

BUILDING CONNECTIONS: HOW TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN GAMIFICATION AND ONLINE REVIEWS SHAPE CUSTOMER LOYALTY

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Abstract:

This study examines the influence of gamification and online customer reviews on customer loyalty in e-commerce, with a focus on how purchase decisions mediate this relationship. As e-commerce grows, customer loyalty becomes crucial for long-term success. The novelty of this research lies in integrating gamification, online reviews, and purchase decisions into one framework to explore their combined impact on loyalty. Data was collected from 300 online marketplace users through questionnaires, and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results show that gamification positively affects purchase decisions and loyalty, with purchase decisions serving as a key mediator. Additionally, online customer reviews enhance purchase intentions, which further boost loyalty. This study fills a gap in the literature by exploring how gamification and purchase decisions interact within the context of customer loyalty in e-commerce. For businesses, the findings suggest that incorporating gamification and leveraging online reviews can be effective strategies for increasing customer loyalty, improving user engagement, and encouraging repeat purchases, especially in competitive digital markets.

Key words: Gamification; Online Customer Review; Customer Loyalty; Purchase Decision

1. Introduction

Technological developments are experiencing increasingly rapid progress in line with the emergence of internet-based technology (Asy'ari & Sukresna, 2023). In recent years, information and communication technology development has revolutionized how consumers shop. Online marketplaces, as platforms that connect sellers and buyers, have become the leading choice for many people in making transactions (Soleimani, 2022). However, despite the many conveniences offered, the challenge of maintaining consumer loyalty remains a central issue for business actors. Consumer loyalty is critical to long-term success in the e-commerce industry (Aslam et al., 2020). Many marketplace platforms allow consumers to move from one marketplace to another.

For this reason, market platforms must struggle to maintain customer loyalty amidst fierce competition (Costa & Castro, 2021; Hänninen et al., 2018). A creative thing that is widely applied is adding a gamification menu to the online marketplace platform. Gamification has attracted considerable attention from practitioners and has become a viable tactic to influence behavior, enhance innovation, and improve marketing outcomes across industries (Ciuchita et al., 2023). Gamification attracts customer attention and creates more profound engagement, which can increase customer loyalty (Suh et al., 2018). According to (Hofacker et al., 2016), gamification uses game design elements in non-game activities to improve product quality or increase consumer value by encouraging consumer behavior such as increasing consumption levels, high loyalty, involvement, or product promotion. Studies that produce findings that gamification has an effect on customer loyalty have been produced (Al-Zyoud, 2021; Fathian et al., 2019; Hwang & Choi, 2020; Kunkel et al., 2021; Mustikasari, 2022; Torres et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, the opposite result was found (Nichora & Sondari, 2023; Shahisa & Aprilianty, 2022) where gamification had no effect on consumer loyalty. The findings of this previous study resulted in inconsistencies, which created a research gap. To bridge the research gap, the author used purchasing decisions taken by consumers. Purchasing decisions are activities carried out by prospective consumers that determine the final purchase decision after analyzing needs and considering various factors (Chen et al., 2017; Qazzafi, 2019). In this context, customer purchasing decisions become a vital mediator that connects gamification with customer loyalty. Game elements such as collecting points, challenges, and rewards can influence how customers make decisions, increasing a sense of involvement and satisfaction centered on stronger loyalty (Tobon et al., 2020). Therefore, it is essential to explore how gamification can influence purchasing decisions and increase customer loyalty.

In addition to gamification, before deciding to buy, consumers often look for online customer reviews to get information about the marketplace (Maslowska et al., 2017). Customers use online customer reviews as a reference or consideration when choosing a product or service because the review can show whether the quality of the product or service is good (Thakur, 2018). Reading a review about a product can cause emotions that indicate a signal of product quality (Wang et al., 2020). Online customer reviews emerge as an influential source of information that significantly influences customers' pre-purchase decisions (Changchit et al., 2021) and also have a long-term impact on customer loyalty

(Khan et al., 2022). Based on the reviews they read, consumers who are satisfied with the products they buy are more likely to shop again and recommend the product to others. This creates a positive cycle that benefits the company, where customer loyalty is formed through experiences influenced by online reviews (Siebert et al., 2020). The novelty of this study lies in the integration between gamification and purchasing decisions in the context of customer loyalty in online marketplaces. Although many previous studies have explored the influence of gamification and online customer reviews separately on consumer loyalty, this study attempts to bridge the gap by examining the interaction between gamification elements, purchasing decisions, and customer loyalty.

