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The role of symbolic capital and symbolic violence in shaping social hierarchies through digital consumption and production in roblox online game

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Abstract

This study examines how symbolic capital accumulates and how symbolic violence legitimizes economic disparities on Roblox. Using Bourdieu's concepts, the analysis shows how platform displays and monetization translate monetary spending and creator outlays into visible status that stabilizes hierarchy. Data come from in-depth interviews with ten experienced Roblox users, participant observation, and document analysis. Findings indicate two principal forms of symbolic capital: prestige, built through paid access to limited or exclusive items and memberships, and reputation, built through creator recognition, verification, and awards. The study identifies a four-stage mechanism of symbolic violence: (1) objectification and classification through icons, badges, role labels, and rare items, (2) internalization of these markers as normal criteria for belonging, (3) justification of unequal outcomes as merit or platform necessity, and (4) reproduction of hierarchy through ongoing spending and creator work such as advertising and playtests. The contribution is a mechanism-level account that links microtransactions and visible recognition systems to status formation and a self-reinforcing prosumer loop that normalizes inequality in everyday play.

Keywords: Roblox; microtransactions; symbolic capital; symbolic violence

Introduction

Digital play has evolved from a leisure activity to an industry that integrates the digital economy in every aspect of its interaction. Traditionally, play is understood as an activity that is the opposite of work-if work aims to achieve efficiency and material results, then play should be oriented towards inner pleasure and freedom of choice (Chang, 2017). However, technological developments and freemium-based business models have transformed the meaning of play into an economic activity dominated by consumption mechanisms (Salehudin & Alpert, 2021) To explain how these monetization logics translate into social differentiation, a sociological lens on status and power is required. Bourdieu's framework is particularly useful here because it traces how economic inputs can be converted into recognized forms of value and domination within a field. Within game studies, research linking Bourdieu to digital play began by adapting his capital framework to games by showing how status, distinction, and value circulate as symbolic/gaming capital through items, rankings, and badges (Consalvo, 2007; Korkeila, 2023; Pitroso, 2023; Walsh & Apperley, 2008). Subsequent work applies symbolic violence to explain how platform norms and classificatory schemes naturalize inequalities among players and creators (Dashiell, 2024; Gray et al., 2017). More recent studies extend this line of inquiry to platformized, prosumption-based economies, with Roblox emerging as a paradigmatic case (Dezuanni et al., 2024; Hardy et al., 2022; Roblox, 2023b). Yet the specific mechanisms by which symbolic capital converts economic power into social recognition, and how symbolic violence legitimizes that conversion in Roblox, remains under-specified. This study situates itself in that trajectory and advances a mechanism-level account of prestige and reputation in freemium environments, with Roblox as its focal case.

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Against this freemium backdrop, monetization is operationalized through microtransactions. In freemium models, players can access games for free but are faced with various microtransactions designed to enrich their gaming experience. Recent studies indicate that the freemium business model constitutes a form of predatory monetization that exploits user vulnerabilities through microtransaction systems. Features such as loot boxes and in-game microtransactions can lead to excessive consumer behavior, closely resembling gambling practices (King & Delfabbro, 2018; Raneri et al., 2022). Moreover, gaming companies employing this freemium model not only encourage users to engage in microtransactions for competitive advantages but also position them as prosumers. In this role, users simultaneously create in-game content and purchase virtual assets through microtransactions. The freemium business model also prompts players to gradually spend money on additional features, such as purchasing skins or battle passes (Campos De Moraes, 2024)

