

# TUNE

APP STORE OPTIMIZATION MASTERCLASS

## How App Ratings and Reviews Impact Rank on Google Play and the App Store

### BIG APPS GET BIG RATINGS

**13,927**

AVERAGE NUMBER OF RATINGS  
FOR TOP-RATED IOS APPS



**542**

MEDIAN NUMBER OF RATINGS  
FOR TOP-RATED IOS APPS

**196,833**

AVERAGE NUMBER OF RATINGS  
FOR TOP-RATED ANDROID APPS



**2,570**

MEDIAN NUMBER OF RATINGS  
FOR TOP-RATED ANDROID APPS

Based on an analysis of ratings for the top 240 apps per category in Google Play and the top 150 apps per category on the App Store.  
iOS data is U.S. only while Android data is global, simply due to the way Apple and Google report ratings.

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**TUNE tl:dr** - Great ratings are table stakes for being a top-ranked Google Play or App Store app, as 80 percent of all top app ratings are either four or five stars. Reviews, however, are critical for rising to the very pinnacle, as apps ranked one through 10 see five to 10X more reviews than apps ranked 10 to 20 in their categories.

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# Good ratings and reviews are critical to top rankings

Quick question: how many apps in Google Play's top 240 or the App Store's top 150\* have poor ratings and only a few reviews? Answer: not many. They exist, but the reality is that most top apps have top-notch ratings and significant numbers of reviews.

The better question for app publishers and developers is: what kind of ratings do I need to rank in the top 200 apps in my category? In the top 50? And, how many reviews do I need to rank in the 10 of all the apps in my chosen category?

Answering these questions will give you keen insight into what you need to do to break into the upper echelons of the app ecosystem.

Also important to note:

- App users can rate without reviewing, but ...
- Reviews must also include a rating
- Apple segments ratings by country, while Google's ratings are global

*\* Google Play top 240 apps per category, and App Store's top 150 apps per category.*

# What the data says: average ratings on Google Play and App Store

The average rating for top-ranked iOS apps is 3.81.<sup>1</sup> The average rating for top-ranked Android apps is even higher, at 4.16.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the ratings vary by category.

On iOS in the USA, five categories average four stars or higher:

- Photo & Video
- Games
- Productivity
- Health & Fitness
- Education

Lower-ranked categories tend to include Navigation, Sports, Entertainment, and News.



Interestingly, the variance of app ratings for top iOS apps is tiny: only 0.6, which means that top apps are all very highly rated. To get in the top rankings, you need top ratings, and these numbers are a good indicator of where you need to go.

**But once you're at the top, ratings are not a huge differentiator for your app.**

Five categories rank over 4.3 stars on Android:

- Software & Demos
- Tools
- Casino (games)
- Personalization
- Health & Fitness

Lower ranked categories tend to cluster in the games subcategories: Simulation, Sport, Family, and RPG (role-playing games).

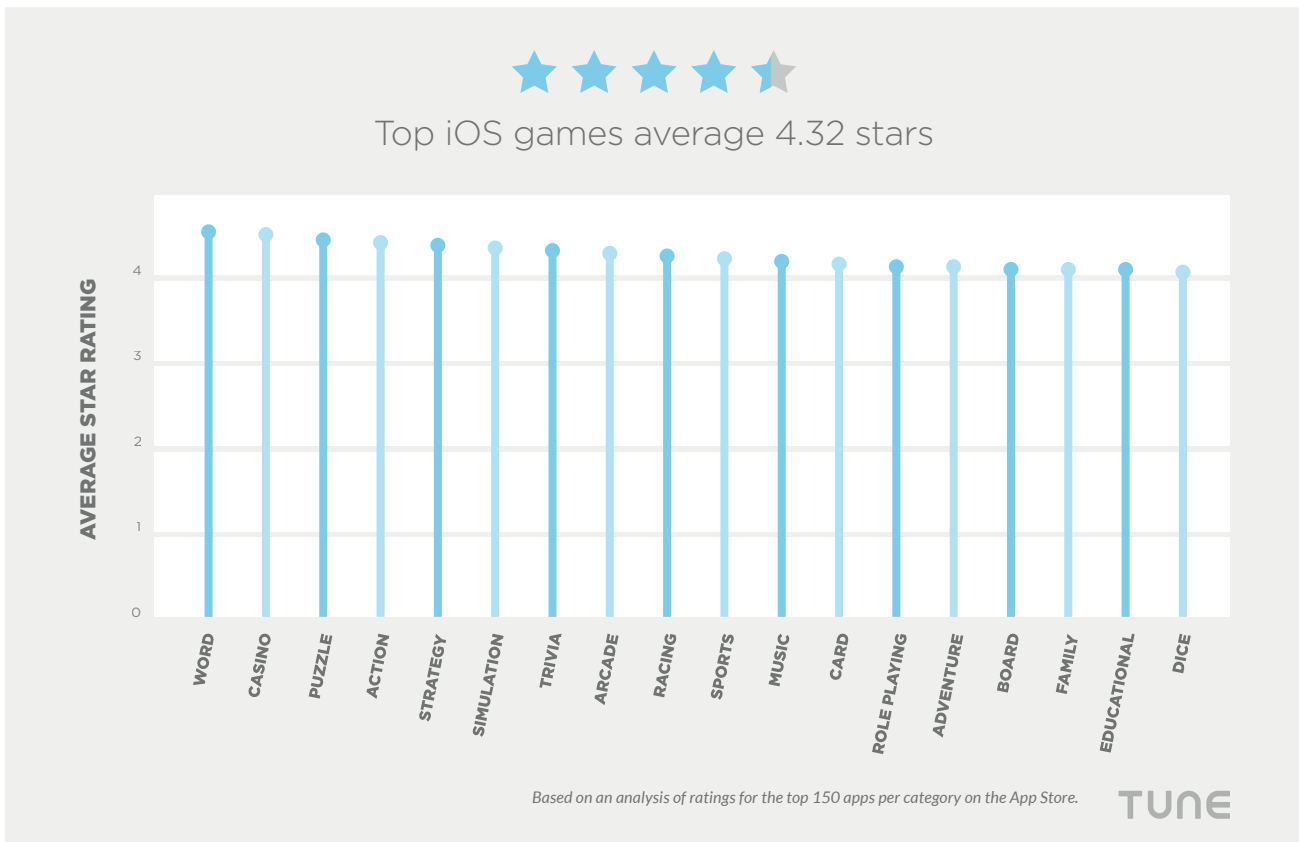


Interestingly, the variance of ratings across top-rated Android apps is even lower than iOS apps: only 0.3. The implication is that, even more so than for iOS, while app ratings are critical for getting in the top ranks of Android games, they are now table stakes for apps that have achieved high rank... and are no longer huge differentiators for consumers.

