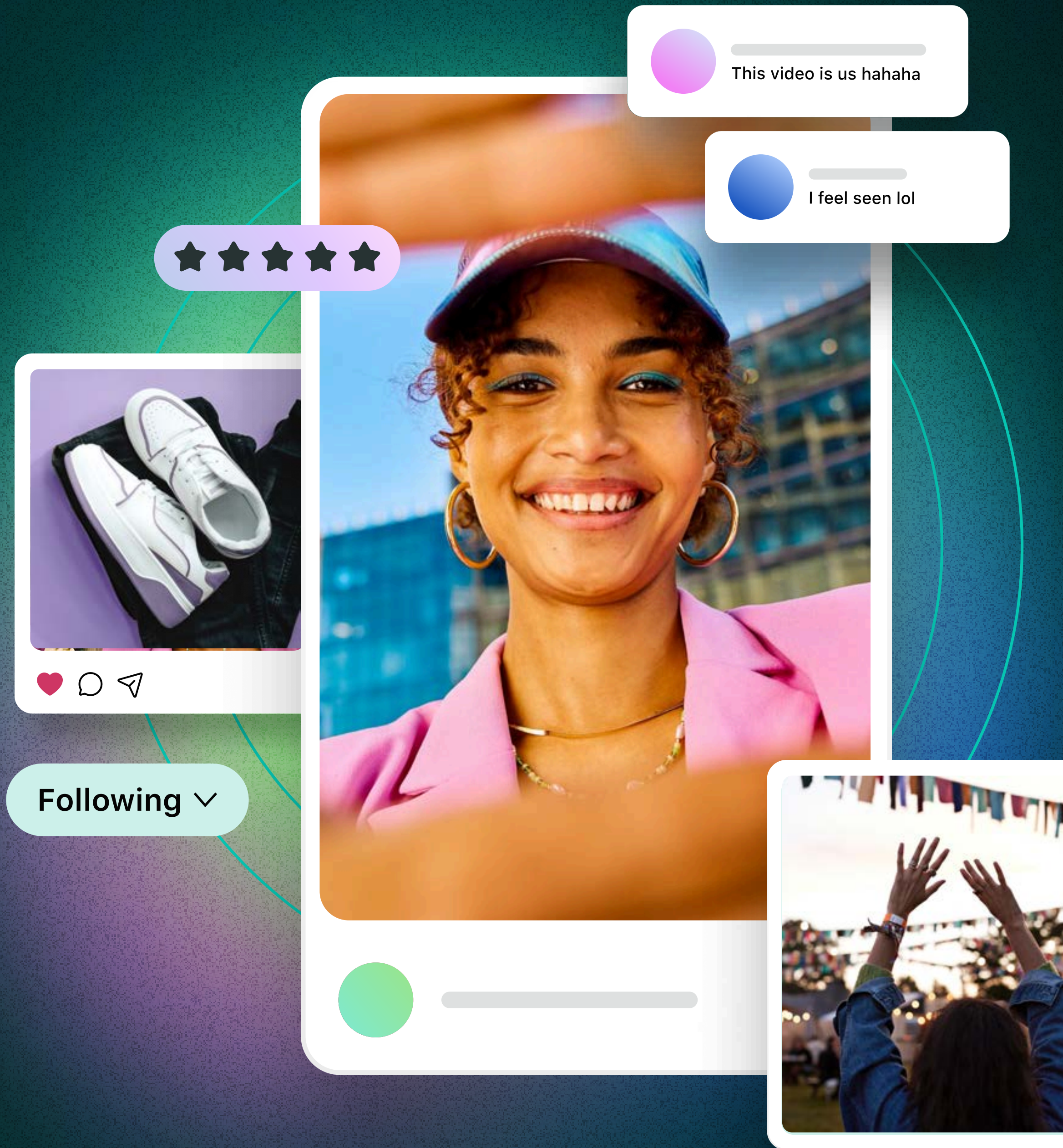


What

Consumers

Want on Social

The 2025 Sprout Social Index™ Edition XX



Introduction

Social media is the center of everything

It's the place where trends are born, news stories break and cultural ties are formed.

The question “What’s happening on social?” echoes across newsrooms, boardrooms, group chats and dinner tables around the world. Social media upended traditional media and became the definitive north star. People look to it for guidance on everything from finding their new favorite trend or product to forming political opinions and joining social movements.



Empowered women empower the world. #EqualityForAll 💪🌸

Following ▾

Social media users experience a brand's content woven within a tapestry of content from other brands, creators and influencers, news outlets, and family and friends. Their attention is hard-won as networks reach max saturation—with new distractions, rabbit holes and niches around every swipe.

Social's always-on culture can be a crushing weight as marketers desperately fight for relevance—jumping on trends haphazardly to appeal to their audience. Or it can be a creative tailwind, depending on your perspective and the resources at your disposal. But do consumers even want brands to participate in online culture? Will that build lasting affinity and loyalty?

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 consumers' relationship to social media will change in 2025, and what that means for brand content, customer care and social commerce.

