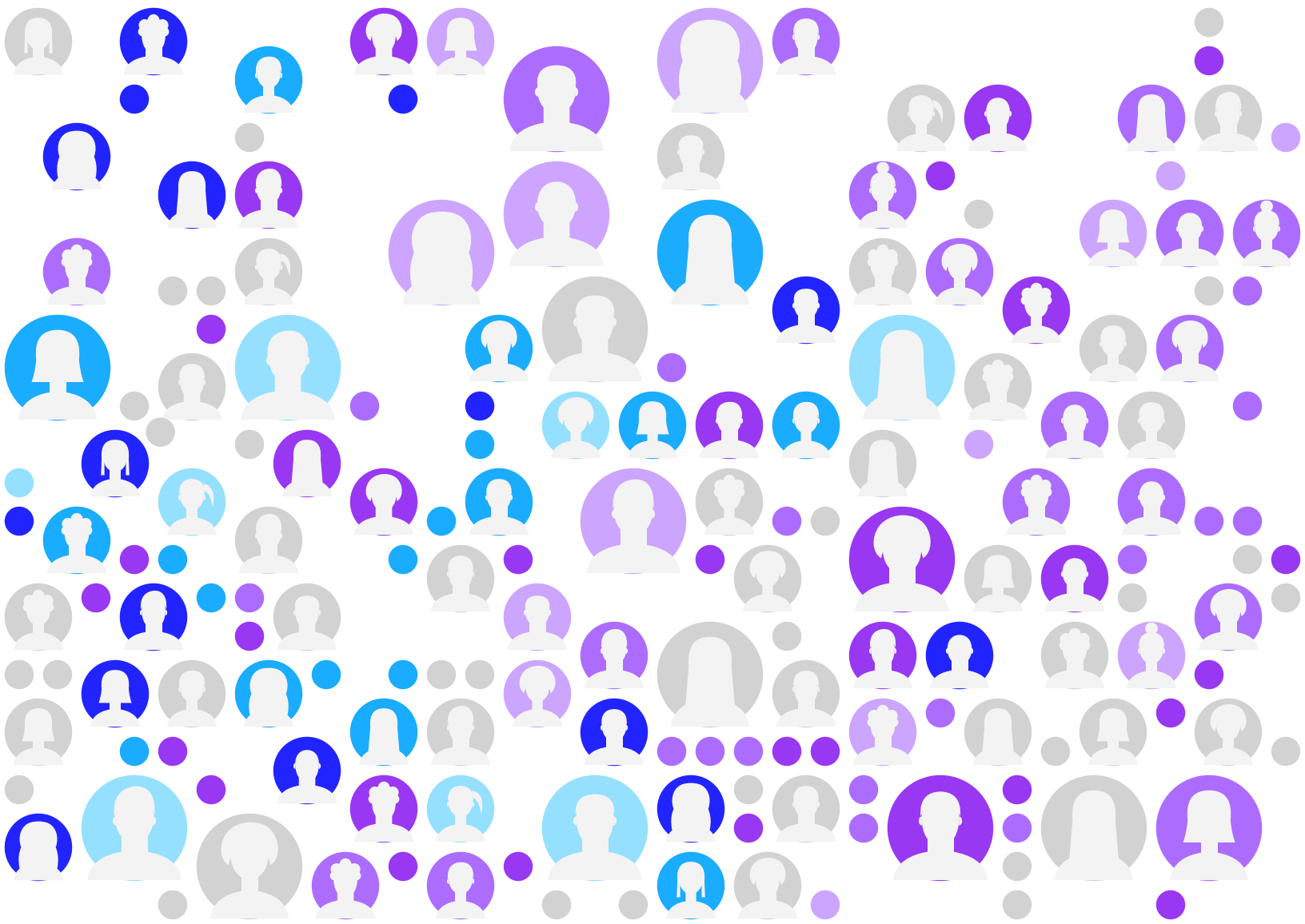


The State of Influencer & Celebrity Marketing





In this report

This study provides an in-depth look at how Americans follow creators, assess endorsements and respond to potential brand partners. The report is broken into two sections. The first gauges the state of influencers, celebrity following and endorsements. The second evaluates the most popular figures in the culture today, both testing a list of 90 names and providing open-ended space.

Part 1: The state of endorsements

- Key takeaways
- 01 The landscape
- 02 Purchasing: discovery and conversion
- 03 Trust
- 04 Who persuades
- 05 Where endorsements are wanted
- 06 AI influencers

Part 2: The most popular celebrities and influencers

- 07 Celebrity popularity
- 08 Endorsement value
- 09 Who Gen Z, men and women like more
- 10 Spokesperson fit by category
- 11 Unprompted favorites: celebrities
- 12 Unprompted favorites: influencers
- 13 Unprompted favorites: the shape of the lists
- 14 Unprompted favorites: brands
- Appendix: method and questions

Study at a glance

6,283

U.S. adults surveyed Sept. 17 to 22, 2026; margin of error ± 1 point for the full sample

90

Celebrities and creators tested for favorability and purchase lift, each by a third of respondents



Key takeaways

1 Trust in influencers is rising among younger consumers

64% of Gen Z and 63% of millennials trust influencers they follow, against 49% of all adults. Trust among these ages is up 13 points since 2019.

2 For Gen Z, influencer posts now rival search on product discovery

67% of Gen Z and 60% of millennials bought a product because a well-known influencer endorsed it. For Gen Z, creator posts (33%) now rival online search (37%) as the main way to find new products.

3 Adam Sandler is the most valuable endorsement, overall and with Gen Z

42% of adults would be more likely to use a brand Sandler endorsed and 10% less likely, a net lift of +32. Among Gen Z, Rihanna, Sandler and Zendaya tie at about +40.

4 Nike completely dominates on positive brand partnership recall

When asked to name a brand whose celebrity or influencer partnership they liked, Nike drew 11 times more responses than the next closest brand (Pepsi).

5 Traditional celebrities continue to maintain far broader appeal than creators

The single most favorably viewed influencer or creator (Sean Evans) ranks behind 46 more traditional celebrities. While celebrities have crossed over to become successful influencers, no one who came up as an influencer has reached the upper echelons of mainstream celebrity appeal.

6 Men follow a narrower set of (mostly male) influencers

33% of men cluster on the same 10 influencers when asked who their favorite follow is. Just 15% of women name the top 10, highlighting how much more sprawling their list is.

7 Authenticity is what makes an endorsement convert

Endorsers who use the product (62%), seem honest (61%) or know the category (60%) move six in 10; fame (40%) moves four in 10.

8 Appetite for AI influencers is already slipping

30% of U.S. adults say they are at least somewhat likely to follow an AI influencer, down 6 points from last year. As Americans get more familiar with AI, it's not necessarily persuading them these accounts are the future.

9 Consumers are most interested in seeing endorsements for food and fashion

About half of adults would find an endorsement useful for food (48%), restaurants (48%) and clothing (46%); one in four or fewer say so for finance (25%), betting (23%) or insurance (21%).