2. Literature review

The Effect of Gamification on Customer Loyalty

Gamification involves using game design elements like points, badges, challenges, and rewards to increase user engagement and experience (Raed S. Alsawaier, 2018). According to (Hofacker et al., 2016), gamification can increase consumer value by encouraging desired behaviors, such as loyalty and engagement. The application of gamification is intended to attract attention and create a more enjoyable and interactive experience for users. Based on consumer behavior theory, high customer engagement is closely related to loyalty. Gamification elements can create deeper interactions between consumers and brands, increase satisfaction, and strengthen emotional connections (Torres et al., 2022). Research (Suh et al., 2018) shows that positive experiences resulting from gamification can strengthen customer loyalty because customers feel more involved and appreciated. In online marketplaces, where interactions between sellers and buyers are often limited, gamification can be an effective tool to create a more engaging experience (Tobon et al., 2020).

Based on this explanation, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Gamification is related to Customer Loyalty

The Effect of Gamification on Purchase Decisions

In the increasingly competitive context of e-commerce, purchasing decision-making is crucial to business success. With the many choices available in the marketplace, consumers often face challenges in making their final choices (Tian et al., 2018). Using game elements such as points, badges, challenges, and transaction rewards can increase user engagement and experience. Through interactive and fun experiences, gamification can attract consumers' attention and influence their behavior (De Canio et al., 2021). This is important in purchasing decision-making, where consumers choose experiences that provide added value. Gamification also serves to motivate consumers. Reward elements, such as collecting points or special offers after completing challenges, can incentivize consumers to purchase (Hwang & Choi, 2020). Research (Tobon et al., 2020) shows that these incentives increase the desire to buy and strengthen consumer commitment to the brand. In the context of online marketplaces, gamification can be an effective tool to improve purchasing decisions. By creating a more enjoyable and interactive shopping experience, the platform can help consumers feel more confident in their choices.

Based on this explanation, the following hypothesis is formulated.

H2: Gamification is positively related to Purchase Decision.

The Influence of Online Customer Reviews on Purchase Decisions

Online customer reviews are among the most influential sources of information in the decision-making process. These reviews provide an overview of product quality and create consumer perceptions and trust in brands and marketplaces (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018; Thakur, 2018). Today's consumers tend to do in-depth research before making a purchase decision, with many relying on online reviews as their primary reference and trusting the experiences and opinions of others rather than advertisements made by companies. This shows the importance of customer reviews in influencing purchase decisions (Maslowska et al., 2017). Positive reviews can increase consumer confidence and reduce uncertainty related to purchase decisions (Grewal & Stephen, 2019).

Conversely, negative reviews can hinder purchase decisions, creating uncertainty that can lead to purchase cancellation. Studies (Thakur, 2018) show that good reviews can significantly increase purchase intentions. Meanwhile (Wang et al., 2020) stated that emotions caused by reviews can be an important signal about product quality, which in turn influences consumer purchasing decisions.

Based on this explanation, the following hypothesis is formulated.

H3: Online Customer Reviews have a positive effect on Purchase Decision

The Effect of Purchase Decision on Customer Loyalty

A purchase decision is a process by which consumers determine the final choice before purchasing a product or service (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020). This process includes needs analysis, alternative assessment, and product selection. A good purchase decision can result in a positive experience that increases consumer satisfaction, contributing to their loyalty to the brand (Chen et al., 2017). Positive experiences from purchasing decisions can increase consumers' sense of attachment to the brand. When consumers are satisfied with their products, they shop again and recommend them to others. A study (Khan et al., 2022) shows that positive decision-making experiences can create a strong relationship between consumers and brands, which is the foundation for customer loyalty. Purchasing decisions are not only influenced by rational factors but also by emotional factors (Wang et al., 2020). Consumers feel more emotionally connected to the brand when they make decisions they consider suitable. Positive emotions from successful decisions can strengthen customer loyalty (Suh et al., 2018). Therefore, it is essential to understand how purchasing decisions can form a lasting emotional bond with a brand.

Based on this explanation, the following hypothesis is formulated.

