

Building

Next Generation

Social Teams

The 2025 Sprout Social Index™ Edition XX

Tier 1 Support

Generate by AI Assis

Insert F

Engagements
775 ↗ 43%

Brand Campaign

@customerservice can I adjust the dates of my stay?

Yes, what is your reservation number?

Social media drives business forward

Brands exist in the context of online culture. Marketers need to help leaders understand why that matters.

Social media is the epicenter of culture. What happens on social informs all other media—news programs, late night TV shows, print media and other digital channels. Its influence on consumers is undeniable. When brands go viral, they report record-setting revenue growth. Some CEOs even mention the impact of social in earnings calls and shareholder letters. But it's getting harder to earn (and keep) consumer attention as platforms become more saturated.



Brand content doesn't exist in a vacuum or even in the traditional context of where products are bought and sold. It shows up on consumers' feeds alongside content from other brands, news outlets, creators, influencers, friends and family. Social marketers are burnt out trying to occupy (and compete for) space. From keeping up with the latest trends to staying in the know about world events, teams feel pressure to be "on" 24/7.

The vastness of social and online culture presents a massive opportunity for brands. But some leadership teams still view social as a risk. Knowledge gaps between social teams and executives persist—and closing them is non-negotiable. **Marketers need to help leaders understand what social can do, and that real business risk lies in not investing in your brand's presence.**

In the 20th edition of The Sprout Social Index™, we surveyed over 4,000 consumers, 900 social practitioners and 300 marketing leaders across the US, UK, Canada and Australia. We also sat down with an experienced collective of social marketers to form the Index Council. These thought leaders weighed in on and interpreted the data we collected to help shape our narrative.

In this report, we uncover how social teams can build memorable brands, and examine the role social insights and AI play in maximizing the value of social and building more sophisticated teams.

What marketing leaders should stop and start in 2025

Stop

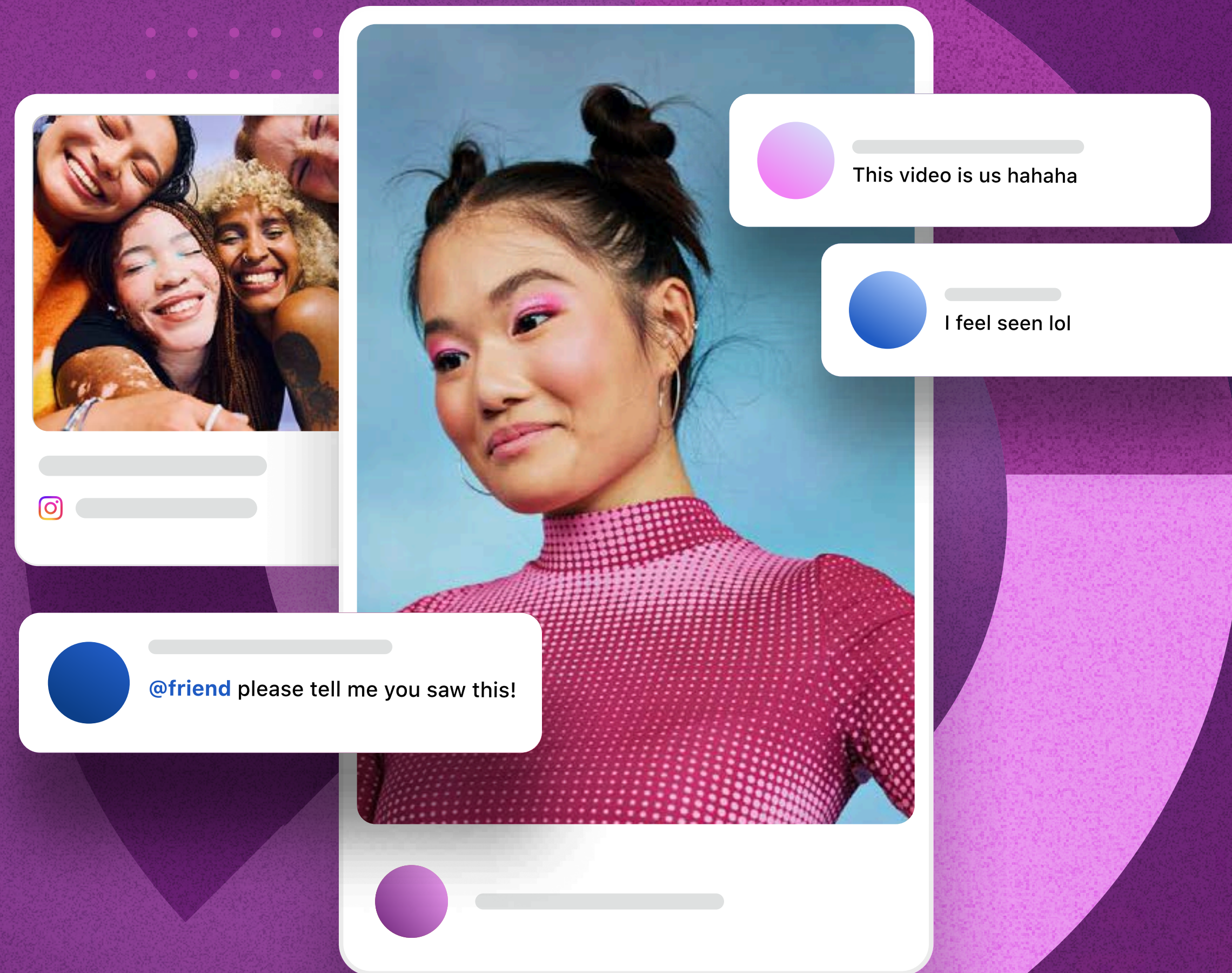
- ⊗ Dictating a social media posting cadence
- ⊗ Pushing social teams to jump on too many trends
- ⊗ Using AI to replace creativity
- ⊗ Implementing too many AI tools and trainings at once
- ⊗ Expecting social marketers to be "on" 24/7

