

The Impact of Implicit Marketing Through Digital Skins in Video Games on Brand Awareness and Purchase Intent Among Generation Z: A Case Study of Selected Models

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Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of implicit marketing through digital skins within video games as a modern marketing tool targeting Generation Z, by analyzing the mechanism of its impact on brand awareness and the shaping of purchase intent. The study adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology based on examining real-world collaboration models between global brands and popular gaming platforms, namely Fortnite and Balenciaga, Roblox and Gucci, PUBG Mobile and McLaren, and League of Legends and Louis Vuitton.

The results reveal that the integration between the virtual digital economy and luxury brands generates symbolic value that may exceed the market value of the real product, as seen in the case of the virtual Gucci bag on Roblox, which sold for a higher price than its real-world counterpart. Meanwhile, the Fortnite and Balenciaga case demonstrates how digital skins are utilized as a brand awareness tool to pave the way for activating real-world purchase intent. The study concludes that virtual scarcity and the digital identity of Generation Z constitute primary drivers for the effectiveness of this type of marketing, while providing strategic recommendations directed at marketers and brands wishing to invest in this channel.

Keywords

Implicit marketing; Digital skins; Skins; Video games; Brand awareness; Purchase intent; Generation Z.

ملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة ظاهرة التسويق الضمني عبر المظاهر الرقمية (Skins) داخل الألعاب الإلكترونية بوصفها أداة تسويقية حديثة تستهدف جيل Z، من خلال تحليل آلية تأثيرها على الوعي بالعلامة التجارية وبلورة نية الشراء. تعتمد الدراسة منهجية وصفية تحليلية تركز على دراسة نماذج تعاون واقعية بين علامات تجارية عالمية ومنصات ألعاب رائجة، وهي فورتنايت وبلانسيغا، وروبلكس وغوتشي، وبيجي موبايل وماكلارين، وليغ أوف ليجيندز ولويس فيتون. تكشف النتائج أن الاندماج بين الاقتصاد الرقمي الافتراضي والعلامات التجارية الفاخرة يولد قيمة رمزية قد تتجاوز القيمة السوقية للمنتج الحقيقي، كما يحدث في حالة حقيبة غوتشي الافتراضية على روبلكس التي بيعت بسعر أعلى من نظيرتها الواقعية، بينما تظهر حالة فورتنايت وبلانسيغا كيف تُستخدم المظاهر الرقمية كأداة توعية بالعلامة تمهيداً لتفعيل نية الشراء الواقعية. تلخص الدراسة إلى أن الندرة الافتراضية والهوية الرقمية للجيل Z يشكلان محركين أساسيين لفعالية هذا النوع من التسويق، مع تقديم توصيات استراتيجية موجهة للمسوقين والعلامات التجارية الراغبة في استثمار هذه القناة.

الكلمات المفتاحية

التسويق الضمني؛ المظاهر الرقمية؛ Skins؛ الألعاب الإلكترونية؛ الوعي بالعلامة التجارية؛ نية الشراء؛ الجيل Z.

1. Introduction

The last decade has witnessed a radical transformation in the structure of consumer marketing due to the intersection of technological development and the rise of interactive platforms. This has generated new patterns of communication between brands and their audiences. Video games are no longer reduced to being an isolated entertainment activity; rather, they have become an integrated economic and social space where symbolic interactions, financial transactions, and the construction of individual and collective identities intersect. In this space, the player transcends their traditional role as a passive consumer of content to become an active participant in shaping the experience and completing its meaning through choice, customization, competition, and communication. Under this new reality, games have emerged as one of the most important channels used by brands to reach young demographics, most notably Generation Z, taking advantage of the substantial time they spend inside digital environments and their higher propensity to engage with messages embedded in entertainment activities compared to explicit, direct advertising.

