

# Build better apps with these essential insights into mobile app consumer behavior

AdMob surveyed a thousand daily mobile app consumers in markets with high app downloads. Click on a country to view the insights.

## Build better apps with these essential insights into mobile app consumer behavior

AdMob partnered recently with research company Parks Associates to survey smartphone consumers in the US, UK, China, Japan and South Korea. We had 1000 responses in each market from people who are daily users of mobile apps.

We've divided the survey data by country and key learnings. Each market has five categories for which we've pulled significant statistics from the study and provided recommendations on how to best use these statistics to your advantage.

### 1. Choosing a Business Model

App users' purchasing trends and downloading habits vary widely among the different markets. Use these recommendations to help guide your monetization strategy.

### 2. Getting Discovered

It's hard to get noticed when you're first starting out. Here are some ideas that we've compiled based on our study of how users explore and choose apps.

### 3. Keeping Users Happy

What do users look for in a good app? What keeps them engaged and coming back for more? Follow these tips to create the best app experience for your users.

### 4. Making Great Games

Find out what qualities and features are most important to gamers in your market, as well as what their in-game purchase habits and trends are.

### 5. Integrating Ads

What drives ad engagement has always been a tricky question to answer. We've compiled some market-specific suggestions of which ad types provide the best ad experience based on user preferences.

## China

### Choosing a Business Model

**Of the markets surveyed, China is the only one in which the majority of users are willing to pay for apps.**

**Fact** 68% of users budget some amount for app purchasing. However, paid apps are also quickly being pirated. The New York Times reports that digital piracy is widespread in China and that alternative app stores often provide unauthorized knockoffs for download.[34]

**Recommendation** Experiment with different app monetization models, and don't exclude the paid model. An alternative strategy is to use a freemium model and release new versions of your app frequently to avoid being pirated.

**Chinese users are more likely to try freemium apps in comparison to other business models.**

**Fact** 46% of users have upgraded from a free to a paid version of an app. In the 30 days prior to the survey, 72% of gaming app spending was on in-app purchases.

**Recommendation** Since users are likely to pay for an upgrade of a good free app, be sure that your initial free version is high quality.

## Getting Discovered

**The strength of a brand is very important to Chinese users.**

**Fact** 80% of respondents in China reported downloading their gaming apps from a major brand or company they knew well before downloading the app.

**Recommendation** If you're a new developer, consider teaming up with a well-known publisher who can release the app on your behalf.

**Chinese users rely most upon search engines to find new apps.**

**Fact** 26% of Chinese users use search engines, versus 14% who browse app stores.

**Recommendation** Users feel more comfortable searching for brands that they're already familiar with and trust, as a filter through the overabundance of apps and app stores. In addition to working with established publishers, research your local market to find the right stores to reach your app's target audience.

"In practice, if we could cover 10 app stores that would get us access to over 70% of users. But China changes rapidly so it's difficult to keep up. Naturally there's a risk associated with doing business without knowing the local situation. That's why we have local partners, who we rely on primarily to provide user support. We don't actually meet with these local partners; everything is done via email. We work to instill high motivation in our partners by setting up a scheme where success benefits both sides." (Keiji Takeuchi, Representative Director of Link Kit, creators of the popular Samurai Defender game app.)

## Keeping Users Happy

**Chinese users rank loss of interest and lack of fresh content as their main reasons for discontinuing app use.**

**Fact** 49% of users marked a loss of interest while 41% of users stated stale content as their explanation. It's important to note that app users in China are much more sensitive to lack of fresh content than users in other surveyed markets, such as the US at 19% and Japan at 9%.

**Recommendation** Adding fresh content on a regular basis is essential for retaining users.

**Nearly half of users think that good quality apps have frequent app updates.**

**Fact** 44% of users prefer monthly app updates and 33% prefer weekly updates.

**Recommendation** Update your app at least monthly to keep users happy.

## Making Great Games

**Gamers in China are much more likely to spend money on buying virtual goods and personalizing characters and avatars.**

**Fact** 32% of Chinese gamers have spent money on personalizing characters, while 43% will pay to stock up on virtual points and coins.

