



Thought paper

**Unlocking business
impact through personal
and cultural relevance**

WARC | Advisory



The future of media runs on relevance

Introduction

In today's crowded media environment, building meaningful connections with consumers is more important than ever. With an overwhelming amount of content and options available, consumers seek brands that truly reflect their values and perspectives. The challenge for marketers is to establish a distinct, authentic point of view that resonates on a deeper level. When brands succeed in doing this, they gain not just attention but also trust and loyalty, becoming integral to consumers' personal and cultural identities.

In this paper, we

- explore what culturally and personally relevant brand content looks and feels like to social and video platform users
- illustrate how brands can achieve positive business effects from focusing on relevance
- provide a framework for creating content and ads that are culturally and personally relevant to consumers and their communities

For marketers that want to be relevant, the best opportunity is to start with your point of view on the world, and then engage with the world based on that point of view. The hope is that the people who see the world the way you do will use your brand to communicate their own identity.

Dr. Marcus Collins

Author of "For the Culture" and
Professor at the Ross School of Business
University of Michigan



Content

Introduction to this report	<u>2</u>
Foreword from WARC and TikTok	<u>4</u>
Executive Summary	<u>5</u>
Chapter 1: The demand for relevance: Consumers crave connection	<u>6</u>
Chapter 2: The business impact of relevance: Creating full-funnel outcomes	<u>18</u>
Chapter 3: Relevance in practice: Strategies for brand success	<u>26</u>
Planning for relevance: A summary of our advice	<u>34</u>

Industry experts interviewed for this report



Dr Marcus Collins
Professor at the Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, Author of For the Culture



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Mark Lynch
Group Head of Media, Data and Insight
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Jesse Spencer
Sr. Director, Global Social Media and Influencer
Coca-Cola

Research approach:

This report includes findings from a survey of 1,500 TikTok users in the US, UK and Australia (500 per country) conducted by WARC in August 2024. Respondents were ages 18-45 and used social media or video platforms at least once every two weeks.

This was in addition to a series of in-depth interviews with senior marketers and industry experts. The following is an analysis of the data and insights from this research, combined with a review of WARC's global data, industry knowledge and examples.

Foreword from WARC



Alexis Wolf

Head of Advisory, Americas
WARC

Achieving cultural relevance seems to be every brand's pie in the sky dream. And for good reason—brands that find themselves at the center of culture don't just sell products; they become status symbols, lifestyles, and tastemakers.

Today's media landscape has democratized culture, with trends emerging from unexpected online spaces and fading just as fast. In this dynamic environment, it can be tough for brands to stay culturally attuned, let alone achieve genuine relevance.

But the opportunity also exists to be closer to consumers than ever before. With consumers' feeds curated by personalized algorithms, the

challenge—and the potential—is to reach audiences in their own personally relevant content lanes. Brands should communicate in a way that integrates seamlessly into a consumer's feed—and, by extension, their life.

Relevance is an ambition worth pursuing - brands who are willing to dive into its nuance will achieve a closer connection to consumers that translates to tangible business results. We conducted this study to demystify what it means to make relevant content on social and video platforms, and provide brands with clear, actionable steps to achieve it.

We hope the findings will be relevant to your business.

Foreword from TikTok



Sofia Hernandez

Global Head of Business Marketing
TikTok

Brands achieve cultural relevance when they truly understand the communities they want to engage with. These insights allow marketers to tap into shared values and lived experiences to foster connections that are lasting, resonant, and meaningful, and keep people engaged well beyond moment-led interactions.

TikTok is a place where culture is shared and spread by our community, and the brands that are winning on the platform have embedded themselves within the communities they aim to serve. They recognize that people are more dynamic than any demographic or psychographic profile suggests and they understand that culture is a conversation. Brands

on TikTok aren't just expected to participate—they're invited to join in. When they do, they're able to reconnect with existing consumers and break through to entirely new audiences.

Every day, we see the business impact and ROI this delivers for our advertisers, which is why we partnered with WARC on this report. We're excited to share these insights and help brands unlock the full power of relevance in today's fast-evolving media landscape.

Executive summary

Chapter 1

The demand for relevance

At a time when attention is scarce, consumers gravitate toward content and trends that resonate with their interests and the communities they identify with.

This chapter explores the importance of relevance from a cultural and personal perspective.

Chapter 2

The business impact of relevance

Brands that pursue personal and cultural relevance unlock new opportunities for growth.

This chapter examines how focusing on relevant content and ads drives better business outcomes, from increased brand awareness, to category expansion, to higher purchase intent.

Chapter 3

Relevance in practice

Success in short-form video requires a strategic approach to relevance.

This chapter provides actionable insights on how brands can amplify their cultural and personal impact and achieve significant business results.

Chapter 1

The demand for relevance: Consumers crave connection



The situation

The power of relevance in the era of fragmented attention

When TV dominated media, broadcasts served as major cultural and informational hubs. With only a few media channels shaping culture, broadcasts were designed for broad audiences, and brands could reliably target them using demographic and contextual data.

Today, audiences are spread across countless channels, platforms, and touchpoints. Consumers now have the power to engage only with content that aligns with their specific interests, values, and passions—not just their demographic profile¹.

Culture has similarly decentralized. Instead of trickling down from a few media gatekeepers, it often “bubbles up”, emerging organically from creators and communities in digital spaces before spreading to broader audiences². This shift is evident in moments like the fan-driven “Barbenheimer” phenomenon or the rise of creators like Jools Lebron, whose viral “demure” TikTok video embedded itself into the modern lexicon.

This shift in media and culture has distinct implications for brands: when consumers have personalized media feeds and the power to scroll away, you can’t artificially create impact.

If brands want to win attention in an age of fragmented media, they must focus on engaging consumers in a way that feels relevant to those they want to reach³.



¹ WARC, Unpack the relationship between culture and consumption live, August 2024

² WARC, Culture 3.0: A new paradigm for brands to engage with communities. September 2023

³ WARC, Restoring ad effectiveness with a framework for attentive reach. August 2024

The opportunity

Relevance is driven by both a personal connection and a shared community

Marketers should deepen their understanding of what it means to be relevant to consumers: to recognize their needs¹ and develop content and ads they identify with.

Exclusive research by WARC and TikTok among social and video platform users ages 18 to 45 in the US, UK and Australia found that the top reason a brand feels relevant to them is if **it understands their needs**. This viewpoint is especially strong among users ages 25-45; they are 46% more likely than those ages 18-24 to say that brands that understand their needs feel relevant to them.

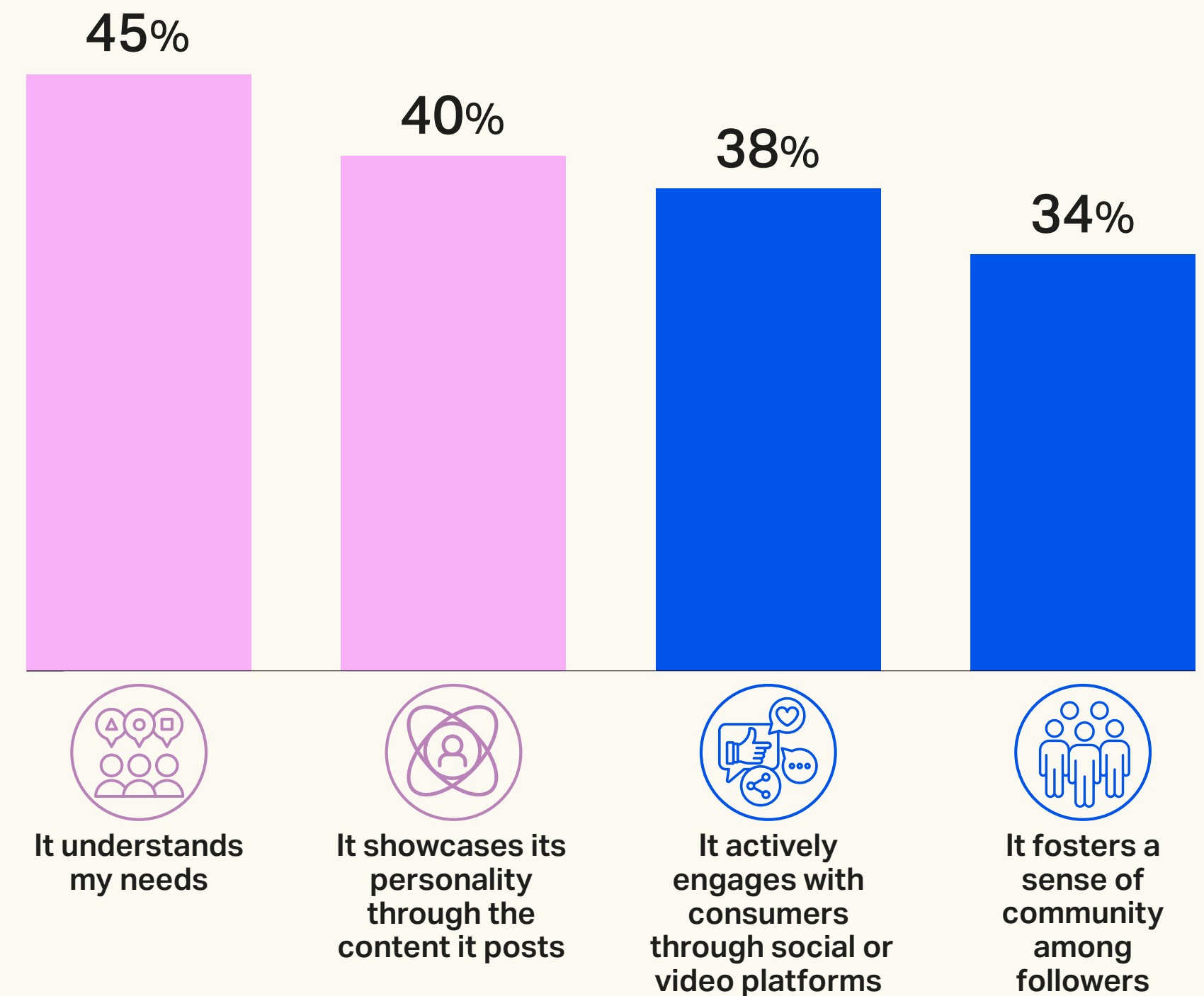
Relevance is further driven by a brand’s **ability to showcase its personality** (40%) which

gives consumers the feeling they know the brand. Together, these offer the consumer the experience of a personal relationship with the brand.