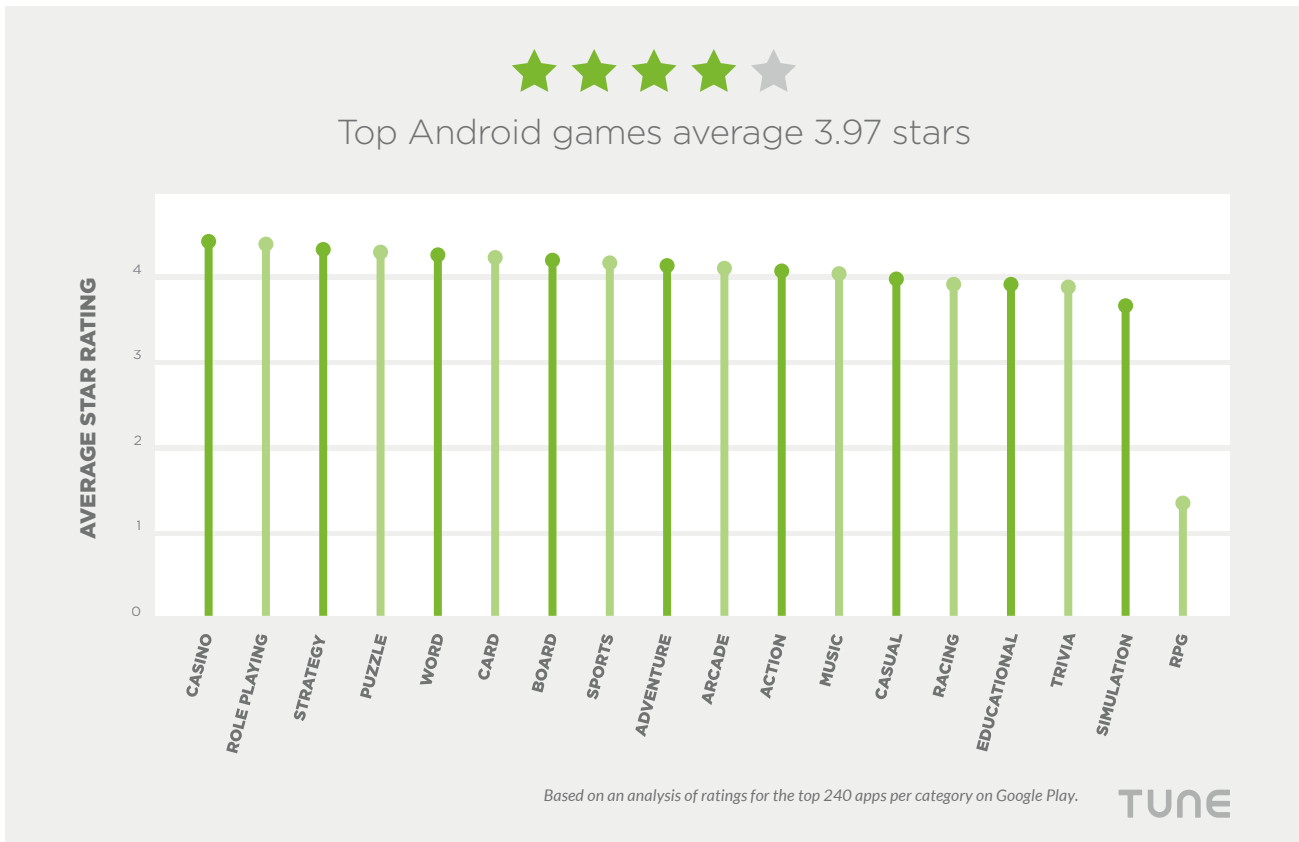
While there are some game categories that do not rate well on Android, overall, games are extremely competitive in ratings with some of the highest ratings in both major app stores.

For iOS, top free games have an average rating of 4.32 stars.

Interestingly, free games get 8X more ratings than paid games, highlighting just how critical freemium is now, and how rare paid apps have become. Paid apps are generally higher rated than free apps on Android, at 4.27 to 4.16 stars, but are slightly lower rated on iOS, at 3.86 to 3.88 stars.



Android games don't get quite as high ratings as iOS games, averaging out at a still-very-healthy 3.97 stars:

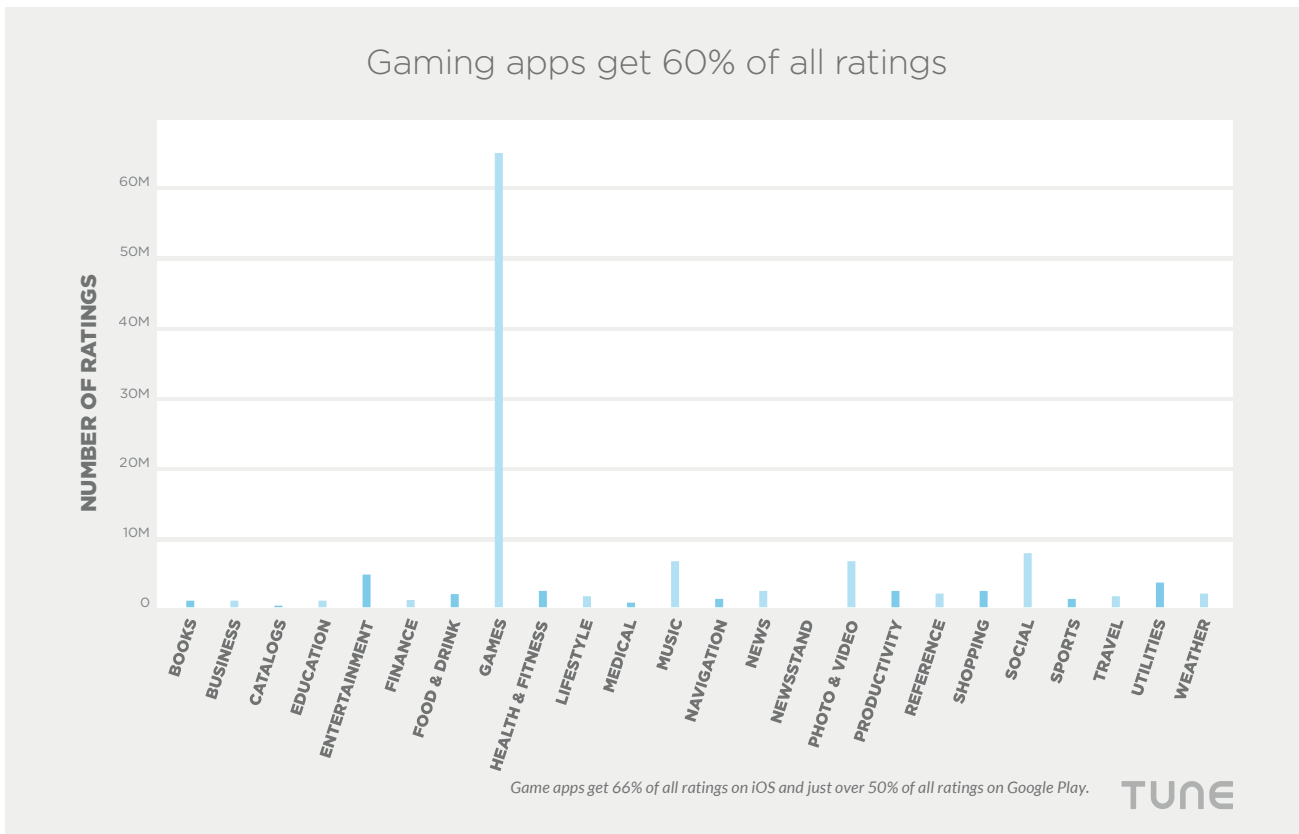


# What the data says: Number of ratings in app categories

Different categories get wildly different numbers of ratings, a critical factor to consider when choosing a category for your app. Not only do you need good-quality ratings to rank among the top apps on Google Play and the App Store, you also need a seriously significant number of them. That number, however, varies depending on which category you choose.

The category that beats all the others consistently across both major mobile platforms in terms of number of ratings is obvious: games.

