



Marketing in EdTech and Online Learning Platforms

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Abstract – This chapter examines the ethical, behavioural, and strategic dimensions of marketing in EdTech and online learning platforms. Drawing on peer-reviewed literature, it addresses two central themes: (1) the ethical imperatives of data privacy, consumer trust, and responsible advertising unique to the EdTech sector; and (2) the social-native marketing behaviours of Gen Z and Generation Alpha — the primary consumers of contemporary digital education. The chapter introduces two original frameworks: the CREST Ethical Marketing Model, grounded in Privacy-by-Design principles and empirical trust research, and the SCROLL Framework for social-first EdTech marketing strategy. Findings confirm that transparency in data handling is a significant predictor of student trust; that influencer credibility outperforms follower count in driving enrolment decisions; and that effective EdTech marketing for Generation Alpha requires simultaneous engagement of both the child learner and the Millennial parent gatekeeper. The chapter concludes with recommendations for two additional topics — AI personalisation marketing and Global South EdTech strategy — each representing significant gaps in the current literature.

Keywords - EdTech marketing, data privacy, consumer trust, Gen Z, Generation Alpha, influencer marketing, ethical marketing, online learning, CREST Model, SCROLL Framework

I. INTRODUCTION

Educational technology (EdTech) has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global digital economy, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the structural shifts it triggered in how learning is delivered, accessed, and consumed. Unlike entertainment or e-commerce platforms, EdTech companies operate at the intersection of commerce, learning science, child development, and public interest — a combination that renders marketing practice in this space both uniquely consequential and underexamined.

Marketing in EdTech must simultaneously address multiple stakeholder audiences — students, parents, institutions, and regulators — while navigating a complex global regulatory landscape and an increasingly privacy-conscious consumer base. The primary consumers of EdTech products — Gen Z and Generation Alpha — are not only the most digitally sophisticated cohorts in history but also the most sceptical of overt advertising and most responsive to peer-authenticated social proof.

This chapter is organised around two core themes. The first — ethical marketing foundations — examines data privacy governance, the multi-dimensional nature of consumer trust in EdTech, and the principles of responsible advertising to student audiences. The second — Gen Z and Alpha consumer behaviour — analyses how next-generation learners discover, evaluate, and commit to educational platforms, with particular attention to social media dynamics, influencer credibility, and the parent-gatekeeper relationship that characterises marketing to younger age groups.

Throughout, original frameworks are proposed that operationalise research findings into actionable marketing

strategy. All empirical claims are grounded in peer-reviewed literature sourced from academic databases.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Data Privacy in EdTech: Regulatory Context and Strategic Implications

Data privacy in educational technology is governed by a complex and evolving global regulatory framework. In the United States, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) governs data collection from users under 13, while the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects student educational records. In the European Union, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) applies broadly, with specific provisions affecting EdTech platforms that process children's data. India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDP, 2023), Singapore's Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA), and Brazil's Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados (LGPD) further expand the jurisdictional complexity for globally operating EdTech companies.

Alier et al. (2021) conducted a landmark analysis demonstrating that educational software increasingly stores and handles student data outside institutional control via third-party cloud providers. The authors argue that current legal frameworks are insufficient to protect student personal information and call for technical, cultural, legal, and organisational responses, establishing the foundation that privacy protection must be embedded into EdTech design and marketing from the outset.

Chen et al. (2024), in a quantitative survey of 420 college students, found that 71% agreed increased transparency in data handling would enhance their trust in online learning platforms. Regression analysis confirmed significant positive relationships between transparency, data control, digital literacy, and user satisfaction, providing direct



empirical support for treating privacy transparency as both a trust-building and marketing tool.

2. Consumer Trust in Online Learning

Trust in EdTech operates across three distinct but interconnected dimensions: institutional trust in the company, product trust in learning outcomes, and relational trust in the human elements — tutors, support staff, and community members. Research confirms that all three dimensions must be addressed for sustainable user acquisition and retention.

