The agility advantage

Social media transforms the world at breakneck speed. The rate of change is unprecedented. And so forth. Yeah, yeah. You get it.

The "whirlwind" cliches have been true for years, and they're still true today. And chasing success in that whirlwind isn't for the faint of heart. In the nine years we've published our annual Social Media Trends report, we've seen too many social marketers burn out chasing trending tactics that are red-hot today and forgotten tomorrow.

That's why this year, we shifted our focus to look deeper behind what's trending — and understand what's working.

The top performing social teams aren't jumping on every trend. They're building social listening into the heart of their corporate strategy to find, understand, and take action on the trends that are right for them. They're rewriting the play-book with new content approaches that break more than a few long-standing rules. And they're finding new ways to accelerate everything from content creation to strategic planning with a little help from — you guessed it — AI.

Let's make 2025 the year you win with informed agility. Here's to dancing in the whirlwind. 💃

5 ways to turn the *insights* in this 45-page PDF into *action*

Share the knowledge

Create a summary of the most relevant stats for your organization and share them with your team as a Slack, email, or slide deck.

Dive in together

Hold a team meeting where you read and discuss the report together. (It's like BookTok! With less smut.)

Start a conversation

Pull out your top 3 insights and create a thought leadership post on LinkedIn, adding your own point of view on the trends.

Loosen purse strings

Use the stats that are most relevant to your organization to build a business case around an experiment or investment that your team wants in 2025.

Plan big moves

Pick a trend and do a quick competitive analysis to see where your brand stacks up and identify the biggest opportunities.

Research methods

This report is based on a commercial survey of 3,864 marketers, conducted in August 2024.

We also conducted primary interviews with social marketing practitioners and leaders.

Our primary data has been supplemented by Talkwalker, as well as secondary research from Statista, Deloitte, Forbes, NielsenIQ, Archrival, Wakefield Research, The Social Intelligence Lab, Hubspot, LinkedIn, TikTok, YouTube, The CMO Survey, and others.

Overview of Hootsuite's global Social Media Trends 2025 Survey

- **3,864** respondents
- **99** countries
- **16** industries
- **28%** directors and above
- **65%** managers and practitioners
- **23%** B2B organizations
- **42%** B2C organizations
- **35%** both B2B and B2C organizations

Note: Survey respondents were from 99 countries, with the most common being the US (n = 2,593), Canada (n = 312), the UK (n = 210), Australia (n = 98), and India (n = 73).

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The Creative Disruption Trend

Social teams ditch brand consistency to push creative boundaries

Last year, our trends survey revealed that above all else, people want to be entertained on social media. But brands weren't meeting those expectations, and struggled to demonstrate ROI because of it.
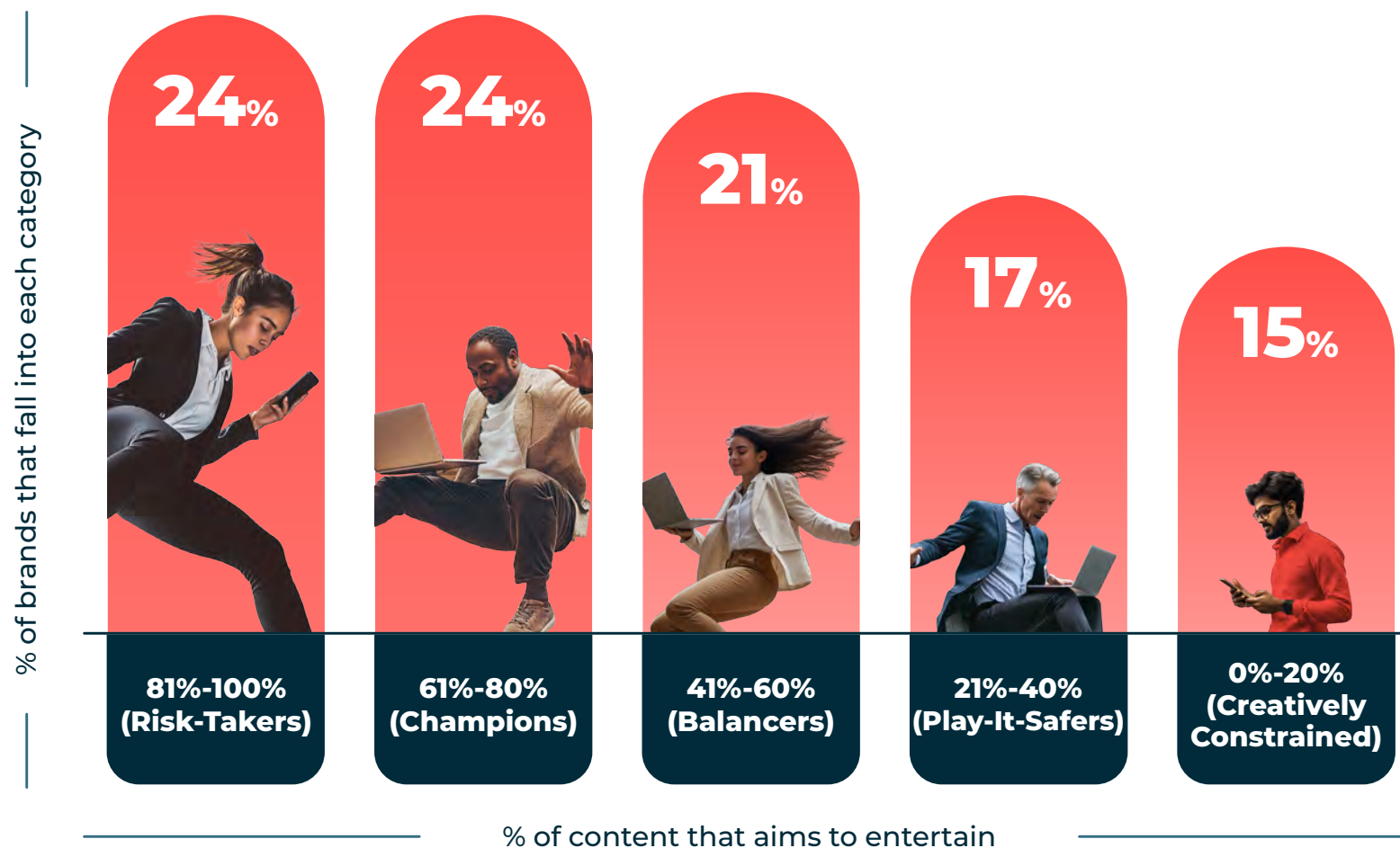
Since then, organizations have stepped up their entertainment game. Nearly half of our survey respondents said that more than 60% of their social content aims to entertain, educate, or inform without directly promoting themselves, their products, or services.

And for a quarter of brands — the ones we've dubbed Creative Risk-Takers — a whopping 81% to 100% of content is entertainment-driven.

Entertainment steals the show for almost half of brands

Percentage of social posts that aim to entertain, educate, or inform without directly promoting their organization/products/services

% of brands that fall into each category

24% 81%-100% (Risk-Takers)

24% 61%-80% (Champions)

21% 41%-60% (Balancers)

17% 21%-40% (Play-It-Safers)

15% 0%-20% (Creatively Constrained)

% of content that aims to entertain

Sample: 3,757 respondents
Source: Hootsuite Social Media Trends 2025 Survey

This boost in entertaining content is in line with TikTok's 2024 trends prediction about "creative bravery" — that brands and creators would go bigger and bolder than ever in 2024, setting an even higher standard for entertainment and creativity on social media. And they sure did.

But what's even more interesting about this new creative precedent is its implications on brand consistency — or rather, *inconsistency*.

We're so used to seeing headlines like "Why Cross-Channel Brand Consistency is So Important" and "Your Essential Guide to Unbreakable Brand Consistency." And yes, this rigidly consistent approach to brand management made plenty of sense in the pre-social media ecosystem, where a single slip could cost a brand dearly.

But the evolution of social platforms and culture have created opportunities that old-school brand playbooks would never allow. And we're seeing more and more organizations toss those playbooks aside, loosen the reins on consistency, and prioritize creativity on social media.

In fact, 43% of organizations have tried out a new tone of voice, personality, or persona on social in the last year. And the most adventurous brands have tested tones and personas so distinct that their social content barely resembles their brand personality on other marketing channels. Just compare Hever Castle & Gardens' Instagram feed to their website, or RSPB's TikTok posts to their web content.

Social marketers who consistently post creative content are more likely to say they have a very positive impact on the business than those who post creative content less frequently.

And these brands aren't just getting away with it — they're getting celebrated for it (and driving results). Because social media is the perfect playground for pushing creativity further, a place where even the most buttoned-up brands can have a little fun. It's the channel where making sacrifices *for* creativity is welcome, even expected.

In most cases, organizations haven't entered 'unhinged' territory with their creative experimentation (not every brand can go full Nutter Butter). They've just shared content that's different and daring for *their* brand.

And in doing so, they're blending into the specific cultures of each social platform as if they were locals, *joining* the conversation rather than trying to control it. It's advice we've been giving for years, but brands haven't pulled it off quite as successfully as they are now.

So how do audiences feel about brands taking on a whole new identity on social media? We can't say for sure, but our data shows that social marketers who consistently post creative content on social are more likely to say they have a very positive impact on the business than those who post creative content less frequently. And when social pros can confidently say their efforts are paying off, it's a good indication their audiences are liking what they see.

