

US Social Media Trends for 2022 & Beyond

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Introduction

Remember 2013? Facebook redesigned its news feed, Vine was introducing the world to the joys of short-form video and no one had heard of social distancing. It was also the year Sprout Social started this annual report on the top trends in social media.

Things have obviously changed since then. The market for social media platforms is more powerful and diversified than ever. Consumers are more conscious with their screen time, especially as they find their footing in a post-pandemic world. Marketers have more channels to choose from, algorithms to untangle and audience preferences to rethink.

This is Sprout Social's ninth year of trend forecasting. If we've learned anything over the years, it's that social moves quickly. Trends, platforms and use cases are constantly changing and it can be hard to keep up. This report is one of the ways we reflect and reorient ourselves to the new landscape every year.

In this report, we surveyed over 1,000 US consumers and 500 US social marketers to understand how social media has transformed on both sides of the marketing equation. We're using that data to break down shifts in consumer expectations, new challenges social faces as a strategic business function and how the bets marketers are taking for the future align with consumers' desires.

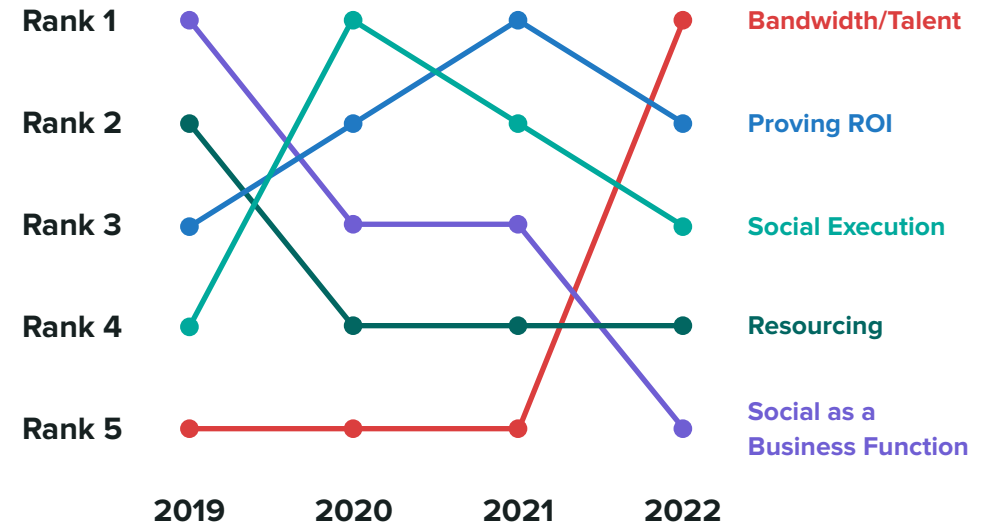
“Consumers are more conscious with their screen time, especially as they find their footing in a post-pandemic world.”

Talent rises to the top (of marketers' challenges)

Social media teams have come a long way in the past few years. In 2019, teams were still trying to convince senior leadership that social media was business-critical and struggling to get access to tools, resources and budget. Now, the value of social across functions is clearer than ever.

But the new responsibilities of social teams come with new challenges. Creating the outcomes businesses have come to expect from social calls for more talent. More than half of marketers (52%) say that finding experienced talent is their number one challenge this year. Brands need to be thoughtful about social team growth—both in identifying which social roles to hire and calibrating job descriptions to attract and foster qualified talent.

Social media teams' biggest challenges



#1 challenge:

Finding talent

88%
of marketers
expect to
hire another
team member
over the next
two years.

