



Popcultr
MARKETING
SUMMIT

MCM LONDON • 24TH OCT 2025

Summit Report

OCTOBER 2025

POWERED BY: **experience12**
the popcultr marketing agency

Foreword

This is the abridged version of the report so I'll keep it short...

What began as a focus on launch moments has matured into something deeper, a conversation about belonging, building, and sustaining connection. That was the thread we carried into the second London Popcultr Marketing Summit of the year.

Year two of The Popcultr Marketing Summit has taken us from London to a mini summit in New York and we're already looking ahead to what next year brings. It's been our pleasure to meet, talk and bring so many of you together because that was in the DNA of the spark that started this entire journey, to start conversations between silos and learn from each other across the pop culture multiverse. Thanks to everyone who contributed, advocated and attended. See you next time.

Chris Whittle
CEO, Experience12



SESSION 1: Fan Research

ex 12



HOST:
CHRIS WHITTLE
CEO
EXPERIENCE12



Session 1: Experience12 Fan Research

CHRIS WHITTLE

**1,115 in-person, face-to-face interviews,
over three days at MCM Comic Con in May
with quantitative & qualitative open-text
responses**

This isn't online data or social chatter these are real conversations with over a thousand fans, captured on the show floor in neutral zones. Starting in 2016 it's the biggest ongoing face-to-face dataset of pop culture fandom in the UK, showing how fan identities and motivations have evolved over time.

This is just a snapshot....



Research Takeaways

Fans are back in full force

Fan sentiment in open-text responses reflects themes of reconnection, routine, and community continuity many describe MCM as “homecoming” or “part of my year again.”

The 2025 dataset signals a steady, established live fan economy, not a spike or rebound. Comic Con is again a cultural fixture, not an exception.

Platform shift – discovery is algorithmic

TikTok overtakes YouTube as #1 discovery channel for under-25s.

Instagram remains the identity platform (“where my fandom lives”).

Discord and Reddit consolidate as long-term community spaces.

Anime + Gaming = cultural super-cluster

Anime (37 %) and Games (32 %) lead by a wide margin they’re now the twin engines of fandom.

The same respondents often list both, plus streaming via Crunchyroll, Netflix, YouTube.



Research Takeaways

Cosplay = creative participation

Cosplay remains the #1 reason for attendance (20 %+ of all mentions).

Fans call it “creative expression,” “art,” and “identity.”

Instagram and TikTok are still the dominant platforms

Experience converts curiosity into spend

72 % say trying something live makes them more likely to buy or watch it

Fans use IRL experiences as proof of authenticity.

This points towards events being the conversion engine in the fan marketing mix.

Fan language = positivity and pride

Open-text analysis shows dominance of positive sentiment ($\approx 70\%$).

Top emotional words: love, happy, creative, together, inspired.

Belonging, escapism, and joy account for most emotional tone.



KEYNOTE:

Don't try to hack fandom.

You can't



SPEAKER:
CALVIN INNES
FANDOM, POP-CULTURE & GAMING
CREATIVE CONSULTANT | CONSULTING ECD

Don't Try To Hack
Fandom... You Cant!



CALVIN INNES

Takeaways

FANDOMS CO-CREATE, AUDIENCES CONSUME:

Fandoms actively shape brands and culture rather than passively consuming. Ninety percent say fandoms define their identity, making authentic engagement exponentially more powerful.

COMMUNITY, CULTURE, CONTRIBUTION

Earn your way into fandoms by working where fans live, learning their unique codes and languages and then inviting them to build with you.

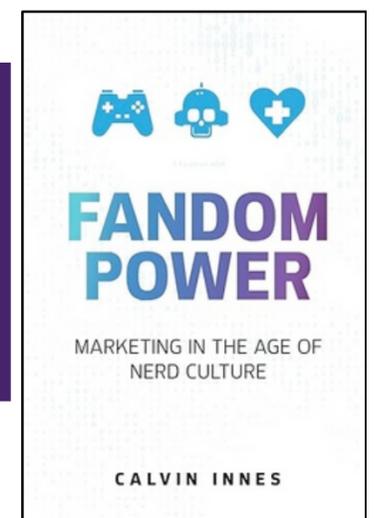
MEASURE DEPTH, NOT REACH

Success in fandom marketing isn't about impressions, it's about participation, creativity, and lasting community contribution over visibility.

