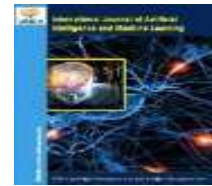




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Research Paper

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Ugc Gaming Platforms Vs Traditional App Stores: A Comparative Analysis Of Game Discovery, Engagement And Monetization

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Abstract

Digital games are moving to a new form of distribution where the player, the creator, the communities, the recommendation system and the monetisation strategy are all built into one platform. User generated content (UGC) gaming platforms like Roblox and Fortnite more closely resemble a hub for game creation, discovery, social interaction, virtual economy and creator rewards, as compared to platforms like the Apple App Store and Google Play, which are more of a transaction and distribution channel for third-party built applications. This disparity has far-reaching consequences for game discovery, engagement, participation by creators, and monetization.

This research is aimed to compare and contrast UGC gaming platforms and traditional App Stores with regards to their comparative characteristics using secondary data. Documentation from the platform, industry reports and published market research are used to synthesise evidence. All of these are examined: discovery mechanisms, recommendation systems, engagement structures, creator participation, monetization diversity, platform control and economic value distribution. The industry has shown signs that the creators and social platforms are driving more and more game discovery. Bain found 24% of those polled said they found new games via online content creators or influencers, while 12% found it via conventional digital storefronts. UGC ecosystems have built up a significant creator economy too. Roblox and Fortnite and Overwolf have seen their creator payouts increase by 47% to approximately US\$2.2 billion in 2025. According to industry estimates, Roblox ended 2025 with over 150 million DAUs and around 13 billion engagement hours for the entire month of 2025.

Both comparative analysis indicate that the UGC platforms possess stronger endogenous discovery capabilities, social interaction and creator monetization capabilities, whereas the traditional app store has stronger distribution capabilities, standardized transaction mechanisms, and broad independent application development capabilities. The results demonstrate that the UGC gaming market isn't merely a distribution channel; it's a full-fledged entertainment ecosystem. The results also reveal a trend toward convergence between the two types of businesses, with traditional mobile-game businesses increasingly employing creator marketing, and community discovery and hybrid monetisation and developer-owned commerce growing in popularity.

Keywords: user-generated content, gaming platforms, app stores, game discovery, player engagement, game monetization, creator economy, Roblox, Fortnite, mobile gaming, digital platforms, platform economics

I. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Digital game distribution has always been based on the identification of distribution intermediaries. In the early days of the games industry, it was stores, digital stores, application stores. Smartphones further raised the significance of the centralized app stores by the development of mobile operating systems that provided a controlled environment where apps could be discovered, downloaded, updated and monetized. The success of the App Store and Google Play that followed made it a crucial platform for mobile-game sales. The app stores are not just app stores, there are several roles they can play. They provide searchable catalogues, app rankings, editorial recommendation, user reviews, payment system, security screening, updates and developer analytics. For instance, Apple offers developers data for their acquisition, engagement, monetisation and peer-group benchmarking via App Store Connect. The App Store discovery environment will also be monitoring "icon clicks" and "product page clicks", as well as "event page clicks" and "installation interface clicks". UGC gaming platforms come in a variety of different architectures. The idea behind a UGC game is to combine the process of

creating, publishing, finding, playing and monetizing independently created content with the creation of a community of content creators and an environment for social interaction (Zhuang et al., 2025). Roblox is an example to look at, as a user can make an experience, or digital products, and other players can find and use them via a centralized platform. User engagement, retention, monetary, friends plays, similarity, and variation are all taken into consideration when it comes to the Roblox recommendation system. The creation tools and user experience of Fortnite have brought about a similar platform orientation. It has been quite several years since the advent of creator ecosystems, making the line between game developer and game player increasingly fuzzy. Consumers, creators, members of community and economic participants as users all at once. The change is significant, as discovery is now an economic asset (Duan et al., 2026). In a traditional app-store game development model, the developer would develop a game and work to rank it, review it and list it on the top ten game apps lists, and then market it via pay-to-play advertisements, search optimization and editorial placement. Content can create more content, communities and social signals in a UGC ecosystem. It can therefore be a successful experience that helps with discovery via player activity, sharing, social interaction and algorithms for recommendation.

