

ROBLOX: A Rapid Analysis

Michael Dezuanni, Amy Schoonens, Amanda Levido, and Tama Leaver

In brief:

- Roblox is a creative game-based platform popular among children, with 32.1 million daily active users under the age of 13.
- In the second quarter of 2024, Roblox generated revenue of over US \$893 million, largely through the sale of digital assets and experiences.
- Roblox has had a wide impact on children’s popular culture and is highly popular as YouTube content.
- The platform has been controversial due to how its in-platform currency, Robux, is used; and due to child safety concerns.

INTRODUCTION

While Roblox is often referred to as a game, it is better thought of as a platform for digital play-based experiences and digital creation.

Founded by David Baszucki in 2004, Roblox was conceived as entertainment for gamers to experience player-constructed content and virtual worlds. Today, Roblox describes itself as the “ultimate virtual universe that lets you create, share experiences with friends and be anything you can imagine”.ⁱ

Roblox has a “vision” to be used by all agesⁱⁱ but is monopolised by young people. The platform has over 77.7M active daily users including 32.1M who are 13 years old and under.ⁱⁱⁱ The fastest growing category of users is aged 17-24.^{iv}

In 2021, Roblox shifted from referring to itself as a game to an *experience*, with *experience* being more closely aligned to the concept of a *metaverse*.^v This shift coincided with a debate about how Roblox is classified within the Apple App Store because it cannot be distinguished as either a social gaming platform, or a sales platform – essentially operating as its own App store.^{vi} Roblox is available for use on smartphones, tablets, computers and gaming consoles.

There are over 4.4 million ‘experiences’ in Roblox, such as games, quizzes, concerts, and ‘hangout’ spots. A popular

form of experience is obstacle courses, or ‘obbys’. The most popular Roblox experiences open to all ages include Brookhaven RP (a real-life simulator), which has been visited 45.8B times, Adopt Me! (a virtual pet adoption game), visited 35.9B times, and Blox Fruits (an online roleplaying game) visited 32B times.

While many experiences are generated by everyday users, independent and large companies also create experiences for the platform, including examples such as music streaming service Spotify, and soft toy company Squishmallows.

CHILDREN’S PARTICIPATION

Roblox users can play games, chat with other users, and create their own content. Children participate in experiences via avatars, which are customisable using freely available content to change hairstyles and clothes, or they can use Robux (the in-world currency) to purchase items from the Marketplace (the in-world shop). Items in the Marketplace may be created by individual users, or commercial entities, and are often presented to users as ‘trending’ items.

Roblox is a social space, and users can ‘Add friends’ by searching for usernames and display names, allowing them to connect with anyone who will accept their friend request. Children can easily join their friends in experiences. They can also create and join groups with their friends and others.

Game creation

Roblox experiences can be created using Roblox Studio, which is part of the Creator Hub. The Creator Hub features built-in learning about coding and games creation, as well as tutorials and guides for educators aiming to teach users how to create games. It brings together all the creator tools to manage content including distribution, monetisation and analytics. Some templates are provided for some common experiences such as Castle, Pirate Island, Obby, and Combat.

BUSINESS MODEL

Roblox generates revenue through platform economies, relationships with game developers, and external organisations benefiting from gamified marketing strategies.^{vii} In the second quarter of 2024 alone, Roblox generated revenue of over US\$893M.^{viii}

User participation and the Roblox business model are heavily interdependent.^{ix} Foxman argues Roblox’s business model is reliant on playbour (player labour) and at each stage of content production, users are

“encouraged to learn the game, develop content, and market it to consumers”.^x Though any player can theoretically create and distribute their own game on the platform, only a small number of users do. Roblox Corporation subsequently receives percentages of purchases of content, advertising and licensing facilitated by general users and brands capitalising on user consumption.

