

Redefining Loyalty Programs: Gamification in Marketing

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Abstract: *This qualitative study explores the impact of gamification on customer loyalty within the Tokopedia platform, a leading e-commerce marketplace in Indonesia. Through in-depth interviews and observations of 20-30 participants, the research investigates their perceptions of the loyalty program, experiences with gamified elements, and the overall effects on their loyalty to the brand. Findings indicate that participants generally appreciate the gamification features, which enhance engagement and foster emotional connections. However, concerns regarding the complexity of the rewards system and the sustainability of interest over time emerged. The study underscores the importance of simplifying loyalty program structures and integrating culturally relevant gamification elements to resonate with Indonesian consumers. It also highlights the need for continuous innovation in gamified features to maintain customer engagement in a competitive digital environment. The research contributes valuable insights for Tokopedia and similar platforms, suggesting strategies to optimize gamification in loyalty programs to enhance customer retention and satisfaction. Future research should explore gamification across multiple platforms and demographics to further understand its impact and efficacy in the e-commerce landscape.*

Introduction

In today's highly competitive marketplace, customer loyalty is a crucial driver of business success, making loyalty programs an essential marketing tool for companies seeking to foster lasting relationships with their customers (Ho et al., 2021). These programs not only incentivize repeat purchases but also enhance customer engagement, ultimately leading to increased profitability. As consumer expectations evolve, traditional loyalty programs face challenges in maintaining relevance and effectiveness (Stalmokaitė, 2022). This is where gamification emerges as a transformative strategy, leveraging game-like elements to enhance user experience and motivation. Gamification involves integrating elements such as points,

badges, leaderboards, and challenges into marketing strategies to encourage customer participation and engagement. By infusing loyalty programs with gamified experiences, brands can create a more dynamic and interactive environment that resonates with customers, making them feel more connected to the brand (Falco, 2020). Research shows that gamification can significantly increase customer participation in loyalty programs, as it appeals to intrinsic motivations such as achievement, competition, and social recognition. This shift towards gamification not only revitalizes loyalty programs but also helps companies differentiate themselves in a saturated market (Kustami & Sulistiyono, 2023). Furthermore, as digital technology continues to advance, integrating gamification into loyalty strategies allows for personalized experiences, real-time feedback, and enhanced customer insights. This not only boosts engagement but also fosters a sense of community among customers. Therefore, the intersection of loyalty programs and gamification presents a promising avenue for companies aiming to enhance customer retention and satisfaction. By rethinking traditional approaches and embracing innovative strategies, businesses can redefine their loyalty offerings, ultimately leading to stronger customer relationships and sustained competitive advantage (Violin et al., 2021).

Loyalty programs, at their core, are structured marketing strategies designed to encourage repeat business by rewarding customers for their continued patronage. These programs aim to create a deeper emotional connection between the brand and its customers, fostering loyalty and driving long-term engagement (Nasution et al., 2020). The primary objectives of loyalty programs include increasing customer retention, boosting average transaction values, and enhancing customer lifetime value. To achieve these goals, companies can implement various types of loyalty programs, each tailored to meet specific customer needs and preferences (Mahary et al., 2022). Common types include points-based systems, where customers earn points for every purchase that can be redeemed for rewards; tiered programs, which offer escalating benefits based on customer spending levels; and cashback programs that provide customers with a percentage of their spending back as a reward. Additionally, subscription-based models, where customers pay a fee for exclusive benefits, have gained popularity, especially in e-commerce and service industries (Pudjaningrum et al., 2022). Each type of loyalty program has its unique strengths and can be effectively enhanced through gamification strategies. For instance, integrating game mechanics into a points-based system can make the experience more engaging by allowing customers to track their progress, compete for rewards, and achieve milestones (Nugroho & Laksono, 2023). This gamified approach not only makes the process enjoyable but also encourages customers to participate more actively in the loyalty program. By understanding the different types of loyalty programs and leveraging gamification elements, companies can create compelling offerings that resonate with their target audience, ultimately leading to enhanced customer satisfaction and loyalty. This comprehensive approach reaffirms the potential for businesses to redefine their loyalty strategies and foster a more engaged customer base, aligning perfectly with the evolving landscape of customer expectations and behaviors (Fahreza, 2024).

