



Culture & Trends Report

Animation's New Wave

How independent, online animators are
reshaping the entertainment industry



New Showrunners

A life-or-death singing competition on an alien planet. A cast of characters trapped in a circus-themed virtual landscape ruled by a maniacal AI ring leader. An afterworld in which Hell is overpopulated and sinners must seek rehabilitation to make it to Heaven. These are the premises of just a few of the unconventional animated series that have originated on YouTube in recent years and found massive, global success.

At a time when the traditional media landscape is dominated by preexisting IP, independent online animators are proving the exception, creating original characters and stories with engaged fan communities and showing what it takes to be successful in entertainment today.

61%

of 14- to 24-year-old animation fans agree that they like watching animated series created by independent animators for YouTube as much as or more than series created by a major studio.⁽¹⁾

(1) Google/SmithGeiger, YouTube Trends Survey, U.S. April 2025, N=358 online Gen Z animation fans age 14-24.

To learn how creators are finding success with independent animation and what this means for entertainment at large, the YouTube Culture & Trends team researched animation trends from around the world, interviewed prominent creators, and ran surveys with SmithGieger, asking thousands of people how they engage with animated videos. Respondents were people who are active online, age 14-49.



Global Growth

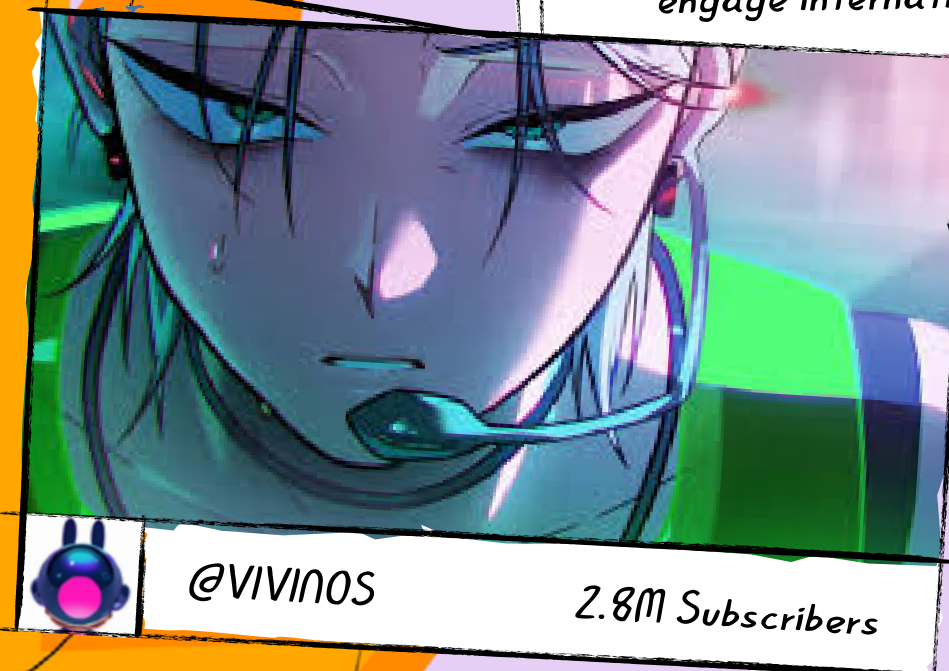
Even a few years ago, it would have felt novel to see videos from an animated Korean show appearing on YouTube's top trending video lists around the world, from the U.S. and Mexico to France and Japan. Yet that's exactly what the "Final" episode of the series "Alien Stage," a YouTube-first show, achieved in 2025. Its success is emblematic of the kinds of international reach that animation creators are seeing online today. And it's happening fast.

ON A GLOBAL STAGE

"Alien Stage" uses a globally recognizable format – the survival audition show – to reach and engage international fans.