In this context, digital skins have emerged as one of the most prominent implicit marketing tools that have reshaped the interaction between brands and players within video games. Although these skins often do not grant a direct competitive performance advantage, they enable users to reshape the appearance of their avatar or equipment in alignment with their preferred tastes and symbols, allowing them to express themselves and build a distinct presence within the virtual community. Thus, skins have transformed from mere secondary cosmetic items into carriers of symbolic and social meanings related to scarcity, uniqueness, belonging, and status within the game—especially among Generation Z, who view digital identity as a natural extension of their real-world identity. Consequently, investing in these elements has become a strategic gateway for brands to establish a deeper relationship with the player based on participation and experience rather than passive reception.

Many global brands, particularly in the luxury fashion and high-value goods sectors, have recognized the potential inherent in this style of marketing. They have shifted from traditional, explicit advertising to more integrated formats based on collaborating with gaming platforms to launch digital skins carrying their visual identity within immersive virtual worlds. Thus, recent years have witnessed the emergence of leading models such as Balenciaga's collaboration with Fortnite, Gucci with Roblox, and Louis Vuitton with League of Legends, alongside partnerships with luxury car companies such as McLaren and widespread competitive games. Through these steps, a brand's presence is no longer restricted to billboards or promotional materials separate from the experience; instead, it has become an organic part of the game world itself, where the player interacts with the brand, adopts its symbols, and incorporates it into their daily digital appearance in a way that opens the door to reshaping brand awareness and purchase intent among Generation Z in the present and future.

1.1 Problem Statement

The problem of this study revolves around attempting to understand and analyze how implicit marketing via digital skins inside video games reshapes Generation Z's relationship with brands—not only at the level of awareness and recognition, but also at the level of

formulating purchase intent and the potential transition from virtual ownership to real-world purchasing behavior. With games transforming into integrated economic and social spaces, and the growing presence of luxury and high-value brands within these spaces, a fundamental question arises regarding the effectiveness of this marketing pattern in influencing young consumer behavior compared to traditional advertising forms.

The phenomenon also raises deeper questions concerning the psychological and social mechanisms that make a virtual skin—often without direct functional utility—capable of creating a strong symbolic attachment to the brand and establishing a mental image whose effects may extend beyond the boundaries of the game. The importance of this problem increases when observing that most prominent applications of this model occurred in the luxury fashion and high-end goods sectors, raising the issue of the generalizability of results to other sectors, as well as the limits and potential of this marketing model in building long-term future loyalty among Generation Z.

Based on this, the general problem of the study can be formulated into the following questions:

- To what extent does implicit marketing via digital skins in video games contribute to building brand awareness and enhancing purchase intent among Generation Z individuals?
- What is the nature of the psychological and social mechanisms associated with digital identity and virtual scarcity that make owning digital skins inside games an active factor in shaping brand awareness and preference among Generation Z?
- How does interaction with digital skins associated with luxury brands or high-value goods (such as Balenciaga in Fortnite, Gucci in Roblox, McLaren in PUBG, and League of Legends in Louis Vuitton) reflect on Generation Z's transition from virtual symbolic ownership to forming real-world purchase intent or future brand loyalty?
- To what extent can the effectiveness of the digital skin marketing model be generalized beyond the boundaries of the luxury fashion and high-end goods sector to be invested as a sustainable marketing strategy in other consumer sectors targeting Generation Z within interactive environments and e-sports?

1.2 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stems from its address of a relatively recent research intersection between digital marketing science, consumer behavior, and video game economics. This is a field still in the process of theoretical formation despite the rapid expansion of its practical applications. The study gains academic significance by enriching literature related to implicit marketing and in-game advertising, as previous studies indicate that repeated exposure to brands within gaming environments improves recall, recognition, and attitude toward the brand, positively reflecting on purchase intent. It also holds practical significance for marketers and brands wishing to reach Generation Z, whose consumer studies show that a significant percentage prefer interacting with brands via immersive gaming experiences rather than traditional advertisements.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to achieve a set of integrated objectives, most notably uncovering the psychological and marketing mechanisms governing implicit marketing through digital skins, and analyzing the concepts of digital identity and virtual scarcity as primary drivers of consumer behavior within games. The study also aims to unpack four real-world collaboration models between global brands and major gaming platforms in order to extract common patterns and differences across various sectors (luxury fashion, high-cost goods, e-sports), and to formulate practical strategic recommendations directed at marketers and brands wishing to invest in this emerging promotional channel.

