

51. AN OVERVIEW OF CHANGING PATTERNS IN GAMING MONETISATION

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Monetisation strategies and patterns in gaming industry are considered. Statistical data regarding the usage of several the most popular monetisation strategies are examined. Changing patterns are identified.

The landscape of gaming monetisation has been transformed profoundly over the decades, shaped by the advances in technology, shifts in consumer behaviour, and evolving industry strategies. What began as a straightforward transactional model, where players purchased physical copies of games, paying only once, has grown into a versatile ecosystem that includes microtransactions, subscription services, battle passes, and emerging technologies like blockchain-based systems. These changes have not only redefined how game developers generate revenue and build their working schedule, but have also raised important questions about ethics and the player's experience.

One-time purchase was the first type of monetisation to appear on the market and was the only one until mid 1990s. As the industry was just starting to evolve no one was even thinking about any other way of selling games.

The first subscription-based game appeared in 1995 and was called Meridian 59 [1]. It was one of the first MMORPGs and the first to introduce a flat monthly subscription fee. This game faced notable success and popularised subscription as a way of monetisation. Later Ultima Online and World of Warcraft that were published in 1997 and 2004 respectively and many other projects assured that success of Meridian 59 was the start of a new tendency and that a subscription is a better way to make money of life-service games like MMORPGs.

Free-to-Play (F2P) games became the next step of monetisation strategies. The first F2P game to come around was Nexon's QuizQuiz published in 1999. "Nexon's QuizQuiz" a trivia-based game, allowed players to enjoy the game for free but offered the option to purchase in-game items. This concept, called microtransaction, became a staple of the F2P model. Later on, beside available for purchase in-game items, companies started to show gamers adds with an option to stop them from appearing for a price. This exact concept came to be extremely popular in mobile gaming segment.

Loot boxes are also sometimes considered a separate monetisation type, while most of the times being just another microtransaction. The concept of loot boxes is that you do not know what exactly you are buying but you always have a chance of getting something far more expensive that the loot box or even exclusive. The first game to introduce this money-making strategy was MapleStory in 2003. Later loot boxes appeared in many other projects such as FIFA, Overwatch, League of Legends etc. that gained huge popularity and attracted attention of regulatory organs. Governments of some European countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands and Slovakia either qualified loot boxes as gambling or made them illegal.

Another very similar yet different monetisation strategy is gacha systems or mechanics. The first released gacha game was Dragon Collection in 2010. Since then a lot of other mainly Asian game developing studios began creating their products around gacha mechanics. This tendency was specific to Asian market up until 2020 when Genshin Impact was released and gathered world-wide popularity, raising over \$1 billion in revenue in six months on mobile platform only [2]. From there gacha games started to become its own huge segment of the industry, rapidly growing at the moment.

Play-to-Earn games also known as NFT games are the most recent trend in monetisation patterns. They let players exchange in-game items for crypto-currency thus making gaming a source of income. While this seems like a next level of gaming now there are no large projects to compete with leads of the market. This approach may in future find a way to new heights, but for now it remains very niche.

The main reason for an existence of all these and other monetisation strategies lies in a huge variety of different computer games. For example, AAA single-player games are ideal for one-time purchase while F2P games require long-term support and frequent updates thus being ideal for subscription or microtransaction approach. So, with more various new games to come there may appear brand new monetisation types.

The global games market, including mobile and other platforms, generated more than \$184 billion in revenue in 2024 [3]. Figure 1 shows the state of each game monetisation type on the market in 2024.

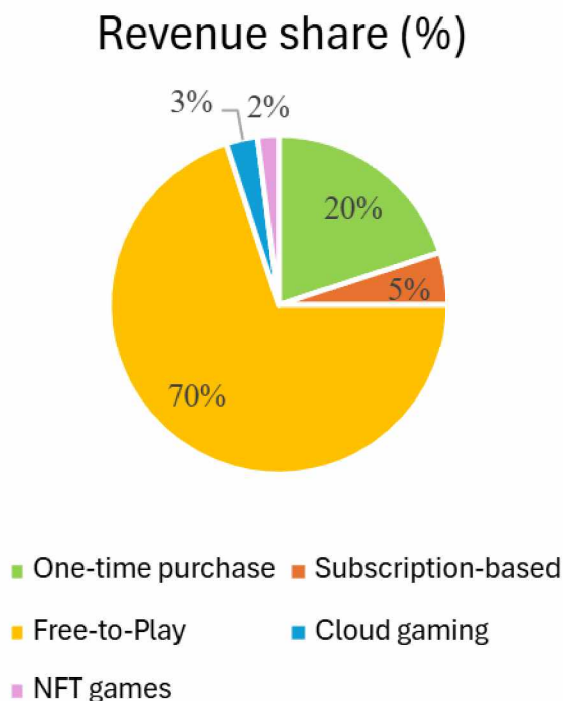


Figure 1 – Revenue share of games with different monetisation type

As you can see F2P currently dominates in revenue share over other monetisation strategies. This shows how the ability to play the game without the requirement to pay anything tends to be the superior idea for gaming industry. This is especially important if taking into consideration mobile games, because a huge percentage of mobile game developing studios do not have a solid reputation in the eyes of a customer. Also selling microtransactions most commonly used in F2P games provides an opportunity to make money of an existing game often without the requirement to even somehow redo or enhance an existing gameplay for a long period of time. This method had a huge effect on F2P games sustainability, that has led to this enormous percentage.

Age plays a significant role in shaping players' responses to different gaming monetisation models. Younger gamers – typically teens and young adults – are generally drawn to F2P models that leverage microtransactions, loot boxes, and gacha mechanics. These models lower the initial barrier to entry, allowing immediate access and frequent engagement without a hefty upfront cost. Their consumption habits, influenced by social media trends and peer-driven dynamics, often favour the thrill of randomised rewards and the continual influx of fresh content. The incentive structures built into these monetisation strategies are well-aligned with the desire for instantaneous gratification and exploratory spending, even if it means frequent small purchases.

On the other hand, older gamers usually gravitate toward models that offer greater clarity and long-term value, such as one-time purchases or subscription-based services. With a greater focus on quality, longevity, and a transparent return on investment, these players often view microtransaction-based models with skepticism especially when such systems can be perceived as “pay-to-win” or exploitative. Their decisions tend to be more deliberate, aiming to invest in a complete experience upfront rather than engaging in continuous, incremental spending that might feel less substantial. Ultimately, this demographic difference illustrates that monetisation strategies are most successful when they are tailored not only to the platform or genre but also to the behavioural and financial expectations of their target age groups.

Today the majority of games are F2P with microtransactions available for purchase; around a quarter of market belongs to one-time purchase games while other types have a single-digit percentage both in market share and revenue. As of inner state of F2P games sector – there battle passes and loot boxes do still hold their ground while gacha sector rapidly expands. Current trends point towards F2P with a variety of different microtransactions available. This tendency is very likely to remain at least for around five years with slight

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changes over time. With growing number of games, that use gacha mechanics, it is safe to presume a number of upcoming laws to regulate this industry. Overall future of gaming sector of global market seems bright and full of opportunities.

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