Videos with "Alien Stage" in the title have received over 330M views in 2025, over 90% of which came from outside Korea.⁽²⁾

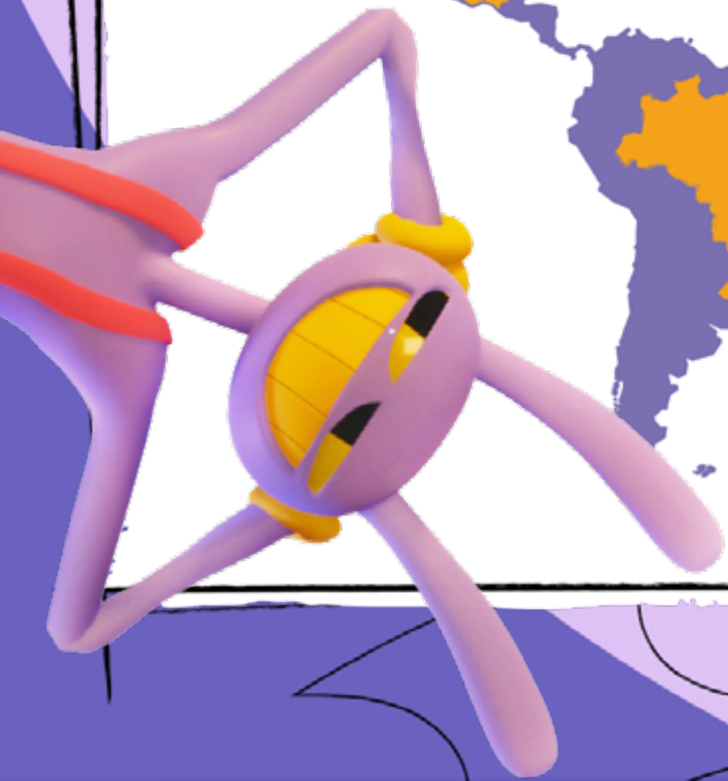
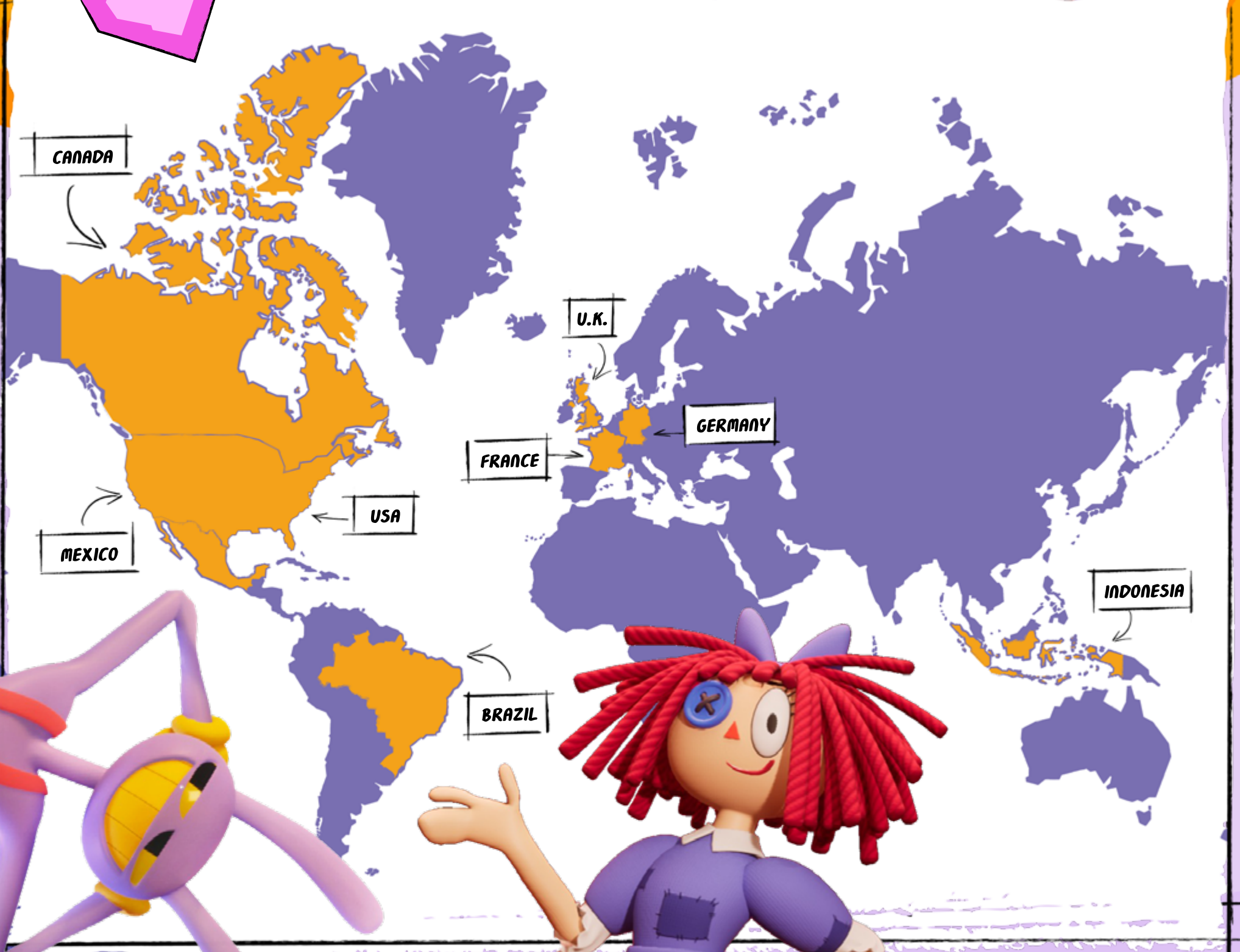
(2) YouTube Data, Global, Jan. 1, 2025 - Sep 15, 2025



