

Exploring gamification in the South African fashion retail industry

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Scripture I live by:

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Quote I live by:

You can never cross the ocean until you have the courage to lose sight of the shore.

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the world economy, affecting practically every industry. The sustained existence of organisations depends highly on strong marketing assets. Given the growing inadequacies of traditional marketing communications channels in the digital age, gamification may be a creative medium to embed within organisations' marketing communications practices, which has downstream impacts of positive brand-related outcomes. Gamification's efficacy as a marketing communication channel and tool can be linked to its potential to satisfy users' intrinsic needs, ostensibly through evoking a pleasurable consumer experience via an autotelic use reminiscent of videogame engagement. Gamification's outcomes, on the other hand, are very context dependent. The objective of this study was to assess the potential contribution of gamification in under-researched and pressing contexts and settings. Therefore, the South African fashion retail industry was chosen as an appropriate context in which to frame the study, given the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this industry as well as the twin realities of hyper-competition among fashion retail brands. Additionally, merchants in South Africa's fashion industry have not yet widely adopted gamification in their marketing tactics, and research on gamification in the context of South African fashion retail has remained limited in scope. To this degree, the stated problem areas, combined with the industry's practical and theoretical infancy, are an adequate incentive for investigating gamification in South Africa's fashion retail industry.

Gamification marketing, which is based on a relational marketing approach, is critical for gaining a lasting competitive edge in South Africa's dynamic fashion retail industry. Gamification systems can motivate users to develop relationship orientation if they have a favourable attitude toward the system, which is contingent upon whether users perceive the system to be simple to use and enjoyable, whether it facilitates social interaction, and whether users perceive it to be useful. The goal of this study was to investigate gamification marketing as it relates to managing customer-retailer relationships in the context of technology-mediated relational interactions.

The empirical study was conducted using primary research, which involved the collection of data first-hand from participants. The study employed a qualitative approach and an exploratory research methodology. A non-probability convenience and judgment sampling strategy was used to recruit participants. Three focus group discussion sessions were held during which to collect data. The study enrolled a total of 25 individuals. The Morse and Field method was used to analyse the obtained data and ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software to code the data and conduct categorical and thematic analyses. Four themes emerged from the analysis, each with 11 subcategories.

The participants' responses suggested that the majority have a favourable attitude toward gamification. They identified enjoyment, an augmented reality feature, entertainment, arcade games, smartphone capabilities, feedback systems, and prizes as necessary components of enjoyable and consistent experiences. Overall, based on the findings of the literature review and the empirical research, it can be stated that incorporating gamification systems that are sensitive to the needs of end-users is a successful tool for relationship marketing management.

This study identified several topics that warrant further exploration. Future research can use other gamified services as the research context, conduct quantitative studies, expand the size and diversity of the sample, employ a probability sampling method, and collect data longitudinally to ensure that findings are applicable to a broader range of gamified environments.

Key terminologies: fashion, fashion industry, fashion retail, gamification, marketing, marketing communications, relationship marketing, retail industry

KEY TERMINOLOGIES USED IN THIS STUDY

Fashion

Bhardwaj and Fairhurst (2009:167) define fashion as a transient cyclical phenomenon that consumers adopt for a specified period. Fashion is a visible product based on the unique demands, interests, identity, and values of consumers (Eluwawalage, 2016:206).

Fashion industry

The fashion industry encompasses a variety of activities ranging from the transformation of natural or synthetic materials into fabrics and yarns to the production of industrial filters (textiles) and synthetic yarns to the production of fashion goods by contractors, designers, and manufacturers and includes marketing, e-commerce, retail, and wholesale markets (Chavan, 2018:212; Tortora & Tortora, 2021:67).

Fashion retail

Fashion retail is described as the process of selling garments and footwear to consumers (Akinboade *et al.*, 2008:512; Druica & Musso, 2014:280; Makholwa, 2011).

Gamification

Gamification is the process of incorporating game design aspects into non-game systems in order to improve users' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and assist them in processing information and achieving goals more effectively or modifying their behaviour (Lowry & Putz, 2018).

Marketing

Marketing is the activity, processes, and collection of institutions involved in communicating, generating, delivering, and exchanging products and services that provide value to customers, consumers, partners, and society as a whole (AMA, 2017).

Marketing communications

The term "marketing communications" refers to the methods by which organisations communicate with consumers and other stakeholders (Armstrong & Kotler, 2018:426). Messages from marketing communications are distributed via one or more channels, including print, radio, television, direct mail, and personal selling (AMA, 2017).

Relationship marketing

Agarwal and Malhotra (2020:5) define relationship marketing as the process of identifying, developing, maintaining, and, if necessary, terminating relational exchanges with customers as a resource integration in a networked environment with the goal of mutual value creation and organisational performance enhancement.

Retail industry

According to Oxford's Lexico (2021), a retailer is an organisation or individual who sells things to the public in smaller amounts for consumption rather than resale. The retail industry comprises all merchants who offer goods or services to consumers for consumption (Farfan, 2020).

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUALISATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter outlines the nature of the research study. It commences with a contextual background to the research, followed by the study's problem statement and rationale of the research study. This chapter then outlines the primary and secondary research objectives, after which the research methodology implemented to achieve the intended objectives of the study is discussed briefly. This chapter concludes with a statement on the dissertation's intended contribution to the scope and body of knowledge. The chapter concludes with a brief and clear outline of each chapter within this study.

1.2 BACKGROUND

This section briefly discusses the salient aspects that were investigated in this research study and presents the general structure of the dissertation.

New practices in the marketing communication field have continued to emerge since the onset of digitalisation (Crepax, 2018:461; Pedersen & Ritter, 2020:180-182), perpetually creating a slew of opportunities upon which marketers can capitalise (Brooksbank *et al.*, 2019:814). More recently, gamification has exploded in the field of marketing communication field (Lowry *et al.*, 2018:131), attracting the attention of academics, educators, and practitioners from a variety of domains (Fels & Seaborn, 2015:16) with applications in areas such as education (Agre *et al.*, 2015; Armstrong & Landers, 2017; Bittencourt *et al.*, 2019; Buckley & Doyle, 2016; Cheong *et al.*, 2014; Harman *et al.*, 2014; Putz & Treiblmaier, 2018), management (Hamari *et al.*, 2018; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2015), health care (Deterding *et al.*, 2016; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Huang *et al.*, 2015), governance (Hamari & Hassan, 2020), research (Benbunan-Fich *et al.*, 2019), and marketing (Bittner & Shipper, 2014; De Ruyter *et al.*, 2016; Hammedi *et al.*, 2018).

Crucially, gamification has been hailed as a next-generation method in the marketing domain (Jansen & Lucassen, 2014:196-201) for facilitating behavioural change in users (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2015:412). However, since gamification is an emerging type of system, there is a dearth of practice-based knowledge that can guide the development of successful gamified systems (Liu *et al.*, 2017:1016). The result is a rich domain that, through the development of theory-driven principles, can yield significant contributions that will lead to successful outcomes for organisations. Consequently, researchers across a variety of disciplines have begun to study the potential applications of gamification (Deterding & Nacke, 2017; Fels & Seaborn, 2015; Gaskin *et al.*, 2013; Jiang *et al.*, 2014; Pfoser *et al.*, 2018; Schöbel & Söllner, 2016).

Numerous gaps were identified during a review of prior gamification studies. For one, gamification research has been dominated by what Deterding (2014:316) aptly refers to as an “additive deterministic paradigm”. That is, most of the publications included in the review place an excessive emphasis on gaming elements, which is interpreted as proof of additive-deterministic thinking. Helmefalt (2019:11) laments that gaming elements are frequently emphasised in the context of gamification, often to the point where practitioners believe that simply incorporating these elements will guarantee favourable results. Ahuja *et al.* (2017:292) and Deterding (2014:316) propose that modern research studies should adopt more nuanced and less deterministic theoretical and design approaches. As a case in point, Bekk *et al.* (2018:99) assert the importance of focusing on the participant’s experience with a gamification activity. The review of gamification literature bolsters the argument that contextual elements are undervalued in gamification studies. According to Kasurinen and Knutas (2018:39), the success of gamification is “very context-dependent, due to the various intrinsic and extrinsic motivators involved with the different activities”. In another example, Fels and Seaborn (2015:19) agree that gamification outcomes are highly context-dependent, and thus similar applications do not always yield the same findings in different contexts. Hamari and Koivisto (2019:206) concur that the critical role of context in gamification has been mostly disregarded and should be considered in future research.

Bertola and Teunissen (2018) and Cantoni *et al.* (2021:32) contend that fashion is a relevant context to frame, given that the fashion industry is becoming a fertile ground for the integration of digital elements within the experience of customers and prospects (Cantoni & Kalbaska, 2019:128). It is also a vivid research domain that includes interdisciplinary studies, diverse approaches, and various research methodologies (Cantoni *et al.*, 2020:121). Moreover, the level of rivalry in the fashion retail environment has increased significantly, urging marketers to employ novel and creative tactics for increasing brand visibility and attracting customers (Chen & Xu, 2017:1; Nagaraj, 2020:161; Randhawa & Saluja, 2017:109; Yao, 2018). Reflecting on such an intricate landscape, this discourse explored gamification of fashion marketing communication. Moreover, an analysis of gamification studies reveals that the majority of published research was conducted in developed and industrialised areas. Given the disparities in consumer behaviour worldwide, it is predicted that the behavioural responses of consumers in developed regions will be incomparable to that of developing countries (Ikechukwu & Singhry, 2020:425).

This study proposed to expand gamification research in relatively under-explored and pressing contexts and settings through the use of literature investigations and rigorous qualitative methods to evaluate the prospective contribution of gamification to the South African fashion retail industry. The qualitative study focused on understanding customers’ awareness, acceptance, and use of gamification applications. In addition, the study explored whether fashion retail gamification-based applications contribute to brand awareness, customer loyalty, and retention.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a destructive impact on South Africa's economy (De Lange, 2020; GSI, 2020). While the fourth quarter of 2020 saw a positive economic growth of 1.5%, it was insufficient to counter the crippling effects of COVID-19 in the second quarter when lockdown restrictions were at their most stringent. Economic activity for the entire year decreased by 7.0% in 2020 compared with 2019 (Stats SA, 2021). Few economists forecast that the economy will return to pre-crisis levels by the third quarter of 2022, but forecasts are riddled with uncertainties. The gloomy and unpredictable outlook is exacerbated with policymakers around the world shutting down official support schemes to preserve consumer purchasing power (Deloitte, 2020:1). Business of Fashion and McKinsey (2020:69) estimated that around 50.0% of organisations would show signs of distress under a partial-support scenario. Indeed, South Africa's retail trade fell by 3.5% early in January of 2021, following a downwardly revised 1.2% decrease in the previous month and falling short of industry estimates of a 2.7% slump. It was the tenth successive monthly decline in retail activity amid the ongoing pandemic crisis (Trading Economics, 2021). This reflects the extreme severity of the global recession in which both consumers and organisations felt the severe pinch.

Since the fashion industry is consumer driven (Lu, 2021), demand for fashion is unlikely to recover due to limited spending power (Business of Fashion & McKinsey, 2020:16). Complete recovery is therefore unlikely without a significant increase in consumer demand (Lu, 2021). Deloitte (2020:1) has set out a broad framework that comprises three facets to ensure organisational success in a post-COVID world. This framework is presented in Figure 1-1.

Figure 1-1: A framework to ensure success in a post-COVID world



Source: Adopted from Deloitte (2020:1).

According to the framework, in a global pandemic, retailers should be resilient amid (i.e., respond to) consumer demands and continue moving forward (i.e., recover and thrive) (Deloitte, 2020:1; Mishra, 2020). Considering that the primary purpose of marketing communication is to build and strengthen the brand, many experts' opinions converge with the idea that in the contemporary

era, marketing communication would be the only way for organisations to establish and maintain a competitive edge (Kailani, 2012:122). Withal, the intense competition necessitates effective marketing tactics that are essential for fashion marketers and retailers to differentiate themselves and effectively appeal to the demands of their markets (Christensen & Kristensen, 2017:241). However, in today's digital era, understanding consumer needs and desires and then meeting them is difficult – especially in the fashion retail industry (Purwar, 2019:997). Gamified systems may be a creative medium to embed within the marketing strategies of fashion retailers (Herrewijn & Poels, 2013:17), and they can allow organisations to study consumer needs in greater depth, thereby satisfying them in a differentiated way (García-Madariaga *et al.*, 2020). Gamification is thought to be more effective than conventional marketing methods (Asaad *et al.*, 2017:461; Coşkun & Yılmaz, 2016:62; Roper & Thorpe, 2019:599), and has allowed an increasing number of customers to engage in organisations' marketing activities and achieve customer fit (Conaway & Garay, 2014:4).

Gamification capitalises on an individual's instinct to play and can be used to alter attitudes and achieve desired behavioural changes. Its primary goal is to incorporate gaming elements (points, badges, leader boards, feedback and status, narratives, challenges, competitions, rewards, avatars) (Hamari *et al.*, 2014:3027) into existing organisational processes rather than develop full-fledged games (Agre *et al.*, 2015; AlMarshedi *et al.*, 2017:26; Deterding *et al.*, 2016:104; Ho & Lu, 2020:14; Kalinauskas & Skaržauskienė, 2014:3). The primary distinction between gaming and gamification is that the latter is widely used to achieve goals beyond the game, while playing games is considered solely autotelic or inherently motivational (Cunningham & Zichermann, 2011:15; Hamari & Koivisto, 2014:141; Przybylski *et al.*, 2006:348). Gamification aims to latch on to this motivating nature of games by applying game design elements to non-game environments (Caprioli *et al.*, 2020:1312; Fels & Seaborn, 2015:26), with downstream impacts of changing consumer behaviour to one that is desired (Deterding, 2012:14).

Several studies have shown that gamification positively affects brand-related outcomes (Bauer *et al.*, 2020:582; Dichev & Dicheva, 2017:1; Hamari & Xi, 2020:455). Chen and Hsu (2018:130) found that engaging in gamification-based marketing practices increases hedonic and utilitarian shopping appeal, resulting in desirable customer behaviours (i.e., brand loyalty). Furthermore, Hammerschmidt *et al.* (2020:360) confirmed that gamified systems result in positive and beneficial behaviour for the organisation (i.e., customer commitment and willingness to pay). Dong *et al.* (2019:205) indicate that, in a digital environment, gamification increases customer engagement and actual sales. Therefore, gamification has become an effective way to steer consumer behaviour on the path of marketers' expectations while satisfying consumers' needs (Gadeikiene *et al.*, 2016:92).

The global fashion industry is learning to adapt to the new (Nagaraj, 2020:161); hence, gamification is gaining traction in the fashion marketing practice. For example, Berger fashion houses (i.e., Balenciaga) are using an online game to reveal their latest collections to fashion retailers (De Jong *et al.*, 2021:8). Moreover, Di Vaio *et al.* (2018) explored the use of gamification in a virtual dressing room dubbed “Fashion Island”. This application lets customers dress an avatar by selecting clothes and accessories in a soothing, tranquil, enjoyable, and immersive world. Users can also evaluate their choices by looking into a mirror located in the virtual environment. Furthermore, ASOS, the fashion retailer, “gamifies” its online shopping experience daily with contests such as fashion bingo, pairing celebrities with clothes, and Pinterest competitions to win prizes. Flash promotions and leader boards for early bird sales are other tactics used to inspire consumers to engage in its fashion retailing games. Jack Wills, a British apparel chain, also introduces interactive gaming during the Christmas seasons, where consumers can search their gift guide calendar each day for a chance to win prizes. Lastly, Missguided, an online women’s fashion retailer, holds daily contests on their Facebook page (Insley & Nunan, 2014:343).

Despite the growing trend of gamification in marketing practice, retailers and brands in the South African fashion industry have not as yet widely implemented or integrated gamification into their marketing strategies. To this extent, the conceptual infancy provided sufficient impetus for exploring gamification in the South African fashion retail industry. This study is particularly endearing to marketers buffeted by the twin realities of hyper-competition amongst fashion brands and retail and the increasing inadequacy of traditional brand-building strategies (Gupta *et al.*, 2016:497; Kusá & Urmínová, 2020). Additionally, owing to the nascent research efforts of gamification (Fels & Seaborn, 2015:29), there is a lack of theoretical and methodological rigor in the gamification research space (Deterding & Nacke, 2017:4503; Hamari & Hassan, 2020:5; Hamari *et al.*, 2014:3029). Given the embryonic nature of rigorous empirical gamification, little academic work has focused on creating a theoretical foundation for gamification. Accordingly, this field requires a comprehensive, theory-based research agenda (Lowry *et al.*, 2018:131). This study reviewed several leading ideas on theory building in information systems (Chin *et al.*, 2007; Gregor, 2006; Hassan & Lowry, 2015; Putz & Treiblmaier, 2015; Rowe, 2014) to start a process that creates the necessary foundation for building breakthrough theories in this area. Aside from adhering to leading guides on theory-building, this study focused on developing a theory upon the knowledge of precedent research by careful interpretation of accumulated material (Rowe, 2014:246). By standing on the shoulders of giants, this study reviewed theories that may contribute important insights to gamification from different perspectives. Withal *et al.* (2015) concluded that taking a multi-theoretical perspective in the creation of a research agenda helps

to produce a holistic picture, which allows classifying subsequent research and helps in structuring a domain.

Accordingly, the study attempted to organise the aggregation of research in this area to create a theoretically-founded research agenda that will support future research in the academic field of gamification. Despite the fact that each chapter should be viewed on its own merit, the study as a whole contributes towards the theory building of gamification. This research is therefore intended to assist academics in their research on the subject, as well as to facilitate relevant marketing and organisational specialists, such as digital marketing managers and game designers, in their marketing communication and brand-building strategies.

1.4 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

1.4.1 Integrated marketing communication

The role of marketing capabilities in achieving an organisation's market and financial success cannot be overstated (Blesa *et al.*, 2011:260; Kanibir *et al.*, 2014:12; Nalcaci & Yagci, 2014:677). Marketing capabilities, as a source of sustainable competitive advantage, are characterised as integrative processes designed to apply the organisation's necessary resources to its market-related needs, allowing the organisation to add value and satisfy consumer demands (Day, 2011:183).

Previous research (Ciravegna *et al.*, 2020:34; Luxton *et al.*, 2017:433) confirmed the significant role of marketing capabilities, including integrated marketing communication (IMC), in empowering an organisation's competitive strategies. Specifically, the power of IMC as a marketing capability drives the achievement of superior performance (Alarcón-del-Amo *et al.*, 2021:77; Luxton *et al.*, 2015:43; Luxton *et al.*, 2017:431). In this regard, Luxton *et al.* (2015:43) consider IMC to be a marketing capability that aids in the conversion of the organisation's resources into desirable brand outcomes.

IMC is defined as a strategic organisational process of cross-functional integration of marketing communication within the scope of an organisation's activities, up to the corporate level, with the aim of cultivating a competitive advantage (Kerr & Patti, 2015:318; Kliatchko & Schultz, 2014:385). Luxton *et al.* (2017:422) position IMC as a firm-wide market-related implementation mechanism that optimises communication approaches to achieve superior communication efficacy, while practitioners consider IMC to entail the entire business process, not just marketing communications (Kliatchko & Schultz, 2014:382). However, the conceptualisation of IMC as a broader organisational approach is beyond this study's scope. For

the purpose of this study, empirical research was solely based upon the narrower promotional approach of IMC in organisations within the South African fashion industry.

1.4.2 The fashion industry

The year 2020 will be remembered as the year fashion nearly died, or as Michael Burke, chief executive of Louis Vuitton, said in the State of Fashion 2021 report, “it killed the last remnants of the past, of the late 20th century” (Business of Fashion & McKinsey, 2020:2). In 2020, COVID-19 brought the global economy to its knees, and the fashion industry was not spared the ravages wrought by the pandemic (Moloi-Motsepe, 2020). As the pandemic wreaked havoc worldwide, the fashion industry suffered its worst year on record, with almost three-quarters of publicly traded organisations losing money (Business of Fashion & McKinsey, 2020:10). The global fashion market size reached a value of nearly \$527.1 billion in 2020, after declining at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of -0.6% since 2015 (Intrado GlobeNewsWire, 2021). Fashion retail sales fell by 28.0% year over year through November 2020, the steepest drop in all of retail. Department stores that rely heavily on fashion garnered a 17.5% loss in revenue (Danziger, 2020). The global economic slowdown triggered by COVID-19 has resulted in a huge drop in demand for fashion products. Fortunately, the market is projected to recover and grow at a CAGR of 9.8% from 2020 and reach an approximated \$842.7 billion market value by 2025 and a further \$1 138.8 billion by 2030 (Intrado GlobeNewsWire, 2021).

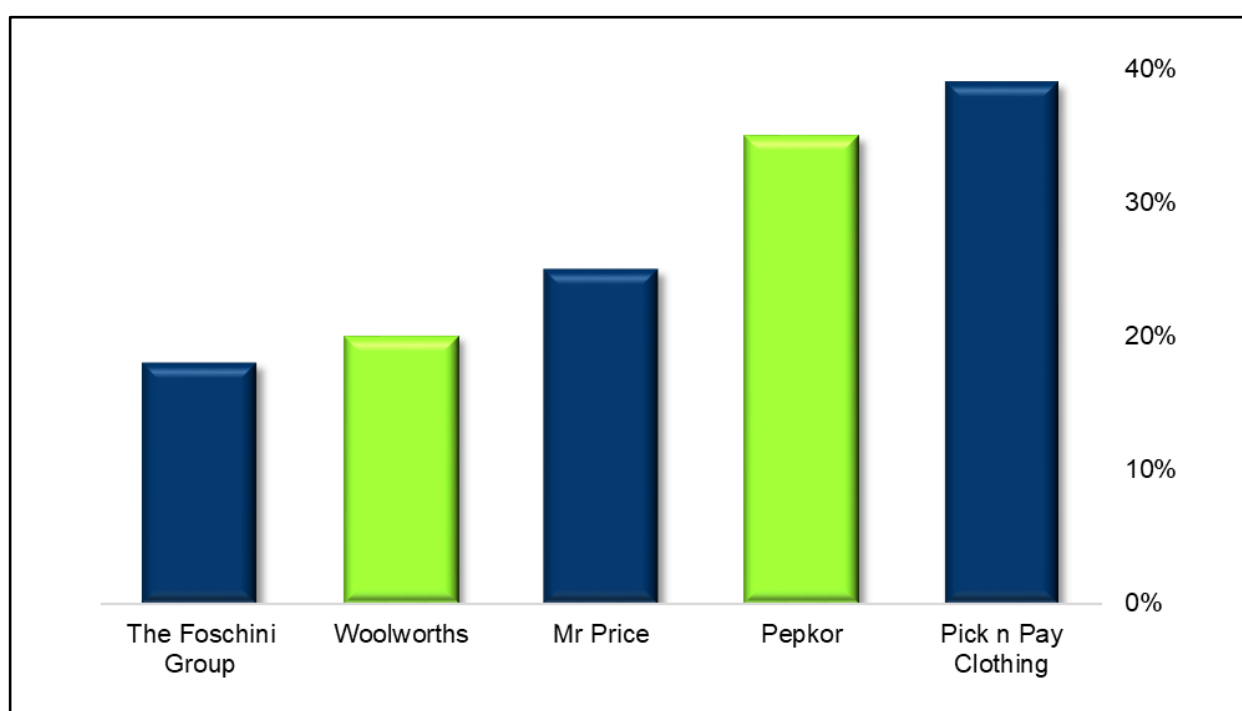
According to a Euromonitor survey, Africa’s fashion industry accounts for a limited portion of the \$1.5 trillion global fashion industry. Nonetheless, the clothing and footwear industry in sub-Saharan Africa is estimated to be worth \$31 billion, and business is expanding (Statista, 2020; Strydom, 2017). In South Africa, the fashion industry accounts for nearly 8.0% of South African manufacturing GDP and 3.0% of overall GDP (Le Guern, 2020). The South African apparel, textile, footwear, and leather (CTFL) manufacturing industry is well established, with products ranging from synthetic and natural inputs to finished clothing and shoes. The South African CTFL manufacturing industry is mainly concentrated in the two coastal regions of KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape, as well as in Gauteng. The Eastern Cape is developing as a CTFL centre (InvestSA, 2020).

This industry is vital to the economic and social empowerment of formerly disadvantaged segments of the population, and it has been prioritised by national government policy initiatives. As a result, it is essential to turn focus to growing employment numbers in the industry. Thus, South Africa’s domestic clothing/manufacturing industry is recognised as a useful industry with considerable job creation potential (Veitch, 2017). South Africa’s once-thriving apparel industry, on the other hand, has been decimated by an influx of low-cost Asian imports and has been

adversely impacted by the rise of mid- and high-end international fashion brands (Business Wire, 2019). Propitiously, South African fashion retailers eschewed locally made products to cut costs and boost profits (Neves, 2020) and the movement to embrace “Proudly South African” labels is steadily gaining ground (Business Wire, 2019). South African fashion retailers like Woolworths and The Foschini Group are planning to increase investment in local clothing manufacturers in an attempt to reduce their reliance on imports from the Asian giant. Although this is a step in the right direction, it will not revive the ailing industry completely (Neves, 2020).

Figure 1-2 depicts some of the more prominent fashion retailers in South Africa that source from local manufacturers.

Figure 1-2: South African fashion retailers sourcing from local manufacturers



Source: Adopted from Neves (2020).

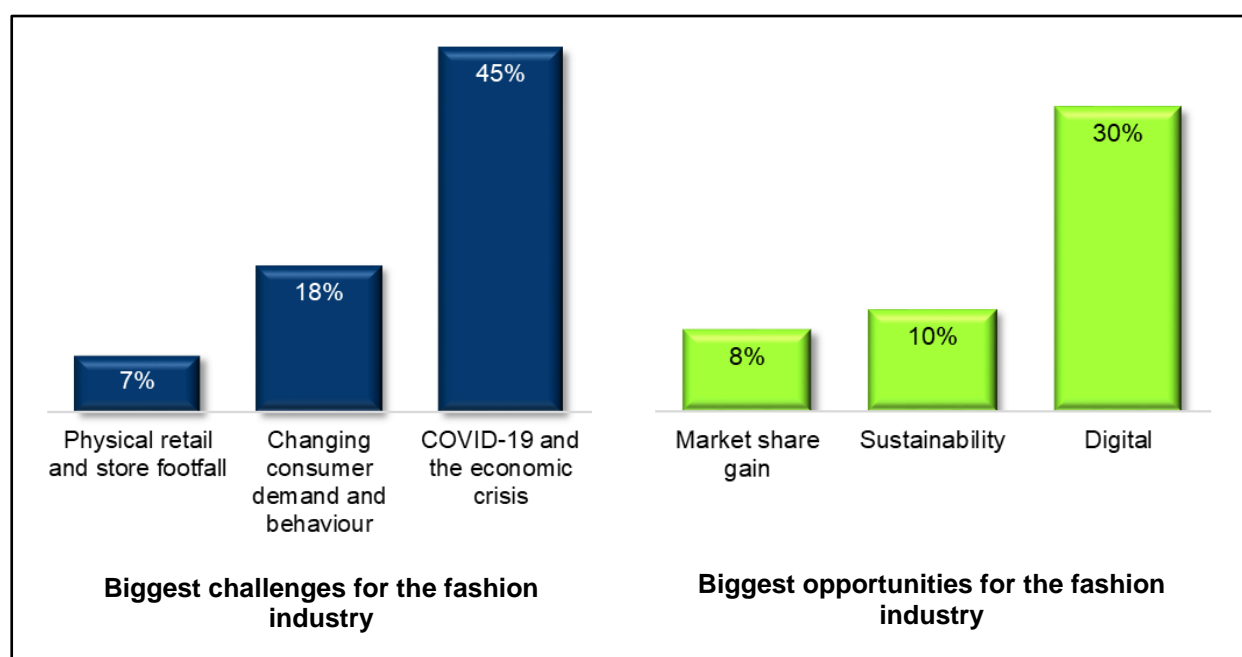
Stakeholders continue to advocate for greater local procurement, which aids retailers to adapt to market trends more swiftly and lessens their vulnerability to currency volatility (Business Wire, 2019). Furthermore, South Africa’s fashion designers, many of whom adhere to slow fashion principles (Le Guern, 2020), have contributed at least R1 billion to the country’s GDP in 2019. As such, designers could play an important role in helping to create jobs and skills as well as revitalise the fashion industry as the country grapples with the impact of and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic (Ngxokolo, 2020).

Despite the fact that the impact of COVID-19 on the fashion retail industry remains uncertain both locally and internationally, there is a significant opportunity in tapping into this industry’s potential

(Le Guern, 2020). According to a report by Business of Fashion and McKinsey (2020:11), the primary driver of growth in the fashion retail industry will continue to be digitisation, which is seen as a silver lining that presents the greatest opportunity for fashion retail in the coming years. Organisations and marketers in the fashion retail industry ought to use this “silver lining approach” and capitalise on bright points in the proverbial storm. Optimism about digital and sustainability is consistent with the commonly held belief that, considering the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, these developments which were still in motion prior to the crisis would continue and, as a result, contribute to a reset of the apparel industry (Business of Fashion & McKinsey, 2020:11).

Figure 1-3 exhibits the major challenges and opportunities for the fashion industry brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, which indicates that digitisation provides the biggest opportunity for this industry.

Figure 1-3: Biggest challenges and opportunities for the fashion industry



Source: Adapted from Business of Fashion & McKinsey (2020:13).

1.4.3 Digital marketing in the fashion industry

Conventionally, the word fashion commonly recalls clothing and apparel (Dlodlo, 2017:23). Nonetheless, it is important to note that fashion is present in all facets of modern life (Ander & Stern, 2004:85). To confine fashion to the realm of costume and adornment is to have an inadequate idea of the true scope of its occurrence (Blumer, 1969:275). In academic literature, there are several definitions of fashion. Thus, at the intersection of conceptualisations provided by leading authors in fashion theory, a generalised definition of fashion emerged for a more

accurate explanation of this construct. Fashion refers to the process of adopting symbols primarily to provide the individual with an identity relative to others. Items that serve as socially symbolic for a given situation might include products, product attributes, services, and actions. Though most products, product attributes, services, and actions have utilitarian value to the consumer, the symbolic context attached to them adds value (Levy, 1959:117; Mantrala *et al.*, 1993:143; Reynolds, 1968:48; Sirgy, 1982:287). This way of understanding fashion has not changed since its inception (Eluwawalage, 2016:206; Mair, 2018:4; Stone, 2010:25) – the contrary, the way it is marketed has changed (Tortora & Tortora, 2021:67).

Marketing today is very different from marketing in the past, as per the significant growth in the fashion retail industry. The advent of advertisements in the 1920s and later other marketing campaigns, as well as the transition from text-based commercials to visual advertisements accompanied by the use of culturally complex messages, have given marketing campaigns the ability to resonate strongly with consumers at a cultural level. Globally, marketers have had to constantly ponder creative ways to pique the interest of consumers and affect their decision-making when buying fashion items (Joaquim & Oniku, 2021). With the fashion industry likely to remain stagnant for some time, marketers must find new sources of demand and devise innovative tactics for their assortments or product offerings in order to attract more consumers. Indubitably, the most often-mentioned opportunity is the digitisation of organisational processes and activities (Business of Fashion & McKinsey, 2020:15). The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the demand for all things digital, enabling creativity, efficiency, and innovative avenues for companies to scale up. The change is permanent, and it will continue to open up opportunities to develop slicker and smarter operating models and distinct consumer offerings that are more tailored to each customer (Business of Fashion & McKinsey, 2020:15).

To fully comprehend the effect that modern advances in digital media have had on fashion, it is important to consider how things were done before media richness became ubiquitous, instantaneous, and accessible. There were many typical routes for a fashion organisation, big or small, to be seen by the buyer. A label, garment, and brand would be devised based on the vision of the fashion designer. These would be interpreted to create visuals or marketing materials for the brand. If these proved successful, the brand would be exhibited at fashion weeks around the world; the designer would employ a public relations firm, meet with the press and potential clients, and their popularity would start to build. A brand's basic marketing materials would often include a look-book, a brochure, and/or a media or press pack (Moore, 2021:10).

Organisations with effective marketing communication tools are able to persuade customers to form a positive perception of their offerings, consequently building a differentiated brand image and awareness (Gao *et al.*, 2011:256). Marketers today have a plethora of marketing

communication tools at their disposal. According to Keller and Kotler (2016:596), the marketing communication mix consists of eight main approaches. These are personal selling, sales promotion, events and experiences, advertising, direct and database marketing, online and social media marketing, mobile marketing, and public relations and publicity. Currently, the organisation's ability to use effective marketing tools through the virtual space is particularly important for success in the fashion industry. Organisations are forced to develop digitised communication tools and diverse channels that will reach consumers with useful and attractive content that suits their constantly evolving needs. As a result, increased attention is being paid to digital marketing tools such as gamification (Fiore *et al.*, 2020:1).

1.4.4 Gamification as a fashion marketing tool

Over the last several decades, there has been an increasing academic focus on games and gaming's various properties, features, and outcomes (Jansz & Neys, 2019:36). Among the phenomena that testify how games are seeping into academic research, gamification appears to play a primary role. Since its diffusion in 2010, gamification has piqued the attention of marketing researchers and practitioners alike. The now-ubiquitous sensor and computer technologies have been a crucial enabler of this groundswell, effectively turning our life-world into a digital game in waiting (Deterding & Nacke, 2017:450).

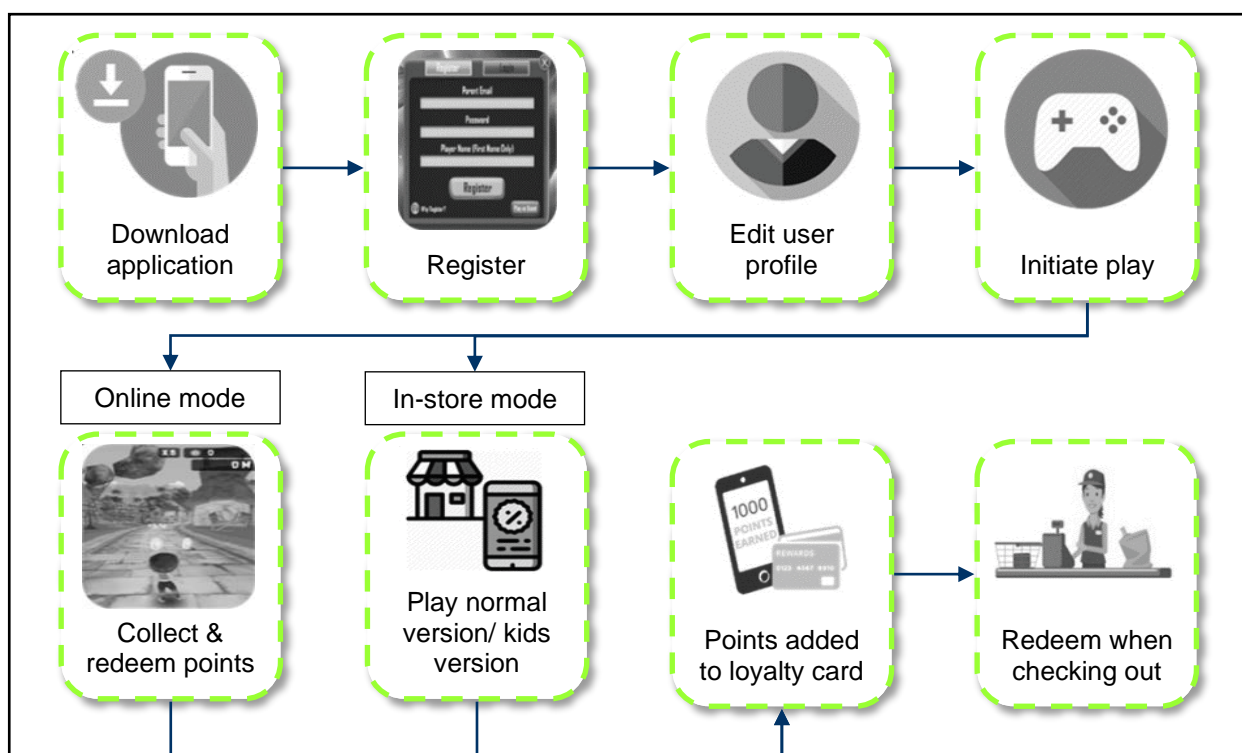
Gamification can be defined as the process of enhancing a system with affordances for gameful interactions in order to support users' overall value creation (Hamari & Huotari, 2017:25), whereby affordances relate to actionable properties shared by an object and an actor (Gibson *et al.*, 1977:67). Gamefulness describes a distinct emotional state experienced while playing games. It is this experience, which is determined by the individual player's subjective perception (Hamari & Huotari, 2012:19), that, in principle, gamification attempts to capture and embed into contexts with a more instrumental intent (Liu *et al.*, 2017:1014).

According to Hamari and Koivisto's (2019:197) analysis of domains in the body of literature, the vast majority of empirical research on gamification is done in the area of education and learning. The second-largest category of empirical studies on gamification is health and exercise, followed by research papers relating to crowdsourcing. These three categories comprise over 70.0% of the empirical research in the current body of gamification literature. The fourth-largest category consists of different social behaviour and networking fields, followed by empirical studies relating to design and development, as well as papers in the marketing and management domain. The remainder of the domain categories comprises less than 10.0% of empirical research papers.

However, since the core of a gamified experience is deriving entertainment, the concept could be more appropriate for shopping experiences that are likely to be more relaxing like that experienced when shopping for clothes (Alles *et al.*, 2020:240). The experience not only allows for online interactions but also supplements the offline experience. When researching consumer preferences and recommendations for a gamified application, consumers favoured both an online version and an in-store version (Alles *et al.*, 2020:238; Insley & Nunan, 2014:343). Consumers may use immersive technologies to navigate the brand's digital environment while remaining absorbed in the physical store elements (Alamanos *et al.*, 2014:2256; Alexander & Alvarado, 2017:192; Badot *et al.*, 2017:68). According to Huang and Liu (2014:100), the integration can create exclusive interactions and lead to a new type of relationship between the fashion brand and its buyers, both of which would benefit the brand as well as its customers (Badot *et al.*, 2017:70; Sachdeva & Goel, 2015:293). Consumers can therefore experience gamification in both the real and digital realms.

Figure 1-4 depicts a flowchart that aids visual clarity in the process and logic of a gamified system.

Figure 1-4: A basic concept for the gamification application



Source: Adopted from Alles *et al.* (2020:239).

Alles *et al.* (2020:238) state that fashion retailers use gamification as a competitive marketing strategy for the following reasons:

- **To generate customer insights.** An unconventional method of analysing purchasing behaviour. The insights from these analyses can be a valuable guide to decision-making processes, assist in creating more appealing offers or sending tailored messages, and make internal store adjustments.
- **To improve customer experience.** Innovative approaches are critical in satisfying today's customer segments, especially the younger generations.
- **To meet marketing goals.** The marketing department, like any other department within a company, has its own set of priorities and objectives to achieve, such as raising brand awareness, engaging customers, attracting eligible leads, and meeting key performance indicator (KPI) targets. Thus, whether the aim is to engage or capture a customer's top of mind, disruptive strategies such as gamification are used.

Oliveira *et al.* (2019:11) conclude that a significant outcome of adopting gamification is customer engagement. Similarly, Hammedi *et al.* (2017:481) state that the primary aim of an organisation's use of gamification is to motivate and engage customers. According to Eisingerich *et al.* (2019:211), gamification facilitates customer engagement, and aids in achieving customer loyalty through social interaction and behavioural improvement. Hsu and Chen (2018:118) emphasise that gamification of marketing practices strengthens engagement. While brand loyalty is a philosophy that extends beyond shopping, customer engagement has shown to have a significant impact on customer loyalty to specific brands (Beatty *et al.*, 2012:136; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2020:6; Islam & Rahman, 2017:102). Thakur (2019:1297) discovered that customer engagement plays a moderating role in the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Similarly, Hsu and Chen (2018:125) argue that gamified user experiences have a substantial impact on users' brand trust and loyalty.

In parallel, the concept of customer-brand engagement is seen as a key factor in establishing an organisation's competitive advantage in markets (Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014:826). As a result, organisations are devoting significant capital to steer customer engagement strategically. Several scholars suggest that companies can actively promote customer engagement by providing effective "engagement platforms" (Breidbach *et al.*, 2014:600; Lusch & Vargo, 2010:176). Game-based incentivised methods, or "gamification" – hailed as a "new industrial revolution inspired by play" (Dibbell, 2007) – is a possible mechanism extolled by some as a panacea for customer engagement. From a behavioural perspective, Lemon *et al.* (2010:254) describe customer engagement as a consumer's behavioural manifestations that rely on an organisation or brand beyond purchase as a consequence of motivational drivers. However, customer engagement can also be characterised as a psychological process that evolves from an ongoing experience with

a focal agent or object. Customer engagement is regarded as a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects of the customer's interactions (Brodie *et al.*, 2011:257). Engagement behaviour has therefore been argued to suitably reflect customer engagement (Groeger *et al.*, 2016:191). The aforementioned demonstrates a close affinity between customer engagement and consumer behaviour (East *et al.*, 2017:4).

Relationships drive consumer behaviour, and along with cooperation, they enable evolutionary advances (Palmatier & Steinhoff, 2019). Gouws (2012:21) and Khan (2012:107) stress that organisations must first endeavour to understand and address their customers' ever-changing needs if they wish to develop long-lasting relationships with them. According to these authors, should the organisation sufficiently understand and address the needs of their customers, they might be able to reap the benefits of higher profit margins and a competitive advantage. Recognising the need for building relationships with customers, organisations devote substantial resources to connect and maintain relationships with them (Beck *et al.*, 2015:803).

1.4.5 Relationship marketing

Over the years, one of the main mantras of both marketing strategy and research has been relationship marketing (Johanesová & Vaňová, 2020:29; Kumar, 2014:1047; Marketing Schools, 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2014:81). Relationship marketing is a highly effective tool for forming long-term, lasting relationships with customers (Ahmed *et al.*, 2019:127). Relationship marketing was pioneered and established by Berry (1983:25) in 1983. Since then, relationship marketing has been the subject of several research papers and the key topic of debate among academics and research experts (Benouakrim & Kandoussi, 2013:149; Egan, 2011:16).

According to relationship marketing theory, it is more lucrative to invest effort in building and maintaining long-term partnerships than attempting to gain short-term, isolated sales (Fulford *et al.*, 2013:495). The retained customer's lifetime value is increased because they prefer to spend more for a longer period on their preferred brand or service (Agariya & Singh, 2011:228; Bulla *et al.*, 2013:233). At the same time, acquisition costs are reduced, given that serving current customers is less costly than attracting new ones (McColl-Kennedy *et al.*, 2011:297).

Relationship marketing moves the focus from acquiring new customers to retaining targeted customers by creating long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships that can foster consumer loyalty (Egan, 2011:74). Furthermore, it is the ongoing process of engaging in collaborative activities and services with immediate and end-user consumers in order to build or increase shared economic, social, and psychological value profitably (Parvatiyar *et al.*, 2015:123). Arnold *et al.* (2015:188) add that relationship marketing is regarded as a feasible method for gaining a long-term strategic

edge, and its relevance in the contemporary marketing environment is undeniable. Satisfying the needs of the respective customers creates an incentive to retain the customer and create customer loyalty for continuous patronage.

1.4.5.1 Customer retention

Relationship marketing is the practice of retaining current clients by fortifying relationships and maintaining their loyalty (Lo, 2012:92). Ultimately, relationship marketing relies on customer retention to maximise revenue, as it is more lucrative to attract loyal customers than to recruit new ones (Dash *et al.*, 2011:22; McColl-Kennedy *et al.*, 2011:292).

Customer retention is described as the continuation of a relationship between a customer and a company (Alkurdi *et al.*, 2012:70; Khan, 2012:107). The continuation of these relationships can usually bring a host of benefits to organisations. The significance of customer retention within relationship marketing stems from the realisation that loyal consumers are considerably less costly to maintain and more lucrative to serve in the long-term than attracting new customers, which requires the investment of scarce capital and time (Bitner *et al.*, 2018:480; Egan, 2011:75).

1.4.5.2 Customer loyalty

Relationship marketing is a method of recognising, establishing, maintaining, and improving long-term customer relationships by promoting customer loyalty and refining business practices to accomplish organisational objectives (Madhavaiah & Rao, 2007:75). Babin and Harris (2016:254) describe customer loyalty as a firmly held commitment to repurchase or re-patronise a preferred product or service in the future in the presence of situational and marketing pressures that may trigger switching behaviour. Customers that are loyal to a retailer are one of the most valuable assets a retailer can have because they provide a consistent revenue base and lower customer acquisition costs. Revenue streams result from increased customer retention and lifetime value, regular customer support over extended periods of time, and an increased share of purchases (Babin *et al.*, 2015:267; Backhaus *et al.*, 2012:629).

Furthermore, existing consumers are less likely to turn to competitors' offerings and more likely to recommend the brand to which they are loyal to others, thereby also lowering consumer acquisition costs (Beck *et al.*, 2015:790; Magatef & Tomalieh, 2015:78). Evidently, gaining customer loyalty is an important strategic objective for fashion retailers (Bellini *et al.*, 2011:461; Evanschitzky *et al.*, 2012:625). As a result, fashion retailers must adopt meaningful and efficient marketing campaigns and use creative marketing engagement techniques such as gamification to increase consumer retention and loyalty, and by so doing, enhance brand awareness (i.e.,

brand recall and brand recognition), equity, and overall profitability levels (Aaker, 2012:10; Bianchi *et al.*, 2014:94; Bıçakcıoğlu *et al.*, 2018:865; Keller, 1993:8; Kotler & Keller, 2012:266).

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1.5.1 Primary objective

The primary objective of this study is to explore gamification in the South African fashion retail industry and its impact on brand-related outcomes.

1.5.2 Secondary objectives

To reflect on the primary objective, the following secondary objectives were formulated:

- 1) Provide an overview of the literature related to this study, namely gamification and relationship marketing.
- 2) Determine participants' awareness of gamification.
- 3) Capture the subjective experience of participants when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.
- 4) Identify the challenges experienced by participants when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.
- 5) Assess participants' acceptance and use of a fashion retail gamification-based application.
- 6) Identify possible security concerns when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.
- 7) Identify the incentives that can be offered to motivate engagement with a fashion retail gamification-based application.
- 8) Identify the indicators that can be provided to maintain usage of a fashion retail gamification-based application.
- 9) Determine whether the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application contributes to customer loyalty.
- 10) Determine whether the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application contributes to customer retention.

- 11) Determine whether the use of a fashion gamification-based application contributes to brand recall.
- 12) Determine whether the use of a fashion gamification-based application contributes to word-of-mouth advertising.
- 13) Determine whether the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application improves sales conversion rates.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The subsequent sections elaborate on the research methodology that was implemented in order to achieve the objectives of the study. A description of the research approach that was used is provided, followed by an explanation of the research methods, that is, the literature investigation, research design, sampling plan, research instrument, data collection method, data analysis, and the planned approaches to confirm trustworthiness.

1.6.1 Research approach

Research can be a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method approach in which both quantitative and qualitative methods are used (Creswell, 2014:4).

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative research approach was used. Babin and Zikmund (2018:109) explain that qualitative marketing research is research that addresses marketing objectives using techniques that enable the researcher to provide elaborate explanations of marketing phenomena without relying on numerical measurements. Similarly, Aspers (2019) explains that qualitative research includes the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data without reducing it to numerical statistics. Hennink *et al.* (2020:10) state that qualitative research allows for the in-depth examination of consumers' experiences. A qualitative approach is especially suited for this study, as it allowed the researcher to identify issues from the perspective of the selected participants of the study so as to gain a deeper understanding of the interpretations they gave of their experiences using a fashion retail gamification-based application (Daniel, 2016:92; Hennink *et al.*, 2020:10).

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, it is important to identify and articulate a coherent paradigm from which the research will emanate (Creamer, 2018:54). Therefore, **for the purpose of this study**, an interpretivist inductive paradigm was adopted.

1.6.2 Research method

The research methods for the study are discussed in this section with specific reference to the literature investigation, sampling plan, data collection method, and data analysis.

1.6.2.1 Literature investigation

To conduct proper and reliable research, relevant literature must be examined critically (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:71). The literature pertaining to gamification is not indexed in a single platform or database; thus, journals, articles, conference proceedings, books, radio and television broadcasts, reports, and multimedia resources listed in various databases were used to access the literature.

For the purpose of this study, the following platforms and databases were used to conduct a comprehensive investigation of the literature relevant to this study:

- SACat: National catalogue of books and journals in South Africa.
- SAePublications: South African journals.
- SAMEDIA: Newspaper articles.
- EbscoHost: International journals on Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, Communication and Mass Media Complete, and EconLit.
- NEXUS: Databases compiled by the NRF of current completed research in South Africa.
- Emerald Insight: International journals.
- ScienceDirect: International journals.
- ProQuest: International dissertations in full text.
- Internet: Google Scholar and various websites and online communities.

A final review of the literature was compiled from the entire source pool that was consulted, which was compared to the results of the empirical study to reach a conclusion.

1.6.2.2 Research design

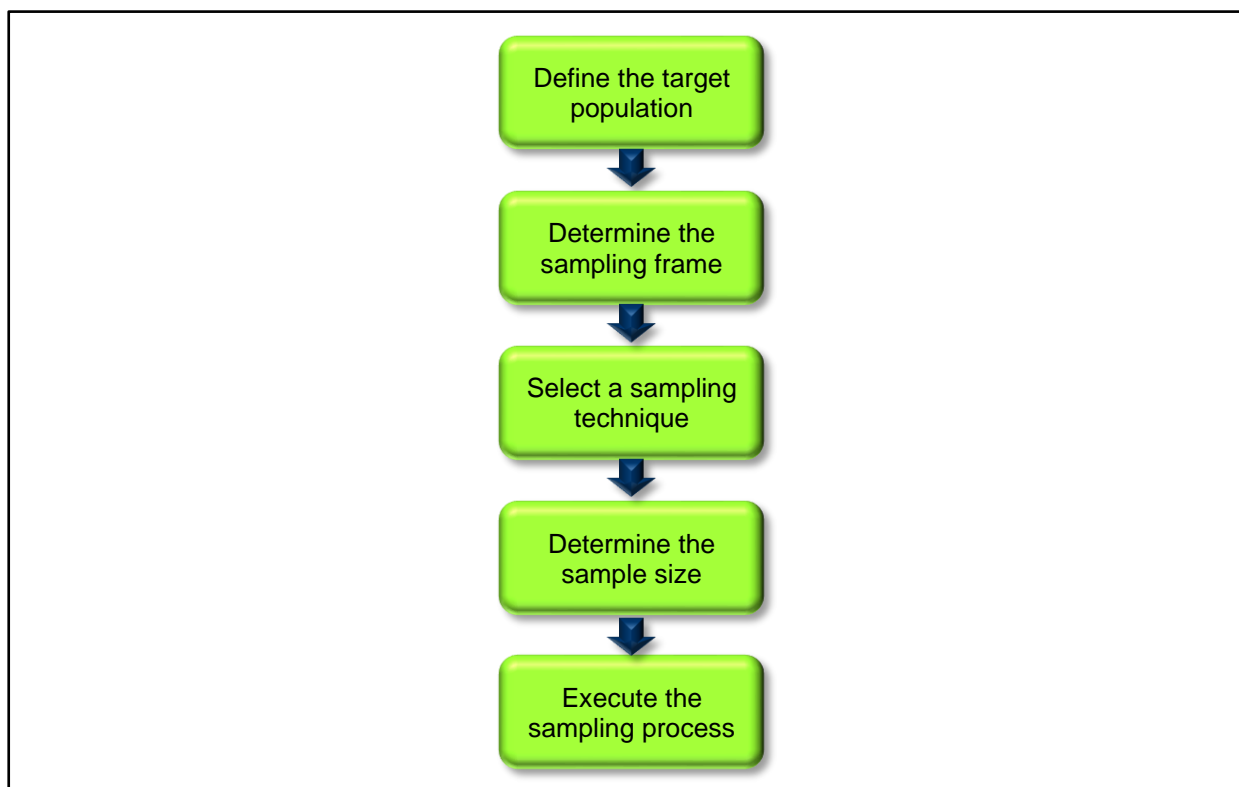
According to Babin and Zikmund (2018:67), a research design can be described as the methods and procedures used in order to collect and analyse the necessary information for a specific type of research. It is a plan that facilitates the collection and analysis of data (Feinberg *et al.*, 2013:54).

For the purpose of this study, exploratory research was conducted by means of focus group sessions, as research pertaining to gamification in the South African fashion retail industry has not as yet been conducted. An exploratory research design allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of how participants subjectively perceive and experience fashion retail gamification-based applications, something that has not as yet been investigated and that can be hard to obtain with a quantitative research approach (Burns & Bush, 2014:101; Churchill & Iacobucci, 2015:59; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019:24).

1.6.2.3 Sampling

The sampling process is a critical stage in any research, as it impacts the data's reliability (Bougie & Sekaran, 2016:2; Kumar, 2011:177). Sampling is the process of selecting a smaller sub-group from the total population. This sub-group, alternatively referred to as population elements, must be representative of the entire population (Babin & Zikmund, 2018:337). Given that it is not always possible to reach the entire target population, it is important to find a sample that is representative of the population (Armstrong & Kotler, 2016:146).

Malhotra (2019:340) believes that when choosing an appropriate sample, a five-step systematic sampling approach should be used. This process is presented in Figure 1-5, after which each step of the sampling process is discussed in more detail.

Figure 1-5: Sampling design process

Source: Adopted from Malhotra (2019:340).

1.6.2.3.1 Target population

Correctly defining the desired target population is a vital component in the sampling design process (Asiamah *et al.*, 2017:1607). A target population consists of population elements about which inferences are to be made (Malhotra, 2019:340).

For the purpose of this study, the target population comprised consumers aged 18 and older who have purchased a fashion item in the past six months in the Republic of South Africa, from whom data was collected during August 2021.

1.6.2.3.2 Sampling frame

A sampling frame can be defined as a list of population elements from which a sample may be drawn (Babin & Zikmund, 2018:34). Privacy and data protection is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and encapsulated in the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013. The South African parliament assented to the Protection of Personal Information Act (PoPI) on 19 November 2013, and this act regulates the processing of personal information by public and private organisations domiciled in South Africa (Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013). Hence, **for the purpose of this study**, no sampling frame was available.

1.6.2.3.3 Sampling technique

Several sampling techniques are available to aid in selecting a representative sample. These sampling techniques are grouped into two main categories, namely probability and non-probability sampling (Babin & Zikmund, 2018:348).

Probability sampling occurs when participants are selected in such a way that they all have a known and equal chance of being selected to partake in the study and can be used to draw simple random samples, systematic random samples, stratified random samples, and cluster samples (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019:431).

According to Etikan *et al.* (2016:1), *non-probability sampling* occurs when samples are gathered through a process that does not provide all sample elements with an equal chance of being selected to partake in the study (Ary *et al.*, 2019:172). The probability of any member being selected cannot be calculated, and the selection relies on the subjective judgement of the researcher (Glen, 2021). These attributes, however, must follow the logic of the research in order to produce reliable results (Kvarforth & Lazar, 2020). Moreover, Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019:431) classify three types of non-probability samples, namely quota samples, convenience samples, and judgement samples.

For the purpose of this study, non-probability judgement sampling was used to select research participants. Participants were had to be aged 18 years or older to be eligible for the study. In addition, participants were required to have purchased a fashion item in the past six months. The researcher judged the participants based on geographic location, foremost on nationality (i.e., South African citizens), after which the researcher aimed to include at least one participant from each of the nine provinces in South Africa.

1.6.2.3.4 Sample size

According to Malhotra (2010:374), sample size is generally described as the number of sample elements included in a research study. Ritchie *et al.* (2013:118) suggest using a sample size not exceeding 50 participants as a rule of thumb for conducting a qualitative study. Adler and Adler (2012:10) recommend a sample size of between 12 and 60 participants, while Ragin (cited by Ritchie *et al.*, 2013:118) recommends between 20 and 50. The rationale for these recommended sample sizes is that sample sizes larger than 50 elements make it increasingly difficult to ensure the quality of data collection and analysis (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013:118).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher conducted three focus group sessions comprising eight to nine research participants each. A total of 25 sample elements made up the sample for

this study. Once the researcher reached a point of diminishing return (data saturation) – where increasing the sample size no longer contributes to new evidence – no additional sample elements were interviewed. Table 1-1 provides a summary of the sampling plan used for this study.

Table 1-1: Sampling plan for the study

Design elements	Application to empirical study
Population	
Sampling element	Consumers aged 18 or older who have purchased a fashion item in the past six months
Extent	The Republic of South Africa
Time	August 2021
Sampling method	Non-probability judgement sampling
Sample size	25 sample elements

1.6.2.4 Moderator's guide

The researcher made use of a moderator's guide composed of various open-ended questions in order to guide the discussion. The moderator's guide was standardised in order to increase consistency and included the following sections:

- **Section A: Introduction to the study**

Prior to each focus group discussion, the participants were thanked for their time and willingness to participate, after which a brief overview of the study was provided along with the confirmation of the interview's confidentiality. The participants received a disclaimer that reminded them that their participation in the study was voluntary. Participants were also informed that the focus group session was being audio-recorded.