Jiang et al. (2022), employing a Privacy Calculus Theory lens with 203 undergraduates, found that risk perception significantly and negatively affects willingness to use online learning platforms, while trust perception exerts a strong positive effect. Critically, improving trust was shown to reduce perceived risk — establishing a trust-risk mediating relationship that EdTech marketers must actively manage. Trust is thus not merely an emotional outcome but a functional driver of platform adoption.

Majjate et al. (2024), studying 602 students across 11 regions, found that platform transparency is a significant factor in building student trust, while also identifying that an excess of transparency can paradoxically cause disengagement. This calibration challenge is further complicated by the finding that rising cybersecurity literacy among users increases critical scrutiny of platform practices, making transparent trust communication increasingly important as digital literacy improves.

3. Responsible Advertising and Ethical Digital Marketing

Responsible advertising in EdTech requires honest representation of outcomes, appropriate targeting practices, and sensitivity to the emotional vulnerability of its primary audiences — children, students under academic pressure, and anxious parents. Radesky et al. (2020), in an authoritative American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement, established that children are uniquely vulnerable to advertising persuasion due to immature critical thinking and impulse inhibition. Even school-aged children who can recognise advertising often cannot resist it when embedded within trusted social networks or delivered by influencers.

Joshi (2025) synthesised academic and industry literature to define ethical digital marketing as the integration of transparency, honesty, data integrity, inclusivity, and fair AI use into online commercial practice. Key findings confirm that consent-based personalisation, accurate claims, and inclusive communication enhance engagement and differentiate brands. Notably, younger, socially-aware audiences — precisely the Gen Z and Alpha consumers that EdTech targets — prioritise brands that embed ethics into AI-driven personalisation and digital interactions.

4. Generation Z and Generation Alpha as Educational Consumers

Gen Z (born 1997–2012) and Generation Alpha (born 2013 onwards) represent fundamentally distinct educational consumers compared to preceding cohorts. They are platform natives, having grown up inside specific social media architectures that shape how they discover, evaluate, and commit to products — including educational platforms.

Höfrová et al. (2024), in a PRISMA-compliant systematic review of 83 studies, identified four key educational themes for Generation Alpha: the changed role of teachers, new pedagogical approaches, novel teaching tools, and blended and online learning. Significantly, the review found that while 'Generation Alpha' is widely used in educational discourse, there remains limited empirical evidence of specifically distinct generational differences, and a major validated concern is that technology use by this cohort has decreased opportunities for social-emotional development, with implications for how EdTech is marketed and positioned.

Šramová et al. (2023) found that Generation Alpha's digital communication is characterised by intentionality, selectivity, and involvement — contradicting assumptions of passive consumption. Their digital applications satisfy four core needs: entertainment, information, education, and games. This finding carries direct implications for EdTech marketing strategy: Generation Alpha are active, selective media consumers who must be engaged on their terms.

5. Social Media Marketing and eWOM in EdTech Enrolment

Social media has become the primary discovery and decision-making channel for EdTech among younger consumers. Kumar et al. (2025), in a quantitative study of 321 students, found a statistically significant positive relationship between strategic social media marketing and student enrolment in EdTech companies. Critically, two factors emerged as dominant drivers: relevant content quality and peer influence, not paid advertising reach. This finding challenges a common assumption in digital marketing that impression volume is the key variable; in EdTech, content relevance and peer recommendation mechanisms carry greater evidential weight.

Ngo et al. (2024), studying 280 Gen Z consumers, found that information quality exerts the strongest positive influence on both information usefulness and information adoption — two mechanisms that mediate the relationship between electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) characteristics and purchase intention. For EdTech, this means that creator-generated content and peer reviews must be high-quality and credible rather than merely high-volume.

Dewantoro et al. (2025) confirmed that social media, particularly influencer content and visual trends on



Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, plays a dominant role in shaping Gen Z consumption preferences. Impulsive purchasing behaviour is driven by fear of missing out (FOMO), peer pressure in digital communities, and e-commerce promotions — dynamics that EdTech marketers can harness through community visibility features and social sharing mechanics.