Additionally, online animation series aren't just breaking through on one platform. Many, including "Helluva Boss" and "Murder Drones," have expanded their footprint, embracing a hybrid distribution strategy: They maintain a home on YouTube while also branching out to upload episodes on alternative streaming services. The cross-platform growth of these shows suggests what audiences are seeking in entertainment: new kinds of storytelling and fresh IP, with cross-culture characters that defy convention and appeal to a generation that has grown up online.




An Amazing Global Achievement

By the end of 2024, after releasing just four episodes, "The Amazing Digital Circus" on YouTube's Trending Topics lists for eight out of 12 countries.



A New Playbook

Online animators are experimenting with a range of video formats that enable faster production and increased audience participation. While some of these formats mirror the more polished state of mainstream animated films, others use less costly means of production. Animation videos on YouTube tend to fall into one of three categories:

 <p>ANIMATION MEME</p>	 <p>ANIMATIC</p> <p>TEASER ANIMATIC</p>	 <p>FULL EPISODES</p> <p>YOUR FAULT</p>
<p>An animation meme is a brief animation of a character, often an OC, or original, creator-made character, who sings or dances to a set piece of audio. These memes serve as a kind of template for other creators and are intended to be easily adapted and riffed on.</p>	<p>In traditional animation, animatics serve as a preliminary storyboarding step on the path to the final production. On YouTube, creators often treat animatics, which may feature more roughly drawn sketches, as the finished, final product.</p>	<p>For some animators, individual episodes serve as stand-alone storylines, while others are intended to gauge audience interest in a full series. These full episodes are typically similar in quality to a mainstream animated show or movie and are often teased via trailers or clips.</p>
<p><i>66% of 14- to 24-year-old animation fans watch animation memes weekly or more. (3)</i></p>	<p><i>57% of 14- to 24-year-old animation fans watch animatics weekly or more. (4)</i></p>	<p><i>63% of 14- to 24-year-old animation fans watch animated series created for YouTube weekly or more. (5)</i></p>

Animation creators are showing that audiences today are receptive to a range of production standards. Younger generations, who have grown up watching multiple video formats online and using apps like Blender and Alight Motion to create animations themselves, do not make the same kinds of distinctions as earlier generations. This means brands and creators have the freedom to play within a spectrum of formats and test concepts in-market earlier in the development process.

(3)(4)(5) Google/SmithGeiger, YouTube Trends Survey, U.S. April 2025, N=358 online Gen Z animation fans age 14-24.

Around the World in seven Animations

Breakthrough animations are not limited to a single genre, format, or country of origin. These are the memes, shows, and animatics that are seeing success today.



@SpindleHorse
11.1M Subscribers

U.S.: "HELLUVA BOSS" (ANIMATICS + SERIES)

Vivienne Medrano, aka Vivziepop, uses animatics in some teasers and trailers for her show, giving more than 11.1 M subscribers a peek behind the curtain.⁽⁶⁾



@WastedSeries
638K Subscribers

ARGENTINA: "WASTED" (SERIES)

Argentinian series "Wasted" leans into dark comedy and hyper niche cultural identities, two components that have helped the channel surpass 625K since launching in spring 2024.⁽⁸⁾



@SociedadedaVirtude
691K Subscribers

BRAZIL: "SOCIEDADE DA VIRTUDE" (SERIES)

Since starting in 2017, this dark comedy series has launched an English-language version of the channel and spread to HBO Max and Adult Swim. The channel has continued to grow, gaining more than a quarter of its lifetime views in 2025 alone.⁽⁷⁾



