

Case Studies

UbiAsk & EcoIsland

The article “Gamifying Intelligent Environments” (Liu *et al.* 2011) presents case studies of the gamification of two applications: UbiAsk, “a mobile crowd-sourcing application designed for image based social search across languages”, and EcoIsland, “a persuasive application for motivating users to reduce CO2 emissions”.

The goal of EcoIsland is “to persuade individuals and families to change their lifestyle patterns to do more eco-friendly activities”. As described, it is not a user goal, but rather a goal of the organization of providing EcoIsland. As further evidence that the goals are not user goals, consider that the lack of impact of the gamification of EcoIsland was described as being a consequence of the fact that:

“It is impossible to magically shift user’s behavior via gamification when the main services of the system cannot attract user’s interests at all. For example, if the users do not have an environmentally friendly mind and have no interests of saving energy at first place, they will not use EcoIsland no matter whether there is game mechanics in the system.” (Liu *et al.* 2011)

In other words, since the goals of EcoIsland were organizational goals, the only users who might find it engaging are those whose personal goals happen to align with the goals of the organization.

Players set their own intermediate achievements, which are target CO2 emission levels. Feedback is provided by a visual indication of whether the user’s household emissions have met or exceeded their targets. There is no apparent progress indicator, and no obvious long term goal. There is no mechanism for increasing the difficulty of goals as users progress through the system.

Feedback is also provided through a mechanism of in-game currency. The currency can be used to purchase decorations, i.e., badges, which other players can see; player’s can also see if other players are meeting their emissions targets. These mechanics presumably support a motivation of ‘Status’. They are not feedback, because while the itself currency was feedback, users have to choose to purchase and display a badge, their motive for doing so is either to garner attention from the community, or to increase their rank in the community, which are Status motives.

Since the motivation to achieve the main goal is ‘Idealism’, mechanics that support ‘Status’ are probably not helpful. Incorporating ‘Status’ mechanics may cause even greater problems since the majority of CO2 emission levels come from self-reported activities. In a game driven by ‘Idealism’, self-reporting is not as likely to be a problem as in a game driven by ‘Status’.

The goals of the application in the other case, UbiAsk, are more obviously not user goals.

The purpose of the application is to provide travelers with rapid translation and explanation of signage. The travelers take pictures of signs with a smartphone and submit it to UbiAsk, which routes the picture to appropriate registered users. Points are awarded to registered users that respond, with the points being weighted to whomever responded first. The points are then used identify the “conqueror” of geographic areas. The article says that “The goal of the game is to conquer territories”, but how this maps to out-of-game goals is indecipherable.

The players are not paid, and UbiAsk is a “non-paid service”. But, since “there is no such thing as a free lunch”, presumably the application is supported by advertisements. So, the service gets paid, and the players do not.

The goal, then, of UbiAsk is to make money for the organization. It is “exploitationware”.

References

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- Reiss, Steven. 2004. “Multifaceted Nature of Intrinsic Motivation: The Theory of 16 Basic Desires.” *Review of General Psychology* 8 (3): 179–93. doi:[10.1037/1089-2680.8.3.179](https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.8.3.179).