What social marketers should stop and start in 2025

Stop

- ⊗ Jumping on every trend
- ⊗ Posting constantly, just for the sake of posting
- ⊗ Building out a content calendar too far in advance
- ⊗ Adopting a salesy or corporate brand voice
- ⊗ Providing slow, generic customer care

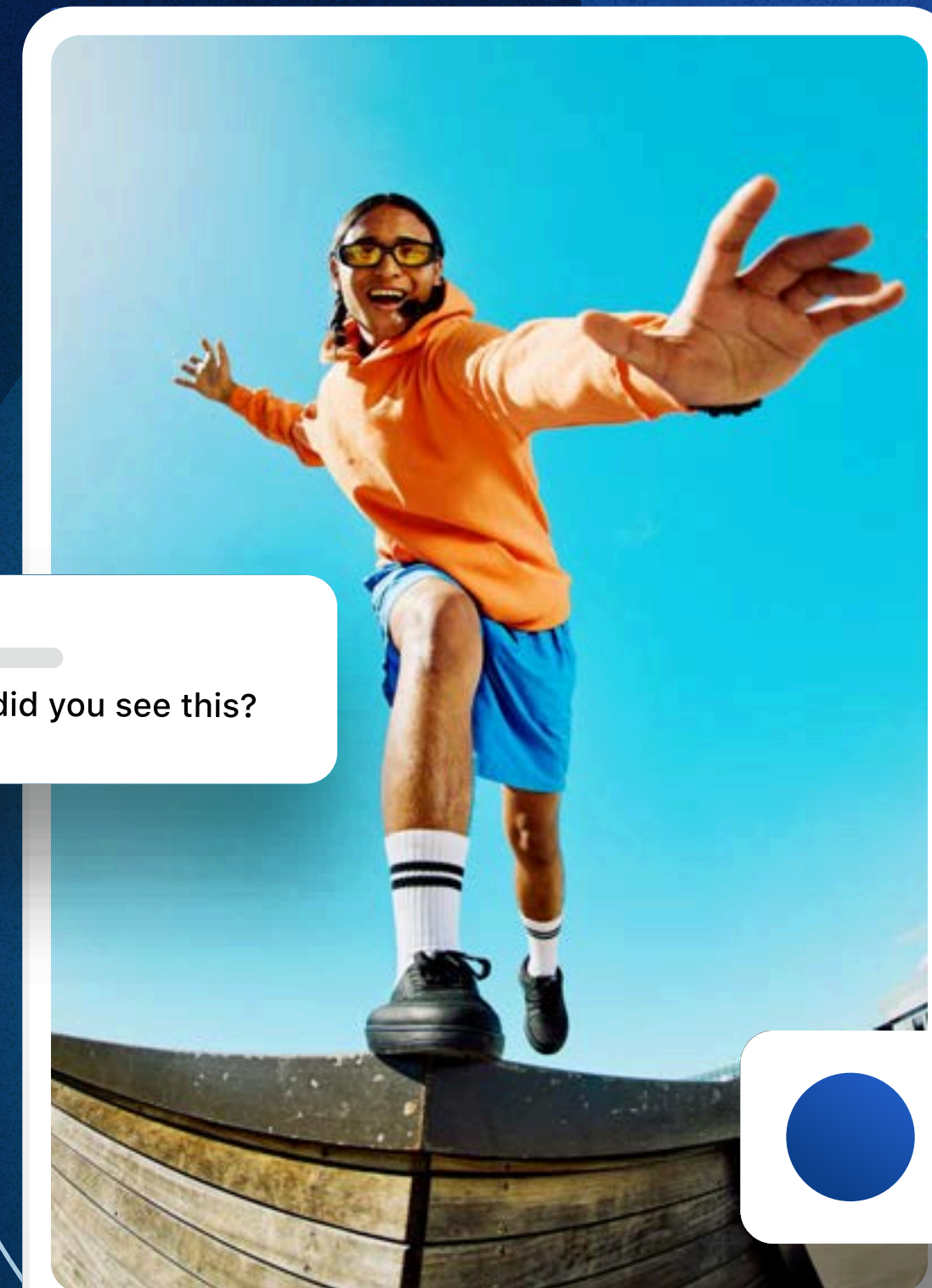
Start


- ✓ Keeping up with online culture and listening to your audience
- ✓ Publishing original, entertaining content and humanizing your brand
- ✓ Combating misinformation
- ✓ Providing fast, personalized customer care
- ✓ Selling products directly through social platforms

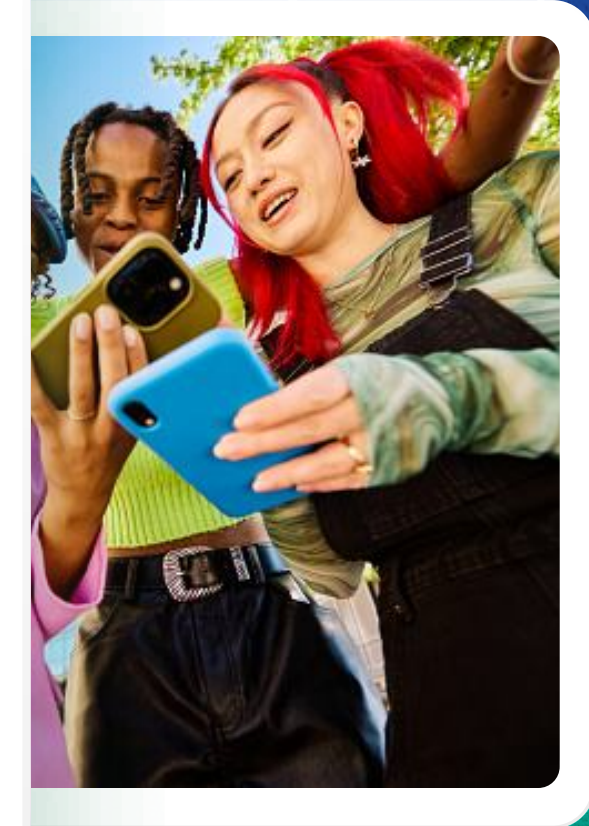
Keeping up with culture


Online culture—the distinct language, behaviors and expectations built and maintained by internet users—is a layered and evolving force. The social media lexicon has morphed into a dialect all its own. Memes and viral moments are generational touchstones.