AUTHENTICITY IS EARNED, NOT CLAIMED

In fandom spaces, authenticity requires fluency, consistency, and respect. Shallow engagement risks backlash; true connection comes from cultural understanding and showing up with genuine intent over time.

Want to know more? Seek out Calvin's book "Fandom Power" at your bookseller of choice.



PANEL 1: **Partnerships:** ARE YOU NOT ENTERTAINED?



MODERATOR:
DAN SALKEY
STRATEGY PARTNER
SMALL W·RLD

PANELLIST:
ERIK LONDRÉ
CEO,
KARTA

PANELLIST:
JULIA KAMODA
GLOBLA DIRECTOR OF PROMOTIONS
& PARTNERSHIPS, HASBRO

Takeaways

ENTERTAIN OR BE IGNORED

Brand partnerships must now compete with culture itself. If they don't entertain, they'll be scrolled past and instantly forgotten.

THE RISE OF THE KIDDULT

Adult fandoms want irreverent, nostalgic fun. Playful, unexpected brand collaborations now outperform traditional campaigns by embracing humour and cultural crossover.

FRAMEWORKS OVER FOMO

Effective partnerships are rigorously evaluated. Strategic models help brands say no to mismatched opportunities and safeguard long-term fan trust.

MAKE IT PLAYABLE

Interactive campaigns on platforms like Roblox turn fans from viewers into participants, increasing engagement, cultural fluency, and emotional relevance.

'ENTERTAIN OR DIE: A Guide to Entertainment First Brand Building' authored by Panel Moderator, Dan Salkey, and the team at SMALL W·RLD can be downloaded [HERE](#) or on this QR code:



PANEL 3: Community

THE POWER OF BELONGING



MODERATOR:
DAVE JEWITT
EXP

PANELLIST:
EMILY HANG
COMMUNITY MANAGER
SIDEMEN ENTERTAINMENT

PANELLIST:
JAROMIR PRAGER
COMMUNITY &
CONTENT MANAGER
UBISOFT

PANELLIST:
EDWIN CHUAH
COMMUNITY MANAGER
SQUARE ENIX

Takeaways

1 FROM TRANSACTION TO TRUST

Community is not built through reach or acquisition. Long-term value comes from retention, shared identity, and member led connection that reinforces itself over time.

2 SPEAK NATIVE OR BE IGNORED

Each platform demands its own tone, content, and culture. One-size-fits-all engagement fails. Fluency across channels is essential to maintain credibility and connection.

3 OFFLINE MAKES IT MATTER

In-person community events reinforce emotional loyalty, giving fans a story to tell and a reason to deepen their online engagement post event.

