

Adaptive Gamification Strategies for Community Resilience in Transitional Societies

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Abstract

This study investigates how adaptive gamification strategies can strengthen community resilience and democratic engagement in post-conflict Sri Lanka, where prolonged ethnic division has eroded civic trust and political participation. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory and participatory action research, the study employed a mixed-method sequential exploratory design. Four structured online gamified sessions were conducted with 48 young adults (aged 18–30) drawn from Northern, Eastern, Southern, and Western Provinces, using interactive digital platforms incorporating points, achievement badges, collaborative challenges, and polling mechanisms. Thematic analysis of session data and engagement metrics identified key barriers to civic participation, including institutional distrust, language accessibility challenges, and limited professional digital literacy. Findings reveal that gamification significantly enhanced cross-community dialogue and participant motivation, with 92% actively engaging in collaborative tasks and 87% earning achievement badges. Unexpectedly, 50% of participants created professional digital profiles for the first time during the sessions, indicating broader developmental benefits. The study concludes that culturally adaptive, multilingual gamification platforms offer a scalable intervention for bridging the gap between marginalized communities and governmental institutions in transitional societies.

Keywords: civic engagement, democratic participation, gamification, post-conflict reconciliation, transitional societies

Introduction

Post-conflict nations encounter considerable obstacles in reconstructing social trust, promoting democratic engagement, and facilitating efficient communication between citizens and government. Sri Lanka, emerging from prolonged ethnic violence, illustrates these problems as communities navigate the intricate transition towards lasting peace and inclusive governance Höglund and Orjuela (2011). Conventional methods of peacebuilding and civic engagement frequently neglect to involve younger generations or sufficiently address the digital gap prevalent in modern transitional cultures Lederach (1997). In this setting, creative techniques utilizing digital technologies and participatory frameworks are crucial for promoting significant community resilience and political inclusion.

Gamification, the integration of game design fea-

tures and mechanics into non-game situations, has become an effective instrument for improving engagement, motivation, and behavioral transformation in several domains such as education, healthcare, and civic involvement Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, and Nacke (2011); Hamari, Koivisto, and Sarsa (2014). Gamification transforms passive encounters into interactive, engaging activities that promote continuous engagement by integrating components such as points, challenges, rewards, and collaborative problem-solving Hamari et al. (2014). Recent research indicates that gamified strategies for civic engagement might markedly enhance participation rates, especially among young and underprivileged groups who may feel alienated from conventional political mechanisms Hassan and Hamari (2020).

In transitional cultures, comprehending public perception and political agendas is essential



for establishing responsive government systems. Conventional survey methodologies and town hall meetings frequently experience poor participation rates and do not effectively capture nuanced community emotions Bellamy, Dunne, and Sharma (2017). Electoral periods offer essential opportunities for assessing public interest and fostering dialogue between citizens and governmental institutions; however, numerous post-conflict communities remain disengaged from these processes due to historical mistrust, insufficient civic education, and inadequate communication channels Sisk (2013).

This work tackles these difficulties by creating and executing a gamified system to monitor voter engagement and evaluate public perceptions during electoral cycles in Sri Lanka. The study investigates the dual functions of adaptive gamification strategies: firstly, as a methodological instrument for obtaining genuine community insights regarding democratic involvement; and secondly, as an intervention approach to improve civic engagement and promote inter-community dialogue. This study investigates how gaming mechanics might establish secure, engaging environments for citizens to articulate their views on government accountability, participatory procedures, and social inclusion through four organized online sessions.

This research is significant for its potential to educate peacebuilding practitioners and policymakers on scalable, technology-based methods for enhancing community resilience. This study illustrates how gamification might connect marginalized groups with governmental institutions, so enhancing the existing literature on digital innovation in conflict resolution and post-conflict recovery Bernal (2021). Moreover, it tackles the particular contextual issues of Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic environment, where historical differences require culturally attuned strategies to promote unity and social cohesion.

