# The Pokémonization of the First Moment of Truth

## Abstract

The gamification of retail, helped essentially by the development of augmented reality, is hailed today as being the reverser of declining retail sales trends. With the rapid expansion and adoption of the Pokémon Go augmented reality game, there is a dire need to understand the true implications of this game app on brands and retailers alike. Given that studies on the risks attributed to the actual gamification of augmented reality are still scarce, this paper establishes an early understanding on this subject and expands the discussion on the potential negative implications of the commoditization of augmented reality. Based on an exploratory qualitative design whereby 24 experts in the marketing field were interviewed, this study develops the currently narrow theoretical and practical understanding of how these apps could affect retailers. In sum, the study proposes a pioneering direction on the likely negative implications that gaming platforms such as Pokémon Go could have on the first moment of truth.

*Key words*: Pokémon Go, augmented reality, shopper marketing, consumer engagement, retailing.

## Introduction

Online communities and groups have been growing expansively ever since their inception in the 1970s. These communities have reached their highest popularity levels to date with the advancement of Web 2.0 and its subsequent developments such as social media and virtual reality games and applications. Today, the latest trend in the digital world is the growth of augmented reality applications, which merge both the physical and virtual worlds into one allowing an individual the chance to overlay and interact with virtual objects and elements in their real-life, immediate environment (Carmigniani *et al*., 2011). Indeed, the gamification of augmented reality has been expanding significantly as is evident in the huge popularity of digital games, such as Pokémon Go.

This development has caused marketers and advertisers around the globe to place a great level of interest into utilizing these augmented reality games as new shopper marketing channels. Undeniably, augmented reality technologies are appealing since they allow for a greater level of fun, which in turn enlivens the customer's shopping encounter and increases his/her purchase intentions (Kim and Forsythe, 2008; Mathwick *et al.,* 2001). Such technological applications are often sought after today in the retail environment as they enhance the ways shoppers interact with brands at the first moment of truth (Orel and Kara, 2014). This has led many global brands, such as LEGO, Adidas, and Coca Cola, to develop augmented reality applications so as to actively interact with consumers, boost sales and increase consumer purchase intentions (Alkhamisi and Monowar, 2013). These tools have led to the creation of the "zero moment of truth" at which a consumer communicates with a brand through digital means and tools.

This paper is the first of its kind to examine and discuss the emergence of the augmented reality gamification of online community platforms and their risks on retailers and brands alike. Extant literature indicates a lack of research in the area of augmented reality and

its impact on the shopping experience, more specifically on the use of augmented reality games in enhancing the consumer shopping experience (Bulearca and Tamarjan, 2010). Accordingly, this paper first discusses online communities vis-à-vis their expansion in the digital and virtual world across the past few decades. It then reviews the rise of augmented reality alongside the growing gamification of shopper marketing through one of the key trending apps, namely "Pokémon Go", considering its' likely effects on shopper marketing. The paper then describes the adopted qualitative research design, discusses the findings, and concludes on the theoretical and managerial implications as well as the potential directions for future research.

## Literature Review

*Online Communities*
According to Balasubramanian and Mahajan (2001), the beginnings of online communities date back to the year 1976, when the Electronic Information Exchange System (EIES) was first implemented. At that time, the EIES focused on computerized conferencing that was designed to coordinate and connect the various, dispersed research communities (Niemand and Rensleigh, 2003). Although these early developments were confined to the scientific community, in the late 1970s the networking of personal computers via modems led to a wider level of participation in these online discussions (Balasubramanian and Mahajan, 2001). The latter process was accomplished through the Bulletin Board System (BBS), which was the early manifestation of online communities that enabled users to share posts or notices with other users on a variety of topics and to download software and information that can be used on their systems (Daintith and Wright, 2008; Kitchin, 1998).

Over the past decade, online communities developed extensively in an accelerated trend especially with the advent of social media and virtual worlds featuring games. Individuals have become more easily connected helped by the growing Internet speed and social platforms deemed as part of the Web 2.0 era. Indeed, Web 2.0 has been greatly defined by its high inclusivity and increased call for participation and involvement in contrast to Web 1.0 platforms where individuals were generally limited to the roles of passive receivers of information (Stevenson and Liu, 2010; Oreilly, 2007). Today, online communities are based upon common beliefs and interests, attract like-minded individuals and act as virtual meeting places for sharing experiences and building relationships (Chen and Ku, 2013; Liang *et al*., 2011). Such platforms not only encourage user engagement but are also commonly used by consumers to interact and share their experiences and opinions with regards to a certain brand/product (Bugshan, 2015). This builds a strong level of consumer loyalty and commitment to these communities and to their fellow virtual friends (Chen and Ku, 2013; Royo-Vela and Casamassima, 2011).

