sproutsocial

INDEX™

## Edition XVII: Accelerate

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The future is bright for social media

Consumers, especially members of Generation Z and Millennials, are spending more time on social than ever before.

Consumer's social media usage is on the rise

71

Seventy-one

percent of consumers say they found themselves using social media more in the past year

Increase in social media use over the past year, by generation

↑ **78%**
Generation Z

↑ **77%**
Millennials

↑ **75%**
Generation X

↑ **54%**
Baby Boomers
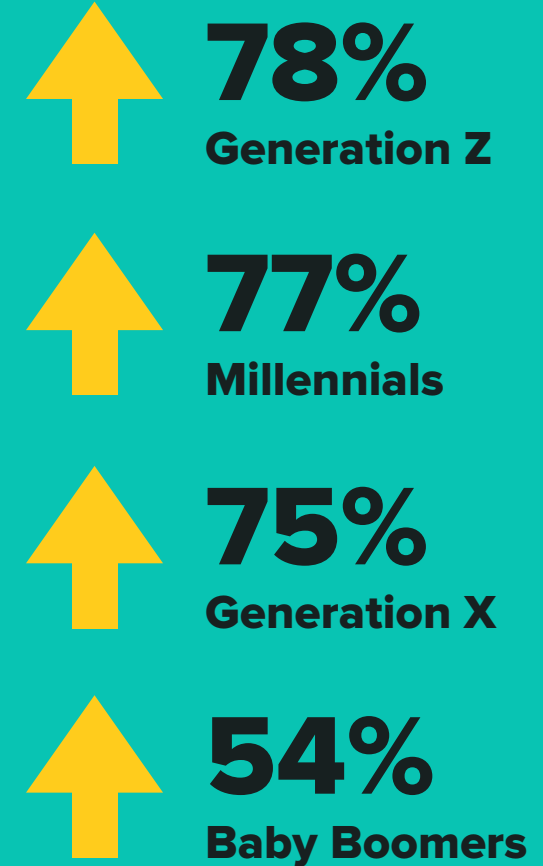
Facebook remains a top contender

When asked which platforms they use, consumers pointed to Facebook, YouTube and Instagram as their top three. Those same three platforms also top the list of where consumers follow brands.

Platforms consumers use

87%	Facebook
74%	YouTube
68%	Instagram
50%	Twitter
42%	Snapchat
37%	Pinterest
36%	TikTok
29%	LinkedIn
28%	Whatsapp
21%	Reddit
15%	Twitch
11%	Yelp
10%	Tumblr
10%	TripAdvisor
3%	Clubhouse

Where consumers follow brands

78%	Facebook
57%	Instagram
47%	YouTube
36%	Twitter
22%	TikTok
20%	Pinterest
20%	Snapchat
16%	LinkedIn
13%	Whatsapp
9%	Reddit
8%	Twitch
4%	Tumblr
4%	Yelp
4%	TripAdvisor
3%	Clubhouse

Stand out from the crowd

Marketers need to listen to the noise before they can cut through it

Nestled within the conversations and interactions consumers have with their friends, family and brands are the insights marketers need to maintain their competitive edge.

93
Ninety-three
percent of marketers acknowledge that social media accelerated competition within their industry

90
Ninety
percent of marketers agree data from social enables them to stay ahead of their competitors

88
Eighty-eight
percent of marketers believe their social media strategy positively influences their bottom line

86
Eighty-six
percent of marketers say they use competitor insights from social to identify new business opportunities

Social gives away a competitor's next move

When it comes to competitor insights, social data reveals the strength of a competing brand's customer loyalty as well as the strengths and weaknesses of their offerings.

How social data informs marketers' understanding of their competitors by rank

1 Tells them the strength of customers' brand loyalty

1 Reveals strengths and weaknesses of competitors' products or services

3 Highlights where their brand can differentiate from competitors

4 Informs their understanding of competitors' customer service efforts

5 Reveals competitors' share of voice

6 Provides insights into competitors' next moves

Know where you stand with your customers

Unlike other marketing channels, social offers marketers a window into consumers' real feelings toward brands and why they follow certain company pages over others. For example: 53% of consumers follow brands on social to learn about new products and services.

How social data informs marketers' understanding of their customers by rank

1 Shows them how customers use their products or services

2 Shows what customers dislike about their brand

3 Tells them what customers like about their brand

4 Provides insight into what customers expect from brands in the future

5 Shows what trends customers are interested in

6 Enables them to get to know their customers on a personal level

7 Tells them what kind of social content resonates with customers

Get to know your audience on a personal level

Connecting with your target audience, however, starts with getting to know what makes them tick.

