



The State of Creator Compensation

Creator payments, scale, and the next phase of growth



By many measures, the creator economy is booming, but not for everyone

Influencer marketing reached an estimated [\\$32.55 billion in global market value in 2025](#), and the [creator economy is valued at over \\$250 billion](#). Brand and agency investment in creator marketing accelerated this past year, with the [average influencer marketing spend increasing by 171% year-over-year, more than the last four years combined](#).

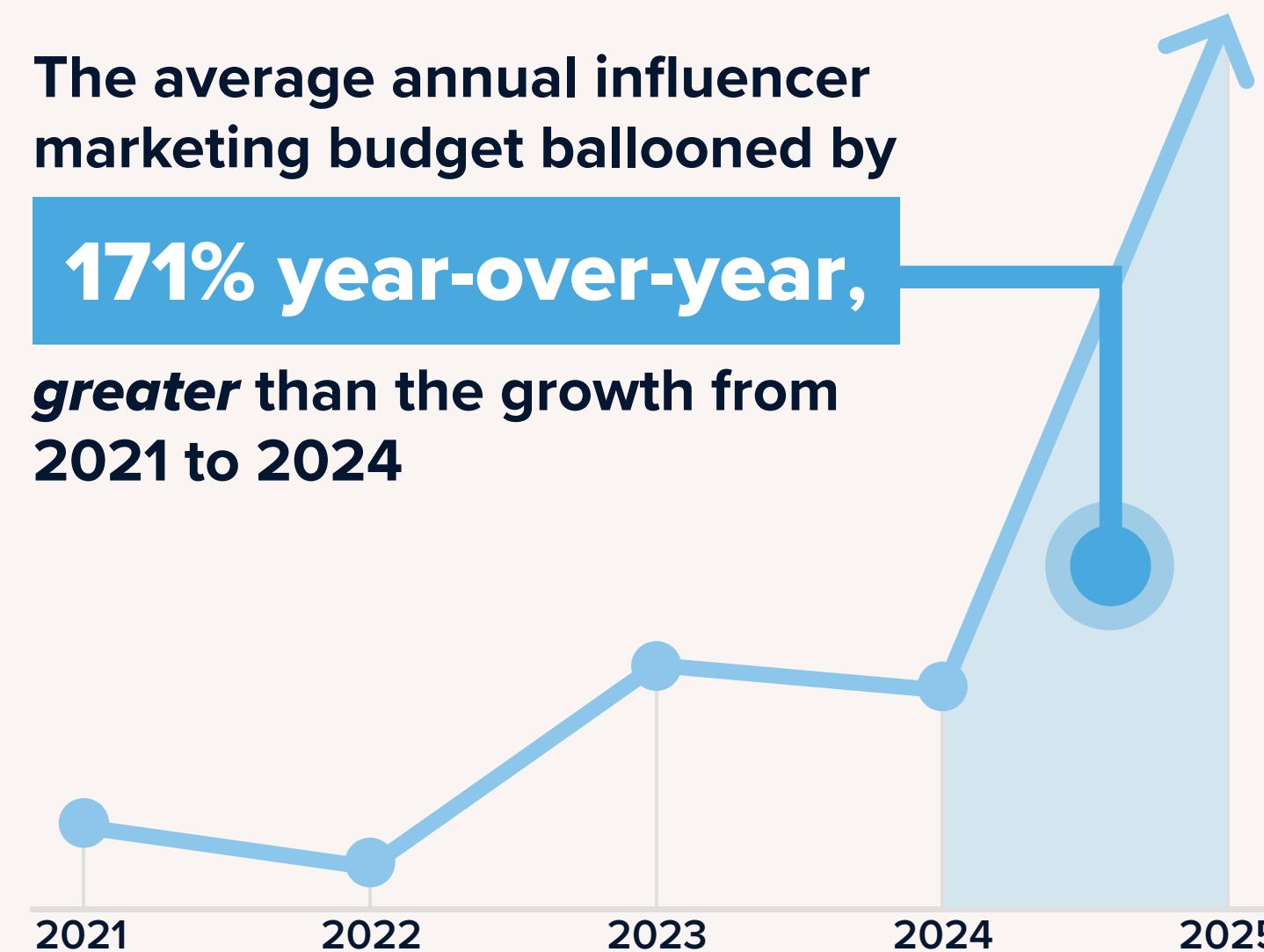
At the same time, creators continue to drive an increasingly essential role in brand strategy, shaping culture, information, and commerce. Social platforms, fueled by creator content, are even [expanding across different mediums like TV](#).

The power of creators over the last couple of years has become undeniable. However, growth at the market level hasn't been extending evenly to individual creators. For many creators, compensation remains episodic and modest, reflecting a long-tail income distribution.

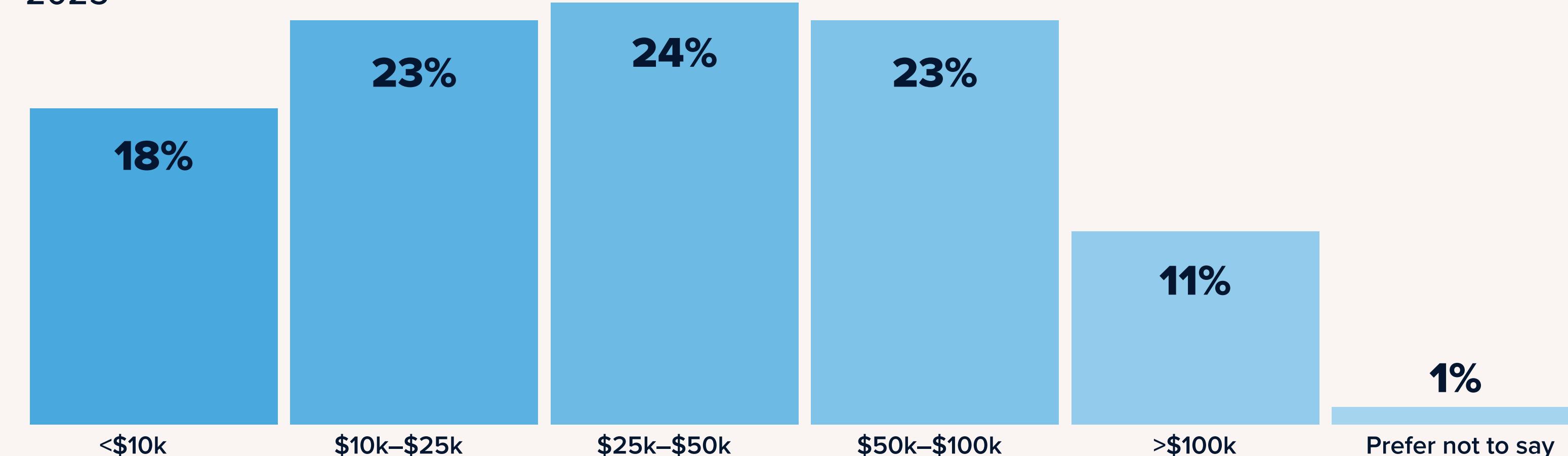
CreatorIQ partnered with Satio Research to survey 300 creators. Among the respondents, the average creator reported earning \$44,293 over the past year. Meanwhile, only 11% secured a 6-figure annual income. CreatorIQ performed additional research featuring 14.4k creators who received payments from brands or agencies. **Industry growth is scaling, but for creators this growth is not evenly distributed.**

The average annual influencer marketing budget ballooned by

171% year-over-year,
greater than the growth from 2021 to 2024



Annual creator income
2025



Creator marketing is scaling faster than creator compensation gains are flowing across the creator ecosystem

