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Whoosh Merchandise Communication Strategy: An Analysis of The Shannon-Weaver Dual-Model and Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)

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ABSTRACT

The launch of official Whoosh merchandise by PT Kereta Cepat Indonesia China (KCIC) in 2025 represents a strategic effort to strengthen the image of Indonesia's first high-speed rail project through visual media that can be used in daily life. This study analyzes merchandise as a visual communication channel using Shannon and Weaver's communication theory, particularly in examining the encoding process, potential noise, and the public's decoding of visual symbols. Previous literature highlights the limitations of physical channels in conveying complex messages, as well as the role of culture in mediating audience interpretation. Using a linear model as a framework, this study demonstrates that Whoosh merchandise faces various forms of noise, such as semantic, visual, and symbolic interference, arising from foreign symbols and non-local aesthetics. Social media serves as an alternative decoding space revealing public resistance to modernity symbolism not rooted in local identity. The findings confirm that the success of strategic communication is determined not only by the clarity of visual messages, but also by the appropriateness of symbols within the recipient's cultural context. Merchandise, in this context, is more than just a product; it is a visual narrative of the nation that demands ideological and semiotic sensitivity.

Keywords: *Noise, Strategic communication, Shannon and Weaver, Merchandise Whoosh, Visual symbols*

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern marketing no longer relies solely on product promotion, but rather on creating comprehensive and meaningful experiences for consumers. One practical manifestation of this strategy is the use of merchandise as a medium for brand communication that is not only symbolic but also functional. PT Kereta Cepat Indonesia China (KCIC), through the launch of Whoosh Official Merchandise on February 14, 2025, at Halim Station in Jakarta, stated that these products aim to provide "a more personal and memorable experience for customers" [26]. Merchandise such as T-shirts, tote bags, tumblers, and puzzles, sold at prices ranging from Rp29,000 to Rp300,000, symbolize KCIC's efforts to build an emotional connection between consumers and the Whoosh brand.

In practice, the launch of this merchandise is not merely a commercial strategy, but also a form of integrated marketing communication. KCIC reported that foreign tourists from more than 150 countries actively seek out and purchase this merchandise as souvenirs of their travel experiences in Indonesia [26]. This phenomenon highlights the role of merchandise as a strategic communication channel that conveys brand messages, national values, and representations of technological advancement. However, the effectiveness of this communication depends heavily on how the message is encoded, transmitted, and received, as well as how communication noise can be minimized, which are the key components of Shannon and Weaver's communication model [7].

From a strategic communication perspective, the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) approach is also highly relevant. Schultz and Schultz define IMC as a strategic communication process that integrates various forms of messages and channels to build a consistent and measurable brand identity [6]. When merchandise functions not only as a retail product but also as a medium carrying messages of experience, nationalism, and lifestyle, its role should be analyzed within the IMC framework. This is important for organizations such as KCIC in designing holistic and consistent communication strategies capable of fostering long-term relationships with customers across different audience segments, including international tourists.

Previous studies have discussed the role of branded merchandise, visual branding, and communication strategies in strengthening customer engagement and brand loyalty. Han and Sung [11] emphasized that branded merchandise can function as an effective marketing communication tool through visual aesthetics and emotional attachment. Kusumawati [12] also highlighted the importance of visual branding strategies in transportation services for building corporate image and consumer recognition.

Furthermore, Rahmani and Tanjung [18] explained that merchandise can influence customer perceptions and communication effectiveness in branding activities. Previous studies also highlighted the importance of communication consistency and visual identity in strengthening brand engagement and audience perception [16], [17]. Despite these contributions, earlier research has generally focused on customer loyalty, visual branding, or consumer perception separately, while limited studies have examined merchandise as a strategic communication channel using an integrated perspective that combines the Shannon–Weaver communication model and IMC theory, particularly in the context of public transportation and national strategic projects such as Whoosh.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze KCIC's communication strategy through Whoosh merchandise using the Shannon–Weaver model and the IMC framework, as well as to examine how these two approaches complement each other in enhancing brand communication effectiveness. The primary research question is how the processes of encoding, transmission, and decoding of Whoosh's brand communication messages through merchandise occur, and how these processes are integrated into the broader framework of marketing communication strategy.

This research is significant because Whoosh represents the first high-speed railway project in Southeast Asia and serves not only as a transportation innovation but also as a symbol of national identity and technological progress. Thus, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the field of marketing communication and practically to institutions or companies seeking to develop integrated brand communication strategies through merchandise and visual communication media.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Shannon-Weaver Model Communication

The Shannon–Weaver model views communication as a linear process consisting of a source, transmitter, channel, receiver, destination, and noise that may interfere with message transmission [7]. This model forms one of the foundations of modern communication studies because it emphasizes systematic and measurable communication processes. According to Fiske [4], communication models such as Shannon–Weaver are important for understanding how meaning is transferred through media and symbols in both interpersonal and mass communication contexts.

In marketing communication, the Shannon–Weaver model explains the encoding and decoding processes in which brand messages are represented through symbols, visuals, and narratives [2]. Within the context of Whoosh merchandise, the encoded messages include representations of national pride, technological advancement, speed, and modernity. These meanings are transmitted through visual elements such as logos, colors, typography, and merchandise design, which are later interpreted differently by audiences depending on their social and cultural backgrounds.

Previous studies have shown that visual communication media play an important role in shaping audience interpretation and brand perception. Tarihoran [21] explained that the Shannon–Weaver model remains relevant in analyzing commercial visual communication because communication disturbances may occur not only technically but also symbolically and semantically. Similarly, Rohmah [19] highlighted that cultural differences often influence how audiences interpret public branding messages. In transportation branding, Zhang and Kim [25] also found that visual identity significantly affects audience perceptions of national railway services.

