sproutsocial

Index™

Edition XVI: Above & Beyond

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Introduction

If it feels like everyone is on social media, that's just about true. Sprout Social's research shows 50% of consumers have increased their social media usage in the last six months alone and [Pew Research](#) found seven in 10 Americans use social media.

For brands, maintaining a presence on social media is a no-brainer—it's a must-have for any brand serious about their bottom line. Brands that invest in social media marketing benefit from increased sales and stronger customer loyalty over the competition. When consumers follow a brand on social, Sprout's research shows that 89% will buy from that brand and 75% of consumers will increase their spending with that brand.

But faced with a saturated social landscape, marketers have a unique challenge when it comes to getting in front of the right people at the right time. More specifically, marketers struggle to identify and reach their target audience, as well as measure their return on investment. Forty-five percent of consumers will unfollow brands that publish irrelevant content on social media.

For the 2020 Sprout Social Index™, we surveyed more than 1,000 social marketers to learn about their goals for social, what metrics they use and how they leverage social data and tools to achieve those goals. We then cross-referenced their responses with those of more than 1,000 consumers who shared how they behave online and what they expect from brands considered best-in-class on social. With the insights from this report, marketers can do more than achieve their goals—they can transform social into a significant growth engine for their brands.

Key findings

Social media fuels bottomline growth.

Eighty-nine percent of consumers say they will buy from a brand they follow on social media and 84% will choose that brand over a competitor. Additionally, 75% of consumers say they'll increase their spending with brands they follow on social.

Brand awareness remains a top priority.

Sixty-nine percent of social marketers say increasing brand awareness is their number one goal for social media. Fifty-two percent say increasing web traffic is their top priority, while 46% say growing their audience is their number one goal.

Marketers aren't using social data to its fullest potential.

While 56% of all social marketers use social data to better understand their target audience, there's a huge opportunity to do more with the data at their disposal. Only 23% of social marketers use social data to measure ROI and 16% use social data for competitive insights.

Visual social platforms are popular with younger consumers.

Social platforms focused on photos and videos, like YouTube and Instagram, are quickly gaining traction among younger consumers. When asked which platforms they plan to use more of, 73% of members of Generation Z said Instagram while 65% said they plan to spend more time on YouTube.

Creativity separates great brands from the rest.

When asked to describe what makes a brand's social media presence stand out, the top response from both social marketers and consumers was creativity. Additionally, 61% of consumers say brands that are best in class on social know how to engage their audience.
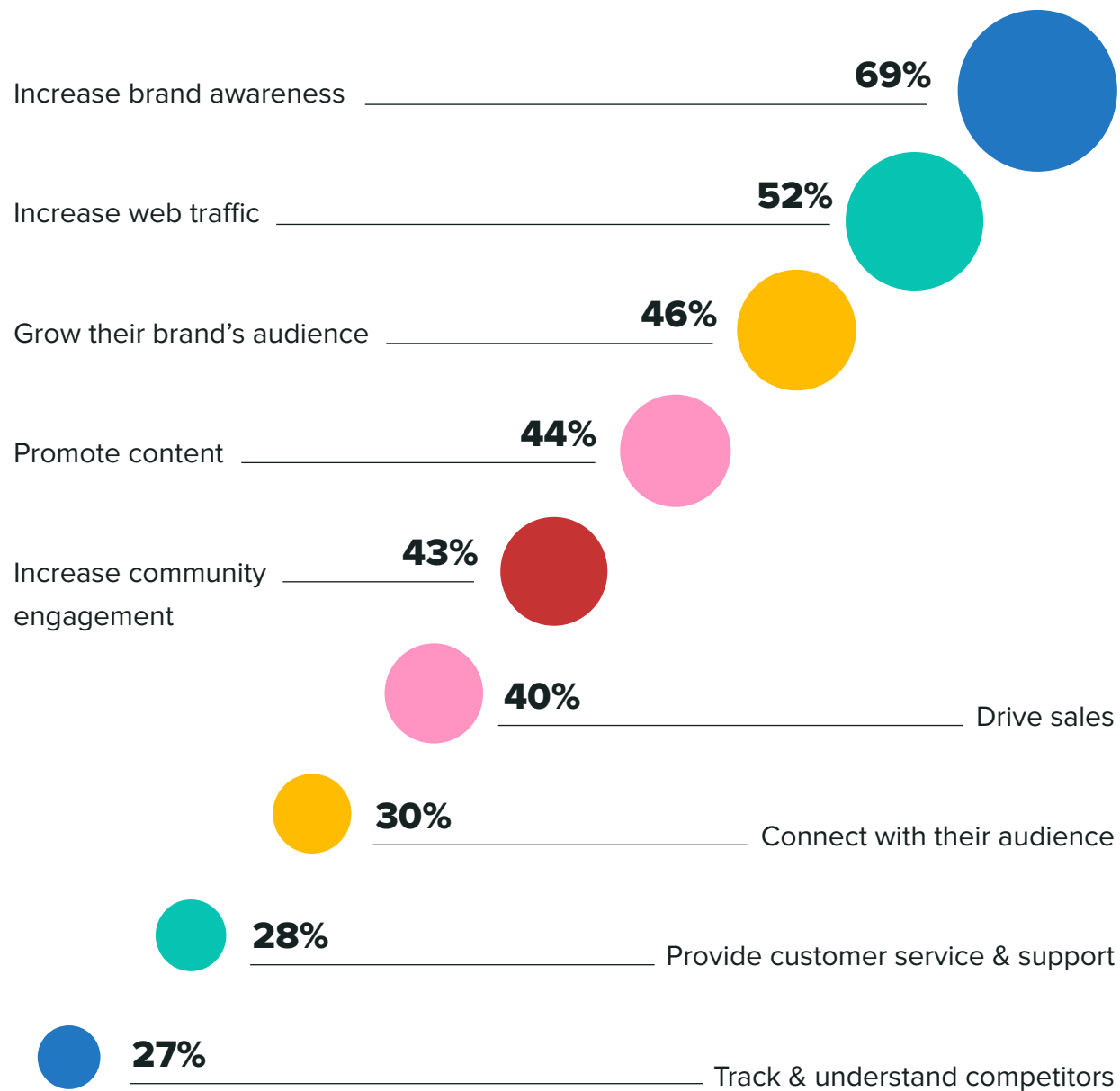
Establish your social foundation

In a society that's more connected to social media than ever before, ensuring your brand's name stands out from the crowd is top of mind for social marketers. Sixty-nine percent of social marketers say increasing brand awareness is their number one priority, a ranking that remains unchanged from our **2019 survey**.

Marketer's primary goals for social media

Increase brand awareness — **69%**

Increase web traffic — **52%**

Grow their brand's audience — **46%**

Promote content — **44%**

Increase community engagement — **43%**

40% — Drive sales

30% — Connect with their audience

28% — Provide customer service & support

27% — Track & understand competitors

Marketing leaders are 36% more likely than practitioners to say growing their audience is a primary goal. Furthermore, marketing leaders are 31% more likely than practitioners to cite increasing community engagement as a goal. This disconnect points to an opportunity for social practitioners to better relate to their bosses. Understanding what marketing leaders consider their primary focus for social will help practitioners develop strategies, tactics and campaigns that directly contribute to top-level goals.
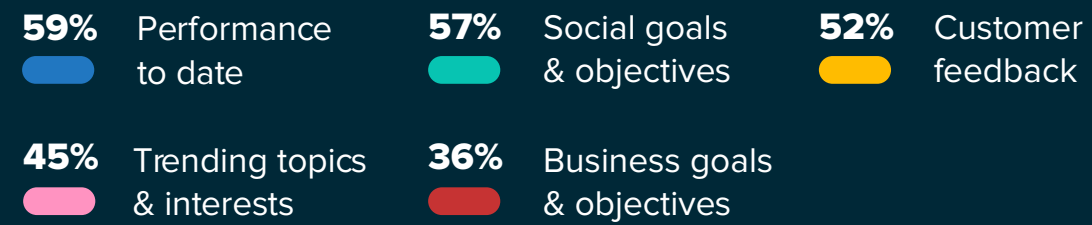
Action item

Setting goals in silos keeps social marketers from visibly influencing an organization's goals and demonstrating social media's value to the entire organization. Establish time to discuss these goals with marketing practitioners, leaders and the heads of other departments to identify how social can support other teams and what insights marketers can share to make the greatest impact.

To measure their performance, 48% of all social marketers prioritize engagement metrics such as likes, shares and comments, while 26% use amplification and brand awareness metrics like reach, impressions and share of voice.