In addition, three screening questions were asked in order to confirm that the participants formed part of the target population for this study and that they qualified to partake in the study. The first screening question confirmed the age of the participants to ensure that all participants were indeed aged 18 or older and confirmed that all participants had read and signed the consent form to partake in the study. The second screening question was asked to confirm that the participants had in fact purchased a fashion item in the past six months. The third screening question confirmed that participants were South African citizens.

- **Section B: Awareness and previous experience**

This section of the moderator's guide probed questions related to the participants' awareness of gamification and how they interpret this concept. The questions' sequence was based on the participants' previous experience with a gamification application to deduce the reasons for using the gamification application, how they were informed about the gamification application, its functionalities, and their continued use of the gamification application.

- **Section C: Real-time experience and usage**

Section C of the moderator's guide required participants to download a specified fashion retail gamification-based application onto their mobile devices. This allowed participants, especially those who had not yet used a fashion retail gamification-based application before, to gain practical experience with the application by using it for approximately 10 minutes. Questions then followed based on the participants' experiences with the application, as well as questions pertaining to the functionalities and proposed functionalities of the gamification application. Questions relating to the sales conversion possibility of using a gamification application were also posed to participants.

- **Section D: Customer loyalty and retention**

This section of the moderator's guide comprised questions about the extent to which customers garnered loyalty by using a gamification application. In addition, questions related to the repeat usage of the gamification application were asked. Lastly, participants were asked whether they would recommend the gamification application to their friends and family and whether using the gamification application contributed to positive word-of-mouth advertising of the brand it promoted.

- **Section E: Closure**

The participants were thanked for their time and their participation in the study and invited to add any concluding remarks to the conversation in order to aid in the achievement of the primary and secondary objectives of the study.

Table 1-2 presents the link between the secondary objectives of the study and the sections of the moderator's guide.

Table 1-2: Link between objectives and moderator's guide

Secondary objective	Section of moderator's guide
1) Determine participants' awareness of gamification.	B
2) Capture the subjective experience of participants when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.	C

3) Identify the challenges experienced by participants when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.	C
4) Assess participants' acceptance and use of a fashion retail gamification-based application.	B, C & D
5) Identify possible security concerns when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.	C
6) Identify the incentives that can be offered to motivate engagement with a fashion retail gamification-based application.	C
7) Identify the indicators that can be provided to maintain usage of a fashion retail gamification-based application.	C
8) Determine whether the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application contributes to customer loyalty.	D
9) Determine whether the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application contributes to customer retention.	D
10) Determine whether the use of a fashion gamification-based application contributes to brand recall.	D
11) Determine whether the use of a fashion gamification-based application contributes to word-of-mouth advertising.	D
12) Determine whether the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application improves sales conversion rates.	C

1.6.2.5 Data collection

The data collection method involves the systematic collection of information relevant to the study (Burns & Grove, 2010:52). Data was collected by means of conducting three focus group sessions, each comprising eight to nine participants. Focus groups are being used increasingly due to their potential to generate rich and in-depth insights into a phenomenon (Alevizou & Oates, 2017:1). A focus group can be defined as an unstructured and interactive in-depth interview conducted by a proficient facilitator among a small group of participants (Brown *et al.*, 2014:30).

The focus groups consisted of participants who qualified to partake in the research study based on the following inclusion criteria:

- Participants had to be aged 18 years or older.
- Participants were also required to have purchased a fashion item in the past six months.
- The researcher judged the participants based on geographic location and nationality (South African citizen) and aimed to include at least one participant from each of the nine provinces in South Africa in order to be more representative of the study's target population.

Prospective participants received an invitation to the study (see Appendix B) via the specific social media platform's direct messaging function (i.e., Messenger on Facebook). The invitation to the

study outlined the objective of the study, the qualifying criteria to partake in the study, as well as details pertaining to the date, time, and platform of the focus group session.

Upon receiving the participants' confirmation of participation in the focus group session, the consent to partake in the research agreement (see Appendix C) was forwarded to be signed by the participant before the focus group session took place. In addition, the moderator's guide (see Appendix A) was also e-mailed to the participants to give them a better idea of the questions that would be asked and discussed in the focus group session. The focus group sessions commenced on Zoom due to time, cost, and geographic constraints and to minimise the risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus. Details of the Zoom meeting were also sent to the participants.

1.6.2.6 Data analysis

According to Babin and Zikmund (2018:70), data analysis refers to the application of computation, summarising, and reasoning in order to understand collected data. After collecting the data, findings need to be analysed and interpreted for it to be useful and contribute to the research (Gilliland, 2014:104). The approach to analysing the data for the study is subsequently discussed.

1.6.2.6.1 Data preparation

Conducting qualitative research usually amounts to large datasets that need to be transcribed and prepared for further analysis (Grbich, 2013:20). The data collected for this study was transcribed by *Language Matters*, a digital audio and video transcription services provider located in Potchefstroom. Once the data had been transcribed, further analysis in terms of coding, categorisation, and thematic analysis was completed by using the ATLAS.ti 9 computer program.

1.6.2.6.2 Method of data analysis: Morse and Field Approach

The Morse and Field (1996) approach was used to analyse the data for this study, as it is widely used in the marketing discipline. The Morse and Field (1996:103) approach includes four steps, namely comprehend, synthesise, theorise, and recontextualise. Each step is outlined below.

- **Step 1: Comprehend**

According to Morse (1991:27), reliable information is necessary to explain what a study entails. Thus, it is important that the researcher understands the topic at hand to comprehend the gathered information and gain an understanding of the study (Morse & Field, 1996:104).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used the collected primary data, which comprised the reviewing of transcripts, manual notes, and collecting peer opinions after each

focus group session, to build a sound understanding of the topic of this study. A summary of the interpretations and results were compiled accordingly.

- **Step 2: Synthesise**

Meeting the objectives of this study requires synthesising understanding from the focus group discussions. As defined by Morse (1991:30), synthesising is the merging of several stories, experiences, or cases to describe a typical, composite pattern of behaviour or response. Therefore, synthesising is the phase in which the data is decontextualised in the sense that analysis is no longer based on the evidence within the context of a particular discussion but rather on the comparison of evidence across cases. The process of synthesis thus allows the research to identify both areas of commonality and difference across discussions and to explain the variations (Beck *et al.*, 2010:320; Hall & Roussel, 2014:90; Jepson *et al.*, 2011:3).

For the purpose of this study, the ATLAS.ti 9 software was used to assist the synthesising and coding of data for the purpose of this study.

- **Step 3: Theorise**

Morse (1991:32) defines theorising as content development and manipulation of malleable theoretical schemes until the best theoretical scheme is developed. During the theorising step, the researcher proposes alternative explanations of the phenomenon studied and then holds these explanations up to assess their fit with the data (Beck *et al.*, 2010:320).

For the purpose of this study, the literature review was used to theorise the perception, usage, functionalities, acceptance, and application of fashion retail gamification-based applications. Upon concluding the study, the empirical data was used to theorise about the desirability of using gamification in the South African fashion retail industry as an IMC tool.

- **Step 4: Re-contextualise**

The final phase is re-contextualising. This phase involves presenting the merging of theory so that it is applicable in other settings (Morse, 1991:34). This process involves making theory-based generations and positioning the study within the field's current body of knowledge (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:239).

For the purpose of this study, the theories from the literature review and the focus group results were combined and integrated in order to recontextualise this study.

While Morse and Field's four phases are useful for organising the analysis of qualitative evidence, they do not provide a specific method of data analysis. For this process, this study undertook a content thematic analysis technique using ATLAS.ti 9. The process concluded with the findings being compared and contextualised to that of existing literature.

1.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS

It was the researcher's aim to deliver truthful results and to limit error in the qualitative research design by focusing on achieving trustworthiness. Guba (1981:80) proposes four criteria that qualitative researchers should consider in pursuit of a trustworthy research study:

- **Credibility (in preference to internal validity)** refers to the degree to which findings and the research methods that are used can be trusted (Guba, 1981:79). According to Beck and Polit (2012:27), credibility indicates the fit between the data gathered from participants and the researcher's portrayal of the data. De Lacey *et al.* (2016:498) explain that a qualitative study is credible when it presents such an accurate representation of individual experiences that others can immediately recognise the description.

This study defended credibility by using a co-moderator for the focus group discussions. Withal, the data was triangulated by comparing the transcribed material with the moderator's field notes.

- **Transferability (in preference to external validity)** refers to the extent to which findings can be applied or generalised in other research studies (Begley & Tobin, 2004:391; De Vos *et al.*, 2011:420; Guba, 1981:79; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014:5746). Transferability for this study was enhanced through dense description of the data and maximising the range of information that could be obtained from and about the assessment context by purposefully selecting participants.
- **Dependability (in preference to reliability)** refers to the consistency of research findings in a qualitative study. Indirectly, the measures of credibility ensure dependability (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:278; Beck & Polit, 2012:492; Begley & Tobin, 2004:391; Guba, 1981:80). Dependability can be established by a dependability audit, dense description of research methods, stepwise replication, triangulation, peer examination, and the code-recode procedure, all of which were implemented in this study.
- **Confirmability (in preference to objectivity)** refers to the degree to which general findings are supported by the data and not the biases of the researcher (Brink & Nel, 2014:5; Guba, 1981:80; Lakew, 2015:276). Raw data from audio recordings was used for data analysis, and audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure confirmability. Furthermore, this study's supervisor and peers who are experts in the field of qualitative marketing research also verified similarities between the themes and the transcripts.

1.8 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

To date, gamification in South Africa has been applied primarily to education (Anning-Dorson *et al.*, 2020; Hagedorn-Hansen *et al.*, 2017; Oliver, 2017) to improve the autonomous e-learning process and to healthcare (Devar & Hattingh, 2020) to promote healthy or environmentally friendly behaviours. This supports the necessity of the present study and sheds light on how gamification can be used to influence desired marketing outcomes in the South African fashion retail industry.

The study is of value to academics and practitioners in helping them to realise and harness the potential of gamification by presenting an evolved perspective on gamification that accounts for recent advances in academic research and business practice through filling an empirical gap by proposing a conceptual model to match the idiosyncrasies of gamification and its unique contexts so as to guide and stimulate future gamification research.

In addition, the results of the study contributed to the literature in terms of gamification-based applications as a form of integrated marketing communications, which at the time of conducting the study, has had limited availability in the South African context.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Researchers are reminded by Babbie and Maxfield (2011:54) and Strydom (2011:113) that although the aim of any research study is to yield maximum benefits or results, the primary purpose should always be to adhere to the highest possible ethical standards in a scientific inquiry.

The ethical considerations that are inherent in research proceedings entail the following:

- The proposal, moderator's guide and other relevant supporting documentation pertaining to the study were submitted to the scientific committee of the School of Management Sciences for close scrutiny and approval, after which the proposal and supporting documentation were presented to the ethics committee of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences in order to obtain ethical clearance.
- One of the qualifying criteria for prospective participants to partake in the research study was that they had to be aged 18 years or older.
- During the real-time experience part of the focus group session, participants were requested to download a fashion retail gamification-based application. Permission for using the selected application was obtained from the parent company prior to conducting the focus group sessions.
- Research participants were requested to sign an agreement in which they consented to partake in the research (Appendix C) before interviewing them in a focus group session. The agreement also assured the participants' that their identities and responses would remain anonymous. In cases where participants' responses were quoted verbatim as supporting evidence in an article or conference paper, such participants were assigned a participant number in order to ensure anonymity.

1.10 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

A brief outline and description of the chapters of the study are presented in Figure 1-6.

Figure 1-6: Schematic representation of chapter outlay**Chapter 1: Introduction and overview of the study**

The discourse proceeded by providing an outline of the research topic at hand. Included in the first chapter were the clarification of key concepts, introduction to the study, problem formulation, problem statement, the objectives and aims of the research, and the research methodology that was implemented in the study.

Chapter 2: Gamification

This chapter discusses gamification as an integrated marketing communications tool. The concept of gamification was defined, followed by an in-depth discussion with regards to its origin, usage, advantages, and challenges. The implementation of gamification within the global fashion industry is also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 3: Relationship marketing

This chapter provides an in-depth discussion on relationship marketing and its various components. The chapter emphasised the contribution of gamification with regards to the various relationship marketing components, with specific reference to brand awareness, customer loyalty, and retention.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

This chapter provides the research methodology, including the methods and techniques used to conduct the literature investigation, the empirical investigation, data collection, and data analysis.

The nature of the various elements of the sample plan, the research design, and the measurement instrument used are also defined.

Chapter 5: Reporting of findings

The penultimate chapter presents the findings of the empirical study, and the themes that emerged from the focus group discussions are provided. Subsequently, the statistical methods that were used for interpreting the data are presented, followed by the results that were obtained from each section in the moderator's guide were described.

Chapter 6: Conclusions, implications, and recommendations

The final chapter provides the main findings along with conclusions according to the results of the study. It closes with various implications for theory and practice and limitations and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: GAMIFICATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The intent of this chapter is to introduce the gamification concept and identify its role in South African fashion retailers' marketing activities as part of an overall integrated marketing communication (IMC) plan. This chapter presents a systematic literature review of relevant publications that provide a comprehensive explanation of the phenomena under investigation following a concentric approach.

As a point of departure, the particularities of the marketing discipline are discussed, providing a prism through which to examine the concept of IMC according to extant literature of marketing communications. However, as IMC is a subject that warrants its own study, some crucial related aspects, such as implementing IMC on the corporate strategic level, fall beyond the scope of this study and are therefore not included in this discussion. It is, however, necessary to provide a short overview of IMC before marketing communications can be discussed in further detail, given that IMC is a part of marketing communications and certain elements thereof pertain to gamification (see Chapter 2).

Marketing communications fundamentally influences the role of gamification in the fashion retail industry. Therefore, the second part of the chapter proceeds with a comprehensive review of the marketing communications practices and trends that are used to embed brand messages in gamification applications as a key organisation-specific capability to operationalise brand-to-target relationships. For clarity, this section takes on the perspective that gamification should be grounded in and interpreted with the aforementioned concepts in mind.

The next section provides insight into the origin of gamification, followed by an investigation of the concept in relation to precursors and similar concepts. In doing so, a platform is constructed on which an unambiguous definition for gamification is developed that is aligned with the purpose of this study. To conclude, fashion marketing and associated industry trends are explored.

2.2 MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Communication has been identified as a critical component of business relationships (Hänninen & Karjaluoto, 2017:467; Schnalke, 2012:45), and the effective use of marketing communications has evolved into a significant component of strategic marketing (Andrews *et al.*, 2021; Bartáková *et al.*, 2020). This study views marketing communications as a method that facilitates the conversion of an organisation's marketing abilities into competitive advantages (Ciravegna *et al.*,

2020:34; Luxton *et al.*, 2015:37). Effective marketing communication is likely to be felt through improved marketing efforts, resulting in long-term relationships and increased performance (Batra & Keller, 2016:135; Danneels, 2008:536; Gajanova *et al.*, 2019; Hao & Song, 2016:755).

2.2.1 Overview of the marketing discipline

According to the Online Etymology Dictionary (n.d.), the term “marketing” was first used in the 1560s to refer to “the process of buying and selling at a market”. Today, technological advancements have resulted in structural shifts in organisational paradigms and altered the practice of marketing (Bartáková *et al.*, 2020; Gal *et al.*, 2021:35). In other words, organisations are shifting away from the traditional focus on the exchange dyad between the organisation and the customer and toward considering value constellations or the service ecosystem when creating economic value (Thomas, 2020:960). To account for changes in the marketing environment, a definition is provided that will aid in the discipline’s understanding.

A formal definition from the American Marketing Association (AMA) helps to establish a shared understanding among various communities, including academia, practice, public policymakers, and the general public, regarding issues that might otherwise cause confusion and a lack of clarity (Lusch, 2007:261). According to the AMA (2017), marketing is the activity, processes, and collection of institutions responsible for developing, conveying, delivering, and exchanging items of value to consumers, clients, partners, and the society. This view of marketing implicitly acknowledges a diverse ecosystem of collaborators that is not organisation-centric but rather orchestrates a process for cooperatively designing, developing, and delivering sustainable value (Felten *et al.*, 2020:76).

The marketing discipline’s conceptualisation is founded on the philosophy and ideology of the marketing concept. The marketing concept exemplifies corporate reasoning (Dibb *et al.*, 2012:19; Keelson, 2012:36). Emerging first in 1952 at the General Electric Company, the marketing concept has evolved from one concept to the next (Keelson, 2012:35). The developing marketing concepts that have arisen over time are a result of various business philosophies geared at satisfying consumer needs at various time periods (Armstrong *et al.*, 2005:14; Keller & Kotler, 2012:18). While it may be true that different market eras necessitated distinct business philosophies, the basic assumption of all concepts, regardless of the market era in which they were prominent, is that they should lead an organisation’s entire activities (Dibb *et al.*, 2012:19; Keller & Kotler, 2012:18). From 1952 until now, organisations have embraced a variety of marketing philosophies, including production philosophy, product philosophy, selling philosophy, marketing philosophy, societal marketing philosophy, and holistic marketing philosophy (Keelson, 2012:36).

One may argue that a thorough categorisation, differentiation, and mapping of these notions can assist marketing theorists in reflecting on the structure and growth of a new field (Patsiaouras, 2019:562). Table 2-1 summarises the six marketing thought and practice perspectives.

Table 2-1: Summary of marketing philosophies

Philosophical orientation	Description
The production philosophy	The production philosophy is predicated on the belief that consumers will prefer readily available and reasonably priced items.
The product philosophy	The production orientation is predicated on the assumption that consumers will choose products based on their quality, performance, and innovative features.
The selling philosophy	The concept presupposes that consumers would not purchase a product unless they are forcefully convinced to do so – mostly through the 'hard sell' strategy.
The marketing philosophy	This concept presupposes that every marketing process should begin with the customer's needs and desires rather than with aggressive selling.
The societal marketing philosophy	The concept presupposes a tension between customer short-term desires and society's long-term interests and that organisations should prioritise practices that promote both consumer and societal welfare in the long run.
The holistic marketing philosophy	Holistic marketing is predicated on the premise that marketing should be approached holistically, encompassing all marketing efforts.

Source: Adapted from Keller and Kotler (2012:19).

A holistic approach to marketing entails coordinating the planning, development, design, implementation, and evaluation of marketing activities (Andrews *et al.*, 2021:10; Keller & Kotler, 2016:18). Juri *et al.* (2012:133) define holistic marketing as a complex marketing paradigm because it is "realized when the consumer orientation pervades the entire organization and all units participate in marketing activities". A holistic approach to marketing places the consumer at the centre of attention with the goal of optimising efforts.

According to Andrews *et al.* (2021:10) and Duncan and Moriarty (1997:5), IMC is a new-generation marketing method that organisations are implementing to better focus their marketing efforts on gaining, keeping, and establishing profitable relationships with consumers and other stakeholders. IMC as a marketing paradigm is a subset of holistic marketing (Alcántara-Pilar *et al.*, 2017:282; Belch & Belch 2012:9; Daszkiewicz & Pukas, 2016:26; Del Barrio-Garca *et al.*, 2017:693; Gil-Saura *et al.*, 2015:959). IMC is a paradigm in which all marketing efforts are connected by a single strategic idea that presents a single narrative across disciplines and media platforms.

2.2.2 Integrated marketing communications

According to Caywood and Duncan (1996:33), value-added communications strives for efficiency and effectiveness. To do this, the communications function is integrated into a single planning system dubbed integrated marketing communication (IMC). There is growing support for unifying all communications efforts under a single concept, and the expansion of the IMC paradigm was undoubtedly a catalyst for such unification (Belch & Belch, 2012:10; Blanco *et al.*, 2019:247; Wildenboer, 2015:3). The need for integration is driven by: the inability of traditional mass communications to reach highly fragmented, disenchanted audiences; the increased use of public relations and sales promotions; the rapid growth and development of database marketing; media proliferation; technological turbulence; consumer empowerment; increased advertising clutter; channel power shift; desire for greater accountability; promotional budget redistribution; and consumers' behavioural changes (Arndt *et al.*, 2004; Blanco *et al.*, 2019:243; Han *et al.*, 2004:1417; Jankovic, 2012:93; Kehinde, 2009:23). Indeed, with rising global rivalry and increased information flows, IMC has become critical to every organisation (Alcántara-Pilar *et al.*, 2019:22; Burgmann, 2007:24).

IMC is viewed as a synthesis of brand and marketing management, in which the strategy for consumer-facing communications activities should be integrated and unified (Burgmann & Kitchen, 2015:35). It is the management process for integrating all marketing communications efforts across relevant audience touchpoints in order to achieve greater brand coherence (Broderick & Pickton, 2005:26). Designed to establish a brand's single strategic positioning in its target market, IMC unifies messages and coordinates numerous communication channels as a single voice concept (Chen *et al.*, 2021:30; Nowak & Phelps, 1994:51). Possibly, the ultimate goal of IMC is to achieve integration and synergy between brand messages (Andrews & Shimp, 2013:11; Antosová *et al.*, 2014:1616; Dahlén *et al.*, 2010:383; Del Barrio-Garca, 2012:326; Oki, 2018:986; Reinold & Tropp, 2012:113) that either reinforce current customer purchasing behaviour or attempt to influence prospective purchasing behaviour. In this respect, IMC is a market-based deployment mechanism that optimises communication approaches to achieve greater communication efficacy, which has a cascading effect (i.e., brand and financial performance).

IMC gained the attention of marketing and management experts as an academic area and is widely regarded as one of the most significant marketing management frameworks to have emerged over the last two decades (Kitchen, 2017:1). Yet, its widely accepted conceptualisation remains ambiguous (Del Barrio-Garca *et al.*, 2012:317; Du Plooy, 2012:47). According to Kitchen and Tafesse (2017:222), scholars disagree on the definitional and conceptual elements of IMC due to the various definitions' reliability.

A review of some of the earliest to the most recent definitions of IMC is maybe necessary to establish the origins of this method and alleviate some of the concept's present obscurity (Du Plooy, 2012:47). The definitions of IMC were chosen based on their apparent acceptability among academics and practitioners who have conducted extensive research on the subject, as evidenced by the numerous citations and references in their publications. Table 2-2 has these definitions.

Table 2-2: Evolution of IMC definitions

Author(s)	Definition
American Association of Advertising Agencies (the "4As") (1989 as cited in Andrews <i>et al.</i> , 2021:11; Belch & Belch 2012:9; Caywood & Duncan, 1996:16; Duncan & Everett, 1993:31; Kehinde, 2009:30; Kotler, 2000:280)	IMC is a marketing communications planning concept that recognises the benefits of a complete strategy that assesses the strategic roles of a range of communication disciplines and integrates them to give clarity, consistency, and maximum communication impact.
Schultz (1992:101)	IMC is the process of managing all sources of information about a product or service to which a customer or prospect is exposed, in order to influence the consumer's behaviour toward a sale and to preserve client loyalty.
Schultz and Schultz (1998:18)	IMC is a strategic business process for planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating coordinated, measurable, convincing brand communication programs with consumers, customers, prospects, and other important external and internal audiences across time.
Broderick and Pickton (2001:17)	IMC is a process that entails the management and organisation of all 'agents' in the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of all marketing communications contacts, media, messages, and promotional tools targeted at specific target audiences in order to maximise the economy, efficiency, effectiveness, enhancement, and coherence of marketing communications effort in order to achieve predetermined product and corporate marketing communications objectives.
Duncan and Mulhern (2004:9)	IMC is a continuous, interactive, cross-functional process for planning, executing, and evaluating brand communication. It involves all parties in the exchange process in order to maximise mutual fulfilment of their respective goals and needs.
Christensen <i>et al.</i> (2008:424)	IMC is the concept and practice of matching symbols, messages, processes, and behaviours within and across formal organisational boundaries in order for an organisation to communicate with clarity, consistency, and continuity.
Gil-Saura <i>et al.</i> (2015:960)	IMC is a tactical and strategic consumer-oriented business process that is facilitated by advances in information and communication technologies (ICT) and that, using data from customer databases and the coordination and synergy of various communication tools and channels, conveys a clear and consistent message in order to maintain a long-term profitable relationship with customers and other stakeholders, as well as to build and maintain brand value.

Table 2-2: Evolution of IMC definitions (continues)

Author(s)	Definition
Del Barrio-García <i>et al.</i> (2017:694)	IMC is an interactive process centred on stakeholders that involves cross-functional planning and alignment of organisational, analytical, and communication processes. It enables continuous dialogue by conveying consistent and transparent messages across all media in order to foster long-term profitable relationships that create value.
Alcántara-Pilar (2019:14)	IMC is an interactive process centred on stakeholders that involves cross-functional planning and alignment of organisational, analytical, and communication processes. It enables continuous dialogue by conveying consistent and transparent messages across all media in order to foster long-term profitable relationships that create value.

Throughout this lengthy, detailed, and at times perplexing definitional journey, the concept of IMC has inexorably evolved from a narrowly focused approach on the simple coordination of the marketing communications mix to a broader organisational approach in which IMC encompasses the entire organisation (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017:466; Del Barrio-García *et al.*, 2017:693; Kitchen, 2017:395; Kliatchko & Schultz, 2014:385; Šerić, 2018:664).

For the purpose of this study, Alcántara-Pilar's (2019:14) definition of IMC will be used, which states that IMC is "a stakeholder-centered interactive process of cross-functional planning and alignment of organizational, analytical, and communication processes that enables continuous dialogue through the transmission of consistent and transparent messages via all media in order to foster long-term profitable relationships that create value". This definition was chosen because it focuses on four themes that have emerged from IMC definitions over time: message consistency; interactivity; stakeholder-centred strategic focus; and organisational alignment (Alcántara-Pilar, 2019:14; Del Barrio-García *et al.*, 2012:326; Del Barrio-García *et al.*, 2017:694). Additionally, the definition was chosen for its explanatory quality. Given that the definition was created in 2019, it likely includes the changes and reforms that have occurred in today's marketing channels and company sectors. As a result, the researcher believed that using this lengthier and more descriptive definition of IMC would facilitate a thorough understanding of the concept.

To comprehend the evolution and significance of IMC, it is vital to situate this research in a broader context. Such a discussion, however, would be outside the scope of this dissertation and hence is not included in this discussion. Since IMC is a subject worthy of its own dissertation, the focus in this study is on marketing communications, as communication is at the heart of IMC. Indeed, marketing communication is critical for a contemporary organisation to operate effectively.

2.2.3 Marketing communications

The term “marketing communications” refers to the methods by which an organisation communicates with its customers and other stakeholders (Armstrong & Kotler, 2018:426). Messages from marketing communications are distributed via one or more channels, including print, radio, television, direct mail, and personal selling (AMA, 2017). As the nucleus of marketing and branding, marketing communications served as the foundation for investigating gamification as a medium in this study.

The concept of marketing communications under investigation was coined in the 1980s as a synonym for the term “promotion”. Only in subsequent years was it recognised that promotion is a unilateral process by which the seller exerts influence over the buyer, while marketing communications is a more developed phenomenon that includes a bilateral process of reciprocal relations between the sender and recipient (Andrews *et al.*, 2021:5; Goban-Klas, 1999 as cited by Pluta-Olearnik, 2018:125; Li & Wu, 2017:78). That is, marketing communications has historically been treated and managed functionally with the explicit goal of persuasion (Del Barrio-Garca *et al.*, 2012:315). Persuasion is the process by which communicators influence individuals by the use of a message targeted at altering their views (Bettinghaus & Cody, 1987:3; O’Keefe, 1990:170; Perloff, 2003:8; Smith, 1982:10). Persuasion is frequently one-directional and is associated with the transactional marketing approach of informing, persuading, and reminding (Boshoff *et al.*, 2003:329; Del Barrio-García *et al.*, 2012:315). According to Duncan and Ouwersloot (2008:9) and Lekhanya (2015:140), the overarching objective of contemporary marketing communications (and marketing as its primary domain) is to establish brands that produce revenue for the brand or organisation. As such, a relational approach to communication extends beyond persuasion and toward fostering a discussion with stakeholders to boost the organisation’s brand value (Del Barrio-Garca *et al.*, 2012:315).

Organisations use communication channels to enable effective communication between the organisation and consumer, between organisation and organisation, or between consumers (Das *et al.*, 2020 as cited by Das, 2021:93; Ellis-Chadwick & Jobber, 2013:508). Marketing literature frequently states that effective use of marketing communications channels is becoming a modern goal of any organisation (Li & Wu, 2017:95). It is believed that an organisation incentivises the consumer by meeting their needs through marketing communications channels, thereby establishing consumer confidence, dedication, and satisfaction, all of which contribute to consumer loyalty toward the product, service, or brand (Cabanelas *et al.*, 2019:623; De Meyer *et al.*, 2015:126; Guo *et al.*, 2016:237; Hassan, 2012:71; Li & Wu, 2017:75).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, digital revolution has altered the marketing communications landscape dramatically, transforming it into a hybrid online-offline, partially managed, and hyperconnected ecosystem (Ceccotti & Vernuccio, 2015:445). Within the IMC framework, new modes of communication and a plethora of digital media coexist with traditional media. The traditional 'outbound'/'inside-out' or 'push' communication system is still based on a one-to-many, linear, and company-centric approach while an 'inbound'/'outside-in' or 'pull' communication model is emerging that, in contrast to the first system, is based on an interactive and customer-centric approach (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017:467). The study defines conventional marketing communication channels as those that involve physical touchpoints and traditional media, whereas modern marketing communication channels involve digital touchpoints.

2.2.3.1 Conventional marketing communication channels

Conventional media channels are the various elements of traditional media channels (Mondal & Sahoo, 2020 as cited by Das, 2021:100). The term "traditional marketing communications channels" refers to a relatively broad category of communication channels. Most authors agree on the following five channels: advertising, direct marketing, personal selling, public relations and publicity, and sales promotion (Blakeman, 2018:14; Czapslewski & Key, 2017:326; Fill & Turnbull, 2016:11; Keller & Kotler, 2016:582; Winer, 2009:109). Although these elements are regarded as the primary tactics or traditional channels of marketing communications, many marketers are shifting away from traditional forms of marketing due to changes in the media landscape (Adnan & Tarik, 2018:45; Bala & Verma, 2018:336; Durmaz & Efendioglu, 2016:38; Oluwasola, 2020). However, it is necessary to consider the dominant promotional activities, namely advertising, direct marketing, personal selling, public relations and publicity, and sales promotion, in order to comprehend the marketing communications mix, which then leads to a discussion of new media and other communication elements.

- **Advertising**

Advertising is one of the most visible aspects of a marketer's communications activities (Koekemoer, 2014:5). Consumers sometimes misinterpret advertising as any message they hear or see that aims to persuade them to acquire goods or services (Blakeman, 2018:15). In reality, advertising is any form of paid impersonal communication about an organisation, product, service, or idea directed at a specific audience by an identified sponsor through various media outlets such as the Internet, magazines, newspapers, outdoor advertising, radio, or television (Andrews & Shimp, 2017:8; Andrews *et al.*, 2021:8; Belch & Belch, 2012:18; Blakeman, 2018:15; Brennan *et al.*, 2015:5; Czapslewski & Key, 2017:327; Duncan & Ouwersloot, 2008:10; Keller, 2008:235).

- **Direct marketing**

Direct marketing directs marketing efforts toward a specific audience through interactive media channels such as direct mail, catalogues, infomercials, and telemarketing to elicit a quantifiable response from a prospect or customer (Andrews *et al.*, 2021:7; Belch & Belch, 2012:19; Blakeman, 2018:15; Consumer Protection Act 68 of 2008; Dinnie *et al.*, 2017:535). The response could be an enquiry, a purchase, or even a note (Kehinde, 2009:121).

- **Personal selling**

Personal selling is interpersonal communication with a commercial purpose (Du Plooy, 2012:41). It is defined as dyadic (two-way) communication between an organisation's representative and prospective consumers with the intent of determining their specific needs and attempting to meet them through the provision of suitable goods, services, or ideas (Ang, 2021:362; Andrews *et al.*, 2021:7; Bothma *et al.*, 2010:6; Czaplewski & Key, 2017:329).

- **Public relations and publicity**

Public relations and publicity are often discussed concurrently. However, publicity is a subset of the public relations effort. Public relations can be defined as the management of an organisation's perceptions and strategic connections with its internal and external stakeholders through communication (Andrews & Shimp, 2017:8; Ekhlassi *et al.*, 2012:762; Koekemoer, 2014:7). Marketing public relations (MPR) is a proactive approach to public relations that aims to maximise possibilities that will help an organisation achieve its objectives and goals (Andrews *et al.*, 2021:7). Publicity is the impersonal and unpaid dissemination of information about an organisation, product, service, or idea through the use of press releases, media interviews, editorials, news items or announcements, films, press conferences, feature pieces, and newsletters (Andrews & Shimp, 2017:8). These are free stories and brand mentions provided by the news media (Duncan & Ouwersloot, 2008:11). Though they are discussed concurrently, public relations use publicity to enhance the organisation's image since it is focused on preserving a positive picture of the organisation in the minds of stakeholders (Belch & Belch, 2012:25).

- **Sales promotion**

Sales promotion is the practice of using short-term incentives to enhance the marketing communications mix to stimulate buyer action or generate instant sales (Andrews & Shimp, 2017:8; Andrews *et al.*, 2021:7; Arens *et al.*, 2008:523; Bothma *et al.*, 2010:228; Czaplewski & Key, 2017:328; McKelvey, 2015:769). Manufacturers and retailers alike can leverage sales promotion as a marketing tool (Ailawadi *et al.*, 2010:303; Andersen, 2013:248; Andrews *et*

al., 2021:7). Sales promotion are commonly separated into two facets or contexts: Manufacturers employ sales promotion to elicit responses from wholesalers/distributors and retailers, “dubbed trade promotions”, whereas retailers use it to target and increase sales to the end customer, dubbed consumer promotion (Ailawadi *et al.*, 2010:303; Andrews & Shimp, 2017:8; Andrews *et al.*, 2021:7; Czaplewski & Key, 2017:328).

To encourage immediate purchases in the trade and consumer markets, an organisation or individual can use trade deals and purchasing allowances, display and advertising allowances, trade shows, cooperative advertising, free samples, coupons, premiums, contests/sweepstakes, cost-packs, refunds/rebates, promotional games, bonus packs, price-off deals, and multi-item promotions (Ailawadi *et al.*, 2010:305; Andrews *et al.*, 2021:7; Bothma *et al.*, 2010:228). However, Broderick and Pickton (2005:639) contend that sales promotion does not only comprise two categories, adding a third called “staff sales promotion”. Employee sales promotions are ones designed to incentivise and urge employees to sell more of the organisation’s products.

2.2.3.2 Contemporary marketing communication channels

The restructuring and reengineering that are occurring in the majority of organisations today are not isolated events. Rather, they are evolutionary processes that require managers to constantly strategize and realign priorities and resources in accordance with organisational objectives. The marketing communications function is at the epicentre of this evolution. The expanding ubiquity of the Internet, combined with the increasing affordability of broadband connections, has altered the landscape of marketing operations significantly (Das & Singh, 2018).

Organisations are increasingly expected to enhance and generate value through the use of digital technologies (Abu-Rumman *et al.*, 2015:539; Akbar *et al.*, 2021:6368; Fiore *et al.*, 2020). While traditional media channels continue to play an important role on account of the broad and segmented audience they provide (Arrigo *et al.*, 2021:6; Choi *et al.*, 2017:280), most organisations are no longer investing heavily in the traditional forms of marketing because, as Abyari *et al.* (2012:388) and Dissanayake (2012:28) raise, they are ineffective. Recent and ongoing technological advancements leverage the interactive capabilities of digital technologies to support organisational marketing communications by increasing the dissemination and effectiveness of marketing messages (Akbar *et al.*, 2021:6368; Alles *et al.*, 2020:235; Banga & Te Velde, 2018:56; Cabiddu *et al.*, 2014:739; Haenlein & Kaplan, 2010:67; Hynan & Reilly, 2014:753; Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014:708). As such, digital technology improves business and marketing operations and is crucial for system leveraging during the customer-centric marketing process (Akbar *et al.*, 2021:6368; Zahay, 2021:129).

Digital marketing practices involve the use of digital technology to streamline the marketing process (Chadwick & Chaffey, 2016:11; Technopedia, 2014). This study adopts Kannan and Li's (2017:23) definition of digital marketing by describing it as an adaptable, technology-enabled process in which organisations work with customers and partners to jointly develop, convey, deliver, and sustain value for all stakeholders. Successful digital marketing technology deployment is believed to promote adaptability to quickly changing markets and the opportunities they present by assisting in the development of lasting competitive advantages (Aldebert *et al.*, 2011:1212; Bakkers *et al.*, 2017:1; Kiron & Ransbotham, 2018). That is, the active presence of digital elements fosters an emotional connection with the brand and its products, hence increasing brand awareness, image, and sales (Purwar, 2019:997). Indeed, the most effective way for increasing brand awareness is through digital marketing channels (Mishra, 2021:176). Additionally, digital marketing as a component of marketing communications fosters brand loyalty (AbuKhoua & De Silva, 2019:113; Ahmed *et al.*, 2019; Nuseir, 2016:236) and hence ensures customer retention for the organisation (Islam & Khan, 2017:523).

Moreover, with the expanding trend of digital consumer traffic originating from varied linked devices, technology enables the real-time collection of large amounts of data about consumer phenomena (Erevelles *et al.*, 2016:898). Several sorts of digital marketing media channels can be optimised to create favourable effects for a brand when conducting digital marketing. Digital marketing aspects are classified as paid, shared, earned, and owned media, with the majority of elements falling under the convergence of the four categories (Oluwasola, 2020).

- **Paid media digital marketing communication elements**

Paid media digital marketing communication elements are marketing tools in the form of spaces or content that organisations purchase from media owners, search engines, and social media platforms among others to distribute their marketing communication commercial messages and thereby increase visibility for their product, service, or brand.

- **Owned media digital marketing communication elements**

Owned media digital marketing communication aspects are the channels through which a business communicates with customers, employees, and other stakeholders. These channels include company websites, content marketing, blogs, and mobile applications.

- **Earned media digital marketing communication elements**

Earned media digital marketing communication aspects entail the methods organisations use to communicate with their external and internal audiences about their organisations, products, and brands. Earned media tools are referred to as 'free tools' since they are

information that is spread by journalists, external publications, site owners, and occasionally customers. Earned media tools are essentially third-party-enabled channels/tools that are delivered for free.

- **Shared media digital marketing communication elements**

Shared media digital marketing communication elements, colloquially referred to as social media, have grown in popularity and effectiveness as a marketing communication platform. It also includes publishing to social networking/sharing sites such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Pinterest. Retweets, shares, and viral marketing are also examples of shared media.

- **Convergence media digital marketing communication elements**

Convergence media digital marketing communication elements refers to a mix of purchased, owned, shared, and earned media used in marketing communication. Advertising or paid media has, historically, been the driving force behind marketing initiatives, both online and offline; however, advertising no longer performs as well as it once did without the backing of additional marketing communication promotional elements/channels.

Campaigns rely on shared, owned, and earned media to distribute brand messages across the multiplicity of intricate paths customers take across devices, displays, and media. Earned, shared, and owned media have grown so ingrained in successful marketing campaigns that they are now collaborating with bought media to generate novel media combinations, such as owned and compensated; owned, shared, and compensated; or earned, compensated, and owned. Paid, owned, earned, and shared media models are now becoming functional (Oluwasola, 2020).

2.2.3.3 Communication through games

Technological advancements, competitive pressure, changes in consumer behaviour, and the continual diversification of customer needs and expectations all point marketers in the direction of identifying new channels for more effective communication with target audiences (Carlson *et al.*, 2021:27; Cicchirillo, 2019:202; Duralia, 2018:101). Drawing inspiration from the growing importance of (video) games and their potential to elicit a variety of beneficial outcomes (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990:6; Fels & Seaborn, 2015:14; Lin *et al.*, 2012:191; Przybylski *et al.*, 2006; Przybylski *et al.*, 2010:156), organisations worldwide have recently begun incorporating game design elements into their business practices (Asaad *et al.*, 2017:461; Bauer *et al.*, 2020:564; Foursquare, 2022; Nike, 2022; Starbucks, 2016) in the form of an approach nowadays commonly known under the monikers as gamification (Deterding *et al.*, 2011:9).

The notion of gamification rocketed to the pantheon of buzzword glory as a new efficacious transmedial platform for marketing communications (Berger *et al.*, 2018:652; Dymek, 2018:591; Malhotra & Mishra, 2021). The primary distinction between gamification and other modes of communication is the participatory dimension that gamification interaction confers to the consumer (Dymek, 2018:598). Recent industry reports anticipate the worldwide gamification market to be worth USD 10.19 million in 2020 and expect the market to expand at a compound annual growth rate of approximately 25.1% over the next five years (Mordor Intelligence, 2022). The growth can be attributed, in part, to gamification's capacity to stimulate or optimise customer involvement (Asaad *et al.*, 2017:466; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2016:31), which is a significant driver of customer loyalty (Brodie *et al.*, 2014:162).

In marketing, gamification has been used to advance advertising (Royne *et al.*, 2019:608), mobile marketing (De Ruyter *et al.*, 2016:26), and e-commerce objectives (Asaad *et al.*, 2017:459). Hennig-Thurau and Marchand (2013:154) predicted that the field's creativity and innovativeness would continue to produce an ever-growing variety of game types, formats, and business models. Gamification, particularly on mobile platforms, enables marketers to connect with customers, and the industry is fast increasing (De Ruyter *et al.*, 2016:26; Högberg *et al.*, 2019).

2.3 THE GAMIFICATION CONCEPT

Academic reaction to gamification has been polarised, ranging from outright rejection to exploratory papers and symposiums expressing curiosity. The conceptual immaturity of gamification combined with this conflict among researchers creates an opportunity for the study of gamification as an object of study. The purpose of this section is to make a preliminary attempt at resolving the contradictory gamification ontologies.

2.3.1 Origin and current use of gamification

As is elaborated in section 2.3.2, precursors and various similar forms of gamification have been devised and leveraged for centuries (Dymek, 2018:591; Werbach, 2014:266). As a result, there is no agreement on what constitutes the first historical occurrence of gamification (Dymek, 2018:591). With this in mind, numerous theories exist on the origins of gamification. Rather than covering the full history of gamification, this section covers some significant examples from the past that influenced current forms of gamification.

One of the earliest documented uses of gamification-like systems was the establishment of a mark-based gamification system in the 1840s Norfolk Island prison colony with the ultimate goal of prison rehabilitation and release (Asplund, 1987 as cited by Dymek, 2018: 595; Hibbert, 2003

as cited by Dymek, 2018:595). A day's work in prison earned 10 points, which could be swapped for a day's sentence reduction (10 points) or a meal (3 points) (Dymek, 2018:595) (Dymek, 2018:595). Moreover, prisoners could expect to wear plain clothes, grow tobacco, or even be granted early parole based on their work performance (Asplund, 1987 as cited by Dymek, 2018:595). Although the system appeared to be successful – a form of token economy – it was terminated fairly quickly, and the previous penalty system of flogging and gallows was resumed (Dymek, 2018:595).

Historical retail research indicates that (proto-)gamification was widely employed as a marketing management tool in the 1920s in the form of mediatised caption contests, quizzes, and games aimed at customers and retailers alike (Cochoy & Hagberg, 2016 as cited by Dymek, 2018:595). Around 2008, the concept of gamification took off as a range of systems combining game-derived concepts and digital platforms for motivation became available (Paharia, 2013 as cited by Werbach, 2014:1).

Foursquare is the obvious market pioneer of gamification – a globally popular location-based social network for smartphone users that has been named “the top ten most influential [smartphone] app” by The Guardian (Hern, 2017). Its fortunes, based on more than 50 million users (Foursquare, 2022) and 10 billion “check-ins” (the fundamental social network action of self-reported positioning announcement), have garnered widespread media and marketing industry attention, as well as scientific inquiry (Cramer *et al.*, 2011; Foxman, 2014) – frequently assuming the media role of the preeminent arbiter of the current state of gamification.

Initially applied in the marketing domain, gamification's popularity rapidly spread to different application domains such as healthcare (Abascal *et al.*, 2015:3; Billiot & Forbes, 2021:132; Cafazzo *et al.*, 2012; Discovery, 2022; Duarte *et al.*, 2014:743; Fernández-Alemán *et al.*, 2017:32; Fit For Bucks, 2021; Kendal *et al.*, 2014:420; Playfit, 2013; Pokémon Go, 2022; Ufford, 2017; Zombies, Run!, n.d.), education (Aguiar & Simões, 2011; Archy Learning, n.d.; Assimakopoulos *et al.*, 2020:4; Brainscape, 2022; Cairós *et al.*, 2016:535; Classcraft, n.d.; ClassDojo, 2013; Dawson, 2010; Duolingo, n.d.; Elucidat, n.d.; Kahoot!, n.d.; Knowre, 2021; Quest to Learn, 2022; Quizizz, 2022; Virtonomics, 2022; VivoClass, n.d.), workplace (Kumar & Raghavendran, 2015:4; Lopez, 2011; Redcritter, 2015; Tay, 2010; WeSpire, 2022), crowdsourcing (ArborCarbon, 2016; Auer *et al.*, 2015:47; Flickr, n.d.; Fox, 2012; Greenemeier, 2015; Kaggle, 2022; Maproulette, n.d.; OpenStreetMap, n.d.; Science Exchange, 2021; UCL, n.d.; Waze, n.d), recruitment (Buil *et al.*, 2019:150; Buil *et al.*, 2020:41), project management (Atlassian, 2022; Kuo, 2012; Redmine, 2014), safe driving (Alt *et al.*, 2016:84; Amaxilatis *et al.*, 2019:105; Bahadoor & Hosein, 2016:277; Bohuschke *et al.*, 2014:4), software development (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2015:412), environmental conservation (Ant Group, 2019; Bardaki, 2018; Cool Choices, 2019; Oracle, 2022), collaborative

work (Da Silva *et al.*, 2012:67; Boehm *et al.*, 2008:3; Borges *et al.*, 2009:369; isee systems, 2021), and financial management (Crunchbase, 2022; Elmlad, 2020). However, beyond the use cases of gamification, how scholars and practitioners define it will affect the coherence of their efforts and shape the critical discussion over its legitimacy (Werbach, 2014:271).

2.3.2 Towards a definition of gamification

The term “gamification” is a neologism that evolved from a varied, intersecting landscape of game concepts (Bai *et al.*, 2020; Felas & Seaborn, 2015:18; Hamari & Thibault, 2021:16; Hanner *et al.*, 2017:6). As an emerging research term, gamification is still contested and frequently discussed in terms of its secondary connotations (Hamari & Thibault, 2021:16; Hanner *et al.*, 2017:6). The ambiguous use of the term “gamification” obstructs attempts to define it (Fels & Seaborn, 2015:18; Hamari & Thibault, 2021:16). Therefore, the different phrases that may be associated with or designated to the phenomenon should be disentangled from the context of gamification in marketing and this terminological cornucopia collaboratively systematised (Hamari & Thibault, 2012:16; Hanner *et al.*, 2017:6). The following table summarises the most frequently used terms and their associated definitions.

Table 2-3: Concepts related to gamification

Concept(s)	Description
Gamification	Gamification is the use of game design elements in non-game contexts.
Pervasive games and mixed-reality games	Pervasive games and mixed-reality games strive to integrate the physical, social, and virtual worlds by utilising pervasive computing technologies to augment traditional games or to develop new games.
Playification	Playification is the use of playful elements in non-play contexts.
Serious games and purposeful games	Serious games and purposeful games are full-fledged games with different purposes stimulating (mostly) real-world events or processes.

Source: Adapted from Deterding *et al.* (2011:2), Hanner *et al.* (2017:7), Hinske *et al.* (2007), Lowry *et al.* (2018), Mäyrä (2008:146), Monu and Ralph (2013:1), and Van Der Spek *et al.* (2013:250).

From the perspective of these definitions, it is clear that gamification could frame a broad range of concepts. Deterding *et al.*'s (2011:2) definition isolates the phenomenon of gamification from previously mentioned areas of inquiry and sets it up in relation to these (Groh, 2012:45). Their definition of gamification is rather general, outlining the fundamental idea and corroborating a possibly widespread interpretation of the term (Hanner *et al.*, 2017:5). Deterding *et al.*'s (2011:2) definition can be summarised as follows: Gamification is the (i) use of (in contrast to extension) (ii) game (in contrast to play or playfulness) (iii) design (in contrast to game-based technology)

(iv) elements (in contrast to full-fledged games) in (v) non-game contexts (regardless of specific usage intentions, contexts or media of implementation) (Groh, 2012:40).

This definition of gamification precludes the gamification of games (Eranti & Hamari, 2011:20), as this would only be an extension of a game and hence would not constitute a gamification design (Groh, 2012:40).

A game is subject to the elephant test: though instantly recognisable, they are difficult to define. The literature contains a variety of descriptions and conceptual expositions (Fels & Seaborn, 2015:16). The so-called “ludologists” emphasised the play/simulation-like element of games, whereas the “narratologists” addressed the narrative components of games. Narratologists emphasised the importance of interactive narratives as the gaming medium’s explanatory underpinning. Janet Murray, most notable of narratologists, asserted that “every game, electronic or otherwise, can be experienced as a symbolic drama” and serves as “a kind of abstract storytelling” (Murray, 1997:142). However, textual machines of simulation or interactive narratives of representation were at the heart of the incommensurable polemic (Dymek, 2018:593), or to quote “radical ludologist” Eskelinen’s (2001) well-quoted anti-narrativistic statement: “If I throw a ball at you I don’t expect you to drop it and wait until it starts telling stories”. This exemplifies the ludological emphasis on “gameplay” (“ludology” derives from the Latin word *ludus*, which means “game”) above other constructions such as narrative, semiotics, hypermedia, or others – one plays games, not narratives, semiotics, or hypertexts – as such, using the term “gameplay” as a primary concept reveals another central ambiguity in-game philosophy: the distinction between *game* and *play* (Dymek, 2018:593).

The distinction between these two conceptions (play vs game) has ramifications for the gamification concept (Deterding *et al.*, 2011:3; Hamari & Thibault, 2021:22). Game and play are difficult notions to distinguish, as they are frequently used interchangeably, even in several languages, and frequently relate to an inhomogeneous collection of activities (Koerner & Staller, 2021:87; Vanolo, 2018:321). The analysis of playing and games in society is covered in Sociologist Roger Caillois’ seminal work *Man, play and games*. Caillois (1961:27) defines game and play on opposite ends of a spectrum ranging from “turbulence to rules”, where *paidia* refers to “the spontaneous manifestations of the play instinct” and *ludus* to “the taste for gratuitous difficulty”, which has been interpreted in gamification studies as the distinction between “playful” and “gameful” behaviour (Dymek, 2018:593).

Caillois (1961:9) and Dymek (2018:593) assert that playing entails instinctual free-form, non-rule-based and expressive activities, whereas gaming entails rule-based, goal-oriented actions. A game is a rule-based, formal system with a changeable and quantifiable

conclusion in which different outcomes are ascribed different values, the player is emotionally invested in the outcome and exerts effort to affect it, and the activity's outcomes are voluntary and negotiable (Juul, 2011 as cited by Mekler, 2015:7). Gamification is mostly concerned with rule-structured, goal-oriented sociotechnical management systems (Dymek, 2018:593). Nonetheless, gamified applications can extract qualities of play to promote playful behaviour and mindsets in practice (Hamari & Thibault, 2021:22), and therefore, this distinction remains largely theoretical (Fels & Seaborn, 2015:27).

From the standpoint of a designer, gamification is a system that incorporates features of games but is not a full-fledged game (Groh, 2012:39). According to Deterding *et al.* (2011:3), it is most beneficial to restrict the term gamification for references to game design features rather than game-based technologies or behaviour within the broader game ecosystem.

Gamification elements (alternatively, game design elements) can be thought of as a broad term that encompasses all the components and factors required for constructing and comprehending a gamification concept (Janson, 2020:643).

While game elements are the fundamental building blocks of gamification (Deterding *et al.*, 2011:12; Werbach, 2012:26), there are multiple taxonomies for gamification elements. For example, Deterding *et al.* (2011:12) proposed a five-level classification scheme for game elements, including interface design patterns, game design patterns or game mechanics, design principles, heuristics or 'lenses', conceptual models of game design units, game design methods and design processes. De Ruyter *et al.* (2016:26) defined gamification elements as story, mechanics, aesthetics, and technology. Given the literature's lack of standardisation, this section will only map a few game components that have been clearly referenced in primary studies.

Table 2-4: Gamification elements

Elements	Description
Achievements	Achievements are objectives in an achievement/reward system (not the core game) that is defined by activities and events in other systems (commonly in the core game) (Eranti & Hamari, 2011:4).
Actions	Actions refer to the activities that a player can perform and the impact of these activities on the game (Schell, 2008:170).
Badges	Badges are symbolic distinctions for participants that denote an accomplishment made while engaged in an activity or action within an information system (Janson, 2020:665).
Challenges	Challenges are discrete pieces of playable material that specify a difficult objective that a player must accomplish – while constrained by time or other constraints – in exchange for an in-game prize or reward (Khoshkangini <i>et al.</i> , 2017).

Table 2-4: Gamification elements (continues)

Elements	Description
Feedback	Feedback informs users of their performance and assists them in remaining aware of their progress and failure while working on activities or actions in an information system.
Leader boards	Leader boards enable users to compare their performance to that of other users throughout the course of a project/task in the gamified environment (Hanner <i>et al.</i> , 2017:8).
Levels	Levels serve as markers of the user's movement through the system (Hanner <i>et al.</i> , 2017:8).
Mediating avatars	A mediating avatar assists users in navigating an information system and gives feedback on their performance and the information system's outcomes. The system designer creates mediating avatars with a specific purpose in mind (Janson <i>et al.</i> , 2020: 665).
Missions	Missions are measurable objectives that users can achieve while completing actions and/or activities within an information system (Janson <i>et al.</i> , 2020: 665).
Objects, attributes, and states	Games contain a large number of distinct objects, each having its own set of properties and states (Kapp, 2012:29; Schell, 2008:165).
Objectives	Objectives specify the effects of a given scenario being met (e.g., completing one level unlocks the next) (Kietzmann <i>et al.</i> , 2015:415).
One-time narratives	One-time narratives are used to tell a story and, in general, every action or activity is embedded within an information system (Janson <i>et al.</i> , 2020: 665).
Points	Points are a metric used to reward users across the various parameters of a gamified system (Hanner <i>et al.</i> , 2017:8, Kapp, 2012:40).
Processing narratives	Processing narratives provide a continuous narrative based on all a user's actions or activities within an information system (Janson <i>et al.</i> , 2020: 665).
Progress bars	A progress bar is used to indicate a user's progress while performing tasks and/or operations in an information system without comparing or challenging the user's performance to that of other users (Janson <i>et al.</i> , 2020: 665).
Reminders	A reminder is intended to help people visualise their prior behaviour by displaying a timeline of their actions (Janson <i>et al.</i> , 2020: 665).
Rewards	A reward is a way for the user to express gratitude for completing the achievement. Extrinsic rewards can be game-related (e.g., points), AS-related (e.g., completing achievement X satisfies one of the requirements for unlocking achievement Y), or application-external (e.g., users receive a shopping coupon) (Hanner <i>et al.</i> , 2017:8). Simultaneously, playing entails various intrinsic incentives, such as mastering specific areas of the game (McGonigal, 2011). Additionally, a third sphere is concerned with social incentives. Current gamification processes, particularly in the digital era and the realm of smart cities, are inextricably linked to social networking technologies. The player can perform game-like activities and display his or her accomplishments to others, which appears to provide the user with existential validation and status (Berry, 2012), thus providing an additional layer of motivation for behaving in the manner required by the software design.
Rules	Rules dictate how the game is to be played (Schell, 2008:174).
Space	The space of a game is the area within which the player can move around (Schell, 2008:158).

Table 2-4: Gamification elements (continues)

Elements	Description
Story/theme	The story/theme serves as the backdrop for the game, allowing the participant to see the context; avatars serve as the participants' self-representation (Asaad <i>et al.</i> , 2017 as cited by García-Madariaga <i>et al.</i> , 2019).
Time	Time can be used as a restriction to limit the amount of time a player can spend on a certain job (Schell, 2008:163), or it can be used to describe how resources accumulate or deplete over time (Kietzmann <i>et al.</i> , 2015:415).
Time manipulations	Time manipulations are steps that users can take while performing operations and/or activities within an information system (Janson <i>et al.</i> , 2020: 665).
User avatars	A user avatar is a graphic depiction of the user that is used to personalise their user profile in an information system. Typically, users choose or build their own avatars, which they can then modify (Janson <i>et al.</i> , 2020: 665).
Virtual goods	Virtual goods are tangible things that may be acquired or sold (for example, coins) (Janson <i>et al.</i> , 2020:665).