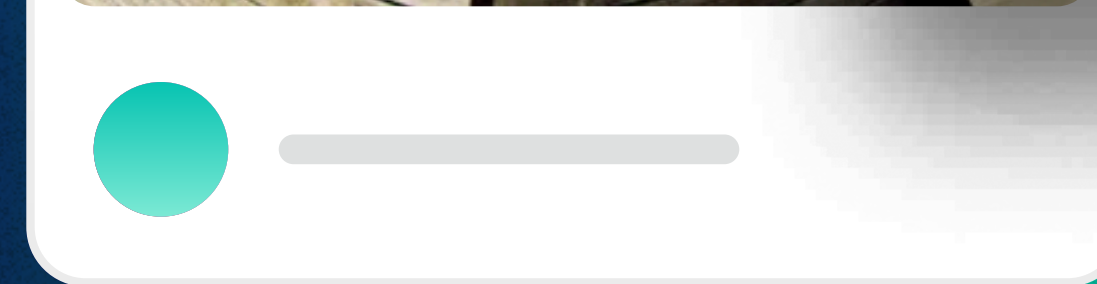
Brands must be culturally competent to understand their consumers and emerge at the top of their industry.



 @friend did you see this?



 This is too much lmao



Fluency in online culture required

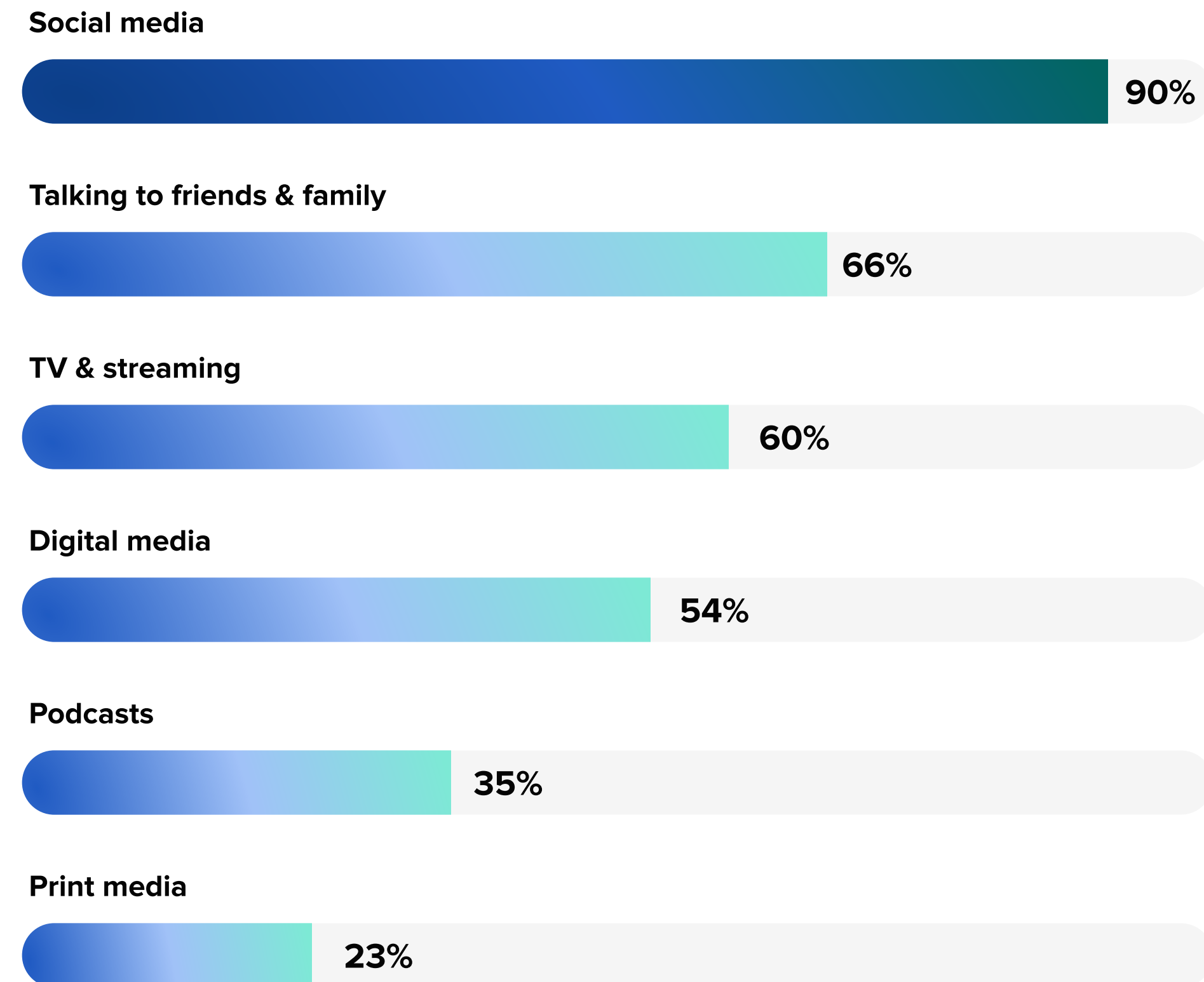
Consumers definitively agree: social is how they keep up with trends and cultural moments. Significantly more so than TV or streaming services, talking to friends and family, and other digital media. This is true across generations—pointing to a wide-scale cultural shift.