Start

- ✓ Trusting your social team knows your online audience best
- ✓ Facilitating faster approvals
- ✓ Supporting original content creation
- ✓ Encouraging your social team to craft a distinct brand voice
- ✓ Empowering social marketers to tell compelling data stories that tie their impact to business goals

What it takes to create a memorable brand

Social moves at lightning speed, leaving many teams with whiplash. But social marketers don't need to recreate every trend. Memorable brands are born through original content, meaningful community engagement and deep audience knowledge.



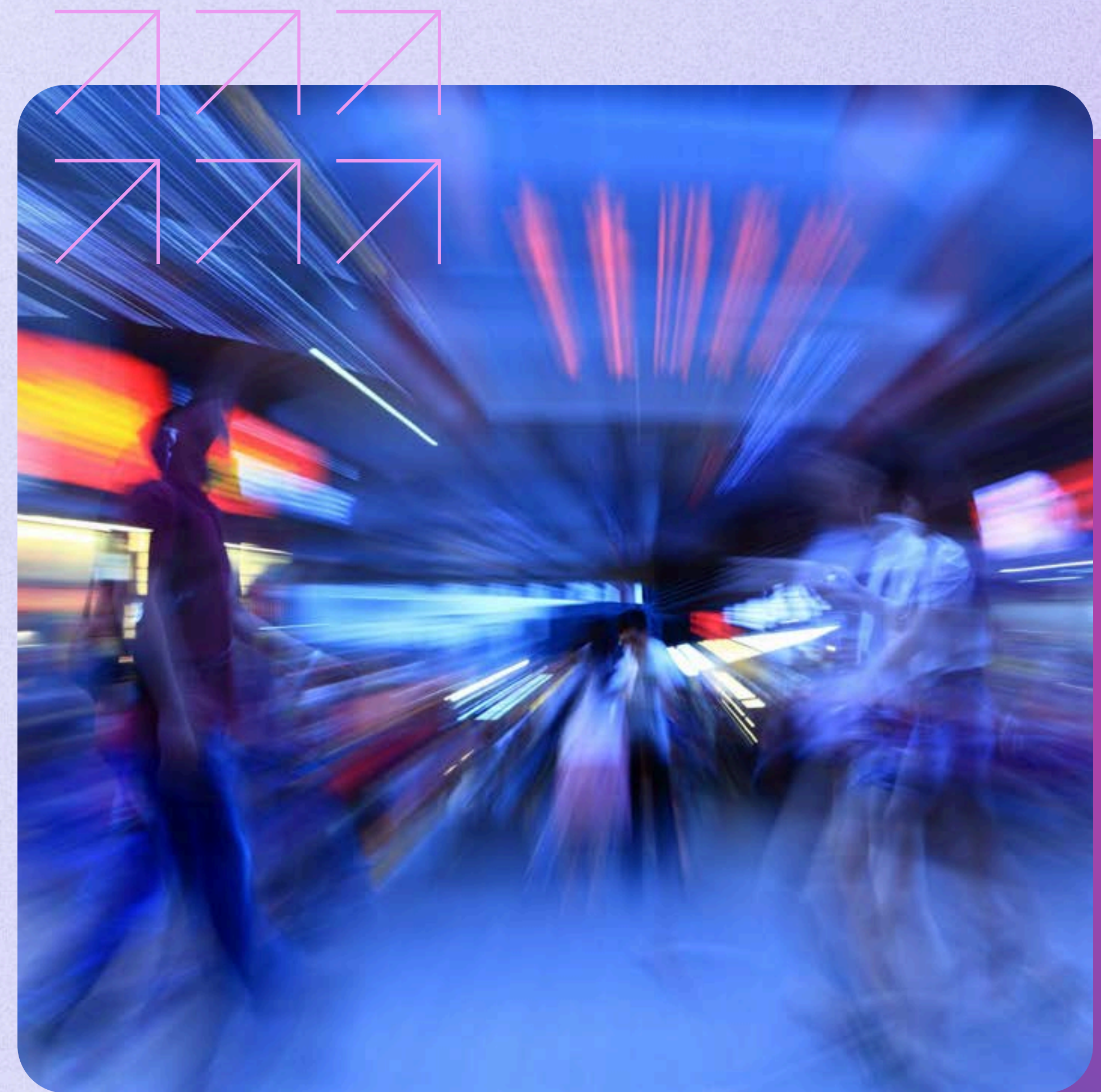
Social media is where culture is born

Social is the first place consumers (and subsequently marketers) go to learn about the latest trends and cultural moments.

