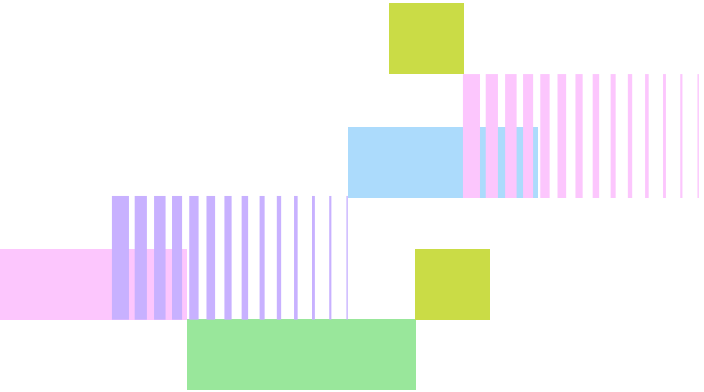




COMMON GROUND

*The brand guide to
communities and fandoms*

 Spotify® **Acast**
mumsnet **Reach**



INTRODUCTION

The appetite for more culturally-led marketing – brands participating in and supporting communities, to meaningfully reach new audiences in new ways and to attract new customers – is growing stronger. It's never been easier to find and observe potential groups into which we can insert brands and their media activations.

But the fear of getting this unconventional element of marketing wrong – causing much more harm to the brand's reputation and credibility than good – is perhaps growing even stronger. No one wants to be THAT brand – at best vilified by the very community you intended to work with, at worst a PR disaster.

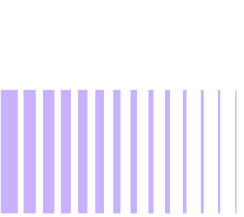
If only there was an empirically researched manual for getting it right. A piece of research compiled with the help of great partners with their fingers on culture's pulse, such as Mumsnet, Acast, Spotify and Reach; research that codifies how brands can inform each stage of communities-based marketing.

Here is said research.

We hope you find it useful.

JEM LLOYD-WILLIAMS
MINDSHARE PRESIDENT AND WPP MEDIA CSO

CONTENTS



PHASE 1: EARN THE RIGHT TO ENTER

The Role Communities Play
Fan Archetypes
The Community Fingerprint
Where Communities come Alive

Rules 1 - 3

PHASE 2: ENGAGE ON THEIR TERMS

Community Culture & Creative Life
Who we Trust
Opportunities and Conditions of
Entry

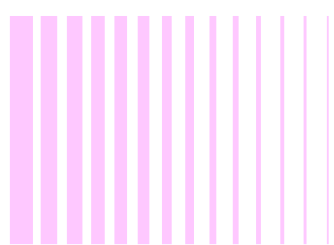
Rules 4 - 7



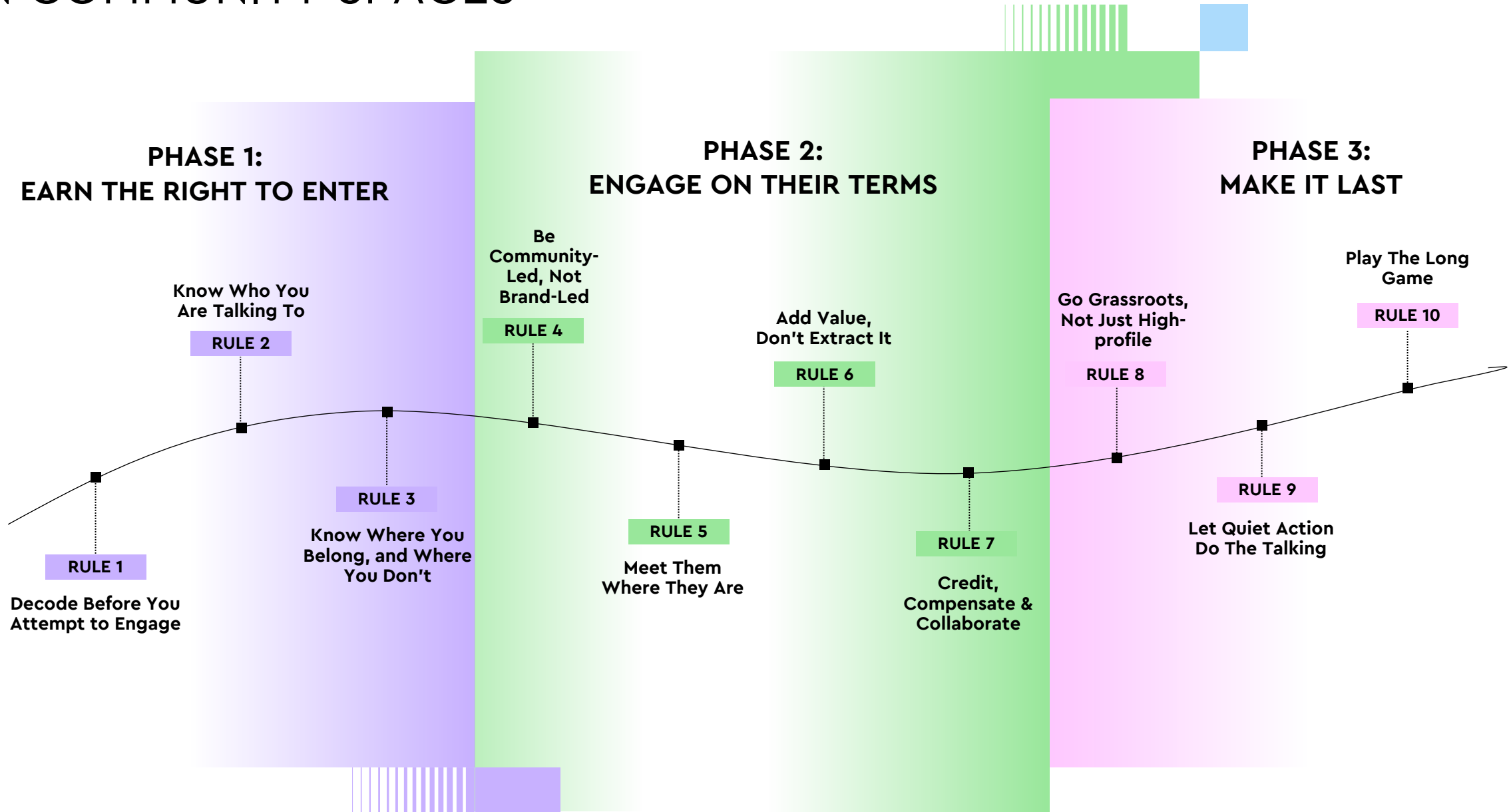
PHASE 3: MAKE IT LAST

Committing for the long term

Rules 8 - 10



A PLAYBOOK FOR BRANDS IN COMMUNITY SPACES





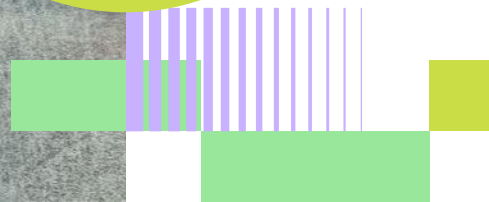
FINDING CONNECTION THROUGH COMMUNITY

We all want to belong; to feel we are part of a community of like-minded souls. From stamp collecting to drum 'n' bass, from volunteering to a fascination with dark academia novels, the topics where we choose to spend our time and energy, and the connections and friendships we make through these shared interests contribute powerfully to the fabric of our identities, to who we are as human beings.

6 in 10 people in the UK are now finding connection through communities and fan spaces, creating ties that often transcend geography, age and background. What matters instead is the shared passion or interest that brings people together, and the sense of belonging and commitment that creates a vibrant culture of peers and relationships. A culture that has its own rules and norms, where language, jokes and imagery is for insiders, and where the energy is creative, self-generated and constantly evolving.

6 in 10

find connection
through
communities and
fan spaces



FANDOM VS. COMMUNITY, A BLURRING LINE

From unique, niche subcultures through to the most mainstream of fandoms, communities offer a new strategic space for brands to better connect with audiences; spaces where a brand can demonstrate understanding and commitment to someone's world, and through this facilitate attention, engagement and influence. But before we begin a deeper exploration of these worlds, let's get our definitions sorted.

Community: A socially-led group connected by shared interests, goals, or values.

Fandom: A specific type of community unified by their vibrant, shared passion for a particular aspect of popular culture.

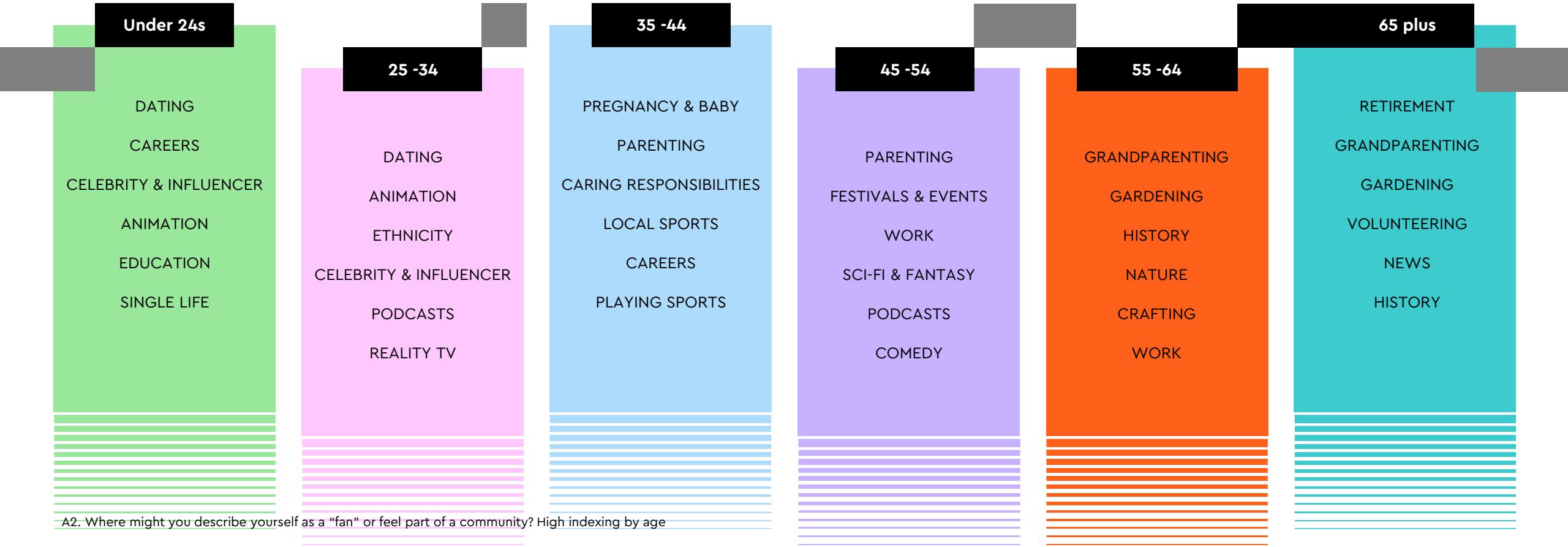
Currently, both are evolving from more passive consumption into "participatory cultures" where members no longer just watch or listen, but instead actively co-create content, drive social change, collaborate, and influence each other, and build global digital tribes often through platforms like TikTok, Discord, and Reddit.



THE SPACES THAT RESONATE

Our study has explored a wide range of community typologies – from interests and pastimes, where the connection point is the activity itself (baking, gardening), to culturally directed passion areas (film, music), to identity and life experiences (parenting, cultural heritage), to challenges and needs-based groups (mental well-being) to local community connections (sports, volunteering).

Using quantitative, qualitative and digital insights approaches we have analysed the role that more than a hundred different types of community play in people's lives, the nature of being a "fan", the systems of influence and trust created by these connections, and how brands can get involved in these spaces.



A2. Where might you describe yourself as a "fan" or feel part of a community? High indexing by age

PHASE ONE:

Earn The Right To Enter

To successfully engage with communities, we need to fully understand them.

The brands that fail in community spaces fail because they haven't done their homework. They've misread the people, the culture, or their permission to be there at all.

Phase One equips you with the frameworks needed to decode any community.

How members engage, what drives them, what they create and what they expect from brand.

What you'll learn:

- The role communities play
- Engagement depth
- Community shapes
- The role for media

Know Who You
Are Talking To

RULE 2

RULE 1

Decode Before You
Attempt to Engage

RULE 3

Know Where You
Belong, and Where
You Don't

THE ROLE COMMUNITIES PLAY

"They are like-minded people who understand me, who cheer me up, who are always ready to give advice... who share the same interests, are hyped about the same things as me. It's important to have this network for your own growth, for feeling safe, understood and loved"

– 25-34, FEMALE, HOBBIES, EXPRESSIVE

FEELING ENTIRELY JOYFUL

In its simplest form, community involvement just makes our lives that little bit more joyful. This is especially the case for cultural, and interest-led fandoms – gardening and crafting, for example, are particularly rewarding on this front, with happiness mentioned as a motivation by 6 in 10 of the participants in these spaces.

Much of this proclaimed happiness is achieved through the connection and belonging that is generated by being part of a shared passion, of finding “your people” and being in a space where small talk can be bypassed, and niche topics and themes are to be celebrated. It's where someone can be a geek or a nerd about a passion, with judgement on hold. 4 in 10 fans talked about how they often experienced a sense of belonging, rising to two thirds amongst those who were involved in local community spaces.

And this happy sense of belonging does more than provide connection; it builds a virtuous circle which is self-reinforcing, creating a safe, almost sacred space where vulnerabilities can be expressed and feelings are validated. This experience of feeling seen and heard enriches levels of openness and self-belief; boundaries are pushed away and further experimentation and deeper involvement in the community is encouraged as a result.



59%
of Gardeners
main motivation
is happiness

61%
of crafting
community find
the reward of
happiness

56%
of Collectors do it
as it brings them
joy

“It introduces me to new people who share the passion for food and it's a never-ending spiral because I'll go to a food festival and then I'll meet lovely people there who will tell me about more food festivals and then I'll go to those and then meet lovely people, and it just continues.”

- 25-34, FEMALE, FOOD,
CONNECTOR

“Do I engage with you about this on a normal level where we have surface level communications of ‘oh, that characters cool’. Or can I go in hard straight away showing you my bag of all the pins I have of this character and talking about what I think their emotional arc means.”

- 25-34, FEMALE, TV &
FILM, EXPRESSIVE

GETTING INVOLVED

Given the significant role that belonging and connection play within our experiences of communities and fan spaces, it is no surprise that existing social links frequently act as the catalyst for getting us involved in the first place. This is particularly the case for 55 plus audiences with "who you know" effectively seeding the opportunity for future shared activities and the creation of new connection moments.

The cliché of the mid-life crisis is hinted at for middle aged audiences, with milestone moments creating powerful reasons to connect – from changing health issues to big events, to being frustrated with other aspects of life, these all play a role in why someone's involvement first began. Given these initial triggers, the opportunity to escape from the routine is an important outcome of any community involvement for this age group – effectively seeking a structured moment of permission to get them through the week and create energy and uplift within day to day lives.

Under 44s, meanwhile, are more likely to be triggered by media moments when compared with other audiences, with content found on social media, influencers and podcasts more important. Social media content is also more important for cultural fandom spaces including fashion, celebrities and comedy.

"When you're finished with a long day of work and you just want to turn off from the world, for a couple of hours you can just go into a new world, escape from your responsibilities and daily chores"

– 25-34, MALE, GAMING, SEEKER

"It represents an area of my life that is almost entirely free of responsibility. It's not my job, it's not my house, it's not my family. This is an area that is entirely joyful."

– 55-64, FEMALE, FASHION, CONNECTOR

25%

over 55s got involved in a community after a conversation with someone

23%

under 24s were triggered to get involved by content on social media



B6. Thinking back to when you initially got involved and interested in this community, what factors influenced your decision?

THE JOY OF BELONGING

Community membership is not just social; it becomes part of how we define ourselves.

The communities where belonging scores highest tend to be those with the clearest sense of shared identity and purpose. For brands, this is a critical signal; the more a community has a strong sense of 'us', the more carefully the permission to enter must be earned.

POPULAR COMMUNITY SPACES FOR FEELING BELONGING



74%

Religion

IDENTITY



68%

Volunteering

LOCAL



62%

Local events

LOCAL



60%

Exercise & fitness

HEALTH



59%

Playing sports

INTERESTS



57%

Ethnicity

IDENTITY



52%

Age

IDENTITY



48%

Adventure & Outdoors

INTERESTS



47%

Festivals

CULTURE



45%

Relaxation & stress management

HEALTH



44%

Watching sports

INTERESTS

A2. Please select any areas where you connect to others through shared passions, challenges or values. Where might you describe yourself as a "fan" or feel part of a community? B4. Tell us a bit more about your involvement with the [community]. How often do you do the following...Often or very frequently

FINDING MY PEOPLE

And from this feeling of belonging, grows a sense of identity, with over half (55%) of people agreeing that their community or fan space involvement is an important part of how they perceive themselves. This sentiment is shared across all ages but tends to be more "on show" and multi-faceted amongst younger age groups who typically belong to more communities. Amongst older ages, it is less externally visible and instead focused around one or two "core" groups where involvement has deepened and enriched over time.

The right fandom gives people the opportunity to express elements of their personality that they often don't get a chance to visit in their everyday lives. It reinforces that sense of not being alone, normalising interests and experiences, and celebrating "difference" and uniqueness from the mainstream - from the freedom of alternate realities offered by the world of gaming, through to the passion and shared expression provided by music fan spaces.

This sense of identity is further reinforced by being part of a community that shares similar values, of feeling like "kindred spirits" irrespective of more obvious demographic differences. This environment creates permission for a more vulnerable version of self to show up, encouraging authenticity. However, given the specialness of this experience, communities can sometimes act to gatekeep values to protect the collective identity, something that brands need to treat with caution.

55%

My community or fan space is an important part of my identity

"For me, it's trying to find people who share my values.... not just the same humour or one hobby, but it's more the type of people that you feel comfortable with, that you can call on each other"

- 45-54, MALE, LOCAL COMMUNITIES, CONNECTOR

AVERAGE NUMBER OF COMMUNITIES BELONGING TO BY AGE



<24



25-34



35-44



45-54



55-64



65+

A4. In total, how many communities and fan spaces are you involved with?