The context category contains information about the environments in which gamification occurs.

Gamification, in principle, requires only a non-gaming context and is not limited to any particular sort of application, process, product, service, task, or context (Lowry *et al.*, 2018).

This non-game setting is sufficiently broad to encompass the numerous applications of gamification (Alsawaier, 2018:57).

While Deterding *et al.*'s (2011:2) definition appears to be appropriate, it has been criticised for its elementary and static nature (Huu, 2020:4; Werbach, 2014:269), as well as its design-centric approach (Hamari & Huotari, 2012:18; Hense *et al.*, 2017:372). Additionally, the term makes no reference to the possible purposes or effects of gamification (Huu, 2020:4). Withal, referring to Deterding *et al.*'s (2011:2) understanding of gamification, Werbach (2014:267) asserts that not all instances of game design principles being used in non-game situations should be classified as gamification. He contends that, per Deterding *et al.*'s (2011:9) definition, any instance of a certain game design element must be referred to as gamification (i.e., the display of progress bars in computer programs). Since such progress bars are purely for the purpose of providing feedback to the user and have no gaming or entertaining intent, they should not be referred to as gamification (Werbach, 2014:270).

To develop a clear and useful definition for gamification that encompasses the domain's entirety, this study disassembled previously published definitions and combined overlapping aspects. The scientific literature demonstrates a variety of meanings for the term, with the most frequently used being the application of game design features to non-game contexts (Cater *et al.*, 2013; Domínguez *et al.*, 2013:381; Frith, 2013:252; Gåslund, 2011:17; Goehle, 2013:235).

Table 2-5: Definitions of gamification

Author(s)	Definition
First use of the term “gamification” by Nick Pelling in 2002 according to Hopfgartner <i>et al.</i> (2015:244)	Gamification is applying game-like accelerated user interface design to make electronic transactions both enjoyable and fast.
Linder and Zichermann (2010 as cited by Fels & Seaborn, 2015:16)	Gamification is a tool for supplementing branding initiatives through the application of game elements and mechanics.
Cunningham and Zichermann (2011:xiv)	Gamification is the process of game-thinking and game mechanics to engage users and solve problems.
Deterding <i>et al.</i> (2011:10)	Gamification is the use of game design elements in non-game contexts.
Hamari and Huotari (2012:19)	Gamification is a process of enhancing a service with affordances for gameful experiences in order to support users’ overall value creation.
Swan (2012:13)	Gamification is the process of adding game mechanics to processes, programs, and platforms that wouldn’t traditionally use such concepts.
Blohm and Leimeister (2013:275)	Gamification is enriching products, services, and information systems with game-design elements in order to positively influence motivation, productivity, and behaviour of users.
Díaz Redondo <i>et al.</i> (2013:348)	Gamification is the utilisation of game mechanics and game dynamics in non-game applications.
Domínguez <i>et al.</i> (2013:381)	Gamification is incorporating game elements into a non-gaming software application to increase user experience and engagement.
Kumar (2013:528)	Gamification is the application of game design principles and mechanics to nongame environments. It attempts to make technology more inviting by encouraging users to engage in desired behaviours by showing the path to mastery and autonomy, and by taking advantage of people’s innate enjoyment of play.
Ašeriškis and Damaševičius (2014:83)	Gamification refers to adding gamefulness to existing systems in non-game contexts usually aiming to increase the value of a product or service beyond its face value, as well as to boost user engagement, loyalty, and satisfaction.
Burke (2014)	Gamification is the use of game mechanics and experience design to digitally engage and motivate people to achieve their goals.
Filsecker and Hickey (2014:138)	Gamification is a design strategy attempting to reproduce the engagement power of games by emulating key game mechanics without actually designing a full game and implementing them in a non-gaming context (e.g., industry, education, etc.).
Hamari <i>et al.</i> (2014:3026)	Gamification is a process of enhancing services with (motivational) affordances in order to invoke gameful experiences and further behavioural outcomes.
Werbach (2014:270)	Gamification is the process of making activities more game-like.
Fels and Seaborn (2015:17)	Gamification is the intentional use of game elements for a gameful experience of nongame tasks and contexts.

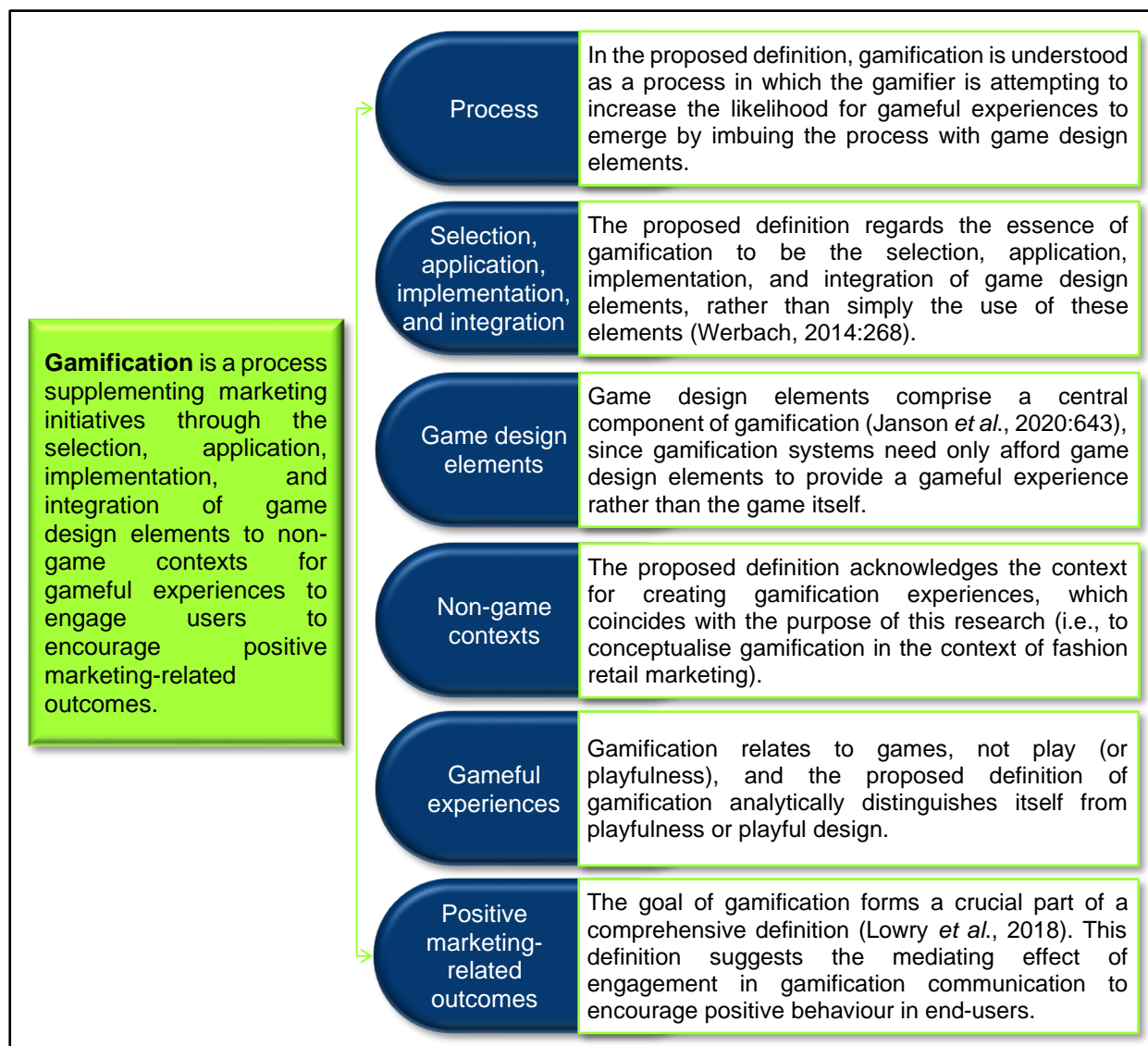
Table 2-5: Definitions of gamification (continues)

Author(s)	Definition
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Kietzmann <i>et al.</i> (2015:411)	Gamification is the application of game design principles in order to change behaviours in non-game situations.
De Ruyter <i>et al.</i> (2016:26)	Gamification is the use of game design elements to enhance non-game goods and services by increasing customer value and encouraging value-creating behaviours.
Liu <i>et al.</i> (2017:1013)	Gamification is the incorporation of game design elements into a target system while retaining the system's instrumental functions.
Lowry and Putz (2018)	Gamification refers to using game-design elements in any non-game system context to increase users' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, help them process information, help them to better achieve goals, and/or change their behaviour.
Hamari and Koivisto (2019:192)	Gamification is a design approach of employing game elements into different types of systems and services, intending to afford gameful experiences.
Hamari <i>et al.</i> (2019:620)	Gamification is a process of transforming any activity, system, service, product, or organisational structure into one which affords positive experiences (...) similar to those afforded by games, and is often referred to as the gameful experience.

After analysing the aforementioned definitions, it is clear that none of them adequately capture the concept's key features, with the possible exception of the one proposed by Lowry and Putz (2018). Their definition builds on Moore and Benbasat's (1991:198) framework and, in their view, more precisely defines the essence and important characteristics of gamification.

By evaluating the definitions, several points of convergence and divergence between the concepts can be recognised. In general, the majority of definitions emphasise gamification's ability to engage users and produce user-perceived value. Following the deconstruction of existing definitions, this study agglomerated the major components in a way that communicated the concept's essential qualities. This study defines gamification, as summarised in Figure 2-1, as a process supplementing marketing initiatives through the selection, application, implementation, and integration of game design elements to non-game contexts for gameful experiences to engage users so as to encourage positive marketing-related outcomes.

Figure 2-1: Detailed explanation of the proposed gamification definition

By considering the proposed definition of gamification, gamification draws from game design and aims to create a gameful experiences in order to direct end-users' behaviour, which in turn can lead to numerous benefits. To this end, Hunter and Werbach (2012:20) view gamification as beneficial to an organisation or goal. The next subsection discusses some of the key advantages of gamification over past iterations of behaviour-change gamification, since they can be used to legitimise gamification communication for marketing purposes.

2.3.3 Advantages of gamification

Organisations can harness the gamification approach relatively easily to achieve benefits through promoting behaviour change (Braatz *et al.*, 2018:440). That is, gamification technologies can increase user engagement and satisfy their basic inner needs in addition to being a useful way of

intrinsically motivating favourable and beneficial behavioural change and performance (Braatz *et al.*, 2018:440; Deterding *et al.*, 2016:104; Edogun *et al.*, 2020:102; Goh *et al.*, 2017:371; Hamari & Xi, 2019:455; Lin *et al.*, 2012:192). Indeed, gamification is posited to offer several advantages for motivating behaviour change (Table 2-6).

Table 2-6: Gamification’s brand-related advantages

Authors	Studied variable(s)	Key findings
Chen and Hsu (2018:126)	Brand association, loyalty, and trust.	Gamification features increase the user experience and thereby brand loyalty, association, and trust positively.
Asaad <i>et al.</i> (2017:466)	Brand attitude.	Gamification increases positive attitude towards the brand.
Deterding <i>et al.</i> (2016:104), Edogun (2020:103), Sigala (2015:141)	Brand awareness, greater marketing exposure, and repeat purchases.	Broad appeal across audiences, broad accessibility through mobile technology, and the combination of extrinsic rewards with social networks (that generate intrinsic motivation affordances) can generate greater marketing exposure, brand awareness, and repeat purchases.
Blohm and Leimeister (2013:277), Donatiello <i>et al.</i> (2018:21), Wolf <i>et al.</i> (2020:359)	Brand commitment/loyalty.	Gamification in mobile applications increases users’ commitment/loyalty.
Berger <i>et al.</i> (2018:667)	Brand connection.	Challenging and interactive gamification features are interrelated and associated with high brand connection.
Ferreira and Nobre (2017:359), Kietzmann <i>et al.</i> (2016:31)	Brand engagement.	Gamification can increase brand engagement.
Buijzen <i>et al.</i> (2012:39)	Brand recall and recognition.	Prominence of a brand in a gamification application evokes increased brand recognition and recall.

Table 2-6 synthesises research findings on gamification’s brand-related advantages. However, fixating solely on these favourable outcomes might represent a short-sighted view that neglects potential drawbacks (Trang & Weiger, 2021:1). When it is used excessively, incorrectly or maliciously, gamification also has disadvantages.

2.3.4 Disadvantages of gamification

Although gamification has been touted as a possible approach to marketing (Hamari *et al.*, 2014:3028) for achieving marketing objectives (De Winter *et al.*, 2014:110), solution sceptics see more drawbacks than benefits (Witoszek-Kubicka, 2020:1), with compelling counter-arguments that this “ludic turn” is not the complete picture. A common issue is that the impacts of gamification tend to weaken and taper off with time (Hamari *et al.*, 2014:126). This issue stems from two

common design flaws that characterise the majority of gamified systems, namely the predominance of simple and static game design elements and a one-size-fits-all approach to game content recommendation (Bucher *et al.*, 2016:219; Carneiro *et al.*, 2020:4891; Chou, 2016:157; Crombez *et al.*, 2020; Huu, 2020:4; Marczewski *et al.*, 2019:108). Indeed, gamification has been heavily criticised for its widespread “stock” approach, which depends solely on gaming components such as badges, leader boards, and points (Bogost, 2011; Kapp, 2012:33). Margaret Robertson, a game designer, explains that this technique entails picking the element that is least vital to games and displaying it as the experience’s center (Robertson, 2010). However, Antin (2012:14) contends that these aspects vilified by anti-gamification activists are not the primary drivers of participation motivation but rather social factors such as community, peer validation, and self-efficacy motivate participants’ continuous involvement.

Ian Bogost, a games scholar, is possibly the most outspoken critic of gamification (Fels & Seaborn, 2015:18). Bogost (2011) asserts in one essay that gamification is “exploitationware”, a perversion and reduction of the game medium for the sake of generating quick profit. Additionally, detractors frequently view the term “gamification” as a sugar-coated keyword to add to a project in order to demonstrate its innovative nature (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2014:280; Hamari & Thibault, 2021:18). As a result, concerns linger concerning what makes gamification worthwhile and distinctive (Werbach, 2014:266).

Additionally, gamified systems may pose privacy risks. In particular, users may lose their guard and engage in privacy-risky behaviour unrelated to the primary activity when in a state of profound concentration and enjoyment (Agarwal *et al.*, 2009:137; Hamari & Koivisto, 2019:206; Trang & Weiger, 2021:8). A breach of user privacy exposes consumers to a variety of privacy hazards, which, in the context of gamified systems, may include price discrimination, unsolicited advertising, and the sharing of personal information with third parties (Acquisti *et al.*, 2016:444; Arya & Punagin, 2015:39; Facebook, 2022; Horky *et al.*, 2015:47). That is, service providers entice users by promising more relevant content and advertising in exchange for the disclosure of personal information (Groene *et al.*, 2014:59), which they can then use for purposes such as displaying geographically targeted advertisements (based on location data) or attracting new customers (based on social media friend lists) (Trang & Weiger, 2021:2). Government restrictions, on the other hand, require marketers to seek a user’s consent before using his or her personal information for marketing reasons (Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013).

Additionally, psychological game research has historically focused primarily on the negative consequences of games, such as aggression (Anderson *et al.*, 2010) and addiction (Andrade *et al.*, 2016:179). Indeed, despite the emergence of new entertainment standards as a result of increasing technology and consumer interaction, there is concern that growing addiction to digital

platforms and, therefore, near-virtual socialisation may result in isolation and mental depression (Mondal, 2021:127). Additionally, customers responded that they would be frustrated if the game was too difficult to use or they had to upgrade to higher game levels, while they would find it dull if the game was too easy (Dong *et al.*, 2019:203). Moreover, older generations have been found to be frequently less enthusiastic about games and gamification (Hamari & Thibault, 2021:21). However, focusing exclusively on these obstacles and ignoring the opportunities of gamification would be an equally apocalyptic stance. Gamification implementation, particularly in an organisational context, is a highly complex endeavour that must take into account a variety of factors, including business innovation, risk assessment, and usage context (Algashami, 2019:136; Giuşcă *et al.*, 2020:1257; Insley & Nunan, 2013:341). Indeed, specificity is necessary, as gamification can take a variety of forms (Insley & Nunan, 2013:341). The academy has made significant contributions to our understanding of gamification's success in a range of contexts (Altobello & Bayuk, 2019; Negruşa *et al.*, 2015). Be that as it may, one area of gamification that has not been examined or understood extensively is that of fashion marketing and retail (Bauer *et al.*, 2020:564; Insley & Nunan, 2013:341).

2.4 THE FASHION RETAIL INDUSTRY

The extent of research on the implementation of gamification in the South African fashion retail environment is limited (Bauer *et al.*, 2020:564; Insley & Nunan, 2013:341). According to some experts, the practice of gamification has not matured sufficiently, and people approach it too enthusiastically because they base it on scant research findings (Hamari & Huotari, 2012:19; Hamari *et al.*, 2014:3029). The conceptual immaturity referred to here serves as an adequate rationale for investigating gamification in the South African fashion retail industry. Thus, the purpose of this research is to contribute to the embryonic body of knowledge regarding the gamification phenomenon in the South African fashion retail industry.

2.4.1 The global fashion industry

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, fashion is described as a “social standing or prominence especially as signalled by dress or conduct” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). However, for the purpose of this research study, fashion refers to apparel and footwear (Joaquim & Oniku, 2021). Fashion became an industry with the advent of the commercial and industrial revolutions towards the end of the 18th century. Since then, the industry has developed at an exponential rate and continues to do so as the global population grows (Arbuckle & Sterlacci, 2017:2). By definition, the fashion industry encompasses all activities associated with the various stages of the manufacturing and value chain, from the transformation of natural or synthetic materials into fabrics and yarns to the production of industrial filters (textiles) and synthetic yarns to the

production of fashion goods by contractors, designers, and manufacturers, as well as marketing to e-commerce, retail, and wholesale (Chavan, 2018:212; Tortora & Tortora, 2021:67). A single organisation can complete all the phases itself, or each phase might be completed by multiple organisations in the supply chain. Each participant in the fashion supply chain has the objective of meeting stakeholder requests in order to generate a profit (Chavan, 2018:213; Du Toit *et al.*, 2010:3). This objective can be accomplished through either fast fashion or slow fashion business models. Fast fashion is a production strategy that generates fashionable garments at a breakneck pace (Choi, 2013:3). In contrast, slow fashion is “founded on sustainable values, taking into account social, environmental, and economic factors that aim to mitigate the fashion industry’s total influence on the (natural) environment” (Henninger & Singh, 2017:104). The following table traces the historical evolution of fashion that helped shape the fashion industry as we know it today.

Table 2-7: Noteworthy developments in fashion and fashion marketing

Period	Development(s)
50000 B.C.E.	Cro-Magnons, the first prehistoric humans, adapted to frigid climes by fashioning garments from animal skins, leaves, and tree bark.
26000 – 20000 B.C.E.	Individuals from this era were obsessed with stylish clothes and had the ability to fashion bone tools for sewing jewellery and skins.
3500 – 27 B.C.E.	Arguably, fashion-marketing dates back to ancient Mesopotamia when drinking vessels, jewellery, statues, wall carvings, and wall paintings functioned as marketing vehicles for the era’s fashion. Exhibited proficiency in drapery, dyeing, embroidery, pleating, and weaving. Clothing conveyed social status. Conformity in fashion clothing. Guilds established to maintain high-quality standards.
330 E. – 1204 C.E.	The Byzantine Empire developed as a result of its closeness to Asia’s richest textiles and connections to Western Europe. The Byzantine Empire had a significant influence on royal fashion.
1300s – 1600s	Fashion trends originated throughout the Middle Ages when economic and societal changes increased demand for trendy products. Royalty were stylish role models. Technological advancements in textile processing resulted in the emergence of the earliest evidence of fashion as an organised system.
1600s – 1700s	International trade grew, creating a need for trendy attire. Mercure Galant, the first French fashion journal, was established in 1672 and contributed to the promotion of French fashion throughout Europe and the New World.
1700s – 1800s	Technological advancements accelerated production and altered the face of fashion manufacturing.
1770	In England, The Lady’s Magazine published its debut fashion issue. This type of publication kept men and women informed of new fashion trends.
1803	In London, The Gallery of Fashion, an exclusive fashion publication, was launched.

Table 2-7: Noteworthy developments in fashion and fashion marketing (continues)

Period	Development(s)
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1800s	Newspapers and publications such as La Belle Assemblée, Godey's Lady's Book, and Ackermann's Repository of the Arts disseminated the newest in modern fashion.
1818	Brooks Brothers manufactured mass-produced ready-to-wear men's suits.
1837	Ready-to-wear clothing.
1850	Le Bon Marché, the world's first department store, was established.
1867	Harper's Bazaar magazine was first published in New York and Paris.
1872	The world's first mail-order firm is founded.
1883	The Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property was established to assist designers in defending themselves against intellectual property theft.
1891	The Madrid Agreement or Madrid System, the first international intellectual property registration service, was established.
1892	Vogue was founded in New York as a weekly fashion publication.
1931	In Doncaster, a direct-sales apparel company is founded. Apparel Arts, a men's fashion quarterly, was launched, subsequently becoming GQ magazine.
1933	Esquire, a men's fashion magazine, is founded.
1945	The publication of Footwear News, a weekly newspaper devoted to the shoe industry.
1967	In Geneva, Switzerland, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) was founded.
1971	The launch of W Magazine, a monthly spin-off of WWD (Women's Wear Daily).
1980s	As fashion marketers, music celebrities, supermodels, and celebrity designers build the concept of brand awareness and designer labels. Fashion marketing utilised a variety of media, including fashion magazines, billboards, catalogues, newspapers, direct mail, television, radio, and the Internet.
1981	The Home Shopping Club, the first regional home shopping cable television show, is launched.
Late 1990s – Early 2000s	Luxury-brand merchandise grew in popularity.
1990s	The mass marketing of mass-produced clothing, together with the logo craze, catapulted fashion into a commodity business. Fashion sales and marketing shifted away from designers and toward advertising firms and corporate executives seeking higher returns on their investments. Image marketing, which gained popularity in the 1990s, generated advertising in which the clothes were secondary to the message.
1994	The emergence of e-commerce as a means of shopping.
2000	Mass consolidation of stores and labels, as well as mergers and acquisitions, altered the face of fashion. Megabrands were formed by posing as designers as celebrities. Designers leased their names to a variety of products to diversify their brand image.
2001	Fashion blogging democratised the fashion media environment and grew in popularity.

Table 2-7: Noteworthy developments in fashion and fashion marketing (continues)

Period	Development(s)
2004	Facebook was founded, which provided commercial communication opportunities for the fashion industry.

2007	The Internet continued to transform the fashion industry. Online fashion marketing brought fashion into a new realm.
2009	Pinterest, a photo-sharing mobile application start-up, was discovered. Through its organisation-to-consumer functionality, Pinterest, among other things, promotes budding designers.
2010	Instagram was developed as a mobile photo-sharing tool to assist designers and merchants in marketing and advertising their fashion products.
2011	Snapchat was launched, a multimedia smartphone application used to advertise and market fashion products.
2016	Mobile applications transformed the retail landscape by bringing retailers and consumers closer together. Sales of luxury brand products slowed. Earnings reports for brick-and-mortar businesses have fallen as e-commerce sites have grown in popularity, pushing retailers to reinvent themselves to attract consumers. The global fashion business has been thrown into disarray as a result of Brexit.
2017	The impact of e-commerce, rapid fashion, off-price, social media, and a younger population uninterested in fashion has created a low-growth environment in the fashion industry, particularly in the luxury fashion retail industry. Low-priced competition from non-brick-and-mortar retailers forced the closure of several store locations. Manufacturers and retailers invested in advanced marketing tactics that allowed them to target individual consumers. Catalogues, eponymous stores, the internet, television, and runway fashion events all served as channels for brand image promotion. Designers licensed their names to companies' items in order to establish their own brand identity. Recognising that they were frequently the subject of imitators, several designers chose to license their names to lower-priced collections. Additionally, manufacturers have licensed or formed relationships with prominent athletes, musicians, actresses and models, in order to increase sales and develop megabrands.
2018	Brick-and-mortar traffic is declining. Fashion brands are experimenting with the direct-to-consumer business model. Asian fashion industry players are asserting their power on the global stage by pioneering innovations and expansion and investment. Mobile payment transactions is exploding in the fashion space. Artificial intelligence is implemented across the fashion industry's value chain.
2019	India is a focal point for the fashion industry as its middleclass consumer base grows and manufacturing sector strengthens. The lifespan of a fashion product is becoming more elastic as pre-owned, refurbished, repair and rental business models continue to evolve. Younger generations' passion for social and environmental causes has reached critical mass, causing brands to become more fundamentally purpose driven to attract both consumers and talent.
2020	Fashion industry players are focusing their marketing efforts less on social media platforms.

Source: Adapted from Arbuckle and Sterlacci (2017:10), Business of Fashion & McKinsey (2017), Business of Fashion & McKinsey (2018)

Fashion as an industry has come a long way since the industrial and commercial revolutions and is expanding (Ngubane, 2017) rapidly. According to The Business Research Company (as cited by Business Wire, 2021), the global apparel market was valued at about \$527.1 billion in 2020, down -0.6% on a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) basis since 2015. The reduction was primarily due to economic slowing in a number of countries as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak and containment measures. Nonetheless, the global market is predicted to rebound and expand at a 9.8% compound annual growth rate beginning in 2020, reaching \$842.7 billion in 2025 and \$1,138.8 billion in 2030.

The Africa-sited global fashion industry is positioned as potentially accelerating economic growth and industrialisation by enhancing regional and global integration (Jiménez-Zarco *et al.*, 2019:49). Local African style is influenced by a variety of factors, including traditional royal handwoven “kente” textiles from the Asante people and current designs such as the ubiquitous nomadic and safari looks seen on worldwide catwalks (Au *et al.*, 2014:179; Jennings, 2015:46). Within Africa, the fashion brand sector is massive in terms of size and value (Alexandre-Leclair *et al.*, 2019:92), with an anticipated market value of \$1.3 trillion in 2019 (African Development Bank Group, 2019). Nigeria and South Africa are the continent’s top two fashion markets (Alexandre-Leclair *et al.*, 2019:92; Brown, 2017). South Africa’s market, in particular, is polished and promising, combining solid economic infrastructure with a vibrant, developing economy (Flanders Investments & Trade, 2016:5; PwC, 2012:27).

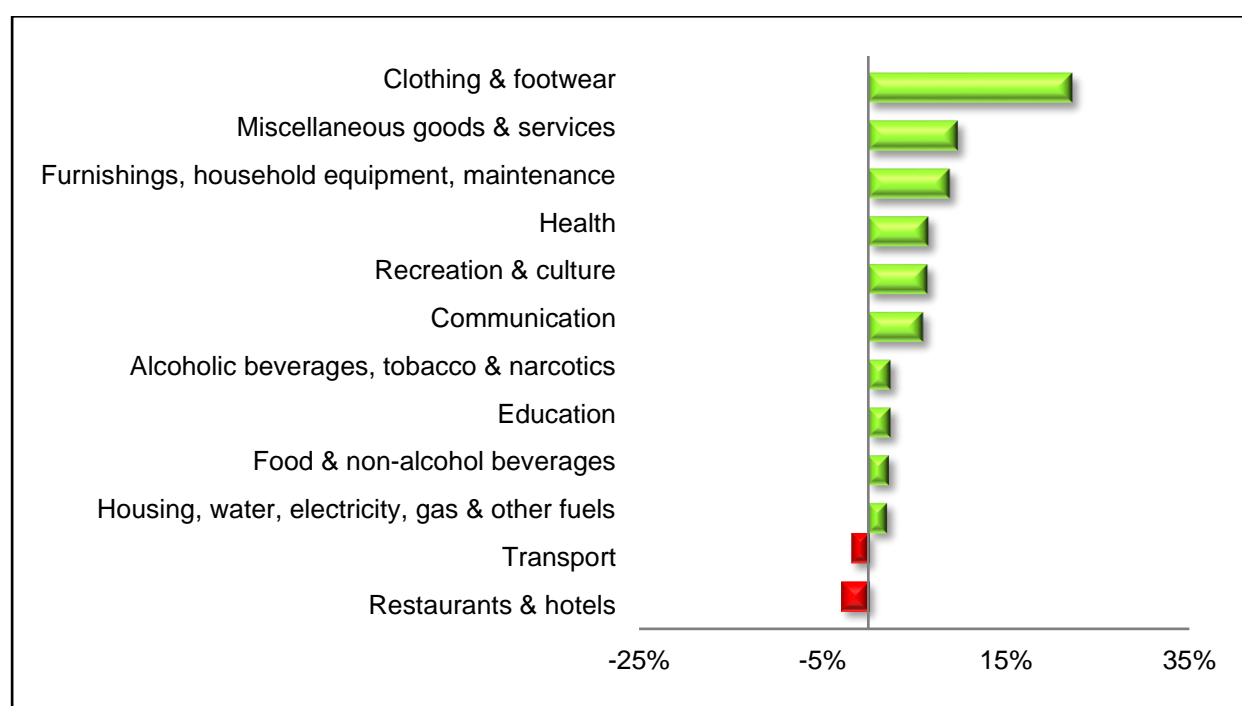
2.4.2 The South African fashion industry

The Republic of South Africa (RSA) is the largest country in Southern Africa, stretching along the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans (Alexandre-Leclair *et al.*, 2019:86). According to a report published by the Fibre Processing and Manufacturing Sector Education and Training Authority (FP&M SETA, 2014:2), South Africa’s fashion industry is diverse and mature, consisting of both low-cost, mass-produced basics and higher-end, value-added fashion and tailored garments made from specialised textiles (Panther, 2015:57). Indeed, fashion is a pervasive industry in South Africa, and the emergence of South African fashion organisations and designers has continued to accelerate in recent years (Roussos, 2018). According to Rusty Beukes, Fashion Director at GQ Magazine, the new generation of creatives and designers in South Africa’s fashion business are redefining the country’s design environment by creating designs that are frequently described as contemporary and unique, reviving the industry (Roussos, 2018). Over the last decade, emerging young South African designers have established successful careers on an international scale. David Tlale, an award-winning designer, is well known in South Africa for his exquisite craftsmanship and opulent couture (Collison, 2017). Additionally, other South African fashion labels, such as Loxion Kulca, Stoned Cherrie, and Sun Goddess, have gained

international recognition (Kimani, 2016). Moreover, approximately 90.0% of the employees of this industry in South Africa is women, indicating high potential for equitable and inclusive growth from this industry. This industry is crucial for the economic and social emancipation of formerly disadvantaged segments of the population and has been prioritised by national government policy interventions. Therefore, it is critical that attention be directed to increasing employment numbers in the industry (Panther, 2015:57), particularly in the retail and wholesale segment, as this industry employs the majority of formal workers in the country (Teuteberg, 2020:14).

In general, South Africa's fashion organisations is regarded as one of the fastest expanding industries in the country (Lu, 2018; Statista, 2021). The apparel market in South Africa is experiencing sustained growth (PwC, 2012:27), with household consumption expenditure increasing at an annualised rate of 4.7% in the first quarter of 2021 (January to March), led by clothing and footwear, which increased at an annualised rate of 22.2% and contributed 1.0% to South Africa's annualised GDP (gross domestic product) growth rate of 4.6% (Statista, 2021; Stats SA, 2021:8).

Figure 2-2: Consumer spending in the first quarter of 2021 in South Africa



Source: Adapted from Stats SA (2021).

2.4.3 The South African fashion retail industry

According to Lexico by Oxford (2020), a retailer is an individual or organisation that sells items to the general public in smaller amounts for consumption rather than resale. Thus, the retail industry is made up of all the retailers who offer items to consumers for consumption (Farfan, 2018). South

Africa's retail industry is the largest and most developed in sub-Saharan Africa, ranking 20th internationally (Mwamba & Qutieshat, 2021:1567; University of Pretoria, 2016:50). Locally, the retail industry in South Africa is divided into seven retail clusters, namely, (i) general dealers, (ii) food, beverages and tobacco in specialised stores, (iii) pharmaceuticals and medical goods, cosmetics and toiletries, (iv) textiles, clothing, footwear and leather goods, (v) household furniture, appliances and equipment, (vi) hardware, paint and glass, and (vii) all other retailers (Stats SA, 2021:2).

The South African retail market is dominated by large retailers, including Massmart, Pick n Pay, Shoprite, Spar, and Woolworths (Teuteberg, 2020:14). According to the Gauteng Province Quarterly Bulletin (2012:4), retail merchants in South Africa utilise a variety of retail formats, including exclusive boutiques, ordinary stores, retail chains, retail or wholesale outlets, and specialised stores. E-commerce platforms are becoming more prominent in South Africa, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Mwamba & Qutieshat, 2021:1567; Teuteberg, 2020:8).

Despite the growth of internet commerce, a recent study done by market research firm Nielsen South Africa found that 64.0% of South African consumers still prefer to shop in a physical store (as cited by Shange, 2020). Regardless of consumer attitude, Nielsen (2017) reports that the South African market is neither bricks nor clicks, but rather a bricks-and-clicks environment that seamlessly blends offline and online features to provide stakeholders with the best possible experience (Jao, 2015).

Overall, the retail industry in South Africa is critical to the country's economic growth (Gauteng Province Quarterly Bulletin, 2012:4; South African Market Insights, 2017). The retail industry in South Africa provides 15.0% to the country's GDP (Toyana, 2021). While retail trade sales in South Africa declined by 0.8% year on year in July 2021, retail trade sales climbed by 8.4% in the three months ended July 2021 compared to July 2020. Retailers of textiles, apparel, footwear, and leather items are a significant factor in the 8.4% increase (Stats SA, 2021:2).

Ackermans, the first clothing retailer in South Africa, started in 1916 (Maydon, 2017), followed by OK Bazaars in 1927 (SA History, 2015). Since then, the market has expanded substantially, both economically and in terms of infrastructure (Flanders Investments & Trade, 2016:5). Economically, many South Africans have risen out of poverty and into the middle class, the country's gross domestic product (GDP) has nearly doubled, and access to basic services has increased significantly (Dobbs *et al.*, 2015). From an infrastructure standpoint, the retail business has benefited considerably from expanded distribution prospects throughout the country's urban and rural areas (Gauteng Province Quarterly Bulletin, 2012:4). The post-apartheid era saw

tremendous urbanisation, which resulted in a surge in mall building (Brand South Africa, 2014). South Africa currently has approximately 2000 malls, totalling 23 million square metres, ranking sixth in the world (University of Pretoria, 2016:50).

The South African fashion retail industry is unique, in that only a few fashion retail firms control and run a diverse range of brands (Flanders Investments & Trade, 2016:12). Pepkor Holdings Limited, Woolworths Holdings Limited, Mr Price Group, The Foschini Group, and Truworths International Limited are South Africa's dominant players in the listed clothing retailer space (Listcorp, 2022). Pepkor's principal operating subsidiaries in South Africa, for example, are Ackermans, Pep, and Pepkor Speciality. The retail enterprises that comprise the Pepkor Specialty division each cater to a distinct segment of the market. These firms include Code, Dunns, Refinery, Shoe City, S.P.C.C., and Tekkie Town (Pepkor Holdings Limited, n.d.). Mr Price Group is responsible for the management and operation of Miladys, Mr Price, Mr Price Sport, and Power Fashion (Mr Price Group Limited, 2021). TFG's (The Foschini Group's) fashion retail brands include American Swiss, Archive, Donna, Exact, Fabiani, Foschini, Galaxy & Co, G-Star RAW, hi, Jet, Markham, Relay Jeans, RFO (Renegade Fashion Outlet), Sneaker Factory, SODA Bloc, Sport Scene, Sterns, The Fix, and Totalsports (The Foschini Group Limited, n.d.). Truworths has the following exclusively owned or licence-operated brands in its stable, namely Daniel Hechter, Ginger Mary, Hey Betty, Identity, Inwear, LTD, Truworths, Truworths Man, Uzzi, Earthaddict, Earthchild, Naartjie, Office London, Context, and specialist chain YDE (Truworths international, 2020:4).

Furthermore, South Africa interacts on a worldwide scale in the fashion business, which is led by Trade Call Investments Apparel (TCI). TCI supplies products to well-known retailers such as Queenspark, Truworths, and Woolworths. TCI not only supplies merchandise to local retailers, but also manages worldwide operations by selling and shipping South African products to overseas retailers (TCI, 2017).

More recently, as international fashion brands continue to enter the South African market (Booyesen, 2015; Mwamba & Qutieshat, 2021:1567; Rogerson, 2006:9), the local fashion industry has been experiencing intense competition (Chen & Xu, 2017:1; Mwamba & Qutieshat, 2021:1567; Randhawa & Saluja, 2017:109; Yao, 2018). South Africa is viewed as the gateway for Africa, in which potential for-profit growth in the fashion market exists. Aca Joe, Gucci, H&M, Forever 21, Polo, Tommy Hilfiger, Topshop, and Zara are examples of international fashion brands that have established a presence in South Africa (Luxurysociety, 2011; Spinks, 2014) and they are thriving (Flanders Investment and Trade 2016:14).

Global brands have surpassed local companies in South Africa, owing to the fact that global businesses do not employ a uniform branding and marketing approach; rather, they tailor their strategy to the country in order to efficiently attract consumers (Erguncu *et al.*, 2013:65; Ngwenya, 2020:2). To secure their continuous existence, it is critical for independent fashion marketers and retailers to strengthen their competitive position, which is primarily reliant on successful marketing tactics for differentiation and market segmentation (De Klerk, 2020; PRNewswire, 2015).

2.4.4 The changing marketing environment

Historically, a fashion brand's basic marketing materials would often include a brochure, a look-book or a media or press pack (Lea-Greenwood, 2013:182; Moore, 2021:10). Nowadays, market-oriented organisations cannot disregard the exogenous pressure of rapid innovation and technological change (Schultz 2016:281). The adoption of emerging technologies is critical in remaining competitive in the industry (Arnerić *et al.*, 2015:379; Euler Hermes Economic Research, 2018:1; Ng'ang'a, 2015:40). Due to the transition to this new industrial paradigm, the way retailers and consumers communicate with each other have shifted (Baghi & Gabrielli, 2016:385; Chalmers *et al.*, 2019:517; Donatiello *et al.*, 2018:17).

Over many years, organisations in the retail industry developed different strategies in response to the dynamic retail environment (Miotto & Parente, 2015:242). Numerous large retailers in the apparel industry, as well as smaller independent merchants, have established mobile, web, and social media presences to engage with their customers (Flanders Investments & Trade, 2016:6). Today, retailers and marketers are continuously on the lookout for creative ways to capture the attention of prospective customers (Alles *et al.*, 2020:234; Kuthuru & Rishi, 2021:190; Melinda & Suharko, 2021:1). In fulfilling this challenge, gamification has been dubbed a contemporary megatrend alongside artificial intelligence, big data, and crowdsourcing (Alles *et al.*, 2020:234).

2.4.5 Growing importance of gamification in the fashion retail industry

Fashion has mostly morphed into a multimedia entertainment sector, where brand recognition and buzz rule the day. As a result, the silent message of a well-fitting garment is no longer sufficient (Sanders, 2019 as cited by Myyrä, 2020:3). The level of rivalry in the fashion retail environment has expanded dramatically, compelling marketers to employ innovative and novel strategies for improving brand visibility and enticing consumers (Chen & Xu, 2017:1; Nagaraj, 2020:161; Ordre, n.d.; Randhawa & Saluja, 2017:109; Yao, 2018). Bauer *et al.* (2020:584) assert that games in retail enhance critical marketing outcomes by focusing on long-term relationship management objectives.

Currently, video games are considered the fastest-growing segment of the leisure market (Chatfield, 2011) and have already become among the most pervasive symbols of the contemporary popular culture (Takahashi, 2018). To a large extent, video games' uprising meaningfulness can be linked to the design aspect of real-time competition (i.e., multiplayer game modes), which boosts players' motivation and enjoyment (Ducheneaut *et al.*, 2012; Kim & Shute, 2015:351). Gamification is a coined term that refers to the fusion of game aspects and non-game activities (Insley & Nunan, 2013:341).

Gamification is regarded a technology with a potentially high impact across a variety of industries, such as consumer goods, healthcare, media, and retail (Fels & Seaborn, 2015:20; Hamari & Koivisto, 2019:204). Organisations can leverage the gamification channel to digitally promote their brand, goods, or services to a wider audience and increase their competitive edge (De Ruyter *et al.*, 2016:26; Häubl *et al.*, 2017:9). In the diversified digital service landscape, gamification triggers enjoyment and thus has business-relevant outcomes (Bauer *et al.*, 2020:584). Gamification is proven to be effective in changing consumer behaviour through the use of reinforcement and emotion mechanisms, which are mainly explored in psychology. While there are several types of reinforcement, it can include extrinsic and intrinsic rewards (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2015:413).

The popularity of gamification has soared in recent years, as evidenced by the growing number of gamified applications (see section 2.3.1), and Deterding and Nacke (2017:452) stated that gamification as a research field has recently gained prominence with no sign of slowing growth, rapidly evolving from a novel research topic into a thriving multidisciplinary field. As a result, gamification is no longer a passing trend, but a significant trend that organisations should consider when interacting with internal and external customers, as it can generate new revenue streams through differentiated business models (Larivière *et al.*, 2017:244; Storbacka *et al.*, 2016:3015). In the broader context of retail marketing, game participation is frequently rewarded with monetary benefits. This popular approach reflects marketers' conviction that combining games with monetary participation incentives delivers the intended business objective more successfully than either technique alone (Bauer *et al.*, 2020:564). Alles *et al.* (2020:238) identified three recurring themes that motivate retail organisations to adopt gamification as a strategic option.

- **To generate customer insights**

Marketing is about identifying and meeting consumers' needs (Pandowo *et al.*, 2020:1205), and gamified systems enable organisations not only to study consumer needs in greater depth but also to satisfy them in a differentiated manner (Alles *et al.*, 2020:238; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019:579; Eisingerich *et al.*, 2019:213; García-Madariaga *et al.*, 2020:10).

- **To enhance customer experience**

Gamification leverages game design elements that improve consumer experiences (Abou-Shouk & Soliman, 2021:8; Aebli, 2019:13; Hamari & Huotari, 2012:19).

- **To achieve marketing key performance indicator (KPI) targets**

As with any other department within an organisation, the marketing department has its own set of goals and objectives to be achieved such as building brand awareness, enhancing consumer engagement, generating qualified leads and their respective KPI targets. If an objective relates to creating engagement, increasing motivation, driving loyalty, promoting positive word-of-mouth, increasing satisfaction or capturing the top of mind within a consumer, disruptive technologies such as gamification is resorted to (Alles *et al.*, 2020:238; Chen & Hsu, 2018:130; Choi & Hwang, 2020:371; Fels & Seaborn, 2015:20; Hamari *et al.*, 2017a:220; Hamari *et al.*, 2017b:177; Hanner *et al.*, 2017:8; Rajanen & Rajanen, 2017:89).

The proliferation of smartphones has prompted marketers to embrace mobile technologies as a means of interacting with consumers (Alles *et al.*, 2020:235). With the advent of mobile phone technology, hundreds, if not thousands, of software apps are now widely accessible (Chen *et al.*, 2018:1427), and gamification has leveraged the popularity of mobile phone technology (Alles *et al.*, 2020:235). Hermès, a French luxury fashion house, has implemented a mobile gamification design in the form of a smartphone application called H-pitchhh, in which players can immerse themselves in the brand's equestrian history by electronically tossing horseshoes by swiping upward on their phones. Players can unlock exclusive content as they accumulate points. Additionally, to create an immersive brick-and-mortar experience, Yves Saint Laurent strategically placed Dance Dance Revolution at the entrance to their Times Square store in New York, while Chanel haute couture uses arcade games in their Coco Game Center pop-up shops, where customers can win product samples (Billiot & Forbes, 2021:132).

2.5 CONCLUSION

One of the study's intended goals was to disseminate knowledge regarding notions related to gamification marketing in the South African fashion retail context. Indeed, one aim of this study is to alleviate part of the uncertainty surrounding gamification, accordingly allowing fashion retailers to revise their marketing activities that could affect their sustainability in the South African market. This chapter, therefore, investigated the conceptual and managerial opportunity for gamification as an instrument for achieving marketing-related objectives, specifically relating to fashion. In this chapter, the novelty of gamification has necessitated a definitional effort to confine the phenomena within the current body of knowledge. This chapter explored a variety of factors that contribute to the adoption of gamification in marketing. However, despite high predictions, its growth has been hampered by the aforementioned hurdles. A conclusion can be drawn from the

literature review that gamification is an important, rising trend for the coming years. The examined literature suggests that more research into the potential of gamification interfaces in fashion retail is warranted. Future research could focus on the use of gamified systems or services as a relationship marketing approach (Hamari & Huotari, 2012:20). Indeed, despite the growing adoption of gamification by organisations, little study has been conducted on the influence of gamification as a relationship marketing approach on consumer behaviour. The next chapter highlights the value of gamification when used in conjunction with relationship marketing.

CHAPTER 3: RELATIONSHIP MARKETING

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the domain of relationship marketing and presents a conceptual framework for gamification within the current context to consolidate the literature review findings. This chapter is organised into five sections. The opening section illustrates how relationship marketing has evolved and proliferated in research and practice and continues to define the relationship marketing concept. The next section addresses the application of gamification as a relationship marketing approach in the South African fashion retail industry and provides actionable guidance on how to leverage this approach in today's relationship marketing environment. Thereafter, this chapter provides deeper insights into the relevant relationship marketing constructs used in this study, namely, trust, satisfaction, commitment, and customer loyalty. As each of these constructs plays a significant role in the building of customer-retailer relationships, various aspects pertaining to each are discussed. Finally, key literature review findings have been organised in a theoretically grounded conceptual framework of gamification marketing related to managing customer-retailer relationships in technology-mediated relational exchanges that are further investigated in the empirical part of this study. At its conclusion, final comments are proffered.

3.2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP MARKETING CONCEPT

In order to survive in today's dynamic and competitive marketplace, more and more organisations are capitalising on strong customer-organisational relationships to achieve customer loyalty (Chen *et al.*, 2015:172; Muhammad & Shahzia, 2021; Palmatier & Steinhoff, 2019:21; Raza & Rehman, 2012:5085). Addressing such an underlying implicit goal, relationship marketing is a way for brands to develop and maintain strong relations with customers (Berry, 1983:25; Gummerus *et al.*, 2017:1; Süphan, 2015:6). This section provides a review of the various relationship marketing notions extracted from previous research studies in which the emergence of relationship marketing and the relationship marketing definition are studied.

3.2.1 Emergence of relationship marketing

Over the last few decades, relationship marketing practices have had a significant impact on the marketing discipline, with the most notable influence being the paradigm shift that organisations have undergone from transaction-based interactions to relationship building (Grönroos, 1994:14; Sun, 2017:47). This shift was driven mainly by the growing belief that relationship marketing's dynamic and long-term customer relationship perspective is significantly more profitable than the transactional marketing orientation (otherwise known as conventional or traditional marketing)

that follows a static and short-term action-based persuasive approach primarily concerned with isolated transactions (Auruškevičienė *et al.*, 2007:83; Biswas, 2014:11; Brito, 2011:70; Egan, 2011:75; Frow & Payne, 2013:44; Grabowska & Šonková, 2015:197; Hollensen, 2015:12). According to Süphan (2015:5), relationship marketing then emerged as an invaluable approach to creating value for both the organisation and the customer as well as strengthening customer relationships.

Although many authors assert that the focus has shifted from transactional marketing to relationship marketing, relationship marketing should not be viewed as a substitute for transactional marketing strategies but as a complementary – and more integrative – perspective on marketing and the marketing management process (Grabowska & Šonková, 2015:206; Grönroos, 2007:252; Hollensen & Opresnik, 2015:20; Oromendía *et al.*, 2015:3). For the purpose of this study, relationship marketing will serve as the primary marketing focus and thus will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Based on the above understanding of the emergence of relationship marketing, the following section defines relationship marketing in order to understand what is meant by the term.

3.2.2 Relationship marketing defined

The term “relationship marketing” was first coined by professor Leonard Berry (1983:25) in a service marketing conference organised by the American Marketing Association (Gupta & Sahu, 2012:57; Johns & Khojastehpour, 2015:158; Parvatiyar *et al.*, 2012:7) where he used it to depict marketing efforts aimed at “attracting, maintaining and – in multiservice organisations - enhancing customer relationships”. Over the years, the conceptualisation of relationship marketing has evolved substantially to propose more elaborate and comprehensive definitions (Agarwal & Malhotra, 2021:5; Grönroos, 1994:9; Grönroos, 1997:407; Hunt & Morgan, 1994:22; Palmatier, 2008:4; Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2000:9; Parvatiyar *et al.*, 2015:123; Porter, 1993:14).

Although previous definitions differ to some degree, most of them point to a few salient characteristics. Agariya and Singh (2011:228) reviewed 72 definitions of relationship marketing advanced between 1983 and 2010 and discovered some characteristics to be recurring in most definitions of relationship marketing, including acquisition, a long-term orientation, profitability enhancement, retention and a win-win situation for all stakeholders of the organisation. Agariya and Singh (2011:207) also illustrated that the process dimension is a critical component of the most frequently cited definitions of relationship marketing. Indeed, according to Parvatiyar *et al.* (2015:122), a significant aspect of the definitions by most authors is their recognition of the process aspects of relationship development and maintenance.

Based on this central proposition, Hütten *et al.* (2018:42) analysed selected definitions of relationship marketing that explicitly embraced this process view and hence conceptualised relationship marketing as the dynamic process by which an organisation acquires, develops, enhances, and, if necessary, terminates customer relationships that generate value for all partners by performing activities that aim to build mutual trust and achieve a set of specified goals. These relationships are bolstered by an organisation's relationships with its other stakeholders. Also, through elaborative content analyses, Agarwal and Malhotra (2021:5) and Parvatiyar *et al.* (2015:123) have each proposed a definition of relationship marketing, which integrates various definitions' salient characteristics and created a more comprehensive approach to relationship marketing.

Parvatiyar *et al.* (2015:123) define relationship marketing as "the ongoing process of engaging in collaborative activities and programs with immediate and end-user customers to create or enhance mutual economic, social and psychological value, profitably"; whereas Agarwal and Malhotra (2021:5) defined relationship marketing as the process of identifying, developing, maintaining, and if necessary, terminating relational exchanges, including purchase and non-purchase-related exchanges, with customers as resource integration in a networked environment, with the purpose of mutual value co-creation and enhancing organisational performance.

Agarwal and Malhotra's (2021:5) view of relationship marketing is integral to this research as this definition is holistic in nature which puts emphasis on the salient characteristics of relationship marketing conceptualisation, including a mutually beneficial relationship (Agariya & Singh, 2011:207). That is, this definition is predicated on value co-creation, which is central to the service-dominant (S-D) logic paradigm (Lusch & Vargo, 2010:173) that is arguably the most relevant development in contemporary marketing thought (Brozovic *et al.*, 2021:563). According to the S-D logic and anchored in Agarwal and Malhotra's (2021:5) definition, customers co-create value through the integration of organisation-provided resources with other resources (Akaka *et al.*, 2008:148). The focus of resource integration then rests on the customers as they engage in bundles of activities that generate value directly or indirectly through subsequent consumption or use (Hibbert *et al.*, 2012:248).

While the relationship marketing concept has indeed evolved over time, the importance of a successful relationship marketing strategy cannot be disputed. This is particularly true for any organisation attempting to navigate the increasingly competitive global marketplace (Affran *et al.*, 2019:800; Agariya & Singh, 2011:204; Yen *et al.*, 2015:172). As a result, the following section establishes appropriate relationship marketing solutions that could potentially safeguard the operational functions of South African fashion retailers.

3.3 RELATIONSHIP MARKETING THROUGH GAMIFICATION IN THE FASHION RETAIL INDUSTRY

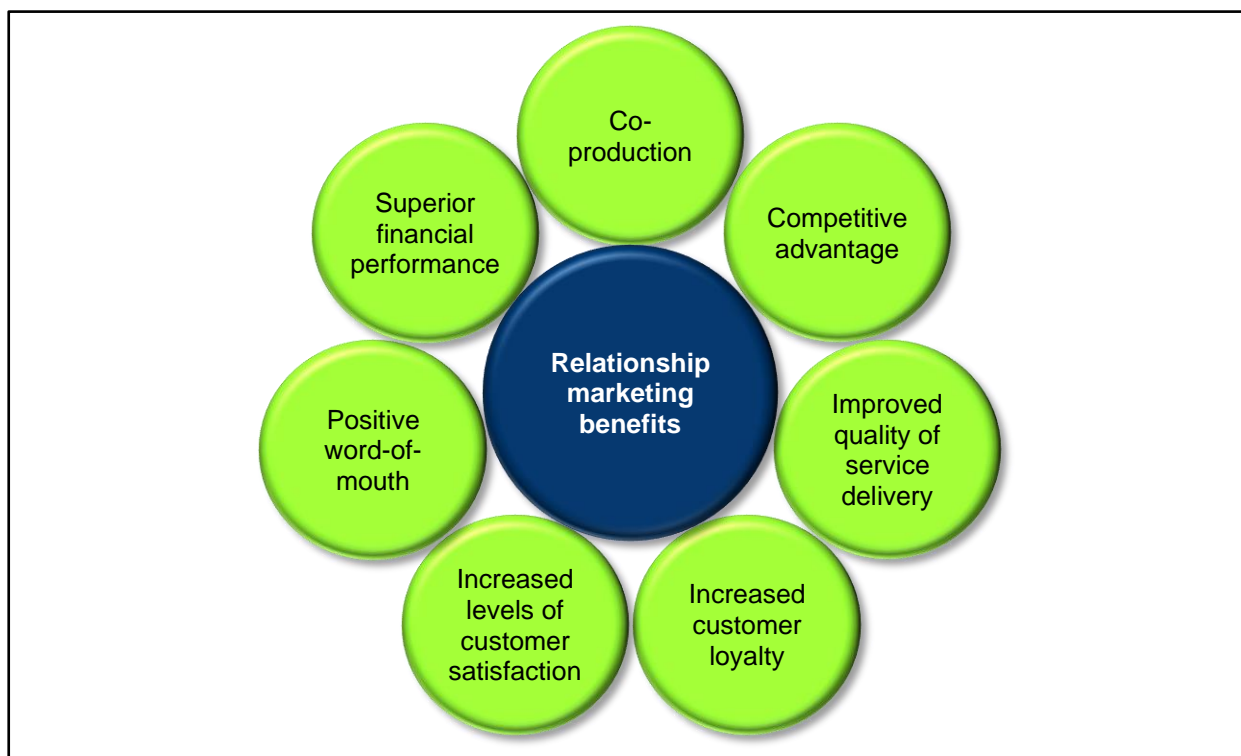
Retail organisations play a large role in the economy of a country. The South African fashion industry, however, is facing a myriad of challenges on the retail front, as it is under intense competitive pressure to systematically produce quality standards, enhance customer satisfaction and generate positive bottom-line results (Madhani, 2020:25) all the while a sub-duded economic environment has constrained South African consumers' disposable income and shifted their needs (Euromonitor, 2016; Palmatier & Steinhoff, 2021:115; Süphan, 2015:1).

This challenging environment necessitates adapting approaches (Süphan, 2015:2). Mwamba and Qutieshat (2021:1568) assert that sub-Saharan retail merchants and consumers, in particular, are promising for retail development strategies and have the opportunity to leverage the available business platforms. As stated by Süphan (2015:3), strong marketing assets can overcome adversity and create competitive advantages and growth for organisations. More specifically, relationship marketing provides retailers with a sustainable competitive advantage, as the intangible bonds that form during relational exchanges are difficult for competitors to emulate (De Wulf & Odekerken-Schröder, 2003:106).

Fashion retailers are recognising the importance of developing strong relationships with customers (Beneke *et al.*, 2015:212; Biswas, 2014:30; De Cannière *et al.*, 2010:87) for retail success (Palmatier & Steinhoff, 2019:21) as relationship marketing is increasingly evident in retail, with retailers aiming to capitalise on the numerous advantages associated with building long-term customer relationships (Ahmed *et al.*, 2013:171; Jones *et al.*, 2015:188; Wong & Sohal, 2006:244). That is, effective relationship marketing strategies hold various benefits that can contribute to a retailer's overall success (Bitner *et al.*, 2012:146; Chen, 2015:114; Khan, 2012:250). Relationship marketing can be linked to benefits as shown in Figure 3-1.