Yet, hyper-personalized algorithms mean everyone experiences social differently—even when they use the same platforms. The trends, creators or content formats they're exposed to may be completely different from others. As much as social contributes to shared online culture, it's also incredibly niche.

Marketers feel pressure to keep up with every rapidly-changing corner of social, constantly cataloging trends and formats to recreate for their brand. Almost all believe social content must keep up with online culture, and that, in order for their brand to seem relevant, they must be chronically online.

98% of social media practitioners agree that social content has to keep up with online trends and culture





Keeping up with every facet of social culture simultaneously is impossible, but many marketers feel forced to try for the sake of delivering successful content, even in the face of burnout.

94% of social media practitioners agree they have to be chronically online to work in social media

Interestingly, consumers largely agree social teams need to be on the pulse of online culture, but are split on whether brands should jump on trends. Around half say original content is what makes their favorite brands stand out on social. Almost all admit they want brands to understand online culture, even if they don't participate.

This highlights a disconnect between what marketers think consumers want, and what they actually do. Instead of planning content calendars months in advance or posting multiple times a day on the same network, marketers should spend more time listening to and engaging with their audience. Brands should use trends with intention, but make original content the bedrock of their strategy.

Ask the Index Council

Decide if a trend is right

“Social marketers need to give themselves more space not to jump on trending moments. You should be willing to take a chance on some. But don’t just do it for the metrics bump—do it because you think it will genuinely resonate with your community.”



Arielle Berlinsky
Director of Marketing,
Movement Strategy

Be mindfully online

“Social media users and marketers need healthy social media boundaries. Marketers have a responsibility to lead by example, and know how to be chronically online without sacrificing their lives offline. But, also, marketers shoulder more responsibility when it comes to understanding the origin of trends. They need to fully understand the context before participating in a trend or their content could reflect poorly on their brand.”



Tameka Bazile
Social and Content Strategist,
formerly of TIME

Focus on the quality of your output

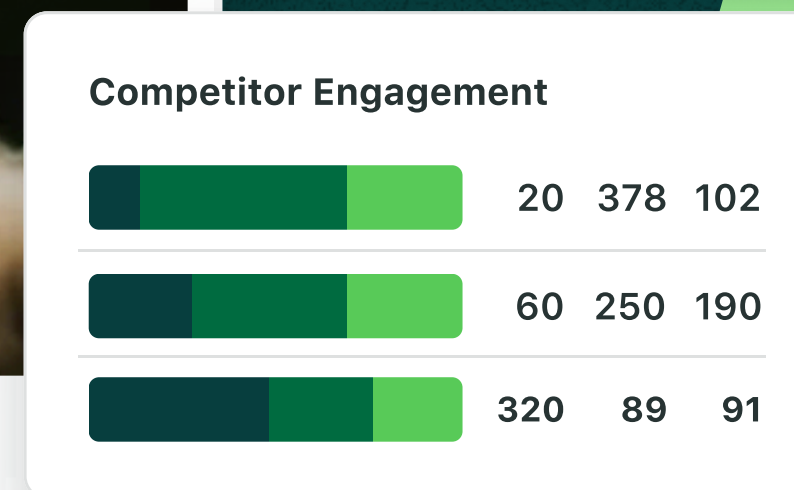
“So many brands are setting wildly ambitious publishing goals. Cadence doesn’t directly correlate with community growth. Content calendars are overrated. You can have structure and know what your pillars are, but you also need to leave room for creatives to be creative. Create for your consumer, not your C-suite.”



Kendall Dickieson
Social Media and Influencer
Consultant to brands like Graza,
Zab's and more

Does leadership *fully* understand the impact of social?

Executives say they grasp the impact of social media, but many teams are skeptical. Social marketers report resource gaps and lack of buy-in that leave teams feeling constrained. Understanding which KPIs and data stories resonate with leaders can help social teams make the case for meaningful investment.



Gaining leadership's buy-in

More than half (57%) of marketing leaders attest their executives completely trust their social team—this rises to 74% among executives themselves. Around three-quarters of marketing leaders already say organic and paid social marketing are top priorities for their organization, behind only content and website marketing. But social practitioners question if this is really true as they struggle to procure resources and approvals, even as they hit or surpass their KPIs. In 2024, 92% of leaders said their teams were on track to reach annual goals.

