

THE CREATOR TRUST REPORT 2026

Do we trust influencers, and does
that affect buying decisions?

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DO WE ACTUALLY TRUST INFLUENCERS IN 2026?

Influencer marketing started with trust.

In the early 2010s, brands noticed something about the people building audiences on blogs and YouTube: their audiences trusted their recommendations, much like how you would a friend's.

Then came the follower counts, engagement rates, and cost per thousand. Creators became purchasable in the same way as any other media. Sure, it's efficient. But it also changed what brands thought they were buying. Follower count is easy to put in a spreadsheet. Trust isn't.

We watched as creators became a distribution channel – and the very trust the whole industry was founded on became a footnote.

Anyone who has actually run creator campaigns already knows this. What a creator has that a billboard doesn't is an audience that trusts them. An influencer you follow every day doesn't feel like an influencer — they feel like someone you know. A friend, or a helpful authority on a topic.

But as the pressure increases to get better results, more creators, more posts, more

output this quarter, the things that make an audience trust a creator are the first to go.

So we wanted to go back to the beginning and test the original premise. Do people trust creators? And does that trust show up in the things brands care about, which is what people buy?

We surveyed 1,042 US adults in June 2026 and asked them how much they trust creators, what makes them trust one, and if they've bought something because of one.

Our main findings:

- 40% say they trust creators
- One in six people trust a creator they follow more than their own friends and family.
- 84% have bought something based on a creator's recommendation
- 82% of people who trust creators would purchase from an unfamiliar brand solely based on the creator's recommendation (Compared to 15% for those who somewhat trust creators).

Note: We use both "influencer" and "creator" interchangeably throughout this report, unless specified otherwise.

WHAT ACTUALLY IMPACTS TRUST?

"INFLUENCER" VS. "CREATOR": WHICH IS MORE TRUSTWORTHY?

"Influencer" and "content creator" evoke very different emotions. Does anyone really want to feel influenced?

We wondered if what we called them made an impact – so we put it to the test. We A/B-split respondents and asked them how trustworthy they found "influencers" or "content creators" to be.

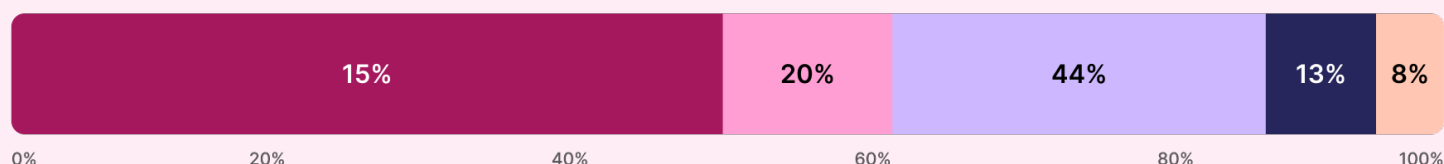
Looking at the whole sample, there doesn't seem to be much of a difference.

● Extremely trustworthy ● Very trustworthy ● Somewhat trustworthy ● Hardly trustworthy ● Not at all trustworthy

"When you think about **content creators** in general, how trustworthy do you find them?" (n=502; 48% of respondents)



"When you think about **influencers** in general, how trustworthy do you find them?" (n=537; 52% of respondents)



