

BELONGING BRITAIN

2026



UNDERSTANDING
MODERN
COMMUNITIES

MG omd





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**A PREVIEW OF MG OMD AND GLOBAL'S
LANDMARK STUDY INTO IDENTITY, COMMUNITY
AND CONNECTION IN MODERN BRITAIN**

WHY THIS RESEARCH IS IMPORTANT

Not long ago, marketing's biggest problem was waste: too many impressions, too many people outside the target audience, and too little accountability for what worked.

Technology promised to fix that – and largely has.

Today, marketers can reach audiences with remarkable precision. Data signals, automated buying and predictive models allow campaigns to target like never before. For UK marketers navigating 2026 – amid stricter privacy rules, economic pressure on budgets, rising media costs and the rapid adoption of AI – efficiency has become the industry's north star.

But in solving one problem, we may have created another. As targeting sharpens and optimisation is a necessary default, marketing has grown more transactional.

To achieve real, lasting impact, we must combine our precise targeting with genuine audience insight. This powerful combination ensures we meaningfully engage people in ways that foster authentic connections and drive long-term value.

We look at audiences through many lenses beyond demographics; attitudes, behaviours, culture, communities and categories. Understanding people in a layered way is the differentiator between a highly targeted campaign and a highly engaging – and ultimately effective – one.

So how can brands genuinely resonate with modern audiences? The 2025 edition of *Belonging in Britain* made a clear and compelling case; understanding people's nuanced identities, tapping into the communities they belong to, the passions that define them, the places and people that anchor them, is a more effective route to connection than dividing audiences into the binary, reductive demographics that have long dominated media planning.

Now, after a year of turbulent cultural and global change, we went back to see what's changed.



8 TRAITS NOW SHAPE THE AVERAGE PERSON'S IDENTITY, UP FROM 7 LAST YEAR

People describe themselves through a wider range of characteristics than a year ago, suggesting that identities are increasingly considered, consciously curated and expressed.

A single defining characteristic, be that age, gender or profession, has never told the whole story, and this finding underlines just how nuanced and important to people modern identities are. Defining audiences based on one or two static traits risks producing communications that feel reductive.

The most effective strategies should reflect a wider texture of people's lives, not a single slice of it.

Despite regular news features about division and disagreement, Britain isn't quite as fractured a nation as they may lead us to believe. 'Belonging' not only matters, but is in fact growing. People are actively finding each other in the communities built around the things they love. In sports supporter groups and music fandoms, in pet groups and foodie circles and local places of worship.

Belonging isn't fading; it's just happening in ways algorithms and click-bait headlines don't always reflect.

Our new research refreshes our understanding of communities and goes further than the first report, exploring:

- How identities can shift, not just what they are made up of
- How external context influences the popularity of different communities
- If communities shape mindsets
- If different media provide a sense of belonging or can even create community

The following headlines are a taster of what we found. Sign up for the full report as soon as it's released, to read more and learn about the planning implications, and guidance for building effective community engagement campaigns.

[Click to view here](#)

2 PEOPLE, PERSONALITY, PASSIONS AND PLACE ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN DEMOGRAPHICS

The top five identity traits remain unchanged year-on-year: 'My Family' remains the most important feature, followed by 'My Personality', 'My Passions and Interests', 'My Friends' and 'Where I Grew Up'. These point to core 'identity anchors', connected to people, passions, personality and place, that are more important than the basic demographic building blocks of age and gender, holding firm regardless of what is happening in the world around us.

1 | MY FAMILY

2 | MY PERSONALITY

3 | MY PASSIONS AND INTERESTS

5 | WHERE I GREW UP

4 | MY FRIENDS

TOP 13 KEY IDENTITY TRAITS

MY FAMILY

62%

PERSONALITY QUALITIES

48%

INTERESTS/PASSIONS

47%

FRIENDS

43%

WHERE I GREW UP

42%

NATIONALITY

40%

39% GENDER

38% AGE

35% FAMILY STATUS

35% MY FAMILY HERITAGE

34% MY STAGE IN LIFE

33% MY EDUCATION

32% MY WORLD VIEW/VALUES

KEY TAKEOUTS

The endurance of certain identity anchors suggests several core traits for brands and communicators to be sensitive to when shaping audience engagement.

Leading with “**who this person is**” rather than what demographic box they sit in will produce work that resonates more deeply and travels further.



3 IDENTITY ISN'T WHOLLY STATIC, PARTS OF OURSELVES ARE SHAPED BY WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE WORLD AROUND US

Beyond the top five, subtle shifts among identity traits emerge year on year.