@offsrambledegg
546K subscribers

U.K.: "SMILE" (MEME)

OFF SCRIPT's Short, which features a character dancing to Lily Allen's single "Smile", received more than 5.8M views and ignited an animated choreography trend.⁽⁹⁾



(6) YouTube Data, Global, April 15, 2013 - Oct. 21, 2025

(7) YouTube Data, Global, Jan. 1 - Sept. 29, 2025

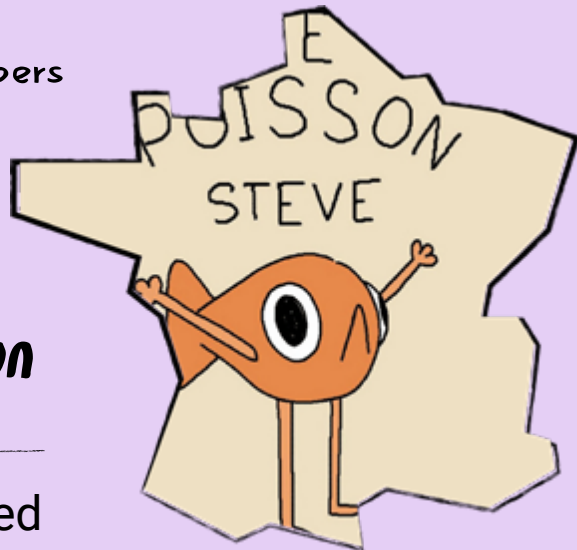
(8) YouTube Data, Global, April 15, 2024 - Oct. 21, 2025

(9) YouTube Data, Global, 22 Jan. 2025 - Oct. 21, 2025

Around the World in seven Animations



@vigzvigz
38.7K Subscribers



FRANCE: LE POISSON STEVE (MEME)

The animation paired with a catchy track created a fan community eager to riff on the titular animated orange fish. In the first 8 months of 2025, there were over 95M views of videos with "le poisson steve" in the title.⁽¹⁰⁾

JAPAN: "LEMON MELON COOKIE" (MEME)

DJ TAK's Vocaloid track inspired various animated styles of a high-energy dance trend, resulting in more than 14K using the audio.⁽¹¹⁾



@WastedSeries
638K Subscribers



@GLITCH
17.9M Subscribers



AUSTRALIA: "KNIGHTS OF GUINEVERE" (SERIES)

The latest release from Glitch Productions is seeing speedy success. In its first three days after release, there were already more than 1.4K with "Knights of Guinevere" or "knightsofguinevere" in the title, featuring fan reactions and animatics.⁽¹²⁾

The memes, series, and animatics that are finding success around the world do not follow any classic storytelling formula. Each is charting its own course, from dystopian science fiction tales to cookie-inspired dances, exhibiting the kind of cross-cultural variety that appeals to viewers today.

(10) YouTube Data, Global, Jan. 1 - Aug. 15, 2025.

(11) YouTube Data, Global, Jan. 15 - Sept. 30, 2025.

(12) YouTube Data, Global, Jan. 19 - Jan. 21, 2025.

Animated Advances

Animators are scaling their projects by using new technologies that simplify global reach, while also employing new economic models to get series off the ground.