1.4 Reasons for Choosing the Topic

The selection of this topic is driven by the rapid growth of the video game industry, which has surpassed 2.7 billion players worldwide—a figure far exceeding the audience of any other traditional media outlet—alongside scientific curiosity regarding a relatively strange economic phenomenon: the market value of virtual assets exceeding the value of their real-world counterparts, as occurred with the virtual Gucci bag sold for over \$4,100 USD, surpassing the price of the real version at \$3,400. In addition to this, there is a scarcity of Arabic-language studies addressing this topic with an analytical depth linking consumer psychology, the characteristics of Generation Z, and the emerging digital economy of games.

1.5 Study Terminology

- **Implicit Marketing:** A promotional technique that embeds a brand or its products within experiential or interactive content (such as games) without explicit and direct advertising, aiming to create a spontaneous and unintended consumer association with the brand (Chaney, I., 2018, p. 20).
- **Digital Skins (Skins):** Virtual, customizable cosmetic items that change the appearance of a character, tool, or vehicle inside a game, acquired through in-game currency or direct purchase without granting a functional competitive advantage during gameplay (Epic, G., 2021, p. 5).
- **Digital Identity:** The symbolic representation of an individual within virtual environments through an avatar and its accessories, which has become a medium for self-expression and social belonging parallel to real-world identity (Papadopoulos, S., 2020, p. 22).
- **Virtual Scarcity:** A marketing strategy based on releasing digital items limited in time or quantity to create urgent demand and high symbolic value, as seen in the release of the Gucci bag for only one hour on Roblox (Law, F., 2021, p. 3).
- **Brand Awareness:** The degree of consumer recognition of a brand and their ability to recall and distinguish it from competing brands as a result of repeated exposure (Ramzy, N. D., 2019, p. 10).
- **Purchase Intention:** The psychological and behavioral readiness of a consumer to acquire a specific product or service in the near future, serving as an important predictive indicator of actual purchasing behavior (Fitriyani, N., 2022, p. 14).

- **Generation Z:** The demographic cohort born approximately between the late 1990s and the mid-2010s, characterized by growing up entirely in a connected digital environment and being the audience most interactive with video games and virtual platforms (McKinsey, C., 2025, p. 2).

1.6 Previous Studies

A review of literature specialized in in-game advertising shows that the study by Ramzy et al. (2019) on FIFA players in Egypt demonstrated that in-game advertising positively affects brand recall (Ramzy, N. D., 2019, p. 41), and that ad placement and timing are among the most important factors determining its effectiveness. Furthermore, the study by Chaney et al. (2018) published in *Computers in Human Behavior* indicated that the size of the advertising element inside a racing game directly affects brand recall and recognition (Chaney, I., 2018, p. 45). On the other hand, a study by Yang et al. (2017) concluded that repeated exposure to brands inside sports games improves brand awareness and attitude toward it, positively reflecting on purchase intent, while emphasizing that prior brand familiarity enhances this effect (Yang, M., 2017, p. 115).

In a more recent study addressing the specificity of virtual currency, Bai et al. (2025), published in the *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, focused on the "Scarcity, Symbolism, and Social Identity" (3S) framework to explain conspicuous consumption behavior regarding virtual gear in metaverse environments, confirming that these three elements constitute fundamental drivers of digital consumer behavior (Bai, K., 2025, p. 8). Meanwhile, Fitriyani's study (2022) at Gadjah Mada University examined the impact of brand trust and perceived value on purchase intent through brand preference in the context of digital gaming products, finding that both variables directly and positively affect brand preference and purchase intent (Fitriyani, N., 2022, p. 50). Similarly, Papadopoulos's study (2020) addressed the impact of virtual reality interactions on brand awareness, confirming that the sense of presence enhances brand recall and recognition processes (Papadopoulos, S., 2020, p. 28).