PART 1

The Influencer & Endorsement Landscape

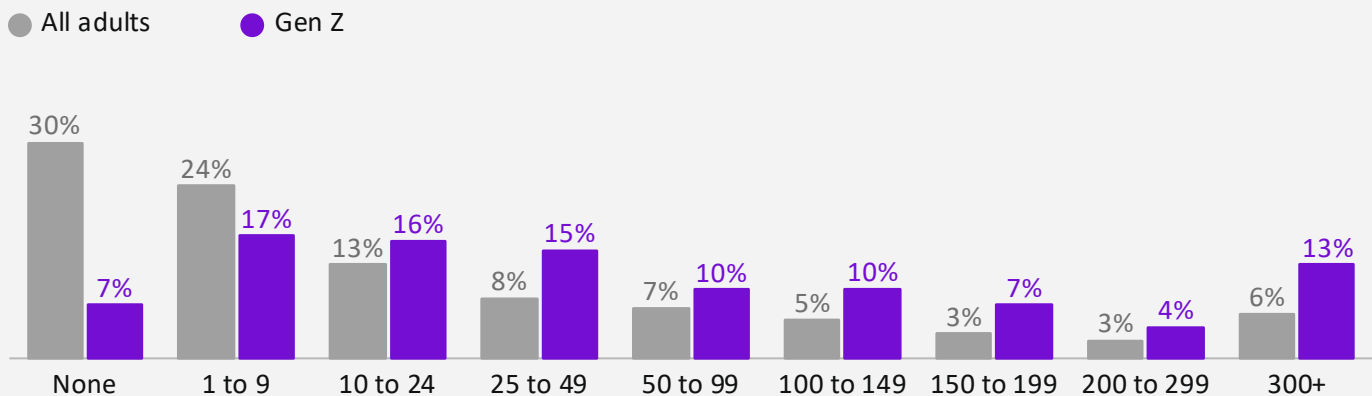


Seven in 10 adults follow at least one creator, and the average Gen Zer follows dozens

- Creator marketing is a mass channel, not a niche one: 70% of adults follow at least one influencer or creator, and among Gen Z almost everyone does (93%).
- Attention is spread thin. 44% of Gen Z follow 50 or more creators and 17% follow 200 or more, so one creator is a sliver of any feed and several mid-size voices cover an audience better than one.
- YouTube is where the most people follow creators, in every generation; for Gen Z it edges Instagram and TikTok. Following is near-universal where young people already spend time: 85% of Gen Z TikTok and Instagram users follow a creator there.
- Creator content is a general-interest medium, not a style channel: among followers, food (51%), comedy (47%) and movies and TV (43%) lead, and news and politics (34%) outranks fashion (31%). Gaming and sports skew male; fashion and lifestyle skew female.

13% of Gen Zers follow over 300 influencers or creators

Share of each group that say they follow that many influencers or creators



YouTube leads every generation; Facebook holds second only among adults over 30

Share of each group who follow at least one influencer or creator on the platform

	All adults	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X
YouTube	52%	78%	67%	50%
Facebook	46%	52%	61%	49%
Instagram	42%	71%	59%	33%
TikTok	37%	70%	50%	30%
X (Twitter)	21%	37%	30%	16%
Snapchat	20%	43%	29%	13%
Twitch	14%	33%	20%	7%

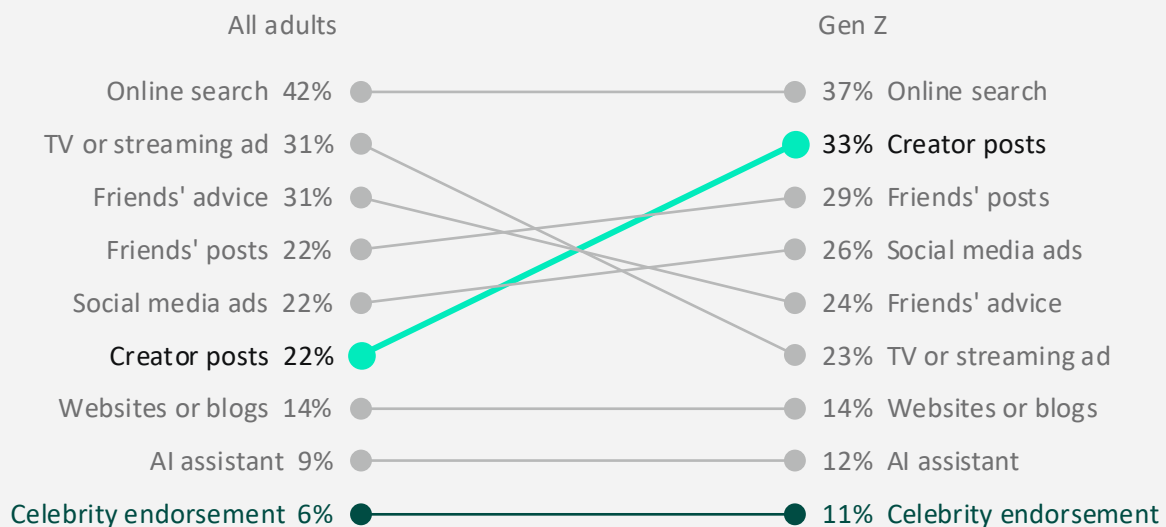


For Gen Z, creator posts now rival search as the way to find new products

- Creator posts are Gen Z's second-biggest route to new products, four points behind search and ahead of TV ads, which fall from second place among all adults to sixth. For young shoppers, creator feeds now do the job TV does for everyone else.
- Two in three Gen Z adults and three in five millennials bought something a creator endorsed in the past year; endorsement-driven buying is mainstream under 45 and a minority behavior beyond it.
- Smaller creators convert buyers as often as famous ones, so a budget spread across several mid-size creators buys the same conversion with reach into more niches.

Where people most often learn about new products, ranked: all adults vs. Gen Z

Share naming each source among their top three

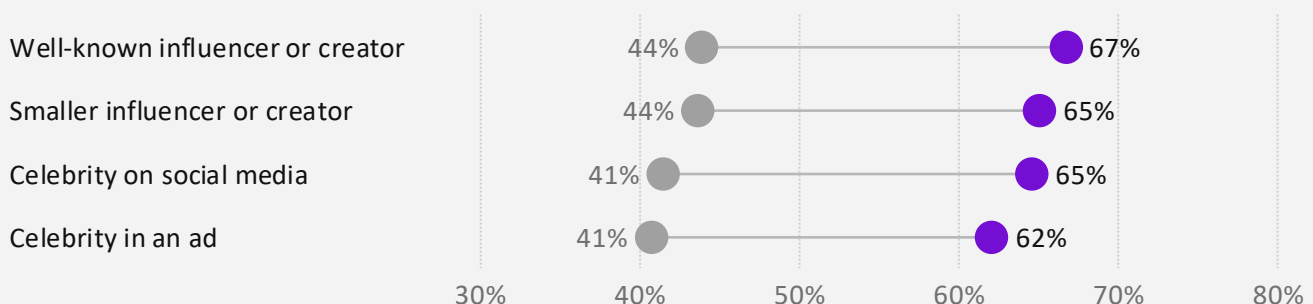


Smaller creators convert buyers as often as famous ones

Share who bought a product in the past 12 months because of each type of endorsement. About four in 10 Gen Z and millennial men bought several times, vs. 26% to 30% of women their age.