*Augmented Reality*
The importance of online communities has grown exponentially due to the fact that individuals are spending greater times online than ever before (Singh and Pandey, 2014); in fact, consumers seem to be spending more time online than they do offline. In fact, the lines between the real and virtual worlds have become highly blurred and interconnected. Today, augmented reality applications and communities have become highly popular and have in turn generated new forms of human and computer communication and collaboration (Zhu *et al*., 2008). These platforms are an advancement of virtual reality platforms and communities since the latter tend to completely immerse an individual in a simulated, computer-generated world with no relation to one's real, physical world (Carmigniani *et al*., 2011). On the other

hand, augmented reality platforms are interactive, real-time applications which superimpose and integrate three dimensional, digital objects and elements into one's immediate, physical surroundings providing the user with an amplified, enhanced version of reality (Carmigniani *et al*., 2011; Yonck, 2011). In particular, the Milgram Reality-Virtuality Continuum presents a spectrum which has the real world and the virtual world on either ends with augmented reality appplications falling closer to the physical world and augmented virtuality applications falling closer to the digital world (Yamabe and Nakajima, 2013; Milgram *et al*., 1994). As a matter of fact, augmented reality tools are leading to an erosion of the existing restrictions between the phsyical and virtual worlds (Sheth and Solomon, 2014; Yang, 2011).

Consequently, individuals using augmented reality applications inhabit both the real and virtual worlds at the same time while bonding with others in both worlds (da Silva, 2013). Augmented reality is believed to enhance individual perceptions and notions of reality as users of such applications are interacting with digital content while also remaining fully aware of their real world surroundings (Alkhamisi and Monowar, 2013). Augmented reality applications provide useful virtual information to users and allow them to view the real environment in a sense acting as an altered live stream of the physical world (Alkhamisi and Monowar, 2013). Interestingly, consumers are nowadays experiencing augmented reality mainly through apps on their smart phones or tablets. In order for such applications to function, a user must wear or carry a certain device (e.g. a headseat, mobile phone, handheld tablet…etc.) (Mackay, 1998). The apps typically contain a tracking sensor that traces individual physical actions and movements (da Silva, 2013). The interface detects optical images, points the individual's interactions and gestures, and processes them to superimpose digital content above the present physical surroundings (Jana *et al.*, 2013; Carmigniani *et al*., 2011).

*Augmented Reality Gamification*
Augmented reality applications have been used for various purposes in multiple domains such as medicine, design, military, education, entertainment, and last but not least, gaming (Liarokapis, 2006). Indeed, game augmentation has become very popular with developers who integrate digital elements into their existing, real game environment offering a heightened level of physical interaction while allowing for an unobtrusive incorporation of virtualization (Yamabe and Nakajima, 2013). Such games are highly complex as they require the use of sophisticated hardware devices that are calibrated to recognize, process and render images of the surrounding environment while also including high-tech softwares to ensure high levels of multi-player interactivity (Liarokapis, 2006). Therefore, augmented reality games are generally interactive and have a noteworthy ability to detect and respond astutely to each user's specific actions, needs, and intentions (da Silva, 2013). In sum, the popularity of these games is due to their capacity to provide players with a heightened audio-visual awareness of their game surroundings, leading to an increased perception of both the excitement and challenge of the game (Liarokapis *et al*., 2004).

Accordingly, with the ever-increasing integration of augmented reality into gaming platforms, there is a dire need to differentiate between a "virtual augmented world" and a "virtual diminished world." A virtual augmented world would be based on a hybrid gaming platform, such as Pokémon Go, whereby the real environment of the gamer is superimposed on the gaming platform. Conversely, a virtual diminished world would be purely based on the confined virtual world of the game with no connection to the outside real environment of the gamer (Azuma *et al*., 2001). This paper will focus on discussing the virtual augmented world.