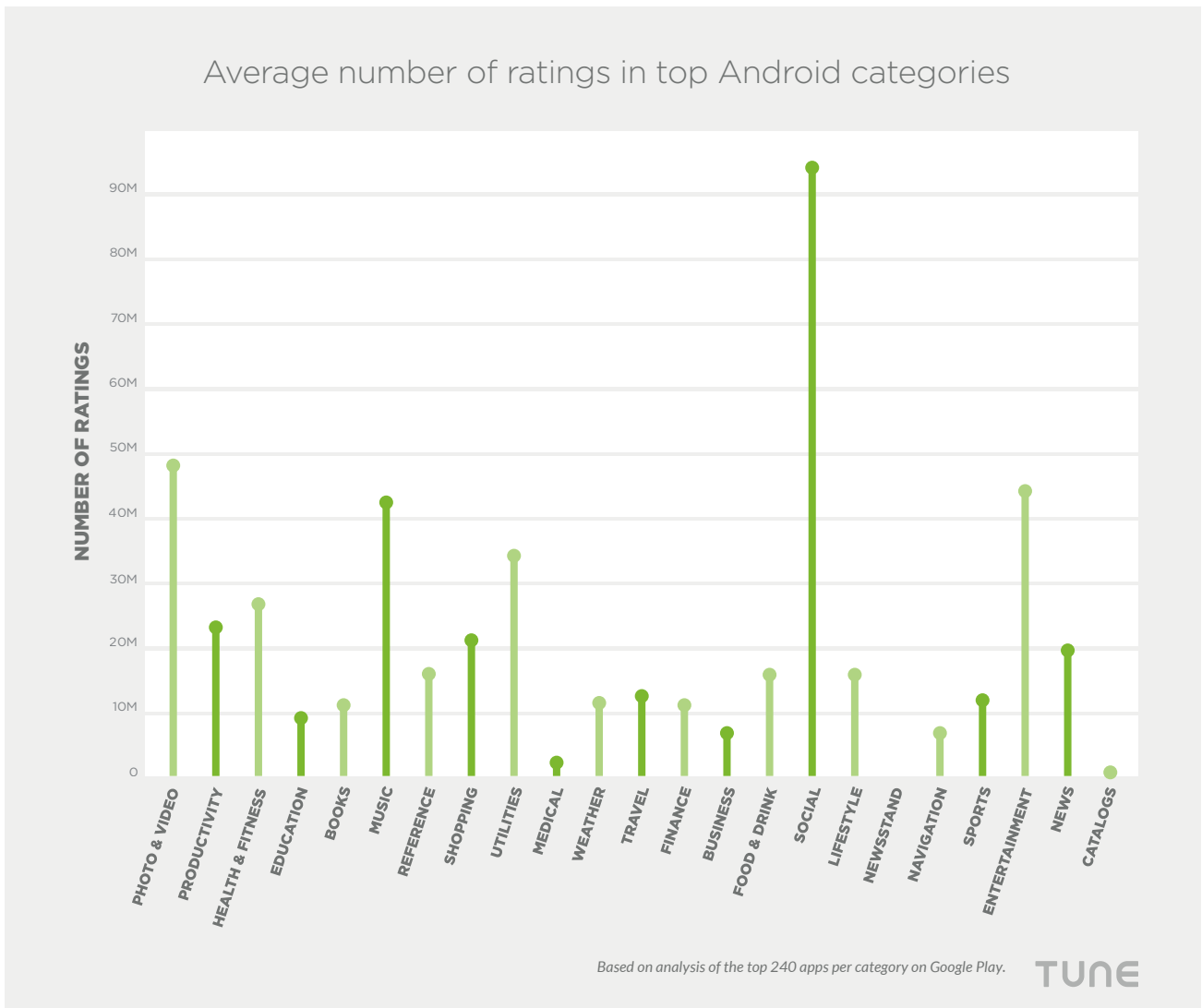
On iOS, the distribution looks like this. There's no need to include the same chart for Android; it's very similar:



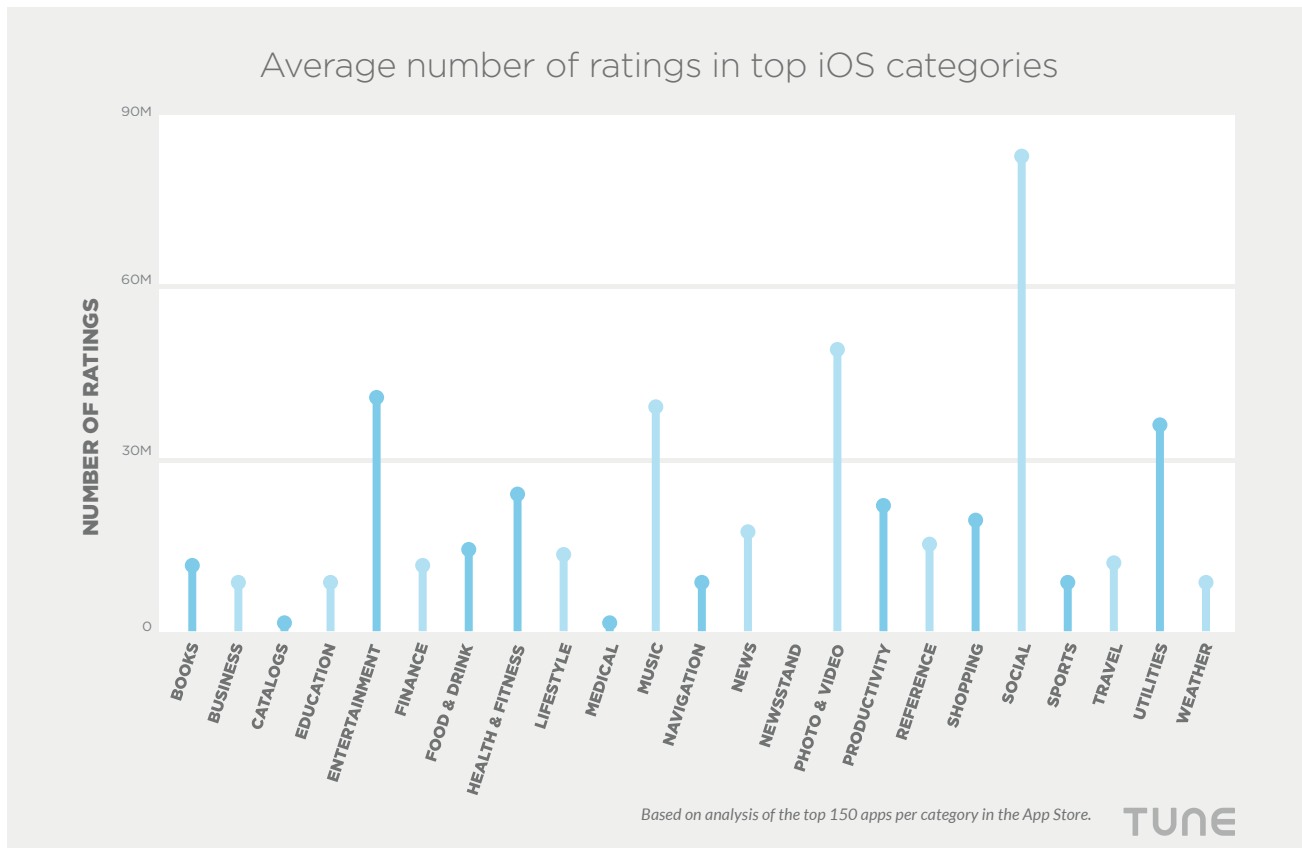


More helpful, probably, is a view without games.