Noise elements in communication are therefore not limited to technical interference but also include symbolic, perceptual, and cultural barriers [7]. In the context of merchandise communication, differences in public interpretation regarding product value, pricing, and visual identity may reduce communication effectiveness. Previous research by Wardani [23] demonstrated that merchandise can shape brand image differently across audience segments, particularly among younger consumers. Meanwhile, Nasution [16] emphasized that visual consistency is strongly associated with brand loyalty and audience trust.

Although the Shannon–Weaver model is linear in nature, it remains relevant as a framework for analyzing visual communication and branding in modern contexts, including merchandise as a physical communication channel that conveys corporate and national identity messages. Therefore, this study applies the Shannon–Weaver model to analyze how Whoosh merchandise encodes, transmits, and delivers strategic communication messages to diverse audiences.

The Theory Of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is a strategic communication approach that integrates various communication channels to deliver consistent brand messages [8]. IMC expands the role of marketing communication from tactical promotional activities into an integrated system that coordinates advertising, public relations, digital communication, events, and alternative media such as merchandise [6]. According to Duncan [3], IMC is designed to create unified brand experiences and strengthen long-term relationships between organizations and consumers.

The core principle of IMC is message consistency across all customer touchpoints [6]. In the context of

Whoosh, merchandise functions as a communication medium that conveys values of innovation, speed, and modernity, while also complementing promotional communication through social media, events, and digital campaigns. Belch and Belch [1] explained that integrated communication strategies are more effective when audiences receive similar meanings across multiple communication channels.

Previous studies have also emphasized the importance of IMC in strengthening brand engagement and consumer relationships. Farida [10] found that IMC strategies in public transportation communication can improve brand awareness and audience interaction. Likewise, Lestari [13] argued that communication consistency in state-owned enterprises is essential for building institutional credibility and public trust. Lim and Tan [14] further explained that strategic messaging across integrated campaigns contributes significantly to audience perception and campaign effectiveness.

Merchandise as a non-conventional communication medium also plays an important role in creating emotional engagement and symbolic interaction. Han and Sung [11] stated that branded merchandise can function as an effective marketing communication tool because aesthetic design influences emotional attachment and customer experience. Similarly, Puspitasari [17] found that visual communication contributes significantly to the creation of brand engagement, particularly through symbolic and experiential interactions. Rahmani and Tanjung [18] also emphasized that merchandise influences customer perceptions because it combines functional and communicative values simultaneously.

In addition, IMC highlights the importance of audience segmentation and communication channel strategy [8]. Merchandise products targeting younger and digitally active consumers can function as both communication media and lifestyle symbols. Smith and Doe [20] argued that customer touchpoints play a strategic role in shaping long-term brand experiences and strengthening emotional relationships between brands and audiences.

Therefore, the application of IMC in this study helps analyze how Whoosh's brand messages are strategically integrated and communicated across various channels. At the same time, IMC complements the Shannon–Weaver model by extending communication analysis beyond technical message transmission toward customer engagement, emotional experience, and strategic brand communication.

3. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative visual semiotic approach within a case study framework to examine Whoosh merchandise as a medium of strategic communication. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate for analyzing symbolic meanings and cultural representations embedded in visual artifacts, allowing for an in-depth interpretation of how messages are constructed and understood. Creswell and Poth emphasized that qualitative research enables researchers to explore social meanings, experiences, and interpretations within specific contexts [29].

The unit of analysis consists of official Whoosh merchandise produced by PT Kereta Cepat Indonesia China (KCIC) in 2025, including apparel, accessories, and promotional items. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select merchandise items that prominently feature visual identity elements such as logos, typography, color schemes, and symbolic imagery. In total, eight merchandise items were selected based on their relevance to branding representation, communication value, and visual consistency.

This study integrates semiotic analysis and the Shannon–Weaver communication model as its analytical framework. Semiotic analysis is used to examine visual signs at both denotative and connotative levels, identifying how meaning is constructed through symbols, colors, typography, and design elements. Chandler explained that semiotic analysis is useful for understanding how visual signs generate cultural meaning and audience interpretation [30]. The analytical process involves systematic coding of visual components, including iconography, textual elements, aesthetic styles, and symbolic representations embedded within the merchandise designs.

The Shannon–Weaver model is applied to map the communication process, including the sender (KCIC as merchandise producer), message (visual and symbolic content), channel (physical merchandise), receiver (audience), and potential communication noise [7]. Particular emphasis is placed on identifying forms of noise such as semantic ambiguity, cultural dissonance, perceptual differences, and visual inconsistency that may influence audience decoding and communication effectiveness. Tarihoran [21] noted that communication noise within visual commercial media often emerges through symbolic interpretation and audience perception rather than purely technical disruption.

The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, visual data were organized and categorized based on recurring design patterns and communication symbols. Second, semiotic interpretation was applied to identify layers of meaning, ideological representations, and cultural references within the merchandise designs. Third, the findings were contextualized using the Shannon–Weaver framework to evaluate the effectiveness of message transmission, audience interpretation, and potential communication distortions.

To enhance the rigor of the study, theoretical triangulation was employed by combining semiotic theory, communication models, and marketing communication perspectives. Analytical transparency was maintained through systematic documentation of coding, categorization, and interpretation processes. Despite these measures, this study acknowledges the subjective nature of interpretive analysis and the absence of direct audience reception interviews as limitations. Nevertheless, this approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how merchandise functions as a

strategic visual communication medium within the context of public transportation branding.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the Merchandise Communication Process Based on the Shannon-Weaver Model

4.1.1 The Role of KCIC as the Sender

In the Shannon-Weaver communication model, the sender acts as the designer of the message to be communicated to the receiver [7]. In the context of the Whoosh merchandise launch, PT Kereta Cepat Indonesia China (KCIC) strategically positioned itself as the message sender aiming to convey the brand identity, travel experience, and symbolic value of Southeast Asia's first high-speed transportation service. As a state-owned enterprise managing a prestigious project, KCIC sought to instill the brand message through an unconventional medium: merchandise [26].

