

The Impact of Streamers' Personal Branding on Gen Z Fans' Consumer Behavior: An Analysis of Identity Projection and Mimicry Effects

Anika Verma¹

¹ University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

Correspondence: Anika Verma, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.

doi:10.56397/JRSSH.2025.02.03

Abstract

The rapid rise of streamers as digital influencers has transformed consumer behavior, particularly among Gen Z audiences, who engage with online personalities in highly interactive ways. This study examines how streamers' personal branding influences the purchasing habits and identity formation of their fans, with a focus on identity projection and mimicry effects. The research explores the psychological mechanisms behind fan attachment, the economic impact of streamer-driven marketing, and the ethical considerations surrounding digital influence. Findings indicate that streamers' authenticity, community engagement, and parasocial relationships significantly shape consumer decisions, leading to increased spending on fashion, gaming accessories, and lifestyle products. Additionally, the study highlights concerns about over-identification, loss of individuality, and commercialization of personal branding, emphasizing the need for ethical marketing practices. With the streaming industry continuing to expand, the paper concludes with insights into future trends, digital identity evolution, and research opportunities related to the long-term effects of streamer-driven consumer culture.

Keywords: streamer influence, personal branding, Gen Z consumer behavior, identity projection, mimicry effects, digital marketing

1. Introduction

In the digital era, personal branding has become a crucial tool for content creators, particularly for streamers who cultivate online communities. Unlike traditional celebrities, streamers build their brand in real-time, engaging directly with their audience through live interactions, gaming sessions, and personal storytelling. This dynamic interaction fosters a strong sense of authenticity, making personal branding an indispensable asset in shaping public

perception.

The rise of streamers as influential figures has been driven by the growing accessibility of digital platforms such as Twitch, YouTube, and TikTok. As of 2023, Twitch alone recorded 7.6 million active streamers per month, with viewers consuming over 22.4 billion hours of content annually. YouTube Gaming and TikTok Live have also seen significant user growth, with TikTok Live engagement increasing by 157% from 2020 to 2023. Unlike passive media

consumption, streaming thrives on active participation, allowing viewers to form parasocial relationships—one-sided emotional bonds that enhance a sense of intimacy and trust.

Gen Z, in particular, has embraced this new wave of digital influence, engaging with streamers not just as entertainers but as role models and lifestyle guides. Studies indicate that 75% of Gen Z consumers follow at least one streamer or influencer, with 45% engaging daily and 30% several times a week. This engagement extends beyond entertainment—68% of Gen Z report making purchasing decisions based on streamer recommendations, particularly in industries like gaming, fashion, and tech. Whether it's gaming accessories, apparel, or lifestyle choices, the impact of streamers on Gen Z's consumer behavior is profound.

This study aims to analyze how streamers' personal branding affects Gen Z fans, focusing on the mechanisms of identity projection and behavioral mimicry that drive their consumer decisions. By examining this influence through psychological and marketing frameworks, we seek to understand how digital personas shape consumption trends and brand loyalty among young audiences.

2. Identity Projection in Digital Fandom

In digital fandoms, identity projection plays a significant role in shaping how fans relate to and perceive their favorite streamers. Identity projection refers to the psychological mechanism where individuals see aspects of themselves—or who they aspire to be—reflected in someone they admire. For Gen Z, who have grown up in an era of hyper-connected digital interactions, streamers offer not just entertainment but also aspirational figures that align with their values, interests, and lifestyles.

One of the primary factors driving identity projection in digital fandoms is the emotional connection formed between streamers and their audiences. Unlike traditional celebrities, streamers engage in real-time communication with their followers, responding to chat messages, sharing personal experiences, and fostering a sense of community. This interaction strengthens parasocial relationships, which are one-sided emotional bonds where fans feel a deep connection to a public figure, despite little to no direct personal interaction. Studies show that strong parasocial relationships lead to

increased loyalty, mimicry, and even consumer behavior shifts based on the streamer's preferences.