*Pokémon and Pokémon Go*
One of the most popular augmented reality games today is the Pokémon Go mobile

application, which was launched in July 2016 by Niantic Inc. and the Pokémon Co. (Ruggless, 2016). The game allows players to walk around and use their smartphones to virtually capture Pokémons that appear to be present in real-life locations (*Pokestosp*) after which the player can combat with other individuals at specified public locations (*Pokegyms*) (Needleman, 2016). The game uses Google Maps and GPS technologies to create a virtual map that specifies the locations of Pokémon; these sites are generally based upon popular public places and user recommendations and proposals (Needleman, 2016).

The game is founded upon the Pokémon series, which revolves around various pocket monsters; it raised to fame in the late 1990s and early 2000s after the launch of the related Nintendo Gameboy video games and subsequent Japanese manga comics and anime television series (Curtin, 2004; Allison, 2003; Shen, 2002). The Pokémon world is inhabited by various Pokémons with unique skills and abilities; individuals strive to catch these Pokémons and train them to evolve into stronger, more complex beings in so as to become masters and battle against other trainers (Allison, 2003). The series was so popular that on its tenth anniversary in 2006 Pokémon Inc. had amassed over $25 billion in profits (Bainbridge, 2014; Kelts, 2007).

Pokémon Go has met similar levels of success with the application being an immediate hit and receiving over 75 million downloads worldwide in the first month of its launch, ranking as the number one free app on Apple's App Store and Android's Play Store (Molina, 2016). The game has quickly become the fastest-growing mobile game in US history earning an estimated $1.6 million per day in the US alone, with Nintendo's share price more than doubling in the aftermath of the game's release (Levine, 2016; Tassi, 2016). Recent studies reported that the average user spends over 75 minutes per day using the app; a large number when compared to the average 35 minutes per day spent on Facebook by the typical phone user (Evangelho, 2016). Statistics actually indicate that individuals are spending approximately 4.1% more time on their phones after downloading Pokémon Go than they previously did pre-download (Evangelho, 2016). It must be highlighted that despite the fact that Pokémon Go is a free application, players generally require in-app purchases to receive certain power ups and gain a competitive edge against other players.

The application has been so successful that advertisers have been striving to use it as a free marketing tool as it allows users to engage with real-life products and surroundings within the augmented reality world it occupies, which in turn enhances consumer engagement with the brand and consequently increases purchase intention (Burgstaller, 2016). Indeed, a New York pizza restaurant has displayed a 75% increase in sales after it invested in *lure modules*, in-app mechanisms that attract rare Pokémons to a certain stop (Castillo, 2016). The appeal of Pokémon Go to marketers is also attributed to the fact that the majority of its users are millennials aged between 18 and 24, a target market that is largely cynical with respect to direct forms of advertising (Hobbs, 2016). However, it must be noted that Pokémon Go is not an advertising channel in itself and marketers must be aware of the fact that individuals are connected to the app to catch Pokémons and combat other trainers and not to receive direct advertisements. In fact, Ambarish Mitra, CEO of augmented reality application developing company Blippa, has warned marketers of directly advertising their products and brands on Pokémon Go as this could cause the application to lose its legitimacy, which will in turn alienate the target market and lead them to remove the application (Hobbs, 2016). The debate on the use of Pokémon Go and other similar augmented reality games by marketers paves the way to a more meticulous discussion of such applications' implications on shopper marketing.

*Shopper marketing*
Marketers have been paying virtual communities and online applications a great level of

attention as possible venues of interactive consumer marketing (Chung, 2008). In fact, augmented reality applications allow consumers to have an interactive, simulated shopping experience that enhances playfulness and hence heightens consumer purchase intentions (Huang and Liu, 2014). The use of augmented reality is garnering a remarkable attention from advertisers and marketers due to the fact that millenials today are greatly invested in technology and tend to be most of the time "connected" (Singh and Pandey, 2014); moreover, millenials seem to be highly suspicious of traditional marketing mediums and therefore expect a novel and creative experience from a brand (Furlow, 2011). In fact, most consumer purchase intentions today are motivated by social media and digital content (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

