Gamification mechanics in subscription apps to drive engagement

Why gamification?

Highly gamified products stand out in Retention Rates



- Industry average 30D Retention is 5% while highly gamified apps can reach 20%+

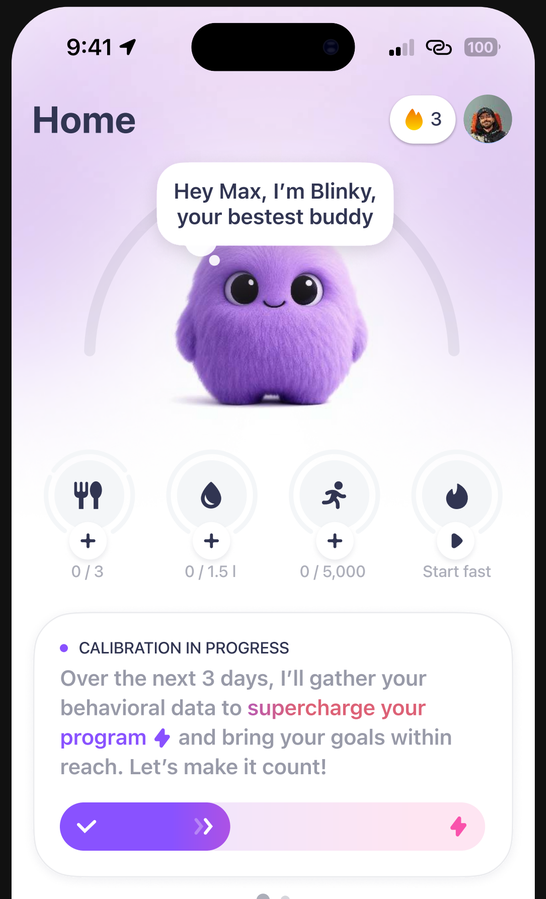
[Sensortower]

A bit about myself



- Senior PM @ Simple –
  weight loss app with 20M+ users
- Leading AI Coaching & Gamification
- Ex DOC+, McKinsey

A bit about Simple



- US Market, 20M+ Users
- Core Audience: Midlife women on a weight loss journey
- Found major Retention growth with Gamification

Gamification drives behavior through motivation

Behavior happens when Prompted if there's enough Ability and if there's enough Motivation

- Behavior = Motivation x Ability x Prompt

[Fogg Behavior Model]



[Fogg Behavior Model]



Duolingo Streak increases user motivation to complete a lesson

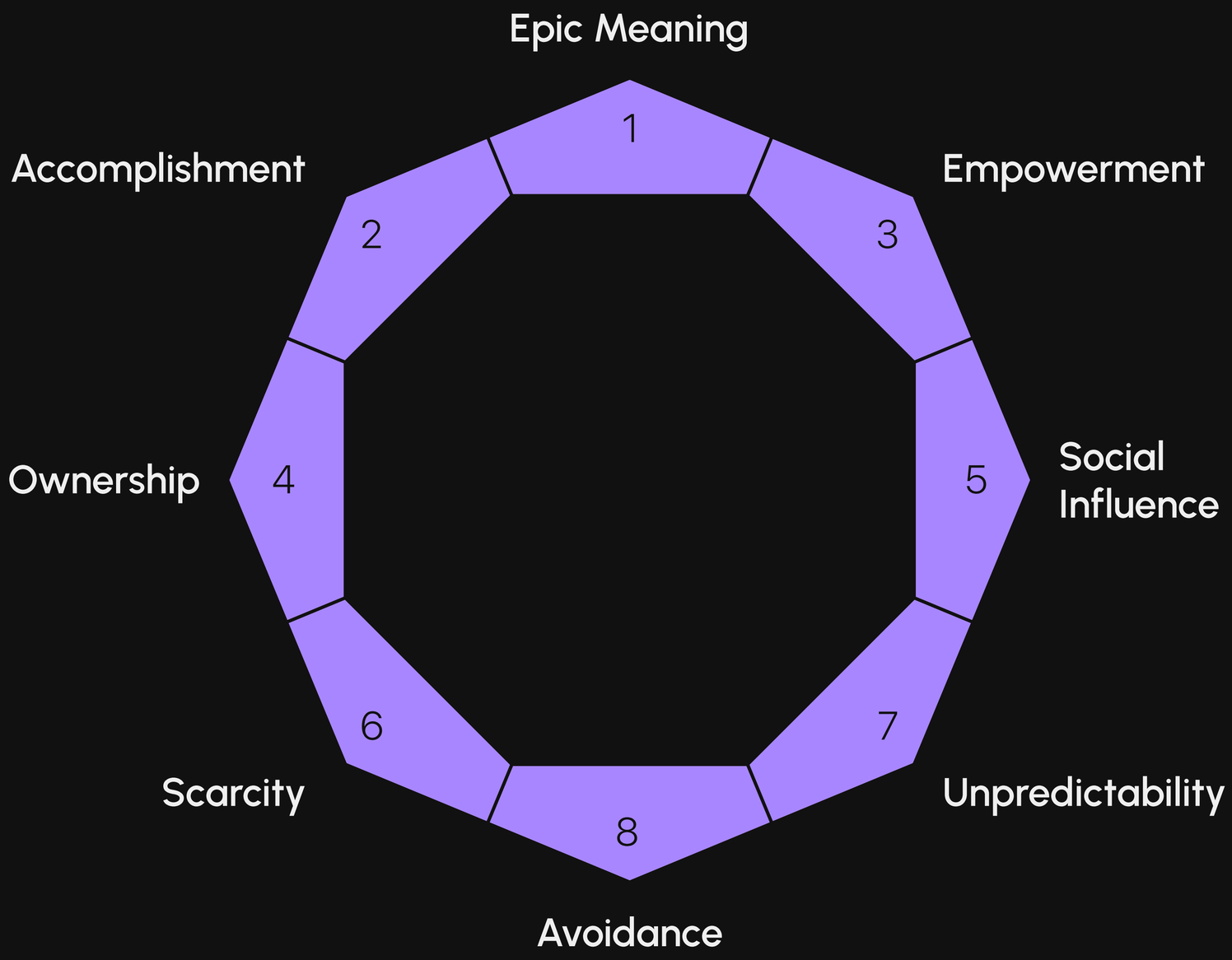
[Fogg Behavior Model]

How to better understand and structure gamification

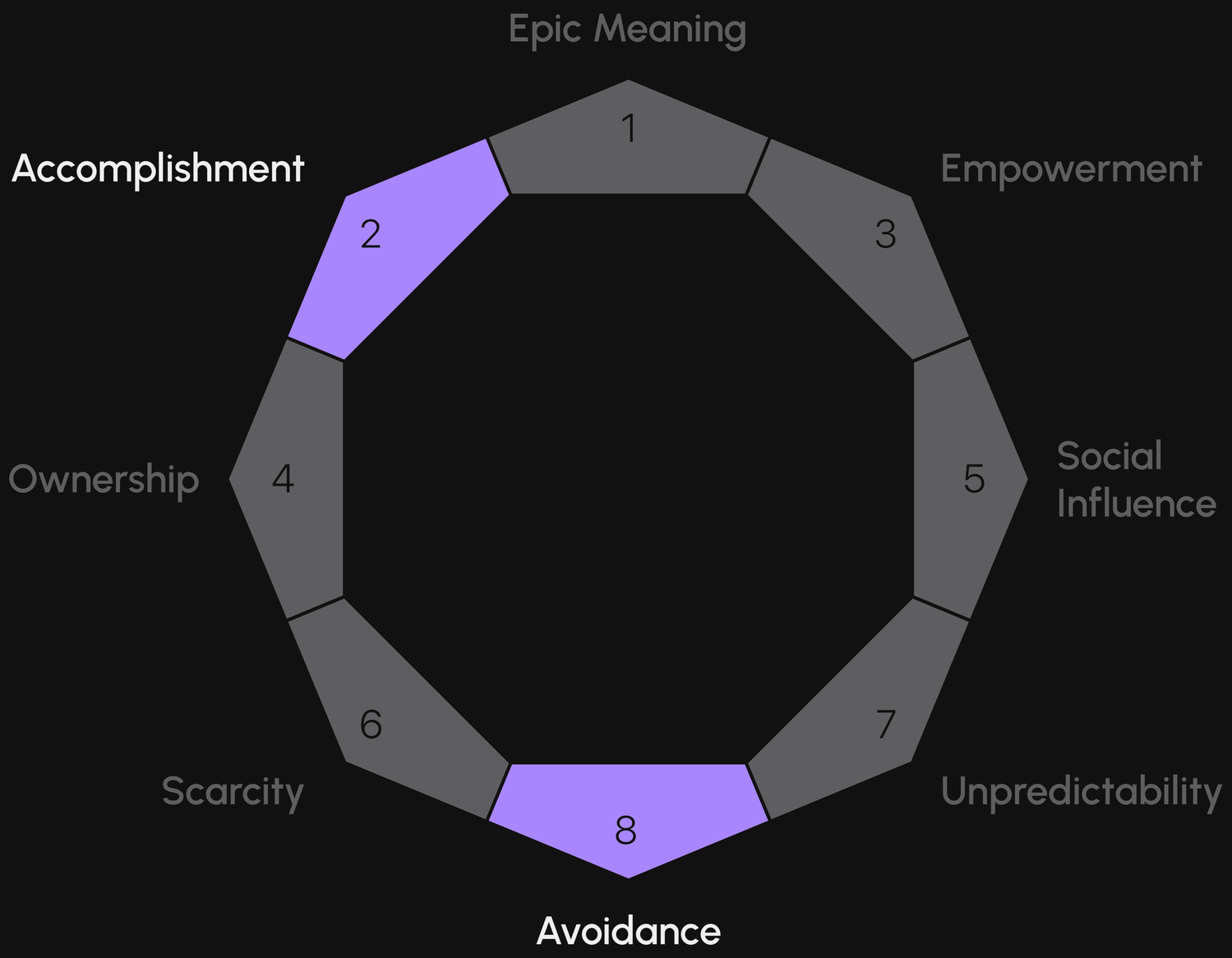
There are 8 key drives that motivate our behavior