1.2 Problem Statement

The principal research issue is to understand the different avenues UGC gaming platforms and classical app stores can follow to gain visibility, engagement and monetization (Farmaki et al., 2025). Traditional app stores provide a big distribution range but developers need to compete with other developers in a large app catalog, and sometimes need to invest in user acquisition out of their own pocket. The statistics from the industry indicate that there's clearly a strong reliance on acquisition in cellular titles. In 2026, paid installs accounted for 59% of gaming IAP revenue, showing the importance of paid installs in the conventional mobile game sale.

The other model is a media platform, which includes a discovery and social interaction platform with the potential to further engage users in platform native ways. The gap raises new questions about the success rate of discovery loops on UGC platforms and impact of social interactions on engagement (will monetization models change? Will users lose control of how they engage with apps on traditional stores?

1.3 Research Objectives

It compares UGC game platforms with the traditional app stores with respect to game discovery, engagement and monetization. The study examines the impact of recommendation algorithms, social interaction, creator involvement, and community-generated content on game discovery. It also examines the methods of retaining players and how different players monetize. Another objective is to acknowledge convergence between the UGC gaming world and the traditional app-store business model.

1.4 Research Questions

The investigation is focused on four main questions. So, what sets UGC gaming platforms apart from the conventional app stores in terms of game-discovery mechanisms? Secondly, how do platform structures affect player engagement and retention? Third, what are the differences between monetization systems in creator-centred UGC ecosystems and the traditional app-store distribution? Finally, what are the features that make UGC gaming platforms more competitive?

Literature Review

2.1 Evolution of Digital Game Distribution

Digital distribution totally changed the game industry by putting a lot of emphasis on online sales in contrast to physical shops. This trend was further fueled by the app stores which connected the mobile users and the developers. Game discovery shifted to the search, category ranking, rating, screenshots and trailers, as well as the editorial placement. Your app stores, social media, user feedback and review recommendations, and YouTube videos are all important discovery sources for Google's mobile-gaming research (Yao et al., 2025). Even in traditional distribution systems, the evidence shows that discovery goes past the door of the store. This was further undermined by the growth of social platforms to be the full discovery space. The discovery process, which the player will go through before reaching the page in the store, is made easier and easier thanks to the help of videos, influencers, communities and social recommendations.

2.2 UGC as a Platform Model

Unlike traditional user-generated participation, with UGC gaming users are able to provide content to the supply side of the market. Put simply, UGC gaming is a place where the users can create games and immersive experience, then use platform discovery tools to reach audiences, Deloitte said. The beauty of this model is that it brings together the supply of content and demand of content from users (Qu et al., 2025). The more creators that create experiences, the more experiences are created and the more players that play, the more audience the creator has! A successful platform is thus benefited by network effects. Algorithmic personalization is key as shown by Roblox's discovery documentation. It performs on two stages: retrieval and ranking, and signals like engagement and retention help to promote distribution. Conventional app-store architectures have the basic distribution unit being an independent package, something that this architecture is not.

2.3 Game Discovery

The first significant difference is the discovery of the games. The traditional app stores use search, category browsing, charts, recommendations, ads and editorial. Apple provides developers with information on how people use store pages and acquisition surfaces.

Similar techniques are used for UGC, but with the addition of data generated by the platform that is social and behavioural (Liu et al., 2024). When a user experiences one play session, they can easily be shown subsequent play experiences, profiles of the creator of the play, and/or activities by their friends and other recommendations within the gaming context.

Bain's research on gaming backs up the change in the discovery hierarchy. According to its survey, 24 percent of gamers found new titles via online creators or influencers, 14 percent through social media and 12 percent through conventional online storefronts. The evidence suggests that external social discovery is getting more competitive in the storefront discovery.

2.4 Player Engagement

The actual use of traditional app-store games can be traced to user retention of the specific game. The progression systems, events, rewards, notifications, social functions and monetization incentives' platforms are a layer of engagement on the ecosystem level, for developers. Switchers can easily jump from one experience to another without switching applications (Gommerman et al., 2024). The platform is the continuous place to be and the games/experiences are units that can be used once. A good example of this would be Roblox, the scale of this. Average monthly engagement is estimated to be 13 billion in 2025 and 3 billion in 2020 in the industry analysis. The increase shows the possibility of having platform-level engagement, beyond the capacity of any individual app.

