

sproutsocial

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**Edition XV: Empower & Elevate**

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# Introduction

## Introduction

There is no questioning the value of social media. Social is a venerable powerhouse, supporting nearly every marketing objective from brand awareness to advocacy over the past decade. And this value forces social teams to think more critically about their integrated marketing strategies as a whole.

To understand the full potential of social and how it can provide the most value to brands, we went right to the source. For this Index, we surveyed more than 1,000 social marketers about their social goals, challenges and expectations, and we cross-referenced their responses with those of more than 1,000 consumers to understand what people really want from brands on social.

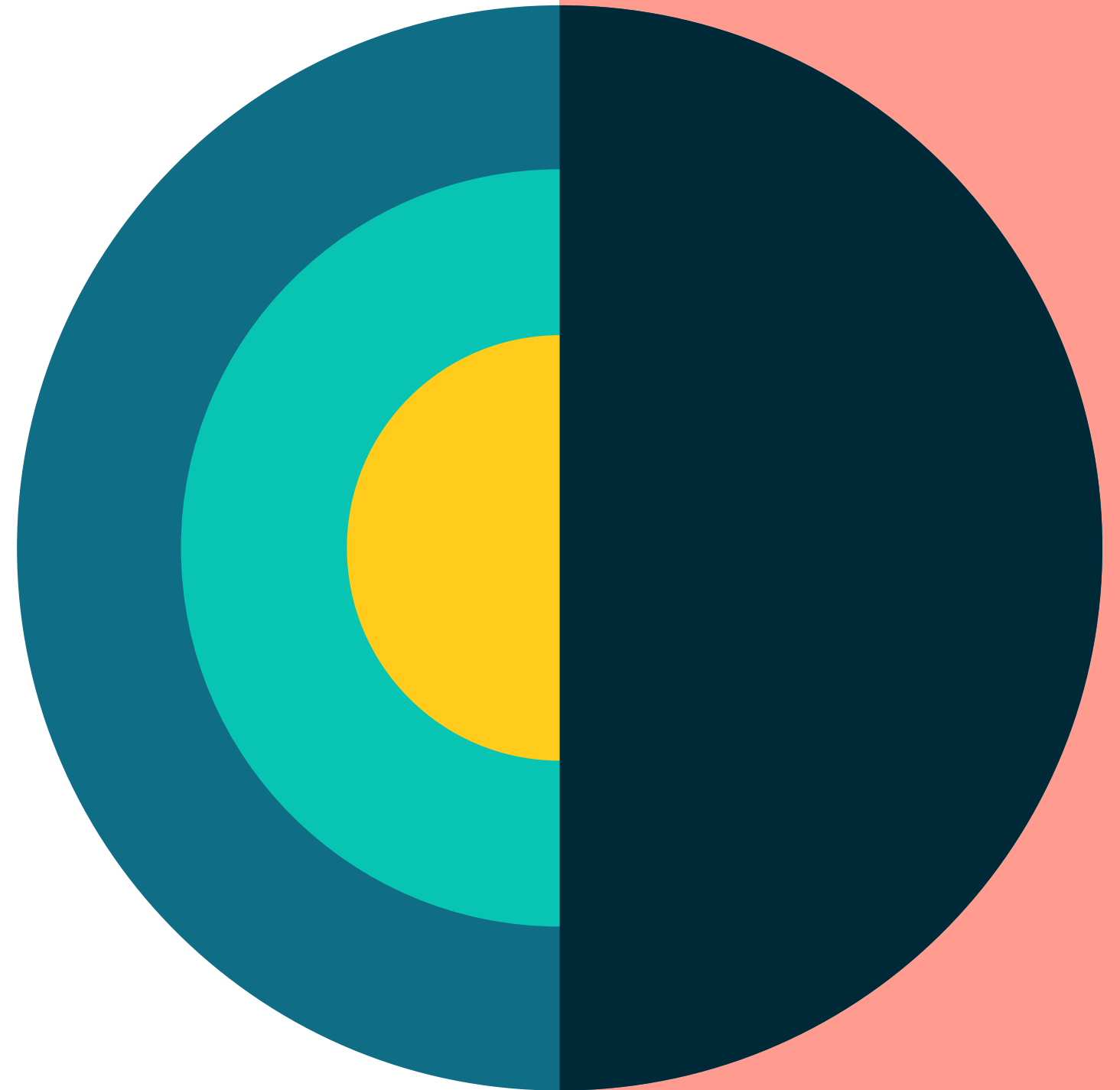
Seventy percent of social marketers say their biggest goal with social is to increase awareness, and more than half (59%) use social to support their sales and lead generation objectives. Other goals include increasing community engagement and growing brand audiences, making social an incredibly rich marketing channel. But with such a versatile resource at their disposal, marketers can find it challenging to prioritize their goals and hone their focus.

Social also remains the optimal channel for marketers to achieve their lofty goals. In the last six months alone, 44% of consumers reported an increase in their personal use of social media platforms. That increased social usage bodes well for marketers seeking to drive their social audience further down the purchasing funnel: when consumers follow a brand on social, 87% say they are likely to visit that brand's website or app.

Despite the potential of social, marketers still struggle to fully embrace its effectiveness. Forty-seven percent of marketers say developing social strategies that support overall business goals is their number one challenge. And 22% of marketing leaders worry their brand's social strategy is ineffective.

While 71% of all social marketers agree they are able to provide helpful insights to teams outside of their departments, only 12% of social teams say their primary function is to provide business insights for their entire organization. At a time when social is more accessible than ever before, its value is still downplayed because of the historical disconnect between social and bottomline business metrics. The time is now for marketers to learn how to effectively communicate the significance of social data, elevate their strategies to serve larger business goals and secure a seat at the table for social teams.

In the latest Sprout Social Index, we explore how social marketers can refine their goals and improve social performance by tapping into consumer insights and rising trends. We'll dig into the challenges holding social teams back from reaching their fullest potential and uncover how marketers can demonstrate the value of social beyond the marketing department. Empowered with these insights, marketers can expand social's influence through the entire organization and even demonstrate how social data positively influences business growth.



# Key findings

## Key findings

By aligning their social goals with those of other departments, marketers can support larger brand objectives, exceed consumers' expectations and maximize the ROI of social.

### **Marketers struggle to create social strategies to support overall business goals.**

Nearly half (47%) of all social marketers, from interns to the C-suite, say developing a strategy that supports their organization's goals is the number one challenge they face.

### **Marketers need to dig deeper to understand their audience.**

Forty-three percent of all social marketers say a major challenge is identifying and understanding their target audience. To address this concern, marketers turn to social data: 63% of practitioners believe social listening will become more important in the coming year.

### **Consumers want to be engaged and entertained before they buy.**

While coupons can attract consumer interest, entertaining and inspiring posts get the most engagement. And 50% of all marketers say posts that entertain are more effective than discounts and sales content in helping them reach their goals.

### **Facebook continues to dominate the social landscape.**

Eighty-nine percent of marketers use Facebook for their brand marketing, and 83% of all consumers surveyed use Facebook. Sixty-six percent of consumers say they Like or Follow a brand profile on Facebook. The next three social platforms on which consumers follow brands are Instagram, YouTube and Twitter.

### **Brands are only scratching the surface of what social can do.**

Seventy-one percent of social marketers believe they can offer helpful insights from social to teams outside of the marketing department. But brands aren't taking advantage of all that social has to offer, and 39% of marketers struggle to demonstrate the value of social to the rest of their organization.

# The state of social media marketing

Today, the [majority of Americans](#) have a social profile, and brands continue to heavily invest in both organic and paid social. In 2019, social advertising spend in the U.S. is expected to reach [\\$18.4 billion](#).

Ninety percent of social marketers agree investing in social media has a direct impact on their business revenue. These days, 63% of social marketers say they frequently discuss social metrics or ROI with

