

## **Competitive paper**

### **Designing BrandY<sup>1</sup>: European brand management as a game concept**

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## **Designing BrandY<sup>2</sup>: European brand management as a game concept**

### **ABSTRACT**

A consortium of 10 European Universities are in the process of developing a game-based experiential teaching module to train marketing students in brand management, through a project funded by the European Union. This paper will take you through the journey of the project team, from their development of the first concept of the game to its testing and evolution, based on the feedback acquired in the field while observing how students from various European countries interacted, across 4 completed testing sessions and 2 to come, with the course material in paper format at the beginning, then with the first versions of the IT game platform.

**Keywords** Branding, game-based teaching, experiential learning, employability, serious game

### **INTRODUCTION**

Our aim as educators is to prepare our students for their future employment. On the approximately 19.8 million tertiary education students across the 28 EU countries in 2017, more than one fifth (22.2 percent) were studying business, administration or law, representing a total of 4.4 million students. A recent EFMD 2022 survey<sup>3</sup> shows that 92 percent of corporate recruiters say they expect to hire a freshly graduate MBA this year, agreeing that demand for new business school talent will increase in the next five years. Yet, research shows that there is a significant gap between graduates' profiles and employers' expectations (see for example Walker et al., 2009; Wellman, 2010; Di Gregorio et al., 2019; Finch & McIntyre, 2019, Gawrycka et al, 2020). For example, 96 percent of university rectors in the US responded that they were adequately preparing graduates for the workforce while in contrast only 33 percent of senior executives shared the same opinion. Finch, et al. (2013) found that, in the field of marketing, there is an important gap between the individual skills and knowledge areas defined as important by professionals and the corresponding performance of new graduates. European experts also confirm the existence of this gap in their report "Skill shortages and gaps in

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<sup>3</sup>[https://www.efmdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2022\\_gmac\\_corporate\\_recruiters\\_survey\\_summary\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.efmdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2022_gmac_corporate_recruiters_survey_summary_report_final.pdf)

European enterprises" published recently by the European Union<sup>4</sup>. Consequently, experts tend to agree that there should be a shift in focus, from knowledge generation to skill development (Rundle-Thiele et al., 2005; Rohm et al, 2019; Miklosik et al, 2019). The EFMD survey cited above mentions that the most important reasons for the lack of confidence of recruiters in the preparedness of business school graduates is their "limited functional work experience", for 49 percent of the respondents. Liberona et al (2021), found that games enable students to experience decision-making in complex environments, bringing a very positive impact in their learning process in higher education, by adding a very good component of experiential teaching. As J.G Clawson (2008) from the University of Virginia emphasizes, experiential teaching methods are those that rely on data generated during the exercise/learning experience rather than on data prepared in advance as with lectures and cases. Experiential methods engage students in experiences that simulate social phenomena. They include games such as Starpower<sup>5</sup> and the Organization Game (Randolph & Miles, 1979) as well as computer simulations like Markstrat<sup>6</sup> or CESIM<sup>7</sup>.

In 2020, the Erasmus Plus Strategic Partnership program of the European Union<sup>8</sup> funded a consortium of 11 European universities<sup>9</sup> to develop a game-based experiential teaching module to train marketing students in European brand management and improve their employability. The framework is based on the concept of one-week international intensive programs (IP) taught outside the students' home university.

The project started in September 2020 and after a first, challenging testing session, that had to take place online due to the Covid-19 Pandemic (Emad et al, 2022), the project could resume its natural course as of the autumn of 2021 when the project could organize a first field test that took place in Bruges (Belgium) in November 2021. It was followed by a second one in Katowice (Poland) in May, then by a third one in Bruges again in November 2022.