In 2025, more organizations will step outside their creative comfort zone and test content that pushes beyond their brand guidelines to capture new audiences (and delight current ones). And orgs that have already taken this first step will use their learnings to expand their experimentation to more platforms and other areas of their social strategy, like paid social, employee advocacy, and executive thought leadership.

Recommendations

1 Unlock your brand handcuffs (but don't throw away the key)

Even when you're trying to deviate from your usual playbook, every brand has its non-negotiables. So get all the relevant marketing teams and leaders in one room (or screen) to do a thorough review of your brand guidelines. Collectively decide what you're willing to let go of and what you're not. And don't be discouraged if you end up with more limitations than you'd like — sometimes having guardrails can actually spark creativity, not stifle it.

2 Have a plan for measuring success

Debuting a new(ish) personality on social media calls for new objectives and new metrics for measuring success — because they can (and should) be different from your typical set. This could be a great opportunity to bring back those "vanity metrics" you previously dropped, since this is an instance where engagement can be *very* telling. Sentiment should also top your list of KPIs, and social listening can help you track how your audience feels about your jazzed-up content in real time.

3 Get your boss on board

For leaders who care about numbers (and dollar signs) more than anything else, testing out bolder content that may not generate quick wins can feel like scary territory to venture into. But remember, customer acquisition matters — and following a brand on social (there's one of those "vanity metrics") does impact purchasing decisions, according to our latest Social Media Consumer Report. So that's a real juicy data point to lean on to get buy-in. More engaging content = new followers = new potential customers = $$$

Trend in action

Carahsoft takes their social content from mundane to memorable

Carahsoft, a Virginia-based company that provides IT solutions to the public sector, has the unique challenge of balancing their own social media goals with the social requests of more than 500 vendors and partners, all itching to promote their events, webinars, resources, and more.

To manage all these requests — sometimes up to 60 a week — they use a ticket system that allows teams to submit an outline of what they need. Once the post has been created by the social team, it's sent out for approval and scheduled to be published.

"The rule of thumb has always been to support our vendors as best we can with the promotions they want," says Elizabeth Slaughter, Social Media Manager at Carahsoft. "But we don't want to oversaturate our feeds with posts that could cause audience fatigue."

That's why, in the last six months, their priorities on social have changed, allowing them to start testing out new content ideas and strategies.

The team now creates content that's closely aligned to their social strategy and the Carahsoft brand — but they still need to support their hundreds of vendor partners. This means finding new avenues for promoting that content. The solution: employee advocacy using Hootsuite Amplify.

Now, if the team receives a social request for a post that may not be a good fit for their corporate accounts, they create content for Amplify so relevant teams can easily share it themselves.

This has opened the door for more creative content on Carahsoft's main social channels.

The team started testing video content and more lively event highlights, and found that showcasing their people taking part in networking events, trade shows, and conferences blows their typical static event promotions out of the water — we're talking 7,000 impressions versus their usual 500. And re-shares have skyrocketed, resulting in a surge in event signups and leads.

This goes to show that when audiences on social see something different — not necessarily wacky or gaudy, but rather engaging and unexpected — it draws them in and both audiences and organizations benefit.

The takeaway: Leaders should be giving their social teams permission to explore new territory on social as a strategy for meeting (and exceeding) social media and business goals.

"Getting executive buy-in is key," says Slaughter. "And it's been a lot easier recently because we've really gone the extra mile to show what's working."

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The Outbound Engagement Trend

Brands drop in on creators' comments to pick up new audiences

These days, you can scroll down to the comments section of almost any social post and find a brand or two chiming in on the conversation.

These outbound engagements (brands commenting on other peoples' posts) are picking up steam. But the smartest brands aren't commenting willy-nilly on any old post. They're strategically engaging with *creator* content.

Why creators specifically? They have loyal fans who pay attention, clinging to the comments just as much as their actual posts. And for brands, that means visibility — a chance to be seen.

But creators' comment sections are also goldmines for cultivating community. And that matters, especially to groups like Gen Z who struggle with loneliness, according to <u>research</u> from The Cigna Group. Zoomers crave connection and hang out in the online spaces that provide it.

No matter your target audience, if you can use the comments to insert your brand into relevant *communities*, not just one-off conversations — and do it authentically and thoughtfully — there's a massive opportunity to foster strong, lasting relationships (and get a few more eyeballs on your brand to boot).

How to stand out in the comments

Our survey shows that 41% of organizations have been testing proactive engagements. But because this is such a new tactic, there's a lot of uncertainty around how to best go about it.

We caught up with the Hootsuite squad of social geniuses, who've been doing some experimentation of their own. They run through a list of key questions to decide if they should chime in on a creator's post. You'll find the full list in our Recommendations, but here are the top takeaways: The conversation should be relevant to your brand or industry, your comments have to add value, and timing is everything.
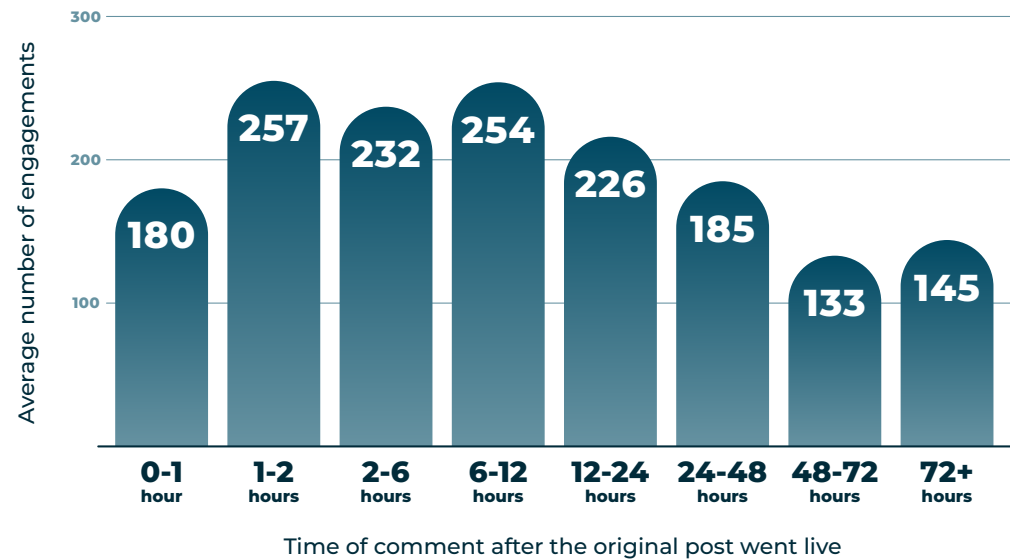
41%
of organizations have been testing proactive engagements

Brands get more love
with timely outbound comments

Average number of engagements by time of comment
(TikTok and Instagram)

Average number of engagements (y-axis)

0-1 hour	1-2 hours	2-6 hours	6-12 hours	12-24 hours	24-48 hours	48-72 hours	72+ hours
180	257	232	254	226	185	133	145

Time of comment after the original post went live

Brands generate more buzz
with mid-length outbound comments

Average number of engagements by length of comment
(TikTok and Instagram)

Average number of engagements (y-axis)

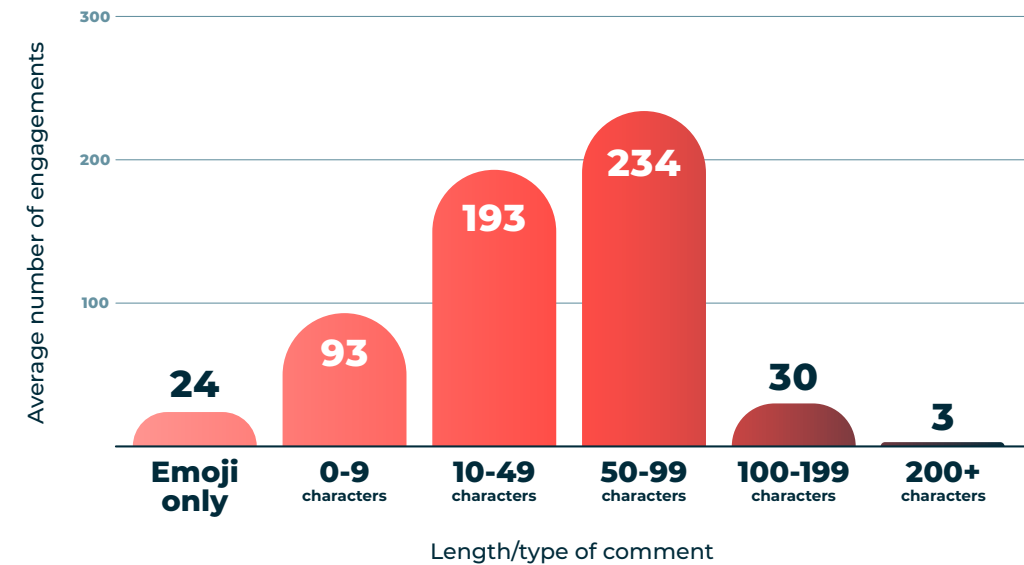| Emoji only	0-9 characters	10-49 characters	50-99 characters	100-199 characters	200+ characters
24	93	193	234	30	3

Length/type of comment

We also partnered with global social media agency Social Element to understand best practices based on the outbound engagements they've been tracking over the last two years within their proprietary community database, CommuniTEA.

