

SAGE Handbook of Brand Management

Contemporary issues in brand management

Chapter 36

Play Smart, Win Big: How Game Elements Can Benefit Brands

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INTRODUCTION

Powered by technological advancement and societal forces, brand management is increasingly participative, and brand meaning is co-created (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016). As consumers become empowered in their brand consumption, they seek opportunities to engage with brands in interactive manners, breaking the rule of the traditional one-way brand relationship style (Füller et al., 2009; Cambier & Poncin, 2020). As a result, consumers perform an increasingly active and co-creative role in brand meaning creation, development and sustenance (Merz et al., 2009). Social media have been a critical impulsion in this change of paradigm (Malthouse et al., 2016), shifting how brands are embedded in consumers' lives to a more networked, open and technology-driven approach (Swaminathan et al., 2020), which is in constant mutation.

Additionally, the exponential growth in smartphones and mobile devices has drastically changed how brands interact with their consumers. With 7.4 billion mobile phone owners worldwide (Statista, 2024) and a rapidly growing portable devices market, technologies such as mobile applications (apps) offer a wide array of opportunities for brands to connect with their users in a meaningful way through engaging experiences and a tight embedding in their everyday lives (Mardon & Belk, 2018). Branded apps are means for brands to engage their consumers in daily experiences and activities. Recently, brands have started using apps as flagship platforms mediating versatile interactions between participants around the brand (Wichmann et al., 2022). Branded applications offer a wide range of benefits to users, tapping into motivations such as usefulness, utility or entertainment (Stocchi et al., 2018) and spanning a variety of sectors, from health management to home automation. Further, such platforms create a rich playground for the gamification market (Kunkel et al., 2021).

Gamification is 'the use of game mechanisms in non-game contexts' (Deterding et al., 2011, p. 2). As a result, gamification is the application of gaming principles to change behaviors in non-game situations (Robson et al., 2015) while tapping into the basic human impulses to socialize, achieve, be engaged and be rewarded. Spurred by the rise of mobile technologies and branded apps, as well as managers' eagerness to capitalize on them, gamification is increasingly becoming one of the drivers of technological and behavioral change in many industries. With an estimated market size of 15.43 billion USD in 2024 and an expected 48.72 billion by 2029, gamification is recognized as a key tool to influence consumer behavior, innovation, productivity and engagement (Mordor Intelligence, 2024) and thus shape brand management.

In this interactive landscape, a number of brands have hopped on the gamification bandwagon. Typical examples include branded apps designed to achieve personal goals, such as fitness apps like Nike Run Club or Strava. These branded apps allow users to set training objectives, measure activity that has been personalized to users' needs and connect with a community of like-minded people. L'Occitane en Provence takes a different approach and creates an app that allows users to nurture a seed and grow a plant with limited resources. By doing so, users get educated on sustainable behavior but also unlock rewards, thus supporting benefits based on moral values while enhancing the brand image.

Gamification is often supported by, but not constrained to, mobile environments. For instance, McDonald's has installed touchpads on tables in certain branches, allowing children to play branded games while waiting for their meals. This technique makes a trip to McDonald's more than just a dining-out experience and enhances user engagement with the brand. The variety of game elements adopted by brands is indicative of the power of gamification to support positive brand outcomes, attain a variety of marketing objectives and offer consumer benefits.

To date, research at the intersection of gamification, consumer behavior and brand management has highlighted some of the potential outcomes of gamified experiences for brands, including consumer engagement with the game, which may extend to the brand (Hammedi et al., 2019), increased purchase intention and behavioral or attitudinal loyalty (Stocchi et al., 2018), data collection or ideas for segmentation and innovation purposes (Nobre & Ferreira, 2017). Further, marketing researchers highlight several factors driving the successful use of gamification for marketing purposes, which may pertain to the situational context in which the gamification is embedded (e.g., time available to play, Berger et al., 2018), consumer characteristics (e.g., individual goals and competitiveness, Robson et al., 2015) or the type of game technique used (e.g., Eisingerich et al., 2019). Yet, there needs to be a comprehensive overview of the interplay of various factors that may contribute to positive brand outcomes in the context of game elements adoption in a brand strategy. Further, the array of potential brand outcomes has been approached in a scattered manner, with each author focusing on a limited set of brand benefits of gamification separately.

As a result, this chapter aims to address these critical gaps by proposing an integrative framework and related propositions, of the individual factors (consumer-level), contextual and game-related factors that lead to positive brand outcomes when brands adopt game elements as part of their strategy. In this way, we offer a theoretical contribution to the brand management literature, showing that the interplay of game elements and their integration into the brand strategy, alongside contextual and individual factors will influence affective, cognitive and behavioral brand outcomes.

In particular, and based on the extant marketing, branding, services and information technology literature, we conceptualize which game elements might be conducive to specific brand outcomes and under which conditions through a conceptual framework, set of propositions and explanations of specific conditions of application. This contribution is relevant because gamification is a multifaceted technique that can be used in many ways by brand managers and for varying purposes. Building on these conceptual foundations, the chapter offers pragmatic advice for managers who wish to use gamification to support their brand creation or development efforts.

UNDERSTANDING GAMIFICATION

Definition and Characteristics

Gamification links game studies to marketing, bridging the perspectives of game designers and users. It is broadly defined as the application of gaming principles to change behaviors in real-life contexts (Deterding et al., 2011). While the gaming perspective emphasizes the game design elements (e.g., frameworks and rules; Robson et al., 2015), the user perspective acknowledges the importance of the gamified experience for individual users (e.g., fun and enjoyment; Huotari & Hamari, 2017). Gamification is thus characterized by the interaction of two separate entities: (a) the system developed by designers, which contains goals, rules and challenges, and (b) the user who interacts with this system, leading to individual experiences with specific dynamics and affective states (Landers et al., 2019; Robson et al., 2015).