H4: Purchase Decision has a significant positive effect on Customer Loyalty

Purchase Decision Mediating Effect

Gamification is a marketing strategy to improve service quality by using game design elements that provide a fun experience to users so that it can increase loyalty, engagement, and brand awareness (Lu & Ho, 2020). These elements are designed to increase customer engagement, which can influence purchasing behavior. According to (Suh et al., 2018), increased engagement can influence consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. When consumers make positive and satisfying decisions, they are more likely to develop brand loyalty. Research shows that good purchasing decisions can increase

customer satisfaction, a critical factor in building loyalty (Khan et al., 2022). In this context, purchasing decisions can function as a mediator connecting gamification with customer loyalty.

Gamification can also motivate users to continue playing the game until they get a reward that can later be used to purchase a product. The provision of this reward aims to encourage consumers to make purchases in exchange for the reward (Djohan et al., 2022). After consumers make a purchase decision and feel satisfied, it will encourage consumer loyalty (Arslan, 2020).

Based on this explanation, the following hypothesis is formulated.

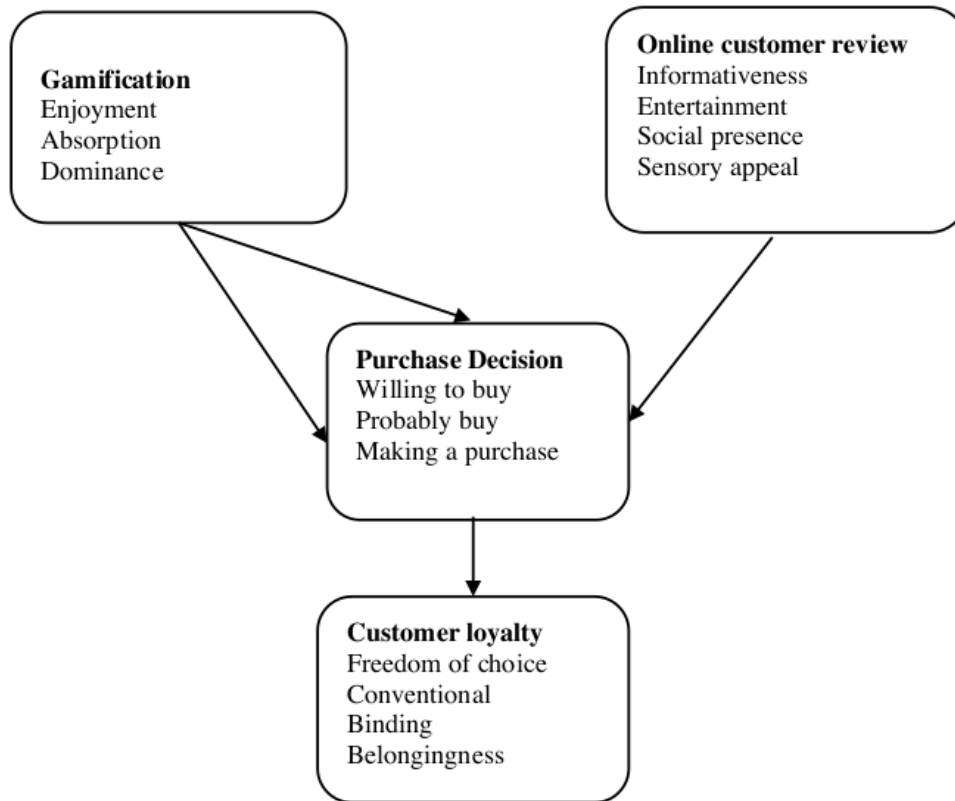
H5: Purchase Decision mediates the relationship between Gamification and Customer Loyalty

In a competitive e-commerce environment, online customer reviews are one of the primary sources of information influencing purchasing decisions (Kang et al., 2022). These reviews provide insight into product quality and shape consumer perceptions and trust in the brand. In the context of an online marketplace, where consumers have quick access to various reviews and information, purchasing decisions become more complex (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020). Customer reviews can help simplify this process, and when consumers are satisfied with their decisions, they are more likely to remain loyal to the brand or platform. Business actors can optimize their marketing strategies by understanding the role of purchasing decisions. Positive emotions from reading good reviews can increase the desire to buy and develop an emotional attachment to the brand (Currás-Pérez et al., 2018; Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2018). This shows that reviews influence decisions rationally and through emotional influence, which then affects loyalty (Siebert et al., 2020).

Based on this explanation, the following hypothesis is formulated.