But brand relevance is further driven by sharing that connection with a community. The ability for a brand to actively engage with its audience online (38%), and foster a sense of community among its followers (34%) were also reported as key drivers of relevance.

In order to position themselves for relevance, marketers need a clear viewpoint of the consumer and the cultural communities they are a part of to identify where the brand can organically intersect and engage.

Drivers of brand relevance



¹ WARC, Understanding the six social media need states, November 17, 2023

Q: In your opinion, what makes a brand relevant to you?

Source: TikTok Marketing Science, Business Impact Through Relevance, US, UK, AU, conducted by WARC, August 2024; Only top 4 responses displayed.

The opportunity

Connecting with consumers through the lens of cultural and personal relevance

To understand consumers, marketers must look beyond simplistic demographic and psychographic segmentation to deeper levels of relevance.

Consider cosmetics as an example. In the past, cosmetics marketing campaigns might have been targeted only to female-identifying consumers. But today, the spectrum of cosmetic users is broader than that, thanks in part to beauty creators who have promoted the idea that gender isn't a defining factor for such products.

Noted culture expert Dr. Marcus Collins defines **cultural relevance** as "the extent to which something is appropriate or fitting to the conventions and expectations that demarcate who we are and what people like us do." In other words, culture is about the communities we belong to—not only

our traditional demographic or geographic communities, but also the interest-based communities that social media and video platforms foster.

Cultural relevance is a key influence on consumers - but it's not the full picture when relating to an individual. There may be parts of a culture that relate to an individual, or multiple cultural influences that interplay to make up an individual's perspective.

Personal relevance, according to Collins, is "the extent to which something is appropriate to one's identity—as an individual, accounting for all the intersections of their cultures, experiences, beliefs, and values."

By understanding and prioritizing what it means to be culturally and personally relevant, brands appeal to consumers based on their interests and the many facets that make up their identity.

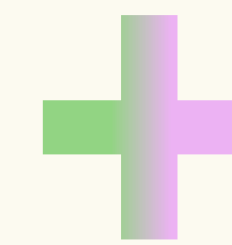
WE: Cultural relevance

Resonating with the conventions and expectations of the communities consumers belong to



ME: Personal relevance

Resonating with a consumer's individual identity and what makes them who they are



The opportunity

Relevance helps solve the attention crisis

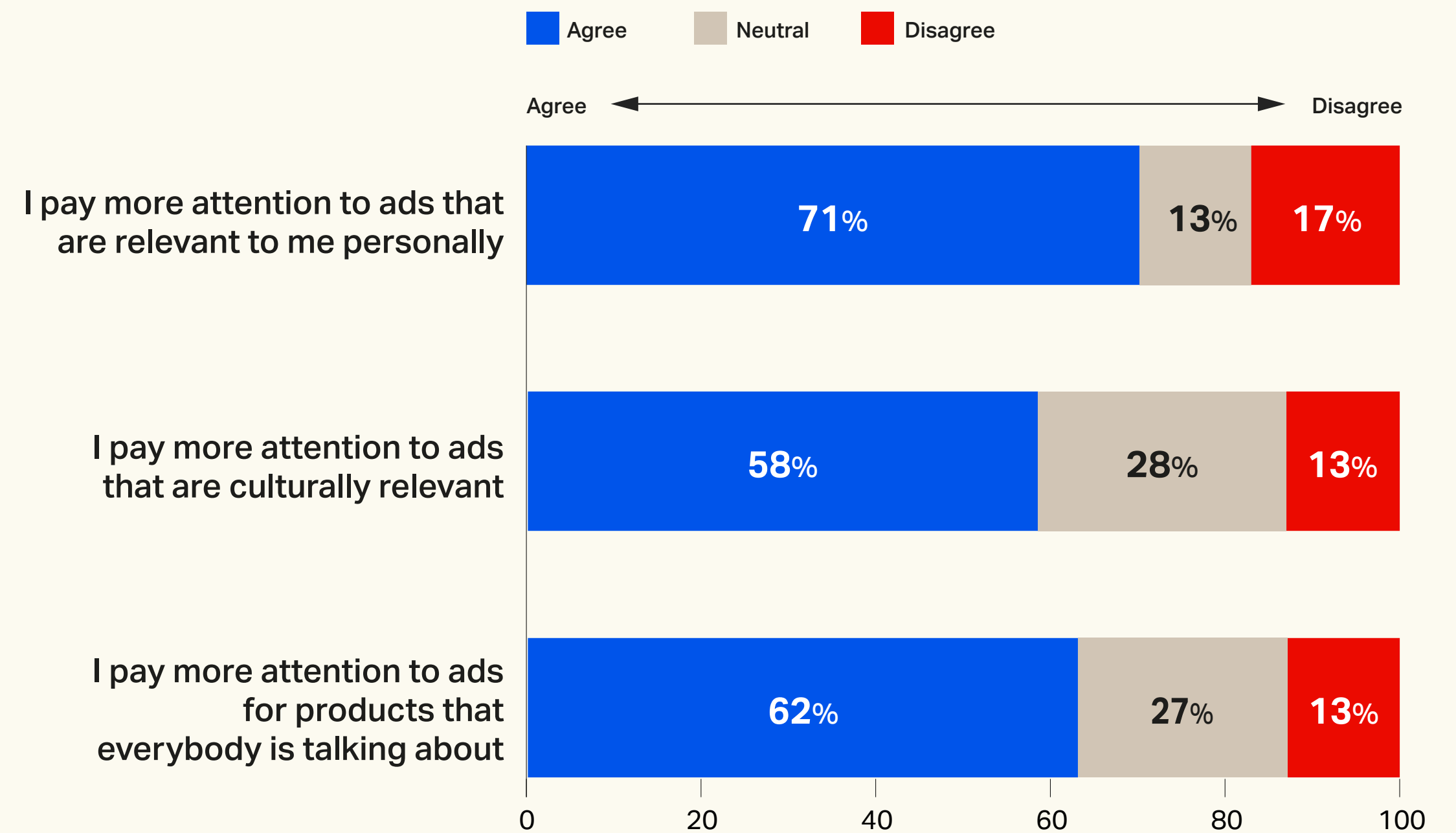
When businesses focus on delivering relevant content and ads to their audiences, they are rewarded with attention.

Attention is important because it starts a chain reaction that leads to emotions, memories and, ultimately, actions¹, argues Ian Forrester, founder and CEO of the creative testing company DAVID. Multiple other studies² have shown the positive brand effects that come from attention.

In our research, 71% of respondents agreed they are more likely to pay attention when ads are personally relevant, while 58% do when ads are culturally relevant. An ad that is buzzworthy and talked about also increases the likelihood of attention.

And when a brand takes itself less seriously, it also leads to attention and relevance. Three-quarters of weekly social and video platform users surveyed by Vox Media and Digitas³ said brands that shed their corporate image in social media grab their attention.

Consumer attention to relevance



Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements

Source: TikTok Marketing Science, Business Impact Through Relevance, US, UK, AU, conducted by WARC, August 2024.

¹ WARC, We've got your attention. Now what?, August 2024.

² WARC, The WARC Guide to attention, August 2024

³ Vox Media, Human-Minded Creativity in a World of AI. August 2024.

Cultural relevance

Cultural relevance is informed by what’s current in communities

Brands should be aware of what’s trending and topical in online communities¹ and niches² and focus on showcasing content that is relatable and authentic in those circles.

Social and video platform users want to be on-trend and in touch with the things that matter to the communities they identify with. Two-thirds (67%) of respondents to our survey said content is culturally relevant if it updates them on trending topics, while 62% said it is if it showcases topics or issues happening in the moment.

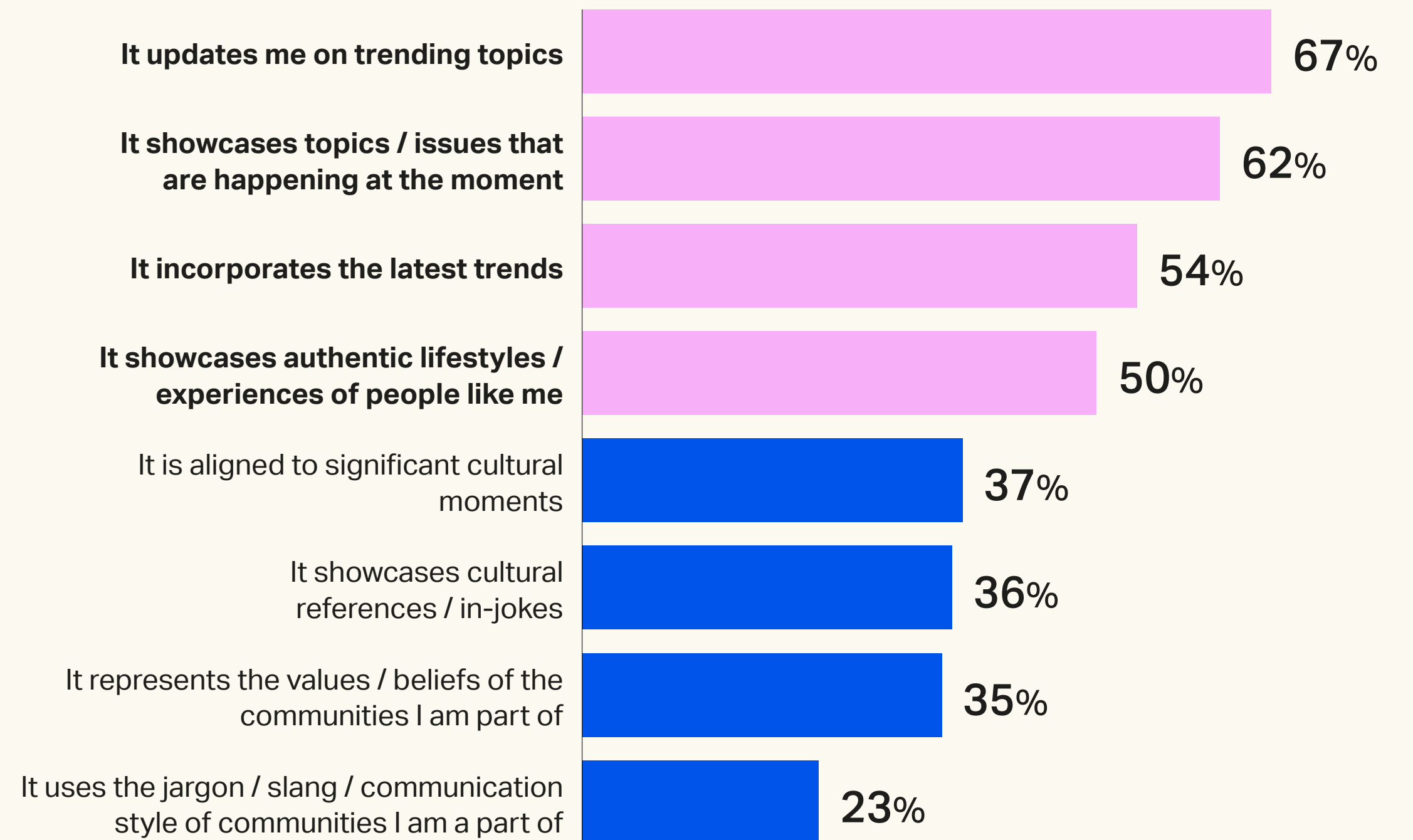
However, brands should not feel the need to respond to every emerging trend. Succeeding in social and video

platforms requires actively listening to and engaging with the communities and creators contributing to culture — and participating only when it makes sense for the brand.