Both games and gamification can be used by brands, yet they differ in their applications and implementations. Gamification shares a foundational relationship with traditional games, drawing on elements that are considered ‘characteristic’ of games (Deterding et al., 2011, p. 12) to tap into human motivation principles and satisfy basic human needs such as relatedness, competence and escapism (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019; Landers et al., 2019). However, gamification differs from typical game environments as its aims often extend beyond the game itself (Landers et al., 2019). While games are designed to create flow and motivation to achieve in-game objectives, gamification applies gaming principles to real-world activities. For example, ‘Red Bull Racers’ is a game where users compete to reach the finish line of a racing track as fast as possible by controlling the speed of a customized racing car and driver. Players can click on a button during the race to ‘drink a Redbull’, giving their racing car a limited speed boost. While fun, entertaining and engaging, the game's goal (winning the race) is constrained to the game context. If the brand were to award loyalty points and exclusive rewards to top players, the game's purpose would extend beyond the game environment, exemplifying gamification. The main distinction is that gamification can produce real-world outcomes, whereas games remain self-contained.

In marketing management, gamification is mainly used to enhance a firm's perceived value by tapping into primary human motivations (Ciuchita et al., 2023). For instance, the famous athletic apparel retailer Lululemon boosts the experience of its consumers through incremental rewards and exclusive benefits following milestone engagement behaviors, with the final aim of fostering brand loyalty and reinforcing connections with the firm and the lifestyle it offers. The brand is then not only seen as a fitness apparel provider but is also linked to fun and enjoyable experiences thanks to its gamified strategy.

Game Elements

Game elements (i.e., the game’s goals, rules and general structure) are the building blocks and common characteristics of all games and gamified approaches (Deterding et al., 2011). While there is currently no explicit agreement on what constitutes a game element (Landers et al., 2019), scholars have historically classified game design into three categories (e.g., Ryan et al., 2006; Tobon et al., 2020).

First, gamification designs use achievement elements, which typically focus on the mastery of the game (Ryan et al., 2006). Challenges, badges, rewards and progression metrics are achievement elements that allow users to track their progress toward a specific goal, often set

by the gamified system (Tobon et al., 2020). For instance, the language-learning app Duolingo uses badges to trigger users' sense of reward linked to personal growth. These badges can be obtained by accomplishing different tasks in-app, such as gaining experience points, learning in the morning or completing a level, directly fostering engagement with the branded app.

Second, immersion elements such as avatars, narratives and role-playing tap into consumers' intrinsic motivation for escapism and discovery (Ryan et al., 2006; Tobon et al., 2020). They focus on fantasy and creativity, as well as being part of a higher purpose and story (Vega & Camarero, 2024). Nike capitalized on this game technique during a campaign for their winter training gear by implementing an action-live online game. In this game, participants assumed the role of famous Nike athletes training in challenging weather. Through the game, users were helping athletes reach their training objectives in cold weather. This narrative-driven experience also led consumers to discover Nike products.

Third, gamification design is usually embedded in the same functions and principles as those used for social media (Yang & Li, 2021). Indeed, gamification often includes social elements that facilitate user interaction and competition (Ryan et al., 2006; Tobon et al., 2020). These social elements can be used in combination with achievement and/or immersion elements to further engage users. For instance, the LEGO Play app allows users to share their creations and interact with fellow enthusiasts. The app offers regular building challenges (mixing achievement and social elements) and uses AR to bring models to life, creating engaging stories (mixing immersion and social elements). Users can post photos, comment on others' builds, and like their favorite posts, fostering both community and brand engagement (Dessart et al., 2015). LEGO highlights outstanding creations, awards virtual badges and features users' work in official communications. Depending on the game feature used, the community can be based on competition or cooperation, thus fostering positive or negative impacts (Ciuchita et al., 2023).

Typology of Game Elements in Brand Strategy

Gamification research often considers the implementation of game principles as a holistic construct without accounting for the variety of implementation approaches developed by the brands (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019; Sailer et al., 2017). Nevertheless, considering the role of gamification in brand strategy requires understanding both the role of game elements and their level of integration into the overall brand offering. This has important implications going ahead because consumers differ in their experience of game elements (Landers et al., 2019), leading to distinct engagement types and supporting different brand objectives. In other words, one must understand (1) how central to the brand offering are the game elements (i.e., if the game elements are core or peripheral to the offering) and (2) if the game elements constitute a self-contained game versus a gamified system.

Table 36.1 summarizes this typology, considering the integration of the game elements in the brand offering on the horizontal axis and what we call the 'gaming perspective' adopted on the vertical axis.

Table 36.1 Typology of game elements in brand strategy

	<i>Integration Into a Brand Offering</i>	
<i>Gaming Perspective</i>	<i>Low Brand Activation</i>	<i>High Core Brand Offering</i>
Low gamification features	Brand activation with gamification features <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Body Shop spin-the wheel Christmas promotion</i> • <i>Sports Round Quiz by Heineken</i> • <i>Starbucks Rewards</i> 	Branded gamified application as part of the core brand offering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Strava, Nike+</i> • <i>Clue</i> • <i>Pokemon Go app</i>
High game as a full product/standalone game	Branded game as temporary activation or campaign, in-game advertising or advergame <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Burberry x Snapchat Animal Kingdom</i> • <i>Gucci World in Roblox</i> • <i>KFC Shrimp Attack</i> • <i>Poke Shops in Pokemon Go</i> 	Game as a core offering of the brand <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>World of Warcraft</i> • <i>Roblox</i> • <i>Fortnite</i> • <i>League of Legends</i> • <i>Etc.</i>

Source: The authors

First, a brand can take what we call a ‘low’ gaming perspective, meaning that they only integrate gamification features into their offering. In this perspective, various possibilities exist, ranging from gamification representing simple add-ons (a ‘low’ integration) or a core offering (‘high’ integration).