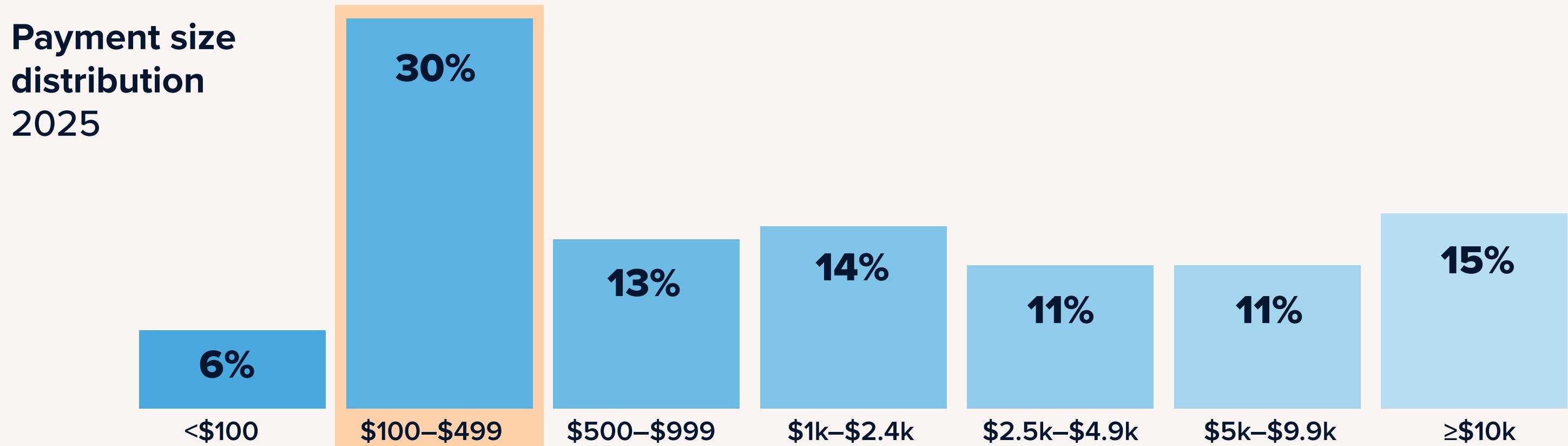
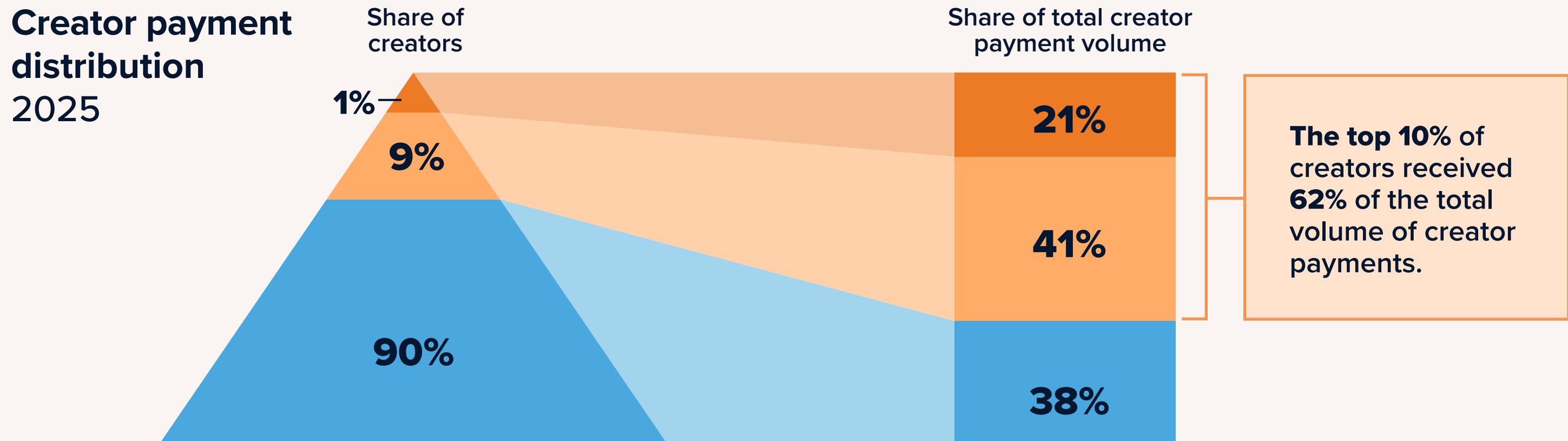
When viewed at scale, creator compensation remains highly concentrated.

Across CreatorIQ campaigns with direct payments in 2025, creators earned an average of \$11.4k, while the median creator earned \$3.0k, reflecting a reality where a small percentage of creators capture a disproportionate share of total spend, while most creators earn at lower levels. Additionally the top 10% of creators received 62% of the total volume of creator payments. The majority of spend flows to a relatively small segment of high-performing creators, and this disparity is deepening.

At the same time, total dollars paid to creators increased by 59% year-over-year, and the number of creators participating in campaigns grew by 183%. In other words, creator marketing is scaling faster than creator compensation gains are flowing across the creator ecosystem.

This dynamic has important implications for both creators and brands. For creators, income volatility remains a core challenge. For brands, it signals a market where creator supply is abundant, but the sustainability of creator partnerships is not guaranteed.

Valuing creators in proportion to their impact is essential to maintaining long-term momentum.



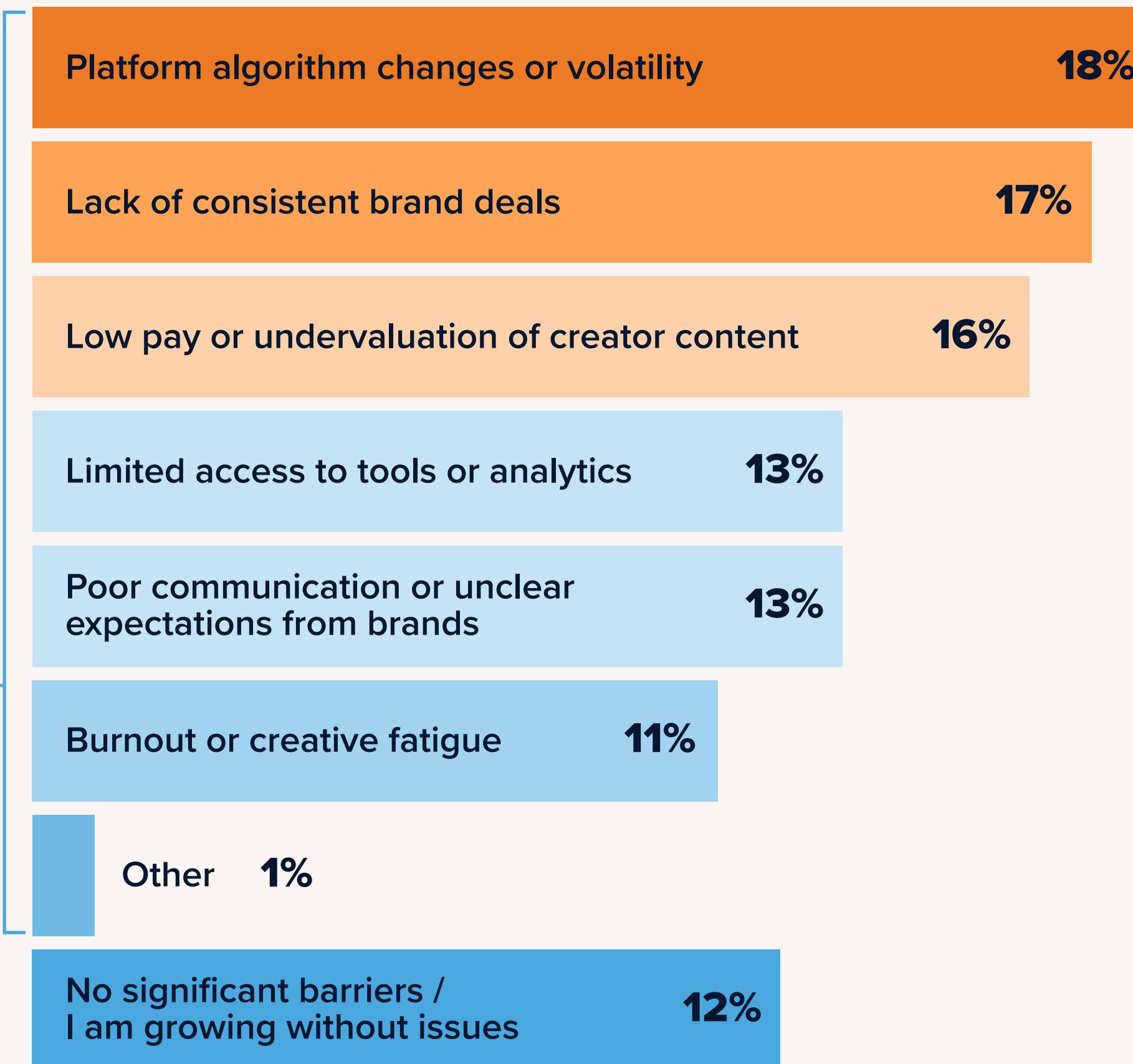
The creator economy professionalized before it stabilized

As creator marketing has scaled, creators have increasingly operated as professional publishers, investing more time, resources, and labor into content creation and brand partnerships. However, this professionalization has not been matched by greater income stability.

