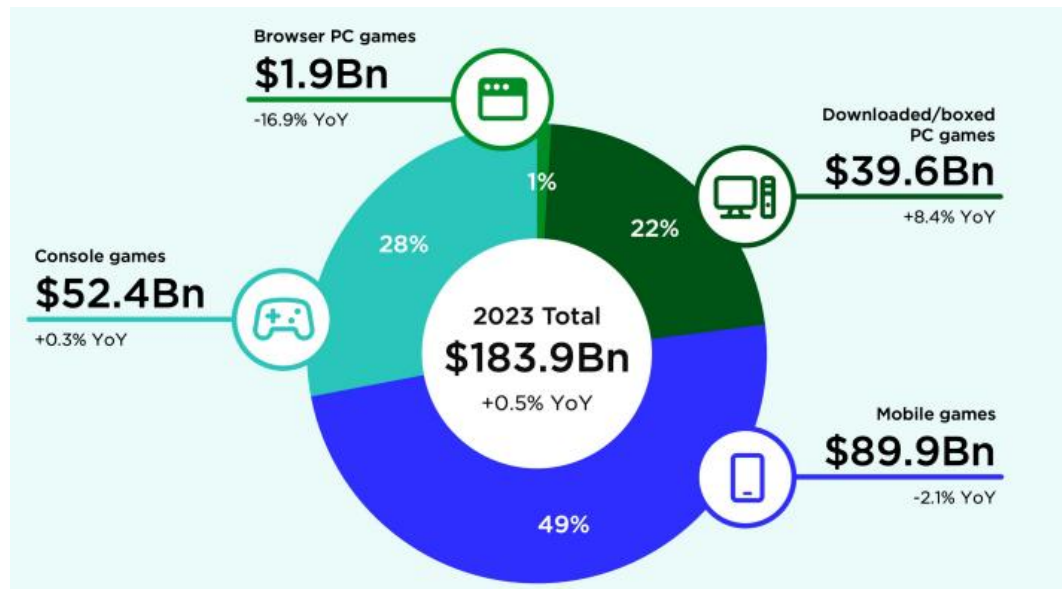


Figure 1.3 Global Esports Player per Segment (2023)

Source: Newzoo

According to the chart above, mobile games occupy the top position as the highest-grossing segment in the esports industry, accounting for 49%, or approximately \$89.9 billion in revenue. This figure underscores the immense economic potential of the sector. Monetization models in esports have also evolved significantly, now encompassing revenue streams such as broadcasting rights, merchandise sales, sponsorships, and social media integrations. Non-endemic brands, including Nike, BMW, and Louis Vuitton, are actively investing in esports sponsorships, signaling both the legitimacy of electronic sports and their broad demographic appeal (Newzoo, 2023).

In Indonesia, the esports industry has experienced tremendous growth over the past decade. With a large youth population and high smartphone penetration, Indonesia has emerged as one of the fastest-growing esports markets in Southeast Asia. Official recognition from the government has marked a pivotal milestone in the industry's development. In 2019, esports was included as an exhibition sport at the Southeast Asian (SEA) Games in the Philippines, where Indonesia secured a gold medal in the Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) discipline. Earlier, in 2018, Indonesia hosted the Asian Games esports exhibition in Jakarta, further signaling its commitment to the sector's advancement (Turnip & Hukom, 2023).

