# Fostering Customer Loyalty through Gamification and Employee Behavior

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## Vorwort

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Isabel Disse                                                                 Steinheim, im August 2024

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# 1 Introduction

The explosive growth of innovative digital technologies in recent years has changed the way customers interact with companies through different touch points in multiple channels and media (Nam and Kannan, 2020). Not only new technologies but also the growing customer preference to move across channels during the search, purchase, and post-purchase phases of buying behavior have obliged companies to seek innovative ways to connect with their customers and enhance the customer experience (CX) (Vaishnav and Ray, 2023). One promising approach is *multichannel marketing*, which is essential for engaging with customers across various touchpoints and thus fostering customer loyalty (Susiang *et al*., 2023). Since the most profitable customers are those who are loyal to one or more of a company's products or services, promoting customer loyalty is generally a fundamental goal of companies (Reichheld and Sasser, 1990). Through multichannel marketing, customers have the opportunity to purchase from a traditional channel, such as a store or catalog, from an electronic channel, such as mobile or the web, or from multiple channels (Neslin *et al*., 2006). Payne and Frow (2004) claim that the overall objective of multichannel integration is to provide an enhanced CX that leads to increased sales, profits, and share of wallet. However, integrated channel offerings can also pose increasing data and privacy risks for customers, and the growing webrooming and showrooming phenomenon can negatively impact profitability, so companies have to analyze their multichannel marketing strategies thoroughly, if not exhaustively (Vaishnav and Ray, 2023).

Multichannel companies can choose from a variety of technologies to implement in different channels, such as beacons, tablets, or magical mirrors, to improve the CX (Baier and Rese, 2020). One popular technology and effective marketing tool to enhance the CX and therefore foster customer loyalty is *gamification* (Heinemann and Gaiser, 2015; Robson *et al*., 2014). By including gamification in their offerings, companies take advantage of human psychology in the same way that games do; for example, game elements like points, badges, or rewards can create fun experiences or competitive environments (Seaborn and Feld, 2015). In this context, affordances refer to interactions with game elements that can be used in different ways, depending on the user. For example, points might provide a competition affordance when a person uses them to compare their performance with that of others (Suh *et al*., 2017). Gamification is increasingly embedded in technologies used in different channels: online shopping (Insley and Nunan, 2014), mobile apps (Hwang and Choi, 2020), and in-store digital technologies like augmented reality or screens, with the potential to become key competitive advantages for companies (Poncin *et al*., 2017). But gamification's effects should not be

overestimated since unwelcome consequences are also possible (e.g. Leclercq *et al.*, 2018). Thus, applying gamification in business practices requires a deep understanding of the relationship between gamification design's goal and the appropriate affordances to apply (Deterding, 2011). A thorough analysis of gamification as a tool for multichannel marketing and for an enhanced CX can therefore help companies foster customer loyalty in an innovative way.

However, it is not enough for companies to focus on technologies when aiming to increase customer loyalty; they must also consider the human factor, since customers prefer human interactions in certain situations, as when seeking for more information about products and services (Butt *et al.*, 2023). In this context, frontline employees are a crucial source of external communication and are supposed to act as advocates to deliver messages through their attitudes and behavior (Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2009). Since employee–customer interactions can influence customers' evaluations and brand perceptions, the engagement of employees in strengthening the brand image and the successful linking of employees' behaviors to brand values is crucial for companies (Engel *et al.*, 2013; Henkel *et al.*, 2007). This is particularly important in the sustainability context, where communications are not always clear and consistent so that customers become confused or skeptical, which can undermine the credibility of marketing claims (Kwon *et al.*, 2016). Since debates about sustainability have increased in recent years through social movements like Friday for Future, when people all over the world protest against the lack of action on the climate crisis, companies are focusing more and more on sustainability strategies (Mathios *et al.*, 2020). The growing concern about sustainability is also reflected by the new customer market called Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability, which emphasizes environmental awareness (Pícha and Navrátil, 2019). Therefore, analyzing employee behavior as a means to foster customer loyalty in this context is especially significant.