Below is Android, and you can see that Social Networking, Photo & Video, Music, and Entertainment are the most competitive categories:



On iOS, the distribution without games is similar, with Social Networking, Entertainment, Photo & Video, and Music also taking top spots:

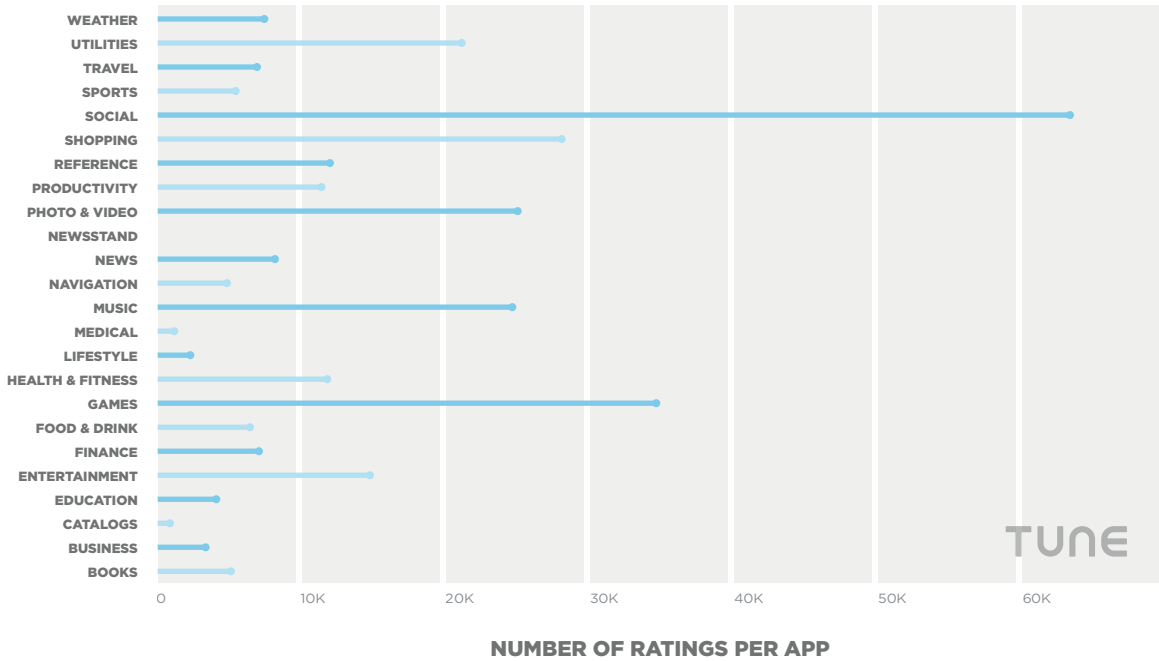


While it's helpful to know what the least and most competitive categories are, it's even more pertinent to know, on average, how many ratings each top app in your category gets. That sets the parameters against which you'll measure your own apps.

For iOS apps in the U.S. App Store, that ranges from the single-digit thousands to over 60,000 per average app, not including games. In other words, you need a lot of ratings to be a top app in Games. Not so much, perhaps, in Newsstand or Catalog.

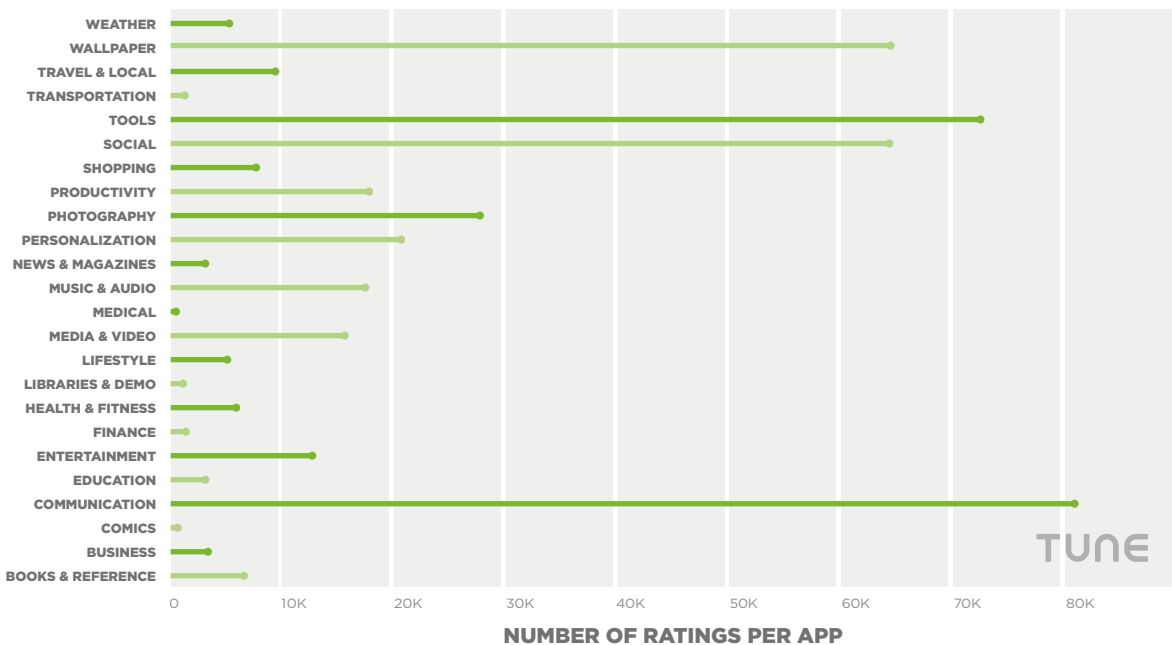
But you need most of all in Social Networking, where an app like Facebook, for instance, has almost 300,000 ratings on iOS (it's close to 43 million on Android).

Average # of ratings per top app: iOS



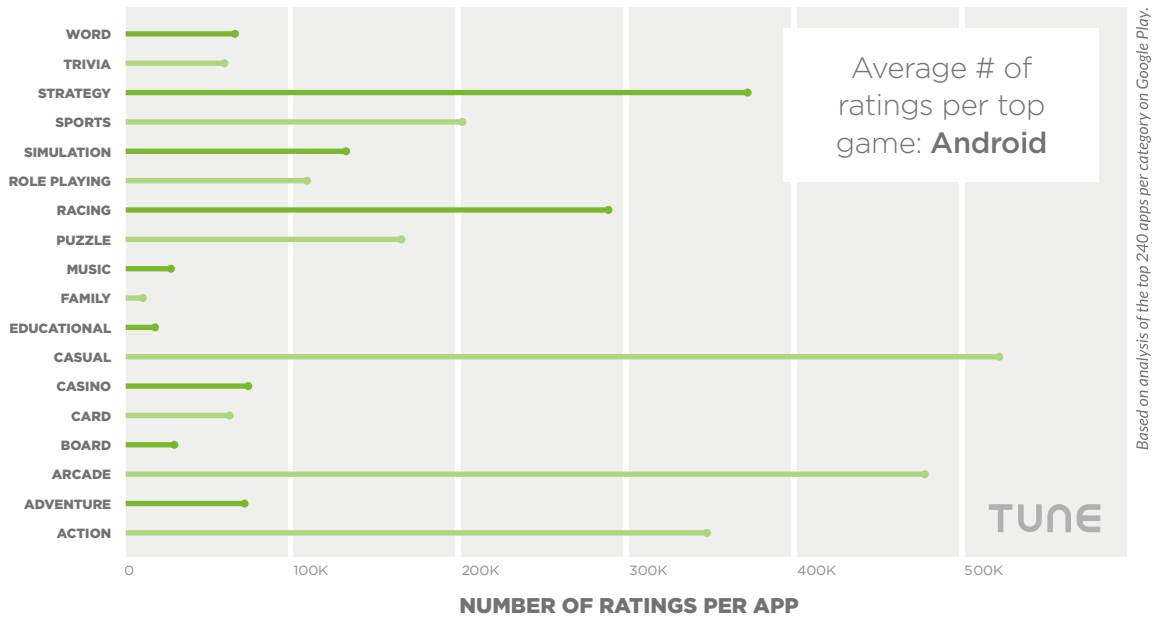
For Android, the number of average ratings per top app is easily 10X what we see on iOS and higher, edging up to the neighborhood of a million ratings per app. Remember, these are ratings that are summed globally, not just from one country:

