

Ogilvy Consulting

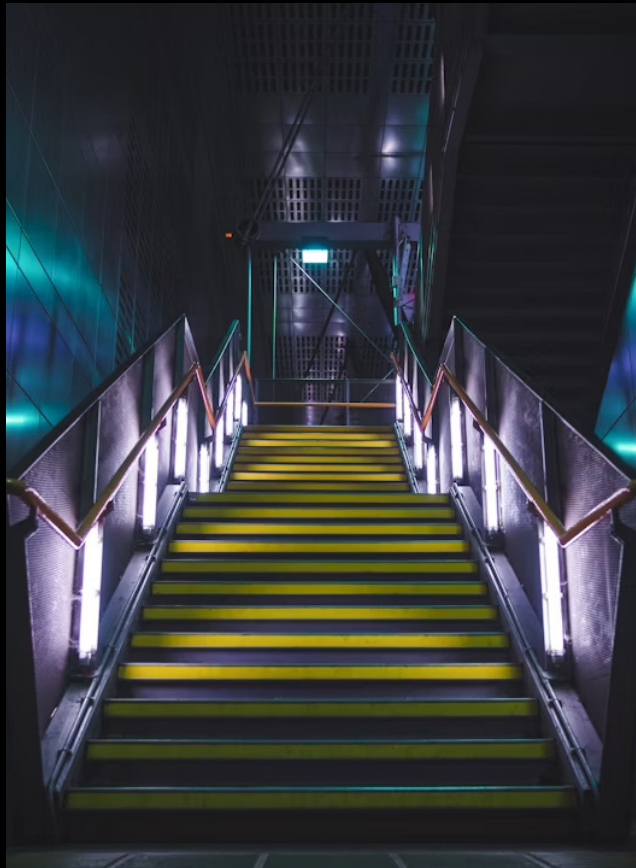
# Fandom FLUX

Codes for growth with  
Gen Z & Gen Alpha



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1.

## NEW LEVEL OF FANDOM UNLOCKED

Fandoms have been around for decades. Even in marketing and business circles the topic and its importance to brands is at least several years old, **so why should you pay attention now?**



### Fandom as a dominant force shaping media, commerce, and identity

The shape and influence of fandoms is rapidly evolving. No longer a matter of general obsession or appreciation, fandom has become Gen Z & Gen Alphas' compass to explore identity, earn creatively and find belonging – all fueled by the latest wave of social tech and creator tools.

Ninety-one percent of 18-25-year-olds say a single pop culture “mainstream” no longer exists<sup>01</sup>. Without the institutions or linear life paths that guided previous generations, fandoms are filling the gap. **Half of Gen Z report their fandoms help them make sense of the world<sup>02</sup>**. And Gen Alpha is the first generation to experience fandom as an act of creation rather than consumption.

Eighty-six percent of Gen Z identify as fans<sup>03</sup> – navigating interest-based communities, and micro-movements and shaping meaning through the things they care most about. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z & Gen Alpha build identity around passions, not traditional demographics, with **81% saying they prefer to be identified by their interests<sup>04</sup>**, interests that evolve in fandoms around things like films, sports, fashion, and music, and increasingly, niche internet culture.



Fandom doesn't just shape self-constructs; it shapes the relationships between young people and forms vibrant global communities. **Half of youth say they're fans of something no one in their immediate circle follows**, and **73% say, "When my IRL friends are unavailable, I can always count on my fanhood friends"**<sup>05</sup>.

And their commitment runs deep. While many fandoms served as a makeshift classroom for how to earn, learn, connect and speak new vernaculars during the COVID pandemic, they've since grown into much more. Despite today's economic pressure, young fans say they'll spend **more time and money** on the things they love in 2026 than they did the year before<sup>06</sup>.

### Fandoms are literally pulling dollars towards Community-Based Platforms

Digital platforms now drive the majority of media and entertainment revenue, rising from 41% in 2014 to 62% in 2023<sup>07</sup>. Brand marketing is following suit: WPP Media projects that ad revenue on creator platforms will surpass traditional media for the first time in 2025. In fact, 93% of brands plan to spend more on creators next year<sup>08</sup>. The shift reflects a recognition that young people are moved by the interests and people they already follow, not passive impressions that interrupt their flow. Need more proof? 75% of young fans say they're more likely to consider purchasing from a brand that tastefully sponsors or creates content related to their fandom<sup>09</sup>. Cultural relevance, both for individuals and for brands, is defined through participation in these fan-driven worlds.

So while the term "fandom" may be familiar, the consumers and creators driving its cultural velocity and evolution are just getting started. The influence fandoms wield and the importance they hold for both young consumers and brands is growing as Gen Z's and Gen Alpha's spending power and tech behaviors evolve. In a fragmented media landscape fandoms offer a stunningly ripe, albeit complex garden for engagement.



***"Fandom is wildly different today than it was for me as a kid in the 90's because it's so much easier to step into, and then influence that world"***

KRISTA DOYLE  
ENTREPRENEUR, MARKETER  
& FANDOM EXPERT

Which means it will take a lot more than just showing up or sponsoring to win with youth culture fandoms; a wholly new approach is required. Today's most effective brands aren't chasing clout, they're building infrastructure. Instead of treating fandom as a media buy, they're creating systems that recognize, reward, and activate fan behavior in real time. Whether it's identifying emerging superfans through engagement signals, personalizing offers or developing new products based on consumption patterns or partnering to tap into streaming and ticketing data — the focus is on turning cultural heat into tangible, trackable business outcomes.

More than ever, marketers need to understand the role of fandom in the lives of young consumers, and how brands can participate among them.

