The Impact of Gaming Influencers on Brand Trust Among Gen Z Gamers

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ABSTRACT

The current study aims to investigate the impact of gaming influencers on brand trust among Gen Z gamers in India. With the rise of the gaming industry and influencer marketing, the importance of understanding the impact of gaming influencers on consumer perception has become critical to marketers who want to reach the younger generation of consumers in India. This study attempts to bridge the knowledge gap on whether influencer marketing can actually build brand trust or merely create temporary consumer engagement. Primary research was carried out among 207 Gen Z gamers in India using a structured questionnaire created on Google Forms. The study revealed that gaming influencers play an important role in building brand trust and increasing purchase intention and brand loyalty among Gen Z gamers in India. Among the variables studied in this research, influencer credibility was revealed to have the maximum predictive power in building brand trust among Gen Z gamers in India. YouTube was revealed to be the most popular gaming platform among gamers in India (76%), and mobile games were revealed to be the most common form of gaming in India (68%). This study reiterates that 71% of people trust a brand endorsed by an influencer, 58% have purchased products based on influencer recommendations, and 73% of people are open to trying new brands endorsed by influencers they trust. Transparency in sponsored content (81% find it important) and product usage (78%) are important to maintain brand trust among consumers. Keywords: Gaming influencers, brand trust, Gen Z, influencer credibility, digital marketing, consumer behaviour, India

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The digital revolution has completely changed the way brands reach out to young consumers. Perhaps the most significant change in the modern marketing environment is the concept of gaming influencers, who are recognized as the "key opinion leaders" of Generation Z gamers. The Indian gaming industry has seen an unprecedented growth spurt in the last five years, making it one of the fastest-growing segments of the Indian entertainment industry. It is reported that the Indian gaming industry is expected to reach a value of over USD 8.6 billion by 2027, primarily driven by Gen

Z consumers belonging to the age group of 16-25 years. This phenomenal growth can be attributed to several factors, including the penetration of affordable smartphones, the steep fall in mobile internet costs, the emergence of competitive gaming, and the popularity of streaming platforms, which enable real-time interaction between gamers and their audience.

The role of gaming influencers is unique in this dynamic environment. Unlike conventional celebrities, who are expected to maintain a degree of detachment from their audience, the role of the gaming influencers is directly connected with the audience through real-time interaction. This gives rise to the concept of "parasocial relationships," which are "one-sided, emotional relationships that fans build with media personalities." Such relationships are quite common in the gaming world, where these influencers are directly connected with their audience through real-time interaction. CarryMinati, Mortal, Total Gaming, and Dynamo Gaming are some of the most popular Indian gaming influencers, who are household names among the youth and have millions of followers on various platforms, influencing the Indian gaming trends, brand, and buying habits.1.2 Problem Statement

However, as awareness about the marketing potential of gaming influencers grows, and such partnerships become more common, the story is not yet complete. There are significant gaps in our understanding about gaming influencers and their role in determining consumer behaviour, particularly in the context of India. Most research has been conducted in Western countries, and applying these results to the context of India is not possible without a critical evaluation. The context in India is unique, considering the rich linguistic diversity, gaming preferences, digital payment adoption, social media usage among youth, and cultural nuances in terms of trust.

There is also a significant gap in most research, which has been conducted in terms of short-term outcomes, whereas the long-term outcomes, such as brand trust and brand loyalty, have not been taken into consideration. This is particularly significant in the context of gaming, considering the high-end purchases involved in gaming, such as gaming consoles, accessories, etc. Hence, understanding the influence of gaming influencers in terms of brand trust is significant from both theoretical and practical considerations.

Despite significant brand spend in terms of partnering with gaming influencers, the question remains unanswered as to whether such partnerships result in the generation of brand trust and brand loyalty, or merely result in short-term engagement. The present study attempts to fill this gap in understanding the role of gaming influencers in terms of building brand trust and determining consumer behaviour among Gen Z gaming consumers, using primary data directly from consumers.1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.2 Goals

Investigate gaming influencers' impact on Gen Z gamers' perceptions.

Determine the level of brand trust among Gen Z gamers for gaming influencers and brand endorsements.

Investigate the relationship between gaming influencers' credibility and brand trust among Gen Z gamers.

Investigate gaming influencers' impact on brand loyalty and purchase intention among Gen Z gamers.