At the level of practice, these freemium dynamics are enacted through microtransactions, which are routine purchases that convert monetary inputs (cash/Robux) into visible status markers (e.g., scarce cosmetic items) and platform-mediated recognition (e.g., verified badges), thereby reproducing classificatory distinctions (Hamari & Lehdonvirta, 2010; Lehdonvirta, 2009) Microtransactions are a form of digital consumption where players spend real money on virtual goods and services within the game. These purchases are typically made for cosmetic enhancements, gameplay advantages, or exclusive experiences, which are designed to enhance player engagement and social status. Unlike traditional purchases, microtransactions create continuous consumption patterns by encouraging repeated spending on time-limited, customizable, or exclusive virtual items (van Roessel & Švelch, 2021). The complexity of the freemium can be found in the online gaming platform Roblox, which also employs this business strategy. Users initially join Roblox for free but are encouraged to make in-game purchases. Roblox has faced criticism for potentially exploiting its users by prompting them to buy virtual items using real money exchanged for the platform's virtual currency, Robux (Common Sense Media, 2022). Additionally, players are encouraged to become developers, creating games for Roblox and engaging in microtransactions during the development process (Roblox, 2023a). This setup results in production and consumption activities revolving around the same individuals, shifting the definition of “play” in to “digital labor” without fair payment. The unfairness here can be seen if we compared Roblox with other platforms, in terms of how these platforms pay their players who became consumers.

At the ecosystem level, Roblox integrates monetization and status dynamics into a closed, platform-governed economy that coordinates both production and consumption while setting fees and commissions that shape how value is distributed (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). As a platform, Roblox governs multiple monetization routes. For in-experience purchases (e.g., game passes and developer products) creators typically receive about 70% while the remaining 30% is retained as a platform fee (Roblox, 2023a)For subscriptions within experiences, creators receive 70% in the first month, and since 15 May 2024 renewal payments carry no platform fee (i.e., the full subscription price flows to the creator) (Roblox, 2024). By contrast, in the Avatar/UGC Marketplace, proceeds are split among the item creator (30%), the affiliate/seller (40%), and the platform (30%), per Roblox’s commission schedule (Roblox, 2025a). Compared with broader creator-economy benchmarks, YouTube shares 55% of watch-page ad revenue with long-form creators and 45% of allocated ad revenue for Shorts (Youtube, 2024), while Twitch uses a standard 50/50 subscription split and a 70/30 tier for qualifying streamers via the Plus Program (Twitch, 2024). Beyond the skewed split, Roblox positions many players as prosumers who both sell and spend within the same closed, platform-governed economy. To sell avatar items, creators must pay an upload fee of 750 Robux and keep items on sale only if they maintain ID verification and an active Premium 1000/2200 membership (Roblox, 2025a) For visibility, creators are encouraged to buy promotion via Sponsored Items and the Ads Manager (Roblox, 2025b**)**. When cashing out**,** they face a platform-set exchange rate of US$0.0035 per Robux and a minimum of 30,000 earned Robux to be eligible for DevEx (developer exchange) (Roblox, 2025). Taken together, these mechanisms make Roblox’s prosumers both producers and paying consumers under platform-controlled terms, concentrating value capture with capital owners (Nieborg & Poell, 2018)**.** Culturally, such economic arrangements are normalized through platform classifications and recognition systems, exemplifying Bourdieu’s notion of *symbolic violence* where inequalities come to appear natural and deserved (Dashiell, 2024; Gray et al., 2017)**.**

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When compared to industry standards, Roblox demonstrates a more asymmetric distribution of proceeds favoring the platform, where players who act as prosumers are in a system that tend to favors capital owners. Despite the inequitable revenue distribution and the dominance of consumption practices through microtransactions, Roblox remains highly popular among users in Indonesia. This is evidenced by the membership of AKRI (Indonesian Roblox Community Association), which consists of over 250,000 members, encompassing individuals who participate both as users and as developers on the Roblox platform. This membership is significantly larger than other gaming communities in Indonesia, such as Minecraft's community with approximately 22,000 members on its Facebook page, and Fortnite's community with around 10,000 members on its Facebook page. This economic extraction is also sustained by processes of misrecognition that normalize unequal status through what Bourdieu terms as *symbolic violence***.** This inference aligns with accounts of how exploitation persists through symbolic power (Burawoy, 2019) and with evidence from game cultures showing that platform norms and classificatory schemes make inequalities appear natural and deserved (Dashiell, 2024; Gray et al., 2017).