## Our working definition:

For young people, fandom isn't just about supporting a person or product – it's a relationship. It evolves as fans influence each other and the culture around what they love, constantly shifting in shape and dynamics. Each fandom, like a family, builds its own norms and roles for members.

***Fandom:*** A co-creative community built around a shared passion – for a person, product, or idea – where people express identity, build relationships, and actively shape the evolution of the IP itself.



## LAWS UNDERPINNING FANDOM

Youth fandoms create as much pop culture as they follow. Whether a massive franchise like *Deadpool & Wolverine*, which hit #1 on YouTube's Trends alongside four fan-made reaction videos, or a niche obsession born in a subreddit or TikTok, as was the case with #EverythingShower, which was then co-opted by several Fortune 100 brands, Gen Z & Gen Alpha don't only build momentum, they create and shape the trajectory of the IP itself.





Gen Z & Gen Alpha see themselves as creators as much as they do consumers

64% of Gen Z describe themselves as video content creators<sup>10</sup>

**EXAMPLE:** Olivia Rodrigo's 2024 "Guts World Tour" turned fans into concert documentarians, with coordinated outfit reveals, "DIY pit guides," and TikTok-era bootlegs driving over 300M views across fan-tagged content that was used by her record label.



Major creators are platforms & authorities not gimmicks or corporate megaphones

92% of consumers trust recommendations from influencers more than traditional advertisements or celebrity endorsements<sup>11</sup>

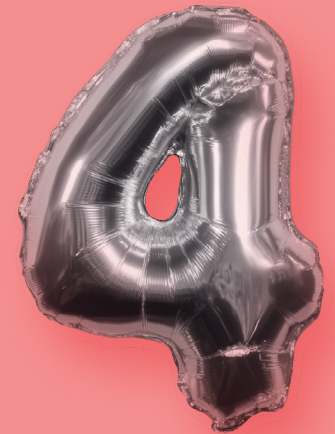
**EXAMPLE:** Alex Cooper didn't just promote Nestlé's *Unwell*—she co-created it. From naming to storytelling, her role blurred the line between endorser and brand architect, turning fans into early adopters, not just followers.



Fandoms are participatory, meaning influence is bidirectional

83% of Gen Z fans say they know their engagement shapes how creators and brands develop content, from concept to release<sup>12</sup>

**EXAMPLE:** When the *GTA VI* trailer dropped in late 2023, it wasn't Rockstar's official account that dominated the conversation, it was the fans. Reaction videos, theory threads, and breakdown edits racked up millions of views, prompting Rockstar to reshare fan takes and even address speculation directly. The fandom shaped how the game was received, covered, and ultimately, marketed.



Brands tapping into Fandoms are implicitly signing over some level of control

66% of Gen Z and Gen Alpha report spending more time with fan-created content than with official content artists<sup>13</sup>

**EXAMPLE:** Vogue's Met Gala livestream had 14 million views on YouTube this year, but creator-posted videos related to the topic were viewed over 550 million times.



Do you accept these terms and conditions?



Today's fans know *their* value. They understand their engagement – views, clicks, posts, word-of-mouth, translates into real revenue. They don't see themselves as an anonymous audience segment, but as stakeholders. In some cases, fans even directly fund the content they love, effectively bankrolling a project's success. This means brands need to tread carefully in the world of fandom, as fans are quite literally investing in the space too.

1. **Fandoms aren't a trend, they're emotional infrastructure:** For many young people, fandoms are replacing traditional support systems like religion or neighborhood friends: offering a virtual cul-de-sac of connection, identity, and a pathway to belonging and even activism.
2. **Fans did it first:** Fandoms existed long before brands got involved. While they may be your most valuable turf as a marketer looking to win with young people, it's not *your* turf.
3. **Fandoms are channel & tech-agnostic:** Because creators span every discipline, from comedians to costume designers, their content defies format – it's diverse and adaptable, flowing across technologies and conversation mediums.



## HOW FANDOMS MANIFEST TODAY

Fandom today isn't passive. It's about finding, repping, and reimagining the people and stories you love. For young people, being a fan means being a creator, a curator, and a community-builder all at once. Whether dropping edits on TikTok, debating lore in Discord, or donning rare merch, fandom is both personal and participatory. Nearly two-thirds of Gen Z fans have made a video in the last year, and 61% say being a "superfan" is core to their identity<sup>14</sup>. Among the younger Gen Alpha, 59% say their fandom has "an enormous influence" on their life<sup>15</sup>. Fandom is a language youth speak to show who they're connected to and where they belong.



## THEN vs. NOW

**Broadcast model:** Fans consume what's released through media gatekeepers.

**One-way worship:** Little direct or meaningful fan interaction. Extremely limited influence.

**Physical proximity = status:** Fandom as localized and analog.

**Binary fans:** Fandoms are somewhat gatekept and inflexible - you're either in or you're out, and some sort of knowledge is often required for admission.

**Networked culture:** Fandom lives and spreads on social. It's participatory, decentralized and core to relationship building.

**Two-way participation:** Fans co-create and even earn with artists: duets, edits, memes, and fan theories shape the narrative. No wall between star and fan and creator.

**Creativity = status:** The fans set the pace (think drop culture, leaks, stan drama, reaction videos) and extend the stories.

**Flexible fans:** Not only are fandoms more distributed, but within each fandom, membership is often more fluid, with many fans discovering and engaging with several communities at once.



***“Fandom is structural and symbolic, not category dependent. Truthfully, even mundane or legacy brands can inspire irrational levels of loyalty when they encode the right meaning or behaviors for their audiences.”***

EUGENE HEALEY  
FOUNDER OF STUDIO EH, KEYNOTE SPEAKER & EDUCATOR (@EUGBRANDSTRAT)



86%

of Gen Z identify as fans.

64%

of youth consider themselves video content creators.

