A high-angle, slightly blurred photograph of a busy city street. The scene is filled with the lower legs and feet of many people walking in various directions. Overlaid on the scene are several blue, semi-transparent silhouettes of people in various walking poses. These silhouettes contain faint, white text fragments, such as "cont", "re. c", "ed t", "uter", "afe M", "infor", "00000", "of typ", "in", "st", "of", "are", "owing.", "estart", "then", "any n", "such", "or", "nced", "00000", "but at", "or techn", "insti", "y updat", "tion:", "ive", "(O", "Addr", "physi", "ump", "system", "disabl", "0005 mem", "safe Mo", "est FB t", "talla", "tes yo", "ue, disab", "le 8005 mem", "safe Mode", "FB to it", "led ha", "y or situat", "nants, ges", "ons, and", "000", "ran", "furch". The overall color palette is dominated by the light, warm tones of the pavement and the cool, blue tones of the silhouettes.

TACOS & TRENDS

FROM SAMENESS TO SIGNAL

The New Rules of Brand Culture

WHAT IS TACOS AND TRENDS

Where Culture, Conversation, and Insights Collide

Tacos & Trends, is a collective of industry professionals sharing expertise with peers. It is a resource for bite-sized trend insights, conversation, and brand discovery. Powered by MADE Trends, it brings together the ideas shaping industries and the community behind them.

@tacostrends | [tacosandtrends.com](https://www.tacosandtrends.com)

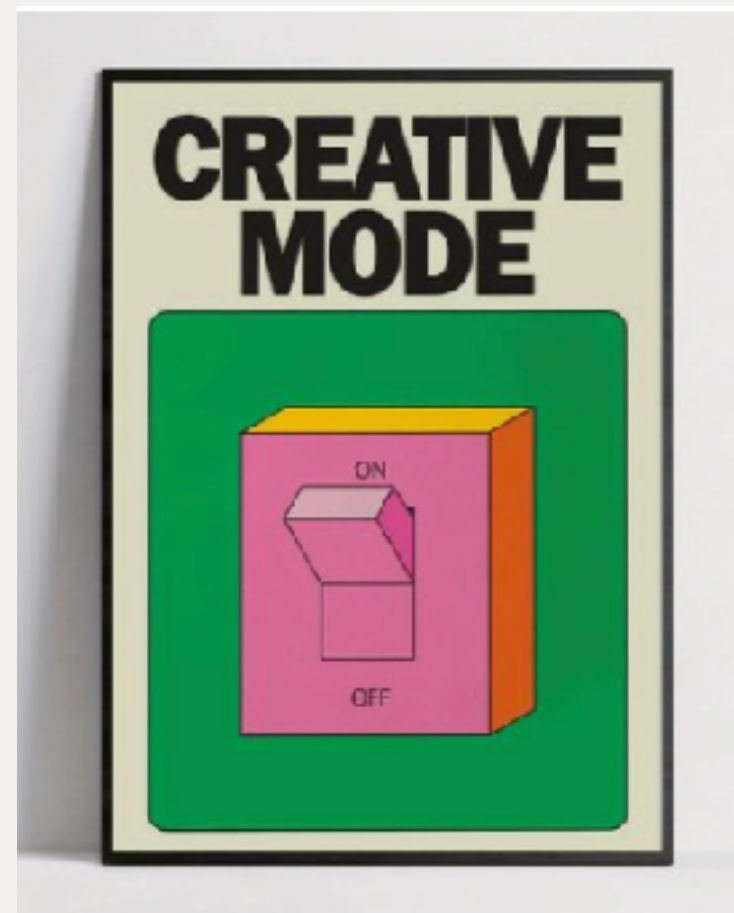


WHY CULTURE & CONSUMER

SHIT-POST

=

HUMAN



A Paradoxical Moment

It is getting harder to define culture when everything starts to look the same. The same tone, visuals, and ideas repeat across feeds and coffee shops across the globe.

Taste once felt instinctive, shaped by personal point of view. Now it is influenced by shared content, with micro-trends replacing individuality.

Authenticity has become a formula. In trying to stand out, consumers end up looking the same and culture evaporates.

WHAT IS AUTHENTICITY?

Connection does not come from being “authentic.” It comes from being relevant in a way that feels personal. Brands are not defined by what they say about themselves. They’re defined by what people believe about themselves in relation to them.

The real question is:

- Do you help people express who they are
- Do you reinforce what they value
- Do you show up in a way they trust

That is what builds meaning. Not visibility, not vulnerability, not volume. The brands that last do not chase authenticity. They become significant enough that people assign it to them.



Authenticity has become one of the most **overused ideas in marketing**. “Real” branding shifted into behind-the-scenes content, casual tone, and forced vulnerability, but it quickly started to feel cliché. What is presented as “**real**” is **often manufactured**. The messiness is intentional, the vulnerability is edited. **What drives connection is not perceived realness, but coherence**. When a brand’s values, tone, visuals, and actions align, trust builds over time.



“Cluttered sink photos have replaced selfies for beauty brands hoping to convey authenticity”



THE TRAP OF AUTHENTICITY

THE ERA OF SAMENESS

Authenticity is in Limited Supply

When everyone draws from the same references, it's harder to stand out.

Algorithm Culture

- Rewards familiarity, frequency, and format
- Originality is not rewarded
- Trends expire faster than ever

Best Practice: Culture Replaces POV

- Point of view replaced by benchmarking
- What works gets copied, then scaled
- Risk is removed in favor of predictability

Aesthetic Convergence

- Minimalism, neutrals, “clean girl,” “quiet luxury”
- Visual identities collapse into one another
- Brands become interchangeable at a glance



ORDER#: HIGHNOBILITY - THE STATUS ECONOMY
TUE 10/03/2026 02:17:49PM



THE STATUS ECONOMY

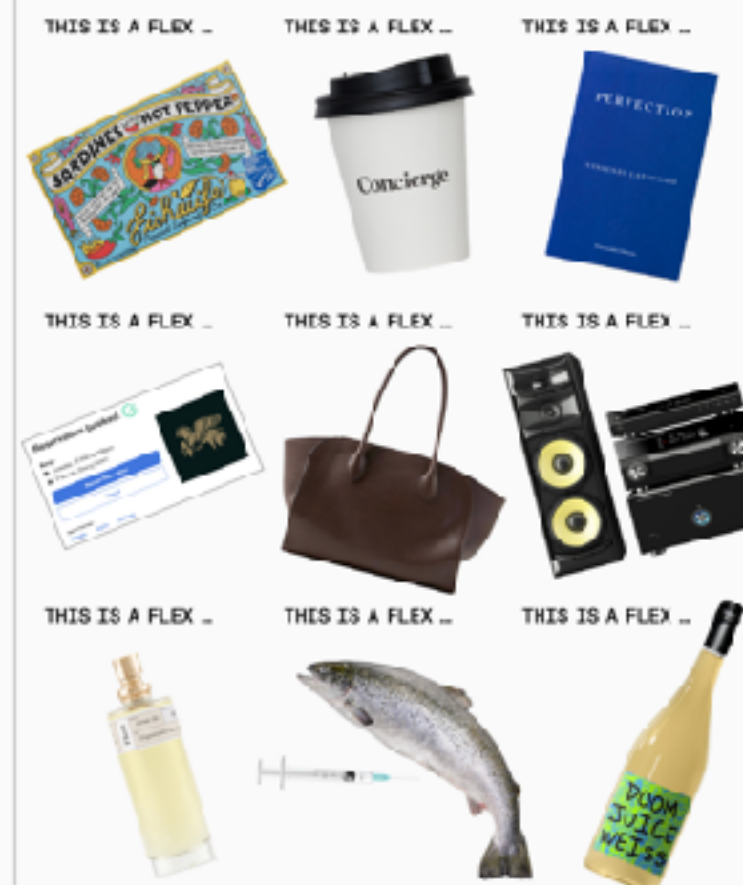
HOW EVERYTHING BECAME A SIGNAL OF CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

THE STATUS ECONOMY

In this hype based status economy *everything* signals taste. It is no longer just fashion that communicates status, but food, hobbies, and everyday choices, where even the most basic staples become symbols of luxury. Value is no longer in the object itself, but in what it communicates about access, knowledge, and taste.

FOR CULTURAL PIONEERS,

EVERYTHING IS A FLEX



FOR CULTURAL PIONEERS, EVERY SURFACE OF ONE'S LIFESTYLE IS A DEMONSTRATION OF CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE, SOCIAL STATUS, AND PERSONAL TASTE



HAVE YOU EVER????

TAGOS & TRENDS

FAST MOVING CULTURAL GOODS

-- POPPI RASPBERRY SODA



-- DAVID PROTEIN BAR



-- MAMA YU'S CHILLI OIL



-- HEINZ KETCHUP



-- MALDON SALT



-- GHIA ORIGINAL APÉRITIF



-- GOOD PHATS OIL



-- COCA-COLA



-- EREWHON SMOOTHIE



-- TONY'S CHOCOLONELY



-- FISHWIFE TINNED SARDINES

-- PINT OF ESTATE DAIRY MILK

-- TORRES CRISPS



-- BORDIER BUTTER



ceremonial grade

NOT WITHOUT MY MATCHA & MY RUN CLUB

What once felt niche has become so common it reads like a meme. What began as subculture behaviors are now ubiquitous, repeated across feeds until they start to feel basic and forced. They start to serve as aesthetics instead of actual lifestyles and hobbies.