The overarching goal of this dissertation is to contribute new insights to customer loyalty through technological and human factors based on the theory of the attitude-behavior relation (Ajzen, 1993), especially the experience-satisfaction-loyalty relation. To achieve that aim, it addresses two key areas, gamification and employee behavior. Specifically, the analysis of (i) gamification as a tool for multichannel marketing, (ii) gamification as a means of creating a gamified customer experience (GCX), and (iii) the presence or absence of sustainable market orientation (SMO) behavior among employees to foster customer loyalty constitute the three foci of this dissertation.

The theory of the attitude-behavior relationship states that attitude influences, explains, and predicts the behavior of an individual and is further influenced by moderator variables that specify the conditions under which that relationship is stronger or weaker (Ajzen, 1993). Satisfaction can be considered an attitude that influences customer loyalty in areas like purchase behavior (Pleshko and Baqer, 2008). Several studies demonstrate that customer satisfaction can positively influence customer loyalty, which is based on this theory (e.g. Helgesen, 2006). The satisfaction-loyalty relationship is well established in the literature, and researchers have also investigated different moderator variables that significantly influence this relationship, such as loyalty cards and critical incidents (Walsh *et al*., 2008). In line with the previous literature, this dissertation extends this relation and focuses on the experience-satisfaction-loyalty link from the customer's perspective, which states that favorable experiences enhance satisfaction that in turn leads to loyalty (e.g., Ferreira *et al*., 2019).

Research shows that CX and satisfaction are critical determinants of customer loyalty, which should be a crucial goal of multichannel marketing (Fatma, 2014; Hsieh *et al*., 2012; Tyrväinen *et al*., 2020). As more companies focus on multichannel marketing and the integration of gamification in different channels, it is a matter of particular interest to analyze whether gamification is suitable as a tool for multichannel marketing. However, researchers have not yet explicitly investigated this topic. Instead, they have mostly examined gamification within single channels, such as mobile apps (e.g., Rialti *et al*., 2022) and websites (e.g., Behl *et al*., 2020), and rarely within two or more channels. In the latter case, research has most frequently examined gamification in the combination of mobile and store in the context of mobile marketing (e.g., Högberg *et al*., 2019b), but not explicitly as a tool for multichannel marketing. This dissertation thus investigates the link between gamification and multichannel marketing based on a systematic literature review (SLR) of studies on gamification in the marketing context. In this context, I consider all three variables of the experience-satisfaction-loyalty link since they constitute important goals for both multichannel marketing and gamification. The first study aims to answer the first research question:

    *(i)*      *Does gamification constitute a successful tool for multichannel marketing?*

Research has already rigorously investigated the concept of CX in different contexts and shown that a positive CX can enhance customer satisfaction and therefore customer loyalty (Hsieh *et al*., 2012; Tyrväinen *et al*., 2020). Thus, creating a favorable CX has become an important goal for (multichannel) companies, especially for retailers that use technologies like gamification to improve the CX in stores (Hofacker *et al*., 2016). Studies investigate how gamification can

influence different experiences, such as motivational experiences (Wolf *et al.*, 2020) and the general shopping experience (Bauer *et al.*, 2020), but not the holistic CX, including the social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and sensorial dimensions (Verhoef *et al.*, 2009). To create a GCX, companies can add gamification to the traditional CX by making the experience dimensions more gameful, such as by allowing customers to take part in a quiz as part of the cognitive experience dimension. However, it remains unclear whether gamification always improves the CX because negative consequences are also possible (e.g., Kim and Anh, 2017). Furthermore, existing studies have examined only certain affordances and their impacts on the retail environment (e.g., Högberg *et al.*, 2019a) or provided a summary of the main affordances in other sectors (e.g., Suh *et al.*, 2017). An overview of key affordances in retail is lacking, although the development of game elements' taxonomies is a central concern in gamification science (Landers *et al.*, 2018). Some studies on retail gamification examine certain influencing factors adopted from other contexts such as monetary rewards from the education context (Bauer *et al.*, 2020). However, there are as yet no studies using an explorative approach to identify the specific influencing factors in physical retail environments. Based on an interview study with customers and gamification experts and a scenario-based experiment, this dissertation explores the key affordances and game elements for creating a GCX, including the various influencing factors. In this context, I focus on the experience component as a basis for customer satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, the second study addresses the following research question:

