

# When play becomes work: the relationship between Roblox Corporation and child labor

*Quando brincar vira trabalho: a relação entre a  
Roblox Corporation e o trabalho infantil*

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyzes how the Terms of Use of the Roblox Corporation platform may reflect practices that constitute child labor, especially in the creation and monetization of content developed by children and adolescents. The research is based on documentary analysis, using primary sources—such as Roblox’s own Terms of Use—and secondary sources, such as journalistic reports and academic literature. Methodological triangulation was applied, consisting of correlating and cross-referencing data from from these different sources, seeking to ensure greater robustness in the interpretation of the data and in the construction of the arguments. The study uses analytical categories from Marxism, such as exploitation, alienation, and the distinction between creative labor and alienated labor, to problematize how the platform’s ludic space is, in fact, an environment structured for the extraction of value from child labor, disguised as fun.

**Keywords:** child labor; exploitation; Roblox Corporation.

## RESUMO

Este artigo analisa como os Termos de Uso da plataforma Roblox Corporation podem refletir práticas que configuram trabalho infantil, especialmente na criação e monetização de conteúdos desenvolvidos por crianças e adolescentes. A pesquisa se baseia em análise documental, utilizando fontes primárias — como os próprios Termos de Uso da Roblox — e fontes secundárias, como reportagens jornalísticas e literatura acadêmica. Foi aplicada a triangulação metodológica, consistindo na correlação e cruzamento de dados oriundos dessas diferentes fontes, buscando garantir maior robustez na interpretação dos dados e na construção dos argumentos. O estudo utiliza categorias analíticas do marxismo, como exploração, alienação e a distinção entre trabalho criador e trabalho alienante, para problematizar como o espaço lúdico da plataforma é, na verdade, um ambiente estruturado para a extração de valor a partir do trabalho infantil, disfarçado de diversão.

**Palavras-chave:** Trabalho infantil; Exploração; Roblox Corporation.

## Introduction

The rise of digital platforms in the last decade has brought new challenges to understanding the dynamics of child labor in the context of the digital economy. Initially focused on entertainment,

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these platforms began offering tools that go beyond playing, enabling the creation and commercialization of content. Such practices raise questions about the fine line between gaming and work, especially when children are encouraged to participate actively in these spaces.

In this context, the research proposes to analyze how the Terms of Use of the Roblox Corporation platform, adopted here as a primary source, reflect practices that may constitute child labor, investigating the role played by children and adolescents in content creation and its monetization. The analysis is based on the Marxist concepts of means of production, exploitation, alienation, and the contradiction between creative labor and alienated labor, problematizing whether the virtual studios offered by Roblox Corporation can be considered a kind of digital “factory floor,” characterized as sites of child labor disguised as leisure spaces.

The research adopts a qualitative approach, of a documentary nature, analyzing primary and secondary sources. As a primary source, Roblox Corporation’s own Terms of Use were examined, an official document that governs user activities on the platform, covering everything from access to the creation studio to monetization rules. Secondary sources consisted of (i) an investigative report by journalist Isabel Harari, published by Repórter Brasil, which addresses child labor practices associated with the platform, and (ii) academic literature composed of scientific articles and theses that analyze the digital economy, gaming platforms, and child labor, with an emphasis on studies that problematize the intersections between leisure, production, and exploitation.

From a procedural point of view, data analysis was conducted through methodological triangulation, an established strategy in qualitative research, which consists of crossing multiple data sources to expand the validity, consistency, and depth of the results. Triangulation, in this study, allows correlating the reading of the Terms of Use (primary source) with information from the journalistic report and academic production (secondary sources), enabling the identification of convergences, contradictions, and complementarities. Thus, the aim was to build a critical analysis of the production and monetization structure of Roblox Corporation, highlighting the role played by children and adolescents in the development of content and its legal, ethical, and social implications in the context of the exploitation of child labor on digital platforms.

The article presents a discussion structured in three parts, in addition to this introduction: the first discusses digital platforms as means of production in contemporary capitalism; the second analyzes the Terms of Use of Roblox Corporation, highlighting evidence of labor relations involving minors; and, finally, the final considerations are presented, synthesizing the research results and their implications for the legal and social debate on child labor in the digital economy.

