

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND GAMIFICATION AS TRANSFORMATIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Tourism and the Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The pandemic, particularly during the period of confinement, has marked a turning point in digital transformation across nearly all areas of business and knowledge. The tourism sector serves as a prime example. Although in-person visits to emblematic locations in each country were not possible, new avenues have opened up to bring the world of tourism and the prosumer closer together (Toffler, 1980). Gamification (Teixes, 2014) has played a decisive role in this process. Through apps and virtual and immersive communication techniques, the connected user has been able to discover information about many of the places they have longed to visit in a tangible way. Therefore, it could be argued that tourist destinations themselves have recognised technology as a tool to enhance engagement with their future visitors.

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1. Introduction

During the pandemic, cities were deserted. The "lonely crowds" (Riesman, 1996) were compelled to retreat into their homes, seeking a collective remedy to continue "the game of life," as Carse (1986) conceptualises it. Human beings require their natural environment, whether urban or rural, to coexist.

During the months of confinement, homes served as a refuge in the fight against a microscopic enemy, providing individuals with a sense of safety. However, while this health battle was being waged, an economic struggle also began. As much as it was about safeguarding health, it was also about covering the expenses incurred by the viral disaster.

Thus, micro- and macroeconomics should continue to function for the common good. Without optimal circulation of money, no political or healthcare system can bear and cover all the costs caused by the global stoppage of the mechanism that drives the entire neoliberal system.

The service sector is among the fastest moving. Shops, offices, and recreational spaces were severely affected by financial inactivity during the period of confinement, primarily due to the impossibility of offering an efficient alternative to the disruption caused by the virus.

In all this turmoil, the tourism sector was among the most severely affected, not only due to travel bans but also because of the industry's inability to identify or generate substitute services to satisfy the needs and desires of prosumers (Toffler, 1980). Given the impossibility of travel, how can we effectively address people's desire to visit places, even digitally? Initially, it was thought that the web, apps (Thoben et al., 2017), and video games (Tejeiro Salguero, 2001) could help to alleviate the desire to travel. However, this proved not to be the case. The technology was not ready. There was insufficient connectivity to enable such solutions, and the hardware to support the programmes being marketed was lacking. Furthermore, the telecommunications infrastructure was unable to support the enormous amount of data required to initiate the service. Even if all these elements had been in place, obvious and logical questions remain: Can the virtual world replace the physical one? Can a material place be enjoyed as much as a digital one? Can an experience created from bits improve upon an experience obtained from the tangible world? Can artificial intelligence (Haugeland, 2001), already in practice in the field of video games, replace physical space? Is it preferable to enjoy the city of Rome in person or through evocative digital means? Today's digital tools make this debate so unique and definitive at this very moment when the pandemic has shown humanity a great fragility and an immense dependence on the two sides of the same coin: the tangible and the ethereal. Towards the solid and the liquid (Bauman, 2017). Towards the palpable and the incorporeal. Towards the touchable and the untouchable.

What, then, can be perceived in each of these two spaces, the tangible and the intangible? It has become commonplace to invoke Ridley's assertion that, "Similarity is the shadow of difference" (Ridley, 2004, p. 9). Human beings are unique. Predicting individual feelings across diverse virtual or material scenarios is therefore impossible. This applies whether individuals create content for organisations or consume content from creative entities within those organisations during or after a pandemic. However, this study does not aim to ascertain personal experiences quantitatively or qualitatively. Instead, it attempts to offer a vision of the possibilities that may exist in the short term, with the available technological and human resources to establish a reconciliation between virtual and physical space. More precisely, we will attempt to establish a theoretical approach to determine, in an approximate way, how the virtual world could be used to bring it closer to the material world, and vice versa. To achieve this objective, it is necessary to describe, as effectively as possible, the scenario in which the tourism sector and its imminent virtualisation are immersed. Therefore, we will delve further into the space in which the individual moves: the universe of the game.

2. Methodology

Following the above introduction and contextualisation, this research has sought to address the pandemic, the capacity of human beings to adapt to change, and the influence that technology and gamification (Lavilla & Sánchez Franco, 2024) are having during this period of adaptation. Therefore, the previous section has attempted to introduce the discourse and its results, which will be presented later. However, it is first worth acknowledging the problem from which the study originates and stating its hypothesis.