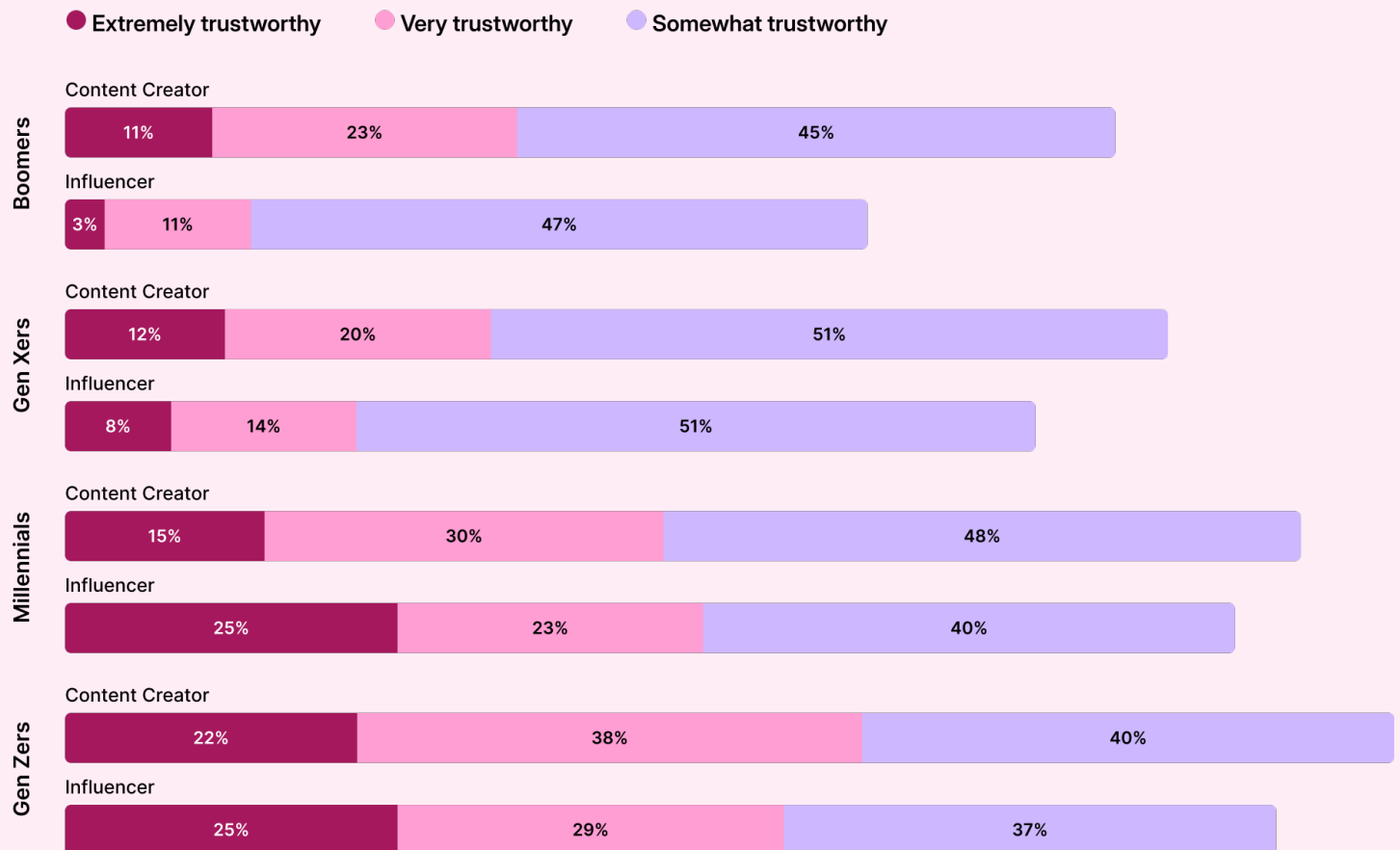
But there are generational differences.

- Boomers and Gen X trend overall towards mistrusting both “influencers” and “content creators” – however, Boomers are particularly mistrusting of “influencer” (Only 14% trustworthy for “influencer” vs 34% for “content creators”)
- For Millennials, “influencer” and “content creator” were roughly the same. (45% vs 48% respectively).
- Not a single Gen Z respondent rated “content creators” as untrustworthy (0% vs 9% for the word “influencers”)

No matter what you call them, the trend is pretty clear. The younger you are, the more likely you are to trust either “influencers” or “content creators.”

As Millennials, who make no difference between the two terms, we’ll use both interchangeably in this report.

“CONTENT CREATOR” VS “INFLUENCER” BY GENERATION



“When you think about content creators in general, how trustworthy do you find them?” (n=502; 48% of respondents)
& “When you think about influencers in general, how trustworthy do you find them?” (n=537; 52% of respondents)

DO PEOPLE TRUST CREATORS' PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS?

We all know the power of word-of-mouth recommendations. It's been the marketing gold standard for years – especially from friends and family.

And for most that we surveyed, that still holds true.

We asked respondents to rank nine sources, starting with the one they trust most for product recommendations. Unlike other surveys, we split influencers into two: creators you follow regularly, and creators you don't know.

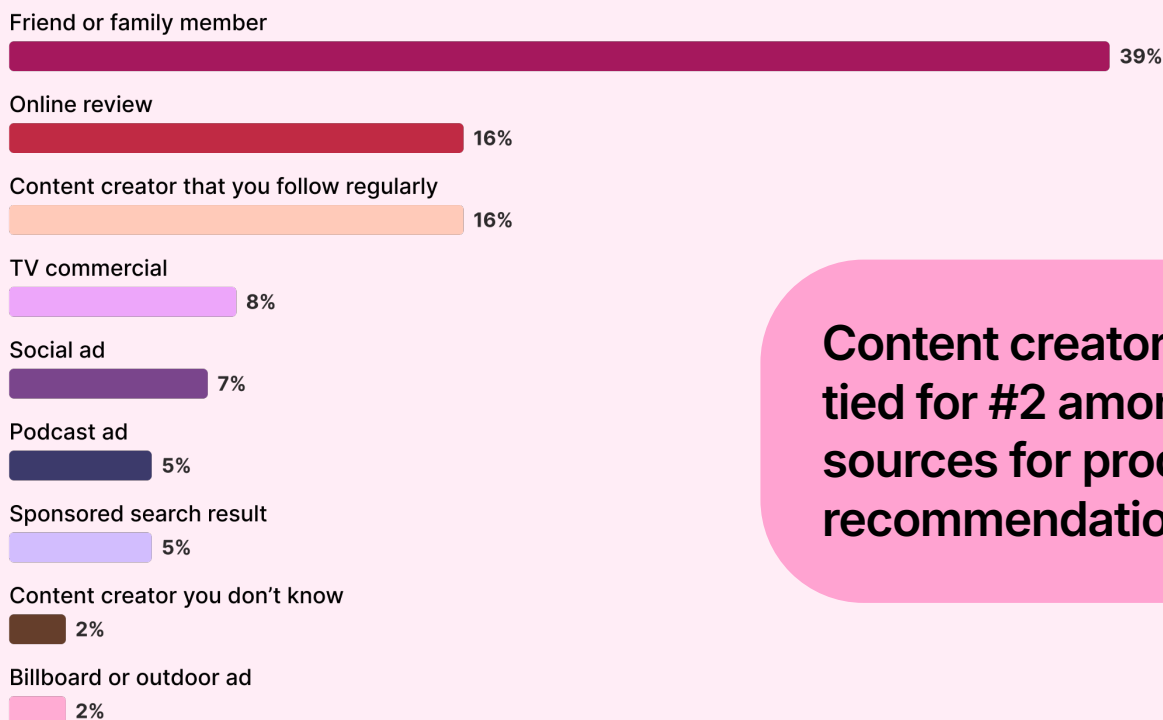
The two ended up at opposite ends of the list.

