

“HOW DO I REACH THESE KIDS?” AN EXPERIMENT IN GAMIFICATION

Ekin Pehlivan and Emma Corette, Martin V. Smith School of Business and Economics, California State University Channel Islands

We are living in the future! Have no doubt; if you have a computer in your pocket, a robot that sweeps your floors, if you communicate using micro-video messaging (i.e. SnapChat) and write in 140 characters (i.e. Tweet), you are living in the future. Our lives have changed drastically in the last decade and many more changes are in the horizon. Generational changes are becoming more pronounced within the millennial (Generation Y) and post-millennial (Generation Z) generation learners. The fast pace of change presents us with many challenges in educational and professional environments. To keep up, teacher-scholars at the forefront of their profession have been experimenting with different approaches to teaching and learning. This paper will focus on one such non-traditional approach, *gamification and game-based learning* in higher education.

Born out of a fellowship grant by the Teaching and Learning Innovations Center in California State University Channel Islands, this study attempts to experiment and report on the adaptation of a gamified Principles of Marketing course that will be offered in Spring 2017 and Fall 2017. The full paper introduces a brief review of the literature, a survey of the platforms available in higher education (including gamification engines and game-based learning management systems). Then I move on to describe the design of the new ‘gamified’ course that will be implemented in upcoming semesters. Once the course is completed assessment of students’ engagement and learning, alongside a case comparison of the current design and the gamified design will provide insight into the complications and the benefits of this method. While there is still a dispute among the educator as to whether gamification is beneficial or harmful to the learner, the outcomes in each trial are context specific. Therefore the contributions of this research will be limited to the student body, subject material and structural design of the course. However certain lessons may be drawn in terms of possible practices in teaching introductory level marketing courses in higher education.

What is ‘gamification’?

Gamification or game-based learning are not new to teaching and learning, however as the millennials (Generation Y) and tech natives (Generation Z) start moving into the higher education as learners they are becoming more commonplace. Deterding and colleagues (2011) worked on a definition of gamification to clarify the conceptual confusion among scholars and teachers. Their definition focused on using *game elements* in non-game contexts, distinguishing between play and gaming, identifying and categorizing game elements. Games have been a part of business and marketing education for the last few decades through strategy simulations, thus we are no stranger to implementing these tools and game elements into our curricula in these disciplines.

Design of a game-based course

Visible game elements in games consist of narrative contexts, levels, feedback, competition, time pressure (Reeves & Read, 2009) as well as badges, point systems and leaderboards (Hamari et al., 2014). Designing a gamified course is not limited to the use of these visible game elements, but should account for the ties between learning objectives and progression on to more complicated outcomes in each level. For the experimental implementation of this technique, I have chosen the Principles of Marketing course because the learning objectives of this course are progressive (increasing in challenge) and aid skill development in identifying, recalling, understanding concepts; analyzing and criticizing processes and applications; and planning, implementing or creating processes to solve problems (from Bloom’s taxonomy).

The progressive and competitive nature of gaming experience suits the progression of learning objectives in this class. In other words, if a self-paced, progressive structure can be implemented, the students can graduate onto advanced modules based on their performance in earlier modules. Students who have not been able to master the earlier modules will have more opportunities to reinforce their learning in the specific areas they are lacking. I expect to observe the impact of this flexible progression as an individualized learning path for each student.

Other important components of the course design is quest based learning, reward mechanisms and competition. Quest based activities are used to assess student learning on each module. Reports of their use state, while they may be very similar to homework assignments, the nature of questing engages the learner (Iosup & Epema, 2014; Madigan 2015) and keeps them motivated, especially when the attempts are rewarded with game elements, like badges or leaderboards for the others to see. Quests can be reinforced using universal design for learning:

In a specific module of this course students will have the option to choose one big challenge, form a team, from people who were able to graduate to their level (module), and go on this larger quest or choose many smaller, individual quests to illustrate their proficiency in the module. In addition to this integrated approach a competitive environment created through game elements, does not mean students compete directly with each other but try to earn rewards that they may be able to use for their benefit in the future. For instance successfully completing a quest-like quiz could award the learner with the option to pass a question in the final.

Conclusion

This year-long project aims to explore the benefits, drawbacks and complications associated with gamification in a higher education context. Millennials are already struggling with the traditional presentation of instructional material. As the tech-natives enter college the challenges are going to be even more pronounced. While we are not strangers to game-based learning in the marketing discipline, an over application of gaming elements to not only content presentation and assessment but also the structuring of the course to implement gaming experience to the user might be one technique to reach the next generation of learners.

References available upon request