SUPER AWESOME

Culture Makers

HOW TEENS DEFINE FANDOMS, TRENDS & SPEND



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The Lowdown

Teens are making culture: shaping trends, building fandoms, creating content, and steering what their households buy.

To connect with them, brands need to understand how Teen influence travels.

1. Teens Are Cultural Leaders

They shape 'cool' and culture in their own peer groups and for those above and below them.

2. Teens Define 'Cool' on Their Own Terms

Their friends' opinions carry the most weight, and they look to each other rather than to Young Adults for what's worth caring about.

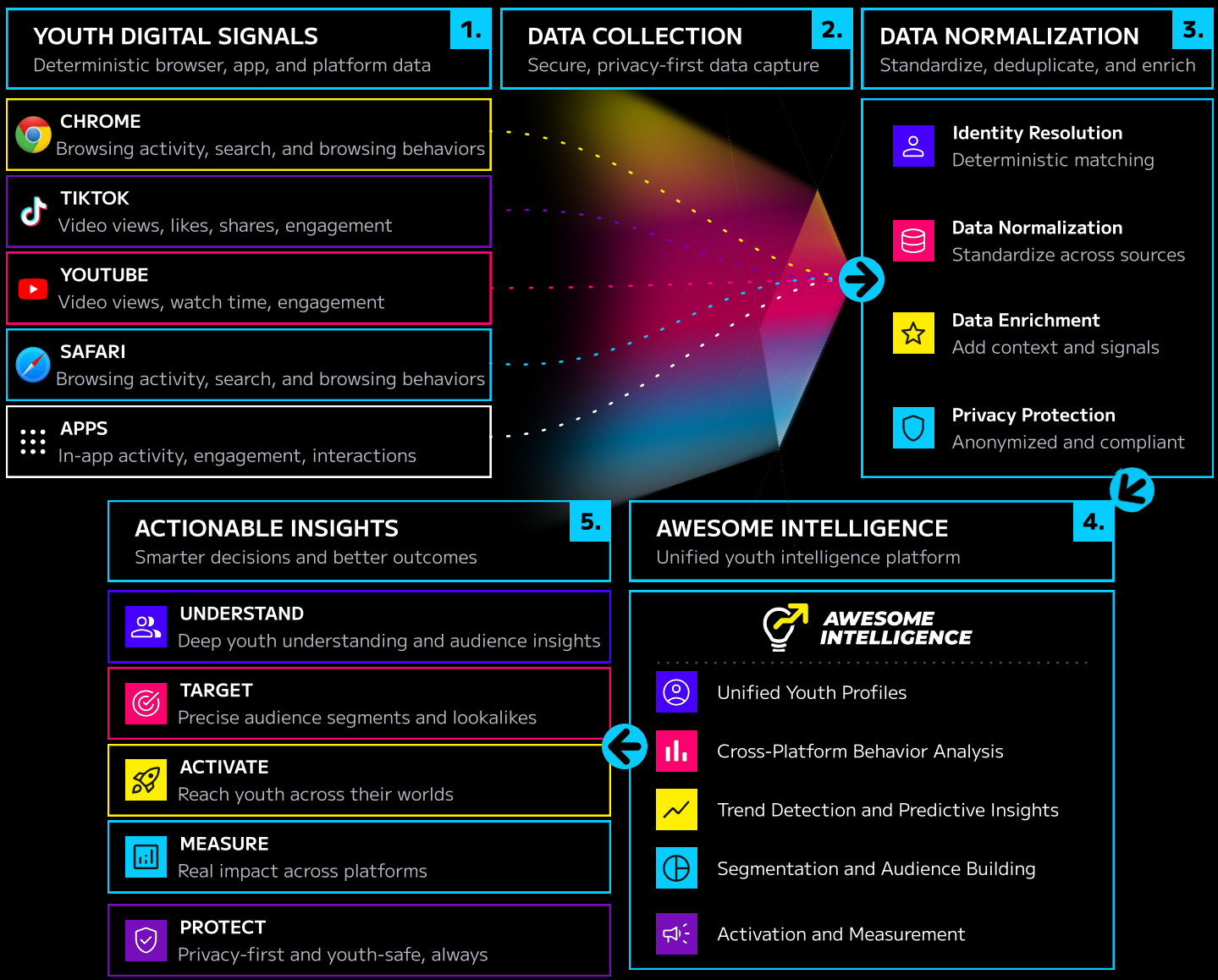
3. Teens Create as Well as Consume

Their content consumption may look algorithm-driven but it masks a cohort adept at sharing, remixing, and creating. This makes creators essential to any brand campaign.

4. Teens Have Agency over Spend

They influence their own and their household's spending, but the digital path to purchase isn't always a simple one.

Our Latest Work Draws on over 500M Real-World Digital Engagements



Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

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What We Set Out to Learn

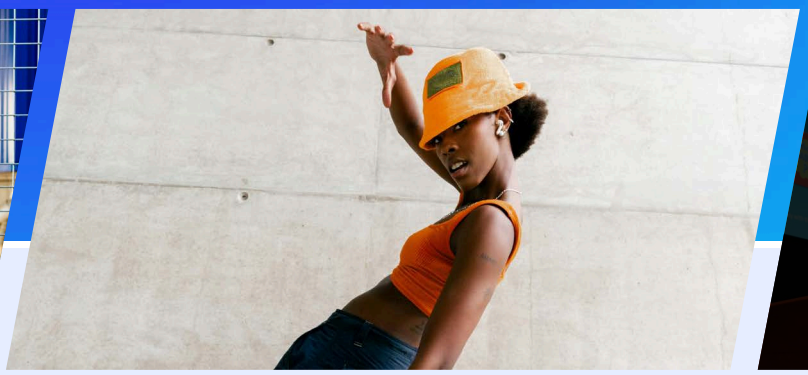
Culture doesn't wait for brands to catch up. While the media landscape fragments and audiences scatter across new platforms, Teens are quietly shaping what comes next - including the trends, language, and things worth caring about. Despite this, many brands overlook them entirely, building for Young Adults and assuming it'll trickle down to Teens, too.

Formulaic, aspirational marketing isn't enough anymore. Brands need to understand Teens on their own terms. The ones who don't, risk missing them entirely, right at the moment their curiosities, loyalties, and brand preferences are taking shape.

This study set out to close that gap, help brands build a genuine understanding of Teen audiences, and overcome the data scarcity that makes Teens so hard to understand and reach effectively.

Along the way, we mapped typical touchpoints in the Teen purchase journey, explored the outsized role Teens play in defining culture and trends, and found that Teen content is reaching and influencing Young Adults, with influence flowing up rather than trickling down. What emerges is a clearer picture of how brands can build connections with Teens that actually last.





Methodology

Most research asks Teens what they think. We wanted to see what they actually do.

We undertook a comprehensive quantitative study with Teen (13-17) and Young Adult (18-24) respondents across the US, pairing opt-in behavioral data with self-reported survey responses alongside 100 qualitative interviews - so instead of relying on memory or perception alone, we could build a fuller picture of Teens' digital lives.

Teens and Young Adults opted in to let SuperAwesome study more than **500M data signals** from over **1,900 devices**. Our in-house insights team dug deep into this blended data set to uncover what's really driving Teen culture today.

1,900+
devices and linked surveys

2M+
app usage events

500M+
data signals



What We'll Cover

1. MEET THE CULTURE MAKERS | 5-9
2. TEENS AREN'T MINI ADULTS | 10-13
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Look out for Brand Actions throughout the report!

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MEET THE CULTURE MAKERS

Youth marketing has long assumed that Teens look up to Young Adults.



Our data shows influence flowing the other way, with Teens setting the pace for the audiences either side of them.



