Gamification and the online retail experience

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Abstract

Purpose: As online retailing grows in importance there is increasing interest in the online customer experience. The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of gamification, the use of game mechanics, in enabling consumer engagement with online retailers.

Design / Methodology / Approach: The research adopts a qualitative methodology carrying out 16 in-depth interviews with individuals who are frequent online shoppers.

Findings: Findings support the importance of including game elements to enhance the retail experience. However, data also suggests that without appropriate management customers can subvert gamification strategies to create their own 'games', increasing competitive pressure between retailers.

Practical Implications: The paper suggests ways in which retailers might successfully 'gamify' their online retail stores and reduce incidences of undesirable customer behaviour.

Originality / value: This paper provides empirical support to the current paucity of research into the role of gamification in the context of the online retail experience.

Introduction

As online shopping has grown to become a critical channel for retailers there has been increasing focus on this area by researchers. However, whilst there is now a significant body of research into online shopping the question of how customer experiences are created and managed online has received less attention. Customer experience has become an important factor for success in contemporary retailing, requiring firms to look beyond pricing strategies and product innovation (Rose et al. 2011). Unlike price and product factors, transferring customer experience from an offline to an online context creates challenges, especially when many of the factors that create a successful physical shopping experience do not translate into the online world. One way in which retailers have begun to enhance the online customer experience is through the application of game mechanics to online shopping, a process known as 'gamification' (Zichermann and Linder, 2011). For example, popular web services such as Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare and Ebay all incorporate game elements to increase customer engagement with their sites. Increasingly, retailers are exploring the application of game techniques to create reward mechanisms and position online shopping it as an entertainment activity. However, whilst there is a growing literature on the application of game mechanisms to non-game environments there is a paucity of research focusing on consumers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, these mechanisms in an online retail environment. Given the increasing importance of customer experience to online retail success it is important to develop a better understanding of the ways in which such techniques can be applied.

This study extends understanding of the online customer experience through an empirical exploration of the use of game elements within the online shopping process. Following from Brown and Dants (2009) suggestion that the online retailing literature would benefit through the application of concepts other than those normally used in an online context, we extent the theoretical basis of this discussion by considering the broader literature on consumer responses to games. We integrate theories on classifications of game types, and explore the extent to which retailers' attempts to formalise and codify their online games risk being subverted by consumers. This study makes both an empirical and theoretical contribution to the retailing literature by extending knowledge of the application of these important new online techniques.

This paper has four parts. Firstly, we review of both the theory and mechanics of the gamification of non-game environments such as retail. In the second part we consider the role of such game elements in influencing online customer experience and present cases of existing retailers activities in this area. Thirdly, we present data from an in-depth qualitative study into the role of such game elements in the online shopping process. Finally, based on this evidence we discuss approaches that retailers might take to successfully 'gamify' their online stores.

Understanding gamification

Gamification has emerged as a manufactured label for the intersection of game elements and non-game activities. A general definition of gamification identifies it as "the process of adding game mechanics to processes, programs and platforms that wouldn't traditionally use such concepts." (Swan 2012, p13). Yet whilst this describes the process it is an unsatisfactory definition as it doesn't indicate *why* one would want

to gamify a process. A more customer specific approach is to consider gamification as a form of loyalty that gets users to make incremental choices to the benefit of a a retailer (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2010).

The enthusiasm over gamification amongst marketers has been driven by the observation that games engage people, and that this engagement is sustained over a period of time. Thus, a number of authors have considered the potential benefits that gamification could bring to business processes, "what if you could reverse engineer what makes games effective and graft it into a business environment?" (Werbach, 2012, p12). Yet, if we look at practical implementations of gamification it is with external customers, rather than employees, that this enthusiasm has become realised.

Before considering the implications and implementation of gamification in retail we believe it is necessary to explore and clarify the origins of the concept. This is necessary for two reasons. Firstly, specificity is required as gamification encompasses a wide range of approaches, many of which can be considered of limited utility in a retail environment. Secondly, much of the discussion into gamification has been driven by the potential of new technology rather than the underlying theories that relate customer behaviour to game mechanics.

Serious Games and Game Mechanics

The precursor to the current gamification movement can be seen in the emergence of serious games in the early 1970's (Abt, 1970). At the core of this concept was the idea that games could play a role in enabling individuals to navigate the increasing abstraction of everyday life driven and the facets of an ever more technologically

complex society. The use of the term 'serious' was designed to help reinforce the educational purpose of such games. However, Abt recognised the effect of the juxtaposition of the words 'game' and 'serious' and the need to reframe games as being a useful, even essential, tool for dealing with important problems outside of the realm of entertainment.