H6: Purchase Decision mediates the influence of Online Customer Review on Customer Loyalty

Figure 1: Conceptual model



3. Methodology

⁵ This study uses a quantitative approach and data collection method with a questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The Google Form link is distributed via the WhatsApp application—sampling with a non-probability technique using purposive sampling, namely, taking samples based on criteria. The sample criteria for this study are online marketplace users who have shopped at online marketplaces at least 2 times, are 17 years old and over, and live in Indonesia. The study sample consisted of 300 respondents. The Gamification variable is measured by the dimensions developed (Eppmann et al., 2018) namely enjoyment, Absorption, and dominance. The indicators measure the Online Customer Review variable developed (Bleier et al., 2019): informativeness, entertainment, social presence, and sensory appeal. The indicators measure the Customer Loyalty variable developed (Närvänen et al., 2020), namely freedom of choice, conventional, binding, and belongingness. Purchase Decision variables are measured using indicators developed (Pei et al., 2014), namely the willingness to buy, probably buy something, and making a purchase.

Statement items are measured using a Likert scale of 1-7 (1: strongly disagree - 7: strongly agree). The research data analysis uses descriptive analysis to analyze the pre-test results and collect sample demographic characteristics. Validity tests use CFA, and

data analysis uses SEM-AMOS. More specific ¹ measurement items are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Construct and Items

Construct	Item	Item abbreviation
Gamification	I feel entertained when playing gamification features in the marketplace.	E1 – Enjoyment 1
	I enjoy playing the gamification feature on the marketplace because there are many rewards.	E2 – Enjoyment 2
	The gamification feature allows me to interact with other users.	A1 – Absorption 1
	The gamification feature makes me return to the marketplace to continue the game.	A2 – Absorption 2
	The rewards offered in gamification on the marketplace can influence my online shopping.	D1 – Dominance 1
	The gamification feature influences me to continue accessing the marketplace	D2 – Dominance 2
Online Customer review	Online customer reviews can help me in choosing a product or service.	I1 - Informativeness 1
	Online customer reviews make finding information about the product or service I will use easier.	I2 - Informativeness 2
	Online customer reviews can provide reliable information.	En1 - Entertainment 1
	I trust reviews that have detailed explanations rather than short and general reviews.	En2 - Entertainment 2
	Reviews that include evidence, such as photos, can be more convincing when choosing a product or service.	SP1 - social presence 1
	I trust reviews that provide clear reasons regarding the advantages and disadvantages of a product or service.	SP2 - social presence 2
	I prefer products or services that have positive reviews.	SA1 - sensory appeal 1
	Positive reviews indicate that the product or service is of good quality.	SA2 - sensory appeal 2
	I trust products or services that have more positive reviews than negative reviews.	SA3 - sensory appeal 3
Purchase decision	I decided to purchase through the marketplace because the products matched my wishes.	Wil1 - willing to buy something 1
	I decided to purchase through the marketplace because the products offered were very diverse.	Wil2 - willing to buy something 2
	I purchased through the marketplace because I heard the experiences of other people who had purchased before.	Prob1 - probably buy something 1
	I recommend that others shop through the marketplace if the product I buy is as expected.	Prob2 - probably buy something 2
	I recommend that others buy products through the marketplace because they are guaranteed safe, and the shipping is fast.	Purc1- making a purchase 1
	I have made purchases through the marketplace more than once because I feel satisfied shopping through the marketplace.	Purc2 - making a purchase 2
	I will make purchases through the marketplace in the future.	Purc3 - making a purchase 3
Customer loyalty	I shop online using the marketplace repeatedly because purchasing is speedy.	FC1 - freedom of choice 1
	I shop again using the marketplace because it is easy to use.	FC2 - freedom of choice 2
	I always use the marketplace every time I shop online.	C1 – conventional 1
	I shop online using the marketplace repeatedly because purchasing is speedy.	C2 – conventional 2

	I shop again using the marketplace because it is easy to use.	B1 – Binding 1
	I always use the marketplace every time I shop online.	B2 – Binding 2
	I shop online using the marketplace repeatedly because purchasing is speedy.	BE1 – belongingness 1
	I shop again using the marketplace because it is easy to use.	BE2 - Belongingness 2

4. Results/findings

The research data was collected in July 2024 via an online survey. The respondents' demographic data were compiled based on the survey results, as shown in Table 1.