- Epic Meaning, Accomplishment, Empowerment,
  Ownership, Social Influence, Scarcity, Unpredictability, Avoidance

[Octalysis Framework]

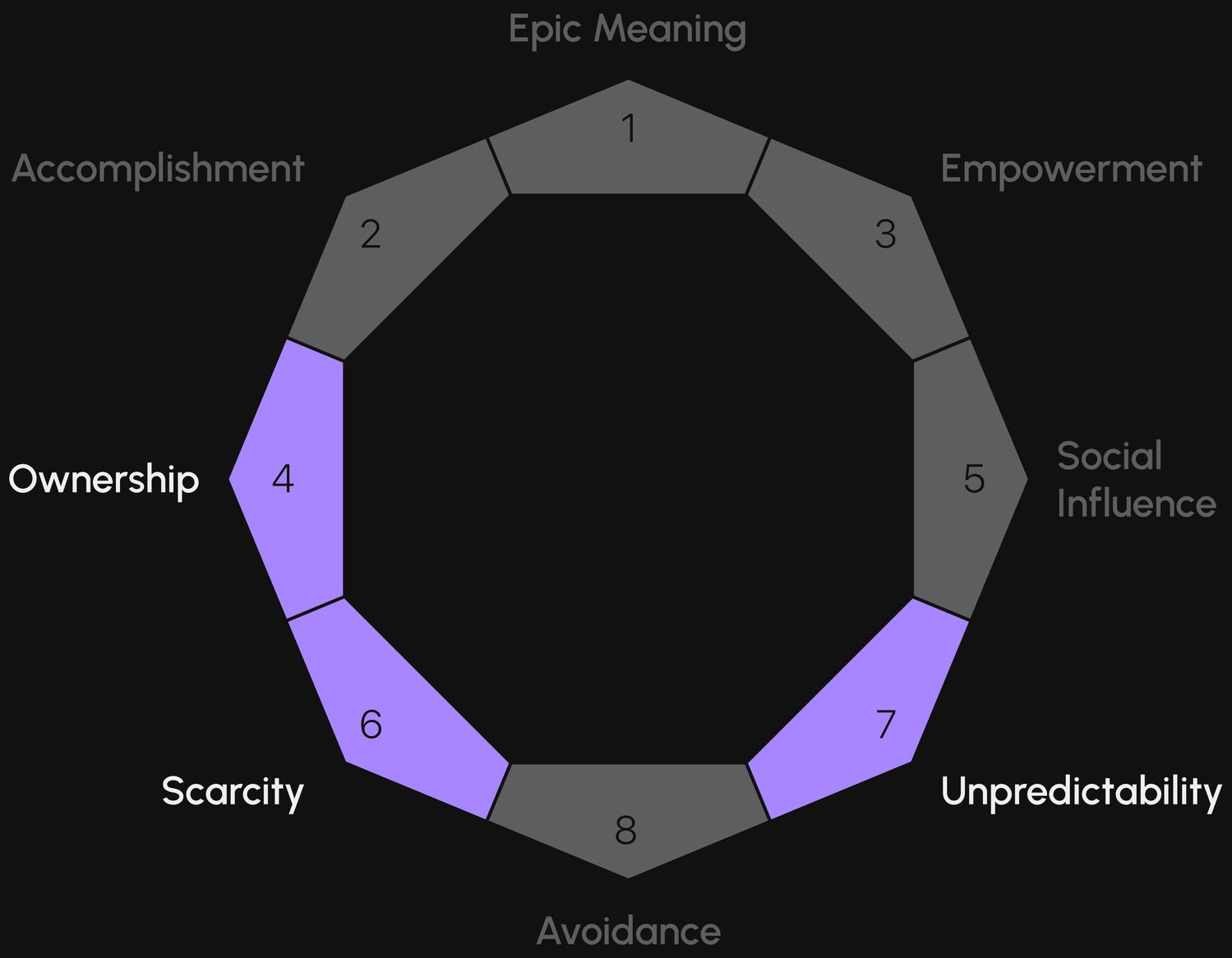


[Octalysis Framework]



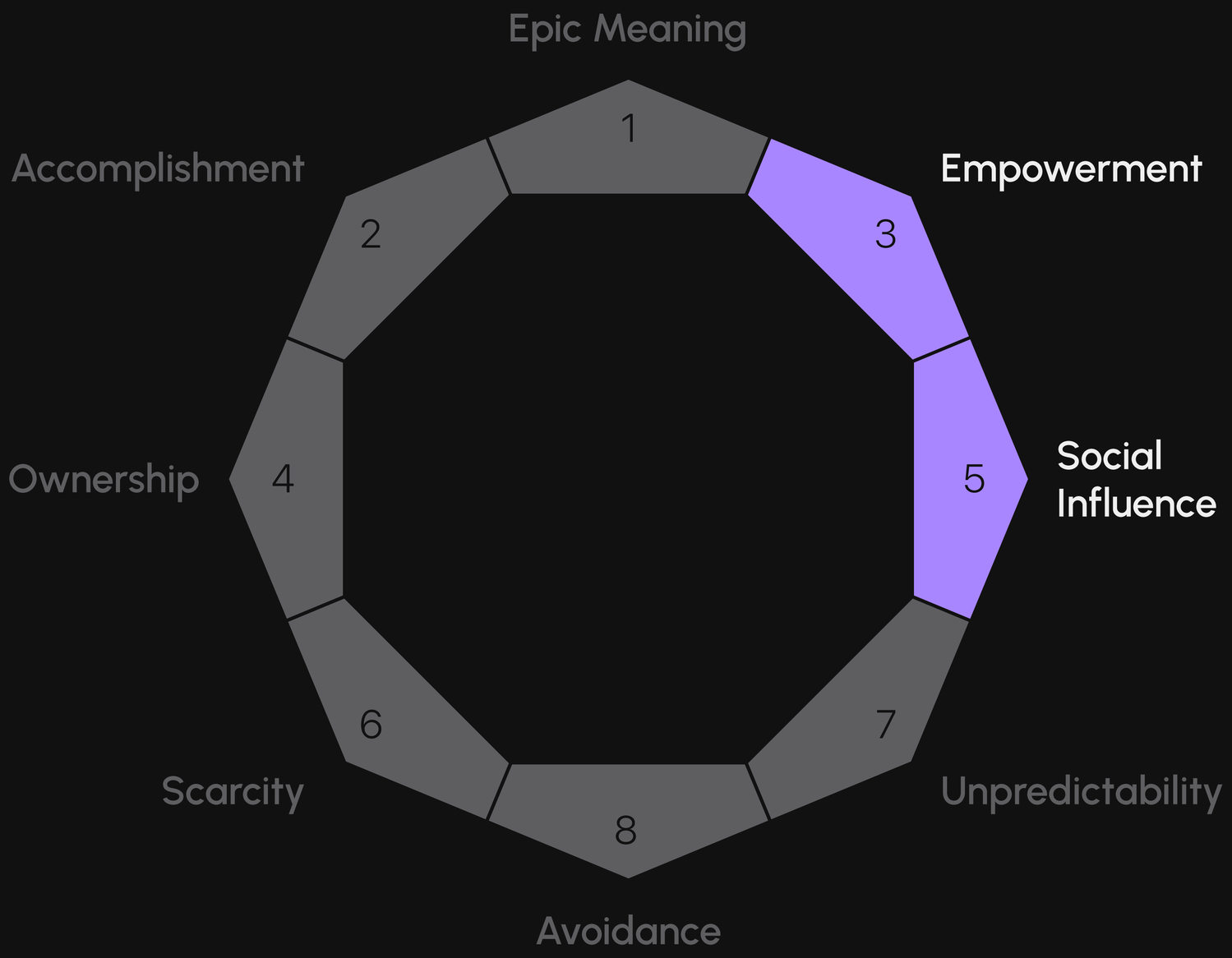
Streaks drive engagement through Accomplishment and Avoidance

[Octalysis Framework]



