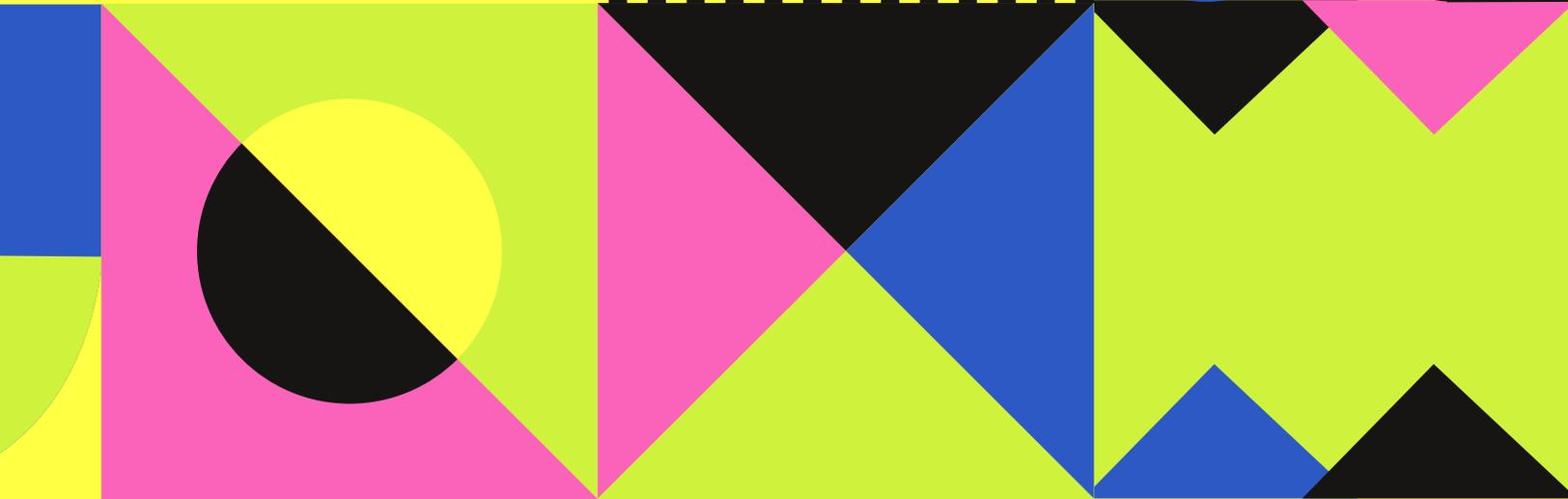
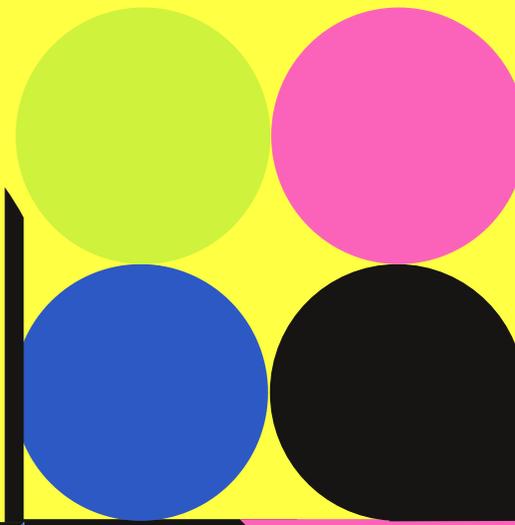
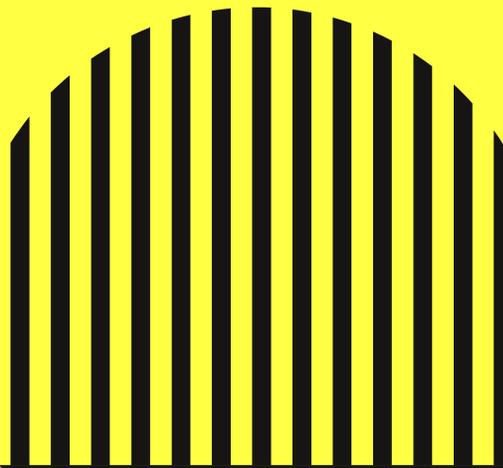
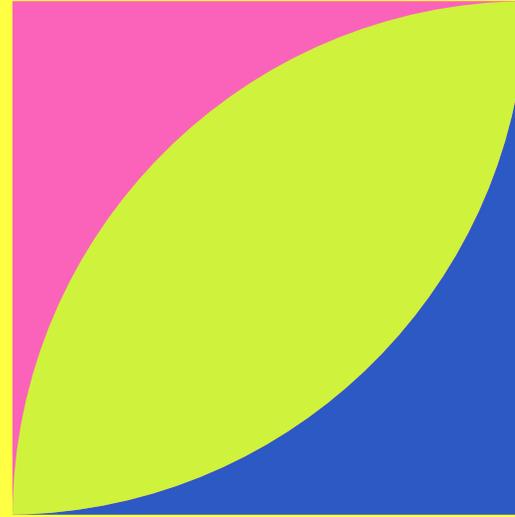
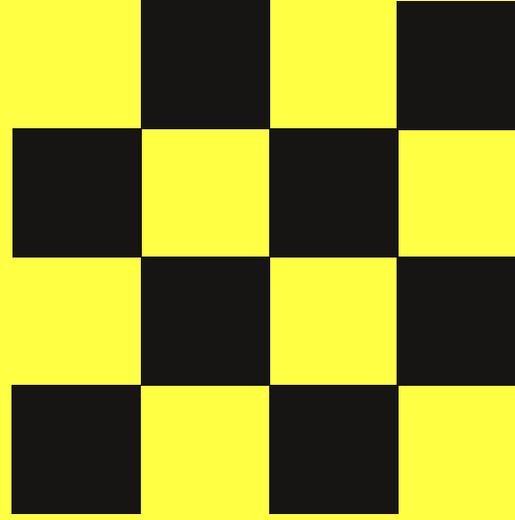




**THE INFLUENCER  
MARKETING  
FACTORY**

**2026**

**CREATOR  
ECONOMY  
REPORT**





# TOP FINDINGS



## TOP FINDINGS: HypeAuditor

- 1 While TikTok still attracts younger users (40.6% under 25), the largest audience segment across all platforms is now 25–34. This signals a maturing creator economy and makes this age group the primary target for cross-platform brand campaigns.
- 2 TikTok is the most democratized short-form video platform among competitors. TikTok manages to have a steady median engagement rate across audience sizes, meanwhile Instagram Reels' median engagement rates steadily drop as audiences increase.
- 3 Short-form video delivers the strongest engagement across platforms. TikTok maintains the most consistent and highest median engagement, while YouTube Shorts shows improving engagement as creators grow. In contrast, Instagram Reels engagement declines as follower counts increase.
- 4 The vast majority of U.S.-based creators struggle for visibility across all platforms. 46.2% of Instagram creators, 76% of TikTok creators, 59.1% of long-form YouTube creators, and 39.94% of YouTube Shorts creators receive fewer than 1K views per post, underscoring that building meaningful reach still remains the primary challenge for most content creators.
- 5 Instagram continues shifting toward video-first content. Reels grew by 3.8% from 2024 to 2025, while image posts declined by -6.41%, confirming that creators who rely on static content are losing visibility.

## SURVEY TOP FINDINGS:

- 1 38.7% Of U.S. respondents have only 1-3 years of experience.
- 2 84.7% of creators post new content more than once per week.
- 3 Product/merch sales and affiliate marketing make up 21.2% of creator income, reflecting a move toward more diversified revenue streams.
- 4 48.7% of creators earn under \$10K annually, while 45.6% earn between \$10K-\$100K and 5.7% earn 100K+, signaling the emergence of a viable “middle class” in the creator economy who are successfully monetizing their content.
- 5 44.9% of creators value stability, consistency, and deeper brand alignment over one-off campaigns.
- 6 51.5% of creators achieved earnings growth year-over-year in 2025.
- 7 56.1% of U.S. creators affirmed that they definitely believe that AI will significantly change how creators will work over the next few years.
- 8 Creators' focus on video production (22.4%) and branding (20%) reveals a strategic pivot towards professionalization and tailored brand identities in 2026.

# REPORT INTRO

The **creator economy** has officially **outgrown** its label as a “**niche industry**”. In 2026, **creators** are **driving** the way people consume, search, shop, and connect, **reshaping** digital culture and the global economy along the way.

With a projected **10% Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR)** in their global population and **\$10.5M** in **projected brand spend** fueling their work, creators have become the backbone of the modern media ecosystem. Today's **top influencers** are **building** sustainable businesses, **shaping** search behavior, and **creating** new paths for entrepreneurship.

This year's data underscores a defining truth: **creators** aren't competing with traditional media; they **are the media**. **56%** of **Gen Z** now consider **creator content more relevant** than TV or film, and **41%** use **social platforms** as their **primary search engine**, signaling a full-scale shift toward intent-based discovery powered by authentic, social-first voices.

As **creators** continue to **grow** into **founders, educators,** and **CEOs** of their own, the economy around them is becoming more sophisticated, more global, and more essential than ever before.

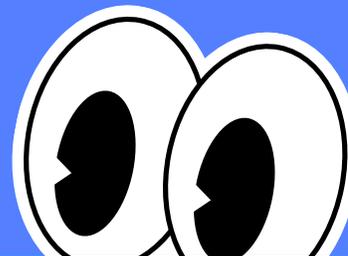
Our 2026 Creator Economy Report explores the **key trends, data,** and **insights** shaping this evolution.

For more amazing tips and news on the creator economy, check out:

[Our Blog](#)

[The Influence Factor Podcast](#)

[LinkedIn Newsletter: Spreading the Influence](#)



# A NOTE FROM OUR CEO

Each year, the **creator economy** proves that **innovation** doesn't just come from technology; it comes from **people**.

What began as **individuals** sharing ideas online has become a **global movement** that drives **culture, commerce, and community**. In **2026**, we see **creators owning** more of their IP, **launching** their own brands, and **shaping** the algorithms that once defined them. Nearly **60%** now identify as **entrepreneurs**, a powerful reflection of the industry's maturity and self-determination.

As the lines between entertainment, education, and entrepreneurship blur, one thing is **certain**: the **next era** of influence will be built on **connection** and **credibility**. **Creators** are now **modern media companies**, redefining what it means to build **trust** in a digital world.

At **The Influencer Marketing Factory**, we're proud to **champion** the **people** driving the **next era** of media and influence. As the creator economy continues to evolve, we invite marketers, brands, and creators to dive into our **2026 Creator Economy Report** and **exclusive survey** to uncover the insights shaping the **future** of digital connection, commerce, and creativity.

Here's what you can expect this year in the creator economy!



**ALESSANDRO BOGLIARI**  
CEO & CO-FOUNDER  
THE INFLUENCER MARKETING FACTORY

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**08** THE STATE OF THE  
CREATOR ECONOMY