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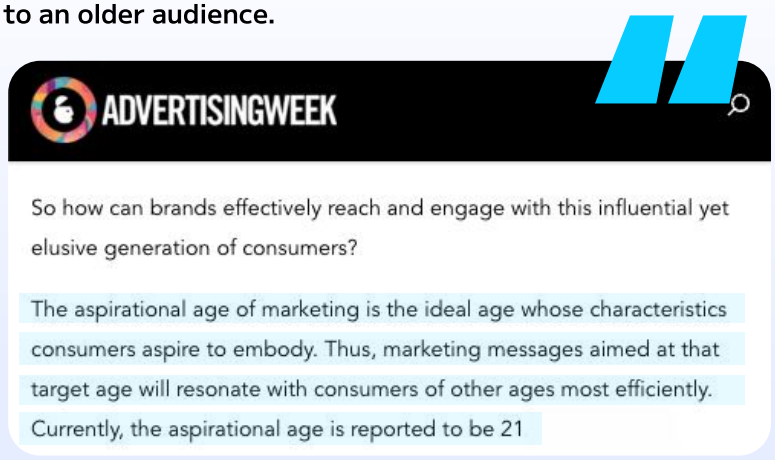
Data Blows up Myths

Some long-held assumptions in youth marketing don't stand up to data. One of the most persistent is the idea of aspiration, or 'aging up': the belief that the best way to reach young people is to speak to an older audience.

The industry has even put a number on this assumption with **the "aspirational age" widely reported to be 21,** on the basis that messages aimed at that age will resonate most efficiently with consumers both older and younger.

But our data shows something different.

Teens look to each other to define what's cool, and their friends' opinions carry more weight than those of the Young Adults above them.



Source: The End of Tween Branding? Advertising Week, April 2024

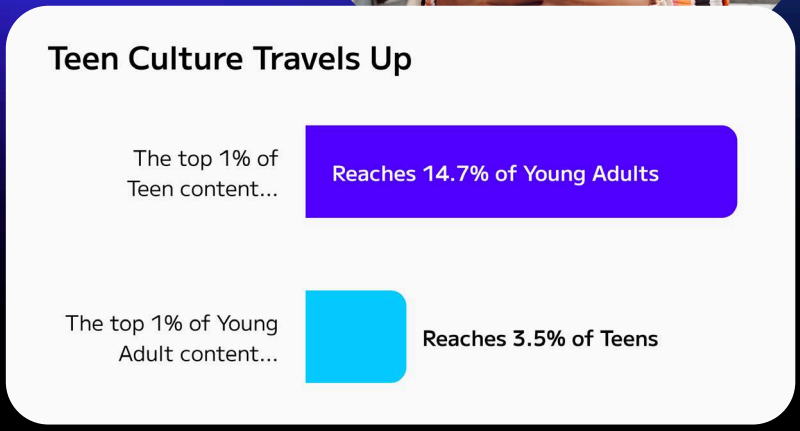
Win with Teens, Win with Young Adults



Our device data shows what Teens and Young Adults actually watch and reveals a clear imbalance. **Content that wins with Teens reaches 4x as many Young Adults as Young Adult content reaches Teens.**

This gap holds across a range of platforms too - on YouTube and TikTok, the videos Teens love most reach Young Adults just as widely as they reach Teens, and sometimes more **(1x more on TikTok and 1.4x more on YouTube)**. By contrast, the videos Young Adults love most reach between one-third and nearly one-half fewer Teens.

Culture travels up, and Teens are setting the agenda for what gets watched, while Young Adults follow their lead.



Brand Action

Use Teen signals as an early indicator of youth trends, not 18–24s as a proxy for Teens.

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

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Gen Alpha Leads. Gen Z Follows.

This trend also shows up in search behavior data, which led us to identify a new category of search we're calling 'Boomer Searches'.

'Boomer Searches'

- What is AO3?
- What is group 7?
- What does 67 mean?
- What is LARPing?
- What is Bebot?
- What is Diddy Blud doing on the calculator?
- What does the Fox say?
- What does FOMO mean?

Boomer Searches are the kind you might make if you didn't know what was going on in digital culture. What stands out about these searches, though, is who's making them: alongside Baby Boomers, Gen X and Millennials, Young Adults are doing it too.

Young Adults are almost 8x more likely than Teens to make a Boomer Search, and the reason is clear. Teens know what's going on, while Young Adults are following along, trying to keep up with a digital culture that Teens are authoring as it unfolds.

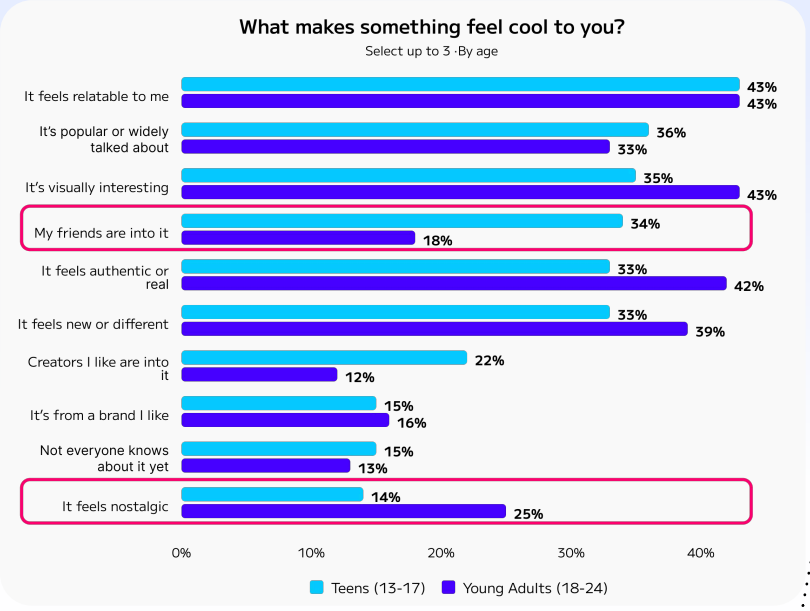
Young Adults are

7.7x

more likely than Teens to 'Boomer Search'

Teens Are Social; Young Adults Are Nostalgic

When asked what makes something cool, Teens were almost twice as likely as Young Adults to say 'my friends are into it' (34% vs. 18%), while Young Adults lean more on nostalgia (25% vs. 14%) as they navigate new responsibilities.



> It does carry more weight because I trust my friends' judgment about certain things, so if they're really into something. If they think they're good enough to send to me, I think it's probably something cool....so I should probably try it out, buy it.
>
> Male, 17

> I mean, I wouldn't say my friend's approval really matters at all.
>
> Male, 24

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

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While Teens Make Culture, Young Adults Are Looking Backwards

76%

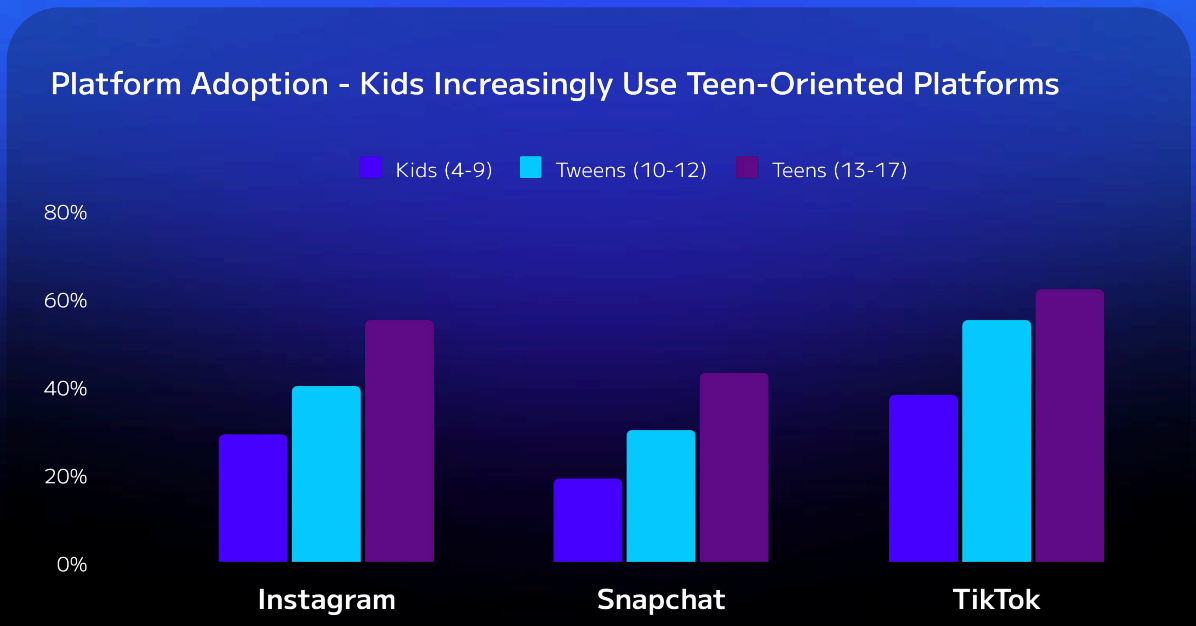
of Young Adults **'sometimes'** or **'often'** watch content that seems made for a younger audience.

