



Ethical Considerations in Gamified Interactive Marketing Praxis

Samaan Al-Msallam, Nannan Xi, and Juho Hamari

I INTRODUCTION

From board games to video games, from the 3D environment to metaverse; technologies, practices and culture from gaming have been increasingly gamifying contemporary reality. Gamification refers to both the general ludic turn where games, play, and gamefulness are becoming more prominent aspects of culture, and practice; gamification also refers to the intentional pursuit of design for affording similar experiences as games do such as in the context of designing products, services, organizational structures or interactive marketing (Hamari, 2019). The premise behind attempting to gamify is often related to the expected effect of gamification to increase individuals' and consumers' positive psychology when it comes to e.g. intrinsic motivation, engagement, playfulness, and creativity. Through this added value, vendors expect that gamified interactive marketing efforts lead to better business performance (Xi & Hamari, 2020). As such, gamification has also become commonplace in contemporary marketing praxis, and especially, on its interactive wing

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S. Al-Msallam (✉) · N. Xi · J. Hamari
Tampere University, Tampere, Finland
e-mail: samaan.almasalm@tuni.fi

N. Xi
University of Vaasa, Vaasa, Finland

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such as in relation to e.g. efforts such as facilitating information delivery (Hsieh & Yang, 2020; Lee, 2019), accelerating service transformation (Kao & Chueh, 2022; Shi et al., 2017), increasing customer engagement (Eisingerich et al., 2019; Hollebeek et al., 2021; Wang, 2021; Xi & Hamari, 2019), and enhancing brand management (Nobre & Ferreira, 2017; Xi & Hamari, 2020). Some of the successful international and well-known gamification marketing campaigns include the Chanel Coco Game Center, Alipay Ant Forest, Nike + Run Club, and Samsung Nation.

However, as gamification commonly, either more or less directly, is related to attempts at affecting consumers' psychological states and continued engagement, a critical reflection of the ethical ramifications of gamification is crucial. Hazards such as manipulation, exploitation, psychological distress, and conflicts with cultural norms are considered as potential challenges that should be observed. Nevertheless, there is a current lack of examination of gamification's ethical implications in the marketing context. For example, game elements such as points, badges, and rewards have been widely embedded into promotion campaigns which would easily induce and lure consumers into making irrational and unsustainable decisions, and induce compulsive consumption; in customer loyalty programmes, level-up-related game mechanisms may often lead to excess competition and extra social pressure; additionally, privacy risk and information overload are ubiquitous in gamified online platforms, communities, and services (Hass et al., 2021; Seo et al., 2021; Trang & Weiger, 2019). Such risks and concerns in gamified marketing practices would have negative effects on the long-term business sustainability (Algashami et al., 2019), and might be detrimental to consumer wellbeing, business ecosystems, environment, and sustainable development in the long run (Ghassemlou et al., 2018; Shahri et al., 2014; Yang & Li, 2021;).

Moreover, empirical evidence regarding the negative outcomes of gamification can hardly be found in the existing literature, especially in relation to the ethical considerations of gamified marketing. More importantly, there is a lack of in-depth understanding and comprehensive discussion on how consumers may perceive physiological risk and ethical aspects in marketing activities involving e.g. information searching, alternatives evaluation, consumption decision, and post-purchase evaluation, where gamification mechanisms, design principles, and technologies have been embedded. Accordingly, this chapter expands the discussion on the ethical aspects of using gamification in interactive marketing. More specifically, through exploring ethical concerns related to the use of gamification in the marketing practices and shedding light on the factors influencing ethical consumer judgement on gamification practices, this chapter enriches the academic knowledge about the ethics of gamification as an interactive marketing tool, and gives more rigorous conclusions that help academic researchers understand how consumers interpret the gamified experience from an ethical perspective. In addition, this chapter helps marketers and gamification designers, as well as policymakers, in monitoring the ethical aspects during the stages of designing and implementing gamification, which will further increase consumers' trust and nudge sustainability.

