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Insight into Online Gamers' Preferences: An Investigation using Conjoint Analysis

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ABSTRACT :

This study investigates the influence of various consumption values—functional, social, epistemic, emotional, and conditional—on purchase intentions in the context of gaming applications. As the digital gaming market continues to expand, understanding the factors that drive consumer behavior becomes essential for developers and marketers. The research employs a quantitative approach to assess how these consumption values impact users' intent to purchase in-game items. Additionally, the study explores the mediating role of reward mechanisms in this relationship, hypothesizing that well-designed reward systems can amplify the effects of consumption values on purchase intentions. The findings reveal that all identified consumption values significantly influence purchase intent, with rewards serving as a crucial mediator. Insights gained from this study provide valuable implications for app developers, suggesting that by aligning game features with user preferences and implementing effective reward strategies, they can enhance user engagement and drive revenue growth. Furthermore, the findings contribute to the broader literature on consumer behavior in the gaming industry, paving the way for future research into demographic influences and evolving gaming trends. This study emphasizes the importance of understanding consumer motivations in an increasingly competitive and dynamic digital landscape.

Keywords: Consumption values, Purchase intention, Gaming app, Reward mechanism & Consumer behaviour.

Introduction

In recent years, the rapid growth of the digital gaming industry has attracted significant interest from scholars and practitioners alike. Gaming apps have become an integral part of daily life for millions, offering not only entertainment but also opportunities for social interaction and cognitive engagement. Understanding the factors that drive consumer purchase intentions in this dynamic environment is crucial for developers and marketers aiming to enhance user experience and optimize revenue. This study seeks to explore the complex interplay between various consumption values—functionality, social influence, epistemic curiosity, emotional connection, and conditional aspects—and their impact on purchase intentions in the context of gaming applications (Gamatche & Niu, 2017; Lei & Abdoul Aziz, 2016; Seow & Wong, 2016).

Consumption values are broad constructs that encompass the benefits consumers derive from products or services, influencing their decision-making processes. Functional value pertains to the practical benefits and usability of a gaming app, while social value emphasizes the importance of social interactions and community engagement within gaming environments. Epistemic value reflects consumers' desire for exploration and novelty, which is critical in a landscape teeming with diverse gaming experiences. Emotional value captures the affective responses and enjoyment derived from gameplay, whereas conditional value addresses the situational factors that may motivate purchase intentions, such as promotional offers or specific rewards (Kaur et al., 2021; Peng et al., 2020; Sheth et al., 1991a).

Moreover, this research introduces the concept of rewards as a mediating variable, hypothesizing that they intensify the relationship between consumption values and purchase intentions. The gaming industry increasingly adopts reward-based mechanisms, such as in-game currencies, bonuses, and loyalty programs as well as loyalty points, aimed at enticing users to make purchases. By examining the mediating role of rewards, this study not only contributes to the academic conversation surrounding consumer behavior in gaming but also offers practical implications for app developers seeking to harness these insights for strategic advantages.

Through a comprehensive analysis of these interconnected factors, this research aims to illuminate the underlying motivations driving consumer behavior in the gaming app market. By providing empirical evidence and theoretical insights, the findings are expected to serve as a valuable resource for future studies and offer actionable recommendations for industry stakeholders. As digital gaming continues to evolve, understanding the complexities of consumer interactions with gaming apps will be pivotal for fostering sustained engagement and driving profitability in this competitive landscape.

Theoretical Background

Theory of Consumption Value

The Theory of Consumption Value (TCV), proposed by Sheth et al. (1991), serves as a foundational framework for understanding consumer behavior regarding product and service choices. It posits that consumer choice is heavily influenced by five distinct consumption values: functional, emotional,

social, epistemic, and conditional (Sheth et al., 1991b).

This theory highlights the multifaceted motivations that drive consumers' decisions and provides valuable insight into the dynamics of consumption behavior in various contexts, including online gaming. Recent research indicates that consumers who are aware of sustainable eco-labeling and exhibit innovative behaviors are more inclined to support and purchase eco-labeled products (Joseph et al., 2024; Tanrikulu, 2021).