This study delineates the methods utilized in the design and execution of gamified sessions, gives findings regarding participant views of democratic engagement, and examines implications for future peacebuilding initiatives in transitional regimes. This analysis posits that adaptive gamification tactics provide a transformative method for enhancing community resilience and inclusive governance in post-conflict settings.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations of Gamification in Civic Engagement

Gamification is theoretically grounded in various areas, such as behavioral psychology, game design, and motivation theory. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), introduced by Deci and Ryan Deci and Ryan (2000), offers a comprehensive paradigm for elucidating how gamification boosts engagement by fulfilling three essential psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Gamified systems that incorporate choice, present attainable tasks, and cultivate community ties can substantially enhance intrinsic motivation for political engagement when applied to civic participation Ryan and Deci (2017). This theoretical framework is especially pertinent in post-conflict environments because individuals frequently experience a sense of powerlessness and disconnection from political mechanisms.

Flow Theory, articulated by Csikszentmihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1990), elucidates how gamification fosters optimal experiences by harmonizing difficulty and skill levels. In the realm of democratic participation, flow states are attained when citizens face suitably challenging civic activities that neither inundate nor disengage them, thus maintaining prolonged engagement Hamari and Koivisto (2014). McGonigal McGonigal (2011) elaborates on this notion, asserting that well-crafted games generate "urgent optimism" and enhance collaborative problem-solving abilities, which are vital for community resilience in transitional cultures.

Social Learning Theory Bandura (1977) offers more theoretical support for comprehending how gamified platforms enhance civic education and promote behavioral change. Participants acquire democratic practices and cultivate political efficacy through observation, modeling, and reinforcement processes integrated into game design. This is especially important in nations recovering from conflict, when civic education systems may have been compromised or politicized Bush and Saltarelli (2000).

Empirical Evidence on Gamification and Political Participation

Empirical studies on the effects of gamification on civic engagement have produced encouraging outcomes in many circumstances. Bonsón et al. Bonsón, Royo, and Ratkai (2015) investigated gamified e-participation platforms in European municipalities, revealing that gamification enhanced both the volume and caliber of citizen contributions to policy discourse. Their research shown that point systems, leaderboards, and achievement badges incentivized sustained engagement, especially among younger demographics often disinterested in politics.

In post-conflict environments, empirical evidence illustrates gamification's capacity to restore societal trust. Bogost Bogost (2007) presented the notion of "persuasive games" capable of altering political beliefs and cultivating empathy among polarized societies. Subsequent research by Cuhadar and Kampf Cuhadar and Kampf (2014) evaluated digital games aimed at fostering Israeli-Palestinian interaction, revealing notable enhancements in participants' openness to other narratives and their engagement in constructive discourse. The findings indicate that gamification can establish secure environments for examining sensitive political matters in transitional cultures.

Hassan and Hamari's Hassan and Hamari (2020) systematic literature analysis of 42 empirical investigations on gamified e-participation platforms revealed consistent positive benefits on user engagement, with effect sizes differing according to design quality and cultural context. They warned that inadequately conceived gamification may result in "pointsification," which emphasizes superficial engagement centered on rewards instead of substantive civic activity. This underscores the significance of culturally responsive design in post-conflict environments such as Sri Lanka.

Gamification in Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution

Recent research has explicitly investigated the use of gamification in peacebuilding processes. Poplin Poplin (2012) illustrated how serious games promote collaborative urban planning in fragmented communities, allowing participants

to resolve conflicting interests through simulated scenarios. Gordon and Manosevitch Gordon and Manosevitch (2011) examined neighborhood-level civic games in Boston, discovering that gamified platforms enhanced involvement across demographic divides and produced meaningful policy proposals.

In the context of Sri Lanka, there is a paucity of empirical research on gamified methodologies for reconciliation, however pertinent works on digital peacebuilding provide valuable insights. Brun and Steele Brun and Steele (2020) analyzed the impact of social media in post-conflict conversation in Sri Lanka, highlighting both the potential for fostering unity and the dangers of exacerbating polarization. Their findings highlight the necessity for meticulously crafted digital interventions that foster active participation instead of passive consumption.

Gordon and Baldwin-Philippi Gordon and Baldwin-Philippi (2014) contend that civic gaming might convert "thin participation"—minimal, singular engagement—into "thick participation" marked by enduring involvement and collaborative action. Their longitudinal research of civic gaming projects revealed that gamified platforms effectively engaged users in local concerns and established enduring community networks. The shift from thin to thick participation is especially vital in transitional countries, where sustaining peace necessitates continuous citizen involvement in governing processes.