Deep Dive FORMULA 1 FANS

COMMUNITY LANGUAGE

El Plan: Fernando Alonso meme about vague strategy

Bwoah: Kimi Räikkönen's signature response

Grazie ragazzi: Italian for "thanks guys," used by Ferrari drivers

Super Star: How 2026 Overtake Mode is being compared

DTS fans vs. OG fans: Identity distinction within community

MGU-K override: Sounds like video game power up, memed as such

We are checking: Ferrari's infamous non-answer to driver questions

X mode / Z mode: Active aero modes replacing DRS

Mario Kart F1: 2026 overtaking system compared to "Super Star" power-up from Mario Kart

It's lights out and away we go!: David Croft's iconic race start phrase, often parodied

56%

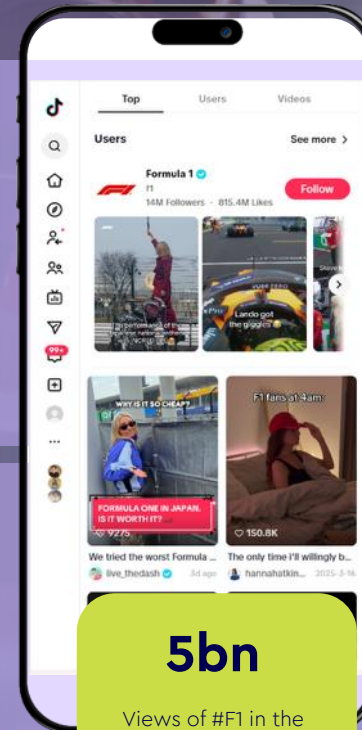
Interested in motor sports because it makes them happy

23%

Got involved because someone they knew was also involved

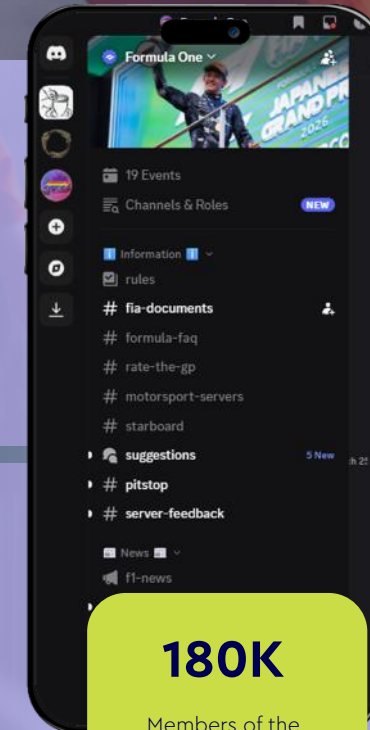
Formula 1 has undergone a remarkable cultural transformation, evolving from a niche motorsport into one of the world's most talked-about entertainment phenomena. Driven largely by a surge in younger and female fans, Three quarters of new 2025 fans were female with 16-24-year-olds being the fastest-growing group.

The F1 fandom is now as much about personality, memes, and community as it is about racing. With 5 billion TikTok views and 11.8 billion Reddit views, it is a fandom that is highly engaged online, debating team strategy, trading predictions, or dissecting the latest rule changes.



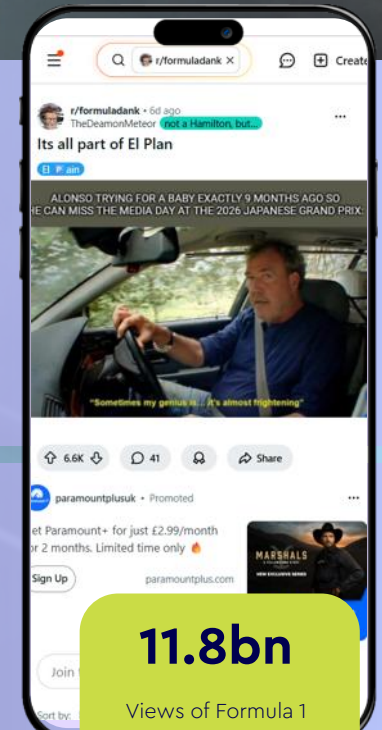
5bn

Views of #F1 in the past 12 months in the UK on TikTok



180K

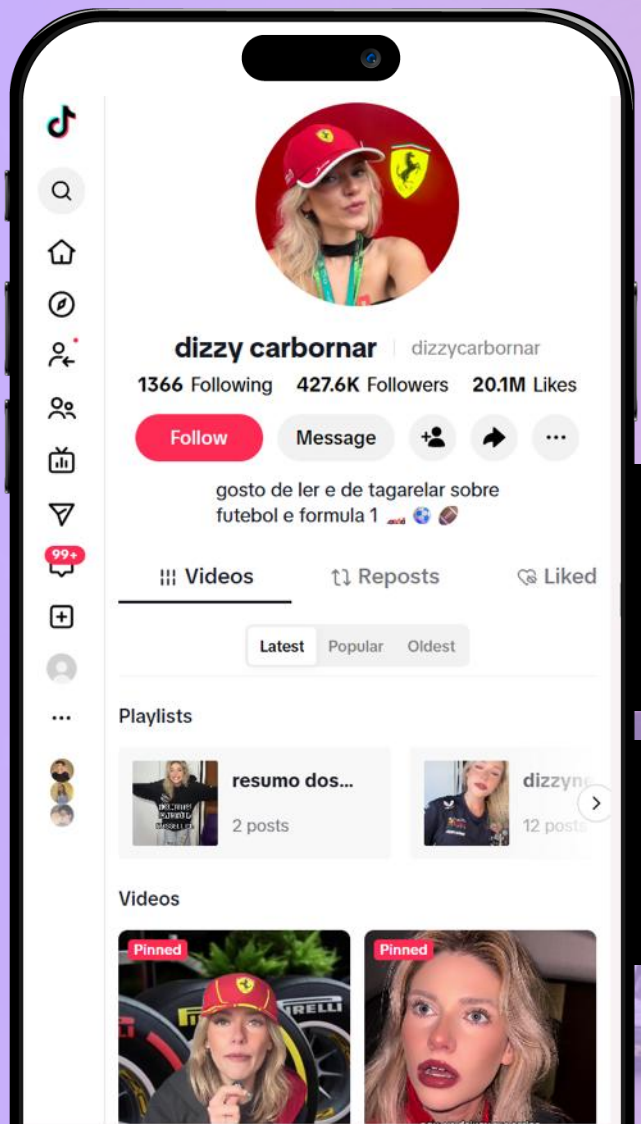
Members of the Formula One Discord



11.8bn

Views of Formula 1 related content on Reddit in past 12 months

Deep Dive FORMULA 1 FANS



Charlotte Tilbury X F1 Academy

Since 2024, Charlotte Tilbury has been the official partner of the F1 Academy. They are the first female founded brand and beauty brand to sponsor.

74% Of new fans in 2025 were female, with the 16-24 age demographic being the fastest-growing group

42% Of total F1 fandom is now female

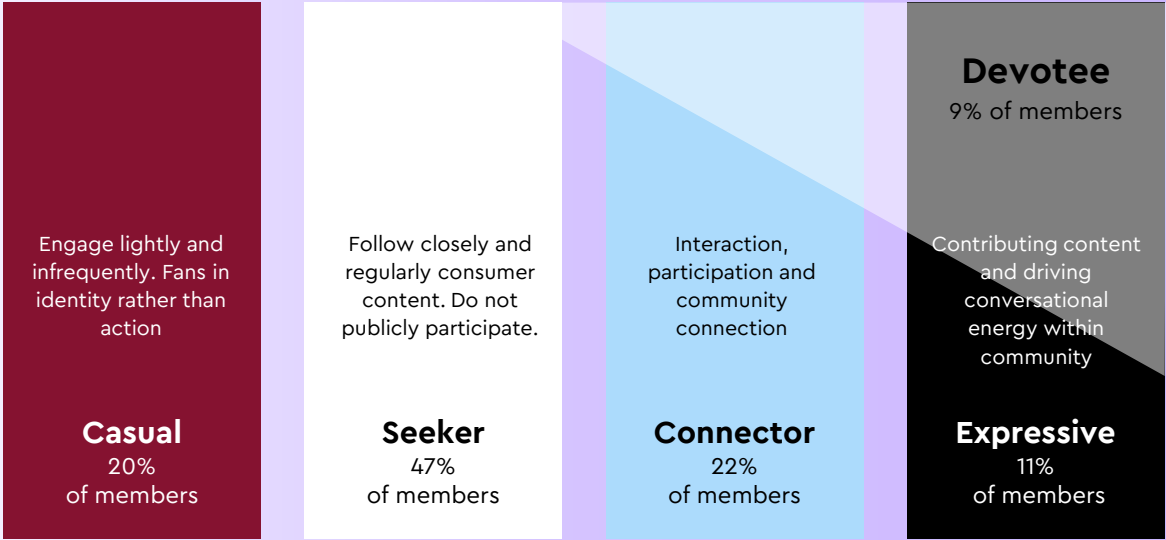


FAN ARCHETYPES

"Knowing other fans are as angry or upset as you are or watching clips of people celebrating — you kind of enjoy it all over again. It's like a shared experience that goes beyond the match itself."

- 45-54, MALE, SPORTS FANS, CONNECTOR

EXPLORING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Not all members engage with their communities in the same way. To understand the diversity of these behaviours, we have identified four distinct engagement types, and within these, a group of particularly devoted members who stand apart for the breadth and frequency of their involvement.

At one end, Casuals (20%) engage lightly and infrequently – fans in identity, if not always in action. Seekers (47%) are the largest group; they follow the fan space closely, and consume content regularly, but tend not to participate publicly, Connectors (22%) are more active, engaging through interaction, participation and community. Expressives (11%) are the most distinctly active group, contributing content and driving the conversational energy within the community.

Cutting across the most engaged end of the spectrum, Devotees (9%) represent those who do it all, do it often and feel it deeply. Drawn mostly from the Connector and Expressive groups, they are distinguished not by a single behaviour, but by the breadth and frequency of their engagement across every dimension of fan life.

INSIDE THE EXPRESSIVE MINDSET

For most members, the community is something to be experienced. For Expressives, it is something to be built. They don't just consume what draws them in, they add to it, extend it and, in doing so, become part of the fabric that holds the community together. It's unsurprising that a high proportion (54%) of Expressives are also Devotees, underlining that creation is not a casual behaviour, but a deeper expression of commitment. The community, effectively becomes more valued in their eyes, as a direct result of their many efforts.

Expressives skew notably younger, with 18–24s and 25–34s both over-indexing significantly; for these age groups the act of making, whether cosplay, fan fiction or digital art, becomes a way of exploring and expressing who they are as human beings. The community provides the safe space for exploration to happen, and a sense of identity to emerge.

Expression carries genuine risk – sharing personal work with a community requires a form of vulnerability they acknowledge openly. What makes it worthwhile is the response: recognition, validation and the feeling of being truly seen. For some, this loop has extended into financial reality through merch, web shops and convention sales. But even without commercial ambition, the intrinsic reward of making is sufficient.

Expressives are also the most protective, distrusting brand involvement and drawing clear lines around what constitutes authentic creative effort. They are simultaneously a brand's most powerful community amplifiers and its most sceptical audience.

"The act of creating something itself is very personal, it's a sense of vulnerability when you share that with other people, especially people who are interested in the same thing as you"

– 25–34, FEMALE, TV & FILM, EXPRESSIVE

"I made a cosplay last year, a few months before this convention, and it blew up and I had people approach me like, oh my gosh, it's you and it was really nice"

– 18–24, NON-BINARY, GAMING, EXPRESSIVE



2.3x
more likely to connect
on Discord

3.4x
more likely to connect
on Twitch

2.1x
more likely to
connect on Pinterest



THE "SUPERFAN" PARADOX

Fandom exists on an endless scale, and no matter where you sit, it always feels like there is someone more committed above. At the upper end, the term "superfan" is often used to describe the most deeply invested. Yet for the very people it's meant to describe – our Devotees – the label rarely lands. Their engagement is real and runs deep, but it is not a word they would choose for themselves.

This discomfort has two roots. First, "superfan" carries connotations of immaturity, a term adults, even those in their early twenties, feel they have stepped away from. Second, Devotees define a "superfan" as someone with tunnel vision - obsessed to the point of lacking a balanced perspective. This is the antithesis of how they see themselves; instead, they are multifaceted, critical and knowledgeable.

The label also carries a strong association with toxic fandom, parasocial relationships, inappropriate investment in celebrities' personal lives and a blurring of passion and delusion. Devotees draw a clear line between deep engagement and unhealthy obsession; they are acutely aware that "superfan" sits on the wrong side of it.

Perhaps most revealingly, "superfan" is recognised as translation language, used to explain themselves to people outside their community, never to describe themselves within it. Devotees maintain two vocabularies: one internal, one external. "Superfan" belongs firmly to the latter.

For brands, there is a clear lesson; don't label or speak to community members in ways they reject. The moment an activity makes someone feel caricatured, it has lost them.

"I would say super fans don't exist on a scale of fandom because they're off it, super fans are people that don't have any other interest"

- 25-34, FEMALE, DEVOTEE

"Super fan, for me, that does have that connotation, that obsessive, slightly cultish thing."

- 35-44, MALE, DEVOTEE

"Super fan is terminology I'd use with people outside of fandom spaces...to explain to my grandmother"

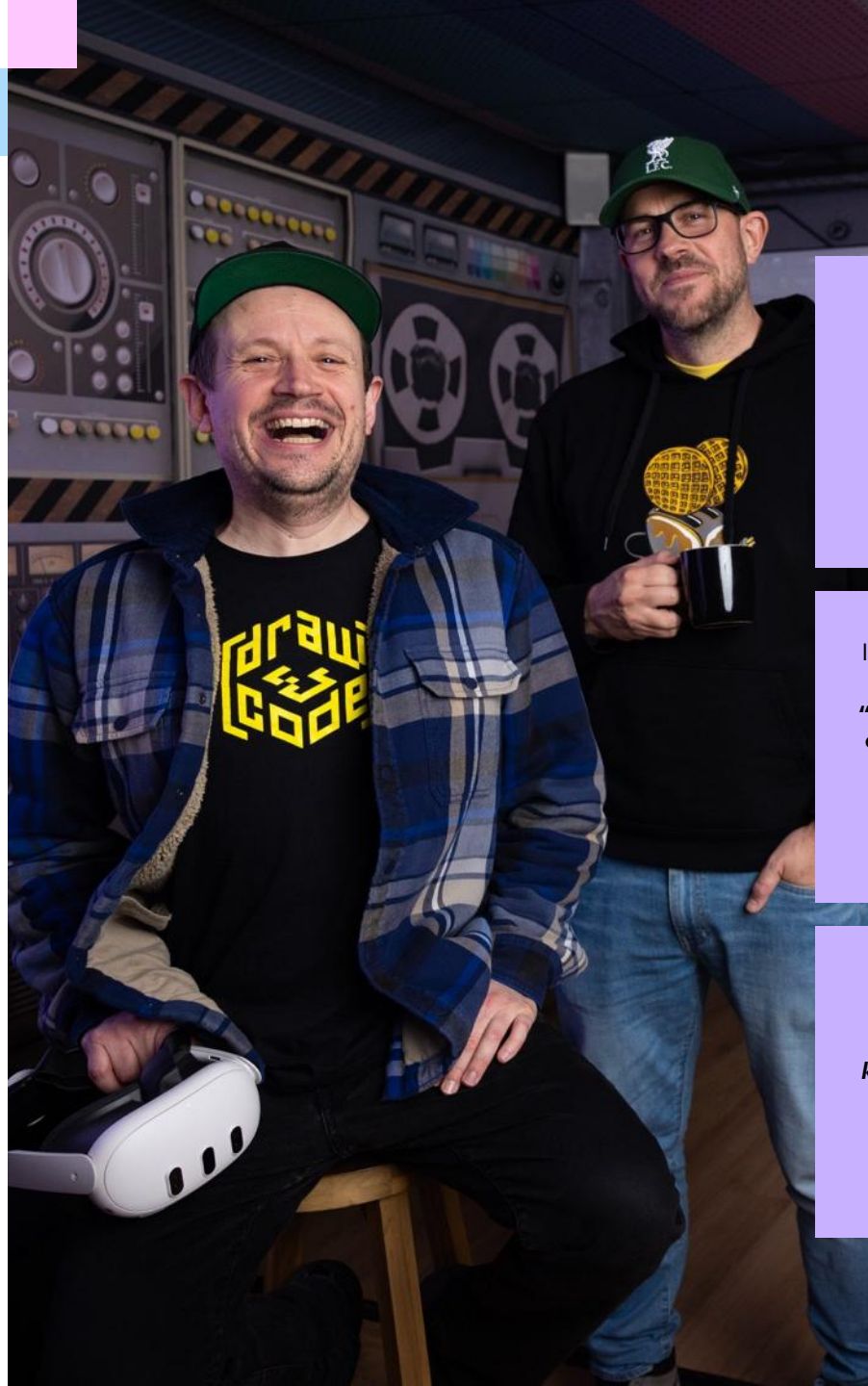
- 25-34, FEMALE, DEVOTEE

WHAT MAKES A DEVOTEE?

Devotees have organically developed language that captures passion without pathology: "real fan" emphasises authenticity and credibility; "not normal about it" uses self-deprecating humour to signal intensity; "enjoyer" removes judgment entirely. Meanwhile, sports and beauty communities avoid fan language altogether, preferring participation-led descriptors.

Central to being a "real fan" is the combination of multifaceted interests and critical engagement. "Real" carries significant weight, it implies authenticity, credibility, and balanced engagement, as opposed to performative or unhealthy obsession. Real fans have other passions and maintain perspectives – blind devotion, in their eyes, is not devotion at all.

Equally important is the distinction between credible depth and surface-level awareness, and between authentic passion and bandwagon jumping. Real fans have earned their position through sustained, substantive investment. They know the history, the nuance and the detail. They engage with substance rather than trend, and it's this depth of engagement – measured in intensity, not duration – that truly defines them.



THE 6 PILLARS OF DEVOTEE BEHAVIOUR

HIGH FREQUENCY ENGAGEMENT

"A daily activity... daily ritual"

– 25-34, FEMALE

ACTIVE SEEKING (VS PASSIVE CONSUMPTION)

"You're actively searching rather than it just finding you"

– 18-24, FEMALE

IDENTITY INTEGRATION

"It would probably be one of the first things I would say to someone new..."

– 35-44, FEMALE

RESOURCE ALLOCATION (time, money, energy)

"Engagement and contribution, I think are the two things, time spent is a big part of it as well"

– 25-34, MALE

CRITICAL DEPTH

"They'll come with the knowledge, the expertise, the advice — they know what they're talking about."

