Gamification as a method to provide deeper insights in the CX market research

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Abstract:

Gamified market research tools help to increase respondents' engagement and obtain more in-depth results. Measuring customer experience (CX) is considered one of the most important trends in contemporary marketing research. Due to the specificity of this field elaborated projective and narrative techniques need to be applied to better reconstruct the customer journeys. The main goal of this paper is to present the areas of use of the gamified CX method: *Our City* board game, the results of the qualitative validation study of *Our City* as well as the experiment proving the accuracy of the psychological premises of this tool.

1. Introduction

Customer experience (CX) is one of important themes in the contemporary marketing – it is a subject of numerous articles and scientific studies (e.g. Meyer and Schwager, 2007; Cetin and Dincer, 2014; Vasconcelos et al., 2015). It's a wide concept affecting all stages of the decision process and multiple touchpoints.

Customer experience affects customers' satisfaction (Anderson and Mittal, 2000), their loyalty towards a brand and creating a more in-depth relationship of participants (Paharia, 2013), and their eagerness to recommend a brand - word-of-mouth (Keiningham, Cooil, Aksoy, Andreassen and Weiner, 2007) across the channels – both traditional and digital.

Since customer experience became a focus of attention of the marketing practitioners, the matter of its measurement has been gaining importance. In the literature there are many attempts to identify the CX components. Dziewanowska (2015) presents a thorough review of different approaches towards defining the frames of the customer experience.

Beside purely theoretical approaches towards customer experience, there are some empirical attempts at measuring CX. Klaus and Maklan (2013) have created a EXQ scale CX consisting of four dimensions: product experience, outcome focus, moments-of-truth and peace-of-mind. It touches upon numerous aspects related to product competitive advantages, customer experience in the process, how a brand functions and reacts in key moments.

CX is a field where emotions play a significant role. They serve as a kind of conveyor belt transforming individual experience into recollections. If a customer can remember some event after a longer period of time, this is usually possible if they are able to link it to some emotions. The more intense are emotions, the better and more durable is the recall. Continued use of brand services, customer's loyalty towards the brand, intention to increase intensity of using, or using a broader range of products and services, are conditioned not just by the sole experiences but by the way consumers recall them (Kahneman, 2010).

2. Qualitative approach towards CX studies – „Our City" game

„Our City" is a board game designed in Kantar Polska to add more in-depth component to the standard qualitative CX research processes based on the cognitive interviews (Geiselman et al. 1984), which are dedicated for one-to-one contact. We wanted to merge the advanced techniques of episodic memory recollection (Tulving, 1972) with the benefits of the group process (Brown, 1988). It resulted in creating a gamified qualitative tool dedicated to thorough exploration of the customer journeys.

Gamification in market research improves involvement of participants and lets us obtain information which is not available in traditional approaches. The experiments show that tasks based on gaming mechanics are more effective than the traditional ones (e.g. Harrison, 2011; Puleston and Sleep, 2011; Puleston and Rintoul, 2012; Ścibor-Rylski, 2018; Ścibor-Rylski, 2019). Involved in a pleasant activity, people are more sincere, engaged, creative and it's easier to discover their hidden beliefs and motivations. Moreover, the group process is smoother and the interaction more natural and efficient.

Designing „Our City" we hoped to create a tool which would let us enter the decision making process, explore its stages and get to know the importance of all the relevant touchpoints, as well as enable interaction of participants and which could be used during FGIs.
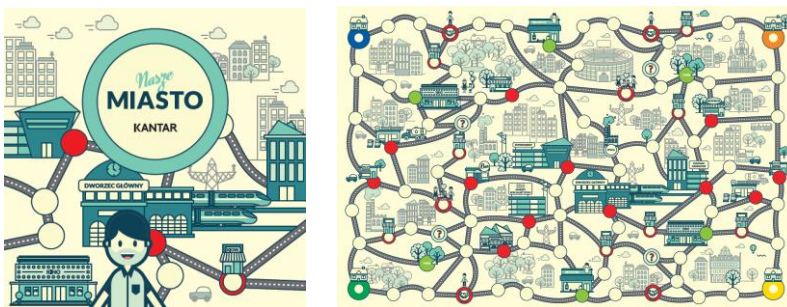

Figure 1. Cover and board of „Our City" game

„Our City" consists of a board, a set of elements required for the game mechanics and the set of rules. The tool may be used to carry out various research goals:

1. Reconstruct a complex decision making process/ customer journey
2. Identify and explore the Category Entry Points together with mental availability of brands (Sharp, 2010).
3. Explore any occasion / situation which could take place in respondent's city. „Our City" then serves as a narrative technique.