- Creators people follow regularly were ranked second, tied with online reviews (both 16%). The only source that beat them was friends and family (39%).
- Put another way, one in six people trust a creator they follow more than they trust anyone else on this list, including their own friends and family.
- Creators people don't know ranked last (2%) — tied, with billboards, below podcast ads and sponsored search results.

And then there's Gen Z.

TRUSTED SOURCES FOR PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS

"Which of the following sources do you find the most trustworthy when it comes to recommending products or services?" (n=1,026; 98% of respondents)



Content creator you follow tied for #2 among trusted sources for product recommendations

Gen Z is the only generation that trusts familiar content creators as much as friends and family members for product recommendations, where they tied for first place.

From this data, we see that what you're paying for in a partnership isn't only reach. You're also paying for a relationship someone else already built.

It also means the same recommendation does a different job depending on who's watching.

For Boomers and Gen X, a creator's word competes with a friend's and loses badly. For Gen Z, it's on equal footing.

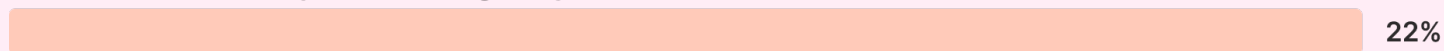
GEN Z TRUSTED SOURCES FOR PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS

*Which of the following sources do you find the most trustworthy when it comes to recommending products or services?"
(n=125; 12% of respondents)*

Friend or family member



Content creator that you follow regularly



Online review



Podcast ad



TV commercial



Sponsored search result



Social ad



Billboard or outdoor ad



Content creator you don't know



Gen Z trusts influencers they follow as much as their friends and family.

WHO TRUSTS CREATORS THE MOST?

So there are “enthusiasts”, and then there’s everybody else.

Enthusiasts are people who watch creator content daily or several times a day – 63% of the total respondents we surveyed.

They’re the megafans. These are the people who champion their favorite creators, and they trust creators more than anyone – 51% of enthusiasts said creators are extremely or very trustworthy, compared to 29% of non-enthusiasts.

And, even going from a daily “enthusiast” to a several-times-a-week “fan” is enough to drop trust – from 54% to 33%.

“Enthusiasts” – people who interact with creator content daily or more – rate creators as the most trustworthy.

How often do you watch, read, or follow content creators on social media?” & “When you think about content creators in general, how trustworthy do you find them?” (n=537; 52% of respondents)

● Extremely trustworthy ● Very trustworthy ● Somewhat trustworthy

More than daily



Daily



More than weekly



Weekly



Less often



Never



If you were born after 1981 (Millennial), there's a 74% chance that you're an "enthusiast" – someone who watches creator content daily or more. If you were born after '97, it's even higher.

- Gen Z: 82%
- Millennials: 74%
- Gen X: 60%
- Boomers: 43%

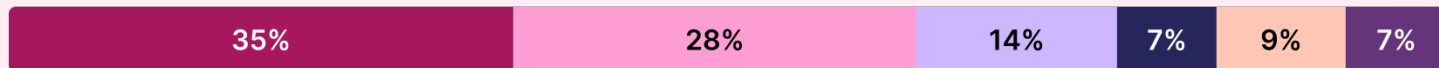
The younger you are, the more you watch creator content – and the more likely you are to trust influencers.