Although young people are Roblox’s primary users, the company promotes itself as a business communication and marketing tool by presenting ‘solutions’^{xi} to commercial entities. Through its ‘solutions’ approach, Roblox claims it can assist in advertising, integrations and virtual goods by capitalizing on digital *experiences*. Roblox offers immersive experiences as a ‘solution’ to businesses to foster “social connection”, “self-expression” and “imaginative exploration” to tell a brand’s “unique story” and offer *authentic* connections with user-consumers to extend “IRL impact”.^{xii} The platform includes many virtual worlds created by high-end brands like Gucci, popular tv shows like *Stranger Things*, and sports content such as the National Hockey League. All these become opportunities for Roblox to connect young people to commercial entities.

POLICIES

Roblox has several publicly available policies both within the platform and on its support website. This includes Terms of Use, Privacy and Cookie policy, Roblox Community Standards, Biometric Privacy Notice; and specific Developer Exchange Terms of Use, which applies to users who are entitled to exchange their in-platform currency (Robux) for real money.^{xiii}

Roblox offers an in-platform parent portal to introduce them to the features of the game and available safety features. The aim is to reassure parents that their children will remain safe whilst engaging with Roblox. It outlines customisable parental controls, chat filters, and reporting procedures. The platform includes clothing detection to ensure all avatars are wearing ‘appropriate attire’.

Roblox publicly promotes itself as being COPPA^{xiv} certified as ‘kidSAFE Plus’. This means Roblox meets the basic components of being certified as kid safe by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission, but also provides additional privacy measures including data integrity and parental consent procedures.^{xv}

Roblox policies refer to *collecting information* rather than using terms such as data retention and storage. Various types of information are collected for the purposes of advertising and under the guise of protecting users. Personal Information (or PI) collected refers to any “information relating to a natural person who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, or an online identifier”.^{xvi} For under 13s, however, only non-personal information (including username, password, birthday and gender) is collected.

For over-13s, Roblox keeps posted content such as messages and comments as well as chats, forums, group walls, personal posts and other features. They state, “We monitor what you say and write to check that it meets our community standards and complies with our Terms of Use. [...] Where the law allows us to, we may use the content you and other users have posted for training or to help us to improve the way we filter content on our platform”.^{xvii} While the policy is careful to state they do not *store* information on gameplay, it suggests that gameplay data is indeed collected. It is unclear if gameplay of under-13s is also collected.

In terms of advertising, Roblox collects information including IP addresses; information on users’ browsers/operation systems, including language settings and general location information; usernames or user IDs. This statement is later qualified with “We do not collect or use Personal Information about users under the age of 13 for marketing purposes.” More information on advertising is discussed in the Cookies section of the policy regarding third-party advertising companies. It outlines the types of ads directed at under 13s but states they do not collection information from users under 13 for the purposes of directing targeted advertising. Though ads cannot be targeted to users under 13, the use of advergames (ads presented in video game formats)^{xviii} are a way around this.

COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC RESPONSES

Roblox has been associated with several controversies.

Most prominently, many have accused the company of not doing enough to stop adult sexual predators on the platform, particularly within the platform’s chat function.^{xix} While Roblox makes it possible to turn off chat and has aimed to stop the overall problem of predation

on the platform, to date they have not been successful and rely heavily on parents to monitor their children's interactions on the platform^{xx} and to use parental controls to assist with keeping their children safe.

The platform has also been criticised for allowing religious and political extremists to recruit children and young people to extremist ideologies.^{xxi}

Numerous YouTubers, including the popular channel *People Make Games*^{xxii}, have accused the platform of exploiting young game developers due to the ways in which the monetary reward system works on the platform, including what has been referred to as an exploitative conversation rate from Robux to real currency. In addition, some critics have shown how younger creators on the platform are sometimes exploited by other, often older, young people who use them as digital labour.^{xxiii} Video game scholar Keogh suggests players are frequently "recruited" to be creators within Roblox because the platform uses "production tools in ways that are almost indistinguishable from play".^{xxiv}

In response to criticisms that the platform exploits young creators, the Roblox Studio head has argued that the platform is a "gift" to young creators as it allows them to monetise their creative capacities.^{xxv}

CULTURAL AND COMMERCIAL IMPACT

There are many commercial products associated with Roblox that are aimed at children. This includes various book series, such as official game and character guides, fiction series for children including *Diary of a Roblox Pro* (published by Scholastic), the *Academy for Roblox Pros Graphic Novel series*, and even a cookbook.^{xxvi} StoryJumper, the self-publishing site for multimedia books, includes many stories about Roblox written by children and adults.