Social platforms marketers currently use

83% Facebook
77% Instagram
57% YouTube
52% Twitter
38% LinkedIn
36% Snapchat
34% TikTok
28% Whatsapp
21% Pinterest
21% Google My Business
16% Reddit

**Social platforms consumers want brands to use more**

60% Facebook
48% Instagram
41% YouTube
30% Twitter
21% Snapchat
21% TikTok
19% Pinterest
17% LinkedIn
17% Whatsapp
11% Reddit
10% Google My Business

Visual content is a must-have for achieving social goals

Marketers' goals for social remain largely unchanged from 2020, with increasing brand awareness (58%) and increasing community engagement (41%) taking the top spots. As visual platforms like Instagram and TikTok become more popular, investing in visual content will be a priority.

Types of content marketers say are most valuable for social goals

54%
Video

53%
Images

30%
Text-based posts

26%
Stories

25%
Live video
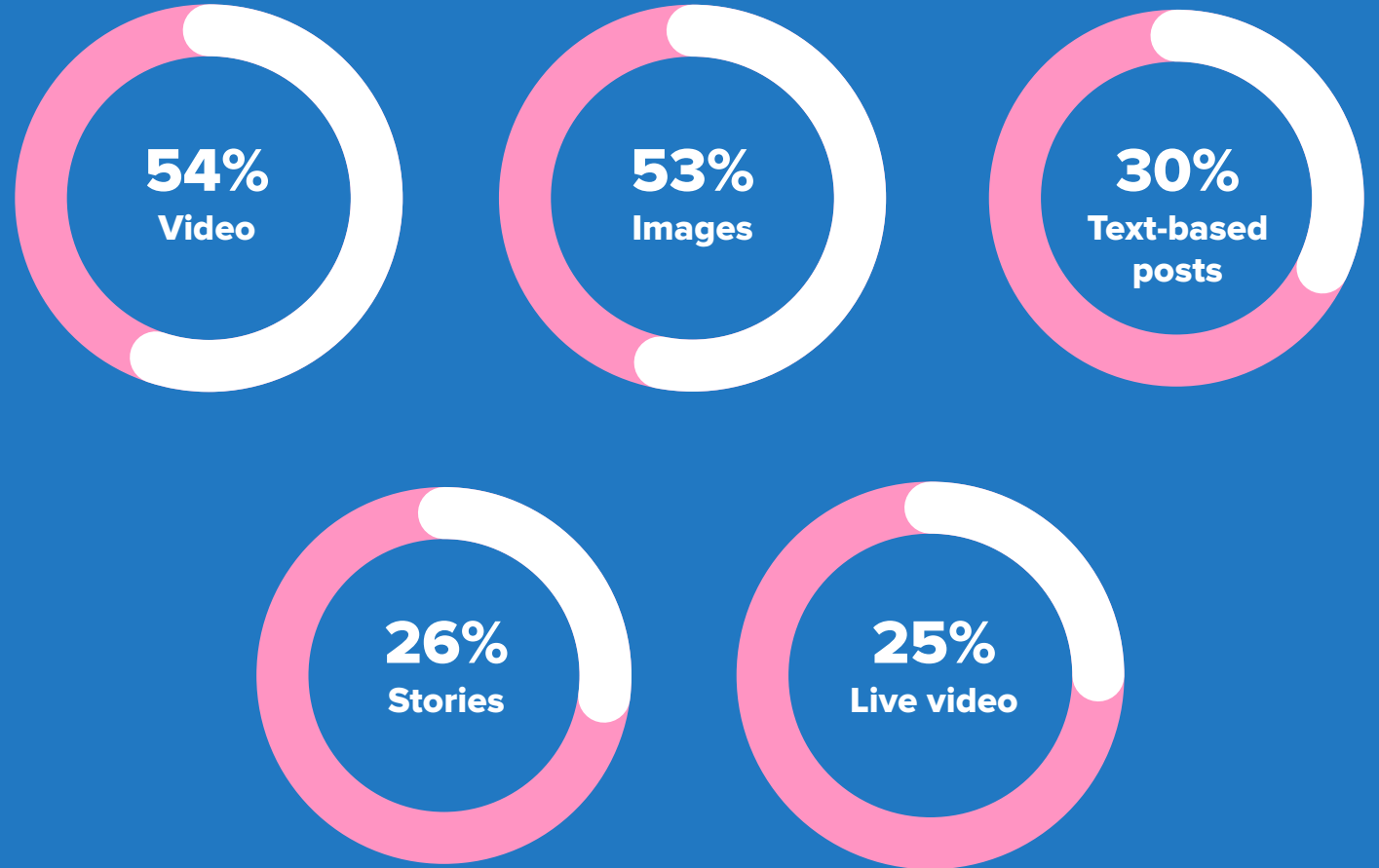
Published video content by network

