



Science Reporter

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POKÉMON Go WITH CARE



Auto and taxi drivers who were until now flummoxed at driving crazy guests, glued to their mobiles, around the city have finally got a hang of the game. They are now offering special packages for 'Pokémon hunters'. Niantic Labs, which unleashed the game, is overwhelmed with requests from businesses wanting their buildings to become PokéStops or PokéGyms with some even paying the app a \$10 daily fee to purchase lures, or items to attract players into their stores.

The game has taken the world by storm. In terms of usage time, Pokémon Go has overtaken every other social media app and is trending at the top spot on app stores. It is making more than \$1.6 million every day. So, while the makers and businesses and even taxi drivers are earning money out of the game, is there any good happening for the 'hunters'?

The technology behind the game is already well known. It uses the smartphone's Global Positioning System (GPS) to track your location and time and find new Pokémons, and then uses the phone's camera to virtually superimpose them over the surroundings. The game switches on the camera, and the user sees a Pokémon appear right in front of him. The user then shoots the 'Pokeball' at the creature to capture it.

The game uses a technology called Augmented Reality which brings the anime creatures to life as computer-generated images or figures allowing users to interact with them virtually. As a technology, Augmented Reality is already being used as a form of exposure therapy to treat phobias, such as cockroach phobia, and also for post-traumatic stress disorder. In one case recently, it was used to treat an amputee's phantom pain, a phenomenon that occurs when a limb is severely damaged or missing.

Working on the same technology, Pokémon Go is giving people incentives to go out and explore. 'Hunters' are citing potential health benefits from walking, social benefits from interacting with new players and psychological benefits from putting together Pokémon Go player groups and communities. The game has introduced an element of exercise in the smartphone loving and texting generation. People are exploring and getting to enjoy new experiences and discovering the treasures and communities in their neighbourhood.

But the benefits are only for those who are conscious of the need to grab these benefits. As with every technology, the game has its cons too. While you are moving out, you are still on your phone exposing yourself to accidents, injuries and criminal acts. There have been many instances of crashed cars, getting hit while crossing roads, being robbed at isolated spots, and even intruding into dangerous areas. Bosnia has even warned players against going to areas where thousands of unexploded land mines are still littered. Eventually, the game could even make you spend more time on the phone and make you less social.

So, what you make of the game is entirely up to you. But the ideal would be to have fun, enjoy, socialize, exercise and keep away from dangers.

Hasan Jawaid Khan

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