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Game on! How gamified loyalty programs boost customer engagement value

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ABSTRACT

Though gamified loyalty programs (GLPs), or loyalty programs that deploy gamified elements, are increasingly adopted, academic acumen of customer engagement with GLPs lags behind, thus exposing an important research gap. Based on this gap, we review the gamification-, loyalty program-, and customer engagement literature, from which we derive important insight. First, extending the customer engagement literature, we develop the concept of *GLP engagement* (GLPE), defined as members' GLP-related behavior, expressed through direct- (i.e., purchase) and/or indirect (e.g., GLP-related learning/advocating) contributions, which we argue are critical to GLP effectiveness. Extending prior research, we also classify members' *indirect* GLP contributions as autonomous (vs. interdependent)-, selfless (vs. self-seeking)-, control (vs. laissez-faire)-based-, collaborative (vs. competitive)-, individual (vs. generic)-, and calculated (vs. non-calculated) contributions. Second, we develop a self-determination theory-informed framework that proposes members' intrinsic/extrinsic motivation as major drivers of GLPE, which in turn impacts customer brand engagement value (CBEV). Third, formalizing the framework's associations, we develop a set of Propositions that serve as a springboard for further GLPE research. We conclude by discussing major implications that arise from this research.

1. Introduction

Gamification is garnering significant interest in marketing practice (Berger, Schlager, Sprott, & Herrmann, 2018; Mishra & Malhotra, 2020), as evidenced by leading companies, including Nike, Starbucks, and Amazon.com increasingly gamifying aspects of their marketing activity (Hamari & Keronen, 2017; Thorpe & Roper, 2019). Worldwide, gamification is big business. For example, the global gamification market is estimated to reach a value of $22.9 billion by 2022 (PSI - Prescient & Strategic Intelligence, 2016). This growth can be attributed, in particular, to gamification's capacity to foster or optimize customer engagement (Leclercq, Hammedi, Poncin, Kullak, & Hollebeek, 2020; Robson, Plangger, Kietzmann, McCarthy, & Pitt, 2016; Yang, Asaad, & Dwivedi, 2017), which is a significant driver of customer loyalty (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014).

Gamification is increasingly deployed to boost the effectiveness of organizational loyalty programs (Davis, 2019), many of which see a disappointing return-on-investment (Kim, Steinhoff, & Palmatier, 2020; Taylor, Buvat, Nambiar, Singh, & Radhakrishnan, 2015). For instance, though the average U.S. household belongs to 29 loyalty programs, it tends to be active in only 12 of these (Berry, 2015). Moreover, while $100 billion in points remain un-redeemed in the U.S. (BBL, 2017), only 47 % of members redeem their points in the U.K. (Deloitte, 2017), revealing members' limited loyalty program (LP) engagement.

However, despite this growing trend in marketing practice, academic insight into GLPs' nature, dynamics, and effectiveness lags behind. Thus, while LP research abounds (Melnyk & Bijmolt, 2015), understanding of their *gamified* variant remains more obscure (Mohammadi, 2020; Moro, Ramos, Esmerado, & Jalali, 2019; Sumenkov, 2018), as therefore explored in this paper. First, while a handful of studies has introduced the notion of GLPs into the literature (e.g., Hwang & Choi, 2020), these have largely overlooked *customer engagement*'s (CE's) role in affecting GLP performance, which we argue is critical to its effectiveness (Bruneau, Swaen, & Zidda, 2018; Leclercq et al., 2020; Pace & Dipace, 2015). In response to this gap, this conceptual paper addresses GLPs' capacity to boost CE and in turn, lift LP performance.

Second, existing LP research has largely focused on the effect of members' extrinsic (e.g., incentive-based) motivation on LP performance, at the expense of users' more innate *intrinsic* motivation (Hwang & Choi, 2020; Mitchell, Schuster, & Jin, 2020). However, as many LPs

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yield unsatisfactory results, it is necessary to also explore the role of members' intrinsic LP-related motivation, which GLPs stimulate, in particular (vs. *non*-gamified LPs). We thus argue that GLPs cater to users' intrinsic, more experiential, *and* extrinsic motivation (Kim & Ahn, 2017; Punnoose, 2020; Hassan, Dias, & Hamari, 2019), which collectively shape GLPE. For example, NikeFuel's GLP app allows members to monitor their workout progress (i.e., offering an intrinsic reward), while also providing discounts/freebies (i.e., offering an extrinsic reward; Davis, 2019). Using self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b), we explore the under-studied role of members' intrinsic/extrinsic motivation on their GLP engagement.

Based on these gaps, this paper makes the following contribution to the gamification-, LP-, and CE literature. First, extending Hwang and Choi (2020) and Harwood and Garry (2015), we develop the concept of members' *GLP engagement* (GLPE). In line with MacInnis (2011), envisioning and conceptualizing new concepts that fill current theoretical voids represents a vital step in the advancement of academic insight (Niehoff, 1998), as undertaken here for GLPE. Correspondingly, our first research question is: *What is GLPE*? We note that GLPE represents a particular subset of the CE/LP concepts, respectively. That is, it reflects that part of CE that addresses members' engagement *with GLPs* (vs. CE with other objects, including brands/products; Hollebeek, Srivastava, & Chen, 2019; Lourenco, 2015). GLPE's scope is also limited to *gamified* LPs (Wasan, 2017), thus reflecting a particular LP subset. We marry the GLP/CE concepts based on their natural fit: GLPs are designed to further CE (Leclercq et al., 2020; Pace & Dipace, 2015), thus boosting many traditional LPs' unsatisfactory performance (Steinhoff & Palmatier, 2016).