**Recommendation** When developing games, providing character personalization and virtual gold as in-app purchase options, could be an incremental monetization strategy.

**Chinese gamers report they make in-app purchases with much higher frequency than gamers in other markets, but they spend the least on in-game purchases.**

**Fact** 36% of Chinese gamers spend money to advance gameplay or unlock features on a weekly basis, three times greater than other markets surveyed.

**Recommendation** In your game, have options of in-game purchases with different price points.

## Integrating Ads

**Chinese smartphone users are much more likely than others to engage with in-app ads.**

**Fact** 92% of users in these markets will click on ads. In the US this figure is 35%.

**Recommendation** You should strive to create the best possible ad experience inside an app; where an ad is placed and how it affects gameplay and user experience is important.

## South Korea

### Choosing a Business Model

**South Korean users are likely to participate in freemium monetization models.**

**Fact** 29% of users have upgraded from a free to a paid version of an app.

**Recommendation** Since users are more likely to pay for an upgrade of a good free app, be sure that your initial free version is high quality.

**In-app purchases are the top revenue generator for gaming apps.**

**Fact** South Korean users say that 92% of their total gaming app spending is on in-app purchases.

**Recommendation** Use an in-app purchase monetization model; even a small number of users making regular in-game purchases can generate a high proportion of your revenue.

### Getting Discovered

**When looking for a new app, the majority of South Korean users spend some time comparing apps before downloading them.**

**Fact** 61% spend some time on research, while 15% do substantial research before downloading an app.

**Recommendation** Be aware of your app and brand's reputation by maintaining a good app store description and monitoring user reviews.

**Cost is the most important factor in choosing an app for South Korean users (according to 67% of users), but reviews and star ratings, plus family and friend recommendations are important too.**

**Fact** 54% of users say user reviews and star ratings are 'very important', while 20% of respondents rank family and friend recommendations as their number one method of discovering new apps.

**Recommendation** While the cost of an app is an overarching factor in buying apps, it's important to recognize that users rely heavily on recommendations from others when deciding what app to download. Consider building a reminder into your app to ask users to rate it after use.

### Keeping Users Happy

**South Korean users rank loss of interest as their main reason for discontinuing app use.**

**Fact** 60% of users marked a loss of interest as their number one reason for discontinuing app use. 42% no longer needed the app and 41% found a better app to use.

**Recommendation** Update your app often to keep users engaged and prevent user turnover.

**Ease of navigation and the ability to personalize an app are important factors for users.**

**Fact** In overall app experience, 44% of users marked easy navigation as 'very important,' and 43% said both app instructions and the ability to personalize the app were 'very important'.

**Recommendation** Keep apps simple and intuitive, and localize well. If adding extra features, personalization options are the way to go.

**South Korean users prefer a high frequency of app updates for the best experience.**

**Fact** 40% of South Korean respondents liked weekly updates for their apps, while 47% of South Korean respondents preferred monthly.

**Recommendation** Users need fresh content to stay engaged and loyal to an app.

## RECOMMENDATION

Test out new translation services with native-language speakers and push newly localized apps out as 'beta' versions for user feedback.

### Making Great Games

**Similar to China, South Korean users are more likely to spend money on personalizing characters in games.**

**Fact** 42% of South Korean gamers have spent money on personalizing characters, monthly.

**Recommendation** Consider offering character personalization as a feature in the South Korean market to boost your revenue.

**Gaming apps are consumers' top priority upon buying a new handset in all markets except China.**

**Fact** In the US, UK and South South Korea, more than 60% of respondents from each market said they downloaded games within a week after getting their smartphone, and it was the top priority. Users in China said finance apps were the most important to download first.

**Recommendation** Developers should market aggressively to new phone owners to stand a better chance of having their app downloaded.