Average # of ratings per top app: Android

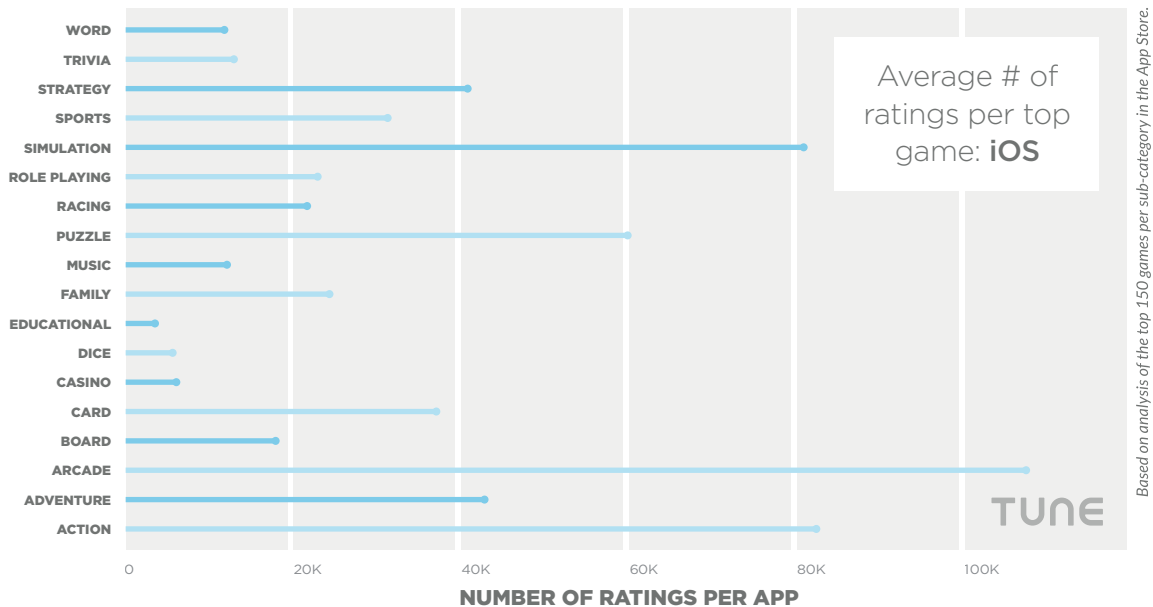


Games are an extremely competitive segment, which is no surprise to anyone.

For Android games, the Casual, Arcade, Strategy, and Racing, and Action categories have the highest number of ratings, in the mid-to-high hundreds of thousands each:



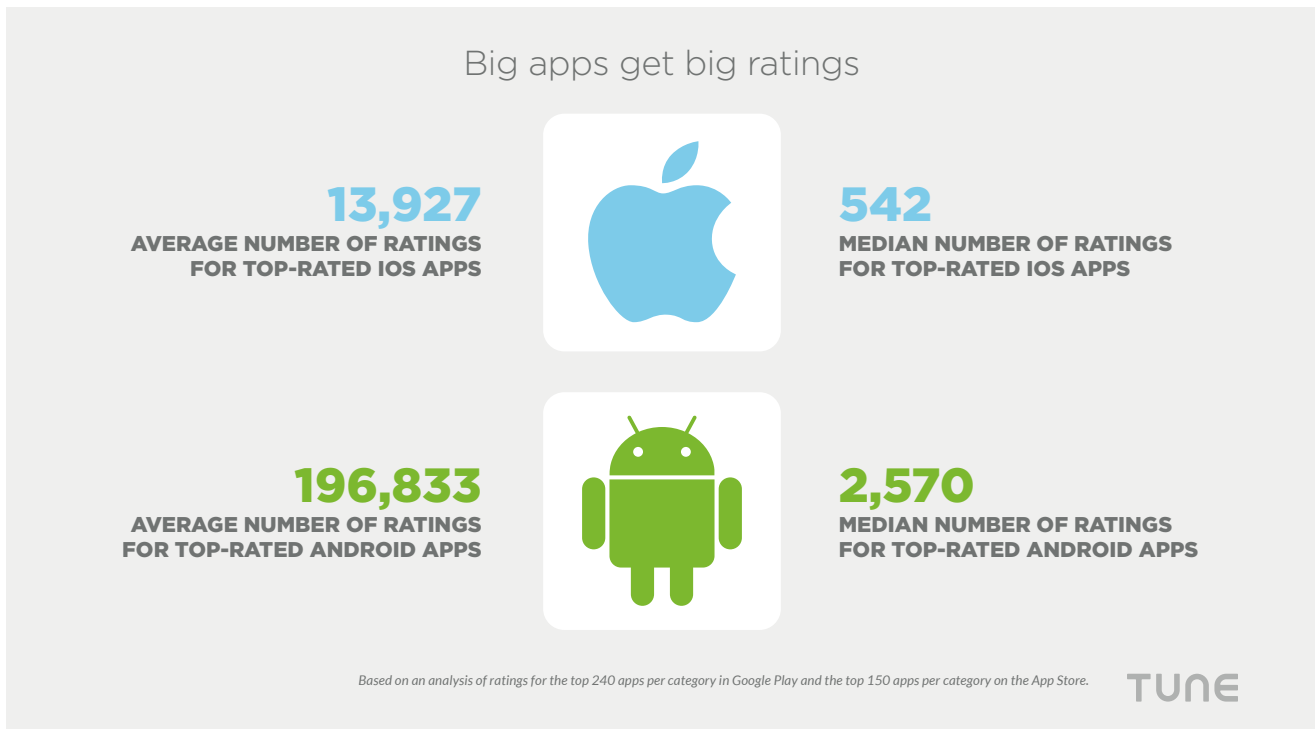
iOS games on the U.S. App Store don't have the same sheer scale of those global numbers, of course, but the level of competition is similar. Top categories include Arcade, Simulation, Action, and Puzzle, with 60,000 to 100,000 ratings per average top app:



One thing, however, is critical to remember: both averages and the extremely popular outlier apps can be misleading. They have huge numbers of ratings, but not all top apps are anywhere close to those numbers. (We define “top apps” as apps that are on the top lists. That’s 240 per category for Android and 150 per category for iOS.)

In fact, while the average number of ratings for top-ranked iOS apps is 13,927, the median — the most common number — is only 542. On Android, the average number of ratings for top-ranked apps is 196,833 but the median is only 2,570.