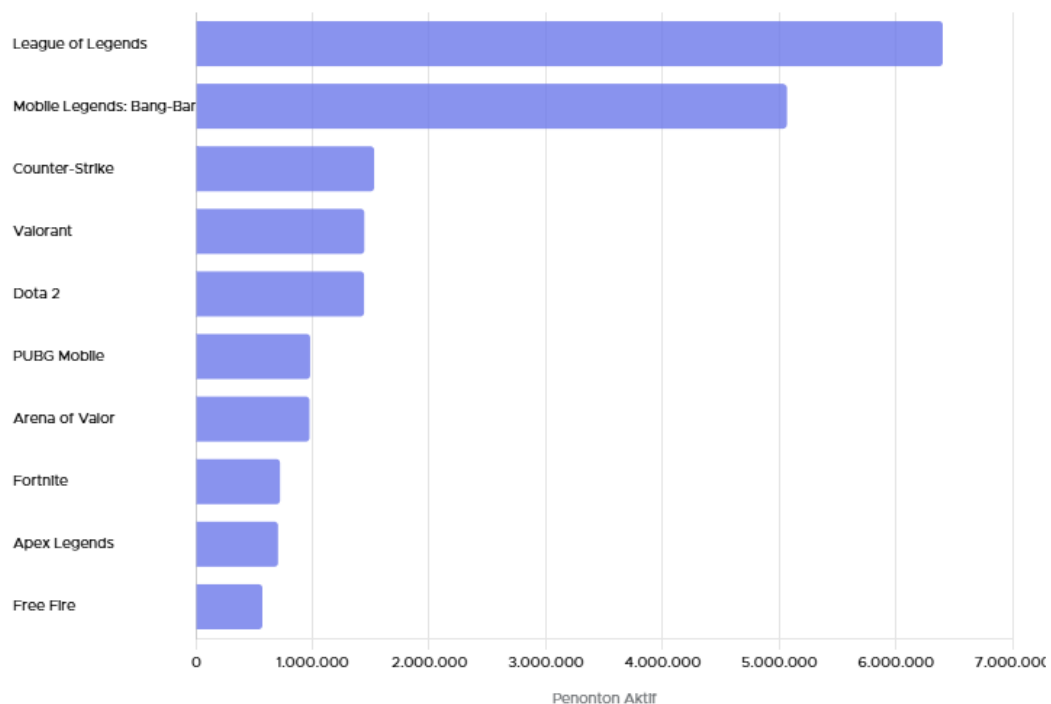


Figure 1.4 Most Popular Esports Games in Indonesia (2023)

Source: Goodstats

According to the chart above, League of Legends holds the top position in terms of active viewership, with 6 million viewers, followed by Mobile Legends:

Bang Bang (MLBB) in second place with 5 million viewers. Indonesia is one of the largest markets for MLBB, consistently ranking at the top in terms of both downloads and revenue compared to other countries. This exceptional popularity is driven by a combination of high smartphone penetration, expanding internet access, and a strong culture of social gaming (Goodstats, 2024).

The Mobile Legends Professional League Indonesia (MPL Indonesia) is the most prestigious MLBB league in the country and one of the most successful esports leagues in Indonesia overall. Launched in 2018, MPL Indonesia has grown into a competition featuring prize pools worth billions of rupiah and regularly draws hundreds of thousands of viewers for key matches. Professional teams such as RRQ, EVOS, and ONIC have become household names among Indonesian esports fans (MPL, 2024).

The economic impact of MLBB in Indonesia extends across multiple sectors. Beyond direct revenue from in-app purchases, a broader ecosystem has emerged that includes content creators, streamers, the merchandise industry, and various supporting businesses. Community-level and amateur tournaments are widespread across the country, from gaming arenas in major shopping malls to campus and school-level competitions.

The international success of Indonesian teams has further elevated MLBB's popularity. Indonesian teams have secured multiple M-Series World Championship titles, solidifying the country's reputation as a dominant force in the global MLBB ecosystem. These achievements have inspired a new generation of players who view esports as a viable career path.

Recognizing MLBB’s marketing potential, major Indonesian brands such as Tokopedia, XL Axiata, and Indomie have formed strategic partnerships with MLBB teams and tournaments. National television networks and digital platforms regularly broadcast MLBB matches, further integrating the game into Indonesia’s mainstream pop culture.

Game	Persentase Pemain Membeli Item	Persentase Pemain Tidak Membeli
PUBG Mobile	82%	18%
Free Fire	30%	70%
Genshin Impact	25%	75%
Rules of Survival	20%	80%
Mobile Legends	20%	80%

Table 1.1 Esports Virtual Item Sales in Indonesia (2024)

Source: Statista

Based on the data presented above, virtual item sales in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) rank among the lowest compared to other popular games in Indonesia, despite MLBB’s position as the most popular game in the country. Moonton, the game's developer, has acknowledged the importance of the Indonesian market by organizing localized events and marketing campaigns tailored specifically for Indonesian players (Statista, 2025). These include the introduction of heroes inspired by Indonesian culture, such as Gatotkaca and Kadita

as well as culturally and historically themed skins and events. Collaborations with local celebrities and influencers have also become a common strategy to strengthen engagement with the Indonesian fanbase.

Bogor Regency is one of the regions in Indonesia with a notably high concentration of MLBB players (Tribunnews, 2024). This is evidenced by the frequency of MLBB tournaments held in the area. One example is a tournament organized by Universitas Terbuka (UT) for high school-level students (SMA/SMK equivalent), which featured a total prize pool of 600 million rupiah and participation from 64 teams (Tribunnews, 2024). This tournament illustrates the strong enthusiasm for MLBB among the youth in Bogor City.

The motivation for this study arises from the observation that although MLBB is one of the most popular esports titles in Indonesia ranking second in player count, its virtual item sales remain relatively low compared to other games. Despite extensive advertising and promotional efforts by Moonton, including collaborations with prominent franchises, player spending on in-game purchases appears limited. This phenomenon is particularly intriguing, prompting the author to investigate whether advertising and promotional activities influence players' purchasing decisions regarding virtual items in MLBB. Bogor Regency has been selected as the research locus, given its high concentration of MLBB players.