KCIC's role as a messenger is evident in the statement by Eva Chairunisa, General Manager of Corporate Secretary at KCIC, who emphasized that the merchandise aims to provide "a more personal and memorable experience" for customers [26]. This indicates that the message design is not merely informative but also affective and symbolic. The messages are designed to build an emotional connection between customers and the Whoosh brand. This approach expands the meaning of corporate communication, which is typically formal, into a narrative that customers can take home and wear.

In terms of visual design, KCIC has created merchandise featuring a color palette, typography, and logo that align with the Whoosh brand elements. Products such as T-shirts, tumblers, tote bags, and puzzles are designed to foster strong brand recognition through distinctive symbols and designs. Based on posts from the official Instagram account @keretacepat_id, there are merchandise designs that highlight the red and blue "Whoosh" visual elements, symbolizing speed and trust [27].

KCIC also leverages the merchandise launch to reinforce a message of national pride. This aligns with the narrative that Whoosh is Southeast Asia's first high-speed train and a symbol of Indonesia's technological advancement. Through merchandise, this message is packaged into tangible products that can serve as souvenirs and be worn in daily life. These products not only convey KCIC's identity but also serve as symbols of national achievement.

The selection of visual content on the merchandise aligns with the brand's message. T-shirts and tote bags, for example, are designed with a minimalist yet modern aesthetic, reflecting the image of speed, comfort, and modernity. The use of premium materials also demonstrates KCIC's commitment to delivering a high-quality message. In Shannon-Weaver theory, this design represents the encoding process, where the message is encoded into visual forms and products that are easily accepted by consumers [7].

Strategically, KCIC has also chosen to time the merchandise launch to coincide with a key moment: February 2025, just before the peak of the tourist season and when Whoosh traffic is high [26]. This demonstrates that message transmission is considered within a temporal context to reach the audience when they are most receptive. Through this approach, KCIC illustrates that the sender's role extends beyond designing the message to crafting a strategic distribution plan that accounts for both timing and location.

Thus, KCIC's role as a sender extends beyond creating merchandise products to designing an entire communication system that incorporates design, symbolism, timing, and the target audience. This strategy demonstrates the application of structured communication principles aligned with the Shannon-Weaver model, while also integrating with the IMC vision to shape brand image and experience [6], [8].

4.1.2 Merchandise as a Communication Medium

In Shannon and Weaver's model, a communication channel is the pathway that conveys a message from the sender to the receiver [7]. In this context, Whoosh merchandise acts as a physical channel that conveys visual and symbolic messages to customers. Products such as T-shirts, tumblers, and tote bags serve as a medium that simultaneously communicates the visual identity, brand values, and image of KCIC to the public.

Merchandise functions not only as a consumer good but as a form of visual branding embedded in social interactions. For example, when a customer wears a Whoosh T-shirt in a public place, the brand message is conveyed not only to the wearer but also to those around them. This makes merchandise a multi-level channel: direct communication with the wearer and indirect communication with the broader public.

This channel has distinct advantages because it is portable, personal, and long-lasting. Unlike advertisements, which are temporary, merchandise is used repeatedly and is present in consumers' daily lives. Within the Shannon-Weaver framework, this extends the duration and reach of the communicated message [7]. Additionally, merchandise holds emotional resonance as it can be identified as part of travel memories, as emphasized in KCIC's statement that these products are "memorable travel keepsakes" [26].

However, as a communication channel, merchandise also has its limitations. One of its shortcomings is the limited quantity and distribution. Currently, Whoosh merchandise is only available at Halim Station, which means the message reaches only a limited segment of the audience [26]. Additionally, the visual messages on the merchandise are passive: they are only effective when worn or seen by others. This makes the channel's effectiveness highly dependent on consumer behavior.

In the context of linear communication, merchandise as a channel does not provide immediate feedback. Unlike digital media, which allows for direct responses, communication through merchandise is one-

way. This reinforces the position of the Shannon-Weaver model, which focuses on the technical processes of communication, yet highlights the need for additional approaches such as IMC to foster more active interaction [6], [8].

The effectiveness of merchandise as a communication channel is also determined by the product's visual quality and design. Products with unattractive designs or low quality can result in the message failing to get across, or even create a negative perception of the brand. In this context, the success of the channel depends on the design's ability to encode the message and the customer's ability to accurately decode it. Nasution [16] explained that visual consistency and design quality significantly influence audience trust and brand loyalty.

Thus, merchandise as a channel in Whoosh's brand communication demonstrates that non-verbal and non-conventional media possess high communicative power when designed with the right strategy. Merchandise is not merely a promotional accessory but an alternative communication channel that reinforces the customer's experience with the brand in a tangible, take-home form.

4.1.3 Audience : Profile, Perception, and Decoding

Within the framework of the Shannon-Weaver model, the audience or receiver is the party that receives and interprets the message sent by the sender through a specific medium or channel [7]. In this context, the audience for Whoosh merchandise consists of two major groups: domestic consumers (Indonesian citizens) and international consumers (foreign tourists). According to KCIC, official Whoosh merchandise is sought after by passengers from over 158 countries, with tourists from Malaysia, Singapore, and Australia making up the majority [26]. This indicates that the audience is multicultural and spans various demographics.

The process of decoding or interpreting the message by the audience is heavily influenced by their cultural background, experiences, and expectations regarding the product. Local customers, for example, tend to view the merchandise as a form of support for a national project and a symbol of Indonesia's technological progress. On the other hand, foreign tourists regard the merchandise as a distinctive souvenir reflecting their experience riding Southeast Asia's first high-speed train. Posts from the Instagram account @lifeatkcic show how customers take and share photos of themselves with the merchandise, indicating that decoding occurs in an affective and visual manner [27].

