Syracuse University
Center for the Creator Economy

FLASH REPORT NO. 2 | NOVEMBER 2026

Save, trust, buy:

How U.S. adults are influenced by creators for holiday shopping

77% save gift ideas from creators, 50% bought on a creator's recommendation last season, and 61% are likely to this year

Nationally representative survey of 988 U.S. adults by gender, age, ethnicity, and political affiliation, fielded through Prolific on November 7–8, 2026

A joint initiative of the Newhouse School of Public Communications and the Whitman School of Management

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key findings

The Center for the Creator Economy's second Flash Report measures how creators inform and influence what Americans save, trust, and buy for the holidays.

WHY WE ASKED

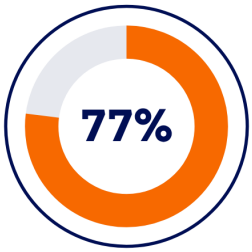
Americans now find holiday gift ideas and deals in creators' feeds, where creators compete with retailers and brands for attention.

WHAT WE DID

- Surveyed a nationally representative sample of 988 U.S. adults through Prolific
- Representative by gender, age, ethnicity, and political affiliation
- Fielded November 7-8, 2026
- Asked about last year's holiday shopping and this season's plans

WHAT WE MEASURED

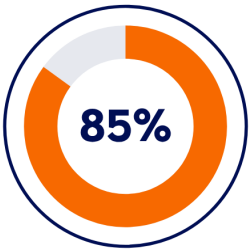
- Saving and sharing gift ideas
- Creator-recommended purchases
- Views of deal promotions
- Trust and confidence spotting paid posts



Save gift ideas from creators



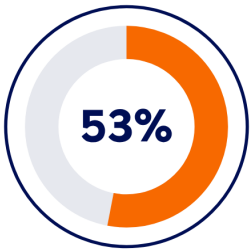
Made at least one creator-recommended purchase last holiday season



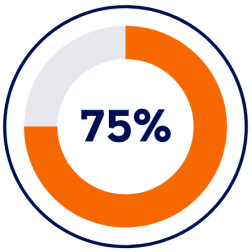
Of last year's creator-influenced buyers are likely to buy that way again



Call creators' holiday deal promotions "mostly just advertising"



Say creators help them find deals that are "actually worth it"



Trust friends and family very much or completely for gift ideas, the most trusted source among adults

THE TAKEAWAY

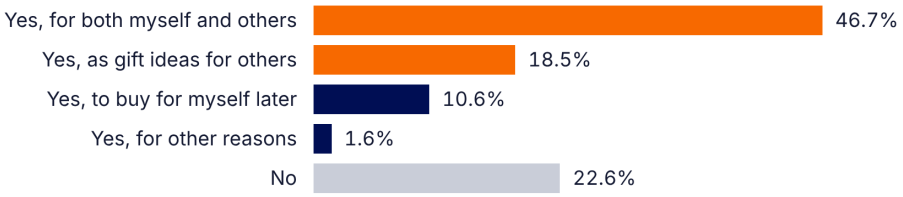
Three in four U.S. adults save gift ideas from creators, and half bought on a creator's recommendation last season, even though most see creator deal promotions as advertising.

FINDING 1

Three in four U.S. adults save gift ideas from creators, mostly for other people

Three in four U.S. adults (77%) save gift ideas from creators. Most save with other people in mind: 65% save creator posts as gift ideas for others, and 47% save for both themselves and others.