In other words, a major power law is happening here and the rich are very much getting richer:



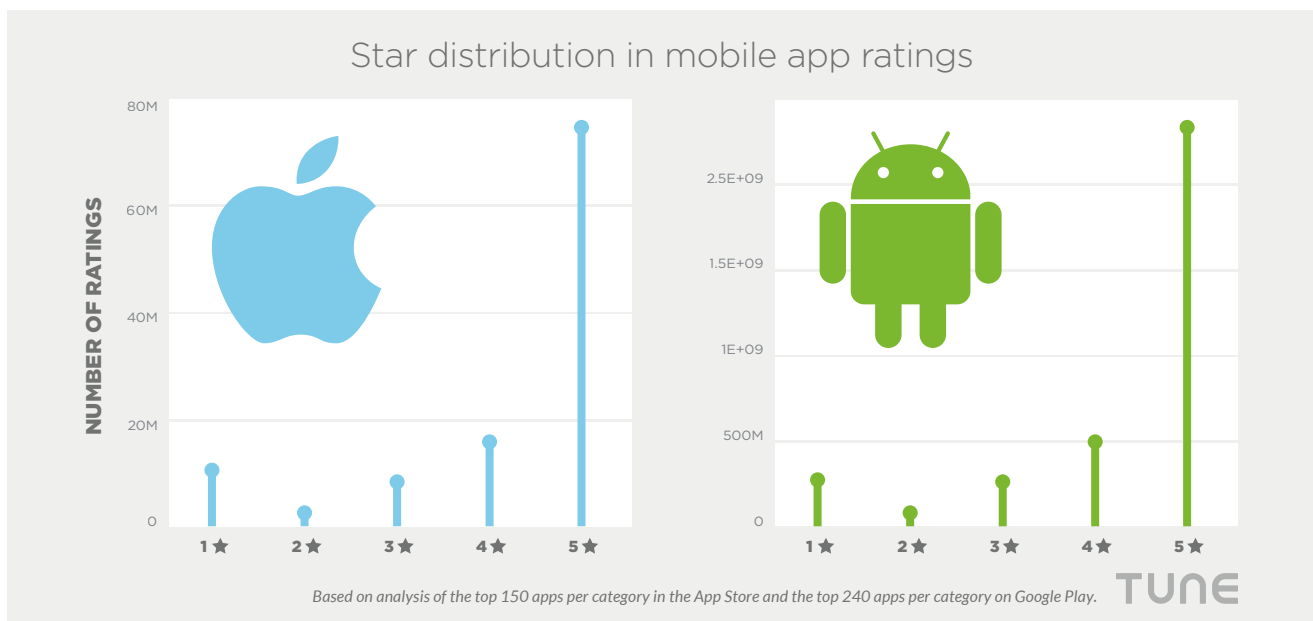
For publishers and developers seeking to conquer the App Store or Google Play, those are the first sets of numbers to hit. Once you’re there, you can always set your sights higher: the Snapchats and Facebooks of the app world.

## What the data says: five-star ratings

Ratings for top apps on both Android and iOS are far from random. In fact, they are carefully groomed by the top apps so that those apps remain top apps.

### Five-star ratings are by far the most common.

In the App Store, 65 percent of all ratings are five stars, and almost 80 percent of all ratings are either four or five stars. On Google Play, 68 percent of all ratings are five stars, and 83 percent of all ratings are either four or five stars.



This is no accident, since top app publishers know how to solicit great ratings and reviews from their most engaged and satisfied users via in-app messages.

Generally, they're using some form of mobile marketing automation, or in-app marketing.<sup>3</sup> Only users who are happy with the app are then sent to actually rate and review the app in Google Play or the App Store, resulting in an unnatural distribution of five-star reviews. To compete with these apps, you need to adopt their strategies and techniques, as well as create a great app experience, of course.

# What the data says: the rating-rich get richer

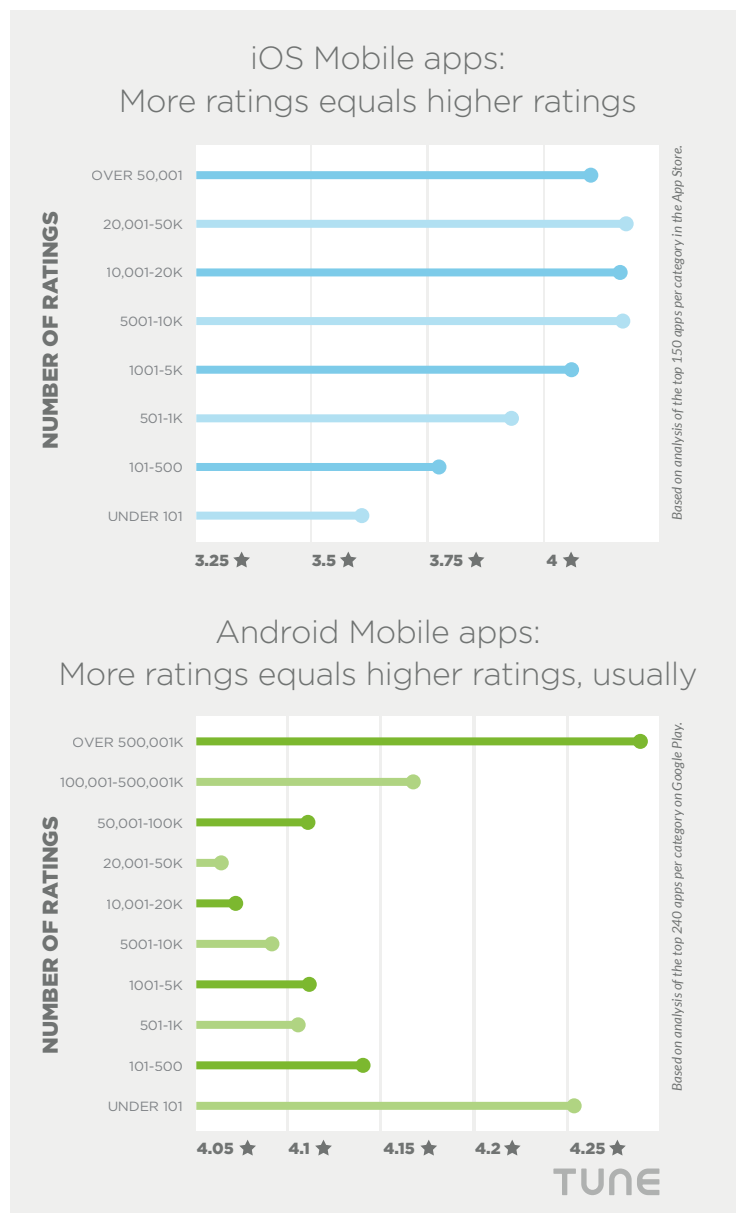
Generally, the more ratings you get, the higher your ratings on both iOS and Android. This is partly due to good apps getting better ratings, and therefore getting more downloads, and partly due to that very popularity generating more and more ratings over time.

**In other words,  
the Kardashian effect.**

Here is the pattern on iOS:

Interestingly, on Android, we see a U-shaped curve as apps with fewer than 100 ratings have very quality ratings. Those ratings go down with volume until about 50,000 ratings per app, and then get highest with the most popular apps at over 500,000 ratings per app.

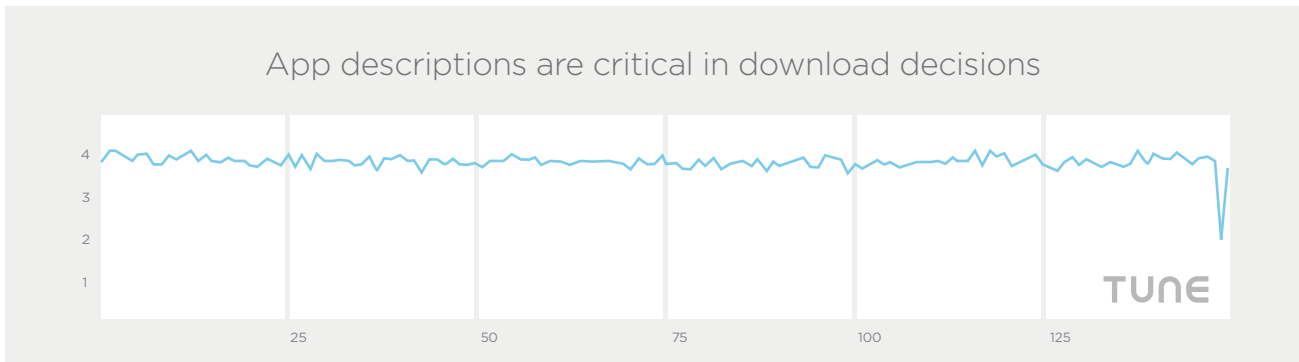
The likely reason: friends and family vote for very low-volume apps, plus a quality gap for middle-volume apps.



