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Article

A Measurement Framework for Serious Games Addressing Food Loss and Waste (SG-FLW)

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Abstract

Serious games and gamified interventions are increasingly being proposed as tools to reduce household food waste, yet the field lacks standardized methods to assess whether these interventions produce measurable behavioral and environmental impact. Despite the European Union (EU) Waste Framework Directive's call for comparable food waste monitoring, most studies report only knowledge gains or attitudinal shifts. This paper presents SG-FLW, a measurement framework that evaluates the evidence quality of interventions targeting food loss and waste across five dimensions: Baseline measurement, Knowledge & attitudinal assessment, Direct behavioral change, Environmental conversion, and Persistence, each on a 0–3 ordinal scale. We demonstrate the framework through worked coding examples and apply it to thirty-five interventions (seven games, ten serious games, and eighteen gamification studies) drawn from two complementary reviews and targeted search. Results reveal a persistent complementary measurement gap: twenty-five interventions assess knowledge or attitudinal outcomes but rarely measure actual behavior, while the five achieving Moderate certainty through objective behavioral measurement (including waste weighing, audits, and consumption proxies) all neglect cognitive assessment. No study achieves environmental conversion, and only one includes post-intervention follow-up. SG-FLW provides a transparent, reproducible tool aligned with EU reporting standards that can be applied both retrospectively (to evaluate published studies) and prospectively (to guide measurement planning during intervention design). By making measurement gaps visible, the framework directs future research toward stronger evidence of impact.

Keywords: serious games; food loss and waste; gamification; behavioral change; knowledge assessment; measurement framework; evidence quality; GRADE; SG-FLW

1. Introduction

Serious games and gamified digital interventions are increasingly proposed as tools to reduce household food waste [1,2]. However, the field suffers from a fundamental measurement paradox: interventions that claim to change behavior rarely measure behavior, and those that measure behavior rarely quantify environmental impact. Most studies evaluate only knowledge gains or attitudinal shifts, leaving actual effectiveness as an open question [3,4]. Prior reviews have catalogued existing interventions and their design characteristics [5,6], but no standardized tool exist to systematically assess the quality of evidence these interventions produce.

Food loss and food waste (FLW), though often conflated, refer to different stages of the supply chain: food *loss* occurs during production, post-harvest handling, and processing, while food *waste* arises at the retail and consumer levels [7,8]. The European Union (EU) Waste Framework Directive mandates that Member States develop prevention programs with comparable monitoring, and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre has published evaluation frameworks for assessing

the performance of food waste prevention actions [9,10]. Yet most digital interventions have not been aligned with these reporting standards, and food waste is measured in inconsistent units (kilograms, packages, or self-reported estimates) when it is measured at all [1,11]. SG-FLW focuses on the consumer-facing stage where serious games and gamification operate, but its measurement logic applies across the supply chain.

This measurement gap extends beyond food waste. Hognon et al. [12] showed that Climate Fresk evaluations are predominantly qualitative, rely on small non-randomized samples, and include no long-term follow-up; they argue that evaluation must also consider cognitive and attitudinal processes, not only behavioral outcomes. The same pattern holds for food waste: studies evaluated without behavior-change frameworks risk overestimating impact by focusing on immediate or self-reported outcomes [12], and gamification-driven engagement may not sustain change once novelty effects subside [13].

Existing frameworks each address part of this problem but none covers the full measurement chain from baseline to persistence. GRADE [14] assesses evidence certainty but is designed for clinical trials, not behavioral interventions. RE-AIM [15] includes maintenance but does not grade baseline or environmental conversion. Kirkpatrick [16] sequences learning before behavior but provide no waste-specific measurement criteria. Typical serious game evaluation rubrics assess engagement and learning outcomes without connecting them to environmental impact. Appraisal checklists (TIDieR, Cochrane Risk of Bias, MMAT) address reporting completeness, internal validity, or mixed-methods quality, but none grades domain-specific measurement rigor across the full chain. SG-FLW (Serious Games for Food Loss & Waste) differs by integrating these concerns into a single five-dimensional measurement chain, synthesizing principles from eight sources (CONSORT/GRADE, Behavior Change Technique Taxonomy v1 (BCTTv1) [17], Kirkpatrick, Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) [18], Cohen's *d*, ISO 14040–14044, RE-AIM, CONSORT-SPI [19]). It evaluates the *quality of evidence* that an intervention reduces food waste, not whether the game is “good” or “engaging.”

