



Gamification for mid-sized restaurants in Helsinki: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

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<p>Gamification has emerged as a fundamental tool in engaging consumers within the restaurant industry, driving customer behaviour, and shaping their dining experiences. This thesis delves into the complicated realm of gamification, exploring its applications and implications in the context of the restaurant industry, specifically for mid-sized establishments. The study's scope lies in understanding how gamification elements impact consumer behaviour, the challenges and advantages encountered in implementation, and the potential differences across restaurant levels.</p> <p>The exploration of gamification unfolds through an intricate analysis of its principles, focusing on engagement, customization, and social interaction within restaurant settings. Furthermore, this study explores the link between consumer behaviour and gamification strategies while also investigating the role rewards play in the development of such experiences. Finally, this study examines the various advantages and challenges that restaurants can encounter when it comes to implementing gamification. It also highlights the knowledge gaps and limitations that exist in the field.</p> <p>The research delves into the theoretical frameworks highlighting gamification, notably Flow Theory, Octalysis Framework, Self-Determination Theory, and MDE Framework, distinguishing their roles in promoting customer engagement. An examination of these theories reveals their relevance in understanding intrinsic motivations, core drivers influencing behaviour, and the emotional aspects connected to gamified experiences.</p> <p>Through a combination of qualitative interviews and data analysis, the study explores the various facets of gamification's effect on customer behaviour. Moreover, it provides insight into the restaurant setting's complexity when it comes to implementing it.</p> <p>The discussion section of the study provides a summary of the findings and explores the future directions of research. Findings from the study discover significant insights into the impact of gamification on consumer behaviour within varying restaurant scales. Lastly, it highlights the author's learning experiences and the significance of gamification in the restaurant industry.</p> <p>In conclusion, this thesis provides an extensive analysis of the various aspects of gamification in the restaurant industry, and it also offers a framework for future research. Overall, it helps improve the customer experience and overlays the way for the development of new strategies.</p>
Key words Gamification, restaurant, engagement, game, consumer behaviour

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1 Introduction

This study is a bachelor's thesis report conducted as part of the Hospitality, Tourism and Experience Management degree programme at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. The author, as a student of this programme, has chosen a topic that has both direct and indirect impacts on the industry and can provide valuable and innovative insights for future studies. The first chapter of this report serves as an introduction, outlining the objectives of the research and providing a clear structure for the thesis. This chapter also establishes delimitations and the scope of the report, specifying what is included and excluded from the study, as well as providing key definitions to ensure clarity on the terminology used throughout the thesis.

Engaging customers has grown more difficult since our lives have gotten more digitalized. Currently, the combination of technology and human connection has produced new strategies for drawing in and holding on to customers. Gamification is one innovative idea that has gained traction across industries and stimulates enterprises' creativity beyond conventional limits.

In recent years, the concept of gamification has garnered substantial attention and acclaim as a strategic tool employed to enhance user engagement, motivation, and behavioural outcomes in a wide spectrum of non-game contexts (Detering, et al., 2011; Hamari, et al., 2014). This multifaceted approach, rooted in the principles of game design, has witnessed exponential growth in its application across industries, transcending traditional boundaries to reshape various facets of contemporary human interaction and experience (Huotari & Hamari, 2012).

Gamification involves the application of gaming elements in unconventional contexts outside the traditional gaming sphere. This approach can wield substantial influence by fostering brand recognition and promoting active consumer participation. Consequently, it has gained popularity across various industries, including the field of tourism (Buhalis & Xu, 2021 p. 1)

Within this transformative landscape, the hospitality sector, a dynamic and highly competitive industry driven by customer engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty, has emerged as a pivotal domain for the deployment of gamification strategies (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2014). This introductory chapter explains the overarching framework of gamification, its emergent prominence in modern discourse, and, more pertinently, its intricate entwinement with the hospitality domain.

1.1 Research Objectives

The topic of the given research is to explore the current state of gamification in the mid-sized restaurant industry in Helsinki. The topic emerged from the author's experience working in the restaurant industry where it was observed that gamification was not fully utilized, if at all. The author's

twofold perspective, having engaged with gamification both as a marketer and as a consumer, produced the curiosity to investigate both the limitations and the vast potential of this emerging trend.

The main research question was set as follows:

What are the challenges and opportunities of gamification in mid-sized restaurants in Helsinki region?

In order to break down and further explore the main research question five sub-questions are designed to provide a more specific direction of the study:

- What is the current state of gamification implementation in mid-sized restaurants in the Helsinki region?
- How does gamification impact consumer engagement and behaviour in mid-sized restaurants in the Helsinki region?
- What are the different types of gamification techniques that could be applied in mid-sized restaurants in the Helsinki region?
- How can gamification be used to enhance the dining experience for mid-sized restaurant customers in the Helsinki region?

The first sub-question examines the perception of gamification by restaurants and assesses its current implementation. The utilization will be measured by conducting interviews with restaurant managers and owners. The second sub-question's aim is to identify the impact gamification possess on consumer engagement and behaviour in restaurant setting Furthermore, by conducting a literature review the author intends to identify innovative gamification techniques that could be potentially applied in mid-sized restaurants in the Helsinki region. Sub-questions four and five investigate how gamification can enhance the dining experience and identify associated risks and drawbacks. This will be achieved through collaboration with restaurants, interviews, feedback collection, and a review of relevant literature.

1.2 Methodology in brief

The study's methodology involves a qualitative approach while being exploratory in nature. To gather primary data, the researcher conducted five face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with managers of hospitality businesses in the Helsinki region. These individuals are responsible for implementing gamification in their day-to-day operations. Furthermore, a diverse array of secondary data, including academic literature, industry reports, and empirical studies, was consulted to inform the study and provide a broader perspective on the subject matter. Furthermore, the analysis method for primary data is thematic analysis.

Using qualitative methods, the data collected from both the primary and secondary sources were analysed. This allowed the author to identify recurring themes and develop a conclusion. By combining the strengths of primary and secondary data sources, this research aimed to provide a well-rounded and in-depth investigation into the world of gamification within mid-sized restaurants in Helsinki.

The research aims to identify both the advantages and obstacles associated with introducing gamification in restaurant environments. To conduct the interviews, a detailed interview procedure was developed, drawing on an extensive review of existing literature and theoretical framework. The study consists of five semi-structured interviews conducted in the autumn of 2023. These interviews involved managers of mid-sized restaurants all situated in the downtown area of Helsinki. These restaurants were chosen based on their recognition in prior research, and the author's personal experiences. The data collected will provide insights into how mid-sized dining establishments in Helsinki integrate gamification into their daily operations.

1.3 Thesis Structure

This sub-chapter of the thesis describes the structure of the thesis itself, which gives an outline of the study's principal contents and its various elements. The author starts with an introduction that briefly explains the purpose of the study and its research objectives as well as delimitations and the key concepts.

The theoretical framework initiates the topic of gamification while exploring the game mechanics commonly used in gamifying experiences in the hospitality and tourism industry. The section on the psychological effects of gamification investigates how this approach can impact consumer behaviour. Several theories are presented that explain how rewards can serve as a motivator for users to participate in games and other activities. Additionally, Flow Theory is explored, which suggests that users' psychological states become optimal when they are fully immersed in a task. By examining these concepts, the section aims to demonstrate the potential impact of gamification on the consumer experience.

Progressing, the author explores the potential benefits and drawbacks of implementing gamification in mid-sized establishments. Specifically, the author examines the obstacles that can restrain the effective application of gamification, such as the lack of knowledge among owners and managers. Additionally, the section provides a framework for successfully incorporating gamification into high-end restaurant operations in the Helsinki district area.

The next section of the thesis covers the methodology used to clarify in detail the methods the author uses to conduct the research. Firstly, a brief background is presented to pinpoint the main

elements of the chapter. Thereafter, the author shows how the data collection process and displays the information discussing the validity and reliability of the results.

The next chapter portrays the involved details of the primary findings with the help of data analysis. It dissects the interviews that were performed with esteemed industry figures and investigates the questions that inspired the investigation. This chapter's structure aims to introduce the reader to the various repeated themes and examine the potential opportunities and challenges that come with gamification in the restaurant industry. With a focus on analysing the data, the chapter explores the relationship between the experiences of customers and the gamification process.

The discussion section of this thesis is the place where the ideas that emerged from the study come to life. It places emphasis on the link between theory and practice, utilizing the insights that came from the data analysis. The interaction between the theoretical and empirical frameworks is designed to bridge the gap between the tangible and the conceptual. The goal of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the various advantages of gamification in the restaurant industry. Through its discussion section, the research findings can be used to spark a wider conversation about the use of gamification in the hospitality industry.

1.4 Delimitations

The goal of this research is to examine the various opportunities and challenges that arise from the implementation of effective gamification strategies in the hospitality industry. This research is focused on the restaurant sector in Helsinki, Finland. The geographical focus of this study is carefully chosen to establish well-defined boundaries. It is also important to note that the results of this research may not be generalized, due to the unique contextual features of this area.

The scope of this study is focused on the mid-sized restaurants. These establishments are typically classified according to their monthly revenue and seating capacity. In order to ensure that the research remains focused on the relevant subject, it excludes smaller establishments and large ones.

Moreover, the timeframe of this research is confined to the preceding four years, a limitation designed to ensure the contemporary relevance of potential gamification strategies. Despite this temporal constraint, the study further refines its focus by specifically casual dining, fine dining, lunch establishments, and a la carte restaurants. Notably, food trucks, pop-up ventures, ghost kitchens, and fast-food establishments are entirely omitted from the research scope.

Furthermore, it is essential to clarify that this research is not commissioned by any corporation. Consequently, the scope remains agnostic to individual company interests, offering a more

balanced and equitable basis for engagement. Lastly, a more collective opportunity may be given for the broader restaurant community in Helsinki to integrate and benefit from the findings, provided they align with the afore mentioned delimitations.

1.5 Key Definitions

This chapter explains the core concepts of the thesis for the reader to be guided throughout the reading process.

Deterding et al. (2011) defined **gamification** as "the use of game design elements in non-game contexts to engage and motivate users." This definition emphasizes the importance of incorporating elements like points, badges, and leaderboards, often found in games, into non-game settings to enhance user engagement. Deterding's work highlights that gamification is fundamentally about tapping into the intrinsic human desire for achievement and competition, driving individuals to participate more actively in activities they might otherwise find uninteresting.

On the other hand, Zichermann and Cunningham, (2011) argue that **gamification** should be seen as "the process of using game thinking and game mechanics to engage audiences and solve problems." They place a strong emphasis on the cognitive aspects of gamification, suggesting that it's not merely about using game elements but understanding the psychology of games. This perspective shifts the focus towards a more holistic approach that includes both the design of the elements and the underlying psychological mechanisms at play when gamifying an experience.

Huotari and Hamari, (2012) offer another nuanced definition, describing **gamification** as "a set of activities and processes to solve problems by using or applying the characteristics of game elements." Their definition underscores the idea that gamification is a toolset for problem-solving and is not restricted to a predefined set of game elements. It allows for flexibility and adaptation to specific contexts. This viewpoint takes a broader stance, emphasizing the creative application of game-like elements to address various challenges, whether in education, marketing, or workplace motivation.

The author interprets the term "**mid-sized restaurant**" as referring to **small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)**. This interpretation is made because there is no existing prior definition or research that specifically outlines what constitutes a mid-sized restaurant in the literature.

European Commission (2021) defines **SMEs** as "enterprises which employ fewer than 250 persons and which have an annual turnover not exceeding 50 million euros, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding 43 million euros." This definition places a strong emphasis on quantifiable criteria such as the number of employees and financial figures. It is a widely recognized and

standardized definition used for policy and regulatory purposes in the European Union and provides clarity regarding the size and scope of SMEs.

World Bank (2021) offers a more general definition, describing **SMEs** as "businesses with a limited number of employees, assets, or revenue." This definition is less prescriptive in terms of specific numerical thresholds, allowing for greater flexibility in application. It is particularly useful in a global context where the size and characteristics of SMEs can vary significantly between countries and regions.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2021) defines a **restaurant** as "a business establishment where meals or refreshments may be purchased." This straightforward definition summarizes the core function of a restaurant, which is to provide food and beverages for purchase, typically for immediate consumption on the premises. Restaurants can vary widely in terms of cuisine, service style, and ambiance, but their primary purpose is to offer customers a place to enjoy prepared meals or drinks. This definition serves as a fundamental and universally understood description of what a restaurant is.

