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Social Networks as A Tool for Promoting and Interacting with Indie Game Communities

Mikhail Pyslar

Social Media Lead (company under NDA), Batumi, Georgia

Abstract: This study analyzes the impact of social media on the development, promotion of indie games, and the communication between developers and their audience. The relevance of the topic is determined by the increasing importance of digital channels and platforms through which gamers discover new projects via YouTube, Twitter (X), Reddit, and other resources. The novelty of the research lies in a comprehensive analysis of indie studios' strategies based on social media marketing (SMM) tools and community management. The study explores user preferences, motivations for subscribing to studio accounts, and the types of content that generate engagement, such as development updates, contests, and behind-the-scenes materials.

The research draws on the works of I.O. Gavrikov, I.O. Guk, I.O. Kovrizhnykh, I.O. Kamankin, P.P. Smirnov, and international scholars (Freeman, Bankov, Chuang) to identify audience engagement patterns across different social networks. The study examines micro-streamers, giveaways, and user-generated content (UGC) within the engagement framework. The objective is to provide recommendations for building a loyal community and increasing brand recognition. The research employs methods of comparative analysis, statistical data synthesis, and content analysis. The conclusion outlines prospects for further studies and justifies the practical value of the findings. This material is of interest to indie developers and marketers seeking effective digital promotion strategies.

Keywords: indie games, social media, promotion,

community, marketing, content, engagement.

M31 – Marketing
L86 – Information and Internet Services; Computer Software
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INTRODUCTION

In the context of the continuous growth of the video game market and intense competition among independent studios, the ability to establish effective communication with the audience through digital channels becomes increasingly significant. Indie teams, operating with limited resources, must prioritize social media, where users develop trust in the brand and a willingness to recommend the game to others. Practical experience demonstrates that targeted content and social media marketing (SMM) strategies enable the formation of a loyal community and extend the lifecycle of games.

The objective of this study is to analyze the role of social media as a promotional tool for indie games and to identify factors influencing the formation of an engaged gaming community. To achieve this goal, three key tasks are addressed:

- Identifying the primary channels and platforms used by the audience to obtain information about new projects.

- Determining the most effective content formats and engagement mechanisms that enhance gamer involvement.

- Formulating practical recommendations for applying SMM tools and engaging with the audience to ensure sustainable promotion of indie games.

The research examines several studies: Gavrikov [1] evaluates the use of social media for brand promotion and the impact of internet marketing on brand awareness; Guk and Kulcheiko [2] propose interaction methods with customers in social media and emphasize the role of online communications in audience attraction; Golenok [3] analyzes the distribution of mobile games and the influence of streamers on project popularity; Smirnova [4] explores indie game promotion practices through social media, utilizing creative content formats; Kamankin [5] investigates the indie game phenomenon and the creative specifics of independent studios; Kovrizhnykh [6] studies the gamification of content to enhance user activity in business promotion; Freeman and McNeese [7] highlight the significance of the "creative community" in team formation and game promotion within the context of indie development and social

aspects; Bankov [8] examines the close relationship between gaming communities and social media in terms of financial impact and user engagement; Nguyen [9] presents a social media marketing plan for a specific indie game, describing survey results and audience preferences; Chuang [10] analyzes engagement factors in online gaming communities, including social identity and virtual experience.

Modern independent studios face challenges in reaching a broad audience without large-scale advertising campaigns. It is necessary to identify the most effective social media channels and engagement strategies, as the dynamics of the indie game market largely depend on word-of-mouth marketing, streaming platforms, and user-generated content. This raises a critical problem: determining optimal tools and mechanisms that allow developers to "hear" the player and transform them into an active participant in promotion while minimizing costs.

The methods used in this study include comparative analysis (to compare strategies of different developers and online platforms), content analysis of materials (articles, surveys), statistical data synthesis (on audience engagement in social media), and theoretical modeling, which allows the generalization of best SMM practices for indie teams.

RESULTS

The study identified significant factors influencing the promotion of indie games through social media. The collected data and respondent opinions provided insights into player preferences, engagement structures, and mechanisms for building a loyal community [1]. According to aggregated assessments, gamers discover new projects primarily through online platforms and video-sharing channels, with YouTube, Twitter (X), and Reddit being the most frequently mentioned [2]. This highlights the priority of digital interaction in disseminating information about indie projects.