	Facebook posts	Instagram posts	Tweets
Advertising & Marketing	14%	13%	5%
Automotive	16%	12%	6%
Banking	11%	11%	4%
Consumer Goods	16%	13%	5%
Education	14%	10%	5%
Financial Services	12%	11%	4%
Food & Beverage	12%	9%	4%
Health, Wellness & Fitness	15%	12%	5%
Legal	8%	7%	3%

	Facebook posts	Instagram posts	Tweets
Media & Entertainment	23%	21%	8%
Nonprofit	14%	11%	4%
Real Estate	12%	8%	4%
Recruiting & Staffing	9%	11%	4%
Retail	14%	10%	4%
Internet & Tech	10%	11%	3%
Sports, Leisure & Recreation	18%	14%	7%
Travel & Tourism	12%	8%	4%

Strong customer service is the hallmark of an exceptional brand on social

When asked what makes a brand best-in-class on social, the number one response from consumers was strong customer service yet marketers cited audience engagement as the distinguishing factor.

What consumers think makes a brand best in class on social

47%	They offer strong customer service
46%	They engage their audience
44%	They are transparent
39%	They create memorable content
33%	They have a distinct personality
28%	They tell a compelling story
23%	They are the first to join a new social network
18%	They set trends
17%	They leverage pop culture

What marketers think makes a brand best in class on social

48%	They engage their audience
45%	They create memorable content
42%	They are transparent
37%	They tell a compelling story
37%	They are the first to join a new social network
35%	They offer strong customer service
31%	They have a distinct personality
19%	They leverage pop culture
14%	They set trends

Stay ahead of the social consumer

Responsiveness is core to social customer service

Don't underestimate the ramifications of poor customer service. Forty-four percent of consumers will unfollow a brand on social because of poor service, putting a damper on brands' growth goals.

Average inbound messages & response rates by industry

Industry	Total inbound messages per day	Daily response rate to messages	Industry	Total inbound messages per day	Daily response rate to messages
Advertising & Marketing	68	47%	Media & Entertainment	139	36%
Automotive	25	30%	Nonprofit	135	37%
Banking	59	28%	Real Estate	7	58%
Consumer Goods	38	75%	Recruiting & Staffing	36	35%
Education	15	37%	Retail	62	72%
Financial Services	43	26%	Internet & Tech	36	48%
Food & Beverage	19	74%	Sports, Leisure & Recreation	31	41%
Health, Wellness & Fitness	33	71%	Travel & Tourism	43	56%
Legal	31	24%			

Social gives consumers a voice and platform

Seventy-eight percent of consumers agree that social media is the fastest and most direct way to connect with a brand—and consumers want their voices heard.

Consumers' preferred channel for sharing feedback about a product or service

31%
Social media
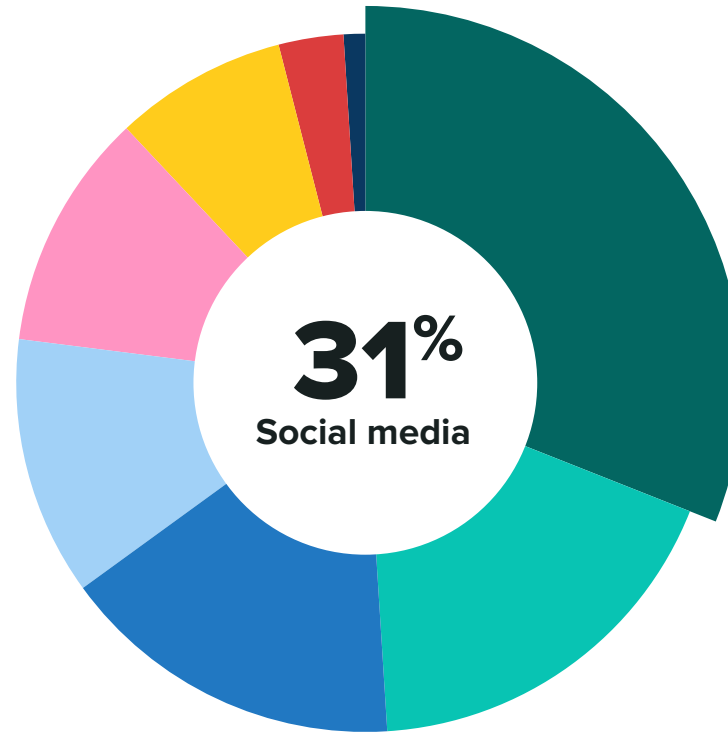
- Social media 31%
- Email 18%
- Review website 16%
- Company website 18%
- Customer service number 11%
- Brand survey 8%
- In-store 3%
- Other <1%