BREAKING DOWN LANGUAGE BARRIERS

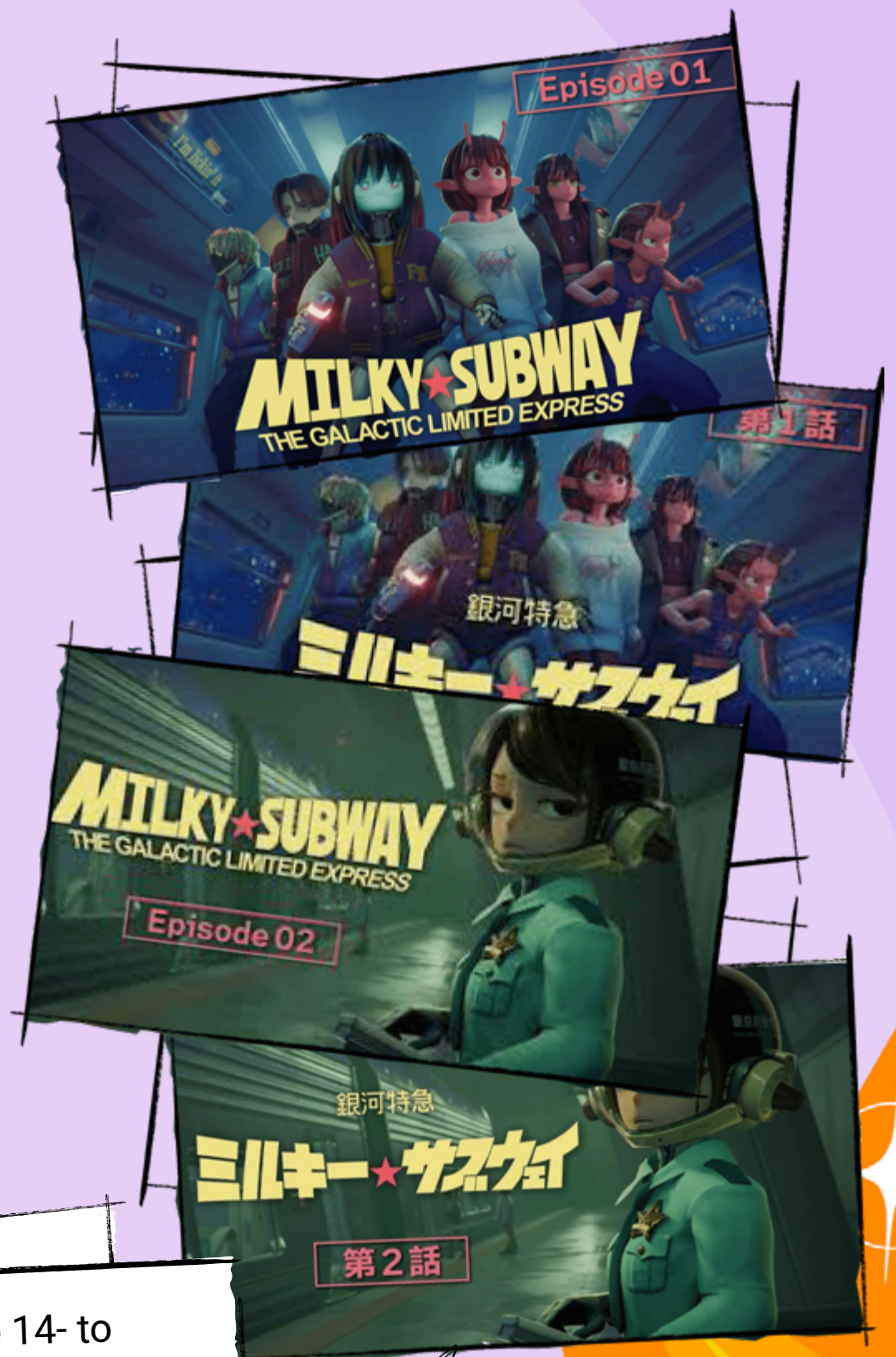
Where language was once seen as a blocker to widespread accessibility, it is now a benefit. New dubbing and auto-translation tools have made it possible for viewers located around the world to engage with foreign language videos. In the process, they discover new storylines, characters, and creators with distinct cultural sensibilities, often different from their own and appealing, in part, because of their novelty.

The most successful animated series take advantage of these tools. For example, the pilot episode of “TADC” features subtitles for 18 different languages and alternate audio tracks for 21 languages. The cyberpunk Japanese show “Milky Subway,” meanwhile, features dubbing in 10 different languages, from Hindi to Spanish.

50%

of animation fans (online 14- to 49-year-olds) agree that they watch animated series in languages other than their own.⁽¹³⁾

(13) Google/SmithGeiger, YouTube Trends Survey, U.S. April 2025, N=671 online animation fans age 14-49.