Indie developers, operating within limited budgets, focus on SMM strategies and original attention-grabbing formats [3]. For such teams, it is essential not only to attract an audience through one-time promotions but also to build a sustainable community, which in turn supports sales and enhances reputation [4]. An analysis of content on Twitter (X) revealed that short posts featuring humor and memes engage not only players but also media representatives. Additionally, Discord has been identified as an environment where regular communication, themed online events, and discussions within channels help maintain high retention rates [5].

Reddit contributes to the organic growth of interest,

provided that the chosen engagement format aligns with the audience's expectations, which tend to be highly critical and direct in feedback [3]. TikTok generates viral reach, particularly when focusing on short, creative videos [4]. YouTube and Twitch offer access to opinion leaders and streamers, whose recommendations often determine the success of new projects. Survey participants indicated that purchasing or downloading decisions are frequently influenced by the advice of bloggers conducting live broadcasts [9].

Observations confirmed the value of user-generated content (UGC), including artwork, memes, and modifications, as such elements enhance brand recognition and encourage creative engagement within the audience. Developers often endorse player-driven content by featuring or adapting the most popular ideas in game updates, sustaining additional interest in the project [8]. Furthermore, collaborations with micro-influencers result in a stable audience increase, as smaller but highly engaged communities demonstrate greater involvement and a stronger tendency to recommend games [6].

It was also found that the success of indie game promotion is closely linked to the participation of bloggers and streamers, although excessive spending on well-known influencers leads to disproportionately high expenses [8]. Microbloggers with smaller audiences establish closer connections with their followers, reinforcing sustained interest in the product. Analytical data confirms that collaborations with streamers generate an immediate surge in visibility and increased traffic to game pages.

An analysis of post-release support (such as additional challenges, community-driven competitions, and prize giveaways) revealed an increase in audience retention [10]. Such activities strengthen long-term interest in the studio's brand, as active fans are more likely to purchase future releases and actively share recommendations [7]. Additional monitoring of in-game statistics and player feedback indicates that continuous content expansion within a project extends its lifecycle.

The final observations demonstrate a direct correlation between engagement and the strategic use of social media in indie game promotion, emphasizing the importance of building a loyal community. Consistently strengthening the brand and maintaining ongoing communication with players contribute to increased sales and user base growth. Digital channels facilitate two-way interaction and drive additional promotion, where the community itself becomes an active co-creator of content. This approach enhances competitive positioning and helps studios maintain long-term stability in the indie gaming sector.

The following section presents the summarized results of the study on the recognition channels for new games that utilize social media and the motivation of subscribers when choosing an indie game account.

Initially, respondents were asked about the sources from which they typically learn about new game projects. The results indicate the predominant role of word-of-mouth (friends and family), reviews, and video channels, along with the significant impact of social media and digital advertising (see Figure 1).
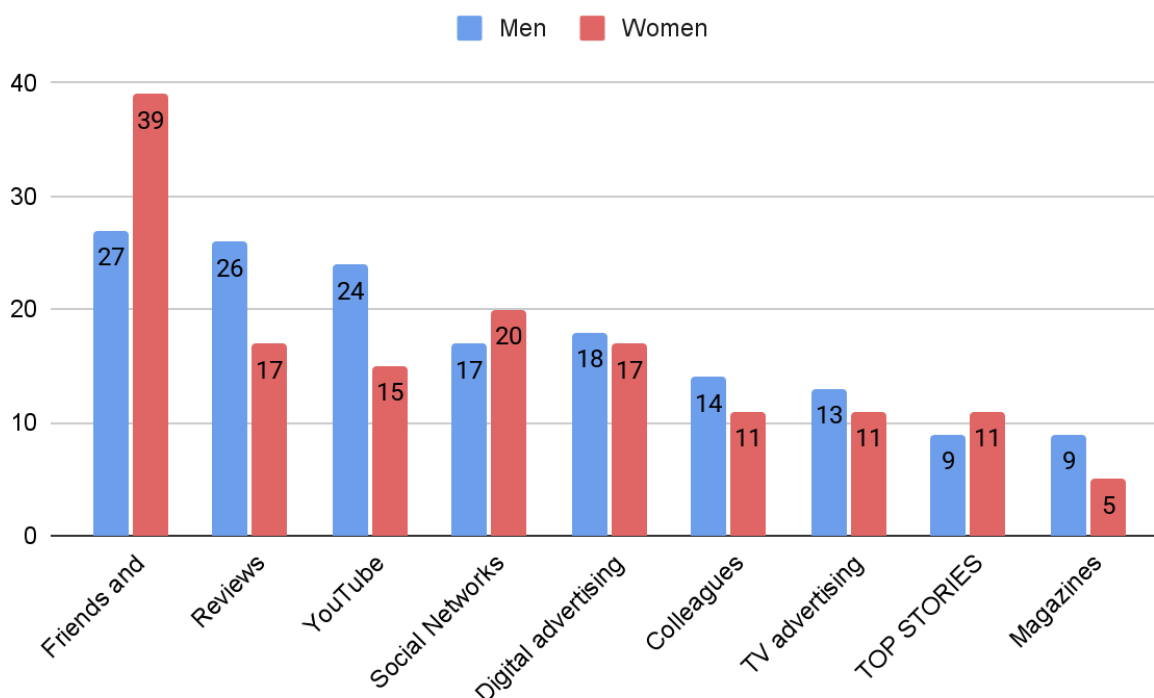
Figure 1. Sources of information about new game releases [3]

