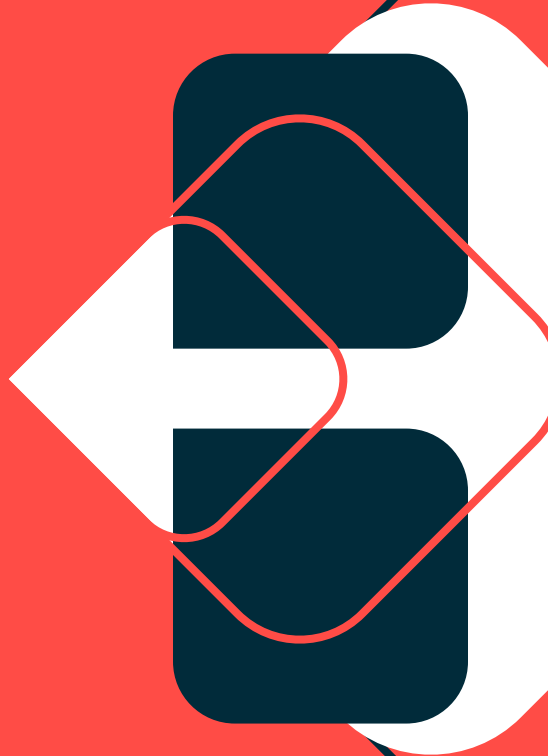
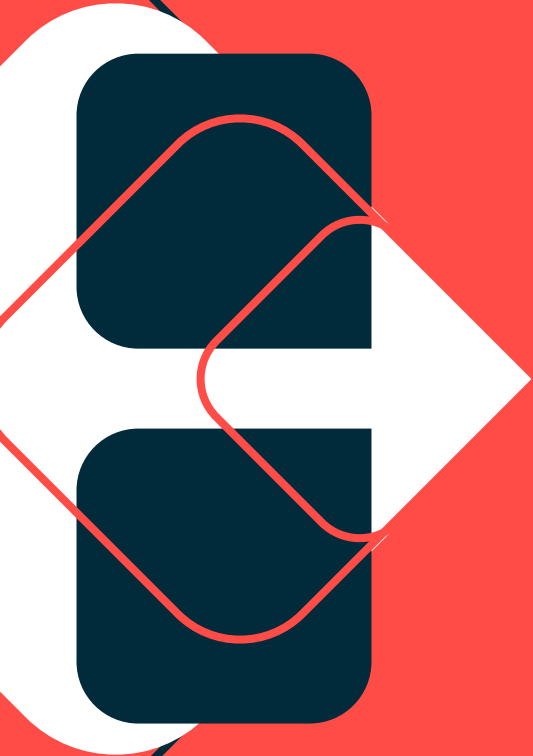


Social **TRENDS** 2024

Hootsuite®





All eyes on ROI

The good old days of jumping on bandwagons and desperately trying to outrun trends on social media are numbered.

Social marketers have come of age—and with their hard-won wisdom comes a renewed focus on performance and less patience for folly. As platforms continue raining new tools, features, and algorithm updates on us all, social marketers are learning to take a deep breath and ignore the noise.

In 2024, ROI will take center stage on social as smart organizations finally close in on their top-performing tactics. From singling out hero platforms and perfecting their content mix to boosting their team's capabilities with AI, the marketers and brands who set the pace this year will do so with a new level of precision and efficiency. There's no time to waste on efforts that yield no results—no matter how sentimental we might feel looking behind us. (Love you forever, blue bird.)

From here on, it's full speed ahead—and that's why we may be looking at social media's most pivotal year yet.

Let's go.

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Methodology

Research Methods

This report is based on a commercial survey of 4,281 marketers and a consumer survey of 4,508 consumers, conducted in August 2023.

We conducted primary interviews with social marketing practitioners, leaders, observers, and partners.

And we ran a news analysis of 15,557 articles from major social media reporting organizations, as well as a content analysis of 1 million anonymized social posts from accounts connected to Hootsuite.

Our primary data has been supplemented by secondary research from Pew Research Center, Statista, Deloitte, Forbes, Insider Intelligence, Forrester, LinkedIn, GlobalWebIndex, The CMO Survey, and others.

Overview of Hootsuite's global Social Trends 2024 Commercial Survey

4,281 respondents

118 countries

16 industries

28% directors and above

62% managers and practitioners

Overview of Hootsuite's global Social Media 2024 Consumer Survey

4,508 respondents

3 countries

65% Gen Z and millennials

26% Gen X and baby boomers

Note: Commercial survey respondents were from 118 countries, with the most common being the US (n = 2,709), Canada (n = 377), the UK (n = 267), India (n = 114), and Australia (n = 67).

AI forces brands to redefine authenticity

With generative AI on the rise, brands toe the line between efficiency and authenticity on social media.

Social marketers warmly welcome a new teammate

Generative AI created a seismic shift when it broke into the mainstream in 2022 and sparked a whole range of emotions typically reserved for fellow humans.

Interest was so high that from 2022 to 2023, topics on learning about AI increased by 550%, according to an analysis we conducted of over 15,500 news articles and blogs.

And social marketers have jumped on the bandwagon.



Since social media managers are typically a [team of one](#) and often strapped for time, it's no surprise the top motivation to use AI is to reduce staff workload, with 61% of our survey respondents selecting this option.

Organizations also report that they're planning to double their use of AI across various activities—even tripling or quadrupling it in some cases. In the coming year, we can expect to see the biggest increase in AI use for revising text, editing images, and providing customer service.

So is generative AI a source of hope for busy professionals like you? The numbers seem to say so. But in the noble quest to reduce your workload, are you at risk of alienating your audience?

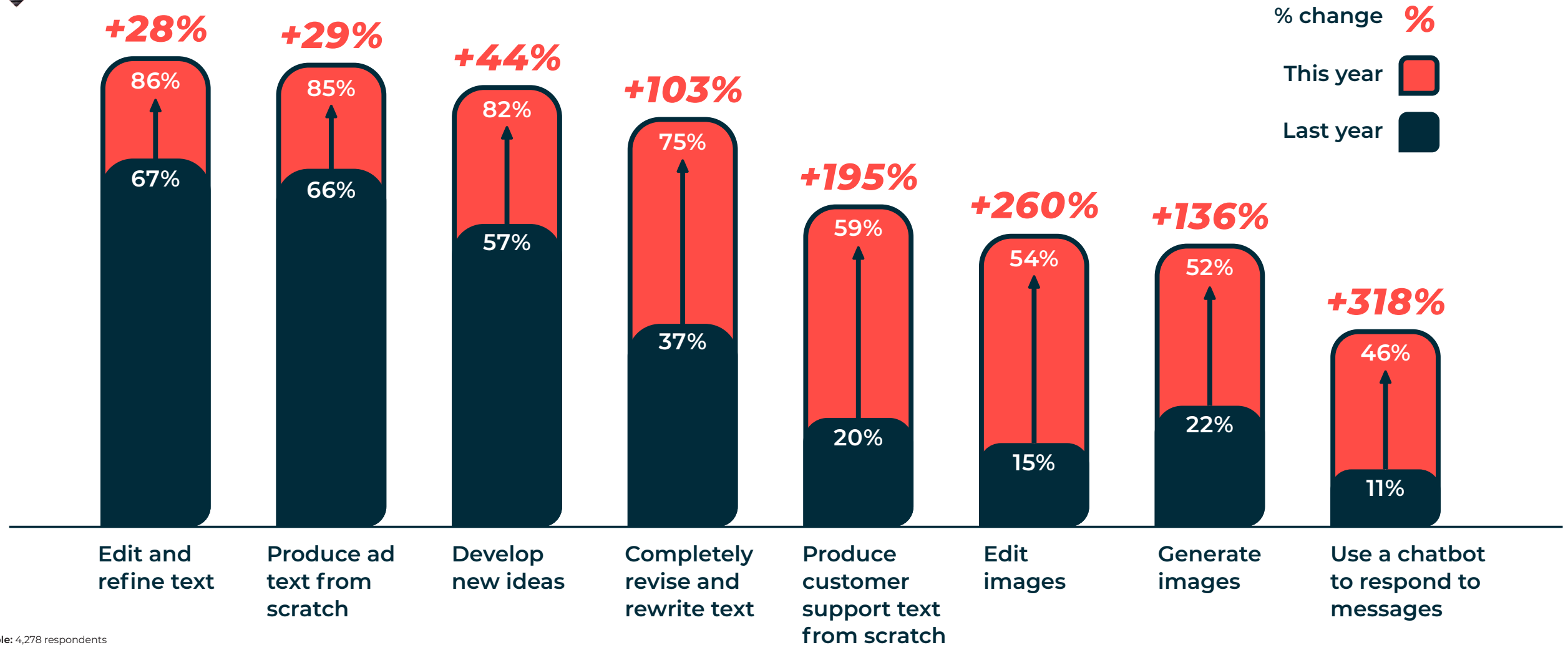
61%
**of organizations
say the #1 reason
they use AI for
social media
is to reduce
staff workload**

Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Survey



AI use will *skyrocket* in 2024

In the last 12/next 12 months, how has/will your organization use(d) AI to assist with social media activities?



Sample: 4,278 respondents
Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Survey

Audiences greet AI with hesitation

There's good news, and there's bad news.

First, the bad news. (Better to rip off the Band-Aid, right?) AI-generated social posts get a lot of buzz, but the question of trust still casts a big shadow.

No one's a stranger to fake news anymore. And the idea of a machine stringing words or mashing images together to be shared online makes some people uneasy, especially when trying to gauge what's real and what's not on social.

These sentiments line up with a 2022 [study](#) by the Pew Research Center on the increased use of AI in daily life. The study found that 45% of US adults are equally concerned and excited about this, while 37% are more concerned than excited, and only 18% are more excited than concerned.

62%

of consumers say they are less likely to engage with and trust content if they know it was created by an AI application

Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Consumer Survey

In other words, audiences are not necessarily embracing AI and AI-generated content as much as social marketers are flocking to use it.

The good news? Not everyone distrusts AI equally.

Different age groups are forming different relationships with AI-generated content. Knowing exactly who your audience is on social will help you develop an AI strategy that's in line with their values and preferences.



Concerns over AI are high among consumers

Thinking about social media content generated by AI, rate your agreement with the following statements

Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree



It's hard to tell what information is real or fake



It's hard to tell what images are real or fake/created using AI

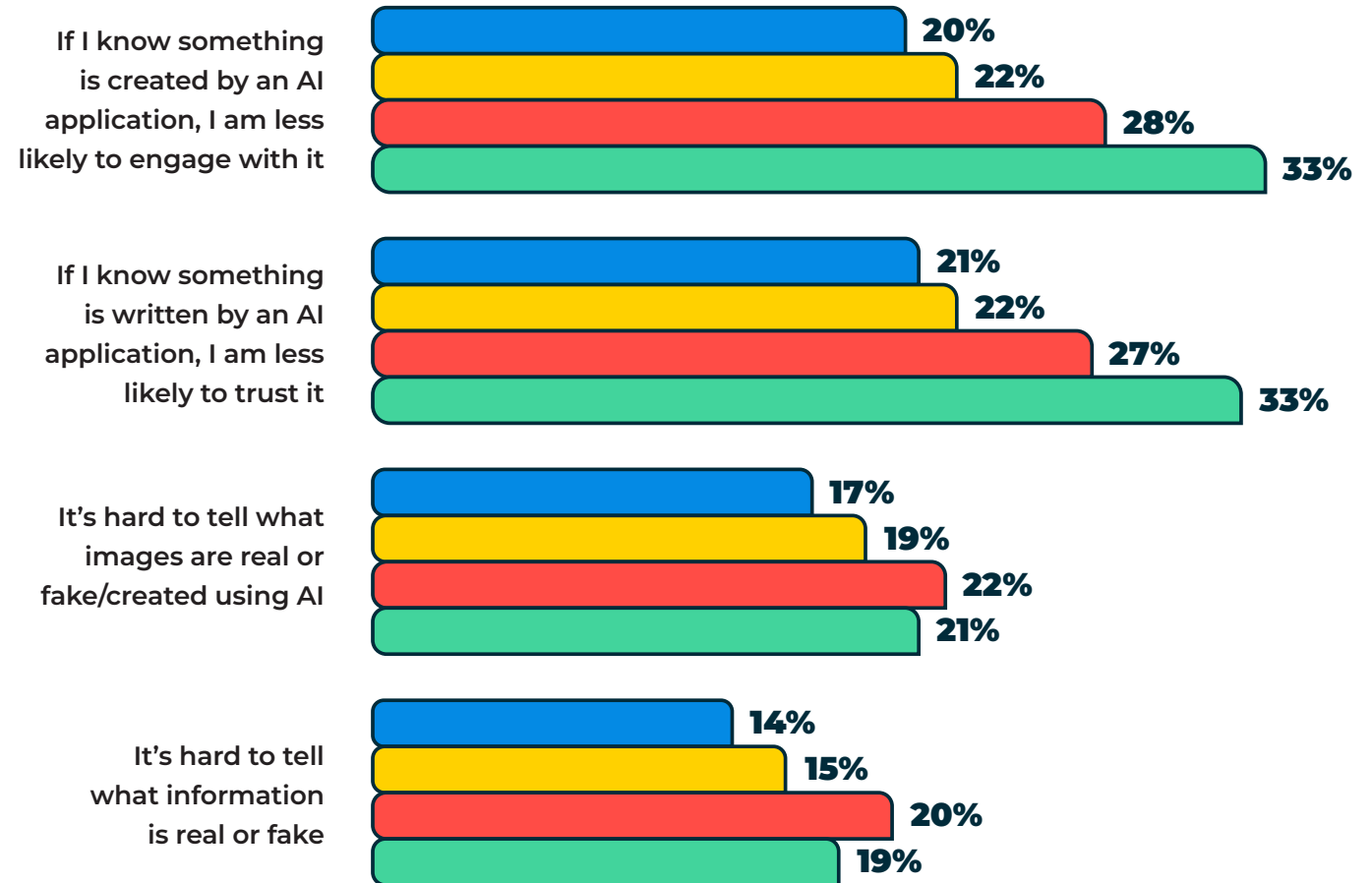
Sample: 4,499 respondents
Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Consumer Survey

Take Gen Z, for example. They're more likely to claim they know what's real and what's created by AI than other generations. They're also more likely to trust and engage with AI content. On the other hand, baby boomers are the opposite on all accounts: less confident in their ability to tell if something is created by AI, and less likely to trust and engage with it if it is.

So if you have a younger community on social, you may have an easier time experimenting with AI. But if your audience is older, it's best to tread carefully for now.