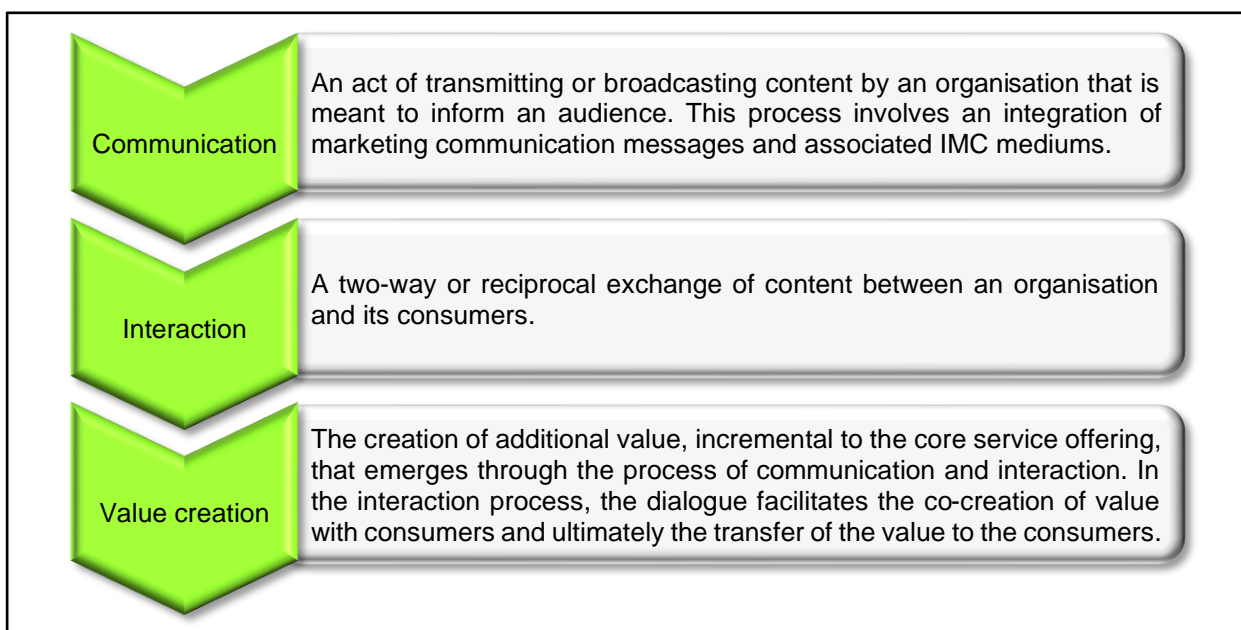
As such, those retailers with strong customer-relationship strategies find themselves in a promising position to thrive (Palmatier & Steinhoff, 2021:115). In this regard, gamification's synergy potential with relationship marketing is significant (Bruce *et al.*, 2021:49). If effectively used, communal, parasocial, personalised, and seamless customer relationships may result (Adams *et al.*, 2020; Demaitre, 2020; Isaac *et al.*, 2020; Palmatier & Steinhoff, 2021:115; Valinsky, 2020). According to Biswas (2014:18), these outcomes are met by a strategic approach that directs marketing research and practice towards the different stages of the relationship marketing process. Grönroos (2004:100) framed the relationship marketing process as composed of three linear stages: communication, interaction, and value creation. Refer to Figure 3-2 for a graphical explanation of these three stages of the relationship marketing process.

Figure 3-1: Relationship marketing benefits



Source: Adapted from Agariya and Singh (2011:228), Agolla *et al.* (2018:157), Aldaihani and Ali (2018:43), Alshurideh (2016:385), Auh *et al.* (2014:48), Bitner *et al.* (2012:146), Boshoff *et al.* (2015:14), Bulla *et al.* (2013:233), Del Río-Lanza *et al.* (2013:55), Egan (2011:75), Gupta and Sahu (2012:63), Hanaysha (2018:4), Kumar (2014:1047), McColl-Kennedy *et al.* (2011:297), Osborne and Strokosch (2013:42), Raza and Rehman (2012:5085), and Yen *et al.* (2015:184).

Figure 3-2: Relationship marketing process



Source: Adapted from Grönroos (2004:102).

In the current context, value-co-creation materialises when retailers and customers jointly and concurrently realise goals that hinge on the alignment between customers' service expectations and their motivations. In support of value co-creation activities, Khusainova *et al.* (2021) concluded that gamification marketing can contribute to value co-creation due to gamification's user-centric approach which facilitates an exchange of information and promotes a collaborative participation of customers (Dale, 2014:85; Guoyan *et al.*, 2021; Kappen *et al.*, 2020; Khusainova *et al.*, 2021). Although gamification design is transmedial in nature and can take many forms (Juul, 2005:7), technology integration is a critical component of value co-creation in the digital age (Barile *et al.*, 2021). That is, according to Trivedi (2019:107), in order to co-create value and build those meaningful and strong relationships with customers, retailers must participate effectively within a technologically-infused ecosystem to facilitate positive relational outcomes.

Gamification enables retailers to leverage this infused technology environment to build relationships by means of web-based and mobile-based applications (Juul, 2005:7; Khaled *et al.*, 2011:11). According to Arli *et al.* (2018:374) and Heppelmann and Porter (2015:10), the mobile channel is especially well-suited for implementing gamification marketing because mobile devices provide access to mobile applications. A gamification mobile-based application's read-write-execute-concurrency capabilities enable symbiotic interaction in a human-like fashion and in real-time. If managed carefully, these apps will strengthen existing loyal relationships with customers while also generating new customer relationships (Chen *et al.*, 2014:1135).

This study argues that clothing customers' are more likely to reciprocate fashion retailers' relationship-building efforts if they have relationship intentions (that is, they want a relationship with the fashion retailer). This introduces the next section of this review.

3.4 DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIONSHIP INTENTIONS

Determining customers' relationship intentions is critical for retailers' relationship-building strategies to succeed (Mende *et al.*, 2013:126) since customers with relationship intentions are inherently motivated to respond to and reciprocate organisations' relationship marketing tactics, facilitating customer retention and loyalty (Bitner *et al.*, 2013:129; Dagger *et al.*, 2013:616; Pelsler & Mostert, 2015:45). Building on the premise that people's intentions predict their actual behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein 1975:16; Faqih & Jaradat, 2015:46; Miladinovic & Xiang, 2016:14; Mou *et al.*, 2017:126), relationship intention, also referred to as relationship proneness (Bloemer *et al.*, 2003:233; De Wulf *et al.*, 2001:38; Parish & Holloway, 2010:61), customer motivation for relationship maintenance (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997:16), and relationship desire (Dagger *et al.*, 2013:615) can be defined as customers' conscious and planned desire to engage in a relationship with an organisation (De Wulf *et al.*, 2003:177; Lin, 2013:209; Raciti *et al.*, 2013:616).

A customer develops an intention to build a relationship with an organisation while buying a product or a service. Once the actual behaviour occurs, a customer has the option of continuing or discontinuing purchases. A customer may choose to remain either because they choose to develop a relationship or are forced to do so (e.g. due to a contractual obligation) (e.g. a contractual situation) (Bohling *et al.*, 2003:669).

Customers with relationship intentions attach importance to their organisational relationships, subsequently demonstrating involvement by voluntarily participating in activities associated with that organisation (Baker *et al.*, 2009:116; Capella & Kinard, 2006:365). Moreover, customers with relationship intentions develop emotional attachments to organisations and experience strong relational bonds with them as a result (Kumar *et al.*, 2003:670). These relational bonds are further strengthened by the numerous relational benefits that customers gain as a result of organisational relationships (Bitner *et al.*, 1998:101; Del Río-Lanza *et al.*, 2009:2293). Customers who express fear of losing their organisational relationship and the benefits derived from it thus exhibits relationship intentions. Establishing organisational relationships entails time and effort investment on the part of customers (De Wulf *et al.*, 2001:34; Liang & Wang, 2006:120). As a result of the time and effort they have invested, customers with relationship intentions have higher expectations of an organisation and its products and services. When their expectations are not realised, customers with relationship intentions are more inclined to provide feedback voluntarily to assist organisations in improving their service delivery (Kumar *et al.*, 2003:670; Liu & Mattila, 2015:213). Moreover, when customers' expectations are unmet, they can either terminate their organisational relationship or choose to cope with their unmet expectations by forgiving the organisation (Beverland *et al.*, 2009:438; Tojib & Tsarenko, 2011:381). Canter *et al.* (2012:59) and Kumar *et al.* (2003:670) claim that because customers with relationship intentions value their organisational relationship and expect the continuation of their organisation's relationship, they choose to forgive an organisation in order to restore the relationship rather than terminate it.

3.4.1 Factors influencing consumers' relationship intentions through gamification

Gamification entails using game design elements to effectuate behavioural change (Xi & Hamari, 2019:218). Using gamification applications to effect behavioural change requires an understanding of the factors that impact customers' decision to use these systems. Many buyers do not make their purchasing decision based on a single characteristic. Rather than that, they make their choice based on a variety of cues and benefits in order to meet their unique demands as well as personal aspirations and goals (Fung *et al.*, 2021:152). The primary mechanisms through which gamification influences usage intention are game design elements (García-Madariaga *et al.*, 2020:6). Engaging with such game elements manifests in motivational experiences that represent are a major driver of recurring gamified service use, which benefits

both the user and the service provider (Hammerschmidt *et al.*, 2018:1193; Hammerschmidt *et al.*, 2020:487). The degree to which a system is useful and easy to use is crucial for customer's decision of adoption of gamification (Abou-Shouk & Soliman, 2021:6; Al-Suqri, 2014:276; Choi & Hwang, 2020:373; Fikry *et al.*, 2017:343; Sanne & Wiese, 2018:8). Perceived enjoyment can be a strong determinant of intention to use the technology and ultimately the relationship intention in hedonic technologies (Bauer *et al.*, 2020:583). The link between perceived enjoyment and technology usage intention has been confirmed in several research contexts, including gamification marketing (Kalinic *et al.*, 2019:149; Liu *et al.*, 2018:209). Additionally, as gamification is a novel method in marketing research, this study strived to explore the moderating effect of the novelty-seeking characteristics and unobserved heterogeneous behaviours of consumers. Investigating curiosity could account for the fact that consumers are often intrigued to engage in novel situations (Fleming, 2014; Venkatraman, 1991 as cited by Bidler *et al.*, 2020:518). Moreover, Aebli (2019:12), Bidler *et al.* (2020:518), and Dong *et al.* (2019:213) emphasise the significant effect of social influence on users' technology adoption. These situational factors may drive customer engagement (Ng *et al.*, 2020:243) and can be used as customer loyalty intention measures (Noyan & Şimşek, 2014:1224).

To realise and maintain customer relationships and enhance the likelihood of long-term success, the marketing manager should focus their efforts to build upon attributes including trust, satisfaction, and commitment, which introduce the next section of this chapter.

3.5 QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

Customers tend to engage in activities that support the organisation if they have a quality relationship (Apriansyah & Sobari, 2021:219). Relationship quality is grounded in the relationship marketing theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994:22) and can be conceptualised as a composite or multidimensional construct that encompasses the different but related components of a relationship (Athanasopoulou *et al.*, 2015:745; Chung & Lin, 2013:6; Dant *et al.*, 2006:183) that reflects customers' overall perception (Agarwal *et al.*, 2014; Qin *et al.*, 2009:393) of the general nature or calibre of strength of the relational bonds between an organisation and its customers (Athanasopoulou *et al.*, 2015:745; Biswas, 2014:15; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002:234). Among the factors identified, trust and commitment are viewed as the two core elements of relationship quality (Buttle & Maklan, 2015:28; Fang *et al.*, 2016:61; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002:234; Morgan & Hunt, 1994:22; Mukherjee & Nath, 2007:1192; Ulaga & Eggert, 2006:314). The input of satisfaction as a complementary element ensures that the main dimensions are implemented (Griesiene & Pavlovaite, 2019:262). Thus, trust, satisfaction and commitment constitute the three major pillars in the establishment of customer-organisational relationship quality (Adame-Sánchez *et al.*, 2014:670; Djumahir *et al.*, 2013:54; Lo, 2012:92; Vesel & Zabkar, 2010:1336).

In line with previous studies conducted in a retail environment (De Cannière *et al.*, 2010; Qin *et al.*, 2009; Tripathi & Dave, 2013), this study considers relationship quality to be a higher-order, multi-dimensional construct, consisting of trust, satisfaction, and commitment. These dimensions are subsequently discussed in greater detail.

3.5.1 Trust

Brand trust can be defined as a positive feeling which is established based on customers' interactions with a brand (Aburoub *et al.*, 2014:78; Banerjee *et al.*, 2016:325; Chumpitaz *et al.*, 2019:12; Dash & Rajshekhar, 2013:3; Utami, 2015:640; Wende, 2019:16). This feeling can be rooted in either rationality or affection or both (Leckie *et al.*, 2012:74; Sonnenwald, 2002:86). Cognitive trust is based on customers' perceptions of the organisation's competence and reliability which is derived from their accumulated knowledge of past experiences (Punyatoya, 2019:81), whereas affective trust is based on the interpersonal bonds that develop between the customer and the organisation (Dowell *et al.*, 2015:120; Sonnenwald, 2002:86). Brand trust can therefore be conceptualised as having two distinct dimensions that reflect different perspectives from which a brand may be considered trustworthy.

The academic literature has identified several antecedents that positively affect trust, such as assurance, competence, customer perceived value, customer satisfaction, customers' socio-demographic data, hedonic benefits, intimacy, perceived corporate reputation, personality traits of good employees (caring, empathic, honest, integrity, reliable, responsible, righteous, scrupulous, virtue, etc.), professionalism, rule of law, service quality, and verbal and nonverbal communication (Alkaa'ida & Alrubaiee, 2011:114; Andreassen *et al.*, 2013:10; Aparicio *et al.*, 2021:10; Beal & De Araugo, 2013:361; Bouzdine-Chameeva *et al.*, 2013:310; Çerri, 2012:85; Chinomona & Sandada, 2013:440; Giovanis, 2016:580; Guo *et al.*, 2011:76; Leninkumar, 2017:452; Mohamad *et al.*, 2016:17; Nagy & Nevkrout, 2018:948).

According to Nevkrout and Nagy (2018:948), hedonic benefits are a particularly significant factor influencing brand trust. Organisations that deliver product or service categories with high hedonic benefits are able to better differentiate their offerings from competitors because hedonic value is rather difficult to compare across different brands (Groening *et al.*, 2014:108). In this regard, gamification can create value for organisations by enhancing trust (Basten, 2017:76; Chau *et al.*, 2020:35). More specifically, gamified elements have a positive influence on generating trust (Hall & Toke, 2018:32). Badges that users earn for conjointly solving a task foster a sense of shared ownership. Withal, enabling users to share or give virtual goods to others can further increase social interaction.

As interaction among users improves, a climate of trust is likely to develop (Basten, 2017:76; Çerri, 2012:85), which in turn may spill over to other perceptions. That is, an increase of trust contributes to social engagement (Kamiński *et al.*, 2019), the intention to use, the intention to repurchase (Aparicio *et al.*, 2021:10), and, ultimately, loyalty towards the brand (Djumahir *et al.*, 2013:54; Guo *et al.*, 2011:76; Hutchinson *et al.*, 2011:194). However, Su and Fan's (2011) study found that the relationship between trust and loyalty cannot be corroborated. Nevertheless, higher levels of trust and commitment generally result in improved customer retention rates, which in turn builds stronger and enduring relationships while also enhancing organisational profitability (Abiodun & Oyeniyi, 2010:112; Benkova *et al.*, 2017:209; Choi *et al.*, 2018:45; Roberts-Lombard *et al.*, 2012:85; Van Vuuren, 2018:65).

3.5.2 Satisfaction

Satisfaction results from an emotional state due to the customer's expectations that are shaped by inimitable personal experiences from the use of a product or a service which differ from customer to customer (Ali & Raza, 2017:561; Belanche *et al.*, 2013:80; Boshoff *et al.*, 2019:26; Chao *et al.*, 2011:1130; Ho *et al.*, 2011:74). Expectations therefore serve as a frame of reference for the customer to make a comparative judgment between what was expected and what was experienced during encounters (Oliver, 1980:460). Customer satisfaction typically comprises two components, namely, transaction-specific satisfaction, and overall or cumulative satisfaction (Kaura *et al.*, 2015:405; Oliver, 2010:10). Transaction-specific satisfaction refers to a customer's post-purchase evaluation of a single purchase (Kaura *et al.*, 2015:405; Oliver, 2010:10). Unlike transaction-specific satisfaction, overall or cumulative satisfaction is derived from the customers' evaluation of the total consumption experience associated with an organisational offering (Backman *et al.*, 2018:851; Bitner *et al.*, 2018:80; Guo *et al.*, 2011:72; Kamaruddin *et al.*, 2017:30; Kühn, 2016:7; Lekhawipat & Lin, 2016:445; Oliver, 2010:10; Trujillo & Vera, 2017:603). Researchers generally consider cumulative satisfaction to be a useful tool for mapping relationships that form between customers and organisations over time (De Matos *et al.*, 2013:534; Williams & Naumann, 2011:26; Zhao *et al.*, 2012:646).

Several factors influence the level of satisfaction marketers can attain. Above all, it is critical to understand the unique demands of each consumer in order to give gratifying products and services (Boshoff *et al.*, 2015:6; Hill, 2017:25). Additionally, customer care, perceived corporate reputation, perceived value, service quality, and sociodemographic characteristics all serve as significant predictors of customer satisfaction (Alkaa'ida & Alrubaiee, 2011:114; Chen *et al.*, 2016:3266; Giovanis, 2016:580; Guo *et al.*, 2011:76; Santouridis & Veraki, 2017:1129). User experience as a function of hedonic value has also been identified as a substantial predictor of satisfaction (Augusto *et al.*, 2021:12; Guoyan *et al.*, 2021). According to Guo *et al.* (2011:76),

playful user experience, in particular, impacts on satisfaction and gamification can elicit these experiences typical of games. According to Chen *et al.* (2018:1425), factors positively affecting users' satisfaction with a gamification application in order from strongest to weakest include the construct of gamification app value (social and enjoyment values), confirmation (an outcome from internal comparison that implies the realisation of expected benefits from use), perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, while regret (the influence of negative feelings caused by external cues) is negatively correlated with satisfaction. Regarding gamification's application value, if effectively implemented, gamification can have a substantially positive effect on need satisfaction of services users, especially through social-related (i.e., team/cooperation, social competition, and social network features), and achievement features (i.e., badges/medals/trophies, virtual currency/coins, points/score/experience points, status bar/progress, level, rankings/high score lists and tasks with increasing levels of difficulty), which is associated with enjoyment (Hamari & Xi, 2019:213; Hense *et al.*, 2017:378; Kim & Lee, 2015:8487). Withal, regret has a negative influence on user satisfaction and the most influential impact on users' intention to discontinue in the context of gamification apps (Chen *et al.*, 2018:1437). Moreover, the satisfaction of the user positively contributes to the brand performance through behavioural intention in favour of an organisation (Alsajjan, 2014:1093; Chen, 2012:203; Mackay *et al.*, 2015:47), reinforcing users' habits (Chen *et al.*, 2018:1436), the factor of recommending the application (Aguar-Castillo *et al.*, 2021; Guoyan *et al.*, 2021), and customer loyalty (Aghara *et al.*, 2017:62), particularly through the reduction of complaint intentions (Wu, 2013:173).

3.5.3 Commitment

Commitment is defined as a "desire to maintain a valued relationship" (Boateng & Narteh, 2016:130) and is manifested by continual investments in activities that are expected to sustain the relationship in the future. The concept of commitment comprises three sub-dimensions (Allen & Meyer, 1991:61; Andrésen & Roxenhall, 2012:88), namely normative, affective and continuance commitment. Normative commitment is a reflection of an individual's moral obligation to the organisation. Affective commitment is defined as the psychological bonds based on emotions that a customer has with the organisation. Continuance commitment is demonstrated whenever an organisation makes a genuine investment in the relationship between the client and the organisation (Wasti, 2002:526).

Relationship investment and management predict commitment (Dagger *et al.*, 2011:278; Giovanis, 2016:580), since perceived relationship investment (PRI) generates commitment velocity (CV) (the rate and direction of change in commitment) (Bayhan *et al.*, 2016:289). To increase investment size and thus customer commitment, organisations can emphasise core and relational service qualities (Di Mascio *et al.*, 2016:996), build brand trust (Agag & Elbeltagi,

2016:295; Hashim & Tan, 2015:149; Roberts-Lombard *et al.*, 2012:86), strengthen perceived corporate reputation (Chen *et al.*, 2016:3266; Dagger *et al.*, 2011:278), enhance customer satisfaction (Chen *et al.*, 2016:3267; Djumahir *et al.*, 2013:62), and provide confidence, social, special treatment, hedonic and, to a lesser extent, economic benefits (Akroun & Nagy, 2018:948; Dagger *et al.*, 2011:278; Di Mascio *et al.*, 2016:996; Giovanis, 2016:580). Concerning the effects of relationship commitment on its consequences, it is discovered that there are significant positive correlations between commitment and behavioural intention (Abbas *et al.*, 2014:217; Ishaque *et al.*, 2012:608; Van Vuuren, 2011:82), commitment and retention decision, commitment and loyalty, and there is a significant positive link between relationship commitment and intention to recommend. The greater the commitment, the more likely the customer is to spread word-of-mouth and provide recommendations (Akroun & Nagy, 2018:948; Chen *et al.*, 2015:681; Dagger *et al.*, 2011:278).

Since relationship quality represents the combined perceptions of trust, satisfaction and commitment within the relationship (Chen *et al.*, 2011:196; Nyaga & Whipple, 2011:356), this study regards relationship quality as a composite rather than a disaggregated construct. This study therefore considers assurance; competence; customer care; customer perceived value; customer satisfaction; customers' socio-demographic data; hedonic value; intimacy; perceived corporate reputation; perceived ease of use; perceived relationship investment and management; perceived usefulness; personality traits of good employees (caring, empathy, honesty, integrity, reliable, responsiveness, responsible, righteousness, scrupulosity, virtue, etc.), positive confirmation, professionalism, regret, rule of law, service quality, socio-demographic characteristics, special treatment benefits, and verbal and nonverbal communication to be vital determinants of relationship quality. Withal, according to Kuhn *et al.* (2016), customers' relationship intentions significantly predict their trust in, satisfaction with, and commitment to a particular fashion retailer. Relationship quality then has the potential to enhance engagement, user intention, retention decision, customer loyalty and word-of-mouth (Akroun & Nagy, 2018:948; Hajli, 2014:25; Ho *et al.*, 2011:84). This confirms the importance of brand relationship quality as a construct for assessing consumer-brand relationships.

A customer's decision to terminate or continue relational exchanges with a specific retailer is thus dependent on the relationship quality with the retailer. It is accordingly not surprising that research has established that relationship quality is strongly linked to retention and customer loyalty. However, given that retention is about the preservation, rather than the growth, of a relationship (Rai & Srivastava, 2014:14). The study focuses on customer loyalty, which is included in the following section.

3.6 RELATIONSHIP MARKETING IMPACT ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY

According to Kanthe *et al.* (2016:36), a loyal customer base is the bedrock upon which all organisations' relationship-building activities and goals are built. Customer loyalty is a broad phenomenon, and many academics and practitioners have debated on what customer loyalty really entails. Customer loyalty definitions can be broadly categorised into attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty (Wende, 2019:4). In order to avoid problems of low reliability using single-item loyalty measures (Pan *et al.*, 2012:157) and spurious loyalty (Bresolles *et al.*, 2020:8), customer loyalty will be considered as a behavioural aspect as well as an attitude structure (Itoo, 2020:204).

Customer loyalty therefore incorporates a customers' continuous purchase of a brand as well as their revisit/repurchase intention (i.e., behavioural loyalty) and their brand/firm-related perceptions and willingness to recommend the brand to salient others (i.e., attitudinal loyalty) (Chuan *et al.*, 2017:46; Fang *et al.*, 2016:145; King *et al.*, 2013:38; Rather, 2018:120; Rather & Sharma, 2016b:76; Rather & Sharma, 2017b:54). This conceptualisation is in line with Beck *et al.*'s (2015:804) definition of customer loyalty as a collection of attitudes aligned with a series of purchase behaviours that systematically favour one entity over competing entities. This study considers customer loyalty as a composite approach of the customer's purchase, recommendation or patronising and intention to repurchase, recommend or re-patronise a service or organisation and remain loyal to the organisation.

Understanding the antecedents of customer loyalty and the reasons for customer loyalty is the prerequisite for identifying the logic and techniques needed to achieve customer loyalty.

3.6.1 Determinants of customer loyalty

Relationship marketing practices, brand trust, satisfaction, commitment, greater perception of switching barriers (particularly economic switching barriers), high perceived service/product value, high perceived service/product quality, a positive corporate image, a positive brand image, a good service provider reputation, social pressure, structural bonding tactics, social bonding tactics, web design, product variation, security (privacy), information quality and customer service/care all show positive correlations with customer loyalty, while the perception of price has a negative correlation with customer loyalty. In

Table 3-1, the antecedents of loyalty together with the author(s) are arranged in an orderly manner from the most commonly cited to the less commonly cited.

Table 3-1: Summary of the antecedents of customer loyalty

Antecedents of trust	Authors
Brand trust	Akther and Hafez (2017), Alusen <i>et al.</i> (2018), Boonlertvanich (2019:292), Guo <i>et al.</i> (2011:76), Hutchinson <i>et al.</i> (2011:194), Djumahir <i>et al.</i> (2013:54), Jumaev <i>et al.</i> (2012:188), Listyawati <i>et al.</i> (2014:8), Martinez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2014:14)
High perceived product/service quality	Adeleke and Aminu (2012:217), Agyapong and Boohene (2011:235), Akther and Hafez (2017), Amha (2020:50), Giovanis (2018), Giovanis <i>et al.</i> (2014:242), Nguyen and Pham (2021:65-66), Rabach and Tarus (2013:485)
Customer satisfaction	Aghara <i>et al.</i> (2017:62), Akther and Hafez (2017), El-Adly and Eid (2016:226), Keshavarz and Jamshidi (2018:235-236), Khajehzadeh and Nyadzayo (2016:267), Rather and Sharma (2016:79-80), Rather and Sharma (2017:52)
Relationship marketing practices	Akhtar and Husnain (2015:7), Alusen <i>et al.</i> (2018), Nam <i>et al.</i> (2017:3559), Lestari and Ruswanti (2016:201), Yulisetiarni (2016:338)
Positive corporate image	Adeleke and Aminu (2012:217), Agyapong and Boohene (2011:235), Akther and Hafez (2017), Amha (2020:50)
Greater perception of switching barriers, particularly economic switching barriers	Bebber <i>et al.</i> (2018:3943), Chang <i>et al.</i> (2016:946), Evanschitzky <i>et al.</i> (2011:805)
High perceived product/service value	Akther and Hafez (2017), Bebbber <i>et al.</i> (2018:3943), Rabach and Tarus (2013:485)
Customer service/care	Adeleke and Aminu (2012:217), Dharmesti and Nugroho (2013:9)
Perception of price	Adeleke and Aminu (2012:217), Del Pobil <i>et al.</i> (2021)
Social bonding tactics	Bebber <i>et al.</i> (2018:3943), Evanschitzky <i>et al.</i> (2011:805)
Good service provider reputation	Bebber <i>et al.</i> (2018:3943)
Information quality	Dharmesti and Nugroho (2013:9)
Positive brand image	Nguyen and Pham (2021:65-66)
Product variation	Dharmesti and Nugroho (2013:9)
Security (privacy)	Dharmesti and Nugroho (2013:9)
Social pressure	Rabach and Tarus (2013:485)
Structural bonding tactics	Bebber <i>et al.</i> (2018:3943)
Web design	Dharmesti and Nugroho (2013:9)

Customer loyalty is primarily determined by characteristics that emerge from customers' evaluations and subsequent perceptions of the service, such as service quality and customer satisfaction, or those factors that fall into the category of relational outcomes of repeated service transactions like trust and commitment. Several others are broadly connected to the company's

position, such as corporate image and communication, or industry dynamics, such as switching barriers (Medha & Rai, 2013:151). According to the review, the primary antecedents of customer loyalty are brand trust, perceived product/service quality, customer satisfaction, relationship marketing practices, and a positive corporate image:

- Numerous studies have supported the notion that brand trust is a significant driver of brand loyalty since it establishes an exchange relationship between loyalty and trust that is highly valued (Akther & Hafez, 2017; Alusen *et al.*, 2018; Boonlertvanich, 2019:292; Jumaev *et al.*, 2012:188; Listyawati *et al.*, 2014:8; Martinez & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2014:14).
- According to Adeleke and Aminu (2012:217), corporate image and service quality respectively are most correlated with customer satisfaction and loyalty. Similarly, Medha and Rai (2013:150) discovered that service quality is found to be the most prominent among all factors that play a decisive role in customer loyalty formation. Diljit and Kiran (2011:109) found that service quality has an indirect influence on customer loyalty, with service value and customer satisfaction as mediating variables. Likewise, service quality plays an important role in the formation of customer emotions (Brooks *et al.*, 2013:201). Emotions, in turn, affect customer satisfaction and affective commitment (Brooks *et al.*, 2013:201; Giovanis *et al.*, 2014:242), which influences affective loyalty, e-trust (affective), and behavioural intentions (Brooks *et al.*, 2013:201).
- Earlier research has demonstrated the empirical support of a positive relationship between satisfaction and customer loyalty (Akther & Hafez, 2017; El-Adly & Eid, 2016:226; Keshavarz & Jamshidi, 2018:235; Khajehzadeh & Nyadzayo, 2016:267; Rather & Sharma, 2016a:79; Rather & Sharma, 2017b:52) with the strength of it varying across product categories and from customer to customer (Agyapong & Boohene, 2011:235; Ding *et al.*, 2011:48).
- Many studies have shown a positive association between relationship marketing practices and customer loyalty (Akhtar & Husnain, 2015:7; Alusen *et al.*, 2018; Nam *et al.*, 2017:3559; Lestari & Ruswanti, 2016:201; Yulisetiari, 2016:338); however, some relationship marketing practices have proven otherwise (Listyawati *et al.*, 2014:7).
- Rabach and Tarus (2013:485) demonstrated that corporate image has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between service value, service quality, customer satisfaction, social pressure, and customer loyalty. The findings of Alves *et al.*'s (2017:481) study revealed that corporate image in traditional retail is directly influenced by service quality, which in turn influences customer loyalty.

3.6.2 Advantages of customer loyalty

Loyal customers are one of a retailer's most valuable assets, because they provide a constant revenue stream, lower customer acquisition costs (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015:13; Beck *et al.*, 2015:790; Cant & Van Heerden, 2015:21; Coenen & Cui, 2016:54; Farazmand *et al.*, 2012:1; Li *et al.*, 2012:1; Pan *et al.*, 2012:150; Watson *et al.*, 2015:790), and word-of-mouth communications (e.g. a customer's referral to and endorsement of an organisation's products and services) (Anaza, 2014:253; Bayraktaroğlu *et al.*, 2018:865; Bianchi *et al.*, 2014:94; Lisita, 2018:115). Lovelock and Wirtz (2011:356) add that establishing strong bonds with customers provides organisations with a competitive advantage, since customers will not easily switch to competing offerings because the existing bond cannot be easily replicated. Consequently, gaining customer loyalty is an important strategic objective for retailers (Backhaus *et al.*, 2012:625; Bellini *et al.*, 2011:461).

There is therefore an opportunity to examine customer loyalty within a gamification marketing context. The next section serves as a first step towards the development of a framework to gain knowledge regarding loyal retail consumers.

3.7 A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF GAMIFICATION IN A RELATIONSHIP MARKETING CONTEXT

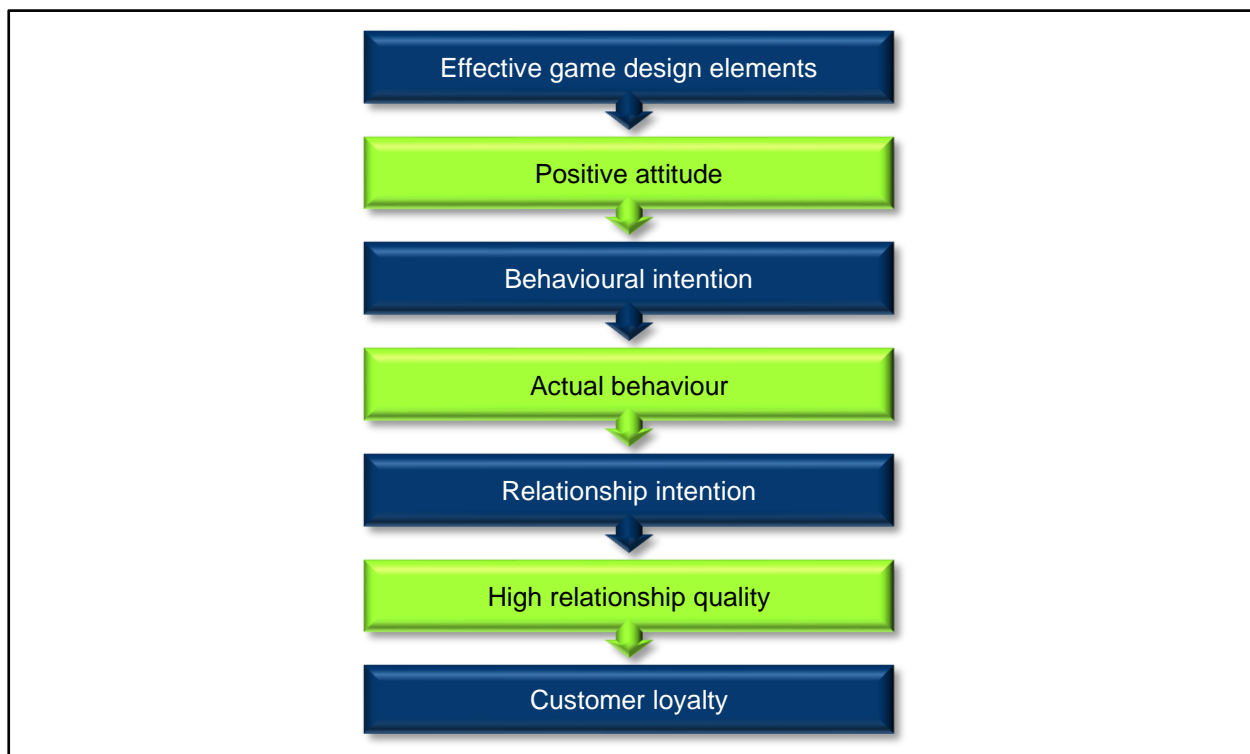
Some generalist qualitative research scholars regard the inclusion of a conceptual framework at the outset of the period of data collection and data analysis as the 'key part' of a research project (Collins & Stockton, 2018:8; Coughlan *et al.*, 2007:740; Maree, 2012:42; Merriam, 2009:70; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017:136; Tardy, 2010:123; Van der Waltd, 2020), since it serves as an organising and learning instrument (Huberman & Miles, 1994:20; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017:8; Van der Waltd, 2020), provides an 'interpretative approach to social reality', thereby aiding understanding (Jabareen, 2009:51), and provides a 'visual illustration' of key concepts and constructs and how these interconnect (Tracy, 2013:97). A conceptual framework, theoretical framework, and theory are terms that have blurred lines within qualitative methods literature (Ball & Kitchel, 2014:190; Huberman *et al.*, 2014:20; Maxwell, 2013:39; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:84; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017:5; Saunders *et al.* 2015:36). However, a conceptual framework will serve as the overriding term for this dissertation. For the purpose of this study, a conceptual framework can be defined as the product of consolidating key literature findings relevant to the research narratively and schematically, revealing the strategic literature direction for the research (Collins & Stockton, 2018:8; Green, 2014:36; Huberman & Miles, 1994:23; Jacard & Jacoby, 2010:54; Maree, 2012:220).

This section provides the conceptual framework within the context of gamification marketing based on a relational approach. The framework takes the form of a series of constructs and highlights how the constituent elements complement one another to enhance relationship-building initiatives between a retailer and customers collectively. Each component of the framework and its specified relationships are well established and grounded in the literature study.

3.7.1 Visual representation of the framework

An attempt to derive commonalities between the streams of thought was done. The secondary data gleaned from the literature review has been expressed as a series of constructs that have been arranged into a conceptual framework that suggests underlying mechanisms describing the relationship between the constructs.

Figure 3-3: Conceptual framework for gamification marketing from a relationship perspective



3.7.2 Structure of the model

The review of research streams from the extant literature resulted in the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework details the various relationships that exist between each construct relevant to the literature study. The first dimension of the framework is the application of game design elements across organisations in their respective relationship-building activities. Organisations should take a structured approach to game design elements in order to exploit its

value and use it effectively to build customer relationships. This study proposes that users who are using gamification may feel inclined to engage in relationship building strategies if users have a favourable attitude towards the application, which hinges on whether users perceive the gamification system as easy to use and enjoyable, whether the system facilitates socialisation, and whether users perceive the system as useful. The implications of game design elements which are the main thrust of gamification provide opportunities for the retailer to create and enhance relationship quality and motivate relationship orientation, thereby encouraging loyalty from customers through stronger ties.

3.8 CONCLUSION

In increasingly complex competitive environments, the opportunity to engage customers in a process of value co-creation is a highly challenging task for organisations. This chapter offered a fine-grained understanding of how gamification might be utilised to create, boost, and maintain users' engagement towards a co-creation platform. This chapter examined the concept of relationship marketing by providing an overview of the development of this concept and the importance of relationship marketing in these changing and challenging times for retailers. It also provided an explanation of the difference between relationship marketing and transactional marketing theories. The chapter continued to discuss the benefits of relationship marketing and also provided insight into the various characteristics, drivers and stages of the relationship marketing process. This chapter elucidated the significance of building and maintaining successful relationships with customers, especially in the current competitive retail market, as the development of relationships will give retailers a competitive advantage in these challenging times.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the methodology that underpins the research study to address the research problem and achieve the objectives. The methodological path of the dissertation is described and motivated – both from a theoretical and empirical perspective. The chapter commences with a discussion on the underlying philosophical orientations of research studies, followed by a description and justification of the philosophical stance taken by the researcher for this study. Hereafter, the various stages of the marketing research process are discussed. The identification of the research problem along with setting the various objectives is the first step in the process. Next follows a brief review of the research problem and a discussion of the primary and secondary objectives in order to provide a background for the selected methodologies, after which the overarching research design is introduced. Designing the data collection method is the third step, where secondary data sources are perused. The literature review process is described, followed by an explanation of the focus group method. Thereafter, the sampling strategy of the study is explained. The chapter proceeds to describe the target population of this study, the specification of the sampling method, and determining sample size. This is followed by an explanation of the steps of the data analysis process and, as the last part of the process, the development of the research report. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how trustworthiness and ethical considerations were ensured for this study and a methodological summary.

4.2 PHILOSOPHICAL ORIENTATION

Research is a process of systematic inquiry into a subject to solve problems and answer questions (Aspers & Corte, 2019:150; Bougie & Sekaran, 2020:1). A fundamental feature of inquiries, whether for addressing academic or organisational issues, is implicitly associated with a specific methodology (Cooper & Schindler, 2014:7; De Souza Bido & Pozzebon, 2019:366; Jaccard & Jacoby, 2020:27). Research methodology is a systematic process of solving a research problem (Bogdan *et al.*, 2016:3; Sahu, 2013:3). This process depends on some fundamental philosophical underpinnings about what establishes substantial study (Al-Ababneh, 2020:76; Stokes & Wall, 2014:88). To guide and assess appropriate logical research, it is imperative to comprehend what these underpinnings are to avoid issues of diverted directions of research and to employ appropriate procedures and techniques to complete a distinguished research study. This section will elaborate on the different philosophical underpinnings in which this research study is rooted. As such, the next subsection aims to describe the philosophical conception through philosophical exploration from the point of view of ontology, epistemology, and axiology.

4.2.1 The nature of research

The nature of scientific activity encompasses assumptions about the nature or essence of the social phenomena under investigation (ontology), methods for researching and inquiring into the nature of the social phenomena under investigation (epistemology), and value judgments and beliefs about the social phenomena under investigation (axiology) (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:3; Guba & Lincoln, 2011b:91; Yulianto, 2021:153). This set of assumptions identified above have direct implications for the researcher's methodological concerns, since the contrasting assumptions, in turn, suggest different research methods (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:6). To be able to establish the choices made throughout the research process, this section endeavours to situate the study with regard to its ontological, epistemological, and axiological considerations that lead to the philosophical stance taken and its influence upon theory building in this context. This analysis takes an important notion from Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:21), who suggest that ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions. These, in turn, give rise to methodological considerations. Laudan (1984:26) placed axiology alongside ontology and epistemology, which adheres to reveal the assumptions and values that the researcher holds about the world.

- **Ontology**

The ontological standpoint regards assumptions about the “nature of reality and existence” (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015:46; Joslin & Müller, 2016:1043; Lewis *et al.*, 2019:133), which relates to our understanding of the nature of the object under study and how that phenomenon is interpreted (Hammond, 2017:12; Kim, 2020 as cited by Orthee & Wang, 2021:17).

- **Epistemology**

Epistemological assumptions indicate the “best ways of enquiring into the nature of the world” (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015:46). That is, epistemology discusses the process of acquiring knowledge (Yulianto, 2021:154).

- **Axiology**

Axiology discusses the value associated with the usefulness of the knowledge gained (Yulianto, 2021:154).

The ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations of an inquiry (as well as its methodological implications) determine the beliefs that shape the researchers' worldview of how problems should be understood and addressed (Lewis *et al.*, 2016:127; Olutade, 2020:184).

4.2.2 Research philosophy

In research parlance, a paradigm (or philosophy) may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) about conducting research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:197). More recently, Lewis *et al.* (2019:130) defined research philosophy as the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge. There are opposing views of the branches of research philosophy. Mertens and Wilson (2019:39) submit that constructivist, transformative, pragmatic and post-positivist are the basic philosophies in research. Leavy (2017:12) suggests the six following terms as a way of categorising a multiplicity of paradigms: post-positivist, interpretivist/constructivist, critical, transformative, pragmatic, and arts-based/aesthetic intersubjective.

Guba and Lincoln (2011a:105) identified five paradigms in qualitative research, namely positivist, post-positivist, critical, and constructivist theory, and the participatory philosophy. Lewis *et al.* (2019:144) classify research philosophy into positivist, constructivist, pragmatic, postmodernism, and critical realistic orientations. Creswell (2014:7) notes four 'philosophical worldviews', namely post-positivist, constructivist, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatic [what? theory?], while Lukenchuk (2013:66) identified six paradigms which include empirical-analytic, pragmatic, interpretive, critical, post-structuralist, and transcendental [what? paradigms?].

In this study, the classification of Bougie and Sekaran (2020:23) is adopted, namely positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism, which are therefore discussed as options from which a researcher can choose as paradigm for their research in the following sections.

- **Positivism**

The positivist research philosophy seeks to explain the world and its many observations in an objective way that is uninfluenced by human interpretation and bias (Andriukaitienė *et al.*, 2018:123; Bougie & Sekaran, 2020:23; Collis & Hussey, 2014:52; Lewis *et al.*, 2019:144; McCarten & Robson, 2016:21). That is, according to Collis and Hussey (2014:52), Lach (2014:89), and McCarten and Robson (2016:20), positivism is rooted in a pursuit of quantitative knowledge and adheres to the view that only 'factual' knowledge is trustworthy so as to produce law-like generalisations. Positivism denotes the "received view" that has dominated academic inquiry (Birks *et al.*, 2017:155; Guba & Lincoln, 1994:108; Su, 2018:17). The positivist philosophy's dominance in marketing research has been and continues to be challenged by other philosophical perspectives that have assisted researchers in developing richer explanations and predictions and especially an understanding and a meaning, as seen through the eyes of consumers (Birks *et al.*, 2017:158).

- **Critical realism**

Critical realism, developed as a critique on positivism (Lewis *et al.*, 2019:148), relies on the idea that the reality of the world is independent of that of the human mind and the assumptions made must be scientific in nature (Lach, 2014:91; Riazi, 2016:71; Tumele, 2015:43).

- **Interpretivism**

Like critical realism, the development of interpretivist philosophy (also sometimes referred to as constructive philosophy) is based on the critique of positivism in social sciences (Lewis *et al.*, 2019:148; McCartan & Robson, 2016:24). Packard (2017:536) asserts that “interpretivism sees the social world through a distinct lens of intentionality rather than causality, of ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’, and relationships and interactions rather than social entities”. Interpretivism is a subjective worldview in which individuals construct their own reality of the world in various contexts through interactions with others (Khan, 2014:225; Schensul, 2011:76). Therefore, refraining from making law-like generalisations enables interpretivists to study and analyse their subject and reach findings that are valid in terms of unbiased reasoning (Kumar, 2019).

- **Pragmatism**

Pragmatic philosophy refers to the idea that a concept or ideology can only be proven to be true or reality if it has been proven to be workable or practical (Christensen & Johnson, 2019:32; Creswell, 2014:10; Robson & McCartan, 2016:28). It strives to reconcile objectivism and subjectivism, facts and values, accurate and rigorous knowledge, and different contextualised experiences (Creswell, 2014:10; Lewis *et al.*, 2019:151).

Table 4-1 presents and compares ontology, epistemology, and axiology across the five research philosophies.

Table 4-1: Comparison of the five research philosophies

Research philosophy	Ontology	Epistemology	Axiology	Typical methods
Positivism	External, granular, independent, organised, real, universal	Scientific method, observable and quantifiable facts, law-like generalisations, numbers, causal explanations, and prediction as contribution	Value-free research, researcher is detached, impartial and unattached to the subject under investigation, researcher maintains an objective stance	Typically deductive, highly organised, large samples sizes, measurement, typically quantitative methods of analysis are used, however a range of data can be analysed
Critical realism	Stratified/layered, external, independent, intransient, objective structures, causal mechanisms	Epistemological relativism, knowledge historically situated and transient, facts are social constructions, historical causal explanation as contribution	Value-laden research, Researcher acknowledges bias, cultural experiences and upbringing, researcher attempts to minimise bias and errors, researcher is as impartial as possible	Retroductive, in-depth historically situated analysis of pre-existing structures and emerging agency, a variety of methods and data types appropriate to the subject matter
Interpretivism	Complex, rich, socially constructed through culture and language, numerous meanings, interpretations, realities, constant flux of processes, experiences, practices	Theories and concepts oversimplified, focus on narratives, stories, perceptions and interpretations, new understandings and worldviews as contribution	Value-bound research, researchers are part of what is researched, subjective, researcher interpretations are key to contribution, researcher reflexive	Typically inductive, small samples sizes, in-depth investigations, qualitative methods of analysis, but a range of data can be interpreted
Pragmatism	Complex, rich, external, 'reality' is the practical implications of ideas, flux of processes, experiences and practices	Practical meaning of knowledge in specific contexts, 'true' theories and knowledge are those that permit successful action, focus on problems, practices and relevance, problem solving and informed future practice as contribution	Value-driven research, research initiated and sustained by researcher's doubts and beliefs, researcher reflexive	Following research problem and research question, range of methods: mixed, multiple, qualitative, quantitative, action research, emphasis on practical solutions and outcomes

Source: Adapted from Lewis *et al.* (2019:144).

For the purpose of this study, interpretivism was adopted as the primary research philosophy due to the qualitative nature of this study. Qualitative studies generally believe the respondents' viewpoints, which reflect personal beliefs and knowledge (Beck & Polit, 2012:14). This demonstrates the properties of multiple realities according to ontological principles (Pring, 2015:65). Ontological assumptions are very much evident in this study since the qualitative data collection is purely shaped with an open-ended focus group interview in which informants interpret their own worldview (Lewis *et al.*, 2019:133). From an epistemological undertaking, human knowledge is crucial to this study because it shapes the primary method of data collection, and it is human knowledge gathered from participants that were analysed and discussed. Axiologically, the researcher's and interviewees' knowledge and attitudes may shape the qualitative findings of the research. Even though the researcher has gone to great lengths to minimise any potential bias, it is still their own interpretation that is central in this study. Therefore, the researcher had to be aware of personal biases. Subsequently, the researcher took the axiological stance into consideration to minimise their influence on the data. The latter involved being transparent with documentation of the data (see section 4.4.5.3) to ensure the quality of this research study.

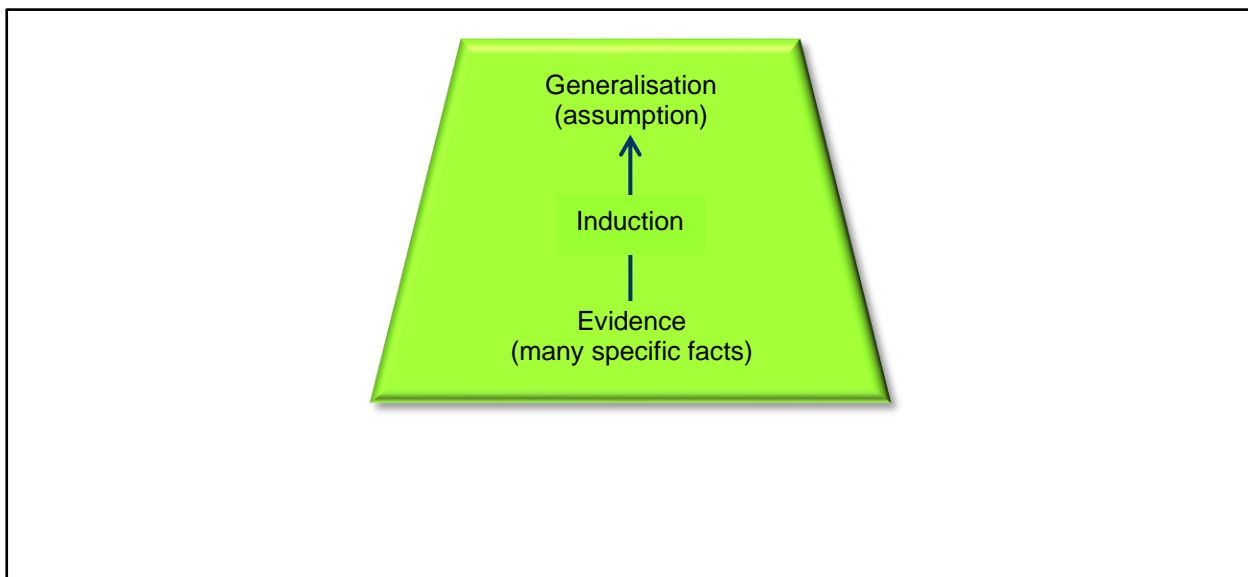
While research philosophy is utilised to understand the approach of how research is constructed, the whole of the knowledge acquired is ultimately the result of three main approaches to theory development: inductive, deductive, and abductive reasoning. These approaches demonstrate the inferential link between the premises and conclusion of an argument (Ahmed, 2021:19).

4.3 APPROACHES TO THEORY DEVELOPMENT

The inductive, deductive, and abductive logics of inquiry are essential parts of the research process and inform the research methodology (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020:22), as they undergird the research's rationality (Gauch, 2012:18) and demonstrate the relationship between research and theory (Lewis *et al.*, 2019:152). The following sections provide a detailed description of each of these concepts to substantiate the former assertion.

4.3.1 Induction

Induction is a form of reasoning that typically involves the inference that an instance or repeated combination of events may be universally generalised (Birks *et al.*, 2017:162). Inductive research does not involve a research hypothesis; instead, it starts with aims and objectives that need to be addressed as the research advances. The observations are recorded, and the patterns in the data sets are studied to draw theoretical conclusions. These patterns and irregularities in the data sets are usually helpful with regard to developing theories and evaluating the aims and objectives (Åsvoll, 2014:292; Babin *et al.*, 2020:87; Birks *et al.*, 2017:162; Seshia, 2015:2038).

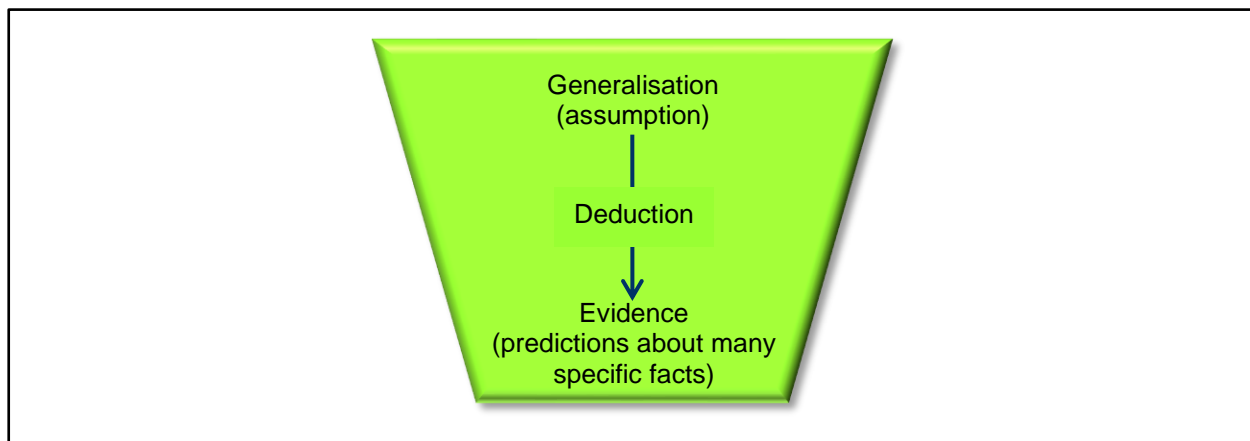
Figure 4-1: Diagrammatic representation of inductive reasoning

Source: Adapted from Brians *et al.* (2018:22).

4.3.2 Deduction

Deduction is a form of reasoning in which a conclusion is validly inferred from a set of premises and proven true if those premises are found to be true (Birks *et al.*, 2017:161). Deductive reasoning starts with a more generalised understanding of an issue and moves towards a specific conclusion (Dirgová *et al.*, 2018:791; Paradis *et al.*, 2020:1122; Seshia, 2015:2038).

A deductive approach proceeds from existing theories that lead to the creation of a tentative answer to a research problem known as a hypothesis in an attempt to explain the relationship in the observed phenomena (Babin *et al.*, 2020:87; Birks *et al.*, 2017:161; Bougie & Sekaran, 2020:22; Lewis *et al.*, 2019:153; Strode, 2015:500). Subsequently, the researcher embarks on a process to gather data that will either support or refute the claims made through various methods that are quantitative or empirical (Birks *et al.*, 2017:161; Orthee & Wang, 2021:18).

Figure 4-2: Diagrammatic representation of deductive reasoning

Source: Adapted from Brians *et al.* (2018:22).

4.3.3 Abduction

Abductive reasoning is synthetic inference in which meaningful underlying patterns of selected phenomena are recognised to comprehend a complex reality and expand scientific knowledge (Folger & Stein, 2017:307; Raholm, 2010:261; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014:131; Urbański *et al.*, 2020:1). The abductive research approach is often seen as a complement to deductive and inductive analysis since it begins with a set of incomplete observations with the aim of providing an appropriate explanation for the same (Bell *et al.*, 2019:24; Urbański *et al.*, 2020:1).

For the purpose of this study, an inductive approach to theory development was chosen, as it enabled an explorative process of examining the ambiguous gamification concept (Bell *et al.*, 2019:23; Bougie & Sekaran, 2020:22) that could contribute to the field rather than strengthening and deepening understanding of what already exists (Babin *et al.*, 2020:87; Lewis *et al.*, 2019:153). Interpretivist research supports the researcher in inductively generating a theory or pattern of meanings (Birks *et al.*, 2017:162).

Within the philosophical approaches applicable to this study, the research followed a specific process to achieve the set objectives so that the study could explain specific behaviour by showing that it followed logically from a set of theoretical assumptions.

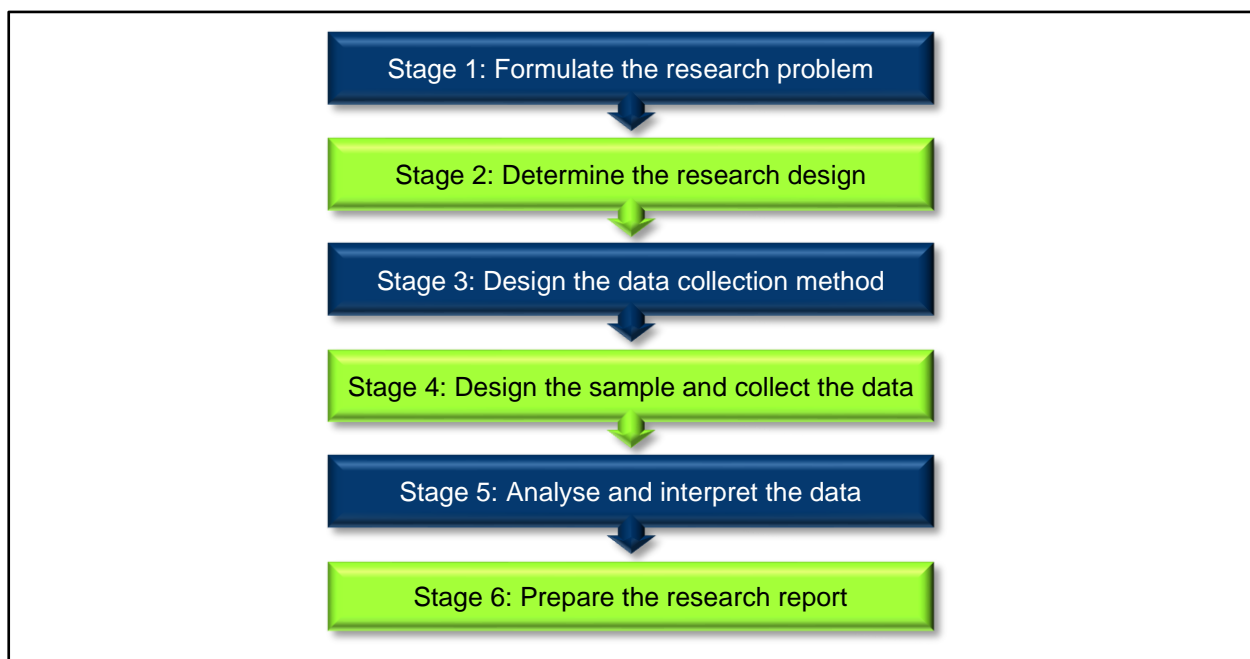
4.4 MARKETING RESEARCH PROCESS

Marketing research is the planning, collection, analysis, and communication of data in order to: identify and define marketing opportunities; resolve marketing problems; generate, refine and evaluate marketing actions; and monitor marketing performance and improve understanding of marketing as a process with the end goal of improving marketing-related decision making (AMA,

2017; Babin *et al.*, 2020:4; Gates & McDaniel, 2021:2; Lewis *et al.*, 2016:124; Maison, 2019:1; Malhotra, 2015:28).

