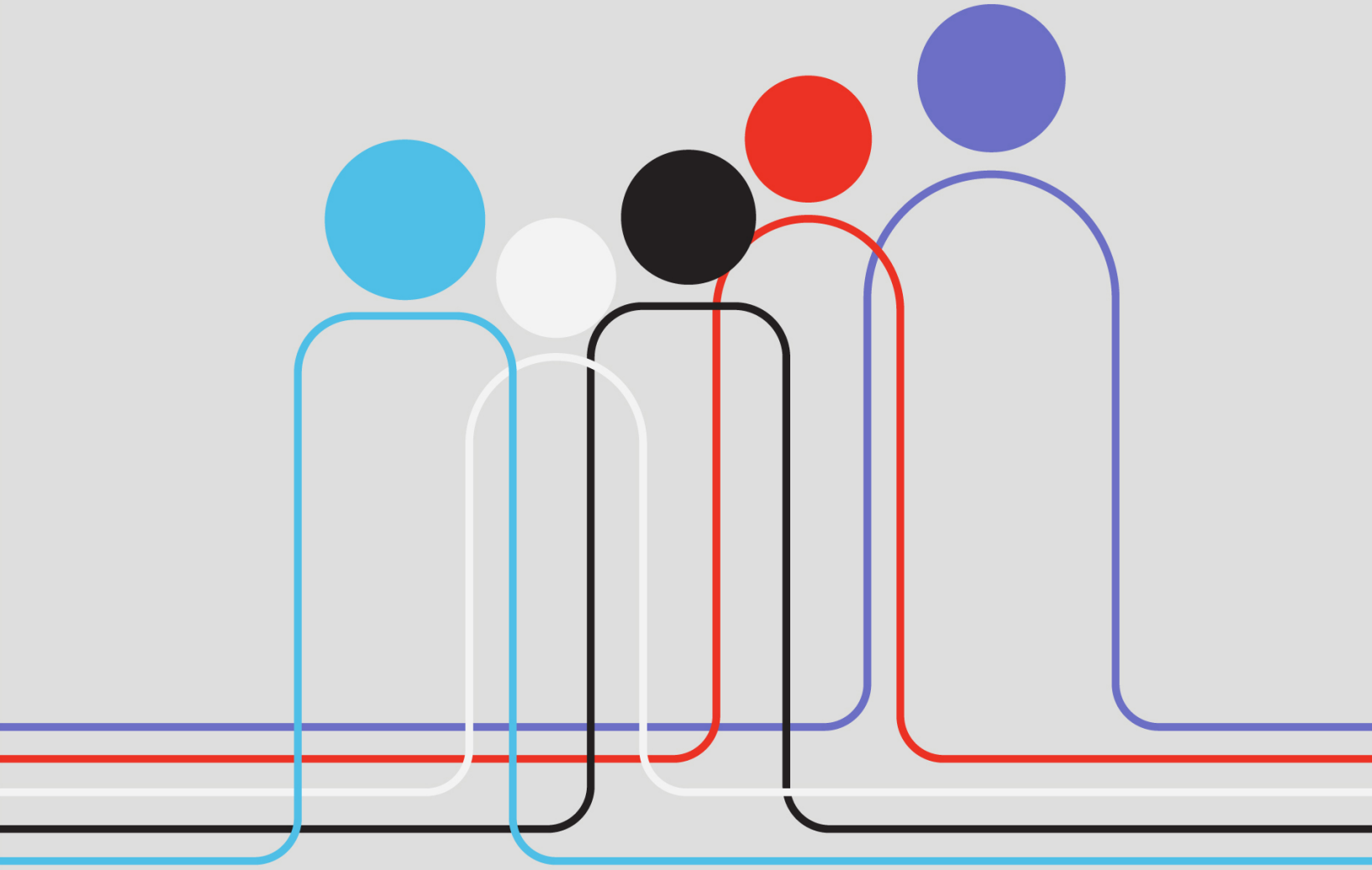
The As-Is Measurement Landscape in the Creator Economy

What's Real, What's Missing, and What Unlocks the Next Wave of Spend



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About this Document & the IAB Experience Center

Defining the Starting Point for Scalable Creator Measurement

This document synthesizes ongoing industry dialogue and practical market observation to map the current state of creator measurement. It examines what is working today, where structural gaps persist, and which measurement foundations are required to unlock the next phase of scalable creator investment. To get to where we're going, we first need to understand our starting point.