2026 CREATOR  
ECONOMY SURVEY

**17**

**26** SOCIAL MEDIA IN 2026

TOP CREATOR  
PLATFORMS

**38**

**44** AI AND THE FUTURE OF  
THE CREATOR  
ECONOMY

CREATORS IRL

**49**

**57** BEST PRACTICES FOR  
MARKETERS IN 2026

RESOURCES

**62**

# FEATURED CREATOR EXPERTS



**Alessandro Bogliari**  
*CEO, The Influencer Marketing Factory*



**Frank Poe**  
*Attorney & Founder, Poe Law PLLC*



**Brooke Erin Duffy, Ph.D.**  
*Associate Professor, Cornell University*



**Alexander Frolov**  
*CEO & Co-Founder, HypeAuditor*



**Lindsey Gamble**  
*Creator Economy Expert*



**Lindsey Lugin**  
*Founder & CEO, FYPM*



**Brooke Berry**  
*Head of Creator Development, Snap Inc.*



**Tarang Jain**  
*Senior Director, Paid Media, US,  
Hill's Pet Nutrition*



**Austin Null**  
*Chief Creator Officer, We Get It*

# FEATURED CREATOR EXPERTS



**Brett Dashevsky**

*Founder, Creator Economy NYC & Siftsy*



**Omer Dahan**

*Head of Affiliates & Partnerships, Fiverr*



**Alex Zaccaria**

*Co-Founder & CEO, Linktree*



**Gigi Robinson**

*Founder, Creator, & Author*



**Jared Carneson**

*Head of Global Social Media, Adobe*



**Ben Wiedner**

*Co-Founder, Warren James*



**Jacob Wallach**

*Founder, Social4TheWin*



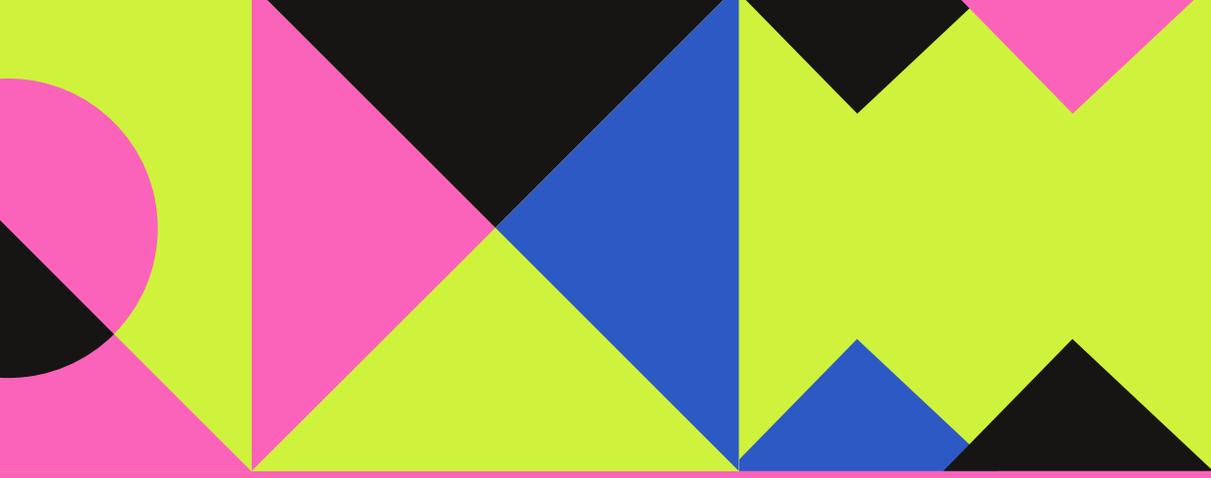
**Jessy Grossman**

*Founder, Women in Influencer Marketing*

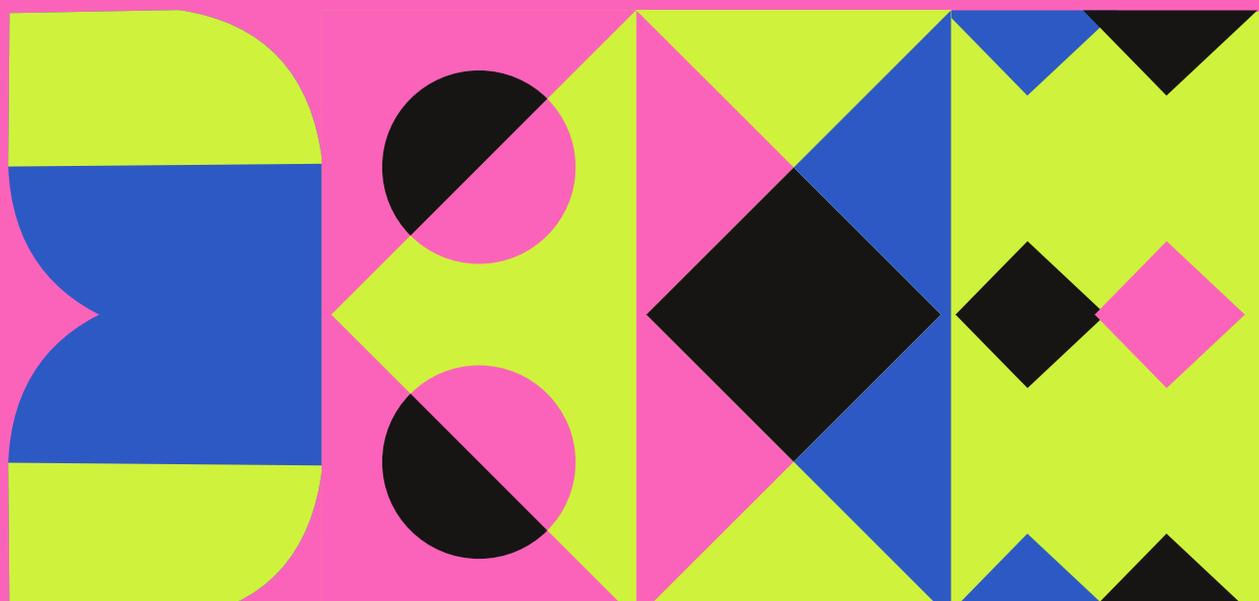


**Pierre-Loic Assayag**

*Founder, Traackr*

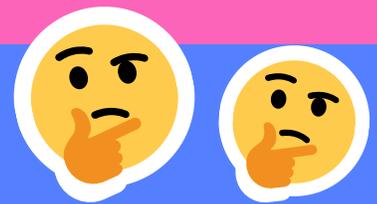


# THE STATE OF THE CREATOR ECONOMY



# 2026 CREATOR ECONOMY MARKET SIZE

## What Is The Creator Economy?



The **Creator Economy** is a class of businesses built by millions of global **content creators** and **social media influencers** that use software and finance tools to assist them with their growth and monetization. The **rapid development** of AI has introduced a **new wave** of **face-less creators** and **automated social accounts**, further **increasing** the size and value of the creator economy. According to research from **MiDiA**, the **global creator population** is projected to surpass **1.1B** by **2032** as AI lowers the barrier to entry for aspiring influencers, supporting content ideation, planning, and more.

## Creator Economy Market Growth

The creator economy is comprised of the **influencer marketing industry**, **creator-led business ventures**, and other relevant **start-ups** and businesses involving **influencer development**.

According to **The Interactive Advertising Bureau**, **creator ad spend**, including **direct partnerships**, **paid amplification**, and **content adjacencies**, in the **U.S.** is set to reach:



**\$43.9B**

Projected U.S. creator  
ad spend in 2026



**+18.3%**

Annual growth



Up from  
**\$37.1B**  
in 2025

# BIG PICTURE 2026 TRENDS



The following are The Influencer Marketing Factory's Top Ten Creator Economy Predictions for 2026. Check out our complete 2026 influencer trend forecast [here!](#)

[Read the full blog here!](#)

01

## More In-Person Creator Activations

In-person creator events are gaining momentum as powerful community-building experiences that also drive direct sales.

02

## The Rise of Creator Media Companies

Top creators are evolving into full-scale media companies, investing in production, distribution, and professional collaboration.

03

## Brand Affiliate Platforms

Brands launching affiliate platforms make creators' program choices a clear signal of authentic partnerships.

04

## Gen Alpha = New Marketing Machine

Gen Alpha's growing spending power and loyalty to platforms are making them a critical audience for youth-driven strategies.

05

## B2C Creator Marketing on LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a viable B2C marketing channel as new video tools attract consumer brands beyond a traditional B2B focus.

06

## Creator Economy & Venture Capital

Venture capital investment in creator-led businesses is accelerating, with new funds fueling the next wave of influencer ventures.

07

## Influencers in C-Suite Roles

Influencers are increasingly stepping into executive and creative leadership roles, embracing long-term partnerships.

08

## Brand Strategy & Co-Creation

Brands are shifting toward co-creating campaigns and experiences with creators to enhance authenticity and audience trust.

09

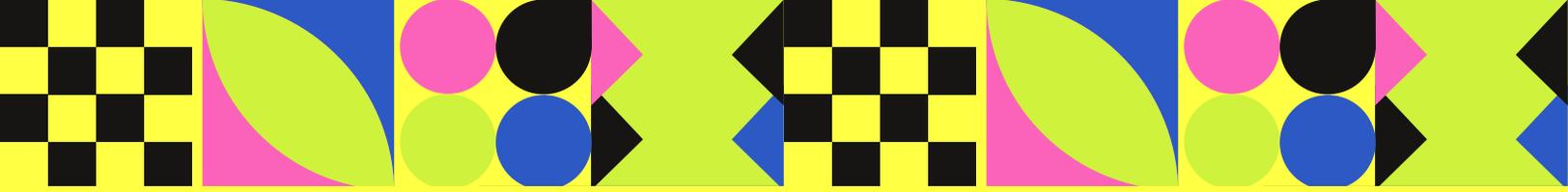
## Human Content vs. AI in Feeds

As AI content floods feeds, creators will stand out by sharing human, relatable UGC that brands increasingly value.

10

## Streamlining Workflows With AI

While AI may not replace creator content, can be useful for streamlining creative workflows, planning, and production.

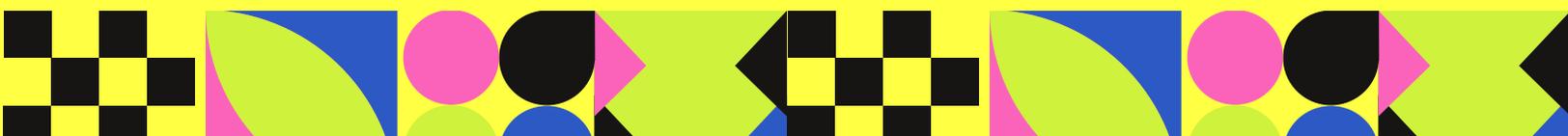


# 5 MILLION ACCOUNTS & TRENDS ANALYZED

FT.  HypeAuditor

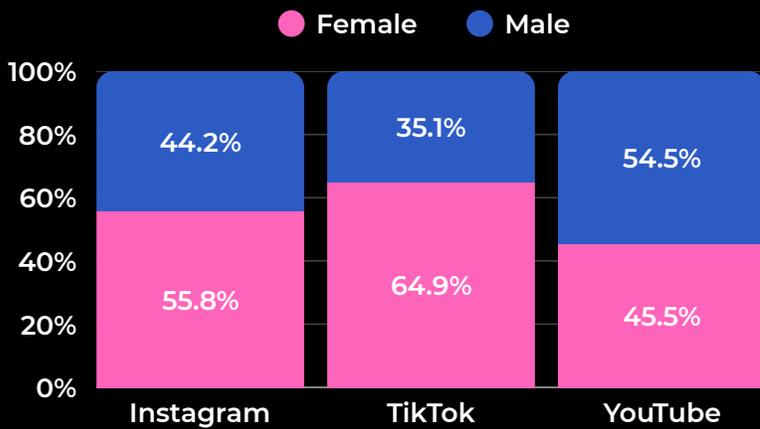
## Analyzing 5M+ Creators Across Socials

The Influencer Marketing Factory partnered with HypeAuditor to analyze creator performance, audience demographics, and content trends across Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. This research examines engagement levels, active creator counts, popular content categories, and content performance among creators with predominantly U.S. audiences who published content in 2025 and have at least 10 total media posts on their respective platforms. All analyzed accounts were filtered to ensure a majority U.S.-based audience, defined as 40% or more followers from the United States. The dataset includes 5,192,108 Instagram creator accounts (personal/non-brand only), 2,986,001 TikTok creator accounts, and 1,098,662 YouTube creator accounts (both personal and brand accounts for TikTok and YouTube). Additional methodology details are provided throughout the report where applicable.



# KEY DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

## Audience Genders by Platform



55%



YouTube stands out as the only platform with a majority male audience.



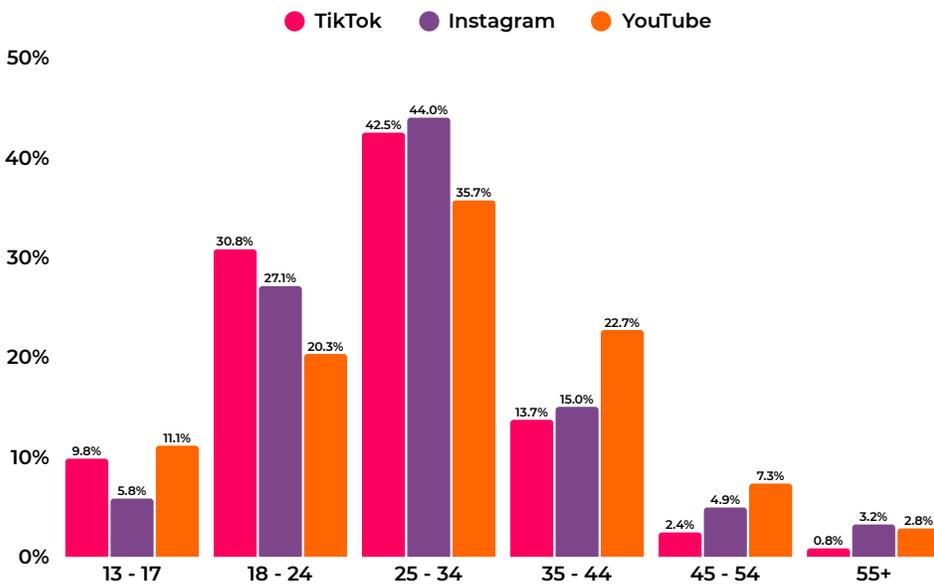
65%



56%

Instagram and TikTok skew female.

## Top Platform Age Demographics



40.6%

of TikTok's audience is under 25

42.5%

are 25-34 year-olds, signaling TikTok's maturation as its core audience ages up.

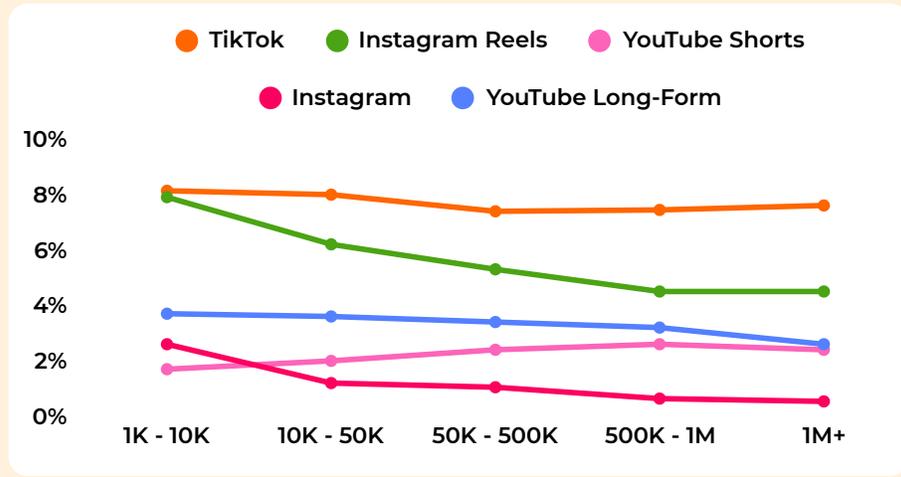
35.7-44%

The 25-34 age group represents the largest audience segment across all platforms, making this demographic the core target for cross-platform campaigns.

Findings are based on exclusive data gathered and analyzed by The Influencer Marketing Factory, using a sample of 5,192,108 Instagram creator accounts (personal/non-brand only), 2,986,001 TikTok creator accounts, and 1,098,662 YouTube creator accounts (both personal and brand accounts for TikTok and YouTube) provided by HypeAuditor.

# KEY ENGAGEMENT TRENDS

## Median Engagement Rate by Platform



TikTok leads all platforms in median engagement.

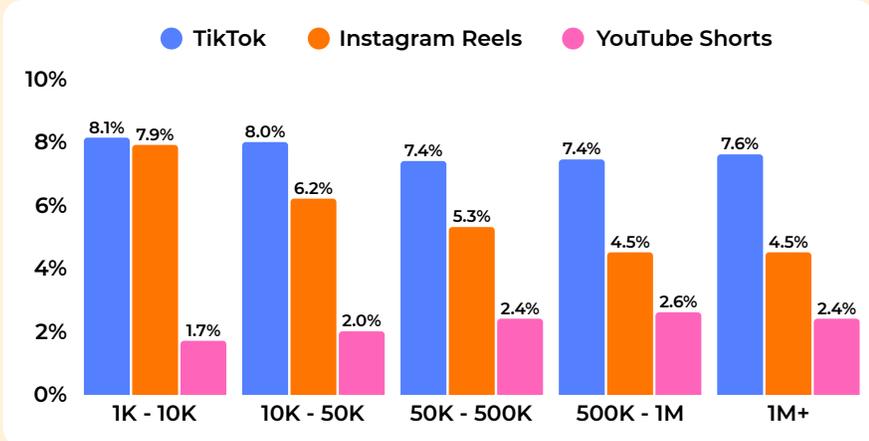


Short-form video is the highest-engaging content format.

This graph displays median engagement rate values segmented by creator follower size across Instagram (Images and Carousels), Instagram Reels, TikTok, YouTube long-form videos, and YouTube Shorts. Median values are used rather than averages to reduce the impact of outliers, as exceptionally high-performing accounts can inflate average ER and misrepresent typical creator performance. Engagement rate calculation methodology differs by content format and platform. For Instagram Images and Carousels, ER is calculated based on followers. For Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube (both long-form and Shorts), ER is calculated based on content views. Because view-based ER typically produces higher percentage values than follower-based ER, cross-platform comparisons should be interpreted with caution. Data gathered and analyzed by The Influencer Marketing Factory in partnership with HypeAuditor.

## Comparison of Short-Form Median Engagement Rates

- TikTok has a steady median engagement rate across audience sizes
- Instagram Reels' median engagement rates steadily drop as audiences increase.
- Median engagement rates appear to steadily increase on YouTube Shorts



This graph displays median engagement rate values segmented by creator follower size across Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts. Median values are used rather than averages to reduce the impact of outliers, as exceptionally high-performing accounts can inflate average ER and misrepresent typical creator performance. Engagement rate (ER) in this analysis is calculated based on content views for all three platforms. Data gathered and analyzed by The Influencer Marketing Factory in partnership with HypeAuditor.