1.7 Research Gap

Despite the abundance of studies related to traditional in-game advertising in its classic format, such as virtual billboards, qualitative literature addressing collaborations between luxury brands and gaming platforms via digital skins as an integrated implicit marketing tool remains limited and scattered among specialized press articles and isolated case studies. This leaves a lack of a unified theoretical framework linking virtual scarcity and digital identity on the one hand, to brand awareness and purchase intent on the other. Arabic-language studies in particular lack a comprehensive methodological treatment of this topic, a gap this study attempts to bridge by analyzing multi-sector real-world application models (Integration, B., 2021, p. 12).

2. Implicit Marketing Through Digital Skins

2.1 Evolution of Marketing Strategies Within Video Games

Marketing strategies inside video games have transitioned across three distinct phases: starting with Static In-Game Ads represented by fixed billboards within the game

environment, then evolving into dynamic advertising updateable remotely, and finally reaching the phase of interactive implicit marketing represented by digital skins and integrated brand collaborations. Studies show that active player control in choosing a brand-associated item, such as selecting a specific car or skin, enhances brand recall more effectively than simple passive exposure, especially in the case of brands already familiar to the player (Control, A., 2021, p. 60). The collaboration between Fortnite and Balenciaga in September 2021 marked a pivotal turning point in this trajectory, with Balenciaga designing four complete virtual skins alongside custom brand items, weapons, and a virtual destination in the first collaboration of its kind between a global digital game and a luxury fashion brand (Epic, G., 2021, p. 10).

The strategic significance of this evolution lies in the fact that brands no longer seek merely to "appear" inside a game, but rather to build an "integrated world" where the consumer experiences the brand through the logic of play itself. This was described by the head of partnerships at Epic Games as a redefining of marketing awareness through "reaching a young, enthusiastic, and digitally native audience" that is difficult to reach via traditional channels. Furthermore, Riot Games contributed through its collaboration with Louis Vuitton to deepening this trajectory by integrating champion digital skins within the game as part of a broader visual identity connecting the competitive gaming world with the luxury fashion world (Win, B., 2021, p. 5).

2.2 The Concept of Digital Identity and Virtual Scarcity

Digital identity constitutes one of the deepest social transformations brought about by video games, where the personal avatar has become a symbolic medium of self-expression no less important than real-world attire, particularly for Generation Z who spend extensive time within these environments. Roblox reported that its daily active users spend an average of 156 minutes (about 2.6 hours) on the platform (Roblox, I., 2021, p. 12). Trend consultancy WGSN noted that there is a "tremendous opportunity for brands to reach players seeking to express their personality through their virtual avatars," and that virtual access to beloved brands has become an essential element in achieving this individual distinction (Fashion, D., 2021, p. 8).

As for virtual scarcity, it represents the second psychological lever for this marketing model, clearly manifested in the incident of the Gucci "Dionysus" bag launched on the Roblox platform during the Gucci Garden event for only one hour on May 17, 2021, at an original price not exceeding 475 Robux (around \$5.50). Due to this strict temporal scarcity, speculators rushed to resell it in the secondary market, with some transactions reaching 350,000 Robux—equivalent to \$4,115 USD—thus surpassing the price of the real-world version of the bag at \$3,400. The theoretical importance of this incident lies in proving that digitally manufactured scarcity is capable of generating economic value that transcends the logic of cost and raw material governing the real product, replacing it with the logic of social symbolism and uniqueness within the virtual community (Law, F., 2021, p. 4).

3. Brand Awareness and Purchase Intent Among Generation Z

3.1 Mechanisms of Building Brand Awareness in Interactive Environments

The mechanisms of building brand awareness within interactive gaming environments differ from traditional advertising in that they rely on voluntary repetition and active engagement rather than forced passive exposure. A study by Yang et al. showed that repeated gameplay combined with brand exposure significantly improves recall, recognition, and positive attitudes toward the brand (Yang, M., 2017, p. 118), while a study by Herven and Bowles proved that the social context of play (individual or group) affects the level of recall for in-game integrated ads (Setting, S., 2021, p. 6). In this framework, interaction with the "Gucci Garden" event on Roblox represents a precise model of this mechanism, as it was not limited to viewing the logo, but extended to "experiencing" the brand through virtual rooms designed along the lines of actual Gucci campaigns, creating a deeper cognitive and emotional connection than mere fleeting vision (Gucci, S., 2021, p. 2).