The central problem, stemming from the research question concerning the period of confinement and the impossibility of physical travel to tourist destinations worldwide, is based on the following questions: Has the tourism sector, affected by the health situation, recognised the Internet and public-private partnerships (PPPs) as opportunities to disseminate its communication strategy in a more gamified manner? Are there practical cases that can be recognised as examples for the tourism industry to study? Can gamification be an effective communication alternative to attract users to the various places they wish to visit physically?

Given the problem, which forms a key part of this analysis, the following hypothesis has been formulated to determine whether it can be validated using the methodology proposed in this work: Given the impossibility of travel, the period of confinement has enabled prosumers interested in travelling to become acquainted with tourist destinations in a virtual and technologically stimulated way, thanks to gamified communication.

To establish the working hypothesis, a cause-effect relationship was developed, according to its classification (Berganza & Ruiz San Román, 2010, p. 56). Regarding the typology of the hypothesis, an *ante-facto* approach (Berganza & Ruiz San Román, 2010, p. 60) was chosen to offer explanations prior to observation, before developing a solution to the problem posed during this study.

In light of the hypothesis, the objectives of this study are as follows:

O1: To understand the pandemic context and its influence on the field of tourism.

O2: To study the concept of gamification and explore its correlation with communication and the tourism sector.

O3: To establish a definition of gamification aligned with the subject matter.

O4: To identify practical cases of gamification that address the problem and provide insights into the topic under study.

O5: To analyse the media context and determine which gamified processes are most effective in capturing the attention of internet users (prosumers) on social networks.

To meet the objectives and verify the hypothesis, a methodology relevant to the area of knowledge and the subject of study was chosen. The deductive-hypothetical method (Morillo et al., 2015) was employed to develop this work. Subsequently, once the problem was defined, the objectives established, and the hypothesis formulated, the inductive-deductive method (Newman, 2006) was used for the argumentation and exposition from which the analysis proceeds.

Regarding the research techniques employed, direct observation was used initially to minimise inferences in the study (Kawulich, 2005). This approach is based on the pandemic context and its impact on tourism in terms of communication, gamification, and new technologies, particularly when compiling relevant information from the analysis and the literature underpinning this study.

Documentary analysis was also employed to classify information into files (Hernández Díaz, 1996). Content analysis was used as a central technique, based on information gathered from various sources.

Discourse analysis was used to understand language within its technological context (Van Dijk & Mendizábal, 1999), and case studies (Simons, 2011) were examined to identify significant technological events in communication and tourism within the relevant historical context. The discursive method (Menéndez, 2022, pp. 221-224) was applied to underpin this qualitative analysis of the facts under investigation.

In terms of the narrative structure, the metaphor of a journey was used in the discursive section, alongside a research structure based on the following steps:

First: Information and sources were compiled, primarily from literature related to the field of study, and searches were conducted to extract cases of potential scientific interest for the topic.

Second: Data sheets were compiled, and information was catalogued.

Third: The methodologies used in the research were determined, and the working method was designated.

Fourth: The problem was stated based on the research questions, the objectives were set, and the hypothesis was stated.

Fifth: The discourse was developed to explain the progression of events at a specific time, such as the period of confinement.

Sixth: Conclusions were drawn from the qualitative techniques used in the work.

3. Results

Humans have gained a better understanding of their environment through two tools considered fundamental in education: stories and games. The combination of these two elements can be particularly effective. However, the tourism sector, like many economic sectors during the pandemic, has often lacked one of these ingredients, which is easily identified. While tourism has benefited from extensive literature, due to the online world's capacity for generating narratives, it has often missed another element: gamification. Although gamification has been present to some extent, companies have not fully exploited its potential.

Numerous video games undeniably use physical spaces to develop their narratives. This encourages gamers (Jenkins, 2009), in the sense that Henry Jenkins understands the concept, to visit locations that have captivated them. However, something is still lacking. Google is currently attempting to provide programmers and developers of gamified stories (Caldera Serrano, 2014) with software that can be integrated into their video game development. These programmes recreate real-world spaces, digitally rendering tangible locations that virtual industry professionals can then easily incorporate into their creations. The aim is to simplify the management of playful proposals for programmers, thereby enabling market control. Furthermore, this not only saves creative professionals time in project development, but also ensures that the most widely used search engine company secures the purchase of this content.