# KEY SOCIAL PLATFORM SIZE TRENDS

## Unique Accounts by Platform

### Under 10K Followers

### 10-50K Followers

82%

72.4%

64.8%

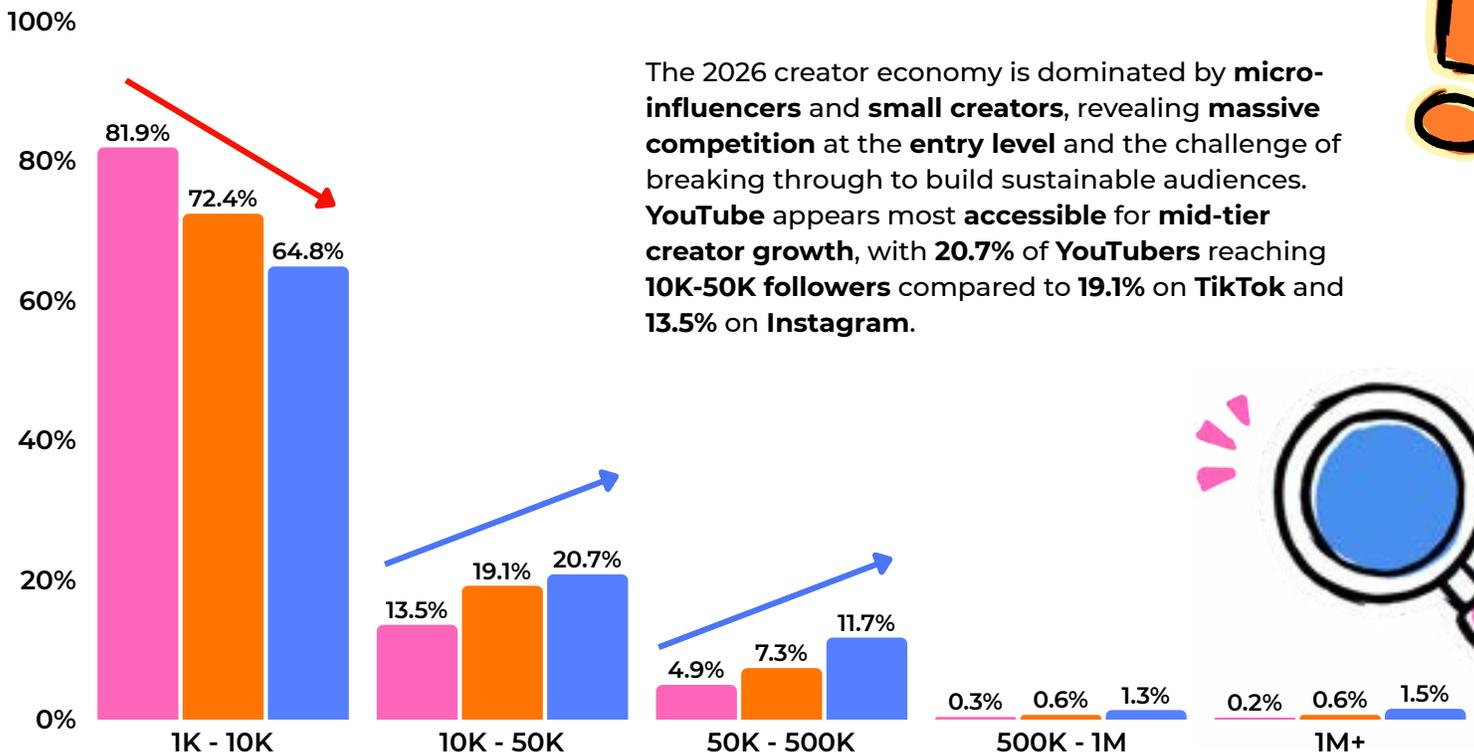
13.5%

19.1%

20.7%



● Instagram ● TikTok ● YouTube

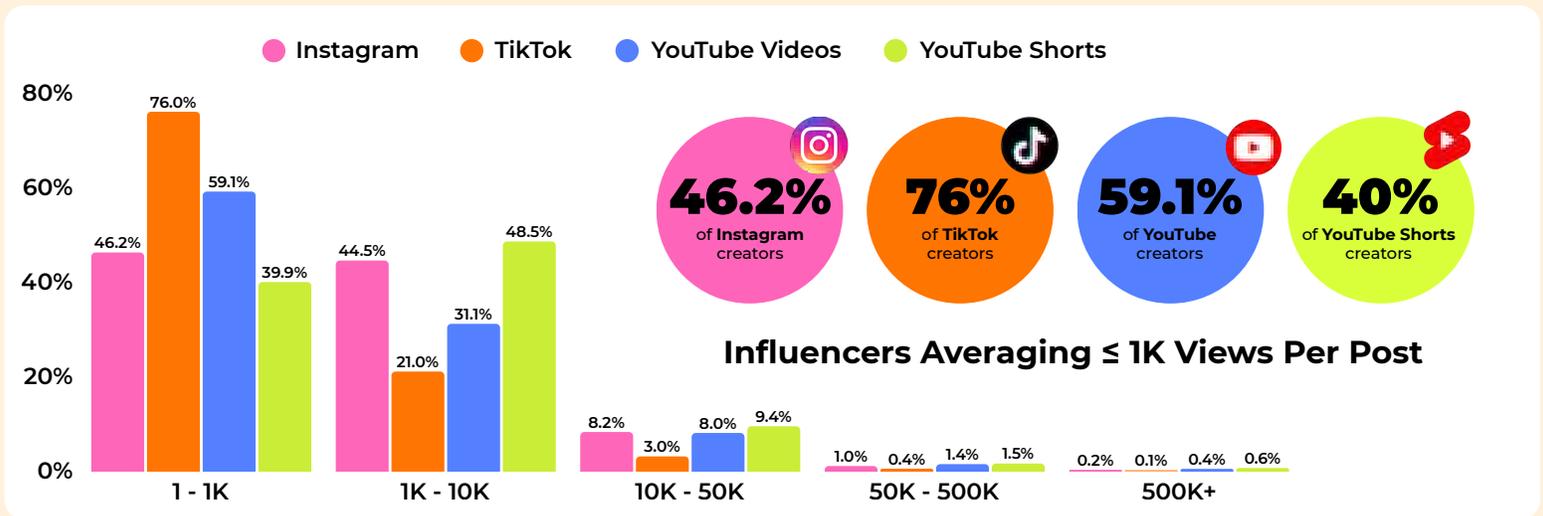


The 2026 creator economy is dominated by **micro-influencers** and **small creators**, revealing **massive competition** at the **entry level** and the challenge of breaking through to build sustainable audiences. **YouTube** appears most **accessible** for **mid-tier creator growth**, with **20.7%** of **YouTubers** reaching **10K-50K followers** compared to **19.1%** on **TikTok** and **13.5%** on **Instagram**.

Findings are based on exclusive data gathered and analyzed by The Influencer Marketing Factory, using a sample of 5,192,108 Instagram creator accounts (personal/non-brand only), 2,986,001 TikTok creator accounts, and 1,098,662 YouTube creator accounts (both personal and brand accounts for TikTok and YouTube) provided by HypeAuditor.

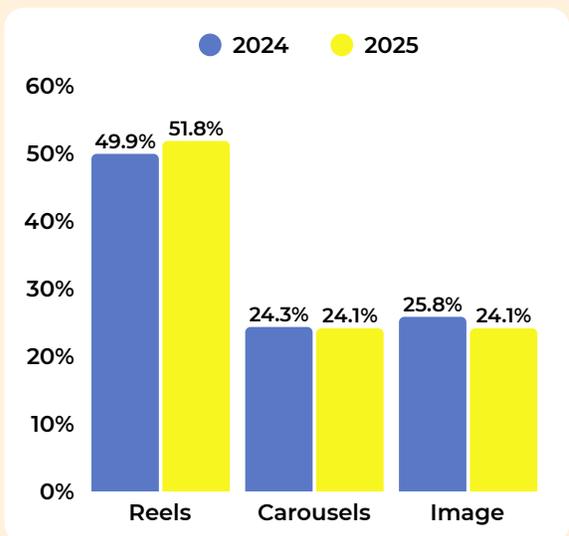
# KEY PERFORMANCE TRENDS

## Distribution of Influencers by Average Views per Creator (USA)



This analysis examines the distribution of creators in the U.S. by average views per creator, segmented across Instagram, TikTok, YouTube (long-form videos), and YouTube Shorts. Data gathered and analyzed by The Influencer Marketing Factory in partnership with HypeAuditor.

## Instagram Content Distribution Trends



Our analysis of Instagram content formats between **2024** and **2025** shows that **short-form video** has become the **dominant content style** for creators, with **Reels** volume **increasing** by **3.8%**.

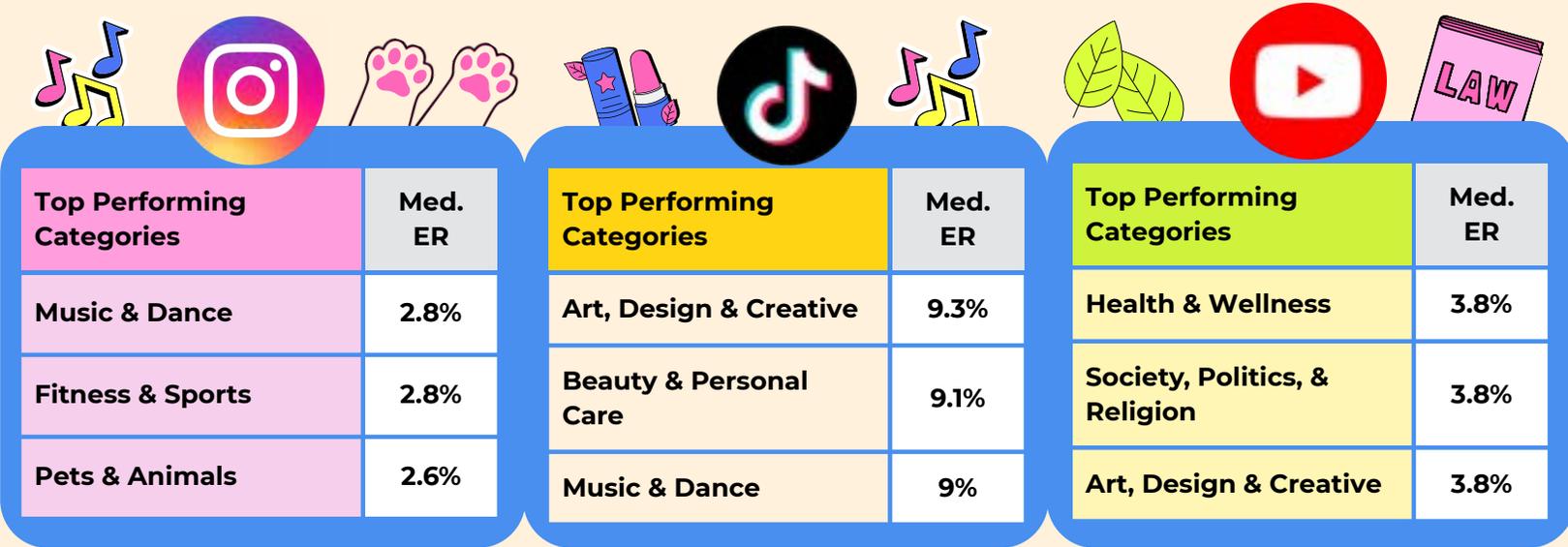
In 2025, images saw a significant drop of: **6.4%**

This analysis examines the distribution of content types published by U.S.-based Instagram influencers between 2024 and 2025. Data gathered and analyzed by The Influencer Marketing Factory in partnership with HypeAuditor.