Determine the effectiveness of gaming influencers' marketing approach through primary research using structured surveys.

1.3 Hypotheses

Based on the literature review and theoretical framework, hypotheses for testing are set as follows:

H1: Gaming influencers' credibility is positively related to brand trust among Gen Z gamers.

H2: Gaming influencers' engagement is positively related to brand trust and purchase intention among Gen Z gamers.

H3: Gaming influencers' transparent engagement of sponsored content moderates gaming influencers' impact on brand trust among Gen Z gamers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Influencer marketing, especially gaming influencers, is based on different theories and concepts of communication science and social psychology.

Source Credibility Theory

According to this theory, persuasion is based on the credibility of the information source. Credibility is composed of three characteristics of a credible source: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. In gaming influencers' marketing, expertise is related to gaming influencers' proficiency and competency in gaming and gaming products. Trustworthiness is related to gaming influencers' honesty and integrity. Attractiveness is related to gaming influencers' physical attractiveness and likability, though it is less important than expertise and trustworthiness.

Parasocial Relationship Theory

This theory is based on one-sided emotional relationships between fans and personalities. Gaming influencers often create parasocial relationships with fans through interaction and engagement with them. Gaming influencers' fans often feel intimate and trusting of gaming influencers' personalities. This relationship is often extended to brand endorsement and brand loyalty, and fans become more likely to trust a brand endorsed by gaming influencers.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM): This model was initially used to explain consumer acceptance of information technologies, but it has been adapted to explain the acceptance of influencer marketing. However, the basic concept remains the same. Two factors, namely perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, are seen to affect the attitudes of consumers towards technologies. Similarly, in the context of influencer marketing, the usefulness of recommendations made by influencers on consumers' purchasing decisions, and the ease of understanding the content promoted by influencers, are seen as influential factors.

2.2 Review of Previous Studies

Mahardika & Muslichah (2025) undertook in-depth research on digital game influencers and found that credibility plays an essential role in developing brand trust among Gen Z gamers. This research on the role of parasocial relationships in developing brand loyalty among Gen Z gamers reiterates the significance of developing relationships with influencers in the digital gaming industry.

In another research, Saxena & Sahay (2025) surveyed Gen Z consumers in Delhi and Mumbai cities. They found that social media influencers have an impact on brand loyalty. However, authenticity and trustworthiness are the primary factors influencing Gen Z consumers while making purchasing decisions. Similarly, the interaction between influencers and consumers increases brand credibility. Thus, there is a need to align the values of influencers with those of Gen Z consumers.

Chavare (2024) undertook research on the impact of content formats and credibility on Gen Z consumer behaviour. According to the research findings, the content format is seen to have an impact on developing trust. Product demonstrations on YouTube videos are seen to develop trust, while short-form videos on Instagram Reels are less effective. However, credibility and positive attitude are seen to have greater weight than physical beauty and fame.

In their study on the effects of influencers' authenticity, informativeness, and similarity on parasocial relationships using the elaboration likelihood model, Liu et al. (2023) determined that parasocial relationships have a positive effect on brand trust and purchase intentions, with consistency and informativeness increasing emotional attachment.

In their study on the effects of influencers on Gen Z purchasing behaviour, Saroyini and Putri (2024) highlighted the importance of authenticity and engagement in Gen Z purchasing behaviour and determined that interactive and informative influencers increase audience engagement, with personalized communication increasing influencers' credibility and leading to more positive brand judgments.

In their study on the effects of influencers on Gen Z and Millennials

2.3 Research Gap

Although there have been some developments in this area, there are gaps that this research seeks to fill. Firstly, there is a noticeable research gap in the gaming influencer market in India. Most research has focused on the Western and East Asian markets, which may not be applicable to India due to cultural and other factors.

Secondly, most research in this area has focused on short-term effects on the market, with less emphasis on the long-term effects on the market, including brand trust and loyalty. It is important to understand the relationship between brand loyalty and gaming influencers to effectively assess the ROI on gaming influencers.

Thirdly, there is a research gap in the area of how different forms of content affect brand trust in India. Most research in this area has compared long and short forms of content, with less emphasis on other forms of content and their effects on brand trust in India.

Lastly, there is a research gap in the area of transparency in sponsored content and its effects on brand trust in India, particularly in the gaming market, as an influencer's credibility is vital in this market.