Thus, the author determines **mid-sized restaurants**, in this study, as any restaurants regardless of their ethnicity that has a capacity of maximum 130 seats and having a no more than 250 people employed.

Customer engagement is "a strategic, ongoing process of interacting with customers through various touchpoints and channels, fostering emotional connections and loyalty by providing personalized experiences and value-added interactions that align with customer preferences and needs" (Verhoef et al., 2020).

However, Vivek et al., (2012) offers a definition that describes **customer engagement** as "a customer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural connection with a brand." This definition encompasses the cognitive (thinking), emotional (feeling), and behavioural (doing) dimensions of customer engagement. It suggests that engagement is a multifaceted concept that includes not only emotional attachment but also how customers think about and interact with a brand.

Consumer behaviour

Solomon et al. (2012, p. 6) defines **consumer behaviour** as the examination of processes wherein individuals or groups make choices, purchases, utilize, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to fulfil their needs and desires. This definition posits that consumers are rational decision-makers who precisely evaluate options to maximize satisfaction and functionality.

Kardes et al. (2011, p. 7) offer another perspective, describing **consumer behaviour** as "all activities associated with the purchase, use, and disposal of goods and services, including the consumer's emotional, mental, and behavioural responses that precede or follow these activities." Notably, this definition broadens the scope by considering not only the actions but also the emotional and cognitive aspects involved in consumer interactions.

2 Gamification

Since its emergence around 2010, gamification has risen to prominence as a leading technology and software trend. Yet, it has also gained a reputation as one of the most demanding domains within software engineering. In addition to the conventional software design criteria, creating gamified systems necessitates expertise in areas like psychology related to motivation and behaviour, game design, and narratology (Morschheuser, et al., 2018.)

According to Dale (2014), “the term ‘gamification’ has been used since around 2003 as a way to influence online and real-world behaviour”. Since then, various definitions have been created by researchers and practitioners, as well as various empirical studies on the topic of gamification. Zichermann and Cunningham (2011) define gamification as “the process of game-thinking and game mechanics to engage users and solve problems”. Detering et. al (2011) suggested that gamification is “the use of game design elements in nongame contexts”. In summary, these definitions share the common theme of applying game-related elements outside of traditional gaming contexts. However, they differ in terms of approach, and the specific elements involved.

2.1 Gamification principles

Games can be found in various aspects of our lives. Whether it's during our travels, leisure time, or even at work, we engage in games to craft enjoyable experiences for ourselves and those around us (Robson, et al., 2014). The act of engaging in a game, as well as defining what qualifies as a game, is highly subjective. Therefore, a game comes into existence only when using the service leads to a playful and game-like experience (Huotari & Hamari, 2012). Nevertheless, there is often confusion between the terms games and gamification (Parapanos & Michopoulou, 2021, p. 13). Before delving into the nuances of gamification in restaurants, it is important to first understand what it is and the principles that are behind it. Unlike traditional games, which are usually tied to a single set of rules, this approach can be used to create different experiences for different audiences.

At its essence, gamification encompasses the following key principles and goals:

- Engagement: Gamification seeks to captivate and immerse individuals in an activity, making it enjoyable and emotionally rewarding (Deterding et al., 2011).
- Customization: Effective gamification recognizes that one size does not fit all. It involves tailoring experiences to the preferences and needs of each participant (Hamari et al., 2014).
- Social Interaction: Gamification often leverages social elements, fostering collaboration, competition, or social recognition among participants (Deterding et al., 2011).

- Motivation: By incorporating elements such as rewards, challenges, and competition, gamification aims to motivate individuals to take desired actions or behaviours (Hamari et al., 2014).

In this chapter, the discussion centres around the principles underpinning gamification's success in the restaurant industry and how these principles can enhance the dining experience. Specifically, we will begin by delving into the first principle, Engagement, and exploring its potential to elevate the restaurant setting.

2.1.1 Engagement

Gamification has garnered considerable attention for its potential to attract, retain, and engage customers. User engagement is central to this concept, as it influences customers' behaviour, satisfaction, and loyalty within these restaurants.

“The term “engagement,” in a business sense, indicates the connection between a consumer and a product or service” (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011). Studies indicate that people tend to stay involved in an activity when they derive pleasure from it or perceive its value and thus, gamification has been identified as a strategy associated with heightened enjoyment and sustained engagement. (Looyestyn, et al., 2017).

User engagement in gamified restaurant environments can be understood through motivational drivers. Gamification elements, such as points, badges, and leaderboards, tap into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation involves the internal satisfaction of accomplishing a task, while extrinsic motivation derives from external rewards or recognition. By understanding these motivational drivers, restaurants can tailor gamification strategies to appeal to a broader customer base, catering to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Hamari, et al., 2014).

2.1.2 Customization

“One increasingly common tactic is product customization, whereby consumers are provided the ability to create their own products from a set of options” (Pallant, et al., 2022). The process of customization can increase consumer perception of symbolic value (Pallant, et al., 2020), and furthermore impact the brand experience outcomes such as satisfaction, loyalty, and willingness to patronage. In fact, numerous suppliers are known to offer a range of white-label tools and adaptable plug-and-play features that can speed up implementing gamification platforms, reducing the time required (Ruhi, 2015).

In the realm of gamification, multiple strategies have evolved over the years in the pursuit of effective ways to offer users customizable options in gamified products. Table 1 illustrates two of the most widely employed strategies, as seen in prominent companies like Apple, Microsoft, and Nike.

Table 1. Strategies for Effective Customization (adopted by Assimakopoulos 2023)

User Profiles	Creating user profiles allows gamified systems to collect data on individual preferences, behaviours, and past interactions.
Choice Architecture	Integrating choice architecture allows users to select their own pathways or objectives within the gamified system.

For instance, avatars, challenges, or rewards can be used as data to personalize the gamified experience promoting content that align with the user's interests (Detering, et al., 2011). On the other hand, the approach of choice architecture empowers users by giving them a sense of autonomy and control over their gaming experience (Morschheuser, et al., 2018).

2.1.3 Social Interaction

In marketing and customer relationships, success depends on persuading and engaging individuals. Gamification stands out as it uses game mechanics to involve customers in a social context, capitalizing on the desire for connection. It motivates through both intrinsic enjoyment and extrinsic rewards, making it a powerful tool for promoting social interaction and cultivating lasting customer relationships (Hamari & Järvinen, 2011). Following Hamari and Koivisto's (2015) proposal, the central theme of this emerging approach is the social aspect, taking inspiration from both social network services and games. Commonly known as gamification, it involves integrating familiar game elements to craft social experiences. This concept has found widespread application in various contexts, aimed at promoting social interactions and motivating individuals.

Furthermore, Lins, et al., (2014) suggests that social influences play a crucial role in gamified systems, with 'leaderboards' being the most frequently implemented mechanics in this category. The researchers found the following data in their conducted study:

While examining gamification within Information Systems (IS), it was found that social influences play a pivotal role in the success of gamification strategies. Employees' interactions, collaboration, and engagement in gamified activities are significantly influenced by the social elements embedded within the design (Lins, et al., 2014.) The case study highlights the significance of this group and how it interacts with other design choices.

The context in which gamification is applied is crucial. While the case study primarily focuses on IS, its findings have broader implications. It suggests that understanding the social dynamics and context in which gamification is introduced is fundamental for its success (Lins, et al., 2014). These insights can be applied to mid-sized restaurants, where social interaction among diners is a central component. Factors such as employees' affinity for social interactions and the novelty of the IS can influence the effectiveness of gamification. In addition to being beneficial for gamification success, knowing these contextual factors can also have a huge impact on the behaviour of consumers in mid-sized restaurants which is exposed in the following section.

2.2 Gamification and Consumer Behaviour

To grasp the effect of gamification on consumer behaviour, it's essential to delve into the psychology. This section examines the principles associated with this field, shedding light on how it motivates users and shapes their actions. In general, the literature extensively records the favourable effects of gamification on both the conduct and attitudes of consumers (Sigala & Nilsson, 2021). But how can we effectively harness the principles of gamification to influence consumer behaviour and enhance their overall brand engagement and loyalty?

Gamification involves the creation of products, services, and organizational practices designed to provide experiences akin to games, with the intention of generating value and influencing people's behaviour (Huotari & Hamari 2017). To fully comprehend the implementation of gamification in user behaviour the author uses the mechanics-dynamics-emotions framework (MDE). According to Robson, et al., (2015) this framework conceptualizes gamification from an input-process-outcome to explain how gamified experiences can be created.

Figure 1 portrays the three-step progression through which the gamified experience unfolds. To provide a clearer explanation, "input" pertains to the mechanics created by the designer for the user. "Process" relates to the dynamics wherein the user chooses to act and make different choices. Finally, "outcome" is about the emotional responses and the mental state of the user during the gamified experience.

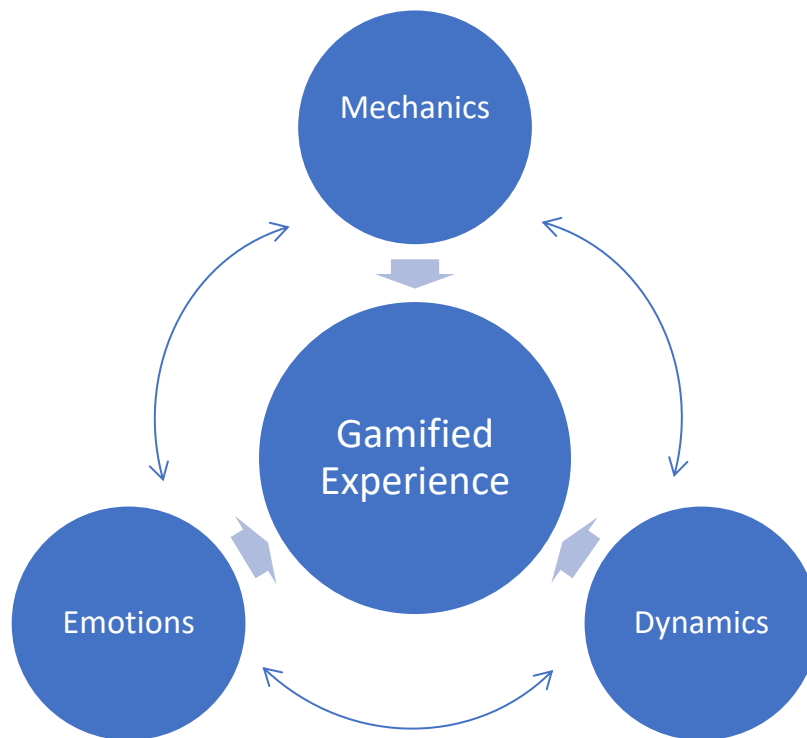


Figure 1. MDE Framework (adapted from Robson, et al., 2015)

Mechanics

In the previous section, the author discussed about the core principles of gamification. To explore the role of game mechanics in this strategy, this chapter will introduce this component to the restaurant industry and how it can be used to improve the dining experience for customers.

Game mechanics serve as the building blocks of gamification, shaping the experiences of participants and driving their engagement. At its core, game mechanics refer to the rules, processes, and systems that define how a game or gamified system operates. These mechanics are carefully designed to create an environment that is both challenging and enjoyable, motivating individuals to participate actively (Deterding et al., 2011).

In the context of gamification, game mechanics play a pivotal role by transforming ordinary tasks or activities into engaging experiences that offer a sense of achievement, progression, and competition (Hamari, et al., 2014). By incorporating these mechanics, businesses, including mid-sized restaurants, can capture the attention of their patrons and encourage specific behaviours that align with their objectives (Xu & Buhalis, 2021, p. 14) .

Table 2. Commonly used game mechanics (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011, adopted by Assimakopoulos)

Points	Points are a fundamental game mechanic that rewards participants for completing tasks or achieving specific milestones (Deterding et al., 2011). They represent a quantifiable measure of progress and are often associated with achievements.
Badges	Badges are visual representations of accomplishments and serve as a form of recognition for participants' achievements (Hamari et al., 2014). They offer a sense of accomplishment and can be displayed as a status symbol.
Leaderboards	Leaderboards introduce an element of competition by displaying the performance rankings of participants (Hamari et al., 2014). They create a competitive environment that motivates individuals to outperform their peers.
Challenges	Challenges and quests present participants with specific tasks or objectives to complete (Deterding et al., 2011). They create a sense of purpose and adventure within the gamified system.
Levels	Levels visually represent the advancement toward a goal or achievement (Xu & Buhalis, 2017). They provide immediate feedback on participants' progress and encourage them to continue.