At a basic level, gamification features can be approached from a brand activation perspective. Here, the gamified brand activation does not represent a central element of the offering but rather a side offering or punctual addition to its promotion and activation. For instance, contests, sweepstakes and other forms of gamification features added to the brand’s communication efforts are known to bring fun and engagement to support the promotion of a product or service (see top left quadrant of Table 36.1). Marketing research has long acknowledged the power of these ‘gamified interactions’ as part of a firm’s promotional strategy (Feinman et al., 1986). Gamified loyalty programs can also bring positive brand outcomes, such as long-term gamified brand activations (Hollebeek et al., 2021).

Integration into the brand offering based on gamification features can also be high (top right quadrant of Table 1). Increasing scholarship recognizes now that complete brand offerings can be based on gamification principles, making gamification an inherent and essential part of the brand (e.g., Jang et al., 2018; Whittaker et al., 2021). Brands often create gamified applications to fully activate gamification in a core and long-term aspect of the offering. These applications typically focus on fostering self-improvement and behavior change, such as language learning, sports practice or sustainability habits. Such gamified platforms have grown to be central offerings for newer brands (e.g., Strava) while also becoming new elements in the offering of established firms (e.g., Nike Run Club or Nike +). Gamification in such contexts often leads to enhanced brand experiences (Hsu, 2023) as well as engagement and behavior change (e.g., Liu et al., 2024), particularly when mechanisms are directly tied to user performance of targeted behaviors (Feng et al., 2020).

Second, we now consider the bottom line of Table 36.1, which represents a ‘high’ gaming perspective, that is, when game elements are used to create a comprehensive, standalone game. This game can either be a side to the brand offering or the brand offering itself.

The bottom left quadrant of Table 1 represents brands going further into the integration of game elements into a brand activation, with the use of advergames or in-game advertising. Advergames are custom-made games developed to promote a firm’s brand or products (Waiguny et al., 2013). For example, food and beverage companies have introduced packaging with codes redeemable in mobile applications to unlock mini-games, such as KitKat Break. The recently launched KFC Shrimp Attack is another example. Advergames have evolved in technology and can now integrate advanced virtual reality (VR) or artificial intelligence features, offering advanced experiential engagement activities (Berger et al., 2018; Harmeling et al., 2017). A similar output is in-game advertising, placing a product within an existing game (Schneider et al., 2005; Berger et al., 2018). In this case, a non-game brand partners with a game brand to feature its product in the game. For instance, Pokemon Go created value for the Nintendo brand and benefited companies like Starbucks and McDonald's, which owned Poke Shops in the game, leveraging the platform to engage with customers. These campaigns offer several advantages, including gathering consumer data, achieving competitive advantage and enhancing brand engagement and community connections (e.g., Eisingerich et al., 2019; Harmeling et al., 2017; Nobre & Ferreira, 2017). Metaverses like Roblox now also collaborate with brands like Gucci to let them be featured in their massive virtual worlds.

Last, games as a core brand offering are a well-established industry (i.e., the gaming industry, see bottom right quadrant), which has largely inspired the gamification approach in marketing (Landers et al., 2019; Robson et al., 2015). For instance, Nintendo, a significant player in the gaming industry, offers games such as Super Mario Bros® as products. Here, the brand creates value for users through entertainment and escapism, which are critical motivations in gaming. Game brands such as Nintendo incorporate gamification principles into their non-core offerings, such as the My Nintendo Rewards program. Through this program, users earn points for various activities such as purchasing products, playing mobile games or interacting with Nintendo services. These points can be redeemed for tangible rewards such as discounts, digital content and exclusive items, enhancing the consumer experience and creating value (Eisingerich et al., 2019). Other examples of integration of full-fledged games are World of Warcraft, Leagues of Legends or the previously mentioned Roblox.

This matrix’s distinctions and granularity have essential implications regarding brand management and consumer perceptions. Different forms of game elements’ integration and roles do not support the same brand objectives, partly due to their central or peripheral role in the strategy. Branded gamified applications as core offerings are more likely to foster strong self-brand connections and long-term loyalty because they are more likely fully embedded in the lives of consumers versus a gamified brand activation. On the other hand, brand activations such as advergames can foster brand image, preference and attitudes or generate one-off purchases.

This chapter examines the impact of integrating game elements into brand strategies through gamification features or standalone games, explicitly focusing on brand management and real-world brand outcomes. While we have acknowledged and detailed the distinction between gamification and games, we will use the terms ‘gamification’ and ‘game elements’ interchangeably for simplicity. Further, we acknowledge the unique nature of games and the

existence of a whole body of literature on gaming and games as standalone offerings (bottom right quadrant of Table 1). In this paper, we focus on the integration of gamification in brand offerings (top quadrants) and the usage of games as specific activations (bottom left quadrant).

THE ROLE OF GAME ELEMENTS IN DRIVING BRAND OUTCOMES

The effectiveness of game elements in achieving positive brand outcomes is documented in extensive research, demonstrating that gamified offerings impact brand attitudes and purchase intentions, amongst others (e.g., Berger et al., 2018). However, more information is needed about the comprehensive range of effects that game elements can have on brand outcomes. Studies have addressed this issue in a piecemeal manner, often focusing on a couple of branding outcomes at a time, as depicted in Table 36.2. Furthermore, they often consider ‘gamification’ as an umbrella term, without specifying the specific game elements under investigation and their deployment in brand strategy.

Table 36.2 Overview of key studies on gamification and branding

<i>Authors, Year</i>	<i>Game Elements Studied</i>	<i>Impact on Brands</i>	<i>Method</i>
Lucassen and Jansen (2014)	Gamification mechanisms	Brand engagement, loyalty and awareness	Qualitative (interviews with executives)
Harwood and Garry (2015)	Gamification	Brand loyalty and trust	Qualitative (netnography and participant observations)
Nobre and Ferreira (2017)	Goals and challenges, competition, customization, rewards, status	Brand value co-creation, engagement and self-connection	Qualitative (interviews and focus groups)
Xu et al. (2017)	Game elements	Brand awareness	Conceptual
Berger et al. (2018)	(e.g., advergames and in-game ads)	Brand engagement (mediator), and self-brand connection	Quantitative (field study and experiments). Real users
Eisingerich et al. (2019)	Gamification principles (i.e., social interaction, control...)	Brand engagement (mediator), and purchase behavior	Qualitative and Quantitative
Högberg et al. (2019)	Gamification	Brand engagement	Quantitative (experiment)
Xi and Hamari (2020)	Immersion, achievement and social features	Brand engagement (mediator), awareness, and loyalty	Quantitative (survey). Real users
Syrjälä et al. (2020)	Gamification (gamified packaging)	Brand engagement	Qualitative (focus groups)
Hwang and Choi (2020)	Reward type	Participation in branded loyalty programs	Quantitative (experiment). Panel
Hollebeek et al. (2021)	Gamified loyalty program	Brand engagement value	Conceptual

