



The State of Creator Marketing

Key findings from CreatorIQ's sixth annual
influencer marketing survey, and what to
expect in 2026 and beyond



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Last year, creator marketing reached an inflection point.

The industry was swiftly maturing. The marketing funnel was no longer linear. The volume of creator content mentioning brands ballooned, reaching 32x what leading brands could produce themselves on owned social channels. To top it all off, for the first time in five years, resourcing was not a top roadblock for companies. The inflection point has come and gone.

Now, the Era of Efficacy is here.

Organizations are navigating a complex mix of challenges, such as measuring program performance, accelerating content production, adapting to AI advances, and mitigating risk. In times of economic uncertainty, the demand for ROI is higher than ever. Nearly 2/3 of increased influencer marketing investment is reallocated from digital and paid channels.

Economic uncertainty presented a tipping point. Faced with cost pressures and shifting consumer behaviors, marketers didn't pause—they pivoted. Creator marketing became the obvious way forward: flexible, scalable, and better at delivering business outcomes.

CreatorIQ partnered with Sapio Research to survey 1,723 brands, agencies, and creators on how the marketing landscape has transformed over the past year.

Building on six years of research, this report combines the latest insights with a historical view of how the industry has evolved over time. For today's marketing leaders, understanding this evolution is essential, not only to make sense of where we are, but to chart a smarter path forward.

1,723
Respondents

17+
Industries

9+
Regions

Respondent Breakdown:

747
Brands

676
Agencies

300
Creators

Title		
	Brands	Agencies
Executive	39%	40%
VP/Director	26%	25%
Manager	27%	25%
Individual contributor	5%	7%
Other	3%	3%

Amid economic uncertainty, average annual influencer marketing investment has increased by 171% year-over-year

The past year has been rocked by economic headwinds, marked by inflation and tariffs. Instead of stalling progress, this volatility became a catalyst. For a while, forces like the decline of third-party cookies, cost limitations on paid social, and low consumer trust were creating pressure to reshape the way brands connect with consumers.

Brands faced a reckoning: legacy playbooks were no longer sustainable. Economic uncertainty was the tipping point, ushering in a new wave of creator marketing, as creators emerged as the most flexible, authentic, and cost-effective way forward. **That's why creator marketing investment isn't declining—it's booming.**

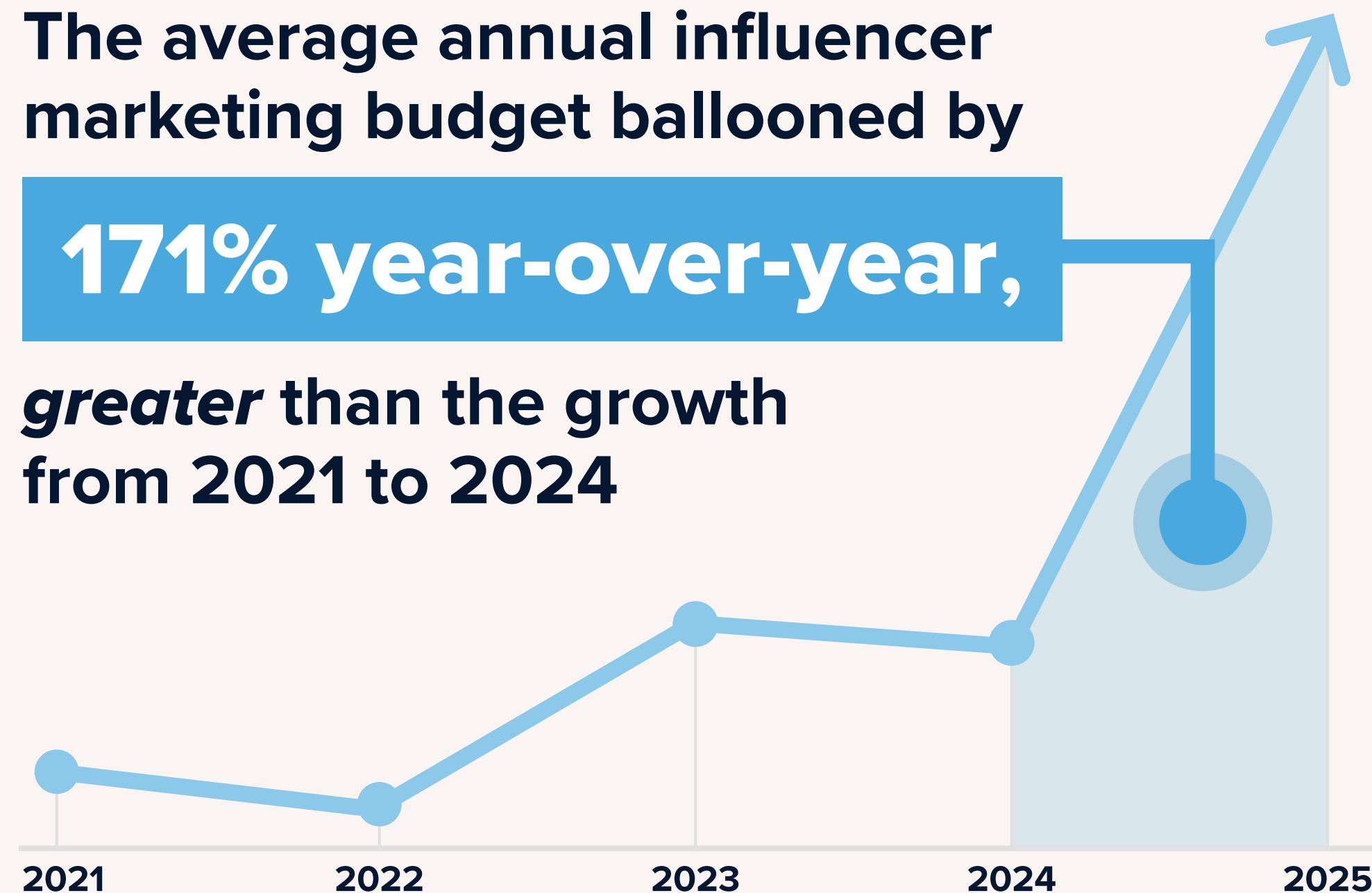
This year brand respondents reported spending on average \$2.9M on their influencer marketing programs annually, while agency respondents reported an average of \$4.4M, with EMEA outspending North America in a departure from last year. Enterprise respondents now invest an average of \$5.6M–\$8.1M annually in creators, and industry leaders average \$7.8M in spend. A greater share of organizations (22%) reported spending \$5M annually, marking a notable shift in marketing maturity.

These figures have grown substantially from last year, but they likely understate total spend, as many paid media programs don't isolate creator-driven investment, and creator content increasingly supports efforts across channels and activities.

The average annual influencer marketing budget ballooned by

171% year-over-year,

greater than the growth from 2021 to 2024



CreatorIQ research, August 2025 via Sapio Research survey data. Respondents were asked “Approximately, how much does your organization spend per year on influencer marketing in US dollars? Select one” with the following options: <\$250,000, \$250,001–\$500,000, \$500,001–\$750,000, \$750,001–\$1,000,000, \$1,000,001–\$5,000,000, \$5,000,001–\$10,000,000, \$10,000,001–\$20,000,000, Over \$20,000,000, or Unsure. The absolute average increase was 285% YoY.

However, this year we expanded the answer choices to include more high-end options, like \$10M–\$20M or Over \$20M. That change allowed for better granularity, especially at the enterprise level, but it also meant the response bins didn't correspond from one year to the next (last year was capped at Over \$5M). To make the two years comparable, we harmonized the bins, mapping this year's answers to the same categories as last year (e.g. rolling responses above 5M into a broader Over \$5M category). This created a like-for-like view of budget distribution over time, yielding a 171% increase in average influencer marketing investment for organizations. The sample mix from year-to-year is similar but not strictly matched, and new markets are included in the sample.

71%

of organizations increased their influencer marketing investment YoY

80%

of enterprise organizations reported an increase in their influencer marketing investment YoY



Enterprise organizations are brands and agencies with 1,000 or more employees.

The primary effect of economic volatility isn't cost saving measures, it's doubling down on ROI

In the face of economic pressure, organizations aren't pulling back—they're optimizing.

Asked how economic volatility affected their marketing strategy, brand respondents reported that their primary course of action was to double down on ROI, narrowly edging out cost-saving measures.

The primary effect of economic volatility is doubling down on ROI

How has economic volatility affected your marketing strategy, if at all?

	Brands Overall	Enterprise Brands
Increased focus on ROI	51%	56%
Seeking cost saving measures	46%	49%
Budget restrictions	44%	43%
Reallocation of resources to proven channels	38%	43%
Job or role uncertainty	29%	39%
Other	<1%	0%
No change	9%	10%

Enterprise agencies were more conservative in response to economic volatility, seeking cost-saving measures

How has economic volatility affected your clients' marketing strategy, if at all?

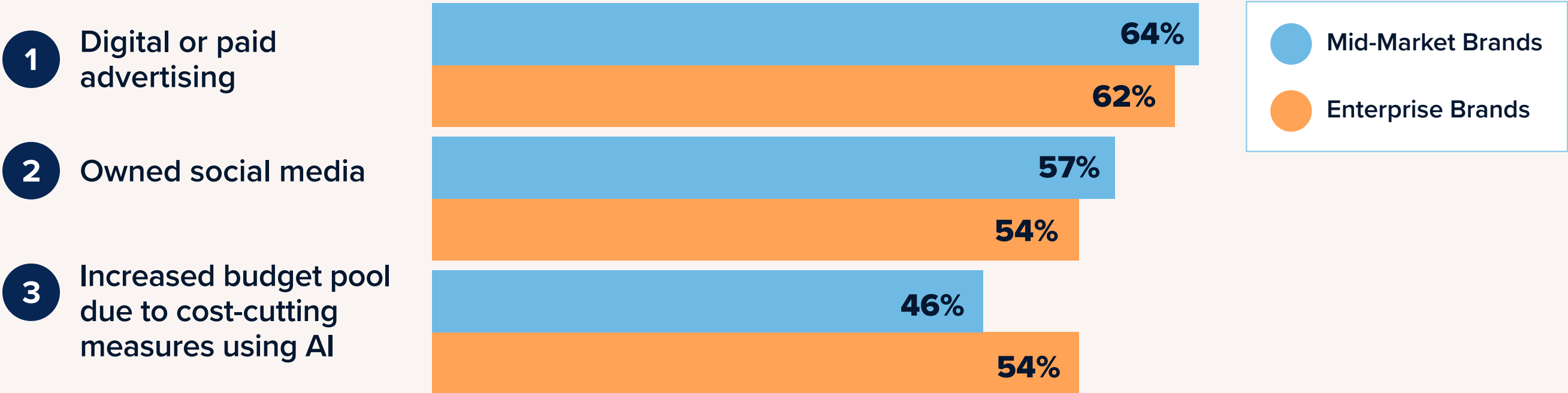
1	Seeking cost saving measures	53%
2	Increased focus on ROI/ program validation	51%
3	Reallocation of resources to proven channels	46%

Nearly 2/3 of increased influencer marketing investment is reallocated from digital and paid channels

For 6 out of 10 marketers, influencer marketing budget increases came out of paid or digital advertising budgets

Even in an atmosphere of greater scrutiny, organizations are betting on the **efficacy of creator content because it’s a nimble and effective strategy.**

Where did the increase in influencer marketing budget predominantly come from?
Select all that apply



Mid-Market Brands		
4.	Email marketing	44%
5.	Events	42%
6.	Print or broadcast advertising	33%
7.	Net new (i.e. budget was not intended for any other marketing use)	30%
8.	Direct mail or gifting/seeding	30%
9.	Changes in software stack	22%
10.	Agency retainer fee	20%
11.	Unsure	1%
12.	Other	<1%

Enterprise Brands		
4.	Email marketing	51%
5.	Events	46%
6.	Net new (i.e. budget was not intended for any other marketing use)	41%
7.	Changes in software stack	41%
8.	Print or broadcast advertising	39%
9.	Direct mail or gifting/seeding	33%
10.	Agency retainer fee	26%
11.	Unsure	0%
12.	Other	0%

Five years from now...

73%

of mid-market organizations plan to increase investment in creator marketing

85%

of enterprise organizations plan to increase investment in creator marketing

Creator marketing investment is growing faster for enterprises.

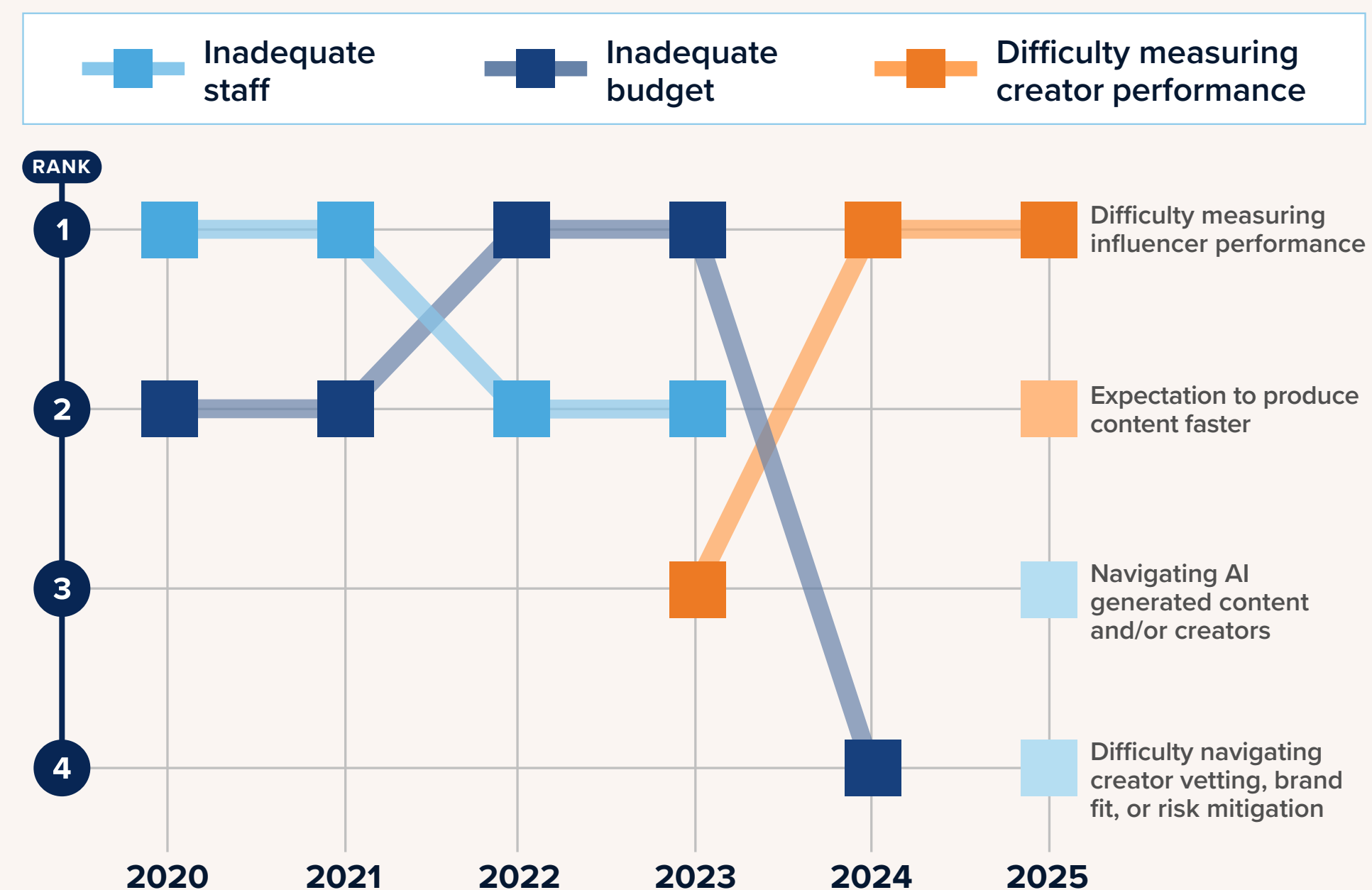
They're spending more, because they're confident in the power of creator content to fuel long-term growth.

One of the most profound shifts in creator marketing over the past year hasn't come from AI itself, but from AI's potential to accelerate what marketing success looks like.

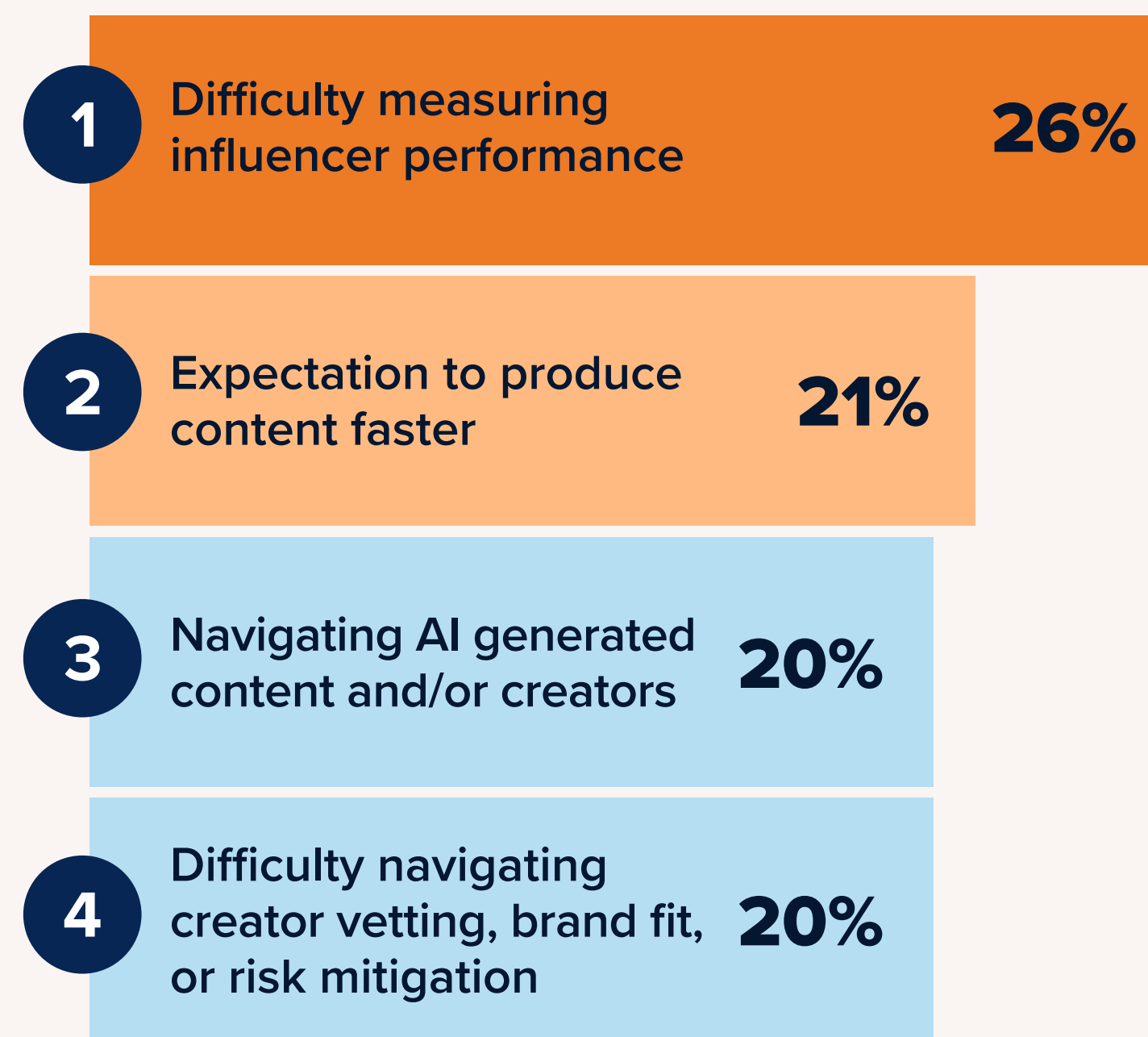
For years, inadequate budgets topped the list of roadblocks to program growth.

That era came to a close last year, when measurement climbed to the top.

Top roadblocks over time



Top Roadblocks for Brands 2025



Programs have gone from seeking efficiency to aiming for something greater: **efficacy**.

In the Era of Efficacy, the primary challenges aren't financial—they're operational. As programs scale and mature, these nuanced barriers reflect both growing sophistication and a mandate for operational excellence.

The primary goals are to improve outcomes, and the processes by which those outcomes are achieved.

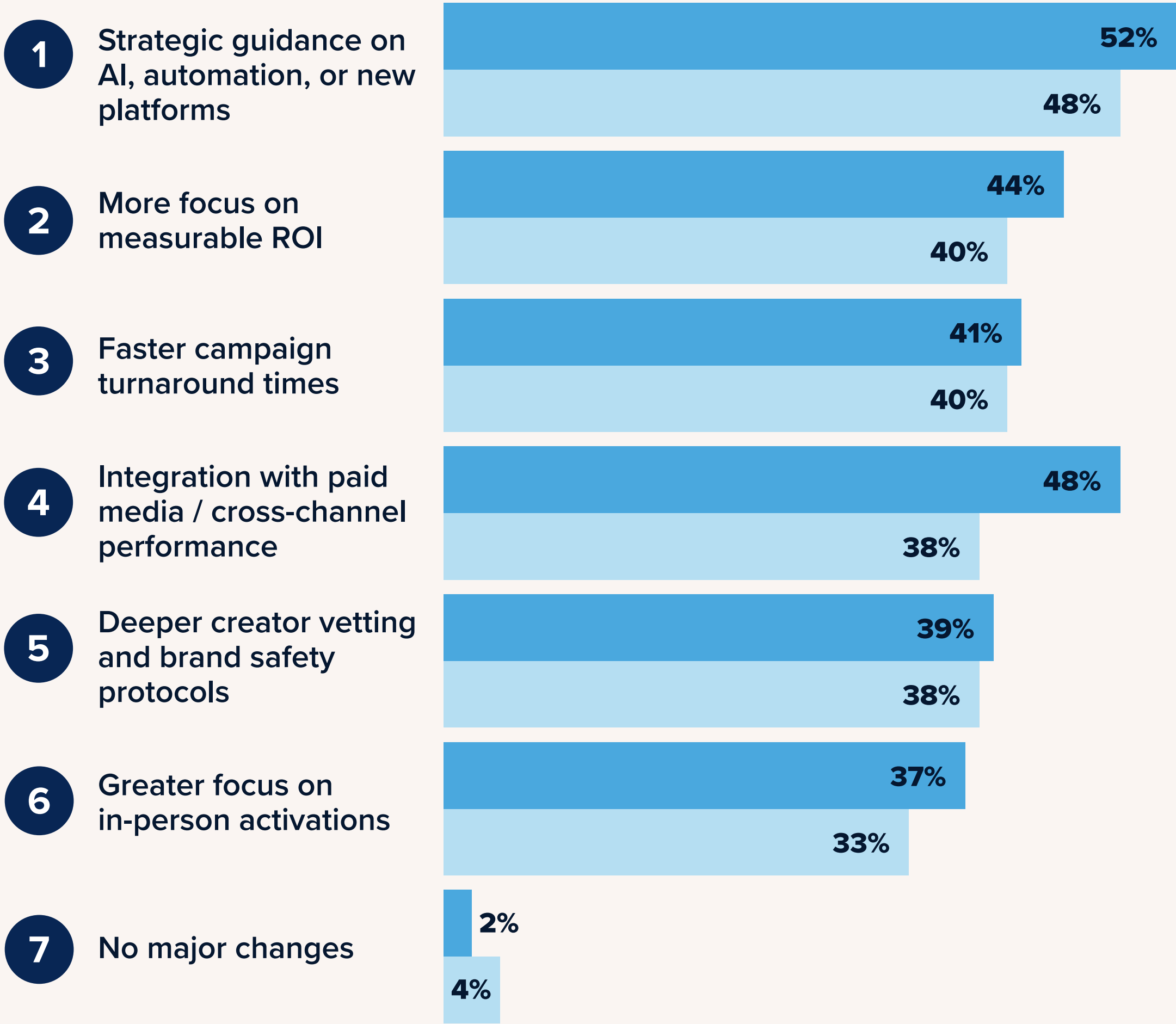


Efficiency is largely about **speed**.