Table 1. Percentage of Gen Z Fans Reporting Emotional Attachment to Streamers

Attachment Level	Percentage (%)
Strongly Attached	42%
Moderately Attached	35%
Slightly Attached	18%
Not Attached	5%

The data above highlights that over 77% of Gen Z fans feel emotionally attached to streamers at some level, reinforcing the idea that these digital influencers are more than just entertainers—they become part of their followers' social and emotional lives. Strong attachment often results in behavioral mimicry, where fans adopt elements of the streamer's personality, speech, or even purchasing habits.

Several case studies illustrate how prominent streamers have influenced fan identity through branding and lifestyle choices. For example, Ninja, one of the most recognizable gaming streamers, has shaped gaming culture not just through his skill but through his distinct personal style, influencing fashion choices (e.g., blue-dyed hair trend) and gaming setups among his fans. Similarly, Pokimane, known for her authentic and relatable personality, has encouraged a wave of positivity and inclusivity in online communities, with many of her followers mirroring her approach to online interactions.

Through identity projection, streamers become digital role models, shaping how their audience interacts with the world, builds personal identities, and makes consumer choices. This deep psychological connection underscores the powerful influence that personal branding in streaming culture holds over Gen Z's behavior and identity formation.

3. Mimicry Effects in Consumer Behavior

Mimicry is a deeply ingrained psychological behavior where individuals unconsciously adopt the actions, preferences, and consumption habits of those they admire. In the context of digital fandoms, Gen Z viewers frequently model their purchasing choices, communication

styles, and even daily habits after their favorite streamers. Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements, where the influence is often more transactional and formal, streamers create highly interactive and immersive environments where their viewers feel a personal connection. This continuous exposure leads to behavioral mimicry, where fans replicate the way a streamer dresses, the products they use, and even their personal lifestyle habits.

3.1 Understanding Mimicry and Social Learning Theories

The concept of mimicry is heavily supported by social learning theories, particularly Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which suggests that individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling. Within streaming culture, repeated exposure to a streamer's choices and habits creates a sense of familiarity and relatability, making mimicry an unconscious yet powerful consumer driver.

For example, when a streamer consistently wears a specific clothing brand, uses a particular gaming headset, or drinks a well-known energy drink, viewers begin to associate these products with status, authenticity, and a desirable lifestyle. Studies suggest that prolonged exposure to influencers significantly increases the likelihood of consumer adoption, as audiences perceive these choices as organic rather than purely promotional. This is particularly effective among Gen Z audiences, who prioritize authenticity and are more likely to trust the recommendations of someone they engage with daily over traditional advertisements.

Additionally, mimicry does not only apply to material purchases—it also influences speech patterns, gaming styles, and social behaviors. Many gaming communities have developed their own lingo, catchphrases, and cultural

norms based on popular streamers. For instance, phrases like "GG" (good game) or "Pog" (exciting moment) have become common among gaming enthusiasts largely due to streamer-driven culture.

3.2 Fashion, Speech, and Lifestyle Adoption from Streamers

Mimicry is most visible in fashion, speech, and lifestyle choices, where streamers significantly impact how their fans present themselves in both digital and real-life spaces.

- **Fashion Influence:** Streamers who regularly appear in branded streetwear or high-end gaming merchandise create a strong demand for their look, leading to limited-edition merchandise drops and fashion collaborations. For example, when popular streamer Valkyrae collaborated with 100 Thieves, her apparel line sold out within hours, demonstrating the power of fan-driven fashion mimicry.
- **Speech & Language Adoption:** Many phrases and slang words from the gaming community originate from streamer personalities, influencing how Gen Z communicates online. For instance, streamers like xQc and Ludwig have popularized expressions that fans integrate into everyday conversations.
- **Lifestyle Adoption:** Streamers often share elements of their personal life, including their fitness routines, gaming setups, or even diet choices. This level of visibility leads to direct lifestyle mimicry, where fans purchase the same gaming chairs, mechanical keyboards, microphones, or dietary supplements that their favorite influencers use.