The framework is designed for researchers, reviewers, and practitioners working with digital interventions targeting food waste, including serious games, gamified mobile applications, interactive installations, and dashboard-based campaigns. SG-FLW supports two complementary modes of use: *retrospectively*, to evaluate the evidence quality of published studies (as demonstrated in this paper); and *prospectively*, to guide the design of new interventions by setting target measurement levels before development begins. A research team designing a serious game can use the dimensional profiles to plan their evaluation strategy, for example committing to $B2/K3/D2/E1/L2$ as a target profile, thereby embedding rigorous measurement into the study design rather than treating it as an afterthought. Note that SG-FLW evaluates *measurement quality*, not intervention quality: a high profile means strong evidence exists, while a low profile indicates evidence is missing, not that the intervention failed. The contributions of this paper are: (i) defining the five SG-FLW dimensions and their 0–3 ordinal scales; (ii) specifying four derived indices for quantitative comparison; and (iii) applying the framework to thirty-five interventions, revealing a systematic complementary measurement gap (no study achieves both $K \geq 2$ and $D \geq 2$).

This paper is organized in 7 sections. Section 2 presents the SG-FLW framework architecture and its five dimensions. Section 3 defines the four derived calculable indices. Section 4 describes the coding protocol. Section 5 presents the evidence certainty classification. Section 6 applies the framework to thirty-five interventions and reports reliability and robustness analyses. Finally, Section 7 discusses implications and concludes.

2. Framework Architecture

SG-FLW evaluates five dimensions, each rated on a 0–3 ordinal scale following a causal logic chain: an intervention must first establish a Baseline (what was waste before?), then assess Knowledge & attitudinal outcomes (did people learn?), demonstrate Direct Behavioral change (did people act differently?), ideally convert that change into Environmental impact (what does it mean for the

planet?), and finally assess whether the change Persists over time (abbreviated L for Longitudinal, the measurement method). Higher scores indicate greater measurement rigor and lower susceptibility to bias. A 0–3 ordinal scale was chosen to balance coder reliability with field-wide applicability, matching the practical evidence tiers observed across the heterogeneous literature; finer granularity (e.g., splitting B3 into calibrated vs. uncalibrated) reduced agreement in pilot coding without adding discriminative value. This causal chain also serves as a design guide: when used prospectively, each dimension prompts researchers to decide *before development* what level of measurement rigor they will implement at each stage.

2.1. B — Baseline Measurement Quality

Measures the rigor of pre-intervention food waste quantification, grounded in CONSORT and GRADE. Without a baseline, waste reduction cannot be calculated; self-reported baselines introduce recall and social desirability bias. For indices that combine baseline and post measures (e.g., Waste Reduction Rate (WRR)), baseline and outcome must be commensurate in unit and aggregation level.

2.2. K — Knowledge & Attitudinal Assessment

Captures whether and how the intervention assessed cognitive, attitudinal, or awareness outcomes, the intermediate processes that precede behavioral change. Grounded in Kirkpatrick's training evaluation hierarchy [16], where Levels 1–2 (reaction and learning) must precede Level 3 (behavior), and in the Theory of Planned Behavior [18], which posits that attitudes and perceived behavioral control shape intentions before action. Many serious games primarily target these precursors; K captures the quality of that assessment independently of whether behavior was measured. K and D are operationally distinct: K evaluates assessments of what participants *know, believe, or intend* (e.g., a food storage quiz, an attitude scale), while D evaluates measurements of what participants *do* (e.g., weighed plate waste, observed sorting behavior). A study may score K3/D0 or K0/D3; neither dimension implies the other. Because K grades measurement rigor rather than construct type, it groups factual knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy into a single scale; this trades construct-level precision for cross-study comparability, a limitation most relevant at K2–K3 where different TPB determinants carry different predictive weight for behavior.