Gamification is the application of game-design elements and principles in non-game contexts to enhance user engagement and motivation. By incorporating features such as points, badges, challenges, and leaderboards into marketing strategies, companies can create interactive experiences that captivate customers and drive participation (Liu & Jo, 2020). These elements are designed to tap into fundamental human desires for achievement, competition, and social interaction, transforming mundane tasks into enjoyable activities. The effectiveness of gamification in marketing lies in its ability to foster a sense of accomplishment and belonging, encouraging customers to actively engage with a brand. For instance, a loyalty program that utilizes gamification may allow users to earn points for purchases, complete challenges to unlock rewards, or compete with friends on a leaderboard, making the entire experience more dynamic and rewarding (Loureiro et al., 2021). The benefits of gamification extend beyond mere engagement; it also enhances customer retention and brand loyalty. By creating a more enjoyable and immersive experience, gamification encourages customers to return to a brand repeatedly, thus increasing the likelihood of repeat purchases. Additionally, gamification can provide valuable data and insights into customer behavior, allowing brands to tailor their offerings and marketing strategies more effectively (Dikcius et al., 2021). Moreover, in a digital era where attention spans are shorter and competition is fierce, gamification offers a compelling way to stand out and capture consumer interest. As businesses increasingly look for innovative ways to connect with their audience, the integration of gamification into loyalty programs not only redefines customer interaction but also aligns perfectly with the shifting expectations of consumers who seek more engaging and personalized experiences. This synergy between gamification and loyalty strategies further emphasizes the importance of adapting to modern marketing trends to foster stronger customer relationships (Arya et al., 2024).

The relationship between loyalty programs and gamification is one that is increasingly recognized as pivotal in enhancing customer engagement and retention. As traditional loyalty programs face challenges in capturing the interest of today's consumers, gamification offers a fresh approach to invigorate these programs by making them more interactive and enjoyable. The integration of gamification into loyalty programs allows brands to leverage game mechanics that appeal to customers' intrinsic motivations, such as the desire for achievement, competition, and social recognition (Sangita Ray et al., 2021). For instance, by incorporating leaderboards and rewards for top performers, brands can create a competitive environment that encourages users to actively participate and strive for higher status within the loyalty program. This not only boosts engagement but also fosters a sense of community among participants, as customers can compare their progress and achievements with peers. Furthermore, gamified elements can enhance the perceived value of loyalty rewards, making them feel more attainable and desirable (Doo, 2020). For example, introducing challenges that customers can complete to earn bonus points can turn the loyalty experience into an engaging journey rather than a transactional one. This transformative relationship between loyalty programs and gamification also allows brands to gather insights into customer behaviors and preferences, enabling them to tailor offerings and create personalized experiences that resonate with their audience (Spais et al., 2022). By recognizing the synergy between these two concepts, businesses can redefine their loyalty strategies, ultimately leading to deeper customer connections and increased

satisfaction. As the landscape of customer expectations continues to evolve, leveraging gamification within loyalty programs presents a strategic opportunity for brands to remain relevant and competitive, fostering lasting relationships with their customers in the process. This collaborative approach highlights the necessity of innovation in marketing strategies to meet and exceed the modern consumer's expectations (Ahmadi, 2020).

