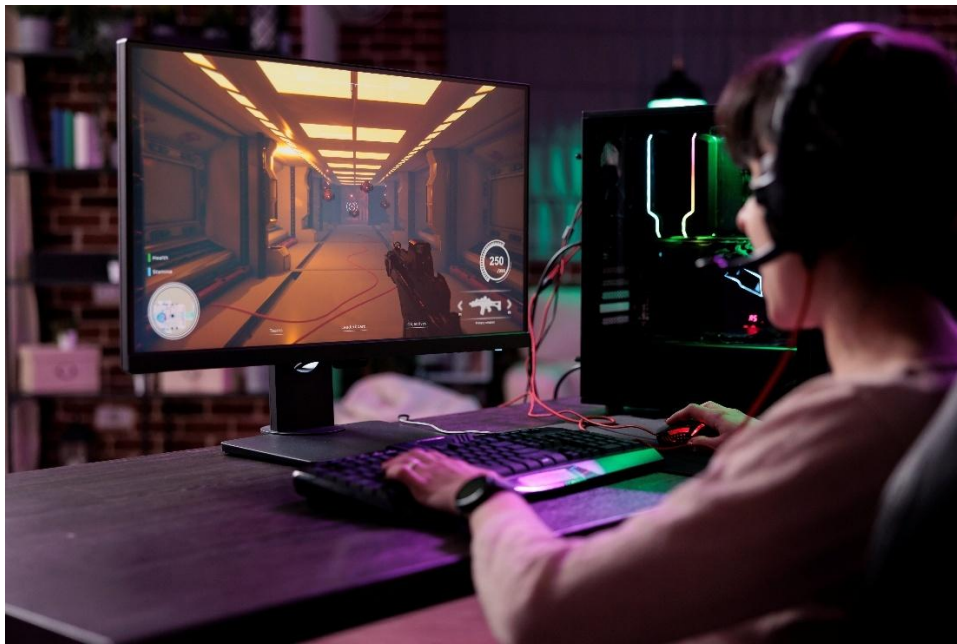


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Beyond The Ban: Why Gaming Remains India's Hottest Marketing Playground | Report

India's gaming boom is turning players into active brand storytellers, with massive advertising potential beyond real-money gaming.



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Article Content:

Despite regulatory shocks and the ban on real-money gaming (RMG), India's gaming industry is booming, turning a compliance setback into a springboard for innovation.

According to Bitkraft and Redseer (2025), India's gaming market is projected to triple to USD 7.8 billion by FY2030, while WinZO and IEIC (2025) estimate it will grow from USD 3.7 billion in 2024 to USD 9.1 billion by 2029.

If RMG slowed one stream, India's digital imagination has already opened many others, proving the sector's resilience, adaptability, and marketing potential.

Game On: India's Shift To Smart Engagement

The post-ban era has reshaped India's gaming landscape. With real-money gaming restricted, advertisers and publishers are focusing on casual, social, and skill-based games, where creativity and community drive engagement.

According to the EY–FICCI 2025 report, India now has 488 million gamers, many from Tier 2–4 cities—an untapped goldmine for regional campaigns and vernacular storytelling.

Brands are tapping this shift through in-game narratives, co-branded esports tournaments, and interactive reward systems, creating experiences that go beyond product promotion to foster emotional connections and loyal communities.

Sameer Jain, Managing Director, Primus Partners, points out that “The industry is moving beyond RMG to experience- and narrative-driven engagement. Three key shifts define this change: story-driven in-game integrations, creator-powered formats like interactive livestreams and playable ads, and smarter measurement focused on engagement depth and community retention.”

In this evolving ecosystem, brands are no longer gambling for attention; they’re earning it. The focus has moved from quick wins to sustainable, community-driven engagement, where players aren’t customers alone but active participants in storytelling and brand culture.

Why Marketers Won’t Quit The Game

Even without real-money gaming, India’s gaming sector presents massive advertising potential. According to Dentsu 2025, gaming advertising is estimated at Rs 33,243 crore, underscoring that brands see opportunity beyond betting.

“From a commercial standpoint, brands were never dependent on RMG mechanics,” says Jain. “Gaming today delivers over 1.5x higher engagement and ad recall than traditional digital banners. New monetisation levers, in-app purchases, ad-supported free-to-play, subscriptions, esports sponsorships, IP licensing, and creator commerce — are scaling rapidly, drawing advertiser and investor confidence.”

The motivations are clear. In the attention economy, gamers spend longer hours in immersive environments, offering brands a chance to engage meaningfully.

With 70 per cent of Indian gamers under 35, marketers can connect directly with Gen Z audiences — a demographic notoriously hard to reach through traditional media. Moreover, interactive and playable ad formats consistently deliver better ROI compared to static campaigns, making gaming a highly efficient marketing channel.

As one industry sentiment puts it, ‘The RMG ban wasn’t a game over, it was a restart for creativity.’ For brands, the new era of gaming is less about risk and more about attention, engagement, and inventive storytelling.

Esports & Interactive Media: The New Brand Battlegrounds

Esports & interactive media are India’s hottest marketing arenas. With revenue projected at USD 120–130 million by FY2030, brands are moving beyond traditional ads—sponsoring leagues, in-game content, and top streamers. The sector already supports 2 million jobs, creating a robust ecosystem.

From auto brands and energy drinks to fintech startups, companies are leveraging immersive gaming experiences to engage India's youth, turning tournaments into dynamic marketing stages.

Rohit N Jagasia, Founder of Revenant Esports, emphasises the importance of non-intrusive, immersive advertising in games. "Esports is highly engaging, and any sudden interruption jars the experience. The best ads are those that feel like part of the gameplay — through branded challenges, smart in-game product placement, and interactive rewards — making brands a natural extension of the community ecosystem."

For marketers, esports and interactive media are not just platforms; they are engagement powerhouses, where community, competition, and creativity converge to deliver attention, loyalty, and measurable ROI.

Regional & Cultural Expansion: Gaming Goes Bharat

India's gaming boom is no longer confined to metros. Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities are driving 70 per cent of user growth, making regional audiences critical for marketers. The EY report highlights that regional language content is now a key differentiator, enabling brands to connect authentically with diverse communities.

For advertisers, this translates into vernacular influencer campaigns, hyperlocal tournaments, and in-game regional storytelling, turning mobile games into cultural touchpoints. Gaming has become more than entertainment; it's a space where pop culture meets regional identity, offering brands a unique opportunity to engage audiences in their own language and context.

Vatsal Bhardwaj, Founder, Jabali AI, observes, "The next 100 million gamers are coming from Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, changing engagement dynamics. Local language, cultural resonance, and relatable influencer ecosystems matter far more than polished campaigns. Brands that embrace vernacular storytelling, collaborate with regional creators, and activate micro-communities see far higher engagement, as players respond to narratives in their own language and context."

Where Brands Go From Here

India's gaming world is evolving, and so is the way brands connect with players. The future isn't just about ads, it's about playable experiences, gamified loyalty programs, and AR/VR campaigns that invite players to participate, not just watch. Cultural mashups, like Bollywood x esports tie-ins or music-gaming fusion events, are turning games into social and cultural moments.

For marketers, the focus is clear: create moments that players remember, share, and talk about. In this space, the game isn't just a pastime, it's a place where brands, culture, and communities meet, making every interaction feel personal, fun, and unforgettable.