● All adults

● Gen Z



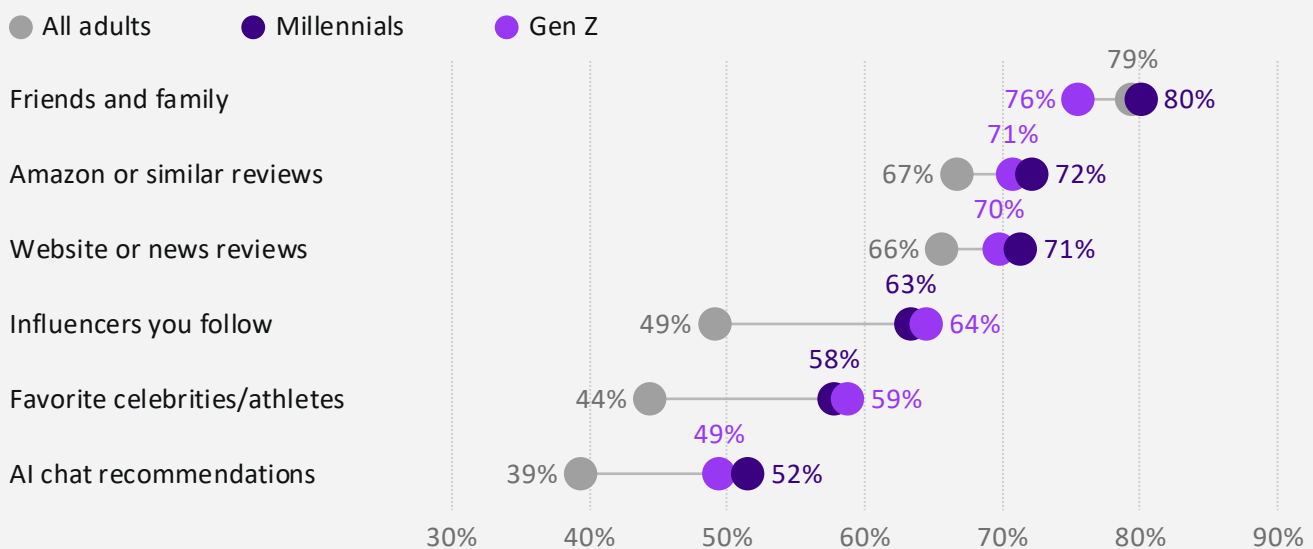


Trust in creators has climbed since 2019, but friends and reviews still rank higher for purchasing influence

- Most adults continue to rank influencers below friends and product reviews when deciding what to buy. Influencers match or edge celebrities in every generation; choose between them on reach and fit, not credibility.
- Among Gen Z and millennials, the gap between a friend's recommendation and a creator's shrank from 33 points in 2019 to 15; creators are nearing word-of-mouth status with this group.
- Men trust every source more than women do, AI chat most of all: brands selling to women need proof alongside the face, and AI assistants are becoming a recommendation channel of their own.

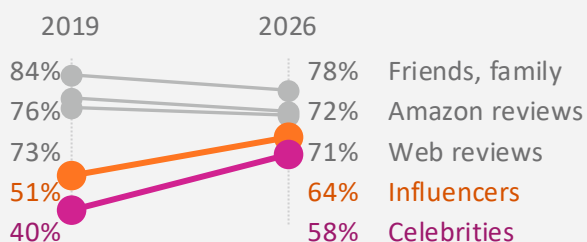
Gen Z and millennials trust creators about 15 points more than the general public does

Share trusting recommendations from each source "a lot" or "some" when deciding what to buy



Since 2019, trust in influencers rose 13 points and trust in celebrities 18

Gen Z and millennials. 2019: ages 13 to 38.



Men trust creators, celebrities and AI chat more than women do

	Creator	Celebrity	AI chat
Gen Z men	67%	62%	56%
Gen Z women	62%	56%	43%
Millennial men	68%	63%	59%
Millennial women	58%	52%	44%



Authenticity is the key to a successful endorsement

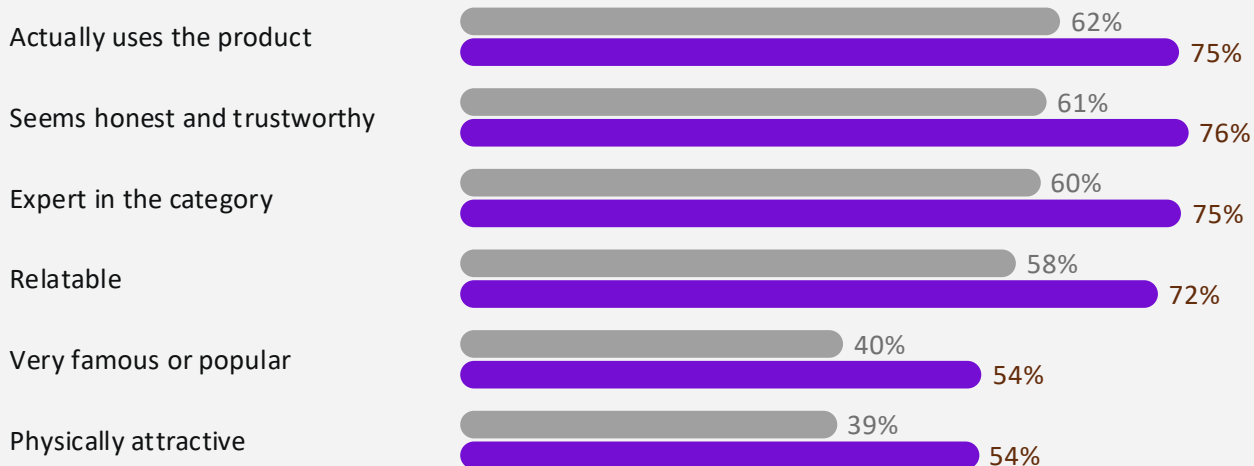
- An endorser who actually uses the product, seems honest or knows the category makes six in 10 adults more likely to buy.
- Skepticism and persuasion coexist: 64% say endorsers only say good things because they are paid, yet 56% of Gen Z and millennials are more willing to try a brand after one. People discount the pitch and act on it anyway.
- Casting has a downside too: 51% of Gen Z think worse of a brand when someone they dislike endorses it. Creator or celebrity, famous or niche, the four convert alike; the differences are reach and recall, measured name by name in Part 2.

What makes people more likely to buy a product an influencer recommends

Share saying each trait makes them "much" or "somewhat" more likely to buy

● All adults

● Gen Z



Two-thirds assume endorsers are paid to be positive; young adults act on them anyway

All adults agreeing or disagreeing with each statement

● Strongly agree

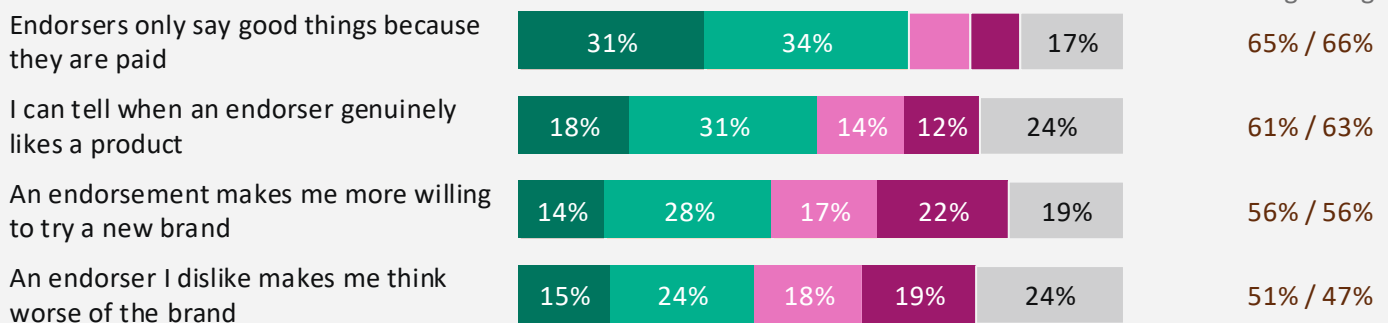
● Somewhat agree

● Somewhat disagree

● Strongly disagree

● Don't know

Gen Z / millennials
agreeing





Endorsements are most welcome in food and fashion, least in sports betting and insurance