What social marketers wish their executives understood

- 1 **Stronger collaboration is needed across departments**
- 2 **Better technology is required to track performance and impact**
- 3 **Social content needs to be audience-centric**

What social teams say

“Executives need to trust that their social teams have done the research, and know when hopping on a trend will work or not (vs. just vetoing the idea).”

“Sometimes executives don’t realize that they are the ones sinking money and resources into ideas that won’t have legs.”

“Educating stakeholders about how different demographics behave on social is a big challenge. It’s amazing that your algorithm looks that way, or that a certain strategy worked for another brand. But this is what our data shows.”

What marketing leaders say

“Executives are listening more, but we still have work to do to get them to see social professionals as experts.”

“Social teams are still getting ‘suggestions.’ Executives think about the content they interact with instead of the content their audience wants.”

“As marketers, a huge part of our role is validating our own jobs and packaging data in a way that’s easy to understand. As a marketing leader, part of your job is to be the midpoint between execs and the social team.”

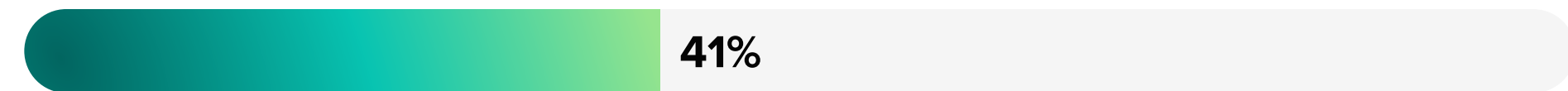
Almost half of individual contributors say their executives only somewhat understand the value of social media, and another 41% report their greatest fear is company leadership not trusting them to publish content that'll perform best. **Some social marketers are unsure what it'll take to get executives to see the company-wide potential of social and what their brand could be if only they had more effective tools.** Social has changed so much in such a short period of time—its full potential isn't apparent if you're not living it every day.

Social media marketers' greatest fears

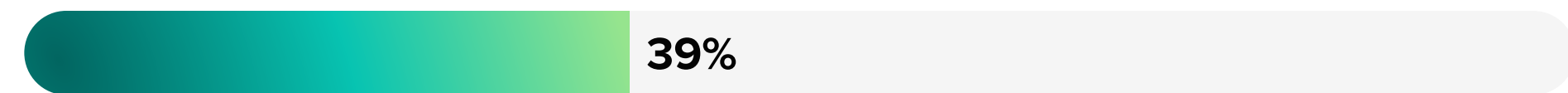
Audiences shifting their social usage to private/closed networks



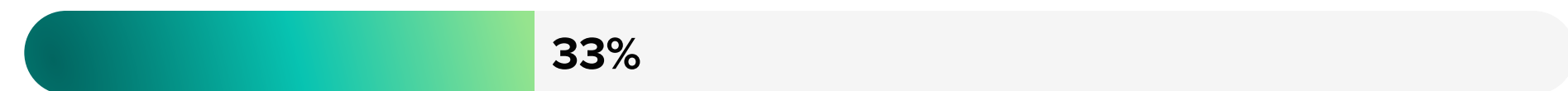
Company leadership not trusting my team to determine what content performs best on social



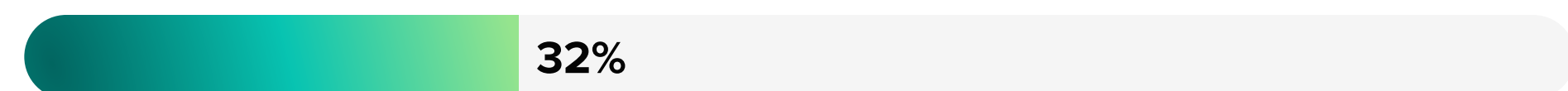
Managing a brand crisis on social



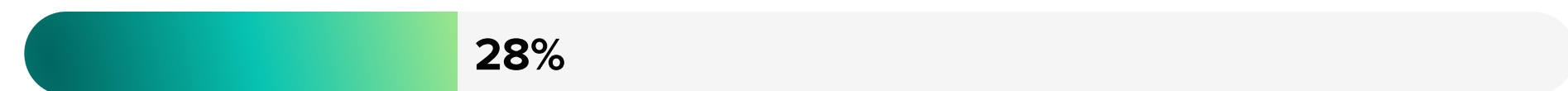
Burnout and creative fatigue



Getting replaced by AI / Getting laid off because my organization doesn't understand the value of my role



Lack of a career path



The most critical KPIs & making the case for more resources

Leaders need to see more proof that their team's social media strategies are working. When social teams request more resources, leaders want them to make their case with data. Metrics like engagement, audience growth and volume of social interactions are most likely to resonate.

These KPIs contrast with how social teams measure success internally, which marketers should keep in mind as they head into discussions with leadership. There's also an opportunity for social teams to educate executives on the insights social offers beyond standard performance metrics, like audience insights gleaned from social listening and competitive research.