The process of marketing research entails a sequence of highly interrelated activities. The stages of the marketing research process overlap continuously, and it would be an oversimplification to state that each research project follows the same order sequence of activities. Nevertheless, marketing research generally follows a standard progression (Babin *et al.*, 2020:14). Figure 4-3 outlines the six stages proposed by Churchill and Iacobucci (2018:23).

Figure 4-3: The stages in the marketing research process



Source: Adopted from Churchill and Iacobucci (2018:23).

As illustrated in Figure 4-3, the first stage in the research process includes the formulation of the problem, followed by stage 2, which focuses on determining the research design. During the third stage, the data collection methods are designed, whereafter the sample needs to be designed, and data collection commences in stage 4. Stage 5 encompasses the data analysis and interpretation, and stage 6 entails the preparation of the research report. The above six stages serve as the chapter outline and act as a roadmap to structure this chapter. In the subsequent paragraphs, the six distinct but highly interrelated stages of the marketing research process are discussed and made applicable within the context of this study.

4.4.1 Stage 1: Defining the research problem and research objectives

Correctly defining the problem is the crucial first step in the marketing research process (Brown *et al.*, 2018:27; Gates & McDaniel, 2021:4; Mooi & Sarstedt, 2019:13), since methodological

choices are a derivative of the research problem. Research can only commence once a research problem has been clearly defined (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:51). According to Clow and James (2014:31), Cupman *et al.* (2016:20), and McNabb (2021:11), a research problem consists of two key components, namely the formulation of the research problem as it is seen by the researcher, and secondly, the setting of research objectives or research questions that will be addressed in the research.

4.4.1.1 Formulating the research problem

A problem definition indicates a gap in marketing decisions or a specific marketing problem to be solved (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:51; Babin *et al.*, 2020:38; Burns *et al.*, 2017:35; Chawla & Sodhi, 2011:31; Mooi & Sarstedt, 2019:13). This research was necessary because of the existing problem of understanding gamification and its implementation to increase organisational profits through relationship marketing tactics. Despite the increased spread of the concept within the marketing sphere, more literature is needed to give gamification meaning in business practice, as organisations have to attain value from the marketing communication activities they engage in (Kumar, 2019). The research problem for this study was presented comprehensively and demarcated in section 1.3. After having clearly defined the problem that needed to be explored, the research objectives had to be set (Del Campo & Rios, 2013:41).

4.4.1.2 Setting the marketing research objectives

Marketing research objectives are goal statements that define the specific information required to address the marketing research problem (Gates & McDaniel, 2021:9). When setting the research objectives for a study, Berndt and Petzer (2011:29), and Burns *et al.* (2017:34) emphasise the importance of setting both primary and secondary research objectives for all research studies.

A primary research objective is related to the study's general purpose and emphasises the study's contribution, while secondary research objectives cascade from the primary objective into additional or exploratory objectives in order to accomplish the original objective in its entirety (Brown *et al.*, 2018:14; Tietze, 2012:162).

The primary objective of this study is to explore gamification in the South African fashion retail industry and its impact on brand-related outcomes. The following secondary objectives have been formulated in support of the primary objective:

- 1) Provide an overview of the literature related to this study, namely gamification and relationship marketing.

- 2) Determine participants' awareness of gamification.
- 3) Capture the subjective experience of participants when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.
- 4) Identify the challenges experienced by participants when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.
- 5) Assess participants' acceptance and use of a fashion retail gamification-based application.
- 6) Identify possible security concerns when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.
- 7) Identify the incentives that can be offered to motivate engagement with a fashion retail gamification-based application.
- 8) Identify the indicators' that can be provided to maintain usage of a fashion retail gamification-based application.
- 9) Determine whether the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application contributes to customer loyalty.
- 10) Determine whether the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application contributes to customer retention.
- 11) Determine whether the use of a fashion gamification-based application contributes to brand recall.
- 12) Determine whether the use of a fashion gamification-based application contributes to word-of-mouth advertising.
- 13) Determine whether the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application improves sales conversion rates.

After the researcher has formulated the research problem, the research design must be developed as part of the research design stage. The nature of the problem will determine whether the research is exploratory, descriptive, or causal (Babin *et al.*, 2020:18).

4.4.2 Stage 2: Determine the research design

During the second stage of the research process, as depicted in Figure 4-3, the researcher needs to determine the research design. A research design symbolises the framework that indicates the

methods and procedures that will be used to collect and analyse data and ultimately address the research problem, question or hypotheses (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018:238; Babin *et al.*, 2020:19; Clow & James, 2014:34; Feinberg *et al.*, 2013:54; Nieuwenhuis, 2016:72). A research design is a crucial stage of the research process because it enables the researcher to arrive at valid findings, comparisons and conclusions (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018:238; Birks *et al.*, 2017:9; De Vos *et al.*, 2014:171). It is therefore used to carry out research in the most effective way (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018:238).

According to Babin and Zikmund (2018:67), three main types of research designs can be distinguished, namely exploratory research, descriptive research, and causal research. Each research design has different uses and requires the application of different analysis techniques (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2019:14).

- **Exploratory research**

Exploratory research is preliminary research conducted in order to investigate a problem or situation (Birks *et al.*, 2017:69; Bougie & Sekaran, 2020:56; Mooi *et al.*, 2018:14). Burns *et al.* (2017:95) explain that exploratory research strives to develop and clarify concepts not yet sufficiently explored, which provides the groundwork for possible new knowledge about the phenomena and their attributes. A variety of techniques is available to conduct exploratory research, such as secondary sources (section 4.4.3.1) and primary sources typically reached using qualitative research tools (Burns *et al.*, 2017:96; Esteban-Bravo & Vidal-Sanz, 2021:20; Neelankavil, 2015:104) such as focus groups, in-depth interviews, projective techniques, observational studies, and ethnographies (section 4.4.3.3) (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2019:15).

- **Descriptive research**

Descriptive research often builds on previous exploratory research. After all, to describe something, one must first have a good idea on what needs to be measured and how it should be measured (Bukve, 2019:205; Clow & James, 2014:28; Malhotra, 2010:106; Mooi & Sarstedt, 2019:17). Descriptive research can be defined as research that is collected to examine certain phenomena, characteristics or functions (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:57; Burns *et al.*, 2017:98; Mooi & Sarstedt, 2019:17). Two basic types of descriptive research studies are available to the marketing researcher: cross-sectional and longitudinal research (Birks *et al.*, 2017:74). Cross-sectional studies measure units from a sample of the population of interest at only one point in time, while longitudinal studies repeatedly measure the same sample units of a population over a period of time (Burns *et al.*, 2017:99). When following a descriptive research design, the most frequently used methods of data collection are

secondary sources (section 4.4.3.1), experiments, the observation method, and the survey method (section 4.4.3.2) (Babin *et al.*, 2020:22; Malhotra, 2015:149).

- **Causal research**

Causal research, also referred to as explanatory research (Lewis *et al.*, 2019:188) or hypothesis-testing research (Brians *et al.*, 2018:70), is designed to examine the cause-and-effect relationship between certain variables that affect the problem (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2019:18; Rahman, 2017:17; Stack, 2017:90). Causal research aims to clarify the relationship patterns between the variables by focusing, analysing, and interpreting a specific situation or problem (Dawar, 2016:135). Causal research is less typically conducted by market researchers than exploratory or descriptive research. Nevertheless, it is critical to understand the complex relationships between important marketing variables and the outcomes they help create (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2019:18). Experiments and observations are a key type of causal research (section 4.4.3.2) (Clow & James, 2014:35; Mooi *et al.*, 2018:21).

In addition to the abovementioned distinction between the three main types of research designs, Table 4-2 provides a summary of the main characteristics of these research designs.

Table 4-2: Summary of the characteristics of different research designs

Characteristic	Exploratory research	Descriptive research	Causal research
Uncertainty characterising decision situation	Highly ambiguous	Partially defined	Clearly defined
Key research statement	Research questions & objectives	Research questions & objectives	Research hypotheses
When conducted?	Early stages of decision-making	Later stages of decision-making	Later stages of decision-making
Usual research structure	Unstructured	Structured	Highly structured
Nature of results	Discovery oriented, productive, but still speculative. Often in need of future research.	Can be confirmatory, although more research might be needed. Actionable results.	Confirmatory oriented. Fairly conclusive, with managerially actionable results often obtained.

Source: Adapted from Del Campo and Rios (2013:48).

For the purpose of this study, an exploratory research design was adopted, as it aligns with the purpose of the research study, which is interpretive and explorative in nature. An exploratory research design was chosen due to the dearth of research regarding gamification and, in effect, formed the basis from which the research problem was formulated (Birks *et al.*, 2017:81). An explorative research strategy is essential to interpret meanings and explanations from

participants. Once the research design has been formulated, the process of gathering or collecting information – the data-gathering stage – may commence.

4.4.3 Design the data collection method

Data is the foundation on which all research is built (Fahmy & Sohani, 2020:36; Mooi *et al.*, 2018:28). Data collection can be described as the method in which information is gathered for the specific purpose of a study (Hartell *et al.*, 2016:112). According to Birks *et al.* (2017:10), two types of data collection methods can be used to collect relevant data, namely secondary and primary data collection (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2019:29). The following subsections describe the process of collecting primary and secondary data in depth.

4.4.3.1 Secondary data

According to Babin *et al.* (2020:104), Birks *et al.* (2017:92), and Brown *et al.* (2018:60), secondary data consists of data that has been gathered previously for the purpose of resolving a specific problem that might be relevant to the current problem at hand (Gates & McDaniel, 2021:23). Secondary data can be found in articles, magazines, newspapers, textbooks, and on the Internet (Hartell *et al.*, 2016:112).

For the purpose of this study, secondary data was used to develop a thorough theoretical understanding of the gamification phenomenon pertaining to South African fashion retailers' context. From the secondary data, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to extract and evaluate pertinent findings and issues which emerged from previous works by other authors in this field. A literature review is a survey of published articles and books that discusses theories and past empirical studies about a topic (Babin *et al.*, 2020:20; McCartan & Robson, 2016:52). The definition of a literature review is distilled by Robson and McCartan (2016:52) into five key purposes when gathering literature: (i) identifying significant gaps in the subject's knowledge; (ii) identifying general patterns based on multiple examples in the research; (iii) comparing contradictory findings from conflicting studies; (iv) defining terminology for your own study, including identifying variations in definitions; and (v) assisting in the identification of "relevant research methodologies and instruments" that can be applied in your own research.

Relevant literature searches were conducted with the aim of furthering the understanding of the concepts within the main chosen topic of gamification marketing. This provided a clarified perspective of the theoretical themes of the concept and was therefore approached accordingly. The literature study was conducted by using accredited and scholarly journal articles, relevant books, subject-specific journals, and websites such as business journals and research

methodology sites. Scholarly articles and journals were obtained from different databases such as SACat, SAePublications, SAMEDIA, EbscoHost, Emerald Insight, NEXUS, ProQuest, ScienceDirect, and the North-West University online library. Electronic search engines such as Google and Google Scholar were used to familiarise the researcher with current informal trends regarding the concepts at hand. Also, searches on Diva identified dissertations and theses in the relevant field, which assisted in the identification of pertinent concepts, ideas, and up-to-date references. Keywords were used alone as well as in combination, which optimised the search result for relevant studies in which data was collected in order to design the theoretical frame of reference. To acquire the broadest scope of qualified papers, this study used the Boolean operators (AND, OR). An asterisk was applied to capture a range of common expressions associated with the constructs investigated in this study (Enago, 2020). Due to the large number of publications found, this study screened the publications by evaluating their abstracts and conclusions. The publications were vetted for relevance to the research topic and were limited to those in the English language (Abhishta *et al.*, 2020:2; Brians *et al.*, 2018:63). The extensive literature review informed the researcher with knowledge of the theoretical constructs investigated in this study, which included gamification (Chapter 2), and relationship marketing (Chapter 3).

4.4.3.2 Primary data

Primary data is raw data collected by a researcher to solve a particular problem (Brown *et al.*, 2018:60; Gates & McDaniel, 2021:23; Kotler & Keller, 2016:63). Primary data is proprietary, recent, and specific for the purpose. By contrast, primary data is usually more expensive and takes longer to collect (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2019:30).

For the purpose of this study, in addition to the secondary data, primary data was used when bringing forward and exploring empirical findings. The choice of utilising primary data is based on two factors. Firstly, primary data becomes increasingly crucial to utilise in a field that is lacking in research, as secondary data does not suffice (Esteban-Bravo & Vidal-Sanz, 2021:62). Furthermore, primary data is required to understand underlying reasoning from a phenomenological perspective, such as how gamification affects consumer brand preference for establishing a relationship with fashion retailers (Bougie & Sekaran, 2016:111). There are different techniques researchers can use to collect primary data, and the selected technique is solely dependent on the applicable research approach (i.e., qualitative or quantitative research) (Esteban-Bravo & Vidal-Sanz, 2021:24). According to Creswell (2014:3), a research approach, also referred to as the strategies of inquiry, refers data collection methods and the analysis and interpretation of the data. The various techniques pertaining to the qualitative and quantitative research approaches are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

- **Quantitative research**

The quantitative approach is predicated on objective numerical representation and manipulation of observations using statistical inferential tools for the purpose of both describing and explaining phenomena (Christensen & Johnson, 2019:33; Houser, 2015:102; Leavy, 2017:92; Malhotra, 2020:153; Mooi *et al.*, 2018:32; Orthee & Wang, 2021:17; Rasinger, 2013:27). Quantitative research is typically used in conclusive research associated with descriptive and causal research designs and for well-structured problems (Brians *et al.*, 2018:4; Burns *et al.*, 2017:143; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:41; Esteban-Bravo & Vidal-Sanz, 2021:24; Malhotra, 2020:153). The goal of quantitative methods is to ascertain whether the predictive generalisations of a theory holds true for a given population quantifying the magnitude of the effects (Esteban-Bravo & Vidal-Sanz, 2021:24). The main advantages and limitations of the quantitative research are presented in Table 4-3.

Table 4-3: Advantages and disadvantages of quantitative research

Advantages	Disadvantages
Regarded as scientific in nature.	Researcher detachment from the sample makes it exceedingly difficult to conduct an in-depth study of the phenomenon within its natural settings.
Data can easily be summarised and analysed using statistical programmes.	There is no opportunity for participants to contribute to the study.
The use of scientific methods for data collection and analysis enables generalisation.	It discourages creative, critical and imaginative thinking since it has a predetermined design, hypothesis, and variables.
It ensures replicability (i.e., the study can be repeated at any other time or place and still provide the same results).	Capable of revealing what/to what extent, but cannot always explore why or how.
The researcher's objectivity is not jeopardised when the researcher is not in direct contact with the sample.	Samples may not always be representative due to problems related to the sample who decline to participate in the research study.
Statistical methods ensure that the analysis is often considered reliable.	
Provides a large sample from which inferences can be drawn.	

Source: Adapted from Babin *et al.* (2020:67), Balas *et al.* (2019:5), Birks *et al.* (2017:151), Brunt *et al.* (2017:28), Eyisi (2016:94), and McCartan and Robson (2016:19).

Examples of different collection methods for quantitative research are controlled experiments, certain observation methods, and surveys (Creswell, 2014:155; Esteban-Bravo & Vidal-Sanz, 2021:24). An experiment is a type of study in which one or more independent variables are manipulated to determine the influence on one or more dependent variables while also controlling the effects of additional extraneous variables (Burns *et al.*, 2017:102).

Controlled experiments are conducted in controlled environments (usually in a company or academic lab) to isolate the effects of one or more variables on a particular outcome (Babin *et al.*, 2017:23; Gneezy, 2017; Mooi & Sarstedt, 2019:20). Observation research extracts data by observing the behaviour of natural or social systems under investigation (either in the real world or in a laboratory) (Esteban-Bravo & Vidal-Sanz, 2021:39). The survey method is a technique used to determine a group of people's attitudes, opinions or experiences by asking a series of questions about the topic under study (Clow & James, 2014:35; Creswell, 2014:155; Fluidsurveys, 2014). The survey method can be categorised into five groups, namely computer-administered questionnaire surveys, computer-assisted survey questionnaires, mixed-mode questionnaire surveys, person-administered questionnaires, and self-administered survey questionnaires (Berndt & Petzer, 2011:135; Burns *et al.*, 2017:172). A computer-administered survey is an online survey that directs respondents to a website that houses the questionnaire (Burns *et al.*, 2017:179). In computer-assisted surveys, the interviewers basically verbalise the questions while using some form of computer technology to aid in the interviewing process (Burns *et al.*, 2017:177). Mixed-mode surveys, sometimes referred to as hybrid surveys, use multiple survey data collection modes (Burns *et al.*, 2017:180). In a person-administered survey, the interviewer reads questions to the respondents face-to-face or telephonically who may rely on computer assistance and records the respondent's answers (Burns *et al.*, 2017:175). In a self-administered survey, the respondents complete the survey on their own without the assistance of an interviewer (Burns *et al.*, 2017:178).

- **Qualitative research**

Qualitative research attempts to gain insights into some phenomenon through techniques that provide nuanced interpretations of the phenomena of interest and to interpret these data through developing a conceptual framework and tentative theories or hypotheses about the system described by the data (Babin *et al.*, 2020:63; Brians *et al.*, 2018:4; Christensen & Johnson, 2019:33; Esteban-Bravo & Vidal-Sanz, 2021:24; Guest *et al.*, 2013:3; Houser, 2015:102; Kodrin, 2021:78). Qualitative research is typically used in exploratory research in the analysis of non-structured problems (Esteban-Bravo & Vidal-Sanz, 2021:24). Table 4-4 provides a summary of the advantages and limitations of qualitative research.

Table 4-4: Advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research

Advantages	Disadvantages
It is well-suited for the provision of factual and descriptive information.	The nature of the research imposes constraints on the ability to generalise data.
The researcher creates theory based on the data gathered.	Replicability is difficult (if not impossible) to acquire.

It has a more nuanced understanding and appreciation of human cognition and behaviour.	Due to its subjective nature, the results may be inaccurate, incorrect, and misleading.
Participants contribute to shaping the research due to the close relationship between the researcher and the sample.	Time-consuming to simplify findings and observations.
It provides rich data and an in-depth understanding.	Qualitative research can generate biased results.
Qualitative research is able to include changes over time.	It could prove problematic to provide estimates based on findings when small samples are used that are not representative of the population.
It enables the identification of previously unidentified phenomena.	Risk of erroneous interpretation.
	Qualitative research has a limited utility.

Source: Adapted from Aspens and Corte (2019:155), Birks *et al.* (2017:152), Brians *et al.* (2018:76), Brunt *et al.* (2017:29), Eyisi (2016:92), Hood (2006:219), and Kulkarni and Vemulkar (2021:24).

Qualitative researchers acquire data by observing (or participating in) the phenomenon under study for an extended period of time and interacting extensively with subjects (Brians *et al.*, 2018:77). Ethnographies, focus groups, in-depth interviews, observational studies and projective techniques are often used to achieve exploratory and qualitative research (Babin *et al.*, 2020:73; Burns *et al.*, 2017:144; Mooi & Sarstedt, 2019:15; Mooi *et al.*, 2018:15). An ethnography research approach studies groups or cultures and data is gathered through direct or participant observation, supplemented by interviews and conversations (Birks *et al.*, 2017:162). A focus group can be defined as an unstructured or loosely structured and interactive in-depth interview conducted by a proficient facilitator with a small group of research participants (Babin *et al.*, 2020:72; Brown *et al.*, 2014:30; Malhotra, 2014:176). In-depth interviews, depth interviews (Esteban-Bravo & Vidal-Sanz, 2021:24), or extended interviews (Cupman, 2016:46) involve an interviewer asking a single interviewee several questions (Esteban-Bravo & Vidal-Sanz, 2021:24; Lewis *et al.*, 2016:124). Observational studies monitor and interpret participants' behaviour (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2019:16). Projective techniques present people with stimuli to which they respond (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2019:15). Projective techniques are unstructured and indirect forms of questioning, which enables participants to project their underlying attitude, beliefs, feelings or motivations regarding the issue of concern (Neelankavil, 2015:119). This can be achieved by word association tests, sentence completion methods, third-person techniques and role-playing, and thematic apperception tests (Babin *et al.*, 2020:84). Observational studies extract data by observing the behaviour of participants in the study (Esteban-Bravo & Vidal-Sanz, 2021:39).

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative method of data collection and analysis was adopted, since interpretivism is associated with qualitative research that illustrates real-world phenomena (Lewis *et al.*, 2019:145; Mann, 2016:18; McCartan & Robson, 2016:25). Moreover, the inductive approach to scientific inquiry is associated with qualitative research and is used to develop or generate new hypotheses and theories (Daniel & Sam, 2011:47). Furthermore, in order to achieve the aim of the research, which is exploratory in nature, a qualitative research approach was more suitable, as it allowed a deeper understanding of the gamification phenomenon (Birks, 2020:153; Birks *et al.*, 2017:148; Bougie & Sekaran, 2016:43; Hair *et al.*, 2017:37; Neelankavil, 2015:104; Stack, 2017:100). Withal, the number of qualitative studies focused on exploratory theory-building is increasing in the overall marketing context and within the contour of the retail context (Cristini *et al.*, 2019). Lastly, the lack of secondary empirical data concerning gamification, as well as limitations such as time constraints to gather quantitative data for statistical analysis, partly informed the choice of the qualitative method of analysis. Primary qualitative data was collected by means of conducting focus group sessions with participants in order to obtain new insights and content-rich information pertaining to gamification in the South African fashion retail industry.

4.4.3.3 Focus group

Empirical data for this dissertation was collected through focus group discussions to guide the qualitative study. Focus groups bring together a small group of people in an unstructured or loosely structured format (Babin *et al.*, 2020:21) to discuss a predefined topic under the leadership of a moderator providing insight into group dynamics (Birks *et al.*, 2017:183; Brians *et al.*, 2018:304; Mooi & Sarstedt, 2019:15). A focus group typically consists of at least one moderator and up to 10 participants and lasts for up to three hours (occasionally even five or six hours).

Table 4-5: Advantages and disadvantages of focus groups

Advantages	Disadvantages
A flexible technique that can be applied to multiple topics.	Scheduling may be less flexible to accommodate participants' timetables.
It enables observing the interactions among several people in a brief period of time.	It demands acute observation abilities to capture a large number of responses simultaneously.
More in-depth knowledge is gained in comparison to individual interviews.	The moderator could (inadvertently) be biased towards the responses.
It facilitates synergy among participants as they react to and build on one another's responses.	Responses from the participants are not independent of one another.
The data collection period may be significantly reduced.	In online focus groups, social cohesion may be compromised, lowering the data's validity.
It is not required for participants to be literate.	Individual stories cannot be learned.
Results are simple to comprehend.	Limited generalisability.

It quickly provides direct information about the similarities and differences between individuals.	Transcription is more time-consuming due to presence of multiple speakers on the recording.
It is less expensive and time-consuming than other data collection methods.	The results may be skewed by one outspoken and opinionated person.
It provides a wealth of rich data in participants' own words.	Due to the open nature of this technique, it may be more challenging to summarise and analyse data.
It may be more acceptable to vulnerable groups than individual interviews.	Focus group interview findings may be confusing.
Online focus groups are convenient and cost-effective.	Due to the small size of a focus group, it is unlikely to be representative of a larger population.
Online focus groups might be particularly well-suited for discussing topics that are sensitive or potentially embarrassing.	Due to the presence of several players, non-verbal clues such as facial expressions become increasingly difficult to monitor online.
Online focus groups result in a larger demographic diversity among participants.	A focus group's artificial setting may have an unpredictable effect on subjects' behaviour.
Online interviews may include software for recordings, which could easily be recorded and retrieved following the focus group.	Responses are more challenging to transcribe due to the presence of multiple voices and the possibility of overlap.

Table 4-5: Advantages and disadvantages of focus groups (continues)

Advantages	Disadvantages
	Respondents compete with one another for time to talk. There is less time to elicit in-depth details from each participant.
	Responses may be biased by other group members' opinions.
	If the subject is sensitive, respondents may be hesitant to talk freely in the presence of other people. It may be difficult to assemble participants.
	In online focus groups, without video feeds, any information gathered from monitoring a respondent's body language will be lost.
	By using an online platform, persons with limited or no access to technology may be excluded.

Source: Adapted from Babin *et al.* (2020:74), Birks *et al.* (2017:186), Bougie and Sekaran (2016:121), Brians *et al.* (2018:306), Dodds and Hess (2020:209), McCartan and Robson (2016:299), Mooi and Sarstedt (2018:80), and Stewart and Williams (2005:411).

Effective focus group moderators prepare discussion guides to help ensure that the groups cover all topics of interest and act as an aide memoir (Babin *et al.*, 2020:77). The structure of the moderator's guide and the operationalisation of the interviews are discussed in the next section.

4.4.3.3.1 Moderator's guide

A moderator's guide was created in advance to prepare for the focus groups. The guide was designed as a semi-structured interview, with the majority of questions being open-ended, allowing the conversation to flow naturally throughout the process. This was deemed ideal because participants could answer the questions candidly based on their own personal and professional experiences (Burns *et al.*, 2017:157). The key concepts of the dissertation were organised into themes, and the guide was structured into five themes. The moderator's guide comprised the following sections:

- **Section A: Introduction to the study**

The participants were thanked for their willingness to participate in the study, and the moderator introduced themselves and gave a brief description of the research. The moderator clarified that they would refrain from participating in the discussion and instead would only ask questions and listen (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2018:80). The moderator emphasised that members of the group may agree or disagree with one another's comments. The researcher notified members that the focus group would be audiotaped. By employing an inductive technique, participants were promised that their identities would be protected and that all material would be treated in a strictly confidential manner (Brozovic *et al.*, 2016:1912). Each participant was issued a pseudonym, and they were required to state their fictional identity before responding to or commenting on another participant's response to a question for ease of the transcription process. Section A also comprised three screening questions for which verbal consent was required. The initial effort was to establish rapport within the group.

- **Section B: Awareness and previous experience**

The aim of this section was to gain insight to the research participants' awareness and previous experience of gamification. In this section, the participants were able to describe their position towards the gamification concept briefly. The researcher provided important information that formed the backdrop of knowledge of the participants regarding gamification. Understanding this knowledge base assisted the researcher in adjusting the level of jargon and explanation that was required when the next level of questions were asked.

- **Section C: Experience and usage**

Participants were asked beforehand to download and use a pre-selected gamification app. The third section sought to gain an understanding of how participants engaged with the pre-selected gamification app.

- **Section D: Customer loyalty and retention**

The fourth theme strived to gain insights more clearly connected to customer retention and consumer loyalty.

- **Section E: Closure**

Participants were thanked for their time and were asked whether they would like to add any concluding remarks to the session. They were assured that they would receive the transcript upon request.

4.4.3.3.2 Steps followed in conducting the focus group sessions

To arrange the focus group interviews with participants, the researcher applied the steps prescribed by Guba and Lincoln (1981:172), which entail:

- **Identification:** Convenience and judgement sampling methods were used to identify possible participants. Possible participants included friends and family members. The researcher personally contacted all the possible participants. During the interactions, the researcher gave the background of the study and sought to find out whether they qualified and were willing to participate in the study. This study had three eligibility requirements: the first requirement was that all participants had to be South African citizens; the second that the participants had to have purchased a fashion item in the past six months, and the third that the participants had to be 18 years or older. Retaining the minimum age requirement made sense from both an ethical (potential concerns over reliability and susceptibility) and practical (avoiding a second layer of parental approval for participation) perspective (Boggis *et al.*, 2015:178; Danby & Farrell, 2005:57; Gaspelin *et al.*, 2015:467). Many of the participants contacted qualified and willingly agreed to partake in the research study, but some did not. A specific date and time for the interview were mutually decided upon once the respondents agreed to participate.
- **Invitation:** If participants qualified and willingly agreed to partake in the study, a letter of invitation to the focus group session was sent to them by email stating the details of the study. If the respondent agreed to partake in the research, they then received the informed consent form. Prior to the interviews, the interview questions were forwarded to the participants so as to aid the interviewees in preparation of the interview and also to facilitate any questions that needed clarification.
- **Appointment:** To gain insight through empirical data, three individual focus group sessions were conducted (with 25 participants collectively) through a synchronous internet-mediated group interview due to the challenges imposed by restrictions implemented due to the

COVID-19 pandemic. The focus group interviews were conducted through an online video conferencing service called Zoom. This platform enables people to video call and share content and text messages through various technological devices (Zoom, 2021). In addition to using Zoom's recording feature, two recording devices were used in order to ensure the interactions were captured in the event of the technical malfunction of the main source (Choo *et al.*, 2015:1107). Focus group 1 comprised eight participants; focus group 2 comprised nine participants, and focus group 3 comprised eight participants.

The three focus groups interviews were conducted within a 60-minute timeframe, and the first focus group discussion was held on the 5 August at 6:30 pm, the second on 11 August at 6:30 pm, and the third on 16 August at 6:30 pm. In order to join the online focus group, participants were required to use a meeting ID to sign into Zoom. For this reason, participants needed to be on a device of sorts, whether it be a desktop, laptop, tablet, or smartphone. Particularly participants using a smartphone or tablet needed to download the free app to take part in the focus group.

4.4.4 Design the sample and collect the data

Data sampling involves the selection of a subset of elements from a larger defined group of elements for investigation from which conclusions and inferences are drawn (Armstrong & Kotler, 2017:115; Babin & Zikmund, 2016:342; Taherdoost, 2016:18). A sampling strategy is used when it is impossible or unreasonable to draw a conclusion from the entire population (Malhotra, 2015:226). Since resources are too limited to study the whole population, the best solution to completing this nature of research is sampling (Birks *et al.*, 2017:413). Bougie and Sekaran (2016:239) propound that when researchers select a sample to reflect the population, several phases should be considered during the sampling process, as discussed in the following sections.

4.4.4.1 Step 1: Define the target population

A target population is a collection of units with similar characteristics from which inferences will be drawn with relation to the research objectives of the study in order to solve a research problem (Birks *et al.*, 2017:414; Burns *et al.*, 2017:240). These units can be groups of individuals, consumers, organisations, or products (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2018:38). A population should be identified correctly, since the sample will be drawn from the chosen population focusing on particular characteristics (Hair *et al.*, 2017:38). Whenever a population of any kind is defined, all of the population's identifying traits must be mentioned, and all members of the population must share those characteristics (Brians *et al.*, 2018:123). The target population should be defined in terms of sampling elements, sampling units, extent, and time (Birks *et al.*, 2017:414). A sampling

element is a subset of the population that is suitable to represent the entire group (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:340). A sampling unit pertains to elements that are available for selection during the sampling process. The term “extent” refers to the geographical area in which the study will be conducted. The time element specifies the time period for data collection (Birks *et al.*, 2017:414). A summary of the target population for this study is presented in Table 4-6.

Table 4-6: Summary of the target population

Dimension	Description
Sampling element	Consumers who are 18 years and older who own a smartphone and have purchased an item from a South African fashion retail outlet in the past six months.
Sampling unit	Fashion retail consumer segment.
Extent	The Republic of South Africa.
Time	2021.

The target population for this study comprised individuals within the fashion retail consumer segment who met the inclusion requirements as specified in section 4.4.3.3.1.

4.4.4.2 Step 2: Identify the sampling frame

Phase two in the sampling process is to identify the sampling frame from which samples can be drawn. Birks *et al.* (2017:415) define a sampling frame as a representation of the target population’s constituents according to a list or set of directions. Burns *et al.* (2017:250) and Dawar (2016:141) mention that some sampling frames include random digit dialling, telephone directories, mailing lists, internal databases, and voter registration lists.

For the purpose of this study, not all individuals within the fashion retail consumer segment could effectively be identified from which to draw a sample, since the new POPI Act prohibits names or contact information to be provided by fashion retail stores for research purposes. Given the lack of suitable sampling frames, it is therefore necessary to provide some directions for identifying the target population (Birks *et al.*, 2017:416). The following section discusses the sampling method applied in this study.

4.4.4.3 Step 3: Select a sampling procedure

The third phase in selecting a sample for the study is to select a suitable sampling procedure. Bradley (2013:155) describes a sample method as the process by which sample units are recruited. There are eight distinct types of data sampling methods, which are classified under two categories, namely probability and nonprobability sampling methods (Birks *et al.*, 2017:419).

When selecting a sampling technique, researchers need to first decide whether to use probability or non-probability sampling.

- **Probability sampling**

A probability sample is a sampling technique in which each member of the target population has a known, non-zero probability of selection so that the sampled group is representative of the population from which it was drawn (Babin *et al.*, 2020:26; Brians *et al.*, 2018:125). Babin and Zikmund (2016:351), Bell and Bryman (2011:176), and Brians *et al.* (2018:125) assert that probability sampling consists of random sampling components so that each unit in the population has a known chance of being selected. There are a number of probability sampling techniques available for research studies, including cluster sampling, simple random sampling, stratified sampling, and systematic sampling (Burns *et al.*, 2016:242). With *cluster sampling*, the target population is divided into homogenous subgroups called clusters, from which sample elements are then selected by means of another probability sampling technique (Brown *et al.*, 2018:35; Burns *et al.*, 2017:243; Hair *et al.*, 2013:143). In *simple random sampling*, every member of the population has a known and equal chance of being selected to form part of the sample (Babin & Zikmund, 2013:325; Burns *et al.*, 2017:251). *Stratified sampling* entails grouping the population into various identifiable and homogenous groups, which are referred to as strata, where samples are then chosen from each of the subgroups by means of another probability sampling technique (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:353; Mooi *et al.*, 2018:45; Taherdoost, 2016:216). In *systematic sampling*, every member or part of the population is identifiable or listed in which the sample is chosen by selecting a random starting point and then picking every *n*th element in succession from the sampling frame (Birks *et al.*, 2017:427).

- **Non-probability sampling**

Non-probability sampling refers to sampling methods in which the selection process of the sample is not random but is made by non-random chance procedures based on subjective judgement (Ary *et al.*, 2019:172; Babin *et al.*, 2020:26; Zikmund *et al.*, 2017:357). According to Zikmund *et al.* (2017:357), researchers may select samples that do not necessarily represent the entire population but have specific aspects and characteristics that the researcher finds compelling. In exploratory research, the researcher's judgement in selecting participants with particular qualities may be far more effective than any form of probability sampling (Birks *et al.*, 2017:433). Popular non-probability sampling methods include convenience sampling, judgement sampling, quota sampling and snowball sampling (Bengart *et al.*, 2018:654; Birks *et al.*, 2017:419; Burns *et al.*, 2017:254). *Convenience sampling* refers to the selection of sample elements based on the accessibility of the

population for the researcher (Bell & Bryman, 2011:713; Clow & James, 2014:231; Diggines & Wiid, 2017:790; Maree & Pietersen, 2016:197; Mooi *et al.*, 2018:63). According to Bougie and Sekaran (2016:248), *judgement sampling* is a sampling method with the goal to strategically sample participants relevant to the research study. *Quota sampling* may be viewed as two-stage restricted judgement sampling in which the researcher divides the target population into subgroups based on predetermined criteria and then selects quotas from each subgroup based on convenience or judgement (Birks *et al.*, 2017:422; Bougie & Sekaran, 2016:248; Mooi & Sarstedt, 2018:42). *Snowball sampling*, also known as referral sampling, entails obtaining information from the initial respondents about additional respondents who qualify to participate in the study (Zikmund *et al.*, 2017:358).

For the purpose of this study, non-probability convenience sampling was used to obtain the appropriate sample. Due to the self-isolation rules enforced by the government, not all the interviewees can be chosen using subjective selection, since most of the interviews will be conducted using online video conferences to adhere to social distancing rules. Therefore, given the restrictions placed on the researcher, the researcher adopted the convenience sampling method because convenience samples are accessible, easy to measure, and cooperative (Birks *et al.*, 2017:421). However, it is important that convenience sampling is not the primary criteria when selecting participants, since it will decrease the credibility of the study (Burns *et al.*, 2017:255; Mooi & Sarstedt, 2018:43; Mooi *et al.*, 2018:63). As qualitative research has continued to evolve, the importance of mixing various sample methods has become more apparent. Given the study's objectives, the sample method was impacted by judgment sampling. Judgement sampling is frequently employed in qualitative research to identify and select cases that include significant amounts of information on the topic of interest (Duan *et al.*, 2015:540). In this study, judgement sampling was used to identify meaningful sources of data, as it assures that all the key constituencies of relevance to the subject matter are covered (Elam *et al.*, 2013:113). Since the focus groups in this study were held online, it was arguably easier to acquire participants with our preferred characteristics. Participants were selected on the basis of their usefulness in providing suitable data within the context of the research (De Jong *et al.*, 2011:182). Once a sampling method has been selected, the next step is to determine the sample size.

4.4.4.4 Step 4: Determine the sample size

According to Birks *et al.* (2017:417), sample size refers to the number of elements to be included in a study. Sample size in this research study may refer to the number of elements included in the focus group discussions and the number of focus group discussions conducted (Kulkarni & Vemulkar, 2021:27; Mooi *et al.*, 2018:64). According to Newhart and Patten (2018:114), sample size has been a point of contention since the advent of qualitative research methodologies, and

there has been no agreement on sample size. The widely recommended indicator of an adequate sample size is data saturation, according to Gates and McDaniel (2012:421) and Glaser and Strauss (2017:60). Glaser and Strauss (2017:61) define saturation as “the criterion for judging when to stop sampling the different groups pertinent to a category is the category’s theoretical saturation. Saturation means that no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category. As he sees similar instances over and over again” (Bell *et al.*, 2019:394; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:236; Glaser & Strauss, 2017:61; Holt, 2017:30; Malhotra, 2019:374). According to Creswell (1998:56) and Gates and McDaniel (2018:327), after interviewing 20 to 30 persons in a qualitative environment, the general pattern of responses begins to solidify.

While qualitative methodologists are unlikely to agree on the precise sample sizes required for various qualitative studies, they generally agree on the fact that a variety of factors might influence the number of interviews required to achieve saturation (Birks *et al.*, 2017:417; Boddy, 2016:429; Cardon *et al.*, 2013:13; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:236; Dawar, 2016:142; Elam *et al.*, 2013:118; Hale & Napier, 2013:171; Wilmot 2005:4).

Important qualitative factors to be considered in determining the sample size include:

- **The nature and scientific paradigm of the research being conducted.** The type of information that qualitative studies yield, particularly exploratory research designs using interpretive inductive qualitative research such as focus groups, is used to make generalisations to theory rather than about a population; thus, it is typically based on small samples (Birks *et al.*, 2017:150; Boddy, 2016:429; Mooi *et al.*, 2018:64).
- **The heterogeneity or homogeneity of the population under consideration.** If the population is diverse in nature in regards to the subject of inquiry, then this is likely to increase the required sample size. On the other hand, if the population is reasonably homogeneous, a smaller sample will capture all the necessary internal variability (Elam *et al.*, 2013:117).
- **The number of selection criteria.** The number of selection criteria considered significant in the sample design will affect the sample size: the more there are, the larger the sample (Elam *et al.*, 2013:118).
- **The nature of the analysis.** If advanced data analysis using multivariate techniques is required, a large sample size is recommended. The same is true if the data is to be analysed in great detail. Thus, if the data is analysed at the subgroup or segment level, a larger sample would be required than would an analysis limited to an aggregate or total sample (Birks *et al.*, 2017:417).

- **Sample sizes used in similar studies.** Sample size is influenced by the average size of samples in similar studies, particularly when non-probability sampling techniques are used (Birks *et al.*, 2017:417; Elam *et al.*, 2013:118).

For the purpose of this study, a manageable sample size was selected in order to provide depth to the research questions rather than simply breadth. The ideal size of a focus group is between six and twelve participants that have been selected based on specific characteristics (Esteban-Bravo & Vidal-Sanz, 2021:59; Malhotra, 2019:193). Bell and Bryman (2019:474) noted that while conducting online focus groups, a minimum of six to eight participants is advised. This is because participants may have limited keyboard skills, and it can be challenging to manage larger groups online. Focus groups with fewer than six or more than ten people rarely work well (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2018:80). Many practitioners consider three to be the minimum number of group sessions that should be held (Brians *et al.*, 2019:310). Based on these recommendations, three focus groups were held with 8 to 9 participants for qualitative data collection. Although the saturation point was reached after the second interview, the researcher persisted and conducted one additional interview in order to validate the point of diminishing returns.

The following section presents the process of collecting empirical data through focus groups and how the participants were acquired. Furthermore, the interview guide is presented as well as an explanation of the execution of the focus groups.

4.4.4.5 Step 5: Collecting the data

The final step of the sampling process requires the data to be collected. Data collection is a method of systematically accumulating and analysing variables' measures in order to address the research questions, test theories, and interpret findings (Kabir, 2016:202).

As mentioned in the research process, data was gathered through secondary and primary methods. Secondary data was gathered from existing journals and books using relevant keywords, while qualitative data was gathered through an open-ended focus group interview in which participants shared their worldviews. According to Babin *et al.* (2020:302) and McCartan and Robson (2016:25), interpretive researchers apply open-ended group interviews to construct and regulate meanings through sense-making about a particular topic. The details of each focus group session are set out in Table 4-7.

Table 4-7: Summary of the focus group sessions

Focus group session	Number of research participants	Location
1	8	Zoom

2	9	Zoom
3	8	Zoom

Three focus groups with up to nine participants each were conducted and moderated by the researcher. The interviews took place in a web conference meeting via a video telephony software program called Zoom rather than a face-to-face meeting because of the restrictions due to the latest global pandemic. A moderator's guide was used to guide and direct the focus group sessions' conversation. Participants were asked pertinent questions in an interactive setting. All questions were derived from the literature and corresponded to a research objective. Each question was drawn from the literature and relates to a certain study objective. While saturation of the data set was achieved during the second interview, an additional interview was done to confirm saturation and boost the study's trustworthiness (Hennink *et al.*, 2017:17). Data saturation was determined by analysing the collective data at arbitrary cut points. As a result, three focus groups were determined to be an adequate number for eliciting sufficient insights and information to address the research problem.

The main product of a focus group session is a transcript of what was said; hence, participants' responses were recorded and transcribed by Language Matters, a professional digital audio and video transcription service provider located in Potchefstroom, South Africa. Recording interviews allows gathering correct empirical data from the participants and eliminates misconceptions and mishearing. It permitted re-listening to the interviews to ensure accurate understanding. The recordings also gave the chance to be fully focused under the interview and not get distracted by note-taking. Collected data must be analysed to be distinguished and structured.

4.4.5 Analyse and interpret the data

The final phase takes into consideration the data analysis methods. Data analysis is the process of using reasoning to understand the data that has been gathered (Babin *et al.*, 2020:27) and using a common, objective language register to describe and explain reality (Brians *et al.*, 2018:4). Qualitative data analysis is characterised as one of the most complex phases of conducting qualitative research (Kulkarni & Vemulkar, 2021:30). As a qualitative method, focus groups do not generate numerical data that can be analysed statistically to identify patterns and relationships. Focus groups produce an enormous amount of verbal data that needs to be transcribed, refined, and analysed. There is no step-by-step guide for focus group analysis, both because project objectives and focus group procedures vary widely and because qualitative analysis relies heavily on insight and creativity (Brians *et al.*, 2018:315; Damsjö *et al.*, 2021:26; Malhotra, 2020:153).

4.4.5.1 Data preparation

Data preparation involves data-processing steps leading up to analysis (Field & Morse, 1996:107; Malhotra, 2012:42). Data has to be converted into an analysable and interpretable format (Gates & McDaniel, 2013:326).

For the purpose of this study, the data preparation stage included transcribing recordings to a textual narrative which was then reviewed and corrected before being transferred to ATLAS.ti 9 for coding and analysis (Field & Morse, 1996:107). According to Babione (2015:188) and McLellan-Lemal (2008:102), transcription is the process of converting audio or video recordings into written (text) documentation. A qualified transcriptionist painstakingly transcribed all the interviews in separate MS Word documents, totalling 61 pages, which were then reviewed and validated by the supervisor and researcher for accuracy by comparing them to audio files. The transcripts were analysed using a coding process intended to reduce the complexity of the data collected to arrive at a conclusion based on logic (Neuman, 2014:478).

The data was analysed using ATLAS.ti, sometimes known as computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) (Hwang, 2008:519). ATLAS.ti 9's analytical capabilities enabled the assignment of specific codes to text in transcripts, allowing for the identification of relationships between codes and the drawing of conclusions based on these links (Friese, 2021:9). The coding process reduced huge chunks of transcribed material, allowing for the identification and assessment of a link and a common thread (Belotto, 2018:2525). Coding, in practice, refers to the process of assigning categories or concepts to segmented transcripts that are relevant to the research objectives (Friese, 2021:12). Additionally, sub-codes were assigned to recurring themes or threads within the codes. To assist the researcher in interpreting and analysing the data, the Field and Morse (1996:104) and Morse (1994:25) process phases of comprehending, synthesis, theorising, and re-contextualising were used.

4.4.5.2 The Morse and Field approach

The Morse and Field (1996) approach was used to analyse the data for this study, as it is relatively user-friendly. This approach includes four steps to analyse qualitative data, namely (i) comprehend, (ii) synthesise, (iii) theorise, and (iv) re-contextualise (Field & Morse, 1996:103). In the first step (comprehending), the researcher made sense of the data to learn "what is going on?" and identified and coded overarching themes and categories. The second step (synthesis) entailed scrutinising the data and then inductively combining the elements into themes and categories. The researcher may already make broad statements regarding the phenomena and the participants during the second step. The third phase (theorising) entailed a methodical sorting

of the data that enabled the researcher to generate alternative explanations for the occurrence and assess their fit to the evidence. The final step (re-contextualisation) entails additional elaboration of the theory and its application in new contexts (Morse & Field, 1996:104).

- **Step 1: Comprehend**

Comprehension is achieved when the researcher is able to identify all the relevant themes to “richly” describe “what is going on” (Morse & Field, 1996:104). Coding is critical for comprehension (Field & Morse, 1996:104). To Birks *et al.* (2017:244), coding data entails segmenting the data into discrete pieces and associating each chunk with a reference. According to Field and Morse (1996:104), a line-by-line analysis is required to code open-ended exploratory queries. The researcher can identify occurring topics or themes within the text units by carefully examining each line of text in the interview transcript (Field & Morse, 1996:104; Gough *et al.*, 2017:192). According to Baker *et al.* (2018:1893), interpretation of data is aided by a survey of the literature, which allows the researcher to assemble a theoretical framework.

The researcher reviewed the transcripts numerous times independently during the empirical study in order to later highlight the recognised common themes from the data that were pertinent to the study’s aims. The transcripts were scrubbed of irrelevant questions and remarks, as well as any sounds and words that detracted from the recognised key information. This procedure was adjusted until the core data provided by each research participant was created with a minimum of meaning loss. Following the revision of the interview transcripts, data were coded using the Field and Morse recommended approach of line-by-line analysis (1996:104). The researcher coded the transcripts using the ATLAS.ti 9 qualitative data analysis software, assigning codes to individual lines of text or keywords based on the transcripts’ tendencies (Friese, 2021:9). The literature review (Chapters 2 and 3) in this study endorsed an understanding of the existing theories underlying the gamification notion in the marketing field. Additionally, the theoretical framework offered context for the interview guide, which assisted in conceptualising the data from the interviews. In accordance with Birks *et al.* (2017:250), primary data was compared to secondary data in order to determine the generalisability of findings. To aid in the process of initiating the data collection, the researcher kept brief notes during the focus group sessions. Field and Morse (1996:126) recommended that an acceptable level of comprehension be achieved before moving on to the next stage of data reduction, synthesis (making generalised statements about the participants).

- **Step 2: Synthesise**

To Fruh *et al.* (2020:93) and Goudling *et al.* (2018:704), synthesising links coding to the writing of a first draft of the analysis and can be defined as the process of identifying and describing regularities or patterns in the data set that are categorised and transformed into a coherent story. According to Field and Morse (1996:105), qualitative data analysis can take two forms, namely the inter-participant analysis and the category analysis. Inter-participant analysis requires comparing transcripts from multiple participants in order to detect similarities and differences, whereas category analysis entails analysing commonalities gleaned from segments of transcripts or notes generated from multiple participants' transcripts.

For the purpose of this study, synthesising was accomplished by comparing the focus group transcripts to the responses of all research participants and detecting significant parallels and discrepancies. To determine commonalities, the researcher used category analysis. The data was synthesised into four themes with eleven interpretation categories by using category analysis in the ATLAS.ti 9 software (Table 4-8). Each of these categories was assigned a reference acronym associated with the corresponding themes and categories.

Table 4-8: Themes and interpretation categories

Theme	Category (A)	Category (B)	Category (C)	Category (D)
Theme 1: Customer awareness of gamification.	Comprehension	Familiarity		
Theme 2: Customer experience with gamification.	Usage	Indicators	Incentives	Challenges
Theme 3: Gamification as an effective tool for advertising.	Communication	Recall	Sales	
Theme 4: The contribution of gamification towards relationship marketing.	Loyalty	Retention		

- **Step 3: Theorise**

Theorising is the selection and the fitting of alternative models to the data. Theorising is a critical tool to qualitative inquiry. Without theory, qualitative results would be without structure and application, and it would be disconnected from the greater body of knowledge (Field & Morse, 1996:105). Theorising directs the researcher to appropriate and existing theories (Field & Morse, 1996:106; Nelson, 2016:567).

During this step of the data analysis, the researcher compared the literature review (Chapters 2 and 3) to the empirical part of the study. This allowed for the various issues underpinning the gamification concept in the marketing field to be theorised.

- **Step 4: Recontextualise**

Recontextualisation is the process of developing an emergent theory so that the theory is applicable to other settings and populations (Field & Morse, 1996:106). The theories identified in step 3 are developed in such a way to make it clear in which settings and populations the theories are applicable. The categories and study findings are combined to demonstrate the extent to which they are supported by established theoretical models. The outcomes of the focus group meetings, in conjunction with the supporting literature, will aid in recontextualising the study's conclusions.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher related the different issues underpinning the gamification concept (identified in step 3) to the context of this study in order to explore the applicability of gamification to South African fashion retailers' brand-related outcomes.

4.4.5.3 Trustworthiness

The purpose of this study was to establish trustworthiness throughout the research process by minimising errors and producing accurate outcomes. According to Guba (1981:75), qualitative researchers should evaluate four factors for measuring trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Bryman *et al.* (2020:363) and Jaworski *et al.* (2020:43) substantiate prior assertions by Barrett *et al.* (2002:4) and Bezuidenhout (2005:170) that trustworthiness should be accomplished by pursuing data credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The study was conducted with the four criteria in mind to ensure methodological trustworthiness.

- **Credibility**

According to King and Stahl (2020:26), credibility refers to the “fit” between the data collected from participants and the researcher's explanation or depiction of the data. Thus, credibility is sought by addressing the following question: “How can one establish confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings of a particular inquiry for the subjects [participants] with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out?” (Guba, 1981:79). Based on the provisions suggested by Anney (2014:276) and Shenton (2004:64) to ensure the credibility of qualitative research, this study obtained credibility through the following individuals and actions:

- **Background, qualifications, and experience of the researcher:** As the researcher was an inexperienced researcher, they performed the data analysis manually: The researcher first used lean coding, restricting the collection to five or six categories, but expanded it to include additional codes as they became more familiar with the data and comfortable with the approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
- **Examination of previous research findings to assess the degree to which the project's research findings are congruent with those of past studies:** To preserve the credibility of this study, the researcher gathered data from a variety of sources, including the literature (Jaworski *et al.*, 2020:43). To illustrate and substantiate the interpretations, verbatim extracts from the data have been provided (see section 5.2).
- **The development of familiarity with the organisation/industry:** Demonstrating familiarity with the organisation/industry is critical for developing a trusting relationship between the interviewer and the participant. The researcher's acquired knowledge aided in the researcher's relationship with the participants before and during the interviews. These initiatives strengthened ties and ensured that the information provided by participants accurately reflected their actual circumstances (Blystad *et al.*, 2016:8).
- **Peer scrutiny of the dissertation study:** Feedback from a variety of sources enabled the researcher to get new and deeper insights, allowing them to fine-tune their research methods and improve their arguments (Moules *et al.*, 2017:3). The results and findings of the focus groups were presented to experienced qualitative researchers to confirm and contribute to the study's findings. Their contributions have been incorporated throughout the study's many phases.
- **The adoption of research methods well established in qualitative inquiries:** With regard to this research, the researcher conducted a comprehensive literature review of peer-reviewed articles that are published in reputable journals. Familiarity with the procedures used in similar research and with the research context has therefore allowed the researcher to justify in advance the motivation for the research methods utilised.
- **Tactics to help ensure honesty in informants when contributing data:** Each person approached was given the option to decline participation in the study, ensuring that the data collection stage involved only those who were willing to participate and provide data freely. Participants were urged to be candid from the start of each focus group session, with the researcher establishing rapport and emphasising that there were no correct or incorrect answers to the questions that would be asked. Additionally, the researcher's independence was emphasised. As a result, participants could share ideas and discuss

their experiences without fear of losing credibility in the researcher's eyes. Participants were informed that they might withdraw from the study at any time and would not be forced to provide a reason to the researcher (Shenton, 2004:66).

- **Triangulation:** Triangulation “involves the use of multiple and different methods, investigators, sources and theories to obtain corroborating evidence” (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007:239). Qualitative research should incorporate at least one or two strategies of triangulation (Anney, 2014:277). When recruiting volunteers for the study, maximum variation was desired. As such, once units were chosen, participants were solicited for interviews with the goal of capturing the whole range of gamification perspectives in marketing practice. Supporting data was gathered to offer context for and help explain the attitudes and behaviours of persons in the group under examination, as well as to verify specific facts provided by participants (Shenton, 2004:66).
- **Frequent debriefing sessions between the researcher and others in a supervisory capacity:** Through collaborative sessions, complementary and divergent understandings of the research emerged and provided context in which the researcher's beliefs, values, perspectives, and assumptions could be revealed and contested.
- **Member checks:** Lincoln and Guba (1985:314) posit that this is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. Member checks mean that the “data and interpretations are continuously tested as they are derived from members of various audiences and groups from which data are solicited” (Guba, 1981:85). The researcher repeated several questions during the interviews to ensure that the participants' responses were recorded accurately (Herman *et al.*, 2011:47; Shenton, 2004:67). The researchers asked supplemental questions in instances when there was a possibility of participants' responses being misinterpreted. At the conclusion of each focus group session, the researcher allowed members to add any extra information they felt was necessary (Madill & Sullivan, 2018:5).

- **Transferability**

Transferability can be defined as the degree to which the study can be generalised (Adams *et al.*, 2016:3; Bryman *et al.*, 2021:42; Lichtman, 2010:228; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014:5746; Statistic Solutions, 2019). Transferability is, therefore, sought by answering the question: “How can one determine the degree to which the findings of a particular inquiry may have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects [participants]?” (Guba 1981:79). This research study aimed not to generalise the results of this study, but rather the application value thereof in the context of gamification marketing in the retail industry. According to Bitsch

(2005:85), the “researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through ‘thick description’ and purposeful sampling”.

- **Provision of a thick description of the phenomenon in question to allow comparisons to be made:** According to Li (2004:305), thick description “enables judgments about how well the research context fits other contexts, thick descriptive data (i.e., a rich and extensive set of details concerning methodology and context, should be included in the research report)”. By describing a phenomenon thoroughly, the extent to which the findings drawn are transferrable to other contexts can be assessed. Transferability was ensured in this study by thoroughly detailing the research procedure and empirical findings, with the purpose of allowing other researchers to compare and conclude on what they consider to be fundamentally relevant and hence transferable to different situations (Maree, 2016:124).
- **Judgement sampling:** Only participants who purchased a fashion item from a South African fashion retail industry during the past six months were chosen to participate in this study.