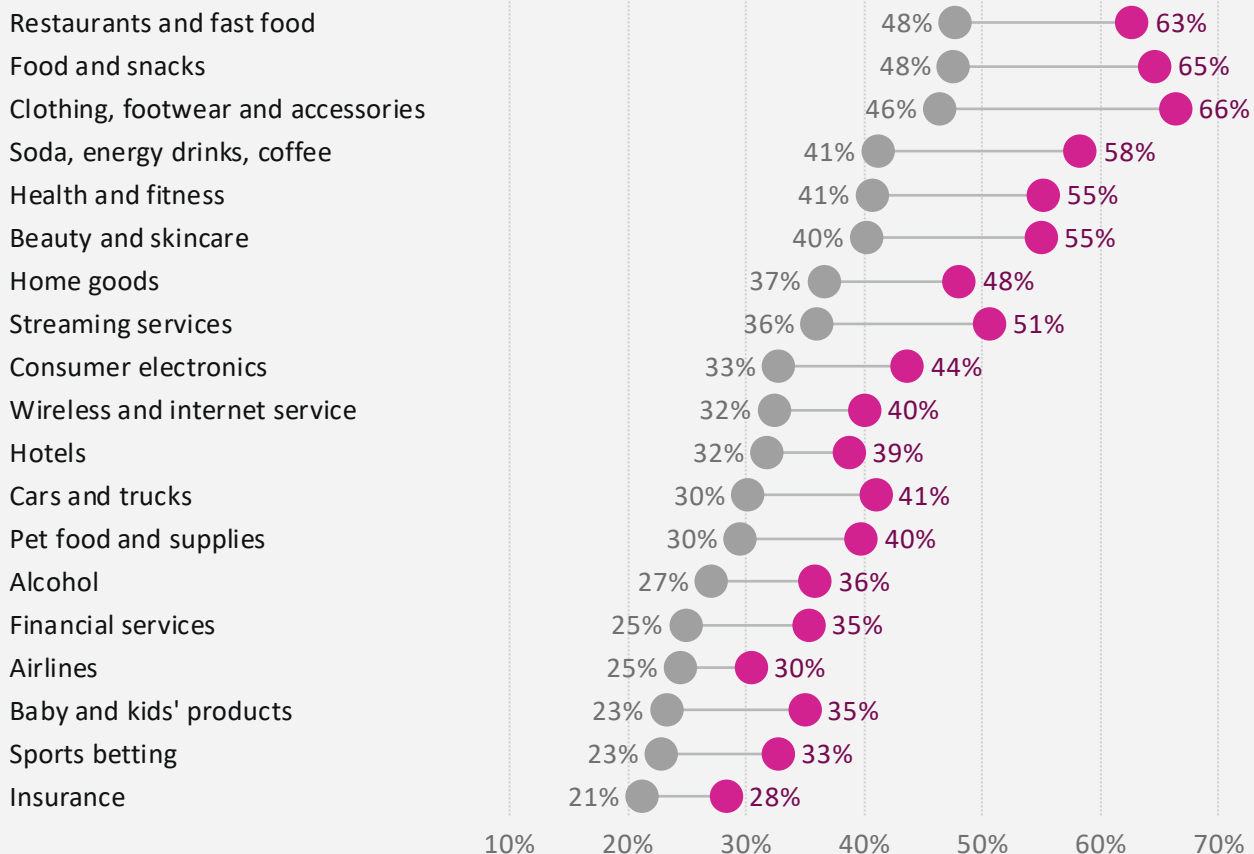
- About half of adults would find a recommendation useful for food, restaurants and clothing; one in five say so for insurance and sports betting.
- Gen Z runs 10+ points higher in nearly every category, with apparel being the standout: Gen Z is 20 points more likely to say a celebrity or influencer recommendation is useful for clothing, footwear and accessories.
- Appetite is gendered: beauty (64% of Gen Z women vs. 46% of Gen Z men) and baby products (46% vs. 24%) are women's categories; sports betting (46% of millennial men vs. 21% of millennial women), alcohol and cars are men's.

Would you find a celebrity or influencer recommendation useful in each category?

Share saying yes

● All adults

● Gen Z





Interest in AI influencers slipped over the past year, but AI chat recommendations already rival celebrity trust

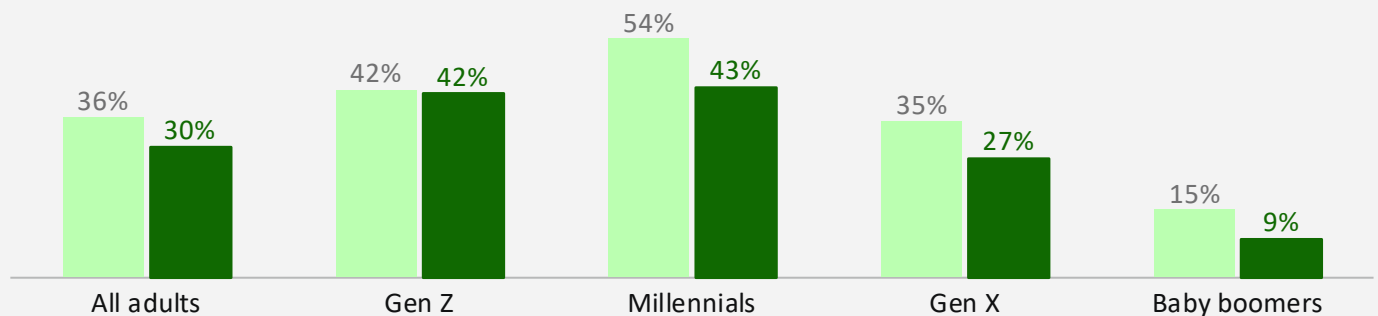
- The share of adults likely to follow an AI-generated influencer fell from 36% to 30% between August 2025 and September 2026, and millennials dropped from 54% to 43%. Gen Z held steady at 42%.
- 39% of adults trust AI chat recommendations, within five points of favorite celebrities, and 9% of adults (12% of Gen Z and millennials) already name an AI assistant as a main way they discover products.
- Women are cooler than men on all things AI: 23% of women would follow an AI influencer vs. 37% of men, and 34% trust AI chat vs. 45% for men.

Likelihood of following an AI-generated influencer, 2025 vs. 2026

Share "very" or "somewhat" likely

● August 2025

● September 2026



Men are warmer to AI than women on every measure

Share of each gender

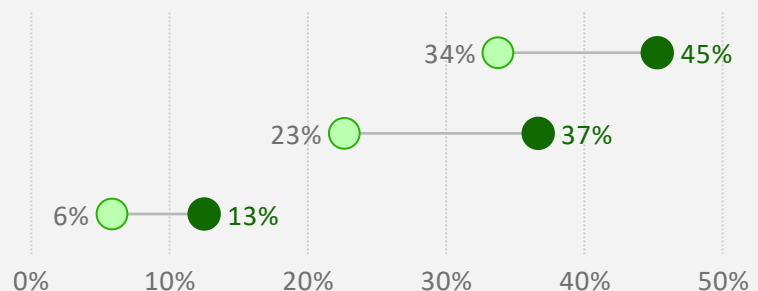
● Women

● Men

Trust AI chat recommendations

Likely to follow an AI-generated influencer

Discover products via an AI assistant





PART 2

The Most Popular Celebrities and Influencers



Ranking the popularity of 90 celebrities and influencers

Actors
 Musicians
 Athletes
 Comedians
 Creators and streamers
 Podcasts and media
 Reality, lifestyle and business

Sorted by net favorability (Fav). Lift = more likely minus less likely to use the endorsed brand.

