

A Fresh Take

Staying ahead of evolving dynamics in the marketplace and our culture

Fandom in Focus

How Cinema Will Captivate Passionate Audiences in 2026





Cinema delivers cultural moments and community for passionate fandoms

Over the years, American society has evolved from a more traditional monoculture to a fragmented pop culture scene where **consumers are identifying more with communities and niche fandoms** that feed their personal passions and interests.

For Gen Z and Millennials, this means a particular interest in things like horror, anime, gaming and book clubs, all of which enables them to **curate their own cultural moments and personal identity**.

Younger audiences have a desire for content that speaks to their passions and communities which foster a sense of belonging with people that have shared interests. **Cinema serves as a central gathering place that delivers the most desirable content and community** for these passionate audiences which creates many opportunities for brands.

Continue reading to learn how the 2026 theatrical release slate will deliver a **continuous pipeline of content aligned with eight key fandoms** that we've identified for Gen Z and Millennials and how marketers can align with these passionate fans to drive **increased brand relevancy** and **full-funnel outcomes lifts** through cinema advertising.

How are consumers defining cultural identity today and how are brands capitalizing on this?



There is a growing sentiment among American adults that there is no such thing as ‘mainstream’ pop culture anymore

▶ 91% of adults 18-25 say a single pop culture “mainstream” no longer exists*



61%

of adults say that there’s
**no such thing as mainstream
pop culture** anymore

(+15% increase since 2023)

Source: Horizon Futures, *The 2025 Subculture Field Guide*, November 2025. *Horizon Futures, *The 2024 Subculture Field Guide*, November 2024.

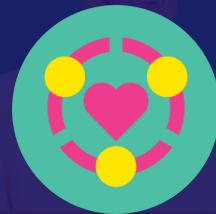
Instead, consumers are identifying more with passionate communities and niche fandoms as society evolves beyond a traditional monoculture

% of Adults Who Say That...



81%

Prefer to be **identified**
by their interests



65%

My identity is defined by
the **communities I share**
passions with*



+9%

Most of my interests
wouldn't be considered
'mainstream' to people*

(vs. 2023)

Source: Vox Media, *Insights & Innovation*, 2024. *Horizon Futures, *The 2025 Subculture Field Guide*, November 2025.

Consumers' passion extends to brands as they are more likely to buy, and even pay a premium for, those that align with their fandom communities

When a brand aligns with someone's passions, people are...

78%
More likely to
consider them



Consideration

3.7x
More likely to
prefer them



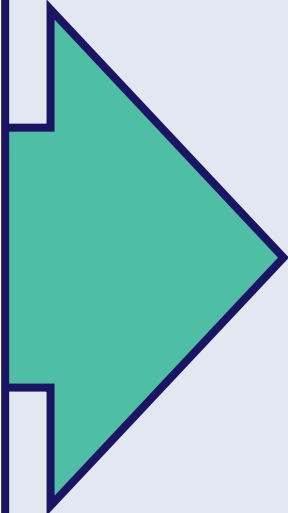
Intent

78%
More likely to
purchase from them



Purchase

64%
Willing to **pay at least**
a little more for them



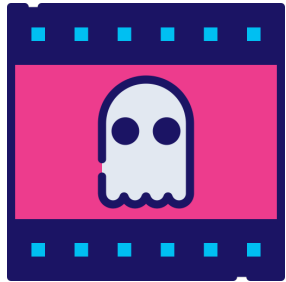
As culture becomes more personalized and fragmented, what are some of the important 'fandoms' for audiences between the ages of 18-44?



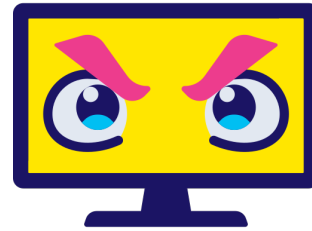
We identified eight key fandoms - including horror, anime, gaming and more – that are particularly culturally significant to younger audiences

Eight Popular Fandoms

Horror



Anime



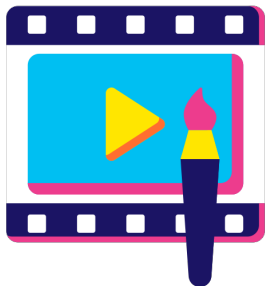
Gaming



Comics



Animation



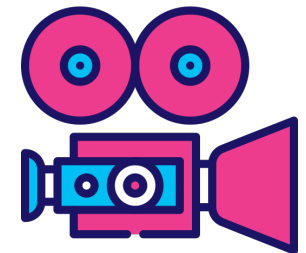
Performing Arts



Books



Millennial Nostalgia



Horror: Younger adults are deeply connected to the screams and scares of horror across premium video platforms

% more likely than A18+



Watched a horror movie in theaters in the last six months

A18-24: +79%

A25-34: +32%

A35-44: +14%



Typically watch horror shows on TV

A18-24: +20%

A25-34: +19%

A35-44: +20%



Typically binge watch horror shows*

A18-24: +27%

A25-34: +18%

A35-44: +22%

How to read: A18-24 are **79%** more likely to have watched a horror movie in theaters in the last six months than A18+

Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons Cord Evolution Study, August 2025, A18+, A18-24, A25-34, A35-44. *'Binge watch' is defined by watching three or more episodes in a single setting.