2 THE ETHICS OF GAMIFICATION

2.1 *Concept*

Like other marketing tools which are subject to criticism and ethical examination such as loyalty programmes, advertising, distribution, and sales techniques (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009; Vermillion, 2002), gamification, touted as one of the effective interactive marketing techniques for engaging consumers, is naturally vulnerable to ethical failings (Hyrynsalmi et al., 2017; Jacobs, 2020; Kim & Werbach, 2016; Kwon & Özpolat, 2021; Thorpe & Roper, 2019). Ethics is a domain of treatise of principles, theories, and world-views according to which virtue can be assessed (Vitell, 1986). Individual morals are determined through a set of values and rules that regulate and direct the behaviour of individuals and groups to distinguish between right and wrong, and how individuals act towards others in different situations (Esmer & Aribaş, 2022; Tsalikis & Fritzsche, 2013; Vitell, 1986). As stated above, one of the ultimate goals of applying ethical principles in this context is to increase granularity and diversity of perspective on what can be considered ethical and unethical in gamification practices (Li et al., 2021; Tsalikis & Fritzsche, 2013). When examining the ethics of gamification, it is important to avoid reductionist approaches which focus on one single measure of ethics or one ethical aspect. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the ethics of gamification from a more comprehensive perspective by emphasizing the following three main tenets. First, there is no single dimension along which right or wrong in gamification practice can be defined (Kim & Werbach., 2016). Encouraging sustainable consumption, directing consumers to work as a team, replacing virtual prizes and badges with donations to non-profit organizations, and increasing public knowledge of consumers; all these and similar objectives are more virtuous if the mechanics of gamification are designed around them than merely seeking to attract consumers and increase sales. For instance, marketers might use a challenge-based gamification design in the form of a quiz to increase consumer engagement (Noorbehbahani et al., 2019). However, the means and purposes might differ, and while some might design the gamified quiz to provide consumers with useful questions and answers to improve their knowledge of significant issues (e.g. sustainability issues), such a design may be considered more ethical and acceptable compared with other designs that involve quizzes with questions that explore consumers' purchase habits and then use the resultant data to track the consumer and send programmatic advertising. By this point, absolute or general judgments on whether or not gamification practices are ethical (or as we prefer to call it, "prejudice to the gamification") may lack accuracy and credibility, and do not consider the context in which the gamification practice was used.

Secondly, as one of the effective persuasive technologies, gamification has been believed to influence and change the attitudes and behaviours of consumers in interactive marketing practices (Jacobs, 2020; Thorpe & Roper, 2019; Vashisht, 2021). Accordingly, there are mainly two ethical

orientations in gamified interactive marketing: namely, the ethics of technology and the ethics of marketing. The former involves issues include e.g. data privacy, manipulation, and autonomy (Berdichevsky & Neuenschwander, 1999; Jacobs, 2020); the latter is often related to the purpose of using gamification such as for achieving unethical and unsustainable marketing goals; such goals may include marketing environmentally harmful, poor quality and shoddy products, and targeting vulnerable consumers (Hass et al., 2021; Tsalikis & Fritzsche, 2013). The major point here is that seeing the ethics of gamification only from the marketing side will likely lead to partial or inaccurate judgments. In such cases, the ethical dilemmas related to the means involved in gamification design will not be considered; instead, the focus will be on examination only of whether the benefits are good or evil.

Thirdly, moral judgement in relation to different gamification practices are affected by many overlapping factors (Khaled, 2015; Oravec, 2020; Shahri et al., 2014; Thorpe & Roper, 2019), such as politics, customs, traditions, and the differences between cultures. Moreover, consumers' ethical beliefs, and the impact of prior experiences with gamification will lead to differing ethical judgments for consumers towards gamification. This chapter focuses particularly on examining consumers' perspectives towards the ethics of gamification, and what factors could impact their ethical judgement. The following section will examine the most prominent ethical concerns related to the misuse of gamification practice.

2.2 *Major Ethical Concerns Towards Gamification*

With the widespread use of gamification in the interactive marketing field (Thorpe & Roper, 2019), marketing researchers and ethicists started to sound the alarm towards several ethical impacts that gamification might cause (Kim & Werbach, 2016; Thorpe & Roper, 2019). Although these endeavours are still in their first stages and need more empirical investigation, this book chapter consolidates these previous scant efforts, and present in more detail four ethical concerns related to using gamification as an interactive marketing tool. Respectively, these concerns mainly include manipulation, exploitation, psychological distress, and conflict with cultural norms. Here, the goal is not to criticize gamification per se, but rather to point out the risks and adverse outcomes associated with using gamification for marketing purposes, when not taking the moral caveats into serious consideration.

2.2.1 Manipulation

One of the common ethical criticisms of gamification is that it manipulates consumers by using mechanics and designs that are not clearly or partially known regarding how they work. When companies avoid disclosing sufficient information on how game mechanics and design principles attract consumers and what is the ultimate goal of the company of using such mechanisms, that might easily make consumers feel like they are being manipulated. (Hyrynsalmi

et al., 2017; Kim & Werbach, 2016; Li et al., 2021; Thorpe & Roper, 2019). More specifically, a gamification design developer stimulates the consumer's intrinsic and extrinsic motivations by using game elements within a well-defined design for use in a digital entity such as a website or app, aiming to increase consumer interaction. However, this process takes place in an ambiguous way for the consumer, which is further complicated when developing gamification designs are based on an immersive experience, in order to make a lasting impression on consumers about the brand.

This point leads us to expand our discussion beyond the ambiguous operations and algorithms that most gamification designs contain. In the case of the gamification provider creating an environment that leads users to choose an option that serves their interests while excluding or marginalizing automatic and rational decisions, this is also considered as manipulation (Birtchnell et al., 2020). For example, transforming the purchase process into a search for collecting points, badges, or earning prizes, leads to distracting the consumer's attention away from evaluating the important aspects of the product, such as quality, price fairness, warranty, etc. Another point related to manipulation is that the gamified experience might involve vague psychological methods, in an attempt to modify or transform a consumer's thoughts towards predetermined goals. Accordingly, this chapter's questions revolve around the morality of such a combination, since it is not entirely known how these psychological methods work at the level of the subconscious, or whether they have negative effects on consumers in the long term.