	Fav	Lift		Fav	Lift		Fav	Lift
Denzel Washington	+55	+31	Caitlin Clark	+24	+11	Oprah Winfrey	+10	+5
Samuel L. Jackson	+51	+24	LeBron James	+22	+11	Addison Rae	+10	+6
Adam Sandler	+50	+32	Tom Brady	+21	+12	Zach King	+10	+5
Tom Hanks	+49	+26	Taylor Swift	+21	+9	IShowSpeed	+9	+7
Dwayne Johnson	+47	+25	Amy Poehler	+21	+9	Bad Bunny	+9	+2
Jennifer Aniston	+45	+27	Kendrick Lamar	+20	+12	Keith Lee	+9	+7
Michael Jordan	+45	+27	Cristiano Ronaldo	+19	+12	Theo Von	+9	+6
Kelly Clarkson	+44	+23	Pedro Pascal	+19	+12	Dude Perfect	+9	+7
Matthew McConaughey	+42	+22	Jason Kelce	+19	+9	Mel Robbins	+9	+6
Reese Witherspoon	+40	+22	Patrick Mahomes	+19	+10	Nate Bargatze	+8	+5
Kevin Hart	+39	+20	Mark Cuban	+17	+8	Kai Cenat	+8	+7
Ryan Reynolds	+39	+22	Ariana Grande	+17	+9	Stephen A. Smith	+7	+4
Snoop Dogg	+38	+23	Billie Eilish	+17	+11	Emma Chamberlain	+7	+7
Adele	+37	+21	Sabrina Carpenter	+17	+11	Drake	+6	+5
Selena Gomez	+37	+21	Lionel Messi	+17	+10	Marques Brownlee	+6	+5
Peyton Manning	+36	+19	Morgan Wallen	+16	+10	Hannah Neeleman	+6	+3
Jennifer Lawrence	+36	+20	Sean Evans	+16	+7	Livvy Dunne	+6	+4
Jennifer Garner	+36	+24	Sydney Sweeney	+15	+7	Valkyrae	+6	+5
Steve Harvey	+35	+15	Shohei Ohtani	+15	+9	Andrew Huberman	+5	+5
George Clooney	+34	+16	Gwyneth Paltrow	+14	+6	Dave Portnoy	+4	+5
Lady Gaga	+33	+15	Travis Kelce	+14	+5	Hailey Bieber	+4	+1
Zendaya	+33	+19	Druski	+14	+7	Alix Earle	+4	+4
Bruno Mars	+32	+20	Joe Rogan	+14	+6	Charli D'Amelio	+3	+3
Leonardo DiCaprio	+32	+14	Timothée Chalamet	+12	+5	Mikayla Nogueira	+3	+2
Stephen Curry	+32	+15	Beyoncé	+12	+6	Charlamagne tha God	+2	+0
Rihanna	+30	+19	Alex Cooper	+12	+7	Justin Bieber	+2	+2
Serena Williams	+28	+15	Pat McAfee	+11	+8	Adin Ross	+2	+2
Simone Biles	+28	+14	MrBeast	+11	+5	Kylie Jenner	-6	-3
Martha Stewart	+27	+20	Coco Gauff	+10	+8	Jake Paul	-9	-7
Post Malone	+26	+16	Shane Gillis	+10	+6	Kim Kardashian	-18	-11



Martha Stewart converts favorability into purchase intent best

- By and large, net favorability and endorsement impact move together. The most well-liked celebrities are also the ones that consumers look to for product endorsements. However, there are key differences worth understanding.
- Adam Sandler has the top-ranking purchase lift, but Martha Stewart, Jennifer Garner and Rihanna convert an even higher share of their goodwill into intent; all three have brands or long-running campaigns of their own.
- George Clooney, Lady Gaga, Leonardo DiCaprio and Steve Harvey are liked about as much but convert under half of that goodwill into lift. Prestige without a shopping association is pleasant to see and easy to ignore.

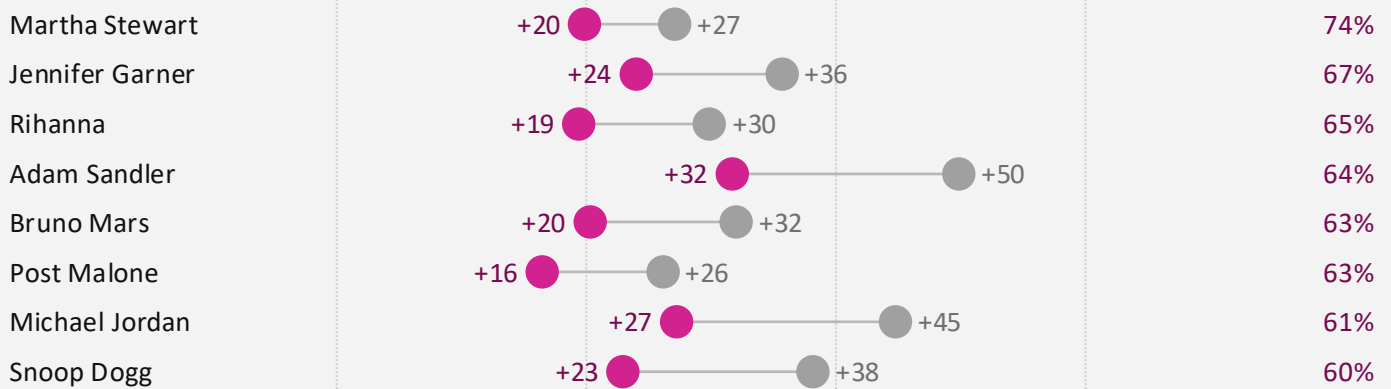
The eight best and eight weakest converters among well-liked names

Names with net favorability of +25 or better, all adults; converted = lift as a share of favorability

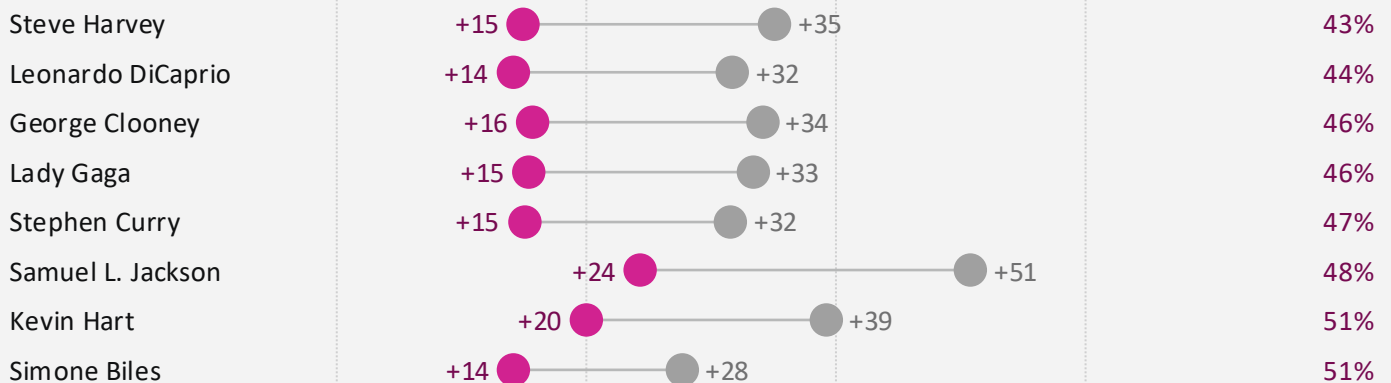
● Net favorability

● Net purchase lift

Best converters



Weakest converters



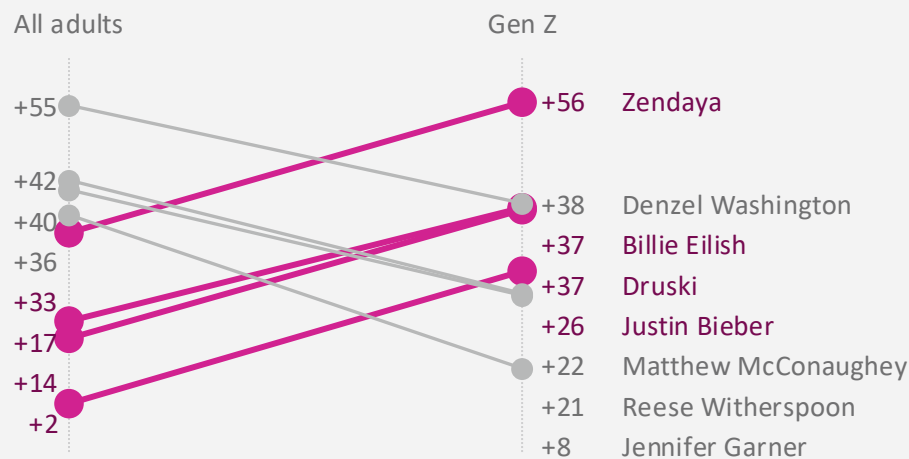


Zendaya, Snoop Dogg and Adam Sandler lead with Gen Z; Tom Brady divides men and women most

- Gen Z's overall favorites are Zendaya (+56), Snoop Dogg (+53), Adam Sandler (+50). With this generation, Justin Bieber, Zendaya, Druski and Billie Eilish have the highest ratings relative to all adults.
- Tom Brady and Sydney Sweeney are the two most gender-divisive celebrities, as men post far more favorable opinions of them. Kelly Clarkson and Adele are the two names that women rate most favorably relative to men.