### Integrating Ads

**South Korean smartphone users are very likely to engage with in-app ads.**

**Fact** 68% of South Korean users have clicked on ads.

**Recommendation** You should strive to create the best possible ad experience inside an app. Where an ad is placed and how it affects gameplay and user experience is important.

**South Korean users prefer full screen video and in-app ads to be displayed when an app opens.**

**Fact** For nearly all types of apps surveyed (shopping, entertainment, gaming, etc.), nearly 50% of users prefer to see full screen ads when they open their app.

**Recommendation** If you decide to use full screen ads, display them at the point a user opens the app.

## Japan

### Choosing a Business Model

**The majority of Japanese users are not willing to pay for apps.**

**Fact** 56% of surveyed users reported that they only download free apps.

**Recommendation** Try using freemium or in-app monetization models.

**The option of downloading a free trial of an app is an influential factor in deciding between several apps of the same type.**

**Fact** 33% of users prefer to download apps that have a free trial version.

**Recommendation** Try using a freemium model to encourage users to download your app.

### Getting Discovered

**Over two-thirds of users conduct background research before downloading an app.**

**Fact** 14% of users do substantial research on apps before downloading, and 58% spend at least a little time

comparing apps before downloading.

**Recommendation** Capitalize on app users' habits of conducting some app research before downloading an app. In addition to current search, browse, and app curation features, consider adding premium app review content by outside experts or revealing to shoppers which of their friends use or have reviewed particular apps.

***User reviews and ratings, free app trials, and app descriptions in app stores are important factors when deciding between apps.***

**Fact** Japanese users ranked these three factors as 'very important.' 40% of users rely on reviews and ratings, 33% on free trials of the app, and 31% on app descriptions in the app store.

**Recommendation** Be sure that your app store presence is strong. Provide informative app store descriptions and make it easy for users to leave reviews and ratings.

## Keeping Users Happy

***Japanese users report the worst experience with app technical support.***

**Fact** 91% of users are not willing to download another app from the same developer after contacting customer support and receiving poor service.

**Recommendation** Be aware that the care and attention you provide to users facing difficulties with your app is a large determinant of your retention rate.

***While cost is the most influential factor in app selection, Japanese users also highly value user reviews and free app trials.***

**Fact** 60% of users say cost is an influential factor, and 40% rely on reviews and star ratings to ultimately select between several apps of the same type.

**Recommendation** Build a feature into your app that reminds users to review it, and be sure to monitor and respond to reviews when they come in.

### RECOMMENDATION

Localize your app store listing and device screenshots since app store browsing is the top discovery method for most markets.

## Making Great Games

***Japanese gamers are least likely to purchase in-game features.***

**Fact** 63% of respondents report they have never spent money to unlock features or advance gameplay.

**Recommendation** When developing games for the Japanese markets, consider other monetization methods, such as ads.

***However, those gamers who do make in-game purchases at least monthly, spend more than gamers in other markets on those purchases.***

**Fact** In a 30-day span, Japanese gamers reported spending \$24.06 on smartphone in-game purchases (and \$40.27 on tablet in-game purchases), in comparison with US gamers who spent \$10.07 and Chinese gamers who spent \$7.81.

**Recommendation** Cater for gamers in Japan who are willing to spend more for in-game purchases.

***Gamers in Japan are much more likely to spend money on personalizing characters and avatars.***

**Fact** 38% of Japanese gamers have spent money on personalizing characters, monthly.

**Recommendation** When developing games, providing this as an in-app purchase option could be an incremental monetization strategy.

**Gaming is the most popular app type when smartphone users in all markets have 30 minutes of spare time.**

**Fact** In Japan, 40% of users said they would play games over other types of apps given this amount of spare time.

**Recommendation** Users are engaging deeply with mobile app content and this challenges the notion that users only want to play games on their phones for a short amount of time. When developing games, foster engagement by creating multiple levels and storylines.