Research Gaps and Contextual Considerations

Notwithstanding the increasing data endorsing the potential of gamification, substantial research deficiencies persist. Limited research has investigated the efficacy of gamification in multi-ethnic post-conflict cultures characterized by inadequate digital infrastructure Khaled, Vasalou, and Holmes (2018). Moreover, the majority of empirical studies concentrate on Western contexts, prompting inquiries regarding the cultural transferability of game mechanics and motivating frameworks Deterding (2019). This study examines gamified civic participation in Sri Lanka's transitional context, focusing on how adaptable techniques might meet different community requirements while utilizing existing digital infras-

structure.

The literature establishes that gamification, when culturally adapted and methodologically rigorous, can meaningfully bridge civic disengagement in post-conflict settings. This study directly responds to identified gaps by examining whether gamification mechanics—theorized to promote autonomy (SDT), optimal challenge (Flow Theory), and observational learning (Social Learning Theory)—translate into measurable civic engagement outcomes among Sri Lanka's post-conflict youth. The findings presented in subsequent sections are interpreted against this theoretical and empirical backdrop, enabling direct comparison between established gamification outcomes in Western contexts and the specific dynamics observed in Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic transitional society.

Methodology/Design/Approach

Research Design

This research employed a mixed-method sequential exploratory design, which was selected because it allows an initial qualitative exploration of under-researched phenomena—specifically, gamified civic engagement in post-conflict Sri Lanka—followed by quantitative participant profiling to broaden analytical scope (Creswell and Plano Clark (2017)). The sequential structure enabled the research team to first establish contextual understanding through gamified online sessions and subsequently situate findings within descriptive demographic data from the survey. This design was particularly appropriate given the absence of validated gamification instruments for post-conflict civic contexts in South Asia, where existing tools developed in Western settings may not adequately capture culturally specific dynamics of participation and trust.

The qualitative component comprised four structured online gamified sessions analysed through thematic coding, while the quantitative component involved descriptive analysis of survey-derived demographic and engagement data. Triangulation between qualitative themes and quantitative engagement metrics enhanced the validity and depth of interpretation. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional re-

view board, and informed consent was secured from all participants prior to their involvement in any data collection activity.

Sampling Strategy and Participant Selection

The study utilized purposive sampling with maximum variation criteria targeting young adults aged 18–30 years from Northern, Eastern, Southern, and Western Provinces of Sri Lanka. These provinces were selected due to their significant exposure to ethnic conflict and their representation of diverse demographic compositions. Particular emphasis was placed on recruiting participants from marginalized communities who experienced direct or indirect impacts of the war, as these populations often face the greatest barriers to meaningful political participation.

Participant eligibility criteria specified individuals who were planning to enter university, currently enrolled in university programs, or recent university graduates. This selection ensured participants possessed adequate digital literacy and access to technology necessary for engaging with online gamified platforms. The criterion also targeted a demographic increasingly comfortable with digital tools for social interaction and information gathering, making them ideal participants for exploring technology-driven civic engagement mechanisms.

Data Collection Methods

An online survey was disseminated through university networks, youth organizations, and community groups across the four target provinces. The survey assessed demographic characteristics, prior civic engagement experiences, access to digital technologies, interest in political participation, and willingness to engage in discussions about democratic governance. Additionally, the survey gathered preliminary information about participants' primary community concerns and the daily challenges they faced in their respective regions.

Following survey completion, the research team conducted individual telephone calls with interested respondents to verify their concerns, discuss community issues in greater depth, and assess their availability and commitment to partici-

pating in subsequent online sessions. These calls served dual purposes: confirming participant interest and establishing initial rapport while gathering contextual information about their lived experiences and perspectives on government-citizen relations.