Run club character...



SAPLY



elizabeth 🧐 @elizardbethc · 9h
 can't stand these bushwick like why are you using hinge on your digital detox flip phone



Block phones, anti-doomscrolling bags, knitting, ceramics, run clubs. Stepping away from screens is everywhere right now. If it's meant to be a radical counterculture move, does it stay that way if everyone is doing it?



NATURE IS THE NEW NIGHTCLUB



OFFLINE OR JUST ANOTHER AESTHETIC

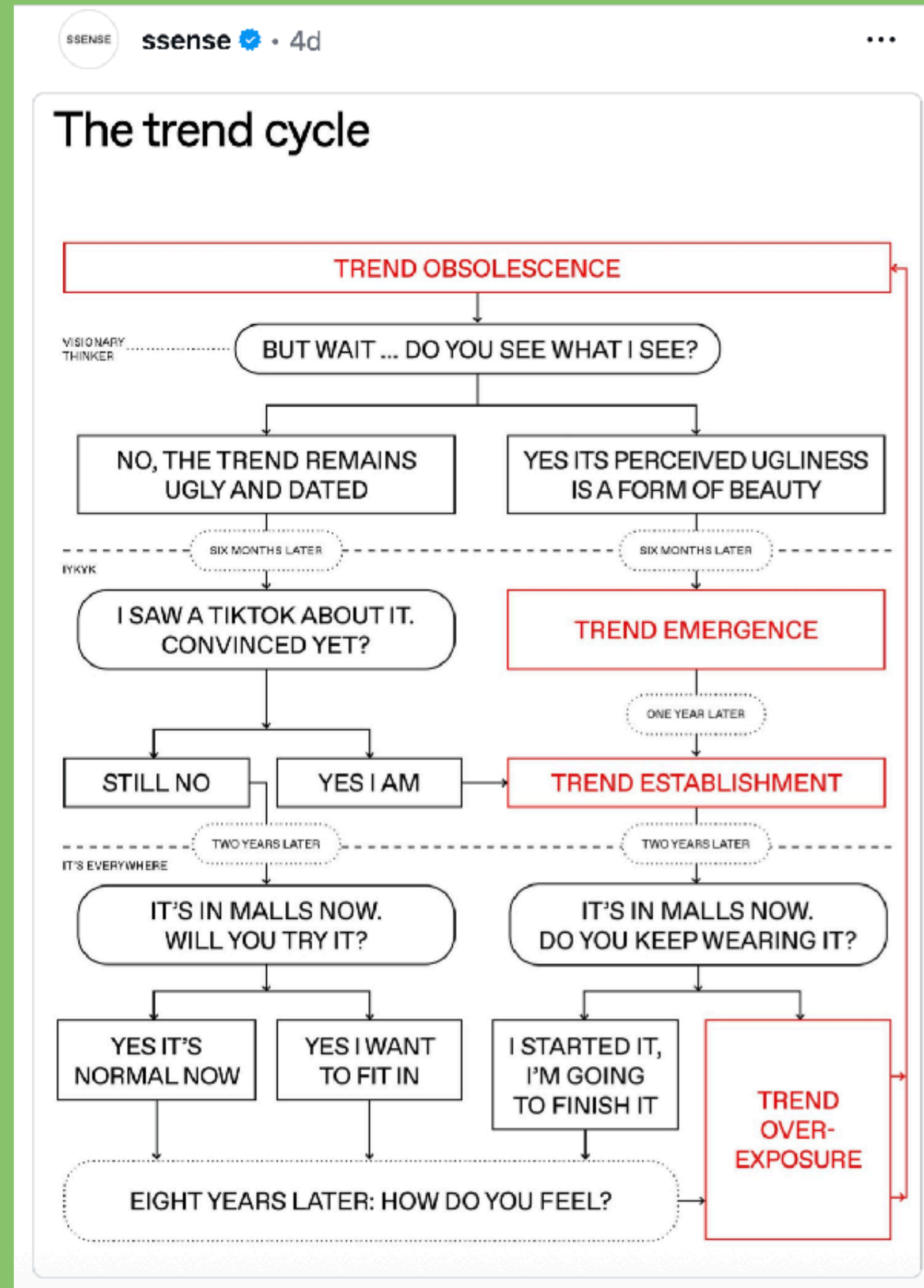


We visited coffee shops across major cities in North America and Europe and found a consistent pattern: many felt interchangeable, as if they could exist in the same place. Kyle Chayka described this phenomenon as “Airspace”, a frictionless, global aesthetic shaped by digital platforms, where spaces, brands, and experiences begin to mirror one another no matter where you are. Thomas Friedman’s idea of a “flat world” described how goods and ideas move faster across borders. What we are seeing now is the cultural version of that same effect, where difference gives way to sameness.

THE COFFEE SHOP EXPERIMENT



HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW



The Diffusion of Innovation causes a rapidly accelerating trend cycle. What gains attention today is widely adopted by tomorrow and exhausted shortly after. As ideas spread faster, their lifespan shrinks. The result is a constant loop of emergence, saturation, and replacement.

A COPY OF A COPY?

Originality In The New Trend Cycle

The carousel consists of five Instagram posts from the account 'fashionbrandcompany', all posted 17 hours ago. Each post has 6.8K likes, 192 comments, and 33 shares. The posts are as follows:

- Post 1:** A collection of six clothing items (short-sleeved and long-sleeved shirts) featuring various geometric patterns. Text: "WE COPIED THE COPYCATS".
- Post 2:** A close-up photograph of a person wearing a black and white horizontally striped shirt with a complex geometric pattern overlaid. Text: "FBC 2025".
- Post 3:** A long-sleeved black and white striped shirt with a geometric pattern. Text: "FBC 2025". Below the shirt are two smaller images: a woman in a blue and white striped crop top and bikini, and a woman in a black and white striped long-sleeved shirt. Captions for these images are "SIMON MILLER" and "NO. 6 STORE".
- Post 4:** Text-based post. Text: "Looks like we accidentally became a reference image this season. We've been doing dozens of variations of this design over the past 6 years (see last slide). We've made direct copies of vintage pieces ourselves and are generally pretty forgiving of other brands' lookalikes, but this one felt a little too familiar. We aren't angry, just inspired! So we made exact copies of the copies. Both are now available as pre-orders (and for cheaper too!)"
- Post 5:** Text-based post. Text: "Now we're wondering, are we the copycats? **Is this how trends work?** Will either brand send a cease and desist? Who's in the right or wrong, or are we all just fashion idiots? Chime in below."