Accessible video editing apps, AI image generators, and filters have lowered the barrier - resulting in an explosion of fan-made videos, art, fiction, mods, and more that extend the life of the original work.





## Wattpad, 2006

Fandom's story incubator, where fanfic, fantasy, and romance get serialized into billion-view franchises. It's the launchpad for breakout hits like *After* and *Light as a Feather*, with readers acting as editors, marketers, and casting agents in real time.

**Brand tip:** Watch Wattpad like a talent scout, today's top fic could be tomorrow's studio deal.

## Tumblr, 2007

The OG fandom engine, and still unmatched for aesthetic, meta-analysis, and multi-fandom overlap. It's where shipping charts, gifsets, and essay-length fan theories thrive without algorithmic interference.

**Brand tip:** Go where the gifs are, authentic engagement beats polished promo here.

## AO3 (Archive of Our Own), 2009

The heart of fan fiction culture, where fandoms aren't just observed, they're rewritten, reimagined, and expanded. AO3 is a living archive of stories that mainstream media won't tell, especially around queer identity, alternate universes, and emotional depth.

**Brand tip:** Respect the fan writers, this is sacred space, not a media buy.

## Artist Alley, Mid-2010s

A space at most major conventions reserved for independent artists. It isn't flashy, but it's where fandom loyalty prints money. A single creator with a fold-out table can outsell the studio booth next door, powered by niche fans who show up in cosplay, buy zines, and fund entire story arcs on Patreon.

**Brand tip:** Invest in the table, not the tent, back the artists driving grassroots culture.

## Patreon, 2013

Where fandom turns into sustained patronage. It gives creators a way to monetize niche content, like fanfic, behind-the-scenes lore, or bonus episodes, directly from their most loyal fans.

**Brand tip:** Support creators at the source, become a patron.

## Discord, 2015

Fandom's favorite backchannel. While social platforms amplify, Discord organizes, hosting deep theory threads, character debate, live watch parties, and creator AMA hangouts.

**Brand tip:** Build private access channels, reward depth, not just reach.

## TikTok, 2016

TikTok is fandom's discovery engine. It turns niche edits, cosplay, fan theories, and character deep dives into viral formats, where the line between creator and consumer disappears.

**Brand tip:** Don't just trend-hop, collaborate with the subcultures that are making the trends.



## Substack, 2017

Substack has become a fandom hub for thinkers, critics, and niche obsessives, offering a platform where fans can analyze, expand, and monetize their passion.

**Brand tip:** Commission the essayists, let your biggest fans shape your narrative arc.

## Waveful, 2020

Waveful is a creator-first platform designed for micro-fandoms and niche communities. It emphasizes closeness over clout, with features like digital badges, superlikes, and built-in monetization that reward loyalty and shared interest, not just scale.

**Brand tip:** Cultivate the corner fandoms, small, loyal communities will carry your brand further than the algorithm ever will.

## TYB, 2022

TYB turns brand fandom into action. Fans join brand-specific communities, complete playful challenges, and earn rewards like coins, collectibles, or early access. With partners like Glossier and Rare Beauty, TYB transforms passive followers into active participants, where sharing, posting, and engaging become currency in the brand-fan relationship.

**Brand tip:** Design quests, not campaigns, let your superfans earn their way into your story.

## Civitai, 2022

This AI-art marketplace empowers fandom artists to train, share, and monetize custom image-generation models (like anime or game styles). With 23M monthly visits by April 2024, it became the go-to hub for fan artists using AI.

**Brand tip:** Sponsor community model packs or run AI-art contests that respect style rights, position your brand as a creator ally, not a copyright cop.

## Autograph, 2024

Autograph turns passive sports fandom into proof of loyalty. Fans earn rewards by engaging with content, listening to podcasts, watching clips, reading updates, and unlock exclusive perks through a gamified Passport system.

**Brand tip:** Enable your biggest fans to earn status with passion and moments across channels.

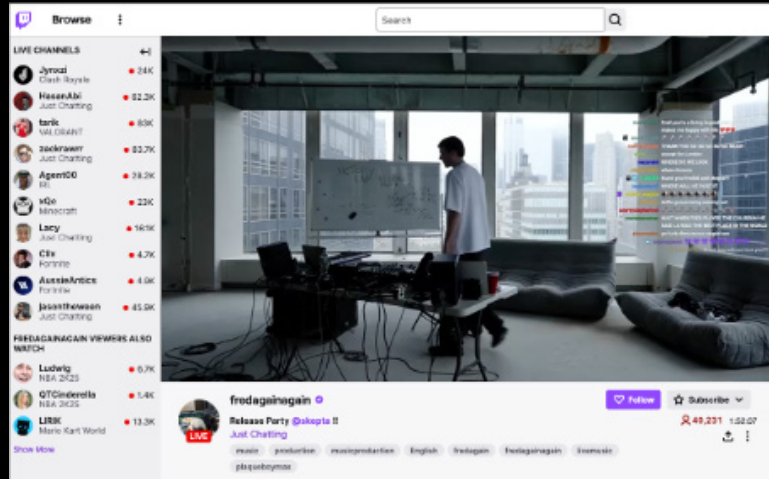
## Bonfire Social, 2025

A federated Bonfire app built on the fediverse model, enabling private branded fandom spaces with customizable governance and threaded discussions. It supports fandoms seeking deeper connection, ownership, and moderation on their own terms.

**Brand tip:** Pilot a brand bonfire, host a fan community space for deep engagement or beta-test feedback in a controllable, ad-free environment.