> *(ii)    How can companies use gamification, including affordances and game elements, to create a GCX?*

As already noted, companies should also focus on human factors when aiming to increase customer loyalty, especially frontline employees, since they are key representatives of companies (Foster *et al.*, 2010). Research provides evidence that the alignment between employee behaviors and a brand's values positively affects customers' perceptions of that brand (Sirianni *et al.*, 2013). By contrast, a misalignment between employee behavior and a brand's values negatively affects customers' perception of the brand (Wentzel, 2009). In the former case, both the CX and customer satisfaction are likely more positive. Customers who emphasize congruence between their own values and the brand's values probably also expect congruence between employee and brand values, since employees are expected to represent their employer (Foster *et al.*, 2010), but the role of value-based brand choice has not yet been investigated in the context of the (lack of) SMO–employee behavior alignment. Furthermore, the relationship

between employee behaviors and customer attitudes and behaviors has not been investigated in the sustainability context, including environmental, social, and economic SMO (Elkington, 1997). In the sustainability context, trust plays a major role since different factors such as the proliferation of eco-seals and green ratings or greenwashing can lead to distrust among customers toward companies claiming to be sustainable (Kwon *et al*., 2016). Research has demonstrated that trust can be considered an attitude (Jones, 1996). Based on the theory of the attitude-behavior relation, I focus on the experience/satisfaction-trust-loyalty relationship with value-based brand choice as an important moderator variable, including a scenario-based experiment. The third study therefore addresses the last research question:

> *(iii)*     *How does the (lack of) SMO–employee behavior alignment influence customer loyalty through trust in sustainable companies?*

## 2 Studies of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of three separate projects that aim to answer the research questions presented above. One study has been published as a working paper from Paderborn University and two studies have been published in peer-reviewed journals.

## 2.1 Gamification as a Multichannel Marketing Instrument: A Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Agenda

Publication details: Working Paper No. 117: 2024-04, Working Papers Dissertations from Paderborn University, Faculty of Business Administration and Economics.

Link: https://EconPapers.repec.org/RePEc:pdn:dispap:117

The first study in this dissertation is entitled "Gamification as a Multichannel Marketing Instrument: A Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Agenda". Prof. Dr. Nancy Wünderlich and I developed the key idea and co-authored the first version of the paper in 2015. A preliminary version was then submitted at the *American Marketing Association Winter Marketing Educators' Conference 2016* (title: "Gamification as a Multichannel Marketing Instrument: A Reflective Review and Future Research Agenda", authors: Isabel Teßmer and Nancy V. Wünderlich), where I received valuable feedback for revising the paper. In 2023 I updated the paper by including current studies with the support of Prof. Dr. René Fahr. His comments were extremely valuable for completing this research project.

Throughout the paper, I focus on the dissertation's first research question, which deals with the suitability of gamification as a multichannel marketing tool. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of gamification in the marketing literature as the basis for analysis. Therefore, I conducted an SLR on this topic by using three large scientific databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and EBSCOhost. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were employed to retrieve the most relevant sets of articles. I thus excluded irrelevant articles by reading the titles, abstracts and, where necessary, full papers. The exclusion criteria included studies that examine gamification outside the marketing context and studies without a focus on customers and marketing outcomes. Inclusion and exclusion criteria and a forward and backward search resulted in 128 usable articles published between January 2011 to October 2023. The summary of the results provides an overview of the articles including context, methodology, investigated channels, game elements, and impact on customer outcomes.