Consequently, it is increasingly easy to acquire the means to create playable scenarios from real-world locations. This implies that the prosumer, in this case the gamer, not only engages in conscious and finite play, but also interacts with places that are not entirely unfamiliar when visited physically, due to their prior virtual connection.

Through gameplay, they learn to associate themselves with environments they may later visit. At the very least, that space potentially becomes a viable location for their in-person tourist activities. Thus, the finite game specific to the digital world, to which they choose to connect at a given moment, can become infinite for them.

In order to explore this topic further, clarify the concepts of gaming, and establish a suitable framework for this dissertation, it is necessary to differentiate between finite and infinite games.

Infinite games (Carse, 1986), according to Carse, emerge from everyday life and do not have winners or losers. The rules in these games are less rigid than in conventional, finite games. Therefore, according to James P. Carse, a person begins playing the primary game, the game of life, from the moment of birth. Subsequently, the player, or human, decides which games to engage in, which adventures to undertake, and, consequently, which tangible tourist experiences to pursue.

Leaving aside, for the moment, its application to tourism, it is necessary to provide further examples to ensure a clear understanding of this concept and to accurately discern this key idea for the development of this exposition. It is important to note that, according to Carse, in the infinite game, the game of life, one does not always have the agency to decide. Chance within the game can introduce scenarios that the individual has not previously chosen. Additionally, even when an individual chooses to participate in certain scenarios, they may not necessarily achieve the desired outcome.

Another characteristic of infinity is that, in principle, there is no definitive winner or loser subject to rules. Therefore, the most valuable aspect of these games may be that humans never cease playing throughout their lives. Furthermore, in this perpetual scenario, there is always a lesson applicable to the ultimate game: the game of life.

To further illustrate this, drawing upon the views of other authors, we might assert, in the words of some, that "infinite games have infinite time horizons. As there is no finish line, there is no practical end to the game. Therefore, one cannot win in this type of game. Moreover, in an infinite game, the primary objective is to continue playing," as Simon Sinek (2018, p. 20) states.

However, this maxim has been presented generation after generation, yet individuals have primarily engaged in consciously regulated games, those that they have proposed, either physically or virtually, in front of a board or on a multimedia platform. Simple games such as hide-and-seek, requiring only a physical space and the motivation to embark on the adventure, or more complex games like hopscotch, which necessitate an added spatial component, have been pivotal in the growth and personality development of the individual.

Subsequently, as rules became more complex, physical spaces were designed to appeal to the individual's most symbolic aspects. This is where more traditional games such as backgammon, chess, or parcheesi, as well as well-known modern board games like Trivial Pursuit, Risk, or Monopoly, became prominent.

Later, with the advent of virtual platforms, these games were digitised, and new recreational environments were created for non-presential play, synchronously or asynchronously, and for collaborative engagement from different locations. Furthermore, these platforms have inspired new creations that stimulate the imagination of those who undertake new challenges, while also training them and offering opportunities to develop skills for continued personal growth in the game of life. Examples include complex games such as The Sims, Fortnite, or Pokémon Go, to name a few relevant and familiar titles for the digitised audience.

Entering the field of digitalisation, and to move closer to the application of the case in question, it is observable how many mobile applications maintain a gamified experience for the prosumer, engaging them within the ludic space that will be further developed in this text. This is evident in apps that serve to maintain direct contact between the brand and the proactive user who frequents it and participates in its communication process of storytelling (Salas, 2017).

Thus, from Iberia to Booking, from Renfe to Omio, and from Google Maps, Waze, or Citymapper to new virtual business models such as Couchsurfing, Airbnb, BlaBlaCar, Uber, or Cabify, the world of tourism has become a gamified space where travellers can begin planning their adventure, their infinite game, from virtual platforms before arriving at their destination. Even without physically arriving, they can access information about any digitised location worldwide, regardless of whether they ultimately choose to visit.