<i>Authors, Year</i>	<i>Game Elements Studied</i>	<i>Impact on Brands</i>	<i>Method</i>
van Berlo et al. (2021)	Virtual reality games	Brand attitude, and purchase intention through consumer learning	Quantitative (lab experiment). Real users
Hsu (2023)	Gamified app as a whole	Brand experience, and repurchase intentions	Quantitative (survey). Real users
Saxena et al. (2023)	Gamification	Brand engagement (mediator), self-brand connection and affective commitment	Quantitative (survey)
Ciuchita et al. (2023)	Gamification	Experience, loyalty and engagement	Conceptual
Kapoor et al. (2024)	Gamified social media content	Brand engagement (mediator), purchase intentions	Quantitative (experiments). Panel
Vega and Camarero (2024)	Gamified storytelling	Brand experience, attitude and word of mouth	Quantitative (experiments). Panel

Source: The authors

Interestingly, a literature overview suggests that, to date, a wide range of methods have been used to understand the link between game elements and brand outcomes (see Table 36.2). A number of conceptual studies, some of them including systematic literature reviews, have addressed this link (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2017), but often focusing on a limited set of outcomes (e.g., experience, loyalty and engagement in Ciuchita et al., 2023). A number of early studies took an exploratory perspective with qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups (Nobre & Ferreira, 2017) and netnography (Harwood & Garry, 2015) – laying the groundwork for more deductive approaches recently. Key publications since 2018 include one to several quantitative studies, including experiments and surveys. We can note that a number of these articles focus on panel respondents, while a smaller number include real-life consumers having experienced gamification first-hand (e.g., Hsu, 2023 or Xi and Hamari, 2020). Despite the promising evolution and wide array of methods considered, the literature still suffers shortcomings in comprehensively bridging game elements and brand outcomes.

The existing literature regularly considers brand engagement as a key outcome of gamification, also often taking the role of mediator to achieve higher-end brand benefits such as brand loyalty. Brand engagement is defined as ‘*the level of a customer’s motivational, brand-related, and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity in brand interactions*’ (Hollebeek, 2011, p. 790). Due to the interaction-focused approach to engagement, it is highly relevant for delivering a brand experience which stresses value-laden interactivity (Harmeling et al., 2017; Vega & Camarero, 2024). Further, brand engagement is a multidimensional construct, allowing the capture of a variety of consumer behavior mechanisms, ranging from affective (affect-transfer) to cognitive (telepresence) or mixed mechanisms (flow) (Berger et al., 2018; Kapoor et al., 2024; Saxena et al., 2023) – which can be aligned with different gamification elements. While gamification studies often consider the role of engagement with the game or platform (referred to as ‘user engagement’, e.g., Bitrián et al., 2021) or general customer engagement (e.g., Leclercq et al., 2018) as mediators to sustain desirable output, engagement with the brand is also inherently

and ultimately enhanced through gamified interactions, as the brand is a key constituent of the experience (branded interface, prompts, goods, features, etc.).

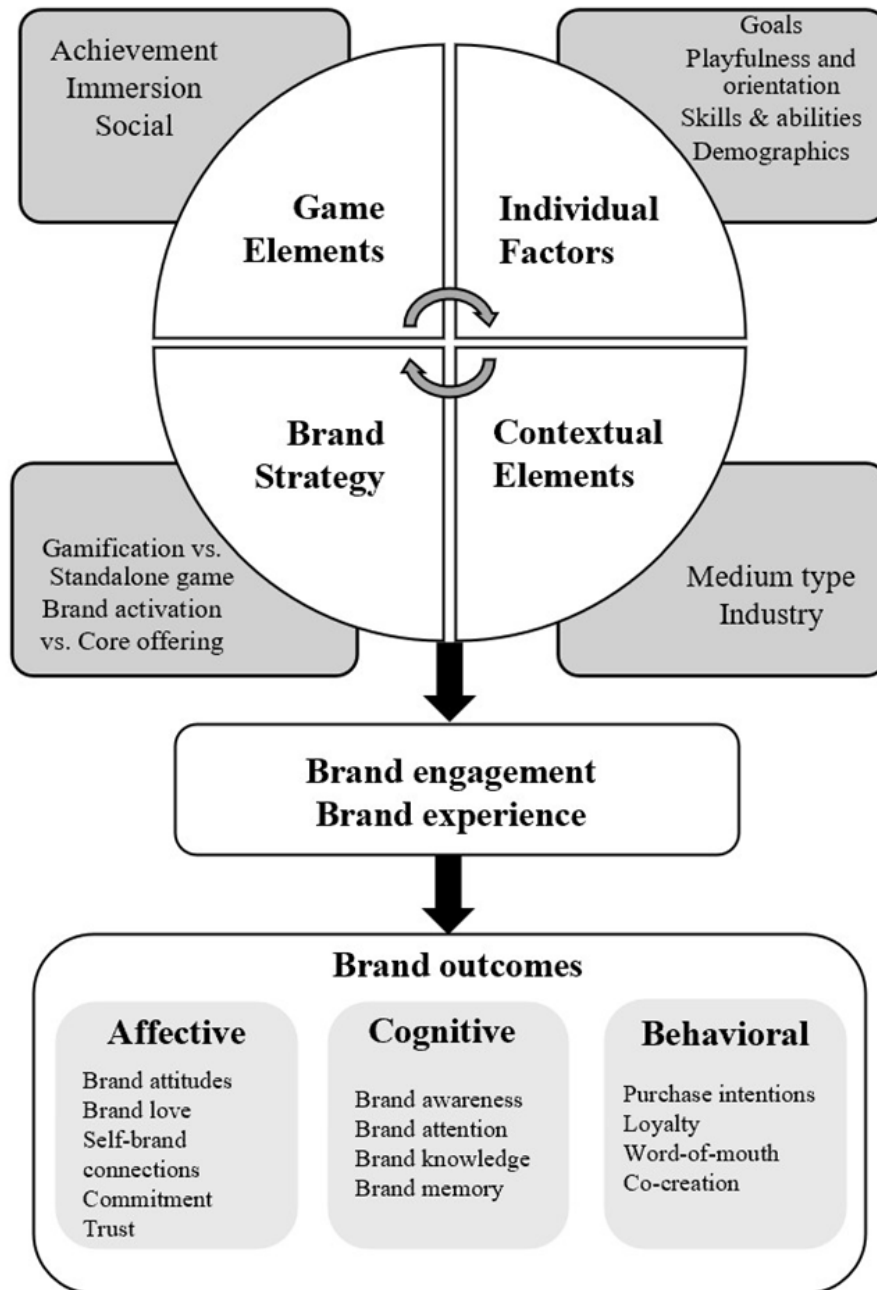
As outcomes of brand engagement (e.g., Xi & Hamari, 2020) or studied in isolation (e.g., Harwood & Gary, 2015), other brand benefits can ensue from positive gamified interactions. For instance, gamified mechanisms such as social sharing, leaderboards or gamified monetary incentives (Lucassen & Jansen, 2014) can enhance brand awareness. Users are compelled to share information outside the game, for instance, by sharing their performance on their social networks, which enhances the visibility of the brand to, potentially, non-customers and prospects. Transactional outcomes such as brand purchase behaviors and behavioral loyalty also often result from gamified interaction. When prioritized in the short term, such outcomes are often associated with time-bound gamified campaigns, rather than a full-blown gamified offering.