- **Dependability**

The third aspect of attaining trustworthiness is to reflect on dependability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985:316). Beck and Polit (2012:175) define dependability as the data's consistency over time and under varied conditions, which is contingent upon the extent to which research techniques are documented, allowing others to observe, audit, and criticise the process. Thus, dependability is determined by answering the following question: "How can one determine whether the findings of an inquiry would be consistently repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same [or similar] subjects [participants] in the same [or similar] context?". To ensure the study's trustworthiness, the researcher took a series of actions. For reliability, a detailed methodological description, an audit trail, peer debriefing and recording, as well as the transcription of focus group sessions were used (Belk *et al.*, 2013:33).

- **In-depth methodological description to allow study repeatability:** This research study delves into the details of what was planned and done in order for subsequent researchers to easily follow the initial researcher's decision path. This researcher has provided a full description of the methodology and methods used in the study and the empirical findings to enable the reader to assess the extent to which sound research practices were followed (Bwalya & Kalu, 2017:10; Shenton, 2004:71).
- **Audit trail:** This study has undergone various audits by outside researchers to ensure the dependability of the research study through the reviewing of the research procedure to evaluate the accuracy of the findings and ensure the quality.
- **Peer debriefing:** The researcher followed a thorough verification procedure to ensure that all decisions made regarding the literature, particularly sources on study methods, were confirmed (Barrett *et al.*, 2002:9; O'Leary, 2004:58; Shenton, 2004:72). The findings' dependability was additionally bolstered by the use of rigorous and systematic data analysis techniques by two experienced academic researchers in the fields of marketing and research methodology (Gericke & Kruger, 2004:44; Myburgh & Poggenpoel, 2003:421). The researcher and supervisor independently verified the codes and analysis of the empirical data (Jaworski *et al.*, 2020:44). Additionally, academic researchers discussed and confirmed the findings' topics.
- **Recording and the transcription of a focus group session:** Various audio recording devices were used to capture the focus groups for this research (see section 4.4.3.3.2). All transcripts were compared to the recordings to rectify any errors and fill in gaps. The transcripts were used for further analysis in terms of coding and categorisation (see section 4.4.5.2). Thematic analysis was conducted using ATLAS.ti (Belk *et al.*, 2013:33).

- **Confirmability**

Confirmation contributes to the objectivity and neutrality of the research (Lakew, 2015:276). According to Guba (1981:80), confirmability in a qualitative study can be ascertained by asking the following question: “How can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are a function solely of the subjects [participants] and conditions of the inquiry and not of the biases, motivations, interests, and perspectives and so on of the inquirer?” Numerous strategies exist to ensure the data’s neutrality and limit the researcher’s bias. Guba (1981:87) recommend triangulation, reflexivity, and a confirmability audit to establish confirmability.

- **Triangulation:** As with credibility, the importance of triangulation in boosting confirmability must be emphasised once more, this time to mitigate the influence of researcher bias.
- **Reflexivity:** To minimise the researcher’s bias, the researcher implemented research techniques honestly and without regard for personal interest or intentions. The researcher’s data was derived entirely from existing ideas and empirical investigations rather than from their own experiences or observations (Shenton, 2004:72).
- **Confirmability audit:** According to Bowen (2009:307), “audit trail offers visible evidence – from process and product – that the researcher did not simply find what he or she set out to find”. The research decisions were documented and explained to ensure that the data interpretation would be consistent with the literature and methodological standards.

4.4.6 Prepare the research report

To conclude the marketing research process, the sixth and final step is the writing of the research report, in which the results of the study are presented and the implications and limitations of the study discussed. The results of the study are presented in Chapter 5 and the conclusions, implications and limitations of the study are discussed in Chapter 6.

4.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When performing marketing research, ethical considerations are crucial (Birks *et al.*, 2017:882). As a result, this research included ethical considerations to safeguard all people involved in the study. The following efforts were made to ensure that ethical considerations were met:

- Compliance with regulations particular to the North-West University was considered.
- All secondary sources consulted are properly credited in accordance with Harvard system standards, and due credit is given to the authors.

- To ensure the study's appropriateness, the ethical clearance for conducting the research was received from the North-West University's (NWU) ethics committee following a thorough examination of all materials and processes. NWU-00096-21-A4 was assigned as the ethical code.
- All individuals who volunteered for this study were informed of the study's purpose and aims.
- Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained. Prior to participation, participants signed separate informed consent forms.
- Measures were taken to ensure trustworthy data. The data collected is stored on a password-protected computer to which only the researcher and the supervisor has access. The data was collected solely for the purpose of this study and will be discarded following the conclusion of the research (Bryman *et al.*, 2017:128).
- No discrimination on gender, age, or race was believed to have been experienced at any stage of the research.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the approach used to accomplish the research objectives outlined in Chapter 1. The methodology followed Iacobucci and Churchill's six-step process (2018:23). According to the philosophical viewpoint of the research study, the researcher used an inductive research approach with an exploratory research design. Qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured focus group interviews, with the unit of analysis being chosen based on three specified target population parameters. These units of analysis were questioned through Zoom, using questions operationalised from the theoretical review and with the assistance of the study's supervisor. The empirical data analysis is based on themes that arose from semi-structured interviews that were decoded manually. The research's credibility was ensured continuously through the use of different methods specific to each data collection method. The authors chose an extensive quality of research in order to assure an enhanced and authentic quality of research while also analysing the study's ethical implications. In conclusion, the methodology section discussed the study process as well as the rationale behind the approaches and methodologies chosen. Chapters 5 and 6 present the study's findings and conclusions. The research findings are reported using the interpretation categories outlined in this chapter (Chapter 4).

CHAPTER 5: REPORTING OF FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this chapter is to report on the empirical findings of the research study based upon the process followed based on the structured methodological approach that was described in the previous chapter. This chapter first provides a review of the questions asked during the three focus group sessions. The categories and themes that were identified in the second stage of the Morse and Field approach to analyse qualitative data are then presented. The results pertaining to each category are subsequently presented, followed by a summary of the main findings.

5.2 RESEARCH RESULTS

In this section, the results of the study are discussed, and the aims of the focus group questions are explained by linking each question asked during the focus group to the literature, with reference to Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, and the objectives of the study formulated in Chapter 1. This section also explains how the questions are related to the respective categories and themes identified.

5.2.1 Aims of focus group questions and relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories

As a point of departure for presenting the empirical research results, the links between the questions asked during the focus groups, the research objectives (see section 1.5), the literature chapters of the study (Chapters 2 and 3), as well as the categories and themes identified (as were determined by using the Morse and Field approach in section 4.4.5.2) are presented in Table 5-1.

Table 5-1: Aims of focus group questions and their relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories

Focus group question:	
B1. Have you ever heard of the term gamification?	
Aim	To establish whether the participant has heard of or is aware of the term gamification.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 2
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	1 Category (B)

Table 5-1: Aims of focus group questions and their relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories (continues)

Focus group question:	
B2. Please tell me what you think the term gamification implies?	
Aim	To establish whether the participant understands what the term gamification implies and whether they know what it entails.
Research objective	Secondary research objective
Literature	Chapter
Theme	1 Category (A)
Focus group question:	
B3. Have you ever made use of a gamification application? Which one?	
Aim	To establish whether the participant has actual experience with a gamification application and determine which gamification applications they have used in the past.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 2
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	1 Category (B)
Focus group question:	
B4. On which device did you download and use the gamification application?	
Aim	To identify the device used by the participant to download a gamification application and on which device the gamification application is used the most.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 5
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (A)
Focus group question:	
B5. How did you become aware of the gamification application that you used?	
Aim	To identify how the participant was informed about or exposed to the gamification application that they used.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 2
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	1 Category (B)
Focus group question:	
B6. Why did you decide to use the gamification application?	
Aim	To establish the reason why the participant downloaded and used the gamification application in mentioned in B6.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 5
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (A)

Table 5-1: Aims of focus group questions and their relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories (continues)

Focus group question:	
B7. Were you rewarded for using the gamification application (i.e., points or vouchers)?	
Aim	To determine whether the participant was rewarded for using the gamification application and whether the decision for downloading and using the application was incentive driven.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 7
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (C)
Focus group question:	
B8. What indicators did the gamification application make use of to show your progression (i.e., leader board, levels/tiers, awards, currencies, progression bar)?	
Aim	To identify the indicators used most often by gamification applications to show progress.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 8
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (B)
Focus group question:	
B9. Did you enjoy using the gamification application after the first try?	
Aim	To determine whether the participant enjoyed using the gamification application and, by so doing, accepting the concept of a gamified brand experience.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 5
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (A)
Focus group question:	
B10. Did you continue to use the gamification application after the first try?	
Aim	To determine whether using the gamification application would lead to customer retention through repeat usage of the application.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 10
Literature	Chapter 3
Theme	4 Category (B)
Focus group question:	
C1. Did you experience any challenges when downloading the gamification application?	
Aim	To identify any challenges incurred by the participant when downloading the application which may have hindered their experience and usage of the gamification application.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 4
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (D)

Table 5-1: Aims of focus group questions and their relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories (continues)

Focus group question:	
C2. Did you experience any challenges when using the gamification application?	
Aim	To identify challenges incurred by the participant when using the application which may have hindered their experience and usage of the application.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 4
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (D)
Focus group question:	
C3. Did you have any security concerns when using the gamification application?	
Aim	To identify any potential security or privacy concerns experienced by the participant when using the gamification application, and to determine the nature of such instances.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 6
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (D)
Focus group question:	
C4. What challenges or concerns do you foresee customers experiencing when using a fashion retail gamification-based application?	
Aim	To identify the potential challenges perceived by the participant that could potentially hinder the experience and usage of other customers in future.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 4
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (D)
Focus group question:	
C5. Could you realise how the user is rewarded for using the gamification application?	
Aim	To establish whether the participant could realise how the user is incentivised for using the gamification application, or whether the rewards aspect of the gamification experience was obscure to the participant.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 7
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (C)
Focus group question:	
C6. What incentives or rewards do you think a brand could offer its customers when using a fashion retail gamification application?	
Aim	To identify the participant's desired rewards or incentives sought for using the gamification application.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 7
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (C)

Table 5-1: Aims of focus group questions and their relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories (continues)

Focus group question:	
C7. Could you realise what indicators are used to track your progress on the gamification application?	
Aim	To establish whether the participant could realise how the user is informed of his/her progress when using the gamification application, or whether the indicators used in the gamification application were obscure to the participant.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 8
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (B)
Focus group question:	
C8. What indicators would you prefer to see on a fashion retail gamification-based application that shows your progress towards an incentive or a reward (i.e., a progression bar, a leader board, badges, awards, etc.)?	
Aim	To identify what indicators are sought by the participant that would show their progress towards achieving a reward or incentive when using the application.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 8
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (B)
Focus group question:	
C9. Did you enjoy using the gamification application?	
Aim	To establish whether the participant enjoyed using a fashion retail gamification-based app, thus accepting the concept in the fashion retail environment.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 5
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (A)
Focus group question:	
C10. Which aspects of the gamification application did you like the most?	
Aim	To identify those aspects of the participant's gamification experience or usage of the application they enjoyed most and contributed to a positive experience.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 3
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (A)
Focus group question:	
C11. Which aspects of the gamification application did you like the least?	
Aim	To identify those aspects of the participant's gamification experience or usage of the application that were least enjoyed and that contributed to a negative or neutral experience.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 3
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (A)

Table 5-1: Aims of focus group questions and their relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories (continues)

Focus group question:	
C12. Has the gamification application provided you with information about the brand that you were previously unaware of?	
Aim	To determine whether the gamification application can be regarded as a useful advertising vehicle to communicate brand or product information to customers.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 12
Literature	Chapter 3
Theme	3 Category (A)
Focus group question:	
C13. By considering the information provided and the fashion items that you saw on the gamification application, if you could, would you visit the brand's store (either online or brick-and-mortar) and browse for or try on these fashion items?	
Aim	To establish whether the gamification app would lead to increased footfall and sales by linking the user to the online or brick-and-mortar store.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 13
Literature	Chapter 3
Theme	3 Category (C)
Focus group question:	
C14. Do you think that the gamification application is an effective tool for advertising the brand? Why?	
Aim	To identify those reasons that the participant provides as to why a gamification application is an effective tool for advertising the brand.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 12
Literature	Chapter 3
Theme	3 Category (A)
Focus group question:	
C15. In future, would you be willing to pay money for using a fashion retail gamification-based application? Why?	
Aim	To determine whether the participant would spend money to make use of a gamification application in future, and if so, the reasons for this decision.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 5
Literature	Chapter 2
Theme	2 Category (A)
Focus group question:	
D1. Do you think that using a gamification application will assist you in remembering the brand name it promotes?	
Aim	To determine whether the use of a gamification app would aid in brand recall.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 11
Literature	Chapter 3
Theme	3 Category (B)

Table 5-1: Aims of focus group questions and their relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories (continues)

Focus group question:	
D2. Would you use a gamification application again in the future? Why?	
Aim	To determine whether the participant would make use of a gamification application in future, and by so doing, strengthening customer retention to a certain extent.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 10
Literature	Chapter 3
Theme	4 Category (B)
Focus group question:	
D3. Would you recommend a gamification application to friends and family?	
Aim	To determine whether the use of a gamification application would contribute to brand loyalty through recommendation of the gamification application to participants' reference groups, and by so doing, spreading positive word-of-mouth advertising.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 9
Literature	Chapter 3
Theme	4 Category (A)
Focus group question:	
D4. Would you recommend the brand to your friends and family based on your experience with the gamification application?	
Aim	To determine whether the use of a gamification application and the actual experience of using the application would contribute to brand loyalty by the participant recommending the gamification application to their reference groups, and by so doing, spreading positive word-of-mouth advertising.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 9
Literature	Chapter 3
Theme	4 Category (A)
Focus group question:	
D5. Would you return to using a brand's gamification application in the future due to the need or desire to accrue more rewards as the "game" progresses?	
Aim	To establish whether the decision to use the gamification application again in the future is primarily driven by the rewards aspect of the gamification application usage and experience.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 10
Literature	Chapter 3
Theme	4 Category (B)

Table 5-1: Aims of focus group questions and their relation to literature, objectives, and interpretation categories (continues)

Focus group question:	
D6. Would this aspect force you to make use of the specific brand's gamification application and rewards system, rather than using another brand's gamification application or rewards system?	
Aim	To determine whether the rewards aspect of the gamification application can be regarded as a competitive advantage against those of competitors who may have a gamification application but that are not incentivised.
Research objective	Secondary research objective 9
Literature	Chapter 3
Theme	4
	Category (A)

The remainder of this section is structured according to the categories and themes identified by using the ATLAS.ti software for analysing qualitative data and applying the Morse and Field approach (see section 4.4.5.2). Specific details pertaining to the data analysis and indications of how the categories have been identified within each theme, and the codebook used during the analysis of the data can be found on the CD-ROM included at the back of this dissertation. Table 5-2 specifies the thematic and categorical framework for the empirical research results and acts as a prelude to the research results discussed in the subsequent sections.

Table 5-2: The thematic and categorical framework for empirical research results

	Category (A)	Category (B)	Category (C)	Category (D)
Theme 1: Customer <i>awareness</i> of gamification.	Comprehension	Familiarity		
Theme 2: Customer <i>experience</i> with gamification.	Usage	Indicators	Incentives	Challenges
Theme 3: Gamification as an effective tool for <i>advertising</i> .	Communication	Recall	Sales	
Theme 4: The contribution of gamification towards <i>relationship marketing</i> .	Loyalty	Retention		

The categories identified with regards to each theme are discussed below. The research results pertaining to each identified category are also presented. Once the findings are presented in relation to each category, the main findings with respect to each theme are summarised.

5.2.2 Theme 1: Customer awareness of gamification

This section provides a discussion of the awareness of customers regarding gamification and presents the research results for each of the two categories identified (see Table 5-2).

5.2.2.1 Category 1(A): Comprehension

Category 1(A) indicates whether the participants know what gamification implies.

The participants were asked to define gamification to determine if they had an understanding of what the concept means. Few participants were either to a great extent or somewhat familiar with the term. Some of their views aligned with the widely agreed upon conceptualisation of gamification in literature. One participant expanded on the current position by providing a practical perspective thereof. Based on their responses, it was determined that the participants interpreted gamification in terms of a game embedded on a website, in-app purchases, engagement, motivation, communication, application, game elements, non-game environment, various usage contexts, and the dimension of interaction. To ensure that all participants had the same understanding of gamification, the researcher provided a definition and included a contextualised example of the concept. A summarising overview is provided in Figure 5-1.

Figure 5-1: Category 1(A) research results – Theme 1

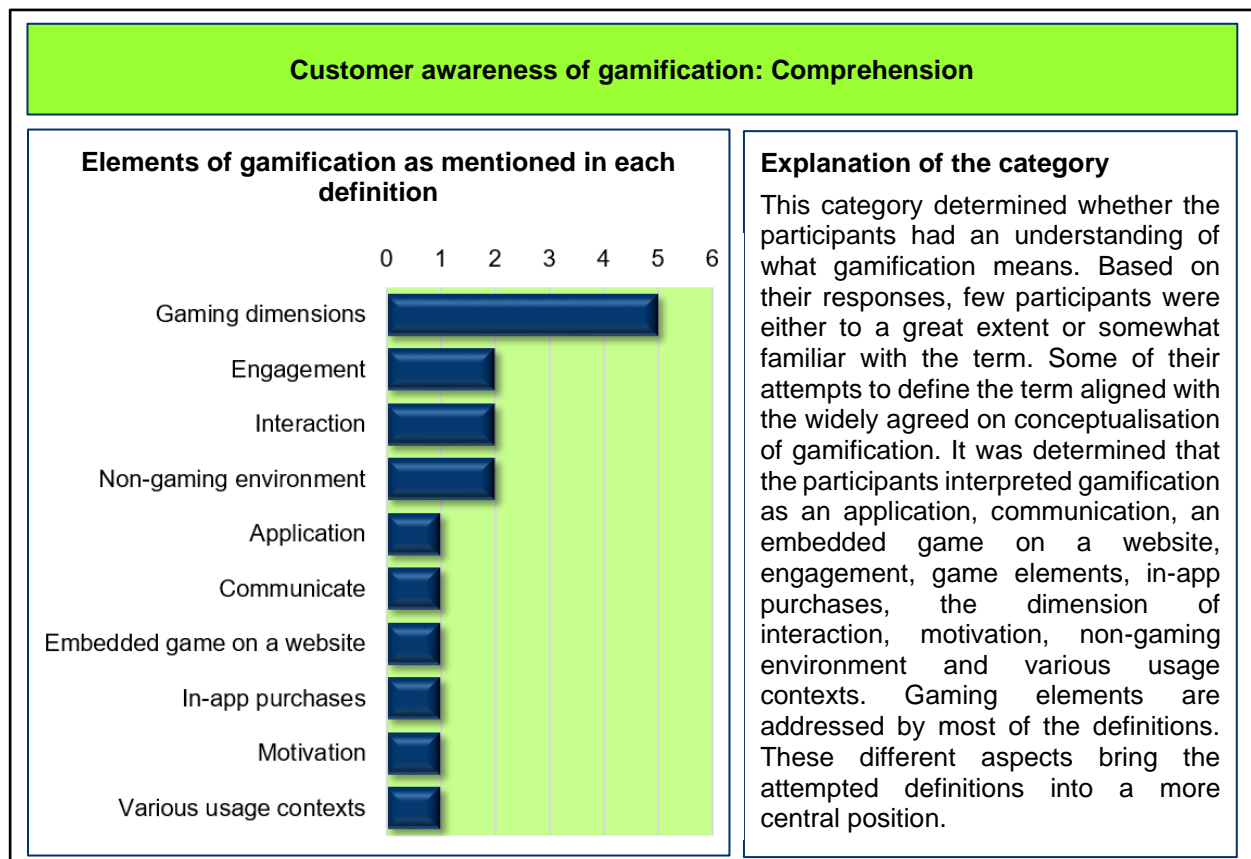


Figure 5-1: Category 1(A) research results – Theme 1 (continues)

Customer awareness of gamification: Comprehension	
Elements of gamification as mentioned in each definition	Representative verbatim quote(s)
Gaming dimensions	<p><i>Participant 2:1</i>: "...it's a way to, I think engage or communicate with a target market either through, in an ... application sense through rewards, challenges, competition..."</p> <p><i>Participant 2:7</i>: "... it's using the elements of games to engage and to motivate people".</p> <p><i>Participant 3:8</i>: "...there's sometimes a leaderboard and rewards that will be given to the participant".</p> <p><i>Participant 3:4</i>: "... it seems to be the application of game-type, uhm, mechanics to non-game-type settings. So, something like Duolingo, for example".</p> <p><i>Participant 3:6</i>: "... points and reward systems in a non-gaming environment".</p>
Engagement	<p><i>Participant 2:1</i>: "... it's a way to, I think engage or communicate with a target market either through, in an application sense through rewards, challenges, competition..."</p> <p><i>Participant 2:7</i>: "... it's using the elements of games to engage and to motivate people".</p>
Non-gaming environment	<p><i>Participant 3:4</i>: "... it seems to be the application of game-type, uhm, mechanics to non-game-type settings".</p> <p><i>Participant 3:6</i>: "... points and reward systems in a non-gaming environment".</p>
Application	<i>Participant 2:1</i> : "... it's a way to, I think engage or communicate with a target market either through, in an ... application sense through rewards, challenges, competition..."
Communicate	<i>Participant 2:1</i> : "... it's a way to, I think engage or communicate with a target market either through, in an ... application sense through rewards, challenges, competition..."
Embedded game on a website	<i>Participant 1:9</i> : "... the gaming option on a site where you can also purchase things..."
In-app purchase	<i>Participant 1:9</i> : "... the gaming option on a site where you can also purchase things..."
Interaction	<i>Participant 1:4</i> : "... it's a way to interact with certain consumers on a certain level..."
Motivation	<i>Participant 2:7</i> : "... it's using the elements of games to engage and to motivate people".
Various usage contexts	<i>Participant 3:5</i> : "... it can also be applied in various contexts. So, it's not only something, uhm, that's restricted to marketing, but it can also be, for example, applied in education".

5.2.2.2 Category 1(B): Familiarity

Category 1(B) indicates whether the participants are aware of what the gamification concept entails, whether and how the participants have been exposed to gamification in the past and some of the examples of gamification systems used by participants, and whether the participants have any previous experience with a gamification system.

The first focus group discussion question was related to participants' familiarity with the "gamification" term. Only few claimed that they were familiar with the term prior to participation, while most answered that they were unfamiliar with this term. After that, participants were questioned about their previous experiences with gamification either in the workplace or their personal lives. Based on the responses, all but one participant reported that they had used a gamification system prior to participation. One participant stated that they had never used any system related to gamification. Most of the participants therefore had some previous experience with gamification. Participants were further asked to provide the specific names of systems in which they used a game-like stimulus. While the study centres on gamification as a marketing tool, most participants were familiar with the concept due to its use in educational contexts (Duolingo, Kahn Academy, Kahoot!), financial and money management applications (FNB Banking App, Mint), food and beverage retail trade (Burger King, Pick n Pay), health and wellness applications (Discovery Vitality, Momentum Multiply, Smoke Free), mobile network providers' mobile application (My Vodacom App), online retail (Loopy Aura, Shein, Takealot), or productivity applications (Forest). The most dominant category centred on those applications emphasising technology and some form of interaction. Most participants used gamification to motivate health and wellness activities and measure and reward goal achievement. Furthermore, participants were introduced to gamification-based applications by family members, friends, social media, advertisements, financial services advisors or brokers, word-of-mouth, employers, school environments, university classrooms, or google searches.

Figure 5-2: Category 1(B) research results – Theme 1

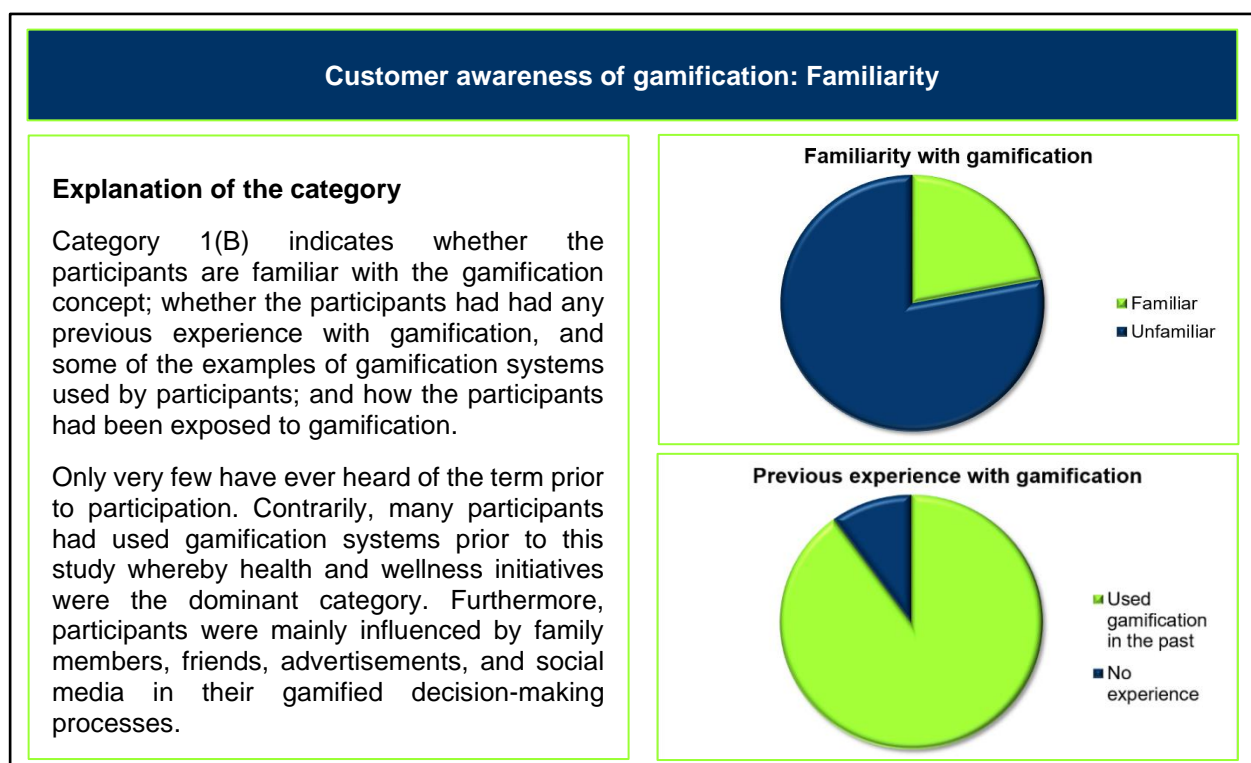
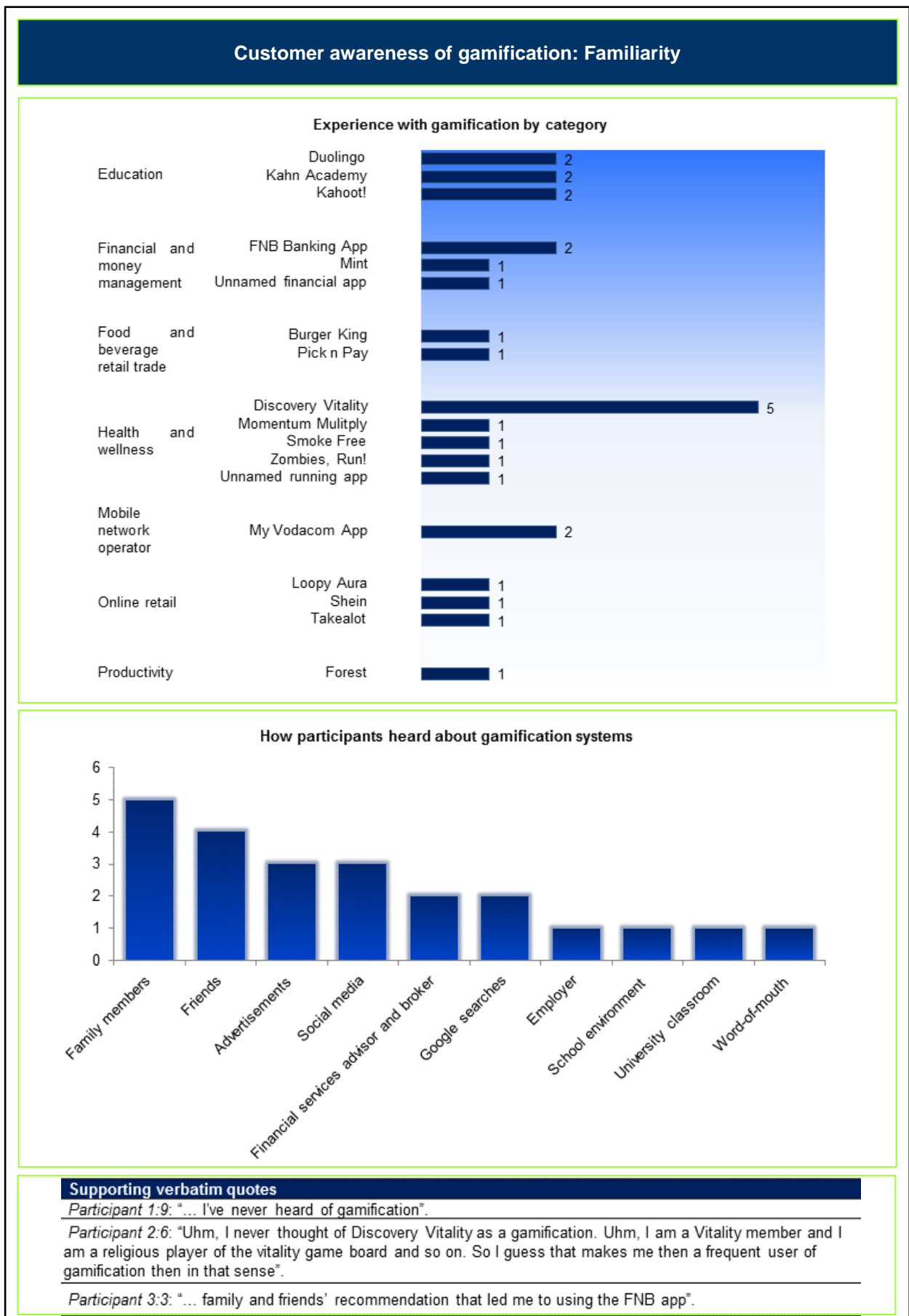


Figure 5-2: Category 1(B) research results – Theme 1 (continues)



By considering Category 1(A) and 1(B), the major theme identified from the empirical study is:

- **Theme 1:** Customer awareness of gamification (see Table 5-2).

Theme 2 and its identified categories are discussed in the subsequent section.

5.2.3 Theme 2: Customer experience with gamification

This section provides a detailed discussion pertaining to participants' experience with gamification and presents the research results for each of the four categories identified. Importantly, this study was not interested in the effectiveness of the gamified features in the assigned gamified application, but in arriving at a more generalisable estimate of their potential effectiveness under the premise that participants actually recognise them.

5.2.3.1 Category 2(A): Usage

This category indicates the preferred device on which the participants use a gamification application, the reasons for using a gamification application, whether they enjoyed using it, whether they had a neutral feeling toward the enjoyment factor of a gamification application, and whether they would be willing to pay to use a gamification application.

Participants accessed gamification applications through various devices. Many of the participants reported using gamification on their smartphones, followed by laptops and tablets. The data analyses uncovered different motives for using a gamification application. Many participants used gamification systems due to their interest in financial incentives, learning, rewards, motivating action, self-monitoring, improving employee morale, creating a sense of achievement, interacting with technology, keeping a relationship with a retailer, keeping organised, and wellness initiatives. Financial incentives seem to hold the most value to participants. This means users engage more with the application to earn greater financial benefits as a positive motivational effect. Financial incentives then act as a positive reinforcement for users' regular participation. Learning is another crucial enhancer of users' engagement. Users who enjoy acquiring new knowledge and skills are likely to engage in using gamification systems. Some participants also perceived gamification systems as an important motivational driver to support behavioural change. Users are further engaged by collecting rewards provided by the application. Such rewards can be linked to users' achievement motivations, which then act as positive reinforcement for their regular participation.

Data revealed that the participants' overall experience with gamified systems were positive. Many participants mentioned that they enjoyed the use of a gamification application. The participants also experienced a gamified application as fun, engaging, addictive, cool, educative, innovative, interactive, and interesting. Among the most engaging gamification components are the

augmented reality function and arcade games, smartphone capability, and interface. The augmented reality feature, which includes creative expression and aesthetic enjoyment, provided strong motivation for engagement. The participants were keen to virtually explore fashion items, which added information and enjoyment during their experiences. The arcade game, which includes sense-making, critical thinking, and problem-solving, provided strong motivation for engagement. Withal, the application kept them engaged and enriched their user experience.

A few participants had either a neutral or negative feeling towards the assigned gamification application. Participants mentioned that enjoyment faded over time and characterised the usage of the application as static and discouraging. They experienced the gamified activities as not challenging enough, perceived the application as too technologically advanced and found the app uninteresting and consequently abandoned their gamified activities. Participants also associated the gamification application with the idea of repetitive actions. The researcher also asked the participants to express whether they would be willing to pay for these applications. Less than half were willing to pay, since application purchases received acceptance from only four participants.

Figure 5-3: Category 2(A) research results – Theme 2

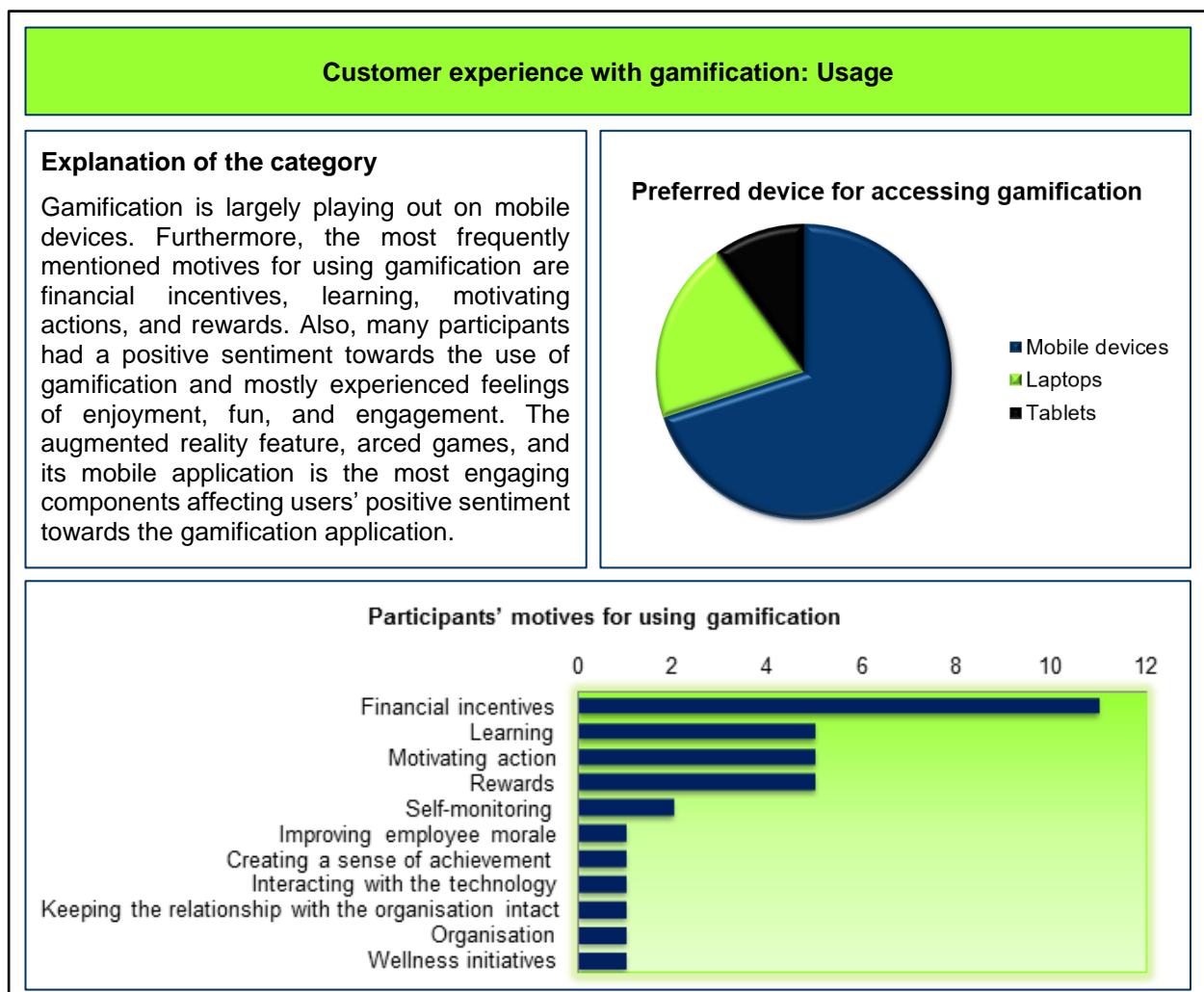
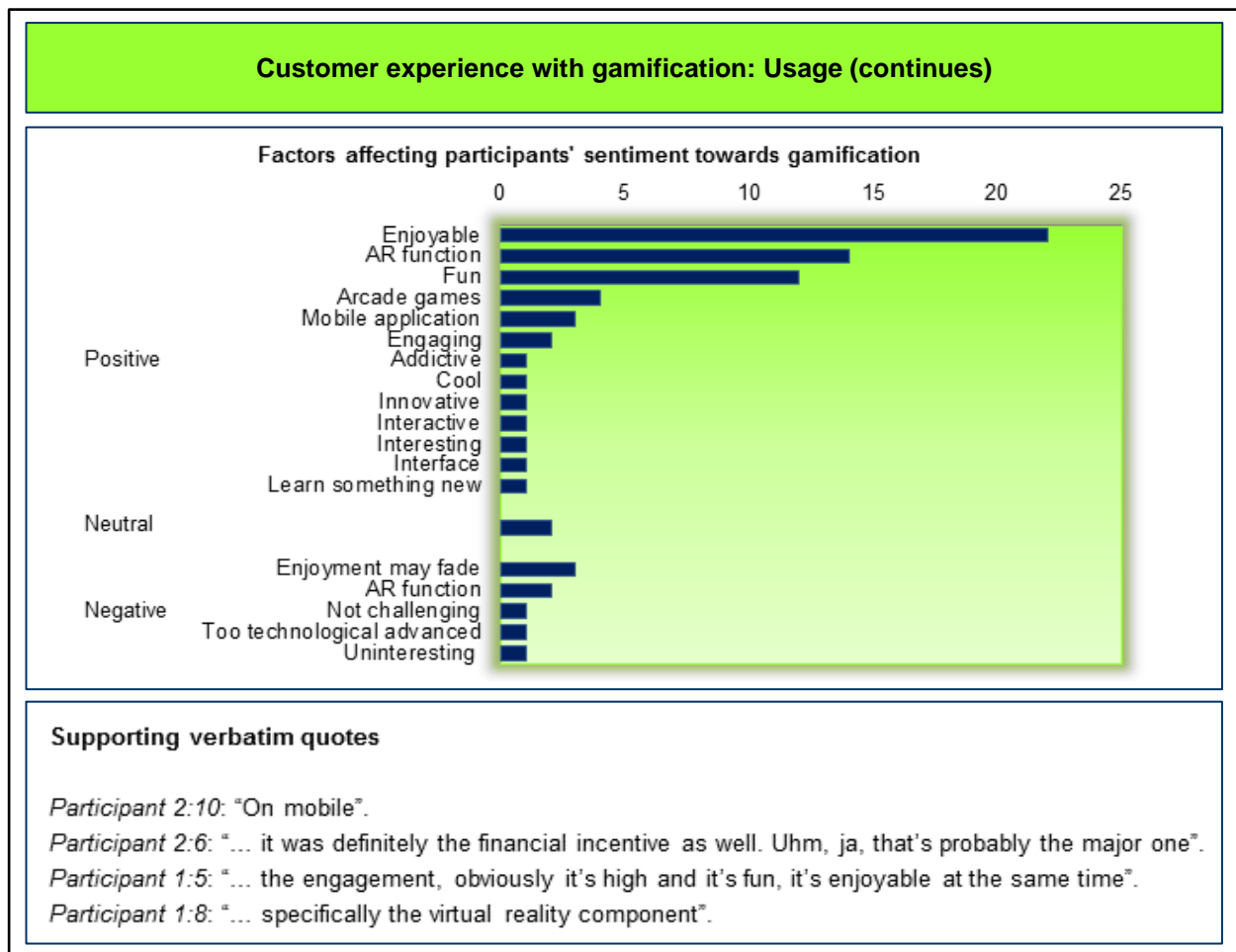


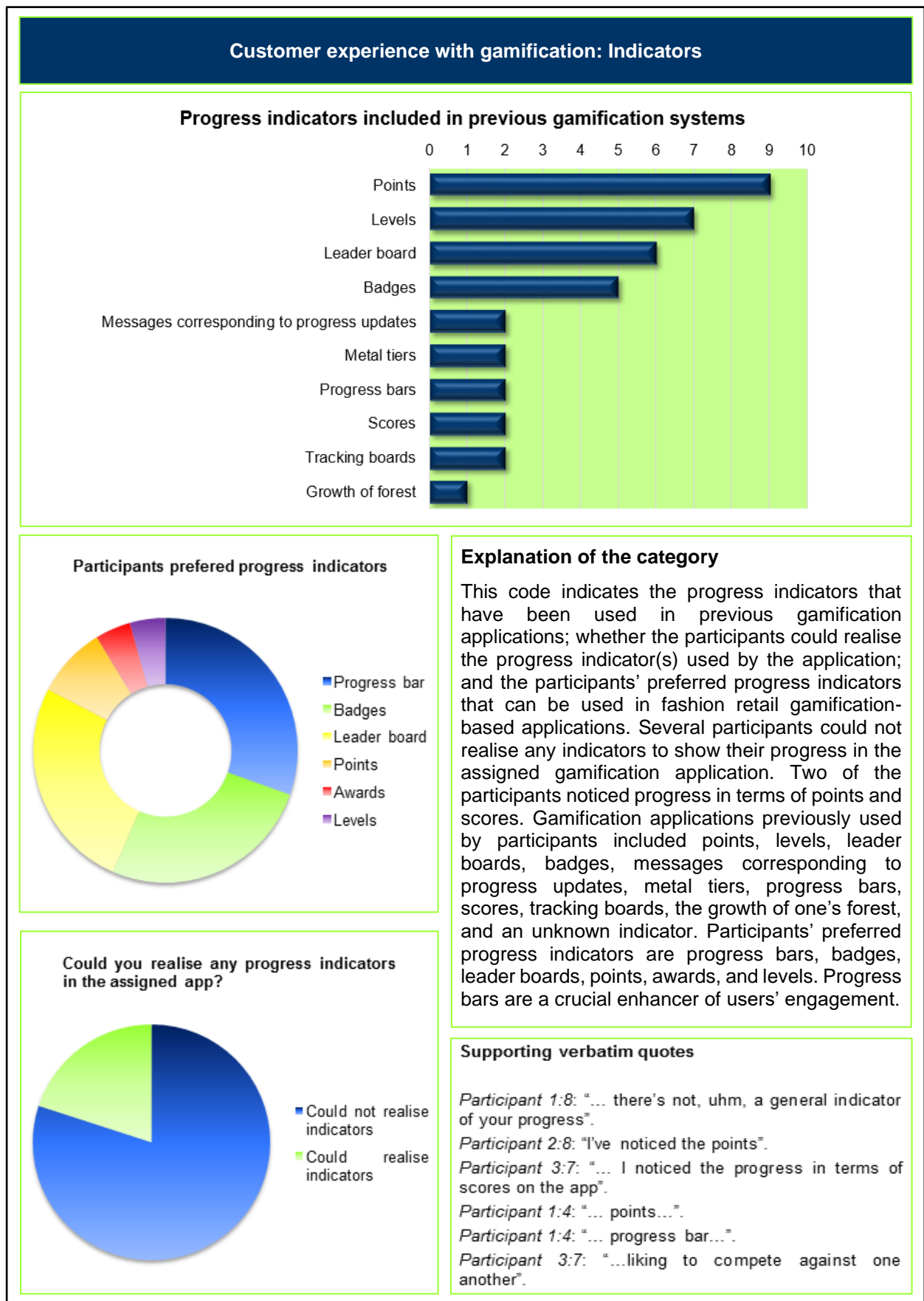
Figure 5-3: Category 2(A) research results – Theme 2 (continues)

5.2.3.2 Category 2(B): Indicators

This code indicates whether the participants could realise the progress indicator(s) used by the gamification app, the progress indicators used in previous gamification apps, and the preferred progress indicators for fashion retail gamification-based apps. A progress indicator that facilitates users' progress and monitors needs was found to be invaluable to some participants. However, several participants could not realise any indicators to show progress in the assigned gamification application. By contrast, two participants noticed progress in terms of points and scores.

Previously used gamified systems included points, levels, leader boards, badges, messages corresponding to progress updates, metal tiers, progress bars, scores, tracking boards, and the growth of one's forest. Participants preferred progress bars, badges, leader boards, points, awards, and levels for fashion retail gamification-based apps. Users are mostly engaged by progress bars, badges, and leader boards. User interaction such as competitions received more attention for users compared to self-progress indicators. That is, most users cared more about their position relative to other users than their personal achievements.

Figure 5-4: Category 2(B) research results – Theme 2



5.2.3.3 Category 2(C): Incentives

This category indicates whether the participants could realise the incentives that can be obtained by using the gamification system, what incentives had been obtained by the participants in the past by using a gamification system, and what incentives the participants preferred when using a gamification system.

Many of the participants were rewarded for using previous gamification systems with discounts, vouchers, points, tangible rewards, a coffee, a direct financial benefit, promotions, and scores for personal achievement. However, most participants did not realise the rewards for using the assigned gamification application. This study’s findings demonstrated that discounts, points, vouchers, accessing sale items a day before it goes public, cashbacks, coupons, entries to competitions, financial incentives, forming part of launches, free access to virtual runways, free products, free shipping, promotions, mystery boxes, and tangible products would increase user motivation to engage with a fashion retail gamification-based application. Such rewards can be mostly linked to users’ economic motivations.

Figure 5-5: Category 2(C) research results – Theme 2

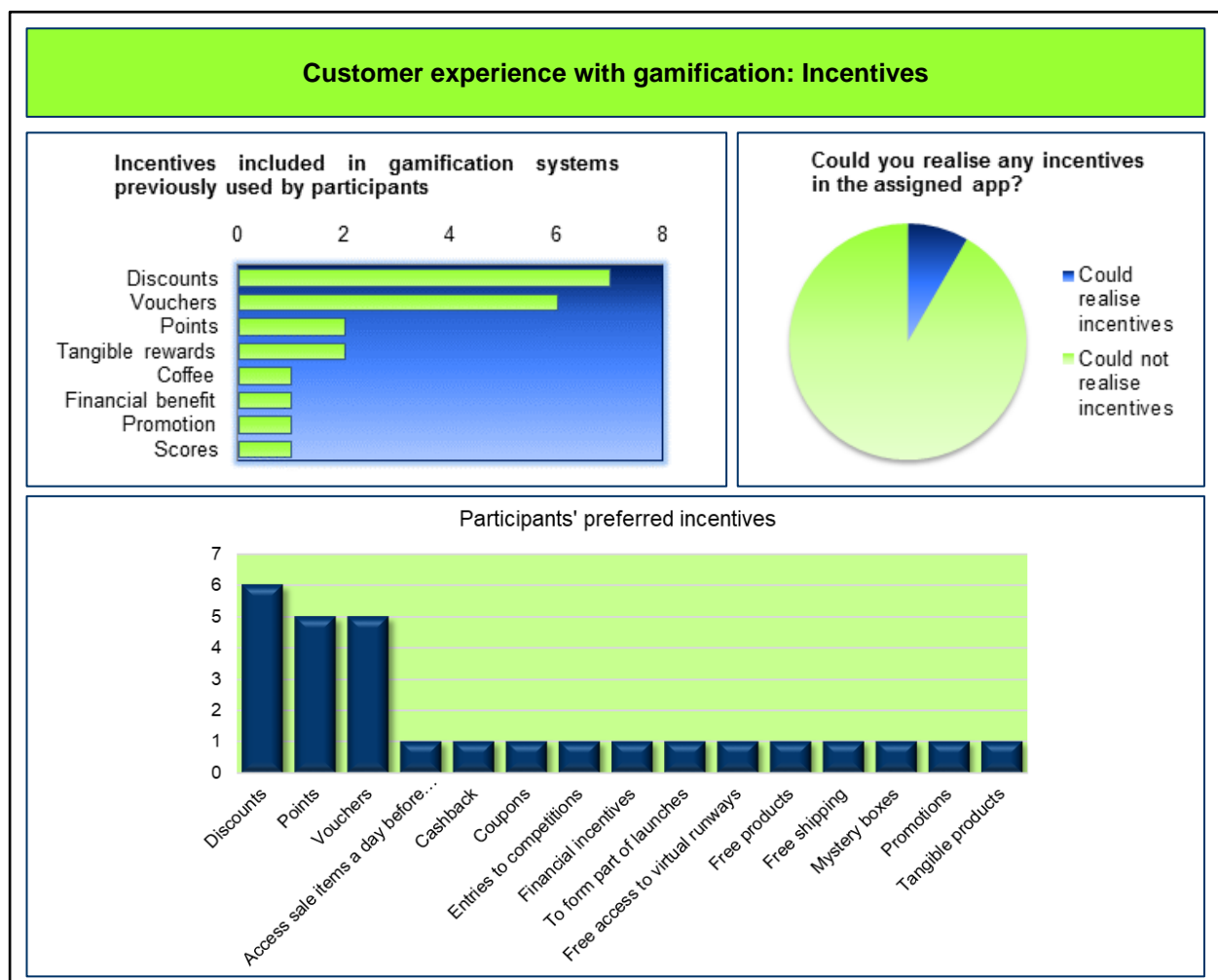


Figure 5-5: Category 2(C) research results – Theme 2 (continues)

Customer experience with gamification: Incentives
<p>Explanation of the category</p> <p>This code indicates what incentives have been obtained by the participants in the past by using a gamification systems; whether the participants could realise the incentives that can be obtained by using the assigned gamification application; and what incentives are preferred by the participants when using a gamification system. Many of the participants were rewarded for using previous gamification systems with discounts; vouchers; points; tangible rewards; coffee; direct financial benefit; promotion; and scores for personal achievement. Most participants did not realise rewards for using the assigned gamification application. The study's findings demonstrated that discounts; points; vouchers; access sale items a day before it goes public; cashback; coupons; entries to competitions; financial incentives; to form part of launches; free access to virtual runways; free products; free shipping; mystery boxes; promotions; and tangible products can increase user motivation to engage with a fashion retail gamification-based application.</p>
<p>Supporting verbatim quotes</p> <p><i>Participant 2:5: "... discounts ...".</i></p> <p><i>Participant 2:11: "I couldn't pick up any reward system...".</i></p> <p><i>Participant 1:7: "... discount ...".</i></p>

5.2.3.4 Category 2(D): Challenges

This code indicates whether the participants experienced any challenges whilst downloading the assigned gamification application, any challenges with regards to the gamification application's network connection, any security concerns whilst using the gamification application, whether the gamification application crashed whilst the participants were using it or experienced any issues related to the navigation on the gamification application, whether the participants considered the gamification application to be usable, and the foreseeable challenges that participants expected users may experience in the future.

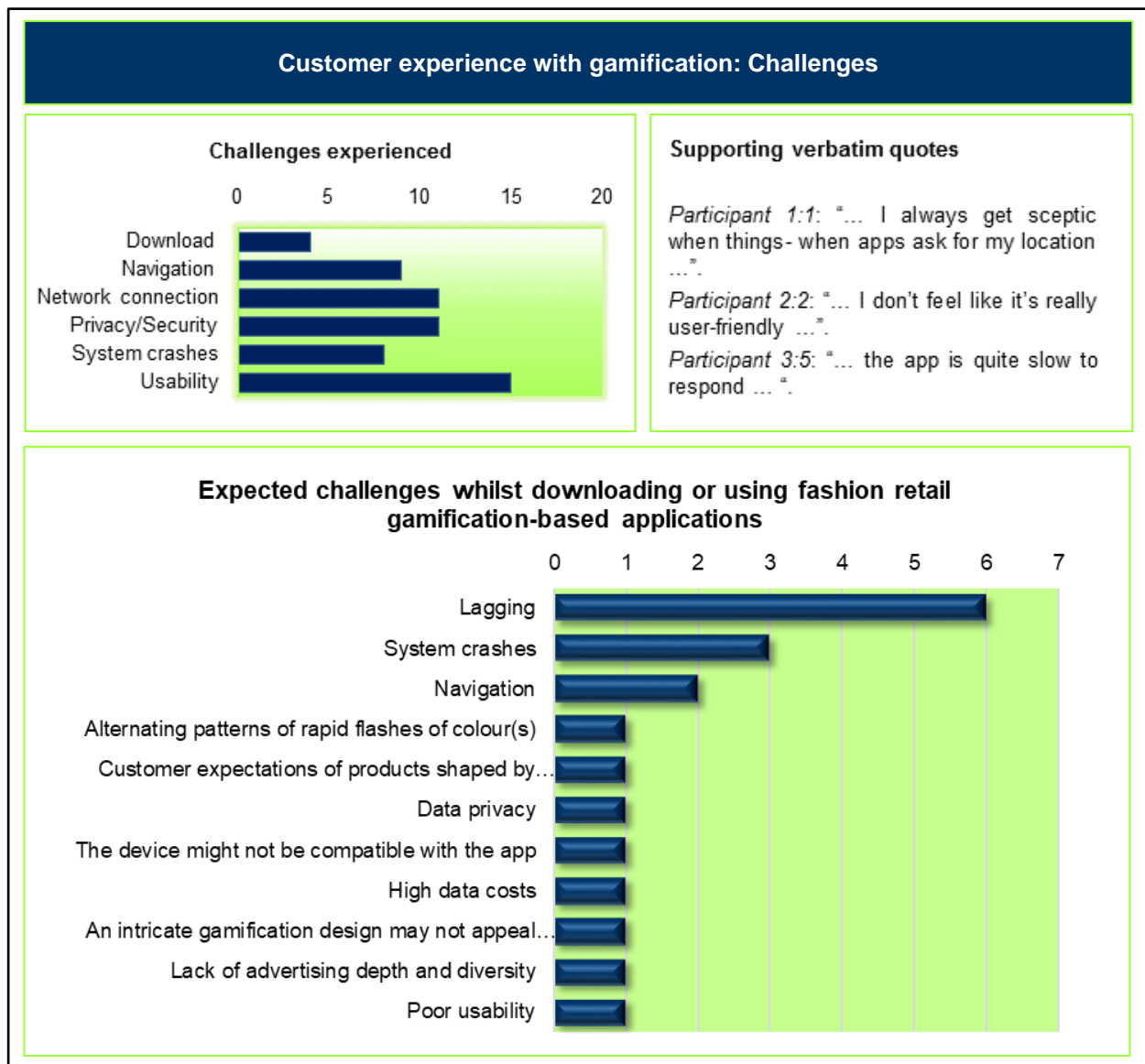
The challenges that participants experienced whilst using the assigned gamification application were categorised into sub-themes of downloading, network connectivity, privacy/security, system crashes, navigation, and usability. Within the download sub-theme, few participants experienced issues whilst downloading the assigned gamification application. One participant experienced slow downloading speed whilst another participant experienced issues after installation. Participants also emphasised connectivity-related problems and system crashes. Among the issues reported, some are technical issues likely associated with device hardware, limitations of the users' internet connection or system programming or setup. Many of the participants encountered privacy/security concerns whereby insecure data storage was a big concern.

Particularly, affordances requiring users to provide location data and sensitive information such as bank details developed less favourable attitudes towards the gamification application. However, some participants had no concerns, with one participant claiming that they normally exercised caution and only downloaded applications from trusted sources. Two participants stated that the application provided the necessary permissions. Moreover, in this study, many participants were unsatisfied and voiced their frustration about navigating the assigned application. Two participants stated that they were unaccustomed to the platform and found the non-linear gamified design somewhat confusing. Nevertheless, the most reported reason why several users could not (continue to) keep up with the platform's activities is because of its poor usability. Two participants factored in the asynchronous and uncoordinated design. All in all, the results indicated that situational factors or poor gamification design negatively affected participation and hindered participants' user experiences. This in turn seemed to have important consequences for the satisfaction potential of the gamification system.

Furthermore, expected challenges identified by participants included lagging, system crashes, poor navigation, customer expectations of products shaped by gamification experience that may not be met, data costs, data privacy, a device might not be compatible with the application, an intricate gamification design may not appeal to non-tech-savvy users, lack of advertising depth and diversity, poor usability, and rapid flashes or alternating patterns of (different) colour(s).

