
RELEASE STRATEGIES FOR MUSIC & TV

BEST PRACTICES FOR LAUNCHING ALBUMS AND SERIES IN A CROWDED ENTERTAINMENT MARKETPLACE



INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Robert Steiner is a Luminate Intelligence media analyst with a focus on the music industry and the creator economy. His work has appeared in Variety, NPR, the Boston Globe and Hyperallergic.

Tyler Aquilina is a Luminate Intelligence media analyst covering the streaming and content landscapes and their effects on the media/tech business. He was previously at Entertainment Weekly, where he wrote on, among many topics, the film industry, streaming and labor issues in Hollywood.

The Next Big Thing Just Dropped — Now What?

One could argue that the process of releasing a work of art is an art in and of itself: The art of getting someone to care about a thing you created.

Generating attention has always been a part of the entertainment business, but the ways of achieving that have vastly changed in the digital era. In this era of personalized algorithms, a pulverized monoculture and a never-ending barrage of content, getting people to cut through the noise to engage with your work is exceptionally difficult.

There are myriad ways to reach audiences, but the line between being a drop in the ocean and a cannonball splash is razor thin. Still, it’s not impossible, and in many ways a successful release strategy for an album or a TV show in 2026 comes down to what you define as success.

A music artist who wants to top the charts will need to take a different approach than one who wants to cultivate a core following. A streamer wanting to score a hit off a debut series or attract new viewers to a season premiere will utilize a different playbook than one that wants to keep the audience it already has.

This report calls out strategies of recent music and TV releases — two entertainment fields uniquely transformed by the streaming era — that had an impact, and we’ve labeled them by their defining feature.

The album rollouts covered include traditional no-fuss releases, era-defing events, releases tailored to the fans and those that grabbed their momentum through surprise. On the TV side, the releases covered highlight key differences between old-school methods (episodic cadence, yearly seasons) and streaming era tactics (binge-style drops and multiyear season gaps).

In either field, nothing is ever a guaranteed hit, especially in this day of rapid-fire change. But the methods detailed herein offer a sense of what can move the needle and get people to tune in, if only for a moment.

/01

MUSIC

- 1/ KEEP IT TRADITIONAL
- 2/ TRUST THE FANS
- 3/ ESTABLISH AN ERA
- 4/ BE ONLINE
- 5/ DROP A SURPRISE
- 6/ THROW OUT THE BOOK



KENDRICK LAMAR
CREDIT: EARL GIBSON III



HAYLEY WILLIAMS
CREDIT: ROLLING STONE



SABRINA CARPENTER
CREDIT: GREG SWALES

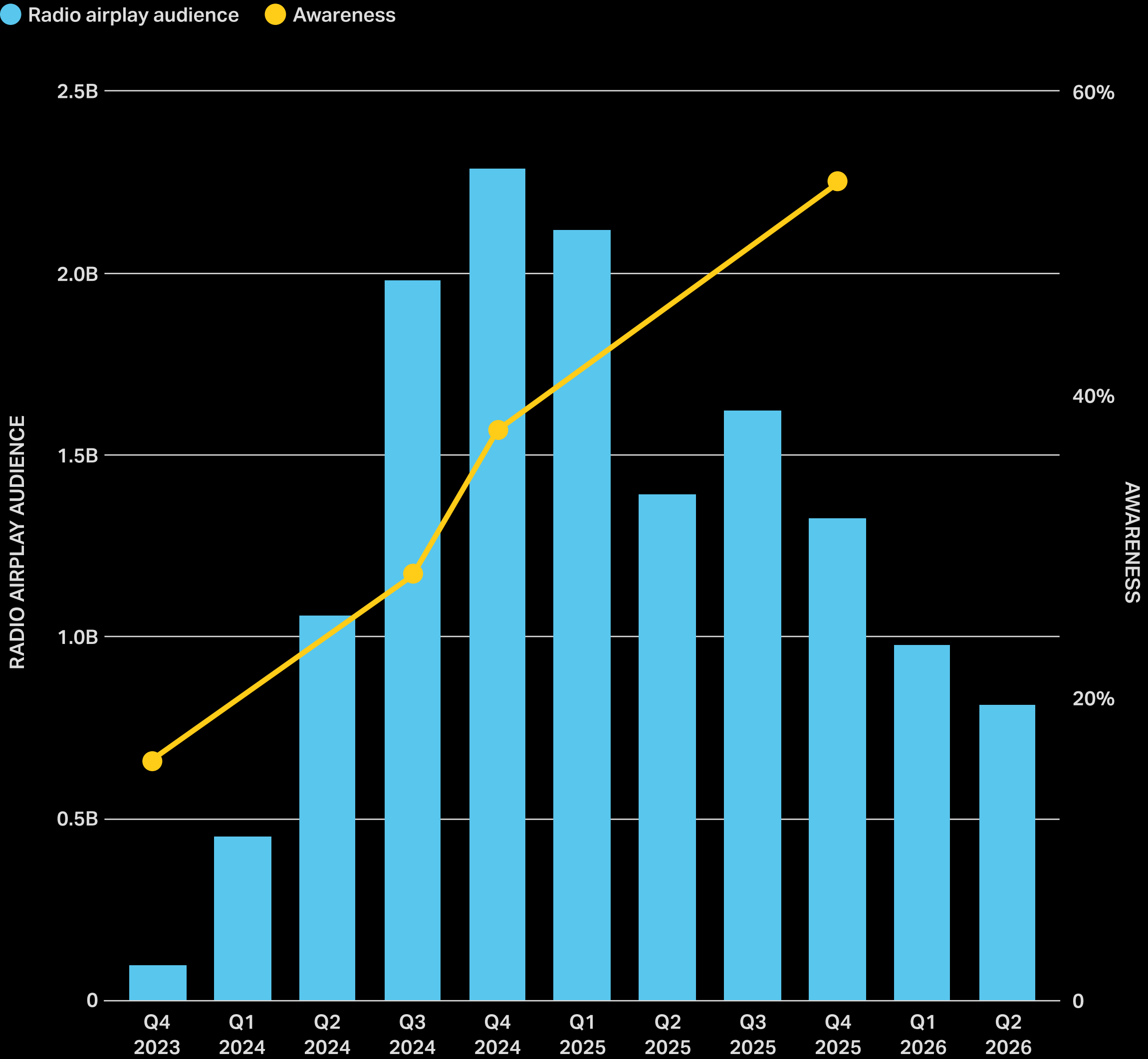
SABRINA CARPENTER went traditional for a mainstream breakout.