In addition to goals and metrics, what other factors shape marketers' approach to social strategy? Fifty-nine percent of marketers look at their performance to date to determine if they need to adjust their plans for social. Fifty-two percent of social marketers will shape their approach to social based on customer feedback.
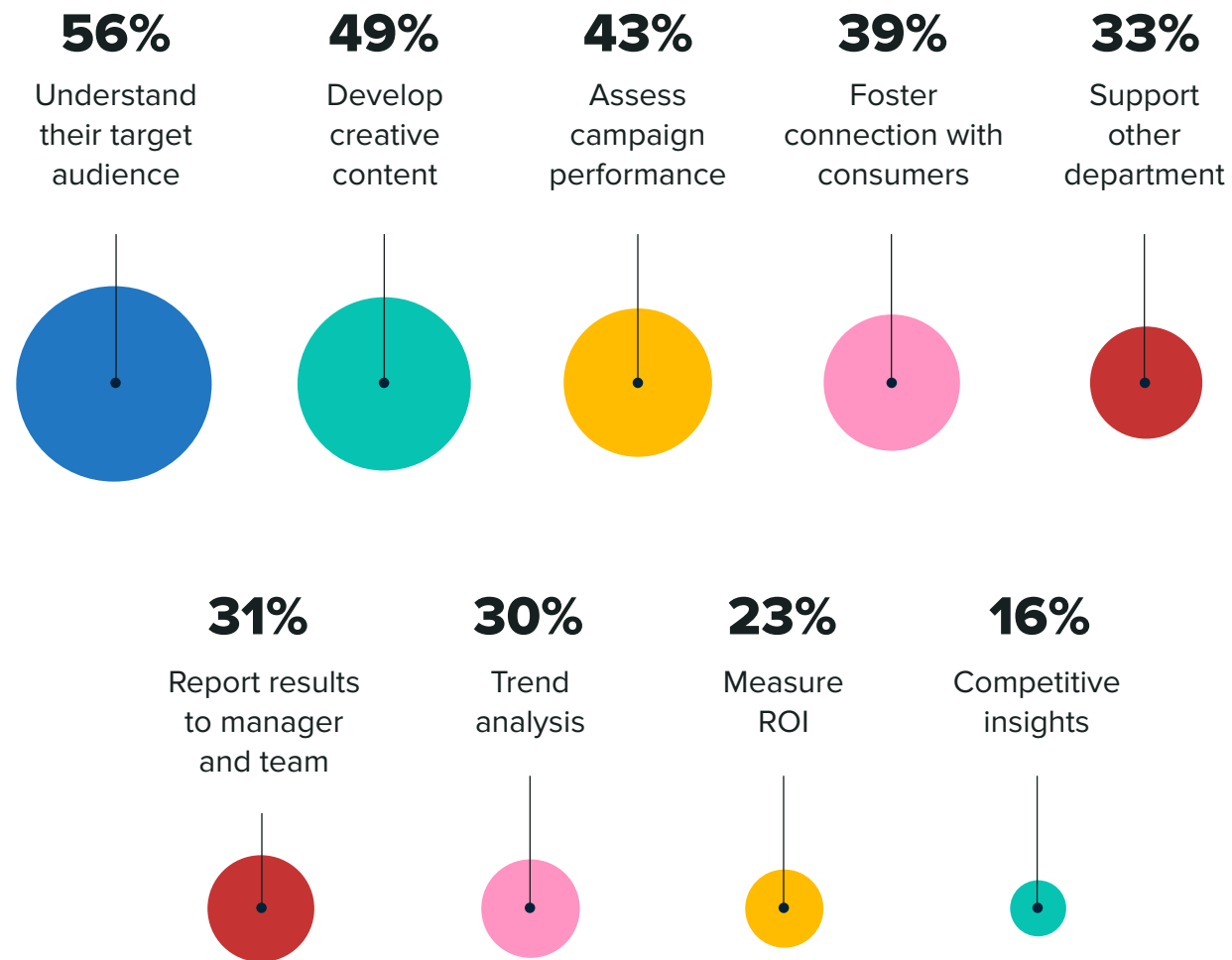
Factors that influence a marketer's approach to social

59% Performance to date

57% Social goals & objectives

52% Customer feedback

45% Trending topics & interests

36% Business goals & objectives

Fifty-six percent of social marketers use social data primarily for understanding their target audiences and 49% use data to inform their creative content. Surprisingly, only 23% of social marketers use social data to measure ROI and less than one-fifth use data for competitive insights.

Using social data to understand consumers can help social marketers solve their biggest challenge: identifying and reaching their target audience. Social marketers also struggle to measure ROI and support overall business goals—but social data can help. Using data from social, marketers can directly track the impact a social campaign has on consumer purchases and even glean aggregate consumer insights that are beneficial to teams like product development and sales.

How marketers use social data

56%
Understand their target audience

49%
Develop creative content

43%
Assess campaign performance

39%
Foster connection with consumers

33%
Support other department

31%
Report results to manager and team

30%
Trend analysis

23%
Measure ROI

16%
Competitive insights

Social marketers' greatest challenges

1 Identifying & reaching our target audience

2 Measuring ROI

3 Supporting overall business goals

4 Publishing content

5 Monitoring our competition

6 Securing budget & resources for social

7 Aligning social strategy with other parts of the business

8 Demonstrating social's impact to other departments

9 Creating engaging & innovative content
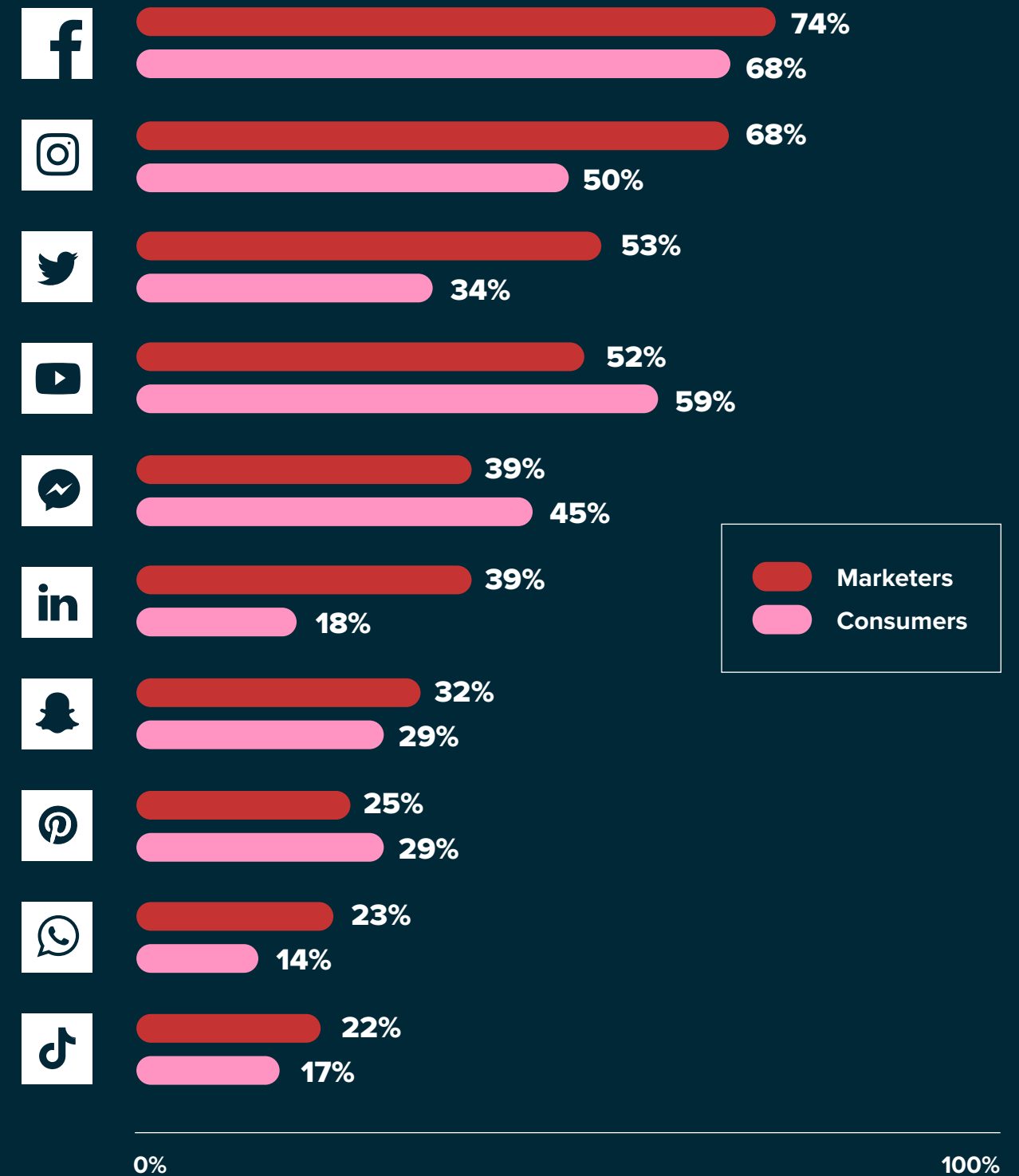
10 Team bandwidth & time

Social data can also help social marketers identify which platforms are gaining traction with their audience—and which ones to avoid. The majority of both social marketers (74%) and consumers (68%) said they planned to use Facebook more in the coming year; additionally, 53% of social marketers and 34% of consumers plan on using Twitter more.

As social marketers target younger audiences, they need to keep an eye on the change in platform usage. Facebook reigns supreme with Millennials and older, but members of Generation Z prefer YouTube (87%) and Instagram (85%).

68
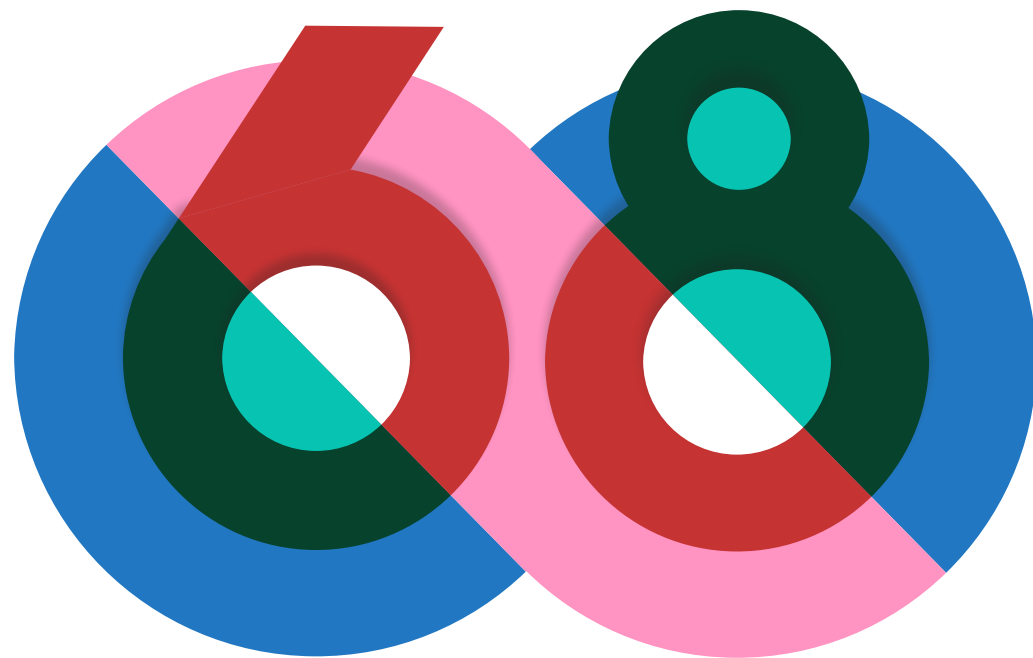
percent of consumers said they planned to use Facebook more in the coming year

The platforms marketers and consumers plan to use more of

Platform	Marketers	Consumers
Facebook	74%	68%
Instagram	68%	50%
Twitter	53%	34%
YouTube	52%	59%
Messenger	39%	45%
LinkedIn	39%	18%
Snapchat	32%	29%
Pinterest	25%	29%
WhatsApp	23%	14%
TikTok	22%	17%

Marketers
Consumers

0%   100%

Sprout stance

A keen understanding of your audience and what will hold their interest can turn a social campaign into a powerful awareness play.