The afore-mentioned facts have all led marketers to consider new, non-traditional channels of shopper marketing to enhance brand sales and generate consumer loyalty (Ramadan *et al.,* 2016; Egol *et al*., 2013; Yuan and Wu, 2008). Shopper marketing differs from traditional marketing in the sense that it incorporates a complete, 360 degree attitude to marketing, whereby the shopper is targeted through innovative approaches pre-purchase, post-purchase and at the purchase point itself (Shankar *et al*., 2011; Shankar, 2011; Deloitte Research, 2007). One of the major channels in shopper marketing is the utilization of technology and related applications, including augmented reality tools, to enhance the shopping experience, influence consumer purchase intention, and increase overall consumer traffic (Shankar *et al*., 2011; Kalyanam *et al*., 2008). For example, in 2013, Audi created an augmented reality experience for their customers through the development of the Audi Vision application whereby a consumer stands in front of an Audi car, ad, or billboard with his/her device and interacts with the car by painting it a different color, gaining exclusive content, getting inside of it or interacting with the dashboard and other interior features (Accenture, 2014; Brenzo, 2013). Augmented reality marketing is perceived as a great strategy for reaching millennials as it invites users to contribute and be part of the experience rather than act as passive recipients of a message.

Moreover, as customers become more digitally empowered, consumers face new "moments of truth" between a consumer and a brand, in contrast to what is generally faced in traditional marketing mediums (Moran *et al*., 2014). The first moment of truth, defined by Procter and Gamble as the first seven seconds after which a shopper faces a store shelf, is the instance at which a consumer forms contact with a brand and develops a certain impression about it (Ertemel and Basci, 2015; Hui *et al*., 2013; Nelson and Ellison, 2005). Two additional moments of truth have been lately introduced to the literature based on the improved technological capabilities of the modern consumer. First, the 'Zero Moment of Truth' describing the real-time moment at which a consumer is exposed to online third-party stimulus related to a certain brand/product (Ertemel and Basci, 2015; Lecinski, 2011). Second, the "Social Moment of Truth" (ScMOT) defined as "the instance during which a shopper in a social networking environment makes a specific brand purchase based on a set of determining factors at the retailer's social page" (Ramadan and Farah, 2017).

The introduction of the latter two moments of truth not only recognizes the importance of technology and consumers' connectedness, but also reflects the increased investments of brands and retailers in marketing through online games as these have the potential to present an entertaining experience for prospective consumers while also allowing for social marketing strategies (Buller *et al*., 2009). In fact, research has indicated that digital games have the capacity to be used as a marketing channel to generate brand awareness and probaly consumer purchase intentions; however, the game must generate customer value or else it will be highly unlikely for it to create any significant consumer behavioral change (Mulcahy *et al*., 2015). In sum, this channel must be approached with caution as consumers might be wary of direct advertising through an independent, gaming platform (Hobbs, 2016).

**Methodology**

In order to investigate marketers' expert opinion on the likely potentials and risks of augmented reality gaming applications, an exploratory qualitative research design was adopted, utilizing 24 semi-structured elite interviews. The interviews were conducted over the phone, in English language, and lasted an average of 35 minutes each. The sample included 13 male and 11 female respondents. The sample was preselected based on the extensive respondents' expertise in the marketing discipline. The respondents' professional background included sales and brand managers, retail executives, digital marketing directors, and applications' developers, with years of experience ranging between 7 and 21 years. Based on Creswell's (1998) recommendation to carry out between 5 and 25 interviews in order to ensure data saturation, the authors opted to recruit the interviewees using a convenience snowballing sampling strategy, whereby the respondents were asked to propose other experts in the field. Data saturation was manifestly attained at the nineteenth interview; nonetheless 4 additional interviews were conducted to warrant comprehensiveness and ensuing depth of discussion.

All interviews started with a pre-set narrative clarifying the objective of the study and seeking interviewees' participation consent. The conversations were recorded -with the interviewees' awareness and permission- for subsequent transcription, thematic coding and analysis. Three versions of the interview questions were developed during the data collection; the third edition was adopted after the fourth interview as the initial proposed questions seemed to be too specific and did not allow for the proper flow of ideas of the interviewees given the innovative nature of the topic studied.

The interviews' questions tackled the subsequent subjects: (a) the interviewee's professional background, (b) brands' versus retailers' activities using augmented reality such as Pokémon Go to attract consumers, and whether these apps could enhance engagement with the consumer, (c) the likelihood that retailers could build long-term relationship with consumers by investing in the virtual world of Pokémon Go to increase traffic to their stores, (d) how the "gamification" of the shopping journey could affect the decision-making process of shoppers and the first moment of truth (i.e. decision making on the shelf), and last but not least, (e) the potential risks coming from augmented reality apps on brands and retailers.