SAVING GIFT IDEAS FROM CREATORS

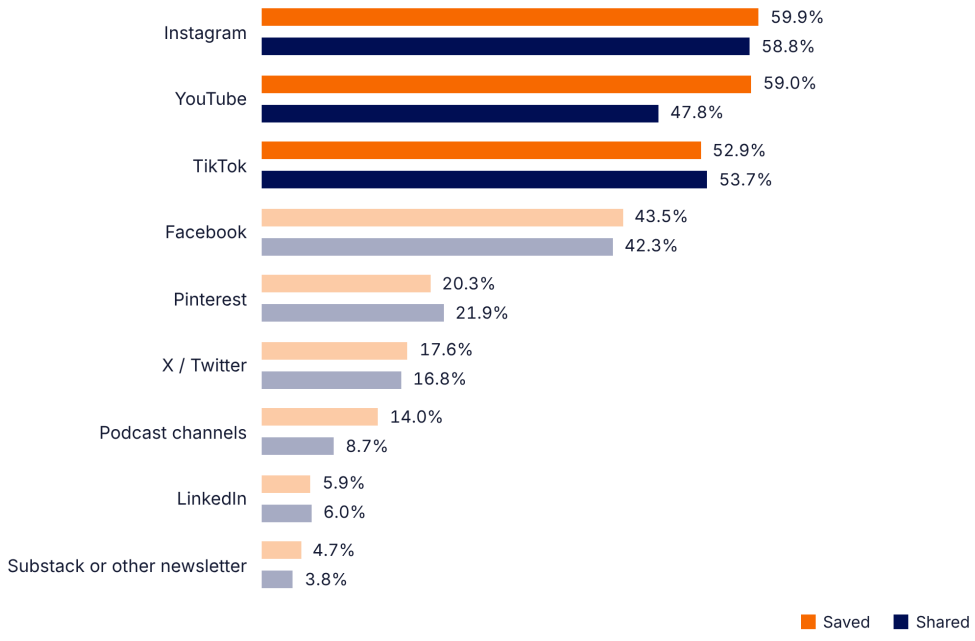


Orange = saves as gift ideas for other people. Orange categories were statistically more prominent in our data, binomial p <.001; odds = 1.87. Base: 988 U.S. adults.

Demographically, women and adults ages 18 to 44 were the most likely to save gift ideas from creators.

Instagram (60%), YouTube (59%), and TikTok (53%) lead as the places where saved gift ideas live. The same three platforms lead when people pass those ideas along, though the order shifts. Instagram stays first for sharing at 59%, TikTok moves up to 54%, and YouTube drops to 48%.

WHERE SAVED GIFT IDEAS LIVE, AND WHERE THEY GET SHARED FROM



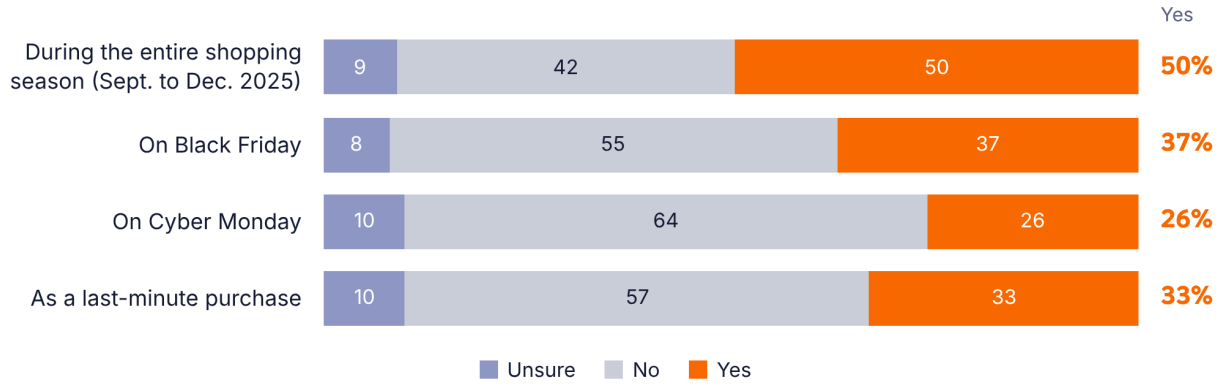
Saved: base is the 765 respondents who save gift ideas. Shared: only respondents who answered yes to the previous question (whether they had shared, or plan to share, saved products with family or friends as a wish list) were asked which platforms they used; base is those 529 respondents. Multiple responses allowed. Top three were most often shared, McNemar $\chi^2(1) = 175.03$, $p < .001$, odds = 7.74, and saved, $\chi^2(1) = 98.49$, $p < .001$, odds = 5.86.

FINDING 2

85% of last season's creator-influenced buyers are likely to buy that way again

Half of U.S. adults (50%) made at least one creator-recommended purchase during last year's holiday shopping season. Creators reached people on the biggest days, too: 37% bought on a creator's recommendation on Black Friday, 26% on Cyber Monday, and 33% for a last-minute gift.

