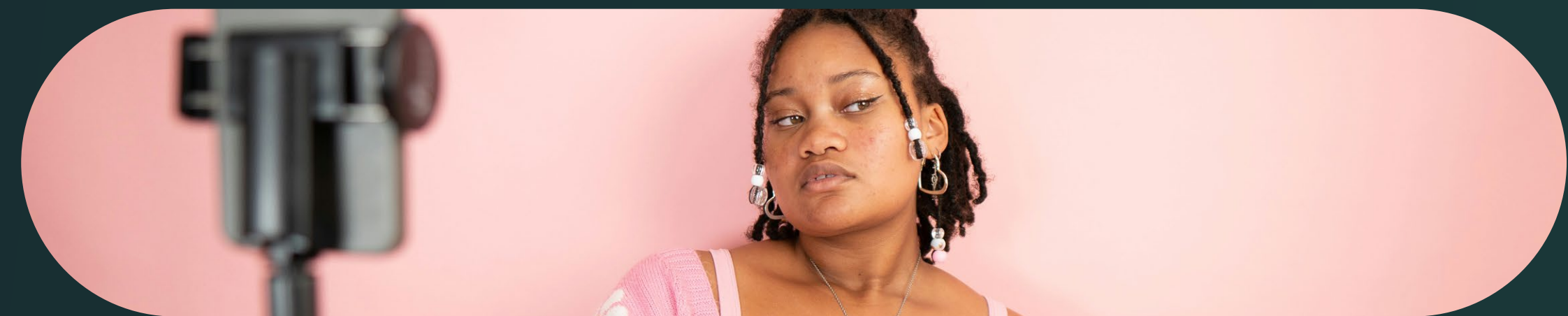
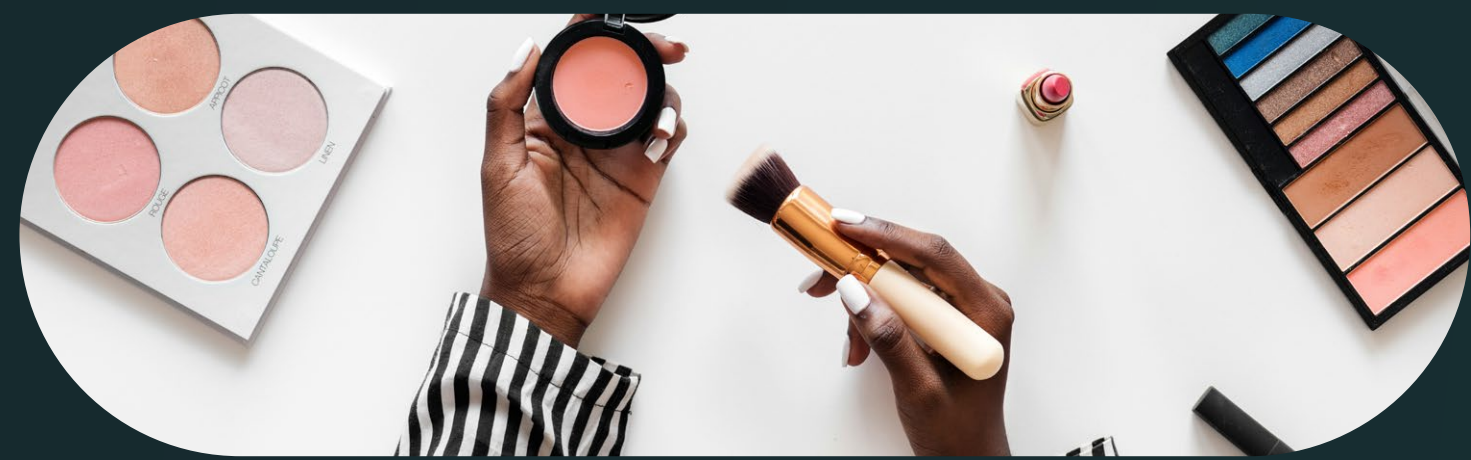


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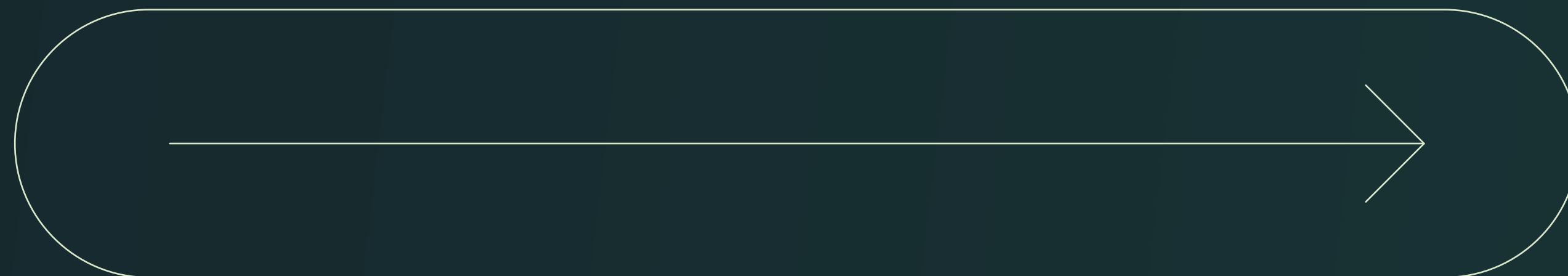


Influencer

Marketing



Aspire



2026

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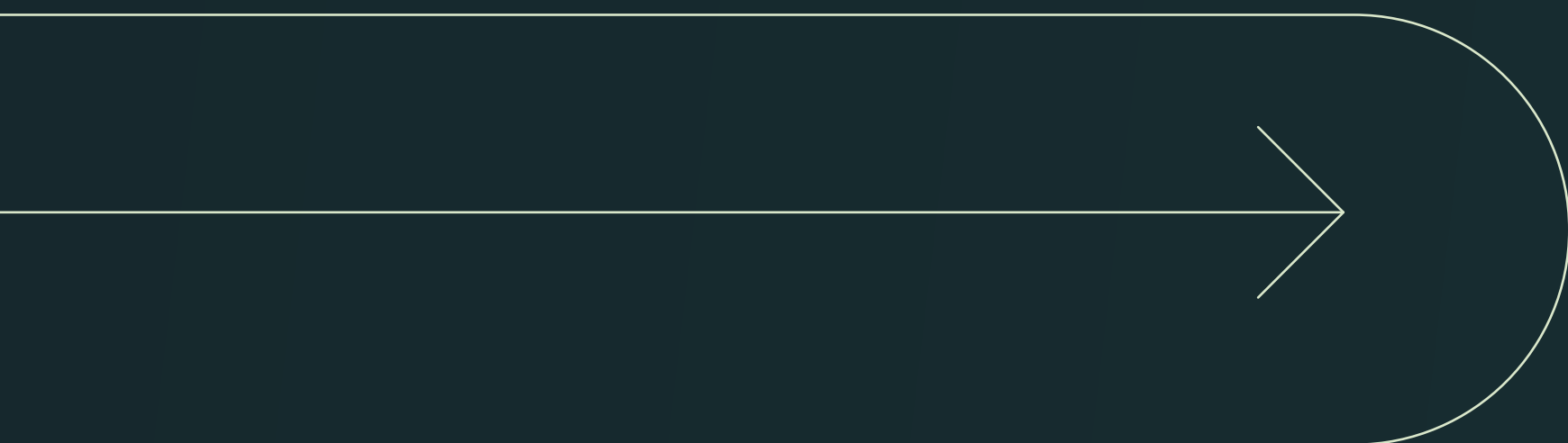
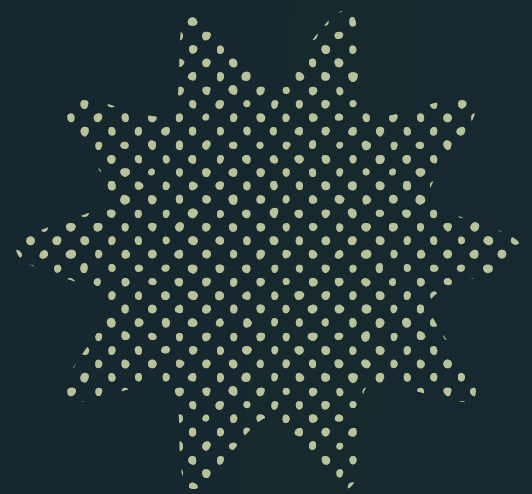
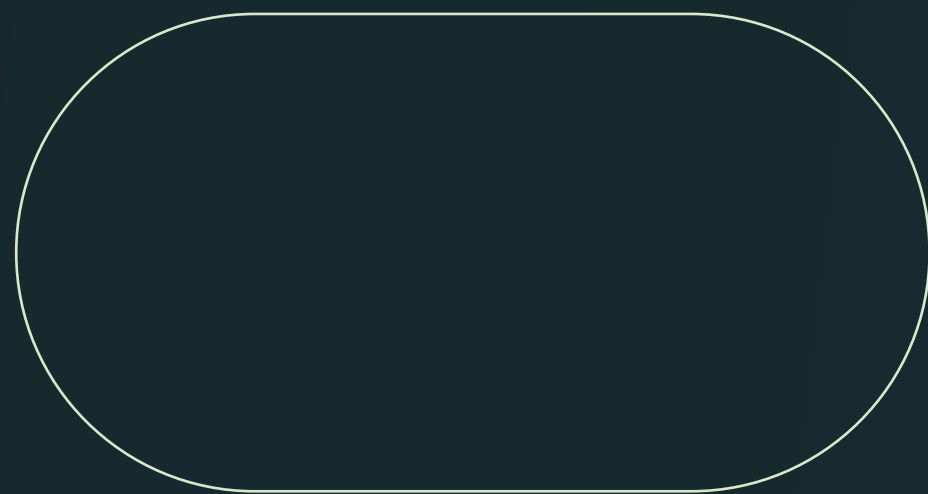
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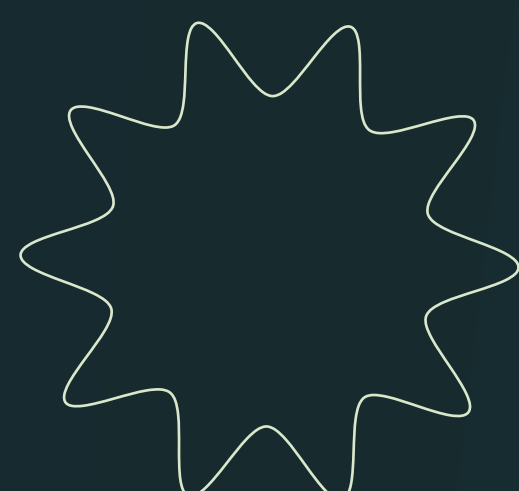
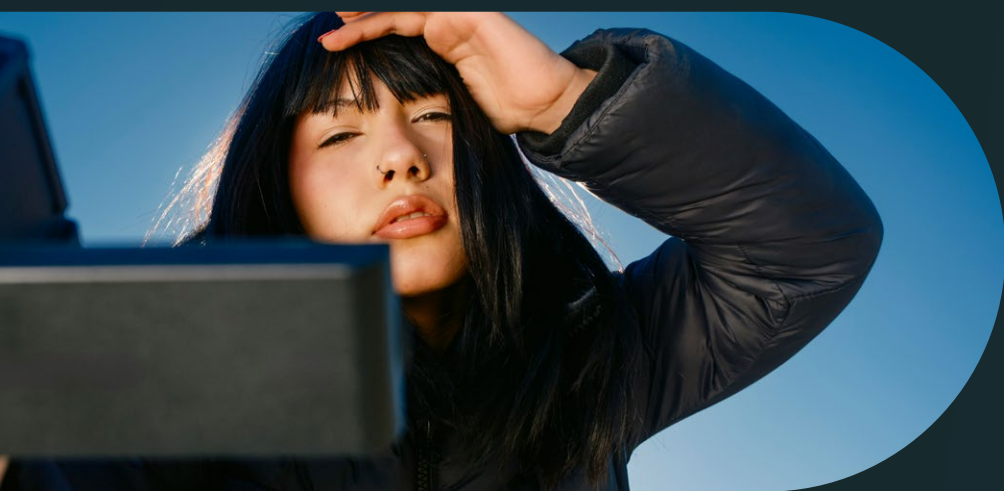
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Introducing Aspire



Introduction

Understanding the Data
This Year's Key Findings








Understanding the Data

We're excited to share our annual industry benchmark report, *The State of Influencer Marketing*, for the 8th consecutive year.

This report uses statistics from Aspire's internal data, as well as surveys of nearly 900 marketers and creators, to reveal insights about the ever-evolving influencer marketing industry.

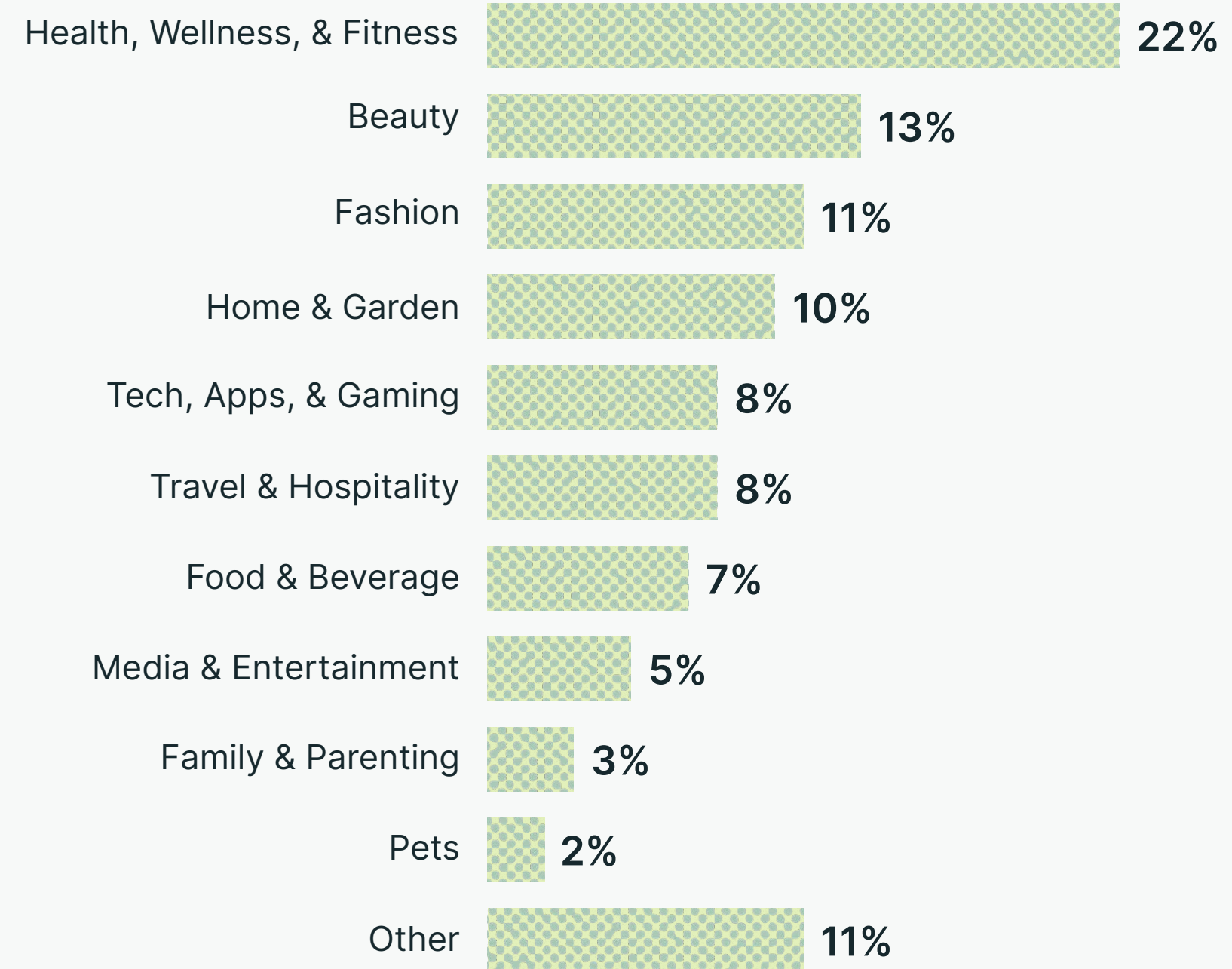
Through our partnerships with Meta, Pinterest, and TikTok, we gain API access to deeper audience insights from our creators across various platforms. Hundreds of thousands of creators also grant us access to performance data from their official social accounts, which allows us to track real-time, first-party data so we can share our learnings in reports such as this one.

This year, we're leveraging this data to dive deep into:

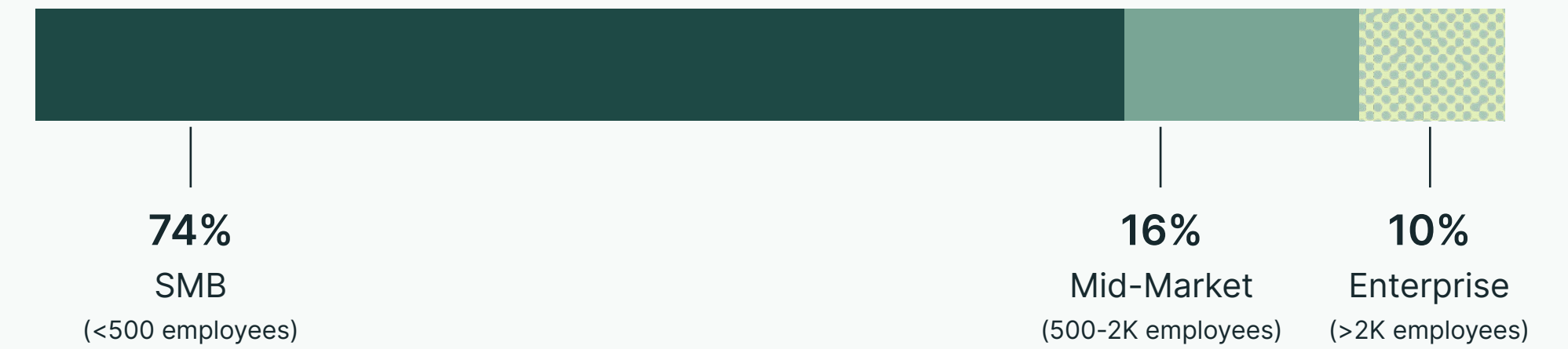
-  Average engagement metrics
-  Influencer pricing benchmarks
-  Campaign trends
-  Our predictions for 2026
-  And much more

About the marketers surveyed:

