



Pokémon Go: why the app is enticing millions of people outdoors A worldwide fan study

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An international online survey by the International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI) in the summer and autumn of 2016 asked 1,661 fans of the Pokémon Go app what they found so fascinating about the mobile game, whether anything in their lives had changed since they had begun playing it, and whether they had noticed any problems with the app. 1,661 active players¹ from 55 countries² - mainly from Germany (62%) - answered the open and standardised questions of the online survey.

A summary of the most important findings:

A return to childhood with Pokémon

“I have always dreamed about being able to catch Pokémon in the real world.” (Man, 27, Germany)

Most fans of the Pokémon Go app almost always connect their current enthusiasm with that which they showed for the Pokémon Gameboy games, animes and trading cards during their childhood (Pokémonia I). The new AR technology allows them to remember the game’s earlier significance and find their way back to certain moments of their earlier, more playful selves.

Hunting, collecting and developing

“It is also addicting, fun to find rare Pokémon. Like a treasure hunt.” (Woman, 39, Canada)

The basic principle of “collecting” is fascinating for players as a form of acquisition and imposing order on the world, with an independent value system based on Pokémon that are easy or difficult to catch. This also goes hand in hand with the principle of hoping to catch especially valuable creatures.

Additional elements, such as developing Pokémon through particular care and training in battles, a feature of the first Pokémonia, are supplemented by aspects such as incubating eggs and collecting items. When an egg announces it has finished incubation, the player anticipates the surprise of which Pokémon it will be. The existence of common and rare Pokémon creates an implicit value system; the hope of having something rare constitutes a further attraction: *“You don’t know which Pokémon will come after the egg is hatched means I am always excited whenever the egg is going to be hatched.” (Man, 21, India)*

New forms of togetherness: being active outdoors, meeting friends, making contacts and thereby overcoming anxieties

“It’s fun to hunt for little monsters in the fresh air. We often combine it with family trips at the weekend. Our seven-year-old son enjoys it and is mad about collecting them” (Woman, 35, Germany)

Pokémon Go has created a new drive to get outside and do things together with other people. The app for families provides a special motivation, since children chose walks together with a game in which they and their parents compete on a level playing field, or in which the children are indeed the better players. When playing alone the app provides occasions to meet new people and a bridge for thematic, easy conversations and get-togethers. This helps people make contacts; it is a low-threshold way, especially for fans with social anxiety or depression,

¹ 44% of fans surveyed are girls or (young) women, 56% boys or (young) men; 11% of respondents are under 18, 53% are between 18 and 26 and 36% are over 26.

² Including Austria, the USA, Mexico, Singapore, Thailand, Namibia, Tunisia ...



to become active and overcome their shyness around people. *“As someone with depression it takes me back to my childhood when things were easier and simpler. I'm out of bed and engaging in nature and other people.”* (Frau, 27, Australia)

Walks take on significance

“Thanks to the Pokéstops and arenas, I now know important places in the area that I hadn't noticed before or that I didn't see the same way in the hustle and bustle of day-to-day life.” (Woman, 27, Germany)

Because players have to move to find new Pokémon, their perception of their own area changes. They discover new spots in their immediate vicinity and entire parts of towns, the Pokéstops and arenas alerting them to points of interest. Due to Pokémon, then, walks through the local urban area take on a special significance – an aspect that adults in particular consider beneficial.

Kawaii is particularly important to women

“There are so many cute Pokémon waiting to be caught :)” (Woman, 24, USA)

Another aspect is the aesthetic element. Research on the success of Pokémon has identified cuteness (Japanese *kawaisa/kawaii*) as one of the most important features. The aesthetic appeal is particularly important for girls/women. They find Pokémon sweet and enjoy being able to catch these cute little animals in the “real world”.

Comparison with friends/strangers – important for some men and younger players

“It's fun to compete with friends to see who can catch the best Pokémon.” (Man, 17, United Arab Emirates)

For some, usually adolescents, boys and men, comparing themselves with strangers or with their friends is important as a form of motivation and competition. They enjoy the stimulus of having more monsters or points than others and thus gaining superiority over them.

The parallel universe of Pokémon as a relaxing escape

“Because in times of terrorism, Erdogan and Trump it is a distraction. Also, you play it outside, you move around and I always play it with family and friends.” (Women, 31, Germany)

Particularly for older players with jobs, Pokémon Go is a relaxing escape from the stress and worries of daily life. Many fans relate how they enjoy the distraction it provides. They enjoy taking a short break from the “real world” with all its problems, be they private or societal/political.

Life-changing: positive side effects of the app

„I'm going on more walks, I talk to friends about the game, and I'm generally more happy.” (Women, 25, USA)

One of the main consequences of enthusiasm for Pokémon Go noticed by fans is that they spend more time outdoors, come into contact with others more frequently and in doing so experience their environment differently. Many of them feel that their quality of life has improved through the game. They feel better, in some cases have lost an appreciable amount of weight, and describe how the game has helped them deal with social anxiety or depression. Children and adolescents benefit especially from the opportunity to meet new people. For millennials, more so than for the other age groups, it is an opportunity to reconnect with positive experiences from their childhood. The older adults mainly enjoy the new significance gained by their perception of their environment.



Potential problems and limitations of the app

“Yes, I think obsessive fans might try to break into places they are not supposed to. Also, the places where Pokémon are frequent might be used for a possible bomb attack, especially in countries like mine - Turkey.” (Woman, 18, Turkey)

Pokémon fans encounter few dangers of playing the app. But they can imagine a variety of problems, above all carelessness in traffic and excessive enthusiasm that could turn into a kind of dependence and addiction. They anticipate aggressiveness and the threat of various forms of attack, including bombing of popular Pokémon locations. But none of them report experiencing such things themselves. Data protection is an issue for half the players, since some of them find the idea that they could be observed or under surveillance through the use of the app disconcerting. *„Theoretically Niantic and Google could know, where I’m all the time the play is running. That is somehow scary! “ (Man, 24, Germany)*

A practical problem that they have experienced themselves is the game’s limitations, which will ultimately lead to the hype dissipating. They are frustrated with the unfair distribution between town and country, the difficulty of only being able to progress slowly after reaching a certain level, since the processes do not change, frustrating experiences in arena battles and the feeling of being at a disadvantage to cheats. Also, as the weather gets worse, they spend more time at home, and hence in Pokémon-free areas.

„The game is repetitive on the long run. It make first and foremost fun, because everybody is playing it, as soon as the number of players went down, it was demotivating for the others.“ (Man, 20, Germany)

More information on the study:

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