Second, we develop a self-determination theory-informed conceptual framework that maps GLPE and its antecedents and consequences, following MacInnis' (2011, p. 141) postulation that "knowledge advancement occurs not only by studying and developing constructs, but also by conceptualizing their relationship to other concepts, often in a nomological network." Self-determination theory assumes that while some of people's motivations transpire intrinsically, without external influence, others are induced by external stimuli (e.g., GLP rewards; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b). Adopting self-determination theory, we identify GLP members' intrinsic/extrinsic motivation as chief GLPE drivers. We argue that GLPE is heavily contingent on user-perceived intrinsic, experiential (vs. extrinsic) rewards, in turn driving firm-perceived customer engagement value (Kumar et al., 2010; Rauschnabel, 2021). Accordingly, our second research question is: *What are GLPE's self-determination theory-informed drivers and consequences*?

Third, we develop a set of Propositions of GLPE that synthesize the associations depicted in the framework, following Hollebeek et al.'s (2019) approach. Our analyses reflect an underlying objectivist epistemological stance, coupled with a positivist theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998), as evidenced by the framework's empirically testable Propositions. For scholars, our Propositions offer a platform for further GLP research. For practitioners, they facilitate understanding of GLPs' nature and its key drivers and outcomes, yielding important implications for GLP management.

The paper is structured as follows. We next review literature on gamification, LPs, and CE in Section 2, from which we develop a conceptual framework and an associated set of Propositions of GLPE in Section 3. In Section 4, the paper concludes with a discussion of implications that arise from our analyses and an overview of the study's limitations and further research avenues.

2. Literature review

We next review relevant literature on gamification, LPs, and CE, which informs the development of our proposed framework in Section 3.

2.1. Gamification research

Widespread use of the term *gamification* commenced around a decade ago (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011). Since then, it has been adopted in myriad fields, including education (Toda, do Carmo, da Silva, Bittencourt, & Isotani, 2019), health (Johnson et al., 2016), governance (Hassan & Hamari, 2020), research (Triantoro, Gopal, Benbunan-Fich, & Lang, 2019), and marketing (Leclercq, Hammedi, & Poncin, 2018), to name a few. In marketing, gamification has been deployed to further firm advertising- (Vashisht, Royne, & Sreejesh, 2019), mobile marketing- (Hofacker, De Ruyter, Lurie, Manchanda, & Donaldson, 2016), and e-commerce objectives (Insley & Nunan, 2014; Yang et al., 2017), among others.

Werbach and Hunter (2012), p. 26) define gamification as "the use of game elements and game design techniques in non-game contexts," to which Rauch (2012), p. 7) adds the purpose of "motivat[ing] people and drive behavior." Huotari and Hamari (2017), p. 25) conceptualize gamification as the "process of enhancing a service with affordances for gameful experiences …to support users' …value creation." By providing game-*akin* experiences, these affordances are designed to support or motivate users toward specific desired behaviors, including elevated engagement (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019). Correspondingly, Pace and Dipace (2015) define gamification as "the process of using game mechanics with other forms of technology [to] increase engagement." Overall, most published definitions share gamification's adoption of *game-like* tactics in *non*-game contexts, along with its capacity to engage users and create user-perceived value (Eisingerich, Marchand, Fritze, & Dong, 2019; Leclercq et al., 2020; Pacauskas, Rajala, Westerlund, & Mäntymäki, 2018; Sailer, Hense, Mayr, & Mandl, 2017).

Below, we map gamification's literature-based interface with LPs/CE, which are discussed further in Sections 2.2 and 2.3, respectively. *Conceptual mapping* "enables researchers to organize their thoughts and visually depict construct relationships in a coherent fashion" (Crittenden & Peterson, 2011, p. 3). To perform the analysis, we used the Scopus database, given its comprehensive coverage of business journals (Singh, Dhir, Das, & Sharma, 2020), in the first week of August 2020. Our search combined the following keywords: (i) "Gamification" or "gamified;" (ii) "LP," and (iii) "Customer/consumer engagement." We searched for these terms in the database, as they appeared in relevant papers' title, abstract, and/or keywords, yielding a sample of 252 articles.

The first article matching our search criteria was published in July 2010. We used VOSviewer to generate a keyword co-occurrence map by limiting our search to those keywords that appeared at least five times in our article sample (see Fig. 1). We also developed Table 1, which lists the top 10 keywords and their corresponding link-strengths. Fig. 1 reveals three main clusters. The first cluster (shown in brown), which centers on gamification, reveals an important link to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000a), as adopted in this paper. While the second cluster (depicted in light-green) focuses on customer/consumer engagement (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2014), the third cluster (shown in purple) comprises loyalty program research (e.g., Steinhoff & Palmatier, 2016), as expected. Overall, the results show that while 25 studies have examined the gamification/CE interface (e.g., Harwood & Garry, 2015) and 13 existing papers study the gamification/LP interface (e.g., Hwang & Choi, 2020), respectively, we did not detect any published research on the three-way interface of gamification, LPs, and CE, substantiating our identified research gap and warranting our analyses.

2.2. Loyalty program research

LP research has proliferated since the rise of *relationship marketing*, which recommends firms to maintain value-laden relationships with profitable customers (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006). Relationship marketing is based on the premise that loyal customers purchase at a greater frequency and in greater quantities, and exhibit lower price-sensitivity and sensitivity to competitive offers, thus incurring lower firm cost than their less loyal counterparts (Palmatier, Jarvis, Bechkoff, & Kardes, 2009; Yi & Jeon, 2003). In this literature stream, LPs are viewed as a prime tool to build customer loyalty (Buhalis &