# KEY CONTENT CATEGORY TRENDS

## Top Creator Niches Across Socials

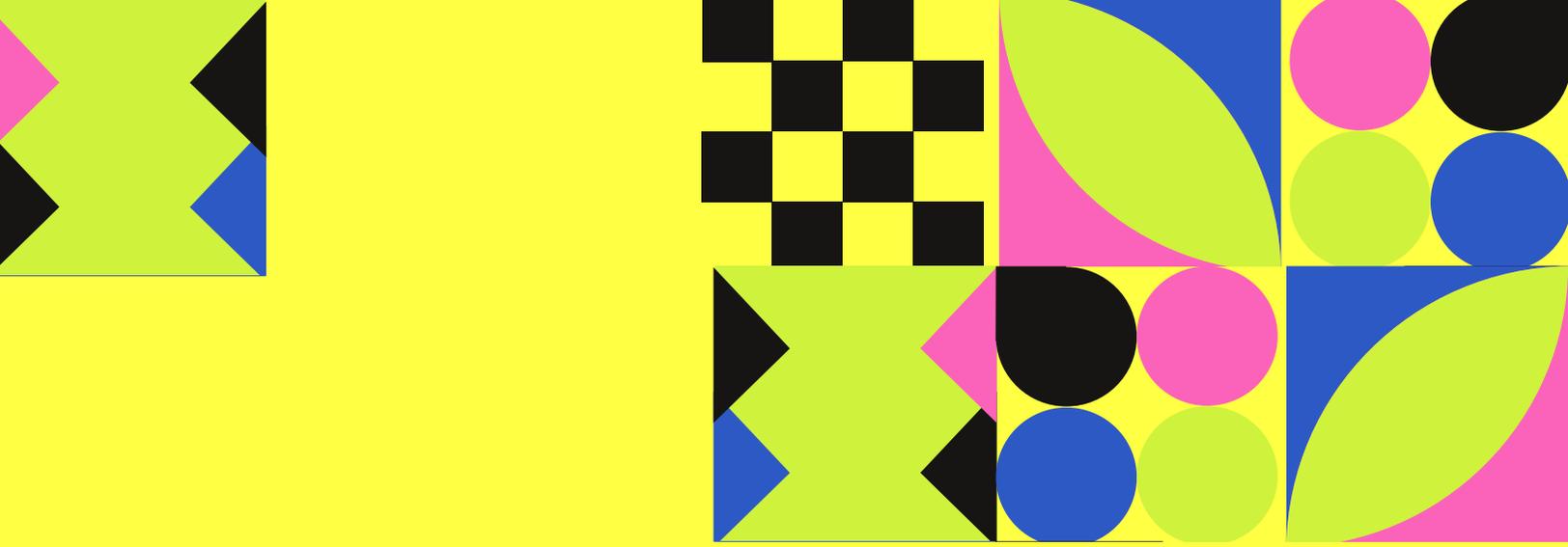
### Top Performing Categories



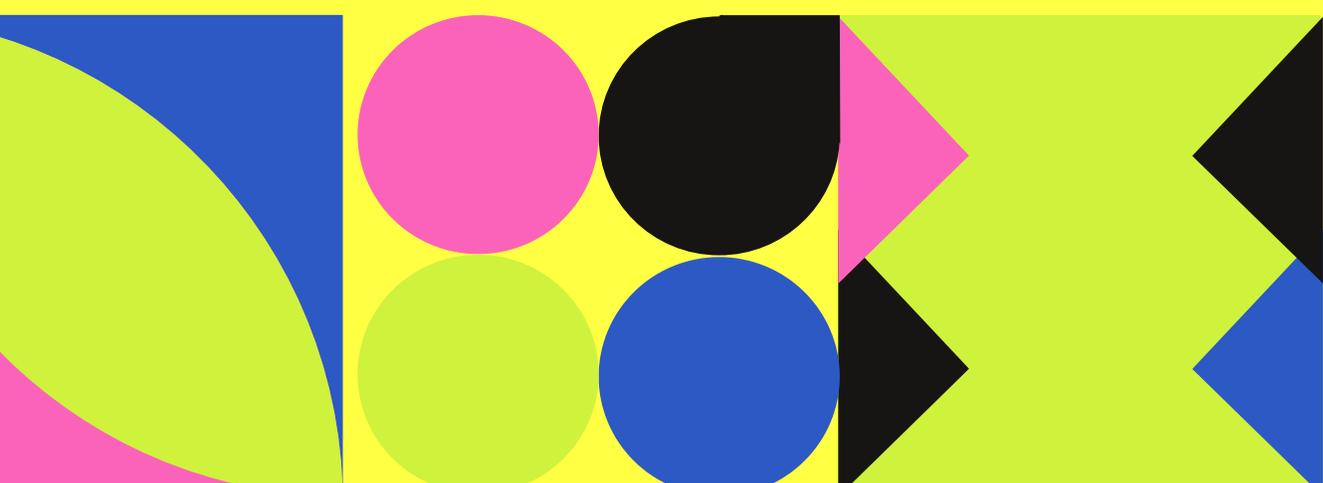
### Largest Creator Communities

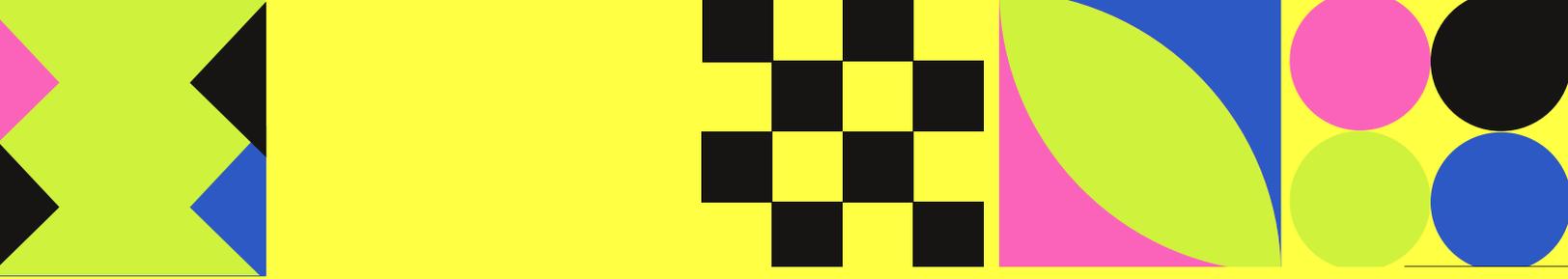


This graph displays median engagement rate (ER) values across Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Medians are used to minimize the impact of outliers that can skew averages. Instagram ER is based on followers, while TikTok and YouTube ER are based on content views. Content categories are assigned by HypeAuditor using ML-based labels derived from creators' published content. Creators may belong to multiple categories, which represent aggregated topic groups. Data gathered and analyzed by The Influencer Marketing Factory in partnership with HypeAuditor.



# 2026 CREATOR ECONOMY SURVEY



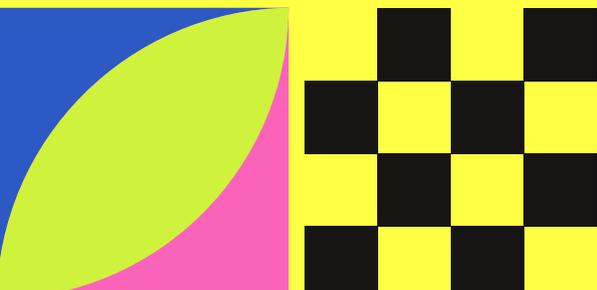


# EXCLUSIVE **2026** CREATOR ECONOMY INSIGHTS RESEARCHED BY **THE INFLUENCER MARKETING FACTORY**

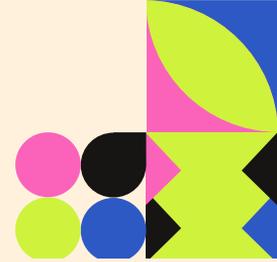
## Our Methodology

The following survey data presented in this report was collected from **1,000 creators** based in the **U.S.** who submitted their responses in **January 2026**. Our **target audience** was **creators** between **18 and 65 years old**. Our goal was to understand creators' preferences regarding social platforms, AI usage, monetization practices, and more.

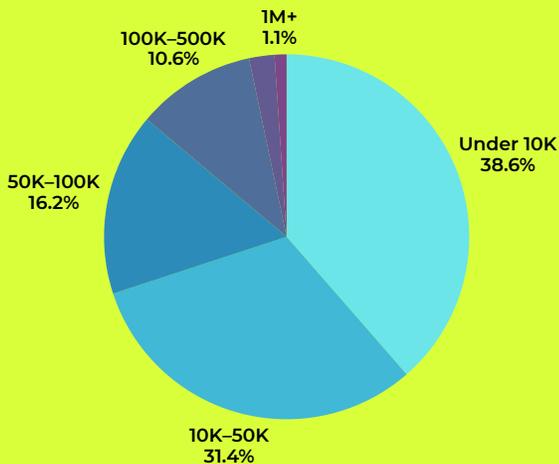
Survey questions marked with an **asterisk (\*)** indicate a **multi-response option**, meaning that respondents could select all the options that best aligned with their views.



# THE 2026 CREATOR LANDSCAPE

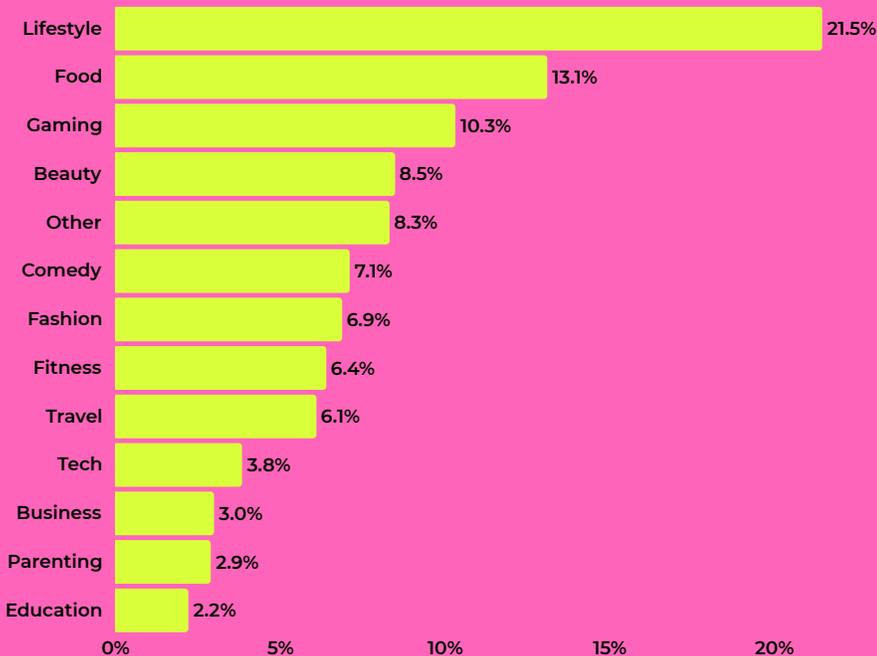


## How many total followers do you have across all platforms?



Micro-influencers with **10K to 50K followers** make up approximately **31.4%** of surveyed respondents.

## What best describes your content niche?



Top three niches for creators in 2026:

**1** Lifestyle



**2** Food

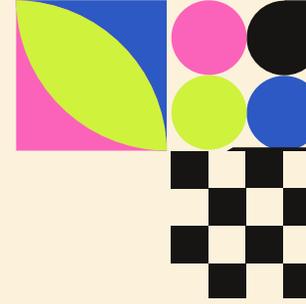


**3** Gaming



The Influencer Marketing Factory analyzed exclusive survey data from 1,000 U.S.-based creators aged 18-65, collected in January 2026.

# THE 2026 CREATOR LANDSCAPE



## Creator Size, Consistency, and Experience



How long have you been a content creator?

**23.8%**

Less Than  
1 Year

**38.8%**

1-3 Years  
(Majority)

**24.8%**

3-5 Years

What is your favorite way to engage with your audience?\*

**29%**

Replying to  
Comments

**19.6%**

Livestreams

**4.9%**

In-person Meetups  
and Events



Source: The Influencer Marketing Factory exclusive survey data from 1,000 U.S. creators aged 18-65, January 2026. This data visualization reflects a multi-select response.\*



How often do you post new content?

**19.3%**

Multiple  
Times Per Day

**33.1%**

Daily  
(Majority)

**32.3%**

A Few Times  
Per Week

How much time do you typically spend creating content per week?

**37%**

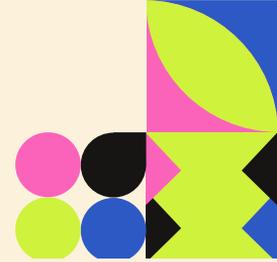
5-10 hours  
per week

**8.4%**

20-40 hours  
per week



# THE 2026 CREATOR LANDSCAPE



## Top Platforms & Creator Monetization Trends

### Top social platforms creators spend time creating content on

-  YouTube
-  Instagram
-  TikTok



YouTube remains the top for time investment, with Instagram and TikTok close behind signaling a deliberate multi-platform strategy.

*For this survey question, respondents ranked a given list of social media platforms on a scale of 1 (Most Time Spent) to 10 (Least Time Spent). Options included TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, X (Twitter), LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitch, and Pinterest.*

### Which platform generates the majority of your income?

-  TikTok
-  YouTube
-  Instagram



While TikTok offers the highest earning potential, the close competition from YouTube and Instagram confirms that diversification across TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram has become the standard creator strategy for 2026.

*For this survey question, respondents could select a single option from the following: TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, X (Twitter), LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitch, Pinterest.*

### What are your top sources of income as a creator?\*

**21.6%**

Ad Revenue

**13.3%**

Creator Payouts

**12.7%**

Brand Partnerships



Notably, passive revenue streams from **Product/Merch Sales** and **Affiliate Marketing combined** account for **21.2%** of creator income, signaling a shift toward diversified, sustainable monetization.

*This data visualization reflects a multi-select response.\**

### What is your approximate annual income from your job as content creator/influencer?

**48.7%**

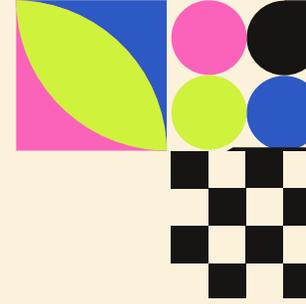
under \$10K

**45.6%**

\$10K-\$100K

This signals the emergence of a viable “middle class” in the creator economy who are successfully monetizing their content.

# THE 2026 CREATOR LANDSCAPE



## Top Platforms & Creator Monetization Trends



### How do you typically find brand deals?\*

**30.2%**

Pitching themselves to potential brand partners

**27%**

Receiving direct brand outreach

**18%**

Partnerships facilitated by third-party platforms

*Source: The Influencer Marketing Factory exclusive survey data from 1,000 U.S. creators aged 18-65, January 2026. This data visualization reflects a multi-select response.\**

### What percentage of your income comes from brand deals/brand collaborations?

**24.4%**

derive 0-10% of their income from brand partnerships

**12.6%**

rely on brands for 30-35% of their income



*Respondents indicated the percentage of their income derived from brand deals and collaborations using a sliding scale in 5% increments (0-100%).*



### Do you prefer long-term partnerships or one-off campaigns?

**45%**

of creators value stability, consistency, and deeper brand alignment over one-off campaigns.

### Have your earnings increased, decreased, or stayed the same in the past year?

**51.5%**

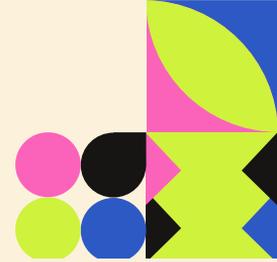
Achieved earnings growth year-over-year

**38.6%**

Reported flat earnings

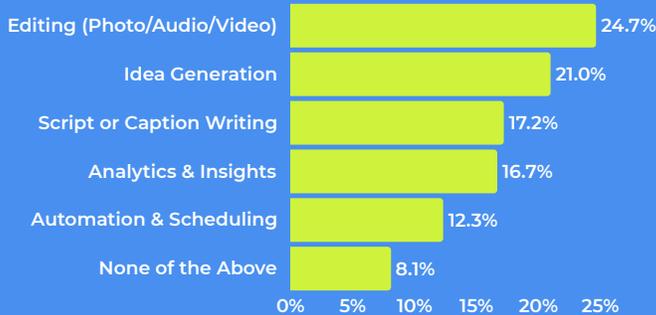


# THE 2026 CREATOR LANDSCAPE



## How Creators Are Leveraging AI Tools

### How do you currently use AI as a creator?\*



Rather than replacing the creator's authentic voice, AI serves as a productivity accelerator, enabling creators to scale production while maintaining their unique human touch.

*This data visualization reflects a multi-select response.\**

### Which AI or automation tools have had the biggest impact on your workflow?\*



AI adoption among U.S. creators is dominated by all-purpose assistants, reflecting a preference for tools that support ideation, writing, and decision-making over single-function creative tools.

*This data visualization reflects a multi-select response.\**

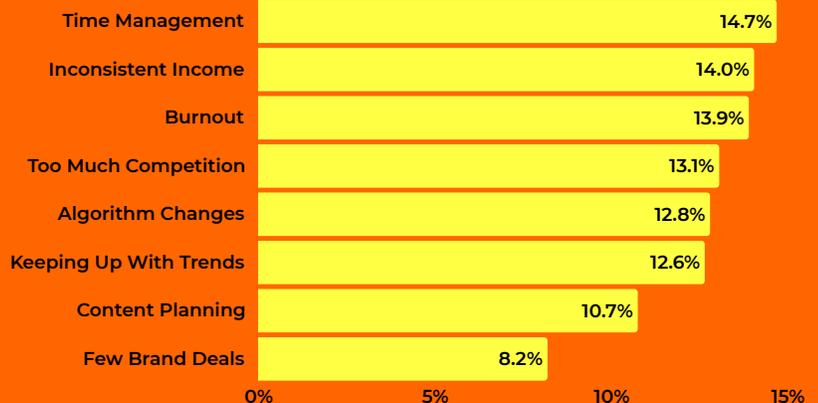
### Do you believe AI will significantly change how creators work in the next 2 years?

**56.1%**

of U.S. creators affirmed that they **definitely believe** that AI will significantly change how creators will work over the next few years.



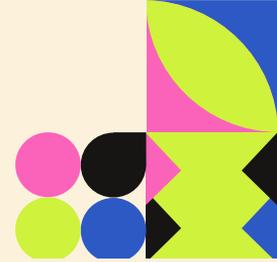
### What are your biggest challenges as a creator?\*



In 2026, creators are struggling most with time management (**14.7%**), navigating inconsistent income (**14%**), and avoiding burnout (**13.9%**).