The SLR reveals that little research has been conducted at the intersection of different channels. Most studies focus on one channel, with occasional reference to another. Furthermore, research

has usually focused on the impact of the combinations of different gamification elements in various channels instead of one particular element in a certain channel. The majority of the reviewed studies show that gamification can lead to an enhanced CX, increased satisfaction, and deeper loyalty, which are important goals of multichannel marketing on the consumer level. Since there are also a few studies that analyze the effects of gamification in a multichannel context—especially the combination of store and mobile—and gamification strives for the same goals as multichannel marketing, it can be concluded that gamification could serve as a successful tool for multichannel marketing. Finally, this paper suggests an agenda for future research and offers examples of promising ways to study connections among different channels rather than in a single channel.

## 2.2 Uncovering the Gamified Customer Experience in the Retail Environment

Publication details: Disse, I. K., and Olsson, M. (2023), "Uncovering the gamified customer experience in the retail environment", *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 51 No. 7, pp. 955-971. DOI: 10.1108/IJRDM-07-2022-0268.

The second study in this dissertation is entitled "Uncovering the gamified customer experience in the retail environment" and is a joint work with Marcus Olsson from Karlstad University. While Prof. Dr. Nancy Wünderlich and Prof. Dr. Anders Gustafsson developed the key idea in 2015, Marcus Olsson and I were in charge of the literature review, the data collection, and the analyses and revisions. Prof. Dr. Nancy Wünderlich and Prof. Dr. Anders Gustafsson provided support by commenting on the first versions of the paper. Since 2019, I have been responsible for this research project and made several revisions, including an additional experiment. The paper was submitted to the *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* and accepted for publication in 2023.

Previous versions of the paper were submitted at

- the *Journal of Business Research* in 2019 (title: "Uncovering the Gamified Customer Experience in Retail", authors: Isabel Teßmer and Marcus Olsson)
- the *Journal of Service Management* in 2021 (title: "Uncovering the Gamified Customer Experience in Retail Service Environments", authors: Isabel Disse and Marcus Olsson)
- the *Journal of Services Marketing* in 2021 (title: "Uncovering the Gamified Customer Experience in Retail Service Environments", authors: Isabel Disse and Marcus Olsson).

A preliminary version of the paper was presented at the *26th Annual Frontiers in Service Conference* in 2017 in New York by Isabel Teßmer and Marcus Olsson (title: "How to Design

Successful Gamification in Retail: The benefits and pitfalls of affordances", authors: Isabel Teßmer, Marcus Olsson, Nancy V. Wünderlich and Anders Gustafsson). It was published in the following proceeding:

- Teßmer, Isabel, Marcus Olsson, Anders Gustafsson and Nancy V. Wünderlich (2017), "How to Design Successful Gamification in Retail: The benefits and pitfalls of affordances", *Proceedings of the 2017 Frontiers in Service Conference*, New York City/USA, June 2017.

The paper addresses the second research question and aims to conceptualize the GCX, including relevant affordances, and investigate its effects on key customer outcomes and influential factors. A qualitative interview study with 20 retail customers and 17 global gamification experts revealed 5 distinct affordances induced by different game elements to make traditional CX more exciting and thus create a GCX; namely, progress, collaboration, competition, immersion, and rewards. Furthermore, the study and a scenario-based experiment with 374 participants demonstrated how the affordances can be connected to all five CX dimensions and GCX's positive effects on customer engagement, customer satisfaction, and brand attitudes among consumers. For example, the progress affordance can be connected to the cognitive experience dimension by offering the game element of a quiz and thus stimulating the customer's thinking process in a playful manner. Generally, affordances evoke different emotions and simultaneously address the behavioral and sensorial experience dimensions. The paper shows that retail customers in particular embrace the cognitive and social experience dimensions and further demonstrates that the progress, collaboration, and competition affordances have the strongest impact on these dimensions. Lastly, the study reveals three influencing factors: retail brand personality, customers' shopping motivations, and fear of manipulation. Specifically, customers were more satisfied when no gamification was present in the case of a sophisticated brand, customers with low convenience shopping motivation perceived a CX to be more exciting when it was gamified, and customers with high fear levels tended to have a worse brand attitude.