Generating buzz and excitement all over Twitter is exactly how Wendy's was able to promote its new breakfast menu offering. The **fast food brand**, known for its snark and biting comebacks, went "private" with its Twitter account and offered a coupon that only its existing followers could see. Wendy's then leveraged its 3.6 million followers to further generate hype by roasting competitors with #WendysBreakfastBattle and posting the most popular tweets on a billboard in Times Square. The stunt generated more than **10,000 follower requests** over a 36-hour period.

That said, most brands aren't operating with Wendy's resources. But what any social marketer can take away from this campaign is the power of turning your most ardent fans into brand advocates. Leverage your own social following to help spread the word of new product launches through user-generated content and make it easy—and appealing—for fans to share your brand content on their own social feeds.
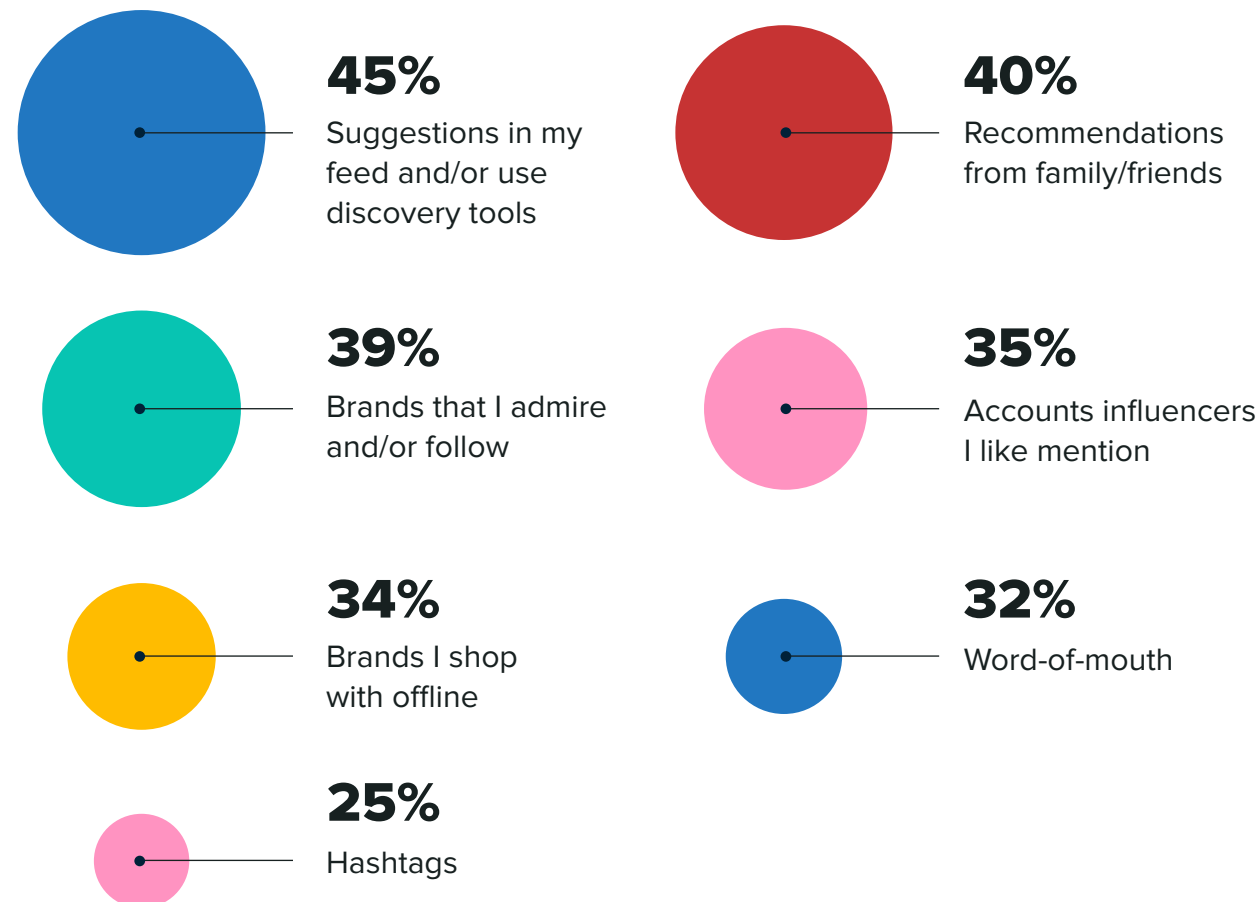
Think, speak and act like your customers

Digging deeper into social data can put marketers in the shoes of the real people who comprise their target audiences. First and foremost, people are personally motivated to use social media to connect with family and friends. They also use social media for personal inspiration, to kill time and receive breaking news.
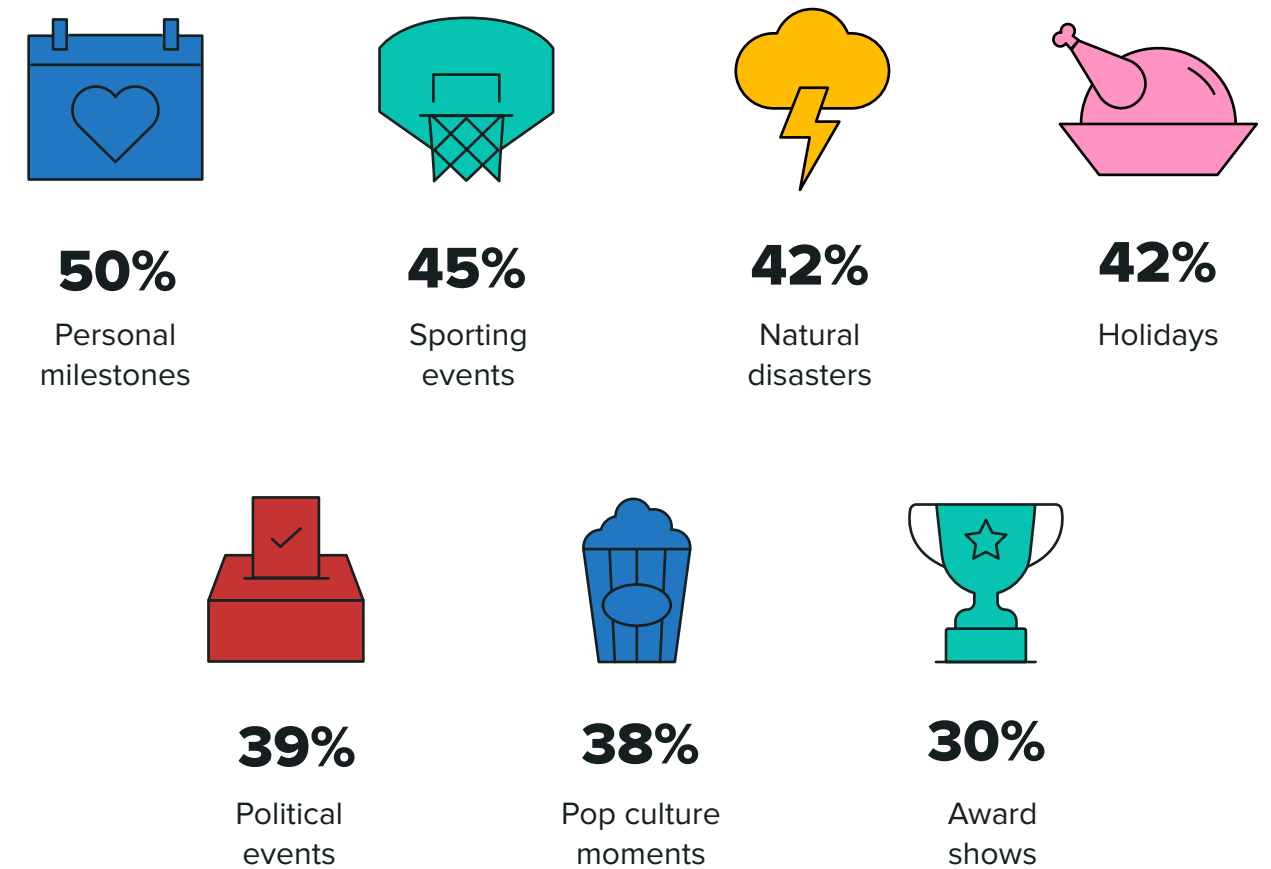
Forty-five percent of consumers rely on suggestions in their feed and/or use discovery tools to find new accounts. But for members of Generation Z, half will find new accounts by looking to the influencers they already like and follow. For Generation X, the number one way they discover new accounts to follow comes from recommendations from family and friends.
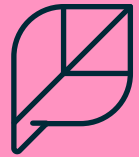
Half of consumers say they're most likely to use social media during a major personal milestone and 45% say they're on social media during a sporting event. When asked when they are most interested in seeing brand content in their feeds, 54% of consumers welcome brand posts during sporting events. They are very uninterested in seeing brand posts during a natural disaster (14%).

