

Research Articles

## Gamification in Marketing: Leveraging Interactive Experiences for Higher Consumer Engagement

Andre Ilyas <sup>1\*</sup>, Ahmad Vajri Rahman <sup>2</sup>, Bella Hartati <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Putra Indonesia “YPTK” Padang : [andreilyas@upiypk.ac.id](mailto:andreilyas@upiypk.ac.id)

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Putra Indonesia “YPTK” Padang : [ahmadvajriahman@upiypk.ac.id](mailto:ahmadvajriahman@upiypk.ac.id)

<sup>3</sup> Universitas Adiwangsa Jambi : [bellahartati0@gmail.com](mailto:bellahartati0@gmail.com)

\* Corresponding Author : Andre Ilyas

**Abstract:** This study explores the role of gamification in enhancing consumer engagement within digital marketing environments by examining the mediating influence of interactive experience. Although gamified marketing systems are increasingly adopted across various industries, their effectiveness often varies due to insufficient understanding of how game elements lead to meaningful user engagement. This research addresses that gap by focusing on how interactive features such as personalization, user control, and sensory feedback transform gamification mechanics into immersive consumer experiences. Employing a qualitative methodology, the study gathered data through in depth interviews with digital marketing professionals and UX/UI designers, complemented by a systematic literature review. Thematic analysis revealed that interactive experience plays a critical role in translating game elements into cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. The findings indicate that successful gamification strategies must be designed with a strong focus on the user experience, aligning game mechanics with the specific motivations and preferences of the target audience. By integrating perspectives from Self Determination Theory and Experiential Marketing Theory, the study offers a conceptual foundation for designing more effective digital engagement strategies. These insights are valuable for marketers aiming to create compelling, user centered digital experiences that foster long term consumer loyalty.

**Keywords:** Gamification; Interactive Experience; Consumer Engagement; Digital Marketing; User Centered Design; Qualitative Research; Motivation; UX Design

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### 1. Introduction

In the dynamic and increasingly competitive landscape of digital marketing, consumer engagement has emerged as a critical success metric. It refers to the depth of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment that a consumer demonstrates during interactions with a brand across digital platforms [1]. These interactions are not merely transactional but reflect an ongoing psychological attachment that fosters loyalty, advocacy, and sustained brand involvement [2]. As consumer attention becomes more fragmented due to information overload and platform saturation, there is an urgent need for innovative strategies that foster immersive and interactive experiences.

One of the most promising strategies to enhance consumer engagement is gamification. Gamification involves the use of game like elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, and challenges in non game environments to enhance motivation and participation [3]. Over the past decade, gamification has gained widespread adoption across various sectors, including digital marketing, due to its capacity to create enjoyable and rewarding user experiences [4]. Studies have found that gamification can trigger the brain's reward systems, stimulate user interest, and drive repeat interaction [5]. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of gamification is highly contingent upon the contextual design and alignment of game elements

with user preferences [6]. Poorly designed gamified systems may result in disengagement or even negative brand perceptions [7].

The strength of gamification lies in its ability to make brand interactions more engaging and enjoyable. However, most existing research primarily investigates the direct relationship between gamification and engagement, without adequately addressing the underlying psychological or experiential mechanisms that mediate this link [8], [9]. Furthermore, empirical findings across different contexts reveal inconsistencies, suggesting that gamification outcomes may vary based on how users perceive and interact with the gamified environment [10]. A major research gap therefore lies in understanding the mediating role of interactive experience in the gamification engagement nexus. Interactive experience encompasses user control, personalization, and multisensory interaction, all of which transform passive content consumption into active participation [11]. While a few studies have acknowledged the importance of interactivity in driving user engagement, there is a paucity of empirical research that integrates this variable as a mediator within gamified marketing frameworks [12], [13]. Addressing this gap is essential for developing more effective and psychologically grounded engagement strategies in digital contexts.

To address this issue, the current study proposes a conceptual model that integrates gamification, interactive experience, and consumer engagement into a single explanatory framework. This model explores how gamified elements stimulate interactive experiences and how these experiences, in turn, drive consumer engagement. A quantitative methodology is employed to empirically examine the causal relationships among these variables, providing a comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms at play. The key contributions of this study are fourfold: (1) it introduces a novel conceptual framework connecting gamification, interactive experience, and consumer engagement in digital marketing; (2) it addresses a critical gap in the literature regarding the mediating processes that explain gamification's impact; (3) it offers empirical evidence to support the theoretical model; and (4) it provides actionable insights for digital marketers seeking to design engaging and sustainable consumer experiences.