## 2.3 The Effects of Employee Behavior in Sustainable Service Organizations

The third study in this dissertation is entitled "The effects of employee behavior in sustainable service organizations" and is a joint project with Hürrem Becker-Özcamlica. Hürrem Becker-Özcamlica and Prof. Dr. Nancy Wünderlich developed not only the key idea, but also co-authored the initial versions of the full paper submissions which were published in conference proceedings. Hürrem Becker-Özcamlica and I were in charge of the literature review, the data collection, and the analyses and revisions. Prof. Dr. Nancy Wünderlich provided support by commenting on and editing not only the first, but also subsequent versions of the paper. Since 2019, I have been responsible for the revisions. I submitted the paper to the *Journal of Services Marketing* in 2021, and it was accepted for publication in 2022.

Previous versions of the paper were submitted at
- the *Journal of Business Ethics* in 2017 (title: "Not All Roads Lead to Rome: Comparing the Effects of the Dimensions of Sustainable Market Orientations on Consumers' Attitudes and Behavioral Intentions", authors: Hürrem Becker-Özcamlica, Isabel Teßmer and Nancy V. Wünderlich)
- the *Journal of Business Research* in 2020 (title: "The Effect of Brand-Consistent Employee Behavior on Customers' Attitudes and Behavioral Intentions toward Sustainable Brands", authors: Isabel Disse, Nancy V. Wünderlich and Hürrem Becker-Özcamlica).

Preliminary versions were presented at
- the *2014 - Conference on Service and Technology Marketing* in 2014 in Passau by Isabel Teßmer and Hürrem Özcamlica (title: "Word and Deed of Sustainable Brands: The Impact of Non-Brand-Consistent Employee Behavior on the Consumers' Perception of a Sustainable Brand", authors: Isabel Teßmer and Hürrem Özcamlica)
- the *AMA SERVSIG International Service Research Conference* in 2014 in Thessaloniki by Hürrem Özcamlica (title: "The Impact of (Non)-Brand-Consistent Employee Behavior of a Service Provider", authors: Hürrem Özcamlica and Nancy V. Wünderlich)
- the *European Marketing Academy Annual Conference* in 2015 in Leuven by Hürrem Özcamlica (title: "Word and Deed of Sustainable Brands: Making the right Emphasis

changes the Consumers' Perception of a Sustainable Brand", authors: Hürrem Özcamlica and Nancy V. Wünderlich)

- the *75th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management* in 2015 in Vancouver by Hürrem Özcamlica (title: "The Impact of Employee Behavior on Employer Attractiveness and Application Intention", authors: Hürrem Özcamlica, Nancy V. Wünderlich and Isabel Teßmer)

- the *American Marketing Association Winter Marketing Educators' Conference* in 2017 in Orlando by Hürrem Becker-Özcamlica (title: „Do Companies Really Have to Emphasize the Triple Bottom Line? Analyzing the Effects of Competing Sustainable Market Orientations", authors: Hürrem Becker-Özcamlica, Isabel Teßmer and Nancy V. Wünderlich).

They were published in the following proceedings:
- Özcamlica, Hürrem and Nancy V. Wünderlich (2014), "The Impact of (Non)-Brand-Consistent Employee Behavior of a Service Provider", *Proceedings of the AMA SERVSIG International Service Research Conference*, Thessaloniki/Greece, June 2014

- Özcamlica, Hürrem and Nancy V. Wünderlich (2015), "Word and Deed of Sustainable Brands", *Proceedings of the 2015 EMAC Annual Conference*, Leuven/Belgium, May 2015

- Özcamlica, Hürrem, Nancy V. Wünderlich and Isabel Teßmer (2015), "The Impact of Employee Behavior on Employer Attractiveness and Application Intention", *Proceedings of the 75th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management (AOM)*, Vancouver/Canada, August 2015

- Becker-Özcamlica, Hürrem, Isabel Teßmer and Nancy V. Wünderlich (2017), "Do Companies Really Have to Emphasize the Triple Bottom Line? Analyzing the Effect of Competing Sustainable Market Orientations", *Proceedings of the 2017 AMA Winter Marketing Educators' Conference*, Orlando/USA, February 2017.

