

Brooms and Bobbles:  
How Harry Potter and Pokémon Have Affected Our World  
Both Economically and Socially

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In August of 1998, a young British boy, all of eleven years, hopped on his broom and flew to the United States. The young man soared through the book charts landing at number one and staying there for many months. The tales of his school years at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry became wildly popular among American children and adults. Most Americans have his first four books along with his two school books on their shelves and are anxiously awaiting the release of the fifth book and the first movie.

Traveling across the ocean, from the Land of the Rising Sun, 151 monsters headed for the United States. Arriving in September of 1998, in the form of a game for Game Boy gaming systems, these little monsters spread across the continent like a wildfire. Soon they inhabited our televisions, movies, theaters, various gaming systems, bed covers, pillows, book shelves, and much more.

Harry Potter and Pokémon both hit it off big in the United States and many other countries around the world. Harry Potter has been translated into some 25 languages and Pokémon is probably close to that (Knobel). Their popularity gained their creators great profits and allowed them to spread to many different media. Also, due to their popularity, they became easy targets

for parents and religious figures.

“We’re in the Money”

Harry Potter and Pokémon both hit it big. Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone, by J.K. Rowling, has been on the New York Times Children’s Chapter Book Best Seller’s List for the last 127 weeks and is currently at number 5 on the chart. The other three Harry Potter chapter books are also on the list. The fictional textbooks Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them and Quidditch Through the Ages, both by J.K. Rowling, are at the number one and two spots respectively on the Children’s Paperback list. These two books have been on that list every week since their release nine weeks ago (“Children’s . . .”).

While books are Harry’s claim to fame, Pokémon has its trading cards. The Pokémon Trading Card Game has been a big seller for Wizards of the Coast. When the card game first came out, Wizards had a hard time keeping it in stock due to people buying whole boxes instead of individual packs. Wizards ended up have to limit sales to five packs per person per day (Armstrong).

To show even further how these two artifacts have affected our economy lets look at the online sales of these products. I choose to use Amazon.com and BN.com, Barns and Noble’s online store, because they are the most widely known book distributors on the web and they both display the sales ranking of each item. The sale ranking is determined by which item has sold the most in a certain period of time. To make things easy and not provide you with a number headache, I have put the information into a table. The table shows the sales rank for all four Harry Potter Books as well as the two textbooks. In the sales rank column the first number is the hardcover edition and the second is the paperback.

Title	BN.com	Amazon.com
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (Book 1)	16 / 20	181 / 139
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (Book 2)	21 / 30	354 / 118
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (Book 3)	7	36
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (Book 4)	10	34
"Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them" and "Quidditch Through the Ages"	3	24

Table 1 - Amazon.com and BN.com sales ranks for J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. Data collected May 21, 2001.

To support my claim that Pokémon is popular I looked up the Pokémon books to discover that there are 243 books on Amazon.com with the best rank at 2,124 for Pokémon Gold and Silver: Prima's Official Strategy Guide. BN.com had 143 titles with the best rank at 1,066 for the same strategy guide. Next, I tried to find info on the sales for the card game but that was nowhere to be found. Finally, I searched for the Game Boy games and found them on Amazon.com. The following table shows the sales rankings of the 5 Game Boy game that are available to buy.

Title	Rank	Title	Rank	Title	Rank
Red	61	Blue	235	Yellow	130
Silver	30	Gold	24		

Table 2 - Amazon.com sales ranks for Nintendo's Pokémon Game Boy games. Data collected May 22, 2001.

So why all these numbers? Easy, they show that these items are still extremely popular. Pokémon Red and Blue came out in September of 1998, and look how well they are still doing. Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone came out in August of 1998, and it still ranks at 16 on

BN.com. These are items that have been profitable for many companies worldwide. To make the items, the companies have to employ many people to make them. The world is happier.

### Pillow Talk

While both Pokémon and Harry Potter have their strong areas, Pokémon has had an easier time expanding into different medium with a popular TV show, trading card game, many electronic games, movies, various types of toys, and comics. They also have a market in clothing, accessories (i.e., bed sheets, pillows, toothbrushes, ect.), posters, and books. Pokémon was a good seller for a long time but then sales dropped due to lack of interest and people switching over to Harry Potter. Hasbro, a maker of Pokémon toys, has relied so heavily on Pokémon that when sales declined the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2000, Hasbro's net income tumbled 80 percent ("Mattel . . ."). The Pokémon movies have also declined in box office sales. The first movie brought in \$86 million while the second brought in only \$43 million (Martinez). I couldn't find the statistic for the third.

Harry Potter has a much smaller reach into the vast number of medium. Harry's main medium is, of course, books. Other medium Harry has spread to are posters, stationary and journals, figurines, clothing and table top games just to name a few. These mediums haven't had nearly as much attention payed to them during the creation process as the many Pokémon mediums have. For example, I bought one of the Harry Potter board games for my fiancé's little sister for Christmas this year. While playing we ran into many spots where the rules were unclear or didn't allow for a situation we were in - and we only played it once! Basically, I had spent about \$25 on a worthless piece of cardboard. Situations like this make people not want to buy the rest of the games. I haven't heard of Wizards of the Coast having a great rush on Potter games.