RULES FOR MODERN BRANDS

The brands that win won't be the most visible, they'll be the most recognizable

Rules For Modern Brands

Specificity over relatability

- Clear perspective
- Not designed for everyone

Consistency over moments

- Not one viral post
- A repeatable, recognizable identity

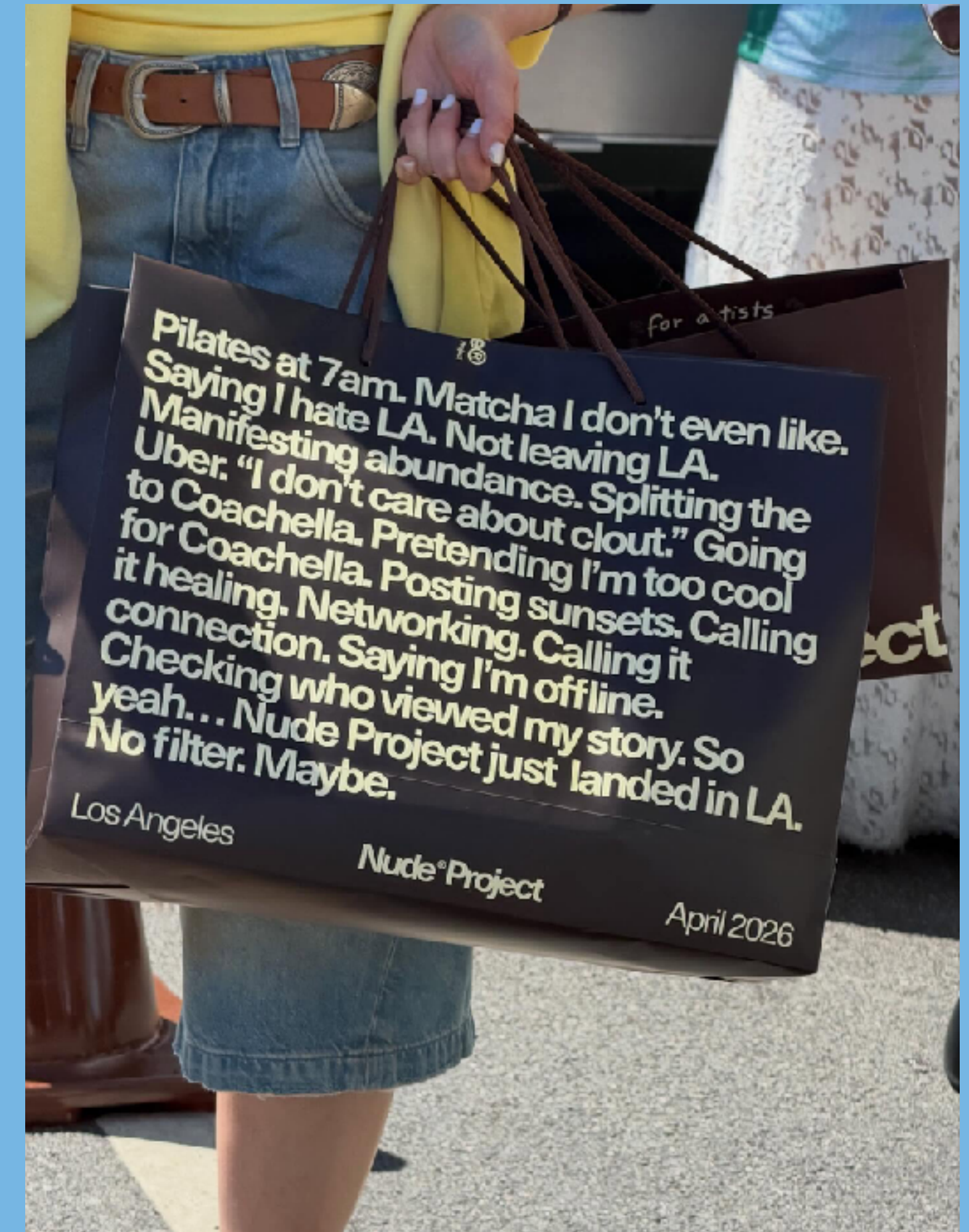
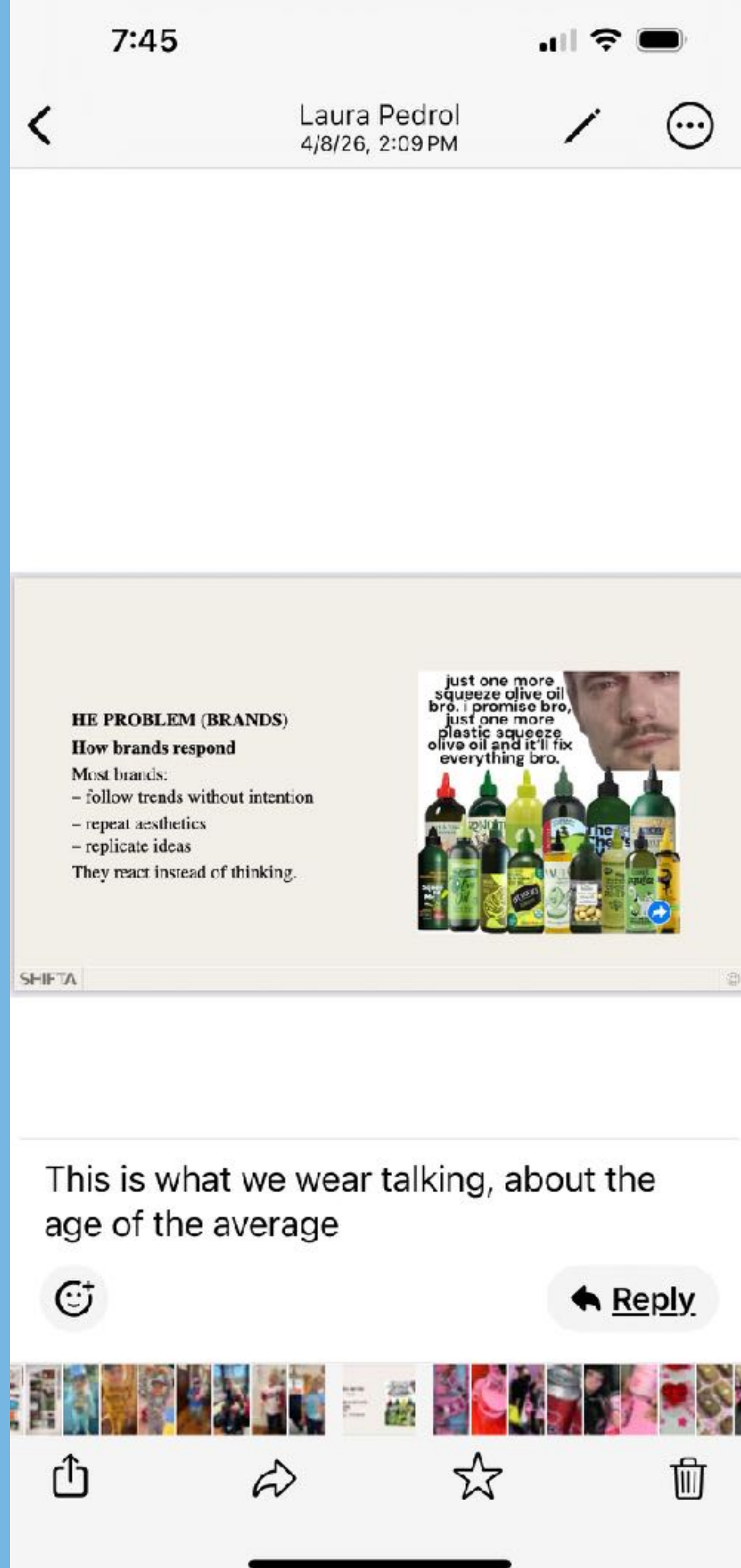
Culture over content

- Build a world
- Not just something to scroll past
- Easy for people to incorporate into their life



THE AGE OF AVERAGE

Some Influencers & Brands Standout and are Reshaping Culture



STARFACE

From Insecurity to Identity

CASE STUDY 1



What They Did

- Made acne patches **bright, visible, and playful**
- Turned treatment into an **accessory**
- Designed for social visibility

Why it works:

- Instantly **recognizable**
- Performs visually on social
- invites **participation**
- The product becomes marketing



GOOD GIRL SNACKS

Snacking for Hot Girls

What They Did

- Unique stand out marketing
- Took an unexpected snack and made it cool
- Built a lifestyle around the niche product

Why it works:

- Clear tone and point of view
- Builds identity beyond the product
- Invites participation through humor and storytelling



SONA COSMETICS

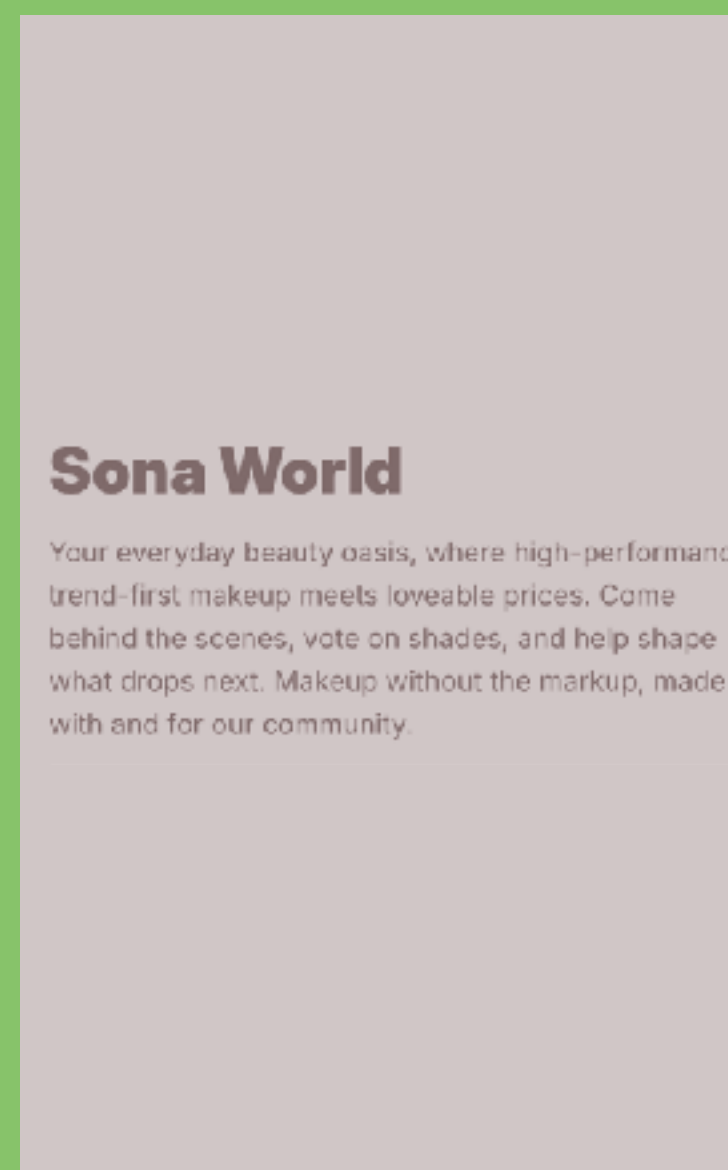
Built for Community

What They Did

- Built brand around community
- Activated locally through real-world presence
- Extended product into a wider brand world