One example of this type of incorporating game elements with psychological techniques is the Adidas Running app "Run for the Ocean" campaign, which challenged users to run and raise money to fight plastic waste. Adidas used the challenge in this app as a strong core motivator. However, when taking a closer look, it can be seen that the gamification mechanic of challenge involved the psychological concept that "the losers participate in the challenge more persistently to continue and repeat the challenge than those who win" (Oravec, 2020; Vansteenkiste & Deci, 2003). In the case of the Adidas Running app, the striking result was that the participants continued in both cases—profit and loss—with the winners enjoying the feeling of victory, and the losers continuing to strive for a win. To be fair, it is still unknown whether the developers of this application deliberately exploited this psychological concept in order to achieve marketing goals or not. But certainly, there are ethical questions related to manipulation that must be raised in such cases. Such as whether it is ethical to achieve marketing goals by using vague psychological methods and whether marketers are fully aware of the long-term impact of integrating psychological concepts with game elements on consumer wellbeing?

2.2.2 *Exploitation*

Exploitation occurs when there is an imbalance between the two parties in a particular relationship (Wertheimer, 1999). A closer look at the use of gamification in the field of marketing shows us that the mutual benefits between gamification providers and the consumer can be unequal (Hammedi, 2021; Kim, 2015). In most gamification designs, the user only gets virtual prizes in the form of badges, stars, or even a simple discount; while the gamification provider usually gets greater benefits such as increased sales and market share that arise from increased user interaction. In addition, exploitation can also be observed in two ways. First, where the user is not given enough information about the gamification experience that he or she will participate in. Second, where the user is not allowed to give or withhold consent after acquiring that information (Trang & Weiger, 2019).

Moreover, the risk of exploitation rises when the increase in benefits of one party to the relationship leads to harm to the other party (Brennan et al., 2021; Wertheimer, 1999). Such a high level of exploitation is likely to occur in gamification if the company does not take ethical warnings seriously. For example, the McDonald's fast-food company used gamification techniques based on the popular game "Monopoly". This campaign achieved a resounding success for McDonald's by increasing consumers' demand for buying fast food, thereby contributing to sales. However, the question remains whether McDonald's considered whether the consumers would be conscious of possible dietary and health consequences? Another case in this context can be illustrated by China's second-largest e-commerce platform "Pingduoduo", which employs game-like elements such as sweepstakes, prizes, and even a game involving watering a virtual tree, so as to continuously motivate its users to possibly partake in excessive purchase behaviour.

In addition, the attempts to reward consumers for thinking a certain way or completing a task according to the designer's criteria can be considered as unethical practice and could include it under the category of exploitation because one of the parties to the relationship seeks to monitor and control the thoughts of the other party (Wertheimer, 1999). A prominent example of this concern can be noted in the service personal finance management provider "Robinhood" which provides consumer empowerment on one hand, while on the other hand, it has been criticized for "*luring*" inexperienced consumers with gamification into making irrational investment decisions. On a critical note, gamification experiences are often not designed to meet everyone's needs. With this in mind, it is expected that exposing the potential consumer to gamified experiences that do not fit his or her needs will result in either physical and/or psychological harm, as well as directing the user to perform tasks that he or she may not want to do, which reduces the consumer's autonomy in a way that Naomi Jacobs (2020) warned that persuasive technology design must consider the experience, interests, and needs of potential users. Jacobs's representative example of a diet app called "MyFitnessPal" (a calorie-counting app that allows users to track their daily food

intake) uses gamification features like providing feedback on the number of calories needed, and rewarding users with trophies and badges; and after detailed discussion, Jacobs noticed that: “...*It became clear that the design of a diet app like MyFitnessPal is not informed by the experiences of users who struggle with body image problems and eating disorders*”.

2.2.3 Psychological distress

Psychological distress refers to psychological and emotional damage which causes negative experiences or undermines the ability of the individual to lead a fulfilled life (Echeburúa et al., 2003; Wheatley et al., 2021). Such psychological distress might happen because of a negative event that caused a new situation that the user cannot address (Echeburúa et al., 2003; Ghassemlou et al., 2020). The competitive settings of extreme goal-setting may lead to negative emotions such as frustration, fear, and anger, and these negative emotions might be caused by a frequent loss in gamified tasks, and can last for long periods and have cumulative effects (Kim & Werbach, 2016; Mullins & Sabherwal, 2018; Nicholson, 2015; Ravoniarison & Benito, 2019). The loss can relate to (fear of) losing out such as not obtaining a prize or winning over other competitors and can also extend to the dissatisfaction that may result from a failure to fulfil the user’s prior expectations (Fornell, 1992). In this vein, such negative emotions might have several effects on the consumer’s cognitive level, like a lack of control over life and future, difficulty in making decisions, or a deep feeling of helplessness. Also, the person may become indifferent on the behavioural level and find it difficult to return to daily life (Echeburúa et al., 2003; Li et al., 2021).