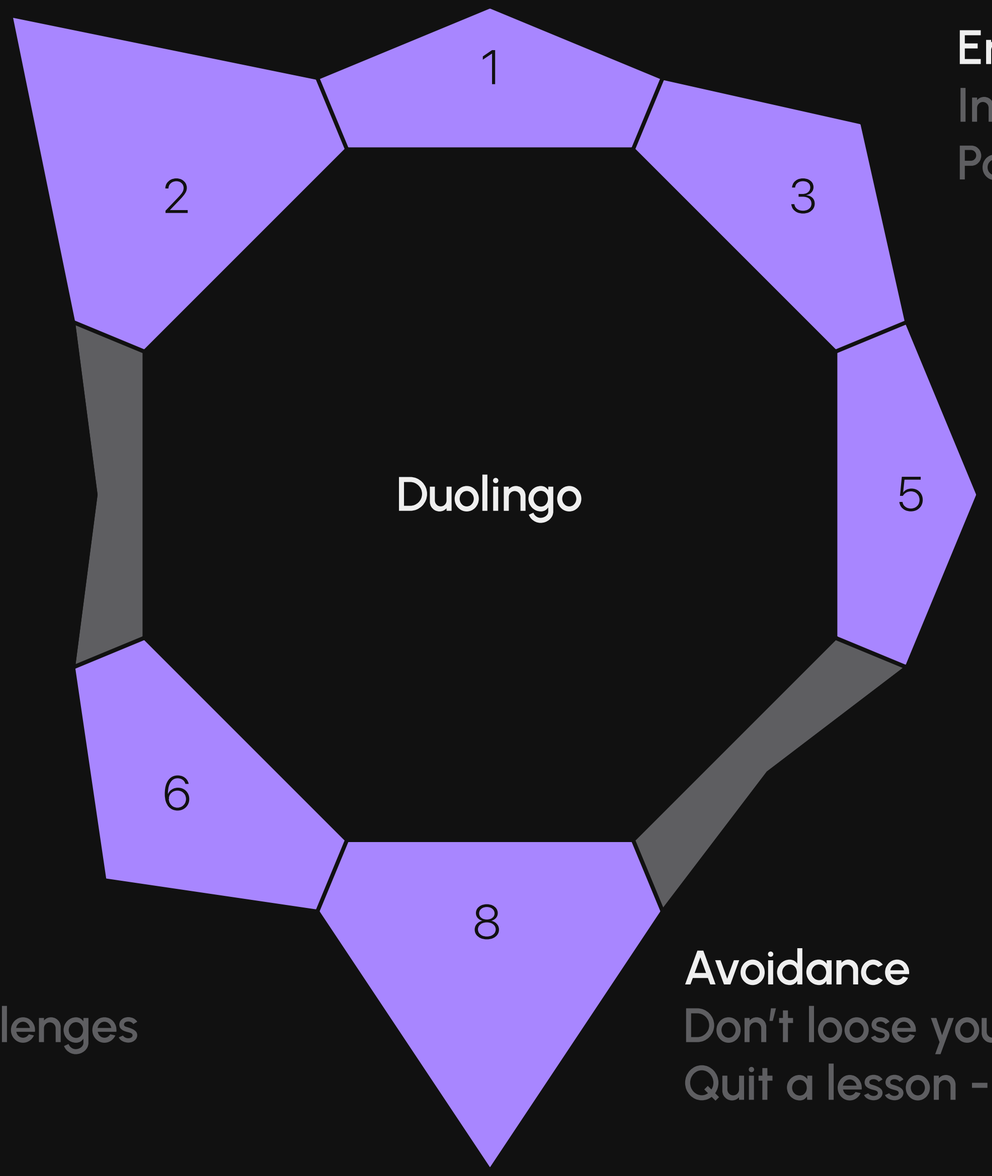
Loot boxes drive engagement through Ownership, Scarcity and Unpredictability

[Octalysis Framework]



Chess drive engagement through Empowerment and Social Influence

[Octalysis Framework]



Epic Meaning
Mastering a language

Accomplishment
Bite-sized lessons
XP
Streaks
Lesson Roadmap
Quests

Empowerment
Immediate feedback
Power-ups during a lesson

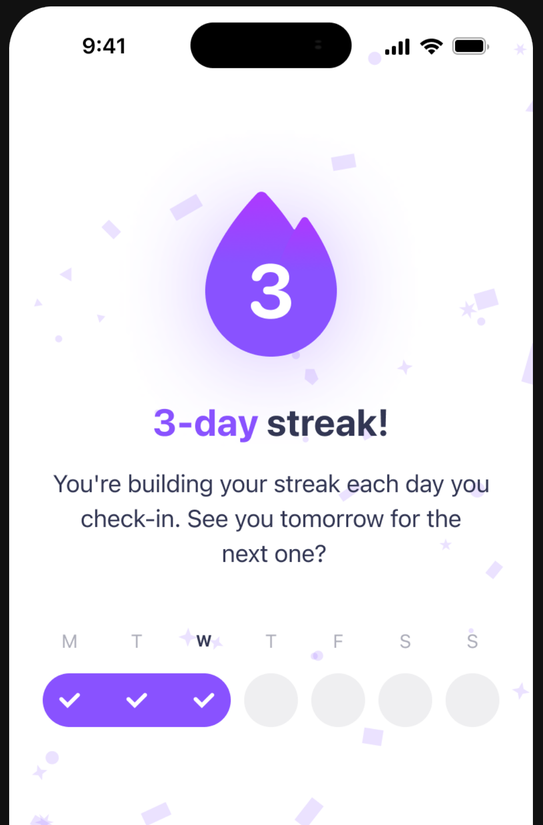
Social Influence
Leaderboards
Streak
Friend challenges
Characters

Scarcity
Limited energy to complete lessons
Time-limited challenges

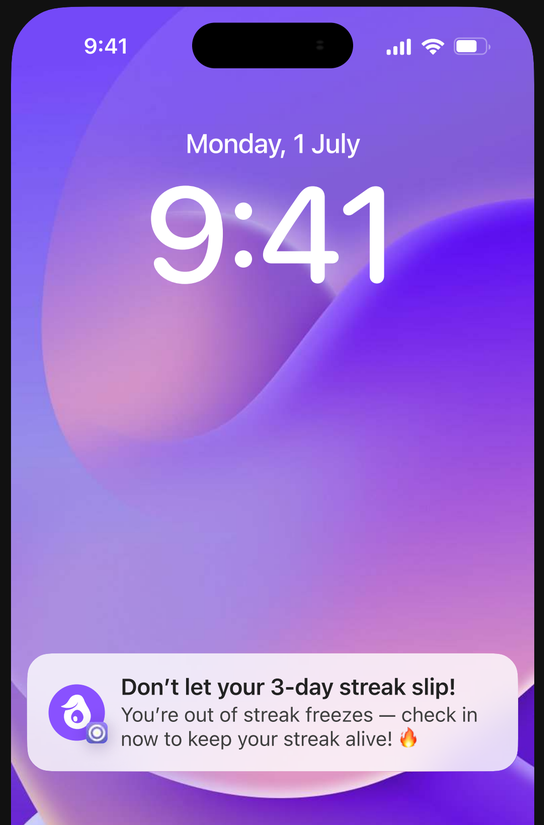
Avoidance
Don't loose your Streak
Quit a lesson - loose XP

Streaks

Streaks work by creating a sense of progress and loss aversion



Simple proxy for progress when the end goal is distant

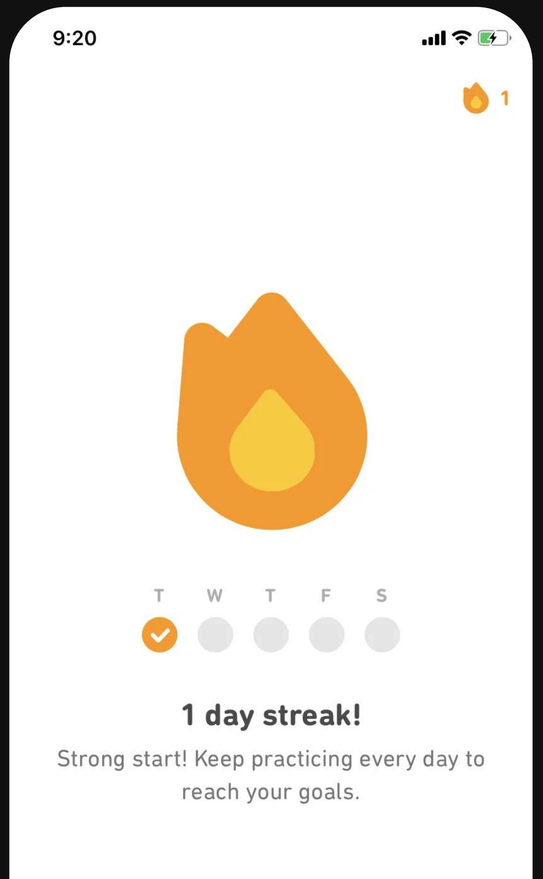


People hate losing what they’ve already built — avoiding that is what keeps people going

Streak Action is the most important choice you make

- **Simple** The simpler the action the easier it is for users to keep the Streak going
- **Meaningful** Users should feel like they've actually accomplished something
- **Business-aligned** Tie streaks to the action that matters most for retention