Efficacy encompasses efficiency but also includes **operational maturity, strategic alignment, precision, and meaningful business outcomes**.

As brands navigate this new era, agencies operate as a strategic partner and indicators of what will come next. They’re helping brands confront today’s complexity, while shaping how tomorrow’s challenges will be solved at scale.

The biggest change in what clients expect from influencer marketing agencies compared to last year: **strategic guidance on AI**



Almost half of enterprise agencies experienced increased pressure from clients to see integration of content across channels.

While this can boost impact, it becomes increasingly important to select the ‘right’ creators to work with, which explains why brand suitability has become a critical challenge for agencies.

The challenges that agencies face serve as a litmus test for what will rise to significance for brands. This shift to efficacy has also created a quiet but critical imperative: owning and centralizing creator data.

In a landscape where speed, AI, and brand safety demand tighter coordination, siloed systems are a liability. The organizations best positioned to thrive in this new era aren’t just faster and more adaptable—they’re building engines that fuel performance by treating creator data as a core strategic asset.

Centers of Excellence are the norm. Operational maturity is the differentiator.

High-performing organizations aren't just spending more; they're **operating at a different level of maturity.**

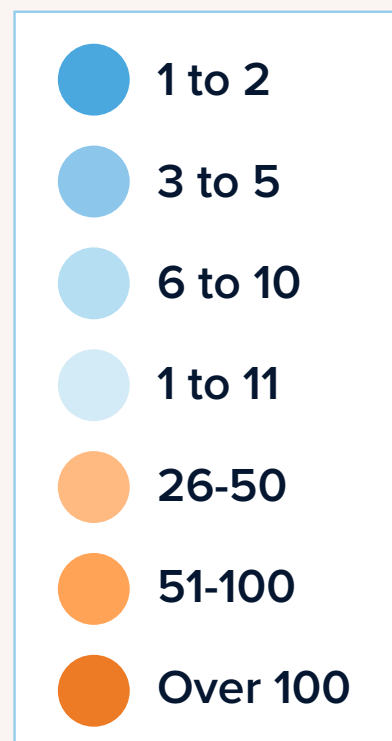
We took a look at how creator marketing programs are set up, as well as how the top cohort of brand respondents, Industry Leaders, corresponded to the market as a whole. 71% of Industry Leaders reported that creator marketing delivered more than 3x the ROI.

One of the clearest indicators of this maturity is the sheer number of people involved. It used to matter how many dedicated influencer marketers were managing a program. Now, what's more important is how creator marketing extends beyond a marketing team.



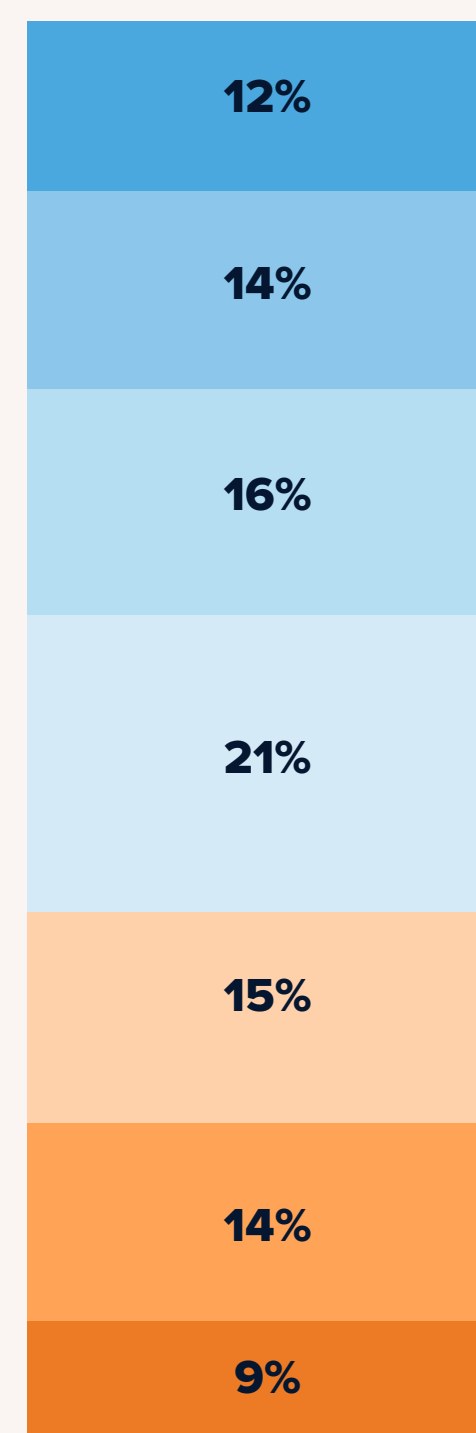
Industry Leaders: Top brands who reported more than double the ROI from influencer marketing and spent \$1M or more on the practice annually

The **average** number of people involved in creator marketing...



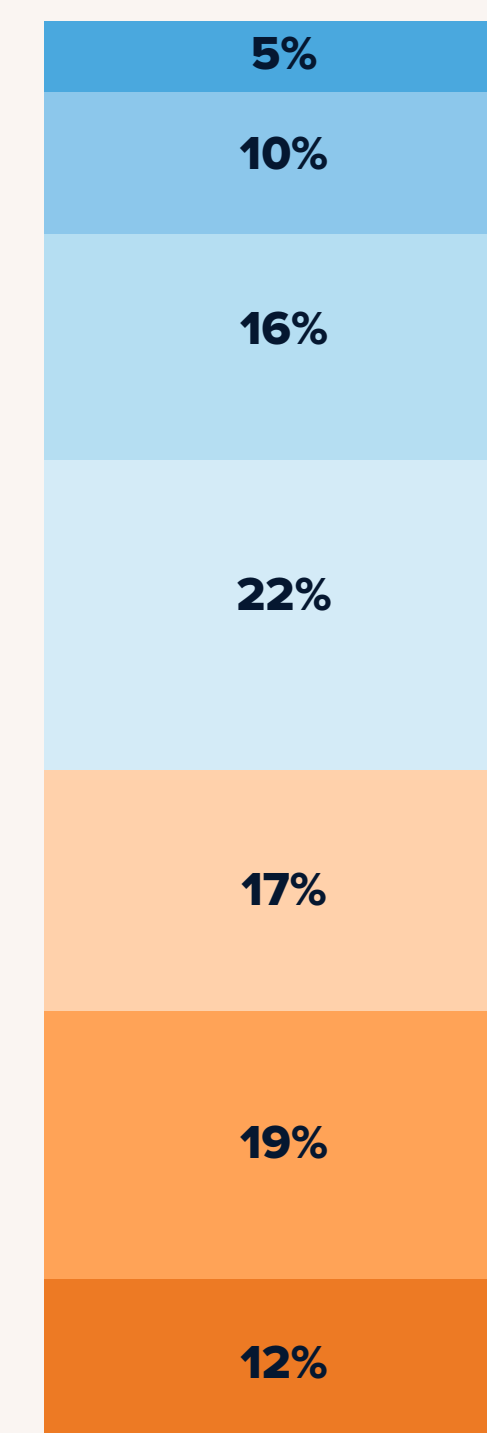
Brands

34



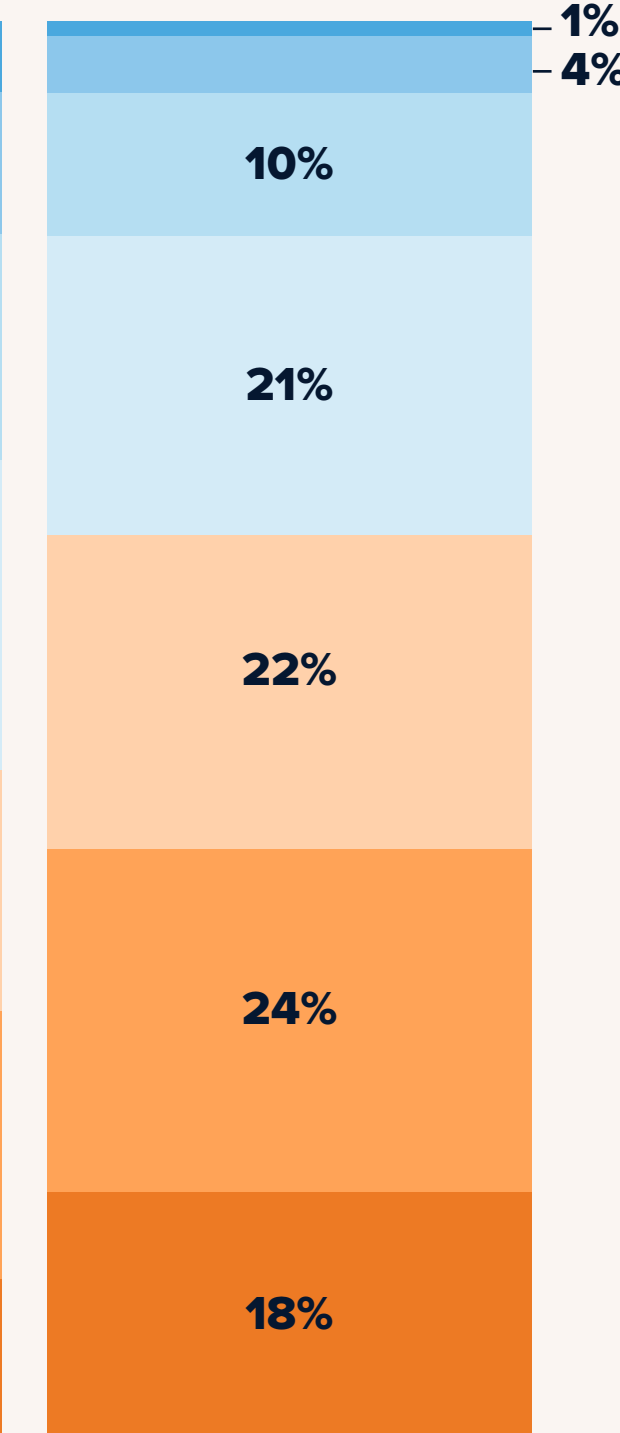
Agencies

41



Industry Leaders

53



This isn't just about having bigger teams.

It reflects how creator marketing now spans multiple business functions, including executive leadership, IT, HR, operations, and more. The cross-functional reach of our respondents mirrors the complexity of modern marketing organizations.

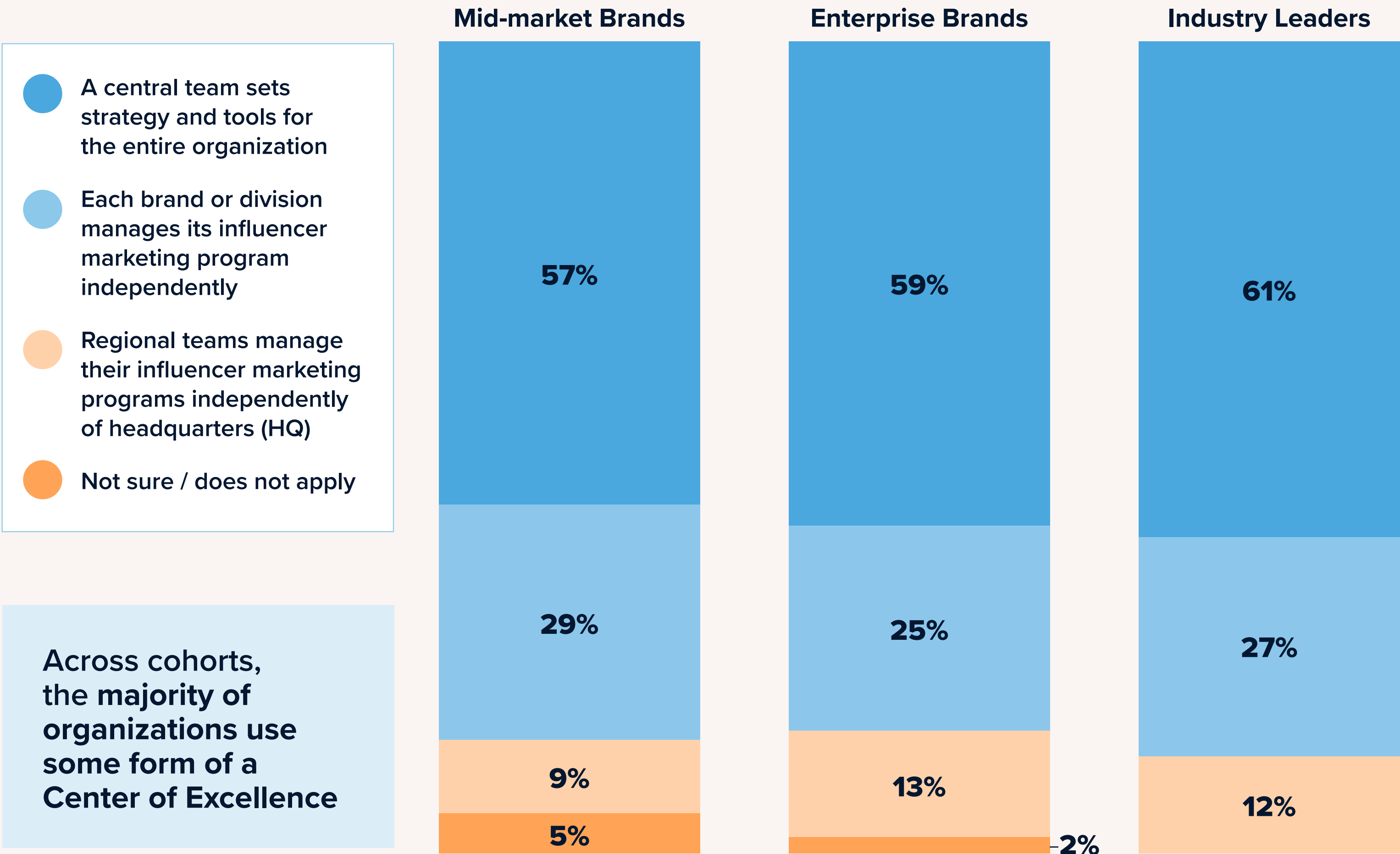
As teams grow in size and complexity, centralization becomes essential.

The majority of brand respondents report having a **Center of Excellence (COE), a central team that sets strategy and tools for the entire organization.**

In this new era, operational maturity is a competitive advantage. Organizations that manage their influencer programs centrally are reporting stronger governance, faster decision-making, and greater coordination, all of which are essential for navigating today’s demands on performance, safety, and scale.

To make a COE more powerful, brands can accelerate their operations via creator content.

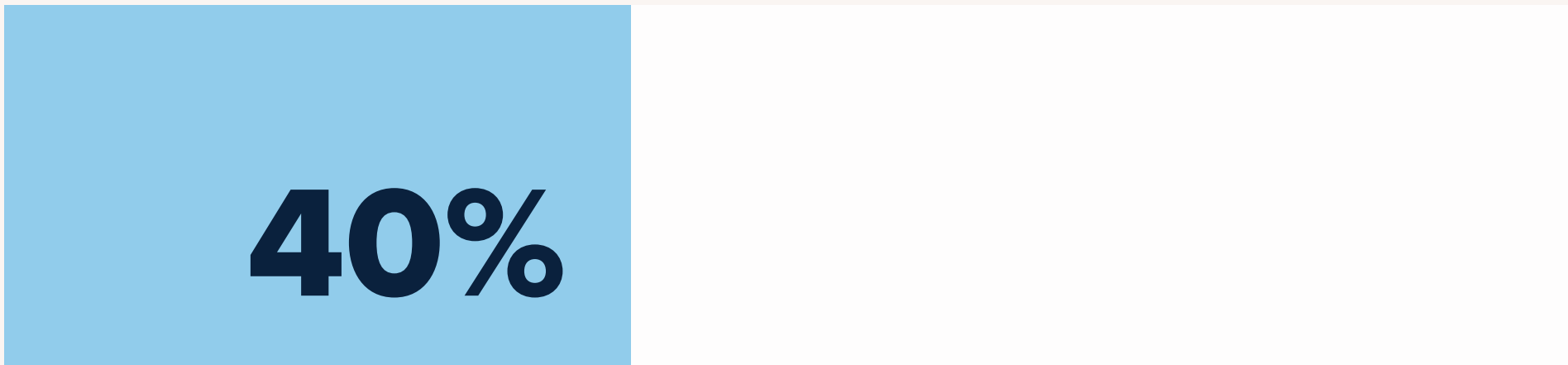
Which best describes how your influencer marketing program is operated?



On average, Industry Leaders devoted more than half of their marketing budgets to creator marketing

Over the past year, what percentage of total marketing spend was allocated toward influencer marketing?

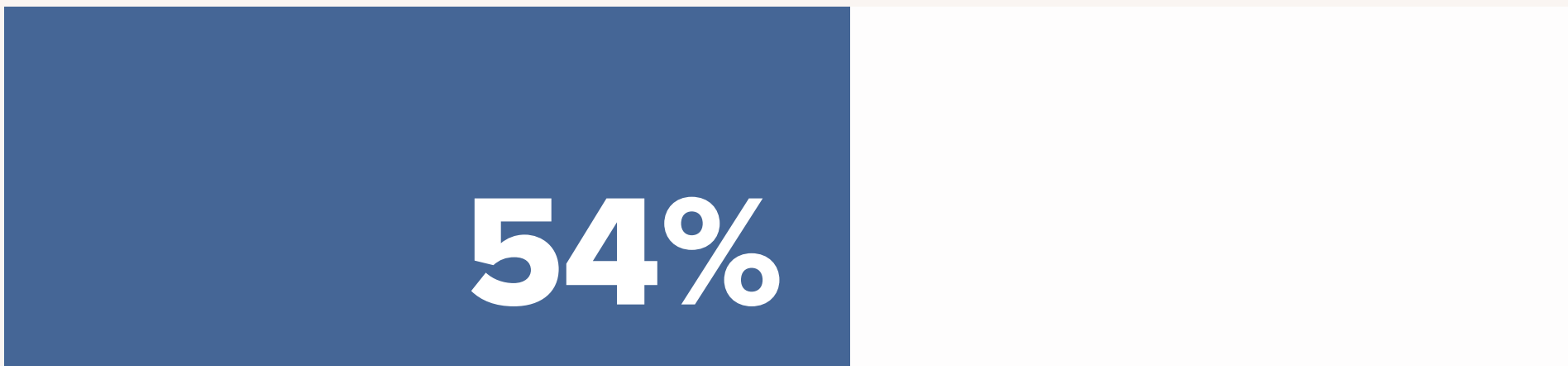
Mid-market Brands



Enterprise Brands



Industry Leaders



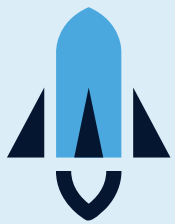
“When you don't have that clear definition and terminology, and everyone on the same boat, going in the same direction, it can get a bit frantic. The bigger it becomes and the more we get data that proves that influencer marketing is best for ROI and creator content is performing better than owned content, it starts to become difficult to tell that story without everyone looking at it the same way.

With the company seeing more and more investment, with us seeing more and more ROI, we decided that we needed a program that would get everything in order.”



Hassan Daoud
Global Head of Social Media & Influencers
Biersdorf

This is an operational principle being echoed by the biggest brands in the world.



Unilever, for example, has committed about [50% of its advertising spend to influencer marketing](#).

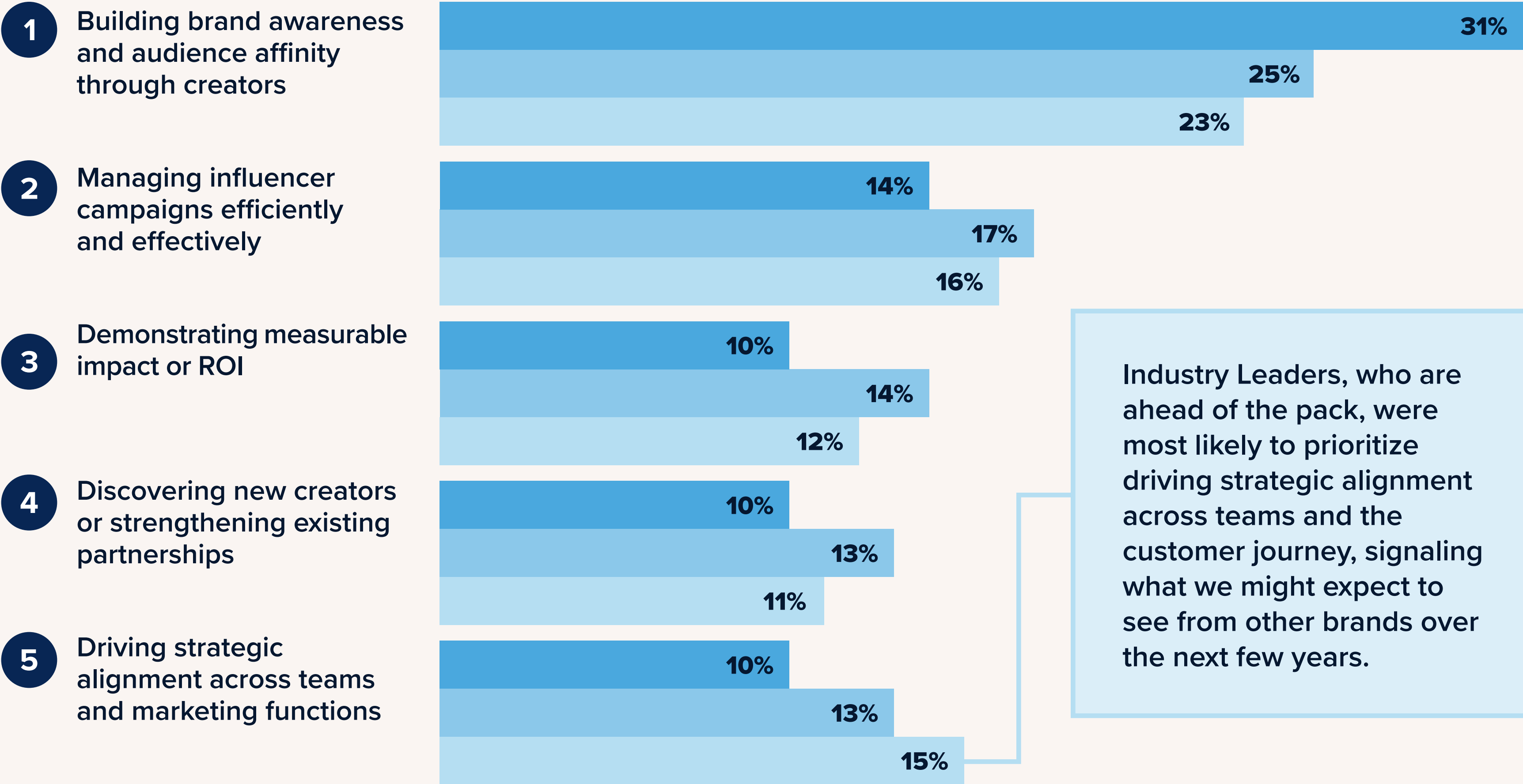
Across cohorts, brands are prioritizing awareness and audience affinity outcomes, even as some of their priorities are operational or executional.

What’s the current top priority for your organization’s influencer marketing program?

