Game elements

Games are a combination of elements and experiences. There are several kinds of game elements that make up a game, which actually constitute the "toolbox" of gamification. Werbach (2016) express game elements as a pyramid (Figure 1). This pyramid structure gives a variety of options for design and implementation. Also note that lower levels tend to implement one or more higher-level concepts.
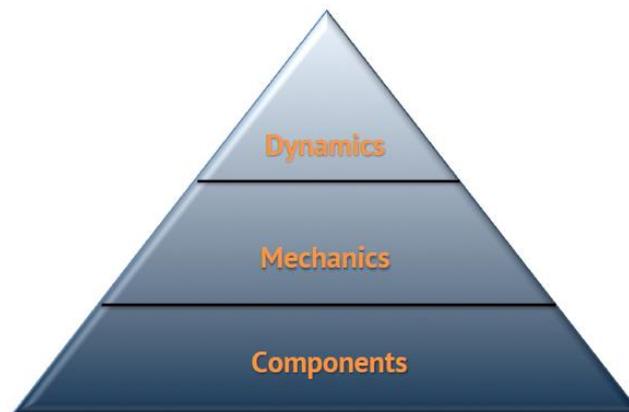

Figure 1. Game elements (Werbach 2016.)

Components are the components of games that are closest to the surface level. The simplest things to get people to progress in the game. They are specific instantiations of mechanics and dynamics, the "nouns", such as: achievements, avatars, badges, boss fights, collections, combat, content unlocking, gifting, leaderboards, levels, points, quests, social graph, teams, virtual goods. (Salcu, A. V., & Acatrinei, 2013, Werbach 2016.)

The most common of these are points, badges, and leaderboards, the so called PBL triad. Points are a way of determining how well someone is doing in the game. They can be used to determine win states. They can connect to rewards, display progress, provide feedback for the player and provide data for the game designer. Points are all equal and can be used to represent anything. Badges are representation of achievements. They are flexible, being just a token for the game designer to reward the player. Badges designate the things that are significant in the game and function as credentials. They can support collections and encourage players to keep collecting them. They convey a certain status or social display. Leaderboards are rankings and feedback on the competition. They encourage the player to achieve a higher score. Besides the PBL triad, other elements like challenges, puzzles, mastery and community are equally important. (Salcu, A. V., & Acatrinei, 2013, Werbach 2016.)

Mechanics are the "verbs" of a game, the elements that move the action forward:
-   challenges: objectives and obstacles
-   chance: a sense of uncertainty
-   competition/cooperation: the interactive design of a game
-   feedback: real time progress report
-   resource acquisition: ability to acquire tools to progress in the game
-   rewards: benefits for some kind of achievement in the game

- transactions: exchanging with other players
- turns: sequences of activity
- win state: the final victory. (Salcu, A. V., & Acatrinei, 2013, Werbach 2016.)

Dynamics are the highest level game elements in the game design system. They are the "grammar" or the hidden structure that makes games coherent and draws the big picture. They are different from the rules of the game. They are the implicit structure, which includes more conceptual elements that provide the framing for the game. Dynamics are for example:

- constraints: limitations in the game
- emotions: the emotions that the game attempts to harness
- narrative: the structure that pulls together the pieces of the game into a coherent storyline
- progression: a sense of having something to achieve – giving the game clear objectives
- relationships: the interactivity and social dynamics that are important to the game experience. (Salcu, A. V., & Acatrinei, 2013, Werbach 2016.)

Sources

Salcu, A. V., & Acatrinei, C. 2013. Gamification applied in affiliate marketing. Case study of 2parale. Management & Marketing, 8(4), 767-790. Cited. 19.5.2017.
http://www.managementmarketing.ro/pdf/articole/337.pdf

Werbach, Kevin. 2016. Gamification online course. Cited. 19.5.2017.
https://www.coursera.org/course/gamification.