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1977), symbolic violence is a form of power that operates subtly through social structures, norms, and values that individuals unconsciously accept as natural or self-evident (Meissner, 2021). It is exercised invisibly through the internalization of social hierarchies and cultural norms, leading individuals to participate in their own subordination without recognizing the underlying power dynamics. Symbolic violence occurs when a society legitimizes certain forms of capital, such as economic, cultural, or social capital by attributing them with s ymbolic value (Stahl & Mu, 2022). This process, which Bourdieu refers to as symbolic capital, enables certain groups to maintain power and status because their forms of capital are recognized and valued within the social structure. Consequently, symbolic violence operates by normalizing social inequalities and legitimizing power relations, making them appear as natural and unquestionable within a given social context (Bourdieu, 1986).

Preliminary research conducted through interviews with 10 Roblox users found that players who purchase exclusive items gain social recognition, while those who do not engage in microtransactions often feel left behind. This disparity suggests that social hierarchies are not merely a result of individual choices but are constructed and legitimized within the digital society of Roblox. Beside of this, the consumptions activities in online games has been confirmed by research written by Wardhana, who highlighted that game players legitimize consumption through microtransaction activities as a means of accumulating economic, social, and symbolic capital (Wardhana, 2023). Additionally, a study by Rimington revealed that game design and rules established by game developers, including those related to microtransactions, significantly influence the social structure within games. In his study of League of Legends, Rimington demonstrated that digital capital distribution, such as rankings or status, creates social conflicts that are accepted as the "rules of the game," ultimately dominating its users (Rimington et al., 2016)

However, previous studies mostly frame microtransactions as a consumer issue**,** for example, links with problem gaming/gambling, motivation and wellbeing (Gibson et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2023; Oksanen et al., 2024; Raneri et al., 2022). While **r**esearch that treats Roblox users as *prosumers* who both create (production) and spend within the same platform-run system remains limited; existing studies map Roblox's creator market and rules but rarely specify the mechanisms that connect spending and creator work to status (Dezuanni et al., 2024; Hardy et al., 2022). To address this gap, Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic capital and symbolic violence is used to explain these mechanisms on Roblox, building on recent applications of Bourdieu in game studies (Dashiell, 2024; Gray et al., 2017; Korkeila, 2023; Pitroso, 2023). Bourdieu's framework is particularly relevant as it explains how symbolic capital, such as prestige and reputation, influences social status and power relations, thereby legitimizing social hierarchies and economic inequalities. Specifically, this study seeks to understand how symbolic capital is accumulated through the acquisition of virtual goods and exclusive memberships, and how symbolic violence operates to normalize economic disparities as logical and accepted social distinctions within the digital society of Roblox.

Method

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This study employs a critical sociological paradigm (Bourdieu, 1977) to examine how power relations and social hierarchies are constructed and legitimized through digital practices within the Roblox platform. By focusing on symbolic violence and symbolic capital, this approach investigates how social inequalities are normalized as natural aspects of digital interaction. This research adopts a qualitative approach using case study method (Yin, 2018), which enables an in-depth exploration of how digital practices, including consumption, production, and prosumer activities, contribute to the construction and legitimation of social hierarchies within Roblox.

The main unit of analysis is social hierarchies within the digital society of Roblox, with two sub-units of analysis: how symbolic capital is accumulated through digital practices, and how symbolic violence operates to normalize economic disparities as natural and unquestionable aspects of digital interaction. By examining how social recognition is obtained not only through the acquisition of virtual goods and exclusive items but also through participation in digital labor, content creation, and prosumer activities, this study seeks to understand how digital practices shape social structures and status hierarchies within the platform. Additionally, it explores how economic inequalities are legitimized as natural aspects of digital interaction, leading users to internalize social hierarchies without questioning the underlying power dynamics.

Data collection was conducted using in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 Roblox users who have long-term experience within the platform's digital society, with a minimum experience of 5 years to ensure the credibility and depth of the information provided. These informants were selected to provide insights into how they perceive and internalize digital practices, symbolic capital, and social hierarchies. Participant observation was carried out by immersing in community interactions within Roblox, focusing on how social interactions, digital labor, and prosumer activities contribute to symbolic capital and reinforce symbolic violence. Special attention was given to how players engage not only in digital consumption but also in content creation and game development as forms of digital labor to gain social recognition.

