

Recently an article in Variety brought a lot of unwanted attention to gamification. The article was titled "[Netflix Is Testing Patches to Gamify Bingeing for Kids](#)"

Reading this, my heart sank, a feeling that just got worse as I read the article. To summarise, Netflix was trialing a system that would award children patches or badges for watching TV shows. Completed "A Series of Unfortunate Events"? have a badge...

Netflix told Variety

"We are testing a new feature on select kids titles that introduces collectible items for a more interactive experience, adding an element of fun and providing kids something to talk about and share around the titles they love. We learn by testing and this feature may or may not become part of the Netflix experience."

After a huge outcry on social media, [Netflix pulled the plug](#). Again, speaking to Variety they said

"We've concluded the test for patches and have decided not to move forward with the feature for kids. We test lots of things at Netflix in order to learn what works well - and what doesn't work well - for our members."

What was the problem then?

Where do I start?

As a parent, I objected to this tactic in the strongest possible way. I absolutely do not want any more reasons for my children to feel they need to watch more TV. It is bad enough they watch as much as they do, let alone then having the added compulsion of collecting badges added on top.

As a gamification expert, there are many reasons to be concerned by this and to dislike it.

- It is a terrible, terrible, terrible example of using the shallowest of gamification possible. Slap a badge on it. Every expert out there in the field is telling people not to do this. It is lazy and proven to not be an effective way to sustain engagement.
- It could only have been considered for the most terrible, almost unethical of reasons. It

had nothing to do with fun, it was purely designed to give kids more incentive to stay glued to Netflix. In fact, if you consider the [code of ethics](#) that I published a while back, this red flags the Integrity section **“Gamification should not be used to manipulate children for commercial purposes.”**

2. Integrity

- Gamification should take into consideration accepted regional social practices, personal or ethical boundaries and general human rights, and should not be used to manipulate people into breaking them.
 - Gamification should not be used for illegal activities (as defined by the laws of the countries and locales for which its use is intended).
 - **Gamification should not be used to manipulate children for commercial purposes.**
- Even worse it is yet another reason for people to have negative feelings towards gamification. News like this is Variety is going to be seen by thousands of people and would get more exposure than any news about it being ended. These are not stupid people. They would have seen this for what it is, a way to get kids to watch more TV and not defect to YouTube or other streaming.

Had Netflix looked any of the good literature out there on gamification or engaged with any experts on the topic, they would have never even have entertained the idea of giving badges for watching TV. Watching TV is already a fun activity that is incredibly compelling. Extrinsic rewards would add nothing of value to that experience, in fact, it would likely make it worse. “I really want the Hello Kitty badge to complete my collection, but I hate Hello Kitty. Well, I’ll watch all 80 episodes anyway, I want that badge.”

We in gamification are constantly struggling to improve the reputation of the industry, trying to prove that it is so much more than just slapping points and badges on a system, and then this sort of thing happens. It is frustrating and so easily avoidable.

Do your homework!