Anime: A surge in interest and viewership is being drawn to life by young adults, with adults 18-34 far more likely to watch and binge anime content

EM | EMARKETER

July 3, 2025

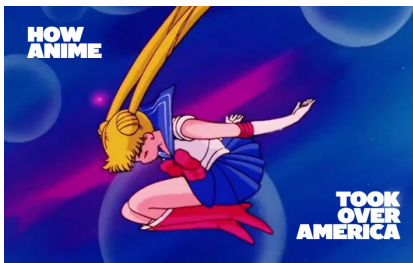
Gen Z, millennials drive anime viewership—and brands should tap in

SCREENRANT

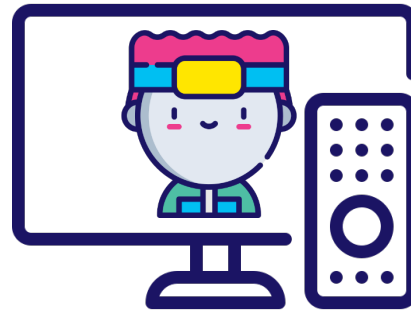
May 21, 2025

How Popular Is Anime These Days? According to Gen Z, It's Now Bigger Than BTS and Pedro Pascal

The New York Times Magazine September 3, 2025



% more likely than A18+



Typically watch anime shows on TV

A18-24: +120%

A25-34: +119%

A35-44: -25%



Typically binge watch anime shows*

A18-24: +136%

A25-34: +114%

A35-44: -20%

How to read: A18-24 are **120%** more likely to typically watch anime shows on TV than A18+

Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons Cord Evolution Study, August 2025, A18+, A18-24, A25-34, A35-44. *'Binge watch' is defined by watching three or more episodes in a single setting. Note: Anime is a visually expressive style of Japanese animation known for bold art, imaginative worlds, and emotionally driven storytelling.

Gaming: Video games attract players into interactive worlds, as they play online with friends, dive deep into fandom and watch Esports competitions

% more likely than A18+



Used online gaming service in the last 30 days*

A18-24: +132%

A25-34: +90%

A35-44: +34%



Have a 'high level of experience' playing video games

A18-24: +118%

A25-34: +80%

A35-44: +32%



Watch Esports competitions on TV or online in last 12 months**

A18-24: +136%

A25-34: +82%

A35-44: +16%

How to read: A18-24 are **132%** more likely to have used an online gaming service in the last 30 days than A18+

Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons Cord Evolution Study, August 2025, A18+, A18-24, A25-34, A35-44. *Includes: Nintendo Switch Online, PlayStation Network and Xbox Network. **Esports are professionally organized multi-player video game competitions. Note: Newzoo's 2024 Global Gamer Study found that **75% of Gen Z gamers say gaming is how they stay connected to friends.**

Comics: Passionate fans, especially younger audiences, are driving a recent resurgence in comic books



October 16, 2025

Comic Stores Are Booming Again As Readers Are Getting Younger



October 15, 2025

In a 'New World,' Comics Are Making A Comeback



May 23, 2025

Global Comics on Fire: Marvel vs. DC and the 2025 Market Boom

% more likely than A18+

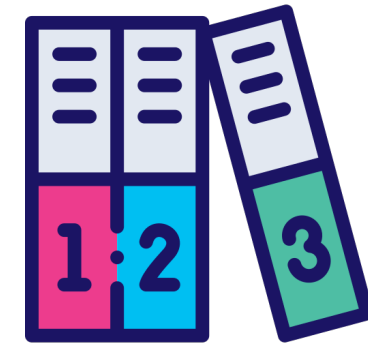


Read comic books
in the last 12 months

A18-24: +55%

A25-34: +63%

A35-44: +33%



Collect comic books

A18-24: +45%

A25-34: +35%

A35-44: +20%

How to read: A18-24 are **55%** more likely to have read comic books in the last 12 months than A18+

Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons Cord Evolution Study, August 2025, A18+, A18-24, A25-34, A35-44.

Animation: Wide, cross-generational audiences are attracted to these fandoms that deliver hyper-engaging content across platforms

BIG THINK

February 14, 2024

Animation may be entering a new renaissance. Here's why.

Medium

November 4, 2024

Animation Is Not Just For Kids And Here Is Why

VARIETY

October 22, 2025

Gen Z Wants More Animation and Less Sex Onscreen, According to Teens & Screens Survey

% more likely than A18+
in the last 6 months



Watched an animated movie in theaters

A18-24: +57%

A25-34: +40%

A35-44: +40%



Watched an animated movie outside of theaters

A18-24: +33%

A25-34: +48%

A35-44: +53%

How to read: A18-24 are 57% more likely to have watched an animated movie in theaters in the last six months than A18+

Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons Cord Evolution Study, August 2025, A18+, A18-24, A25-34, A35-44.

Performing Arts: Young adults have particular interests in the arts and are more likely to be into music, creating art and participating in local theater

% more likely than A18+
in the last 12 months



Attended a music festival

A18-24: +41%

A25-34: +34%

A35-44: +11%



Painted, drawn or sculpted

A18-24: +41%

A25-34: +36%

A35-44: +22%



Participate in local theater

A18-24: +34%

A25-34: +26%

A35-44: +25%

***How to read:** A18-24 are **41%** more likely to have attended a music festival in the last 12 months than A18+

Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons Cord Evolution Study, August 2025, A18+, A18-24, A25-34, A35-44.