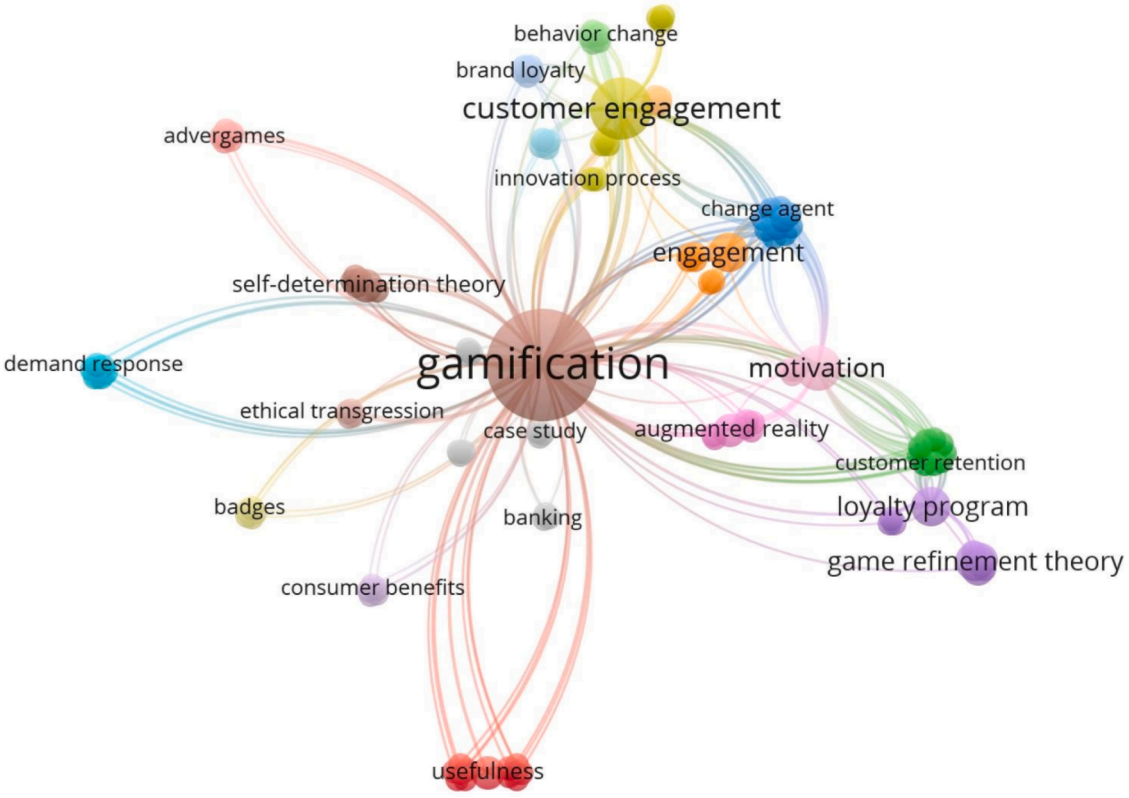

Fig. 1. Keyword Co-occurrence Map - Interface of Gamification-, LP-, & CE Research.

Volchek, 2021; Chang & Chen, 2009; Melnyk & Bijmolt, 2015).

Despite the widespread attention given to LPs, consensus regarding the concept's definition is lacking. For example, Steinhoff and Palmatier (2016), p. 90) define LPs as "any institutionalized incentive system that attempts to enhance consumers' consumption behavior over time." Moreover, Sharp & Sharp (1997, p. 474) define LPs as "structured marketing efforts which reward, and therefore encourage, loyal behavior, which is hopefully, to benefit the firm." Most conceptualizations share or imply LPs' focus on retaining customers by fostering brand/firm-related CE, in turn cultivating enduring, profitable customer relationships (Hollebeek et al., 2019; Palmatier et al., 2009). However, despite the abundance of LP research, insight into their *gamified* subset remains nebulous, as explored in this paper.

2.3. Customer engagement research

In the past decade, CE research has rapidly gained traction (Dwivedi, Ismagilova, Hughes, & Carlson, 2020; Fang, Zhao, Wen, & Wang, 2017; Kumar et al., 2010). Despite definitional debate, the CE literature centers on the customer's dynamics during or related to their *interactions* with brand-related objects, including GLPs (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a). Second, while CE has been viewed from uni- (e.g., Van Doorn et al., 2010) and multidimensional perspectives (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2014), we adopt the former, purely *behavioral* perspective, given CE behaviors' directly observable nature (vs. latent CE-based emotions/cognitions; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012). By capturing *actual* behavior, engagement behaviors have therefore been argued to suitably reflect CE (Groeger, Moroko, & Hollebeek, 2016; Kang, Lu, Guo, & Li, 2021).

Third, prior studies predominantly take a *customer* perspective of CE. For example, Hollebeek et al. (2019) view CE as customers' resource investment in their brand interactions, where individuals will tend to invest more of their personal resources in perceived value-adding (vs. *non*-value adding) interactions (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019). Others however advocate a *firm* perspective of CE. For example, Kumar et al. (2010) view firm-based *CE value* to comprise customer lifetime-, referral-, influencer-, and knowledge value, which collectively describe the different ways in which CE adds value to the firm (see Section 3). We bridge these largely disparate CE sub-streams by assimilating members' GLPE (i.e., customer perspective) and its effect on firm-based CE value (i.e., firm perspective).

Despite these advances, few studies to date examine LP-based CE (Bruneau et al., 2018). As a notable exception, Viswanathan, Hollebeek et al. (2017) track users' engagement with an app-based LP, as measured by their app login recency/frequency. However, the authors explore traditional (vs. *gamified*) LPs, as examined in this paper.

3. Conceptual development

Based on our review, we next develop the GLPE concept (Section 3.1), offering insight into our first research question. We then compose a self-determination theory-informed conceptual framework of GLPE (Section 3.2), thus answering our second research question.

Table 1
Top 10 Keywords and Link-strengths.

