

BRAND BUILDING IN THE CREATOR AGE

FROM REACH TO RESONANCE

WONDERY

SEPTEMBER 2026

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Narrowing The Lens

The creator economy is vast, and one segment deserves a closer look.



What is a creator? Is it the self-taught makeup artist posting tutorials? The retired scientist broadcasting live experiments? An award-winning journalist sourcing audience Q&A? The answer is all the above. **Today, anyone with a perspective and a platform can create, and millions do. The creator economy spans every format, every niche, and every level of ambition.**

Within this expanding landscape, a specific category of creator has emerged. **Those that are not just posting, but hosting. These creators produce episodic programming around their voice and point of view, and, over time, they have built audiences that consistently show up across formats and channels.** In a world where attention is increasingly fragmented, these creators have built something rare, an audience that keeps coming back.



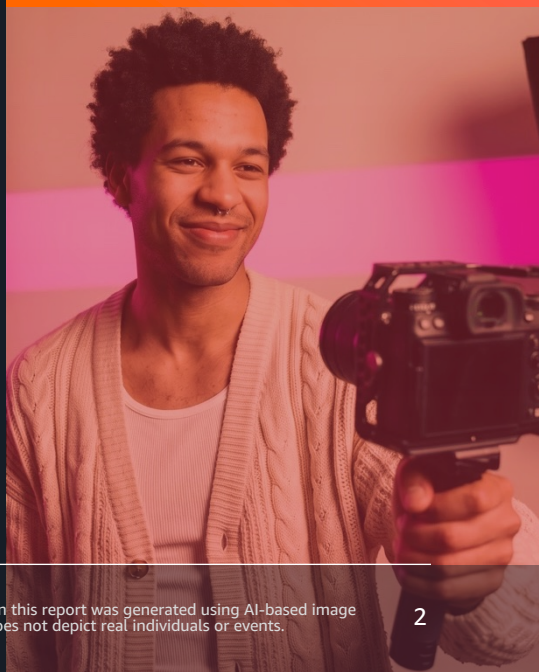
Despite the loyalty these creators command, the industry lacks a reliable way to prove it.

Advertisers have used a variety of inconsistent metrics to guide their creator advertising decisions. While follower counts and views may be valid signals of potential reach, they don't quantify a creator's resonance.

Resonance, a trusted voice's ability to convert attention into action is quickly becoming one of the most meaningful predictors of full-funnel success. To close that gap, Amazon's Wondery commissioned SmithGeiger to survey 3,000 U.S. adults who regularly tune into a creator-hosted podcast or digital series. **The findings map what drives resonance among these fans: how they engage with their favorite show, what earns their trust, and what happens when brands show up with consistency or fall short of it.**

3,000

U.S. adults surveyed



These audiences didn't form overnight. They are the result of what happens when creators invest in community, and they reward brands that do the same.

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PART ONE

The rise of creator-hosted Premium video



> **“I enjoyed watching little snippets and clips of their conversations, now they are a big part of my weekly routine and something I look forward to.”**
>
> – FEMALE A26
> SPEAKING ABOUT GIGGLY SQUAD

Familiarity drives routine engagement

Creator-hosted podcasts and digital series have crossed the threshold from niche to mainstream, with fans tuning into an average 4-5 shows on a regular basis. This space is notably ripe with well-known personalities, from reality TV stars and business leaders to a former First Lady serving as hosts. **8 out of 10 surveyed fans were already familiar with the host of their favorite show before tuning in**, and most were already fans.

That familiarity translates into routine. Most fans surveyed treat new episodes as appointment viewing, and **nearly 3 in 4 say these shows are more matched to their personal interests than serialized programming because hosts offer real and candid conversations**.