The amount of time consumers spend on social is holding steady and growing in some pockets. Even though many consumers are already “chronically online,” **30% plan to use social more in 2025**, while 56% plan to maintain their current usage.

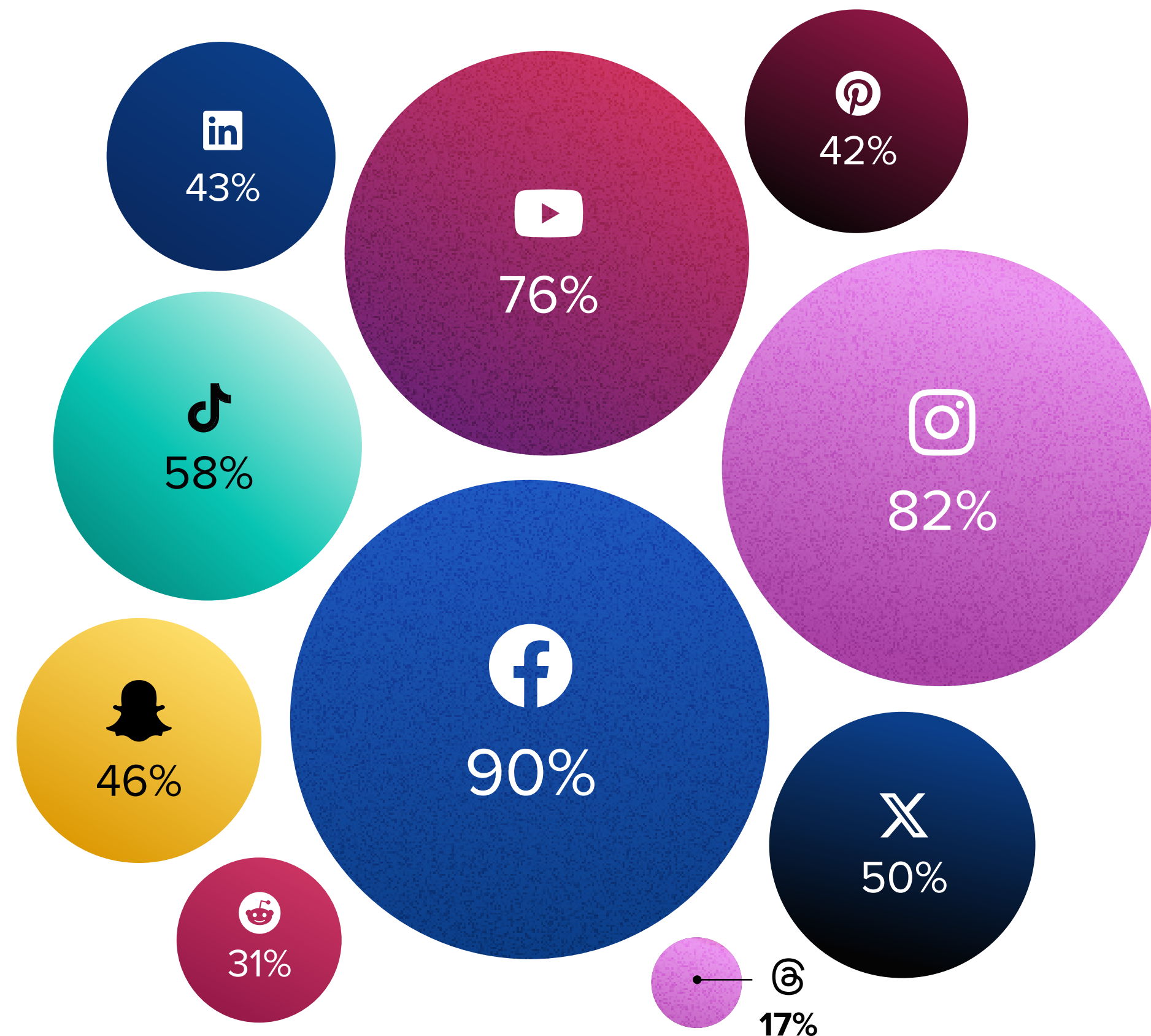
As social media continues to drive culture, consumers agree brands must be tuned in. The good news: 94% of consumers affirm that most brands’ social content already does a good job keeping up with online culture.

93% of consumers agree it’s important for brands to keep up with online culture

Sources consumers use to keep up with trends and cultural moments



Networks consumers have a profile on



Networks consumers turn to

In pursuit of discovering trends and participating in cultural moments, consumers are present on *all* social media platforms. But they are most likely to have Facebook, Instagram and YouTube profiles, and use these well-established networks to keep up with the zeitgeist. If they could only use one social media network, they would choose Facebook, followed closely by Instagram.

This varies for Gen Z, who is most likely to have Instagram (89%), YouTube (84%) and TikTok (82%) profiles instead—a defining generational difference.