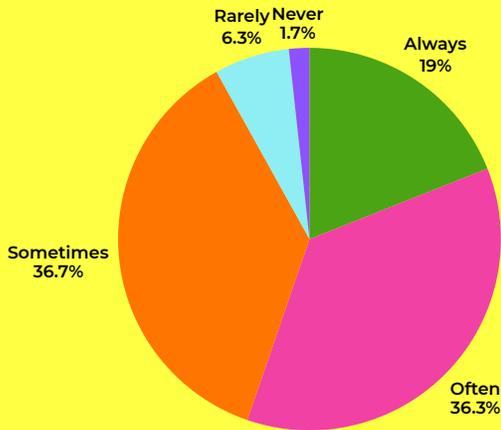
*This data visualization reflects a multi-select response.\**

# THE 2026 CREATOR LANDSCAPE



## The Future of Creator Monetization

Do you feel brands value creators fairly for their work?



In terms of monetization and brand deal rates, the majority (**55.3%**) of U.S. creators find brands to value them fairly.

Do you plan to launch your own product/brand in the next 1-3 years?

**20%**

of creators plan to launch a physical product/brand

**27%**

of creators plan to launch a digital product/brand

**36%**

are still considering if they'd like to launch a business

**17%**

do not plan to launch anything in the next few years

According to our survey findings, **Digital Products** will be the top priority for creator launches in the next 1-3 years.

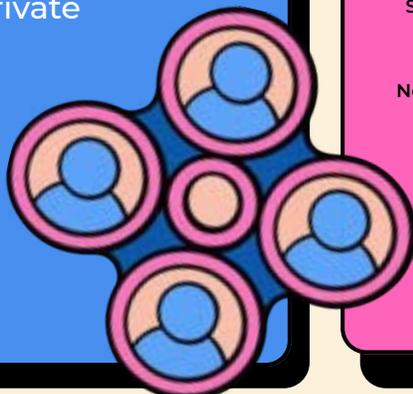
How likely are you to build a private or paid community in the next year?

**40.3%**

of creators are **very likely** to build a paid or private community in 2026

**31.1%**

of creators are **somewhat likely** to do so



Which skill do you want to invest in most for the future of your creator business?

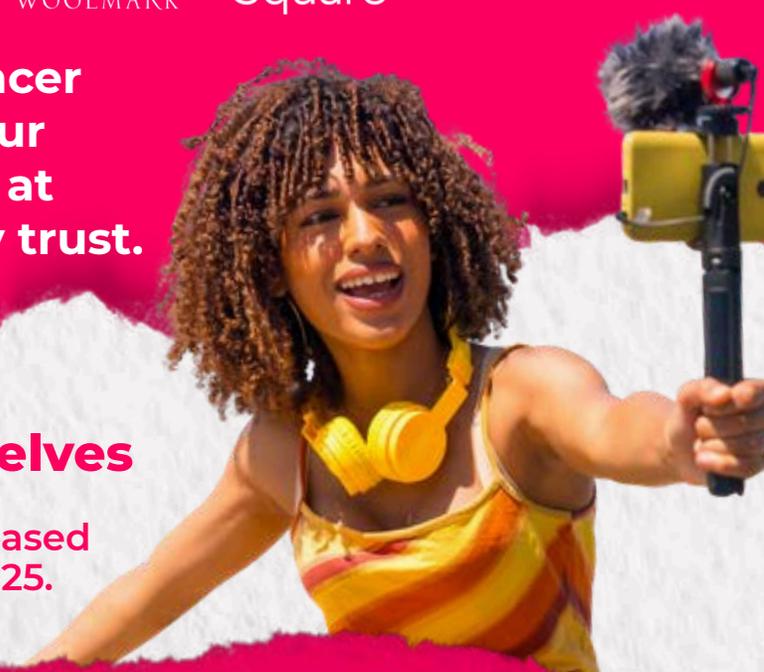


Creators' focus on video production (**22.4%**) and branding (**20%**) reveals a strategic pivot towards professionalization and tailored brand identities in 2026.

# Turn Creator Content Into Your Most Powerful Ad Channel



We amplify top-performing influencer content through paid media, so your brand reaches the right audiences at scale, with content people actually trust.



The numbers speak for themselves

**80%** of brands maintained or increased their influencer budgets in 2025.



And for good reasons...

**2x** Audience attention



Viewers engage deeper and are less likely to skip

**6 in 10**

people say they place more trust in influencer recommendations.

Results we've driven for brands with paid amplification:

**4-7x** ROAS

Online seller & sales

**2x** Conversion Value

Banking & Finance

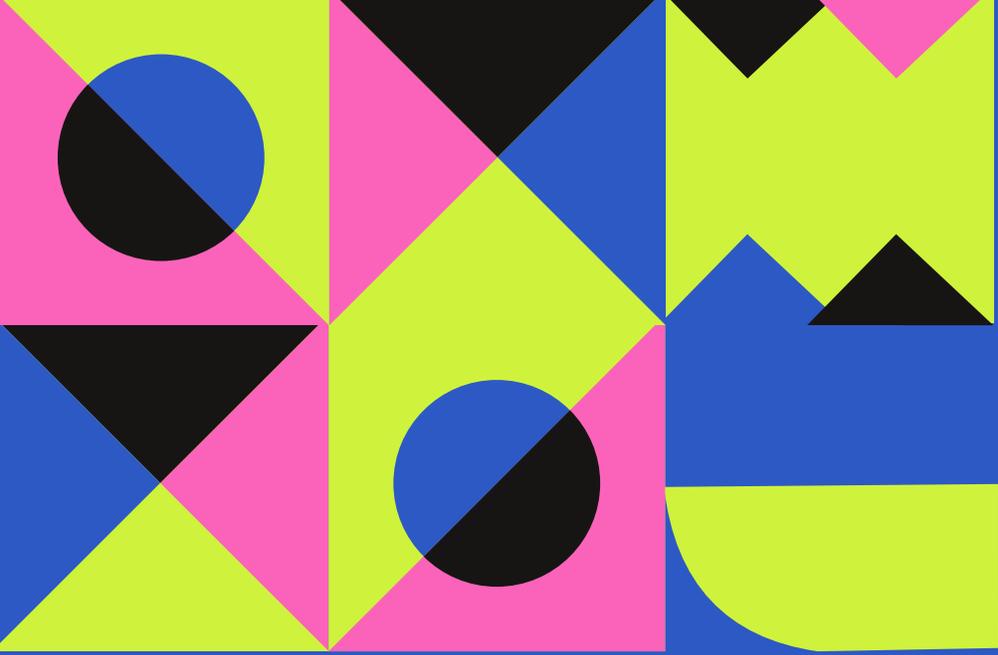
**30%+** Incremental Lift

Global Businesses Sales

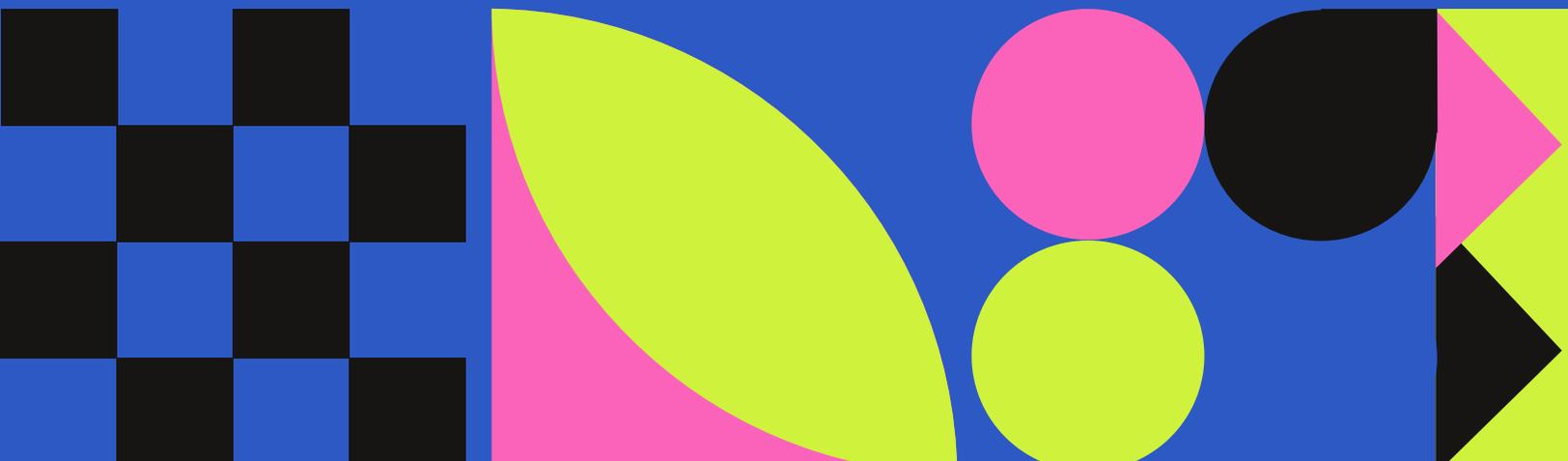


[Start Scaling With Paid Media!](#)





# SOCIAL MEDIA IN 2026



# TIKTOK



## TikTok Shop

TikTok is continuing to propel **social commerce trends** and set new standards for **affiliate marketing** with creators. In 2025, TikTok launched **GMV Max** for marketers and embraced **live shopping** for the **beauty** vertical, its **top-performing sales category** according to **Capital One**. **Short-form video** will be a priority for Shop content on TikTok in 2026 as it continues to influence TikTok Shop sales.

**\$32M**

Daily U.S. TikTok Shop Purchases

TikTok Shop Health & Beauty Purchases (Top Performing Category)

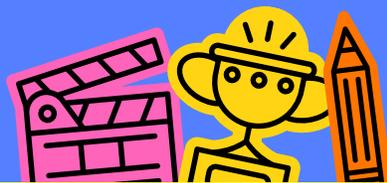
**79.3%**

## Creator Monetization

TikTok has introduced several new **rewards programs**, leaning into **high-performance niches**.



**Specialized Rewards Program:** Invite only, niche-based bonus earnings for Film & TV, Auto, Education, and Sports creators



**TikTok Go:** Allows creators to earn rewards via affiliate links for hotels, restaurants, and other travel experiences



## Community & Creator Programs

TikTok is taking notes from other top social media platforms with its latest tools and user features geared towards **community engagement**. **Creator Chat Rooms** allow creators to host a group chat with top fans, similar to **Instagram's Broadcast Channels**, and new **Footnotes** now feature **community-notes-style** contextual information on videos, like on X/Twitter.

# TIKTOK



## Platform Tools & Key Features

This past year, TikTok introduced several platform upgrades, including a refreshed **desktop** experience, expanded **bio length**, and early testing of **text-post creation** through **Search**. The app is doubling down on this **search-first user behavior**, now rivaling **Google** and **YouTube** as **1 in 4 users initiate a search within 30 seconds** of opening the app, according to [Ipsos](#).

**25%**

TikTok users initiate a search within 30 seconds of opening the app

## AI For Brands & Creators

TikTok's latest suite of **AI tools** and features focus heavily on **content optimization** as well as **social commerce** and **search recommendations**. TikTok now has **Gen-AI image tools**, **caption suggestions**, and two chatbots, **TikTok Takao** and **Creative Assistant**, which support with answering general questions and **data-based content strategy**, respectively. Moreover, marketers can also utilize Gen-AI tools for TikTok's **GMV Max** to optimize **TikTok Shop Ads**, boosting **performance** and **ROI**.

## TikTok Statistics Marketers Need to Know

Audiences and content preferences are shifting on TikTok, and the following stats are a signal of **what's to come** on the platform.

**SHORT-FORM CONTINUES TO DOMINATE TIKTOK**

**55%**

Of Time on TikTok is Spent Watching Short-Form Content, [Sensor Tower](#)

**GEN X+ AUDIENCES ARE INCREASING TIKTOK USE**

**25%**

Of TikTok's Audience is ages 45+, vs. only 2% in 2019, [EMARKETER](#)

**TIKTOK IS A GO-TO SOURCE FOR NEWS & UPDATES**

**1 in 5**

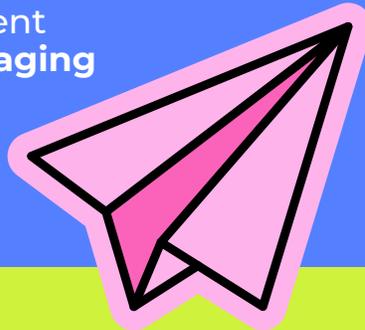
Americans now getting news from TikTok, [Pew Research Center](#)

# INSTAGRAM



## Instagram Reels: To Save & Share

This past year, **Reels** introduced a new **Watch History** tool, prioritized **Saves** and **Shares** for algorithmic distribution, debuted **password-gated Reels** for special promotions, and encouraged posting vertical videos under **3 minutes** in length. Although Instagram developed a standalone app for Reels, these videos serve a central role of fostering engagement through **private messaging** and **sharing with friends** on the platform.



## Direct Messaging & Friend Features

Instagram is leaning further into **friend-focused features**, adding **Direct Messaging** to the center of the menu, giving users direct access to their friends' messages. In addition to Direct Messaging, friends on Instagram now have access to a new **Blend feature** which create an **AI-powered Reels feed** blending their unique interests.



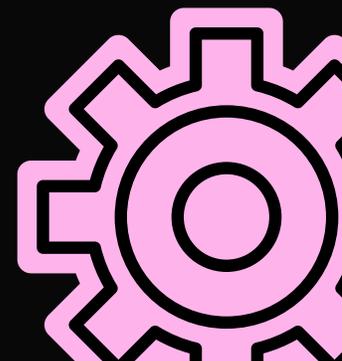
## Instagram Teen Accounts

Besides AI and other creative priorities, **safety** is a key value for Instagram moving into 2026. Last year, Instagram released a suite of new **safety tools** for **Teen Accounts**, protecting teen users ages **13 and older**. According to **Ipsos**, **95% of parents** claim that **Teen Accounts** are helpful in **safeguarding their teens** on the platform.



## Breaking Down the Instagram Algorithm

Instagram Head **Adam Mosseri** has been very vocal on the platform, sharing updates on **Instagram's algorithm** and **content development**. According to Mosseri, **Saves** and **Shares** are the **top metrics** utilized to give content **Relevancy Scores** which then impact its placement in users' algorithms. Mosseri also notes that these Relevancy Scores are given to content users follow as well as those they don't and take into account **predictions** on their **likeliness to engage** with said content.



# INSTAGRAM



## The Edits App

Meta officially launched the **Edits App**, a **standalone platform** for **editing** and **scheduling Reels**. Within its first week of release, the Edits App was **downloaded over 7M times globally**. Now, Edits creators have access to exciting **weekly updates** and **new tools** like **caption animations**, restyling with **AI**, **multi-platform sharing**, and a dedicated **“Ideas” tab** for brainstorming and analyzing content.

## Creator Tools & Analytics

Instagram has also upgraded its **in-app data features** to assist creators with strategizing and managing content. A new **Competitive Insights** feature allows creators to compare their performance with up to **10 other creator accounts**, while new **Shareable Insights** enable **downloadable analytics reports**. Meta users can also compare engagement across **Instagram** and **Facebook**, helping creators better understand **cross-platform performance** and strategize **content repurposing**.