These conversations are increasingly moving from the phone to the living room screen as creator-hosted shows find homes on streaming services. Gen Z and Millennial fans surveyed are significantly more likely than Gen X fans to stream creator-hosted podcasts on TV. Video is how most fans first arrive but the connection begins before they hit play

% Surveyed fans reported familiarity with the host of their favorite creator show

48% Very familiar, already a fan

18% Knew who they were, not a fan yet

15% Heard the name, knew little

19% Not aware before this show

Like to stream their favorite podcast on TV



33% Gen Z



30% Millennial



25% Gen X

Base: Watch Creator Podcasts (N=2282), Gen Z (n=612), Millennial (n=960), Gen X (n=710)

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> **"I started as casual listener, now feel personally connected and emotionally invested deeply."**
>
> — MALE, 35
> SPEAKING ABOUT ARMCHAIR EXPERT

Long-term fans are
The most leaned-in

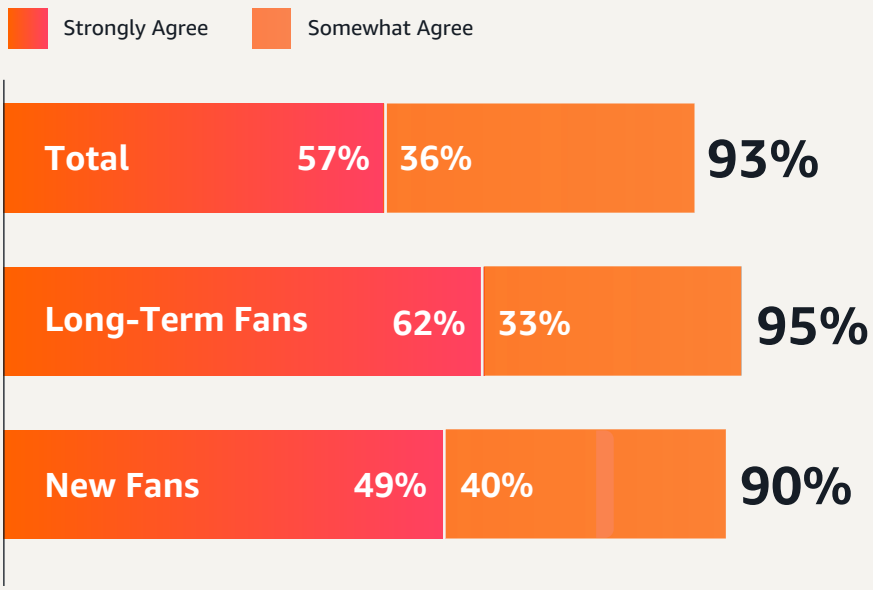
Because most fans today report discovering shows in their social feeds, 3 in 5 convert to a full-length episode on video.

And they stay leaned in on video because of the human connection. 45% choose to watch creator-hosted podcasts so they can see the host's reactions.

Tenure drives anticipation and on-screen attention. Two-thirds of surveyed fans report they have tuned in regularly to their favorite show for at least a year.

Those long-term fans are significantly more likely than newer ones to anticipate each new episode drop as much as their favorite TV shows.

% Surveyed fans who look forward to new episodes as much as their favorite TV show



Base: Total Respondents (N=3000), Tuned in >1 year (n=1837), Tuned in <1 year (n=1163)

Among surveyed fans that watch creator shows

60%

Sit down and watch on any screen

62%	Long-Term Fans
56%	New Fans

40%

Put it on in the background

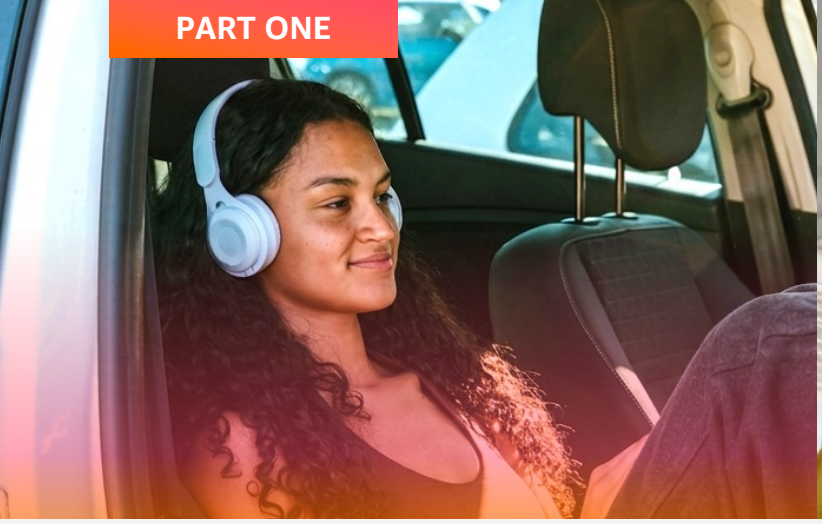
38%	Long-Term Fans
44%	New Fans

Base Sizes: Watch Creator Shows (n=2695), Long-term fans, tuned in >1 year (n=1632), New fans, tuned in <1 year (n=1063)