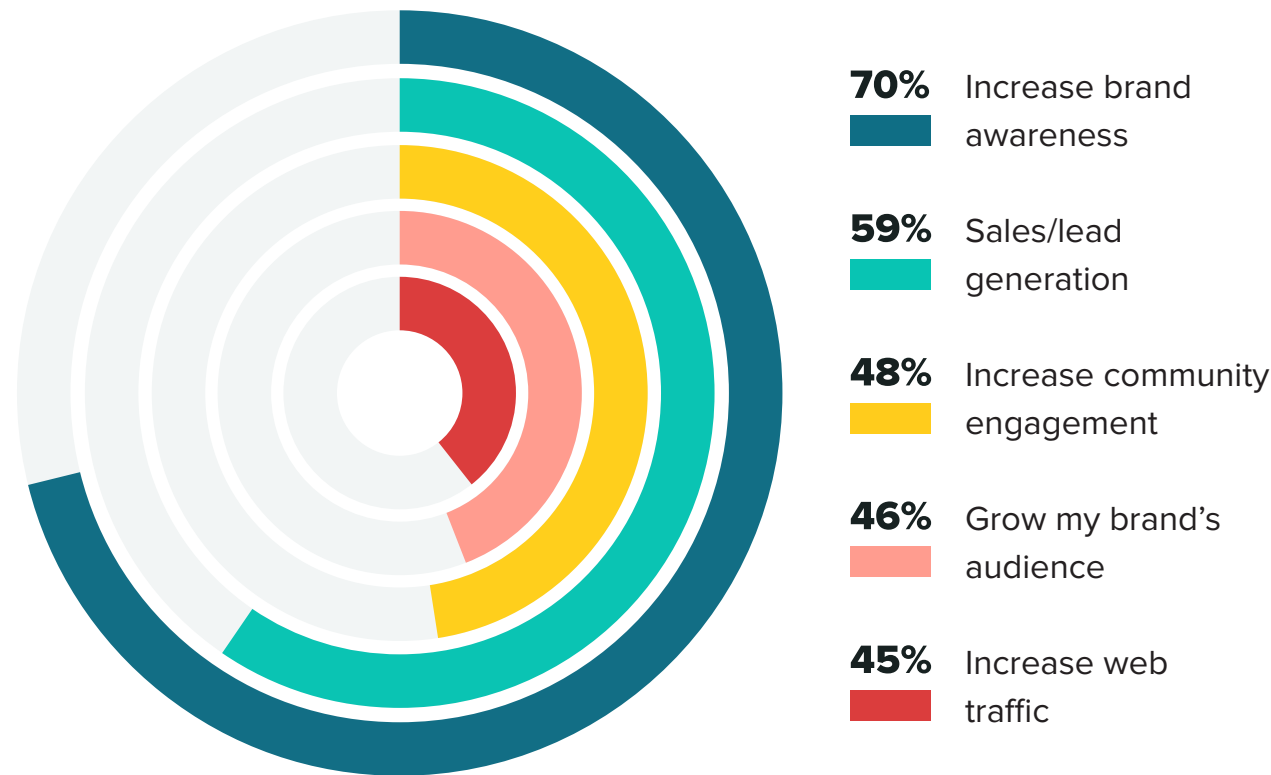
their bosses, a 23% increase compared to marketers who said the same thing in our [previous Index report](#).

When it comes to setting social media goals, social marketers say brand awareness, which was their focus last year as well, is still their number one priority. Marketers' goals also include driving sales and lead generation through social marketing, as well as increasing community engagement and growing their audience.

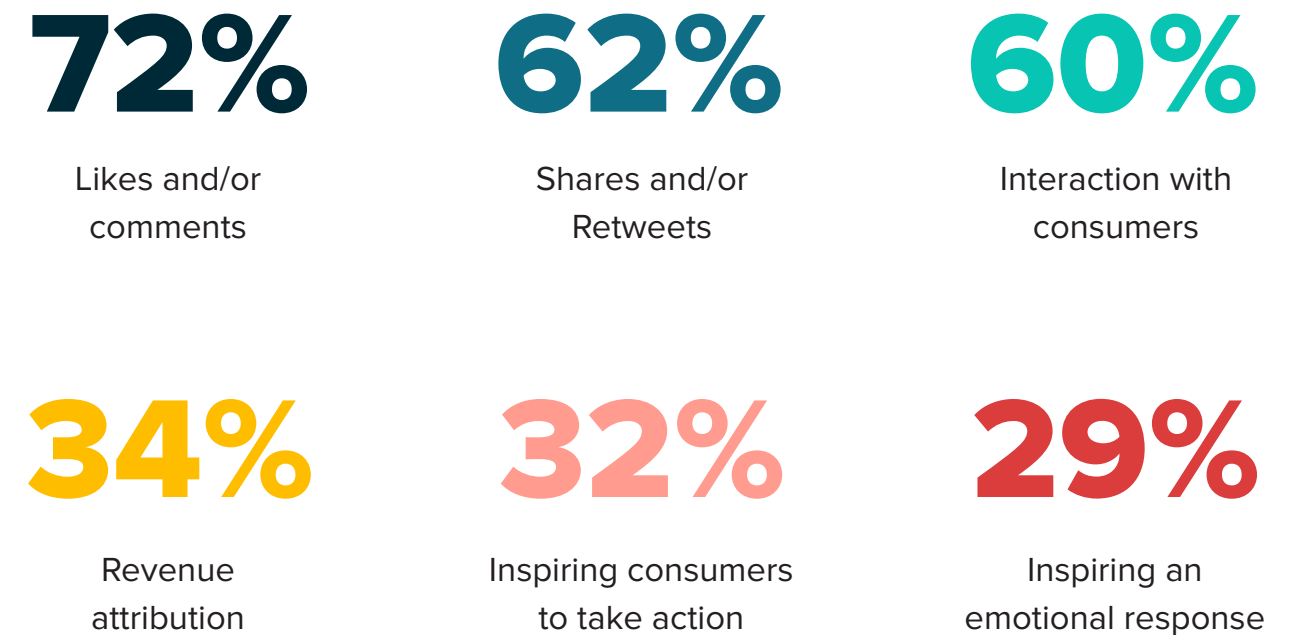
With social marketers focused on increasing awareness, it's easy to assume they would prioritize reach and impressions to meet their goals. But when asked which metrics they focus on to help meet their goals, 63% of social marketers say they leverage engagement metrics. Less than half (41%) use amplification and brand awareness metrics, like reach and impressions, and 50% of social marketers focus on conversion and revenue metrics.

When asked how they define engagement to measure the success of their social strategies, social marketers pointed to Likes and comments, as well as shares, retweets and interaction with consumers.

## Social marketers' top goals for social



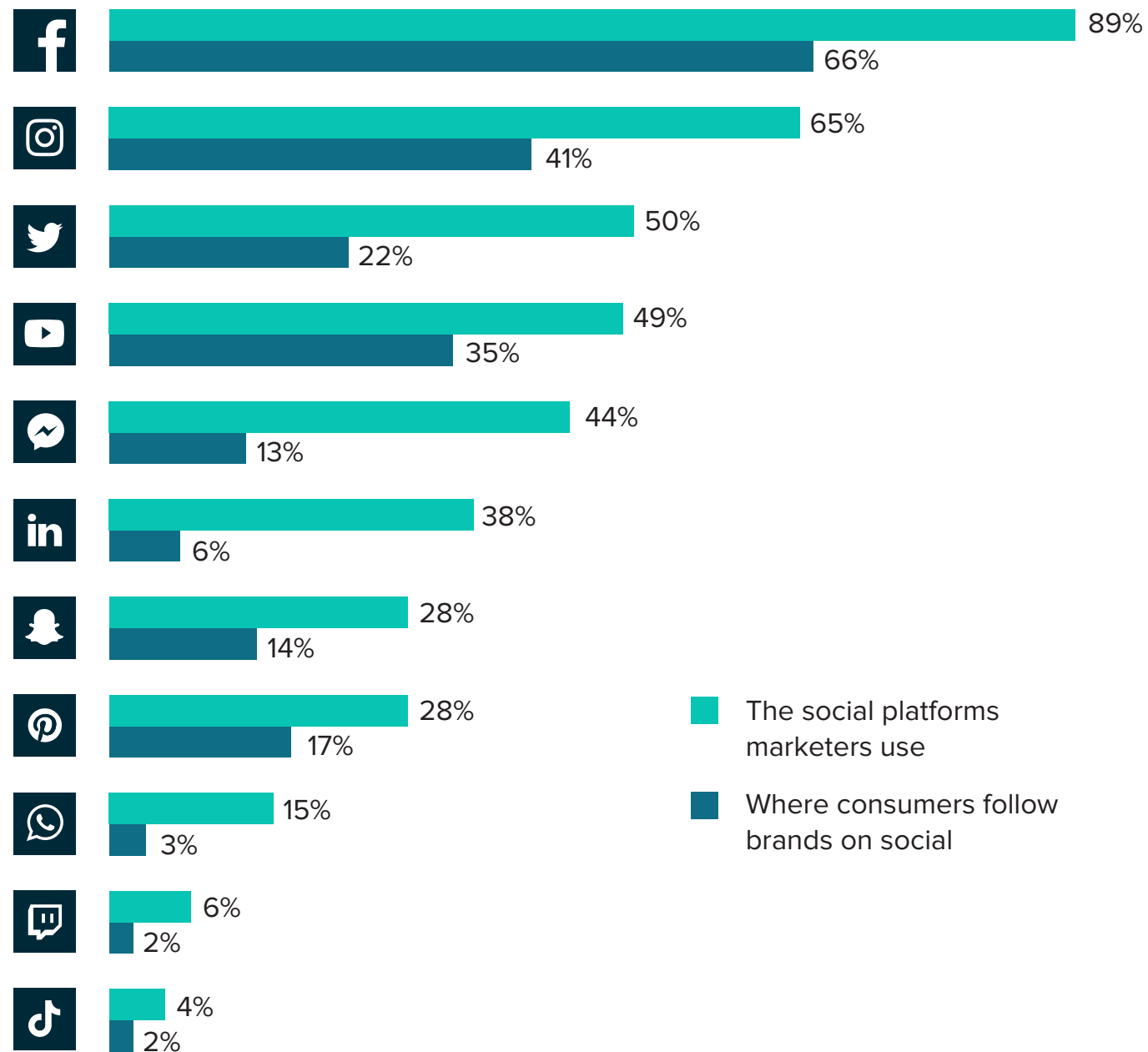
## How marketers define engagement when measuring social success





Social marketers also have a good idea which social platforms to use in order to connect with their target audience. Aligned with consumer behaviors, 89% of marketers say they use Facebook as part of their brand's social strategy.