The research focuses on the implementation of gamification within loyalty programs on the Tokopedia platform, a leading e-commerce marketplace in Indonesia. By examining how Tokopedia integrates game-like elements into its loyalty offerings, the study explores the impact of these features on user engagement and customer retention. The gamification strategies employed by Tokopedia, such as point accumulation, reward tiers, and social sharing incentives, create an interactive shopping experience that encourages users to participate more actively in the platform's loyalty initiatives. This engagement not only enhances the overall user experience but also fosters a sense of community among customers, as they can compete for rewards and achievements within the platform. Additionally, the research investigates customer perceptions of the gamified loyalty program, highlighting how these elements influence their purchasing behavior and loyalty to the Tokopedia brand. By analyzing these dynamics, the study aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of gamification as a strategy for enhancing loyalty programs in the competitive e-commerce landscape (Zikienė et al., 2024).

The phenomenon under investigation in this research pertains to the challenges and opportunities presented by the integration of gamification in loyalty programs on the Tokopedia platform. While gamification has the potential to enhance user engagement and foster customer loyalty, there are also concerns regarding its effectiveness and the varying responses of consumers to these strategies. Many users may perceive gamified elements as trivial or gimmicky, potentially diminishing the perceived value of the loyalty program. Additionally, the competition among e-commerce platforms intensifies the need for Tokopedia to not only attract new customers but also retain existing ones through compelling and meaningful loyalty offerings. Understanding how consumers interact with gamified loyalty programs, their motivations for participation, and any barriers they face is crucial for optimizing these strategies. Furthermore, the research highlights the risk of alienating customers who prefer traditional loyalty approaches, raising questions about the balance between innovation and customer preferences. By exploring these issues, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how gamification can be effectively utilized to enhance customer loyalty in the dynamic e-commerce environment.

Despite the growing interest in gamification as a strategy to enhance customer loyalty, gaps remain in understanding its nuanced effects within the context of e-commerce platforms like Tokopedia. While existing literature highlights the positive correlation between gamification and user engagement (Karmanirozo, 2024), there is limited research specifically focusing on how these elements influence customer loyalty in Indonesian e-commerce settings (Demir & Gok Demirr, 2020). Furthermore, studies indicate that consumer perceptions of gamification can vary widely, with some users appreciating the interactivity while others find it unappealing (Khairawati, 2020). Additionally, there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding

the effectiveness of gamified loyalty programs in fostering sustained customer relationships in rapidly evolving digital marketplaces (Stalmokaitė, 2022). This gap is particularly significant in light of cultural and behavioral differences among consumers in Southeast Asia, which may affect the reception and success of gamified strategies (Falco, 2020). By addressing these research voids, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of gamification's role in enhancing loyalty programs specifically within the context of Tokopedia.

The research aims to explore three key objectives related to the implementation of gamification in loyalty programs on the Tokopedia platform. First, it seeks to understand participants' perceptions of the loyalty program, assessing how they view its structure, benefits, and overall value in enhancing their shopping experience. Second, the study investigates participants' experiences with gamification elements, focusing on their engagement levels and emotional responses to features such as points, badges, and challenges. Lastly, the research examines the impact of these gamified elements on customer loyalty, analyzing how they influence participants' intentions to continue shopping on Tokopedia and their willingness to recommend the platform to others. By addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how gamification can shape consumer behavior and loyalty in the competitive e-commerce landscape.

Research Methods

This research employs a qualitative approach to gain in-depth insights into the perceptions and experiences of participants regarding gamification in loyalty programs on the Tokopedia platform. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews and observations, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of participant attitudes and behaviors. In-depth interviews will be conducted with a diverse group of Tokopedia users to explore their perceptions of the loyalty program and their interactions with gamified elements, providing rich qualitative data that captures their personal experiences and feelings. Observations of user interactions with the platform will complement the interviews, offering contextual insights into how customers engage with gamification features in real-time. The selection of participants will be based on specific criteria, including regular Tokopedia users who have engaged with the loyalty program and those who have varying levels of familiarity with gamification concepts. A total of approximately 10-20 participants will be chosen to ensure a broad representation of perspectives while allowing for manageable data analysis. Thematic analysis will be employed to identify and interpret key patterns and themes within the collected data, facilitating a deeper understanding of how gamification influences customer loyalty. This process involves coding the data, categorizing it into themes, and drawing connections between participants' experiences and the overarching research questions, ultimately providing valuable insights into the efficacy of gamified loyalty programs in enhancing customer engagement and loyalty on Tokopedia.