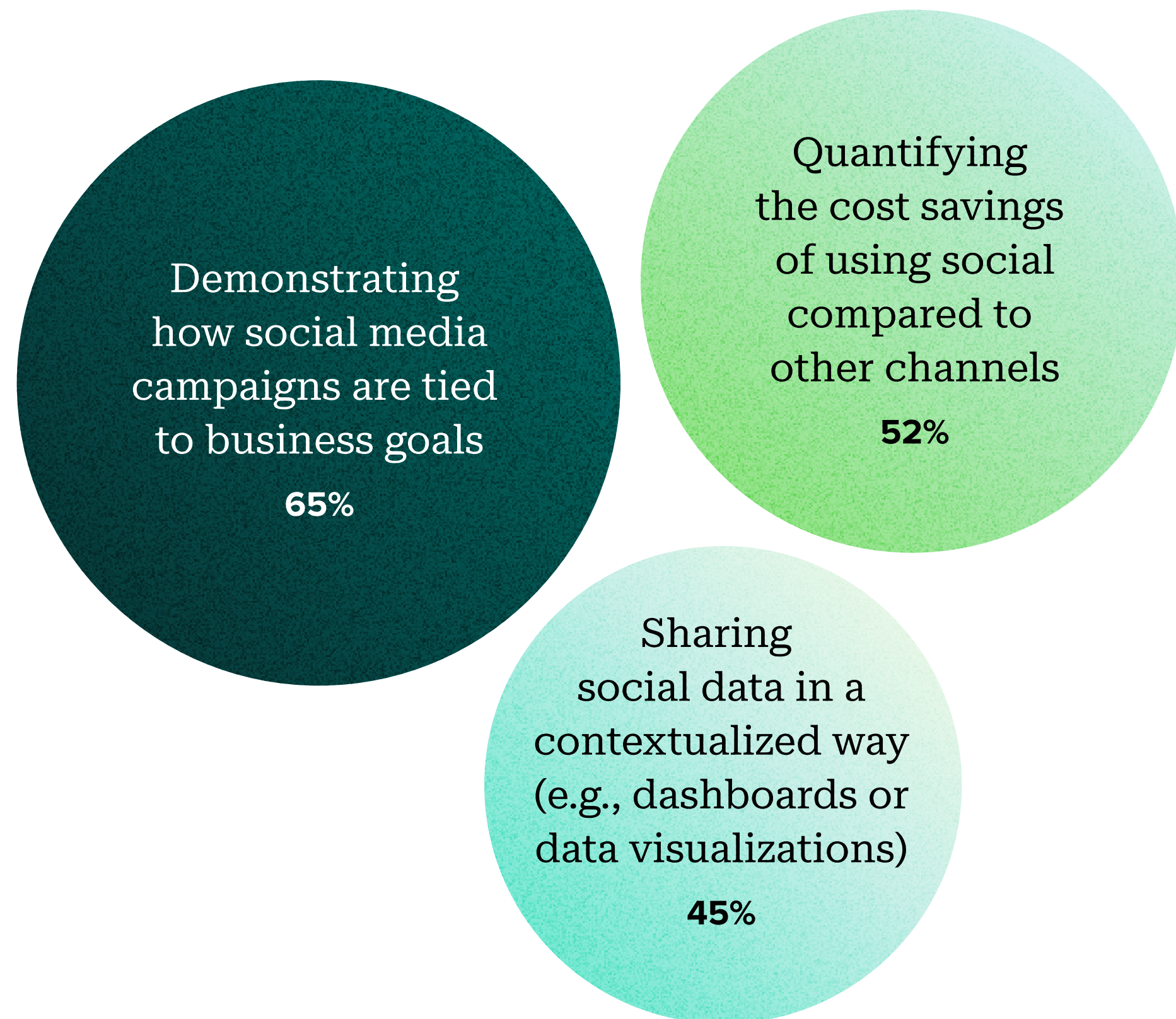
How marketing leaders will measure social media success in 2025

- 1 Overall engagement
- 2 Audience growth
- 3 Social interactions (i.e., comments)
- 4 Web visitors
- 5 Share of voice

How social teams measure success internally

- 1 Production efficiency
- 2 Volume of positive feedback from leadership
- 3 Number of teams who use social data to inform their work
- 4 Number of team members who share content to amplify brand reach
- 5 Success rate securing more budget

What marketing leaders say is crucial for securing social investment



Almost any executive business case needs to answer the same questions: Will it grow the bottom line? Will it minimize expenses? Will it mitigate risk? Social is no exception. Raw data alone is insufficient. Practitioners need to zero-in on the metrics that matter most and use data storytelling skills to weave them together.

Once marketing leaders feel armed with the right metrics, they're confident in their ability to convey the value of social company-wide. Over 97% at least somewhat agree they do an effective job of communicating the social team's value and the value of social media in general to their organization. This underscores the importance of social teams forging strong relationships with leaders, and learning to translate data into a language they understand.

Ask the Index Council

Think of executives like an internal audience

“Treat each executive like a consumer when delivering data. Ask yourself: What data does this consumer care about most? Tailor your reports to your audience. Build trust with executives because, even if you do everything right, social isn’t always attributable.”