2.3. D — Direct Behavior Measurement

Captures how behavioral outcomes are recorded, grounded in BCTTv1 and Cohen's *d*. Knowledge is not behavior: quiz scores and self-reported intentions correlate weakly with actual food waste behavior [18].

2.4. E — Environmental Conversion

Assesses whether behavioral change is translated into environmental impact metrics, grounded in LCA methodology (ISO 14040–14044). Reducing 1 kg of meat waste has a fundamentally different impact than reducing 1 kg of bread waste; without conversion, behavioral data cannot inform sustainability policy.

2.5. L — Persistence (Longitudinal Measurement)

Evaluates whether behavioral effects are assessed over time after the intervention ends, drawn from RE-AIM's Maintenance dimension: "long-term effects ≥ 6 months after the most recent intervention contact" [15].

3. Calculable Indices

When minimum dimensional requirements are met, SG-FLW enables four derived indices computed from the study data.

WRR — Waste Reduction Rate (requires $B \geq 2, D \geq 3$):

$$WRR = \frac{W_{pre} - W_{post}}{W_{pre}} \quad (1)$$

Proportion of waste eliminated (0–1.0). Pre and post measurements must be commensurate in unit and aggregation level.

BII — Behavioral Impact Index (individual-level; requires $B \geq 3, D \geq 3$):

$$BII = d = \frac{M_{pre} - M_{post}}{SD_{pooled}} \quad (2)$$

Standardized effect size (Cohen [20]; 0.2/0.5/0.8 = small/medium/large). Positive values indicate waste reduction; apply Hedges' correction when $N < 20$.

EII — Environmental Impact Index (requires $E \geq 1, D \geq 3$):

$$EII = \sum_{c=1}^k \Delta W_c \times EF_c \quad (3)$$

where ΔW_c represents the waste reduction (kg) for food category c and EF_c is its emission factor (kg CO₂eq/kg). EII requires D3; behavioral proxies (D2) are insufficient unless converted to mass units in-study.

PI — Persistence Index (requires $L \geq 3, D \geq 2$):

$$PI(t) = \frac{\Delta W(t)}{\Delta W(t_0)} \quad (4)$$

Ratio of the behavioral effect at time t to the initial post-intervention effect. With ≥ 3 time points, the decay constant λ can be estimated and the behavioral half-life $T_{1/2} = \ln 2 / \lambda$ computed.¹

4. Coding Protocol

SG-FLW coding follows three principles adapted from CONSORT-SPI and BCTTv1: (1) *Code what is reported*, not what is implied: if a study does not explicitly report weighing of food waste, do not infer it; (2) *Independent dimensions*: each dimension is coded independently, so B0/K2/D3/E0/L0 is a valid profile; (3) *Conservative coding*: when evidence is ambiguous, code the lower level.

For each dimension, coders follow a decision path: first determine whether the relevant data exist (score 0 if absent), then classify its quality level (1–3) based on the criteria in Tables 1–5. Following BCTTv1 methodology [17], two coders independently rated each intervention; inter-rater reliability is reported in Section 6.3. In multi-arm trials where arms differ in measurement level, the profile reflects the arm with the strongest measurement chain.

Table 1. Baseline (B) dimension rating scale.

Score	Label	Criteria
0	No Baseline	No pre-intervention waste data collected.
1	Self-Reported	Participants estimate own waste via surveys, diaries, or recall.
2	Aggregate / Proxy	Aggregate or proxy waste baseline measured pre-intervention at group level (e.g., canteen-level plate waste).
3	Individual Weighed	Individual-level waste weighed using calibrated instruments (or audited with equivalent rigor). Reports sufficient dispersion to support effect estimation (e.g., SD/SE/CI of levels or paired differences, or raw data).

¹ The exponential decay model assumes $PI(t) = e^{-\lambda t}$; fitting λ to observed PI values yields the half-life.

Table 2. Knowledge & Attitudinal (K) dimension rating scale.

