Executive Summary

WTG (Way to Go)! How to Take Gamification Research in Marketing to the Next Level

By René Eppmann, Kristina Klein, and Magdalena Bekk

Gamification is currently one of the major trending topics in marketing and business practice. Although a large managerial interest in gamification exists, academic literature so far does not offer much explanations regarding what gamification really is and why and when it works. To fill this gap, this paper begins with discussing prominent perspectives of gamification and proposes to understand gamification as the enhancement of an autonomous (core) entity with game elements (e. g., missions, rewards, engaging stories) as affordances for gameful experience in a non-game context (e. g., market research). This definition emphasizes the importance of gameful experience (i. e., feelings that typically result from playing games), which represents an affective reaction to game elements. Ultimately, the goal of gamification is to positively affect consumers’ brand evaluations. This paper provides a theory-based research framework, which identifies important and promising avenues for future research to guide empirical research on the question of why and when gamification results in positive brand evaluations.

Although gamification uses game elements as affordances for gameful experience, which in turn should positively affect consumers’ brand evaluations, managers need to be aware that not all game elements elicit (the same level of) gameful experience. Therefore, some gamified entities might fail to positively affect brand evaluations. Additionally, even potential negative effects of gamification on brand evaluation might exist, which may result from the specific design of some game elements (e. g., the degree of challenge and specific outcome options like losing or winning) or in the usage of gamification per se. The research framework allows to further identify potential moderating factors (such as consumers’ innovativeness or their optimum stimulation level), which may influence the effects discussed and provide potential answers to the question when gamification works.

Managers will benefit from this research framework in several ways. First, it sheds light on why positive effects of gamification might occur, namely due to the positive feelings people have when using a gamified entity, that is, gameful experience. Second, it cautions managers in that gamified entities might not always be effective in positively influencing consumers’ brand evaluations, particularly depending on how gamified entities are designed. Third, the framework assists managers in identifying factors they can use to potentially reduce the risk of investing in a gamified entity that might fail its objectives. Fourth, the framework demonstrates potential negative effects of gamification on brand evaluation, which managers need to carefully consider until future research comes up with solutions to avoid the risk of such negative effects.