Document analysis was conducted on official Roblox policies, monetization guidelines, and academic studies related to digital practices and economic structures in digital platforms, providing contextual data on the structural and economic mechanisms that shape social hierarchies and symbolic violence within Roblox. Data analysis was conducted using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), allowing for a detailed examination of patterns related to symbolic capital accumulation, social status, and internalization of economic disparities. Thematic Analysis was chosen because it enables the application of an existing theoretical framework while revealing patterns of social structures, power relations, and economic practices within digital labor and prosumption.

The data analysis process followed six stages of Thematic Analysis, first, All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and field notes from participant observation were organized systematically. Second, Open coding was used to identify relevant data segments related to digital practices, symbolic capital, social status, and economic disparities. Third, Axial coding was employed to group initial codes into broader themes that represent patterns of social structures and power relations. Fourth, Themes were reviewed to ensure consistency and coherence with the theoretical framework. Fifth, Each theme was clearly defined and named to reflect its role in constructing and legitimizing social hierarchies within the platform. And the last step was Producing the Report, detailed narrative was developed to summarize the findings, supported by direct quotes from participants to illustrate key themes.

The analysis was interpreted through Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic violence and symbolic capital to explain how digital practices contribute to the construction and legitimation of social hierarchies. To ensure analytical rigor, Triangulation is used to legitimate the result by compared the Data from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis and also cross-verified it, to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings (Yin, 2018) This data analysis approach provides a comprehensive examination of how digital practices in Roblox contribute to the construction and legitimation of social hierarchies that will advancing our understanding of power dynamics and symbolic violence within virtual communities

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Results and Discussion

Accumulating Prestige and Reputation: Symbolic Capital in Roblox

Based on the coding analysis from in-depth interviews, it was found that symbolic capital in the Roblox ecosystem not only functions as a tool to assert social position but also shapes players' engagement in economic practices within the platform. Two main types of symbolic capital were identified in this study: (1) Symbolic Capital Representing Prestige and (2) Symbolic Capital Representing Reputation. These findings are summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Forms of symbolic capital in Roblox's digital sphere

Type of Symbolic Capital	Form of Symbolic Capital	Symbolic Object
Prestige	Premium & Limited Virtual Items, and exclusive membership	Exclusive Avatars, Rare accessories/items, game pass, VIP pass.
Reputation	Game Developer & creator	Building a game, Receiving awards (Such as Innovation Award), having a verified Badge,

Prestige is accumulated through digital consumption practices, particularly by purchasing premium and limited virtual items, exclusive memberships, and VIP passes. These digital assets enhance symbolic capital by signaling wealth and exclusivity, thereby legitimizing economic disparities as a natural social distinction within the digital society of Roblox. Informants linked scarce or exclusive goods and memberships to standing out and being recognized as "worthy," translating Robux/cash into visible status signals. One participant described how paid membership displayed an emblem that felt like "showing off", *"I was really happy. In the game there was also an icon showing I had this membership, so it felt like* ***showing off****"* (Informant C, translated). Others noted how monetization structures in experiences make premium access feel consequential for participation, "*But sometimes, to fully* ***maximize the features****, they're somewhat* ***restricted*** *behind a* ***game pass****.."* (Informant A, translated). Prestige can also be socially calibrated as "normal" consumption in the community:
"*Many players consider* ***purchasing in-game items*** *to be* ***normal*** *and* ***important*** *....*" (Informant D, translated). And peers sometimes nudge one another toward cosmetic buys, "*Friends would recommend: 'Hey, buy this, it's good*" (Informant C, translated)

Meanwhile, Reputation is accumulated through social influence and recognition as game developers and creators, who gain symbolic power by shaping community norms and expectations. Verified badges and symbolic awards further reinforce this accumulation by granting institutionalized legitimacy and authority within the digital society of Roblox. Informants described a clear status gradient favoring recognized developers and verified creators, turning cultural capital (skills) and social capital (networks) into authority *"When I meet a more experienced developer, I arrive early and mostly listen—I'm sure I'll learn a lot"* (Informant B, translated). Verification also works as symbolic legitimacy and travels across platforms, "*The verified badge is respected; many people display that title on social media as well*" (Informant D, translated). Informants also emphasized its scarcity in Indonesia, *"As far as I know, there are only two verified creators from Indonesia on Roblox"* (Informant B, translated)