## Digital platforms as means of production: the sale of labor power

In Marxist thought, the means of production are the fundamental elements for the production of goods and services, including tools, machines, technology, raw materials, land, and infrastructure. In the capitalist system, these means are concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie, while the proletariat, deprived of them, is forced to sell its labor power to survive, establishing a relationship of exploitation. This division underpins power and production relations, with the bourgeoisie controlling productive processes and workers subordinated to these conditions. Marx highlights that this dynamic is the basis of class struggle, as the possession of the means of production determines the relations of exploitation and inequality in the capitalist mode of production.

In platform capitalism, the means of production are predominantly digital, represented by algorithms, data systems, and networks that connect workers, consumers, and companies. Platforms act as economic infrastructures that accumulate value through data and centralized control of interactions.

Digital platforms configure themselves as true technological infrastructures that facilitate interaction between two or more groups, positioning themselves as central mediators of diverse activities. They connect a wide range of users: customers, advertisers, service providers, producers, and suppliers. In the context of platform capitalism, these tools transcend their intermediation function and begin to act as catalysts for new markets and forms of production, according to Amorim and Grohmann (2022):

In this sense, the *digital platform, this immense productive force*, which extends and branches its reach with its arms of subordination, does not break with the types of industry, labor, and management forms of past centuries, if we observe that they are still present and operate in a way that structures production processes:

1) the separation between producers and means of production, which confers dominion and power to the capitalist over what to produce and how to produce, continues to divide social classes; 2) cooperation as a general principle of industry, with the combination of diverse types of labor, in the sense of meeting increased productivity (which can be deepened via algorithmic management or based on monitoring and control software), reproduces itself as a central element of industrial production; and 3) real subsumption that still directly subordinates the collective worker to the “new machinery,” that is, to the new information and communication technologies (apps and software), in addition to incorporating old and new labor practices (know-how) of the collective worker, articulates and integrates workers, radicalizing the extraction of surplus labor via cooperation (p. 8 - emphasis added).

In the digital universe aimed at children, these platforms often provide a range of resources that allow users to create their own products and services. In this scenario, play can easily be converted into work, as children and adolescents are encouraged to produce

content, develop skills, and even commercialize their creations. Thus, platforms promote an almost imperceptible transition between playful activities and economically productive activities, highlighting the ambiguities between leisure and economic exploitation.

This model not only redefines the nature of digital interactions but also reinforces the power of platforms as contemporary means of production, capable of capturing the value generated by their users, often without due recognition or legal protection. Such dynamics deserve a critical analysis, especially regarding the terms of use that regulate these interactions and which frequently end up legitimizing exploitative practices, including those involving children and adolescents, given that digital platforms act as central infrastructures of contemporary production, reorganizing labor practices and challenging traditional concepts of work and production.

## Roblox Corporation's Terms of Use: evidence of labor relations involving minors

For an in-depth analysis of the topic in question, it is essential to examine whether digital platforms involving minors utilize their labor force directly or indirectly. This requires a careful evaluation of the terms of use of these applications, with the objective of identifying possible indications that minors are, in fact, offering their labor power to these companies. The study begins with the analysis of the Terms of Use of Roblox Corporation, founded in 2004 and headquartered in San Mateo, California.

Upon analyzing item 2, paragraph "a", of the Roblox User Terms, it is observed that there is no age restriction imposed on its users, as deduced from the transcription of the mentioned clause:

User Accounts; Access to Services.

a. *Creating an Account.* To access certain elements and functionality of the Services, you will need to create a Roblox account ("*Account*"). To create an Account, you will be asked to provide username, date of birth, and method of authenticating your Account, which may include a password and, depending on the resources accessed, you may also be asked to provide other information like a verified email address, verified phone number, or a government-issued photo identification. You agree that all information provided to Roblox will be true, accurate, and up to date. Roblox reserves the right to take steps to ensure that any information you provide to Roblox in connection with your Account is accurate.