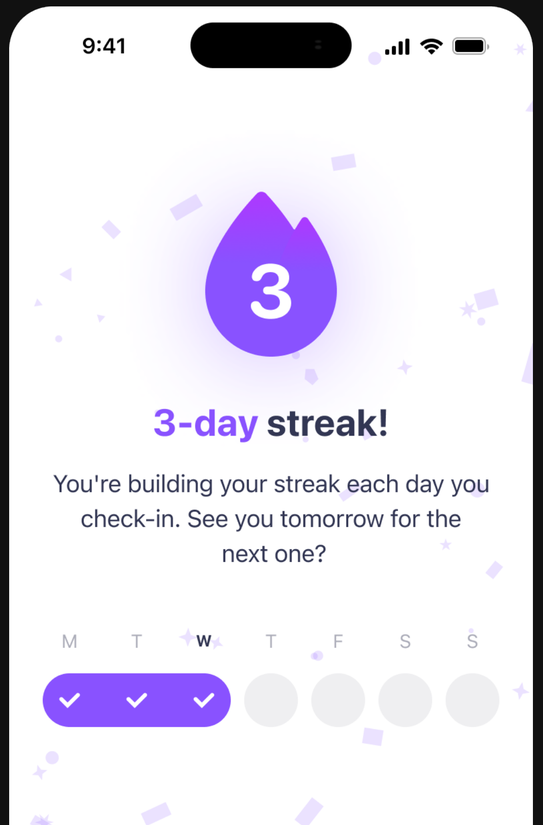
Streak Action is the most important choice you make



Simple

Duolingo switched from “reach daily goal” to “complete one lesson”

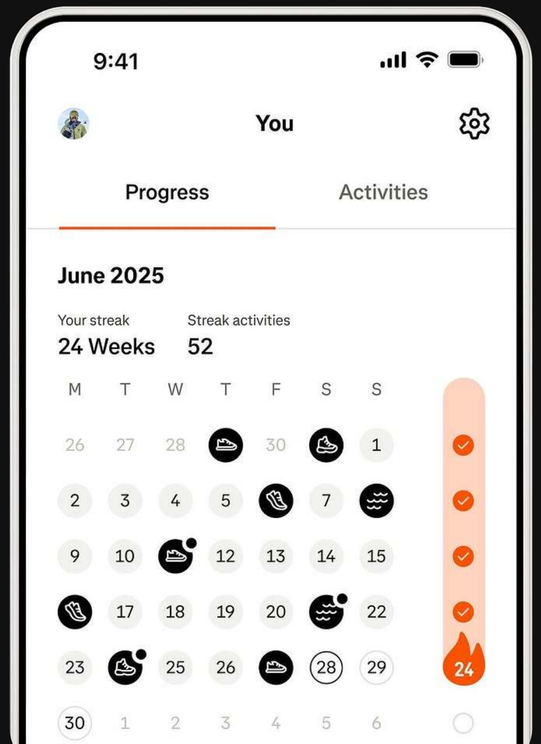
Streak Action is the most important choice you make



Meaningful

Logging in < Checking in < Logging a meal

Streak Action is the most important choice you make



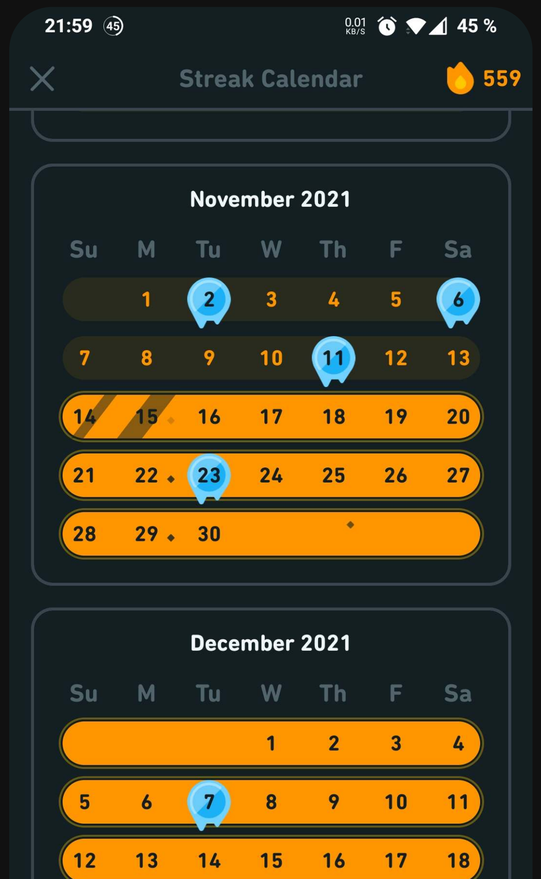
Business-aligned

For Strava it’s 1 activity per week

Start with a simple system then layer on additional mechanics

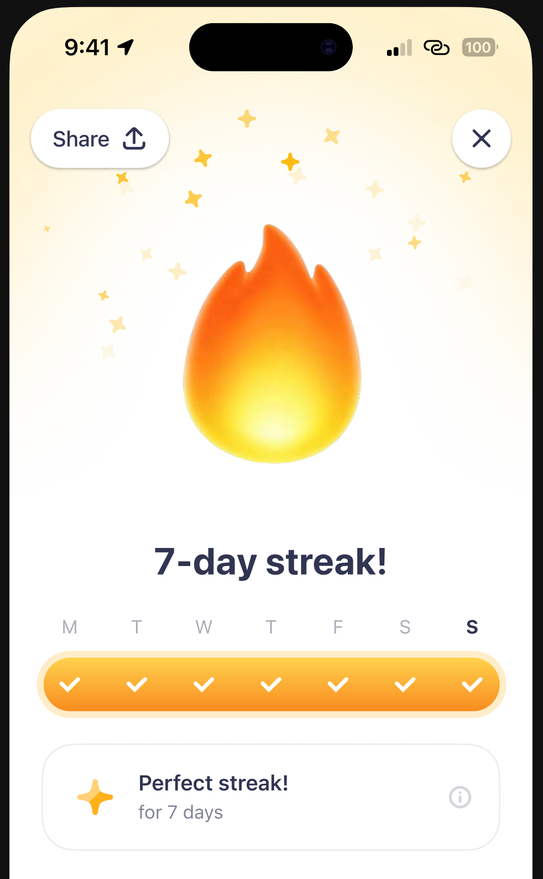
Streak Freezes help users keep their streak going