> *"Games may be serious without being solemn, interesting without being hilarious, earnest and purposeful without being humorless, and difficult without being frustrating."* (Abt, 1970, p10).

One early example of a 'serious' game was that of military war games, and it is perhaps not surprising that many early adopters of serious games technology were in the security and defence sector. For example, flight simulators were adopted as a means of providing simulated training that would not be cost effective, or possible, in the physical world.

Over time, the gap between commercial computer games and those used for specialist training has narrowed. As the capabilities of home computer systems have advanced, and software companies become able to hire the best developers, cost-conscious clients in the military and security area are increasingly borrowing from commercial games technology. For example, the US army has gone as far as creating its own military game studio and game called 'America's Army' which it uses both for internal training purposes and as a means of encouraging potential recruits via a publicly accessible version which became one of the world's 10 most popular games

(Hsu, 2010). However, within the areas of education and training the game concept has typically taken on a very literal and realistic recreation of the physical world.

By contrast, the role of gamification in retail can be understood through applying game mechanics to everyday processes, rather than attempting to simulate everyday life. Key types of game mechanics include status, reward, competition and achievement (Zichermann and Cunningham, 2011). The most basic form of game mechanic is the provision of a reward mechanism for completing certain tasks (Swan, 2012). At the simplest level many online customer communities provide an opportunity for consumers to gain status through points or badges in return for posting. For example, Amazon provides a number of badges for frequent reviewers including "#1 Reviewer" and "Top 1000 reviewer". Rewards can also be provided for encouraging desirable behaviour, such as the Amazon "Real Name" badge given to individuals who provide accurate data when leaving online reviews. Another example is the online fashion retailer ASOS who enable users to create and then share 'outfits' with other online shoppers and compete to see who receives the most 'follows'. These examples highlight that gamification in a retail context is not about the application of computer games but is rather through more subtle addition of game elements to enhance an existing shopping process.

Gamification and the retail customer experience

The emergence of gamification has come in the context of increasing interest amongst researchers in consumer motivations when shopping online. The key question here has been the extent to which offline models of consumer behavior can be seen as analogous to online models. Whilst some studies have found that online consumers

could be segmented in similar ways to offline consumers based on key behavioural traits, (Ganesh et al. 2010; Brown et al. 2003) others make the case for additional behavioural categories in online shopping. Rohm and Swaminathan (2004) for example identify the 'variety-seeking shopper' who is stimulated by the extensive choice available on the internet. However, the overall thrust of research into online shopping to date has been around online shopping related to utilitarian and functional motives (Brown et al. 2003; Dennis, 2009, p1121). For example, Rohm and Swaminathan found that the need for social interaction was not significant compared to the offline store environment; they suggest that 'online shopping appeals to more functional as opposed to recreational shoppers' (2004, p755). This is consistent with Liu and Forsythe's findings that enjoyment is not a direct influence on online usage and instead 'online shoppers primarily perceive utilitarian, but not hedonic, benefits as sure gains from using the channel' (2010, p98). These findings create significant challenges for retailers who, in order to succeed in a multi-channel market, must find ways to move consumers beyond such utilitarian motivations (Rose et al. 2012).

It has been recognized that retail success in a multi-channel market depends on delivering an effective customer experience, not simply focusing on price and product innovation (Grewal et al. 2009). For retailers in industries such as fashion, the context of this research, this focus on utilitarian motivations is particularly challenging in sectors where online retailers face difficulties recreating the more sensory experience of apparel shopping (Elliott, 2002). Since clothes are an experiential product, the lack of physical contact, uncertainty about product quality or inability to provide the atmosphere experienced in-store have been deterrents to customers purchasing online (Hansen and Jensen, 2009). The adoption of gamification strategies by fashion

retailers can therefore be a response to this challenge, and an attempt to build effective customer experiences online as well as offline.

Returning to the question of the gamification, this raises questions over how games can be appropriately incorporated into the online shopping environment. One implication is that 'game' elements need to be built from, and integrated within, the core utilitarian functions of the shopping task. We illustrate this through a number of examples of the use of game elements by retailers that build upon the core shopping function.