Further, gamified products or campaigns can exist for the sake of enhancing the consumption experience without a transactional objective. However, the gamified experience is often promoting purchases, at least indirectly. Gamification has indeed extensively been linked to loyalty and increased purchase intentions (e.g., Xi & Hamari, 2020). First, gamification is used extensively to promote loyalty programs and foster their adoption. Gamified loyalty programs are more efficient and experiential than traditional loyalty programs in that they drive more consumer behavioral responses (Hwang & Choi, 2020) and more indirect engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2021). Similarly, gamified applications that represent a standalone brand offering also generate strong behavioral loyalty intentions for the brand in question, as evidenced by the Nike + app, through enhanced brand engagement (Hsu, 2023), integration into the everyday lives of consumers, and specific features the app notifying users when it ‘might be a good time to change your shoes because of wear and tear’.

While these insights demonstrate gamification’s effectiveness in delivering positive outcomes for brands in specific contexts, they also lead to a fragmented understanding. In particular, the specific game elements and type of brand strategy investigated are often referred to under the umbrella term of ‘gamification’, without recognizing the diversity of approaches that gamification can represent when it comes to a gamified branded strategy. Furthermore, existing research often fails to consider the complementary role of various forces in successfully integrating game elements into a brand strategy.

As highlighted in Figure 36.1, we propose that four key factors will play a role in the effectiveness of adopting game elements for reaching positive brand outcomes: contextual elements, individual consumer-level elements, aspects related to the game elements used, as well as the level of game integration and role of the game/gamification in the brand offering (i.e., the typology of game elements in brand strategy discussed above). In the following paragraphs, we offer a detailed description of relevant individual and contextual factors and discuss their relative potential in driving certain brand outcomes when coupled with specific game elements and brand strategies. By doing so, we stress the complementary role of a diverse set of factors working together in achieving the most prevalent brand-related consumer responses and offer reflections on the links characterizing the relationships between those brand-related responses and their drivers.

Figure 36.1 Integrative gamification-branding framework



Source: The authors

Contextual Factors

A variety of contextual elements impact the implementation and performance of gamification for brand management. First, the type of medium, platform or ecosystem used can influence gamification's effectiveness (Landers et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2024), mainly because distinct game elements need different types of platform affordances. To illustrate, the level of immersion of a gamified offering will likely depend on the interactive and sensory features of the media and platforms used and the quality of the sensory imagery offered. For instance, employing VR in gamification can help brands provide highly experiential and personalized

experiences for customers, particularly effective in enhancing affective brand outcomes such as emotional connections and brand attitudes (e.g., van Berlo et al., 2021), but also enhancing memory of brand elements (Kostyk et al., 2024). For example, Sephora's Beauty Insider program uses VR elements to reward loyal customers with unique experiences. Users can unlock exclusive VR content, like behind-the-scenes footage and virtual makeup tutorials, by earning points through the loyalty program.

Integrating game elements in a brand strategy can also be achieved through third-party platforms. In this case, the adequacy of the medium used will also influence its effectiveness, as congruence with the brand identity and values is considered essential to drive positive outcomes, such as engagement. For instance, Kunkel et al. (2021) show that gamification offered by a third-party platform using game elements related to a brand can enhance attitudinal outcomes for the brand (through heightened engagement with the third-party platform and heightened knowledge of and identity with the brand). Other platforms enabling social network features can indirectly influence brands by creating a stronger community appeal and positive associations. Research shows that gamified advertising from influencers on social media can also enhance brand engagement and intentions (Kapoor et al., 2024), especially when the message delivered and the influencer's characteristics match the perceived brand image.