6. Influencer Marketing and the Edu-Creator Economy

Research on Gen Z purchasing decisions consistently identifies influencer credibility, not reach, as the primary determinant of persuasion effectiveness. Erislan (2026), using structural equation modelling with 300 Gen Z respondents, found that credibility, content alignment, and interaction intensity all significantly affect purchasing decisions, with credibility emerging as the most influential factor. Trustworthiness and expertise are central to digital persuasion. The implication for EdTech is clear: subject-matter expert micro-creators with high credibility outperform high-reach generalist influencers in driving enrolment.

Ridwan et al. (2025), in a PRISMA-guided systematic review, identify five key drivers of Gen Z online purchase decisions: social proof, personalised marketing, sustainability, emotional engagement, and gamification. Gen Z values authenticity, social responsibility, and personalised experiences, prioritising brands aligned with their values. For EdTech, this means that platform values — affordability, accessibility, and the social impact of learning — must be surfaced in creator and social content, not just course features.

7. The Parent Gatekeeper Dynamic for Generation Alpha

For Generation Alpha (under 14), EdTech marketing must navigate a dual-audience challenge: the child who discovers and desires the product, and the Millennial parent who controls the purchase decision. N.R. et al. (2025), in a survey of 290 parents of children aged 6–12, found that gamification, virtual reality, and collaborative learning significantly enhance engagement for Generation Alpha, while parental digital literacy and involvement greatly improve the quality of educational app selection. Parents play a vital role in shaping Generation Alpha's digital learning by choosing high-quality content, fostering digital literacy, managing screen time, and actively engaging with educational technologies.

8. Algorithmic Targeting and Behavioural Economics

EdTech marketers operating on algorithmic platforms must navigate an ethical tension between efficient audience targeting and the potential amplification of academic anxiety and cognitive bias. Ren (2025) identifies three algorithmic mechanisms that manipulate Gen Z purchasing decisions: the anchoring effect, driven by inflated reference prices; the herding effect, produced by social proof cascades driven by TikTok's engagement algorithm;

and the endowment effect, generated by virtual ownership and limited-time urgency mechanics. Responsible EdTech marketers must actively avoid exploiting these cognitive vulnerabilities in campaign design.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

1. Privacy-by-Design (PbD) in EdTech Marketing

Privacy-by-Design (PbD), developed by Ann Cavoukian, proposes embedding privacy into system architecture rather than retrofitting it as a compliance measure. Adapted for EdTech marketing, the seven foundational principles provide both product design and communications guidance. The framework's application to marketing represents an original contribution: treating privacy not merely as a legal safeguard but as a brand asset and strategic differentiator.

Table 1. Privacy-by-Design Framework Applied to EdTech Marketing

PbD Principle	Marketing Application	EdTech Example	Trust Impact
Proactive, not reactive	Communicate data practices before users ask	Privacy dashboard surfaced at sign-up	High
Privacy as default	Opt-in rather than opt-out for data sharing	Analytics cookies off by default	Very High
Embedded privacy	Privacy messaging in all marketing collateral	'Your data, your learning' brand pillar	Medium
Full functionality	Do not trade features for data consent	Full feature set without surveillance consent	High
End-to-end security	Publicise encryption and security certifications	ISO 27001 / SOC 2 badge in advertising	Medium
Visibility & transparency	Plain-language privacy policies	One-page privacy summary for parents	Very High
User-centric	Data portability and deletion on demand	'Download your data' feature marketed prominently	High

2. The Three-Dimensional EdTech Trust Model

Drawing on Chen et al. (2024), Jiang et al. (2022), and Majjate et al. (2024), a three-dimensional trust model is proposed for EdTech, encompassing institutional, product, and relational trust. Each dimension requires distinct marketing interventions and is supported by specific empirical evidence.



Table 2. The Three-Dimensional EdTech Trust Model

Institutional Trust	Legal compliance visibility · Executive accountability · Third-party security audits · Clear refund policies (Basis: Chen et al., 2024 — transparency directly predicts trust)
Product Trust	Outcome guarantees · Independent efficacy research · Authentic testimonials · Free trials without dark patterns (Basis: Jiang et al., 2022 — benefit perception drives adoption)
Relational Trust	Human touchpoints in onboarding · Tutor credentialing transparency · Responsive support service level agreements · Community safety policies (Basis: Majjate et al., 2024 — interaction quality affects engagement)

3. The Social-First EdTech Purchase Journey

Based on Kumar et al. (2025), Ngo et al. (2024), and Dewantoro et al. (2025), a six-stage social-first purchase journey is proposed that describes how Gen Z consumers move from discovery to enrolment via social media channels.

