

Chapter 6

Application of Gamification in a Marketing Context: The Psychological Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Gamification, a popular tool widely used in various contexts such as marketing, education, and organizations, among others, has demonstrated its potential for engaging, motivating, and achieving behavioral change in the targeted audience. For an ideal gamification system, it is necessary to know how the gamification elements affect human emotions. This chapter conducts a journey through gamified contexts and their psychological impacts on individuals. This chapter gathers up the different threads of gamification in the marketing context. The three important objectives fulfilled by this chapter would be that it provides information about the topic of gamification and the psychological perspectives behind its operation; discusses its application in various marketing contexts, such as digital marketing and online payment sites; and finally, investigates various behavioral outcomes of gamification.

INTRODUCTION

Gamification is a popular term that emerged in digital platforms and is now applied in several contexts (Kamel et al., 2017). In concrete language, gamification transfers the structure of games to a new context, encouraging customers to earn from attributes such as timely feedback and challenges. The game design elements, which are the backbone of gamification, helps to fulfill different psychological needs. Studying how game elements interact with human emotions is necessary to know the psychological mechanisms behind gamification (Zhang, 2008). The expected outcome from most gamified platforms is ‘user motivation’ (Tang & Zhang, 2019). Game design elements that satisfy the essential psychological

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needs of ‘intrinsic motivation’ are identified as points, badges, and leader boards fulfill the competence need, profile building and options to select avatars satisfies the autonomy need, and team activities and friendly competitions contribute to the relatedness need (Sailer et al., 2017). It is also identified that providing rewards without a meaningful link to psychological needs can undermine intrinsic motivation (Lopez & Tucker, 2019). Another essential outcome expected from the application of gamification is ‘user engagement.’ The three kinds of engagement identified are behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks, 2004). Mere reward distribution or badge allocation contributes only to the behavioral engagement of the user. In order to fetch cognitive engagement outcomes, the gamified system must be capable of contributing to user development (Da Rocha Seixas et al., 2016).

The purpose of most gamified applications is to enable consumers to alter their behavior. The pair of pathways through which gamification affects behavioral change is the informational and affective pathways (Cardador et al., 2017). Informational pathways provide frequent and adequate feedback about one’s performance and affective pathway, making the tasks more enjoyable. The change that comes from a see-feel situation is better than a change that comes from an analysis-think situation (Kumar & Raghavendran, 2015). The success of any gamified application depends on how it measures and communicates the user experience (Hamari, 2013). As we see in the practice, gaming under relevant scientific and methodological support conditions has the most efficient mechanism that can be applied in education, marketing, human resource management, and productivity improvement. Researchers suggest that gaming illustrations should inspire employees and customers in marketing to fetch the best results (Vinichenko et al., 2016).

Designing organizational tasks as different game levels and integrating with different game elements can help people achieve their goals without a forced mechanism (Mochocki, 2011). Different game elements like frequent feedback, rewards, and recognition motivate employees to contribute their best to the organization. Many researchers like (Lazzaro 2008) supported it, who states that “Video games lead the design of interactive systems that realize behavioral changes. When we incorporate the essence of a game into an activity design, the activity becomes more fun, providing emotional consequences to the user. Full-fledged games often incorporate points, badges, and leader boards to reward users, based on simulations of real-world scenarios like gamification systems. The various complex design elements that make this game attractive are rarely exploited instead. Gamification is also used in certain behavioral experiments to motivate people to behave in certain ‘desirable’ ways by exploiting different elements of the game. (Linehan et al., 2015). The role of gamification is to attain the desired behavior from the users without pressurizing or controlling them. When the game elements and mechanics are utilized in a non-game context, the fun and entertainment aspect is expected to be embedded.

This chapter gathers up the different threads of gamification in the marketing context. The essential objectives of this study are to provide the reader’s insights about the topic gamification and conduct a literature review of the topic in the marketing context. This chapter is organized into two different sections, which fulfill the stated two objectives of the study. Section 1 deals with the overview of gamification and the psychological perspectives behind its functioning. Section 2 illustrates important themes identified from the literature review of gamification in the marketing context; In addition, this section also elucidates two gamified contexts: The application of gamification in digital marketing and online payment sites.

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