When it comes to keeping up with trends and cultural moments, 51% of consumers prefer Facebook and Instagram and 37% prefer YouTube and TikTok.

Ask the Index Council

Prioritize which platforms you invest in

“There are so many platforms and ways that brands can show up online. It’s tempting to believe you have to be everywhere. Provide what your current and prospective audience members are looking for—be intentional instead of trying to be everything to everyone. Don’t chase shiny objects. It’s more important to build community and trust on priority platforms.”



Brianna Doe

Founder, Verbatim Agency, Host, Stop the Scroll Podcast

The foundation of online culture is shared understanding

“Online culture is ever-changing and constantly evolving. It includes viral images and videos, celebrity meme-able moments and emerging content formats, but is more than the sum of its parts...It’s fueled by the consumer appetite for the next glimmer of entertainment.”



Arielle Berlinsky

Director of Marketing, Movement Strategy

Use social listening tools to zero-in on relevant information

“If they use social listening tools, social marketers don’t always need to be online because they can just filter for the information that they need. Instead of having to doom-scroll for an hour, you get relevant information delivered to you.”



Benjamin Munro Smith

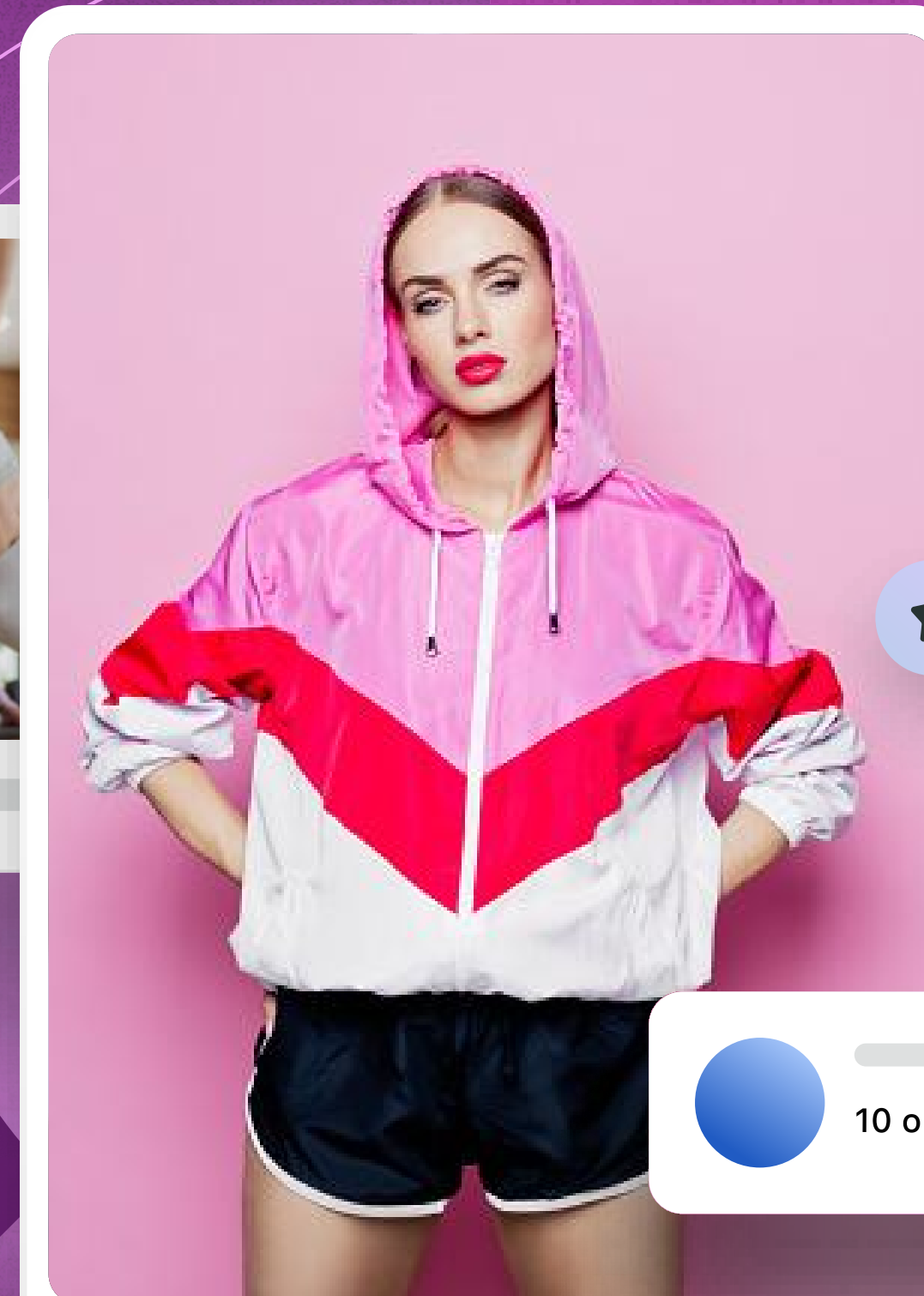
Manager of Social Media, Macquarie University

How brands cut through the noise

It's important to be well-versed in online culture—not recreate every meme. Though consumers want brands to have a pulse on culture, jumping on every trend doesn't make brands stand out. It can have the opposite effect. Consumers want to be listened to, not talked at, and they reward brands who prioritize originality, relatability and audience engagement.



Following ▾



10 out of 10. Would recommend.

