



SXSW **LONDON 2025** **CHANGEMAKER** **TREND REPORT**

THEME 4: COMMUNITY DRIVEN BRANDS

4 \ COMMUNITY DRIVEN BRANDS: BRANDS WHO DON'T SHOW UP FOR THEIR COMMUNITIES WILL BE FORGOTTEN

Brands can no longer afford to sit on the sidelines of their communities. Real loyalty now comes from active participation – not from chasing scale or surface-level engagement. Communities today want to co-create, not just consume, and they can spot fakeness a mile off. Purpose and shared values are at the heart of this shift. Brands that

build deep, meaningful connections – especially within smaller, niche communities – will earn trust, advocacy and long-term loyalty. It's no longer about speaking to the masses; it's about showing up for the people who care and creating space for them to shape the story with you.

“FANDOM IS NO LONGER A MARKETING TREND OR SOMETHING RESERVED JUST FOR SPORTS OR POP CULTURE. IT'S REALLY FAST BECOMING THE MOST POWERFUL CURRENCY INVOLVED FOR BRANDING, BECAUSE ATTENTION ALONE DOESN'T CUT IT ANYMORE,”

said **Suzy Socker, Managing Director - Brand, Edelman in Cultural Capital:**
How Female Athletes Are Building New Fandoms and What Brands Can Learn



Dina Asher-Smith “How the power of women in sport is influencing luxury fashion”

COMMUNITY DRIVEN BRANDS: BRANDS WHO DON'T SHOW UP FOR THEIR COMMUNITIES WILL BE FORGOTTEN

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

SXSW London explored the rapidly evolving world of community-building and brand loyalty, with a focus on how creators, brands and platforms are reshaping community engagement. As Leandro Barreto from Unilever said, "Communities will become the centerpiece of everything we do ... Brands belong to the people that buy them. We are the stewards."

From live streaming to niche audiences, the future of relationships is about deeper, authentic connections. Brands now need to recognise that their communities are diverse, dynamic and co-creative, but also understand what is underpinning this movement. If we take the opinion that much of marketing merely holds a window up to society and reflects back the feelings and emotions of the wider world, then something is clearly at play. Social Health is a clear priority. We need to treat it with the same reverence as we do physical and mental health.

Whilst much of the conversation was explicitly around the opportunity for commercial brands,

the idea of purposeful and joyful communities, curated by well-intentioned third parties is what's needed. If it's fake, the people will feel it. As we heard in one expansive session at Rich Mix hosted by EnginePOP's Athena Witter, community = influence. Indeed 88 per cent of humans trust people rather than brands. Community can't be a bolt-on: it's an absolute necessity.

As we saw, communities are fuelled by beautiful collisions; from disparate groups, from collaborators, by creators, glued together by a common interest.



The Supercell store



Rosemarie Ryan, Cristina Diezhandino and Leandro Barreto: "The Future of Marketing 2030"

THE SPEAKERS EXPLORED:

1. Fandom is evolving into community

Communities are no longer just about passive fans – they're about active participants who shape the story. From Twitch to Formula E, brands are understanding that real loyalty is built through long-term, meaningful engagement, not quick hits.

2. Creators are now community leaders

Whether through Substack or Supercell, creators are taking ownership of their audiences. Building strong, engaged communities allows for deeper emotional connections and drives long-term success – audiences want to co-create, not just consume.

3. Purpose is the heart of loyalty

Brands must align with their community's values to build lasting relationships. Formula E's focus on sustainability shows how a shared purpose can turn fans into loyal advocates, not just customers. Authentic engagement is the new currency.



Julia Goldin and Emily Prazer speak: "Lights Out with F1 and The LEGO Group - How to Build Immersive and Relevant Experiences for Your Audience"

IN BRIEF

- **From passive fandom to active involvement**

The future of brand engagement lies in participation, not just presence. Brands must move beyond transactional moments and invite their communities to actively shape the narrative. Whether through co-creation, live streaming, or long-form content, the shift from audience to participant builds deeper trust, emotional connection and true brand advocacy.

- **Why smaller communities can drive bigger impact**

It's no longer about millions of followers, it's about the few who truly care. Brands often chase scale, but real influence comes from depth: the strength of connection, not the size of the crowd. As one speaker put it, even a community of 1,000 deeply engaged people can be enough to sustain a business or movement. These micro-communities are where trust is built, ideas are stress-tested and advocacy is born. For brands, focusing on fewer but more invested participants leads to richer feedback, stronger loyalty and more meaningful long-term impact.

- **Purpose drives authentic loyalty**

As branding becomes increasingly community-first, alignment on values is no longer optional, it's the foundation of future brand growth. Shared values are emerging as the new competitive edge, with audiences gravitating

toward brands that actively reflect their beliefs. This shift is transforming followers into allies. In the noise of modern marketing, authenticity cuts through and purpose that feels real, lived and local will define the next era of loyalty.