As an example of this discussion, the Nike company offered a product called The Nike + FuelBand, an activity tracker worn on the wrist and compatible with mobile devices. This product allows the user to track their physical activity and the amount of energy burned. Gamification mechanisms support the Nike + FuelBand to change the user’s tracked movements into NikeFuel points, and such points can uncover achievements, be shared with friends, and start a competition with others. The FuelBand and the idea itself look exciting and beneficial to the user’s health. However, the ethical question that must be asked here is whether Nike take into account the negative emotions that might be caused by a repeated inability of the user to overcome the challenge (which is represented here in the amount of energy that the user intends to burn daily), or the user’s concerns about not staying at the advanced levels, or users constant preoccupation with monitoring their performance and the results of others, etc.

At the same time, addiction represents a more serious problem that may be caused by companies’ apps that are supported by gamification techniques. In game-related literature, many studies have investigated the addictive behaviours of players in video games (Miller, 2013; Mathews, 2019; Stockdale & Coyne, 2018). Similarly, gamification sharing the same game mechanisms and elements as video games, might easily lead to addiction-related

issues especially in the contexts providing highly immersive and challenging experience (Andrade et al., 2016; Nyström, 2021; Ravoniarison & Benito, 2019; Thorpe & Roper, 2019; Yamakami, 2013). Another issue related to the possibility of becoming addicted comes from the fear of the hyper-use of gamified services as a way to diminish boredom and keep the mind stimulated by getting so much entertainment offered by the services. Cognitive psychologists have warned that there is a relationship between “addiction to stimulation and novelty” through the sustained pursuit of entertainment on one hand, and decreased creativity, ability to focus on solving problems, and performing tasks that require deep thinking on the other hand (Mann & Cadman, 2014; Ravoniarison & Benito, 2019; Seaward, 2020).

2.2.4 Conflict with cultural norms

Gamification also requires consumers to stick to particular rules and game mechanics. However, such mechanics and rules might be inconsistent with the local cultural values of consumers, which may lead them to interpret gamification practices as being socially and culturally incompatible (Khaled, 2015). In addition, a constant exposure to gamified products and services will shove individuals to prioritize the values promoted by gamification over their cultural context. In other words, culture gives the individuals rules for how to treat others (Hofstede et al., 2005; Maitner & Summerville, 2022) and being exposed to conflicting rules through gamification can have potentially harmful results on existing local cultural values in the long term (Khaled, 2015; van Roy & Zaman, 2018).

As an example, in Scandinavian cultures, the prevailing values in society emphasize and encourage social equality, acting for the benefit of other people, viewing others as moral equals, and pursuing common goals. In these cultures, it is undesirable for the individual to frantically strive to stand out from their peers, or simply to stand out at all (Khaled, 2015; Nishimura et al., 2008). Moreover, in such egalitarian cultures, the companies’ rationale for providing products and services supported by gamification designs that focus on competition, excellence, and achievement is constantly questioned (Khaled, 2015). In the same regard, some types of gamification designs might support classifications based on differences between individuals according to attributes such as skill and experience, which may be considered as a negative aspect (Khaled, 2015; Morschheuser et al., 2019; Papoutsoglou, 2020). Moreover, in challenge-based gamification, for instance, designers (intentionally or unintentionally) tend to support an individual ethos rather than a team ethos, and competition rather than cooperation and sacrifice. As what can be noted from these observations, designing gamification experiences without considering the different cultural contexts in which potential consumers belong can conflict with prevailing cultural norms in regard to what each individual in society deserves, and how one communicates with others in the society.

3 GAMIFICATION AND CONSUMER ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING

Marketing researchers and ethicists have sought to know and understand how the consumers make moral judgments (Al-Khatib et al., 2004; Carlson et al., 2009; Escadas et al., 2020; Al-Msallam & Abdelhadi, 2022; Ferrell & Ferrell, 2021; Hunt & Vitell, 1986; Jones, 1991; Jones & Middleton, 2007; Rest, 1986). In the previous section, the authors discussed several ethical concerns that might be related to using gamification as an interactive marketing tool. However, the question remains as to how consumers judge their gamified experience from an ethical perspective? To answer this question, this chapter looks more closely at the ethical theories and models that have investigated the ethical decision-making process (Sect. 3.1). Based on these theories and models, the authors infer and further argue (from a conceptual point of view) the factors that may affect the consumer's ethical judgement towards gamification (Sect. 3.2).

3.1 *Consumers' Ethical Decision-Making Frameworks*

Decision-making involving moral assessment is defined as “the process by which people use their principles and values to determine whether a particular issue or situation is right or wrong” (Carlson et al., 2009). Traditionally, the ethical decision-making process includes four stages (Rest, 1986). It begins when individuals *recognize* if the situation they are exposed to contradicts one or more of their moral rules. In the context of gamification, the ethical recognition is reached when a potential consumer recognizes the ethical issues of gamification design. After an ethical issue is acknowledged, individuals make a judgement and choose between possible alternatives based on their moral correctness—this stage is called *ethical judgement*. In our case, based on ethical considerations, the alternatives might be to continue or leave the existing gamified experience, or perhaps to engage in another gamified experience consisting of a more ethical design. Such a meditation process might involve, for instance, evaluating the impact of potential risk on oneself and on others, the extent of the conflicts with cultural norms, data gathering policy, etc. The next stage is called *ethical intentions* and represents the individual's intent through which he/she will carry out his/her ethical judgement. At this point, the consumer must demonstrate their intent to adopt the option that he/she considers to be more ethical. Finally, the individual engages in *ethical behaviour* that is supported by one or more moral standards. Ultimately, the consumer engages in an ethical gamification experience (whether the existing experience or another alternative), or he/she quits engaging in the gamified experience (Bayer et al., 2019; Schwartz, 2016).

