

omd



# SXSW 2025

Trends that are shaping the world today  
and where advertisers fit within them.

Updated: March 28, 2025

WE *Create* WHAT'S NEXT

## From AI Trendspotting to Reality at SXSW

This year, South by Southwest (SXSW) welcomed an impressive [345,000 attendees to Austin, TX](#). While CES showcases futuristic tech, SXSW has a culture-focused component, meaning debate is more focused on how tech is being used and the wider implications of that use, with a lineup of 450 community-sourced sessions, film premieres, musical performances, and keynote presentations.



While discussions spanned entertainment, sustainability, healthcare, and more, the future landscape and applications of artificial intelligence (AI) underpinned the entire conference. AI's influence is pervasive, affecting every sector. The message at SXSW was clear: we should embrace this wave of change with cautious optimism.

American Futurist and CEO of Future Today Institute, Amy Webb delivered a keynote on [emerging tech trends in 2025 projects a future](#) where AI and biotech come together to create new materials. As well as how agentic “action” models evolve to set and accomplish their own goals, and how large-scale problems like the climate crisis can be tackled with newfound rigor.

As we [incorporate AI technologies into our toolkit](#) to enhance productivity and output, we must also take responsibility for unintended side effects and [not fall prey to AI myths](#). For example, the responsible use of [synthetic information](#) and the design of safe open-source AI models after removing the guardrails warrant extra consideration.

Consumers are now looking [beyond the initial hype](#) and are eager for practical executions [that allow them to connect](#) and ultimately augment their everyday experiences. AI is giving people access to [new dimensions of human experience](#) and [bringing new life to artistic ideation](#).

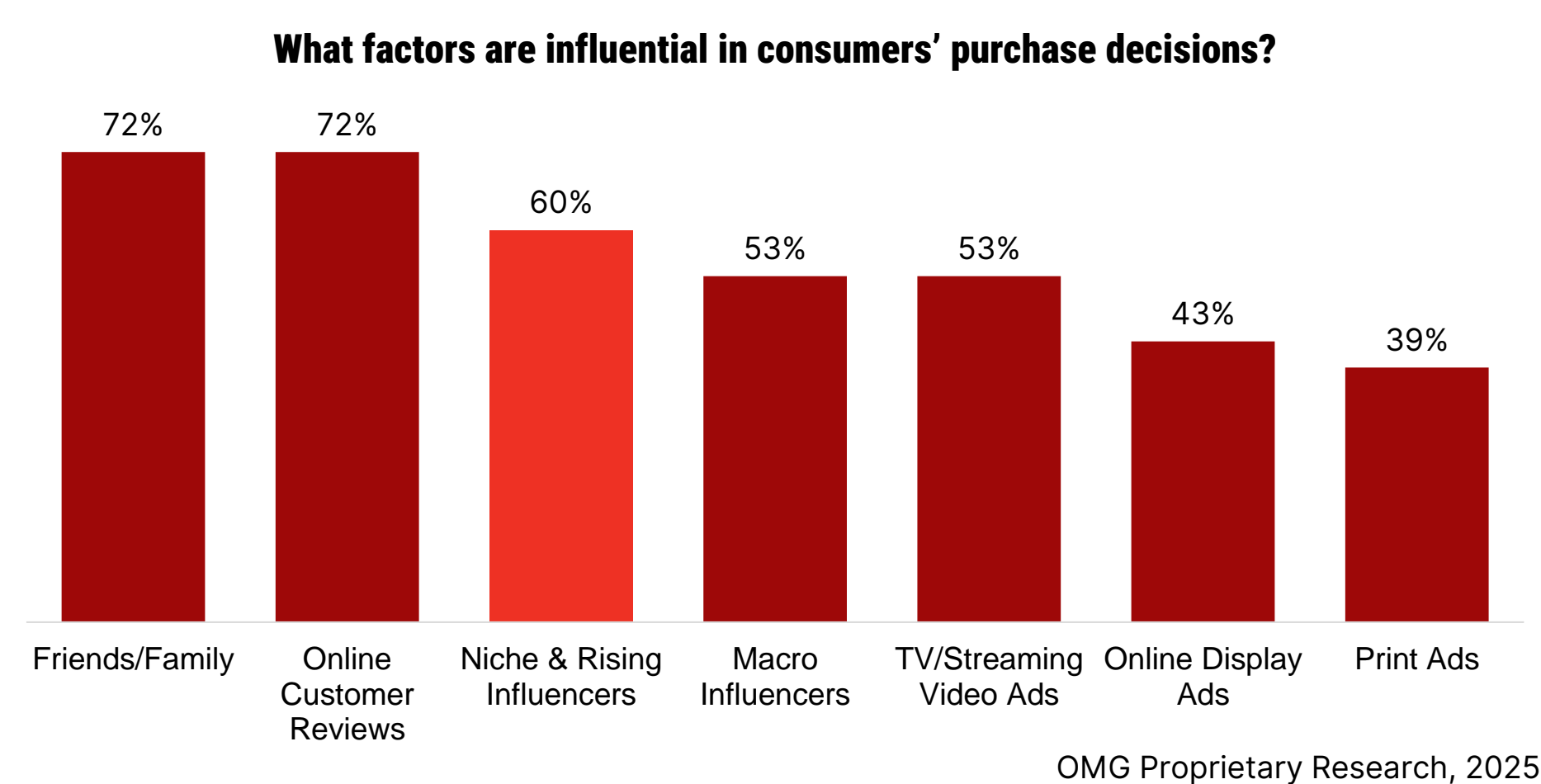
Brands need to anticipate the effects of AI on consumer behavior, industry dynamics, and even the future of [collaboration between humans and AI](#), positioning their brands to adapt proactively.