Among Young Adults (18-24) who often/sometimes watch younger-audience content, they do so because it is...

Reason for watching younger-audience content	18–24
It is funny or entertaining	52%
Comfort / easy watching	52%
Nostalgia	51%
I genuinely like it	46%
It shows up in my feed	32%

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

And Kids Look up to Teens, Too



Teen influence extends to younger audiences as well as older ones. Platform adoption rises steadily from Kids to Tweens to Teens, as younger audiences follow Teens into the spaces they've already established and made their own.

Source: SuperAwesome, Platform Engagement Study, Q: B4 - Which of these apps, games, and websites do you use?, 6 - 17 year olds from the USA , 2026, Base: N= 3065. Parents answered on behalf of children under 7

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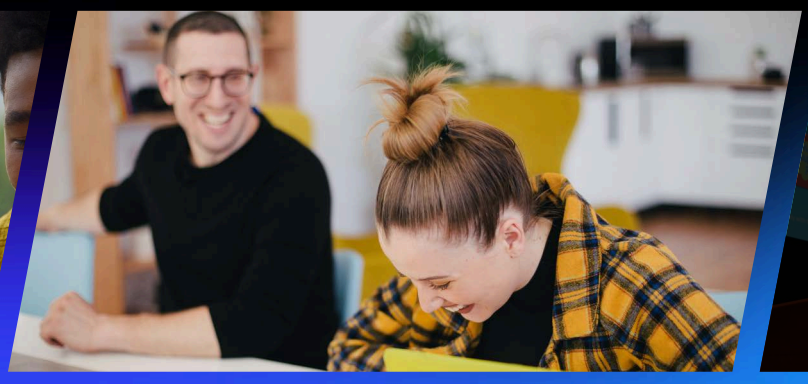
Teens Sit at the Center of the Cultural Flow

Teens are still growing up while Young Adults are actually 'adulting'.
And that makes all the difference to their cultural impact.

Digital Behavior

Kids*	Teens (13-17)	Young Adults (18-24)
Self-concept building	Identity formation	Identity expression
Family-guided choice	Peer approval	Personal preference
Play & mastery	Exploration	Optimization
Guided discovery	Discovery	Decision making
Belonging through play	Community seeking	Community participation
Interest immersion	Trend participation	Lifestyle building
Play focused	Entertainment focused	Utility focused





*Method note: Kids data based on self-reported survey data; Teens and Young Adults are based on consented deterministic data

Source: Kids column: SuperAwesome synthesis of CDC, Pew Research Center and UNICEF Innocenti RITEC evidence. SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

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TEENS AREN'T MINI ADULTS

If Teens lead culture, brands need to know where their attention goes. Teens and Young Adults use the same platforms but in very different ways, and those differences shape how trends start.





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Mind the Gap: Teens vs. Young Adults

Brand Action

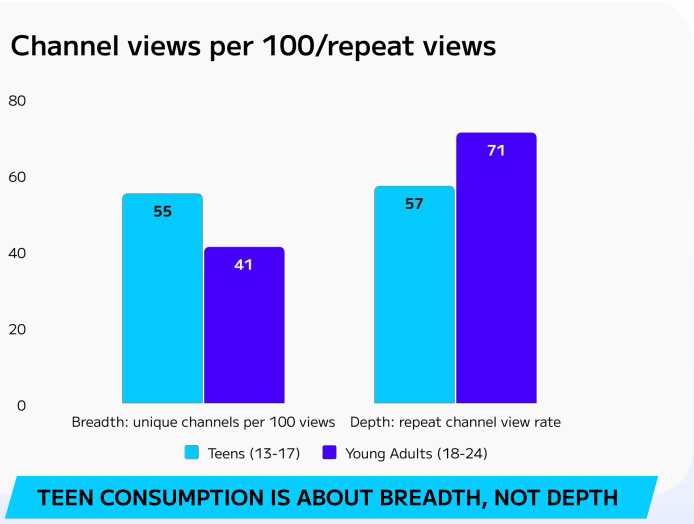
Brands need to be intentional about when and where they reach Teens to maximize impact.

Teens and Young Adults both spend most of their time online consuming content, but in different ways. Young Adults settle into longer sessions, while Teens squeeze viewing, scrolling, and messaging into short windows around school, activities, and family rules, making their experience more fragmented.

TEENS ARE HARDER TO FIND, BUT WORTH MORE

	Teens (13-17)	Young Adults (18-24)
Consumption apps	76	84
Communication apps	24	17

Teens have a distinct usage pattern that drives the talkability of and participation in trends.



TEEN CONSUMPTION IS ABOUT BREADTH, NOT DEPTH

Teens are exploring content across a wider range of channels and content, while Young Adults are more routine-driven, repeatedly watching content they already know.

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

Teens Have Less Time to Give and More Places to Give It. Their Attention Moves Across Platforms, but Conversation Travels with Them.

MAKE EVERY SECOND COUNT.

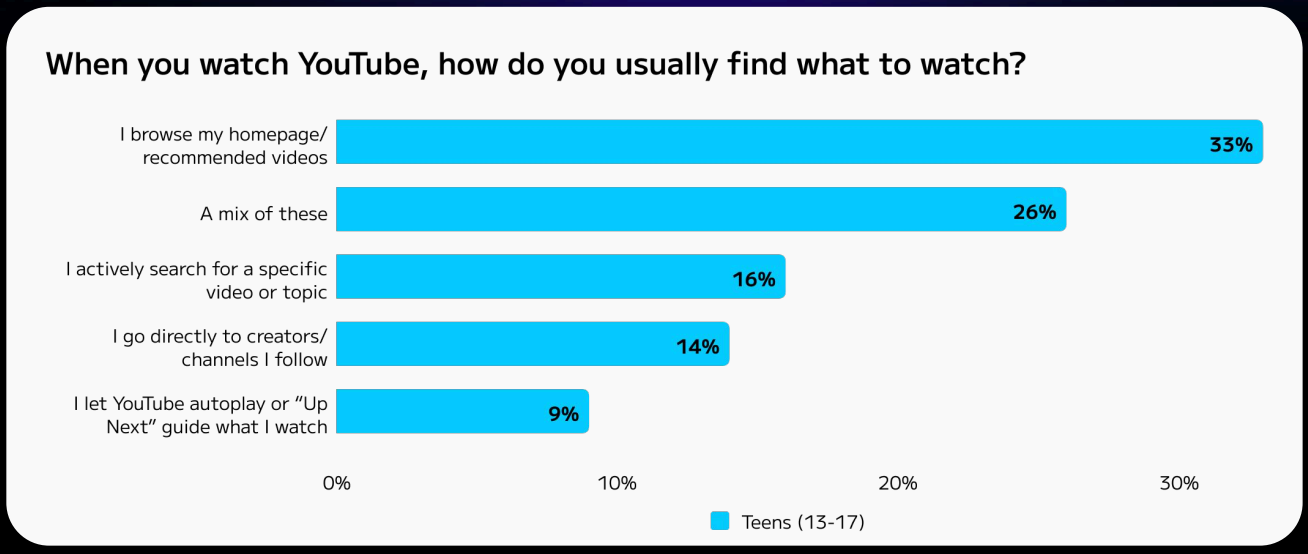
TEENS DON'T HAVE ATTENTION TO SPARE.

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98% of Teens' YouTube Viewing Is Algorithmic

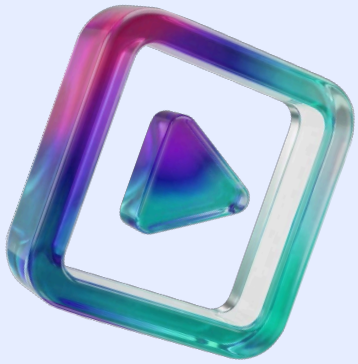
Ask Teens how they find what to watch on YouTube and many say they search or go straight to creators. Their device data shows 98% of their viewing follows a recommendation or autoplay.