Online fashion retailers ASOS regularly 'gamifies' the online shopping experience with competitions such as fashion bingo, matching celebrities with clothing and Pinterest competitions to win prizes. Flash sales and leader boards to gain early bird exclusivity to sales are also strategies used to encourage its customers to participate in its retailing games. British fashion retailer Jack Wills also incorporates interactive games into its Christmas period as customers can scan their gift guide calendar each day for a chance to win prizes. Missguided, an online women's fashion retailer, run frequent competition through their Facebook site. As well as fashion retailers grocery retailers such as Tesco encourage customers to participate and interact with each other in social spaces for the chance to win various prizes.

Gamification and Co-creation
The discussion of gamification has so far been based about the creation of games, typically online games, by organisations attempting to increase customer engagement

with their digital platforms. With this carries the assumption that gamification is something that is 'done' to consumers, another tool in the retail marketers toolbox alongside other forms of promotional activity. However, theories around the concept of games suggest that we are potentially missing a significant dimension if the role of consumers in creating and adapting games is ignored. This is highlighted through the classic study of games by Roger Caillois (1959) whose theories differentiated between two characteristics of games, "Ludus" (games) and "paidia" (play). Whilst *games* are highly structured, skill based and built upon formal rules *play* involves improvisation and creativity. This identifies what is, perhaps, the major challenge in implementing game designs in an online retail environment – for the game to be enjoyable people must play it out of choice.

> *"...play must be defined as a free and voluntary activity, a source of joy and amusement. A game which one would be forced to play would at once cease being play."* (Callois, 2006, p124)

One example of this difference is the way that children play with toys such as Lego. There is the 'formal' toy to be constructed based on the instructions, but then there are the opportunities for children to improvise and create new models by recombining elements in ways that differ from the original (McGonigal, 2012). Transferred to a retail setting this perspective on games encourages, and indeed requires, a co-created perspective where customers can create, or re-purpose existing games.

Research Questions

The research questions for this exploratory study are based on two core themes that have emerged from the literature. The first is the extent to which consumers derive game like experiences from online shopping. Grewal et al. (2009) refer to this aspect of customer experience as *excitement seeking*, whilst in the context of gamification Zichermann and Cunningham (2011) talk about the role of *fun*. Here we use the more neutral term of entertainment. The second question explores the mechanisms through the specific impact of game mechanics within these experiences. Reflecting this experiential focus following research questions were used for the empirical study:

RQ1. How do consumers derive entertainment experiences from partaking in online shopping?

RQ2. How do consumers respond to the inclusion of game mechanics within online retail experiences?

Method

Since the research context is an emergent area of research and seeks to discover 'latent, underlying, or non–obvious issues', qualitative research methods are used to gain a deeper understanding into online shopper behaviour (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p10). Firstly, qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it is used to study social phenomena in context and importantly continues to seek detailed and elaborative explanations into 'why' a phenomenon occurs (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Secondly, it seeks to access an 'inside' experience of humans, focusing on recording naturally occurring and ordinary events (Mason, 2002; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). The data collection method combined semi-structured in-depth interviews with of data

collection with in-person observation of consumers partaking in online shopping activity.

The sample consisted of 19 UK consumers who purchased fashion clothing items online. Respondents were selected via a snowball sampling process on the basis of being individuals in employment with access to their own credit card. All respondents stated that they had purchased fashion items online in the previous six months and preferred online shopping over physical retail stores. This sampling decision aligns with the exploratory nature of the research by giving a focus on individuals who carried out the majority of their *fashion* purchasing online. Respondents were asked to list stores where they had purchased fashion items in the previous six months and these retailers' current sites were checked for evidence of gamification strategies.

In terms of research location a naturalistic approach was taken, studying people in ordinary settings and so, wherever possible, interviews were be conducted in the participant's own home helping to make interviewees feel more comfortable and confident throughout the process. It is also the natural place where interviewees tend to shop for clothes online and so was used to help prompt respondents when recalling experiences. Interviews and observation were carried out face-to-face and took an average of 45 minutes. As part of the observation process respondents were asked to shop for an item of their choice on a site identified as using gamification strategies and discuss the motivations for engaging with the online store. Once interviews were completed they were transcribed and refinement of themes then took place by categorisation of similar characteristics found in the transcripts.

Results

Findings are presented in relation to each research question with core thematic areas identified for each and supporting evidence from interviews provided.