## The Maturing Creator Economy

Recent OMG research illustrates that [creators aren't just engagement tools](#); they function as comprehensive media channels equipped with creativity, audience insights, and the ability to drive KPIs across the entire marketing funnel.

The professionalization of influencers has brought new expectations to the forefront on [both the brand side and the creator side](#). As the number of marketers investing in influencers is set to [surpass 90% by 2027](#), marketers are taking cues from creators to reach their audiences in more meaningful ways.

Audiences at SXSW were eager to see how to capitalize on this now essential investment arm of ad spend. Featured sessions included topics from [Fans and Fandom with Evan Shapiro](#) to [Influencer Entrepreneurship with Keith Lee](#), showing the breadth and depth of what creators can do as [consultants to brand campaign development](#), audience insights, and for their own personal brand development.



Creators are advised to take their content across platforms and diversify their revenue streams. Platforms such as Flip, Meta, and Substack are bringing back [incentive programs in the wake of TikTok's uncertainty](#).

Despite platform backing, creators still face [challenges in building audiences in a "for you page" world](#) and keeping up with the fast pace of content creation with the rise of short-form content.

The good news is that despite shortened attention spans, audiences are looking to [go deeper into the content they love](#) with their favorite creators, [outside of simply viewing content](#). Fans are gravitating towards community in chats, live events, and exclusive media. They are loyal and invested in valuable content, with [80% of core fans saying that they're willing to pay for content from the creators they love](#). Brands can enter this space and be successful by facilitating connection authentically, and amplifying value over virality.

## Participating in Culture as it Happens

The discussions surrounding culture straight from the mouths of icons and legends are one of the biggest draws of SXSW.

- Michelle Obama and her brother Craig Robinson recorded their [new podcast 'IMO' live](#) and gave their thoughts on the psychology of happiness.



- Jay Gruber, CEO of Bluesky, spoke about [data democratization and novel social media frameworks](#) in the wake of content overload.
- Bryan Johnson, the famous biohacker, explained [the science of longevity](#), while Ke\$ha spoke about [combating shame and loneliness in dating culture](#).

Many media panels had a common thread that ultimately reflects the collective mindset of culture today: [battling cynicism](#), [social connection](#), and [authenticity](#).

Brand and culture coexist most effectively when the focus is on authenticity and storytelling over pure spectacle and chasing trends. [L'Oréal, in partnership with NBCUniversal, proposed a new way to think about cultural events on television](#) as not just a passive viewing experience but a true ecosystem where brand partnerships feel native, entertaining, and ultimately add value.

According to NBCU's post-event analysis, SNL 50 drove [38% higher emotional engagement for ad creatives](#) versus non-sponsors and was the most-watched primetime entertainment event on NBC in five years.

Taking part in culture goes beyond showing up beyond the broadcast; culture is cemented through [participation](#), not just consumption. [Aligning core values with culture](#) through live experiences, digital content, and social integration is [how brands stay relevant in the conversation](#).

## Experience is the New Black

Finally, SXSW is not complete without mention of the brand activations and innovative experiential moments available to both attendees and Austin residents alike. In addition to keynote discussions about [immersive storytelling](#), the [future of world-building](#) at the iconic Disney parks, and a Metallica concert [using 3D video capture](#), VR and AR experiences had a dedicated space within the expo.

- Along with a grand sponsorship of the conference, Rivian wowed conference-goers with an [off-road driving](#) experience, [electric ice-cream vans](#) with Ben & Jerry's, and more.



- Tech showcases from Dubai's Future Foundation's AI Chocolate featured a room including a [massive screen display with AI-generated art](#) from visual artist Refik Anadol.
- Criterion brought their infamous ['Criterion Closet' on tour](#), where visitors explored the collection and created personalized content, recreating their favorite celebrity moments for themselves.
- The Polyphonic Spree brought their [immersive dome theater experience](#) of the album *Salvage Enterprise* to life.

The most [interesting activations](#) were at the intersection of [unlikely partners](#) that together created something unique. The future of experiential brand activation is characterized by a [shift from storytelling to story living](#). [Tailored and engaging](#) in-person activations are at the core of [winning new audiences](#), where simply ['fear of missing out' can drive participation](#).



**ALINA JAN**

Sr. Analyst, Product and Insights | OMG