Reinforcing the possibility of minors accessing the Roblox Corporation platform, it is verified in the introduction of the Terms of Use that minors must submit the term to the reading and acceptance of their guardians before using the services:

If you are under the legal age of majority (a “minor”) in your jurisdiction or state of residence, before using the services, your parent or legal guardian must read and consent to the Roblox Terms. By permitting a minor to use the services, a minor’s parent or guardian becomes subject to the Roblox Terms and agrees to be responsible for all of the minor’s activities on the services, including the purchase of any virtual content.

The Terms of Use establish that, to create an account, the minor must provide a username, date of birth, and an authentication method, these information being sufficient for opening the account. Only after the account is created, before accessing the platform’s content, is it requested that the terms be submitted to their guardian, who, upon allowing use, assumes responsibility for all activities performed by the minor. In the company’s view, the legal relationship is formalized at the moment of registration, and only subsequently are the terms presented to the guardian.

From reading item 2, subsection II, of the Creator Terms of Use, it is extracted that Roblox Corporation makes available to users a tool called “Roblox Studio,” a virtual studio designed to create, develop, and modify 3D virtual content:

ii. Roblox Studio. Roblox provides Creators with a free software tool (“*Studio*”) that allows them to create, develop, modify, operate, and Publish Experiences and 3D Virtual Content (collectively encompassed by “UGC,”<sup>1</sup> as that term is originally defined in the User Terms) on the Services. Roblox owns and/or controls all rights in/to Studio and all elements contained therein. Subject to Creator’s compliance with these Creator Terms, Roblox grants Creator a non-exclusive, limited, revocable, non-sublicensable, and non-transferable license to use Studio solely for the purpose of creating, developing, modifying, uploading, and Publishing Creator’s UGC on the Services (“*Studio License*”). Creator may only use Studio in a way consistent with these Creator Terms.

It is undeniable, based on the provisions of article 2, subsection II, of the Creator Terms of Use, that the studio provided by Roblox Corporation functions, in essence, as the virtual “factory floor,” with control established by the company, which dictates the production rules through the norms created and imposed in the Creator Terms of Use. In the studio, workers develop games that generate profitability for the company, which, according to article 2, subsection III, holds the ownership of all produced content:

iii. Roblox Templates. “*Templates*” are made available by Roblox (generally via Studio) and serve as a starting point that Creators can use to more

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1 Stands for “User Generated Content.” UGC is content of any kind or nature, whether material, assets, or otherwise, that Users (including but not limited to Creators) upload to, create and publish on, or otherwise generate through or make available on the Services.

easily create UGC. Roblox owns or controls all rights in all Templates and all elements contained therein and makes Templates available to Creators pursuant to the Studio License. Creators may only use Templates in a way consistent with these Creator Terms. Using a Template does not give Creator any ownership rights in/to that Template.

Thus, player-users end up playing the role of service providers for the company, configuring a labor relationship masked under the label of recreation, in which the act of playing transforms into work. As highlighted by Flôr et al. (2023, p. 5): “The company demonstrates game development as something purely recreational and attractive, diverting the conformation of the relationship present where player-users end up acting as service providers for the platform.”

The child worker is separated from the products of their own work, from the means of production, and from control over their productive activity. At Roblox, this process is evident when minors, even acting as developers, do not own the games they create. All content produced belongs to the company, as stipulated in the Terms of Use, reinforcing the expropriation of the creativity and the immaterial labor of children. Thus, what could be a free, playful, and formative activity converts into an alienated process subordinated to the logic of capital valorization.

Finally, the contradiction between creative labor and alienated labor becomes central to the analysis. The act of playing—an expression of creative labor in childhood—is transformed into alienated labor when inserted into the platform’s productive dynamics. The Roblox environment, under the appearance of a ludic space, constitutes itself as a true digital means of production, in which children’s activities are directed no longer at the realization of their human potential, but at the generation of value for the platform and its investors. This movement evidences a new morphology of exploitation in platform capitalism, which appropriates even the most primary expressions of human development—play—and converts them into commodities.