Mid-market Brands

Enterprise Brands

Industry Leaders

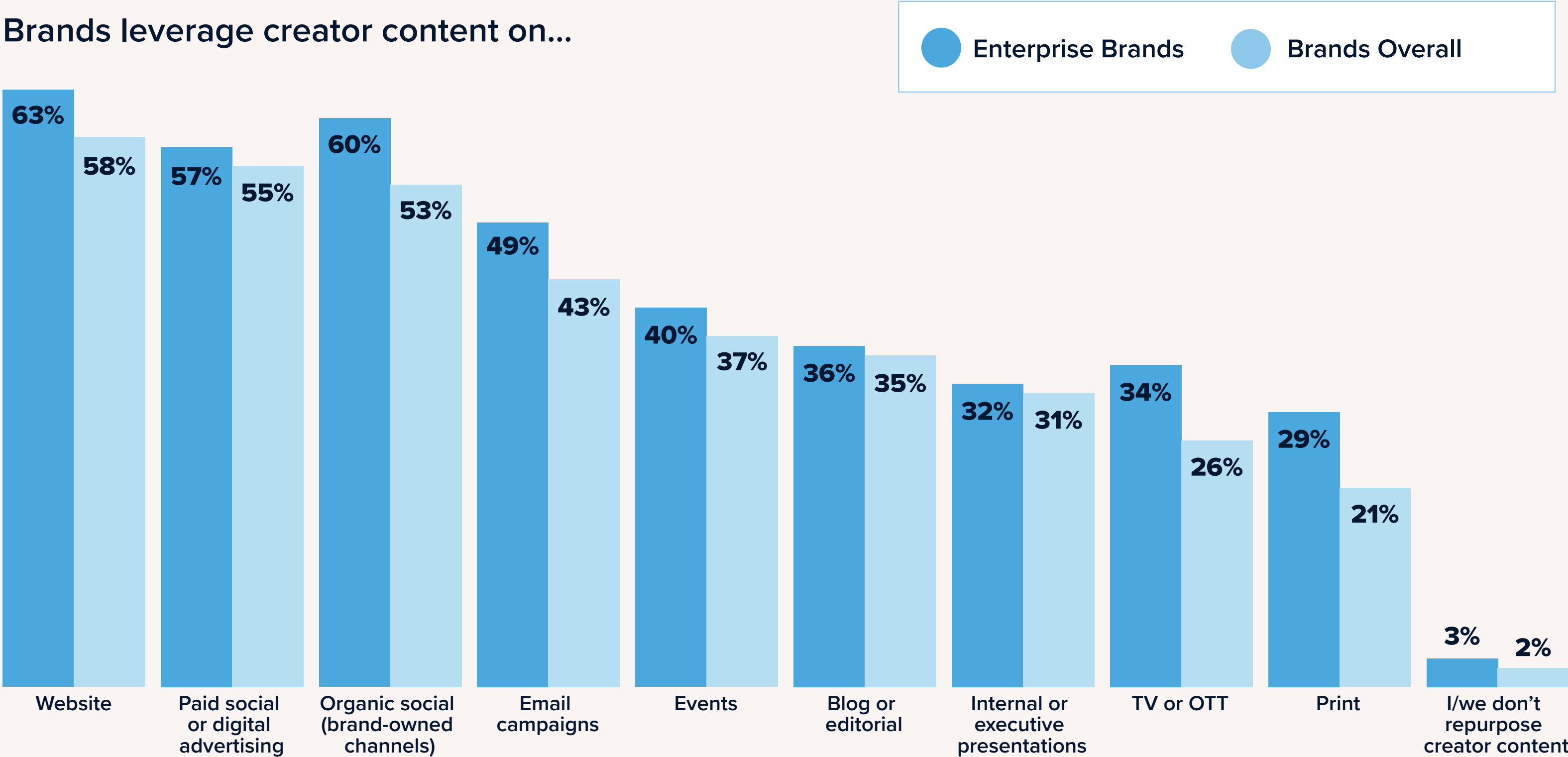


Industry Leaders, who are ahead of the pack, were most likely to prioritize driving strategic alignment across teams and the customer journey, signaling what we might expect to see from other brands over the next few years.

Creator marketing is the content engine for the entire marketing mix

98% of brand respondents repurpose creator content on other channels

Brands leverage creator content on...



The question is no longer, “Does creator marketing work?,” but “**How can we build optimal infrastructure for creator marketing that makes success more likely?**”

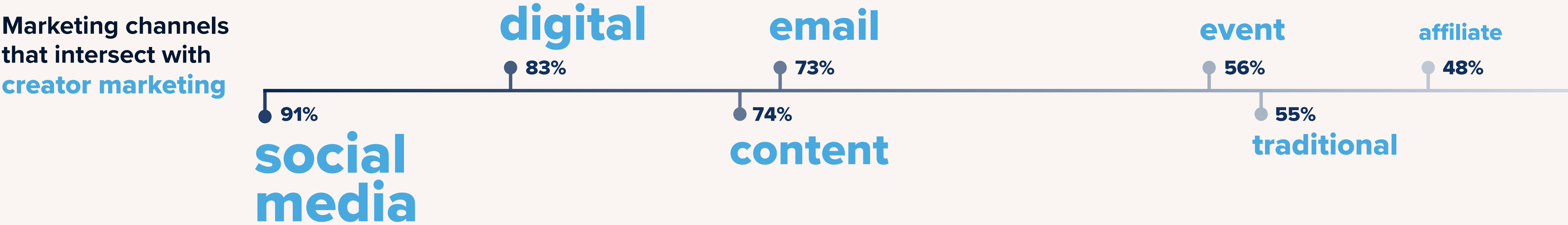
For the majority of brands, repurposing creator content, whether on their website, paid social/digital advertising, or owned social, is non-negotiable.

The power of creator marketing extends beyond specific social media platforms or channels. Creator content makes for effective operational infrastructure that scales and fuels business outcomes.

64% of brands increased their use of creator content over the past year

Creator marketing has become critical for organizations, emerging as a versatile, resilient engine that powers nearly every marketing tactic.

Among respondents, all of whom are senior leaders who do creator marketing, 91% also leveraged social media, 83% with digital, and 74% with content marketing.



What’s telling isn’t just what channels intersect with creator marketing, but how consistently creators are being tapped to strengthen them.

Creator marketing doesn’t sit next to other marketing functions, it sits beneath them, strengthening the entire system. It’s the thread that ties together performance, authenticity, and efficiency across touchpoints.

While channels like affiliate and traditional marketing appear furthest away in the association map, that distance is also instructive. As emerging strategies like social commerce gain traction, creator marketing’s foundational role is likely to grow. We’re seeing the early stages of that shift now, with affiliate marketing already a top ROI-driver and a predicted area of future impact according to respondents.

For agencies, brand safety is the No. 1 challenge

Creator content now fuels the entire marketing machine, but **with scale comes scrutiny.**

As brands integrate creators across paid, organic, and owned channels, the stakes for reputation, compliance, and cohesion rise. That’s because consumers are more likely to encounter your brand via a creator vs. your owned channels. Which means brands must expand their approach to creators from short-term risk mitigation to long-term brand fit.

Nowhere is this pressure more acute than among agencies. Since agencies enact creator marketing programs for multiple brands at once, they are a leading indicator for both the challenges brands face and the opportunities before them. **More than before, agencies are accountable not just for campaign success, but for reputational risk, suitability, and strategic alignment.**

Brand safety has emerged as the No. 1 challenge for agencies, and because managing expectations from clients is a close second, it stands to reason that more and more brands are thinking about it, too.

Top Challenges for Agencies



Top Challenges for Enterprise Agencies

1	Ensuring creator suitability (vetting), risk mitigation, or legal compliance	42%
2	Demonstrating measurable impact or ROI	41%
3	Securing buy-in from leadership for creator marketing program	40%

Brands are funneling more investment behind creators than before. For agency respondents, this investment is even greater, especially as paid media becomes increasingly creator-powered.

More investment means higher risk and expectations. Agencies aren’t the only cohort contending with brand safety.

72%

of enterprise brands report brand safety has become more critical YoY

BRAND SUITABILITY

For 7 out of 10 enterprise respondents, brand safety has become more critical over the past year. As time has gone on, how organizations approach brand safety has transformed, too.

Given the complexity, scale, and risk associated with creator marketing today, particularly as investment and reputational risk grows, brand safety is no longer just about vetting and avoiding NSFW content.

Today, brand safety is a holistic, always-on strategy that safeguards brand reputation across every touchpoint. Brand safety encompasses governance, compliance, risk mitigation, and brand suitability.

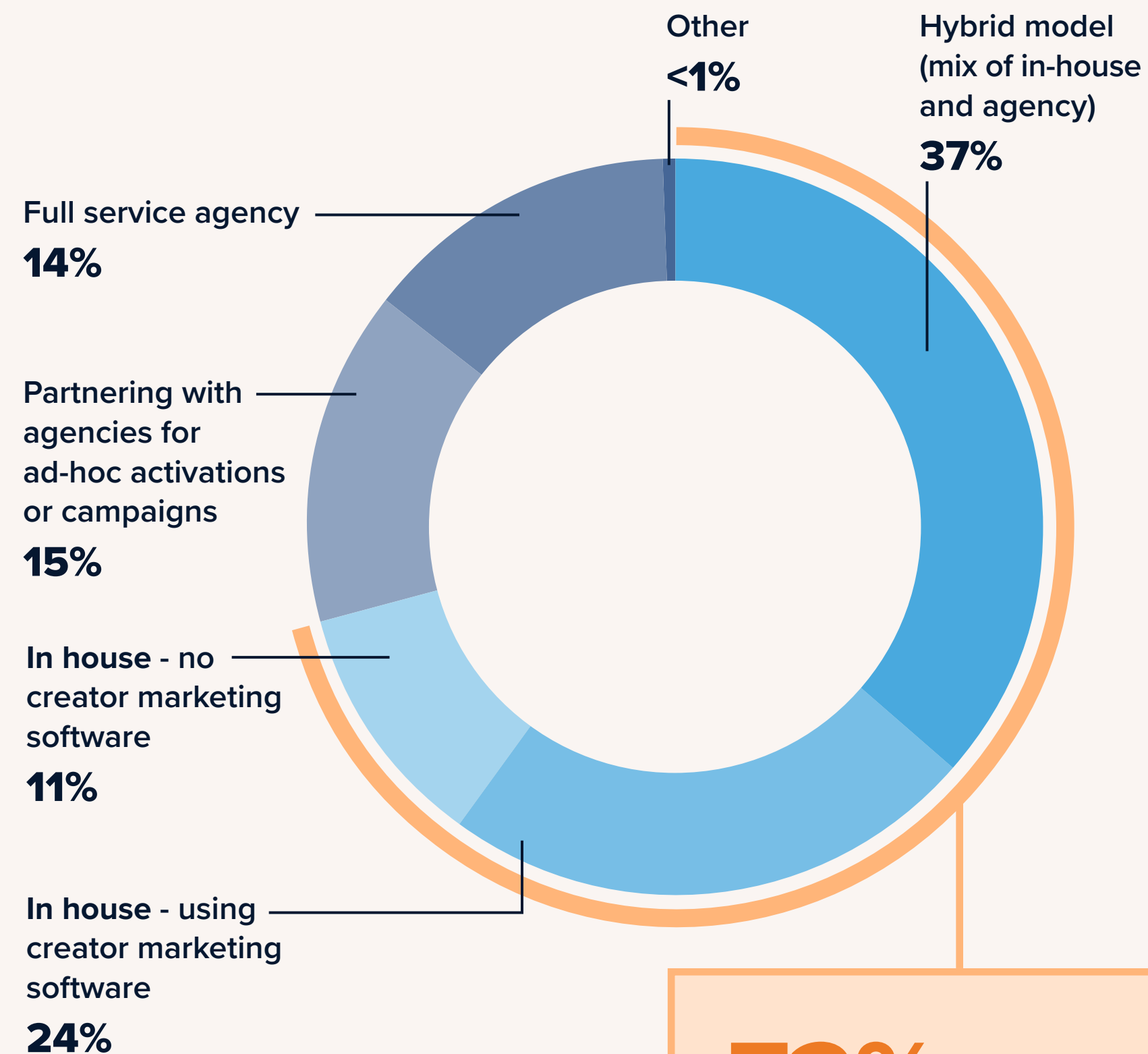
In short, brand safety is not a checklist. Now, it's a strategic imperative.

COMING OCT. 21!



CreatorIQ's new
State of Safety report

How do you manage your creator marketing?



72%

of brands manage creator marketing in-house in some capacity

At present, 37% of brand respondents employ a hybrid model of program management, while 6 out of 10 lean on agencies in some way. This reflects the enduring role agencies play in guiding strategy, ensuring expert execution, and navigating emerging risks.

As creator marketing investment grows and creators expand a brand's reach and exposure, the center of gravity will shift. Safety and suitability at scale require something deeper than parameters: they require data. Increasingly, data governance is not something brands can afford to outsource. Ownership of creator data, risk management infrastructure, and intelligent guidelines will become non-negotiable aspects of a brand's long-term strategy.

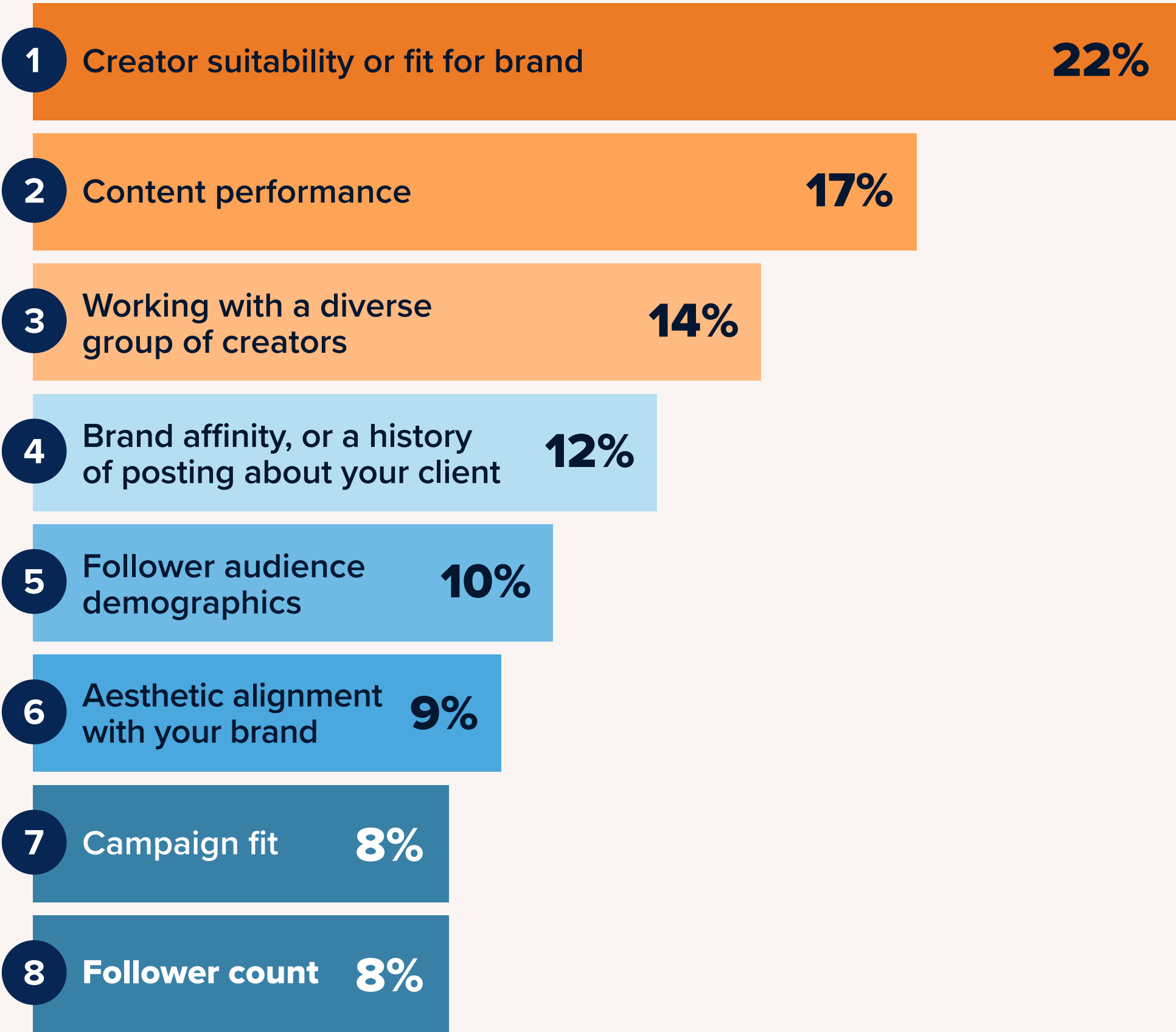
The new ‘F’ word: follower count falls from favor

As influencer marketing programs become more sophisticated, what matters is quickly evolving.

In the Era of Efficacy, brands are engineering for impact. Operational maturity has helped unlock the ability to assess performance, standardize processes, and manage creator partnerships at scale.

But with that growth comes a strategic shift: **the industry’s long-standing obsession with follower count is officially over.**

When you are selecting new creators to work with, which factor is most important?



In this year’s survey, follower count ranked as brands’ **least-important** factor when selecting creators.

~~Followers~~ **Fit** 

What’s risen to the top is brand suitability: the degree to which a creator aligns with a brand’s identity, values, and voice.

The content-first future has arrived in the present, reflecting an industry adapting to algorithmic changes and the demand for deeper resonance with consumers. Brand suitability is how modern teams operationalize brand safety.



Brand safety is a holistic framework that protects an organization’s reputation, longevity, and long-term growth.

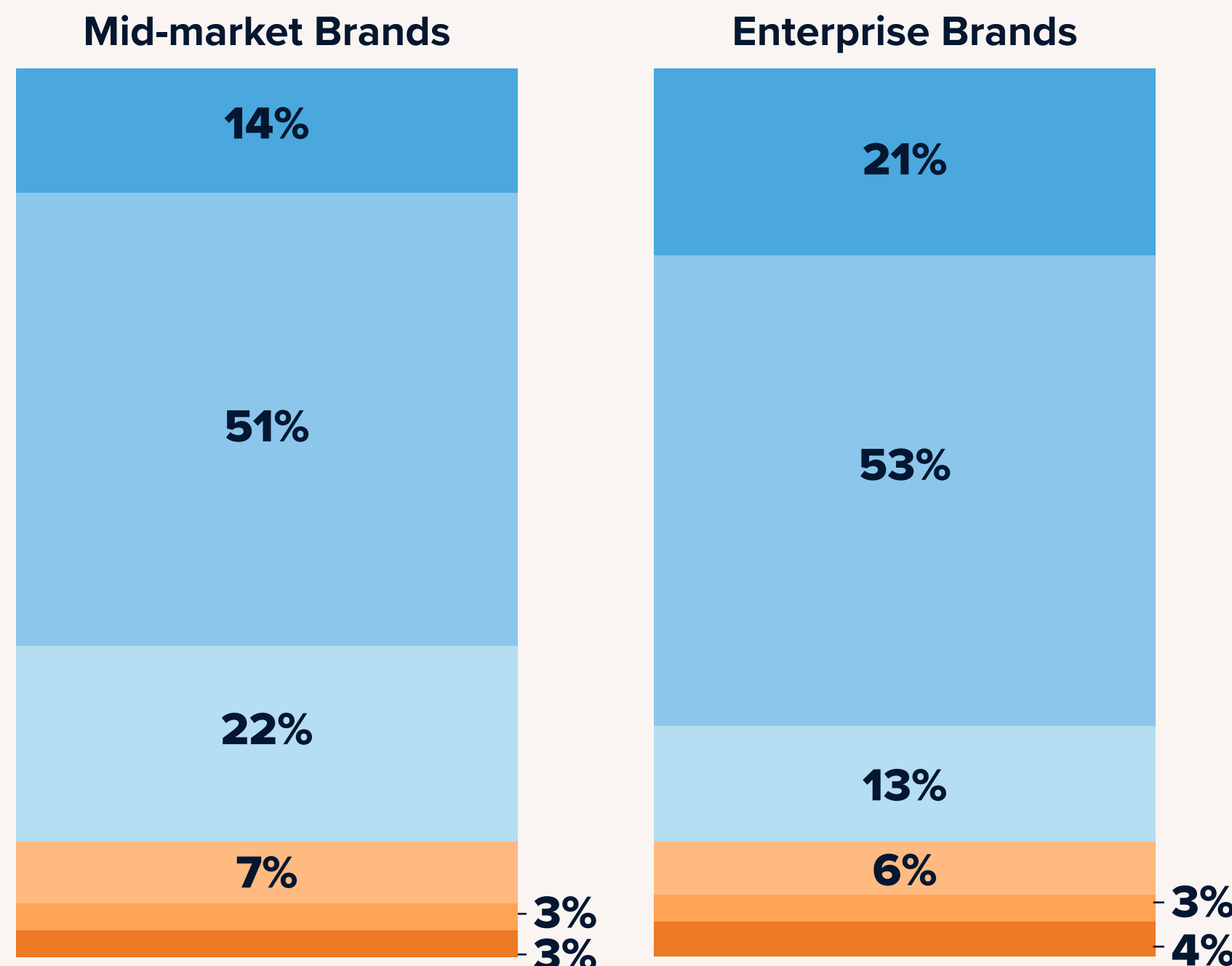
Brand safety encompasses governance, risk mitigation, brand suitability, and fit.

A 2025 BCG consumer survey found that [social media influencers were the top source for consumers' purchasing decisions](#), outpacing online search, owned social media, traditional media channels, and word-of-mouth. This aligns with CreatorIQ's finding that [94% of organizations report that creator content drives more ROI than traditional digital advertising](#).

Nearly 7 out of 10 brand respondents more than doubled their ROI with creator marketing, with nearly 4 out of 10 reporting more than 3x the ROI. More organizations are seeing ROI YoY because they're extending the value of creator content beyond just social and reducing costs for content creation on other channels.

For 74% of enterprise brands, creator marketing ROI is up YoY

How has the ROI of your creator marketing program changed over the past year?



“We are layering and using creators to multiply our impact. We like to start with the mid-, micro-, and affiliates—just getting people samples, talking, having fun, and being enthusiastic. What that does for us is send signals. This is where the marketing science comes in. We're starting to send signals to the algorithms on different platforms. Then we layer in paid media. We'll sometimes take that creator content or UGC content and use that in a paid campaign where you can have a little more control over your audience targeting, and then we'll amplify that. Then we'll run linear or streaming TV.

Now all of a sudden, in a very short amount of time, we've used creators to build buzz, send signals, and we layered in paid marketing to amplify that. It becomes a full flywheel.”