AI for the ages

Thinking about social media content generated by AI, rate your agreement with the following statements



Response = Strongly agree

Sample: 4,420 respondents (filtered to those who strongly agree)
 Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Consumer Survey

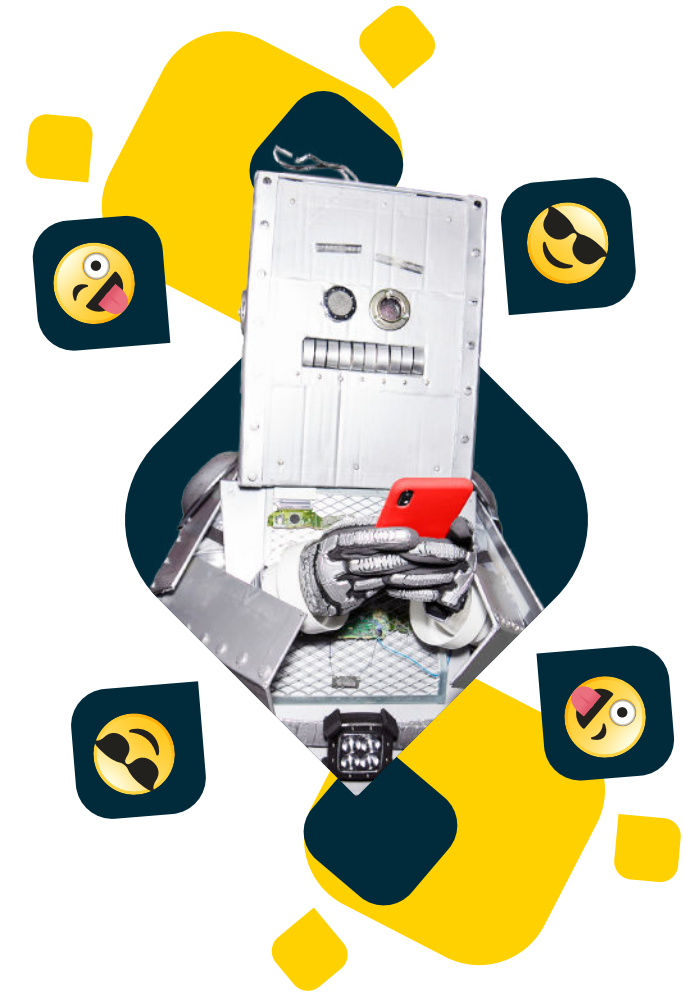
Authenticity 🤝 AI

It's inevitable: AI will become ubiquitous on social. And it's completely fair for social marketers to use a tool that makes their life easier. Scaling back on its use now would be like reverting from computers to typewriters.

To thrive in this new environment, marketers and brands need to move beyond defining “real” and “authentic” based on whether something was created exclusively by a human. Like it or not we're all cyborgs now, at least at work. Whether we're using AI as a brainstorming partner, letting it finish our sentences for us, pretending it doesn't exist, or (more likely) a mix of the above, this genie is out of the bottle.

In 2024, the most successful brands will redefine “authenticity.” It's not about who (or what) creates your content anymore; it's about the brand experience your content creates for the customer.

Does it feel right? Does it reinforce the brand? Does it work? Get those right and you can dismiss questions about whether a bot made it with a shrug.





The trend in action

Croda discovers the art and science of AI

Driven by its purpose to use “Smart science to improve lives,™” [Croda](#) combines its knowledge, passion, and entrepreneurial spirit to create, make, and sell specialty ingredients that are relied on by industries and consumers around the world. Its social media audience is mostly scientists and chemists—a community that values innovation and is open to exploring emerging technologies like AI.

So when ChatGPT became widely available in 2022, Ashley Sidi, digital marketing lead at Croda, immediately saw an opportunity.

“If we’re not using AI, other companies will,” says Sidi. “This is going to be the next big thing—and we have to evolve with this transformative technology to stay competitive in the evolving business landscape.”

Sidi set out to champion AI within the company. It’s now used not only for social media and marketing, but also for sales, product development, and more.

With marketers who are primarily chemists and no internal design team, creating professional-looking social images has been a challenge for Croda. This is one aspect of the job Sidi plans to delegate to AI.

“Basic design elements, like making sure that text isn’t running off to the corner, resizing images, color consistency: It sounds like little things, but it really does make your brand look professional,” she says. “I think AI is going to help quite a bit in the design space.”

In addition to creating consistency and improving the quality of social media images, Croda’s marketing team also uses AI for brainstorming content ideas and drafting social media captions.

To make sure Croda is set up for success, Sidi collaborated with IT and other teams within the organization to put AI policies in place. Now the company has clear guidelines for securely using AI across different departments.

The marketing team also has an approvals process in place so every bit of AI content is fact-checked and greenlit before it’s posted on social—a priority among their fact-loving, data-driven community.



Think of it as having a personal virtual assistant. If you use it in this manner, it will be effective. However, it’s important to sprinkle in the real stuff. Maintaining a healthy balance between technology and authenticity is key.

Ashley Sidi

Digital Marketing Lead, Croda



Recommendations

1 Know your audience and how they feel about AI

It's timeless advice for a reason: Know your audience.

A deep understanding of who your audience is on social will be essential for using AI in the right ways this year.

Don't stop at basic demographics. Who are they? What do they like? How do they feel about what they see on social media?

Other data points you can learn about your audience include:

- Location
- Interests
- Stage of life
- Language
- Challenges
- Buying habits

These can help you gather insights on whether other factors such as culture, geography, or interests have influence on their perception of AI. As a bonus, you'll also be able to fine-tune the rest of your content to their likes and needs.



Master your target market on social media with our [in-depth guide](#)

2 Decide which tasks to keep on your plate to help build relationships

AI makes a great assistant—but you still have to run the show. It's up to you to delegate which aspects of the job AI can support, and which aspects need a more delicate hand (and nuanced brain, tbh). After all, your audience's trust is on the line.

As AI gets more sophisticated, it may become tempting to pass off AI work as yours. But remember: Social relationships are built on trust. Leading audiences to believe that the content they're interacting with is human when it's not is a quick way to break that trust. Not to mention, it could create serious damage for a brand if it's ever brought to light.

(And if any of you thought to yourselves just now, "But they'll never know," you just made Owly really, really sad.)

PRO TIP Play around with social media AI that's seriously easy to use

Instantly generate captions and get post ideas—fast—for every network with [OwlyWriter AI](#)

Delegate tasks with this cheat sheet



Use the bots

- Brainstorming ideas
- Organizing your thoughts
- Giving content suggestions
- Writing first drafts for captions
- Suggesting images



Keep it human

- Creating a content strategy for social
- Editing and refining captions
- Ensuring images and posts are up to brand standards
- Interacting in the comments section

3 Create AI policies and best practices for social media

Nothing's worse than an employee going rogue and posting their AI-generated "masterpiece" on the company Instagram account. Or a befuddled customer raging in your DMs because your tone-deaf chatbot "handled" the issue.

But if you have rules and regulations in place to guide your organization's use of AI, these potential nightmares can be avoided.

Making sure your team and organization are aligned will help you use AI safely and effectively.

Step-by-step guide to creating an AI policy

Step 1: Loop in the wider organization

- Get IT's input to identify security issues
- Ask for Legal's advice on the use of images on various platforms
- Determine whether you're allowed to feed proprietary data into the program or use AI's help with confidential information

Step 2: Define AI's scope in your work

- Will you limit its role to idea generation and brainstorming for now?
- Will you use it for writing and generating images?
- Will you use it to interact with customers?

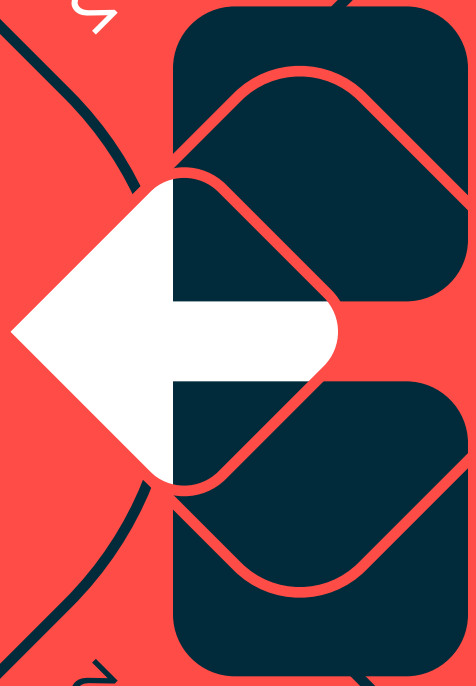
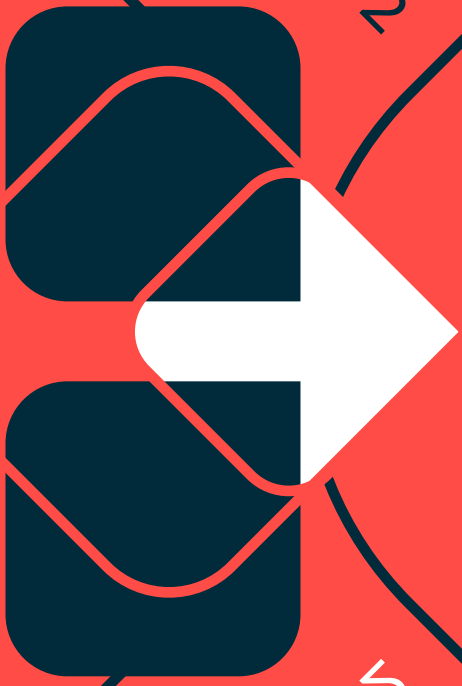
Step 3: Create an AI style guide for social

- Include notes for tone of voice and photography or illustration styles
- Add tips for effective prompts
- Share with all internal and external content creators so your social content is consistent across all channels

Strategic brands

commit to their champion platforms

Strapped for time and resources, organizations stop stretching themselves thin and double down on the social platforms that get results.