Books: Reading is being redefined by younger audiences who are creating a social culture with others around literary worlds and immersive stories

The Guardian US

February 9, 2024

'Reading is so sexy': gen Z turns to physical books and libraries

FAST COMPANY

May 1, 2024

Gen-Z and millennials love reading books. But being a 'reader' means something more

NBC NEWS

April 13, 2025

The hottest new social scene might be a book club

% more likely than A18+



Have a 'great level of experience' reading books

A18-24: +10%

A25-34: +10%

A35-44: +5%



Used book apps on mobile phone or tablet in last 30 days

A18-24: +0%

A25-34: +7%

A35-44: +15%

How to read: A18-24 are **10%** more likely to have a great level of experience with books than A18+

Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons Cord Evolution Study, August 2025, A18+, A18-24, A25-34, A35-44

Millennial Nostalgia: A wave of reminiscence is shaping millennial viewing habits, pushing them toward remakes, sequels and revived franchises

76%
of millennials
experience **nostalgia**

FASTCOMPANY

September 8, 2024

**You don't need to be a '90s kid to know:
Millennial nostalgia is now driving culture**

% more likely to have seen each movie in last 6 months*
A30-44 vs. A18+

Saw X

+45%

Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga

+37%

Mean Girls
(2025)

+36%

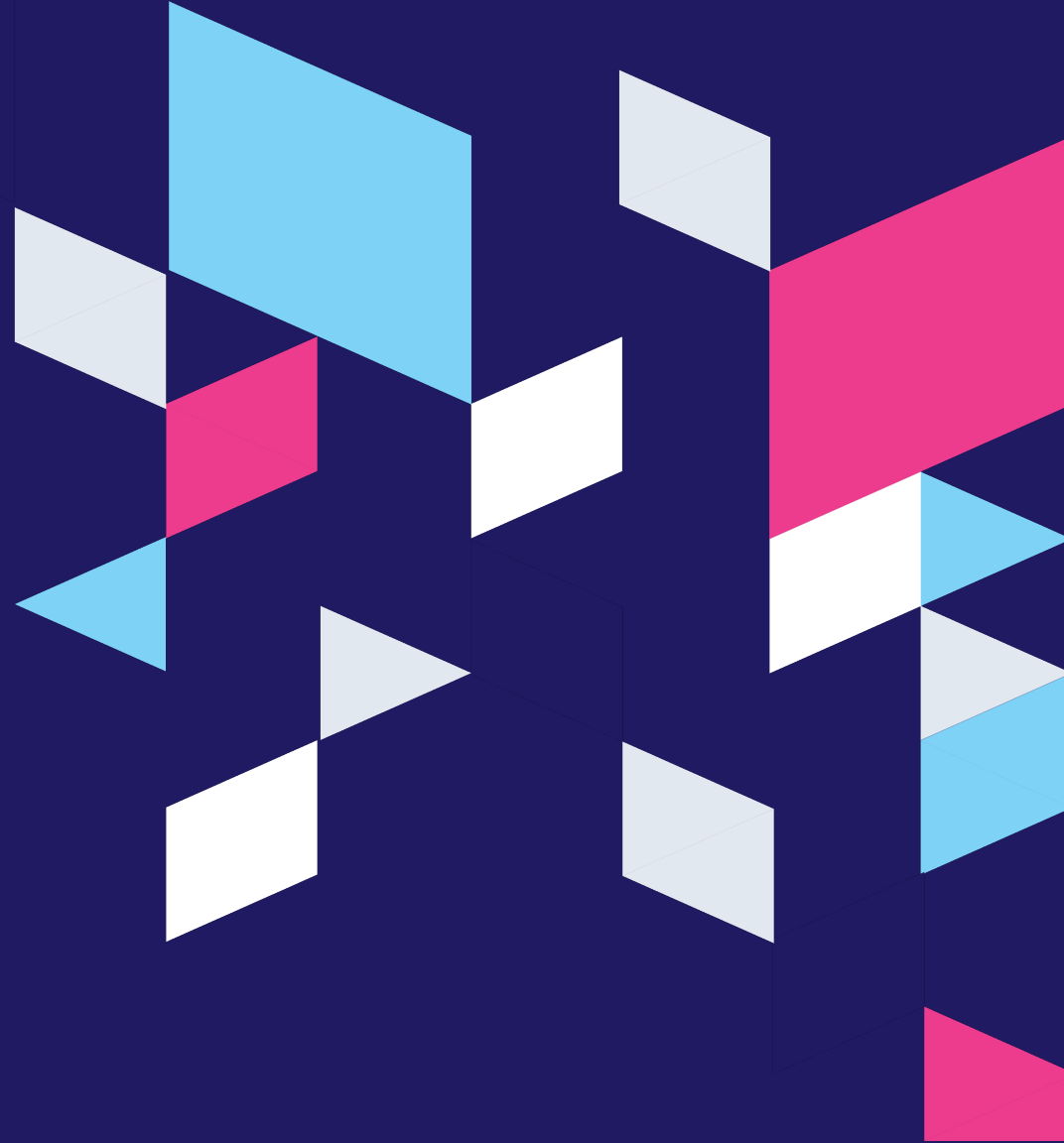
Deadpool & Wolverine

+33%

How to read: A30-44 are **45%** more likely to have recently seen *Saw X* than A18+

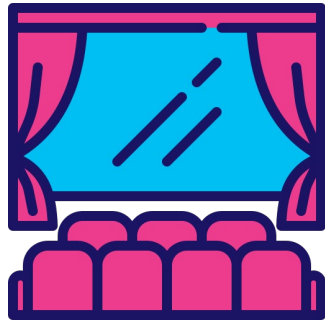
Source: Human Flourishing Lab, *Historical Nostalgia in Modern America*, May 2025. *VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons Cord Evolution Study, August 2025, A30-44 & A18+.