2.4 Player Engagement

The other important difference is monetization. The traditional app stores are usually pretty accommodating of paid downloads, subscriptions, in-app purchases and advertising. Google estimates that about a third of gamers have paid for something in the game. UGC platforms introduce monetization to the core monetization model of players. For creators and for small development teams, game production can be an economic game if they are able to receive revenue shares from the platform. As of 2025, the developer payouts for Roblox, Fortnite and Overwolf have reached US\$2.2 billion, a 47% increase from the year before, said Navik. This type of payment puts the platform in the driver's seat as a market organiser instead of a distribution intermediary.

2.6 Hybrid Monetization

In-app advertising and gaming have grown into a common way of monetizing traditional mobile games in recent years. Google found that 76% of those who played action games found the ads in the games were neutral or positive, while 85% of the respondents were interested in the ads in the games (Zhang et al., 2024). Apple's game research also indicates that paid acquisition is still very reliant and that in-app purchases still have a big impact. The results show that the typical gaming model that has been used for all these years is evolving into increasingly complex revenue models: the platforms are introducing hybrid monetisation models, where revenue from the players is mixed with the revenue generated by the content creators. The economic structure that is created has three key players: the platform, the creator and the player.

Conceptual Framework

The study characterizes three axis of game-platform competition: discovery, engagement, and monetization.

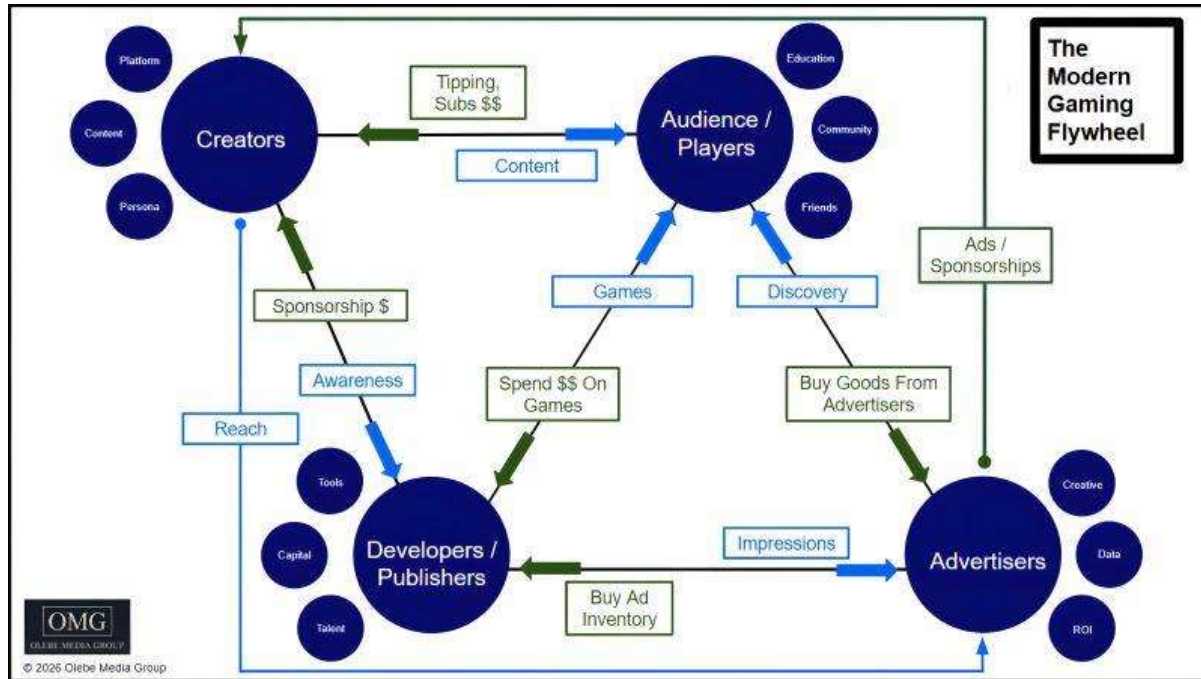


Figure 1. Comparative Platform Capability Index

The six characteristics of the platforms are given a score from 1 to 5 in the analytical index. These scores are not scores of the survey but rather are comparative scores made by the researcher based on the functionality of the platform described in the literature. More points are gained for the personalization, social interaction, creator participation, monetization diversity and retention loops on UGC platforms (Sun et al., 2025). The distribution-control score is greater for the traditional App Stores, because they provide “storefront” infrastructure for centralized application distribution and transaction controls with uniform application distribution and transaction controls.

