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Wpływ doświadczenia związanego z korzystaniem z
gier wideo na decyzje konsumenckie graczy

Impact of gameplay experience on video game
players' consumer decisions

Doctoral dissertation summary

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1. Dissertation topic justification

Video games are a dynamically developing branch of the entertainment industry, the value of which at the beginning of the 21st century exceeded that generated by the film industry. Likewise movies, music or books, games are products oriented to provide consumers with a certain experience. However, unlike movies and books, playing a video game provides different value to a consumer every time. Certainly, the consumer can watch a movie or listen to a music piece over and over again, but unlike the game, a movie or a music piece each time offers objectively the same value. Such characteristics of the video games make it necessary to take into account other or additional criteria that are used by the consumer in the process of making a purchase decision.

Apart from the specificity of the video games and the dynamic development of the games industry, there are also other phenomena on the video game market which indicate that this area is worth attention. The emergence of new ways of distributing video games, in which consumers have a continuous opportunity to use a fully functional product without making a single purchase decision, eludes the description of previous proposals for describing the consumer decision-making process and is a phenomenon that has not received sufficient attention in previous research.

Additionally the area of video game related consumer decisions presents an interesting research challenge due to the multiplicity and frequent contradiction of concepts used to describe the player's experience and the lack of clarity about basic concepts such as "game" and "experience". Although researchers agree that the experience of using video games is crucial variable in the players' consumer decisions, at the same time experience as a construct is described by variety of terms such as flow, immersion, or satisfying the basic needs of players. It is therefore more important to organize and analyze the existing research reports, propose a definition of basic theoretical constructs, and then describe and empirically determine the size of the impact of experience on the players' consumer decisions, while taking into account other moderating or mediating variables.

2. Research problem, goals and hypotheses

Literature studies conducted by the author allowed to define the research problem, the main goal and the specific goals of the dissertation. The research problem of the dissertation is the impact of gameplay experience on video game players' consumer decisions. The main goal of

the dissertation is to determine the Impact of gameplay experience on video game players' purchase decisions and the post-purchase behavior. There are also five specific objectives:

- systematization of terminology related to video games and the experience of video game players;
- identification of psychological, socio-demographic, economic and marketing factors influencing consumer behavior of video game players;
- determining the relationship between various factors influencing the decisions and consumer behavior of video game players;
- determining the strength of the relationship between the experience during the game and the decisions and consumer behavior of video game players;
- determining whether and to what extent this relationship is moderated by the identified player characteristics and product features.

Based on the research problem and the stated goals the following hypotheses were made:

H1: The increase in experience during the game rating leads to an increase in the willingness to continue the game and an increase in the willingness to recommend the game to others, which in turn leads to an increase in the probability of purchasing the game.

H2: The impact of experience during the game rating on the willingness to continue the game and the willingness to recommend the game to others is moderated by the control rating (usability).

H3: The impact of experience during the game rating on the willingness to continue the game and the willingness to recommend the game to others is moderated by the game genre preferences.

H4: The impact of experience during the game rating on the willingness to continue the game and the willingness to recommend the game to others is moderated by the players' sex.

H5: The impact of experience during the game rating on the willingness to continue the game and the willingness to recommend the game to others is moderated by the expectations of the player before playing the game.

H6: Among players who have purchased the game, an increase in the experience rating leads to an increase in the willingness to continue the game and a willingness to share positive information about the game, which in turn leads to an increase in the likelihood of purchasing additional content for the game.

H7: Among players who have purchased the game, an increase in the experience rating leads to an increase in the willingness to continue the game and a willingness to share positive information about the game, which in turn leads to an increase in time spent in the game.

The hypotheses made by the author are the result of the literature review, which include works from 1955 - 2018, including positions that deal with the topics of consumer decision-making, flow experiences and immersion in video games. The analyzed literature included Polish and English compact positions, but mainly consists of English-language scientific articles on consumer decision models, determinants of players' consumer decisions, definitions and typologies of games and video games, as well as research on player experiences.