**Cinema super serves these passionate
fandom communities by creating a big
screen, theatrical experience for the
most desired content**



Younger audiences are more likely to be frequent moviegoers who are excited to see new theatrical releases immediately

% more likely than A18+



Go to the movie theater
monthly

A18-24: +35%

A25-34: +28%

A35-44: +15%



See a movie during
opening weekend

A18-24: +49%

A25-34: +34%

A35-44: +30%



Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons Cord Evolution Study, August 2025, A18+, A18-24, A25-34, A35-44.

For Gen Z and Millennials, theatrical releases impact their culture and the cinema creates a sense of community which is even more important now

% of Gen Z and Millennials who agree that...



80%

A movie is **more impactful in culture** if it's available in theaters



72%

The **togetherness of seeing a movie in theaters** has become more important post-pandemic

2025 featured many popular theatrical releases across the eight key fandoms that deeply resonated across younger audiences

Sampling of 2025 Theatrical Releases by Genre

Horror

Sinners



The New York Times 5/10/25

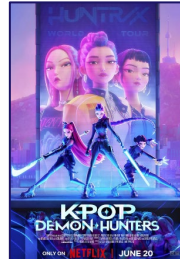
'Sinners' Box Office Success Puts It in Elite Company

THE WRAP 5/11/25

'Sinners' Passes Box Office Milestone No Original Film Has Reached in 8 Years

Anime

KPop Demon Hunters



BOXOFFICEMOJO 8/24/25

Weekend Box Office: KPOP DEMON HUNTERS Stuns in First Place Finish

Gaming

A Minecraft Movie



SCREEN RANT 4/4/25

Minecraft Movie Box Office Breaks Video Game Movie Record One Day Into Release

Superhero / Comic

Fantastic Four: First Steps



DEADLINE 7/28/25

'Fantastic Four: First Steps' Lands At \$117M+, Opening Repts Record For Franchise, Stars & Director Matt Shakman – Box Office Update

Animation

Lilo & Stitch



DEADLINE 5/29/25

'Lilo & Stitch': All The Box Office Records Broken

- Biggest 4-Day Memorial Day Weekend
- Biggest 3-day Opening for a PG Movie In May
- Biggest Tuesday In May for a PG Movie

Arthouse / Independent

Materialists



VARIETY 9/18/25

'Materialists' Is First Indie Movie of 2025 to Surpass \$100 Million at Global Box Office

Book Adaptations

How to Train Your Dragon

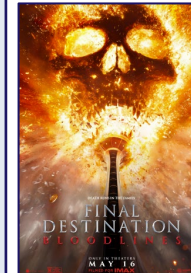


DEADLINE 8/11/25

'How To Train Your Dragon' Rises To Franchise-Best \$84M+ Box Office Opening, Eyes \$40M+ 2nd Weekend

Millennial Nostalgia

Final Destination Bloodlines



DEADLINE 5/18/25

'Final Destination Bloodlines' Coursing To Franchise-Best \$51M Bow; Nobody Is Rushing To 'Hurry Up Tomorrow' – Sunday AM Box Office Update

SCREEN RANT 5/28/25

Final Destination Bloodlines Box Office Breaks The Horror Franchise's 16-Year Highest-Grossing Record

Films within these fandoms deliver highly concentrated, passionate younger audiences for brand to connect and engage with

▶ Adults 18-34 make up 29% of the A18+ population, but they can be reached in much higher concentration in cinemas*