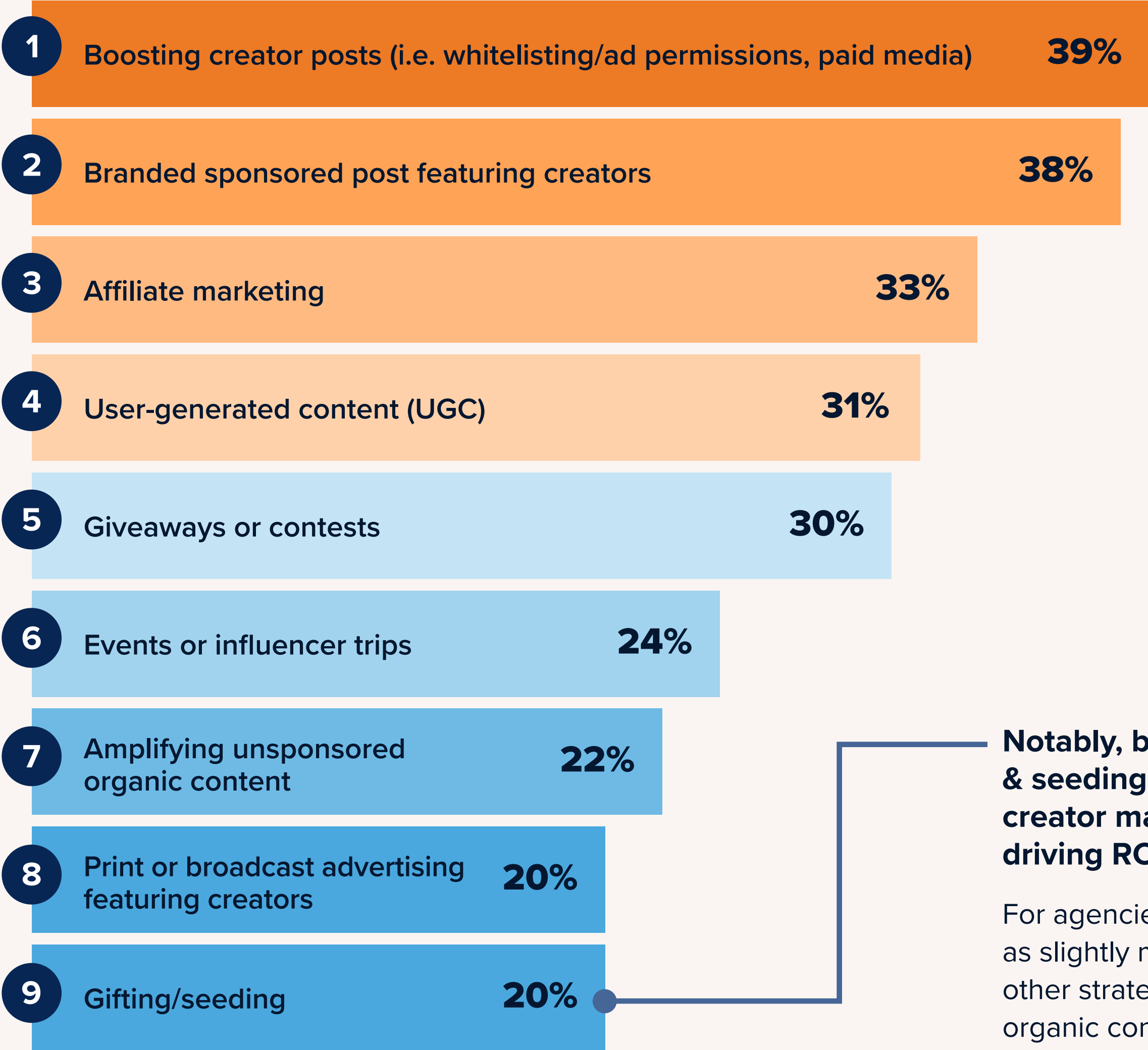
Liz Grampp
VP Global Marketing Communications
Moose Toys

When it comes to ROI, not all creator marketing activities are created equal.

Boosted creator posts and branded content are currently the top ROI-drivers for organizations, reinforcing the importance of paid amplification strategies that leverage creators to scale performance without sacrificing authenticity.

Creator content fuels a strong marketing infrastructure across channels and teams, making it one of the few investments that improves performance and output, while keeping overhead sustainable. In other words, with creator content you get a lot more out of it than what you put in.

Top ROI-drivers



Notably, brands selected gifting & seeding as their least effective creator marketing strategy for driving ROI.

For agencies, gifting & seeding ranked as slightly more effective than just one other strategy (amplifying unsponsored organic content).

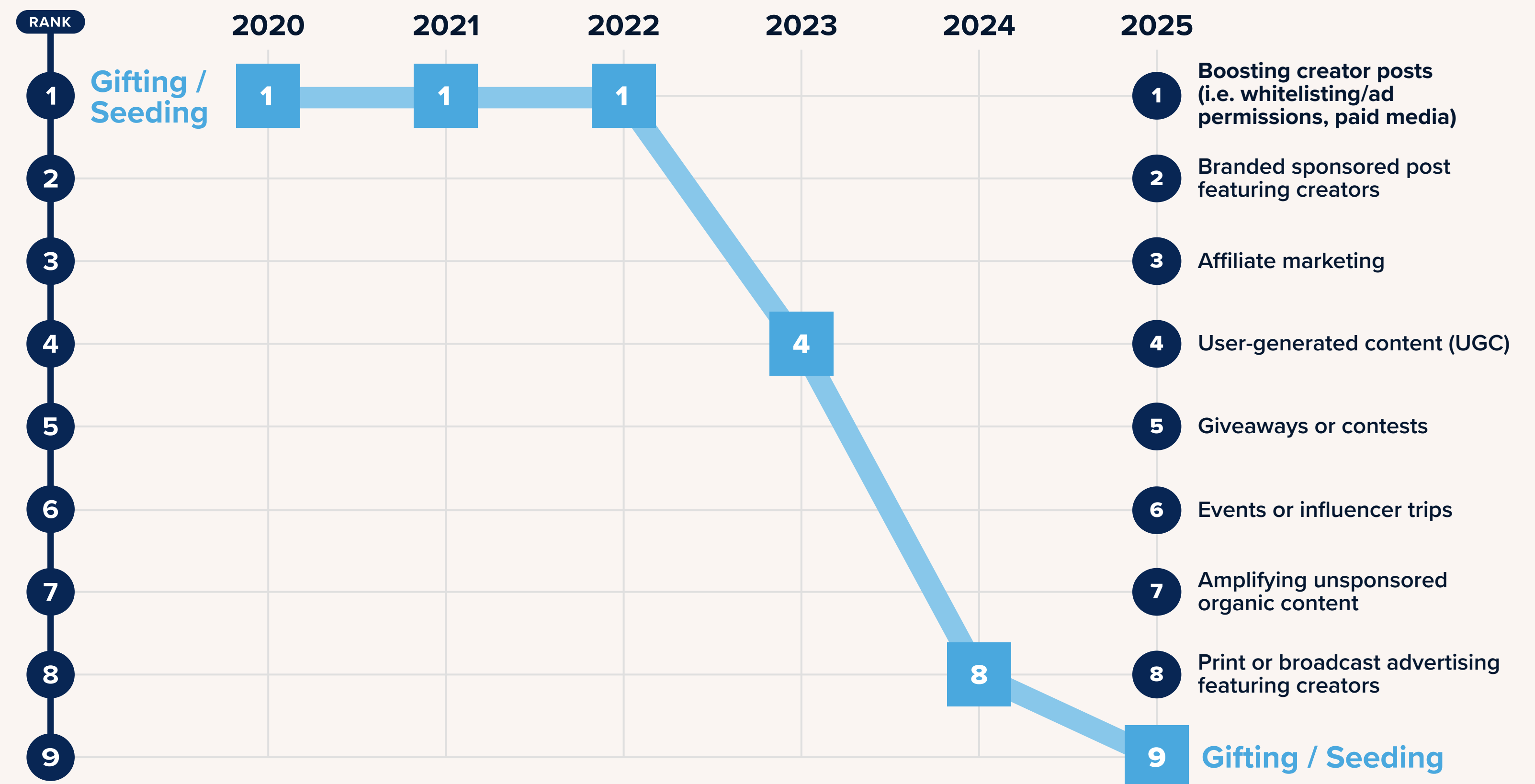
The return of gifting & seeding has declined in favor of paid media strategies

This marks a historical change from 2020-2022, when marketers selected product sends as the most effective strategy for ROI.

In 2023, gifting & seeding dropped to #4, selected by 14% as a top-three strategy for ROI. Last year, gifting and seeding dropped to the #8 most impactful strategy for brands (17%), more effective than only print/broadcast advertising and whitelisting/ad permissions.

While gifting & seeding is still great for **relationship building and community retention**, it fails when it's done unintentionally and hinges on the hope that creators talk about your product.

How the most effective creator marketing strategies have changed over time



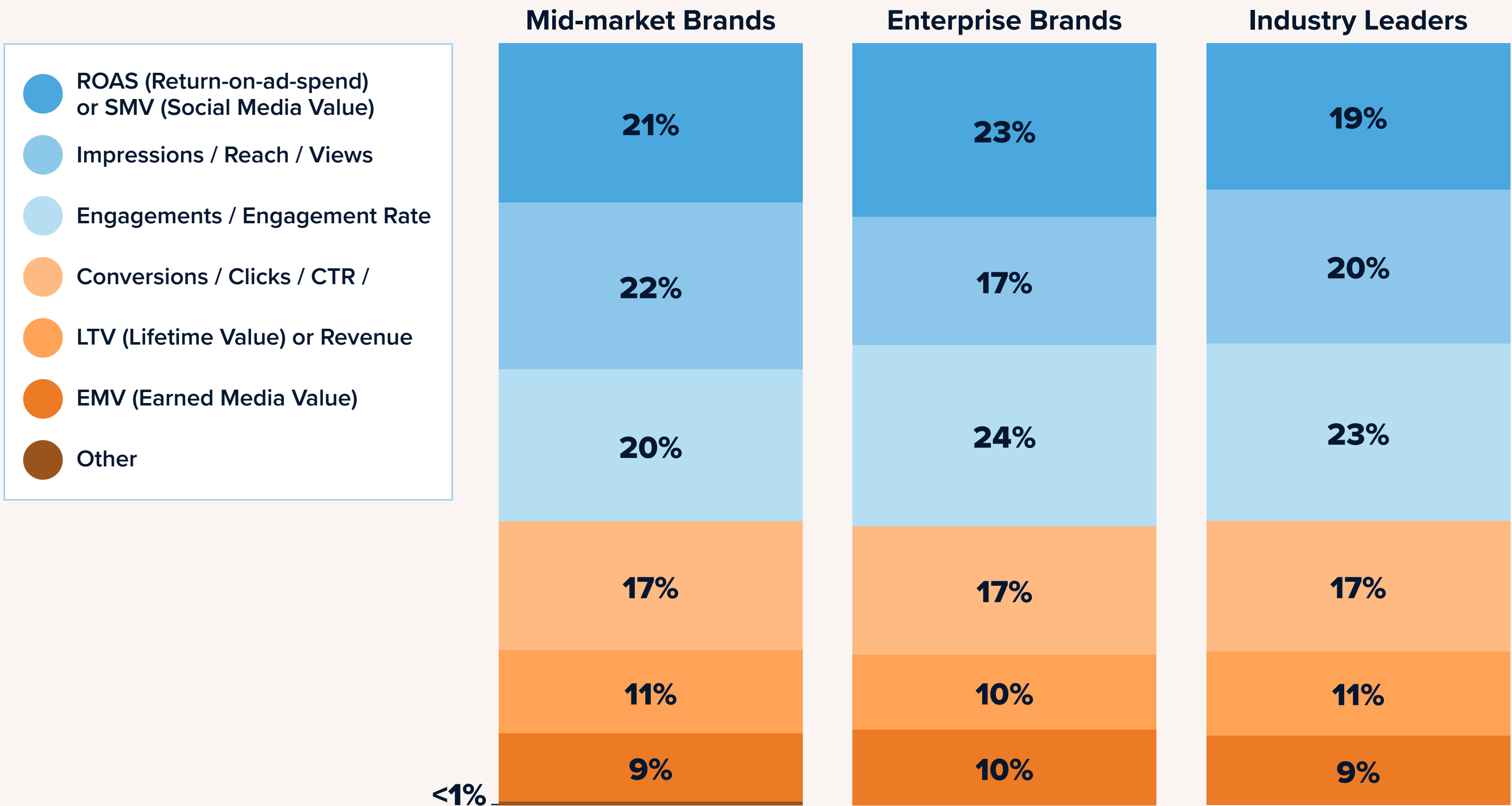
Marketers have evolved beyond surface-level metrics

As creator marketing matures, so too does the demand for more sophisticated ways to measure its impact. While organizations once relied heavily on awareness metrics like impressions and reach, today’s marketers are pursuing a more nuanced, multi-tiered approach to measurement.

When asked which marketing metric is most useful for justifying their programs to leadership, responses were nearly evenly split across multiple metrics—further proof that no single metric tells the full story. Rather, it’s important to leverage a layered approach to measurement based on outcomes.

Measurement has transformed from its early days when one metric was sufficient to validate a program’s success. The future of measurement is holistic, incentivizing brands to move beyond a one-size-fits-all mentality to an outcomes-first mindset. The most effective marketers identify the best metrics based on whether their goals operate on a campaign, program, and/or business level. After identifying what piece of the pie they’re in charge of, marketers must then determine how specific metrics ladder up to their goal.

Engagements is the No. 1 metric enterprise brands use to justify creator marketing, but by a slim margin



Marketers report a high effectiveness rate for many of the most common measurement tools, indicating that adequate measurement infrastructure is in place—it just requires the right lens to measure success.

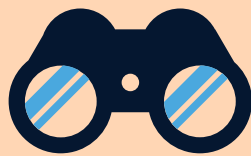
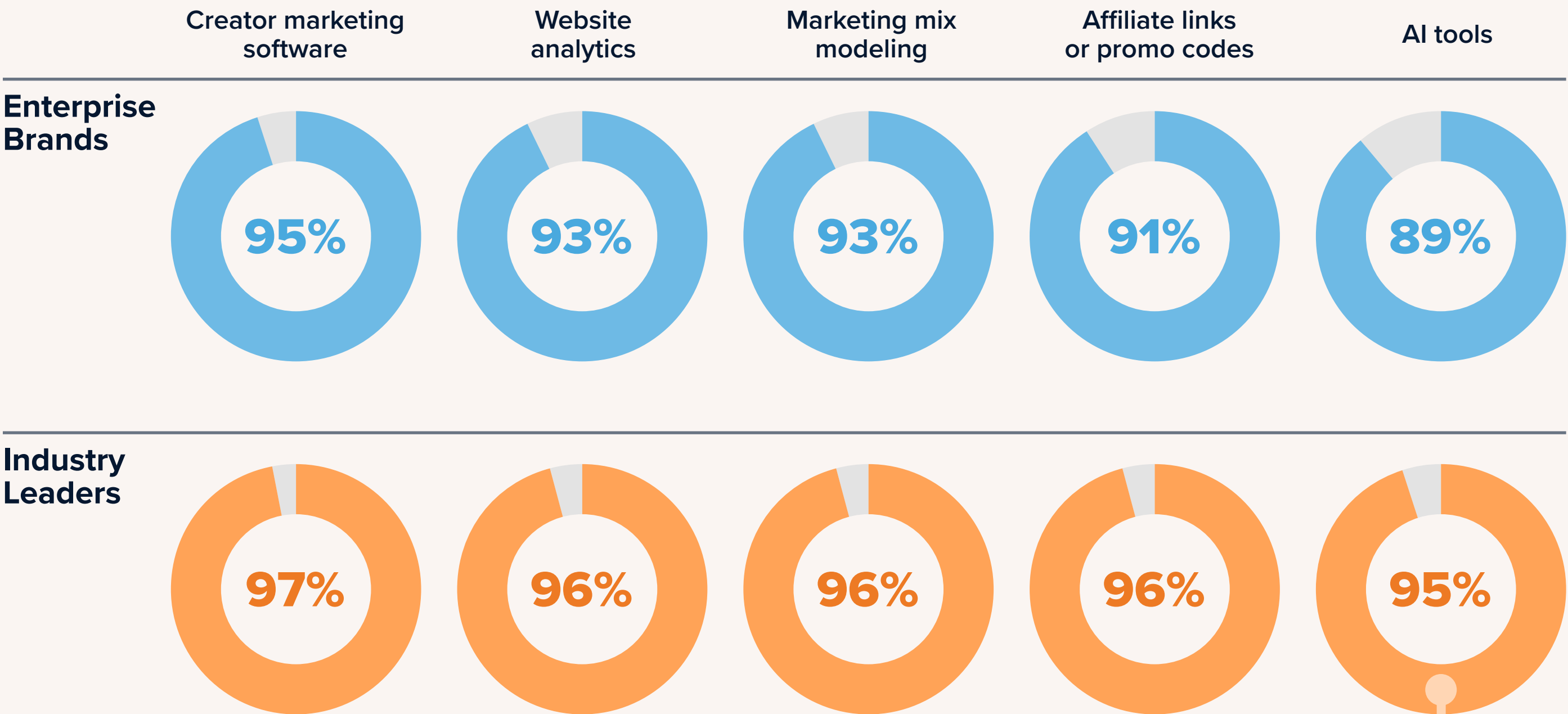
“As creator marketing budgets have risen, so have demands for financial accountability. Many organizations now hold the tactic to the same measurement standards as performance media, while a volatile macro-environment adds increased pressure to justify spending. Meanwhile, scale and precision have become top priorities for marketers, resulting in budget shifts and an increased focus on creator selection.”



Jasmine Enberg
Former VP & Principal Analyst
EMARKETER

For enterprises, creator marketing software is the most effective measurement solution

Percent of respondents who find the method effective



Industry Leaders find AI tools more effective than enterprise brand respondents, but least effective among the current set of tools—in part, because marketers are still exploring how to get the most out of AI.

Nearly all marketers use AI, but they’re still deciding what they do and do not want from it

The rise of AI in creator marketing is undeniable: **95% of brands and 97% of agencies have used AI in marketing over the past year.**

Though AI has quickly become ubiquitous, it’s clear that AI is better at some tasks than others.

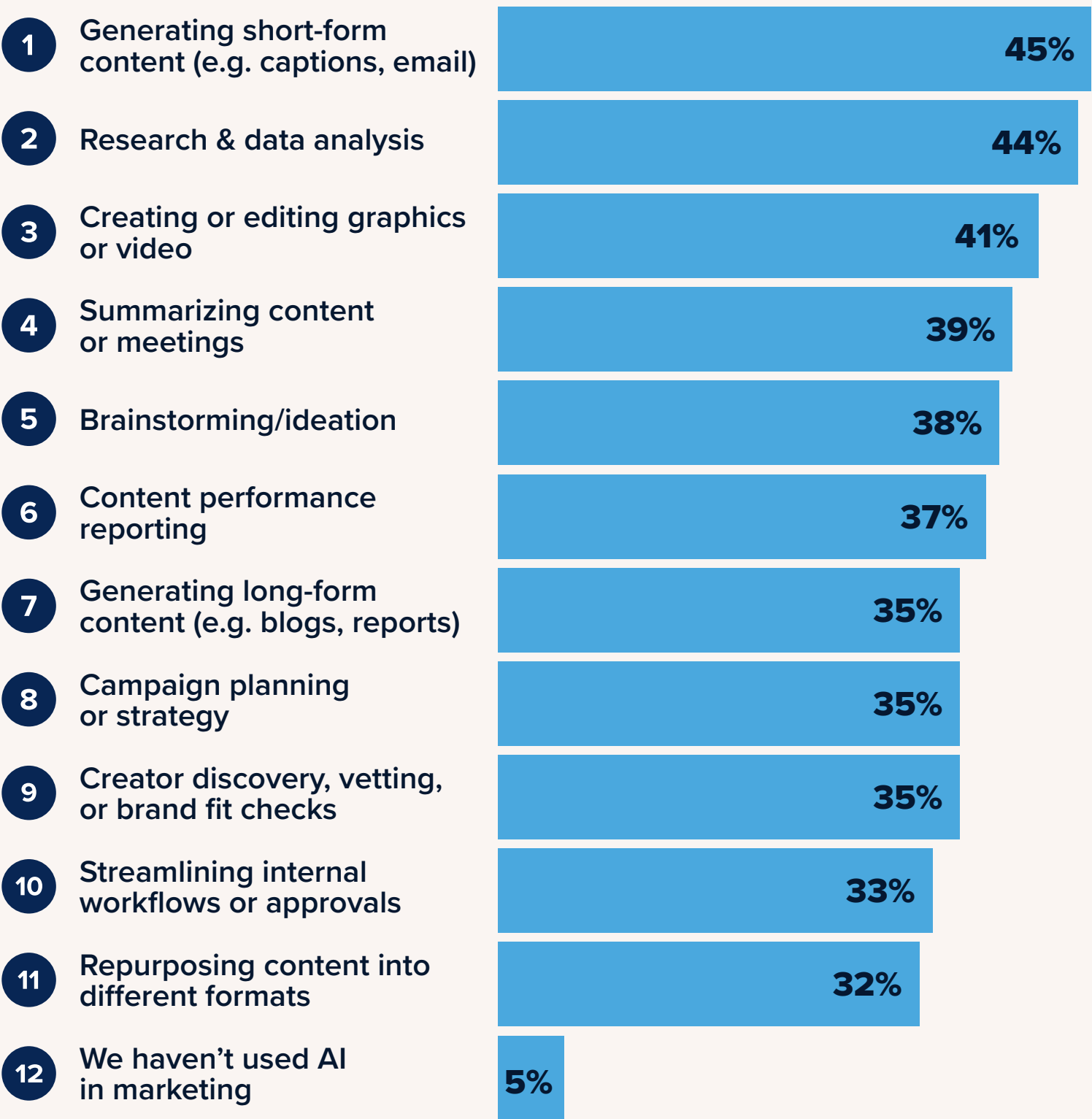
Top use cases of AI have changed in just one year.



Last year, **brainstorming/ideation** was the No. 2 most frequent use case for brands.

Most Common Use Cases of AI for Marketers

Brands



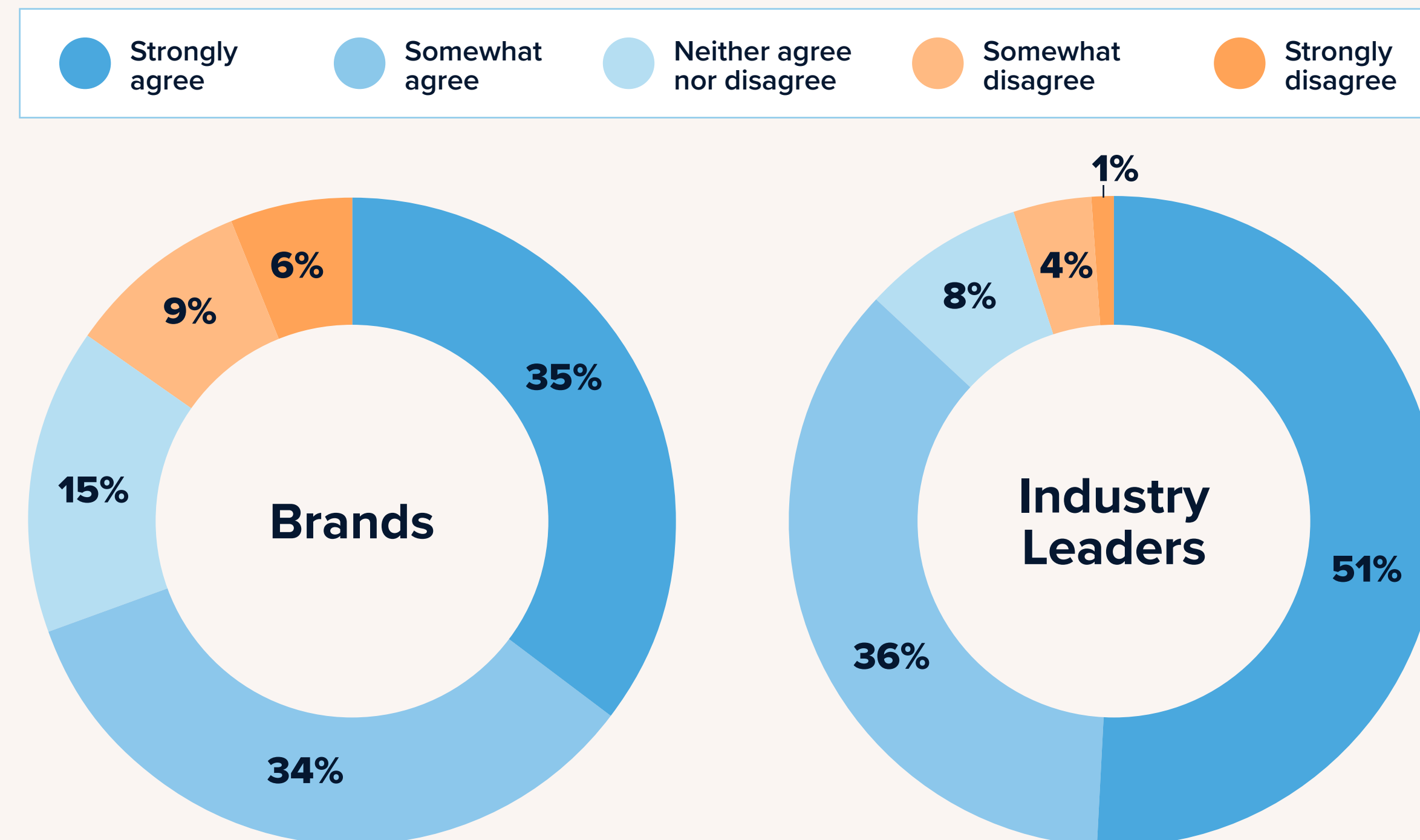
Agencies



We asked senior marketers at brands and agencies to what degree they were in favor of fully automating influencer marketing with AI.