About the Experience Center

The IAB Experience Center focuses on the future of advertising by exploring emerging advertising channels like the Creator Economy, gaming, and AR/VR. It helps brands navigate shifting consumer behaviors and technologies, fostering collaboration to develop, measure, and scale new interactive experiences.

Led by Zoe Soon, VP, Experience Center, the group is heavily focused on making immersive and creator-driven content measurable and actionable for marketers. Zoe also leads the IAB Creator Board, an invitation-only group of leading Creator experts and marketers who are tasked with professionalizing and scaling the business of the Creator Economy.

To find out if you qualify for the Creator Board or to learn more about creator-focused industry initiatives and our IAB Creator Economy Committee, please contact Zoe at zoe@iab.com

About IAB

The Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) empowers the media and marketing industries to thrive in the digital economy. Its membership comprises more than 700 leading media companies, brands, agencies, and the technology firms responsible for selling, delivering, and optimizing digital ad marketing campaigns. The trade group fields critical research on interactive advertising, while also educating brands, agencies, and the wider business community on the importance of digital marketing. In affiliation with the IAB Tech Lab, IAB develops technical standards and solutions. IAB is committed to professional development and elevating the knowledge, skills, expertise, and collaboration of the workforce across the industry. Through the work of its public policy office in Washington, D.C., the trade association advocates for its members and promotes the value of the interactive advertising industry to legislators and policymakers. Founded in 1996, IAB is headquartered in New York City.

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Executive Summary

Creators deliver what brands need most: *culturally relevant creative and built-in distribution*. That combination is fueling the next wave of investment. At its core, creator-led growth is powered by trust; Creators convert because audiences believe them. Yet while credibility is becoming one of the most valuable currencies in advertising, the industry still lacks a scalable way to quantify, measure, and value it alongside other media currencies.

To date, creator marketing has been optimized for content performance rather than business outcomes. As brand investment grows, creators are increasingly expected to perform like media, yet they are still managed like talent. This mismatch leaves the channel operating without the structural foundations that underpin every major digital media channel.

At a tactical level, creator programs are already optimized with reasonable confidence. At a strategic and financial level, however, creators are still siloed from media buying. This creates a structural imbalance: creator investment is growing faster than the enterprise's ability to measure, forecast, benchmark, and underwrite it with CFO-grade rigor.

That limitation, not creative supply, platform adoption, or audience demand, is what now caps institutional growth.

Measurement standardization will be an exercise in rewiring the current jerry-rigged and fragmented systems and creating concrete foundations that align with the major digital channels.

The Enterprise Implication

Creators now influence **brand, performance, commerce, and culture simultaneously**, but they are still measured primarily through:

- Siloed platform KPIs
- Lower-funnel commerce proxies
- Brand studies
- Inconsistent valuation frameworks

As a result, creators aren't connected to their true impact on the business. The implications are:

- Systematic misallocation of media spend
- Inability to model and forecast revenue growth
- Unquantifiable brand risk exposure at scale

This creates a growing disconnect between **where consumer influence is actually formed and how media value is formally calculated inside the enterprise**.

The Risk of Standing Still

If this disconnect persists:

- Creator budgets will not be able to graduate to the media investment level.
- Finance and procurement will struggle to apply consistent discipline.
- Cross-channel optimization will remain constrained by blind spots.
- Upper-funnel creator impact will continue to be structurally undervalued.
- And the creator economy will remain partially institutionalized, rather than fully integrated.

In short, without measurement reform, creator advertising risks becoming too strategically important to ignore yet too structurally immature to fully normalize.

What Will Unlock the Next Wave of Spend

The next phase of creator growth will not come from additional creators, platforms, or formats. It will come from infrastructure convergence, specifically:

- Measurement standards
- A universal, cross-platform currency
- Traffic Quality & Valid Exposure Controls
- Independent, media-grade verification
- Full-Funnel Attribution & Incrementality
- Finance-trusted pricing benchmarks
- Supply-Path Transparency Across Creator Tech
- Education - building a shared operating language between two ecosystems that developed independently

These are the same institutional mechanics that previously unlocked scale in paid social, programmatic, and CTV. Their absence in the creator economy is no longer a technical inconvenience; it is now a commercial bottleneck.

