

About: This Quiz is Your Reward!

The future is intriguing to everyone. Why? Because so much about it is a mystery. No matter how much we try to control what will happen, there is always some degree of chance. Whether your belief is that this chance is due to fate or God or random luck, that chance leaves room for us to speculate. Some online networks that specialize in entertainment, such as BuzzFeed Originals, focus on creating lists, quizzes and videos that claim to answer any questions we may have about our future (About Buzzfeed Page). So why do we, as individuals who recognize that this chance does depend on fate or luck, spend time on these types of quizzes? My quiz, “This Quiz is your Reward,” attempts to get the participant to think about this question, and eventually understand that we are driven to find various rewards. Overall, my quiz aims to prove that although users are drawn to online quizzes because of the specific rewards of the self, tribe and hunt that they promise, when they are made aware of the addictive strategies that these quizzes employ, they will be less inclined to fall into the same traps in the future.

I decided to choose a quizzing platform for a few reasons. The first was based on personal experience. I recognized that a few years ago I spent an incredible amount of time on sites like BuzzFeed, taking quizzes that claimed to know things about my future. I wanted to prove that if I had known exactly how BuzzFeed was appealing to my desire to feel rewards, I might not have wasted my time. The second reason is that I hypothesized that the quiz platform would give users a false sense of accomplishment. Rather than scrolling through social media, they are actively answering questions. This aspect, I figured, would add to the reward of the self that the user feels while taking the quiz. When thinking of the questions that I would prompt the user with, I thought about how to best make the user feel that there was some degree of purpose behind the questions, while at the same time asking random questions to cast doubt about the “predicting power” of the quiz. Therefore, I decided to include some questions that were entirely random, such as “What is your favorite condiment?”, as well as some questions, such as “How easy is it for you to make decisions?”, that seemed more serious or logical. The goal was to make the participant feel as though the quiz questions were using some logic-based algorithm in order to predict the aspect of their future that it claims to return.

To give a better sense of how exactly I create the quiz itself, I will walk you through, at a high level, the basic steps my partner and I completed. Because I am not as technically skilled as many of my peers, Isaiah Nields thankfully served as my partner on the project. He served as a technical guide during the coding process, providing the leadership and experience I needed to develop a visually appealing, non-buggy, functional quiz platform. Using my vision for the quiz along with the question base I developed, Isaiah aided me in writing the components of the quiz in React, which is a JavaScript library specifically for building user interfaces (React Tutorial). After building in React, we compiled the components into a webpage, which Isaiah placed on a public GitHub page under my account (<https://nisku99.github.io/your-path-quiz/>) so that any user with the link could access it and take the quiz once I deployed it.

To give a better sense of how the quiz works overall, I want to next explain the framework of it. “This Quiz is your Reward” is an online quiz that randomly prompts each user with one of three enticing statements (which were selected and adapted from previous quizzes on the BuzzFeed website):

- (1) Answer these questions and we will tell you what your future career will be!
- (2) Answer these questions and we will tell you how rich you will be in 15 years!
- (3) Answer these questions and we will tell you what your love life will be like in 5 years!

The user must then actively choose to start the quiz. The quiz is comprised of around 30 questions, which are displayed in a random order, so that there will be a mix of the random questions and the more serious-type ones (as I mentioned above). Each time the user answers a question, one of two things will happen. First, a progress bar that is labeled “prediction strength” will accumulate a new percentage. Second, a spinning loading wheel will appear until the next question loads. After each question, the amount of time it takes for the spinner to stop spinning is decided at random. So, for example, after the 20th question, it might take 17 seconds for the 21st question to appear. At any point during the quiz, the user can click a button that says, “Forget it, I quit the quiz.” This will, intuitively, end the quiz and prompt the user with the ending pop-up. Regardless of completion or quitting the quiz, the next screen the user will see returns the following: “You spent X second of your time taking a quiz that claims to know some unpredictable fact about your future. Why?” This marks the end of the quiz. There will then be a button available that says, “Click to See Why,” where the user will read an explanation of how the quiz utilizes an addictive strategy to make users feel at least one of three rewards: rewards of the self, the tribe or the hunt. After reading this statement, the user will see one final question: Now that you know that this quiz (and quizzes like it) employed addictive strategies to draw you in, would you take this quiz again even if it promised to return a result?

