

Game ON : Customer Gamification Program as Key to Improve Trust and Customer Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

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This research aims to examine the impact of a gamification program on customer trust, with customer satisfaction serving as a mediating variable, while also assessing the effects of antecedent factors including performance expectancy, effort expectancy, facilitating conditions, and social influence. A quantitative approach was employed by distributing questionnaires to Indomaret customers who actively use the Poinku application. Data were analyzed using the Partial Least Square–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique to evaluate both direct and indirect relationships among the research variables. The findings reveal that performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and facilitating conditions significantly and positively influence the Customer Gamification Program, whereas social influence shows no significant effect. Moreover, the gamification program was found to have a significant effect on customer satisfaction, and customer satisfaction strongly influences customer trust. This finding confirms that the success of Indomaret's gamification program in building customer trust is not direct, but rather achieved through first increasing customer satisfaction. Therefore, companies need to continue developing gamification innovations that focus on benefits, ease of use, and facility support in order to create sustainable satisfaction and ultimately strengthen customer trust.

Keywords: Gamification, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Trust, Retail Technology, UTAUT

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly changed consumer behavior and the competitive landscape in the modern retail industry, particularly in Southeast Asia and Indonesia, which is one of the countries with the fastest digital economic growth. Retailers are driven to adopt innovative strategies that are not only transactional but also capable of delivering interactive and personalized shopping experiences. Gamification programs are one of the strategies for approaching consumers. Gamification programs involve applying elements and principles typically used in games, such as points, levels, challenges, rewards, leaderboards, or missions, to non-game contexts like business, education, healthcare, or marketing, with the aim of increasing user or customer engagement, motivation, and positive behavior [1]. Gamification has emerged as an effective marketing approach to increase user engagement, build emotional connections, and foster long-term loyalty through digital platforms [2, 3]. The use of digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence and big data, has helped retailers optimize customer experiences by leveraging personal data for service and product personalization [4]. This aligns with the increasing digitalization in retail, which is impacting customer relationships and business strategy management [5, 6].

Technological innovations in the form of interactive and personalized shopping experiences are increasingly being integrated into business models [7]. Some examples include the use of augmented reality, mobile applications, and artificial intelligence-powered recommendation systems, all of which can enhance customer interaction with brands [8-10]. Retailers are implementing this new technology to build a shopping experience that is not only transactional but also emotional, which in turn fosters long-term customer loyalty [11, 12].

Gamification programs are defined as the application of game elements in non-game contexts, and an increasing number of retailers are utilizing this approach to enhance user engagement [13, 14]. Accompanied by location-based strategies, gamification serves to attract consumer attention within the store through interactive challenges and point-based reward systems, demonstrating a significant positive relationship between gamification and customer experience [14]. In this way, retailers not only facilitate purchases but also create a meaningful and enjoyable shopping experience for consumers [15].

The success of the retail industry in adopting digital technology and gamification is a determining factor in differentiation strategies. Competition in the modern retail industry is not only measured by price and product but also by how well they can offer personalized and enjoyable consumer experiences through technological innovation [11, 16]. Therefore, the integration of digital technology and gamification into marketing strategies should be seen as an integral part of responding to market digitalization and changing consumer behavior.

Gamification mechanisms in retail mobile applications in Indonesia, as implemented by Indomaret Poinku and Alfagift, include elements such as point systems, leaderboards, badges, and reward-based missions. This mechanism is designed with the aim of increasing purchase frequency and building sustainable customer interaction and habits in using the application. Research shows that interfaces using a gamification approach can increase user enjoyment and autonomy, as well as their engagement with the gamification program, all of which positively impact customer satisfaction and consumer trust in the brand [17, 18]. The implementation of gamification features in mobile applications has proven effective in motivating higher usage among users, as well as in creating a fun and satisfying experience [19-21]. This explains why it's important for retail app developers to understand how gamification elements can be integrated in a way that is engaging and relevant to their users [22].

