The impact of gamification adoption intention on brand awareness and loyalty in tourism: The mediating effect of customer engagement

Mohamed Abou-Shouk [a,b,*], Mohammad Soliman [b,c]

[a] College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
[b] Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Fayoum University, Egypt
[c] University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Salalah CAS, Oman

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ABSTRACT

Gamification has been used by tourism organisations for marketing purposes to reinforce customer engagement and to achieve brand awareness and loyalty. The current study, using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology, aims to investigate the antecedents and consequences of gamification's adoption intention by tourist organisations, and to examine the mediation effect of customer engagement. A quantitative method was employed using a survey to collect data from a random sample of relevant managers in travel agencies. Using structural equation modelling for data analysis, the findings revealed that tourism organisations have positive intentions to adopt gamification to increase customer engagement and to achieve tourist destinations' brand awareness and loyalty. Implications, limitations, and future research are also addressed.

1. Introduction

Gamification entails using games with specific aim in mind, typically engaging users and influencing their behaviour (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011; Xi & Hamari, 2019). It is identified as a promising tool for tourism marketing through which customers are engaged to promote tourism destinations. While enjoyed, tourists use serious games to find out information about the places of visit and to achieve memorable experience (Buhalis et al., 2019; Bartoli, Elmi, Bartoli, & Smorti, 2018; Bulencer & Egger, 2015; Xu, Buhalis, & Weber, 2017). Furthermore, gamification has crucial potential benefits for destinations' brand awareness and loyalty (Xu et al., 2017). Liu, Wang, Huang, and Tang (2019) and Buhalis et al. (2019) stated that gamification is a useful technology for tourism sector to reinforce tourist relationships' development, human resources management, and sustainable community support for tourism. Buhalis (2019) has attributed gamification as one of the technologies that will help increase customer satisfaction and engagement in the future.

Rodrigues, Oliveira, and Rodrigues (2019) pointed out that gamified websites attract young generations' attention and raise their aspiration. Additionally, with the spread of mobile technology, businesses are encouraged to embrace gamification to engage customers and increase sales (Eisingerich, Marchand, Fritze, & Dong, 2019). Hence, Zhang,

Phang, Wu, and Luo (2017) indicated that global companies incorporate gamification in their marketing activities (i.e. Expedia). Eisingerich et al. (2019) and Buhalis and Sinarta (2019) mentioned that customer's data collected from gamification apps and social media help companies understand their customers' needs, preferences and support building customer value co-creation.

Gamification has been used by destination marketing organisations (DMOs) for marketing purposes. According to Xu et al. (2017), some DMOs in Thailand and Germany use gamification to market their tourist attractions. Some airlines use it to increase passenger's loyalty and some hotels use it to improve customer engagement or to recruit employees. Some museums use it to maximize visitors' experience (Kasurinen & Knutas, 2018).

Although the previous research has studied the motivations of customer engagement in online communities (i.e. Islam & Rahman, 2017; Rather, Hollebeek, & Islam, 2019) and has also reached a conclusion that customer engagement has a strong effect on brand loyalty, Xu et al. (2017) stated that gamification is still in its infancy stages in tourism industry and the empirical research on the influence of gamification on tourism sales and marketing are called for. In addition, Rodrigues et al. (2019) concluded that measuring attitudes and intentions towards gamification's adoption is a recommended direction for future research to help provide research models contributing to

* Corresponding author. College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates.
E-mail addresses: maboushouk@sharjah.ac.ae (M. Abou-Shouk), msoliman.sal@cas.edu.om (M. Soliman).