Teens report more intentional discovery strategies, but while they start with this intent, device data shows that they fall into algorithmic flows.



Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

The Algorithm Drives Viewing on Socials, but Teens Are Savvy at Training Their Algos



95%

of Teen browsing on **TikTok** follows feed scroll; only 1.8% follows a search event.

Search represents 1.5% of Teen events.

98%

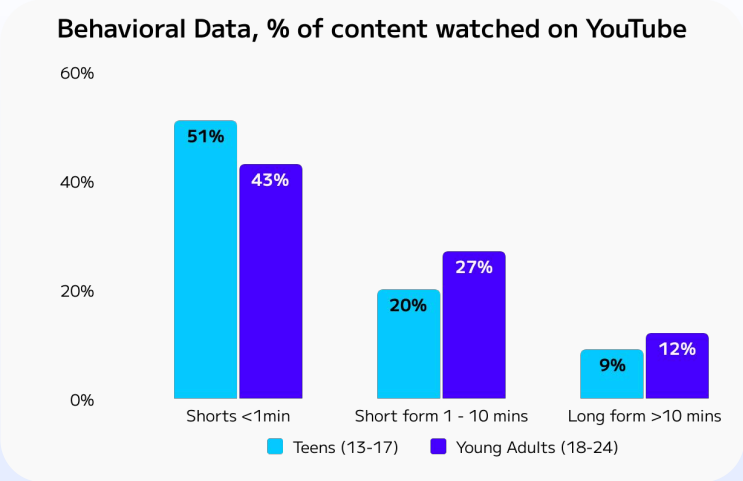
of Teen watches follow recommendations or autoplay on **YouTube,** while 2.2% follow a search event.

Search represents 11% of Teen events.

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

Novelty Reigns over Repetition

Teens want to be distracted and amused. They prefer bite-sized content on YouTube, with Shorts driving over half of all viewing.



5.6x

more short-form than long-form content

Content categories watched	No. of Teens	Average watches per viewer
Entertainment	152	2,285
Learning	137	249
Sports	116	176
News	107	28

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

When Attention Moves Fast, Content Has to Move Faster. Teens Are Drawn to What Feels Fresh, Immediate, and Worth Stopping For.



Brand Action

Show up with short, bite-sized content that offers them something new.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DM

Teens spend their time online in short, scattered bursts, yet their ideas still spread. Here's how an idea moves from a Teen's feed to their group chat and into everyday life.



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Teens Spot Trends, but Their Power Is in Amplification

Teens decide what deserves attention, translate it for the people closest to them, and carry it into everyday life. Much of this happens out of public view in group chats, DMs, sibling conversations, and school hallways, where friends make ideas feel personally relevant and can just as quickly make them feel cringe.

It extends to spending too: Teens create the want, research the options, and choose the exact item, even when a parent pays.

For brands, the **'Teen Relay'** matters more than any single platform. An app can introduce an idea, but a group chat turns it into action.

The Teen Relay

SCOUT

Teens discover something new via their feeds, Fandoms, creator streams, or niche communities

INTERPRET

They go deeper through longer-form videos, search, comments, or other creators to understand it and make it their own

ROUTE

They send it to their friends or group chats where it means something

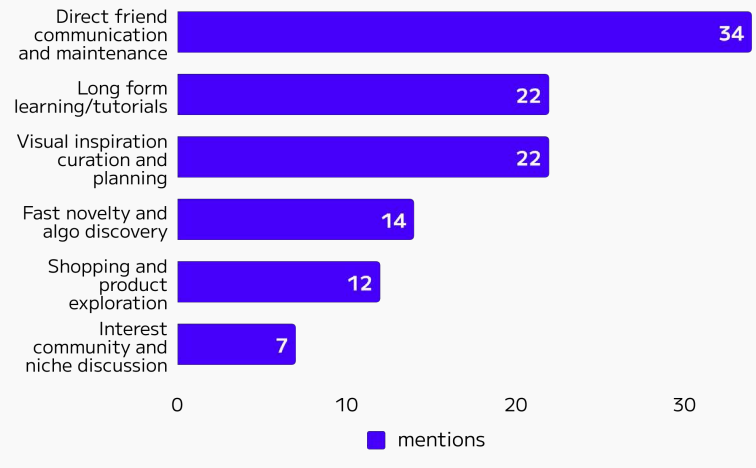
ENACT

They talk about it, remix it, wear it, play it, ask for it, or buy it

And Platforms Are the Cultural Baton

Teens give each platform a different job, from outfit inspiration on Instagram to messaging on Snapchat. Talking directly with friends is the use they mention most.

Teens use platforms as a cultural relay

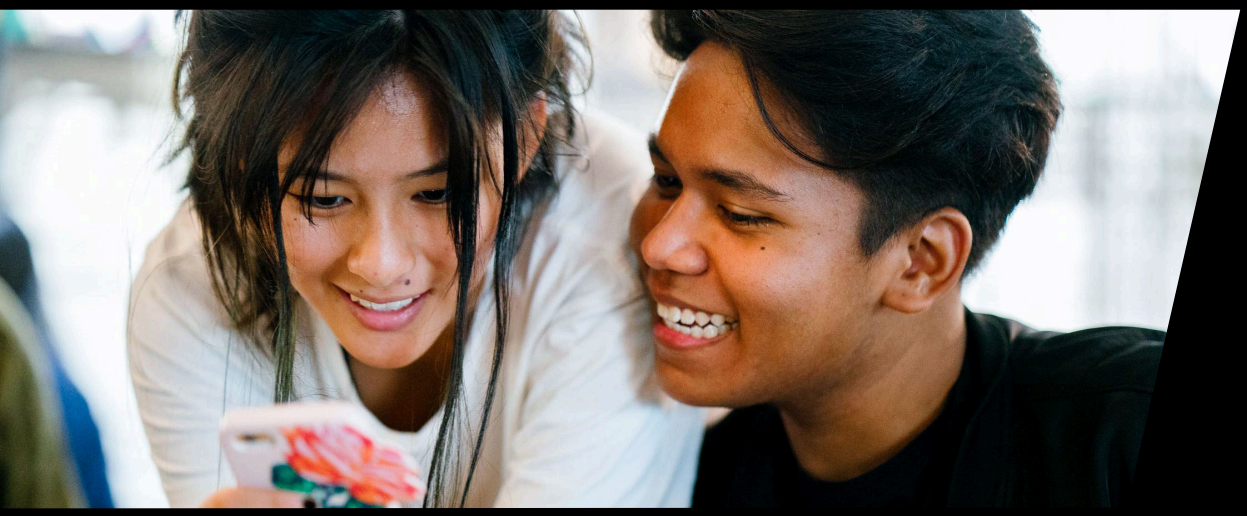


> Instagram, I'll use that to find outfits and contact, like keeping contact with family or whatever. Snapchat I usually just used just for messages, but Instagram I use for messages and calls. On Instagram, I interact with family and friends.
>
> **Female, 15**

> I love to share with friends, not just liking. I do like, and I love to repost and send to friends and make people in my surrounding area aware of them and just try and introduce the topics to them.
>
> **Female, 14**

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], Qualitative Interviews, 14-24 year-olds from the USA, Base: N=100

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The Feed Creates Visibility, Private Sharing Turns It into Youth Culture.

For brands, content needs to be talkable, but sendability is more valuable than generic shareability.

A useful asset should remain understandable outside of its original feed and make the sender's intent obvious: ‘this fits you’, ‘we should do this’, ‘look at this proof’, or ‘can we get this?’

TEENS ARE MORE LIKELY TO PRIVATE SHARE CONTENT

1 in 5

Teens privately circulated a recent discovery vs. **1 in 6** Young Adults

> I send this stuff to my friends sometimes to see their opinions on it.
>
> **Male, 17**

PRIVATE SHARING IS MORE EMBEDDED IN TEEN SOCIAL CONNECTION

66%

of Teens vs. **46%** of Young Adults describe private sharing as ‘community-forming’

> I think it does carry more weight because it shows that we have the same interests and they thought about me when they saw it. And I have bought things that my friends have sent me before.
>
> **Female, 15**

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

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SAME SCREENS, DIFFERENT LIVES

Each platform plays its own part in the ‘Teen Relay’. Knowing which part matters more than being everywhere at once.