Indomaret, as one of the largest convenience store chains in Indonesia, has implemented this concept through the i-Saku application and the Indomaret Poinku program. Every time customers shop using their membership card or app, they earn points that can be collected and redeemed for discounts or products. This points system is complemented by membership tiers that offer greater benefits to frequent customers. Additionally, Indomaret regularly holds shopping missions and challenges, such as spending a certain amount within a specific number of transactions to earn bonus points or vouchers. Through the application, customers can also play mini-games such as spin and win or picture guessing games that offer prizes in the form of points, vouchers, or raffle tickets. Not only that, Indomaret also utilizes competition-based events where customers compete to collect the most digital coupons to win prizes, and features a leaderboard to showcase the most active customers. The point redemption process was also made interactive, both at the cashier and in the app, so customers have a more enjoyable experience. With this approach, Indomaret's gamification not only serves as a loyalty program but also as a means to strengthen emotional connections with customers and build trust through consistent and satisfying interactions.

The adoption mechanism of gamification programs in digital retail applications, this research uses the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) theoretical framework developed by [23] and expanded in UTAUT2 [24]. This model identifies four main determinants of technology acceptance: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions [25-27]. However, its application in the context of gamified retail applications remains minimally explored empirically, especially in developing market regions like Indonesia.

Some studies in the retail industry show that gamification elements can increase customer satisfaction and loyalty [25]. Research conducted by Baur found that gamification can improve the shopping experience by creating greater engagement, which directly impacts purchasing decisions [25]. Recommendations from friends and the experiences of other users can significantly influence the adoption of gamified retail applications [26]. Research shows that users exposed to positive experiences from friends or influencers are more likely to adopt applications with gamification elements [27].

METHODS

This research applies a quantitative approach with an explanatory design to examine the causal relationships among the variables in the conceptual model, specifically analyzing how factors from the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) affect repurchase intention through customer engagement in gamification (customer

gamification retail) and customer satisfaction. This research stems from the need to understand digital consumer behavior in Indonesia, particularly within the context of using gamified retail applications, such as Indomaret Poinku, which has become part of the digital marketing strategy in the modern retail sector [28].

The research location is focused on the Central Java province. Central Java was chosen due to its high modern retail penetration rate and large digital native population, particularly among Generation Z and early millennials. The research object is specifically directed toward users of the Indomaret Poinku application, considering that this application has integrated gamification features such as loyalty points, a "spin" game, gift coupons, and digital badges, all aimed at increasing customer retention. Therefore, this research is not only academically relevant but also has practical contributions to the development of user experience-based digital marketing strategies in the Indonesian retail sector.

Table 1. Variables and Indicators in the Study

Variabel/Dimensi	Indicator	Source
Performance Expectancy	PE1. Improving the quality of the shopping experience	[23, 24]
	PE2. Helping to complete transactions efficiently	
	PE3. Adding value from using the application	
	PE4. Membantu proses belanja digital	
Effort Expectancy	EE1. Easy to understand gamification features	
	EE2. Doesn't require much effort	
	EE3. Using the features feels easy.	
Social Influence	SI1. Encouragement from important people	
	SI2. The influence of friends or the social environment	
	SI3. The use of features is influenced by social trends.	
Facilitating Conditions	FC1. Resource availability	
	FC2. Technical support for the system	
	FC3. Device compatibility	
Customer Gamification Program	Return on Investment (the benefits generated from the gamification program)	[29]
	User Acceptance (User satisfaction and acceptance level of gamification elements within the program)	
	Completion Rate (users who successfully achieved their goal or completed the challenge)	
Customer Satisfaction	Participation Rate (Percentage of users actively participating in gamification features)	[30]
	Satisfaction with gamification features	
	Fun gamification experience	
Customer Trust	Satisfied with the overall experience	[31]
	Reliability (the confidence that a company or service provider will fulfill its promises and commitments)	
	Integrity (the perception that the company is honest, consistent, and trustworthy)	
	Credibility (the belief that the company has expertise and competence in providing products/services)	
	Good Intentions (the belief that the company cares about customer interests, not just profit)	

RESULTS

A total of 240 respondents participated in this study, all of whom were active consumers who frequently shopped at Indomaret in the Central Java region. Respondent selection was based on purposive criteria, specifically individuals who had participated in at least one game, such as Indomaret Poin, within the last three months and had experience using gamification features like point redemption, daily missions, the "spin" game, and loyalty badges.