Participants were then asked to identify the social media platforms they use most frequently. According to the statistical data, Facebook remains the most popular, followed by YouTube and Instagram. Meanwhile, TikTok continues to gain audience share, while Reddit, Twitter (X), and Discord remain niche channels, based on the responses (see Figure 2).
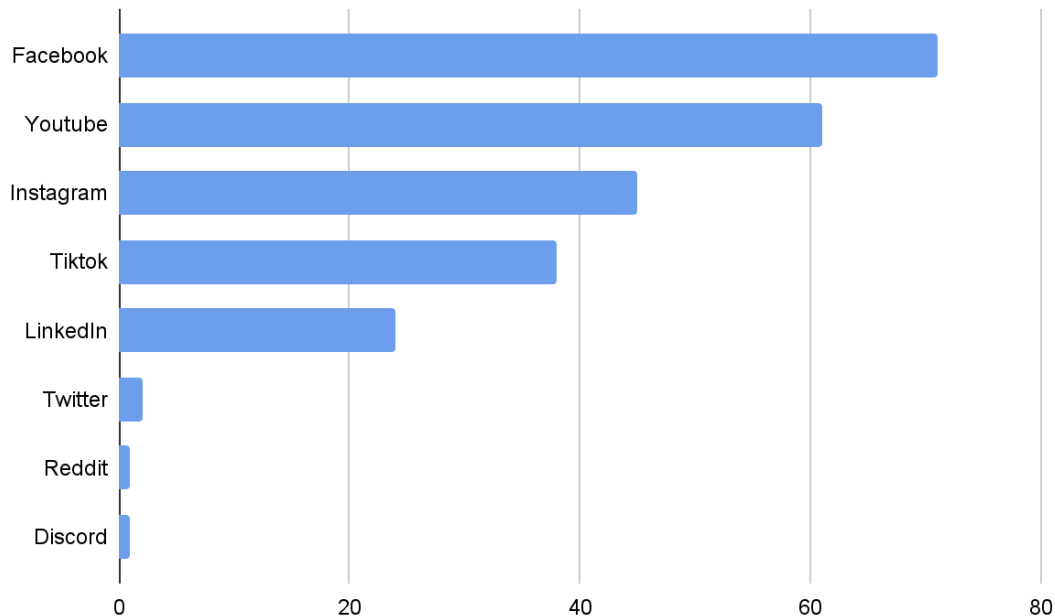
Figure 2. Social media platforms used by gamers [9]

The experience of organizing community management departments at Ravenage and SuperGG demonstrates the targeted use of digital channels to establish an active community. At Ravenage, the creation of a dedicated department contributed to attracting over 100,000 subscribers across Steam, X, Facebook, YouTube, and Discord, resulting in a revenue turnover exceeding $2 million and over 1 million wishlists. Free playtesting sessions, content creator and beta tester clubs accelerated real-time product adjustments, which positively impacted the commercial performance of indie projects such as *Megaloot*, *Heretic's Fork*, and *The Crackpet Show*.