## Social platform use: marketers vs. consumers



# 89% of marketers say they use Facebook as part of their brand's social strategy.



While Facebook reigns supreme, it's worth taking a closer look at which [social platforms](#) are most popular among certain age groups. Facebook, for example, is the primary platform where members of Generation X Like or follow brands (77%), but for members of Generation Z, Instagram takes the cake (69%).

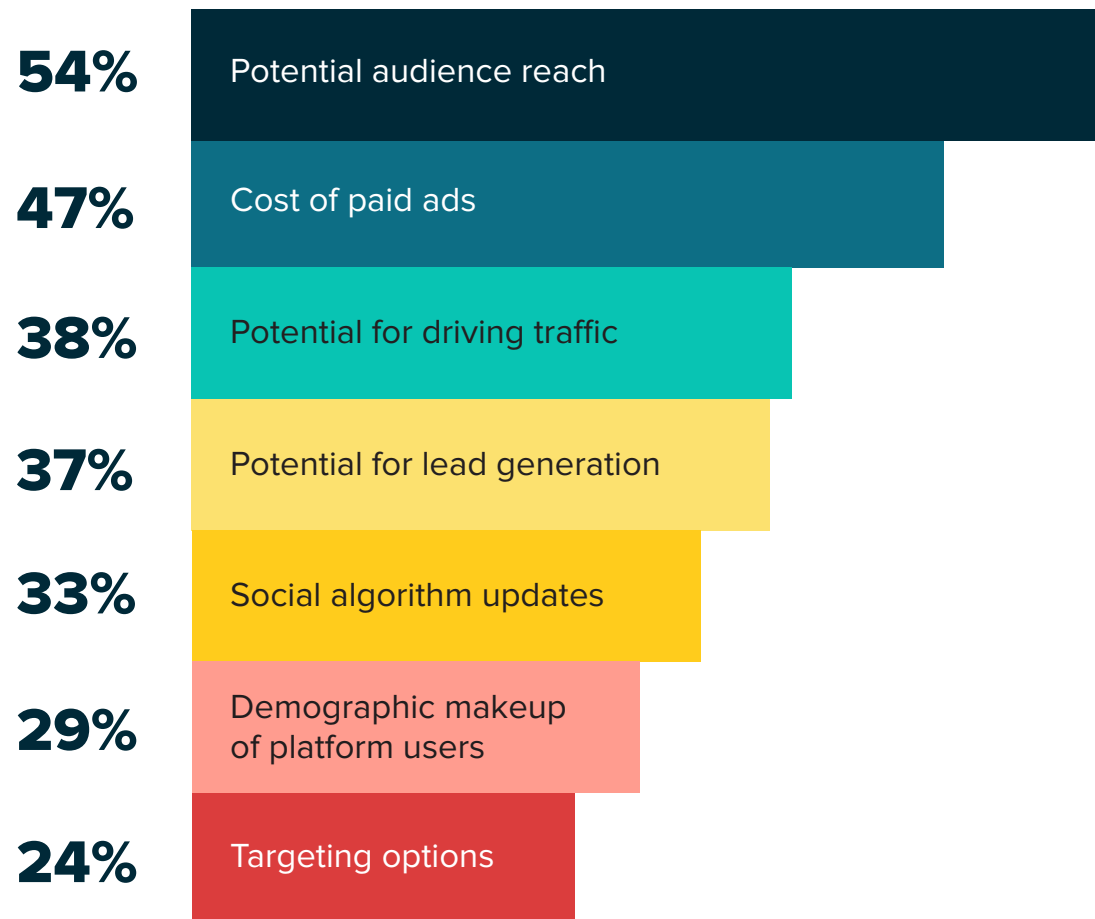
In addition to age and platform preferences, social marketers weigh several other factors when deciding which social platforms to build their strategy around. While cost remains a major consideration, social marketers today are primarily interested in how many people they can reach on a specific platform.

Despite having a clearer picture of goals and metrics, almost half (47%) of social marketers find it difficult to develop social strategies that support their overall business goals. Social marketing leaders in particular agree with this statement. Fifty-one percent of leaders say creating social strategies that fit in their organization's business goals is a top challenge for

them, compared to 44% of practitioners.

Outside of developing social strategies for overall business goals, 43% of all social marketers struggle to identify and understand their target audience, while 31% find it difficult to secure budget and resources for social media.

## How marketers prioritize which social platforms to invest in



## Social marketers' greatest challenges

<p><b>1.</b> Developing social strategies to support business goals</p>	<p><b>2.</b> Identifying and understanding our target audience</p>	<p><b>3.</b> Securing budget and resources for social media</p>
<p><b>4.</b> Publishing content</p>	<p><b>5.</b> Measuring ROI</p>	<p><b>6.</b> Monitoring our competition</p>
<p><b>7.</b> Aligning social strategy with other parts of the business</p>	<p><b>8.</b> Demonstrating social's business impact to other departments</p>	<p><b>9.</b> Team bandwidth</p>



# Sprout stance

Looking back at marketers' greatest challenges and their primary functions, it's clear there's a disconnect in expectations and responsibilities. When so few marketers share business insights gleaned from social with the rest of their organizations, it's no wonder why so many struggle to develop social strategies that support big picture goals.

Part of the problem stems from the fact that social teams often remain siloed in marketing even though social data can provide influential guidance to other departments. It's up to social teams to prove it in order to open the door to relationships that will move brands forward.

Take [Kraft Foods](#), for example. They've used social data to shape product development and conduct market research. When considering their potential entry into the burger or mini-burger market, Kraft gathered insights from social. To focus their approach, Kraft dove right into customers' social conversations, searching for common themes and how people in different audience segments felt about sliders. Kraft has also used social media to poll customers about new products they'd like to see in stores. One such poll received 930,000 votes and led to the creation of [Mayochup](#), a mayonnaise and ketchup hybrid you can actually buy today.

**What your  
audience really  
wants**

## What your audience really wants

Elevating your social strategy requires a two-pronged approach. First, social marketers must align and collaborate with the right teams to set goals that meet consumer and brand expectations. Then, marketers must use insights about consumer habits and preferences to build connections with their audience on social.

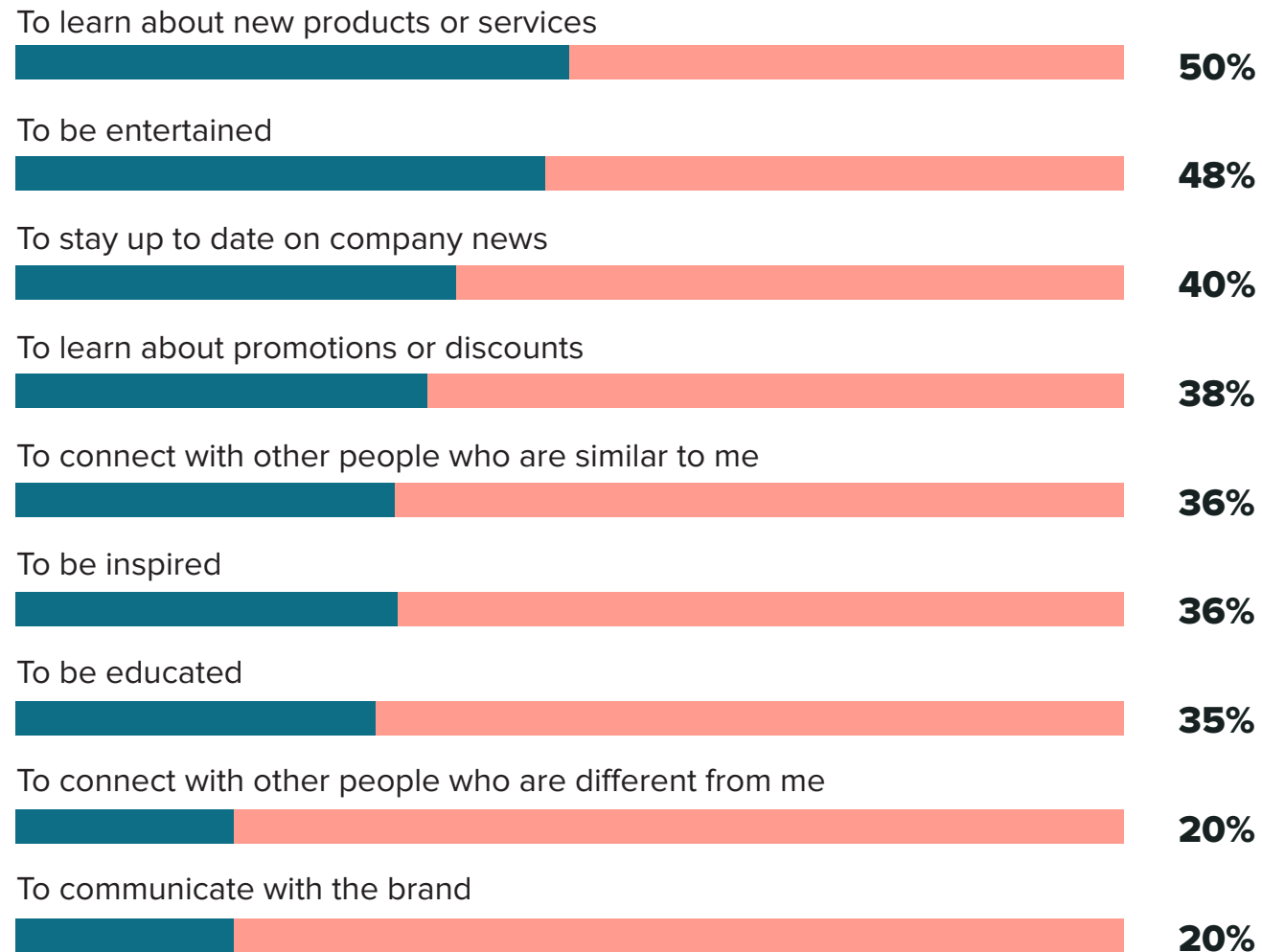
## Understanding the ‘why’ behind consumer actions

