The Gamification of Buying

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Evidence from six (laboratory and field) experiments shows that construing part of the shopping process as a game that one must complete successfully in order to “unlock” an object (i.e., a product, feature, or offer) increases consumer preference for that object relative to a non-gamified shopping process.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Recently, marketers have started to embed challenging tasks, i.e., gamified shopping processes, into the purchase experience to enhance consumer preference. The current research introduces the concept of gamification whereby consumers are required to perform a task (such as completing a product feature, or offer) in order to unlock the option to acquire products. Specifically, the current research examines how this gamification of shopping processes influences the desirability of an unlocked option relative to a traditional shopping process. The current research examines how this gamification of shopping processes influences the desirability of an unlocked option relative to a traditional shopping process. Specifically, the current research examines how this gamification of shopping processes influences the desirability of an unlocked option relative to a traditional shopping process.

Experiment 1 was designed to demonstrate the effect of the gamified shopping process on consumer preference. In the control condition, participants played a beer pong game and were informed that participants were randomly assigned to either a game or a control condition. In the game condition, participants had to throw a ball five times into a cup, and participants had to throw a ball five times into a cup. Participants of the control condition completed a filler task. Upon completion participants were free to trade initial chocolate bars for the unlocked chocolate bar (identical except for packaging color). As predicted, participants in the game condition more often chose the unlocked chocolate bar than participants in the control condition (M_game = 60%, M_control = 39%, F(1.94) = 4.120, p < .05).

Experiment 2 mirrors the experiment 1, but examines whether a gamified shopping process motivates action (i.e., payment) beyond trading between two equally attractive options. 85 students were randomly assigned to either a game or a control condition; however, they were only allowed to purchase the right to participate in a university coffee mug. In line with our theorizing, participants in the game condition were more likely to buy the mug than participants in the control condition (M_game = 58%, M_control = 33%, F(1.83) = 5.686, p < .05).

The purpose of experiment 3 is provide both a first demonstration of the proposed mediating role of consumers’ experienced challenge in a gamified shopping process, and to manipulate the challenge induced on consumers in a between subjects design (i.e., by two game conditions that differ in their level of challenge). 151 students were randomly assigned to either a high challenge or a low challenge condition in which participants had to throw a ball from a distance of two centimeters five times into the cups. Upon completion, participants could buy a Red Bull energy drink for 1 Swiss Franc. Participants in the high challenge game condition were significantly more likely to buy the mug than the two other conditions (M_highChallengeGame = 50.00%, M_lowChallengeGame = 26.00%, M_control = 30.61%, F(2, 148) = 3.721, p < .05), supporting that the experienced challenge increased consumer preference.

Experiment 4A examines the psychological process underlying the effect and tests a set of alternative explanations. We used different versions of a roller ball game across the experimental conditions with the outcome that the opportunity to purchase the lottery ticket (for USD .20) was unlocked. Controlling for effort, participants in the control condition had to steer a ball to the end of a straight track. The track was manipulated such that they could not fall off. Participants in the first game condition had to complete the same game but with multiple curves. If the ball fell off the track they had to start over (or were free to leave without the option to purchase the lottery ticket). In a second game condition that was designed to disentangle the mere act of winning from playing a game participants had to play the same game, but had to roll a six using a virtual dice afterwards. In a third game condition that was designed to control consumer skills required by the game participants solely had to roll a six on the virtual dice. 191 participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions. As suggested, participants in the game condition were more likely to purchase the lottery than participants in all other conditions (M_game = 68.75%, M_diceOnly = 35.42%, M_control = 27.66%, F(3, 187) = 6.67, p < .001). A mediation analysis confirmed that the experienced challenge increased the preference for purchasing the lottery. In a follow-up experiment (Experiment 4B; N=107) we found that feelings of accomplishment mediate the effect of experienced challenge on the purchase of the lottery. Results supported the sequential mediation. Together, experiments 4A and 4B provide evidence on the mental process underlying the preference enhancing effect of a gamified shopping process.

The objective of the final experiment is to examine the evaluative consequences of a gamified shopping process. Participants had to configure a car. In the game condition participants had to unlock specific attributes (by completing the roller game) while participants in the control condition had to complete a filler task. Again, the game increased consumer preference for the unlocked attributes, however, satisfaction with the car configuration decreased pointing out that a gamified shopping process can be detrimental for consumers.

Six experiments provide converging evidence that experiencing a feeling of challenge when unlocking an object increases consumer preference for that object. By showing that overcoming challenging tasks as games can enhance preferences, the findings mainly contribute to literature that suggests that task characteristics determine whether the effort expended is experienced positively or negatively (Buechel and Janiszewski 2014; Yang, Mao, and Peracchio 2012).

REFERENCES