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The Platform Role

Teens and Young Adults inhabit the same youth platform ecosystem, but they don't move through it in the same way.

TikTok is the common cultural and discovery layer. But Teens use fewer platforms while exploring a wider range of content, creators, and trends within them.

Private exchanges through apps like Snapchat and Instagram help those signals to circulate, and commerce moves to a parent-compatible marketplace like Amazon.



Platforms Have Multiple Uses and Prompts at Different Stages of the Journey

Teen Relay Stage	Likely Platforms	How It Works
1. Scout	TikTok, YouTube	High volume browsing, trend, and curiosity-led discovery
2. Interpret	YouTube, Google	Going deeper into a trend or piece of content to understand it
3. Route	Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok	Sharing with friends in DMs and group chats. Younger Teens skew to Snapchat, older Teens to Instagram and TikTok
4. Enact	Creators, peers, Amazon, TikTok Shop, in store	Peer and creator trust turns interest into a request or a purchase, often completed off-platform or by a parent

Across the three main social platforms, Teens are more likely to use them for private messaging than public broadcast. While search is largely on Google and YouTube, the algorithm reigns supreme for Teens on social.

Organic discovery followed by a quick share with friends should be the goal for brands.

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

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TikTok Is Where They Chase the Moment. YouTube Is Where They Go Deeper Into What They Love. Google Is Where Utility Takes Over.

Brand Action

Re-frame thinking from 'platform mix' to 'platform role'. Build for their mindset, not the media placement.





Discovery & Search Is Not One-Size-Fits-All

While Teen (13-17) discovery is led by curiosity and virality, Young Adult (18-24) discovery is more needs-based.

ENTERTAINMENT DISCOVERY

Teens: Viral Moments, TV Trends

Young Adults: Influencers, Beauty

CREATOR CONTENT CONSUMPTION

Teens: Gaming, Entertainment, Influencers

Young Adults: Gaming, ASMR, Music, Kids Content

PRACTICAL PROBLEM SOLVING

Teens: School, Shopping

Young Adults: Jobs, Finances, Nostalgia, Parenting

Teens are harder to reach through routine exposure but more open to discovery. Brands that understand Teen curiosity can meet culture at its source and turn Teen discovery into broader youth discovery.

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

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AI NATIVES IN THE MAKING

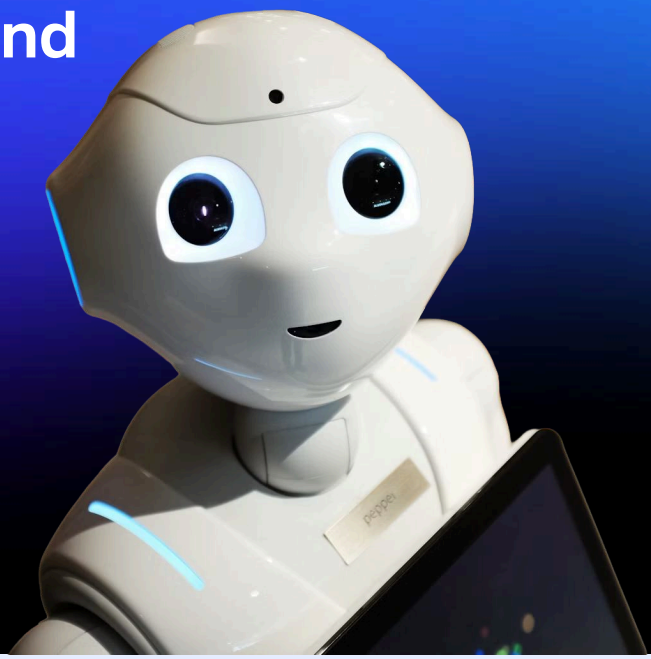
AI is fast becoming part of how Teens discover, learn, and create. Their search data shows how they're using it.





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AI Is Becoming Part of How Teens Operate. They're Using It to Create, Learn Faster and Hack Everyday Tasks.



Brand Action

Don't treat AI as a separate channel. Build for a world where AI is already shaping how teens discover, decide, and create.

'That's So AI'

For a generation growing up surrounded by AI-generated content, 'AI' is already emerging as shorthand for something that feels fake, generic, low-effort, or simply not quite human.

That doesn't mean young people are anti-AI - many use it comfortably for everything from homework and search, to recommendations and planning. The distinction is in how it's used.

This matters enormously for brands. Teens are incredibly fluent in the digital culture and content they consume. AI can absolutely be part of creating for this generation, but using it as a shortcut for originality, creativity, or genuine human understanding risks becoming visible very quickly.

> If it looks like it's AI-generated, I'm not interested, and I think negatively of it.
>
> Female, 17

In August 2026

58%

of Teens engaged with AI content

Brand Action

The lesson for brands isn't 'don't use AI'. It's that in an AI-saturated world, human creativity, cultural understanding, and authenticity become more valuable, not less.

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

The Rising Tide of AI for Teens

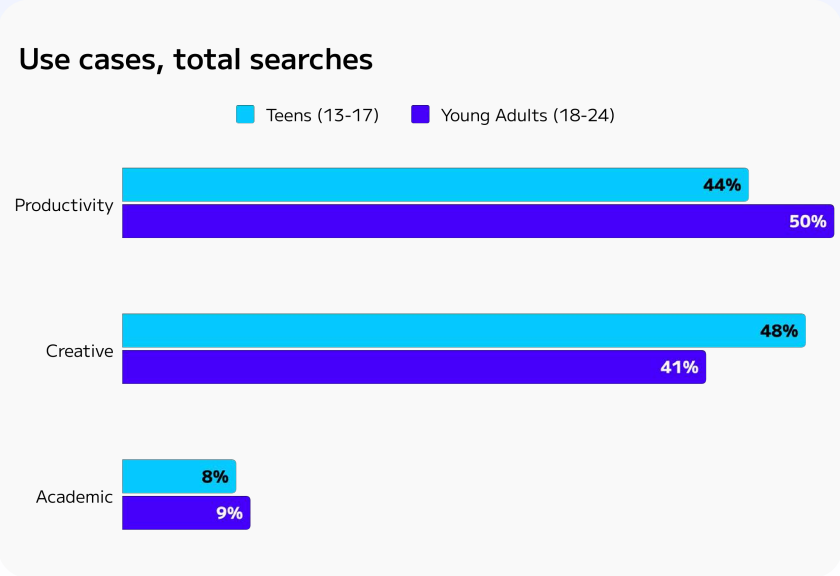
While adults use AI more frequently, Teens are also embracing AI. They're fast becoming AI natives, changing the way they consume and create across media.

AI has migrated from dedicated tools to platforms, which are being used with increasing sophistication and for different purposes. Examples for Teens include:

- **Google/Chrome:** Discovery
- **TikTok:** Trending Content
- **YouTube:** Entertainment-Focused

Brand Action

Brands need to ensure that they can compete in an AI-enabled world to capture Teens' attention.



Teen AI Searches Show Sophistication and Curiosity

Teen AI searches go well beyond homework, from productivity and creative trends to roleplay chatbots and big questions about AI itself.

PRODUCTIVITY
ChatGPT / Gemini

ACADEMIC CAT & MOUSE
AI Detectors & Humanizers

AESTHETICS & CREATIVITY
TikTok Viral Trends, Inspiration & Personalization

ROLEPLAY AI
Character AI

JAILBREAKS / FILTER BYPASS
Bypass / Unfiltered

EXISTENTIAL CURIOSITY
AI Consciousness / Beliefs

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

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AI's Potential for Accelerated Learning Is a Key for Teens

Teens are searching for both AI detectors (to check their work) and AI humanizers (to avoid detection).

TERM TIME USAGE

Peak usage surges with end-of-term assignments in November and March.

EDUCATION TOOL ADOPTION

Google Classroom, Blooket, and Canva rank among top Teen searches. Digital-first learning is now a baseline rather than exceptional.

HACKING THE SYSTEM

AI detection tool searches are rising rapidly as Teens build AI into their daily workflows while simultaneously developing critical evaluation skills.

