

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GAMIFICATION MARKETING AND GEN Z SUSTAINABLE DECISION: ROLE OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Clarifying the intermediate impact of consumer experiences on the relationship between gamification marketing activities and Sustainable Decisions within the scope of research in the Hanoi area targeting Generation Z (Gen Z). Utilizing basic theories of social presence and inheriting research values from scientists and authors, the authors construct a high-level research model. Through SmartPLS4 software with 372 research samples, the conclusion is drawn to clarify the intermediary role of consumer experiences. The research results serve as both a theoretical contribution and practical content for firms in the content marketing market. By recognizing the pivotal influence of consumer experiences, related firms can tailor their marketing strategies more effectively, enhancing consumer engagement and fostering sustainable decision-making practices.

Keywords: Sustainable decision, gamification marketing activities, social presence, customer experience, Gen Z.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The digital era has altered the behaviors and preferences of consumers, particularly Gen Z consumers, with a prominent focus on sustainable choices garnering significant attention from this demographic. To encourage sustainable consumption, firms have increasingly applied gamification marketing activities (GMA), leveraging user experiences to drive behavioral changes [1]. Feelings of

guilt and pride play crucial roles in convincing consumers of the efficacy of sustainable consumption choices. Indeed, gamification marketing activities evoke customer emotion, which can influence sustainable choices. Furthermore, [2] segmented consumer markets indicate that goal-oriented gamification strategies may effectively attract Gen Z consumer groups. Despite current research results, significant knowledge gaps persist in understanding the nuanced interactions among GMA, user experiences, and sustainable consumption choices among Gen Z consumers.

Entertainment plays a pivotal role in enhancing the customer experience of gamification marketing activity. Entertainment is crucial in attracting customers, thus emphasizing the importance of marketing activities. GMA understood as the gamification of marketing, applies gaming elements to engage individual users [3, 4], utilizing game elements in marketing strategies to create enjoyable experiences and positive interactions with customers. This includes employing elements such as competition, rewards, penalties, scores, levels, and challenges to stimulate consumer behavior, increase participation motivation, and generate interest in interacting with the brand [5], particularly among the Gen Z.

The impact of GMA on consumer sustainable choices exists [6], where sustainable choices entail changes in consumer behavior for positive purposes, educating about sustainable activities, notably enhancing awareness of balanced decision-making [7]. Specifically, it involves the decision-making process of purchasing or consuming products and services that positively impact the environment, society, and economy, aiming to support the maintenance and development of sustainable balance among these factors. Consumers

prioritize purchasing and using products and services that have positive effects on the environment and society, while also feeling satisfied with their shopping and consumption experiences. This may include engaging in gamification marketing activities that encourage sustainable choices by creating enjoyable, engaging, and entertaining user experiences, thereby fostering interest and encouragement for Gen Z consumers to choose products and services that positively impact the environment and society.

2. BACKGROUNDED THEORIES AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

2.1. Theoretical of social presence

The development of social presence theory [8] brings forth discussions on the interactions and discussions of individuals through the media, wherein social presence is the sense of "realness" of an individual's presence [9, 10]. The relationship between social presence and community building in virtual environments helps users express themselves more confidently. However, the social presence is not solely influenced by individual characteristics but also by external factors. Current research has further complicated and clarified the theory of social presence, expanding the scope of the fundamental theory. The social presence theory [11] focuses on measuring media, meaning different platforms will have different impacts on the social presence. Across media platforms, various types of intermediate interactions need to be provided, especially within virtual interactions. Particularly, expanding the scope of interaction targets, humans with humans, humans with non-humans. Presence enhances the experience in virtual environments [9].

2.2. Gamification marketing activities

Gamification in marketing is a marketing approach that utilizes game elements to enhance customer engagement and experience [12], integrating entertainment elements into gamification strategies to create more enjoyable and appealing experiences for customers. Integrating entertainment into GMA positively impacts customer engagement and satisfaction. Leveraging social media channels can enhance the value of GMA and contribute to delivering a more engaging experience for customers [13]. Entertainment [14, 15] is also considered one of the five factors shaping social media marketing [16, 17]. The potential of gamification in creating entertainment experiences leads to increased levels of interaction and

