

Hootsuite®

Social Trends 2024 ◆ *in* ◆ Government



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In 2024, ROI will take center stage on social as smart government agencies finally close in on their top-performing tactics. It's why we may be looking at government's most pivotal year for social media yet.

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Methodology

Research Methods

This report is based on a commercial survey of 4,281 marketers and a consumer survey of 4,508 consumers, conducted in August 2023.

We conducted primary interviews with social marketing practitioners, leaders, observers, and partners.

And we ran a news analysis of 15,557 articles from major social media reporting organizations, as well as a content analysis of 1 million anonymized social posts from accounts connected to Hootsuite.

Our primary data has been supplemented by secondary research from Pew Research Center, Statista, Deloitte, Forbes, Insider Intelligence, Forrester, LinkedIn, GlobalWebIndex, The CMO Survey, and others.

Overview of Hootsuite's global Social Trends 2024 Commercial Survey

4,281 respondents

118 countries

16 industries

28% directors and above

62% managers and practitioners

Overview of Hootsuite's global Social Media 2024 Consumer Survey

4,508 respondents

3 countries

65% Gen Z and millennials

26% Gen X and baby boomers

Note: Commercial survey respondents were from 118 countries, with the most common being the US (n = 2,709), Canada (n = 377), the UK (n = 267), India (n = 114), and Australia (n = 67).



Strategic agencies commit to their champion platforms

Strapped for time and resources,
government organizations stop stretching
themselves thin and double down on
the social platforms that get results.

The multi-platform predicament

Be where your audience is, they said.

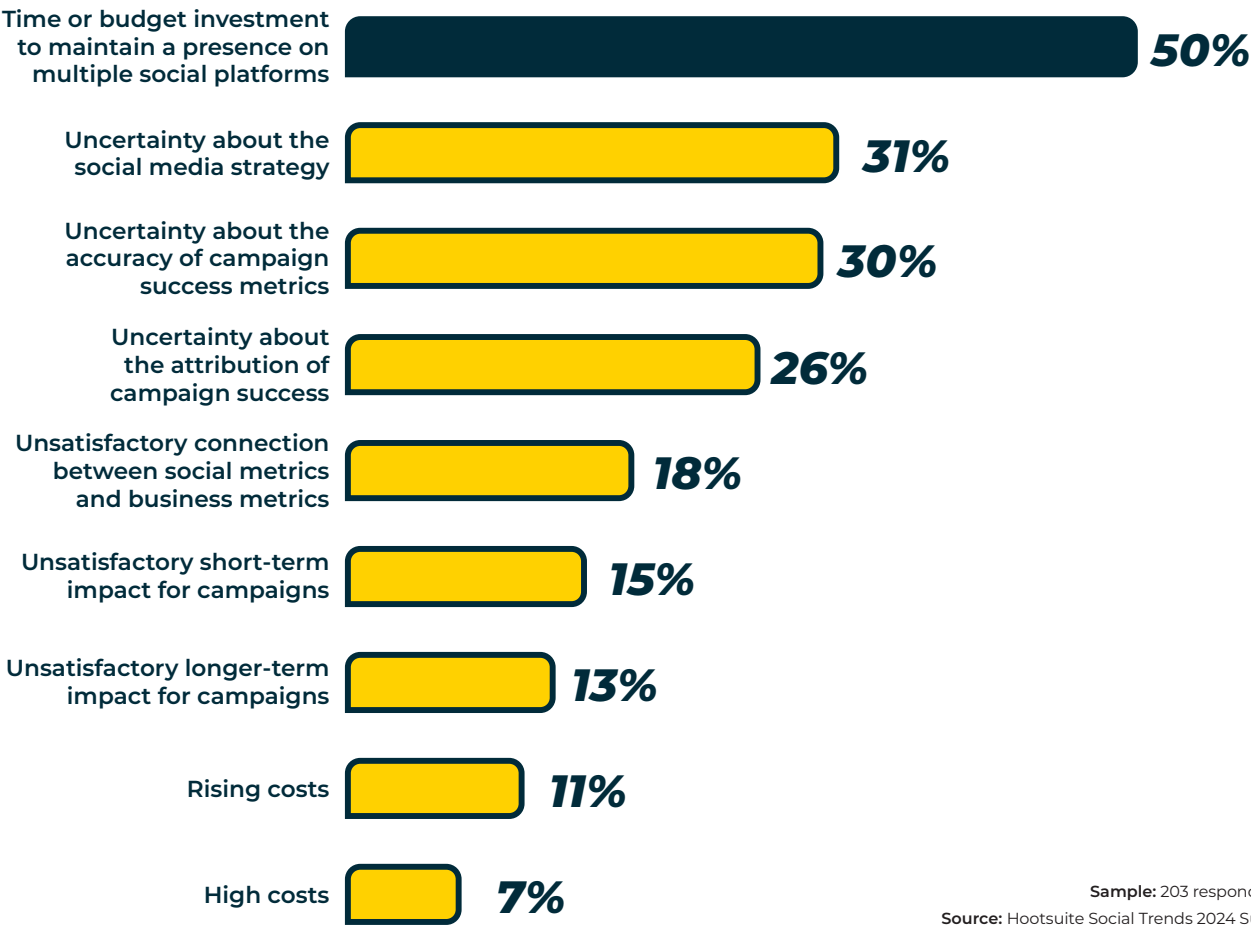
But when your audience is everywhere, that’s a tall order—and the average social media user logs into about seven platforms each month. Seven.