The Strategic Opportunity

The creator economy is entering the same inflection point that every transformational media channel reaches: the moment when measurement must evolve to unlock larger budgets. The organizations that help define these standards will not only shape how creator spend scales, they will shape how influence itself is priced across modern media.

Bottom Line for Executives

The question is no longer whether creator advertising works, but whether it can scale under financial rigor. Current measurement limits confidence in long-term capital allocation. Solving this will decide whether creators stay a fast-growing budget line or earn a role within the core media investment strategy.

Introduction

The Creator Economy is no longer experimental. With 50% of US buyers ranking Creators a must-buy behind only Search and Social, Creator ad spend is growing 400% faster than the media industry average and is projected to reach $37B this year.

The market has already voted: creators work. They drive discovery, influence consideration, shape culture, and increasingly move product. What has not moved at the same pace is the **measurement infrastructure needed to evaluate creators with the same financial confidence as other major media channels.**

Today, creator measurement operates through a hybrid system of platform dashboards, creator self-reporting, third-party creator platforms, affiliate tracking, and brand lift studies. This produces scattered metrics that, at times, are in conflict with one another based on origin and methodology and therefore produce tenuous insight that does not lead to confidence in action. Attribution remains biased toward the lower funnel, cross-platform reach is largely unavailable, verification is uneven, and benchmarking lacks normalization.

And yet budgets continue to rise.

That tension between **commercial confidence and measurement immaturity** defines the current state of the creator economy. It does not signal fragility. It signals a channel that has scaled faster than its infrastructure; exactly the same pattern previously seen in paid social, programmatic, and CTV.

The next growth phase of the creator economy will not be unlocked by more creators or more content. It will be unlocked by measurement that supports cross-media planning, forecasting, and ROI confidence. This report documents where creator measurement stands today and what must evolve next.

Why Measurement Matters Now

Creators have moved from the margins of media plans to the heart of them. Once treated as episodic "influencer activations", creator programs are now:

- Always-on
- Integrated into paid media
- Linked to commerce and retail media
- Evaluated alongside social, CTV, and digital video

But as budgets scale, so do expectations. CMOs are now asked to defend creator spend in the same rooms and with the same standards as every other line item on the media plan.

This is the moment when **measurement becomes the gating factor for scale**. Creative supply is abundant. Audience demand is proven. The remaining question at the top of the enterprise is no longer "Do creators work?" It is: "Can we measure creators with the same financial confidence as the rest of our media mix?"

For many organizations, the answer today is: not yet or at least, not with conviction.

What Is Being Measured Today

Creator measurement now spans every stage of the marketing funnel, but with **uneven rigor across each layer**. Most advertisers rely on a combination of media delivery metrics, engagement signals, commerce outcomes, and proxy indicators of brand impact.

Delivery Metrics

- Impressions
- Reach
- Views
- Frequency (limited and rarely deduplicated)

These establish basic scale, but **true cross-platform reach and frequency remain largely unavailable**. Most reporting still reflects siloed platform exposure, not unified audience delivery.

Engagement Metrics

- Likes
- Comments
- Shares
- Saves
- Watch time
- Video completion rate

Engagement remains the most universally used proxy for creative performance. Executives increasingly recognize, however, that **engagement alone is not a business outcome** — it is an input signal.

Brand Impact Metrics

- Awareness
- Ad recall
- Favorability
- Consideration
- Purchase intent

Brand lift is measured most often through platform studies or custom surveys. These studies are:

- Expensive
- Inconsistent across vendors
- Difficult to benchmark longitudinally
- Impossible to measure at scale
- In the agency or platform's best interest to prove proxy ROI for retention

As a result, brand impact is widely **believed**, but still **infrequently proven at scale with statistical rigor**.

Performance & Commerce Metrics

- Clicks and CTR
- Promo code redemptions
- Affiliate conversions
- Attributed revenue
- ROAS

Creator-driven commerce is now one of the fastest-growing segments of the market, fueled by social shopping, affiliate networks, and retail media integration. These metrics dominate ROI conversations, but they disproportionately credit **last-touch behavior**, structurally under-valuing creators' role in earlier-stage influence in the brand building.