In terms of gender, the majority of respondents are female (60%), while males account for 40%, reflecting the dominance of female users in application-based retail shopping activities. Based on age group, the majority of respondents were in the 17–25 age range (72%), belonging to Generation Z, a group known for its high level of technological adaptation and responsiveness to interactive and digital features. The remaining respondents were from the 26–35 age group (20%) and the rest were over 35 years old (8%).

Regarding the frequency of application use, approximately 55% of respondents reported using the Indomaret Poinku application more than twice a week, while 30% used it once a week, and 15% used it only occasionally or during specific promotions. This indicates that the majority of respondents are quite active in using the application and its gamification features.

Table 2. Hypothesis Test Results, R Square, F Square

Hubungan Antar Variabel	Koefisien (O)	T-Statistic	P-Value	R Square (Variabel Depend)	F Square
Effort Expectancy → Customer Gamification program	0,244	3,902	0,000		0,114
Facilitating Conditions → Customer Gamification program	0,19	3,801	0,000		0,073
Performance Expectancy → Customer Gamification program	0,558	7,556	0,000	0,535	0,496
Social Influence → Customer Gamification program	0,016	0,241	0,809		0,215
Customer Gamification program → Customer Satisfaction	0,329	4,377	0,000	0,108	0,121
Customer Satisfaction → Customer Trust	0,488	9,126	0,000		
Customer Gamification program -> Customer Satisfaction -> Customer Trust	0,160	3,226	0,001	0,238	0,312

The test results reveal that Performance Expectancy is the strongest predictor of the Customer Gamification Program ($\beta = 0.558$, $t = 7.556$, $p = 0.000$, $F^2 = 0.496$), indicating that perceived usefulness and rewards drive customer engagement most effectively. Effort Expectancy ($\beta = 0.244$, $p = 0.000$, $F^2 = 0.114$) and Facilitating Conditions ($\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.000$, $F^2 = 0.073$) also have significant positive effects, suggesting that ease of use, technical support, and accessibility enhance participation. In contrast, Social Influence shows no significant effect ($\beta = -0.016$, $p = 0.809$), implying that participation decisions are largely individual.

The Customer Gamification Program significantly increases Customer Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.329$, $p = 0.000$, $F^2 = 0.121$), and Customer Satisfaction strongly predicts Customer Trust ($\beta = 0.488$, $p = 0.000$, $F^2 = 0.312$). Moreover, satisfaction mediates the relationship between gamification and trust ($\beta = 0.160$, $p = 0.001$), confirming its role as a psychological bridge between engagement and loyalty. The model explains 53.5% of the variance in gamification engagement, 10.8% in satisfaction, and 23.8% in trust—indicating moderate to strong predictive power of the structural model.