Consumers' preferred channel for reaching out with a customer service issue or question

33%
Social media
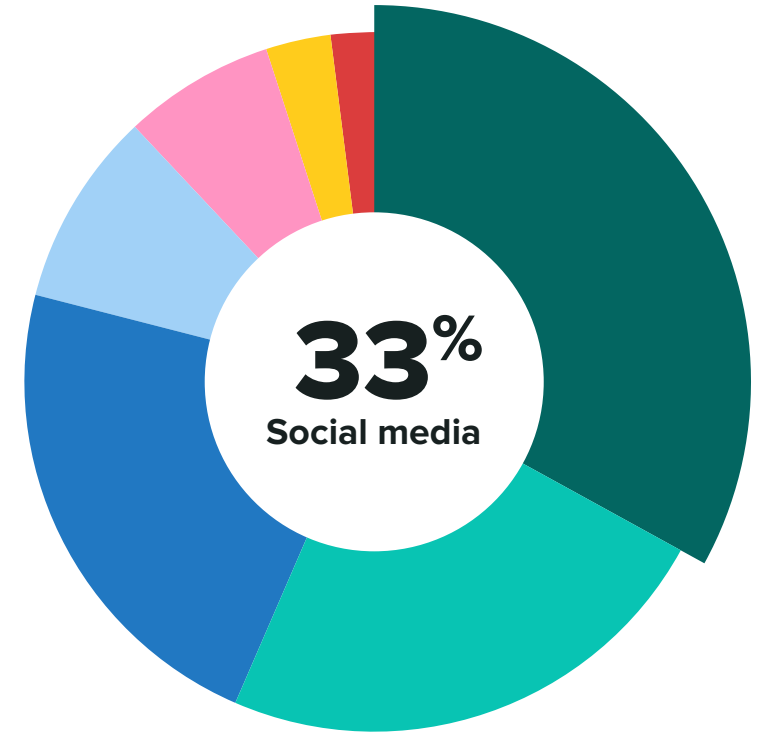
- Social media 33%
- Customer service 24%
- Email 23%
- Company website 9%
- Review website 7%
- In-person 3%
- Brand survey 2%

Stop treating followers as a vanity metric

Nine out of 10 consumers will buy from brands they follow on social, while 86% will choose that brand over a competitor.

Actions consumers take when they follow brands on social
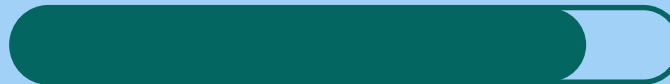
Visit the brand's website or app   **91%**
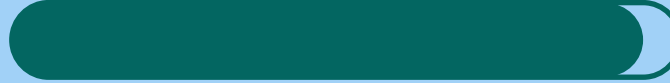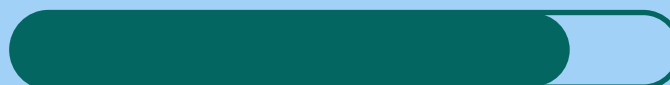
Buy from that brand   **90%**
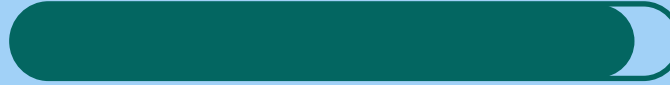
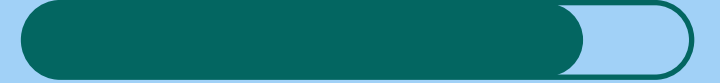**Choose that brand over a competitor**   **86%**

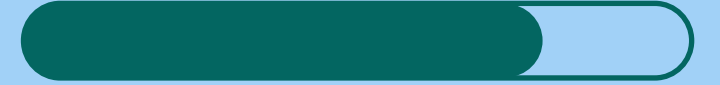**Visit the brand's physical retail store**   **86%**