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PART ONE





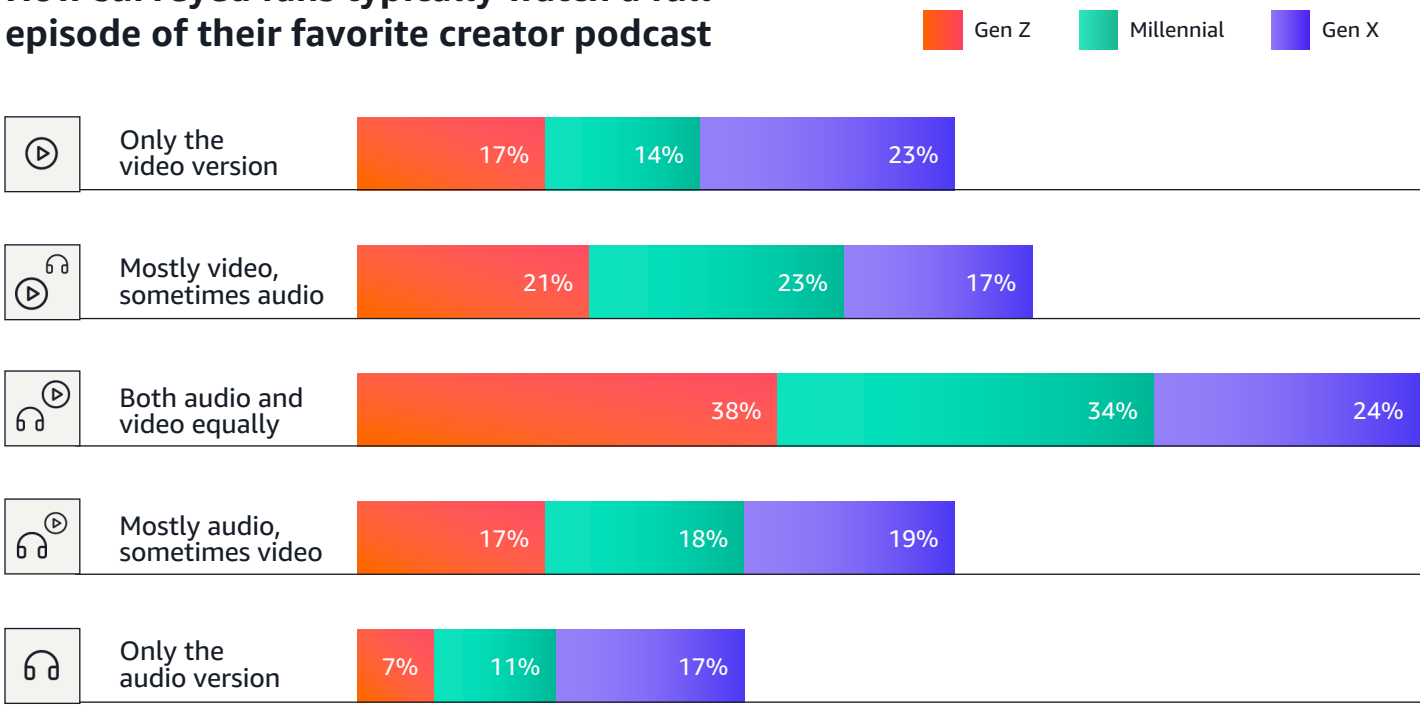
Podcast fans follow creators, not formats

For fans of creator podcasts, video hasn't replaced audio.