SuperGG focused on centralizing SMM processes and establishing a permanent community management department, which facilitated the promotion of *Raji: An Ancient Epic*, a game nominated for *The Game Awards*, and its successful large-scale commercial implementation. The application of SMM tools, development of promotional campaigns, and coordination with marketing divisions illustrate the effectiveness of digital communications in expanding audience reach and increasing sales.

Respondents were then asked to specify what motivates them to subscribe to indie game accounts on social media. Below is the translated question fragment and a summary of the results in tabular form.

This section of the survey focused on the motivations behind choosing an indie game page or social media account. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Motivation of subscribers when choosing an indie game social media account [9]

Response Option	Percentage
Updates on the development process	52%

Response Option	Percentage
Contests/Giveaways	44%
Behind-the-scenes content	22%
Fan content (art, cosplay, etc.)	17%
Other mentions (graphics, branding, etc.)	5%

The most common response was tracking news on the game's development progress (over 52%). Such content—regular updates on new features or overall progress—enhances subscriber growth. The second most popular choice was contests and giveaways (44%), indicating increased engagement when developers incorporate gamified activities. "Behind-the-scenes content" received 22% of the votes, demonstrating subscriber interest in the internal aspects of game creation. Approximately 17% selected fan content, such as artwork or cosplay. A smaller portion of respondents mentioned other factors, including graphical style, brand image, and useful promotional materials.

Overall, the survey results suggest the importance of regularly publishing development updates and organizing contests, supplemented by diverse content, to maintain audience interest and encourage continued engagement.

As shown in the table, the most effective strategies for SMM accounts involve consistent updates on the development process, gamification mechanics (contests, giveaways), and the creation of behind-the-scenes and fan content, which fosters a stronger emotional connection between subscribers and the project.

DISCUSSION

The results of the analysis confirmed the initial hypothesis regarding the significant role of social media in promoting indie games and forming an active community around them. The obtained data indicate that the majority of respondents discover new projects primarily through digital channels, with development updates and giveaway mechanics exerting the most influence. These preferences highlight the high demand for content that visually represents the game development process, as well as for regular events that stimulate engagement. These findings align with previous studies that emphasized the importance of direct communication between development teams and their audience.

However, this study has certain limitations. First, the sample primarily consisted of active social media users who voluntarily participated in the survey. This may introduce a bias toward an audience that is more knowledgeable about SMM. Second, the regional specificity of the survey (conducted among users predominantly residing in a single country) may limit the generalizability of the results to other cultural contexts. Additionally, the data were collected within a limited timeframe and reflect only specific aspects of promotional strategies, without covering, for instance, interactions with opinion leaders beyond conventional blogging.

The practical application of these findings lies primarily in adjusting the social media content strategy for independent studios. Developers should implement short and visually engaging formats (videos, stories), focus on showcasing work processes, and simultaneously organize small contests to increase brand recognition. A crucial element is the establishment of a continuous feedback channel, where community members can influence future development decisions and updates.

Future research prospects may involve a more detailed analysis of various platforms (such as Reddit, TikTok, and Discord), taking into account their specific audience characteristics, as well as studying the long-term effects of giveaways and regular live streams. Another promising direction is the comparison of content strategies across projects of different genres and budgets, which would enhance the understanding of engagement mechanisms in the dynamic indie game market.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that social media plays a key role

in promoting indie games while simultaneously facilitating direct interaction with the audience. The stated objectives have been achieved:

- The primary platforms where players most frequently discover new releases have been identified (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok).

- The most effective content formats have been examined (weekly updates, contests/giveaways, behind-the-scenes materials, user-generated fan art).

- Recommendations for increasing engagement have been formulated, emphasizing visual content, direct interaction with the community, and support for micro-influencers.

These findings confirm the hypothesis that utilizing digital channels alongside a transparent demonstration of development processes contributes to increased loyalty and a stronger reputation for indie projects. The results provide indie studios and marketers with insights to refine engagement strategies, from content planning to selecting suitable collaboration formats with opinion leaders.

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