– 35-44, FEMALE

EMOTIONAL INVESTMENT

"It's a massive part of my life. If it disappeared there would be a big void"

– 55-64, FEMALE

THE COMMUNITY FINGERPRINT

With ice skating I found it was accidentally multi-generational. I wasn't expecting it to be... I thought it was going to be really humiliating ice skating with a bunch of 7-year-olds, but they were really sweet and the age range was from about four to the oldest woman who was there, who was in her 70s."

- 25-34, Female, Hobbies, Connector

FOUR DISTINCT COMMUNITY TYPOLOGIES

So where do these different types of fans show up? Is it more the case of "birds of a feather flock together", or are they to be found across the wide diversity of communities and fan spaces available?

By understanding the balance of seeking, participating, connecting and creating across the wide range of communities we researched, as well as the proportions of Devotees within each, we have been able to identify four distinct types of community space, each with its own engagement fingerprint.

Using these patterns of engagement can help brands to design activations that work within the existing architecture of how people are showing up, rather than fighting against their typical behaviours.

Seeker-led

32% of communities

5% Devotees

Interests defined by rich content ecosystems – there's always something to watch, read or follow. Content is the primary connection point between members.

TV & Reality TV

Gaming

Watching sports

Travel

Sci-fi and fantasy

Books

Gardening

Parenting

Connection-led

18% of communities

13% Devotees

Activity and the community are inseparable and often grassroots in nature. All about how you show up.

Playing sports & local sports

Religion

Exercise & fitness

Environment

Volunteering

Adventure & outdoors

Expression-led

12% of communities

17% Devotees

Niche or specialised, with interests that invite personal expression. Members are defined by what they make and share, not just what they consume.

Civic participation

Art & design

Photography

Body type

Side hustles

All-Round Active

39% of communities

9% Devotees

Broad, flexible interests that don't prescribe how you should engage. Members participate on their own terms making these among the most accessible and multi-modal groups.

Political views

Celebrities & influencers

Home & decor

Fashion & style

Music & podcasts

Finance & money

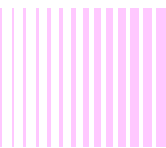
Age Group	Percentage
18-24	10%
25-34	25%
35-44	20%
45-54	15%
55-64	10%
65-74	5%
75-84	2%
85+	1%

Members rally around specific content properties: titles and franchises (i138) and celebrities (i113) are their standout interests.

Organisations and clubs (i182) and community connections (i158) are the highest index values – relationships are key within these types of communities.

The most expressive and niche-oriented: fan works (i176), subgenres/movements (i160), and specific creators (i144) dominate, reflecting members who go deep, rather than broad.

No main focus point, but members are more likely to be commercially-focused: brands/products (i130) and merchandise/collectibles (i124) are their standout interests.



A RANGE OF MOTIVATIONAL MINDSETS FUELS INVOLVEMENT

X
Members of Seeker-led communities engage primarily for escape and restoration. Relaxation (i117), me time (i117) and escaping the routine (i121) are their defining motivators - the community is a retreat from everyday life, with almost no aspiration or identity investment.

Connection-led communities sit at the opposite end of the spectrum. Contributing and giving something back is the standout motivator (i189), followed closely by a sense of purpose and desire to challenge themselves (both i145). These members engage to mean something, to find purpose, not just to enjoy something.

Expression-led groups present the most distinctive profile. Making money (i220) is the highest index, sitting alongside recognition (i146), accomplishment (i136) and personal growth (i132). The under-indexing for "makes me happy" (i88) is telling for some of these people, the community is less about enjoyment and more about active pursuit of creative, professional or financial goals.

All-round active groups are the most balanced motivationally, with no dramatic peaks or troughs - showing a modest but consistent tilt towards self-improvement and identity expression that reflects the broad nature of this community type.

MOTIVATIONAL MINDSET

Seeker-led

Escapist, restorative, fun & happy

Connection-led

Purposeful, contributory, community-driven

Expression-led

Aspirational, achievement-driven, financially motivated

All-round active

Balanced, self-improving, identity-reflective

MINDSETS SHAPE HOW AND WHERE WE FIND JOY

Seeker-led

Content is king

Insider jokes / memes

The gossip

Humour

"Experiencing other people's opinions and views, realising we share those views and opinions...being able to see that other people all over the world feel the same way as you"

- 35-44, MALE, SEEKER

Connection-led

Community drives engagement

Making a tangible difference

Sense of allegiance and loyalty

Sense of inclusion and belonging

Shared goals and purpose

"You spend time with each other, which is not something that happens a lot in adult life increasingly...it's the first time for a very long time that I feel like I actually belong somewhere"

- 45-54, MALE, CONNECTOR

Expression-led

Fan culture dominates

The creative expression

Making a tangible difference

Exclusive content or experiences

Having a voice / influence

"It allows you to share your own personal works with other people that already fundamentally understand something that you are passionate about and engage with"

- 25-34, FEMALE, EXPRESSIVE

All-round active

Breadth and range

Talks about the brands I like

The creative expression

The feeling of nostalgia

Being in the know

"It's the quickest way to get the information about the thing you like, right? ...it's as easy as a click of a button and then you get all these fan theories and information"

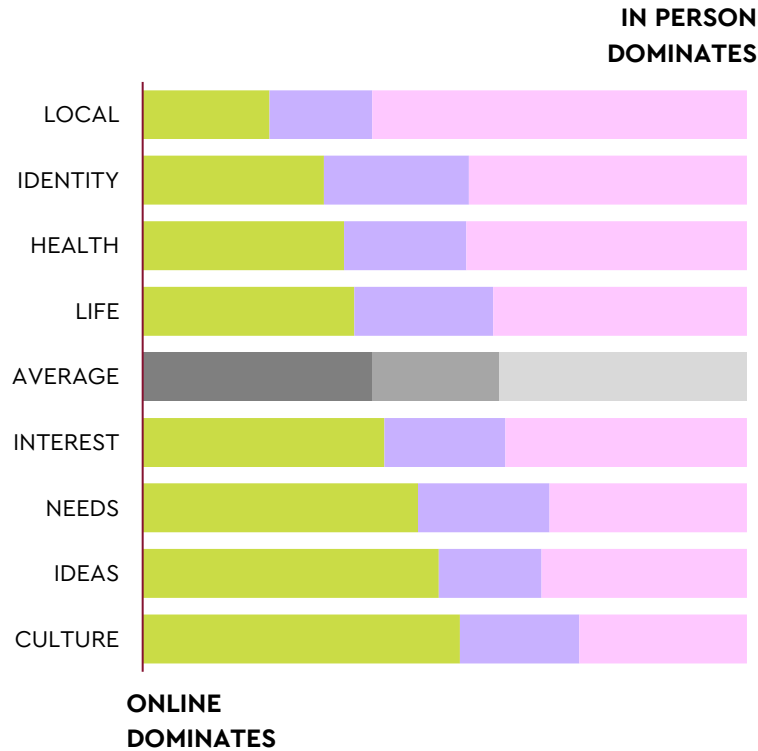
- 25-34, MALE, CONNECTOR

WHERE COMMUNITIES COME ALIVE

"Every other fandom that I've joined, someone has either told me about it or I've seen it on TikTok... it's already in my world and on my 'for you' page, because obviously it's curated for you."

– 18-24, FEMALE, TV & MUSIC, CONNECTOR

ACROSS THE SPECTRUM



B2. How do you typically engage with others around this community? Is it more online or more in person?



With fans participating in a plethora of activities across their chosen passion areas, it should come as no surprise that many of the communities and fan spaces we explored had both strong online and real-world presence. Typically, communities rather than fan spaces tend to be in-person-dominated, with local the most extreme example of this - 60% of its energy is out in the real world, rising to 75% amongst its older participants. A strong sense of belonging, and higher levels of physical time being spent are more likely amongst these more face-to-face connections.

At the other extreme, culture and ideas fan spaces are more online facing, but even then, this only accounts for around half of what's going on. This does, however, rise to 70% in its most extreme example of Celebrities and Influencer based fandoms, climbing even higher amongst under 34 fans, to 84%. For some, the anonymity of online is the appeal; a chance to have discussions and explore issues that might be awkward in the real world.

ONLY CONNECT

Platform usage within communities tends to operate along age lines, with behaviours mirroring wider adoption levels. WhatsApp, which comes in second and is used by 4 in 10 fans, is one of the more universally favoured options across the demographics, and a big hit in connection-led communities. From a genre perspective it is less likely to feature in culture or interest dominated spaces.

Amongst fans aged 35 to 64, Facebook still dominates how communities connect with each other, with well over half of participants mentioning the former as being a useful platform for them. It is universally used across different types of community areas, with the highest levels of adoption being found amongst local spaces. However, whilst around half this middle-aged group do notice advertising here, trust levels for it tend to be lower.

YouTube and Instagram also perform strongly, especially amongst under 45 audiences and Expression-led communities. Instagram tends to be used across all types of community and fan spaces, though it is slightly less likely within locally focused communities. YouTube, meanwhile, is more culture and interest based. YouTube was referenced as the channel where this age range are now most likely to encounter brand messaging; but at the same time, it is also the place where they are most likely to dislike being exposed to it. There were some qualitative indications that AI-generated content was the issue here, eroding trust in what people were seeing.

"There's a Facebook group called Girls Love Travel, I've been on quite a few groups with them, I have met friends through them as well but even just seeing the posts on there and interacting with them and talking to people"

– 35-44, FEMALE, TRAVEL, CONNECTOR

"I was trying to buy a tool the other day online...the first two videos I saw [on YouTube] ...they were all like AI garbage slop videos of the top 10 and obviously all text-to-speech garbage"

– 25-34, MALE, DIY & CRAFTING, SEEKER



B5. And which of the following platforms do you use when connecting with your community?

MEDIA ACTIVITY BY COMMUNITY AND FAN TYPE

Seeker-led

41%
*More cautious
about advertising*

Dominated by content consumption, community members prefer more established media channels that are ideally ad funded vs subscription. Trusting of print titles – both national and local.

Catch up TV

Radio

Social media avoidant

Short snippets

Watching

Connection-led

41%
*More cautious
about advertising*

With more in-person connection and socialising than other archetypes, connector-led communities celebrate their local areas and seek out content that is focused around it.

Physical

Local

Schedule led

Reading

Subscriptions

Print

Expression-led

35%
*Open to
advertising*

Tech savvy and early adopters of content and culture, these social media fans love immersing themselves in a topic – with listening a key means of connection. More likely to be shopping for fun, expression-led communities are more open to ads so long as they don't get in the way of their favourite topics.

Spotify

Social media lovers

Podcasts

Deep dive

Listening

Global focus

Blogs

Devotees

58%
*Open to
advertising*

Advertising friendly, content hungry and open to fresher forms of brand messaging these early adopter fans are voracious consumers of multiple different media platforms across both online and more established channels.

Podcasts

Social media lovers

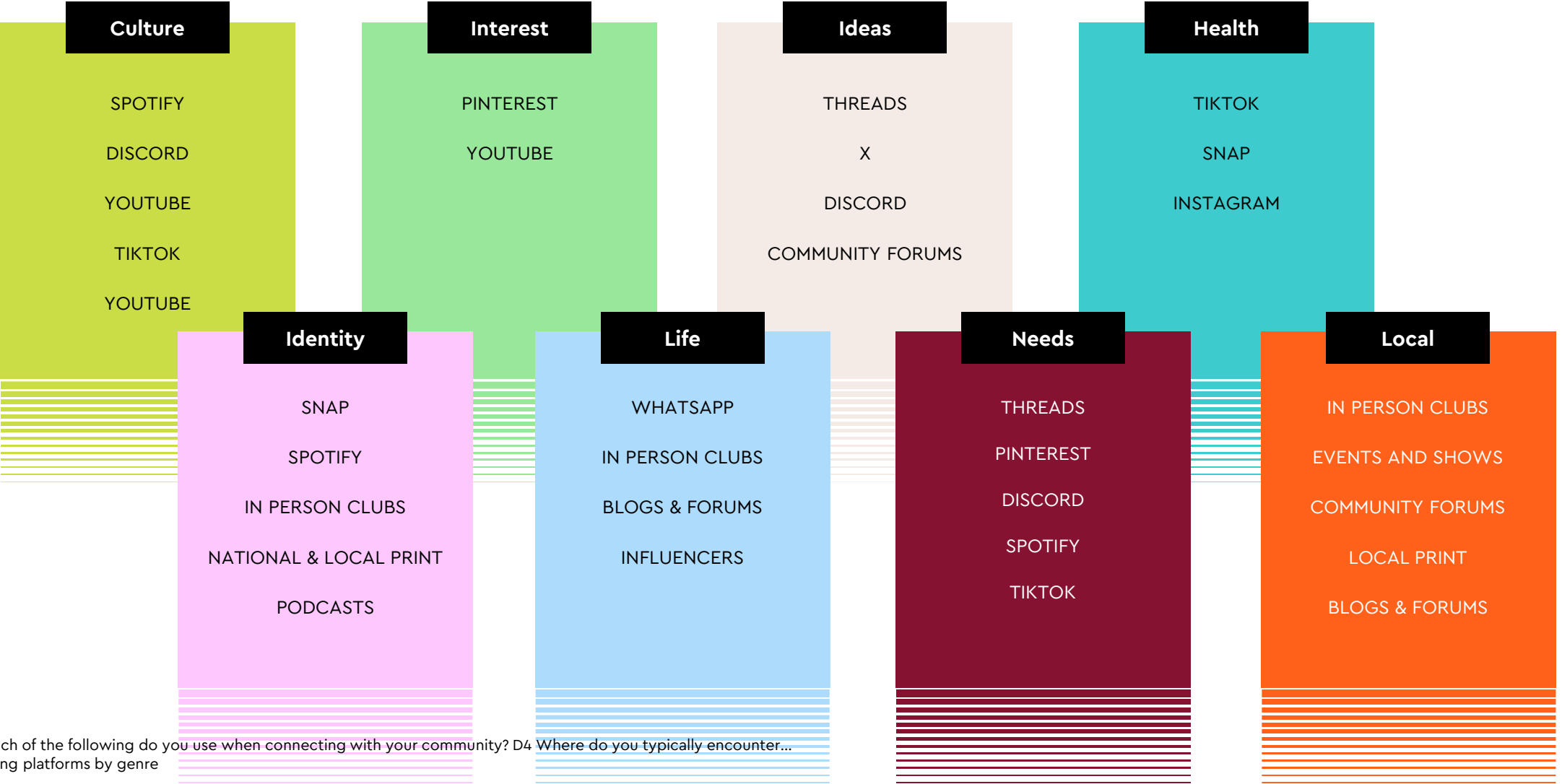
Gaming

Subscriptions

TikTok

YouTube

HOW CONNECTION POINTS VARY BY COMMUNITY GENRE



B5 And which of the following do you use when connecting with your community? D4 Where do you typically encounter...
High indexing platforms by genre

RULE 1: DECODE BEFORE YOU ATTEMPT TO ENGAGE

The brands that fail in community spaces rarely do so because of bad creative or insufficient budget. They fail because they arrived without doing the homework.

53%

agree that for brands to feel relevant they need to be up to speed with the communities and fandoms that matter to them

What does this look like in practice?

Map the language, the hierarchies, the content types, the platforms and the moments that matter before briefing any creative or collaboration. Understand who you are trying to talk to and the norms of the community or fandom. Decoding needs to go beyond the obvious.

Brand Example

Nike managed to get it wrong when trying to tap into the Parkrun community. Though product-wise they are aligned, the brand did not consider the ethos, language and values of the group they were trying to align with. By creating messaging that read 'You didn't come all this way to walk' and 'Runner only', they showed they had not done their research into what Parkrun pride themselves on.

C8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Phase 1
EARN THE RIGHT
TO ENTER

"A community isn't just an audience sitting there waiting to be advertised to. You're joining a conversation that's already happening, and it's wise to respect that."

The best brand involvement starts with listening to and understanding the community. If there's already an existing behaviour, ritual or dynamic there, don't try to bend it towards your own agenda. Understand why it works, then work with it rather than against it."

- JUSTINE ROBERTS CBE,
FOUNDER OF MUMSNET

RULE 2: KNOW WHO YOU ARE TALKING TO

Not every member of a community is the same and treating them as one can be a costly mistake for brands. Each community has a distinct profile based on how their members engage.

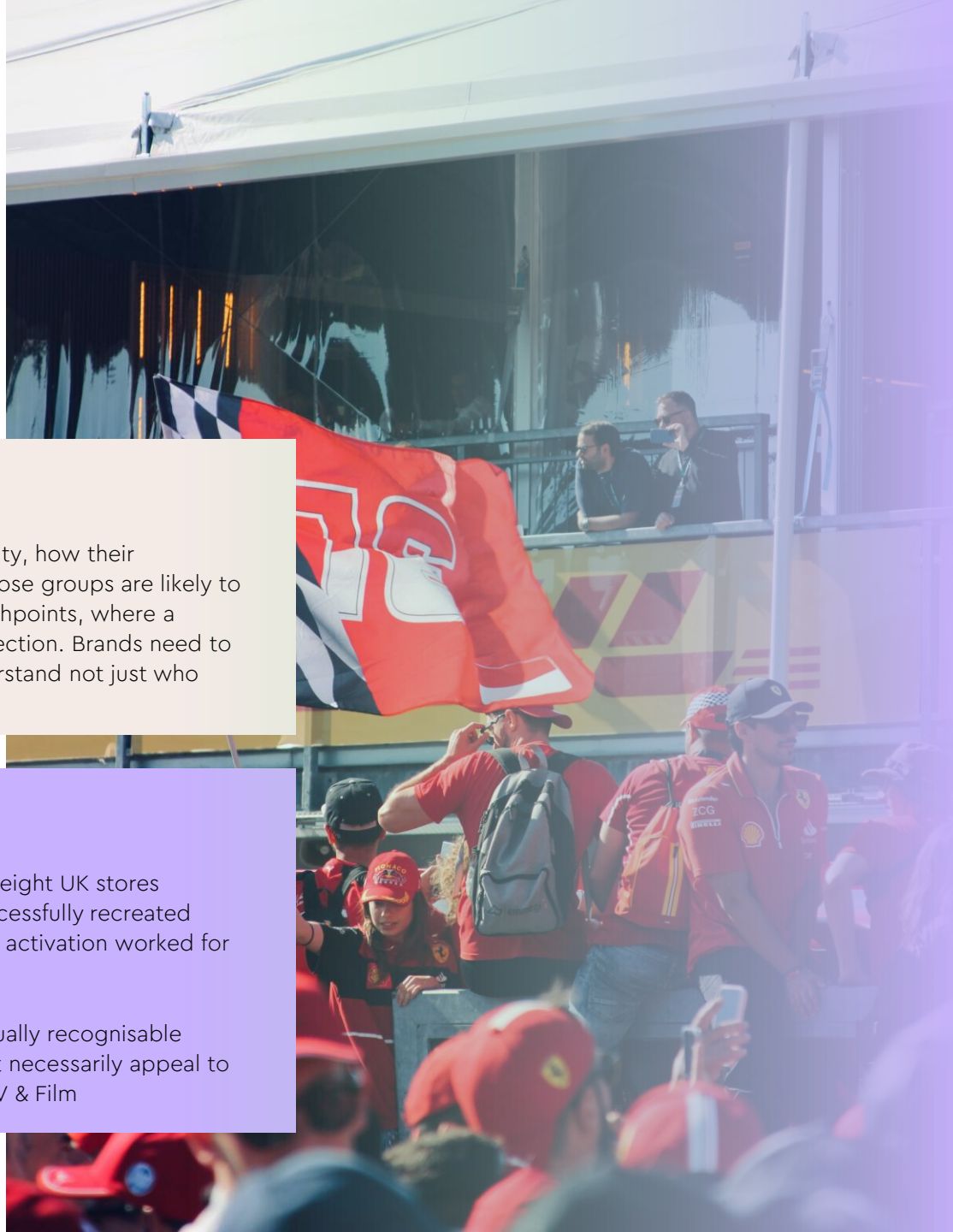
What does this look like in practice?

