



DATA BRIEF · 2026

Quarterly Signals

Where participation is outperforming reach — a short brief of the strongest current signals, with sources.

At a glance

A concise scan of the data points where audience participation is outperforming passive reach. Each signal is sourced; this brief curates third-party research rather than reporting proprietary measurement.

88%

TRUST RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM PEOPLE THEY KNOW

77%

MORE LIKELY TO BUY A
PRODUCT FOUND VIA UGC

20%

OF US MUSIC LISTENERS ARE
SUPERFANS

200M+

DISCORD MONTHLY ACTIVE
USERS

+66%

SUPERFAN LIVE-MUSIC SPEND
VS. AVG.

56%

GEN Z FIND SOCIAL MORE
RELEVANT THAN TV/MOVIES

The signals

1 · Trust has moved to participants

People trust recommendations from people they know above all advertising (88%, Nielsen), and most are more likely to buy a product they found through user-generated content (77%, Bazaarvoice) — the persuasion layer is now people, not placements.

2 · Superfans monetize through participation

Superfans are 20% of US music listeners and spend at multiples of the average — e.g. ~66% more on live music — buying merch, memberships, and experiences, not just streams.

3 · Community is the default surface

Discord alone surpassed 200M monthly actives; audiences increasingly gather in participatory spaces rather than broadcast feeds.

4 · Younger audiences prefer participatory media

A majority of Gen Z (56%) find social content more relevant than TV shows and movies, and roughly half feel a stronger connection to creators than to traditional personalities (Deloitte).

Reach vs. participation — the gap

Persuasion: trust people-you-know recommendations — Nielsen, 2021



Discovery: shopper photos lift purchase likelihood — Bazaarvoice, 2022



Spend: superfan live-music premium — vs. average listener



The throughline: where audiences *participate*, they trust more, discover more, and spend more than where they merely *receive*. Reach still scales; participation increasingly converts.

What to watch next

- Whether platforms begin **returning value** to participants or only absorb participation mechanics.
- Emergence of **standard participation metrics** (e.g. a Participation Value Index).
- Superfan monetization maturing into a distinct, measured market line.

References

1. Goldman Sachs Research, "The creator economy could approach half-a-trillion dollars by 2027," April 2023. [goldmansachs.com](https://www.goldmansachs.com)
2. Deloitte, "2024 Digital Media Trends" (18th edition), 2024. [deloitte.com/insights](https://www.deloitte.com/insights)
3. Luminate, "2024 Year-End Music Report" (superfan findings), 2024.
4. Music Ally, "Discord now has more than 200m monthly active users globally," April 2024.
5. Nielsen, "Trust in Advertising" — recommendations from people you know, 2021. [nielsen.com](https://www.nielsen.com)
6. Bazaarvoice, "Shopper Experience Index" (user-generated content & purchase behavior), 2022. [bazaarvoice.com](https://www.bazaarvoice.com)

Third-party figures are attributed to the sources above. Any model, index, or proposed study design is labeled as such and is not presented as a proprietary empirical finding.