

Neymar joins 'Fortnite' as video game universe expands

March 24 2021, by Yassine Khiri



"Fortnite" users will be able to play as Brazilian football superstar Neymar in the shoot'em up video game

Gamers are used to taking control of Neymar in virtual football pitches, but the Brazilian star has found a new field to run wild on: the shoot'em up mega-hit "Fortnite".

Neymar's recruitment is part of a strategy by Epic Games to expand the universe of "Fortnite" beyond its kill-or-be-killed "Battle Royale" by wheeling in the sports, music and film worlds.

The footballer follows in the footsteps of US rapper Travis Scott, whose avatar performed five virtual concerts on "Fortnite" last year seen by 12 million players.

The [game](#), which has 350 million users (more than the US population), has also hosted a "Short Nite" film festival and a "Party Royale"—a virtual party with famous DJs.

"In a time like now, where getting together in person is more challenging, we think it's incredibly important to have these social connected experiences virtually," Nate Nanzer, head of global partnerships at Epic Games, told AFP.

"We definitely think of Fortnite as a platform for social connected experiences and not just the game."

Users have been able to put the kits of football teams such as Manchester City and Juventus on their avatars since the start of the year, but Neymar is the first athlete with an unlockable "player skin".

Nanzer said Neymar's selection made sense because the footballer is a fan of the game—he streams himself playing "Fortnite" live on Twitch—and has nearly 150 million Instagram followers.



An avatar of US rapper Travis Scott performs on "Fortnite" as the game looks to broaden its horizons

Meet me in the 'metaverse'

"Fortnite" is not the only video game looking to broaden the format's horizons.

"Roblox", an [online platform](#) that lets users build their own games, has been a massive hit during the pandemic, with birthday parties, social get-togethers and even company meetings held there.

"It's the metaverse," said Julien Pillot, a researcher at leading French business school INSEEC.

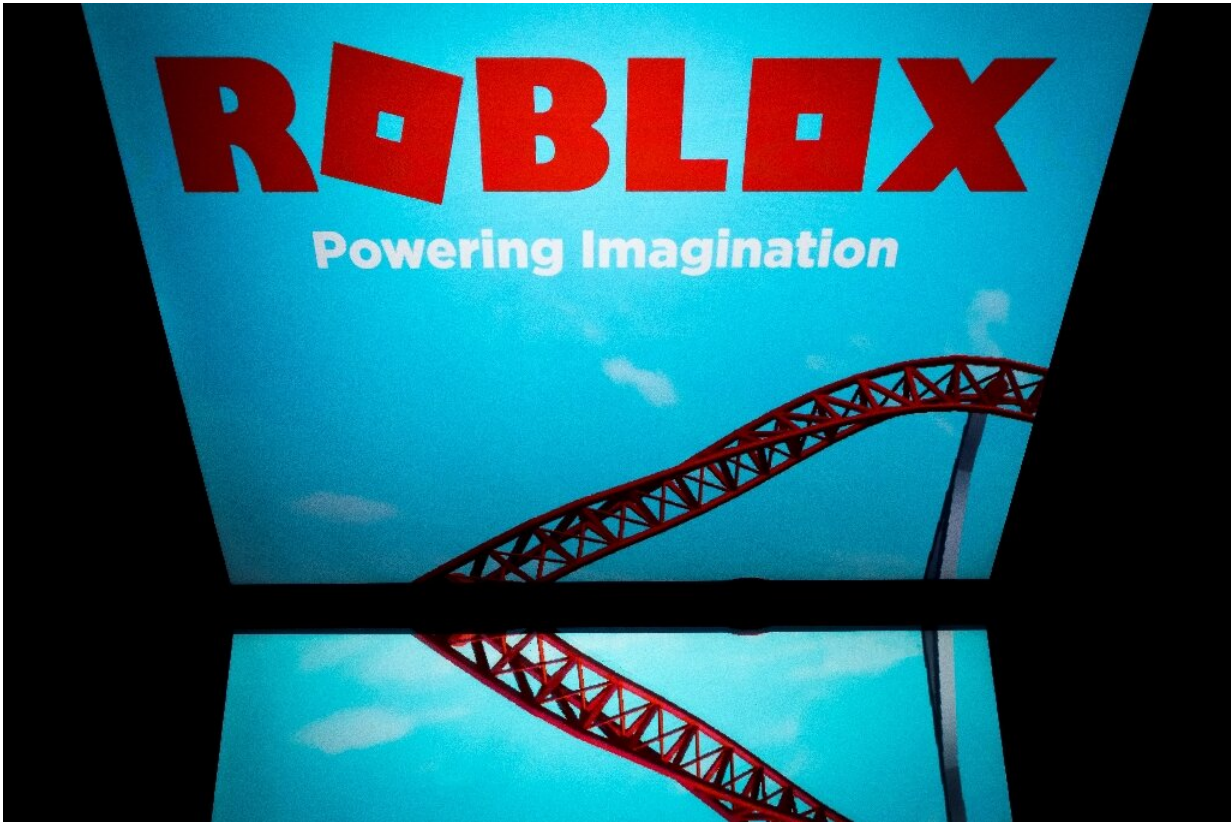
The "metaverse", a term coined by sci-fi writer Neal Stephenson, refers to a shared online world in which users can more freely interact, hang out, spend money, consume media and potentially even work jobs.

Charles-Louis Planade, a video game expert with Midcap Partners, said the "Holy Grail" of creating a metaverse was not new for gaming, citing the massive multiplayer game "World of Warcraft" which struck a chord in the 2000s.

"What is new is that these video games have almost become a 'hub', where playing is one of the activities offered—but not the only one," Planade said.

The numbers game

The metaverse dream also expands the ways that such games can rake in profits—while "Fortnite" and "Roblox" are free, users can spend real money on virtual goods and services within the games.



Roblox, an online platform that lets users build their own games, has been a massive hit during the pandemic

It has also created new ways to advertise to an overwhelmingly young audience—most of Roblox's 150 million monthly users are under 16.

Brands including Nike and Disney have already used the platforms, with the latter promoting the last Star Wars movie on "Roblox" in 2019.

Warner Brothers and DC meanwhile created a Wonder Woman game on Roblox to promote the superhero's last film, with US rapper Lil Nas X performing there.

And "Roblox" made its Wall Street debut earlier this month, listing on

the New York Stock Exchange for a valuation of \$46 billion—more than four times that of video game giant Ubisoft.

Should traditional social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram be worried?

Researcher Pillot said that the game-playing element still excluded some audiences.

"For mass advertising contracts, you will never beat a Facebook (2.8 billion users) that caters for everyone, young and old. You cannot compete on the same audience level," he said.

But analyst Planade said "we're heading straight in that direction."

"Tomorrow everyone will be playing video games."

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