## Integrating Ads

**Japanese app users are more likely to prefer banner ads shown on the screen (top or bottom) than in-between app activities.**

**Fact** 62% of users prefer banner ads at the top or bottom of screen during main app activity rather than between activities. Specifically, 32% prefer top of the screen and 30% prefer bottom of the screen.

**Recommendation** Japanese users prefer to see banner ads when using apps.

**Search ads and website display ads are most effective at driving app downloads in Japan.**

**Fact** 22% of users downloaded an app after seeing it as the result of an online search. 20% downloaded apps after seeing them displayed on a website.

**Recommendation** Prioritize ad spend for search ads, website display ads, and ads placed within similar apps.

# United States

## Choosing a Business Model

**Cost is the most influential factor in app selection in the US.**

**Fact** 76% of users marked cost as a 'very important' factor in deciding between several apps of the same type.

**Recommendation** US users will decide against downloading even a good app if they feel the cost is too high. Don't rely only on a paid monetization model to build your business.

**The majority of US smartphone users only download free apps.**

**Fact** 54% of respondents said that they only download free apps, and only 7% of users "commonly" spend on apps that cost \$6.99 or more. Over a third of US smartphone gamers and non-gamers have paid to upgrade an app, either for a game whose free trial has ended, or for an app's free to paid version.

**Recommendation** Use a freemium business model to make the most out of your monetization strategy.

## Getting Discovered

**Users are most likely to download an app after seeing an ad for it in another app or on a social network.**

**Fact** 24% of users have downloaded apps after seeing ads in social networks and within other apps.

**Recommendation** Prioritize ad spending on ads within similar apps and leverage social media where appropriate.

**US users prefer to download apps via native/OS app stores.**

**Fact** Three out of the four top app discovery methods involve app stores. 29% of users ranked app store browsing as their number one method. App store search bars and app stores' top app lists followed with 16% and 12%, respectively.

**Recommendation** Improve your app store presence with informative and clear descriptions, attractive screenshots, and user reviews and ratings.

## Keeping Users Happy

**US app users are particularly concerned about an app's ease of use.**

**Fact** 72% of users felt that ease of navigating an app and making it quick to open were the two most import-

ant factors in overall app experience.

**Recommendation** Focus strongly on simple navigation and smooth user experience to create a winning app.

**Smartphone users, both gamers and non-gamers, expect frequent app updates.**

**Fact** 43% of users prefer monthly updates, while 25% would like weekly updates.

**Recommendation** Update frequently to avoid stale content and keep users engaged.

## RECOMMENDATION

Support your users. If you are going global, be aware that you may need to provide technical support to international users in a variety of languages and time zones.

## Making Great Games

**Gaming is the most popular app when smartphone users in all markets have 30 minutes of spare time.**

**Fact** In the US, 37% of users said they would play games given this amount of spare time. In comparison, the second highest choice came in at only 17%, for reading books and magazines.

**Recommendation** Lengthy smartphone gameplay is increasing among users and you can accommodate by adding levels and complexity, or by introducing storytelling elements to your games.

**Game design & aesthetic, quality of graphics, and limited ads are the most important qualities to US users.**

**Fact** 53% of users rated quality of graphics as 'very important,' with game design & aesthetic and limited following at 50% and 49%, respectively.

**Recommendation** Graphics, design, and smart ad placement go hand in hand when creating great apps  
Integrating Ads

**US smartphone users prefer ads for apps or games similar to the ones they use.**

**Fact** 27% of users preferred this type of targeting over ads based on personal information or online and mobile activities.

**Recommendation** When setting ad filters for US markets, refine based on this statistic.

**US app users are most likely to prefer banner ads between app and game tasks, or activities.**

**Fact** 46% of respondents prefer in-app banner ads between activities over ads at the top or bottom of the screen during gameplay.

**Recommendation** When choosing placement of ads, keep in mind that US users prefer their ads between activities or levels, which is actually the preference in all markets we surveyed.