# What does fandom look like today?

HOW FANDOMS MANIFEST TODAY



40,000+ New Yorkers waiting (and excitedly chatting) on a livestream for Fred Again to drop the location for his same-day surprise concert on a rainy Tuesday afternoon



Father and daughter falling in love with the same characters, 30 years apart



A fan-inspired campaign challenged Mr Beast to plant 20 million trees upon reaching 20M subscribers



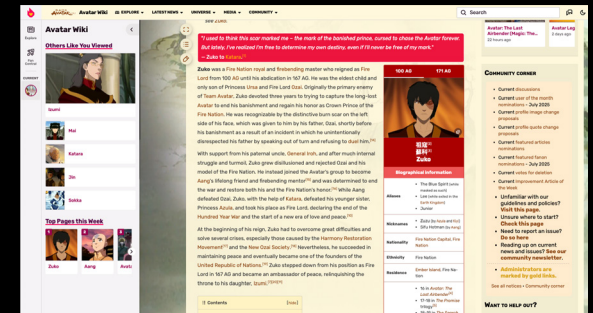
The tight-knit communities that show up to grab the latest drop from independent creators in Artist Alley



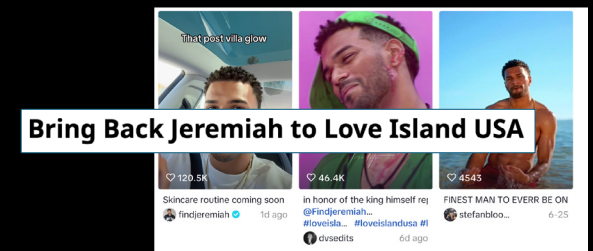
Hilton crafting an entire experience around the world of Wicked



One Direction fan fiction on Wattpad being picked up by Simon&Shuster and selling 15+ million copies, before being turned into a film franchise



Fan created and run wiki pages for beloved characters (Fandom.com)



A Change.org petition asking to "Bring Back Jeremiah" to Love Island USA has garnered over 72,000 signatures in recent weeks, fueled by TikTok edits, fan outrage, and frustration over his surprising exit



Conservative Gen Z Influencers celebrating Trump's presidential victory in Washington, D.C.



***“The flywheel of fandom requires big fans, emerging fans and the ‘thing’ itself to keep it all spinning.***

***The insight is that each party has unique needs and offerings, which relate to another party. Big fans need respect from the ‘thing’. New fans need knowledge onboarding from the big fans. And ‘the thing’ needs sustainability from both new and old fans. Figuring out how to orchestrate these needs is the challenge and opportunity for brands. That’s how you keep the gears of fandom spinning.”***

MATT KLEIN  
HEAD OF FORESIGHT AT REDDIT, AUTHOR  
OF ZINE (WEBBY AWARD WINNER OF BEST  
INDEPENDENT PUBLICATION ONLINE)  
MARKETING LEADER & PROUD GEEK)



We’re going to explore five of the largest stages for fandoms shaped by the key shifts in culture and technology:



# MUSIC FANDOM

Music is more than a soundtrack to young people's lives; it's a controller for many other passions. From TikTok remixes to IRL concert pilgrimages, music fandom has become both a social network and a shopping trigger. And beyond being a high-spend engine, young music fans are becoming industry and brand gatekeepers. Their engagement determines what trends, what sells, and who breaks through. For brands and the music industry alike, ignoring their power, or worse, treating them like the fans of yester-year will lead to big misses.



Music fandom is even shaping careers. Take Adriana Castillo, a 24-year-old in Tampico, MX whose teenage work as a community mod in the One Direction fandom catapulted her career as a social media manager. She's since built a community, Stan2Stra, for "aspiring marketers whose first 'client' was a fan account."

TikTok now influences

84%

of Billboard Global 200 tracks<sup>16</sup>

58%

of Gen Z & Gen Alpha say fandom for their favorite artist is an important part of their identity<sup>17</sup>

2024, Gen Z outspent other cohorts in US live event spending for the first time<sup>18</sup>

~10%

of Gen Z are actually earning income from their music fandom<sup>19</sup>

**Brand example:**  
Levi's × Beyoncé

**What happened:** Beyoncé namedropped Levi's on "Cowboy Carter" and eventually launched a global "Reimagine" campaign with the brand.

**Impact:**

- Levi's saw a ~20% stock boost, attributed to the song reference<sup>20</sup>
- Foot traffic to stores rose 20%, with UK searches for "women's Levi's jeans" up 263%<sup>21</sup>
- Additional sales of around \$1.2 M were directly tied to the mention<sup>22</sup>

**Why it worked:** Levi's leveraged the cultural capital of Beyoncé's endorsement without question, understanding her protective and demanding fanbase wants to see brands get in line rather than use the moment to steal the spotlight. Levi's even changed its IG logo to match Beyoncé's new spelling.



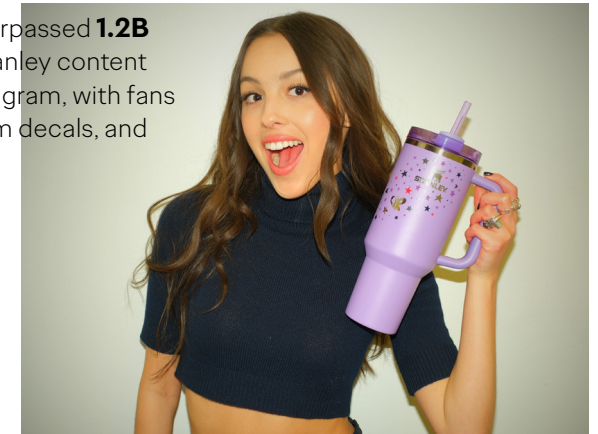
**Brand example:**  
Stanley × Olivia Rodrigo

**What happened:** In early 2024, Stanley partnered with Olivia Rodrigo on a limited-edition purple Quencher inspired by her "Guts" album. The drop followed a wave of TikTok fan content featuring customized tumblers with Olivia's lyrics, and was released exclusively through Target and Stanley's site.