This is because consumers gravitate toward content that relates to them in a way that feels genuine. Half (50%) of respondents said culturally relevant content “showcases authentic lifestyles/ experiences of people like me.”

Authenticity can seem an overused buzzword in marketing, but to social and video users, being authentic is still vitally important³.

What makes content culturally relevant



¹ WARC, Communities are the ‘new demographics’, says TikTok, December 19, 2022

² WARC, Future of Strategy 2023: Niche at scale – why small communities matter to brands and how to reach them, October 2nd 2023

³ WARC, Walk this way: How to engage in culture in a meaningful way, October 2023

Q: In your opinion, what makes the content you see on social media and video platforms culturally relevant (relevant to the communities you are a part of)?

Source: TikTok Marketing Science, Business Impact Through Relevance, US, UK, AU, conducted by WARC, August 2024.

Cultural relevance

Consider generational nuances to cultural relevance

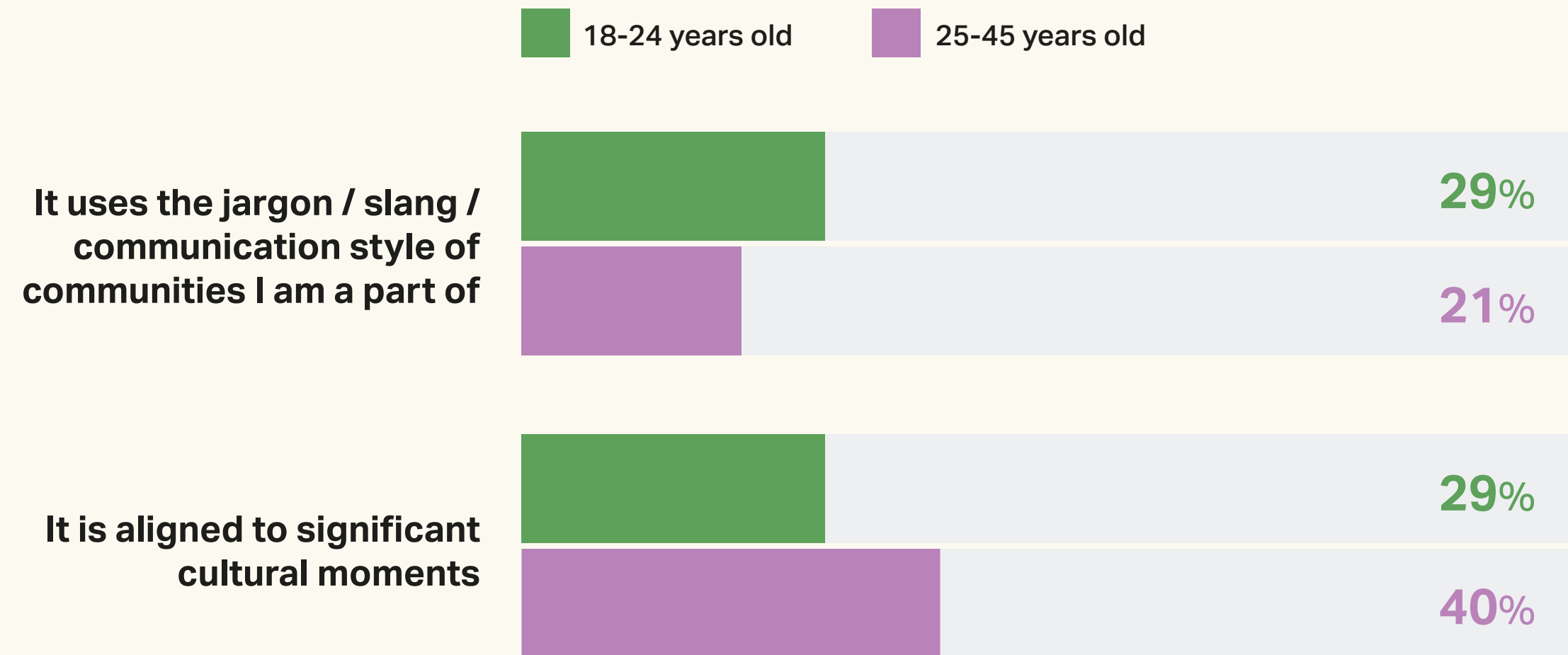
Tapping into emerging topics and trends is the most important way brands can be culturally relevant, no matter the generation. But Gen Z adults have somewhat different expectations of language and the need to align with significant cultural moments.

In our survey, social media and video platform users agree being timely and topical are the most important ways content can be culturally relevant.

However, when creating content or ads themed to tentpole cultural moments (i.e. sporting events, award shows, social movements), marketers should keep in mind that it may be more meaningful for people aged 25-45 than for Gen Z. Adults aged 25-45 are more likely to find value in content that aligns with major cultural moments and events.

To reach Gen Z requires an awareness of the trends they are gravitating toward, as well as the language they use. Respondents ages 18-24 were 38% more likely than those ages 25-45 to consider content culturally relevant if it uses the jargon or slang of their communities. This makes young adults perceive that brands are in tune with the communities they are a part of.

How generations differ when it comes to relevant content



Q: In your opinion, what makes the content you see on social media and video platforms culturally relevant (relevant to the communities you are a part of)?
 Source: TikTok Marketing Science, Business Impact Through Relevance, US, UK, AU, conducted by WARC, August 2024.

Personal relevance

Personal relevance is more achievable than you think

Personality, interests, and passions are themes that drive personal relevance. While it's impossible to individually know every consumer, our survey found three valuable traits that make content feel personally relevant.

Humor feels personal

Across all age groups surveyed, humor was the top trait that makes content feel personally relevant (55%). But it's more than just being funny for the sake of being funny. Rather it's about meeting a user's needs because they find the content funny—and often, this is a byproduct of their cultural conditioning, so look to their communities to identify their sense of humor.

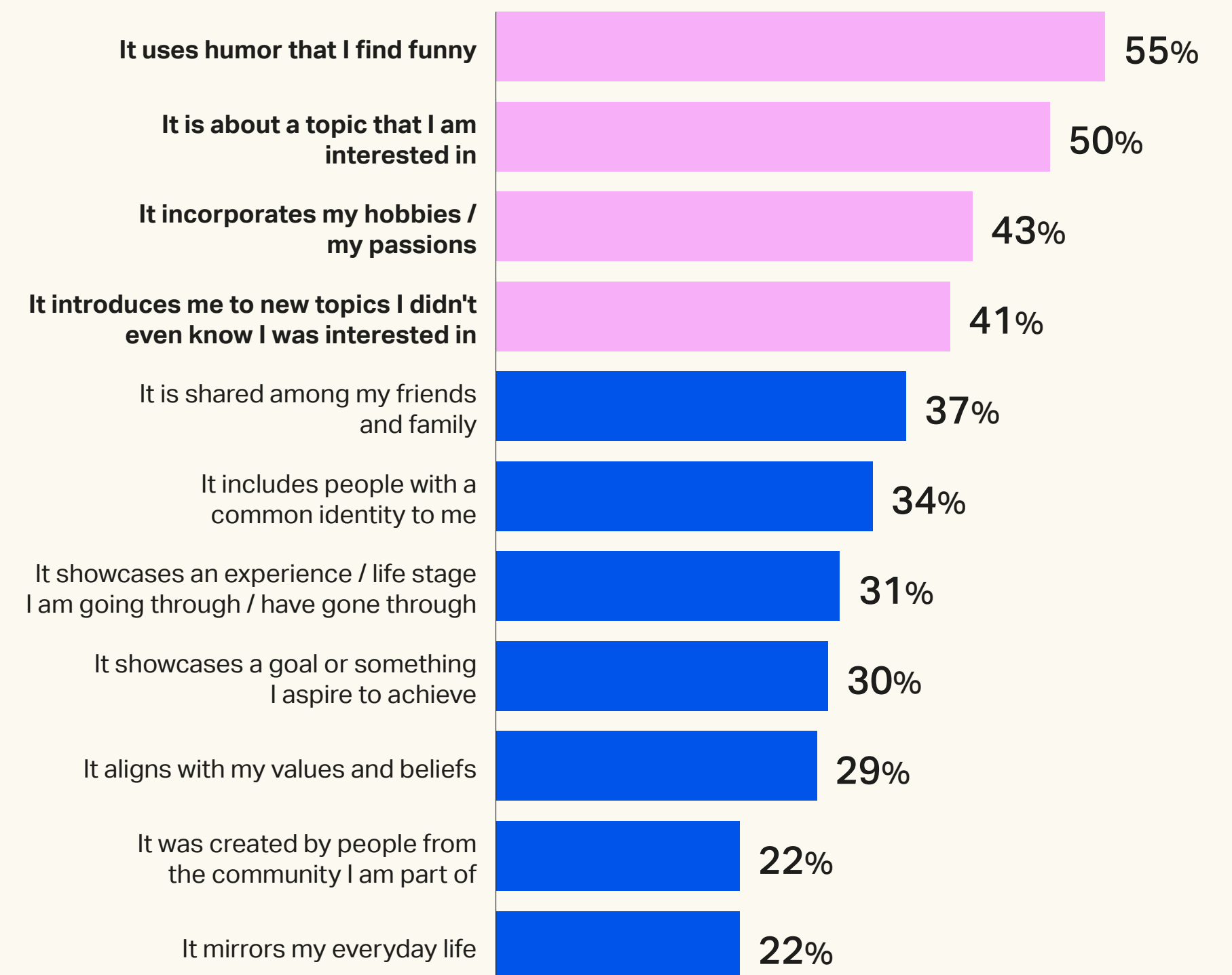
Discovery is rewarding

Consumers are looking for content that doesn't just incorporate their interests, but expands their interests. Content feels personally relevant when it introduces users to new topics they didn't even know they were interested in (41%).