When asked about the greatest barriers to their success, creators reported platform algorithm changes or volatility was No. 1, closely followed by lack of consistent brand deals.

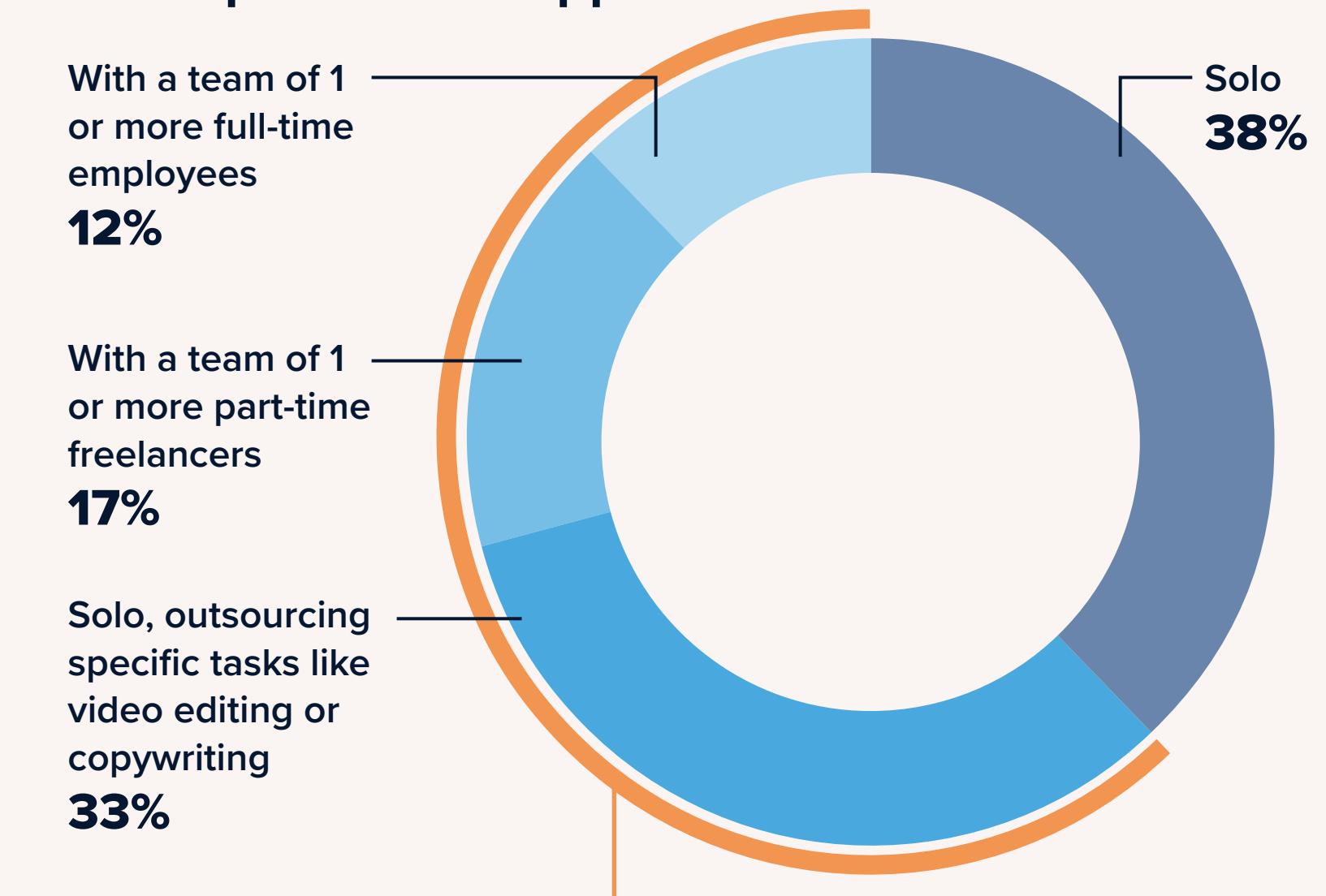
88%
of creators experience
barriers to their success

What is your biggest barrier to growing your creator business?



Together, these forces create a structural tension in the creator economy: creators are expected to behave like business owners, but without the consistency, predictability, or safeguards that typically support long-term growth.

The majority of creators work with operational support



62% of creators work with operational support

Creators drive disproportionate impact at scale

And yet it *is* called creator marketing for a reason.

Creators now operate at a scale that most brands cannot replicate through owned channels alone.

Across CreatorIQ's database, the number of creators tracked outnumbers brands by 800x, reflecting the sheer breadth of the creator ecosystem and the growing role creators play in content production, distribution, and audience engagement.

This scale translates directly into impact. When compared to brand-owned content, creator content consistently delivers significantly greater volume and reach, amplifying brand presence across platforms where attention is increasingly fragmented.

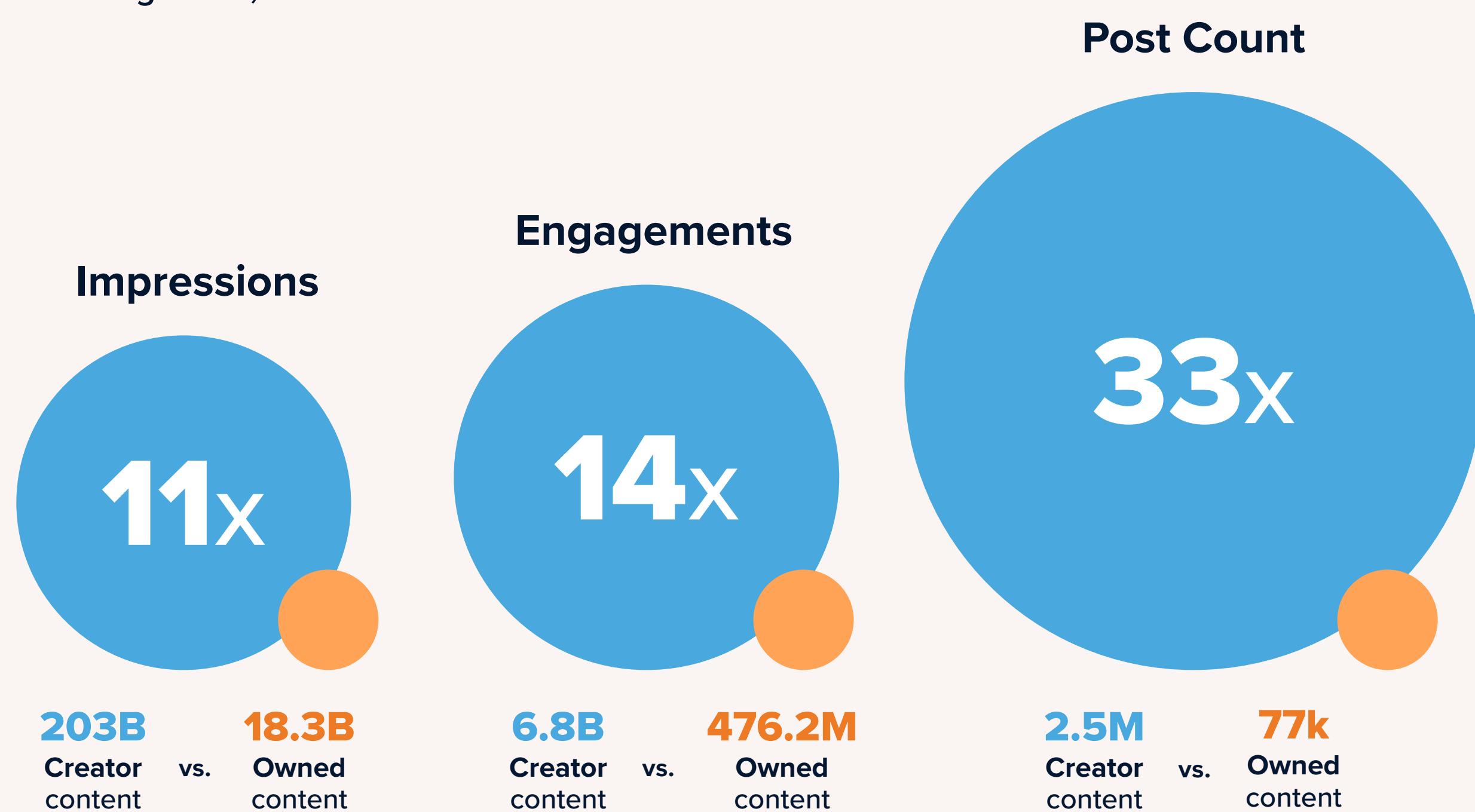
An analysis of Fortune 100 brands in the U.S. across TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube from January through August 2025 illustrates this dynamic clearly. During this period, these brands published 77,000 posts on their owned channels. Meanwhile, creators produced 2.5 million posts featuring these brands. In other words, creators generated 33 times more content than the brands themselves.

