
FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE SUCCESS OF A GAMIFIED MOBILE SPORT FAN ENGAGEMENT APP

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Synopsis:

Mobile apps offer many benefits to sport organizations. This research used two qualitative studies to explore that Usability of the app, Competition among users, Pride and achievement, Gaining knowledge, and Diversity of content are factors that contribute to the success of a gamified mobile sport fan engagement app.

Abstract:

Mobile apps offer many benefits to sport organizations. They can be utilized to engage fans, extend the fan experience beyond the game, provide over-the-top content, gather consumer insights, generate leads, increase sponsorship income, and introduce loyalty programs. A recent development in the area of mobile apps is the gamification of consumer engagement. Examples are the Manchester City Matchday app or the Arenoo app. These apps draw on the competitive spirit of their fans through leaderboards and reward fan activity, such as answering trivia questions or predicting game results, with prizes. The recent emergence of gamified customer engagement via mobile apps provided an opportunity to investigate factors that contribute to the success of a mobile fan engagement app.

Customer engagement represents customers' behavioral manifestation toward a brand or firm beyond purchase (Marketing Science Institute, 2010).

Customers participate in engagement activities to receive incentives such as financial benefits or emotional benefits, such as pleasure or positive affect.

Organizations participate in customer engagement activities to develop and enhance the organization-customer relationship, which subsequently leads to a strong, enduring psychological connection accompanied by interactive brand experiences beyond purchase that may influence consumer loyalty and purchase decisions (Hollebeek, 2011; So, King, Sparks, 2014). To increase the effectiveness of engagement activities, organizations are utilize gamification elements. The purpose of gamified engagement is to improve user experience and user engagement and in a service-marketing context defined as "a process

of enhancing a service with affordances for gameful experiences in order to support user's overall value creation" (Huotari & Hamari, 2012, p. 19). The emergence of gamified mobile apps was the basis of the following research question: What factors contribute to the success of a gamified mobile sport fan engagement app?

Data for this research was derived from users of the Arenoo app, which engages fans of the German Bundesliga. Users select their favorite league and club and Arenoo provides news related to users' favorite club. Users receive points for answering quiz questions related to the sport of football, for predicting upcoming match results, for checking in at the stadium, or on television, for inviting friends to join the app. Points determine a leaderboard and the fan of the week wins prizes. Qualitative online-questionnaires were sent to users (Study 1 November 2014 N = 46; Study 2 March 2015 N = 25) of the Arenoo app who have received at least 250 points. Questions addressed what users liked about the app and where they recommended areas for improvement. Data were analyzed in six phases following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach.

Qualitative data analysis revealed five themes. 1) Usability was concerned with comments that addressed the speed, simplicity, design and navigation of the app. 2) Competition was concerned with comments that highlighted users' enjoyment of competing with fellow fans and seeing their ranking compared to other fans. 3) Pride and achievement was concerned with comments that highlighted users' enjoyment of showcasing their passion, demonstrating who has better knowledge about the sport and receiving badges and prizes. 4) Gaining knowledge was concerned with comments how users gained knowledge about the league and its teams through using the app. 5) Diversity was concerned with comments that users wanted more functions within the app, such as fantasy football and being able to select other leagues and sports. Findings indicate that successful apps should be founded on a simple, intuitive structure that makes it easy for users to navigate the various functions within the app. Based on this foundation, sport organizations can utilize gamification elements to engage their consumers through providing them a platform of competition with their friends and other fans. Gamified competition can be utilized to promote information that may lead to the creation of brand associations (e.g., team tradition). Additionally, gamified engagement can stimulate positive emotions, such as pride and achievement, which may lead to increased engagement within the app (e.g., in-app purchases) and potentially foster consumers' identity process (e.g., Lock, Taylor, Funk, & Darcy, 2012) influencing other sport related behavior (e.g., merchandise purchase, game consumption). Managerial implications for digital media managers of sport teams making a decision in which app to invest are provided at the conference.

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