After years in entertainment, Sabrina Carpenter scored in 2024 with her sixth album, *Short n’ Sweet*. While the virality of singles “Espresso” and “Please Please Please” were major boosts, Carpenter and her team also utilized a traditional rollout approach (several singles released ahead of the album) to gain momentum via offline channels ahead of the release, including radio.

Even in the streaming era, radio airplay can be key for driving an artist’s cultural cachet. Here it boosted awareness of her among the U.S. general population, prompting massive gains in streaming consumption after *Short n’ Sweet*’s release, jumping from 16% to 55% awareness in just two years, according to Luminate’s Artist + Genre Tracker. Her follow-up, *Man’s Best Friend*, arrived a year later and utilized a similar but shorter traditional rollout.

SABRINA CARPENTER: AWARENESS VS. RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE

Share of U.S. gen pop



TAYLOR SWIFT knew the fans would show up.

Taylor Swift has some of the most dedicated fans in music, if not the entire entertainment industry — and the heavy use of variants and multiple editions in her album rollouts suggests she and her team are well aware of that fact.

K-pop perfected the art of flooding the market with multiple versions and formats of an album to appeal to fan dedication. Swift has taken a similar but amplified approach with her albums of late, releasing vinyl color variants, deluxe editions, retail exclusive versions and much more. Her latest, *The Life of a Showgirl*, in fact had 65 different product releases across physical and digital formats, according to Luminate consumption data.

If successful, this approach can boost an artist’s long-term chart performance and provide fans more opportunities to engage with the artist (and spend money).

Indeed, Swifties’ willingness to spend on the singer’s albums and collect their many versions — whether out of dedication to her or FOMO — has propelled her recent albums to new sales records. However, it’s worth noting that pushback from certain fans online over *Showgirl*'s variants underscores the careful line artists must tread when using this strategy.

PHYSICAL PRODUCT SALES



MIDNIGHTS

RELEASE YEAR: 2022

NO. OF PRODUCT RELEASES: 67

ATD PRODUCT SALES: 3.3M



THE TORTURED POETS DEPARTMENT

RELEASE YEAR: 2024

NO. OF PRODUCT RELEASES: 54

ATD PRODUCT SALES: 3.7M



THE LIFE OF A SHOWGIRL

RELEASE YEAR: 2025

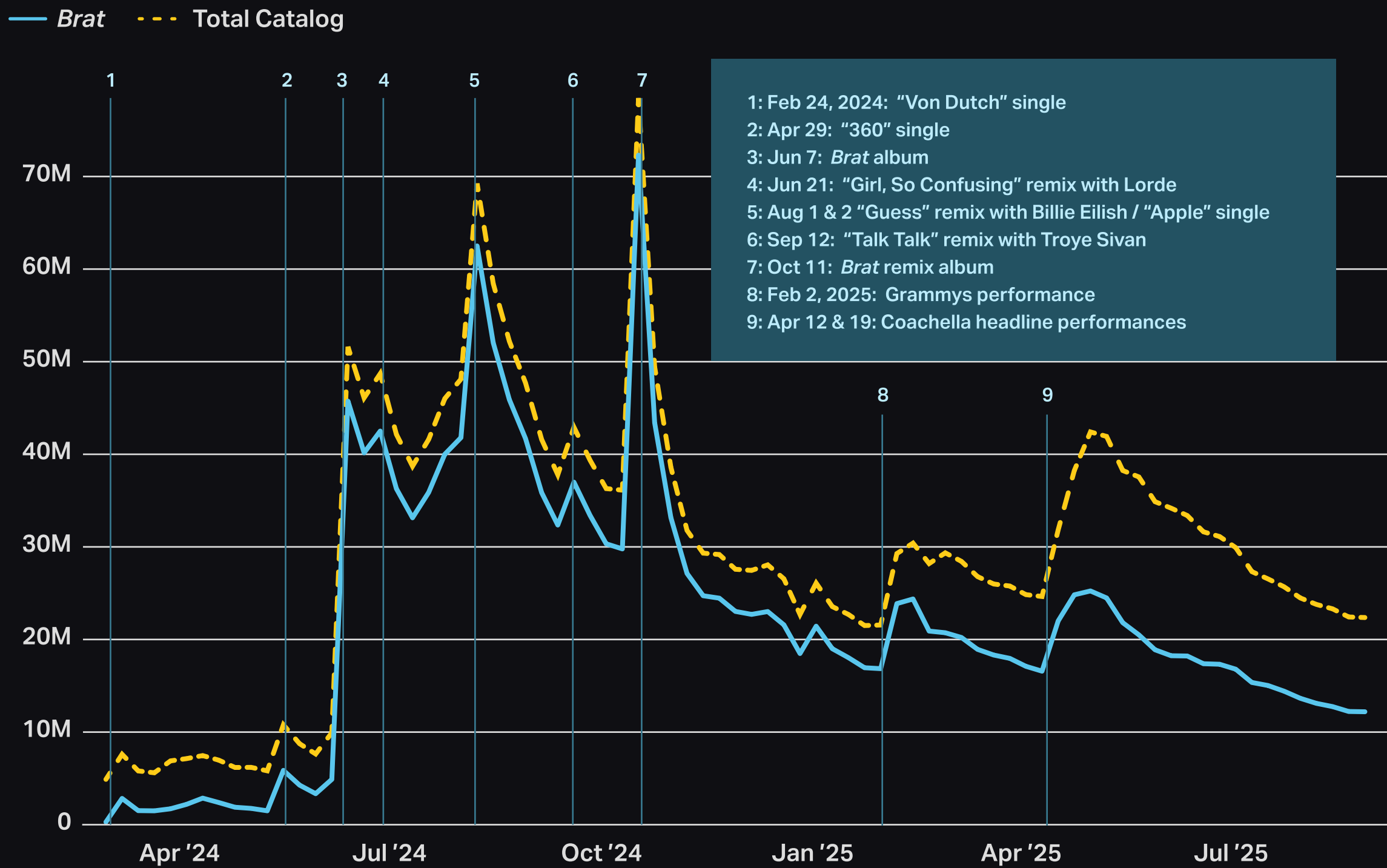
NO. OF PRODUCT RELEASES: 65

ATD PRODUCT SALES: 4.1M

CHARLI XCX created a moment with “*Brat* summer.”