Prestige in this context marks a hierarchy: players who can buy exclusive items and memberships differentiate themselves from those who cannot. Limited items and exclusive avatars are expensive and rare, so they operate as visible signals of wealth and superiority. In effect, Robux is converted into publicly legible prestige, and the scarcity and cost of access make status differences

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appear natural within play, sustaining hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1986). The informants' accounts mirror this conversion, where visible purchases become status cues: *"There's an icon on the profile/leaderboard if you have a membership, so it comes across as showing off*" (Informant C, translated).

Exclusive memberships such as Roblox Premium and VIP Passes intensify this dynamic by granting entry to limited-edition collectibles and exclusive avatars that regular players cannot obtain. This privileged access allows members to display status and distinguish themselves from non-premium peers. In short, premium memberships transform economic outlays into symbolic capital and, by tying recognition to paid access, normalize inequality and reinforce a stratified order in the Roblox community, enabling premium members to accumulate symbolic capital more easily and maintain a privileged position. In practice, participants observed that paywalled features matter for participation and visibility, *"Certain features are paywalled, so the disparity becomes visible."* (Informant A, translated)

Meanwhile, Reputation is achieved through social influence and recognition as game developers and creators. In Roblox, being recognized as a reputable developer is not only about technical skills but also about gaining symbolic power and authority within the community. Developers who are successful in creating popular games or content are admired and respected by other players that further reinforcing their social position. This reflects Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, where individuals in higher social positions influence community norms and behaviors, thereby reinforcing social hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1990). Developers and creators accumulate symbolic capital through their cultural capital (technical skills and creativity) and social capital (recognition and influence within the community). This accumulation of symbolic capital allows developers and creators (Producer) to shape community standards and expectations that solidifying their authority and influence within the digital society of Roblox. As respected developers are admired and followed by other players, they gain symbolic power and authority, which legitimizes their social status and reinforces their position at the top of the social hierarchy. In this way, symbolic capital makes economic inequalities appear natural and unquestionable. Informants explicitly placed developers/creator at the top, above heavy spenders, underscoring how reputation consolidates authority, *"The highest position is usually the owner/developer; players with expensive items still can't surpass a dev's status."* (Informant C, translated)

Moreover, verified badges and symbolic awards such as the Innovation Award and Builderman Award of Excellence enhance developers' credibility and reputation within the community. These forms of symbolic capital serve as institutionalized markers of social legitimacy which grant developers symbolic authority and power within the digital society of Roblox. By receiving formal recognition from Roblox, developers are perceived as more trustworthy and influential, which reinforces their social status and authority. This reflects Bourdieu's notion of symbolic legitimacy, where recognition from an authoritative entity legitimizes power relations within a social field (Burawoy, 2019). Verified badges and symbolic awards thus operate as tools of symbolic capital that institutionalize social hierarchies and reinforce economic domination, as they grant developers privileged access to exclusive opportunities, collaborations, and influential networks.

As one informant put it *"The verified badge is respected… it's often flaunted on social media too."* (Informant D, translated). These mechanisms show how symbolic capital in the form of prestige and reputation not only reflects individual status but also serves as a tool for maintaining social hierarchies and economic domination. By attributing symbolic value to exclusive items, memberships, and recognition, Roblox encourages users to pursue symbolic capital through digital consumption and production practices, ultimately benefiting the platform's capitalist ecosystem. This pursuit of symbolic capital drives consumer behavior, leading to increased spending on virtual goods and memberships, which reinforces economic disparities within the community. The findings align with Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, where social recognition and prestige are accumulated through practices that are valued and legitimized within a particular social field (Bourdieu, 1986). In the context of Roblox, symbolic capital is constructed through digital consumption and production practices, which reinforce social status and economic power, thereby influencing players' participation in the platform's economic ecosystem. By creating a hierarchical social structure based

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on symbolic capital, Roblox effectively maintains economic inequalities and social hierarchies, reflecting broader dynamics of symbolic violence and domination in digital capitalism.