The multi-platform predicament

Be where your audience is, they said.

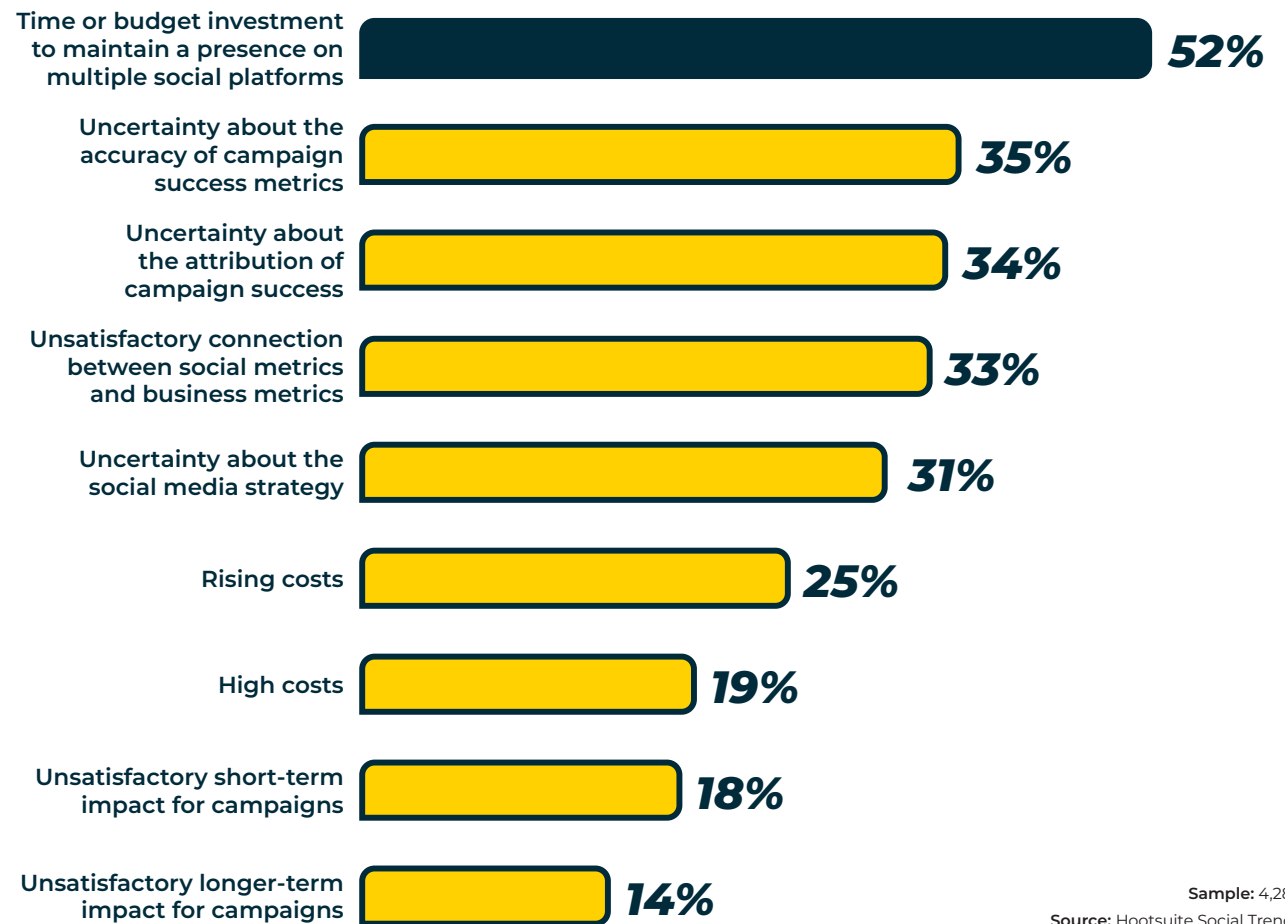
But when your audience is everywhere, that's a tall order—and the average social media user logs into about seven platforms each month. *Seven.*

For brands, maintaining a presence on just one social network is hard enough, let alone many. And *maintaining* is the baseline. Doing it well is a whole other story.

In fact, this is such a challenge for organizations, it's emerged as the top ROI concern for social media—even trumping issues that have to do with measuring success (some of social's most talked-about struggles).

Orgs fear the ROI impact of being on so many platforms

Which of the following issues do you think contribute to your organization's concern about return on investment for social media activities?



Sample: 4,281 respondents
Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Survey

Most social marketers could talk your ear off about why it takes so much time and energy to be active—and thrive—on several social media networks.

One of the biggest factors: How important it's become to tailor social content to each network. (Cross-posting just doesn't cut it anymore, sadly.) Different channels have different audiences, lingo, trends, and hashtags, not to mention word counts and image specs. Brand posts that mimic the content and formats of individual platforms make for a better user experience—and less annoyed customers.

Users also have different reasons for being on each platform—Facebook for connecting with friends and family, TikTok for being entertained, Instagram for exploring interests, and Twitter/X for getting news and event updates, for example.

The differences between platforms—and the amount of work it takes to cater to them all—

are enough to make social marketers' heads spin. No wonder 66% of them say they have too much to do, according to our [2023 Social Media Management Career Survey](#).

Social marketers are responsible for developing strategies, creating content, tracking analytics, executing ads, responding to comments, scheduling posts, and soooooo much more—and that's *before* considering that each of those tasks have to get done for multiple channels.

It's also before taking into account the constant platform changes that social pros are expected to stay on top of. Today, networks release new user and advertising features so often that more than half (58%) of marketers say it's difficult to keep up.

The good news? Social marketers aren't the only ones who feel the pressures of having to deal with multiple platforms. Company leaders are *finally* starting to clue in, recognizing the impact this is having on their business.

58%

**of marketers say
the pace at which
networks release
new user and
advertising features
makes it hard to
keep up**

Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Survey

Platform priorities are shifting

Historically, when organizations felt iffy about how a platform was contributing to their social and business goals, they didn't do much about it.