However, decoding does not always go as planned. Some responses from netizens on X (Twitter) reveal differing perceptions of the merchandise [28]. Some consider the prices too high for mere T-shirts, tote bags, tumblers, or puzzles, while others feel the designs fail to adequately represent elements of Indonesia's local culture. This demonstrates that even when encoding is done with positive intent, interpretations can still vary depending on the audience. This is where the importance of a multicultural communication strategy that accounts for diverse perceptions lies [19].

The audience is also segmented based on the nature of their relationship with the Whoosh brand. Regular passengers who have used the service multiple times tend to have higher emotional attachment and are more open to merchandise. Conversely, passengers who have only tried it once tend to view merchandise as a one-time purchase. Therefore, the audience's level of brand engagement is a key factor in the effectiveness of message decoding. Wardani [23] explained that merchandise contributes differently to brand perception depending on audience involvement and consumer characteristics.

Most merchandise customers also fall into the young and urban demographic, as evidenced by the dominance of interactions on KCIC's social media by users aged 20–40. This indicates that a modern, minimalist, and Instagram-friendly visual design strategy has a significant impact on how the message is received. Merchandise products that are "Instagram-worthy" become part of an extended message channel, where the recipient also acts as a co-sender in spreading the message to their network. Belch and Belch [1] emphasized that audience participation and social media interaction are increasingly important in contemporary marketing communication strategies.

From the perspective of audience behavior, it was found that interest in merchandise increases significantly when accompanied by promotions or special activations. According to a KCIC report, during the promotional period of February 14–16, 2025, merchandise purchases increased up to threefold compared to regular days [26]. This demonstrates that decoding is also influenced by social context and economic incentives, not merely the quality of the message. Schultz and Schultz [6] explained that effective IMC strategies require the integration of promotional activities, emotional engagement, and customer experience across communication touchpoints.

Overall, the receiver's role in the Shannon-Weaver model indicates that message interpretation is dynamic and highly dependent on audience characteristics [7]. Therefore, Whoosh's merchandise communication strategy must account for the diversity of the audience's backgrounds, cultures, expectations, and digital interactions to ensure the message is received and interpreted optimally.

4.1.4.Noise in the Communication Process

One of the key components in the Shannon-Weaver model is noise, which refers to any form of interference that can hinder the message transmission process [7]. In the context of Whoosh merchandise communication, noise can stem from various aspects, ranging from technical factors such as product quality, semantic differences in meaning, to psychological and cultural perceptions. These disruptions can reduce the effectiveness of message delivery and even result in meanings that are contrary to what KCIC intended.

One notable form of noise is the issue of price perception. Some netizens' comments on social media

suggest that the prices of the merchandise, particularly the puzzles and tumblers, are considered expensive compared to similar products on the market [28]. Within the Shannon-Weaver framework, this can be categorized as affective noise because it creates emotional resistance toward a message that is intended to be positive. A price that does not align with the audience's perceived value can transform the intended message of "exclusivity" into one of "excessive commercialization."

Noise can also arise from visual designs perceived as failing to represent local identity. Some netizens questioned why Whoosh merchandise does not incorporate Indonesian cultural elements such as batik patterns or local geographical icons [28]. This indicates the presence of a cultural decoding barrier, where audiences fail to establish a personal or cultural connection with the communicated message. Rohmah [19] explained that communication strategies involving multicultural audiences require sensitivity toward local cultural representation to avoid symbolic disconnection. In the Shannon-Weaver model, this type of noise is particularly significant because it causes the message to lose social and cultural relevance [7].

Another communication disruption stems from distribution limitations. With availability limited to a single location, namely Halim Station, many potential audiences lack access to the merchandise [26]. This creates channel noise, which refers to obstacles occurring in the message delivery pathway. Although KCIC plans to expand distribution to additional stations, delays in accessibility risk reducing communication momentum and limiting broader audience engagement.

From a semantic perspective, messages encoded through visual symbols may not always be interpreted correctly. For example, the modern and minimalist Whoosh logo may be perceived as too generic or less visually appealing by audiences who prefer more eye-catching or ethnically inspired designs. This semantic noise prevents optimal decoding and disrupts the intended communication objectives. Nasution [16] emphasized that visual consistency and symbolic relevance strongly influence audience interpretation and brand perception.

Equally important, social noise also plays a major role, especially in the digital era. Negative comments on social media can create a multiplier effect because they influence the perceptions of other potential consumers. Several posts on X reveal sarcastic remarks regarding the use of merchandise as a form of "sales pitch" within a government project [28]. This indicates that visual communication unsupported by a strong narrative risks losing legitimacy within the digital public sphere. Belch and Belch [1] argued that public responses and audience interaction in digital communication environments significantly influence brand perception and communication effectiveness.

Nevertheless, KCIC's efforts to address this noise have begun to appear through promotional programs, digital activations, and service improvements. Offering incentives such as free popcorn and product discounts during promotional periods serves as a strategy to reduce economic and perceptual noise [26]. In addition, active engagement through social media platforms helps manage audience perceptions and maintain communication relevance. Schultz and Schultz [6] explained that integrated communication strategies are essential for managing audience responses and strengthening positive brand experiences across communication channels.

In conclusion, noise in Whoosh merchandise communication is multidimensional and must be managed strategically. KCIC must conduct ongoing perception research to ensure that encoding and decoding processes remain aligned while anticipating various forms of communication disruptions that may emerge at technical, symbolic, cultural, and social levels [7].