For government agencies, maintaining a presence on just one social network is hard enough, let alone many. And *maintaining* is the baseline. Doing it well is a whole other story.

In fact, this is such a challenge for government organizations, it’s emerged as the top ROI concern for social media—even trumping issues that have to do with strategy and measuring success (some of social’s most talked-about struggles).

Government orgs fear the ROI impact of being on so many platforms

Which of the following issues do you think contribute to your organization’s concern about return on investment (ROI) for social media activities?



Sample: 203 respondents
Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Survey

Most government social marketers could talk your ear off about why it takes so much time and energy to be active—and thrive—on several social media networks.

One of the biggest factors: How important it's become to tailor social content to each network. (Cross-posting just doesn't cut it anymore, sadly.) Different channels have different audiences, lingo, trends, and hashtags, not to mention word counts and image specs. Posts that mimic the content and formats of individual platforms make for a better user experience—and less annoyed customers.

Users also have different reasons for being on each platform—Facebook for connecting with friends and family, TikTok for being entertained, Instagram for exploring interests, and Twitter/X for getting news and event updates, for example.

The differences between platforms—and the amount of work it takes to cater to them all—are enough to make government social

marketers' heads spin. No wonder 63% of them say they have too much to do, according to our [2023 Social Media Management Career Survey](#).

Social marketers are responsible for developing strategies, creating content, tracking analytics, executing ads, responding to comments, scheduling posts, and soooooo much more—and that's *before* considering that each of those tasks have to get done for multiple channels.

It's also before taking into account the constant platform changes that social pros are expected to stay on top of. Today, networks release new user and advertising features so often that 60% of marketers in government say it's difficult to keep up.

The good news? Social marketers aren't the only ones who feel the pressures of having to deal with multiple platforms. Organizational leaders are *finally* starting to clue in, recognizing the impact this is having on their results.

60%
of marketers in government say the pace at which networks release new user and advertising features makes it hard to keep up

Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Survey

Platform priorities are shifting

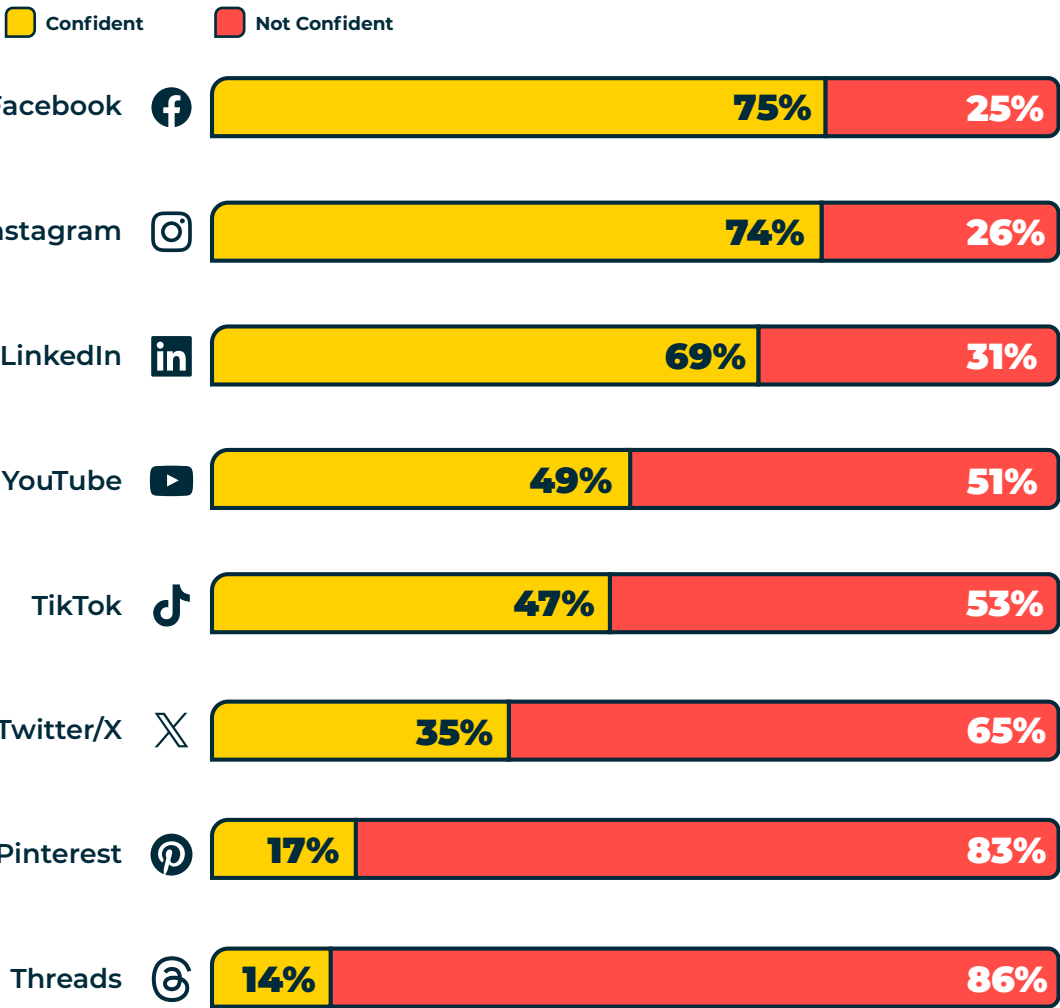
Historically, when organizations felt iffy about how a platform was contributing to their social and business goals, they didn't do much about it.

Social marketers would overextend themselves trying to do everything, everywhere, all at once, and drain time, money, and resources while they were at it. This was all too common, and yet, nothing would ever change. (Red flag alert!) Even though this resulted in lousy content, poor social media performance, and burnt out staff, it was still considered less of a risk than scaling back on platform efforts. So they (foolishly) stuck it out.

But now, organizations are starting to stray from this way of thinking. Instead, they're acknowledging the problems and taking steps to turn things around. Our data reveals that they're getting serious about understanding which platforms work for them and which ones don't—and ROI confidence helps them decide.

Government agencies are most confident in Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn

How confident are you that each of the following social platforms delivers a positive return on investment for your organization?



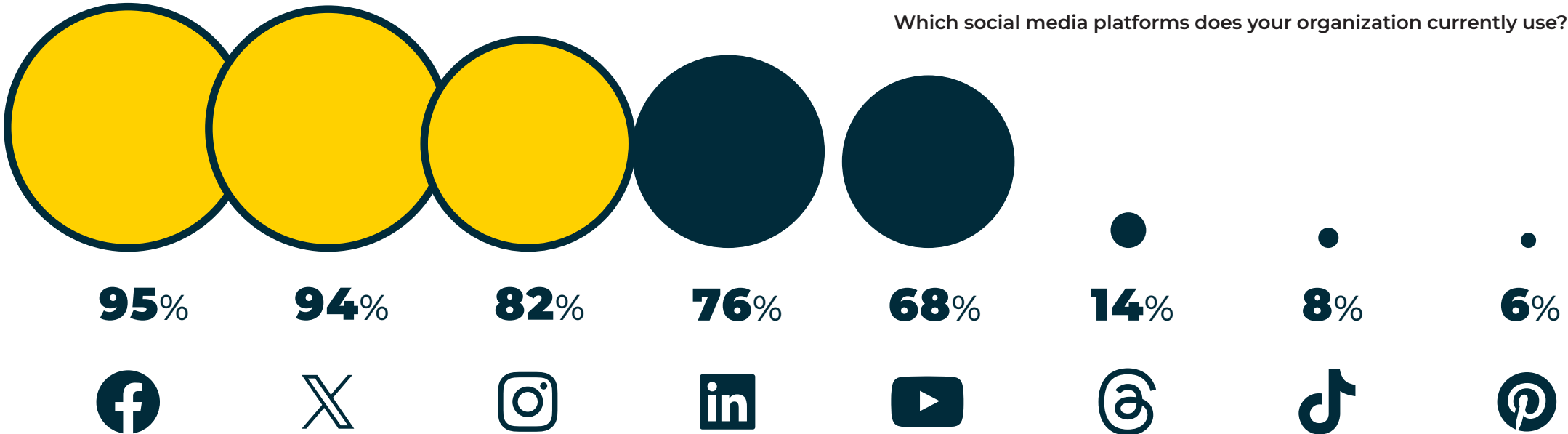
Just because a government agency is active on a platform, doesn't mean they're sold on the ROI it drives. Take Twitter/X, for example. Almost all (94%) government organizations have a presence there, but only a third of them feel strongly that it delivers a positive ROI—and considering