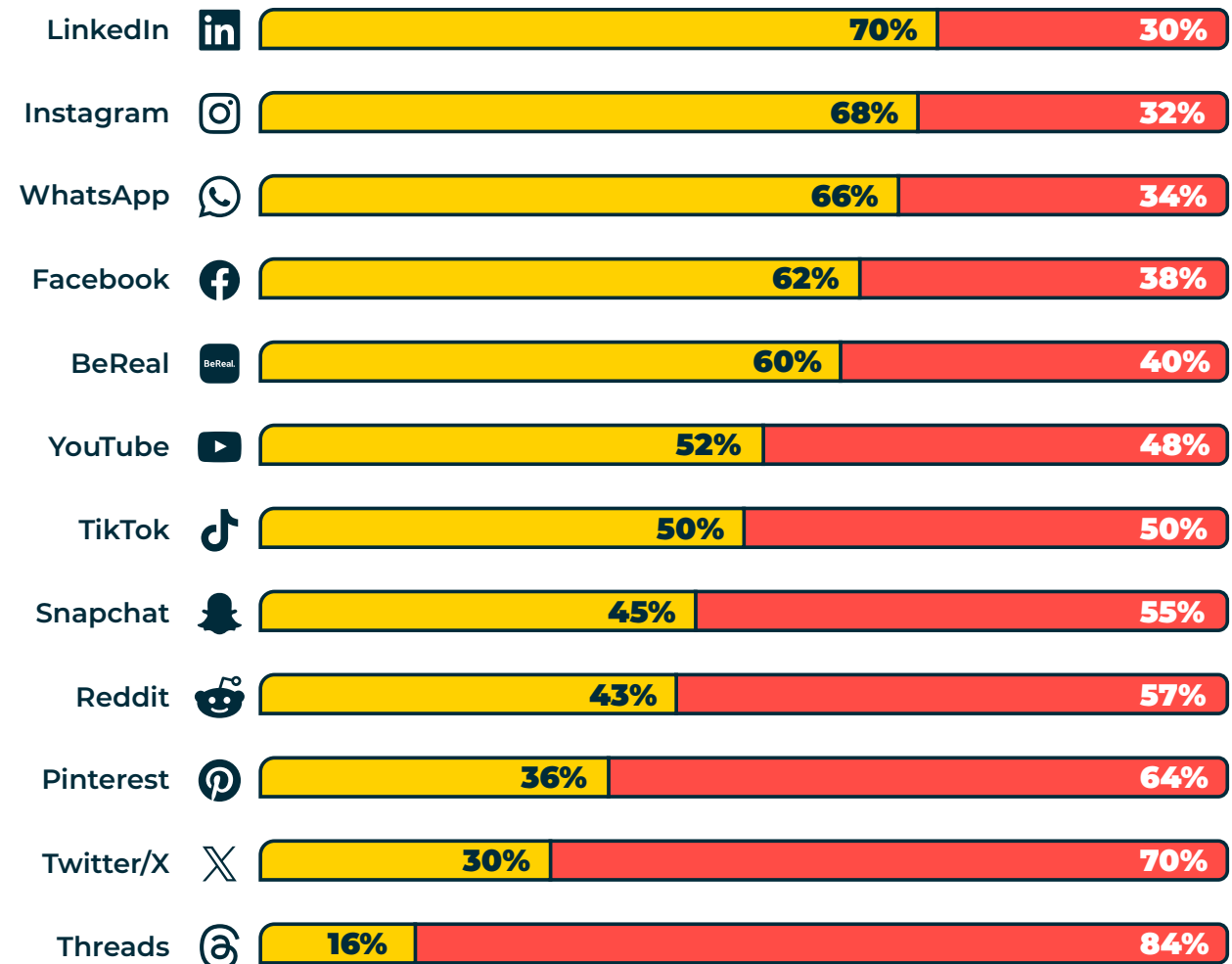
Social marketers would overextend themselves trying to do everything, everywhere, all at once, and drain time, money, and resources while they were at it. This was all too common, and yet, nothing would ever change. (Red flag alert!) Even though this resulted in lousy content, poor social media performance, and burnt out staff, it was still considered less of a risk than scaling back on platform efforts. So they (foolishly) stuck it out.

But now, organizations are starting to stray from this way of thinking. Instead, they're acknowledging the problems and taking steps to turn things around. Our data reveals that they're getting serious about understanding which platforms work for them and which ones don't—and ROI confidence helps them decide.

Brands are most confident in LinkedIn, Instagram, and WhatsApp

How confident are you that each of the following social platforms delivers a positive return on investment for your organization?

■ Confident
 ■ Not Confident



Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Survey
Sample: 3,891 respondents

The platforms that drive the most ROI confidence aren't necessarily the most widely used, and vice versa. Take WhatsApp, for example. Only 14% of organizations have a presence on the instant messaging app, but almost two-thirds of them feel strongly that it benefits their business. So there aren't too many who use it, but those who do, feel they get a lot out of it.

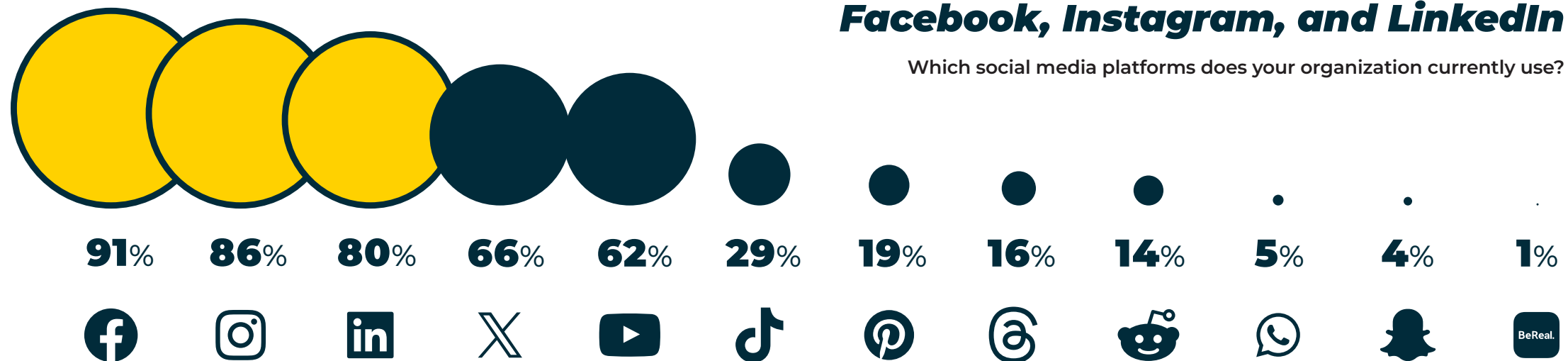
Conversely, the majority of brands are on Twitter/X, but only 30% think it drives value—which is a 23% decrease from last year and might explain the platform's 7% drop in brand use.

So we have some speculations about Twitter/X, but why are brands shifting their strategies away from Pinterest (down 11%) and WhatsApp (down an eye-popping 18%)? They didn't tell us—and

these numbers don't dovetail neatly with overall ROI confidence for these platforms. What we do know is that whatever their reasons, organizations are more willing than ever to say buh-bye to platforms and strategies that aren't meeting their definition of ROI. They're finally prioritizing their own platform-by-platform ROI scores and making business decisions accordingly.

Most orgs have a presence on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn

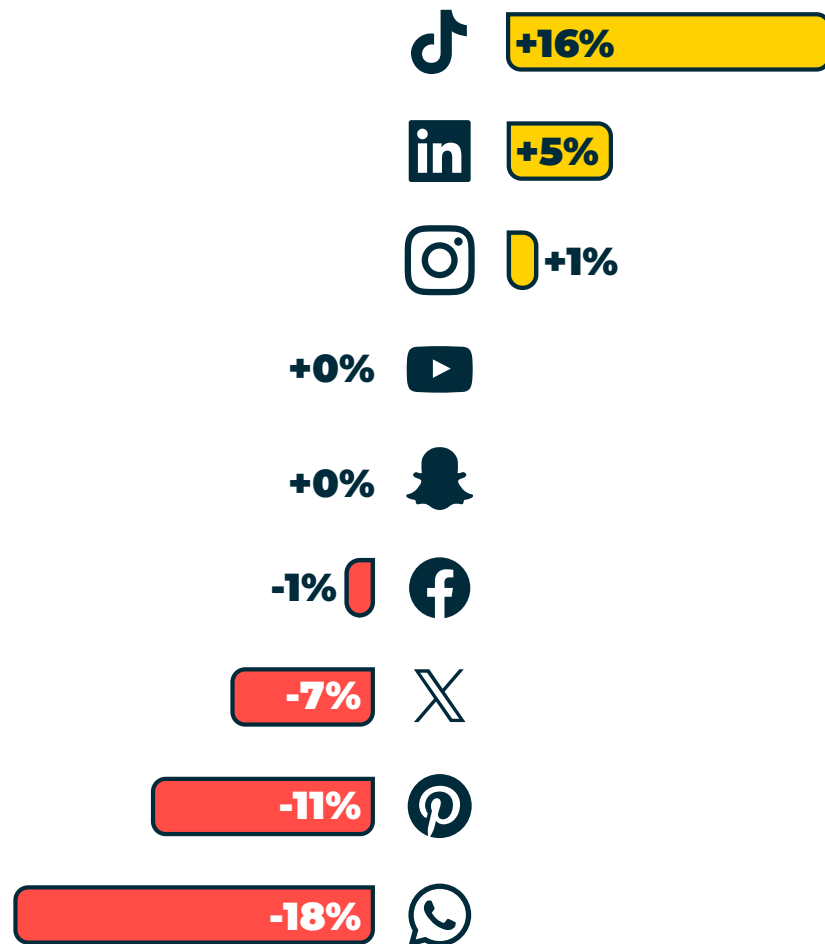
Which social media platforms does your organization currently use?