Industry of brands surveyed



Business size of brands surveyed

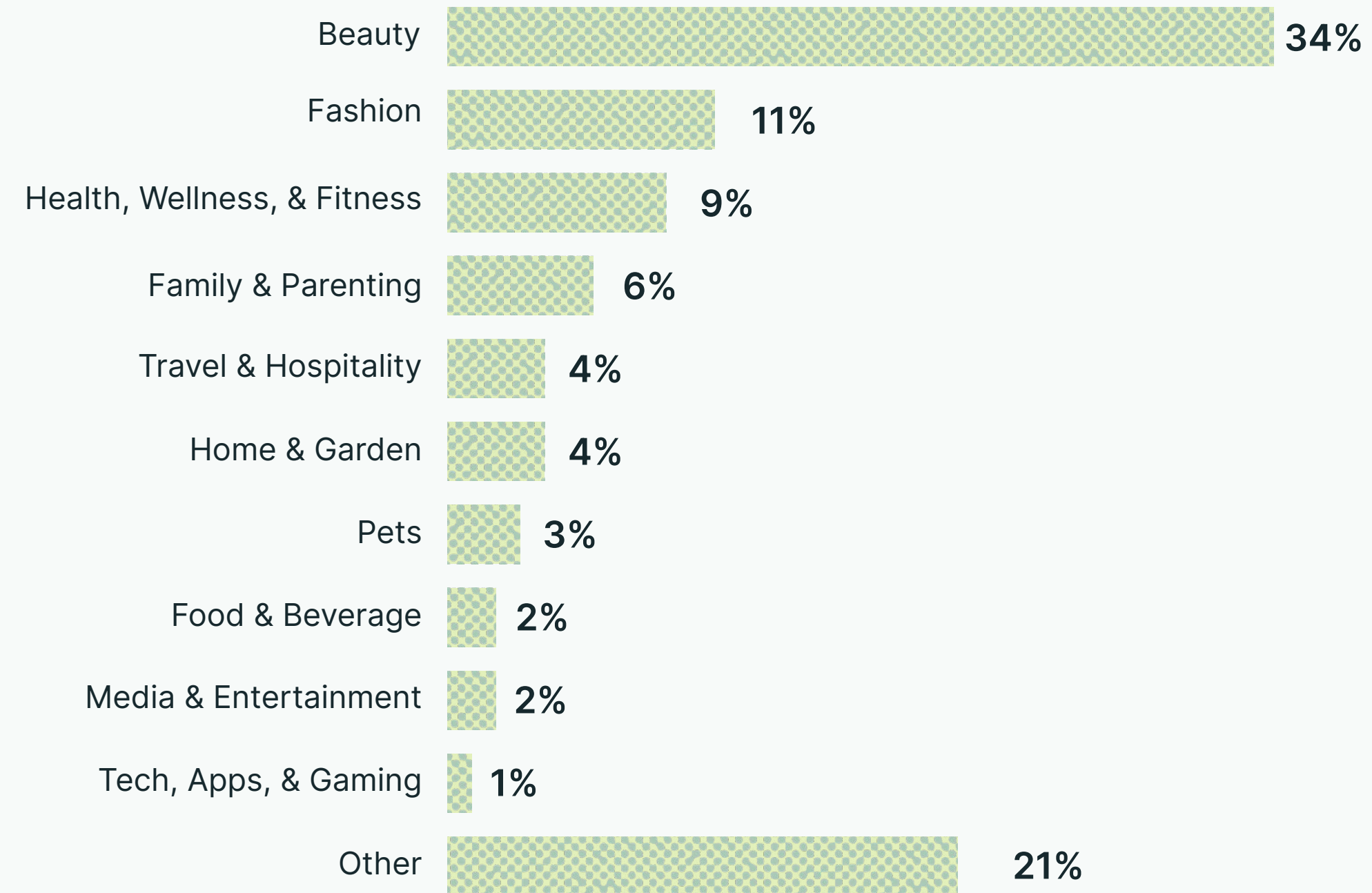


Program management of brands surveyed

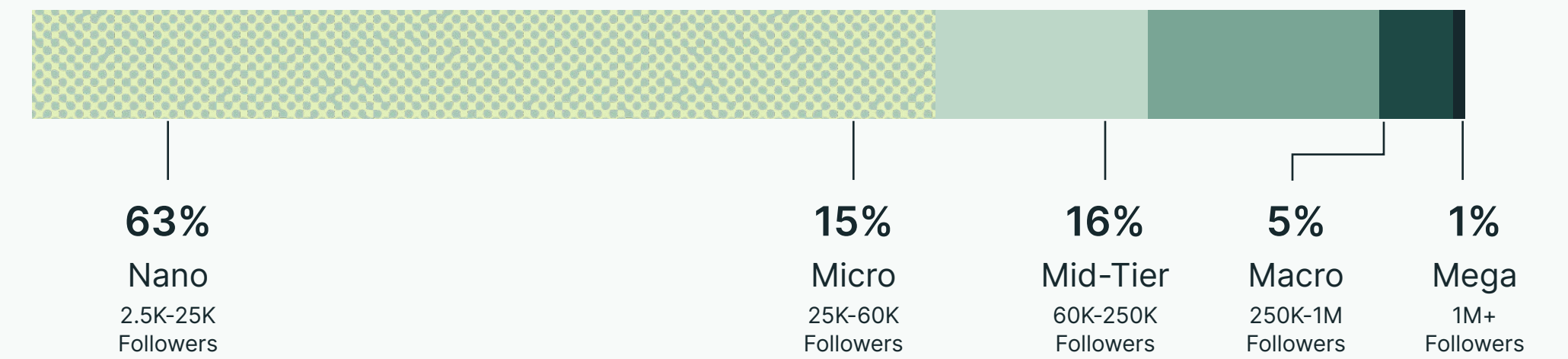


About the creators surveyed:

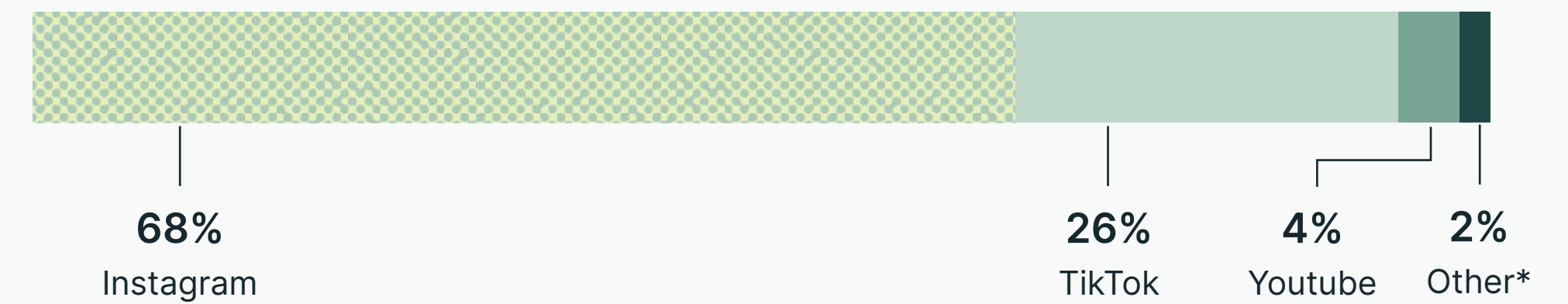
Primary niche of creators surveyed



Audience size of creators surveyed



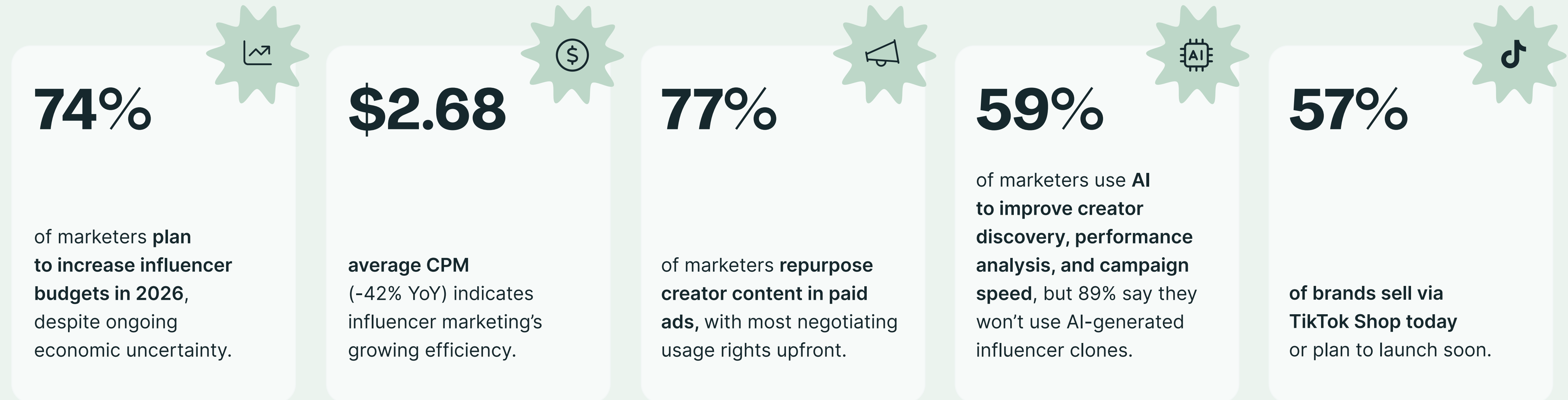
Primary channel of creators surveyed



*Substack, Facebook, Pinterest, Snapchat, X

This Year's Key Findings

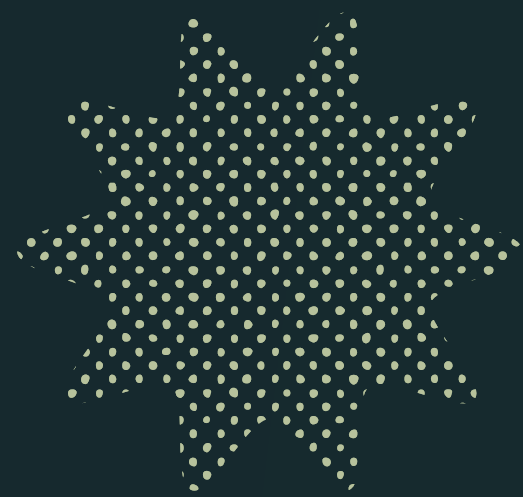
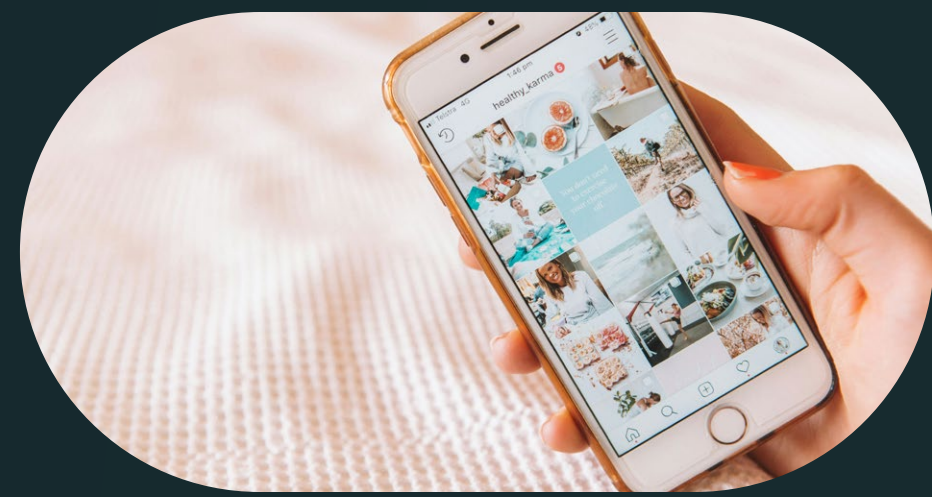
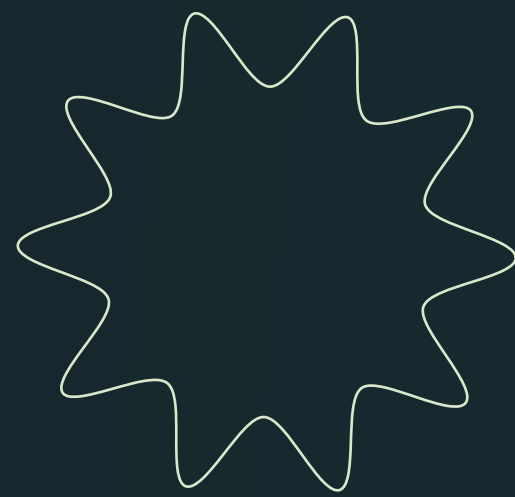
Don't have time to dive into the full report right now? Here are the top trends and must-know insights from this year's report.





The Current State of Influencer Marketing

Influencer Marketing is Resilient, Even Under Pressure
AI is Powering Scale (But Not Replacing Talent)
Hi-Fi Content Returns to Our Feeds



Influencer Marketing is Resilient, Even Under Pressure

Powered by over 50 million creators worldwide, the global creator economy is projected to double in size to **\$480 billion by 2027**. In the US alone, influencer marketing spend is expected to reach **\$12.17 billion in 2026**, up 15.7% year-over-year.

And there are no signs of slowing down, even amid tightening budgets. Nearly three-quarters of marketers plan to increase their influencer marketing budgets in 2026, as creators continue to capture both attention and ad dollars.

“Analysts expect platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to surpass traditional media in ad revenue. That shift in ad dollars reflects where attention has been moving for years: toward social platforms. And at the heart of social platforms are creators.

- Lindsey Gamble, Influencer Marketing Consultant & Advisor

50M+ creators globally

\$480B market size by 2027

\$12.17B U.S. spend in 2026

+15.7% YoY growth



For brands, this shift has clear performance implications. Creators drive measurable impact across the entire funnel, from awareness and engagement, to conversions and long-term loyalty, pushing influencer programs beyond one-off campaigns into long-term, multi-channel partnerships embedded across paid media, ecommerce, and storefronts.

“

Our influencer program is one of the core pillars of our overall marketing mix. Creators fuel our entire content engine and support broader marketing needs, from creative R&D to building brand sentiment.

Sabrina Cheng-Wingate, Social Media and Influencer Manager at PopSockets

As more marketers double down on creator-led strategies, influencer marketing is cementing its role as an indispensable growth engine that drives both efficiency and innovation for years to come.

AI is Powering Scale (But Not Replacing Talent)

AI is becoming a foundational layer of influencer marketing in 2026, but adoption isn't uniform across the industry. Creators and marketers are embracing AI at different rates (and for different reasons), revealing both enthusiasm and hesitation as the technology evolves.

Automated processes

59% of marketers say they're already using AI in their influencer marketing operations to make their campaigns faster, smarter, and more data-driven. The majority of them are turning to AI-powered platforms like Aspire to identify better-fit creators through automated filtering, predict which content will perform best based on real-time campaign data, and analyze performance more efficiently.

Faster content creation

Meanwhile, creators are almost evenly split on AI adoption: 49% of creators use it for content creation, while 51% do not. Those who do use AI treat it as a creative and efficiency tool for brainstorming, scripting, polishing ideas, and writing SEO-optimized captions.

Marketers are also increasingly using AI tools like ChatGPT to handle much of the "behind-the-scenes" work like drafting outreach messages, tightening briefs, organizing ideas, and planning campaigns, allowing them to move faster and communicate more clearly.



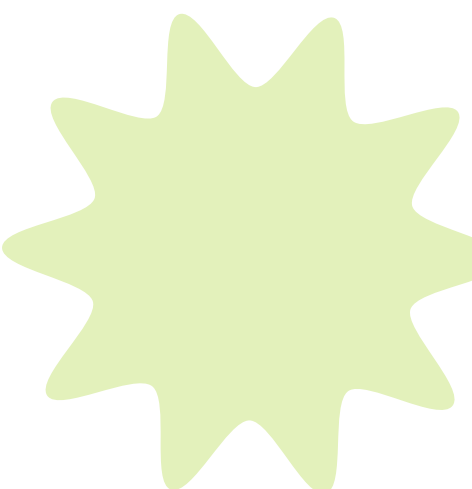
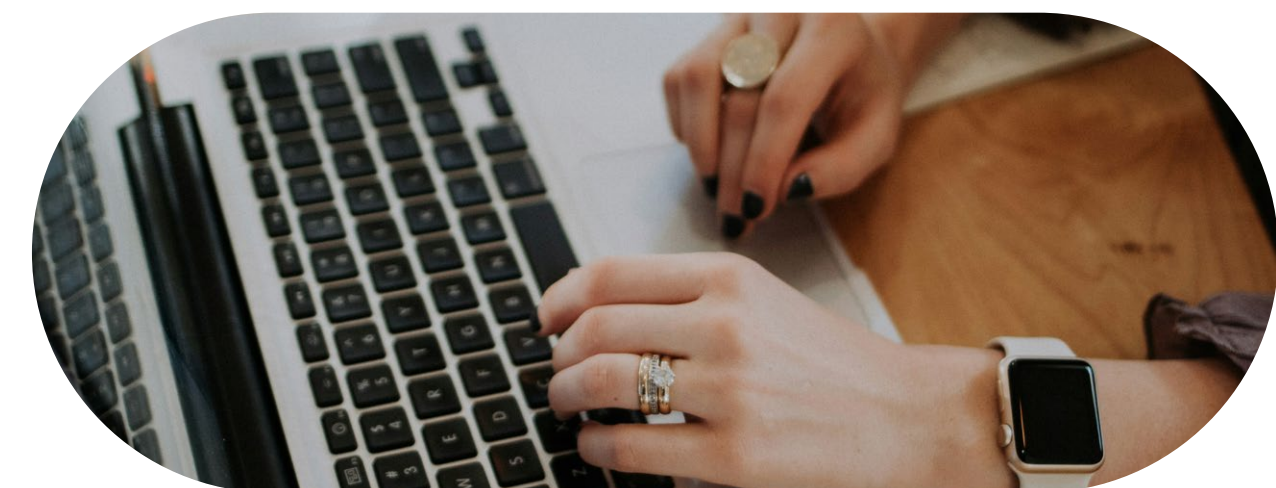
49%

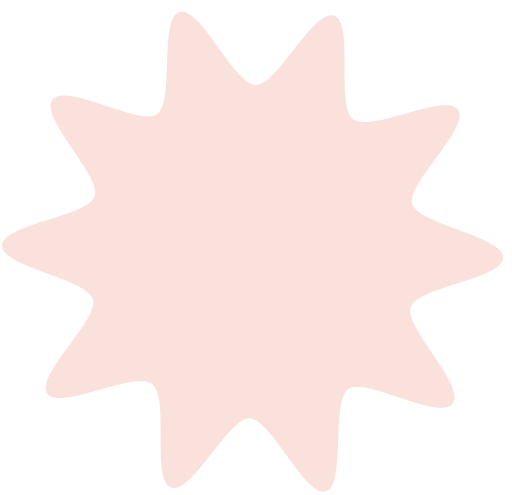
Creators use AI for content creation



59%

Marketers use AI in influencer marketing





89%

Marketers will not work with AI-generated influencers

Better ad delivery

AI is also reshaping the ad ecosystem, and Meta's Andromeda is leading the charge. This powerful AI recommendation engine analyzes millions of ads and billions of data points to deliver the right message to the right person at the right time. To succeed in this new landscape, marketers need both volume and diversity in their creative. And that's where creators shine, offering the agility, relevance, and efficiency that help Andromeda perform at its best.

...But AI isn't replacing talent

Even with AI's growing influence, human creativity remains essential. 89% of marketers say they won't be working with virtual influencers or AI-generated creator clones, underscoring that authenticity and trust are still the key ingredients to success. **Consumers connect with real stories, emotions, and personalities** — areas where human creators will always have the edge.

What this means for brands in 2026



Invest in AI for scale and speed, not creativity replacement.



Win on Meta by feeding Andromeda creative volume, not over-optimizing audiences.



Choose platforms that connect creator data, paid performance, and content reuse.

Hi-Fi Content Returns to Our Feeds

Over the past few years, lo-fi content has become the heart of social media. But recently, we're seeing the pendulum swinging back as more brands invest in **hi-fi content**.

Hi-fi content:

Polished, story-driven video with elevated visuals, intentional editing, and clear creative direction that mirrors the look and feel of a commercial or short film, but is built specifically for digital audiences.