Table 3. The Social-First EdTech Purchase Journey

Stage 1 — Serendipitous Discovery	Algorithm surfaces EdTech content based on academic content consumption or peer activity, not active search. Platform: TikTok/Instagram algorithmic recommendation.
Stage 2 — eWOM Validation	User checks comments, seeks peer reviews, searches '[Platform] review' on YouTube, Reddit, and TikTok. Basis: Ngo et al. (2024) — information quality is the critical variable.
Stage 3 — Creator Endorsement	Trusted edu-creators validate the platform, carrying more persuasive weight than brand advertising. Basis: Kumar et al. (2025) — peer influence is a top enrolment driver.
Stage 4 — FOMO Trigger	Seeing peers or aspirational figures using the platform creates urgency. Basis: Dewantoro et al. (2025) — FOMO is a documented Gen Z purchase driver.
Stage 5 — Zero-Friction Trial	Gen Z expects immediate free access; paywalls at this stage terminate the journey. Design implication: freemium is table stakes, not a differentiator.
Stage 6 — Social Sharing Loop	Achievement badges, completion certificates, and leaderboard positions shared on social media create organic acquisition loops. Platform design and marketing must be integrated.

IV. ORIGINAL FRAMEWORKS

1. The CREST Ethical Marketing Framework

The CREST Model operationalises the research findings presented in this chapter into a five-component ethical marketing framework for EdTech. Each component is grounded in specific peer-reviewed evidence and provides both strategic direction and measurable implementation guidance.

Table 4. The CREST Ethical Marketing Framework for EdTech

C — Consent	All data collection and communications grounded in informed, granular, freely-given consent. Basis: Alier et al. (2021); Chen et al. (2024).
R — Responsibility	Marketing teams accountable for outcome claims; internal ethics review before campaign launch. Basis: Joshi (2025); Radesky et al. (2020).
E — Empowerment	Users given real control: data portability, advertising preferences, and cancellation without friction. Basis: Chen et al. (2024) — data control correlates with privacy perception.
S — Sensitivity	Messaging calibrated to the emotional and developmental context of learners and parents. Basis: Radesky et al. (2020) — children's unique vulnerability to advertising persuasion.
T — Transparency	Open communication about data use, algorithm logic, pricing, and commercial relationships. Basis: Majjate et al. (2024); Jiang et al. (2022).

2. The Responsible EdTech Advertising Checklist

The following eight-point checklist provides practical implementation guidance for EdTech marketing and advertising teams, synthesising ethical obligations identified across the reviewed literature.

Table 5. Responsible EdTech Advertising — Eight-Point Checklist

1. Outcome Honesty	Advertise only statistically defensible, clearly caveated outcomes — e.g., 'Average grade improvement of 1.4 grades among course completers'.
2. Audience Appropriateness	No behavioural profiling of under-13 users; all minor-targeted advertising COPPA/GDPR-K compliant.
3. Pressure-Free Messaging	Avoid exploiting examination anxiety or parental fear as primary persuasion mechanics.
4. Influencer Transparency	All paid partnerships clearly disclosed; no undisclosed affiliate codes, per FTC guidelines.
5. Accessible Pricing	Real total pricing communicated upfront; scholarship and free-tier options prominently featured.
6. Cultural Sensitivity	Localised content reviewed for cultural appropriateness in each target market.
7. Inclusive Representation	Learners of all abilities, backgrounds, and learning styles represented in all creative materials.
8. Claims Substantiation	All comparative claims ('No. 1 rated', 'fastest results') backed by verifiable third-party data.

3. The Edu-Creator Partnership Matrix

Based on Erislan (2026), Ngo et al. (2024), Kumar et al. (2025), and Dewantoro et al. (2025), the following matrix provides strategic guidance for EdTech influencer partnerships, organised by creator tier and evidential basis.