customer satisfaction. Interaction plays a crucial role in virtual reality environments [14, 15]. Interaction contributes to shaping communication marketing activities. Within this context [18], the potential of interactive marketing activities, including gamification, is to enhance brand experience and customer value. The significant role of creating interaction in the GMA experience is fundamental to user the engagement as these activities mimic experiences akin to traditional gaming [19]. Interaction helps enhance the user experience [9, 19]. Trendiness plays a crucial role in shaping communication marketing activities, attracting users and avoiding obsolescence [14, 15]. In gamification marketing activities, trendiness refers to the application of modern and popular elements, styles, or trends in designing and implementing gamification campaigns. This may include using gamification elements inspired by popular video games or integrating modern user experience design trends such as point-based gamification, levels, or reward opportunities. The goal of integrating trendiness into gamification marketing is to create an engaging and enjoyable experience for users while keeping marketing campaigns current and capturing attention from the crowd. Intimacy is one of the two core factors shaping social presence [8], creating a closer environment between customers and brands, thereby enhancing their positive experience with products or services. Intimacy here includes both verbal and non-verbal elements [8]. In a gamification environment, customers are often engaged in games, challenges, or interactive activities that they find interesting and satisfying. Providing seamless and engaging online experiences for customers is crucial [20], as it enhances the overall customer experience in the digital environment. Technological interventions aim to enhance more intimate and personalized experiences for consumers [21], emphasizing the role of creating intimacy and personalized interactions at every stage of the customer experience [22]. Creating various touchpoints with customers is essential, including ITM elements in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors [23]. The novelty [15] in GMA enhances customer engagement and acceptance of innovative services, demonstrating a clear positive influence on user acceptance [24], contributing to increased customer interaction and participation [17], playing a crucial role in the context of marketing initiatives related to GMA [25]. In today's world, sustainability plays a crucial role in consumer choices. Gamification Marketing, when used to

enhance customer experience, can have a positive impact on their sustainability decisions. By incorporating sustainability principles into Gamification Marketing strategies, not only can we improve the customer experience, but also motivate consumers to make more sustainable choices. Therefore, customer experience serves as a key link between Gamification Marketing and customers' sustainability decisions. In this, novelty refers to the uniqueness and freshness of gamification elements applied in marketing campaigns. This includes using new ideas, mechanisms, and methods to stimulate consumer curiosity and interest. Novelty can come from designing unique games, providing new challenges or reward opportunities, or creating different interactive experiences that users have not experienced before.

2.3. Research model and hypothesis

Based on backgrounded theories, and the overview content, the author proposes a research model as Figure 1.

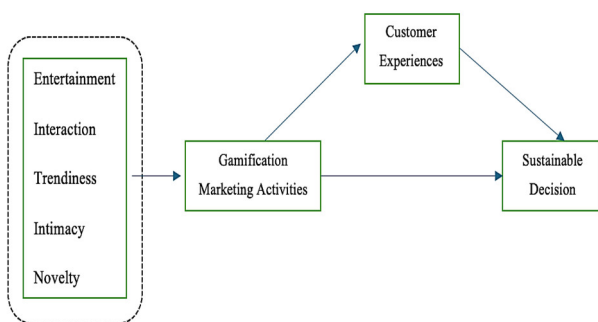


Figure 1. Research Model

Consumer sustainable behavior is influenced by various factors, including concerns about the environment and ethical considerations. Through this, GMA target environmentally conscious users and influences their sustainable decision-making. Entertainment content can enhance awareness of environmental issues and encourage sustainable consumption behaviors. Advertising campaigns that use entertainment to promote environmentally friendly products have a positive impact on consumer behavior, making them more likely to choose sustainable products. Direct interactions with consumers, such as events, discussions, or competitions, can create opportunities to provide information about sustainable choices. GMA frequently updates new trends, including sustainable trends. When GMA integrates sustainable trends into its marketing strategies, it increases the likelihood that consumers will choose sustainable products. The intimacy and personalization in user experiences can

promote sustainable choices. Intimacy increases trust and connection with environmentally friendly products. Novelty and creativity in sustainable products or services can highlight new sustainable options. Integrating sustainability principles into marketing strategies to attract environmentally conscious consumers has proven effective in GMA promote sustainable consumer behavior [26]. Marketing helps build customer loyalty, thus Gamification marketing activities is used to create long-term commitments for consumers to sustainable products and services [27].

Hypothesis H1: GMA positively influence Sustainable Decision-making.