By proposing endogenous as the process of discovery through the UGC platforms, the framework proposes to change the structure of discovery. The framework proposes endogenous as the process of discovery through the UGC platforms and thus changes the structure of discovery. Engagement creates behavioural data which provides the foundation for the recommendation system which further drives engagement, which results in more monetisation opportunity, which results in more creators' incentives, which leads to more activity from creators, which leads to more content.

Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The type of research design is a comparative research with secondary data. The methodology is based on the synthesis of the literature, platform document analysis and descriptive quantitative comparison. The study is not intended to be an original player survey or controlled experiment (Duan et al., 2022). The principal compares between the two types of the platform. These are platforms that are user-generated like Roblox and Fortnite. The second is the traditional applications store, for example Apple's App Store and Google Play.

4.2 Data Sources

All data was collected from authentic platform documentation, and industry research reports. Documentation from Apple was used to analyse app-store discovery, acquisition, engagement and monetization analytics. Roblox documentation has been used to explore the architecture of recommendations and discovery in Roblox. Mobile discovery and monetization was investigated by analyzing Google gaming research. Numerical evidence was given at the industry level from Bain, BCG, Deloitte and Appler and Navik reports.

4.3 Comparative Variables

The main variables were game discovery, algorithmic personalization, social interactions, player retention rate, involvement of creators, monetization variety, platform control and revenue distribution (Stokes et al., 2024). Analysis is broken down between indicators that are numerical (as reported) versus analytical (as created by the researcher). Where possible published numerical values are kept as reported. Comparative scores are not used to make conclusions.

4.4 Analytical Procedure

There were four phases to the analysis. The first step was to determine the features of the platforms. Secondly, the numbers were extracted from published reports. Thirdly, the indicators were grouped into discovery and engagement and monetization. Finally, cross-platform patterns were interpreted (Saha et al., 2024). For the six major characteristics of platforms the following comparative index was developed, based on five points representing each level of the characteristic. A score of 1 indicates it is not present at all in the school and a score of 5 indicates it is well developed in the school. The index is not a measure of the size of the fishery resource, but it is a tool to compare and not a measure of statistical estimation.

Results and Analysis

5.1 Game Discovery Results

The first is related to the relative importance of non-store discovery. The traditional app stores are still in play as they provide direct download and trading capability. However, the industry has come out and proven that there are more and more games in creators, influencers and social media (Kang et al., 2024).

Table 1. Reported Game Discovery Channels

Discovery channel	Reported share
Online creators/influencers	24%
Social media	14%
Traditional digital storefronts	12%
Other channels	50%