**Impact:**

- The \$49.95 tumbler sold out in under 24 hours on Stanley's website and in many Target stores nationwide<sup>23</sup>
- Resale prices on eBay and TikTok Shop reached **\$200–300**, over **5x the retail price**
- The hashtag **#StanleyCup** surpassed **1.2B views**, while Olivia-related Stanley content surged across TikTok and Instagram, with fans showing off unboxings, custom decals, and resale drama<sup>24</sup>

**Why it worked:** Stanley didn't force a fandom moment — it responded to one. The collab tapped into preexisting fan behaviors, validating Rodrigo's community while quietly collecting demand signals through TikTok trends, e-commerce heat maps, and in-store foot traffic. The result: viral hype, earned media, and a wave of new Gen Z customers — all without a traditional ad campaign.





## FOOD FANDOM

Food is one of Gen Z and Gen Alpha's top passions points globally, not just for taste, but for storytelling. From street snacks to viral recipes, what they eat is how they connect, flex, and explore cultures. And in this generation, foodie obsession doesn't live in Michelin stars, it lives on social, on apps like Beli and Supper Club. About 70% of Gen Z consider themselves Foodies<sup>33</sup>, and #food is the most popular Instagram tag. As food becomes content, currency, and a conversation starter, Gen Z's palates, and the creators they follow, are shaping everything from product drops and hot reservations to global flavor trends – literally rewriting the food chain.



67%

of Gen Z say discovering new food and drink experiences is a key passion point<sup>34</sup>

Over 55%

of Gen Z have tried a food trend they saw on social media this year<sup>35</sup>

Gen Z spends more dining out per capita than any other generation<sup>36</sup>

50%

of Gen Z say they have planned entire trips around visiting specific restaurants<sup>37</sup>

**Brand example:**Coca Cola × *Yes, Chef!*

**What happened:** In May 2024, the *Yes, Chef! Food Festival* debuted in NYC, hosted by Jack Goldberg (@Jacksdiningroom) a 26-year-old food creator with 4M+ followers. Designed as a celebration of internet-born food culture, the event features social-native chefs, trending food collabs, tastings, and community cooking experiences. Coca-Cola was the presenting sponsor, offering product sampling and a VIP creator lounge to facilitate on-site content creation.

**Why it worked:** Rather than leading the story, Coca-Cola played a supporting role in a creator-led narrative. It wasn't about pushing product, it was about proximity to the fandom, letting credibility and culture do the talking.

**Impact:**

- The festival sold out its full run in NYC, driven largely by creator and fan promotion on TikTok and Instagram<sup>38</sup>
- Coca-Cola gained organic placement in numerous recap videos and influencer content, aligning the brand with the future of food culture and Gen Z fandom
- The event earned **over 250 million media impressions**, with coverage from *Forbes*, *Vogue*, *Thrillist*, and *Eater*



## GAMING FANDOM

Unlike with previous generations, for Gen Z and Gen Alpha, gaming is social infrastructure and a creative stage, not just entertainment. They spend around 12 hours every week gaming<sup>25</sup>, making platforms like Roblox (which now boasts over 100 million daily active users), and Fortnite core to Gen Z fandom experiences. Campaigns like Roblox's *TWICE Square* pulled in 301K+ unique fans and 91M visits, while tools like Ready Player Me and Genies let fans shape identity and monetize it. Gaming influences how Gen Z & Gen Alpha connect and decide what's worth their time. Discord, with 150M+ monthly users, serves as the connective tissue.

Gen Alpha's gaming time increased

65%

between 2020 and 2024<sup>26</sup>

65%

of Roblox's user base is under 16 years old<sup>27</sup>

75%

of Gen Z gamers say gaming is how they stay connected to friends<sup>28</sup>

50%

of Gen Z & Gen Alpha gamers discover new brands via in-game moments<sup>29</sup>

72%

of Gen Z & Gen Alpha gamers take part in fandom events or in-world collaborations<sup>30</sup>



**Brand example:**

Maybelline on *Paradise RP* (Roblox)

**What happened:** In mid-2024, Maybelline integrated into *Paradise RP*, one of Roblox's most visited worlds (14.9M monthly visits), to promote its Sunkisser Blush. The experience included mini-games teaching application techniques and virtual try-on tools embedded right in the gameplay.

**Why it worked:** By integrating the blush as a usable in-game item tied to play, Maybelline turned a product launch into part of Roblox's core self-expression loop—blending beauty and gaming fandom in a way players could perform and share. It wasn't a placement; it was a feature.

**Impact:**

- 25 million virtual try-ons, indicating strong brand engagement<sup>31</sup>
- 38.5 million impressions and 2.4 million mini-game interactions<sup>32</sup>
- 42 minutes average session time for users redeeming branded items



## FASHION FANDOM

Gen Z and Gen Alpha treat fashion like a playable character, switching aesthetics by the week, sampling subcultures, and cosplaying new versions of themselves. Nearly **70% of Gen Z say fashion is their primary form of self-expression**<sup>39</sup> and it shows. From “niche-core” deep dives to archival outfit breakdowns on TikTok and Reddit, fashion sits at the center of Gen Z’s fandom universe: remixable, referential, and always in motion. Clothes aren’t a uniform, they’re a plot twist. And as trends move at the speed of the algorithm, they’re not waiting for fashion houses to catch up. Gen Z fans are the designer, the critic, and the runway, shaping taste in real time.