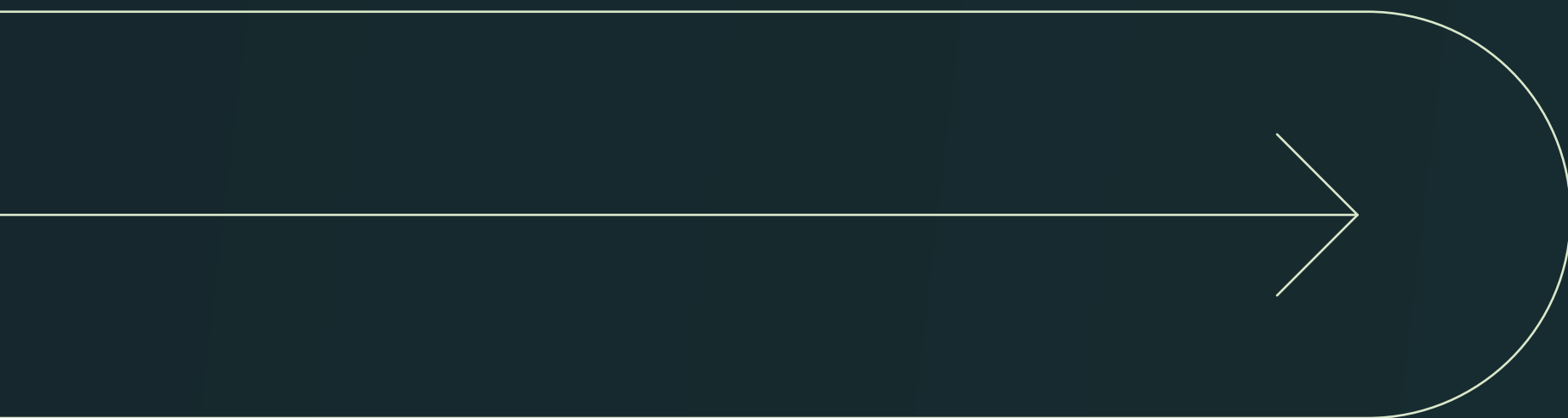
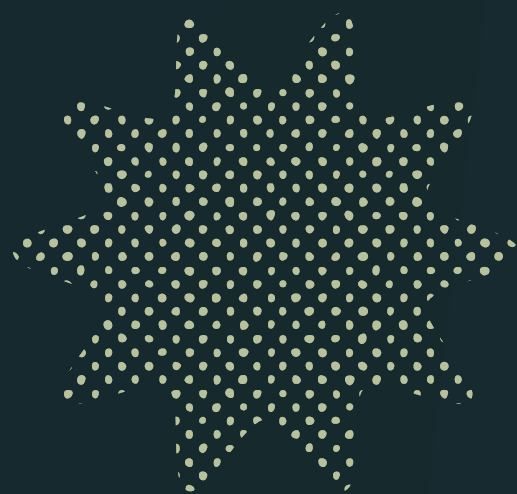
For example, Zola's video series "Pop the Questions" features creators sharing their wedding-planning journeys through an entertaining Q&A format that naturally integrates the brand. Meanwhile, Reformation's short film *Followed* took a cinematic approach to launch its collaborative collection with creator Nara Smith, blending Reformation's editorial aesthetic with Nara's persona for subtle, high-impact storytelling.

Why is hi-fi content making a return?

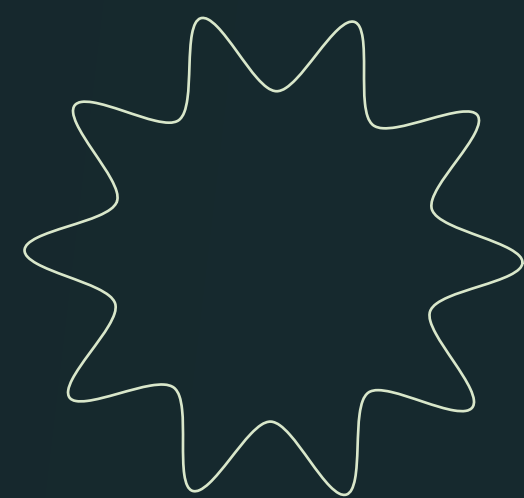
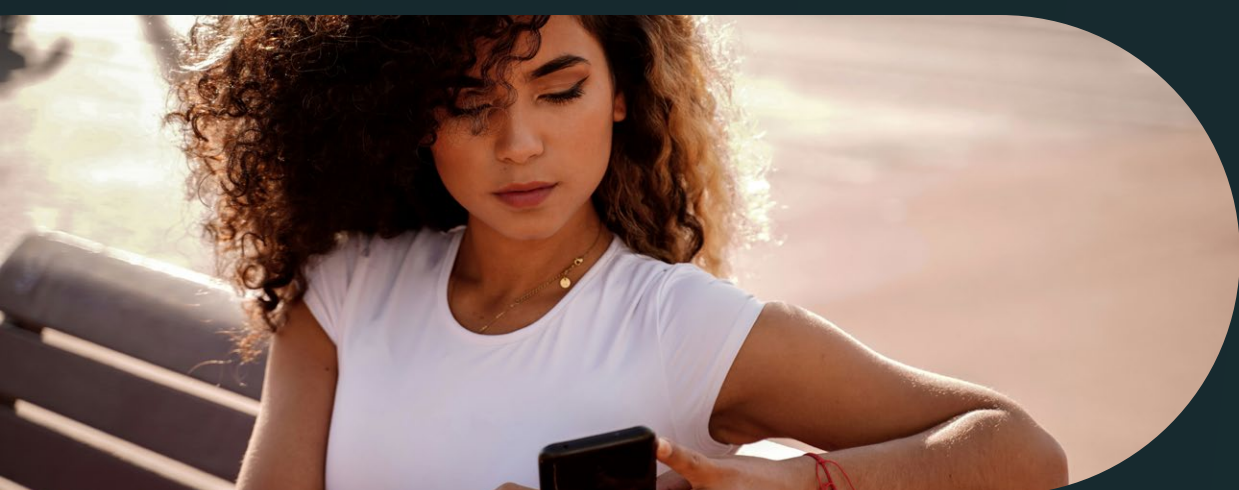
- **Feed saturation:**
Hi-fi helps brands stand out in feeds crowded with similar lo-fi formats.
- **Creators as production partners:**
Today's creators act as directors, producers, and distributors, delivering campaign-level content with cultural relevance.
- **Platform evolution:**
TikTok and Instagram increasingly support longer-form and narrative formats, which enables episodic and cinematic campaigns.



Looking forward, we expect more brands to invest in hi-fi content to create tentpole campaign moments and longer-term creator partnerships. At the same time, lo-fi content remains essential as the day-to-day driver of engagement, conversation, and shares. The most effective strategies will balance both: hi-fi for impact, lo-fi for consistent audience connection.



Social Channel Trends



What Channels are Brands Investing In?

What Channels are Creators Investing In?

Average Engagement Rate by Follower Count

Average Engagement Rate by Platform

Trends by Channel



What Channels are Brands Investing In?

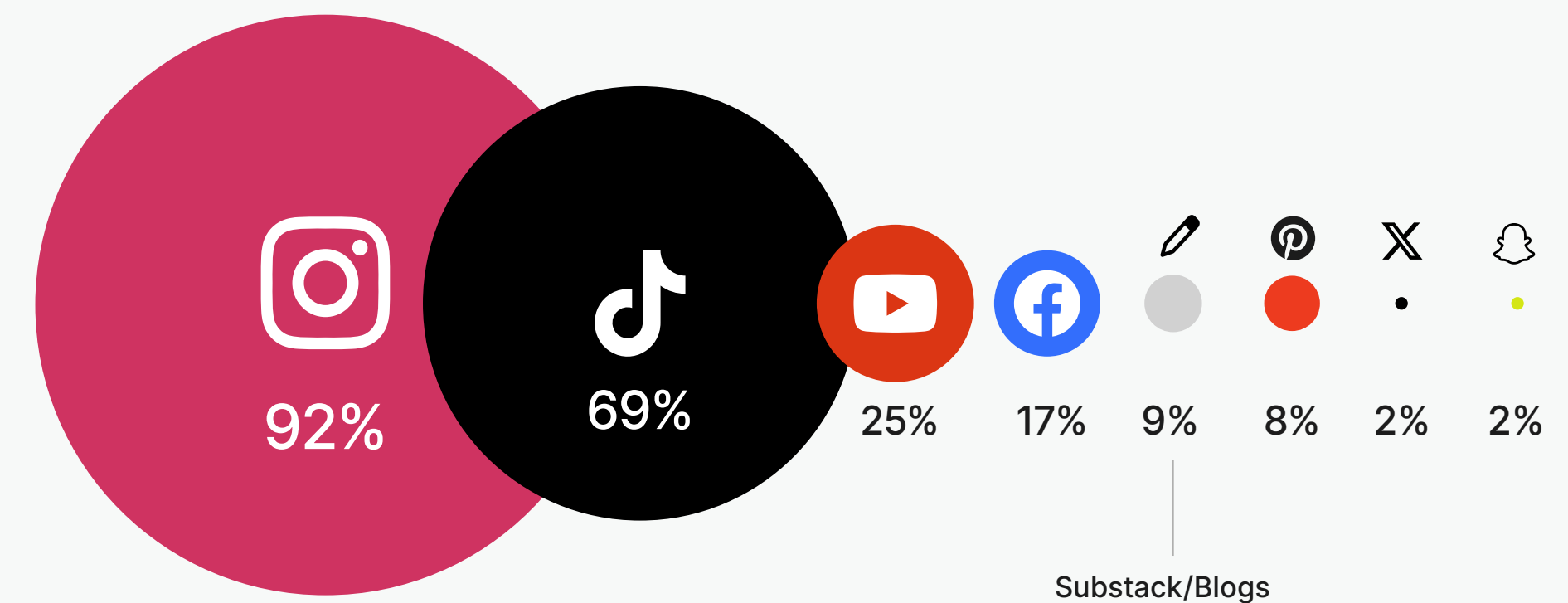
Based on the active campaigns on Aspire in 2025, Instagram continues to reign as the most popular channel for influencer marketing among brands.

TikTok follows closely behind, with brands continuing to increase investment despite ongoing chatter around its US operations. In fact, TikTok campaign activity on Aspire had a record year in 2025, with campaign volume up 189% year-over-year, signaling sustained confidence in the platform.

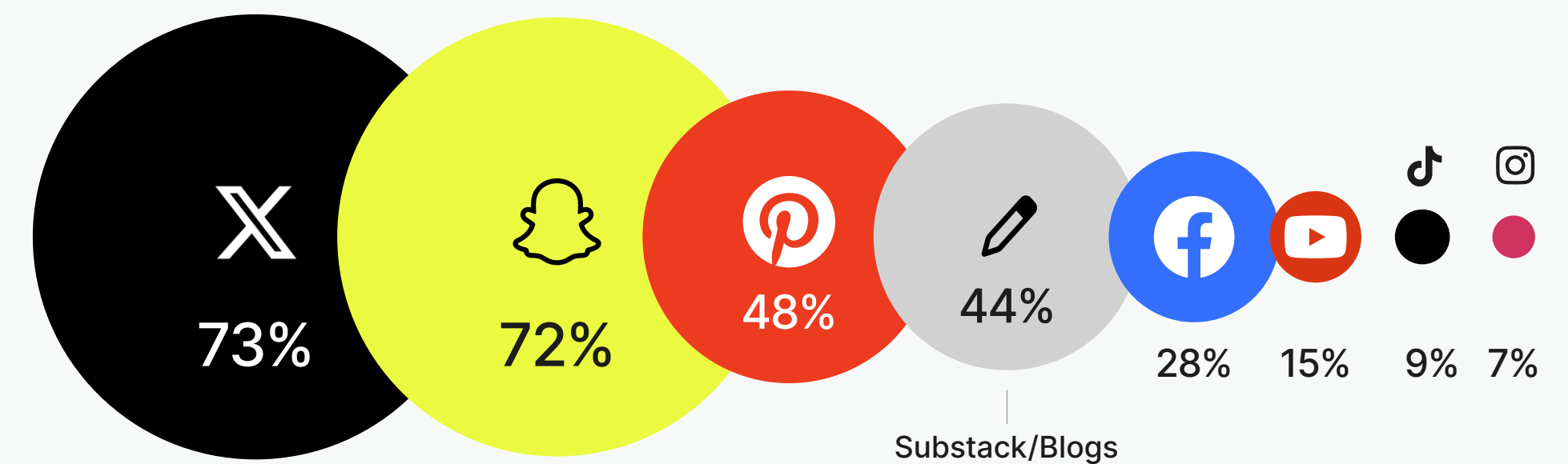
Looking ahead, this momentum is expected to continue. The majority of brands say they plan to invest even more in Instagram and TikTok in 2026.

At the same time, brands are becoming more selective about where they focus their efforts. Platforms like X and Snapchat are being deprioritized as brands concentrate budgets on channels with stronger creator ecosystems and proven performance.

Which channels do you plan to use the most for influencer marketing in 2026?



Which channels do you plan to use the least for influencer marketing in 2026?



What Channels are Creators Investing In?

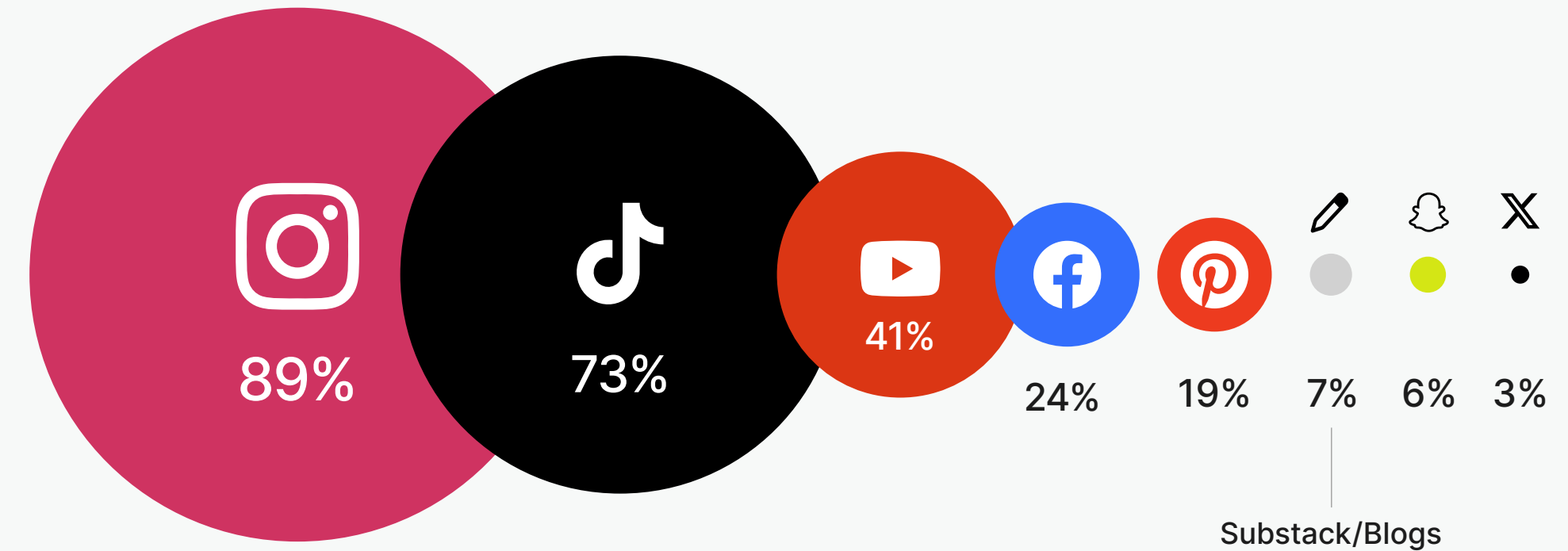
Creators are largely aligned with brands in where they plan to focus their energy in 2026, with **Instagram** and **TikTok** remaining as the top priorities.

At the same time, creators are leaning into **YouTube** more than brands are. This signals a growing interest in a mixed video strategy, where long-form and short-form content work together to deliver durable reach, stronger SEO benefits, and higher earning potential through ads and affiliate programs.

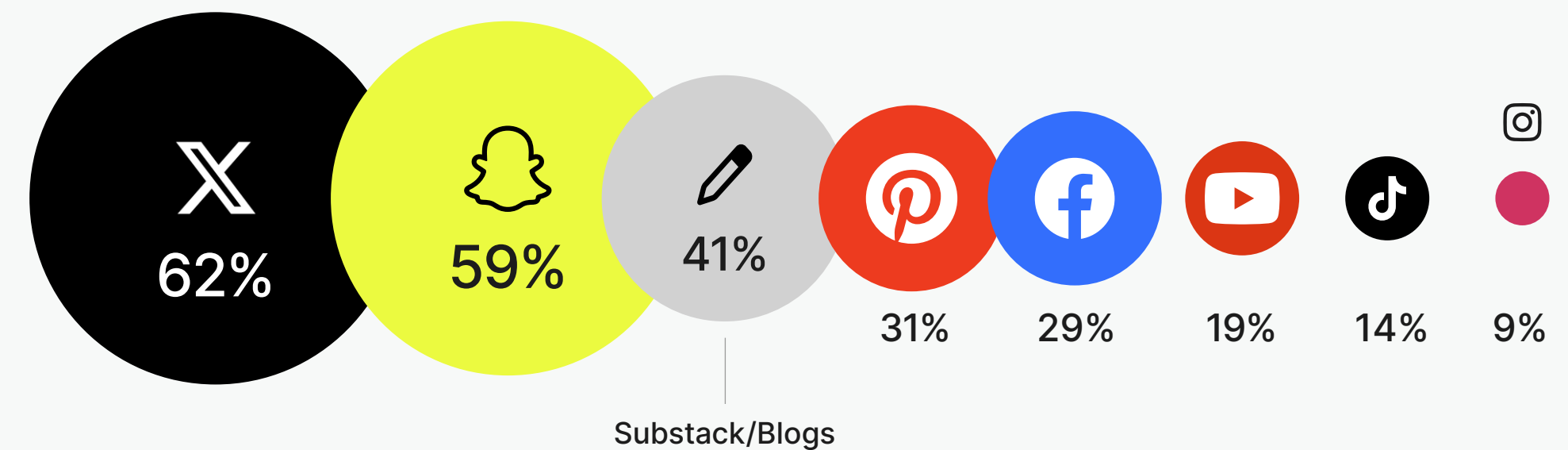
These 3 platforms offer creators the most reliable combination of audience growth, monetization opportunities, and discovery algorithms that reward consistent posting.

Conversely, creators plan to spend significantly less time on X and Snapchat.

Which channels do you plan to utilize the most in 2026?



Which channels do you plan to utilize the least in 2026?



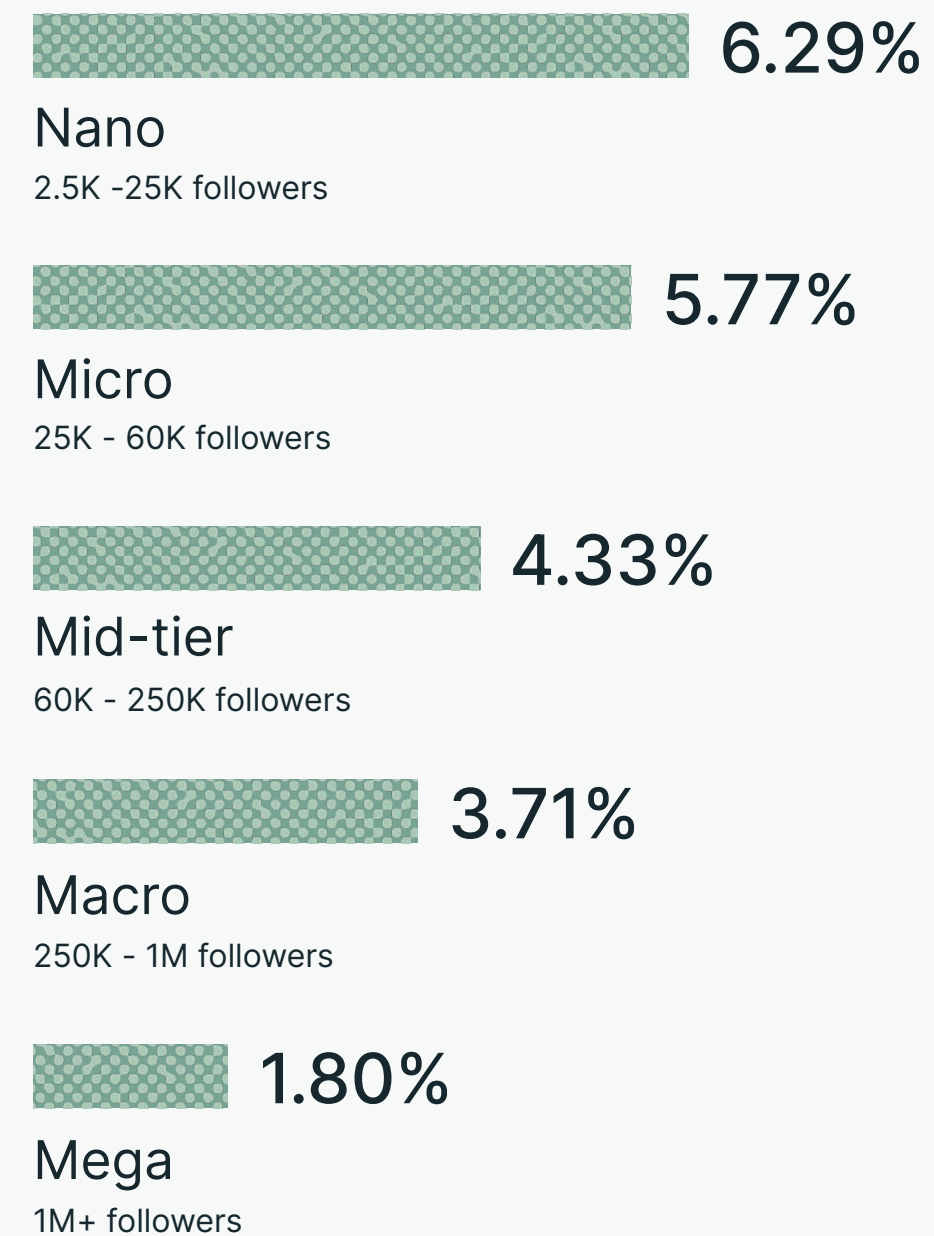
Average Engagement Rate by Follower Count

Influencers come in all sizes, from nano to mega. But as every savvy marketer knows, follower count is no longer the sole measure of impact.

