Level Up Against Gender-Based Violence

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ABSTRACT
Gender-based violence is widely acknowledged as a significant societal concern, needing a concerted effort to raise awareness of its manifestations and repercussions. Serious games have frequently been utilized to tackle this issue, especially among younger demographics. Conversely, the utilization of gamification – incorporating gaming elements to enhance engagement with the topic – in raising awareness of gender-based violence remains largely unexplored. To fill this void, we developed a gamified platform to raise awareness about gender-based violence, specifically addressing the influence of gender stereotypes on young adults. This study presents the outcomes of our initial qualitative assessment. These findings offer crucial insights for future enhancements to the platform and contribute to the exploration of gamification in addressing sensitive subjects.

CCS CONCEPTS
• Human-centered computing → Human computer interaction (HCI);
• Applied computing → Interactive learning environments.

KEYWORDS
Gamification, Gender-Based Violence, Sensitive Topics

1 INTRODUCTION
Gender-based violence (GBV) describes any violence directed towards individuals based on their gender, gender identity, or gender expression [4]. Research consistently demonstrates that tolerance and bias towards GBV are linked to traditional gender stereotypes and sexist beliefs [8]. Efforts to combat GBV typically emphasize raising awareness about the influence of gender norms and stereotypes, highlighting the positive impact bystanders have in preventing or mitigating its effects [3, 7]. Game-based interventions have emerged as effective means of educating people about GBV [1, 10]. Gamification – intended as the incorporation of game elements such as points, badges, and narratives – is a powerful educational approach [2]. However, applying gamification to sensitive topics like GBV presents challenges, risking oversimplification of multifaceted issues and potentially negatively impacting learners’ motivation [5, 12].

We present a first qualitative evaluation of StandByMe, a gamified educational platform that aims to combat GBV and promote gender equality in adolescents [11]. The platform was developed collaboratively by social psychologists, human-computer interaction experts, educators, teachers, and students, to meet users’ needs and expectations. More than 20 activities are included in the platform, focused on three main objectives: raising awareness of GBV and its cultural roots, fostering empathy, and encouraging action against GBV [9]. Considering recent evidence of the impact of game modality on modulating the effectiveness of gameful systems [6], we compared an individual to a cooperative modality.

2 THE STUDY

2.1 Participants and Methods
A total of 15 participants (20-29 years old, M = 23.36, SD = 2.95; 8 female and 7 male) took part in semi-structured interviews regarding the platform and its game modality, lasting 5 to 10 minutes. Participants were split into two groups: i. cooperative condition (N = 6): participants in this group used the cooperative version of the gamified platform. In this iteration, participants completed activities collaboratively by social psychologists, human-computer interaction experts, educators, teachers, and students, to meet users’ needs and expectations. More than 20 activities are included in the platform, focused on three main objectives: raising awareness of GBV and its cultural roots, fostering empathy, and encouraging action against GBV [9]. Considering recent evidence of the impact of game modality on modulating the effectiveness of gameful systems [6], we compared an individual to a cooperative modality.

2.2 Analysis and Results
Two researchers conducted a thematic analysis and independently analyzed data from the interviews. In the following, we present the themes that emerged from the analysis.

2.2.1 Cooperation. Participants considered the activities an occasion for reflection upon the theme, and that cooperation can represent a further advantage. Some users emphasized the potential...
educational benefits of peer-to-peer interaction during activities, facilitating mutual support in comprehending the platform, and engendering discussion concerning the topics encountered in the activities. On the other hand, other participants reported concerns regarding being judged. This highlights the potential anxiety associated with discussing such a delicate controversial topic in a conversation.

2.2.2 Constructive Feedback. The interviews highlighted the importance of providing helpful feedback after each task. Constructive feedback plays a crucial role in enhancing understanding and memory retention. By addressing misconceptions and reinforcing correct information, it assists individuals in improving their grasp of the material.

2.2.3 Real-world Relevance. Participants appreciated the connection with real-world relevance (e.g., memes, chat screenshots), as they can catch users’ attention and represent a form of communication closer to adolescents’ everyday lives.

2.2.4 Playfulness and Game Elements. The interviews revealed a strong appreciation for the interactive nature that contributes to the perceived playfulness of the platform. Users recognized the value of incorporating games to convey educational messages, noting their ability to gain the attention of adolescents. Several users expressed that specific game elements served as potent motivational tools, prompting them to explore the platform thoroughly and complete its activities.

2.2.5 Thought-provoking Content. The results underscore the importance of educational materials and activities that encourage critical thinking, as they are crucial in cultivating a more profound comprehension of the subject matter and increasing participants’ engagement. Thus, content that stimulates thought is not only vital for capturing students’ interest but also for encouraging active participation and reflection, aiming to expand perspectives and challenge beliefs over time.

2.2.6 Findability Issues. Participants faced difficulties in locating content or identifying the material we intended for them to access. These issues often arise from the platform’s information architecture and graphical interface elements, such as an uneven visual hierarchy, absent labels, or misplaced call-to-action buttons.

2.2.7 Balance with Students’ Skills. Some participants found the activities on the platform to be overly simplistic and lacking in challenge, resulting in boredom and disengagement. These observations underscore the importance of educational activities maintaining a suitable balance in difficulty, matching participants’ skill levels and age, to sustain their motivation throughout the entire experience.

2.3 Discussion
Fifteen (15) participants evaluated the StandByMe gamified platform’s effectiveness in raising awareness of GBV. Overall, the platform was well-received. Despite positive feedback, some issues emerged (e.g., findability). Participants found the platform user-friendly and engaging, sparking discussions and reflections on GBV. They appreciated real-world scenarios and desired more content, including profiles of individuals combating GBV. Gamification elements resulted to be well-integrated, with playful aspects enhancing rather than overshadowing main activities. Participants particularly valued the narrative aspect, suggesting it as a strong motivator. Suggestions for improvement included a more structured organization of activities, with the narrative serving as a cohesive link.

3 CONCLUSIONS
The qualitative evaluation of the StandByMe gamified platform revealed positive feedback overall. However, some issues (e.g., findability) were noted. Participants overall appreciated the platform’s user-friendliness and the possibility to engage in real-world scenarios. While gamification elements were well-integrated, some activities were considered too simple, highlighting the importance of adjusting the challenge of the activities to users’ knowledge. Suggestions for improvement included better organization of activities and utilizing the narrative as a cohesive link. Addressing these issues will be crucial to enhance the platform’s effectiveness and sustain user engagement.

REFERENCES