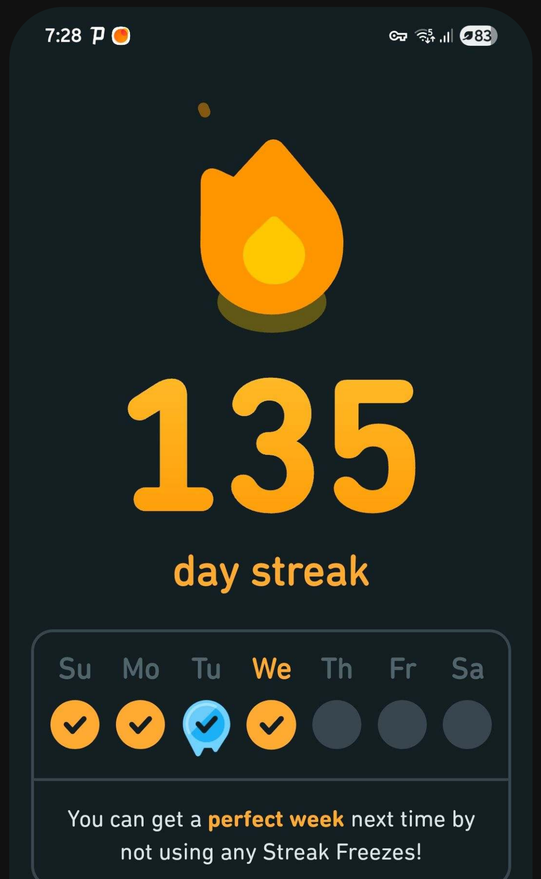




Loosing a Streak is demotivating so you should help users save it

Perfect Streak creates additional motivation for engaged users

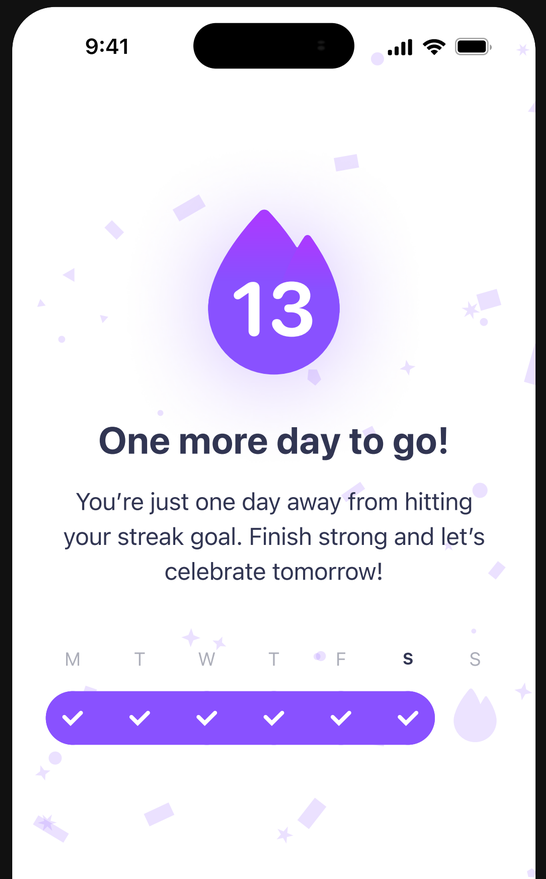




Perfect Streak mechanic is about having a Streak without using Freezes

Streak Goal helps create a conscious commitment

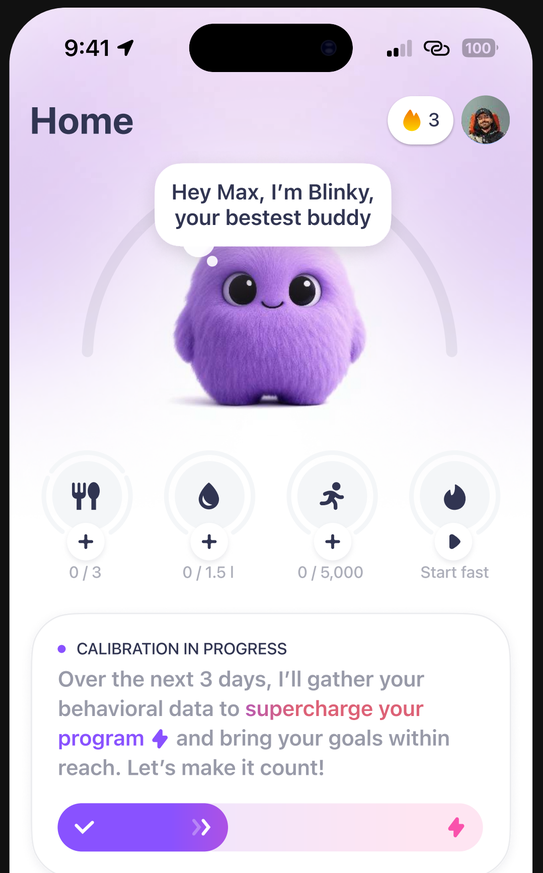




Keep users accountable for their goal

Mascots

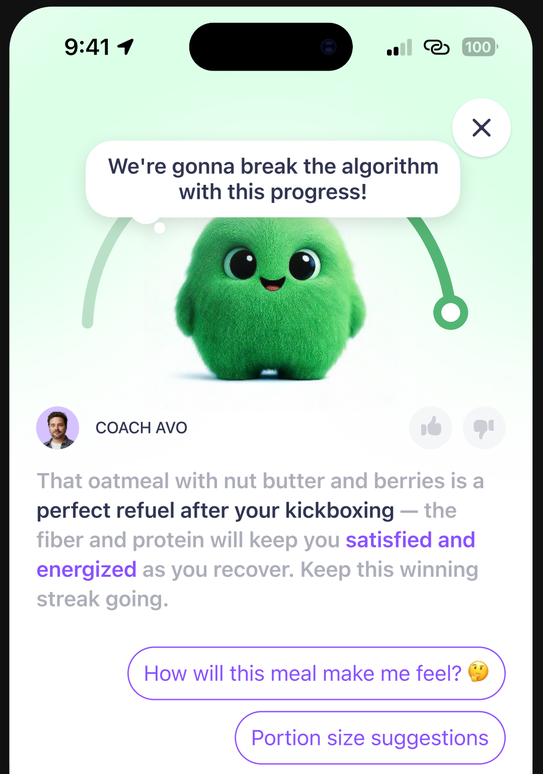
It’s crazy until it’s not



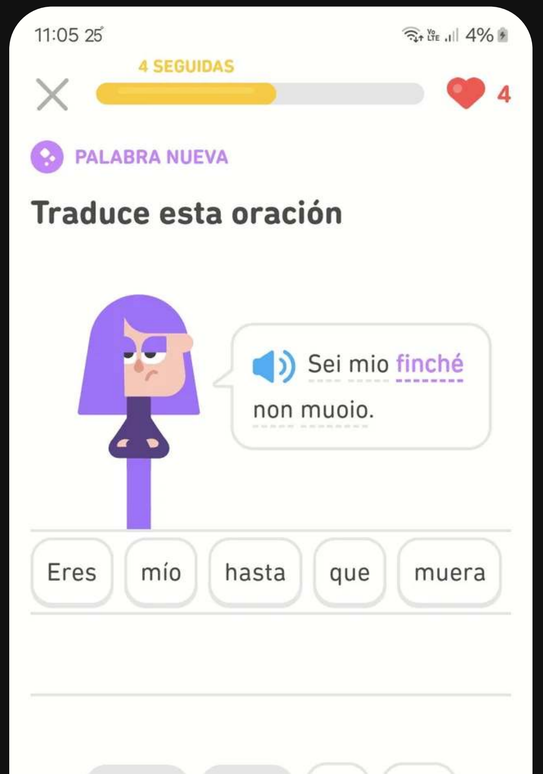
- Core Audience: Midlife women on a weight loss journey

Mascots bring emotions to otherwise utilitarian products

Simple



Duolingo



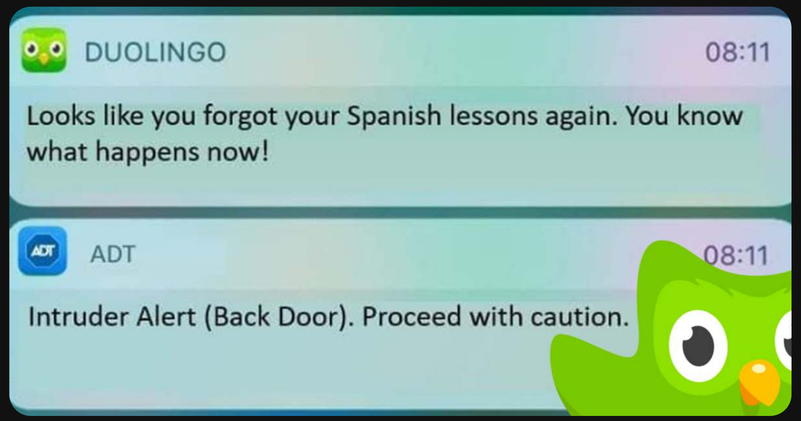
Headspace



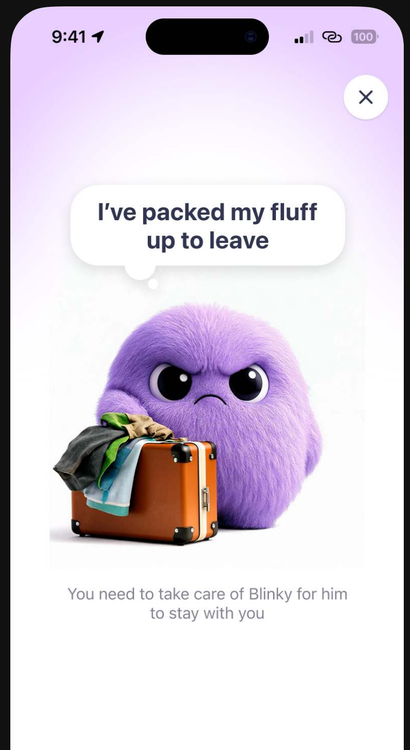
Grok



Give your mascot a distinctive character



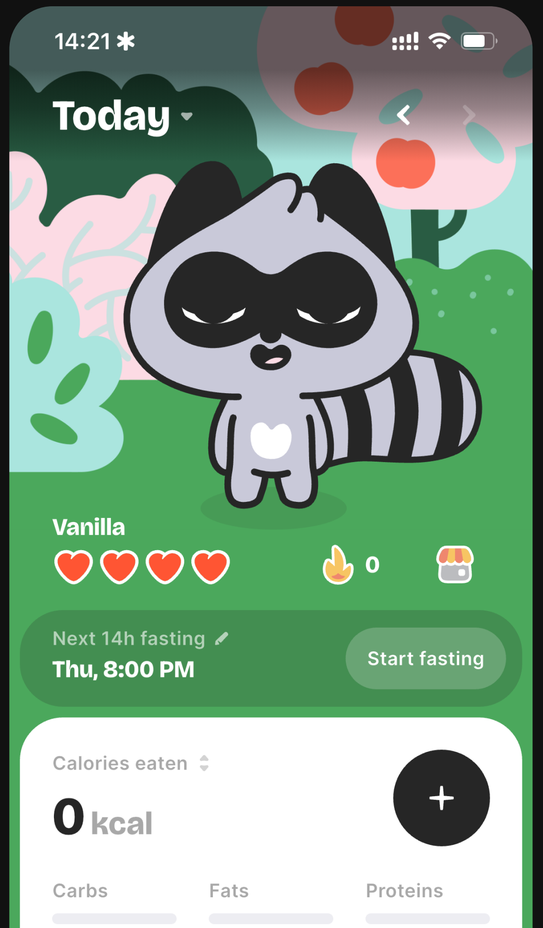
The Duolingo owl has no morals — it will do whatever it takes to make you complete a lesson.