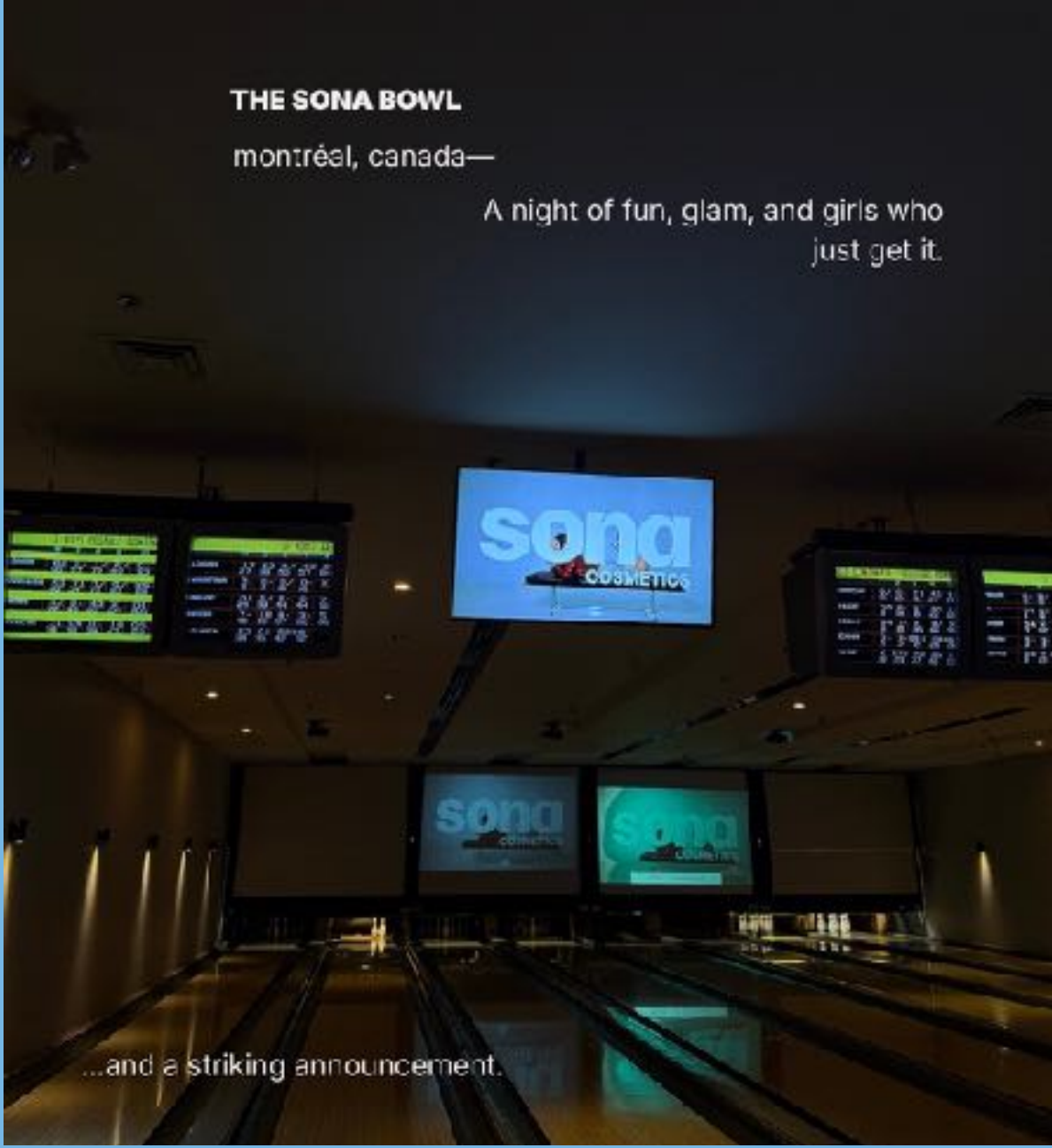
Why it works:

- Meets a real need for connection
- Builds loyalty through feeling seen
- Encourages different ways to engage with the brand



SONA COSMETICS

Built for Community



THE SONA BOWL
montréal, canada—

A night of fun, glam, and girls who just get it.

...and a striking announcement.



THE PURPOSE

We brought our girls together for a girls night out to celebrate connection and what happens when beauty meets real life.