Quality products and distinct brand identities stand out

Consumers are most likely to favor brands on social that have a high quality product or service. Which is a striking reminder for brands that social can't overcompensate for larger business issues—and providing a top-tier experience for customers should be a critical priority.

It reinforces the importance of authentic influencer and creator reviews, positive word-of-mouth (especially in the comments section) and listening to customer feedback. But this stat isn't a rationalization for going all-in on product-focused content. Consumers agree brands should stop using so much “*salesy*” and “*corporate*” messaging.

What consumers say makes their favorite brands stand out on social

- 1 **Quality of their product or service**
- 2 **Originality of their content**
- 3 **How they engage with their followers**
- 4 **How quickly they respond to customers**
- 5 **Content their employees post**

Most and least important traits of brand content

Most important

✓ Authenticity

✓ Relatability

✓ Entertainment

Least important

✗ Off-the-cuff

✗ Polished

✗ Product-centric

Social users also factor in the originality of a brand's content and how a brand interacts with their audience before they decide to hit follow. Audience growth and retention require delivering human-centric content that demonstrates you're paying attention to your community. Posting constantly won't endear people to you. It's more important to engage and interact with them. Even in a space as densely populated as social, the one-to-one moments still matter.

When consumers rank the most important brand content traits, authenticity and relatability top the list. Consumers also say they're tired of sexually explicit brand voices. Instead of floating along the sea of sameness or being contrarian for the sake of it, brands should carve out an identity that is true to them.

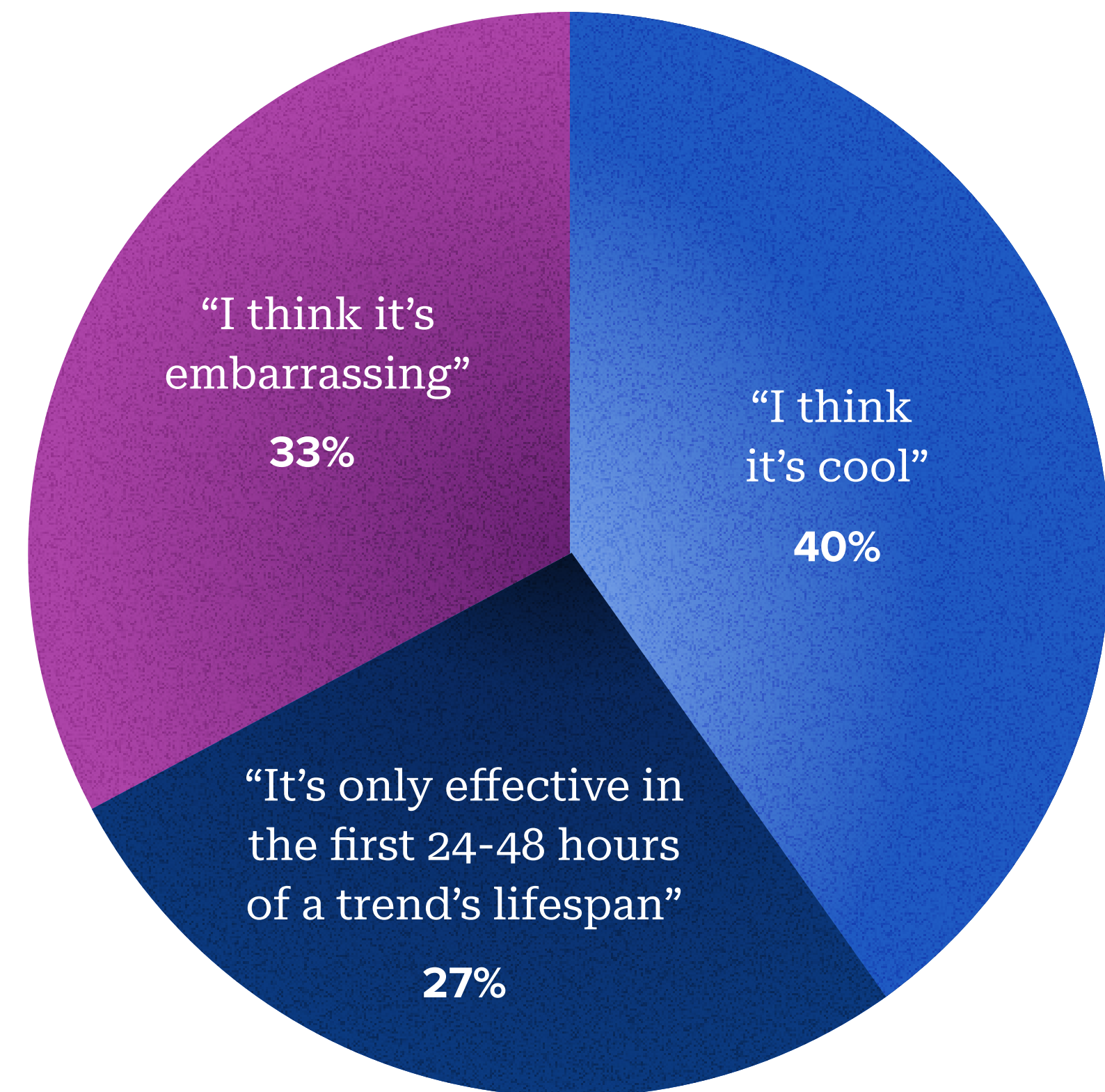
Production value and product-centricity are markedly less important to consumers. People don't really care how lo- or hi-fi content is, as long as brands make it make sense for their identity.