Thus, a prosumer can create an initial itinerary without visiting a ticket office, referring to the traditional method, and, using multiple tools, can plan a trip, even within the context of a pandemic in the information age (Lavilla & Sánchez Franco, 2024). While travel may not have been possible, it has undoubtedly been possible to learn about the unique characteristics of each location. This information, gathered from virtual visits to various cities, can be retained and, once restrictions are lifted, this pre-travel planning can be successfully executed.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this is that people can effectively plan their travels in a playful manner, even remotely. Moreover, this planning can be quite cost-effective, resembling a travel management game. In the Performance Society (Han, 2022), as the same author also discusses in *The Tiredness Society* (Han, 2019), where individuals "throw themselves into voluntary self-exploitation" (p. 64), in the words of the South Korean author, to make any action profitable, this can be a significant motivator for the gamer who wishes to travel.

In this context, it becomes feasible to plan a destination using self-management tools without the need for physical travel. Even during a pandemic, why not consider planning a trip for when travel becomes possible? A possible itinerary of playful tools, specifically, travel-oriented applications, could be as follows:

Firstly, Lonely Planet, offering urban tourist guides, allows for the downloading of potential routes. Google Trips could also serve this purpose. Subsequently, AccuWeather enables better prediction of impending atmospheric phenomena, facilitating the packing of appropriate clothing to mitigate weather-related setbacks. For packing, applications such as PackPoint, Pack the Suitcase, or Packing Pro can be utilised. To assist with language comprehension, Google Translate is a useful tool. For identifying noteworthy locations within a city, Yelp or Foursquare offer viable alternatives for planning. Regarding the potential expenses of physical travel, tools like Settle Up or iShare Money provide options for improved financial management. Finally, Instagram, TikTok, and other generalist social networks can aid in visualising the planned trip's progress among each traveller's followers.

Might a journey, then, be considered a game of games? Is it not necessary to be physically present in a location to gain a deeper understanding of the city? Could the infinite game of travelling not yield superior outcomes and, consequently, improved returns on the chosen route?

At this juncture in the exploration, which this text aims to outline, the structure and concept may appear well-developed. However, further information is required. Therefore, to facilitate a more concrete discussion of the universe of games, and journeys, it is beneficial to conceptualise and establish some relevant facts regarding the current gamification process in which we are engaged.

To continue the previous discussion regarding the underutilisation of gamified tools during the pandemic, it is pertinent to examine the work of Johan Huizinga (2012), a key author in the academic discourse on gamification. His book, *Homo Ludens*, has become an essential text for those seeking to theorise, generate knowledge, or develop new play spaces. Huizinga establishes the foundations of play with key concepts that have inspired creators and theorists alike.

One of the central concepts in this work is, undoubtedly, the “Magic Circle” (Huizinga, 2012). Huizinga defines this as the space, whether physical or virtual, if we consider the Internet age, within which a game takes place. Within this realm, gamers not only feel secure due to their understanding of the governing rules but also find that it facilitates the establishment of robust and consistent relationships, enabling cooperation even within what might initially appear to be a simple competition.

Homo Ludens extends beyond this initial, yet innovative, concept for its time. It also offers an illuminating definition of play, providing a comprehensive view of the role of play processes in human evolution and cultural contributions. Huizinga defines play as

a free action or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its end in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is ‘different’ from ‘ordinary’ life. (Huizinga, 2012, p. 25)

Considering this, might we not argue that, during the pandemic, the Magic Circle has expanded beyond the confines of the physical world? Do virtual media possess the capacity to unite more individuals than physical spaces? Can the Magic Circle created during an in-person journey be extended by the pre-existing connectivity of the Magic Circle originating from the digital realm?

It is conceivable that, upon reading the definition and reflecting on the analysis of the Magic Circle, the central concept underpinning this text, and which has justified the dissertation's premise, might be obscured. Namely, the intention of this exploration, inspired by James P. Carse's notion of the infinite games inherent in life itself. However, the delimitation of finite games can, in fact, complement the concept of infinite games. Firstly, because human understanding of space-time remains imprecise. Secondly, the process of “being otherwise” could involve recognising the player's own alter ego. This implies that, once a specific action is completed, the resulting learning becomes an infinite aspect of the individual's self-knowledge, that of the player. Consequently, a concrete fact derived from a specific game can be applied to a life that is already inherently indeterminate. Infinite.

Further elaborating on this concept, Caillois, in *Games and Men: The Mask and Vertigo*, introduces two additional terms relevant to this discussion, representing the freedom of the infinite and the constraints of the finite: chance and norm, or *paidia* and *ludus*; play and game.