Earned & Amplification Metrics

- Earned Media Value (EMV)
- Secondary distribution
- Reposts and remixes
- Organic reach acceleration

EMV is a proxy metric used to estimate the dollar value of organic exposure generated by creators or content by translating impressions, engagement, and reach into an equivalent paid media cost. In simple terms, EMV answers the question: *"What would this organic exposure have cost if we had paid for it as media?"*

How EMV is typically calculated (varies by provider):

- Organic impressions × assumed CPM
- Weighted values for likes, comments, shares, and saves
- Sometimes adjusted for audience size, platform, or creator tier

Key limitations of EMV:

- EMV is **not an outcome metric** (it does not measure sales, lift, or incrementality)
- Methodologies are **inconsistent across vendors**
- It provides **directional value, not finance-grade accountability**

Earned and amplification metrics are much more rarely used than engagement and brand metrics.

How Measurement Is Currently Executed

The Operational Reality Behind the Data

Despite the scale and strategic importance of creator marketing, the operational reality of measurement remains **surprisingly manual.** Most brands and agencies still rely on a patchwork of disconnected systems to understand performance. Day to day, teams typically pull delivery and engagement data **from platform-native dashboards**, supplement that with s**creenshots and self-reported metrics from creators**, aggregate campaign performance through **creator platforms and marketplaces**, track lower-funnel outcomes via **affiliate and commerce tools**, and measure brand impact through **brand lift studies**.

Because these systems were not designed to interoperate, **holistic reporting still requires manual reconciliation in spreadsheets or custom-built dashboards**. While automation is improving at the margins, the core workflow remains fragmented. This operational complexity increases cost, slows optimization cycles, and introduces reporting risk, especially as creator programs scale from dozens of partners to hundreds or thousands.

In practice, organizations use a mix of tactical and advanced measurement approaches depending on budget, objectives, and technical maturity. The most common tools and methods in use today include:

- **Platform analytics and creator reports**
  Native metrics from TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and other platforms. These are fast and widely accessible, but siloed by platform and not cross-comparable.
- **Brand-lift surveys**
  Exposed-versus-control survey studies used to measure awareness, recall, and consideration. These provide critical upper-funnel validation, but are run as one-offs and expensive to run at scale.
- **First-party and retail data integrations**
  OS, CRM, and retail media integrations used to link creator exposure to sales where data-sharing agreements permit.
- **Attention, verification, and viewability partners**
  Third-party vendors used to assess delivery quality, fraud risk, and attention signals. Adoption is growing, but application remains inconsistent across creator campaigns.

The net effect is a system that **can support directional optimization and performance validation**, but still falls **short of fully automated, cross-platform, media-grade accountability**. Measurement works, but at a higher operational cost and with lower standardization than executives have come to expect from other major digital channels. You can infer that the campaign was successful, but not be able to connect it to business outcomes. Essentially, this workflow and these metrics prove content performance, not business outcomes.

