# blink

By

Darshana Tuladhar

[This is the second part of a two-part post covering Pokémon GO. Part one can be read here.]

The concept of augmented reality (AR) has been buzzing around for a while. However, there had yet to be a tangible, real-world application of AR for the masses until recently. Enter Pokémon GO. The game has rapidly introduced millions across the globe to AR and illustrated the capabilities of a real world application in a fun and engaging way. This app has taken the United States by storm, altering human behavior and interactions overnight.
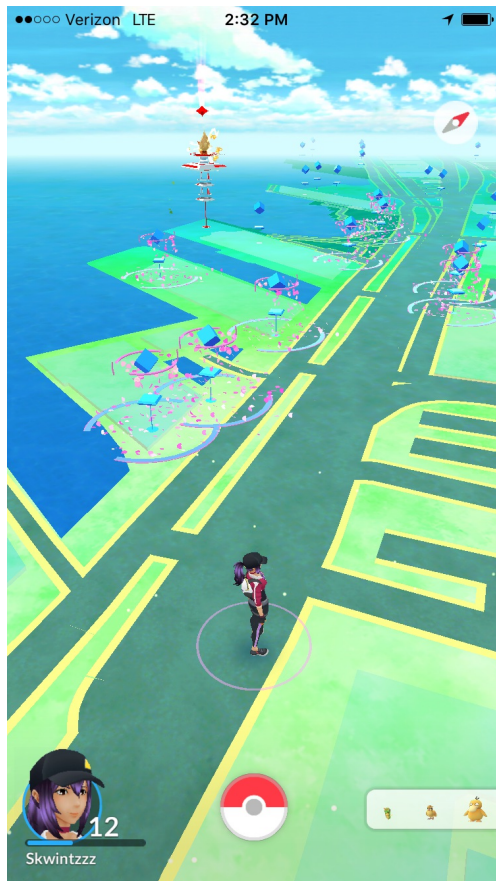
Numerous lures are set up at the waterfront and pier; not surprisingly this is a popular place for players.

Earlier this week, my colleague Jessica shared her initial thoughts on the Pokémon GO phenomenon and our decision to head out to the Seattle waterfront to find out more about user behavior and motivations (and catch some Pokémon, of course). We armed ourselves with our smartphones and headed to the waterfront pier where a Pokémon gym was present near several lures. On our way there, we could easily identify other players by their behavior, which resembled the following: walking with their phone out, looking up, looking down, tapping on the screen, some swipes, more looking up. Sometimes there would be a full stop and furious swiping upwards. Most notably, nearly every other person we walked by was playing.

When we reached the area near the gym, we noticed people camping out with their phones displaying similar Pokémon GO behavior patterns. We used this as an opportunity to talk with several users about their experiences and discovered a few interesting findings.

Pokétourism: A new way of sightseeing

We found that a number of the people we talked to traveled to downtown Seattle specifically to check out the Pokémon scene. Driving this behavior was the way Pokéstops and Pokémon were geographically distributed. A couple from Bremerton, a neighboring island, noticed that stops in Seattle were more spread apart geographically. They reported that in Bremerton and the surrounding towns they visited, they were more concentrated. We also found that players came to the pier by reasoning that different types of Pokémon could be found there vs. the ones they typically encountered in their own neighborhoods. A young tourist from Houston commented that there were Pokémon in Seattle that she had not encountered back home and vice versa. When we approached a group of University of Washington students, they stated, "We came [to the pier] because a friend told us that there were rare Pokémon here."

People also reported exploring their neighborhood and surrounding areas, a behavior they normally would not do. They enjoyed finding Pokémon as a result, but they also found learning about local points of interest and historical landmarks they unknowingly passed by every day interesting and pleasantly engaging.

"It gets her out of the house," one father said, appreciating that Pokémon Go encourages his daughter to explore outside.

Pokésocials: A recreational activity

There have been and are multiple Facebook Pokémon Go events in Seattle.