To gauge success of outbound comments, Social Element looked at engagements (a key indicator of visibility, which, as we've established, is a top goal of proactive commenting). They identified two critical drivers: timeliness and length.

Engagements decrease dramatically if you comment on an original post that's more than 24 hours old. As for comment length, keep it short — but not *too* short. Comments between 10 and 99 characters drive the most engagement; anything more or anything less, including emoji-only comments, are a total bust.

Sample: 25,000 outbound engagements
Source: Social Element

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Also interesting: Engagements are 1.6x higher when the original creator replies to your comment. So it's important to be intentional about *who* you're targeting to increase your chances of getting those golden creator responses. Social Element's study shows that nano- and micro-influencers (those with between 1k and 50k followers) are the most responsive. But we'd bet that nothing is more effective than having a pre-existing relationship with the creators you engage with.

Pair this data with your own learnings and you've got everything you need to steer your proactive commenting efforts.

But beware: Outbound engagements as a marketing and social selling strategy are starting to gain momentum, so creators' comment sections could soon become oversaturated with brands competing for attention. And creators will get choosy with their replies, avoiding ones that could compromise their authenticity and credibility.

In 2025, as more brands take a stab at proactive engagements, the most strategic ones will go beyond the comments section (and even beyond social media) to foster genuine relationships with creators and influencers as a prerequisite to building successful outbound engagement strategies.

Engagements on outbound comments are

1.6x

higher when the original creator replies

Source: Social Element

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Recommendations

1 Unify your outbound engagement and influencer marketing strategies

Proactive engagements are most effective when they're part of a larger strategy aimed at building relationships. So it's wise to center your outbound commenting efforts around the same creators you're engaging with for your influencer marketing strategy. Broadening the scope of your influencer partnerships will help you amplify visibility and gain trust. The more you interact and appear in creators' online spaces (within reason), the more you advance your relationship and build a rapport that feels authentic and natural to their audiences. And that's the key to winning them over.

PRO TIP With Inbox 2.0, you can keep track and respond to all your comments, DMs, and customer service questions in one place. So you'll never miss a message — including those sweet, sweet creator replies — again.

2 Scope out the scene before making your move

Hold off on that snap decision. Before you jump into the comment section, ask yourself a few key questions. Here are the five q's our very own social team uses to make informed decisions:

Relevance Is this post relevant to my brand? Engage with posts and creators that are related to your industry, product, service, area of expertise, brand mission, or values so your comments are genuine and authentic.

Sentiment What's the current vibe of the comments section? Make sure the comments are actually relevant to the original post, and be sure to evaluate sentiment — you don't want to get caught in a sea of negativity or enter a discussion that's plagued by trolls.

Audience Who else is commenting? Are they part of your brand's audience? Are they likely to become customers? How would they react to your comment? It's important to consider the 'who' so you can gauge what the response will be and the potential for engagement.

Timeliness When was the original post published? If you're late to the party, your comment may not get much attention. As a rule of thumb, try to comment within 24 hours of the original post.

Value Will your comment add value to the discussion? The goal is to advance the conversation by sharing insights or thoughts that will be meaningful to your audience. If you don't have anything valuable to say, don't say it at all.

Bonus insight: If you're spending too much time trying to come up with a comment, it might not be worth it. Outbound engagements require some thought and do take time, but racking your brain for a response could be a sign that you should just move on.

Trend in action

Mastercard racks up views, followers, and traffic with outbound engagement

If you're familiar with Mastercard's legendary "Priceless" campaign, you'll know that they've spent nearly 30 years celebrating the moments in life that money can't buy. And proactive comments provide new opportunities to turn those moments into valuable brand equity.

"Let's say someone posts a video of a son surprising his father with tickets to the World Series," says Nick Sylvia, Director of Global Social Media at Mastercard. "We're going to jump in because that, in our eyes, is a priceless moment we want to celebrate and amplify."

This is one way the Mastercard team uses social media to embody the spirit of their campaign and connect with their audience on an emotional level. It's why outbound engagements are so important for them.

To find the special moments worth joining, the social team searches for videos that evoke deep emotional feelings and feature people engaging in their passions. But so many amazing moments show up on social every day, and it's impossible to parse through them all. Talkwalker, their social listening solution, helps the team identify the precious moments they're looking for.

They've only just begun their outbound engagement efforts, but they can already tell that this strategy is working. When one of their proactive comments takes off, they tend to see a spike in profile visits. This leads to more content views and followers, and those followers, Sylvia says, ultimately convert and turn into fans.

The Mastercard team plans to ramp up their outbound commenting activities in 2025, and we can't wait to see them, um, max out their potential engagement.

Social Listening

The Social Performance Trend

Listening launches social pros into
their performance marketing era

The Micro-Virality Trend

Social listening refines
the art of trendjacking

The Social Performance Trend

Listening launches social pros into their performance marketing era

Performance marketing (a strategy centered entirely around the measurable aspects of a campaign) is all about driving revenue and growth. It's designed to meet tangible business goals like increasing sales and leads, while cutting down on customer acquisition costs. Its connection to revenue is, and has always been, crystal clear.

Insert envious side-eye from social marketers here

Even after nearly two decades as a key marketing channel, social media has remained notoriously difficult to connect to ROI (a.k.a. the numbers that prove business success and win investment from leadership).

Take brand awareness, for example. Our survey shows that it's a social media objective for 79% of brands, signaling how critical it is to overall success. But because it's typically measured through what many see as "vanity metrics" (likes, shares, comments, and followers), it's harder to link to a dollar amount.

But (finally!) that's changing. In recent years, we've seen more social marketers reporting increased confidence in their ability to prove ROI. And this year, we saw that confidence reach its highest point among social pros who use one specific tactic: social listening.

The information that social listening provides is valuable in two ways — it helps social teams deliver meaningful brand, customer, and competitor insights to the rest of their organization, *and* it equips them to track hard numbers that prove return on their investment.

With a continuous stream of real-time insights, organizations can:

- Better understand their audience
- Improve their strategies, campaigns, and customer service
- Uncover market gaps to guide product development
- Spot potential crises so they can take control before it's too late

And *all* of this info acts as quantitative data that allows social pros to track and report on ROI — exactly what they need to make a business case for investing in it (not to mention other tools or initiatives that might also require executive buy-in).

Social listening was the missing piece that tied their seemingly unmeasurable efforts to real business impact. And today, the majority (62%) of social marketers use social listening tools, according to our survey, helping them do just that. Social listening is even ranked by organiza-

How social reporting started...

Our social posts drove **2,735 likes** and **842 comments** this month.

VS

how it's going...

Social listening identified customer complaints about our competitors' lengthy wait times. So we created a 'No-Wait Guarantee' campaign, which we launched as paid and organic social posts. It drove **35% more traffic** to our site and a **10% lift in new customer sign-ups**.

tions as their second-highest priority on social media (the only activity that beats it is marketing to or engaging with their audience).
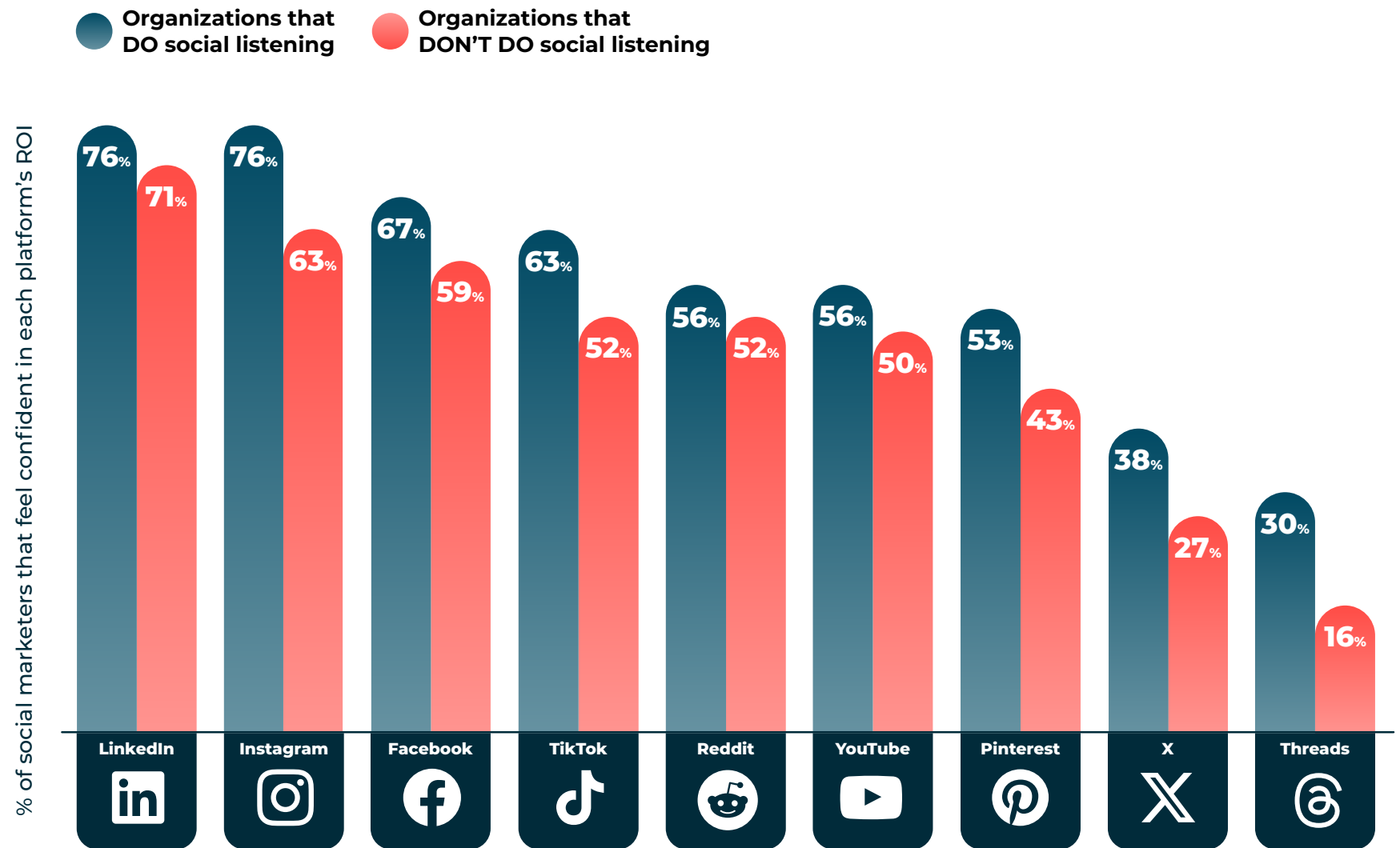
So, yeah, social listening is important (if not a necessity), and its ability to drive sales and growth — and prove it — is a big reason why.