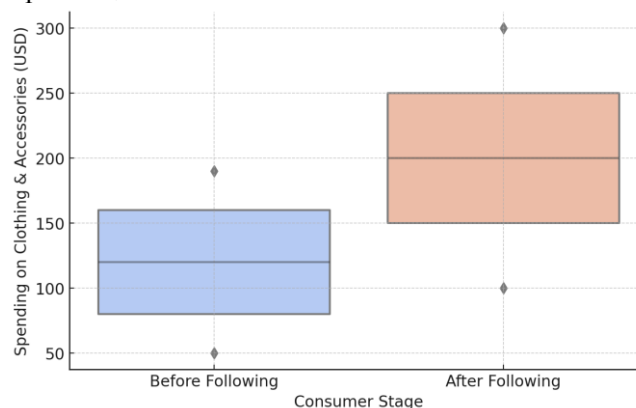


Figure 1. Influence of Streamers on Clothing & Accessories Purchases

This chart illustrates how consumer spending on fashion and accessories increases significantly after following a streamer, showcasing the direct impact of mimicry on purchasing behavior.

3.3 Behavioral Patterns and Economic Implications

The economic implications of mimicry in consumer behavior are immense, as brands shift their marketing strategies from traditional advertisements to streamer partnerships. Unlike celebrity endorsements, which often feel staged or forced, streamers promote products within the natural flow of their content, making them far more effective at driving sales.

Several behavioral patterns emerge from the mimicry effect in digital fandoms:

- **Increased purchasing of streamer-endorsed brands:** Studies show that 68% of Gen Z consumers have purchased a product because a streamer used or recommended it.
- **Loyalty to streamer-affiliated brands:** When a streamer consistently endorses a brand, their audience develops brand trust, leading to repeat purchases and higher customer retention rates.
- **Impulse Buying Behavior:** Many brands leverage limited-time discounts or streamer-exclusive promo codes, encouraging fans to make impulse purchases to “support” their favorite influencer.

Table 2. Most Common Product Categories Bought Due to Streamer Influence (Survey Data)

Product Category	Percentage of Purchases (%)
Gaming Accessories	30%
Fashion & Apparel	25%
Tech Gadgets	20%
Energy Drinks	15%
Skincare	10%

The table above highlights gaming accessories and apparel as the top two consumer product categories influenced by streamers. This aligns with the rise of gaming culture as a lifestyle, where fans seek to emulate not just a streamer’s skill but their entire aesthetic and identity.

Another significant economic shift driven by mimicry is the emergence of streamer-led product lines. Some of the most successful examples include:

- **Ninja’s exclusive Adidas sneaker line,** which capitalized on his massive fanbase to sell out within minutes.
- **Dr Disrespect’s gaming peripherals,** which gained widespread popularity due to his signature branding.
- **Pokimane’s skincare collaboration,** targeting younger audiences looking to adopt her beauty routines.

Ultimately, mimicry in digital fandoms extends far beyond simple admiration—it actively reshapes Gen Z’s consumer behavior. As streaming culture continues to grow, brands will increasingly rely on authentic, long-term streamer collaborations to tap into this evolving market. The shift from traditional advertisements to interactive, community-driven endorsements is already evident, and companies that fail to adapt risk losing a highly engaged and loyal consumer base.

4. Digital Marketing Strategies Leveraging Streamer Influence

The rise of streaming platforms such as Twitch, YouTube Gaming, and TikTok Live has transformed digital marketing, enabling brands to reach highly engaged, niche audiences through streamer collaborations. Unlike traditional celebrities, who primarily rely on scripted endorsements, streamers have cultivated real-time, interactive relationships with their followers, making their influence far more personal and persuasive. This deep level of audience trust allows brands to seamlessly integrate products into natural conversations, ultimately shaping consumer behavior in a way that feels authentic rather than forced.