If social marketers want to deepen their connections with consumers on social, it helps to know how and

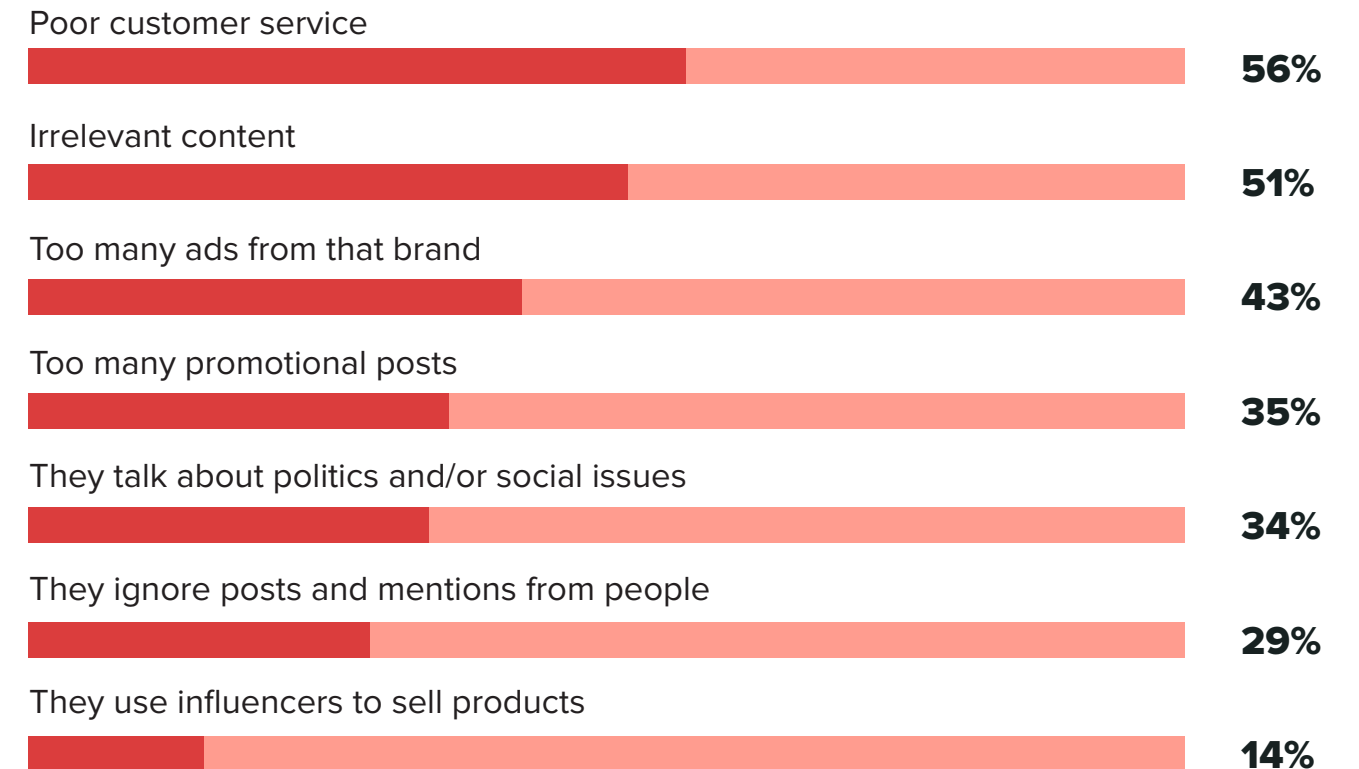
why people use social media in the first place. Half of consumers follow a brand to learn about new products and services, while 48% of consumers follow brands on social to be entertained.

It’s equally helpful to understand what brands do or say on social media that turns consumers away. Poor customer service is the number one reason why consumers will unfollow a brand on social media, followed by posting irrelevant content.

## Why consumers follow brands on social media



## Why consumers unfollow brands on social media



## What your audience really wants

Identifying which actions can trigger a Like or an unfollow is challenging—but it's a necessary move for social marketers trying to achieve their goals. In addition to knowing what encourages Likes and follows, social marketers also need to know what types of posts consumers will interact with the most.

When we asked consumers what types of posts they're most likely to leave comments on and share, entertaining posts were the number one answer across the board. This is in line with what most social

marketers consider to be effective; 50% of social marketers say entertaining and inspirational posts are the most effective in helping them reach their goals.

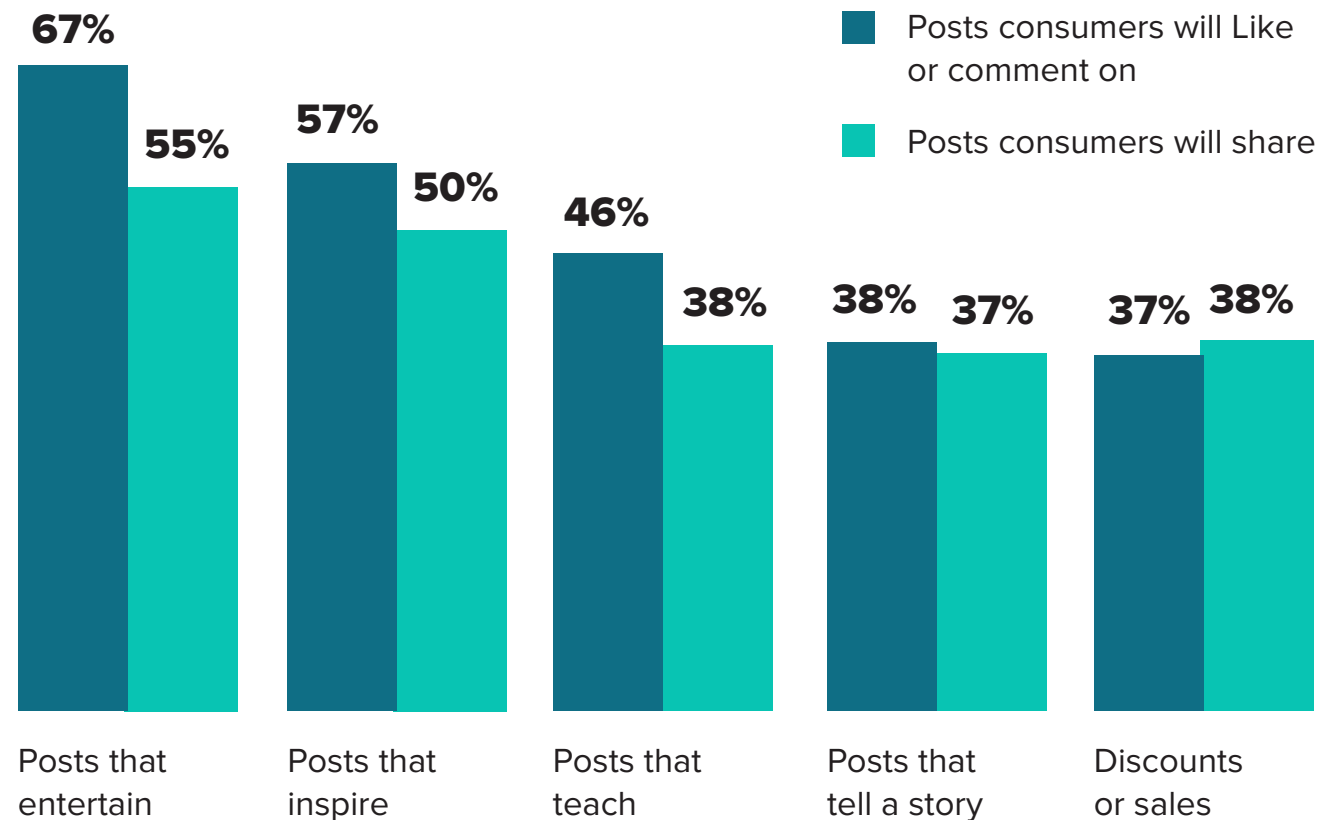
What's interesting to note is consumers' shift away from discounts and sales and toward entertaining and inspirational content. In 2018, 67% of consumers said they were most likely to engage with discounts, while over half (51%) said they would share posts promoting sales. In this year's Index, our findings reveal the majority of consumers prefer interacting

with entertaining posts, and only a little more than one-third (37%) engage with discounts and sales. In [another survey](#) earlier this year, 64% of consumers said they want brands to connect with them, and with social as the premier channel for connection, marketers will need to reevaluate how they encourage engagement.