Several previous studies have indicated a relationship between advertising and promotion related to in-game purchases decision. Specifically, in the context of the game MLBB, research conducted by Asmorowati (2024) and Ayasy (2025) found a positive influence of advertising and promotion on in-game purchase decisions. This finding is further supported by the study by Romelah (2024), although her

research was not specifically focused on MLBB. However, despite existing studies on the role of advertising and promotion in influencing in-game purchase decisions, its effectiveness in regions such as Bogor Regency remains underexplored.

Thus, although numerous previous studies have indicated a strong and positive correlation between advertising and promotion and in-game purchase decisions, no research has yet been conducted on their influence in Bogor Regency, despite it being one of the regions with a large number of MLBB players. This motivation leads the author to propose a study with the following title "THE IMPACT OF ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION IN MOBILE LEGENDS: BANG BANG VIRTUAL ITEMS ON USER PURCHASE DECISIONS IN BOGOR REGENCY".

1.3 Formulation of the problem

The development of the esports industry in Indonesia has shown significant and rapid growth. The Indonesian government has demonstrated its support by officially recognizing esports as a legitimate sports discipline. Among the various esports titles, Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) stands out as one of the most played games in Indonesia, ranking second with a total of 5 million players as of 2023 (Goodstats, 2024).

A variety of national and international tournaments, such as the Mobile Legends Professional League (MPL) and the M-Series World Championship, have been hosted in Indonesia. These events have contributed not only to the growth of the esports ecosystem but also to economic activity across several sectors, including entertainment, hospitality, food and beverage, and corporate sponsorship. As such,

the esports industry is increasingly recognized as a sector that positively contributes to national economic development.

However, despite the high level of engagement and player base for MLBB in Indonesia, virtual item sales for MLBB remain the lowest when compared to other popular esports titles. This presents a noteworthy issue, especially considering Moonton's extensive investment in advertising and promotional efforts, including the release of Indonesia-themed heroes aimed at strengthening the game's appeal to the local market.

This study aims to examine whether MLBB's advertising and promotional strategies have a measurable influence on users' purchase decisions regarding virtual items in the game. By analyzing the relationship between these two variables, the research seeks to determine whether shortcomings in advertising and promotion may be a determining factor behind the low purchase rate of virtual items among MLBB players.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute academically to the field of marketing management, particularly in the context of digital and gaming industries. Practically, the results may offer valuable insights and recommendations for Moonton and other stakeholders in the esports industry in designing more effective advertising and promotional strategies for virtual items.

1.4 Research Question

The primary objective of this study is to examine whether advertising and promotion have an influence on user purchase decisions regarding virtual items in

Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB). To achieve this objective, the study will address the following research questions:

1. Does advertising influence user purchase decisions for virtual items in MLBB?
2. Does promotion influence user purchase decisions for virtual items in MLBB?
3. How does the quality of advertising and promotion in MLBB influence the decision to purchase virtual items among Bogor players?

1.5 Research Objectives

1.5.1 Theoretical Objective

1. To examine whether advertising influences user purchase decisions regarding virtual items in MLBB.
2. To examine whether promotion influences user purchase decisions regarding virtual items in MLBB.
3. To extend understanding of the influence of advertising and promotion quality on virtual item purchase decisions within the Bogor Regency esports market.

1.5.2 Practical Objective

1. To provide insights into the consumer behavior of MLBB players in Bogor Regency for the development of region-specific marketing strategies.

2. To develop practical recommendations for the MLBB marketing team to enhance their advertising and promotional efforts in Bogor Regency.

1.6 Benefits of Research

1.6.1 Theoretical Aspects

This study is expected to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the field and advance the marketing management literature, particularly in the areas related to advertising and promotion and their influence on user purchase decisions regarding virtual items in esports games. This research is also anticipated to serve as a reference for future researchers who wish to explore similar topics in the same domain.

1.6.2 Practical Aspects

This study aims to offer valuable insights for the development of advertising and promotion strategies in esports games, which could ultimately enhance the sales performance of virtual items.

1.7 Systematics of Final Project Writing

This study is conducted within a systematic framework and structure provided by Telkom University. The structure of the research proposal for this quantitative study is as follows:

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The first chapter explains the research object, research background, problem formulation, research objectives, benefits of research, and systematics of writing the final project

CHAPTER II LITERATURE STUDY AND SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The second chapter briefly and concisely describes the theory and previous research, and the framework of thought related to the research topic.

CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODS

The third chapter delineates the methodologies, strategies, and techniques employed in the collection and analysis of data that are capable of addressing or elucidating research inquiries.

CHAPTER IV RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The fourth chapter provides an in-depth discussion regarding the methodologies employed for data processing and analysis pertaining to the research outcomes derived by the author concerning the research subject, aiming to elucidate the inquiries formulated in relation to the research problem.

CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Chapter five presents the conclusions drawn from the previous research and includes recommendations provided by the author that are expected to be beneficial for both the research subject and other relevant parties.