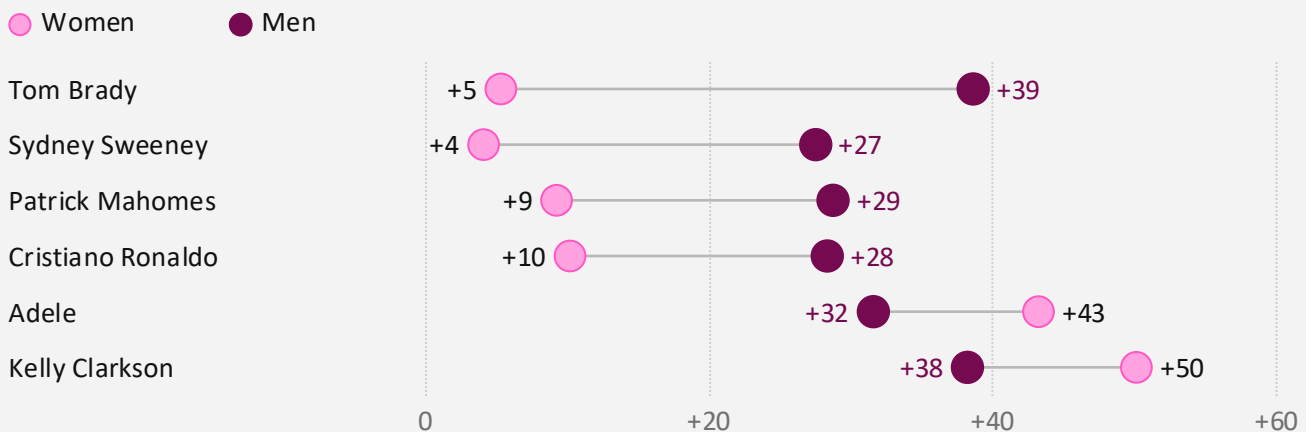
Biggest shifts in net favorability from all adults to Gen Z

The four names Gen Z rates highest relative to all adults, and the four it rates lowest



The widest gaps between men and women in net favorability

Net favorability among men and among women





Spokesperson-category fit: Mapping how prominent celebrities match up on 10 major advertising categories

- Asked which of 12 names would be a fitting spokesperson, adults gave clear answers in only a few categories: Rihanna for beauty (45%) and fashion (40%), LeBron James for sports betting (39%), Matthew McConaughey for cars (33%).
- Fit tracks existing associations more than popularity: McConaughey leads cars after a decade of Lincoln ads and edges the field on beer, Peyton Manning leads insurance, LeBron James soft drinks and sports betting. A name's general favorability says little about which category it can carry.
- Among Gen Z, Zendaya overtakes Rihanna on beauty (51% vs. 48%) and LeBron James reaches 48% on sports betting.

Share of adults naming each person a fitting spokesperson for the category

	Cars	Insurance	Beauty	Wireless	Fast food	Soft drinks	Beer	Credit cards	Fashion	Sports betting
Rihanna	9%	9%	45%	14%	13%	18%	8%	13%	40%	7%
Zendaya	7%	8%	34%	13%	13%	17%	7%	12%	33%	6%
LeBron James	22%	16%	6%	17%	19%	21%	18%	18%	12%	39%
Travis Kelce	23%	14%	5%	15%	18%	17%	25%	12%	9%	28%
Matthew McConaughey	33%	22%	6%	22%	17%	18%	29%	22%	15%	15%
Peyton Manning	25%	24%	6%	21%	19%	20%	24%	20%	9%	32%
George Clooney	21%	20%	7%	19%	14%	14%	21%	24%	16%	12%
Sydney Sweeney	8%	8%	25%	12%	11%	14%	8%	11%	23%	8%
Morgan Wallen	17%	10%	5%	10%	11%	11%	20%	10%	8%	8%
Shane Gillis	9%	7%	4%	8%	11%	9%	12%	7%	5%	7%
Hailey Bieber	7%	7%	30%	11%	10%	14%	6%	9%	25%	5%
Gwyneth Paltrow	7%	9%	29%	11%	9%	11%	6%	13%	24%	5%
None of these	31%	39%	24%	38%	39%	35%	30%	37%	24%	30%

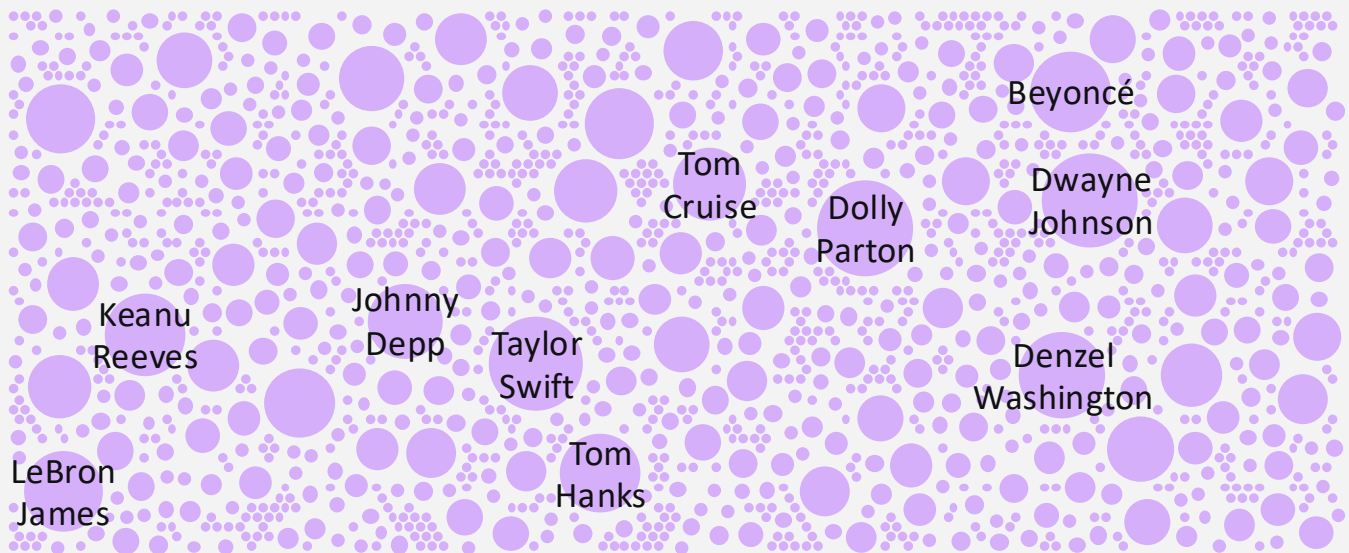


Asked to name their favorite celebrity, Taylor Swift, Dwayne Johnson and Dolly Parton tie

- A wide, diverse field: Of the 6,000 respondents asked, 4,871 adults named a favorite celebrity, and 1,428 different celebrities were named. The three most-named celebrities received only about 100 mentions.
- The survey was conducted three weeks after Dolly Parton's death, likely making the country icon top of mind for respondents.
- Musicians stand out for Gen Z: 6 of the 10 most mentioned celebrities for this cohort are musical artists, led by Beyoncé, Drake and Rihanna.