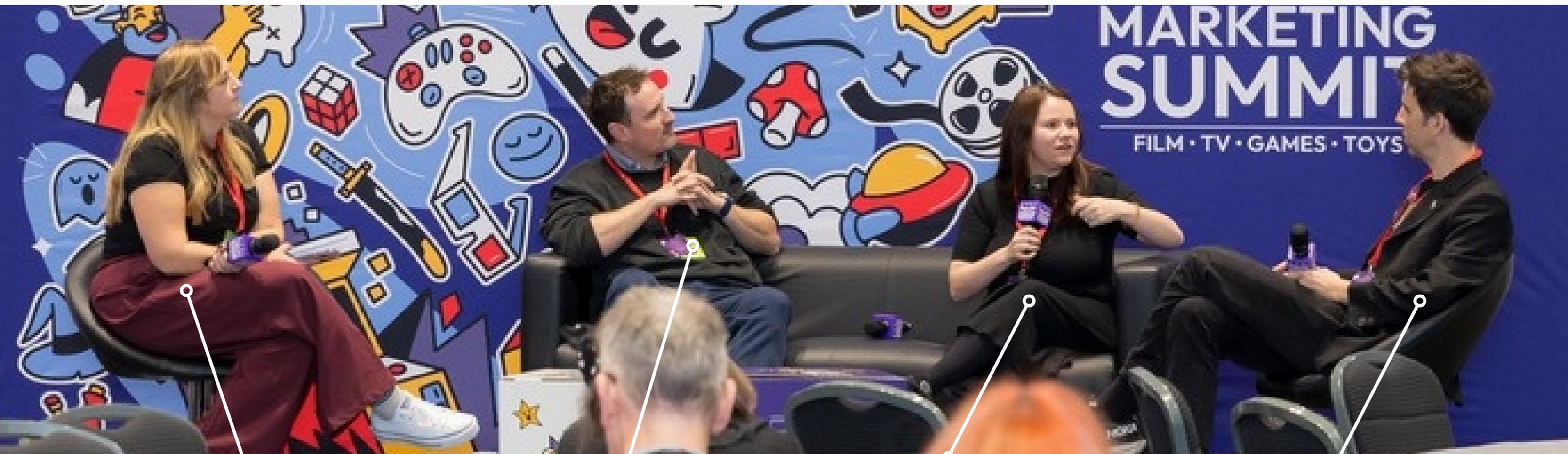
4 CODES, NOT CAMPAIGNS

Community legitimacy is built on shared language. Misused tone signals inauthenticity. Cultural fluency enables trust, relevance, and long-term fan alignment with brand presence.

“Community is no longer a marketing channel it’s a strategy built on cultural fluency, emotional depth, and long-term brand relevance. It’s not easy but it is impactful when done well”

PANEL 3: Creator

CREATORS & THE COMMUNITY



MODERATOR:
BETH WAIN
OPERATIONS LEAD
THE PATH

PANELLIST:
MARK BASSETT
HEAD OF INFLUENCER
PRECISE TV

PANELLIST:
NICOLA CLARKE
ACCOUNT DIRECTOR
TWITCH

PANELLIST:
DAN BIDDLE
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS
MANAGER; GLOBAL CONTENT
PARTNERSHIPS, META UK

Takeaways

1 FOLLOW THE MYCELIUM, NOT JUST THE METRICS

Creators activate networked communities. Brands must measure influence beyond follower counts tracking how content spreads between creators, platforms, and connected fan behaviour.

2 CONVERSATION IS THE KPI

Brand value emerges from community interaction, not just creator output. Prioritise peer-to-peer dialogue, social continuity, and shared experiences to build lasting equity in creator partnerships.

3 DON'T SCRIPT THE STREAM

Livestream platforms require relaxed, real-time integration. Brands must adapt to the format, not polish it and give creators space to remain authentic.

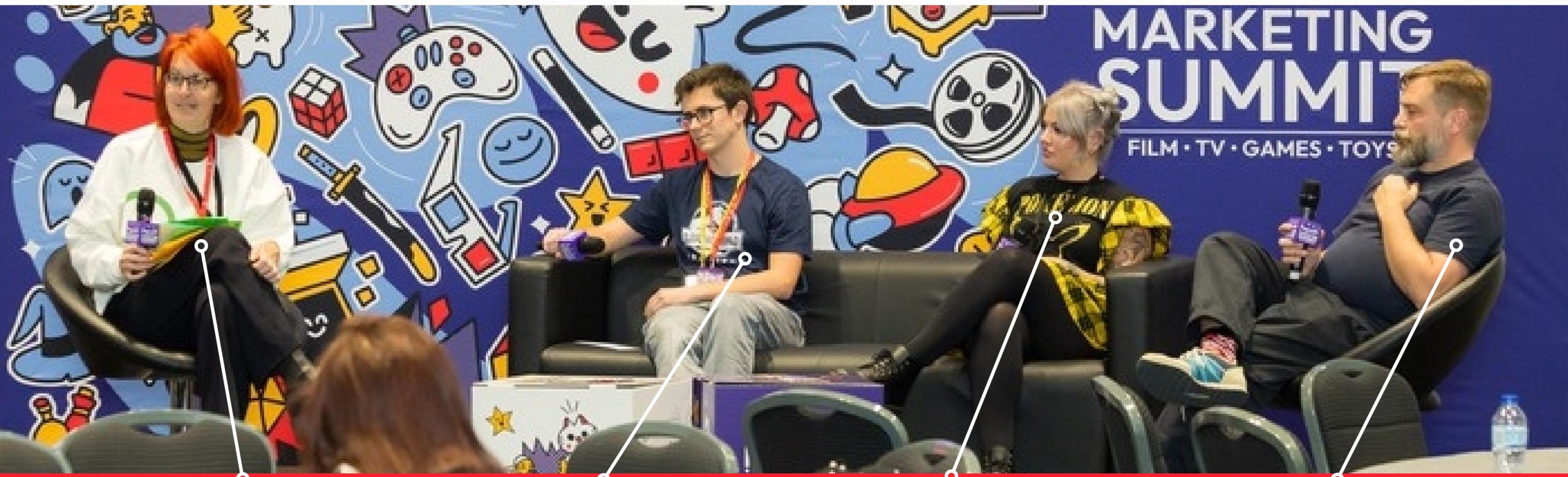
4 GUARDRAILS, NOT HANDCUFFS

Creators need freedom to stay authentic but with clear expectations. Remember why you hired them, and don't compromise their voice, format, or community trust.