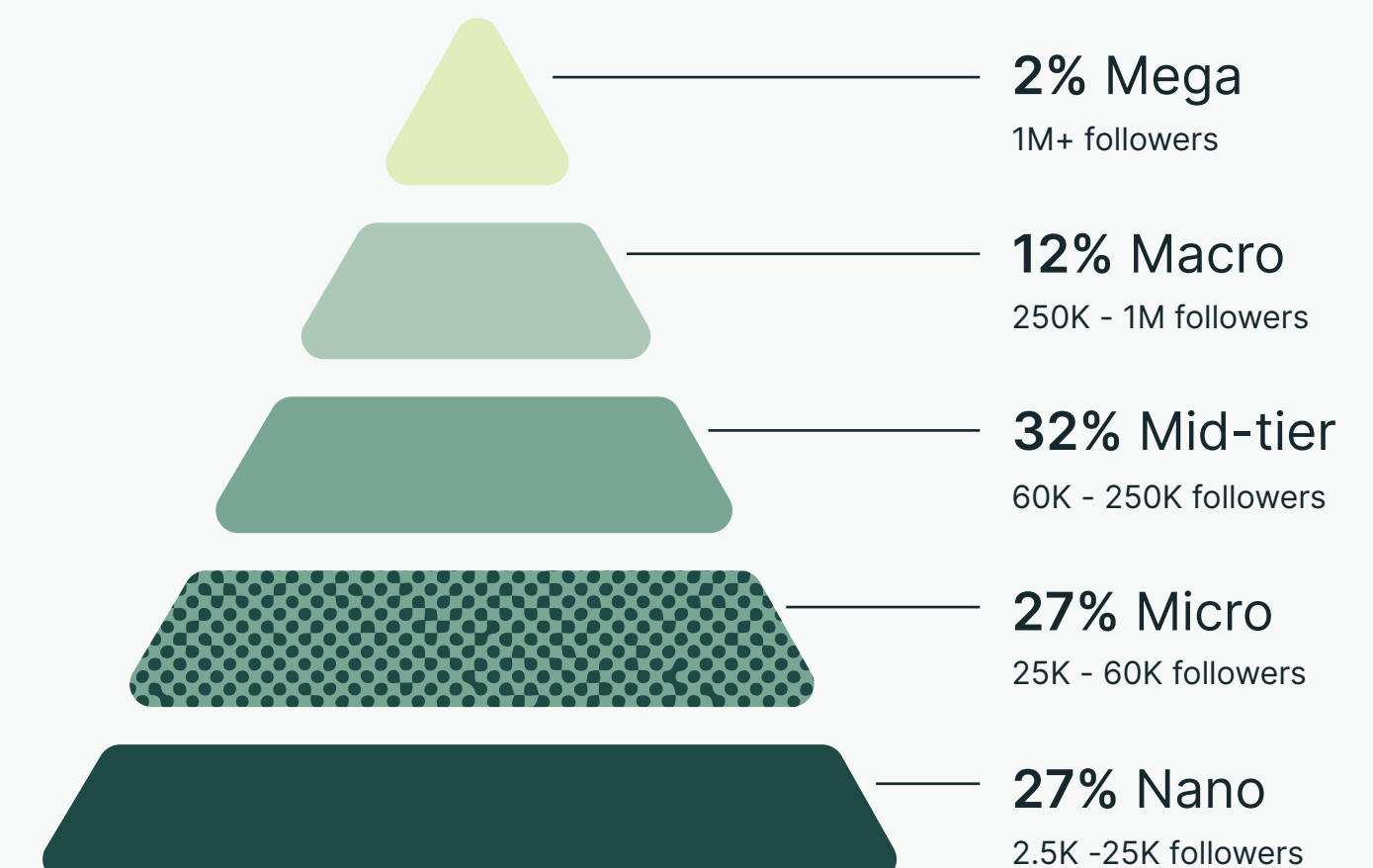
In fact, our internal data shows that nano-influencers consistently achieve higher engagement rates across platforms compared to macro creators, highlighting the value of authentic, close-knit connections.

Smaller creators continue to drive the highest engagement rates, but our survey data highlights an interesting shift. While **54% of marketers primarily work with nano and micro creators**, a growing **32% brands are investing in mid-tier influencers** for both their strong engagement and broader reach — the perfect mix for campaigns that need both authenticity and scale.

Average engagement by follower count:



What is the average following of the influencers you work with?



54% of marketers today are working with nano- and micro-influencers.



Macro and mega creators remain important for select initiatives, particularly those focused on mass awareness or high-profile activations. But impact at this level isn't driven by follower count alone. It's driven by fit, story, and authenticity.

“

Even with larger creators, fit and story matter more than follower count. The best partnerships happen when they authentically use our products or when there's a cultural moment they can help bring to life. We aim for co-creation instead of a transactional brief, because that's when their content feels real.

Sabrina Cheng-Wingate,
Social Media and Influencer Manager at PopSockets

In 2026, brands will continue to diversify their influencer portfolios, combining the high engagement of smaller creators with the scalable reach of mid-tier and macro talent to maximize campaign performance.

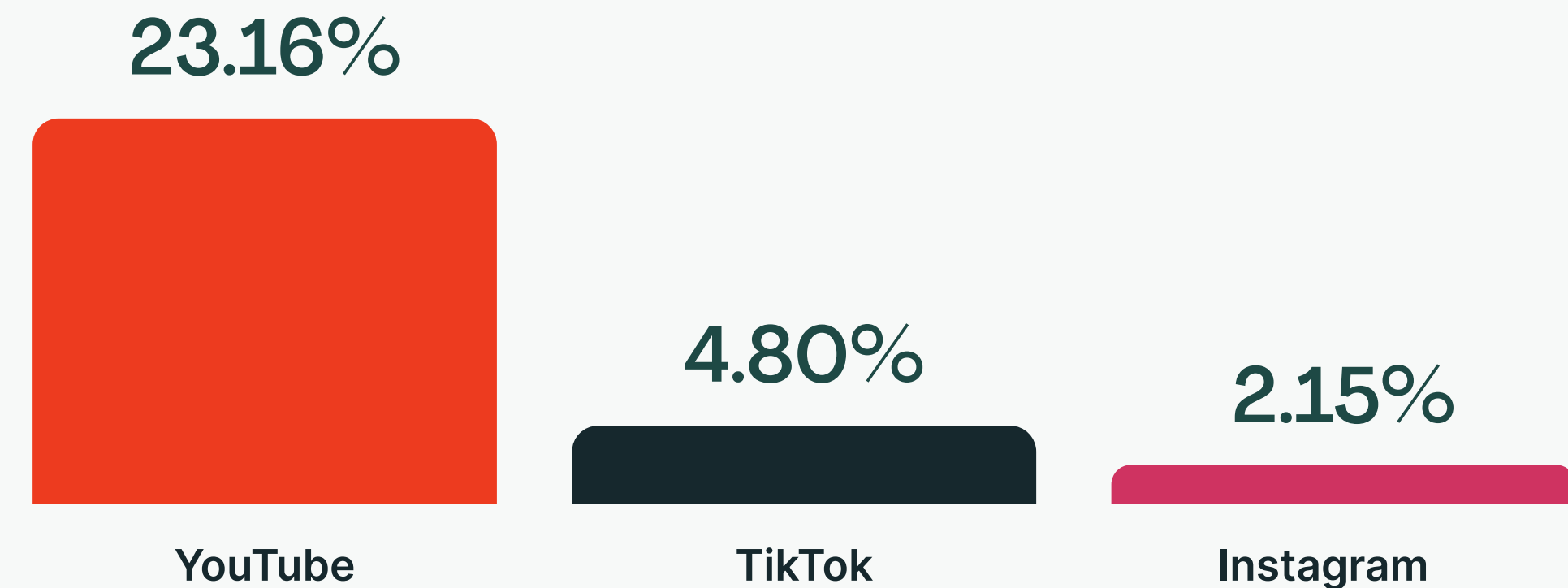
Average Engagement Rate by Platform

Analyzing thousands of posts on our platform, we aggregated the average engagement rates influencers received across their social channels in 2025.

Consistent with trends from previous years, **YouTube continues to lead in engagement.**

YouTube's high engagement comes from the intentional nature of its content consumption. Unlike the passive scrolling typical on Instagram and TikTok, watching a YouTube video requires a deliberate action. Each view counts as an engagement, which makes up a large portion of interactions on YouTube.

Average engagement rate by platform:



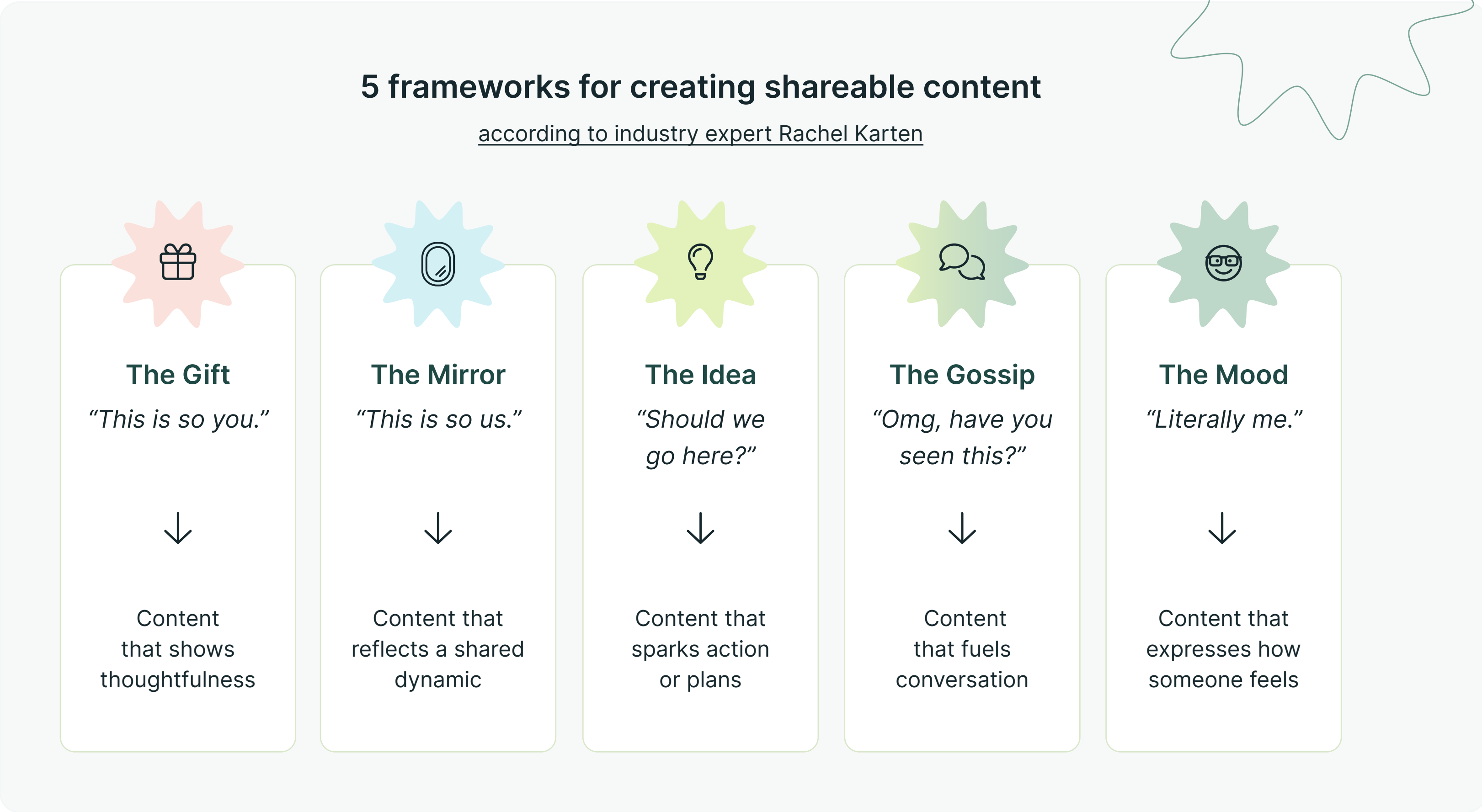
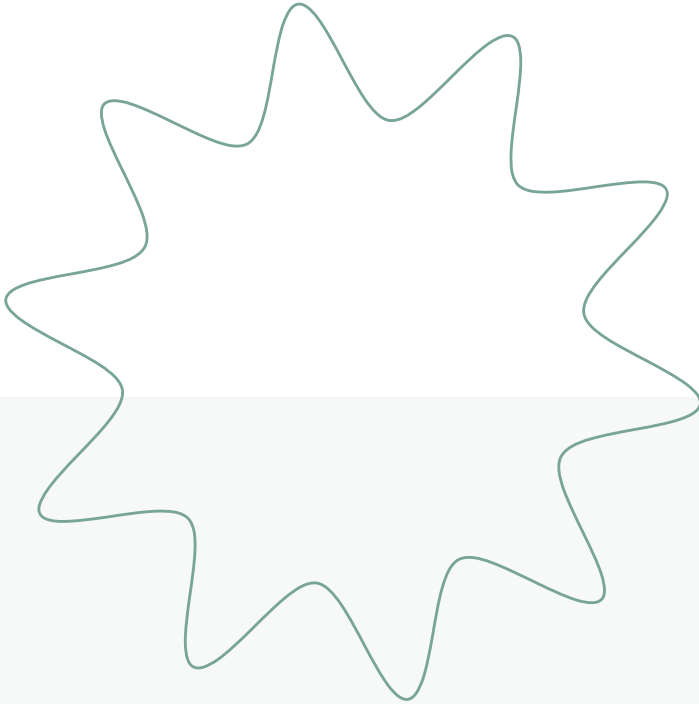
Trends by Channel

Instagram

According to both Aspire’s internal data and survey results, Instagram remains the most popular platform for influencer marketing going into 2026. It’s also one of the most widely used social media apps globally, recently surpassing 3 billion monthly active users.

But user behavior is shifting. With more people now engaging within DMs in the app than they are with feed posts, Instagram is now prioritizing content that encourages sharing — so much so that the app now displays send counts publicly.

Looking ahead to 2026, shares will be a key visibility metric, signaling to the algorithm how well your content resonates and spreads through private channels.



TikTok

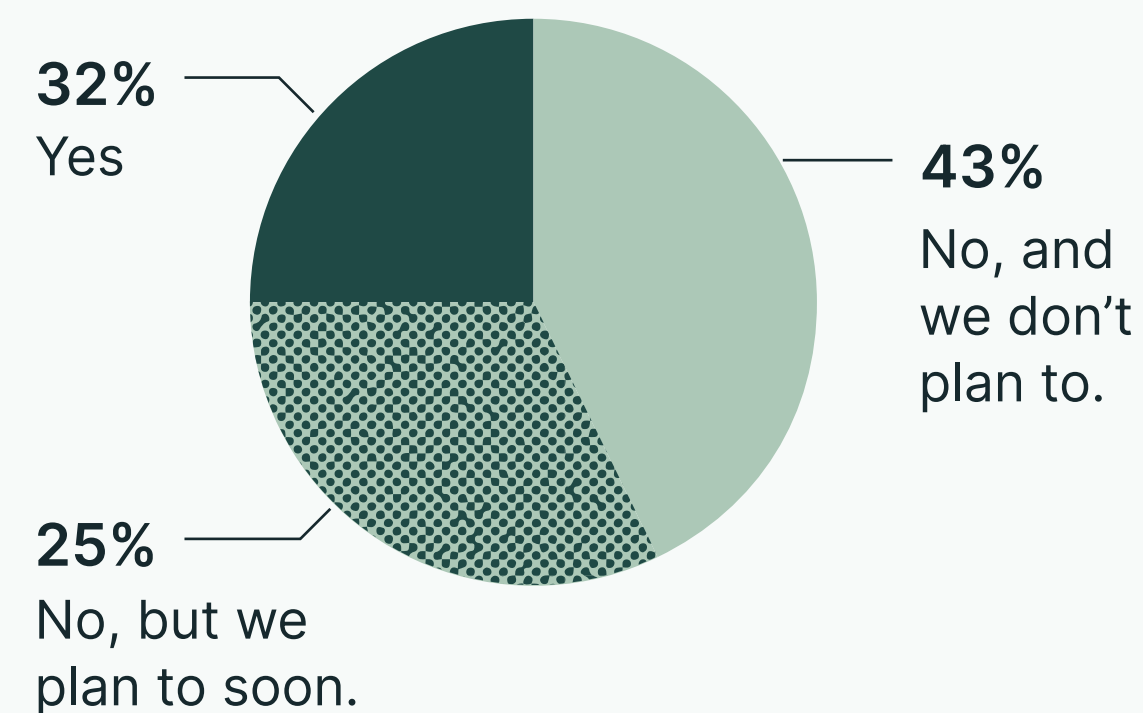
Despite lingering uncertainty around its US operations, TikTok shows no signs of slowing down. Marketers are adjusting budgets as clarity emerges, but projections still show continued revenue growth through 2027, signaling strong confidence in the platform's performance.

Much of this optimism stems from TikTok Shop's explosive rise, fueled by creator-led livestreams and shoppable videos. In fact, TikTok Shop is now one of the top 10 beauty retailers in the country. And over the 2025 Black Friday and Cyber Monday weekend alone, TikTok Shop sales exceeded \$500 million.

Our survey data reflects this growing impact: **32% of brands now sell through TikTok Shop** (up from just 17% last year), with another 25% planning to start soon. The brands that do sell via TikTok Shop attribute an average of 16% of their total sales to the platform.

With creators at the center of product discovery, TikTok continues to blur the line between content and commerce, and that momentum isn't slowing down anytime soon.

Do you sell via TikTok Shop?



Youtube

While YouTube has long been known for its long-form video format, the platform is quickly emerging as a short-form powerhouse with 62% of brands reportedly upping their Shorts ad spend.

Recent platform updates are accelerating this trend:

- **Monetization for creators:** Shorts creators can now earn from app promotions through co-branded Partnership Ads with custom CTAs.
- **Shoppable product stickers:** Creators can tag products directly in Shorts, making it easier for viewers to shop.
- **Google Lens integration:** Users can visually search products or landmarks directly from Shorts, enhancing discovery.

And by pairing YouTube Shorts with TikTok and Instagram Reels, brands can connect with audiences across multiple touchpoints, fueling community, engagement, and sales.

For marketers, YouTube is a powerful one-two punch. Shorts spark awareness and attract new audiences at the top of the funnel, while the platform's legacy long-form content builds depth, trust, and conversions. Used together, the two formats provide both the scale of short-form and the impact of long-form.