Zichermann and Cunningham (2011) suggests that the primary game mechanics are points, badges, leaderboards, quests, and levels. Table 2 displays and explains each mechanic's application and correlation to gamification.

Dynamics

Individuals tend to become more competitive when they are aware of being observed, as they strive to avoid appearing incompetent in the presence of others. Thus, gamification dynamics are difficult to predict and thus can lead to unintended behaviours and outcomes, which can be positive or negative in nature (Robson, et al., 2014). Game dynamics can be defined as the top-level components of a gamified system that shape the subsequent scenario of a specific activity utilizing gamification (Werbach & Hunter, 2012, p. 81). Simply put, we may state that game dynamics are the "big picture" aspects of a gamified system.

The authors suggest the following are the most important game dynamics:

1. Constrains

2. Emotions
3. Narrative
4. Progression
5. Relationships

All in all, people share fundamental needs and desires, such as the longing for status, rewards, self-expression, achievement, competition, altruism, and more. These universal needs transcend age, demographics, culture, and background. Game designers leverage gamification to cater to and satisfy these inherent human needs. Gamification provides a means to acknowledge and fulfil these aspects of human nature (Pandey, 2022.) In conclusion, we may state the understanding and incorporation of game dynamics in gamification are pivotal for addressing and satisfying the universal human needs.

Emotions

“Gamification emotions are the mental affective states and reactions evoked among individual players when they participate in a gamified experience”. (Robson et al., 2014)

The concept of MDE underscores the significance of emotional experiences in driving human behaviour. Building on previous research on gamification, this framework asserts that enjoyment stands as the foremost objective for engaging players, and it can stem from a range of positive emotions, including excitement, surprise, and the feeling of triumph over challenges. Furthermore, MDE recognizes the value of mixed emotions, such as disappointment or sadness that can result from failures in the game (Mullins & Sabherwal, 2020.)

Overall, businesses should aim to stimulate positive emotions within a gamified experience, as “positive emotions may induce buying behaviour” (Gatautis, et al., 2014). To create a truly compelling gamified experience, we must thoroughly dissect consumer emotions and desires, as gamification emotions represent the mental and affective states that individual players experience while engaging with the system (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011).

2.2.1 Motivation Behind Gamification

Hamari et al., (2014) report that based on the findings of the majority of the reviewed studies, it is evident that gamification yields positive effects and benefits. These findings align with the results reported in quantitative studies. In most of the reviewed papers, positive outcomes were documented in relation to certain motivational aspects of the gamification implementations under examination. While many of these studies examined were not conducted for the tourism and hospitality

field the author uses them as a theoretical foundation to comprehend how motivation behind gamification functions.

For understanding motivation behind gamification, we may use the Octalysis Framework as a widely recognized model introduced by Chou in 2013. This framework provides a systematic and structured approach to dissecting the driving forces that underpin user engagement and participation in gamified systems. It encompasses eight core drives, each representing a distinct part of human motivation and behaviour.

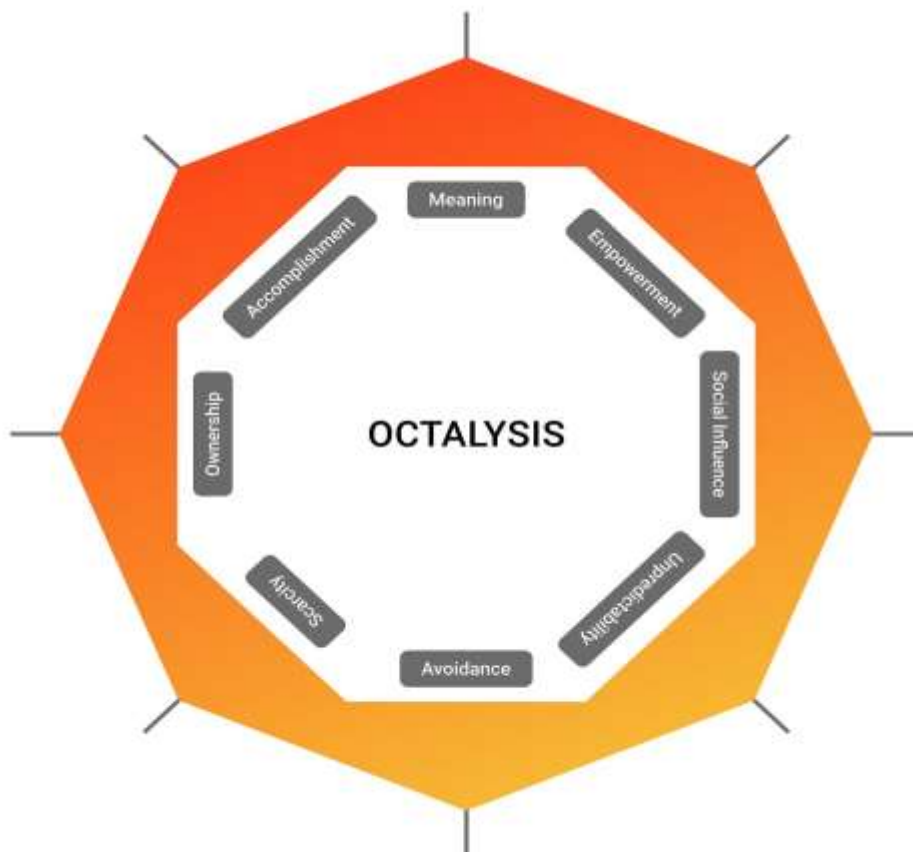


Figure 2. Octalysis Framework. (Chou, 2023)

The eight core drivers are explained as follows:

- Meaning

This core drive is centred around the human desire to be part of something greater, to have a purpose, and to pursue a calling. In gamification, it manifests as a quest for a meaningful goal that drives users to participate.

- Accomplishment

Development and accomplishment motivate users to improve, achieve, and progress. This core drive encourages users to strive for mastery and to continually level up their skills or experiences.

- Empowerment

Users are motivated by the opportunity to express their creativity and receive feedback on their actions. Gamification leverages this drive through mechanisms that allow users to create, customize, and receive validation for their contributions.

- Ownership

The desire to own and possess objects or achievements is a fundamental human drive.

Gamification taps into this by offering users rewards, collectibles, or virtual possessions that they can cherish.

- Social Influence

Human beings are inherently social creatures. This core drive leverages our need for social interaction, connection, and recognition. Gamification often incorporates features like social sharing, leaderboards, and collaborative challenges.

- Scarcity

Scarcity creates a sense of urgency and the fear of missing out. Users are motivated to act quickly and engage more deeply when they perceive limited-time opportunities or exclusive rewards.

- Unpredictability

Curiosity is a powerful driver of human behaviour. This core drive encourages users to explore and engage with gamified systems due to the unpredictability and surprise elements they contain.

- Avoidance

The fear of loss or missing out on something valuable is a strong motivator. Gamification leverages this drive by introducing consequences or risks for inaction, encouraging users to stay engaged.

These core drives, when applied to gamification, reveal the fundamental motivations that drive user interaction, participation, and value creation in gamified experiences. Moreover, Xu et al. (2014, in Parapanos & Michopoulou, 2021) underscore the pivotal role of motivation in gamification, where gamified systems are designed to influence behaviour toward desired and beneficial actions. This

is accomplished by integrating game design principles to engage individuals in meaningful and productive activities.

Self Determination theory (SDT)

"Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1980), distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation based on the underlying reasons driving actions. Intrinsic motivation, stemming from genuine interest and inherent pleasure in an activity, is considered a powerful catalyst for sustaining long-term engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 55). This intrinsic motivation is characterized by personal interest and has been shown to effectively maintain engagement across a wide range of tasks.

Moreover, a recent study conducted by Laurn et al. (2023) explored the relationship between gamification features (social, achievement, immersion) and intrinsic learning motivation. By applying SDT, the study revealed the positive impact of aligning gamification with individuals' psychological needs, including relatedness, competence, and autonomy, on intrinsic motivation. The findings from this study underscore the potential of gamification to tap into intrinsic motivation, particularly relevant to gamified dining experiences in the restaurant industry.

On the contrary, external motivation, primarily driven by the pursuit of specific outcomes or rewards, differs in its effects on behaviour. Individuals motivated by intrinsic factors tend to exhibit higher levels of interest, enthusiasm, self-assurance, and subsequently, improved performance, endurance, and creativity (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 57). Playful behaviour, according to SDT, aligns closely with intrinsic motivation (Ryan et al., 2006). Given that gamification incorporates playful elements, it holds the potential to encourage intrinsically motivated behaviour (Gajanova & Radisic, 2021). These insights highlight the importance of intrinsic motivation and how gamification, within the restaurant industry, can be leveraged to enhance customer engagement and influence their behaviour positively."

Flow theory

Juho Hamari (2014), proposes that flow, representing a state of peak experience where individuals are completely absorbed and engaged in an activity, is considered one of the foremost psychological outcomes of both gamification and games. This psychological concept introduced by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, examines the mental state of "flow" that individuals experience when fully engaged in an activity. This state is characterized by deep concentration, a sense of control, and a feeling of intrinsic reward. In the context of gamification, understanding flow theory is pivotal to comprehending how motivation is intricately linked with user experiences.

It is most comprehended that flow encompasses nine dimensions: challenge-skill-balance, clear goals, control, feedback, autotelic experience, loss of self-consciousness, time transformation, concentration, and merging action-awareness (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). However, for a thorough understanding of the concept of flow, the challenge-skill relation paradigm is introduced.

Figure 3 illustrates the flow channel as a delicate equilibrium between the challenge and skill levels. Anxiety arises when challenges surpass one's skills, while boredom occurs when challenges fall short of one's skills.

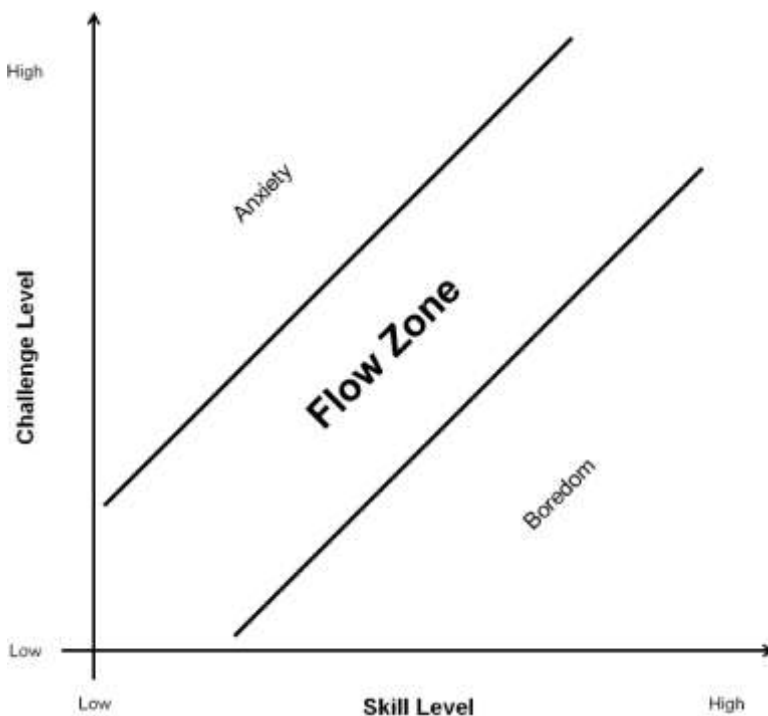


Figure 3. Flow Channel (adopted by Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002)

Krath et al., (2021) in a systematic review and analysis of theory in research on gamification upon revealing the theoretical basis of gamification, found out that flow theory was the second theory in rankings as far as theoretical framework research in gamification is concerned. Moreover, they found out that flow was used as a measure to assess gamified interventions and to derive insights into the connection between flow and behavioural outcomes.

A more recent the study by Thomas and Baral (2023) into the flow subchapter enhances the understanding of the significance of flow in the context of gamification. This study, while originally focused on learning engagement, reveals insights that are convertible to gamified dining experiences. It underscores the positive impact of gamification on emotional and behavioural engagement, emphasizing that emotional engagement exhibits the most significant difference. Furthermore, the study highlights that variations in learning engagement among different instructional

designs are closely tied to the influence of flow. Gamified designs, in detail, excel in enhancing learning engagement due to their ability to create a state of flow, a factor not fully explained by a direct relationship. This highlights the importance of incorporating flow elements to enhance user engagement in restaurant settings.