HOW GENERATIONS INTERACT WITH CREATOR CONTENT

"How often do you watch, read, or follow content creators on social media?" (n=1,041; 99% of respondents)

● > Daily ● Daily ● > Weekly ● Weekly ● Less often ● Never

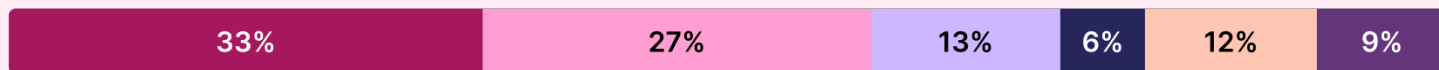
Overall average



Boomer



Gen X



Millennial



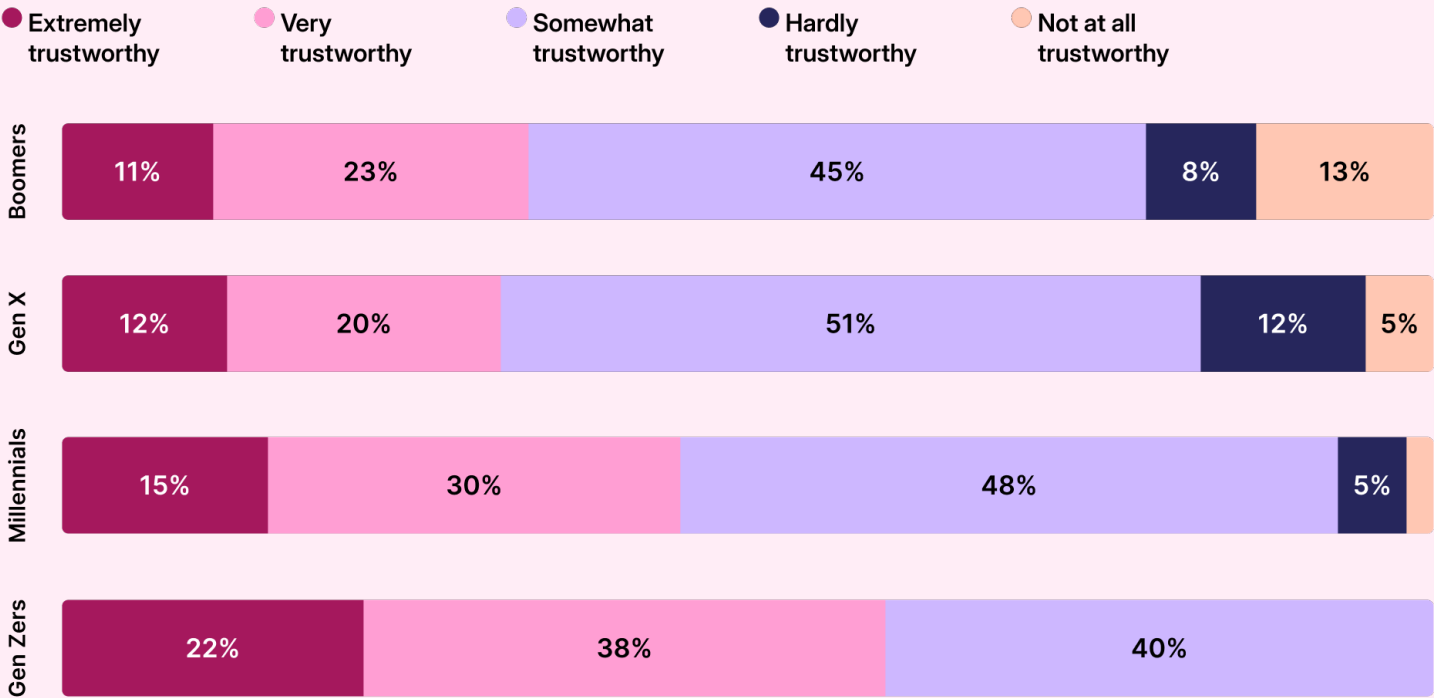
Gen Z



Trust follows a similar path. 60% of Gen Z called creators extremely or very trustworthy, and 45% of Millennials. Gen X and Boomers sit around a third.

At the other end: Only 2% of Gen Z watch creator content less than weekly or not at all. For Boomers, it's 31%.

CREATOR TRUST BY GENERATION



“When you think about content creators in general, how trustworthy do you find them?” (n=502; 48% of respondents)

WHAT BUILDS TRUST

We gave respondents 8 scenarios and asked whether each one made them trust a creator's recommendation more or less.

There was more agreement about what built trust than what took trust away.

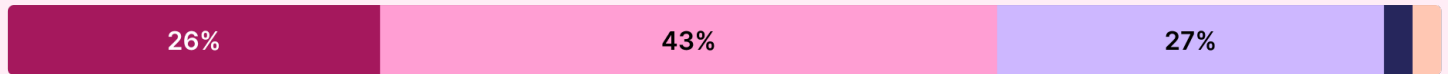
What respondents said increased trust:

- 69% – The creator appears to genuinely use the product
- 63% – Another creator they follow has also recommended it
- 55% – The creator clearly discloses that the post is sponsored
- 46% – The creator has promoted the same product multiple times

*"How much does each of the following affect how much you trust a content creator's recommendation?"
(n=1019; 98% of respondents)*

● Increases my trust a great deal ● Increases my trust somewhat ● No effect ● Decreases my trust somewhat ● Decreases my trust a great deal

The creator appears to genuinely use the product



Another creator you follow has also recommended the product



The creator clearly discloses that the post is sponsored



The creator has promoted the same product multiple times



We also asked respondents to describe in their own words what made a creator's product recommendation feel trustworthy. Largely, they echoed the above scenarios, boiling them down to authenticity and whether the recommendation felt "genuine."