The impact extended well beyond volume. In aggregate, **creators delivered 11 times the impressions and 14 times the engagements than some of the world's largest brands**. Creators are primary drivers of visibility, engagement, and relevance. As brands rely more heavily on creators to reach and influence audiences at scale, the responsibility to build aligned, sustainable partnerships becomes increasingly critical.

Creators produce more impressions, engagements, and post count than some of the world's biggest brands

Fortune 100 Brands Owned Vs. Creator Content

TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube
Jan–Aug 2025, U.S.



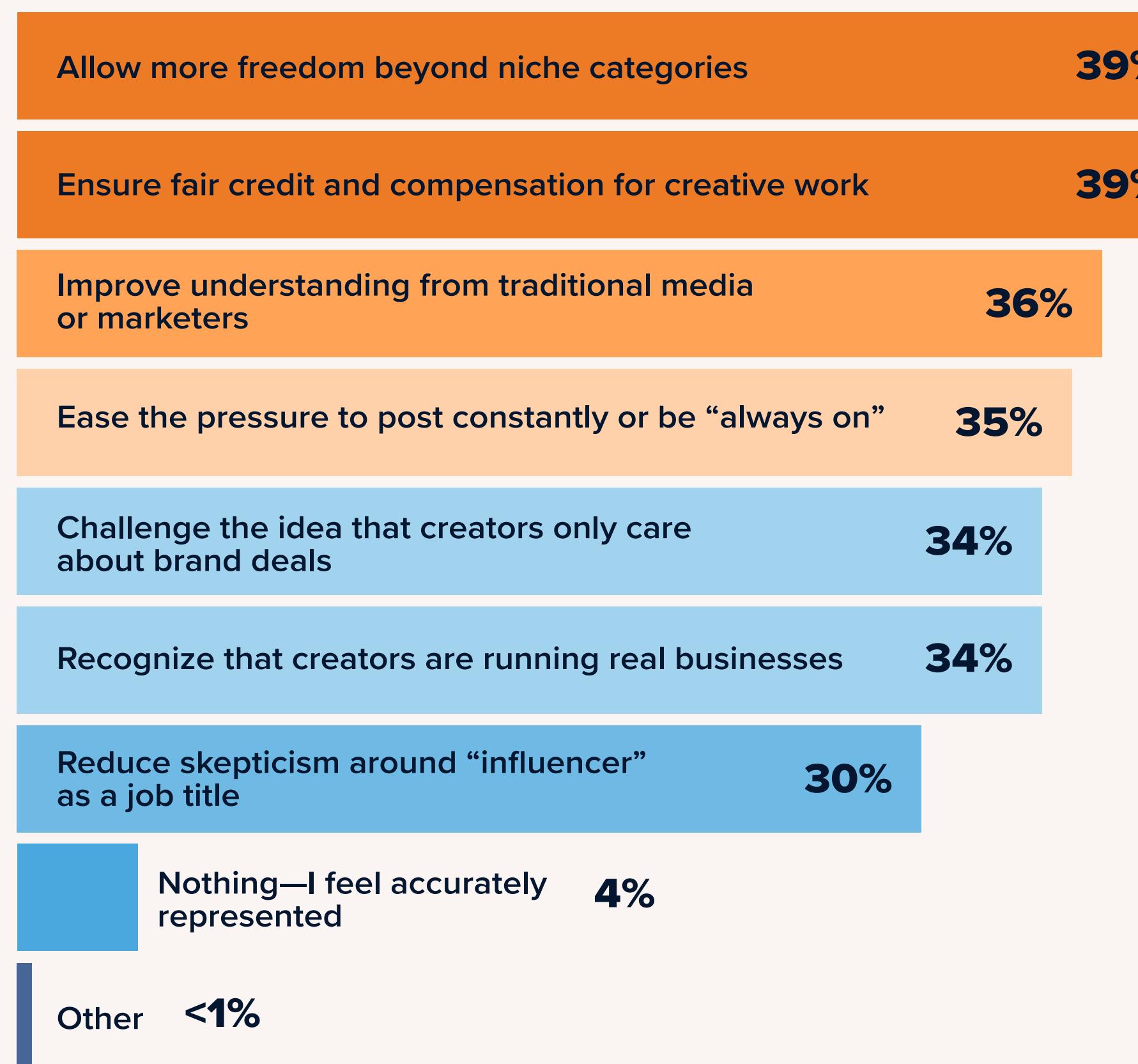
Creators say the best brand partnerships prioritize growth opportunities, fair pay, and creative control

A staggering 96% of creators report that common perceptions of creators are not accurate.

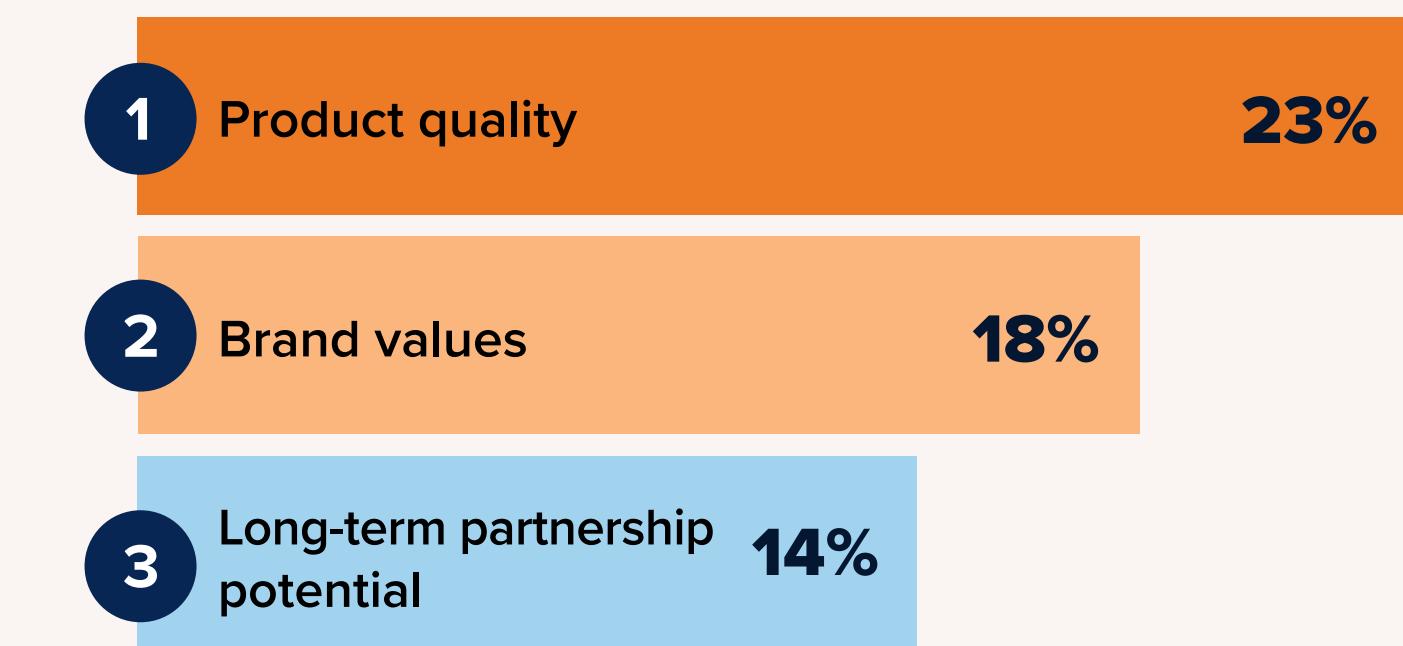
Creators most wanted to ensure fair credit and compensation, as well as make sure they weren't constrained by the categories they post in. Creators want a bigger piece of the pie, and they also want to expand what they do.

