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AR'S 3-MINUTE SWEET SPOT IN POKEMON GO

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In the ongoing debate over whether or not Pokémon Go is AR (or if it really matters), one argument is that most players turn off AR mode. It can deplete your battery and make gameplay harder. AR's novelty in the game can also wear off after the first few times using it.

For those unfamiliar, AR Mode in Pokémon Go activates the user's camera so that encountered Pokémon appear overlaid on real-world scenes. When AR Mode is off, the camera is likewise off so the backdrop within gameplay is animated, and can vary based on situational factors.

Niantic is open about AR mode's limited use, and admits that AR isn't a silver bullet for any game. CTO Phil Keslin said once that most people use AR only occasionally for posed photos of Pokémon in the real world. CEO John Hanke likewise said at GDC that AR mode is limiting.



Image Credit: TechCrunch

“AR in and of itself is not a magic bullet for a hit game. There are some real drawbacks to it,” Hanke said on stage, adding that ideal interaction time for AR mode is two-to-three minutes. In fact, he admits that the majority of the gameplay should and does take place outside of AR.

The 2-3 minute sweet spot makes sense given physical realities. AR is a snack (VR is a meal) as we've examined. Not only is there arm strain, but cultural factors preclude holding up a camera while walking around. And focus can be distracted in awkward ways in high-traffic areas.

After learning some of these lessons, Niantic recently formalized the feature Keslin referenced, to let players pose with their Pokémon in real-world scenes. Known as Go Snapshot, it optimizes AR's role within the app by giving it an official feature that plays to the technology's strengths.



Image Credit: Niantic

In other words GO Snapshot could do AR a favor by letting it be its best self within the game (versus AR mode), as validated by user behavior. And it could spread AR outside the game through people sharing AR photos, a la Snapchat Lenses. We'll see creative uses of the feature.

Speaking of doing AR a favor, findings like the 2-3 minute sweet spot are gold for anyone developing AR. As a byproduct of its games (and Real World Platform), Niantic is testing the waters for user behavior. And it has a pretty large and reliable sample of 65 million active users.

As Real World Platform continues to develop, and as Harry Potter Wizards Unite rolls out, we'll see more UX lessons. And we'll be paying close attention whenever those nuggets are disclosed. Mobile AR interactions are still a developing art, and it will be a long learning process.

Video Companion

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Run by analysts and former journalists, coverage is grounded in a disciplined and journalistic approach. It also maintains a business angle: Though there are lots of fun and games in AR & VR, long-term cultural, technological and financial implications are primary.

Products include the *AR Insider* publication and the *ARtillery PRO* research subscription., which together engender a circular flow of knowledge. Research includes monthly Intelligence Briefings, market-sizing forecasts and consumer survey data, all housed in a robust intelligence vault.

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About the Author

Mike Boland was one of Silicon Valley's first tech reporters of the Internet age, as a staff reporter for *Forbes* (print) starting in 2000. He has been an industry analyst covering mobile and social media since 2005, and is now Chief Analyst of *ARtillery Intelligence* and Editor-in-Chief of *AR Insider*.

Mike is a frequent speaker at industry conferences such as VRLA, ad:tech and LeadsCon. He has authored in-depth reports and market-sizing forecasts on the changing tech & media landscape. He contributes regularly to highly read online news sources such as *TechCrunch*, *Business Insider* and the *Huffington Post*.

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