## What the data says: ratings weakly correlate with rank

For top-selling apps<sup>4</sup>, ratings are weakly correlated with higher rank in Google Play, and even less so in the iOS App Store. In other words, good ratings are necessary in most cases for strong ranking, but insufficient.

Top iOS apps are generally all highly rated, with only a very slight downward trend as you get to apps ranked 100 to 150 in their categories:

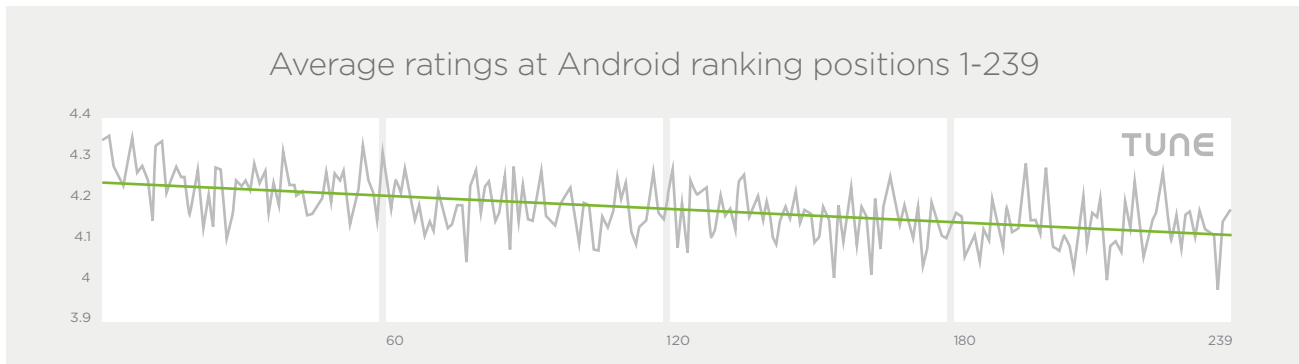


Android is a little different.

The highest-ranking apps are rated higher than the lower-rated apps from position 75 down to 240 on Android – a difference from iOS. As you can see below, there is a very definite trendline from top top-ranked apps in the 4.3 to 4.4-star range, to bottom top-ranked apps in the 4.1 to 4.2 range.



Even so the differences are fairly minor:



The upshot: you need good ratings, generally, to rank well for both iOS and Android apps. However, particularly in the App Store and also to a large degree in Google Play, good ratings will not get you there alone, and they will not be much of a differentiating factor once you make it there.

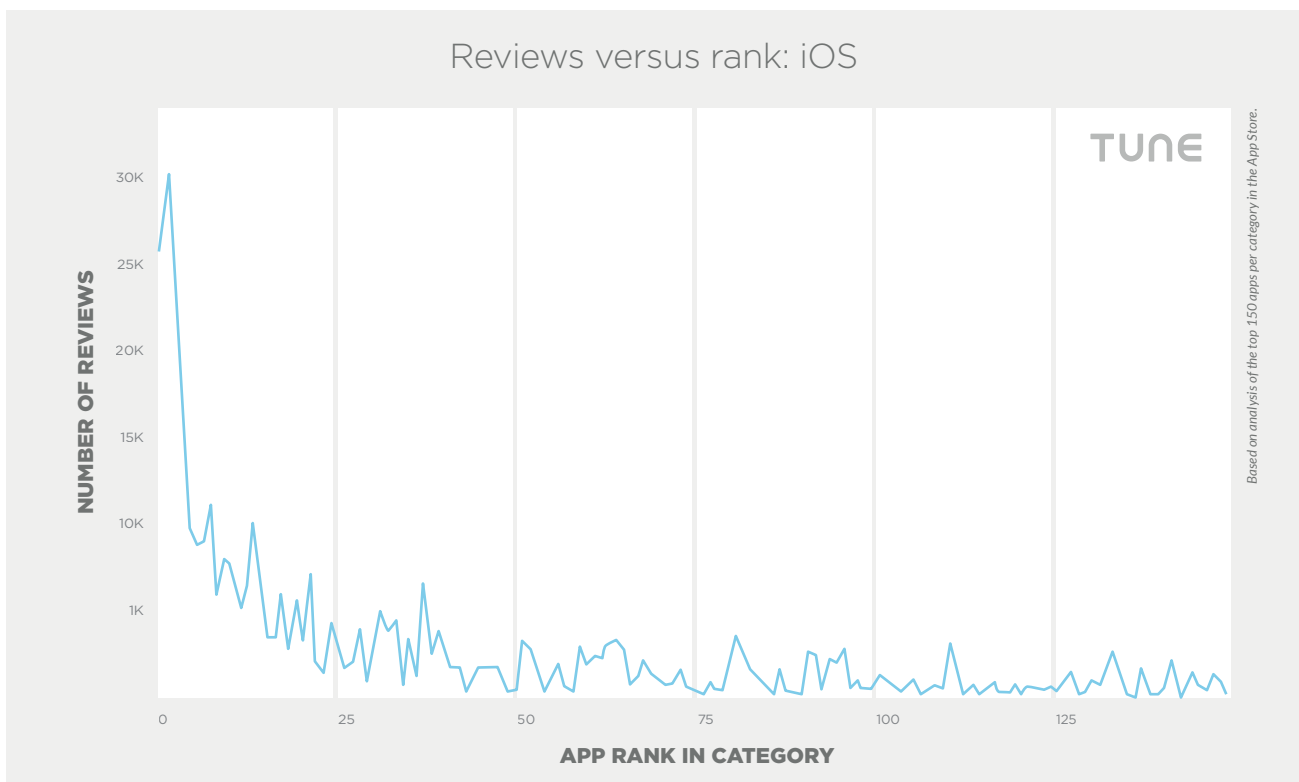
# What the data says: reviews strongly correlate with rank

There is a very strong correlation on both Google Play and the App Store between number of reviews and rank.

Ratings, as you know, can be done very quickly and simply: pick a star, tap it, and you're done. Reviews, on the other hand, take considerably more time and effort. You have to think about something meaningful to say and you have to write it on a mobile keyboard. The whole process takes easily 10X more time than simply rating.

