

Pleased to play, paid to please: memory commodification within Roblox's creator economy

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on Roblox experiences that reconstruct the Yugoslav Wars (Zurovac & Amadori 2025), the study explores how Roblox monetization systems become intertwined with practices of memory-making in post-conflict digital environments (Hammar & Woodcock 2019; Sturken 2008). Drawing on a mapping of the platform's monetizing infrastructure (Roblox Corporation 2025) and an inductive thematic analysis of player and creator conversations on Roblox and Discord (Guest et al. 2011; Holmes 2013), the paper identifies three key dynamics: the normalization of memory commodification, creators' liminal position between hobbyist and entrepreneur, and the strategic value of historical accuracy. The paper argues that platform capitalism shapes which representations of the past become economically sustainable and therefore culturally visible, revealing how collective memory on user-generated platforms becomes structurally entangled with commercial optimization in post-conflict contexts (Baillie et al. 2019; Hartmann 2016).

Keywords

User-generated online games, monetization, mediated memory, Yugoslavia, Roblox

INTRODUCTION

User-generated gaming (UGG) platforms have emerged as significant spaces for the construction and negotiation of collective memory, yet research has largely overlooked how their economic infrastructures shape the ways historical pasts are produced, consumed, and contested.

On platforms like Roblox, monetization is not a neutral technical layer but a structural force that determines access, visibility, and symbolic hierarchies within game worlds: passes, developer products, subscriptions, paid access, private servers, engagement-

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based payouts, and immersive ads create a complex ecosystem where creators must balance historical representation with economic sustainability, and where players encounter the past through purchase flows, paywalls, and micro-transaction prompts. Understanding how monetization intersects with memory work is particularly urgent given Roblox's young user base and documented concerns about aggressive micro-transaction logics, harmful game design, and unmoderated social interaction in historical and politically sensitive contexts (Zhang et al. 2025; Kou et al. 2025).

This work addresses these concerns by examining Roblox experiences that reconstruct the Yugoslav past, a case that sits at the intersection of creator economy dynamics and post-conflict memory politics.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s produced enduring traumatic memories and nationalist tensions that continue to shape online discourse among post-war generations (Absoth & Griesbeck 2024). Roblox, as both a game creation platform and a social environment, has become an unexpected site where these contested pasts are remediated through user-generated worlds, avatar customisation, and community interaction on associated Discord channels. Prior research has shown how Yugoblox games - Roblox games that address the Yugoslav conflict - range from attempts at geopolitical realism to ideologically-driven depictions, creating dynamic spaces for negotiating collective memory (Caselli 2021) and national identity (Zurovac & Amadori 2024). What remains unexplored is how the introduction of economic incentives and barriers transforms these representational dynamics. Therefore, the main research question asks: how do monetization strategies enter shape practices and discourses in Yugoblox?

To answer such question, the study first maps the monetization options available to Roblox creators, drawing on the platform's regulatory framework (Roblox Corporation 2025): game passes that permanently unlock abilities, areas, or military ranks; developer products that players can purchase multiple times for in-game currencies and boosts; recurring subscriptions that grant monthly benefits; paid access priced in Robux or local currency; subscription-based private servers; automated creator rewards linked to user engagement; and immersive advertising placements. This taxonomy is then applied to Yugoblox to observe how these tools are concretely implemented, or deliberately avoided, when what is effectively being sold is access to a traumatic past (Hammar & Woodcock 2019). Secondarily, an inductive thematic analysis of player conversations on Roblox and Discord (Holmes 2013; Guest et al. 2011) about monetization is conducted.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The preliminary results show three overarching themes: a) normalized commodification of memory; b) creators' liminal positions between hobbyists and entrepreneurs; c) strategic commitment to historical accuracy.

All games can be played freely, yet some Discord channels regularly announce sales, bundle offers, and promotional deals that structure community rhythms and expectations around purchasing opportunities. These promotional rhythms normalize monetization as integral to community participation rather than external imposition. Sales events become community moments: shared anticipation, collective purchasing

behavior, social capital derived from possessing items. Moreover, economic logic is internalized and enforced by users themselves: 1) sanctioning requests not supported by payment (“you ain’t gonna get rpg for free”); 2) players adopt consumer mindsets demanding accountability (“bro i want my robux back”).

While game creators frame Roblox as "side gig" ("i will make some time tomorrow to fix the gamepasses issue ive been terribly busy working these months") they simultaneously organize into "studios" producing multiple game experiences and suggesting professionalization aspirations beyond casual hobbyism. Such aspirational entrepreneurialism is presented through practices (e.g. game advertising on social media) and business organizational models (e.g. launching marketplace sales; recruiting promoters for social media campaigns), while maintaining precarious and minimally compensated labor structures.

Despite most of the games present historical accuracy (e.g. symbols, places, buildings), creators face player requests for historically inaccurate content additions ("add Russia", "add Greece"), which often reveal tension between the historical simulation and identity representation. When national belonging is perceived as a purchasable asset, creators must find ways to moderate gamers’ desires and game’s integrity, as such games are advertised on social media via their historical accuracy.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research contributes to understanding how platform economic infrastructures incentivize specific forms of memory commodification (Sturken 2008) in post-conflict societies. On Roblox, engaging with Yugoslav pasts is mediated through normalized consumerism and entrepreneurial performance. While historical accuracy may remain a strategic asset in game promotion, memory work becomes structurally entangled with commercial optimization. This reveals how platform capitalism may operate by determining which representations become economically viable and thus available: a transformation particularly urgent in post-conflict contexts where collective memory carries enduring political consequences for reconciliation, justice, and historical understanding (Baillie et al. 2019; Hartmann 2016).

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