



## A Conceptual Review on Gamification as a Platform for Brand Engagement in the Marketing Context

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### **ABSTRACT**

With the impact of new technological advancement marketing strategies and tools have evolved significantly. Gamification is one of the trendiest tools which can be used to generate more brand engagement in the marketing context. Gamification has been used in different industries so far in order to generate brand engagement by targeting different sets of the target audience. Sometimes it has been linked with different types of platforms and mostly used to provide a better-gamified experience along with the brands in the marketing context. In many countries, this concept is tested in different platforms in order to use this more effectively in the marketing context. With the impact of severe problems and different circumstances, gamification has been used in the industry to generate better brand engagement and this notion has evolved and subsequently gained the attention of researchers. However, it is questionable what significant characteristics a firm needs to focus on gamification to have better brand engagement in the marketing context. As a result, the purpose of this paper is to attempt to review both empirical and theoretical arguments and aspects to consider in gamification as a platform and its impact on brand engagement in the marketing context. To objectively analyze the gamification components described by many writers, a thorough literature review is conducted by selecting both conceptual and empirical works mostly published recently in

renowned publications. Based on the content, gamification components have been identified as mechanics & aesthetics, self-benefits, self-interaction, and self-achievement. A proposed model extends the findings into a conceptual realm by summarizing all these aspects.

**Keywords:** *Customer Engagement, Gamification, Gamified Experience Marketing, Mechanics, Social Interaction*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Gamification is a trendy marketing technique. Many businesses feel that gamification can boost consumer engagement, awareness, and loyalty to a brand (Hamari and Xi, 2020). Moreover, gamification is a design strategy that aims to provide similar positive experiences to those found in games to influence user behaviour and cognitive processes (Hamari, 2019; Huotari & Hamari, 2017). Gamification is described as "a method of improving a service by providing affordances for gameful experiences to assist users' overall value generation" (Huotari & Hamari, 2017, p. 25). Gibson's (1977) idea of affordance has been investigated in areas such as marketing (e.g., de Luca et al., 2020) and human-computer interface (HCI) (e.g., Huotari & Hamari, 2011; Jung et al., 2010). As a result, gamification, through the user's voluntary involvement with the system and its affordances, promotes several psychological effects in him/her, such as increased desire and engagement, with the ultimate goal of influencing his/her behaviours (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019). Microsoft, Samsung, Nike, Alfa Romeo, and Foursquare are among the current organizational adopters. Gamification is founded on the assumption that modern ubiquitous technologies will intersect with "informed, connected, empowered, and engaged consumers" (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 6), leading to experientially based customer engagement and good relationship consequences (Soonkwan and Wang, 2011). Many modern-day experiences are digitally mediated (e.g., eHealth, eLearning, digital games, social media, online search). As a result,

understanding humans' interactions with these digital environments is now both timely and crucial (O'Brien & Cairns, 2016; O'Brien, 2018).

## **2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The term "gamification" was created in 2002 by Nick Pelling, a British video game developer (Marczewski, 2012), while traces of the phrase were reportedly discovered in 1980s publications. Over the last decade, research and development efforts to define gamification techniques have grown considerably. Bloomberg uses Gartner technology research figures to reinforce similar points, noting that a new study by research company markets & markets projects gamification will be a \$5.5B business by 2018. (Bloomberg 2014). While most studies look at the overall effect of gamification or merely use gamification as a research framework, more granular and thorough research on gamification and marketing is still lacking (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019; Rapp, Hopfgartner, Hamari, Linehan, & Cena, 2018). More crucially, brand equity has not been investigated as a dependent variable in current gamification-related work as the major structure to quantify the strength or worth of a brand. As a result, there is a study vacuum in understanding how gamification might boost brand engagement (Hamari, Xi, 2020). Hence the paper attempts to review both empirical and theoretical arguments and aspects to consider gamification as a platform and its impact on brand engagement in the marketing context.

## **3. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

Even if past research has recognized the importance of gamification, there are variances in what firms must do to attract interested individuals to the platform for optimal brand engagement. As a result, it restricts an organization's awareness of the most appropriate gamification components for engaging its target audience. The gamification components that boost consumer engagement are investigated in the first part of this study to increase the concept's application in the marketing environment.

Alongside, a comprehensive literature survey was carried out as the main research tool to explain the empirical reviews on gamification and brand engagement. It has added a discussion part by investigating how the applications of gamification have been found in different market and practice perspectives. The literature for this study was gathered from empirical and concept papers published in indexed journals on gamification and brand engagement. The main literature reviews were associated with the keywords of gamification and brand engagement to generate arguments and findings. The paper concludes with a discussion based on empirical facts and future research opportunities.