"A product recommendation feels trustworthy when the creator is honest about both pros and cons and has real experience using the product."

– Male, Millennial, Washington

And what's better than one authentic creator transparently promoting a sponsored product they're obviously using? Two.

When another creator they follow is also recommending the same product, 63% of respondents said it increased their trust in that recommendation.

"If the content creator uses the product itself and multiple creators also use the product."

– Female, Boomer, Massachusetts

Then, for others, trust was just intuition.

"I feel it in my bones."

– Male, Gen X, Pennsylvania

While we haven't quite worked out how to get "bone feeling" down, there are plenty of ways to send trust signals when you're working with creators.

Trust is built when a creator is actually using your product – give them time to test it. It'll make their content a lot more genuine if they've found a way to fit your product into their lives.

Advocate for radical transparency. Make sure they're being upfront and honest about the sponsorship and giving genuine feedback – both good and bad.

And if you can work with several influencers who have audience overlap, all the better for building trust within their shared communities.

Working with the same influencer over a longer period of time helps them casually use the product across several pieces of content – which is going to read as more authentic.

6 in 10 say creator expertise counts

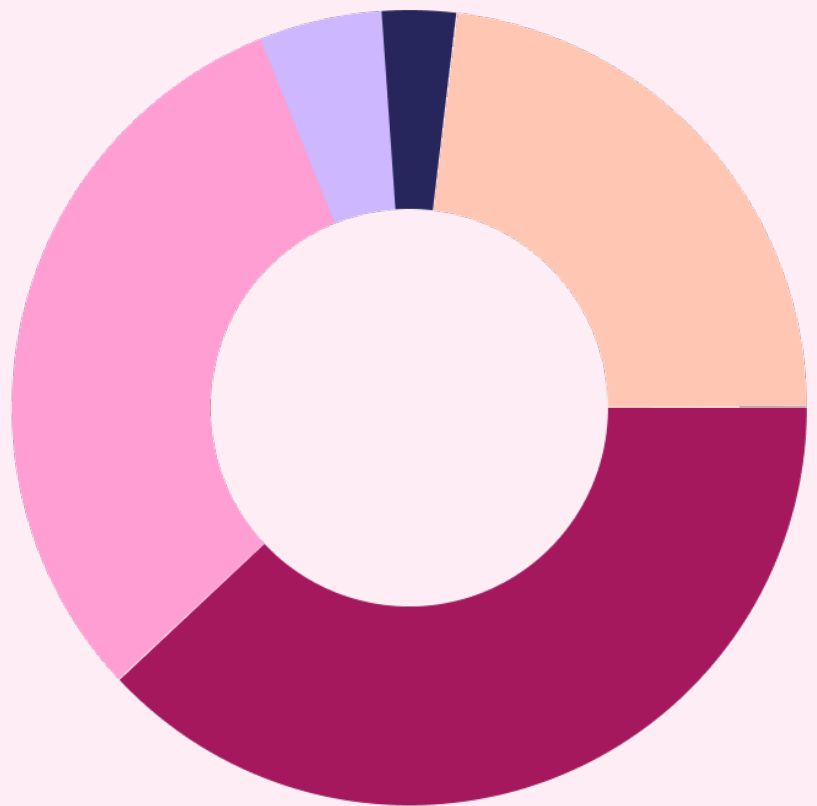
There's a big difference between a creator who covers a topic and a creator who's an expert in that topic.

61% of respondents said creator expertise was either very or extremely important.

IMPORTANCE OF CREATOR EXPERTISE

"How much does it matter to you that a content creator is considered an expert in the topic they cover?" (n=895; 86% of respondents)

- Extremely important (23%)
- Very important (38%)
- Somewhat important (5%)
- Hardly important (5%)
- Not at all important (3%)



That said, the older you are, the less expertise seems to matter.

For Boomers, expertise was very important (51%). For Gen Z, it was everything (72%).

