



RAPTIVE INSIGHTS

The Confirmation Economy

Why trusted creators are becoming essential to brand growth

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Consumers are validating before they act

For years, marketers treated reach as a shortcut for influence. That shortcut is breaking. In an AI-shaped, platform-fragmented media environment, consumers do not just discover information. They compare it, test it, and look for trusted signals before they decide.

Raptive defines this shift as the Confirmation Economy: a new era of influence where trust is built through multiple sources, useful context, and recognizable voices.

Trusted creator ecosystems are not merely channels for attention. They are trusted environments where audiences compare options, solve practical problems, and make more confident choices.

8.8%

rely exclusively on the top search result

48.6%

treat search as a multi-step process

37.2%

trust information only after multiple sources agree

CORE THESIS

The next era of creator strategy will not be won by reach alone. It will be won by trusted creator ecosystems that help consumers validate information, build confidence, and make decisions with greater certainty.

EVIDENCE BASE

Raptive sees both sides of the market shift

The Confirmation Economy draws from two Raptive research streams: a national consumer study on search behavior and trust, and a creator survey focused on spring and summer content strategy. Together, they show a powerful two-sided shift: consumers are cross-checking information, and creators are building the useful, owned, repeatable experiences that make that validation possible.

Because Raptive works across thousands of independent creator and publisher businesses, the company has a unique view into both sides of this shift: how consumers are changing the way they discover and validate information, and how creators are adapting their content, channels, and audience relationships in response.

Research input	Sample / source	What it helps explain
Raptive Search Behavior Survey	1,030 U.S. adults; national consumer research fielded January 2026	How people search, cross-check, use AI and social platforms, and decide which sources to trust
Raptive Edge Creator Survey	63 creator responses; fielded February 18, 2026 to March 9, 2026	How creators plan content, formats, engagement strategies, and business priorities around utility and audience loyalty
IAB 2025 Creator Economy Ad Spend & Strategy Report	Supporting market context	Broader industry context on creator advertising investment and strategy

WHAT CONNECTS THE DATA

Consumers want trusted evidence, not just answers. Creators are responding by building useful content, owned channels, and repeat audience relationships that help people feel confident before they act.

CONSUMER DISCOVERY

The end of the single click

Raptive's 2026 Search Behavior Survey shows that the traditional search-and-click model is giving way to a multi-step, multi-platform behavior. Google remains a major front door, but consumers increasingly cross-check information across websites, AI tools, social platforms, and known resources before they are satisfied.

71.5%

name Google as the front door for search

52.5%

prefer to stay on the platform where they searched

81%+

report being happy with their search results

WHAT THIS CHANGES

- The top result no longer owns the entire journey. Only 8.8% of consumers say they rely solely on the top search result.
- Search is becoming a process, not a destination. Nearly half of consumers, 48.6%, are not satisfied with the first answer and use a second method or platform.
- Consensus creates trust. The largest group, 37.2%, says they trust information once multiple sources say the same thing.
- Gen X shows the strongest verification mindset. This cohort reports the highest double-checking rate at 54.5%.

For brands, the opportunity is clear: credible creator environments can influence the validation layer, the moment when consumers are deciding what is useful, trustworthy, and worth acting on.

CREATOR STRATEGY

Creators are building for utility, loyalty, and owned engagement

The Raptive Edge Creator Survey included 63 creator responses about spring and summer content plans. The findings show creators leaning into practical value, repeat engagement, and owned distribution – the same conditions that help audiences validate information and build trust over time.



SIGNALS FROM THE EDGE SURVEY

Signal	Top finding	Strategic read
Audience need	57% selected saving time / making life easier	Creators are prioritizing utility and everyday problem-solving.
Rising audience priority	51% selected practical solutions; 46% selected budget/value guidance	Audiences are seeking confidence, efficiency, and value.
Engagement move	54% selected personal stories; 51% selected series content	Trust is built through consistency and personal connection.
Business priority	40% named audience growth; 21% named site improvements	Creators are balancing growth with stronger owned foundations.

THE FRAMEWORK

The Confirmation Economy model

The Confirmation Economy explains how influence is built when people no longer rely on a single source before acting. The model shows why trusted creator ecosystems matter now: they build relationship depth beyond reach, create owned environments beyond rented attention, deliver utility beyond passive engagement, and serve as trusted confirmation points across the decision journey.

Shift	From	To	Why it matters
1. Relationship	Reach	Relationship depth	Audiences return to sources that consistently help them make better decisions
2. Distribution	Rented attention	Owned environments	Websites, newsletters, and direct channels create stable, high-trust surfaces
3. Content value	Passive engagement	Utility-driven content	Practical guidance reduces uncertainty and makes content worth revisiting
4. Decision journey	Single-channel discovery	Multi-source validation	Consumers seek confirmation across multiple sources before they act

INNOVATION LENS

The innovation is a new way to plan creator investment, not as a reach buy, but as trust infrastructure. In the Confirmation Economy, trusted creator ecosystems help brands show up where consumers validate what to believe, what to buy, and who to trust, compounding credibility, context, and confidence in ways impressions alone cannot.