Sample: 4,281 respondents
Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Survey

No value, no point: Brands leave some of the social platform giants

Change in platform use for businesses from 2022 to 2023



Zeroing in on the platforms that work

It's easy to fall into a pattern of following social media industry norms. But industry norms don't consider the unique goals, growth strategies, KPIs, and customers of your organization. That's why it's so important to take a step back, challenge your own assumptions about the platforms you're on, and think about what's best for *your* business.

The key is being able to defy distractions that prevent you from making smart decisions about your channels. Keeping up with what your competitors are doing and experimenting with shiny new features or entirely new platforms is an essential part of a social marketer's job, but not at the expense of driving real business value from social.

In 2024, strategic organizations will push back against unjustified expectations to do everything on every platform. They'll unlock their top-performing channels based on ROI, and focus their attention on those—and only those. If they're *really* confident (and brave), they might even abandon one or two altogether.

This will give social marketers more time with the platforms that make the cut—time to understand their audiences, experiment with content to see what resonates, stay on top of trends and algorithms, and get up to speed with all the features. Because mastering a few key platforms is surely better than being so-so at many.



The trend in action

iShares by BlackRock embraces millennial and Gen Z platforms

If you're trying to reach a brand new audience, you can start by chucking your business-as-usual efforts out the window.

Keen to capture a new generation of potential investors, exchange-traded fund (ETF) company [iShares by BlackRock](#) did just that—and made research their first priority (as it should be).

To kick off the development of their [new social and content strategies](#), they took a deep dive into the demographics, interests, behaviors, and financial literacy of millennial and Gen Z investors. And that analysis helped identify the best platforms to reach them—Instagram, Twitter/X, LinkedIn, Reddit, and TikTok.

It also gave them insights into what types of content would resonate. Knowing that everyday “financial speak” would sound like gibberish to (and totally bore) this young audience, they landed on clear, jargon-free messaging with bold headline-driven visuals.

And it worked. By leaning into the platforms that were relevant to their audience—and strategically dodging the ones that weren't, like Facebook—iShares by BlackRock met their objectives of awareness (acquainting this new audience with their brand and product) and education (shedding light on the benefits of ETFs). Their content was so engaging and impactful they even received a congratulatory note from LinkedIn. #Goals!

The Harvard Graduate School of Education untangles Threads

When it comes to enticing users to join a new network, Meta cracked the code with Threads.

The app's integration with Instagram made creating an account absolutely seamless. It's why Maya Wesby, social media manager at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), knew the platform was a good fit for her organization.

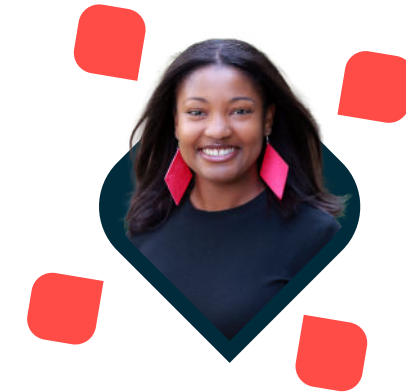
"Instagram has been a strong channel for us, so [Threads] was a natural way to reach a community we already had," Wesby says. "And they were all jumping on board."

At first, HGSE was relatively active on the platform and getting lots of engagement. But once the initial excitement of the app wore off, Wesby noticed a hard dip in interactions—which isn't surprising when you consider the [70% drop](#) in Threads' daily active users just weeks after its launch.

But that didn't scare Wesby away. Looking at HGSE's Threads metrics, she noticed that although engagement wasn't rising, it was still there. And new followers were still trickling in. "For those reasons, we're still active on the platform today," she says.

What's changed is the strategy. She posts content to Threads less frequently than she used to—maybe once or twice a week—allowing her to devote more time to the school's more popular channels. And she continues to monitor the platform to keep tabs on the HGSE community and other educational institutions, so if an opportunity pops up, she'll be ready to join the conversation.

That's a pro move, and it proves that you don't always have to make rash decisions when your social media outcomes change. You just have to pivot when and where it makes sense.



Threads was a natural way to reach a community we already had.

**Maya
Wesby**

Social Media Manager
Harvard Graduate School of Education



Recommendations

1 Run a social media audit for platform intel

What's happening across all your social platforms? A social media audit will tell you. It'll uncover your most engaging posts, your highest-performing content formats, and other patterns that'll help you decide how to approach your social strategy moving forward.

Crushing it on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok? Consider these your hero platforms, and pour all your efforts into them. That means spending the majority of your time (and budget) on those platforms—researching, experimenting with content, doing social listening, and engaging with your audience.

An audit should also help single out the platforms that may be doing more harm than good (in other words, eating up a lot of your time but not giving you results that make it worthwhile). If you find any major flops, it may be time to scale back on those channels or even shut down those accounts. But these decisions shouldn't be made lightly—be sure to share your findings with key players in your organization so you can make the call together.

Get a step-by-step walk-through of the easiest audit process with our [Social Media Audit Guide](#)

2 Put your platforms in an ROI showdown

You've probably calculated the ROI of your social media activities before. (If not, you really, *really* should.) It's important to know how you're doing on social overall.

But to figure out if each of your platforms is worth the effort you're putting in, you need to do this exercise for—you guessed it—every platform. And yes, that means more math, but we've got you: Bypass spreadsheets and manual calculations with our [ROI calculator](#).

Once you've [determined your ROI](#) for each of your platforms, you'll have a clear picture of which channels were profitable, and which ones weren't. But when you're trying to make

informed decisions about your platforms, these numbers don't mean much until you weigh them against each other.

For example, say you're active on five different platforms, and you find that you have a positive ROI (anything above zero) for all of them. That's great—if you're looking at your channels individually. But if you place your ROI scores side-by-side, and one platform has a much lower ROI than the rest (even though it's still positive), that can be telling. The channel that's lagging behind may not warrant as much of an investment because there's greater potential for growth with the other four.



3 Master the art of (proper) cross-posting

We know what you're thinking. Didn't we say that cross-posting just doesn't cut it anymore?

Well, let's be clear: When we encourage social marketers not to cross-post, we're referring to the copy-and-paste method (reusing the same post on every platform without making any changes). Sure, it's a fast and easy way to feed the insatiable content beast—but it also leaves *a lot* of potential on the table.

That said, there *are* ways to do cross-posting right. And when you have content or campaigns that can resonate across all your channels, you absolutely should capitalize on that.

The top rule for cross-posting is to align your content with the norms, best practices, and formats of each platform. All your posts can be based on the same idea, promote the same campaign, or have a similar look and feel. But to boost your chances of strong engagement, each platform should dictate your goals, formats, visual and copy specs, and the way you speak to and interact with your audience.

Moral of the story: If you've pinpointed your champion platforms with the intention of improving your social media outcomes, the work can't stop there. Now, your content must do the heavy lifting, and tailoring it to each platform is the first step to doing your new social strategy justice.

Discover how to plan a cross-platform campaign in this [strategy guide](#). (Hint: All these great tips can be applied to non-campaign cross-platform posting too.)

Entertainment fuels the social ROI engine

In the quest for social ROI, brands
must turn to entertainment to
boost the bottom line.

