



# Brands that Shape Culture

The new marketing funnel to succeed in the social era

DIGITAL VOICES

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SOCIAL-FIRST WORLD <sup>01</sup>	02-06
THE NEW FRAMEWORK <sup>02</sup>	07-10
THE FRAMEWORK IN PRACTISE <sup>03</sup>	11-20
BEST IN CLASS SOCIAL FIRST BRANDS <sup>04</sup>	21-27
KEY TAKEAWAYS <sup>05</sup>	28-31

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# Contents

The traditional marketing funnel is broken. From nearly a decade of Digital Voices' industry leading global influencer campaigns, we've learned that customers today behave differently. Brands need to keep up and adapt in the era of social media. Based on extensive research and consultation with industry leaders, we're sharing a cutting-edge marketing framework for product launches and learn how to engage audiences consistently through culturally relevant influencer partnerships. We share examples from some of today's top social-first brands including Duolingo, e.l.f., and DoorDash.



Brands must succeed  
in a social-first world

**With Gen Z spending nearly 3 hours on social media every day, you need to pique curiosity, saturate social feeds, and build community to win over the “chronically online” consumer.**

In today's world, influencers and social commerce drive culture and customer demand over traditional media.

# Creators hold the cards to winning on social

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# 12x

creator content generates 12x more impressions

Brands working with creators are seeing significant uplift, with creator content generating 12x more impressions and 17x more engagements than owned content according to a recent study of Fortune 100 brands.

Source: [CreatorIQ](#)

Image: xixvodka Instagram



# The Traditional Marketing Funnel is dead.





## Customers today make purchasing decisions based on emotions, social proof, and rapid online trend cycles.

The classic marketing funnel assumes a linear customer journey. Marketers historically relied on predictable stages of awareness, consideration, and conversion, assuming that customers would follow a neat and orderly path from one to the next. Instead, as industries mature and consumer behaviors change, the funnel is outdated.

Brands need to constantly show up where their customers are, grabbing attention at every key moment of the journey and staying front of mind long after a purchase.