In addition, the extensive media coverage surrounding these collaborations generated multiplied awareness exceeding the boundaries of the original player base. The virtual Gucci bag incident dominated headlines in global media specialized in fashion and technology alike, meaning that implicit marketing via skins possesses a "multi-layered" impact encompassing the direct player and the non-player audience receiving subsequent news coverage (Value, R., 2021, p. 9).

3.2 Drivers of Purchase Intention: From Virtual Ownership to Real-World Purchase

The transition from virtual ownership to real-world purchase intent is shaped through several overlapping drivers. Prominently, Yang et al. confirmed that repeated exposure to a brand in a positive entertainment context raises purchase intent levels directly and with statistical measurement (Yang, M., 2017, p. 122). Furthermore, Fitriyani's study demonstrated that brand trust and the perceived value of the digital product positively affect purchase intent, even in the absence of a direct effect from brand preference alone (Fitriyani, N., 2022, p. 55). This driver is practically manifested in the design of the Fortnite and Balenciaga collaboration, which included a direct real-world element represented by a limited edition of caps, t-shirts, and hoodies carrying the Balenciaga x Fortnite identity for sale in physical Balenciaga stores and on its official website, coinciding with the launch of the virtual skins. This represents a direct marketing bridge connecting the digital experience to real purchasing behavior (Epic, G., 2021, p. 11).

Additionally, the element of scarcity acts as a direct psychological driver for purchase intent via what is known as the "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO). The limited availability of digital items prompts expedited purchasing decisions in anticipation of losing the opportunity—a mechanism proven effective in driving resale at multiplied prices, as in the case of Gucci on Roblox. The "Scarcity, Symbolism, and Social Identity" (3S) framework adds a deeper explanatory dimension, illustrating that virtual gear becomes a tool of conspicuous consumption reflecting social status within the virtual community. This symbolic drive often extends its effect to real-world purchasing behavior as a natural continuation of social identity construction (Bai, K., 2025, p. 14).

4. Study of Real-World Models for Marketing via Skins

4.1 The Luxury Fashion Sector and Reflections of Digital Value

The luxury fashion sector represents the most prominent pioneer in investing digital skins as a marketing tool, given its natural capacity to convert symbolism and uniqueness into tangible economic value inside virtual environments, exactly as it does in the real market.

4.1.1 Impact of Virtual Purchase on Real Sales: Fortnite x Balenciaga Collaboration

In September 2021, Balenciaga became the first luxury fashion brand to officially collaborate with the Fortnite game, which exceeds 400 million global players. The brand's artistic director, Demna Gvasalia, designed four complete virtual skins, items, weapons, and a dedicated virtual destination featuring a virtual Balenciaga store. The skins were priced at 1,000 V-Bucks—equivalent to only about \$8 USD—with the explicit goal of maintaining accessibility for all player segments (Fashion, D., 2021, p. 12). The artistic director explained that this collaboration was not an isolated innovation, but an extension of a previous experiment launched by Balenciaga via its proprietary game "Afterworld" using the Unreal Engine, reflecting an integrated and sustainable brand strategy for presence in the metaverse rather than a fleeting marketing campaign (Integration, B., 2021, p. 15).

More importantly from a marketing perspective, this collaboration included a direct real-world dimension linking virtual purchase to real sales. A limited series of caps, t-shirts, and hoodies bearing the Balenciaga x Fortnite identity was launched for physical sale in brand stores and on its official website in parallel with the launch of the digital skins, alongside actual 3D billboards displayed in major cities like New York and Tokyo to attract audiences not originally interested in games. However, this collaboration witnessed a striking turning point in November 2022 when Epic Games ceased re-releasing Balenciaga skins in the game store following a reputational crisis faced by the brand, elevating the market value of accounts owning these rare skins to hundreds and thousands of dollars in the secondary market—a further embodiment of the logic of virtual scarcity even in the absence of official product support (News, G., 2022, p. 3).