> I never use it for the actual answers. I figured that out by myself. I just look up the processes with the AI and it usually works out the best.
>
> **Female, 16**

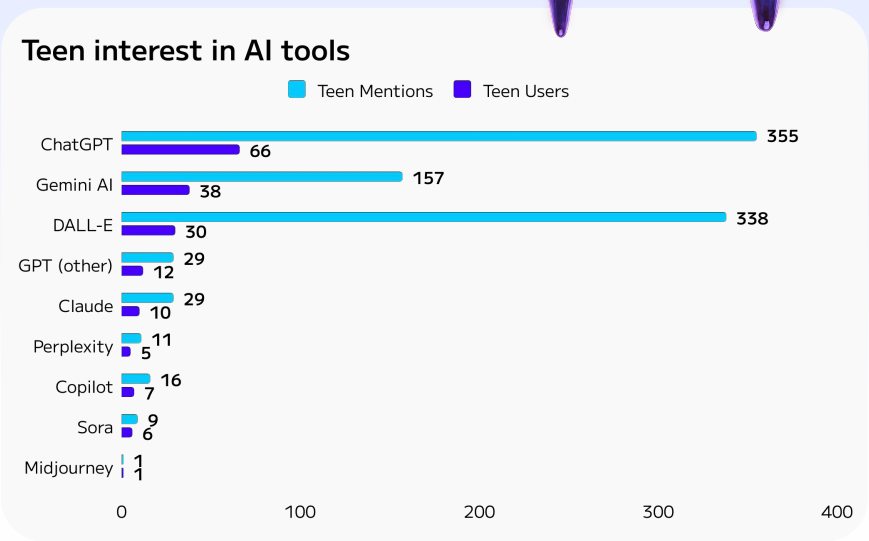
> I used it instead of asking someone else because it was when I was doing my homework and I kind of needed a, like, quick response before I submitted it.
>
> **Female, 16**

ChatGPT Is the Tool of Choice, for Now

Across age groups, ChatGPT is used by approximately twice as many people, but Claude is growing in popularity.

Specific AI tools are also gaining traction. Sora AI is popular with Young Adults (18-24), while Teens (13-17) explore roleplay and conversational tools like Character and Janitor AI.

2,222
Teen ChatGPT searches



Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

CREATORS: WHERE FANDOM TAKES ROOT

Creators often start the ‘Teen Relay’. Teens trust them, follow their lead, and build Fandoms around what they make.





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Creator Trust Is Strongest Among Teens

Creators often act as the ‘Scout’, surfacing ideas that Teens go on to share.

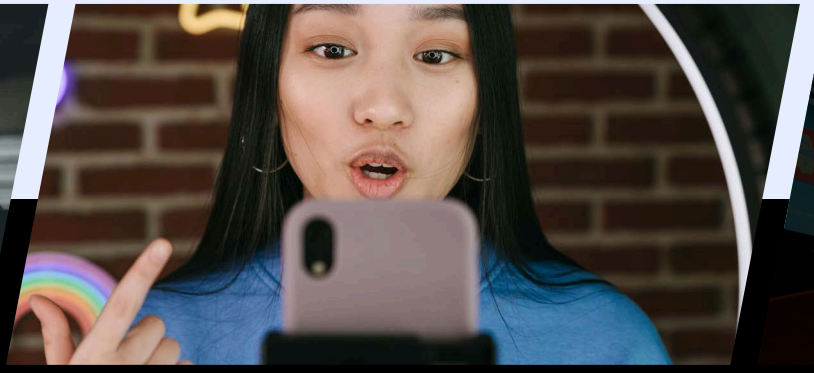
Brand Action

Build trust and relatability alongside talkability with creators.

71%

of Teens trust creator recommendations over random ads





Creators Seed Culture

Creators introduce an interest, fans and creators then build on this and explore lore, and Teens carry it into their own circles.

> Sometimes I'll watch certain YouTubers who make theories and videos on the books and games and stuff. Also, there's pop-ups on Instagram and TikTok sometimes, there's fan art from the games and all that kind of stuff. There's also fan games on different sites that you can play, which are really cool for the community.
>
> **Male, 17**

> Honestly, they're on every platform. There's a lot of creators on Instagram, um, of course Reddit. There's a lot of people on TikTok, like cosplayers and writers. They're truly everywhere. Even offline, you can even find them in bookstores or in conventions or festivals.
>
> **Female, 17**

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

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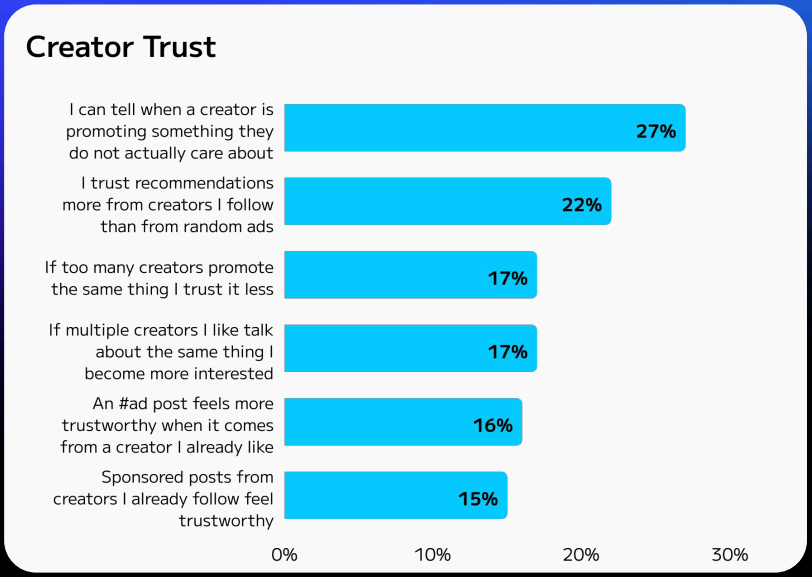
Teens Value Authenticity and Creators Create Trust, but Only When They're True to Themselves

Influencers can create a multiplier effect, but it's a fine balance. It only works when the content comes from Creators that Teens trust.

Overexposure with large creators can alienate Teens, making a diverse mix of trusted voices essential.

Nano and micro-creators act as trusted recommendation sources, helping brands build meaningful connections with Teens while extending their reach.

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100



Teens Embrace Fandoms While Young Adults Share Their Lives

Gen Alpha engages with their Fandoms and builds on content, using UGC to perpetuate memes more than Young Adults.

While sharing memes and content is an important part of Teens' digital lives, the importance of entertainment and consumption is reflected in their deeper involvement in Fandoms. Privacy-conscious Teens are sharing less publicly than their older counterparts.

	Teens (13-17)	Young Adults (18-24)
Participate in a trend, challenge or fandom	40%	34%
Remixed, stitched or used someone else format or audio	17%	14%
Shared a meme or trend with friends	73%	77%
Posted a video or photo publically	40%	56%

Brand Action

Leverage Fandoms to connect with Teen audiences. Check out our Fandoms research below.

GET OUR FANDOMS REPORT →

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

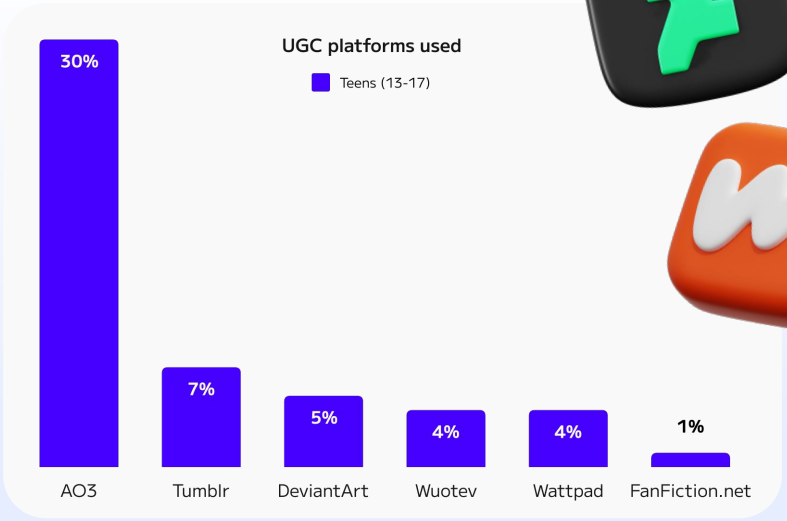
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Want to Find the Next Fan Content or Engage with Committed Fans?

