

"Pokemon Go" gets gamers out into an augmented reality world

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff on 07.21.16

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Exeggcute, a Pokemon, is found by a "Pokemon Go" player in Miami, Florida, July 12, 2016. The game marks a turning point for augmented reality, or technology that superimposes a digital facade on the real world. Photo: AP Photo/Alan Diaz

LOS ANGELES, Calif. — Virtual reality is often described as the future of gaming. It can transport gamers to computer-generated environments. Virtual worlds seem real because gamers use high-tech headsets, gloves with sensors or helmets with screens to interact with them. This special equipment simulates three-dimensional images and settings.

The recent runaway success of the mobile gaming app "Pokemon Go" is suggesting big things for augmented reality, a related technology. Augmented (meaning "added-to") reality works by superimposing a computer image onto the real world.

"Pokemon Go" Can Be Played With A Smartphone

Pokemon is a Japanese entertainment brand that became popular in the 1990s. Its newest product is "Pokemon Go," a location-based augmented reality game. The game makes Pokemon characters pop up on players' smartphone screens by using their cameras and GPS.

"Pokemon Go" was launched this month. In less than a week, U.S. players spent more time playing it than they spent on Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook Messenger, according to Internet research company SimilarWeb.

Shops, parks and other public spaces around the world have recorded a surge in foot traffic as gamers venture out with their smartphones. Experts think the popularity of "Pokemon Go" is just one sign that augmented reality, or AR, will play a huge role in our lives.

Augmented Reality Games Need Less Equipment

Virtual reality currently requires people to use headsets or other equipment. Augmented reality is simpler. People can blend the real and virtual worlds using just their smartphones. Many augmented reality games allow gamers to interact with each other. "Pokemon Go" does this by allowing players to compete against one another for monsters, encouraging them to step outside and interact with others. That's only possible because the game is played on smartphones. An estimated two-thirds of American adults already carry smartphones with them everywhere.

"It taps into the fact that we have our mobile devices on us 24/7, we're checking them dozens of times a day, and it allows us to use them in new and novel ways," said Scott Steinberg. He is an expert on trends at a technology consulting company.

"Pokemon Go" can be played in small bits of time throughout the day. People are already checking their phones many times a day. Now they can play in augmented reality for a few minutes, too. This is unlike playing games on a console or a computer.

"Pokemon Go" Sparks Interest In Augmented Reality

The gaming industry itself has largely overlooked augmented reality. Until now, people weren't as excited about it as they were about virtual reality. There was also a sense that too few people understood the technology.

But now that "Pokemon Go" has taken off, there's little doubt that gamers understand and adore augmented reality features.

Gamers such as Anthony Moreno, 17, of Compton, California, have trekked across the Los Angeles region trying to catch Pokemon. "We went to the San Pedro pier, Redondo pier and now we're going to the park over here," he said, standing outside Los Angeles City Hall. "We haven't been here, so it's going to be a new experience for us."

The popular game "Angry Birds" taught a generation of smartphone users how to swipe on touch screens. In the same way, "Pokemon Go" could help gamers better understand augmented reality, said Joost van Dreunen. He is a researcher for video game research company SuperData Research.

"People tend to lump augmented reality and virtual reality, and 'Pokemon Go' lets you separate the two," Van Dreunen said.

Quiz

- 1 Select the paragraph from the section "'Pokemon Go' Sparks Interest In Augmented Reality" that BEST explains what the experience of playing the game is like for people.
- 2 Which piece of evidence BEST explains why the game is so accessible to people?
 - (A) This special equipment simulates three-dimensional images and settings.
 - (B) Until now, people weren't as excited about it as they were about virtual reality.
 - (C) Gamers such as Anthony Moreno, 17, of Compton, California, have trekked across the Los Angeles region trying to catch Pokemon.
 - (D) People can blend the real and virtual worlds using just their smartphones.

- 3 Read the following sentence.

The recent runaway success of the mobile gaming app "Pokemon Go" is suggesting big things for augmented reality, a related technology.

How does using the word "runaway" affect the tone of the sentence above?

- (A) It conveys the confusion the game has caused for players.
 - (B) It conveys the popularity the game has gained among players.
 - (C) It conveys the challenge the game poses for players.
 - (D) It conveys the amusement the game has given players.
- 4 Read the sentence from the article.

This special equipment simulates three-dimensional images and settings.

Which option is the best definition of the word "simulates" as used in the sentence?

- (A) reproduces
 - (B) transmits
 - (C) organizes
 - (D) inputs

Answer Key

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Paragraph 10:

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