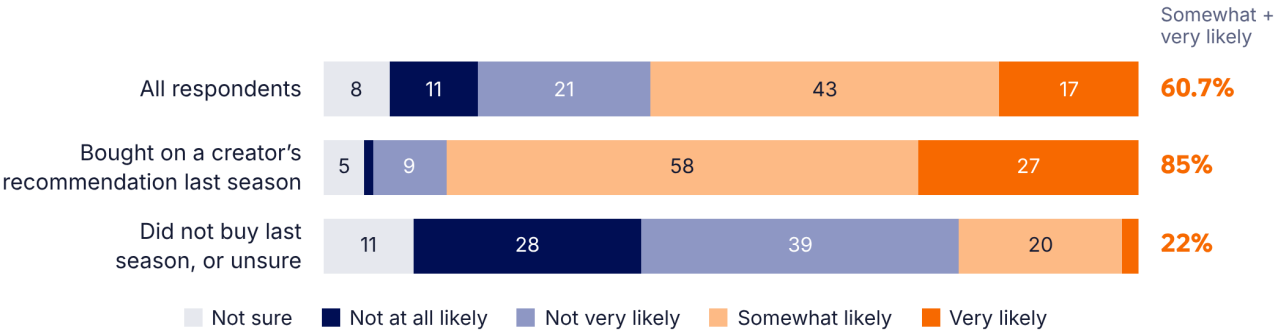
CREATOR-RECOMMENDED PURCHASES LAST HOLIDAY SEASON



Response options: yes, no, unsure. Base: 988 U.S. adults.

Looking ahead, 61% say they are somewhat or very likely to buy a creator-recommended gift this season. Among those who bought on a creator's recommendation last year, 85% are likely to do it again. Creators influenced women more than men last year, and women expect to act on creator recommendations more than men this year as well.

LIKELIHOOD OF BUYING A CREATOR-RECOMMENDED GIFT THIS SEASON



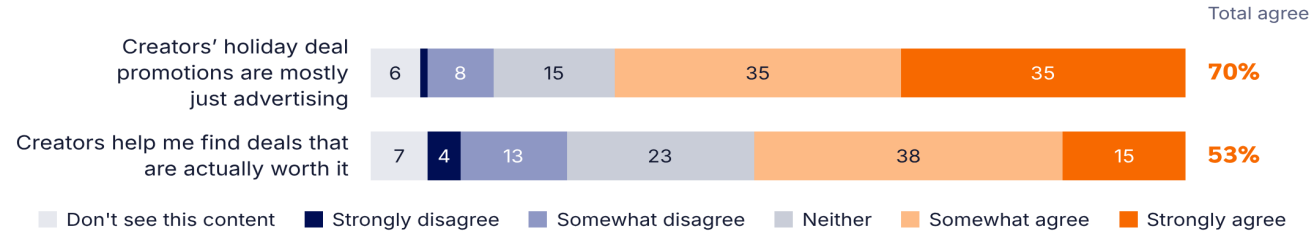
Response scale: not at all likely to very likely, plus not sure. Values rounded. Differences among all proportions were statistically significant at p <.001. Odds for choosing somewhat or very likely are 1.55, 5.86, and 0.28, respectively. Base: 988 U.S. adults.

FINDING 3

Holiday deal promotions are advertising, but useful advertising

Seven in ten (70%) agree that creators' holiday deal promotions are "mostly just advertising." Many still find value in them: a majority (53%) agree that creators help them find deals that are "actually worth it."

CREATORS' BLACK FRIDAY AND CYBER MONDAY DEAL PROMOTIONS

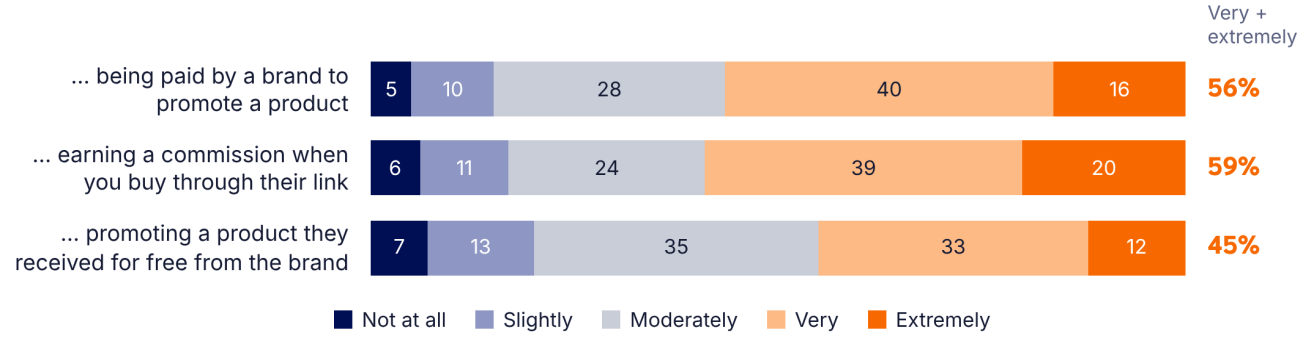


Response scale: strongly disagree to strongly agree, plus "I don't see this kind of content." Somewhat and strongly agree were chosen more than other options, binomial ps < .001, odds = 2.32 and 1.14, respectively. Base: 988 U.S. adults.