To decrease non-response, interviewees were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity and given the chance to choose their ideal schedule in terms of both date and time. The verbatim transcribed text from the recorded interviews was analysed by two researchers who systematically coded the data based on extracted themes and jointly checked the results for consistency. The thematic categories were established on the actual terms used by the interviewees and extracted through the content analysis performed on NVIVO (version 10).

**Findings and Analysis**

While augmented reality as a whole is typically viewed from a positive lens, the findings from the interviews conducted demonstrate that its' gamification potential for retailers is rather viewed from a not so favourable perspective. While retailers are mainly driving location-based marketing through the gamification of augmented reality, brands would rather focus on building awareness and equity. Brands who own their retail shops (versus FMCG brands sold in supermarkets) will be able to generate traffic and increase brand awareness but only to the extent of the "lure" timing. Hence these "lures" act exactly as price discounts and

promotions. The moment they end, price-sensitive shoppers, or in this case "Pokémon-sensitive" gamers, would leave to another location featuring a better offer or Pokémons to catch.

The problem with this approach is that the gamification of augmented reality à la "Pokémon Go" would run the risk of commoditizing augmented reality in general. Instead of using this tool to enhance shoppers' experience, retailers and brands alike would be exploiting it as a mere short-term sales tool that focuses on immediate incentives with no added competitive value for the long-term. Marketers will benefit from utilizing such games as a tool to engage with consumers and build long-term experience-driven relationships between the brand itself and members of the augmented reality community (Hsu *et al.*, 2012).

Accordingly, a key differentiation between the different shopper marketing approaches given the differing environments should be made. For that purpose, respondents pinpointed the ideal integrated approach for an augmented shopper marketing equation. The differentiation came as follows:

- **A typical shopper marketing equation**: a typical shopper marketing equation is usually based on driving penetration (generating higher traffic to the store as well as to a specific category), frequency (e.g. generating more frequent footfall per week and per month), and higher spending (i.e. trading up to bigger quantities and/or more expensive line-ups) (Flint *et al.*, 2014). As one respondent mentioned, *"shoppers need a genuine representation of reality and retailers depend mainly on the traditional FMOT to drive higher and more frequent traffic, facilitating as well higher spending."* (Head of Internet & Mobiles, 21 years of experience). Accordingly, the shopper marketing of today is mainly based on the following equation:

  *Sales conversion = [penetration] (more traffic x category traffic) x [frequency] x [more spending]*

- **The current gamification approach of augmented reality**: the recent adopted approach of gamified augmented reality will entail a missed opportunity on generating higher spending; *"as shoppers focus more on the virtual reality screen (versus physical reality), shopping on 'auto-pilot' will become more common than now."* (Marketing Director, 11 years of experience). As another respondent puts it, "*a risk would be the users of the app would remember the store for the app and not for their product. This can affect the reputation of the brand or retailer."* (Digital Manager, 5 years of experience). Accordingly, the current gamification approach of augmented reality is seen to be based on the following equation:

  *Sales conversion = [more traffic] x [higher dwell time] x [frequency]*

- **The proposed** "**augmented shopper marketing equation**": the suggested approach would be to first and foremost focus on the experiential pattern linked to the shopping journey. One respondent suggested for example to have a game that would *"collect points during shopping, like a 'health' focused shopper competes with peers for the 'healthiest' shopping list purchases."* (Marketing Director, 11 years of experience). Another respondent stated that *"some customers might remember the experience they had at a particular retailer and keep coming there long after they would have stopped playing the game."* (Digital Manager, 5 years of experience). This is indeed fundamental as *"consumers are very much into engagement activities nowadays as traditional advertising is no longer credible or meaningful."* (Marketing Manager, 12 years of experience). On that basis, the proposed augmented shopper marketing equation would be derived from the following:

  *Experiential sales conversion = [penetration] (more traffic x category traffic) x [frequency] x [more interactive spending]*

*The Augmented Path to Purchase Shopping Journey*

The main striking difference between a conventional path to purchase journey and an augmented shopping journey is that the journey does not start with a consideration set of needs. In fact, the journey's needs are worked backwards, whereby potential shoppers go to the retail stores based on a gamification need to catch Pokémons rather than on a need for a product to buy. One respondent mentions that *"I think the decision making process of shoppers would be negatively affected since now they might go for the game and not the shop, hence less decision making in buying"* (Digital Manager, 5 years of experience).