89%

of US Gen Z say fashion is important for boosting confidence<sup>40</sup>

25%

of Gen Alpha already turn to social media creators for fashion inspiration<sup>41</sup>

62%

of Gen Z say they prefer creator-led analysis of fashion shows over the official streams<sup>42</sup>

53%

of Gen Z have bought something based on a creator's outfit breakdown or aesthetic explainer<sup>43</sup>

Gen Z is the largest audience segment for fashion resale platforms like Depop, StockX, and The RealReal, accounting for over 60% of P2P resale volume<sup>44</sup>



### Brand example

## Savage × Fenty

**What happened:** In 2024, Savage X Fenty, Rihanna's lingerie and fashion brand, expanded its fandom-first approach with its third retail flagship opening in Las Vegas. The new store featured rotating in-store activations and VIP "fashion shows" that felt more like intimate fan events than traditional retail openings.

### Impact:

- The flagship launch drove millions in foot traffic and saw membership sign-ups jump 20–30% within weeks<sup>45</sup>
- Savage X Fenty reached a valuation over \$1 billion in 2024, driven by its core fans and inclusive brand credentials<sup>46</sup>
- Their fandom creation platform, Savage X Ambassadors has over 4.5 million social followers, with ambassadors and fans generating massive UGC around unboxings, try-ons, and live events

### Why it worked:

By making its spaces feel like fandom activations complete with VIP events, ambassador-driven content, and inclusivity-first messaging, Savage X Fenty turned retail into runway and store openings into a community stage.



***"I've experienced being a customer in the lingerie space and have felt as if I didn't fit the mold of the product. But Savage X Fenty is very inclusive, and I want to continue to expand on that so that our consumers can feel our commitment and community within the retail space."***

RIHANNA,  
VIA FASHIONISTA



## NICHE IP & FAN FICTION

Niche fandoms may not dominate the charts, but these deep worlds shape behavior with just as much intensity. On BookTok, readers hype cult hits like *Fourth Wing*, while on AO3 (*Archive of Our Own*), fanfiction communities spin expansive new storylines. Anime and manga fans still obsess over the lore of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Tabletop gamers gather as “Critters” of *Critical Role*, producing fan art, cosplay, and new campaigns. And new micro-communities emerge often — like self-proclaimed “Color Theory and Stationery nerds,” on bullet journal TikTok, where Muji vs. Mildliner debates play out daily.





Sometimes these fandoms break into the mainstream, as with queer love story *Heartstopper*, which began as a self-published webcomic but went on to log 24 million viewing hours in its Netflix debut week. Other times they remain cult classics, like Terry Pratchett's *Discworld*, a 40+ novel series whose philosophy-driven fandom has stayed fiercely devoted for decades. With 70% of young fans saying their fandom communities are part of everyday life<sup>47</sup>, these smaller, creator-driven spaces prove that depth can matter more than breadth.

59%

of 16–24-year-olds say BookTok or book influencers helped them discover a passion for reading through a specific series<sup>48</sup>

As of 2025, AO3 hosts over

15.8 million

works spanning 73,690+ fandoms

FIMFiction, the hub for *My Little Pony* fanfiction, now has over 150,000 approved stories and more than

600,000

registered users

Crunchyroll, the leading anime streaming platform, has topped

17M

paid subscribers globally<sup>49</sup>

**Brand example:**

**What happened:** In June 2024, **Garnier** launched its “Remove Your Makeup, Never Your Pride” campaign featuring *Heartstopper* star **Bel Priestley** (who plays Naomi) in celebration of Pride. Garnier highlighted Bel’s own experience as a trans influencer and supported youth mental health through a partnership with **Just Like Us**, an LGBTQ+ youth charity. The creative centered on realness and self-expression, resonating deeply within the *Heartstopper* and wider queer Gen Z fandom.

**Impact:**

- Garnier’s tie-in with LGBTQ+ charity *Just Like Us* reinforced brand values, earning editorial praise across Pride coverage<sup>50</sup>
- 4.5 million+ impressions across TikTok and Instagram during Pride Month, topping Garnier’s usual engagement rates<sup>51</sup>
- Social comments hailed it as “beautiful” - particularly from *Heartstopper* fan accounts who noted it felt “like something the fandom actually wants”

**Why it worked:** Garnier didn’t just feature a *Heartstopper* actor, it embraced the fandom’s emotional gravity and social purpose. By spotlighting Bel’s real-life identity and supporting queer youth and charities, the brand earned both relevance and respect from a community that values sincerity over spectacle.



**Brand example:**

**What happened:** As bullet journal fandom exploded on TikTok, with #Bujo and #StudyTok hashtags driving billions of views, Muji pens and Zebra Mildliner highlighters emerged as cult objects. Instead of heavy ad campaigns, Muji leaned in lightly — partnering with select creators in Japan and reposting fan-generated “pen test” and journaling content — while Zebra amplified Mildliner fan art and color-swatch videos across its social channels.

**Impact:**

- Fans drove organic comparison trends (“Muji vs. Mildliner”), cementing both brands as status symbols in journaling culture
- #StationeryTok overall has logged **2B+ views** as of 2024<sup>52</sup>
- Zebra formalized its fandom ties through creator-ambassadors to drive weekly social content on journaling and lettering, blending grassroots fan rituals with branded storytelling

**Why it worked:** By observing and amplifying fan culture rather than engineering it, Muji and Zebra turned everyday stationery into fandom icons. Their role was to fuel what fans were already doing, proving that even subtle interventions can scale when culture is already burning hot.

Although we’re looking at these categories one by one, they are not isolated or exclusive. Often, separate fandoms work together and reinforce one another, as is the case with anime’s seismic global takeover in recent years: Netflix’s anime audience has tripled since 2021, with over half the globe watching. Fueled by hits like *One Piece* and *Demon Slayer*, anime has become a top platform priority — proof that fandoms are massive, deeply engaged, and ready-made for cross-promotion in gaming, apparel, and experiential — a true 360° content ecosystem fans can live inside.