2025 Theatrical Releases: % A18-34 Audience Composition (A18+)

Demon Slayer:
Infinity Castle



71%

The Conjuring:
Last Rites



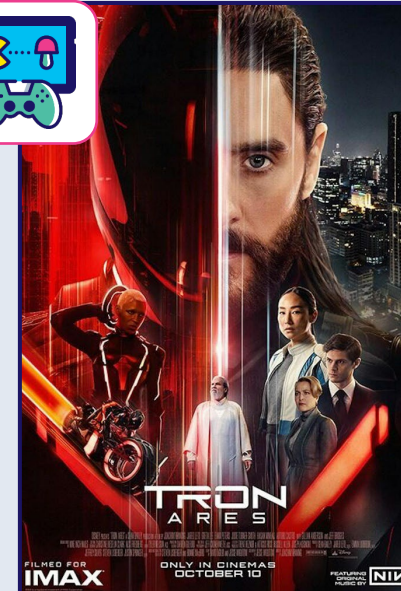
69%

Caught Stealing



65%

Tron: Ares



52%

Jurassic World Rebirth



51%

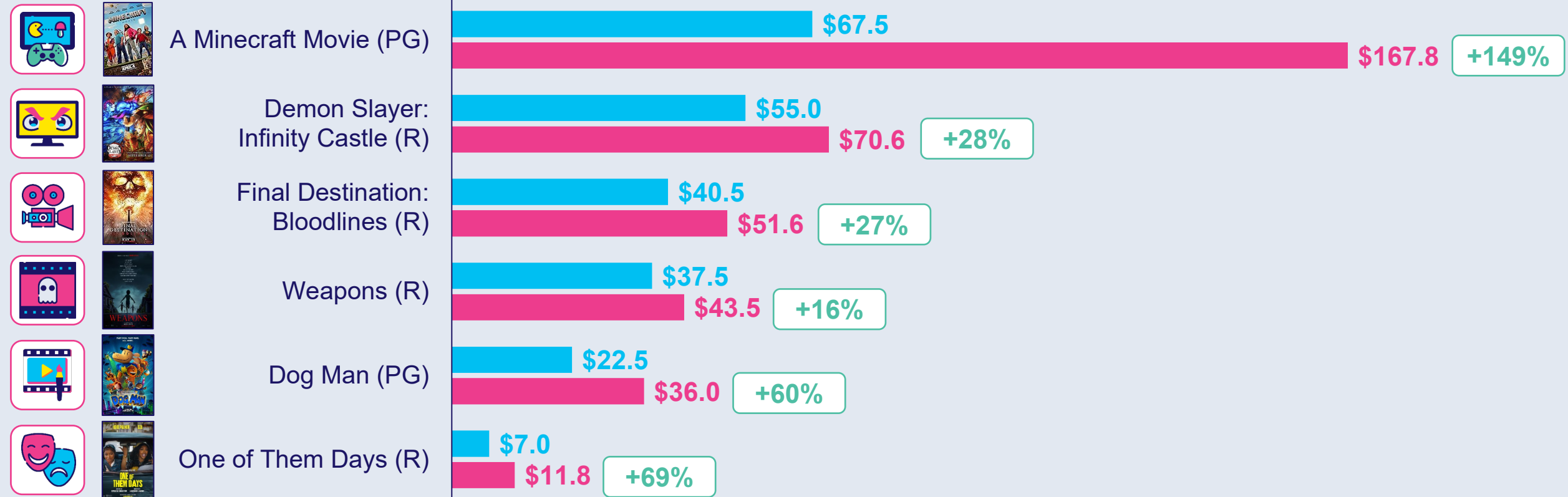
Source: Deadline, *Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle* – “Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle’ Huge With \$70M Opening: A Record For Anime & Crunchyroll; 6th Best For September, Sony’s Biggest YTD”, 9/14/25; *The Conjuring: Last Rites* – “The Conjuring: Last Rites’ Possesses \$83M U.S.: 3rd Biggest Horror Opening Ever, Breaks Franchise Records, Warner Bros. Ascends To Top Of Global B.O. With \$3.77B Marketshare”, 9/7/25; *Caught Stealing* – “Summer Ending With \$3.67B Near Even With Last Year Thanks To ‘Weapons’ Labor Day; Misses \$4B Projection – Update”, 8/31/25; *Tron: Ares* – “Tron: Ares’ Box Office Grid Dims To \$33M+ Opening – Sunday Update”, 10/12/25; *Jurassic World Rebirth* – “Jurassic World Rebirth’: Dinosaur Gets Bigger With \$36M+ Saturday; 5-Day Opening Now Roaring To \$147M+; Promo Campaign Clocks \$150M – Update”, 7/6/25. *VAB analysis of MRI-Simmon Cord Evolution Study, August 2025, A18-34 & A18+.

These passionate fandoms have driven outsized box office success, vastly overperforming industry experts' top-end revenue projections

Domestic Box Office Projections vs. Opening Weekend Box Office

\$ in MM

■ Projection ■ Revenue



Source: Projections based on VAB analysis of Screendollars, *Wednesday Report Forecast*, 1/15/25, 1/29/25, 4/2/25, 5/14/25, 8/6/25 & 9/10/25. Chart projections reflect a median of projection range (A Minecraft Movie's 4/2 projection was \$65MM to \$70MM, with a median of \$60MM). Opening Weekend Revenue based on finalized opening weekend box office per [boxofficemojo.com](https://www.boxofficemojo.com), as of 11/21/25.

Cinema will continue super serving passionate audiences, and advertisers, throughout 2026 with a consistent theatrical release slate aligned with the eight key fandom communities



The film industry is investing heavily in content within the eight key fandoms to engage passionate communities at movie theaters in 2026

 **Topicdrill**

August 25, 2025

Walk into any movie theater, and you'll likely find at least one superhero film commanding the biggest screen

SCREENRANT

November 24, 2025

2025's Record-Breaking Horror Movie Box Office Will Be Even Harder To Beat After Next Month

COMICBOOK

November 30, 2025

Zootopia 2's Box Office Success Proves Animation Deserves More Respect in Theaters

VOGUE

March 3, 2025

Small But Mighty: Indie Filmmaking Triumphed at the 2025 Oscars

SOUTHERN NEWS

November 19, 2025

Young adult books are taking over Hollywood

 **NEWS**

July 27, 2025

Nostalgia takes over the box office

The New York Times

September 3, 2025

The film industry is investing heavily in anime, so much so that its distinctive style is now seemingly everywhere

SCREENRANT

October 13, 2025

Video Game Movies: The Future of Cinema's Box Office Success

gdgt
GADGETS MIDDLE EAST

August 9, 2025

From TV show reboots of classic sitcoms to blockbuster movie remakes, studios are doubling down on the emotional pull of the past

***Brands can tap into these cultural moments
coming soon to a theater near you...***



‘Horror’ Theatrical Releases: New movies like *Soulm8te* and *The Bride* and the latest installments from the *28 Days Later* and *Insidious* franchises