It's not all about me

Content can be personally relevant without literally being "about the person" and their surface identities and practical needs. Content that looks like someone's everyday life or their community background is important for some users, but other factors are much more likely to create relevance. Consider providing content value beyond mirroring demographic attributes.

What makes content personally relevant



Q: In your opinion, what makes the content that you see on social media and video platforms relevant to you personally?
 Source: TikTok Marketing Science, Business Impact Through Relevance, US, UK, AU, conducted by WARC, August 2024.

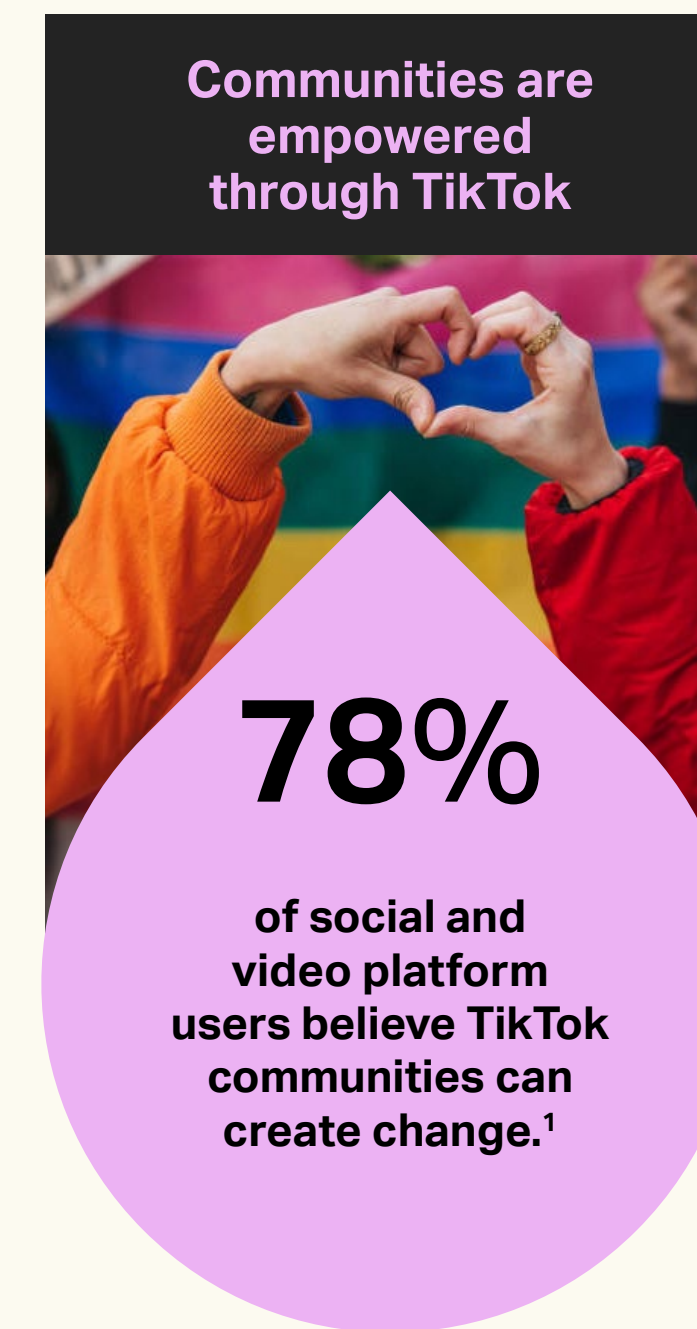
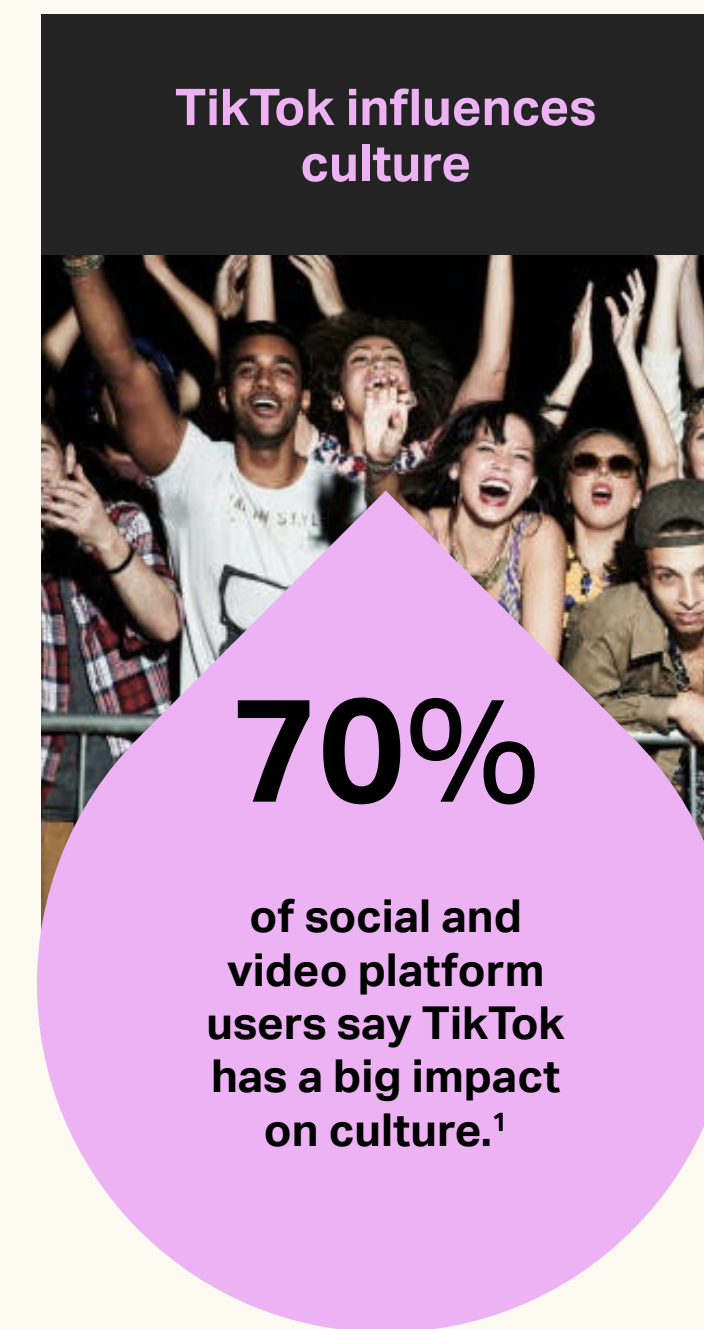
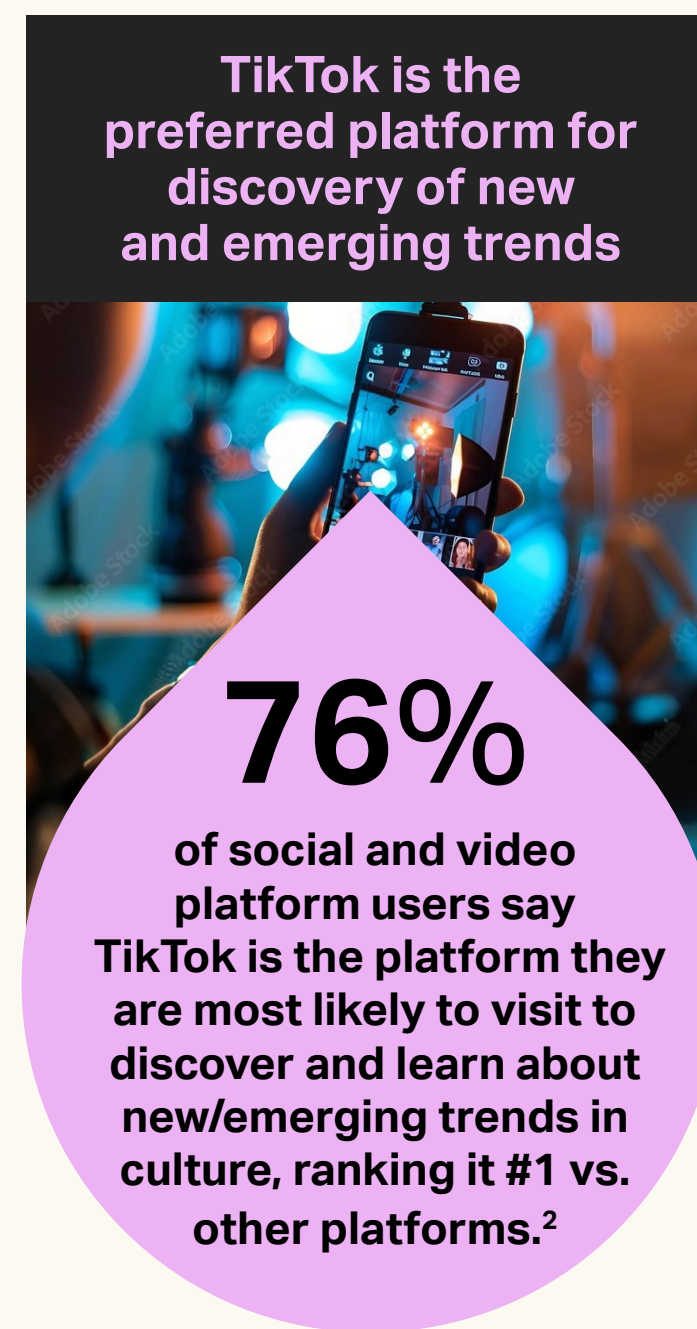
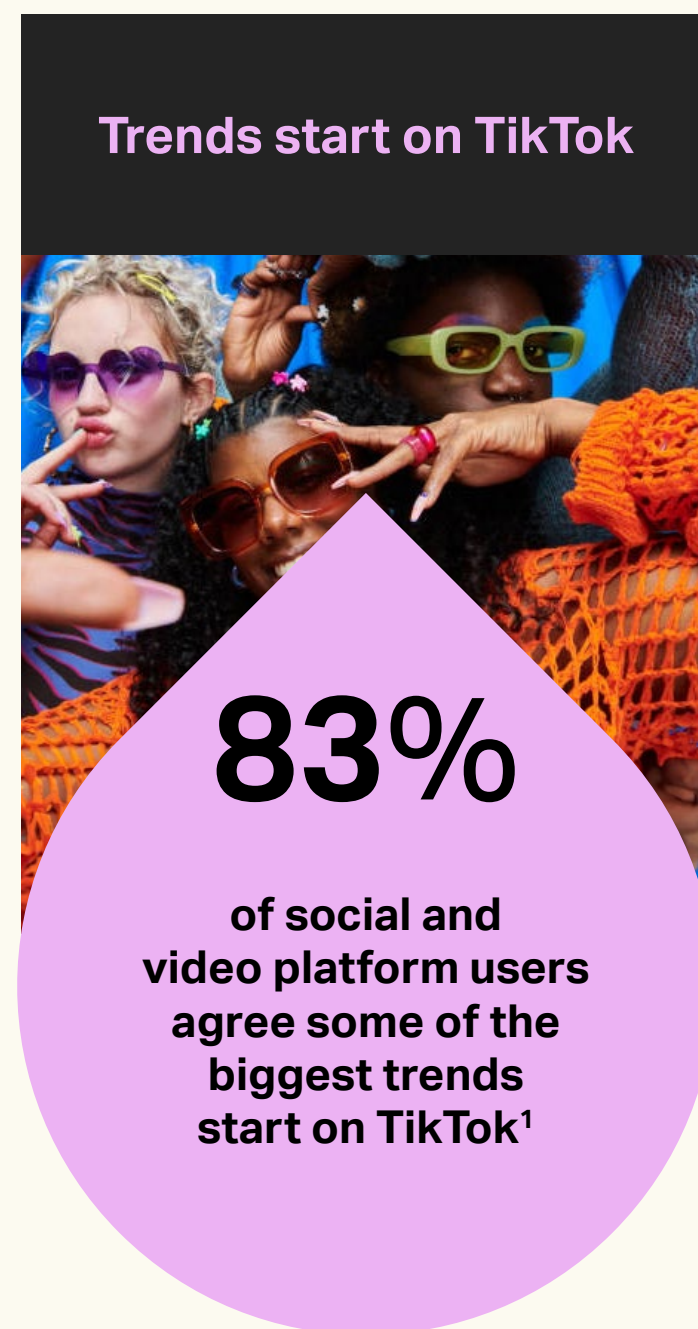
Spotlight on TikTok