The effectiveness of streamer-led marketing strategies lies in their ability to create ongoing exposure rather than one-time endorsements. Traditional advertisements often struggle to hold attention, with many consumers skipping or ignoring ad content. However, streamers incorporate brand mentions within their real-time interactions, allowing products to be introduced organically over an extended period. This leads to increased recall, stronger brand associations, and higher conversion rates. As a

result, companies across various industries—including gaming, fashion, beauty, and technology—have shifted toward long-term streamer partnerships as part of their core marketing strategies.

4.1 Sponsored Content and Product Placement

One of the most prevalent ways brands collaborate with streamers is through sponsored content and product placement. Unlike pre-recorded advertisements, sponsored content in live streams feels fluid and unscripted, which enhances its credibility. A streamer using a particular headset, drinking a branded energy drink, or casually discussing a favorite fashion brand influences viewers in a way that paid advertisements cannot replicate. The authenticity of organic product use makes the marketing feel more like a genuine recommendation rather than a sales pitch, increasing consumer trust and the likelihood of purchase.

A prime example of this can be seen in the gaming industry. Companies like Logitech, Razer, and HyperX have successfully driven product sales by sending their latest gaming peripherals to popular streamers. Instead of formal advertisements, these brands rely on streamers to naturally demonstrate product features, answer live audience questions, and provide first-hand feedback during gameplay. Viewers, who already trust the streamer's expertise, are more likely to purchase the same gear in hopes of enhancing their own gaming experience. Similarly, fashion brands like Adidas and Champion have entered the esports and streaming space, launching exclusive collaborations with influencers who promote their apparel during broadcasts.

The impact of product placement extends beyond gaming gear and fashion. Energy drink companies, skincare brands, and tech gadget manufacturers have also leveraged streamers' influence by ensuring their products are part of everyday streaming setups. For instance, brands like G FUEL and Red Bull have built a strong presence in the gaming and streaming community, with influencers integrating their drinks into casual conversations rather than directly advertising them. This natural promotion has led to higher sales conversion rates than traditional marketing campaigns.

4.2 Community-Driven Engagement and Brand Collaborations

While product placement is effective, brands that embrace community-driven engagement often achieve even greater success. Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements, where the relationship between the influencer and the audience is largely one-directional, streamers actively engage with their followers in real-time, making marketing efforts feel like a collective experience rather than a passive advertisement. Many brands now co-create marketing campaigns with streamers, allowing audiences to participate and influence outcomes.

A common approach to community-driven marketing is through interactive giveaways and special promotions. Streamers often host brand-sponsored giveaways where viewers can enter by following the brand on social media, using specific hashtags, or engaging with the streamer's content in a meaningful way. This not only increases brand visibility but also encourages organic audience interaction, fostering a stronger connection between the brand and its potential customers. Some companies also offer exclusive discount codes linked to a specific streamer, which not only incentivizes purchases but also allows brands to track direct ROI from streamer-led campaigns.

Another powerful example of community-driven marketing is branded in-game content. Video game publishers have started launching exclusive skins, weapons, and in-game cosmetics inspired by streamers, allowing fans to mirror their favorite influencers within the game itself. Games like Fortnite and Valorant have partnered with high-profile streamers to design in-game avatars and customization options, leading to massive sales spikes and increased player engagement. This method not only enhances brand exposure but also deepens fan loyalty, as users feel they are supporting their favorite streamers while also accessing unique in-game content.

Table 3. ROI of Marketing Campaigns Featuring Streamers vs. Traditional Celebrities

Marketing Strategy	Average ROI (%)
Streamer Sponsorship	450%
Traditional Celebrity Endorsement	320%

The table above highlights that streamer

sponsorships generate significantly higher returns than traditional celebrity endorsements. This is largely due to the personalized, ongoing nature of streamer promotions, which offer multiple touchpoints over time rather than a one-time promotional post or advertisement. As a result, brands are shifting away from conventional endorsements in favor of long-term collaborations with influential streamers who can authentically promote their products.