Adults feel confident spotting paid creator posts

More than half of U.S. adults (56%) are "very" to "extremely" confident they could tell when a creator is being paid to promote a product. Respondents feel slightly more confident spotting a commission link (59%). Their confidence drops to 45% when a creator is promoting a product they received for free from the brand.

HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU THAT YOU COULD TELL IF A CREATOR IS…



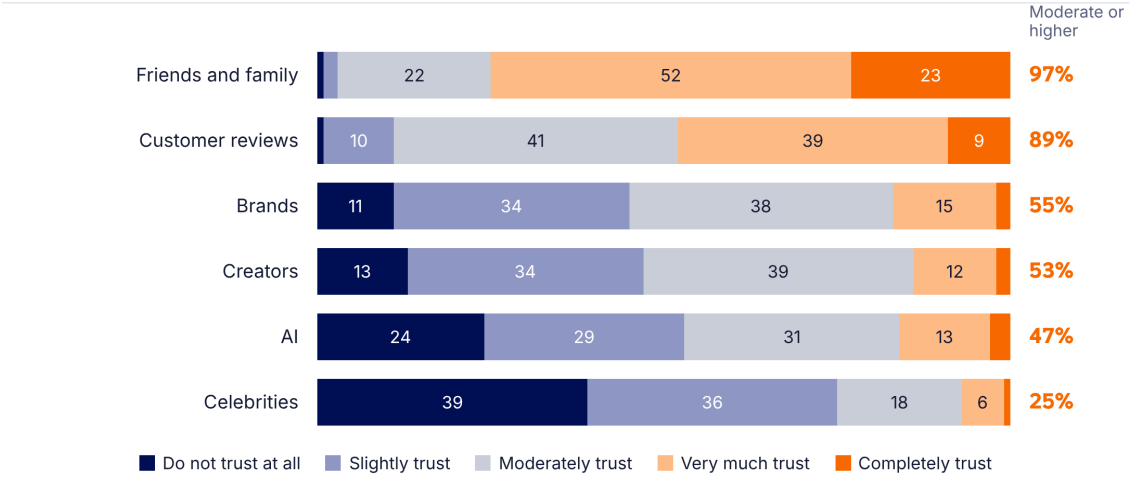
Response scale: not at all to extremely confident. Very and extremely were chosen more than other options, binomial ps ≤ .001, odds = 1.29, 1.44, and 0.81, respectively. Base: 988 U.S. adults.

FINDING 4

Creators nearly match brands on trust and outrank AI and celebrities; friends and family lead

Friends and family remain U.S. adults' most trusted source of gift ideas: three in four (75%) trust them "very much" or "completely," and about half (48%) say the same of customer reviews. Over half of adults (53%) place moderate or higher trust in creators, compared with 55% for brands. Nearly a quarter (24%) do not trust AI at all for gift ideas, and 39% say the same of celebrities.

TRUST IN HOLIDAY SHOPPING RECOMMENDATIONS, BY SOURCE

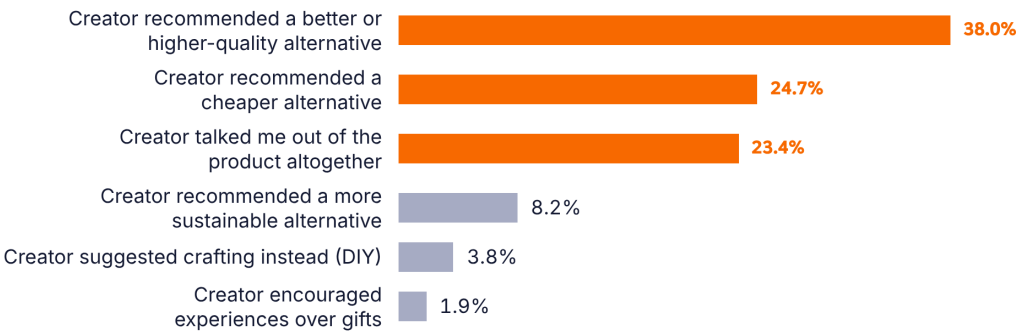


Response scale: do not trust at all to completely trust. Values rounded. Moderate or higher trust statistically higher for friends and family and reviews, p < .001, odds = 28.06 and 7.67; statistically lower for celebrities, p < .001 , 0.33. Base: 988 U.S. adults.