What Works Today & What Still Breaks at Scale

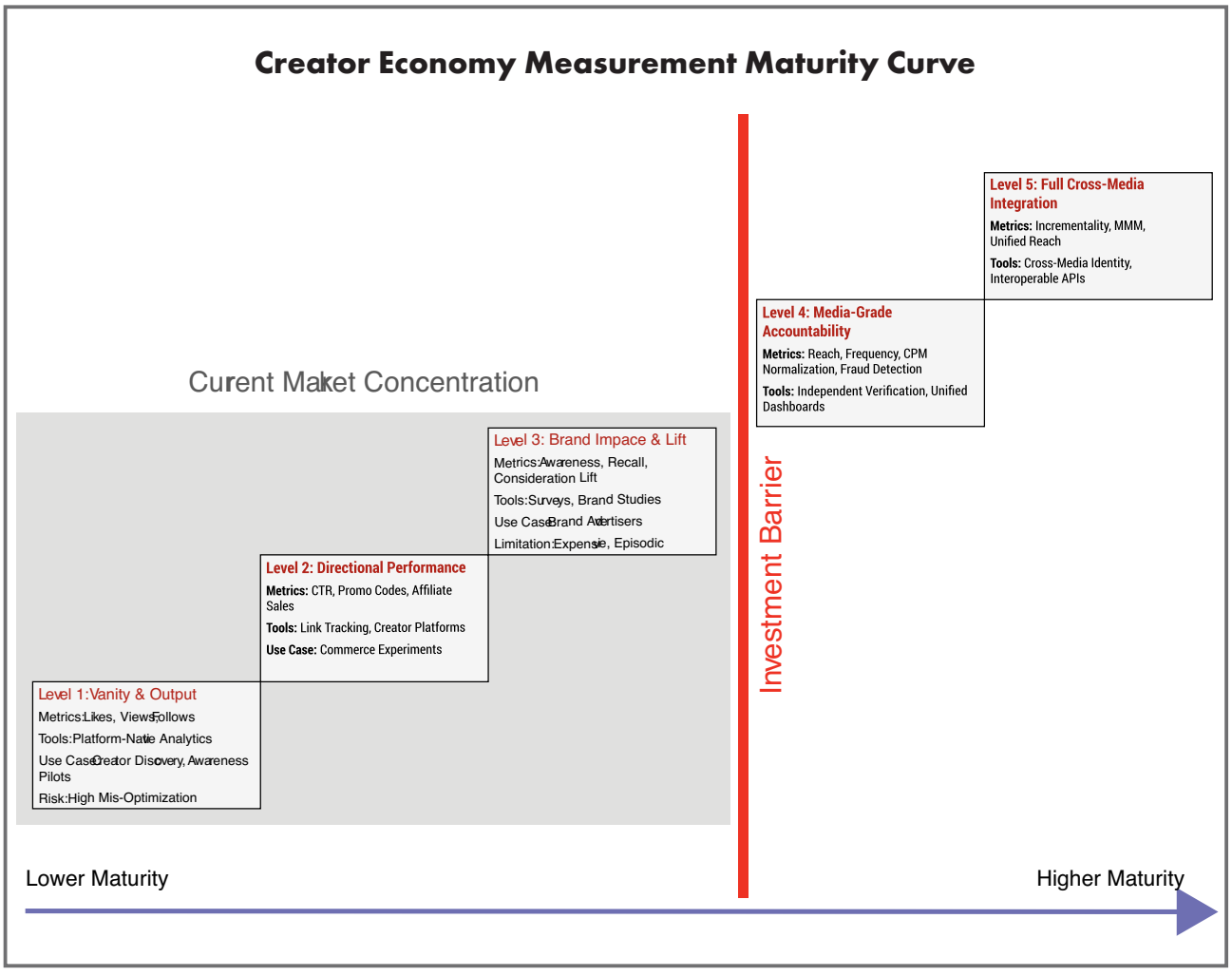
Today's ecosystem supports:

- Directional performance tracking
- Engagement optimization
- Affiliate commerce measurement
- Content and creator testing

It does not yet consistently support:

- Deduplicated cross-platform reach
- Unified frequency management
- Mathematically defensible incrementality
- Long-term brand equity modeling
- True cross-media benchmarking

The result is a market that **optimizes tactically with confidence**, but still **allocates strategically with partial visibility**.



Biggest Measurement Challenges Right Now

Fragmentation

Fragmentation is not a side effect of creator measurement. It is its core structural feature. Each major platform uniquely defines:

- What constitutes a "view"
- How impressions are counted
- What qualifies as engagement
- What data is accessible via APIs

There is no unified, third-party system today that can:

- Social teams own engagement
- Influencer teams own creators
- Media teams own paid amplification
- Commerce teams own conversions

Each group uses different tools, metrics, and success criteria, making holistic optimization difficult. And now multiply this by the innumerable companies within the industry, all using their own tools and metrics, and you get fractals within the fragmentation.

Walled Gardens & Limited Transparency

Major platforms control much of the data, creating attribution gaps and "black box" reporting.