GMA have a positive impact on customer experience [17, 28, 29]. GMA positively influences sustainable decision-making through a supportive environment that enhances consumer engagement. GMA, with its diverse marketing activities such as entertainment advertising, interactive events, and trend updates, can create an environment that encourages sustainable consumption. Entertainment marketing activities not only raise awareness about environmental issues but also motivate consumers to explore and choose sustainable products. Furthermore, personalization in marketing strategies: such as sending messages and offers tailored to consumers' preferences and values - creates a deeper connection and increases trust in environmentally friendly products. Additionally, interactive events and activities such as competitions and discussions provide opportunities for consumers to experience and understand sustainable choices better, thereby positively influencing their decisions. Thus, the supportive environment created by GMA through these factors can act as an important mediator in promoting sustainable consumer decision-making. Social media is perceived and built upon the platform of brand value through consumers. GMA not only influence customers but also build brand value in the minds of consumers, affecting customer intentions, and reinforcing customer experiences [30]. Customer experience positively affects sustainable social relationships, leading to more sustainable behaviors [31]. For customer behavior, social media marketing is highly effective in shaping consumer purchasing decisions. This highlights the role of experience in influencing sustainable decisions [32-34].

Hypothesis H2: Customer experiences serve as a positive mediator in the relationship between GMA and Sustainable Decision-making.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The author uses a quantitative research method by constructing a questionnaire with a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. Then, through the quantitative research method to achieve the research objectives, it provides more objective significance based on careful data analysis. The research targets Gen Z individuals in the Hanoi area aged between 18 and 25, through data collection via survey questionnaires. The study includes a total of 32 observed variables, inherited from previous research [8, 9, 15, 26, 34]. The sampling method is non-probabilistic, and after cleaning the data, the author group collected 372 survey samples, sampling formula: $5n$ where n is the number of observed variables. There are a total of 28 observed variables in the study.

In the two-tier research model, the authors conducted an assessment using the method of embedding latent variables at a higher level in two stages. In Stage 1, the authors analyzed the model using the repeated measures observed variables technique to obtain LOC scores. These LOC scores were then stored in the data, becoming new data for use in Stage 2. In Stage 2, the authors constructed a new model, converting the LOCs obtained from Stage 1 into observed variables, and then conducted an evaluation similar to the basic model.

4. RESEARCH RESULT

The authors utilized SPSS 26 software to provide descriptive statistical evaluations, as Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistical evaluations

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Sex	Male	115	30.9	30.9
	Female	257	69.1	69.1
Old	<16	4	1.1	1.1
	16 - 18	78	21.0	21.0
	18 - 20	119	32.0	32.0
	20 - 24	129	34.7	34.7
	24 - 28	42	11.3	11.3
Education	High school	76	20.4	20.4
	University	265	71.2	71.2
	After university	31	8.3	8.3
	Total	372	100.0	100.0

Source: SPSS 26 software

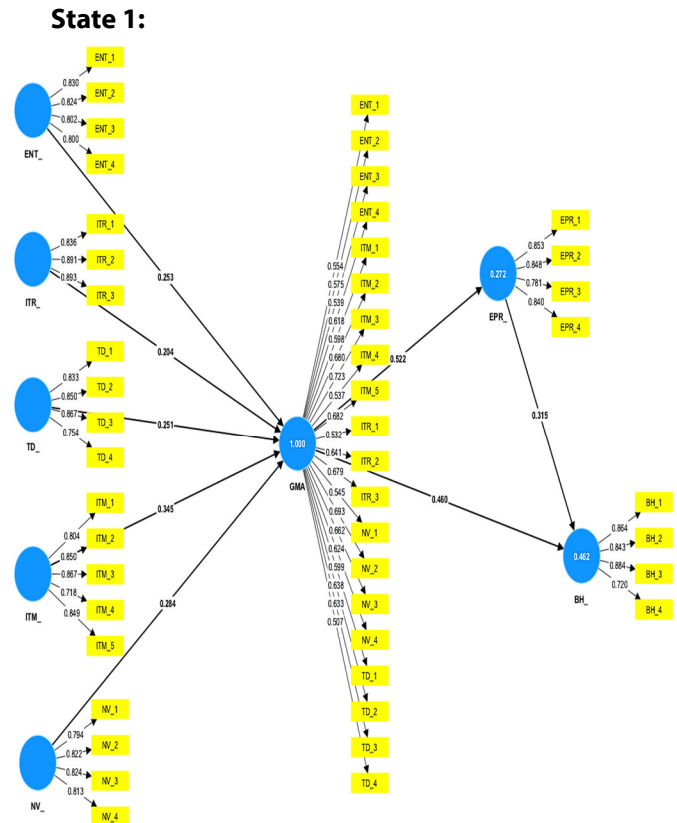


Fig. 2. Model measurement results

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater reliability of the structure [35]. Specifically, values between 0.60 and 0.70 are deemed acceptable in exploratory research studies, while values between 0.70 and 0.90 can be considered satisfactory. Values below 0.60 fail to meet the reliability requirements. The magnitude of the factor loadings, collectively referred to as indicator reliability, is crucial. At a minimum, the factor loadings of all indicator variables must be statistically significant. However, a statistically significant factor loading may still be relatively weak; thus, a general rule is that standardized outer loadings should exceed 0.7. According to the assessment of internal consistency, observed composite reliability (CR rho c) values are all greater than 0.7, ensuring internal consistency and meeting the requirement. Correspondingly, an AVE value of 0.50 or higher indicates that, on average, the structure explains more than half of the variance of its indicator variables. Conversely, an AVE value less than 0.50 suggests that, on average, more variance is contained in the error of the indicator variables than in the variance explained by the structure.

