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Balancing Entertainment and Behaviour value: M-games as a Social marketing Agent of Change

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Abstract

In a marketplace where millions of dollars are spent on the design of mobile games (m-games), social marketers are now using this technology as a tool for behaviour change. Despite high expenditure by governments and non-profits on social marketing m-games, little is known about their effectiveness in terms of creating value. Value creation has been demonstrated to have an important impact on satisfaction and behaviour. This paper reports the results of a qualitative study involving four focus groups with 23 participants to reveal two categories of experiential value, entertainment and behaviour. Additionally, it was discovered that entertainment could be characterised by amusement and social value dimensions. Whereas, behaviour could be made up of information, simulation and distraction value dimensions. The categories of value, as well as the dimensions of information, simulation and distraction are entirely new to the social marketing literature and thus represents a unique contribution to social marketing.

Keywords: experiential value, mobile games, technology, social marketing

Track: Social Marketing

Introduction

Technological trends in the marketplace have created difficulties for social marketers seeking to reach consumers using traditional marketing channels. Social marketing interventions using conventional products and services, such as water counters for water conservation or condoms for sexual health, are experiencing diminishing effectiveness in encouraging target audiences to uptake and sustain a behaviour (Luca et al., 2010). In light of the technological trends in the marketplace and diminishing marketing effectiveness of traditional approaches, social marketers have been encouraged to look for alternate means to deliver their value offerings (Bernhardt et al., 2012). Value is an important concept for social marketing as it assists in understanding consumers evaluation of goods and services used in social interventions (Russell-Bennett et al., 2009). Further, value has been shown to be critical driver of key marketing outcomes including satisfaction, service quality and repeat behaviour (Cronin Jr et al., 2000). Indeed, recent empirical studies in social marketing have demonstrated the importance of value in the use of social marketing goods and services, particularly in the context of free preventative health screenings for women (Zainuddin et al., 2013).

M-games in social marketing are a particularly interesting area of research as they differ to traditional commercial games based upon their intent (improve individuals lives and society vs generating a profit). Social marketing m-games are complex in that they try and motivate consumers to use the game through entertainment and other hedonic natured experiences (Jones et al., 2006). Further, they try and provide players with the ability to change their behaviour through functional and utilitarian benefits including tools and simulations which can be used to attain social goals (Jones, et al., 2006). Therefore, as social marketing m-games are so complex and have a different intent to commercial m-games, existing gaming literature which focuses on entertainment cannot be easily used to explain the type of value created for a social marketing m-game. Further, whilst m-games have been used and researched in similar fields including health and commercial marketing, little research has investigated the value created through a social marketing m-game which aims to both entertain and reach a social goal. This research addresses this theoretical gap.

Literature Review

Many scholars acknowledge that experiential value is contextually bound (Gummerus et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2011). As a result, it is difficult to apply previous value research to the context of social marketing m-games, especially when social marketing research is primarily in non-technological services (Zainuddin, et al., 2013) and mobile research is commercially focused (Kleijnen et al., 2007; Pura, 2005). Nevertheless, a review of previous experiential value frameworks can provide insight into potential value dimensions and aid in understanding the value created by social marketing m-games. Two major experiential frameworks are reviewed here: Sweeney and Soutar (2001) and Mathwick et al. (2001).

Sweeney and Soutar (2001) Framework

The framework developed by Sweeney and Soutar (2001) suggests that consumers seek products and services that offer functional, emotional, social and price value. Support for this framework has been found in a number of contexts, including social marketing, with Zainuddin, Russell-Bennett and Previte (2013) showing that emotional and social value (and not functional or price value) influenced participation in breast screening services for older women. Gaming research suggests that games have the potential to positively contribute to people's social and emotional wellbeing. Socially, games have been shown to encourage group interaction and involvement, resulting in significant friendships and personal development (Krotoski, 2004). They also support both short-term and long-term social

behaviours (Gentile et al., 2009). Emotionally, games have been shown to contribute to positive emotions including relaxation and reduced stress when played in moderation (Olson et al., 2007). However there is more to value in a social marketing m-Game than just the social and emotional elements. Sweeney and Soutar's (2001) conceptualisation of experiential value does not focus on interactive ability of technological mediums such as mobiles. Technology allows for collaboration and interaction between organisations and customers to co-create value (Vargo & Lusch, 2008) and thus a unique aspect of value may be present when technology is involved. Therefore, given Sweeney and Soutar's (2001) framework of experiential value does not incorporate value derived from technological mediums such as social marketing m-games, another conceptualisation relevant specifically for technology may provide additional insights. One such approach was proposed by Mathwick, et al. (2001).