Visualizing every favorite celebrity named

Bubble area is the number of people who named that person; the 10 most-named are labeled



All adults: top 10

1. Dolly Parton (101)
2. Dwayne Johnson (101)
3. Taylor Swift (100)
4. Denzel Washington (84)
5. Keanu Reeves (75)
6. Beyoncé (72)
7. LeBron James (72)
8. Tom Hanks (71)
9. Johnny Depp (62)
10. Tom Cruise (58)

Gen Z: top 10

1. Beyoncé (26)
2. LeBron James (25)
3. Drake (18)
4. Rihanna (17)
5. Zendaya (16)
6. Dwayne Johnson (16)
7. Cardi B (15)
8. MrBeast (15)
9. Taylor Swift (14)
10. Selena Gomez (13)

Millennials: top 10

1. Dwayne Johnson (46)
2. Taylor Swift (43)
3. Beyoncé (33)
4. Keanu Reeves (32)
5. LeBron James (31)
6. Kevin Hart (27)
7. Johnny Depp (27)
8. MrBeast (25)
9. Jennifer Aniston (23)
10. Rihanna (22)

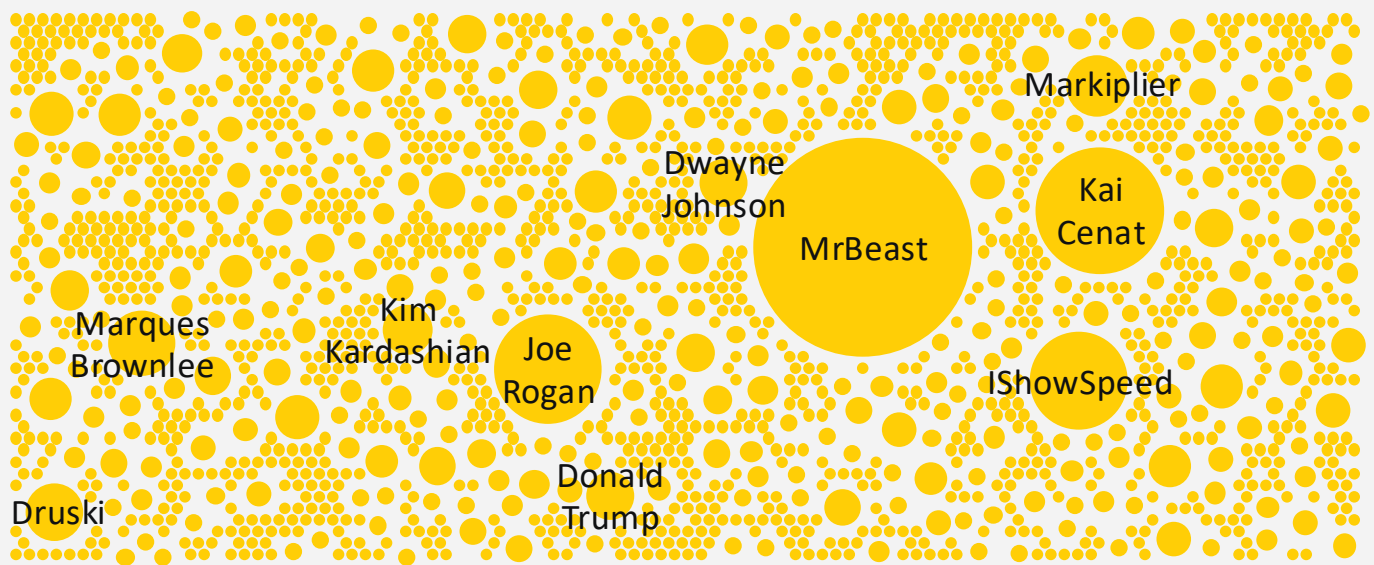


Asked for a favorite influencer, adults name MrBeast three times as often as anyone else

- MrBeast was named 316 times, Kai Cenat 107, and Joe Rogan 78. Outside that top three, the list scatters across 1,787 names, of which 1,482 were given just once.
- 16% named the same person as favorite celebrity and favorite influencer, and one in six "favorite influencer" answers is a traditional celebrity (such as Dwayne Johnson).

Visualizing every favorite influencer named

Bubble area is the number of people who named that creator; the 10 most-named are labeled



All adults: top 10

1. MrBeast (316)
2. Kai Cenat (107)
3. Joe Rogan (78)
4. IShowSpeed (64)
5. Marques Brownlee (29)
6. Markiplier (24)
7. Druski (22)
8. Donald Trump (16)
9. Kim Kardashian (16)
10. Dwayne Johnson (15)

Gen Z: top 10

1. MrBeast (53)
2. Kai Cenat (49)
3. IShowSpeed (27)
4. Markiplier (18)
5. CoryxKenshin (8)
6. Druski (8)
7. DDG (7)
8. CaseOh (7)
9. Alix Earle (6)
10. Marques Brownlee (5)

Millennials: top 10

1. MrBeast (174)
2. Kai Cenat (48)
3. Joe Rogan (30)
4. IShowSpeed (30)
5. Marques Brownlee (21)
6. Druski (11)
7. Dwayne Johnson (8)
8. Mama Cookie (7)
9. FunnyMike (7)
10. Jen Hamilton (7)

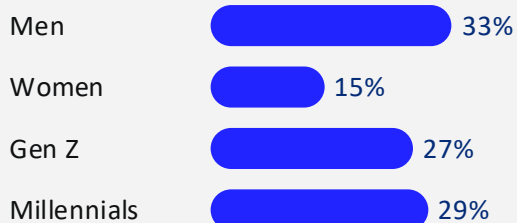


Men cluster on a few favorite creators; nearly all of them male

- Men converge around their favorite influencers more than women: 33% of male respondents listed one of the 10 most-named creators. That drops to 15% for women, highlighting how much more sprawling their list is.
- Just 6% of men name a woman as their favorite influencer, whereas 57% of women name a man.
- Gaming creators are far more popular with Gen Z: A quarter of their named favorites cluster in this category, compared to just 11% of millennials, and under 1% for boomers.

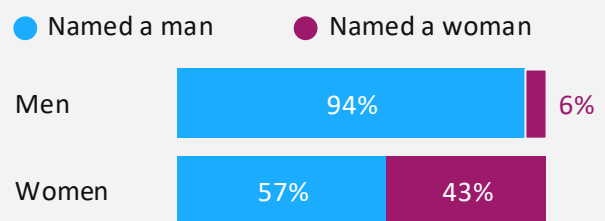
Men cluster more around their top 10

Share naming one of the 10 most-cited creators for each group



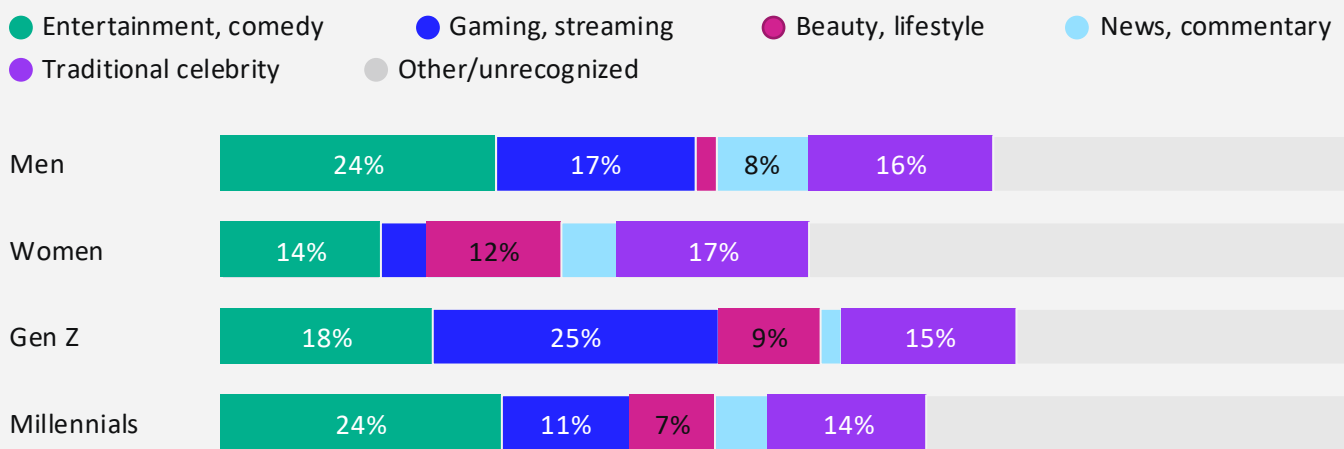
Men name almost only men

Answers naming one of the 80 most-named creators (29 are women), 39% of all answers