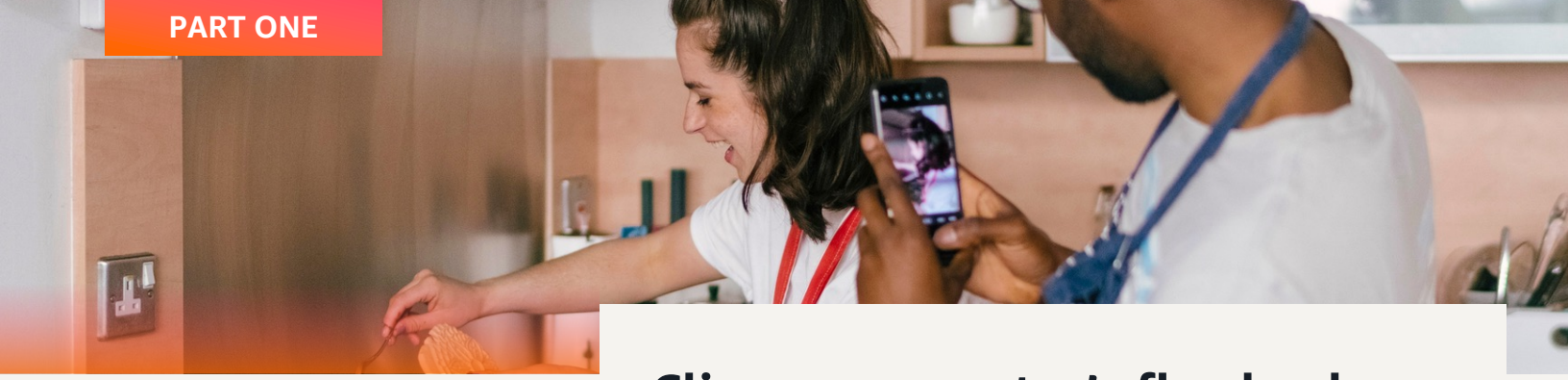
70% move fluidly between watching and listening to full episodes of their favorite show, choosing audio when the situation demands it: commutes, chores, and screen-free moments.

Generationally, older fans tend to pick a lane while younger fans toggle between both. This is likely to continue as fans report they are no more likely to shift toward video or audio in the coming year.

How surveyed fans typically watch a full episode of their favorite creator podcast



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> **“From the clips, I found myself wanting to know more about whatever it is that they were talking about and then I found myself enjoying the full episodes on YouTube.”**
>
> — FEMALE, 46
> SPEAKING ABOUT GOOD HANG



Clips are a creator’s flywheel —

Engaging existing audiences and bringing in new ones

95% of fans surveyed take action after watching a clip. Clips are the **#1 source for show discovery**, nearly twice as effective as word-of-mouth, but they do more than recruit new audiences. They keep the conversation going for existing ones. Nearly all fans surveyed said they encounter clips from their favorite creator shows, which they talk about and share directly with their friends. **1 in 3 use them to keep up** when they don’t have time for the full episode.

For advertisers, clips of creator shows also function as standalone viewing experiences with their own memory encoding as **nearly 1 in 4 fans recall seeing a brand or logo in a clip on social**. For brands, clips extend reach to new audiences while reinforcing presence among loyal ones. The question is how to translate that visibility into genuine resonance?

41%
Talk about clips

37%
Share clips directly

24%
Recall seeing a brand logo on a clip

Base Sizes: Watched clips of favorite show (n=2571)

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PART TWO

Connection over Persuasion



Fans view creators as peers, not personalities

Audiences keep coming back because of the creator. **9 in 10 report the host is the leading reason they tune in**, and not just for their unique voice or point of view.

By tuning in regularly, fans say they've come to know the host more as a real person than as a performer, developing a sense of closeness that rivals actual friendship. Most fans say they trust the host of their favorite creator show as much or more than their own friends.

Given this depth of trust, fans welcome branded messaging in their favorite shows. **Over 3 in 4 don't mind hearing ads in their favorite creator show if it helps support the host.** Fans recognize that brand partnerships are investments in the creators they care about and are willing to give their attention in return.