This gap in perception extends to what drives creator satisfaction. Although compensation is important, creators are increasingly more motivated by growth opportunities, the top contributor to creator satisfaction.

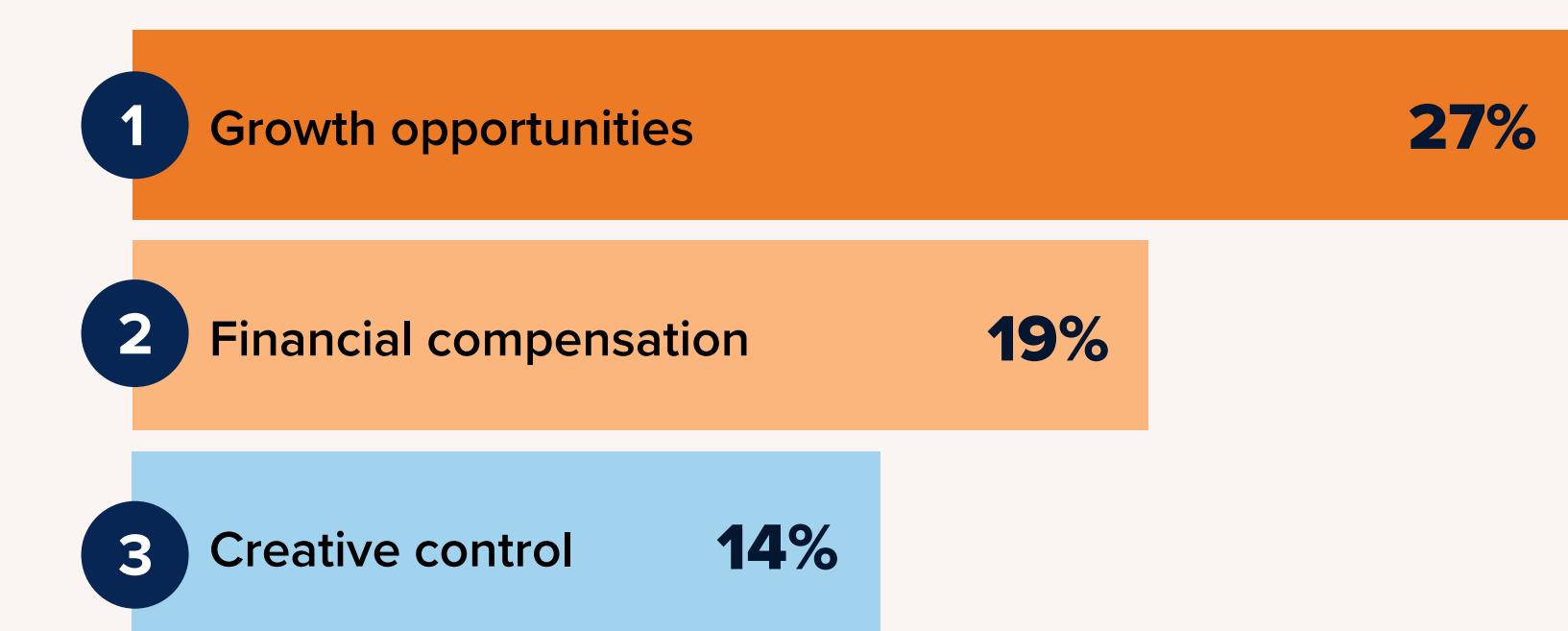
How, if at all, would you like to see perceptions of creators change?



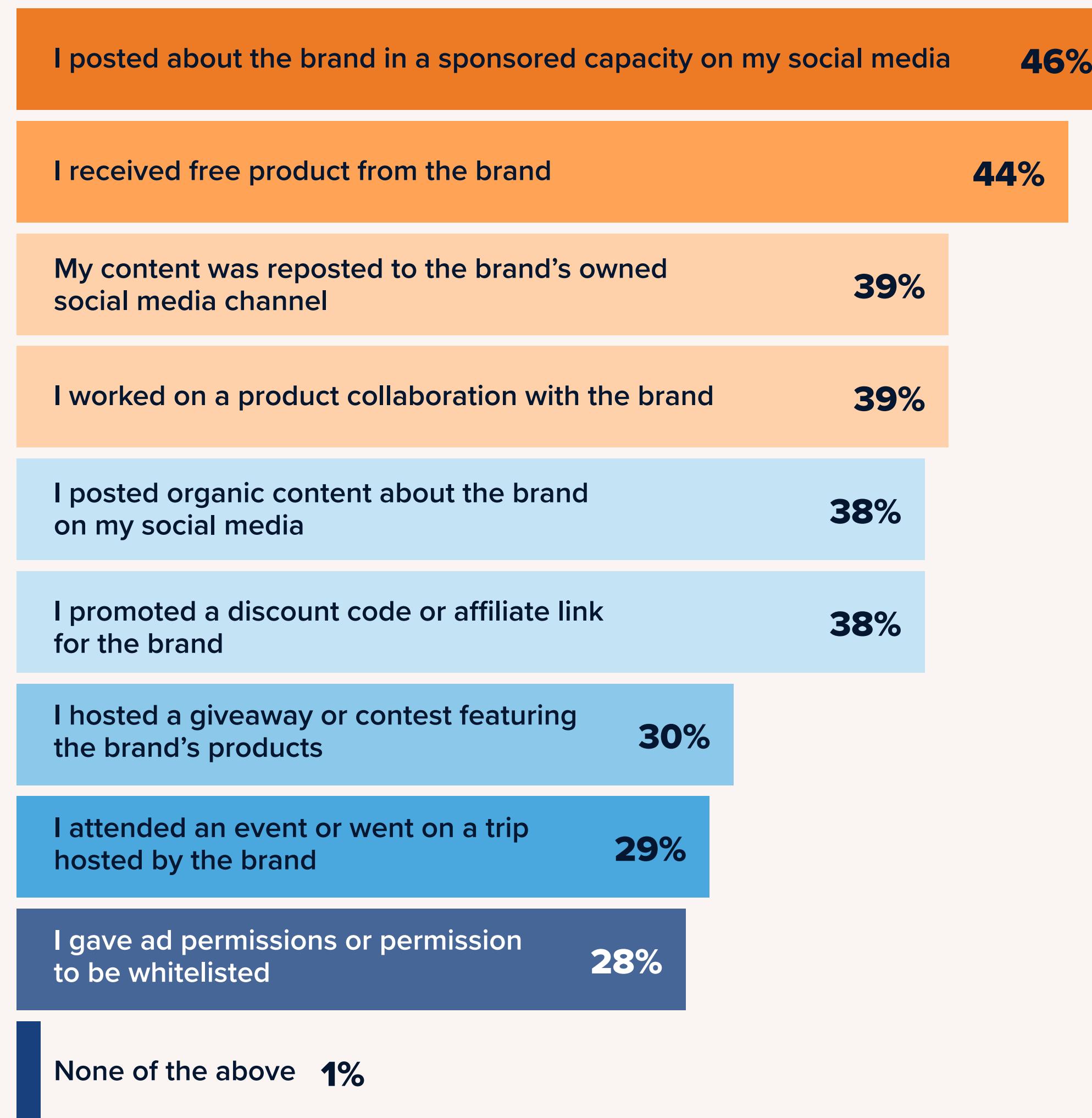
Most important factors when considering brand partnerships