The second aspect of the investigation focuses on the analysis regarding the existence of remuneration for both children and adolescents who develop games using the Roblox Corporation studio, described as a true virtual “factory floor.” In this scenario, the studio is not limited to being a creative tool, but is configured as a capitalist means of production exclusively owned by the company. This dynamic evidences exploitation, in which the act of playing is frequently transformed into work. Furthermore, the ownership of the merchandise produced by children and adolescents (the games) belongs entirely to the company, as provided in article 2, subsection III, of the Creator Terms of Use: “Roblox owns or controls all rights in all Templates and all elements contained therein [...]” (Roblox Corporation, [2024], n.p.).

Considering the theme “When play becomes work: an analysis of the terms of use of digital platforms and child labor,” it becomes essential to analyze the Terms of Use to verify if children and adolescents receive remuneration for creating games. With this purpose, let us examine what is disposed in article 3, paragraphs “a” and “c”, of the Roblox Terms of Use:

#### Robux and Roblox Premium Membership

a. “*Robux*” is the official currency of the Roblox Services and can be used to acquire content such as Virtual Items (defined below) or access to interactive content called “*Experiences*” on the Services. *Robux are not a substitute for real currency, do not earn interest, and have no equivalent value in real currency.* Except as otherwise outlined in the DevEx Terms with respect to Creators who have applied and been accepted to the DevEx Program, Robux cannot be redeemed for any real currency, and Roblox is not obligated to exchange a User’s Robux for anything else of value.

[...]

c. *Acquisition and Use of Robux.* Robux may be acquired on the Services in one of several ways. A User may acquire Robux (i) by purchasing or otherwise receiving Robux from Roblox; (ii) through the purchase of Robux on behalf of the User by another person; (iii) by purchasing a membership (“*Premium*” as more fully described in Section 3f below) that includes a certain stipend of Robux each month; (iv) by trading Virtual Items with other Users (as described in Section 4c below); or (v) by other means that Roblox may introduce. Additionally, a Creator may earn Robux as described more fully in Section 4 of the Creator Terms.

An analysis of the terms above reveals that Roblox Corporation implemented a virtual currency called “Robux” for operations within its platform, as provided in article 3, paragraph “a”, of its Terms of Use. This virtual currency can be acquired through conversion of current currency (physical money) during the purchase of subscriptions or received by content and game creators, as foreseen in article 3, paragraph “c”, whenever the content produced by them is commercialized.

Although article 3, paragraph “a” of the Roblox Terms of Use states that the virtual currency Robux does not substitute real currency, does not earn interest, and has no equivalent value in current currency, the referred provision establishes an exception, provided for in the Developer Exchange Terms of Use:

#### Developer Exchange Terms of Use

*The Roblox Developer Exchange Program (also known as DevEx) is a program that allows Roblox creators to exchange their Earned Robux for real money.* While any creator can use Roblox Studio to learn to code, create experiences or items to enjoy with their friends, and even earn some Robux, only successful creators will be able to meet the high requirements (described below) to earn money through DevEx. Reaching this level of success typically requires a lot of time, effort, skill, and strategy. Even then, there is no guarantee of earning money. Regardless of goals, be it fun or career advancement, we offer creators what they need to start building for free at [create.roblox.com](https://create.roblox.com) (emphasis added).

Note that the Developer Exchange Terms of Use explicitly state that the program “allows Roblox creators to exchange their Earned Robux for real money” and that “only successful creators will be able to meet the high requirements (described below) to earn money through DevEx.”

The eligibility requirements for DevEx, which allow the conversion of Robux into money, are specified in item 2 of the Developer Exchange Terms of Use, as follows:

#### DevEx Eligibility Requirements

Eligibility to participate in DevEx is solely up to Roblox, and the requirements may be changed by Roblox at any time by updating the DevEx Terms. To participate in DevEx you must meet all the following minimum requirements (“the DevEx Eligibility Requirements”):

1. Be at least 13 years of age or older;
2. Have at least 30,000 Earned Robux (defined below) in your account;
3. Have a Roblox-verified email address;
4. Have a valid DevEx portal account;
5. Have an IRS form W-9 (for U.S. taxpayers) or W-8 (for non-U.S. taxpayers) on file with Roblox;
6. Comply with the Ongoing Service Requirements for Developers (described below); and
7. Be in complete compliance at all times with the Roblox Terms of Use, which include these DevEx Terms and the Roblox Community Standards. By way of example, the following will disqualify you from DevEx: scamming, phishing, false advertising, attempting to exchange Robux for real currency other than through DevEx, and any illegal or unethical activities.