Score	Label	Criteria
0	No Assessment	No knowledge, attitude, or awareness outcomes reported.
1	Qualitative	Informal or qualitative assessment: observations, open-ended responses, case study notes.
2	Structured	Structured pre/post assessment using tests, surveys, or scales (may not be psychometrically validated).
3	Validated	Validated psychometric instruments targeting behavioral determinants (e.g., TPB constructs, self-efficacy, habit strength), with reported effect sizes or statistical tests. Usability/acceptance scales (e.g., Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), System Usability Scale (SUS)) alone should be coded K2; they qualify as K3 only when the study explicitly hypothesizes acceptance as a causal mediator of the target behavior.

Table 3. Direct Behavior (D) dimension rating scale.

Score	Label	Criteria
0	No Behavioral Data	No behavioral outcome data reported (including self-report).
1	Self-Reported	Participants report own behavioral changes without objective verification.
2	Objective Proxy / Logs	Behavioral data captured objectively: app logs, sensor data, photos, observer coding, or consumption-based proxies when justified in-study (e.g., plate clearance as proxy for waste). Data must capture behaviors plausibly linked to waste reduction (e.g., recorded leftovers reuse, meal planning adherence), not engagement metrics alone (e.g., logins, screen time, or time-in-app do not qualify).
3	Measured Waste	Post-intervention food waste directly measured (weighed, audited) in mass units (kg, g) or a clearly stated equivalent.

Table 4. Environmental Conversion (E) dimension rating scale.

Score	Label	Criteria
0	No Conversion	No environmental impact metrics reported.
1	Generic	Single emission factor applied from a cited external source (peer-reviewed LCA database or government factors) with stated scope (food category coverage, geographic/temporal context; e.g., 1 kg food waste = X kg CO ₂ eq).
2	Category-Specific	Food-category-specific emission factors; multiple indicators reported.
3	Full LCA	Complete Life Cycle Assessment per ISO 14040–14044 with system boundaries.

Table 5. Persistence (L) dimension rating scale.

Score	Label	Criteria
0	No Follow-Up	Measurement only during or immediately after intervention.
1	Short	Follow-up at <6 months post-intervention.
2	Medium	Follow-up ≥6 months. Meets RE-AIM Maintenance criterion.
3	Longitudinal	Multiple follow-ups (≥2 points, ≥1 at ≥6 mo). Enables decay modeling.

5. Evidence Certainty Classification

Inspired by but distinct from the GRADE approach [14], SG-FLW profiles map to a measurement-chain certainty level (Table 6). Certainty here refers to *certainty about waste reduction*: substantiating a reduction claim requires both a commensurate baseline (B) and post-intervention behavioral measurement (D). SG-FLW classifies measurement-chain adequacy, not causal identification. SG-FLW therefore produces two orthogonal outputs: *waste-reduction certainty* (determined by B, D, E, L) and *mechanism evidence* (captured by K). Knowledge gains do not constitute evidence of waste reduction; K is reported separately because it captures the cognitive precursors that the attitude–behavior gap [18] shows are necessary but insufficient. For Moderate, D2 must capture behaviors linked to waste outcomes (not merely engagement metrics). A *commensurability rule* applies: baseline and outcome must match in unit and aggregation level (e.g., group-level baseline requires group-level outcome); violation downgrades the study one level (e.g., B3 in kg/household/week paired with D3 in g/person/day; no study in this corpus required downgrade). Moderate accepts behavioral proxies (D2), but waste-mass indices (WRR,

EII) require D3. High requires $E \geq 1$ and $L \geq 2$ because policy-relevant waste reduction claims need environmental conversion (reducing 1 kg of meat waste differs from 1 kg of bread waste) and evidence of sustained change; in practice, E0 dominates because most studies lack food-category composition data needed for conversion. A study can reach High for *behavioral* certainty (B3/D3/L2) without E, but not for *sustainability* certainty, which demands environmental conversion; High is intentionally rare, representing policy-grade evidence sufficient for SDG 12.3 reporting. This is a GRADE-inspired measurement-chain classification, not a full GRADE assessment of bias and precision.

Table 6. GRADE-inspired measurement-chain certainty classification.