How consumers find new accounts to like and follow

45%
Suggestions in my feed and/or use discovery tools

40%
Recommendations from family/friends

39%
Brands that I admire and/or follow

35%
Accounts influencers I like mention

34%
Brands I shop with offline

32%
Word-of-mouth

25%
Hashtags

When people are most likely to be on social media

50%
Personal milestones

45%
Sporting events

42%
Natural disasters

42%
Holidays

39%
Political events

38%
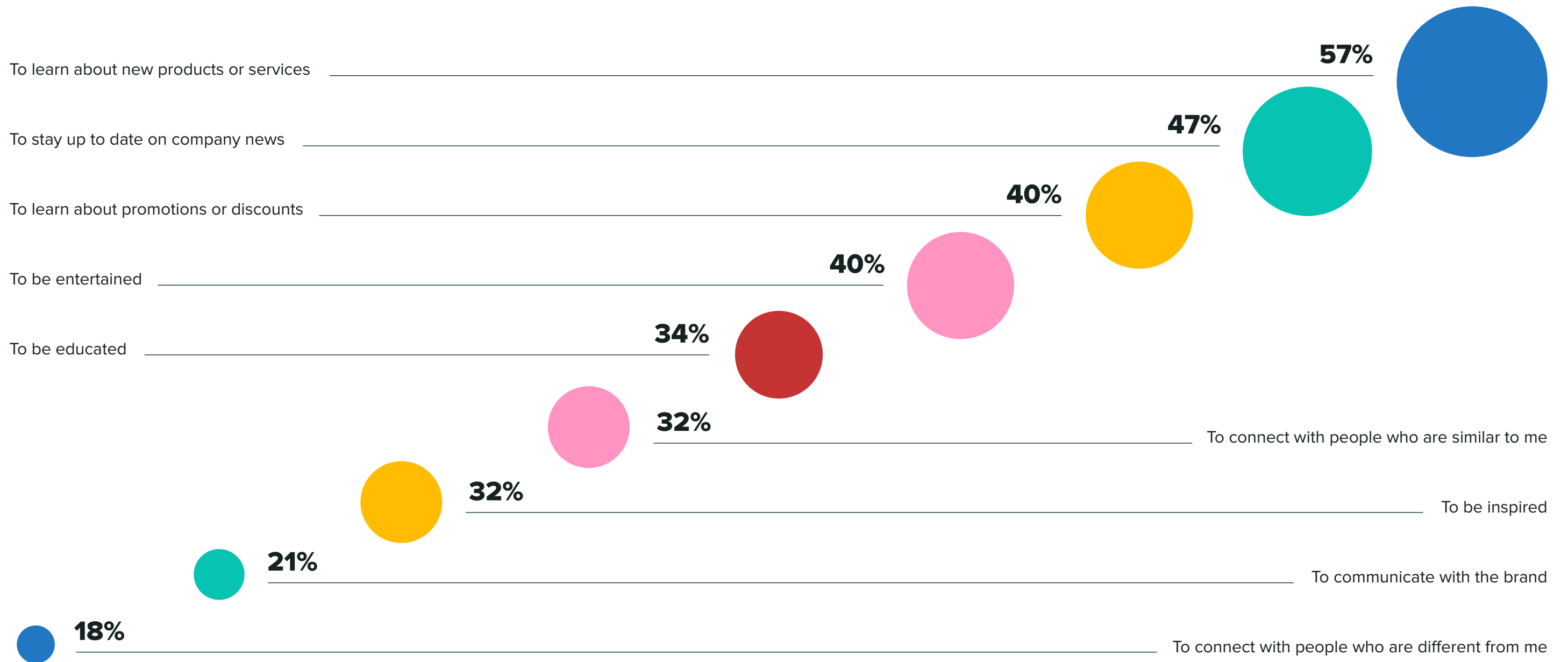Pop culture moments

30%
Award shows

Sprout stance

For marketers struggling to reach their target audience, it's helpful to understand when consumers are most interested in seeing branded content—and when they're not.

To launch its new bridalwear brand, Ted Baker turned to Pinterest to target brides and grooms-to-be after social data revealed weddings are one of the top search topics for Pinners. Knowing that customers used Pinterest to search for wedding inspiration, the **Ted Baker** team created a series of wedding-inspired boards, Promoted Pins and editorial content to help brides and grooms prepare for their big day. The Wed With Ted campaign helped Ted Baker boost awareness around their new wedding collection and resulted in over 400 in-store consultations.

Social data can tell brands when their customers are most likely to be on social media and what types of content are likely to resonate. If you're targeting customers celebrating a personal milestone, such as a wedding, birthday or vacation, consider which social platforms those people use to source inspiration. With this knowledge, you can create a message that resonates the strongest with your audience and reaches them right at the beginning of their customer journey.

When it comes to connecting with brands, 57% of consumers will follow a brand on social media to learn about new products and services. Forty-seven percent follow brands to stay up to date on company news, while 40% want to learn about promotions and discounts.
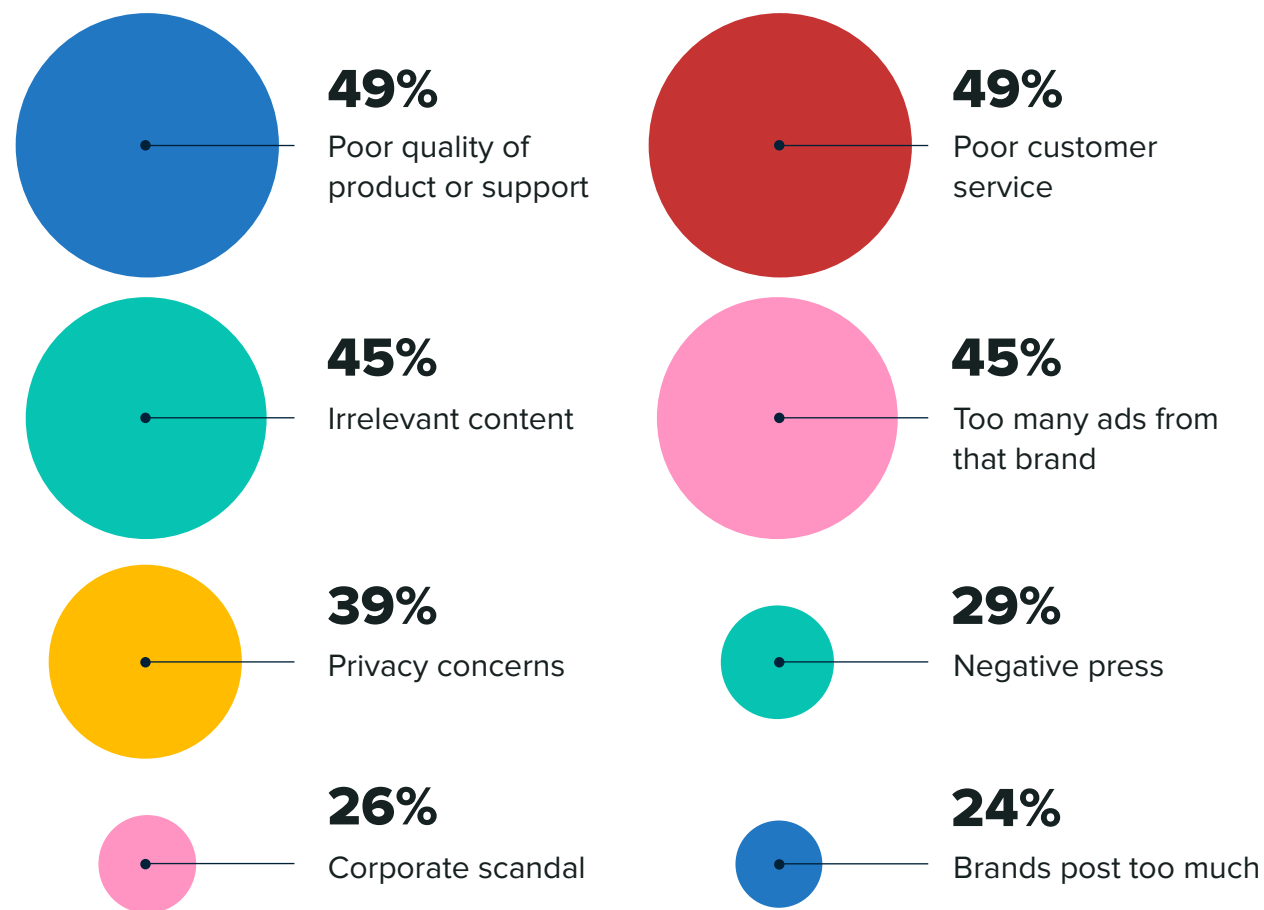
Why consumers follow brands on social media

To learn about new products or services — **57%**

To stay up to date on company news — **47%**

To learn about promotions or discounts — **40%**

To be entertained — **40%**

To be educated — **34%**

32% — To connect with people who are similar to me

32% — To be inspired

21% — To communicate with the brand

18% — To connect with people who are different from me

On the flip side, consumers will unfollow brands on social media because of poor quality of products and subpar customer service, two factors often outside of a social media manager's control. A closer look at the social data may reveal what specifically customers don't like about a certain product, or where the customer service process is breaking down, and social marketers can share these insights with the responsible teams for further action.

Why consumers unfollow brands on social media

49%
Poor quality of product or support

49%
Poor customer service

45%
Irrelevant content

45%
Too many ads from that brand

39%
Privacy concerns

29%
Negative press

26%
Corporate scandal

24%
Brands post too much

When consumers do follow brands on social, those brands are rewarded: 89% of consumers say they'll buy from a brand they follow on social. Seventy-five percent of consumers will increase their spending with a brand they follow on social—a number that has increased 12% **year over year**. Knowing that a brand's social following has a significant impact on the bottom line gives practitioners a better understanding of how senior leaders prioritize their goals for social.

Action item

Growing your social following supports your business' revenue goals, but to attract new followers marketers need to know what types of content will engage (and repel) their customers. For social practitioners, lean on social data to learn about your audience's interests and inspire your content creation. For marketing leaders, help your team build relationships with other marketing disciplines to share insights about the messaging that's working across channels.
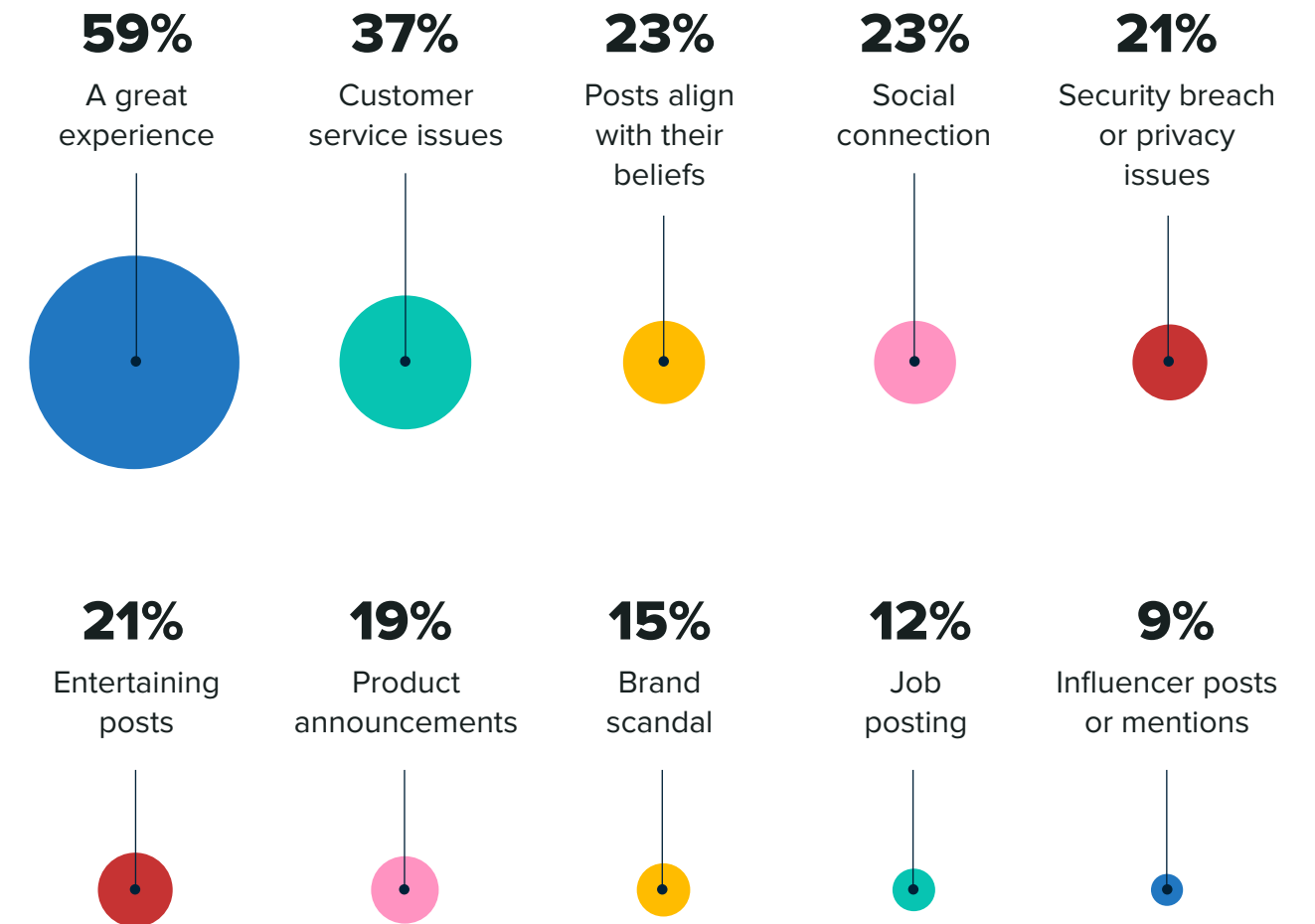
Actions consumers take when they follow brands on social