It is yet too soon in the project to perform a comparative assessment of skills acquisition through the developed game versus through traditional teaching methods. This paper aims at describing the concept of the game as well as the results of the various 4 field tests that have already taken place online in Spring 2021, in Bruges (Belgium) in Autumn 2021, in Katowice (Poland) in Spring 2022, and again in Bruges in Autumn 2022.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/3071\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/3071_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.simulationtrainingsystems.com/schools-and-charities/products/starpower/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://web.stratxsimulations.com/simulation/strategic-marketing-simulation>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cesim.com/>

<sup>8</sup> Experiential education. Interactive/Intensive course of European brand management (BrandY) (2020-2023) reference number 2020-1-PL01-KA203-081852

<sup>9</sup> See appendix 1 for the list of participating universities

## **LITTERATURE REVIEW**

In recent years, much attention was given by marketing educators to experiential methods in teaching and learning. A review of publications in the Journal of Marketing Education between its creation in 1979 and 2019 (Donthu et al, 2021) shows the interest of marketing educators for experiential learning methods. “Experiential learning” has been among the most published subject (124 articles, by 272 authors, 2357 citations) in the Journal of Marketing Education, right behind “self-regulated learning” (126 articles, 274 authors, 3179 citations). A previous review of all articles published in the Journal of Marketing Education between 1979 and 2012, conducted by Gray et al (2012) had already shown that “experiential learning” had the second greatest number and percentage of articles published. Simulation was the third experiential learning technique covered in the journal, according to this 2012 review.

Simulations are what is also known as serious games, defined by Abt (1970, p. 9) as having “an explicit and carefully thought-out educational purpose and not intended to be played primarily for amusement”. According to Faria and Nulsen (1996), They have been used for business and educational purposes since the early 1950’s. They were initially simple, involving a limited number of variables and participants. The development of technology and the internet has enabled their variety and number to grow, leading to their application to a wide number of fields and educational organization curricula (Crookall, 2010; Fu et al., 2016).

The use of games in education has been studied at length from different angles and still is. To cite a few examples, Malone explored the intrinsically motivating qualities that games have and how they might be useful in designing educational games (Malone, 1980; Malone, 1981), Kafai had schoolchildren design games to learn computer programming concepts and mathematics (Kafai, 1995; Kafai, 1996), Green and Bavelier studied how action-video-game playing can alter a range of visual skills (Green and Bavelier, 2003), Squire explored the use of commercial games as a means for engaging disenfranchised students in schools (Squire, 2005), Rosser et al. studied the impact of video games on training surgeons (Rosser et al, 2007) and Gerber explored how video games shape students' reading and writing in both online and offline spaces (Gerber, 2009; Gerber & Price, 2013). After conducting a systematic literature review of papers published after 2012 covering the use of games and gamification techniques in higher education, Subhash and Cudney concluded that there are several benefits of using gamified learning, such as improved student-engagement, motivation, confidence, attitude, perceived learning, and performance (Subhash & Cudney, 2018). DeSmale et al

(2015) showed that there is a positive connection between the implementation of games and simulations and the learning outcome. More specifically in business education, more recently Manzano-Leon et al. studied the potential impact of educational gamification on the academic performance, commitment, and motivation of students (Manzano-Leon et al,2021).

A study conducted by Pejić Bach et al in 2020, on 180 higher education lecturers shows that 84 percent of higher education lecturers use, have used or intend to use games and simulations in their teaching, Marketing educators' interest in using games as part of their teaching being among the highest, immediately after Management educators. The top 3 reasons cited by these educators for their interest in using games are the fact that they increase student motivation for 74 percent of respondents, they encourage student collaboration and communication in class for 67 percent of respondents and they facilitate learning for 46 percent of respondents. Lastly, comparing games and simulation teaching outcomes versus ex-cathedra lectures, the 180 respondents assessed that simulations provide better participation in class for 76 percent of them, and they provide better student understanding for 71 percent of them. Regarding students' results at exams, 45 percent of respondents stated that there is no significant difference between student's exam results for either of the 2 teaching methods, but 35 percent stated that games and simulations provide better exam results vs only 16 percent stating that ex-cathedra teaching provides better exam results. Additionally, Riley and Nicewicz (2022) also found that games are a good way to teach soft skills.

From the students' perspective, a study conducted by Farashahi et al (2018) on 194 undergraduate and MBA students shows that they perceive simulations as the most effective teaching method for developing their interpersonal skills and self-awareness followed by case studies and lectures respectively. Regarding problem solving skills the study found that simulations and case studies are perceived as being similar but more effective than lectures.

According to Shernoff et al (2014) games contain what is needed to engage students and help them enter the state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, I. S., 1992), in which they are fully immersed, energized and focused on their learning activity, losing track of time. Games can increase student engagement, which is strongly associated with student achievement (Shute et al, 2009). Games and digital games can be more engaging than other classroom activities (Malone, 1981; Rieber, 1996). When learning tasks are made increasingly challenging, games can also sustain engagement and motivation for a longer period of time (Gee, 2009; Rupp et al, 2010).