> **"I have learned about them and have listened to their show for so long they feel like friends more than just hosts of a show."**
>
> — MALE, 23
> SPEAKING ABOUT THE COLIN AND SAMIR SHOW





The friend effect

85%
Say the host of their favorite creator show feels like a friend

50% Strongly Agree

35% Agree Somewhat

81%
Trust the host as much or more than their friends

44% Trust More

37% Trust as Much

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> **They are always so unfiltered and honest on the podcast, I trust that they wouldn't endorse a product they don't actually use or like"**
>
> FEMALE, 36
> SPEAKING ABOUT CALM DOWN WITH ERIN AND CHARISSA

For trust to transfer from creator to brand,

Authenticity is non-negotiable

For brands, partnering with a creator means borrowing trust from a voice the audience believes in. **Nearly two thirds say that they trust the host of their favorite show over any brand message on its own** so when the host endorses a product, it gives fans the confidence to buy.

How do these creators maintain audience trust? Through a relentless commitment to authenticity. **Nearly all fans say trust derives from honest, unscripted conversations that they don't get from other media.**



78%

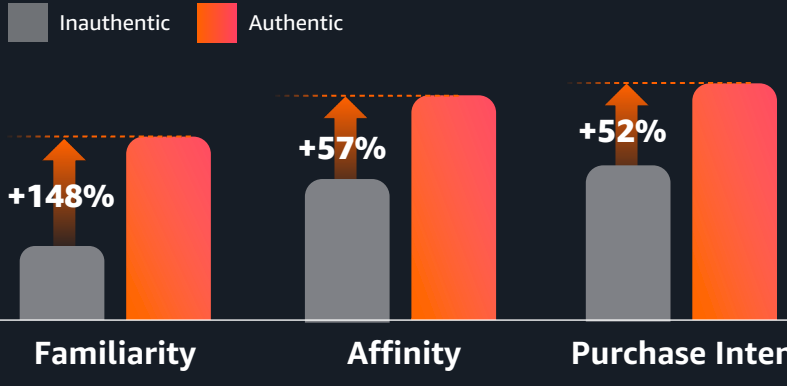
Feel more confident buying a product the creator has endorsed

Fans say an endorsement is most authentic when the creator explains how they use the product and why they chose it over alternatives. Beyond the host read, when an ad feels genuine within the context of the show and creator's world, it consistently outperforms those that don't.

According to an analysis of over two dozen cross platform campaigns run by Wondery, those rated above the norm for ad authenticity delivered significantly higher lifts in familiarity, affinity, and purchase intent compared to ads deemed inauthentic. But one credible endorsement does not move the needle on its own.

Authenticity Drives Lifts Across the Brand Funnel

Lift among campaigns rated high vs. low on ad authenticity



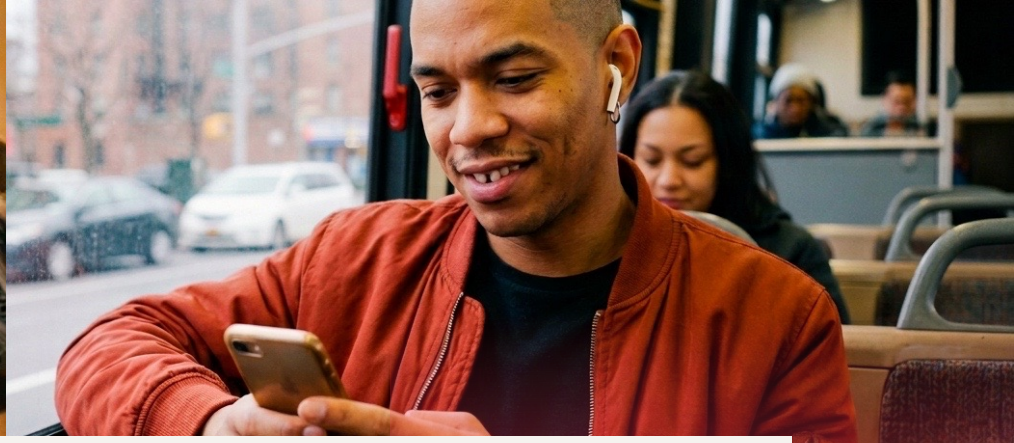
Source: Nielsen Brand Lift Meta Analysis commissioned by Wondery; Campaigns were indexed against the Nielsen Q2 2026 Total Database norm for ad authenticity (0.33) and grouped into overperformers (index >115) and underperformers (index <85) to compare average brand lift outcomes across each cohort. Campaign dates 2021 – 2026.