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Strategy for Whoosh Merchandise

4.2.1 Message Consistency Across Channels

One of the key principles of the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) approach is message consistency across all communication channels. According to Tuckwell [8], effective communication must convey the same message using a coordinated style and symbols to avoid confusing the audience. In the case of Whoosh, this consistency is evident in the use of a uniform visual identity across merchandise, advertisements, social media, and corporate narratives. The dominant red-and-blue color scheme, minimalist logo, and modern typography are hallmarks of Whoosh's standardized visual communication.

The official Instagram account @keretacepat_id regularly posts content showcasing official merchandise, customer experiences, and testimonials from passengers who have purchased the products [27]. All these posts reinforce the same message: that Whoosh merchandise is a unique memento of a journey on a modern high-speed train. The narrative used emphasizes a "personal" and "memorable" experience, aligning with KCIC's official statements in various press releases [26]. This demonstrates that, both linguistically and visually, the message conveyed is consistent and well-controlled. In addition to visuals, consistency is also evident in the brand narrative emphasized by KCIC. For example, keywords such as "first in Southeast Asia," "innovative," "modern," and "memorable" frequently appear in both merchandise promotions and other campaigns. This reflects an IMC strategy that seeks to strengthen the brand image through the delivery of a consistent message across all touchpoints. This consistency is crucial for building long-term brand equity and minimizing communication noise across channels [6].

However, this consistency also poses challenges in the context of audience diversity. Visual messages that are too modern and minimalist may be effective for urban audiences, but they lack "narrative" appeal for audiences seeking cultural elements or Indonesian local identity. Several comments on social media indicate a desire for merchandise designs to better reflect Indonesian culture, such as batik or local icons from Bandung and Jakarta

[28]. This suggests that consistency must be balanced with message flexibility for various segments [19].

Meanwhile, in terms of digital content, there was no discrepancy between the messages on social media and the physical visuals of the merchandise. Social media promotions explicitly featured the same products sold in physical stores [27]. This demonstrates that the KCIC marketing team actively maintains coordination across communication channels, in line with IMC principles regarding message synchronization across platforms [6], [8].

Consistency is further supported by offline activations such as launch events and booths at stations. At these events, Whoosh's visual identity is displayed on backdrops, digital media, and uniform product designs. This strengthens the brand's credibility, as it demonstrates that KCIC's visual and verbal communication does not only occur online but is also physically translated on the ground. Thus, it can be concluded that KCIC has implemented the principle of cross-channel consistency quite well. However, from an IMC perspective, consistency should not lead to rigidity. The challenge ahead is how to maintain a cohesive brand identity while remaining relevant to the diverse needs, cultural values, and tastes of the audience.

4.2.2 Merchandise as a Touchpoint in IMC

In IMC theory, every touchpoint between customers and a brand represents a strategic opportunity to convey messages that shape brand perception and brand experience [6]. Merchandise, in this context, is a physical touchpoint that directly interacts with customers. KCIC positions Whoosh merchandise as an element that extends the travel experience, not merely as a retail product. An official statement notes that the merchandise is designed to "create memorable keepsakes to take home" [26].

This touchpoint is particularly significant because it is tangible and can be reused in customers' daily lives. T-shirts, tote bags, and tumblers serve as extensions of the high-speed train experience, which lasts only a few hours. By carrying this merchandise, customers re-engage with the Whoosh brand in a more personal and informal context. This aligns with the concept of post-purchase communication, where the value of communication continues even after the transaction is complete [6].

Merchandise also serves as an experience marker. In brand experience studies, physical contact with brand symbols has been shown to increase emotional engagement and brand loyalty. Photos of customers posting Whoosh merchandise on social media demonstrate that these products successfully create positive and pride-inducing associations with the brand [27]. In other words, merchandise acts as a visual narrative that reinforces the connection between a temporary experience, namely riding the high-speed train, and long-term memory. Han and Sung [11] explained that branded merchandise contributes significantly to emotional attachment and customer engagement through symbolic and aesthetic experiences.

In IMC, the key value of a touchpoint lies in the consistency of meaning and the reinforcement of brand perception [8]. Whoosh merchandise successfully maintains this integration through design choices that align with the main brand identity. However, to maximize its function as a touchpoint, merchandise must remain emotionally and contextually relevant. For example, by offering special editions for cultural celebrations or specific destinations, KCIC could increase engagement among broader audience segments. Rohmah [19] emphasized that cultural relevance is important in strengthening communication effectiveness among diverse audiences.

The role of merchandise can also be strengthened as a brand advocacy tool. Customers who are satisfied with their experience tend to wear the merchandise with pride, thereby becoming unofficial brand ambassadors. In the digital age, this activity extends to social media, where customers post photos with the products and spread the brand's message to their networks [27]. This activity is known as earned media, namely communication generated organically through customer experience and loyalty. Belch and Belch [1] explained that customer-generated communication and social sharing significantly influence brand image formation in contemporary marketing communication.

However, this touchpoint also carries risks if not managed properly. Products with low quality or uninspired designs may generate negative perceptions that influence the overall image of the brand. Therefore, merchandise must continuously be developed through research-based approaches and customer feedback to ensure that it remains relevant, attractive, and impactful as a communication medium. Nasution [16] emphasized that visual quality and design consistency strongly influence audience trust and long-term brand loyalty.

Thus, merchandise functions as a strategic touchpoint within KCIC's IMC strategy, not only expanding the reach of the brand message but also deepening customer experience and emotional attachment toward Whoosh as both a transportation service and a symbol of national pride.

4.2.3 Segmentation and Targeting Strategies

Within the IMC framework, segmentation and targeting are crucial steps to ensure that messages communicated through merchandise reach the right audience in a relevant way. Tuckwell emphasized that communication strategies must be built on an understanding of specific market segments rather than a one-size-fits-all approach [8]. KCIC appears to have recognized this by developing Whoosh merchandise in various forms and price points, ranging from Rp29,000 to Rp300,000 [26]. This price range indicates an effort to reach customers across different socioeconomic classes.