Ensure you fully understand the strata that exist within a community, how their behaviours differ and how open to brand engagement each of those groups are likely to be. For example, all-round active are likely to want low-level touchpoints, where a Connection-led are going to want activations that facilitate connection. Brands need to establish who they are talking to and how their needs vary. Understand not just who you're reaching, but who will be doing the judging too.

Brand Example

Virgin Media O2 created an immersive pop-up experience across eight UK stores featuring iconic Stranger Things scenes. Whilst the activation successfully recreated memorable visuals, fandom members felt it was surface level. The activation worked for casual viewers but missed the depth that Devotees value.

"This does very much capitalise on, oh, this is one of the most visually recognisable marketing points of the show itself, and so this feels like it doesn't necessarily appeal to people who are very immersed in the fanbase." 25-34, Female, TV & Film



Phase 1
EARN THE RIGHT
TO ENTER

"When you misunderstand the community or make assumptions about them or what they want, I think that's where the biggest backlash is... because the gaming community is probably one of the most diverse communities you'll get in terms of the demographic of people ... so I think it's really risky in gaming to make mass generalisations of exactly how a community will react to this one thing, because it's so varied

- NATHAN BLISS,
GAMING EDITOR, REACH

RULE 3: KNOW WHERE YOU BELONG, AND WHERE YOU DON'T

Understanding a community is necessary but not sufficient on its own. There needs to be an honest evaluation of whether the community itself will see a reason for the brand to be there. Permission can be values-led as well as product-led, but there needs to be alignment, otherwise the community's 'immune system' will kick in.

What does this look like in practice?

Before entering any community space, ask three honest questions. Does this community already have this brand in its orbit in any way? Would our presence add something they don't already have? And could we sustain a genuine presence here or are we only here because this community is culturally prominent right now?

Brand Example

Charlotte Tilbury's partnership with the F1 Academy succeeded not because beauty products are linked to motorsport, but because a female-founded brand supporting female participation in the sport is a values connection the community recognised immediately.



1 in 10

agree that brands in their spaces don't have a strong enough reason to be there

"If there is new companies contacting us, we tend to ask our members on the WhatsApp group, what they would like from that company and if they feel that it aligns with our values or not."

- 25-34, NON-BINARY, IDENTITY, EXPRESSIVE

"You can't fake your way into a fandom, and it's the same for any brands trying to crowbar their way in. Fans are smart, communities are smart - they can sniff it out."

- SIMON JENKINS, HEAD OF CREATIVE INTELLIGENCE, SPOTIFY CREATIVE LAB

PHASE TWO:

Engage On Their Terms

Permission to enter is not the same as knowing *how* to show up

Communities aren't passive audiences waiting to be reached, they're active participants who will scrutinise your motives, check credentials and not be afraid to give you feedback.

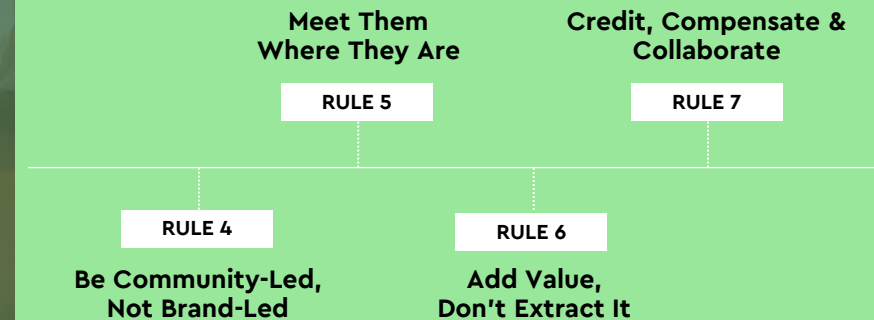
Brands that succeed understand that community membership must be earned, not bought.

Phase Two shows you how to engage in ways that communities will welcome

Being community-led, showing up where they are, adding value without extraction and honouring their creative work.

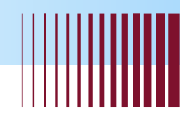
What you'll learn:

- How communities shape culture
- Relationships, trust & influence
- The role for advertising & brand





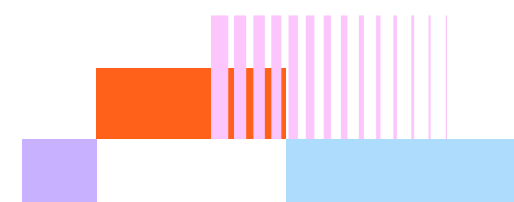
COMMUNITY CULTURE & CREATIVE LIFE



"Music has always been a very powerful tool for self-expression and identity, and you can see that in the ways in which fans show up in the real world."

It's Swifties dressing up for concerts and trading friendship bracelets a full seven hours before the gates even open. Or it's tens of thousands of Pitbull fans putting on a bald cap and making their way to a concert. Last summer it was 90,000 grown men and women walking through cities with bucket hats on to express their love of an entire genre. Music shapes not just what we listen to, but really how we present ourselves to the world."

- SIMON JENKINS, HEAD OF CREATIVE INTELLIGENCE, SPOTIFY
CREATIVE LAB



EXPRESSION & ENGAGEMENT

Which comes first – the community or the culture? Fandoms and communities do not purely exist because of, and in reaction to, culture. They play a vital role in defining it, with fandoms generating their own cultural momentum that then shapes the content we experience in the wider world.

Expression of fandoms shows up in a multitude of ways, from fan edits and fiction reshaping narratives, shared language that creates a new vernacular, memes and inside jokes that dominate the online discourse as cultural touchstones. They remove the barriers between personal expression and established media properties, moving from consumption to creation and giving fans an active role in culture.

Creating this content is a clear signal of the depth of engagement fans experience around topics, helping them to go beyond enjoying it at a surface-level, into feeling 'so normal about this', and from there creating a shared language for enjoyment. This creativity acts as a bonding mechanism, deepening ownership and creating pathways for them to build connections grounded in the shared vulnerability, intimacy and values which come from this expression.

"Cosplay is phenomenal... people acting out films they've made, which are brilliant. They make their own comics and their own artwork."

– 45-54, FEMALE, TV & GAMING, EXPRESSIVE

"It creates a freedom in the community to explore and share ideas that aren't controlled by the original creators, which when you have big properties like Marvel, DC or Star Wars, that world away from officialness is a really good breeding ground for discussion and creativity."

– 25-34, FEMALE, TV & FILM, EXPRESSIVE

32%

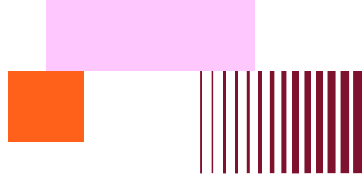
create content relating to their community

40%

for under 24s

B4. Tell us a bit more about your involvement with the [community]. How often do you do the following....

FRAMEWORK OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION



Written

Fan fiction
Poetry
Reviews

"I write fan fiction anonymously, so I'll be talking to people about that on Tumblr and Instagram, I follow some of the artists who create their own comics."

– 45-54, FEMALE, TV & GAMING, EXPRESSIVE

Visual

Fan art
Comics
Fan edits

"Heated Rivalry would not have blown up in the way it has if people weren't making edits and talking about it and creating all these things."

– 18-24, FEMALE, TV & MUSIC, EXPRESSIVE

Audio

Character playlists
Covers
Fandubs

"There's a whole sub community of people doing vocal covers or drum covers, guitar covers."

– 25-34, MALE, MUSIC, CONNECTOR

Interactive & physical

Cosplay
Merch
Game mods

"A group of modders in the community have recreated one of the old Elder Scrolls games and modernised it and it's completely free."

– 25-34, MALE, GAMING, OBSERVER

Social

Language
Memes
Insider jokes

"Even things like memes or funny tweets ... It keeps the conversation going, it gets people engaged."

– 25-34, FEMALE, TV & FILM, EXPRESSIVE



REQUIRING CREATIVE AUTONOMY

For many, creative expression plays a vital role in keeping their communities active and engaged. People in culture-focused groups are 1.3x more likely than other communities to prioritise fan-created works; this is particularly true for under 25s who are twice as likely to say they are most interested. During gaps between official releases, when the show ended 10 years ago, the next album isn't on the horizon or there isn't new material to pore over, fan creation helps sustain the momentum. These actions reveal something important about the community's resilience and sense of ownership – fans don't require permission or "official" content to sustain themselves – the community is theirs to shape as they desire.

Fan creations also serve to expand source material, making fictional worlds feel larger and virtually endless. By filling narrative gaps, creating new interpretations of works or expanding the lore, it helps communities feel like there is always more to discuss, analyse or share.

Beyond simple continuity, fan works offer a creative space free from any official oversight, acting as a breeding ground for fresh ideas, interpretations, and narratives that official creators aren't exploring. This independence gives communities genuine autonomy over how they engage with the topics or works they love. It also explains why AI-generated content is actively rejected in these spaces. Fan works derive their meaning from human investment and personal interpretation. AI sidesteps both, producing output without the passion that gives fan creativity its value.

"Our characters don't have official visual presentations. So, people can imagine them however they want, which allows them to draw artwork and create content with them looking however they like, looking like themselves if that's what they want."

- CALLUM DOUGHERTY, CCO AND COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR
FOR RUSTY QUILL LTD

WHERE IS
CREATIVE
EXPRESSION
FLOURISHING?



Photography



Side Hustles

1.5x
25 - 34



Technology



Education

1.6x
35 - 44

HOW CREATIVE EXPRESSION FULFILLS

Transformative

To remix, correct or expand

To explore the 'what if'

To reclaim & reshape

"Maybe it's a bit of denial because they don't want to let the character go, they write to keep the story alive and to get what they want out of the characters and see whatever scenes they want."

– 18-24, FEMALE, TV & MUSIC, CONNECTOR

Celebratory

To embody and pay tribute

To share joy and enthusiasm

To appreciate

"There were people doing cosplay, I find it very heartwarming; these are just normal people who in their spare time are doing the work of costume designers and professional makeup artists."

– 35-44, MALE, TV, SEEKER

Analytical

To deconstruct, challenge and assess

To examine themes and tropes

To debate interpretations

"In terms of the content I engage with, it's looking deeper and drawing connections and theories or things about narrative and characterisation."

– 25-34, FEMALE, TV & FILM, EXPRESSIVE

Cultural

To create shared moments and shorthand

To signal membership and belonging

To maintain energy

"You could instantly tell if someone was a fan and played that game rather than they just looked it up online and didn't know what they were talking about..."

– 35-44, FEMALE, GAMING, CONNECTOR

WHEN THE ALGORITHM CAN'T BE TRUSTED



Community creative culture exists against a backdrop of eroding trust. The infrastructure of digital discovery is breaking down. The channels that connected people to trusted information for the last few decades (e.g. YouTube tutorials, Google searches, product reviews) are increasingly contaminated with AI-generated content.

As traditional discovery channels become less reliable, people are returning to human-verified sources.

With 7 in 10 concerned the internet will have more AI-generated content than human-made, communities are filling the trust vacuum that AI has created. Community lived experience and collective knowledge do not come from algorithms.

For brands, this has two direct implications. AI-generated content deployed in community spaces will be identified, rejected and held against you. More significantly, community presence is no longer just a nice to have, it is becoming the primary trusted discovery channel for a generation that has learned not to trust the algorithm.

Trends E8. When thinking about AI and automation more generally, what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements?, E9. There are many different narratives about the use of AI, how concerned are you about...? (somewhat/very concerned)

"Before AI I probably trusted Google too much. Now it's easy to see the slop at the surface. I trust it a lot less and I'm much better at doing in-person research."

-18-24, MALE, HOBBIES, SEEKER

"I think what's happening with that lazy AI content, is that your algorithm will favour it because it's cleaner or easier to filter through and people just don't engage with it the same way, people are so much less interested."

- 25-34, MALE, MUSIC, CONNECTOR

"It is a bit naff and at times a bit lazy. Whereas, you know, going back three years, it didn't exist so people would have had to put a bit more effort into the making of something."

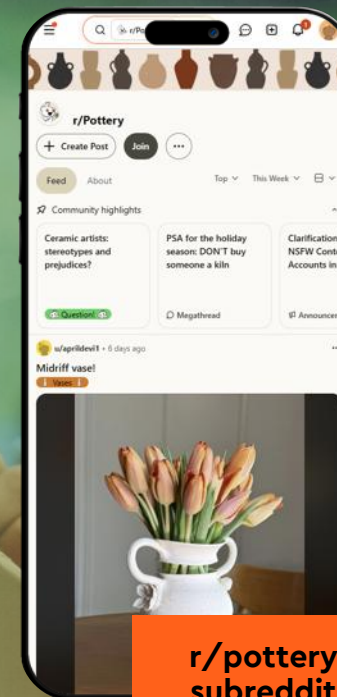
- 35-44, MALE, TV, CONNECTOR

Deep Dive POTTERY ENTHUSIASTS

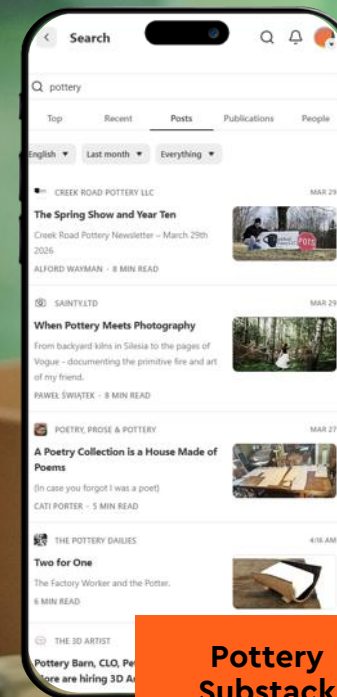
Pottery has experienced a revival, growing from a traditional craft into a community centred around creativity, mindfulness, and self-expression. With 10 million UK searches and 273 million TikTok views, interest is growing, with people increasingly looking for offline activities. The community is deeply motivated by happiness (61%) and a sense of achievement (58%), making it a highly emotionally engaged group.



**r/pottery
discord**



**r/pottery
subreddit**



**Pottery
Substack**

10M

Searches for pottery
classes and content in
the UK in past 12
months

r/Pottery #Pottery

135K weekly visitors
on Reddit

273 Million views
2 Million posts
on TikTok in the UK

Deep Dive POTTERY ENTHUSIASTS

Huge amount of content online of makers sharing their craft, receiving high levels of engagement.



37%

Of craft community identify as superfans



42%

Consume content relating to crafting

61%

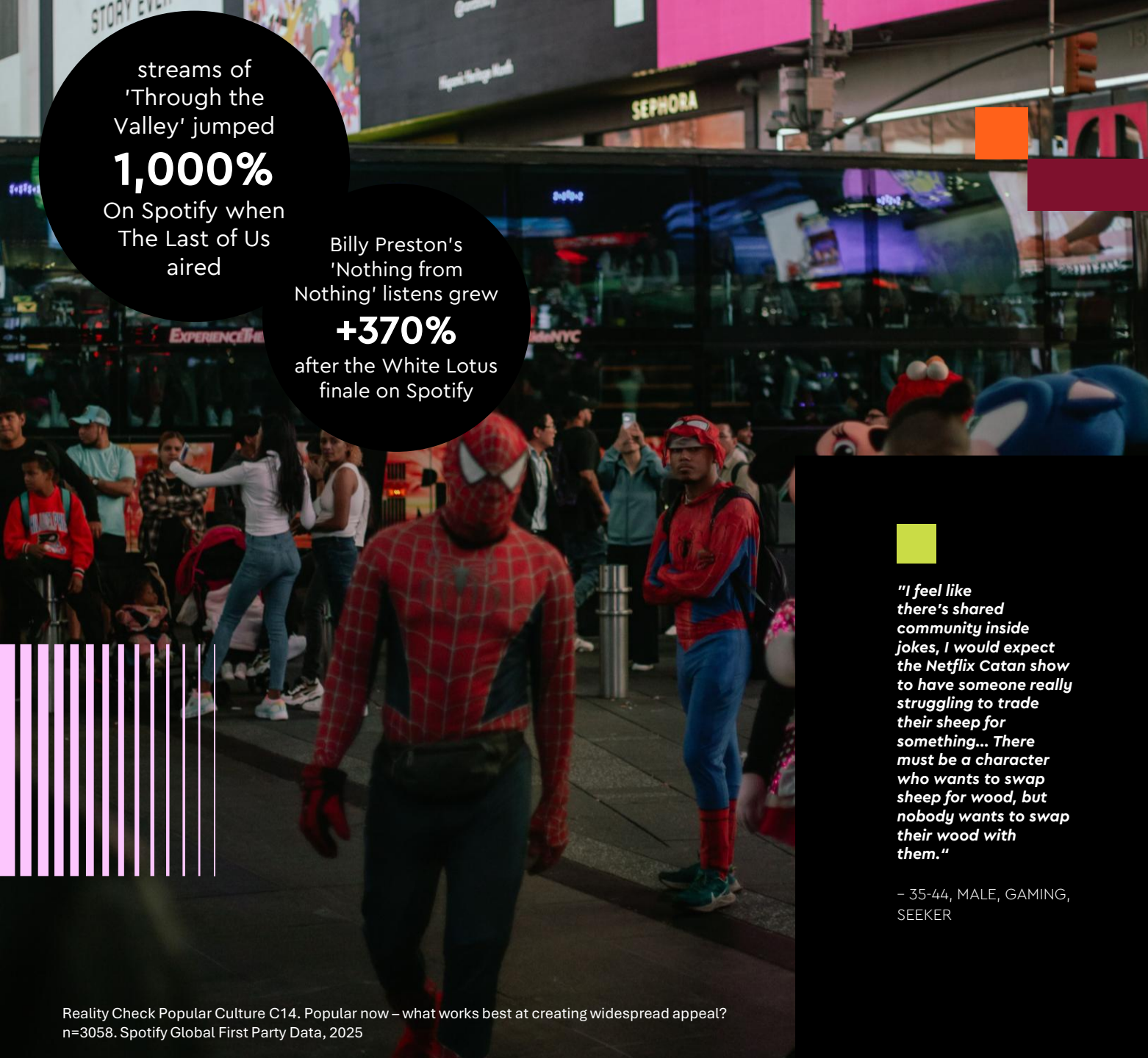
Are part of the crafting community because it makes them happy

58%

Are part of the crafting community for the sense of achievement

34%

Got involved because they had time on their hands



streams of
'Through the
Valley' jumped
1,000%
On Spotify when
The Last of Us
aired

Billy Preston's
'Nothing from
Nothing' listens grew
+370%
after the White Lotus
finale on Spotify

DRIVING CULTURAL MOMENTUM

With fandoms creating their own cultural momentum, we can see this influence and energy filtering back into wider popular culture. A quarter of people (24%) agree that a strong fan community works best for making something in culture even more popular, rising to 28% for under 45s.