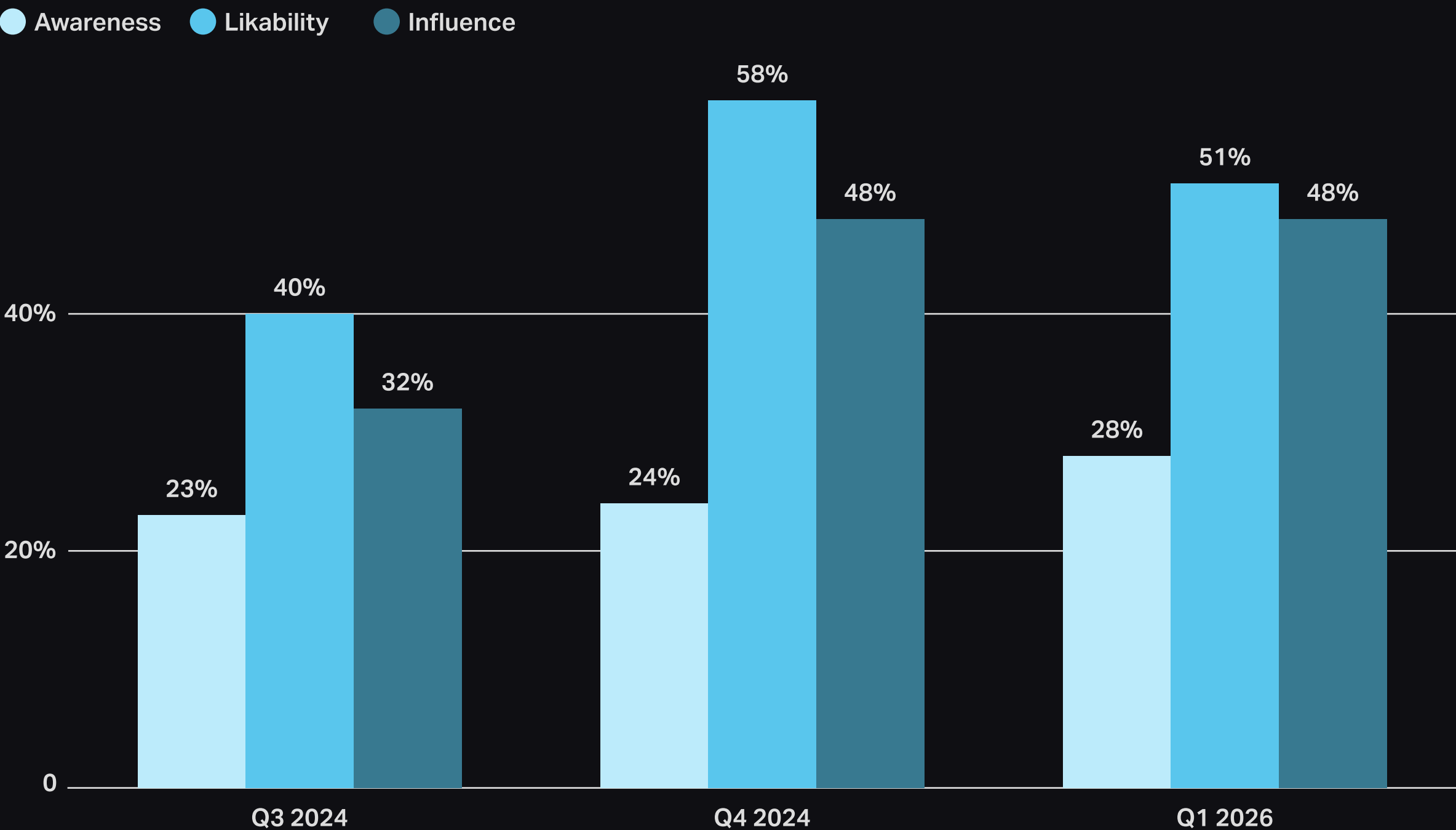
The summer of 2024 will forever be “*Brat* summer,” a great example of how an album’s promotional cycle can evolve into a distinct, broader artistic statement. Many factors went into building the *Brat* era: the slime green cover, the 2010s indie sleaze-inspired visuals and Charli XCX’s unadorned authenticity while promoting the album, all of which heightened the music’s party-like energy and invited old and new fans to join in. Additionally, Charli continued to release new versions and remixes of *Brat* songs throughout the album’s rollout, culminating in a full *Brat* remix album in October, aptly titled *Brat and It’s Completely Different but Also Still Brat*. That move further turned *Brat* summer into an active, ever-evolving movement rather than a standard album rollout. Two years later, Charli is still benefiting from *Brat*’s success: Listenership for her back catalog has steadily grown over the past year, and Luminate survey data found that her awareness increased 8.8% post-*Brat*.