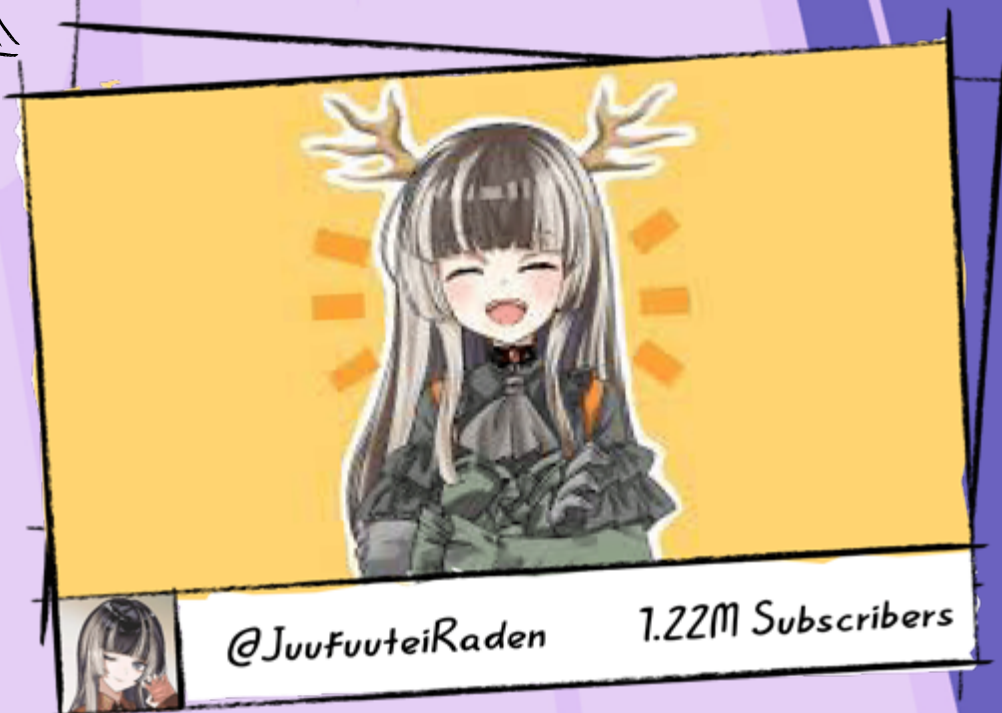


@milkygalacticuniverse
1.01M Subscribers

Animated Advances

THE VIRTUAL CREATOR BOOM

As interest in engaging with virtual creators and artists — animated digital avatars with distinct online personas — continues to grow, many fans choose to express their fandom for these creators by transforming VTuber livestream stories into animations of their own. This phenomenon helped propel Japanese VTuber Juufuutei Raden past 1M subscribers.



A NEW STUDIO MODEL

Creator-led studios like Glitch Productions are showing what's possible when they join forces to provide their peers with the monetary, marketing, and creative support to develop new projects. Glitch hires independent animators, often sourced through YouTube, to create series that live on its channel, while still allowing the showrunners to maintain creative control.

Globalization is at the center of indie animation's rise. Audiences today are primed for increased language accessibility, adoption of internationally-born trends, and creations from global studios that empower online talent.



61%

of 14- to 24-year-olds who have watched a virtual creator online agree that it's possible to feel just as connected to a virtual creator or artist as a real creator or artist. ⁽¹⁴⁾

(14) Google/SmithGeiger, YouTube Trends Survey, U.S. April 2025, N=671 online animation fans age 14-49

FACTORY

Appealing to Next-Gen Viewing Behavior: *Fan Participation*

Today's generation of teenagers have grown up in an online world that has been shaped by access to YouTube and open world videogames. As a result, they have a unique set of expectations about entertainment. One of these expectations is that they will be active participants, creating content that responds to and riffs on what they watch. Successful animation creators are recognizing this interest and designing for it.



In some cases, this means purposely producing content that fans can turn into remixes and memes. For example, the first episode of "The Amazing Digital Circus" features a scene where the main character, Pomni, opens a series of doors leading into rooms. Glitch posted this still frame online but changed the room to a green screen, anticipating that fans would turn it into a meme. They did just that, helping to organically spread awareness of the show from the start.

Engagement with fans can also occur more organically. Vivienne Medrano, the creator of popular animated series "Hazbin Hotel" and "Helluva Boss", turned a fan-made song into a full music video. "If it's something that feels like it can give back to the show, I love collaborating with the fans that make this art in a way that can elevate it to be a bit more real," she says.

As more fans contribute to the visual universes of their favorite shows, they multiply the show's potential reach and popularize characters. Brands and creators should seek to encourage fan contributions during all stages of the production process.

Appealing to Next-Gen Viewing Behavior: *Fan FUNDING*

In addition to leaning on their communities to help spread awareness through fan creation, animation creators are also diversifying their revenue sources and using fan funding to turn pilot episodes into fully fledged series. This is the model followed by YouTube-first animated series like “Dungeon Flippers” and “Far-Fetched,” both of which surpassed their fundraising goals on Kickstarter.