Keyword	Occurrences	Total Link-strength
Gamification	30	281
Sales	11	150
Customer engagement	8	87
Motivation	6	59
Commerce	5	64
Marketing	4	44
Engagement	3	34
Game refinement theory	3	36
Loyalty program	3	28
Mechanics	3	32

3.1. Conceptualizing gamified loyalty program engagement

Following Van Doorn et al. (2010), Bruneau et al. (2018, p. 148) define *LP engagement* as "customers' behavioral manifestations toward a company's LP," which include members' direct- and indirect LP contributions. First, Pansari & Kumar (2017, p. 295) define *direct* contributions as "customer purchases" of a firm's offerings. While greater purchase behavior typically implies higher GLPE, elevated GLPE can also see *low* purchase behavior when members' indirect contributions are high. That is, GLPE may comprise members' varying ratios of direct (vs. indirect) GLP contributions.

Second, *indirect* contributions are customers' *non*-purchase behaviors that add value to the firm, including "incentivized referrals…, social media conversations…, [and]… feedback [or] suggestions" (Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, & Carlson, 2017; Pansari & Kumar, 2017, p. 295). These also include members' proactive GLP (e.g., app/card) usage, receptivity to GLP-related information (e.g., updates/reminders), and GLP-related learning and points redemption behavior (Bruneau et al., 2018; Dorotic, Verhoef, Fok, & Bijmolt, 2014; Nayal, Pandey, & Paul, 2021; Nielsen, 2016). Members' extensive (limited) GLP contributions reveal high (low) GLPE, respectively (e.g., Viswanathan, Hollebeek et al., 2017). Based on our review, we define GLPE as:

> *Members' GLP-related behaviors, expressed through direct- (i.e., purchase) and/or indirect contributions (e.g., GLP-related learning/advocating).*

3.2. Conceptual framework

We next develop a self-determination theory-informed framework of GLPE, as discussed further in Sections 3.2.1 (GLPE antecedents) and 3.2.2 (GLPE consequences), respectively. We deploy self-determination theory to address members' motivation behind their GLP-related behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 2012). *Motivation* implies "to be moved to do something" (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, p. 54), which the theory classifies as follows. First, *intrinsic motivation* reflects one's "inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 70), revealing users' experiential focus, as outlined. Intrinsically-motivated (e.g., altruistic) activities are thus viewed as rewarding in their own right.

Second, *extrinsic motivation* refers to "doing tasks for a separable outcome" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 71), including rewards/prizes, or to avoid loss (e.g., degradation of one's in-game status). Unlike intrinsic motivation, its extrinsic counterpart is thus incited by individuals' desire to attain specific rewards by performing particular activities that, in themselves, are not viewed as rewarding. This also implies that while intrinsic motivation exists innately within individuals (e.g., desire for challenge; Werbach & Hunter, 2012), extrinsic motivation is primarily cultivated by GLP-based game design elements, including in-game points, badges, or leaderboards (Eisingerich et al., 2019; Liu, Santhanam, & Webster, 2017; Suh, Wagner, & Liu, 2018).

Though intrinsic motivation has been linked to gamification effectiveness (Tobon, Ruiz-Alba, & García-Madariaga, 2020), its *GLP*-based dynamics remain tenuous. We therefore adopt self-determination theory to explore the effect of members' intrinsic - and extrinsic GLP-related motivation on GLPE (Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973), as discussed further below (see Fig. 2).

3.2.1. GLPE antecedents

Unlike traditional LPs, we expect GLPs to be particularly useful in evoking members' intrinsic motivation and GLPE (Bruneau et al., 2018), as stated. We therefore propose self-determination theory's intrinsic (Section 3.2.1.1) and extrinsic (Section 3.2.1.2) motivation as key GLPE antecedents (Ryan & Deci, 2000a), as discussed further below.

3.2.1.1. GLP members' intrinsic motivation. We next outline the role of GLP members' intrinsic motivation, which we further classify into several sub-motivations (Eisingerich et al., 2019; Suh et al., 2018), and address their respective impact on GLPE below. *Self-efficacy* reflects a GLP member's personal judgment of "how well [s/he] can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective [GLP-related] situations (Bandura, 1982). Under high self-efficacy, members feel they

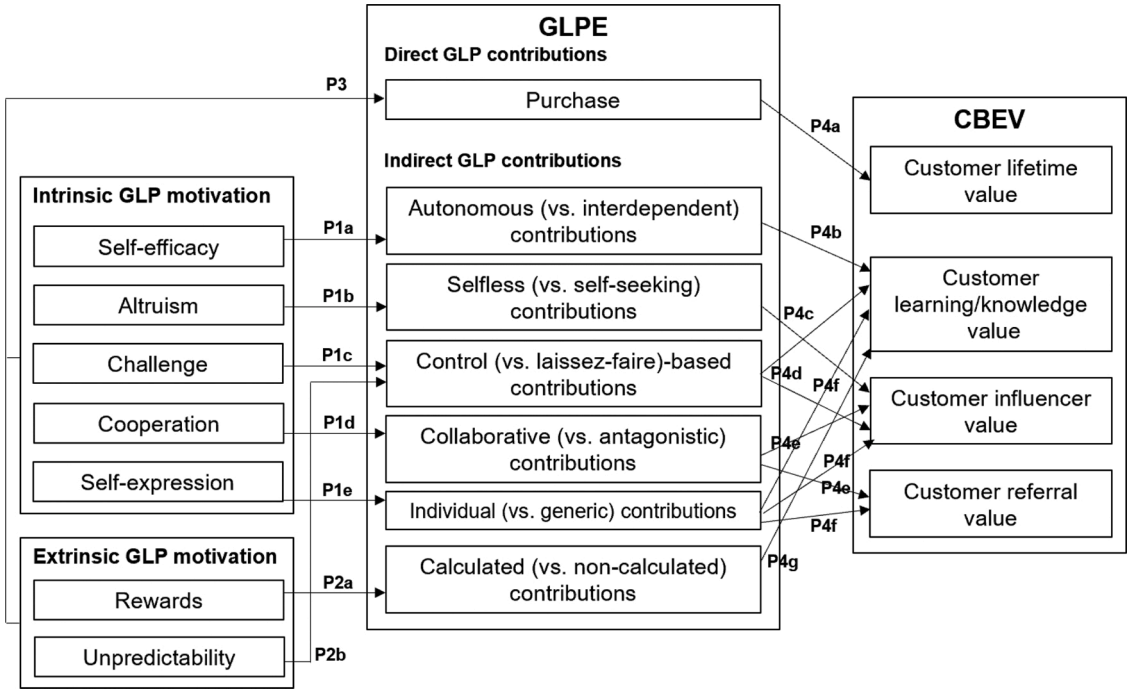

Fig. 2. Conceptual Framework.
Notes: GLP: Gamified loyalty program; CBEV: Customer brand engagement value.