Brianna Doe

Founder, Verbatim Agency, Host,
Stop the Scroll Podcast

Don't shy away from hard conversations

“Budget shouldn’t be a dirty word. Speak plain language that ties social media performance back to business results. Keep it simple and focus on: 1) bringing the receipts, 2) positioning social as a laboratory for testing and learning, and 3) sharing the cost of not being part of the conversation.”



Josh Rangel

Senior Director, Social, Ogilvy

Opportunity cost is a powerful metric

“We’ve had a lot of success benchmarking ourselves with other brands. When executives see that we’re not on the same level as our competition, it becomes tangible. It translates to more investment and wins for us.”

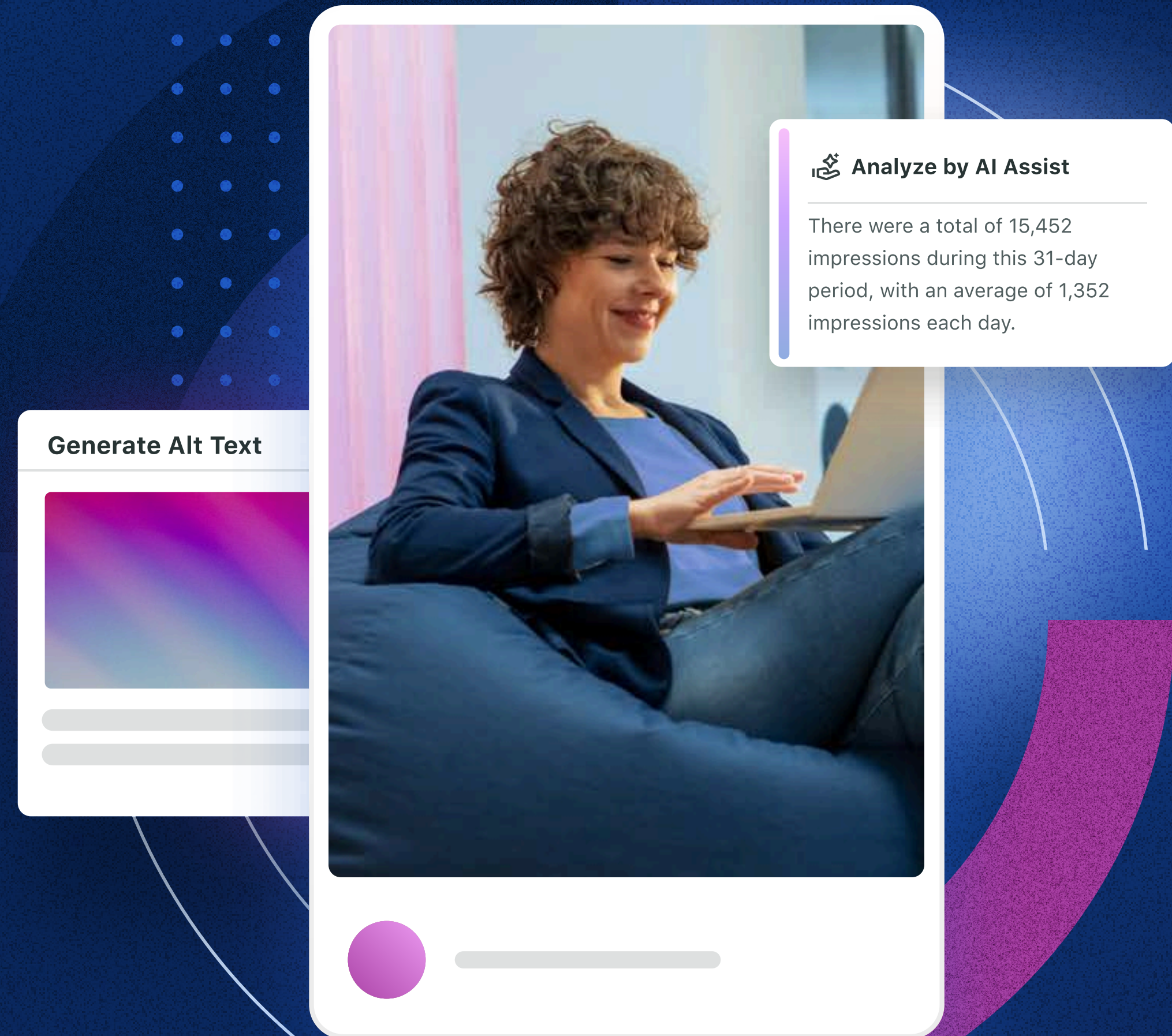


Allie Coulter

Enterprise Social Media Department
Head, Honda

AI moves from shiny new toy to absolute necessity

A few years ago, most marketers were only scratching the surface of AI's capabilities. Today, almost all teams are using it to some extent, and it's emerged as a hero in the battle against creative burnout. In 2025, it could be the key to finally unlocking highly specialized roles.