Understanding TikTok’s impact on relevance

Relevance can’t exist in a vacuum. Platforms like TikTok act as an ecosystem to cultivate and disseminate personal and cultural relevance.

By fostering communities, serving personally-driven content through the ‘For You’ Feed, and enabling discovery, TikTok enables relevant content to take flight at massive scale.

Of social and video platform users, most believe that the biggest trends start on TikTok, and consider TikTok a key driver of culture and change. Most strikingly, they reported that TikTok is their preferred platform to discover and learn about new and emerging trends in culture.



¹ WARC/TikTok consumer survey, August 2024

² WARC/TikTok consumer survey, among respondents that have used TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook in the past 2 weeks, n=974, August 2024

Spotlight on TikTok

How TikTok discovery supercharges relevance

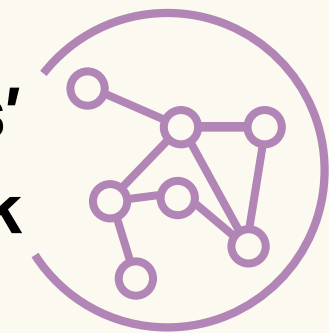
TikTok helps social and video platform users discover new topics they didn't know they would like, see products they haven't purchased before in a new light, and connects them to new brands they didn't know well.

These attributes arise from TikTok's 'For You' feed, which delivers a personalized stream of videos that users find new and surprising—ultimately becoming relevant to their communities and personal identities.

Nearly two-thirds of social and video platform users (64%) consider TikTok content culturally relevant, and an even higher percentage (71%) agree the content is personally relevant.

Marketers on TikTok gain a brand awareness halo effect from the platform's ability to deliver new, relevant content. According to our survey, a reported driver of personal relevance was the ability for content to expand a consumer's interests. TikTok's innate ability to inspire relevant discovery unlocks this effect for brands. When respondents who have used social media and video platforms in the past 2 weeks were asked on which platforms they see brand content that is most relevant to them, TikTok ranked first.

Social media and video platform users' attitudes towards TikTok



Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Source: TikTok Marketing Science, Business Impact Through Relevance, US, UK, AU, conducted by WARC, August 2024. Percentage of respondents that agreed and strongly agreed.

Industry view

Our aim is to create content that evokes an emotional response and authentic connection that will stop the scroll. If we can get consumers to feel or do something - by making them laugh or driving an action in real time - we will create deeper, lasting connections.



Heather Stuckey

VP, Brands and Content
Marketing, North America
Mars

Relevance is everything. It's about creating an experience, a connection, a relationship that speaks to their passions and identities. When a brand truly understands the heart and soul of its community, it becomes more than a choice—it becomes a part of their lives.



Kory Marchisotto

CMO
e.l.f. Beauty

Relevance has always been important. Whether it's the 1950s, 60s, 70s, 80s, all brands have tried to align their relevance to the interests of their consumers. Now, it's less of a surface relevance, and it goes a lot deeper into the brand and it becomes part of the brand DNA.



Mark Lynch

Group Head of Media,
Data and Insight
Stellantis

One of the things I find the most interesting right now, especially in the social spaces, is the ability to use subculture to break through to culture. It's finding cultural nuances and niche cultural significances that then attract enough attention that they actually become a part of culture.



Jesse Spencer

Senior Director, Global Social
Media and Influencer
Coca-Cola Co

Chapter takeaways

1 Cultural and personal relevance can help brands deepen their connection with consumers

To create advertising that resonates, go beyond simplistic segmentation to explore the various dimensions of personal and cultural relevance.

Understanding consumers' needs and showcasing personality are two ways for brands to increase their relevance among consumers.

2 To be culturally and personally relevant, brands should be aware of trending content and use humor

Consider the drivers of cultural and personal relevance that can act as levers for your marketing strategy.

Pay attention to the voices of communities and creators actively shaping culture and use humor to deepen personal relevance. Representing these voices authentically is important, especially when engaging Gen Z adults.

3 TikTok offers an ecosystem that cultivates and disseminates relevance

With its ability to deliver a personalized experience within a community-based platform, TikTok drives relevance and expands consumers interests.

Social and video platform users say TikTok is the platform they are most likely to visit to discover and learn about new/emerging trends in culture.

Chapter 2

The business impact of relevance: Creating full-funnel outcomes



At the brand level

Harnessing relevance delivers outsized brand impact

By focusing on relevance, businesses can build brand value.

When brands pursue relevance, they play a more meaningful role in consumers' lives, fuelling their businesses to go from purely transactional to relational. This can lead to brand advocacy and positive sentiment even outside of the campaign cycle¹, Leila Fataar, founder of cultural marketing consultancy Platform 13, has argued.

And these effects see returns. Brands that have high cultural relevance grow nearly six times more² compared with brands that have low levels, Kantar has found.



Brands with high cultural relevance grow nearly 6x more than brands with low levels

According to Kantar

¹ Adweek So Your Brand Wants Cultural Relevance? Your Marketing Playbook Needs To Change, August 2, 2023

² Kantar, Why playing a greater role in culture is key to growth

The growth opportunity

Brands can reach new audiences and expand categories

When brands focus on delivering relevant content on social and video platforms they unlock the potential for category expansion by effectively attracting new audiences at scale.

Brands drive growth by expanding their reach and increasing market penetration¹, making it essential to cultivate new consumer groups. Finding category entry points that make your brand relevant to new buyer groups is essential.

This effect is particularly pronounced on discovery-oriented platforms like TikTok, where three-quarters of respondents report discovering new brands and products they had never heard of or considered before.

On social and video platforms, consumers actively seek content that broadens their interests. Forty-one percent of respondents report that content feels personally relevant when it introduces them to topics they didn't know they would be interested in.

How Peugeot achieved increased consideration by pursuing new subcommunities on TikTok

“The DNA of the Peugeot brand is sportiness, dynamism, fluidity, technology, design and allure. But that was not always reflected back by general consumers. So **we found groups on TikTok that were interested in design, technology and photography and used that as a point of entry.** People initially were reluctant to accept us. But as **we built our relevancy through consistent messaging and showing genuine interest, our results got better in terms of consideration, and we opened ourselves up to an entirely new audience.**”

Mark Lynch, Group Head of Media, Data and Insight, Stellantis



¹ WARC, What we know about the theories of brand growth. February 2024.