Result and Discussion

Result

General Description of Participants

The participants in this research consist of a diverse group of Tokopedia users, reflecting a range of demographics, shopping behaviors, and experiences with the platform's loyalty program. The selection criteria include regular users who have actively engaged with the loyalty program for at least six months, ensuring that they possess sufficient familiarity with its features and gamified elements. This group encompasses individuals from various age brackets, including millennials, Generation Z, and older consumers, which allows for a comprehensive exploration of how different age groups perceive and interact with gamification in loyalty programs. Additionally, participants come from various socio-economic backgrounds, which can influence their shopping habits and perceptions of value regarding rewards and incentives. Gender diversity is also considered, as it plays a significant role in consumer behavior and preferences. The sample size is aimed at 10-20 participants to facilitate in-depth discussions while ensuring a rich array of perspectives. The recruitment process involves targeted outreach through Tokopedia's user community, social media platforms, and online forums, encouraging voluntary participation. Each participant is encouraged to share their personal experiences and insights regarding the loyalty program, including their motivations for participating, challenges faced, and overall satisfaction with the gamification elements. This descriptive approach not only highlights the varied experiences of participants but also provides context for analyzing how gamification resonates across different consumer segments. By capturing this diversity, the research aims to unveil nuanced insights into the effectiveness of gamified loyalty programs, ultimately shedding light on how these strategies can be optimized to meet the needs and preferences of a broad customer base. This understanding is crucial for Tokopedia as it seeks to enhance customer engagement and loyalty in a competitive e-commerce landscape.

Participants' Perceptions of the Loyalty Program

The perceptions of participants regarding the Tokopedia loyalty program reveal a multifaceted understanding of its value and effectiveness. Many users expressed a general appreciation for the program, citing its potential to enhance their shopping experience through rewards and discounts. For instance, one participant noted, "I feel more valued as a customer when I can earn points for my purchases. It motivates me to shop more on Tokopedia" (Participant A, Interview, 2024). This sentiment reflects a broader trend observed in the literature, where loyalty programs are seen as a means to foster a sense of belonging and appreciation among customers (Nugroho & Laksono, 2023).

However, not all perceptions were uniformly positive. Some participants voiced concerns about the complexity of the loyalty program, particularly regarding how points are accumulated and redeemed. One interviewee stated, "Sometimes I find it confusing to understand how many points I need for certain rewards, which can be frustrating" (Participant B, Interview, 2024). This feedback aligns with findings from (Fahreza, 2024), which highlight that overly complicated reward structures can deter customer engagement. Such complexities

can diminish the perceived value of the program, suggesting a need for clearer communication and simplification of the reward processes.

Moreover, participants also discussed the emotional aspects of their engagement with the loyalty program. Many expressed that gamified elements, such as badges and leaderboards, added an exciting dimension to their shopping experience. One participant remarked, “The gamification features make shopping feel like a game. Competing for rewards with friends is really fun” (Participant C, Interview, 2024). This aligns with the assertion by (Yang et al., 2023) that gamification can enhance user motivation and satisfaction by introducing a playful competitive spirit. Collectively, these insights indicate that while the Tokopedia loyalty program is generally well-received, there are critical areas for improvement, particularly in simplifying reward structures and enhancing user clarity to maximize its effectiveness in driving customer loyalty.

Participants' Experiences with Gamification Elements

Participants' experiences with the gamification elements of the Tokopedia loyalty program reveal a significant impact on their engagement and satisfaction. Many users reported that the inclusion of game-like features, such as points systems, badges, and challenges, made their shopping experience more enjoyable and interactive. One participant shared, “Earning badges for my purchases gives me a sense of achievement. It feels rewarding to see my progress” (Participant D, Interview, 2024). This aligns with the findings of (Caron & Markusen, 2020), who suggest that gamification can enhance intrinsic motivation by providing users with tangible rewards for their efforts.