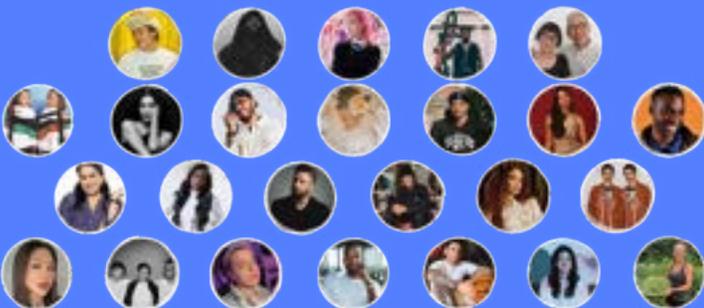
## New Influencer Programs

Instagram’s recent fleet of creator monetization programs distinguish **new creator recruitment** and **niche influence** as top priorities for 2026 and beyond.



**Instagram Rings:** Recognizes “extraordinary creativity” from creators rather than follower milestones

**2025 Awards Recipients:**



**Breakthrough Bonus:**

Incentivizes new creators with \$5K rewards, top earners reported \$50K monthly rewards for stellar Reels performance



# YOUTUBE



## Gen Alpha & Gen Z User Behavior

Gen Alpha and Gen Z youth's growing preference for YouTube is now translating to new **shopping** and **inspiration-seeking** behaviors. According to [YouTube Shopping's Culture & Trends Report](#):



**59%**

Of Gen Z say YouTube content has influenced their sense of style



**YouTube Shorts**

Drive more sales compared to equivalent spots on TikTok

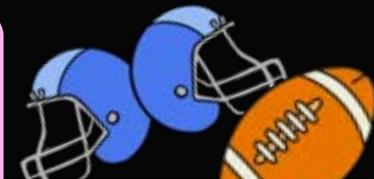


**38%**

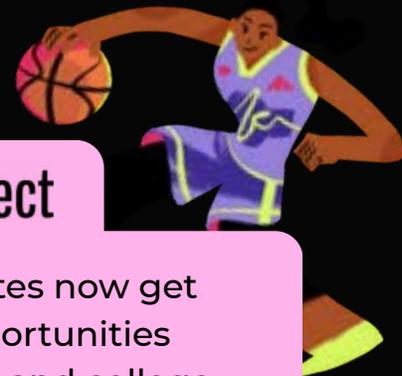
Increased use of YouTube by Gen Z last year in the U.K.

## Professional Sports Dominate YouTube

Last season, YouTube drew a **17.3M average-minute audience**, the **most-watched YouTube live stream ever**, for an exciting match between the Chargers and Chiefs. Moving forward, YouTube is embracing top influencers to draw in more **NFL** and **professional sports fans** through creator programs old and new.



**Access Pass Legends Program:** has generated over 200M views to date, enables creators and former NFL players to legally use NFL footage



NIL student athletes now get monetization opportunities through women's and college sports lineups

# YOUTUBE



## YouTube on the Big Screen

Given YouTube's streaming success and its viewership outpacing Netflix and Disney+, **TV streaming** is the **new frontier** for long-form YouTube content.

YouTube CEO Neal Mohan shared in his annual letter that **TV screens have officially surpassed mobile** as the top device for YouTube viewing in the U.S.

Recent **Nielsen data** revealed that **seniors watched twice as much YouTube content on TVs** in 2025 as they did in 2024.

## Creator Incubators, Education, & More

YouTube is expanding support for emerging creators by spotlighting channels **under 500K subscribers** through **Hype**, launching new **education initiatives** like **Creator Academy** in the **MENA**, and doubling down on **entrepreneurship** by actively promoting creator-led startups.

## Rising Trends on YouTube Shorts

YouTube is **upgrading Shorts** with **longer 3-minute formats**, updated **view counting** from the first frame, and expanded **creation tools** including **AI stickers**, **rhythm alignment**, **AI music**, **new remix features**, and tighter **Adobe Premiere mobile integration**. On the monetization side, the platform is rolling out **Shorts Partnership Ads** and **shopping stickers**, which are driving significantly higher product clicks than traditional tags.

## THE INFLUENCE FACTOR

Want to learn more about storytelling and content strategy for YouTube? Check out our episode of [The Influence Factor](#) featuring [Victoria Blinova, Senior Strategic Partner Manager at YouTube!](#)



# YOUTUBE



## New Creator Monetization Models

This past year, YouTube introduced several new monetization models and social commerce opportunities for creators.

### Monetization



- **Player for Education:** now pays creators based on watch time, even without ads
- **Open Call:** allows brands to post campaign briefs for which creators can submit videos to be used as ads

### Social Commerce



- **Shoppable URLs:** can be marked at specific timestamps set by creators in videos
- **TalkingShopLive Partnership:** new integration for live shopping purchases on YouTube

## New Platform Tools & AI Features

AI was a key theme for YouTube's latest suite creator tools in 2025. YouTube also rolled out new **creator tools** to **expand global reach** and **discovery**, including **multi-language audio**, updating analytics with **viewer segmentation**, and introducing new social features like **expanded Community spaces**.



YouTubers can now use Gemini AI to analyze livestreams to auto-find Short clips



YouTube Shorts recently integrated Google's Veo 2 AI to generate video clips



For audio creators, new AI tools for podcasting and music creation are in development

# SNAPCHAT



## Gen Z on Snap: Shopping & AR Trends

Snapchat's latest **Generation Report** shows that for **young shoppers**, influence comes from **shared experiences**, not traditional sales tactics. Shopping is **highly social**, with nearly all Snap users involving friends in the process, positioning **AR** as a proven tool for brands looking to **drive meaningful engagement** with Gen Z consumers.

75%

Active Snapchat users  
ages 13 - 34

57%

Users turning to Snap  
for AR-powered shopping

97%

Snap users involving  
friends in shopping

## Creator Programs & Monetization

### Monetization & Growth

- **Snap The Gap:** elevates female athletes into monetized Snap Stars
- **Snap School Partnerships:** educates creators to enable deeper, long-term brand partnerships



### Discovery & Funding

- **"Find Your Favorites":** recent initiative spotlighting creators building sustainable audiences
- **\$500M:** total value of Snap Star creator payouts in 2025, signaling continued investments in 2026



## Joining the Pro-Sports Movement

Snapchat is also leaning further into **professional sports** as part of its creator strategy, aligning with a broader shift across social platforms. This approach builds on **Snap The Gap's** inclusion of athletes from the **NWSL, WNBA, and NCAA**, alongside initiatives like its **NFL creator program**, reinforcing Snap's commitment to blending **sports, creators, and culture**.

# SNAPCHAT



## AR, AI, & Technology on Snapchat

Snap is accelerating its **AR strategy**, with **India** emerging as a **key growth market** as its AR developer community has **expanded 50%** over the past two years, according to Snap **data**. The platform is also **advancing AI-driven experiences** through **sponsored AI lenses** that let brands creatively modify user photos, alongside a partnership with **Perplexity** to bring **conversational AI search** directly into Snapchat.



## Back to the DMs: Messaging Trends

Snap recently released its **Snapchat Recap 2025** report, highlighting key shifts in **user behavior** and **engagement** over the past year and what we can expect looking towards 2026.



**5B**

Voice notes sent on Snap by U.S. users



**1.7B**

Min. daily in-app talk time (30% YoY growth)



**44%**

Increase in chat reactions on Snapchat

Given the increased use of **messaging** on Snap, brands who are able to create **sharable content** on Snap, across **Spotlight** or **creator branded Stories**, may see greater **engagement** this year.

## THE INFLUENCE FACTOR

Check out our episode of [The Influence Factor](#) featuring **Brooke Berry, Head of Creator Development at Snap Inc.**, for an inside look into the strategic programs helping uplift Snap Stars.

# LINKEDIN



## The Rise of Video on LinkedIn

Video is taking center stage on LinkedIn, with the platform rolling out a **TikTok-style “For You” feed on desktop**, surfacing **more videos in search**, adding a **more prominent follow button**, and introducing **Average Watch Time** to spotlight what's truly resonating with viewers.

**36%**

**Increase in LinkedIn video uploads YoY**

**36%**

**Increase in LinkedIn user viewership of videos YoY**

## Creator Programs, Revenue & Tools

LinkedIn is expanding creator monetization through **ad revenue sharing**, **sponsored creator posts**, and its **BrandLink program**, while also launching a **new API** that gives **third-party tools** access to **key creator metrics**. The platform is also doubling down on its creator strategy with a **B2B creator guide** highlighting the **strong influence** creators have on **buyer behavior**.

## B2B Thought Leadership & Content Trends

**Thought leadership** is proving more powerful than traditional marketing on LinkedIn, especially as **Millennials** and **Gen Z** now favor self-education through video-first content. According to **Buffer**, **posting 2–5 times per week** and using **strong verbal hooks** to capture attention in a fast-moving feed will be critical strategy moving forward.

**71%**

**of B2B buying on the platform is dominated by Millennials and Gen Z**

## LinkedIn Platform Tools & Analytics

LinkedIn is enhancing insights and reach with more **advanced post analytics** that show which content drives **profile views**, **new followers**, and **outbound clicks** for **Premium Business users**. All members can now **create newsletters** without a follower minimum, and **deeper analytics** are available through **API integrations** with **Hootsuite**, **Buffer**, and **Metricool**.

# LINKEDIN



## Advertising & Brand Partnerships

LinkedIn is expanding its **advertising options** with new **connected TV capabilities**, tapping into the proven effectiveness of video, which **93% of B2B marketers** say **outperforms static images** for **brand recall**. LinkedIn also partnered with **Adobe Express** to provide **LinkedIn-optimized ad templates** that can be **exported directly into LinkedIn Ads**, streamlining ad creation for brand marketers. Additionally, LinkedIn is scaling its **BrandLink program** through **B2B creator-led shows** and **partnerships** with major publishers such as **BBC Studios, TED, The Economist, and Vox**.

## Insightful LinkedIn Strategy, Exclusive IMF Data

Our team at **The Influencer Marketing Factory** studied over **9.5K LinkedIn creators** and **195 sponsored posts** to create in-depth report on **LinkedIn's creator and brand landscape**. Read our **Ultimate LinkedIn Influencer Guide** for exclusive **platform insights**, LinkedIn influencer marketing **case studies**, and more!

<https://timf.io/linkedin>



# TOP CREATOR PLATFORMS

## AI APPS



### Opus Clip

Transforms long-form videos into clips and publishes them across socials with one click.



### Meta AI Studio

Lets anyone create and discover chatbots based on their interests, including creators who want to build extensions of themselves.



### ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini

User-friendly AI platforms commonly used by creators for content ideation, script writing, email revisions, and other routine daily tasks.

## MONETIZATION TOOLS



### Visa

Creator tools position creators as small businesses with real-time payouts, AI invoice management, and credit access.



### Karat

Provides creators with tailored financing services, rewards, and support to help them earn and save more as they grow.

## NEWSLETTER PLATFORMS



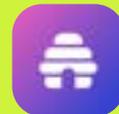
### Substack

Connects creators and communities, offering top-tier writing, podcasts, and videos across diverse topics.



### Kit (ConvertKit)

The premier marketing platform for all creators, offering creator-focused tools, improved templates, and an App Store.



### Beehiiv

An all-in-one platform for creators to build and monetize email newsletters with tools for design, analytics, and more.

## PODCASTING



### Patreon

Best known for podcasting, enabling creators to build community and earn recurring income through subscriptions.



### Riverside

AI-powered online studio for recording, editing, repurposing, and distributing studio-quality podcasts and videos with ease.



### Spotify for Creators

The home of audio and video podcasting on Spotify, offering creators powerful tools to grow, monetize, and manage their shows.

# TOP CREATOR PLATFORMS

## DIGITAL PRODUCTS



### Kajabi

Helps creators create, market, and sell digital content, with support for online courses and app development.



### Stan.store

Makes it easy to earn online by hosting courses, digital products, and bookings directly in creators' link-in-bio.



### Teachable

Trusted by 150K+ creators and businesses to build, sell, and scale courses, memberships, and more.

## CONTENT CREATION



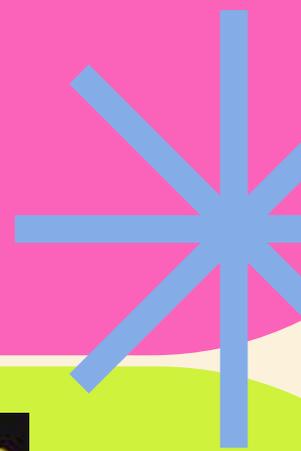
### Capcut

Freemium, AI-powered editing platform, offering smart templates and streamlined tools for video, photo, and voice editing.



### Canva

Free online design platform for creating social media posts, videos, logos, and more.



## SOCIAL COMMERCE



### LTK

The top social community where 40M+ users discover and shop trusted recommendations from their favorite creators.



### ShopMy

A premium affiliate and influencer marketing platform that connects top content creators with leading brands they know and love.



### WhatNot

A live shopping marketplace to buy, sell, and explore 250+ product categories through interactive livestream auctions.

## LINK IN BIO



### hoo.be

An invite-only link-in-bio platform for top brands and creators, offering a home for bloggers and other creatives to launch their own hub.



### Link.tree

The world's largest link-in-bio platform, used by 70M+ creators to sell, share, and showcase everything they do online.



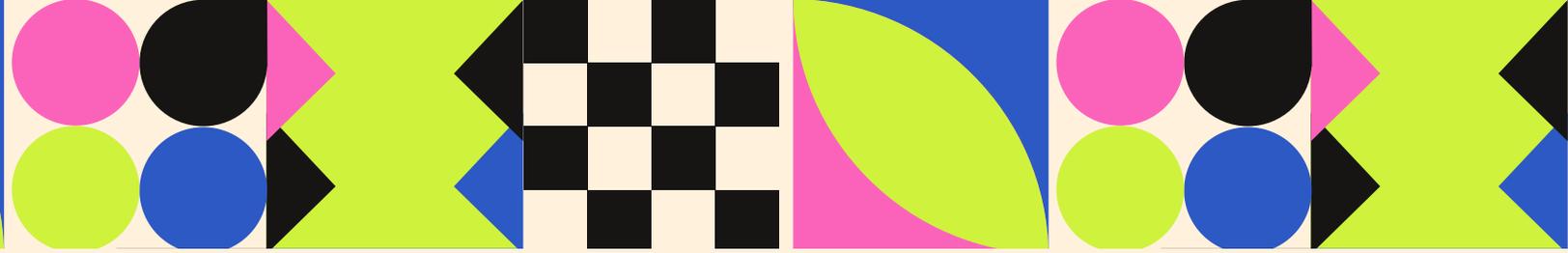
### Later

Offers influencer marketing, social media management, social listening, and link-in-bio solutions for creators.



### Beacons.ai

A free all-in-one platform for creators, offering a link-in-bio, media kit builder, online store, and email marketing tools.



The Creator Economy is rapidly evolving, projected to surpass **\$500 billion by 2027**, driven by the rise of influencer marketing.



This resource covers **content monetization, personal branding, community engagement, and more!**

Featuring insights from industry leaders and top creators.

Whether you're an established influencer or just starting out,

### **The Influencer Marketing Factory**

is here to support you with our **Ultimate Creator Guide**

[Access The Ultimate Creator Guide Here](#)



# THE NEW FRONTIERS OF CREATOR COMMUNITIES



Collaboration plays an important role in community building on Reddit, but the platform's structure around channels and threads has made creator authority a growing focus that developers are actively supporting. As Reddit moves into 2026, integrations between Reddit Pro insights and AI-powered search are elevating community discussions, positioning Reddit as a leading destination for human-driven knowledge rooted in expertise and influence within specific interest-based communities.