Beyond the more structured and established fan creativity, like fiction or cosplay, the micro-expressions of fandom that are traded across social platforms play a huge part in creating culture, particularly for younger audiences. When it comes to the factors that shape popular culture, half of Gen Z (51%) agree that memes and viral videos are very important, whilst nearly 4 in 10 (38%) would also add language, slang, and catchphrases to that list.

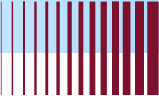
As culture continues to shift and move with the pace and fluidity of social media, the fan connections that exist across all levels of the internet are playing a huge part in shaping its future direction.

"I feel like there's shared community inside jokes, I would expect the Netflix Catan show to have someone really struggling to trade their sheep for something... There must be a character who wants to swap sheep for wood, but nobody wants to swap their wood with them."

– 35-44, MALE, GAMING,
SEEKER

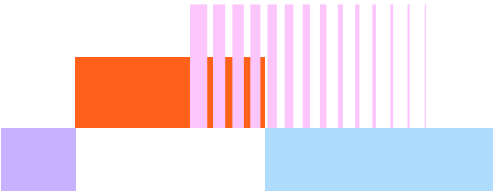


WHO WE TRUST



"Our fans also trust that when we do an ad, the thing is probably going to be good. They think, if I support this advertiser, I'm directly or in some way directly supporting the content that I like."

- CALLUM DOUGHERTY, CCO AND COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR FOR RUSTY QUILL LTD



MAKING FRIENDS

The connections formed within communities and fandoms vary widely in intensity; from deeply personal bonds and emotional safety, to more casual acquaintances who provide reach and information flow. 87% of people agree they have made at least one friend through their community or fan space involvement, with an average of 9.7 friends typically found.

These community friendships are anchored in emotional investment. This, in turn, generates trust that then further intensifies as engagement with the community deepens - 9 in 10 (89%) devotees saying they trust those they connect with.

Friendships within the groups can be far more diverse in age, gender, and ethnicity than real-life social circles, this is highly valued by many as it allows them to experience their community through the eyes and lives of others.

However, because community friendships are tied to the spaces that bring people together, they can often be deliberately compartmentalised.

This can result in a friendship portfolio where recommendations move freely and travel deep within a given circle but are less likely to travel widely between them.

Understanding the specific points where communities do overlap in people's lives is key to achieving genuine cross-network reach.

"It was a lot harder to find other dads to communicate with about being a young dad, my wife had her mum, her sister, the midwives that would check in, I was a bit like what am I supposed to do... so through these communities, we can talk to each other about it."

- 35-44, MALE, PARENTING, CONNECTOR

"It's like sisterhood support, but I don't personally know them. It's just on that forum; I don't have their number. They don't have my number."

- 18-24, FEMALE, BEAUTY, SEEKER

9 in 10

Made friends through their community involvement

AVERAGE NUMBER OF FRIENDSHIPS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY OR FAN SPACE



Casual



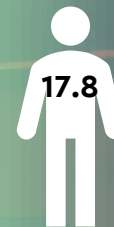
Seeker



Connector



Expressive



Devotee

C2. How many people would you describe as friends? C4. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (any agree)

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

Lived experience creates credibility, with people trusting recommendations from others who've faced the same challenges or share the same passions. While this level of influence remains topic specific, community members are valued as "experts" within the bounds of their shared passion, whether parenting, gaming, or beauty.

Trust and influence follow deeper engagement, with 87% of Devotees agreeing that people in their community spaces influence each other, compared to 57% amongst regular members.

We can also see the size of community having an interesting effect on influence. Amongst smaller groups, the more intimate setting doesn't necessarily foster a deeper feeling of trust or lead to higher levels of influence. Only 4 in 10 (41%) of those who are connecting with 5 or less community friends have made decisions based off the words of their fellow members, rising to 6 in 10 (59%) for groups where people are better connected, with 20+ friendships.

I trust the people I connect with in the fan spaces that matter to me

64% > 80%

1-5 friends

20+ friends

People in my community influence each other

58% > 72%

1-5 friends

20+ friends

I've made decisions on what to buy based on words of community members

45% > 59%

1-5 friends

20+ friends

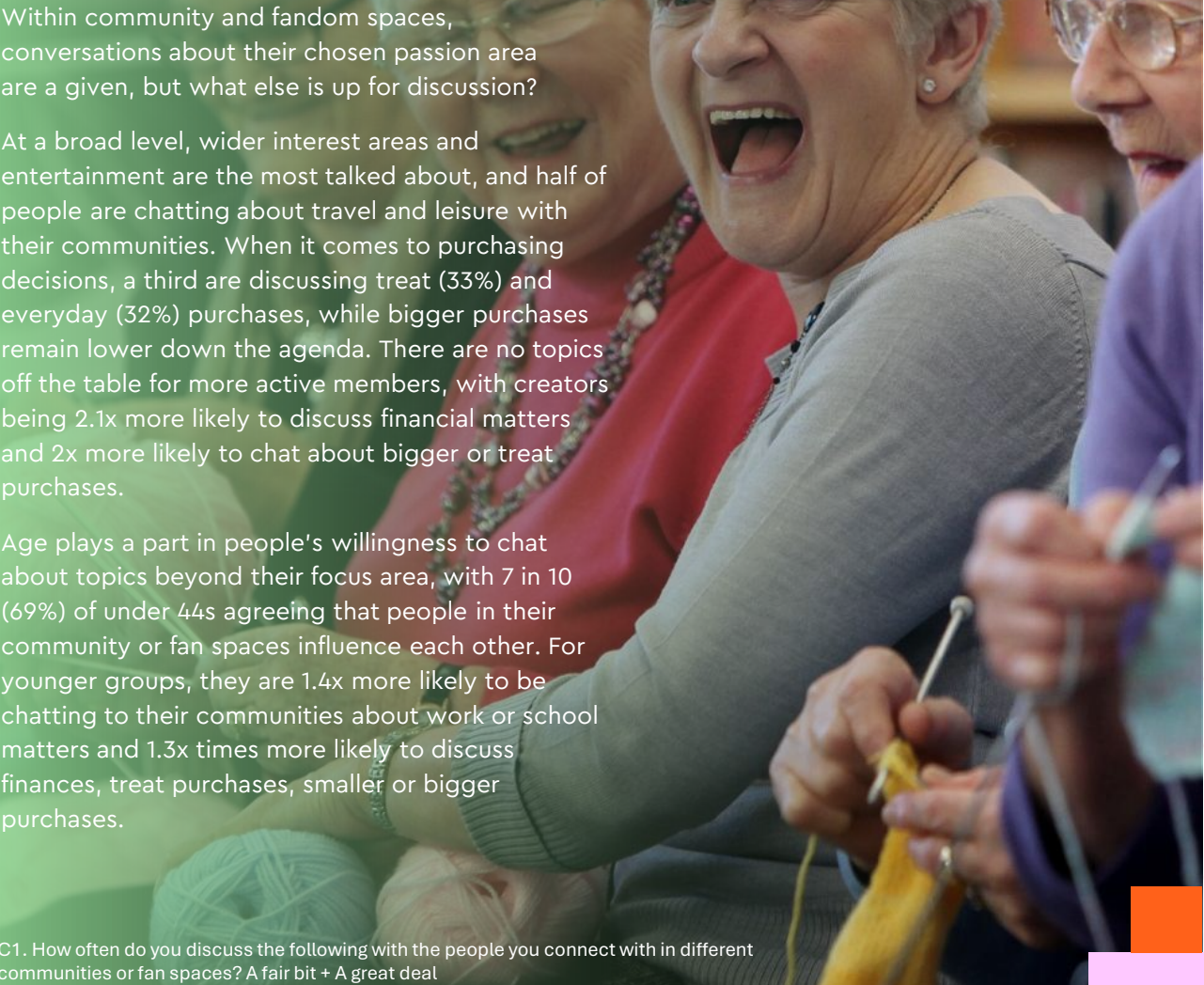
"I think there's definitely people that I would approach if I needed some expert advice or was lacking knowledge and knew someone had that knowledge... we have a whole range of professionals from teachers to cosmetic surgeons."

- 25-34, FEMALE, LOCAL COMMUNITY, CONNECTOR

"We were discussing different options for helping us cope with the mental health side of being a carer. If someone says, 'this helped me', others actually pay attention. It doesn't feel like advertising, it feels more trustworthy because it's coming from real experience."

- 18-24, MALE, FAMILY SUPPORT, CONNECTOR

THE CONVERSATIONS HAPPENING



Within community and fandom spaces, conversations about their chosen passion area are a given, but what else is up for discussion?

At a broad level, wider interest areas and entertainment are the most talked about, and half of people are chatting about travel and leisure with their communities. When it comes to purchasing decisions, a third are discussing treat (33%) and everyday (32%) purchases, while bigger purchases remain lower down the agenda. There are no topics off the table for more active members, with creators being 2.1x more likely to discuss financial matters and 2x more likely to chat about bigger or treat purchases.

Age plays a part in people's willingness to chat about topics beyond their focus area, with 7 in 10 (69%) of under 44s agreeing that people in their community or fan spaces influence each other. For younger groups, they are 1.4x more likely to be chatting to their communities about work or school matters and 1.3x times more likely to discuss finances, treat purchases, smaller or bigger purchases.

C1. How often do you discuss the following with the people you connect with in different communities or fan spaces? A fair bit + A great deal

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION IN THE COMMUNITY SPACE



66%

Hobbies & interests

73% Creator-led



59%

Entertainment



56%

Health & wellbeing

62% Creator-led



44%

Local community

58% Social-led



33%

Treat purchases

71% Devotees



32%

Smaller everyday purchases



31%

Financial matters

45% Creator-led



26%

Big one-off purchases

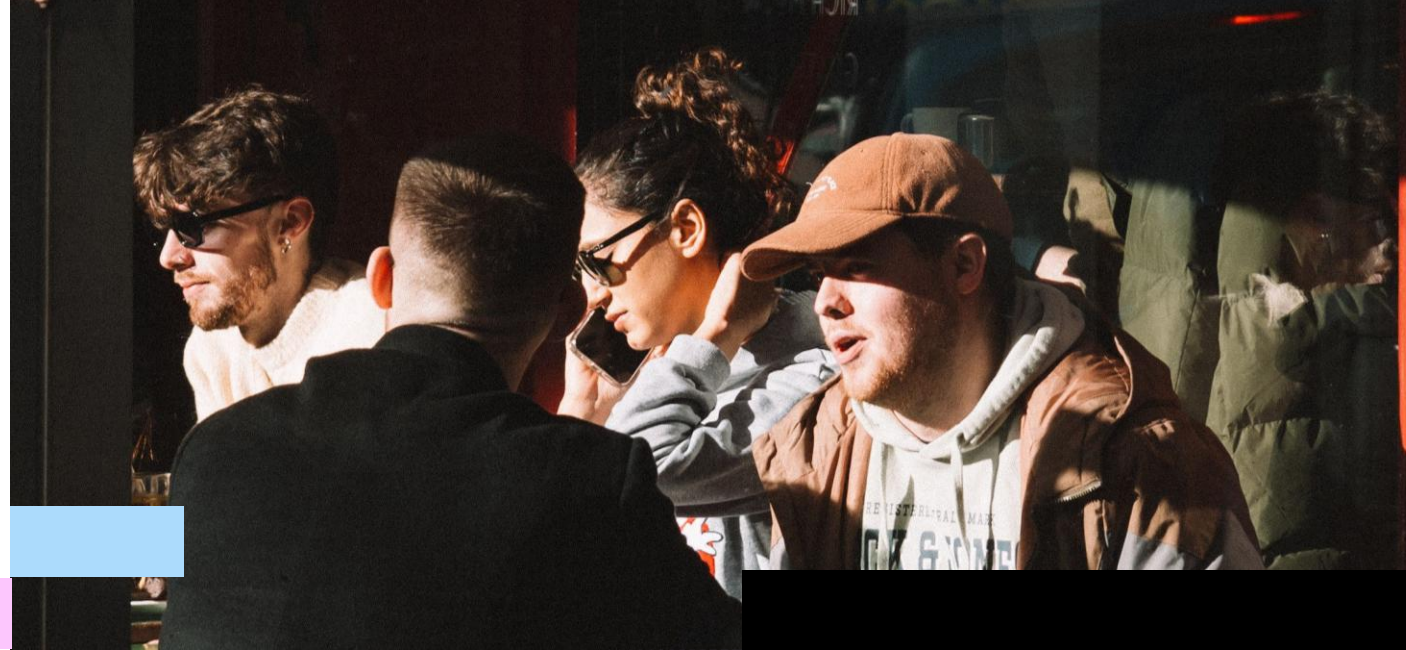
60% Devotees



50%

Travel & leisure

THE PEOPLE WHO GET IT, GET IT



Behind every community friendship is a gap that another relationship couldn't fill. Communities don't supplement relationships, instead they compensate for what those primary connections are not able to offer.

There are some things even our nearest and dearest can't give us. Not because they don't care, but because they don't share the same world. The right expertise and support, the matching intensity and judgement-free space to be obsessive about something without explanation.

This isn't a failure of our primary relationships, but the closeness that makes them irreplaceable is also what limits them. Close friends often create echo chambers, reflecting the same experiences, social circles and references. Community spaces break that pattern, offering perspectives, experiences and emotional mirroring that the people closest to us aren't positioned to provide.

Understanding what the specific gap is that a community addresses for its members is essential knowledge before entry. Brands that recognise and honour that function will be welcomed far more readily than ones that treat the space as simply an interest group.

"My friends want to talk about what's on Netflix. They're just not interested. I've found my people in that reading group."

- 35-44, FEMALE, LOCAL COMMUNITIES, CONNECTOR

"There's no one in my immediate social circle that I can talk about [niche music] with. Having that sense of community means you don't have to let go of that part of your identity."

- 25-34, MALE, MUSIC, SEEKER

"I can't talk to my normal friends about Pilates because they get bored of it very quickly. But with my friends from class, we can talk about it with such intensity and detail."

- 18-24, FEMALE, SPORTS PARTICIPATION, CONNECTOR

SERVING BOTH THE SEARCH AND THE SCROLL

Communities fill gaps in the big moments that matter, but also in the quieter moments in between.

Engagement happens in two distinct modes. The first is intentional, seeking out a review before a purchase, or searching for advice on a specific problem. The second is more habitual, checking in without a specific purpose, scrolling through community spaces in the gaps between other activities. The latter mode is less visible, but far more frequent and serves to maintain a continuous thread of connection that runs alongside daily life rather than punctuating it.

These more ambient daily check-ins, though passive, help to maintain a sense of belonging that keeps members oriented toward their community across the whole week, not just during active participation moments.

While it may be tempting to focus only on moments of intentional engagement, both modes present a distinct opportunity and leaving one underserved means missing a significant part of where community members actually spend their time.

The two modes require different strategies. Intentional engagement rewards depth through content that makes the visit worthwhile. Habitual engagement rewards presence by being a familiar and welcome part of the scroll.



"It shows up on my doom scroll...between work activities...when I'm bored. I go to those groups for distraction. It's a part of my every day, even if it's just little moments."

- 25-34, FEMALE, MUSIC, EXPRESSIVE



"I'm always passively scrolling on my phone or looking up what certain groups are talking about, seeing what content the algorithm sends me – it knows I'm a fan."

- 35-44, MALE, TV, SEEKER



INFLUENCER DISCOVERY, NOT DECISION

Understanding how communities engage also changes how we think about influence. Members don't make decisions at the point of influencer contact – not because they're more sceptical, but because they have a pre-built verification they can consult.

When a general consumer sees an influencer recommendation, verification is individual e.g. reading reviews, checking star ratings. But when a community member sees a recommendation within their area of passion, verification becomes collective. Questions go directly to forums, Discord servers and closed groups where people with similar circumstances have already pooled their experience and formed a collective verdict. These aren't anonymous reviewers, but trusted members of a shared space with credibility and lived experience.

Influencer investment and community presence are consecutive stages in the same journey, not alternative options. The influencer provides the introduction while the community delivers the verdict. Getting this right means treating influencer and community strategy as one brief, not two. Choose influencers with genuine community credibility rather than simply high reach, seed genuine advocates and ensure product information is accessible where verification happens.

"Once an influencer recommends a product, I then look into the community for actual reviews to see if they differ."