The segmentation of the target audience can be viewed from two main perspectives: geographic and psychographic. Geographically, the merchandise targets both domestic and international markets. KCIC data indicate that customers from over 158 countries have shown interest in Whoosh merchandise, with a dominant

presence of tourists from Malaysia, Singapore, and Australia [26]. This suggests that the products are not only designed for the local market but also incorporate elements that appeal to international tastes. In the context of IMC, this approach is referred to as "glocalization," namely combining global standards with local values [6].

From a psychographic perspective, the merchandise appears to target customers with modern lifestyles who are active on social media and take pride in national innovation. The clean, futuristic, and neutral-colored product designs indicate a focus on urban and young professional demographics. T-shirts and tote bags are two products particularly suited for Millennial and Gen Z consumers, who tend to prefer items that are both functional and aesthetically appealing. This segmentation is reinforced by the use of social media as the primary promotional channel [27]. Belch and Belch [1] explained that digital communication channels are highly effective for targeting younger audience segments because they encourage participation, interaction, and brand engagement.

However, this segmentation strategy could be further developed. There has been no visible effort by KCIC to introduce merchandise specifically designed for children, families, or particular local cultural segments. Within the context of a comprehensive IMC strategy, targeting should not rely solely on age and lifestyle but also consider occasion and usage context. For example, during annual migration seasons or national holidays, KCIC could introduce special-edition products that strengthen customers' emotional connection with the Whoosh brand. Rohmah [19] emphasized that cultural relevance in communication strategies is important for increasing audience attachment and symbolic identification.

Product design is also an important element in targeting strategies. The use of large logos, neutral colors, and premium materials is suitable for customers who prioritize visual aesthetics and quality. However, for more traditional or nationalistic audience segments, it may be more relevant if the merchandise incorporates Indonesian cultural elements such as batik motifs, local flora and fauna, or national slogans. By implementing segmentation based on cultural values, KCIC can expand its communication reach to audience segments that have not yet been fully optimized. Wardani [23] argued that merchandise carrying cultural and symbolic value contributes significantly to strengthening brand perception among broader audience groups.

From an IMC perspective, the success of targeting also depends on the accuracy of distribution channel selection. Currently, Whoosh merchandise is available exclusively at Halim Station [26]. This condition limits accessibility for customers outside Jakarta and restricts broader market reach. A more inclusive distribution strategy through e-commerce platforms or collaborations with souvenir stores would help reach wider geographic segments and improve communication effectiveness. Schultz and Schultz [6] emphasized that effective IMC strategies require integration not only in messaging but also in communication channels and distribution accessibility.

Overall, KCIC's segmentation and targeting strategy through Whoosh merchandise demonstrates a clear and data-driven direction. However, its effectiveness can still be enhanced through deeper audience mapping, contextually relevant product diversification, and broader distribution strategies to maximize the potential of integrated communication and strengthen audience engagement across different market segments.

4.2.4. Communication Activation: Promotions and Events

One of the key pillars of IMC is communication activation, namely activities designed to increase audience engagement with the brand through direct experiences [6]. In the context of Whoosh merchandise, KCIC conducted this activation during the official store launch at Halim Station on February 14–16, 2025. During those three days, KCIC offered various attractive promotions such as "buy two T-shirts, get a free tote bag," "three puzzles for only Rp100,000," and free popcorn with every purchase [26]. This strategy aims not only to boost sales but also to generate brand buzz through positive customer experiences.

These promotions serve as a concrete example of IMC-based activation targeting both the emotional and rational aspects of customers. Emotional engagement is created through the launch atmosphere, visual presentation of merchandise, and direct interaction at the event location. Meanwhile, rational considerations are strengthened through discounts and product bonuses. This approach aligns with the IMC perspective proposed by Schultz and Schultz [6], which emphasizes that effective communication activation should balance emotional value with economic incentives to strengthen audience engagement.

The success of this promotion is reflected in the high level of customer engagement, particularly among audiences who shared their experiences on social media [27]. Customer posts on Instagram and X (Twitter) demonstrate positive responses toward product design, promotional bonuses, and the lively atmosphere of the launch event [28]. This interaction generated earned media, namely communication voluntarily created by customers through social sharing and online participation. Belch and Belch [1] explained that customer-generated communication significantly contributes to expanding brand reach and strengthening brand credibility in contemporary communication environments. Through this activation, merchandise functions not only as a product but also as a social amplifier within the brand communication ecosystem.

However, the effectiveness of communication activation is not determined solely by a single event. From an IMC perspective, activation must become a continuous process capable of creating long-term interaction cycles between audiences and brands [8]. KCIC still needs to develop follow-up programs such as loyalty programs for merchandise buyers, engagement

activities with passenger communities, or limited-edition products released during national celebrations or special events. Through this strategy, merchandise can evolve beyond a retail product into a medium for strengthening brand communities and long-term emotional attachment.

On the other hand, location-based activations such as those conducted by KCIC also have limitations. Without support from online distribution and digital communication channels, the impact of the activation may remain local and temporary. Therefore, integrating offline activation with digital campaigns becomes essential. The use of dedicated hashtags, Instagram filters, digital storytelling, or social media challenges can extend campaign visibility and reach audiences beyond the physical event location. Duncan [3] emphasized that IMC effectiveness depends heavily on the integration of offline and online communication channels to maximize audience interaction and communication continuity.