Mathwick et al. (2001) Framework

The value framework proposed by Mathwick et al. (2001) proposes four dimensions of experiential value for an online context: playfulness, aesthetics, customer return on investment (CROI) and service excellence. Their framework has been applied to electronic marketing tools including websites, blogs (Keng et al., 2009) and even m-Games (Okazaki, 2008). Okazaki (2008) examined the pleasure sought by players adopting m-Games and found that the experiential value dimensions proposed by Mathwick et al. (2001), particularly playfulness, CROI and aesthetics, were applicable and useful in this context. These findings suggest that Mathwick et al.'s (2001) framework provides useful insights to explaining the value package consumers experience and enjoy in an online entertainment venue such as m-games. Although Mathwick et al. (2001) framework of experiential value fills some gaps when investigating, the related theoretical concept of Service-Dominant (S-D) logic (Vargo et al., 2004) hints that some important experiential value dimensions are still potentially missing. Likewise all prior studies in value and m-games have been in the commercial sector with a focus on entertainment rather than for behaviour change or maintenance of a social behaviours. Given that the needs of a consumer to be entertained (momentary utility) are different to the needs of a consumer seeking to change/maintain a socially desirable behaviour (long-term utility), it is likely that additional value specifically related to long-term social behaviour is required. Thus the current research fills this gap by exploring the dimensions of experiential value created by social marketing m-games.

Method

Four qualitative focus groups were conducted with 23 participants aged 18-35 years and lasted between 1 hour and 1 hour 15 minutes each. The groups were semi-structured, with the use of an interview guide, but this was not followed rigidly and discussions were flexible based upon participant responses. Purposeful sampling (Coyné, 1997) was used, which involved the selection of smart phone owners aged 18-35 years of age, as this demographic is generally the target of most social marketing m-games, making information rich responses more likely. Further, using a sample of current smart phone owners allowed for the downloading and playing of social marketing m-games in the focus group. At the start of the focus groups, participants were presented with four games to choose from: *Dumb Ways to Die*, *My Quit Buddy*, *Quit for You Quit for Two* and *City GT*. These games were selected because they were part of a social marketing or behaviour based programs focused on voluntary behaviour change. Participants played their chosen game for 10 minutes, followed by discussion. Once collected, the data was then analysed using a hybrid of inductive coding, using an open coding technique; and deductive coding using an axial coding technique.

Results and Discussion

Thematic analysis revealed two categories of experiential value created from social marketing m-games, which were entertainment and behaviour. From these two categories five dimensions of experiential of value were identified which fell under the categories of entertainment and behaviour, these included: amusement, social, information, simulation and distraction value (see Figure 1).