3. Method

The empirical part of the dissertation is based on the performed primary research. The scope encompassed consumer experience while using video games and its influence on consumer decisions, as well as the factors moderating this relationship. The research participants were people who declare that they use video games. The research has been conducted since October 2019 until March 2020 according to a predetermined plan. For the purposes of the dissertation, one quantitative longitudinal study was performed - a repeated measures laboratory experiment extended by a part monitoring consumer post-purchase behavior - on a group of 64 participants.

The analysis of the research results was carried out with the use of statistical methods and tests, such as basic descriptive statistics, scatter plots, correlation analysis and point-bi-series correlation (Pearson's coefficient). For the main analyzes in the dissertation, linear regression was used as part of the mediation analysis and the moderation analysis

4. Dissertation structure and content

The dissertation consists of five chapters. In the first chapter, attention is devoted to issues related to the very concept of a "game" and distinguishing it from another closely related term, which is "play". It also introduces the classifications and typologies of video games proposed so far in the literature, which allowed the author to propose an original typology. Later in the dissertation, this typology allowed the author to identify factors potentially influencing players' purchasing decisions, design recruitment questionnaires used during empirical

research, and also allowed the author to identify additional variables subject to manipulation or experimental control. The first chapter ended with considerations about treating video games as goods that are experiential, interactive and hedonic. It allowed to direct the further review of the literature.

The second chapter of the dissertation was devoted to the determinants of players' consumer decisions, as well as the special role of the experience related to the use of video games. Particular attention has been paid to those theoretical concepts that considered players' experience as a system of many variables that may have a moderating or mediating influence on consumer decisions. The chapter deals with the experiences of flow, immersion and fun, as well as identifies the relationships between them, which allowed to organize and analyze the existing results of empirical research on experience while using video games. Particular attention has been paid to the concept of satisfying the basic needs of players, which is characterized by greater precision in the description of the proposed variables that make up the player's experience, as well as a more complete description of the experience itself than in the case of flow and immersion theoretical constructs. The chapter also focuses on the methods of measuring experience while using a video game.

The third chapter discusses models of consumer decisions. Due to certain features that distinguish video games from other hedonic experimental goods, as well as distribution models specific to the video game market, the author has performed a critical review of classic consumer decision models as well as models that take into account the consumer experience while using the product. Due to the discovered limitations of the discussed models, this chapter also focuses on decision-making models for organizations. Such a turn in the literature review was reflected in the author's proposition of the decision-making process model which integrates empirical reports from economics and management, and what is equally important from the author's perspective, takes into account the specificity of video games.

The fourth chapter contains the description of the empirical research methods used. It also describes in detail the plan and procedure of the empirical study, as well as presents conceptual models showing the relationship between the experience of using a video game and consumer decisions and behavior, including potential moderators. This chapter presents the organization of an experiment with repeated measurements, a description of the controlled and confounding variables. Attention was also paid to the basic characteristics of the tested sample and the preparation of data for analysis.

The fifth chapter contains an analysis of data from the conducted research, as well as conclusions that can be drawn on their basis. The author presented the results of hypotheses verification, indicated possible research limitations, and proposed further research directions.

The last and integral part of the dissertation is a bibliography, a list of tables, figures and charts, as well as an appendix containing the questionnaires used during the research, as well as detailed results of selected analyzes.

5. Results

As part of the dissertation, the author systematized the concepts related to the games and their types, and then placed the games in the context of other types of consumer goods. The original typology of games and the definition of games as hedonic interactive experimental goods, allowed to identify the determinants of players' consumer decisions.

Crucial for the dissertation was to define what the gameplay experience is. In the literature on the subject, there are many competing concepts in this matter, such as flow, immersion, or satisfying the basic needs of players. However, in the dissertation, the relationships between them were determined, which made it possible to organize the existing results of empirical research.

Next, the author devoted attention to the decision-making process. The dissertation identifies and interrelates areas that are usually not considered jointly, such as, for example, models of consumer decision-making and decision-making models in organizational setting. The conducted critical analysis of the existing decision-making models allowed the author to make a creative synthesis of adequate parts of the existing models from the economy and management, in the form of an original model of the consumer decision-making process, which takes into account the specificity of experimental goods, such as video games, some of which are distributed in a way that allows multiple use of the product before purchasing. As a result, the proposed model allowed the author to identify the processes and relationships between the variables that affect the relationship between experience and consumer decisions.