Searching for Pokémon has already become a recreational, social activity (like going to the

beach with some friends) where other users meet and play. It brings people together by facilitating interactions amongst strangers and encourages friends and families to participate in exploring neighborhoods. This has inspired the emergence of Facebook events and [meet-ups](#) **organized specifically** to hunt for Pokémon and socialize with others that play the game.

Interestingly, all of the individuals we talked to were in pairs or a group and met specifically to play. Many users we talked to mentioned that they have struck up conversations with strangers while congregating around gyms, something they would not typically do. The gyms and battles create a bonding experience where players will discuss and share their experiences, tips, and strategies for attacking and defending gyms.

Local businesses are also capitalizing on the Pokémon trend. One user described a local coffee shop with a Pokéstop that purposefully set up lures and encouraged players to hang out and socialize. This is not an uncommon practice in Seattle as many others have also described seeing similar strategies to "lure" real-life customers.

These two pals met up specifically to play Pokémon GO in downtown Seattle.

Pokéfails: Usability issues and user tolerance

Our interviews revealed that players have an unusually high tolerance for Pokémon Go. They continued to play despite the challenges and obstacles they constantly faced, especially in the game's first few weeks after launch.
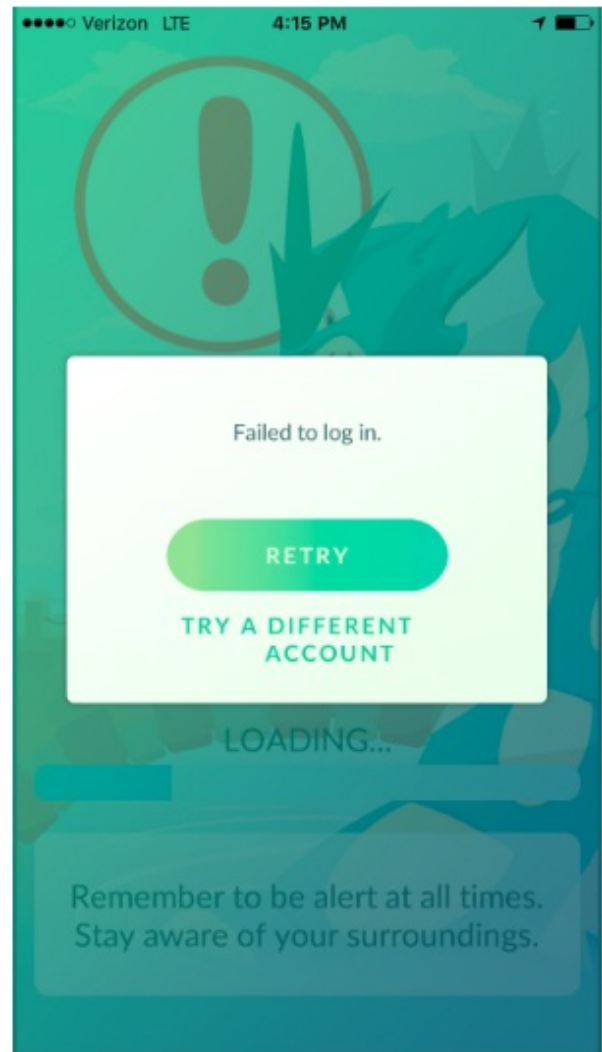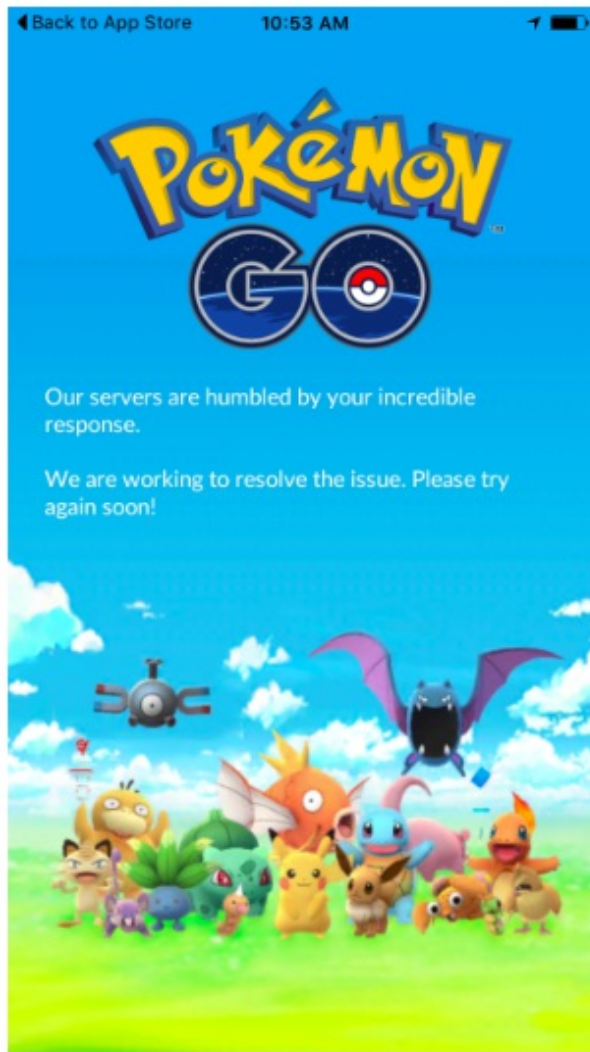
Shortly after launch, players often encountered the inability to connect to server screens.