In the realm of online games, the TCV elucidates how different consumption values interact to shape players' purchasing intentions. Functional value refers to the perceived utility derived from a product's functional and physical attributes, which encompasses reliability, durability, and price (Sheth et al., 1991b). In the context of online gaming apps, functional value plays a crucial role as players assess the quality and efficiency of in-game purchases against their utility, determining the value they receive for the expenditure they incur. Traditionally regarded as the primary driver of consumer choice, functional value is pivotal in influencing players' decisions to make purchases, especially when considering in-game enhancements and features (Zailani et al., 2019).

Social value relates to the benefits derived from a product's ability to enhance an individual's self-concept and is often influenced by interactions with others (Tan & Chiu, 2024). In online gaming, social value manifests through community engagement, where players derive satisfaction from shared experiences and recognition within their gaming circles. This value can sway their decisions to purchase in-game items that boost social status or community standing, illustrating how social interactions can significantly affect consumption behavior (Maksum & Haryono, 2024).

Epistemic value emphasizes the attraction of novelty and curiosity, which can drive players to explore new content and features within games (Sheth et al., 1991b). The urge for knowledge and new experiences is crucial in the gaming industry, where developers frequently release expansions and updates. Empirical evidence supports that such knowledge-driven curiosity greatly influences purchase intentions and behaviors within gaming contexts.

Furthermore, emotional value encompasses the psychological responses that games elicit, capable of evoking strong feelings among players (Sheth et al., 1991b). Emotional reactions significantly affect players' perceptions and predispositions towards purchasing decisions; thus, understanding the emotional engagement that a game offers can illuminate potential pathways for increasing in-app spending (Khan & Mohsin, 2017).

Conditional value pertains to the benefits derived from alternatives based on specific situations confronting the decision-maker (Zailani et al., 2019). In online gaming, such conditional factors can influence purchase decisions, as players may choose to buy items based on contextual elements like promotional sales, events, or their immediate gaming environment. The ability of conditional values to either support or restrain decisions highlights the need for game developers to consider situational variables in their marketing strategies (Yeo et al., 2016).

In summary, the Theory of Consumption Value provides a comprehensive framework for exploring the various dimensions that influence purchase intentions within the online gaming industry. By integrating functional, emotional, social, epistemic, and conditional values, the TCV helps illustrate the diverse motivations that underlie consumer decisions, offering valuable insights for researchers and practitioners alike in understanding how to effectively engage gamers and enhance their purchasing experiences.

Reward

User perceptions of experiences are significantly influenced by the peak-end rule, which posits that individuals tend to remember experiences based on their most intense moments and their final outcomes. In the context of online gaming apps, this principle is strategically leveraged in design to foster memorable and rewarding experiences, ultimately enhancing user engagement and retention. The implementation of well-structured rewards and incentives within games serves to create meaningful interactions that resonate with players. These rewards can take various forms, including in-game bonuses, social recognition, and competitive rankings, each playing a crucial role in shaping player experiences and satisfaction (Paul et al., 2024).

Within the framework of online gaming, intrinsic motivators are centered around aspects such as pleasure and knowledge sharing. Players often derive satisfaction from the enjoyment associated with gameplay and the opportunity to share experiences and strategies with others, reinforcing their connection to the game (Doll & Ajzen, 1992). This intrinsic motivation fosters a sense of belonging and community among players, enhancing their overall gaming experience and encouraging continued participation.

Conversely, extrinsic motivators, such as rewards and recognition, are also critical in driving user behavior (Vallerand, 1997). These external incentives reinforce positive behavior and encourage players to engage more deeply with the game. By rewarding players for achieving specific milestones or participating in competitive events, developers can significantly influence players' purchasing intentions, thereby driving revenue and increasing user retention.

In-game purchases are dependent on players' engagement with mobile games due perhaps to the vital link between users' engagement behavior and purchase intention (Balakrishnan & Griffiths, 2018).

Consequently, the nuanced interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators in online gaming apps not only illustrates the importance of designing rewarding experiences that capture both emotional and practical aspects of user engagement but also raises the question of whether rewards serve as a mediating factor influencing the relationship between consumption values and purchase intentions. This potential mediation effect warrants further investigation to ascertain the exact role rewards play in shaping consumer behaviors within the gaming environment.

Purchase Intention

A few studies, such as Balakrishnan and Griffiths (2018), have studied in-app purchase intention for mobile gamers via addiction and loyalty, creating a gap in the exiting literature to understand the in-app purchase intentions of gamers. As aforementioned, engagement (loyalty) and stickiness (addiction) are essential to in-app purchases, and loyalty may be an intervening factor that mediates addiction to in-app purchases (Balakrishnan & Griffiths, 2018; Gong & Huang, 2023).