Visit the brand's website or application

91%

Buy from that brand

89%

Recommend that brand to a family or friend

85%

Choose that brand over a competitor

84%

Visit the brand's physical retail store

84%

Increase their spending with that brand

75%

Reach out for customer service or support

74%

Read that brand's blog or site content

74%

Engage with that brand on social media

71%

As for which types of content consumers want to engage with, 68% say they prefer to interact with images while 50% like to engage with video content.
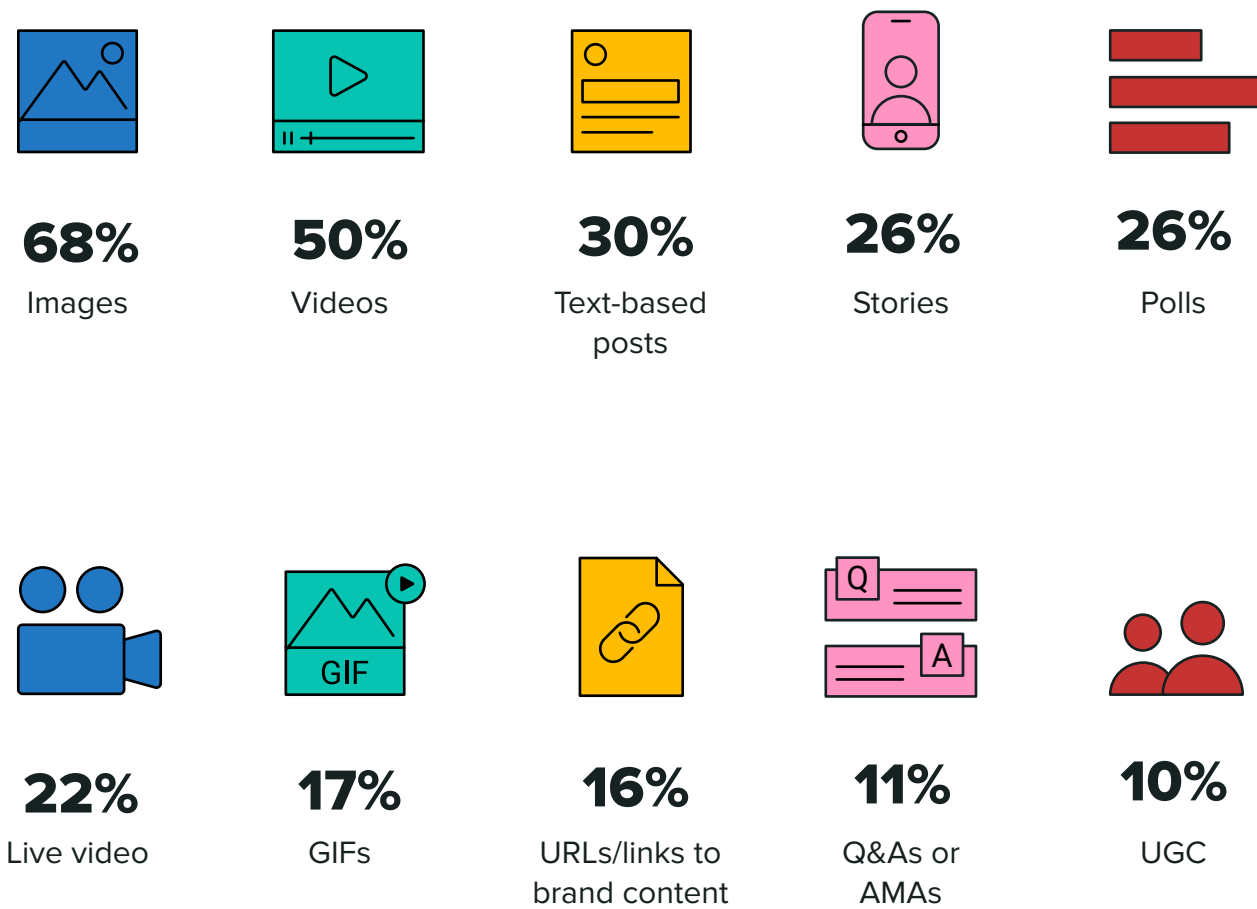
Beyond engaging with content, more than half of consumers (59%) will message a brand after a great experience, while 37% will reach out in regards to a customer service issue.

The types of content consumers want to engage with

68%
Images

50%
Videos

30%
Text-based posts

26%
Stories

26%
Polls

22%
Live video

17%
GIFs

16%
URLs/links to brand content

11%
Q&As or AMAs

10%
UGC

Why consumers message a brand on social media

59%
A great experience

37%
Customer service issues

23%
Posts align with their beliefs

23%
Social connection

21%
Security breach or privacy issues

21%
Entertaining posts

19%
Product announcements

15%
Brand scandal

12%
Job posting

9%
Influencer posts or mentions
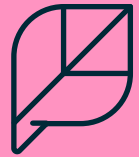
Sprout stance

Social media has brought consumers closer to their favorite brands than ever before, and many shoppers follow their favorite brands to stay up to date with the latest news.

Apple, for example, turned to YouTube to announce the newest iPhone model. In 2019, the tech company livestreamed the product reveal for the public for the first time ever, drawing nearly **two million viewers**. Social media is the perfect platform for brands to launch new products: you can update followers in real-time and consumers can provide brands with direct feedback about their initial impressions.

> **"I think Apple is a great brand to follow because... their customers are usually kept up to date and public announcements regarding issues of bug fixes are always important."**
>
> **2020 Index Survey Respondent**

Brands are also using social media to broadcast important business updates during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. Shortly after the pandemic started, **CorePower Yoga** shifted their in-person business model to online, virtual classes. They used their Twitter account to keep customers up to date with the latest policy changes while remaining transparent about the steps they were taking to address certain challenges. Social media is often the first place where customers will turn to for product and service information, so be prepared to share timely updates as soon as they're available.

Leave the competition in the dust

When asked what differentiates stand-out brands from their peers on social media, 61% of consumers believe brands that engage with their audience are best in class. But while marketers prioritize memorable content (46%) and compelling storytelling (45%), consumers are focused on transparency (45%) and strong customer service (44%). If social marketers want to ensure their brands are considered best in class, they may want to be more transparent and responsive on social media.

Additionally, both social marketers and consumers agree a brand's social media presence stands out from the competition when it is creative, memorable and impactful. Social data can help marketers identify what their core audience considers creative and memorable so when they launch their next social campaign they can be sure it catches their buyers' attention.

What makes a brand's social best in class

● What marketers think   ● What consumers think

Engagement with audience
59%
61%

Transparency
35%
45%

Memorable content
46%
40%

Distinct personality
34%
33%

Compelling storytelling
45%
32%

Setting trends
31%
21%

Strong customer service
37%
44%

Pop culture references
26%
18%

What makes a brand's social presence stand out

What marketers think

1. Creative
2. Memorable
3. Impactful
4. Unique
5. Interactive

What consumers think

1. Creative
2. Memorable
3. Impactful
4. Entertaining
5. Unique

Sprout stance

When asked their opinion, 9% of our consumer respondents said Nike was the best brand to follow on social. The sportswear company is known for creating impactful campaigns that range from covering hard topics like **racial equality** to celebrating the **start of the NBA season**.

The company is also known for elevating its social creativity, as evidenced by the Jordan Brand's collaboration with Snapchat to produce the **A/R Jordan experience**. Using Snapchat's accessible A/R technology, the Jordan Brand created a **social commerce experience** that lives entirely in augmented reality. Sneakerheads could use a special Snapchat filter to recreate the iconic Jordan dunk outside of the Staples Center during the 2018 NBA All-Star Weekend and to purchase the limited edition Air Jordan Tinker IIIs. The shoes sold out in the first **23 minutes**.

The key to Nike's success—which any brand can emulate—is intimately knowing their target audience. Sneakerheads are always on the lookout for the big releases and use social media to stay informed of when and where the next "drop" will take place. Social data can help marketers paint a clear picture of who their customer is, detailing how they use social media and what types of content holds their attention. With this information, brands can develop creative campaigns that engage their core audience and leverage social media to drive specific consumer behaviors.

Marketers should also evaluate if they're keeping pace with the standards of their industry. Sprout Social's own data reveals certain industries are likely to receive a higher volume of engagement (e.g. comments and Retweets) over others. Sports brands, for example, see roughly 975 inbound engagements per day while real estate brands see an average of 41 engagements per day.

