Chapter 6
Gamifying a Car’s Servicescape

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ABSTRACT

Research so far has explored and examined physical and digital servicescapes, but little is known about more abstract settings such as cars. Drawing from research on gamification and service marketing, this chapter explores the brand as game mechanics in a car’s servicescape. The chapter uses a qualitative empirical case with a global car manufacturer to further anchor gamification with service marketing literature. The chapter reveals that the manufacturer strategically plans and designs the car’s servicescape by employing the brand-related stimuli as game mechanisms in the interior. It also reveals that consumers do not actively participate in creating value in non-game contexts.

INTRODUCTION

When people play the game Red Dead Redemption 2, they get to “explore” the game’s environment through the character Arthur and are astonished by the beautiful and detailed landscape mirroring the American West. As players advance through the game, they encounter all the essential characteristics of the Wild West, such as colonists, outlaws, trains, the Hudson River, and animals like buffalos and horses. Everything in the game feels meticulously handcrafted, such as brewing coffee before drinking or cocking a pistol before firing. While moving around, every consumable is labelled and can be picked up and inspected. Thus, it provides the impression of being inside the servicescape of the American West like a gamified virtual museum.

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Although the example above is fictitious, it serves as an illustration of how consumers can perceive and interact with a gamified servicescape, whether in a digital or physical setting. Thus far, research on gamification has mainly focused on the human-computer interaction and game studies (Huotari & Hamari, 2017). However, gamification has received growing interest in various research domains and among practitioners (Helme Falk & Marcusson, 2019). There are various definitions of gamification, but the common denominator is applying game thinking and mechanics in non-game contexts (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011). In recent years, gamification research has skyrocketed and builds upon the emotional aspects of the consumers, which involve the characteristics of gaming, yet a full-fledged game may not be absolutely necessary (Wünderlich, Gustafsson, Hamari, Parvinen, & Haff, in press). It is elucidated by “the use of game mechanics and experience design to digitally engage and motivate people to achieve their goals” (Burke, 2014, p. 6). As seen in Red Dead Redemption 2, the logic of gamification is applied through structure and mechanics in the game, such as challenges, levels, and missions (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011). However, it is not limited to the player’s goal to succeed, since all the stimuli in the game are designed to gestalt the American West, which is seen as marketing strategy from the game developer (Hamari & Lehdonvirta, 2010). Thus, the anecdote aforementioned also considers the importance of designing the servicescape to provide the consumer with the desired outcome – in this case, enjoying the game and becoming a loyal consumer to the developer, for example, by purchasing additional missions and future sequel games.

Despite the significant interest to bridge the gamification and marketing domains (for reviews, see Helme Falk & Marcusson, 2019; Huotari & Hamari, 2017), surprisingly little attention has been given to gamify a servicescape with brand-related attributes, subsequently engaging consumers with the given brand (Berger, Schlager, Sprott, & Herrmann, 2018). Servicescape is a contextual landscape where a service is produced and consumed, thus an environment where the manufacturer and consumers can interact with each other (Bitner, 1992). According to Huotari and Hamari (2017, p. 29), this is “a process of enhancing a service with affordances for gameful experiences in order to support users’ overall value creation”. Therefore, gamification in marketing is anchored in service-dominant logic (SDL) (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2016) and requires consumers’ participation to interact and experience the service provided by the manufacturer, which leads to value creation (Huotari & Hamari, 2017). In accordance with Berger et al. (2018), the present chapter views a game as a playful experience between a manufacturer’s brand and consumers (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), which is created in a servicescape by building a brand experience (Andreini, Pedeliento, Zarantonello, & Solerio, 2018; Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Iglesias, Markovic, & Rialp, 2019) to situate meaning and value in the consumers’ minds.
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