Research Question 1

The first research question is concerned with the ways in which the online retail experience can be constructed as an entertainment experience. Respondents identified two core themes, the first related to the way that online shopping is seen as a replacement for other entertainment activities. For example, by partaking in online shopping rather than watching a film. The second theme identifies the ways in which the online shopping experience provides a number of emotional benefits associated with entertainment activities, including excitement and relaxation.

Theme 1: Online shopping as recreation

Respondents saw online shopping as a replacement for other entertainment options . As such, the motivation for shopping was not to carry out a specific purchase but more as a means of filling some time.

"In the evenings, where some people might watch a film, I shop".

"If I've got a spare half an hour I will look online rather than read a book for example".

"It's more like a hobby".

"Sometimes I just like to have a look each week as something to do".

Respondents value avoiding the hassle of stores and being able to shop 'whenever you want, there's no set opening hours' enables shopping activities to be an option during time slots that might have previously been reserved for entertainment activity.

"I shop a lot more but in shorter bursts or in the evening rather than one afternoon".

The convenience of the online channel seems to also have provided the foundations for customers to be in the 'position to enjoy it' when it suits them. Respondents also noted that they cumulatively spend longer shopping online but do not consider it as such a big chore because it does not need to be planned and can better fit within their lifestyles.

"If you're working you don't finish till five, it really limits where you can go and also be in a position to enjoy it".

"I definitely shop more frequently online, but don't spend a whole day on it like before".

"I shop a lot more but in shorter bursts or in the evening rather than one afternoon"

Theme 2: Affective aspects of online shopping

When describing their feelings of online shopping, respondents identified feeling many of the emotional responses associated with entertainment experiences. For example, one common feeling was that of excitement, particularly around the delivery of items.

"I get the extra buzz of happiness when it gets to me".

"There's more anticipation I guess so maybe this adds to the excitement for me".

"I get really excited about shopping and when things arrive. It's a double hit."

Respondents described how when they 'feel down' or are in a stressful situation, shopping is mechanism through which to reward and distract themselves from the larger task at hand. Respondents also spent time online fantasizing over what they consider special, indulgent items of clothing. This evokes strong feelings of desire and requires an element of self-justification that these items are deserved.

"I can do it 20 minutes at a time as a break from studying or revision".

"I find shopping online a great distraction from things at work, at home etc [...] I shop to cheer me up, to break up my day".

"Spending money makes me feel good at the end of the day. If I've been working hard, I deserve to see what I can spend the money on!".

"I end up browsing most weekday lunchtimes to get me through the day".

Respondents also rewarded themselves with temporary 'mini-breaks' to improve their mood. Distraction activities such as reading a retailers own blogs on fashion trends or creating possible outfits online in virtual changing rooms provide instant gratification. For example, one respondent stated that they used functionality provided by one online retailer to create collages of various product styles as it cheered them up. The 'mini-breaks' also act as an incentive to reach a bigger goal by focusing their escapist goals on an item which can be eventually purchased as a reward. This adds to the body of literature on self-gift giving behaviour in the retail context where consumers' motivations for purchasing self-gift items are concerned with rewarding oneself and fulfilling a need, in particular self-esteem or escapism, rather than a physical purchase (Mick and DeMoss, 1990a, 1990b; Sherry et al., 1995).

Research Question 2.

The second research question considered the role of game elements within the shopping experience. This was achieved through analyzing evidence of the existing of the previously identified specific forms of games mechanism within the online shopping process status, reward, competition and achievement (Zichermann and Cunningham, 2011). Whilst respondents did identify some interaction with specific retailer implemented game mechanics, the majority of the discussion occurred over descriptions of respondents improvising their own 'games' from various elements of the retail experience. Thus, whilst on the level of an individual retailer there was some interaction with game elements these were subsumed by a larger element of macro

game where respondents co-created competition between multiple retailers. We therefore focus on these forms of improvisation based around three key themes of competition with other consumers, competition against retailers' policies and engaging in competition between retailers based on pricing or promotions.

Theme 1: Competing against other shoppers

Respondents applied their knowledge and skills to get 'better' items or deals than other shoppers. The online search process for the best deal, price or quality item was considered by certain interviewees as a form of entertainment and a motivator behind frequent online shopping activity. Like other forms of competition there was a feeling of disappointment when the search wasn't successful.