The crowd has spoken: They want to be entertained

Before you quit reading, we get it. Entertainment can be an intimidating word, especially if you work in a “serious” organization (let alone a regulated industry). Can you even connect entertainment to something quantifiable, like ROI?

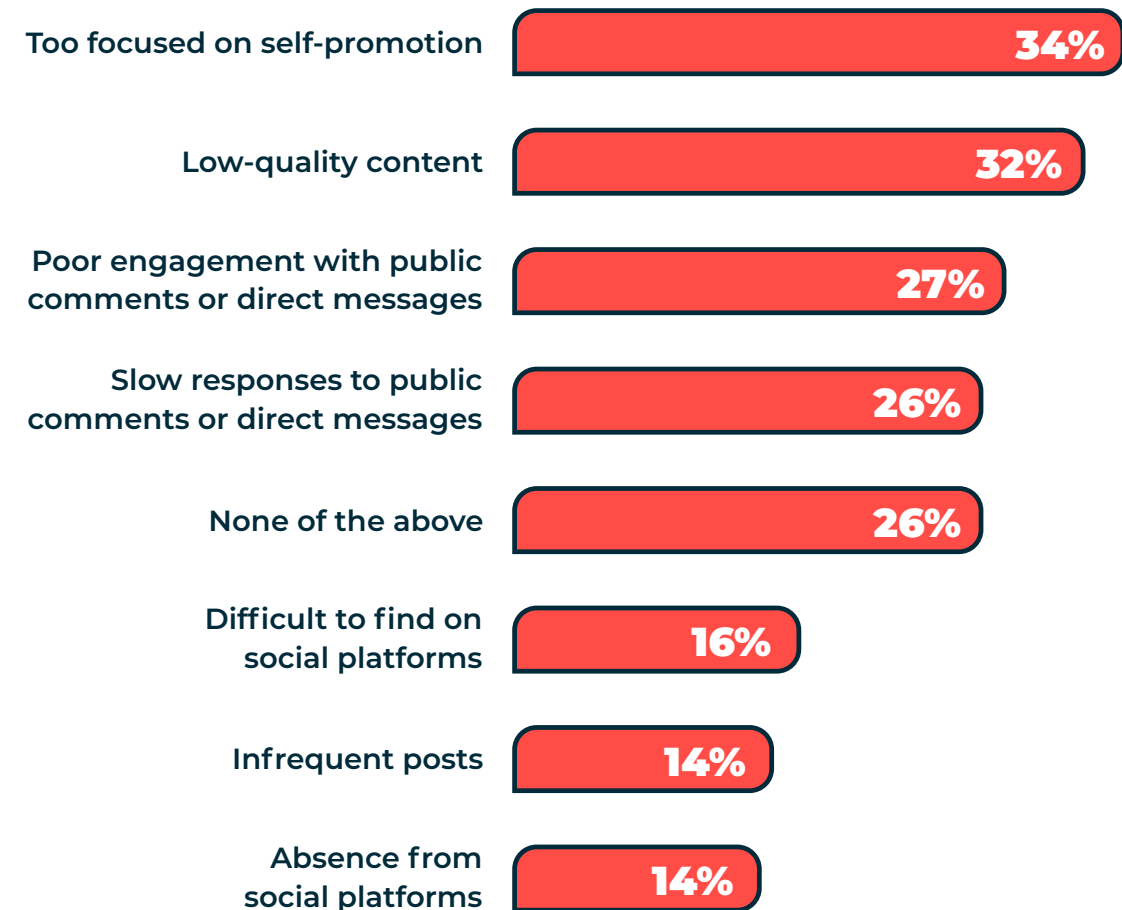
But here’s the thing: Consumers are saying it loud and clear. After staying in touch with family and friends, the top reason they use social media is to be entertained and to mentally unwind, according to our Social Trends 2024 Survey.

And you know what else they said? That they don’t like it when brands are too focused on self-promotion. In fact, 34% say it’s a major turn-off in how they perceive brands on social.



Audiences give too much self-promotion a thumbs down

Thinking about the organizations/brands you follow on social media, which of the following has a negative impact on how you view them?



Sample: 4,508 respondents
Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Consumer Survey

The problem is, brands seem to have other ideas.

It turns out, 48% of marketers publish product or brand updates or news multiple times a week, according to our survey. That's a huge disconnect between what brands are posting and what people really want to see.

And it gets worse.

While almost half of organizations are yammering about themselves, 69% say engagement is the top metric they use to demonstrate ROI.

How can you demonstrate ROI through engagement metrics when you're giving the audience exactly what they *don't* want to engage with?

It's no surprise, then, that 68% of social marketers report being concerned about the ROI of their social activities. When brands measure success in ways that don't add up, ROI *will* be hard to come by.

Social ROI remains a big concern for marketers

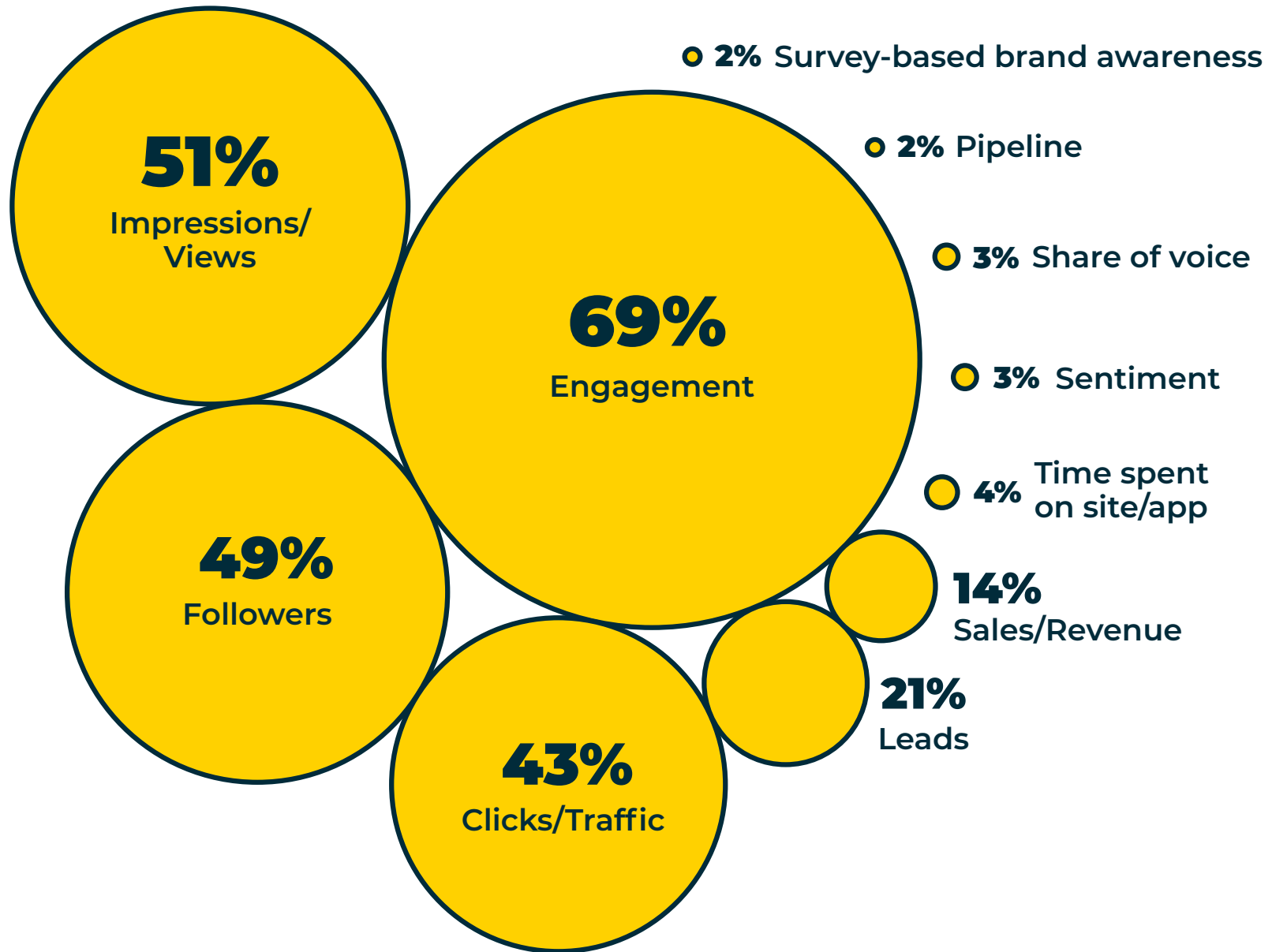
How concerned are you personally about the return on investment for social media activities?