With the release of the *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* movie in November, I believe that more Harry Potter items will pop up. During New York's Toy Fair in early February this year only book-based Harry Potter items were available. Warner Brothers Consumer Products executives said they didn't want to flood Toy Fair as part of their plan to manage Harry Potter products with scrutiny and secrecy (Ebenkamp). This is where Harry has the edge on Pokémon. There will be new Harry items for at least six more years with the release of the books and possibly more movies and a TV series. Pokémon can come out with all the extensions to the TV series and card game but they have done it all before and the plot doesn't change much. Harry Potter on the other hand, has a new plot with each book. I do admit that the long wait between the rest of the books will cause down areas in sales, but the release of the next book will bring them up again.

#### The Bans are On

So we know that both Harry Potter and Pokémon are economically good for the US. So why do people think they are "evil" and bad influences?

For 1999 the American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom reported that Harry Potter was the number 1 most challenged book. By "challenged" they mean that a formal, written complaint was filed with a library or a school about the books content or appropriateness (Oder, "Harry . . ."). A report by Family Friendly Libraries stated that the Harry Potter series was not appropriate for schools due to occult themes, violent content, and anti-family bias. "If children are excited about a book, it must be suspect," concluded author Judy Bloom in response to the FFL's report, "at the rate we're going, I can imagine next year's headline: 'Goodnight Moon Banned for Encouraging Children To Communicate with Furniture'" (Oder, "FFL . . .").

Some religious heads believe that Harry Potter promotes Satanism and Paganism. How could it? There is no mention of witchcraft as a religion; it's a way of life. Nowhere in the books does anyone worship any deity or acknowledge/deny their existence. Religion is just not part of the Harry Potter world's daily life which makes it pleasant for people of any religion, or no religion, to read.

In addition, if this story has too much magic then Harold and the Purple Crayon, a popular preschool book by Crockett Johnson, should have been banned long ago. I mean talk about magic, this little kid draws stuff with a purple crayon and it becomes real. Crayons are much more accessible tools than wands, so every mother should watch out.

Then there is A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle, which I was required to read in sixth grade. This tale involves space/time travel. Looking at the BN.com web site, most of the recent reviews of this book suggest reading the Harry Potter series if you like it. Maybe this book should be banned as well.

Pokémon is facing the threat of being banned in the Islamic nations for related goods encouraging gambling. Apparently Pokémon games and toys are considered as gambling items (Akmar). How you gamble with them beats me.

Pokémon has also faced problems religious figures. Pokémon is also said to be Satanist and that it's evil because you play God over the Pokémon. One areas religious leader believe that since one of the Pokémon explodes into little stars while it evolves that it represents the Star of David in a negative way. More and more religions are being "discovered" in Pokémon such as promotion of the cross, Free masonic ideas, and Shintoism (Akmar).

There seems to be a trend here. If its popular, ban it. Parents and religious heads seem to believe that these items will take their children off the beaten path. The critics seem to think that

thrusting the news that these items are bad or “evil” into the media will keep kids from viewing the material. This way all the kids who haven’t heard of them will. This will also peak curiosity in people and they will have to see for themselves what the big deal is. Maybe this is all just a big ploy by the producers to expand the number of consumers.

Oh No, Its Educational!

Some parents keep missing the most important aspect of Harry Potter and Pokémon - they are educational! How could Harry Potter and Pokémon be educational? Easily. The story of Harry Potter “emphasizes the importance of loyal friendship, the practice of reciprocity based on the idea that ‘one good turn deserves another,’ the need for selflessness and kindness, the importance of logical thinking and deduction, and so on” (Knobel). Harry Potter shows that even an orphan that is forced to live in the cupboard under the stairs of his aunt and uncles house can make something of himself. The books also show that teachers can be helpful and the kids DO their homework! Harry Potter has been analyzed by psychiatrists, scholars and even the International Congress on Medieval Studies. The psychiatrists concluded that Harry Potter books “are not merely escapes but tools for children and adults to work through their daily struggles ” (“Psychiatrists...”). Scholars say that Harry Potter has many literary virtues such as compelling plots and well-developed characters as well as many metanarratives such as good over evil or the strong and powerful being defeated by the weak and defenseless (Knobel). The International Congress on Medieval Studies looked at the medieval archetypes present in the books and many others. They decided that Harry has many similarities with King Arthur and that Hogwarts is like King Arthur’s court (Kinzer). Harry Potter is a piece of literature that is going to live on for generations.



While scholars may not analyze Pokémon it still has educational value. The Pokémon television series stresses team work and friendship. Those seem to be its only educational qualities, but then you look at the Pokémon Trading Card game. To many it may not seem educational, but it is. The kids have to read the cards to understand what each one does. After a while they learn to memorize the cards for faster play. Each person has to put together their own deck out of hundreds of possible cards; this enforces strategy. To be able to play and not get the other players mad they have to practice fair play and good sportsmanship. On top of all that, the cards are collectors items so the kids need to take good care of their cards and learn their values. Pokémon cards also make people interact with each other.

## Conclusion

Pokémon and Harry Potter have had a huge affect on our economy and will continue to do so for many years until their popularity dies out. They will constantly be challenged by many people but those people will never win the fight, at least in the United States, due to the masses that love them. And maybe someday those people who wish to ban Harry Potter and Pokémon will realize their educational value. Most importantly, Pokémon and Harry Potter bring people together and encourage communication, wether they are discussing why little monsters and a boy on a broom are evil, the latest Harry Potter book, Pokémon League at Wizards, or why Hasbro's stock fell so much last year.

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