The content above demonstrates that a 13-year-old adolescent—the minimum age in item 1 of the DevEx Eligibility Requirements—can, in theory, perform activities of a labor nature for Roblox Corporation. However, this practice contradicts Article 7, item XXXIII, of the Brazilian Federal Constitution, which prohibits the work of minors under 16, except in the condition of an apprentice, permitted only from the age of 14. Along the same line of prohibition, Article 403 of the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT) and Article 60 of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA) are emphasized.

## **Roblox Corporation and the false promise of fun: child labor disguised as entertainment**

The introduction of the Terms of Use of Roblox Corporation presents an attractive discourse, highlighting creativity and imagination as pillars of the experience on the platform, suggesting these are activities of pure entertainment:

## Introduction

*Welcome to the Roblox universe, where imagination and creativity rule!*

Roblox Corporation and designated subsidiaries (“Roblox”, “we,” or “us”) offers the Roblox website ([www.roblox.com](http://www.roblox.com)) and its related platform (collectively, “Platform”) and various other features and services, including websites, applications, forums, content, functionality, products, and services (together with the Platform, “Services”) to allow users (“Users,” “your,” or “you”) to play, create, and connect (Roblox Corporation, 2005 – emphasis in original).

Roblox Corporation declares that its platform is intended exclusively for entertainment, as highlighted in the publication of the portal *Olhar Digital*: “Roblox denies that there is any employment relationship between developers and the company, stating that its platform is aimed exclusively at fun” (Figueiredo, 2024).

According to Williams (2007, p. 42-43), words must be understood as products of the social and historical forces that shape them. In this context where words and meanings are defined by dominant forces, such as big technology companies, it is fundamental to recognize that the vocabulary employed in documents such as the Terms of Use of Roblox Corporation is not neutral. Words like “play,” “create,” and “connect” are loaded with intentionality and reflect a historical and cultural construction that may hide dynamics of exploitation, including child labor. These vocabularies should not be seen as an unquestionable tradition or as a natural and legitimate expression of language, but rather as a configuration molded by specific interests, adapted to contemporary social and economic conditions, whose purpose is to increase the profit rate through unpaid or precarious child labor.

Therefore, it is necessary to adopt a critical stance towards these terms, recognizing that they can be reconfigured according to different points of view and realities. The analysis of these vocabularies must be a tool to unmask possible illegalities, especially in the case of children and adolescents who, under the pretext of fun, may be being exploited in labor activities. Thus, it is up to academia and society to reevaluate and reconstruct these words so that they reflect ethical and just values, in opposition to the real intention of the researched company.

Under the promise of a space to “play, create, and connect,” practices emerge that may hide child labor relations disguised as fun. Roblox Corporation utilizes terms that suggest a collaborative and open community, but also introduces concepts that, in practice, may imply exploitation of minors in game development and the offering of “experiences.” As minors play more and, also, create products, the concept widely used in the digital era emerges: prosumers, characterized by the junction of the words “producers” and “consumers.” The term is used to describe individuals or groups of individuals who, instead of just consuming products or services offered by platforms,

actively participate in their production, creation, or modification, according to Dantas (2014, p. 93 – emphasis added):

Many years before the internet appeared as we know it today [...] [Toffler] already spoke of the tendency towards the increasing overcoming of differences between “producers” and “consumers”. [...] capital narrows the spatiotemporal distance between the moment of “production and the *moment of consumption*, thus causing the *appearance* of the “prosumer” to emerge, [...].