**"REDDIT IS SUCH A POWERFUL PLATFORM TO GO WHEN YOU'RE UNCERTAIN ABOUT SOMETHING BECAUSE YOU'RE NOT JUST GOING TO GET ONE ANSWER...IT ACTUALLY INSPIRES YOU TO ASK MORE QUESTIONS AND SEE MORE PERSPECTIVES"**

**Will Cady**  
*Global Brand Ambassador*



[Listen to Will's episode here!](#)



This past year, Substack centered its platform strategy on transforming writing into a collaborative growth engine, powered by a unique peer-driven recommendation system, now accounting for the majority of new subscriptions. In 2026, Substack is doubling down on its "multi-node" discovery, allowing creators to bundle subscriptions, cross-promote audiences, and launch joint multimedia projects directly within the dynamic platform.



# THE COMMUNITY MARKETING FUNNEL

## The 3 Core Communities Every Brand Needs

### TOP OF FUNNEL

### AWARENESS



#### Interest-Based Communities

- Niche Social Spaces
- Industry Conversations
- Creator-Audiences

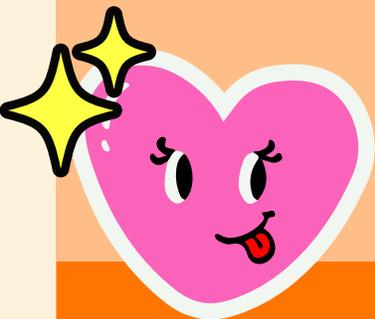
#### Brand Role:

- Listen
- Observe
- Storytell

**Goal: Relevance and Discovery**

### MIDDLE OF FUNNEL

### CONSIDERATION



#### Fan-Made Brand Communities

- Product Discussions
- Fan Groups and Subreddits
- Comment Sections

#### Brand Role:

- Be Present
- Support
- Engage

**Goal: Trust and Loyalty**

### BOTTOM OF FUNNEL CONVERSION → ADVOCACY



#### Brand-Owned Community

- Discord, Reddit, Hub
- Insiders and Ambassadors
- Feedback and Co-Creation

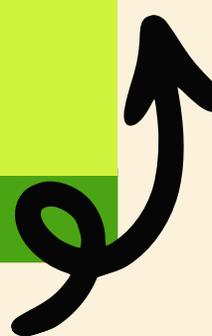
#### Brand Role:

- Lead
- Reward
- Define

**Goal: Advocacy**

Advocacy doesn't end the funnel - it restarts it

**Community** → **Advocacy** → **Awareness**





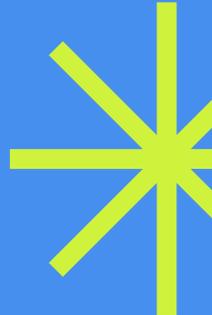
# CREATOR LABOR 2.0: ADVOCACY & POLICY



More brands will ask [creators] to **manage live streaming** and **storefronts** (see Sephora), and this will require Creators to **seek more sophisticated protections**, i.e. **insurance**, and other services (**accounting and legal**).

Creators will also become **more vocal** about brands that are **not holding up their end** or are **treating them unfairly**. Creators will recognize that the **same power to support a brand** can also bring to light brands that are **not supportive of them**.

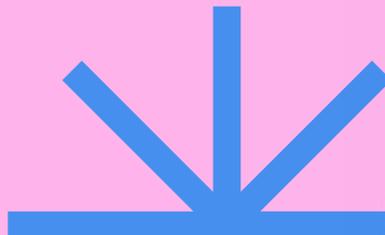
**Frank Poe**  
*Attorney & Founder*



Spurred by **platform dominance** and **AI-related uncertainty**, 2026 will mark an **inflection point** for **creator labor rights**. I anticipate more coordinated forms of **creator activism** and **solidarity**, alongside **deeper engagement** with **policymakers**.

Creators are now being **taken seriously** across the **news, information, and entertainment** industries... In 2026, creators will be held to **higher standards** by **media institutions, political actors**, and the wider public.

**Brooke Erin Duffy, Ph.D.**  
*Associate Professor*



# AI AND THE FUTURE OF THE CREATOR ECONOMY

## Growing Investment in AI

AI has become one of the **most heavily funded** layers of the creator economy, signaling a **structural shift** rather than a passing trend. According to a recent report from **Business Insider**, more than **\$2B** was **invested** in **creator economy startups** in **2025**, with **\$1.2B** of that total raised by just **eight AI content-creation companies**, each securing **funding rounds** of **\$50M** or more. The following are some of the year's **most notable AI investments**, highlighting the tools attracting the greatest investor attention moving into 2026.

**\$250M**

SUNO

**\$180M**

 synthesia

**\$180M**

IElevenLabs

**\$140M**

Manychat

## Creator Adoption: Optimizing Workflows

AI is now **embedded** across nearly **every stage** of the **creator workflow**, from **ideation** and **editing** to **distribution**. For many creators, these tools act as the ultimate form of **optimization**, **shrinking production timelines** and **lowering production barriers** for new creators. According to data from **Billion Dollar Boy**, **87%** of content creators say they **used AI tools more in 2025**, and **86%** expect to **use them even more this year**. Although AI can help streamline workflows, speed alone is no longer a competitive advantage, pushing creators to **differentiate** through **storytelling** and **human-led creativity**.

### The State of Virtual Influencers

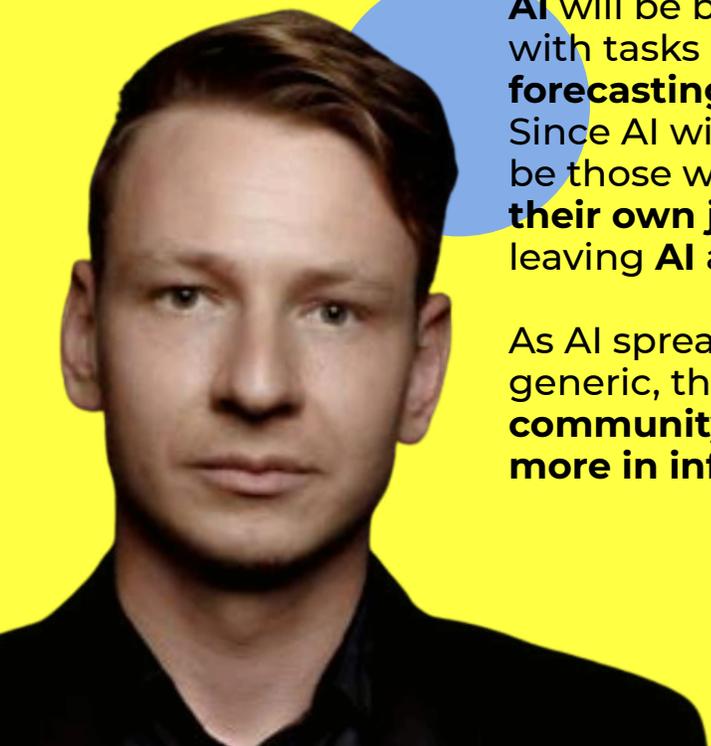
Check out our Virtual Influencers survey for exclusive data on the *influence* of digital computer-generated “creators.”

[Read the full blog and infographic here!](#)





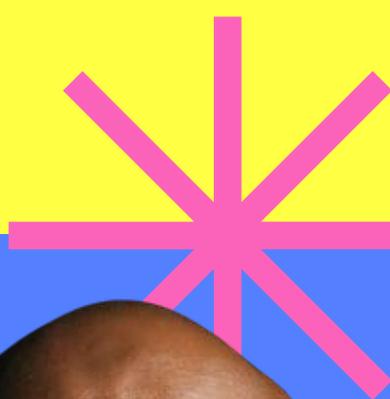
# AI AS A CO-PILOT: NEW BRAND STRATEGIES



AI will be built into most **workflows**, helping marketers with tasks like **finding** and **analyzing creators**, **forecasting performance**, and **testing messages**. Since AI will be **everywhere**, the ones who **succeed** will be those who use it to **speed up** the work but still **trust their own judgment**, staying in the **driver's seat** and leaving AI as a **co-pilot**.

As AI spreads and many touchpoints start to feel generic, this mix of **measurable impact** and **human, community-led content** will be a key reason to **invest more in influencers**.

**Alexander Frolov**  
CEO & Co-Founder



**Brands**, especially in **B2B**, will increasingly run **creator marketing programs** focused on boosting their **visibility** in **AI-powered search tools** like ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google Gemini.

As **blogs, newsletters, YouTube, and LinkedIn** become some of the **most cited sources** for LLMs, working with creators to **produce content** across these channels, aligned with how brands want to **appear in search**, will become a **key strategy** for **optimizing visibility in AI**.

**Lindsey Gamble**  
Creator Economy Expert



# AI AND THE FUTURE OF THE CREATOR ECONOMY

## Increased AI Ad-Spend in 2026

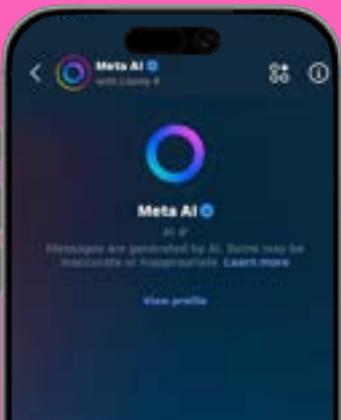
Marketers are rapidly increasing spend on AI-assisted and AI-generated creator content. Looking ahead, **79%** of marketers plan to **further increase spending on generative AI creator content** this year, up from **70%** in **2023**. At the same time, **76%** expect AI to **grow overall creator economy ad spend**, and **77%** anticipate **reallocating budgets** from traditional creator marketing to **AI-generated content** by **2026**, per **Billion Dollar Boy**.

## How Platforms Are Investing in AI

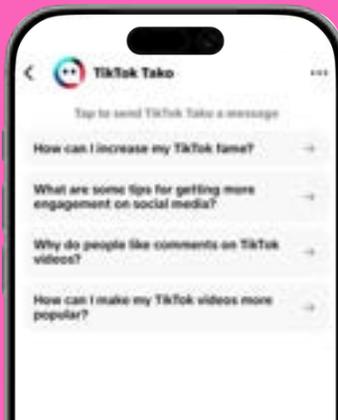
Platforms are **embedding AI** more deeply into the **creator ecosystem** through **avatars, conversational features, and automated tools** aimed at **boosting engagement** and **ad inventory**. **TikTok** and **YouTube** are emphasizing **advanced generative video** and **AI-powered editing** to streamline the production of **short-form, viral content**, while **Instagram** is leaning into **conversational AI** and **generative styling** to make everyday **storytelling** more **interactive** and **personalized** for creators and brands.



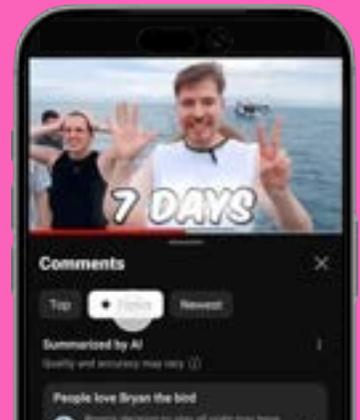
INSTAGRAM



TIKTOK



YOUTUBE





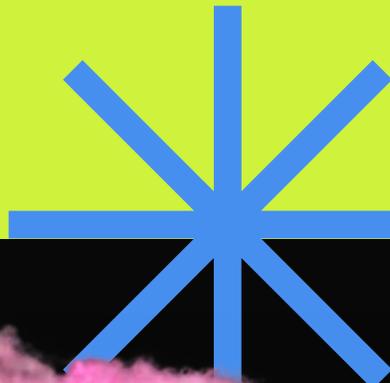
# AI & THE COMPETITIVE ATTENTION ECONOMY



AI slop is going to drive more social media users **back into the real world** and at the same time **ramp up demand for authentic, imperfect content** from real creators.

**Increased competition for fewer eyeballs will drive up the prices** brands are **willing to pay** for these types of creators...As it becomes more difficult for **DTC/digital-native brands** to grab and hold the **attention** of their customers online, they will **rely on creators with storytelling skills** to do this more.

**Lindsey Lugin**  
*Founder & CEO*  
**fypm\***



**Creators that hit key audiences and niche communities** will find success in a year where **brands** are eager to go **direct to consumers**.

**Creators** don't just endorse, they **produce, distribute, and contextualize** the message for a **specific audience. Trust lives inside communities**, not mass reach...Products still need **storytellers**, and audiences still **follow people they trust**.

**Brooke Berry**  
*Head of Creator Development*

**Snap Inc.**





# BRANDS & CREATORS CO-DESIGNING CULTURE



As **Brands** start to **understand** and **appreciate** the **influencer voices** and **magic** on their consumers, **2026** will see more **deep, long term brand partnerships** with influencers who represent the brand **ethos** and **personality**. The move from many **one-time interactions** to fewer but **longer, more meaningful partnerships** is coming!

**Tarang Jain**

*Senior Director, Paid Media, US*



**Creators** have always **shaped culture** through their **communities** and **brand's** have **rented space**, or often times even hijacked their way in to these spaces.

In **2026**, **smart brands** will **empower, come alongside,** and **build cultural moments** with **Creators** by bringing them in at the very beginning of the **campaign building process** to **build the strategy and creative ideas collaboratively**, instead of building something **Creators** don't resonate with and asking them to fit into the brand's box.

**Austin Null**

*Chief Creator Officer*

## WE GET IT



# CREATORS IRL

## The New Wave of Experiential Marketing

The creator economy is experiencing a **renaissance** of **creativity** and **connection**, one taking place **offline** and in person. According to a recent report from **Reach**, **college-age students** are shifting away from traditional, static marketing and toward more **authentic, real-time, interactive experiences** like **in-person creator activations**.

## Key Stats Marketers Need to Know

The **Influencer Marketing Factory** conducted an exclusive **Creators IRL Survey** with **1K U.S.-based respondents ages 18-65** to learn how fans are **connecting** with **brands** and **creators** through **experiential influencer marketing**. The following are some of the top stats marketers need to know.

41%

Of respondents attended at least one Creator IRL event this past year

2/3

Respondents interested in attending an IRL event (34% yes, 33% maybe)

33%

Very likely to make a purchase at an IRL event, with 60% somewhat likely

## Which type of influencer event would excite you the most?



### Meet & Greet

Casual hangout or photo opportunity with the influencer



### Product Launch

First access to a new product or exclusive drop with creators



### Workshop

Learn directly from creators (e.g. content, beauty, business)



# CREATORS IRL:

*How The Creator Economy Intersects  
With Experiential Marketing*



## Creators IRL Blog & Survey

Check out our complete blog for **fresh survey insights**, a deep dive into event **case studies**, and takeaways from our **exclusive interview** with **Brooke Berry**, founder of The Shift Crawl.