2.2.2 Rewards in Gamification

The concept of a reward system holds significant importance in gamification. Rewards play a vital role in determining one's success, boosting motivation, and improving performance (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011). Consequently, they are a crucial component in even the most basic gamified models. In the realm of gamification, it is vital that rewards are distributed within a relatively short timeframe. This ensures that it's clear why a reward was given, contributing to the effectiveness of the gamification strategy. In real-life situations, providing instant rewards is often impractical. This aspect further underscores the value of employing gamification techniques. (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011.)

In a study conducted by Mason et al. (2017) rewards were positioned as antecedents of episodic memory, with reward value and reward uncertainty proposed as factors in a reward signal. The study concluded that when it's essential for a player to retain specific information, linking a valuable reward to an immersive experience can prove to be a potent method. Therefore, the association of a valued reward with an immersive experience serves as a powerful strategy for enhancing information retention. Another study by Garaialde et al. (2021) suggests that placing rewards at the beginning of the interaction sequence results in an enhanced perceived value of the reward, thus encouraging continued selection.

While these studies discuss (Hamari, et al., 2014) different aspects of rewards and gamification, they share a common theme of how important using rewards is strategically to improve user engagement, motivation and information retention.

Another angle for stimulating customer engagement is the SAPS framework introduced by Zichermann and Cunningham (2011). SAPS is an acronym and stands for status, access, power, and stuff. In simple terms, it's a reward system that neatly organizes prizes from most desired to least, most attractive to least, and cheapest to most expensive.

Status refers to an individual's position compared to others in a social group. Status benefits and rewards enables players to advocate in a ranking system. This system can be entirely artificial, not connected to the real world. Most common examples of status items include badges and leaderboards (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011). Based on Inluitive's (2023) article access means that, as the status grows, customers gain exclusive privileges, such as early access, special offers,

exclusive items, or event invitations. Further, it is stated that power reflects customers' knowledge of their preferences in comparison to the business or the products in addition of gaining authority over other players. Lastly, stuff refers to the rewards, such as a free month of usage, a cup of coffee, or a complimentary upgrade, receiving loyal customers. Overall, these incentives are most efficient when accompanied by the three preceding stages in the model (Influitive 2023; Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011.)

2.3 Gamification in mid-sized Restaurants

Due to the increasing competition in the restaurant industry in Helsinki (Helsinki 2022), mid-sized establishments are looking for new ways to retain and attract their customers. As already mentioned through this literature review, one such innovation gaining momentum is gamification—a concept that transcends the boundaries of gaming and enters the realm of real-world experiences. (Xu & Buhalis, 2021). Originally created in the gaming industry and now encompasses various other sectors, this strategy has grown into a powerful tool with broad applications.

Although the restaurant industry has been known to create great dining experiences, in today's digital age, customers are demanding more than just food. They want experiences that are both enjoyable and interactive (Alonso & O'Neill, 2010). This is where gamification comes into play. At its core, gamification involves the strategic infusion of game elements and mechanics into non-game contexts to engage and motivate individuals (Detering, et al., 2011). In the context of mid-sized restaurants in Helsinki, gamification holds the potential to revolutionize the way patrons interact with menus, make dining decisions, and share their experiences. By gamifying certain aspects of a restaurant's experience, it can tap into the human desire for achievement, competition, and challenge.

2.3.1 Limitations of Gamification in Restaurants

Although gamification can be beneficial for enhancing the experience of mid-sized establishments, it is important to keep in mind its limitations when it comes to restaurant settings (Lee & Lu, 2023). This section investigates these difficulties and how they can be overcome to make use of such strategies.

According to Sigala & Nilson (2021, p. 113) “as technologies are having profound impact on customer experiences, understanding how to use technology applications for enhancing customer engagement is an important part of a successful digital strategy”. The challenge of overcoming the resistance of customers to gamification is difficult and this can be especially true if they prefer a more traditional approach to dining (AIContentfy, 2023). To overcome this obstacle, it is important to educate the public about the advantages of adopting this strategy. One of the most effective

ways, as proposed by Triantafyllou and Georgiadis (2022), to do this could be to create clear communication and user-friendly interfaces.

One of the most significant limitations of gamification is its ability to sustain user engagement. Although it can initially generate excitement and interest among customers, this type of feature can eventually wear off if not regularly updated (AIContentfy, 2023.) To prevent this, restaurants must develop strategies to keep their users engaged. These include introducing new rewards and challenges. Furthermore Sigala et al., (2021, p. 103) suggest that gamification proves valuable in guaranteeing the successful execution and results of co-creation processes that demand active customer engagement, due to its ability encourage customer participation.

Finally, due to the current state of heightened sensitivity regarding data (Trang & Weiger, 2021), restaurants are required to take the necessary steps to protect their customers' privacy and data. This can be done through the implementation of secure technologies and the obtaining of explicit consent. Doing could help keep the trust of the customers (AIContentfy, 2023).

2.3.2 Lack of Understanding and Knowledge

Gamification plays a multifaceted role in enhancing the overall tourist experience (Pasca, et al., 2021). It serves as a bridge connecting tourists, organizations, and local communities, promoting responsible and ethical behaviour. While some perspectives may view gamification as merely a means to attract tourists or clients, its sustainability aspects are evident (Xu & Buhalis, 2021). Notably, this approach not only proves effective in generating economic benefits in the best-practice cases but also demonstrates significant advantages in terms of social and environmental sustainability. Perhaps the most significant benefit lies in the boost it gives to brand loyalty. However, the impact should not solely be measured by the quantity of products or services consumed; it should also consider the willingness of tourists to embrace the sustainable behaviours encouraged by gamification providers. (Negruşa, et al., 2015.)

In summary, the authors address the need for a transparent and unified approach in gamification, especially in hospitality, and highlight the role of leadership and the challenges faced by smaller businesses in adopting gamification strategies (Negrusa, et al., 2015). Table 3 pinpoints potential drawbacks of implementation of gamification in the tourism and hospitality sector the authors concluded from the study.

Table 3. Drawbacks of gamification (Negruşa, et al., 2015, developed by Assimakopoulos)

Challenges for Small Companies	Small companies or new entrants to the gamification market may face challenges. These challenges stem from their limited financial
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	resources and the lack of market recognition that larger companies enjoy.
Transparency and Sustainability	While not obviously drawbacks, the need for transparency for gamification to be sustainable implies that a lack of transparency can hold back its long-term success. Without transparency, gamification efforts may become manipulative or overly focused on distractions, which can be considered as drawbacks.
Potential Negative Practices	The risk of gamification going in a negative direction, such as channelling, manipulating, and distracting attention. These practices are drawbacks because they can lead to undesirable outcomes and experiences for the stakeholders, mainly customers, involved.

2.3.3 Obstacles of Gamification

While gamification offers substantial benefits for enhancing user engagement and consumer behaviour, it is not without its share of challenges and obstacles. Research by Seaborn & Fels (2015) indicates that the current body of success across the board could be enhanced if the design of gamified systems, particularly extrinsic motivators, considers the intrinsic motivators of end-users. Moreover, it is stated that the challenge lies in accommodating variations in what inherently motivates individuals, all while satisfying the goals, needs, and limitations set by the designer or client. Dale (2014) adds that involving users in the design and execution of a gamification strategy is crucial. Otherwise, there's a risk of users (such as employees, customers, or stakeholders) feeling like they're being "gamed" or manipulated, which could result in unintended behaviours, such as mass defections, contrary to the initial intentions.

Another aspect of potential obstacles in gamified systems is the risk of individuals extracting excessive rewards or for users to even cheat to manipulate a gamified system introduced by Robson et al., (2015). In the realm of gamified processes, there will always be individuals attempting to cheat or manipulate the system, including participants, onlookers, and bystanders. It's vital to recognize both the advantages and drawbacks of this behaviour. On one hand, it can lead to negative emotions, like perceived injustice, which may discourage others involved. Additionally, some individuals may exploit the system to gain excessive rewards that surpass the benefits to the organization implementing gamification (Robson et al., 2015.)

Finally, the positive impacts of gamification may diminish as its novelty fades. Over time, gamification demands ongoing investments, such as creating fresh challenges. Otherwise, users might consider tasks too easy as their skills improve as suggested by Basten (2017). This concept aligns

with Flow theory, which emphasizes the importance of balancing skill and challenge to keep individuals fully engaged (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Additionally, if game elements are removed, user performance could decrease, potentially falling below the level before gamification was implemented (Basten, 2017).

2.4 Own Framework

In the preceding sections, the author explored various aspects of gamification. Now, as this study proceeds to design and implement a gamification strategy adapted to the context of mid-sized restaurants in Helsinki, it becomes apparent that a framework specific to this field is essential. This section introduces the author's custom framework for gamification in dining establishments. In this study, a comprehensive theoretical framework has been developed to examine the multifaceted aspects of gamification within the restaurant industry. This framework is structured around five key components, each of which is integral to understanding the intricate dynamics of gamification. Table 4 presents an overview of these components, the corresponding theories that underpin them, and the distinguished authors responsible for these theories.

This framework serves as a foundation for the research, allowing the author to delve deeper into the unique aspects of gamification within the context of mid-sized restaurants in the Helsinki region. From this table, essential questions will be derived to guide the qualitative interviews, aligning each set of questions with the corresponding framework component. By exploring these components, the author aims to gain insights into the challenges and opportunities presented by gamification in the restaurant industry.

Table 4. Theoretical Framework Components

Components	Theory	Author(s)
Rewards	SAPS Framework	Zichermann & Cunningham, (2011)
Customization	Self Determination Theory	Deci & Ryan, (1980)
Customer Engagement	Flow Theory	Csikszentmihalyi, (1990)
Motivation	MDE Framework	Robson et al., (2015)
Consumer Behaviour	Octalysis Framework	Chou (2013)
Social Interaction		

3 Empirical Research

This section of the thesis describes the methodology used for the data collection as well as the design of the whole research. This study is exploratory in nature and is rooted in a thorough examination of the industry, with a particular focus on gamification applications within the hospitality sector, specifically in the context of restaurants. "Empirical research is specifically defined as research in which conclusions are drawn exclusively from concrete, verifiable evidence," as stated by Imed Bouchrika (2023). This precisely aligns with the author's goal of obtaining reliable data from industry professionals and practitioners using qualitative approaches and methods to conduct the study.

Selecting the appropriate research methodology is a critical decision that guides the data collection and analysis methods. In empirical research, the choice typically concludes to a selection between qualitative and quantitative research methods. These two approaches have distinct characteristics and serve different purposes. Table 5 provides a concise comparison of qualitative and quantitative research.

Table 5. Comparison of qualitative and quantitative research (Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Mack, et al., 2005; Simister & James, 2020)

Characteristics	Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Data Format	Words, Textual, Images	Numerical, Variables
Methods of data collection	Open-ended questions in surveys and interviews, focus group discussions, observation, case studies	Predefined options and closed questions in surveys, direct measurement, digital data collection
Data Analysis	Search for patterns and themes	Identify statistical relationships among variables
Research Objectives	Subjective description and exploration	Numerical description and casual explanation
Sampling	Purposive	Large and random samples
Flexibility in design	High Some aspects of the study are flexible	Low Study design is stable from beginning to end

	Participant responses do not influence or determine how, and which questions researchers ask next	Participant responses affect how, and which questions researchers ask next
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Quantitative research primarily deals with numerical data, often involves larger sample sizes, and employs statistical analysis to identify patterns and establish generalizability. It focuses on collecting data that can be quantified and measured to answer specific research questions. In contrast, qualitative research is more concerned with exploring complex phenomena, understanding the underlying reasons and motivations, and delving into the context of a given topic. It often involves smaller sample sizes and in-depth investigations (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Comparatively, quantitative research, while valuable, may not offer the depth and nuance required for this exploratory study. Quantitative methods could involve surveys with closed-ended questions, large datasets, and statistical tests. These methods are often used for establishing correlations, causal relationships, or general patterns within a population (Saunders, et al., 2012).

The decision to embrace qualitative research is rooted in the recognition that it offers a more in-depth and insightful analysis of the gamification scene within the hospitality sector. It is an ideal choice to capture the complex nature of consumer behaviour and its relationship with gamification in the restaurant industry. This qualitative approach enables a nuanced understanding of the psychological and behavioural aspects, emphasizing the exploration of the subjective experiences of professionals in the industry.