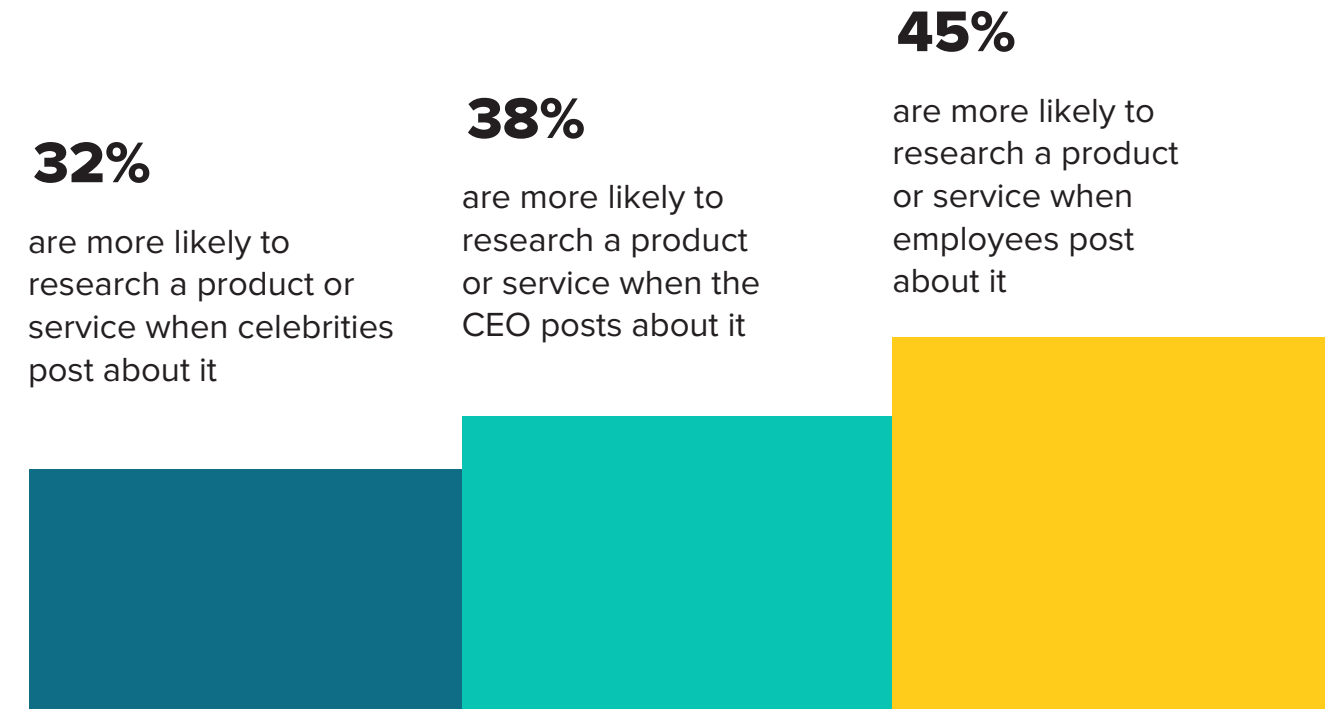
With a solid strategy for building awareness among consumers, the next step for social marketers is turning that awareness into genuine consideration.

One way to encourage people to seriously consider a brand is to leverage employee advocacy. Today, almost three quarters (72%) of all social marketers use their employees as social media advocates. Forty-five percent of consumers say they are more likely to research a product or service when someone relatable, like an employee, posts about it. Thirty-two percent of consumers react similarly when a celebrity or influencer posts about the same thing.

## Social posts that encourage consumers Likes & shares



## How consumers respond to employee advocacy & influencers





# Sprout stance

While offering discounts remains an effective strategy, rising consumer expectations have devalued promo posts as the primary means of connection with customers. Remember: Consumers want to connect with brands on social—but it can be difficult trying to connect with a faceless brand.

To further nurture connections with customers on social, [Dell](#) turned to its employees to serve as the face of the computer company. Dell created the Dell Social Media University, empowering thousands of employees to become brand ambassadors by completing an internal social media and training certification program. In addition to posting brand messages on social, Dell's employees take the time to answer customer questions, write blog posts on behalf of the brand and even connect with prospective new hires.

## What your audience really wants

Setting a solid foundation for awareness and consideration is critical because it can lead to stronger customer engagement and a final purchase decision. When consumers follow a brand on social, 67% of consumers are more likely to spend more with that brand, and 78% say they will visit that brand's physical retail store. This is especially true among millennials: 84% said they were more likely

to buy from a brand they follow on social media compared to a brand they don't follow on social.

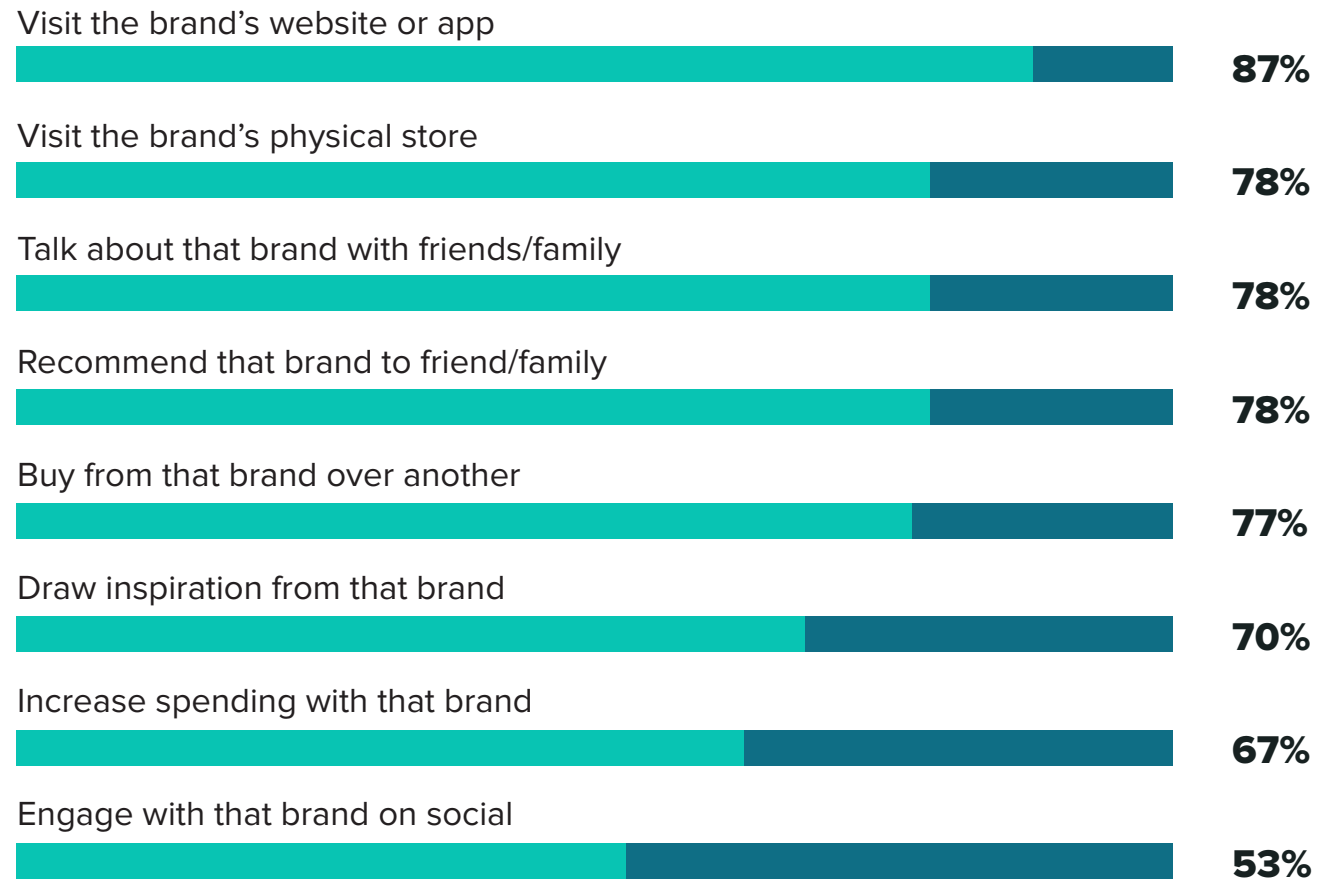
The actions consumers take when they follow brands on social demonstrates why brands should invest in connecting with their target audience online. When social marketers take the time to build authentic consumer relationships, they are

rewarded with an increase in web traffic, a boost in sales and word-of-mouth advocacy.