Fullerton et al (2004) highlight that when developing a game, changes can be brought, at the beginning, with limited financial consequences. However, changes become costlier as the project

moves along. Playtesting has therefore to be a continuous and iterative process all along the development of any game and players should be provided with prototypes and asked for feedback, as early as possible in the development process.

### **THE BRANDY CONCEPT**

In August 2020, a consortium of 11 European Universities received a funding from the Erasmus Plus Strategic Partnership program of the European Commission, to develop a platform for an integrated study module for universities and SMEs, dedicated to international brand management, to improve the competences of future employees in managing European brands on global markets. The platform should be based on new technologies (access to teaching materials, implementable remotely), experiential teaching and learning based on gaming concept. The research team is committed to designing this experiential learning instrument, taking into consideration: 1) the scientific concepts and models as described in the academic literature (see Keller, 2012 for ex.); 2) the knowledge and skills expected by the practitioners and professionals to ensure a good employability of participants; 3) the requirements of the marketing educators both in terms of contents and usability of the teaching instruments and 4) the already existing experiential instruments available for marketing educators to avoid overlaps.

Based on a preliminary survey<sup>10</sup> performed by the research team, from an educators' point of view, the instrument will also include the following features: 1) a ready-to-use instrument for teachers and students; 2) a possible real-time feedback from different stakeholders; 3) an engaging scenario and contents and 4) a good link with the related academic theories and models.

The BrandY game<sup>11</sup> is an internet-based platform designed to develop Marketing students' mastering of branding concepts through an intensive program where students are involved in an interactive simulation and in the framework of intensive programs (IP) (around one-week duration).

The game goes through 7 stages, preceded by an introductory stage in which students will have to analyze the market, industry and competition to define their own brand of clothing by choosing their brand name, defining their mission statement and designing their brand logo.

In the first official stage, students are asked to decide on the targeting of their brand by designing and describing two of their main buyer personae. At a second stage, students decide on the positioning of their brand by designing a collection of clothes meant to seduce their target customers and defining

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<sup>10</sup> <https://sphinxdeclic.com/surveyserver/s/yupi61>

<sup>11</sup> <https://brandygame.eu/>

5 keywords that characterize the uniqueness of their brand. At this point, there is a third stage in which they develop their brand narrative strategy by designing their brand narrative system, according to the cultural branding model (Holt, 2004). At the fourth stage, students are required to work on the Brand equity of their company by developing the customer journey of one of their buyer personae, identifying the various steps and touchpoints. At a fifth stage, students are required to work on the communication of their brand by developing an Instagram advertisement. For this activity, they are encouraged to use the mood board and word clouds as tools that will help them visualize and explain the culture they are targeting. At a sixth stage, students will have to design, describe and justify the loyalty program of their brand by producing a promotional description of it, to be published for example as a leaflet available on stores, or as a web page on their brand's website, as well as a description of the objectives, mechanisms and budget of their loyalty program. Lastly, at a seventh stage, students will be required to take their brand internationally, to the market of their choice, adjusting their buyer personae, updating their brand and adapting their marketing mix accordingly. At the end, a final presentation enables students to summarize all the analysis, decision and work done by their team. The table below summarizes the process description of each stage

**Table summarizing the process description of each stage. (Gamification is not included in this table)**

Stage	Name (to be adapted)	Assignment description	Supporting Resources	Timing	Duration	Evaluation Method
0	Introduction	Analyze the market – choose company name, mission statement and design logo	Industry, consumers and competition information packages, logo development apps	Day 1 AM	3 h	NO
1	Targeting	Define buyer personae	Supporting visuals Consumers information packages	Day 1 PM	4 h	By teachers Evaluation grid
2	Positioning	Choose positioning words	List of words to select from	Day 2 AM	3 h	Algorithm
		Design the first collection of your clothes	Bitmoji app			Eval by consumers (online survey)
3	Brand narrative / strategy	Design brand narrative system	Supporting visuals	Day 2 PM	2 h	By teachers Evaluation grid
4	Brand Equity	Customer Journey mapping	Supporting visuals	Day 3 AM	4 h	By teachers Evaluation grid
5	Brand communications	Design mood board & word clouds from your typical customer and design an Instagram ad	Supporting visuals, Consumer videos, mood board and word cloud apps	Day 3 PM	3 h	Algorithm
6	Brand Loyalty	Design loyalty program (promotional slide and justifications)	Supporting visuals	Day 4 AM	4 h	Pros (online survey) or teachers
7	Internationalization	Internationalization plan	Supporting visuals International market information packages per country	Day 4 PM	4 h	By teachers Evaluation grid
Wrap-up	Final presentation	Summarize your decisions in a final 15 minutes presentation	Decisions and evaluations from all previous stages	Day 5 AM	4h	NO