Informants also described the prosumer side-creators spend to produce, learn, and attract traffic (assets/ads/playtests), while production increases visibility and demand. *"The big costs are advertising to bring in players and playtests—it's expensive and often doesn't break even."* (Informant D, translated). *"I tried daily ads for a week; the results didn't meet expectations."* (Informant A, translated). Through these mechanisms, symbolic capital in the form of prestige and reputation effectively converts economic capital into social status, reinforcing social hierarchies within the digital society of Roblox. This system of symbolic capital not only influences individual behavior but also shapes community norms and values, thereby reinforcing the platform's capitalist logic. By legitimizing economic disparities through symbolic value, Roblox sustains a cycle of consumption and status-seeking that benefits its economic ecosystem. This reflects Bourdieu's assertion that symbolic power and capital are fundamental in maintaining social hierarchies and legitimizing economic domination within any social field, including digital societies (Bourdieu, 1990).

Symbolic Violence: Legitimizing Economic Disparities in Digital Interaction

The previous section showed that prestige from exclusive or limited items and memberships, and reputation from creator recognition, verification, and awards, accumulate as symbolic capital in Roblox. Building on that discussion, the same accumulation also operates as symbolic violence. Symbolic violence is a subtle and non-coercive form of power that shapes how players perceive value, status, and what counts as normal, which in turn stabilizes hierarchy and economic domination (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990; Burawoy, 2019). In line with Table 2, the process unfolds through four linked stages namely, objectification and classification, internalization of social norms, justification of economic disparities, and reproduction of social hierarchies.a

Table 2. Mechanism of symbolic violence

Stages	Description	Example in Roblox	Impact on Social Hierarchies
Objectification and Classification	Distinctions are made visible and encoded as status markers; monetary inputs become status signals	Badges and verification on profiles; premium icons; scarce limited items; owner/developer labels	Creates visible rank-markers that prefigure hierarchy and make comparisons easy
Internalization of Social Norms	Players take those markers as normal criteria for belonging and status	Chasing verified badges/awards; treating purchases and game passes as "normal" for participation	Reinforces the idea that symbolic capital is essential for social participation
Justification of Economic Disparities	Unequal outcomes are narrated as reasonable results of merit or platform needs	Success of reputable developers read as merit; acceptance of platform cuts/fees	Inequalities are rationalized as deserved social distinctions
Reproduction of Social Hierarchies	Ongoing practices sustain the order and keep gaps in place	Continued spending on premium items, ads, playtests; ongoing content production	The hierarchy persists as players willingly engage in practices that maintain the ecosystem

The first stage begins when distinctions are made visible and encoded as status markers. In Roblox, the interface and the market produce concrete signs that can be seen and compared. Examples include verified badges on profiles, premium icons that appear next to usernames, scarce limited items that circulate as prestige goods, and role labels such as owner or developer. Informants described how these signs immediately sort people into recognizable ranks. One informant explained that *"Headless*

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is seen as a status symbol, rare and expensive, considered cool by many players" (Informant F, translated). Another informant said that *"the verified badge is respected, and people display that title on social media"* (Informant D, translated). A third informant added that "*the highest position is usually the owner or developer, and even players with expensive items cannot surpass a developer's status"* (Informant C, translated).

These accounts show objectification at work. Scarcity, price, and platform labels are materialized in icons, badges, and profile or leaderboard displays. Because these signs are embedded in the interface, they feel objective rather than subjective. As a result, economic inputs such as Robux spending and development resources are converted into recognizable signs of worth. Once these signs circulate as common sense, they function as a classification scheme that places premium buyers, verified creators, and developers in superior positions while regular players occupy lower positions.

After status markers have been objectified and classifications become visible, players start to absorb them as expectations for belonging. This is the second stage, where symbolic violence deepens through internalization. Players learn that to be included and to be taken seriously they should spend, subscribe, or pursue recognized signals such as verification and awards. Informants repeatedly described buying as normal and linked access to paywalled features with participation. One informant stated that *"purchasing in-game items is normal and important"* (Informant G, translated). Another informant noted that "certain features are paywalled, and the disparity becomes visible" (Informant D, translated). A further informant observed that *"people show that they have bought a game pass, and then they are noticed"* (Informant A, translated).