Look no further than AO3: **30% of Teens** who use UGC sites use AO3, far outstripping other fan platforms.

1/3

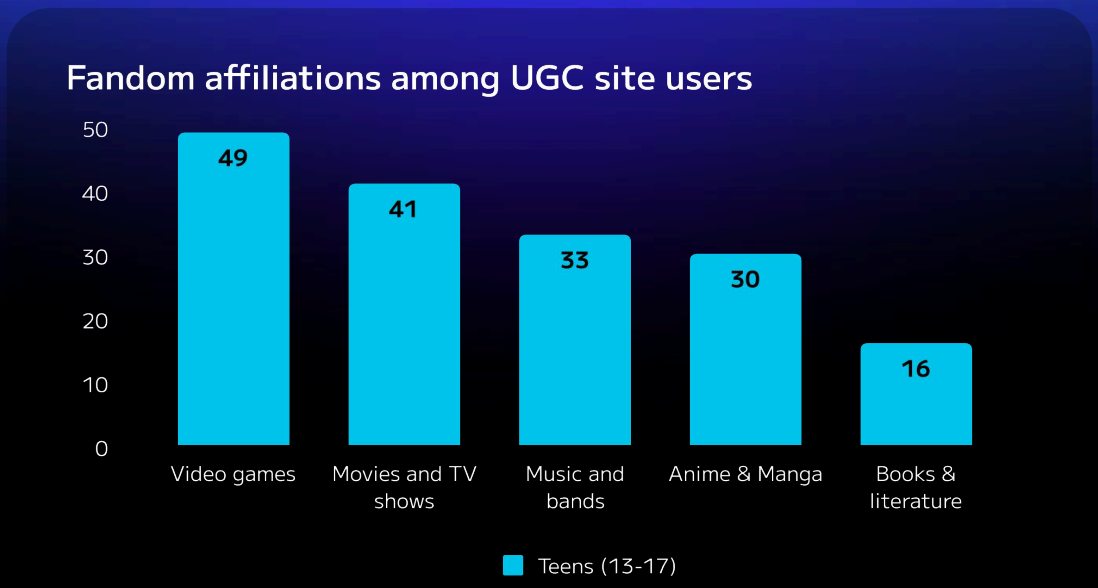
of Teens use at least one fan UGC site, such as AO3, DeviantArt, Tumblr, Wattpad, FanFiction.net, QuoteV, Fandom Wiki.



Enter 'Boomer Search': What is a03?

Connect with Engaged and Passionate Fans via the Content They Love

Video games, movies, and TV lead Fandoms for Teens who use fan UGC sites.



Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

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Five Steps to Fandom

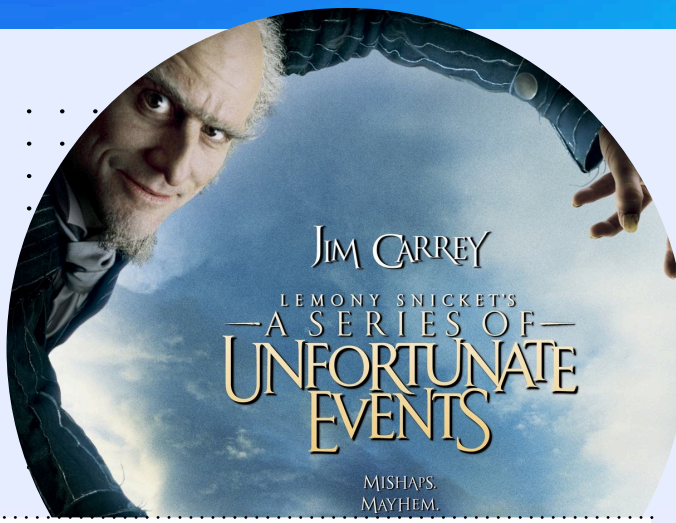
Teen Fandom grows through the people around them. It often starts by accident, with a clip that keeps reappearing in their feed until the content feels impossible to ignore. Curiosity pulls them in and they go looking for more.

Sharing it with friends is what turns interest into a Fandom, and over time it becomes part of how Teens express who they are. Each new release or cultural moment starts the process again.



FEED EXPOSURE → ACTIVE EXPLORATION → PEER CIRCULATION → REPEATED SOCIAL PROOF → VIEWING/ FANDOM/ SPENDING

Shared Participation Makes a Fandom



> Love when it comes to seeing fanfic on my feed, edits of characters, drawings, anything of those sorts. ... I love to discuss the show with my best friend. Actually, we both love the Fandom. We discuss it, we draw pictures, we also, um, buy merch. ... This community is amongst many different platforms - TikTok, Instagram, Reddit, even Discord, all sorts of things. What makes me feel a part of it is just being able to talk about it with people, communicate, and share our interest and love for the show.
>
> **Female, 14**

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

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THE PURCHASE PATH

Teens decide fast, guided by creators, peers, and trends, while parents often approve, pay, or place the order - meaning brands need to win with both.



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Teens and Young Adults
Shop Differently

Teens use fewer touchpoints and lean on creators, peers, and trends to decide. Young Adults search, compare, and shop around more.

TEENS (13-17)	YOUNG ADULTS (18-24)
Use fewer touchpoints	Search more
Have simpler journeys	Browse more
Are more creator-driven	Compare more
Are more peer-driven	Use more channels
Are more trend-driven (internet and memes)	Require more reinforcement
Spend less time on digital devices	More likely to have an app for the store
More fragmented	
More likely to use general stores like Walmart or Amazon	

Brand Action Ensure talkability to create peer recommendations and use creators to connect with Teens on their purchase journey.



The Teen Purchase Funnel Is Different

Young Adults are 2.5x more likely to engage across 3+ touchpoints before buying.

81%

of Teens engage with only 1 or 2 digital touchpoints before they buy.

Teens show up ready to buy, relying on creators, peers, and trends as shortcuts that help streamline their shopper journey.

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

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Teens Are Inspired by Social Media

But they don't necessarily buy there. Only 15% buy through social media apps.

Brand Action

Brands have less chance to be seen by Teens during their shopper journeys, so being present across media to ensure consideration is key.

74%

of Teens buy things they have seen on social media.





Teens Are the Demand Owner, Even When an Adult Is the Transaction Owner

They identify and specify the product, while parents may approve, pay, provide an account, place the order, or veto it.

77%

of Teens asked a parent or someone else to order something they had seen or researched in the past 3 months.

> I usually don't buy stuff. I give it my mom, she pays for it, and then I pay her back. Usually she places my order for online pickup or Amazon or TikTok Shop.
>
> **Female, 14**

SuperAwesome Family Influence Tracker, 13-18 year olds from the USA , 2025-2026 , Base: N= 708

Teens Have a Disjointed Purchase Path, Frequently Moving from Online Discovery to Parent-Aided Purchase

73% of Parents Are 'Likely' or 'Very Likely' to Buy What Teens Ask For

Parent funding is the norm, either through direct funding or family purchase decisions.

41% of Purchases Are Teen Decided but Parent Funded

Teen influence drives household purchasing from snacks to entertainment.