- 18-24, FEMALE, BEAUTY, SEEKER

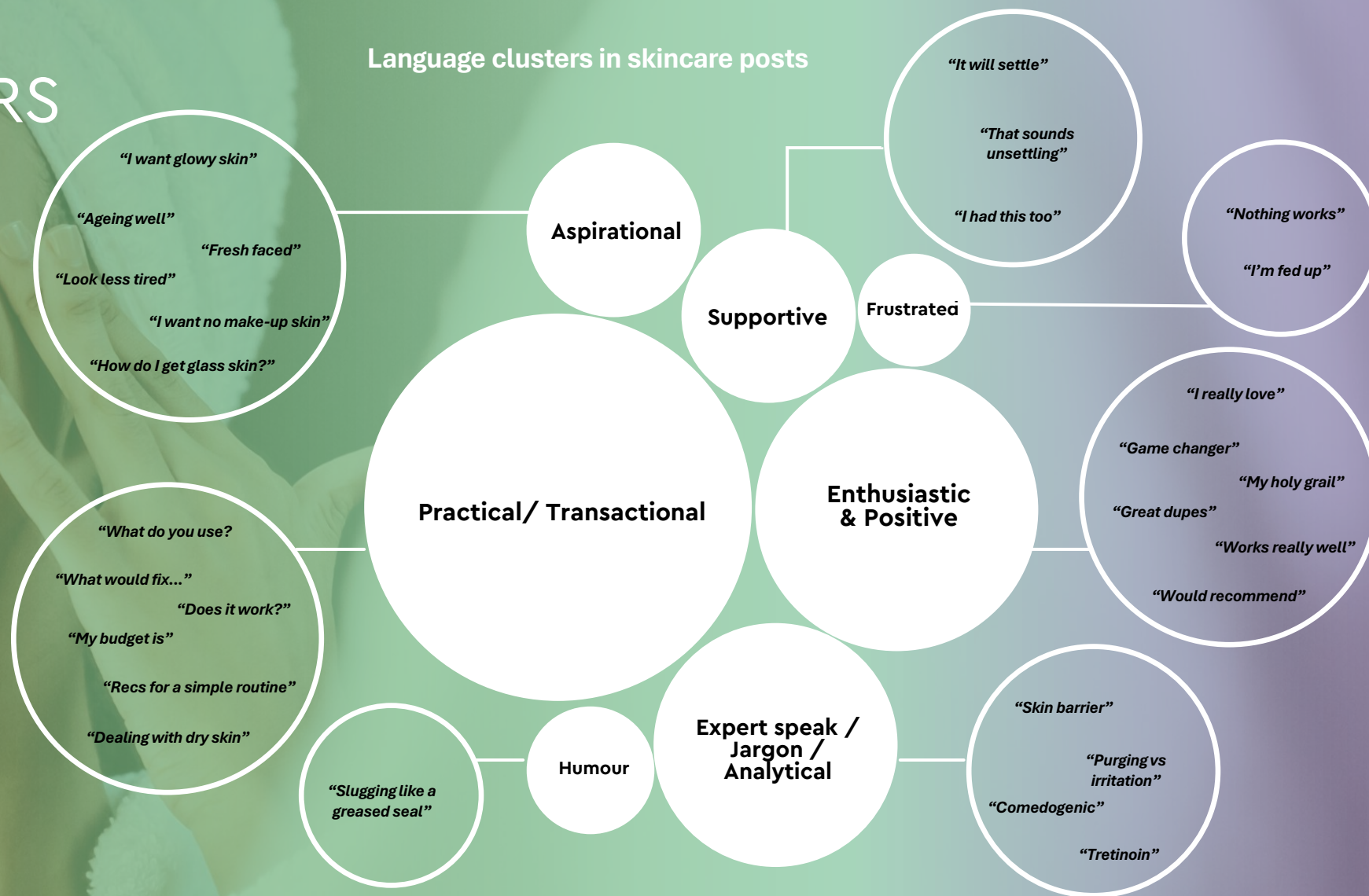
"I wouldn't take advice from a single well-known gamer, but I look at Reddit for reviews. Not specifically from an individual, but I look at the community as a whole and how they're responding."

- 25-34, MALE, GAMING, SEEKER

Deep Dive SKINCARE LOVERS

Skincare discussion naturally blends peer expertise, reassurance and recommendation. It is often focused on specific need states or problems that people are experiencing with their skin, such as eczema, or expert advice on how to treat those issues. Those who are part of a 'beauty and skincare' community are more likely to purchase product and actively engage with content and online discussion. This makes online platforms such as Mumsnet, Reddit and TikTok a huge part of the community connection.

Language clusters in skincare posts



516K monthly unique users
in skincare threads

Mumsnet 2026

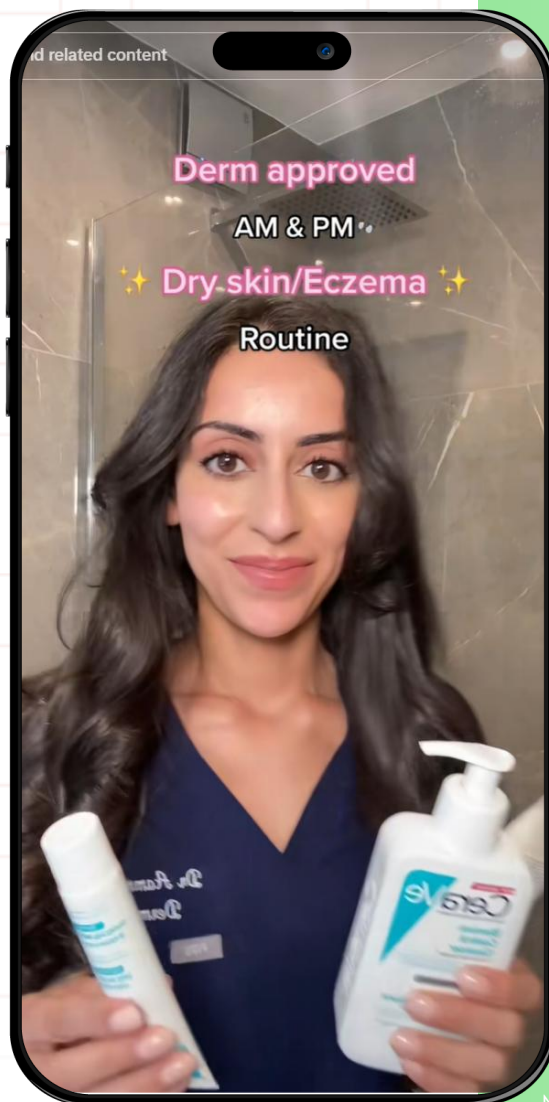
1.3M monthly skincare
page views

51% of skincare OPs
contain a question

23% became part of the
community because of
content on social media

19% became part of the
community because
of a lifestyle challenge

Deep Dive SKINCARE LOVERS



For the skincare and beauty community, brands are a huge part of the experience and people are very open to hearing from brands. A large focus for the community when it comes to products and brands are around consideration and use.

71%
of threads mention at least one brand

The average thread includes
3.84
distinct brand mentions

67%
feel positive about seeing advertising within these spaces

36%
find the community appealing because they talk about the brands they like

Purchase Journey ←

1%

Awareness

"I keep seeing retinol everywhere"
"Do I need a serum?"

42%

Consideration

"Does it work?"
"What's the difference between...?"
"Is it worth it?"
"Has anyone tried?"

Trial

"I've just started using it"
"Should I start once a week?"
"I'm patch testing first"
"Can I use this with...?"

7%

Purchase

"Where's cheapest to buy it?"
"Is it on offer anywhere?"
"Boots have 3 for 2"
"I've ordered it"

6%

27%

Use

"How often do I...?"
"I second..."
"My routine involves..."
"Is this purging?"

10%

Advocacy

"It's my holy grail"
"I wouldn't be without it"
"Highly recommend"
"It's a game changer"

5%

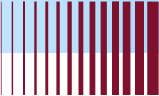
Brand exit

"I've stopped using it"
"They've changed the formula"
"It's too expensive"

Mumsnet 2026. B10. How do you feel about the brands or advertising messages that feature around your community?

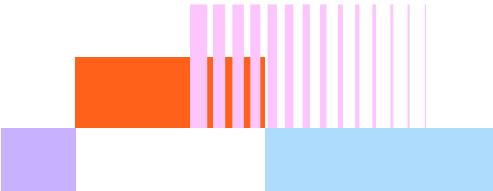


OPPORTUNITY AND CONDITIONS OF ENTRY



"The positive side of it is when there's good things, it really gets spoken about, it will get a following, it will get shared, and it can be a hugely uplifting thing, where people feel seen. We all just want to feel seen and accepted."

- 18-24, TRANSFEM, IDENTITY, EXPRESSIVE



WHERE DOES ADVERTISING FIT?



56%

Seen or heard advertising within their community

More than half of fans currently experience advertising or brand messages in their chosen community, with even greater levels of exposure (62%) within the Cultural, Health and Needs fan spaces.

And the more engaged someone is with a community the more likely they are to be open to advertising in general, to notice brand messaging within it, and to feel positive about it being there. 8 in 10 (82%) of Devotees are positive about the brands that feature in the communities they love, with only 2% claiming to feel negative about the advertising they come across. Three quarters (76%) of Expressives are similarly positively engaged with brand messaging.

In total, two thirds (64%) of community members are open to brands engaging in their passion areas, provided it is done well. More strikingly, 6 in 10 say they are more likely to actively support brands who get involved in spaces they care about, rising to 83% amongst Devotees. The commercial opportunity is real and significant.

"There are definitely opportunities as long as they're adding value and are a source of goodness. I certainly wouldn't be supporting any brands that I didn't feel like were adding value or were not actually promoting positivity within the community... for me it has to be what is the purpose behind it?"

- 25-34, FEMALE, LOCAL COMMUNITY, CONNECTOR

THE EXPECTATIONS ON BRANDS

Fan types have differing brand expectations, shaped by their distinct underlying need states. Seekers need to feel understood; Connectors need to feel facilitated; Expressives need to feel seen and enabled. Meanwhile, Devotees require all aspects to be honoured.

Seekers

Share similar values and purpose
Understand the things I'm passionate about
Use appropriate language and terminology

Connectors

Be there for the longer term
Help members to connect and grow
Listen and respond to community feedback
Help solve problems

Expressives

Encourage creativity
Create exclusive content
Provide platforms for fans to connect and share
Collaborate with popular fan creators or leaders

Devotees

Create exclusive content that celebrates the fans
Create niche merchandise
Collaborate with popular fan creators or leaders
Actively support initiatives

C5. Thinking about the brands you see or hear in the communities you're involved in, what do they get right? C6. And what are they getting wrong? C7. How can a brand engage best with your community? What type of involvement might make you think more positively about it?

TWO THIRDS OPEN TO BRANDS GETTING INVOLVED IN A FAN SPACE

However, there are conditions attached to that openness to brand involvement. Community members are not passive audiences waiting to be reached, they are active, protective, deeply invested participants who can detect inauthenticity and performative actions. They will scrutinise a brand's motives, check its credentials, and share their verdict across the community at speed and scale.

The brands that succeed in these spaces are not the loudest or the biggest spenders, but the ones who invest time and effort. They are the ones who understand that community membership must be earned, not bought, and who approach that process with patience, humility and genuine intent.

64%

I'm open to brands engaging as long as it's done well

vs 85% Devotees

61%

Too much brand involvement can make it feel inauthentic

56%

Advertising relevant to my community less annoying than general ads

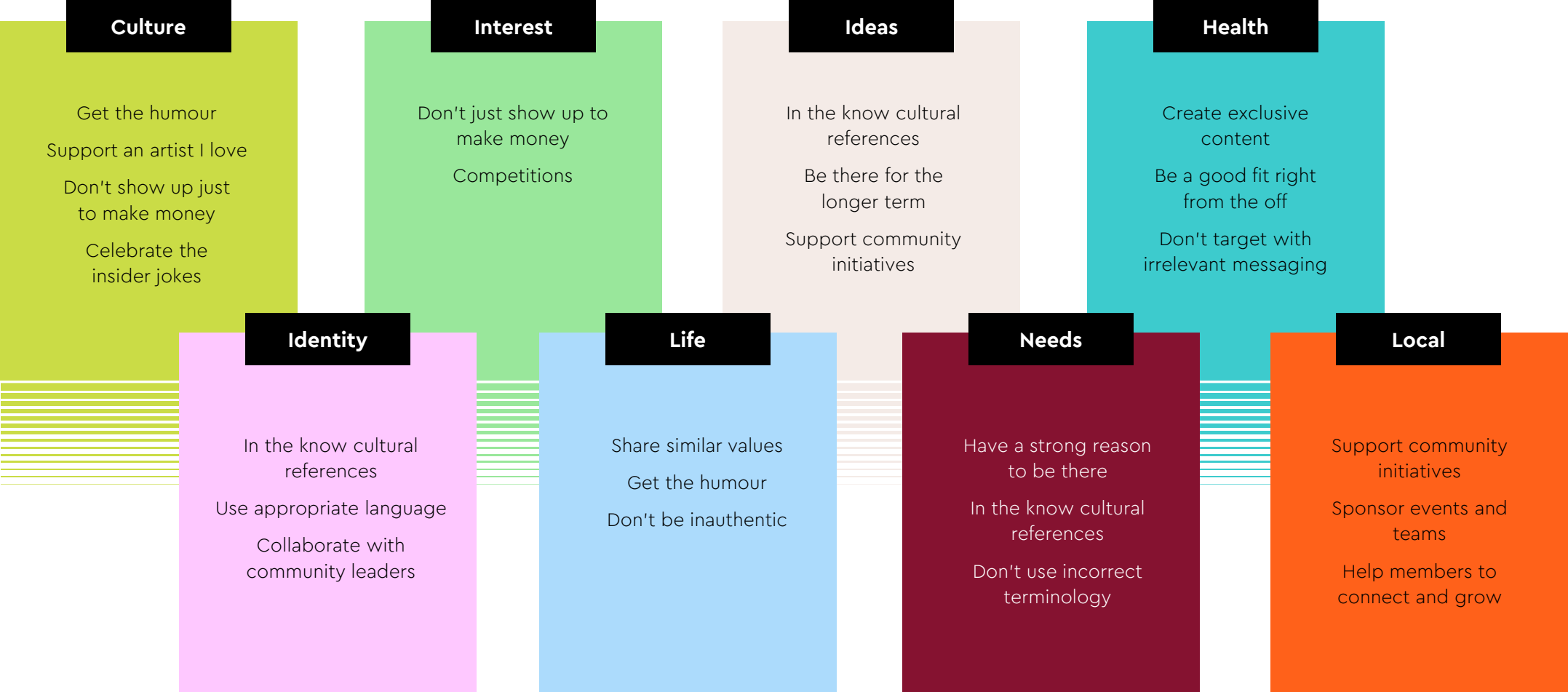
54%

Enjoy creative ads tailored to reflect my community

vs 76% Expressives



BRAND EXPECTATIONS BY COMMUNITY GENRE



C5. Thinking about the brands you see or hear in the communities you're involved in, what do they get right? C6. And what are they getting wrong? C7. How can a brand engage best with your community? What type of involvement might make you think more positively about it?

RULE 4: Be Community-Led, Not Brand-Led

This is the single most important rule in the entire playbook. When brands lead, arriving with their own agenda, their own creative and their own objectives driving decisions, the results feel disingenuous. Brands will need to be willing to adapt to fit in.

What does this look like in practice?

Start the brief with the community, not the brand. What does this community celebrate? What problems does it have? What content does it naturally create? Let those answers shape the creative direction before brand messaging objectives enter the room. Being genuinely prepared to act on the answers is what separates community-led engagement from community-adjacent advertising.

Brand example

Gymshark has built its brand on community. They sought out people already deeply embedded in the fitness community, real creators with genuine audiences, and handed them the creative lead. They listen to what their community needs with initiatives such as 'Gymshark Insiders' and facilitates connection through in person events, products and content.

C5. Thinking about the brands you see or hear in the communities you're involved in, what do they get right?

Beyond Engagement – Understanding Influencer Payback – IPA/ WPP Media

Phase 2
ENGAGE ON
THEIR TERMS

"I'd want to know why and what is going to be the outcome of it, not just we are targeting you, but why have you chosen this? How will it benefit us?"

- 65+, FEMALE,
PARENTING, CONNECTOR

"The worst thing people do is borrow audiences. Brands see an influencer doing something really well and the obvious route is to say, how much do you want to do that for us? And it just doesn't work because it takes everything that's right about that content away from it. What would usually be a million views suddenly gets 15,000. It's just because you're borrowing an audience."

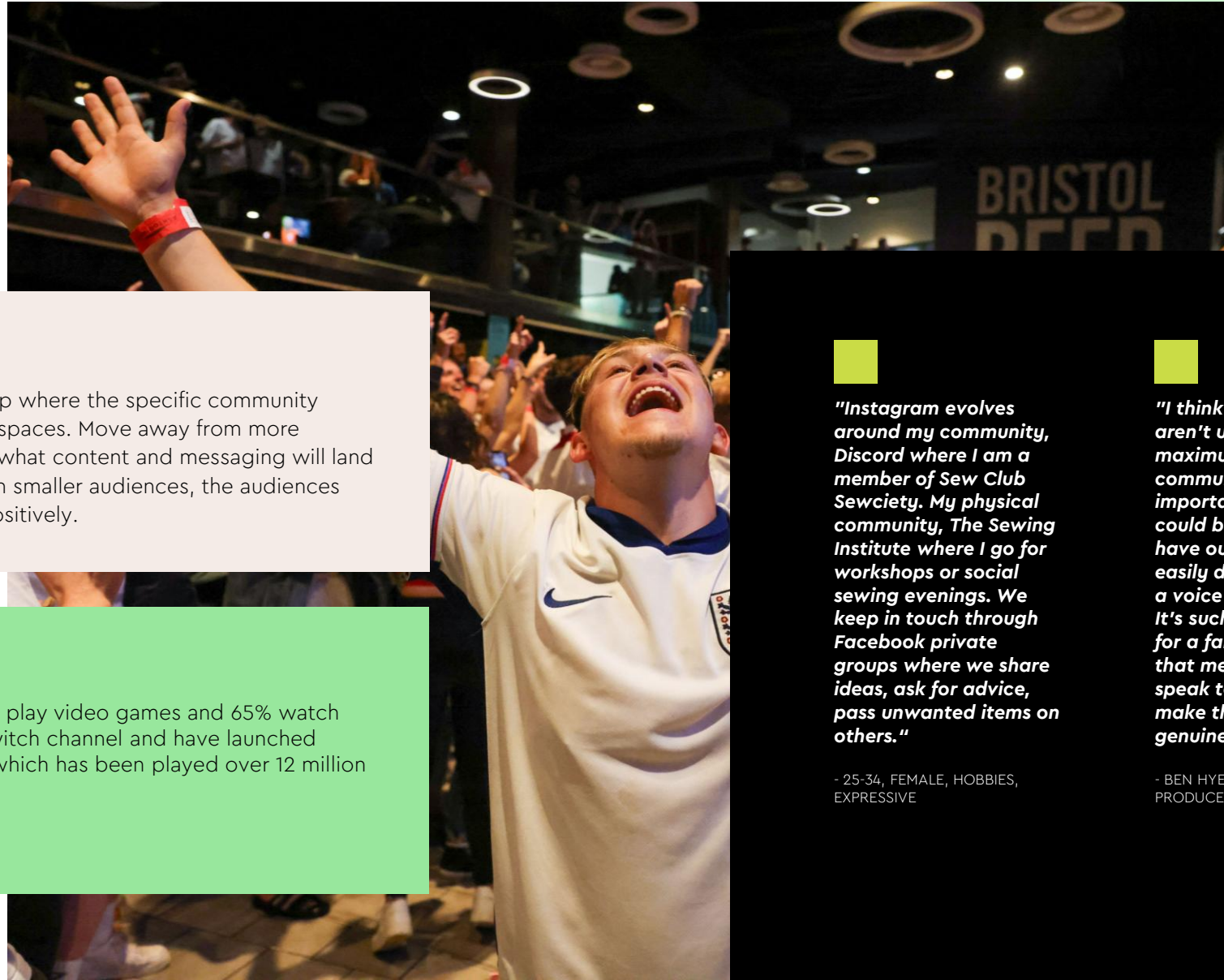
- BEN HYETT, SENIOR SPORTS
PRODUCER, REACH

3x

Improvement in conversion rates when close alignment is created between brand values, audience interests and creator content

RULE 5: Meet Them Where They Are

Brands need to identify where a community lives, which platforms and spaces it uses, what it does on each of them, and what kind of presence feels native versus intrusive. The question is not how many people a brand can get in front of, it is whether the brand is showing up in the right place, in the right format, at the right moment.