WEEKLY U.S. ON-DEMAND AUDIO STREAMS

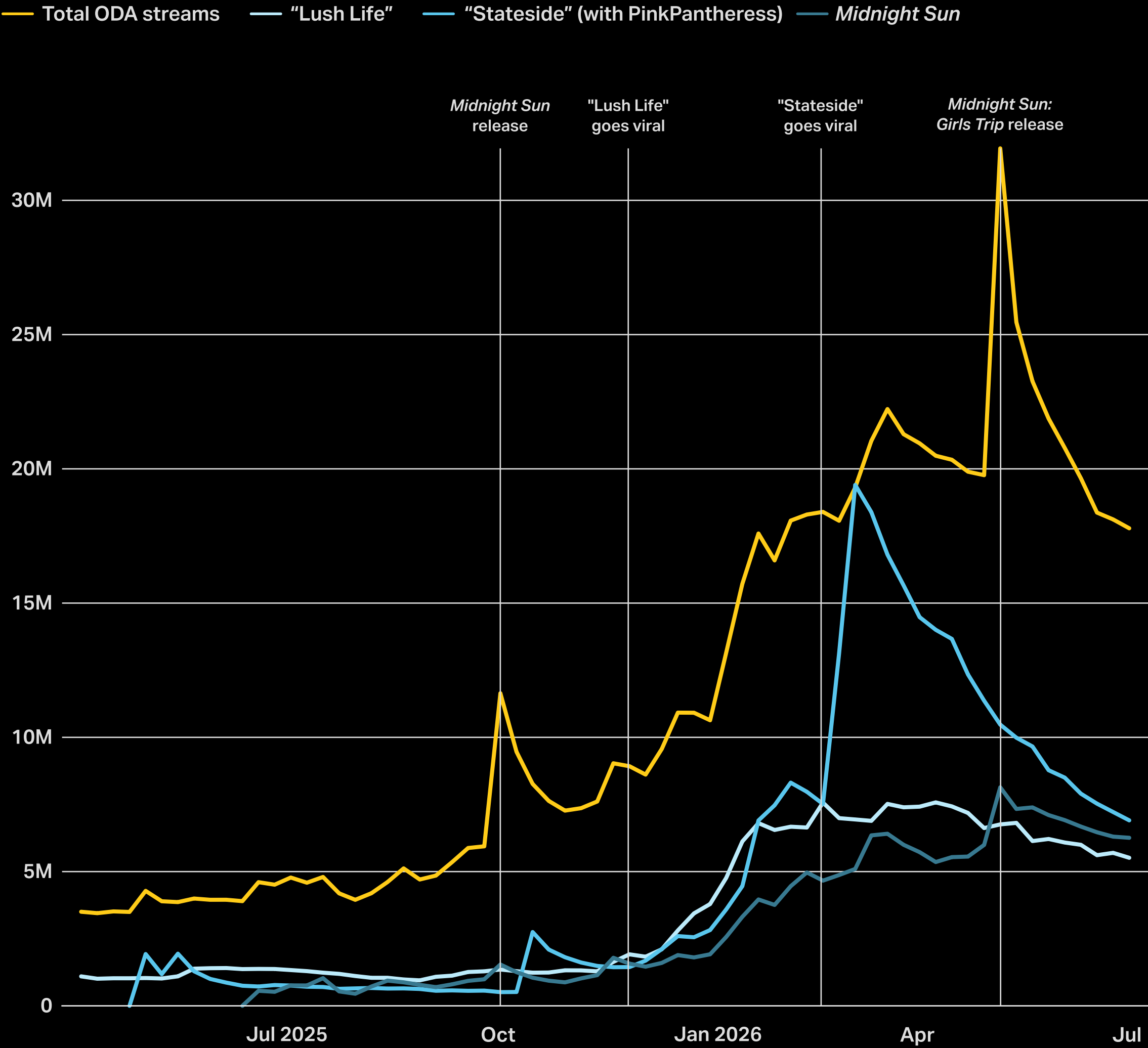


CHARLI XCX: PUBLIC PERCEPTION & AWARENESS

Based on U.S. respondents who knew of the artist



ZARA LARSSON: WEEKLY U.S. ON-DEMAND AUDIO STREAMS



SOURCE: LUMINATE MUSIC CONSUMPTION DATA; "STATESIDE" STREAMS DO NOT CONTRIBUTE TO LARSSON'S TOTAL CATALOG STREAMS

ZARA LARSSON harnessed internet virality to hit new heights.

In August 2024, TikTok users began posting dark confessions juxtaposed over a colorful image of a dolphin and the song "Symphony" by Clean Bandit featuring Zara Larsson.

That meme unexpectedly inspired Larsson's rebrand of bright tropical visuals and Y2K aesthetics for her 2025 breakthrough, *Midnight Sun*. This tongue-in-cheek branding, combined with the artist's genuine talent and longstanding underdog status, earned her a supportive and very invested base.

Midnight Sun saw strong first-week numbers, but the internet continued the album's upward momentum. In November, a video of a fan dancing onstage with Larsson to her 2015 track "Lush Life" went viral. In February 2026, skater Alysa Liu's use of PinkPantheress' "Stateside" remix featuring Larsson at the Winter Olympics gained worldwide attention. These moments boosted streams not only for the individual songs but her entire catalog.

This momentum culminated in the May release of the remix album *Midnight Sun: Girls Trip*, which gave Larsson an all-time high of 31.9M U.S. ODA streams the week of its release (+720% YoY).



KENDRICK LAMAR
CREDIT: CHRISTOPHER POLK

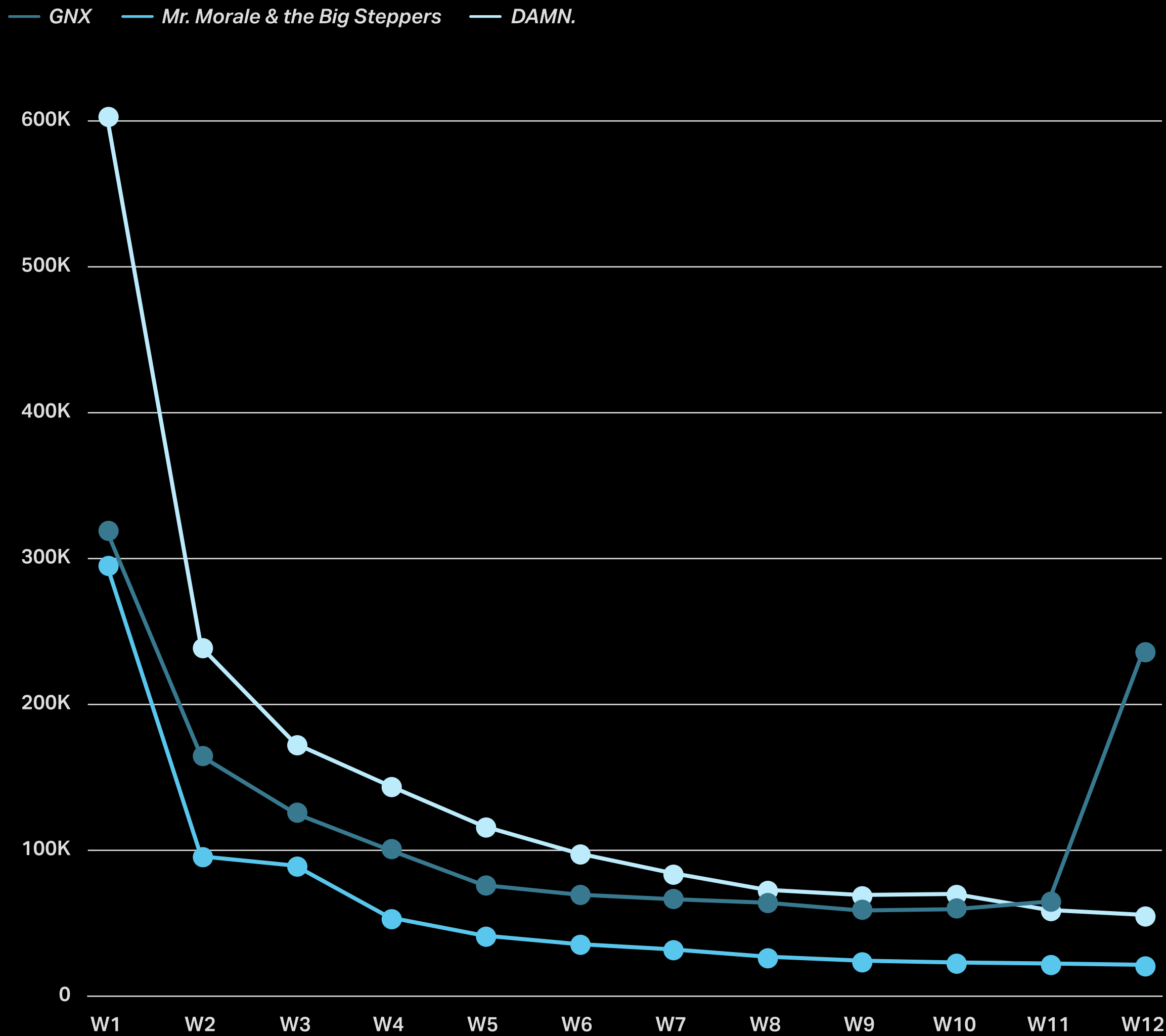
KENDRICK LAMAR found the perfect time to strike with GNX.