With this shift, it's no surprise that the social listeners we surveyed are more likely than non-listeners to say they have a positive impact on the business. They're also more likely than non-listeners to feel confident in the ROI of every social platform. And why wouldn't they? Data-backed decisions deliver results.

In 2025, social teams that master social listening will earn more credibility and budget by delivering valuable insights that drive growth and success across their organization, along with the hard numbers that prove their ROI. And that's not all they'll deliver. With the help of social listening, we'll see more leads coming directly from social media — leads that will now be welcomed by sales teams with open arms.

Social listening lifts *ROI confidence*

Percentage of social listeners vs. non-listeners that feel confident in the ROI of each platform

● **Organizations that DO social listening**   ● **Organizations that DON'T DO social listening**

% of social marketers that feel confident in each platform's ROI

Platform	DO	DON'T
LinkedIn	76%	71%
Instagram	76%	63%
Facebook	67%	59%
TikTok	63%	52%
Reddit	56%	52%
YouTube	56%	50%
Pinterest	53%	43%
X	38%	27%
Threads	30%	16%

Sample: 3,864 respondents   **Source:** Hootsuite Social Media Trends 2025 Survey

Recommendations

1 Memorize the social media performance loop

Social media management? Table stakes. The future is all about social media performance. And to truly get into a performance marketing mindset, this is how you need to rewire your brain: What **insights** can I find on social that can inform the right **actions** to drive business **impact** (which double as more insights). This continuous loop is how to unlock the most value from social — and prove it.

INSIGHTS
ACTION
IMPACT

INSIGHT
Understanding customers better

ACTION
Smarter strategy + execution

IMPACT
Driving the metrics that matter

2 Gear up your sales team for social media leads

Leads from social media are a different breed. They're born in a fast-moving, informal space where trust-building is everything. And social marketers — who know these customers and the environment they come from best — should play a role in setting up sales reps for success. Arm them with customer insights from social listening for more personalized conversations, emphasize the need for lightning-fast follow-ups (social leads expect speed!), and encourage softer sales techniques that feel less pushy and more like friendly advice.

3 Connect social data to your org's CRM

Providing social listening insights to your sales agents shouldn't be a hassle. So if you're toggling between apps and flooding your sales team's inboxes with email updates, there's a better way. Integrations like Hootsuite Social Customer Care make sharing information between social and sales teams easy and efficient. With social data and interaction history directly in CRM profiles, sales reps can better understand who they're talking to and deliver tailored customer experiences — and neither team has to leave their respective management platform.

4 Level up your reporting

Stellar social listening calls for stronger reporting — all those insights need precision and direction. And when your goal is to show off ROI, you really shouldn't take any shortcuts. But that doesn't mean reporting has to be hard. Grab yourself a social media report template and replace those fluffy statements about "vanity metrics" with clear, detailed, and specific summaries of your performance, keeping every department in sync and proving the value of social across the board.

PRO TIP **Give your Social Performance Score a front-row seat in your weekly updates.**

This snapshot of your social media performance across Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn is the single benchmark your leaders need to understand your social success and progress at a glance — and it's built right into your Hootsuite dashboard.

Trend in action

Grand Canyon University serves up social listening gold

> "Insights from listening help us look at our content with a new perspective."

Natalie Barber
Social Media Specialist
Grand Canyon University

Campus dining options have become a key consideration for students choosing a university or college, according to new research from the National Association of College and University Food Services.

So, yes, an institution's social posts about food on campus *can* impact enrollment.

It's a big part of why the social team at Arizona's Grand Canyon University (GCU) uses social listening to monitor conversations around this topic. And the insights that come out of it are two-fold.

First, the data helps the social team make informed decisions about their content, especially if they see a rise in negative sentiment.

"That tells our team we need to be really careful about the type of dining content we put out,"

says Natalie Barber, Social Media Specialist at GCU. "Or we open up our comment section for complaints."

So when they catch a spike in negative feedback, they'll reevaluate upcoming food content, asking themselves if it could strike a nerve and spark further negative chatter. If the answer's yes, they'll adjust the post or pivot altogether.

Other times, they'll wedge in an extra post to offer a solution. Like if students are voicing concerns over long lines at on-campus dining, the team might share tips on how to dodge them.

"Insights from listening help us look at our scheduled content with a new perspective," says Barber. "We'll ask ourselves: 'If I was mad at the dining options, what would my reaction be to this post?'"

The team also escalates food-related social conversations to university leadership, which has prompted positive changes. Social listening once found that there was a huge desire for a Taco Bell on campus. What did the exec team do about it? Negotiated a contract to bring Taco Bell on campus, of course.

Outcomes like that keep current students happy *and* boost interest for prospective ones. That's how social listening extends the value of social media to the entire institution — and how it helps the social team meet their no. 1 marketing objective: enrollment.

The Micro-Virality Trend

Social listening refines the art of trendjacking

Most social marketers (82%) are confident in their ability to keep up with current social media trends, according to our survey. And most of them know that they shouldn't jump on every one (though some still do… womp womp).

Nothing kills a trend faster than the inevitable dogpiling of brands. Chasing these fleeting moments of virality is both ineffective *and* inauthentic. So it's no shock that conversations around 'going viral' have become increasingly negative over the last year.
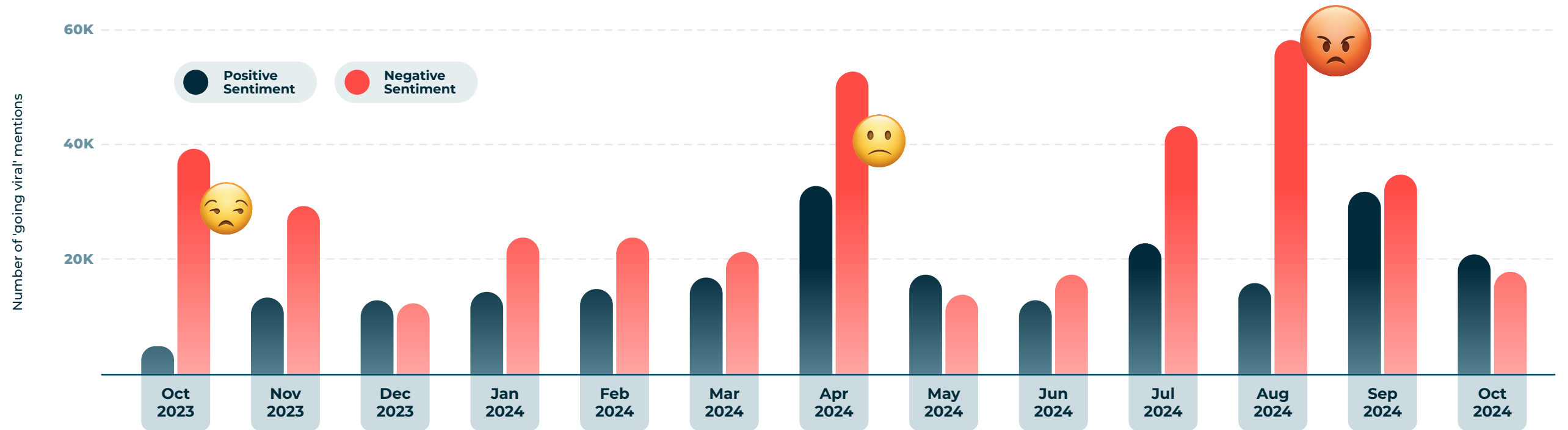
hootsuite ✔️ Say it with me: You don't need to jump on every single trend 👏

51w

Attitudes toward 'going viral' have *soured*

Sentiment around viral marketing in 2024

Number of 'going viral' mentions

- ● Positive Sentiment
- ● Negative Sentiment

Oct 2023 · Nov 2023 · Dec 2023 · Jan 2024 · Feb 2024 · Mar 2024 · Apr 2024 · May 2024 · Jun 2024 · Jul 2024 · Aug 2024 · Sep 2024 · Oct 2024

Source: Talkwalker   **Sample:** 1,119,860 mentions

But if done right, tapping into trends can be an important part of a social strategy. In fact, that's what consumers want — they *like* when brands get involved in cultural moments on social, according to our 2024 Social Media Consumer Report.