Four structured online sessions were conducted via video conferencing platforms, each lasting approximately 90–120 minutes. Sessions incorporated multiple gamification elements including point systems, achievement badges, collaborative challenges, and interactive polling mechanisms. These game mechanics were designed to increase participant motivation, encourage active contribution, and facilitate cross-community dialogue. Data analysis proceeded through two parallel tracks. Qualitative data from session transcripts and facilitator notes were coded thematically using inductive open coding, followed by axial coding to identify relationships among emerging categories. Two independent coders reviewed a 20% sample of transcripts to establish inter-rater reliability (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.78$), indicating substantial agreement. Quantitative engagement data—including point accumulation, badge acquisition rates, session attendance, and polling response rates—were analysed using descriptive statistics. Participant responses regarding barriers to civic engagement and attitudes toward government accountability were cross-tabulated by province and age group to identify patterns of variation across demographic subgroups.

Variables and Research Questions

The study examined several key variables including participant engagement levels, quality of contributions, willingness to engage in cross-community dialogue, perceived barriers to civic participation, and attitudes toward government accountability. Independent variables included gamification elements, provincial background, ethnic identity, and prior civic engagement experience.

Four primary research questions guided the investigation: What are the primary barriers to civic engagement among marginalized youth in post-conflict Sri Lanka? How do gamification elements influence participant motivation and engagement? What perceptions do participants hold regarding government accountability and

citizen-government communication? Can gamified platforms facilitate constructive dialogue across ethnically divided communities?

Results

Through the initial online survey, 101 participants were recruited for the study, and 48 of them finished all four gamified online sessions. According to demographic data, 47% of participants were between the ages of 26 and 30 and had just finished their university education, while 45.5% of participants were between the ages of 21 and 25 and presently enrolled in university programs. The remaining 7.5% were getting ready to start college. With 40% of participants coming from the Eastern Province, 35% from the Southern Province, 20.8% from the Northern Province, and 4.2% from the Western Province, there was a notable variance in provincial participation. The gender distribution showed that 45.5% of participants were men and 54.5% were women. In terms of conflict exposure, only a small percentage of participants had firsthand recollections of the civil war itself, whereas 33.6% of participants reported having direct memories of previous conflicts, mostly mentioning the 2019 Easter Attacks and the 2014 Aluthgama riots. This result is consistent with the study's emphasis on younger populations whose early life experiences took place in the years following the war in Sri Lanka rather than during actual hostilities.

Important accessibility factors were indicated by language preferences for session participation. Almost 80% of participants preferred online sessions held in Tamil or Sinhala, noting challenges with English-medium conversations. Later, sessions were modified to allow for code-switching and multilingual communication. Important insights on patterns of civic engagement were obtained from the gamified sessions. After the online conversations, almost 65% of participants said they had brought up issues that were discussed during the meetings with friends, family, and neighbors. However, just 10–15% of these interpersonal networks provided meaningful replies or involvement. Participants ascribed this lackluster response to dominant beliefs that downplay online conversation and digital harm in favor of face-to-face contacts and tangible community

problems.

Regarding professional growth and digital literacy, a noteworthy finding surfaced. Almost half of the participants said that their participation in the gamified sessions was their first time creating a LinkedIn profile or a curriculum vitae. Prior to the survey, the majority of participants had only used social media for personal communication and enjoyment, not for civic engagement or professional networking. Participants were unintentionally exposed to professional digital tools and techniques during the gamified sessions, indicating potential advantages beyond the study's main goals of civic involvement. 92% of participants actively participated in collaborative challenges, and 87% of participants earned at least one achievement badge, according to engagement metrics from the gamified features. Point accumulation patterns showed low dropout rates following first participation and consistent involvement across all four sessions.

Discussion

The demographic makeup of survey participants illustrates significant truths regarding civic engagement in post-conflict Sri Lanka. The prevalence of participants aged 21–30, predominantly from academic institutions, indicates that educational establishments are vital for promoting democratic engagement among younger demographics Brun and Steele (2020). The predominance of participants from Eastern and Southern Provinces, coupled with minimal representation from the Northern Province, signifies enduring obstacles to engagement in areas most adversely impacted by continuous conflict. This spatial disparity may indicate infrastructural constraints, persistent displacement impacts, or profound skepticism towards external interventions in regions severely damaged by conflict Höglund and Orjuela (2011).