The emphasis given to the “Creator Terms,” which cover the use of Roblox Studio and the production of virtual content, raises questions about the role played by children and adolescents in this dynamic. Under the pretext of allowing users to explore their creativity, the platform encourages minors to invest time and resources in the creation of games and experiences, as evidenced in the testimonials of minors cited in the report by journalist Isabel Harari, published in 2024 by Repórter Brasil (n.p. – emphasis added):

JUCA\*, 12 YEARS OLD, began to get interested in game programming when he “heard that a person could get rich.” Lucas, 16, always liked video games, but decided to study the subject when he realized he could “bring this passion to a side where he could be rewarded.”

After creating programming codes for fun, José, 13, discovered it would be possible to “get a little profit.” With the same age, Guto has been remunerated for making animations for only a year, but is already making plans: “I save this money to pay for a course in the future.”

Guto, 13, spends two to three hours programming on the platform every day, but guarantees that this does not affect his studies. José, 13, estimates spending four hours a day creating games from Monday to Friday, and “from 6 to 7 hours” on Saturdays and Sundays. Leandro, 13, states he does a regimen of “6×3 [six hours each day, for three days], but sometimes it exceeds 12 hours,” he acknowledges.

By transforming the act of playing into a profession, the minors mentioned in the report come to view the game no longer as a ludic activity, but as a means of subsistence. As Soares (2019, p. 137) analyzes, this change of perspective causes the player to lose part of the enchantment of the game, transforming it into employment, into a tool of subsistence with sponsors and career building. Thus, their concerns and objectives distinguish themselves from those of common players.

Under the Marxist perspective, it is possible to identify here the classic mechanism of exploitation, in which capital appropriates the time, energy, and creativity of children, converting these activities, apparently spontaneous, into commodities that generate surplus value. Although the company’s discourse reinforces the idea of autonomy and leisure, the relationship established in practice is a production relationship, since the products

created—games, experiences, and virtual objects—are the property of the company and integrate its logic of profitability.

Allowing children and adolescents to labor for more than 12 hours, as reported in the media outlet *Repórter Brasil*, reminds us of the account described in Marx's work (2013, p. 470):

“My attention was drawn,” he says, for example, an English factory inspector, “to an advertisement in the local paper of one of the most important manufacturing cities of my district, which I reproduce here: wanted, 10 to 20 boys, grown enough to pass for 13 years old.”

According to the same work, minors needed to pass for 13 years old because, in that dark period of history, children under 13 could only work 6 hours, while the employer intended to submit them to longer workdays.

In the period reported by Marx, the fraud consisted of making minors under 13 be presented as being over 13, allowing their submission to excessive workdays. Currently, the strategy has changed: minors need to appear to be participating in leisure activities, and not work. It is capitalism reinventing itself to maximize the profit rate.

This relationship suggests a subtle transformation of fun into work, especially considering the absence of clear labor regulations and the lack of guarantees for these young creators. Thus, the platform configures itself as a space where the line between entertainment and exploitation becomes increasingly tenuous, revealing the need for a critical analysis of Roblox Corporation's practices in light of legislation protecting against child labor.

## Conclusion

The analysis of Roblox Corporation's Terms of Use and the dynamics of production on the platform revealed the tenuous border between leisure and work, particularly in the child context. Although the company states that its platform is aimed exclusively at fun, the structuring of tools like Roblox Studio and the monetization of user-generated content point to practices that may constitute the exploitation of child labor. The promise of profit and the “gamification” of creative activities transform play into a productive activity, without the due legal and social guarantees for the minors involved.

From a legal point of view, the absence of specific regulation for these digital platforms presents significant challenges. The normative gap allows potentially exploitative practices to be legitimized by terms of use that obscure the relationship between the company and the minor creators. From an ethical point of view, the impact of these practices

on child development is questioned, especially regarding the alienation of labor and the loss of the ludic essence.

This study contributes to the debate on the exploitation of child labor in the digital economy, highlighting the urgent need for regulations that protect children's rights. It is recommended that future research deepen the analysis of other similar platforms and examine the psychosocial implications of these practices on minors. The awareness of families, educators, and legislators is essential to ensure that the digital environment is safe and fair, preserving children's right to leisure and full development, free from exploitation.

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