#### **4. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Gamification is defined as the application of game components and mechanics in non-game situations for user engagement and problem solving, as coined by computer programmer/game designer Nick Pelling in 2002. (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, Nacke, 2011). Gamification has been characterized by researchers as "the use of game mechanics, dynamics, and frameworks to encourage desirable behaviours" (Lee and Hammers 2011) and "the application of game design features in non-game situations" (Deterding. 2011). McGonigal (2011) defines gamification as a new e-business technique that promotes consumer engagement and increases sales. Despite its current popularity, the concept of "gamification" has been around for a long. According to Meloni and Gruener (2012), gaming aspects have been employed in company marketing operations for a long time. Gamification's rising popularity is linked to the growth of information and communication technology, and early attempts to apply gamification were episodic and costly. The rise of gamification marketing impacts not only business marketing strategy but also consumer behaviour. Gamification, as a marketing tool, may promote consumer engagement, improve product/brand awareness, and generate loyalty, in addition to increasing sales and profit. To obtain a competitive edge, practitioners must identify the fundamental aspects and crucial

features that contribute to the majority of the user experience and increase engagement using gamification in marketing (Lu and Ho, 2020).

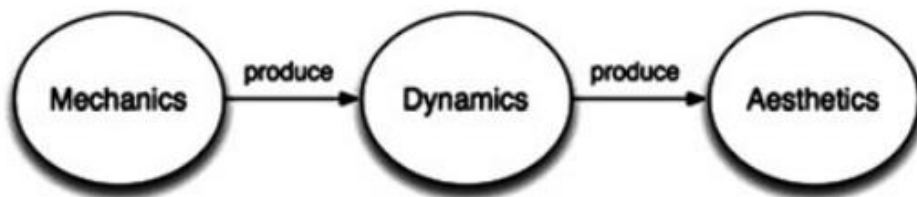
#### **4.1. Mechanics & Aesthetics**

Mechanics are the decisions made by designers who want to gamify a non-game setting to establish the goals, rules, context, types of interactions (i.e., opponents), and boundaries of the scenario to be gamified. These gamification mechanics are understood before the event begins and stay constant throughout. In other words, they do not vary from one player to the next, and they remain consistent each time a player participates in the experience. In chess, for example, the mechanics include decisions on the number of pieces, how pieces move and take pieces, the number and pattern of squares on the board, and how a winner is selected. Mechanics, in organizational control theory, are the organizational structures and technologies that managers may utilize to produce the desired behaviours and outputs (McCarthy & Gordon, 2011). Setup mechanics, rule mechanics, and progression mechanics are three sorts of mechanics that are extremely crucial not just for games but also for gamified experiences. Setup mechanics are the factors that create the experience's environment, such as the setting, what items are required, and how the things are to be divided among players. The setup mechanisms will decide whom a player will face: Is the competitor known or unknown, internal, or external, an individual or a group? These choices have an influence on the entire context of the gamified experience. The notion or aim of the gamified experience to be sought is shaped by the rule mechanics. Progression mechanics are several sorts of instruments that designers incorporate to influence the experience as it occurs (Elverdam & Aarseth, 2007).

Chatfield (2010) and Priebatsch (2010) proposed several design ideas for developing video games in their TED speeches, which, if consistently used, may help consumers engage more with the game environment and better flow with the user experience it provides. Furthermore, they claimed that when 'gamifying' a real-life event to

encourage the target population (e.g., company personnel, application users), similar ideas may and should be utilized. The following principles are summarized:

Figure No.1: Principles of Gamification



Source: MDA Framework, Hunicke et al., (2004)

Aesthetics refers to the ideal emotional responses elicited in the player when interacting with the game system (Hunicke et al. 2004). Evoking emotional reactions in individuals (e.g., enjoyment, surprise...) when they interact with the system, according to the MDA paradigm, increases their motivation and engagement. Aesthetics, according to Hunicke & al. (2004), includes:

Figure No.2: Human desires X game mechanics

Game Mechanics	Human Desires					
	Reward	Status	Achievement	Self Expression	Competition	Altruism
Points	●	●	●		●	●
Levels		●	●		●	
Challenges	●	●	●	●	●	●
Virtual Goods	●	●	●	●	●	
Leaderboards		●	●		●	●
Gifting & Charity		●	●		●	●

Suitablemechanic  
 Most suitable mechanic

Source: www. Bunchball.com (2010)

Aesthetics are a hedonistic feature of games. The purpose of the gamified system should be represented through context aesthetics in the gamification. For example, if a job is done utilizing gamified systems, the user is happy. As a result, emotional responses should not divert the user's attention away from the targeted conclusion.

## **4.2. Self - Benefits**

A gamified brand app's entertainment impact allows users to have a pleasurable experience while using it, thereby raising the app's attractiveness, and improving consumers' sentiments about the brand. When consumers' mood improves, they are more likely to recognize the brand. 2016 (Camacho, Florencio, Silva, Vázquez). When customers become involved in a brand app, their interest increases, leading them to explore the brand app more. At this point, their joy will be transferred to the items or brands with which they come into touch, resulting in a favourable brand attitude (Beatty, Landers, Mothersbaugh, Wang, 2015).