Second, the industry or sector in which the brand operates is crucial. While gamification was initially thought to have the most impact in high involvement, emotional sectors (e.g., automotive industry), research increasingly shows the relevance of gamification in other B2C sectors and with non-symbolic brands, like toothpaste or shampoo (Nobre & Ferreira, 2017). The narrative style of gamification should align with the product type: action-focused narratives suit utilitarian products, while experience-focused narratives are better for hedonic products (Bekk et al., 2022; Hofacker et al., 2016). In this regard, game elements focused on achievement might be better suited to foster robust engagement with and experience of utilitarian brands, ultimately leading to positive behavioral brand outcomes such as loyalty. On the other hand, game elements focused on immersion are particularly relevant for experiential services and products (Hofacker et al., 2016), such as luxury or destination brands. Indeed, immersive gamification taps into consumers' emotions, providing unique, memorable, and stimulating experiences and enhancing emotional connections (Saxena et al., 2023).

Gamification's transformative potential is also notable in areas requiring long-term commitment, such as health, well-being or learning (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019). Because such contexts involve customer habit creation (and maintenance), they largely benefit from a mix of achievement and social game elements through a core brand offering (e.g., branded gamified applications) to encourage behavioral change. For instance, online challenges improve attitudes toward healthy food content on social media (Charry et al., 2024), while rewards enhance consumer learning and intentions for sustainable offerings (Mulcahy et al., 2021).

Individual Factors

Individuals experience different types of games and gamification in distinct ways (Landers et al., 2019), thus highlighting the importance of individual factors in brand gamification's effectiveness.

Notably, users differ in the goals they hope to achieve when and their motives for interacting with gamified brand offerings (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019). Motivation types for gaming vary,

with Bartle's four player types – achievers, explorers, socializers and killers – highlighting diverse player profiles (Tobon et al., 2020). Specifically, achievers are typically motivated by high-performance levels or gaining rewards, socializers like to interact with other players, explorers thrive on the discovery of new aspects of the game and killers enjoy being better than anyone else. These further align with key motivational factors explaining why people play games, including social interaction, escape, competition, skill development or fantasy (Demetrovics et al., 2011). Accordingly, the type of feedback provided by gamified platforms influences user outcomes depending on their personal goals toward the brand and the gamified activity. Put plainly, game elements focused on immersion will particularly resonate with individuals looking for escapism and exploration, while achievement elements foster skill development and rewards. Depending on the brand's industry, its customer base might have a prominent motive for interacting with gamified brand offerings. For instance, immersive gamification might enhance enjoyment and engagement for hedonic products, whereas for utilitarian products, it may act as a distraction due to the dominance of cognitive processes in consumer decision-making (Bekk et al., 2022; Hofacker et al., 2016).

Additionally, player orientation, the preference for competitive versus cooperative experiences, further shapes how users interact with gamification (Robson et al., 2015). Those with a competitive orientation may derive more satisfaction from leaderboards and achievement badges, whereas cooperative players value team-based challenges and collaborative goals. Hence, the platform type further reinforces these differences, as the presence of social affordances might shape how the gamified offering is presented. In summary, users have different motivations for engaging with gamified brand offerings. Accordingly, individuals are drawn to distinct motivational affordances and may encompass multiple motivations within a single player, depending on contextual factors.

Other individual factors play a role in shaping the effectiveness of gamification strategies. Skills, knowledge and abilities act as pivotal resources that moderate consumer engagement with gamified brand experiences (Ciuchita et al., 2023; Landers et al., 2019), influencing discussions on consumer vulnerability within such contexts. Moreover, individual differences in playfulness impact consumers' attraction to game-like interactions and susceptibility to gaming addiction (Landers et al., 2019; Hofacker et al., 2016). Demographic factors, such as age and gender, might further influence the effects of gamification (Ciuchita et al., 2023). Notably, younger users generally exhibit more favorable attitudes toward gamification, likely due to the perceived ease of use of gamified systems (Koivisto & Hamari, 2014) and their inherent interest in gaming activities (Deterding, 2019). Additionally, gender plays a role in shaping the perceived benefits of gamification (Koivisto & Hamari, 2014; Zhang et al., 2021), suggesting that a single gamification approach may vary in effectiveness across different consumer segments.

Game Elements

The type of game elements (i.e., the game's goals, rules and general structure) plays a crucial role in attaining various brand objectives. In designing game elements, companies can typically implement three main types of gamification techniques, namely social, immersion and achievement (Tobon et al., 2020). To date, research shows that social and immersion techniques promote relatedness as a psychological outcome (Bitrián et al., 2021), as well as affective brand outcomes, thus particularly impacting the emotional brand relationship positively (e.g., Berger et al., 2018). Achievement elements, on the other hand, tend to be more efficient at supporting behavioral outcomes such as positive word-of-mouth or brand loyalty

(e.g., Hwang & Choi, 2020), tapping into consumer's drive for action, when the challenge level is appropriate and fostering users' sense of competence (Bitrián et al., 2021).

Another key aspect of game elements and features is the level of interactivity of the game or gamified support. While gamification is based on the principle of consumers being active co-creators of their experience, the brand can leave more or less room for interactivity in the game or gamified offering. Interactivity in the game has been recognized to support psychological, emotional and cognitive brand outcomes (e.g., Berger et al., 2018).

Brand Strategy

Branded gamified applications as core offerings are more likely to foster strong self-brand connections and long-term loyalty because they are more likely fully embedded in the lives of consumers versus a gamified brand activation. On the other hand, brand activations such as advergames can be used to foster brand image, preference and attitudes or generate one-off purchases.

While gamification can positively impact consumer enjoyment and experiential brand outcomes, it might reduce cognitive brand outcomes because of its distracting potential, especially when the brand is not easily recognizable (for instance, in a branded game in which the consumer does not understand well the link with the brand or doesn't notice the brand at all) (Bekk et al., 2022). Differently put, positive effects of gamification often arise when affective outcomes (i.e., driven by emotions) are the focus (Bekk et al., 2022)

Last, caution must be applied when integrating game elements into a brand offering. Gamification is generally based on the premise that the consumer is voluntarily involved in value co-creation and game(ful) activities (Huotari & Hamari, 2017). However, gamified branded activities may not always be used voluntarily. Landers et al. (2019) state that a gameful experience only occurs when usage is voluntary. The problem with the implementation of gamification when the consumer wants to avoid using it (e.g., access to a product feature is conditioned to playing a game, or a previously non-gamified offering has been gamified) is that the design system of gamification is there. However, the consumer does not experience the positive effect, which typically results in positive outcomes. For instance, compulsory play weakens emotional brand engagement and time pressure reduces cognitive brand engagement (Berger et al., 2018). To have a gameful experience (and thus, gamification), the consumer must feel free to stop playing if they don't want to anymore, even if it's not true (Landers et al., 2019).