Increasingly, we’re also seeing the blending of completely different fan universes. One fandom, say from music, influencing fandoms in other categories like fashion and food, as was the case with Cardi B’s Rap Snacks or Prada teasing its new “Balm in Banana Yellow” in Sabrina Carpenter’s Manchild music video.

Young fans expect remixes and crossovers, and when done right, these mashups feel exciting and expansive. We’ve seen it in Fortnite x Marvel and Minecraft x Barbie. In 2026, F1 and Disney will reportedly roll out a global partnership that brings Mickey Mouse into F1 events<sup>53</sup>. It’s an unusual pairing, but a signal that even traditional sports leagues are chasing blended IP to hold young people’s attention. These crossovers work when they feel earned, reflecting real fan passions and sparking momentum across platforms. Gen Z & Gen Alpha love seeing their favorite worlds collide, but anything that feels forced or purely transactional risks both rejection, and your brand’s reputation.

## HOW BRANDS SHOULD MOVE FORWARD WITH FANDOMS:

Across these industries, we've seen the way into any fandom isn't through interruption, it's through contribution. Fans are looking for allies who bring them closer to what they already love. Brands who reward passion and fan labor, not just spend.





***“Listen to the fans - and I don't just mean social listening, I mean all of it, from on the ground with fans at fandom forward events like Comic Con to showing up & partnering with creators that care about niche groups. People that aren't just talking AT fans but inviting fans into the conversation. Once that listening happens - take action!”***

AUNDRE SEALS  
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY  
MANAGEMENT & ENGAGEMENT (SOCIAL  
MEDIA MARKETING LEADER)

For brands, cultural relevance now depends on how deeply they're woven into the fan experience. The most forward-thinking players are moving beyond surface-level associations to build systems that convert fan behavior into measurable value. Early signals, from follows and shares to repeat engagement, are tracked and activated to identify high-potential fans, deliver exclusive rewards, and personalize experiences that drive both loyalty and revenue.

Of course, the balance for marketers is cost vs. return: providing fan value and receiving brand lift, first-party data, or incremental sales without breaking the bank. And increasingly, that return comes from designing for participation, where every interaction becomes a signal, every fan touchpoint an opportunity to deepen the relationship.

In this equation, brands should think about fandoms as long-term partners. And while every fandom is unique, the most meaningful (and valuable) brand moves tend to center on providing fans experiences, access and belonging.



# Fandom mapped by emotional weather and fan behavior

To help brands navigate fandom spaces more strategically, we used WPP Open & GPT to analyze social language and media mentions (2022–2025) to map a variety of active fandoms across two axes:

**Participation Style:** From remix-friendly to highly protective

**Emotional Tone:** From comforting/kind to chaotic/bold

The result reveals striking behavioral differences across categories like fashion, food, music, and media. For example, while Emma Chamberlain and Alex Cooper are often grouped together, their fandoms behave very differently.

**Why it matters:** Understanding how fans engage is just as important as who they follow. Participatory, kind-spirited fandoms may be better entry points for brands, while more intense or protective ones demand earned relevance and cultural fluency.

**Footnote:** Fandom placements were determined through AI-assisted synthesis of over 20,000 data points from 2022–2025, including cultural reporting, social media discourse and platform behavior across TikTok, Reddit, YouTube, Substack, and more. Coordinates reflect perceived emotional tone and fan dynamics, not individual sentiment.



# What this could look like:

## EXPERIENCES:

Turn fandom moments into memories, by smoothing friction, amplifying joy, and showing up where the energy already is.

**What if...** Coca-Cola had stepped into Fred Again's surprise NYC concert, helping to streamline the chaotic Twitch Livestream ticketing process, reduce scalpers, and sponsor the venue as the official beverage provider of the pop-up. Fans would've had a smoother path to tickets and a cold Coke in hand while waiting in the summer heat. In return, the brand would've earned cultural relevance, on-site presence, and first-party data from fans who signed up for ticket links.



FRED AGAIN.. HAS HOSTED YET ANOTHER NYC POP-UP SHOW; HOWEVER, THIS ONE SPARKED QUITE A BIT OF SOCIAL MEDIA CONTROVERSY.

## ACCESS:

Help get more fans a seat at the table or build new ones. Not just to watch, but to shape the culture alongside creators and talent.

**What if...** Nike partnered with WNBA obsessed creators to co-host a "Tunnel Takeover" program, inviting superfans to style their favorite players for game-day walk-ins? Fans could submit style edits, moodboards, or TikToks reimagining tunnel fits. Winners would earn backstage access, a Nike co-sign, and the chance to co-create a capsule line rooted in women's basketball culture. This way Nike treats fan creativity as credentialed expertise.



The WNBA Tunnel Is Officially a Fashion Destination

## BELONGING:

Build spaces where fandom lives offline too, transforming existing spaces into temples of identity, connection, and shared obsession.

**What if...** Hilton built on its "Stay Like.." platform, creating a series of 'Fan Stays' curated in partnership with superfans, for superfans? Think Taylor Swift-themed rooms in Nashville, anime-inspired lofts in Tokyo, or LAN-ready gaming suites in Berlin.

Fans could apply and be compensated to help design spaces inspired by their fandoms, with Hilton providing micro-grants and design toolkits. Each listing would spotlight not just the decor, but the community around it, with local meetups, viewing parties, and even creator residencies. Hilton would build a network of physical belonging rooted in shared obsession – because fandom isn't just online. It travels.



