

Augmented Reality: too good to be true?

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My wife and I share everything. However, since Pokémon Go is played in our homes - or actually mainly outside, on the street in public space - we no longer fully share our physical world. For example, where there are "only" trees on our morning dog walk in my world, in my wife's world there are also Pokémons that can be collected or fought in battles with other players of the game. Most Pokémon Go players play the game on their smartphone. The game is an example of immersive technology, in which digital (virtual) elements are added to the physical world. Immersion is then originally the perception of being physically present in a non-physical world, which here is experiencing the physical presence of a non-physical element (the Pokémon). This seems like a very good idea. But is it?

Except that the first (fatal) accidents as a result of Pokémon Go have already been reported, this seems relatively harmless. But when you enter the public space with smart glasses, you will be able to see a digitally modified version of the physical world. There is already an app – DeepNude – that shows all passing women realistically naked, or an app that erases “unwanted” people such as bums from the area. So while Augmented Reality (AR) started out innocently, even as a child's play, it can easily turn into something really unpleasant. How should public administration and regulations respond to this? If in the AR version of my village there are all kinds of slogans on my house, or if my voice cloned says the most terrible things, with or without my face, what can I do?

Nothing! There is no legislation that states that what applies offline (on site) also applies online. As so often, governance and regulation lag behind decades of developments, which are still accelerating. I have to admit that at first I only saw great opportunities in Pokémon Go, or in other ways to enrich the physical world with digital information. We have also contributed to these developments with my research group. It seems like a win-win when a mechanic looks at the faltering engine through Google glasses and is then digitally assisted to quickly and adequately diagnose and solve the problem. Or voice control, which ensures that working with the computer is no longer only possible via the keyboard or mouse, seemed much more natural to me. Everyone, including my wife, laughed at me about 5 years ago when I dictated my messages instead of typing them on my smartphone. In the meantime, I have stopped doing that, and have emphatically turned off the voice control functions, because I noticed that even passive conversations about, for example, a new refrigerator almost immediately resulted in advertising messages about e-devices.

Deep-fake, deep-nude, and immersive techniques blur the boundary between the physical and virtual world and thus between real and fake (fake). Not only will we, if we 'accidentally' appear in the digital field of view of the 'glasses' of others, be noticed by a multitude of aspects, such as, for example, our face, our gait, our voice, or our posture and as a result be fully traceable (in the loop). Also, if these developments continue and everyone sees other "enrichments" (or omissions) through his/her glasses in the public space, the Babylonian confusion of tongues will become a Babylonian distortion of reality. Will there be regulations against apps that, for example, remove clothing from film images, or that perform (real-time) unwanted interventions on the bodies of people entering public spaces? I have written about Pandora's Box before. Immersive technology seemed too good to be true. Well, we will have to endure its terrible "side effects" in the coming decades as well. That is, if we haven't already succumbed to the environmental and climate impacts of past "blessings"!

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