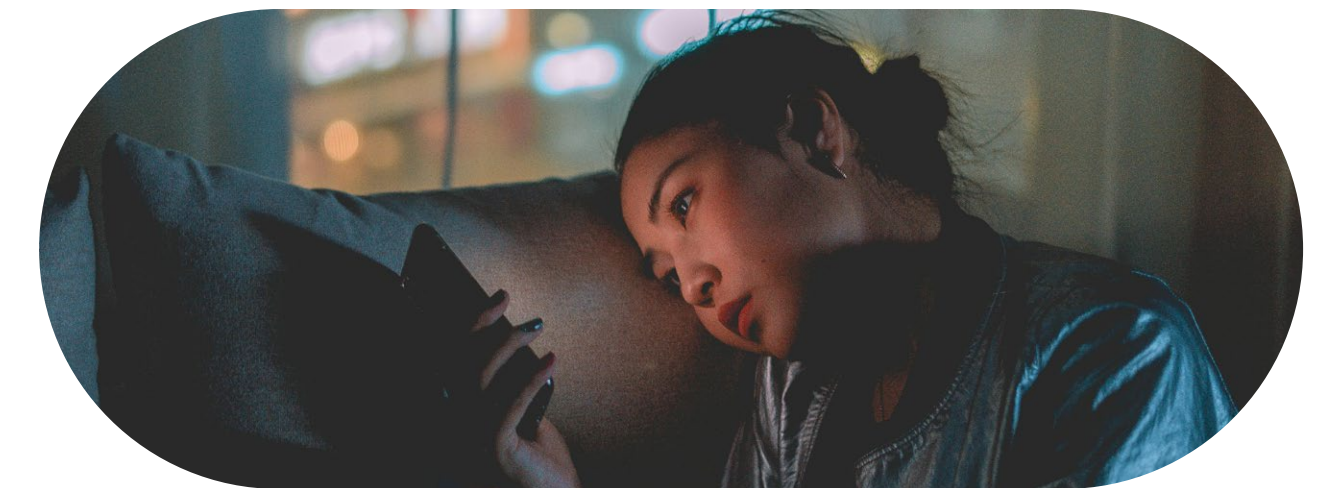
“ This year, YouTube has invested heavily in creator-led ad formats, new tools to help brands find creators, and an open API for third parties. This is going to open up a lot of new ways for brands to partner with YouTube creators.

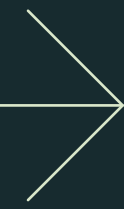
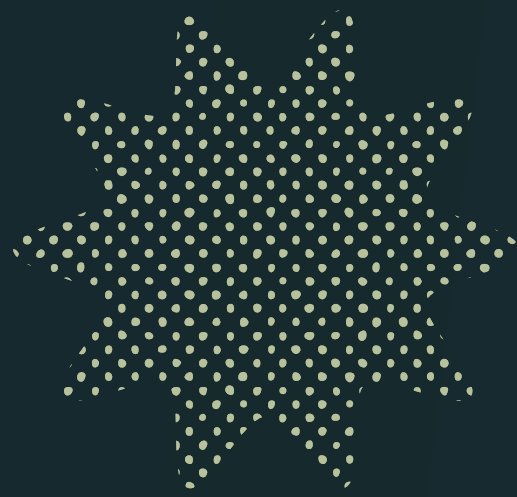
Lindsey Gamble,
Influencer Marketing Consultant & Advisor

62% of brands are increasing their Shorts ad spend.



40% of the YouTube campaigns on Aspire were Shorts campaigns





Pricing & Budget

Average Cost Metrics

Pricing Discrepancies

Paid Media KPIs

Let's Talk Budget

Creator Rates



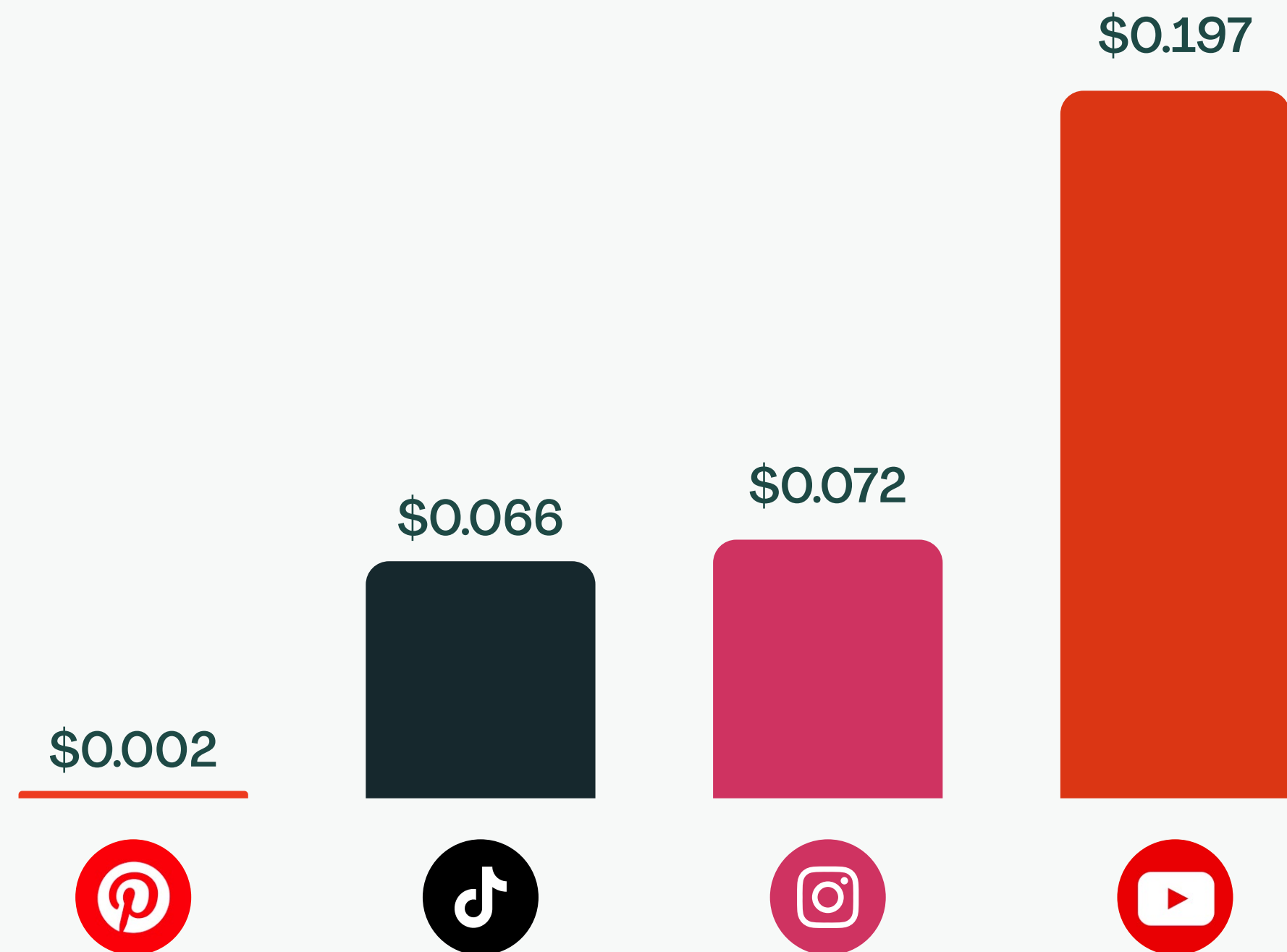
Average Cost Metrics

Cost Per Engagement (CPE)

Cost-per-engagement (CPE) is the pricing metric that digital marketers use to determine how much they're paying for each user interaction on a piece of content, such as likes, comments, and shares.

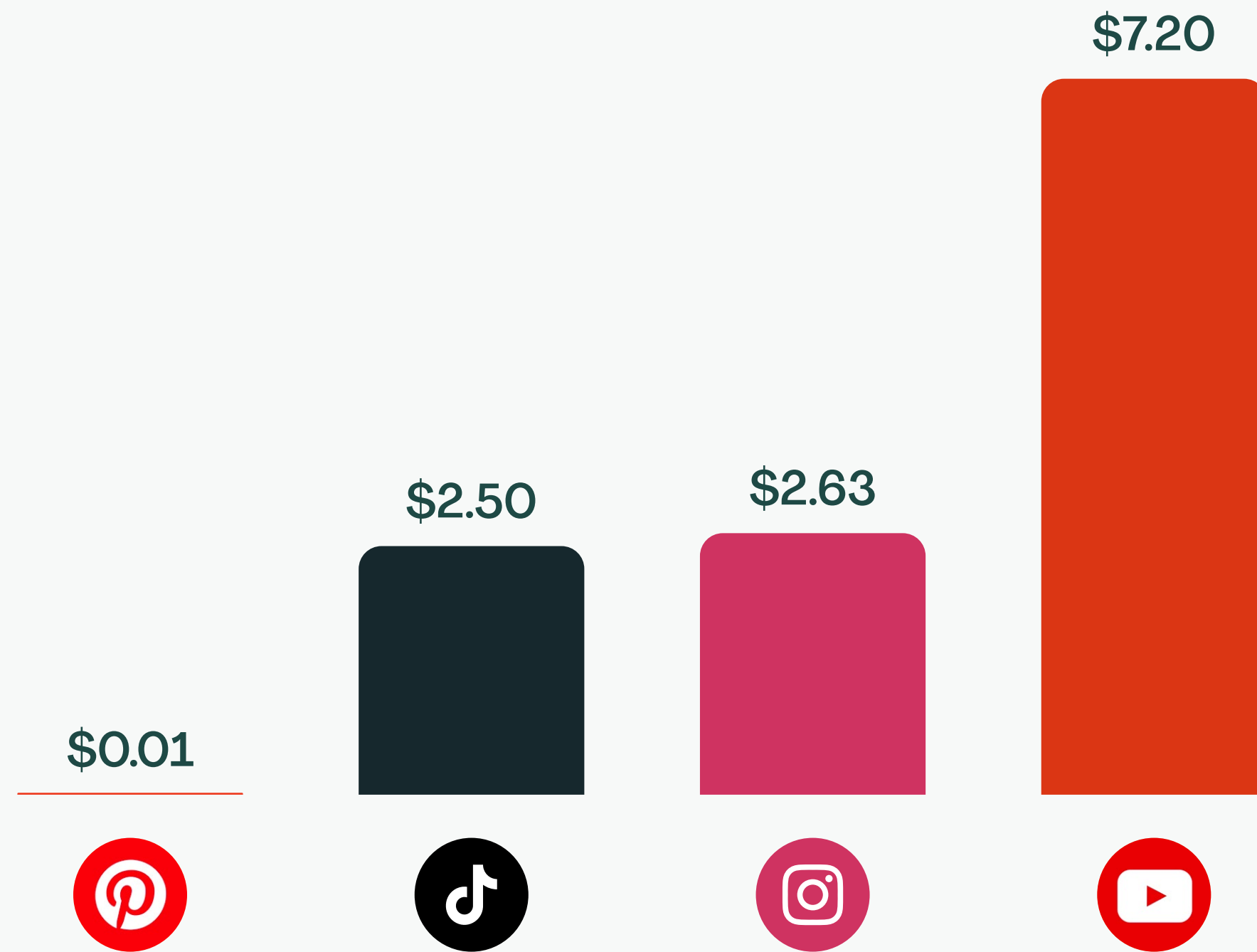


Average cost per engagement per channel*:



* This CPE data is based on total creator investment (e.g. cash payments, product cost, shipping) relative to total organic engagements in the last year.

Average cost-per-mille per channel*:



* This CPM data is based on total creator investment (e.g. cash payments, product cost, shipping) relative to total organic impressions in the last year.

Cost-Per-Mille (CPM)

Cost-per-mille (CPM) is the cost an advertiser pays for one thousand views or impressions on an influencer's post.

Across all platforms, the average influencer marketing CPM in 2025 was \$2.68*, reflecting a 42% year-over-year decrease. This continued decline underscores influencer marketing's growing cost efficiency, enabling brands to reach highly engaged audiences at significantly lower costs than traditional channels like TV or display, where CPMs often reach double digits.

This efficiency is driven by a shift toward sustained, multi-post creator partnerships and always-on programs. As creators deliver more content per collaboration (often repurposed across channels), brands unlock greater exposure without a proportional increase in spend.

As a result, influencer marketing is becoming one of the most competitive channels in the broader media mix, with creator partnerships delivering strong performance alongside (or even outperforming) traditional advertising.

Pricing Discrepancies

Generally across all social channels, there are multiple factors that determine how much brands pay an influencer.

Brands and creators typically negotiate based on these factors:



1. Reach

While we encourage brands to look beyond follower count, it's still true that a macro-influencer with millions in reach will likely charge more than a micro-influencer with a smaller following. This is because creators with larger audiences have the ability to spread brand awareness at a greater scale — similar to running a commercial during a TV program with high viewership.

2. Engagement

Engagement metrics, such as comments and saves, are a strong indicator of brand love and can show purchase intent from existing and new customers. If an influencer's post garners high engagement, there's a chance that it could translate into sales down the road. Therefore, an influencer who consistently achieves high engagement can have pricier rates.

3. Content type and post requirements

Many partnerships today are multi-post engagements, meaning that creators deliver a bigger content package — creating 3-4 posts versus just 1, for example. Keep in mind that creators will charge additional fees depending on how much effort it takes to create the deliverables you're asking for.





4. Content usage rights

While some smaller creators view repurposing or amplifying their content as a major value-add — and therefore allow you to use their content for free — many creators today will expect additional payment for brand ownership of their content. The pricing typically depends on the length of time in which you're looking to repurpose content, and where that content will be repurposed.

5. Exclusivity

Because exclusivity prohibits influencers from posting, promoting, or being affiliated with any other advertiser for a period of time, creators will expect to be paid more in lieu of taking on other brand partnerships.

6. Value of free product provided

86% of creators are still willing to work with a brand for just free products as long as they love the brand or the product value is high. The higher the value of the product you're offering, the more room you have to negotiate price.

7. Industry

There can be a slight variance in price by the industry the creator belongs to. In more saturated spaces like beauty and fashion, some creators decrease their rates in order to compete with others in the space. In niches like food and travel where brands often expect professional quality content, creators may charge higher as a production fee.

8. Experience

A creator's experience on one particular social platform may affect pricing across other platforms. For example, some creators with smaller followings on TikTok may still charge a higher rate due to their large audience base on Instagram or YouTube, as this represents their recognizable personal brand and popularity in the industry.

9. Joint work history

The longer you've worked with an influencer, the more opportunity there is for negotiating. For instance, you can negotiate a lower rate for the content your long-term brand ambassadors create, in exchange for a monthly shipment of free products, first access to new launches, seasonal promo codes, always-on affiliate links, and other incentives.

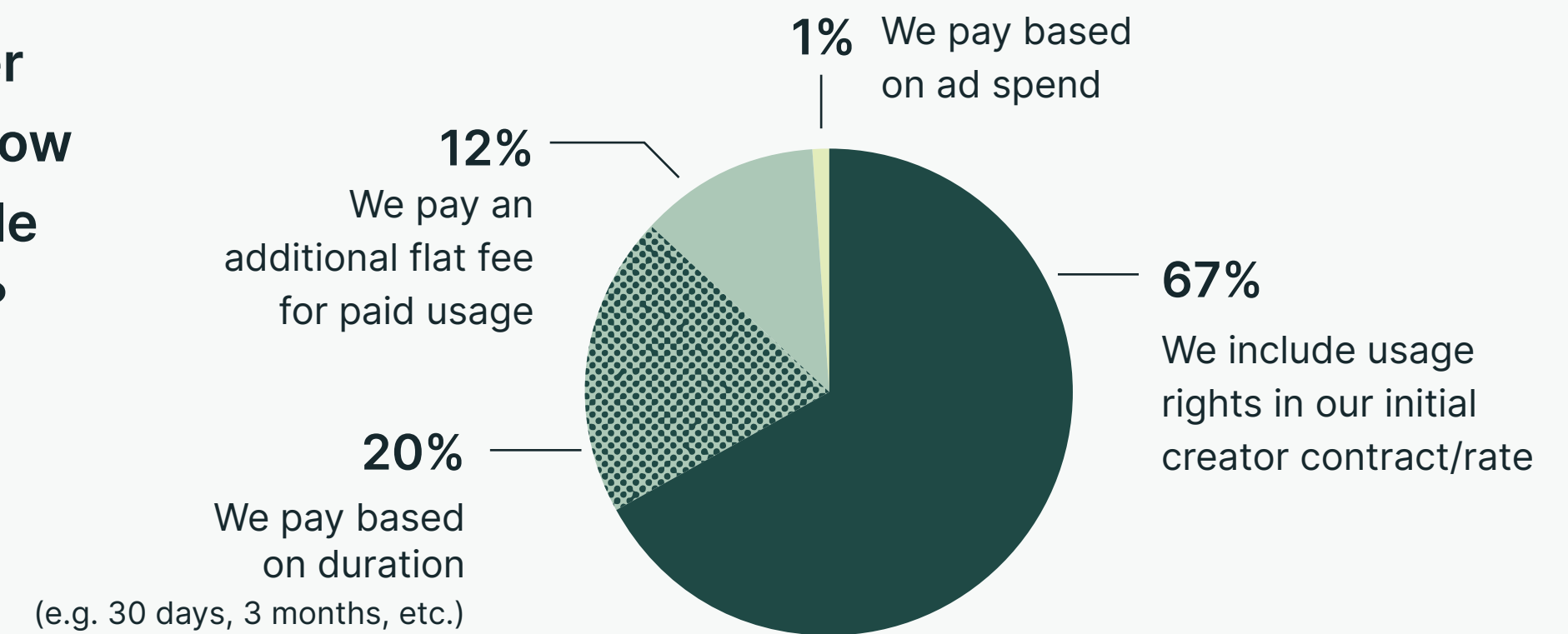
Paid Media KPIs

As paid media and influencer marketing continue to converge, content usage rights have become a key factor in negotiations. We asked both creators and marketers to share how they approach (and price) usage rights.

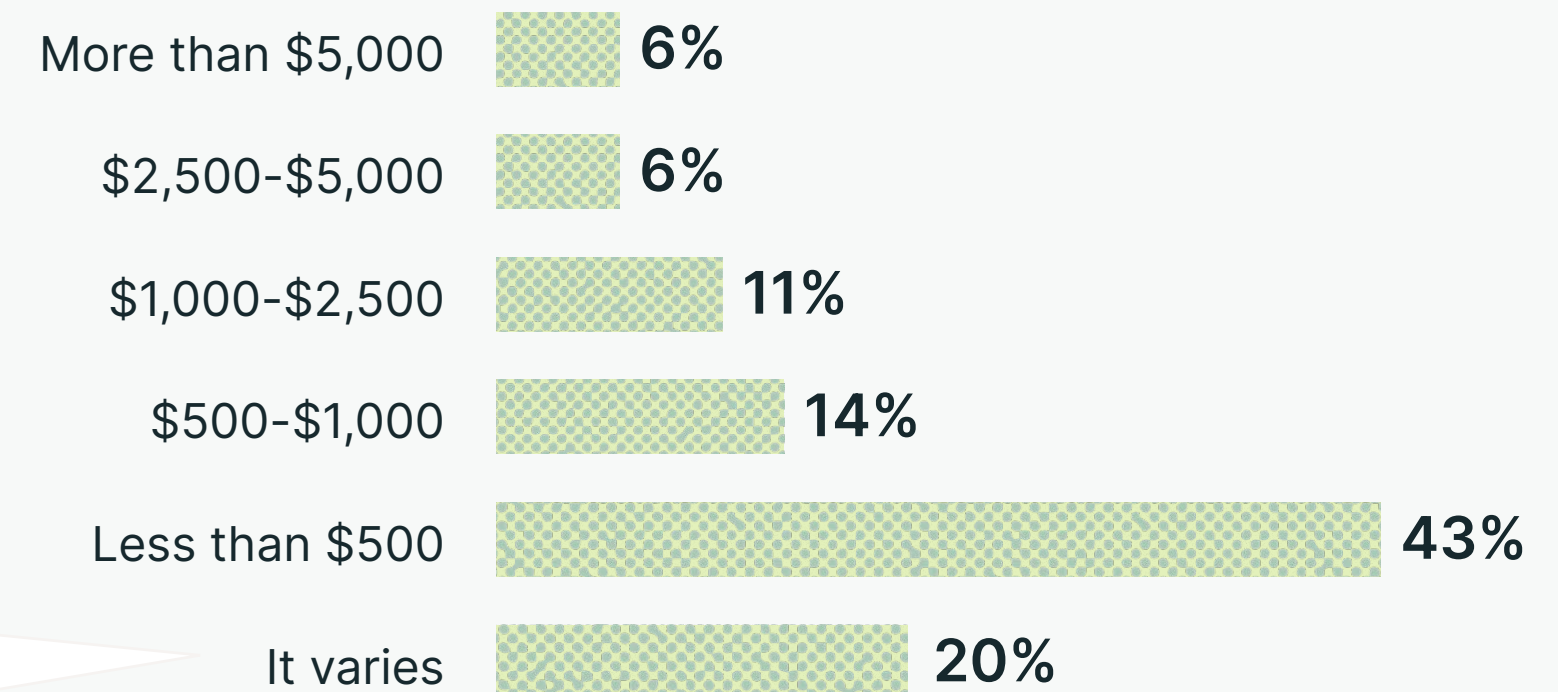
Understanding that influencer content is a valuable paid media asset, 67% of brands negotiate content usage rights directly into the creator's initial contract or rate. Meanwhile, 20% say they pay based on duration, and 12% pay an additional flat fee (generally investing \$500 or less).