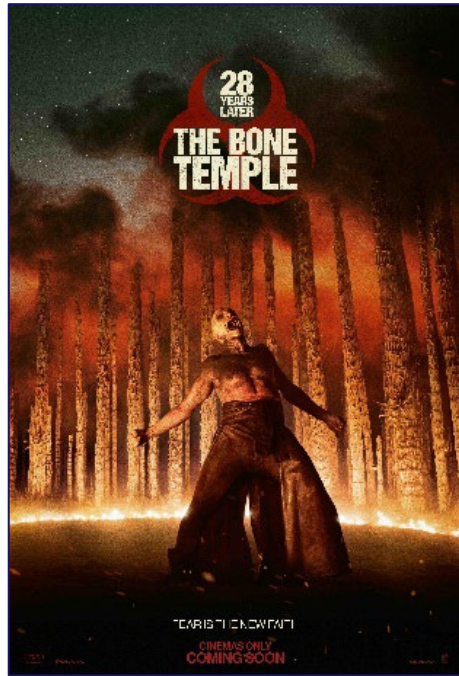
Sampling of Planned 2026 Theatrical Releases

Soulm8te



1/9/26

**28 Days Later:
The Bone Temple**



1/16/26

Psycho Killer



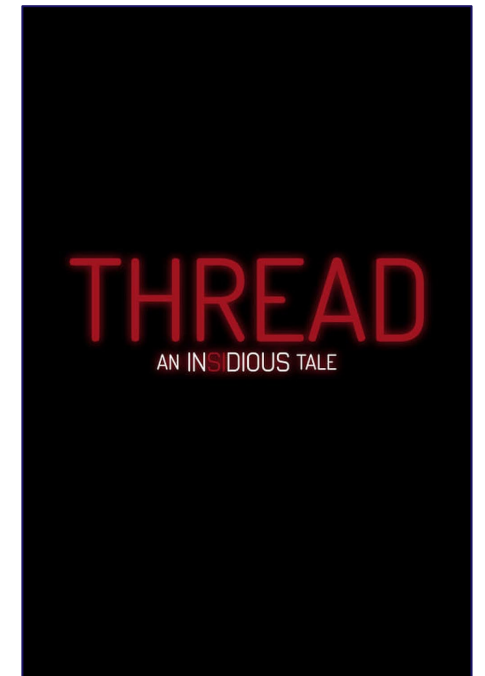
2/20/26

The Bride



3/6/26

**Thread:
An Insidious Tale**



8/21/26

Source: IMDb, Upcoming Releases, 2026. Note: Release dates planned as of 11/18/2025 and subject to change.

'Anime' Theatrical Releases: Fan favorite stories heading to the big screen like *All You Need Is Kill*, *Mononoke* and *Expelled from Paradise*

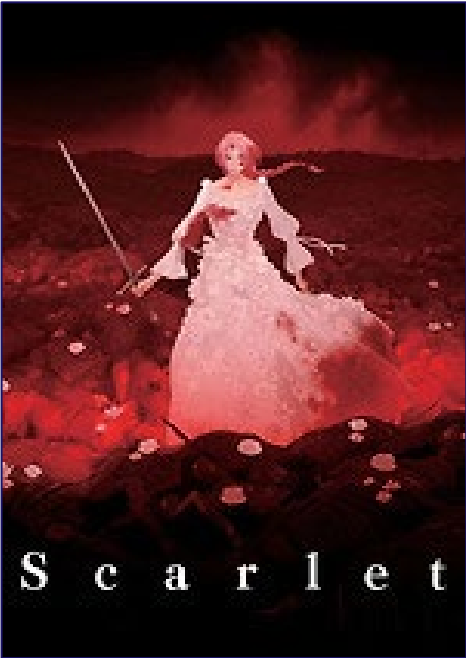
Sampling of Planned 2026 Theatrical Releases

All You Need Is Kill



1/16/26

Scarlet



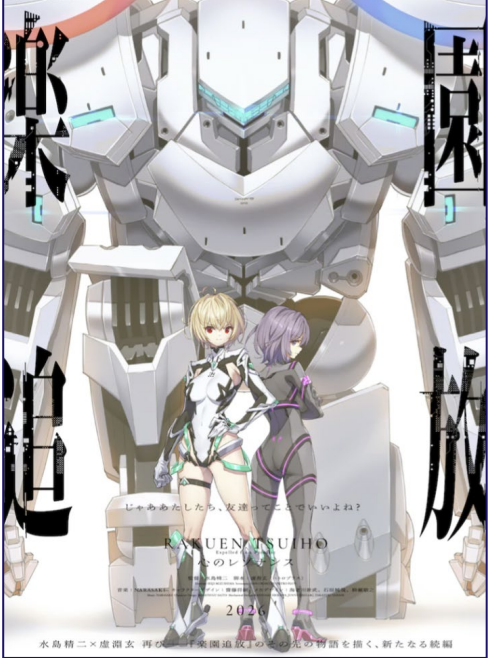
2/6/26

Gekijoban Mononoke Dai-San-Sho:



Spring 2026 (TBD)

Expelled from Paradise: Resonance of the Heart



11/13/26

Puella Magi Madoka Magica



2026 (TBD)

Source: IMDb, Upcoming Releases, 2026. Note: Release dates planned as of 11/18/2025 and subject to change.

‘Video Game Adaptation’ Theatrical Releases: Gamers are gearing up for films from the popular *Super Mario*, *Street Fighter* & *Call of Duty* universes

Sampling of Planned 2026 Theatrical Releases

Return to Silent Hill



1/23/26

The Super Mario Galaxy Movie



4/3/26

Street Fighter



10/16/26

Dune: Part Three



12/18/26

Watch Dogs



2026 (TBD)

Source: IMDb, Upcoming Releases, 2026. Note: Release dates planned as of 11/18/2025 and subject to change.

