Gaming Signals: How to win Gen Z now

By 2030, Gen Z will account for nearly $12.6 trillion in spending. Gaming brands that don't deliver on customization, community, and microtransactions won't see their share of it.

See the full story in Basis Signals: Gen Z's New Rules for Growth >

Four Signals disrupting Gaming in 2026 and beyond

1. Identity through avatars

The signal:
84% of Gen Z say their real-world fashion is influenced by how they dress their avatars across games, social platforms, and digital spaces. Games are now one of the first places Gen Z experiment with identity, with digital looks setting the tone for offline trends.

Why it matters:
Alongside social media, gaming is now a core space for identity. Fashion leads the charge, but it's part of a wider ecosystem of self-expression spanning avatar design, world-building, and community. If you're not enabling meaningful customization, you'll miss not just new revenue streams but the crossover into real-world culture and commerce.

How to explore this further:
Explore how Gen Z shape identity across platforms using **segmentation, AI Personas,** and in-game testing. Identify which customization features, symbols, or aesthetics build the strongest emotional connection and translate into real-world affinity.

2. Microtransactions as the norm

The signal:
Almost half of Gen Z play games every day, and 41% make in-app purchases while doing so. But it's not just about buying skins or passes. It's about how they think about value. Microtransactions have rewired Gen Z's sense of spending, normalizing frequent, low-stakes payments that offer instant satisfaction.

Why it matters:
Gen Z players expect constant refresh and reward, with every microtransaction offering a hit of progress or recognition. The risk for gaming brands isn't over-monetization, it's underestimating what each purchase represents emotionally. If you don't tune mechanics to those motivations, you'll lose both spend and engagement.

How to explore this further:
Use **behavioral segmentation** and **conjoint testing** to map how Gen Z balance frequency and spend across categories, not just within games. Then test which reward structures or "mini-purchase" mechanics best sustain engagement without driving fatigue.

3. Creator-led discovery

The signal:
Almost half of Gen Z go to TikTok, YouTube, or Twitch over Google to discover games and content. They're not just watching either, with nearly one in three now calling themselves content creators.

Why it matters:
User generated content now shapes how titles gain visibility, build community, and sustain engagement. If your brand or release isn't being shared, reviewed, or talked about, it's missing from the conversation.

How to explore this further:
Use **social listening** and **brand tracking analytics** to see where and how your release surfaces organically. Then test which formats and collaborations most effectively engage creators, amplify reach, and drive purchase intent.

4. AI as co-pilot

The signal:
6 in 10 Gen Z now use AI tools like ChatGPT for search, relying on it for tips, coaching, and personalized recommendations.

Why it matters:
AI is becoming an important layer in discovery and gameplay, shaping what players learn, try, and buy. Alongside streamers, forums, and peers, it now acts as a tutor, curator, and gatekeeper for Gen Z players. If your content isn't optimized for AI pathways, you risk being harder to find and easier to forget.

How to explore this further:
Test how your brand and titles appear in AI search and chat tools. If you're not visible, you're already losing players. Then use **U&A studies** to explore how in-game AI features, such as coaching, recommendations, or adaptive challenges, can strengthen engagement and long-term loyalty.

BASIS Signals

Our data systems blend cultural signals, behavioral analytics, and brand tracking, so you can see not just what's trending, but what's commercially viable in gaming.

Want to hear more? Get in touch at **Basisglobal.co/contact**

Signals sources in order of appearance

1. By 2030, Gen Z will account for nearly $12.6 trillion in global spending
Gen Z Will Be the Highest Spending Generation in History. Here's What to Know

2. 84% of Gen Z say their real-world fashion is influenced by how they dress their avatars
Virtual to Reality: 84% Say Their Avatar Style Impacts Their IRL Looks

3. Almost half of Gen Z play games every day, and 41% make in-app purchases while doing so
GenZ & Gaming - Who's Playing What?

4. Almost half of Gen Z now go to TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube instead of Google
GenZ Dumping Google For TikTok, Instagram As Social Search Wins

5. 30% calling themselves 'creators' and a quarter 'influencers'
Hubspot Consumer Trends Report

6. 6 in 10 of Gen Z prefer searching with AI tools like ChatGPT and Gemini over traditional search engines
The rise of the personal AI advisers