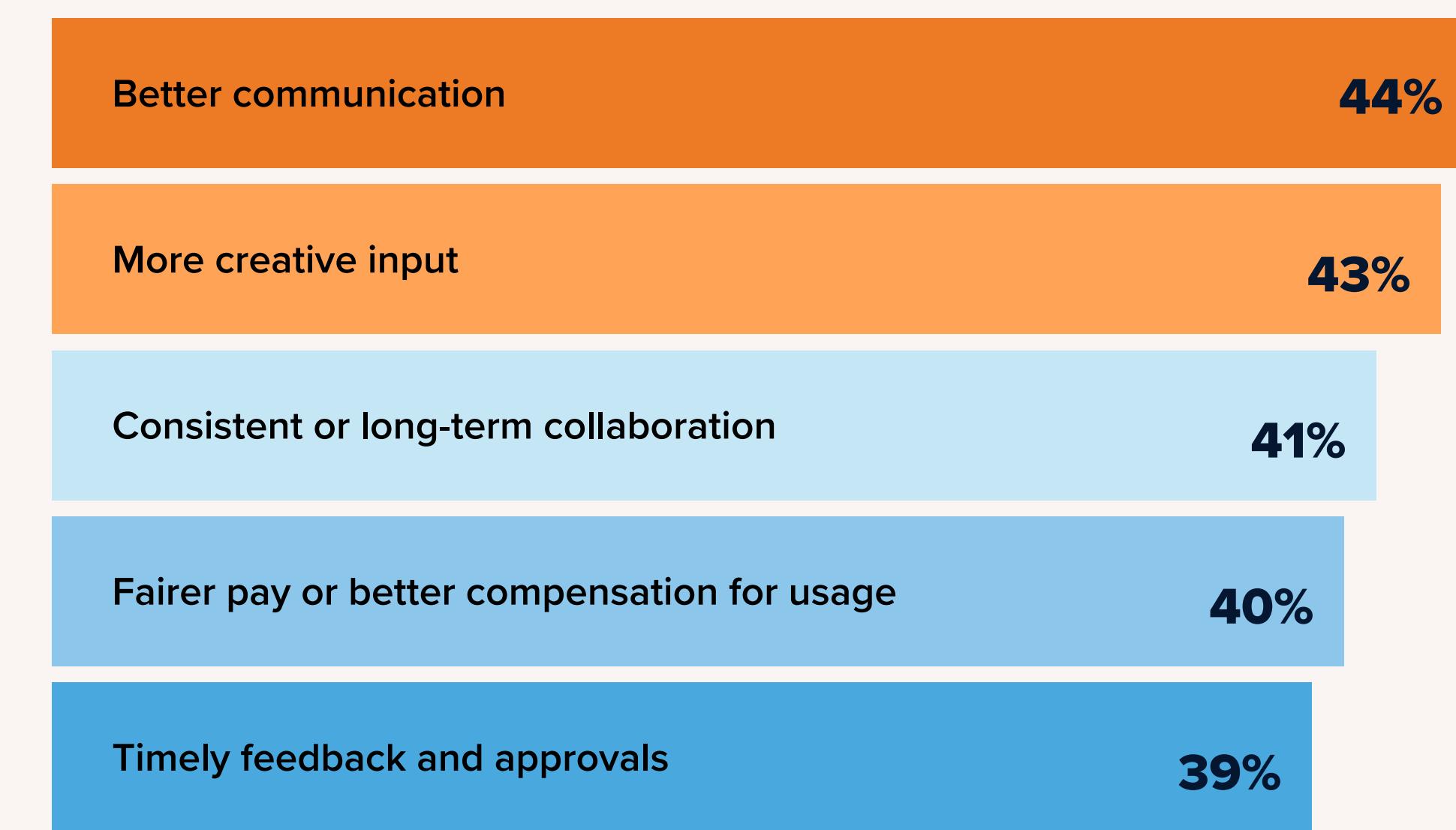
Top three aspects of brand partnerships that most contribute to creator satisfaction



How creators engaged with brands over the past year



What would make partnerships more successful?



99%
of creators believe creative control is important in brand partnerships

Creators consistently prioritize longer-term relationships, stability, alignment, and respect for their creative process.

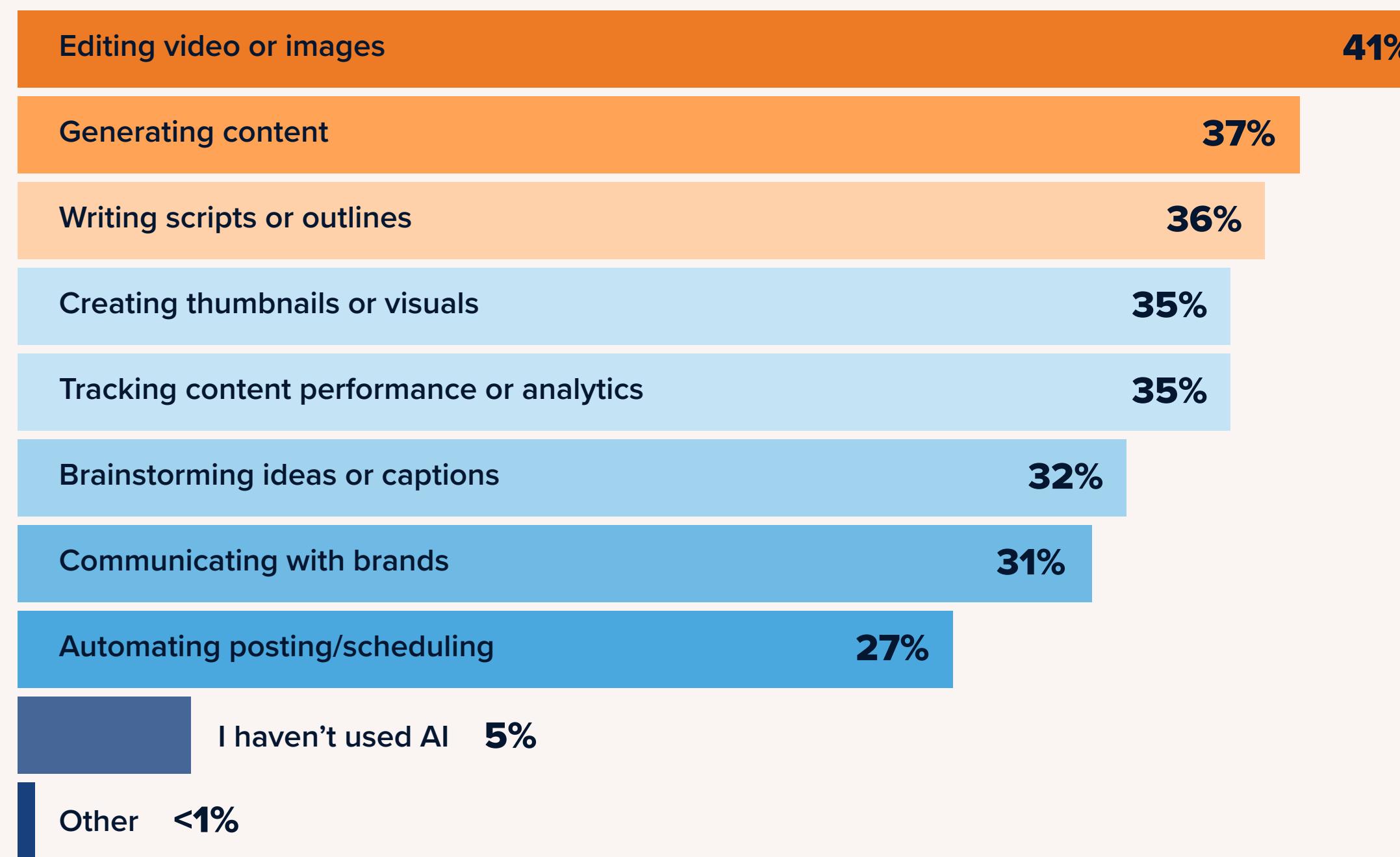
These priorities signal a shift away from transactional engagements toward partnerships designed for durability and mutual value.