## **4.3. Social Interaction**

People utilize social networking services to communicate with friends and collaborate on assignments. When customers form Social Interaction Ties with others, they have a stronger feeling of pleasure, both physically and psychologically (Cohen and Wills, 2020). Interacting with people, allow gamers to have enjoyment. That is, the more individuals gamers meet through a brand app, the more they will be inspired by their peers and the more they will become engaged in the game. A player's psychological immersion can be enhanced by social interactions such as communication, coordination, and collaboration. People who have greater Social Interaction Ties might experience more pleasure, both psychologically and physically (Lazzaro, 2019),

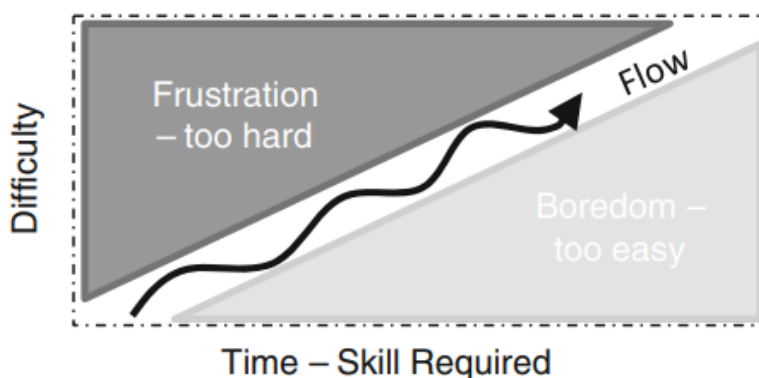
## **4.4. Self-Achievement**

The mechanics of a game are the heart of the operation and refer to the game's processes and regulations, such as how players achieve their goals and receive rewards. In a game, players receive rapid feedback such as scores, badges, upgrades, and incentives for completing barriers such as levels, tasks, and challenges, allowing them to have a better gaming experience (Chiou and Wan, 2006). The drive for

achievement is a natural tendency in humans. Achieving difficult goals in gamification may have a powerful motivating impact (Lu and Ho, 2020). According to the flow theory, an activity that seems to be the only thing that matters. The experience is so pleasurable that individuals will do it even at tremendous expense just to do it (Csikszentmihalyi 2008). Csikszentmihalyi (2008) discovered many flow characteristics. The following are closely connected to motivation and engagement and should be considered while creating gamification:

- A challenging activity that requires skills.
- Merging of action and awareness.
- Concentration on the task at hand.
- Clear goals and feedback.

Figure No.3: Flow Theory



Source: Csikszentmihalyi (2008)

#### 4.5. Brand Engagement

Consumer brand engagement research has developed dramatically in recent years, demonstrating both theoretical and practical consequences (Alexander, 2018). Individual engagement with a brand has been defined as an emotional connection between a brand and a customer (Kumar & Pansari, 2016), as a predictor of positive



marketing outcomes (Harmeling, 2017), and as a conduit to value co-creation activities (Storbacka, 2016). Brodie (2011) describes consumer brand engagement as an individual's psychological state that happens throughout brand-related activities in an ongoing, dynamic engagement process encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components. The actor's (i.e., the consumer's) psychological state can impact their commitment, bonding, and loyalty to a brand or product, leading to engagement (Brodie, 2016).

## 5. DISCUSSION

Gamification has risen as one of the trendiest marketing tools in the modern-day marketing world. Although it has become the trendiest marketing tool firms are still get struggled with planning and its functionality to have better customer engagement towards specific brands. All the consequences and considerable factors have been addressed above and to have a better gamification delivery there are few factors that have been identified by the author. In contrast to other gamified contexts that try to influence people's behaviour in other pre-determined ways, the goal of gamification in marketing is to convince customers to purchase (e.g., Raftopoulos 2014; Sharahi et al. 2014). A company creates an engaging experience that motivates an audience, or 'users,' to make a purchase. Gamification incorporates design elements that subtly or openly persuade involvement. Manipulating the pace of the game experience and the extent of congruence between the game and the product, for example, can both influence brand recall and purchasing behaviour in digital game design - a common reference point for designers of gamified systems - and more specifically within advergaming (Vashisht & Sreejesh 2015a, 2015b, 2016). So recently, research has focused on demonstrating the usefulness of gamification in a variety of situations. A few basic frameworks have also evolved (e.g., Maican et al. 2016; Plangger et al. 2016; Raftopoulos 2014; Robson et al. 2015). Marketing contributes to the creation of gamified systems in both theory and practice: it is a starting point for investigating

the possible need for more specific monitoring in the sector and how this may be created.