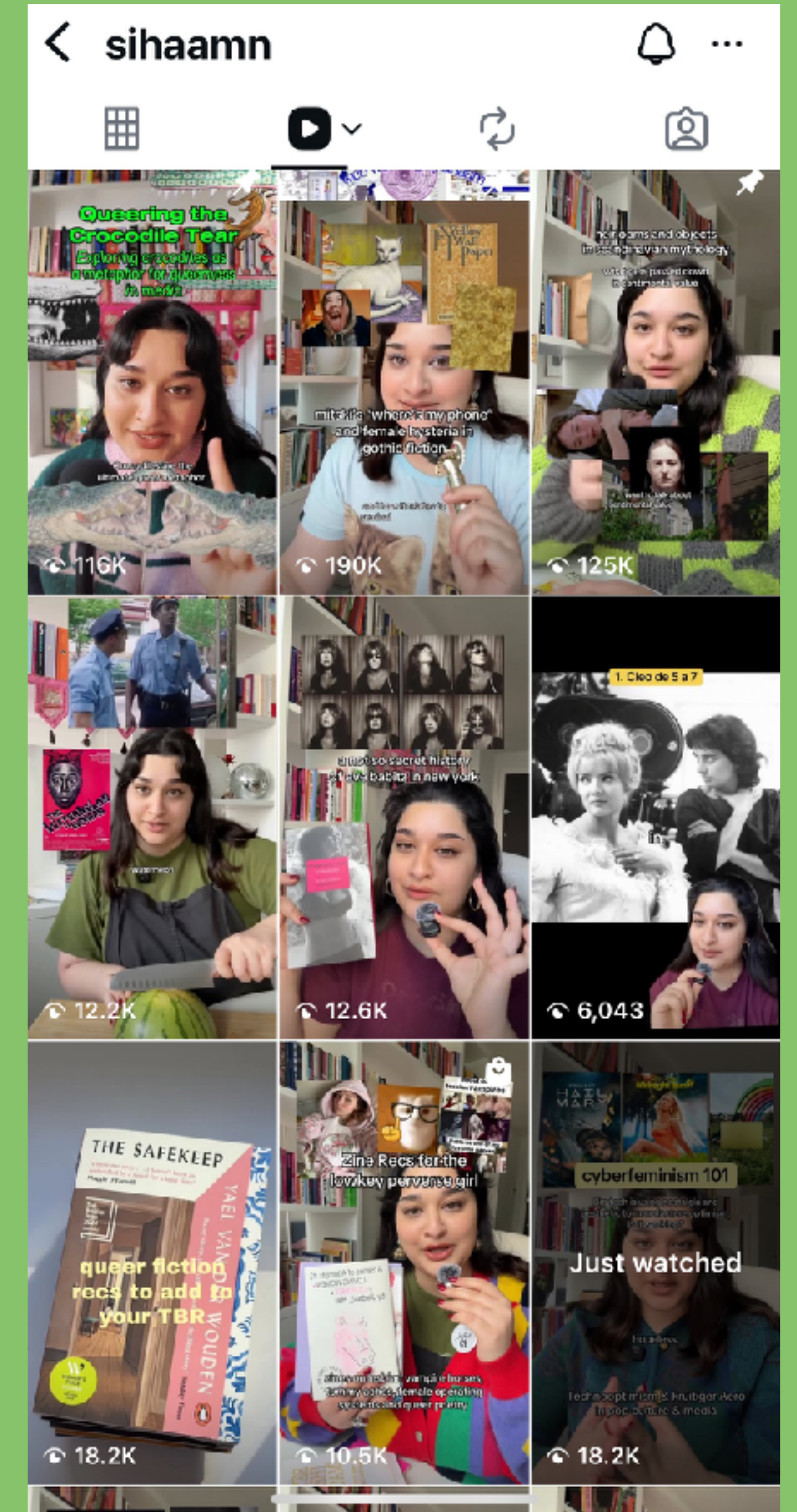
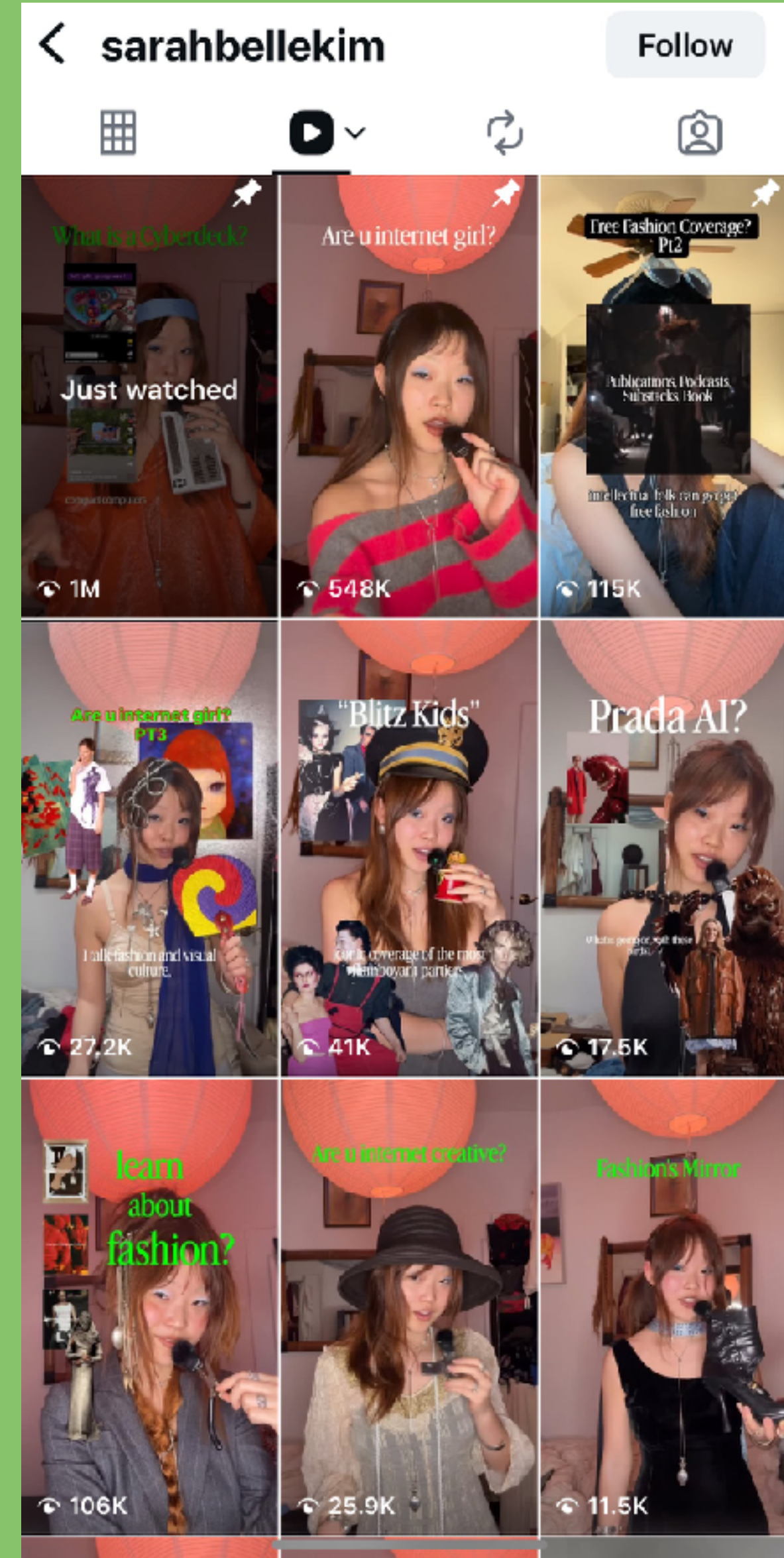
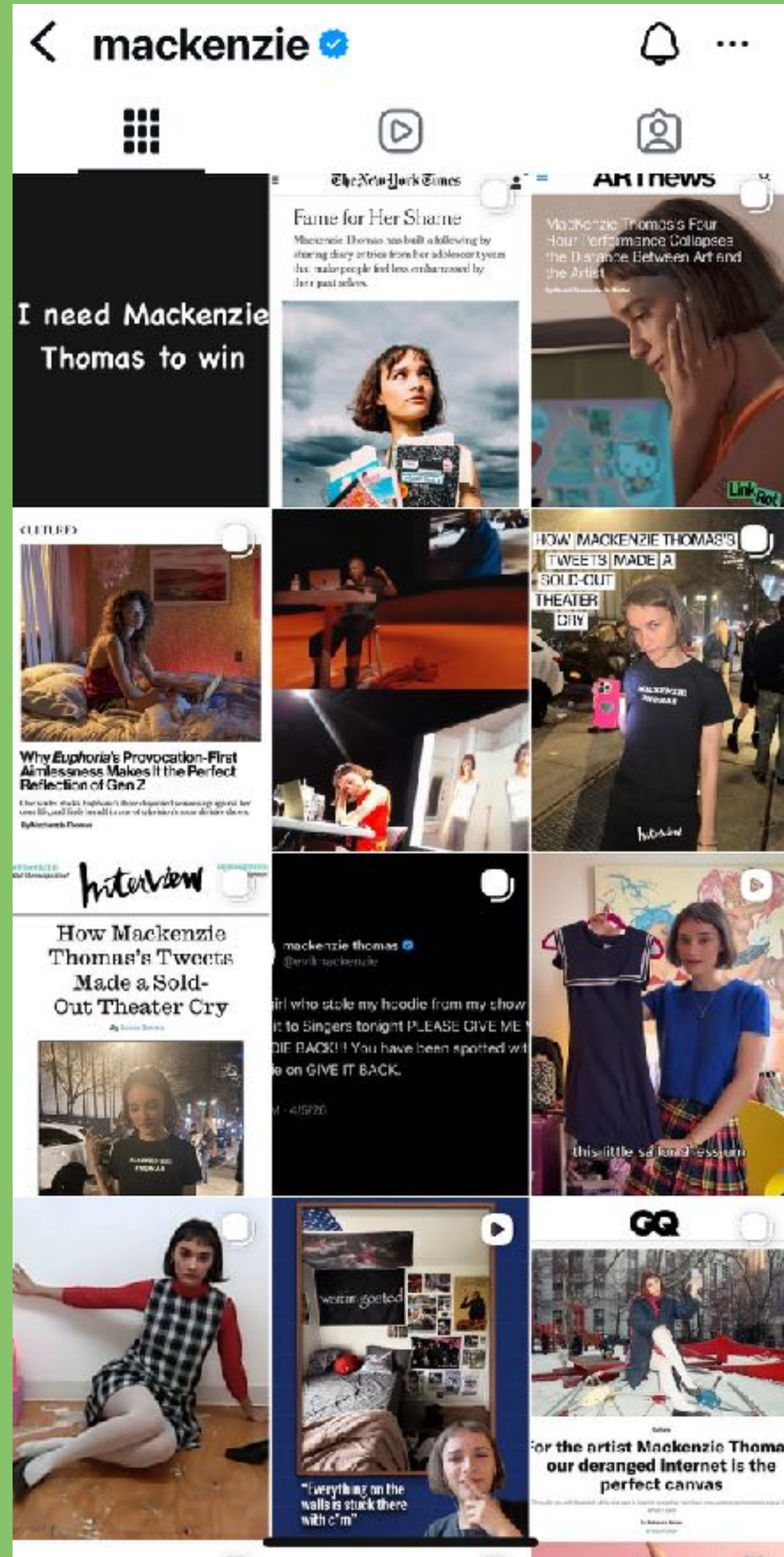
—it was our community coming together, exactly how sona world was meant to be experienced.



THE ENERGY



NOT AVERAGE: WHEN AUTHENTICITY IS THE LUXURY





Here's what's capturing attention on social, driving participation, and building loyalty.

IMMERSIVENESS

THE TV-IFICATION OF SOCIAL

Series are outworking one-off viral hits.

Narratives have gotten longer.

UGC has shifted towards familiar faces, partners, and creator ownership.

EGC has formed deeper, authentic brand connections.

BOLD VOICES

DEFINED POINTS OF VIEW

A younger generation of digital natives demand to know where things stand.

Long-form is reclaiming a place for nuance.

Audiences are drawn to brands with bold voices, clear positions, and strong convictions.