AI makes creators more valuable, not less

AI increases the volume and speed that creators can produce, but as AI gets more advanced, trust and connection will be increasingly important.

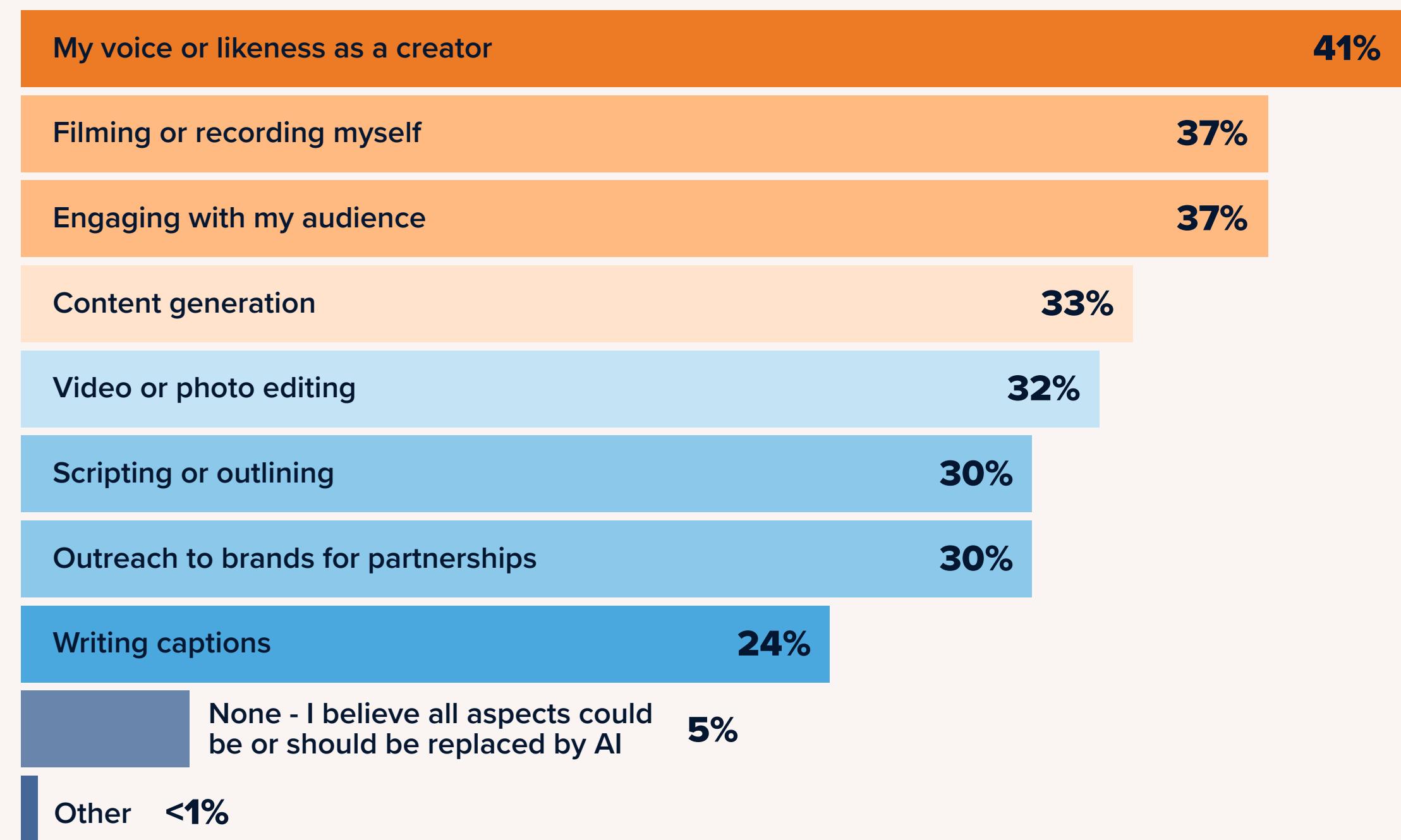
Similar to brands, creators primarily use AI to increase efficiency and reduce friction in their workflows.

How creators have used AI



When asked what they believe AI should not replace, creators consistently chose authentic voice, creative direction, and audience connection as areas that must remain human-led. **AI renders creator relationships with consumers even more important.**

What AI *shouldn't* fully replace, according to creators



The next phase of creator marketing is about partnership quality and how value is actually shared

The future of the industry will be defined by how value is structured, shared, and sustained.

Creators are producing more content, reaching larger audiences, and delivering disproportionate impact for brands. At the same time, income remains uneven, work remains episodic, and expectations continue to rise. The result is an ecosystem where creators are scaling their output faster than the rewards they reap.

Brands need to pivot with the times and adjust how creator programs are designed and evaluated. Growth is no longer solely defined by the number of creators activated or the volume of content produced. Effective and future-proof programs will require alignment, consistency, and quality partnerships.

Brands that are best positioned for the next phase of creator marketing are already adapting by:



Prioritize **retention and longer-term creator relationships**



Allow creators greater **ownership over creative execution** while offering **clear guardrails**



Align **compensation** with engagement rates, expectations, and outcomes



Design programs that **reward trust and performance**, not just reach

Creators are **revenue catalysts and innovation partners**.

To the brands that treat creators like vendors instead of value-drivers, this is your wake-up call.

Stop undervaluing creators—your growth depends on it.

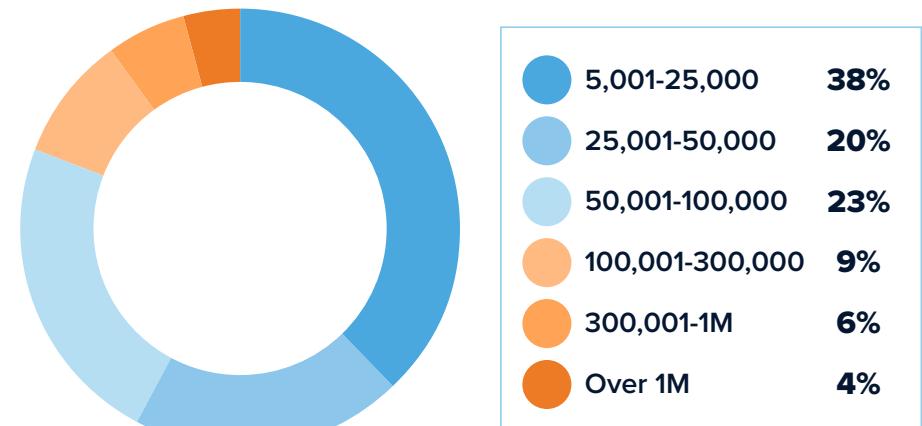
About this report

The market research represented in this report was conducted by Sapi Research in July 2025. The graphics below refer to this market sample of 300 creators.

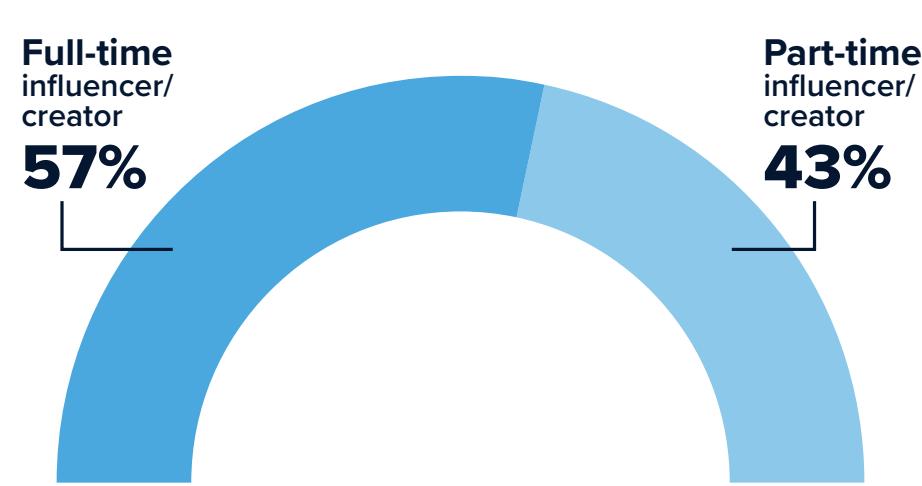
CreatorIQ conducted additional research in August–September 2025 and December 2025. The research from December features 14.4k creators who received direct payments through CreatorIQ.