'My Nationality' moved up a place to become the sixth most important characteristic in 2025. In a year when Union Jacks were flown across the country, when the Lionesses led a wave of national sporting successes, and when a Brit-culture revival was heard on stages and seen on fashion runways, nationality is not just about geography or politics. It is about heritage, roots, cultural pride – not (just) a place on a map.

Amid stories of a slowing job market, calls back to the office and the impact of AI on employment, professional identity matters more than before: now one in four UK adults consider their job central to who they are, up from one in five.

With external events influencing identity, having a sensitive finger on the identity and cultural pulse is a must for brands who want to connect authentically.

Q. Please select the features that you feel are central to who you are and what 'makes you, you'
NB multi choice response. Full data available in final report.

4 NEARLY 1 IN 5 SAY THE BRANDS AND MEDIA THEY CONSUME AND EVENTS THEY GO TO ARE PART OF 'WHAT MAKES THEM, THEM'

In this wave, we tested if the brands people use, the media they choose and the events they attend form part of their identity.

For some, it seems 'we are what we buy' – about 1 in 5 say the brands and events people choose, or deliberately avoid, are a way of curating a personal brand, telling the world something about who we are, our values, tastes and the 'tribes' we affiliate with – without speaking.

Consumer choices matter most to the identities of the youngest in Britain (18-44s) and in urban populations. In fact, 18-24s said these features are more important to their identity than social class.

KEY TAKEOUTS

This changes the dynamics for brands. Instead of just competing for a purchase, they are competing for a place in someone's personal brand. Communicators must explore if and how your brand can enhance or reflect people's identity, to move beyond preference into something far more durable.

5 'BELONGING' IN BRITAIN GREW IN 2025 AND COMMUNITIES WERE ON THE RISE

Despite headlines of social divisions, 'belonging' in communities has risen:



35%



OF PEOPLE NOW SAY THEY FEEL AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION OF 'BELONGING' TO THEIR COMMUNITIES, UP FROM 30% IN 2024

70%



SAY THEIR COMMUNITIES ARE IMPORTANT TO THEIR IDENTITY, UP FROM 64%

4

THE AVERAGE PERSON NOW BELONGS TO FOUR GROUPS, UP FROM THREE



People are not retreating from each other. They are finding each other in the places that matter to them, over the things that bring them joy. In a world that some might think is becoming atomised, community is thriving.

This signals that connection through community remains an important part of the fabric of life, how people navigate the world and – in uncertain times – find kinship and 'belonging' with others. They're where people choose to spend time - not only rare places of togetherness and routes to reach many, but moments and contexts of focused attention.



FAN NATION – SPORTS SUPPORTER GROUPS ARE NOW BRITAIN'S NO.1 FORM OF COMMUNITY, WITH MUSIC FANDOMS CLOSE BEHIND

Over 1/3 of people belong to a 'sports supporter' group, making it the number one community type, overtaking 'hobbies and interests' groups. Health, fitness and fandom emerge as key themes across the 2025 community landscape. 'Sports teams or clubs' also rose up the ranks, from seventh to fourth place, closely followed by 'health and wellness' groups. Elsewhere, 'music fandoms' entered in at third place.

Just as parts of people's identities can respond to moments in time, the communities people belong to mirror salient interests, passions, and concerns. 2025's notable shifts clearly align with Britain's cultural calendar. Britain experienced a strong run of sporting moments: England's men reached the Euro's final in 2024 and women's sport dominated summer 2025, particularly with the Lionesses European Cup win and Rugby World Cup win. Elsewhere, a Britpop resurgence took hold and the Beyhive community was out in force.