Along with Rest's model, Hunt and Vitell's (1993) model has gained wide acceptance among marketing researchers in the field of ethics. Hunt

and Vitell adopt the normative ethics approach and consider that individuals have different moral philosophies in assessing ethical issues. These moral philosophies are divided into two parts: deontological and teleological. Individuals who adopt a deontological ethical philosophy judge the morality of any behaviour based on its appropriateness to rules or standards, regardless of the correctness or wrongness of the consequences of the action (Kant, 1785/2008). In contrast, individuals who adopt a teleological ethical philosophy examine the result of the action, and for them, the morally correct action is the one that produces a good result (Mill 1861/1979).

Based on the observations of previous models of the ethical decision-making process, Jones (1991) concluded that previous models focus only on including personal and organizational factors, without regard to the role that the characteristics of the moral situation itself can play in the ethical decision-making process. According to Jones (1991), previous models must consider the possible differences between the ethical issues involved. Consequently, the individual's ethical decision about a particular ethical issue will differ from one situation to another, according to the characteristics or dimensions of the moral intensity of that situation. Thus, issues with a low level of moral intensity will lead to an increase in the individual's belief that their decisions are considered to be moral, and vice versa.

Overall, several marketing inquiries have used the above-described models as a reference point to explore other influencing factors in the consumer ethical decision-making process. Nevertheless, limiting the research to the factors included in these models would neglect the impact of the context (gamification in our case) (Bayer et al., 2019). In addition to the previously mentioned factors in models of ethical-decisions making, this chapter adds factors related to gamified experience, which the authors argue impacts the consumer ethical judgement process.

3.2 *Factors Influencing Consumer Ethical Judgement Towards Gamification*

3.2.1 *Previous Experience with Gamification*

Consumer experience with gamification includes dealing with the consequences of engaging with gamification, a comparison with personal and societal ethical standards, and feelings that arise such as guilt or pride (Ward, 2010; Whittaker et al., 2021; Williams, 2006). With this, consumers who have previously been exposed to one or more gamification experiences will be able to make more accurate ethical judgments than those who have not been exposed to a similar experience (Williams, 2006). More precisely, consumers who have had a previous positive experience with gamification based on, for example, winning attractive prizes, spending time filled with joy with others, increasing feelings of pride in a certain achievement, etc., are likely to reflect this positive experience on their perceptions of the gamification ethics, in a way that mitigates negative judgments on any potential ethical implications;

and vice versa in case where the consumer experience was negative, such as exposure to manipulation, or any form of exploitation and deception by the provider of the gamification (Seo et al., 2021; Versteeg, 2013).

The accumulation of consumer experience with diverse designs of gamification and in different contexts will necessarily lead to the formation of a more comprehensive ethical conception of gamification (Hass et al., 2021; Ward, 2010). However, it is worth noting that ethical judgments resulting from previous experience with gamification are subject to change or modification (either positively or negatively), every time the consumer is exposed to a new gamification experience (Ward, 2010).

3.2.2 *Gamification Design Type*

Gamification designs vary from each other, based on, for example, the *game elements* that are used in these designs like points, stars, leader boards, etc. (Hamari et al., 2014), or the *game mechanics* adopted in these designs like challenges, cooperation, feedback, etc. (Hunter & Werbach, 2012). With this in mind, this chapter joins the previous studies which have discussed that the consumer's ethical judgement might differ according to the gamification design being used (Shahri et al., 2014; Toda et al., 2017). Some types of gamification might easily lead to ethical issues than others. For example, designs that encourage collaboration between participants, increase the feeling of autonomy, or provide valuable add-value to the participants might be looked at by consumers as ethical designs, or at least as having fewer ethical issues compared with designs that pose a conflict with local cultural values, or exploit consumer efforts without meaningful feedback.

One may argue that the ethical judgement of gamification designs is not always clear and simple (Kim & Werbach, 2016). Particularly, some gamified designs might have both ethical and unethical aspects simultaneously. Assuming that gamification designs support consumer autonomy, but without providing a transparent policy about consumer data privacy (Hass et al., 2021). In such cases, other factors related to gamified experiences like previous experience, individual attributes, cultural and ethical norms, etc., could outweigh and justify a particular aspect over another (i.e. ethical aspects or unethical aspects).