3.1 Research Approach

Qualitative researchers aim to comprehend the meaning individuals have constructed, specifically how people interpret their surroundings and the experiences they encounter in their lives (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). For that purpose, as mentioned, this study utilizes a qualitative research approach to delve into the challenges and opportunities of gamification in mid-sized restaurants within the Helsinki region. Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring complex phenomena, such as the perceptions, experiences, and practices (Hennink, et al., 2020, p. 10) of restaurant managers and owners concerning gamification within their establishments. By adopting a qualitative approach, this study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the subject matter and capture the distinctions that quantitative methods might miss.

The research strategy adopted for this study is exploratory in nature. The goal is to comprehensively investigate the current state of gamification within mid-sized restaurants and to discover both the gamification techniques currently in use and potential techniques that could be applied in this

context. An exploratory study is a valuable approach for posing open-ended questions to uncover what is taking place and to acquire insights into a subject of interest. It proves especially useful when seeking to refine one's comprehension of a problem, particularly when uncertainty exists regarding the exact nature of the problem (Saunders, et al., 2012, p. 171). Thus, an exploratory strategy allows for open-ended inquiry and is especially well-suited to uncovering the multifaceted nature of gamification and its potential impact on the dining experience. Given that this area is relatively unfamiliar within the Helsinki restaurant industry, an exploratory approach is highly appropriate.

In the following sections, the author details the data collection methods, guiding this research of which contribute to the fulfilment of the exploratory research objectives. Furthermore, the author will discuss data analysis, reliability, and validity considerations will be applied to maintain the consistency and robustness of this qualitative research approach.

3.2 Data Collection

In pursuit of a comprehensive understanding of the gamification landscape within mid-sized restaurants in Helsinki, this research employs a multi-faceted approach, integrating primary and secondary data sources. The combination of these data types enables a well-rounded examination of the subject matter.

Even if it were possible, collecting data from every individual in a community is not a necessity to obtain valid findings. In qualitative research, researchers typically select a sample, which is a subset of the population, for each specific study (Mack, et al., 2005, p. 5). According to Tracy (2013, p. 134) proficient qualitative researchers, at a minimum, employ purposeful sampling, which involves deliberately selecting data that align with the project's research questions, objectives, and aims. In this research, this chosen sampling technique was selected, a widely used strategy that categorizes participants based on predetermined criteria that are appropriate to the specific research question. The research question investigates what the challenges and opportunities of gamification in mid-sized restaurants in Helsinki region are.

Thus, to portray the study population, a deductive approach was employed based on three distinct criteria:

- Geographical Location
- Mid-sized Qualification
- Managerial Role

The first criterion specified that the selected establishments must be situated within the Helsinki region. The second criterion required that these establishments fell within the classification of mid-

sized. Finally, to ensure the reliability and comprehensiveness of the research, a third criterion directed those interviewees held a managerial position within the restaurant business. This qualification was anticipated crucial as it provided interviewees with an all-encompassing perspective on gamification and its applications across various sides of restaurant operations.

The chosen data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and the collection of multiple published sources are involved in interpreting the research questions. These multiple data sources contribute to the triangulation of findings, ultimately strengthening the research's robustness and reliability (Saunders, et al., 2012, p. 304).

3.2.1 Qualitative Interviews

The author carried out five qualitative, in-depth semi-structured interviews with representatives from the restaurant industry in Helsinki. An in-depth interview is a qualitative research method in which a researcher collects information from an individual about their viewpoints on specific topics. This method combines structured and unstructured interview elements in the interaction with the individual. The researcher approaches the subject by asking questions in an unbiased manner, actively listening to their responses, and inquiring further with additional questions and probes based on those responses (Mack, et al., 2005, p. 116).

Structured interviews are an appropriate choice when dealing with a substantial sample size that requires comparative analysis. They are commonly employed in research scenarios involving research assistants and large-scale telephone surveys following a question-and-answer format (Tracy, 2013, p. 141). Additionally, structured interviews typically employ predetermined questionnaires with a uniform set of questions, often referred to as interviewer-administered questionnaires, as described by Saunders, et al. (2012, p. 374). However, this quantitative interview method does not align with the author's research objectives. Instead, the study aims to facilitate in-depth exploration of the topic and provide the flexibility to delve into "how" and "why" questions. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews are a more suitable choice.

Conversely, unstructured interviews are informal discussions designed to explore a broad spectrum of topics. In contrast to structured interviews, where a predefined list of questions guides the conversation, unstructured interviews have no fixed set of questions to adhere to (Saunders, et al., 2012, p. 375). According to Douglas (1985), in Tracy (2013, p. 139), this approach encourages interviewers to be adaptable, respond to changing circumstances, and surrender control of the discussion to the interviewee. Among the various interview methods available, the author has chosen to conduct semi-structured interviews. This method combines elements of both structured and

unstructured interviews, involving 20 predetermined questions while allowing for the flexibility to introduce additional, spontaneous questions during the interview process.

Saunders, et al., (2012, p. 378) suggest that in cases where it is important to comprehend the motivations, attitudes, and opinions of research participants, conducting in-depth or semi-structured interviews is often necessary. These interview formats allow for a more detailed exploration of the participants' perspectives and the reasons behind their actions and beliefs. Moreover, the authors stress that semi-structured interviews offer the opportunity to 'probe' answers, enabling interviewees to further explain or expand upon their responses when needed. This allows for a deeper and more comprehensive exploration of their insights and perspectives.

The interviews were carefully planned and scheduled at least two weeks in advance of their actual dates. This scheduling allowed for ample preparation time for both the interviewer and the interviewees, ensuring that the exchanges were productive and insightful. All interviews were conducted within a seven-day timeframe, beginning with the first interview on October 25th. Subsequently, the second and third interviews were conducted on the following days, October 26th and 27th, respectively. Finally, interviewees four and five were interviewed on October 30th.

In addition to the well-planned schedule, interviewees were introduced to the research's focus before the interviews took place. Each participant received a set of interview questions, a brief overview of the research's purpose, and an explanation of the gamification concept via email in advance (appendix 1). This preparation allowed for more informed and thoughtful responses during the interviews. Furthermore, each interview session had an average duration of 40 minutes, providing sufficient time for the participants to share their insights and experiences comprehensively.

In an indication of transparency and to ensure the accuracy of data analysis, participants were granted permission for the interviews to be recorded. These audio recordings served as the basis for detailed transcriptions, a vital step in the subsequent analysis of the data collected. However, interviews conducted in diverse locations according to given circumstances. Interviews 1 and 3 took place in a hotel room, providing a neutral and confidential space for discussion. Contrarywise, interviews 2, 4, and 5 were conducted within the restaurant environments of the interviewees themselves, creating a unique backdrop that allowed interviewees to share their insights within the very spaces they managed.

The collected data helped shape the data analysis phase of the study, which would involve examining and interpreting the restaurant industry participants' insights. The objective of the research was to identify the various gamification opportunities and challenges faced by mid-sized restaurants within the Helsinki region which will be discussed in more detail in the data analysis chapter.

3.2.2 Secondary Data

“Working with data without theory and methodology makes you blind” as stated by Brinkmann, (2013, p. 83). Thereupon in addition to the primary data collected from the interviews this research tends to verify the findings from validated multiple-source secondary data. Secondary data refers to information that is generated by merging two or more distinct datasets before it is used for research purposes. These datasets may consist entirely of written records or survey data, or they may be a combination of both (Saunders, et al., 2012, p. 675).

These sources include scholarly articles, books, industry reports, and other relevant publications available in literature databases and online libraries. Secondary data is a valuable resource for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the gamification concept and its applications within the restaurant industry. By conducting an extensive literature review, the author identified key theories, models, and frameworks that underpin the study, including the Self Determination Theory, the Octalysis Framework, and the MDE Framework (see chapter 2). This theoretical foundation served as a basis for the development of the research questions and provided context for the analysis of primary data.

Secondary data was also used to support the interpretation of primary data. It allowed the author to compare the findings with existing research in the field, enabling a more comprehensive discussion of the implications of the research. The use of secondary data was directly aligned with the research questions and objectives and are further cross-examined in chapter five. It helped the author refine the focus of the study, providing insights into gamification's challenges and opportunities within the context of mid-sized restaurants in the Helsinki region.

3.3 Data Analysis Approach

According to Hennink, et al., (2020, p. 212) qualitative data analysis entails immersing oneself in the data to identify and interpret the experiences of study participants. It's a process of discovery that allows for a close examination of the data, leading to an evidence-based understanding of the research issues. As mentioned earlier, the author conducted five semi-structured interviews and audio-recorded them (see chapter 3.2.1). Every recorded interview must be transformed into a verbatim transcript, encompassing both the participants' spoken words and the interviewer's questions. Verbatim transcripts are crucial for preserving the participants' own expressions, which offer rich detail and enable researchers to comprehend the participants' unique perspective on the topics discussed in the study (Hennink, et al., 2020). Thus, the author considered this as a crucial part of the analysis to organize the data in a manner that can be efficiently coded.

“Codes are labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles, et al., 2014, p. 71). Simply put, codes help the researcher understand and categorize the data, as well as give meaning to the information gathered throughout a study. Mack, et al., (2005) suggest that coding can be carried out using a variety of materials, including paper and colored pencils, an Excel spreadsheet, or computer-aided qualitative data analysis software. However, Hennink, et al., (2020) argues that codes cannot be generated by software programs for qualitative data analysis since text interpretation and the identification of effective codes require human judgment. For that reason the author used his own critical thinking when developing the codes from the gathered data.

The timeline for this thesis was structured in two main phases. First, the author delved into exploring the relevant theory and crafting the research question and objectives. Following this preparatory phase, the author conducted the interviews. Yin (2009) suggests a deductive approach, which entails utilizing existing theory to shape your research question and objectives and using the theoretical propositions that aided in this process to create a framework for organizing and directing data analysis (as discussed in chapter 2.4).

Table 6. Strategies used for developing codes (Hennink, et al., 2020, adopted by Assimakopoulos, 2023)

Deductive strategies	Topics from Interview guide	Use core topics from the interview guide as codes.
	Concepts from literature and theory	Use issues from research literature or concepts from existing theory initial codes.
Inductive strategies	Active reading	Reading data, critically thinking and reflecting on the meaning of issues raised.
	Notice repetition	If issues are repeated within or across texts that may signify an important issue for participants and a potential code.

This approach is commonly known in the research literature as a "deductive approach." Additionally, (Hennink, et al., 2020) introduces deductive strategies for data analysis. As stated in their book, deductive strategies for code development can involve using topics from the study's

conceptual framework, research instruments, or concepts derived from existing research literature as the initial points of reference. Lastly, it is also suggested not to use only deductive strategies as this does not allow the data to “speak for itself” and therefore it is recommended the use of both deductive and inductive strategies. On the other hand, inductive strategies revolve around examining data, recognizing issues, contemplating their significance, and translating these insights into codes. Table 6 illustrates the strategies the author used for developing the codes used in data analysis in chapter 4.

In addition to the strategies discussed earlier, the author employed thematic analysis as the primary method for analysing the gathered qualitative data. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that focuses on identifying and examining recurring concepts, known as themes, within a dataset (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). The developed codes spotted by the author using deductive strategies as outlined in the literature (Hennink et al., 2020), served as the foundational framework for this analysis. Afterward, an examination of the data facilitated the identification of emerging patterns and connections. Through this process, repeated themes and concepts emerged in the dataset, allowing for the development of primary themes. These themes, interpreted in the data analysis chapter, represent the reliable findings extracted from the interviews, illuminating the diverse perspectives and experiences shared by the participants.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Saunders, et al., (2012, p. 191) emphasize that the fundamental ethical responsibility in research design is to safeguard participants from potential risks, including embarrassment, pain, harm, or any significant disadvantages. Therefore, a central ethical consideration at the start of this research was to provide interviewees with comprehensive information about the relatively innovative concept of gamification within the restaurant industry. This proactive measure aimed to ensure that participants felt at comfort during the interviews, even if they were unfamiliar with certain sub-concepts or specific questions related to gamification, and to prevent any potential exposure to risks that might affect their businesses.