Based on the reviewed literature and overview of the current knowledge at the intersection of gamification and branding, we propose a series of relevant propositions that aggregate key considerations addressing the role and impact of gamification in modern brand management. The propositions address as well as the conditions under which these relationships can occur and develop optimally or not. Specifically, our propositions (first column) consider how each factor influences the way brand outcomes are delivered by games or gamification, but we also suggest specific conditions (second column) for the success of game elements for brands that are based on the interplays between these factors. Table 36.3 summarizes these considerations in the form of propositions and specific conditions.

Table 36.3 Propositions and specific conditions

<i>Propositions</i>	<i>Specific Conditions</i>	<i>Key References</i>
P1: Contextual factors influence gamification's effectiveness in driving affective, cognitive, and brand outcomes.	<p>I. Highly immersive platforms (e.g., VR) are conducive of affective brand outcomes (e.g., self-brand connections and brand attitudes).</p> <p>II. Game elements focused on achievement are particularly relevant for behavioral brand outcomes in utilitarian contexts, while game elements focused on immersion are particularly relevant for affective brand outcomes in experiential contexts.</p> <p>III. Brands involved in transformative industries (e.g., health, education) will be particularly enhanced in terms of cognitive and behavioral outcomes through achievement and social game elements.</p>	Bekk et al. (2022); Hofacker et al. (2016); Mulcahy et al. (2021); Nobre and Ferreira (2017); van Berlo et al. (2021)
P2: Individual factors influence gamification's effectiveness in driving affective, cognitive, and brand outcomes.	<p>I. Consumers with escapism and exploratory motivations will respond more positively to immersive and social game elements, driving affective brand outcomes (e.g., self-brand connection).</p> <p>II. Consumers with skill development and reward-based motivations will respond more positively to achievement game elements, driving cognitive and behavioral brand outcomes (e.g., loyalty).</p> <p>III. Consumers with higher social orientation and motivations will respond more positively to competition and cooperation game elements, enhancing cognitive and behavioral brand outcomes (e.g., value co-creation, brand knowledge).</p> <p>IV. Consumer skills, abilities and existing knowledge should match the gamified brand offering to provide optimal levels of challenge and flow, driving cognitive brand outcomes (e.g., brand knowledge).</p>	Koivisto and Hamari (2019); Robson et al. (2015); Tobon et al. (2020)
P3: The type of game elements used influence gamification's effectiveness in driving affective, cognitive and brand outcomes.	<p>I. Immersion elements (potentially coupled with social elements) are particularly suited to foster affective brand outcomes (e.g., brand love, self-brand connections).</p> <p>II. Achievement game elements (potentially coupled with social elements) are particularly suited to foster behavioral brand outcomes (e.g., word-of-mouth, loyalty), especially when designed with an optimal level of challenge.</p> <p>III. Interactivity features strengthen gamification's potential in supporting affective, cognitive, and behavioral brand outcomes through heightened brand engagement and experience.</p>	Berger et al. (2018); Bitrián et al. (2021); Hwang and Choi (2020)
P4: The brand strategy in integrating gamification	I. Immersion and interactivity elements are more favorable in the context of core brand offerings as they might direct consumers' attention to other (deeply immersive) game elements rather than the	Bekk et al. (2022); Berger et al. (2018); Huotari and Hamari (2017)

<i>Propositions</i>	<i>Specific Conditions</i>	<i>Key References</i>
into its offering influence gamification's effectiveness in driving affective, cognitive and brand outcomes.	branded elements, which would fail in terms of brand shorter-term activation campaigns. II. Branded games as activation campaigns are best suited to foster affective brand outcomes through enhanced experience (e.g., positive associations around the brand). On the other hand, gamification features are best suited to foster cognitive and behavioral brand outcomes through heightened engagement (e.g., value co-creation, loyalty). III. Compulsory (versus voluntary) play, and the implementation of time pressure, reduce brand engagement and experience, weakening brand outcomes.	

Source: The authors

CONTRIBUTION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Scientific Contribution

Gamification and, more generally, the introduction of game elements in a branded offering can bring undeniable benefits to brands. This paper offers a comprehensive, yet non-systematic, view of current research combining gamification and branding interests. It develops propositions that guide future scholarship and brand specialists' practical use of gamification. In doing so, this chapter offers important and nuanced insight into the benefits and appropriate use of gamification in various situations.

Specifically, our work shows that the interplay of game elements and their integration into the brand strategy, alongside contextual and individual factors, will influence affective, cognitive and behavioral brand outcomes. In doing so, we first offer a more comprehensive overview of the factors that come into play when applying game elements to a brand strategy, and we also show how their specific integration and interplay can generate brand outcomes.

First, gamification effectiveness is largely conditioned by its integration into the brand offering. In other words, how prominent and central to the brand offering the game elements are bears significant strategic implications. Branded gamified applications as a product are more likely to foster strong self-brand connections. As core brand offerings, these applications (often mobile- or wearable-based) are more likely to be fully embedded in the lives of consumers. Mobile technologies support the close proximity and usability of the gamified platform, and if they are core to the brand offering, usage propensity is increased to fully benefit from the brand experience. On the other hand, gamified brand activations such as advergaming can be used to foster brand image, preference and attitudes. Often used in the shorter term or as part of limited campaigns, these tools contribute to the vitality of the brand and generate faster adoption rates and behavioral outcomes.