3.2.3 *The Ethical Perspective of the Consumer*

To figure out the role of personal ethical perspectives on ethical judgement, by applying Hunt and Vitell's (1993) model to the gamification context, it may be inferred that those consumers who consider themselves to belong to the deontology view will form their ethical decisions towards gamification according to an adherence to ethical principles, and a "right" gamification design is identified based on confirming or denying the ethical principles involved, regardless of the ultimate outcome (Sparks & Pan, 2010; Arora & Razavian, 2021). For example, let us assume that a sports company developed a health fitness app using gamification mechanics like feedback and reward

to help their consumers do more sport, track how many calories they burn daily, eat healthy food, etc. It is likely that the sports company will have access to and also track consumers' daily activity, the food type they buy, and other personal information, in order to achieve such outcomes. Following the deontology theory and the idea that it is wrong to track people's activities and personal life details, consumers will judge such gamified fitness apps as unethical practices. On the contrary, the teleological ethical view focuses on the consequences of gamification, and the use of gamification by companies to promote and encourage, for instance, healthy practices or sustainable consumption behaviours may be considered an ethical practice from the perspective of consumers who belong to the teleological ethical school, even if these gamification practices include unethical issues like manipulation or a lack of data privacy.

3.2.4 *Moral Intensity*

The impact of moral intensity on ethical judgement has been confirmed through several studies (Barnett, 2001; Paramita et al., 2022). These studies depend on Jones's (1991) model, which consists of several components. This chapter considers four of these components; first is the *magnitude of consequences*, which represents the extent to which the consumer is aware of the severity of the ethical implications caused by gamification. For example, suppose consumers evaluate the striving to obtain their personal information by a company providing a gamified experience as a violation of their privacy (Trang & Weiger, 2019). In that case, it is likely they will judge the gamified experience as an unethical practice. The second component is related to *the probability of effect*, when consumers perceive that the ethical concerns that gamification might cause will actually occur and cause harm, then consumers might judge their use of gamification as an unethical marketing tool. For example, if a famous alcohol company uses gamification to offer discounts and rewards, which in turn will boost sales, then consumers might tend to adopt a judgement towards gamification as unethical practice because they consider that the probability of adverse effects would be high based on the idea that consuming too much alcohol will cause health damage. The third component is *temporal immediacy*, and refers to the length of time between the time taken engaging in gamification and the actual occurrence of ethical concerns. To illustrate: suppose the consumers perceive that this period will be long and there are no immediate negative consequences. In that case, they are likely to consider gamification as an ethical marketing practice, and vice versa. The last component in the Jones model is the *concentration of effect*. According to this component, consumer ethical judgement depends on the number of people affected by the negative outcomes expected to occur from participating in the gamification experience. For example, suppose the consumers' participation in the gamification experience leads to psychological or physical harm to the people around them, whether they are competitors, family members, or

colleagues in the workplace. In that case, the consumer may be inclined to judge the practice of gamification as unethical.

3.2.5 *Social Environment*

Societies consist of a set of systems, mores, customs and norms that control, to a large extent, the behaviour of individuals who belong to these societies (Bommer et al., 1987; Moffett, 2019; Tsalikis & Fritzsche, 2013). Accordingly, any behaviour carried out by individuals should be congruent with the general opinion prevailing in the society about the rightness or wrongness of this behaviour. Otherwise, this behaviour is considered to be unethical (Nill & Schibrowsky, 2005). The consumer's ethical judgement towards gamification does not stray too far from this rule. Khaled (2015) points out that successful gamification experiments largely depended on a high level of social acceptance. This social acceptance is represented by the degree of harmony of the gamification design with the values recognized in society. From this perspective, can be identified that the more the consumer realizes that behaviours driven by gamification are to some extent compatible with the moral values of society, the more positive his/her judgement on the ethics of gamification, and the opposite is true for gamification designs that are incompatible with societal moral values (Khaled, 2015; Kim & Werbach, 2016).

4 MONITORING OF GAMIFICATION IN MARKETING PRACTICE

To achieve marketing goals through gamification, companies should build a trusting relationship with target consumers, based on their perceptions that the company uses ethical means in their marketing campaign. With this in mind, this chapter identifies recommendations to help marketers, gamification designers, and policymakers to monitor the use of gamification in the marketing context and reduce the related ethical issues.

Marketers should establish a marketing strategy which includes gamification mechanics, based on the principle of minimizing any potential unethical implications for their target consumers. In all of the gamified experience stages, collaboration with gamification designers is crucial to ensure that the gamification designs will use an ethical means to reach the desired marketing goals. Communication with the consumers is also important after the gamified product or service takes its place in the target market. At this point, consumers in the target market are usually classified into two categories (Jones & Middleton, 2007). The first category includes those consumers who might worry about using gamified products or services, which can be attributable to a negative perception that such products or services might have unethical implications. The second category includes consumers who cannot accurately infer the harms that may be associated with their use of gamified products or services, and which will eventually put them at risk due not to