I decided to design the quiz in this way to show that users of social media (like BuzzFeed) are addicted to the rewards given by interactive quizzes. In this case, the quiz gives users a combination of the rewards of the self, the hunt and the tribe. Rewards of the self are the rewards we seek for “personal gratification” (Nir and Far). In this quiz, the reward that will gratify the self of the user is the expected outcome of the quiz, for example, if the quiz were to tell the user that they will be a doctor in the future. The user thus seeks some personal assurance or gratification from the returned career (or love scenario or wealthiness) given by the quiz. Furthermore, based on the statement that the user encounters at the start of the quiz, which claims that “Patience is associated with [good character], so please excuse long wait times,” any user that takes and completes the quiz will prove to themselves that they are not a quitter and that they are patient (minful.org). This enhances the rewards of the self. Rewards of the tribe are rewards that make us feel “accepted, important, attractive, and included” in the context of society as a whole (Hooked, 100). In this quiz, the user is enticed by the statement that says, “Compare your results with friends that have taken the quiz!” By stating this early, for example, two friends will want to compare outcomes of the quiz with each other to see if their prediction about their future is ‘normal’ or if it is the ‘best’ option. If they take a quiz that tells them that they will be rich while others might not be, they will associate that wealth with societal acceptance or clout. Rewards of the hunt have to do with the rewards we get while searching for or anticipating something. It is the compulsion that keeps us on social media for an hour in “pursuit” of certain outcomes or feelings (Hooked 107). Once the user begins the quiz, they are compelled to continue by a variety of factors: anticipation of outcome, curiosity of what the next question will be, and the climbing progress bar at the top of the screen. In all, the quiz aims to provide these rewards, and the user will take the quiz just to experience them.

The real goal here, though, is to make sure the users are aware that their quests for these rewards had effectively outweighed their personal opportunity cost of time. The quiz itself randomly varies the time between each question to instill frustration in the user. After question 20, for example, the user will have a random wait time in order to see question 21 and increase their progress bar. If the user makes it to the end of the quiz without quitting it, then it becomes clear that the promised rewards have outweighed long loading times and any frustration

associated with that. One of the final screens, which is returned regardless of if the user quits or completes the quiz, is designed to make the user think about why they took the quiz to begin with and why they spent X amount of time on it. Therefore, the user's experience, however, extends beyond this screen. The user might contemplate why they took the quiz in the first place: Did they want simple (meaningless) confirmation that they would have a good job, make lots of money or have a husband or boyfriend? Did they want to see if their job, salary or love-life would be similar to a friend's or enemy's? If the answer to either of these questions is yes, then the user has unknowingly recognized that they are addicted to the rewards of the self or tribe respectively. When the user sees the seconds spent on the quiz in large font, they will ideally begin to think about why they continued to take the quiz. Was it because they needed the progress bar to reach 100%? Was it because they wanted to give the most data possible in order to see a "more certain" prediction? Did they anticipate what the quiz was going to tell them? Were they curious to see what questions needed to be asked for a quiz to predict some aspect of their future? If the user realizes the answer to any of these questions is yes, then they have unknowingly recognized that they are addicted to the rewards of the hunt. The intention of the product is to frustrate the user to the extent that they really do take time to reflect after seeing the outcome of the quiz and the final question. Once they reflect, they will be able to learn about the technical terms for what they reflected on, and an explanation of how the quiz was specifically designed to entice them to waste time. They will begin to understand that the quiz was strategically designed to make them feel frustration, want an outcome, desire progress and need to share their outcome with friends. Finally, they will have the option to read more "About this Quiz" in this exact paper, so long as they click on the link within the webpage. The hope is that the user will realize that they have been targeted based on their ties to rewards, and that they will refuse to take part in quizzes like this in the future. The end of the explanation asks the user if, after finally realizing what these quizzes do and the strategies they employ, they would take a quiz like this again. The hope, which was supported by the responses of the individuals that took this quiz, is that the answer to this question is no.

Of course, there is concern that the user does not take the time to reflect on the question proposed at the end of the quiz, and that the user behavior will remain unchanged. This is, perhaps, the largest shortcoming of the product itself. The product will not immediately directly lead the user to the realization that they are addicted or "hooked" on the rewards that this type of media provides. Instead, it creates frustration in the user by using a variable timing method and by returning an unexpected outcome. Because users vary in personality types, the frustration will not always directly translate into a rational, contemplative state at the end of the quiz. Though some users will feel that the question is valid and that there is a point to be made about our addiction to the rewards of quizzes like this one, others will be annoyed and will focus only on the lost time. In the subset of users that feel this annoyance, the question of why they took and continued the quiz will never be contemplated. They might never "Click to See Why," and therefore will never understand that the quiz employed specific strategies to keep them hooked. Another shortcoming of the product is that in order to get individuals to take the quiz, I need to ask them to take it for me. This makes it hard for the individual to know if they would have clicked on it to take it without my request. This is coupled by the fact that the quiz is not hosted on a social media website, but instead is just a deployed version of the quiz attached to a GitHub account. Without a social media aspect like BuzzFeed, it will be hard for users to determine that they are addicted to social media because of rewards. Instead, they might just realize that they were invested in the outcome of this standalone quiz. Though I tried to combat this by improving

the aesthetic of the quiz to be more enticing and colorful, the reality is that the quiz is not a platform in it of itself. This is a risk that any standalone project runs; unfortunately, for the purposes of this product, there was not a feasible way to create a social media platform, collect a user base, and then introduce a “shock” to the user base to get them to think about why they use the entirety of the platform.