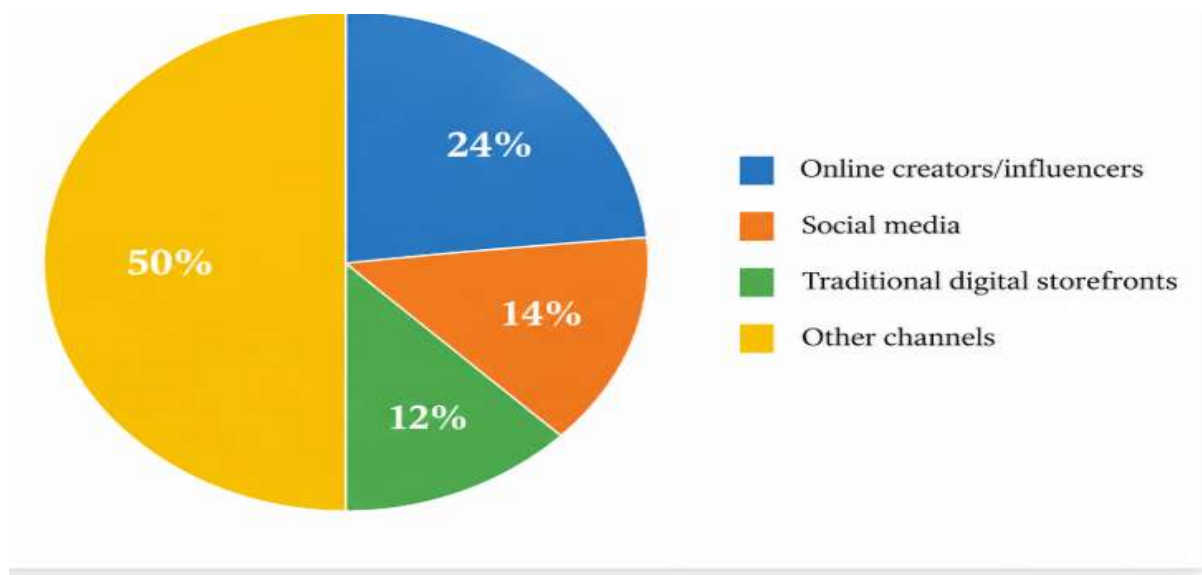


Figure: Reported Game Discovery Channels

The data are the difference between creator-led discovery and traditional storefront discovery is significant. The discovery of creators and influencers is twice that of traditional digital storefronts. Adding to digitally

mediated discovery outside the storefront is the addition of social media, which accounts for another 14 percent.

The implications for platform competition are the result. The last place where users install the application and pay for it is traditionally controlled by a traditional app store. Discovery may be found elsewhere (Liu et al., 2025). By blending the discovery process with the consumption process, UGC platforms eliminate the distance between discovery and consumption, as recommendations, social interaction and gameplay can take place in the same environment.

5.2 Algorithmic Personalization

Ranking, search, recommendation and editorial systems are the traditional approaches used in app stores. UGC platforms are based on similar algorithmic processes but are able to mine more detailed gameplay-level behavioral data. Engagement, retention, monetization, friend plays, and the like are all listed as recommendation signals in Roblox's documentation. These signals will be produced by activity within the platform.

The difference can be conveyed conceptually using the following relationship:

UGC discovery value = content supply x behavioural data x social interaction x recommendation efficiency It shows that UGC platforms can make ongoing recommendations based on player actions. Recommendations are also personalized in traditional stores, but most often the application is the main consumer of such stores.

5.3 Engagement Results

One of the key benefits of platform ecosystems is engagement (Lo et al., 2026). For the traditional app stores, the traffic flow is from the store to a separate application. UGC platforms keep users in one place and facilitate transitions between experiences.

Table 2. Selected Engagement Indicators

Indicator	Value
Roblox average monthly engagement hours, 2025	~13 billion
Roblox average monthly engagement hours, 2020	~3 billion
Roblox daily active users at end-2025	>150 million
Netflix monthly engagement hours, 2025	~16 billion
Fortnite creator-made experience share of playtime, 2025	~40%

The industry analysis includes the Roblox and comparative engagement values. In addition, industry analysis reports the share of Fortnite UGC.

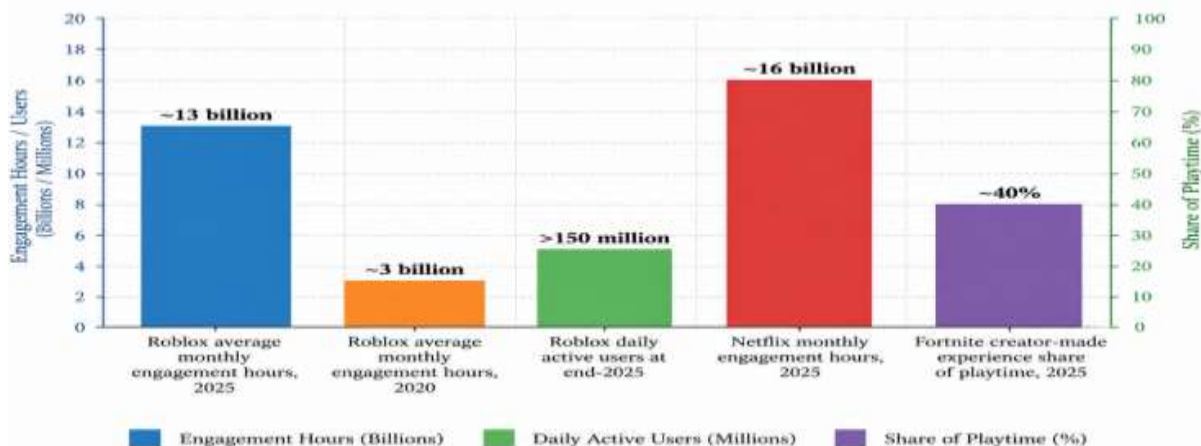


Figure 3. Engagement Scale Comparison, 2025

About 13 billion engagement hours each month suggest Roblox is scaling up to be comparable to the likes of a major digital entertainment service. The comparison isn't meant to be taken as a true to true measurement between Roblox and Netflix, rather, it is meant to reflect the amount of engagement that is reported for the respective ecosystems. Growth from ~3 billion monthly engagement hours in 2020 to ~13 billion in 2025 is ~333%. The scale illustrates the potential for platform-level engagement to multiply as users can access a vast menu of experiences at any time (Li et al., 2023).