This research aims to fill this research gap by conducting an in-depth analysis of the effects of gaming influencers on brand trust in India among Gen Z gamers in India.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Design

The study employed a descriptive research design. This is because, in most cases, descriptive research is employed in the study of the way people think, feel, and view things. It is also employed in the study and structuring of people's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions in a more organized and systematic way. This is the most appropriate research design in this study, as it can be employed in the study and structuring of the way gaming influencers, their credibility, and their engagement influence Gen Z gamers. This research design is also appropriate in this study since, in most cases,

descriptive research is employed in the study and structuring of trends and patterns in consumer behaviour, which can also be done using quantitative data.

3.2 Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data were employed in this study.

Primary Data: The researcher employed a questionnaire in the collection of data from the respondents. The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and had 22 questions.

Secondary Data: The researcher also employed secondary data in this study. The researcher employed relevant research papers and articles in this study.

3.3 Validation of the Research Instrument (Static Validation)

The research instrument was validated before collecting the final data to ensure that it was clear, relevant, and appropriate to the research objectives. Experts in academics and the research guide were consulted to validate the research questionnaire in terms of its structure and clarity of questions and their relevance to the research objectives. Based on their feedback, the necessary corrections were made to the research instrument before its administration using Google Forms.

3.4 Sampling Techniques

Population: The researcher employed Gen Z gamers in this study, as this population has been influenced in some way by gaming influencers in the digital environment.

Sampling Unit: The researcher employed Gen Z gamers in this study, as this population has been influenced in some way by gaming influencers in the digital environment.

Sample Size: The researcher managed to collect 207 questionnaires from the respondents. This is adequate for this study, as this sample size can help in the identification of trends and patterns in consumer behaviour.

Sampling Method: The researcher employed convenience sampling in this study, as this is a non-probability sampling technique. This technique was employed in this study due to the constraints involved in this study.

3.5 Data Analysis

We imported the data from Google Forms into Excel for data analysis. The data analysis technique employed in this study is descriptive, where we attempted to find the distribution of data, calculate the proportion using percentages, and interpret the qualitative data. The aim was to find the association between significant data sets, such as the credibility of influencers, the engagement level of influencers, and the trust level in the brand, and identify demographic and behavioural differences among the respondents.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents was analysed based on age and gender in order to understand the composition of the sample used in the study.

With respect to age distribution, the results indicate that the majority of the respondents belong to the 19–22 years age group, representing 64.7% of the total sample. This is followed by respondents in the 23–25 years age group, accounting for 19.8% of the participants. A smaller proportion of respondents falls within the 16–18 years age category, representing

10.1%, while only 5.3% of the respondents belong to the 26–30 years age group. These findings confirm that the sample is strongly dominated by individuals within the core Generation Z demographic, indicating that the study successfully captured the intended target population of Gen Z gamers.

In terms of gender distribution, the findings reveal that 72% of the respondents are male, whereas 28% are female. This distribution reflects the prevailing trend within the Indian gaming ecosystem, where male participation in gaming activities remains significantly higher than female participation. However, the presence of female respondents in the sample also indicates the gradual growth of female engagement in digital gaming platforms.

4.2 Gaming Behaviour Patterns

With reference to gaming frequency, 58% respondents play games every day, 27% play games several times a week, and 15% play games occasionally. This shows that most respondents are avid gamers and play games regularly.

With reference to gaming platforms, mobile gaming is the most preferred gaming platform, with 68% respondents preferring mobile games. The next prominent gaming platform is PC/Laptop gaming, which is preferred by 22%, followed by console gaming, such as PlayStation and Xbox, at 10%.

In this section, we examine the source that people use to access gaming influencers and the nature of the content that people prefer.

In terms of platforms, YouTube emerges as the most preferred source, with 76% of the people selecting this option. Instagram is the second most preferred source, with 15%. The remaining 9% are distributed among other platforms, including Twitch and Discord. This again reflects the importance of YouTube in reaching gaming influencers.

In terms of the nature of the content, entertainment content emerges as the most preferred option, with 45%. This is followed by live streams at 25%, tutorials at 18%, and reviews at 12%. This reflects that Gen Z people prefer entertainment content as opposed to informative content.