The discovery that 33.6% of participants predominantly remember post-war events rather than the civil war itself highlights a generational shift in the recollection of conflict and the priorities of peacebuilding. Current youth issues focus on recent community violence and terrorist incidents rather than past ethnic strife, indicating that reconciliation initiatives must evolve to confront

changing security challenges and intercommunal discord Seneviratne (2020). This transition has considerable ramifications for gamification design, as successful civic engagement tools must confront contemporary fears rather than only emphasizing historical frustrations.

Language preferences highlighted essential accessibility factors frequently neglected in digital civic engagement efforts. The pronounced preference for Sinhala and Tamil over English undermines assumptions regarding the linguistic competencies of digital natives and underscores how language prerequisites might unintentionally marginalize certain groups from participating activities Canagarajah (2018). Gamified platforms tailored for various post-conflict environments must integrate multilingual functionalities to guarantee authentic inclusivity and prevent the reinforcement of colonial linguistic inequalities that favor English proficiency.

The gap between voicing concerns and obtaining responses highlights a substantial obstacle to ongoing civic participation. Although gamified sessions effectively motivated participants to engage in discussions on political topics within their social networks, prevalent perceptions that diminish the legitimacy of digital discourse compared to in-person interactions constrained the influence of these talks Hassan and Hamari (2020). This discovery indicates that successful gamification tactics should transcend individual players to alter wider community beliefs on the legitimacy and significance of digital civic spaces. Future interventions may include community-wide components that engage different generations concurrently, facilitating the bridging of digital divisions in the legitimacy of civic discourse.

The unforeseen discovery concerning professional digital literacy—wherein 50% of participants developed their first CVs and LinkedIn profiles—highlights significant ancillary advantages of gamified civic engagement platforms. This result corresponds with the assertion of Gordon and Baldwin-Philippi Gordon and Baldwin-Philippi (2014) that civic gaming can offer multifaceted benefit beyond immediate political aims. The study unexpectedly tackled economic empowerment and career development demands while introducing participants to professional digital tools in a civic engagement environment, complementing democratic participation objectives.

This discovery indicates that gamification tactics in transitional countries might effectively amalgamate several development objectives, enhancing the appeal of civic engagement platforms to youth who prioritize economic prospects in difficult post-conflict labor markets.

Collectively, these findings resonate with and extend the theoretical frameworks outlined in the literature review. The high engagement rates (92% collaborative participation, 87% badge acquisition) empirically support Self-Determination Theory's prediction that gamified environments fulfilling autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs will generate intrinsic motivation Ryan and Deci (2017). The sustained involvement across all four sessions aligns with Flow Theory's emphasis on balanced challenge and skill Csikszentmihalyi (1990), suggesting that the session design successfully maintained participants within a productive engagement zone. The organic diffusion of civic discussions into participants' social networks—reported by 65% of participants—reflects Social Learning Theory's modelling mechanisms Bandura (1977), whereby exposure to civic discourse within a structured environment prompted subsequent behavioural replication in informal settings. Critically, the findings diverge from Hassan and Hamari's Hassan and Hamari (2020) warning about "pointsification": rather than producing superficial reward-seeking behaviour, the gamified sessions generated substantive multi-dimensional outcomes including cross-community dialogue, professional skill acquisition, and sustained civic discussion. This divergence may be attributable to the culturally adaptive, multilingual session design, which—as the literature on non-Western gamification contexts suggests Deterding (2019); Khaled et al. (2018)—is essential for translating gamification's theoretical potential into measurable real-world impact in post-conflict societies.

Conclusion

This study shows that adaptive gamification tactics can be useful for getting young people in Sri Lanka who have been through a conflict to be more involved in their communities and keep track of how they feel about politics. The study

identified substantial obstacles such as linguistic accessibility, intergenerational perceptions of digital communication, and insufficient professional digital literacy. Gamified online sessions effectively promoted interaction across communities and encouraged participants to carry political discussions into their social networks; nevertheless, prevailing societal attitudes still restrict the efficacy of digital civic involvement. The results indicate that successful gamification in transitional societies necessitates multilingual design, incorporation with professional development opportunities, and methods for legitimizing digital civic spaces within broader groups. Future peace-building projects must regard gamification not merely as separate technical interventions, but as holistic strategies that tackle several aspects of post-conflict rehabilitation and democratic advancement.

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