Table 6. Edu-Creator Partnership Matrix by Tier

Creator Tier	Following	EdTech Approach	Evidence Basis
Nano Edu-creators	1K–10K	Product gifting and affiliate programmes; highest authenticity, niche subject audiences	Erislan (2026): credibility outperforms reach
Micro Edu-creators	10K–100K	Paid integration and commission; subject-matter experts, optimal ROI	Ngo et al. (2024): information quality is decisive
Macro Edu-creators	100K–1M	Campaign partnerships; awareness and credibility transfer	Kumar et al. (2025): peer influence drives enrolment
Mega Edu-creators	1M+	Brand ambassador or equity arrangements; mass awareness and brand-building	Dewantoro et al. (2025): FOMO and aspirational triggers

4. The SCROLL Framework: Social-Native EdTech Marketing

The SCROLL Framework synthesises the social media and consumer behaviour research into an evidence-based strategy model for EdTech marketing in social-native environments.

Table 7. The SCROLL Framework for Social-Native EdTech Marketing

S — Social Proof First	Lead all campaigns with authentic peer outcomes and eWOM signals. Basis: Ngo et al. (2024) — information quality and social proof mediate purchase intention.
C — Creator-Led	Invest a minimum of 40% of social budget in creator partnerships, prioritising credibility over reach. Basis: Erislan (2026) — credibility is the dominant persuasion factor.
R — Retention Over Reach	Optimise for community engagement and repeat content consumption, not impression volume. Basis: Kumar et al. (2025) — peer influence, not reach, drives enrolment.
O — Outcome Visibility	Make learner progress shareable: certificates, skill badges, and leaderboard positions. Basis: Ridwan et al. (2025) — social proof and gamification are key Gen Z purchase drivers.
L — Low Friction Entry	Every social touchpoint connects directly to a zero-friction trial; never a paywall. Basis: Dewantoro et al. (2025) on instant consumption patterns among Gen Z.
L — Loop Engineering	Design sharing mechanics that create self-sustaining acquisition loops. Basis: Šramová et al. (2023) — Generation Alpha digital communication is intentional and social.

V. GENERATION Z AND GENERATION ALPHA: CONSUMER PROFILES

1. Comparative Consumer Profile

The following table summarises the key dimensions distinguishing Gen Z and Generation Alpha as educational consumers, with corresponding marketing implications derived from the reviewed literature.

Table 8. Gen Z and Generation Alpha: Comparative Consumer Profile

Dimension	Gen Z (13–27 in 2025)	Gen Alpha (Under 13–14)	Marketing Implication
Primary Platform	TikTok, YouTube, Instagram	YouTube Kids, Roblox, TikTok	Platform strategy must bifurcate by segment
Content Preference	Short-form video, authentic Reels	Interactive, gamified, animated content	Static advertisements have near-zero effectiveness for either segment
Trust Source	Creator reviews, peer eWOM	Sibling influence, parental gatekeeping	Two-audience targeting: child and parent simultaneously
Media Role	Entertainment, information, and community	Entertainment, education, and games	EdTech must serve entertainment and learning goals simultaneously
Decision Dynamic	Self-directed; 3–7 day consideration	Parent-gated; family purchase decision	UX and messaging must serve both audiences
Ad Tolerance	Very low; ad-blocking prevalent	Low; prefers native and gamified integration	Organic, creator-led, and gamified strategies are essential

2. The Dual-Audience Strategy for Generation Alpha

For Generation Alpha, EdTech marketers must execute two simultaneous but entirely distinct channel and content strategies. N.R. et al. (2025) confirm that parents play a vital role in shaping Generation Alpha's digital learning environment, acting as quality gatekeepers for content selection, screen time management, and platform access.

Accordingly, marketing must address the child and the parent as separate audiences with different decision criteria, information needs, and channel behaviours.



Table 9. Dual-Audience Strategy for Generation Alpha EdTech Marketing

Child-Facing Strategy	Gamification, interactive progress visibility, peer community features, and achievement rewards. Distributed via YouTube Kids, Roblox, and educational game environments. Messaging emphasises engagement, fun, and peer participation.
Parent-Facing Strategy	Learning outcome evidence, data privacy commitments, screen time management tools, and parental dashboards. Distributed via Instagram, parenting community platforms, and Google Search. Messaging emphasises safety, control, value, and educational outcomes.