A key to the market rebound is to enhance gamers' continued playing intention and in-game purchase intention. Past research has noted that users' emotions toward media characters and interactions among media characters usually positively influence users' attitudes and use of media.

Several studies have confirmed the positive effect of social value on purchase intention (Hamari et al., 2020). A high social value encourages players to purchase in-game virtual goods (Mäntymäki & Salo, 2015).

Research Methods

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the influence of consumption values on purchase intention of gaming apps, integrating the theory of consumption values. A sample of 572 online gaming app consumers was surveyed using a structured questionnaire, which includes validated measures for consumption values, purchase intention, and the mediating construct of reward. Correlation analysis was utilized to examine the relationships between consumption values, reward, and purchase intention. This approach allows for assessing the significance and strength of associations, providing insights into how consumption values impact consumers' purchase behavior in the gaming app context.

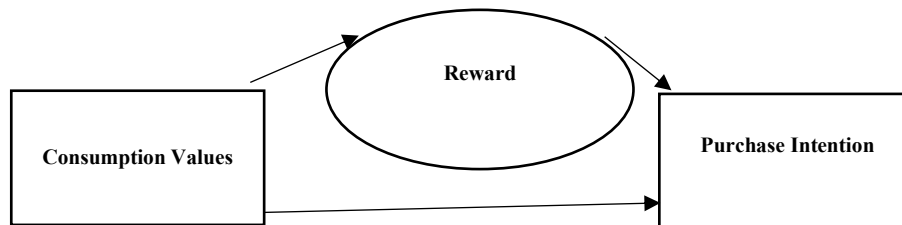


Figure 1: Proposed Model of the study

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Data for this study was collected through a structured questionnaire utilizing a five-point Likert scale to measure participants' responses regarding consumption values, purchase intention, and the mediating role of reward from July 2024 to September 2024. The scale ranged from "1 - Strongly Disagree" to "5 - Strongly Agree," facilitating a nuanced understanding of consumer attitudes and perceptions. A convenience sampling technique was employed to recruit 572 online gaming app consumers, who were invited to complete the questionnaire via an online platform. This method ensured efficient data capture while maintaining clarity and reliability in measuring the constructs associated with gaming app purchases.

Empirical Analysis

Demographic Characteristics of Sample

A frequency analysis was conducted to survey the distribution of various demographic variables within the sample. The gender distribution revealed that 338 participants (59%) were male and 234 (41%) were female. Regarding age demographics, 234 individuals (41%) were in their 20s, while 155 (27%) belonged to the 30s age group. Additionally, 120 participants (21%) were in their 40s, and 63 (11%) were aged 50 and above. The most prevalent occupation among respondents was sales, encompassing 203 sales (35%), followed by 137 students (24%), 131 in desk work (23%), 44 employed in government roles (7%), and 57 in business (11%). The educational attainment of the sample indicated that 143 individuals (25%) had completed high school, 303 were graduates (53%), and 126 had pursued post-graduate education (22%). Furthermore, monthly income levels varied, with 74 respondents earning between 0 to 20 thousand (13%), 154 earning between 21 thousand to 50 thousand (27%), 212 making between 51 thousand to 75 thousand (37%), and 132 individuals earning above 75 thousand (23%). This data illuminates the demographic composition of the sample and provides valuable context for further analysis.

Table 1. Sample profile (n = 572)

		n	Percentage (%)
Age	20-29	234	41
	30-39	155	27
	40-49	120	21
	50 & above	63	11
Gender	Male	338	59
	Female	234	41
Education	High School	143	25
	Graduate	303	53
	Post Graduate	126	22
Income/month	0 – 20,000	74	13
	21,000 – 50,000	154	27
	51,000 – 75,000	212	37
	75,000 & above	132	23

Occupation	Sales	203	35
	Desk work	131	23
	Student	137	24
	Government	44	7
	Business	57	11

Validity and Reliability Analysis

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MAS) is a crucial indicator for assessing the appropriateness of conducting factor analysis, with a value exceeding 0.60 suggesting minimal adequacy (Hair et al., 2019). Additionally, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity must yield significant results, thereby confirming the presence of sufficient inter-correlations among variables necessary for factor analysis and ensuring the assumptions of the procedure are satisfied. When the KMO measure surpasses 0.60, along with a substantial and significant Bartlett's test result, the factorability of the dataset is considered adequate (Morgan et al., 2004; Pallant, 2020).