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PART TWO





Consistency signals credibility

Without consistent presence across episodes and channels, audience trust erodes. In open-ended responses, fans draw a clear line between genuine partnerships and one-off ad reads. Their signal is whether a brand appears consistently across episodes and across the creator's broader media presence.

A single mention does more than fail to build trust; for half the audience, it signals the creator may not actually like the product. That skepticism is even sharper among younger fans, rising to 59% of Gen Z and 54% of Millennials surveyed.

In contrast, a sustained presence builds brand equity. **2 in 3 fans say that when they encounter a brand partner in daily life, they associate it with the creator or series that mentioned it, a powerful halo effect for brands willing to invest over time.** And while over half can name a brand mentioned on their favorite show, no single ad format dominates that recall, reinforcing that cross-channel consistency, not any one placement, drives memorability.

> **"Over time, I've gotten better at filtering out the obvious cash grabs and paying attention to the people who actually care about what they're recommending."**
>
> — MAN, 28
> SPEAKING ABOUT ALL-IN PODCAST



Among Surveyed Fans

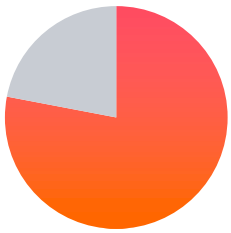


71%

When a brand appears in **multiple episodes, it feels like a real partnership** between the brand and creator

74% Gen Z

73% Millennials



78%

When a brand appears in **multiple episodes; it impacts how I think about the brand**

70% **more likely to trust** the brand

68% consider the brand **more premium**

67% more likely to **try the brand**

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PART THREE

From ad placement to Community presence

> **They were talking about the Super Bowl and all I could think of was I can't wait to get to work and talk about this with my coworkers."**
>
> — FEMALE, 38
> SPEAKING ABOUT THE PAT MCAFEE SHOW

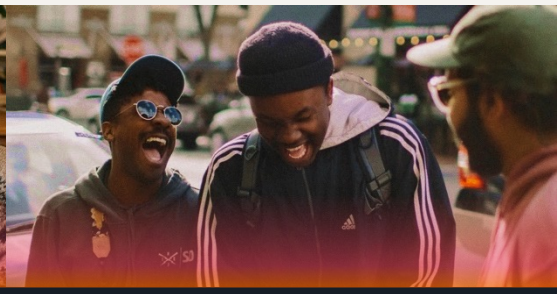
Creator shows are conversation starters

The conversation doesn't end when the episode does. Fans follow their favorite creator-host across an average of five touchpoints beyond the show itself.

45% of fans surveyed say that moments and interviews from creator shows fuel their conversation at work and online, outpacing traditional watercooler topics.

What makes a moment worth talking about? Fans consistently point to content that feels real and unscripted, thought-provoking analysis or debate, inside jokes that make sense to the show's community, and public figures saying something unexpected. These are the moments that travel beyond the episode, carrying the show's cultural footprint into daily life.