16% say a creator talked them out of a gift, most often toward a better-quality option

Less often, creators steer people away from a gift. Only 16% say a creator talked them out of one last season. The most common reason was a better-quality alternative (38%), ahead of a cheaper alternative (25%) or being talked out of the product altogether (23%).

WHY THEY DIDN'T BUY IT



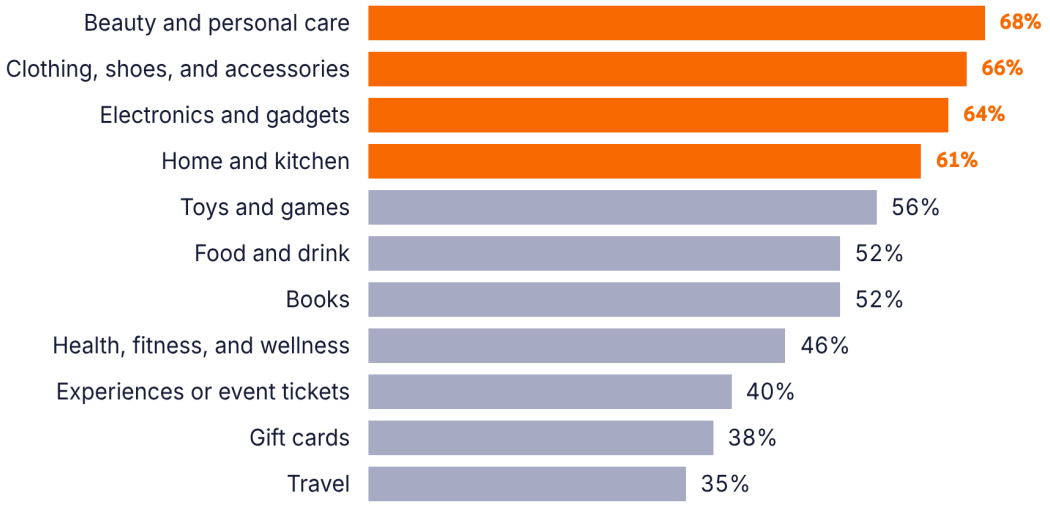
Single select. Frequencies are statistically significant from each other, $\chi^2(5) = 96.58$, Cramer's w = .782). Shading represents similarity among choices frequency. Base: the 158 respondents (16%) a creator talked out of a gift last season.

FINDING 5

Beauty, fashion, tech, and home top the list of creator-influenced gift categories

Beauty and personal care, clothing and accessories, electronics, and home and kitchen were the most popular holiday purchasing categories. Women were the most likely to say they would buy beauty and personal care products this season based on a creator's recommendation.

HOLIDAY PURCHASING CATEGORIES



Orange = the four most popular categories; shaded blue = all others. Differences in category popularity were assessed by comparing mean likelihood of purchase scores across categories, $F(8.83, 6102.50) = 58.81$, $p < .001$, generalized $\eta^2 = .05$; shading separates most frequent choices using Holm-corrected $p < .05$.

DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

Women and younger adults lead creator-driven holiday shopping

Gender was the most consistent divide, with women ahead on saving, buying, and planning creator-recommended gifts.

- **Saving gift ideas from creators** runs highest among women and adults ages 18 to 44.
- **Creator-recommended purchases last holiday season** were more common among women.
- **Planning a creator-recommended gift this season** is more likely among women.
- **Buying beauty and personal care** is driven most by women.

METHODOLOGY

Sample	988 U.S. adults, nationally representative by gender, age, ethnicity, and political affiliation, recruited through Prolific
Fielded	November 7-8, 2026
Demographics	Ages 18 to 84 (average 45.5); 50.9% female, 49.1% male; 64.4% White, 11.7% Black, 10.4% mixed, 7.1% other, 6.4% Asian
Analysis	Percentages use all respondents as the base unless a chart names a smaller one, and are rounded. Differences in category popularity were assessed by comparing mean likelihood of purchase scores across categories. Reported differences are statistically significant (Holm-corrected $p < .05$). Statistical significance levels and effect sizes for other analyses included as footnotes on relevant figures, where applicable.

ABOUT THE CENTER

The Center for the Creator Economy (CCE) at Syracuse University studies and shapes the fast-growing industry built by independent creators. Launched in 2025 as a joint initiative of the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications and the Martin J. Whitman School of Management, the CCE connects research, education, and industry. The Center publishes monthly Flash Reports and original research on creators, audiences, and platforms. It prepares students for careers in the creator economy through coursework and hands-on programs, and convenes creators, brands, platforms, and policymakers through events including the annual 'CUSE Creator Con. Learn more at creatoreconomy.syracuse.edu.