Section 02

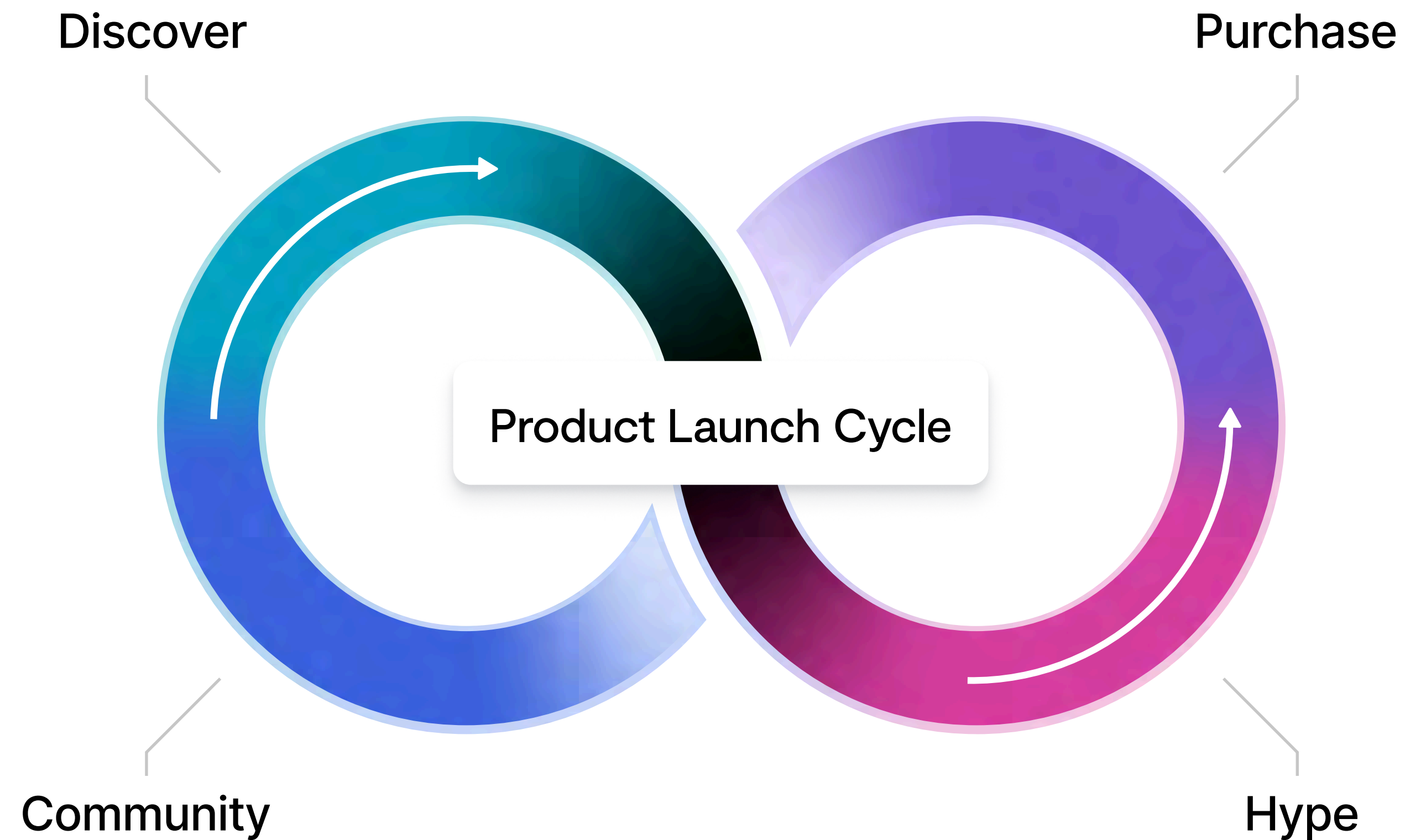
# The New Framework



There is no linear “start” and “end” point but instead a constant loop of brand communications to ensure the “purchase” stage doesn’t fall off shortly after launch.



## Digital Voices' Framework for Product Launches



### Discover

The first glimpse of the new product—whether catching their eye online or standing out on a store shelf.

### Hype

Brands need to create FOMO and make their product unmissable—flooding social media feeds, partnering with influencers, and strategically placing retargeted ads to keep the product front and center in consumers' minds.

### Purchase

After discovering the product and seeing their social feeds buzzing with influencer and UGC content, audiences are inspired to take action.

### Community

Customers convert to a community. This is the post-purchase stage where your audiences become your product ambassadors.



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Shopping behaviors have changed, but most brands are still built for a traditional funnel, keeping paid and organic teams siloed. Innovative brands integrate them to drive better performance, improve ROI, and turn creator marketing into a real growth engine.

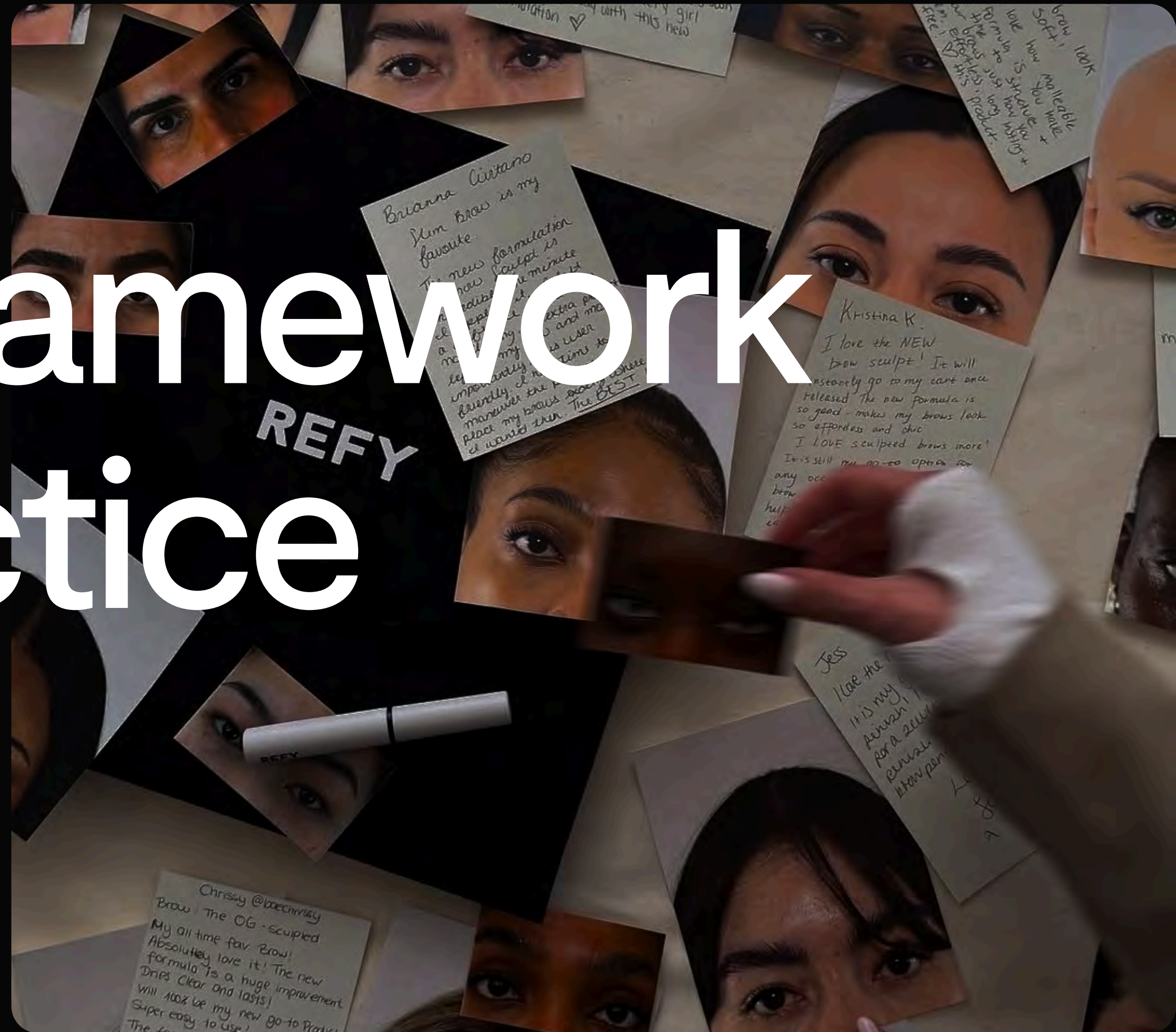
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Jamie Gutfreund