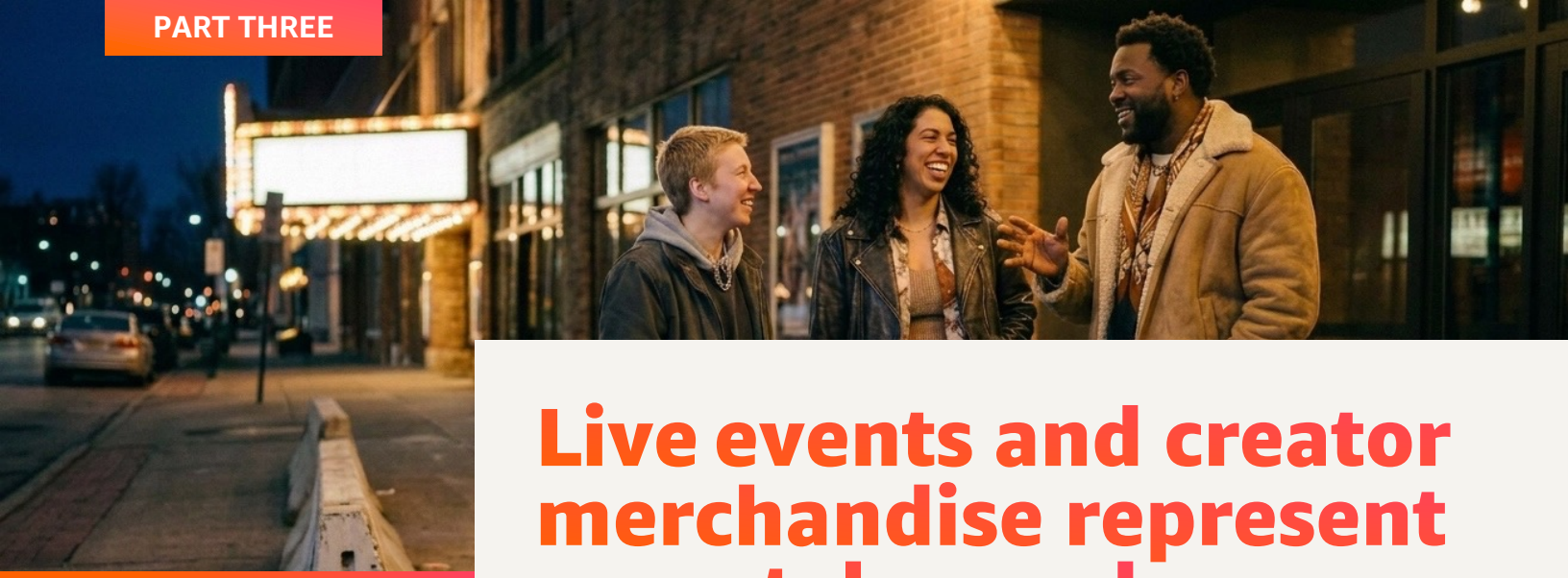
Top ways surveyed fans connect with the host outside the series



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PART THREE



Live events and creator merchandise represent unmet demand

“The hosts genuinely make all of us viewers feel like a family.

They continuously mention the community, call us by our community name, they give us platforms to talk to others on and there are small social media groups.”

— WOMAN, 29
SPEAKING ABOUT
GOOD MYTHICAL MORNING

For these audiences, the show itself is not enough.

They want to show up for their favorite creator in more ways. **Nearly 3 in 5 say they have attended or want to attend live creator events,** and over half would travel to see them. There’s a similar story around commerce. **55% have bought or want to buy host or show-related merchandise but 1-in-3 haven’t yet had the opportunity**.

What powers this organic amplification is community. **87% of fans say their favorite show makes them feel part of a community** of people who share their interests. These aren’t passive audiences consuming in isolation, but a collective with a shared language tied to the creator’s world. For brands, it’s not just about appearing in an episode, but earning a place within the community that surrounds it.