Level	Min. Profile	Interpretation
HIGH	$B \geq 3, D \geq 3, E \geq 1, L \geq 2$	Meets the strongest measurement-chain criteria: individual-level baseline and post waste measurement with commensurate units and aggregation, environmental conversion, and maintenance follow-up.
MOD.	$B \geq 2, D \geq 2$	Objective behavioral evidence linked to waste outcomes ($D \geq 2$ as defined in Table 3) with a commensurate baseline ($B \geq 2$) in unit and aggregation level; otherwise downgrade to Low.
LOW	$D \geq 1$	Some behavioral signal exists but self-reported or lacking baseline.
V. LOW	$D = 0$	No behavioral outcome data. Claims of effectiveness unsupported regardless of K.

6. Framework Application

We applied SG-FLW to thirty-five interventions drawn from three sources: (1) nine interventions from our qualitative review [3]; (2) twenty-nine interventions from our systematic review [1]; and (3) two behavioral studies using cloud-based automatic weighing. Duplicates were identified by matching intervention name, authors, and year across sources; five serious games appeared in both reviews and were counted once. The merged corpus comprises games ($n = 7$), serious games ($n = 10$), and gamification ($n = 18$) per the taxonomy in [1]. This category split is descriptive; SG-FLW is category-agnostic. Two coders independently rated each intervention (Section 4); reliability ($\kappa_w = 0.96$) and borderline decisions are in Section 6.3. The corpus spans prototype-stage studies scoring all zeros to quasi-experimental trials at Moderate certainty, showing the framework differentiates across evidence levels.

6.1. Worked Examples

To illustrate the coding process, we present two contrasting cases.

Worst case — Verloop [21]: This serious game for food waste data collection was evaluated using qualitative methods only. *B*: No pre-intervention waste data was collected (B0). *K*: Qualitative observations were gathered informally (K1). *D*: No behavioral outcomes, not even self-reported, were measured (D0). *E*: No environmental conversion (E0). *L*: No follow-up (L0). Profile: $[B0/K1/D0/E0/L0]$, Very Low certainty. The study provides no evidence of behavioral impact, although K1 acknowledges that qualitative data was collected.

Best case — Seta et al. [22]: This gamified self-monitoring app was tested with 126 households using a cloud-based automatic weighing system (SmartMat). *B*: Individual household food waste was weighed during a two-week baseline period (B3). *K*: No formal knowledge or attitudinal assessment was conducted; the study focused exclusively on behavioral waste measurement (K0). *D*: Post-intervention waste was directly measured in grams per household per week, yielding a 45% reduction as reported by the authors (D3). *E*: No environmental conversion was reported (E0). *L*: A follow-up approximately three months post-intervention was conducted, below the six-month RE-AIM threshold (L1). Profile: $[B3/K0/D3/E0/L1]$, Moderate certainty. This is the highest-scoring intervention on the behavioral evidence chain and the only one with any post-intervention follow-up, yet it illustrates a complementary gap: strong behavioral evidence without cognitive assessment.

6.2. Full Results

Table 7 presents the complete SG-FLW profiles for all thirty-five interventions.

Table 7. SG-FLW profiles for all reviewed food waste interventions. Classification follows [1].