Numerous YouTubers create Roblox content. Popular examples among children such as Tofuu, IAmSanna and Sketch who upload Roblox content weekly and sometimes daily. ShanePlays, who has over 3.94M subscribers, has a channel dedicated to Roblox movies, which features dozens of animated films ranging from 1 to 2.5 hours long, featuring characters in the style of Roblox characters.^{xxvii}

Roblox is also interconnected with many popular consumer products and entertainment 'supersystems'.^{xxviii} The popular game 'Adopt Me' (accessed >35B times)^{xxix} is a Roblox experience developed by Uplift Games which focuses on adopting, caring for, collecting and trading virtual pets. With over 425M players, this experience has spawned various Adopt Me toy lines including the mystery collector toys, plush toys, action figures and playsets, as well as colouring books, game guides and journals.

Videos tagged with #Roblox on TikTok have been viewed over 715B times, showing that experiences associated with the platform have a strong cross platform presence.

Education

Roblox has been used for educational purposes, including for family education, maths, religious education, skills training and programming. It is often described as opportunities to support social interaction and collaboration learning.^{xxx}

The Roblox Creator Hub offers a free curriculum to teachers and there are some experiences under the 'Learn & Explore' category that directly relates to various curriculum context.

Numerous extra-curriculum programs for children offer after-school and holiday coding and game making experiences for children.

FURTHER READING

Dezuanni, M., et al. (2023). Digital Child Working Paper 2023-11, *Manifesto for a Better Children's Internet*. Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, Queensland University of Technology. <https://doi.org/10.26187/q42e-6047>

Davis, H. and Hjorth, L. (2024) Roblox in Lockdown: Understanding Young People's Digital Social Play in the Pandemic. In P. Siuda, J. Majewski, K. Chmielewski (Eds.). *Gaming and Gamers in Times of Pandemic*. Bloomsbury.

Han, J.; Liu, G.; Gao, Y. (2023) Learners in the Metaverse: A Systematic Review on the Use of Roblox in Learning. *Educ. Sci.*,13, 296. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13030296>

How to cite this paper

Dezuanni, M., Schoonens, A., Levido, A., Leaver, T. (2024). Roblox: A Rapid Analysis. Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child. Queensland University of Technology, DOI: 10.5204/rep.eprints.254236



A word on methodology: This rapid analysis was undertaken by a small team of researchers over a short period of time in 2024. The primary approach included document analysis, including analysis of online sources of information such as public and journalistic commentary and Roblox’s official statements.

ⁱ Roblox Corp. (n.d). Roblox. Apple App Store. <https://apps.apple.com/hr/app/roblox/id431946152>

ⁱⁱ Baszucki, D. (2023, May 17). Our vision for all ages. *Roblox Blog*. <https://blog.roblox.com/2023/05/our-vision-for-all-ages/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Statista (2024, May [a]). Daily active users (DAU) of Roblox games worldwide from 4th quarter 2018 to 1st quarter 2024). <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1192573/daily-active-users-global-roblox/#:~:text=As%20of%20the%20first%20quarter,from%20the%20previously%20reported%20quarter.>; Statista (2024, May [b]). Daily active users (DAU) of Roblox games worldwide from 4th quarter 2019 to 1st quarter 2024. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1190309/daily-active-users-worldwide-roblox/>

^{iv} Baszucki, 2023.

^v Robertson, A. (2021, May 15). Apple said Roblox developers don’t make games, and now Roblox agrees. *The Verge*. <https://www.theverge.com/2021/5/14/22436014/apple-roblox-epic-fortnite-trial-what-is-game-name-change>

^{vi} Robertson; Keogh, B. (2023). The videogame industry does not exist: Why we should think beyond commercial game production. The MIT Press.