Accordingly, the shopping journey turns typically into an impulse buying pattern, whereby augmented reality would be driving the journey alongside the cross-selling of products that would provide bonuses to the game; *"Depending on the consumer segments, I think this will help increase the impulse buying"* (Portfolio Strategy and Innovation Manager, 12 years of experience). In addition, the journey itself might change suddenly from its original purpose of buying a product due to a gaming opportunity: *"the gamification of the shopping journey would deter shoppers from the original purpose of the journey. For example, if there is a 'Pokémon' in the store, some shoppers would go to the aisle where the 'Pokémon' is before going to the needed categories in their shopping list, thereby making the journey longer. The game would have a higher priority than the items shoppers need."* (Mobile Applications Developer, 4 years of experience).

As highlighted earlier, this presents a rather sizeable risk to brands and retailers who would be using augmented reality gamification for short-term gains that would not build sustainable long-term relationships with consumers. The gaming platform itself would hence become the key intermediary that regulates the communication between shopper and brands/retailers. Indeed, the gaming platform is *"adapting the message to consumers' preferences through their preferred media/communication channels. Same as TV ads 50 years ago"* (CIO, 20 years of experience). This will pose another high risk on companies, especially brands, as the relationship building enters into another 3rd party loop in addition of the retailer. As the relationship milestones increase, brands will get farther from their consumers.

Accordingly, in addition to adopting an augmented shopper marketing equation approach, brands and retailers alike should take into account the following suggested strategies and solutions:

1. **Co-branding**: an integrated marketing approach should be implemented whereby marketing efforts from retailers and brands should be embedded within the augmented reality gaming app: *"These apps could be used as a chance for co-branding and then people will link the Pokémon brand to the other brand. For example, if McDonald's started adding Pokémon plush toys in the happy meals, people would start buying happy meals to get them while playing Pokémon."* (Digital Manager, 5 years of experience); *"there will be no thinking, the decision will happen before the consumer gets to the shop. There will be no need to have in-store activation campaigns or POSM as the consumer will be guided though the game to the shelf"* (Brand Manager, 10 years of experience).

2. **Develop own augmented reality app:** retailers and brands should develop their 3rd party app linked to the widespread gamified augmented reality app. These applications are of great value to a marketer since they not only promote their brand in a social, in-game environment but they also facilitate direct communication between the consumer and the afore-mentioned brand itself (Procopie *et al.*, 2015): *"consumers would arrive due to this Pokémon app, then realize the products in the*

*store and buy through the 3ʳᵈ party app which can influence consumers on what to buy. The 3ʳᵈ party app can be used to display a popup on shoppers' phones, thus making the shopping experience easier. These pop ups could include details about the product, and what variety it's available in. Also you can input the details of the product you want into the app, and the app can lead you across the store pointing you in the direction of the desired product.* "* (Digital Manager, 5 years of experience); "the FMOT would be affected positively or negatively depending on the store's support of the game through their own apps. To take full advantage of the AR apps, retailers should find the best ways to connect with their customers. Pokémon Go seems the most suitable today since it has a huge number of fans. Retailers and brands could partner with the app to create in game events specific to this brand. This will enhance customer engagement and even create better relationships with customers.*" (Mobile Applications Developer, 4 years of experience).

3. **Differentiate and maintain the own developed app:** proprietary apps should be well updated and most importantly differentiated from other competing apps: *"The app could enhance consumer engagement with the brand or retailer, but only if they can keep the app well maintained and alive since a lot of other brands would also be doing the same. Brands could add advertisements in the app to drive up sales or even show important sales happening right now so that the consumer heads to the store."* (Digital Manager, 5 years of experience). Moreover, embedding a platform for sharing customers' opinion and having the possibility to live chat with a sales consultant would enhance greatly proprietary apps; *"the app could connect you with other customers to share their opinion and help you make a decision about the item by directing you towards them virtually. It would definitely attract the young generation. But if they target older generations, they need to add more human side to the applications, perhaps have a consultant online"* (Career & Placement Officer, 12 years of experience).