"Creator communities function as dynamic ecosystems where long-form engagement, cross-interest relevance, and peer-to-peer interaction drive brand value beyond traditional metrics or isolated partnerships."

PANEL 4: Experiential

MOMENTS THAT MATTER



MODERATOR:
EMMA FISHER
AKA MISS CAKEHEAD
CREATIVE & ART DIRECTOR,
SUPERHERO PUDDING

PANELLIST:
ALEX BOLTON
PR MANAGER
FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS

PANELLIST:
KELSEY CHRISTOU
FREELANCE INFLUENCER
AND EVENTS SPECIALIST

PANELLIST:
CHRIS WHITTLE
FOUNDER & CEO
EXPERIENCE12

Takeaways

1 IT STARTS WITH THE MOMENT

Experiential is no longer an add-on it's a campaign anchor. Social ROI and undivided attention make real world moments central to marketing strategy.

2 DESIGN BEYOND THE CONTENT CAPTURE

The best experiential activations balance shareable photo moments with emotional depth—creating lasting engagement that turns attendees into advocates, not just content creators.

3 RIGHT CROWD, RIGHT MOMENT, RIGHT MESSAGE

Culturally relevant activations resonate. Poorly targeted experiences risk backlash. Align event design with audience identity, not fleeting trends, to protect brand equity and drive impact.

4 CANON IS THE FAN CAMPAIGN

Fan trust is earned through detail. Canon accurate moments and thoughtful nods resonate more than spend proving brands understand the IP and value the community.

“Experiential has evolved into a strategic lead channel where audience-first design, cultural relevance, and emotional detail now drive campaign impact, advocacy, and measurable ROI.”

PANEL 5: Anime

EVERYTHING, EVERYWHERE



MODERATOR:
JAMES GATES
FREELANCE WRITER
& ANIME SPECIALIST

PANELLIST:
MADISON SALTERS
PUBLISHER
J-NOVEL CLUB, A KADOKAWA
WORLD ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY

PANELLIST:
JONATHON COLLIS
MANAGING DIRECTOR
JNC NINA GMBH

PANELLIST:
KERRY KASIM
GENERAL MANAGER,
UK & IRELAND
ANIME LIMITED

PANELLIST:
ANDREW PARTRIDGE
CO-FOUNDER & CEO
ANIME LIMITED

Takeaways

1 TRUST IS THE NEW TEASER

When audiences already know the story, marketing shifts from building anticipation to earning trust by honouring fan knowledge through authenticity, quality, and emotional connection.

2 RESPECT EARNS ACCESS

Success requires cultural diplomacy; balancing fan expectations with Japanese IP control. Trust, context, and reputation matter more than budget in earning long-term access.

3 COMMUNITY IS THE PRODUCT

In saturated markets, loyalty stems from dialogue. Ongoing community engagement through visibility, transparency, and shared spaces delivers more lasting impact than one, off title announcements.

4 EXPANDING THE FRAME, NOT JUST THE FANBASE

Anime's growth lies in its diversity. Strategic partnerships and unexpected placements attract new audiences, while authentic local engagement keeps core fans amplifying the message.

"Anime's expansion shows that it's long-term pop culture growth is driven by deep, authentic community roots building confidence and accelerating mass adoption"

FIRESIDE CHAT

FANDOM, FORMAT, AND THE FUTURE OF FILM JOURNALISM



INTERVIEWER:
ANDY GIBBONS
FREELANCE
ENTERTAINMENT
JOURNALIST

CHRIS HEWITT
EXECUTIVE EDITOR
EMPIRE MAGAZINE

Takeaways

FROM TEASERS TO TICKING CLOCKS

Film marketing has shifted from year long rollouts to last minute sprints, forcing brands and publishers to adapt to tighter timelines, faster approvals, and real time agility.