Intervention	B	K	D	E	L	Cert.	Key Gap
<i>Games (n = 7)</i>							
Altarriba et al. [23]	0	0	0	0	0	Very Low	Prototype only, no assessment
Joyner et al. [24]	2	0	2	0	0	Moderate	Consumption proxy, no cognitive assessment
Sato et al. [25]	0	2	0	0	0	Very Low	Pre/post questionnaire only
Tian & Zheng [26]	0	0	0	0	0	Very Low	Simulation model, no participants
Miller et al. [27]	0	2	0	0	0	Very Low	Awareness gains only
Rodrigues et al. [28]	0	1	0	0	0	Very Low	Minimal food waste content in quiz
Elnakib et al. [29]	0	3	0	0	0	Very Low	TPB validated, no behavior
<i>Serious Games (n = 10)</i>							
Verloop [21]	0	1	0	0	0	Very Low	No behavioral or structured assessment
Grüter [30]	0	1	0	0	0	Very Low	Intentions only, no behavior
Sinclair [31]	0	1	0	0	0	Very Low	Emotional awareness only
Seiler [32]	0	3	0	0	0	Very Low	TAM validated, no behavior
Sato & Mizuyama [33]	0	2	0	0	0	Very Low	Supply chain simulation only
Vasconcelos et al. [34]	0	2	0	0	0	Very Low	Knowledge assessed, no behavior
Jespersen [35]	0	2	0	0	0	Very Low	Memory retention only
Löchtefeld [36]	0	2	1	0	0	Low	Self-reported, no baseline
Vasconcelos [37]	0	3	0	0	0	Very Low	Validated usability, no behavior
Olim et al. [38]	0	2	0	0	0	Very Low	Knowledge gains only
<i>Gamification (n = 18)</i>							
Fadhil [39]	0	1	0	0	0	Very Low	Preliminary assessment only
Anderson & Reid [40]	0	1	0	0	0	Very Low	Decision-making only
Dolnicar et al. [41]	2	0	3	0	0	Moderate	No cognitive assessment
Gaggi et al. [42]	0	2	0	0	0	Very Low	Quiz scores only
Jacobsen et al. [43]	0	1	0	0	0	Very Low	Sorting awareness only
Soma et al. [44]	3	0	3	0	0	Moderate	No cognitive assessment
He et al. [45]	0	1	0	0	0	Very Low	No structured assessment
Nkwo et al. [46]	0	0	0	0	0	Very Low	App evaluation, no intervention
Haas et al. [47]	0	2	0	0	0	Very Low	Intentions only
Tuah et al. [48]	0	1	1	0	0	Low	Self-reported disposal
Jung [49]	0	1	1	0	0	Low	Self-reported composting
Perera et al. [50]	0	0	0	0	0	Very Low	Survey only, no intervention
Pajpach et al. [51]	0	2	1	0	0	Low	Self-reported waste reduction
Yu et al. [52]	0	1	2	0	0	Low	App-logged actions, no baseline
Hamada et al. [53]	0	0	0	0	0	Very Low	Exploratory stage only
Santa Cruz et al. [54]	0	2	1	0	0	Low	Self-reported habits
Seta et al. [22]	3	0	3	0	1	Moderate	No cognitive assessment
Seta et al. [55]	3	0	3	0	0	Moderate	No cognitive assessment

SG-FLW provides a *common vocabulary* for comparing what was measured across a heterogeneous field. A Very Low profile means the study's measurement focus lay elsewhere, not that the intervention failed. We define a *complementary measurement gap* as the pattern where studies scoring $K \geq 2$ score $D=0$, studies scoring $D \geq 2$ score $K=0$, and zero studies achieve both $K \geq 2$ and $D \geq 2$ simultaneously.

Of the thirty-five interventions, twenty-five score $K > 0$ ($K1: n = 11$; $K2: n = 11$; $K3: n = 3$), but twenty of those score $D=0$. Yu et al. [52] is the nearest bridge, reaching $D2$ through app-logged actions but with only $K1$ and no baseline ($B0/K1/D2$). In Kirkpatrick's terms [16], most studies remain at Levels 1–2 without progressing to Level 3 (behavior), and the documented attitude–behavior gap in food waste [4,11] confirms the need for objective data.

Conversely, five studies achieve Moderate certainty ($B \geq 2, D \geq 2$), yet all score $K0$. Dolnicar et al. [41] weighed plate waste (34% reduction); Joyner et al. [24] measured cafeteria vegetable consumption as a waste-reduction proxy (99.9% increase in servings taken); Soma et al. [44] conducted curbside audits across 164 households ($p = 0.07$); and Seta et al. [22,55] deployed cloud-based automatic weighing across 126 and 119 households respectively (45% reduction, $d = 0.341$). These studies reach Kirkpatrick Level 3 but bypass Level 2, leaving cognitive mechanisms unexplored. Where reported data permits, the indices from Section 3 can be computed: Dolnicar yields $WRR=0.34$, Seta (a) yields $WRR=0.45$ and $BII = d = 0.341$; the remaining Moderate studies lack the dispersion statistics that BII requires.

No intervention achieves $E \geq 1$, only one [22] includes follow-up ($L1$), and none reaches High certainty. The highest combined $K+D$ is $K2/D1$ (Löchtefeld [36]; Pajpach et al. [51]; Santa Cruz et al.

