Pokémon GO: A Revolution in Social Gaming

Dr. Clay Gransden

Liverpool Hope University

gransdc@hope.ac.uk

Social Entertainment Zone

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In the summer of 2016, the 20th anniversary of Pokémon, the Pokémon GO app was released. The game was developed by Niantic who collaborated with Nintendo, by way of The Nintendo Company.[[1]](#footnote-1) Pokémon of course is no small brand, it is currently in the top 30 licensed brands worldwide.[[2]](#footnote-2) Pokémon as a brand has diversified over the years and has many strong interests in the entertainment and gaming industry. There have been over 280 million video games sold worldwide, $670 million (approx.) accrued in box office revenue and 21.5 billion trading cards shipped worldwide.[[3]](#footnote-3) Combining this strong brand with a new form of gaming to create a totally immersive advergame has created quite a buzz. To really grasp the impact of the game it is important to first understand how the app works.

The game itself revolves around catching, evolving or hatching each Pokémon and registering them on the in-game catalogue called the ‘Pokédex’.[[4]](#footnote-4) Each player is helped along the way by visiting Pokéstops (which are places in the real world) which when visited reward the players with in-game items to help continue their journey through the experience.[[5]](#footnote-5) The game utilises a mix of both VR and GPS tracking which is perhaps one of the reasons for its success.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The game not only makes you explore where you live, but also encourages players to get outside and walk through gamification. In February 2017, Phil Keslin the chief technology officer at Niantic stated that 8.7 billion kilometeres have been walked in-game, which is the equivalent of walking to Pluto.[[7]](#footnote-7) The impact of this social game is incredible, there have been claims that the game could add an estimated 2.825 million years of additional lifetime to its U.S. users.[[8]](#footnote-8) The game transcends those social games that have come before, it does not have the traditional features of leaderboards and in-game messaging. This is a game played through an electronic device that encourages you to work together with others in the real world and converse with others in the real world.

It is, of course, not the first game to do so, Niantic also released a game called Ingress which had similar features.[[9]](#footnote-9) Ingress uses the same system of integrating GPS into a gaming app. It has been said that without the original gamers from Ingress there would in fact have been no Pokémon GO, with much of the data being used from the former to help with the formation of said Pokéstops.[[10]](#footnote-10) Without the power of a licensed brand, Ingress did not have the same impact, with 20 million downloads compared to Pokémon GO’s recent claim of 650 million downloads.[[11]](#footnote-11)[[12]](#footnote-12)

Pokémon GO as of February 2017 has now amassed a massive $1 billion dollars.[[13]](#footnote-13) This is the quickest of any app and places it as one of the highest grossing apps of all time.[[14]](#footnote-14) One of the main reasons behind this are the microtransactions and in-game purchases that can take place within the app. Similar to the other games that have grossed $1 billion, Pokémon GO allows the player to purchase extra items to assist in the game.[[15]](#footnote-15) The game is also free to play, and this duality seems to be one of the driving principles of many of the other top grossing apps in the marketplace.

If you are a hardcore gamer there is plenty to do including the levelling up system, which has yet to be maxed by any player (without the use of bots).[[16]](#footnote-16) For casual gamers you can still pick up and play the game without being disadvantaged by not putting the hours in. The game also has appeal for those who played or watched the original iterations. There is also an integrated camera system within the game which enables players’ content to be shared through personal networks.

One thing that is clear about Pokémon GO is its success, it has amassed an enormous player base in a relatively short time and accumulated an incredible amount of money. The game has also reinforced Pokémon as a brand creating demand for other merchandise to rocket in some cases increasing the value of some of the trading cards to as much as $10,000 dollars.[[17]](#footnote-17) Unfortunately, there has been a slowdown in people playing the game since its launch.[[18]](#footnote-18) But, with Pokémon now in its 7th generation and boasting a staggering 801 creatures there is potential to continue to add content.[[19]](#footnote-19) This humble app has revolutionised mobile gaming, with the advent of VR and more powerful devices being released, this is an exciting time to be using social entertainment for marketing.[[20]](#footnote-20)

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