4. **Integrate an Omni-channel approach:** relationship building with consumers entails the integration of an Omni-channel approach whereby making sure that shoppers have a seamless similar brand experience across all different touch points and marketing channels. The presence of new socially-driven touch points, such as online forums and games, does reshape the methods in which consumers learn about a certain brand and form attitudes towards, it which in turn directly impacts their purchasing behavior (Park and Feinberg, 2010); *"The usage of this technology should not replace at 100% all interaction with consumers. Otherwise the brand/store will not have any emotional link with consumer on human factors."* (Portfolio Strategy and Innovation Manager, 12 years of experience). *"AR will help companies build long-term relationship with consumers as long as they can link this to an offline experience and /or further online engagement."* (Marketing Director, 25 years of experience). *"Pokémon Go essentially breaks down the wall between technology and real-world experience, so as brands drive people into new locations, there's a real opportunity for them to do more ambient marketing that isn't exclusively digital"* (AML Officer, 15 years of experience).

Overall, augmented reality, and especially its recent growing gamification, is a big opportunity for companies to focus on. Augmented reality communities are highly centered upon social interaction and engagement with many of these applications and games being directly or indirectly structured around consumption (Kim and Jin, 2006). Consumers greatly value such communities with many individuals sharing norms, beliefs, and attitudes with

their fellow society members, which in turn significantly impacts consumer loyalty and retention (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002). This is due to the fact that online interaction between various members and gamers generates conversations and electronic word of mouth with regards to given retailers and brands that is in turn perceived as both credible and useful by the consumer (Hansen and Lee, 2013).

Nonetheless, brands and retailers should take into consideration the associated risks and how to take advantage of the high related potential. In fact, one respondent summarizes the importance of this trending tool in that *"in the near future, people will stop deciding on which products to buy and will make the app decide for them"* (Retail Manager, 8 years of experience). Furthermore, *"This is the way forward to engage with consumers, nowadays consumers are overloaded with ads in billboards, outdoor screens, magazine, TV.... So to attract consumers' attention, the ads need to be interactive in an engaging manner. Hence AR is the tool for this. This tool will help initiating the relationship, but I think it is up to the retailers to continue maintaining the relationship at their level"* (Portfolio Strategy and Innovation Manager, 12 years of experience). Last but not least, the gamification of augmented reality has to *"keep things simple and aligned with user expectations is key to providing an interaction experience that doesn't hinder the customer journey and helps shoppers navigate, explore, pick and take a purchase decision with little effort"* (AML Officer, 15 years of experience).


**Conclusion and Future Research**

The highly trending topic of the gamification of augmented reality for retail and brand sales purposes is growing exponentially today. This is highly due to the fact that such games are leading to the creation of new forms of communities whereby like-minded individuals and consumers connect, share opinions, and influence one another's offline beliefs and behaviors (Park and Feinberg, 2010). In fact, members of such gaming communities have been shown to significantly engage with and trust one another (Hsu et al., 2012). Therefore, marketers should utilize such communities and venues in order to indirectly market their products and shape to their advantage consumer purchase intentions.

Nonetheless, the literature is significantly lacking on giving any potential direction for businesses especially when it comes to potential risks. The significant contribution that this study does in relation to highlighting the key points of risks, the differing shopper marketing approaches, as well as providing scholars and business alike with the best adapted augmented shopper marketing equation is highly needed to expand on the current scarce understanding of this field.

From a managerial perspective, this paper discussed the changing fundamentals of sales conversion when using augmented reality gamification tools. The study highlighted how the path to purchase journey becomes impulse driven on the basis of gaming needs rather than on shopping needs, and hence how the gaming platform itself would hijack further the relationship building process between consumers and brands/retailers. With the current nascent but threatening model of augmented reality gamification, this tool might become commoditized into a short term sales incentive removing with this all forms of long-term experience-based relationship building with consumers.

While this study was derived from elite interviewing to focus on the key areas and directions to take on the still very novel and emerging field of augmented reality gamification in the retail environment, the research is accordingly limited in its scope and

generalizeability. Accordingly, future research could further develop the ideas put forward in this study across different markets and industry segments. Additional work could also examine upcoming new platforms other than the Pokémon Go game considered in this study as it is expected that this field will grow exponentially in the years to come. Furthermore, future research could evaluate the impact of the normative influences and subjective norms of an online gaming community's on the individual member's consumption attitudes and intentions.

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