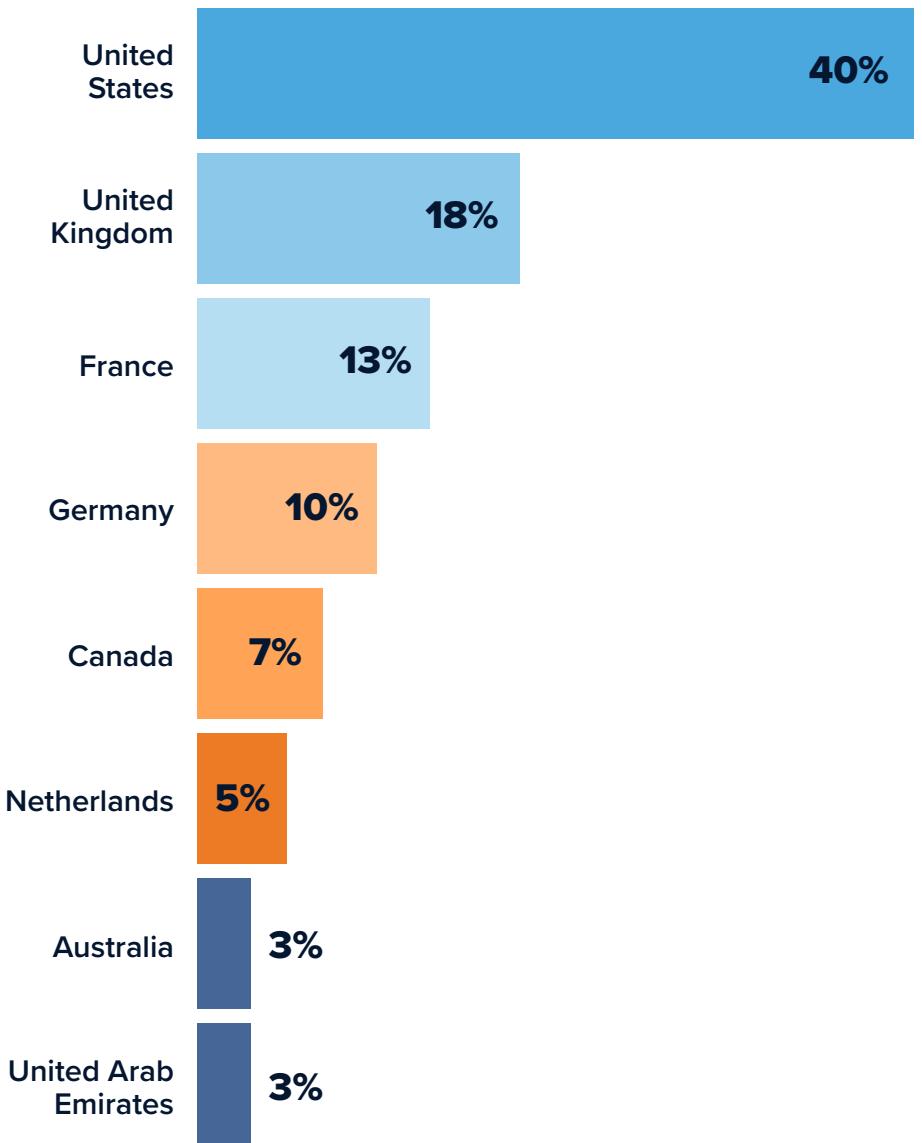
Follower count on primary social platform



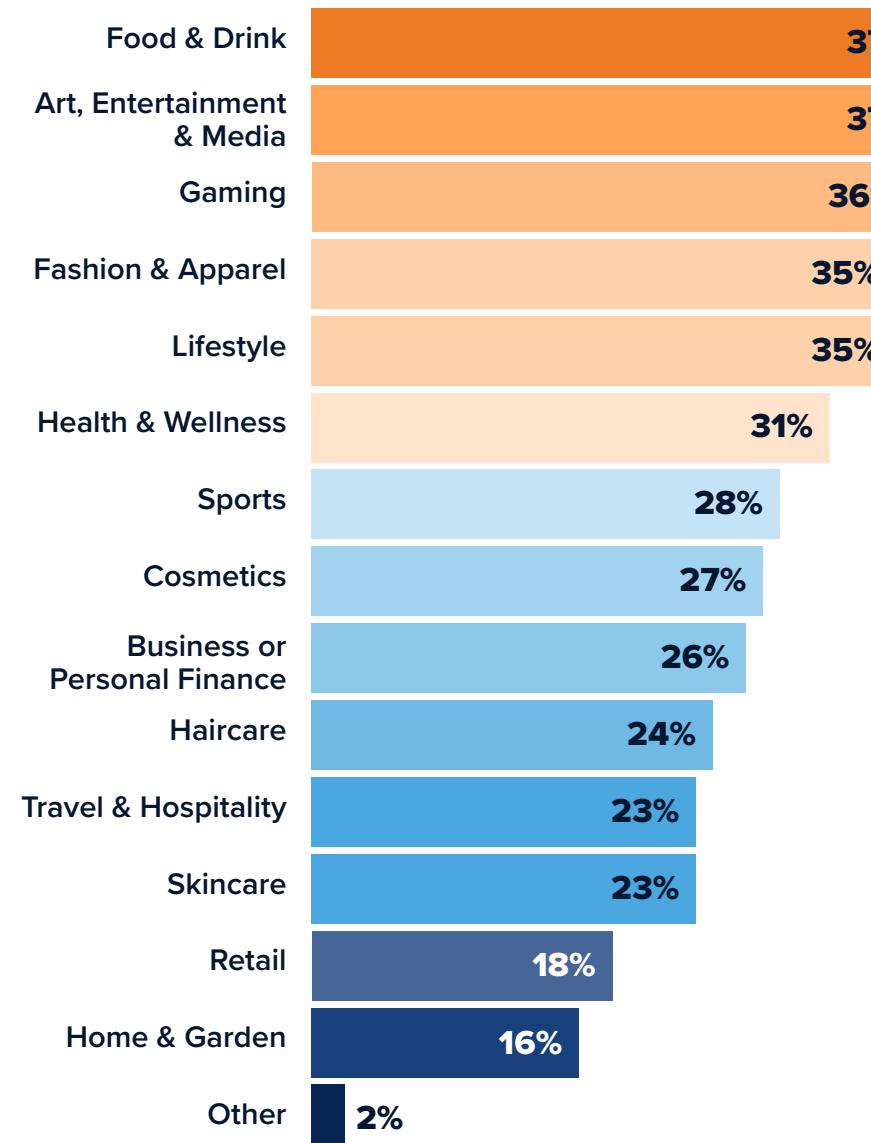
Status



Regions represented



Content Categories



Grow with Creators. Scale with CreatorIQ.

For more insights from over 1,700 industry practitioners on how to prepare for the future of the creator economy, check out **The State of Creator Marketing 2026**.

About CreatorIQ

CreatorIQ is the all in one, AI-native operating system for creator-led growth, trusted by 1,300+ of the world's most innovative brands and agencies, including Burson, Delta Air Lines, Google, Movers+Shakers, Nestlé, and Sephora.

CreatorIQ's enterprise platform unifies every aspect of creator marketing—across paid, owned, earned, commerce, community, and content—into one seamless ecosystem. With its industry-leading intelligence infrastructure, highest compliance and security standards, and best-in-class partnerships with Meta, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube, CreatorIQ enables marketing teams to move beyond just running influencer campaigns to building holistic and safe creator-led media strategies at scale.

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