The strength of Our City lies in the combination of a board game involving participants with an elaborate narrative technique which lets a researcher understand individual customer experience: pain points, success points, moments of truth etc.

3. Qualitative validation of „Our City" game

A qualitative validation of „Our City" tool effectiveness was run. The main goal was to verify the mechanics of the game, its fit to the research purpose and the obtained opinions expressed by participants.

The theme of validation study was customer experience related to buying a new car. 18 residents of Warsaw and the suburbs participated in this study: both men and women, aged 24-58. All of them bought a new car in the past 6 months. The process consisted of two stages. In the first one all respondents took part in an online study (a bulletin board on Krealinks platform). The goal of this stage was to get to know participants, to get an initial view of decision making processes and to eliminate less involved respondents. At the second stage three focus group interviews were run, each with four participants and lasting 3h. During the FGI participants played „Our City" game reconstructing all the stages of their decision making processes and thoroughly describing customer experience in individual touchpoints. After each session was completed an additional interview was held with all the participants.

The outcome of qualitative validation is positive – we have achieved highly detailed data combined with involvement of participants of the study. The group process (e.g. Brown, 1988) helped to increase self-awareness of respondents during the FGI - they referred to opinions expressed by other participants, confronting them with

personal experience, and finally recalling some elements of own processes they could not remember during the online stage. Additionally, the story structure imposed by „Our City" game mechanics has led to adding structure to individual narratives and to arriving at a more in-depth customer experience analysis in particular touchpoints.

Participants of the validation process expressed very positive opinions about their experience with the „Our City" game and found it more interesting than the standard research approach. The respondents also admitted that during the game they managed to recall experience they could not remember at the preceding online stage. Competition being an element of the game mechanics generated a favourable response as well. These observations are confirmed by the quotations from the interviews held after completing the „Our City" game:

„This is a fairly interesting type of experience, I have figured out what my decisions were like, what the process was like and I discovered that it was not so simple at all.", Katarzyna, 50

„Competition in this game was motivating. It was such a trigger to get even more involved.", Mateusz, 24

„The game structured the whole process which was long, and in normal conditions, if we were talking about it without the game, I would present it in a much more chaotic manner, here I was able to order it and to focus on what mattered most in fact.", Agnieszka, 54

The results of the qualitative validation of „Our City" tool prove its effectiveness both on the level of obtained information and the participants' satisfaction.

4. Experimental validation of the psychological premises of „Our City" game

"Our City" game was designed to put the recollection of the customer journey in the context similar to the real circumstances of the memorization. It contains a map of the city with all important spots and also several jokers, which allows the players to choose their own, unique touchpoints. The game also provides options for recalling online elements of the decision processes.

4.1. Research problem and hypothesis

Well-known psychological experiments proof that people are much more efficient in the recollection of information in the conditions similar to those present during the process of memorization (Godden and Baddeley, 1975). Designing "Our City" we assumed that episodic memory and in particular, autobiographical memory (Tulving, 1972) will work the same way: players will more easily recall the details of the subsequent phases of their decision process if they participate in its simulation on a board depicting the touchpoints they "visited" during the customer journey. The goal of the described experiment was to verify this assumption. A hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis: the effectiveness of the recollection of episodic memory elements is higher when people has access to the visualization of the space present during the memorization process, than in condition without this element.

4.2. Experimental design

The participants was asked to recommend places to eat something out in Warsaw. It's a task that engages episodic memory and encourages people to recall the places that have left good impression.

78 students of University of Warsaw participated in the experiment (53,8% women and 46,2% men). They were randomly assigned to three groups:

- control group was asked to recommend some places to eat something out in Warsaw without any experimental manipulation.