## **THE TESTING:**

In-line with the recommendations in terms of game development (see Fullerton et al, 2004), 4 IP sessions were planned in the project, for testing and assessing the game-based teaching instrument along its development stages, the first one was planned as early as March 2021. Each IP takes place in one of 4 different European locations gradually involving more students from more countries, in order to ensure that the game has been tested by a diverse panel of European students from various nationality and thus is suited for all European countries. The first testing session in Bruges (Belgium) in March 2021 was meant to involve 20 participants, 10 from Switzerland and 10 from Poland. It was ultimately held online due to Covid-19 lockdowns (see Emad, 2022) and extended to additional participants, ultimately involving 28 students from 4 different countries: Switzerland, Poland, Belgium and Russia. Its live version was postponed to November 2021 in Bruges. Another testing session was held in Katowice (Poland) in Spring 2022 and involved 24 students from 4 countries, 6 from Spain, 6 from Italy, 6 from Hungary and 6 from Belgium. A further IP will take place in Annecy (France) in Spring 2023 and will involve 36 students from 5 countries: 8 from Switzerland, 7 from Belgium, 6 from Spain, 6 from Germany and 9 from Poland. A last IP is planned to take place in Valencia (Spain) in Summer 2023 and should involve at least 54 students from 9 countries, 6 from each Hungary, Switzerland, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Romania, Poland, France and Germany, and enable the testing of the complete game. An additional IP was inserted in November 2022 in Bruges, mostly to test the IT platform. It involved 31 students from 6 countries: 7 from Italy, 5 from Poland, 2 from Romania, 3 from Belgium, 6 from Hungary and 8 from Spain.

As the project started and before any IT development was initiated, the project team tested the various stages as normal assignments, in order to evaluate how students perceived the various tasks they were asked to perform. Assessment was done on the following dimensions. The fun, the engagement, the intuitiveness, the ease of understanding, the ease of cooperating with others, whether the tasks helped them understand the concept, whether the task enabled them to achieve the purpose of the stage, the opportunity they were given to discover new tools, the learning of new concepts and the possibility to be creative.

For some of the stages, it was only the assignments themselves that were tested, and for others the evaluation of the assignments also had to be tested. Even the information packages to be provided to the students, as well as the gamification elements were tested, first at their conceptual phase, then in a manual format, before being tested in their IT version as the project comes closer to its end. Furthermore, as the project evolved and some stages were validated, an IT version could be developed



and tested, whereas other activities had to be conceptually tested several times as earlier versions turned out not to be satisfactory.

## **RESULTS**

The first online IP involved the testing of stages 2 (targeting), 3 (positioning) and 5 (communication) (see Emad, 2022) and led to the validation of the concepts of stages 2 and 5. Regarding the positioning stage, it was only partially tested as each student group was asked to test different apps to design their collection and to provide qualitative feedback on the various suggested apps. Overall, they did not find any “*perfect*” app. Each one they tested had pros and cons. Students expressed clear likes and dislikes which the project team could translate into do’s and don’ts when looking for the best app for this activity. The second part of stage 3: defining 5 keywords to characterize the uniqueness of their brand was not tested at this stage.

At the live Bruges IP in November 2021, Stages 4 (Brand Equity) and 6 (Loyalty) were tested and a renewed concept of the collection design of stage 3 was tested, asking the students to develop their collection on either Photoshop or Gimp. Both stages 4 and 6 were validated, stage 4 as is, and stage 6 with a suggestion to add the cost aspect of the loyalty program. Regarding stage 3, once again mixed feedback was provided showing that neither of the 2 software, suggested by the project team allowed students to express their creativity when designing their clothes collection. In parallel, a specific session in focus group format collected feedback on what students liked and disliked when playing game, as a basis to develop the gamification layer of the BrandY game.