^{vii} Dwivedi, Y., Hughes, L., Wang, Y. [...]. (2023). Metaverse marketing: How the metaverse will shape the future of consumer research and practice. *Psychology and Marketing*, 40(1), 750-776. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21767>

^{viii} Statista. (2024, Aug). Revenue generated by Roblox Corporation worldwide [...]. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1190638/quarterly-revenue-roblox-corporation/>

^{ix} Livingston, S., & Pothong, K. (2021). *Playful by design: A vision of free playing a digital world*. Digital Futures Commission (London: 5Rights Foundation).

^x Foxman, M. (2022). Gaming the system: Playbour, production, promotion and the metaverse. *Baltic Screen Media Review* 10(2), p. 230

^{xi} <https://brands.roblox.com/>

^{xii} Roblox. *Roblox Solution: Experiences*. Sighted July 2024. <https://brands.roblox.com/solutions/experiences>

^{xiii} In 2023, 5M developers and creators earned Robux on the platform, and 12K of those opted to exchange their Robux for real-world currency. Statista (2024, Feb.). Annual number of developers and creators earning money from Roblox from 2021 to 2023. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1376688/roblox-annual-earning-creators/>

^{xiv} The Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) is embedded in Unites States Federal Law.

^{xv} Kid Safe Seal Program. <https://www.kidsafeseal.com/aboutourseals.html>

^{xvi} Roblox Privacy and Cookie Policy. *Roblox*. (Sighted October 2024). <https://en.help.roblox.com/hc/en-us/articles/115004630823-Roblox-Privacy-and-Cookie-Policy>

^{xvii} Ibid.

^{xviii} Bains, C. (2024, Jul 14). ‘Advergames’: how games platform Roblox became a corporate marketing playground. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/games/article/2024/jul/13/advergames-how-games-platform-roblox-became-a-corporate-marketing-playground?>

^{xix} Parents’ ultimate Guide to Roblox.’ (2022, Dec 14). Common Sense Media. <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/articles/parents-ultimate-guide-to-roblox>

^{xx} Carville, O. & D’Anastasio, C. (2024, July 23). Roblox’s pedophile problem. *Bloomberg*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2024-roblox-pedophile-problem/>

^{xxi} ‘Online gaming platforms such as Roblox used as ‘Trojan horse’ for extremist recruitment of children, AFP warns.’ (2023, Dec 3). *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/dec/03/online-gaming-platforms-such-as-roblox-used-as-trojan-horse-for-extremist-recruitment-of-children-afp-warns>; Carville, O., & D’Anastasio, C. (2024, July 22). Roblox’s pedophile problem. *Bloomberg*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2024-roblox-pedophile-problem/>

^{xxii} People Make Games. (2021, August 19). Investigation: How Roblox is exploiting young game developers. YouTube. Sighted July 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXlauRB1EQ>

^{xxiii} Parkin, S. (2022, January 9). The trouble with Rolbox, the video game empire built on child labour. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/games/2022/jan/09/the-trouble-with-roblox-the-video-game-empire-built-on-child-labour>

^{xxiv} Keogh, p. 217.

^{xxv} Cripe, M. (2024, April 5). Roblox Studio head: Play-to-earn isn’t child labor, it’s a gift. *IGN*. <https://www.ign.com/articles/roblox-ceo-pay-to-earn-isnt-child-labor-its-a-gift>

^{xxvi} Wilson, S. (2021). Roblox Cookbook: Giving You Unique Recipes Of Many Dishes From Your Favorite Series. (Independently published.)

^{xxvii} ShanePlays YouTube channel. Sighted July 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/@ShanePlaysRBX>

^{xxviii} Dezuanni, M., et al. (2023). Digital Child Working Paper 2023-11, *Manifesto for a Better Children’s Internet*. Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, Queensland University of Technology. <https://doi.org/10.26187/q42e-6047>

^{xxix} Statista (2024, April). Most played Roblox games worldwide as of April 2024, by all time visits. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1220905/roblox-most-visited-games/>

^{xxx} Han, J., Liu, G., & Gao, Y. (2023). Learners in the Metaverse: A systematic review of the Use of Roblox in learning. *Education Sciences*, 13(3). <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13030296>