5.4 Creator Economy Results

One of the most significant differences between UGC platforms and the traditional app stores is creator monetization.

Table 3. UGC Creator Economy Indicators

Trustworthiness concern	Managers reporting concern
Unclear accountability	28%
Limited explainability	27%
Inadequate physical and mental health protection	27%

The reported values are based on Navik's analysis of Roblox, Fortnite and Over wolf in 2026. creator payouts illustrates the shift from a developer-driven production model to a distributed production economy (Roy Choudhury et al., 2026). While traditional app stores are great for letting developers monetize apps, the application store itself is not typically a creator ecosystem where users can develop and publish thousands of interconnected experiences within the app store itself.

5.5 Monetization Results

Monetization in traditional app stores is mostly based on application purchases, subscriptions, in-app purchases and advertising. Apple offers insights into monetization, subscription, download to paid conversion. UGC platforms add more revenue streams. The players can buy virtual items, enjoy the higher level experiences or spend money to obtain the content created by the games builder. Creators earn a revenue share from the platform.

Table 4. Comparative Monetization Architecture

Monetization mechanism	UGC gaming platforms	Traditional app stores
In-app purchases	High	High
Advertising	High	High
Subscriptions	Moderate-high	High
Virtual goods	Very high	High
Creator revenue sharing	Very high	Limited
User-created experiences	Very high	Low
Platform-wide virtual economy	Very high	Low
Developer-owned external commerce	Emerging	Increasing

As shown in the table, the UGC platforms have a much wider internal economic system. The traditional stores focus on distribution and transaction infrastructure, while UGC ecosystems integrate distribution, content creation, and creator compensation.

5.6 Acquisition Economics

Mobile games are traditionally played on devices that have high UAC as developers vie for attention through advertising. The gaming store in-app-purchase revenue was split 50/50 from paid installs, Appier said in its 2026 analysis. The economic impact is significant. If game developers rely on paid acquisition to generate revenues, then they are in a constant acquisition spend cycle. However, for partial substitution, UGC platforms can be used to partially replace platform-native discovery for external acquisition, but in this aspect, the recommendation system distributes experiences based on players' activity and engagement. Not eliminating the marketing expenditure (Yu et al., 2022). Creator promotion and sponsored placements/external social media engagement are still relevant. The platform can, however, convert successful engagement to further organic reach.

5.7 Developer-Owned Commerce

The other result has to do with the growing trend toward direct commerce. The proportion of top-grossing mobile games with developer-owned online stores has risen from 12% to 44% in 2019 to 2024, according to Bain. The shift signifies an alternative commerce infrastructure is shaking up traditional app-store economics. Direct customer relationships, control of transactions and better economic margins are a growing priority for developers.

5.8 Comparative Analytical Index

Table 5. Researcher-Developed Comparative Platform Index

Dimension	UGC platforms	Traditional app stores
Discovery personalization	5	3
Social interaction	5	2
Creator economy	5	1
Monetization variety	5	4
Retention loops	5	3
Distribution control	4	5
Overall index	29/30	18/30

The index shows that UGC has more built-in features in discovery, social engagement and creator monetization. The traditional app stores have an edge in terms of distribution control. The index should not be used as an empirical measure of user preferences. It is a systematic categorization based on the features of the platform reported in the analysed sources.

Discussion

6.1 Transformation of Game Discovery

The results confirm that discovery has become a distributed ecosystem of creators, social media, algorithms, communities and recommendation systems, as opposed to a process that happens in a storefront. While traditional applications stores are still relevant to point of install, they don't necessarily provide the full discovery experience. For instance, the Bain report revealed that 24% of players find games online via creators or influencers, whereas 12% find them on the traditional digital storefronts. Google research also reveals that app stores, social media, recommendations and YouTube are all significant discovery channels (Li et al., 2026). These are a few of the mechanisms that are integrated into the game itself on UGC platforms. A player will view an experience that is recommended and see friends playing it, enter that experience, interact with a community of that experience, and without leaving the platform have another recommended experience appear.

