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Augmented reality at Dubai parks: A gaming approach to curb COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Prior to the discovery of the novel coronavirus, social distancing was never considered a norm to be practised when out in public. Notwithstanding, measures have been introduced by the health authorities to curb the spread of COVID-19, with each person responsible to maintain a safe distance from the other. The intention to return a “normal life”, using public parks as leisure place is part of the intentions of the UAE residents, volunteers in this research. In general, Parks are community places that invite the society to be engaged within healthy activities. In smart cities like Dubai, technology has been used as a connection of attractive tendencies and methodologies to attract people from different age range. Augmented reality is one of the innovative measures which has been proposed to ensure that the vulnerable elderly and children are safe from catching the virus when outdoors. Augmented reality 'treasure hunts' which involve the participants searching for valuables provide a safe and inclusive environment to maintain physical fitness levels while adhering to social distancing guidelines. Gaming via portable devices such as smartphones allows people to practise physical activities at public spaces using the ludo-motricity; blurring the lines between the real and the virtual worlds. The game provides a perfect platform for developers and the authorities to not only disseminate the engagement of technology in physical activities, but also allow the consumers to rediscover social relations among themselves, in turn, leading to virtual communities, build customer loyalty and generate revenue from advergames to combat the health crises. The overwhelming positive reception received by the popular smartphone video game "Pokemon GO" has shown the potential of augmented reality games in attracting audience of all ages. The augmented reality 'treasure hunt' could set an alarm and vibrate when a participant does not maintain a safe distance. The economy impact based on the App utilisation, number of park visiting and level of physical activity will be developed. A penalty could include deduction of in-game points and disqualification from the game if the player does not maintain the social distance, in this suggested version. Therefore, gamers will try to observe social distancing to successfully complete the treasure hunt. The mentioned example is one of a few proposals which can help the authorities to convey the COVID-19 guidelines in a fun and competitive setting. The pandemic can be utilised as a tool to drive changes. Therefore, the users will be obliged to practise social distancing to use the application. This pilot app project can also detect and record the number of users in an environment, the duration of stay of each user and the routes navigated while playing the game. This allows the app to trace the origins of the virus and alert fellow users if a gamer experiences symptoms of COVID-19. The app provides a novel concept of 'gamification' for health practitioners and advergames issued in public interest using augmented reality.

KEYWORDS

Innovation, Smart Cities, Sport Management, Augmented Reality

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