- **The future belongs to niche communities**

Understanding and embracing the diversity within your community is essential for growth. As audiences become more specific in their interests, brands must move beyond one-size-fits-all content and create personalised experiences that speak directly to niche, passionate groups. By tapping into these distinct subcultures, brands can drive greater cultural relevance and real-world impact.

- **Community engagement drives business growth and redefines impact**

Communities are a key driver of long-term business growth. A community-first approach builds authentic relationships that transform audiences into advocates, driving sustained success. True impact lies in emotional connections, influence and loyalty, not surface-level metrics. Brands must rethink how they measure community engagement, moving beyond traditional metrics to capture the real value of these relationships. By embracing this deeper understanding, brands can create resilient, growth-driving communities.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How can your brand move from passive engagement to active community-building?

Focus on fostering authentic, participatory communities that co-create value with your audience, rather than simply onsuming content.

2. Are you tapping into the full potential of your audience's diversity?

Recognise that your community is made up of different subcultures and diverse voices. How can you tailor your strategies to reflect this?

3. What is your brand's true purpose and how does it resonate with your community?

Ensure your mission aligns with the values of your audience. How can your brand show up authentically and engage deeply with fans over the long term?

4. How are you measuring community impact, beyond surface metrics?

Rethink traditional engagement metrics – are you tracking real connections, influence and long-term value?

5. Are you creating pathways for your fans to become co-creators, not just followers?

Consider how you can invite your community to shape the narrative and contribute to the creative process, enhancing loyalty and advocacy.



THREE TOP SESSIONS

1. The Livestreaming Economy

Dan Clancy, CEO of Twitch, discussed how live streaming is revolutionising audience engagement, turning passive viewers into active community members. He highlighted the power of real-time, shared experiences and the growing role of live streaming as the cornerstone of authentic connections in the creator economy.

2. Creator-Led, Community Driven

A fireside chat with Substack's Hamish McKenzie and author Emma Gannon explored how independent platforms and newsletters are continuing to forge deep connections—no spam, just trust. The session reinforced that community is the engine powering sustainable creator-led media, and this is why Substack exists. Peer to peer exchange and finding “your people” is what brings people back time and time again.

3. Why fandom's the future of brand loyalty

Jeff Dodds, CEO of Formula E, explored how brands can build deeper, purpose-driven fan communities. He discussed how aligning with values like sustainability fosters loyalty and turns fans into long-term advocates. This session revealed how fandom is evolving from passive consumption to active participation.



“WE DON’T WANT TO HAVE A HUMAN CONNECTION WITH AI. EVERYONE THAT THINKS THAT’S THE FUTURE, I THINK THAT IS JUST CRAZY. WE WANT TO HAVE A CONNECTION WITH OTHER HUMAN BEINGS.”

Session: The Livestreaming Economy

Speaker: Dan Clancy, CEO, Twitch

“63% OF PEOPLE TRUST THEIR PODCASTERS MORE THAN THEY DO SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS... IT SPEAKS TO THE WAY THAT CREATORS ARE APPROACHING PODCASTING... THEY’RE THINKING ABOUT HOW THEY CAN BE VERY AUTHENTIC. AND BECAUSE OF THAT AUTHENTICITY... RELATIONSHIPS ARE LONG LASTING.”

Session: It’s a Creator’s World

Speaker: KAY HSU, Global Head of Creative Lab, Spotify

“ALL SPORTS ARE CHASING THE CASUALS AND NEXT GEN ... BUT DO CULTURAL RELEVANCY AND FLEETING MAINSTREAM MOMENTS TRANSLATE TO GROWTH?”

Session: Growing Sport: The Battle for Fans

Speaker: Adam Kelly, President, IMG



ALL THEMES IN THE CHANGEMAKER TRENDS REPORT

THE THEMES

1 \ AGENTIC AI WILL TRANSFORM WORK FROM TIRING TOIL TO CREATIVE COLLABORATION

2 \ SPACE: THE NEXT BUSINESS FRONTIER IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

3 \ COLLECTIVE INDIVIDUALISM: A FRAMEWORK TO DRIVE BETTER IMPACT

4 \ COMMUNITY DRIVEN BRANDS: BRANDS WHO DON'T SHOW UP FOR THEIR COMMUNITIES WILL BE FORGOTTEN

5 \ BUSINESS WITH CONSCIENCE: AS GEOPOLITICS FALTER, BUSINESSES FIND THEIR CONSCIENCE

6 \ THE HEALTHCARE TECH REVOLUTION: WILL HELP US LIVE BETTER, LONGER LIVES

7 \ EXPERIENCE-LED MARKETING: IS EXPERIENCE THE ANSWER TO MORE JOYFUL MARKETING?

8 \ REDEFINING INFLUENCE & AUTHORITY: CREDIBILITY SHIFTS, AS AUDIENCES SEEK OUT NEW VOICES OF AUTHORITY

[VIEW THE FULL REPORT HERE](#)

THANK YOU FOR READING OUR FOURTH THEME FROM THE CHANGEMAKER TRENDS REPORT



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