What kind of creator each group names

Share of each group's answers by the type of person named



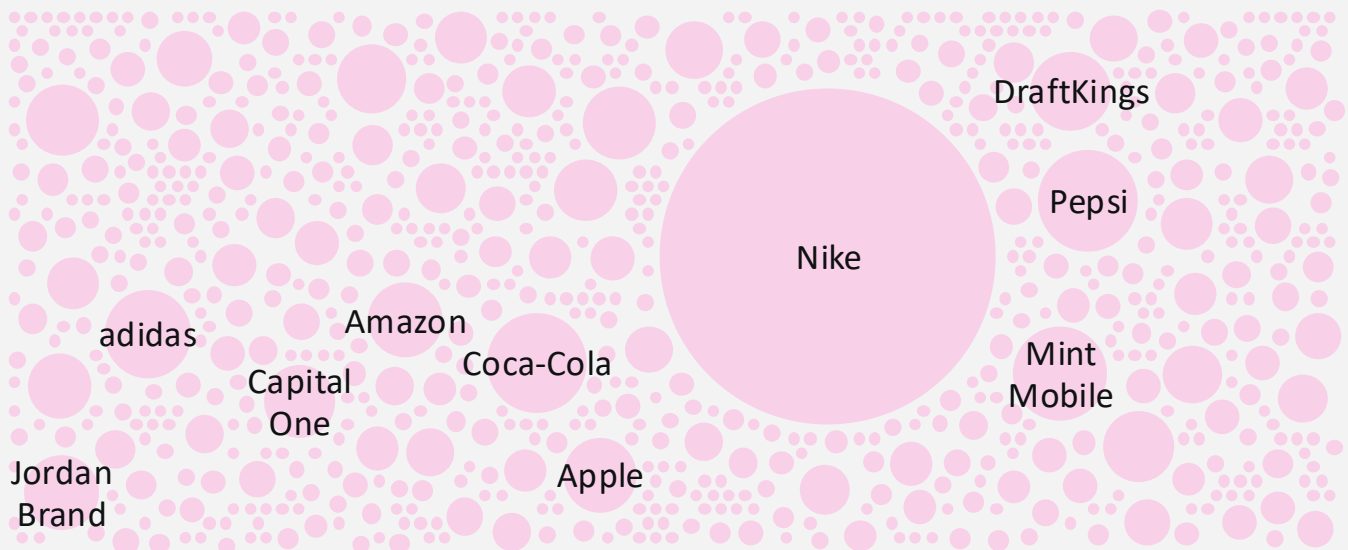


Asked for a brand whose celebrity or influencer partnership they liked, Nike completely dominates

- Respondents were asked: “Try to think about a brand that has worked with a celebrity or influencer in a way that you liked. What, if any, brand comes to mind?”
- Nearly a quarter (24%) of the 3,211 adults who named a brand said Nike, 11 times more than the next closest brand (Pepsi).
- While most of the top mentions are major incumbents with decades of prominent sponsorships, Mint Mobile and DraftKings offer a playbook for how newer brands can stick out in consumer minds.

Visualizing every favorite brand-celebrity partnership named

Bubble area is the number of people who named that brand; the 10 most-named are labeled



All adults: top 10

1. Nike (771)
2. Pepsi (70)
3. Coca-Cola (67)
4. Mint Mobile (60)
5. adidas (53)
6. DraftKings (43)
7. Jordan Brand (40)
8. Amazon (38)
9. Apple (38)
10. Capital One (36)

Gen Z: top 10

1. Nike (155)
2. adidas (14)
3. McDonald's (13)
4. e.l.f. Cosmetics (10)
5. Pepsi (10)
6. Dunkin' (8)
7. Coca-Cola (8)
8. Feastables (8)
9. PrizePicks (7)
10. DraftKings (7)

Millennials: top 10

1. Nike (351)
2. adidas (28)
3. Jordan Brand (22)
4. Apple (22)
5. Pepsi (21)
6. DraftKings (18)
7. Coca-Cola (18)
8. McDonald's (17)
9. Amazon (16)
10. PRIME (14)



Method and questions

Survey

Morning Consult poll 2609061, conducted Sept. 17 to 22, 2026, among 6,283 U.S. adults, with data weighted to approximate a target sample of U.S. adults. Margin of error ± 1 percentage point for the full sample; subgroups carry wider margins. Gen Z (born 1997 to 2012, adults only) $n=1,027$; millennials (1981 to 1996) $n=2,015$; Gen X (1965 to 1980) $n=1,589$; baby boomers (1946 to 1964) $n=1,500$. Gender-by-generation bases range from 474 (Gen Z women) to 1,010 (millennial women).

The 90 names

Each of the 90 celebrities and creators was shown to a randomized third of respondents (about 2,100 adults; 330 to 350 Gen Z). Favorability: very or somewhat favorable minus somewhat or very unfavorable. Purchase lift: much or somewhat more likely minus somewhat or much less likely to use a brand the person endorses. Familiarity: share not answering "don't know who that person is." Type groupings are analyst judgment.

Trend comparisons

Trust: Morning Consult surveys of Gen Z and millennials in September 2019 (ages 13 to 38, $n=2,200$) and 2024; the 2019 universe included teens, so the comparison is directional. AI influencers: Morning Consult poll 2507144, Aug. 4 to 9, 2025, among 2,253 U.S. adults.

Open-ended questions

Favorite celebrity, favorite influencer or online creator, and a brand whose celebrity or influencer partnership the respondent liked. Answers were cleaned to one name per entity (typos and familiar aliases merged; ambiguous first names left unresolved). Counts are unweighted respondent mentions; category shares are weighted. "None," no recall and off-topic answers are excluded from usable bases: 4,871 celebrity, 3,202 influencer and 3,211 brand answers.

Questions reported

Q1 Social media use by platform. Q2 Following influencers on each platform. Q3 Number of influencers followed. Q4 Content followed from influencers. Q5 Where people learn about new products. Q6 Categories where an endorsement would be useful. Q7 Brand partnership recall (open end). Q8 Trust in recommendation sources. Q9 Traits that make a recommendation persuasive. Q10 Effect of following size on trust. Q11 Purchases driven by each type of endorsement. Q12 Attitudes toward endorsements. Q13 Likelihood of following an AI-generated influencer. Q14 Favorite celebrity (open end). Q15 Favorite influencer (open end). Q16 Favorability of 90 names. Q17 Purchase impact of 90 names. Q18 Spokesperson fit by category.

Reading the charts

Unless labeled otherwise, figures are weighted shares of all adults in the group named. Nets are computed from unrounded data. Where a chart compares all adults with Gen Z or millennials, the generations are subsets of the all-adult figure. Differences described in the text clear the relevant margins of error unless flagged as directional.

Contact

Morning Consult Research Intelligence. Data in this report draws on Morning Consult's U.S. adult panel and brand tracking; custom cuts, including income and region, are available on request.