4.1.2 Digital Scarcity and Virtual Value Outperforming Reality: Roblox x Gucci Garden Collaboration

In May 2021, Gucci, in cooperation with the Roblox platform, launched the two-week "Gucci Garden Experience," featuring multi-themed virtual rooms inspired by actual Gucci campaigns that allowed players to experience and purchase exclusive digital items for their avatars. The most prominent of these items was the "Dionysus Bag with Bee," released for sale at an original nominal price of 475 Robux (around \$5.50) for just one hour on May 17, and then for another hour the following day, making it one of the rarest items available in the platform's history up to that time (Platform, G., 2021, p. 5).

This strict temporal scarcity drove speculators to resell the bag within the Roblox secondary market, where some asking prices reached 1 million Robux (around \$10,000), while the most documented transaction settled at 350,000 Robux—equivalent to \$4,115 USD—surpassing the price of the real-world version of the bag itself at \$3,400. The profound significance of this incident, as observed by *The Fashion Law*, lies in the fact that "the market value of the virtual version exceeded the actual version," raising fundamental questions about the future of the digital fashion industry, which some projections estimated would reach \$400

billion by 2025. Nevertheless, the bag's value dropped sharply after the event ended to less than \$800, revealing that this inflation in value was closely linked to the fleeting moment of scarcity rather than a stable intrinsic value of the digital asset—an important observation for understanding the limits of sustainability for this model (Law, F., 2021, p. 7).

The following table compares the two models from the angle of scarcity mechanism and its reflection on market value: (Platform, G., 2021, p. 9).

Criterion	Fortnite x Balenciaga	Roblox x Gucci
Launch Date	September 2021	May 2021
Original Price of Digital Item	Around \$8 (1,000 V-Bucks)	Around \$5.50 (475 Robux)
Availability Duration	One week	One hour on each sales day
Secondary Market Value	Thousands of dollars after official support ceased	Up to \$4,115 at peak
Real-World Link	Parallel physical apparel release	No direct physical extension

4.2 High-Cost Goods Sector and Building Future Loyalty

4.2.1 Randomized Pricing Strategies (Lucky Spin): PUBG Mobile x McLaren Collaboration

PUBG Mobile's collaboration with luxury car manufacturer McLaren, which launched for the first time in June 2021 and repeated in subsequent editions until late 2024 and early 2025, represents a fundamentally different model from the fashion sector. It utilized a "Lucky Draw" mechanism instead of direct sales (Tencent, K., 2021, p. 2). In the first edition, the McLaren 570S Coupé was offered in six different finishes as the first vehicle presented via the game's lucky draw system, alongside a virtual McLaren showroom inside the classic Erangel map, allowing players to use the car as a distinct air-drop jump vehicle within matches. In the latest edition between November 2024 and January 2025, items varied between McLaren 570S models in different colors and finishes and the McLaren P1, alongside items inspired by the Formula 1 team itself, with acquisition tied to collecting "Lucky Medal Cards" via a reward track requiring free or UC-paid acceleration.

The "lucky wheel" or randomized pricing mechanism reveals a marketing strategy deeper than direct purchase, as it bets on the principle of "gamified randomness" to drive the player to invest more time and money searching for the visually rarest item. This mechanism has proven its marketing viability through the continuous repetition of this collaboration for over three consecutive years between 2021 and 2025 (McLaren, F., 2021, p. 5). From the perspective of building future loyalty, linking an ultra-luxury car brand like McLaren—whose actual models cost hundreds of thousands of dollars—to virtual vehicles that players can acquire at a nominal cost inside the game creates early and repeated exposure to the brand's identity among a young demographic that does not necessarily represent its current customer base, but represents its potential long-term customer base. This aligns with study conclusions linking prior brand familiarity to improved brand awareness and subsequent purchase intent (Tencent, K., 2021, p. 8).