69% of brands want to fully automate creator marketing operations

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
“I am in favour of fully automating influencer marketing with AI”?



“The creator economy stands apart from other digital channels because distribution isn’t programmatic. There’s a human creator in the loop, deciding what gets shared and when. Creators are often protective of their feeds, and rightly so; they ensure advertorial content fits **naturally** into their content.

Only the right brands make it through, and audiences pick up on this selectivity. That authenticity gives the message word-of-mouth credibility, which is often why it performs so well. What other marketing channel has audiences congratulating publishers for 'getting that bag?'”



Nate Harris
VP of Product Innovation
CreatorIQ



AI seems most useful and welcomed when it offers **clear efficiency gains**, such as evaluating large chunks of data, informing strategic decisions, aiding with creator discovery, and allowing for experimentation or targeted outreach.

The part of their job marketers *least* want AI to replace?

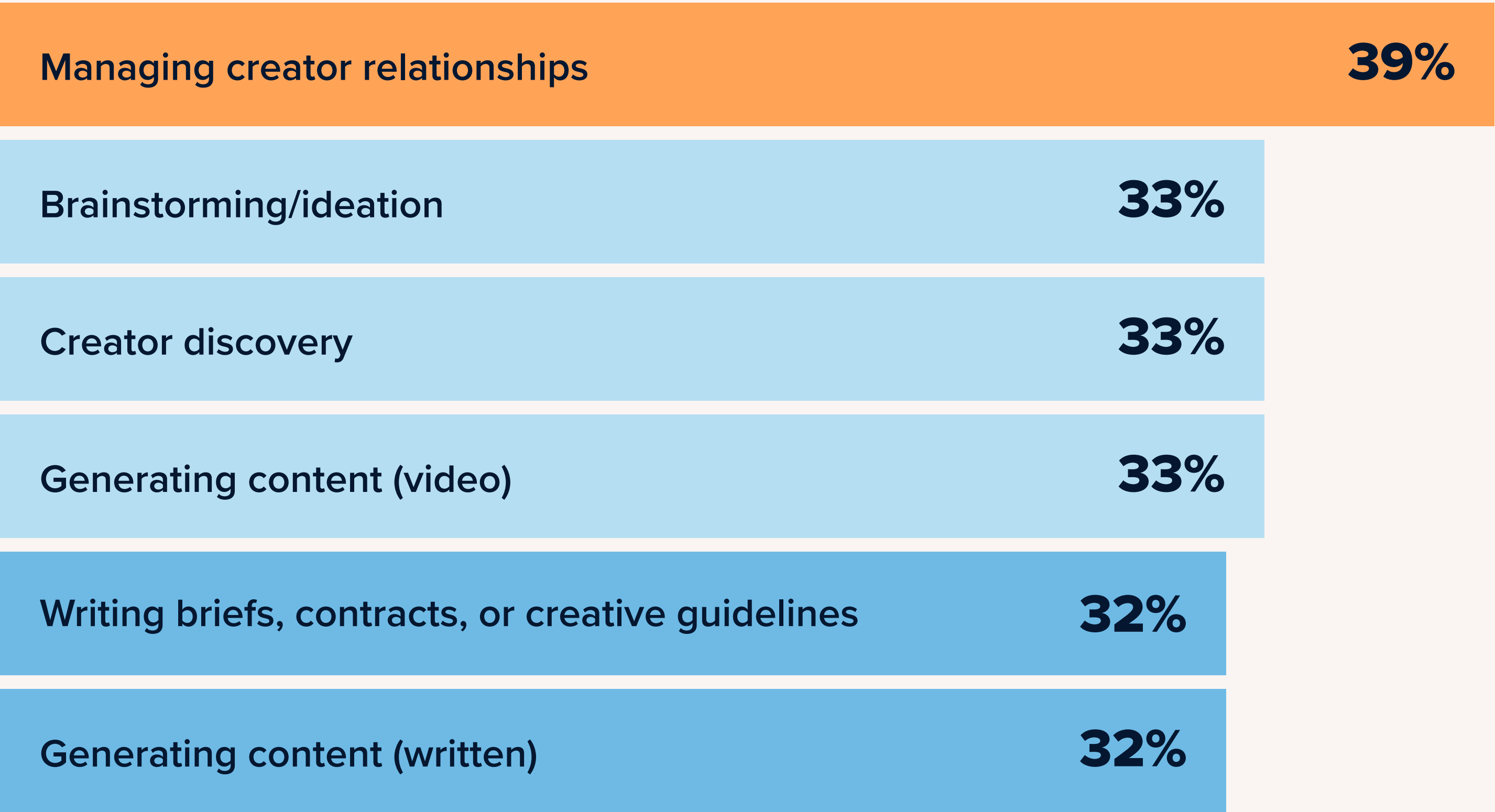
Managing relationships with creators

Just because AI can do a lot, doesn't mean it should.

At this point in time, AI works best as an accelerator that transforms the backend of creator operations, rather than a replacement for human judgment or creativity. The feedback loop between creators and AI is essential for maximizing impact.

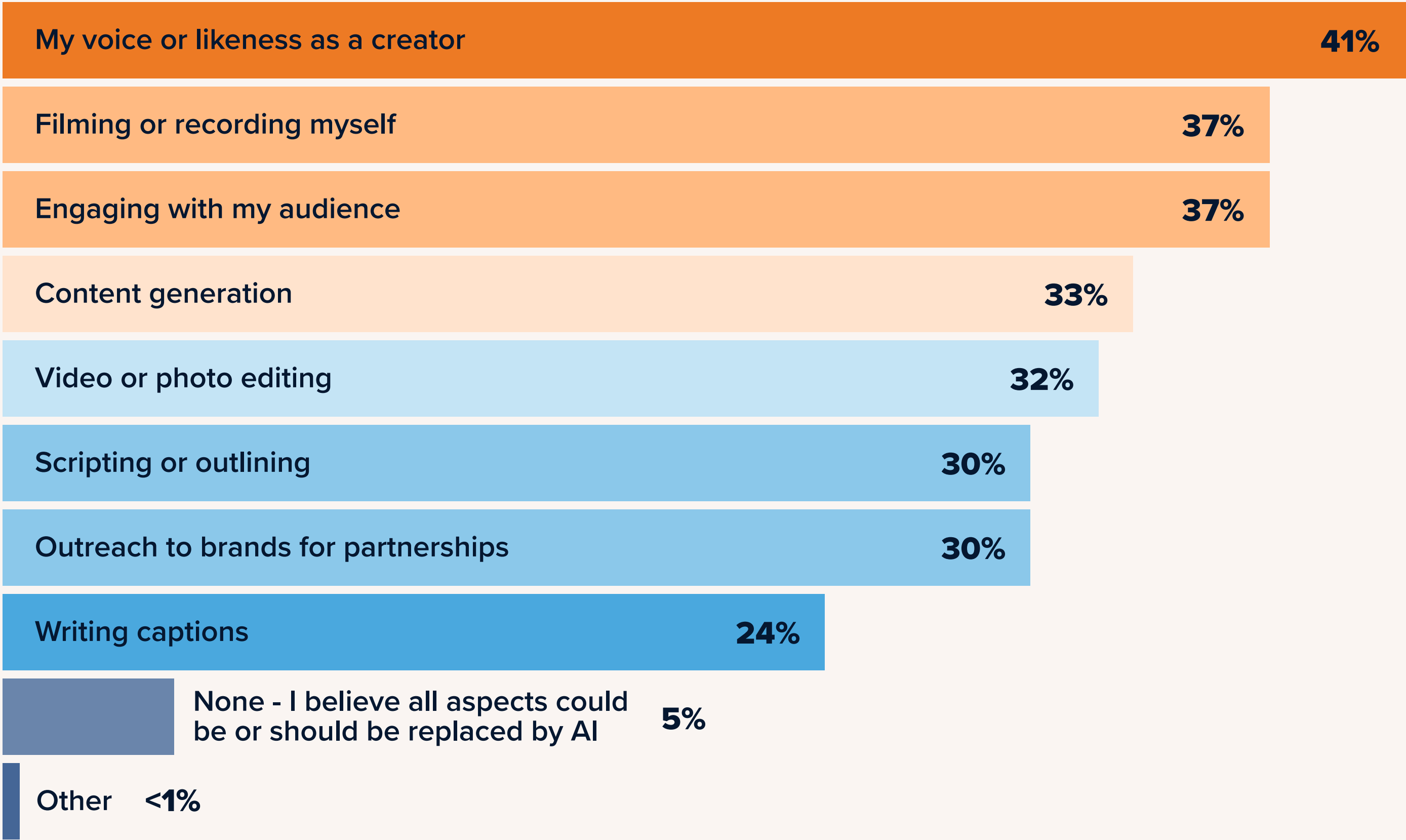
Notably, while marketers were keen on increased automation of their operations, they were less enthusiastic about replacing the most human aspect of the industry: managing relationships with creators.

What AI *shouldn't* fully replace



Creators echoed this sentiment.
While 95% have used AI for content creation, 41% say their voice or likeness should never be replaced.

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



Though some organizations are investing in AI-generated influencers, in **H1 2025, the average engagement rate on Instagram for AI-generated creators that we track was low at 1.02%.²**

In an industry powered by creators, it’s necessary to maintain the human spark that fosters community and trust between creators and consumers.

The industry is still deciding what to do with AI. Though AI offers so much potential and opportunity, upskilling and guidance is needed. Marketers have to decide now what AI shouldn’t do. As it becomes harder to source what’s real and what’s not, human creators will be increasingly important as vetted, authentic sources of connection.

² CreatorIQ research, August 2025.

Meta's ecosystem remains the backbone of influencer campaigns, but organizations average five platforms each

Over the last six years, the platform landscape for influencer marketing has grown both broader and more strategic. On average, organizations are now leveraging five social platforms to power their influencer campaigns, signaling the increasing complexity and scale of modern programs.

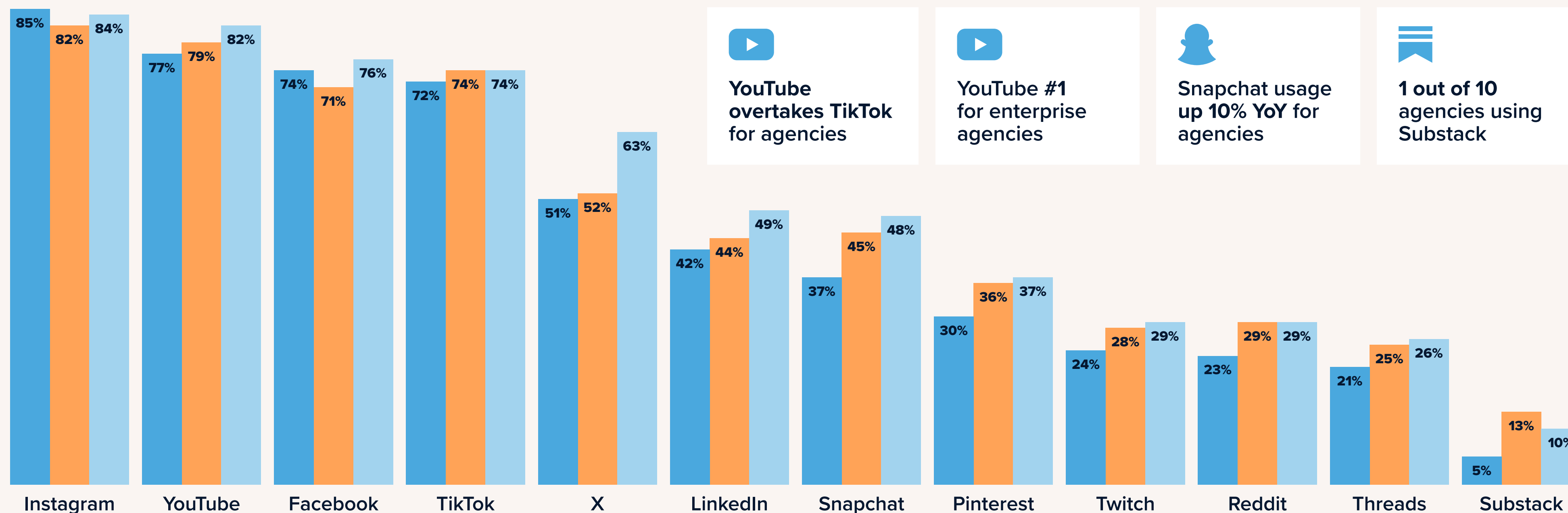
Meta's ecosystem still dominates, with Instagram ranking as the most-used and most integral platform across both brands and agencies. Additionally, amid TikTok uncertainty in the U.S., Facebook usage among brand respondents surpassed TikTok this year.

53% of all campaign posts are published on Meta

According to H1 2025 CreatorIQ platform data

Most Commonly Used Social Platforms For Creator Marketing

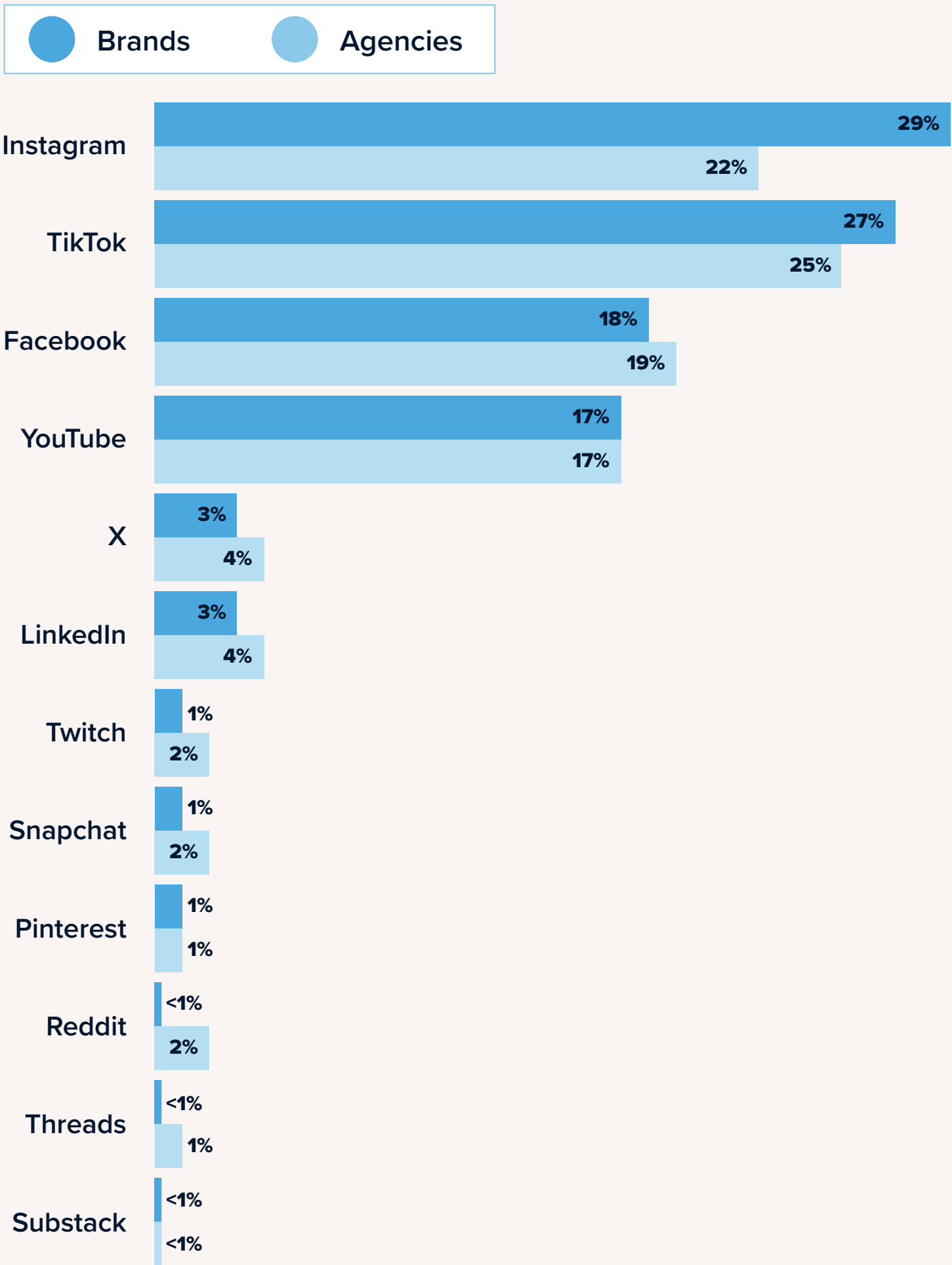
- Brands
- Agencies
- Enterprise Organizations



SOCIAL PLATFORMS

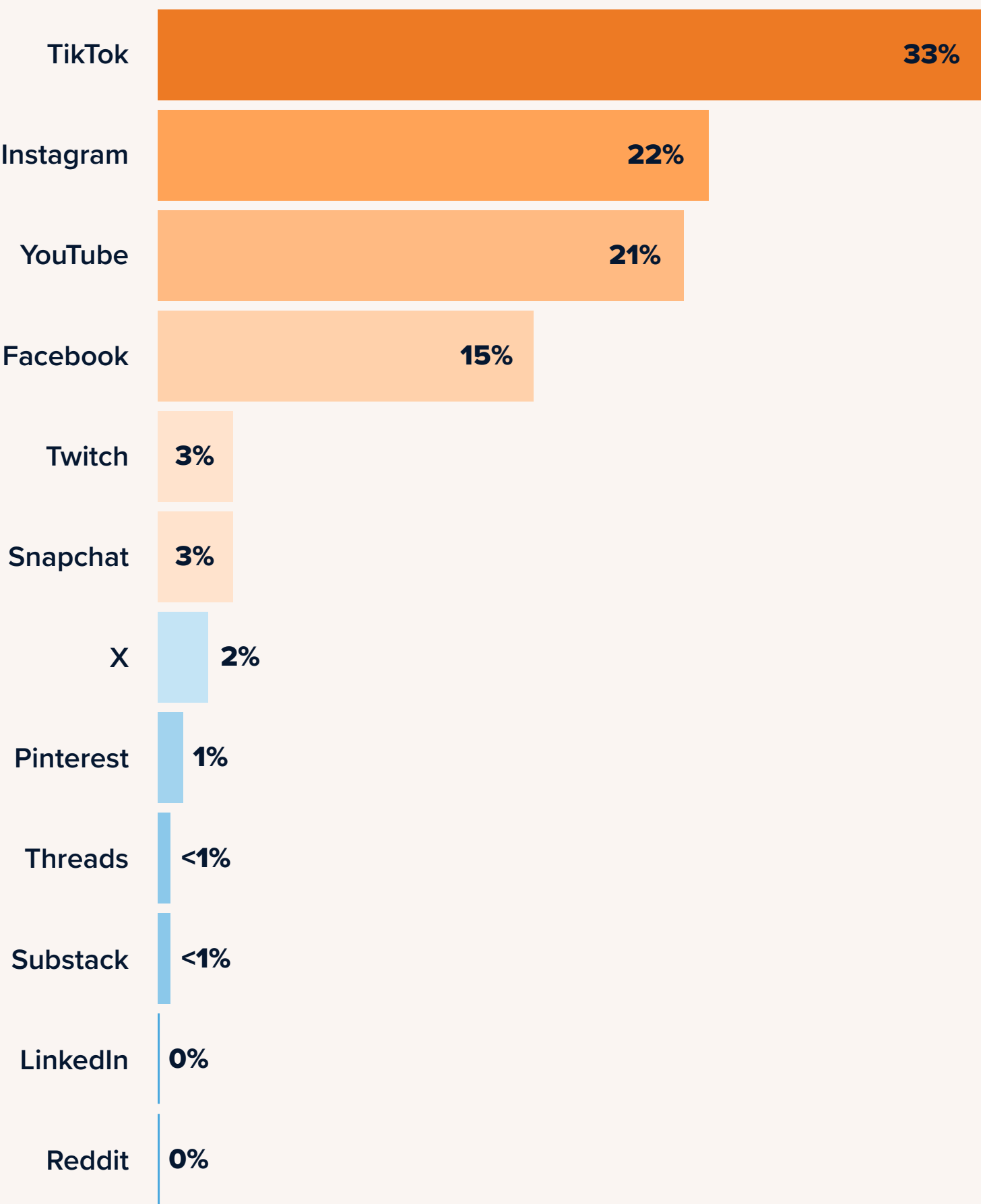
For agencies, TikTok offers the most ROI

Social media platforms that provide greatest ROI for creator marketing



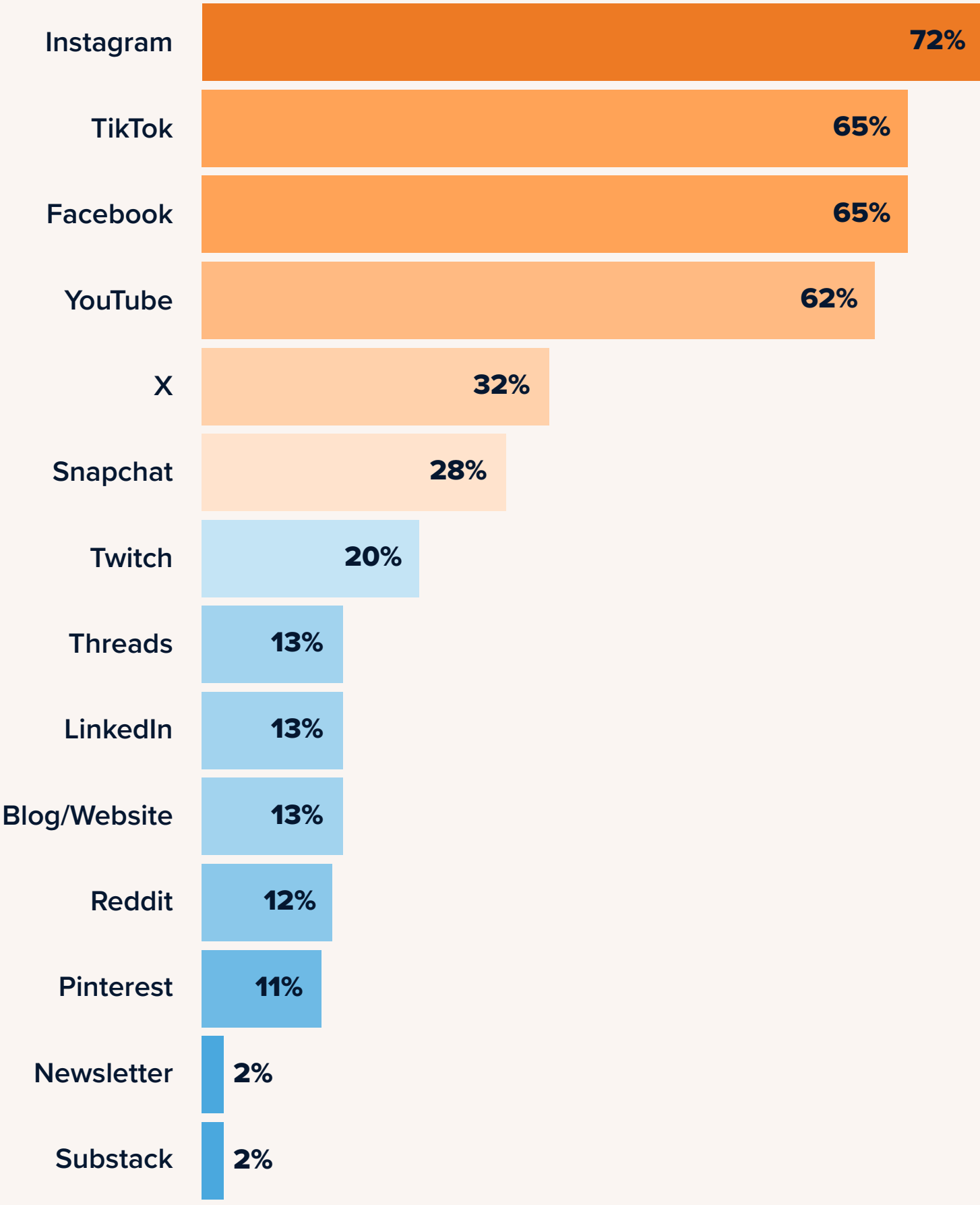
For creators, TikTok offers the best content performance