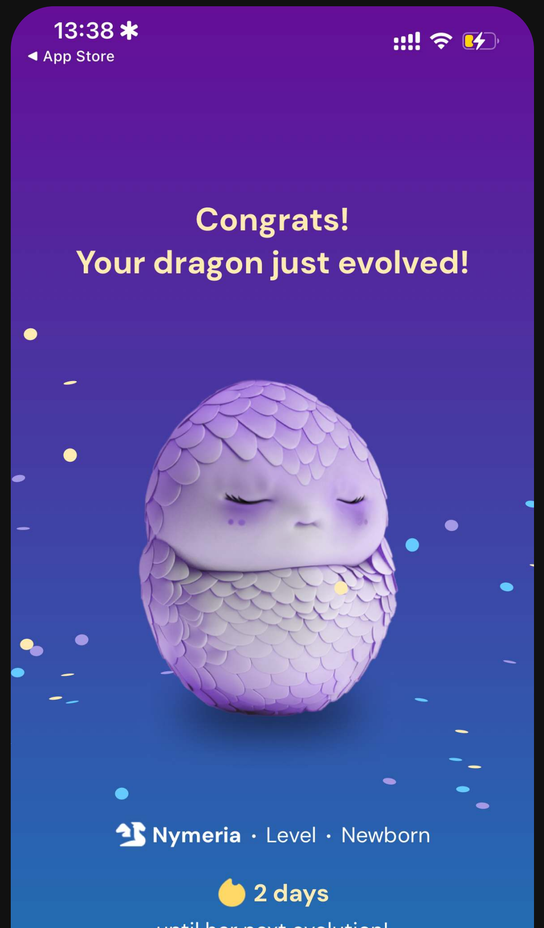
Blinky is emotionally unstable and a drama queen

Drive engagement with your mascot

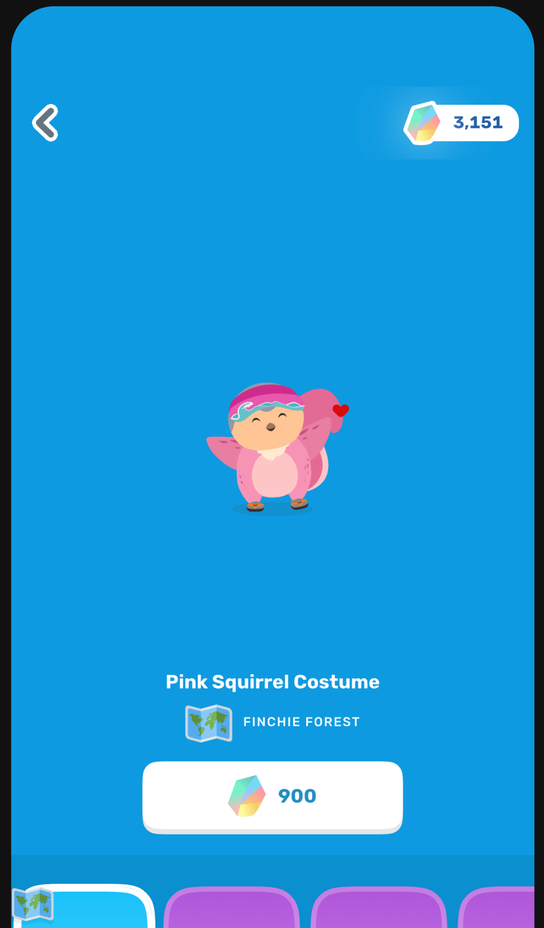
Tamagotchi (BitePall)



Evolution (Musa)



Finch (Customisation)



Be prepared that it's not for everyone

❤️

- Cutest thing ever
- Motivating
- Love it

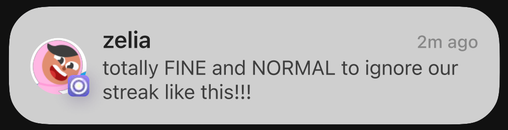
💔

- I'm not a child
- Not for me
- Can I turn it off?

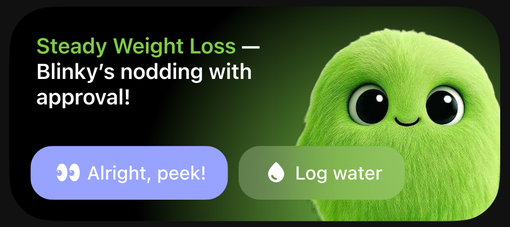
UX principles that make gamification actually drive engagement

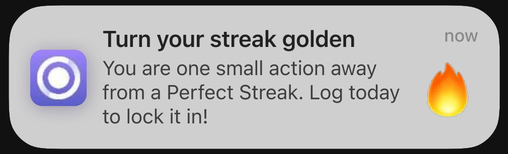
Bring gamification outside the app

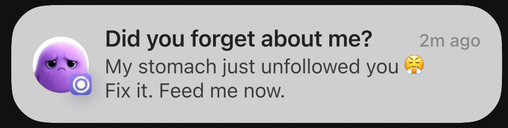


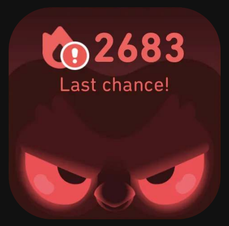


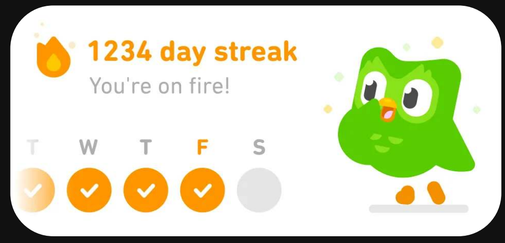




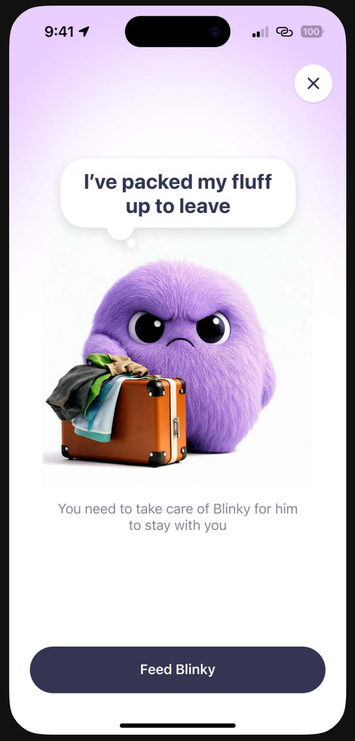








Make gamification emotional



The last couple days I've been sick and didn't enter anything in the app, I had to share blinky with you ... I'm still cracking up over this picture!

772 216

Omggoodness!! Sorryyy Lil Buddiee eeshhh! PTSD triggered a lil ahahaha AM MOVVVING!!!

64 18

Bruh!! 134 days in a row...
I've checked in, consistently ✅
Logged water ✅
Logged meals ✅
Started my fast, on time ✅

Yet this little so and so acting like I left it at Walmart. If DCFS shows up, just know this was all a misunderstanding. 🤣

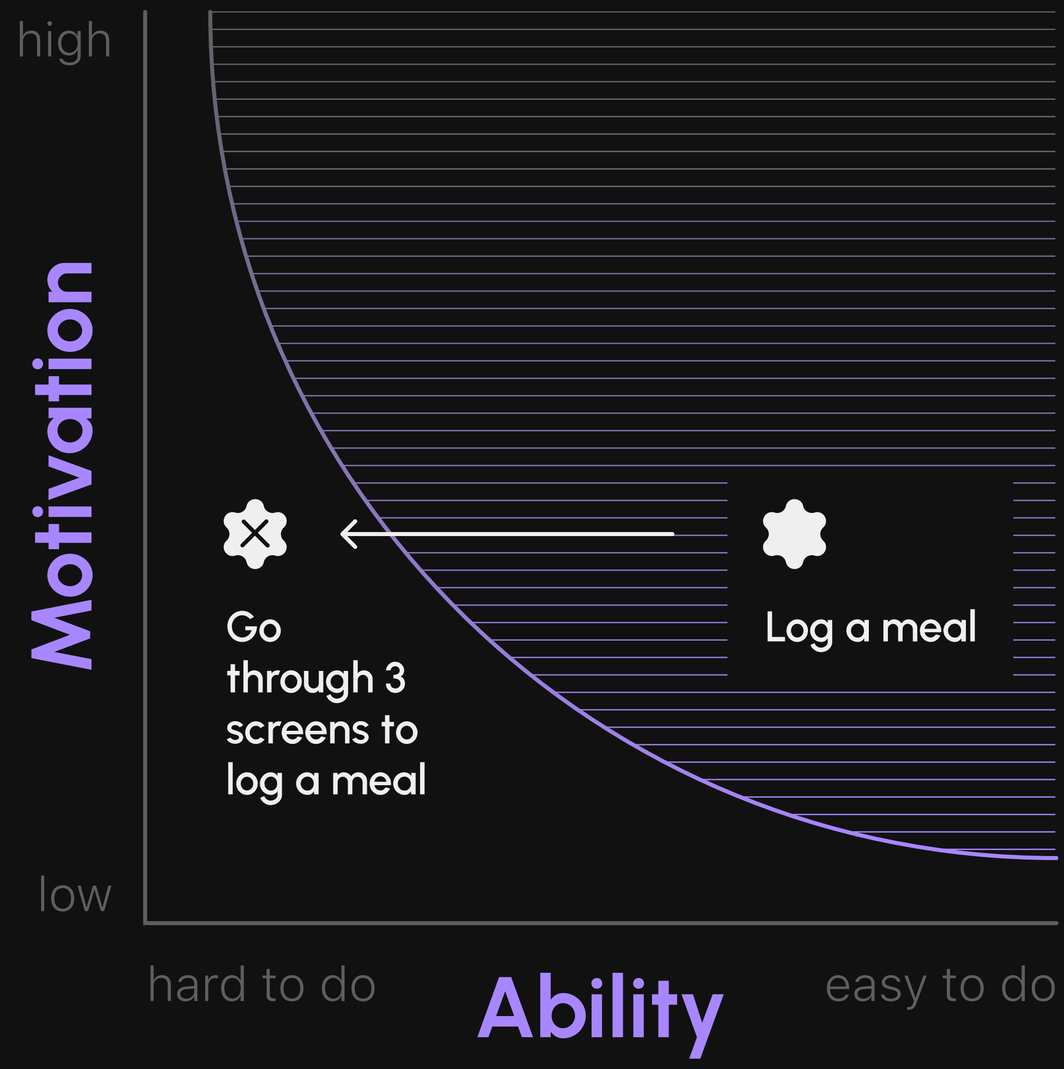
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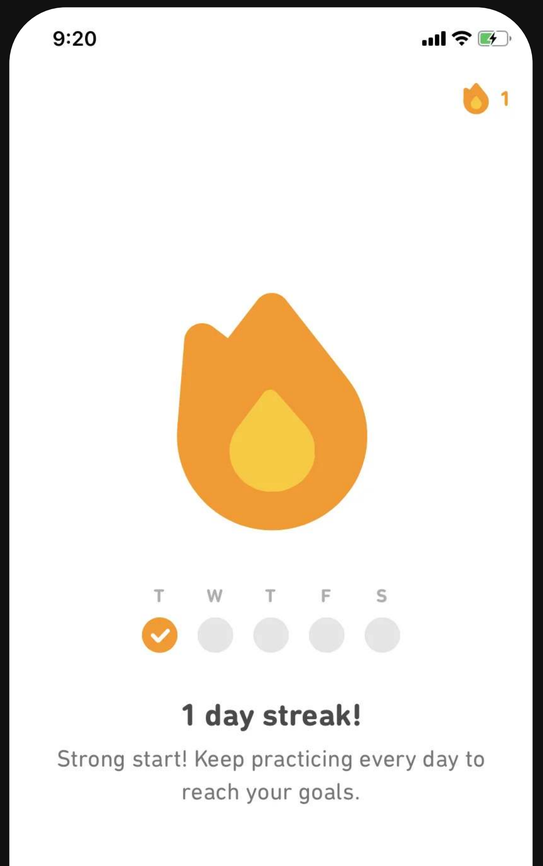
This is the cutest thing!! Haha ..... I've since checked in because I couldn't stand to see that pouting face. I like the smiles better. 🤣😂