Moreover, ethical concerns hold significant importance in research, especially when human participants are involved, regardless of whether the research takes place in person or through other means (Saunders, et al., 2012, p. 208). Mack, et al. (2005, p. 8) highlights the central role of research ethics in governing the interactions between researchers and the individuals they study. As part of these ethical considerations, the interview questions were thoughtfully shared with the participants before the interviews commenced. This proactive approach aimed to ensure that participants had a comprehensive understanding of the interview process, emphasizing that they held the discretion to choose not to answer any questions that they found uncomfortable. Additionally, a

mutual agreement was established with the participants, ensuring the strict confidentiality of all data collected, with an explicit commitment that this data would remain exclusive for the purpose of this research.

On the other hand, professional ethics encompasses various issues, including the nature of collaborative relationships among researchers, mentoring relationships, matters related to intellectual property, data fabrication, and plagiarism, among other considerations (Mack, et al., 2005, p. 8). This is the reason why all sources and literature used in the thesis have been given due respect, and proper citation procedures were followed to acknowledge the contributions of other authors and researchers. This demonstrates the commitment to ethical scholarship and responsible academic practice throughout the research endeavour. Lastly, throughout the research process, utmost attention was given to the planning, execution, and reporting of the study, ensuring full accordance with the guidelines set forth by Haaga-Helia for writing a bachelor's thesis.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

To make sure this research is accurate and reliable, the author took some important steps. First, an experienced senior lecturer checked and approved the questions the author asked in the interviews. This made sure the questions were beneficial for the research. The author also sent the questions to each participant before the interviews and explained them again during the interviews. This assisted the participants understand what was being asked and gave the author improved answers. Moreover, the author picked participants who were carefully selected based on specific criteria (see chapter 3.2). The aim was to make sure they had a substantial understanding of gamification in their restaurants. This selection process added to the trustworthiness of the research. Lastly, the author recorded the interviews and transcribed them afterwards. This way, the author could check the information and make sure it was accurately captured.

The methodology utilized to ensure the reliability of the study was using semi-structured interviewing. This technique involved formulating a set of core questions that were designed to be asked to every participant. Doing so allowed the author to explore different thematic areas and ensure that the interview process was conducted in a standardised manner. The author wanted to make sure that the interview places were well-equipped to handle the various distractions that could affect the quality of the research. To minimize the chances of getting distracted, the author selected establishments such as restaurants and hotels that have rooms that can be used for interviews.

Besides the usual factors, the author additionally considered the various aspects of the study to ensure that the interviews were conducted in a reliable manner. One of these is ensuring that the participants were fully aware of the terms used. This was done by providing explanations for the

different terms that were used. This strategy minimized the chances of misinterpretations, ensuring that the data collected was both accurate and trustworthy, which helps strengthen the study's overall reliability.

4 Data analysis

The study's empirical basis is established by the analysis of the qualitative insights gathered from interviews with restaurant managers in Finland's Helsinki region. The author then explores the transcripts, looking for patterns, themes, and codes that represent the varying perspectives of industry professionals.

4.1 Primary Data Analysis

The data collected during the study was thoroughly analysed using deductive and inductive coding methods. The findings provided insights into the various aspects of the gamification industry and its potential impact on the operations of medium-sized restaurants. In addition to shedding light on the implementation's details, this analytical approach also serves as the basis for the subsequent discussion chapter, which will be contextualized and interpreted according to the findings.

During the transcription process, each interview was thoroughly transcribed (see chapter 3.3), and transcript labels were crafted to organize the extensive data systematically. The labels used for the interviews were designed to provide a navigational help and ensure the accuracy and consistency of the analysis. Moreover, to preserve the confidentiality of each participating restaurant manager, a unique identifier is assigned to every interviewee in this chapter (table 7). The numbering will be stable throughout the chapter and further will be used in the discussion chapter.

Table 7. Identification of each responder

R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5

As mentioned in sub-chapter 3.3, thematic analysis is particularly suitable for unravelling the rich layers of information gathered through semi-structured interviews. As highlighted by Nowell et al. (2017), thematic analysis offers flexibility, allowing researchers to adopt both deductive and inductive approaches. In this study, a combination of deductive coding, guided by themes derived from the literature review, and inductive coding, driven by patterns emerging directly from the data, will be employed.

The themes identified in the literature review (chapter 2) have already provided a foundational framework for designing the interview questions. Now, in the data analysis phase, these predefined themes will guide the initial coding process. However, the analysis will not be confined solely to these predetermined themes, as the inductive approach allows for the emergence of new themes organically from the interview data (Hennink, et al., 2020). This combined deductive-inductive

thematic analysis approach ensures a comprehensive exploration of both the predetermined and unexpected aspects of the gamification landscape within Helsinki's mid-sized restaurants.

4.2 Results

In this section, the author presents the responses obtained from the five participants within the restaurant industry, offering a differential view of their perspectives on gamification. The insights shared by these professionals shed light on various aspects of gamification, such as its implementation, impact on customer behaviour, and challenges faced. The findings of the study have helped to provide a deeper understanding of how the gamification environment is perceived in Finnish restaurants in Helsinki.

After subjecting the qualitative data to thorough thematic analysis, three prominent themes emerged, capturing the diverse insights from the interview responses. The analysis has outlined three core themes: "Awareness Variation," "Customer Motivations," and "Implementation Challenges." Each theme summarizes distinct perspectives, offering comprehensive insights into the levels of awareness and implementation of gamification in the restaurant industry, the multifaceted motivations driving customer engagement, and the obstacles encountered during the implementation of gamification strategies. To facilitate clarity and ease of comprehension for readers, the following presentation of interview responses has been structured thematically, aligning each answer with its respective thematic category. This structured approach aims to offer a coherent narrative, allowing for a focused exploration of each theme's degrees and observations within the qualitative data analysis.

4.2.1 Awareness Variation

Firstly, upon exploring the familiarity of respondents with gamification in the restaurant industry, diverse levels of awareness emerged. Respondent 1 (R1) initially expressed unfamiliarity but, upon clarification, recognized the concept through the lens of a loyalty program in her company. Respondent 2 (R2) demonstrated a strong familiarity, citing active use of gamification methods, particularly in rewarding guests for specific purchases and levels achieved. Respondent 3 (R3), while familiar with gamification, primarily associated it with industries such as hotels and airlines rather than specifically in the restaurant context. Respondent 4 (R4) acknowledged awareness of gamification but confessed to a limited understanding within the restaurant industry, citing knowledge of related techniques and strategies. Finally, respondent 5 (R5), with extensive hospitality experience, admitted a limited familiarity with gamification in restaurants, having heard the term but not extensively explored or implemented it in their restaurant. The varying degrees of awareness suggest a

nuanced landscape of understanding among respondents regarding the application of gamification in the restaurant sector.

Continuing to the question regarding the key principles of gamification in the restaurant industry the responses revealed varied perspectives. R1 emphasized the existing application of customization in many restaurants, citing the example of pre-ordering through QR codes. However, concerns were raised, especially among older customers, who preferred a more traditional approach. R2 stood out by emphasizing the importance of social interaction, aiming to make guests feel emotionally connected to the restaurant. R3 expressed a preference for customization and social interaction, seeing these elements as having a potentially significant impact on customers. R4 provided a comprehensive view, stating that all key principles—customization, engagement, motivation, and social interaction—could be applied, with specific examples for each. In contrast, R5 narrowed down the focus to engagement and motivation, suggesting the potential application of interactive elements and incentives to enhance the overall customer experience. The diversity in responses highlighted the multifaceted nature of gamification principles and their potential implementation in restaurant settings.

The participants' responses to the inquiry about encountering or implementing gamification in restaurants provided insights into their varied experiences. R1 initially struggled to recall instances of gamification in restaurants but noted its common use in hotels. In contrast, R2 detailed the implementation of gamification in their restaurant, specifically through a bonus points system tied to purchases and the attainment of certain levels for additional benefits. R3 had direct experience implementing gamification methods in a restaurant, emphasizing that it was initiated by the owner and returned moderate success. R4, while not personally implementing gamification, acknowledged its presence in the form of loyalty programs in some establishments. R5, similarly, hadn't encountered gamification in the restaurants they worked in but was aware of its usage, particularly in loyalty programs and mobile apps, as a means to encourage customer engagement and loyalty. It's noteworthy that R1, R4, and R5 shared a perspective that gamification, especially in loyalty programs, seemed more prevalent in international settings than in Finland, adding a cultural dimension to its adoption in the restaurant industry.

Gamification, as perceived by participants, emerged as a potent tool shaping customer behaviour and decisions in restaurants. R1 noted the impact of a loyalty program, highlighting cost considerations. R2 emphasized gamification's interactive nature, foreseeing increased exploration and spending. R3 stressed its motivational aspect, affecting decision-making for more substantial rewards while R4 saw gamification's role in challenges and leaderboards, enhancing mainly

satisfaction. Lastly, R5 introduced a competitive element, motivating customers to accumulate points and make favourable decisions for the restaurant.

Upon being asked about the importance of rewards in gamification, R1 emphasized the significance, suggesting rewards like a glass of prosecco could be effective depending on the client. R2 acknowledged the crucial role of rewards, mentioning options like discounts, exclusive offers, free samples, and personalized experiences as potentially impactful. R3 strongly asserted that rewards are vital, providing motivation and tangible benefits to customers, especially in the early stages of gamification adoption. R4 concurred on the importance of rewards and highlighted personalized rewards tailored to individual preferences. R5 reinforced the importance of rewards, particularly in loyalty programs, where achieving milestones through spending earns customers gifts or benefits, enhancing their overall experience. The agreement among respondents was that rewards play a pivotal role in motivating customer engagement in gamified experiences.

The potential overall impact of gamification on the restaurant industry in Helsinki was promising, with respondents expressing optimism about its future integration. R1 believed that in a few years, gamification would be more prevalent, making everything easily accessible through digital means. R2 saw high potential for gamification to increase customer engagement, happiness, and overall satisfaction, predicting a rise in its adoption by restaurants over the next five to ten years. R3 acknowledged that gamification currently had limited impact in Helsinki's restaurant industry but foresaw significant potential, especially with technology evolving rapidly. R4 noted that as technology advanced, more restaurants in Helsinki might start using gamification, making it a common feature in customer engagement. R5 observed a growing trend of businesses in Helsinki adopting gamification, and as technology continued to play a significant role, more restaurants were likely to use interactive elements for an enjoyable dining experience in the future.

The participants generally observed a lack of understanding or awareness of gamification concepts among restaurant owners or managers in the Helsinki region. R1 expressed that they had introduced people to loyalty programs but hadn't used the term "gamification" before. R2 noted that the term and the concept are relatively new, and many colleagues may not truly understand the potential of gamification in Helsinki's restaurant scene. R3 emphasized a lack of awareness, stating that even those using some gamification techniques might not be familiar with the term, especially considering it's translated into Finnish. R4 admitted that there has been a lack of understanding among some owners or managers, attributing it to the innovation of the concept in the industry. R5 speculated that awareness might be limited in their circles but couldn't provide a definitive answer.

In response to the question about successful reward systems in the restaurant industry, the participants shared diverse examples. R1 highlighted the spin-based reward system at KotiPizza and the

star-based rewards at Starbucks. R2 provided insights into a multifaceted reward system involving free vouchers, discounts, and bonus points, especially beneficial for families. R3 described a stamp collection system leading to rewards like free meals or drinks and shared a positive experience of receiving a birthday reward via email. R4 mentioned loyalty programs abroad, where points earned could be redeemed for discounts or special promotions. R5, while not citing specific examples, acknowledged the success of loyalty programs, particularly in chains like S-group. Overall, the responses underscored the prevalence of various rewarding strategies in the restaurant industry, enhancing customer engagement and loyalty.

Closing the interview sessions, R1 highlighted the importance of being open-minded and considering changes in the restaurant industry, emphasizing the need for flexibility and exploration of different options. R2 expressed a desire to see more restaurants in Helsinki adopting guest loyalty programs, envisioning a future where gamification methods create a sense of belonging and encourage customers to share their positive experiences. R3 underscored that gamification is a tool and not a guaranteed solution, emphasizing the importance of how it is used, by whom, and for what purpose. R4 emphasized the potential benefits of gamification in enhancing customer experiences but stressed the need for careful planning, implementation, and continuous evaluation for long-term success. R5 found the topic interesting and expressed a willingness to explore and learn more about the strategies and potential of gamification in the restaurant industry.