Kendrick Lamar’s *GNX* was released without warning on Nov. 22, 2024, but that doesn’t mean it was released without intention. The album followed the artist’s high-profile rap beef with Drake, resulting in the biggest single of his career, “Not Like Us” (which itself teased *GNX*’s first single, “Squabble Up,” in its music video). The album also set the stage for his *Super Bowl LIX Halftime Show*, extending Lamar’s cultural dominance into 2025. In other words, the timing was perfect.

That excitement resulted in *GNX* reaching 319K U.S. album-equivalent units in its first week, making for his biggest release week since 2017’s *DAMN*. Interestingly, *GNX* saw a smoother decay curve than his previous albums, likely due to listeners who missed the initial surprise drop, and received a late-game boost thanks to the halftime performance. (Lamar also released the vinyl edition of *GNX* two days before the Super Bowl.)

KENDRICK LAMAR: WEEKLY U.S. ALBUM-EQUIVALENT UNITS

For first 12 weeks of three most recent albums



HAYLEY WILLIAMS threw out the book with *Ego Death*.

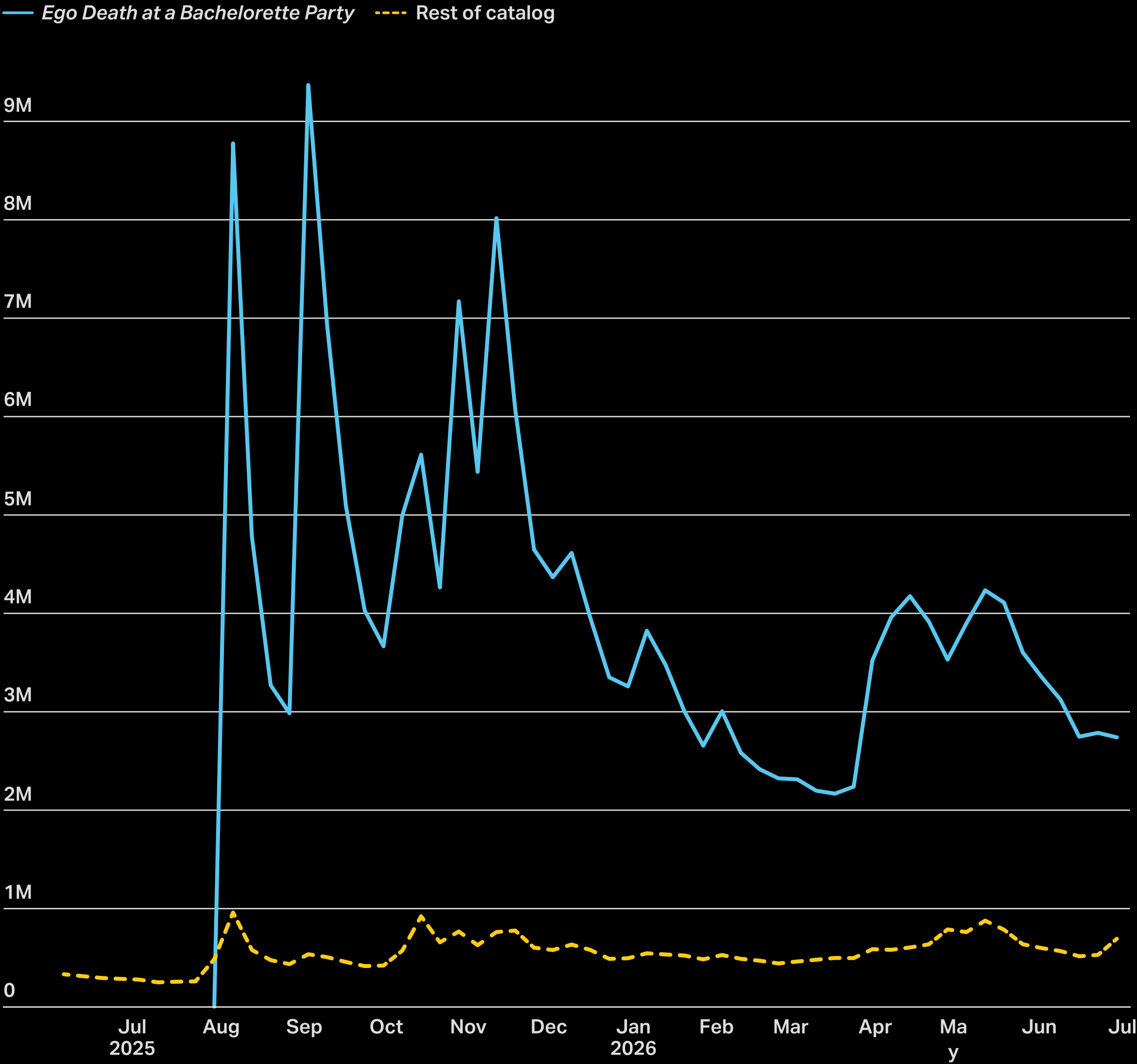
With *Ego Death at a Bachelorette Party*, Hayley Williams took the concept of establishing a distinct immersive era in a chaotic but compelling direction.