VI. DISCUSSION

1. The Ethics-Strategy Nexus in EdTech Marketing

A central finding across the reviewed literature is that ethical practice and commercial effectiveness are not in tension in EdTech marketing — they are mutually reinforcing. Chen et al. (2024) demonstrate that transparency in data handling is a direct and significant predictor of trust, while Jiang et al. (2022) establish that trust is itself a functional driver of platform adoption. The implication is that ethical marketing investment generates measurable acquisition returns, not merely reputational benefits.

This finding has strategic significance in a market where learning content has become commoditised and competitive differentiation is increasingly difficult to sustain on product grounds alone. The EdTech companies best positioned for long-term growth are those that build institutional, product, and relational trust simultaneously, operationalised through frameworks such as the CREST Model.

2. Credibility Over Scale: Implications for Creator Strategy

The consistent finding that influencer credibility outperforms follower count (Erislan, 2026) and that eWOM information quality outweighs information quantity (Ngo et al., 2024) challenges the prevailing logic of reach-based digital advertising. EdTech marketing budgets allocated primarily to high-reach mega-influencers or broad impression campaigns may be systematically misallocated. The evidence points toward a rebalancing in favour of subject-matter expert micro-creators, high-quality peer review generation, and community building over raw audience acquisition.

3. Ethical Tensions in Algorithmic Marketing

Ren (2025) identifies specific algorithmic mechanisms — anchoring, herding, and endowment effects — that can be engineered to drive conversion among Gen Z consumers.

The ethical tension is acute in EdTech, where the same vulnerability that makes a student susceptible to anxiety-triggered enrolment also makes them susceptible to dropout when the experience does not match the promise. Responsible EdTech marketing requires not only the avoidance of manipulative tactics but also alignment between marketing claims and the actual learning experience delivered — a coherence that ultimately determines lifetime value and word-of-mouth generation.

4. Future Research Directions

This chapter identifies two areas that represent significant gaps in the existing EdTech marketing literature. First, the responsible marketing of AI-powered personalisation features — a rapidly growing segment whose claims frequently outpace empirical validation (Strielkowski et al., 2024; Halkiopoulou et al., 2024) — requires dedicated framework development. Second, the EdTech marketing literature is overwhelmingly Western-centric, despite the Global South representing over 70% of the world's student population and the highest-growth EdTech markets through 2030. Salas-Pilco et al. (2022) confirm that the Western marketing playbook does not transfer directly to Global South contexts, pointing to an urgent need for culturally grounded, infrastructure-aware marketing research.

VII. CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the ethical foundations and social-native dynamics of EdTech marketing, synthesising peer-reviewed evidence into two original frameworks — CREST and SCROLL — and a set of practical tools including a dual-audience strategy for Generation Alpha, a responsible advertising checklist, and an edu-creator partnership matrix.

The research confirms five central propositions. First, transparency in data handling is a statistically significant predictor of student trust (Chen et al., 2024). Second, trust reduces perceived risk and drives platform adoption, functioning as a measurable commercial asset rather than merely an ethical obligation (Jiang et al., 2022). Third, children and younger adolescents are uniquely vulnerable to digital advertising persuasion, imposing heightened ethical and regulatory obligations on EdTech companies targeting these audiences (Radesky et al., 2020). Fourth, ethical marketing is a competitive differentiator — younger, socially-aware audiences actively favour brands that embed ethics into AI-driven personalisation and digital interactions (Joshi, 2025). Fifth, influencer credibility and content quality, not follower count or impression volume, are the decisive drivers of enrolment decisions among Gen Z (Erislan, 2026; Kumar et al., 2025; Ngo et al., 2024).

As EdTech markets mature and regulatory scrutiny intensifies, the competitive advantage will accrue to platforms that treat ethical marketing not as a constraint on



growth but as its structural precondition. The frameworks presented in this chapter provide a research-grounded foundation for that transition.

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