Play, in this context, embodies a fundamental principle of amusement and unrestrained joy, characterised by “free improvisation and carefree joy...spontaneous manifestations of the instinct to play...immediate and disorderly agitation...an elementary need for movement and noise” (Teixes, 2014).

Expanding upon Caillois' concept, Teixes, in *Gamification: Fundamentals and Applications*, posits that play is characteristic of a child engaging freely, unconstrained by rules. This freedom generates a game, a journey, based on the experiences encountered during play. As the child progresses, he or she can integrate actions that enhance the enjoyment of his or her future endeavours.

Such a proposal could readily emerge from chance or destiny, or indeed both concurrently, contingent upon the reader's individual conviction, or that of the players themselves. If we were to embrace play, harnessing a boundless imagination driven by chance, determination, or free will, we might immediately envision an individual confined to his home, experiencing boredom due to the pandemic. Immersed in the vast expanse of content circulating online, this individual decides to construct a hypothetical itinerary born from his imagination. There would be no financial constraints, no temporal limitations, and no logistical impediments regarding transportation. Furthermore, the available tools would enable him to traverse from one location to another, to leap between destinations, and to roam freely without adherence to rules or restrictions. This activity could even be presented as a game to a partner, a child, or a distant friend residing hundreds of kilometres away. The game could be modified instantaneously, potentially evolving into a new game with established rules or, conversely, embracing even greater randomness.

Regarding *Homo Ludens*, the game can be defined as "the complement and education of *paidia*, which discipline enriches" (Caillois, 1997, p. 37). In other words, it refers to the pre-existing rules governing the game. Reverting to Teixes, this author likens it to play from which randomness has been subtracted through the imposition of rules. However, a prior phase of play is not necessarily a prerequisite for the creation of a game. Certain games exist as pure games, such as those previously mentioned: board games, games played in physical spaces, and those played in virtual formats through interaction with mobile applications.

Should one desire to engage in a game, any internet user could participate in a territory or roaming themed game during a period of confinement. Alternatively, they could simply connect to one of the aforementioned applications, or indeed to all of them simultaneously, and playfully devise a trip. From this amalgamation of games, of *homo ludus*, the individual could conceive a game with a set of rules to determine who can circumnavigate the globe most economically, utilising tourist resources such as accommodation and transportation. Furthermore, if the individual did not create such a game, why did the companies responsible for these applications not do so? Why did they fail to recognise the opportunity that a crisis invariably presents to generate novel entertainment alternatives? Where were the collaborative partnerships between companies in the travel sector to attract players, prosumers, when so-called "normality" returned?

Arguably, time has favoured individual or creative endeavours during the pandemic. This period could have represented a pivotal moment for the player, whether prosumer or entrepreneur. Confinement afforded the opportunity to contemplate diverse facets of human existence, including, for instance, the infinite nature of the game of life. Within this process, any gamer with an affinity for travel could playfully extract, via multimedia platforms, a wealth of information pertaining to various tourist destinations, facilitating either in-person or virtual travel, as we have endeavoured to demonstrate throughout this text.

However, to forge new neural pathways and to unleash the imagination within the infinite game of life, or the journey, it would be advantageous to understand the fundamental characteristics that a game may possess, thereby facilitating a potential new creation. In this context, the work *Gamification: Fundamentals and Applications* identifies four fundamental characteristics, as established by the lecturer, writer, and game designer Jane McGonigal (2011):

Firstly, the game must possess an objective. What is it intended to achieve? In the case of creating a game related to tourism, could travel be rendered safer, cheaper, faster, or all of these concurrently?

Secondly, the game must have rules in order to cultivate determination within the player. This becomes clearer upon reviewing the itinerary outlined in the preceding points. In this instance, multiple platforms exist, many of which have been mentioned previously, implying that the prosumers, the gamers, are fully aware of the platform they are using and their objectives in doing so. While rules impose limitations, they also eliminate randomness. Consequently, individuals engrossed in a chosen game will experience the security afforded by the platform's rules. This, by definition, fosters a greater sense of comfort, assuming the validity of the Magic Circle concept previously discussed.

Thirdly, the chosen game should furnish feedback that visualises the player's progression within the designated play space. Furthermore, this feedback, which may be continuous in certain instances, allows for the observation not only of performance but also of the player's proximity to or distance from achieving the stated goal.