'Comics & Superheroes' Theatrical Releases: Comic fanatics have their calendars marked for new *Star Wars*, *Spider-Man* and *Avengers* movies

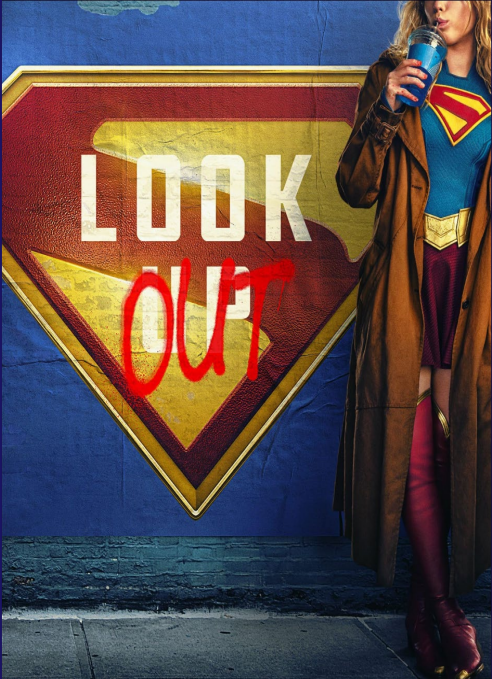
Sampling of Planned 2026 Theatrical Releases

**Star Wars: The
Mandalorian and Grogu**



5/22/26

Supergirl



6/26/26

**Spider-Man:
Brand New Day**



7/31/26

Clayface



9/11/26

**Avengers:
Doomsday**



12/18/26

Source: IMDb, Upcoming Releases, 2026. Note: Release dates planned as of 11/18/2025 and subject to change.

'Animated' Theatrical Releases: Audiences of all ages are looking forward to new movies from the *Toy Story* and *Minions* franchises and more

Sampling of Planned 2026 Theatrical Releases

GOAT



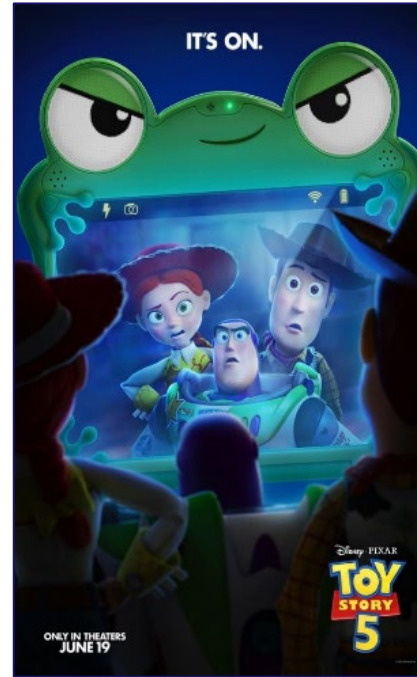
2/13/26

The Pout-Pout Fish



3/20/26

Toy Story 5



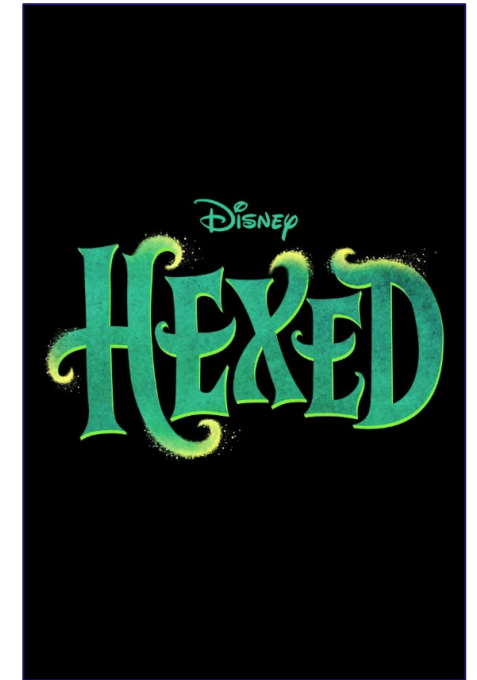
6/19/26

Minions 3



7/1/26

Hexed



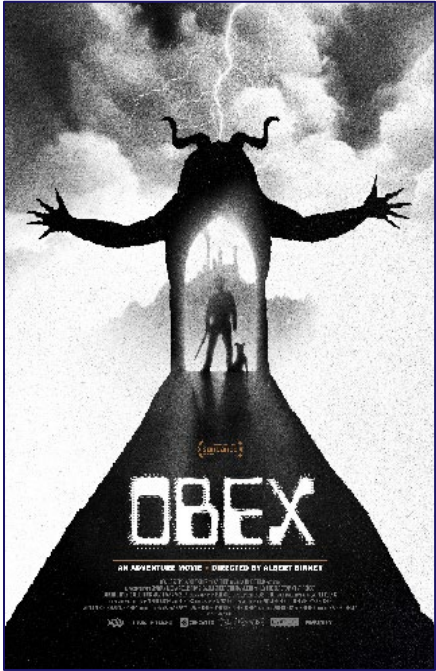
11/25/26

Source: IMDb, Upcoming Releases, 2026. Note: Release dates planned as of 11/18/2025 and subject to change.