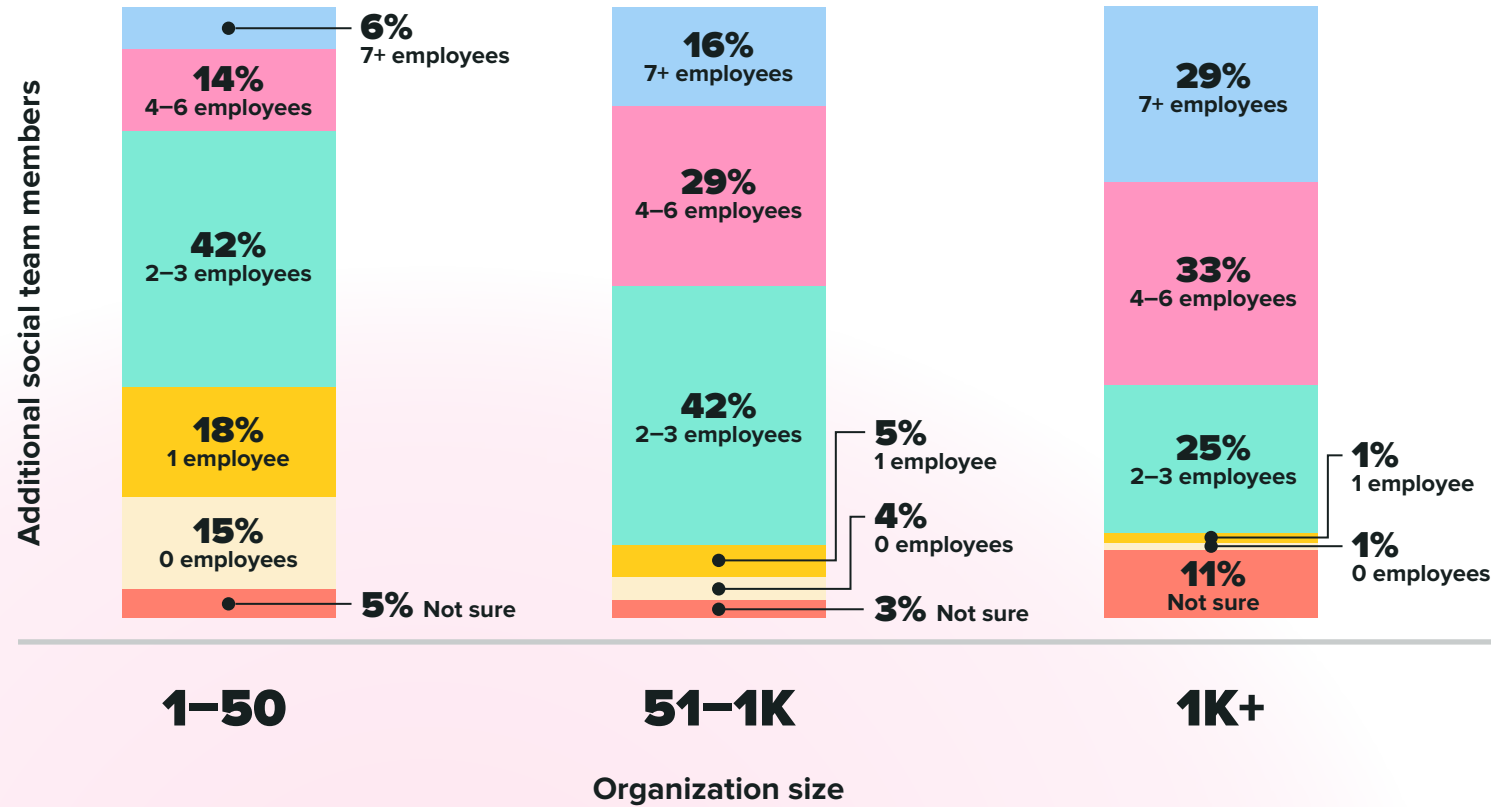


Team expansion takes priority for businesses of all sizes

There has never been a better time to be a job seeker in social, regardless of your level of tenure. Whether they're hiring for practitioners, leaders or specialized roles—like influencer partnerships or employer brand—88% of marketers expect to hire another team member over the next two years. More than half (62%) anticipate hiring for between 2–6 new positions.

[LinkedIn reported](#) that social media managers are the third most in-demand marketing position by posting volume in 2022, while social media coordinator roles have the third most year-over-year growth of all marketing titles. There's ample opportunity for social media professionals—and a lot of competition for hiring managers.

Anticipated social media team headcount growth over the next two years



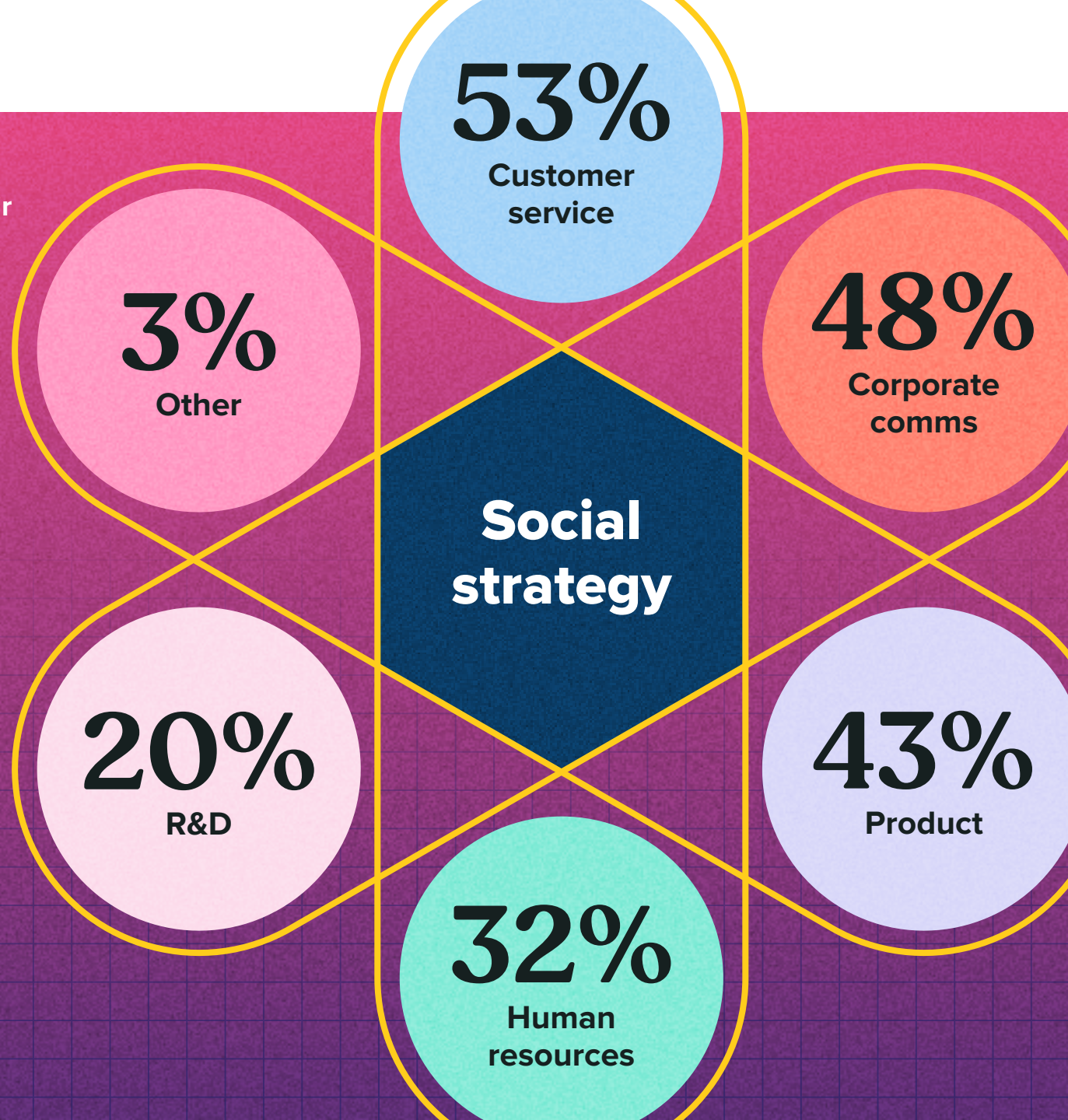
62%
of marketers anticipate hiring for between 2-6 new positions over the next two years.

