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Examining the impact of gamification on intention of engagement and brand attitude in the marketing context

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ABSTRACT

The development of multiple applications with features of games has brought about a new trend – gamification. Gamification has become a fast-emerging practice in the business world, with a growing number of organizations adopting gaming techniques and game-style rewards in order to increase customer engagement. Despite this growing trend and the potential role played by gamification, the marketing literature lacks models that explain the use of gamification in the marketing context, customers' perceptions of gamification and its effects on their attitudes towards the brand. This study addresses this omission by adopting the TAM framework in a gamification context. Similar to TAM, gamification finds its roots in the technology and information systems literature. Drawing on TAM, this study presents a model that examines the effects of gamification on customers' intention to engage in the gamification process and their attitudes toward the brand. Using a quantitative methodology, the results provide empirical support for perceived usefulness and perceived enjoyment as predictors to intention of engagement and brand attitude. However, perceived ease of use was surprisingly found not to be significantly related to people's intention of engagement with the gamification process and their brand attitude. In addition, perceived social influence was found not to be related to people's intention of engagement, but was related to their brand attitude. The findings of this research have theory and practical implications.

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1. Introduction

The concept of gamification and its mechanics in non-gaming environments has become a fast-emerging practice in business, especially in marketing. Though in its infancy, the dynamics and techniques of gamification have been found to be easily transferrable from their gaming software origins into the world of commerce. The use of gamification tools and methods has the potential to benefit organizations from all industries because of their fundamental potential to shape and influence behaviors and attitudes. A growing number of organizations are adopting gaming techniques and game-style rewards in order to increase customer engagement (Gartner Research, 2011). Despite the practical importance of gamification, current gamification literature remains anecdotal and lacks academic rigour (Hamari, Koivisto, & Sarsa,

2014). In other words, a conceptualisation of gamification for a specific purpose has rarely been provided when people have undertaken academic research in gamification in various contexts. Second, since gamification is a relatively new concept, it is largely unclear how an effective design can be realised (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011) for a specific purpose. Burk (2013) noted that there are often unrealistic expectations of success, and consequently many businesses are implementing gamification without a proper examination of whether or not gamification is the right instrument to improve their business processes. Due to poor design of gamification, some practices have failed in reaching business objectives (Gartner Research, 2012). Furthermore, there is no uniform approach to developing and successfully implementing gamification aspects in an existing process. This means that there is limited knowledge on how gamification can be structurally applied in many processes. It is also unknown if gamification is appropriate for changing people's behavior or attitude in all types of business processes (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004). Third, academic evidence of the effects or benefits of gamification is lacking.

Gamification is regarded as a new technology-based system

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which has been applied to different areas. In the field of information systems, technology acceptance theories have examined the adoption of technology-based systems. In particular, the technology acceptance model (TAM) is a well-established, robust and parsimonious model for predicting user acceptance. However, the model has been criticised for disregarding other important aspects (e.g. social aspects) that may predict technology acceptance. The model is also said to overlook other types of behavioral intentions or attitudes specific to particular contexts. Through an extension of the TAM model, this study aims to examine the concept of gamification in the marketing context through and its effects on users' engagement intention and attitude towards the brand.

2. Literature review

2.1. Gamification

Gamification is a relatively new term, especially when it is used in relation to the internet, but it is not a new concept. The roots of gamification originate in the digital media industry (Deterding et al., 2011) and started out with the term “funware” (Tahashi, 2008). Gabe Zichermann first employed this term. The author defined it as “the art and science of turning your customer's everyday interactions into games that serve your business purposes” (Zichermann & Linder, 2010, p. 20). Gamification gained widespread recognition in the 2010s, when several industry players popularised it (Deterding, 2011). Companies like Bunchball and Badgeville created platforms for integrating game elements into sites.

Gamification is perceived as a system applying game design elements to a non-game context to change people's behavior (Bunchball, 2010). Gamification is viewed as an entertainment system based on technologies which combine wireless devices with communication forms (Lule, Omwansa, & Waema, 2012). In the past few years, gamification has been applied to numerous applications across diverse areas, such as information systems and social sciences. Gamification describes a number of design principles, processes and systems used to influence, engage and motivate individuals, groups and communities to drive behaviors (intentions) or generate the desired effect (Deterding et al., 2011; Glover, 2013; Nicholson, 2012).