Here the term "normal" is not neutral. It names a standard that raises the social cost of abstaining from purchases or from pursuing badges. Visibility of paywalled features and purchase signals encourages conformity because not joining premium or not buying passes becomes legible as a lack. In Bourdieu's terms, the field develops a doxa, which is the taken-for-granted background that guides practice (Meissner, 2021). Distinctions feel self-evident rather than contested. Consequently, players treat symbolic capital as a criterion of standing and they make everyday choices about what to buy and what to display that keep the standard in place.

The third stage is justification. Inequalities in visibility, recognition, and income are narrated as reasonable outcomes of merit, effort, or platform needs. In this stage, informants often accepted fees and outcome gaps as appropriate. One informant said *that "it is fair enough as long as it is not excessive, because the company needs to survive"* (Informant D, translated). Another informant added that "*I am fine with Roblox taking a cut from developer earnings*" (Informant B, translated).

These statements reframe structural asymmetries as deserved or necessary. Better developers are said to earn more because of their skill. Premium buyers are said to stand out because they invest more. Platform extraction is framed as the natural price of infrastructure. This merit-focused story hides how access to economic capital for premium purchases and advertising, symbolic gatekeeping through verification and awards, and design choices such as paywalls, icons, and algorithmic visibility shape the field in advance. In Bourdieu's language, misrecognition occurs because domination is recognized as legitimate (Burawoy, 2019). The mechanisms look normal, necessary, and even virtuous, so differences that are produced through

Taken together, these stages show how the platform's interface and market design translate monetary inputs (Robux spending and development resources) into publicly legible status, teach these signals as the normal terms of belonging, rationalize the resulting gaps as merit or necessity, and routinize practices that reproduce them. In this sense, economic capital is converted into symbolic capital under doxa and misrecognition, so power operates through what feels normal rather than overt coercion (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990; Burawoy, 2019)

This account connects several strands of prior research. Studies of gaming capital showed that items, ranks, and badges act as recognized signs of status (Consalvo, 2007). Work on virtual goods explained how design, pricing, and rarity stimulate repeat purchases (Hamari & Keronen, 2017; Lehdonvirta, 2009). Research on microtransactions and loot boxes highlighted consumer risks and gambling-like features (King & Delfabbro, 2018). The present results link these ideas by showing how monetization and display systems do more than drive spending, it teaches what counts as value, which makes status differences feel reasonable and expected. In platform studies, scholars argue that platforms coordinate production and consumption and capture value from user activity (Nieborg &

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Poell, 2018; Ritzer, 2010). The interviews specify how that capture is culturally stabilized through paid prestige and platform recognition create symbolic returns that keep players and creators investing even when cash returns are uncertain. Theoretically, the results clarify a conversion chain where money buys passes, rare items, and promotion, the interface makes these purchases public then recognition follows and justifies the spend. It also shows how doxa is cultivated through interface placement, rarity rules, and verification criteria, and how misrecognition turns structural asymmetries in fees and visibility into stories about merit or necessity.

Conclusion

This study shows that digital play on Roblox functions as an economic system in which microtransactions turn monetary inputs into symbolic capital that reproduces social hierarchy. Prestige grows through paid access to limited or exclusive items and memberships, and reputation develops through recognition of developer or creator work and through verification. Together these forms of symbolic capital translate economic power into visible status and make inequality appear reasonable in everyday interaction. As discussed, this occurs through objectification and classification, the internalization of norms, the justification of unequal outcomes, and the routine reproduction of these differences.

Conceptually, the study offers a mechanism-level account that links monetization and display architecture to status formation and to a prosumer loop in which creators both spend and produce in order to gain visibility. Practically, the findings point to design and policy levers, including greater transparency about fees and exchange rates, lower salience of paywalled status signals in the interface, and recognition systems that rely on contribution and quality rather than spending. The study has limits because it is qualitative, focuses on a single platform, and uses a purposive sample. Future research can combine platform data and experiments, compare platforms and regions, and test interface or policy changes that alter visibility, rarity, and reward structures in order to evaluate effects on status formation and distributional outcomes.

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