

Concerns about Pokémon Go technology



After the release of augmented reality game Pokémon Go in July, the game became a sensational cultural phenomenon influencing diverse social sectors, including the stock market, smartphone accessories and even the real-estate market.

Developed by Niantic for Android, iOS and Apple Watch devices, Pokémon Go is a location-based smartphone game that users play with virtual creatures, called Pokémon originally from a Japanese animation series. Utilizing the smartphone's GPS capability, the game locates Pokémons on players' current geographical location, in which the players capture, train, and battle Pokémons. By combining a friendly and familiar entertainment content, Pokémon Go helps people easily understand the concept of augmented reality.

One day after its release in selected 20 countries, the game recorded the highest download on the app markets of both Android and iOS. Within the first week from its release, the number of Pokémon Go users outnumbered the number of daily Twitter users and outplaced other mobile games as the fastest

game ever to No. 1 on the mobile revenue chart. As of July 13 it topped 15 million downloads on Google Play and Apple's App Store, according to a USA Today report. Consequently, numerous game strategy guides, tricks and secrets have been introduced for all users at different levels, across various media and the world: "How to get unlimited Poke Coins Free", "How to track rare Pokemons on your map" or "XP Trick for Lucky Eggs." For instance, one blogger posted his trick, such as suspending the smartphone on a toy truck and letting the truck run to move swiftly to catch more Pokémons and items.

With the high popularity of the game, the technology industry has launched a variety of subsequent products and promoted its existing products associating to the specifications of Pokémon Go. Since Pokémon Go is a mobile game, products featuring saving the battery of devices are attracting public attention. Exemplified by Apple Watch, wearable devices operate battery-efficiently, but also provide users more opportunities to enjoy an immersive and cinematic virtual reality experience.

But there are always side effects. The media have reported recent accidents happening to players while playing the game. One Pokémon Go player crashed his car into a tree in Alabama, an Arizona couple left their two-year-old baby at home unattended to play Pokémon, and one man was rescued after he fell off ocean bluff while hunting Pokémon in California.

And the media are reporting other dangers. The number of police reports have been increasing, which robberies become rampant using Pokémon Go. Robbers hide nearby "PokéStop" – where players gather game items – and conduct armed robberies targeting the players. Not only physical attacks but also players' device security became vulnerable. In the countries where the game has not been released, several malware apps were spread masquerading as the beta version of Pokémon Go app or other game-related content. When cyber crimes are brought to the table with Pokémon go, not only the individual user but also any connected network to the user can be infected since

the game operates based on the Internet connection and utilizes the users' account of Social Network Sites.

In addition, as the game utilizes the players' GPS information, their privacy is an issue. Pokémon Go can access users' current location, travel information, camera and other content in the device or cloud storage. And since players are likely to use their personal accounts and work accounts interchangeably when logging in on mobile apps, data from both accounts can be transacted, monitored and used while playing the game. Possible risks from data leakage are omnipresent.

Beginning with Pokémon Go, augmented reality apps and products will mushroom as the next big game in the technology industry. At the same time that the new technology gives more chances of new pleasure, enhanced productivity and a new way of life, it also can appear to be at least a bit of a threat to the society. For now, at the early stage of the big technology wave of the future, it is important for the media to fully acknowledge and report on such issues.