4.4 Influencer Credibility and Engagement

The majority of the respondents, around 74%, believe that the gaming influencers understand the needs and interests of the Gen Z gamer community. This forms the basis for the influencer's overall credibility. Considering the aspect of engagement, it is found that 68% of the respondents engage with the influencer content. The bond between the influencer and the audience seems strong, which would be beneficial for the marketer.

4.5 Brand Trust and Purchase Behaviour

Brand Trust and Purchase Behaviour.

The findings indicate that 71% of respondents trust gaming brands endorsed by the influencers they follow, highlighting the significant role influencers play in building brand trust among Gen Z gamers. This suggests that followers tend to rely on the opinions and recommendations of influencers they regularly engage with. Additionally, 69% of respondents perceive influencer-endorsed gaming brands as more reliable, which demonstrates that influencer endorsements positively influence brand credibility and consumer perception.

In terms of purchasing behaviour, 58% of respondents reported that they have purchased a gaming product after seeing a recommendation from their favourite influencer. This indicates that influencer marketing does not only affect brand awareness but can also lead to actual purchase decisions. Furthermore, 73% of respondents stated that they are willing to try a new gaming brand if it is promoted by an influencer they follow, suggesting that influencer endorsements encourage consumers to explore new brands and products within the gaming industry.

Overall, the results clearly demonstrate that gaming influencers significantly influence brand trust, brand perception, and consumer purchase behaviour among Gen Z gamers. These findings highlight the growing importance of influencer marketing strategies for gaming brands that aim to effectively reach and engage younger digital audiences.

4.6 Sponsored Content and Transparency

Attitude towards Sponsored Content

Statement	Agreement (%)	Disagreement (%)	Neutral (%)
Influencers should clearly mention when their content is sponsored	81%	8%	11%
Influencers who genuinely use products are more trustworthy	78%	7%	15%
Sponsored content reduces my trust in an influencer	33%	35%	32%

Most people agree that sponsored content should be disclosed, at 81%. This shows Gen Z cares about transparency in sponsored content. However, people have differing opinions on whether sponsored content hurts trust. Out of the 100 people, 35% disagree, 32% are neutral, and 33% agree. This might suggest that sponsored content does not hurt trust, as long as the information is disclosed. Another point worth noting is that 78% agree with the statement that "influencers who genuinely use the products are trustworthy."

4.7 Factors Influencing Trust
From the open-ended responses, there are several common elements that are likely to enhance trust or distrust in the gaming influencers.

Trust Enhancers:
  Honesty and transparency in reviewing the content
  Good communication and high-quality content
  Genuineness in using the products and sharing personal experiences
  Being relatable and having a culture connection with the audience
  Being good at games
  Engaging with the audience through the comment section
  Being transparent about sponsored content

Trust Diminishers:
  Being overly promotional and not giving real evaluations
  Being inconsistent in messages and recommendations
  Lack of transparency regarding sponsored content
  Promotions that seem insincere or overly promotional
  Negative personal behaviours or controversies
  Misinformation or deceptive product claims

4.8 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study support all the hypotheses set forth.

For H1, the relationship between the credibility of the gaming influencer and brand trust is supported by the fact that 74% rely on the influencer's credibility to trust the brand, and 71% trust the brand when it is endorsed by a credible influencer. The connection seems to be supported by the Social Cognitive Theory and literature (Mahardika & Muslichah, 2025; Saxena & Sahay, 2025).

For H2, the effect of engagement on trust and purchase intention is also supported because 68% claim to be engaged with the influencer's content, and it positively influences trust and purchase intention. The literature also supports the idea that the more engaged the audience, the more it strengthens the parasocial relationship and

4.9 Summary of Key Findings

The findings of the study reveal several significant insights into the impact of gaming influencers on brand trust for Gen Z gamers. The study results show that 71% of the participants trust brands associated with gaming influencers, and 69% of the participants believe that brands associated with gaming influencers are perceived as more trustworthy compared to non-endorsed brands.

The study also reveals that 58% of the participants have purchased products based on influencer recommendations, indicating the impact of influencer marketing on consumer purchase decisions. Additionally, 73% of the participants were willing to try new brands associated with gaming influencers, indicating the strong impact of influencer marketing on consumer purchase decisions.

The study also reveals that 67% of the participants believe that regular promotion of brands by gaming influencers helps build trust with brands, and 74% of the participants believe that influencer credibility is an essential factor before building trust with a brand.