From an IMC theoretical perspective, activations also function as intensive touchpoints where audiences interact deeply with the brand within a relatively short period of time. Therefore, the quality of interaction during the activation event becomes highly important. Friendly service, visually attractive booth designs, and convenient transaction systems significantly influence whether audiences perceive the experience positively or negatively. Nasution [16] explained that visual quality and consistency contribute strongly to audience perception and customer satisfaction in branding communication.

With more strategic and integrated promotional and event strategies, KCIC has significant potential to position merchandise as a communication activation tool with wide-reaching impact. Strengthening storytelling, expanding distribution channels, and integrating digital communication strategies will ensure that every activation event functions not merely as a product-selling activity but also as a communication moment capable of reinforcing the position of the Whoosh brand in the minds of audiences and customers.

Integration of the Shannon-Weaver Model and IMC

4.3.1 Synergy Between Mechanistic and Strategic Models

The integration of the Shannon-Weaver model and Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is an approach that enables the combination of technical and strategic dimensions in communication. The Shannon-Weaver model provides a basic framework regarding the mechanism of message flow, from encoding, through the channel, to decoding, while also accounting for communication interference or noise [7]. On the other hand, IMC focuses on the consistency of cross-channel communication strategies and customer-experience orientation [6], [8]. In the context of Whoosh merchandise communication, the synergy of these two models creates a cohesive and relevant communication system capable of addressing the dynamics of contemporary audiences.

In KCIC's communication strategy, the encoding process, as described by Shannon-Weaver, is carried out by designing visual and symbolic messages in the form of merchandise. T-shirts, tote bags, and tumblers, for example, have been designed with consistent visual elements such as the Whoosh logo, blue-and-red color schemes, and messages emphasizing a "memorable journey" [26]. This demonstrates that the message has been systematically encoded into symbols and visual artifacts that can be directly experienced by the public. This encoding process is further reinforced through communication channels such as Instagram and media publications, which support the IMC principle of communication consistency across platforms [27].

In the Shannon-Weaver model, the channel dimension is represented by merchandise itself as a physical communication medium, while digital media function as visual and promotional support channels [7]. These channels operate in parallel, with merchandise functioning as a medium for indirect experiential communication and social media serving as a platform for digital interaction and communication reinforcement. Within IMC strategy, this approach is known as multi-channel communication, where all communication channels are coordinated to deliver consistent and mutually reinforcing messages [6]. Duncan [3] explained that integrated communication strategies become more effective when all communication channels support a unified brand narrative.

Although the Shannon-Weaver model is commonly understood as a one-way communication model, its integration with IMC enables the emergence of two-way feedback mechanisms. Feedback regarding Whoosh merchandise can be identified through social media comments, purchasing behavior, and customer-generated content shared on platforms such as Instagram and X (Twitter) [27], [28]. In IMC theory, this form of audience participation is referred to as consumer-generated communication and serves as an important indicator in evaluating communication effectiveness and customer engagement [1].

Furthermore, the concept of noise in the Shannon-Weaver model is highly relevant for evaluating communication disruptions that emerge within strategic communication processes [7]. Criticism regarding overly modern designs, limited local cultural representation, and perceptions of high product prices are examples of communication noise that interfere with audience decoding of the intended message [28]. IMC then functions as a strategic response mechanism through educational campaigns, promotional activations, audience engagement, and adjustments to product design and communication strategy. Thus, the two approaches complement each other: Shannon-Weaver identifies communication problems technically, while IMC provides strategic solutions to maintain communication effectiveness and audience relationships.

The synergy between these two models also enables organizations such as KCIC to manage communication systematically and relationally. Shannon-Weaver assists in mapping technical communication pathways involving sender, message,

channel, receiver, and noise [7], while IMC emphasizes long-term emotional engagement and customer experience [6], [8]. Therefore, the integration of these two theories provides a strong theoretical and strategic foundation for understanding brand communication practices in contemporary marketing environments.

By examining Whoosh's merchandise communication strategy, it can be concluded that the integration of the Shannon-Weaver model and IMC enables the creation of a cohesive communication flow. From message encoding, communication channel selection, and noise management to audience reception and interpretation, these elements have been implemented in accordance with both communication theories. However, to strengthen communication effectiveness, continuous monitoring and strategic refinement remain necessary in order to adapt to the evolving dynamics of audience perception, digital interaction, and consumer expectations.

4.3.2 The Role of Merchandise in Public Transportation Marketing

Merchandise holds strategic potential in the marketing of public services, particularly transportation, as a medium that combines symbolic, economic, and emotional functions. In the case of Whoosh, merchandise serves not merely as an additional product but as a tool for communication and brand differentiation. Through products such as T-shirts, hats, and tumblers, KCIC extends the brand's reach into customers' personal spaces and social environments. This represents a tangible implementation of the IMC principle in increasing touchpoints between the brand and consumers [6], [8].

The differentiation function becomes particularly crucial amid increasingly homogeneous public transportation competition. Products such as merchandise help Whoosh establish a unique identity among other transportation modes such as KAI, MRT, and LRT. When customers take home and wear the merchandise, they indirectly become part of a larger narrative, namely Indonesia's progress through technological innovation. This represents differentiation rooted in symbolic meaning rather than merely transportation services. Kotler and Keller [5] emphasized that strong brand differentiation is built through emotional value and symbolic associations attached to products and experiences.

Moreover, merchandise plays an important role in shaping national branding. KCIC actively promotes Whoosh as "Southeast Asia's first high-speed train" and positions its merchandise as "memorable souvenirs" [26]. Through this approach, the Whoosh brand has evolved into a symbol of nationalism and technological advancement. The merchandise serves as visual evidence of this narrative and contributes to building a positive image of Indonesia among foreign tourists, who constitute an important segment of the target audience. Yuliana [24] explained that transportation aesthetics and branding strategies significantly contribute to nation-branding efforts in Southeast Asia.