master GLP-related activities and requirements and are able to independently complete them. We expect users' self-efficacy motivation to yield their relatively *independent* GLP contributions, revealing their chiefly autonomous or self-directed (vs. interdependent) GLPE (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Weinstein, Przybylski, & Ryan, 2012). We propose:

P_{1a}: GLP members' self-efficacy motivation primarily stimulates the development of autonomous (vs. interdependent) GLPE.

Altruism. Fang and Chiu (2010), p. 237) define *altruism* as an individual's "voluntary helping actions, where one attempts to improve the welfare of others at some cost to oneself." That is, people's innate altruism motivation sees them offer service to others (Suh et al., 2018). Sample GLP-based altruistic tools include loyalty point gifting to other users or collaborating with others to help them achieve their objectives (Hwang & Choi, 2020). Beneficiaries may express gratitude for these altruistic acts, sparking their motivation to reciprocate, thus triggering a virtuous altruism cycle (Hollebeek, 2011b; Palmatier et al., 2009). Correspondingly, we anticipate members' altruism motivation to predominantly foster their selfless (vs. self-seeking) GLP contributions (e.g., by sharing one's reward points with others; Doo, Zhu, Bonk, & Tang, 2020; Rajagopalan, 2011). We postulate:

P_{1b}: GLP members' altruism motivation primarily stimulates the development of selfless (vs. self-seeking) GLPE.

Challenge represents a "puzzle or task that requires effort to solve" (Werbach & Hunter, 2012, p. 79). For example, in-game time pressure renders users' missions increasingly demanding the further they progress through the game (Berger et al., 2018; Xi & Hamari, 2019), thus tapping into their challenge motivation. So long as challenges are neither perceived as too easy nor too difficult, they help foster GLPE by appealing to users' desire to control or master them (Hollebeek et al., 2020; Wrosch, Schulz, & Heckhausen, 2002). We therefore expect users' challenge motivation to spark their desire to control particular GLP (e.g., gameplay) aspects, leading them to display control (vs. laissez-faire)-based GLPE (Demerouti, Bakker, De Jonge, Janssen, & Schaufeli, 2001; Eisingerich et al., 2019). We propose:

P_{1c}: GLP members' challenge motivation primarily stimulates the development of control- (vs. laissez-faire)-based GLPE.

Cooperation refers to the behavior induced "when players must work together to achieve a shared goal" (Werbach & Hunter, 2012, p. 79), thereby facilitating user-perceived relatedness and belonging (Eisingerich et al., 2019; Sailer et al., 2017). In GLPs, members can - for instance - cooperate by engaging in joint gameplay or by sharing GLP points. Under low levels of cooperation, users are *competition*-focused, which denotes a need to provoke others to contest and win (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Yee, 2006). Unlike cooperation, which tends to see collaborative members' agreeable GLP contributions, competition typically breeds more adversarial or antagonistic contributions (e.g., by trying to beat top players' scores; Clark, Lages, & Hollebeek, 2020; Wolf, Jahn, Hammerschmidt, & Weiger, 2020). We assert:

P_{1d}: GLP members' cooperation motivation primarily stimulates the development of collaborative (vs. competitive) GLPE.

Self-expression, which refers to "the unique identities users can create through virtual goods in gamified information systems" (Yee, 2006), has been identfied as a prime gameplay motivation (Lange, 2011). In GLPs, members may express themselves through personalized avatars, game-related accessories, color schemes, etc. (Sailer et al., 2017; Suh et al., 2018). By catering to members' self-expression motivation, GLPs are thus able to foster GLPE (Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006; Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009; Xi & Hamari, 2019). Given self--expression's inherently personal nature (Tafarodi, Mehranvar, Panton, & Milne, 2002), we anticipate this motivation to chiefly cultivate individual (vs. generic/universal) GLPE (Hollebeek, 2018). We postulate:

P_{1e}: GLP members' self-expression motivation primarily stimulates the development of individual (vs. generic) GLPE.

3.2.1.2. GLP members' extrinsic motivation. As discussed, extrinsic motivation entails GLP members' performance of "tasks for a separable outcome" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 71), including rewards or prizes. Major GLP-based, extrinsically-motivating tools include rewards and unpredictability, as discussed further below. *Rewards* are "benefits [received] for [an] action or achievement" (Werbach & Hunter, 2012, p. 79), including gameplay incentives (e.g., badges, attainment of game-related tiers/levels), freebies (e.g., free upgrades), invitations, exclusive newsletters, deals, or cash-back; e.g., Hwang & Choi, 2020; Kim & Ahn, 2017). We expect members who are chiefly motivated by the attainment of extrinsic GLP-related rewards to pre-calculate or -estimate those rewards (Robson, Plangger, Kietzmann, McCarthy, & Pitt, 2015). However, less easily calculable (e.g., more intrinsic) rewards are of lesser interest to these users. Consequently, these members will adjust their GLP contributions based on their expected rewards (Blau, 1964; Hollebeek, 2011b). In other words, greater anticipated rewards will spark these individuals' elevated GLPE (Kaur, Mandakini, Islam, & Hollebeek, 2020; Rehnen, Bartsch, Kull, & Meyer, 2017). We posit:

P_{2a}: GLP members' extrinsic motivation to attain GLP rewards primarily stimulates the development of calculated (vs. non-calculated) GLPE.

