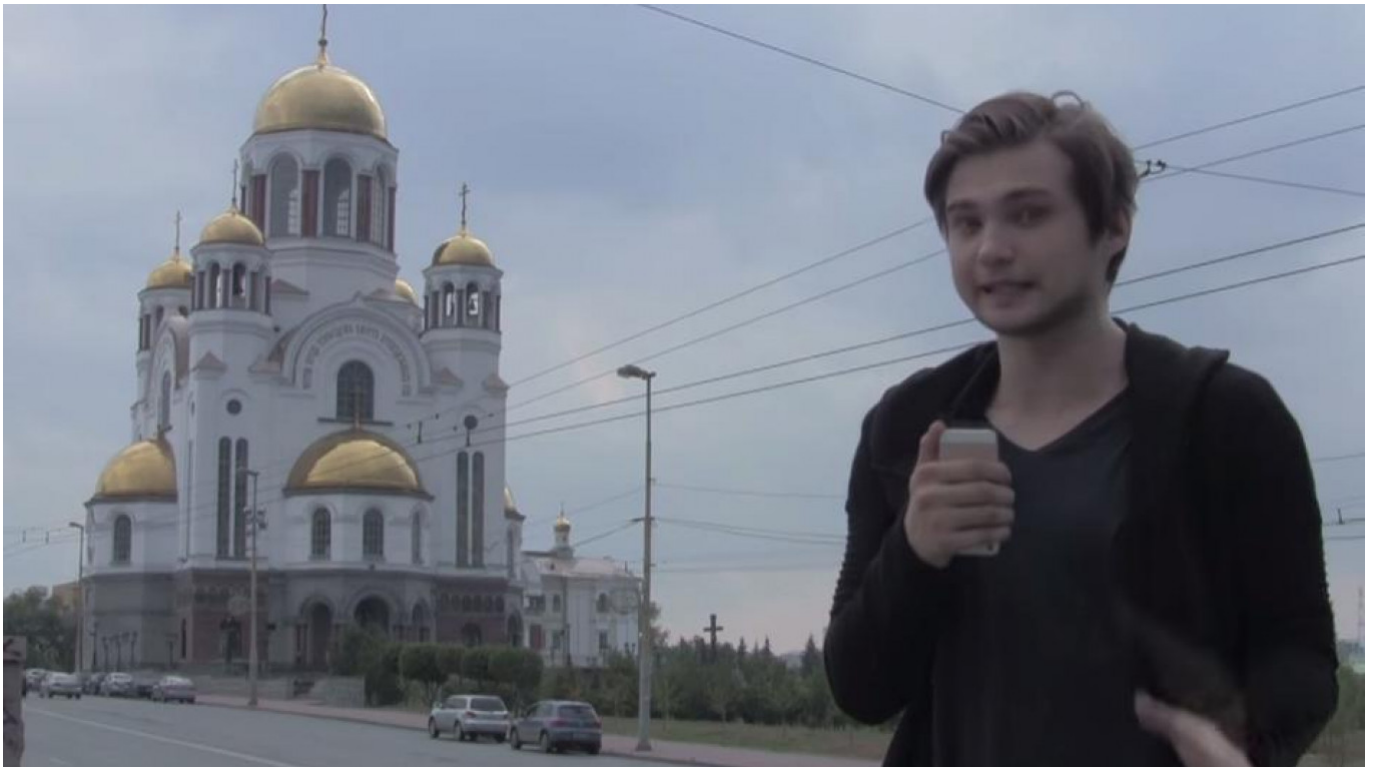


Russian Blogger on Trial for Playing Pokemon Go in a Cathedral

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Ruslan Sokolovsky **Ruslan Sokolovsky / YouTube**

The trial of blogger Ruslan Sokolovsky, accused of extremism and offending religious believers for playing Pokemon Go in a cathedral, began in the Ural city of Yekaterinburg on Monday.

Sokolovsky was arrested for a series of videos he uploaded to YouTube in August 2016, which the police deem “extremist” and “offensive to religious believers' feelings.” He faces a maximum sentence of seven and a half years in prison.

The 21 year-old blogger's most infamous video, which turned him into an online celebrity in Russia, shows him entering the Church of All Saints in Yekaterinburg and playing Pokemon Go on his iPhone. Sokolovsky later added narration to the video which police describe as illegal and “obscene.” In a short speech at the beginning of the video, Sokolovsky rejects warnings reported in the Russian press that playing Pokemon Go in churches could result in a prison sentence.

Sokolovsky says that he does not intend to apologize or ask for forgiveness from the Russian Orthodox Church for his videos.

“The Russian Orthodox Church is asking for a public repentance. I don't see why I should repent in front of an organization I do not like,” he told journalists after the court hearing.

Instead, he said he would be “interested” if the church sent him to work for one of their charities as a form of punishment. “I would accept such a form of repentance because I would be helping specific people and not the Church,” he said.

The young blogger also added that he sees how some of his videos could have offended believers. “If I offended anyone, I am ready to apologize to specific people,” he said.

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