## **2. Literature Review**

The advancement of digital technologies has redefined how consumers interact with brands, making consumer engagement a critical area of interest in contemporary marketing research. This section reviews existing literature on consumer engagement, gamification, and interactive experience within digital contexts. By synthesizing recent theoretical and empirical studies, this review identifies key constructs, explores methodological approaches, and highlights unresolved issues. Particular attention is given to how gamification influences consumer behavior and the potential mediating role of interactive experience. This literature review ultimately uncovers significant research gaps and provides a foundation for the proposed conceptual framework of this study.

### **2.1. Consumer Engagement in Digital Contexts**

Consumer engagement has become a foundational concept in modern marketing, particularly within digital ecosystems. It encapsulates the intensity of a user's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement with digital content or brands [1]. Studies have shown that engaged consumers demonstrate higher levels of loyalty, repeat purchases, and willingness to co create value [2], [3]. Recent work by Hollebeek and Macky [4] confirms that digital consumer engagement is not only influenced by content quality but also by interactivity and emotional resonance. Moreover, user generated content and community participation significantly boost engagement, reinforcing the importance of experiential dimensions [5].

Despite its growing relevance, the concept of consumer engagement in gamified environments remains under explored. While engagement is often treated as an outcome variable, its dynamic and multidimensional nature suggests a need for deeper analysis of its antecedents and psychological drivers [6]. This study addresses this gap by investigating how gamified systems and interactive experiences co construct the engagement process.

## 2.2 Gamification and Motivational Design

Gamification is rooted in Self Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes intrinsic motivation through the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness [7]. Game elements such as points, leaderboards, and badges are designed to foster these psychological needs [8]. Several studies have demonstrated that gamification can significantly enhance user motivation, retention, and participation in digital contexts [9], [10]. For instance, Mekler et al. [11] revealed that different game mechanics influence specific motivational dimensions, making customization essential for efficacy.

However, gamification research presents inconsistent findings, especially when applied in commercial or marketing contexts. Some studies report increased engagement and satisfaction [12], while others suggest that poorly aligned game mechanics may lead to user fatigue or disengagement [13]. These inconsistencies are often attributed to differences in user type, context, and design implementation [14]. Thus, a key limitation in existing gamification literature is the lack of a mediating framework that explains how user experience transforms gamified input into engagement output.

## 2.3 Interactive Experience as a Mediator

Interactive experience refers to the degree of control, personalization, and multisensory feedback that users perceive during digital interactions [15]. Rooted in flow theory and experiential marketing, it is associated with deep user involvement and emotional immersion [16]. In digital marketing, interactivity transforms passive consumers into active participants, thereby increasing engagement, satisfaction, and brand trust [17]. Recent studies suggest that interactivity is not merely an outcome but a process that mediates user perception and behavior. Chang et al. [18] showed that personalized interactivity strengthens the impact of digital stimuli on engagement. Similarly, Santhanam et al. [19] found that multisensory engagement enhances the perceived quality and enjoyment of digital environments, further reinforcing emotional connection.

Despite its relevance, the role of interactive experience as a mediator between gamification and engagement remains under theorized. Only a few empirical models explore this relationship, leaving a gap in understanding how user experience bridges the motivational effects of gamification to sustained engagement [20]. This research addresses that gap by positioning interactive experience as a psychological mechanism through which gamification influences user behavior.

## 2.4 Research Gaps and Theoretical Contributions

Based on the reviewed literature, two key gaps are identified: (1) the lack of integration between gamification theory and interactive experience in explaining consumer engagement, and (2) the limited empirical modeling of interactive experience as a mediating construct. Existing studies tend to examine gamification and engagement in isolation, with minimal attention to experiential mediators [7], [13]. This study contributes to the literature by offering a mediated engagement model, grounded in SDT and experiential theory, which explains how gamification strategies stimulate interactive experiences that, in turn, drive digital consumer engagement. This framework not only extends theoretical understanding but also provides practical insights for designing user-centered digital marketing systems.