BRAND WORLDS

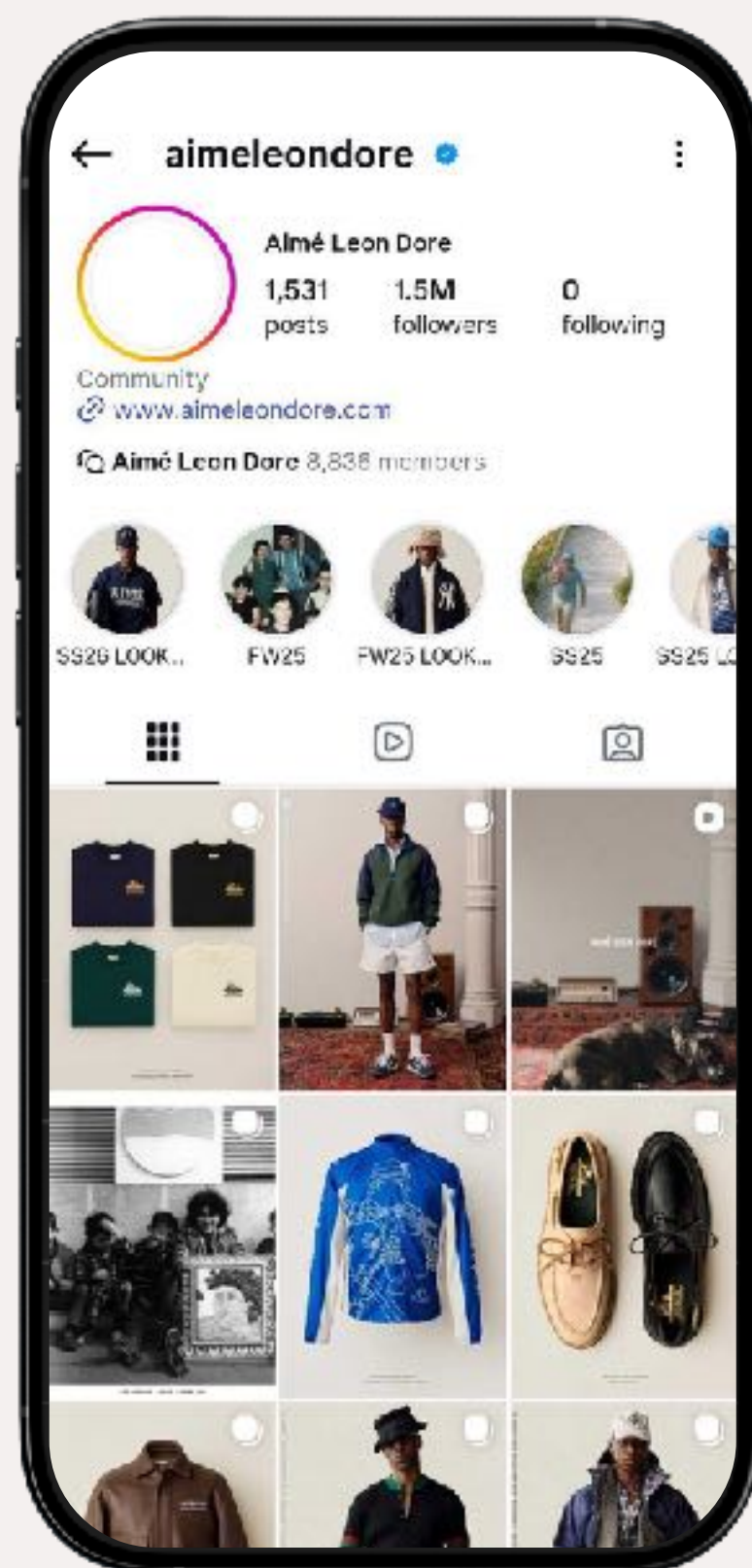
BLUR THE LINES BETWEEN IRL & DIGITAL

The most successful brands on social are creating worlds that seamlessly flow between the real and the online.

Social is where every moment is amplified to the highest degree.

For brands, it's about more than interrupting. **It's about returning attention and building loyalty + closeness.**

REFERENCE POINTS WHERE WE SEE SUCCESS.



1. A Return to Cinematic

Vertical fatigue is real. The TikTok-ification of content has created a hunger for depth, pacing, and horizontal storytelling.

Example:

[Aimé Leon Dore](#)

While some fashion brands fight for 3 seconds of attention with fast cuts, Aimé Leon Dore produces **slow, atmospheric short films that feel like silent cinema**. Their campaigns (often featuring real people in NY) are shot horizontally, color-graded like film, and refuse to rush. The cool confidence of their brand world is unmistakable.



2. Statement-Core Worlds

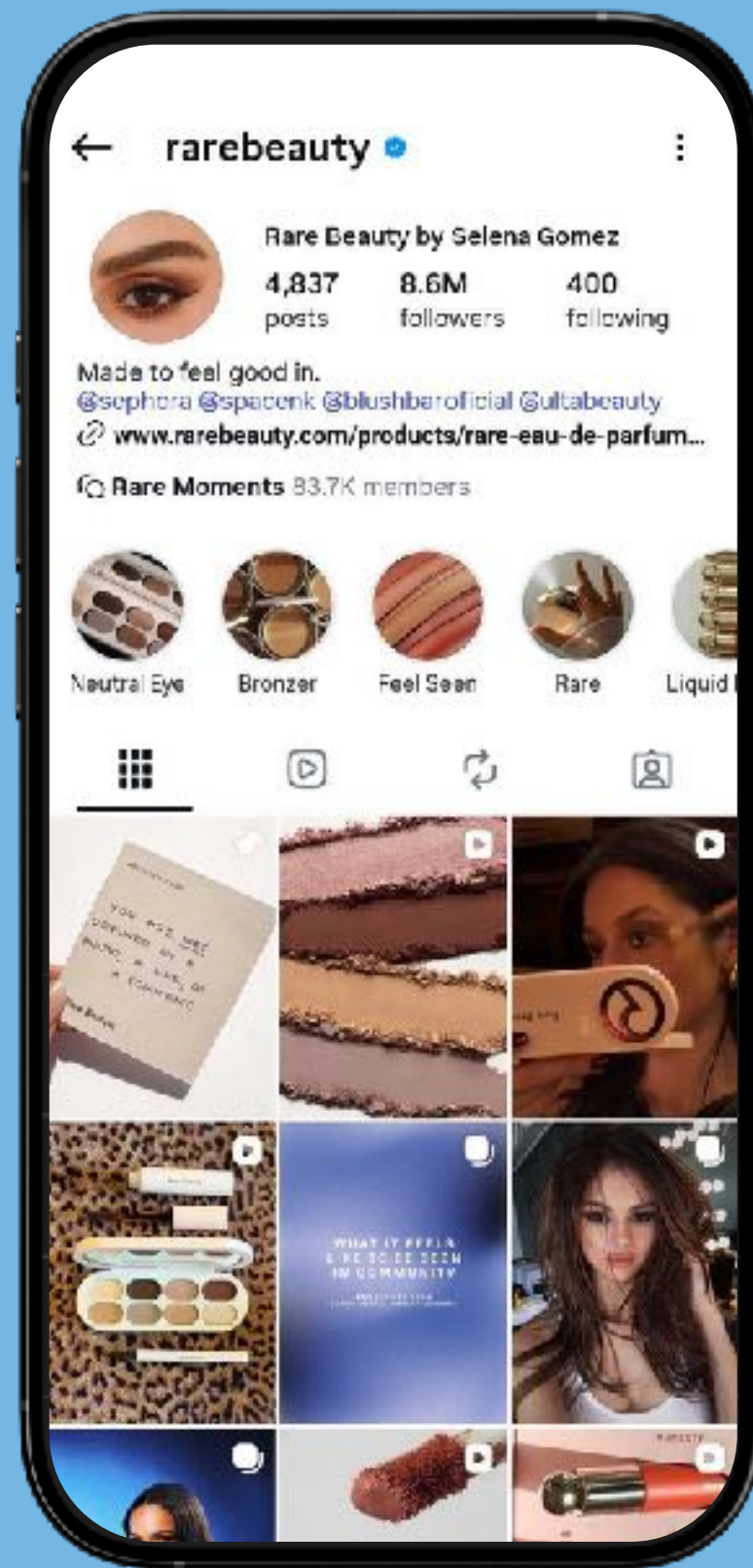
Borrowed aesthetics are dead. Brands must build their own distinct visual and verbal languages that stand out across platforms

Example:

[Vacation Inc.](#)

They built a fictional 1980s leisure corp. Every touchpoint, from their “Executive Director of Poolside Relations” to their distinct corporate-synth music, and receipt fonts builds an immersive world. **When you tap their content, you’re buying a ticket to their specific version of retro reality.**

REFERENCE POINTS WHERE WE SEE SUCCESS.

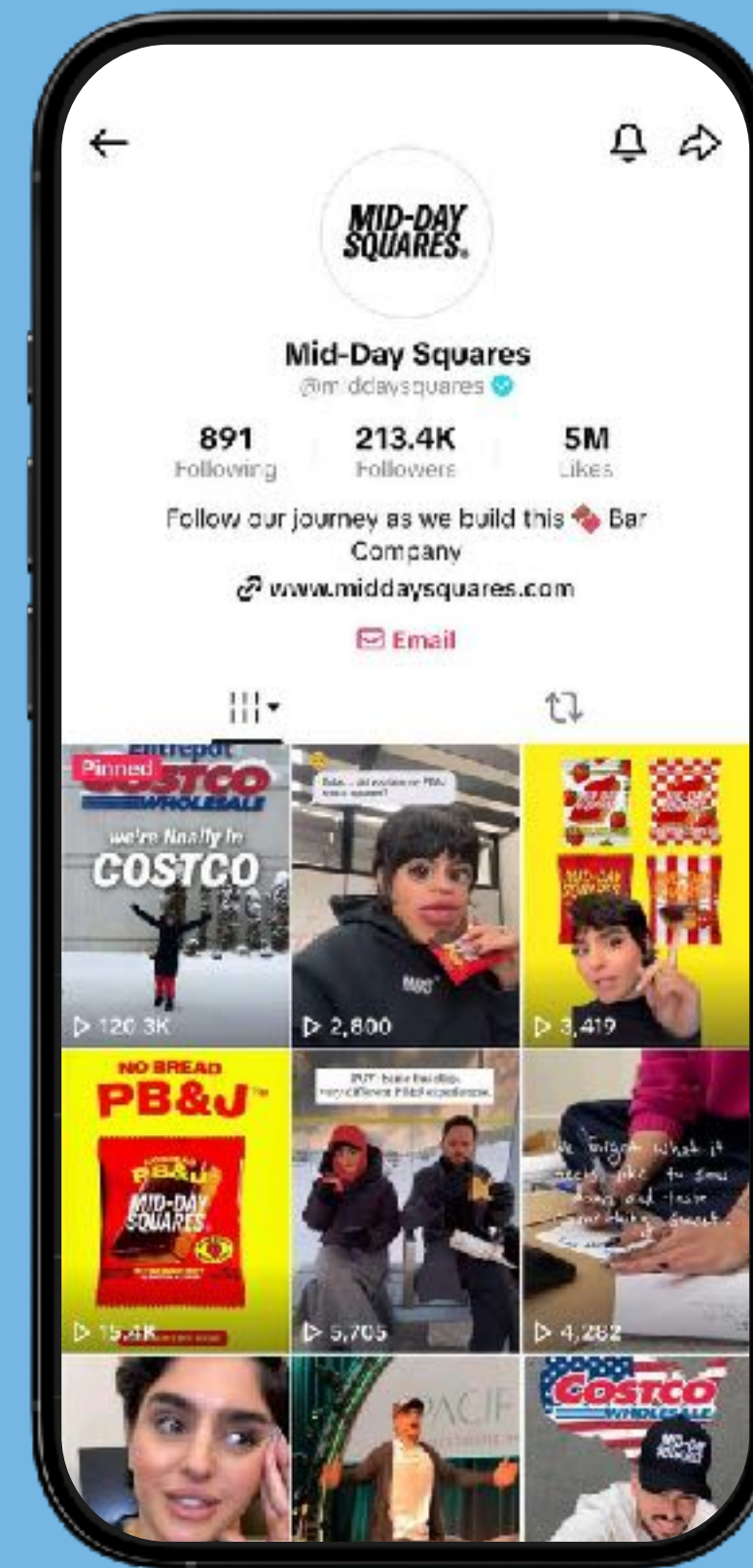


3. Emotionally Literate

Hype is being replaced by EQ. The most potent brands in 2026 will be those that can read the emotional room, offering comfort, wit, or genuine intelligence with a point of view.