The scope of who shapes and executes brands' social strategy widens

What's driving all this growth in social? More departments are discovering the value of social media and they want in.

Social is no longer limited to marketing, with functions across the business weighing in on strategy. But as a more diverse set of stakeholders gets involved, core social teams will need to adapt. Figuring out who owns what, and which proficiencies are needed across teams, has to be addressed as social strategies become more sophisticated.

Teams that contribute to their organization's social strategy





Test, learn, evolve

You already know that your brand is in constant competition for consumers' attention, online and offline. Savvy marketers need to understand where their audience is going and what they're looking for when they get there.

“Consumers find short-form videos 2.5x more engaging than long-form videos.”

The content consumers crave

74%

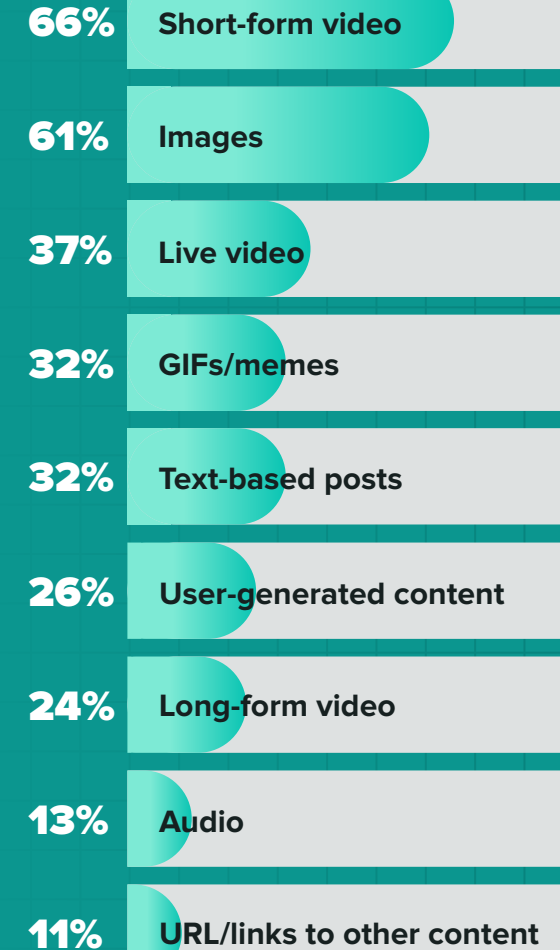
of consumers think the publishing sweet spot for brands is 1–2 posts per day.



But that number is based on what consumers actually see in their newsfeeds. Since every platform has a different algorithm, brands may need to post more often to make sure their customers see the ideal number of posts.

Length matters. Consumers find short-form videos 2.5x more engaging than long-form videos. In 2020, 50% of consumers thought short-form was the most engaging type of content and that's only growing. In 2022, 66% of consumers report paying the most attention to short-form content.

The most engaging types of in-feed social content

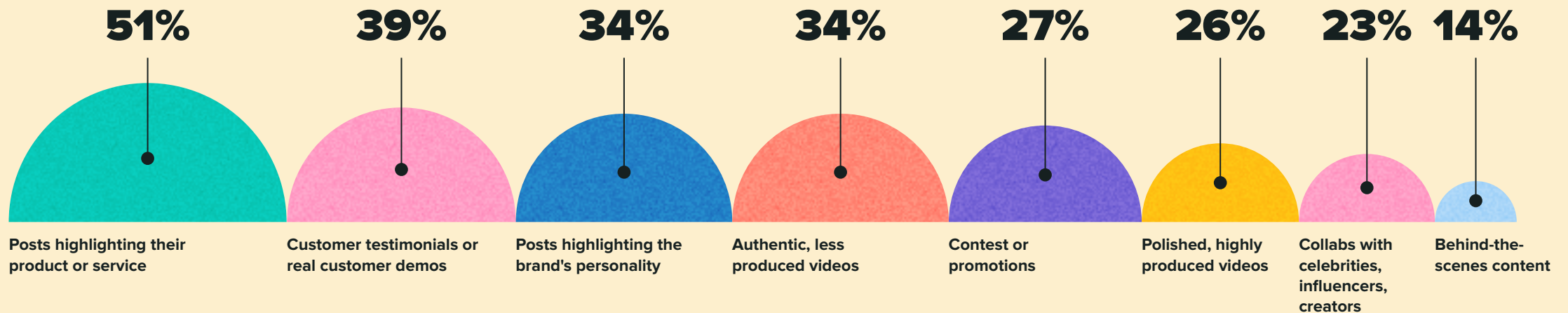


Consumers want to see brand content that features a product or service, or real customers. In early 2022, [Bush's Beans](#) capitalized on consumers' hunger for short-form, product-centric content with the #BushsCanFilmContest. They called on their followers to create bean-centric TikToks and Reels for a chance to win

cash prizes or a slot in their Bush's Beans Can Film Festival. By leveraging this kind of in-demand user-generated content, Bush's Beans received so many submissions that they had to add [five additional winner's slots](#) to the competition.

Not all audiences respond to influencer marketing in the same way. Younger generations value collaborations with celebrities, influencers or creators more than older generations: 33% of Gen Z and 28% of Millennials value content collaborations over just 17% of Gen X and 9% of Baby Boomers.