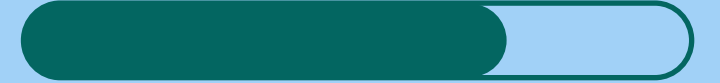**Buy from that brand more often**   **85%**

Recommend that brand to friends/family   **83%**
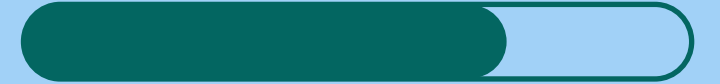
Leave a review for that brand   **79%**
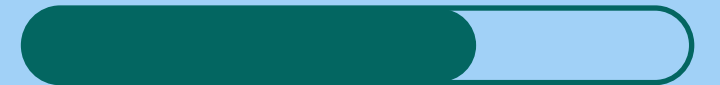
Reach out for customer service/support   **76%**

Read that brand's blog or site content   **76%**

Engage with that brand on social   **73%**

Relevance separates the best from the rest

Listening to and acknowledging your customers isn't just good manners—it's also good business sense. A seamless customer experience, no matter the time or day, and content that speaks to the consumers' needs can further distinguish a brand from its competition.

Actions brands can take to get consumers to buy from them over a competitor

	All ages	18-23	24-39	40-55	56-74
Respond to customer service questions in a timely manner	47%	41%	41%	46%	60%
Demonstrate an understanding of what I want and need	43%	50%	45%	37%	41%
Create more culturally relevant content	39%	36%	53%	51%	13%
Create educational content about their product or service	31%	27%	25%	32%	42%
Engage with me on social	27%	31%	37%	29%	10%

Section 3

Break through the social ceiling

Brands are losing out on the true potential of social

Eighty-eight percent of marketers agree their social strategy positively influences their bottom line. But the reality is that organizations still consider social a marketing-specific resource and undervalue its business impact. Asked to describe their cross-team efforts in regards to social, 50% of marketers say they maintain occasional communication and collaboration with other teams while 17% operate in complete silos.

How social data is viewed within an organization

47%

A resource that influences strategy for multiple teams

46%

Strictly as a marketing resource

8%

**A resource for organization-wide business intelligence**

To stay competitive, everyone needs to be all-in on social

In order to take advantage of all that social has to offer, marketers need to demonstrate how insights from social positively influence strategies for every department, not just marketing.
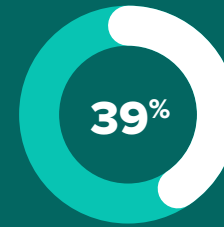
How marketers use social data
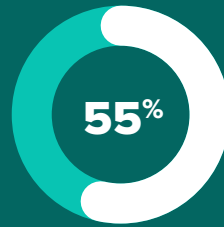
55% Understanding my target audience
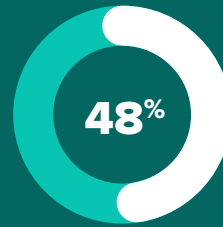
48% Developing creative content

39% Supporting other departments

32% Analyzing trends

29% Assessing campaign performance

26% Fostering connection with customers

25% Reporting results to my manager and/or team

15% Measuring ROI

10% Informing business decisions

Grow faster with social

Social will only continue to accelerate competition in nearly every industry, leaving brands with two options: embrace social and thrive, or do nothing and fall behind. The insights from social inform everything from what your competitors are planning next to what your customers need from your brand in the future. For marketers, this is an opportunity to demonstrate how social positively influences all parts of the business and why a brand's competitive advantage lives on social.

Methodology

The Sprout Social Index™ is a report compiled and released by Sprout Social. All referenced data is based on 1,002 US consumer respondents and 1,001 US marketer respondents. Both the consumer and marketer surveys were conducted online by Lucid between March 30 and April 6, 2021.

The report also analyzed more than 782 million messages from 534,000 public social profiles that were active between January 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020. Data includes posts from Facebook, Google My Business, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, TripAdvisor and Twitter. The top 0.5% of data was winsorized to limit the impact of extreme outliers.

Graphics are rounded to the nearest whole percentage and may not add up to exactly 100%.

For questions about the data, please contact **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 brands and agencies worldwide. Sprout's unified platform integrates the power of social throughout every aspect of a business and enables social leaders at every level to extract valuable data and insights that drive their business forward. Headquartered in Chicago, Sprout operates across major social media networks, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube and LinkedIn. Learn more at **sproutsocial.com**.

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