Joining online culture ≠ jumping on a revolving door of trends

Consumers are relatively split on whether it's cool or embarrassing for brands to participate in trends. More than a quarter agree it's only effective if brands can pull it off within one or two days after the trend emerges—an impossible feat for teams with long approval workflows. Gen Z is more likely to support brands jumping on trends; Boomers are least likely.

It might seem like consumers' lukewarm feelings toward brands joining trends contradicts their expectation for social marketers to be aware of online culture. But there's an important distinction between the terms. **Online culture describes the entire internet ecosystem (largely influenced by social media). Trends—though very influential—are just one aspect of this culture.**

Consumer reactions to brands jumping on viral trends



Consumers aren't intrigued by brands who churn out content to participate in every trend, especially if it impedes their ability to respond. They'd rather brands deeply understand the nuance of online culture as it pertains to their interests, and participate in sub-cultures their community is already a part of. Like any culture, online culture is about belonging and emotional connection.

93% of consumers think that brands need to combat misinformation more than they are today

In their role as stewards and bastions of online culture, almost all consumers agree brands need to take up the torch to combat misinformation far more than they do today. Listening to conversations about your brand, industry and community is critical to understanding if and how your team should weigh in or correct misinformation.



Ask the Index Council

Understand the cultural context brands live within

“Trends—and related formats—can be a connector. But marketers need to understand how trends are culturally stapled. We, as social teams, need to recognize the nuance and know when trends aren’t right for our brand.”



Tameka Bazile
Social and Content Strategist,
formerly of TIME

Create value and listen rather than meeting inconsequential posting volumes

“People don't log on to social every day in search of branded content. Shocking, I know. So, if your brand skips a day or two or three, it's going to be okay. Your followers aren't going to file a missing brand report. Instead, focus on: 1) content value vs. content volume, 2) community engagement vs. filling up a content calendar and 3) listening vs. posting.”



Josh Rangel
Senior Director, Social, Ogilvy

Providing a top-tier experience should be your top priority

“Social and brand reputation are one-in-the-same. Customer experience, community management and humanization are shaping the next evolution of social.”




Allie Coulter
Enterprise Social Media Department
Head, Honda


The state of social commerce and customer care

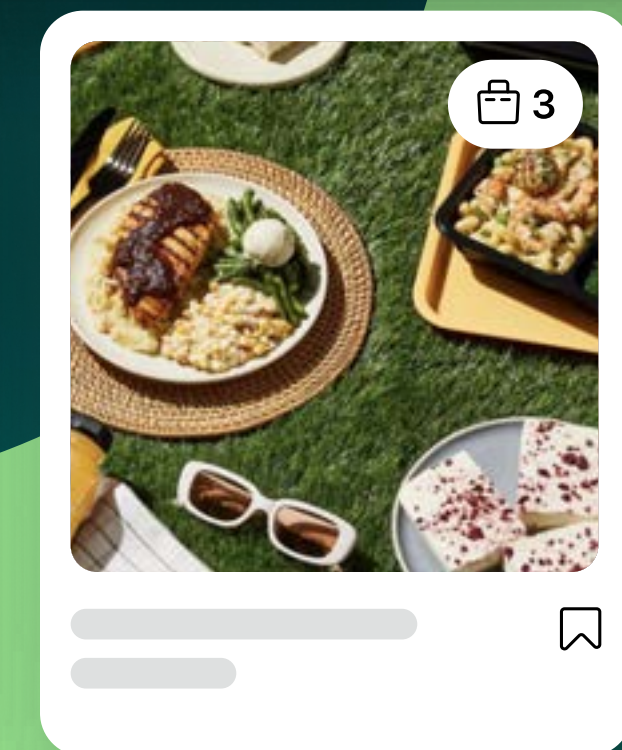
Every stage of the customer journey exists on social. Algorithms and search bars drive discoverability and product awareness. Comments sections, @-mentions and DMs are consumers' preferred method of customer service. User-generated content and online communities foster loyalty and evangelism. In 2025, social will play an even larger role in all commerce—a shift that's been years in the making.

73% of social users agree if a brand doesn't respond on social, they'll buy from a competitor



 @customerservice which meal options are gluten-free?

 Here's a link to our **gluten-free menu**. The grain bowl is our fav!



Responding to customers isn't optional. Almost three-quarters of consumers agree if a brand doesn't respond to their customer service questions on social, they will buy from a competitor next time. Nearly three-quarters of consumers expect a response within 24 hours or sooner, which is consistent with Index reporting in 2022 and 2023—a potent reminder that customer care standards aren't slipping and brands need to double-down on their efforts.

Consumers want social customer care to feel like white-glove service, distinctly customized to their needs. **Consumers say companies should make personalized customer service their #1 social media priority in 2025.***

Most consumer interactions with brands begin long before they make a purchase. Many turn to social to research products one to six months before they buy. The service brands provide to other customers could influence the purchase decisions of prospective consumers lurking in the comment section.