Fourthly, and finally, there is the element of "voluntary participation". This entails that players accept the objective, rules, and feedback system inherent within the game. In other words, the player embraces the functioning and structure of the environment they inhabit, accepting all occurrences within this new virtual space as they delve deeper into it, utilising their alter ego as the primary tool within the play space.

3. Discussion and Conclusions

It is true that, as the discourse within this text progresses, its inherent randomness diminishes. Consequently, the rules arising from finitude render the exposition less ethereal and more substantial, potentially fostering greater comfort for the recipient. Nevertheless, the journey, the itinerary, is established progressively. It is sometimes necessary to traverse various phases before arriving at more or less congruent conclusions.

At this juncture, it must be stated that a general framework for the ultimate act of creation, the journey from the general to the specific, from the infinite to the finite, and from chance to determination, has been presented. Therefore, to maintain coherence within the argument, it is appropriate to offer some fundamental definitions of gamification, ultimately striving to arrive at the most suitable definition to unify the discourse.

It should be noted beforehand that the concept of gamification is already well established in the digitalised world. However, it is useful to review various alternatives before arriving at a working definition in the case in point. The book *Gamification: Fundamentals and Applications* offers several previous alternatives, before the author culminates his objective with the following definition: "Gamification is the application of game resources (design, dynamics, elements, etc.) in non-game contexts to modify the behaviour of individuals through actions on their motivation" (Teixes, 2014, p. 23). On the other hand, *Gamification: Revolutionise Your Business with Game Techniques* defines gamification as "the process of manipulating fun to serve real-world goals". Furthermore, both Hunter, D. & Werbach (2013) make it clear that "gamification is the use of game elements and designs in non-game contexts" (Hunter, D. & Werbach, 2013, p. 28).

As a final definition, employed to achieve the aim proposed at the beginning of this section, Kapp, in *The Gamification of Learning and Instruction: Game-Based Methods and Strategies for Training and Education*, defines gamification as "the use of mechanisms, aesthetics and the use of thinking to engage people, incite action, promote learning and solve problems" (Kapp, 2013). While all these definitions could be adapted to generate a specific definition for the topic at hand, they lack a fundamental characteristic of the action that leads an individual to engage in any game: motivation.

Following the framework outlined in *Gamification: Fundamentals and Applications*, there are two primary types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, which stems from the individual's internal desires, and extrinsic motivation, which arises from the design of the game itself. Furthermore, building upon Pink's self-determination theory, this work incorporates Andrzej Marczewski's RAMP model (Relatedness, Autonomy, Mastery, Purpose), as disseminated by Teixes (2014). This model offers several fundamental pillars that can serve as a foundation for generating highly motivational play environments. These include relatedness, which is the way players interact with one another. In this case, the undertaking of the activity would occur naturally. The user would engage with other prosumers, establishing a community motivated both by the environments themselves and by the relationships fostered within them.

Countless individuals would be willing to exchange leisure time, especially during a pandemic, for knowledge gained through virtual socialisation. Moreover, in this context, there would be no setbacks, as convergence on digital platforms is an integral part of the gamer's everyday experience.

Autonomy or the feeling of freedom that occurs within a gamified system. This motivation is particularly prevalent in the performance society, as previously discussed. The freedom afforded by connectivity is considerable, although it is, of course, not entirely genuine, fundamentally because the prosumers are so closely linked to the medium that they find it difficult to disengage. As can be seen, this section presents a duality. On the one hand, it generates the feeling of being able to connect whenever a player desires; on the other hand, the game tool itself can generate addiction and a desire to remain connected, thus offering an illusory sense of choice. It should be remembered that while one remains connected, dopamine is released, which produces a pleasurable sensation for the gamer, much like the effect of sugar. Once experienced, it generates a peak of well-being; however, when one ceases engagement for a period, there is an almost irremediable need to play again. During the pandemic, there have been numerous instances of seeking connectivity, whether out of loneliness or mere boredom. Therefore, addiction to screens has been amplified simply because of accessibility and the available time to connect.

Mastery is when players feel they are becoming an expert and learning new skills. This type of motivation is becoming increasingly prevalent among prosumers. Returning to the concept of the Performance Society, the player can observe in real-time their progress in acquiring new skills, and the level of reward for the knowledge they have gained in the game process is very attractive to this prosumer profile.

