Extending StackOverflow® Gamification Using Social Media

| Arturo Reyes Lopez  University of Victoria  areyeslo@uvic.ca | Nitin Goyal  University of Victoria  ngoyal@uvic.ca | Tim Baker  University of Victoria  timbaker@uvic.ca |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Richard Wagner  University of Victoria  rbwagner@uvic.ca | Alastair Beaumont  University of Victoria  alastair@uvic.ca |  |

# ABSTRACT

StackOverflow is a popular Q&A community, with thousands of users solving and answering questions. SO community uses elements of badges and reputation to practice gamification. Our motivation for this project is to identify the effectiveness of gamification and how it can be improved further. This project will address the issues and recommendation from selected SO users to improve/extend gamification elements. First group of users will be selected from SO community based on reputation levels and the second group will be UVic StackOverflow users. There is a definite need of improving gamification in StackOverflow.

## Author Keywords

StackOverflow (SO).

# INTRODUCTION

# StackOverflow is a popular Q&A website for an ever-increasing range of computer programming topics. SO is likely to be the most popular website in the computer programming world with over 4,000,000 registered users [1] and with more than 11,000,000 questions [2]. The website serves as a platform for users to both ask questions related to programming and to answer the questions of other users. These contributions by the users are the heart of the content and are met with reputation points and “badges” for the user. What we hope to uncover is whether this use of gamification is the primary motivating factor for the user’s collaboration and if so, is it possible to improve the current system in order to foster an increase in collaboration by users that wouldn’t normally contribute?

This research aims to examine the ways that collaboration is achieved in SO and what changes can be made to encourage collaboration of more users and to promote an increase in contributions from users of all skill levels. We aim to answer the following research questions:

* Is the publication of reputation and badges on social media a factor to promote more answers?
* Is the current gamification used by StackOverflow meeting the member’s necessities?
* How would the users like to include their reputation and badges on social media?

Throughout the course of this research, we will present an overview of relevant, related work, examine what the primary motivating factors are for user collaboration, discuss the merits and shortcomings of the current system, and provide our recommendations of how StackOverflow may be improved to encourage more active participation from a wider range of its users.

# Related work

StackOverflow has been heavily studied in recent years. The following papers are the most representative

**StackOverflow and GitHub**: Associations between Software Development and Crowdsourced Knowledge which successfully linked users from the two platforms and determined that “for active committers, asking questions on StackOverflow catalyzes committing on GitHub and similarly, for active committers, answering questions on StackOverflow catalyzes committing on GitHub.”

**One-day flies on StackOverflow**: Why the vast majority of StackOverflow users only posts once which found that “less active users” are more likely to not have questions answered, get negative feedback (or answers that can be interpreted that way), self-answer their own question and less likely to have questions not already answered.

**Can Gamification Motivate Voluntary Contributions?** **The case of StackOverflow Q&A Community**: This research was focused on answering activity considering a dataset with 46,571 StackOverflow users. The analysis was focused on comparing the answering activity 7 days before getting the badge and 7 days after the awarding date. The results suggested a positive impact on increasing the number of answers due to badges. For example, those users increasing reputation when answering questions are more likely to answer more questions as a result of the gamification. The analysis was more focused on the behavior of members after receiving a badge. In general, the researches have shown that badges motivate the participation of the user. However, we argue that a change in the current classification of badges besides the inclusion of social media could boost the increase of participation in StackOverflow.

**Does Gamification Work?**: This research indicates that gamification provides positive effects, however, the effects are greatly dependent on the context in which the gamification is being implemented, as well as on the users using it. Most of the reviewed papers reviewed positive results for the same of the motivational affordances of the gamifications implementations studied.

**Building Reputation in StackOverflow**: The authors analyzed the StackOverflow (SO) data from four perspectives to understand the dynamics of reputation building on SO. They found that a large number of questions are related to .NET technologies, OOP languages and web development. Therefore contributors with expertise in those topics will have greater chance building reputation quickly. A contributor should participate regularly and answer as many questions as possible. These actions will improve the contributor’s influence and chances of getting up-votes.

**StackOverflow Badges and User Behavior:** An Econometric Approach: The authors included the different actions to increase reputation, such as editing posts, asking questions and answering questions. They discovered that the behavior changes according to the action to obtain the badge. For example, users earning a badge for editing tend to make more edits in the prior days to receiving a badge compared to days after. In addition, the users who receive a badge for asking questions are not motivated to obtain more badges. The authors proposed anonymous questions feature to increase the rate of posted questions. However, a system of anonymous questions can decrease the level of quality and increase the number of questions.

# REsearch methodology

## To study the collaboration in StackOverflow through answering questions, qualitative research will allow us to address human aspects such as motivation to increase the contributions on the community. On StackOverflow, the contributions are composed of questions and answers. However, this research is focused on maximizing the contributions on questions through proposing a more detailed classification in the elements of gamifications and social media as an external factor to strengthen the current gamification. The next sections are dedicated to the research questions and study design to be followed.

## Research Questions

***Is the publication of reputation and badges on social media a factor to promote more answers?***

This question will explore the user reaction when sharing reputation and badges on social media such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* or *Linked-in*. We will study if this additional recognition can stimulate the contributions in the community.

***Is the current gamification used by StackOverflow meeting the user requirements?***

This question will provide us the possible dissatisfaction in the user experience related to gamification and find the possible improvements on current classification of badges. The result will involve a change on how the badges are being classified to more suitable classification including more detailed characteristics such as programming language.

***How the users would like to include their reputation and badges on social media?***

This question will provide the user’s vision about the specific information that they would like to share on social media. Base on the second question, users can provide recommendation on how they would like to export their achievements and which information they would consider important to be included and now it is discarded.

## Study Design

This research will include two groups of StackOverflow with 30 participants each one. In the first group, the members are retrieved by the data dump available[[1]](#footnote-1) in StackOverflow website and considering three different levels of reputation: low, medium and high level. A second group will consist of UVic students who are currently taking CSCW subject and use StackOverflow. In the first phase, we will send Surveys to obtain information about the current gamification and possible impact of social media. In the second phase, unstructured interviews through Skype will be applied to participants of the first group. In addition, we will apply interviews to the second group in person. The insight of having two different groups would provide us some differences in the answers due to age and profile. In the third phase, we will apply survey questionnaires including changes in the user interface related to Gamification and collect again the answers to confirm the possible impact of social media and gamification on the community.

# RISKS

Part of the results of this project depends on the availability of the SO members chosen from the data dump offered by SO. Not having the insights of these users might reduce the domain range and levels of reputation in the study. We will consider to automatize a process to crawl the email users and send massive emails to obtain the needed participation. In addition, the recommendations to improve Gamification might lead to having the SO community being biased and sarcastic. Finally, given the limited time, we might carry out interviews and surveys for small domain of users.

# EXpected results

After collecting all the data from our research we expect to have a better understanding of how gamification and social media affects StackOverflow and its users. To be more precise, we will look at how these game design elements such as badges and reputation points. We will be collecting data to make sure if the current gamification is working to prompt users to be more active and engaging. Based on our findings we will hope to add our own contributions which will improve this system. We will also be looking at how social media is impacting the user experience. Our expected contributions will be based on the data we collect and the answers to our research questions. We are looking to end this extensive study with concrete improvements to StackOverflow’s: gamification implementation, social media synergy and user interaction.

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1. https://data.stackexchange.com/stackoverflow/query [↑](#footnote-ref-1)