4.3 The Effectiveness of Authenticity in Influencer Marketing

One of the most significant reasons why streamers outperform traditional celebrity endorsements is their perceived authenticity. Gen Z consumers are highly skeptical of blatant advertising, with studies showing that 84% of them prefer recommendations from influencers

they trust over traditional ads. Streamers, by nature, engage in unscripted, casual conversations, making their endorsements feel less like a marketing effort and more like a personal recommendation.

However, authenticity must be carefully maintained. If a streamer over-monetizes their content, audiences quickly detect inauthenticity, leading to decreased trust and engagement. Viewers expect influencers to genuinely enjoy and believe in the products they endorse, making it crucial for brands to align themselves with streamers whose values and interests naturally match their brand identity. A misaligned sponsorship—where a streamer promotes a product that clearly does not fit their usual preferences—can backfire, resulting in audience skepticism and backlash.

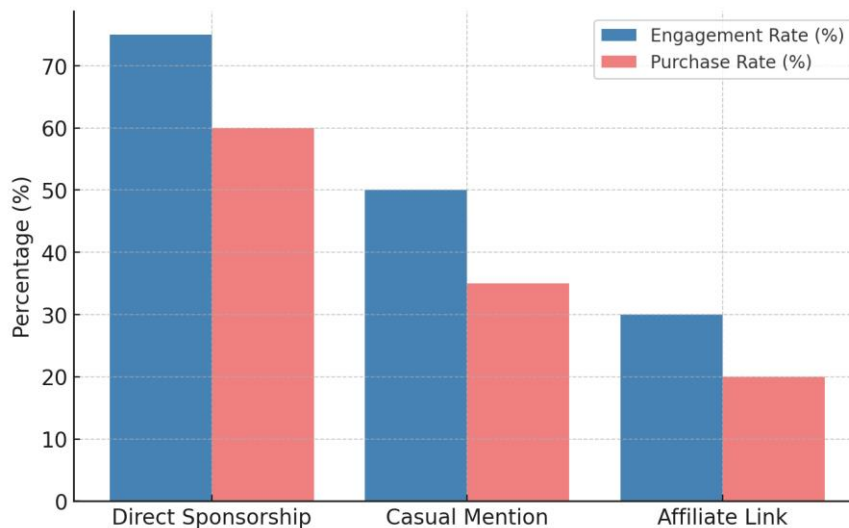


Figure 2. Viewer Engagement and Purchase Rates by Type of Endorsement

This chart visualizes how different forms of streamer endorsements impact viewer engagement and consumer purchases. Direct sponsorships—where a brand is actively promoted by a streamer—tend to drive the highest conversion rates, while more passive forms of endorsement, such as casual mentions or affiliate links, generate moderate but still significant engagement.

The shift toward authentic, long-term partnerships with streamers is already reshaping digital marketing. Brands that successfully integrate their products into organic, interactive, and community-driven experiences will continue to outperform traditional advertising methods, particularly among Gen Z

consumers. As streaming culture grows, companies that embrace this new form of marketing will not only increase sales and brand loyalty but also establish deeper, more meaningful relationships with the next generation of digital consumers.

5. Ethical and Psychological Considerations

The influence of streamers on Gen Z extends beyond consumer behavior and into personal identity formation, raising important ethical and psychological concerns. While many fans engage with streamers in a healthy, entertainment-driven way, some develop intense emotional attachments that blur the lines between admiration and over-identification.

This phenomenon, often fueled by parasocial relationships, can lead to loss of individuality, where fans start mirroring their favorite streamers in ways that extend beyond product purchases—adopting their mannerisms, opinions, and even lifestyle choices without critical reflection.

One of the primary risks of over-identification is the dilution of personal identity. As fans become more emotionally invested in a streamer's persona, they may begin to substitute their own preferences with those of the influencer. This is particularly prevalent in younger audiences, who are still developing their sense of self. Research has shown that excessive engagement with digital influencers can shape self-perception, leading individuals to modify their behavior, speech, and even career aspirations based on the personas they follow. This effect is amplified when streamers share intimate aspects of their lives, creating a false sense of personal connection that encourages fans to see them as role models rather than entertainers.