Types of content consumers like to see from brands they follow on social

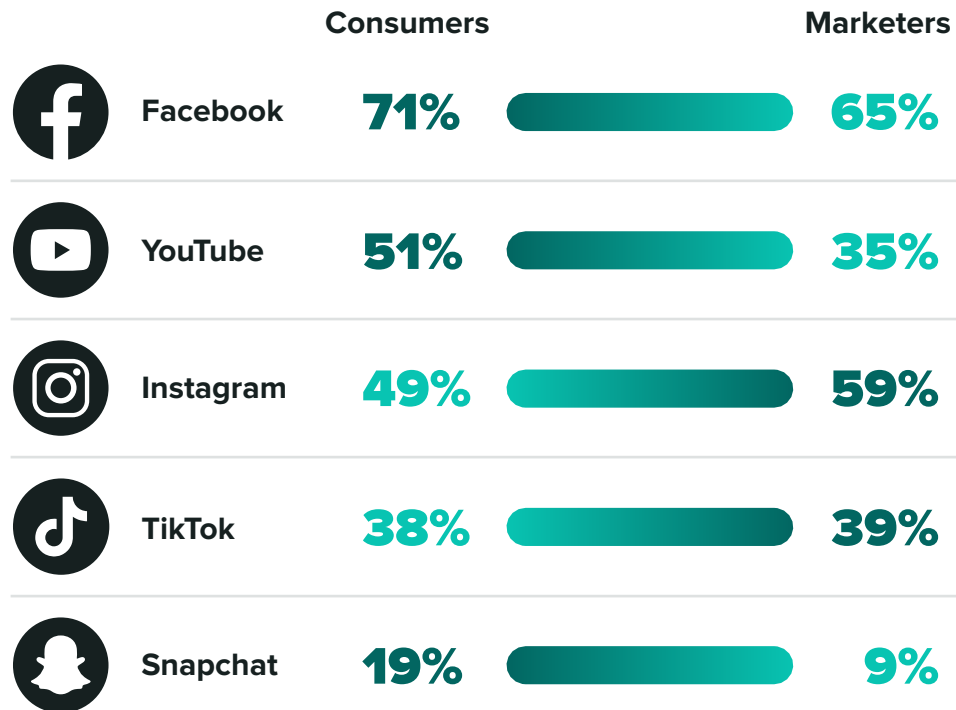


“Today’s consumers seek authenticity, and a super polished or overly stylized piece of content isn’t it. A produced video is essentially your opinion—and consumers aren’t interested in your opinion. They want to hear what other people think of your brand and/or product. Who better to serve as brand ambassadors than people who love your brand so much that they create content for their personal channels bragging about you?”

Jenny Li Fowler

Director of Social Media Strategy at MIT

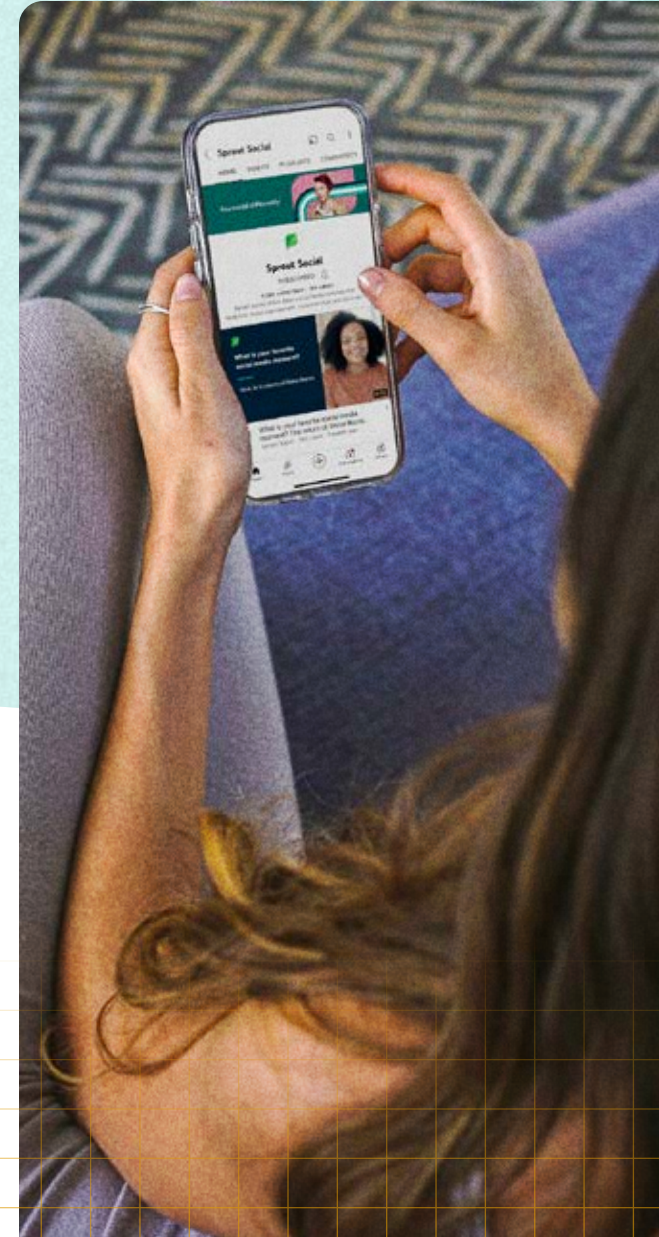
The top platforms consumers and brands anticipate using most in the next 12 months



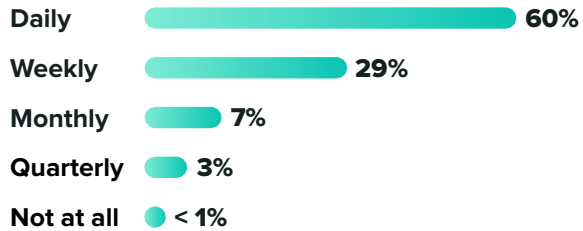
Platform preferences: Do you know where your audience is?

It's hard to have a conversation about social without TikTok entering the chat. It makes sense, as 38% of consumers plan on using TikTok, more than double the 17% who were planning on it in 2020.