Creator Vision

Section 03

# The Framework in Practice



### What is the Discovery stage?

The Discovery phase is critical: where you introduce your product and its story to your audience for the first time. This shapes first impressions and sets the tone for how a product will be perceived. Whether online, in-store, or through word of mouth, every touchpoint matters.

### Who gets it right?

Crumbl cookies excel at discovery. From their signature cut through pink box branding, to lines outside of stores, and flooding social media feeds with reviews of weekly cookie drops there are so many routes for potential customers to discover Crumbl, even if they are not looking.

### Top Tip

Think about how can you surprise and delight your customers to make the purchase feel special in person or seamless online, Could that be free shipping? Include an offer to join their affiliate program in exchange for a gift?



# Discover

## What is the Hype stage?

The Hype stage is all about creating FOMO. Flooding social feeds with creators showcasing your product to make consumers feel like everyone is using and loving it. By positioning the product as a must-have, influencers create a sense of urgency, encouraging audiences to talk about it and amplify the buzz. Consistent media and influencer content keep the product front of mind, driving excitement.

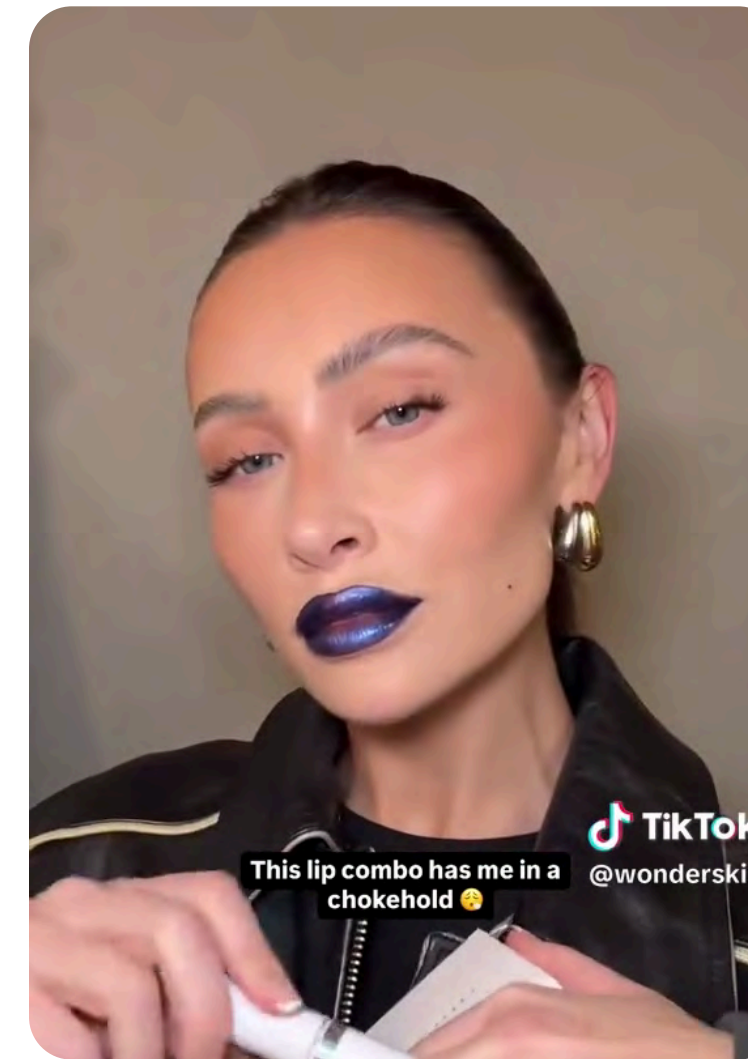
## Who gets it right?