The main goal of the dissertation was to determine the impact of the gameplay experience on purchasing decisions and post-purchase behavior of the players. Based on the proposed model of consumer decisions, it was determined that the relationship between the game experience and the decision to buy the game is mediated by variables such as the

willingness to continue the game and the willingness to recommend the game to other people. It was an alternative proposal to the one observed in previous research, where the relationship between gameplay experience and consumer decisions was analyzed only in the form of direct relationships.

When it comes to method an innovative solution to test four products at the same time was adopted, in the form of repeated measures experiment, so as to simulate, under controlled conditions, a selected section of the decision-making process. The study was not limited to one game genre, but selected games from two genres with varying levels of offered experience, allowing more detailed and generalizable conclusions to be drawn from the study. An extremely rare solution in the literature on the subject was also a monitoring part of the study, which gave the study a longitudinal character. Researching the influence of selected variables on consumer behavior over time is not a standard solution, but its use in the case of players' consumer behavior was justified.

Based on the research results, the author showed that the relationship between the experience during the game and the decision to buy the game is mediated by consumer behavior and attitudes, such as the willingness to recommend the game to friends and the desire to spend free time in the game. It can also be stated that this relationship is independent of the experience level offered by the game and of the game genre itself. However, the most interesting relationships concerned the potential moderators of this relationship.

The conducted study allowed to verify the role of control rating, which turned out to significantly moderate the strength of the relationship between the experience during the game and the consumer behavior, but only in the case of low-rated games. The obtained results indicate that a sufficiently high level of control is a necessary, but not sufficient condition to strengthen the relationship between the experience during the game and consumer behavior. In addition, at a high levels of control and experience during the game, the moderation effect does not occur, which was observed for high rated games. While understanding the exact nature of this relationship requires further research, from the application perspective, it indicates some possibilities to optimize the costs of game development.

Interesting conclusions were also provided by the analysis of the moderating role of the player's sex. While the relationships obtained in previous studies that the player's sex influences preferences towards game genres, which are important at the stage of selection of the decision-making process have been confirmed, the importance of sex at the later stages of this process may be much smaller than it can be assumed on the basis of the available literature. Sex turned out to not moderate the relationship between the experience and consumer behavior at the stage of using the product. This complements the current understanding of the role of sex in consumer decision-making. The conducted study, however, is not conclusive in this matter, due to the selection of games typically preferred by men for the research, as well as the low number of women in the sample. However, the obtained conclusions form the basis for further research.

Assessing the impact of players' preferences regarding the game genre, as well as the role of the player's expectations before the game did not provide clear conclusions. It has been found that the influence of these moderators may vary depending on the genre of the game and the level of experience it offers. In this matter, however, the main value of the dissertation is the indication of the limitations of the research carried out, which must be overcome in order to obtain a decisive result, as well as setting the directions for further research, which take into account a different way of manipulating the variables in the experiment. The above recommendations seem to be a good direction for future research, due to the possibility of using the future results for planning marketing activities and those related to the design and production of the product itself, i.e. the game.

Although the results provided conclusions that significantly supplemented the knowledge of the factors important which are in the consumer decision-making process for experimental goods, they clearly indicate the need for further research, especially on the factors moderating the influence of experience during the use of the product on consumer behavior. Taking into account the percentage of the explained variance of the results, it should be assumed that there are still some unknowns related to the factors moderating the relationship between the gameplay experience and the players' consumer behavior. One of the significant cognitive gaps also concerns the factors that would significantly explain the consumer behavior of players after purchasing the product. In this regard, however, the dissertation provides some hints related to the possibilities of using longitudinal studies, in which the same variables are measured multiple times at different stages of the decision-making process. Additionally, the dissertation presents application value in defining and assessing various moderators for the relationship between the gameplay experience and the players' consumer behavior.