A closer look at the average number of responses received per post gives brands a range against which they can measure the engagement on their own content. Consumer goods, for example, receive an average of 38 consumer responses per social post while education only receives an average of six.
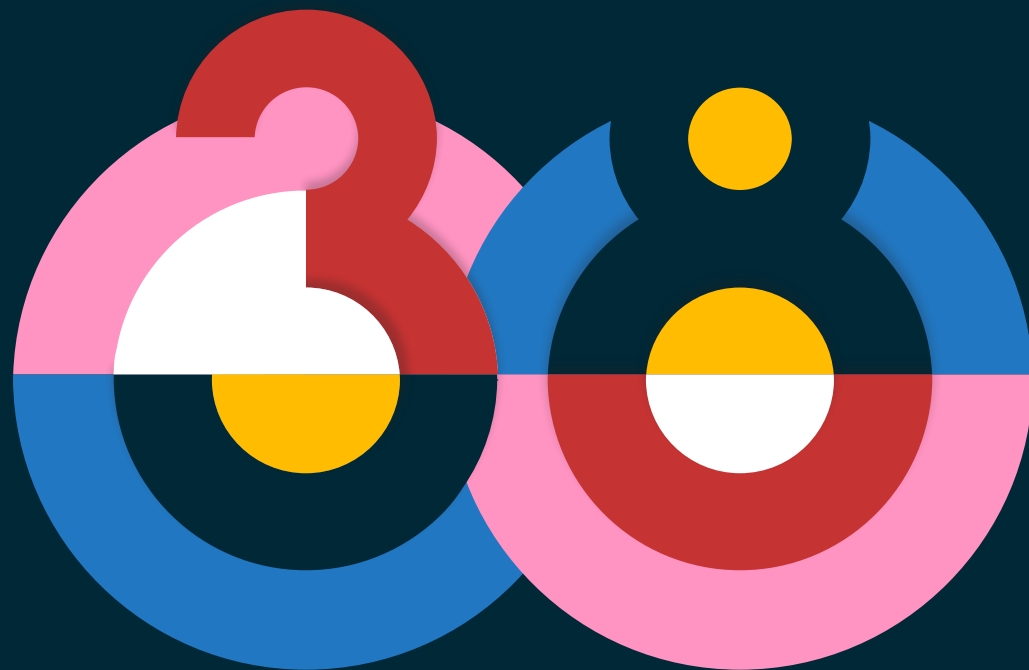
average number of consumer responses per social post for consumer goods

Average content engagement by industry

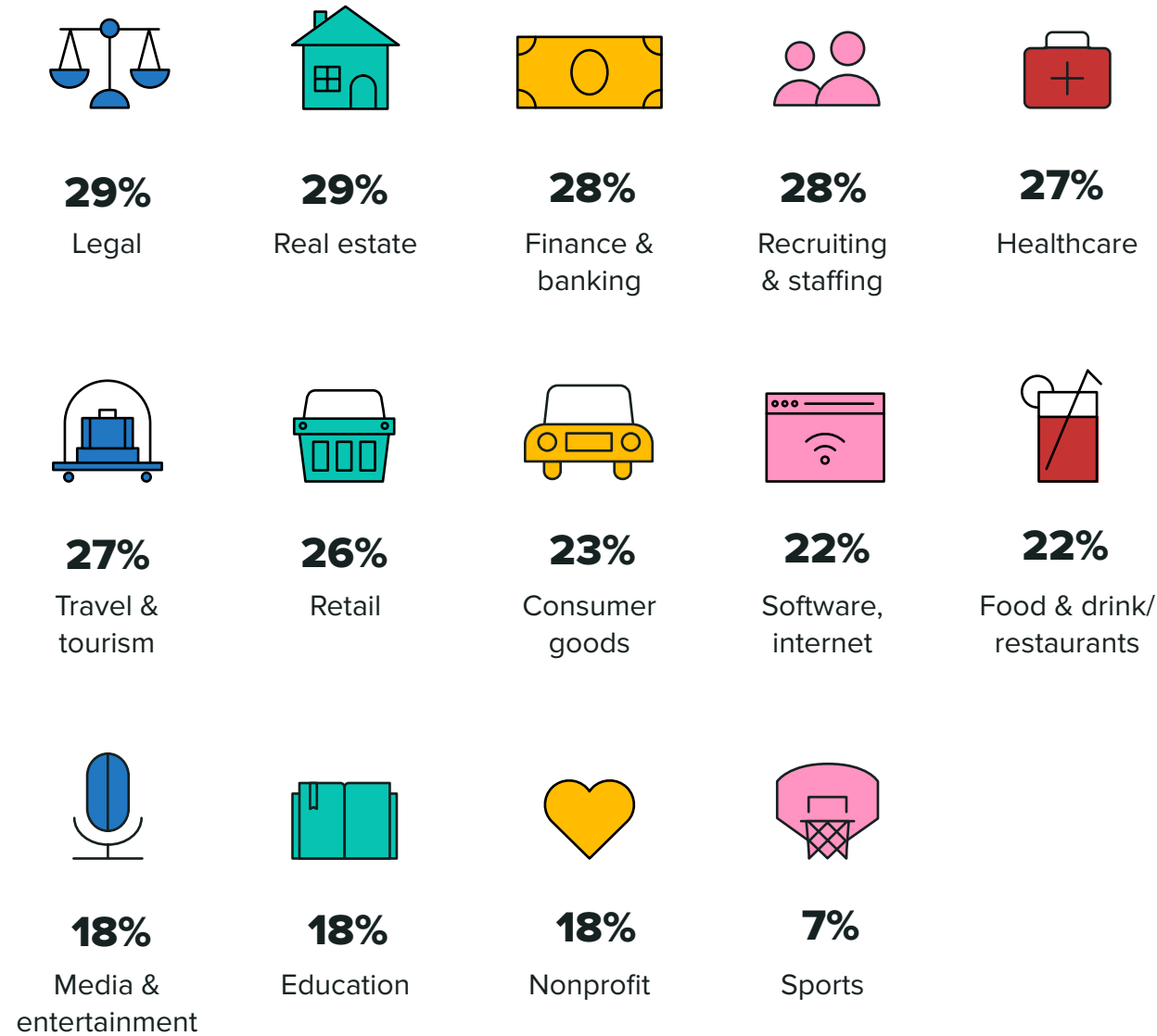|		Average inbound engagements per day	Average engagements per post
	Consumer goods	270	38
	Education	64	6
	Finance & banking	75	10
	Food & drink/restaurants	98	16
	Healthcare	78	14
	Legal	306	30
	Media & entertainment	1,123	28
	Nonprofit	276	19
	Real estate	41	6
	Recruiting & staffing	60	19
	Retail	256	36
	Software, internet	357	25
	Sports	975	29
	Travel & tourism	101	14

Forty-four percent of consumers also say customer service distinguishes a brand from its peers. Average brand response rates by industry reveal that legal and real estate businesses have the highest average response rate (29%) while sports have the lowest (7%).
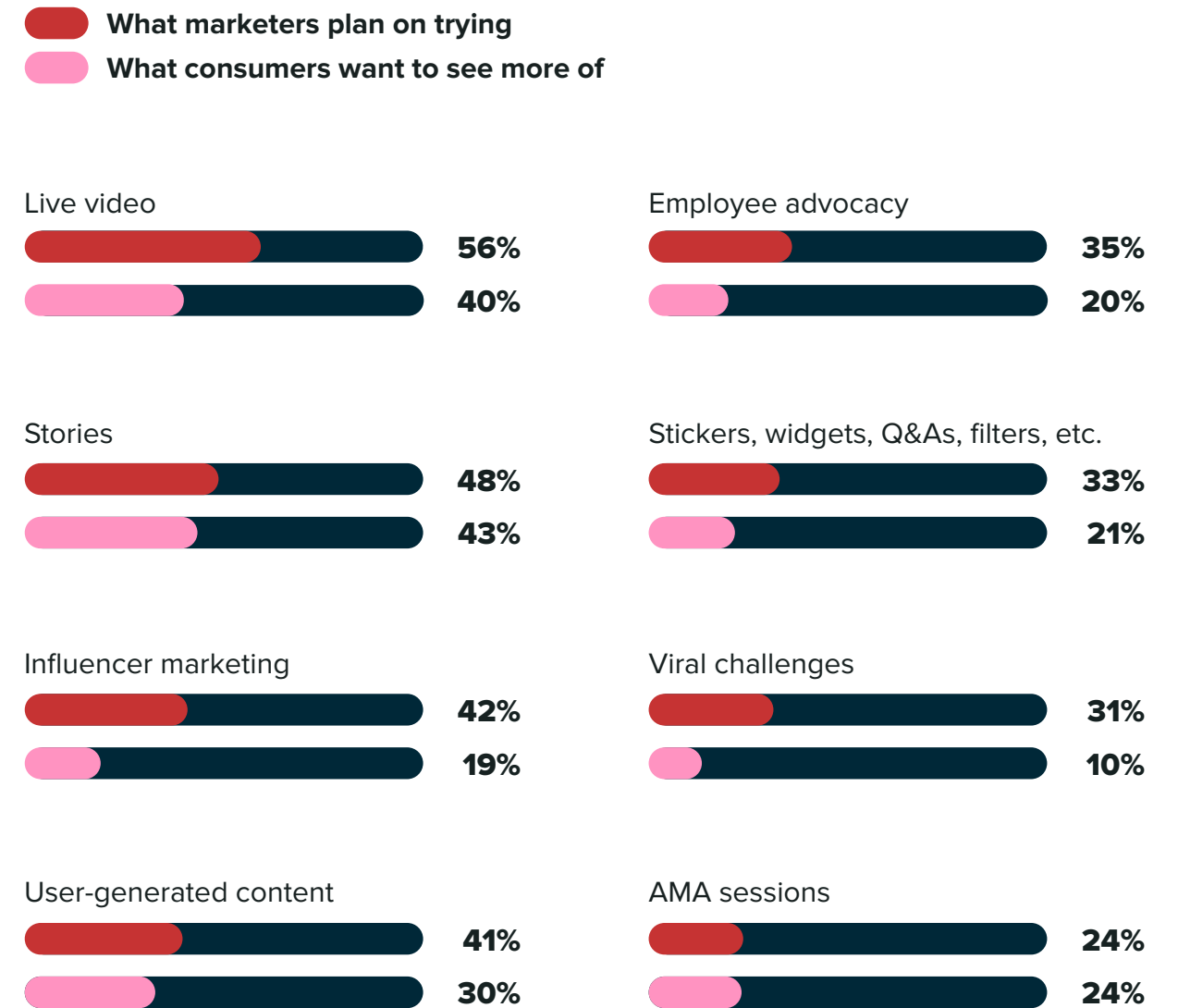
How quickly a brand responds on social media is equally important. Forty percent of consumers expect brands to respond within the first hour of reaching out on social media, while 79% expect a response in the first 24 hours.