This discovery process can be described as a Closed Loop Discovery Architecture:

Exposure → Recommendation → Play → Engagement → Social interaction → Data generation → Recommendation → Repeated play

Traditional app stores generally operate a shorter sequence:

Search/advertisement → Store page → Download → Application

More opportunities for algorithmic optimization, as the longer UGC loop does more.

6.2 Transformation of Engagement

The engagement opportunity of UGC platforms comes from the portfolio-level consumption. A conventional application store model, where each game is a stand-alone application. The application context needs to be changed when switching between games.

Multiple experiences within a single ecosystem, meaning that there are fewer switching costs with UGC platforms. The same player can go from an adventure style experience to a social experience, from a competitive game to a creator-made simulation and from one community to another without changing the platform (Yu et al., 2023). The numbers of hours Roblox reportedly earned on engagement are testament to the size that can follow such structure. In 2025, about 13 billion hours of engagement per month were estimated, which is over four times the amount of engagement hours in 2020 (estimated at 3 billion hours). The engagement mechanism then moves from holding onto the applications to retaining the ecosystem. It's not solely about every single experience to keep users on the platform. The following session can be a different experience.

6.3 Transformation of Monetization

Monetization difference is also significant. The primary economic value of traditional stores is through the applications being distributed through the store. UGC platforms can monetize the interactions among players, creators and experiences. Creators receive rewards for continuous content creation through payouts (Qu et al., 2025). If creators earn money from platform usage, the platform's economic production relies on the participation of the creators. The creator economy is huge given the approximate US\$2.2 billion that was paid out in 2025 across Roblox, Fortnite and Overwolf. The 47% increase year-over-year shows that creator monetization is far from a minor aspect of the gaming economy; it's growing.

6.4 Network Effects

UGC platforms exhibit low degree of cross-side network effects. More players means more users to creators. The greater the number of creators, the more content is available to players and the more varied it is (Gommerman et al., 2024). The more content, the more the platform is valuable to its users. The more users use it, the more behavioral data you get, which helps in improving the recommendation systems.

The resulting structure can be represented as:

Creators → Content → Players → Engagement Data → Recommendations → More Players → Greater Creator Opportunity

App stores also have network effects, though the feedback is less closely coupled with content production. Most developers create their own applications independently, and compete for their distribution.

6.5 Role of Recommendation Algorithms

Algorithmic recommendation is the infrastructure between supply and demand. According to Roblox documentation, 'engagement' and 'retention' are two of the recommendation signals. This has the benefit of distinguishing catalogue size from discoverability. However, millions of experiences cannot be consumed on a platform. Recommendation algorithms narrow down information overload by picking out a sub-set of possibly relevant experiences (Duan et al., 2022). The same issue exists with traditional app stores. There is the possibility, though, to capture more nuanced behavioural cues because gameplay is within the platform environment where UGC platforms can be more granular. This benefit is one of consistency of data continuity. The discovery and gameplay data, social and monetization data can be linked in a unified ecosystem.

6.6 Economic Consequences for Developers

Some traditional app-store developers are having trouble competing for visibility. When organic discovery is not enough, it may be necessary to resort to paid acquisition. The fact that AppsFlyer found that 59% of gaming store IAP revenue was made from paid installs shows just how significant acquisition spend is. UGC platforms can alleviate some of the discovery problem by making use of algorithmic distribution (Kang et al., 2024). This does bring in another dependency though. Creators get dependent on the suggestions from the platforms, ranking algorithms, and revenue-sharing models. This means that the UGC model shares some of the acquisition risk with algorithmic-platform risk.

6.7 Convergence Between the Two Models

The results suggest that UGC platforms are not going to fully replace app stores. Rather, the two models converge more and more.

Influencers, user-generated advertising creatives and creator partnerships are tools that traditional game developers are turning to today. In some gaming scenarios, AppsFlyer's research has found that UGC-driven ads creatives are linked to better retention results. Meanwhile, UGC sites get richer and richer in monetisation, ad and commerce systems that are normally reserved for app stores and digital marketplaces (Liu et al., 2025). This creates a hybrid digital-game economy where distribution, social discovery, creator participation and direct commerce all exist at the same time.