BUILT ON VIBES, BEFORE THE ALGORITHM

Empire grew digital by following creative instinct not trend forecasts. Authentic, unfiltered content built loyal audiences long before platforms demanded it, proving culture moves faster than strategy.

FLUENCY OVER FOLLOWER COUNT

In film marketing, authenticity matters. Fans spot insincerity fast and successful creator partnerships require genuine passion and deep knowledge, not just reach or performative engagement.

MAKE MOMENTS WORTH RETELLING

Personal experiences create emotional impact that advertising can't. Memorable stunts become stories fans retell and builds lasting brand equity through narrative, not just spend.

THE BIG PICTURE:

Key Themes and Takeaways



1. Authenticity Trumps Quick Wins

2. The Death of Passive Consumption

3. Emotional Equity Builds Brand Value

4. Creators Are Cultural Partners

5. Relevance Rewards the Bold

6. Marketing Compression



1. Authenticity Trumps Quick Wins

Fandoms Are Long-Term Bonds

Engagement often spans over a decade marketers must treat fandoms as relationships, not one-off activations.

Missteps Invite Backlash

Entering fandom spaces without understanding the rules or values is seen as disrespectful. Authenticity means doing the work, not just adopting the language.

Local Context Matters Deeply

Each platform and territory has its own cultural logic. Understand the rules or risk being shut out.



2. The Death of Passive Consumption

1 Play Culture Is Mainstream

Gamified, creative participation is now a standard expectation, not a novelty. Especially among adult consumers.

2 Three-Way Conversations Win

Communities thrive when audiences speak with each other, not just with creators; platforms must enable multi-directional interaction.

3 Digital Worlds Are Activation Hubs

UGC platforms like Roblox offer experiential reach at scale; blending play, commerce and community seamlessly.



3. Emotional Equity Builds Brand Value

1 Emotion Extends the Campaign

Moments that surprise and move people last longer than ads. Fans share experiences that resonate and emotion builds longevity where impressions don't.

2 Experience Extends Shelf Life

Campaigns anchored in meaningful experience travel further and last longer through retellings, community buzz and offline memory.

3 Proof Beats Promotion

Experiential acts as tangible proof that a brand gets it. It shows, not tells, garnering fandom respect, making belief visible and brand love real.



4. Creators Are Cultural Partners

1 Fluency Beats Formal Training

Platform natives such as creators, streamers, and community managers outperform traditional marketers in audience trust and execution.

2 Let Creators Stay Creators

Restricting their voice weakens campaigns. Let them “cook” within strategic guidelines. Give them room to lead and the results feel native and credible.

3 Fans Notice Everything

Amateur experts hold grudges. Credibility is fragile brands must get it right the first time.



5. Relevance Rewards the Bold

1 Surprise Sparks Amplification

Unexpected moves when rooted in insight cut through cultural noise. Safe doesn't travel. Smart, strange, timely ideas get talked about.

2 Crossover Culture Is the Growth Engine

Fans live in overlapping worlds. Bold collaborations across categories (anime x fashion, gaming x beauty) unlock new tribes and relevance without diluting core identity.

3 Cultural Timing Is Everything

Right message, wrong moment? It flops. Brands that tune into emotional context, what audiences are feeling, not just buying will win attention and affinity.



6. Marketing Compression

Timelines Have Changed for Good

Studios now market films in weeks, not months demanding faster strategy and stronger impact.

Culture Is Oversaturated

Audiences are stretched across too much content cut through now requires emotional relevance and timing.

Community Counters Fragmentation

Building long-term fan engagement is the antidote to short-term attention crises brands that invest see sustained results.