Lower-funnel outcomes

Inspiring purchase decisions and driving action

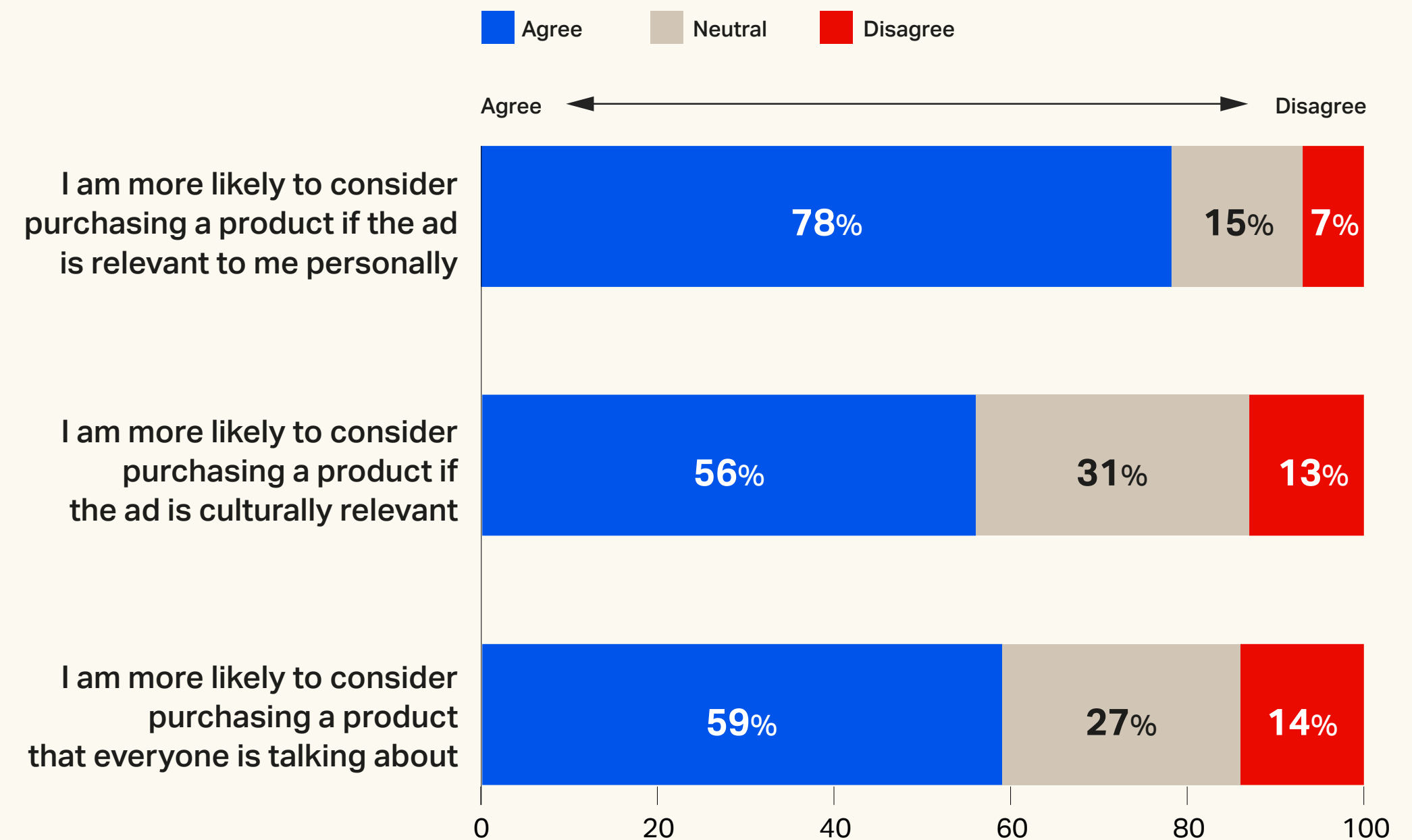
When brands pursue cultural and personal relevance, they are more likely to experience enhanced conversion.

In our research, 78% of social and video platform users said their purchase likelihood would increase if the ads were personally relevant, and 56% felt the same if the ad was culturally relevant.

Studies have proven relevancy drives action. Gracenote Inclusion Analytics¹ found that culturally relevant ads in diverse media achieved up to three times more conversions and sales lift than non-cultural ads in general markets among heavy buyers.

This can be linked back to the quality of attention given to an ad that resonates. Relevant ads capture consumer attention, which is linked to brand impact beyond the upper funnel. Researchers from Lumen, Teads and Dynata² revealed that increased attention not only boosts recall but also strengthens mid- and low-funnel metrics, demonstrating longer dwell times and deeper consumer engagement.

Relevance drives purchase consideration



Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements

Source: TikTok Marketing Science, Business Impact Through Relevance, US, UK, AU, conducted by WARC, August 2024.

¹ Ad Age, Diverse media—how culturally relevant ads drive sales conversions and brand lift, May 21, 2024.

² WARC, New study shows a clear link between attention and brand effects, August 15, 2023.

Spotlight on TikTok

TikTok drives new purchase behavior

The impact of relevance on category expansion is evident on TikTok.

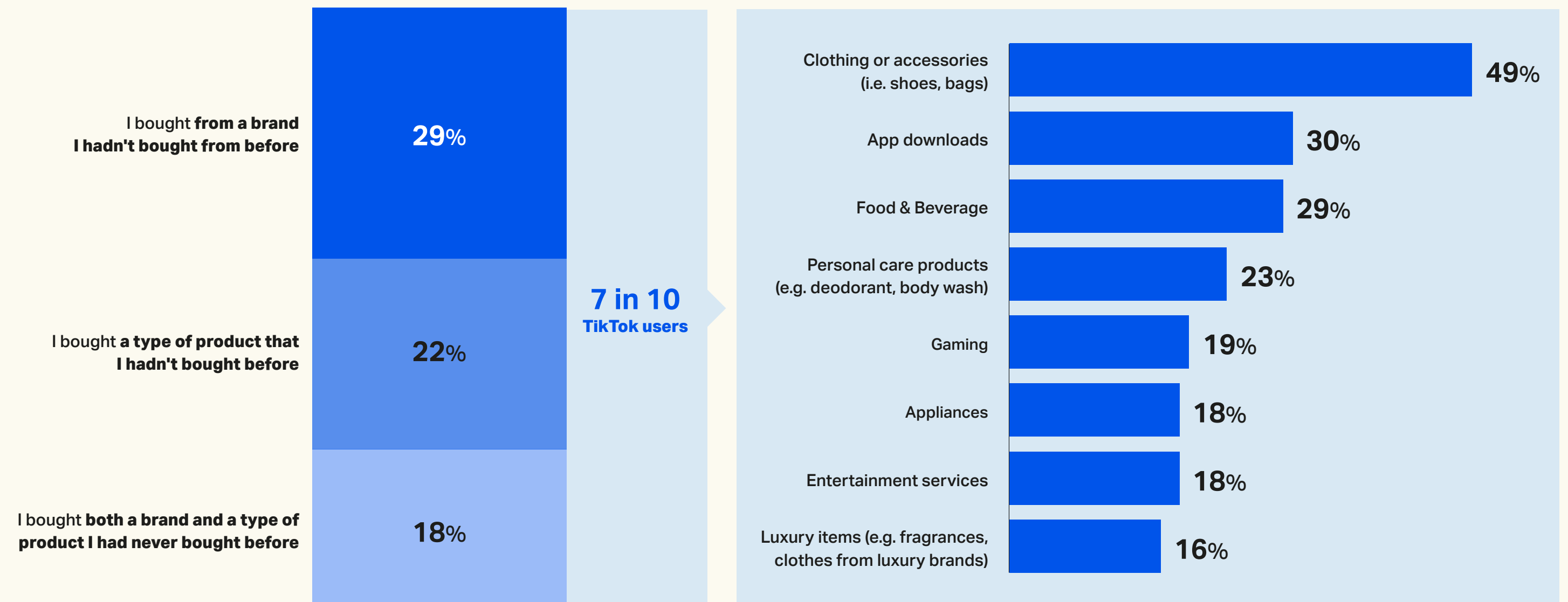
When users are open to new content, it makes them open to discovering new brands. TikTok is 1.7x more likely to be a source of product discovery than other platforms.¹

Our survey found that 7 in 10 social and video platform users have bought a product or brand they had never purchased before after seeing content on TikTok.

One-fifth of those buyers were new category entrants who had bought a type of product they had never bought before from a brand they had never bought before.

TikTok creates this impact across a number of categories. Nearly half of respondents who had purchased a new type of product did so in the clothing or accessories category. But notably, three out of 10 buyers had purchased app downloads or food & beverage items.

Impact of TikTok content on first-time purchases



Q: Thinking about products you have purchased after seeing content on TikTok, have you ever bought from a brand or bought a type of product that you've never bought before?

Q: Which of the following product categories did you purchase for the first time after seeing content on TikTok?

Source: TikTok Marketing Science, Business Impact Through Relevance, US, UK, AU, conducted by WARC, August 2024.

¹ TikTok Marketing Science Global Retail Path to Purchase Study 2021, conducted by Material, as cited in The infinite loop: TikTok's unique retail path to purchase, February 10, 2022

Spotlight on TikTok

Relevance brings in new buyers on TikTok

On TikTok, cultural and personal relevance play a direct role in influencing purchases of new brands or products.