Table 2. Demographic data

Education level	%	Age	%
High school	75	17 – 24 Years	92
Bachelor's degree certificate	25	25 – 32 Years	5
Job	%	33 – 40 Years	0
Job Seeker	5	41 – 50 Years	1
Student	63	> 51 Years	92
Freelancer	4	Gender	%
Private Employee	20	Male	17
Government employees	2	Female	83
Housewife	6		

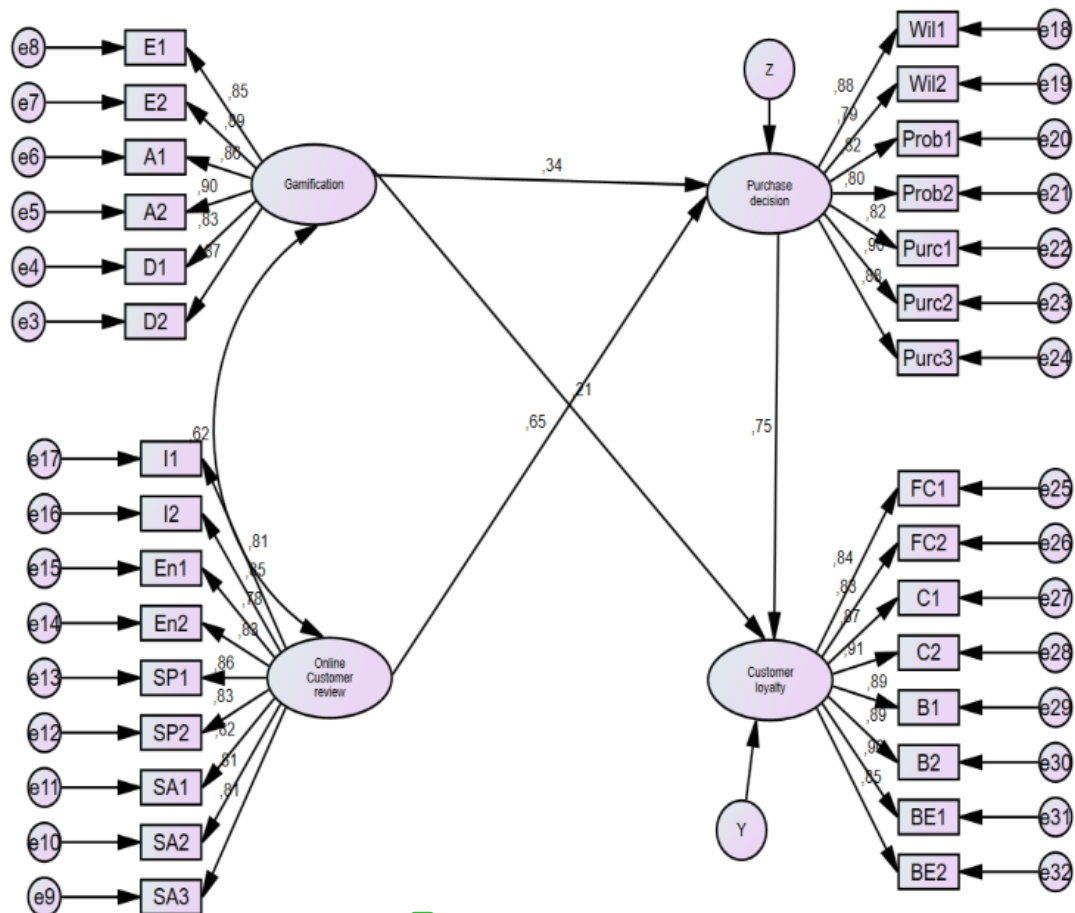
The initial research conducted instrument testing through reliability and construct validity. Based on the results of data analysis in Table 3, the estimated value of standardized Regression Weight for all statement items was above 0.5. This statement can be interpreted if all questionnaire items in this study are declared valid. Reliability testing is known from the CR and AVE values. From the calculation results, the CR value is above 0.9, and the AVE value is above 0.5, so all questionnaire items are also declared reliable.