Wonderskin burst onto the market, saturating the TikTok FYP with their blue lip stain. Capitalizing on the revolutionary lip colour that was long lasting and “move proof” - an often trending topic on the app - the product was available on TikTok shop, encouraging millions of people to buy directly on the app after watching hundreds of influencers and UGC creators trial the product in their content.

 **Hype**

## Top Tip

Do not underestimate the volume of content you need to produce and the frequency that you need to hit your target customers with to drive demand. Balance influencer content with UGC and use this content in paid advertising on social to make your product unmissable.



**WONDERSKIN**



## What is the Purchase stage?

The purchase stage is all about making buying a seamless experience. Bonus points if you can surprise and delight your customers. To convert first-time buyers to repeat customers, smart brands are either making purchasing seamless, for example through social commerce, Shopify's Shop app, listing on delivery apps, offering buy now-pay later, rewarding loyalty and offering free shipping. If the purchase is in-store, how can buying be a surprise-and-delight experience?

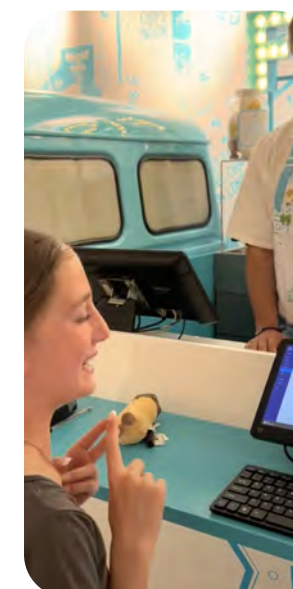
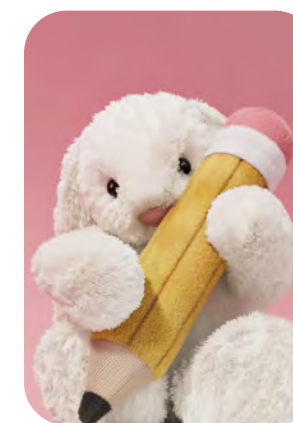
## Who gets it right?

Jellycat pop-up experiences have delighted their customers, through playful and whimsical purchase moments. Interest in the brand has grown 171% in 2024 alone, with customers sharing the pop-up ordering and packing experiences all over TikTok. For online purchases, Expedia's new Travel Shops, launched in late 2024, have allowed influencers to act as curators of travel experiences and earn affiliate benefits - adding a trust and curation element to the travel purchase experience.

# Purchase

### Top Tip

Think about how can you surprise and delight your customers to make the purchase feel special in person or seamless online, Could that be free shipping? Include an offer to join their affiliate program in exchange for a gift?



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### What is the Community stage?

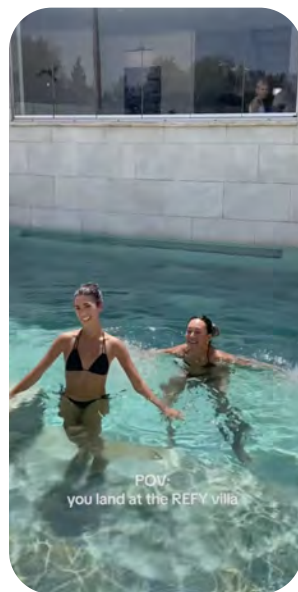
The Community stage is all about turning your customers into advocates who celebrate and recommend your product. In our social media era, word of mouth doesn't just mean verbal recommendations. Brands need to make it easy to save and share product videos and mentions with friends in private chats or on social platforms. Offline, smart brands are hosting in-person events to build a sense of community, celebrate and reward their customers.

### Who gets it right?

Refy responded to influencer trip fatigue through taking 8 members of their customer community with the founder Jess Hunt on an all-expenses paid trip to Mallorca. Nike Women's Jordans x Nordstrom partnered to host a 10 week series of "Girl Talk" sessions every Thursday evening at the Nordstrom flagship store events, including talks on women's roles in basketball and streetwear culture.

### Top Tip

Think about how you can reward, feature and celebrate your community in 2025. Reward them for their loyalty, thank those who post about or comment on your brand, offer access to exclusive brand-run events.