the platform's 12% drop in daily active users between November 2022 and September 2023, maybe that's not such a surprise. But how long will an organization continue on a path that's leading to a dead end? Based on what we're seeing, not very long.

Organizations are now more willing than ever to say buh-bye to platforms and strategies that aren't meeting their definition of ROI—and government agencies may soon follow suit when (and if) their audiences ghost the platforms they're on.

Most government orgs have a presence on Facebook, Twitter/X, and Instagram

Which social media platforms does your organization currently use?



Sample: 203 respondents
Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Survey

Zeroing in on the platforms that work

It's easy to fall into a pattern of following social media industry norms. But industry norms don't consider the unique goals, growth strategies, KPIs, and audiences of your organization. That's why it's so important to take a step back, challenge your own assumptions about the platforms you're on, and think about what's best for *your* agency.

The key is being able to defy distractions that prevent you from making smart decisions about your channels. Keeping up with what your peers are doing, and experimenting with shiny new features or entirely new platforms is an essential part of a social marketer's job, but not at the expense of driving real business value from social.

In 2024, strategic government organizations will push back against unjustified expectations to do everything on every platform. They'll unlock their top-performing channels based on ROI, and focus their attention on those—and only those. If they're *really* confident (and brave), they might even abandon one or two altogether.

This will give social marketers more time with the platforms that make the cut—time to understand their audiences, experiment with content to see what resonates, stay on top of trends and algorithms, and get up to speed with all the features. Because mastering a few key platforms is surely better than being so-so at many.

1 Run a social media audit for platform intel

What's happening across all your social platforms? A social media audit will tell you. It'll uncover your most engaging posts, your highest-performing content formats, and other patterns that'll help you decide how to approach your social strategy moving forward.

Crushing it on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube? Consider these your hero platforms, and pour all your efforts into them. That means spending the majority of your time (and budget) on those platforms—researching, experimenting with content, doing social listening, and engaging with your audience.

An audit should also help single out the platforms that may be doing more harm than good (in other words, eating up a lot of

your time but not giving you results that make it worthwhile). If you find any major flops, it may be time to scale back on those channels or even shut down those accounts.

For large organizations with many agencies and an equal number of accounts for each social platform (some have hundreds!), an audit can even reveal where you might be able to consolidate accounts. This can help you establish a social media Center of Excellence workflow that allows agencies and teams to contribute to content development without having to maintain those channels.

But these decisions shouldn't be made lightly—be sure to share your findings with key players in your organization so you can make the calls together.



Recommendations

Get a step-by-step walk-through of the easiest audit process with our [Social Media Audit Guide](#)

2 Put your platforms in an ROI showdown

You've probably calculated the ROI of your social media activities before. (If not, you really, *really* should.) It's important to know how you're doing on social overall.

But to figure out if each of your platforms is worth the effort you're putting in, you need to do this exercise for—you guessed it—every platform. And yes, that means more math, but we've got you: Bypass spreadsheets and manual calculations with our [ROI calculator](#).

Once you've [determined your ROI](#) for each of your platforms, you'll have a clear picture of which channels are doing well, and which ones aren't. But when you're trying to make

informed decisions about your platforms, these numbers don't mean much until you weigh them against each other.