Marketers are increasingly approaching usage rights like media budgeting — paying for the value a creator's content delivers in paid channels. This shows a growing maturity in campaign planning, with brands integrating influencer content into paid strategies alongside other performance-driven investments.

When using influencer content in paid ads, how do you typically handle content usage rights?



If you pay an additional fee, how much do you typically pay per creator or per asset?



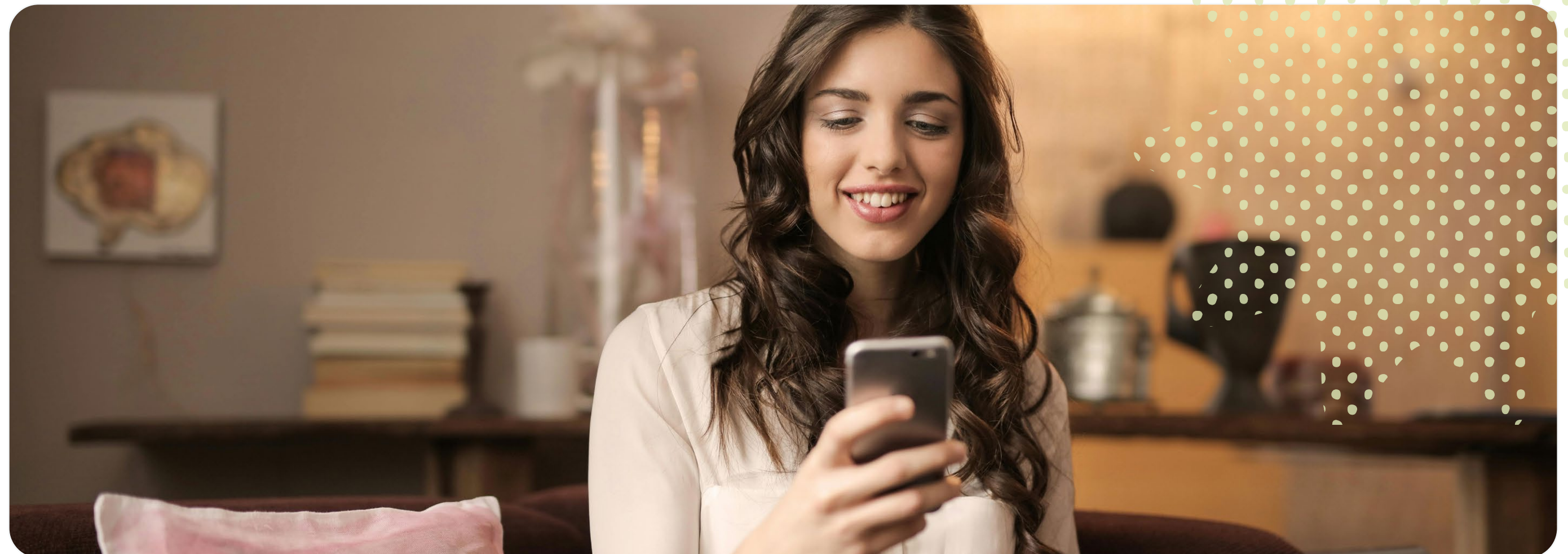
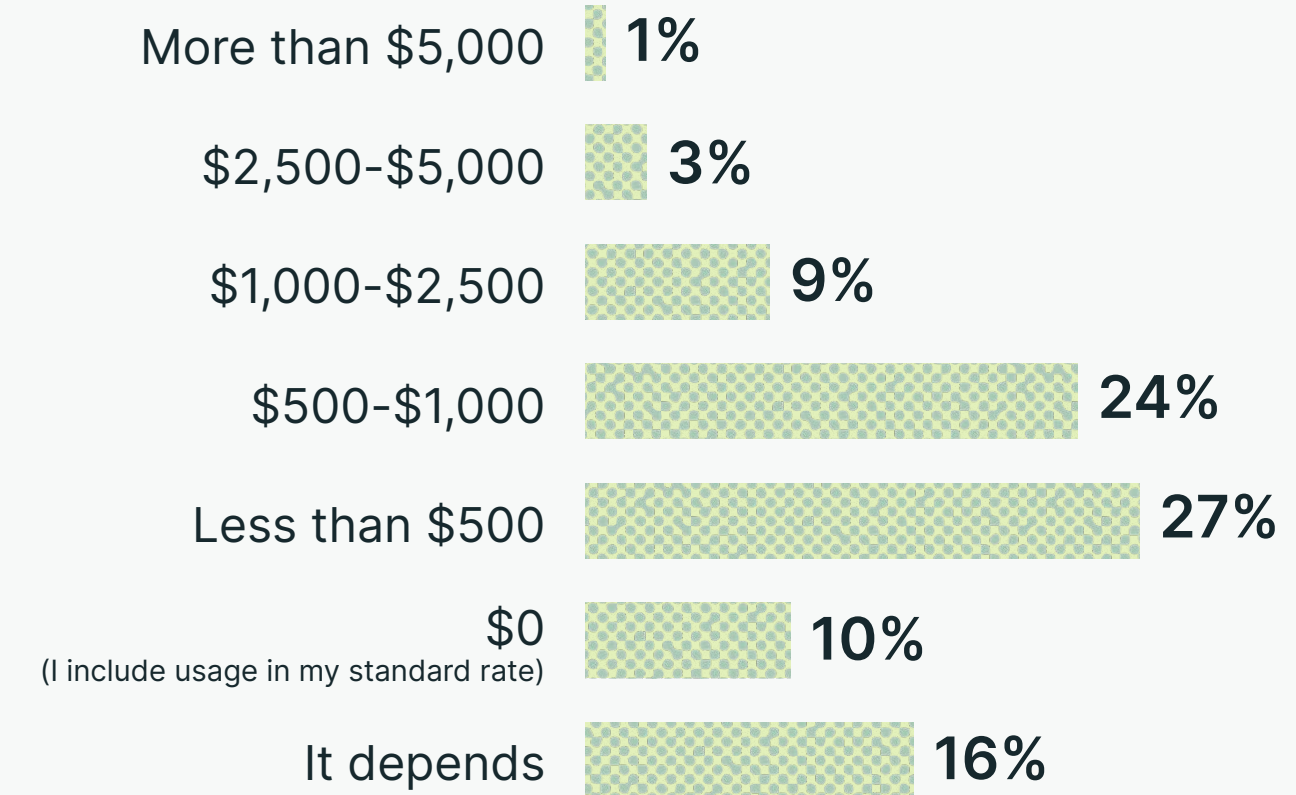
“We’ve paid anywhere from \$100/month to \$1000/month, and usually the creator sets the price.”

On the creator side, pricing is more varied and increasingly sophisticated. 37% of creators charge \$500 or less, 33% charge between \$500-\$2,500, and a smaller segment charges higher amounts.

Other creators say the amount they charge largely depends on factors such as the duration of the content usage, platform scope (social-only vs. multi-platform), and exclusivity.

Creators are also adopting percentage-of-base-rate models, commonly charging 15-35% per 30 days or flat extension fees of \$500 to \$1,000. This approach mirrors traditional advertising licensing structures, reflecting the increasing role of influencer content as high-performing paid media.

When brands request paid usage rights for your content, what do you typically charge?



Let's Talk Budget

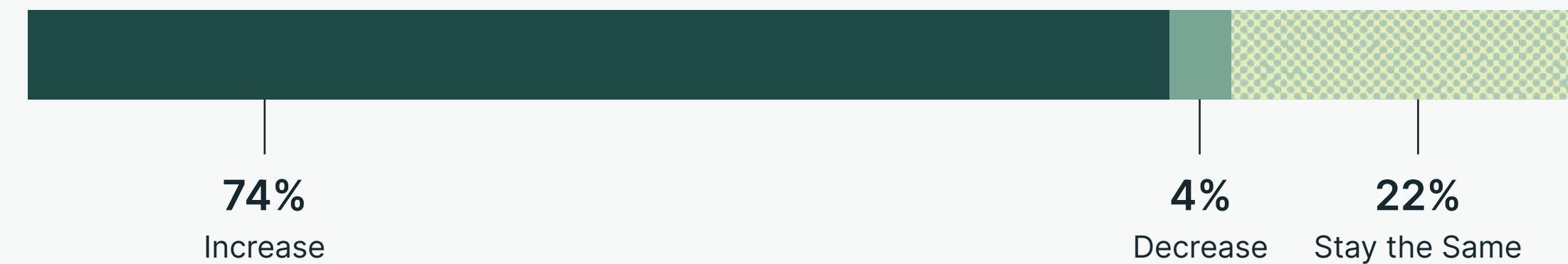
In 2025, brands invested 23% of their marketing budgets, on average, toward influencer marketing.

We foresee this number surging up this year, as 74% of marketers plan to increase their investment in this channel in 2026.

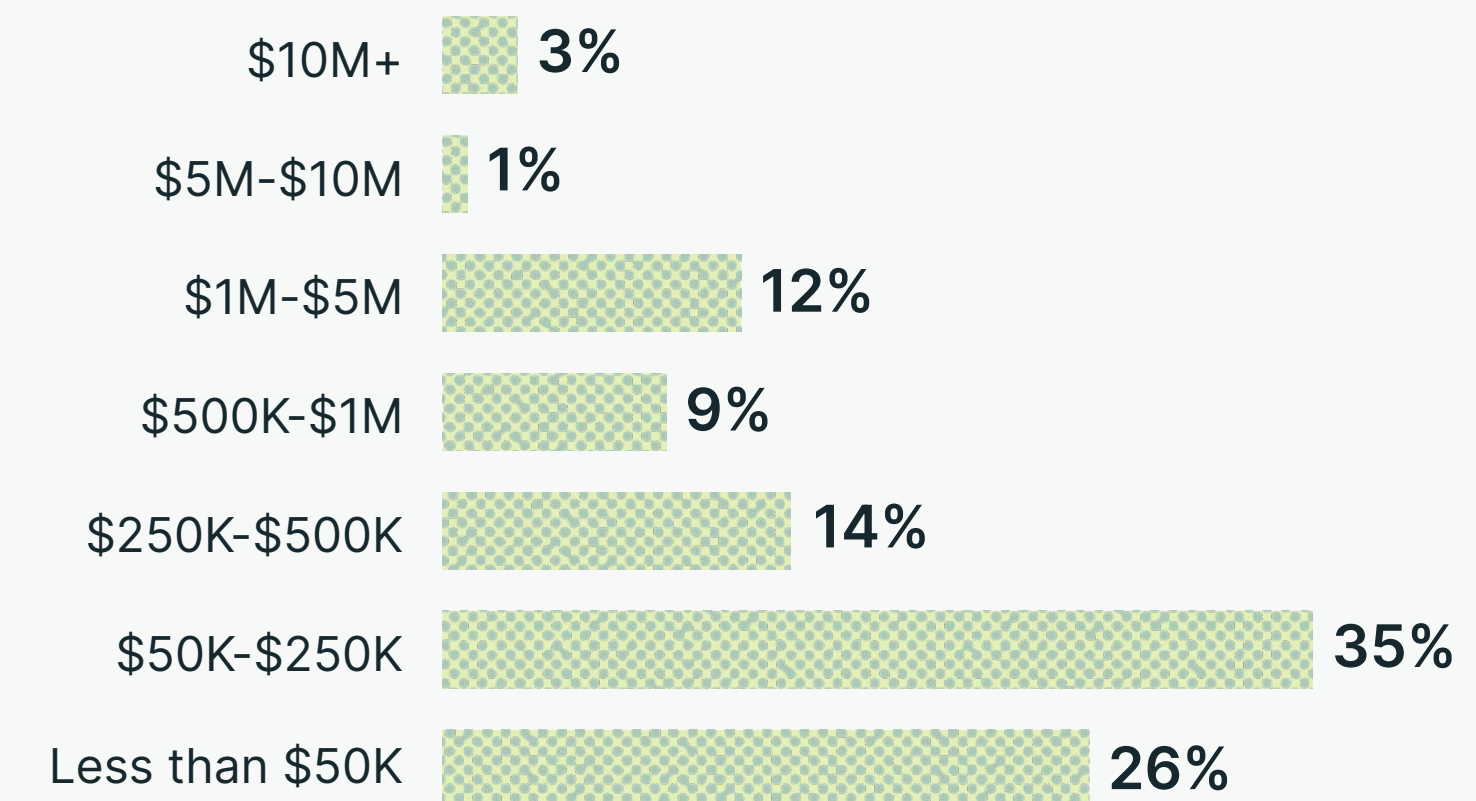
But what does that actually mean in dollar terms? Our survey shows a wide spectrum of planned budgets, signaling both the maturation of established programs and the rise of new investment.

While most programs (61%) still fall under \$250K, a notable share of brands (16%) are scaling into multi-million-dollar budgets, highlighting the strategic value of influencer marketing.

Do you plan to increase or decrease your influencer marketing budget in 2026?



How much \$ do you plan to invest in influencer marketing in 2026 (annual)?



What Brands are Saying

Amid economic headwinds, marketers also shared how they're investing in creators to stretch their dollars and maximize ROI. Savvy marketers are:

- **Leveraging cost-effective strategies** like affiliate marketing, gifting, and user-generated content in paid channels.

“We are shifting to gifting and only paying for ad usage if needed or a small flat fee. We are negotiating much harder with creators and just being open with them about our budgets.”

“We're squeezing more value from each deal through ad rights, raw files, and multi-platform usage so every dollar works twice.”

“We're leaning more into affiliate and UGC partnerships to stretch the budget while keeping performance strong.”





- **Meticulously measuring performance metrics** and recent campaign data to make every dollar count.

“We are highly analytical when evaluating potential partnerships, focusing on recent performance data to confidently build out CPC/CAC projections. This step is more critical in 2025 due to both economic challenges and the complex nature of Meta’s algorithm hampering reach.”

“We’re shifting from vanity reach to hard-ROI creators — focusing on mid-tier/micro influencers with proven IPM, running tighter pilots before scaling, and prioritizing content formats that convert (native, lo-fi, searchable).”

- **Emphasizing authentic, story-driven content** by giving creators creative freedom and building long-term relationships.

“We’re focused on building long-term relationships with creators instead of one-off posts. We’re prioritizing authentic content that feels natural and adds value instead of pushing sales.”

“We let the creators create! Giving them artistic freedom makes the relationship lower-lift and more enjoyable, so when they endorse us, their audiences trust that it’s real (and it is! We only work with people who are true brand champions). Plus, they are willing to reduce their rates to work with us (which helps us economically), and it produces more authentic, quality content.”

Creator Rates

On the creator side, **59% plan to increase their rates in the coming year** to fit their growing engagement and content expertise.

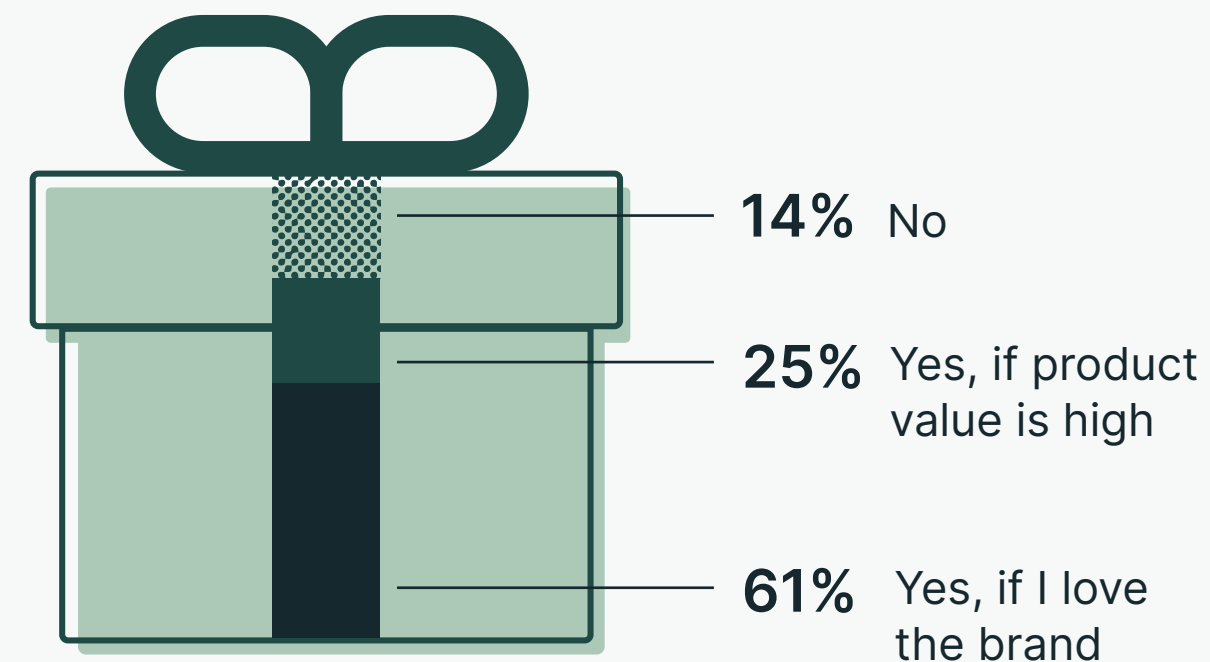
That being said, **86% of creators are still willing to work with brands for just free products**, if they love the brand or the product value is high.

But remember, your collaboration proposals are more likely to be accepted when you're offering payment.

We asked creators to share their thoughts on product-only versus paid campaigns.

⬇ See next page

Would you work for a brand just for free product?



