

Russian Entrepreneurs Target 'Pokemon Go' Phenomenon

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Savvy entrepreneurs are cashing in on viral mobile app "Pokemon Go" by targeting groups of gamers as they gather across Moscow.

The game became an overnight sensation after being launched on July 6, despite not yet being available in Russia. The game challenges users to catch animated creatures called Pokemon as they move around the city in real-time. "Pokemon hotspots," often triggered by in-game bonuses, have been attracting large group of people across the world.

"Businesses can't ignore such gatherings of people. They're selling Pokemon souvenirs such as mugs, caps, badges, [among players]," Moscow blogger Ilya Varlamov [wrote](#) Tuesday.

Creative street vendors are selling inflatable couches to gamers as they gather at prime

Pokemon-hunting spots in the Kitai-Gorod area, with some players paying 1,500 rubles (\$23) to avoid sitting on the ground, Varlamov said. Some store owners are also using in-game features to lure more Pokemon — and Pokemon hunters — to the area around their businesses.

The game, based on a popular 1990s Japanese cartoon show, uses augmented reality technology to project animated Pokemon onto real-life landscapes via a smartphone camera.

Moscow, in particular, is home to hundreds of Pokemon, and despite the efforts of presidential press secretary Dmitry Peskov's to dissuade people from catching them in the Kremlin, Muscovites have shown that almost nothing will stop them in their bid to “catch them all.”

“Hundreds of people run around [Moscow] in all kinds of weather and catch virtual monsters,” Varlamov wrote Tuesday. “In one race between players to catch a Pokemon nearby, many people climbed over a fence to get to it.”

Moscow City Hall announced this week its that it would release its own version of the game, using famous Russian historical figures in the place of Pokemon. The move is a bid to encourage young Muscovites to learn about the city's history.

Further afield, the mayor of Yekaterinburg, Russia's fourth-largest city, decided to leave a meter-high sculpture of a Pokeball — the device used to catch Pokemon — on the city's waterfront, the TASS news agency reported Tuesday.

A local resident painted an existing sculpture of a granite sphere in the red and white colors of the Pokeball.

“I do not see anything wrong with it,” said mayor Yevgeny Roizman. “People love to play and express their emotions.”

A St. Petersburg student currently boasts the world's largest collection of Pokemon on the game, TASS reported Tuesday. Grigory Timofeev, 19, is now considering selling his collection of virtual creatures.

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