For example, say you're active on five different platforms, and you find that you have a positive ROI (anything above zero) for all of them. That's great—if you're looking at your channels individually. But if you place your ROI scores side-by-side, and one platform has a much lower ROI than the rest (even though it's still positive), that can be telling. The channel that's lagging behind may not warrant as much of an investment because there's greater potential for growth with the other four.



3 Master the art of (proper) cross-posting

We know what you're thinking. Didn't we say that cross-posting just doesn't cut it anymore?

Well, let's be clear: When we encourage social marketers not to cross-post, we're referring to the copy-and-paste method (reusing the same post on every platform without making any changes). Sure, it's a fast and easy way to feed the insatiable content beast—but it also leaves *a lot* of potential on the table.

That said, there *are* ways to do cross-posting right. And when you have content or campaigns that can resonate across all your channels, you absolutely should capitalize on that.

The top rule for cross-posting is to align your content with the norms, best practices, and formats of each platform. All your posts can be based on the same idea, promote the same campaign, or have a similar look and feel. But to boost your chances of strong engagement, each platform should dictate your goals, formats, visual and copy specs, and the way you speak to and interact with your audience.

Moral of the story: If you've pinpointed your champion platforms with the intention of improving your social media outcomes, the work can't stop there. Now, your content must do the heavy lifting, and tailoring it to each platform is the first step to doing your new social strategy justice.

Discover how to plan a cross-platform campaign in this [strategy guide](#). (Hint: All these great tips can be applied to non-campaign cross-platform posting too.)



Entertainment fuels the social ROI engine

In the quest for social ROI, government
agencies must turn to entertainment
to boost the bottom line.

The crowd has spoken: They want to be entertained

Before you quit reading, we get it. Entertainment can be an intimidating word, especially if you work in a serious industry like government. Can you even connect entertainment to something quantifiable, like ROI?

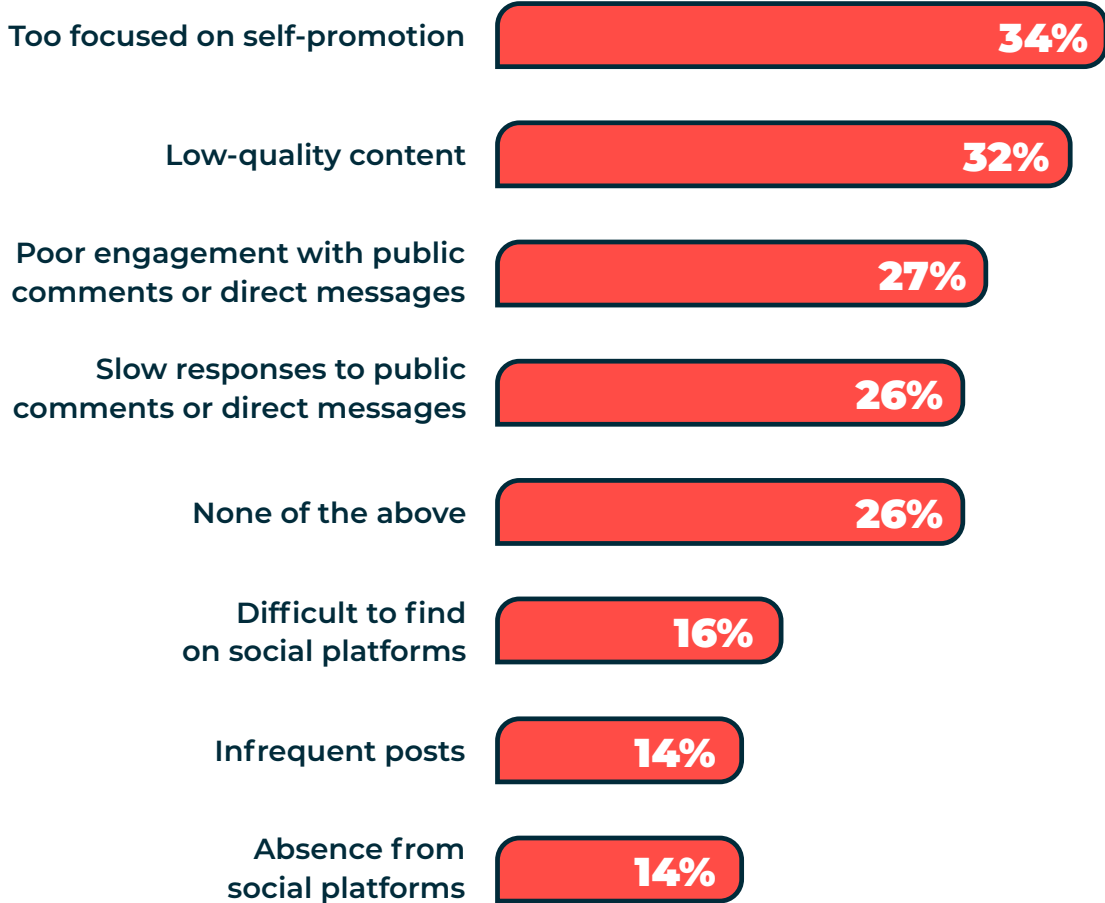
But here's the thing: The people are saying it loud and clear. After staying in touch with family and friends, the top reason they use social media is to be entertained and to mentally unwind, according to our Social Trends 2024 Survey.