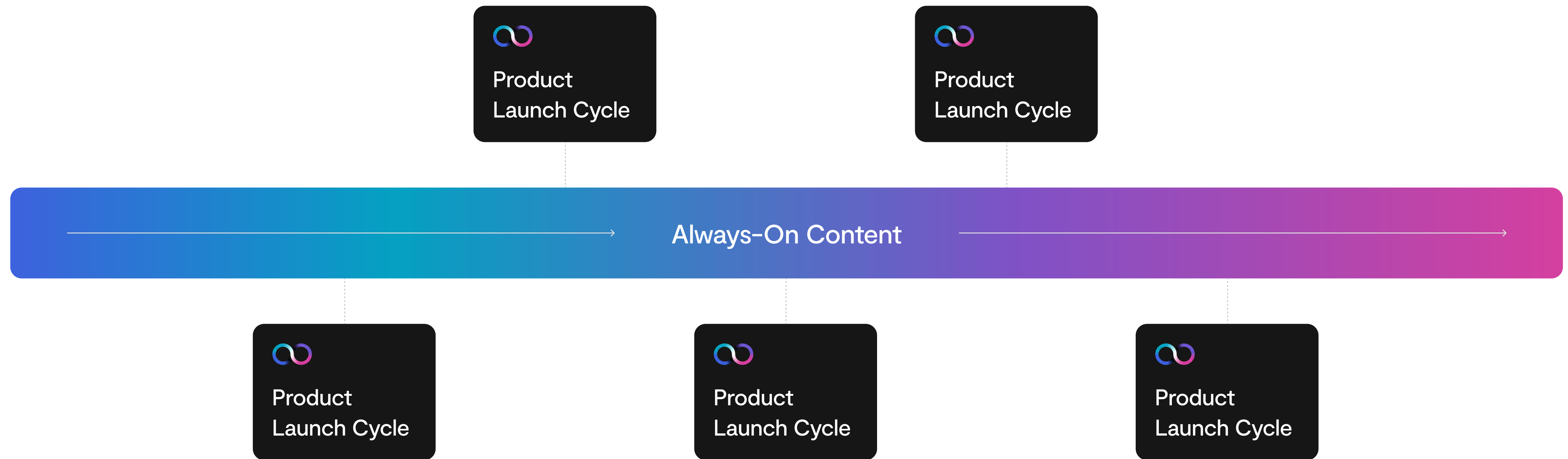


# Community

But driving obsession over  
one product isn't enough to  
build a beloved brand



To drive **brand love**, stellar brands produce always-on content based on your brand values...