[timf.io/creatorsIRL](https://timf.io/creatorsIRL)



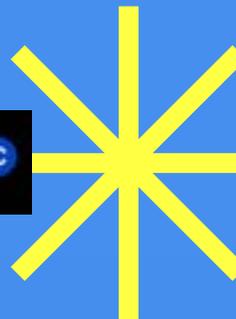
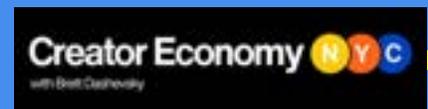
# VANITY METRICS VS. MESURABLE ROI



In 2026, brands will **prioritize creators** with **proven audience resonance**, not just reach.

**Measurement** will shift beyond likes and views toward **post-campaign insight**, especially **comment analysis**, to understand what **audiences** actually **thought, felt, and took away**.

**Brett Dashevsky**  
*Founder*



In 2026, brands are pivoting toward the **bottom line**. **Success** is no longer measured by the "vanity" of views, likes, and comments; instead, the focus has shifted to **measurable ROI, direct sales, and revenue growth**.

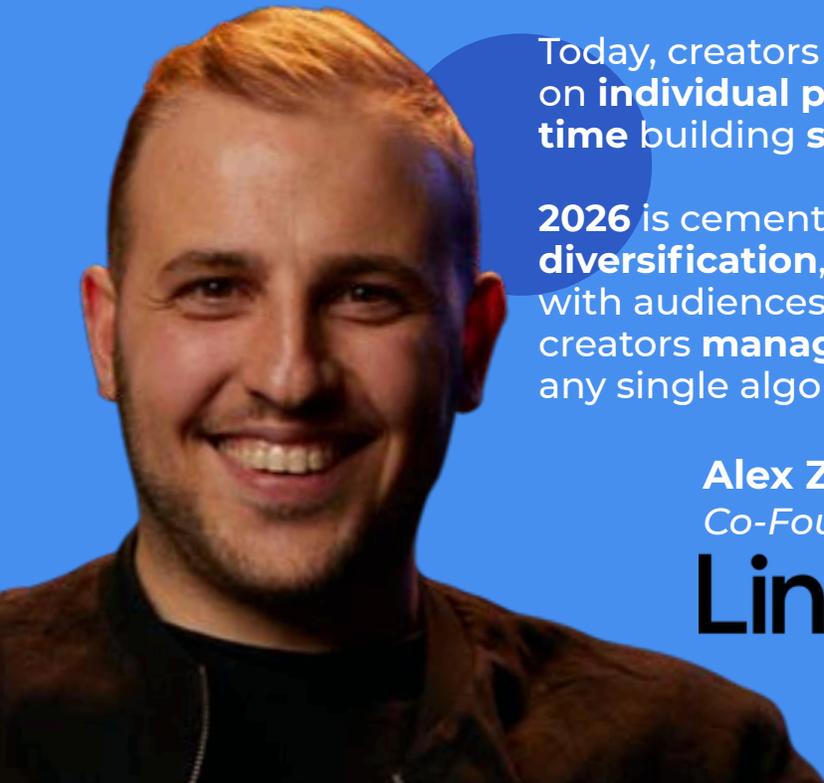
Moving forward, **high engagement** should be viewed as a **secondary indicator** rather than the **North Star** of influencer marketing.

**Omer Dahan**  
*Head of Affiliates & Partnerships*





# DIVERSIFICATION & OWNERSHIP IN 2026

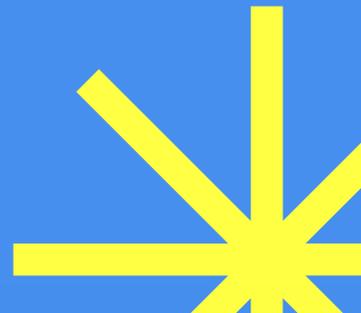


Today, creators are spending **less time** trying to win on **individual platforms** and considerably **more time** building **sustainable businesses**.

**2026** is cementing a shift toward **ownership**, **diversification**, and **direct, authentic relationships** with audiences. That means that **tools** that can help creators **manage** that **complexity** matter more than any single algorithm or platform decision.

Alex Zaccaria  
Co-Founder & CEO

Linktree\*



In 2026, the **creator economy** will move from being **attention-driven** to **ownership-driven**. We'll see fewer creators chasing one-off brand deals and more building **real businesses** with **diversified revenue streams**, **long-term partnerships**, and **IP they actually own**.

The **gap** between **“content creators”** and **“creator-entrepreneurs”** will widen and the latter will **define the next era**.

Gigi Robinson  
Founder, Creator, & Author

HOSTS *of*  
INFLUENCE



# RISING CREATOR FOUNDERS & INVESTORS

## The Surge of Influencer Entrepreneurship

As influencer marketing evolves, more creators are becoming **successful entrepreneurs**, launching **brands** built on **deep audience insights and trust**. Their close connection with followers gives them a **powerful edge**, unlocking opportunities to expand into **diverse** and **scalable business ventures**.

## Top Influencer Brands Across Industries

Check out our library of **Influencer Marketing Factory blogs** for insights on the **top creator-founded brands**, including **food**, **beauty**, **fitness**, and more.



## THE INFLUENCE FACTOR

Check out our episode of The Influence Factor featuring **Saurabh Shah, CEO of Warren James**, for an inside look into the end-to-end processes behind scaling creator businesses.





# RISING CREATOR FOUNDERS & INVESTORS

## The Creator Investor Shift

Creator entrepreneurs are taking the **financial lead** in the creator economy, backed by **major investments** from **VC firms** like **Slow Ventures** that are helping **scale their niche businesses**. Now, influencers are stepping into the role of **investors** themselves, accepting **equity deals** in their favorite brands and funding the **next generation** of **viral consumer products**.

## Top 3 Best Influencer Investors

The following are three of the **top influencer investors** who have made headlines for their **strategic investments**. Learn more on our blog [here!](#)



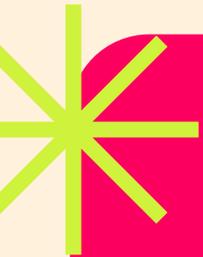
Alix Earle



Logan Paul



MrBeast



## THE INFLUENCE FACTOR

Want to learn more about investments in influencer-founded brands? Check out our episode of [The Influence Factor](#) featuring [Billy Parks, Venture Partner at Slow Ventures!](#)





# CREATOR IP & LONG-TERM BRAND STRATEGY

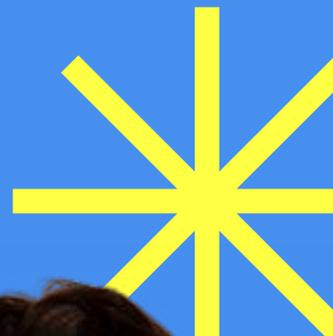


The clearest patterns across the strongest social work this year, from brands and creators alike, revealed a **shift away** from ‘**campaign thinking**’ and toward **programming thinking**.

The best brands no longer aim to win a **single moment**; they architect **content systems** that are **serialized, character-driven, community-activated, globally scalable, and increasingly AI-powered**. They are behaving less like advertisers and more like **IP houses**.

**Jared Carneson**  
*Head of Global Social Media*

**Adobe**



**Creators** are becoming **modern IP owners**.

The next phase of the creator economy is about turning **audience trust** into **durable, diversified businesses** that can **scale** across **categories, channels, and years**.

**Ben Wiedner**  
*Co-Founder*

**Warren James™**





# WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE CREATOR ECONOMY



The next evolution of influencer marketing is designing creator ecosystems that adapt over time, instead of being fully defined upfront.

**Jacob Wallach**  
*Founder*

**Social4TheWin**



I think this is going to be the year of **reckoning**. Only the **best** will **survive**.

**Jessy Grossman**  
*Founder*

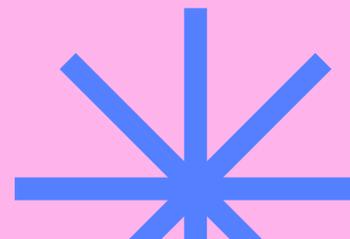
**WIIM**



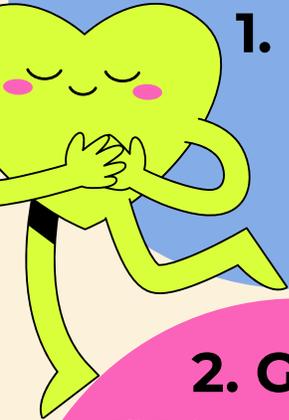
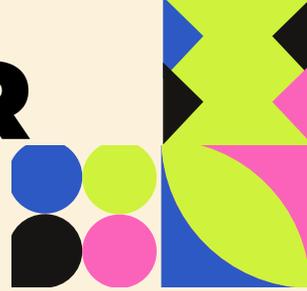
The availability of data will become more tablestakes, but the companies that have the **best, most meaningful** and **action-oriented data**, alongside the **tools** to take action will **win**. We will continue to see there is **no single way to win** in creator marketing, and the **best brands** will be **natively nimble**.

**Pierre-Loic Assayag**  
*Founder*

**traackr**



# BEST PRACTICES FOR MARKETERS IN 2026



## 1. Embrace Co-Creation With Creators

The most successful activations are co-created with creators, giving them the freedom and input to naturally integrate brands in a way that feels authentic and resonates with their audience. Involving creators early through clear communication and collaborative planning helps elevate audience satisfaction by aligning expectations and strengthening creative execution.

## 2. Gen Alpha is the Next Key Audience

TikTok remains the leading social platform among younger users, while Snapchat also skews heavily Gen Alpha and Gen Z. As the creator economy matures, emerging brands like Sincerely Yours and Yes Day are increasingly launching with Gen Alpha in mind, meeting this rising audience where they already spend their time.



## 3. Increase Short-Form Content Investment

As outlined in our analysis with HypeAuditor, TikTok videos and Instagram Reels dominate median engagement rates across platforms. Moreover, prioritizing saveable and shareable content is key for maximizing short-form creator partnerships.

## 4. Sponsoring Creator Series Authentically

In 2026, brands that integrate naturally into structured creator series will succeed with developing authentic partnerships. Not only does this take the guesswork out of creative briefing, but it ties brands to the overarching story arc of creators' social channels.



## 5. Lengthen the Content Lifecycle

With a strong omnichannel strategy, brands can extend the momentum of an influencer activation well beyond the in-person moment. Successful creator-led events account for both physical and digital audiences by leveraging formats like livestreams, behind-the-scenes content, creator vlogs, fan POVs, and recap reels. When executed effectively, a single IRL event can fuel weeks of content, conversation, and engagement.



# NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREATORS IN 2026

01

## AI Optimization

Utilize AI to streamline content creation workflows like scripting content, formalizing emails, and building out content calendars. While human creativity remains the heart of social media, AI serves as a powerful tool for optimizing and scaling the production process.

02

## Signature Series That Scale

Regardless the platform, signature series are a necessary strategy for creators looking to scale their audience and brand opportunities. Key examples include iShowSpeed's travel series and the resurgence of Vlogmas during the 2025 holiday season.

03

## Fan Engagement Online & IRL

Discover new ways to engage with your community online and IRL. Utilize Stories or Broadcast channels to poll fans on their interests then organize a fun in-person event. Social media users are going analog, and IRL events are the best way to reach them.

04

## Peak Nostalgia

According to TikTok, searches for "2016" surged by 452% in the beginning of January. Throwback music and content styles like long-form YouTube vlogs are trending, and creators have a prime opportunity to tap into this wave of nostalgia across all social channels.

05

## Test For TV

TV streaming is set to be a major priority for YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok in 2026, requiring creators to evolve their content strategies. This year, influencers may experiment with long-form series and livestreaming to better align with TV viewing behaviors. For larger influencers, FAST channels offer a scalable way to expand reach with premium TV-ready content.

06

## Expanding to Global Audiences

Global audiences mean new horizons for creative collaboration and meaningful engagement. In 2026, creators can expect to leverage AI dubbing among other tools to distribute content to global audiences across diverse social channels.

# THE INFLUENCE FACTOR



A TOP 1% PODCAST ABOUT INFLUENCER MARKETING, THE CREATOR ECONOMY, SOCIAL COMMERCE AND MUCH MORE...

Hosted by Alessandro Bogliari,  
Co-Founder and CEO  
The Influencer Marketing Factory

WITH GUESTS FROM



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THE INFLUENCER  
MARKETING  
FACTORY





# Need help building your influencer marketing strategy?



The Influencer Marketing Factory is a globally recognized agency specializing in crafting bespoke influencer campaigns for businesses across all sectors. Our team of business marketing experts excels in driving business growth through strategic influencer partnerships.

Trusted by top brands for influencer marketing success:



**Unleash the Power of Influencer Marketing!**



# Become an IMF Talent!

At The Influencer Marketing Factory, we specialize in helping creators secure more brand deals and gain valuable PR opportunities to boost their visibility in major publications. With our commitment to inclusivity and diverse talent representation, we're here to support your growth, expand your reach, and align you with the right brands.

Connect with us today and take your influence to the next level!

[Learn more about our  
Talent Agency Services  
HERE!](#)



# Resources

1. <https://www.americaninfluencercouncil.com/aic-member-memo/2025-creator-economy-research-from-goldman-sachs>
2. <https://www.tubefilter.com/2025/03/19/emarketer-youtube-influencer-marketing-report/>
3. <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/technology/digital-media-trends-consumption-habits-survey/2025.html>
4. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/chelseatobin/2025/07/10/what-google-indexing-instagram-means-for-your-business-visibility/>
5. <https://www.midiaresearch.com/reports/the-state-of-the-video-creator-economy-the-road-to-one-billion-creators>
6. <https://www.iab.com/insights/2025-creator-economy-ad-spend-strategy-report/>
7. <https://content-naf.emarketer.com/6-ways-marketers-thrive--37-billion-us-creator-economy>
8. <https://capitaloneshopping.com/research/tiktok-shopping-statistics/>
9. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/commerce-redefined-tiktoks-role-ushering-new-era>
10. <https://sensortower.com/state-of-mobile-2025>
11. <https://content-naf.emarketer.com/older-adults-outpace-younger-generations-on-tiktok>
12. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/09/25/1-in-5-americans-now-regularly-get-news-on-tiktok-up-sharply-from-2020/>
13. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/parents-believe-new-instagram-teen-accounts-will-benefit-teens>
14. <https://www.instagram.com/p/DPZgiYbjFN/>
15. <https://blog.youtube/culture-and-trends/tr25-youtube-shopping-report/>
16. <https://blog.youtube/news-and-events/chiefs-vs-chargers-recap/>
17. <https://newsroom.snap.com/snapchat-generation-report>
18. <https://newsroom.snap.com/india-ar-day-2025>
19. <https://newsroom.snap.com/snapchat-recap-2025>
20. <https://techcrunch.com/2025/02/04/linkedin-amps-up-vertical-video-tools-as-uploads-jump-36/>
21. <https://digiday.com/media/linkedins-video-push-appears-to-be-working-in-2025/>
22. <https://buffer.com/resources/how-often-to-post-on-linkedin/>
23. <https://www.forrester.com/blogs/younger-b2b-buyers/>
24. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/making-easier-break-through-noise-get-results-video-jwosf/>
25. <https://www.businessinsider.com/creator-economy-investments-ai-social-commerce-whatnot-synthesisia-shopmy-suno-2025-12>
26. <https://www.emarketer.com/content/exclusive--ai-slop-threat-creator-economy>