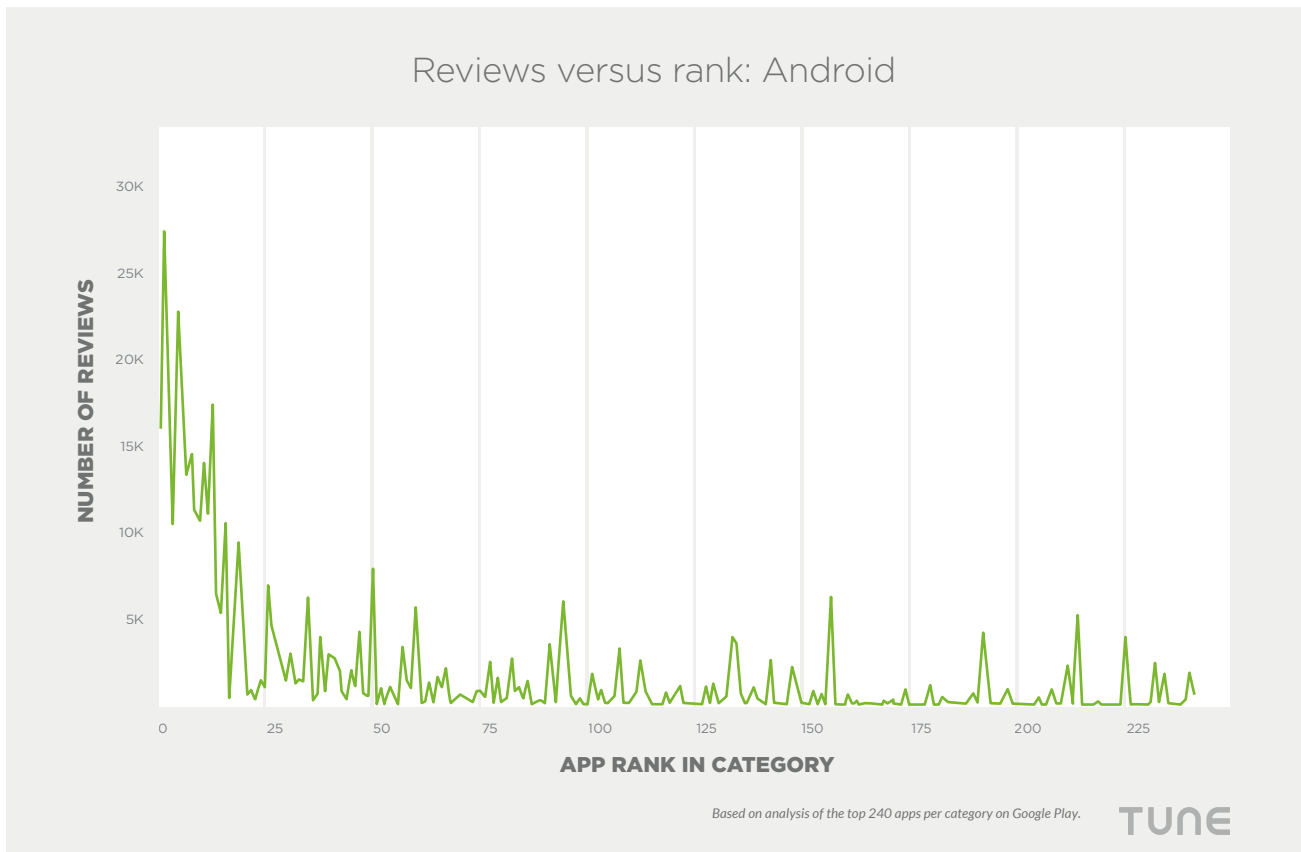
Perhaps as a consequence, Google and Apple take reviews much more seriously as a ranking factor.

For iOS, this is immediately obvious. Top-of-the-top apps, in positions one through 10, have double to 10X the number of reviews that apps from 10 to 20 have, and 50-100X the reviews of lower-ranked apps:



Android is almost as clean a chart.

Besides a few apps with number-of-review spikes in the teen rankings, and a number of others all the way down to apps ranked from 150-160 in their categories, the trendline is very clear: get more reviews, rank higher in Google Play.

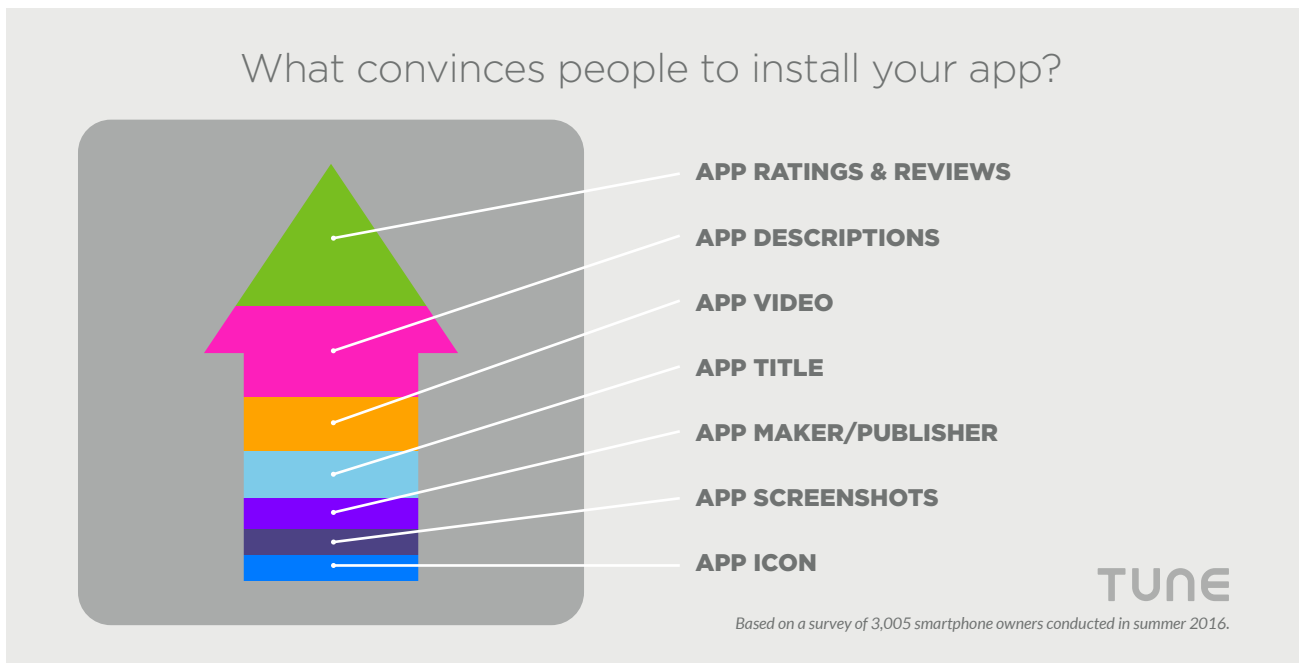


# What the data says: users at the point of install

The soft-survey data matches up with the hard analytics data.

We surveyed 3,005 American smartphone owners about what convinces them to download an app.  
The first-place answer in a stack-ranking contest of six different factors?

Ratings and reviews.



This is one of the key reasons to focus on ratings. As we see from the above, they're a minimum entry requirement for high-profile apps ... but they are necessary for ranking, and they are also necessary for conversion at the point of install.

The same is true for reviews. They're stronger than ratings in helping to achieve a high App Store or Google Play rank for your app, and they're also something that users look closely at when making download decisions.

## Data used in this report

Data used to create this report was drawn from three sources:

The first was a 3,005-person survey of American smartphone owners completed in early summer 2016. The group was U.S. census-representative for gender, age group, and geography, and all results are statistically relevant at a 99-percent% confidence level with a 2.4-percent margin of error.

The second was a large anonymized dataset based on TUNE's App Store and Google Play app store optimization product, App Store Analytics. We studied about 50,000 top apps, focusing on the leading 150-300 apps in each category on both major app stores, and analyzed data on billions of ratings, reviews, and other app listing data and metadata.

The third was a study of about 74 million app installs by 48 million anonymized American smartphone and tablet owners in September 2015.

## Footnotes

1. Top-ranked iOS apps are apps that are in the top 150 in their categories.
2. Top-ranked Android apps are apps that are in the top 240 in their categories.
3. <https://www.tune.com/in-app-marketing/>
4. Apps in the top 150 per category in the iOS App Store, and in the top 240 per category in Google Play