4.3 E-Sports as an Advertising Platform for Generation Z

4.3.1 Integrating Luxury Brands in Competitive Events: League of Legends x Louis Vuitton Collaboration

Riot Games announced an unprecedented partnership with the House of Louis Vuitton in September 2019 to design a bespoke luxury travel trunk for the Summoner's Cup, the highest award in the League of Legends World Championship, alongside designing champion digital skins and a limited clothing line (Riot, G., 2019, p. 6). Designing the trunk took over 900 hours of work involving more than 25 artisans and engineers, blending Louis Vuitton's 160-year traditional craftsmanship with advanced technical elements such as integrated screens on its five sides, LED lighting, a smoke mechanism, and an automated system to open and close panels and raise the cup. Louis Vuitton CEO Michael Burke stated that this trunk represents "the largest trophy case designed by the house in its 163-year history," a comparison reflecting the strategic seriousness the house placed on this entry into the world of e-sports (Whitewall, M., 2019, p. 14).

The collaboration extended to a deeper creative dimension when the artistic director of women's collections at Louis Vuitton, Nicolas Ghesquière, designed "Prestige Skins" for specific game champions such as Qiyana and Senna, parallel to a full real-world fashion collection bearing the Louis Vuitton monogram pattern inspired by the game world, applied to iconic bags like Neverfull and Speedy, and athletic sneakers. The distinguishing marketing value of this model lies in selecting e-sports as an advertising platform, as the League of Legends World Championship provides a massive, highly engaged global audience from Generation Z following the competitive event with enthusiasm comparable to traditional football or basketball fans. This makes the appearance of the champions' digital skins alongside the physical cup on the global stage in Paris act as a dual implicit announcement reaching millions simultaneously inside and outside the game via media coverage (Modaes, G., 2019, p. 2).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Research Conclusions (Evaluating Impact on Awareness and Purchase Intent)

This study concludes that implicit marketing through digital skins constitutes an effective and growing channel for building brand awareness and stimulating purchase intent among Generation Z, though the degree and nature of this impact vary according to the sector and the adopted marketing mechanism. For the luxury fashion sector, the Fortnite-Balenciaga and Roblox-Gucci models showed that virtual scarcity is capable of generating symbolic value surpassing the real-world value of the product, with a clear superiority for the Balenciaga collaboration in building a direct bridge between virtual purchase and real purchase via the release of parallel physical goods. Meanwhile, the Gucci collaboration remained confined to a symbolic and awareness-raising effect without a direct, measurable extension to real sales.

In the high-cost goods sector represented by the PUBG Mobile-McLaren collaboration, the randomized pricing mechanism proved effective in building future loyalty and repeated, sustainable brand exposure over multiple years—an effect slower but deeper in terms of building long-term brand familiarity. In the realm of e-sports, the League of Legends-Louis

Vuitton collaboration illustrated how digital skins can function as a tool for enhancing symbolic status for a luxury brand by tying it to the finest moments of e-sports competition, rather than serving as an immediate, direct purchase-stimulus tool (Bai, K., 2025, p. 18).

In general, it is evident that brand awareness is achieved rapidly and with high intensity through this marketing model thanks to the amplified media coverage accompanying these collaborations, whereas translating this awareness into actual purchase intent remains contingent upon the presence of a tangible extension linking the virtual world to the real world, whether through parallel physical products as in the case of Balenciaga, or through the accumulation of long-term familiarity as in the case of McLaren (McLaren, F., 2021, p. 15).

5.2 Strategic Recommendations for Marketers and Brands

- Design a carefully calculated temporal or numerical scarcity mechanism, avoiding excessive, rigid scarcity that restricts benefit to a small group of speculators rather than the broader target audience.
- Connect the digital product to a direct real-world extension (parallel physical goods or exclusive discounts) to convert in-game generated awareness into measurable purchase intent, following the Balenciaga model.
- Select the gaming platform to match the targeted age bracket and interests within Generation Z, keeping in mind that Roblox user demographics differ from those of Fortnite or competitive e-sports.
- Maintain the continuity of the relationship through repeated and renewed collaborations rather than a single fleeting campaign, as McLaren did with PUBG Mobile over multiple years to build cumulative familiarity.
- Continuously monitor the campaign's digital reputation post-launch, as an unexpected reputational crisis can prompt the gaming platform to entirely pull collaborative content, as happened with Balenciaga skins in Fortnite (News, G., 2022, p. 6).

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