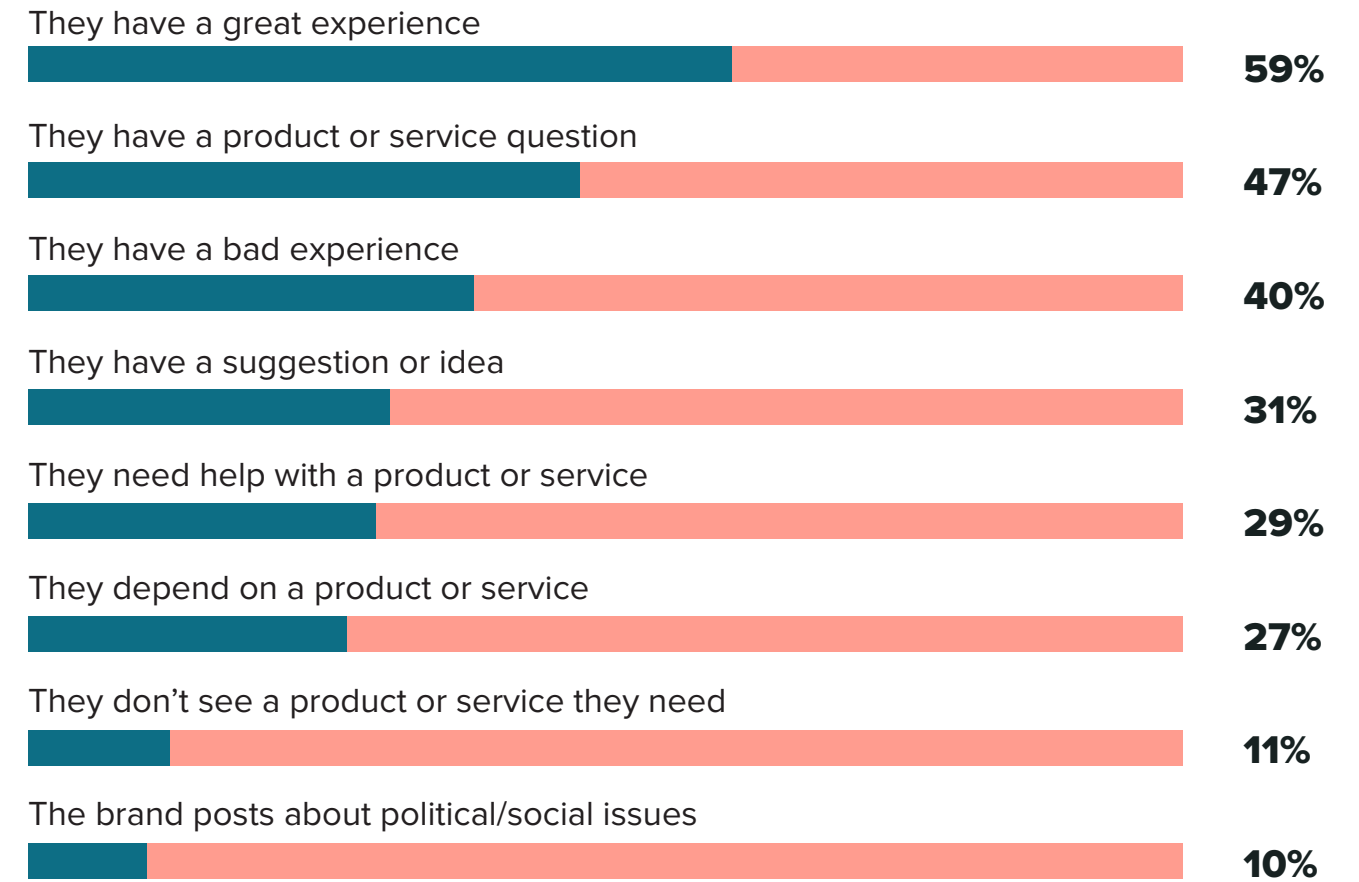
For consumers who choose to engage with brands on social, there's usually a specific reason for reaching out in the first place. The majority (59%) of consumers say they'll interact with a brand when they have a great experience with

that organization, while 47% reach out when they have questions about a product or service. And despite what some brands think when it comes to posting about politics or social issues, only one out of ten consumers will reach out to a brand when they choose to get political.

## Actions consumers take when they follow brands on social



## Why consumers reach out to brands on social





## Moving consumers from engagement to decision making

Social marketers also need to keep in mind the 53% of consumers who follow brands on social even though they don't buy or shop with that brand. Forty-six percent of consumers say they follow brands just for the inspirational content while 41% follow brands they don't buy from for entertaining content.

## Why consumers follow brands they don't shop with on social

1

They post inspirational content

2

They post entertaining and/or funny content

3

They post aesthetically pleasing content

4

They align with my personal values

5

They tell an interesting story

## What your audience really wants

For marketers, converting those followers into paying customers is a huge opportunity to bolster business growth and demonstrate how data-driven content contributes directly to the bottom line. Once they have the attention of followers, marketers need to identify what types of content and social actions will take that connection a step further. Sixty-one percent of social followers said posts offering discounts could encourage them to make a first purchase, while 45% said informational material would convince them to buy. Based on social data, marketers can see what types of posts have the best conversion rates and invest their resources into creating effective social content.



## How brands can encourage followers to shop with them

- 61%** Create posts offering discounts or trials
- 45%** Provide more information about products and services
- 40%** Demonstrate how a product or service is used
- 23%** Post about something the consumer personally supports
- 16%** Increase transparency into their operations



# Sprout stance

Not every consumer is going to click the checkout button on the first go-round—and that's okay. What marketers should focus on is strengthening the connections they share with their followers until those consumers are ready to take the plunge.

When it is time to convert people into active buyers, social marketers should use a combination of discounts, product demonstrations and educational content to move followers through the funnel.

[Casper](#), the direct-to-consumer mattress brand, used social media to drive \$100 million in revenue in its first full year of mattress sales by positioning itself as the authority on sleep. Instead of posting promotional codes, the mattress brand posts a combination of relatable Tweets, wellness tips and unboxing videos to make followers feel like they're missing out on this one-of-a-kind experience. By investing in authentic content that resonates with its audience, Casper transformed an otherwise pedestrian experience (buying a mattress) into a coveted activity.

# Moving toward a social-first business

## Breaking down today's social media teams

As social's business value continues to grow, marketers are increasingly asked to take on more strategic work but without additional organizational support or manpower.

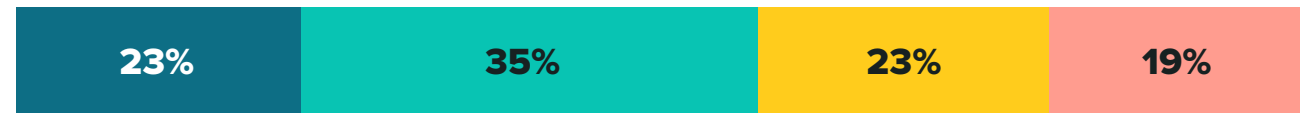
At small companies (one to 50 employees) in particular, 59% of social marketers say they work on teams of one to two people. The number of team members increases as the size of the organization also increases. At mid-sized companies with 51-1,000 employees, 35% of social marketers work on teams of three to five people; 37% of enterprise social marketers work on teams of more than 11 people.

## The size of today's social team by company size

### 1-50 employees



### 51-1,000 employees



### 1,001+ employees



1-2 people   3-5 people   5-10 people   11+ people

Given how they're often juggling multiple responsibilities at once, it's no wonder social marketers don't always have the time they need to dig into the parts of their job that provide value to the rest of the business. Social teams are responsible for supporting a variety of business objectives, but this work is often spread across small teams. This makes it difficult for marketers to devote the time and energy required to hone in on one specific objective. For example: 46% of social marketers wish they could

spend more time developing strategy instead of working on tactical execution.

So what's stopping them? Time. More than half (59%) of marketers say they don't have enough time in the day to build out their social strategy, while 45% cite other business priorities as keeping them from strategic work. An additional 29% of marketers point to excess tactical work to handle, and over one quarter (27%) of marketers say a lack of resources keeps them from pursuing strategic work.

## What keeps social marketers from strategic work

59%

Time

45%

Business priorities

29%

Too much tactical work to do

27%

Lack of resources

17%

Unsure where to start

14%

Lack of support



# Sprout stance

Finding a healthy balance of tactical and strategic work is the key for marketers; when done right, both should complement and reinforce each other.

To combine tactical and strategic work, it helps to create [specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound \(SMART\) goals](#). Break larger, organizational goals into smaller, specific objectives per social channel; determine how to measure outcomes; and clarify why achieving this goal is important to marketing teams and the overall brand. Establish a baseline to regularly measure goals against to determine growth and define what social data means for the company based on industry standards. Schedule regular meetings with every department so different teams have regular access to social data that impacts their own initiatives.

With SMART goals, marketers can divide their time up more efficiently and demonstrate to the rest of their organization how to use social for more than publishing and reporting purposes. And with a standardized way of measuring goals, marketers can quantify their results in a way that clearly illustrates the impact of social on other departments.