The album, in fact, was initially released as 17 individual songs on her website on July 28, 2025. Those songs, along with seemingly related videos, images and audio clips, were available only via a code that fans could get by purchasing the “Ego” hair dye shade from Williams’ company, Good Dye Young.

The songs were removed from the website and uploaded to DSPs as 17 individual singles on Aug. 1, with the goal of encouraging fans to actively engage and create their own track orders. Williams continued adding new songs to *Ego Death* even after it was officially put out on Aug. 28, resulting in numerous streaming spikes post release.

Not only was the album Williams’ deeply personal account of heartbreak and the painful but necessary process of growth, but it was also the first release after her 20-plus-year contract with Atlantic Records ended. In other words, the album was a major turning point for Williams as both an artist and a person, and the rollout heightened that sense of change and uncertainty.

HAYLEY WILLIAMS: WEEKLY U.S. ON-DEMAND AUDIO STREAMS



/02

TV

- 1/ BINGE OR WEEKLY
- 2/ LONG BREAKS
- 3/ ANNUAL SEASONS



BRIDGERTON
CREDIT: LIAM DANIEL/NETFLIX



THE BEAR
CREDIT: FX

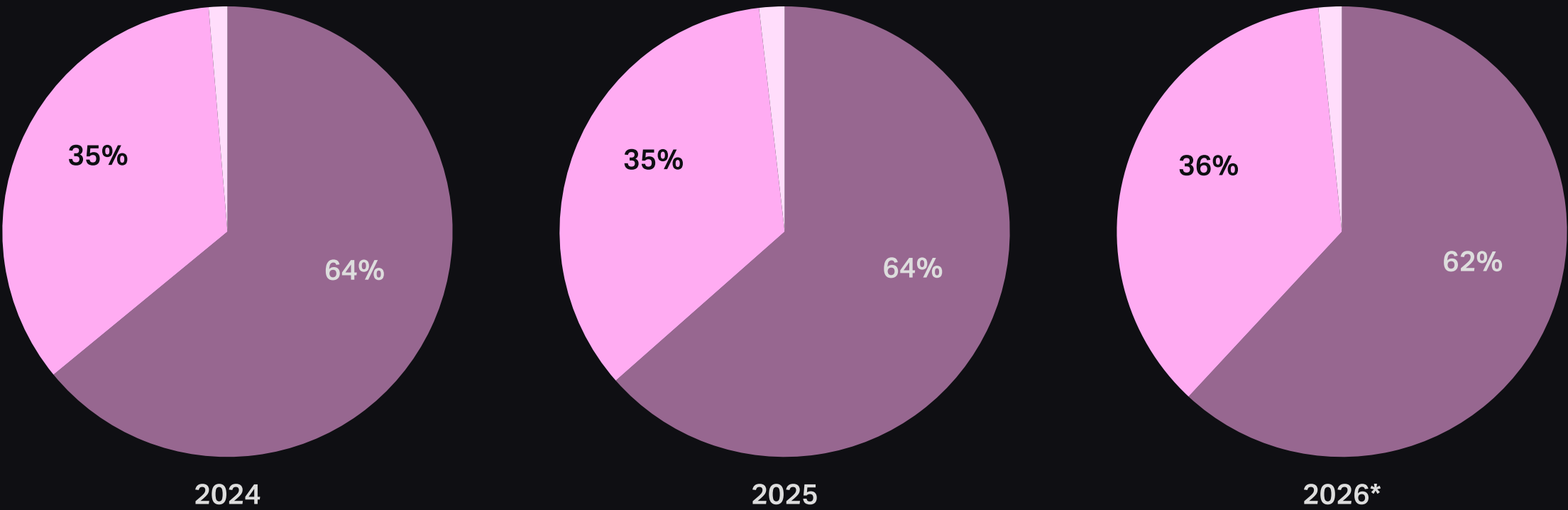
Binge-style TV releases are largely driven by Netflix but not uncommon at rival streamers.

For all the criticism lobbed against the all-episodes-at-once (or “binge”) release cadence, it remains prevalent even outside of Netflix, which still releases the vast majority of its original series this way. Nearly 40% of TV premieres at the seven other major U.S.-based SVODs were binge releases in H1 2026, including marquee titles such as *The Bear* at Hulu and *The ‘Burbs* at Peacock. The binge strategy does possess certain advantages, such as inflating first-week engagement and thus potentially securing a high spot on weekly ranking charts, which can further positive word of mouth for the series. On the other hand, binge-release viewership tends to decay quickly, whereas a weekly-release hit can remain on the charts week after week, continuously drawing new eyes.