While most industries could stand to improve their response rates, another way to improve social performance is to stay ahead of consumer trends. When asked what trends they want to see brands use more of, 43% of consumers want to see more Stories while 40% want more live video. And marketers are ready—these are the top two trends they plan on trying or testing in 2020.

Social response rates by industry

29%
Legal

29%
Real estate

28%
Finance & banking

28%
Recruiting & staffing

27%
Healthcare

27%
Travel & tourism

26%
Retail

23%
Consumer goods

22%
Software, internet

22%
Food & drink/ restaurants

18%
Media & entertainment

18%
Education

18%
Nonprofit

7%
Sports

Trends for 2020

- What marketers plan on trying
- What consumers want to see more of

Live video
56%
40%

Employee advocacy
35%
20%

Stories
48%
43%

Stickers, widgets, Q&As, filters, etc.
33%
21%

Influencer marketing
42%
19%

Viral challenges
31%
10%

User-generated content
41%
30%

AMA sessions
24%
24%

Sprout stance

Leveraging visual content is an effective way for brands to catch their audience's attention while delivering information on new products and services. With roughly **half of Instagram's one billion users** using Instagram Stories every day, brands would be wise to build out their strategy for Stories (if they haven't already).

One brand taking advantage of Instagram Stories is **Samsung Mobile**. Following the release of the Galaxy Note 10, Samsung hosted a makeshift office hours on its Instagram account, inviting followers to submit any questions they had about the phone directly through Stories. The electronics manufacturer used their content to educate consumers on new features and provide instructional how-to's with tips for taking the perfect photo.

With platforms like Instagram, brands can both educate and engage their core audience through video. Brands can demonstrate how to use and get the most out of their products in short, digestible video clips while simultaneously encouraging followers to send in any questions they have. Social also gives brands an opportunity to crowdsource feedback from consumers: social marketers can use Q&A and poll features to determine what their audience wants to see next.

Grow your skills, grow your career

Creating a strong social strategy isn't the only way to succeed. When asked about their professional goals, 47% of social marketers say they want to outperform the goals they set for this year. Marketing leaders especially want to surpass the goals they set for themselves, with 52% saying this is their primary objective for 2020 (compared to 39% of practitioners).

Professional goals for social marketers

	All	Practitioner	Leader
Learn a new skill	**51%**	**50%**	**57%**
Improve upon the skills you already possess	**50%**	**44%**	**50%**
Outperform your goals for 2020	**47%**	**39%**	**52%**
Increase my influence internally	**43%**	**39%**	**48%**
Secure a promotion	**38%**	**35%**	**39%**
Increase your contributions to overall company goals	**24%**	**33%**	**42%**

But if it feels like social marketers still struggle to get the resources they need, that's because it's true. Only 45% of social marketers strongly agree they have leadership buy-in, and one-third say they don't have the skills they need to achieve their social goals.
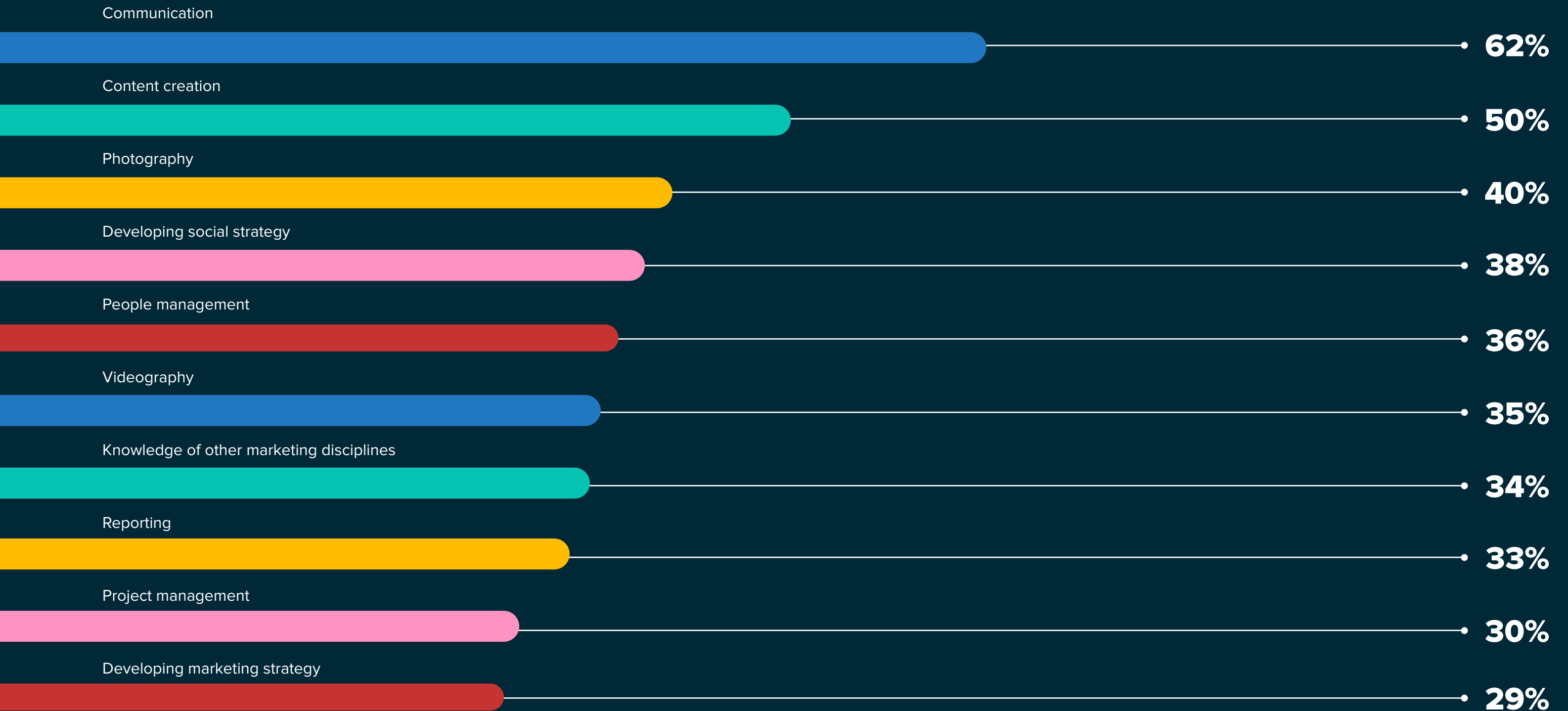
Social practitioners in particular lack leadership support. Forty-two percent of practitioners say they need more leadership buy-in to make a greater business impact through social—but only 39% say they have it.

Action item

When leadership teams see results, they're more likely to show their support. For social practitioners seeking additional buy-in, use data to show how social drives business growth and supports the goals of other departments. For social leaders, help your team build their influence internally by encouraging them to make proactive recommendations and coaching them on what business goals they can inform or support using social data.
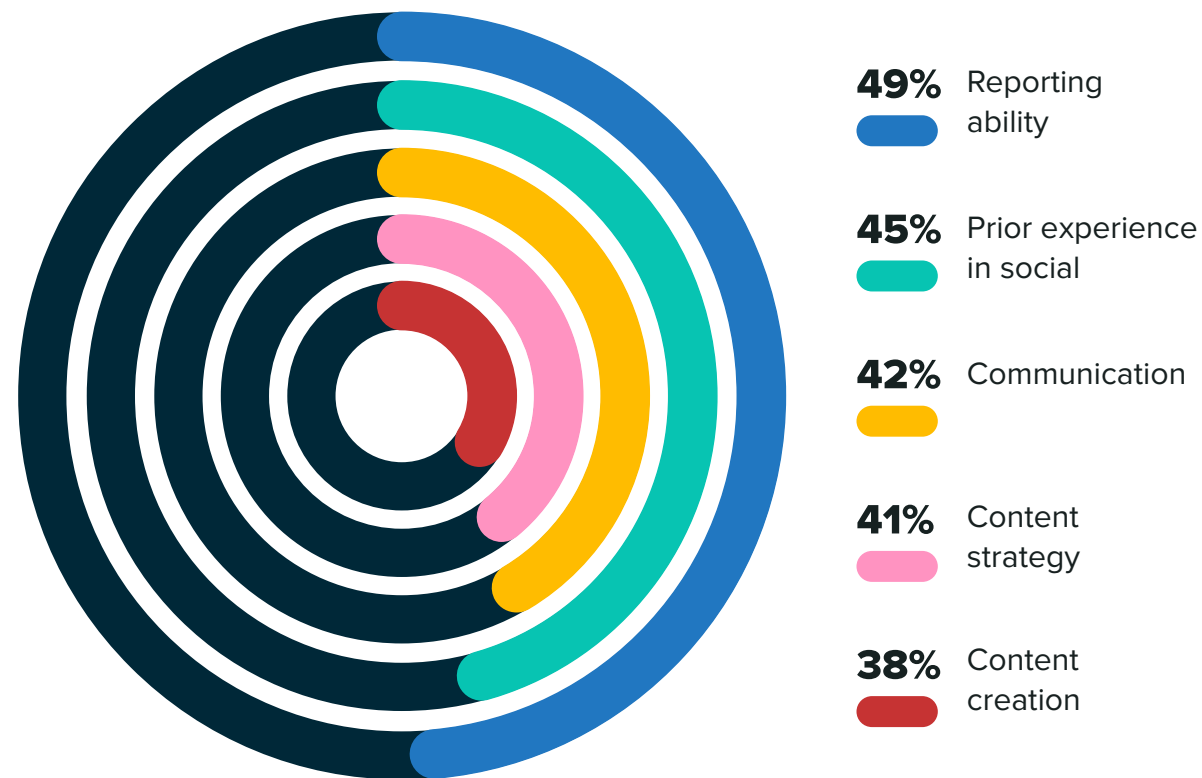
As for which skills they need to achieve their brand's social goals, 62% of all social marketers said communication is a must-have skill. Surprisingly, while 42% of marketing leaders said the ability to develop social strategy is valuable, only 31% of practitioners feel the same way.