Smart social media managers ask themselves key questions to figure out if they should join in on the fun: Does the trend align with our goals, what we do, and who we are? Do we have something valuable to add? Assuming they know their own brand inside and out, those questions should have clear, easy answers.

But when it comes to timeliness and whether or not it's relevant to their audience (arguably the most critical questions), their answers are educated guesses at best — and that can be a gamble.

That's where social listening comes in.

Our survey shows that almost a third of brands now use social listening tools to stay up-to-date with current social media trends. It's a good start, but it's what you learn *after* identifying them — the analysis — that matters most. And 31% of social listeners say *analyzing* cultural trends is a primary objective for using listening tools, according to The Social Intelligence Lab's 2024 social listening report.

Real-time data from social listening helps brands understand if a trend resonates with their audience, what they're saying, and how they feel about it — as well as if a trend has reached its peak, is tapering off, or still has some runway.

Now that more organizations are turning to social listening for otherwise hard-to-come-by insights, they can make more informed decisions about which trends to embrace and which to avoid.

And when all the stars align, the most strategic brands are ready to pounce. More than a quarter of social marketers switch up their content because of cultural opportunities like memes and trends. Having a flexible content calendar is essential for being able to act fast or pivot when the right trends come along.

In 2025, 'going viral' will take on a whole new meaning. Brands will strive for smaller-scale virality — the kind that only catches fire among their own audience (versus a much broader one) — to achieve goals more effectively. This means we'll see fewer organizations blindly piggybacking on mainstream social trends, but more organizations tracking them for actionable insights.

27% of social marketers switch up their content because of cultural opportunities like memes and trends

Recommendations

1 Prioritize timeliness

Create a formal plan with guidelines that help your team decide which trends to catch and which ones to dodge. And always keep it handy — new trends can pop up overnight, but most are short-lived. So if you do choose to get in on the action, being timely is key. (You can also use social listening to check out a trend's predicted lifespan.)

2 Do a deep dive into your customers' preferences

This is how you'll find insights that lead to more tailored content — content that has the potential to gain serious traction among your audience (the targeted virality you want). Social listening tools can show you what your customers are engaging with and how they feel about it, their interests and hobbies, the platforms they're on, the trends they care about, and more. And you can go down some rabbit holes to uncover what they really want from your brand on social. We suggest dedicating time each week to dig allllll the way to the bottom.

3 Take a trend hiatus

Every so often, challenge yourself to put trend-hopping on the backburner. Social consultant and *Future Social* creator Jack Appleby would tell you to do a 30-day detox and avoid trends altogether. What should you do instead? Exactly what social listening is designed to help you do: Create original content based on insights that are unique to your brand and customers. That originality is ultimately what will help you achieve the kind of micro-virality that drives results.

PRO TIP Stay on top of the trends (and everything else) your customers care about with Hootsuite Listening.

Trend in action

Georgia State University pounces on insights to create share-worthy content

Browsing through Georgia State University's social accounts, you'll find fun, engaging content that captures student and campus life, a lot of blue, and *a lot* of Pounce (the beloved blue panther, also known as the school mascot). What you won't find? A wall of content that's driven by every major trend.

The social team at Georgia State is extremely intentional about creating content that appeals to their audience — and their audience only. Mainstream trends don't always resonate.

Their students and alumni come from all walks of life and their interests are extremely nuanced. Broad, viral trends rarely hit the mark for this diverse audience. So the challenge is finding what does, and social listening is key.

The team uses social listening to understand what matters to their community — unearthing deep insights like their favorite underground music artists and the places they like to hang out. That intel helps them create content that sticks.

But social listening also unveiled another gem of an insight: How much their students and local followers steal their posts — which the team doesn't mind one bit. In fact, they built a whole strategy around incentivizing their audience to do just that. Because when their students repurpose content and post it on their personal channels, it amplifies the original post, builds it *into* a trend, and puts Georgia State at the center of it all. The cherry on top? It happens 100% organically.

"We don't try to generate trends that attract our students. We try to be part of the trends that they make."

Cody Benson
Senior Director of Digital Strategy
Georgia State University

"At Georgia State, we don't try to generate trends that attract our students," says Cody Benson, Senior Director of Digital Strategy at Georgia State University. "We try to be part of the trends that *they* make."

They also have Pounce to lean on. The mascot represents the one thing *all* the students have in common: Georgia State — so featuring him is a surefire way to get lots of attention. It's also the easiest way to keep posts light-hearted and on-brand, the team's top considerations when deciding if an idea is worth exploring.

"Through hard work, we learned that it was super important for us to use Pounce in our content," says Benson. "People can be background actors, but they can't ever be the butt of the joke. Just let Pounce do that. He's got claws and big teeth, so nobody messes with him."

Instead of jumping on every viral trend, the Georgia State team uses social listening — and Pounce — to build content their audience will turn into trends. And the success of student posts extends back to the brand, helping the team reach their own goals of driving admissions and retention through engagement and the brand experience.

At a glance: *How Georgia State University turns insights into action into real business impact*

INSIGHT

The Georgia State team uses social listening to understand what their audience of students, alumni, and local followers care about.

ACTION

They use those insights to create content they know their audience will love, share, and amplify.

IMPACT

Students repurpose the content and generate more buzz, catapulting it to trending status within their community, and ultimately helping the Georgia State team reach their social media and business goals.

AI

The AI Content Trend

Generative AI is off probation
and officially on the team

The AI Strategy Trend

Social media strategists get
a new thought partner

The AI Content Trend

Generative AI is off probation and officially on the team

When we released last year's trends report, social marketers were just starting to experiment with ChatGPT and a limited number of other AI tools — *if* their organizations let them. At the same time, they were concerned about what AI could mean for their future as social media managers.

But in just one year, that's all changed.

Social marketers double down on generative AI in 2024

Percentage of social marketers that used AI applications for the following social media activities

● 2023   ● 2024

Activity	2023	2024	Growth
Edit and refine text	67%	80%	+19% GROWTH
Produce text from scratch	66%	77%	+17% GROWTH
Completely revise and rewrite text	37%	72%	+95% GROWTH
Develop new ideas	56%	70%	+25% GROWTH
Edit and modify images	15%	42%	+180% GROWTH
Generate images	22%	41%	+86% GROWTH
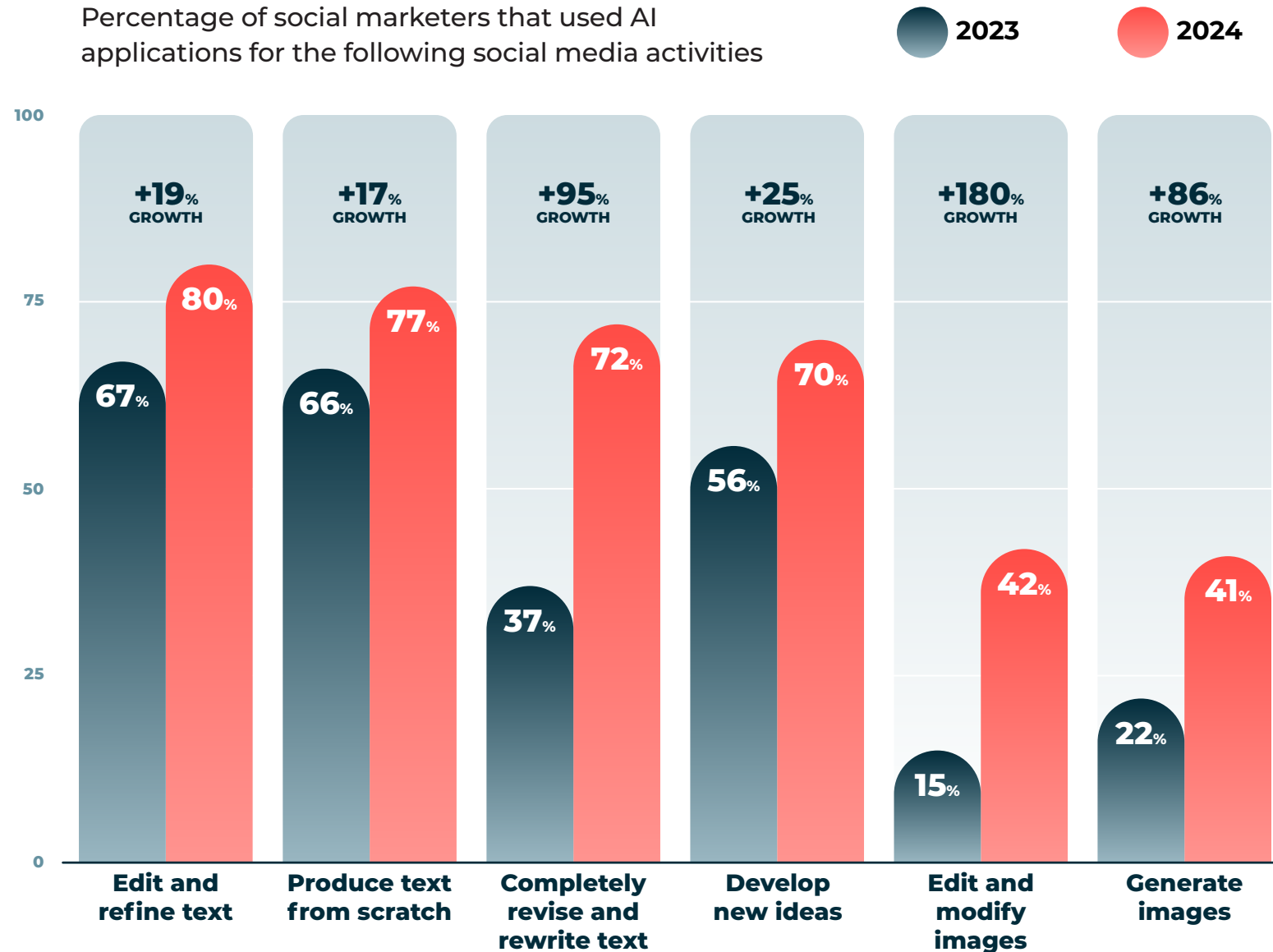
Samples: 3,843 respondents (2025), 2,865 respondents (2024)
Sources: Hootsuite Social Media Trends 2025 Survey, Hootsuite Social Media Trends 2024 Survey