> *"I look for deals, or just wait and I will find something and keep searching. The purchase doesn't feel as good if I don't get a discount, it's like I've lost out."*

> *"It's like a race – my phone goes with an e-mail and there are only few items in my size so I have to get there first. Especially, for example, Urban Outfitters. I love their sales but they are so limited so you have to be quick [...] you have to be quicker than others. It's like a game".*

> *"I'm quicker than normal people at getting through the pages".*

Theme 2: Competing against other retailers policies

For a number of respondents the excitement was derived from competing against retailers own online policies. This took a number of forms, for example taking advantage of pricing arbitrage and reselling heavily discounted items.

> *"That's the other side to my online shopping which I find exciting. I sell things for more than I bought them for, so technically the item was free".*

> *"I've found a new site recently actually which I found from buying a pair of shoes from Misguided and the website which the shoes had come from was on the box, so I Googled it. [...]I shop directly from them now and cut out the middle person".*

Another strategic form of game was buying items to resell for a higher price at a later date, for example when the items are no longer available. A further example was manipulating the free delivery options.

> *"With Topshop, you get free delivery if you spend over £75 on orders but its free returns. So I will spend £75 and then just return what I don't want. Normally I buy shoes because they are around £60-70 because if I buy a bargain top and its £3 delivery, it's no longer a bargain top. Then it's quite exciting because they come and I can try them on and see how amazing they are but I know I'd never wear them. I take my top, thank you very much, and send back the shoes. So I've tricked them".*

One respondent also noted the pleasure in shopping more strategically by cutting out the 'middle-man' and going straight to the wholesaler. Another described 'a good feeling and quite a lot of pride' having 'tricked' websites into giving free postage. This type of behaviour can be considered as an online form of 'deshopping' (King and Dennis, 2006), defined as the 'deliberate return of goods for reasons other than actual faults in the product' (Schmidt, 1999, p2). In an online environment, this unethical behaviour is made easier because the absence of direct confrontation means there is no threat of public embarrassment. Whilst respondents interviewed did not wear the items, unpick seams or ensure the garment is faulty before returning, (as described in King and Dennis' 2006 research) they do buy items with the pre-mediated intention to return in order to get free postage for a cheaper item. They also consider it a bonus to try on items they wouldn't usually buy, such as expensive high heels which are tried on for temporary fun and fantasy. Since the amount respondents spent on clothes online far outweighed postage costs, the behaviour is more about the thrill of 'winning' against the company. For these shoppers, it is not necessarily about getting items cheaper, but about finding items that are unusual or difficult to find. They enjoy manipulating the shopping process and gaining social approval from their purchases.

Theme 3: Pricing Games

Another group of respondents gained pleasure from the increased sense of self-control over their purchases. For these shoppers, it was not only about purchasing items at discounted prices but about carrying out sufficient research into a purchase that they could be sure they were buying the right items. The increased time to evaluate their purchases and reading blogs or reviews helped them to resist impulse buys, which

frequently caused feelings of regret and post-purchase dissonance associated with in-store purchases.

> *"I would get swept up in the moment and regret it afterwards as I probably shouldn't have spent money treating myself on something I would wear once. When I'm at home I don't make as many rash decisions and I feel my purchases are more considered and I can justify them".*

> *"As I'm typing in my details I start to think, is this sale item really worth it, there is more time to reflect on it. In shops you can end up buying all sorts on the spur of the moment".*

> *"Online when you look at your basket you can re-consider and have more thinking space. I'm buying less, but better things".*

The reduced pressure to buy an item immediately made interviewees feel more in control of their behaviour and they feel they have 'made a proper decision, rather than be pressurised into buying something for the sake of it', which would often occur at the end of a shopping trip. They also appreciate the flexibility online, for example by using the shopping cart to evaluate items and prioritises them in order to purchase the most desired piece of clothing.

For some respondents exhibiting economic self-control on auction sites was a point of pride. They were aware of getting caught up in bidding wars: 'I think it's quite easy to get sucked into stuff, and if you watch the bidding you tend to pay more than you

wanted, so I don't tend to do this'. The risks of paying more than initially planned on auction sites was seen to spoil the excitement. Respondents therefore distanced themselves from the bidding so they would win an item for a good price without the feelings of regret of an impulse purchase. Regardless of the cost of the clothing item, or the retail outlet, the respondents preferred the online experience because they find joy in being able to control their behaviour online and becoming more intelligent with their purchases.