Skills marketers need to achieve their social goals

Communication

62%

Content creation

50%

Photography

40%

Developing social strategy

38%

People management

36%

Videography

35%

Knowledge of other marketing disciplines

34%

Reporting

33%

Project management

30%

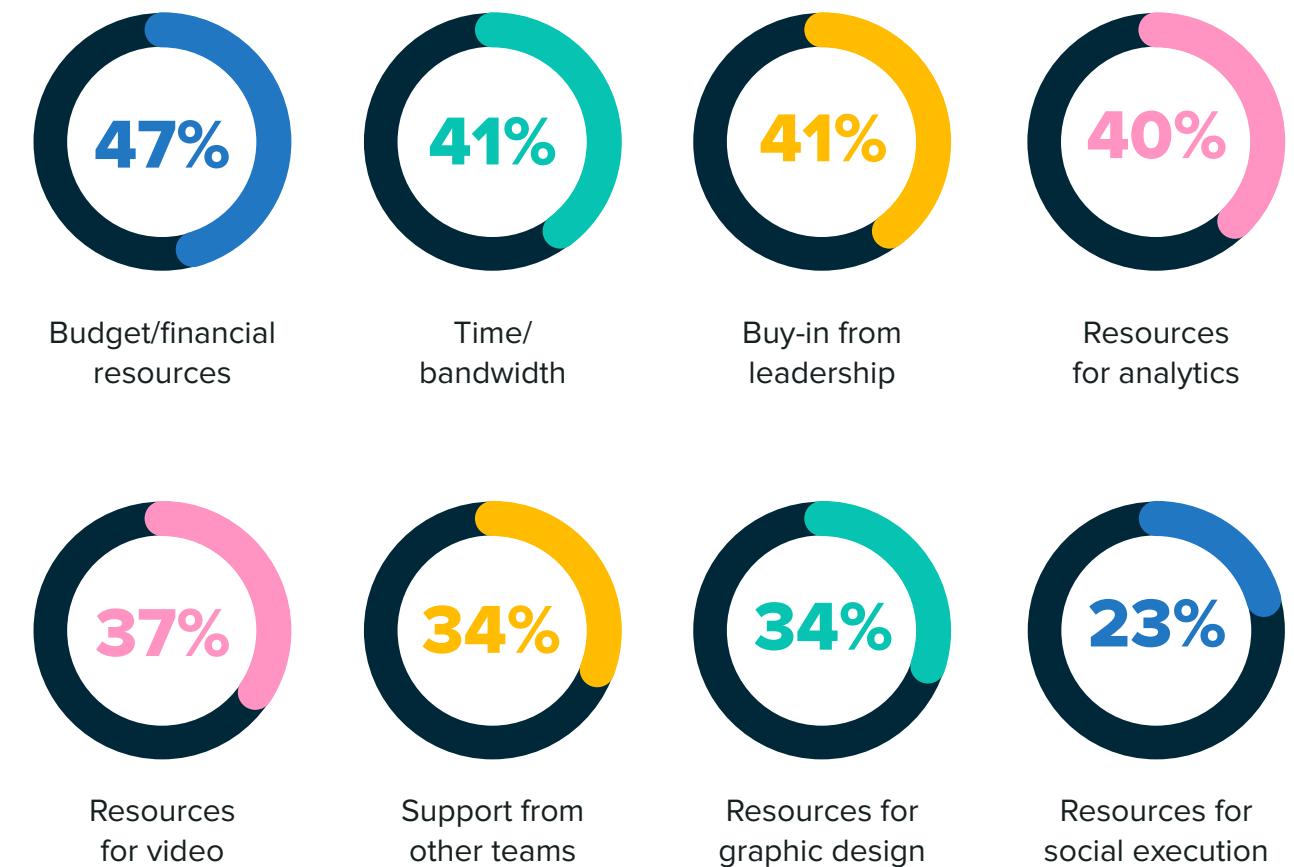**Developing marketing strategy**

29%

For social marketers in a hiring position, reporting ability was the number one skill they looked for in candidates, placing an emphasis on how important it is for marketers to know and understand their social data. Forty-five percent of social marketers also look for prior experience in social and 42% expect candidates to have strong communications skills.

Finally, social marketers need more resources to make the biggest impact through their work. Forty-seven percent of social marketers say they need additional budget and financial resources to make a greater business impact with their social strategies. And 41% say they need more time and bandwidth. Currently, in-house social marketers say the most common number of employees involved in social is one to two employees at small businesses (37%), five to 10 employees at mid-market companies, (40%) and 11 or more employees at enterprise organizations (46%).

Top 5 skills marketers look for when hiring

49% Reporting ability

45% Prior experience in social

42% Communication

41% Content strategy

38% Content creation

Resources social marketers need to make a greater business impact

47% Budget/financial resources

41% Time/ bandwidth

41% Buy-in from leadership

40% Resources for analytics

37% Resources for video

34% Support from other teams

34% Resources for graphic design

23% Resources for social execution

Sprout stance

When social marketers have the personnel and bandwidth they need, they're able to turn their brand's social platforms into powerful tools for connecting with their core customers. For a brand like Southwest Airlines, a fully staffed social team ensures the airline is able to respond to as many of their customers as possible.

Since the founding of the social care program in 2011, Southwest has grown its social team from three to around **40 customer service professionals**. Having a large social team is necessary, considering the airline receives roughly 2,500 to 3,000 inbound messages per day across Twitter and Facebook. With their social care team staffed **24 hours every day**, Southwest is able to resolve travel issues in real-time and boasts an average response rate of **six minutes and 36 seconds**.

When consumers reach out to brands on social media, they expect a response in a timely manner. And failure to respond—even to messages where your brand isn't explicitly tagged—can negatively impact people's perception of your brand. By prioritizing social media monitoring and investing in the right team and tools, brands can keep track of every social mention and quickly resolve any customer issues that arise.

Conclusion

By now, it should be clear social media is a powerful awareness play for brands—and it's also proven to drive all the other parts of a growing business, from sales to customer service and support. A great brand presence on social media can drive consumers to the checkout line and give brands a leg up over their closest competitors.

Today's social marketers are still just scratching the surface of what they can do with social media. As they continue to hone their skills, increase their focus on creativity and embrace social data, social marketers will begin to see the impact their strategies can have on a business' bottomline. Because social media is a true growth engine for any business. And when social marketers unlock the full potential of the social data at their fingertips, they'll do more than meet their goals for social media—they'll go above and beyond.
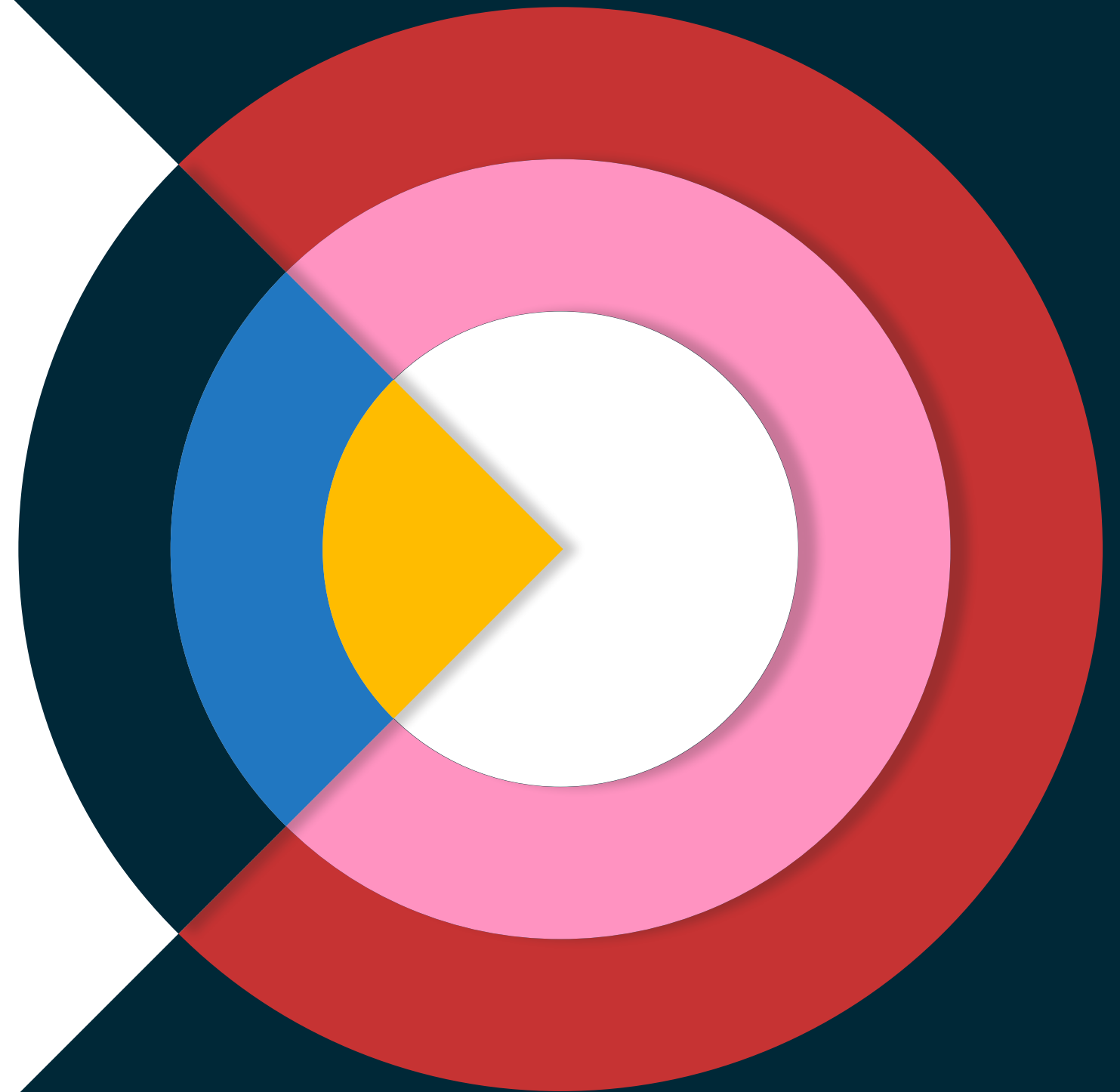
About the data

The Sprout Social Index™ is a report compiled and released by Sprout Social. All referenced data is based on 1,028 consumer respondents and 1,003 marketer respondents. Both the consumer and marketer surveys were conducted online by Lucid between February 28 and March 4, 2020. Graphics are rounded to the nearest whole percentage and may not add up to exactly 100%. In breaking down marketing seniority, we qualify 'practitioners' as interns, coordinators or specialists; and 'leaders' as directors, VPs or C-level marketers.

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 and advocacy solutions to more than 23,000 leading brands and agencies worldwide. Sprout's suite of solutions supports every aspect of a cohesive social program and enables organizations of all sizes to extend their reach, amplify their brand and create the kind of real connection with their consumers that drives their business forward. Headquartered in Chicago, Sprout operates across major social media networks, including Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram and LinkedIn. Learn more at **sproutsocial.com**.