As a final theoretical starting point, we define gamification as distinct from other types of persuasive marketing. On the one hand, they both pose ethical issues regarding manipulation and opaque processes. Personalized digital marketing, for example, works by tracking internet surfing histories using cookies (Simon et al. 2016), but it raises concerns about how aware consumers are of this process. These difficulties apply to low-tech marketing approaches, which frequently rely on subconscious perception and sensemaking. Product packaging, for example, is frequently made to be deliberately persuading (e.g., Rundh 2005; Spence 2016; Velasco et al. 2015). 'Good' gamification is successful gamification from a strategic and organizational standpoint. The company creates an engaging experience in order to achieve the desired behavioural effect. A successful outcome in marketing often pertains to monetary benefit for the company - for example, targeted consumers purchasing (more of) the firm's products or services. Although consumers are aware of their involvement, the gamification process still requires significant hidden action. Users may be unaware that some aspects of the experience are intended to affect their behaviour, for example. These impacts, in fact, function best when they are as subtle and covert as possible. Furthermore, corporations may purposefully conceal the intended consequence from users.

We acknowledge, however, that social media now allows customers to endorse or criticize companies (Bernritter et al. 2016; Dessart et al. 2015; Scheinbaum 2016). In some ways, this 'customer engagement behaviour' (van Doorn et al. 2010) allows traditional marketing tactics to piggyback on the fuller interaction given by social media platforms, perhaps allowing for larger levels of 'consumer brand engagement' (Hollebeek 2011, 2013). However, this contrasts with gamification, which provides considerably more complicated, intense, and repeated prepurchase interaction that is purposely placed into systems to affect engagement more extensively. When

conventional marketing is combined with social media, the company has less control over when, when, and how people tweet and publish, and cannot censor content.

When it comes to the literature findings, it suggests that there are several factors that need to be considered when providing better customer engagement for the target audience of an organization. In this study, the author has identified six broad factors namely mechanics & aesthetics, self-benefits, social interaction, and self-achievement. The usage of mobile commerce would also be an avenue to penetrate the gamification as a business opportunity by providing easy access opportunities for clients as per some studies highlight the advancements of mobile commerce in general (Dissanayake & Velananda, 2020). Accordingly, it is noticed that gamification has grown in significance in mobile e-commerce platforms as a means of enticing users and promoting subsequent visits. Overall, adding gamification to mobile e-commerce platforms can boost their competitiveness in the crowded e-commerce space, improve user experience, and produce positive financial outcomes. However, there are certain grey areas that do not seem to be more focused on organizations. This involves advanced technology implications with instruments necessary that are rarely identified by corporate organizations and are not effectively identified by customers and the four identified factors are directly related to gamification. Accordingly, Mechanics & Aesthetics, Self-benefits, Social-interaction and self-achievement have been claimed in many studies that determine or explain the concept of gamification (Lu & Ho,2020). The measures of the sub dimensions of gamification have been summarized in the undermentioned table.

*Table 1: Measures of Gamification Dimensions*

Concept	Variable	Measurement/Indicators	Sources
Gamification	Mechanics & Aesthetics	Tasks	MDA Framework (Lu and Ho, 2020)
		Rewards	
		Levels	
		Upgrades	
		Interface	
		Altruism	

	Self-benefits	Success	
		Overcome Challenges	
		Team Achievements	
	Self-Achievement	Conflict	
		Competition	
		Challenges	
	Self-Interaction	Consumer Attitudes	
		Sense of Pleasure	

## 6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This paper made an attempt to explain various gamification-related components at the consumer and company levels. However, in future research, these criteria should be assessed using empirical data, namely from consumers who have participated in or are considering participating in gamification activities. Furthermore, gamification was investigated in this study from both a consumer and a company standpoint. Integrating diverse platforms in the marketing environment, on the other hand, will accelerate the benefits of gamification. As a result, future researchers may focus on social media-based gamification, website-based gamification, multi-gamification and so on.

Despite being utilized in marketing for many years, gamification is still in its infancy. There are 'growing pains' (Hamari & Parvinen 2016, p. 1307): Models that have been empirically tested are few, with some missing focus and rigour; industry-led frameworks depend too heavily on games to influence their design and ethical thought, which is particularly deceptive at the detailed level (Deterding 2015). More effective gamification will emerge as research advances and becomes more incorporated into practice, but ethical difficulties will arise. This is due to the fact that 'good' gamification is based on techniques that frame the purchasing decision in a way that manipulates people into purchasing.

Although not a novel concept in marketing, gamification raises more ethical considerations about damage and deceit due to the level to which involvement becomes feasible. Specifics vary depending on the ethical perspective used. Nonetheless, there appears to be a compelling case for ethical concern in some areas. Moreover, this concept can be further investigated from the vast technological process and equipment perspective, AI-based gamification bots, multi-gamification activities etc.

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