As it turned out, problems occurred before a player even started playing. For the first week or so, it was common to get an error message stating that the servers were down, screen freezes on the loading or a message about failure to log in. Server failures were so common that websites were created specifically to inform users when the game is down. We found users trying to get in again immediately until successfully being able to connect, while others waited and revisited the game later.

The screen that players dread – the Pokéball of death.

Players still frequently experience, as one user put it, "the Pokéball of death." This is in reference to when a Pokémon is captured and the screen freezes on the Pokéball, a signal that the app crashed. Users will typically force quit the app and restart it. It's especially frustrating if the Pokémon is not registered as a catch and credited to their profile. A pair of Pokémon users we talked to discussed varying experiences, with one regularly being credited for capturing the Pokémon after a crash while the other would not. Many of the players we talked with also experienced other types of freezes and crashes throughout their play. On average, users said that they reset the game 6-8 times a day.

Pokémon GO uses real-time geospatial data to track your location and the phone camera for an augmented reality experience, which tends to drain mobile phone batteries quickly. To overcome this, players have started carrying and using portable phone batteries to extend playtime and phone usage. This is a common solution, apparently, as we spoke to and observed multiple people who had tethered batteries while playing. One user discussed the enjoyment of the AR experience but turned it off to conserve battery life. With all of these issues, users continue to use and return to the app. In general, users incorporate the app resets and workarounds as part of the experience.

So why is Pokémon GO so popular?

Simply, the rewards and enjoyment outweigh the challenges. It is extremely fun, and players enjoy the social aspects along with exploring and learning history about their neighborhoods.

Pokémon Go offers a fun way to experience AR every day. Here we see a Goldeen in a glass of water.

The AR feature plays a pivotal role in making the experience delightful for many people. Although Ingress, the game's predecessor, has been on the market since 2012, it has not caught on with the general population like Pokémon GO. This could be because Pokémon has a history with the general public, and was introduced into our culture through video games, television, and movies two decades ago. One user we spoke with stated that while he was at dinner with friends the whole group started playing. The highlight was when they found a Pokémon on their friends' dinner plate. Playing the game has injected itself into the daily lives of many people.

Our take: Pokémon Go is playing a critical role in the introduction of AR to everyday people. It would not be surprising if in the near future there was a surge in AR based apps.

It has also likely changed the way some of those familiar with AR view it and has demonstrated a fun, real world application that is inspiring and appeals to the masses.

Where do you think we'll see augmented reality show up next?