The study focuses on the dissertation's third research question, which concerns employee behavior in sustainable companies to foster customer loyalty. The purpose of this paper was to investigate the impact of the (lack of) SMO–employee behavior alignment on customer attitudes and behavioral intentions while considering the social, environmental, and economic SMO and the role of value-based brand choice. A scenario-based experiment with 313 participants demonstrated that employee behavior that is not aligned with SMO influences customers' trust more negatively compared to SMO-aligned employee behavior, independent of which SMO is involved. Furthermore, a mediation analysis revealed that trust fully mediates

the effects of the (lack of) employee behavior–SMO alignment on customer loyalty intentions. Lastly, the effect on trust is moderated by value-based brand choice; that is, customers' emphasis on customer-brand value congruence moderates the effect of employee behavior on trust. Customers with a strong emphasis suffer more from employee behavior that is not aligned with SMO than SMO-aligned employee behavior. It can be assumed that such nonaligned behavior represents employee-brand value incongruence, which lowers trust among customers who attach importance to brand value congruence and like also expect employee-brand value congruence. Furthermore, the trust of customers with a strong value-based brand choice is higher than the trust of customers with a weak value-based brand choice when an demonstrates SMO-aligned behavior. This finding indicates that customers who choose brands that are consistent with their own values perceive employee-brand value congruence more positively.

# 3 Conclusion

This dissertation provides new insights into the realm of customer loyalty by analyzing the influence of both technological and human factors. The first two studies focus on gamification as a tool for multichannel marketing and a means for creating a GCX, while the third study addresses the alignment between SMO and employee behavior. In particular, the thesis brings forward important contributions to multichannel companies, retailers, sustainable companies, and scholars interested in the following research questions:

(i) *Does gamification constitute a successful tool for multichannel marketing?*

(ii) *How can companies use gamification including affordances and game elements to create a GCX?*

(iii) *How does the (lack of) SMO–employee behavior alignment influence customer loyalty through trust in sustainable companies?*

## 3.1 Summary and Discussion

To answer the first research question, the first study demonstrated that gamification has the same goals as multichannel marketing. The study revealed that gamification can enhance the CX, increase satisfaction, and foster customer loyalty, which are all important goals of multichannel marketing. A few studies have also investigated gamification in a multichannel context (i.e. mobile and store). Overall, it can be concluded that gamification could create synergistic effects between different channels and thus serve as a successful tool for multichannel marketing.

This dissertation is the first research effort to examine gamification as a multichannel marketing tool directly and propose an agenda for future research, including examples of promising avenues to examine connections across different channels. For example, gamification has typically been investigated in a single channel or occasionally in combinations of channels like mobile apps and stores. Thus, future research could examine how gamification in combinations of other channels influences customer outcomes. Scholars have also generally directed their attention to combinations of different gamification elements in various channels instead of a specific element in a particular channel. This prevents the examination of the impact of certain elements on customer outcomes or making any connections with regard to elements in certain channels. For multichannel marketing, it would therefore be useful to investigate individual elements in specific channels to test the impact on customer outcomes within other channels. The paper further proposes valuable research questions not only on gamification in the

multichannel marketing context in general but also more specific research questions with regard to the CX, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty.

For companies that strive to find innovative ways to engage their customers across various touchpoints, it is advisable to integrate gamification into their multichannel strategies to create synergistic effects between different channels and reach favorable customer outcomes. Based on the results, multichannel companies could combine gamification in the mobile and store channels when aiming at increasing the CX in stores and thus customer satisfaction and loyalty. But other combinations are also possible, such as applying gamification to websites or social media to foster customers' store visits or vice versa. Since gamification can sometimes also negatively affect customers, multichannel companies should collaborate with professional gamification designers and carry out rigorous testing in order to avoid negative effects. The paper also provided important guidance for multichannel companies to consider concerning the individual goals. For example, it is important that a consistent CX should be created both within and across channels in multichannel marketing (Frow and Payne, 2007), so companies should direct resources to creating similar experiences within and across different channels through gamification, whether those channels are electronic or traditional. They should also carry out a segmentation of multichannel customers to better grasp their multichannel behavior and deliver a superior and more customized CX (Mahrous and Hassan, 2017), in acknowledgment of the likelihood that gamification could vary in its appeal to certain customers or be more or less suitable in different multichannel operations.