- experimental group 1 was given a task based on gamified context method. Referring to the results of the experiments proving the effectiveness of gamification in marketing research (Puleston and Sleep, 2011), such task should increase the number of recommendation compared to the control group. The participants in this group were asked to imagine they are responsible for preparing a Warsaw culinary guide and they need to list the recommended places.

- participants in experimental group 2 were given a map of the central Warsaw. Their task was to make a virtual walk through the city centre,

recall the moments they really walked these streets, passed bars and restaurants. and then recommend places with good food.

Such task was designed to be close to the condition of playing "Our City" game, where players simulate walking the streets and re-constructing their customer journeys. We assumed that using the additional stimuli supporting the process of recollection will be more effective even that a gamified task but without any stimulation of the personal experience.

4.3. Results

One-way analysis of variance was used to analyse differences in average numbers of listed places between groups. The control group obtained the smallest average number of the recommended eating out places (M = 4,21; SD = 1,95). Experimental group 1 (contextual gamification) resulted in higher mean (M = 7.00; SD = 2,79), and the biggest average number of places was listed by experimental group 2 (virtual "Our City" walk; M = 10,00; SD = 6,09).

ANOVA revealed statistically significant difference, and high size of the effect: $F(2,37) = 12,99$; $p < 0,001$; $\eta^2 = 0,27$.

Significance of differences between particular groups was calculated with a post hoc test with Bonferroni correction. The outcome is presented on chart 1. The arrows mark statistical differences at $p<0,05$ significance.
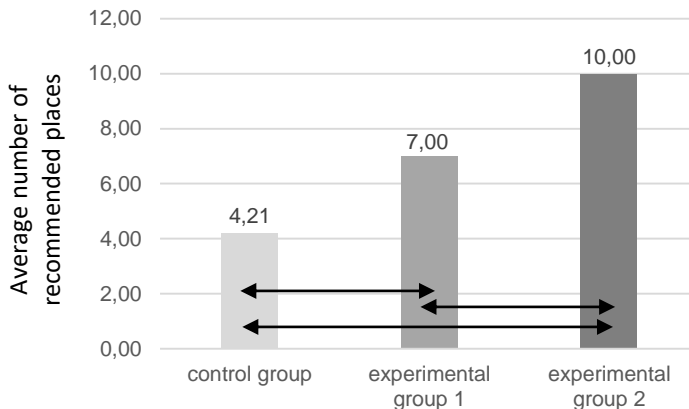

Figure 2. Differences in average number of listed eating out places

All the differences were statistically significant. Participants were the most effective in the condition with the visualization of the city and virtual walk. Also contextual gamification group was more productive than the control group.

4.4. Results discussion

The results support the hypothesis. The simulation of the real memorization process is the most effective tool to acquire information in the task dedicated to the recollection of the items from episodic memory. The experiment also proved the superiority of the contextual gamification over the control group, but only simulation of the mechanisms that underlies "Our City" game maximize the effect.

5.   Conclusions

A growing demand of experience is observed on the Polish market – already one in three Poles (34%) claims that they would rather spend money on experiences than on material things (The Experience Advantage. 2019 Report Retail Banking, Kantar, 2019), the index is lower than seen in the western markets, which may imply that local interest in experience is likely to grow. Presumably then, the importance of experience marketing will increase as well, leading to development of research tools which may even better adjust to goals set for customer experience with various brands, being even more effective in blending different areas of brand activities.

"Our City" game is a tool which combines the benefits of two standard qualitative methodologies traditionally applied to map customer journeys – cognitive interviews and focus group interviews. On the one hand – similarly to cognitive interviews - it allows for in-depth understanding of individual customer journeys and identification of its key stages and touch points. It helps the game participants to reconstruct their processes in detail and focus on the experiences of strategic importance. At the same time, it stimulates respondents' interaction and group dynamics, which allows to include the elements which go

beyond customer journeys mapping and, for example, indicate how customer experience can be improved in order to better suit the current market needs. The effectiveness of "Our City" tool was confirmed in both the qualitative and the experimental approach.

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