[54]). In summary: 20/35 score $K > 0$ with $D = 0$; 5/35 score $D \geq 2$ with $K = 0$; 0/35 achieve both $K \geq 2$ and $D \geq 2$. In cross-tabulation: of 14 studies with $K \geq 2$, none achieves $D \geq 2$; all 6 with $D \geq 2$ score $K \leq 1$. These patterns hold across all three categories and match the evaluation deficits Hognon et al. [12] identified in climate education, suggesting a field-wide gap rather than a sampling artifact.

6.3. Reliability and Robustness

To assess coding reliability, two coders independently rated all five dimensions for a purposive subsample of twelve interventions selected to span the full evidence range and include all identified borderline cases: Altarriba, Verloop, Seiler, Löchtfeld (Very Low); Pajpach, Yu, Santa Cruz (Low); Joyner, Dolnicar, Soma, Seta (a), Seta (b) (Moderate). Both coders were trained on the codebook (Tables 1–5) using three pilot studies before independent coding. Table 8 reports per-dimension results. κ_w was computed for B, K, and D; E and L had no variance in the subsample (all E0; all L0 except Seta (a) L1, agreed by both coders), so κ is undefined for those dimensions. The high agreement reflects the design of the scale: B and D levels are anchored in observable reporting artifacts (weighing, audits, app logs) rather than subjective judgments, which constrains coder disagreement. The two disagreements were each one level apart: Seiler K3 vs. K2 (TAM as validated instrument vs. structured scale) and Yu D2 vs. D1 (app-logged actions vs. self-initiated records). After discussion, both were resolved to the higher category (K3, D2) because the studies met the formal criteria in Tables 2 and 3; Seiler explicitly hypothesizes acceptance as a determinant of adoption behavior and uses a validated instrument (TAM) with A/B design, satisfying the K3 mediator criterion; Yu's 800+ app-logged actions are server-recorded, not self-reported. E and L reliability cannot be assessed in this corpus due to insufficient variance; future application to studies with $E \geq 1$ or $L \geq 2$ should include these dimensions in reliability testing. κ values may also be lower in corpora with greater E/L variance, where finer distinctions between adjacent levels become necessary.

Table 8. Inter-rater reliability on stratified subsample ($n = 12$).

Dim.	Agree	κ_w	Interpretation
B	100%	1.00	Almost perfect
K	91.7%	0.93	Almost perfect
D	100%	1.00	Almost perfect
E, L	100%	—	No variance (κ undefined)
<i>Pooled</i>	<i>94.4%</i>	<i>0.96</i>	<i>Almost perfect</i>

κ_w = linearly weighted Cohen's κ . Linear weights penalize all adjacent-level disagreements equally on this 4-level scale. Pooled κ_w computed on 36 stacked B+K+D rating pairs. Labels follow Landis & Koch (1977). E, L: κ undefined (no variance).

Table 9 documents six borderline scoring decisions where adjacent levels were considered. These cases operationalize the boundaries of each scale and illustrate decision rules.

Table 9. Borderline scoring decisions.

Study	Dim	Decision	Rationale
Joyner	D	2 not 3	Consumption proxy, not direct waste mass.
Yu	D	2 not 1	800+ app-logged actions constitute objective records.
Seiler	K	3 not 2	TAM validated; study hypothesizes acceptance as determinant of adoption behavior (A/B design).
Dolnicar	B	2 not 3	Plate waste at aggregate buffet level, not individual with dispersion.
Seta (a)	L	1 not 0	Follow-up conducted (~3 mo) but below 6-month threshold.
Seta (b)	L	0 not 1	Follow-up mentioned but no outcomes reported.