Unpredictability reflects the uncertainty or randomness of rewards offered to players in the game environment (Paharia, 2013). Prior research has established the typically superior effectiveness of a variable (vs. fixed) reward schedule (Ferster & Skinner, 1957; Latham & Dossett, 1978), suggesting high (vs. low) reward unpredictability's greater contribution to GLPE. However, variable rewards may be perceived as more controlling, as users cannot predict when they will be given out (Hussain, Williams, & Griffiths, 2015). Thus, variable reward schedules will tend to incite members' hands-off or *laissez-faire*- (vs. control)-based GLPE (Roberts, 2004), particularly as they realize or accept their limited ability to influence the provision of rewards. We propose:

P_{2b}: GLP members' motivation for reward unpredictability primarily stimulates the development of laissez-faire (vs. control)-based GLPE.

Finally, any of the identified intrinsic (e.g., self-expression) or extrinsic (e.g., reward) GLP motivations, or specific combinations thereof, may trigger the direct GLP contribution of purchase (Koo, Chung, & Nam, 2015; Pansari & Kumar, 2017), as shown in Fig. 2. We posit:

P_3: GLP members' particular intrinsic and/or extrinsic GLP motivations stimulate purchase.

3.2.2. GLPE consequences

Following Bowden, Conduit, Hollebeek, Luoma-Aho, and Solem (2017), we postulate that members' GLPE will spill-over to or influence their engagement with the *brand* more generally (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013), in turn driving customer brand engagement value (Kumar et al., 2010; Zhang, Guo, & Liu, 2017), as shown in Fig. 2. Hollebeek (2011a, p. 790)) defines *customer brand engagement* (CBE) as a "customer's …brand-related… state of mind characterized by specific … [contributions]," which generate a particular level of firm-perceived CBE value (CBEV; Gong, 2018; Kumar, 2020; Kumar et al., 2010). Moreover, the AMA - American Marketing Association (2020) defines CBE's constituent sub-concept of the *brand* as "a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers," thus also implying brands' value-creating role (Stern, 2006). Below, we discuss specific ways in which GLPE's (in)direct contributions shape CBEV, which comprises the sub-facets of customer lifetime-, learning/knowledge-, influencer-, and

referral value (Kumar et al., 2010).

3.2.2.1. Effect of direct GLPE-based contributions on CBEV. Following Pansari and Kumar (2017), we define customers' *direct GLP contributions* as their purchase of a firm's offers, as outlined. Given its purchase focus, direct contributions unambiguously impact the firm's bottom-line by driving *customer lifetime value* (Kumar et al., 2010, p. 299), defined as "the [net] present value of future profits generated from a customer over his/her life of business with the firm." Customer lifetime value acknowledges a client's total transaction-based financial contribution (i.e., revenues minus costs) over his/her entire lifetime with the company (Rust, Zeithaml, & Lemon, 2000). For example, by purchasing a firm's products via GLP-based, in-game purchase channels, customers directly contribute to their lifetime value. As shown in Fig. 2, we posit:

P_{4a}: Customers' direct GLP contributions primarily boost customer lifetime value.

3.2.2.2. Effect of indirect GLPE-based contributions on CBEV. Customers' indirect GLP contributions reflect their *non*-purchase behaviors that add value to the firm (e.g., through brand-related referrals; Pansari & Kumar, 2017, 2018), as discussed. Below, we address the effect of customers' indirect GLPE-related contributions on CBEV, as outlined. *Autonomous (vs. interdependent) contributions* lead customers to make relatively independent contributions to their GLPs, as outlined (e.g., by self-managing these). These autonomous contributions are expected to enhance customers' brand-related know-how, boosting their *learning/-knowledge value*, or the value of a client's brand knowledge to the firm (Hamilton, Kaltcheva, & Rohm, 2016; Kumar et al., 2010). We postulate (see Fig. 2):

P_{4b}: Customers' indirect autonomous (vs. interdependent) contributions primarily boost customer learning/knowledge value.

Selfless (vs. self-seeking) contributions reflect GLP users' desire to engage in unselfish behavior (Heilman & Chen, 2005), including by helping or gifting their GLP points to others. Through these acts, members are likely to earn the esteem of focal others (Karylowski, 1982), facilitating their ability to persuade or influence them and thus, affecting customer influencer value (see Fig. 2; Harmeling et al., 2017). Kumar et al. (2010, p. 299) define *customer influencer value* as "customers' influence on other … customers [or] prospects [e.g., through] word-of-mouth activity that persuades and converts prospects to customers, minimizes buyer remorse to reduce defections, [and] encourages increased share-of-wallet." As shown in Fig. 2, we propose:

P_{4c}: Customers' indirect selfless (vs. self-seeking) contributions primarily boost customer influencer value.

Control (vs. laissez-faire)-based contributions reveal GLP members' desire to regulate or exercise direction over GLP-related activities and performance (Ajzen, 2002; Eisingerich et al., 2019; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). While members' control-based contributions reveal individuals' desire for power, *laissez-faire*-based contributions reflect a low control motivation (e.g., by allowing one's GLP contributions to be directed by the firm; Roberts, 2004; Thompson, Sobolew-Shubin, Galbraith, Schwankovsky, & Cruzen, 1993). Control-based contributions, which are chiefly stimulated by members' self-efficacy, challenge, and reward unpredictability motivations (see Fig. 2), thus lead users to self-direct their GLP activities. We expect members' control-based contributions to chiefly impact their learning/knowledge and influencer value, as shown in the framework. First, *customer learning/knowledge value* captures the extent to which a customer offers value to the firm through his/her brand-related learning, thus reducing firm-based (e.g., customer support) cost (Hollebeek et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2010). GLP members' control-based contributions drive the development of brand-related knowledge, allowing them to self-orchestrate or -manage their GLP contributions (vs. being reliant on others), akin to Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) *actor control*. Second, *customer influencer value* denotes a "customer's influence on other customers [or] prospects" (Kumar et al., 2010, p. 299), as discussed. GLP users' control-based contributions steer the development of customer influencer value, as control not only implies directing one's *own* GLP-related activity, as above, but can also focus on directing that of others, as recognized in Kelley and Thibaut's (1959) *partner control*. For example, GLP users may persuade their friends or relatives to join a GLP or gift their GLP points to them. We posit:

P_{4d}: Customers' indirect control (vs. laissez-faire)-based contributions primarily boost customer learning/knowledge- and influencer value.