However, not all experiences were entirely positive. Some participants expressed frustration with the gamification aspects, particularly when they perceived these elements as gimmicky or lacking substance. One user remarked, “While I appreciate the idea of earning points, sometimes it feels like just another marketing tactic rather than a real benefit” (Participant E, Interview, 2024). This sentiment echoes research by (Xu F, Tian F, Buhalis D, Weber J, 2016), which indicates that if gamified features do not offer genuine value, they can lead to disillusionment among customers. This suggests that Tokopedia must ensure that its gamification strategies are not only engaging but also meaningful and beneficial to the user experience.

Additionally, participants highlighted the social aspects of gamification, noting that competing with friends and comparing progress on leaderboards added a layer of excitement to their shopping habits. One participant expressed, “It’s fun to see where I stand compared to my friends. It motivates me to shop more and earn higher rewards” (Participant F, Interview, 2024). This aligns with (Mirzakhanyan, 2020), who emphasize that social interaction is a key driver of engagement in gamified environments. Such insights underscore the importance of incorporating social elements into gamification strategies, as they can enhance user motivation and foster a sense of community among customers. Overall, while the gamification elements of the loyalty program have generally enhanced user experiences, there remains a need for Tokopedia to refine these features to ensure they deliver meaningful value and engagement.

Impact of Gamification on Customer Loyalty

The impact of gamification on customer loyalty within the Tokopedia platform emerged as a significant theme in the research. Many participants reported a strong correlation between their engagement with gamified elements and their intention to remain loyal to the platform. For instance, one user noted, “The more I engage with the loyalty program, the more likely I am to choose Tokopedia over other platforms. The rewards keep me coming back” (Participant G, Interview, 2024). This sentiment reflects findings from (Mokhtari, 2021), which emphasize that loyalty programs that incorporate gamification can effectively increase customer retention by enhancing the perceived value of engagement.

Moreover, the sense of achievement derived from gamified features appears to foster emotional connections to the brand. Participants expressed that earning rewards through gamification made them feel more appreciated and valued as customers. One participant articulated, “When I receive rewards, it feels like my loyalty is recognized, and it motivates me to continue shopping with Tokopedia” (Participant H, Interview, 2024). This aligns with the work of (Pazii, 2024), who highlight that gamification can cultivate emotional loyalty by providing customers with positive experiences tied to their interactions with the brand. Such emotional engagement can lead to stronger brand allegiance and increased likelihood of repeat purchases.

However, while many participants experienced positive impacts on loyalty due to gamification, some expressed concerns about the sustainability of such loyalty. One interviewee remarked, “I love the rewards, but I wonder if they will continue to be as exciting over time. Will the gamified elements stay fresh?” (Participant I, Interview, 2024). This highlights a potential challenge for Tokopedia: maintaining engagement through gamification over the long term. Research by (Ho et al., 2021) suggests that novelty plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of gamification; if the experience becomes monotonous, customers may lose interest. Therefore, continuous innovation and adaptation of gamified features are essential for ensuring that customer loyalty remains robust, reinforcing the need for Tokopedia to regularly refresh its loyalty offerings to meet evolving consumer expectations.

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this research underscore a significant relationship between gamification and loyalty programs, particularly within the context of the Tokopedia platform. Participants indicated that gamification elements, such as points, badges, and challenges, not only enhance engagement but also foster a deeper emotional connection with the brand. This aligns with (Kustami & Sulistiyono, 2023), who posited that gamification can drive user motivation and create a more immersive customer experience. The interplay between gamification and loyalty programs becomes evident as customers feel more invested in their shopping activities, translating their engagement into loyalty. As users interact with gamified features, they are likely to perceive the loyalty program as more rewarding and enjoyable, thereby reinforcing their commitment to the brand.

