

Chapter 9

The Dark Side of Gamification: Ethics, Privacy, Surveillance, and Monitoring in Virtual and Gamified Environments

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyses the opposite perspective on the use of game elements, the so-called gamification, and is devoted to its Ethical Issues, Privacy Aspects, and Surveillance Aspects. The study analyses how gamification can influence one's behavior and cause addiction as well as privacy invasions. Again, when using a qualitative research methodology among the case studies and relevant literature, the chapter identifies emerging patterns in data gathering activities and user surveillance. Significant findings revealed that while applying gamification increases the level of interest, it involves important ethical concerns concerning the openness and permission, which compromise user agency. The analysis concludes that stakeholders, including developers and policymakers, must prioritize ethical frameworks to balance user engagement with privacy and ethical considerations, ensuring responsible gamification practices. Ultimately, fostering awareness of these issues is essential for developing more ethical and user-centered gamified systems.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-8886-0.ch009

INTRODUCTION

Gamification is the process of using game design techniques for purposes other than playing a game and is today used as a powerful way of engaging people (Fitria, 2022). It has uses in education, marketing, healthcare systems, as well as employee training, with concepts such as points, badges, and leaderboards being implemented right into the learning process ensuring that individuals act in a way that is desired. Specifically, gamification intends to engage users by appealing to their psychological needs or rather the desire to achieve goals as they complete tasks. However, as this approach becomes increasingly accepted and used, it has essential ethical implications that need to be addressed (Rowicka, 2023).

There is a concept as the ‘dark side’ of gamification which means that apart from the positive outcomes of the process, it has negative consequences and ethical issues. On the positive side, gamification has the potential of creating healthier engagement and, on the negative side, manipulation, addictions, and the abuse of personal data. These issues are compounded by the fact that data capture and user monitoring are common features of gamified systems. Therefore, one will have to turn his attention to the ethical perspective of gamification, namely privacy concerns and surveillance as well as consent.

This way, it will be possible to identify which specific concerns have to be addressed to make gamified experiences more responsible. With the emergence of digital spaces that permanently monitor users’ activity, it is critical to create a set of measures that need to be ethical and protect users’ rights. The goal of this chapter is to discuss the factors that make the use of gamification conceptually elusive and practically challenging with a focus on the ethical dimension.

There is widespread belief that gamification can improve engagement, but researchers have recently started to mention its less obvious and significant negative side too. People who support this theory note that the influences responsible for motivation and involvement can also be twisted to manipulate, exploit and even cause harm to people. For example, Self-Determination Theory explains how trying to obtain points, badges and leaderboards in games can end up reducing a person’s motivation. People may enjoy what they are doing less and become bored when the prizes or rewards are gone. Because of this phenomenon, called the overjustification effect, it is crucial that game elements in programs do not interfere with people’s freedom and good health.

The field of gaming studies brings up issues of possible ethical challenges due to manipulation and changing a person’s behavior (Sheetal, 2023). Systems that feature gamification are created to help users adopt certain habits that usually fit the needs of the organization or are beneficial for a business. They may use psychological techniques to develop habits in users, as users may not be aware of the

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