Collaborative (vs. competitive) contributions reflect GLP users' cooperative (vs. competitive) stance (Wolf et al., 2020), respectively. While members' collaborative contributions center on teamwork, sharing, and partnership, competitive contributions can inflict friction, rivalry, or strife (e.g., member-perceived competition sparked by leaderboard-based user rankings; Clark et al., 2020; Hussain et al., 2020). We expect members' collaborative contributions to chiefly impact their referral/influencer value (see Fig. 2). First, *customer referral value* denotes a customer's value to the firm that stems from his/her referrals of new customers (Kumar et al., 2010, p. 299), reflecting a particular type of influencing behavior (Schmitt, Skiera, & Van den Bulte, 2011). Given its inherently positive (i.e., recommending) nature, referral value reflects the endorsing customer's collaborative (vs. competitive, antagonistic) stance. That is, by referring a brand to others, clients seek to help the prospect and/or the firm (Clark et al., 2020). Second, *customer influencer value* gauges customers' influence on other clients or prospects (Kumar et al., 2010), as outlined. While fellow customers will tend to perceive an individual's collaborative contributions as supportive, competitive contributions are likely to instil a sense of rivalry or friction (Clark et al., 2020; Wolf et al., 2020), rendering the individual's attempted influencing less effective. We therefore anticipate customers' collaborative (vs. competitive) contributions to exert a greater effect on customer influencer value, as follows:

P_{4e}: Customers' indirect collaborative (vs. antagonistic) contributions primarily boost customer referral- and influencer value.

Individual (vs. generic) contributions expose GLP members' personalized (vs. universal) contributions. While individual contributions reveal the user's individuality, generic contributions are germane or indistinguishable across customers (Seiler, 1979). For example, users may express their individuality by choosing their GLP-related preferences (e.g., avatar, wallpaper; Hussain et al., 2020), while generic contributions include GLP app downloading behavior. We argue that customers' individual (vs. generic) contributions impact customer learning/knowledge-, influencer-, and referral value, in particular, as discussed below. First, individual contributions affect customer learning/knowledge value, because by personalizing one's GLP, users acquire brand-related know-how and learn (Cordova & Lepper, 1996). Second, individual contributions also impact customer influencer value. For example, more personalized GLPs convey the user's GLP literacy, thus typically raising the member's status, as viewed by others (Bleier, De Keyser, & Verleye, 2018). In turn, these members are expected to be better able to influence others (Harmeling et al., 2017). Third, individual contributions also affect referral value, because by making a GLP one's "own," user clout in offering effective referrals is expected to rise (Kang, Shin, & Gong, 2016). We postulate:

P_{4f}: Customers' indirect individual (vs. generic) contributions boost customer learning/knowledge-, influencer-, and referral value.

Calculated (vs. non-calculated) contributions reflect GLP members' measurable resource contributions (Kumar, Rajan, Gupta, & Dalla Pozza, 2019). Chiefly extrinsically-motivated customers tend to qualify

their contributions based on the level/quality of the expected reward (Blau, 1964; Hollebeek, 2011b), as discussed. However, GLP users displaying a low extrinsic reward motivation are less likely to weigh their contributions (vs. the anticipated reward; Bear, Slaughter, Mantz, & Farley-Ripple, 2017). Members making extensive (vs. few) calculated contributions are mainly of value to the firm through their learning/-knowledge value, as shown in Fig. 2. That is, reward-optimizing members tend to be keen learners, as their advancement of brand-related knowledge will facilitate the attainment of more (desired) rewards (Watkins, 1989). We propose:

P_{4g}: Customers' indirect calculated (vs. non-calculated) contributions primarily boost customer learning/knowledge value.

4. Discussion, implications, and further research

4.1. Discussion and theoretical implications

In this paper, we developed a self-determination theory-informed framework of GLPE and its drivers and consequences. Though Bruneau et al. (2018) address the role of customer engagement in the LP context, insight into members' *GLP*-based engagement (GLPE) lags behind, warranting the undertaking of this research and offering insight into our first research question. Moreover, while Hwang and Choi (2020) explore GLPs, they do not examine CE's role herein, which we argue is pivotal to their effectiveness (Leclercq et al., 2020; Pace & Dipace, 2015). Hwang and Choi's analyses are also limited to the role of extrinsic (vs. intrinsic) rewards on GLP performance. We however argue for the critical role of GLP users' *intrinsic* motivation, which we - given its innate nature - believe to be more stable and enduring, thus making a superior contribution to longer-term GLPE (vs. extrinsic motivation; Suh et al., 2018; Tobon et al., 2020). Based on this gap, we compose a self-determination theory-informed framework of GLPE that permits investigation of members' intrinsic *and* extrinsic GLP-related motivations (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b), thus offering insight into our second research question.