When it comes to video, you can't count out YouTube. More than half of consumers expect to spend more time on YouTube—but only 35% of marketers plan on leveraging the platform, down from 52% in 2020. There's not a lot that we want to bring back from 2020, but that year's YouTube investment might be worth revisiting.



How often organizations use social data



“Sales strategy is the number one use case for social data.”

Productive experimentation and successful execution starts with data

The power of social data is undeniable. Most marketers are checking in on a daily or weekly basis to stay agile in a world where trends could last two weeks or 20 minutes.

Social data is useful for more than keeping up with the latest TikTok challenge. Sales strategy is the number one use case for social data, especially as social commerce becomes more prevalent and social has more impact on the bottom line. Understanding how customers respond to posts about your products and services can pave the way for direct sales on the platforms your audiences already use. Social data takes the guesswork out of social commerce.

My brand uses social data for...



Social data also gives marketers a window into how customers are using their products and services. The insights from social can be a powerful tool for understanding what your buyers want—and when they want it.

Grammarly takes social data a step further with a [comprehensive tagging system](#) that tracks inbound messages based on content. By standardizing their data, Grammarly can respond quickly and correctly to customer needs, while mining information for other departments like product, sales and user experience.

“Insights from social can be a powerful tool for understanding what your buyers want.”



Tried and true

Marketers love hard measurements like share of voice, impressions, customer acquisition cost and revenue. But the true goal of marketing isn't quite so measurable. We're trying to build the kinds of brands that people love and trust. Supporting your customers when they need it and speaking out on the issues that matter can't be quantified, but it can build relationships that keep consumers coming back for more.

71%

of consumers think it's important for brands to take a stand on sensitive issues.

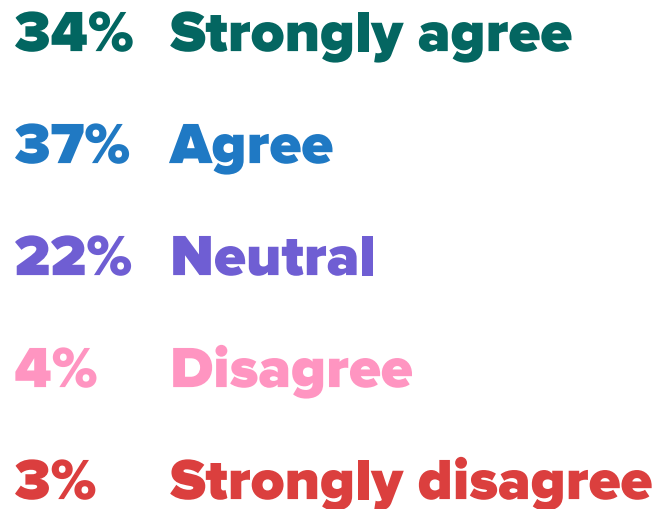


When brands take a stand, consumers stand with them

Most consumers (71%) think it's important for brands to raise awareness and take a stand on sensitive issues—a 7.6% increase from 2017. That importance jumps up even more for Gen Z (73%) and Millennials (77%). At the same time, 48% of marketers say that brands need to speak out on social issues to stay culturally relevant on social media.

“Brands need to speak out on social issues to stay culturally relevant on social media.”

Consumers' POV: It is important for brands to raise awareness and take a stand on sensitive topics



Marketers' POV: What does it mean for brands to be culturally relevant on social media?



Tried and true

Despite the overwhelming consumer desire for brands to take a stand, social media marketers are having a hard time pushing their companies and leadership teams to do so. Two-thirds (66%) of marketers report having to encourage leadership to create company positions on the big issues.



As someone involved in social media at my company, I often have to push my company/leaders to raise awareness or speak out on social issues.

26%

Strongly agree

40%

Agree

19%

Neutral

10%

Disagree

5%

Strongly disagree

“Many leaders think social media managers are ‘the people who post stuff on Facebook.’ But the best leaders take the time to learn about their social media operation—the strategy, the day-to-day ins and outs and the pain points. Leaders who have invested this time position their companies to act quickly and with precision when a crisis or major issue is brewing. When leaders lack that understanding, things go sideways—often making headlines for out-of-touch responses and missing the mark.”

Sue Serna

Founder and CEO of social media
consulting agency Serna Social

What affects consumers' decision to pick a brand over a competitor



Knowing and embracing your audience's personal values—where it makes sense—has a clear tie to revenue. Company alignment with personal values is 74% more important to consumers than it was in 2021. Your products and services are still important, but consumer preferences are increasingly fueled by trust and shared values.

Adidas proved this point in February 2022 with their “Support Is Everything” [sports bra ad campaign](#). By featuring 25 sets of bare breasts of all shapes and sizes, they sparked a greater conversation around body positivity. It paid off for them, with their launch Tweet alone garnering over 34,000 likes. But your position has to be authentic to your brand's culture. Your company's values may not always align perfectly with your customers' personal values, so you'll want to be prepared when you find that intersection.

Company alignment with personal values is

74%

more important to consumers than it was in 2021.