This strategic potential can also be replicated by other transportation entities. KAI, for example, could leverage historical routes and cultural values in its merchandise products through special editions inspired by trains such as Argo Lawu, Taksaka, or KA Wisata. Likewise, MRT Jakarta could emphasize urban lifestyle and environmentally friendly narratives in its communication strategy. Through IMC-based merchandising strategies, public transportation companies can strengthen user loyalty while expanding their brand appeal beyond the purely functional dimensions of transportation services [6].

Merchandise marketing also provides public transportation companies with opportunities to generate additional non-fare revenue. This is important because public transportation business models often depend on subsidies or regulated ticket pricing systems. Professionally managed merchandise opens opportunities for monetization through retail activities, licensing partnerships, and themed campaigns linked to cultural events, tourism, or sporting activities. Belch and Belch [1] noted that integrated marketing communication strategies can simultaneously strengthen brand equity and create commercial value through diversified communication channels and branded products.

However, the success of merchandise in public transportation branding depends heavily on product quality, design relevance, and the narrative accompanying the communication strategy. Products that fail to reflect customer experience or are promoted without integrated communication planning risk weakening the brand image rather than strengthening it. Therefore, combining the Shannon-Weaver model as a structural communication framework with IMC as a strategic communication approach becomes essential for maintaining the sustainability and effectiveness of merchandise-based branding communication [7], [6].

By positioning merchandise as part of a strategic communication system, public transportation companies can expand brand value while also increasing public participation in shaping collective identity. Merchandise therefore functions not merely as a commercial product, but as a medium representing experiences, emotional engagement, and collective values embodied in tangible forms that can be used, shared, and remembered by audiences.

4.3.3 Recommendations for Future Merchandise Communication Strategies

Based on the findings and previous discussion, Whoosh's future merchandise communication strategy should focus on strengthening cross-channel integration, diversifying messaging, and optimizing public perception. First, KCIC is advised to expand merchandise distribution not only physically at stations but also through online platforms. This can be achieved by selling products on major e-commerce platforms such as Tokopedia and Shopee, as well as opening ordering channels through the official website. Integrating offline and online channels will strengthen multi-channel delivery and expand audience reach beyond Jakarta. This

recommendation aligns with IMC principles emphasizing the importance of communication channel integration and accessibility [6], [8].

Second, future communication strategies should incorporate a localized branding approach. Merchandise products can be developed using local cultural or geographical themes. For example, KCIC could release a special "Bandung Edition" featuring Gedung Sate motifs or West Java natural landscapes. This strategy would not only broaden market appeal but also create more personal and contextual meaning for audiences. In IMC, this approach is known as cultural customization, which contributes to increasing emotional engagement and brand affinity among diverse audience segments [19].

Third, customer community engagement should be strengthened. KCIC could develop a frequent traveler club or brand ambassador program consisting of loyal customers who voluntarily share positive content and reviews regarding the Whoosh experience and merchandise products. This strategy reflects a relationship-building approach within IMC, where customers function not only as communication targets but also as active participants in the communication process itself [6]. Belch and Belch [1] explained that customer participation and consumer-generated communication significantly strengthen long-term brand equity and communication effectiveness.

Fourth, storytelling strategies through merchandise should be expanded. Each merchandise product could be accompanied by short narratives explaining the symbolic meaning behind the design, the history of specific routes, or the technological achievements represented by the high-speed train project. This narrative element would strengthen the symbolic value of the merchandise while deepening customers' emotional attachment to the brand. Kotler and Keller [5] argued that brands with strong emotional and symbolic narratives are more memorable and capable of building stronger customer relationships.

Fifth, customer feedback mechanisms should become an integral part of the communication system. Customer satisfaction surveys, analysis of social media comments, and tracking of purchasing behavior can help evaluate the effectiveness of message encoding and decoding processes. By applying evaluation principles derived from the Shannon-Weaver model and adaptive strategies within IMC, KCIC can continuously improve product design, promotional activities, and distribution strategies based on audience responses and behavioral data [7], [6].

Sixth, expanding cross-sector collaboration may also become a strategic opportunity. Whoosh merchandise could collaborate with local designers, SMEs, and creative communities to produce limited-edition collections. In addition to increasing brand value, this strategy would support the development of Indonesia's creative economy ecosystem, aligning with the role of public transportation as both a public service provider and a social catalyst. Yuliana [24] emphasized that transportation branding integrated with cultural and creative industries contributes significantly to strengthening national image and public engagement.

By considering these strategic recommendations, KCIC can not only maintain the effectiveness of its merchandise communication strategy but also strengthen Whoosh's position as a progressive, competitive, and community-oriented brand. If developed sustainably and supported by continuous academic and market evaluation, this strategy could become a best-practice model for branding and communication within Indonesia's public transportation sector.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study analyzes the communication strategy of Whoosh merchandise using an integrated approach combining the Shannon–Weaver model and the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) framework, finding that the merchandise functions not merely as complementary products but as strategic communication media conveying brand identity, nationalism, and customer experience; within the Shannon–Weaver perspective, KCIC acts as the sender encoding messages of modernity, exclusivity, and national pride through visual and symbolic designs embedded in merchandise, which are transmitted through physical, digital, and experiential channels and decoded differently by diverse audiences, while communication noise emerges from factors such as price perception, limited local cultural representation, and distribution constraints; from the IMC perspective, merchandise serves as a key touchpoint ensuring message consistency across channels and enhancing brand experience through emotional and physical engagement, although segmentation and promotional efforts, while effective in increasing engagement, remain limited in reach and continuity; overall, the integration of both frameworks provides a comprehensive understanding of technical and strategic communication processes, demonstrating that Whoosh merchandise represents a strategic innovation in public service marketing in Indonesia and offers a replicable model for strengthening brand communication through more integrated, creative, and customer-oriented approaches.

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