The second study shed light on the second research question, which deals with the creation of a GCX in retail environments. It showed that retailers can use five distinct affordances to create a more exciting CX and thus a GCX that positively influences customer engagement, satisfaction, and brand attitude. To create a GCX, retailers can add gamification to traditional CX efforts by deploying a more gameful strategy, such as permitting customers to play together as part of the social experience. The GCX's effect is dependent on different factors such as retail brand personality, customer shopping motivations, and fear of manipulation.

This paper makes three contributions. First, it adds to gamification research by offering an overview of the key affordances in the retail sector that can help researchers when choosing which game elements to study in that context. The conceptualization of the GCX is the second contribution; it provides a more nuanced account of holistic CXs when gamification is involved. This bolsters CX research by providing new insights into how the CX is transformed into the GCX and how gamification impacts the various CX dimensions. Finally, this study has revealed

key influential factors on customers that have not been previously investigated in retail gamification. It thus contributes to retail gamification research by identifying retail-specific influences that lead to a better evaluation of the effect of gamification on retail.

For retailers that aim to foster customer loyalty in an innovative way, it is advisable to apply gamification to achieve an enhanced CX. They can use the identified affordances as a basis for creating a GCX and encouraging positive customer outcomes. The creation of progress and collaboration affordances is particularly advisable, since customers embrace the creation of a cognitive and social experience, especially when playing with familiar people. Retailers should thus apply begin by applying extrinsically motivating game elements before moving on to intrinsically motivating game elements to support long-term engagement. Retailers should also analyze whether their brand personality is suitable for a given gamification design; otherwise, gamification could negatively affect customer satisfaction. Furthermore, they should carefully examine their customer segments, some of which might be less interested in certain gamification designs or are afraid of being manipulated into buying and thus develop a negative brand attitude. This can help retailers design appropriate game elements, such as factors that support fast shopping for convenience shoppers. Retailers could also make it abundantly clear that they use gamification to foster customer loyalty so that customers might be less afraid. Knowing about these influences is crucial, because considering affordances with both customer and retailer characteristics can help retailers offer a positive GCX and reach positive customer outcomes.

Apart from gamification as a technological factor, the last study provides insights into employee behavior as a human factor to foster customer loyalty. It addresses the last research question by showing that a lack of alignment between SMO and employee behavior influences trust more negatively than an SMO-behavior alignment. In this context, trust fully mediated the relationship between the SMO–employee behavior alignment and customer loyalty. Furthermore, the effect on trust is moderated by value-based brand choice; that is, customers with a strong emphasis on customer-brand value congruence suffer more from employee behavior that is not aligned with SMO compared to SMO-aligned employee behavior. Additionally, the trust of customers with a strong value-based brand choice is higher than the trust of customers with a weak value-based brand choice when there is SMO-employee behavior alignment.

This is the first study to examine the relationship between the alignment between SMO and employee behavior on customers in the sustainability context. Despite the growing importance

of sustainability, the investigation of sustainable brands has largely been neglected in this context, even though employee behavior is particularly important in a sustainability context because of customers' skepticism toward the increasing number of companies claiming to be committed to sustainability (Kwon *et al*., 2016). In line with previous research, our study showed that SMO-aligned employee behavior positively affects customers' perceptions in contrast to behavior that is not so aligned (e.g., Sirianni *et al*., 2013). While there are studies that show differences concerning the SMO of the triple bottom line (e.g., Choi and Ng, 2011), our study found no significant differences between SMOs. In other words, it cannot be concluded which SMO is better or suffers more from a lack of alignment with employee behavior. The paper thus also contributes to sustainability research. Finally, the study further considers the role of value-based brand choice, which has not previously been investigated in the context of employee behavior. The paper therefore extends existing findings concerning employee behavior that is (not) aligned with a company's values.