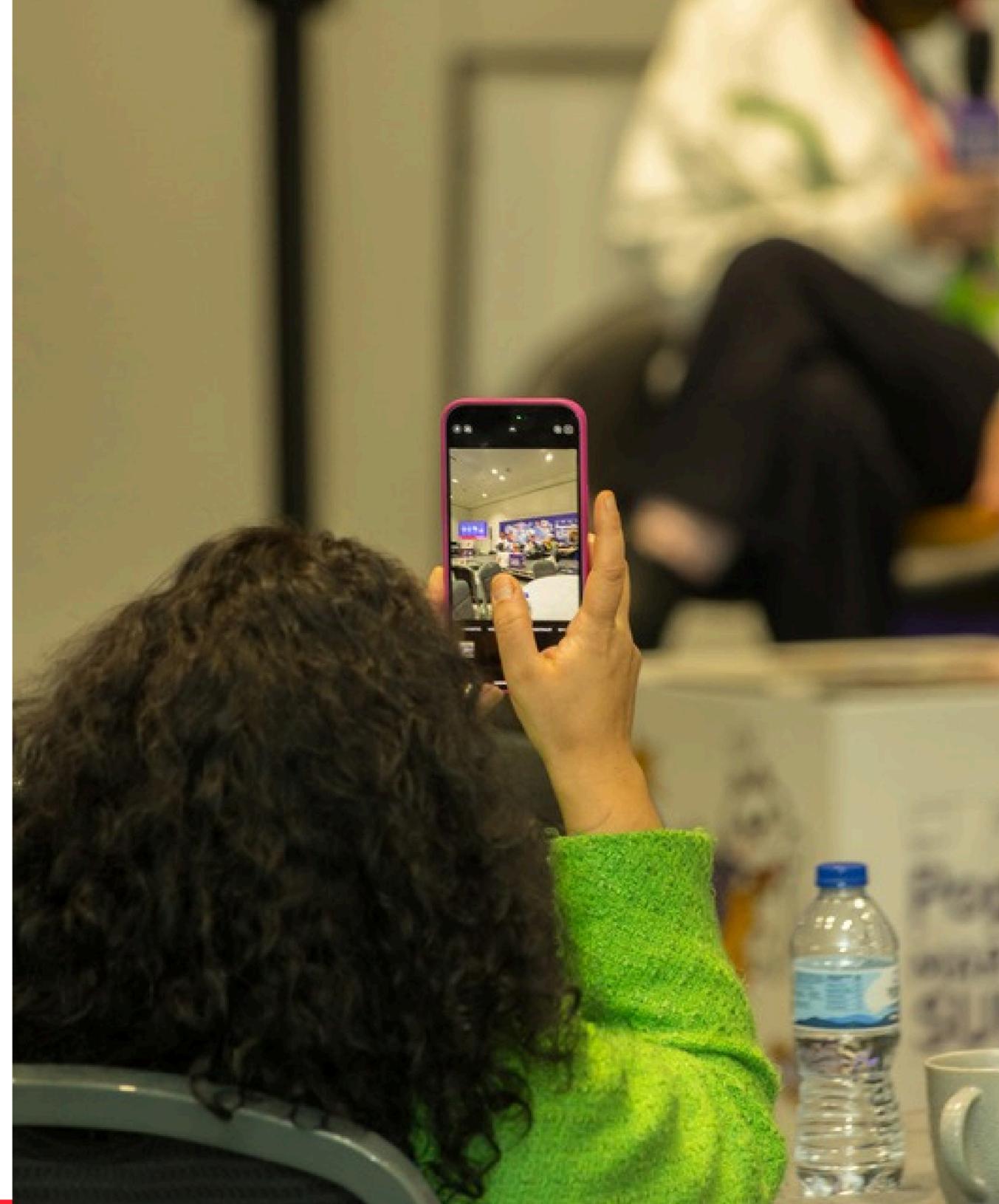
Summing Up

Building Belonging, Not Just Hype

Pop Culture Marketing is no longer about visibility, it's about belonging.

Whether you're activating IP, launching a creator campaign, or crafting a physical experience, the brands winning attention now are those who earn emotional equity, not just impressions.

As timelines shrink and attention fragments, one truth holds: fans remember how you made them feel. The future of marketing in pop culture isn't louder. It's closer.



Thanks

TO ALL THE CONTRIBUTORS:

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BEHIND THE SCENES

The Ex12 team: Tariq Shaded, John Bibby & Jared Pepall. The MCM Team: Dan Jones, Sophie Gilligan, Rachel Dickinson, Kahlil Schweitzer and all the team. Ian Senior, & Ana Goncalves from ExCel London. Amber O'Dell on the socials, Nick Andrews for the photography, GeoLaw for the amazing graphics, Nathan Edmonds and the Get In team for the hype video, Jack Woodhams at Posterspy for art direction & video content

THE SUMMITEERS

Everyone who attended the summit, we know your time is more precious than ever so thanks for choosing to spend it with us and being such a great, inclusive and engaged crowd. See you next time



POWERED BY

experience[★]12

the **popcultr** marketing agency