What does this look like in practice?

Before allocating budget across channels, map where the specific community congregates and how they show up in those spaces. Move away from more traditional reach and frequency and focus on what content and messaging will land in which environments. Though this may mean smaller audiences, the audiences you reach are much more likely to respond positively.

Brand example

e.l.f. cosmetics found that 70% of its followers play video games and 65% watch streams. They have a dedicated e.l.f. YOU! Twitch channel and have launched experiences like e.l.f. UP! Tycoon on Roblox, which has been played over 12 million times.

C8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

"Instagram evolves around my community, Discord where I am a member of Sew Club Sewciety. My physical community, The Sewing Institute where I go for workshops or social sewing evenings. We keep in touch through Facebook private groups where we share ideas, ask for advice, pass unwanted items on others."

- 25-34, FEMALE, HOBBIES, EXPRESSIVE

"I think a lot of brands aren't using WhatsApp to its maximum. The WhatsApp community platform is so important currently and could be far bigger. If we have our hosts, they can easily drop into that, leave a voice note, record videos. It's such a great touch point for a fan and something that means we can directly speak to our audience and make them feel like we genuinely care."

- BEN HYETT, SENIOR SPORTS PRODUCER, REACH

RULE 6: Add Value, Don't Extract It

Community members are not opposed to brand involvement. What they cannot tolerate is brand involvement that takes without giving, using community spaces as a reach vehicle, harvesting credibility for commercial gain, while offering nothing to the community.

What does this look like in practice?

Build genuine, lasting value into every activation - something the community will value independently of its brand association. In the podcast space, this means funding an exclusive episode or live event that deepens the fan relationship with the show, not just placing an ad inside it. In sport, it means creating access to experiences that money alone cannot buy for most fans. In gaming, it means enabling community tournaments or creator tools that expand participation, rather than just brand visibility within it.

Brand example

Red Bull is now strongly associated with extreme sports. However, it does not just use that as a platform to promote its products, it adds value for the athletes and fans.

The Red Bull Athlete Performance Centre offers elite athletes access to coaching, sports science and physiotherapy at no cost. Additionally, their Media House produces documentary-quality content for the fans to watch unrelated to the brand.



55%

It's easy to tell when a brand's involvement in the community is inauthentic

Phase 2
ENGAGE ON
THEIR TERMS

"The brand partnerships that work best on Mumsnet are usually the ones that lead with usefulness rather than promotion. They offer something genuinely helpful rather than simply broadcasting."

- JUSTINE ROBERTS CBE,
FOUNDER OF MUMSNET

C8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

RULE 7: Credit, Compensate and Collaborate

Phase 2
ENGAGE ON
THEIR TERMS

Communities generate enormous amounts of original content. Fan art, fiction, edits, reviews, memes, playlists, tutorials and analysis. This is not supplementary material. It is the infrastructure of community life and is deeply personal and highly valued.

What does this look like in practice?

Build creator collaboration into the brief from day one, not as an amplification add-on at the end. The community creates it, the brand platforms it, the creator is credited and paid. When the community shapes the work, acknowledge their involvement to earn the community's trust in return.

Brand Example

Vaseline Verified tested consumer Vaseline hacks from social media to help validate them as effective. Off the back of the campaign, Unilever created products such as an eyebrow tamer and a hair stick based on how real customers were using it. Those who inspired the products were given affiliate links to allow them to profit off the products they helped create.



"I think if the brand is using something fan created or fan made, it has to be very clear...you can't monetise someone's creativity where they've been inspired by something and not give them that credit."

- 25-34, FEMALE, MUSIC, EXPRESSIVE

1in3

create content
relating to their
community or
fandom



PHASE THREE:

Making It Last

Brands the commit long-term will gain protection, advocacy and loyalty from communities.

When a brand becomes woven into community fabric through sustained presence, members move from tolerating your involvement to advocating for it.

Community members will recommend you, defend you and choose you over competitors, not just on product or service quality alone, but because you have proven you care about their space.

Phase Three shows you how to earn belonging by shifting from outsider to ally.

Stop being seen as 'a brand that advertises to us' and start being seen as 'a brand that supports us'

Why this is worth the investment

Communities remember patterns, not moments. Whether the community has 500 members or 5 million, whether it emerged last year or has existed for decades, what matters is showing up consistently.

Let Quiet
Action Do The
Talking

RULE 9

RULE 8

Go Grassroots, Not
Just High-profile

RULE 10

How Up For
The Long Term

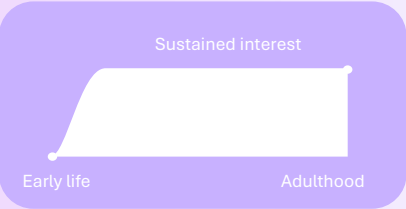
ENGAGEMENT RARELY A STRAIGHT LINE

The relationship between a person and their community is rarely a straight line. People step away and return, shift between communities as their lives change, and spike in encouragement around content releases before drifting back to baseline. But the underlying sense of community identity and belonging rarely disappears, even when active participation does.

Understanding this non-linearity is essential for brands committed to long-term community presence.

A community that appears quiet today may be full of dormant members who will return at full intensity with the right trigger.

Fan journeys follow four recognisable patterns, each with its own rhythm and implications for when and how sustained brand commitment pays off.



Lifetime Supporter

Generational or early-life adoption, often inherited or culturally embedded. Devotees maintain high intensity for decades; Seekers will watch or follow casually but consistently.

"I've been a United fan since I was born basically, I started supporting them in the 70s when we were rubbish, we got relegated and I stuck with it... through thick and thin"

- 55-64, FEMALE

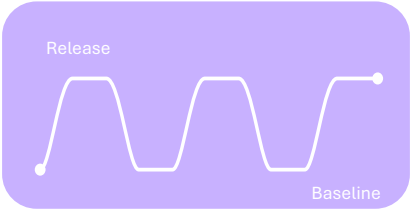


Serial Engagement

Always a fan of something, but the passion object rotates. Maintain fan identity while focus shifts sequentially between properties and communities. Devotees evangelise each new passion; Seekers browse multiple interests without deep commitment.

"I tend to hop between them over the years... there's no one particular fandom that I think defines me in terms of identity"

- 25-34, FEMALE

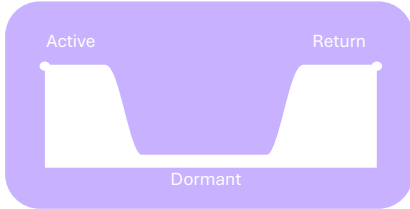


Phase-Cycler

Baseline interest with predictable intensity spikes tied to content releases. Devotees maintain status throughout, but expression varies with content cadence. Casual fans may only engage during new content windows.

"When they release new songs or anything that happens around them, that's very active. Then more passively engaging with the broader community on social media."

- 35-44, MALE



The Returner

Deep historical connection followed by dormancy, then reactivated by a trigger event. The fan identity doesn't disappear but hibernates. Seekers may return at low intensity; Devotees return at full intensity.

"I've always liked board games growing up... me and a friend bought a game called Pandemic and started playing it all the time. And then I've just become more and more interested."

- 35-44, FEMALE

THE PRICE OF BELONGING

Financial investment is one of the clearest signals of an underlying commitment to a community. Members who spend money on virtual assets, limited-edition merch, event tickets, equipment, subscriptions aren't just casual participants. They're committed for the longterm and are the audiences that brands with long term ambitions most need to understand.

But this financial investment exists alongside a structural tension. Rising costs are quietly pricing out newer, younger and less financially secure members, the very people who give communities their energy and longevity.

For brands committed to long-term presence, both realities require attention. Reward depth through exclusive content and limited collaborations that speak to the most financially committed members, while protecting accessibility through grassroots activations and free touchpoints that keep the community's doors open.

Honouring the financially invested while protecting accessibility for those who can't keep pace isn't a contradiction. It is a definition of a brand that genuinely cares about a community's long-term health.

34%

of collectors want brands to create platforms for them to share

32%

of Sci-fi community want exclusive content from brands

"Tickets are like four to five hundred pounds...travelling up and down the country to go. It's got bragging rights, kudos, social currency."

- 25-34, MALE, MUSIC, DEVOTEE

"I've never actually seen the UFC; it costs a bit too much unfortunately. Darts I've also never been to see live, although I'd love to. The tickets are just so unaffordable"

- 35-44, MALE, SPORTS FANS, SEEKER

Deep Dive RUN CLUBS

Run clubs have evolved far beyond a shared love of running; they've become a movement built around identity, community, and social connection. With nearly 600K searches in the past 12 months and over 104M TikTok views of #runclub, this community is highly active both on and offline. Subgroups range from casual social runners to dedicated Parkrun tourists and ultra-marathon competitors, each with their own rituals, language, and motivations. Many brands have tapped into this by providing products, facilitating events and supporting long term connections.

r/UKRunners
19M

Subreddit views
in past 12 months

60%
Exercise and fitness
community feel a
sense of belonging

'Run club'
597K

Searches in the UK
in past 12 months

More likely
to connect
through:

In person
Instagram

#runclub
104M

Views on TikTok
in past 12 months

Role for the
community:

A challenge
A sense of
achievement
Reducing stress

COMMUNITY LANGUAGE

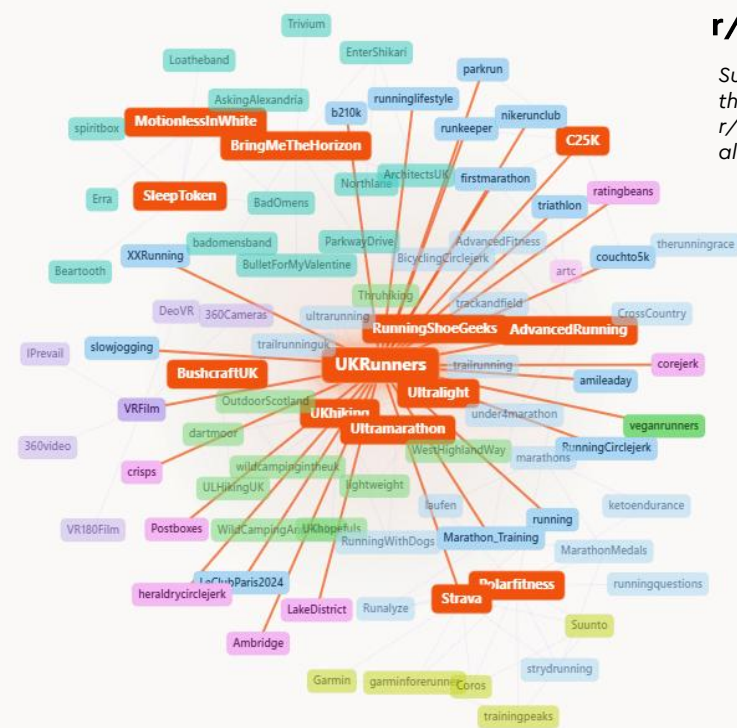
Sexy pace: A conversational,
low-intensity running pace

Runife:
Running selfie

GFA: Good
For Age

Bonking: Sudden, severe
fatigue caused by glycogen
depletion

Deadmill: Running on a
treadmill that is turned off

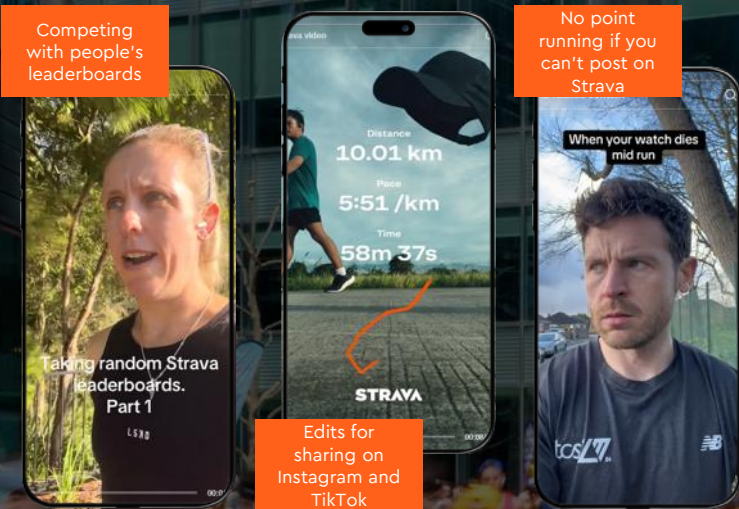


r/UKRunners
Subreddits that
those who post on
r/UKRunners are
also posting on

Deep Dive RUN CLUBS

Strava

Strava is more than a fitness tracker, it's a social platform with its own culture. The community is highly online, regularly cross-sharing routes and achievements across Instagram and TikTok.



Competing with people's leaderboards

No point running if you can't post on Strava

Edits for sharing on Instagram and TikTok



FRANCO MANCA X STRAVA

Franco Manca launched a 'Map my Pizza Run' campaign that encouraged people to run in the shape of a pizza to earn £1 off for every km run.



This tapped into a behaviour of creating images with running routes that already existed within the community and was seen as a positive engagement.

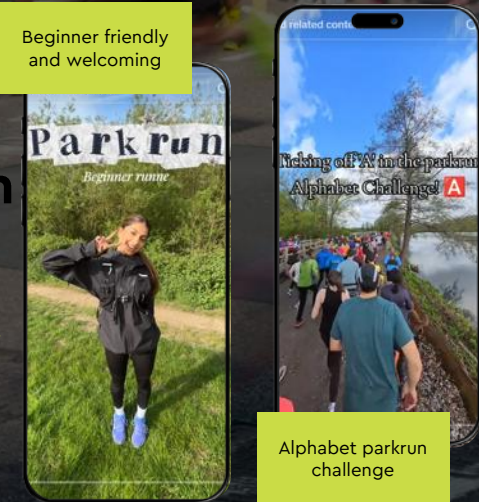
Parkrun

Parkrun has become a nationally recognised subgroup of the running community.

It focuses on inclusivity and encouraging anyone and everyone to get involved in running.

#ParkRun
55M

Views on TikTok in the UK in the past 12 months



Beginner friendly and welcoming

Alphabet parkrun challenge



NIKE X PARKRUN

On the other hand, Nike tried to hijack Peckham Rye Parkrun. The volunteers had not been made aware of the activation, and the content was extremely misaligned with the ethos of Parkrun.



"Imagine trying to take that away from them. Imagine trying to shame them for walking just for a bit of brand awareness."

KIRSTY WOODBRIDGE, A PARKRUN GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

BELOW THE SURFACE

Community depth isn't only expressed in what members spend – it's also expressed in what they give. Behind every thriving community is a layer of unglamorous, unpaid work that most members benefit from without even noticing. Alongside the fan artists, cosplayers and content creators, there also exists a quieter group, the Archive Builders.

These people appear across every community type, creating the guides, spreadsheets, wikis, moderation frameworks and admin systems that keep communities functional, navigable and welcoming. This labour is rarely credited, almost never paid and often invisible to brands entering community spaces, despite being the foundation upon which all engagement is built.

Supporting archive builders doesn't require large budgets, but it does require attention. Think covering server hosting costs for a community wiki, providing materials to a tutorial creator rather than commissioning branded output. In every case the principle is the same, meet the specific practical need rather than creating one shaped around brand objectives.

When brands support this layer of infrastructure, new members find their way in more easily and community knowledge becomes durable rather than dependent on a single person. Doing so also sends a signal to the wider community that the brand sees all its members, not just the most visible or commercially attractive ones. Communities notice when someone is looking after their own.

Behind the scenes...

I'm part of the university governing body, organising the registrations for basically every single university Ice Hockey club ever and deal with any queries and concerns"

- 18-24, FEMALE • SPORTS PARTICIPATION, SOCIALISER

"He's made guides for the last 10 years basically, and everyone uses his guides"

- 25-34, MALE • GAMING, DEVOTEE

"I'm trying to build a directory so people can start getting access to local services, grants and other types of funding"

- 55-64, MALE • LOCAL COMMUNITIES, SOCIALISER

"I run a couple of WhatsApp groups for local mums, keep them up to date with what's going on in the area"

- 25-34, FEMALE • PARENTING, SOCIALISER



NO DEAD ENDS

Campaigns end, trends fade, but communities persist. They pause, reshape, branch off and reactivate, but they don't stop.

The most familiar expression of this is reactivation. Members step away and return, often finding the community transformed but still alive. Communities that fold don't disappear. They hibernate and reignite without having to rebuild.

Communities also branch and multiply over time. A woodland group becomes a hiking club. A craft community spawns a choir. Shared interest creates the initial bond, and human connection does the rest.

Even when official content ends, fan communities sustain themselves. Creators fill the gaps through creative output, keeping conversations alive long after the source material has moved on. The community around a cancelled show can be more active than one around something that launched last month.