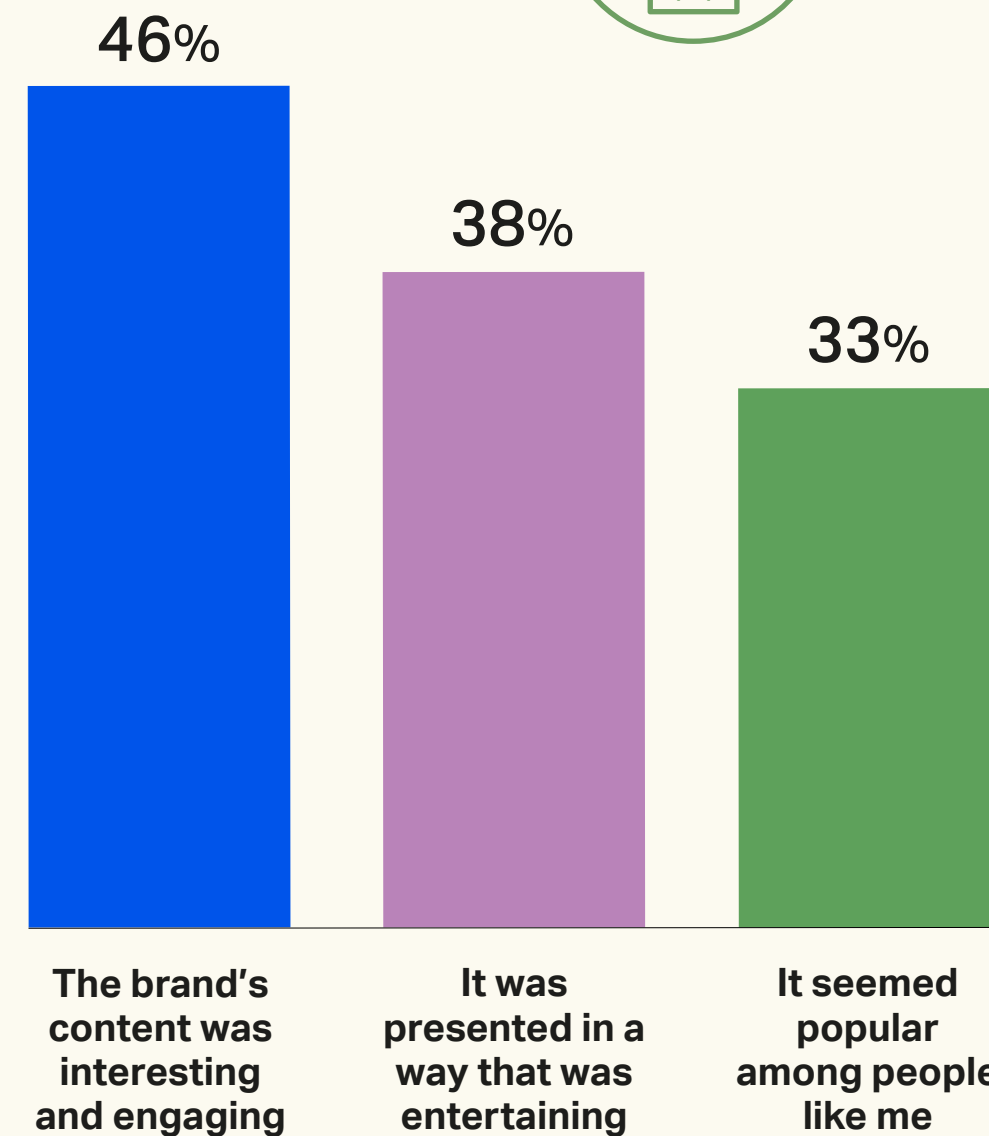
Our survey found that consumers are drawn to new brands when their content is engaging, entertaining, and resonates with their social circles, while they are more likely to try unfamiliar products if the content sparks curiosity and feels relevant to their lives.

These insights underscore the significance of cultural and personal relevance; brands that understand their audience’s needs and showcase personality, align with current trends, and expand consumer interests are more likely to drive engagement and inspire exploration.

In the final chapter, marketers will learn specific strategies for how they can engage social and video platform users and inspire purchase behavior by leaning into relevance.

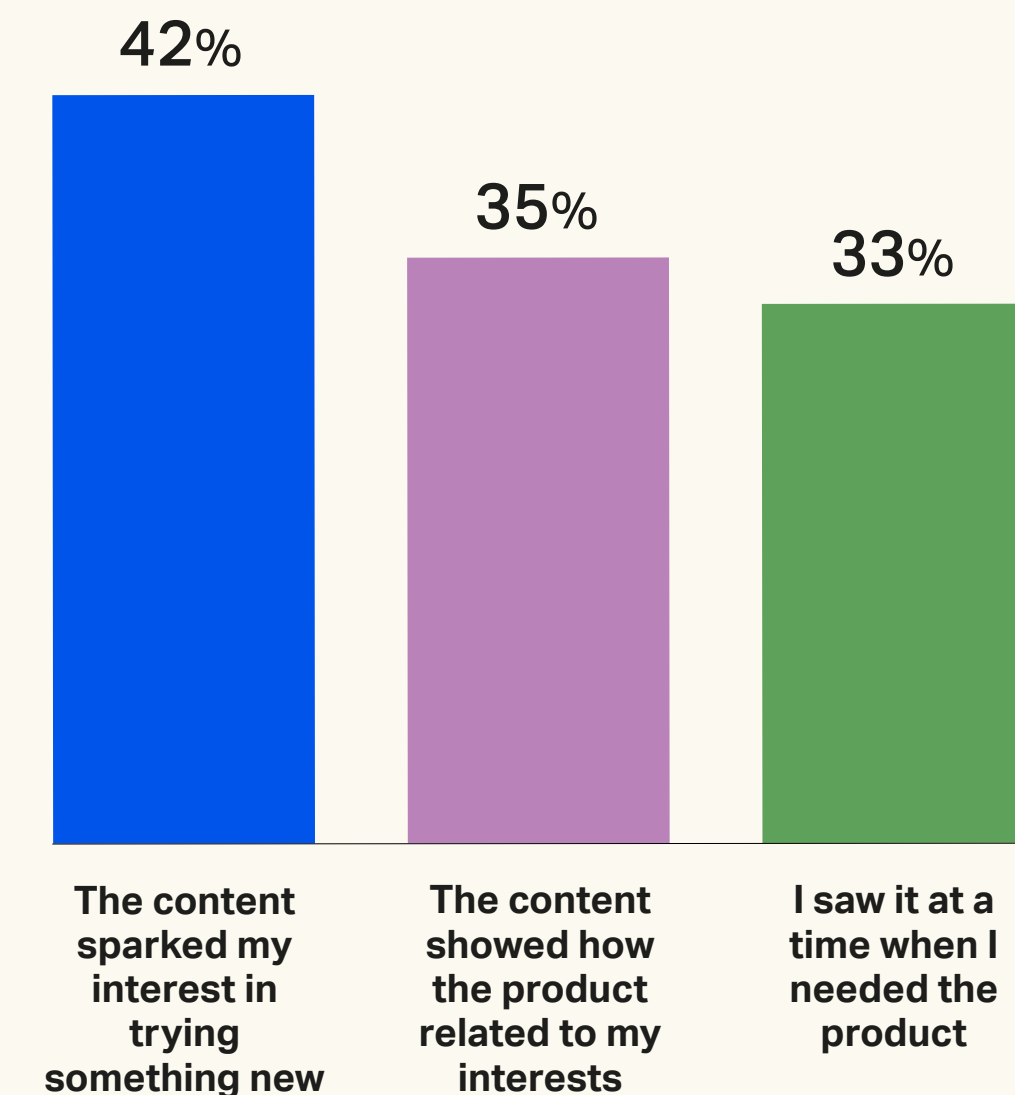
What influenced new purchases

By brand



Q: What influenced you to buy a brand you had never purchased from before?

By product



Q: What influenced you to buy a type of product you had never purchased before?

Note: Among those who purchased a brand or product for the first time after seeing content on TikTok; top three choices shown

Source: TikTok Marketing Science, Business Impact Through Relevance, US, UK, AU, conducted by WARC, August 2024.

Industry view

In our owned media strategy [on TikTok], we find people who we think align with our brand codes and brand values and have them interpret our brand in a way that's relevant to their audience. We might find a baker that makes amazing pies. And we're like, why don't you make a checked Burberry pie? There's magic in that, and it becomes relevant in an unexpected way.

Alex Whitlock

Global Social Media Director
Burberry



We increased our penetration of TikTok by using it to get to different audiences. In order to stand out and be noticed by those groups, we had to find parts of our own culture that we could reflect back on the platform, so it felt genuine.

Mark Lynch

Group Head of Media,
Data and Insight
Stellantis



There's a real economic impact if I'm appropriately showing up with all the different faces that are out there, using creators to have that authentic conversation that then has a business impact.

Amy Lanzi

CEO
Digitas North America



Consumption is a cultural act; we buy things as a way to signal our cultural subscription. If we are to get people to consume in some sort of sustainable, predictable way, the influence of culture is going to be the biggest force we have at our disposal.

Dr. Marcus Collins

Author of "For the Culture" and
Professor at the Ross School of Business
University of Michigan



Chapter takeaways

1 Pursuit of relevance enhances full-funnel effectiveness for brands

Relevance drives the opportunity for brands to play a more meaningful role in consumers' lives, which translates to better metrics across the funnel.

From inspiring more buzz at the brand level to driving action at the conversion level, relevance can help brands achieve greater impact.

2 When marketers embrace relevance, they can reach new consumers.

Relevance can win new buyer groups and drive category expansion.

Consumers connect with content that expands their interests. Social and video platform users are more likely to say content that introduces them to new things is personally relevant than content showing things that are familiar. In this context, marketers have the opportunity to expand their audience and drive penetration.

3 TikTok inspires consumers to buy products and brands they have never purchased before.

Seventy percent of social and video platform users have bought something new to them after seeing content on TikTok.

TikTok enables category expansion by showing users content that is topical, trending and new.