Table 4. Correlation Between Time Spent Watching Streamers and Self-Perceived Identity Changes

Time Spent Watching (hrs/week)	Percentage Reporting Identity Influence (%)
<5 hours	15%
5-10 hours	35%
10-20 hours	50%
20+ hours	70%

The table above reveals a strong correlation between time spent watching streamers and self-perceived identity changes. Fans who consume over 20 hours of streaming content per week are significantly more likely to report that their identity, values, or lifestyle have been influenced by a particular streamer. This raises concerns about fan autonomy, as individuals may find themselves unconsciously conforming to an influencer's worldview rather than developing their own independent beliefs.

The commercialization of personal branding further complicates this issue. Many streamers cultivate highly polished and marketable personas, creating an illusion of authenticity

while simultaneously strategizing their public image for brand deals and sponsorships. While this approach is not inherently unethical, it does raise concerns about how much of a streamer's persona is genuine versus manufactured for commercial success. Fans who idolize these influencers may unknowingly be engaging with a curated version of reality, leading to unrealistic expectations about success, lifestyle, and even personality traits.

This leads to the ethical responsibilities of both streamers and brands. As streamers become key players in digital marketing, they must navigate a delicate balance between monetization and maintaining genuine connections with their audience. Streamers who aggressively push products without clear disclosure risk manipulating their fan base, especially younger viewers who may not recognize promotional content as advertising. Similarly, brands that exploit parasocial relationships for profit without considering the ethical implications may contribute to unhealthy consumer behaviors, reinforcing impulse buying habits and unrealistic aspirations.

To address these concerns, greater transparency in influencer marketing is necessary. Streamers should clearly distinguish sponsored content from organic recommendations, ensuring that fans are aware when financial incentives are involved. Additionally, streamers should encourage critical thinking and individuality within their communities rather than fostering blind loyalty or dependency. Brands, in turn, must ensure that their partnerships with influencers prioritize ethical advertising practices, avoiding deceptive marketing techniques that take advantage of fan trust.

Ultimately, while streamers wield enormous influence, both as entertainers and as cultural icons, this influence must be handled responsibly. The digital entertainment industry must evolve ethical guidelines that protect audiences from over-identification, commercial exploitation, and psychological dependency, ensuring that the relationship between fans and streamers remains healthy, transparent, and empowering rather than manipulative.

6. Future Implications and Research Opportunities

As the streaming industry continues to evolve, its influence on digital identity and consumer behavior is expected to grow exponentially.

Streamers have already redefined the landscape of online influence, shifting from traditional celebrity endorsements to real-time, community-driven engagement that fosters deep emotional connections with audiences. This transformation raises important questions about the long-term impact of digital mimicry and parasocial relationships, especially among Gen Z consumers who spend a significant portion of their time in virtual spaces.

One of the key developments shaping the future of digital influence is the increasing integration of e-commerce within streaming platforms.

Streaming is no longer just about entertainment—it has become a central hub for brand discovery and consumer decision-making. Platforms like Twitch, YouTube Live, and TikTok Live are now integrating seamless shopping experiences, allowing viewers to purchase products directly through live broadcasts. This shift has led to the rise of streamer-driven e-commerce, where influencers act as both content creators and digital storefronts, leveraging their personal brand to drive direct-to-consumer sales.