Percent of creators who ranked the platform No. 1 by content performance



Creators most regularly create content on Instagram

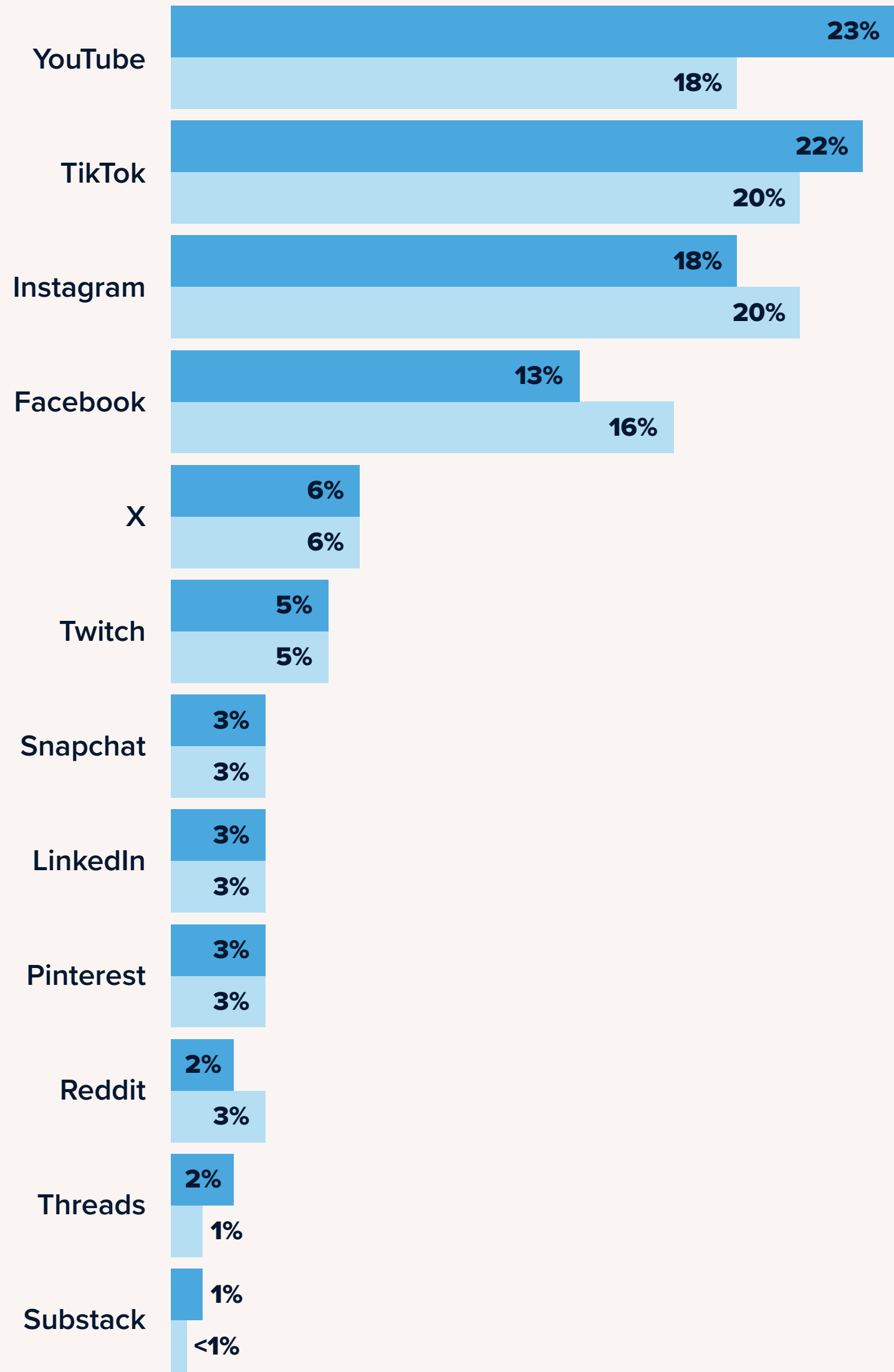
Percent of creators who regularly use the platform



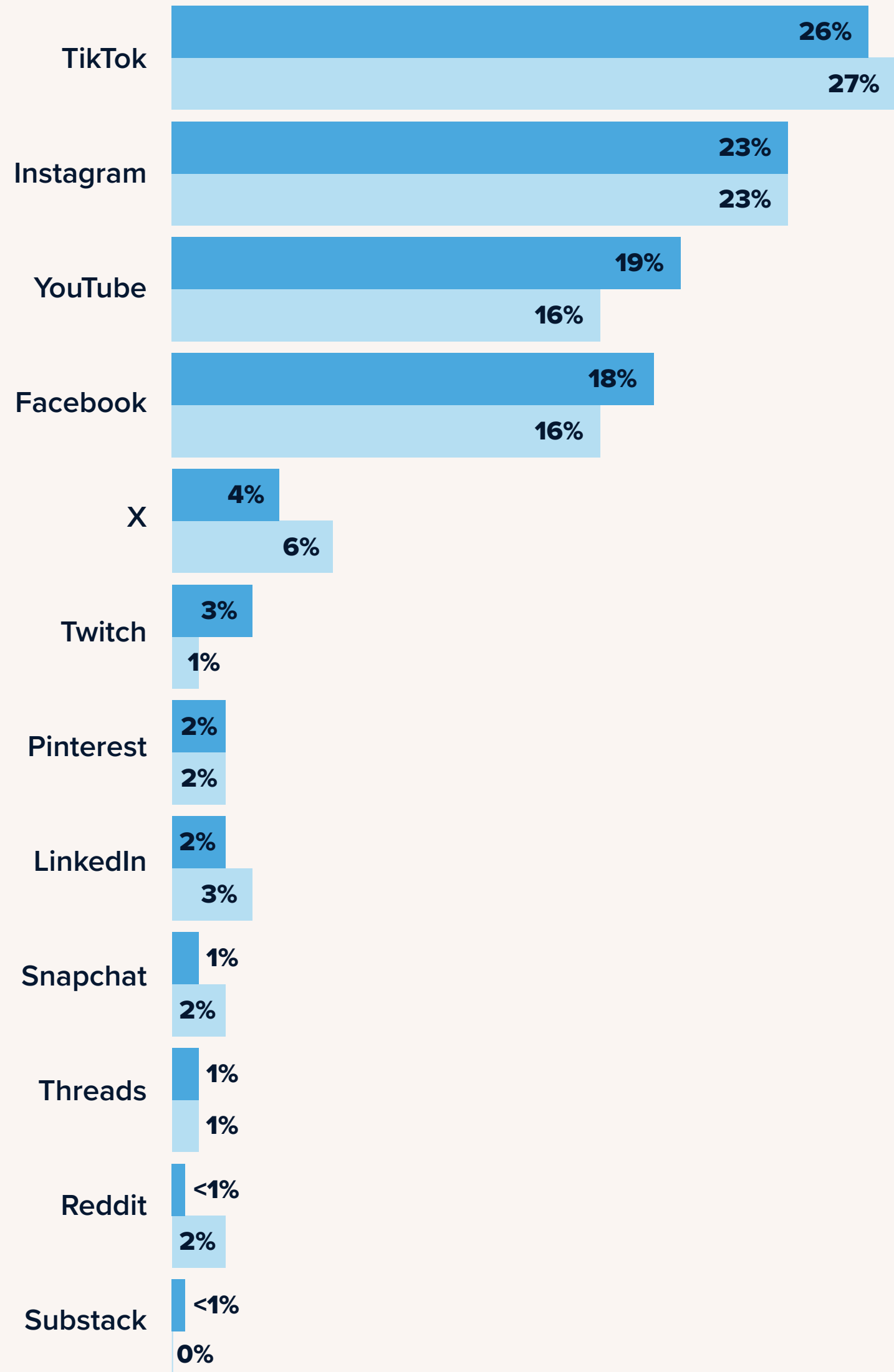
SOCIAL PLATFORMS

On its 20th anniversary, YouTube is the No. 1 choice for brands looking to experiment and expand

Which social media platform do you expect to experiment with or expand on over the next year?



The platforms organizations plan to use most next year



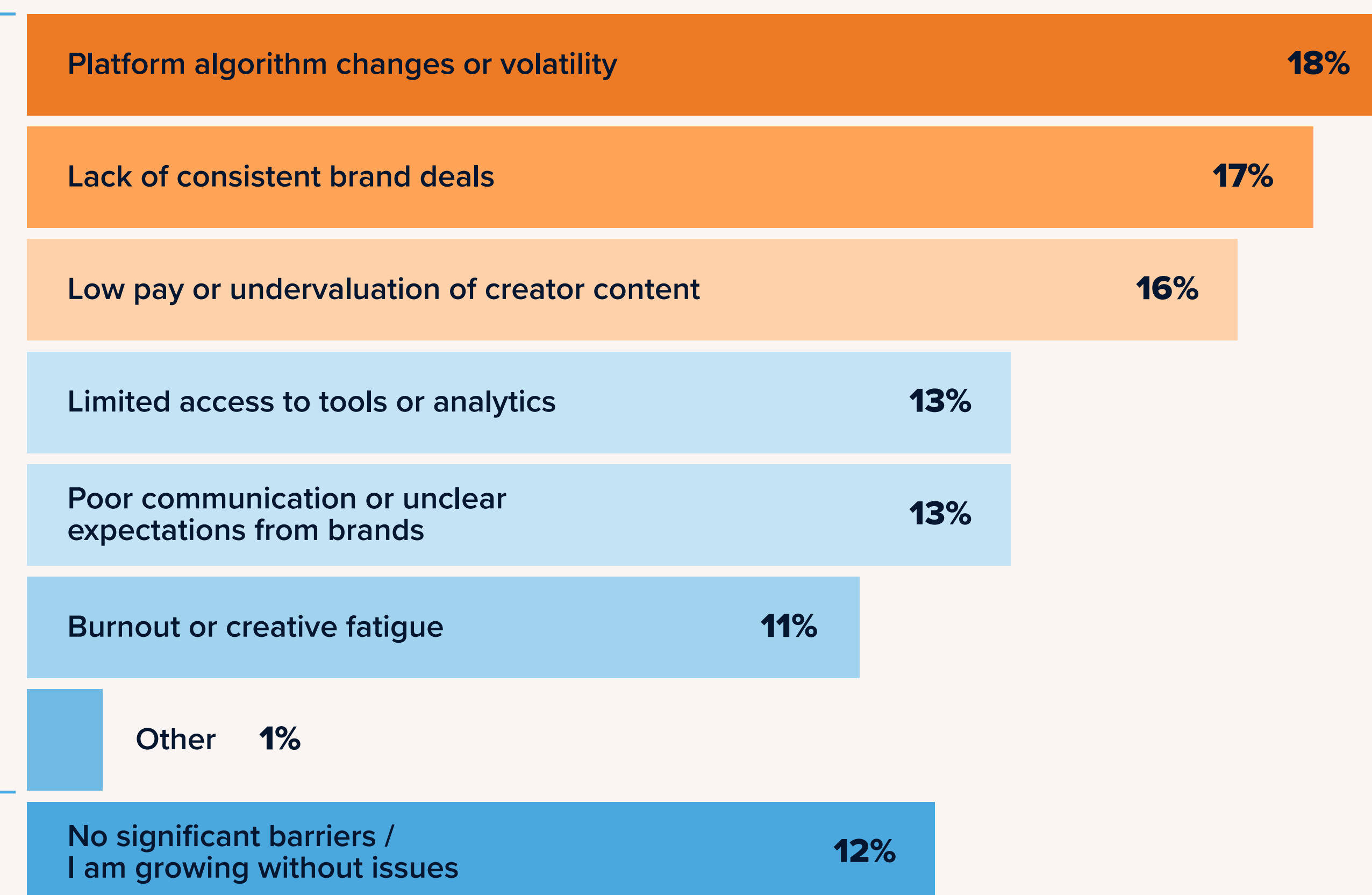
Platform algorithm volatility overtakes brand deal inconsistency, low pay as top barrier to growth for creators

As creators build more structured and sustainable businesses, their challenges are evolving.

This year, the No. 1 barrier to growth is platform algorithm volatility, though creator concerns spread over a wide range of challenges.

88%
of creators
experience
barriers to
their success

What is your biggest barrier to growing your creator business?



Platforms are becoming harder for creators to navigate and anticipate.

While creators are contending with a diverse and complex set of issues, they largely agree that brand partnerships could be better. Across the board, creators point to better communication (44%), more creative input (43%), and longer-term collaboration (41%) as the key ingredients to making brand relationships more effective.

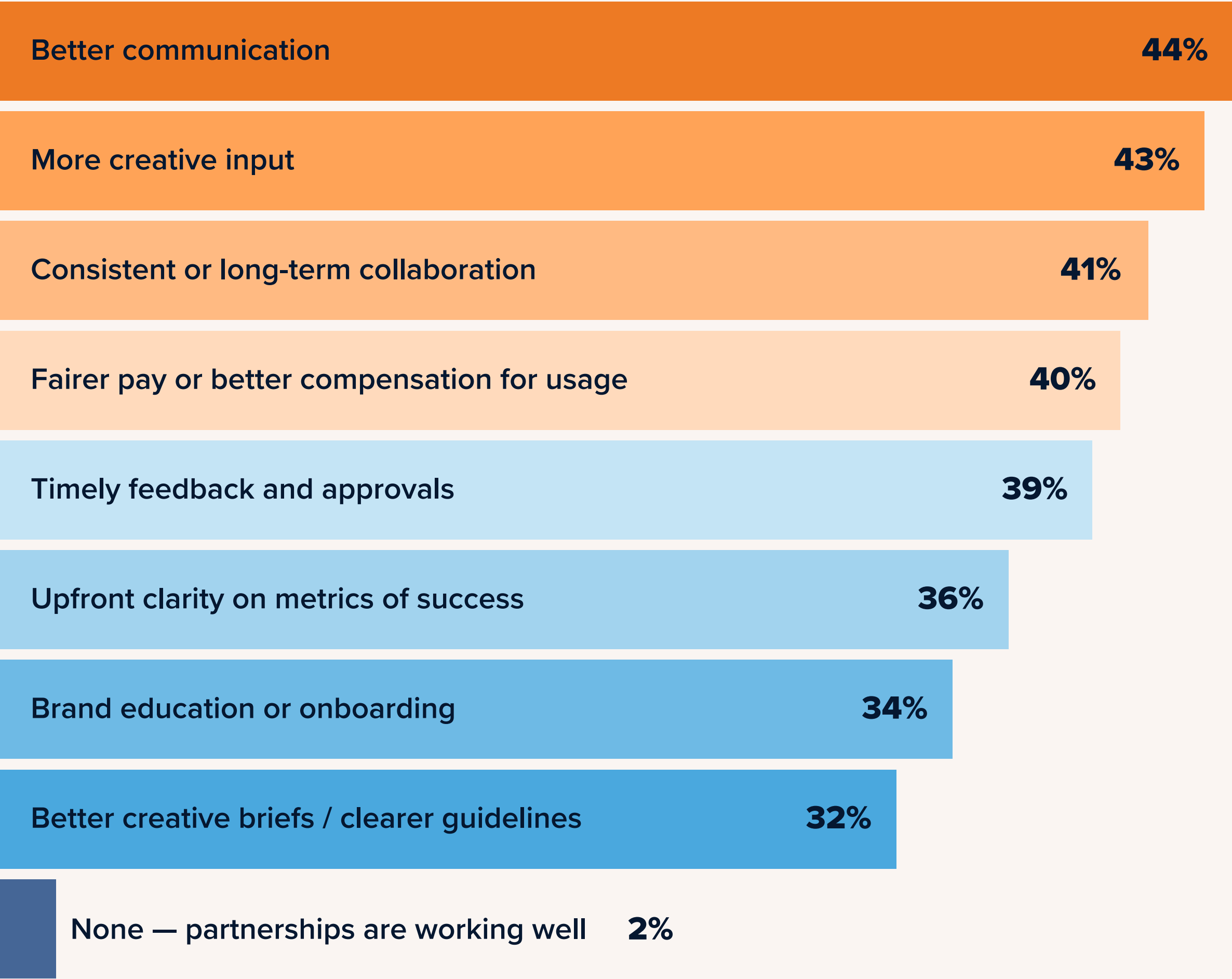
“Creators want to feel respected and know our value in this billion-dollar industry is truly acknowledged by brands. Our creative input isn’t a nice-to-have—it’s why the partnership works. And the brands that pull ahead will be the ones who vet thoughtfully, and equally invest both their time and capital into their creator partners. At the end of the day, relationship building between brands and creators is essential, and it needs to come from both sides.”



Gabby Beckford
Founder & Creatorpreneur
Packs Light

Creators want better communication from brands

What would make partnerships more successful?



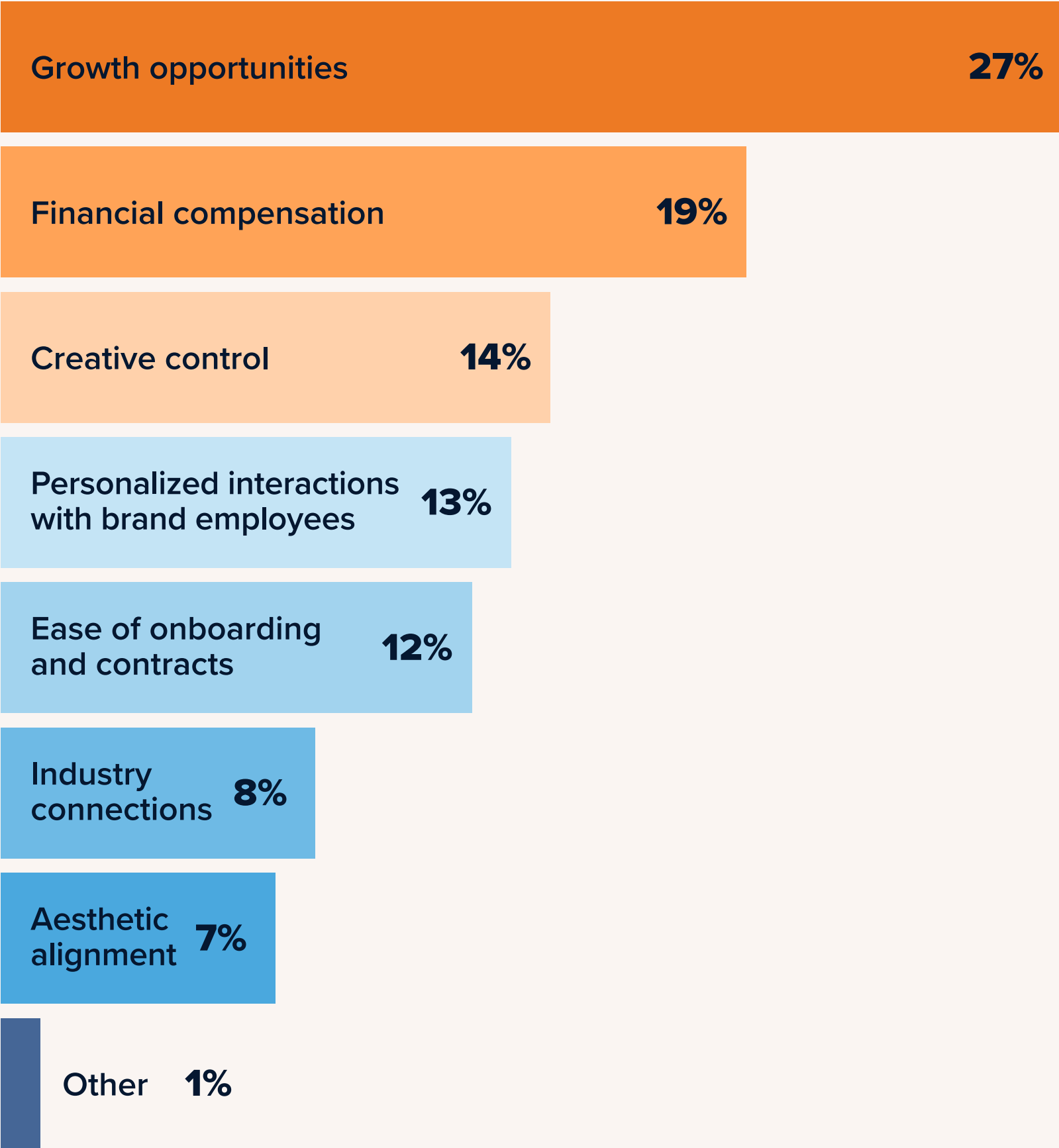
For the second year in a row, growth opportunities was the No. 1 contributor to creator satisfaction. This solidifies the shift from 2023, when compensation was No. 1 and growth opportunities was No. 3, selected by only 15% of respondents.

As creators seek to build enduring businesses, brands must take them seriously as partners and media powerhouses in their own right.