Today, social marketers are adopting countless generative AI tools to help with efficiency, creativity, and impact. And what was once viewed as a threat to their jobs is now considered a major asset. In fact, 69% of marketers now see AI as revolutionary technology that can *create* job opportunities, according to AdAge's 2024 AI white paper with findings from Wakefield Research. (We love a good villain-turned-hero story!)

Most notably, use of generative AI for social media content creation shot way up.

What's fueled this growth? The perpetual need for more content — because today, an always-on social presence is vital for staying competitive and delivering ROI.

In-depth research conducted by Hootsuite and Critical Truth indicates that brands should aim to make between 48 and 72 posts per week across platforms.

Good luck posting this much *without some AI help*

Optimal posting frequency for brands by social network

Instagram	**3-5 / week**
IG Stories	**2 / day**
Facebook	**1-2 / day**
X	**2-3 / day**
LinkedIn	**1-2 / day**
Threads	**2-3 / day**
TikTok	**3-5 / week**
Pinterest	**1 / week**
Google My Business	**1 / week**

Plus, for the majority of brands, at least 60% of their content is created specifically for social media and not repurposed from other marketing materials, our survey shows.

That's A LOT of work. No wonder nearly half of social marketers say they feel burdened by the need to consistently produce creative social posts.

Generative AI has come to the rescue, with 83% of marketers saying it helps them create significantly more content than they could without it, according to HubSpot's 2024 State of Marketing & Trends Report.

AI is helping marketers with tasks like:

- Writing captions, ad copy, and scripts (in multiple languages)
- Suggesting relevant hashtags
- Generating DM replies and comments
- Creating images and short videos
- Coming up with content ideas
- Drafting outreach emails or proposals for partners and influencers

At Druva, a cloud-based data security platform, they use AI for creative brainstorming, drafting copy variations, tailoring posts more effectively, and editing images. Derek Koehler, Senior Social Media Strategist at Druva, claims it's one of their not-so-secret weapons for staying agile.

"I've noticed at a high level how my day-to-day has changed," Koehler says. "I'm a one-man band, so whenever I can get my head above water on the day-to-day activities, it allows me more time to explore trends and new features."

Every team we spoke to for this report had similar feelings around AI, each with their own guidelines — formal or informal — on how and when to use it for content creation. (Always adding a human touch was the most common protocol — music to our ears.)
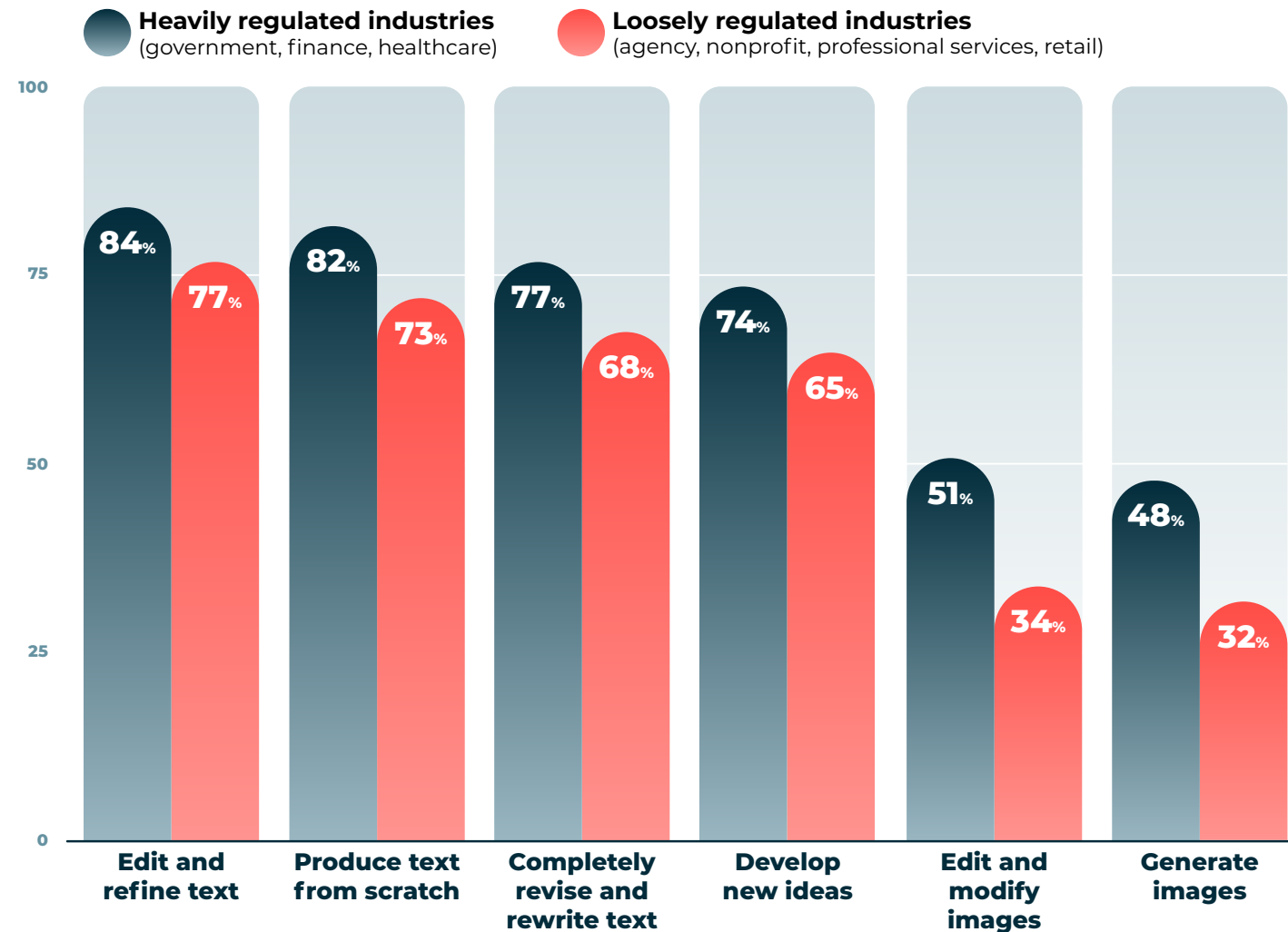
Even organizations in heavily regulated indus-tries like government, finance, and healthcare have hopped on the AI bandwagon.

And get this: These industries now use AI *more* than loosely regulated industries, which is surprising given their strict compliance rules, regulations, and privacy policies. This time last year, the opposite was true. So the swap says it all — AI for content creation has become stan-dard practice in social media marketing.

In 2025, using generative AI to create social content at scale will be table stakes. A necessity, not an option. A staple, not a novelty. A fixture, not an experiment. And it certainly won't be an advantage. Organizations will continue to integrate AI extensively into their strategies and workflows — and those that don't will get left in the dust.

Social marketers in regulated industries *embrace AI*

Percentage of organizations that use AI for the following activities by level of regulation severity

● **Heavily regulated industries**
(government, finance, healthcare)

● **Loosely regulated industries**
(agency, nonprofit, professional services, retail)

	Edit and refine text	Produce text from scratch	Completely revise and rewrite text	Develop new ideas	Edit and modify images	Generate images
Heavily regulated	84%	82%	77%	74%	51%	48%
Loosely regulated	77%	73%	68%	65%	34%	32%

Recommendations

1 Train your AI tools

One of the biggest challenges with AI-produced copy is making it sound authentic and on-brand. But it is possible to train your AI tools so they get better at it. Here are a few tips for training generative AI (but never skip human reviews and approvals!):

- Try using the same tools repeatedly so they learn your style and voice over time
- Supply your company's style guide to align AI with brand standards and tone
- Provide website and blog content to help with accuracy of promotional messaging
- Specify preferred content formats and structures to maintain consistency
- For AI image generators, upload brand-approved visual elements and photos so they grasp your aesthetic and can generate on-brand variations

2 Play around with new (and old) AI features

With constant AI advancements and new tools and features popping up regularly, AI exploration should be part of your daily routine. This blog gives you the rundown on how to use AI for social content creation and the top AI-powered tools to help you do it. Test them out — this should be fun, not tedious — to decide if they should become part of your tech stack in 2025.