Table 3. Constructs validity and reliability

Construct	Item	Loading Factor	CR	AVE	Construct	Item	Loading Factor	CR	AVE
Gamification	D2	,872	0.947	0.75	Purchase decision	Wil1	,876	0.94	0.71
	D1	,827				Wil2	,795		
	A2	,897				Prob 1	,818		
	A1	,862				Prob 2	,804		
	E2	,890				Purc1	,816		
	E1	,847				Purc2	,902		
Online Customer review	SA3	,813	0.95	0.68	Customer loyalty	Purc3	,884	0.96	0.76
	SA2	,811				FC1	,840		
	SA1	,824				FC2	,831		
	SP2	,830				C1	,868		
	SP1	,861				C2	,914		
	En2	,831				B1	,894		
	En1	,784				B2	,892		
	I2	,848				BE1	,897		
	I1	,812				BE2	,852		

Based on Table 3, all statement items are declared valid and reliable. The next stage is to conduct a complete research model analysis to test the hypothesis. The results of the hypothesis testing are presented in Figure 2 and Table 3.

Figure 2. Full model analysis



Hypothesis testing is done by looking at the t statistic and p values to determine whether the hypothesis has a positive and significant effect. The relationship is declared positive and significant if the t -statistics value is >1.96 and the p -value is <0.50 (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 4. Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Effect	Estimate	SE	T Statistics (>1.96)	P value	Decision
H1	Gamification -> Customer Loyalty	.143	.032	4,424	0.000	Supported
H2	Gamification -> Purchase Decision	.244	.031	7,996	0.000	Supported
H3	Online Customer Review (X2) ->	.768	.061	12,585	0.000	Supported

	Purchase Decision					
H4	Purchase Decision - > Customer Loyalty	.728	,056	13,010	0.000	Supported
H5	Gamification-> Purchase Decision - > Customer Loyalty		0.026	6.718	0.000	Supported
H6	Online customer review -> Purchase -> Decision Customer Loyalty		0.062	9.0578	0.000	Supported

¹ Sumber: Authors' own elaboration based on primary data (2024)

Based on the results of data analysis in Table 4, the p-value of the direct relationship between the constructs tested in hypotheses 1-4 is 0.000, and the t-statistic value is more significant than 1.96. These results indicate that the direct influence on hypotheses 1-4 is significant, so the study's results support the hypothesis. Indirect testing by adding purchase decision as a mediator in hypotheses 5 and 6 also has a p-value of 0.000 and a t-value > 1.96. These results have meaning if hypotheses 5 and 6 are stated to be significantly supported by the study results.

5. Discussions

The analysis shows that gamification has a significant positive relationship with customer loyalty. This finding strengthens previous studies (Al-Zyoud, 2021; Fathian et al., 2019; Hwang & Choi, 2020; Kunkel et al., 2021; Mustikasari, 2022; Torres et al., 2022). However, it differs from studies (Nichora & Sondari, 2023; Shah & Aprilianty, 2022), where gamification does not affect consumer loyalty. Gamification, the application of game elements in a non-game context, has become a popular strategy for increasing customer engagement (Huseynov, 2020). Gamification makes marketplace services more fun and exciting because gamification designs services to provide a gaming experience for consumers by creating value and increasing positive responses (Sundjaja et al., 2022). When customers play games, it can increase emotional engagement transaction frequency and create a community so that companies can build strong customer loyalty. Elements in gamification provide customers with direct feedback, enhancing the user experience. This helps customers feel valued and recognized, which contributes to long-term loyalty. However, it is essential to design a gamification strategy that is appropriate and relevant to the audience to maximize its results. With the right approach, gamification increases loyalty and creates a more satisfying customer experience.

Gamification also has a positive relationship with purchase intention. One of the main reasons why gamification can increase purchase intention is through the motivation it generates (Yu & Huang, 2022). Gamification elements such as points, levels, and badges can encourage intrinsic motivation, where consumers feel more involved and satisfied in the purchasing process (Tobon et al., 2020; Xi & Hamari, 2019). In addition, extrinsic motivation, driven by rewards or incentives, increases purchase intention (Meyer-Waarden et al., 2013). Gamification can also create interactive and fun experiences, increasing consumer engagement. When consumers are more engaged, they tend to spend more

time and attention on the product or service being offered. This high engagement often increases purchase intentions, as consumers feel more connected and motivated to make a transaction (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020). Effective gamification implementation can be tailored to consumer preferences and behaviors.