And you know what else they said? That they don't like it when organizations are too focused on self-promotion. In fact, 34% say it's a major turn-off in how they perceive organizations on social.



Audiences give too much self-promotion a thumbs down

Thinking about the organizations/brands you follow on social media, which of the following has a negative impact on how you view them?



Sample: 4,508 respondents
Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Consumer Survey

The problem is, social marketers in government seem to have other ideas.

It turns out, 51% publish product and brand updates or news multiple times a week, according to our survey. In addition, 66% more government respondents reported publishing product and brand updates once a day or more compared to the overall sample.

That’s a lot of posts—and a huge disconnect between what agencies are posting and what constituents really want to see.

(The news isn’t all bad, though. As you’ll see in Trend 4, posts about services and support *are* hitting the mark.)

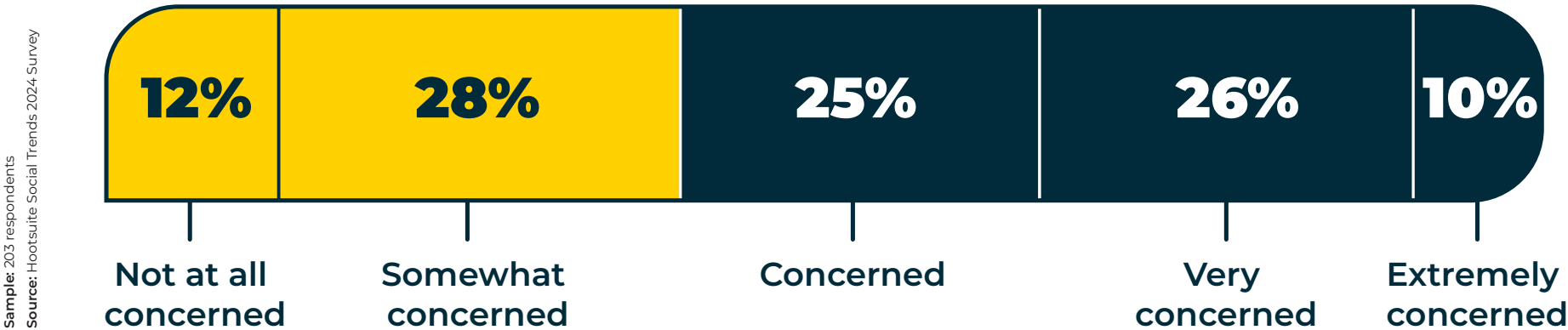
Unfortunately, while over half of agencies are overly focused on posting about themselves, 79% say engagement is the top metric they use to demonstrate ROI.

How can you demonstrate ROI through engagement metrics when you’re giving constituents exactly what they *don’t* want?

It’s no surprise then that 61% of social marketers in government report being concerned about the ROI of their social activities. When agencies measure success in ways that don’t add up, ROI *will* be hard to come by.