Figure 5-6: Category 2(D) research results – Theme 2

Customer experience with gamification: Challenges
<p>Explanation of the category</p> <p>This code indicates whether the participants experienced any challenges whilst downloading the assigned gamification application; whether the participants experienced any challenges with regards to the gamification application's network connection; whether the participants experienced any security concerns whilst using the gamification application; whether the gamification application crashed whilst the participants were using it; whether the participants experienced any issues related to the navigation on the application; whether the participants considered the gamification application to be usable or not; and the foreseeable challenges that participants expect users may experience whilst downloading or using fashion retail gamification-based applications in the future. Few participants experienced issues whilst downloading the assigned gamification application. Participants also emphasised connectivity-related problems, system crashes, privacy/security concerns and a few voiced their frustration about navigating the application. The most reported reason why many participants could not (continue to) keep up with the platform's activities is because of its poor usability. All in all, the results indicated that poor gamification design or situational factors can negatively affect participation and user experience, and the subsequently satisfaction potential of the gamification system. Furthermore, expected challenges identified by participants included lagging; system crashes; navigation; customer expectations of products shaped by gamification may not be met; high data costs; data privacy; a user's device might not be compatible with the application; an intricate gamification design may not appeal to non-tech-savvy users; lack of advertising depth and diversity; poor usability; and alternating patterns or rapid flashes of (different) colour(s).</p>

Figure 5-6: Category 2(D) research results – Theme 2 (continues)

By considering categories 2(A), 2(B), 2(C), and 2(D) respectively, the major theme evident from the empirical study for these categories is:

- **Theme 2:** Customer experience with gamification (see Table 5-2).

Theme 3 and its respective categories are discussed in the section that follows.

5.2.4 Theme 3: Gamification as an effective tool for advertising

This section provides a detailed discussion pertaining to the effectiveness of gamification as a tool for advertising and presents the research results for each of the three categories identified.

5.2.4.1 Category 3(A): Communication

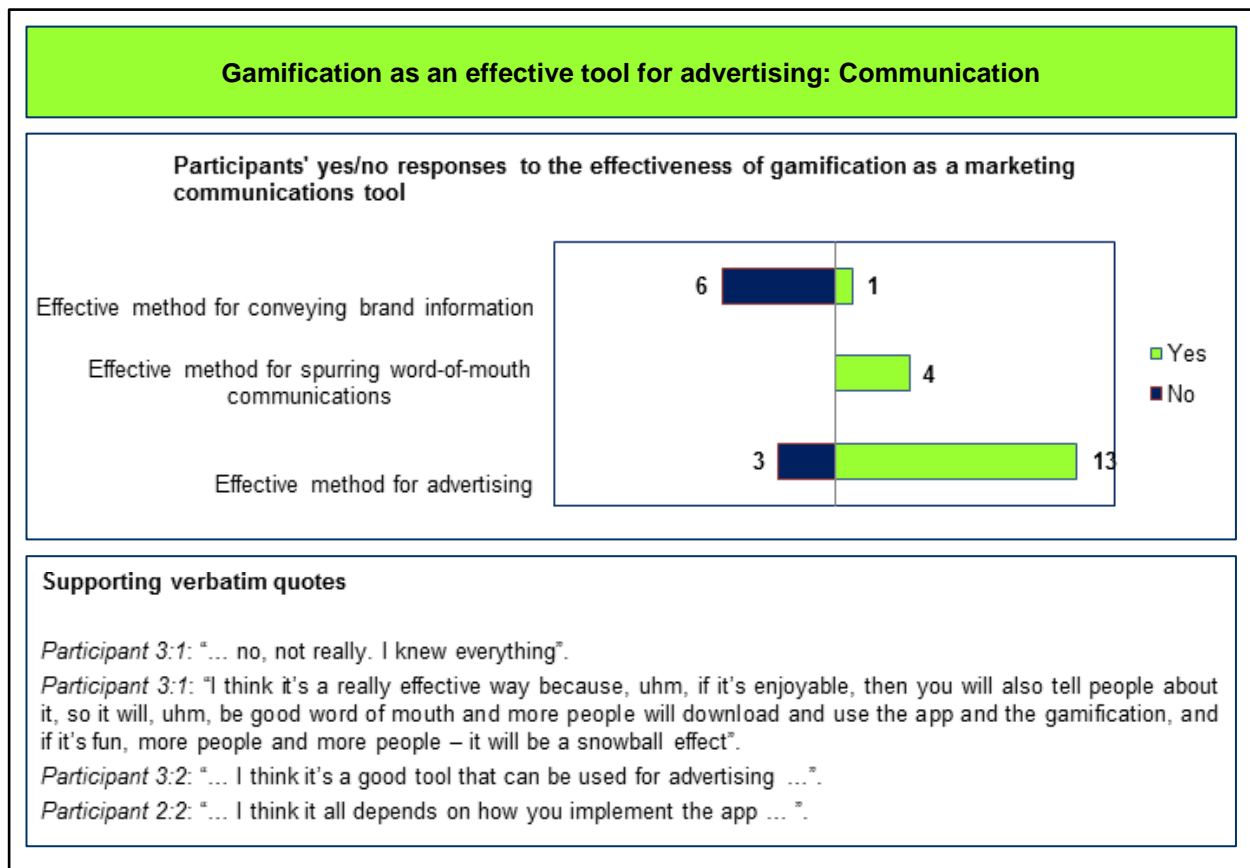
This section indicates whether the participants considered a gamification application to be an effective method of advertising, they believed that a gamification application would spur word-of-mouth advertising, and they considered a gamification application to be an effective method for conveying brand information.

Gamification was almost unanimously thought to be an effective marketing communications tool that is, according to two participants, conditioned upon its execution. However, from the perspective of three participants, gamification cannot yet be considered as an effective marketing communications tool for attracting and retaining customers due to information overload within the app, according to one participant. Moreover, results indicated that gamification stimulates word-of-mouth communications.

Gamification systems should be fully created around a brand and often has a clear rhetoric to transfer specific brand information. However, the assigned gamification application is less capable of transferring a substantial amount of brand-related information since many of the participants seem to have difficulty recalling brand information. Notwithstanding, consumers' susceptibility to advertising, defined as the extent to which individuals attend to and value commercial messages as sources of information for guiding their consumptive behaviours (Barr & Kellaris 2000:230), can determine whether they play either an active or passive role in the communications process.

Figure 5-7: Category 3(A) research results – Theme 3



Figure 5-7: Category 3(A) research results – Theme 3 (continues)

5.2.4.2 Category 3(B): Recall

This category indicates whether the participants will recall a brand name by making use of a gamification application.

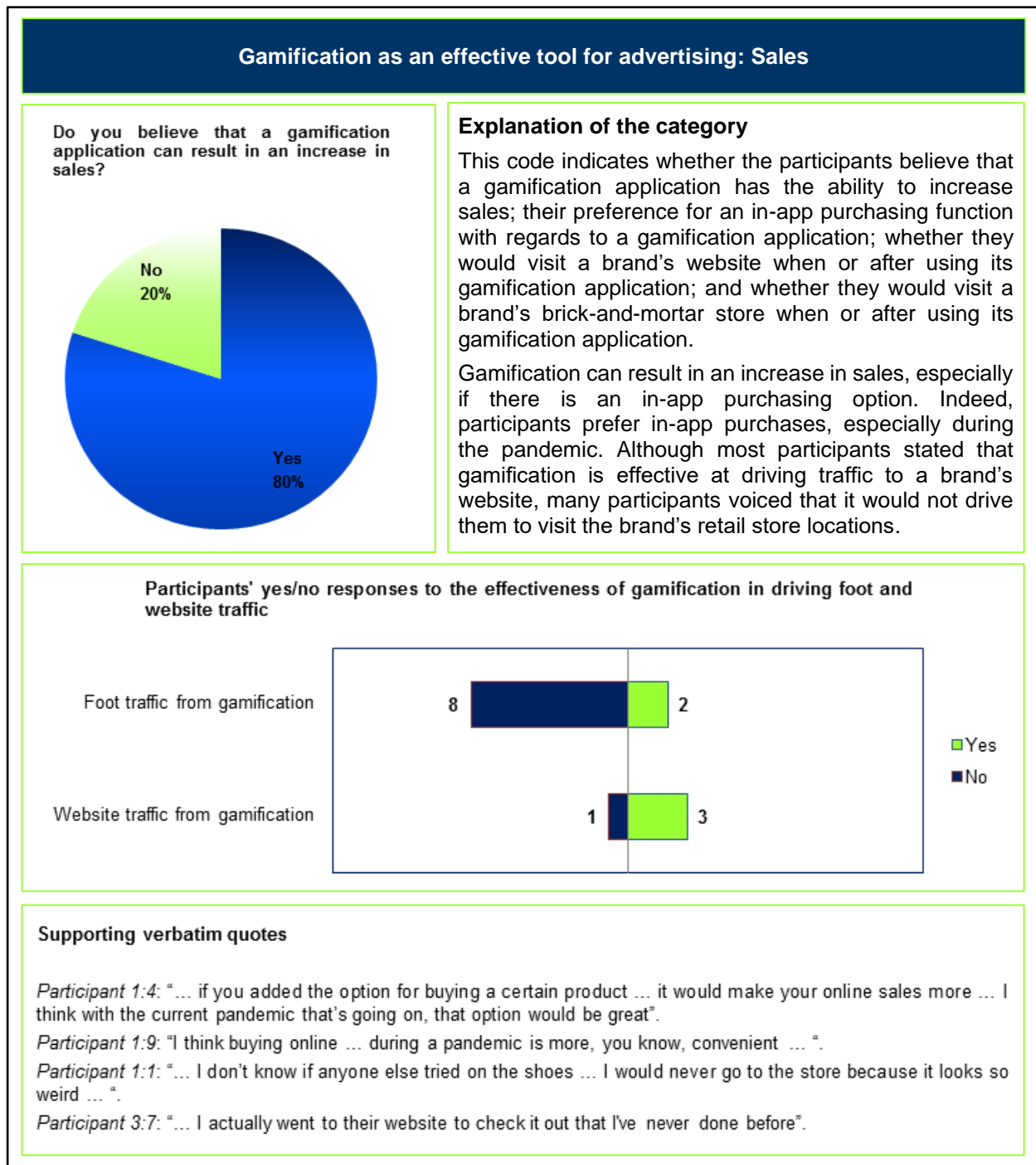
The responses postulate 100.0% brand recall, which indicates that the participants would recall a brand name as a result of using a gamification system in a relevant manner to compete in the game tasks. However, according to one participant, this processing is contingent upon users' flow experiences during playing or their sense of presence in the gamified environment.

5.2.4.3 Category 3(C): Sales

This code indicates whether the participants believe that a gamification application has the ability to increase sales, their preference for an in-app purchasing function with regards to a gamification application, whether they would visit a brand's website when or after using its gamification application, and whether they would visit a brand's brick-and-mortar store when or after using its gamification application.

Gamification can result in an increase in sales, especially if there is an in-app purchasing option. Indeed, participants preferred in-app purchases, which unlocks additional value, especially during the pandemic, enabling users to browse and purchase right from the app. Participants also stated that gamification is effective at driving traffic to a brand’s website. However, many participants voiced that it would not drive them to visit the brand’s retail store locations.

Figure 5-8: Category 3(C) research results – Theme 3



By considering categories 3(A), 3(B), and 3(C), the major theme evident from the empirical study for these categories is:

- **Theme 3:** Gamification as an effective tool for advertising (see Table 5-2).

Theme 4 and its respective categories are discussed in the section that follows.

5.2.5 Theme 4: The contribution of gamification towards relationship marketing

This section provides a detailed discussion pertaining to the contribution of gamification towards relationship marketing and presents the research results for each of the two categories identified.

5.2.5.1 Category 4(A): Loyalty

This category indicates whether the participants believed that using a brand's gamification application would influence their relationship with the brand, whether they would recommend a gamification application to other consumers, and whether they would recommend a gamification application's brand to other consumers.

Participants demonstrated the willingness to engage with the brands and invest in brand relationships through a gamified approach, since gamification gives them the opportunity to interact differently with the brand, promoting feelings of fun, engagement, interactivity, personalisation, and enjoyment. Moreover, many of the participants showed availability and willingness in adhering, suggesting, and recommending gamified experiences. Brand user imagery perspectives, continual enjoyment, information richness, need satisfaction, positive attitudes towards a brand, solutions that reduce consumer effort, perceived benefits, and perceived value were mentioned as driving factors of word-of-mouth communications.

Results also showed that gamification systems exerted a positive effect on brand recommendations if there are online reviews, the tool has an open-source platform; and if it was a pleasant experience for the participant. However, some participants were more likely to share their experiences based on their evaluation concerning an organisation and its product and service quality, which can then install satisfaction and word-of-mouth intention. Therefore, positive attitudes towards an organisation, its products or services could be translated into preferred intentions and behaviour for the organisation.

Figure 5-9: Category 4(A) research results – Theme 4



5.2.5.2 Category 4(B): Retention

This category indicates whether the participants would continue using a gamification application.

Participants explicitly showed openness to participate in a gamified system conditioned on the reward element, perceived benefits, need satisfaction, perceived value, whether it is a pleasant user experience, application troubleshooting, whether there are easier ways to earn in-game rewards for certain participants, whether game tasks are easily achievable, enjoyment, the presence of games, positive attitudes towards the brand, come recommended, reduces consumer effort, and regularly updated rewards. Given the novelty of the experience, participants also mentioned the intention to adhere to a gamified system of any brand due to curiosity. However, some participants were disengaged due to their preferences for other channels, user inactivity, the application's inability to incentivise participants, delayed gratification, and enjoyment that faded over time.

Figure 5-10: Category 4(B) research results – Theme 4

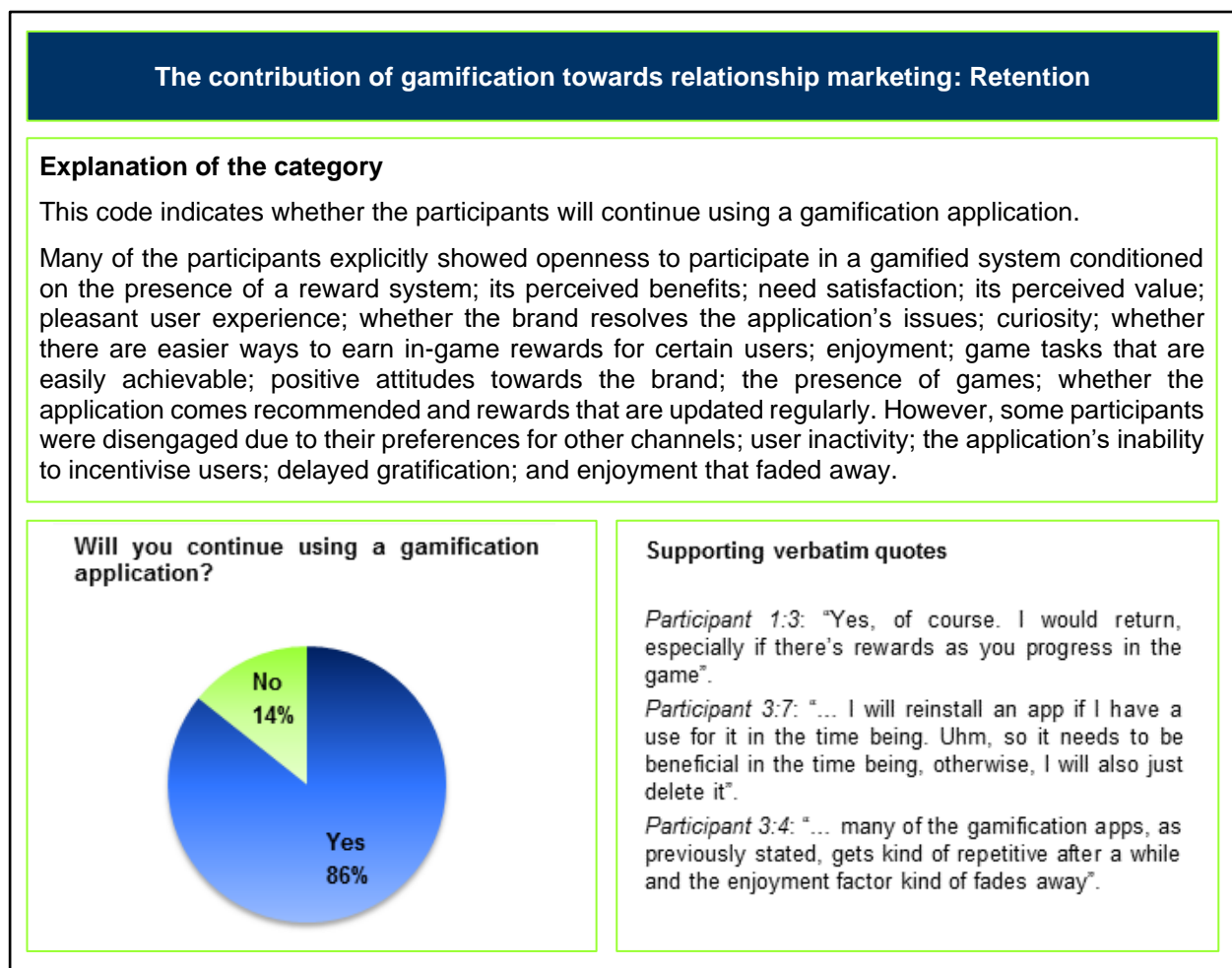
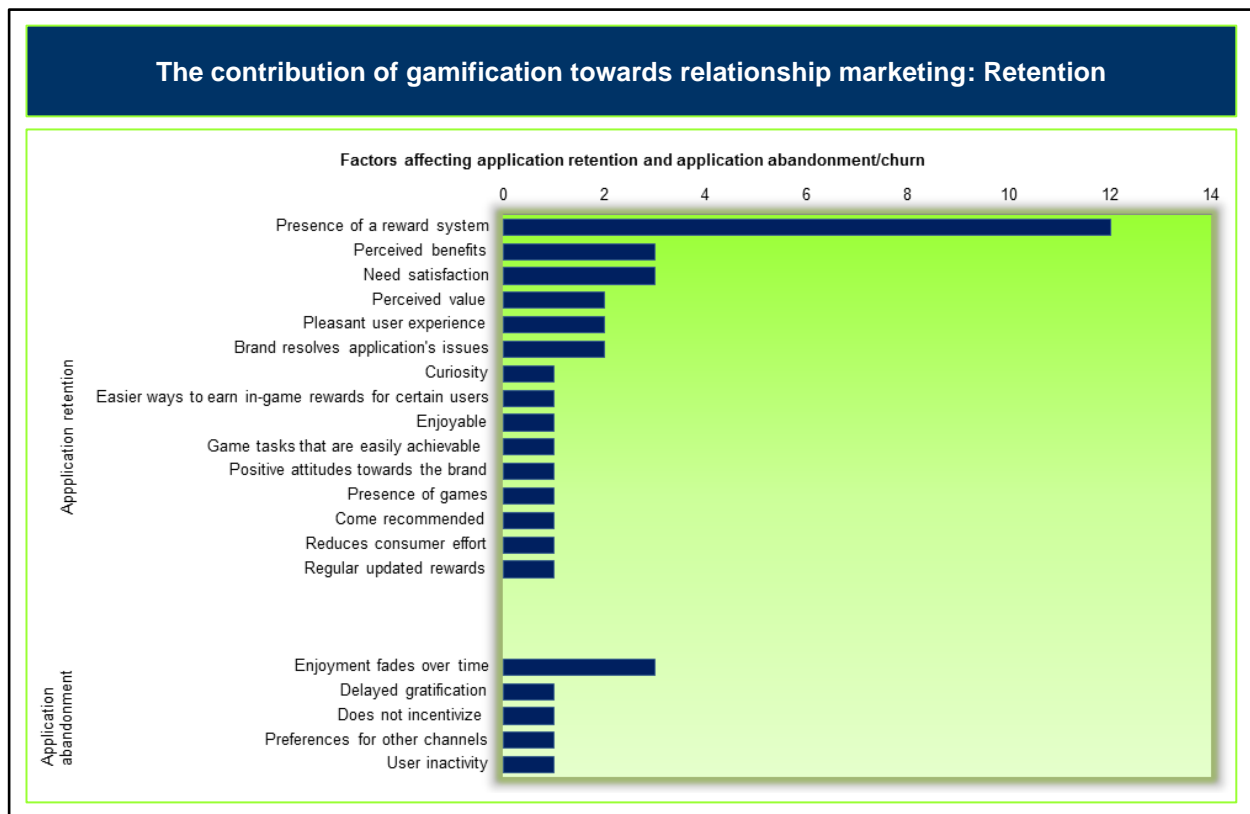


Figure 5-10: Category 4(B) research results – Theme 4 (continues)



By considering categories 4(A) and 4(B), the major theme evident from the empirical study for these categories is:

- **Theme 4:** The contribution of gamification towards relationship marketing (see Table 5-2).

5.2.6 Summary of the empirical research results

Table 5-3 summarises the categories and themes identified in the empirical results. It also notes the main findings pertaining to each theme. A summary of results follows for each theme.

Table 5-3: Summary of empirical research results

Theme 1: Customer awareness of gamification

Categories	1(A) Comprehension	1(B) Familiarity
Main findings	It can be concluded that there is a general awareness of gamification systems. While many lacked knowledge of the concept, the participants of this study revealed to have a moderate familiarity with this system, since many participants used gamification on a daily basis. Withal, the same portion of the sample that marked no familiarity with gamification indicated knowledge of a gamification system after the provided explanation. Moreover, the influence of family members and friends is an important determinant in the intention to use gamified systems. Withal, findings indicated that advertisements and social media could serve as an acceptable support platform in gamification interventions with consumers.	

Table 5-3: Summary of empirical research results (continues)

Theme 2: Customer experience with gamification

Categories	2(A) Usage	2(B) Indicators	2(C) Incentives	2(D) Challenges
Main findings	The responses seem to indicate that the majority of participants had a rather favourable attitude towards gamification. The participants referred to enjoyment, an augmented reality feature, fun, arcade games, and smartphone capabilities as necessary factors for pleasant and continuous experiences. Although participants resume a globally positive experience about gamification, the focus groups' outcomes induce that gamified experiences should accommodate feedback systems and rewards and that the system should not experience any issues. Indeed, this study provided empirical evidence of the potential that interaction with progression-oriented elements has for satisfying participants' needs. The participants provided some progress indicators to be included in fashion retail gamification-based applications that might enhance the likelihood of successful gamification implementation, such as progress bars, badges, and leader boards. Withal, as reported, a basic motivation for engaging gamification is financial incentives that seem to support the flow of the game. Many participants suggested discounts, points, and vouchers to a fashion retail gamification-based application to make it more motivating. Overall, the participants enjoyed the gamification experience and suggested that if it was designed properly, it could enhance their consumer experience. Furthermore, situational factors were also found to be significant confounds, with implications for the ability of game elements to enable value generation.			

Theme 3: Gamification as an effective tool for advertising

Categories	3(A) Communication	3(B) Recall	3(C) Sales	3(A) Communication
Main findings	Although many of the participants seemed to have difficulty recalling brand information within the application, and gamification interventions would not necessarily drive the participants to visit the brand's retail store locations, their reactions are generally positive. That is, this study empirically establishes that the participants identified clear potential in gamification as a way of engaging with fashion brands. Gamification can further affect the preferred behavioural changes through word-of-mouth communications. The app's novel and engaging interface positively affects the participants' brand recall. Gamification can result in an increase in sales, especially if there is an in-app purchasing option. That is, participants preferred in-app purchases and also stated that gamification is effective at driving traffic to their website.			

Theme 4: Contribution of gamification towards relationship marketing

Categories	4(A) Loyalty	4(B) Retention
Main findings	The results of the focus groups showed that participants would establish a loyal relationship with a brand through gamification that gives them the opportunity to interact differently with the brand. Additionally, brands can potentiate knowledge sharing within gamified systems, as participants were willing to perform this communication voluntarily. Moreover, many voices echoed the desire to continue using a gamification system mainly based on its rewards system, perceived benefits, and need satisfaction potential.	

5.3 CONCLUSION

The objective of this chapter was to report on the empirical results obtained from the data collected for this study. The chapter commenced by providing a brief review of the questions asked during the focus group sessions, the aim of the questions, the secondary research objective addressed by the questions, the literature chapter pertaining to the specific questions, and the themes and categories related to the questions. The chapter continued by presenting the thematic and categorical framework, which was subsequently used to report the empirical research results pertaining to each respective category and theme identified. The chapter concluded by providing the main findings related to each identified theme. The study now progresses to Chapter 6, which concludes the study by providing a comparison between the initial aim of the study and the goals that were set out and the manner in which the aim and goals were achieved to achieve the set objectives.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the research objectives that have been formulated within this study. It commences with a brief overview of the study, followed by conclusions and recommendations for each of the objectives of this study. The chapter then concludes with the limitations of the study alongside advice for future research.

6.2 OVERVIEW

In order to provide context in terms of the conclusions and recommendations of each objective discussed in section 6.3, this section provides a summary of this study's objectives, the topics addressed in the literature study (Chapters 2 and 3) and the research methodology (Chapter 4).

As set out in Chapter 1, the primary research objective of this study was to explore gamification in the South African fashion retail industry. In order to address the primary objective, various secondary objectives were formulated. To recapitulate, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a destructive impact on the world economy with adverse implications across nearly all sectors of activity. The impact of this environment on the fashion industry together with the twin realities of hyper-competition amongst fashion retail brands has been highly significant. Fashion retailers' continued existence is heavily dependent on effective marketing assets to overcome competitive adversity, target markets effectively, create competitive advantages or strengthen competitive positions, and ensure growth for fashion retailers. Given the increasing inadequacy of traditional marketing communications practices, gamified systems may be a creative medium to embed within fashion retailers' marketing communications practices, with downstream impacts of desirable outcomes. Retailers in the South African fashion industry have not as yet widely integrated gamification into their marketing practices. Also, research focused on the application of gamification within the South African fashion retail context is limited in scope.

To this extent, the identified problem areas, as well as the practical and theoretical infancy thereof, are sufficient impetus for exploring gamification in the South African fashion retail industry. This research is therefore intended to assist academics and scholars in their research on the subject and facilitate relevant retail and marketing specialists such as digital marketing managers and game designers in their marketing communications practices.

A literature study was conducted pertaining to the key concepts of gamification and relationship marketing, which presented the theoretical basis. Throughout the course of this study, the literature chapters aimed to provide the necessary background to facilitate an understanding of gamification with a specific focus on a relational marketing approach in the South African fashion retail industry. This background, with reference to Chapters 2 and 3, made insightful contributions in acknowledging the theoretical and empirical implications surrounding this study.

Chapter 2 aimed at exploring the gamification concept in the South African fashion retail industry. Within this chapter, it became clear that gamification marketing is an interdisciplinary topic that requires an understanding of marketing communications, the gamification concept, and its usage context. As such, in light of the literature on marketing communications, the particularities of the marketing discipline were discussed. The literature revealed that integrated marketing communications (IMC) is one of the new-generation marketing approaches being used by organisations to better focus their marketing efforts in acquiring, retaining, and developing profitable relationships with consumers and other stakeholders (Andrews *et al.*, 2021:10; Duncan & Moriarty, 1997:5). It was therefore necessary to provide a short overview of IMC before proceeding to discuss marketing communications in further detail. That is, conventional and contemporary marketing communications channels were discussed, since marketing communications messages are delivered through one or more of these channels. The chapter then provided a detailed description of the gamification concept. The chapter detailed the origins and current use cases of this emerging research term and demarcated this phenomenon from various terms that might be related or be named in the context of gamification. The chapter further deconstructed previously published definitions of gamification to merge overlapping elements in order to communicate the essential characteristics of the subject. The chapter also discussed some of the key advantages of gamification over past iterations of behaviour-change gamification since they can be used to legitimise gamification communications for marketing purposes. The chapter also presented the concept's potential drawbacks. Within the research's usage context, fashion marketing and associated industry trends and activities were also discussed.

Since relationship marketing emerged as an invaluable approach to creating value for both the organisation and the customer and strengthening customer relationships (Süphan, 2015:5), Chapter 3 reviewed the conceptual domain of relationship marketing. The chapter provided a review of the various relationship marketing notions extracted from previous research studies in which the emergence of relationship marketing and the relationship marketing definition were studied. The application of gamification as a relationship marketing approach in the South African fashion retail industry was addressed, and actionable guidance on leveraging this approach and reaching relational marketing objectives in today's relationship marketing environment was provided. These outcomes were met by a strategic approach that demanded the chapter to be

directed at the different stages of the relationship marketing process. The chapter also provided deeper insights into the relevant relationship marketing constructs used in this study, namely, trust, satisfaction, commitment, and customer loyalty. As each of these constructs plays a significant role in the building of customer-retailer relationships, various aspects pertaining to each are discussed. Furthermore, since some generalist qualitative research scholars regard the inclusion of a conceptual framework at the outset of the period of data collection and data analysis as the 'key part' of a research project, key literature review findings have been organised in a theoretically grounded conceptual framework of gamification marketing related to managing customer-retailer relationships in technology-mediated relational exchanges.

The key aspects pertaining to each literature chapter are presented in Table 6-1.

Table 6-1: Key aspects of each literature chapter

Key aspects	Reference(s)	
Chapter 2: Gamification	The particularities of the marketing discipline were discussed, including its definition and the marketing concept.	Section 2.2.1 Table 2-1
	A short overview of integrated marketing communications was provided, including its significance, definition, and primary objective.	Section 2.2.2 Table 2-2
	A comprehensive review was undertaken into marketing communications practices and trends that are related to the embedding of brand messages in gamification applications as a key organisation-specific capability to operationalise brand-to-target relationships.	Section 2.2.3
	The gamification concept was discussed in terms of its origin, followed an investigation of the term in relation to precursors and similar concepts in order to devise an unambiguous definition for gamification.	Section 2.3 Figure 2-1 Table 2-3, Table 2-4, Table 2-5 & Table 2-6
	Fashion marketing and associated industry trends and activities were explored.	Section 2.4 Figure 2-2 Table 2-7
Chapter 3: Relationship marketing	The relationship marketing concept's evolution and proliferation in research and practice were illustrated and a definition for the relationship marketing concept was provided.	Section 3.2
	The application of gamification as a relationship marketing approach in the South African fashion retail industry was addressed and actionable guidance on how to leverage this approach in today's relationship marketing environment was provided.	Section 3.3 Figure 3-1 & Figure 3-2
	Various aspects pertaining to trust, satisfaction, commitment, and customer loyalty were discussed.	Sections 3.4, 3.5 & 3.6 Table 3-1
	Key literature review findings were organised in a theoretically grounded conceptual framework of gamification marketing related to managing customer-retailer relationships in technology-mediated relational exchanges.	Section 3.7 Figure 3-3

The literature study provided a solid foundation for the process followed in Chapter 4, whereby the structured methodological approach detailed how gamification marketing related to managing customer-retailer relationships in technology-mediated relational exchanges within the South African fashion retail industry can be investigated. From the viewpoint of ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions, this study adopted interpretivism as its primary research philosophy. Moreover, in this study, the choice of approach to theory development was induction. In addition, an exploratory research design was adopted for this dissertation, as it aligns with the nature of this research study. Furthermore, secondary data was used to develop a thorough theoretical understanding of the gamification phenomenon pertaining to South African fashion retailers. In addition to the secondary data, primary data was used when bringing forward and exploring empirical findings.

Based on the embryonic nature of gamification marketing within the South African fashion retail industry, primary data was collected using a qualitative research approach by means of three focus group discussion sessions. To maximise the efficacy of the investigation, categorisation of the participants' gamified experiences required the deployment of a fashion retail gamification-based application to determine how participants experienced a fashion retail gamification-based application. A non-probability judgement sampling method was used to recruit the participants (see section 4.4.4.3). The data collected was analysed by using the Morse and Field approach. The ATLAS.ti qualitative data software was used for analysing the data of which the results were presented in Chapter 5. The categories and themes derived from participants' responses provided valuable insights into the considerations required to achieve the complementarity aspect of gamification for building marketing capabilities or capability constructs with long-term strategic value.

The current chapter superimposes discussions of established findings structured on the various principles provided in the preceding chapters in pursuit of set objectives. The subsequent section provides conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to each objective of the study.

6.3 ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This section provides answers to the research objectives formulated for the purpose of this study. Firstly, the secondary objectives are addressed in order to answer the primary research objective. An indication of how the study's research objectives are linked to the literature review and empirical study is provided in Table 6-2. Each research objective is revisited and summarised as below.

Table 6-2: Summary of the linkages between the research objectives, literature review, and empirical study

Research objectives	Literature review	Empirical study
Primary research objective		
The primary objective of this study is to explore gamification in the South African fashion retail industry.	Chapters 2 & 3	Focus group questions: B1-B10, C1-C20, D1-D6
Secondary objectives		
1) Provide an overview of the literature related to this study, namely gamification and relationship marketing.	Chapter 2 & 3	
2) Determine participants' awareness of gamification.	Chapters 1 & 2	Focus group questions: B1, B3, B5
3) Capture the subjective experience of participants when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.	Chapter 2 & 3	Focus group questions: C10, C11
4) Identify the challenges experienced by participants when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.	Chapter 2	Focus group questions: C1, C2, C4
5) Assess participants' acceptance and use of a fashion retail gamification-based application.	Chapters 2 & 3	Focus group questions: B5, B6, B9, C9, C15
6) Identify possible security concerns when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.	Chapter 2	Focus group question: C3
7) Identify the incentives that can be offered to motivate engagement with a fashion retail gamification-based application.	Chapter 2	Focus group questions: B7, C5, C6
8) Identify the indicators that can be provided to maintain usage of a fashion retail gamification-based application.	Chapter 2	Focus group questions: B8, C7, C8
9) Determine whether the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application contributes to customer loyalty.	Chapters 2 & 3	Focus group questions: D3, D4, D6
10) Determine whether the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application contributes to customer retention.	Chapter 3	Focus group questions: B10, D2, D5
11) Determine whether the use of a fashion gamification-based application contributes to brand recall.	Chapter 2	Focus group question: D1
12) Determine whether the use of a fashion gamification-based application contributes to word-of-mouth advertising.	Chapter 3	Focus group questions: C12, C14
13) Determine whether the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application improves sales conversion rates.	Chapters 1 & 2	Focus group question: C13

Conclusions and recommendations pertaining to each secondary objective were drawn based on the empirical research results presented in Chapter 5 as well as the literature review presented

in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively. The following section provides conclusions and recommendations pertaining to each of the study's research objectives.

6.3.1 Conclusions and recommendations

6.3.1.1 Secondary objective 1

Secondary objective 1 aimed to provide an overview of the literature related to this study, namely gamification and relationship marketing.

Table 6-3: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 1

Literature findings: Secondary objective 1

To address this objective, this dissertation reviewed literature pertaining to the key concepts of gamification and relationship marketing in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively, which presented the theoretical basis in order to start the investigation study presented in Chapter 4.

Marketing communications strives to engage stakeholders in order to boost the value of an organisation's brand (Del Barrio-Garca *et al.*, 2012:315). At the moment, there is an increasing expectation of organisations to enhance and create value through the use of digital technology (see section 2.2.3.2). (Abu-Rumman *et al.*, 2015:539, 541; Akbar *et al.*, 2021:6368). Digital gamification marketing can be seen as a dynamic, state-of-the-art strategy for marketing communications (see section 2.2.3.2) centred on long-term relationship management objectives to adapt to a changing environment (Bauer *et al.*, 2020:584). Gamification is a neologism that evolved from a diverse, interconnected landscape of game concepts (Bai *et al.*, 2020; Fels & Seaborn, 2015:18; Hamari & Thibault, 2021:16; Hanner *et al.*, 2017:6). As a relatively new research concept, gamification is still debated and is frequently discussed in terms of its secondary connotations (Hamari & Thibault, 2021:16; Hanner *et al.*, 2017:6). The term "gamification" has been used inconsistently, impeding attempts to define it (Fels & Seaborn, 2015:18; Hamari & Thibault, 2021:16). As explained in section 2.3.2, this study then defined gamification as a process supplementing marketing initiatives through the selection, application, implementation, and integration of game design elements to non-game contexts for gameful experiences to engage users in order to encourage positive brand-related outcomes.

Organisations can leverage the gamification strategy very readily to produce benefits by naturally encouraging favourable and helpful behavioural performance and change (Braatz *et al.*, 2018:440; Deterding *et al.*, 2016:104; Edogun *et al.*, 2020:102; Goh *et al.*, 2017:371; Hamari & Xi, 2019:455; Lin *et al.*, 2012:192). Gamification's brand-related advantages include brand association, brand attitude, brand awareness, brand commitment, brand connection, brand engagement, brand loyalty, brand recall, brand recognition, brand trust, greater marketing exposure, and repeat purchases (Asaad *et al.*, 2017:466; Berger *et al.*, 2018:667; Blohm & Leimeister, 2013:277; Buijzen *et al.*, 2012:39; Chen & Hsu, 2018:126; Deterding *et al.*, 2016:104; Donatiello *et al.*, 2018:21; Edogun, 2020:103; Ferreira & Nobre, 2017:359; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2016:31; Sigala, 2015:141; Wolf *et al.*, 2020:359). Contrarily, potential drawbacks that are often observed are gamification's effects that tend to diminish and taper off over time (Brownholtz *et al.*, 2008:572; Hamari *et al.*, 2014:126); the "gamification" term is often seen as a form of sugar-coating if not as a simple misplaced keyword to add to one's project to prove its innovativeness (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2014:280; Hamari & Thibault, 2021:18); and there might be a privacy risk with gamified systems (Agarwal *et al.*, 2009:137; Hamari & Koivisto, 2019:206; Trang & Weiger, 2021:8).

Table 6-3: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 1 (continues)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 1

Furthermore, since fashion retailers play a large role in the economy of South Africa (Gauteng Province Quarterly Bulletin, 2012:4; Lu, 2018; PwC, 2012:27; South African Market Insights, 2017; Statista, 2021; Stats SA, 2021; Stats SA, 2021:8), the application of gamification marketing within the South African fashion retail context in response to the COVID-19 outbreak and the evolving competitive environment (De Klerk, 2020), which is influenced by technology (Erguncu *et al.*, 2013:65; Euler Hermes Economic Research, 2018:1; Ngwenya, 2020:2; PRNewswire, 2015), shows great promise.

As noted, according to Süphan (2015:5), relationship marketing has emerged as indispensable to creating value for both the organisation and the customer and strengthening customer relationships. Agarwal and Malhotra (2020:5) define relationship marketing as the process of identifying, developing, maintaining, and if necessary, terminating relational exchanges, including purchase and non-purchase-related exchanges, with customers as resource integration in a networked environment, with the purpose of mutual value co-creation and enhancing organisational performance. In support of value co-creation activities and thereby enhanced organisational performance, Khusainova *et al.* (2021) concluded that gamification marketing can contribute to value co-creation due to gamification's user-centric approach, which facilitates an exchange of information and promotes a collaborative participation of customers (Dale, 2014:85; Guoyan *et al.*, 2021; Kappen *et al.*, 2020; Khusainova *et al.*, 2021). Withal, since technology integration is a critical component of value co-creation in the digital age (Barile *et al.*, 2021), and gamification capabilities further present possibilities for retailers to leverage this infused technology environment and build relationships through web-based and mobile-based applications (Juul, 2005:7; Khaled *et al.*, 2011:11). Arli *et al.* (2018:374) and Heppelmann and Porter (2015:10) argue that the mobile channel is particularly well-suited for gamification marketing implementation because the read-write-execute-concurrency capabilities of a gamification mobile application enable symbiotic interaction in a human-like and real-time manner. If managed carefully, these applications will enhance existing loyal relationships with customers and generate new customer relationships (Chen *et al.*, 2014:1135).

Moreover, consumers tend to engage in activities that support the organisation if they have a quality relationship (Apriansyah & Sobari, 2021:219). Among the factors identified, trust, satisfaction, and commitment constitute the three major pillars in the establishment of customer-organisational relationship quality (Adame-Sánchez *et al.*, 2014:670; Djumahir *et al.*, 2013:54; Guo *et al.*, 2011:72; Lo, 2012:92; Vesel & Zabkar, 2010:1336). Withal, relationship marketing practices, brand trust, satisfaction, commitment, greater perception of switching barriers, particularly economic switching barriers, high perceived service/product value, high perceived service/product quality, a positive corporate image, a positive brand image, a good service provider reputation, social pressure, structural bonding tactics, social bonding tactics, web design, product variation, security (privacy), information quality and customer service/care show positive correlations with customer loyalty, while the perception of price is negatively correlated with customer loyalty (see section 3.6.1).

Furthermore, some generalist qualitative research scholars regard the inclusion of a conceptual framework at the outset of the period of data collection and data analysis as the 'key part' of a research project (Collins & Stockton, 2018:8; Coughlan *et al.*, 2007:740; Maree, 2012:42; Merriam, 2009:70; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017:136; Tardy, 2010:123; Van der Walldt, 2020) since it serves as an organising and learning instrument (Huberman & Miles, 1994:20; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017:8; Van der Walldt, 2020); provides an 'interpretative approach to social reality', thereby aiding understanding (Jabareen, 2009:51) and provides a 'visual illustration' of key concepts and constructs and how these interconnect (Tracy, 2013:97). A conceptual framework, a theoretical framework and theory are terms that have blurred lines within qualitative methods literature (Ball & Kitchel, 2014:190; Huberman *et al.*, 2014:20; Maxwell, 2013:39; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:84; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017:5; Saunders *et al.*, 2015:36). However, a conceptual framework will serve as the overriding term for this dissertation. For the purpose of this study, a conceptual framework can be defined as the product of consolidating key literature findings relevant to the research narratively and schematically, revealing the strategic literature direction for the research (Collins & Stockton, 2018:8; Green, 2014:36; Huberman & Miles, 1994:23; Jacard & Jacoby, 2010:54; Maree, 2012:220).

Table 6-3: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 1 (continues)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 1

The first dimension of the framework is the application of game design elements across organisations in their respective customer-focused activities. Since game design elements are the primary mechanisms that can be credited with gamification's influence on use intention (García-Madariaga *et al.*, 2020:6), organisations need to take a structured approach to game design elements in order to maximise its value and use it effectively to build customer relationships. This study proposes that users who are using gamification may feel inclined to engage in relationship building strategies if users have a favourable attitude towards the application, which hinges on whether users perceive the gamification system as easy to use and enjoyably, if the system facilitates socialisation and if users perceive the system as useful. That is, the degree of the system's usefulness and easiness-to-use is crucial for customer's decision of adoption of gamification (Abou-Shouk & Soliman, 2021:6; Al-Suqri, 2014:276; Choi & Hwang, 2020:373; Fikry *et al.*, 2017:343; Sanne & Wiese, 2018:8; Sergueeva & Shaw, 2019:50). Withal, in hedonic technologies, perceived enjoyment can be a strong determinant of intention to use the technology and ultimately relationship intention (Bauer, 2020:583; Kalinic *et al.*, 2019:149; Liu *et al.*, 2018:209). Furthermore, Aebli (2019:12), Bidler *et al.* (2020:518), and Dong *et al.* (2019:213) emphasised the significant effect of social influence on users' technology adoption. These situational factors may drive customer engagement (Ng *et al.*, 2020:243) and can be used as customer loyalty intention measures (Noyan & Şimşek, 2014:1224). The implications of game design elements which are the main thrust of gamification provide opportunities for the retailer to create and enhance relationship quality and motivate relationship orientation, thereby ultimately encouraging loyalty from customers through stronger ties. A customer develops an intention to build a relationship with an organisation while buying a product or a service. Once the actual behaviour occurs, a customer chooses to continue or stop buying. A customer chooses to continue either because the customer intends to build a relationship or is forced to continue (e.g. a contractual situation) (Bohling *et al.*, 2003:669). Ultimately, confirmation of the proposed framework may further highlight the role of engagement as a mediator in the proposed model (Abou-Shouk & Soliman, 2021; Beatty *et al.*, 2012:137; Brodie *et al.*, 2011:259).

6.3.1.2 Secondary objective 2

Secondary objective 2 aimed to determine participants' awareness of gamification.

Table 6-4: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 2

Literature findings: Secondary objective 2

As previously noted, the term "gamification" is a neologism which emerged within a varied, intersecting landscape of game concepts (Bai *et al.*, 2020; Fels & Seaborn, 2015:18; Hamari & Thibault, 2021:16; Hanner *et al.*, 2017:6). As an emerging term, these game concepts are frequently referred to as gamification (Hamari & Thibault, 2021:16; Hanner *et al.*, 2017:6). As a result, questions linger regarding what is unique and valuable about the gamification concept (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2014:280; Hamari & Thibault, 2021:18; Werbach, 2014:266). Hence, this study attempted to develop a precise and useful definition for gamification to isolate the phenomenon from various concepts that might be related or be named in the context of gamification as well as set it in relation to it (Hamari & Thibault, 2012:16; Hanner *et al.*, 2017:6). This study defined gamification as a process supplementing marketing initiatives through the selection, application, implementation and integration of game design elements to non-game contexts for gameful experiences to engage users in order to encourage positive brand-related outcomes (see section 2.3.2). Moreover, Foursquare - a globally successful location-based social network for smartphone users - which frequently assuming the media role of the preeminent arbiter of a more nuanced and less deterministic theoretical and design approach to gamification, has been named as "the top 10 most influential [smartphone] app" by The Guardian (Hern, 2017).

Table 6-4: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 2 (continues)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 2

In recent years, gamification's popularity rapidly spread to various different application domains such as healthcare (Abascal *et al.*, 2015:3; Billiot & Forbes, 2021:132; Cafazzo *et al.*, 2012; Duarte *et al.*, 2014:743; Discovery, 2022; Fernández-Alemán *et al.*, 2017:32; Fit For Bucks, 2021; Kendal *et al.*, 2014:420; Playfit, 2013; Pokémon Go, 2022; Ufford, 2017, Zombies, Run!, n.d.), education (Aguiar & Simões, 2011; Archy Learning, n.d.; Assimakopoulos *et al.*, 2020:4; Brainscape, 2022; Cairós *et al.* 2016:535; Classcraft, n.d.; ClassDojo, 2013; Dawson, 2010; Duolingo, n.d.; Elucidat, n.d.; Kahoot!, n.d.; Knowre, 2021; Quest to Learn, 2022; Quizizz, 2022; Virtonomics, 2022; VivoClass, n.d.), workplace (Tay, 2010; Kumar & Raghavendran, 2015:4; Lopez, 2011; Redcritter, 2015; WeSpire, 2022), crowdsourcing (ArborCarbon, 2016; Auer *et al.*, 2015:47; Flickr, n.d.; Fox, 2012; Greenemeier, 2015; Kaggle, 2022; Maproulette, n.d.; OpenStreetMap, n.d.; Science Exchange, 2021; UCL, n.d.; Waze, n.d.), recruitment (Buil *et al.*, 2019:150; Buil *et al.*, 2020:41), project management (Atlassian, 2022; Kuo, 2012; Redmine, 2014), safe driving (Alt *et al.*, 2016:84; Amaxilatis *et al.*, 2019:105; Bahadoor & Hosein, 2016:277; Bohuschke *et al.*, 2014:4), software development (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2015:412), environmental conservation (Ant Group, 2019; Bardaki, 2018; Cool Choices, 2019; Oracle, 2022), collaborative work (Da Silva *et al.*, 2012:67; Boehm *et al.*, 2008:3; Borges *et al.*, 2009:369; isee systems, 2021), and financial management (Crunchbase, 2022; Elmlblad, 2020). However, gamification in South Africa has been predominantly applied to education (Anning-Dorson *et al.*, 2020; Hagedorn-Hansen *et al.*, 2017; Oliver, 2017) to improve the autonomous e-learning process and to healthcare to promote healthy or environmentally friendly behaviours (Devar & Hattingh, 2020). Moreover, according to Hamari and Koivisto's (2019:197) analysis of domains of the body of literature indicates that the vast majority of empirical research on gamification is conducted in the field of education and learning. Health and wellness are the second-largest category of empirical studies, followed by research publications on crowdsourcing. Over 70.0% of the empirical research in the present body of gamification literature falls into these three groups. The fourth-largest category includes research on various aspects of the body of literature consisting of different social behaviour and networking fields, followed by empirical studies relating to design and development, as well as papers in the marketing and management domain. The remaining domains account for fewer than 10.0% of empirical research papers.

Secondary objective 2 was addressed in main finding 5.2.2.2. Conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to determining participants' awareness of gamification are provided subsequently.

Conclusions: Secondary objective 2

Conclusion 2.1: Only very few participants claimed that they were familiar with the "gamification" term prior to participation, while most responded that they were unfamiliar with the term. The apparent discrepancy between those familiar and those unfamiliar with the gamification concept could be due to the fact that game elements existed prior to the emergence of the term "gamification". Gamification is novel within the context of viewing the concept as a marketing communications channel in a technology-mediated environment and further by seeing the marketing experience as game-like.

Conclusion 2.2: There are three kinds of knowledge that individuals obtain: awareness-knowledge that leads to how-to knowledge, and then principles-knowledge (Rogers, 2003:165). Although some of the participants sampled were in an awareness-knowledge stage, only few participants that were familiar with the "gamification" term were motivated to learn more (how-to-knowledge). None of the participants wanted to know how gamification functioned (principles-knowledge).

Conclusion 2.3: Although many of the participants associated some game element(s) with the concept, the empirical study's overall findings indicated that participants had various perceptions and definitions of the concept of gamification. The variations in perspectives and definitions reflected in participants' responses are fairly congruent with the current research, as no single definition of gamification exists. In the absence of a uniform definition, stakeholders are apt to hold a wide variety of unspoken perceptions of gamification, potentially leading to disparate expectations, aims, experiences, and outcomes when implemented.

Table 6-4: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 2 (continues)

Conclusions: Secondary objective 2

Conclusion 2.4: Based on the responses, all but one participant reported that they had perceivably used a gamification system prior to participation. While the study centres on gamification as a marketing communications channel, many of the participants were only familiar with the concept due to its use in educational contexts, financial and money management applications, food and beverage retail trade, health and wellness applications, mobile network providers' mobile applications, and online retail and productivity applications.

Conclusion 2.5: Many of the participants used gamification systems to motivate health and wellness activities and to subsequently measure and reward goal achievement. Another theme that appeared was the dependence on family members, friends, advertisements, and social media channels for gamification adoption. As such, some gamification adoption relied heavily on family members, friends, advertisements, and social media channels for participation, communication, and recognition.

Recommendations: Secondary objective 2

Recommendation 2.1: Given the research study's results, retailers should be mindful of any differences in stakeholders' perceptions of the idea of gamification. As a result, any implementation effort should begin with a clear definition of the gamification concept. Additionally, to generate positive effects and outcomes, the gamification implementation effort should be closely linked to marketing principles so that the designs and strategies are appropriate for the selected setting.

Recommendation 2.2: To create or increase awareness amongst consumers, fashion retailers should endeavour to achieve appropriate relationship marketing approaches to provide up-to-date information through customer interactions relating to its gamification system(s). Retailers should consider further investments in various contemporary marketing communications channels such as blogs, a paid banner advertisement campaign, press releases and social media platforms whereby retailers could boast about the system's features and showcase screenshots and videos as these channels have proven to be an effective way of communicating with consumers.

6.3.1.3 Secondary objective 3

Secondary objective 3 aimed to capture the subjective experience of participants when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.

Table 6-5: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 3

Literature findings: Secondary objective 3

Gamification systems, particularly on smartphone platforms, have a capacity to foster or optimise customer engagement and satisfy users' basic inner needs that is based on the subjective nature of gameful and playful experiences and can therefore be a useful way of intrinsically motivating beneficial and favourable behavioural change and performance (Alles *et al.*, 2020:235; Asaad *et al.*, 2017:466; Braatz *et al.*, 2018:440; De Ruyter *et al.*, 2016:26; Deterding *et al.*, 2016:104; Edogun *et al.*, 2020:102; Goh *et al.*, 2017:371; Groh, 2012:39; Guo *et al.*, 2011:76; Gustafsson *et al.*, 2019:128; Hamari & Xi, 2019:455; Högberg *et al.*, 2019; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2016:31; Lin *et al.*, 2012:192).

Table 6-5: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 3 (continues)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 3

According to Chen *et al.* (2018:1425), factors positively affecting users' satisfaction with a gamification system includes the construct of gamification application value (enjoyment and social values), confirmation (an outcome from internal comparison and it implies the realisation of expected benefits from use) and perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. Regarding gamification's application value, if effectively implemented, gamification can have a substantially positive effect on need satisfaction for users, especially through social-related (community, cooperation/team, peer approval, self-efficacy, social competition and social network features) and achievement-related features (badges/medals/trophies, experience points/points/score, high score lists/leaderboards/rankings, level, progress/status bar, virtual coins/currency, and increasingly difficult tasks) which is associated with enjoyment (Antin, 2012:14; Hamari & Xi, 2019:213; Hense *et al.*, 2017:378; Kim & Lee, 2015:8487). Likewise, the design element of real-time competition (i.e., multiplayer game modes) increases players' enjoyment and motivation (Ducheneaut *et al.*, 2012; Kim & Shute, 2015:351). Moreover, regarding the notion of increasing each game task's difficulty, according to Berger *et al.* (2018:667), challenging and interactive gamification features are interrelated and associated with high brand connection. The concept of flow experience was first introduced by Csikszentmihalyi (1975:36), who defined it as "the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement". Flow occurs when an activity is optimally arousing (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990 as cited by Mulcahy *et al.*, 2020), and it is characterised by a fine balance between challenge and skills (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975:86). Also, Chen and Hsu (2018:130) discovered that engaging in gameful experiences within the context of gamification systems increases hedonic and utilitarian shopping appeal, resulting in desirable outcomes (i.e., brand loyalty) (Hamari & Koivisto, 2015:420; Hamari *et al.*, 2019:646).

In addition, regret has a negative influence on users' satisfaction in the context of gamification systems and has the most influential impact on users' discontinuance intention (Chen *et al.*, 2018:1437). Furthermore, a shortcoming that is often observed is that gamification's effects tend to diminish and taper off over time (Brownholtz *et al.*, 2008:572; Hamari *et al.*, 2014:126). Also, gamification is often seen by critics as merely sugar-coating a project to prove its innovativeness (Bogost, 2011; Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2014:280; Hamari & Thibault, 2021:18). Additionally, the growing addiction to digital platforms and, as a result, a near-virtual socialisation may result in isolation and mental depression (Mondal, 2021:127). Furthermore, users may become frustrated if the game tasks are too difficult to complete or if they are unable to advance to higher game levels, while it would be boring if it is too easy (Dong *et al.*, 2019:203). Also, older generations are often less passionate about games and gamification (Hamari & Thibault, 2021:21).

Secondary objective 3 was addressed in main finding 5.2.3.1. Conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to capturing the subjective experience of participants when using a fashion retail gamification-based application are provided subsequently.

Conclusions: Secondary objective 3

Conclusion 3.1: Many participants divulged that their overall experiences were either highly positive or positive. Given that gamification was overall well received as a way to encourage users to engage with a brand, participants appeared to relish taking an active role as co-creators. Indeed, the findings support the concept that gamification can be viewed as a platform for co-created experiences, with implications for co-creating brand value.

Conclusion 3.2: The stickiness of the gamification system is influenced by whether users perceive a gamified system as enjoyable, fun, engaging, addictive, cool, educative, innovative, interactive, and interesting. Design features, such as the augmented reality function, arcade games, mobile capability and a gamified interface, provided strong motivation for engagement, and crucially, retailers have the economic motivation to pursue and exploit such features. The participants were keen to virtually explore fashion items using the augmented reality function, which added aesthetic enjoyment, creative expression, fun, and information during their experiences. The arcade games, which include critical thinking, problem-solving, and sense-making, and the mobile application kept them engaged and enriched their user experience.

Table 6-5: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 3 (continues)

Conclusions: Secondary objective 3

Conclusion 3.3: Enjoyment that fades; the augmented reality function; game tasks that are too easily achievable; technology that is too advanced; and interest that is not aroused was deterrents for few participants. Flow might play an influential role in determining the intention towards usage within the current context.

Conclusion 3.4: Users are overall influenced not only by utilitarian (goal-directed) motives (behaviours) but also by experiential motives. The experiential process is, for some individuals, as or even more important than the final instrumental result. These results may have an effect on how users perceive and engage with the gamified system, which appears to have significant implications for the gamification system's ability to satisfy needs. Considering that utilitarian motivations and experience novelty is attractive to participants, gamification can contribute to the brand statute. This statement reinforces the power of gamification as a marketing communications channel for brand value co-creation.

Recommendations: Secondary objective 3

Recommendation 3.1: The results of the analysis revealed that variation does exist in how participants are motivated by gamification systems and it can be profiled to establish a motivation-based typology of users in gamified systems.