## 3. Method

This study adopts a qualitative research approach using both literature review and in depth interviews to explore how gamification in digital marketing creates interactive experiences that enhance consumer engagement. A qualitative design is appropriate as it enables a deeper understanding of meanings, user perceptions, and psychological mechanisms underlying gamified marketing, which are inherently complex and context dependent [1]. The object of this research is the practice of gamification in digital marketing campaigns, with a central focus on how interactive experiences encompassing user control, personalization, and sensory feedback mediate consumer engagement. Primary data are gathered through semi structured interviews with digital marketing experts and UX/UI professionals who have hands on experience in implementing gamification strategies. Informants are selected via

purposive sampling, based on their professional expertise and direct involvement in gamified marketing projects.

Additionally, secondary data are obtained from a systematic review of international peer reviewed journals published since 2020, covering key theoretical foundations such as Self Determination Theory (SDT), consumer engagement in digital contexts, and interactivity in marketing systems [2]–[4]. Thematic analysis is used to interpret qualitative data, identifying patterns that link gamified elements to interactive experiences and consumer engagement [5]. Triangulation of sources and expert validation are employed to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. This methodology enables the research not only to describe the connection between gamification and engagement but also to uncover the experiential and psychological mechanisms that mediate this relationship addressing the critical theoretical gap in the current literature [6]–[8].

### **3.1. Research Approach**

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how gamification in digital marketing contributes to consumer engagement through the mediating role of interactive experience. The qualitative approach is appropriate for gaining an in depth understanding of consumer experiences, perceptions, and the psychological processes that underlie engagement with gamified digital environments. Qualitative methods allow for rich, contextual data collection and interpretation, which is essential when examining phenomena that are not easily quantifiable but are deeply rooted in user perception and behavior [1]. To explore this complex relationship, the study combines two primary data collection strategies: a systematic literature review and in depth interviews with practitioners. The literature review is used to establish a theoretical baseline, while the interviews offer real world insights that validate or challenge existing conceptual models. This dual approach strengthens the research's analytical depth and ensures that both theory and practice are considered in model development and refinement [2].

### **3.2. Research Object and Focus**

The object of this study is gamification practices within digital marketing campaigns across industries, particularly those targeting user interaction through mobile applications, websites, or social media platforms. These marketing systems often incorporate game mechanics to drive behavior, yet the pathways through which these elements foster meaningful engagement remain unclear. The focus of this research is to identify interactive experience as a key mediator that translates gamified features into consumer engagement. Specifically, the study investigates how features like points, badges, leaderboards, and missions enhance user control, personalization, and sensory experience dimensions of interactive experience. These experiences are hypothesized to promote higher levels of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement. Understanding this mechanism provides not only theoretical insight but also actionable implications for digital marketers seeking to design sustainable engagement strategies [3].

### **3.3. Data Collection Methods**

Primary data were collected through semi structured interviews with ten informants consisting of digital marketing managers, UX/UI designers, and gamification consultants. These participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals with direct experience designing or managing gamified marketing systems. Interviews were conducted online, recorded with consent, and lasted approximately 60 minutes. Each session explored participant perspectives on how gamification features affect user experiences and behaviors. To complement the interviews, the study also conducted a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2020 onward. The keywords used included “gamification,” “interactive experience,” and “consumer engagement,” and the databases searched included Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Taylor & Francis. The literature provided a theoretical grounding that helped frame the interview questions and guided the thematic coding process. This triangulation of sources enhances both the depth and validity of the study [4].

### 3.4. Data Analysis Technique

The data obtained from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that allows the researcher to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships among the responses. Following Braun and Clarke's six phase framework, the analysis began with familiarization with the data, followed by coding, theme generation, theme refinement, definition, and reporting. Each transcript was coded manually using open and axial coding to preserve interpretive depth [5].

Themes that emerged were then cross referenced with findings from the literature review to determine the consistency and uniqueness of the patterns. Themes such as "motivational alignment," "user autonomy," "multisensory interaction," and "feedback loops" were prominent. These were linked back to theoretical constructs from Self Determination Theory and Experiential Marketing Theory. The interpretation focused on how interactive experiences derived from gamified systems contribute to consumer engagement across various contexts [6].

### 4. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the effectiveness of gamification elements varies significantly across different digital platforms, depending on the industry sector and the behavioral characteristics of the users. Three platforms were analyzed P1 (fashion retail), P2 (online grocery), and P3 (digital bookstore) each employing distinct gamification strategies. P1 implemented points, badges, and leaderboards to encourage competition and brand loyalty in a trend sensitive fashion context. P2 integrated time based challenges and reward coupons to drive impulsive purchases and break the monotony of routine shopping behavior. In contrast, P3 adopted narrative driven elements such as quests and loyalty levels to support content oriented engagement. These differences confirm the hypothesis that successful gamification relies not only on the selection of game elements but also on their contextual design and alignment with user motivations and platform objectives.