We tested four threshold perturbations: (1) L2 threshold lowered from 6 to 3 months: Seta (a) L1 → L2, but E0 blocks High; (2) consumption proxies excluded from D2: Joyner drops to Low (5 → 4 Moderate), gap unchanged; (3) TAM/SUS always K2 unless tied to a behavioral mediator: Seiler K3 → K2, no D change, gap persists; (4) Moderate requires $D \geq 3$: Joyner removed (5 → 4), gap persists

(still 0/35 with $K \geq 2$ and $D \geq 2$). Across the corpus, K and D are negatively correlated (Spearman $\rho = -0.35$, $p = .04$; computed on raw ordinal scores from Table 7, $n = 35$, asymptotic p -value with ties; the correlation is primarily descriptive given ordinal data), suggesting that the complementary gap is a systematic pattern in this corpus rather than an artifact of threshold placement.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

As Hognon et al. [12] argue, evaluation should not be reduced to behavioral outcomes alone: the cognitive processes that serious games activate are themselves dimensions of impact, and K makes this visible. Yet the Theory of Planned Behavior [18] and Kirkpatrick's hierarchy [16] both treat knowledge as necessary but insufficient for behavioral change. The complementary gap (Section 6) confirms this: without the measurement of *actual* behavioral outcomes, the field cannot establish whether cognitive gains translate into waste reduction [4]. This gap partly reflects disciplinary silos: HCI and education researchers prioritize learning outcomes (K), while public health and environmental science groups prioritize objective outcome measurement (D) without embedding games. Evidence from the corpus supports this reading: all five Moderate studies ($D \geq 2$) are gamification interventions, while all three K3 studies are games or serious games. Early-stage studies scoring K2 or K3 with D0 are not failures; they represent the first half of the measurement chain, and SG-FLW's prospective mode can help them plan the second.

Inconsistent measurement compounds this problem [4,6]. SG-FLW's profiles complement both systemic perspectives such as Rossitto et al.'s Digital Environmental Stewardship [56] and game-focused evaluation frameworks (engagement, usability, flow); it assesses only the evidence chain for waste reduction, not whether the game is well-designed. Used prospectively (Section 1), target profiles such as $B2/K3/D2/E1/L2$ make both K and D visible from the outset, avoiding the pattern where cognitive and behavioral measurement are treated as mutually exclusive.

The framework has limitations, SG-FLW evaluates measurement quality, not intervention quality; a low profile indicates missing evidence, not that the intervention failed. Its ordinal scale does not capture all study design nuances (K, for instance, groups distinct TPB constructs into a single rigor scale), and borderline cases are expected (Table 9); dual coding mitigates but does not eliminate subjectivity. E and L are empirically unanchored in this corpus (all E0; only one $L > 0$), so E1–E3 distinctions remain untested until studies begin to report environmental conversion. Our corpus is drawn from two prior reviews, and the framework was iteratively refined on these same studies; independent application to a different corpus might yield different gap patterns. To mitigate overfitting, each scale level is anchored to observable reporting artifacts (weighing, validated instruments, app logs) rather than corpus-specific features. Reliability ($\kappa_w = 0.96$; Section 6.3) is based on a single coder pair coding 12 of 35 studies; resource constraints prevented full dual-coding, but the purposive subsample spans the full evidence range and includes all borderline cases. SG-FLW does not capture intervention dosage or implementation fidelity, nor participatory outcomes from co-design processes. In continuous-measurement interventions where the instrument is also the game mechanic (e.g., SmartMat), B and D may be conflated through reactivity; this is a known issue in behavioral measurement generally, not specific to SG-FLW. Because the causal chain is domain-agnostic, SG-FLW could serve energy, water, or carbon domains; Hognon et al. [12] identified identical evaluation deficits in climate education.

Future studies should pair cognitive assessments (K) with objective behavioral measures ($D \geq 2$) and baselines ($B \geq 2$) to test the $K \rightarrow D$ pathway predicted by Ajzen [18], aligning with the EU's call for standardized monitoring [9,10]. A minimal pathway to $B2/K2/D2/E1/L1$ requires: aggregate waste weighing before the intervention (B2), a structured pre/post questionnaire (K2), app-logged or photo-documented waste actions (D2), one published emission factor applied to the waste stream (E1), and a three-month follow-up (L1). None of these steps demands specialized equipment; upgrading to the full target $B2/K3/D2/E1/L2$ requires only substituting validated instruments for K and extending follow-up to six months. Environmental conversion ($E \geq 1$) should become routine for SDG 12.3 progress,

and longitudinal follow-up (≥ 6 months) is needed to separate novelty from sustained change [12]. Reporting participant demographics [57,58] would enable moderator analyses across SG-FLW profiles.

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