The study's results also support the third hypothesis, which shows that online customer reviews positively affect purchase intention. One of the main factors explaining the positive relationship between online customer reviews and purchase intention is the role of trust (Ventre & Kolbe, 2020). Reviews written by other consumers are often considered more credible than direct promotions from the company. Consumers also tend to trust the opinions of others who have real experience with a product or service. Positive reviews can increase consumer trust, encouraging purchase intention (Grewal & Stephen, 2019; Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2018). According to (Aradatin et al., 2017), Online customer reviews are used by consumers as a reference or consideration in choosing a product or service because the review can show whether the quality of the product or service is good. Online customer reviews serve as information that helps consumers evaluate products before purchasing. Consumers' intention to buy increases when they feel more confident in their decisions. The study's results also support the hypothesis that purchasing decisions positively and significantly affect consumer loyalty. Purchasing decisions are the process of consumer decision-making in purchasing, where consumers make choices and then decide to buy and feel satisfied with that choice that meets their needs (Dwijantoro et al., 2022). After making a purchase, consumers' pleasant and satisfying experiences can strengthen loyalty (Molinillo et al., 2017). If consumers are satisfied with the product or service they receive, this increases their likelihood of returning to shop. The value consumers perceive from a product or service also plays a vital role in forming loyalty. When consumers feel that their purchasing decision provides more significant benefits than other alternatives, they are more likely to choose that brand again. Loyalty is often formed from decisions based on solid values.

The data analysis results also support the indirect effect of Gamification on Customer Loyalty, which Purchase Decision mediates. Gamification provides a pleasant experience for consumers when using services, and providing attractive rewards can motivate consumers to continue to be loyal to using marketplace services, thus influencing consumers to make purchasing decisions (Djohan et al., 2022). The existence of the reward motivates consumers to make purchasing decisions because of the various benefits, so consumers will use the platform again and again, reflecting consumer loyalty (Diansyah & Putera, 2017). When gamification elements attract consumers' attention, they tend to be more involved in purchasing (Behl et al., 2024). This involvement can lead to positive purchasing decisions. Consumers who feel connected and involved are likelier to choose the same product in the future, increasing their loyalty. The study's results also support the sixth hypothesis, where Online Customer Reviews influence Customer Loyalty mediated by Purchase Decisions. When consumers read positive reviews, they are more likely to make profitable purchasing decisions (Chen et al., 2017). If supported by a positive experience after purchase, this decision will increase customer loyalty (Kumar & Anjaly, 2017). In other words, purchasing decisions influenced by positive reviews can contribute to the formation of stronger loyalty. A positive purchasing experience, driven by

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decisions based on good reviews, increases customer satisfaction. When consumers are satisfied with the products they purchase, they are more likely to become loyal customers (Arslan, 2020). This satisfaction creates a desire to shop again in the future, which is the essence of customer loyalty.

6. Conclusions

3 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the literature on customer loyalty by integrating the concepts of gamification and online customer reviews as factors influencing purchase decisions and loyalty. The results of this study support the theory of customer engagement, indicating that gamification elements can deepen emotional attachment, increase purchase intentions, and strengthen customer loyalty. This strengthens the theoretical model that purchase decisions can mediate between gamification or customer reviews and loyalty, providing further understanding of the influence of both factors in the context of e-commerce.

Practical Implications

For e-commerce companies, the results of this study underscore the importance of implementing the correct gamification elements to increase customer loyalty. Reward facilities in the form of points, challenges, or awards can create a pleasant shopping experience and increase customer transaction frequency. Moreover, these results suggest that customer reviews should be managed well to strengthen customer trust in products or services, making it easier for them to make purchase decisions. By implementing the right strategy in both aspects, companies can strengthen loyalty and increase their competitiveness amidst the tight competition in the e-commerce market. This emphasis on practical implications should leave the audience feeling informed and equipped with actionable insights.

Research Limitations

This study, like any other study, has limitations. These limitations include that data collection through an online questionnaire can lead to respondent bias or underrepresentation of responses. By acknowledging these limitations, the audience will feel aware of the scope of the study and its potential biases. This study used quantitative methods, so aspects of customer experience may not have been explored in depth.

Recommendations for Future Research hold the potential to expand the sample by involving respondents from various regions, thereby obtaining more representative results nationally or internationally. A mixed approach (quantitative and qualitative) could explore customer experiences more deeply, especially regarding motivations and feelings triggered by gamification and customer reviews. This potential for further exploration should leave the audience hopeful and interested in continuing the study.

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