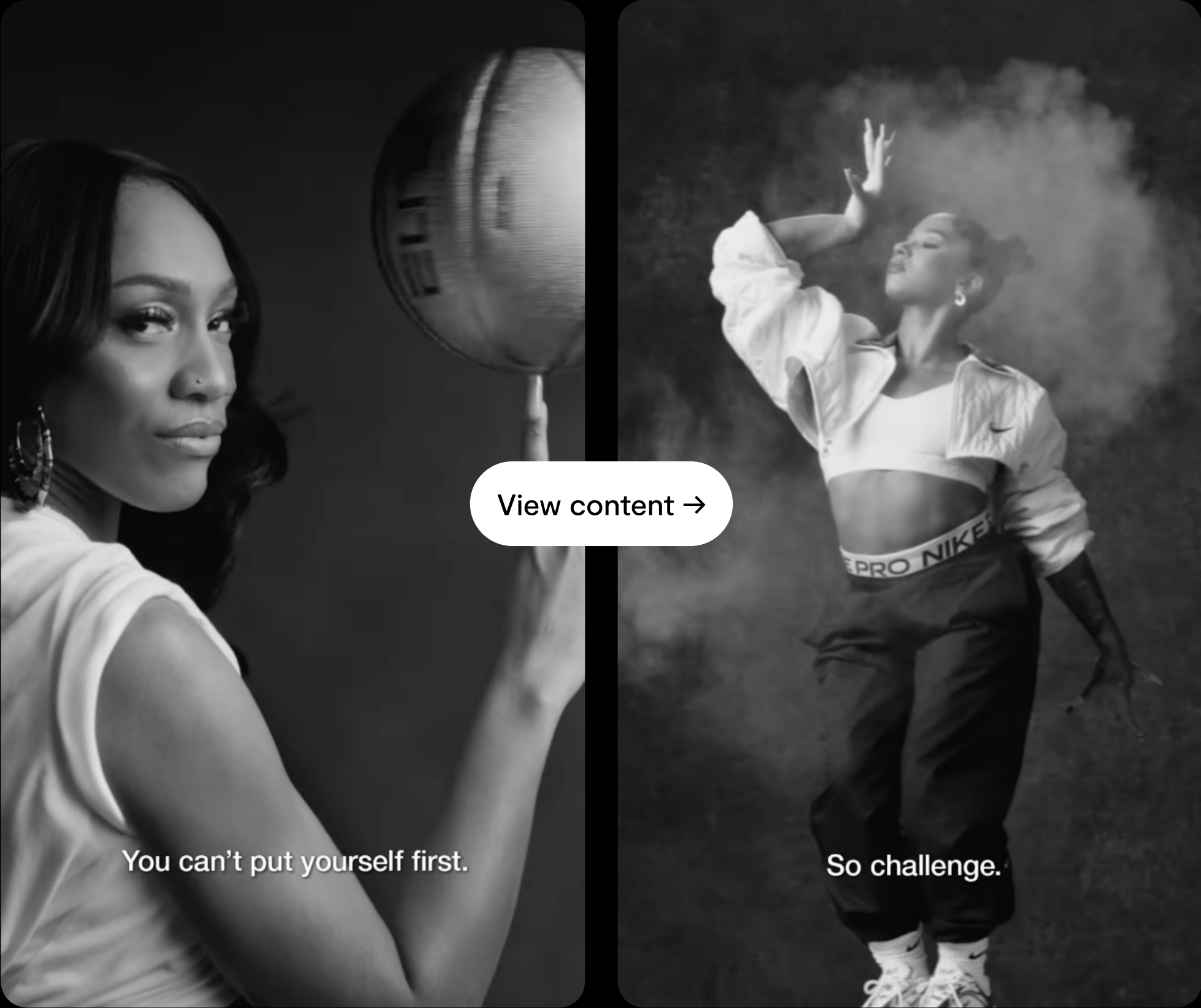


# Always on content is content produced for social media – tailored to your brand values.

Always on content can be on owned social channels, brand-produced, influencer-produced or live on influencer channels. It serves as a constant reminder of your brand to build love beyond product launches or purchase moments.

Exceptional brands approach content through the lens of their brand values – this is how you should look at always-on.

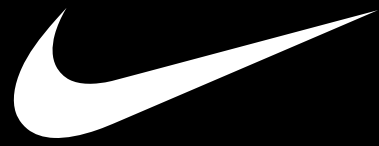
What feeling do I want people to take away from watching this content?



View content →

You can't put yourself first.

So challenge.



Nike has a gritty persona on social media. They showcase stories of hustle and defiance. This tone resonates with their target audience – young, driven, active individuals who value resilience, and purpose in the brands they support.

# These brands spark consumers' emotions with clear content styles



## Unhinged

Duolingo has mastered the art of being unhinged, using mascot Duo in reactive content and encouraging community engagement.



## Roast

Wendy's is quick to hop on the latest content trends, injecting self-aware teasing and playful competitor roasting.



## Playful

As well as showcasing garments and behind the scenes content, the founder Simon Porte Jacquemus bring personality to the brand socials.



## Grit

Nike's gritty tone resonates with their target audience – young, driven, active individuals who value resilience, and purpose in the brands they support.



## Expert

AG1 has created an expert persona, emphasizing science-backed ingredients, insights from health professionals, and promoting wellness with an authoritative voice.



## Value & Ethical

e.l.f has leaned toward ethics and inclusivity. Their identity focuses on affordability, inclusion, and cruelty-free products.

Note \_\_\_\_\_

# Reserved for the bold.

Not all brands need to do this. Many survive and thrive on customers who are cult fans of their individual products – not the brand. Always on is reserved for the ambitious brands. The brands who want to shape culture and invest in customers for the next decade.



The fast food chain's online persona is witty, and includes bold use of roasting, often playfully mocking competitors and even poking fun at itself. This sarcastic humor has helped the brand stand out on social media, especially among younger audiences who appreciate edginess and trend driven content

Section 04

# Best in Class Social-First Brands



# duolingo

Duolingo is the world's largest free online language learning app. The app uses a gamified approach to keep its 575m users consistent and engaged.

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## 60%

of users on the app are aged under 30

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## 10x

The Duolingo team post approximately 10x per week on TikTok

## Sum up their social — Unhinged & Reactive

In 2025, Duolingo has over 17 million TikTok followers. Duo, their bird mascot, is at the core of their social presence and is ubiquitous among Gen Z audiences. The brand's business model relies on habitual usage (ads-supported model), and their humorous social media presence offers consistent reminders to trigger daily language learning. Their always-on content is produced in-house which allows Duo to react to trends, experiment with partnerships and produce NSFW irreverent.



[View content →](#)



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We are not afraid of messing up. We are not afraid of having to have tough conversations. We are not afraid of Legal. We are not afraid of our senior leadership team. We've spent the past 5 years fostering this mindset, these relationships because it is far too expensive to not do so. It costs more time & resources for less user acquisition to sit on the sidelines waiting.

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Zaria Parvez

Global Social Media Manager, Duolingo



Founded in 2004. Today, e.l.f. Cosmetics is the #1 cosmetics brand among female teens.