4.2.2 Customer Motivations

The participants shared varied perspectives on the impact of collecting and redeeming rewards or points on customer motivation. R1 expressed confidence in the effectiveness of such systems, especially in the Finnish context, suggesting that having a point reward system in a restaurant, even within a hotel chain, could be appealing to customers. R2 delved into the psychological aspect, highlighting that customers feel empowered when they accumulate points in their loyalty program "bank account," enhancing their engagement and involvement. R3 emphasized the role of individual personality, noting that some customers prefer saving points for significant purchases, while others enjoy immediate benefits. In agreement with the positive impact, R4 asserted that the collection and redemption of rewards or points contribute to a sense of achievement and excitement, motivating sustained engagement. R5 confirmed this sentiment, emphasizing the positive effect on customer motivation through the anticipation of redeeming rewards and the overall sense of progress and achievement. The varied responses highlight the nuanced nature of customer motivations in the context of gamification and loyalty programs.

Following the previous question regarding consumer behaviour, the participants were asked to describe any specific instances where gamification has positively impacted customer behaviour in

restaurants. R1 emphasized the positive impact of discounts or points, revealing that customers expressed satisfaction despite concerns about potential compromises in quality. This suggests that, in certain instances, the attraction of rewards may override reservations about perceived compromises. R2 illustrated a scenario where guests, unaware of certain loyalty program benefits, experienced a surge of happiness upon discovering additional perks. This emphasizes the potential surprise and delight factor that gamification elements can introduce. R3 provided a concrete example involving stamps, showcasing how tangible, collectible elements can influence behaviour positively. The customer's joy indicates that gamified incentives, even simple ones, can significantly impact customer satisfaction. While R4 didn't offer specific examples, their insight into gamification's potential to enhance engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty provides a theoretical framework for its positive influence. R5's detailed account of a restaurant implementing virtual badges and levels demonstrated a nuanced understanding of how gamification mechanics, such as unlocking achievements, can drive customer engagement and create a sense of accomplishment, ultimately generating positive word-of-mouth for the restaurant.

When the respondents were asked what they think motivates customers to engage with gamification, the answers shared a vast similarity. R1 suggested that various elements, including benefits and marketing strategies, motivate customers to engage with gamified experiences, especially when these elements address concerns like pricing. R2 emphasized the social aspect, stating that customers are driven by a desire for status and the opportunity to showcase their membership levels. R3 highlighted that current engagement is often driven by the tangible rewards associated with gamified experiences, suggesting that customers may later embrace the emotional aspects of these experiences. R4 identified multiple motivations, including recognition, fun, and exclusive offers, as factors that drive customers to engage with gamification. R5 concurred, asserting that customers are primarily motivated by rewards, recognition, and a sense of achievement, aligning with the idea that meaningful incentives drive active participation in gamified elements.

Upon being asked about whether different generations of customers might have varying motivations for participating in gamification, R1 pointed out that younger generations, like millennials and Gen Z, often engage due to a digital upbringing, finding motivation in competition and social sharing. In contrast, older generations are motivated by tangible benefits like discounts and trying new experiences. R2 emphasized the ease for tech-savvy members but highlighted potential challenges for the elderly. R3 concurred, noting that younger generations are drawn to technology and immersive experiences, while older generations are motivated by simpler gamification approaches. R4 shared concerns about older generations adapting to digital methods, suggesting a gradual transition with both paper and digital options. R5 acknowledged differences in motivation, citing the younger generation's focus on social interaction and the older generation's emphasis on tangible

rewards and personalized service. The respondents collectively highlighted a generation gap in gamification motivations, stressing the need for adaptable and inclusive approaches.

4.2.3 Implementation Challenges

The next questions the interviewees were asked was: if they saw any limitation in gamification for impacting customer behaviour. First, R1 highlighted the challenge of maintaining consistency between gamified elements and the restaurant's overall brand image, emphasizing the importance of alignment to prevent customer disengagement. R2 introduced a unique challenge related to customer forgetfulness, pointing out that if patrons fail to mention their loyalty program membership during a visit, they miss out on benefits, potentially leading to disappointment. This underlines the need for effective communication and reminders. R3 raised a critical point about customer awareness, suggesting that if customers are well-versed in gamification techniques, they may become sceptical, impacting the intended behavioural outcomes. R4, in contrast, did not identify specific limitations, providing a perspective that implies a more optimistic view of gamification. R5 emphasized the challenges related to effective implementation and management of gamified systems, as well as the necessity of ensuring that the rewards offered align with customer preferences to be impactful.

When asked about potential pitfalls associated with rewards in gamification, R1 highlighted the challenge of catering to diverse customer preferences, where what might delight one customer could disappoint another. R2 expressed no direct negative aspects, emphasizing the positive psychological impact of small rewards on customer happiness. R3 cautioned against pitfalls related to customer demands, pointing out instances where customers may seek changes to predefined rewards. R4 identified pitfalls such as creating overly complex reward systems leading to confusion and the risk of conditioning customers to only engage for rewards, especially among younger generations. R5 mentioned pitfalls like devaluing rewards by making them too easily attainable, fostering a sense of entitlement, and encouraging undesirable behaviours. The respondents collectively acknowledged the need for careful reward system design to avoid potential drawbacks.

In response to the feasibility of applying gamification in mid-sized restaurants in Helsinki, the participants expressed optimistic views. R1 emphasized the importance of a clear goal, well-designed strategy, and a suitable platform, leaning towards the feasibility being more realistic for cafes and lunch places at the moment. R2 expressed a strong affirmative stance, suggesting that loyalty programs should be more widespread across all restaurants. R3 highlighted the need for education on gamification for both employees and customers, deeming it equally important for restaurants. R4 acknowledged that some restaurants already use gamification to some extent, supporting the feasibility of its application. Finally, R5 firmly asserted that it is definitely feasible for mid-sized

restaurants in Helsinki, presenting an opportunity for differentiation and an engaging dining experience for customers.

In considering the application of gamification in mid-sized restaurants compared to larger chains or smaller establishments, the participants highlighted distinctive limitations and advantages. R1 noted that larger chains face challenges in implementing individualized strategies due to standardized systems, whereas smaller establishments enjoy more flexibility and experimentation. R2 emphasized that mid-sized restaurants, with limited marketing budgets, could benefit more from loyalty programs as a cost-effective marketing tool. R3 pointed out that larger chains have the advantage of developing apps with a secure customer base, while smaller establishments excel in customization and customer interaction. R4 highlighted the potential for mid-sized restaurants to create an intimate, personalized atmosphere through gamification but acknowledged resource limitations. R5 emphasized the flexibility of mid-sized restaurants in tailoring gamification to their audience but noted challenges in resource allocation.

Participants outlined various challenges that mid-sized restaurants may encounter when implementing gamification. R1 emphasized the constraints faced by larger chains in comparison, suggesting that mid-sized establishments have more possibilities. However, no additional challenges were identified. R2 highlighted the importance of loyal staff members for the success of gamification, emphasizing the challenge of high employee turnover. Solutions proposed included employee education and fostering long-term relationships between staff and guests. R3 mentioned potential difficulties in older generations adapting to new digital systems but proposed offering physical options as a solution. Additionally, the perceived incompatibility of gamification in fine dining settings was noted, though it was not specified as a challenge exclusive to mid-sized restaurants. R4 mentioned budget constraints and technical expertise as challenges for mid-sized restaurants, suggesting a cautious approach to determine industry adaptation. R5 did not identify any direct challenges specific to mid-sized restaurants, citing previous responses correlated to limitations.

Lastly, addressing the knowledge gap in gamification was achieved through education, information sharing, and showcasing success stories in the restaurant industry. R1 suggested providing more examples and best practices to demonstrate the benefits of gamification. R2 proposed industry courses, collaborative learning, and internal education within organizations to share knowledge. R3 emphasized the consequences of businesses missing out on important revenue streams and customer engagement techniques, suggesting that education and industry-wide proof of feasibility were essential. R4 believed that businesses would incorporate gamification as customers became ready, and seminars or consultants might help with education. R5 expressed that time and

technology would naturally contribute to understanding gamification, and failing to grasp its potential might result in missed opportunities to differentiate from competitors.

4.3 Summary

The three key themes that emerged from the qualitative data collected through interviews, provided insight into the complexities of gamification in the restaurant industry. The first theme, "Awareness Variation," describes how respondents' levels of knowledge and understanding of gamification in restaurant contexts differ. It captures understanding degree, from extensive knowledge of loyalty programs to scant awareness and implementation of gamified tactics. "Customer Motivations," the second theme, delves into the various factors that compel users to interact with gamification features. This theme explains the involved interactions that shape consumer behaviours in gamified events, from the attraction of incentives and social recognition to the impact of age demographics on motives. Lastly, the theme "Implementation Challenges" delves into the practical barriers encountered in deploying gamification approaches, ranging from aligning gamified elements with brand images to managing customer expectations and technical complexities.

Moving forward, the goal of the discussion chapter is to explore the various aspects of gamification and its impact on the restaurant industry. Through an analysis of the literature on the subject, it will be able to provide a deeper understanding of its potential and provide guidance on how to implement it in the future. Furthermore, the discussion will examine the implications of the chosen themes, emphasizing their significance in the context of technological advancements, consumer behaviours, and engagement strategies. The analysis will also help contribute to the evolving gamification practices in the restaurant industry.

5 Discussion

The main conclusions drawn from the qualitative data gathered through interviews will be thoroughly reviewed and debated in this chapter. Every discovery will be carefully examined to demonstrate how important it is to accomplish the study's goals. Furthermore, this section seeks to establish the foundation for further research in this field as well as to shed light on the immediate outcomes of these results. The author highlights the need for more research in this area by outlining suggestions for future research topics and gaps found in this study. The investigation's learning outcomes, which summarize the knowledge acquired, difficulties faced, and wider implications for the gamification landscape in the restaurant business in Helsinki, will be presented last.

In this upcoming section, the author puts together the secondary data drawn from the existing literature with the insights garnered from the analysis conducted in the preceding chapter. Emphasizing coherence and relevance, this discussion aligns with the author's established framework introduced in sub-chapter 2.4. This framework serves as a foundational tool, bridging theoretical foundations with practical research while simultaneously linking back to the research questions originally posed at the study's outset.

5.1 Key Findings

Beginning with the first component the author uses the SAPS framework introduced initially by Zichermann and Cunningham in 2011 when connecting the rewards with the results of the responses. The SAPS framework highlights the significance of rewards in gamification, emphasizing the role of rewards in stimulating customer engagement (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011). Across the interview responses, there's a unanimous agreement on the pivotal role of rewards in driving customer engagement within gamified experiences. For instance, R3 strongly emphasizes that rewards are essential for motivation and tangible benefits, particularly in the initial stages of adopting gamification. This aligns with the SAPS framework's emphasis on the significance of rewards in encouraging customer participation.

Additionally, the interviewees' concerns regarding potential pitfalls associated with rewards in gamification confirm some considerations outlined in the SAPS framework. R1 and R3 touch upon the challenge of catering to diverse customer preferences and demands, which aligns with SAPS's emphasis on the need for a strategic hierarchy in rewards based on customer preferences. Meanwhile, R4 and R5 highlight risks associated with reward systems, such as complexity, devaluation, and fostering undesired behaviours, echoing SAPS's warning against overly complex reward systems and the need for balancing reward accessibility.

Lastly, R2's emphasis on the social aspect and the desire for status among customers aligns remarkably well with the SAPS framework's component of "status" as an essential driver of engagement in gamified experiences. In their response, R2 highlights customers' motivation for engaging with gamified experiences, specifically pinpointing the desire for status and the opportunity to showcase membership levels as key incentives. This directly resonates with the concept of "status" within the SAPS framework, where the attainment of status benefits and rewards enables players to promote within a ranking system. R2's emphasis on showcasing membership levels aligns with the status elements suggested by Zichermann and Cunningham (2011), such as badges and leaderboards, which provide customers with a visible status within the gamified system.

The second theory explored within the literature review is the Flow theory. The responses from the interviewees provide a mixed perspective regarding the role of gamified experiences in customer engagement, particularly in the context of Csikszentmihalyi's Flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). R1's emphasis on the need for consistency between gamified elements and the restaurant's brand image reflects a concern for potential disengagement when these elements are not aligned. This highlights the importance of maintaining a unified experience that resonates with the customers' overall perception of the brand, potentially impacting their flow state within the gamified environment.