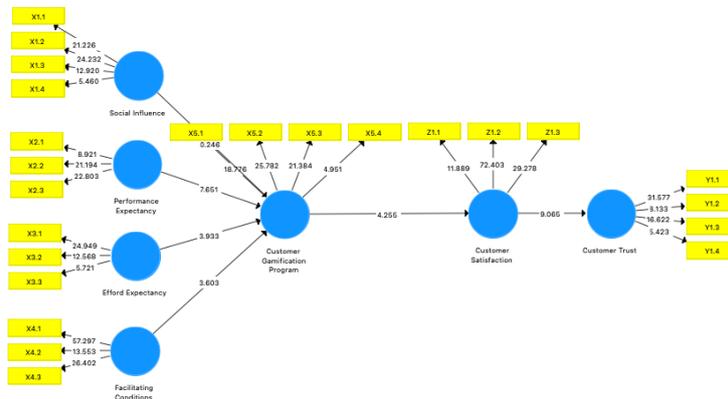


Figure 2. Path Analysis

DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that social influence plays an important role in increasing customer participation in the gamification program. This indicates that customers’ decisions to engage in the program are not only influenced by individual benefits but also by social encouragement from their surrounding environment, such as friends, family, and digital communities. For Indomaret, this condition highlights the need to strengthen social features within its application, such as implementing a leaderboard system, enabling achievement sharing on social media, or developing a refer-a-friend program that provides additional points for customers who successfully invite new users. By doing so, the social element can become a natural driver that expands the program’s reach and accelerates gamification adoption among customers.

Performance expectancy also has a significant influence on the level of customer engagement in the customer gamification program. Customers are more motivated to participate when they perceive tangible benefits—whether financial advantages, entertainment value, or transactional convenience. In the case of Indomaret, this perception of usefulness can be enhanced by integrating the gamification points system with various promotional programs, such as exclusive discounts, digital vouchers, or personalized offers based on customers’ purchase histories. Through this strategy, customers not only enjoy the entertainment aspect of the game but also experience real economic value from every interaction they have with the application.

The positive influence of effort expectancy indicates that the ease of using the gamification system is a key factor in driving customer engagement. Within the context of Indomaret, digital applications such as iRewards or KlikIndomaret should be designed with a simple, fast, and intuitive interface so that customers do not experience difficulties when accessing game features or redeeming their collected points. A smooth and hassle-free user experience will make customers feel comfortable to continue participating, thereby increasing the frequency of their interactions with the Indomaret brand.

Facilitating conditions have also been proven to play an important role in the effectiveness of the customer gamification program. Factors such as device compatibility, network stability, and digital payment support significantly affect customers’ comfort when using the application. Indomaret must ensure adequate technological infrastructure and compatibility across different devices and operating systems. Integration with digital wallets such as OVO, DANA, or GoPay also serves as an essential facility that can accelerate and simplify customers’ processes of redeeming points or claiming digital rewards.

The test results reveal that the success of the gamification program directly contributes to an increase in customer satisfaction. When customers feel delighted and have enjoyable experiences interacting with the gamification features, they develop a positive perception of Indomaret’s service and brand. This satisfaction does not solely come from receiving rewards or points but also from the emotional experience of feeling valued, recognized, and involved by the company. To maintain this level of satisfaction, Indomaret should continuously update the gamification content by introducing new missions, tiered levels, or unexpected surprise rewards to keep customers challenged and enthusiastic about participating.

Furthermore, customer satisfaction has been proven to be a determining factor in building customer trust. In the context of Indomaret, when customers are satisfied with the clarity of the system, transparency in reward distribution, and service consistency, their trust in the brand grows naturally. This trust is crucial because it serves as the foundation for long-term customer loyalty. Customers who trust the honesty and credibility of the program are more likely to make repeat purchases and recommend Indomaret to others. Therefore, maintaining transparency in point collection and redemption mechanisms, ensuring clarity of program rules, and guaranteeing consistency between promotional promises and actual reward realization are essential aspects that Indomaret's management must uphold.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings of this study emphasize that the success of Indomaret's customer gamification program is not solely dependent on technological sophistication but also on customers' perceptions of usefulness, ease of use, technical support, and social factors surrounding the program. Indomaret should view gamification not merely as a promotional tool but as a long-term strategic approach to create emotional engagement and deep loyalty among its customers. When customers perceive that their participation in the digital program provides real benefits, enjoyable experiences, and a sense of trust toward the brand, gamification will become a crucial foundation in strengthening Indomaret's position amid the increasingly technology-driven and experience-based modern retail competition.

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