**Picture 1.** Gamification Experience Engagement Flow

Picture 1 visually represents the relationship between gamification elements, interactive experience, and consumer engagement. At the center of the image is a user engaging with a digital interface, symbolizing the active role of consumers within gamified digital marketing environments. On the left side, icons such as badges, medals, rankings, and progress bars illustrate common gamification features used in marketing strategies. These features are designed to motivate consumers through competition, achievement, and rewards. On the right side, elements of interactive experience are depicted through icons like game controllers, shields (symbolizing trust and security), coins (representing rewards), and 100% completion indicators. These visuals emphasize a user experience that is personalized, immersive, and responsive to user actions. Arrows connect both sets of elements gamification and interactive experience leading toward the central outcome: Consumer Engagement.

This design reinforces the study's central argument that consumer engagement results from a synergistic relationship between well crafted gamification and meaningful interactive experiences. The infographic clearly communicates the logical flow of the research model and underscores the importance of integrating game elements with engaging user experiences to develop effective and sustainable digital marketing strategi. This section presents a comparative overview of the three digital platforms examined in the study, highlighting the specific gamification features implemented in each. The platforms represent different industry contexts fashion retail, online groceries, and digital publishing allowing for a diverse analysis of how gamification is tailored to user behavior and business objectives. As shown in Table 1, each platform applies a unique combination of game elements, such as points, badges, leaderboards, and challenges, reflecting strategic adaptations to engage users effectively. This comparison supports the study's framework by illustrating contextual variations in gamified marketing practices.

**Table 1.** Overview of Case Platforms and Gamification Features

Platform Code	Industry Sector	Gamification Elements	Active Since
P1	Fashion Retail	Points, Badges, Leaderboards	2022
P2	Online Groceries	Time Challenges, Reward Coupons	2021
P3	Digital Bookstore	Quests, Loyalty Levels	2020

Table 1 provides a comparative overview of the three digital marketing platforms analyzed in this study. Each platform operates in a distinct sector fashion retail, online groceries, and digital bookselling which offers contextual variation in the application and design of gamification strategies. Platform P1, operating in the fashion retail industry, utilizes standard gamification elements such as points, badges, and leaderboards. These features are primarily designed to encourage repeated purchases and reward brand loyalty. The competitive nature of fashion trends makes leaderboards particularly effective in promoting user participation through social comparison.

Platform P2, in the online grocery sector, integrates time based challenges and reward coupons. These game mechanics are highly time sensitive and are aimed at driving impulsive buying behaviors and increasing shopping frequency. Given the repetitive nature of grocery purchases, this platform leverages gamification to maintain novelty and engagement over time. Platform P3, representing the digital bookstore, adopts more narrative driven gamification through quests and loyalty levels. These elements align with the content consumption behavior of readers, who are naturally goal oriented and responsive to progress based rewards. This design promotes long term engagement and encourages deeper exploration of available content.

Across all platforms, the implementation of gamified features reflects both strategic intent and user context alignment. While all three platforms apply core mechanics such as rewards and progression, their customization to the specific behaviors and expectations of their respective audiences demonstrates the importance of contextual gamification design. This variation supports the study's core assertion that gamification's effectiveness depends not only on the presence of game elements but also on how they are integrated into interactive experiences that resonate with target users.

## 5. Conclusion

This study investigated the role of interactive experience as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between gamification and consumer engagement within digital marketing environments. Using a qualitative approach that combined literature review and in depth interviews with digital marketing professionals and UX/UI designers, the findings revealed that gamified features alone do not guarantee consumer engagement. Rather, it is the quality of the interactive experience marked by personalization, user control, and sensory feedback that transforms game mechanics into meaningful consumer involvement.

The research offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it integrates Self Determination Theory and Experiential Marketing Theory to propose a mediated engagement model that addresses a notable gap in existing literature. Practically, the study suggests that marketers should prioritize user centered gamification strategies that align game elements with contextual user needs and interactive preferences. Future research may expand on these findings by employing quantitative validation or cross cultural comparative studies to test the robustness of the proposed framework in different digital ecosystems.

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