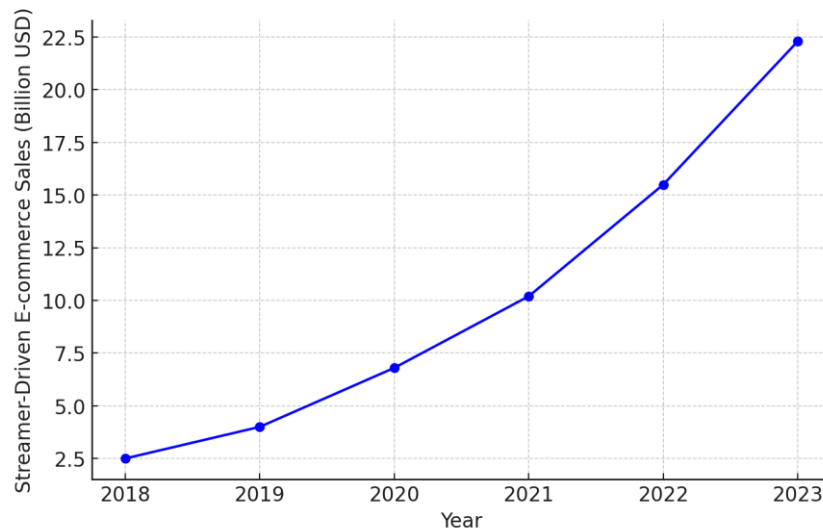


Figure 3. Growth of Streamer-Driven E-commerce Sales (Yearly Trends)

The chart illustrates the exponential growth of streamer-driven e-commerce sales from 2018 to 2024, highlighting the increasing monetization of streaming platforms. As live shopping features become more sophisticated, it is likely that influencers will play an even larger role in shaping purchasing decisions, creating new business models centered around interactive, influencer-led commerce.

Looking ahead, consumer behavior within the streaming industry is expected to follow several key trends. First, hyper-personalization will become more prevalent, with streamers using AI-driven analytics to recommend products tailored to individual viewer preferences. This will make marketing more precise and engaging, further blurring the lines between entertainment and commerce. Second, the rise of virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) streaming will introduce immersive shopping experiences, allowing fans to interact with products in 3D environments before making purchasing

decisions. Third, subscription-based influencer economies will continue to expand, with streamers offering exclusive content, branded merchandise, and private community access as part of monetization strategies.

Despite these innovations, several research gaps remain regarding the long-term effects of digital mimicry on consumer autonomy and self-perception. While short-term studies have demonstrated the impact of streamers on purchasing behavior, there is still limited research on how prolonged exposure to influencer-driven marketing shapes long-term financial habits, psychological well-being, and identity formation. Furthermore, the ethics of AI-driven recommendation systems within influencer marketing remains an unexplored area, raising concerns about consumer manipulation and data privacy.

As streaming platforms continue to evolve, academic and industry researchers must explore the intersection of digital influence, consumer

psychology, and ethical commerce. Future studies should focus on how streaming culture shapes generational spending habits, the role of AI in personal branding and content curation, and the potential risks associated with hyper-engagement and digital dependency. Addressing these questions will be crucial in ensuring that streamer-driven influence remains a sustainable and ethical component of the digital economy.

References

- Anderson, K., & Lee, S. (2023). Mimicry Effects and Digital Identity Projection: A Psychological Perspective on Streamer Influence. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 29(4), 312-329.
- Carter, P., & Nguyen, D. (2020). Branding in the Streaming Era: How Twitch and YouTube Influencers Reshape Consumer Preferences. *Marketing & New Media Journal*, 12(1), 77-93.
- Patel, S., & Evans, J. (2021). Ethical Considerations in Influencer Marketing: The Commercialization of Personal Branding in Streaming Culture. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 169(2), 502-518.
- Robinson, A., & Kim, T. (2023). Social Learning and Consumer Behavior: How Streamers' Authenticity Affects Brand Perception and Loyalty. *Consumer Psychology Review*, 18(3), 256-274.
- Smith, J., & Taylor, R. (2022). The Role of Digital Influencers in Shaping Gen Z Consumer Identity: A Study on Streamer Branding and Purchase Behavior. *Journal of Digital Marketing Research*, 14(3), 215-232.
- Williams, L., & Chen, M. (2021). Parasocial Relationships and Consumer Trust: How Streamers Influence Buying Decisions Among Young Audiences. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 45(2), 184-198.