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87%

influencers they work with have between 10k and 1m followers, with the average partner influencer having 221.5k followers

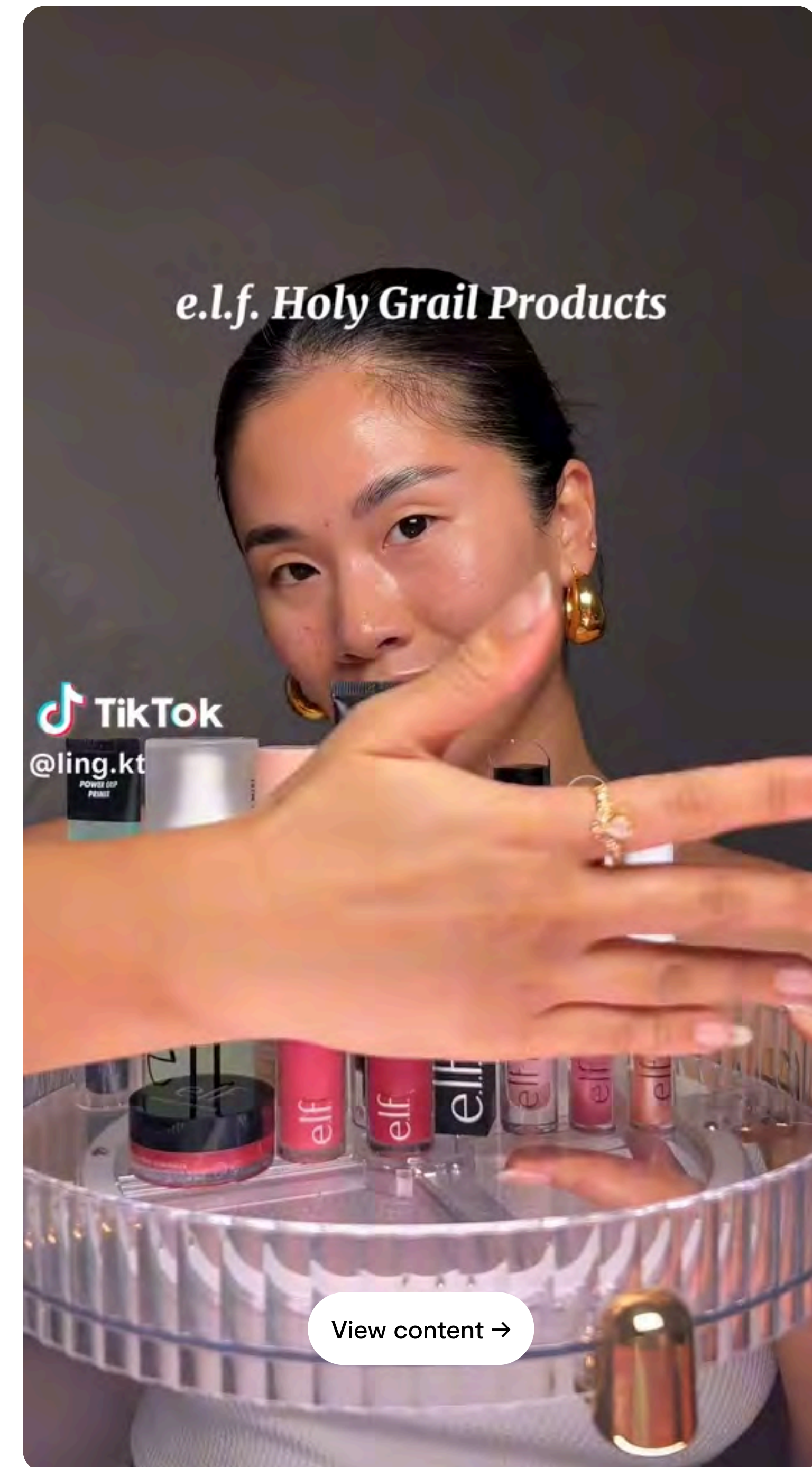
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55%

influencer partnerships are one-time

## Sum up their social — Unexpected, Accessible, Inclusive

Social media is e.l.f.'s core marketing channel, with a focus on building community. With a consistent appetite for experimentation - the brand is renowned for their unexpected campaigns and partnerships. They have an ethical identity - focusing on affordability, inclusion and purpose by showcasing cruelty-free and vegan products that deeply appeal to ethical and Gen Z consumers.





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At e.l.f., we foster an orbit of inspiration, expression, and empowerment not just for our community – but with our community. The e.l.f.iverse is of the people by the people, for the people – created with the people. It’s a world they help to build and shape, and that makes it worthy of their most precious asset – their time.

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Kory Marchisotto

CMO, e.l.f.



DoorDash is the US' largest delivery app, that connects customers with their favorite local businesses.