This study has important implications for companies with a sustainability focus. It is crucial that employees behave in line with a company's core values, independent of SMO. To achieve this, there should be codes of conduct for employees, including guidelines on SMO-aligned behaviors regarding specific SMOs; for example, for an environmental SMO, employees should always carefully separate recyclables and dispose of them appropriately, rather than simply throwing all waste into the dustbin. Employees should also be involved in strategic value orientation, for example, they could be given the opportunity to propose socially, environmentally, or economically sustainable projects that the company will fund. Companies should further enhance employees' trust with a genuine and sustained commitment to sustainability, transparency, and employees' active participation in sustainability projects, such as distributing food for people experiencing homelessness, a social SMO. Additionally, it is important to keep information about standards up to date so that employees are aware of the need for sustainable commitment. Demonstrating the significance of a specific SMO can be achieved by discussing an important issue, such as the negative economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, its consequences, and how the company, including its employees, can help address that challenge. Having this information can increase employees' awareness of sustainability and therefore foster SMO-aligned behavior among them. Additionally, ethical training programs led by professionals who offer face-to-face training like skills practice or videos for small groups can create a positive ethical climate (Schwepker *et al*., 2019). Furthermore, when companies recruit service employees, they can focus on applicants who identify with the corporate values since they will be more likely to act authentically

(Wünderlich *et al*., 2020) when aligning their behavior with the company's SMOs. Lastly, companies facing customers with a strong value-based brand choice should particularly avoid SMO-nonaligned employee behavior. Given the increasing awareness of and preference for sustainability among the general public (i.e., customers), this finding emphasizes the importance of SMO-aligned employee behavior in companies with a sustainability focus.

As demonstrated throughout the preceding summary, the insights gained in this research are not only valuable for customer loyalty research but also have far-reaching managerial implications. In today's digitally driven world, companies constantly seek innovative ways to connect with their customers. One popular and innovative way is gamification, the central focus of this dissertation, which demonstrates that gamification can be effectively applied in multichannel marketing and constitutes a promising means to create a GCX, which in turn bolsters customer loyalty. Nevertheless, the human factor should not be neglected since customers still prefer personal interactions in certain situations. Thus, this dissertation also analyzes how employee behavior should look to obtain and maintain customer loyalty.

## 3.2 Limitations and Outlook

Despite the extensive implications of the findings and the valuable contribution to professionals and researchers alike, some limitations, especially regarding aspects of the method such as the sample, are addressed in this section.

The results of the scenario-based experiments may not reflect real-world situations. Although we conducted realism checks and several pretests to ensure that participants understood and could imagine the particular scenario, participants may behave differently in their natural environment; this may limit the generalizability of the results. Thus, field experiments could be considered in future research. The SLR was conducted by a single person. An SLR conducted by at least two people independently would minimize the likelihood of errors. Furthermore, one might question the representative nature of the sample since the customer interviews included only Germans and convenience buyers, and the majority of the sample consisted of younger people (41.6% of participants were between 21 and 26 years). Thus, future research could survey other buyer types, employ a more demographically balanced sample, and conduct cross-cultural studies. Additionally, the interviews and scenario-based experiments were conducted in specific contexts. The data in the second study are based on supermarkets, furniture stores, and clothing stores, whereas we applied the hotel context in the last study, which may also limit the generalizability of the findings. Particularly in the latter case, researchers should consider that the hotel industry already has a significant impact on the environment, so other contexts

would also be interesting to examine. Furthermore, all studies only investigated certain types of variables, such as the impact on the CX, customer satisfaction, and loyalty (first study), the influence of two brand personalities (second study), the impact on the customer outcomes trust and loyalty, and the influence of value-based brand choice (last study). Previous research has shown that there are other customer outcomes that are relevant in different contexts and other types of brand personalities and brand choice that would be worth investigating and might increase the generalizability of the results. Specifically, the second study considered gamification in general and not the specific game elements, although some such elements can negatively affect customers or could be investigated regarding particular experience dimensions. Thus, investigating specific types of game elements would also be interesting in this context.

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