taking the prudent precaution of reducing the possibility of unethical consequences. To deal with both categories of consumers, marketers should make an effort to maintain a transparent and honest policy with consumers. This is done by providing the consumer who may be interested in being involved in the gamified experience with detailed information about, for example, the company's goals of adding gamification to its products or services, the levels that the consumer will pass through, the expected time to complete the tasks, the benefits that may be obtained, and information regarding the consumer's data in relation to e.g. how the data will be used and who has access to it. In addition, providing such information is accompanied by allowing the consumer to express his/her opinion about their involvement in the gamified tasks, by giving or withholding their consent. Marketers should be aware that providing informed consent will increase consumers' trust in the company's operations in the long run (Chadwick & Gallagher, 2016; Kolb, 2007). From this perspective, marketers have to go further and challenge the common belief that any regulation of gamification practice will impede or threaten innovation, and might decrease consumers interaction, whether that regulation takes the form of legislation by policymakers or internal ethical codes within the company, such a challenge should be strengthened by providing an enabling environment at the company level, in order to encourage dealing with regulation and ethics as part of gamification innovations, and not as an obstacle.

In addition to communicating with gamification designers and consumers, marketers are recommended to inform the company's stakeholders of any potential unethical harm to the consumers and society that might be caused by using gamification. Furthermore, stakeholders must be aware of the ethical liability and the consequences that the company should bear if actual harm happens to the consumers or society. Such consequences will not be limited to declining sales and loss of trust in the company businesses, but can also be extended to the stakeholders themselves through accountability to authorities and non-governmental organizations that defend consumer rights.

Marketers should also look to benefit from the ethical problems that have been experienced in the past which are directly or indirectly related to the use of gamification in marketing, and try to use this knowledge to develop ethical gamification designs and support innovation. The authors emphasize that marketers who use gamification should not prioritize growth over what is good for consumers and society, in order to maintain a competitive advantage in highly competitive markets. Ensuring the use of gamification designs to deliver an added value to consumers while avoiding any kind of exploitation or deception will contribute to achieving the company's sustainability, and consequently increase consumer trust and society's acceptance of the company's business.

Ethical Principles Should Guide Gamification designers while developing the gamification design, and they should be keen to monitor all of the design steps and

implementation stages through an ethical lens. Such ethical principles can integrate the company's ethical policy, the designer's ethical philosophy, and also the prevailing ethical values in society. It has become increasingly clear that companies give gamification designers a space for selecting what kind of gamification mechanics and game elements they want to use, in order to increase the appeal of the final design. With this, designers should not use this space to make designs without ethical controls, and instead, they need to be more driven by an intrinsic motivation to use such freedom to ensure that gamification design is kept within an ethical range. Designers should spend more time thinking about any potential negative impacts on consumers due to their use of gamified products or services, and especially the development of gamification technology. In addition, designers need to recognize that ignoring ethical aspects during the design of gamified products or services (which may occur for many unacceptable reasons such as thinking that other employees have to be responsible for ethical aspects, for fear of the possibility of stifling creativity, or having a lack of sufficient knowledge of ethics philosophy, etc.), might have huge ramifications for their work such as legal accountability, losing their job, and a negative societal view of their role. From this standpoint, companies have a responsibility to raise ethical awareness among designers who work in the gamification field, in a similar way that many universities integrated ethics into programming and computer science courses (Fiesler et al., 2020). Companies can do this by providing seminars, workshops, and courses concerning contemporary ethical matters, in order to develop designers' abilities to follow ethical principles and detect any potential ethical issues related to gamification design. At the same time, designers should keep a balance when developing their gamification designs between satisfying the desired marketing outcomes of the company, and the ethical principles that need to be followed, and they should be keen to monitor and correct any potential unethical implications through feedback from marketers, consumers, and academic researchers.

Policymakers should become more involved in the process of regulating the use of gamification, in order to avoid or at least reduce any potential ethical implications. By taking a closer look at the current marketing efforts, noted that companies have added gamification tools to almost every marketing campaign in various forms, starting from basic gamification tools like rewards and points, to advanced gamification designs which use advanced technology and complex algorithms to attract consumers and increase their interaction. Nevertheless, policymakers still ignore this rapid change in the marketing tools that directly and indirectly affect consumers. In addition, there is a clear gap between policymakers and those who develop and use gamification designs (i.e. marketers and gamification designers). All of these aspects create a need to set policies and to regulate the progress that has been achieved in gamification design. Overall, policymakers need to lend more interest to gamification and raise interventions for the design process and use. This does not mean that policymakers should be experts in gamification, however, they need to think, ask,

and try to understand how they can prevent unethical practices in gamification, and what is the role of political decision-makers to monitor and regulate the increasing sophistication of gamification designs, with an aim to limit potential ethical dilemmas. Policymaker intervention in the gamification field might take different forms. One such form could be creating a collaboration between all concerned parties, and more precisely with marketing managers and gamification designers to work together to avoid and minimize the potential ethical concerns of gamification, while taking advantage of its benefits. In this regard, the presence of gamification designers and company representatives in the work teams of political decision-makers will help to develop policies that control gamification in an ethical manner without either restricting or ignoring its benefits (Schneier, 2020). Another form of intervention might be in the form of encouraging companies to adopt a more transparency policy with consumers who the gamification practices might target, so as to ensure that consumers are well informed about the gamification process and company goals, and at the same time, the privacy policy that the company implements to protect consumer data.