Aside from the potential shortcomings that depend heavily on the attitude of the user, the product does have its successes. Particularly, in the best scenario, when a user takes and completes the quiz, they will feel compelled to think about why they took the quiz and why they spent so long on a frustrating quiz that took long periods of time to load seemingly random questions. The quiz does a good job at developing the frustration by way of the function that varies wait times. Furthermore, the incorporated spinning loading wheel allows the user to not assume that the quiz has broken. Simultaneously, the wheel makes the user aware of the fact that they are waiting, thus allowing them to build anticipation until the next question is revealed. Thus, the wheel makes it so that the user becomes aware of the time they are giving up in order to take the quiz. In other words, the user slowly begins to realize that there is an opportunity cost to taking this quiz and that the only reason they are sticking with it is because they want to see what the outcome is for themselves (reward of the self), compare the outcome to the outcomes that their friends have received (reward of the tribe), or that they simply want to fill the progress bar in in order to make it so that they can anticipate a decent prediction (supposedly) provided by the quiz and based on their “data” or answers (reward of the hunt). Furthermore, this climbing bar allows users to feel as though they are accomplishing something with each question, even though the reality they will experience is that they wasted time. If the user is someone that is not overcome with annoyance, they quiz will help them realize that many forms of social media, BuzzFeed for example, essentially take advantage of our need for small rewards, such as a backless prediction about our future based on a variety of random questions.

Based on my personal experiences and the experiences of individuals who took the quiz, I can confirm that though the potential shortcomings gave reason for concern, the final result of the project had the desired effect. I tested all versions of the quiz, and with each version I reflected on whether or not I felt as though the argument that I would be less likely to use quizzes like this one in the future now that I am aware of how they entice me with various rewards was clear. With each version I decided to add statements and explanations, going from a product that simply returned the time spent on the quiz to a product that probed the user with a question, a statement about the uselessness, and a short description of why they became victims of their own desire for the rewards that quizzes like this one use as bait. The final version includes a question that asks whether or not the user would retake the quiz if it did return a true guess at the original proposed question. Not a single one of the individuals that tested out the product said they would. Furthermore, when I asked these users to reflect on why they had spent so much time on the quiz, they maintained they stayed with it for various reasons:

- 1) The quiz “satiated their boredom”
- 2) The quiz “gave them something to do”
- 3) They were intrigued by a potential “entertaining prediction about the future”
- 4) They felt that the progress bar “provided a feeling of accomplishment”
- 5) They had a desire to see if they would be single forever” (in a joking tone)
- 6) They had a desire to see if their response matched what I got (which I made up if they asked me what my result was prior to them taking the quiz)

In all of these reasons, they experienced at least one of the types of rewards that I outlined earlier in this paper. Once they became aware of the fact that the quiz was specially designed to bait them by offering these rewards, every single test user agreed that it would be pointless to take any type of quiz like this again.

Overall, the quiz instills curiosity in the user, frustrates them, and allows them time to reflect on the question of why they were taking a quiz that would have otherwise had no legitimate impact on their lives. After allowing them to reflect, the quiz teaches the user that their intentions for taking and sticking with the quiz were actually predicted by the maker of the quiz, based on research about the human psychological addictions to rewards of the self, the tribe and the hunt. Once it becomes clear to the user that this quiz, along with many other quizzing media platforms, has strategically fed on the users predicted tendencies, the quiz probes the user, immediately asking them about whether or not they would take a quiz of this nature again given what they know. These last few parts, namely the outcome of the quiz, the reflection, the educational explanation and the final question, are what differentiates this quiz from any BuzzFeed quiz that might originally seem similar to it. Essentially, this quiz takes the form of a well-known quizzing platform (like BuzzFeed) and proves a different point. The desired effect is that the users associate this quiz with that well-known platform and alter their behavior on it in the future. Throughout this series of frustrating yet reflective events, this quiz aims to prove that users will partake less in quizzes of this type in the future now that they understand that the entire purpose of the quiz is to feed them rewards and effectively “hook” them onto a platform where user time is directly correlated to company revenue.

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