86%

of creators are willing to work with brands for just free products, as long as they love the brand or the product value is high



What Creators are Saying

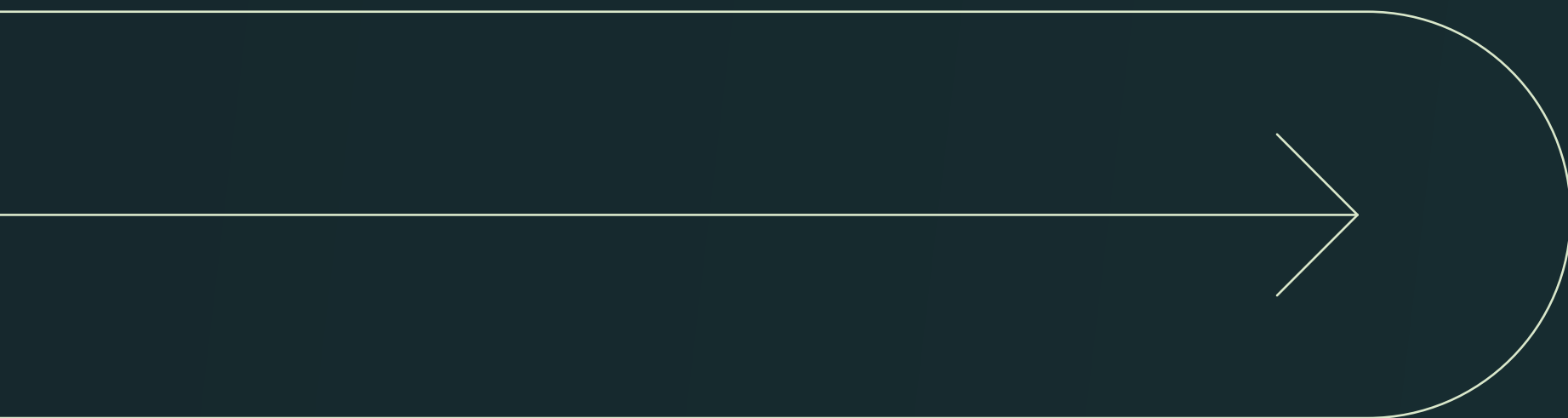
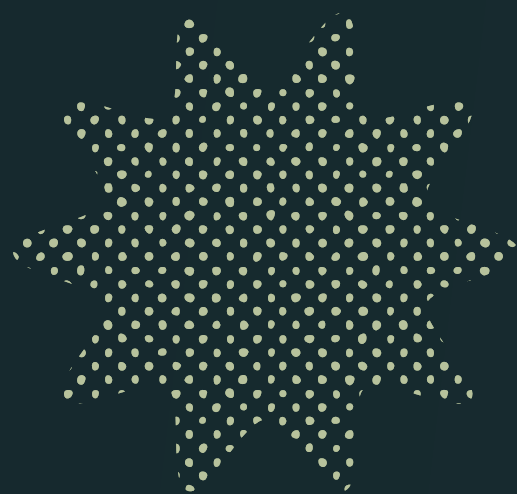
“It all depends on the product. Do I like it? Do I need it? Do I want it?...If I answer yes to any of the questions, then I’m ok with product only collaborations, but the products have to be worth my time. For example. I will not do a product-only collaboration when the brand is only offering one bottle of shampoo or 1 cheap item in exchange for a well-produced, time consuming video or post that takes hours to film, edit and post. It just has to make sense and worth my work.”

“As a full-time creator, I put a lot of care into producing high-quality content — from filming, lighting, and sound to understanding a brand’s audience and tailoring the message accordingly. I’m comfortable speaking on camera, I work quickly, and I take every project seriously. With my experience and the level of effort that goes into each piece of content, I naturally prefer paid campaigns that fairly compensate creators for their work.

That said, I do sometimes accept product-only collaborations — but only when my schedule allows and when I genuinely align with the brand’s values and the product itself.”

“Both approaches have their merits. Product-only campaigns are effective for showcasing the product itself and can work well in certain contexts. However, I personally prefer paid campaigns because they allow us to maximize the value of the time, creativity, and effort invested in creating and posting content.”

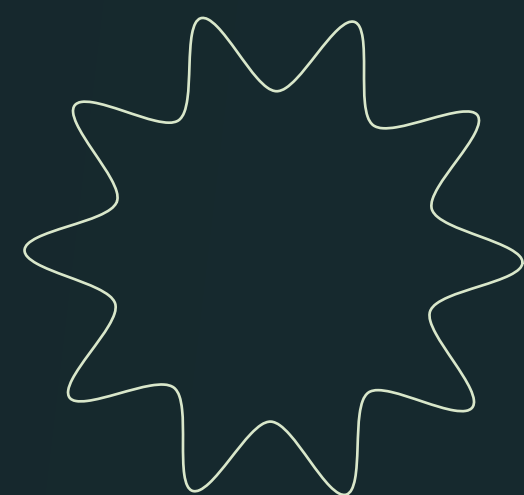




Campaign Production & Strategy

Campaign Overview

Campaign Breakdown



Campaign Overview

In 2025, the average campaign had:

28 creators

360 posts

449K engagements

2.8M impressions

\$30.2K spent per campaign

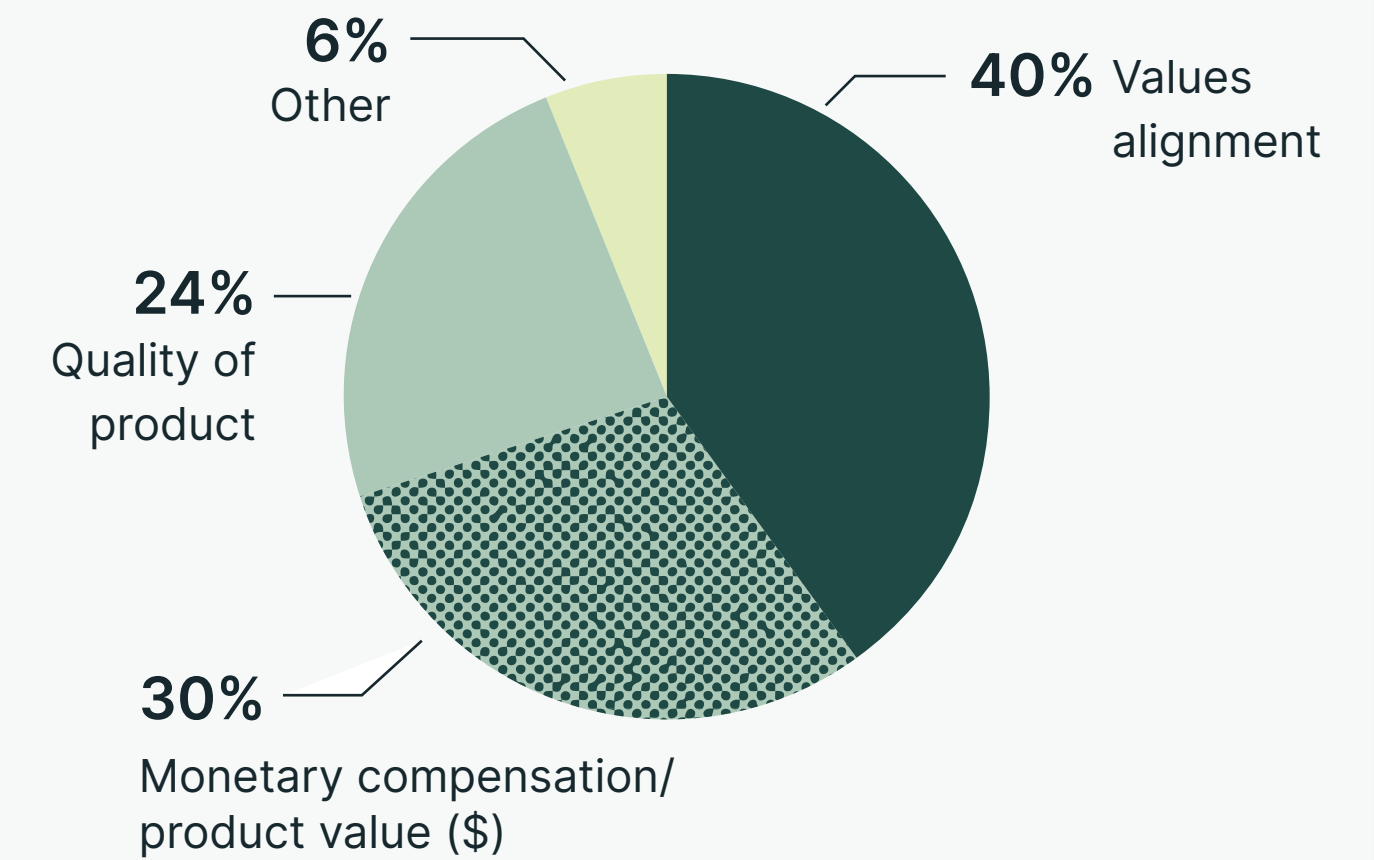
\$1.3K spent per creator per campaign

While the number of creators stayed relatively consistent year over year, content output surged. The average campaign produced **360 posts in 2025, up 4.5x from last year. Engagement scaled alongside content, jumping a whopping 221% year-over-year.** This suggests that content is resonating more deeply with audiences, likely because it feels more authentic and aligned with both the creator's voice and their values.

Survey data reinforces this shift. When asked what matters most when choosing brands to work with, **40% of creators ranked values alignment** as the top factor, outperforming monetary compensation (30%) and product quality (24%).

Despite producing significantly more content, spend increased only modestly. **Average campaign spend rose 11% to \$30.2K, while average spend per creator dropped 28% to \$1.3K.** Brands are spreading budgets across broader creator mixes and prioritizing fit and long-term performance, allowing campaigns to scale in a more sustainable and efficient way.

What's the most important factor when choosing brands to work with?



40%

of creators prefer to work with brands that align with their values.

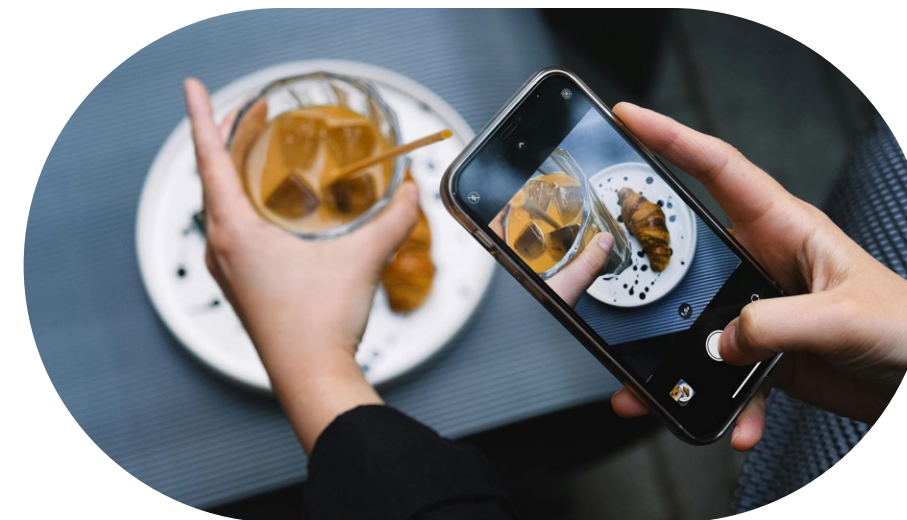
Campaign Breakdown

The savviest brands are diversifying their creator programs beyond one-off partnerships, matching creators with campaigns tailored to their unique strengths — whether that's creating engaging UGC or driving mass sales.

Let's take a look at the top campaign strategies that stole the show in the past year.

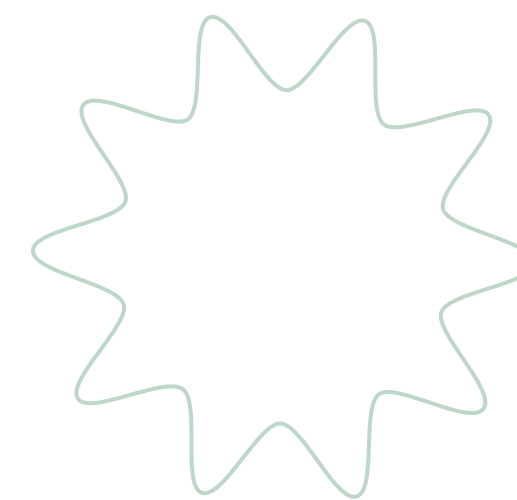


Product Seeding



Ambassador Programs

Affiliate Programs



Creator-Led Paid Ads

Product Seeding

Product seeding had a breakout year in 2025, accounting for **31% of all campaigns on Aspire, up from 20% last year.**

But this growth isn't limited to small gifting programs. 40% of brands running seeding campaigns gifted over \$20K in product to more than 100 creators. This level of investment signals growing confidence in product seeding as a reliable driver of content, engagement, and downstream performance.

As seeding programs scale, the strongest results come from brands that stay intentional about who they gift to. Sabrina Cheng-Wingate, Social Media and Influencer Manager at PopSockets, shared that effective product seeding starts with prioritizing creators already engaging with the brand or actively shaping the category conversation.

Her advice:

- **Use social listening** to identify real fans and emerging voices.
- **Let creators choose their own products** from your collection and interpret your brand in their own style.
- **Activate surprise-and-delight moments** for your most loyal customers and consistent UGC overperformers.

This approach helps large-scale gifting programs stay authentic, maintain content quality, and drive meaningful impact without turning product seeding into a transactional channel.



Brand Ambassador Programs

According to our survey, ambassador programs delivered the highest ROI of any influencer strategy in our survey — underscoring the impact of long-term, relationship-driven creator partnerships.

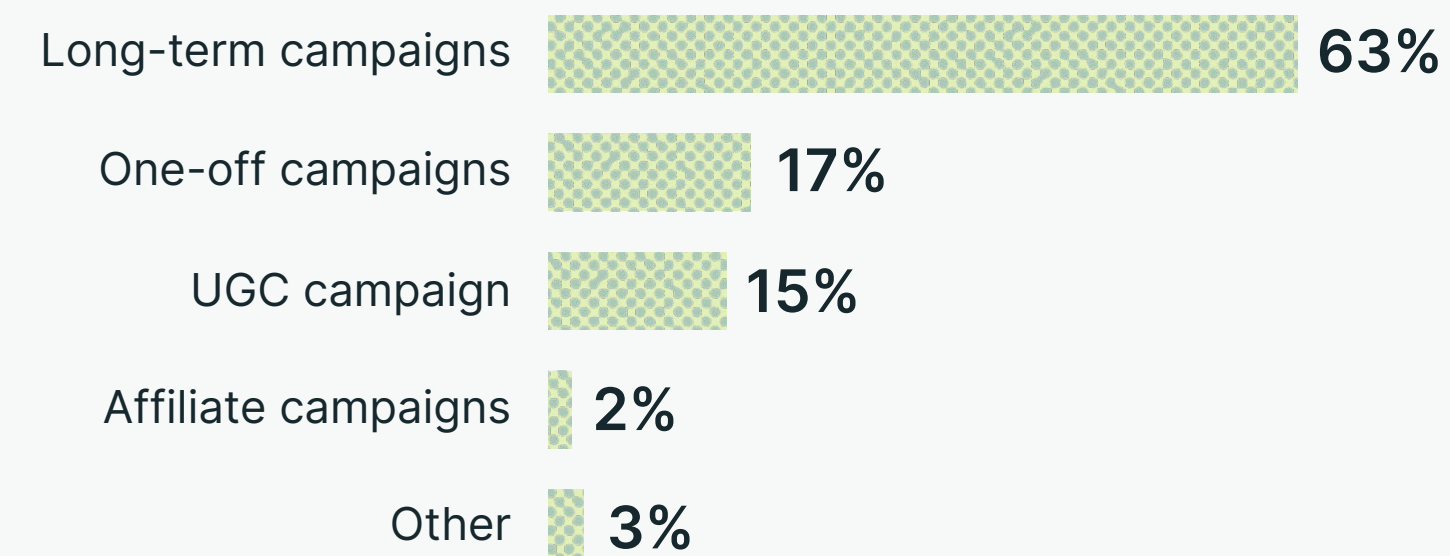
By investing in lasting relationships with creators, you can create campaigns that feel more authentic and build trust with their audience (AKA your future customers).

But ambassador programs aren't just the top strategy for brands. They're also creators' favorite way to collaborate. In fact, **63% of creators say they prefer long-term partnerships** over any other type of campaign.

Which influencer marketing strategy has driven the most ROI for your brand?



What is your favorite way to work with brands?



“To succeed in 2026, brands need to build ongoing touchpoints that bring creator insights, feedback, and perspective into the work. Creating space for honest input through surveys, focus groups, or regular check-ins will help brands build alignment and stronger partnerships.”

Lindsey Gamble,
Influencer Marketing
Consultant & Advisor

Affiliate Programs

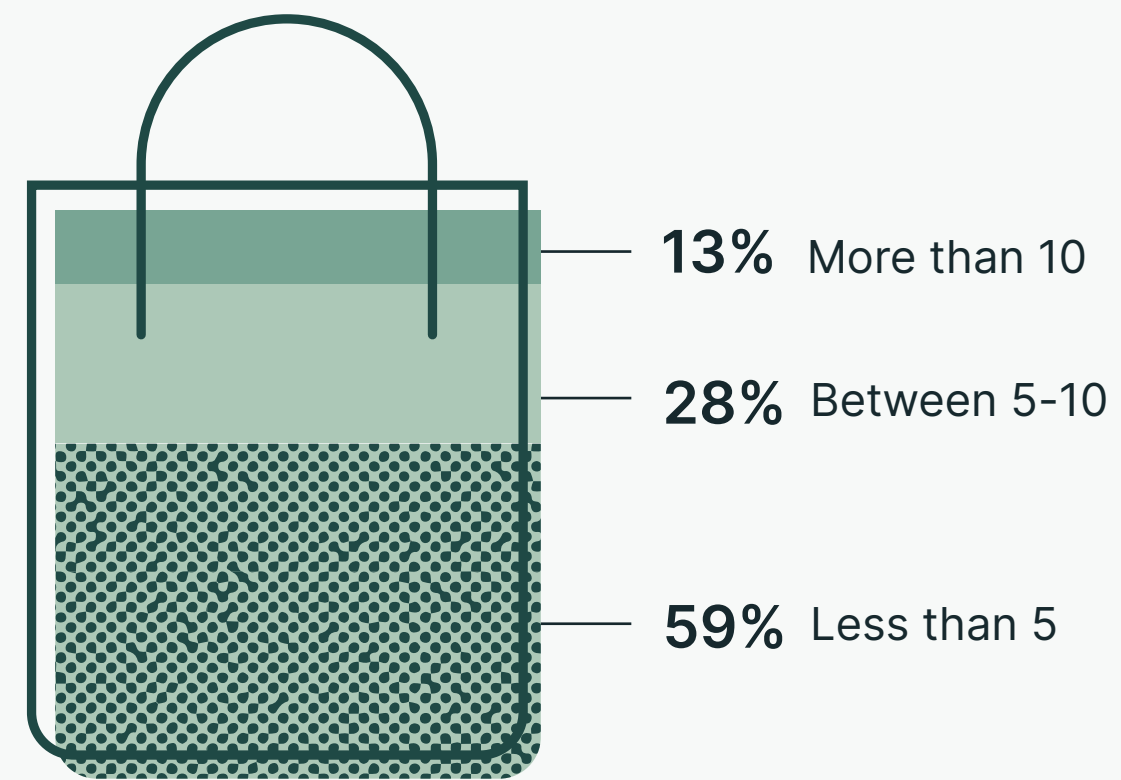
Affiliate marketing is also emerging as a top strategy among brands and creators, showcasing a shift in the influencer marketing space.

Once dominated by pay-to-play deals, we're now seeing a surge in revenue-sharing programs. More brands are sharing their profits with creators, giving them direct financial incentives based on content performance.

Creators are embracing this shift more than ever. In fact, a growing **41% of creators surveyed participated in more than 5 affiliate campaigns over the past year**, signaling creators' openness to commission-based partnerships.