3 Add 'AI chops' to your hiring must-haves

With AI now woven into social marketers' day-to-day, it should be a mandatory skill — for new *and* current members of your social team. List AI competencies as key qualifications in your job descriptions, look out for AI expertise in resumes, and ask specific questions about AI familiarity and experience in job interviews.

PRO TIP **Embrace the new normal** with OwlyWriter AI that whips up social posts in seconds and saves you hours of work.

Trend in action

AI becomes the "middle man" for effective image creation

Using AI to create images for social media can be a huge help, especially for teams with limited budgets and resources. But no brand wants their AI-generated images to look, well, AI-generated.

At Hootsuite, we've been using one particular approach to combat this — and it's working well. So we thought: Let's pull back the curtain to show our readers what that looks like (no gatekeeping!).

Our design team has implemented what they like to call the "sandwich" approach, which involves starting and ending the process with humans, and bringing in AI somewhere in the middle.

Take our Social Media Consumer Report, for example. To convey the idea that "relationships are worth more than gold," the team wanted to

> bitly That drip, tho.
> 34w Reply
>
> hootsuite ✔ Isn't it gorg 🤩
> 34w Reply ...

create 3D objects and emojis that looked like they were dripping in gold paint.

They knew that to really nail the aesthetic they envisioned and stay on brand, AI wouldn't do the trick — at least not on its own. So they hired a 3D artist (shoutout Ryan Bechtel!) to establish the visual style.

Ryan created a handful of assets, including the campaign's hero image — the golden thumbs-up emoji (or "like") — which then served as the reference point for AI to generate additional visuals in the same style.

Once generated, those images got some human touch-ups before making their way into the report, social posts and ads, and other campaign assets.

Best of all? Those images received a lot of love from our audience.

Plus, we established a repeatable approach that we've used for many projects since, including this very report:

- **Humans** (our brilliant creative team and video producers) came up with the idea to represent 'agility' with an airborne blast effect
- **AI** helped us create mock-ups for proof of concept
- We did a photoshoot with **real people** to bring it all to life (since rendering people remains a challenge for AI)

AI's ability to craft images will continue to improve, and as it does, our approach will likely evolve. But right now, having a balance between human and robot is absolutely essential for AI-generated images, just like it is for AI-generated text.

"AI is a tool to facilitate getting information and ideas," says Gianfranco Valentini, Senior Graphic Designer at Hootsuite. "But it's not a magic wand."

Yet.

"AI is a tool to facilitate getting information and ideas, but it's not a magic wand."

Gianfranco Valentini, *Senior Graphic Designer,* Hootsuite

The AI Strategy Trend

Social media strategists get a new thought partner

From developing new ideas to drafting captions and producing images, it's clear that generative AI has reshaped the way social pros create content for social media.

Also fascinating? The speed at which we're seeing the use of AI make its way up to higher-level strategic roles.
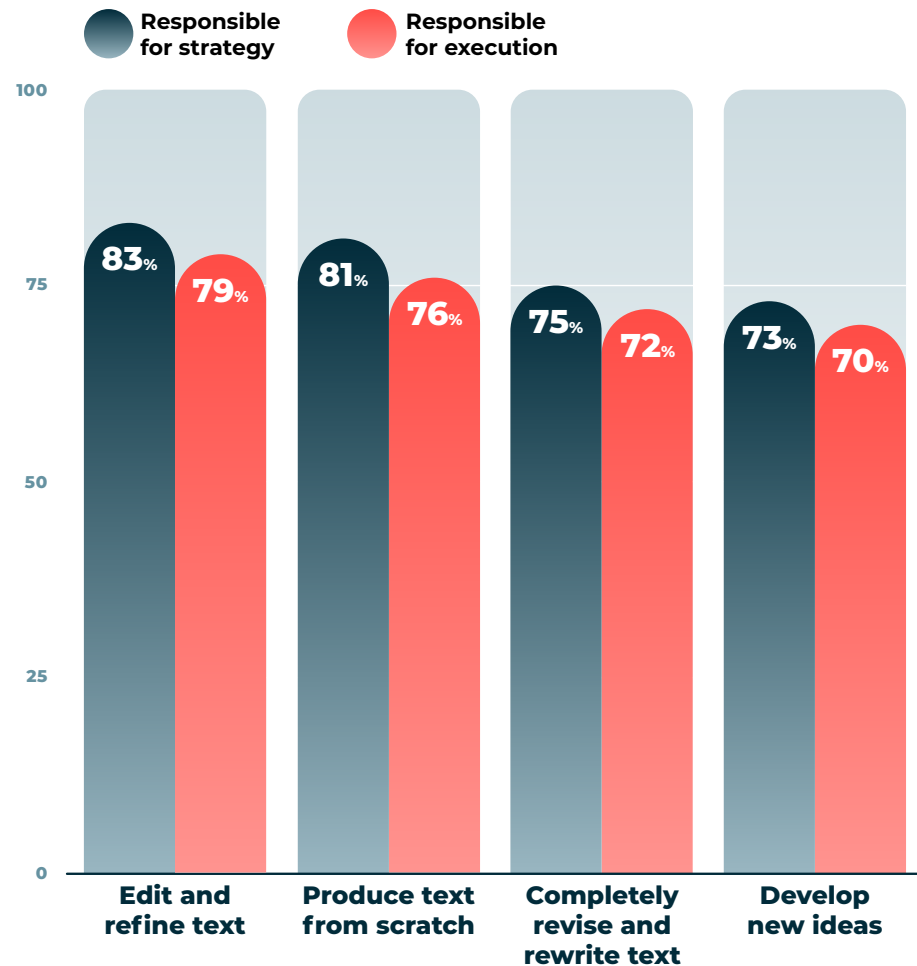
More than three-quarters of those only responsible for social strategy (mainly C-level execs and VPs, according to our survey) report using AI for social media activities. And here's the kicker: They're already using it *more* than those who do execution.

Social media planners
lean on AI the most

Percentage of social marketers that use AI for the following activities by role/responsibility

● Responsible for strategy   ● Responsible for execution

	Edit and refine text	Produce text from scratch	Completely revise and rewrite text	Develop new ideas
Responsible for strategy	83%	81%	75%	73%
Responsible for execution	79%	76%	72%	70%

Samples: 3,864 respondents
Sources: Hootsuite Social Media Trends 2025 Survey

It begs the question: How has AI use accelerated so quickly beyond content and image creation into strategy? For starters, new AI features have been integrated into the tools that strategists are using daily to analyze data, manage projects, and track performance — and they've adopted these features at warp-speed.

It's not surprising, then, to see social strategists turn to AI to expedite creative brainstorming, streamline campaign planning and forecasting, optimize content strategies, and manage budgets and resources.

AI has become the efficiency and thought partner they never knew they needed.

"I feel like we're able to do even more now," says Adair LeBlanc, Manager of Digital Content at Ochsner Health, the leading nonprofit healthcare provider in the Gulf South. "I don't know what we did before having AI tools because I still feel so busy and I have these tools to help with my workflow."

Almost half of marketing leaders have invested in AI tools for their team, new Hubspot research shows. This got us wondering: What do these leaders and social teams have in common?