Recommendation 3.2: In increasing the stickiness of the gamification system, retailers can superimpose an augmented reality function within the gamification system which allows users to try on items virtually. Other design considerations include the use of arcade game elements in the gamification system as well as ensuring mobile compatibility. Developers and decision-makers have to be aware that these game elements and gamification features have to be constructed in such a manner that their use contributes to the creation of an enjoyable, fun, engaging, addictive, cool, educative, innovative, interactive, and interesting experience. Disengaged and neutral users can then be turned into actively engaged ones in the process.

6.3.1.4 Secondary objective 4

Secondary objective 4 aimed to identify the challenges experienced by participants when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.

Table 6-6: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 4

Literature findings: Secondary objective 4

The expanding ubiquity of the Internet, combined with the increasing affordability of broadband connections, has altered the landscape of marketing activities (Das & Singh, 2018). With the advent of mobile phone technology, hundreds, if not thousands, of software apps are now widely accessible through application stores (Chen *et al.*, 2018:1427), and gamification has capitalised on the popularity of mobile phone technology (Alles *et al.*, 2020:235).

However, a shortcoming that is often observed is that gamification's effects tend to diminish and taper off over time (Brownholtz *et al.*, 2008:572; Hamari *et al.*, 2014:126). This problem can be sourced from two prevalent design errors characterising most gamified applications: the dominance of simple and static game design elements and a one-size-fits-all strategy in proposing game content to players during the game (Bucher *et al.*, 2016:219; Carneiro *et al.*, 2020:4891; Chou 2016:157; Crombez *et al.*, 2020; Huu, 2020:4; Marczewski *et al.*, 2019:108). Moreover, gamification has been frequently criticised for exclusively relying on game elements such as points, badges and leaderboards (Kapp, 2012:33; Robertson, 2010). Game designer Margaret Robertson states that such approaches mean "taking the thing that is least essential to games and representing it as the core of the experience" (Robertson, 2010). Amongst gamification's most vocal critics, doubts remain regarding what is unique and valuable about gamification (Fels & Seaborn, 2015:18; Hamari & Thibault, 2021:18; Werbach, 2014:266).

Table 6-6: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 4 (continues)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 4

Furthermore, marketing communications has been historically approached and managed from the functional perspective with the explicit aim of persuasion (Del Barrio-García *et al.*, 2012:315). Persuasion refers to the process through which communicators influence people through a message aimed at modifying perceptions (Bettinghaus & Cody, 1987:3; O'Keefe, 1990:170; Perloff, 2003:8; Smith, 1982:10). Persuasion is frequently one-directional and is associated with the transactional marketing technique of informing, persuading, and reminding (Boshoff *et al.*, 2003:329; Del Barrio-García *et al.*, 2012:315). According to Duncan and Ouwersloot (2008:9) and Lekhanya (2015:140), the overall objective of contemporary marketing communications (and marketing as its primary domain) is to build brands, which ultimately generates revenue for the brand or organisation concerned. As such, a relational approach to marketing communications is a wider concept that extends persuasion and strives to foster discussion with stakeholders in order to boost the brand value of the organisation (Del Barrio-García *et al.*, 2012:315).

Secondary objective 4 was addressed in main finding 5.2.3.4. Conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to the identification of the challenges experienced by participants when using a fashion retail gamification-based application are provided subsequently.

Conclusions: Secondary objective 4

Conclusion 4.1: As previously noted, gamification was positively received; however, issues were highlighted that could impact upon the efficacy of gamification. The participants all stated that the assigned gamification application is by its design not usable. Participants also emphasised technical issues that are likely associated with device hardware, limitations of the users' internet connection or system programming or setup. Moreover, in this study, many participants were unsatisfied and voiced their frustration about navigating the assigned application; two participants stated that they were unaccustomed to the platform and found the non-linear gamified design somewhat confusing. Nevertheless, the most reported reason why several users could not (continue to) keep up with the platform's activities is because of its poor usability whereby two participants factored the asynchronous and uncoordinated design. All in all, the results indicated that situational factors or poor gamification design negatively affected participation and hindered participants' user experiences. This in turn seemed to have important consequences for the satisfaction potential of the gamification system.

Conclusion 4.2: Furthermore, expected challenges identified by participants included lagging, system crashes, poor navigation, customer expectations of products shaped by gamification experience may not be met, data costs, data privacy, a device might not be compatible with the application, an intricate gamification design may not appeal to non-tech-savvy users, lack of advertising depth and diversity, poor usability, and rapid flashes or alternating patterns of (different) colour(s). Technology is usually associated with a cost and could be expensive to adopt. A key finding is that communications that are overtly promotional will not generate the intended marketing effect. On the contrary, it is about developing relationships rather than "hard" selling.

Recommendations: Secondary objective 4

Recommendation 4.1: To ensure usability, game designers should create consistency in user interface design.

Recommendation 4.2: Furthermore, before gamification systems are developed, game designers should avoid using technology on the path of sunseting.

Recommendation 4.3: Instead of downloading and installing the application, it can be streamed from trusted sources like the Google Play App Store or the Apple Store. When the user stops using the application, the streamed data may be discarded or cached on the device for future use. As the applications are not downloaded and installed, this will remove the requirement of updating the applications frequently.

Table 6-6: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 4 (continues)

Recommendations: Secondary objective 4

Recommendation 4.4: Since a few devices have limited storage capabilities, which restrict the number of applications to be installed on a device, an abbreviated version of an application can be downloaded. Withal, mobile cloud computing features can be leveraged to extend device storage capabilities. This concept improves the device's performance and reduces data usage.

Recommendation 4.5: To further enable users' access to the gamification application, designers should allow users to download and install the application to be played offline. This concept also improves the device's performance and reduces data usage.

Recommendation 4.6: It is adjuvant to involve users, who are directly involved in the co-creation process. That is, gamification design should be an iterative process whereby feedback from users be taken adequately into account. Designers could create an in-application form for users to report any issues they come across or send feedback. This allows fast response and to adapt concepts even before completion.

6.3.1.5 Secondary objective 5

Secondary objective 5 aimed to assess participants' acceptance and use of a fashion retail gamification-based application.

Table 6-7: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 5

Literature findings: Secondary objective 5

Due to the rise in the use of mobile devices, marketers are increasingly interacting with consumers through the mobile channel (Alles *et al.*, 2020:235). Along with the widespread embrace of mobile technology, hundreds, if not thousands, of software programs are widely accessible via application stores (Chen *et al.*, 2018:1427). In 2016, mobile applications transformed the retail environment by connecting retailers direct to consumers (Arbuckle & Sterlacci, 2017:10). Numerous large retailers in the apparel space and smaller local entrepreneurs have established mobile presences through which to communicate with their consumers. Mobile technology's widespread accessibility can increase marketing exposure, brand awareness, and repeat purchases (Edogun, 2020:103) and gamification has capitalised on the popularity of mobile phone technology (Alles *et al.*, 2020:235). Notwithstanding, there is a growing trend of digital consumer traffic coming from diverse connected devices (Erevelles *et al.*, 2016:898).

According to Kietzmann *et al.* (2015:411) and Lowry and Putz (2018), gamification technologies refers to using game design elements in any non-game system context to increase users' extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and help them process information, help them to better achieve goals or change their behaviour. That is, gamification technologies can be a useful way of realising favourable and beneficial behavioural change and performance (Braatz *et al.*, 2018:440; Deterding *et al.*, 2016:104; Edogun *et al.*, 2020:102; Goh *et al.*, 2017:371; Hamari & Xi, 2019:455; Lin *et al.*, 2012:192).

According to Chen *et al.* (2018:1425), factors positively affecting users' satisfaction with a gamification application includes the construct of gamification application value (enjoyment and social values), confirmation (an outcome from internal comparison and it implies the realisation of expected benefits from use) and perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Regarding gamification's application value, if effectively implemented, gamification can have a substantially positive effect on need satisfaction for services users especially through social-related (community, cooperation/team, peer approval, self-efficacy, social competition and social network features) and achievement-related features (badges/medals/trophies, experience points/points/score, highscore lists/leaderboards/rankings, level, progress/status bar, virtual coins/currency, and increasingly difficult tasks) which is associated with enjoyment (Antin, 2012:14; Hamari & Xi, 2019:213; Hense *et al.*, 2017:378) which is a strong determinant of intention to use the technology and ultimately relationship intention (Bauer, 2020:583; Kalinic *et al.*, 2019:149; Liu *et al.*, 2018:209).

Table 6-7: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 5 (continues)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 5

Likewise, gamification is proven to have business-relevant outcomes by using the elements of extrinsic (monetary) and intrinsic (psychological) rewards (Blohm & Leimeister, 2013:277; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2015:413). As such, in the broader context of retail marketing, game participation in the context of gamification is often incentivised by offering consumers monetary rewards (Bauer *et al.*, 2020:564). Broad appeal to a diverse audience, widespread accessibility through mobile technology, and the combination of extrinsic rewards and social media (which provide intrinsic motivation affordances) can result in increased marketing exposure, brand awareness, and repeat purchases (Deterding *et al.*, 2016:104; Edogun, 2020:103; Sigala, 2015:141). Furthermore, relationship quality has the potential to enhance engagement, user intention, retention decision, customer loyalty and word-of-mouth communications (Akrouf & Nagy, 2018:948; Hajli, 2014:25; Ho *et al.*, 2011:84).

Secondary objective 5 was addressed in main finding 5.2.3.1. Conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to participants' acceptance and use of a fashion retail gamification-based application are provided subsequently.

Conclusions: Secondary objective 5

Conclusion 5.1: Responses revealed participants preferred to use gamification digitally since users accessed gamification systems through various technological devices. Although gamification is not solely designed for mobile applications, many participants mentioned that they used mobile devices to access gamification systems. A few of them used laptops and few of them used tablets.

Conclusion 5.2: Many of the participants indicated that they are extrinsically motivated to play the gamification system. Nonetheless, the analyses of the collected data revealed that there are motivational differences in how users interact with the gamified system. As such, the perceptions of gamification systems are highly individual. Given the knowledge base stemming from empirical research concerning motives for gamification participation, gamification illustrates a promising tool to evoke positive effects among participants and to create a more enjoyable experience for participants.

Conclusion 5.3: Many participants did mention their disposition towards purchasing the gamification applications.

Recommendations: Secondary objective 5

Recommendation 5.1: A technology-related consideration is mobile compatibility, as mobile gamification could be better integrated with users' busy daily schedule. Notwithstanding, since a few of the participants accessed gamification using laptops and tablets, designing gamification solutions compatible with various devices becomes an increasingly relevant consideration. The system should be equally accessible for users with mobile devices, laptops, tablets, or other smart devices.

Recommendation 5.2: Furthermore, as previously recommended, the results of the analysis revealed that variation does exist in how participants are motivated by gamification systems and it can be profiled to establish a motivation-based typology of users in gamified systems.

Recommendation 5.3: In order to reach a majority of users, a gamification concept could provide several motivational structures that fit the users' needs which additionally create a certain versatility, which can motivate over longer periods of time.

6.3.1.6 Secondary objective 6

Secondary objective 6 aimed to identify possible security concerns when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.

Table 6-8: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 6

Literature findings: Secondary objective 6

Customer loyalty is positively correlated with security (privacy) measures (Dharmesti & Nugroho, 2013:9). However, there might be a privacy risk with gamified systems. In particular, during a state of deep concentration and enjoyment while engaged in the task at hand, users might lower their guard and engage in potentially harmful privacy-related behaviours unrelated to the primary activity (Agarwal *et al.*, 2009:137; Hamari & Koivisto, 2019:206; Trang & Weiger, 2021:8). A privacy breach renders users vulnerable to various types of privacy risks, which in the context of gamification systems can include price discrimination, unsolicited advertising or sharing of personal information with third parties (Acquisti *et al.*, 2016:444; Agarwal *et al.*, 2007:100; Arya & Punagin, 2015:39; Facebook, 2022; Horky *et al.*, 2015:47). That is, service providers entice users with the promise of more relevant content and advertising in exchange for the disclosure of private information (Groene *et al.*, 2014:59; Xu *et al.*, 2009:139), which they can then utilise for purposes such as displaying geographically targeted advertisements (from location data) or attracting new customers (from social media friends lists) (Trang & Weiger, 2021:2). However, governmental regulations require marketers to obtain a user's permission before exploiting his or her personal information for marketing purposes (Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013).

Secondary objective 6 was addressed in main finding 5.2.3.4. Conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to the identification of possible security concerns when using a fashion retail gamification-based application are provided subsequently.

Conclusions: Secondary objective 6

Conclusion 6.1: Many of the participants encountered privacy/security concerns whereby insecure data storage was a big concern. Particularly, affordances requiring users to provide location data and sensitive information such as bank details which developed less favourable attitudes towards the gamification app.

Conclusion 6.2: Some participants had no concerns owing to one participant claiming that they normally exercise caution when downloading applications and only downloading applications from trusted sources, and two participants stated that the application provided the necessary permissions.

Recommendation: Secondary objective 6

Recommendation 6.1: To protect users' digital privacy, game providers and regulators may need to address the lack of security mechanisms to avoid privacy breaches within these systems. It is advised that designers encrypt data shared by users while interacting with the application. Further, gamification designers should reduce the number of permissions that the app requests, which can significantly reduce the risk of exploitation of those sensitive data permissions, ensuring that the system is much less vulnerable to attackers. Developers should use trusted sources such as Google Play App Store or Apple Store.

6.3.1.7 Secondary objective 7

Secondary objective 7 aimed to identify the incentives that can be offered to motivate engagement with a fashion retail gamification-based application.

Table 6-9: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 7

Literature findings: Secondary objective 7

It is believed that the consumer is incentivised by an organisation that meet their needs which are met by marketing communications channels that establishes consumer confidence, dedication and satisfaction, all of which foster consumer loyalty in the product, service or brand (Cabanelas *et al.*, 2019:623; Guo *et al.*, 2016:237; Hassan, 2012:71; Li & Wu, 2017:75). Consumer confidence, dedication and satisfaction of the needs of the respective consumers which are met by marketing communication channels, thereby creating customer loyalty for continuous patronage.

Table 6-9: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 7 (continues)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 7

Effectuating business-relevant outcomes through gamification systems rests on the cognisance of game elements (García-Madariaga *et al.*, 2020:6). Engaging with game elements, which manifests in motivational experiences (or gameful experiences), represent a major driver of recurring gamification use, benefitting both the user and the gamification provider (Hammerschmidt *et al.*, 2018:1193; Hammerschmidt *et al.*, 2020:487). More specifically, gamification is proven to be effective in behavioural change by using extrinsic (monetary) and intrinsic (psychological) rewards (Blohm & Leimeister, 2013:277; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2015:413; Lowry & Putz, 2018). Within gamification systems, a reward is the user's remuneration for completing an achievement. Extrinsic rewards can be game-related (i.e., points), achievement-related (i.e., by unlocking achievement X you fulfil one of the conditions for unlocking achievement Y) or application-external (i.e., users are rewarded with a shopping coupon) (Hanner *et al.*, 2017:8). At the same time, several intrinsic rewards are implicit in playing, such as mastering aspects of the game (McGonigal, 2011). Adding a further layer of motivations, a third sphere refers to social rewards. Current gamification systems, particularly in the digital era and in the sphere of smart cities, are inextricably linked to social networking technologies. The user can complete and display his/her results to others which provide the users with an existential confirmation and status (Berry, 2012). Antin (2012:14) argues that social factors such as community, peer approval and self-efficacy reward users and encourage their continued involvement.

In the broader context of retail marketing, game participation is often incentivised by offering consumers monetary rewards. This prevalent practice reflects marketers' conviction that combining games with monetary participation incentives (i.e., price discounts) more effectively achieves a desired business outcome than either tool on its own (Bauer *et al.*, 2020:564). Moreover, when users experience flow through gamification, it has several positive effects, such as increased participation (Sigala, 2015:205), increased engagement with the product/service (Asbell-Clarke *et al.*, 2016:175; Berger *et al.*, 2018:668; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2016:33) increased purchase intention (Jung *et al.*, 2011:674). Similarly, in hedonic technologies, perceived enjoyment can be a strong determinant of intention to use the technology and ultimately relationship intention (Bauer, 2020:583; Kalinic *et al.*, 2019:149; Liu *et al.*, 2018:209). Furthermore, broad appeal across audiences, broad accessibility through mobile technology and the combination of extrinsic rewards with social networks (that generate intrinsic motivation affordances) can generate greater marketing exposure, brand awareness and repeat purchases (Deterding *et al.*, 2016:104; Edogun, 2020:103; Sigala, 2015:141).

Secondary objective 7 was addressed in main finding 5.2.3.3. Conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to the identification of the incentives that can be offered to motivate engagement with a fashion retail gamification-based application are provided subsequently.

Conclusions: Secondary objective 7

Conclusion 7.1: This study implies that gamification has a substantially positive effect on extrinsic need satisfaction for users. Specific gamification tactics that seemed to resonate with the participants centred on the creation of an extrinsic reward system that would include both virtual and tangible rewards. Although users are motivated in many different ways and prefer various rewards, participants reported that discounts, points and vouchers would be the most effective as rewards. By embedding these elements in gamification systems, an incentivised and engaging experience can be created that would positively change behaviour to support building respective capabilities.

Conclusion 7.2: None of the participants indicated that they are intrinsically or socially motivated to play the gamification system.

Conclusion 7.3: A concern related to a reward-driven behaviour is that users may work to achieve a reward solely for the sake of getting that reward. Although this approach may work for a short period of time, it is generally not sustainable.

Table 6-9: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 7 (continues)

Recommendations: Secondary objective 7

Recommendation 7.1: From the designer's perspective, the practical implications are to quantify users' contributions and provide users with extrinsic rewards that are well aligned with the fashion retail brand. Simultaneously, the motive structure of users has to be kept in mind in order to offer a viable incentive scheme. As such, a comprehensive diagnosis should be performed on the retailer's goals and success factors as well as the targeted audience before implementing these (as well as any) gamification elements. Overall, the implications of these findings are that retailers and gamification designers should integrate reward structures into the application's content and assure that it is well aligned with the organisation and users' motive structures and users' preferred incentives.

Recommendation 7.2: Given the differences recorded in users' motive structures and preferences for rewards, designers may consider offering users a personalised approach over a "one-size-fits all" design to select their ideal gaming elements.

Recommendation 7.3: Given that many of the participants preferred tangible rewards, designers can allow users to use virtual rewards accumulated to redeem real-world rewards (i.e., discounts or vouchers) to enhance regular participation.

Recommendation 7.4: Social points and exchange can contribute to an overall social appeal of the artefact by fostering the need for recognition and being in contact with others.

Recommendation 7.5: Designers should focus on using gamification systems to support marketing objectives and enhance users' marketing experience, rather than simply using rewards to push users to achieve a targeted performance goal. Designers could therefore consider providing rewards both at intervals and ratios. That is, designers can provide special challenges for them to earn special rewards. Also, instead of solely extrinsically motivating the usage of the platform, a storytelling element that incorporates the advertising materials can be used to develop immersive and engaging content.

6.3.1.8 Secondary objective 8

Secondary objective 8 aimed to identify the indicators that can be provided to maintain usage of a fashion retail gamification-based application. Table 6-10 presents the literature findings, conclusions, and recommendations pertaining to this objective.

Table 6-10: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 8

Literature findings: Secondary objective 8

Feedback informs users of their performance and assists them in remaining aware of their progress and failure while working on tasks and/or actions within an information system (Janson *et al.*, 2020:665). Achievement-related features, which includes gamified feedback such as progress bars; leaderboards; and badges, is effective for enjoyment and motivation and can have a substantially positive effect on need satisfaction for users (Hamari & Xi, 2019:213; Hense *et al.*, 2017:378; Hunter & Werbach, 2012; Kim & Lee, 2015:8487). That is, consumers will be frustrated whether the game is unable to advance to higher game levels (Dong *et al.*, 2019:203). Indeed, gamification's effects can diminish and taper off over time (Brownholtz *et al.*, 2008:572; Hamari *et al.*, 2014:126) owing to the dominance of simple and static game design elements as well as a one-size-fits-all strategy in proposing game content to players during the game (Bucher *et al.*, 2016:219; Carneiro *et al.*, 2020:4891; Chou, 2016:157; Crombez *et al.*, 2020; Das *et al.*, 2015; Huu, 2020:4; Marczewski *et al.*, 2019:108; Miller, 2013:298; Werbach, 2014:269). However, gamification has also been widely criticised for exclusively relying on badges, leaderboards and points (Bogost, 2011; Kapp, 2012:33; Robertson, 2010).

Table 6-10: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 8 (continues)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 8

Secondary objective 8 was addressed in main finding 5.2.3.2. Conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to the identification of the indicators' that can be provided to maintain usage of a fashion retail gamification-based application are provided subsequently.

Conclusions: Secondary objective 8

Conclusion 8.1: Research participants appraised the immediate visual feedback when they completed a game task. Participants may believe that the acknowledgement provided them with some degree of motivation.

Conclusion 8.2: Users favoured progress bars, badges, and leaderboards. The interest in progress bars may indicate a certain preference for obtaining detailed feedback through visual displays of current progress. The "leader board" element could reinforce the desire for social interaction through the comparison of performance with others.

Conclusion 8.3: Progress indicators which create competition received more attention amongst participants compared to personal achievement/self-progress indicators. Competition can lead to the co-creation of fashion experiences with users and also among consumers themselves. However, some participants are not motivated by competition and it could make some users feel disengaged.

Recommendations: Secondary objective 8

Recommendation 8.1: To enhance the user experience, the use of immediate visual progress should be emphasised. The progress bar is most suited amongst users to display progression. It should clearly indicate what the user has currently completed and what remains to be completed. Although leader boards enable visible comparisons amongst users, some users may feel uneasy about leader boards if they have not performed well. Two approaches to address this is to either give users the option for their ranking to be publicly viewable or to allow users to use an anonymous display name that does not identify them to others.

Recommendation 8.2: The results of the analysis confirmed that variation does exist in participants' preferred gamified feedback. Hence, different types of feedback could be provided.

6.3.1.9 Secondary objective 9

Secondary objective 9 aimed to determine if the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application contributes to customer loyalty. Table 6-11 presents the literature findings, conclusions, and recommendations pertaining to this objective.

Table 6-11: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 9

Literature findings: Secondary objective 9

Loyal customers are one of the most valuable assets that retailers can have, because they provide a constant revenue stream, lower customer acquisition costs (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015:13; Beck *et al.*, 2015:790; Cant & Van Heerden, 2015:21; Coenen & Cui, 2016:54; Farazmand *et al.*, 2012:1; Li *et al.*, 2012:1; Magatef & Tomalieh, 2015:78; Pan *et al.*, 2012:150; Watson *et al.*, 2015:790) and word-of-mouth communications (i.e., a customer's referral to and endorsement of an organisation's products and services) (Anaza, 2014:253; Bianchi *et al.*, 2014:94; Bayraktaroğlu *et al.*, 2018:865; Lisita, 2018:115; Magatef & Tomalieh, 2015:78). This study considers customer loyalty as a composite approach of the customer's purchase, recommendation or patronising and intention to repurchase, recommend or re-patronise a service or organisation and remain loyal to the organisation.

Table 6-11: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 9 (continues)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 9

As explained in section 3.6.1, the factors leading to customer loyalty are primarily those which either stem from customers' evaluations and subsequent perceptions of the service such as service quality and customer satisfaction or those that fall into the category of relational outcomes of repeated service transactions like trust and commitment. There are few others which are broadly related to the company's own position such as corporate image and communication or industry dynamics like switching barriers (Medha & Rai, 2013:151). According to the review (see Table 3-1), brand trust, high perceived product/service quality, customer satisfaction, relationship marketing practices and a positive corporate image constitute the main customer loyalty antecedents.

It is believed that an organisation incentivises the consumer by meeting their needs through marketing communications channels which establishes consumer confidence, dedication and satisfaction, all of which foster consumer loyalty in the product, service or brand (Guo *et al.*, 2016:237; Hassan, 2012:71; Li & Wu, 2017:75). Digital marketing, as a marketing communications element, drives brand loyalty (AbuKhouza & De Silva, 2019:113; Ahmed *et al.*, 2019; Nuseir, 2016:236). Gamification systems as a digital catalyst cultivate valuable impacts. In particular, Garry and Harwood (2015:542) demonstrated that gamification marketing culminates in loyalty outcomes which can be attributed to gamification's capacity to foster or optimise customer engagement (Asaad *et al.*, 2017:466; Hamari & Xi, 2020:455; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2016:31) and gamification's mobile compatibility (Donatiello *et al.*, 2018:21; Wolf *et al.*, 2020:359). Similarly, gamification features increase the user experience and, thereby, brand loyalty positively (Chen & Hsu, 2018:126). Satisfaction of the user positively contributes to the brand performance through customer loyalty (Aghara *et al.*, 2017:62). Concerning the implications of relationship commitment, it is discovered that there are significant positive correlations between (Chen *et al.*, 2015:681) commitment and loyalty, and there is a significant positive link between relationship commitment and intention to recommend (Akrouf & Nagy, 2018:948; Chen *et al.*, 2015:681). Withal, digital marketing, as a marketing communications element, drives brand loyalty (AbuKhouza & De Silva, 2019:113; Ahmed *et al.*, 2019; Nuseir, 2016:236) and hence ensures customer retention for the organisation (Islam & Khan, 2017:523).

Secondary objective 9 was addressed in main finding 5.2.5.1. Conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to determining if the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application contributes to customer loyalty are provided subsequently.

Conclusions: Secondary objective 9

Conclusion 9.1: Participants demonstrated the willingness to engage with the brands and invest in brand relationships through a gamified approach, since gamification gives them the opportunity to interact differently with the brand, promoting feelings of fun, engagement, interactivity, personalisation, and enjoyment.

Conclusion 9.2: Many of the participants showed availability and willingness in adhering, suggesting, and recommending gamified experiences. Brand user imagery perspectives; continual enjoyment; information richness; need satisfaction; positive attitudes towards a brand; solutions that reduce consumer effort; perceived benefits; and perceived value were referred as driving factors of word-of-mouth communications. Results also showed that gamification systems exerted a positive effect on brand recommendations if there are online reviews; if the tool has an open source platform; and if it was a pleasant experience for the user.

Conclusion 9.3: Some participants are however more likely to share their experiences based on their evaluation concerning an organisation and its product and service quality, which can then install satisfaction and word-of-mouth intention. Therefore, positive attitudes towards an organisation, its products or services could be translated into preferred intentions and behaviour for the organisation.

Recommendations: Secondary objective 9

Recommendation 9.1: Participants demonstrated the willingness to engage with the brands and invest in brand relationships through a gamified approach that promotes feelings of engagement, enjoyment, fun, interactivity and personalisation. Also, personalisation can include personalised in-application messages and push notifications that could acknowledge the accomplishment of a task and communicate special offers and tips. Withal, mobile tracking technologies can be used to gather user data to personalise the communications sent through application alerts.

Table 6-11: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 9 (continues)

Recommendations: Secondary objective 9

Recommendation 9.2: Participants' inclination to display positive word-of-mouth communications of gamification systems depends on brand user imagery perspectives; continual enjoyment; information richness; need satisfaction; positive attitudes towards a brand; solutions that reduce consumer effort; perceived benefits; and perceived value. All of these elements should be present, as their interrelationship may contribute to positive word-of-mouth. Factual information about the brand should be presented to the audience in the application. In order to develop effective content for a gamification application and augment favourable word-of-mouth intentions, retailers should elevate the convenience and efficiency of users. Hence, it is preferable that the system should be designed in such a way that it reduces the efforts of the users. Retailers should also communicate the gains that are derived by using the system.

Recommendation 9.3: To promote positive word-of-mouth of the fashion brand using a gamified approach, retailers could adopt reviews with high information quality published on websites to promote their gamification system. Game designers and retailers could design an open-source gamification platform that provides customisable game elements to increase user interaction on the system.

6.3.1.10 Secondary objective 10

Secondary objective 10 aimed to determine if the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application contributes to customer retention.

Table 6-12: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 10

Literature findings: Secondary objective 10

Recent research has indicated that customer retention remains a significant challenge for many service companies in today's turbulent and saturated business environment and that the future direction calls for "enhanced customer retention management". Retention is the continuation of an organisation's purchasing relationship with its clients, regardless of existing contracts or transaction type (Ascarza *et al.*, 2018:66). Generally, organisations profit from the continuation of these partnerships in a variety of ways. Organisations focusing on satisfying the needs of retained customers fosters confidence benefits (higher trust levels, reduced anxiety and a sense of comfort), customer voluntary assistance in service delivery, free advertising through means such as positive word-of-mouth communications, greater profit margin, improved return on investment, mentorship (e.g. existing customers perform the role of mentor to new customers who wish to use the organisation's products or services), premium pricing, repeat purchases, social benefits (i.e., customers engaging in friendship-like relationships with other customers who use the same products or services/ sense of familiarity with the organisation or its employees), special treatment benefits (reduced prices and faster or individualised services), reduces the overall operational and marketing expenditures (Alshurideh, 2016:38; Anaza, 2014:253; Bateson & Hoffman, 2011:391; Dagger & O'Brien, 2010:1534; Lisita, 2018:115; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011:356; Zeithaml *et al.*, 2018:151) and serves as a competitive advantage for organisations, as customers will not easily switch to competing offerings because the existing bond cannot be easily replicated.

Gouws (2012:21) and Khan (2012:107) emphasise that if organisations wish to retain their customers, they must first endeavour to understand and address their ever-changing needs. Digital marketing as a marketing communications element ensures customer retention (Islam & Khan, 2017:523). Relationship intention facilitate customer retention and loyalty (Bitner *et al.*, 2013:129; Pelser & Mostert, 2015:45). Moreover, higher levels of trust and commitment generally result in improved customer retention rates, which in turn builds stronger and enduring relationships while also enhancing profitability (Akrouf & Nagy, 2018:948; Benkova *et al.*, 2017:209; Chen *et al.*, 2015:681; Choi *et al.*, 2018:45; Khan & Qadri, 2014:1; Van Vuuren, 2018:65). A customer's decision to continue or terminate relational exchanges with a specific retailer is thus dependent on the relationship quality with the retailer, which has the potential to enhance engagement, user intention, retention decision, customer loyalty and word-of-mouth (Akrouf &

Nagy, 2018:948). Zeithaml *et al.* (2018:85) emphasise that loyalty results in higher rates of customer retention.

Table 6-12: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 10 (continues)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 10

Secondary objective 10 was addressed in main finding 5.2.5.2. Conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to determining if the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application contributes to customer retention are provided subsequently.

Conclusions: Secondary objective 10

Conclusion 10.1: Changing sustainable behaviours through gamification may be a somewhat subtle process based on the proverbial nudge which may lie in the reward element, perceived benefits, need satisfaction, perceived value, whether it is a pleasant user experience, application troubleshooting, whether game tasks are easily achievable, enjoyment, the presence of games, positive attitudes towards the brand, come recommended, reduces consumer effort, and regularly updated rewards. Although no participant in this research self-identified as an individual with a disability, participants in this research have also commented on easier ways to earn in-game rewards for certain users. Given the novelty of the experience, participants also mentioned the intention to adhere to a gamified system of any brand due to curiosity.

Conclusion 10.2: Some participants were however disengaged due to their preferences for other channels, user inactivity; the application's inability to incentivise users, delayed gratification, and enjoyment that faded over time. Some participants have no special interest in games.

Recommendation: Secondary objective 10

Recommendation 10.1: Retailers and game designers could consider the Hook Model (Eyal & Hoover, 2014:5) when designing their gamification system. The Hook Model outlines a design methodology for creating habit-forming products. To do so, the product should encourage users to go through the following four phases in a continual cycle: (i) being triggered to perform an action, (ii) enabling the user to perform an action, (iii) being given variable rewards, and (iv) having the user invest (intellectually, not financially) in the product in a way that will encourage them to go through the cycle again (Eyal & Hoover, 2014:7). For this to happen, effective content or elements could be provided at certain intervals. Retailers and game designers could then consider embedding analytics tools into gamification systems to provide considerable insight into user engagement.

6.3.1.11 Secondary objective 11

Secondary objective 11 aimed to determine if the use of a fashion gamification-based application contributes to brand recall.

Table 6-13: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 11

Literature findings: Secondary objective 11

Although brand recall was not documented in the literature reviewed for this study, a brand is said to have recall if it comes to consumers' minds when its product class is mentioned (Aaker, 1996:11). Brand recall is a sub-dimension of brand awareness that relates to the strength of a brand's presence in the consumer's mind and is measured according to the different ways in which consumers remember a brand, ranging from recognition to recall to "top of the mind" to dominant (Aaker, 1996:10). The brand awareness construct, including brand recall, is a key factor in determining consumers' purchase behaviour and brand selection process (Subhani & Osman, 2011:18). Delgado-Ballester *et al.* (2010:34) suggested that the consistency of marketing messages sent to a target market affects the recallability of a brand. As a result, IMC can result in brand recall. Inconsistent marketing messages, on the other hand, boost the likelihood of a brand being recalled because customers will strive to combine the disparate signals, thereby thinking more about the brand and thus being more likely to recall it when making a purchasing choice.

Table 6-13: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 11 (continues)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 11

According to Buijzen *et al.* (2012:39), increasing a brand's visibility in a gamification application can result in greater brand recall. Van Reijmersdal (2009:151) notes "a prominent placement is more deeply processed, and that leads to increased memory". Likewise, Babin *et al.* (2021:1027) assert that brand placements have a significant beneficial influence on brand placement memory. The available research suggests that prominent brand placement generally results in increased or at least equal (but not poorer) recall of the placed brand. Moreover, Gross (2010:1263) indicates that in an advergame environment, highly congruent games result in enhanced recall for the sponsoring brand. As a result, fashion retailers must implement meaningful and efficient marketing campaigns, as well as creative marketing engagement techniques such as gamification, in order to increase consumer retention, loyalty, and brand awareness (brand recall and recognition), equity, and overall profitability (Aaker, 2012:10; Bianchi *et al.*, 2014:94; Bıçakcıoğlu *et al.*, 2018:865; Keller, 1993:8; Kotler & Keller, 2012:266; Ling & Severi, 2013:126).

Secondary objective 11 was addressed in main finding 5.2.4.2. Conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to determining if the use of a fashion gamification-based application contributes to brand recall are provided subsequently.

Conclusion: Secondary objective 11

Conclusion 11.1: The responses postulate 100.0% brand recall which indicates that the participants would recall a brand name as a result of using a gamification system in a relevant manner to complete the game tasks. However, according to one participant, this processing is conditional upon users' flow experiences during playing or their sense of presence in the gamified environment.

Recommendations: Secondary objective 11

Recommendation 11.1: There should be coordination and synergy across various communication channels and tools to preserve a long-term lucrative relationship with customers and other stakeholders and to build and maintain the brand value.

Recommendation 11.2: The level of recall depends on two variables, including engagement and the flow experience, which may contribute to enhanced memory of the brand. Because marketing efforts are sharing users' cognitive "space" with the game tasks itself, marketers must find ways to capture a player's attention and increase the propensity of brand recall. To make a placement more conspicuous means to make it garish, unforgettable, and vibrant in comparison to more subtle brand and product depictions.

6.3.1.12 Secondary objective 12

Secondary objective 12 aimed to determine if the use of a fashion gamification-based application contributes to word-of-mouth advertising.

Table 6-14: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 12

Literature findings: Secondary objective 12

Although word-of-mouth communication was not exhaustively documented in the literature reviewed for this study, word-of-mouth describes a customer's referral to and endorsement of an organisation's products or services. Consumers' susceptibility to advertising, defined as the degree to which they pay attention to and value commercial messages as sources of information for guiding their consumption behaviours (Barr & Kellaris 2000:230), can indicate whether they participate actively or passively in the communication process. Furthermore, Akrouf and Nagy (2018:948) and Chen *et al.* (2015:681) stated that the higher the relationship commitment, the more willing the customer is to spread word-of-mouth. Loyal customers are valuable assets to retailers, because they provide word-of-mouth communication

(Bayraktaroğlu *et al.*, 2018:872; Bianchi *et al.*, 2014:94). Relationship quality and relationship marketing outcomes thus has the potential to enhance word-of-mouth communication (Akrouf & Nagy, 2018:948).

Table 6-14: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 12 (continues)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 12

Secondary objective 12 was addressed in main finding 5.2.4.1. Conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to determining if the use of a fashion gamification-based application contributes to word-of-mouth advertising are provided subsequently.

Conclusions: Secondary objective 12

Conclusion 12.1: The assigned gamification application is less capable of transferring a substantial amount of brand-related information since many of the participants seem to have difficulty recalling brand information.

Conclusion 12.2: Gamification was almost unanimously thought to be an effective marketing communications tool which is, according to two participants, conditioned upon its execution. However, from the perspective of three participants, gamification cannot yet be considered as an effective marketing communications tool for attracting and retaining customers due to information overload within the app, in accordance with one participant. Moreover, results indicated that gamification stimulates word-of-mouth communications. Overall, the interest expressed for the use of the gamification applications suggests there is an opportunity to disseminate marketing communications using these apps.

Recommendations: Secondary objective 12

Recommendation 12.1: Content should not contain information that is irrelevant or superfluous. Each additional unit of information in a dialogue competes with the relevant units of information and diminishes their relative visibility.

Recommendation 12.2: It is evident through this research that not all participants appreciate the gamification approach. If developed with sensitivity towards execution and ultimately end users' genuine needs, gamification can indeed increase marketing effectiveness.

Recommendation 12.3: Balancing the gamification systems with other marketing communications channels is another important consideration.

6.3.1.13 Secondary objective 13

Secondary objective 13 aimed to determine if the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application improves sales conversion rates.

Table 6-15: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 13

Literature findings: Secondary objective 13

Although fashion retail gamification-based applications' potential to improve sales conversion rates were not documented in the literature reviewed for this study, the gamification approach can be leveraged by organisations to achieve benefits through promoting behaviour change (Braatz *et al.*, 2018:440). That is, gamification technologies can increase user engagement and satisfy users' basic inner needs and be a useful way of intrinsically motivating favourable and beneficial behavioural change and performance (Braatz *et al.*, 2018:440; Deterding *et al.*, 2016:104; Edogun *et al.*, 2020:102; Goh *et al.*, 2017:371; Hamari & Xi, 2019:455; Lin *et al.*, 2012:192). Garry and Harwood (2015:542) demonstrated that gamification culminates in purchase outcomes. Likewise, Dong *et al.* (2019:205) showed that in a digital environment, gamification increases customer engagement and actual sales. That is, the active presence of digital elements creates an emotional attachment for the brand and products, which ultimately improves sales (Purwar, 2019:997). Moreover, the gamification experience not only allows for digital interactions but also supplements the offline experience. Moreover, gamified in-store applications for customers enable retailers to combat revenue denigration (Meegahapola & Perera, 2017:280).

Table 6-15: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 13 (continues)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 13

When researching consumer preferences and recommendations for a gamified application, consumers favoured both an online version and an in-store version (Alles *et al.*, 2020:238; Insley & Nunan, 2014:343). Consumers may traverse immersive technologies to navigate the brand's digital environment while remaining absorbed in the physical store elements (Alexander & Alvarado, 2017:192; Badot *et al.*, 2017:68). According to Huang and Liu (2014:100), the integration can create exclusive interactions and lead to a new type of relationship between the fashion brand and its buyers, both of which would benefit both the brand and its customers (Badot *et al.*, 2017:70; Sachdeva & Goel, 2015:293).

Secondary objective 13 was addressed in main finding 5.2.4.3. Conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to determining if the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application improves sales conversion rates are provided subsequently.

Conclusions: Secondary objective 13

Conclusion 13.1: Gamification can result in an increase in sales especially if there is an in-app purchasing option. Indeed, participants preferred in-app purchases that unlocked additional content value, especially during the pandemic, since it enables users to browse and purchase right from the application.

Conclusion 13.2: Participants stated that gamification is effective at driving traffic to a brand's website.

Conclusion 13.3: Many participants voiced that gamification would not drive them to visit the brand's retail store locations.

Recommendations: Secondary objective 13

Recommendation 13.1: Game designers and retailers should monetise the gamification system by integrating an in-app purchasing function to enhance content value and generate additional revenues.

Recommendation 13.2: Users could redeem extrinsic rewards in-store which provides a significant increase in retail foot traffic. Also, users could also be rewarded for social media check-ins or frequent visits to the retailer's brick-and-mortar locations. Withal, in-store gamification can be used at brick-and-mortar locations to increase retail foot traffic.

6.4 LINKING ALL ASPECTS OF THE STUDY: RESEARCH OBJECTIVES, QUESTIONS, MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 6-16 provides a summary of the links between all aspect of the study therefore including the research objectives, questions asked, the main findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Table 6-16: Links between objectives, questions, main findings, conclusions, and recommendations

Questions	Main finding	Conclusions	Recommendations
Secondary objective 1: Provide an overview of the literature related to this study, namely gamification and relationship marketing.			
Chapters 2 and 3			
Secondary objective 2: Determine participants' awareness of gamification.			
Section B: questions 1, 3 & 5	5.2.2.2	2.1 – 2.5	2.1 – 2.2

Table 6-16: Links between objectives, questions, main findings, conclusions, and recommendations (continues)

Questions	Main finding	Conclusions	Recommendations
Secondary objective 3: Capture the subjective experience of participants when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.			
Section C: questions 10 & 11	5.2.3.1	3.1 – 3.4	3.1 – 3.2
Secondary objective 4: Identify the challenges experienced by participants when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.			
Section C: questions 1, 2 & 4	5.2.3.4	4.1 – 4.2	4.1 – 4.6
Secondary objective 5: Assess participants' acceptance and use of a fashion retail gamification-based application.			
Section B: questions 4, 6 & 9 Section C: questions 9 & 15	5.2.3.1	5.1 – 5.3	5.1 – 5.3
Secondary objective 6: Identify possible security concerns when using a fashion retail gamification-based application.			
Section C: question 3	5.2.3.4	6.1 – 6.2	6.1
Secondary objective 7: Identify the incentives that can be offered to motivate engagement with a fashion retail gamification-based application.			
Section B: question 7 Section C: questions 5 & 6	5.2.3.3	7.1 – 7.3	7.1 – 7.5
Secondary objective 8: Identify the indicators' that can be provided to maintain usage of a fashion retail gamification-based application.			
Section C: questions 7 & 8	5.2.3.2	8.1 – 8.3	8.1 – 8.2
Secondary objective 9: Determine whether the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application contributes to customer loyalty.			
Section D: questions 3, 4 & 6	5.2.5.1	9.1 – 9.3	9.1 – 9.3
Secondary objective 10: Determine whether the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application contributes to customer retention.			
Section B: question 10 Section D: questions 2 & 5	5.2.5.2	10.1 – 10.2	10.1
Secondary objective 11: Determine whether the use of a fashion gamification-based application contributes to brand recall.			
Section D: question 1	5.2.4.2	11.1	11.1 – 11.2
Secondary objective 12: Determine whether the use of a fashion gamification-based application contributes to word-of-mouth advertising.			
Section C: questions 12 & 14	5.2.4.1	12.1 – 12.2	12.1 – 12.3
Secondary objective 13: Determine whether the use of a fashion retail gamification-based application improves sales conversion rates.			
Section C: question 13	5.2.4.3	13.1 – 13.3	13.1 – 13.2

The following section describes the limitations of this study and outlines the challenges faced.

6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Even though the study was successfully conducted, a number of limitations were uncovered. The following limitations regarding the literature review were identified:

- During the research period, limited research was available on gamification, especially on gamification marketing within the South African context. Therefore, literature pertaining to gamification was mostly used within an international context.
- The researcher could not find any literature that involved the use of gamification as a relationship marketing communications channel and, therefore, no direct comparisons can be made with other similar studies.
- Due to the nature of this literature review, it is important to identify the possibility of publication biases, as the search was limited to English and peer-reviewed publications available, which may have limited the number of potential publications identified and included in this review.
- Some literature included in this study is older than 10 years.

The following limitations regarding the empirical study were identified:

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, focus groups had to be held via Zoom, which made it difficult to properly read participants' body language during the sessions.
- Only three focus groups were conducted, with a total of 25 participants, instead of 30 participants (10 participants per focus group). Therefore, it could limit the generalisation of the findings to the greater population.
- Participants were mainly from Potchefstroom. This could limit the generalisation of the findings to the greater population. However, as mentioned in Chapter 4, the sample was still representative of the population that this study was targeting.
- Another limitation is that participants' responses were constrained by their understanding of gamification. Evidence that participants may have had a very limited understanding of gamification is that their suggestions for implementation centred on rewards. Although rewards are a common feature of games, rewards are but one of many elements in a gamification program. Given a more comprehensive understanding of the gamification concept, participants may have had different perspectives. Additionally, only two focus groups were provided with a definition. It follows that participants received varying amounts of information during participation. Future studies could control for this limitation by assuring that every participant receives the same information before participation.

- This study was conducted with one gamification application. Therefore, the findings cannot be assumed to be representative of all gamification systems. Instead, the present study's findings should be considered exploratory, providing initial insights regarding participants' viewpoints, readiness, and implementation suggestions relative to gamification systems.
- One limitation which possibly reduced the robustness of the study's results was the lack of criticality of outcomes to participants.
- The number of responses that formed the usable dataset was somewhat low.
- The researcher had limited previous knowledge of qualitative research.
- This research is situated in the context of fashion marketing with a focus on a relationship approach in South Africa. As a result, conclusions from this study are closely associated with the researched context, therefore potentially constraining the generalisation of the results to other contexts.

Nevertheless, none of these limitations detracts from the value of the present research. Indeed, they provide an opportunity to advance research in this domain. By considering the limitations of the study, various recommendations for future research are presented in the subsequent section.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study was not without limitations, and these limitations were carefully considered, discussed, and justified throughout the dissertation. Hence, they did not negatively impact the value of the study. Furthermore, the limitations identified in this study could serve as areas for further research. The following recommendations are proposed for the future:

- Future research could investigate the effects of every single gamification element individually. This may contribute to the granularity of similar studies.
- Future studies could expand to different contexts, such as the gamification context of education, health and wellness or travel. Examining the uses and impacts of gamification across several contexts would challenge or confirm the generalisability of the results from the present research.
- The longitudinal study can be considered to examine the long-term effect of gamification on brand and marketing management, tracking users' behavioural intentions in terms of improvement in the system's features and their experience and attitude.
- Future research could focus on gamification marketing quantitatively.

- Future research could extend the number and diversity of participants so as to further enhance the generalisability of the findings.
- Through means of utilising a probability sampling method, results could be representative of the entire population and not only the participants included in this study.
- All participants should receive more comprehensive information regarding gamification, with care taken to ensure that everyone receives the same information.
- Despite its growing range of implementations, however, understanding of the process by which gamification influences customer behaviour remains limited (Landers, 2019:140). Future research can refer to Landers' (2019:140) call to further improve scholarly comprehension of customer behaviour in the context of gamification. The more knowledge there is about consumer behaviour, the more successful the gamification strategy will be (Gajanova, 2020:288). Future research can gain insights anent consumer behaviour; that is, the appraisal and ascertainment of inherent variables of consumers in order to leverage the findings in such a way to assimilate consumers' intentions towards utilising gamification applications.

6.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an overview of this study in the view of a literature and empirical perspective followed by conclusions and recommendations for each of the secondary objectives provided in this study. The chapter concluded with limitations of the study and bestowed recommendations for future research. From the joint appraisal of the literature study and the outcomes of the empirical analysis, it can be concluded that gamification can be a significant marketing communications channel for relationship marketing management between retailers and consumers in terms of an effective and long-term engagement facilitator. While its potential for universal success is far from guaranteed, this study's findings indicate that, if developed with sensitivity towards end users' needs to ultimately provide more effective and sustainable systems, gamification can indeed increase marketing effectiveness. As such, gamification design should improve users' feelings in the aspects that hinder their user experience. It is important to note that gamification is not a standalone solution but can potentially be used as a catalyst that helps drive behavioural changes towards marketing capability building efforts by harnessing the power of games that can create the right set of psychological and behavioural antecedents. Overall, this study emphasised gamification as a valuable means of marketing to create, boost, and maintain user engagement, therefore addressing the primary objective of the study.

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[boost/#:~:text=Retail%20trade%20accounts%20for%20a,a%20lynchpin%20for%20economic%20recovery](https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-07-14-south-african-retail-sales-rise-in-may-but-looting-is-set-to-dent-gdp-boost/#:~:text=Retail%20trade%20accounts%20for%20a,a%20lynchpin%20for%20economic%20recovery) Date of access: 25 Jan. 2022.

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APPENDIX A: MODERATOR'S GUIDE

Moderator's guide

Section A: Introduction

Thank participants for their time and provide a short description of the topic under study. This study aims to theoretically and empirically explore the viability of gamification in the South African fashion retail sector. In order to achieve this objective, I need to explore various related aspects of gamification. The focus group will commence by determining your awareness of gamification. You will then be asked to download and play a pre-selected fashion retail gamification-based application on your smart phone for approximately 10 minutes. Following gameplay, we will engage in a discussion lasting approximately 60 minutes. We will firstly discuss your experience with the specific gamification-based application, and then we will discuss your acceptance and use of such applications in the fashion retail sector; the possible security concerns you may have; proposed incentives for using such an application; proposed indicators when using such an application; and then any general comments you wish to make with regards to the gamification concept in the South African fashion retail space.

Please take note that this focus group session is being audio-recorded, but you can be rest assured that the recording will remain confidential. I would therefore like to ask that you please put your cellular phone on the silent mode for the duration of the focus group session. Lastly, may I please ask that you state your name and the province in which you reside prior to answering a question or commenting on another participant's response to a question or statement. Participants were kindly asked to introduce themselves prior to commencing with the rest of the session.

We are going to start off with two screening questions in order to assure that you qualify to partake in the study.

SQ1: Please confirm that you are above the age of 18 and that you have read and signed the consent form to partake in the study.

SQ2: Please confirm that you have purchased a fashion item in the past six months.

SQ3: Please confirm that you are a South African citizen.

Section B: Awareness and previous experience

1. Have you ever heard of the term *gamification*?
2. Please tell me what you think the term *gamification* implies?
3. Have you ever made use of a gamification application? Which one?
4. On which device did you download and use the gamification application?
5. How did you become aware of the gamification application that you used?
6. Why did you decide to use the gamification application?
7. Were you rewarded for using the gamification application (i.e., points or vouchers)?
8. What indicators did the gamification application make use of to show your progression (i.e., leadership board, levels/tiers, awards, currencies, progression bar)?
9. Did you enjoy using the gamification application?
10. Did you continue to use the gamification application after the first try?

Section C: Real-time experience and usage

1. Did you experience any challenges when downloading the gamification application?
2. Did you experience any challenges when using the gamification application?
3. Did you have any security concerns when using the gamification application?
4. What challenges or concerns do you foresee customers experiencing when using a fashion retail gamification-based application?
5. Could you realise how the user is rewarded for using the gamification application?
6. What incentives or rewards do you think a brand could offer its customers when using a fashion retail gamification application?
7. Could you realise what indicators are used to track your progress on the gamification application?
8. What indicators would you prefer to see on a fashion retail gamification-based application that shows your progress towards an incentive or a reward (i.e., a progression bar, a leadership board, badges or awards, etc.)?
9. Did you enjoy using the gamification application?
10. Which aspects of the gamification application did you like the most?
11. Which aspects of the gamification application did you like the least?
12. Has the gamification application provided you with information about the brand that you were previously unaware of?
13. By considering the information provided and the fashion items that you saw on the gamification application, if you could, would you visit this brand's store (either online or brick-and-mortar) and browse for or try on these fashion items?
14. By considering the information provided and the fashion items that you saw on the gamification application, if you could, would you visit this brand's store (either online or brick-and-mortar) and purchase these fashion items?
15. Do you think that the gamification application is an effective tool for advertising the brand? Why?
16. In future, would you be willing to pay money for using a fashion retail gamification-based application like the one you have tried out today? Why?

Section D: Customer loyalty and retention

1. Do you think that using a gamification application will assist you in remembering the brand name it promotes?
2. Would you use a gamification application again in the future? Why?
3. Would you recommend a gamification application like the one you tried today to your friends and family?
4. Would you recommend the brand to your friends and family based on your experience with the gamification application you tried today?
5. Would you return to using a brand's gamification application in the future due to the need or desire to accrue more rewards as the "game" progresses?
6. Would this aspect force you to make use of the specific brand's gamification application and rewards system, rather than using another brand's gamification application or rewards system?

Section E: Closure

The participants will be thanked for his/her time and will be asked whether they would like to add any concluding remarks to the conversation.

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPTS

Please refer to the CD-ROM included at the back of this dissertation.

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF INVITATION

Dear (NAME OF PARTICIPANT)

1 May 2021

REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY OF GAMIFICATION IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN FASHION RETAIL INDUSTRY

I am currently working towards completing my master's dissertation in Marketing Management at the North-West University Potchefstroom Campus, with specific focus on *exploring gamification in the South African fashion retail industry*. In order to gather reliable and relevant data, I would like to invite you to take part in my research study by attending a focus group session that will take no more than 60 minutes of your time. Your input will provide valuable information in disseminating research findings.

Research objective

The purpose of my research study is to explore gamification in the South African fashion retail industry. Your participation is critical as the results from the focus group will be used to inform academe and practitioners on the applicability of gamification to improve the retail experience in the South African context.

Sample and methodology

The research aims to conduct focus groups with South African fashion shoppers who own a mobile device. The focus group session comprising around 10 participants will take approximately 60 minutes of your time. Questions will be asked pertaining to your awareness and previous experience of gamification as well as experience related with the assigned fashion retail-gamification based application. The focus group session will be audio recorded in order to aid further analysis.

Confidentiality and anonymity

All responses are strictly confidential and the results are exclusively for research purposes. The data collected through the focus group will be stored under an encrypted and password protected data system. Upon completion of the dissertation, the data shall be disposed in line with governing procedure at the North-West University. Participants are free to withdraw from participation at any time before or during the study. All participants are welcome to request results upon completion of this study.

Participation

The focus group sessions will commence between 5 August 2021 and 16 August 2021. The focus group session will take place via Zoom in order to minimise the risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus. The link to the Zoom meeting will be provided to you upon confirming your willingness and availability to partake in the focus group session.

Kindly confirm whether you are willing to participate in the study by attending the focus group session, no later than five working days from receipt of this invitation. Failing to confirm or decline participation in writing within this timeframe will automatically exclude you from the study.

Upon confirmation of participation in the study, a confidentiality agreement will be emailed to you which must be signed and returned prior to the date of the focus group session.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor. Thank you in advance for your participation and contribution to this research.

Yours sincerely,

V.L. Nel

Masters student

Cellular: 084 056 4106

Email: valeska.ne198@gmail.com

Student number: 28537599

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roland Goldberg', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr R.H. Goldberg

Supervisor

Office: 018 285 2207

Email: Roland.Goldberg@nwu.ac.za

Personnel number: 2770626

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTAKE IN RESEARCH

Exploring gamification in the South African fashion retail industry

- I _____ (name & surname) voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the focus group, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves providing general information pertaining to my motivation for frequenting shopping centres in South Africa.
- I understand that I will not benefit *directly* from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in dissertations, conference presentations, and published papers.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Research Participant

Date

I believe that the research participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Valeska Nel
Researcher

Date

APPENDIX E: DATA ANALYSIS AND CODEBOOK

Please refer to the CD-ROM included at the back of this dissertation.

APPENDIX F: PEER CHECKING APPROVAL LETTER

Mr. Johan Gouws
Junior Lecturer
North-West University
Potchefstroom
South Africa

Ms. Valeska Nel
Master's student in Marketing Management
North-West University
Potchefstroom
South Africa

1 October 2021

To Whom It May Concern

PEER REVIEW OF VALESKA NEL'S QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

This letter verifies that I, Johan Gouws (Junior Lecturer in Entrepreneurship and Business Management at the North-West University; Staff No. 24970190) meticulously reviewed the qualitative analysis of the transcribed data of Ms. Nel's dissertation entitled "*Exploring gamification in the South African fashion retail industry*". Moreover, I reviewed Ms. Nel's use of the Morse and Field approach towards analysing qualitative data. Conclusively, this letter confirms that Ms. Nel rigorously analysed the data and verifies that the themes identified reflect both confirmability and dependability.

Yours faithfully



Mr. Johan Gouws

APPENDIX G: LETTER FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR



- Language Matters Pty Ltd
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Language Editor's Declaration

Language editing – Translation – Transcription – Simultaneous interpreting

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This document certifies that the manuscript/title listed below has been edited, within reasonable, ethical and professional limits, for syntax, grammar, spelling, punctuation and specific stylistic requirements of the English language by one or more qualified language practitioner(s) at Language Matters. The editor's revisions and comments serve as recommendations; the overall quality of the final manuscript's contents remains the responsibility of the client/author. The language editor does not accept responsibility for any changes made to the manuscript after the issuing of this declaration.

Manuscript title: Exploring gamification in the South African fashion retail industry

Author(s): VL Nel

Date Issued:

Issued by: Simone Barroso

BGS Language Matters and Media Services director and co-founder

BA Hons Language Practice (NWU 2011)

Accredited member of the South African Translators' Institute (SATI)