Table 2 showed that all criteria for evaluating the model measurement results meet the standard requirement.

Table 2. Evaluation of the Model Measurement Results

Latent variable	Indicators	Convergent validity		Internal Consistency Reliability			Discriminant Validity
		Loadings	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability	Composite Reliability	HMTM
		> 0.7	> 0.50	0.60 - 0.90	0.60 - 0.90	0.60 - 0.90	Significantly lower than 0.85 or 0.9?
Entertainment	ENT_1	0.830	0.663	0.831	0.832	0.887	Yes
	ENT_2	0.824					
	ENT_3	0.802					
	ENT_4	0.800					
Interaction	ITR_1	0.836	0.763	0.845	0.858	0.906	Yes
	ITR_2	0.891					
	ITR_3	0.893					
Trendiness	TD_1	0.833	0.684	0.845	0.853	0.896	Yes
	TD_2	0.850					
	TD_3	0.867					
	TD_4	0.754					
Intimacy	ITM_1	0.804	0.671	0.877	0.886	0.910	Yes
	ITM_2	0.850					
	ITM_3	0.867					
	ITM_4	0.718					
	ITM_5	0.849					
Novelty	NV_1	0.794	0.661	0.830	0.835	0.886	Yes
	NV_2	0.822					
	NV_3	0.824					
	NV_4	0.813					
Customer Experiences	EPR_1	0.853	0.690	0.850	0.852	0.899	Yes
	EPR_2	0.848					
	EPR_3	0.781					
	EPR_4	0.840					
Sustainable Decision	BH_1	0.864	0.689	0.850	0.874	0.898	Yes
	BH_2	0.843					
	BH_3	0.884					
	BH_4	0.720					

Source: SmartPLS4 data

State 2: High-level HOC model

Table 3. HOC model results - outer loadings

	BH	EPR	GMA
BH_1	0.863		
BH_2	0.843		
BH_3	0.884		
BH_4	0.728		
EPR_1		0.854	

EPR_2		0.848	
EPR_3		0.780	
EPR_4		0.840	
ITR			0.727
ITM			0.759
NV			0.790
TD			0.721
ENT			0.722

Source: SmartPLS4 data

Table 4. Assessing the reliability, convergence, and discrimination of the model in phase 2

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
BH	0.850	0.874	0.898	0.689
EPR	0.850	0.852	0.899	0.690
GMA	0.799	0.806	0.861	0.554

Source: SmartPLS4 data

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater reliability of the structure [35]. Specifically, values between 0.60 and 0.70 are generally acceptable in exploratory studies, while values between 0.70 and 0.90 can be considered satisfactory. In Table 4, Cronbach's alpha values during from 0.7 to 0.8, this is a good value. Checking for internal consistency according to [35], it is noted that the composite reliability is consistently greater than 0.7, ensuring internal consistency, meeting the requirement. AVE values of 0.50 or higher indicate that, on average, the structure explains more than half of the variance of its indicator variables. All the values of Table 4 are accepted for the study.

State 3: Second-order structural model evaluation

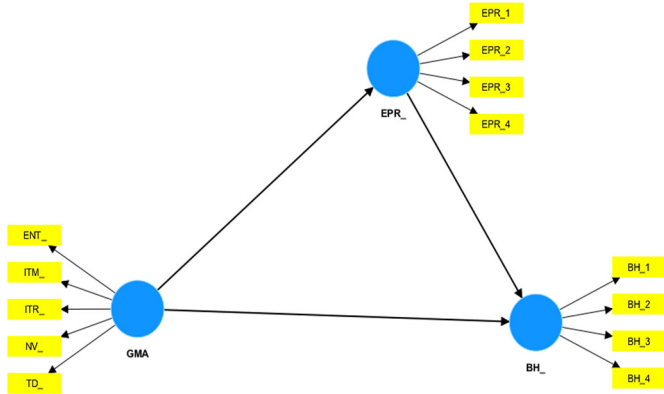


Fig. 3. Second - order model (Source: SmartPLS4 data)

Table 6. Evaluate the impact coefficient and significance of the impact levels of the path

Hypothesis	Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Status
H1	GMA -> BH	0.461	0.464	0.072	6.433	0.000	Accepted
H2	GMA -> EPR	0.523	0.527	0.047	11.251	0.000	Accepted
	EPR -> BH	0.314	0.314	0.085	3.711	0.000	Accepted
	GMA -> EPR -> BH	0.164	0.165	0.045	3.679	0.000	Accepted

Source: SmartPLS4 data

Note: From the analysis results above, we observe that all hypotheses are accepted because the p-value is less than 0.05. So, this result has meaning to study.