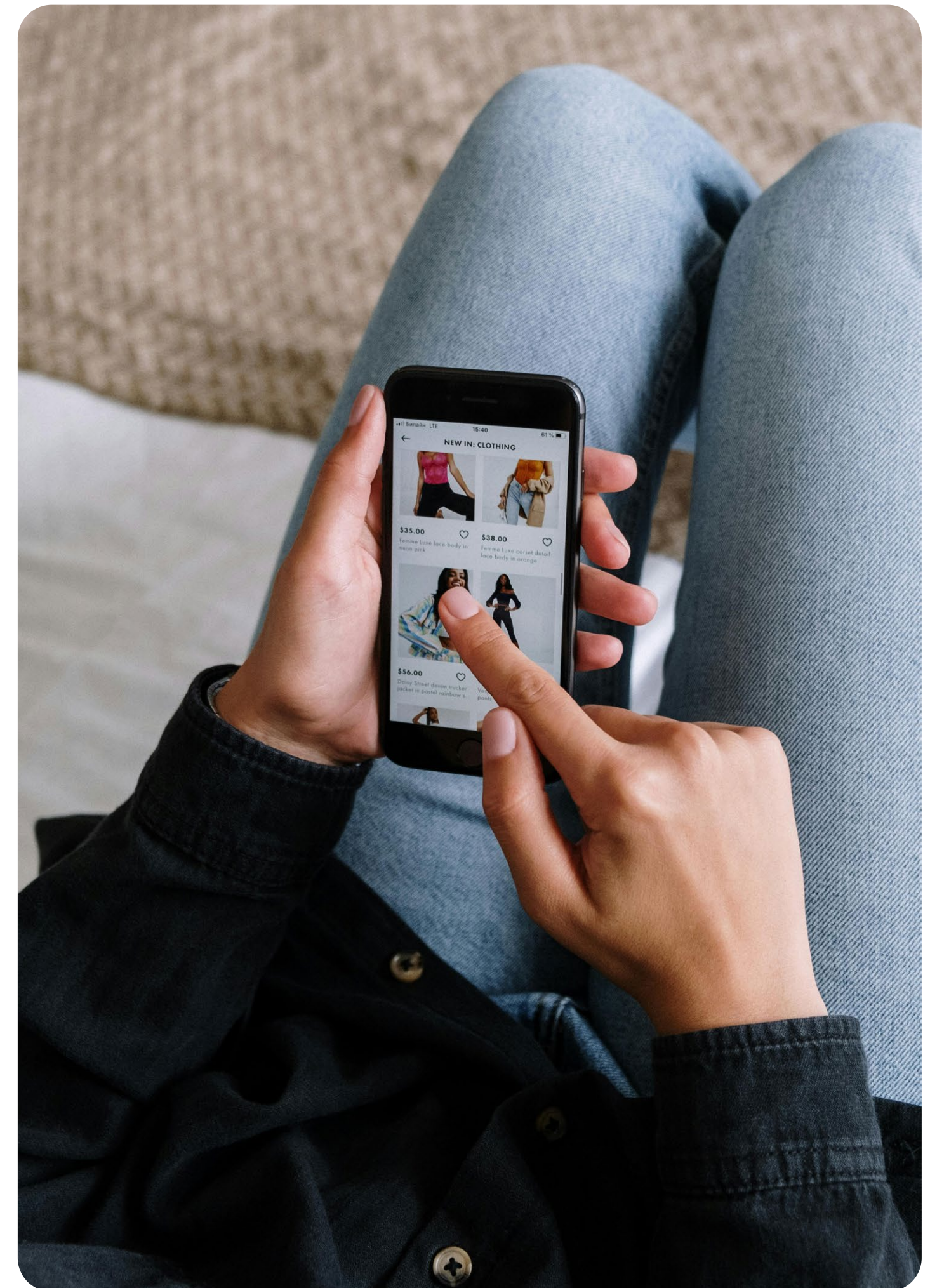
Together, creators on Aspire drove over \$52 million in attributed affiliate sales in 2025, a 45% year-over-year growth. This revenue is directly attributed to the affiliate links and codes created on Aspire, allowing brands to tie influencer spend directly to revenue growth.

How many affiliate campaigns have you participated in this year?



41%

of creators participated in multiple affiliate campaigns in 2024



Creator-Led Paid Ads

77% of marketers actively repurpose creator content in paid ads to fuel performance at scale and extend its impact well beyond organic reach.

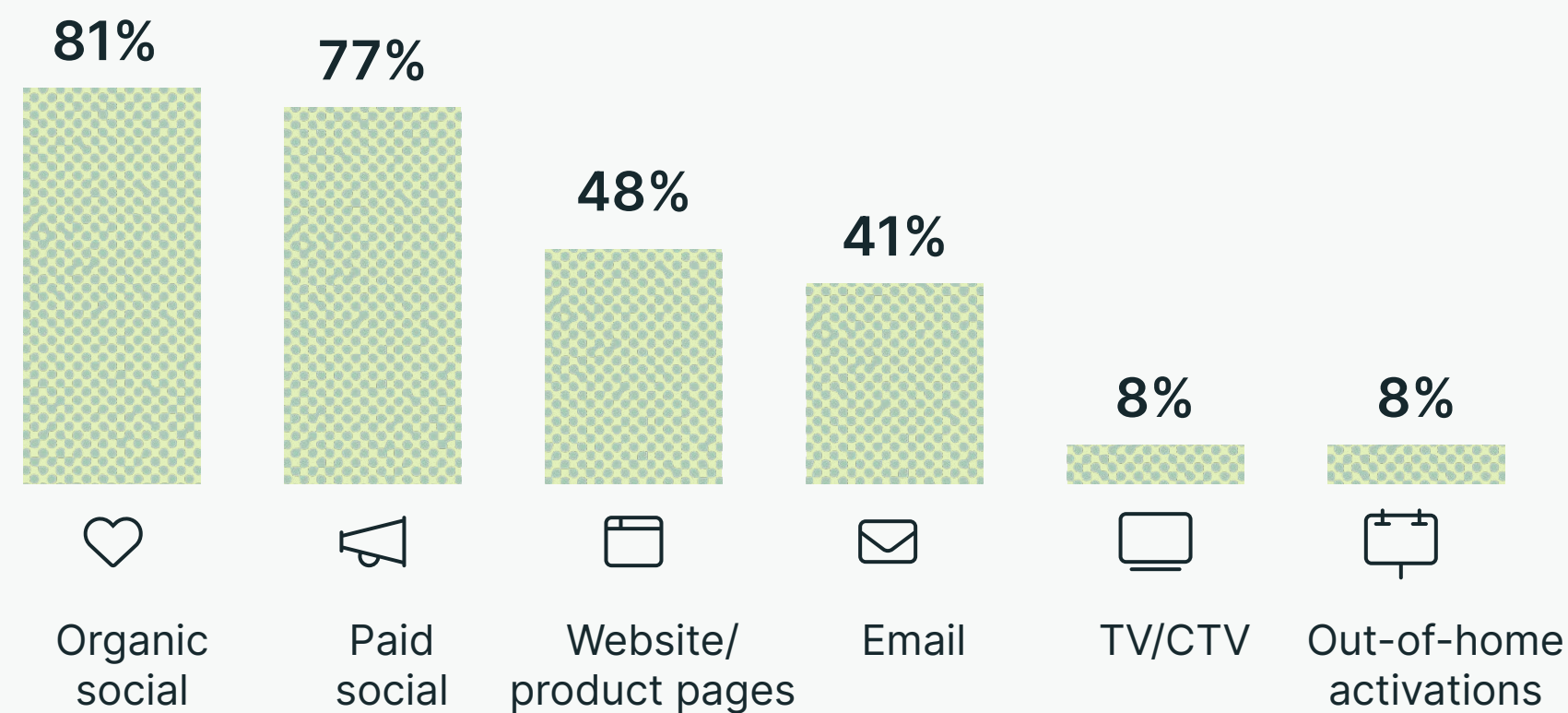
And this shift is only accelerating in the age of Meta's Andromeda. As Meta moves toward AI-driven optimization that prioritizes creative volume and diversity over audience segmentation, performance now depends on feeding the algorithm a steady stream of high-quality creative.

Creator content is uniquely suited for this, naturally delivering different voices, formats, tones, and styles

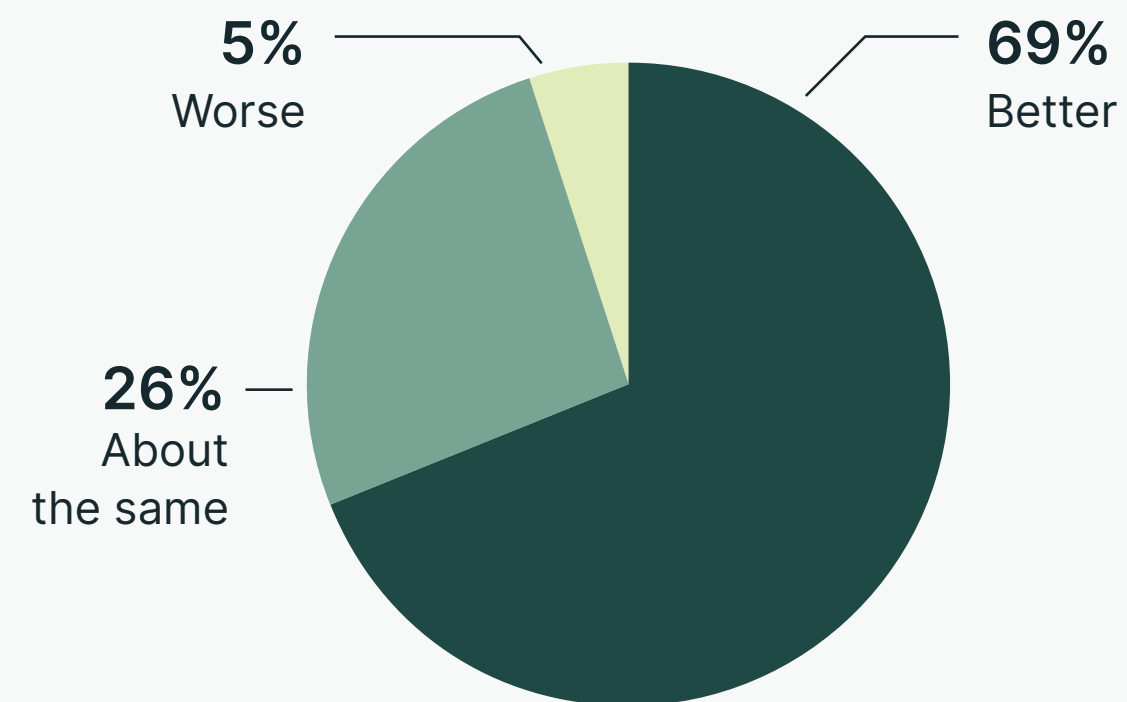
that actually resonate with audiences. In fact, **69% of marketers say influencer-generated content performs better than brand-directed content.**

In 2025, brands running Meta Partnership Ads through Aspire achieved an average 2.4X ROAS, reinforcing creator content as a high-performing, cost-efficient input for paid media.

Where do you repurpose influencer content?

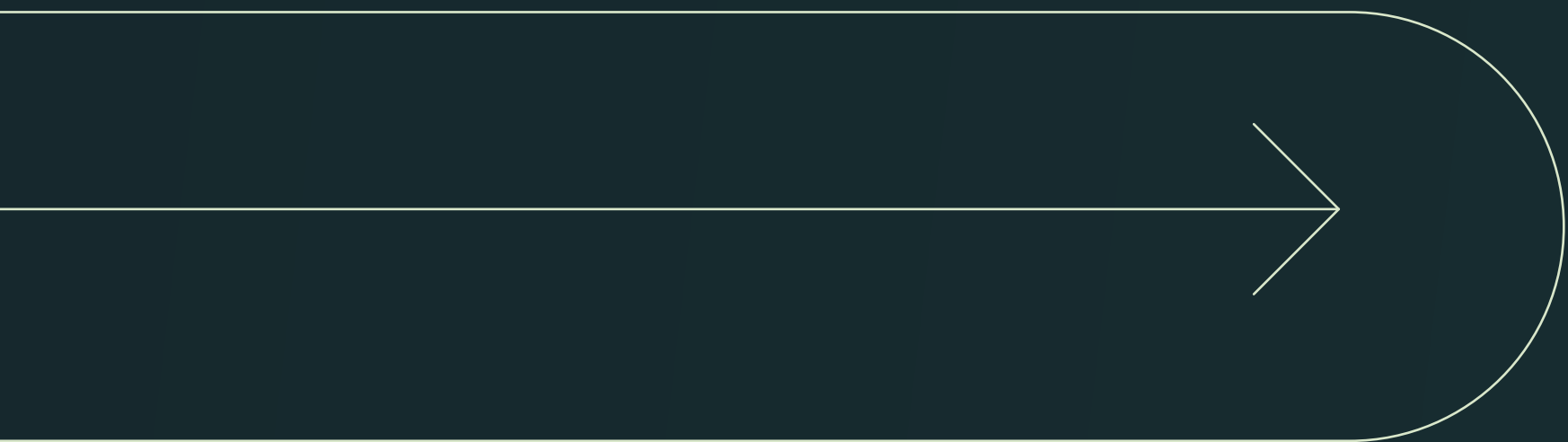
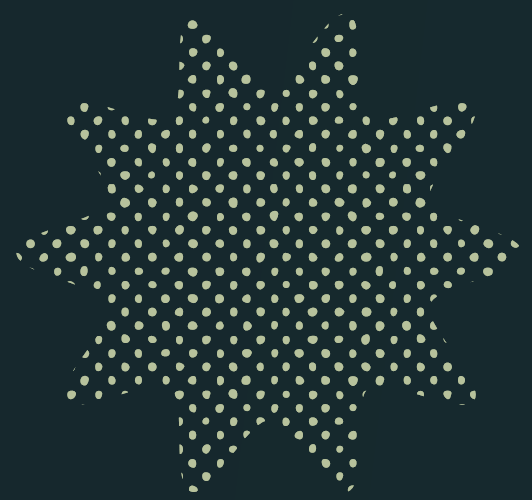
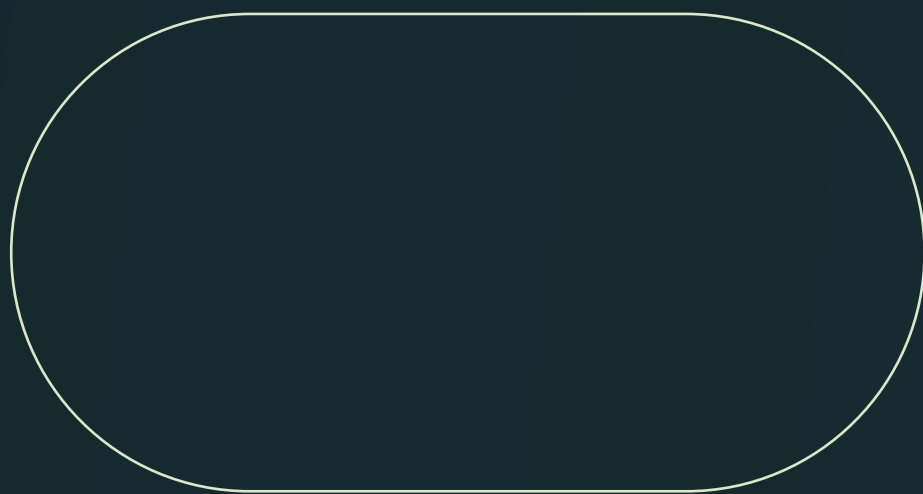


How does creator content perform when compared to your other creative?



During our off-season campaign, where we need to create demand, influencer content drove 27X ROAS. That's about 5X the rate of brand content.

Raechelle Dias,
Social Media & Partnerships
Lead at Veradek

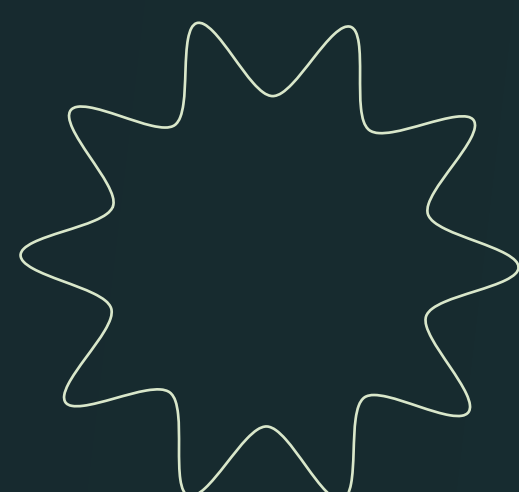


Looking Forward

5 Best Practices for 2026

Our 2026 Predictions

Introducing Aspire



5 Best Practices for 2026



Incorporate affiliate marketing into your overarching strategy.

Bake affiliate links and codes into your creator activations. Keep creators motivated with tiered commissions, bonuses, and performance-based rewards that incentivize and reward the top sales drivers.



Plan for paid amplification from day one.

Negotiate content usage rights upfront and design briefs with paid placements in mind. Identify top-performing creator content early, then scale it through paid channels to drive stronger efficiency, higher ROAS, and longer creative lifespan.



Prioritize long-term creator relationships over one-off activations.

Invest in ongoing partnerships and ambassador programs with your top performers instead of constantly sourcing new creators. Long-term partnerships deliver higher ROI, better content, and are consistently creators' preferred way to work with brands.



Anchor budgets where performance is proven, and test where attention is underpriced.

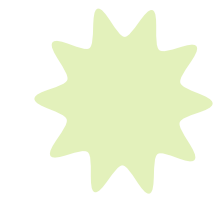
Lock in returns on proven channels like Instagram and TikTok, but reserve budget to test emerging creators, creative formats, platforms, and distribution surfaces.



Use AI to scale operations, but rely on human creativity.

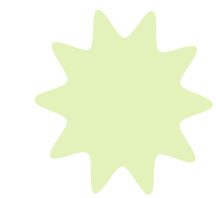
Invest in an AI-powered solution like Aspire to streamline creator discovery, workflow, and analytics, but rely on human judgment for creator fit, storytelling, and cultural relevance.

Our 2026 Predictions



Brands will double down on niche creators.

In 2026, brands will increasingly prioritize niche creators with deeply trusted voices in hyper-specific communities, where credibility matters more than reach. Today's consumers love to see brands that thoughtfully identify creators whose values, storytelling, and even aesthetics feel genuinely aligned. As fatigue grows around unrelatable, "flex culture" creators, we predict brands will double down on niche comfort creators and loyal customer-turned-creators with real community influence.



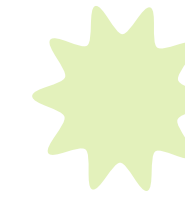
AI will power scale, not replace creators.

For brands, AI will become the default operating layer for influencer marketing, handling creator discovery, campaign optimization, content planning, creative testing, and performance analysis at scale. However, brands will not use AI to replace human creativity, as authenticity and relatability remain crucial for consumer trust.



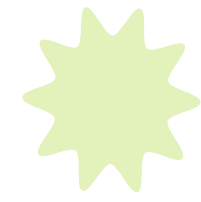
Influencer partnerships, like marketing as a whole, is full of risk taking. Forget your favorite influencer and find your audience's favorite influencer. You'll be surprised with how much better you resonate in an unexpected landscape.

Cala Wolf,
Influencer Marketing Strategist



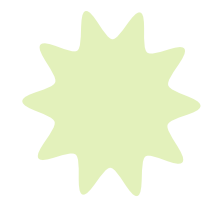
Hi-fi creator content will power brand moments.

Lo-fi content will remain essential for daily engagement, but hi-fi content will define major product launches and tentpole moments. We expect more cinematic, episodic, and editorial-style creator collaborations in 2026.



There will be many more influencer activations IRL.

Brands will invest more in IRL creator activations, from pop-ups and branded dinners to community events, designed to spark deeper connection and richer storytelling. These moments will serve as high-impact content engines, turning real-world experiences into weeks of authentic, creator-led social content.



Creators will evolve from promoters to strategic advisors.

As creators sit closer to consumer sentiment than any survey or focus group, brands will increasingly involve them earlier in the marketing and product lifecycle and give them a bigger role in shaping product ideas, messaging, and go-to-market strategies — not just amplifying them.



Introducing Aspire

To elevate your influencer marketing program in 2026, invest in a smart solution like Aspire.

Aspire is the leading influencer marketing solution empowering the world's most sophisticated enterprise brands and fast-growing DTC businesses to build and cultivate influential communities.

Our Software Includes:

- ✓ Influencer discovery tools, both inbound and outbound
- ✓ Customizable campaign workflows for your unique needs
- ✓ Creator relationship management system
- ✓ Ecommerce integrations with Shopify, WooCommerce, and more
- ✓ ROI measurement and analytics suite
- ✓ Searchable content library
- ✓ Ad amplification integrations with Meta, TikTok, and Pinterest
- ✓ And much more!

Our Agency Services offering includes:

- ✓ Comprehensive creative, content, and channel strategy
- ✓ End-to-end program management and agile optimization — from curated discovery to custom creator and campaign briefing, to contracting and content management, to bespoke reporting, and full payment processing and reconciliation
- ✓ Paid media management, A/B testing, and spend optimization
- ✓ Fully transparent creator budgeting with no hidden fees or fixed service spend percentages
- ✓ Dedicated account staffing with demonstrated category expertise
- ✓ “Flex and flow” servicing paradigms custom-designed to deliver seamless management of seasonal/promotional events, tentpoles, affiliate programs, and always-on IGC and UGC

To learn more about how Aspire helps brands achieve success

get in touch with us