Example: Rare Beauty

In a beauty industry obsession with fixing flaws, Rare Beauty built a billion-dollar empire by positioning itself with **empathy**. Their social strategy prioritizes **mental health resources and down days** over constant, high-glam perfection. They understand that for the modern consumer, the product is not a mask for concealment, but a tool for self-alignment.



4. The Human Moat

As AI content floods feeds we need humans to create connection. Unfiltered humanity becomes the antidote.

Examples:

Mid-Day Squares & Good Girl Snacks Both treat their content less like a corporation and more like a **reality show**. Mid-Day Squares operates like a **family soap opera**, documenting company meltdowns with uncomfortable intimacy. Good Girl Snacks (creators of Hot Girl Pickles) operates like an **unhinged group chat**, reposting hate comments and filming chaotic car vlogs. You can duplicate a product, but you cannot duplicate a dynamic.

WHAT PEOPLE ARE RESPONDING TO

Across platforms, industries, and audience types, a consistent pattern is emerging.

What's driving attention instead:

Micro-communities meet Macro Behaviors

Identity is forming in smaller, more specific spaces: **niche communities, recurring series, and familiar faces.**

Audiences are leaning into immersiveness and defined points of view.

A digital backlash has led to a ***demand for depth*** and a yearning for human stories and human voices.

Recognizability Over Frequency

Brands that feel the same across formats outperform brands that simply post more. ***Consistency is no longer about cadence; it's about coherence.***

Brands can't be static, but they should feel familiar.

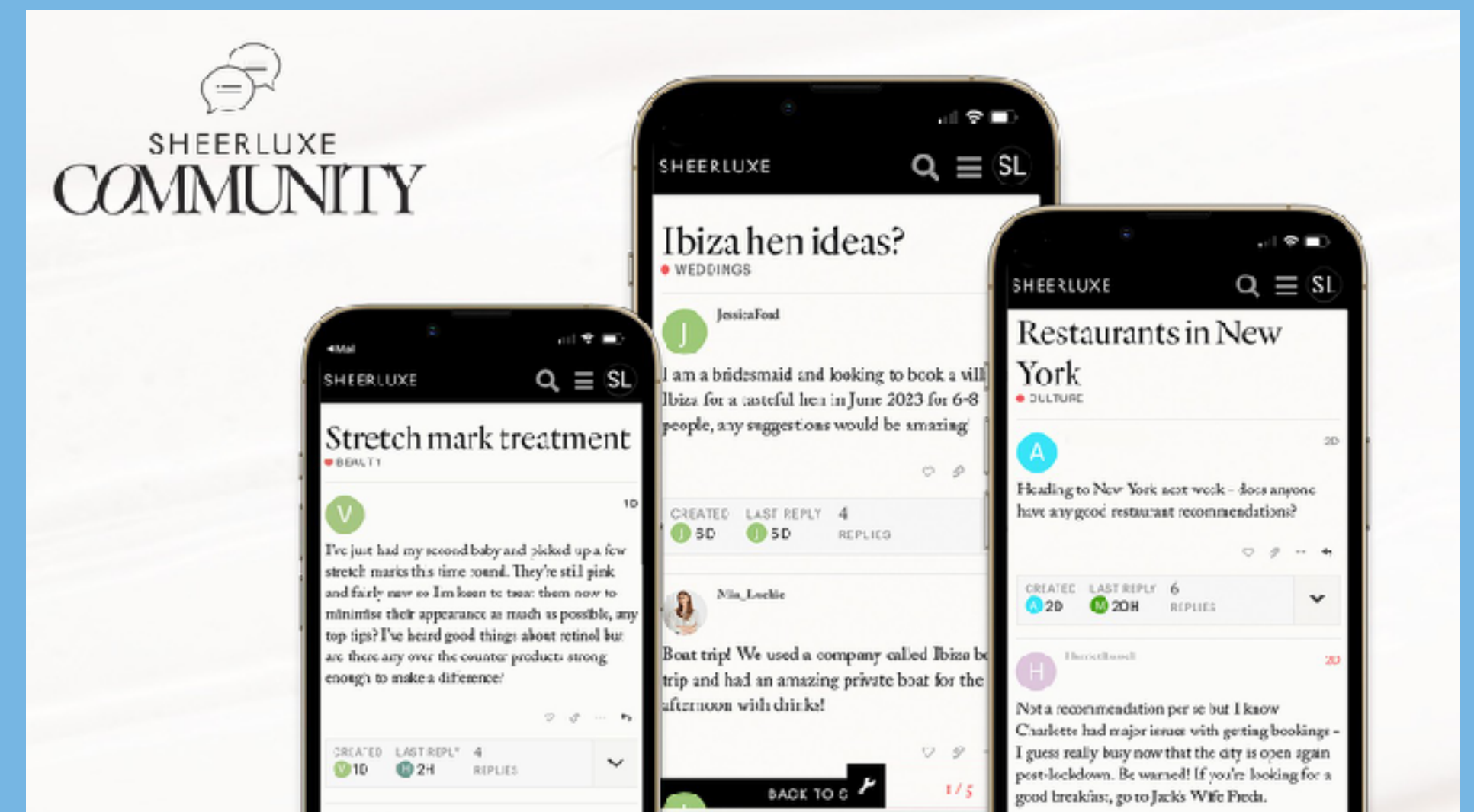
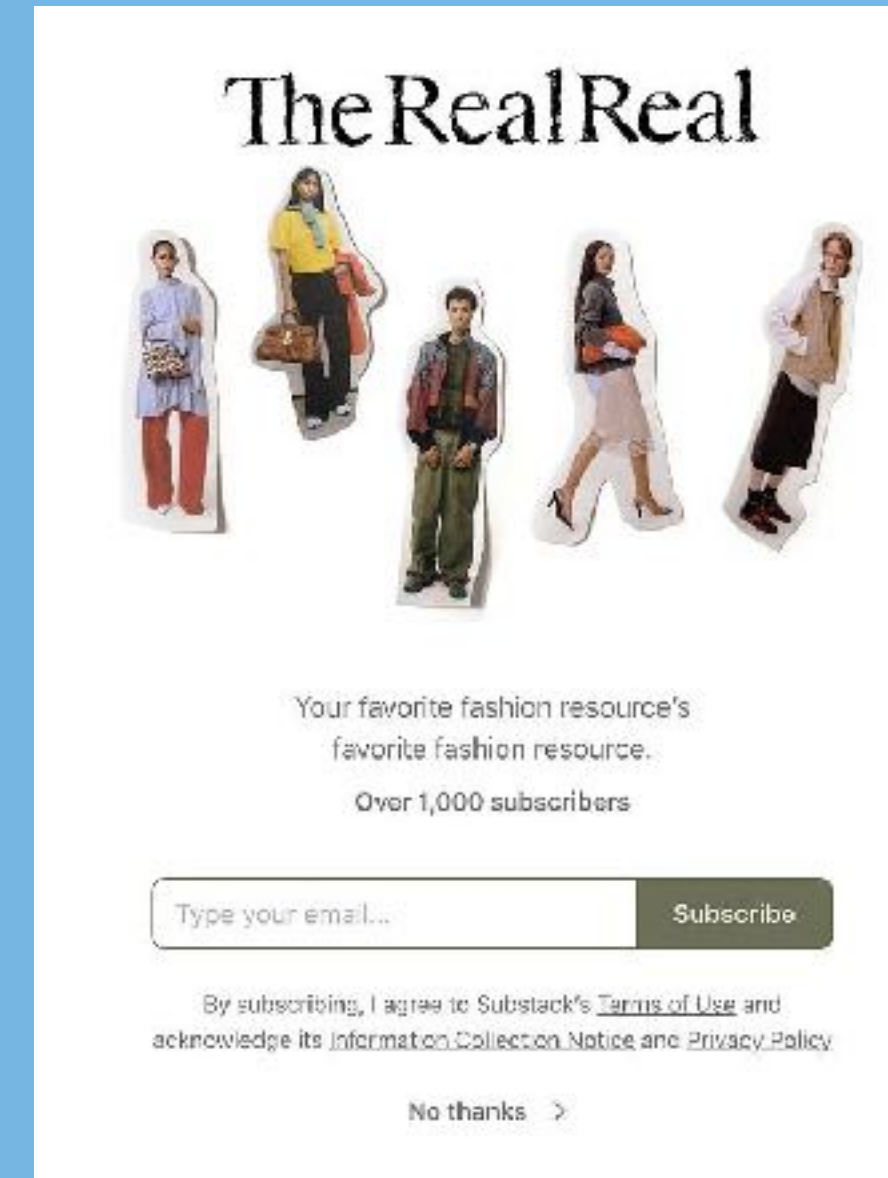
FROM AUDIENCE TO COMMUNITY

Reach is easy to buy. Trust is not.