## United Kingdom

### Choosing a Business Model

**Gaming is the most popular entertainment app type among UK smartphone users.**

**Fact** 62% of respondents play games at least once a month, more than any other entertainment activity.

**Recommendation** Games is a lucrative space to consider developing apps for the UK market.

**In-game purchases generate the most revenue in total gaming app spending.**

**Fact** 94% of spending in gaming apps have been on in-app purchases.

**Recommendation** Develop games with in-app purchase options such as unlocking new levels and upgrading from free to premium games.

## Getting Discovered

**UK smartphone users are most likely to discover new apps by browsing app stores.**

**Fact** 35% of users rank browsing an app store as their number one discovery method. Family and friend recommendations, and specific search queries in the app store search bar come second and third, with 18% and 13%, respectively.

**Recommendation** Be sure to have attractive screenshots, good descriptions and strong reviews for your app store listing.

**When deciding between similar apps, users highly value reviews and ratings, and app store descriptions.**

**Fact** When evaluating apps, 50% of users consider reviews and rating to be 'very important,' while 45% highly value an app's description in the app store in their app selection process.

**Recommendation** Write app store descriptions in a clear, concise, and compelling way. Be sure to monitor and respond to app reviews in a timely fashion to demonstrate to users that you care about their input.

### RECOMMENDATION

Check reviews often and respond if you can! Engagement with users is key to building a strong and loyal fan base.

## Keeping Users Happy

**UK app users are particularly concerned about an app's ease of use.**

**Fact** UK users prioritized quick to open, easy to navigate, and battery saving as their top three characteristics of a good app.

**Recommendation** Focus strongly on simple navigation and smooth user experience to create a winning app.

**Two-thirds of UK users feel that their customer support experiences have been inadequate.**

**Fact** Only 33% of respondents felt that their app experience was improved as a result of contacting customer support, and only 33% said that they would be more likely to download another app from the same developer as a result of contacting customer service.

**Recommendation** Invest resources into providing fast and reliable channels for customer support to prevent users who are experiencing issues from submitting low ratings and poor app reviews in app stores.

## Making Great Games

**Game design & aesthetic, quality of graphics, and limited ads are the most important qualities to UK users**

**Fact** 46% of users rated quality of graphics as 'very important,' with game design & aesthetic and limited ads following at 41% and 48%, respectively.

**Recommendation** Graphics design and wise ad placement go hand in hand when creating great apps.

**UK users engage with multiple types of in-game purchases.**

**Fact** The most popular types of in-game purchases for UK users were unlocking new chapters, upgrading after free trials, buying special bundles of items, and paying to clear difficult levels.

**Recommendation** When developing your monetization strategy, be sure to include a few of these in-app purchase models for your game.

**US gamers spend the least amount of money, in total, on smartphone gaming apps.**

**Fact** Average spending on gaming apps over a 30-day period was \$4.53 for US users, compared to \$14.03 for South Korean users. This statistic includes paying to download games, in-game purchases, and gaming subscriptions.

**Recommendation** Since US users spend the least on gaming apps, consider emphasizing ads as your monetization model, keeping in mind that smart ad placement is key.

## Integrating Ads

**UK smartphone users prefer ads for apps or games similar to the ones they use.**

**Fact** 28% of users preferred this over ads based on personal information or online and mobile activities.

**Recommendation** For higher ad engagement, avoid the use of demographic information and prioritize ad spending for ads placed within similar apps.

**Ads within other apps and social networks, are effective at driving app downloads.**

**Fact** 19% of users have downloaded an app after seeing an ad for it within another app, and 18% after seeing an ad while on a social network.

**Recommendation** Smart ad placement is key in gaining exposure and downloads. Consider buying ad space within similar apps, advertising on social media, and offering your users the option to display game scores or app reviews in their social network streams.

### RECOMMENDATION

Tap into your user base: Small developers that have built strong followings can recruit loyal users to help translate for the app.