RELEASE CADENCE SHARE OF SVOD ORIGINAL PREMIERES

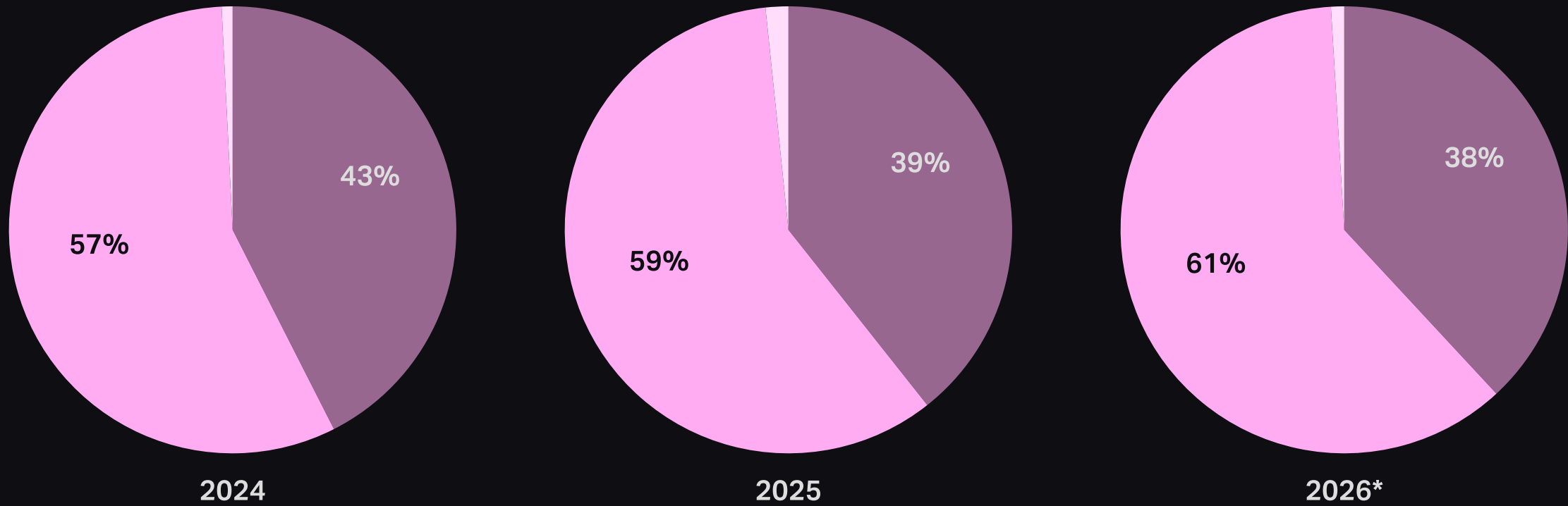
Among major U.S.-based platforms

● Binge ● Weekly ● Split season



Among major U.S.-based platforms, excluding Netflix

● Binge ● Weekly ● Split season



Long breaks between seasons usually lead to audience shrinkage for hit series.

Lengthy gaps between seasons have been a persistent headache for streamers, with the annual premieres once met even by blockbuster cable series like *Game of Thrones* no longer standard procedure. And while megahits such as *Stranger Things* can still return after multiyear breaks to massive viewership, a long hiatus (more than 1.5 years) for streaming series typically leads to a reduced audience, at least in the U.S. market. Average views dropped for every title in a sampling of recent hits — even *Stranger Things*, down nearly 25% in its final season. Streamers no doubt have a vested interest in speeding up the turnaround between seasons of hits, but actually doing so is far from easy, especially when extensive post-production work is required.

LONG SEASON GAPS’ IMPACT ON VIEWERSHIP

In first 12 weeks of release

TITLE	HIATUS (APPROXIMATE)	U.S. VIEWS (ESTIMATED)	CHANGE FROM PREVIOUS SEASON
<i>Bridgerton</i> S4	1.75 years	19.4M	-20%
<i>The Night Agent</i> S2	1.8 years	16.5M	-47%
<i>Bridgerton</i> S3	2 years	24.1M	-7%
<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power</i> S2	2 years	7.1M	-57%
<i>Poker Face</i> S2	2.25 years	4.5M	-42%
<i>Ginny & Georgia</i> S3	2.5 years	13.3M	-19%
<i>Wednesday</i> S2	2.75 years	22.1M	-59%
<i>Stranger Things</i> S5	3.5 years	29.5M	-23%



Stranger Things' long break supercharged catch-up streaming.

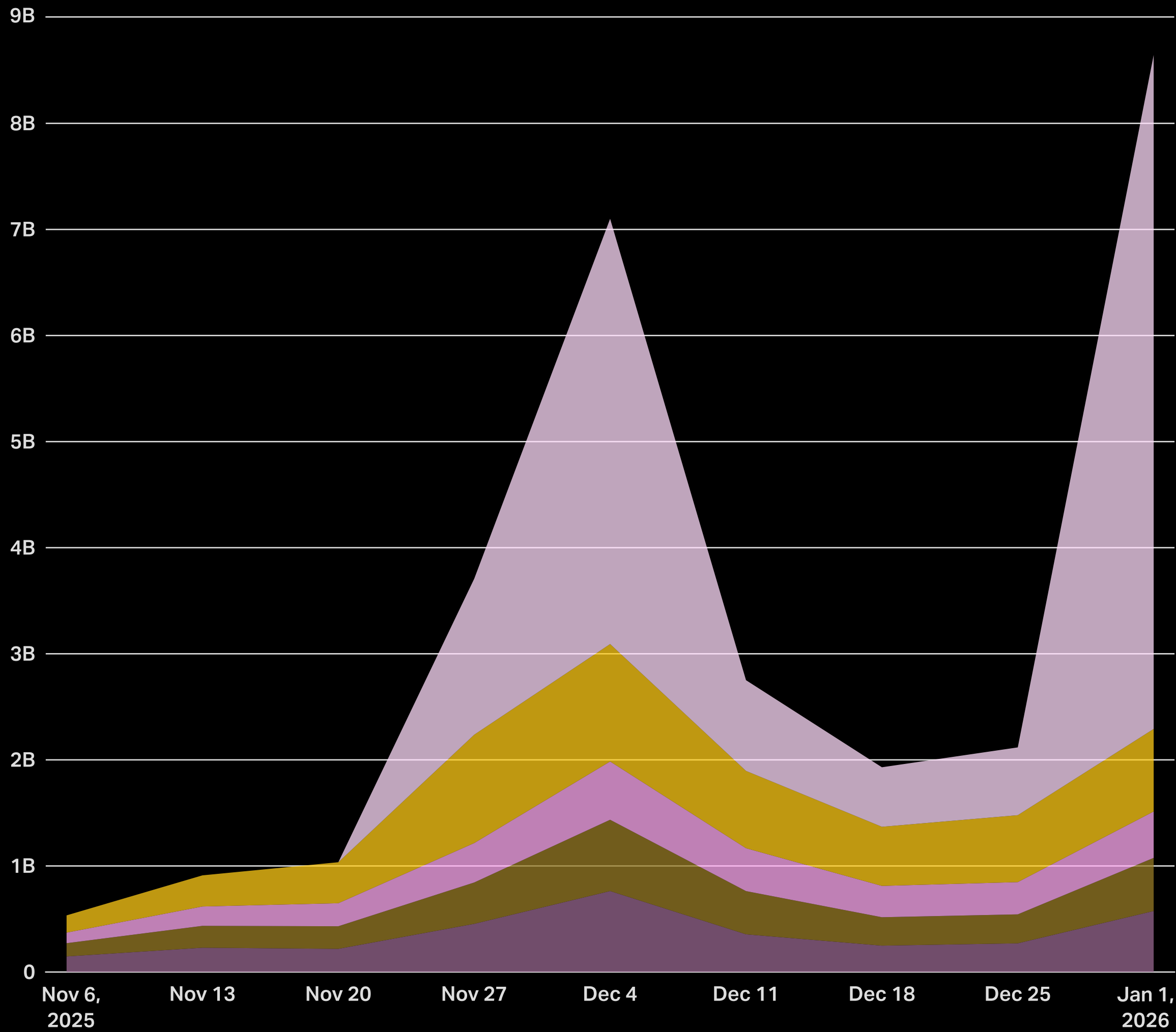
One benefit a lengthy hiatus can provide is boosting engagement for past seasons as the premiere of new episodes looms, with viewers refreshing their memories on where things left off. *Stranger Things* certainly profited in this way, as the final season's approach lifted all four previous entries into the upper ranks of the most-streamed original TV seasons for multiple weeks.

