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## Gamification

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### Definition

"Gamification" consists of the use of game-design elements (e.g., rankings, levels, and badges) into non-game contexts. Playful-dynamics are based on three elements: first, an artificial conflict among users (*competition*); second, a set of *rules* to govern such conflicts; and third, quantifiable outcomes (*rewards*). Due to the growing relevance of strategies aimed at influencing decision-makers through mobilizing segments of the public opinion, actors as diverse as corporations and civil society organizations have begun to experiment with game-design elements. Gamification has therefore become a tool for mobilizing citizens on key policy matters, or building trust between pressure groups and their communities.

### Introduction

This chapter sets out by briefly analyzing how game-design has been applied in sectors as diverse as marketing, public decision-making, and advocacy strategies (in the latter case, from both civic and corporate stakeholders). After this brief introduction, the focus of the chapter shifts to providing a few examples of stakeholders (corporations and civic actors) operating in democratic systems that have incorporated game-design in their influence strategies. In doing so, the chapter also analyses the potential impact of such innovative strategies on public decision-making and its related drawbacks. The chapter concludes by sketching likely the future scenarios concerned with the use gamification for influence, separating the concept of mobilization from that of organization.

### Game-Designed Influence Strategies

The business sector is the area in which gamification has developed the most. While in recent years social networks pushed ahead the use of game-design to enhance user-retention and attract new users, companies have applied gamified strategies well before the advent of social media. Another field where the game-design strategies has been growing is political communication. In most cases, political actors test playful design with the aim of engaging


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voters. There are, however, certain experiments of gamification applied to post-voting political environments. In such cases, gamification has been used either to provoke thought or discussion or to coordinate the activities of the network of volunteers revolving around a political party. More recently, game-design has been experimented with by public administrations. This is not entirely new. Games were part of the public sphere in Greek and Roman societies, and have existed in some form or other throughout the history of public power. For the first time in history, however, public regulators are looking at how to harness the motivational potential of game-design to counter disenchantment with politics and foster civic engagement. The final goal would be to realign democracy with citizens' expectations, making participation more playful and rewarding (Lerner, 2015; Sgueo, 2018).

## Game-Designed Influence Strategies

Game-design is being used by a wide variety of stakeholders in Western democracies for scopes as diverse as information-sharing, coalition-building, or fundraising. So, while it is correct to say that the final end is to gain influence on decision-makers, through mobilizing the public opinion in favor or against certain topics, it is also correct to assume that, at a more granular level, game-design strategies may have different goals.

Three main types of gamification may be applied to the attempts of being influential within decision-making systems. The first can be described as "*informative*"; the second and third are "*networking*" and "*fundraising,*" respectively.

1. Informative types of gamified advocacy aim at raising awareness and spreading ideas about topics of interest to concerned actors. Cases falling within this type of gamified advocacy are designed to provide the largest possible number of users with (direct) knowledge of a given problem as well as (indirect) knowledge of the activity of the civic actor who is responsible for the initiative. Take the case of the Women's Link Worldwide (WLW), an international non-profit organization advocating the human rights of women and girls, especially those facing multiple inequalities. Every year, the WLW holds the "*Gender Justice Uncovered Awards*" to recognize the influence of the judiciary in the daily lives of people. There are two award categories. The "*Gavel award*" is allocated to judicial decisions that promote gender equality. The "*Bludgeon award*," instead, is allocated to judicial decisions that are retrograde and discriminatory. In both cases there are a gold, silver and bronze winners. An independent jury of three members, composed of women and men from different parts of the world, is nominated every year and tasked with the responsibility of selecting the winners of the categories. In addition to these two awards, there is a "*People's Choice Award."* As the name suggests, this is decided by the number of votes received online – with the person with the most online votes winning the award. Some of the cases nominated for Awards may also become part of the Gender Justice Observatory of WLW. The Gender Justice Observatory is a program that maintains a free online database of jurisprudence with case summaries, as well as the complete texts of judicial decisions that have established a significant precedent on gender issues, in both English and Spanish.
2. Networking types of gamified advocacy are instead aim at creating "engagement networks" – i.e., communities connected by a common purpose, and distributed in both leadership and infrastructures. Such networks can be of a *collaborative type* (i.e., consisting of a linked group of individuals figuring out together the best ways to carry out a prescribed task that itself may evolve) or rather of an *innovative type* (i.e., a linked group of individuals tasked with generating new ideas, processes, and products in the service of a prescribed general goal). In 2019, a number of pharmaceutical companies interested at influencing the European Union (EU legislator about the regulation of new products to the market launched a wide-ranging campaign of information. This consisted of different actions, ranging from

more traditional tools (e.g., posters and online ads) to more innovative ones (as a virtual box installation within the EU Parliament premises, where users could get information through engaging with trivia and other interactive tools).

3. Finally, gamified advocacy strategies that are aimed at raising funds may be described as "fundraising." This is obviously used mostly by civic actors, constantly in search of strategies that could boost the success of campaigns for raising funds. Exemplary is the case of Depaul – a youth homelessness charity headquartered in Britain that in 2010 launched "*IHobo*," an app generating a virtual homeless person. After installing the app, players were asked to take care of the needs of this "Ihobo" for three (real time) days. If players failed to properly care for their "virtual dependent," the homeless person would deplete his/her resources and, eventually, die. At the end of the 3 days, users were asked to make a donation, via mobile, of £3, £5 or £10 to Depaul. *Ihobo* shot to the top of the iTunes download chart. At the end of the first week of its release, it had collected 210,000 downloads. Most importantly, the app generated 4,956 new one-off donors for Depaul, who received an average donation of £2.

## Conclusions

Traditional campaigning, conventional tactics for coalition building, and classic strategies for knowledge sharing or crowdfunding are being increasingly complemented by the use of mobile applications, design-thinking, and behavioral mechanics. This is both promising and challenging.

- On the one hand, gamification promises an easy path to engaging citizens in campaigns promoted by pressure groups (Lupia and Sin, 2003). Advocacy strategies that are "gamified" through digital platforms have the potential to boost support and uptake of whatever social cause the advocacy strategy is promoting.
- On the other hand, some problematic questions remain unanswered. Does gamified advocacy always work? Most importantly, are game-design elements incorporated into advocacy/lobbying strategies encouraging the mobilization of public opinion, and therefore enhanced chances of impact on policy-making, or are they only mobilizing few users, for limited amounts of time?

A solid body of scholarship has demonstrated that approaches that are "fun" can be a powerful trigger for individual motivation (Kahne et al., 2009; Yoannis et al., 2014). Empirical evidence suggesting that adding game characteristics to a system results in enhanced engagement exists, for instance, in the field of public policy, college students' engagement, user activity with online services, and physical exercise. In the case of lobbying, the effectiveness of gamified advocacy should be assessed toward the distinction between to concepts: mobilizing and organizing (Han, 2014).

- *Mobilization* is obtained through e-mail lists or online petitions, and it normally leverages powers that already exist (Obar et al., 2012).
- *Organizing*, in contrast, consists of capacity-building activities that create new power by bringing people to take action as a community. Organizing can lock in sustained support in ways that commitment to a single issue – the type of motivation on which tend to rely the mobilizing approaches – may not. Gamified advocacy seems to work well with mobilizing citizens. The "attentive public" – i.e., the portion of the broader general public that shares similar issue-perspectives and values, as in the case of the environmentalists – is an ideal target of gamification. On occasions, the attentive public could be organized into a convergent strong public – this is, a committed public, formally committed to objectives and values, usually via provision of membership fees or donations. In this respect, however, gamification seems to be less effective.

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