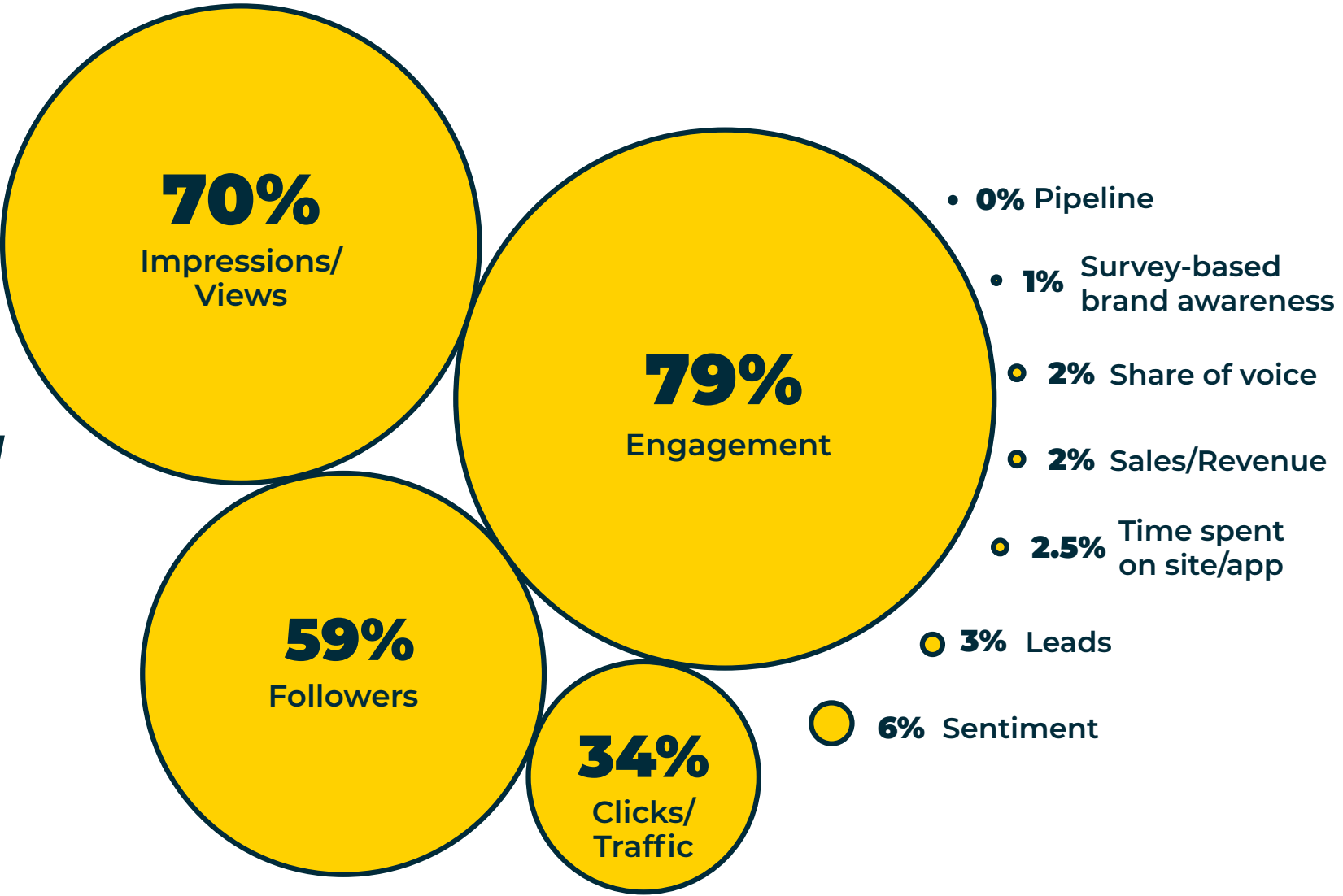
Social ROI remains a big concern for government social marketers

How concerned are you personally about the return on investment for social media activities?



Government agencies cling to engagement to demonstrate ROI

Which metrics does your organization most commonly use to demonstrate the return on investment of its social activities? (Select up to three.)



Sample: 203 respondents
Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Survey

Let entertainment lead the way to ROI

Which takes us back to entertainment.

In 2024, government agencies that publish entertaining content on social will succeed in winning eyeballs, engagement, and (eventually) market share away from agencies that keep on publishing the same old stuff.

This isn't a strategy you can pivot to overnight—especially if you've been measuring ROI through metrics that aren't aligned with your initiatives. But if that strategy isn't working as well as it used to, it's time for you to get back to the true strength of social media: building brand awareness, affinity, and long-term relationships with your citizens through engaging, entertaining social content.