Making the most of AI tools

Marketing departments across industries have gone all-in on AI. While half of marketing leaders say they'll spend 2025 maximizing the AI tools they've already purchased, 48% are keen to invest in even more.

C-level executives are more likely to strongly agree with the need to adopt AI in day-to-day work, illustrating how the push for AI implementation is coming from the top down. Some marketing leaders feel their teams don't have the bandwidth to dedicate to experimenting with new tools or workflows—rewiring processes with AI in mind can be a full-time job on its own.

This push and pull is something executives need to be aware of when buying new tools. Just because a vendor offers “powerful AI” doesn't mean it's easy to adopt, makes sense for your team or integrates with your existing tech stack.

97% of marketing leaders say it's crucial marketers know how to use AI in their work





The solution to creative fatigue

Almost half of social practitioners report the same amount of creative fatigue as a year ago, while over one-third feel even more. Most individual contributors are on board with AI as a resource to battle this persistent creative burnout, with 53% reporting they're very confident in its ability to help.

93% of social practitioners believe AI is a tool that can help creative fatigue

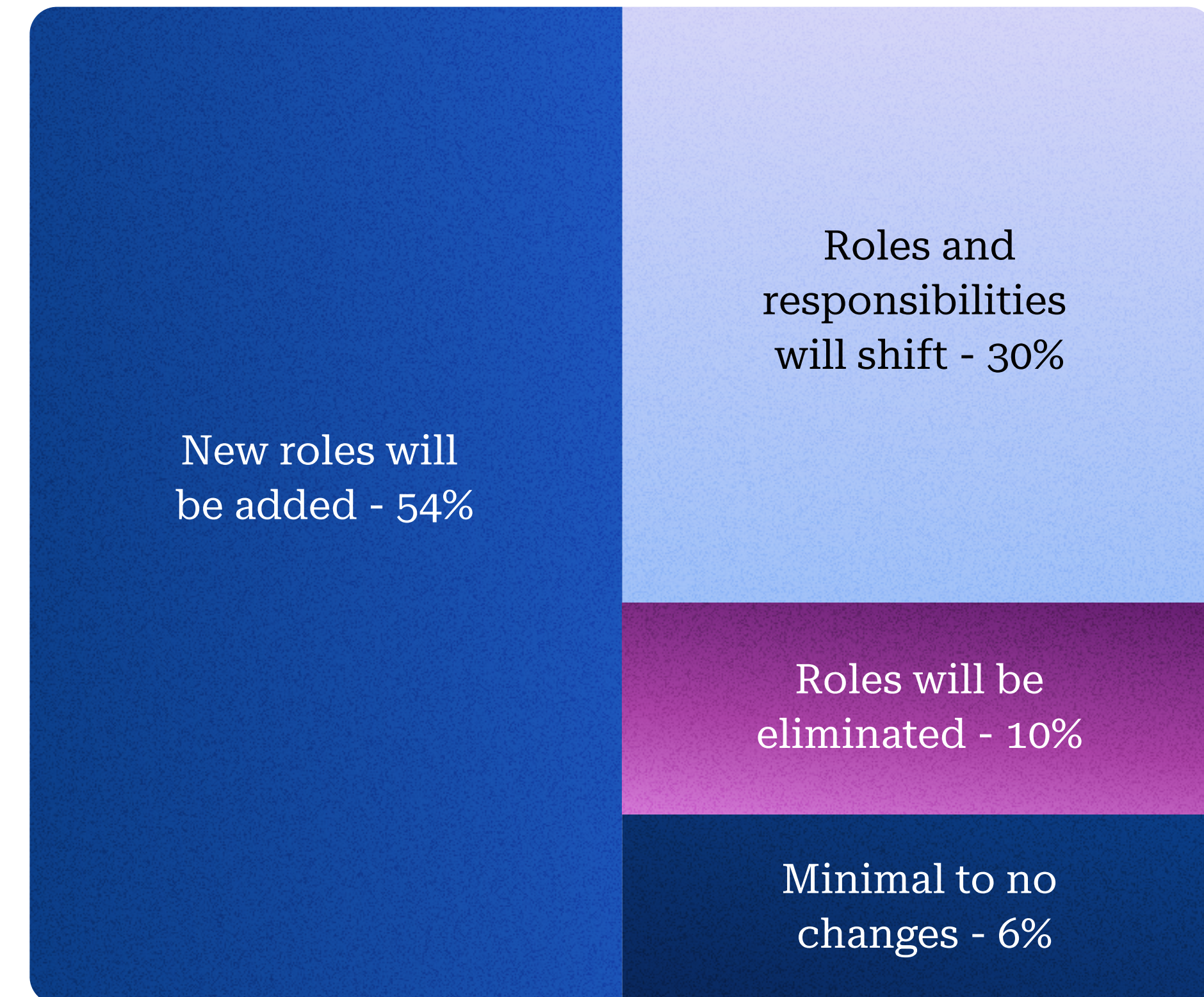
But AI isn't something that should be used to create content from start-to-finish. Almost one-third of individual contributors fear AI is likely to replace them. Instead, it should be an efficiency tool, giving them more time to do things that require brain power and creative thinking. It should bear the mental load of monitoring social, completing basic tasks and performing intensive data analysis.