## Setting goals & working across departments

As organizations continue to lean into social, marketers are beginning to share out their data

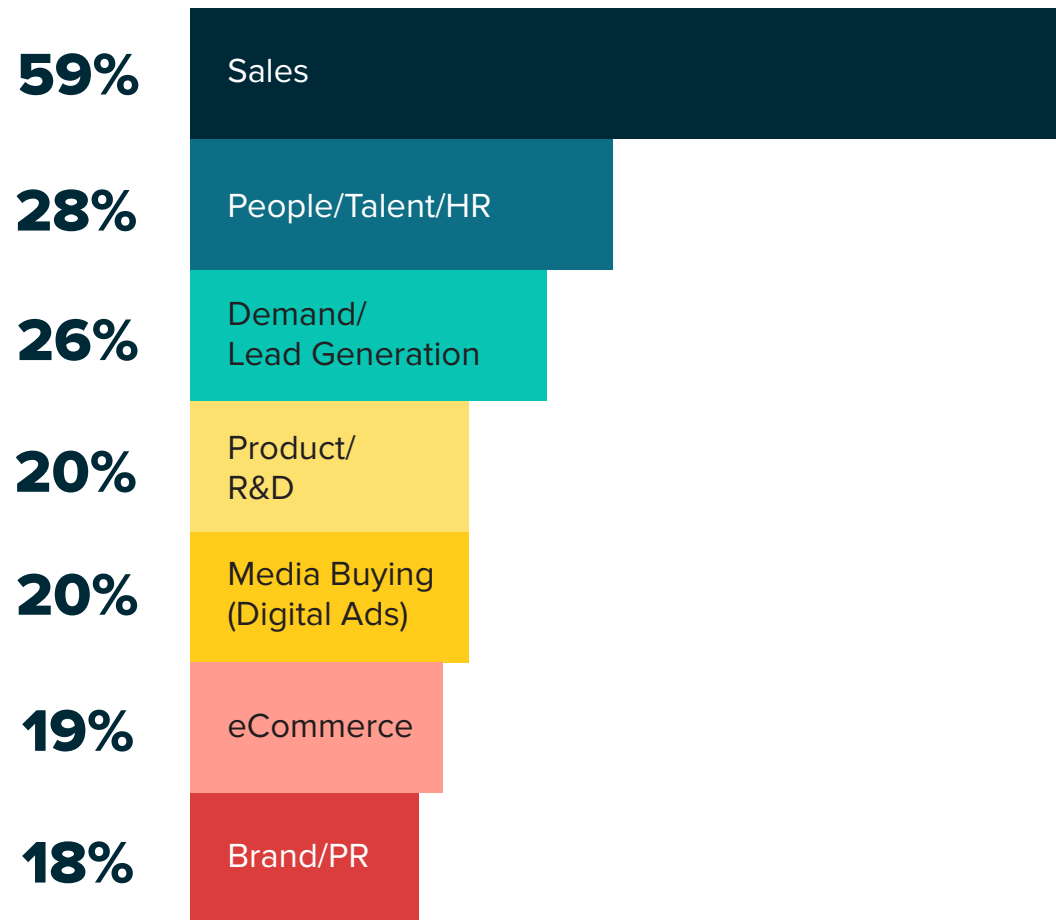
and work across departments to create goals and benchmarks. But despite the uptick in collaboration, marketers still wish their work had a greater impact on the very colleagues they work with. Social marketers also express a desire to impact departments outside of marketing: specifically, nearly six out of 10 social

marketers wishes they had more influence on their sales team, while 28% say the same about people/human resources.

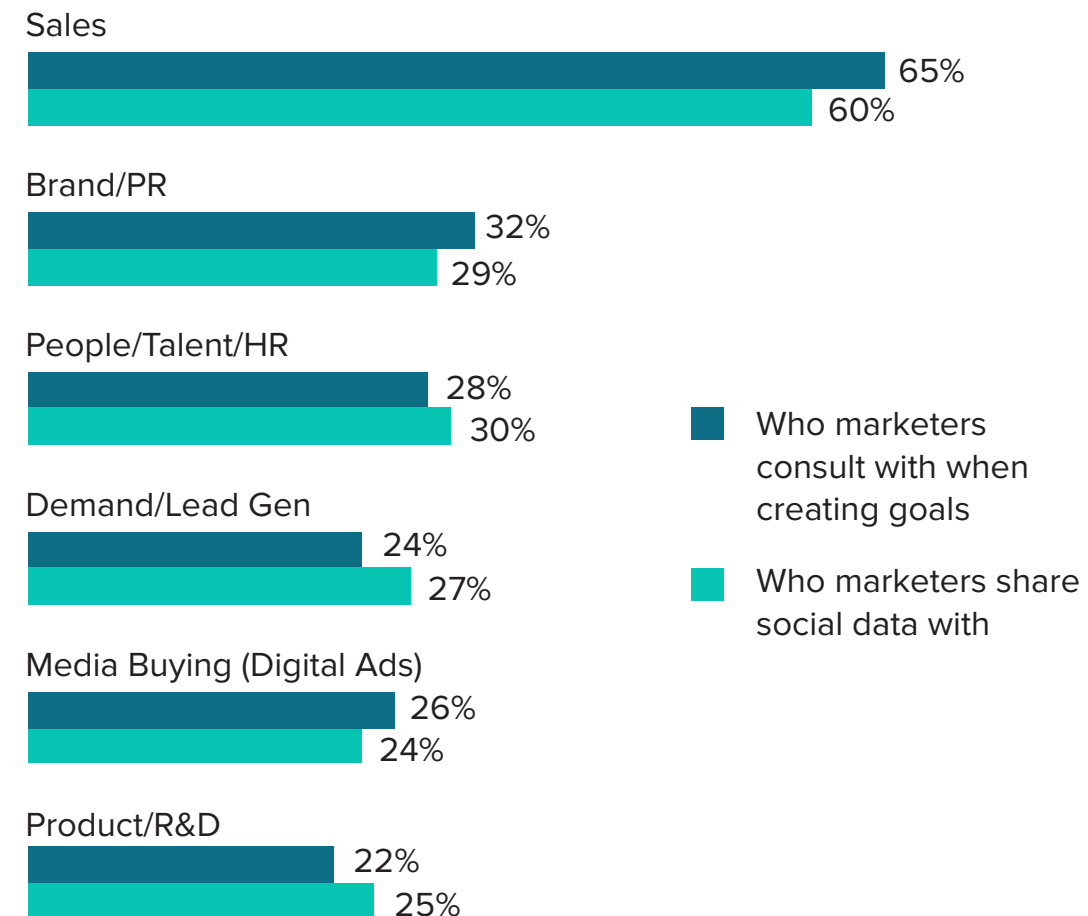
And more than half (53%) of C-level marketers and one-third (33%) of VPs say proving the value of social

to those outside of marketing remains a challenge. Marketers know they can impact different areas of the business with the social data at their disposal. But before they can support other departments, marketers need to first prove how social can impact those specific departments' goals.

## Which teams social marketers wish they could influence more



## Which teams social marketers consult & share data with



There is also a disconnect between who social marketers share their data with and their previously stated goals. Increasing awareness is the number one goal for all social marketers, but only 29% of marketers share their data with their brand and PR teams. Getting teams on the same page and encouraging data sharing across departments can help marketers develop social strategies to support overall business goals.

Because if other departments don't understand how social pertains to their responsibilities, it perpetuates the myth that social media only benefits marketing.

The insights gleaned from social are diverse and can apply to multiple business initiatives beyond raising awareness and promotions. Social data, as it's traditionally measured, can drive results for disciplines outside of marketing but teams historically have not applied these insights to non-marketing initiatives.

Beyond demonstrating the importance of social to the rest of their organization, social practitioners also have an opportunity to get their reporting in front of their bosses. When we break down marketers by seniority and experience, their goals and challenges differ due to the scope of their roles.

## Social marketers' top challenges by role

### Practitioners

45%

Identifying/  
understanding  
target audience

44%

Developing social  
strategy to support  
overall business goals

33%

Securing budget  
& resources  
for social

### Leaders

51%

Developing social  
strategy to support  
business goals

33%

Publishing  
content

31%

Securing budget  
& resources for  
social media

# Only 29% of marketers share their data with their brand and PR teams.

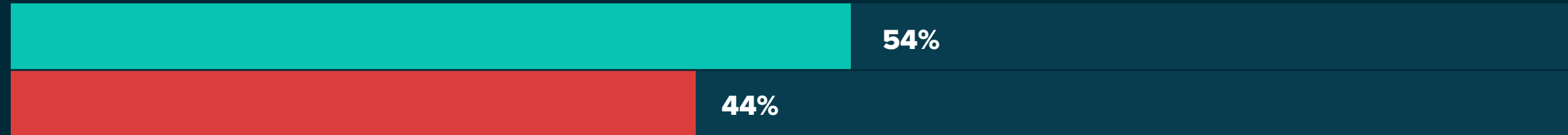




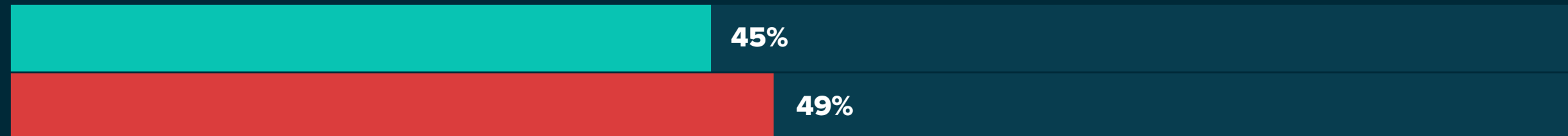
## How social marketers use data: practitioners vs. leaders