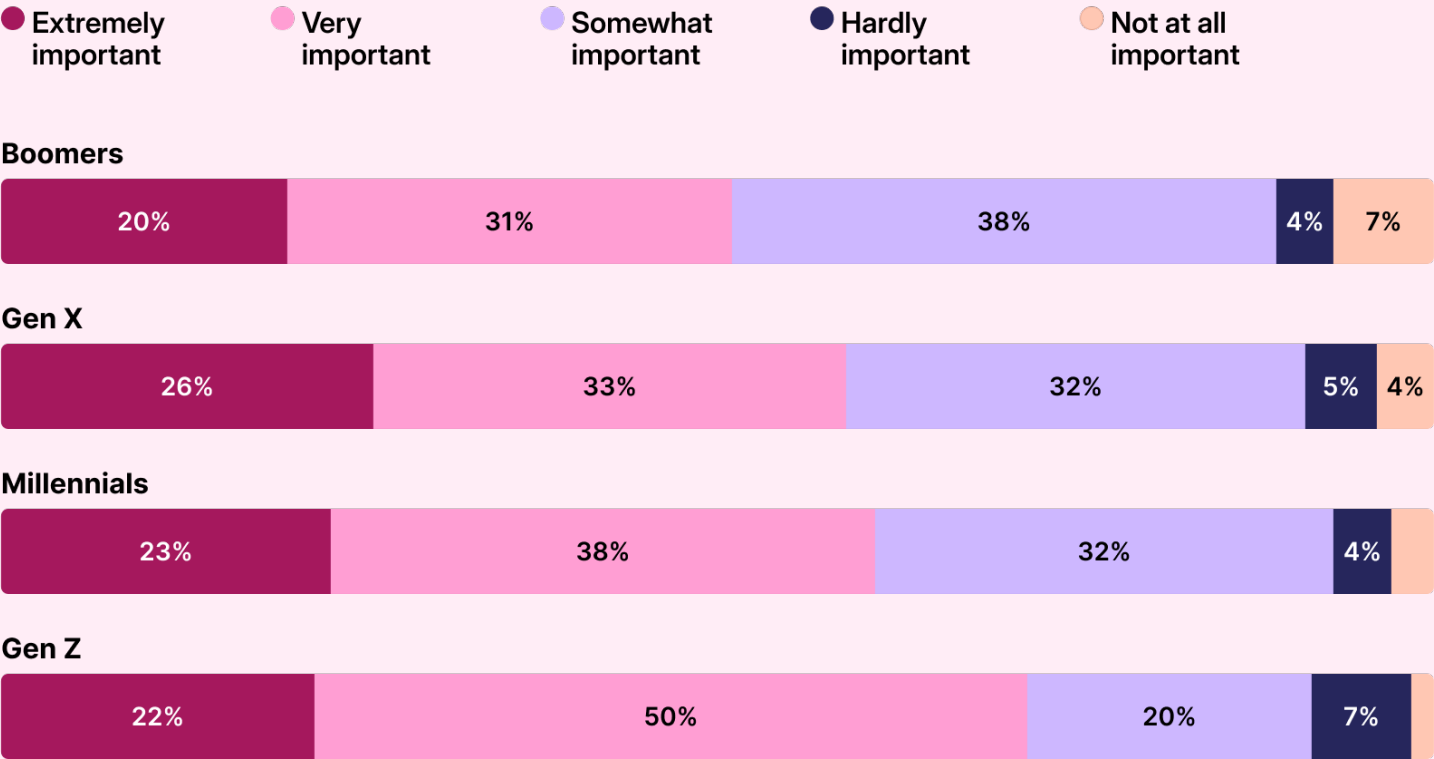
When we asked this question, we contextualized expertise with “for example, a dermatologist recommending skincare products.”

While certain domains can be pretty cut-and-dry (like medical), others might be a bit hazier. (like fashion)

Expertise ultimately comes down to audience perception – an influencer who seems like more of an expert will earn more trust, especially among younger audiences. That expertise might look like a defined method for reviewing products, being known for brutal honesty about products they try, or having solid, deep knowledge in a particular niche.

CREATOR EXPERTISE BY GENERATION

“How much does it matter to you that a content creator is considered an expert in the topic they cover?”
(n=895; 86% of respondents)



WHAT BREAKS TRUST

Respondents reported the highest levels of distrust when a sponsored product didn't make sense for the creator's content and when the creator used AI-generated content. Although these scenarios are tied, AI-generated content provoked a much more intense reaction (dropping trust a great deal – 21% vs 14% for poor product fit).

What respondents said decreases trust:

- 43% — The product seems like a poor fit for the creator's content
- 43% — The creator uses AI-generated content
- 40% — The creator does NOT disclose that the post is sponsored
- 36% — The creator reads from a script or hits marketing talking points

After that, if the audience felt that a post was sponsored without disclosure, or if the creator was just reading from a script, trust took a hit as well.

*"How much does each of the following affect how much you trust a content creator's recommendation?"
(n=1019; 98% of respondents)*

● Increases my trust a great deal ● Increases my trust somewhat ● No Effect ● Decreases my trust somewhat ● Decreases my trust a great deal

The creator uses AI-generated content



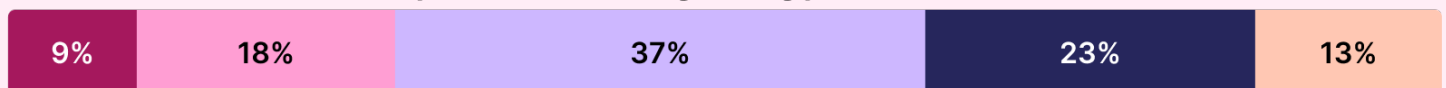
The product seems like a poor fit for the creator's content



The creator does NOT disclose that the post is sponsored



The creator reads from a script or hits marketing talking points



When it doesn't feel authentic, the audience just switches off.