STRUCTURAL SHIFTS

How trust compounds beyond a single impression

1

Relationship depth over reach

Reach can introduce a brand. Relationship depth helps earn belief. Creator audiences return when the content is useful, consistent, personal, and credible. The Edge survey reinforces this shift: 52% of creators are optimizing engagement around repeat visits and loyalty, while personal storytelling and recurring series are among the top engagement moves.

MARKETER IMPLICATION

Prioritize creators who can build durable relationships, not just temporary exposure. Repeat audience behavior, newsletter engagement, returning visits, and trusted voice should become core planning signals.

2

Owned environments over rented attention

Owned creator environments are becoming more important as search, social, and AI discovery fragment. In the Edge survey, 90% of creators said they will rely on newsletters/email and 83% will rely on long-form website content. These channels create a durable trust base that is less dependent on a single platform algorithm.

MARKETER IMPLICATION

Invest where creator trust compounds: websites, newsletters, evergreen guides, and direct audience channels. These environments are especially valuable when consumers are comparing, validating, and seeking context.

The behaviors changing how influence gets built

3

Utility-driven content over passive engagement

The creator content that matters most in the Confirmation Economy is practical, useful, and decision-supportive. In the Edge survey, 57% of creators said they expect to help audiences save time or make life easier, and 51% said audiences will care more about practical solutions than they did in the past six months.

This utility shows up as quick wins, how-tos, budget guidance, planning tools, personal recommendations, evergreen explainers, and seasonal guides. These formats reduce uncertainty and make content worth revisiting.

MARKETER IMPLICATION

Partner with creators who help audiences solve real problems. Practical formats like guides, comparisons, how-tos, recommendations, and planning tools give brands a credible role in moments when consumers are actively seeking confidence.

4

Multi-source validation over single-channel discovery

The Search Behavior Survey shows that trust is built through confirmation. People do not simply accept the first answer. They compare, cross-check, and look for recognizable voices before closing the loop. That makes trusted creators valuable not only at awareness moments, but also during consideration, comparison, and validation.

MARKETER IMPLICATION

Plan creator partnerships across the full consumer journey. The strongest creator strategies help brands show up when consumers are researching, comparing, validating, and deciding.

MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

What CMOs and CEOs should do differently

Creator partnerships should be planned as full-funnel media investments, not one-off influencer activations. Brands that continue to buy creators primarily for scale risk missing where influence is actually being built.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES FOR THE CONFIRMATION ECONOMY

Plan creators as durable media investments. Long-term creator relationships can compound audience trust over time.

Buy for trust signals, not reach alone. Evaluate audience loyalty, repeat engagement, content utility, owned distribution, and contextual credibility.

Invest in owned creator environments. Websites, newsletters, and other direct channels can provide stable, high-trust environments as platforms fragment.

Measure influence across the journey. Consider how creators drive awareness, validation, confidence, and action, not only impressions or engagement.

Prioritize creator-brand fit. Credibility depends on whether the creator's expertise, tone, audience relationship, and context align with the brand message.

CMO TAKEAWAY

The Confirmation Economy gives leaders a framework for investing where influence is being built: inside trusted creator ecosystems that help consumers move from discovery to confidence to action.

How to evaluate trust as a media signal

If trust is becoming a core media signal, creator evaluation needs to move beyond audience size. Marketers should assess the conditions that make a creator ecosystem credible, useful, and capable of influencing decisions over time.

Signal	What to look for
Relationship depth	Repeat visitation, newsletter engagement, returning audience behavior, community connection
Content utility	Evergreen guides, practical advice, problem-solving content, category expertise
Owned distribution	Creator websites, newsletters, direct audience channels, search visibility
Contextual credibility	Alignment between creator expertise, audience need, and brand/category message
Validation role	Presence in comparison, research, review, how-to, and decision-support moments

These signals help marketers understand whether creator partnerships are likely to deliver confidence, credibility, and decision support.

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

Study information

STUDY INFORMATION

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Research conducted by: Raptive Insights Team

Research components: Raptive Search Behavior Survey; Raptive Edge Creator Survey / Spring-Summer 2026 Content Outlook Survey; supporting market context from the IAB 2025 Creator Economy Ad Spend & Strategy Report.

RAPTIVE SEARCH BEHAVIOR SURVEY

Nationally representative survey of 1,030 U.S. adults, fielded January 2026, examining platform preferences, AI adoption, search intent, and trust markers across four age demographics. Source draft dated February 2, 2026.

RAPTIVE EDGE CREATOR SURVEY

Proprietary creator survey of 63 Raptive creator responses, fielded February 2026, examining seasonal content plans, audience needs, formats, engagement strategies, and business priorities.

SUPPORTING MARKET CONTEXT

IAB 2025 Creator Economy Ad Spend & Strategy Report, used to contextualize broader creator economy investment trends.

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