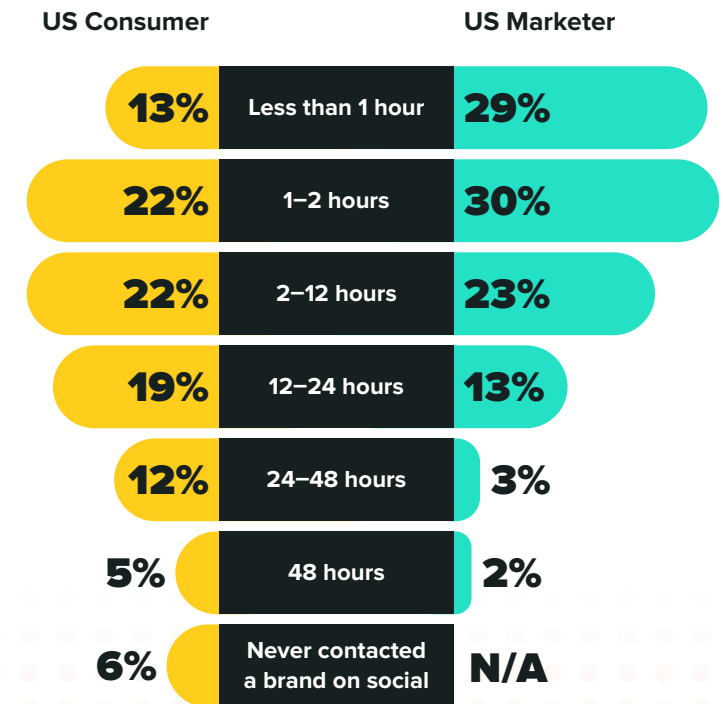


Customer care expectations: High for consumers, higher for brands

How soon should you respond to that message? We ask that question in our personal lives and it's one that brands ask themselves when it comes to replying to consumers on social.

More than half of marketers say their organization has an average response time of two hours or less. But what do customers expect? More than three-quarters of consumers expect a response within 24 hours, meaning that brands hold themselves to a higher standard than their audiences do.

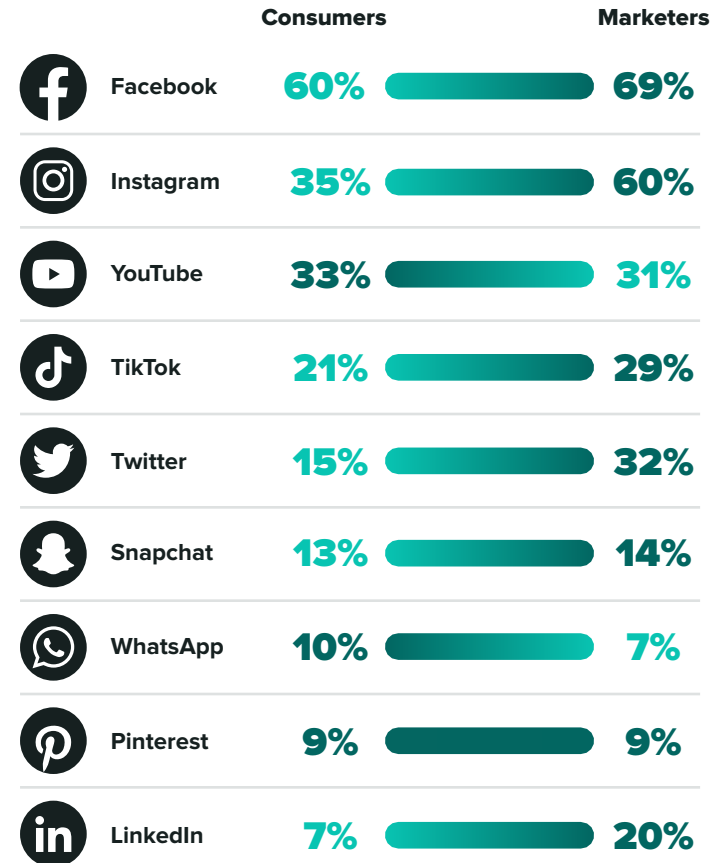
How quickly consumers expect a response on social vs. brands' average response times



But lower customer expectations aren't an excuse to sit back and relax—taking too long to respond has consequences. When this happens, 36% of consumers say they'll share that negative experience with friends and family. A comparable 31% won't complete their purchase, while 30% will buy from a competitor instead.

One space where consumers and brands are in sync is their preferred channels for customer care. Consumers are turning to Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, while brands are turning to Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. There's a lot of potential for brands to invest proactively in educational or product videos on YouTube to meet their customers where they are and boost engagement.

The platforms US consumers and brands use most for customer service



“Consumers are turning to Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, while brands are turning to Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.”

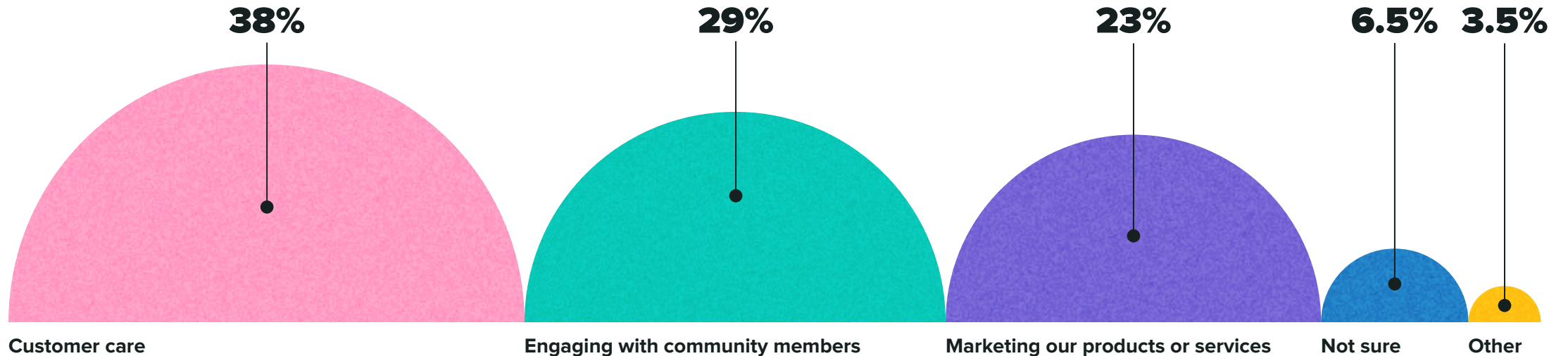
The days of dialing 0 to speak to a representative or emailing asynchronously with a support rep are coming to a close with 60% of brands saying private/direct messaging plays a role in their customer care strategy. Further, 55% of brands use direct messaging for marketing purposes, showcasing the enormous opportunity that social

commerce provides. Don't make the mistake of viewing DMs solely for support.