We asked respondents to think about a time when they decided not to purchase a product a creator had recommended and to tell us what put them off.

For many, the product simply wasn't relevant. For some, it just didn't feel like an honest recommendation.

"They didn't seem genuine about the product and just wanted the product referral button used to get commission."

– Male, Boomer, South Carolina

Another respondent mentioned that the product didn't really make sense for the creator.

"It seemed random and unrelated to their content."

– Female, Millennial, Wisconsin

If we want sponsored content to work, it has to feel authentic. So, the best thing we can do is let influencers have the creative freedom to, well, create. If they're reading off a script, hitting ultra-corporate talking points, and it's not an easy, natural sell that they actually use the product, their audience will pick up on that.

"It seemed like the content creator was just doing it to make money and didn't really like or use the product."

– Female, Millennial, South Carolina

Another respondent mentioned that instead of showing the product, they only showed AI-generated content.

"They were using AI-generated content instead of showing the product, or not showing the product at all."

– Male, Gen Z, Illinois

We asked respondents how they'd feel about a creator using AI to help write posts or scripts without disclosing it.

While a few said it wouldn't change anything for them, more said it would negatively impact their opinion of the creator. They believe AI undermines originality, authenticity, and honesty – making the creator less trustworthy overall.

Many mentioned unfollowing the creator completely, and others just said they'd be skeptical of trusting them again.

One person mentioned that it destroys the creator's authenticity.

"I generally feel that the content creators should use personal non-AI posts or scripts. It should be natural if you use the product instead of just selling it, trying to make money off of it. Using an AI seems to make the ad not genuine, purely for sales."

– Female, Millennial, Wisconsin

Another respondent said they'd feel "cheated":

"I would feel cheated. I follow cooking content creators because I genuinely love to cook, and if I found out that those people were using AI, I would distrust what they were saying."

– Female, Gen X, Louisiana

For some, they'd be okay with it under certain circumstances – for example, the creator's transparency about using AI as a tool and what they were using it for.

"I wouldn't have a big problem with it because many people use AI as a tool. However, I would prefer if they were honest about it from the beginning. Being transparent helps build trust with their audience."

– Male, Millennial, California

**"I would feel cheated."
– AI involvement in creator content**

We also asked respondents how they'd feel about a content creator promoting AI products or services. Overall, 60% of respondents reacted either positively or neutrally. 4 in 10 had a visceral negative reaction.

Of those who responded, Boomers and Gen Z were the coldest towards creators promoting AI products. Boomers often expressed a general mistrust of technology, saying they didn't really understand it.

Gen Z, however, mistrusted creators promoting AI with eyes wide open – often citing concerns about the environment.

"I don't trust or like AI. It is harmful to society and the environment, so any creator using it supports that, and I don't support or trust them."

– Female, Gen Z, California

AI is a hot-button topic, and it's polarizing. It's not a no-go, but if it's going to be used either as a promotional tool or as what's being promoted, tread carefully and make sure the creator is transparent about its use.

**DOES TRUST
IN CREATORS
ACTUALLY MAKE
PEOPLE BUY?**

WHO BUYS FROM CREATOR RECOMMENDATIONS?

Among people who follow creators, 84% have bought something based on a creator's recommendation.

Over half (52%) purchased a creator-recommended product in the last month. And nearly a quarter (22%) had done it in the last week.

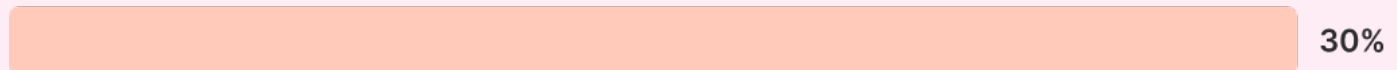
Half of people purchased a product a creator recommended in the last month – nearly a quarter in the last week.

How long ago did you last purchase something based on a content creator's recommendation?" (n=741; 71% of respondents)

In the past week



In the past month



In the past 3 months



In the past 12 months



More than 1 year ago



IS TRUST NEEDED TO PURCHASE?

We found a correlation between those who said they found creators trustworthy and how recently they'd purchased from a creator's recommendation.

Among people who rated creators extremely trustworthy, 82% had bought something on a creator's recommendation in the last month. And 45% had purchased in the last week.

For those who said very trustworthy, 58% had purchased in the last month. For somewhat trustworthy, it dropped to 33%.