5 CONCLUSION AND CONTRIBUTION

This chapter provides a narrative examination of some of the possible ethical considerations related to gamification pursuit related to setting goals for consumers, monitoring their progress and rewarding for their consumption decisions. The chapter extends the current exposure of gamification to ethical treatise in the extant literature. In terms of its research contribution, this chapter bridges the research gap regarding the dark side and potential negative outcomes of gamification regarding marketing performance and societal impact. The majority of the current literature has investigated and discussed the positive effects of gamification on consumer experience and marketing performance. However, there is a lack of discussion on gamification from the perspectives of sustainable aspects such as individual wellbeing, long-term effect, and harmonious society. To address such shortcomings and by conducting a comprehensive literature review, our findings have documented four prominent ethical concerns that companies should consider before and during using gamification as a marketing tool: manipulation; exploitation; psychological distress; and conflict with cultural norms. Additionally, a closer examination of the models of ethical decision-making reveals that these models have studied several factors that might impact the consumer ethical judgement process, but neglected the impact of the context, (i.e., gamification context).

This chapter also provided a contributions to the marketers, gamification designers, and policymakers (see Sect. 4). The findings demonstrated that companies aiming to develop ethical principles for gamification practice should understand how consumers form their ethical judgments, and what factors influence it. Five affected factors were documented in this regard: previous

experience with gamification; gamification design type; the ethical perspective of the consumer; moral intensity; and social environment. The findings underscore that gamification designers should be aware that users involved in gamification might be vulnerable to adverse psychological effects. Particularly, social pressure, depression, low self-esteem, and other psychological distress might accompany the user's failure in achieving their desired achievements. Designers need to be careful when selecting the game elements and mechanics they want to involve in the gamified design. For example, designs built on a base of hyper-competition between users without considering their cognitive levels and skills might cause unfavourable comparisons, which can develop, in some cases, to cause severe psychological damage.

There is recognized unclarity regarding what users know about the fate of their data when using gamified apps, which presents a need for companies to adopt a transparent policy to clarify the objectives of data collection. This involves a commitment to maintain a balance between profiting from consumers attracted by using gamification designs, and managing their data in a way that respects privacy rules. Maintaining this balance remains a challenge. However, it will provide companies with a competitive advantage over competitors who do not follow clear standards of user data privacy. The authors further recommend that respect for cultural differences and fostering consideration for cultural diversity should be a priority for companies when developing gamification mechanics as an interactive marketing tool. Notably, game elements and designs appropriate for a particular culture may not be suitable in another. In this context, policymakers are urged to play a firm and sustained role in preserving local cultural values by considering new propositions through which to regulate and monitor gamification use.

When a company decides to adopt a new interactive marketing tool like gamification, it is recognized that marketers will face several challenges and demands. Considering ethical principles is one of these demands, and how it is managed might reflect on the whole company's business prosperity. From this standpoint, examining and studying the ethics of gamification will help marketers understand the ethical concerns related to using gamification in the marketing field, especially with regard to the rapid developments that are being made in gamification technology.

6 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This chapter contains a number of limitations, but simultaneously, new paths for future research. More specifically, this chapter mainly focuses on four ethical concerns related to using gamification technology in a marketing context, and it is acknowledged that gamification might be vulnerable to other ethical dilemmas. In addition, while this chapter examined five factors that affect the consumer's ethical judgement towards gamification, the authors understand that there are other factors that might be important that this chapter may have overlooked. Furthermore, consumers, employees, designers,

and owners have varied goals and ethical perspectives towards gamification; this chapter mainly highlighted the consumer perspective.

Together with the findings, these limitations pave the way for future research on the ethics of gamification. Regarding ethical concerns related to using gamification in a marketing context, future research might examine other ethical concerns, such as physical harm, data security, negative impact on mental health, negative impact on vulnerable groups, and lack of accountability. In this chapter, we have mainly discussed the ethical concerns from identified “bad”, i.e., the dark side of factors that could take both positive and negative values. Accordingly, to cover the gamification ethics topic from its various aspects, we should also consider the positive consequences of gamification and posit different results paths in a more comprehensive perspective, since ethics and moral virtues are not limited to bad issues. In the same manner, future research could investigate other factors that might affect ethical decision-making like self-concept, demographics, personal environment, corporate culture, and legal environment. It would also be interesting and valuable if future research conducted an empirical study across various cultures to investigate how gamified experiences affect the ethical judgement process, and what kinds of ethical implications might be involved in such experience, with an aim to understand the differences between cultures with respect to their ethical judgement processes towards gamification practices. Moreover, future research examining other parties’ (e.g. marketers, designers, and stakeholders) perspectives about ethical issues related to gamification will provide a more holistic and diverse picture of the topic. Furthermore, examining how ethical consumer judgments on gamification practice impact future consumer behaviour and other marketing outcomes like brand image, word of mouth, and customer loyalty will help us to better understand the consumer journey that is driven by gamification from an ethical perspective.

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