Top ways surveyed fans want to connect — but haven’t yet



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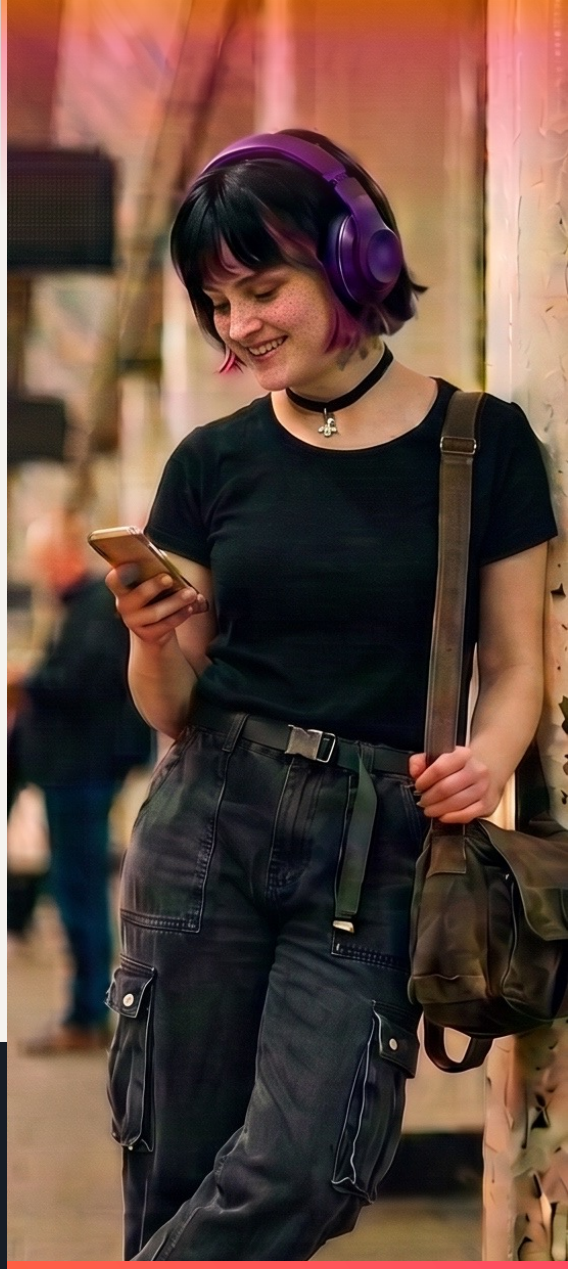
PART FOUR

Earning Resonance

What makes this sector of the creator economy unique is that **fans arrive with familiarity**.

Tune-in leads to trust, fandom leads to friendship, and community leads to conversation. So when a host brings a brand into their orbit, its relevance is immediate. For advertisers, it's like getting in front of an audience that's already in-market for your product.

But a relevant ad doesn't necessarily resonate. Resonance, borrowing the trusted voice of a creator to turn attention into action, isn't something a single placement can generate. The data shows there are **three conditions that unlock it:**



1 Trust is the entry point

9 in 10 fans keep watching for the creator. Most trust the creator's voice over traditional sources of media. Audiences are receptive to brand messaging in creator shows (76% don't mind it) specifically because it supports the show and its host.

2 Authenticity moves the needle

When a creator explains how they use a product and why they chose it, **78% feel more confident buying**. Authentic ads can more than double brand familiarity, moving audiences from recognition to consideration.

3 Consistency signals credibility

7 in 10 say multi-episode presence makes the partnership genuine. Brands that show up across episodes and channels over time earn trial intent (67% more likely to try) and conversion (59% have purchased and liked a brand).

The question for brands is not whether these communities have value.

It's whether they are willing to earn their place in them. That means showing up with creators across their channels, over time, and wherever their worlds extend.

The opportunity isn't a placement. It's a partnership.

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Wondery in partnership with SmithGeiger Group conducted a quantitative online survey of:

3,000

U.S. adults aged…

18–64

who regularly watch or listen to hosted podcasts or hosted online series

The sample was balanced to 50% men and 50% women, with near-equal distribution across generations:

30% **Gen Z**
Ages 18–29

40% **Millennials**
Ages 30-45

30% **Gen X**
Ages 46–64

Fieldwork took place in June 2026



Representative targets by U.S. region and ethnicity

Respondents were required to **regularly watch or listen to a hosted show**, defined as one where a host or hosts discuss different topics each episode, either with each other or with a guest, spanning genres including entertainment, society and culture; political or social commentary; self-improvement, health, or wellness; sports; technology; business, entrepreneurship, or finance; faith, religion, or spirituality; and food, travel, or cooking.

Respondents answered questions about a single show and host assigned based on their stated favorite, covering…

- Their viewing and listening habits
- Their relationship with the host
- Their exposure to & recall of brand sponsorships
- Their broader media and community behaviors

Respondents completed a combination of closed-ended survey questions and open-ended prompts about their favorite show and creator. All responses were provided directly by real human participants, with no AI-generated or synthetic responses used at any stage. AI was used solely to moderate follow-up probing on open-ended questions, enabling deeper, more conversational exploration of each respondent's answers. This approach grounded the results in self-reported attitudes and behaviors reflective of a real, ongoing relationship between creator and consumer. Figures throughout this paper reflect the total respondent base unless otherwise noted.

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