Consumers want more personalized and conversational opportunities, and messaging can be a lucrative way to provide them. Loungewear brand **MeUndies** has taken its customer care

model to the next level, with a major focus on direct messaging. Their team maintains an average first response time of 19 minutes on Instagram, where they receive thousands of monthly inbound direct messages, comments and mentions.

The role of private messaging/direct messaging in brands' social media strategy





Taking off

Social is a world of constant change, whether you're keeping up with new platform features and algorithms, deciphering which trends are here to stay—or ones you can set yourself—or refining strategy to meet your evolving business goals. Diving into emerging technologies and trends is a huge part of why marketers get into social and the next few years are full of opportunity.

81%

of consumers will unfollow creators if they post sponsored content more than a few times a week.

Cracking the creator code

Creator partnerships are extremely effective when done correctly, but they can fall flat if they're not. Choosing the right creators to partner with is key. Consumers care about creators' qualifications, so you need to choose wisely. There are implications for creators as well—81% of consumers will unfollow creators if they post sponsored content more than a few times a week.

The most important qualifications of creators working with brands

Ranked by marketers and consumers

- 1 Their experience with the product
- 2 Their authenticity (i.e., they seem like a real user of the product)
- 3 Their use of high-quality content (e.g., visually appealing posts)
- 4 Follower count
- 5 Their demographics in relation to me/our audience (e.g., similar age, sex, gender)



“When building a brand, authenticity is everything. That’s a quality that resonates with consumers at every touchpoint when interacting with your brand. Consumers are more marketing savvy than ever—they can tell when there’s a disconnect between a brand’s values and how they promote a product or service.

This is no different for content creators. While many creators believe you need to have hundreds of thousands of followers to get brand partnerships, that’s not necessarily the case. Having an engaged community, consistent voice and content style is what attracts opportunities.”

Jayde Powell

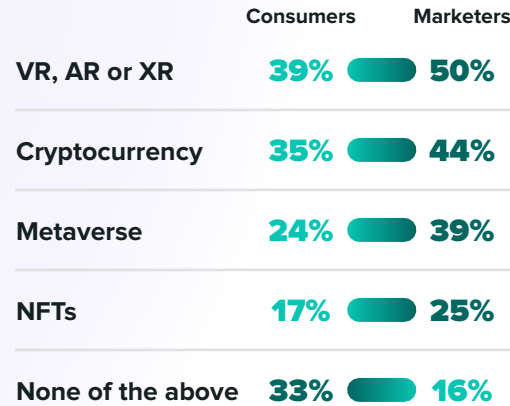
Content Creator and Marketer

Who's ready for the VR revolution? Not everyone

When it comes to emerging technologies, there are two types of crowds: early adopters and those who prefer to wait and see.

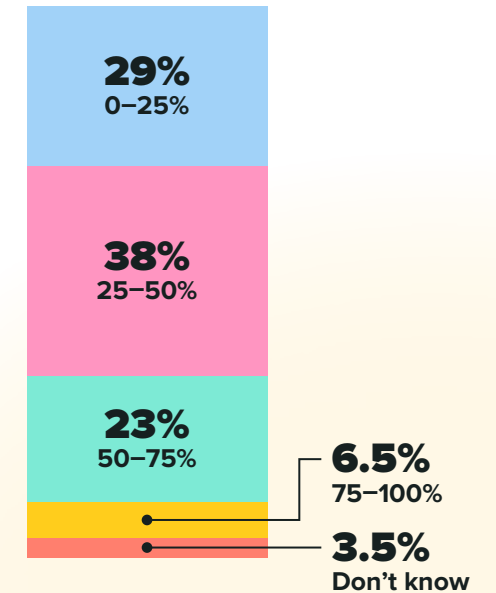
Marketers are clear early adopters while consumers aren't quite as eager, whether they're thinking about augmented and virtual reality (AR/VR) or non-fungible tokens (NFTs). While Gen Z and Millennials are most likely to anticipate using AR, VR or extended reality (XR) to interact with brands in the future, they're still in the minority at only 46% each.

How consumers and brands anticipate emerging tech playing a role in their interactions over the next 12 months



More than two-thirds (67%) of marketers anticipate investing at least a quarter of their budget into metaverse tactics over the next 12 months, with 33% of marketers believing their brands are ahead of the curve for implementing AR/VR into their social strategy and 28% saying they're ahead of the curve in integrating metaverse efforts. Though marketers are ready for the next big thing in tech, it's important to strike a balance between meeting customers where they are and showing them what the future can hold.

Percentage of budgets marketers anticipate spending on metaverse, AR & VR social strategy in the next two years



“There’s no doubt that metaverse and AR/VR technologies will play a significant role in social media’s future, and brands are incredibly curious. Investing now is akin to building out social media capabilities in 2006. It’s an opportunity to be an early adopter, test and learn, and gain a competitive advantage.”

Brendan Gahan

Partner and Chief Social Officer at
independent creative agency Mekanism

Some brands are diving in head-first. In March 2022, brands including Forever 21, DKNY and Estée Lauder teamed up for a [metaverse fashion week](#). The four-day event brought together legacy and start-up brands to sell both physical products and NFTs in a virtual space. The event is an exciting peek into the future of these opportunities.