2.2. Gamification for marketing

Due to the rise and popularity of games in marketing activities, the new trend of gamification has attracted the attention of marketers. It is slowly being embedded in the minds of marketing executives, and the gamification market is expected to grow to \$2.8 billion in 2016 (Meloni & Gruener, 2012). In a 2013 survey, more than 70% of Forbes Global 2000 companies stated that they planned to use gamification for marketing and customer retention purposes (Park & Bae, 2014).

Due to improvements in the productivity and development of technologies, customers are becoming more and more selective in how and where they spend their money and time. Accordingly, companies are pressurized to find new ways to adapt their marketing strategies in order to attract customers' attention and keep them engaged in the process. The marketing area is highly innovative and sophisticated in deploying new ideas and phenomena, so many companies have used gamification in the marketing area for branding, including earning points, badges and free products through playing games or joining competitive activities. Companies can also take back control of the brand experience by engaging users, encouraging them to join a community, driving active participation, sharing with friends outside the community and

even recruiting friends to join the community (Meloni & Gruener, 2012). Therefore, a particularly compelling, dynamic and sustained gamification experience can be used to accomplish a variety of marketing goals. Pioneering participants include Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Nike and Sony.

In this paper, the authors refer to gamification as a system applying game design elements to a non-game context in order to generate playful experiences and influence users' attitude and/or behavior. Gamification can be perceived as a form of service packaging, where a core service is enhanced by a rule-based service system that provides feedback and interaction mechanisms to the user with the aim of facilitating and supporting the users' overall behavior or attitude change. In this case, the core service can also be a game that can be further gamified (Huotari & Hamari, 2011).

2.3. Motivations and effects of gamification

2.3.1. Motivations of gamification

There are generally two types of human motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Extrinsic motivation involves doing something for its external rewards, like money, praise or other tangibles. Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, drives behaviors that result in internal achievement or perception, like enjoyment or other positive feelings (Denny, 2014). Traditionally, it was believed that intrinsic motivation was more desirable if it resulted in a better learning outcome (Deci, Koestelr, & Ryan, 1999). As gamification marketing process is normally committed to instil products or brands information to users, it is a drive for participants to learn the information and further join or continue an action – in our case, engaging with gamification – because of the effects it has. Therefore, when people are intrinsically motivated, they have a genuine desire for the activity itself and enjoy it tremendously. Two main intrinsic motivation theories guided the understanding of psychological aspects associated with participation or engagement behavior. The theory of 16 basic desires (Reiss, 2000) was employed to understand innate human desires along with foundations for collaborative engagement in business, providing utility for analyzing and predicting human behavior, which includes Order, Power, Independence, Curiosity, Acceptance, Saving, Idealism, Honor, Social Contact, Family, Status, Vengeance, Romance, Eating, Physical Activity, and Tranquility. In addition, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) framed a motivation model for understanding what and how human behavior is initiated and regulated. It recognizes social and environmental conditions that affect personal volition and engagement in activities. This theory also combines both psychological needs and cognition motivations describing needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Hence, it is interesting to note that both of these theories modelled a close association between people's basic desire, social aspects and cognitive factors. In the context of gamification for marketing, if the social needs and cognitive motives are inherently intertwined with “play”, users may be affected by those factors in behavior or attitude.

In addition, in game studies, it is evident that the motivational and emotional involvement during playing can be immense. The basic idea of gamification is to use this motivational power of games for other purposes not solely related to the entertaining purposes of the game itself. As some recent research illustrates, gamification systems are currently used with aims as diverse as influencing behavior or attitude, motivating for physical workout, fostering safe driving behavior, and enhancing learning in education (e.g. McGonigal, 2011). However, although gamification is often supposed to be an effective instrument to foster motivation, researches and investigations about the motivational pull of gamification are scarce, especially for marketing use.

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