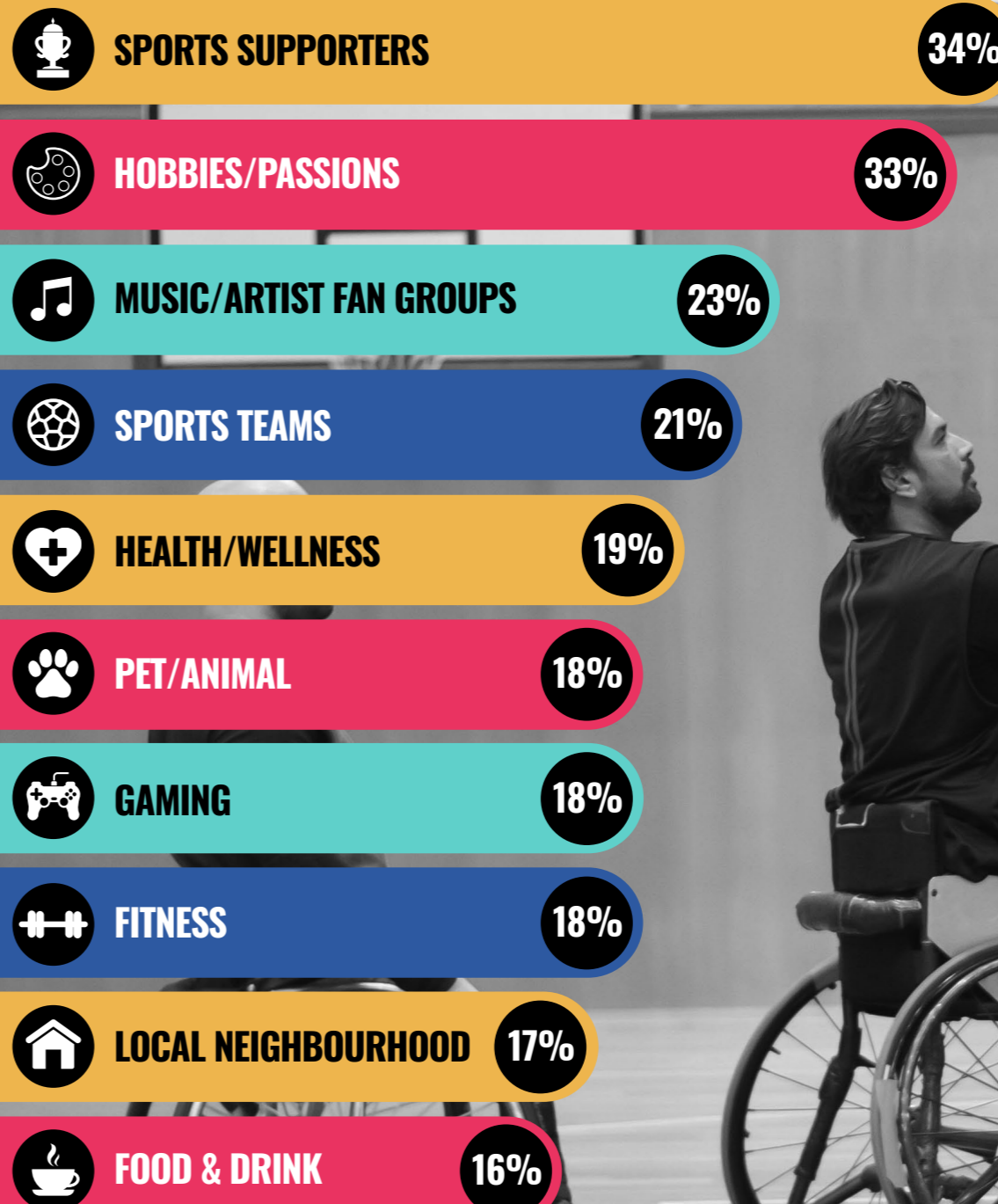


KEY TAKEOUTS

In a world of weakening institutional trust, fandoms (and particularly British sports communities) offer a predictable calendar of moments to reach people where they are genuinely, deeply present and **memories are made.**

Q. What types of groups are you involved in? Please select all that apply. NB multi choice response. Top 10 shown, full data available in final report.

TOP 10 GROUPS PEOPLE ARE PART OF





7 MEDIA CAN BRING BELONGING AND EVEN CREATE COMMUNITY

In 2025 we asked some thorny questions: can media bring a feeling of belonging to people? Does it foster community? Does it matter to people's identities? The results were positive!