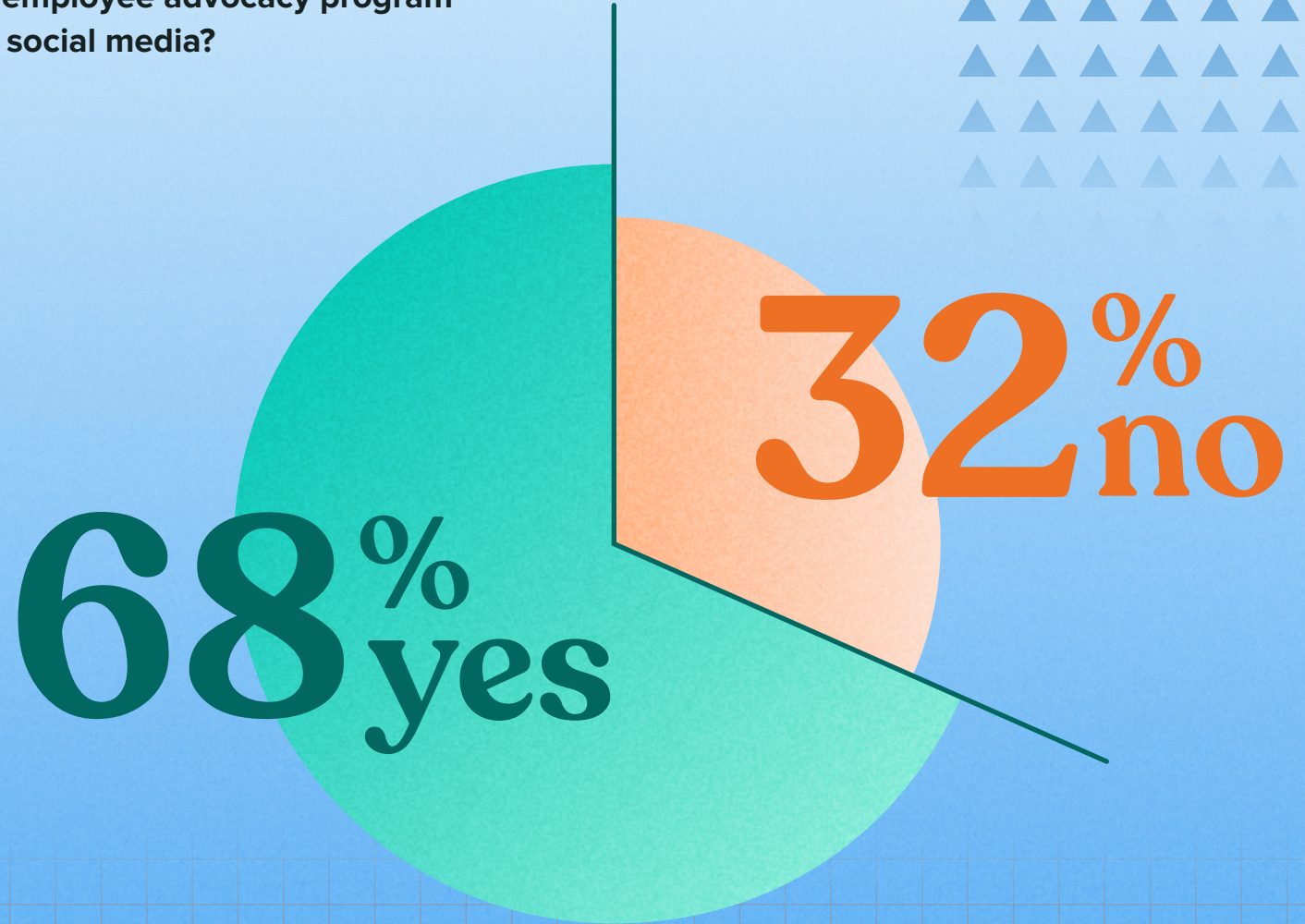


Sophisticated brands are leveling up all employees' social expertise

As social becomes more prominent in brands' overarching business strategy, social teams are relying on employee advocacy programs to extend their reach beyond their own bandwidth.

More than two-thirds (68%) of marketers report that their organizations have an advocacy program for social. Marketers are using these programs to increase their brand awareness and build an employer brand that attracts a pipeline of qualified job applicants. While many advocacy programs are informal side projects right now, sophisticated brands will find ways to formalize and evolve them through dedicated staff, tools, processes and employee training.

Does your organization have an employee advocacy program for social media?





The most important business outcomes of an employee advocacy program

- 1 Increase brand awareness
- 2 Increase # of qualified job applicants
- 3 Control over brand messaging
- 4 Drive more qualified leads
- 5 Establish thought leadership
- 6 Networking opportunities

The real strength behind the strategy

This data shows some of marketers' biggest social media questions, challenges and priorities. But the story behind the numbers is that the effective social strategy of tomorrow relies on people.

Success on social depends on the consumers who are rethinking what it means to engage with brands and where and how they'd like to spend their time. It depends on the creators who drive traffic to platforms and partner with brands to produce compelling content. And it depends on the experts who are ready to grow and lead social media teams, take smart risks and collaborate across the organization to realize the true power of social media.

As we look into the future of social, the tactics might change, but the values that underscore marketers' efforts are stronger than ever. The companies that can translate those values into action are positioned to win.



About the data

The data referenced was collected as part of Sprout Social's 2022 Index project. Participants ages 18–75 were recruited by Lucid between February 22 and March 01, 2022, via online survey. Selected US consumers (N=1,236) were those who use at least one social media platform and follow at least one brand on social media. Selected US marketers (N=506) were those who hold a full-time job in marketing and were involved (i.e., performed the job themselves or managed someone who does) in managing their brand's social media strategy.

Relationships between variables collected were analyzed using parametric statistics for statistical significance.

For questions about the data, please contact pr@sproutsocial.com

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Sprout Social offers deep social media listening and analytics, social management, customer care, commerce and advocacy solutions to more than 31,000 brands and agencies worldwide. Sprout's unified platform integrates the power of social throughout every aspect of a business and enables social leaders at every level to extract valuable data and insights that drive their business forward. Headquartered in Chicago, Sprout operates across major social media networks, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube and LinkedIn.

Learn more at sproutsocial.com