Purpose or aim is the gamer's need to play the game they are playing has a predefined meaning. If the objectives are clear, and the inherent connectivity of the platforms makes the path of the experience

clear to the user while connected, the results of the game will be very gratifying for the player, especially if the theme, in this case, the development of the programming of new journeys and discoveries of possible destinations, is an intrinsic incentive.

Once the user has reached this point, and once he has decided to play and feel motivated to do so, it is desirable that he comes to experience that sense of immersion in the game and its premise, commonly known as "flow" by Csikszentmihalyi (2016). Regardless of whether there is confinement or not, the individual can achieve that feeling of being carried away by the platform with which he interacts. It is not only a question of having time; the tool itself, due to its programming, design, or the objectives established within it, can make the hours pass more quickly than what is considered normal.

According to Mihály Csikszentmihalyi, there are eight elements that generate such a powerful immersion in the individual that they even lose track of time while performing an activity or, as in this case, while playing a game. These are as follows (Csikszentmihalyi & Larsson, 2016):

First, the activity must be feasible. Second, there must be concentration. Third, there must be clear and well-defined objectives. Fourth, there must be a continuous feedback loop. Fifth, the action should not involve excessive effort. Sixth, one must have complete control over their actions. Seventh, self-consciousness disappears. Eighth, the sense of time is lost.

It is worth noting that the endogenous motivation to connect is potentially already in place, and that the pandemic has been a decisive moment in offering the possibility, in terms of the scenario that was generated by the need to be connected, to interact with the platforms. Thus, all eight elements were almost achieved by the very context of the action itself. In addition, the gamer's experience was present, and if not, there was, in most cases, time to understand and assimilate the novelty of the platform in question.

Now that it is understood how the player acts, it is necessary to examine the types of player profiles that exist. According to Teixes, in *Gamification: Fundamentals and Applications*, the following basic typology of gamers' attitudes can be observed (Teixes, 2014).

Firstly, there is the Killer, who seeks only to compete with other players. Then there is the Achiever, whose goal is to attain rewards and overcome challenges. This is followed by the Socialiser profile, who are more motivated by the social aspects of the game than any other. Finally, there is the Explorer, whose ultimate goal is to discover and learn new skills and knowledge, and who feels that the game has the capacity to fulfil their deep desire for self-improvement.

Thus, these four profiles encompass the different roles that a player assumes when playing a game. It is worth noting that competition itself is already a highly appealing motivation for a user who decides to log on and when performance can be measured against other gamers. In this sense, it should be mentioned that the very social custom of the different games in which human beings have been involved since childhood has this intrinsic purpose.

In terms of achievement and reward, it is commonplace in everyday activity to observe how familiar the individual's cognitive and behavioural process is with the desire to develop and be recognised for their performance in a given task. Furthermore, appealing to the most basic instinct, human beings have been collecting items and creating spaces for performance and nurturing since the beginning of their development as individuals. For this reason, any environment, even a fictitious one, will be perceived as natural.

At this point, one might mention the Tamagotchi, a toy designed to encourage investment of time in its upbringing. Based on this artefact, from which emotional rewards are derived in terms of nurturing, related games have been developed. FarmVille, for example, was one of the first to appeal to the parenting instinct. From there, tools have emerged that offer the player the chance to observe the process of evolution, such as Pou, My Boo, Hatchi, and Animal Crossing. On the other hand, a game that has marked the beginning of a new era, due to its evolution, theme, and form of interaction, is Pokémon Go, which, with augmented reality, offers the possibility of improving the physical environment and expanding its information.

In terms of user socialisation, the most notable aspect of this section is that, despite the confinement, the prosumer was able to communicate with other gamers who had connectivity. However, it is important to acknowledge the existing digital divide. Although this divide is narrowing, with many reports showing that over ninety per cent of users in Spain have internet access, it remains the case that not all connected individuals are proficient in using digital tools. This lack of proficiency

affects various digital environments, not only in tourism but also throughout the broader digital ecosystem.

Finally, regarding the innate human characteristic of exploring one's environment, multimedia devices instil in the prosumer an incessant need to understand and learn how to navigate new places, both material and virtual. In this sense, this motivation is considered key, given that travel and tourism are an exploration of the environment that surrounds the human being. Therefore, this motivation is intrinsic to the activity and to its development, regardless of the location, whether physical or virtual, in which it is carried out.