As a highly serialized show with extensive mythology, *Stranger Things* lends itself to this level of catch-up, or refresher, viewing, which is not guaranteed even for other massive hits. For instance, while previous seasons of *Bridgerton* did see an engagement spike around S4's February release, they did not rise to the same levels as *Stranger's* past entries.

STRANGER THINGS: U.S. MINUTES STREAMED, BY SEASON

For week ending ...

S1 S2 S3 S4 S5



Annual seasons are making a comeback among major streaming hits.

After years of long delays between seasons of streaming hits, the pendulum appears to be swinging back in the direction of an annual release cadence. *The Pitt* and *Landman* both launched their sophomore seasons almost one year to the day after their debuts and were rewarded with huge viewership bumps, with *The Pitt* more than doubling its estimated audience. Meanwhile, unscripted hits *The Traitors* and *Love Island USA* found breakout moments in the past two years after returning each winter and summer, respectively, like clockwork. The outlier among this group, *The Night Agent*, saw viewership decline between seasons 2 and 3 despite a short gap, but this notably came after the show had a larger drop-off from S1 following a nearly two-year break.

ANNUAL SEASONS' IMPACT ON VIEWERSHIP

In first 12 weeks of release

TITLE	HIATUS (APPROXIMATE)	U.S. VIEWS (ESTIMATED)		CHANGE FROM PREVIOUS SEASON	
<i>The Pitt</i> S2	1 year	15.8M		132%	
<i>The Traitors</i> S4	1 year	8.4M		121%	
<i>Love Island USA</i> S7	1 year	5.1M		96%	
<i>Landman</i> S2	1 year	25.5M		52%	
<i>Love Island USA</i> S8	1 year	5.6M		9%	
<i>The Lincoln Lawyer</i> S4	1.3 years	16M		-4%	
<i>The Night Agent</i> S3	1 year	12.8M		-22%	

Unscripted series can become oversaturated quickly with a multiseason year.

Hit unscripted TV franchises have long generated not just one but multiple seasons annually, and SVOD has begun to adopt this cadence as well. Netflix’s *Love Is Blind*, for instance, has dropped two installments per year since 2022 (not to mention multiple international versions). While undeniably a hit, and a persistent one — S10 ranked among the U.S.’ top 20 most streamed original TV seasons in H1 2026 — the show’s average season views peaked with S2 and have not reached a comparable high since S6 in February 2024. With Peacock’s *Love Island* now outranking *Love Is Blind* in the U.S. and multiple spinoffs also being produced, its studio should be wary of the dangers of overexposure.

LOVE IS BLIND: U.S. SEASON VIEWS

In first 6 weeks of release



DIG DEEPER INTO MUSIC & TV RELEASE STRATEGIES

Like what you've just read? This free report is an abridged take on Luminate's expansive data dive into media release tactics. **[CLICK HERE](#) to become a Luminate Intelligence subscriber**, and get lots more data and insights in an expanded version of this analysis (as well as access to many other reports). Just some of the additional findings covered:

MUSIC

- Artists are using unconventional strategies to help their albums cut through the noise.
- An album rollout can signal anything from a multifaceted “era” to a well-orchestrated surprise.
- With the right planning (and luck), a promotional cycle can evolve into a full-blown cultural moment.

TV

- Episodic schedules or a binge-style drops can both work for series — but achieve different goals
- Long wait times between seasons prompt audience shrinkage but also sometimes supercharge catch-up streaming.
- New titles can break out at any point as consumers discover them on their own timeline

ABOUT LUMINATE INTELLIGENCE

Launched as an extension of the Variety brand in 2020, Variety Intelligence Platform (VIP+) was acquired by Luminate and rebranded as Luminate Intelligence in 2025.

Since that time, Intelligence has established itself as an authority in the entertainment industry, counting executives working at the highest levels of the biggest entertainment brands among its thousands of subscribers.

Luminate Intelligence produces high-quality market research that mixes forward-looking analysis and data on the issues and trends most important to the industry, from film, TV and music to streaming, video games and AI. In-depth white papers are released throughout the year, as are weekly commentaries accessed via email and the Luminate website.

As no Intelligence analysis big or small is complete without statistical charts and tables, we are replete with a combination of exclusive Luminate data and a highly curated blend of dozens of relevant third-party data sources, with an emphasis on gathering the most recent numbers.

Our analyses are written in a compelling, provocative style laser focused on putting findings in a prescriptive perspective that drives decision-making.

Intelligence is also available to collaborate with companies looking to create customized reports, either for private internal use or as sponsored marketing material.

COVER PHOTO CREDITS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT):

BRIDGERTON: LIAM DANIEL/NETFLIX; CHARLI XCX: AGATA SERGE; *FALLOUT*: AMAZON PRIME VIDEO;
ZARA LARSSON: SAMI DRASIN; *THE PITT*: WARRICK PAGE; TAYLOR SWIFT: JOHN NACION