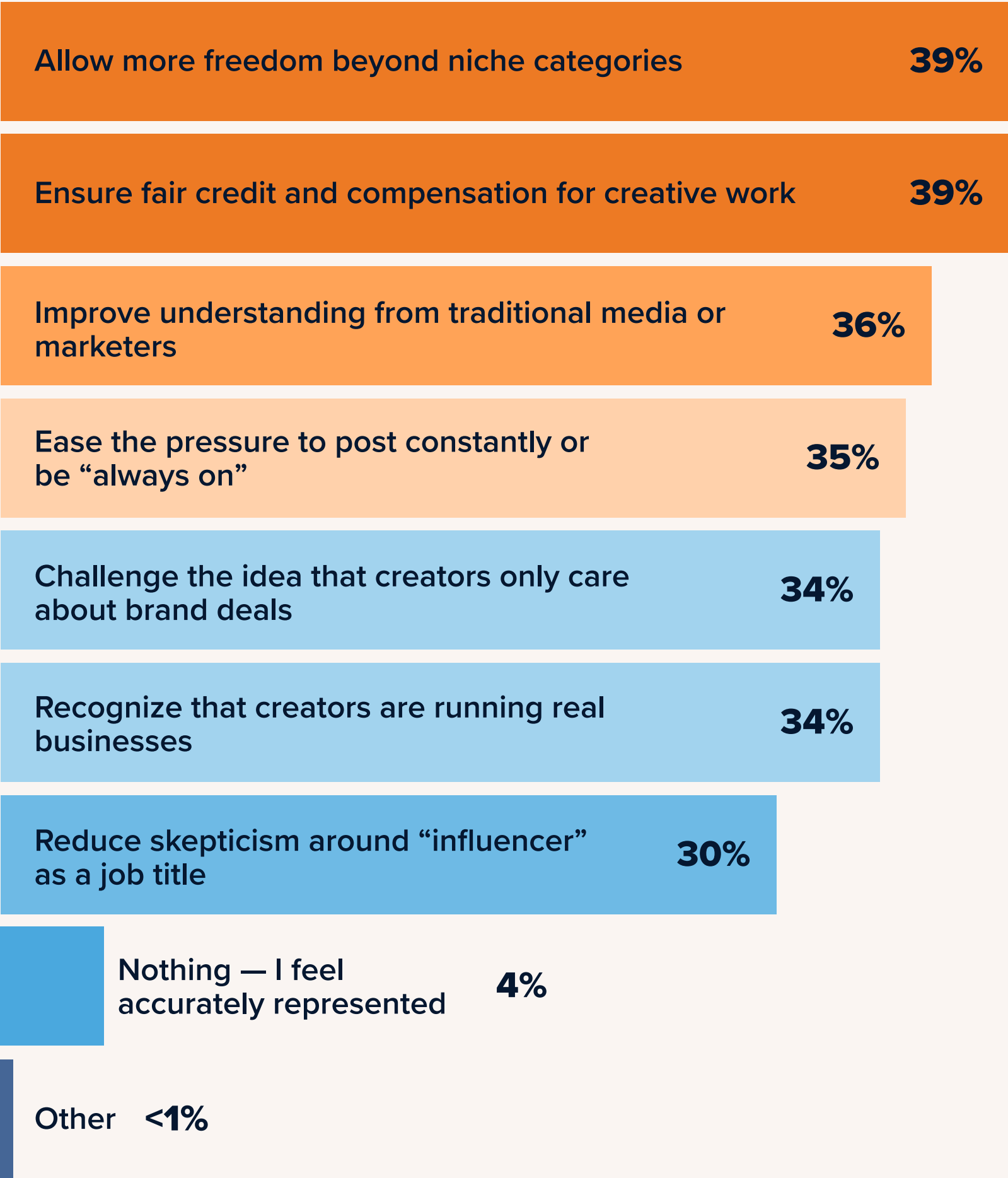
Creators are in a period of professionalization, which requires consumers and organizations to perceive them differently. While ⅓ are still focused on the skepticism around the “influencer” job title, they care more about being limited by their industry and receiving fair credit or compensation for their work.

Growth opportunities is the No. 1 contributor to creator satisfaction

Which aspect of brand partnerships most contributes to your satisfaction?

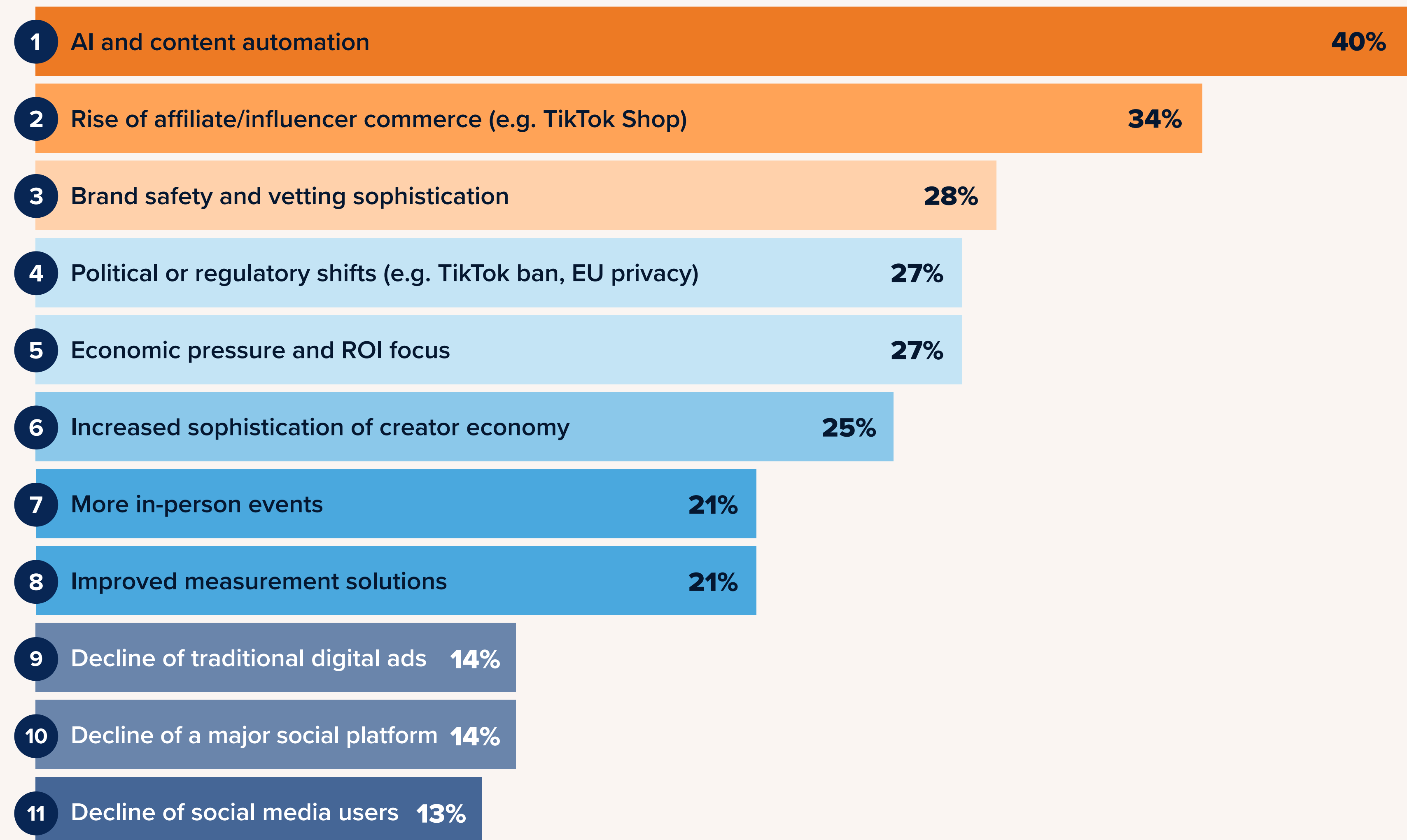


How, if at all, would you like to see perceptions of creators change?



Here's what marketers will have to contend with in the coming years:

What will have the biggest impact on marketing in years to come?



What to expect in 2026 and beyond

AI and content automation pose challenge for industry

Marketers are already navigating growing expectations around AI: from the expectation for faster campaign turnarounds, to the need for strategic guidance on how to best use AI and automation. Nearly all marketers are already utilizing AI, so looking ahead, the biggest impact on marketing won't be about adoption, but integration. Teams that can embed AI into discovery, experimentation, and reporting without compromising human creativity will define the next wave of efficacy.

Risk rises to the surface as marketers seek brand safety

28% of enterprises believe brand safety will have the biggest impact on marketing in 2026

From brand safety to political/regulatory shifts, marketers are focused on risk mitigation in the future. Facing increased pressure around creator vetting, compliance, data ownership, and privacy, savvy marketers know that operational maturity and centralized program control will become not just advantageous, but essential. Future-ready marketing programs will necessitate diligence, transparency, and control.

Attribution pressure will fuel a measurement renaissance

51% of brands report that economic volatility has sharpened their focus on ROI

Marketers are under increasing pressure to validate the role of creator marketing within the broader media mix. More than half of brands report that economic volatility has sharpened their focus on ROI, while nearly 1 in 3 (29%) cite attribution challenges as a barrier to investment. While the conversation around ROI has long toggled between whether creator marketing works best for awareness or performance, new platform capabilities and AI-assisted technology are creating fresh opportunities for measurement.

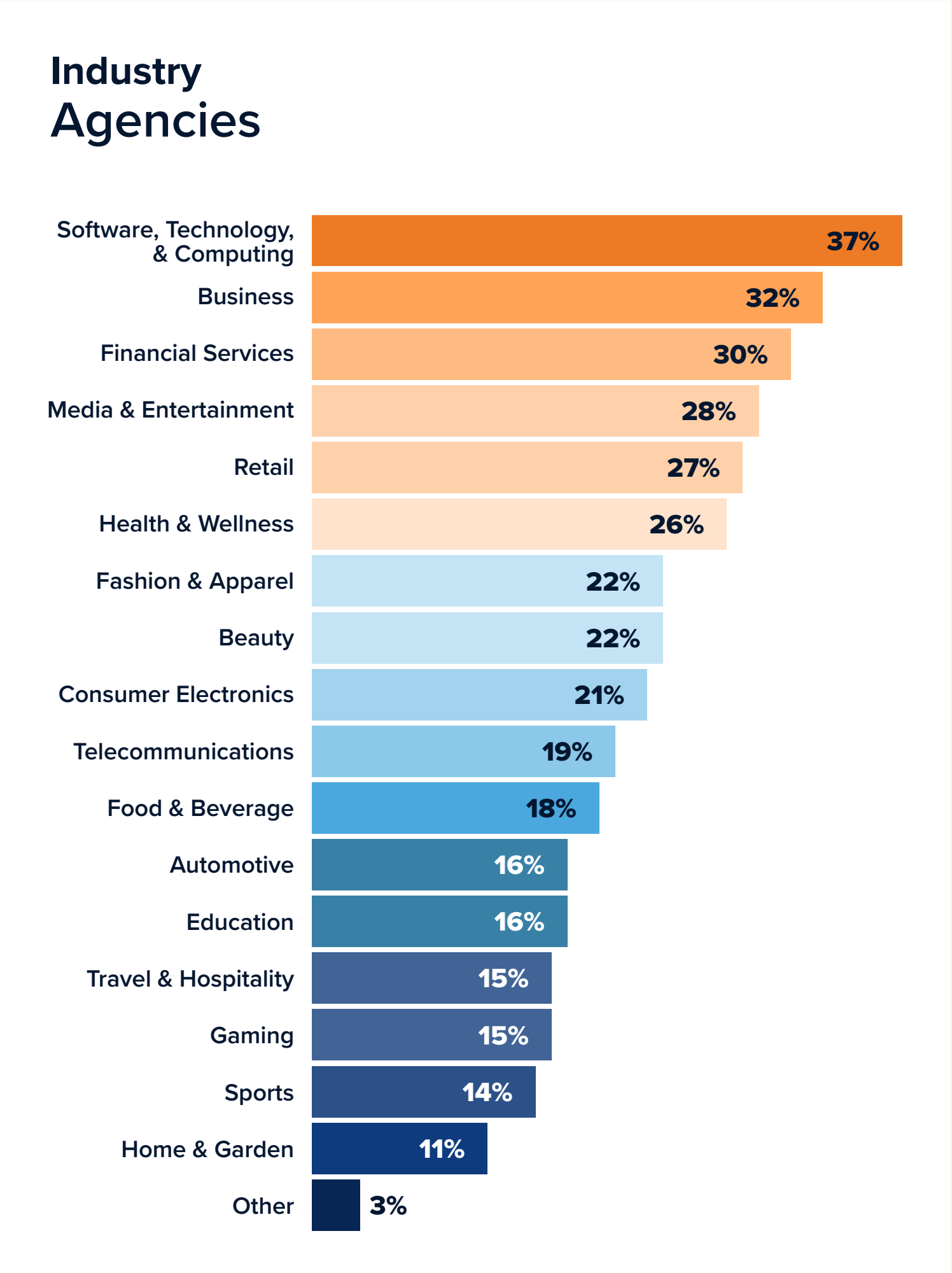
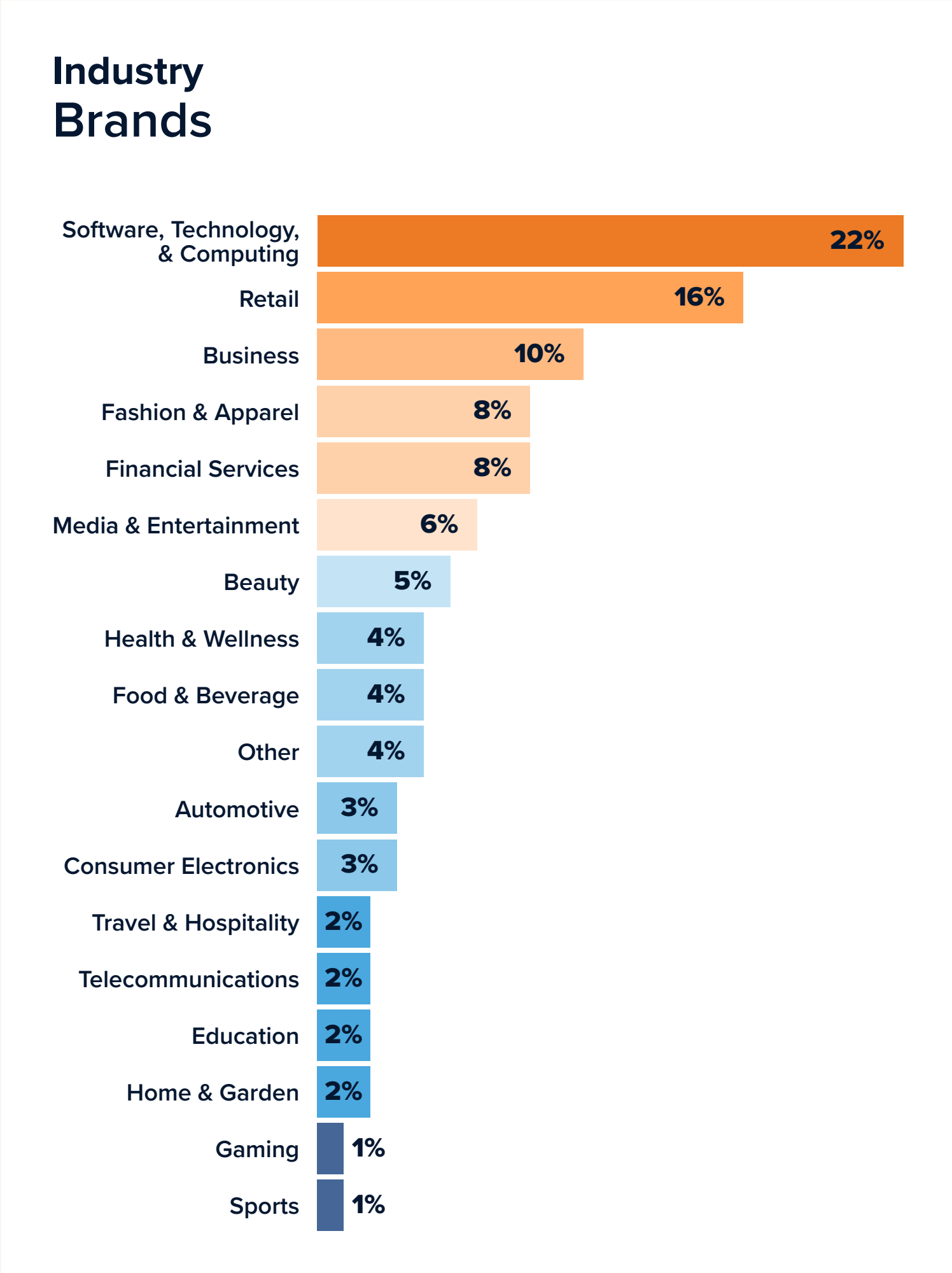
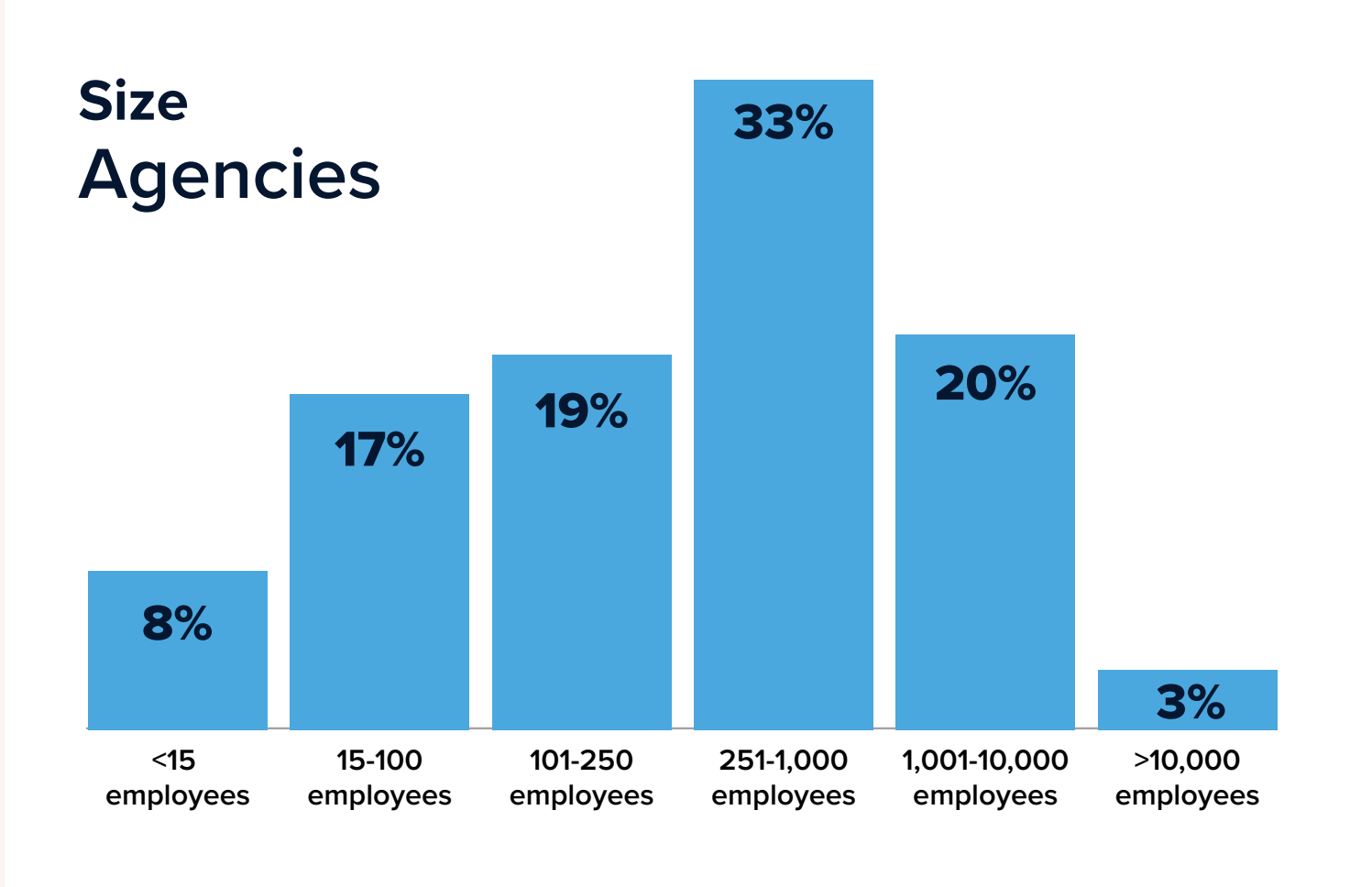
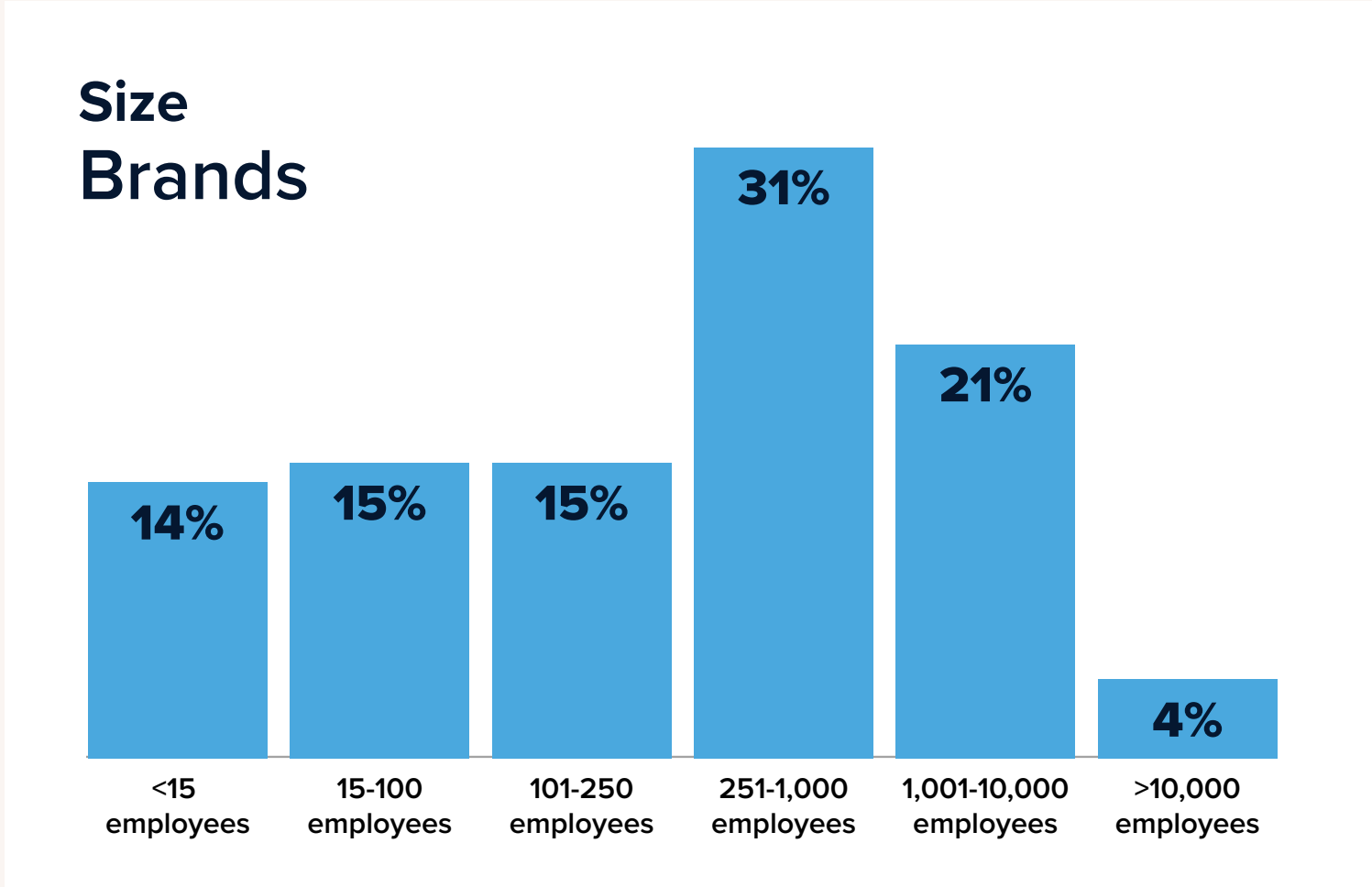
The question is no longer, "Does creator marketing work?," but "How can we build optimal infrastructure for creator marketing that makes success more likely?" The moment demands cross-channel insights, nimble databases, and sophisticated attribution models.