Furthermore, R3 highlighted that customer engagement is often driven by the tangible rewards associated with gamified experiences, suggesting that customers may later embrace the emotional aspects of these experiences. This aligns with the emotional engagement aspect of Flow theory. Csikszentmihalyi's theory emphasizes that the state of flow involves an emotional aspect where individuals feel deeply involved and absorbed in an activity, experiencing a sense of happiness and fulfilment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Additionally, R5's position that customers are motivated by rewards, recognition, and a sense of achievement also corresponds to the emotional elements within Flow theory. The sense of achievement evokes positive emotions, contributing to the enjoyment descended from engaging in the gamified experience. Csikszentmihalyi highlights that the emotional engagement experienced in flow moments leads to heightened levels of satisfaction and enjoyment.

Continuing, the MDE (Mechanics-Dynamics-Emotions) framework by Robson, et al., (2014) offers a comprehensive lens to understand and analyse gamification within the context of customer engagement and motivation in the restaurant industry. The author, after aligning the responses with the relevant components of the MDE framework the following topics emerged.

The responses highlighted how gamification mechanics such as points and leaderboards play a crucial role in motivating customer engagement within restaurant settings. Participants emphasized

the significance of a point reward system, badges as forms of recognition, and leaderboards to introduce competition. The viewpoints regarding different generations' motivations shed light on dynamics. Younger generations showed enthusiasm for digital engagement and competition, while older generations favoured tangible benefits and simpler gamification approaches. Additionally, the impact of collecting and redeeming rewards or points on customer motivation reveals diverse customer preferences and behaviours, highlighting the role of individual personality traits. The responses indirectly touch upon the emotional aspect of gamification. R3 highlighted how customers currently engage due to tangible rewards but may later embrace emotional aspects of the gamified experiences. Furthermore, the anticipation of redeeming rewards was linked to positive emotions like excitement and achievement. The MDE framework's Mechanics, Dynamics, and Emotions align with the varied perspectives on the mechanisms and motivations driving customer engagement through gamification. The incorporation of game mechanics, understanding dynamics across different generations, and recognizing emotional responses contribute significantly to comprehending how gamification influences customer behaviour in the restaurant industry.

The author analyses three core drives from Chou's (2023) Octalysis Framework—Avoidance, Social Influence, and Accomplishment—to discover their influence on customer behaviour in gamified restaurant experiences.

Avoidance reflects the fear of missing out or losing valuable opportunities (Chou, 2023). Participants highlighted diverse challenges in designing reward systems that accommodate varied preferences, preventing dissatisfaction among customers and avoiding a reliance solely on rewards for engagement.

Social Influence stresses the importance of social interaction, recognition, and connection (Chou, 2023). Gamification elements like challenges and leaderboards enhance customer satisfaction and motivate points accumulation, fostering a sense of competition. Participants also noted the impact of social sharing and collaborative challenges in driving engagement.

Accomplishment drives users to improve, achieve, and progress (Chou, 2023). The responses showcased how gamification elements like challenges and leaderboards enhance satisfaction, prompting customers to strive for mastery and continually level up their experiences.

Connections among respondents' answers highlight the elaborate interaction of these core drives. Challenges in aligning gamified elements with the brand's image resonate with Avoidance, emphasizing the need for consistency and communication. Meanwhile, the desire for mastery and progress aligns with Accomplishment, influencing decisions to engage and participate actively. Social Influence emerges as a significant motivator through elements like competition, recognition, and

collaborative challenges, shaping customer behaviour by fostering social connections and interaction. These insights feature the connected nature of these core drives within gamification strategies, shaping diverse customer behaviours in restaurant experiences.

Last element examined is customization and the author uses Self Determination theory introduced by Deci and Ryan (1980) to make necessary connections between the interviewees responses. The Self-Determination Theory (SDT), according to the authors, delves into intrinsic and extrinsic motivations governing human behavior. Intrinsic motivation, fueled by genuine interest and inherent pleasure in an activity, sustains long-term engagement. This aligns with the findings from Lurn et al. (2023), showing that gamification features, like social, achievement, and immersion elements, positively impact learning motivation by satisfying psychological needs. These findings emphasize gamification's potential to tap into intrinsic motivation, especially relevant in gamified dining experiences within the restaurant industry.

In the area of customization within restaurants, respondents' views highlighted varying perspectives. While R1 emphasized the existing application of customization and concerns among older customers preferring traditional approaches, R2 focused on adopting emotional connections through social interaction. R3 supported customization and social interaction, recognizing their significant impact on customers. R4 provided a comprehensive view, encouraging for the application of all key principles (customization, engagement, motivation, and social interaction), citing specific examples for each. In contrast, R5 narrowed down the focus to engagement and motivation, suggesting the potential use of interactive elements and incentives to enhance the overall customer experience. These diverse responses showcase the complex nature of gamification principles in restaurant settings, focusing customer needs and preferences.

Finally, considering the application of gamification in different restaurant sizes, participants identified unique limitations and advantages. Larger chains face barriers in implementing individualized strategies due to standardized systems, while smaller establishments enjoy more flexibility for experimentation. Mid-sized restaurants, as highlighted by R2, could leverage loyalty programs as cost-effective marketing tools due to limited budgets. R3 pointed out advantages for larger chains in app development with a secure customer base, while smaller establishments excel in customization and customer interaction. However, mid-sized restaurants face resource limitations and challenges in tailoring personalized gamification experiences, as mentioned by R4 and R5, despite their potential to create relaxed, personalised atmospheres. These insights confirm the relevance of intrinsic motivation and showcase the potential and challenges for gamification, particularly in mid-sized restaurants, in aligning with customer preferences and enhancing engagement.

Initially, when mentioned in sub-chapter 1.1 the objective of this study was to identify the current state of gamification within the restaurant business in the geographical location of the Helsinki region. As a summary, upon reflecting with the results and the discussion, this research has accomplished its objectives correlated with the research question and its sub-questions presented at the start the thesis.

What are the challenges and opportunities of gamification in mid-sized restaurants in Helsinki region?

- What is the current state of gamification implementation in mid-sized restaurants in the Helsinki region?
- How does gamification impact consumer engagement and behaviour in mid-sized restaurants in the Helsinki region?
- What are the different types of gamification techniques that could be applied in mid-sized restaurants in the Helsinki region?
- How can gamification be used to enhance the dining experience for mid-sized restaurant customers in the Helsinki region?

Responses from participants reflected a varied landscape of understanding regarding gamification implementation, consumer impact, and potential techniques within these mid-sized dining establishments. While some respondents exhibited strong familiarity and active utilization of gamification methods, others demonstrated limited awareness or associated gamification primarily with industries beyond the restaurant sector. This range of awareness stressed the nuanced comprehension among participants, enlightening the current state of gamification implementation in these settings.

Moreover, insights revealed diverse perspectives on how gamification influences consumer engagement, behavior, and motivation within the restaurant sector. Participants highlighted crucial elements such as customization, rewards, social interaction, and motivation as fundamental factors shaping positive consumer behaviour. These findings showcased the complex nature of gamification principles and their potential application, indicating opportunities for enhancing the dining experience. Overall, the study succeeded in providing comprehensive insights into the varying degrees of awareness, potential techniques, and their influence on consumer engagement, while simultaneously, effectively addressing the research question concerning the challenges and opportunities of implementing gamification strategies within Helsinki's mid-sized restaurant industry.

5.2 Future Research

While this study primarily focused on insights gathered from restaurant managers and industry professionals, future research could greatly benefit from including the customer perspective. Integrating quantitative research methods to directly engage customers will provide precious insights into their perceptions, experiences, and preferences concerning gamification in restaurants. Understanding how customers perceive and interact with gamified elements, their preferences for specific gamification strategies, and the impact of these strategies on their dining experiences will enrich the overall comprehension of gamification's effectiveness. Moreover, a critical area for future exploration lies in quantifying the financial impact of implementing gamification in restaurants. Researchers can delve into assessing the profitability of gamification programs. This involves analyzing financial metrics like increased revenue, return on investment (ROI), and customer loyalty to determine the tangible business benefits brought about by gamification strategies.

While this study focused on gathering insights from knowledgeable restaurant managers, regarding gamification, future research could focus towards conducting comparative analyses. Specifically, future research may examine and compare restaurants that have implemented gamification strategies against those that haven't. This approach can provide a comprehensive understanding of the direct impact of gamification on various aspects, such as customer engagement and business performance. Last, future studies should focus on a detailed exploration of the specific strategies engaged by restaurants when implementing gamification. A more persistent analysis of these strategies, including the types of game mechanics used, the integration of technology, and the overall implementation process, will provide a deeper understanding of the varied approaches adopted by restaurants in incorporating gamified elements into their operations. Understanding these strategies in detail will offer valuable insights into best practices and effective implementation methods for successful gamification in the restaurant industry.

5.3 Learning Outcomes

The author's knowledge and skills related to their thesis have significantly evolved throughout the study. One of the most significant factors that emerged was their ability to manage their time effectively. Doing so allowed them to manage multiple tasks and analyse data. This process filled a deeper understanding of how to effectively manage tasks and deadlines within a research framework, enhancing the author's organizational skills and productivity. In addition, through the study, the author was exposed to various research methods, which allowed them to develop their expertise in different areas. This exposure also allowed them to improve their critical thinking skills.

Furthermore, throughout this academic journey, the author, has also gathered substantial knowledge about gamification, both in its general context and specifically within the restaurant industry. Delving into the details of gamified experiences and their application in restaurant settings provided insights into consumer behaviour, motivational drivers, and the dynamics of engagement. Understanding the distinctions of how gamification elements influence customer decisions and motivate participation has been a crucial quality of this learning experience. Moreover, exploring the combination of gaming mechanics with dining experiences has showed the potential for innovative strategies in enhancing customer engagement and loyalty within the hospitality sector. This enriched understanding not only increases the author's knowledge base but also lays the foundation for future exploration and innovation in this evolving field.

To conclude, one of the most critical lessons that the author learned during their study was the significance of discipline. Doing everything within a plan and staying concentrated on the objectives of the study made a vast difference. The ability to persevere through the various obstacles that came their way during the course of the study was also a valuable trait that the author developed. In essence, the study's journey has been a transformative experience, not only in terms of subject theme knowledge but also in embracing personal and professional development. Overall, the new-found skills in time management, research methodologies, and discipline have laid a solid foundation for the author's academic journey, equipping them with essential tools for future scholarly endeavours.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Questionnaire

This research focuses on exploring the potential of gamification within the context of mid-sized restaurants in the Helsinki region. Gamification is a concept that introduces game elements into non-gaming environments, aiming to enhance customer engagement, and overall dining experiences.

My aim is to investigate the challenges and opportunities presented by gamification in the restaurant industry and understand how it can influence consumer behaviour and customer engagement. By participating in this study, you play a critical role in shedding light on the impact of gamification, contributing to valuable insights for restaurant owners and researchers alike.

- Can you briefly introduce yourself and your role in the restaurant industry?
- How familiar are you with the concept of gamification in the context of the restaurant industry?
- if we know the key principle of gamification are customization, engagement, motivation, and social interaction, which of these do you think can be applied in the restaurant industry?
- Did you ever come across gamification in restaurants, or have you tried implementing it. Please explain.
- In most of the establishments today, rewards or points are collected, and they can be redeemed later. Do you think this has effect on customer's motivation?
- How do you think gamification can influence customer behaviour and decision-making in restaurants?
- Can you describe any specific instances where gamification has positively impacted customer behaviour in restaurants?
- What are the potential limitations or challenges of using gamification to influence customer behaviour?
- What do you think motivates customers to engage with gamified experiences in the restaurant industry?
- Do you believe that different generations of customers may have varying motivations for participating in gamification? If so, how might these motivations differ?

- Do you think rewards are important and what type do you think might have the most effect on the customer?
- What are the potential pitfalls associated with the use of rewards in gamification, particularly in a restaurant context?
- Can you provide examples of successful reward systems that you've come across in the restaurant industry?
- Do you think it's feasible to apply gamification in mid-sized restaurants in Helsinki?
- Are there any unique limitations or advantages of applying gamification in mid-sized restaurants compared to larger chains or smaller establishments?
- Can you describe any specific challenges that mid-sized restaurants may face when implementing gamification? –how can these challenges be solved?
- Have you observed a lack of understanding or awareness of gamification concepts among restaurant owners or managers in the Helsinki region?
- How can this knowledge gap be addressed, and what are the consequences of not fully grasping the potential of gamification?
- In your opinion, what is the potential overall impact of gamification on the restaurant industry in Helsinki, and how do you envision its future?
- Anything else you would like to add on this topic?