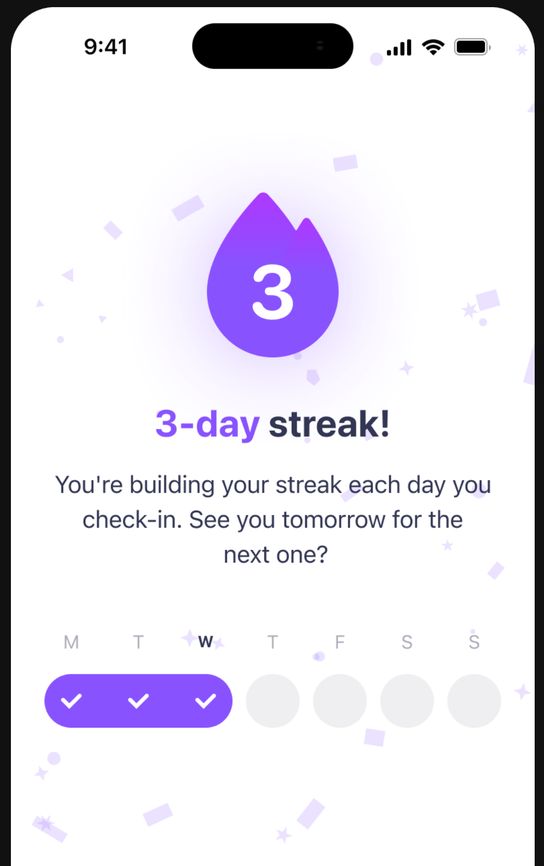
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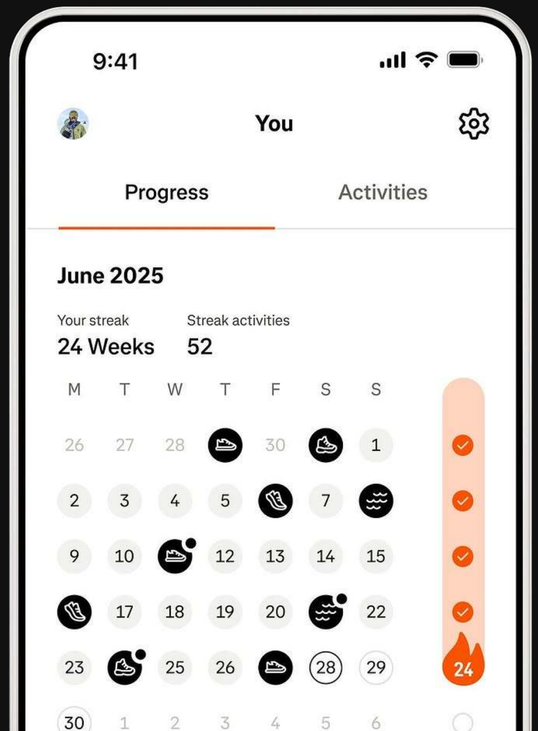
Do not increase complexity with gamification