Implications

7.1 Implications for Game Developers

Black hat game developers in the traditional stores need more than game development skills. Store optimization, influencer marketing, community management and paid acquisition and social discovery are having an increasing impact on commercial results (Lo et al., 2026). A different philosophy of production is required for UGC ecosystems. It's a developer responsibility to create experiences that inspire sharing, repeat play, social interaction and participation of creators. Engagement is not merely a measure of retention, but a distribution channel as well.

7.2 implications for Platform Operators

There is a trade-off between efficiency in recommending content to creators and diversity of creators. A large amount of advice can be delivered to a few experiences, and this can affect the chances of new creators (Roy Choudhury et al., 2026). To achieve a successful UGC platform, it is necessary to have both existing and new content discovery mechanisms, with high-performance content. Creation involvement is also impacted by revenue sharing deals. Competitive creator economics can drive up the volume of content, but bad deals can deter pro creators.

7.3 Implications for Marketers

Marketing strategies are more and more combining paid media and creator-led discovery. Initial awareness can be created through traditional advertising, and creators and communities can provide social validation and sustained attention. In UGC environments, the line between advertising and content gets blurred. Creators can use their gameplay, livestreams, short-form videos, and community recommendations to accomplish both entertainment and promotional purposes.

7.4 Implications for Consumers

The more content that UGC platforms can provide, the more consumers are getting it. But the more content, the more information overload. Algorithms for recommendations then become part of the consumer's experience and a crucial component to it. There is also a shift from being a "consumer" to being "consumers" (Yu et al., 2022). Players can be creators, members of the community, reviewers, promoters and economic participants.

Limitations of the study

The study depends on secondhand information, so it cannot make causal links between platform design and per-player results. Numbers reported are from various research organizations and populations and measurement methods. It should therefore be used with care for direct comparison (Duan et al., 2022). The comparative platform index is developed by researchers and is an analytical classification, not a scale that is statistically validated. Do not take the numerical scores as the measure of consumer preferences. The analysis also focuses on the leading UGC ecosystems and app-store infrastructures. Other creator platforms, regional mobile apps marketplaces or other PC distribution ecosystems are not explored in a similar manner.

Conclusion

The UGC gaming platforms vs traditional app stores comparison represents a paradigm shift in the digital game distribution landscape. Basic app stores are essentials for application distribution and discovery, security, payments and developer analytics. With UGC gaming platforms, on the other hand, distribution and creation, recommendation, social interaction, community building, and creator's monetization are all in a single package.

The major distinction is where value is created. The traditional app stores tend to structure access to applications created by third parties. The UGC platforms provide players the opportunity to become creators, and creators the opportunity to become economic players.

The best feature that sets the game apart is its discovery. According to Bain's reported discovery numbers, creators and influencers on the web were responsible for 24% of discovery, while traditional digital storefronts were responsible for 12% of discovery. Many discovery mechanisms are built into UGC platforms in the form of recommendations, social activity and player behavior.

Engagement also reflects a 'transformation at the platform level'. As per the industry analysis, Roblox hit over 150 million daily active users at the end of 2025 and around 13 billion monthly engagement hours during 2025. These figures represent what ecosystems can be when it comes to continuous play between experiences.

It is not surprising that monetization has also undergone a dramatic transformation. The US\$2.2 billion in creator payouts for Roblox, Fortnite and Overwolf in 2025 illustrates the fact that a large creator economy is starting to develop. The business model of the application stores is solid, especially in-app purchases, advertising and subscriptions, and apps owned by the developer will become more and more important in the coming years in relation to web stores. The traditional business model of the application store is still very solid, especially in-app purchases, advertising, subscriptions, and web stores with a developer's branding will gain importance in the future. The path of market development is reflected in the statistics of the share of top grossing mobile games that run developer-owned online stores, which increased from 12% in 2019 to 44% in 2024.

The results show that UGC platforms cannot only be considered as an alternative game store. Their architecture is a larger, more platform oriented model in that content creation, discovery, consumption and monetization are all linked. Traditional app stores still offer distribution scale and transaction backbone, while UGC platforms offer more robust, user and creator-centric tools for personalization, social interaction and participation.

The convergence, therefore, is likely to be the future of the gaming market, and not full replacement. The traditional app stores are getting more advanced in their discovery analytics, more creator-friendly in their marketing and direct-commerce approaches, and UGC platforms are getting more sophisticated in their monetization and distribution methods. Efficient discovery, continued engagement, creator incentives and diversified monetization within meaningful platform ecosystems will be the key to competitive advantage.

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