The Cronbach's Alpha of items is reliable. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on consumption value including 5 dimensions namely, functional value with 4 items, social value with 4 items, epistemic value with 3 items, emotional value with 3 items, and conditional value with 2 items. The relative explanatory power (Eigenvalues) for each dimension is 3.027, 3.357, 2.113, 1.812, and 1.712, respectively. These dimensions cumulatively captured 77.629 percent of the variance in the data. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MAS) for all items was 0.913. The reward has been measured with 3 items. The relative explanatory power (Eigenvalues) for the same is 2.556. This captured 82.573 percent of the variance in the data. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MAS) for all items was 0.831. The purchase intention was a single factor with 5 items. The relative explanatory power (Eigenvalues) is 75.513 percent of the variance in the data. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MAS) for all items was 0.823. Besides, by deriving Cronbach's alpha coefficient to test the reliability of these factors. The Cronbach's alpha value of reward is 0.912 and of purchase intention is 0.909. Thus, all measuring factors had high inner consistency and scale reliability of scales. The results of factor analysis as the Table 2.

Table 2. Results of exploratory factor analysis and reliability analysis

	Factor and variable		Factor loading	Eigen value (variance)	Cronbach's α
Functional Value (FUV)	FUV1	The app runs smoothly without significant lag or technical issues.	0.829	3.027 (20.121)	0.937
	FUV2	The loading times are minimal, allowing for a quick start to gameplay.	0.776		
	FUV3	The game maintains a high level of performance even during intense gaming sessions.	0.718		
	FUV4	This app effectively utilizes my device's capabilities for an enhanced gaming experience.	0.671		
Social Value (SUV)	SUV5	The app encourages collaboration with other players.	0.819	3.357 (21.147)	
	SUV6	The app allows me to form friendships with players I meet while gaming.	0.807		
	SUV7	I feel validated when others acknowledge my skills or achievements in the game.	0.773		
	SUV8	Playing with friends or family enhances my gaming experience in this app.	0.723		
Epistemic Value (EPV)	EPV9	The app provides opportunities for exploration and discovery of new ideas.	0.761	2.113 (15.107)	
	EPV10	The puzzles or tasks presented in the game encourage me to apply what I know.	0.754		
	EPV11	The content in the game promotes deeper understanding and analysis.	0.701		
Emotional Value (EMV)	EMV12	The app keeps me excited and engaged throughout my gaming sessions.	0.701	1.812 (11.123)	
	EMV13	The gameplay experience in this app is calming and soothing for me.	0.657		
	EMV14	The emotional engagement fostered by this game keeps me playing for longer periods.	0.651		
Conditional Value (CDV)	CDV15	The app provides relevant content that resonates with my current mood or circumstance.	0.817	1.712 (10.131)	
	CDV16	The app allows me to reconnect with people during times when social interaction is dominant.	0.763		
Total variance explained=77.629, KOM=0.913, Bartlett test of sphericity, $\chi^2=31576.045$, p=0.000					
Reward (RWD)	RWD1	The app provides rewards that resonate with my current mood or circumstance.	0.897	2.556 (42.593)	0.921
	RWD2	I feel compelled to return to this game whenever I think about getting reward.	0.877		
	RWD3	I enjoy redeeming my reward because it enhances my	0.815		

	experience.				
Total variance explained=82.735, KOM=0.831, Bartlett test of sphericity, $\chi^2=1317.324$, p=0.000					
Purchase Intention (PUI)	PUI1	The app's functionalities and offerings make me more inclined to spend money.	0.896	3.780 (75.609)	0.919
	PUI2	The social interactions fostered within the app enhance my desire to buy items.	0.894		
	PUI3	The emotional engagement and the appeal of premium features drives my intention to spend money on this app.	0.885		
	PUI4		0.854		
	PUI5	The availability of exclusive items during certain gameplay circumstances increases my likelihood to buy.	0.816		
Total variance explained=75.609, KOM=0.873, Bartlett test of sphericity, $\chi^2=1187.623$, p=0.000					