Could AI be the key to highly specialized teams?

Social teams are finally growing. Almost 86% of marketing leaders anticipate hiring at least two new team members in 2025. These leaders overwhelmingly agree AI won't eliminate social media roles. In fact, 54% believe **AI is what'll empower them to grow their teams moving forward.**

That growth could mean more than just headcount. When asked which skills social marketers should hone in 2025, individual contributors and managers agree: specialization. Many of the top-reported skills tie back to what teams need to produce more original content. They mirror emerging job titles, like Social Media Analyst and Social Media Project Manager.

How marketing leaders say AI will impact social teams



The social media skills practitioners and marketing leaders think are most important for 2025

Functional skills



Social listening

Developing queries and analyzing social conversations to identify trends



Data analysis and storytelling

Communicating performance metrics to stakeholders



Creative direction

Writing briefs for other teams to reference when developing content or campaigns

“Soft” skills



Project management

Coordinating campaigns across teams and timelines



Brand voice development

Crafting and maintaining a consistent tone and personality



Partnership building

Collaborating with other brands for joint campaigns

Though AI can scale these skills, they can't fully be taken over. AI can analyze data, but not tell a cohesive story. It can identify brand partners, but not build relationships. It can take administrative work off your plate, but can't craft a unique creative direction or brand strategy.

Practitioners seem optimistic about the professional opportunities in the industry, as (79%) plan to stay in their current role for three or more years while fine-tuning their skills.

Ask the Index Council

AI should support creatives, not replace them

“AI should be used for things that don’t require brain power and creative thinking. AI isn’t a replacement for our creative brain. It should just take on the things we don’t want to spend time doing.”



Brianna Doe

Founder, Verbatim Agency, Host, Stop the Scroll Podcast

AI only saves time when it’s intuitive

“In social, you’re serving many different internal and external clients. You need help managing all of the moving tasks and assignments. That can be hard and time-consuming...but so can AI training and learning new tools. We need more consensus and regulation to ensure safety protocols and quality standards, and that the tools we use are really effective.”



Allie Coulter

Enterprise Social Media Department Head, Honda

Professional development will require harnessing AI tools so social marketers have more time for storytelling

“Data will be critical to creative storytelling in the future. Leadership knows they can let their social media teams trust their gut, but are going to want to add in the data to make sure the ideas are rock solid.”



Josh Rangel

Senior Director, Social, Ogilvy

Conclusion

Your brand's future is on social media

Social media's relevance in our culture is riding a decades-long upward trajectory, showing no signs of slowing. It's become the center of everything, including your industry.

Social's place at the epicenter increasingly means that failing to invest is a massive business risk. Teams need the tools to see and hear their audiences more clearly than ever.

By framing the opportunity cost in terms executives can understand, marketers can win the freedom to execute the strategies they know will work. Thanks to audience preferences and AI, that doesn't mean being chained to a content calendar or production hamster wheel. But instead, honing a distinct identity and voice that builds long-term relevance.

Your customers are on social. *How will you show up for them?*



Meet the Index Council



Tameka Bazile

LinkedIn and TikTok Creator, and former Manager for Social Strategy at TIME. Tameka is based in Brooklyn, New York and New Jersey.



Arielle Berlinsky

Director of Marketing at Movement Strategy, a leading social media agency. Arielle is based in Atlanta, Georgia.



Allie Coulter

Department Head of Enterprise Social Media at American Honda Motor Company, Inc. Allie is based in Los Angeles, California.



Kendall Dickieson

Social Media and Influencer Consultant to DTC and CPG Brands, and author of the No Filter newsletter. Kendall is based in New York, New York.



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Josh Rangel

Senior Director of Social at Ogilvy, a premier creative agency. Josh is based in Chicago, Illinois.

About the data

This research was conducted online by Glimpse on behalf of Sprout Social in the US, UK, Canada and Australia. Participants included 4,044 consumers who followed at least five brands on social media. Additionally, 900 full-time social media practitioners involved in managing their brand's social media strategy and 322 marketing leaders (who oversee social media teams) were surveyed from a cross section of businesses. All surveys were conducted from September 13 through September 27, 2024.

*Denotes a Q4 2024 Pulse Survey of 2,000+ consumers in the US and UK conducted by Glimpse on behalf of Sprout. The survey was conducted online from September 27 to October 1, 2024.

About Sprout Social

Sprout Social is a global leader in social media management and analytics software. Sprout's intuitive platform puts powerful social data into the hands of more than 30,000 brands so they can deliver smarter, faster business impact.

With a full suite of social media management solutions, Sprout offers comprehensive publishing and engagement functionality, customer care, influencer marketing, advocacy and AI-powered business intelligence. Sprout's award-winning software operates across all major social media networks and digital platforms.

[Learn more at sproutsocial.com](https://sproutsocial.com)

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