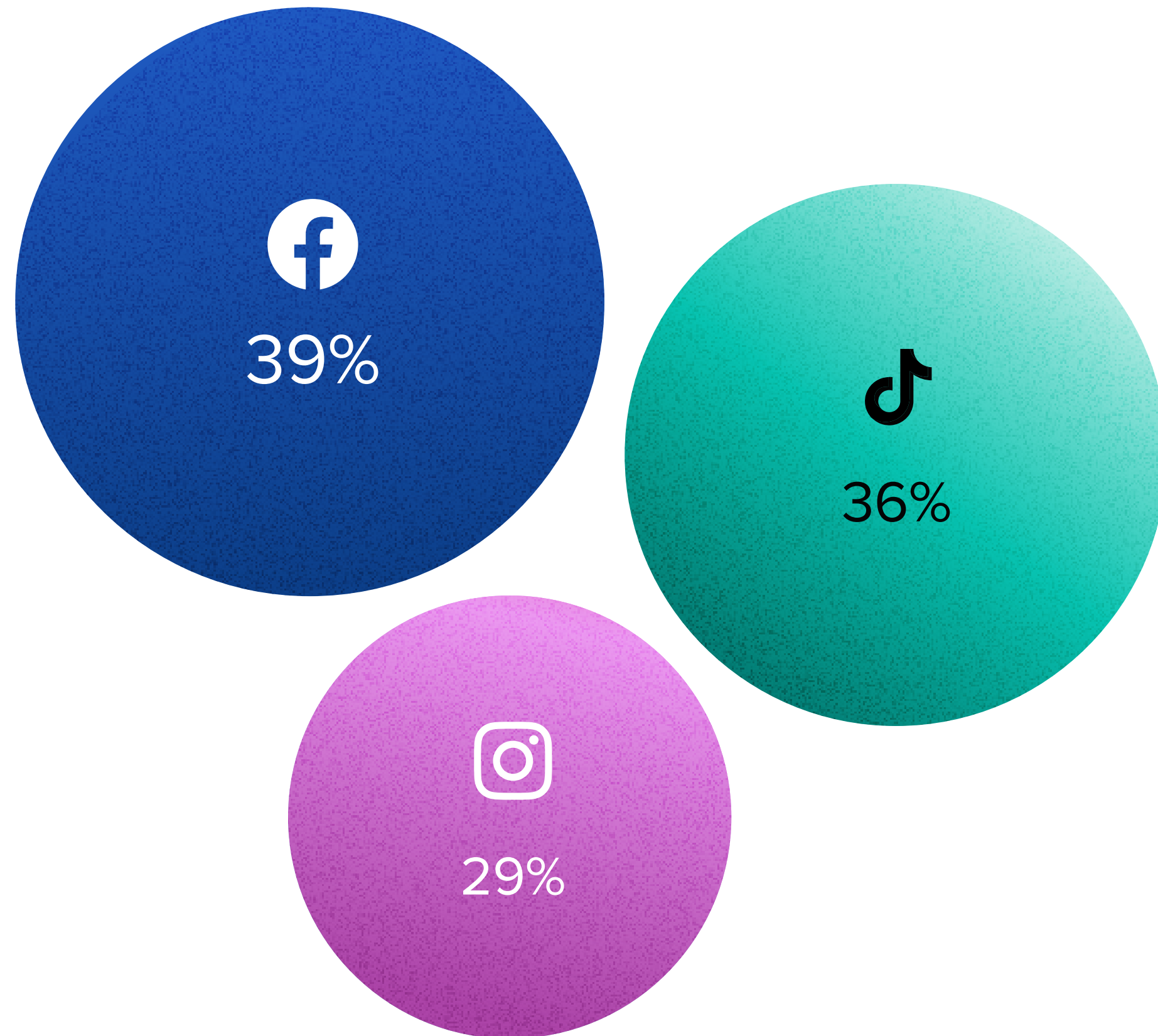
Consumers search for new products and services on social media when they need to make a purchase...

1 Within the next month

2 ASAP

3 In the next 3-6 months

Platforms used to make purchases in 2025



Most users also make spur-of-the-moment purchases inspired by social media (at least sometimes).

Roughly 81% of consumers say social media compels them to make spontaneous purchases multiple times per year or more, with 28% making impulse purchases once a month. Hyper-individualized algorithms deliver targeted ads, influencer content and user-generated reviews that speak to specific consumer pain points.

The increasingly seamless shopping experience on social also enables faster purchase decisions. Though only 13% of consumers currently buy directly from the social networks themselves, that's likely to change. About one-third of all consumers anticipate making more purchases from social networks in 2025, a number that rises to nearly half among Gen Z.*

When consumers are ready to make a direct purchase, they're most likely to turn to Facebook, followed by TikTok and Instagram. This varies for Gen Z, who's is most likely to use TikTok.*

Conclusion

Social media is the core of brand relevance

Social media drives culture forward. It's at the heart of global information sharing—connecting us all and shaping our future. It influences everyone's worldview: from what we find entertaining and what we buy to closely-held political and cultural opinions.

Rather than seeing social as a stage for performing the latest trends, marketers should consider it a portal to the most imperative consumer insights and a way to embed their brand into culture.

On social, businesses can craft truly authentic brand identities, build seamless customer journeys and engagement strategies, and refine product development using candid customer feedback.

Your audience is speaking. Are you tuned in?



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.



Brianna Doe

Founder and CEO of Verbatim, a full-service marketing agency, and host of Stop the Scroll: The B2B Influencer Marketing Podcast. Brianna is based in Phoenix, Arizona.



Benjamin Munro Smith

Manager of Social Media at Macquarie University. Benjamin is based in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.



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.

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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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