Table 5. VIF value information

	VIF
BH_1	2.245
BH_2	2.034
BH_3	2.413
BH_4	1.592
ENT	1.530
EPR_1	2.127
EPR_2	2.075
EPR_3	1.643
EPR_4	2.022
ITR	1.660
ITM	1.616
NV	1.755
TD	1.556

Source: SmartPLS4 data

Note: The model does not exhibit multicollinearity as the values of VIF are all less than 5.

Table 7. Explanation of the independent variables for the dependent variables

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
BH	0.463	0.460
EPR	0.274	0.272

Source: SmartPLS4 data

For the "BH" variable, the R-squared value is 0.463, indicating that the independent variables collectively explain 46.3% of the variance in the dependent variable, while the adjusted R-squared is 0.460.

For the "EPR" variable, the R-squared value is 0.274, meaning that the independent variables explain 27.4% of the variance in the dependent variable, with an adjusted R-squared of 0.272.

Table 8. Effect size of independent variables (f-square)

	BH	Effect	EPR	GMA
EPR	0.134	Min		
GMA	0.287	Average	0.377	High

Source: SmartPLS4 data

For the "BH" variable: The effect size on itself is 0.463, indicating a moderate to high effect size. The effect size on "EPR" is 0.134, suggesting a small effect size.

For the "EPR" variable: The effect size on itself is 0.274, which is moderate. The effect size on "GMA" is not provided in the table.

For the "GMA" variable: The effect size on "EPR" is 0.377, indicating a high effect size.

Contribution of research:

Firstly, the GMA factor is established by five low-level attributes including Entertainment, Interaction, Trendiness, Intimacy, and Novelty, as identified in a prior study [15]. This finding aligns with previous research [15], bolstering confidence in the GMA development structure. It provides practical groundwork for implementing effective gamification marketing strategies in the marketing landscape. Businesses and researchers can leverage this information to develop more reliable and effective gamification marketing strategies to attract and retain customers.

Secondly, the positive impact of GMA on Sustainable Decision holds significant implications in the context of addressing sustainability among GenZ [26, 27]. From a research perspective, this suggests that implementing gamification marketing activities not only generates interest and positive interaction from GenZ consumers but also encourages them to make more sustainable decisions. This can be attributed to gamification creating positive consumer experiences, enhancing awareness of sustainability issues, and promoting responsible consumption behavior. In practice, these findings can assist businesses and marketers in developing gamification-based marketing strategies to stimulate sustainable consumer behavior among GenZ. Particularly noteworthy is the current emphasis among GenZ on sustainable values in their lifestyles. Furthermore, these results affirm the crucial role of gamification in fostering awareness and action on sustainability issues within the young consumer community.

Thirdly, the relationship between GMA and Sustainable Decision is mediated by Customer

Experiences. The link between gamification marketing activities and sustainable decisions is not only a direct one but also depends on customer experiences. This introduces a new perspective on how gamification can influence customer decisions and behavior, particularly in promoting sustainability in today's consumer market. As customers undergo positive experiences with gamification, they tend to develop awareness of sustainability issues and make more responsible consumption decisions. In practical applications, these findings can greatly assist businesses and marketers in understanding the importance of creating positive experiences through gamification to achieve their goals. This conclusion also provides a comprehensive and detailed view of gamification activities, used as an effective tool to enhance awareness and promote sustainable consumer behavior within the young consumer community.

5. DISCUSS AND RESEARCH DIRECTION

The study also has limitations in terms of the generalizability of the conclusions. Although this research provides valuable insights into the relationship between Gamification Marketing Activities, Sustainable Decisions, and Customer Experiences among Gen Z consumers, these findings may not be applicable to other demographic groups or industries. The study specifically focuses on Gen Z consumers, so the results may not fully represent other age groups.

Future research directions can conduct comparative studies across different age groups to examine whether the relationships between Gamification Marketing Activities, Sustainable Decisions, and Customer Experiences vary among different generations.

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