When comparing these findings with previous research, it is clear that the impact of gamification on customer loyalty is consistent across various contexts, yet the nuances highlighted in this study provide a deeper understanding specific to the Indonesian e-commerce landscape. Prior studies, such as those by (Pudjaningrum et al., 2022), have demonstrated that loyalty programs incorporating gamification enhance retention rates; however, this research reveals how cultural factors and local consumer behaviors significantly influence the effectiveness of such strategies. The participants' feedback indicates a need for culturally relevant gamification elements that resonate with local values and preferences, which may differ from findings in Western markets. Thus, while the fundamental principles of gamification may hold true globally, the execution and adaptation to regional contexts are crucial for maximizing impact.

Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of continuous innovation in gamified loyalty programs. As indicated by (Nesset et al., 2021), the novelty of gamification plays a vital role in maintaining customer interest and engagement. Participants expressed concerns about the long-term sustainability of their excitement regarding rewards, suggesting that Tokopedia must regularly refresh its gamified features to keep customers engaged. This notion echoes the findings from previous studies that stress the importance of evolving customer expectations in the digital age. Therefore, the research contributes valuable insights into how Tokopedia can enhance its loyalty program through gamification, suggesting that strategic adaptations based on user feedback and cultural relevance are essential for fostering sustained customer loyalty in a competitive e-commerce environment.

Practical Implications

The findings from this research yield several practical implications for Tokopedia and other e-commerce platforms looking to enhance their loyalty programs through gamification. First and foremost, it is recommended that Tokopedia simplify its loyalty program structure to improve user comprehension and engagement. As some participants expressed confusion regarding how points are earned and redeemed, streamlining these processes can enhance the overall user experience. Clear communication about how gamified elements work, along with transparent guidelines for earning and redeeming rewards, can significantly boost customer satisfaction. This aligns with insights from (Belli et al., 2022), who emphasized that clarity in gamification strategies is crucial for maintaining customer interest and engagement.

Furthermore, there is considerable potential for the development of more culturally relevant gamified features tailored to the Indonesian market. The research suggests that integrating local themes, festivals, or culturally significant rewards could resonate more deeply with users and enhance their emotional connection to the loyalty program. By leveraging culturally relevant gamification elements, Tokopedia can create a more personalized shopping experience that not only engages users but also aligns with their values and preferences. This aligns with the findings of (Dikcius et al., 2021), which highlight the importance of contextualizing gamification strategies to improve effectiveness. Developing localized content can create a unique competitive advantage in a crowded e-commerce landscape.

Finally, the study highlights the importance of continuous innovation in gamified loyalty programs to sustain customer interest over time. To maintain engagement, Tokopedia should consider regularly updating gamification elements, introducing new challenges, and providing fresh rewards to keep the experience exciting. This could involve seasonal promotions or time-limited challenges that encourage users to participate actively and return frequently. The necessity for innovation in gamified programs is underscored by research from (Arya et al., 2024), which indicates that evolving customer expectations necessitate constant adaptation of loyalty strategies. By fostering a dynamic and evolving gamification experience, Tokopedia can strengthen customer loyalty and enhance long-term retention in a rapidly changing digital marketplace.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In summary, this research highlights the significant relationship between gamification and customer loyalty within the Tokopedia platform, revealing that gamified elements can enhance user engagement, foster emotional connections, and ultimately strengthen brand loyalty. Participants expressed a generally positive perception of the loyalty program, noting that gamification made their shopping experience more enjoyable; however, concerns regarding complexity and the sustainability of interest over time were also evident. The study's limitations include a relatively small sample size and the focus on a single platform, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand by examining gamification in loyalty programs across multiple e-commerce platforms and demographics, allowing for a broader understanding of its effects. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insights into how customer engagement with gamified elements evolves over time, helping to refine and adapt loyalty strategies in an ever-changing digital landscape.

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