Correlation Analysis

In this study, a correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the variables. The analysis revealed a positive correlation across all variables, indicating that the direction of the relationships aligns with the research hypotheses. Consequently, it can be concluded that the measurement dimensions are effective. Additionally, the results of the factor analysis can be found in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation analysis

Factor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
FUV	1						
SUV	.523**	1					
EPV	.614**	.586**	1				
EMV	.643**	.622**	.671**	1			
CDV	.597**	.521**	*.587**	.522**	1		
RWD	.451**	.402**	.419**	.453**	.389**	1	
PUI	.521**	.413**	.507**	.557**	.411**	.671**	1

**p<0.01

Conclusion

This study has provided insightful findings regarding the influence of consumption values on purchase intention in the context of gaming apps, demonstrating that various consumption values—functional, social, epistemic, emotional, and conditional—significantly affect consumer behavior. The data revealed that each consumption value contributes uniquely to the purchase intention, underscoring the multifaceted nature of consumer motivations when engaging with gaming applications. For instance, functional values emphasize the practical benefits of gaming apps, such as enhanced gameplay and in-app features, which directly correlate to a higher likelihood of purchase intention. Similarly, social and emotional values highlight the importance of community and the emotional satisfaction derived from gaming experiences, reflecting a distinct consumer preference for connection and emotional engagement in digital environments.

Moreover, this study found that the reward plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between consumption values and purchase intention. This indicates that the perceived rewards, including in-game incentives and benefits, significantly amplify the effects of consumption values on consumers' decisions to make purchases. As gaming apps often utilize strategies that emphasize rewards, understanding this mediating relationship is critical for developers and marketers aiming to optimize user engagement and maximize revenue.

In conclusion, the findings of this study not only enhance the understanding of consumer behavior in the gaming app market but also provide practical implications for the design and marketing of these applications. By effectively leveraging consumption values and designing attractive reward systems, app developers can significantly improve users' buying intentions. Future research could expand upon these findings by exploring additional variables, such as demographic factors or the role of user experience, to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic landscape of consumer behavior in gaming apps. This study serves as a foundational step in unraveling the complexities of consumer motivations in the digital gaming marketplace.

Implications

6.1 Managerial Implications

The findings of this study offer valuable managerial insights for gaming app developers and marketers. An understanding of the influence of consumption values on purchase intention can guide managers in designing marketing strategies that emphasize these values. By focusing on functional benefits, fostering social interactions, and enhancing emotional engagement within the app, managers can effectively cater to user preferences. Additionally, integrating attractive reward systems can amplify the effects of consumption values on purchasing behavior. Managers should consider these factors when developing promotional messages and app features to optimize user engagement and increase overall revenue growth.

6.2 Practical Implications

For practitioners in the gaming industry, this study underscores the importance of aligning app features and marketing strategies with consumer consumption values. Developers should prioritize creating applications that enhance functional, social, and emotional experiences, ensuring users derive tangible benefits and satisfaction from their gameplay. By recognizing the mediating effect of rewards, practitioners can implement reward-based mechanisms that incentivize purchases and foster user loyalty. Furthermore, the findings highlight the need for continuous market analysis to adapt to evolving consumer preferences. This proactive approach can lead to a more tailored gaming experience, thereby driving higher purchase intentions and long-term success in the competitive gaming market.

Future Scope

The future scope of this study opens several avenues for further exploration regarding the influence of consumption values on purchase intention in gaming apps. Firstly, future research could investigate the interplay between demographic variables, such as age, gender, and education, and how they moderate the relationship between consumption values, reward mechanisms, and purchase intentions. This could provide a nuanced understanding of consumer behavior across different demographic segments.

Moreover, expanding the study to include a diverse range of gaming app genres—such as casual, strategy, or role-playing games—could yield valuable insights into how consumption values and rewards may vary based on the gaming experience. Additionally, longitudinal studies could assess how evolving consumption values impact purchase intentions over time, particularly as technology advances and consumer preferences shift.

Furthermore, qualitative research approaches, such as interviews or focus groups, could complement quantitative findings by providing deeper insights into consumer motivations and emotions related to gaming purchases. Lastly, exploring the impact of emerging trends, such as virtual reality and augmented reality in gaming, on consumption values can pave the way for innovative approaches to app development and marketing. By delving into these areas, future research can significantly contribute to the understanding of consumer behavior in the ever-evolving gaming industry.

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