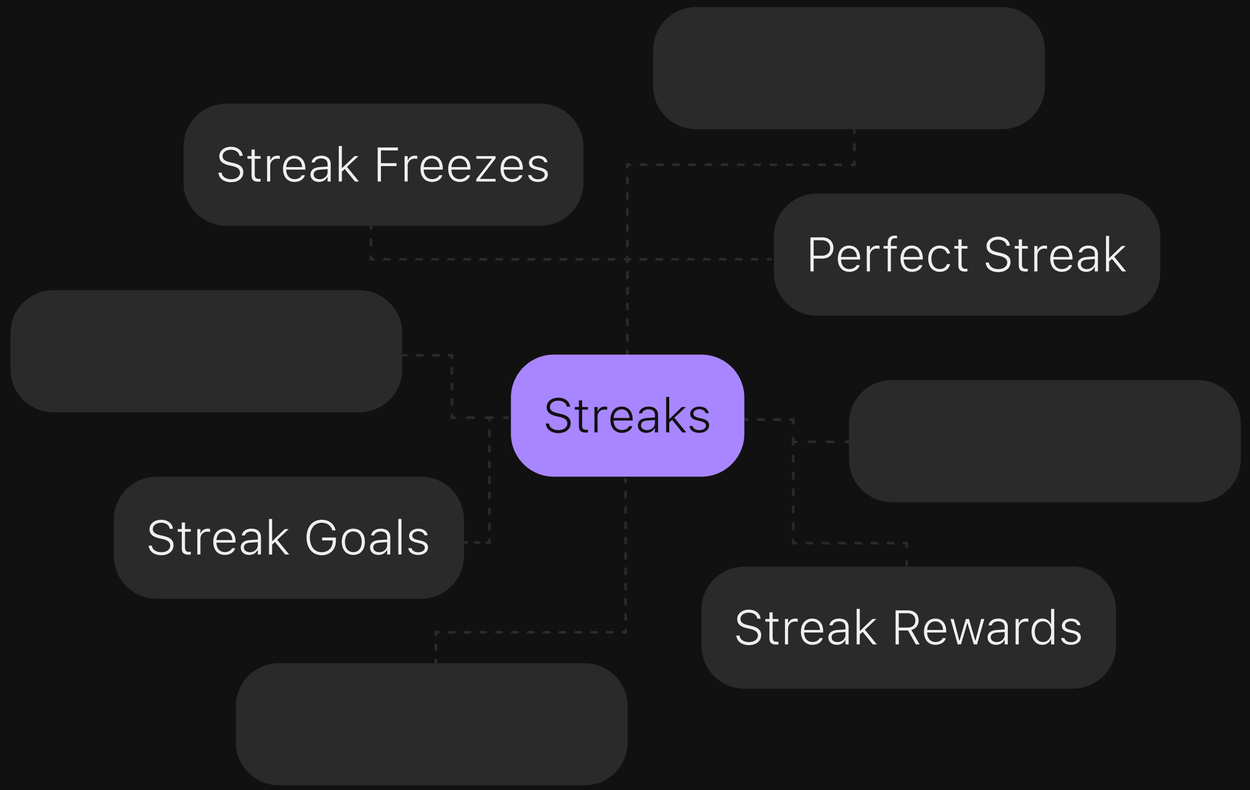
Build gamification on your core actions



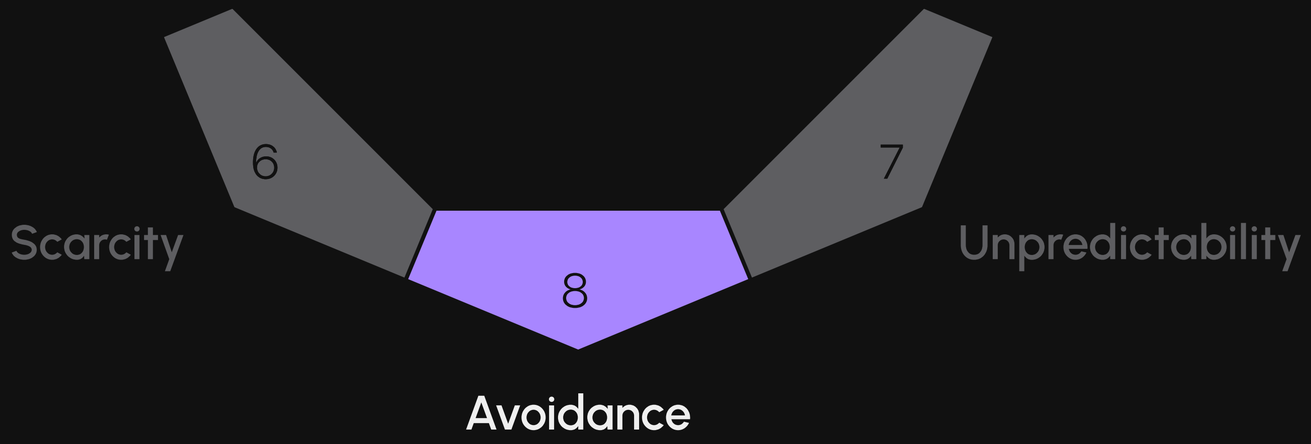


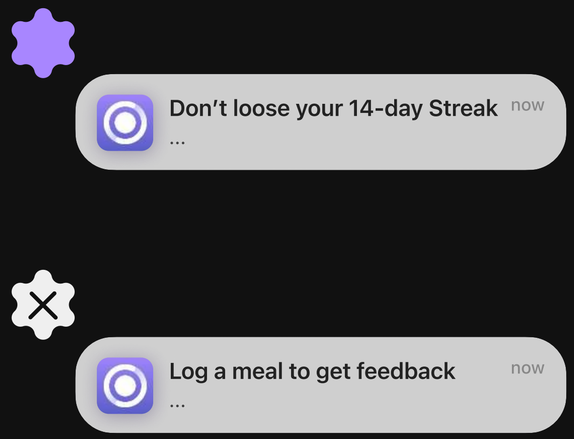


Start simple then layer on mechanics



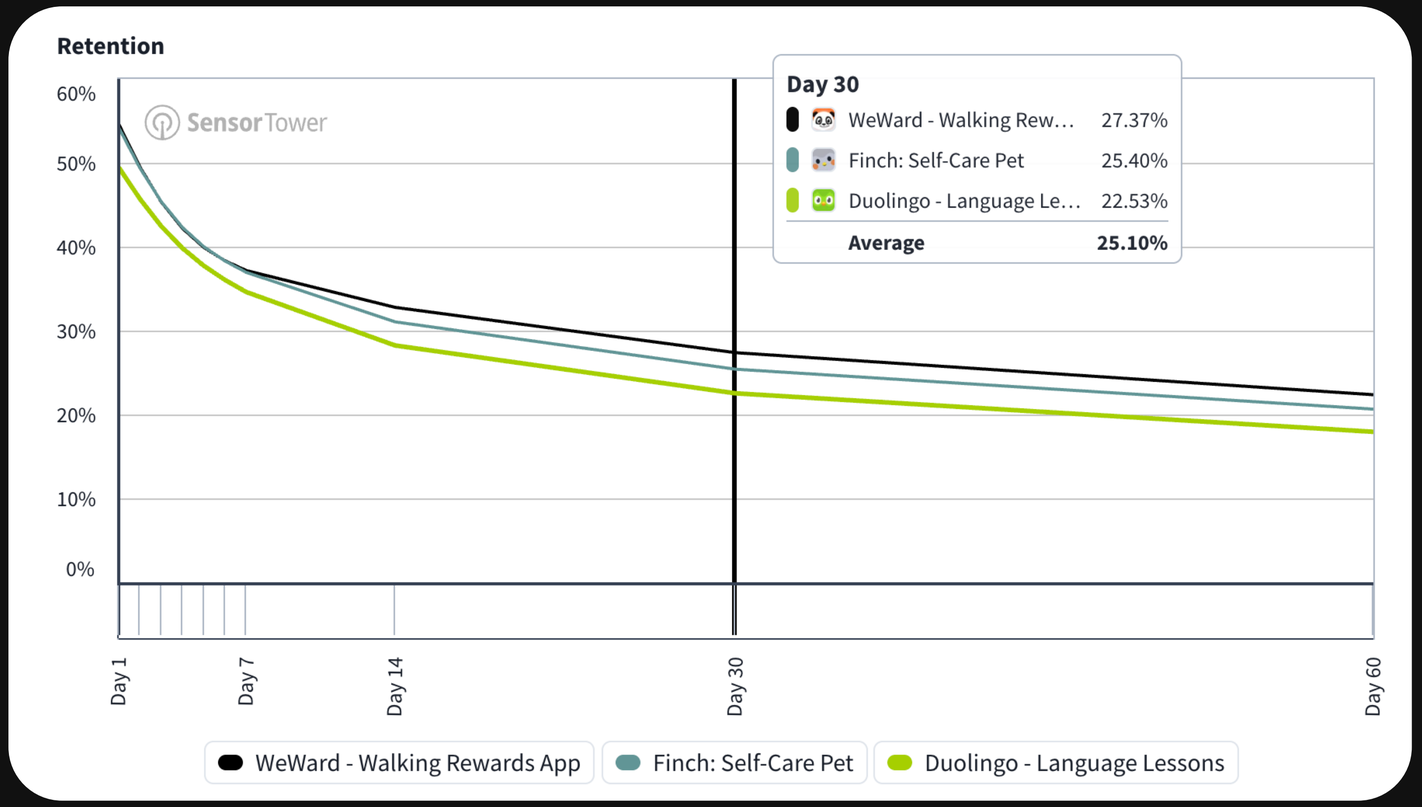
Always remember what is the psychological driver





Let's sum it up

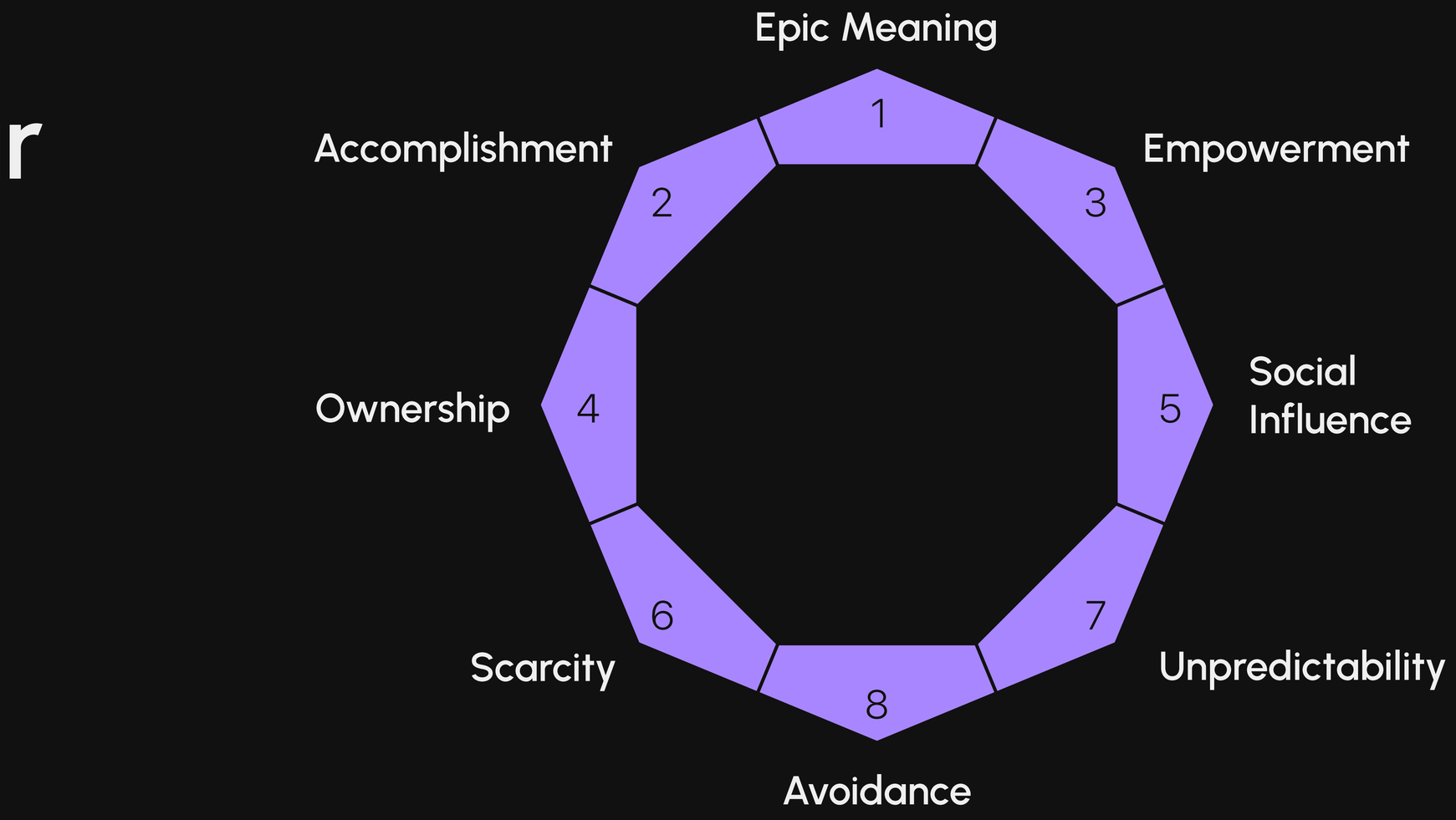
Gamification drives engagement



Gamification drives engagement through motivation



There are 8 key drives that motivate our behavior



Key principles that make gamification actually drive engagement

1. Bring gamification outside the app
2. Make gamification emotional
3. Do not increase complexity with gamification
4. Build gamification on your core actions
5. Start simple then layer on mechanics
6. Always remember what is the psychological driver