'Performing Arts' Theatrical Releases: Film buffs, music fans and thespians are looking forward to *OBEX*, *Michael* and a new *Camp Rock* movie

Sampling of Planned 2026 Theatrical Releases

OBEX



1/9/26

Dead Man's Wire



1/16/26

**Good Luck,
Have Fun, Don't Die**



2/13/26

Michael



4/24/26

Camp Rock 3



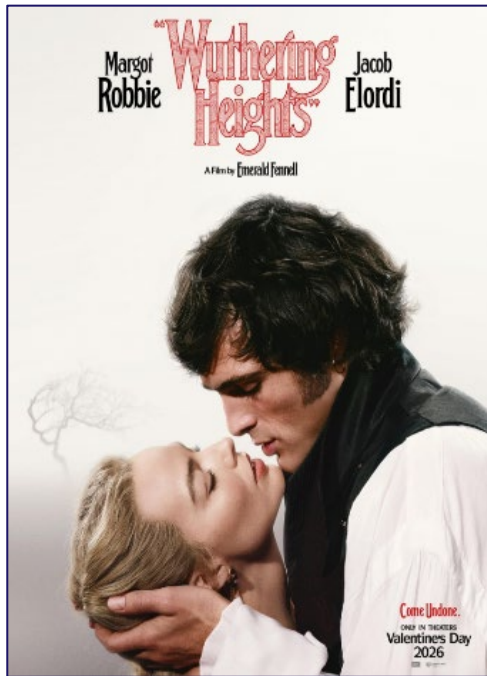
2026 (TBD)

Source: IMDb, Upcoming Releases, 2026. Note: Release dates planned as of 11/18/2025 and subject to change.

‘Book Adaptation’ Theatrical Releases: *Wuthering Heights*, *Project Hail Mary*, *The Odyssey* and more will be engaging bibliophiles at the movies

Sampling of Planned 2026 Theatrical Releases

Wuthering Heights



2/13/26

Reminders of Him



3/13/26

Project Hail Mary



3/20/26

The Odyssey



7/17/26

Verity



10/2/26

Source: IMDb, Upcoming Releases, 2026. Note: Release dates planned as of 11/18/2025 and subject to change.

'Millennial Nostalgia' Theatrical Releases: New films from well-known nostalgic properties like *Masters of the Universe*, *Scream* and *Scary Movie*

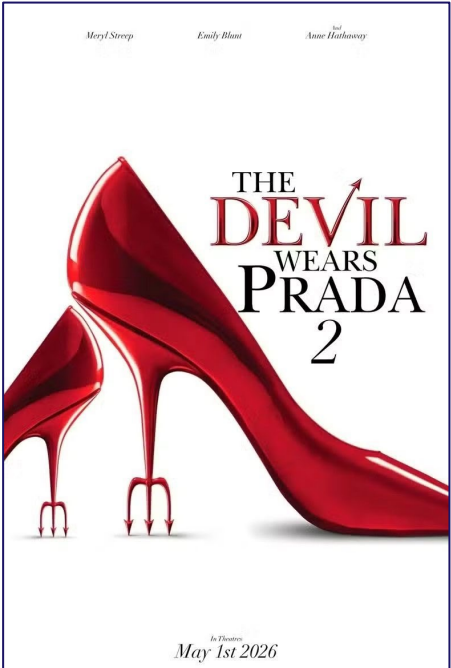
Sampling of Planned 2026 Theatrical Releases

Scream 7



2/27/26

The Devil Wears Prada 2



5/1/26

Masters of the Universe



6/5/26

Scary Movie 6



6/12/26

The Cat in the Hat



11/6/26

Source: IMDb, Upcoming Releases, 2026. Note: Release dates planned as of 11/18/2025 and subject to change.

In summary, Cinema will offer constant cultural moments across the eight key fandom communities throughout 2026

Sampling of Planned 2026 Theatrical Releases



Source: IMDb, Upcoming Releases, 2026. Note: Release dates planned as of 11/18/2025 and subject to change.

Color Code: **Horror**, **Anime**, **Video Game Adaptation**, **Comics & Superheroes**, **Animation**, **Performing Arts**, **Book Adaptation**, **Millennial Nostalgia**.

Key Marketer Takeaways

Cinema delivers cultural moments and community for passionate fandoms

- ▶ **In a world of cultural fragmentation, consumers find individual identity through their fandoms.** Most adults no longer see a single 'mainstream' pop culture and instead are identifying more with their personal passions and the communities built around them.
- ▶ **Cinema is where young audiences feel a deep cultural impact.** Gen Z and Millennials view theaters as the most meaningful way to experience content and immerse themselves in relevant cultural moments.
- ▶ **Fandoms come together in theaters to connect as a community.** Audiences across fandoms come together with fellow passionate fans at movie theaters to engage in the shared experience of watching their most desired content.
- ▶ **2026 theatrical releases provide scalable, passion-aligned marketing opportunities.** As the theatrical slate takes shape, marketers can align themselves with passionate fans to drive increased brand relevancy and full-funnel outcomes lifts through cinema advertising.

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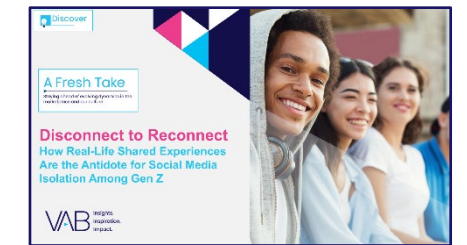
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