Finally, as an added value to this whole process, although it has not been possible to implement all technological activities during the pandemic for the reasons indicated at the beginning of this presentation, there is technology associated with making virtual and physical spaces converge. Although, for obvious reasons, precisely those caused by confinement and limited travel, it has not been possible to put them into practice.

In this sense, one could cite all those technologies that help to generate greater immersion in the content that is poured into each platform. As mentioned above, Pokémon Go serves as an excellent example for implementing a new game feedback process because it has all the necessary ingredients to make the user feel part of the activity of two worlds in one. The fact is that augmented reality, associated with the playability of the rules of an emotional and creative story, makes the feeling towards the brand that develops this type of dynamic highly favourable. It is for this reason that, more than likely once the pandemic has passed, we will likely see new applications that bring together two worlds, material and digital, which, although they remained separate, can now be one. Having examined user engagement and the diverse options available to maintain connection with tourism despite travel restrictions, we can define the infinite game of travel. This infinite game utilises existing finite games to sustain interest in tourism, reflecting humanity's inherent desire to explore and understand diverse environments. These environments can be physical or digital, tangible or intangible, material or virtual, or encompass a combination of these elements.

Therefore, based on this guided tour, we can offer the following definition of the concept of gamification of tourism. This definition is accompanied by several considerations derived from our theoretical itinerary, an itinerary designed as an expository journey that commences with the pandemic and anticipates a future of increased physical and virtual connectivity. The definition of gamification applied to tourism could then be understood as "the ludic process that comes from an infinite game by which a highly motivated individual voluntarily decides to get to know new spaces, environments, and cultures and for this purpose uses the resources of finite games (physical and virtual). The main objective of this action could be to evaluate, modify, and better understand his environment and himself."

Once a definition that aims to approximate the current context has been concluded, it should be pointed out that the gamer, in the midst of the pandemic, has shown himself to be very receptive to the use of technologies. All the tools related to the tourism sector could have brought the proactive subject closer to the action, not in the short term, since he cannot move around freely, but could have encouraged him to visit places in person when he returns to normality. For this, there were numerous possibilities: games, apps, websites, blogs, and other virtual content. However, the problem is that the tourism-related business world has not known how to connect all the available alternatives it had to generate a compelling narrative that tries to link the prosumer in a more emotional way with the brands.

Nor has entrepreneurship nurtured ideas in this sector, perhaps because the return on investment was not going to be immediate. The exposure of capital in a market as volatile as the technology market and as demanding as the tourism sector may, therefore, be too high a risk. However, it is worth noting that some companies have been able to make communications that enhance branding but have acted on their own just when the market demanded more togetherness. In this sense, some organisations not related to tourism have joined forces, such as audiovisual content platforms like Netflix, Disney, or HBO, to try to get closer to the prosumer and continue to change their consumption habits, which could have been a good mirror to look into. Amazon has also adapted successfully to the new circumstances. Not only has it expanded its user base and cultivated a positive brand image through improved logistics and home delivery, but it has also developed a creative and consistent narrative. Interestingly, this narrative employs tourism as a lure, specifically space tourism, which is inherently technological. Virgin has also

been closely involved. They even congratulated Jeff Bezos' company via Twitter. However, their message was not as assertive as that of their competitor in the space tourism sector. The pandemic presented significant challenges. These included promoting destinations with unfavourable legislation for tourism. Furthermore, prohibitions and health concerns compromised the safety required for tourism development.

Technology also presented a challenge to tourism. Internet access was inconsistent in many regions. Infrastructure limitations initially hindered connectivity for numerous users. Moreover, if there were already problems for this on some occasions, how could there not be problems for implementing innovative actions with immersive formats (augmented reality, virtual reality or 360 technology)?

In conclusion, gamification and tourism offer promising prospects. Maintaining prosumer motivation proves achievable. It has been found that there are very effective techniques that can be put into practice for the benefit of the prosumer, who is already becoming a gamer, above all, because there are more and more technological alternatives available to become one. The sector requires major brands to foster connectivity. This enhances engagement in travel a popular pursuit. Travel facilitates experiential learning transforming participants into modern day Ulysses figures.

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