37% of Teens Discover Online but Buy Elsewhere

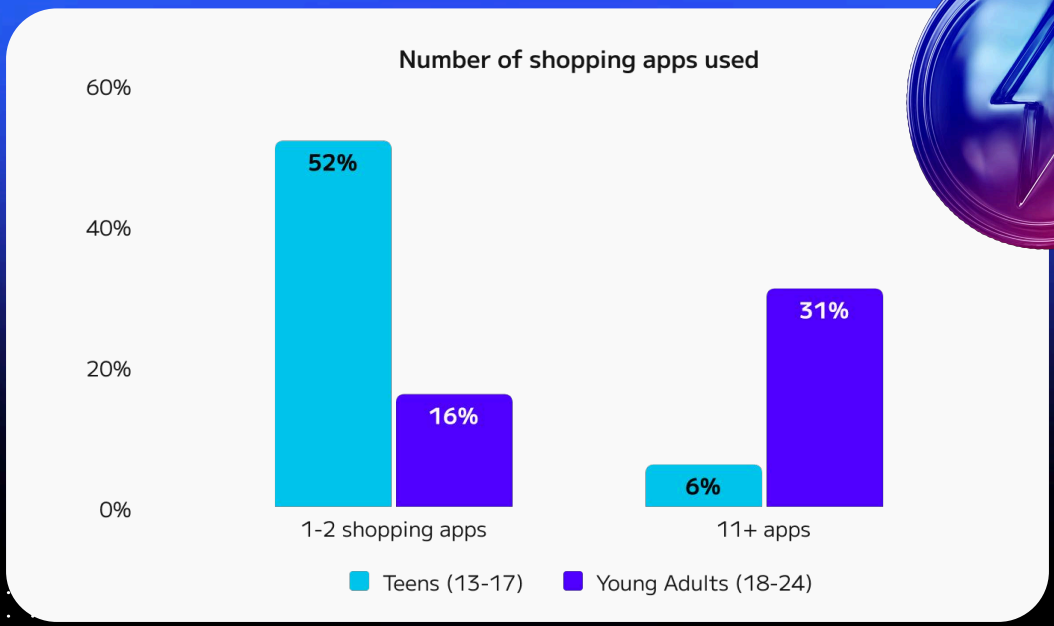
They discover on their own screens, but the purchase often moves to where a parent can help, whether that's through the family Amazon account or a trip to the store.

Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

SuperAwesome Family Influence Tracker, 13-18 year olds from the USA , 2025-2026 , Base: N= 708

Teens Are Generalist Shoppers

They use 1 or 2 shopping apps like Amazon and Walmart rather than using multiple brand retail apps.



Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

BRAND ACTIONS

Teens Own the Demand, While Parents Often Own the Transaction. Brands Need to Design for Both.



Design for the Decision Unit, Not Just the User

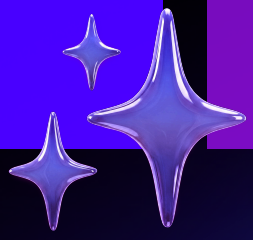
Give Teens identity, relevance, and product detail. Give the approving adult information on price, safety, durability, reviews, returns, and recurring costs.

Make Cross-Channel Migration Easy

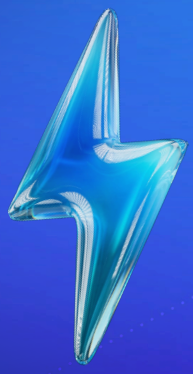
Keep product names, imagery, variants, and claims consistent across creator content, social posts, brand pages, authorized retailers, and stores.

Build a Share-to-Approve Path

Preserve the exact model, color, size, price, evidence, stock status, and retailer options when a Teen sends an item to a parent. Add gift requests, persistent wish lists, family carts, and approval links rather than forcing the journey to restart.







Source: SuperAwesome Culture Makers Study [2H 2026], 13-24-year-olds in the USA, N=1909; Qualitative Interviews N=100

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MAKING IT COUNT

Here's what the findings mean for brands that want to reach Teens, and the audiences that follow them.





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WHAT THIS MEANS FOR BRANDS

How to Engage Teens Effectively



1.

Plan for Teens First

Teens set the trends that travel up to Young Adults and down to Kids. Treat their signals as an early read on where youth culture is heading.

2.

Win the Scroll in Seconds

Teen attention comes in short, scattered bursts. Lead with short-form content that feels fresh and gives them a reason to stop.

3.

Make It Sendable

Teens take ideas from the feed to the group chat, where friends decide what's cool. Create content that makes sense outside the feed and gives Teens a reason to pass it on.

4.

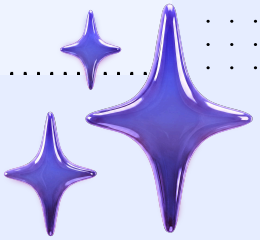
Let Creators and Fans Lead

Teens trust creators and build fandoms around them. Work with creators they already follow, and give fans clips, edits, and prompts they can make their own.

5.

Design for Teens and Parents

Teens choose, but often parents pay. Give Teens the detail they want to share, give parents what they need to say yes, and make the handoff between them easier.





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PUT SUPERAWESOME'S TEEN EXPERTISE TO WORK

We Know What Matters to Teens, Where It's Happening and How Brands Can Be Part of It

1.

View Teens as a Distinct Audience

Build Teen-first strategies using youth intelligence, not 18–24 proxies.

2.

Reach Them Where Culture Happens

Show up across YouTube, Gaming, Creators, and Audio, with each channel playing the right role in discovery, fandom, influence, and consideration.

3.

Navigate the Rules Safely

Teen advertising works differently by platform. We help brands navigate everything from U16 YouTube restrictions to creator disclosures and youth-specific advertising requirements.

4.

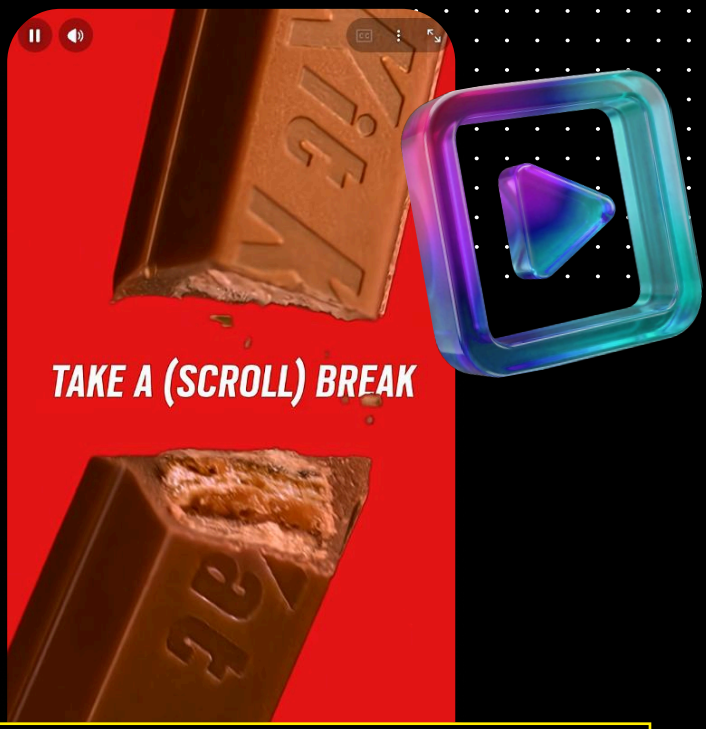
Move at the Speed of Teen Culture

Trend discovery powered by Awesome Intelligence keeps campaigns relevant as interests, fandoms, creators, content, and formats shift.

5.

Prove What Works with Teens

Go beyond generic campaign reporting with Teen-specific measurement, including sentiment tracking, creative assessment, and brand lift studies.



CLICK HERE TO CHECK OUT OUR WORK →



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BUILT TO DELIVER FOR TEENS

SuperAwesome's Core Solutions Are Driven by Intelligence and Uncompromising on Safety

AWESOME VIDEO

The infrastructure powering most digital video advertising was built for adults. Awesome Video delivers a purpose-built youth-safe solution across YouTube, Connected TV, and in-app environments – eliminating waste while ensuring compliance, safety, and performance.

AWESOME ADS

A curated, privacy-first interstitial marketplace integrating youth intelligence, playable formats, premium inventory, and transparent measurement.

AWESOME CREATORS

Influencer marketing that helps brands show up where culture is made – inside their worlds, feeds, and communities. We connect you with the most trusted voices to spark conversation, drive action, and do it all safely.

AWESOME AUDIO

The world's largest youth audio ecosystem, from the podcasts families enjoy together to the music young audiences listen to every day.

AWESOME GAMING

Reach young gamers at scale across Roblox, Minecraft, Fortnite, Discord, and more - powered by proprietary youth data that helps your brand show up in the right places.

POWERED BY

AWESOME INTELLIGENCE

A new standard for youth contextual marketing.

Build a deeper understanding of young audiences, their interests, and motivations, and connect with them where they are with our audience data and recommendation platform.



Want to dig deeper?

Get in touch with the team

www.superawesome.com

hello@superawesome.com

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SUPER AWESOME



POWERED BY
AWESOME INTELLIGENCE