Turns out, social teams that use AI the most are also the ones that update their strategy most frequently.
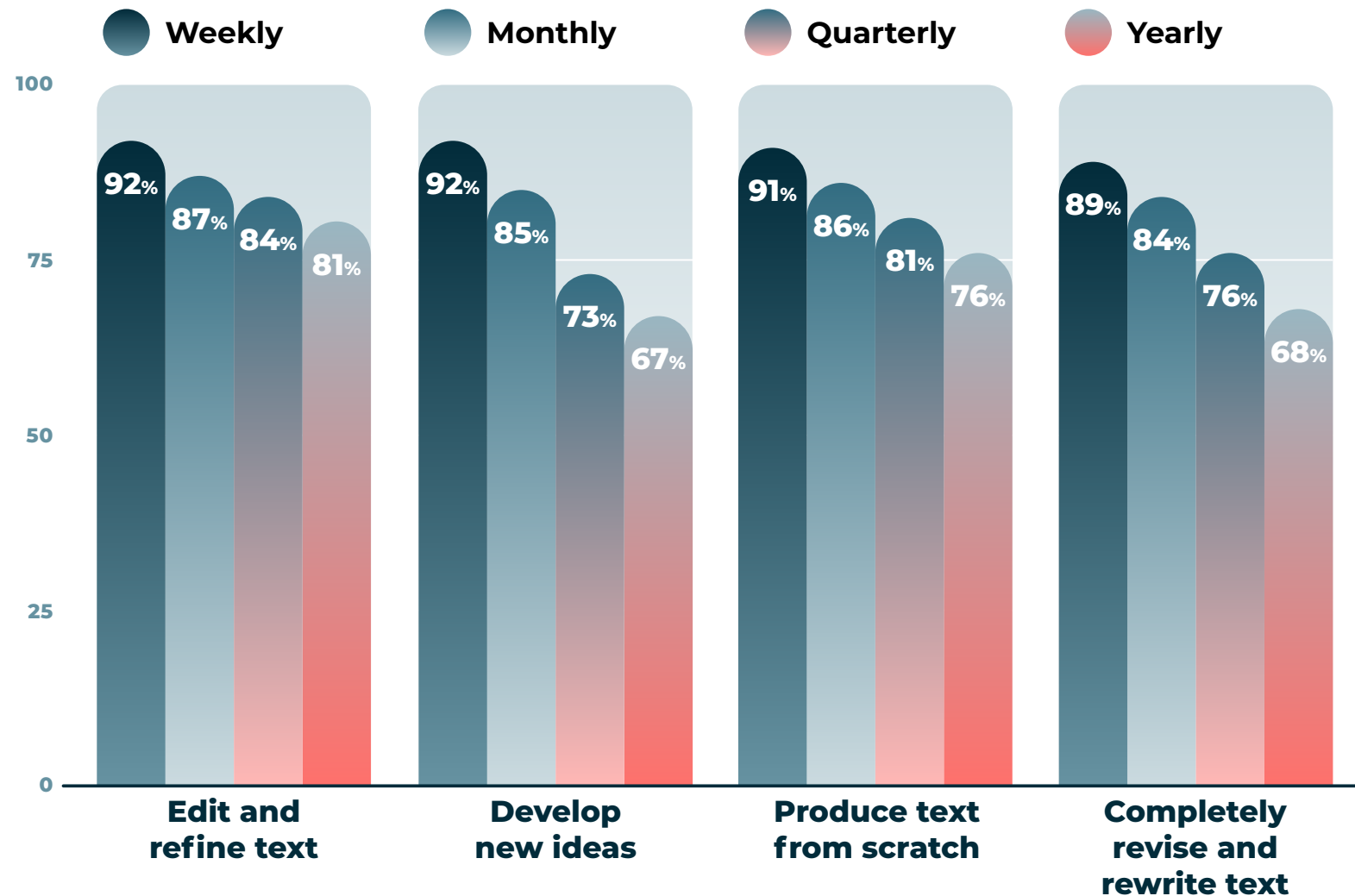
Of course, there are countless reasons why an organization might make frequent updates to their strategy. They could be in an industry where the competitive landscape shifts quickly, or have an audience that's particularly receptive to trendy content. They could just be really good at incorporating campaign learnings into their strategy or modifying their approach every time a platform gets an algorithm update.

Agile strategists lead the AI charge

Percentage of organizations that use AI for the following activities by frequency of social strategy updates

● **Weekly**   ● **Monthly**   ● **Quarterly**   ● **Yearly**

Edit and refine text
- Weekly: 92%
- Monthly: 87%
- Quarterly: 84%
- Yearly: 81%

Develop new ideas
- Weekly: 92%
- Monthly: 85%
- Quarterly: 73%
- Yearly: 67%

Produce text from scratch
- Weekly: 91%
- Monthly: 86%
- Quarterly: 81%
- Yearly: 76%

Completely revise and rewrite text
- Weekly: 89%
- Monthly: 84%
- Quarterly: 76%
- Yearly: 68%

Whatever the reason, one thing's for sure: Organizations that prioritize agility in their strategies also prioritize AI use across their social teams.

And it makes sense. Think back to our social listening and content experimentation trends. We've seen that AI solutions boost the ability to gather valuable insights, deliver more impactful creative work, and execute on strategic pivots faster and more effectively than ever.

In 2025, social teams that invest in building out their strategic AI capabilities alongside their tactical ones will drive efficiency and insights that enhance marketing effectiveness and open the door to new opportunities.

Samples: 3,864 respondents
Sources: Hootsuite Social Media Trends 2025 Survey

Recommendations

1   Start with the basics

New to using AI for strategic purposes? That's okay. Just start small.

First, pinpoint specific strategic tasks where AI would make a difference — maybe you could use help analyzing data, segmenting customers, or drafting briefs.

Next, leverage the AI features that are built right into your current marketing platforms. Many are great for things like transcribing sales calls, summarizing big chunks of text, analyzing data, and generating insights.

Then, try implementing AI in small pilot projects to test effectiveness. For your next competitor analysis report, for example, you could ask AI to analyze competitors' social profiles to find unmet customer needs (so you can swoop in to solve their problems, of course).

With just a bit of AI experience, you'll muster up the confidence to take your AI experimentation to the next level. You got this.

2   Become a prompt-writing pro

The key to getting great results from AI is mastering the prompt, or the instructions you provide to get a response. Here are a few beginner-friendly tips for getting more precise, creative outputs:

1. **Be clear and specific.** Don't be vague. AI needs specificity to deliver strong responses.

2. **Give context.** Share details like the setting, audience, and tone.

3. **Use examples.** This helps AI to better understand the context.

4. **Include requirements.** Ask for the length, format, and number of variations you want.

5. **Adjust and refine.** Tweak your prompts to improve output.

Want a head start? Check out our sample marketing prompts for ChatGPT. They're yours for the taking — just be sure to modify the specifics to suit your needs.

Trend in action

AI turns a sea of scribbles into a pro presentation — and sparks strategic exploration

At Hootsuite, we're *all in* on using AI to enhance our work and workflows — our Marketing VP is actually pretty passionate about it. So after the marketing leadership team returned from a planning offsite, we were eager to know how they incorporated AI into their sessions.

They had ChatGPT turn pages of scattered notes into concise presentation slides in seconds — which inspired us to think of other ways organizations could use AI for their own social media planning.

For example, imagine attending a kick-off meeting to discuss an upcoming campaign. You review your post-mortem from last year, discuss the objectives for this year, talk timelines, and throw around some ideas. And because you're the social media strategist, you come away tasked with drafting the creative brief.

You've already got an AI-generated meeting transcript, so you start by having your GPT of choice summarize the main takeaways. Then, you pair that summary with a previous creative brief to give additional context, and add a few more prompts of your own. Next thing you know, AI pumps out a brand new brief that includes:

- Campaign goals and KPIs
- Insights from a quick analysis of audience and customer data
- Unique angles and approaches based on a scan of competitor campaigns
- Project requirements, deliverables, and timelines
- Creative thought-starters, best practices, and benchmarks

AI might not get that brief to 100%, but even getting it halfway there can save a ton of time and effort. (Plus, getting from "halfway" to "most of the way" can be as simple as refining your prompts with additional info and running a few more iterations.)

Approaching strategic work with this mindset can transform your ability to think quickly, plan effectively, and turn insights into action faster.

We're inspired by what we've seen from our leaders and look forward to seeing what you do next with all the possibilities these AI tools unlock.

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SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS 2025

Acknowledgements

Big thanks to all the wise and talented owls who contributed to this year's report…

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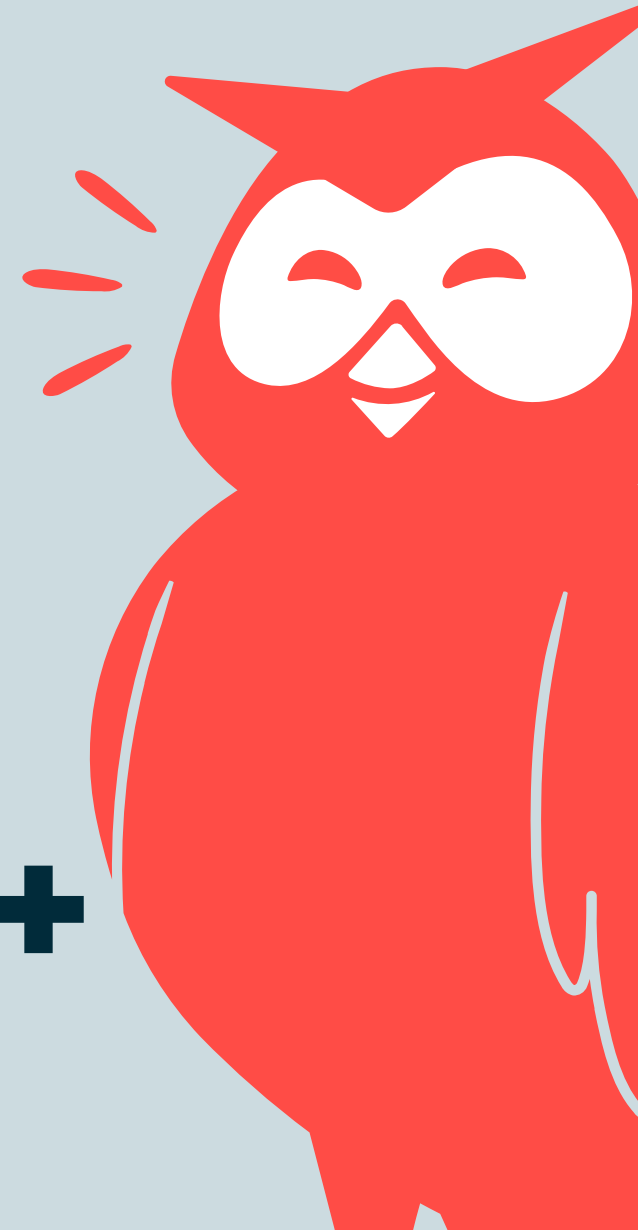
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