Second, by exploring the effect of GLP users' intrinsic/extrinsic motivation on their (in)direct GLP contributions (i.e., GLPE), we advance scholarly acumen regarding the nature of members' *indirect* GLP contributions, in particular, which we classify as autonomous (vs. interdependent)-, selfless (vs. self-seeking)-, control (vs. laissez-faire)-based-, collaborative (vs. competitive)-, individual (vs. generic)-, and calculated (vs. non-calculated) contributions, as outlined in Section 3. That is, by classifying members' indirect GLP contributions, our analyses extend the work of Pansari and Kumar (2017) by offering more granular insight into the nature of these contributions. As discussed, the framework also addresses GLPE's subsequent impact on firm-perceived CBEV. Collectively, our analyses offer a springboard for further (e.g., empirical) GLP-, CE-, LP-, and/or GLPE research.

4.2. Managerial implications

Our analyses raise important managerial implications. First, by identifying the central role of customers' self-determination theory-informed intrinsic *and* extrinsic motivation in fostering GLPE, we advise managers to consider appealing to *both* user motivations in their GLP design (Hoffman & Lowitt, 2008). In fact, our identified greater number of intrinsic (vs. extrinsic) GLP usage motivations suggests the former's potentially elevated role, particularly in fostering users' *indirect* contributions (see Fig. 2), which nurture customer/firm relationships (Palmatier et al., 2006). That is, though users' indirect non-purchase behavior has a limited effect on short-term sales (Pansari & Kumar, 2018), we expect it to add significantly to customers' longer-term brand engagement value by facilitating the *conversion* of non-purchase- to future purchase behavior. For example, illustrating customers' *individual* (vs. generic) contributions, we anticipate personalized GLPs to positively affect clients' desire to purchase the firm's products (Shareef, Dwivedi, Kumar, & Kumar, 2017), thereby also impacting their future *direct* contributions.

Consequently, cultivating users' indirect GLP contributions is crucial for relationship marketing- and customer relationship management-oriented organizations (Harrigan, Miles, Fang, & Roy, 2020; Hollebeek et al., 2019). We recommend managers to first, thoughtfully evaluate the relative importance and possible costs/benefits of GLP-induced customer learning/knowledge-, influencer-, and referral value in their business. We next advise them to design their GLP interfaces and activities in line with users' indirect contribution dynamics and preferences to optimize their uptake by members. For example, we expect users' early (e.g., first-time) GLP interactions to be pivotal in shaping their longer-term GLPE intent (Nayal et al., 2021).

Second, we advocate the adoption of GLPs (vs. traditional LPs), given their capacity to cater to a broader range of user motivations, including self-efficacy, altruism, challenge, cooperation, and self-expression, which tend to be under-served by traditional LPs (Nastasoiu & Vandenbosch, 2019; Werbach & Hunter, 2012). For example, *Club Psych*'s GLP is used to promote the U.S.-based television show *Psych* (Bunchball, 2016). Appealing to viewers' self-efficacy-, challenge-, and self-expression motivation, this GLP allows users to earn points for watching videos, sharing content, browsing photo-galleries, or broadcasting their achievements on social networking sites, thus deepening the customer-firm relationship. Moreover, to cater to users' reward unpredictability motivation, many GLPs also use (e.g., Google Pay-based) variable rewards (e.g., digital scratch-cards).

4.3. Limitations and further research

Aside from its contributions, this research also has several limitations that offer opportunities for further research. First, the purely conceptual nature of our analyses renders a need for future empirical investigation and validation of our proposed framework. For example, researchers may wish to test the nature and strength of particular associations modeled in the framework across (e.g., industry-based, national, cultural, or customer-based) GLP contexts.

Second, it would be useful to establish the relative impact of users' particular intrinsic and extrinsic motivations on their (in)direct GLP contributions, which would help managers prioritize users' most salient GLP-related motivations (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019). We also recommend the undertaking of further study on the relative effect of GLP users' (in)direct contributions on firm-based customer lifetime-, learning/knowledge-, influencer-, and referral value, as shown on the framework's right-hand side.

Third, though we adopt self-determination theory to frame our analyses (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b), other theories may be used. For example, regulatory focus theory, social identity theory, or uses-and-gratifications theory can be adopted to explore members' GLP dynamics (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2020), which are likely to yield differing nomological networks. Then, the attained insight may be compared and contrasted to ours to further advance GLP-based insight.

Fourth, though LPs have been predominantly explored in the B2C context, their use in B2B settings is rising (Viswanathan, Sese, & Krafft, 2017). However, academic research on B2B-based LPs remains sparse (Kwiatek & Thanasi-Boçe, 2019), thus revealing another opportunity for further study on B2B-based GLPE (Hollebeek, 2019; Kumar & Pansari, 2016), or by comparing or contrasting B2C/B2B-based GLPE.

4.4. Conclusion

This conceptual paper offers a pioneering exploration of GLPs and their GLPE-boosting capacity, thus offering an important addition to the gamification-, LP-, and CE discourse. Drawing on existing literature, we conceptualized GLPE and developed a self-determination theory-informed framework of GLPE. The framework asserts the vital role of

customers' *intrinsic*, as well as extrinsic, motivations in driving GLPE, thus advancing existing acumen. We conceptualized GLPE as members' GLP-related behaviors, expressed through direct- (i.e., purchase) and/or indirect (e.g., GLP-related learning/advocating) contributions. Of these, we viewed members' *indirect* contributions, in particular, to represent a strategic opportunity for firms, given their suggested elevated effect on GLPE.

Extending Pansari and Kumar (2017), we also classified members' *indirect* GLP contributions as autonomous (vs. interdependent)-, selfless (vs. self-seeking)-, control (vs. laissez-faire)-based-, collaborative (vs. competitive)-, individual (vs. generic)-, and calculated (vs. non-calculated) contributions, thus refining existing insight. Moreover, we explored the respective effect of these indirect GLP contributions on firm-perceived customer brand engagement value, which comprises customer lifetime-, learning/knowledge-, influencer-, and referral value. Finally, we developed a set of Propositions that detail the associations modeled in the framework, thus offering a springboard for further GLPE research.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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