81%

OF PEOPLE FEEL A SENSE OF COMMUNITY THROUGH AT LEAST ONE MEDIA CHANNEL

79%

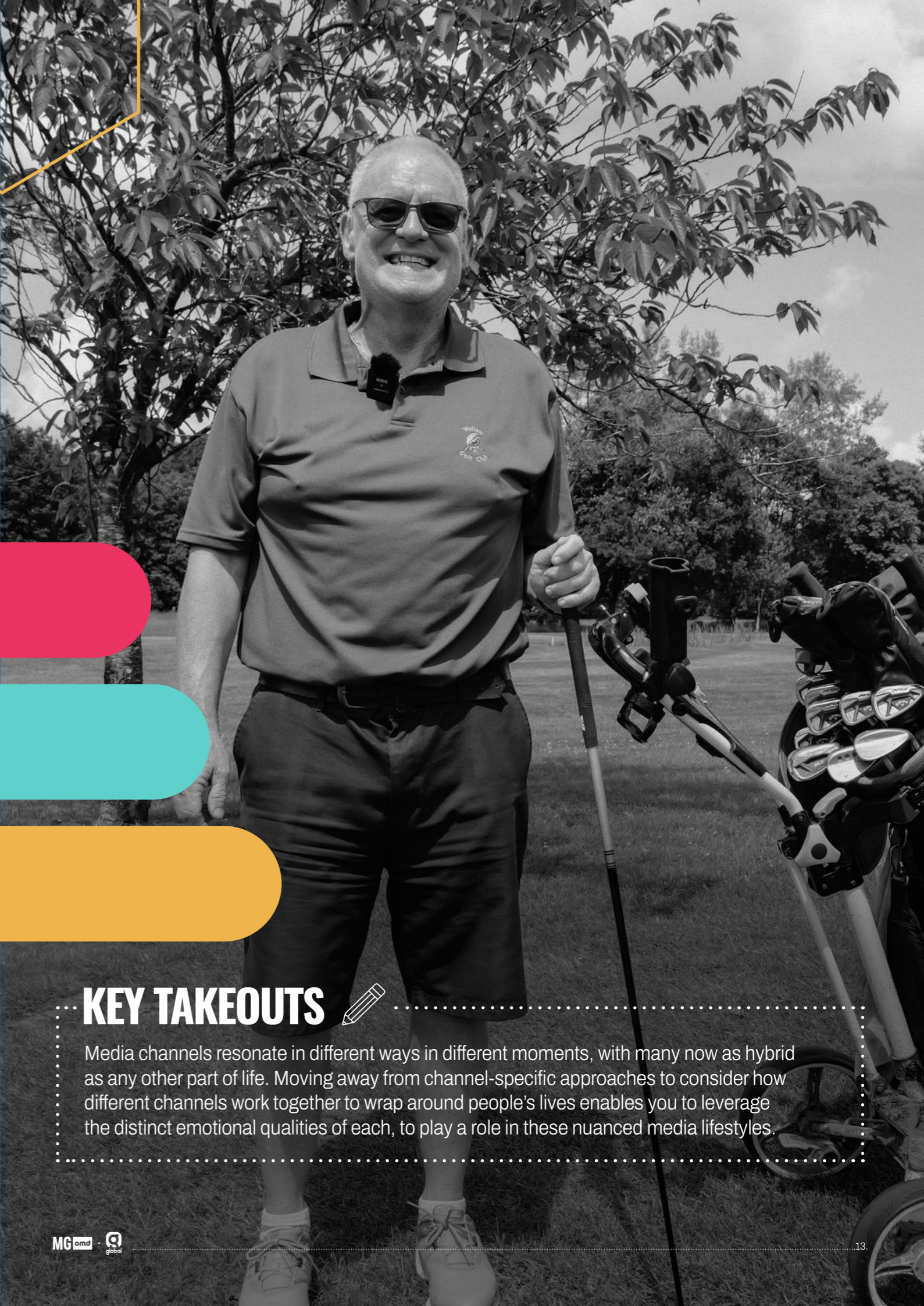
GAIN A SENSE OF BELONGING WITH AT LEAST ONE MEDIA CHANNEL

74%

AGREE AT LEAST ONE MEDIA CHANNEL CONTRIBUTES TO THEIR IDENTITY

No single channel dominates. On average people selected two media types for each question, and we saw an interesting variety of combinations, reflecting the way people curate their own unique media experiences, aligned to their needs, interests and lifestyle.

For some, the proximity and relevance of local media builds belonging, for others, podcasts deliver personal, ritualised intimacy, while interest-led, interactive social media communities can shape identities.



KEY TAKEOUTS

Media channels resonate in different ways in different moments, with many now as hybrid as any other part of life. Moving away from channel-specific approaches to consider how different channels work together to wrap around people's lives enables you to leverage the distinct emotional qualities of each, to play a role in these nuanced media lifestyles.

COMMUNITIES CAN FOSTER COMMERCIALLY VALUABLE, OPTIMISTIC, PROGRESSIVE MINDSETS

In 2025, we explored the different mindsets of people in communities, and found that they show higher levels of optimism and are more likely to feel in control of their lives than we tend to see among the general public*.

77%

of people in communities agree they have choice and control over their lives, vs. 46% of the general population

63%

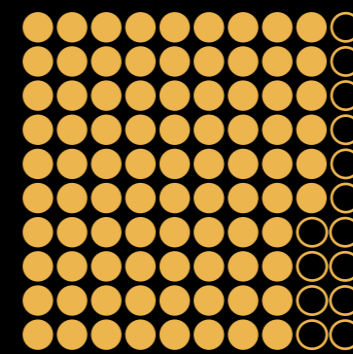
of people in communities have confidence about their own and Britain's future, vs. 53% of the general population

Research* shows that when people are more optimistic and with higher sense of agency, they're more likely to try new things, buy new things, explore new places and adopt emerging ideas, which is exciting for brands and organisations regardless of sector.