Social commerce will transform buying behavior

34% of agencies believe social commerce will be one of marketing's biggest disruptors

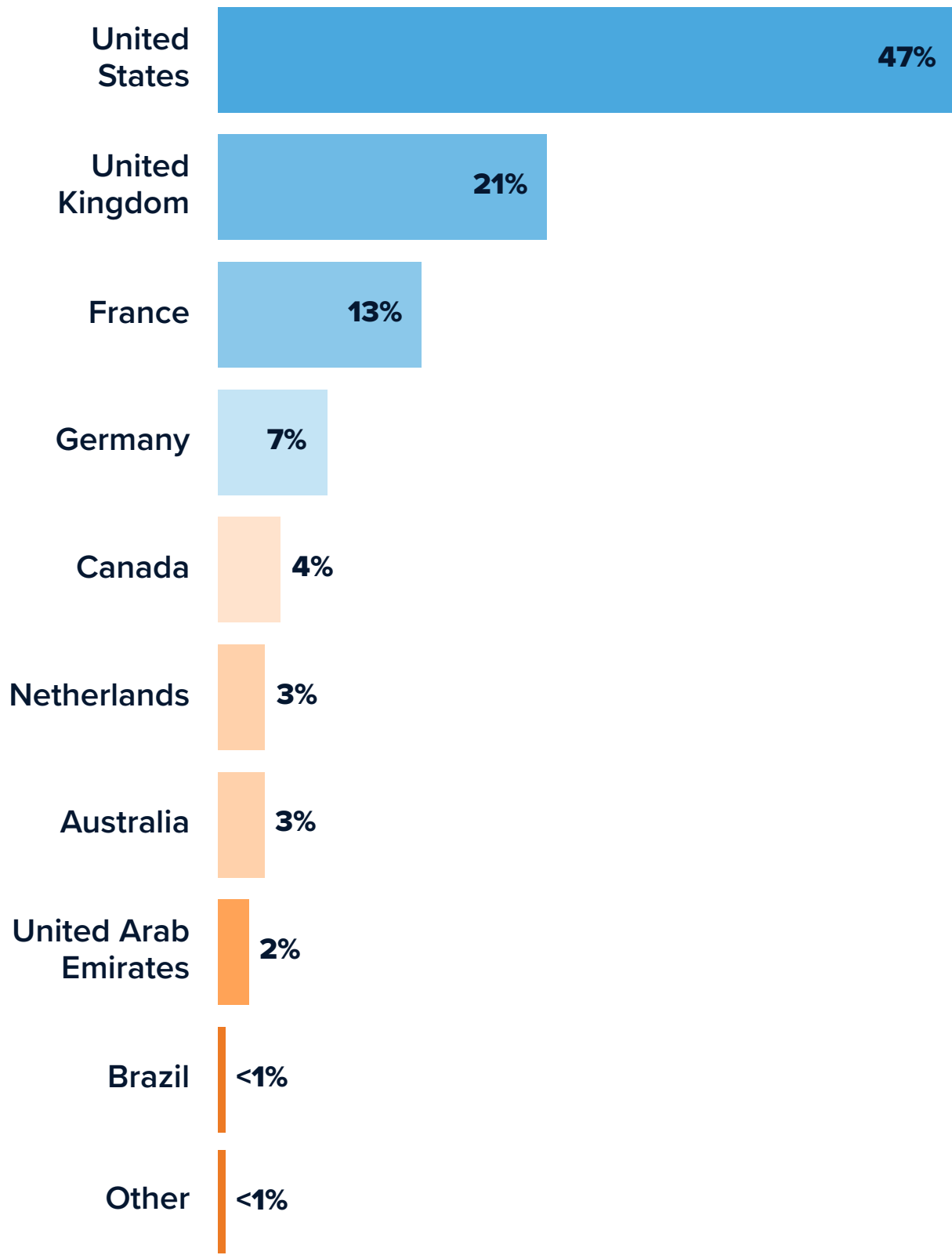
The non-linear buying journey, spruced up with AI, means that consumer touchpoints are both more numerous and more targeted than ever before. In an environment where marketers and creators are accountable for business outcomes, marketers will seek meticulous performance tracking, in addition to the awareness goals that are the current No. 1 priority for marketers. From TikTok Shop to affiliate links, marketers will need to have their hands on robust data to make informed decisions that align with business imperatives.

Organization Demographics

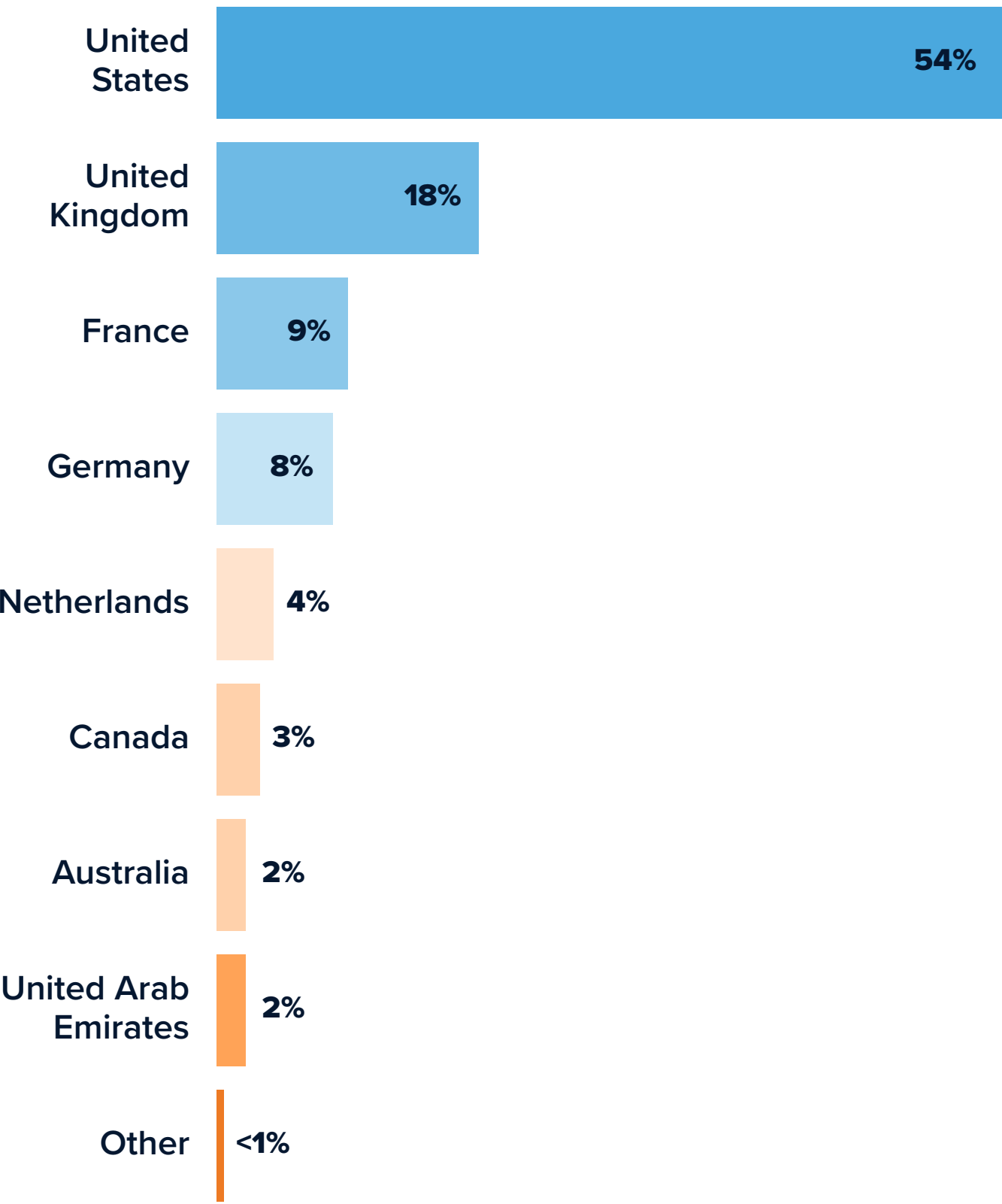


Organization Demographics

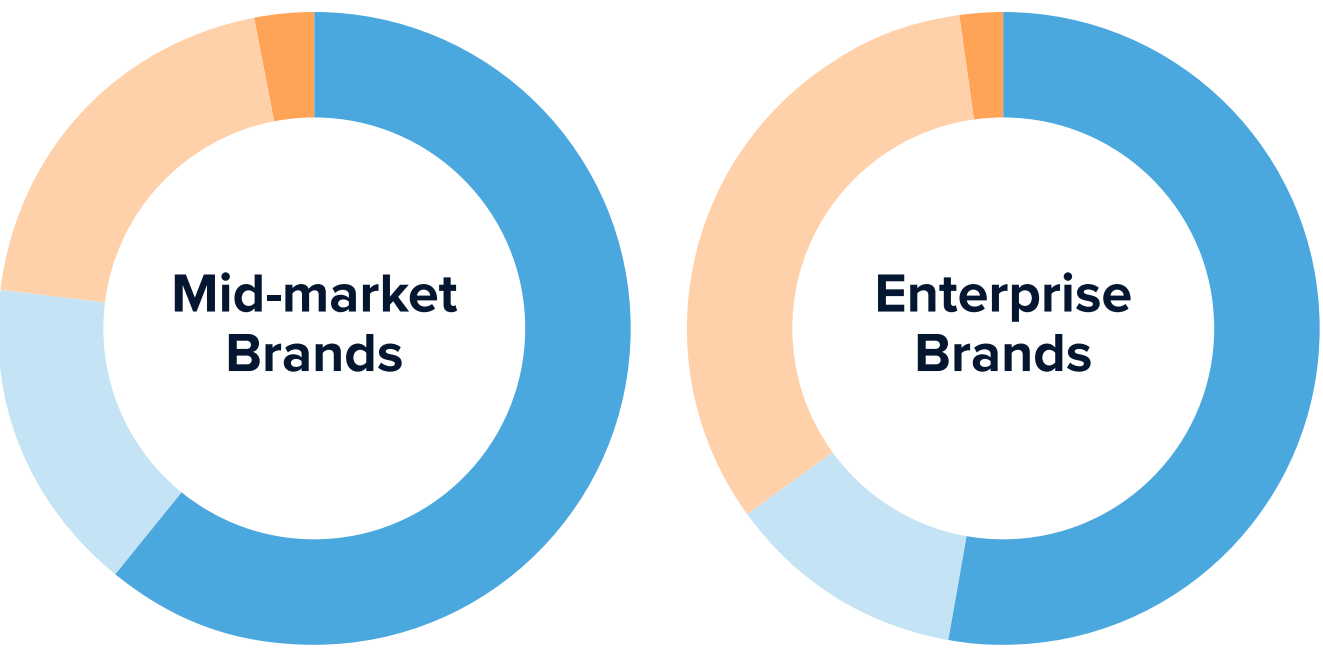
Region Brands



Region Agencies



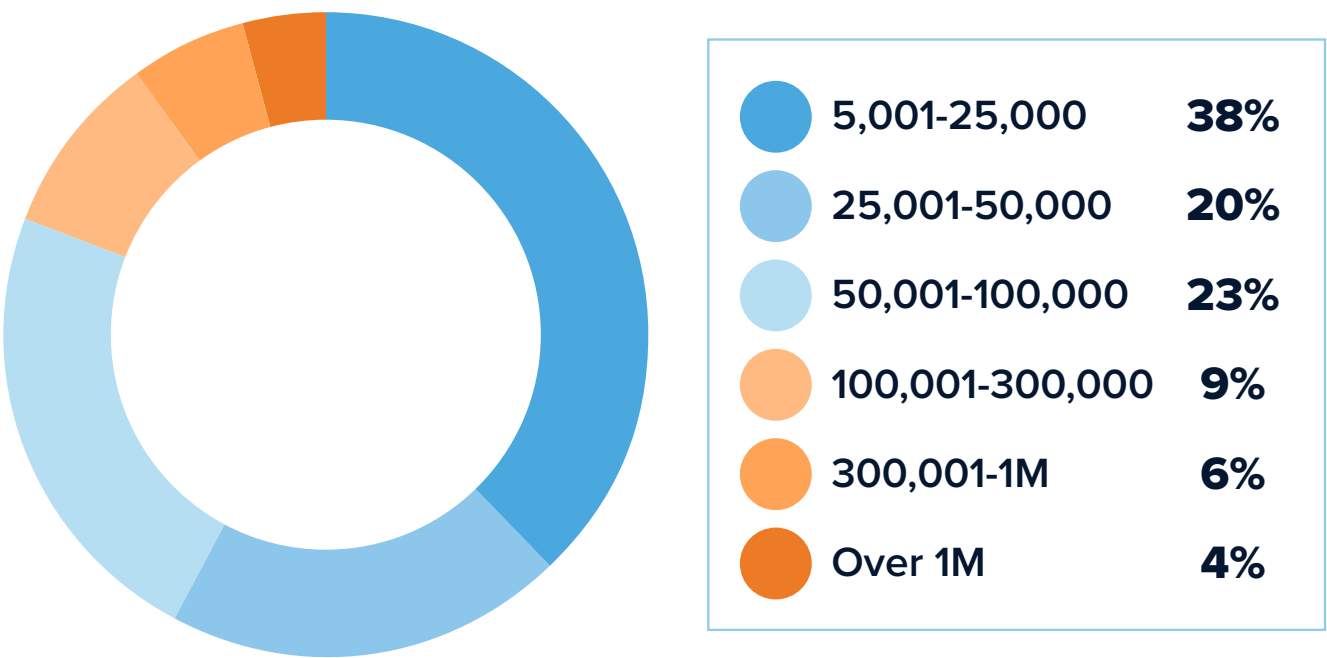
Organizational Type



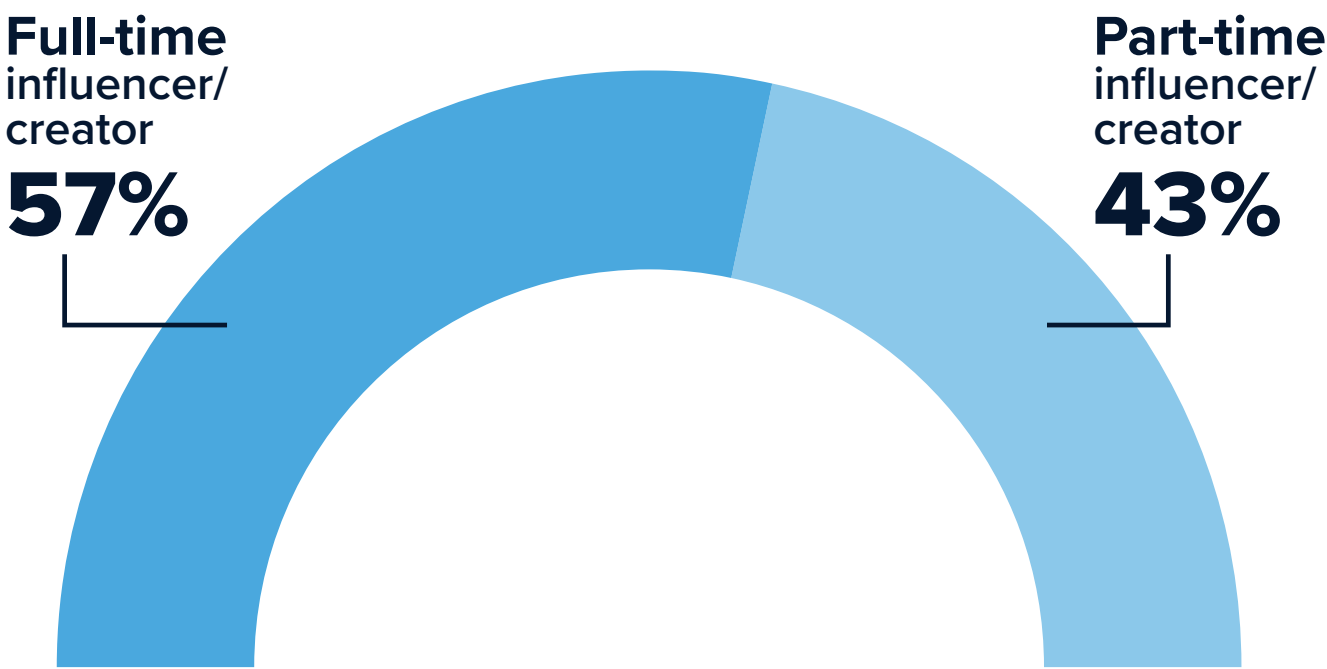
	Mid-market Brands	Enterprise Brands
A single brand or business unit	61%	53%
A brand or division of a parent company	16%	12%
A parent company that has multiple brands or business units	20%	33%
A joint venture or partnership	3%	2%

Creator Demographics

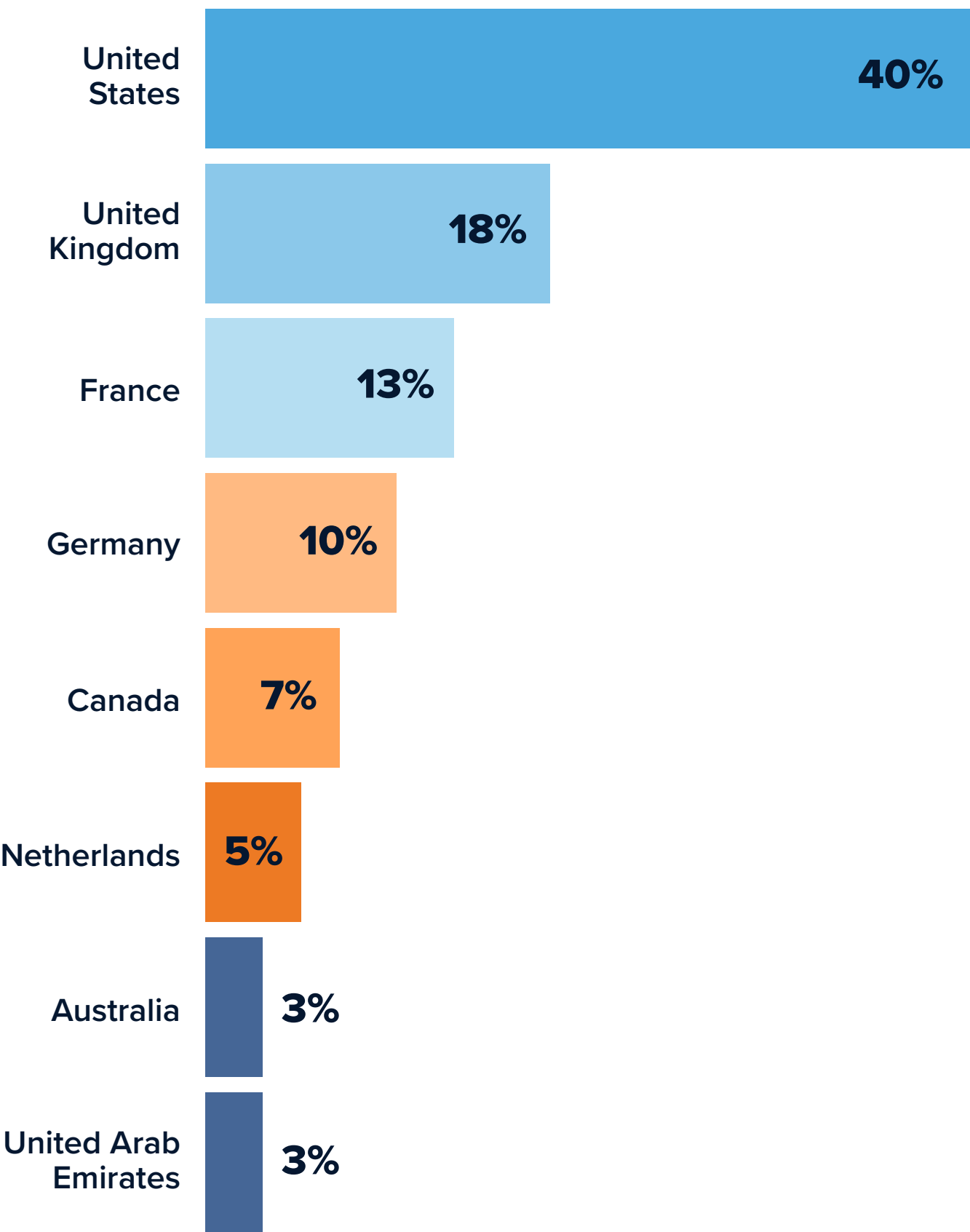
Follower count on primary social platform



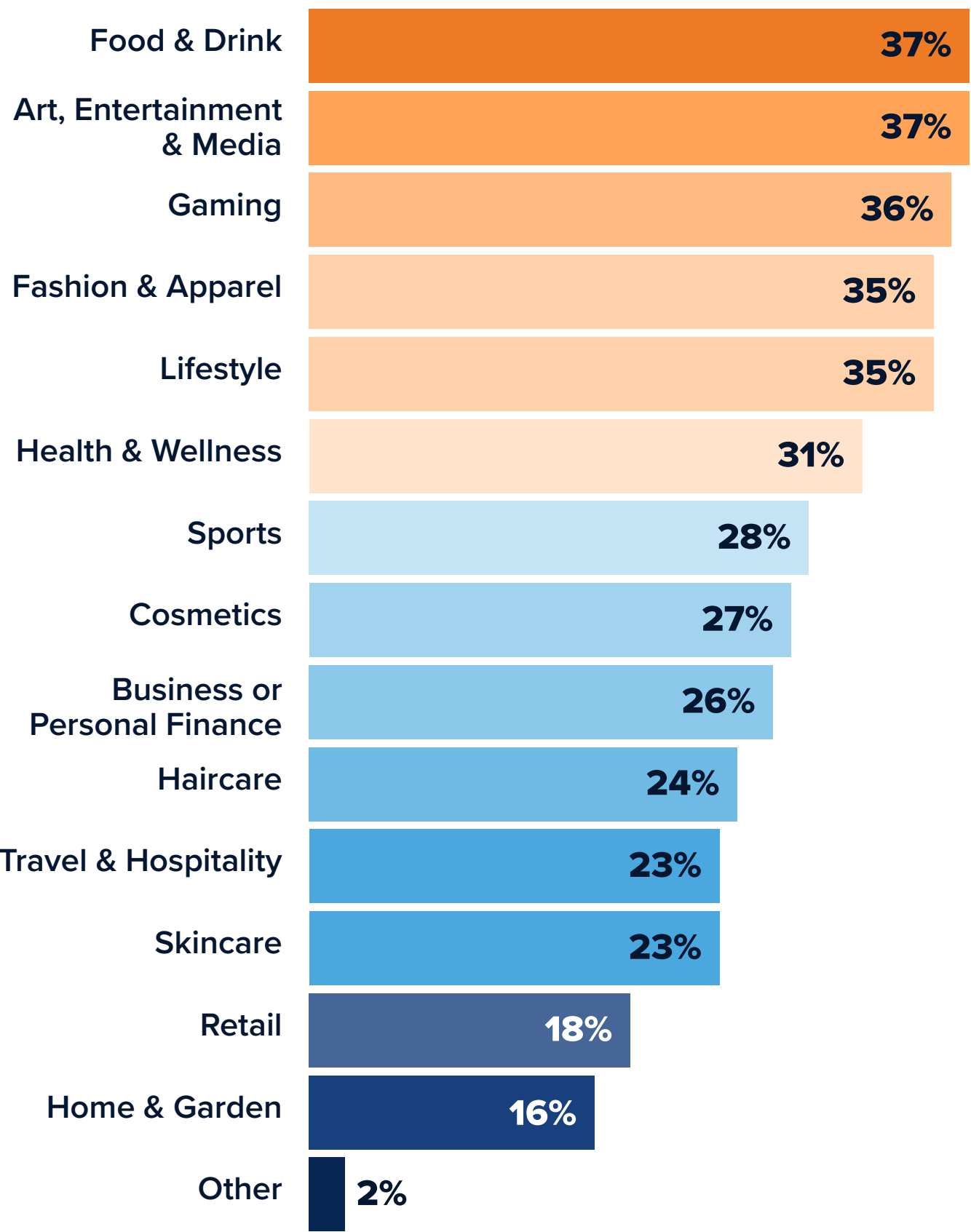
Status



Regions represented



Content Categories



Define what's next

 **Lead** with intelligence.

 **Grow** with creators.

 **Win** with CreatorIQ.

About CreatorIQ

CreatorIQ is the AI-native operating system for creator-led growth. Trusted by more than 1,300 global brands and agencies—including Burson, Delta Air Lines, Google, LVMH, Nestlé, and Sephora—CreatorIQ unifies creator marketing across paid, owned, earned, commerce, and community into one seamless, enterprise-grade ecosystem. With industry-leading intelligence infrastructure, rigorous compliance and security standards, and integrations with Meta, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitch, YouTube, and more, CreatorIQ empowers brands and agencies to harness the creator economy as a strategic growth engine.

Learn more at www.creatoriq.com and follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#).