

Pokémon Go



Pokémon Go

Component 1: Exploring Media Industries and Audiences

Focus Areas: Media Industries Audiences Media Contexts

PRODUCT CONTEXT

- Produced by Niantic and in collaboration with Nintendo, *Pokémon Go* is an augmented reality video game for iOS and Android devices.
- Using the same technology as Google Maps, *Pokémon Go* relies on players' GPS to allow them to locate, capture, battle and train virtual creatures called Pokémon in the real world.
- Pokémon Go* had an extended launch, being released in Australia, New Zealand and the United States first on July 6th 2016, and then in other countries (e.g. South Korea in January 2017).
- The game is free to download and play but there is the possibility to spend real money purchasing PokeCoins, the in-game currency, to get extra items and enhancements.

PART 1: STARTING POINTS – Media Industries

Cultural Context:

Pokémon's status as a **globally popular franchise** has left a significant mark on today's popular culture. The Pokémon characters themselves have become pop culture icons. Aside from the thousands of merchandise items available, there has also been a Pokémon travelling theme park in Japan, two different Pikachu balloons in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and All Nippon Airways even operates Pokémon Jets. Given the success of the **franchise**, it was probably safe to assume that a ground breaking video game was always going to be successful.

Consider the impact of technologies

and convergence:

- For an industry to survive over forty years, it has to constantly evolve and serve the needs of its audiences. The video games industry has done just that. By 2010, virtual reality and augmented reality were emerging as major drivers for game hardware and gameplay development. There was also a huge rise in casual gaming through mobile devices.
- In 2016, the mobile gaming market was estimated to have taken \$38 billion in revenue. This is where *Pokémon Go* stepped in.

Consider the Pokémon franchise:

- Pokémon is a media **franchise** that started in 1995 and the trademark is owned by **Nintendo**.
- The franchise began as a pair of video games for the Gameboy yet now spans video games, trading card games, animated TV shows and movies, comics, books and toys.
- It is the second best-selling video game franchise behind Mario and is one of the **highest grossing** media franchises of all time.
- The Pokémon **franchise** has been in existence for more than two decades due to its **adaptive** nature and has built up a huge **fan base** during that time.

Consider the importance of different funding models:

- Within days of its release, the game managed to break records set by other games in the Apple iTunes Store. It did this by making the app completely free to download and play so how does it make any money?
- A big part the game's **revenue** is generated through the **in-app purchases**. Players can buy PokéCoins to purchase extras that can enhance their gaming experience – power ups, extra Poké Balls, lures and character upgrades. A YouGov survey estimated that one in five players of *Pokémon Go* spend money on in-app purchases with the majority of those users spending between 80p and £14.99 in the first month of its release.
- Throughout the year, the game holds limited time in-game '**events**' such as Halloween.

During the event users are more likely to see ghost Pokémon, the game pays out double candy (a resource needed to upgrade and evolve Pokémon) and drastically shortens the distance you needed to walk before a player's buddy Pokémon produces candy. Therefore, in-game time is more lucrative for users who are able to upgrade their Pokémon collection quicker. It was no surprise then that, during this event, users increased their spending on in-app purchases.

- In addition to in-app purchases, Niantic makes money from “**sponsored locations**” – businesses such as McDonalds, movie theatres and pubs pay to show up as prominent locations in the game. In the UK, many small businesses are exploiting their status as Pokéstops to try to attract new customers, some even use lures – in-app features that turn Pokéstops into magnets for Pokémon – to attract more customers.

Consider regulation of the media:

- **Age ratings** are systems used to ensure that entertainment content, such as computer games, are clearly labelled by age according to the content they contain. Age ratings provide guidance to consumers (particularly parents) to help them decide whether or not to buy a particular product. The rating on a game confirms that it is suitable for players over a certain age.
- In 2012 the **PEGI system** was incorporated into UK law and **The Video Standards Council** was appointed as the statutory body responsible for the age rating of video games in the UK using the PEGI system.
- *Pokémon Go* was awarded a **PEGI 3+** rating in the UK. However, there is still some confusion for users as, in the iOS app store, it is stated as being suitable for those aged 9 years and over due to mild fantasy violence, and the lobby group Commonsense Media say it is really only suitable for children aged 13 years and over due to privacy and personal safety concerns. Perhaps the wide variance in this age guidance is a sign of just how ground-breaking *Pokémon Go* is.

PART 2: STARTING POINTS – Audiences

Social and Cultural Context

Although *Pokémon Go* has been hugely successful, the game does have its downsides. Within its first two days of release, *Pokémon Go* raised safety concerns among players. Multiple people also

suffered minor injuries from falling while playing the game due to being distracted. In addition, police departments in various countries have issued warnings regarding inattentive driving, trespassing on other people's property and being targeted by criminals due to players being unaware of their surroundings. In addition, there are all of the obvious risks associated with online social media – not knowing who you're chatting to, keeping personal information safe, concerns around arranging to meet strangers offline.

Consider the ways in which media organisations target audiences:

- While Pokémon's **target audience** is young boys, *Pokémon Go* seems to have captured the imagination of a much wider demographic.
- Pokémon's core fan base - those that saw the first film and have been a follower ever since – were another obvious target audience group, but given its innovation there are actually many more gamers than maybe even the creators could have imagined.
- In its first month, the game's average **player demographic** was categorized as a highly educated, well-paid, 25-year-old white woman. Now the craze has settled down, a YouGov survey shows that, demographically speaking, the average player is aged 18-34, enjoys Kinder, Smirnoff and Domino's Pizza and is “more likely to be unmotivated” than the average citizen.
- Knowing their audience so well means the game has created more marketing opportunities both for itself and for others.

Consider theoretical perspectives:

- If we consider Blumler and Katz's **Uses and Gratifications theory**, we could argue that audience members play simply for **entertainment/diversion** from their everyday lives. However, another main reason people take part is for the **social interaction** the game offers. With so many other people playing it, there is always someone to discuss it with, not to mention the online community on Twitter and Facebook. Users are even able to use the in-app camera to snap themselves with a Pokémon, then upload to social media if they wish.