As performance marketing loses impact, brands are shifting toward community. Not as an audience to capture, but as a group to belong to.

Community filters for the right people. It creates shared context, where brands do not need to explain themselves. The value is not just attention, but connection.

Build community from in person events like run clubs or online communities like Discord.



61 %

Of Gen Z say they feel closer to online creators than traditional celebrities

(Morning Consult)

1 IN 3

Gen Alpha users say a streamer “feels like a friend”

(GWI Youth Study)

28 %

Of Gen Alpha consumers already buy directly from brands regularly vs 13% of the general population, making them the first AI-native shopping generation

(KPMG, 2025)

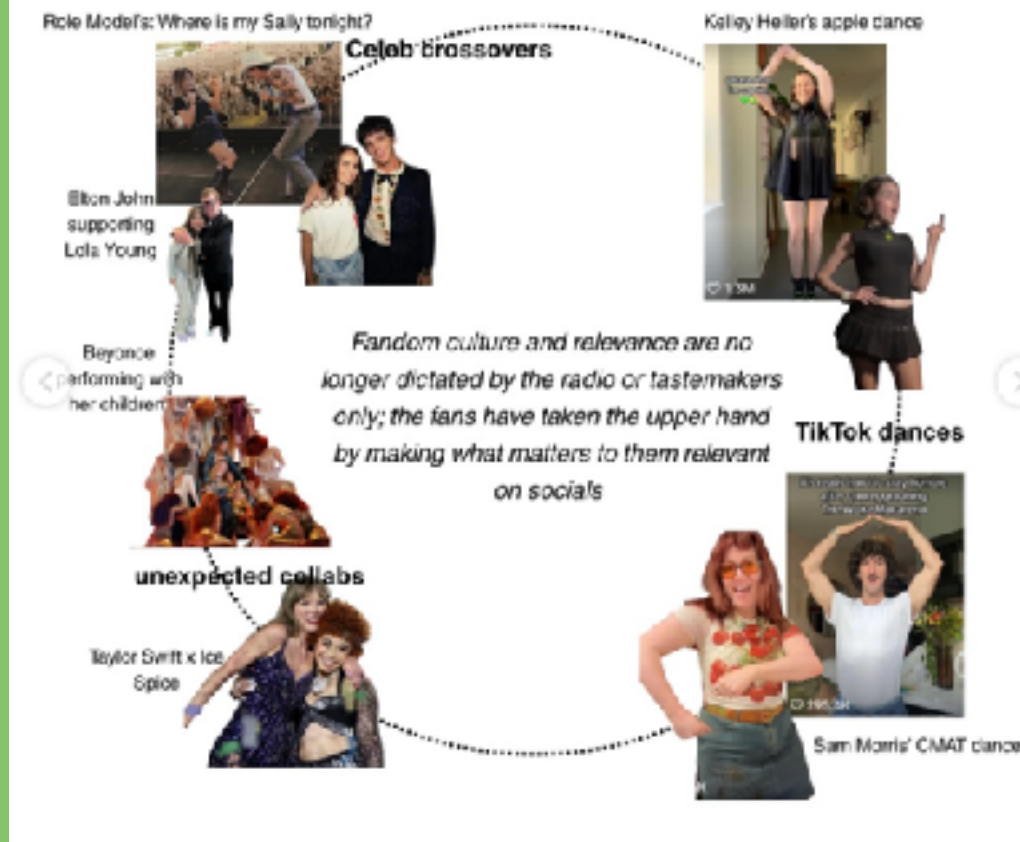
ARE YOU IN A PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIP?

A parasocial relationship is a one-sided emotional connection where audiences feel personally connected to someone-or something-that doesn't know them.

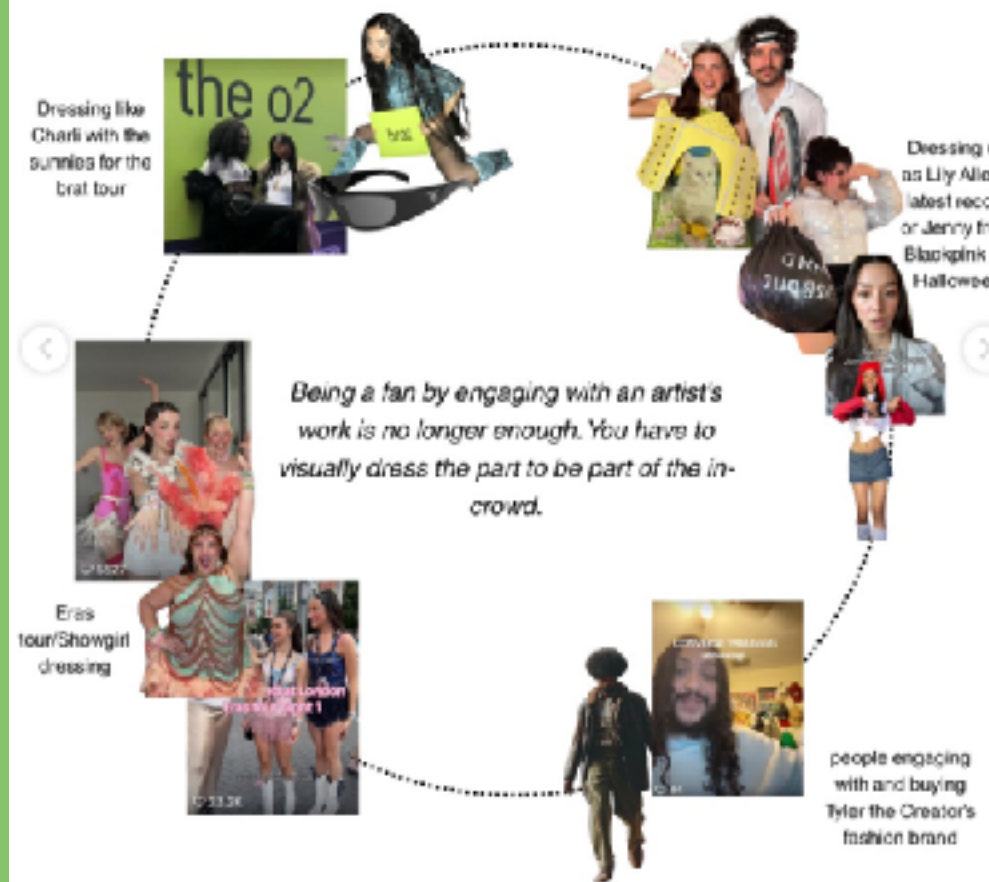
being a fan is a full time job



how fandoms dictate relevance



how fandoms have become a visual identity



NEW RULES OF THE FANDOM

We are in an era of “mass personal” media, where content feels intimate at scale. Audiences form one-sided relationships with creators, treating them like friends. This dynamic now shapes attention, trust, and influence. At the same time, fandom has evolved from passive consumption to active participation. Fans create, remix, and distribute culture themselves. Relevance is no longer dictated top-down. It is built collectively.

THE GENERATIONS AS PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS



Each generation approaches fandoms differently. Millennials invest emotionally, treating creators as genuine connections, with real disappointment when that feeling didn't hold up. Gen Z understands the dynamic is transactional, but still participate, using irony, "receipts", and cancel culture as part of how they engage. Gen Alpha is growing up inside the system, where there is no distinction between creator and audience and buying from people you watch is normal behavior.

MILLENNIALS	1981 - 1996
GEN Z	1997 - 2012
GEN ALPHA	2013–2024

IN CONCLUSION

Algorithm-driven systems have reshaped how brands are built and consumed. By rewarding familiarity, repetition, and proven formats, these systems have created a form of convergence across industries, from coffee shops to fashion to digital content. What appears as a shared aesthetic is not coincidence, but the natural outcome of optimization. In this environment, authenticity has shifted from identity to performance, often resulting in brands that feel interchangeable despite intentions to stand out.



Contact

Autumn Zimmerman
MADE Trends

Email: autumn@madetrends.com

Web: madetrends.com

Social: @madetrends

Web: tacosandtrends.com

Social: @TACOSNTRENDS

Daphne Barron
Serotina Media

Email: daphne@serotinamedia.com

Web: serotinamedia.com

Social: @serotinamedia

Lauren Mezzaluna
Sona Cosmetics

LinkedIn: linkedin.com

Web: sonacosmetics.ca

Social: @sonacosmetics.ca

THANK YOU