### Understanding target audiences

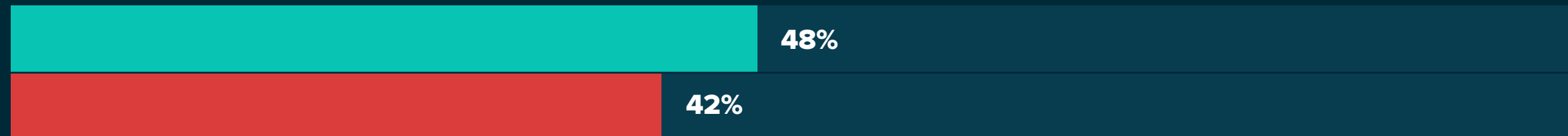
Practitioners Leaders



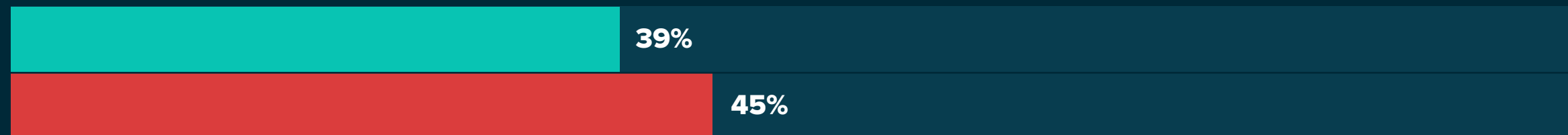
### Assessing campaign performance



### Developing creative content



### Fostering connections with consumers



Marketers at varying stages of their careers turn to social data for different reasons. Practitioners, on the frontlines of social, rely on data to understand their audience so they can consistently deliver engaging content and foster connections with consumers. On the other hand, marketing leaders are focused on using social data to measure campaign performance.

This discord creates a perfect opportunity for practitioners to establish themselves as the authorities on all things social. Practitioners can surface the data their bosses care about and ensure they have the information they need to demonstrate how social provides business value. For marketing leaders, it's important to follow the lead of their practitioners when it comes to understanding their brands' target audiences. No one knows a brand's audience better than the practitioner, who spends their time nurturing the customer experience and forging those connections on social.



# Sprout stance

The insights gleaned from social can fuel organizational growth—but it's on the social marketer to prove just how valuable social really is and get the buy-in to make this happen. After all, the product and sales teams aren't the ones in the social trenches, seeing what consumers have to say about the brand day in and out. For practitioners especially, this is an opportunity to show how social insights support the entire organization well before other departments think to ask for social data.

**Glossier**, the makeup brand with a **billion dollar valuation** founded by Emily Weiss, relies on social data to acquire new customers and inform new product development. When the brand realized traffic to the blog didn't translate to paying customers, Glossier sourced data from its various online platforms to figure out why. Realizing that their audience started their buying journey on mobile but completed most transactions via desktop, Glossier began using a new database to link the user across sites on mobile and desktop. Glossier also leverages consumer engagement to support its product team. The makeup brand, for example, relied on direct customer feedback to create a **facial cleanser** that met the specific needs expressed by consumers on social.

# Trends to watch

## Trends to watch

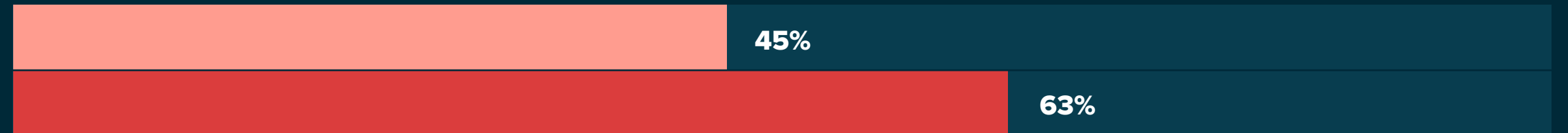
As marketers set out to recalibrate their goals and distribute social insights throughout their organization, it's equally important to look ahead at what trends will enhance future strategies and which ones to ignore.

Without a doubt, marketers should incorporate the features their target audience wants to see in the coming years. When asked what trends or features consumers would like to see most from brands, live video topped the list, followed by more user-generated content and Instagram stories.

# Social trends on the rise: consumers vs. marketers

What consumers want to see from brands ■  
Marketers who say this will become more important ■

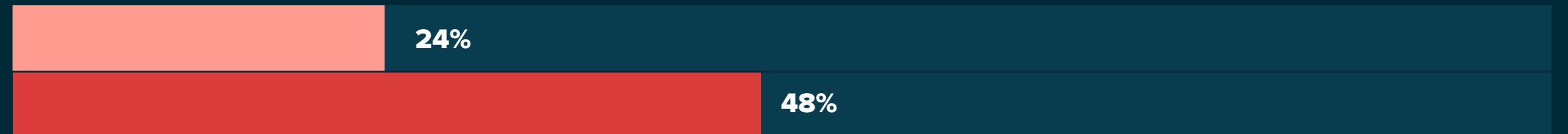
## Live video



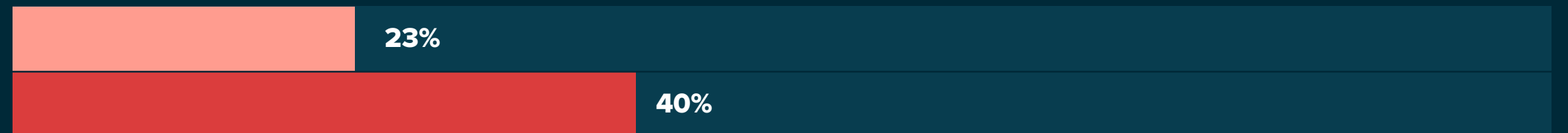
## User-generated content



## Instagram Stories



## Private community groups



## Trends to watch

Both marketers and consumers agree live video will become a significant factor in a brand's social strategy. Forty-two percent of social marketers already have a strategy for Facebook Live, while 31% of social marketers plan to build strategies for Facebook Video and Instagram Live. Despite the push for video content, marketers are still behind the curve when it comes to [nurturing their presence on YouTube](#), creating a missed opportunity to connect with younger consumers like Generation Z. Less than a quarter of marketers (24%) intend to create a strategy for YouTube Live. If marketers are concerned about sustained growth, it doesn't hurt to start building strategies that directly address tomorrow's consumer.

Private communities like Facebook or LinkedIn Groups also offer brands a unique opportunity to

connect directly with their audiences. More than two-thirds of consumers (67%) will join a private group because they want to connect with people who are similar to them, while almost half (46%) join to communicate directly with a brand or business. In addition to nurturing connection, private groups can help the 48% of marketers who want to increase community engagement in the coming year.

Tools within the social space, such as analytics and listening, are also maturing as marketers find themselves responsible for data analysis. With listening, marketers can drive customer research at scale, and 63% of practitioners say listening will become more important over the coming year. As the role of the marketer continues to evolve, analytics and listening tools will become must-haves for the data-driven marketer.

# 63% of practitioners say social listening will become more important.





# Sprout stance

Marketers have immeasurable amounts of data to work with—but tools like listening and analytics make it easier than ever for marketers to distill all this data into actionable insights. Listening tools, for example, give marketers the ability to analyze social conversations at scale to understand why consumers talk about their brand or industry the way they do. Social data is more accessible than ever before, and marketers have access to information that supports initiatives like trend analysis, product research, competitor insights and sentiment research.

Consider how Grubhub tapped social listening to [think like their customers](#) and used data from social media to inform product innovation. With social listening, Grubhub found their customers were Tweeting about having their [Taco Bell](#) delivered—so Grubhub made it happen. The take-out delivery platform has since updated their product to include Taco Bell restaurants, a decision that has positively impacted both their brand perception and business growth overall.

# Conclusion

## Conclusion

Marketers understand the significance of social, but those outside of the marketing department continue to overlook how social can impact larger business objectives. At this stage in social marketing, marketers should focus on aligning their social strategies with other parts of the business and identifying ways to use social to drive bottom-line growth.

Today's marketers understand how versatile social data can be. They know that beneath social's vanity metrics, there are insights that fuel multiple strategies from marketing to product development to sales to customer service. And marketers can rely on more than a gut feeling when speaking to teams outside of their department: they have the hard data straight from consumers to support their beliefs. With more data and consumer insights than ever at their fingertips, social marketers will become the key factor to long-term business growth and success.





# About the data

The Sprout Social Index is a report compiled and released by Sprout Social. All referenced data is based on 1,011 consumer respondents and 1,018 marketer respondents. Both the consumer and marketer surveys were conducted online by Lucid between February 20 and 25, 2019. 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; 'managers' as social media managers; and 'leaders' as VPs, C-level marketers or directors.

For questions about the data, please contact [pr@sproutsocial.com](mailto:pr@sproutsocial.com).



# Sprout Social

Sprout Social offers deep social media listening and analytics, social management, customer care and advocacy solutions to more than 25,000 leading brands and agencies, including Evernote, Grubhub, NBC Universal and Edelman. 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. Learn more at [sproutsocial.com](https://sproutsocial.com).