Discussion

This study suggests that game elements can serve to enhance consumer engagement with online shopping but that the relationship between consumers and 'games' is somewhat more complex than has been suggested by those promoting gamification. Before addressing this we first discuss two criticisms that have been directed at the commercial use of gamification. The first is the consideration that the process of gamification is a form of advanced psychological manipulation designed to generate purchases, and provide a means of gaining greater data on customers in environments where competitor sites are just a click away. Such criticism may appear similar to other generic ethical concerns over the collection of data by advertisers. However, a concern specific to gamification that has emerged amongst some commentators is the potential intersection between gamification and gambling, the awkwardly named 'gamblification' (Gopaladesikan, 2013). The second is that gamification is simply another form of digital 'snake oil' that makes little meaningful difference to the effectiveness of online shopping experience (Robertson, 2010). On the second point it is true that even proponents of gamification acknowledge its limitations as a strategic driver, "if you expect gamification to fix your businesses'

core problems – bad products or poor product-market fit – it will not" (Zichermann and Cunningham, 2011, pxxi).

Yet, embedded in these criticisms is the assumption that gamification is driven by corporate design rather than a co-created, or consumer driven, process as suggested by the findings of this research. Here it is not the formalised game mechanics that prove the most engaging, but rather the unstructured and improvised games that customers create as a means to fulfill their own experiential needs when shopping online. Significantly, despite being a part of such games retailers are unaware, and perhaps unwilling, participants. Such behaviour by online shoppers creates challenges for retailers still basing their online pricing and promotional decision on an assumption of information asymmetry between themselves and consumers. When comparing prices and special offers between different types of retailers some consumers in this study not only sought out information on different prices, but have found a way of making such information seeking a type of entertainment. Similarly, this study highlights the challenges of assuming that online retailing is overly analogous with its offline counterpart. For example, the role of the online shopping cart as an organisational tool used to help compare prices rather than as a means of storing goods before purchase has potentially significant implications for retailers.

The exploratory nature of this study and small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings. It does however suggest avenues for further empirical research that might quantitatively establish the wider impact of gamification strategies upon consumers. The study also raises the possibility that retailers can use gamification

strategies to better manage 'undesirable' comparative shopping behavior between online retailers. With this in mind, we suggest the follow strategies that retailers could adopt to manage and maximize the benefits of gamification strategies:

- Gamification should be optional. Different customers will have different levels of responses to games and not all will have shopping motivations that lend themselves towards partaking in a game. Additionally, introducing game elements that are likely to be considered as a chore by customers could result in potential customers leaving a website. Retailers should therefore consider appropriate segmentation when integrating game elements within a site.

- Use games to reduce forms of undesirable consumer behaviour. Gamification can be usefully used as a means of re-channeling undesirable consumer behaviours, such as deshopping or misuse of postage policies. For example, running games and competitions to get free postage could to save the retailer money and satisfy the competitive needs of this consumer type.

- Use gamification to manage price-comparison behaviour. Retailers could integrate game elements into shopping carts, and make them a more persistent element of the shopping experience to more effectively respond to cross-retailer pricing differences.

- Gamification as a source of insight data. A key challenges with online shopping is building an understanding of what consumers are doing on other sites. Whilst web analytics data can provide a partial picture, for example through provision of data on search terms, retailers are likely to be left with significant gaps in understanding of online data. Rather than simply focus on engagement with their own site, retailer could gamify the customer experience by providing applications or web services that enable consumers to engage

across sites. For example, building on the gamifying of a shopping cart retailers could challenge shoppers to find a cheaper prices elsewhere and ask them to enter the data. This would not just provide information on pricing, which the retailer may already be aware, but provide greater detail on the extent and location of online price searches.

Conclusions

Given the importance of customer experience to online retail, understanding ways to enhance consumer engagement with online shopping is an important part of a successful digital strategy. This study suggests that gamification of online retail can help to generate a deeper level of consumer engagement, and cognitively reposition the shopping experience as a form of entertainment. However, consumers also seek to co-creatively recombine elements to form their own entertainment experience by manipulating pricing or other policies. Overall, the research suggests that when considering gamification retailers should look beyond games as a promotional tool and consider the wider context, particularly where the retailer may be *part of* the game. Whilst this study was limited in its generalisability by its exploratory and qualitative nature, it suggests avenues for future quantitative research in assessing the specific benefits that game elements can bring to online retail.

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