Second, gamification is a highly personalized and personal matter, building on human motivation principles to appeal to and engage consumers (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019; Landers et al., 2019). Our work stresses the role of individual factors such as consumer personality,

motivations and traits, as gamification is often used to support individualistic objectives (such as self-improvement, self-care, and enjoyment). As a result, each individual consumer will respond to a lesser or greater extent to a specific trigger based on their profile. In this regard, it is essential to match the game elements in the gamified brand strategy to the industry the brand operates in and the potential motivations consumers have for interacting with the brand offering. For instance, luxury or experiential brands can capitalize on gamification to tap into the potential need for escapism that consumers showcase in this particular context. On the other hand, different considerations are needed for gamification's implementation for functional brands, which fulfill distinct consumer needs. Furthermore, brands using gamification in their strategy should pay particular attention to the knowledge and skills of their customer base to ensure that the game elements can be used optimally. Suppose brands fail to consider the specific individual factors of their target audience. In that case, they risk missing the mark by developing game elements in their brand strategy that lack relevance and impact.

Third, gamification elements and their combinations can offer various benefits and support varying brand objectives. As a result, managers seeking to implement gamification in their offering should therefore make sure that the gamification or game elements are integrated in their offering in a way that supports their objectives. For instance, any brand seeking to create long-lasting engagement and strong brand relationships could consider the development of a gamified brand offering that is tightly integrated with the current offer in a seamless customer experience. Platform brands (Wichmann et al., 2022) rely on versatile platforms, allowing them to engage with consumers beyond product purchase, thus creating an all-encompassing ecosystem of interactions and touchpoints around the brand. These platforms often capitalize on gamification features to keep consumers engaged and interested.

Managerial Recommendations

The 'specific' conditions that we develop in Table 36.3 offer a number of actionable recommendations for managers, which highlight first that game elements should be tailored to the type of industry in which the brand operates and that the choice of platforms is crucial, as well as the specific features developed.

Beyond the specific type of integration into the brand strategy, which we explore as a key factor of success, managers should always ensure that the brand is highly recognizable, particularly when dealing with third-party integrations. While gamification can positively impact consumer enjoyment and experiential brand outcomes, it might reduce cognitive brand outcomes because of its distracting potential, especially when the brand is not easily recognizable (for instance, in a branded game in which the consumer does not understand well the link with the brand or doesn't notice the brand at all) (Bekk et al., 2022). Positive effects of gamification often arise when affective outcomes (i.e., driven by emotions) are the focus and the brand is identifiable (Bekk et al., 2022). Last, managers should also be aware of the critical amount of consumer data generated by gamified interactions. Such data can serve strategic branding objectives such as consumer profiling and targeting.

Future Research

Our research also sheds light on various underexplored yet topical aspects of gamification, which also concern brand managers. Future research should address several promising questions. First, most game-related affordances studied rely on competitive dynamics (points and leaderboards). Yet, more research is needed to better understand how gamification can

support collective behaviors (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019). For instance, gamification can support connection and cooperation within a brand community, rather than competition (Leclercq et al., 2018), which is highly relevant for brand community managers. The collective dimension of gamification outcomes is under-explored in extant research to benefit individual dynamics and brands (Nobre & Ferreira, 2017).

Further, the impact of gamification on cognitive brand-related outcomes has received less attention than affective or behavioral aspects. While we know that gamification often supports consumer learning (e.g., van Berlo et al., 2021) and that immersive interactive environments can enhance memory of brand-related elements (Kostyk et al., 2024), there is a dearth of focus on how gamification supports consumer cognition concerning brands. Studies should elucidate the role of gamification in fostering brand awareness, knowledge, attention and memory.

Next, gamification has frequently been studied not only for high-involvement, hedonic goods (e.g., Xu et al., 2017) but also increasingly for utilitarian products or mass-market offerings (Nobre & Ferreira, 2017). Yet, there is a lack of application in social and sustainable brands. Apart from notable exceptions (e.g., Mulcahy et al., 2021; Whittaker et al., 2021), few studies investigate the potential for brands to use gamification for good and promote sustainable and ethical practices. Given the power of gamification to educate consumers, shape their attitudes, and impact their intentions, brands with sustainable values and missions, along with researchers, should harness this tool and study its impact as a lever of positive societal change. Finally, while this chapter aimed to present an integrative framework highlighting the brand benefits of incorporating game elements into a brand strategy, an increasing body of research highlights the potential adverse effects of gamification. Accordingly, we encourage future research to investigate the potential detrimental impacts of gamification on both brands and their consumers. For instance, Bekk et al. (2022) evidence that gamification can negatively impact product information recognition. Hammedi et al. (2024) further show that consumer engagement declines when gamification is too frequent. In some cases, gamification may result in disengagement (Hammedi et al., 2021), as well as impede the development of key behavioral brand outcomes, including word-of-mouth (Wolf et al., 2020) and co-creation (Leclercq et al., 2018). The negative impact of gamification and the conditions under which they occur warrant further elucidation to avoid satiation effects and missing brand objectives. To elucidate this aspect of gamification, the involvement of real-life users of game elements is warranted, to have first-hand information, crucial to address such experience-sensitive questions.

Gamification can also result in unintended consequences for users. While brands incorporate game elements into their strategies to enhance engagement (Landers et al., 2019), an emerging body of research questions the assumption that increased engagement necessarily leads to improved outcomes for users (e.g., Baiwir et al., 2024; O'Brien et al., 2022). Gamification can thus backfire for brands. Particularly, heightened interactions with technologies have been linked to negative effects on well-being, including addiction, anxiety and stress (Kumar et al., 2022; McLean et al., 2024). In this context, future research should critically investigate the relationship between gamified brand offerings and negative consumer outcomes, focusing on identifying the conditions under which specific game elements may contribute to well-being and dysfunctional brand engagement. Additionally, given the highly personalized nature of gamification and its dependence on individual factors, future research should examine the role of these factors in driving the negative consequences of gamification. Particularly, identifying the consumer profiles that may be more vulnerable to the adverse effects of gamified brand offerings is warranted to ensure ethical brand practices.

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