*Trajectory, Optimism Index, July 2025



COMMUNITIES ARE POWERFUL SPACES OF INFLUENCE



86%

OF PEOPLE IN COMMUNITIES HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY THINGS THEY'VE SEEN OR HEARD

Community influence runs deeper than word of mouth. It shapes opinions, changes real-world behaviour and drives discovery of products and services that people might never have found otherwise.

In passion-led spaces – be it technology forums, artist fandoms, gaming circles, fitness groups or pet communities, decisions take shape in conversation. Recommendations have credence as they sit within an ongoing, trusted exchange between people who care deeply about a subject. People share experiences, compare products and vote on recommendations publicly. Discovery emerges through shared evaluation and collective knowledge.



SUMMARY

Over the past decade an explosion of data, targeting and measurement has fuelled greater targeting accuracy but, in many instances, this has also fuelled the misconception that effective campaign planning is simply about targeting the right person in the right place at the right time.

This research highlights two challenges to this approach:

1



Current audience targeting often overlooks the nuanced ways people define themselves, focusing on individuals rather than the power of the collective.

2



We tend to act on information we're exposed to in communities because we intentionally seek them, enjoy spending time in them, with people we feel we 'belong' with. This means we're in positive, highly attentive environments, with more trusting mindsets open to influence by the opinions of those we affiliate with – be that through shared interests, experiences, beliefs, or locations.



Moving beyond audience demographics to explore the identity anchors and communities that are relevant for your brand.



Getting curious and taking the time to really understand communities. What can you create to inform, entertain and show you understand their world? Think about your creative, content, experiences and even specific products or services.



Which aspects of your brand, products, or services might help your audience express aspects of their identity and how you can move beyond simple preference to embody values and belonging.



Creating media eco-systems to leverage the distinct qualities of the mix of media that builds belonging and identity for different individuals and communities.



The opportunity here is huge. When you are able to combine this level of deep understanding alongside targeting, this blend becomes a superpower.

For those wanting to engage with modern Britain, consider:

This research gives us a clearer and deeper picture of what matters to Modern Britain and how we define ourselves. It demonstrates the power of expanding your strategy to include relevant communities in order to create difference that matters. They are a core pillar of how audiences in Modern Britain form their identities; spaces where attention is genuine, trust is high and influence travels fast.

If you would like to be one of the first to receive the research in full, and discover the detailed planning implications, community influence findings, and guidance for building effective campaigns.

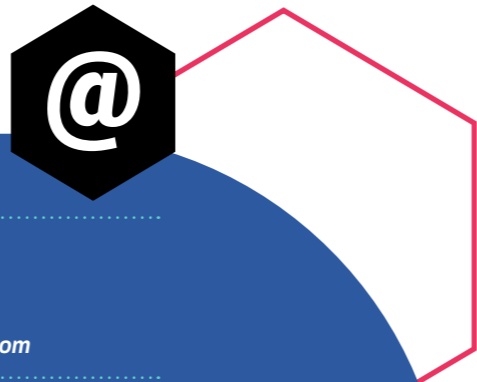
[Let us know here](#)

At a time when media fragmentation poses a challenge for communicators, communities are enduring and could allow us to set the future of media and its targeting. To harness this opportunity, we must consider community driven strategies from the outset, evolving from ideas of 'audience' and 'customer' to 'community' and 'advocates'.

The rules of engagement have changed. People want to have a say and be heard. Alongside this, people increasingly want to buy from brands or are more receptive to organisations that reflect their values, their identities and relate to their realities.

To understand how to connect with people in this new reality, a more personal, democratic, open dialogue approach is needed – and communities are a route to achieve this. Our research into this important area is just the tip of the iceberg and further guidance on how to engage is being developed.

But in the meantime, instead of being an afterthought, community approaches should be a forethought and standard part of the communications insight and planning toolkit.



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**FOR FURTHER
INFORMATION,
PLEASE
CONTACT US.**

METHODOLOGY

Research was conducted by Toluna Research, between 17th and 24th July 2025.

A nationally representative (UK) quantitative survey of 2011 people aged 18+. Including often under-researched groups, such as those over 75, people living in rural and coastal geographies, with mixed ethnicities, disabled people, unemployed or of lower social advantage.

N.B. the original April 2024 survey was conducted by a different research supplier, with a sample of 3,000 UK people. Sample frame and quotas were consistent. While the 2025 survey re-tested most of the original questions, some additions were made and others not re-tested. We recommend caution when comparing exact figures between the surveys and recommend referring to trends.



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