Other series, like the galaxy-crossing space show “MonkeyWrench” give their paying channel members special perks, like short animation updates between episodes that provide an insider look at what’s to come. In a world where a single episode of a show has the power to supercharge a fan community, it’s easier for creators to start monetizing through secondary means from the start.



Instead of waiting to see how a new show performs, Glitch Productions produces tie-in products for each release. “We generally like to turn each episode that we drop into a spectacle, or an event, and tied to this event is some merchandise,” says Kevin Lerdwichagul, the company’s cofounder and CEO. “Every time someone buys a piece of merch that goes into funding more shows, more episodes.”

“EPIC: The Musical” CASE STUDY

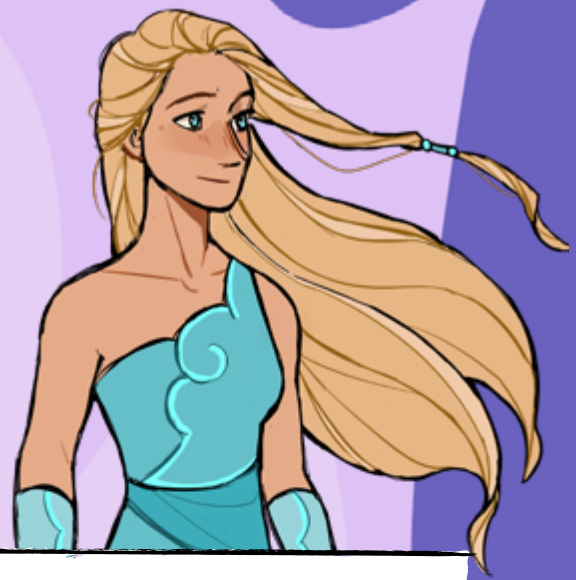
“EPIC: The Musical,” a musical adaptation of Homer’s “The Odyssey,” is a best-in-class example of a creator cultivating a fan community. Creator Jorge Rivera-Herrans’ first videos primarily focused on developing the musical’s songs, but he quickly realized that his viewers included talented artists who could shape its visual identity. Their contributions multiplied the musical’s impact: Since it started, there have been more than 1.3B views of videos related to “EPIC: The Musical.”⁽¹⁶⁾

In the first six months of 2025, there were more than 4K uploads of videos related to “EPIC: The Musical” and animatic.⁽¹⁷⁾

(17) YouTube Data, Global, Jan. 1 - June 30, 2025

Art by
julsunart

Art by
Giulia Toneatto



STEP 1

ENCOURAGING AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Rivera-Herrans encouraged fans to upload video auditions and kept fans updated by uploading development animatics on his own channel.

STEP 2

ACTIVELY ENGAGING WITH FANS

Noticing fans were imagining scenes and characters and turning them into animatics, Rivera-Herrans recognized these creations by uploading reaction videos to the animatics on his own channel.

STEP 3

COMMISSIONING FAN CONTRIBUTIONS

Rivera-Herrans then sourced artists directly from the active fan community, commissioning them to create official animatics for the series. The live-streamed release party for the series, featuring these animatics, became his most-viewed long-form video.

(16) YouTube Data, Global, Aug. 1, 2021 - Oct. 4, 2025.

LOOKING AHEAD

The creativity demonstrated by independent animators is not just transforming the entertainment ecosystem on YouTube – it's already changing the broader industry, which is rushing to license shows and work directly with creators. These creators are building a blueprint for breaking through, one that shows how their processes and methods can be adopted and implemented by others to see success.

"Ultimately, my main goal for the industry through all of this is creating the culture and ability for basically anyone to be able to go put their stuff online, get an audience, get support, and actually go get the thing made."

Kevin Lerdwichagul

Of course, underlying all of this is a compelling story. Even as technologies evolve and methods of distribution change, viewers ultimately want fresh narratives to connect with and characters to call their own. The next wave of new IP starts here.



Opportunity for brands and creators today means:

- ① Actively seeking fan contributions, both content and monetization
- ② Embracing international trends, languages, and creators
- ③ Diversifying production formats

"One of the things that makes EPIC special, if not the biggest thing, is really the community. Doing all of the auditions online, getting all of these animators and animatic artists from within the community and showing the process over years...all of those together I feel like really helped us bond as a community."

Jorge Rivera-Herrans