Chapter 3

**Relevance in
practice: Strategies
for brand success**

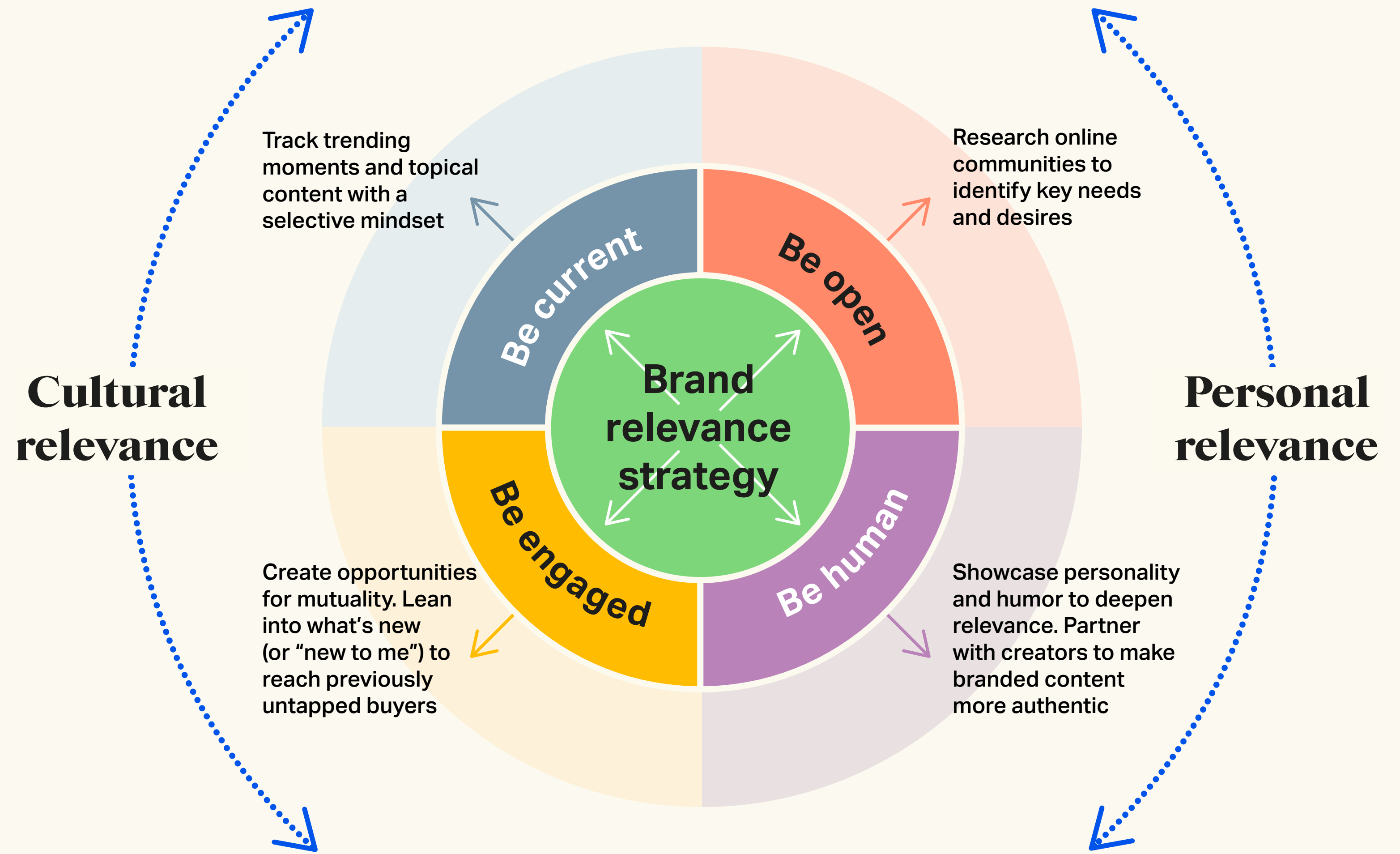


Planning for relevance: A framework

What does being culturally and personally relevant actually look like in practice? It requires a strategic approach. In this final chapter, we provide actionable insights from marketers and agencies that have aligned their internal organizations and external marketing approaches to amplify their cultural and personal impact.

Being relevant can attract the attention of time-starved social and video platform users; create connections that draw them in, both personally and culturally; and lead to new pockets of purchase demand.

Our guidance follows the framework to the right, which is designed to help marketers maximise the relevance of their advertising and content on social media platforms.



Be current

Monitor trending moments and topical content—but be selective about what you react to

Having a finger on the pulse of their particular communities and tapping into the trends and topics that are on the radar of those communities will pay greater dividends than trying to adapt to every trend that bubbles up.

Brands should participate in trending and topical moments when it makes sense for their strategy – and when they provide an opportunity to not just respond to but amplify culture.

Nearly all of the survey respondents think it’s important for ads to reflect popular culture and 55% say brand content that is topical feels relevant.

According to TikTok’s What’s Next Trending Report, brands have a higher opportunity to stay relevant when activating on larger emergent creative ideas and behaviors, rather than activating at each trending viral moments. This is the difference between brands being “on trend” versus simply following “what’s trending now.”

“Am I hijacking culture so I can make my brand authentic and relevant? Or am I actually mining culture so I can look for trends that allow me to connect with growth cohorts?”

Amy Lanzi, CEO, Digitas North America



Q: How important is it to you that ads reflect what's popular in culture? (e.g. trends, viral songs, hot topics). Source: TikTok Marketing Science, Business Impact Through Relevance, US, UK, AU, conducted by WARC, August 2024.

Be open

Engage niche communities for insights that can spark bigger brand moments

Brands are seen as relevant to consumers when they engage with them. This engagement sparks a true value exchange - when marketers take the time to get to know niche communities, they can gain inspiration for marketing campaigns, new products and more.

Engaging niche communities on social media allows marketers to not only better serve communities, but glean deeper insights for their business. By understanding the unique interests and preferences of these groups, brands can craft more engaging experiences that resonate with consumers, fostering loyalty and connection. This interaction not only enhances the content offered to the audience but also equips marketers with essential insights that can spark innovative campaigns and product ideas.

This reciprocal relationship helps brands stay attuned and responsive to their consumers' needs – and therefore better solidifies them as a part of their lives.

How paying attention to creators and fans helped Mars make Starburst candy 'different'

Social and video platform users were enjoying Starburst candies in novel ways. That led to its new "Different Every Time" campaign that responsibly used generative AI to create and deploy hundreds of content assets across digital and traditional platforms.

The goal was to modernize our approach to how we connected with our consumers. We were inspired by what they were already doing with our product, and we turned that into something bigger while still ensuring we kept people and creators at the heart.

Heather Stuckey, VP Brands and Content Marketing, North America, Mars



Be human

Showcase personality and use humor to deepen relevance

For optimal success on social and video platforms, focus less on being funny to everyone and more on being funny to the audiences you want to reach. Remember that for 55% of our survey respondents, brand content that feels personally relevant uses humor “that I find funny.”

Many of the top award winners in Kantar’s Creative Effectiveness awards use humor¹. But digital ads are less likely to contain humor than ads on radio or TV, Kantar found—leaving an opening for digital marketers to lean more heavily into making people laugh.

Even for brands where humor might be difficult aspiration, humor has its place. Research by emotion-AI company Affectiva and Kantar shows that viewers respond positively to ads that opt for a fun or humorous tone. They generate stronger emotional responses and, crucially, more positive emotional responses than most ads.

For more on using humor to create buzz, emotional engagement, and virality, see WARC’s [guide](#).

How an e.l.f./Liquid Death collab used humor for maximum impact



Thanks to a deep understanding of its audience’s sense of humor, e.l.f.’s “Corpse Paint” cosmetics collab with Liquid Death garnered over 12 billion organic media impressions and a bronze Lion in the humor category at the 2024 Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity.

The effort, which included a video, a stunt with actress Julia Fox and an exclusive e.l.f./Liquid Death can in Roblox, helped the collab product sell out in 45 minutes.

Platforms that foster engagement and co-creation are goldmines. The magic happens when you curate a mix that speaks to the many layers of culture.

Kory Marchisotto, e.l.f. CMO



¹ Kantar, [Starting to laugh again. The slow return of humor in advertising. August 2023.](#)

Be human

Partner with creators to make branded content more authentic

Creators offer two huge benefits: They help keep brands on top of trends that are resonating with their communities. And they can create quick-turn content that helps brands that find it difficult to respond quickly on their own to stay relevant.

After watching ads from creators, over 40% of TikTok users¹ agreed with the statements, “It makes me feel like a part of the creator’s community” and “It makes me feel like a part of the brand’s community.”

Creators are our cultural whisperers—they’re the eyes and ears of emerging trends, amplifying the voice of our community. They bring a fresh, authentic lens that connects in ways traditional advertising never could.”

Kory Marchisotto, e.i.f. CMO



¹ TikTok Marketing Science. Global Creators Drive Commerce Study. 2022. Conducted by Material.

Be engaged

Lean into what’s new (or “new to me”) to reach previously untapped buyers

Algorithmic social media feeds prime users to be more open to exploring things that are new to them and consider them relevant. To take advantage of this unique attribute, marketers should prioritize framing “the new” as a guiding philosophy.

Marketers should be open to tapping broader category entry points on social media and video platforms, as opportunities to expand their reach and attract new audiences. Since platforms like TikTok prime users to be open to discovering new and unexpected content, marketers should frame their strategies around introducing new consumers through topics, trends, and products that align with users’ evolving interests.

When curated by an interest-driven algorithm, relevant content is the key to reach. Creating content that introduces your category, brand, and product across wider interests, audiences, and verticals can unlock greater potential for reach.

Three ways to be new on social and video platforms



Create videos

that use new trends, musical sounds or artists



Show a product

or brand in a new and unexpected way



Seek out new audiences

beyond typical targets or current buyers / fans

How Burberry found new communities in unexpected places

At Burberry, a focused strategy of working with creators outside of the fashion sphere has paid dividends in creating awareness and reaching new communities.

“The approach is to look at all of the verticals that we love from a content perspective within TikTok, whether that’s graffiti artists or sculptors, find the best person within those verticals, and work with them on an owned piece of content. Then we share that content out on our channel and via their channel.”

Alex Whitlock, Global social media director, Burberry



Industry view

Committing to a platform like TikTok and **embodying the platform fully** – its behaviors, etc. – is a commitment to cultural relevance.

Alex Whitlock

Global Social Media
Director
Burberry



We need to create distinctive, engaging content that is **specific to our brands and their fans**, because consumers are quick to sniff out inauthenticity. People don't wake up thinking about our category, so ensuring that we build mental availability and brand power is critical on these platforms.

Heather Stuckey

VP, Brands and Content
Marketing, North America
Mars



There used to be this notion that a community comes to you, and then a brand engages. **We're being a lot more proactive in finding communities and subcultures instead of waiting for them to come to us.**

Jesse Spencer

Senior Director, Global Social
Media and Influencer
Coca-Cola Co.



Stay curious, stay connected, and most importantly, stay human. **Relevance isn't a finish line; it's a journey.** Lead with empathy, stay rooted in your values, and always listen to your community. That's how you not only stay relevant—you become irreplaceable.

Kory Marchisotto

CMO
e.l.f.



Planning for relevance: A summary of our advice



Who we are

At WARC, our purpose is to save the world from ineffective marketing by putting evidence at the heart of every marketing decision.

We believe that effective marketing is based on facts and not opinions.

Since 1985, we've brought confidence to marketing decisions through the most trusted research, case studies, best practice, data and inspiration.

Today, we help 75,000+ marketers across 100+ countries. Our clients include the world's leading brands, advertising and media agencies, media owners, research companies and universities – including the top-five largest agency groups and top-five largest advertisers in the world.

Learn more about WARC Advisory [here](#).

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About TikTok

TikTok is where you can unleash your brand's creative side. A fully immersive no judgement world where there's an audience for every voice.

No matter how big or small your business, no matter what you're making or selling, we believe your brand deserves to be discovered on TikTok.

Find out more [here](#).