Sample: 4,281 respondents
Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Survey

Brands cling to engagement to demonstrate ROI

Which metrics does your organization most commonly use to demonstrate the return on investment of its social activities? (Select up to three.)



Sample: 4,268 respondents
Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Survey

Let entertainment lead the way to ROI

Which takes us back to entertainment.

In 2024, brands that publish entertaining content on social will succeed in winning eyeballs, engagement, and (eventually) market share away from brands that keep on publishing the same old stuff.

This isn't a strategy you can pivot to overnight—especially if you've been measuring ROI through metrics that aren't aligned with your initiatives. But if that strategy isn't working as well as it used to, it's time for you to get back to the true strength of social media: building brand awareness, affinity, and long-term relationships with your audience through engaging, entertaining social content.

What does that actually mean? Let's get back to basics and bust open the dictionary. "Entertainment" simply boils down to "providing enjoyment"—and that can mean a lot of different things.

Humor is enjoyable for sure. But so is finding inspiration, getting excited, feeling moved, or learning something new. Surely you can think of something enjoyable you could provide to your audience. (If you're stumped, these post ideas are a great spot to begin.)

You don't need to overthink it: 56% of consumers think that brands should be more relatable on social, according to our Social Trends 2024 Consumer Survey.

56%
**of consumers think
that brands should
be more relatable
on social media**

Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Consumer Survey

So in the words of everyone's favorite cliché, just be yourself—but your *person*-self, not your *all-important-super-serious-brand*-self. After all, social media is not a place where you talk *at* someone. It's an interactive space where the exchange of value is a two-way street.

We also know how tempting it is to fast-track ROI through sales. After all, [Statista](#) forecasts social commerce to keep growing 30% year-over-year. They even estimate sales via social channels to reach US\$2.9 trillion by 2026.

But focusing solely on dollar figures risks turning social media into a short-term demand-generation machine. Instead, maximize social media as a space to create deeper connections, meaningful interactions, and customer relationships.

It's more of a slow burn, but it can end up driving more ROI long-term.

Give what they want, take what you need

Brands can't keep talking about themselves, then hope to keep their audiences engaged. That's a surefire way to flop. They should instead be thinking about what their followers want.

Like entertainment—in all the shapes and forms it takes.

In return, you won't just win your audience's attention and interest; you'll also win their affinity, trust, and eventually, their desire to convert and become loyal customers.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't sell or promote on social at all either. It's just about realigning your priorities and reevaluating your content so you can better serve your audience.

Social media can be a massive profit engine for your business. But for that to work, it has to be built on relationships, not transactions. And relationships are built by sharing something meaningful together.





The trend in action

Lemonade paints Instagram pink

Insurtech disruptor [Lemonade](#) knows what's up. They're an insurance company, which—on social media—often translates to boring.

So they [asked](#) themselves, “Why would anyone want to follow an insurance company on Instagram?” Sure, they could give tips and advice to their largely young customers, but before they could do that, they'd first have to build their following.

Their answer may have been out of left field, but it certainly solved the challenge.

The company tapped into the #OddlySatisfying trend and came up with [the idea](#) to dip objects in their signature pink color. They got followers

to engage by suggesting what items they should dip next. And instead of simply sharing educational content, they used the opportunity to show more transparency about their business operations and their [Giveback program](#).

The pink paint was such a hit among their followers that Lemonade expanded the idea to include artists during the pandemic. It has also now become a recurring theme for their [Instagram visuals](#).

Hopping onto a trend on social may not always work for finance companies, but when you get it right, its impact can shape your entire presence on social media.

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's winning engagement recipe

When you picture a wildlife conservation society on social media, “fun” and “entertaining” are probably the last words that come to mind.

But while the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has very important things to say on social, they're also just a hoot.

As a state government conservation agency, the department has a responsibility to use their platforms to educate. But their [funny posts](#) and [on-point TikToks](#) don't just attract hunting hobbyists or local conservation enthusiasts looking to get accurate information; they also [attract all kinds of people](#) who are there for the lols.

For the agency's social media specialist, Sarah Southerland, this means creating content that serves their primary audience without alienating the rest of the community they've built.

Why? Because it creates goodwill.

“Not everyone in our audience would care about deer disease,” she notes. “But we do need them to trust us and have goodwill toward us—so at other times, like when we need help to raise awareness, we can go further.”

With the responsibility of using their funding in the best way possible, the department makes sure to connect their social media initiatives to organizational goals.



Goodwill on social media can go such a long way.

Sarah Southerland

*Social Media Specialist
Oklahoma Department
of Wildlife Conservation*

It's not enough for a post to go viral—they also measure how it affects event attendance. Other times, likes and shares are given less importance if what they ultimately want are votes. #DuckStampContest

Whatever they do on social, it's centered on the department's mandate of creating a safe, educated, and engaged community of wildlife enthusiasts.

The result? The department became so beloved by their community that when TikTok bans were introduced for federal agencies in the US, their community came together and asked the governor to give them a pass.

Just by creating relevant content, the department was able to build a community that has their back and supports them in times of need—even when those followers aren't their primary audience, like hunters. It's proof of how far your audience can take you when you give them value first.

If you're genuine with people, you get returns.

We were allowed to use TikTok because our followers thought we were important to them and they were able to make a case for that.

Sarah Southerland

Social Media Specialist, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation



Recommendations

1 When it comes to content, follow your audience's lead

Don't assume you know what your followers want to see. The beauty of social media is that you can ask them and get their input directly.

Grab the opportunity to ask them what they want. Run polls on types of content you could post. Host Q&As to hear their suggestions.

You can also run experiments where you tweak your tone of voice, or try new content categories altogether. Maybe add more memes to your Instagram stories, or add more conversational posts

on Facebook. Then, whatever sticks, do more of that.

If you have current posts that aren't performing too well, look into those too. Compare all your underperforming posts and see if they have anything in common. Are they all bland? Maybe they have low-quality images. Or maybe your followers simply don't get much from them other than bits of old information.

Once you have an idea, start tweaking future posts to address the issue, and keep testing and iterating as you go.



Use **social listening** to hear what people are saying about your brand, competitors, and industry

2 Let social be the long game

With all this experimentation, you should give social (and yourself) the space and time to dial in your winning tactics.

Don't rush into "smashing those goals" or "crushing those targets." Social is best for building brand equity, which takes time—and that's okay.

More importantly, don't start getting impatient and reverting to your old, self-promotion-y ways. We've already established that no one likes a hard sell. Letting them flock to you will be much more effective in the long run.

And when you *are* talking about yourself (because you're a business and that's unavoidable), just make sure you're warm, authentic, and relatable. Position your promotion with a human experience, so it becomes more personal and meaningful.

3 Make social relationships the foundation of your ROI

Paying attention to what your customers want and actually giving it to them? Well done. That's the first step.

Tracking engagement across your social initiatives? Another leap in the right direction.

Now, measure how far those engagements go beyond social and across your larger business goals. Things like, did that viral post move the needle and increase your social share of voice after the Twitterverse (X-verse 🤔) gave it so much love? Are you seeing more web traffic after a customer advocate shared your post to her bajillion followers? Are more likes on your TikToks translating into a higher sign-up rate for your events?

Making sure your social content connects with business goals gives your social media efforts a higher purpose. And putting your audience's desires at the heart of those efforts keeps them rooted in customer value and authentic relationships.



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