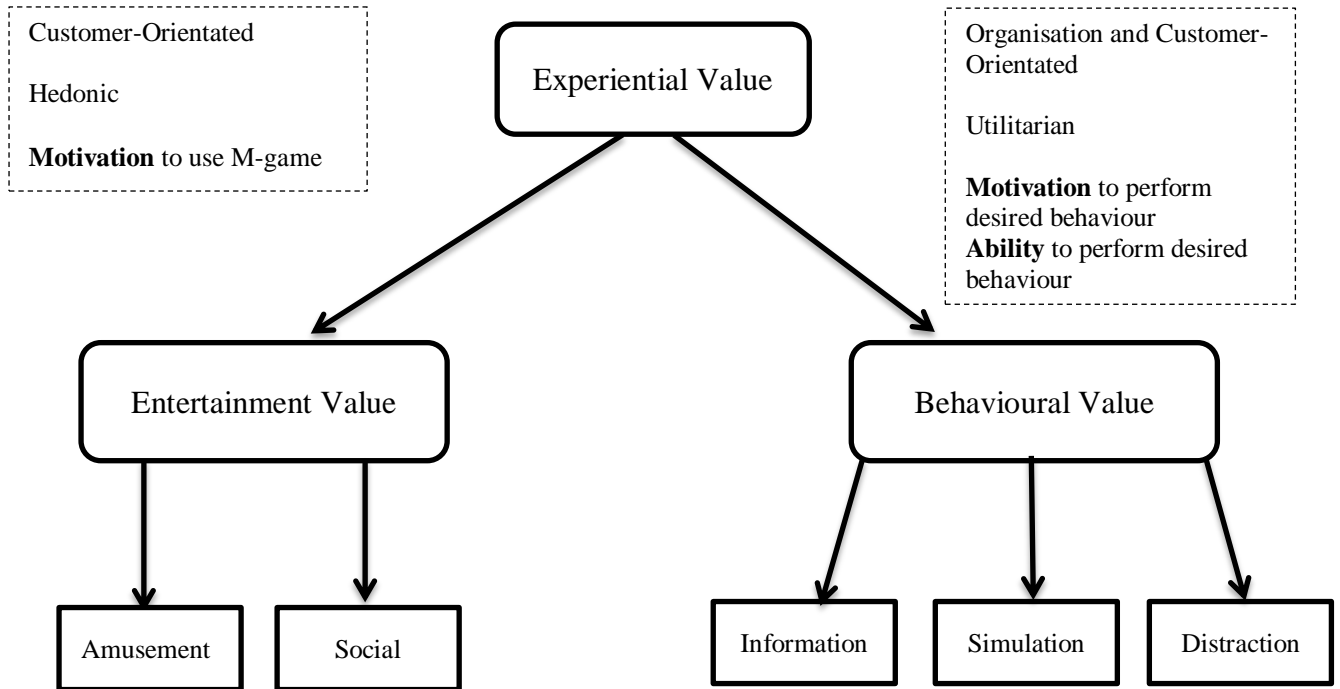


Figure 1: Experiential Value Categories and Dimensions in Social Marketing M-games

While some dimensions were comparable with the two previous experiential value frameworks, an additional three dimensions emerged that were unique to a social marketing m-game. The dimensions identified in the data that were comparable to aspects of Mathwick et al. (2001) and Sweeney and Soutar's (2001) frameworks were amusement and social dimensions. Similar to Mathwick et al.'s (2001) dimensions of playfulness and aesthetics and Sweeney and Soutar's (2001) social and emotional dimensions, amusement and social value identified in the data were hedonically motivated and focused upon aspects which reflected multi-sensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of the social marketing m-game experience. Further, amusement and social were similar in that they were customer-orientated, as they were valuable benefits sought primarily by the consumer when using and experiencing the service, in this instance using a social marketing m-game. These two dimensions were categorised as entertainment value in the proposed typology. The three new experiential value dimensions specific to the behavioural goal aspect of social marketing were; informational, simulation and distraction. These were classified as behavioural value in the proposed typology. Unlike the value dimensions categorised as entertainment, information, simulation and distraction value were focused on the behaviour targeted by the m-game. As such, these dimensions enhanced a player's motivation to change their behaviour as well as provide the skills and ability necessary to carry out the behaviour. Thus behavioural value reflects a more functional and utilitarian aspect of the value created by social marketing m-games. The following section will explore these experiential value dimensions in more detail.

Entertainment Experiential Value Dimensions

Amusement Value

The first dimension of entertainment experiential value to emerge from the data was amusement value, which refers to the enjoyment consumers feel and experience when using a social marketing m-game (Mathwick et al., 2001; Sweeney et al., 2001). Like Mathwick et al.'s (2001) playfulness and aesthetic dimensions, this can be characterised by enjoyment/entertainment and visual experiences. As one participant explained, the social marketing m-game he played provided enjoyment:

"I actually think it was pretty fun. Like you know, I don't usually enjoy things like that. Yeah, I liked just the quick pace of it and instantly changing the game almost" Respondent 10, Dumb Ways to Die.

Whereas, participants also discussed how they valued games which were represented well visually and how this impacted on the amusement the game provided:

"I did the Dumb Ways to Die game. Just when you look at it, out of all the games it was the most colourful, engaging sort of thing. It had a lot of different characters and the cartoony look of it sort of appealed to me. Sort of looked like it would be fun to play". Respondent 16, Dumb Ways to Die

Social Value

Social value was the second entertainment experiential value to be identified within the data, which can be characterised as the social relationships and connections built or enhanced via a social marketing m-game (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001)

It appears to be created in two distinct ways: via social competition and social connectedness. Social marketing m-games can create social value by providing consumers with a medium to **compete** socially against peers and family. This is illustrated by the following participant comment:

"I actually based a lot of my gaming off being competitive. For example I just got up my Dumb Ways to Die score to check if I beat these guys...I only play until I beat another person" Respondent 13, City GT.