VOGUE

Hilton Invites Guests to 'Stay Like McLaren Racing' at Trafalgar St. James London

# ULTIMATELY...



With Gen Z & Gen Alpha fandoms aren't just subcultures, they're new systems of influence blending consumption with creation, identity with economy, loyalty with labor.

The future of brand growth lives inside these high-energy, high-loyalty communities. Marketers that ignore fandom risk becoming background noise in a culture that now runs on participation, not promotion. Over the next couple of years, the brands that win will be the ones embedded in fan worlds, adding value and exploring new models for growth without taking over. Get fandom right, and you're not just part of the conversation, you're part of the canon.

1.

Don't chase the star, tap the subculture.

Beyoncé didn't put Levi's into culture, her fans did. The win came not from the name-drop, but from the brand already being recognizable and remixable within her world. So, whether it's New Balance, Stanley, or Levi's, brands that earn their place in the ecosystem *before* the spotlight hits are the ones fans will amplify when it does.

2.

Speak to the theory crafters, not the tourists.

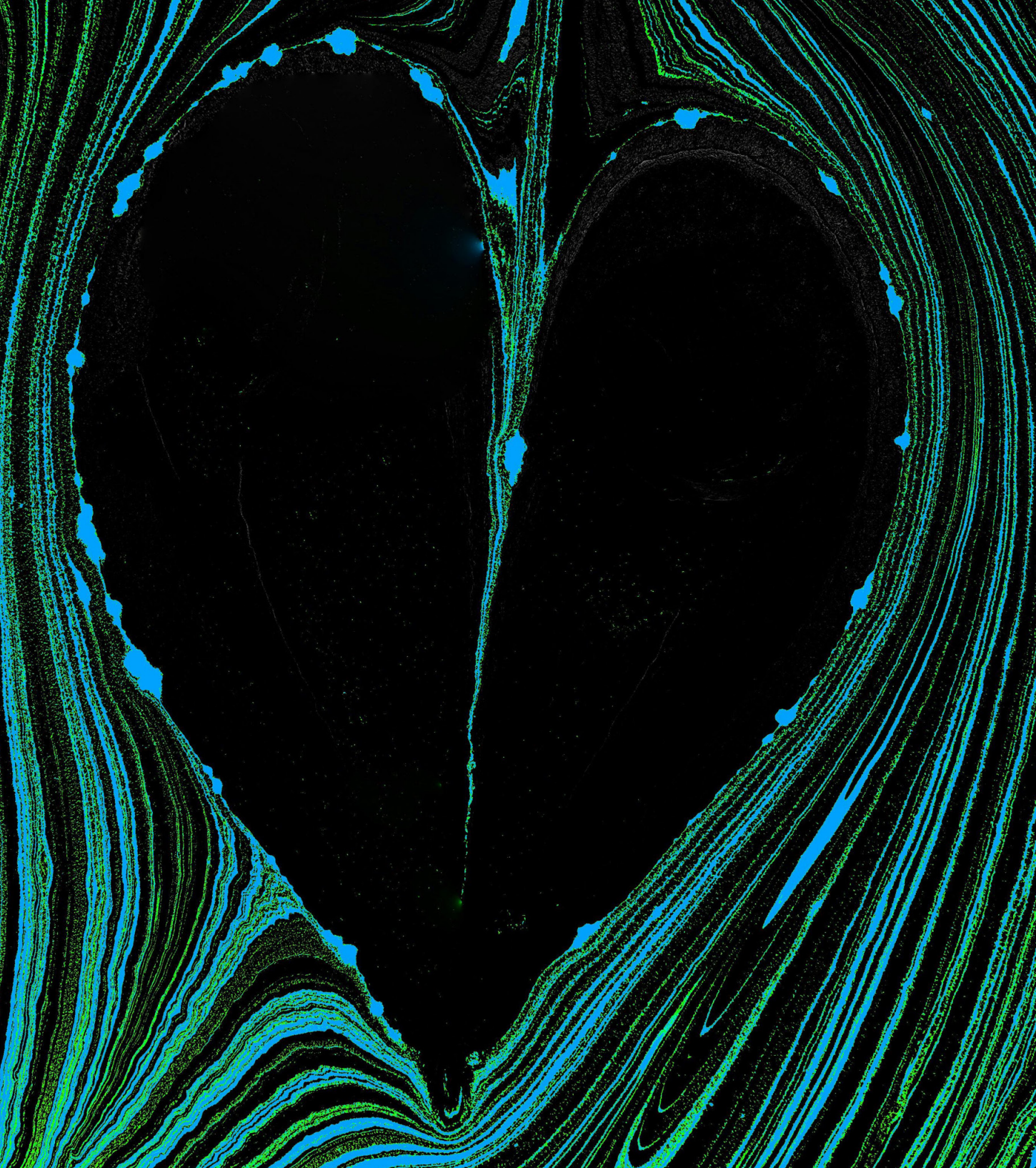
Fandoms thrive on detail, nuance, and knowing winks, not broad strokes. Whether it's *Heartstopper* fans dissecting every frame for queer-coded symbolism or Swifties decoding liner notes and stage outfits, the most powerful brand moments reward deep knowledge and emotional investment. To resonate, meet fans in the weeds – where meaning is made.

3.

Give fans something to complete, not just consume.

Fandoms in or around youth culture don't want final products—they want semi-blank canvases and open worlds. Olivia Rodrigo didn't choreograph a challenge, but her fans turned “bad idea right?” into a POV genre. And *The Sims* wasn't built for K-pop, but modders made it so. Whether it's remixing a meal drop, or editing an unreleased music leak, fans show love by adding layers. Winning brands give fandoms space to play, reinterpret, and leave their mark.

And remember, experimenting with the tidal wave of new media, communities, and brand opportunity begins with a single fan.



## Endnotes

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