Attribution: Where Value Is Systematically Under-Credited

Most creator performance today is evaluated through:

- Last-click links
- Promo codes
- Affiliate tracking

These systems reward what closes the sale, not what influenced it. Creators operate disproportionately in:

- Discovery
- Consideration
- Trust formation
- Cultural validation

Creators don't always close the sale, but they prime the system that closes the sale, and this is not adequately captured. Multi-touch attribution and incrementality testing exist, but adoption remains limited due to:

- Cost
- Data access
- Cross-platform identity constraints

As a result, creators are frequently **under-credited for the value they generate**, even as budgets continue to grow based on directional confidence rather than mathematically provable incrementality.

Data Quality, Fraud & Verification

Creators now deliver meaningful scale which means data trust is no longer a niche issue.

- Delivery metrics are largely **self-reported by platforms**
- Independent third-party auditing remains limited
- Fake followers, bots, and engagement manipulation persist
- GIVT/SIVT standards are not uniformly applied across creator media

Buyers increasingly expect creator data to meet the same **financial-grade verification standards** as programmatic and CTV. The market is not yet there, but expectations are rising quickly.

Pricing, Benchmarking & Spend Accountability

Creator pricing remains highly variable and largely non-standardized. Rates are influenced by:

- Platform
- Creator tier
- Vertical
- Content format
- Usage rights
- Exclusivity
- Amplification permissions

There is still **no normalized creator CPM** that finance teams can reliably use to benchmark efficiency across media channels. As a result, creator pricing behaves more like talent **compensation** than media inventory, even as it is increasingly budgeted and optimized as media.

This disconnect complicates forecasting and cross-channel comparisons.

What Needs to Happen to Unlock the Next Wave of Creator Spend

The next wave of creator investment will be unlocked by six structural upgrades:

1. **Measurement Standards**

Buyers need consistent definitions for views, impressions, and engagement across platforms to enable true cross-media planning. Every major digital channel that achieved institutional scale: search, social, programmatic, and CTV, eventually converged around:

- Common metric definitions
- Independent verification
- Normalized pricing constructs
- Interoperable reporting

Creators have not yet crossed that threshold. Not because the market lacks demand, but because:

- Platforms evolved independently
- Talent emerged outside traditional media systems
- Commerce, brand, and entertainment converged faster than standards could

The absence of standardization is now the **primary constraint on the next order of budget growth**.

2. **A Universal, Cross-Platform Currency**

We need the Creator Economy equivalent of a "GRP" or "CPM" but for influence. A normalized "quality impression" standard that accounts for attention, watch time, viewability, and engagement depth, works across platforms and enables apples-to-apples buying and planning.

3. **Traffic Quality & Valid Exposure Controls**

Scale requires confidence not just in reach, but in who and what that reach represents. Creator media must adopt consistent standards for traffic quality, including invalid traffic (GIVT/SIVT), view authenticity, audience validity, and brand-safe exposure—aligned with media-grade expectations.

4. **Independent, Media-Grade Verification**

Creator delivery must meet the same audit and fraud-prevention standards as other scaled digital channels.

5. **Full-Funnel Attribution & Incrementality**

The industry must move beyond last-click toward multi-touch and incrementality-based creator evaluation.

6. **Pricing Benchmarks That Finance Teams Can Trust**

Normalized CPM-style benchmarks must emerge to support forecasting and cross-channel efficiency analysis.

7. **Supply-Path Transparency Across Creator Tech**

Buyers must be able to see where dollars flow, what fees apply, and how value is distributed.

These are not theoretical upgrades. They are the same institutional mechanisms that unlocked scale in every other major digital channel. The creator economy is now large enough and commercially important enough to require them.

8. **Education - building a shared operating language between two ecosystems that developed independently**

Creators bring culture, trust, and distribution; the media system brings discipline around pricing, measurement, and risk. Education on both sides is what turns creator media from bespoke opportunity into institutional investment.

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Conclusion

Creator advertising is no longer about proving whether it works. It is proving how fast it can scale and what must change for that scale to become fully institutional.

Measurement today is **directional but not definitive**. Budgets are rising on confidence, not yet on complete financial proof. That is a natural phase of market maturation and one the creator economy is now rapidly outgrowing.

The opportunity ahead is not simply to measure creators better, it is to **integrate creators fully into the financial and planning systems that govern modern media investment**. When that happens, creator advertising will no longer be discussed as a category apart, it will simply be called media.