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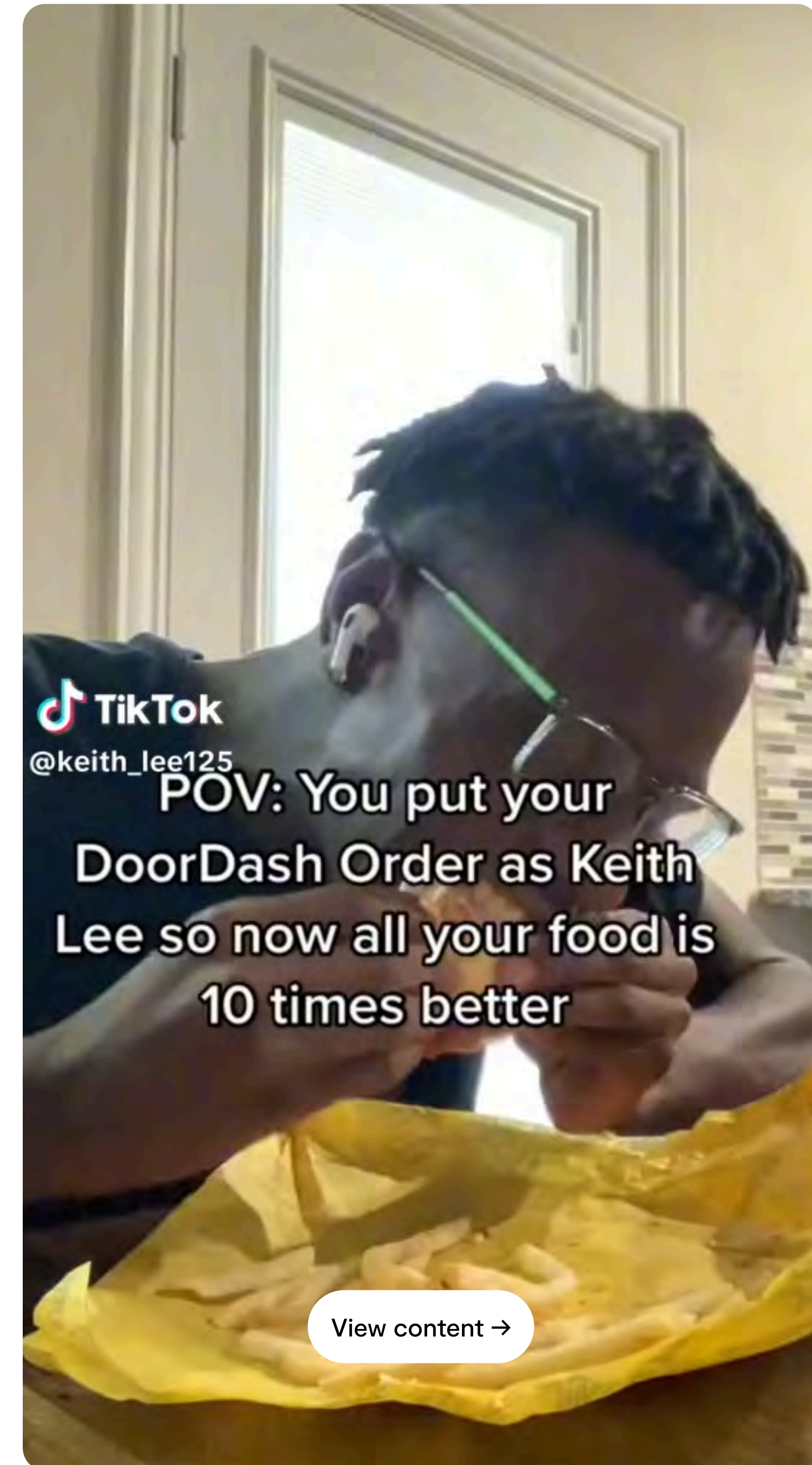
**3000%+** growth in EMV between 2018 to 2023

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**100%** increase in impressions between 2023 and 2024, despite only a 9% increase in the number of sponsored posts

## Sum up their social — Joyful, Unexpected

DoorDash is the 18th most loved brand amongst US Gen Z (DCDX 2024), underlined by a social media presence focused on sparking joy and conversation. DoorDash's social media presence relies heavily on influencers (including the People's Food Critic Keith Lee), merchant and brand partnerships, and sports moments - rather than owned social content - to keep the brand consistently front-of-mind for customers. Tentpole events and merchant partnerships help make the brand omnipresent in marketing. EMV for DoorDash has surged from \$2.9M EMV in 2018 to \$106.56M EMV for 2024, an improvement of over 3000%.





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We want consumers to think of DoorDash for all things like dashing NyQuil during cold and flu season or thinking DoorDash for flowers on Valentine’s Day. We want to get to the point where it’s just a default reflex.

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Kofi Amoo-Gottfried

CMO, DoorDash

Section 05

# Key Takeaways





# Digital Voices is an global award-winning Influencer Marketing agency.

Digital Voices was founded by Jennifer Quigley-Jones in 2017. Jennifer, who previously worked at YouTube, launched Digital Voices to address the gap in brands understanding of influencer partnerships. Renowned for our award-winning work with industry giants such as DoorDash, Unilever and PepsiCo, Digital Voices designs and executes campaigns that succeed at every stage of the marketing funnel.



Do you want to drive customer  
obsession? Drop us an email.  
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