"How long ago did you last purchase something based on a content creator's recommendation?" & "When you think about content creators in general, how trustworthy do you find them?"
(n=502; 48% of respondents)

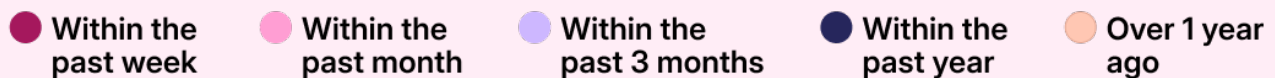
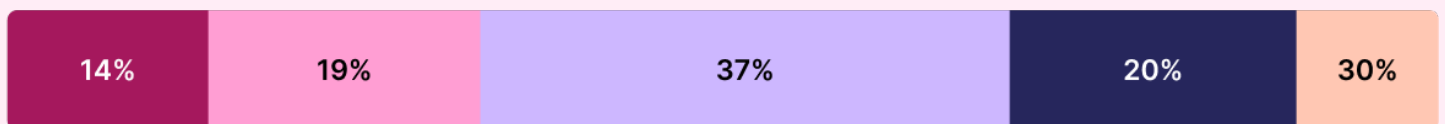
Extremely trustworthy



Very trustworthy



Somewhat trustworthy



HOW MUCH SWAY DOES A CREATOR'S RECOMMENDATION REALLY HAVE?

Those that find creators the most trustworthy are also the most likely to purchase a creator's recommendation, even if they don't know the brand:

- 82% of those who say creators are extremely trustworthy
- 45% of those who say creators are very trustworthy
- 15% of those who say creators are somewhat trustworthy

And for people who already trust creators the most, brand recognition doesn't really change their willingness to buy a creator-recommended product.

Those who find creators extremely trustworthy were just as willing to buy from an unfamiliar brand (82%) as a familiar one (79%).

For the somewhat-trustworthy group, though, brand familiarity is the difference between 15% and 51%.

PURCHASE LIKELIHOOD BY TRUST

"When you think of content creators in general, how trustworthy do you find them?" & How likely would you be to purchase a creator-recommended product from an unknown brand/known brand?"

Unknown Brand

Extremely trustworthy



Very trustworthy



Somewhat trustworthy

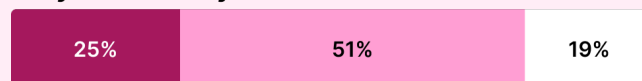


Known Brand

Extremely trustworthy



Very trustworthy



Somewhat trustworthy



● Completely likely ● Very likely ● Somewhat likely

BRING BACK TRUST

The more we treat creators like “yet-another-marketing-channel”, the less authentic it all feels.

And the less honest and authentic it feels, the more a creator’s audience will switch off.

That very honesty is what makes creators relatable. It’s what makes them trustworthy.

If there’s one thing you take away from this report, it’s this: **trust is the catalyst to making this channel work for brands.**

While answering the question of whether or not we trust influencers is complicated, it’s clear that those who trust influencers the most are the ones most ready to take their recommendations at face-value – even for brands they’ve never heard of.

That trust can be reinforced when a creator:

- Has expertise
- Seems to actually use the product they’re promoting
- Is transparent about sponsored content
- Is among other creators also recommending that product

That trust can also be broken when a creator:

- Isn’t honest about a sponsored post
- Promotes a product that doesn’t belong in their world
- Hits ultra-corporate talking points from a script
- Leans on AI – either for the content itself or promotes AI products

So how do we make sure an audience is going to trust the creator recommending our product?

Spoiler: it involves trust.

Trust a creator you work with to do their thing. Trust them to make a product make sense in their lives. Trust their honest takes and feedback. And trust them to present your product in a way that will really resonate with their audience.

Yes, even when there’s pressure to make the number in the spreadsheet go up.

Yes, even when the creator feels a bit risky.

Yes, when you’re testing new things.

Because this whole industry hinges on trust – and you can’t expect a creator’s audience to trust them if you don’t trust them first.

METHODOLOGY & STATISTICS

In partnership with ResearchScape, we surveyed a proportionate sample of 1,042 US adults over the age of 18 between June 10th and 11th, 2026. Of those, 51% were women, and 49% were men.

Respondents fell into four generations, defined as:

- Boomers (1946 – 1964): 301 respondents
- Gen X (1965 – 1980): 279 respondents
- Millennials (1981 – 1996): 314 respondents
- Gen Z (1997 and later): 126 respondents

Respondents were recruited from a diverse variety of different sources: panels, apps, websites, and rewards programs. In the interest of being representative of the general population of US adults, they were recruited proportionate to age, ethnicity, gender, household income, marital status, and level of education.

Responses were then weighted to the US population as per 9 demographic questions with a credibility interval of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

No study or research is 100% accurate or perfect. But with ResearchScape, we have done our best to frame an accurate and representative sample of US adults and the way they feel about content creators.

Data collection & processing: ResearchScape

Author: Whitney Blankenship

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ABOUT MODASH

Modash is the all-in-one influencer marketing platform to manage and grow your creator program. Find creators, run campaigns, track performance, and pay partners — all from one place. Built for brands on Shopify. Loved by all. Already powering 2,000+ influencer programs, Modash is where your whole workflow finally connects.

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