The study also reveals that transparency is a significant factor in building trust with gaming influencers, and a significant percentage of 81% of the participants believe that gaming influencers should be transparent about sponsored content, and 78% of the participants believe that gaming influencers who actually use the

4.10 Limitations

Although this study has yielded a wealth of knowledge, there are some limitations to consider:

Sample Size: The sample size is 207, and although this is adequate for drawing broad inferences, it may not reflect the entire Gen Z gamer population in India.

Sampling Method: The use of convenience sampling is helpful in drawing broad inferences, but this may also result in sampling bias.

Geographic Focus: The focus has been on urban Indian gamers, and this may not reflect the gamer population in semi-urban and rural areas.

Data Type: The reliance on self-reported data may result in recall biases and social desirability biases.

Cross-Sectional Design: The study is based on a cross-sectional design, and this may not reflect any causal relationship or longitudinal trends.

Platforms: The study has been conducted among YouTube and Instagram users, although there is some mention of other social media platforms such as Twitch, Discord, and Loco.

5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

5.1 Conclusion

This study has shown that gaming influencers have a positive and significant influence on the brand trust of Gen Z gamers in India. This influence is from different directions, such as the influencers' expertise, their authentic way of communicating, and the usefulness of their content in assisting the audience in their buying decisions.

The major finding is that the credibility of the influencer, which includes their expertise, authenticity, and transparency, is the most important factor in predicting the brand trust of the audience. Thus, brands must focus more on the credibility of the influencer than the number of followers they have, especially when planning influencer marketing campaigns.

This study has also shown the importance of transparency in the content posted by the influencer, with 81% of the participants demanding this, and the authenticity of the product, with 78% of the participants desiring this.

The study has shown that YouTube is the most popular platform for gaming content, which the audience trusts the most, and that the gaming market in India is indeed a mobile market, which has been confirmed in this study.

This study has shown that influencer marketing has a significant influence on the audience's behaviour, with 58% of the participants admitting to buying the product, and 73% willing to try the product using influencer marketing.

All research hypotheses have been supported. The research makes an academic contribution in that it provides a contextual understanding of influencer marketing in the context of India's unique digital space. The research has extended Source Credibility Theory and Parasocial Relationship Theory to the Indian gaming space with a sense of relatability.

If you're a brand looking to effectively utilize gaming influencers for your brand, here are some guidelines to follow:

1) Select influencers based on credibility rather than the number of followers they have.

2) Form long-term relationships with your influencers to build trust.

3) Promote content that's authentic and reflects actual experiences.

4) Be transparent to retain credibility.

5) Focus on YouTube as it's the most used platform at 76%, focusing on long-form content to build trust with your audience.

6) Ensure that your content is mobile-friendly as 68% prefer mobile gaming.

7) Ensure that your campaigns encourage audience interaction to build parasocial relationships.

8) Ensure that your relationship with the influencer remains authentic at all times.

Key findings:

Authenticity in style, being open about

Future Scope

There are many avenues that this study could be extended into in the future:

 Broader Scope: The study could be extended to a larger geographic region of India.

Longitudinal Approach: The longitudinal approach could be extended to understand changes in consumer-influencer-brand relationships over time.

Cause and Effect: The cause and effect of influencer behaviour on brands could be tested through experiments.

Other Gaming Categories: The study could be extended to other categories of products in the gaming arena such as hardware and software.

Other Gaming Platforms: The study could be extended to new platforms such as Twitch, Discord, and Loco, and what unique features they offer for influencer marketing.

Deeper Meaning Construction: The study could be extended to understand deeper consumer experiences and the process of meaning construction.

Cultural Studies: The study could be extended to understand cultural differences and similarities in terms of consumer responses to influencers.

Negative Influence: The study could be extended to understand how negative influencer behaviour affects brand credibility.

Micro-Influencers: The study could be extended to understand the role of micro-influencers in the context of India and its gaming community.

Generational Studies: The study could be extended to understand generational differences between Gen Z and Millennials and Gen Alpha.

As the gaming arena in India is likely to expand and grow in the future, it is likely that influencer marketing will remain at its core. Therefore, it is likely that new platforms will emerge, new influencers will emerge, and new content will emerge. However, it is also likely that credibility, authenticity, engagement, and transparency will continue to be the guiding principles of the influencer marketing arena in India.

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