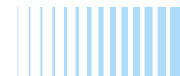
Understanding this reframes what long-term community investment means. While campaign spend has an endpoint, community investment compounds. Trust and relationships built today persist into the community's next form. When communities transform, brands that have genuinely embedded themselves don't lose their position, they carry it forward.

"Even when I've stopped playing for a year and then come back, it'll be as if I've never gone. It's something that keeps drawing me back, over and over again."

- 25-34, MALE, GAMING, DEVOTEE

"Through the craft group, I ended up joining the community choir. One thing leads to another."

- 55-64, FEMALE, HOBBIES, CONNECTOR



RULE 8: Go Grassroots, Not Just High-Profile

The instinct to associate with the most visible, prestigious tier of a community, the stadium naming rights, the superstar partnership, the headline sponsorship, is understandable. It is also frequently counterproductive. Community members consistently distinguish between investment that reaches them and investment that doesn't. Elite-level sponsorship that remains distant from actual participation feels transactional.

What does this look like in practice?

For every high-profile community partnership, consider a parallel grassroots activation at entry level.

Fund local clubs alongside a league sponsorship, support emerging artists and small venues alongside a festival headline deal, enable amateur tournaments and community streamers alongside a major title partnership. The grassroots strand need not match the headline deal in scale, but it must be real, sustained and directed towards participation rather than visibility.

Brand example

McDonald's has been the longest-standing supporter of grassroots football in the UK since 2002. Rather than only attaching its name to elite leagues, McDonald's delivers free football coaching to children aged 5-11 in local communities across the country. It works with British Blind Sport, UK Deaf Sport, and Access Sport to make sessions genuinely inclusive.

51%

feel brand involvement and support is necessary for groups to thrive

31%

say that brands sponsoring events makes them think more positively about them



"If brands were able to pivot and actually connect with people on the ground, I think if they did it right, it could be powerful and would be a better use of their money."

– 45-54, MALE, SPORTS FANS, CONNECTOR

RULE 9: Let Quiet Action Do the Talking

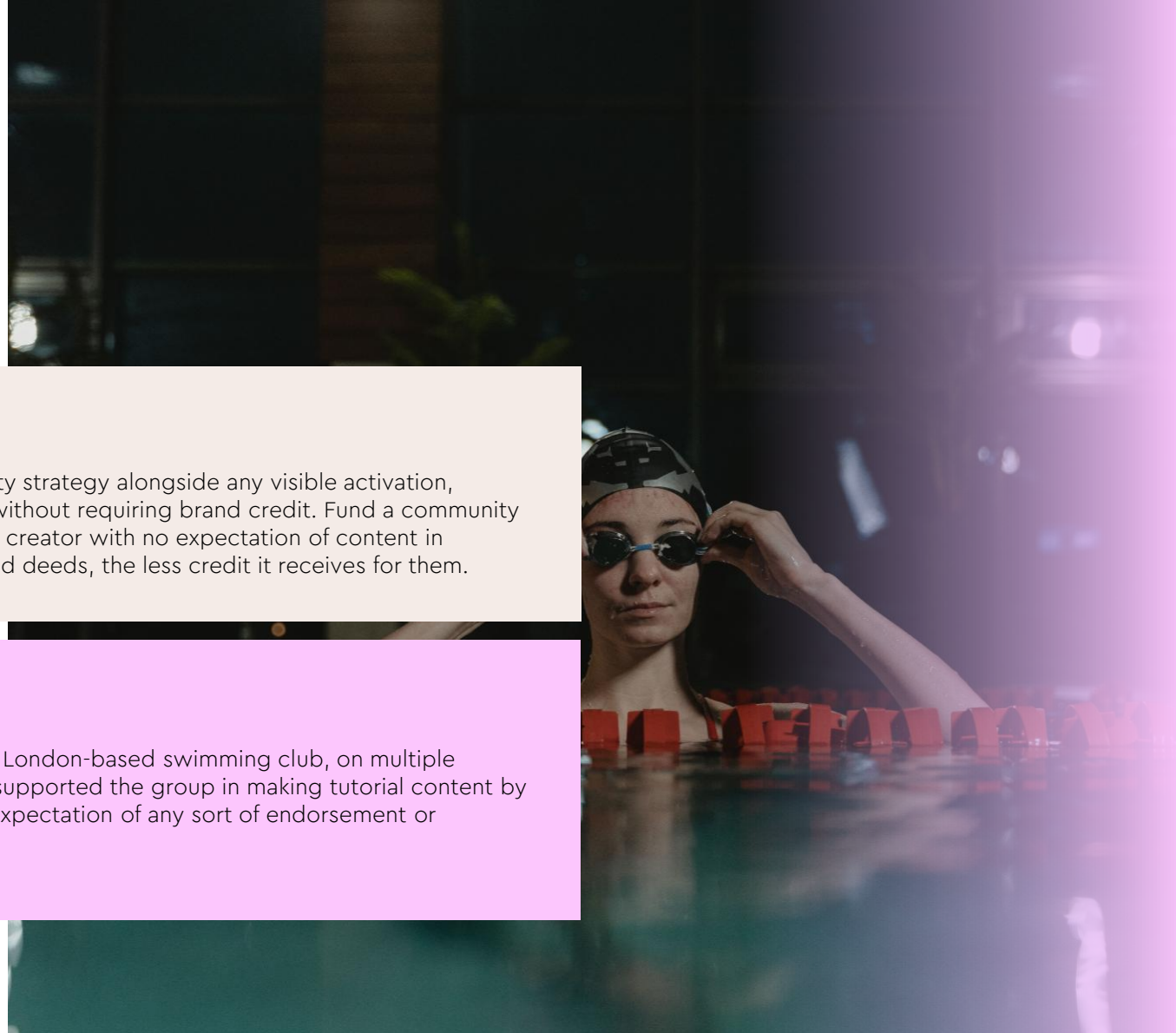
The most respected brand involvement in community spaces operates almost invisibly. The brands that generate the deepest affection are discovered through experience or word-of-mouth, not through press releases announcing their community credentials.

What does this look like in practice?

Build a quiet investment strand into community strategy alongside any visible activation, ongoing actions that benefit the community without requiring brand credit. Fund a community resource, provide space for events, support a creator with no expectation of content in return. The louder a brand announces its good deeds, the less credit it receives for them.

Brand example

Speedo have worked with SwimDem Crew, a London-based swimming club, on multiple campaigns. But behind the scenes, they also supported the group in making tutorial content by providing equipment and expertise, with no expectation of any sort of endorsement or recognition of brand involvement.



Phase 3
MAKE IT LAST

"Sainsbury's do that with City Hospice in Cardiff. Nearly every day a box of stuff arrives... and it's amazing... and you wouldn't know that from any advertising, I only know because I've seen it arrive. ...They don't have to advertise that they're doing it"

- 55-64, FEMALE, HOBBIES, CONNECTOR

"Even with our brand integration we wanted it to feel genuinely organic, bare minimum logo, a segment people can take part in for free. No one is being pushed into anything, that's exactly the balance we were after."

- BEN HYETT, SENIOR SPORTS PRODUCER, REACH

RULE 10: Show Up for the Long Term

Trust is not seen in a moment; rather it is demonstrated by patterns of behaviour. Communities are suspicious of brands that appear when a topic is culturally prominent and disappear when the moment passes - one of the most reliable signals of bad intent available. Genuine presence requires a time horizon that can be hard for brands to naturally accommodate. The community does not evaluate a brand on what it did during the campaign. It evaluates it on whether it was there before the campaign, and whether it is still there after.

What does this look like in practice?

Plan community engagement in years, not campaigns. Set objectives that include community health metrics such as trust levels, sentiment, creator relationships, alongside commercial ones. Build in a mechanism for sustaining presence during quiet periods, not just activating around peaks. The brands that earn the deepest community trust are often the ones that were there when the community was smaller, less visible and less commercially attractive.

Brand example

Launched in 2004, Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty is now over 20 years old, making it one of the longest-running brand community commitments in advertising history. In a landscape where most brands chase cultural moments, Dove has stayed on a single, consistent mission: challenging unrealistic beauty standards and building genuine self-confidence.



63%

are wary of brands that suddenly try to connect with groups they have previously ignored

Phase 3
MAKE IT LAST

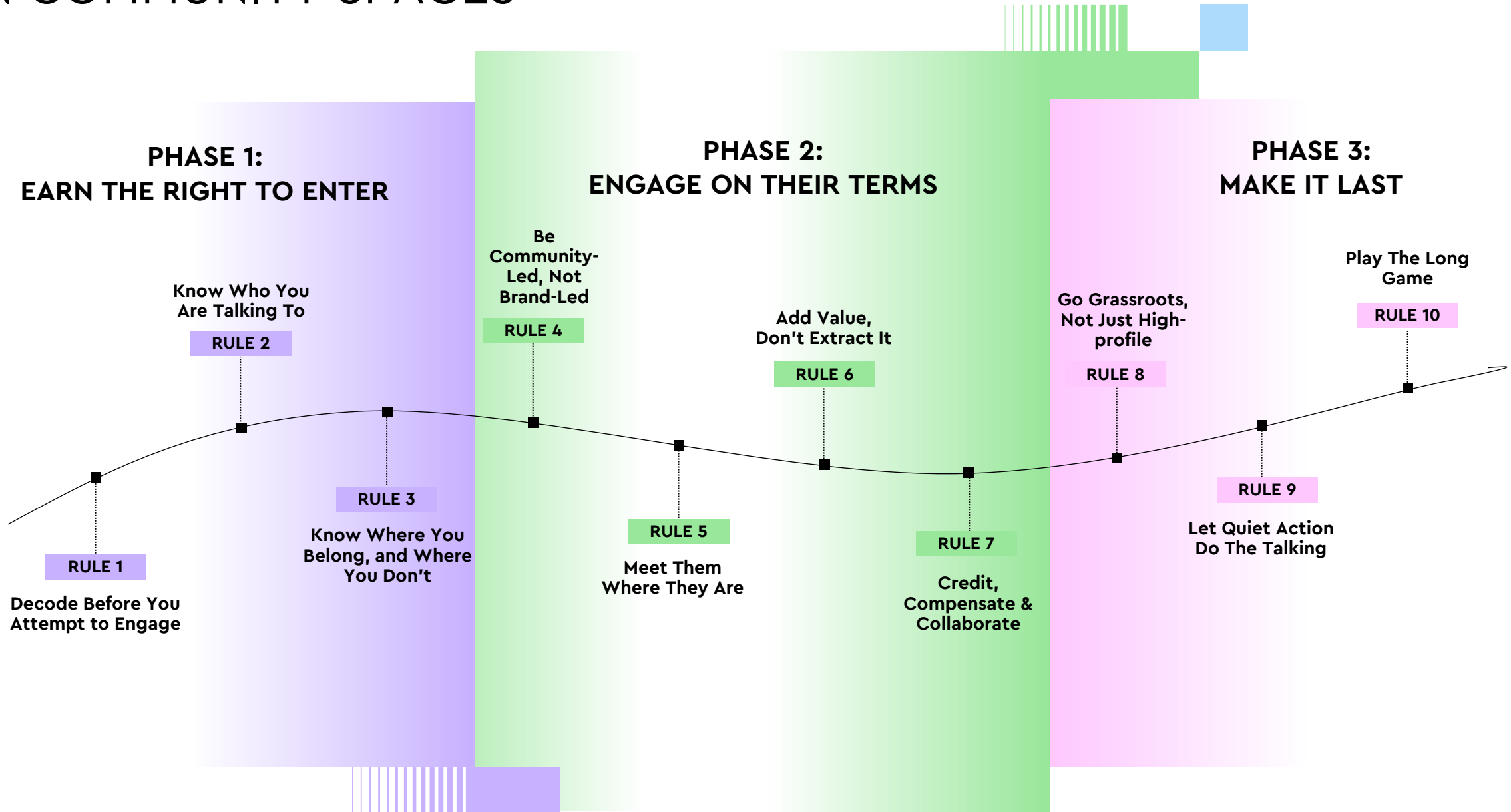
"I'd like to see long-term commitments to that and not just on the spot, that would create trust for me... It's quite clear what they're going to deliver... long-term, honest involvement is what counts."

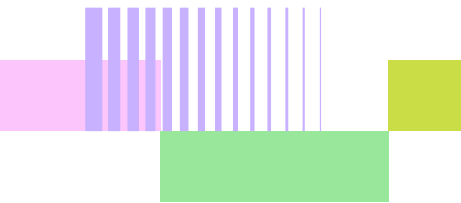
- 45-54, MALE, LOCAL COMMUNITY, CONNECTOR

"Long-term collaboration will pay off so much more than a short-term hit. Just a three-year plan — to really integrate yourself with someone that believes in you, and you believe in them. Short-term campaigns are just such a bad move for big brands that can actually afford to take a risk."

- BEN HYETT, SENIOR SPORTS PRODUCER, REACH

A PLAYBOOK FOR BRANDS IN COMMUNITY SPACES





HOW OUR RESEARCH CAN SUPPORT BRAND INVOLVEMENT

Phase 1:
Earn The Right

01

**Community Fit
Scorecard**

A templated scorecard using Common Ground and WPP proprietary sources including BAV to understand potential community belonging and alignment opportunities for your brand.

02

Community Audit

Tapping into the wealth of existing information from Common Ground, alongside digital ethnography to decode chosen community signals.

Phase 2:
Engage On Their Terms

03

**Co-creation and
Community
Testing**

Engaging with community members to test, workshop and stretch collaboration opportunities. From short online ethnographies through to in-person workshops.

04

**Community
Heuristics**

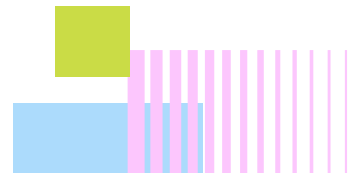
Analysing how successfully a brief or concept is aligning against the key rules for your specific community. Experts assess the brief against a framework to identify possible risks and enhancements.

Phase 3:
Make it last

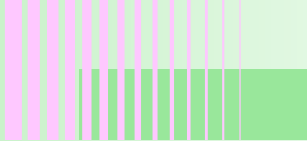
05

**Community
Response
Evaluation**

Evaluate community response to the activation post launch, using qualitative, quantitative and digital ethnography approaches. What's working, what needs refining?



METHODOLOGY



Large scale 25-minute
online survey with a
nationally representative
sample of n=5,000, using
Yonder fieldwork.

Fieldwork
February 2026

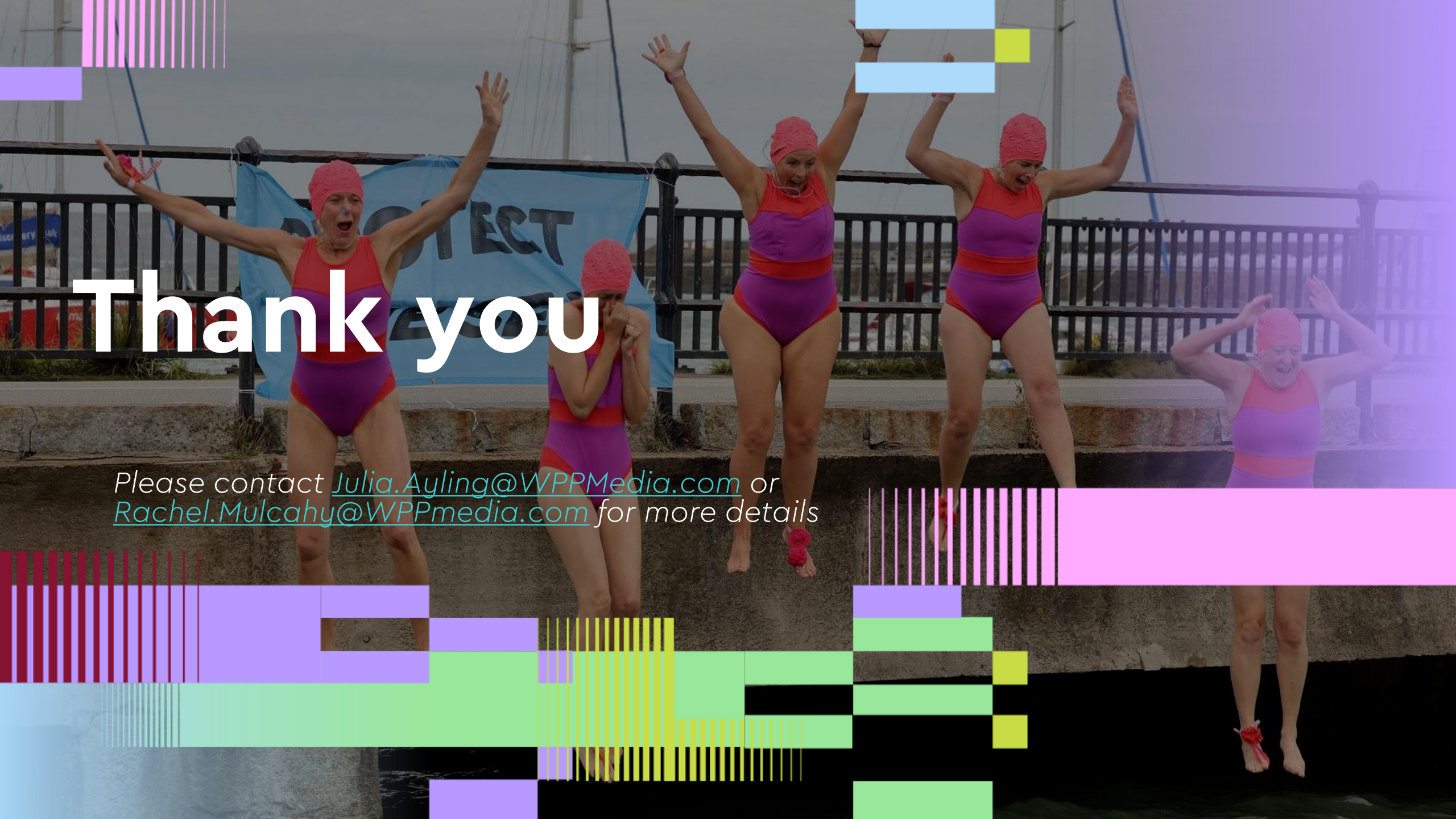
Extensive qualitative and
ethnographic research

GENRE LED GROUPS	9 Groups
COMMUNITY FRIENDSHIP TRIADS	8 interviews
BRAND FOCUSED MOBILE ETHNO	20 Participants
DIVERSITY STANDARDS COLLECTIVE	2 councils

Digital ethnography and
expert interviews

Additional datasets and
opinions provided by Spotify,
Acast, Mumsnet and Reach





Thank you

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Rachel.Mulcahy@WPPmedia.com for more details