Social marketing m-games can also create social value by offering consumers an experience where they can interact with peers and family as a way of feeling **connected**. The following quote is indicative:

"It's just something easy to do and to connect with everyone. So you can also play your mates and like that and on the go" Respondent 9, City GT.

Behavioural Experiential Value Dimension

Information Value

The first behavioural experiential value dimension to emerge from the data was information, which can be characterised as reminders, data, facts and figures which a social marketing m-game provides users. Additionally, this information is used to increase motivation and knowledge of how to perform the desired behaviour. Information value was evident in three of the four social marketing m-games: *My Quit Buddy*, *Quit for You Quit for Two* and *City GT*. In *My Quit Buddy* and *Quit for You Quit for Two*, players were provided with information about the consequences of smoking and the benefits of quitting, as well as helpful tips of how to quit. Participants indicated that this provided value to those who played these games as illustrated by the following response:

"I do like the idea of the calculator and being able to track how much money you have saved. Like having a reminder like that is good because with something like cigarettes where it's a small amount like \$20 they do eventually add up." Respondent 14, My Quit Buddy

Whereas, for *City GT* players discussed how it was useful that the game explained the dangers of using a phone whilst driving with an audio cue, as explained by the following response:

"And when you completed the game it came up at the end it came up with your four times more likely to have an accident when using your phone." Respondent 11, City GT

Simulation Value

The second behavioural experiential value dimension that was discovered within the data was simulation value. This refers to social marketing m-games tasks representing real life situations that provide players the ability to practice desired social behaviours. Simulation value was evident in two of the four games, namely *City GT* and *Dumb Ways to Die*. In the *City GT* game players described how they appreciated how the game simulated real driving and a “fake” phone call as described by the following respondent:

“I liked the fact that it did test you and didn’t warn you in any way that you were going to receive a phone call and how that was incorporated into the game. Like I honestly thought it was someone trying to call me. And I was like well....I won’t answer it.” Respondent 9, *City GT*

Whereas, in the *Dumb Ways to Die* game, players were provided with a simulation in terms of controlling an anthropomorphized character which they could perform desired train safe behaviour such as pulling the character behind the yellow safety line. Players described that such tasks and simulation was a valued part of the game, however this was not frequent enough throughout gameplay as illustrated by the following response:

“So the actual game to do with train safety I only did one that whole time I played. I don’t know whether it’s reminding you often... So maybe the frequency of actually reminding you about the purpose of the game would have been enhanced if they did that more often.” Respondent 4, *Dumb Ways to Die*

Distraction Value

The third value dimension related to behaviour that emerged from the data was distraction. Distraction value is created by social marketing m-games which are used to distract users from performing an undesired behaviour. For example, the *My Quit Buddy* and *Quit for You and Quit for Two* games are designed to be used as a distraction when users are craving a cigarette. From the data it was evident that this would be a valued outcome from using a social marketing m-game built for such purposes as distractions when craving cigarettes. However, participants mostly indicated that games were not designed sophisticatedly enough for this value to be experienced for an extended period of time:

“I mean, its intended for when I have a craving. Right? its mindless it keeps me occupied. So I mean I would say it’s adequate, not fantastic (at distracting me), because it doesn’t engage me to the point where I’m really thinking about it or excited about it (the game). So it’s just barely over the line of holding my interest.” Respondent 5, *My Quit Buddy*

Implications and Conclusion

The current research explores the experiential value in social marketing m-games and reveals that two categories of experiential value exist, entertainment and behaviour, along with five dimensions of value: amusement, social, information, simulation and distraction. Interestingly, it appears that social marketing m-games can create value based upon the gaming experience itself (entertainment) as well as for the social marketing cause (behaviour). The value dimensions of information, simulation and distraction have not been identified in previous marketing literature on customer value and thus this research makes a unique contribution to that literature. This is unique from other m-games especially in commercial marketing, which primarily focus more upon entertainment as the intended value outcome. These results contribute to recent scholarly discussions regarding value creation in social marketing. Further, this research builds upon the works of Mathwick et al. (2001) and Sweeney and Soutar (2001) to explore value in a social marketing m-game specific context. The findings have important implications for social marketers practitioners, demonstrating the complex creation of value in m-games used for social interventions. It is important to note that the value dimensions identified in social marketing m-games can vary by game and importantly, by player as well. Future research should endeavour to uncover how these dimensions of experiential value are influenced by game attributes (characteristics) and how this in turn impacts on player satisfaction.

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