At the Katowice IP in May 2022, Stages 1 was tested and validated. A modified version of stage 3 was tested, in which students had to look by themselves, for new apps on which they could design their collection, and evaluate them. In addition, the “defining 5 keywords to characterize the uniqueness of their brand” part of stage 3 was also tested. This second part of stage 3 was validated. Regarding the apps, it turned out that the app students preferred to design their clothes collection was Bitmoji<sup>12</sup>. In parallel, the gamification elements were tested and validated in a conceptual format. Students were also provided with an extended number of information packages on the industry, the competition and consumer trends and asked to rate them. This enabled the project team to identify the importance students gave to the various information files provided, and to decide which information should be provided as a starter pack in the game, and which one should be purchased by

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<sup>12</sup> Registered trademark of Snap inc.

student groups at which price tags. Lastly, students were asked to evaluate and make suggestions on the narrative of the BrandY game and came back with suggestions of narratives in video format.

The additional Bruges IP, inserted in November 2022, was mainly aimed at testing the IT platform that had started to be developed, however, additional stage testing were included, mostly for stage 3 that had not been completely validated yet. In this latest version, students were asked to design their collection using the Bitmoji app they had selected in the previous IP. This approach was validated, at last. In addition, the evaluation part of this activity was also tested as the project team wanted to introduce an innovative evaluation method by which instead of having teachers assess the collections proposed, the public would also be invited to vote. To build a database of people who would be asked to vote for this activity, each student had to provide 10 e-mail addresses of friends and family that were ultimately sent a random sub-selection of the collections designed by each student team. This generated a very high response rate and turned out to be a really viable solution to have a more market-based evaluation of the collections. Regarding the IT platform, stages 1, 2 and 3 of the game were tested on the IT platform and the most important conclusions are that the IP was engaging for them with 70 percent of respondents who strongly agree and agree, more than 80 percent of students found that the program helped them understand the concept of Branding. More than 75 percent were very satisfied or satisfied with the general look and feel of the game platform. Regarding the evaluation of each of the specific 3 stages of the game that were tested, 93 percent found stage 1 very good or good, 59.2 percent found stage 2 very good or good and 67.9 percent found stage 3 very good or good.

## **CONCLUSION**

Along 4 IP sessions of testing the BrandY game, the concept of 6 of the 7 stages have now been tested and validated: the brand narrative system, the targeting, the brand positioning, the brand equity, the communication and the brand loyalty. The information packages and the gamification concept have also been validated. Students have also provided exciting game narrative ideas. In addition, the IT platform of stages 1, 2 and 3 has been validated by the students who were given the opportunity to test the game. In the IP testing session scheduled to take place in Annecy at the end of February, the concept of stage 7 will be tested, as well as the algorithm for the evaluation of the communication stage and a paper prototyping version of the gamification elements of BrandY. Students will also be able to test stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 on the IT platform and provide user experience feedback on the

wireframe<sup>13</sup> of stages 5, 6 and 7. In June 2023, during the last testing IP, which will take place in Valencia (Spain), the BrandY game platform will be completely developed and tested by at least 54 students from 9 different countries, providing a cross sample of the European students that will be able, in the future, to play the BrandY game to enhance their skills in Brand Management. Once the development will be completed, we are planning to determine objective (instead of self-report) measures of skill development, by comparing the performance of students trained through the BrandY platform and of students trained through more traditional methods.

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<sup>13</sup> Layout of a web page that demonstrates what interface elements will exist on key pages

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## **APPENDIX**

The project is coordinated by the University of Economics, Katowice, Poland, and includes eleven partners from European higher - education institutions:

- University of Economics, Katowice (Poland),
- Université Savoie Mont Blanc (France),
- Budapest Gazdasagi Egyetem (Hungary),
- Universitatea din Bucuresti (Romania),
- Universitaria San Pablo-CEU- Universidad CEU Cardenal Herrera (Spain),
- Hogeschool West-Vlaanderen Howest (Belgium),
- Universidad de Leon (Spain),
- Università degli Studi di Trento (Italy),
- Haute École Spécialisée de Suisse Occidentale (Switzerland),
- Bauhaus-Universitaet Weimar (Germany).
- Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University (Russian Federation), (partner excluded as of March 2022)