What does that actually mean? Let's get back to basics and bust open the dictionary. "Entertainment" simply boils down to "providing enjoyment"—and that can mean a lot of different things.

Humor is enjoyable for sure. But so is finding inspiration, getting excited, feeling moved, or learning something new. Surely you can think of something enjoyable you could provide to your citizens. (If you're stumped, these post ideas are a great spot to begin.)

You don't need to overthink it: 53% of consumers think that organizations should be more relatable on social, according to our Social Trends 2024 Consumer Survey. Yet 40% think that organizations are also too corporate and insincere.

53%
of consumers think that organizations should be more relatable on social media

40%
of consumers think that organizations that post to social media are often too corporate and insincere

Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Consumer Survey

Give what they want, take what you need

So in the words of everyone's favorite cliché, just be yourself—but your *person*-self, not your *all-important-super-serious-agency*-self. After all, social media is not a place where you talk *at* someone. It's an interactive space where the exchange of value is a two-way street.

It may be more of a slow burn, but creating a space for deeper connections, meaningful interactions, and customer relationships can end up driving more long-term ROI.

Government agencies can't keep self-promoting or flooding their feeds with announcements, then hope to keep their citizens engaged. That's a surefire way to flop. They should instead be thinking about what their followers want.

Like entertainment—in all the shapes and forms it takes.

In return, you won't only win your citizens' attention and interest; you'll also win their affinity, trust, and eventually, their desire to become an active member of the community.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't promote or use social to share information either. It's just about realigning your priorities and reevaluating your content so you can better serve your citizens.

Social media can be a massive engagement engine for your agency. But for that to work, it has to be built on relationships, not transactions. And relationships are built by sharing something meaningful together.





The trend in action

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's winning engagement recipe

When you picture a wildlife conservation society on social media, “fun” and “entertaining” are probably the last words that come to mind.

But while the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has very important things to say on social, they're also just a hoot.

As a state government conservation agency, the department has a responsibility to use their platforms to educate. But their funny posts and on-point TikToks don't just attract hunting hobbyists or local conservation enthusiasts looking to get accurate information; they also attract all kinds of people who are there for the lols.



Goodwill on social media can go such a long way.

**Sarah
Southerland**

*Social Media Specialist
Oklahoma Department
of Wildlife Conservation*

For the agency's social media specialist, Sarah Southerland, this means creating content that serves their primary audience without alienating the rest of the community they've built.

Why? Because it creates goodwill.

"Not everyone in our audience would care about deer disease," she notes. "But we do need them to trust us and have goodwill toward us—so at other times, like when we need help to raise awareness, we can go further." With the responsibility of using their funding in the best way possible, the department makes sure to connect their social media initiatives to organizational goals.

It's not enough for a post to go viral—they also measure how it affects event attendance. Other times, likes and shares are given less importance if what they ultimately need are votes.

#DuckStampContest

Whatever they do on social, it's centered on the department's mandate of creating a safe, educated, and engaged community of wildlife enthusiasts.

The result? They became so beloved by their community that when TikTok bans were introduced for federal agencies in the US, their community came together and asked the governor to give them a pass.

Just by creating relevant content, the department was able to build a community that has their back and supports them in times of need—even when those followers aren't their primary audience, like hunters. It's proof of how far your audience can take you when you give them value first.

**If you're genuine with people, you get returns.
We were allowed to use TikTok because our
followers thought we were important to them
and they were able to make a case for that.**

Sarah Southerland

Social Media Specialist, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation



Recommendations

1 When it comes to content, follow your citizens' lead

Don't assume you know what your followers want to see. The beauty of social media is that you can ask them and get their input directly.

Grab the opportunity to ask them what they want. Run polls on types of content you could post. Host Q&As to hear their suggestions.

You can also run experiments where you tweak your tone of voice, or try new content categories altogether. Maybe add more memes to your Instagram stories, or add more conversational posts

on Facebook. Then, whatever sticks, do more of that.

If you have current posts that aren't performing too well, look into those too. Compare all your underperforming posts and see if they have anything in common. Are they all bland? Maybe they have low-quality images. Or your followers simply don't get much from them other than bits of old information.

Once you have an idea, start tweaking future posts to address the issue, and just keep testing and iterating as you go.



Use social listening to hear what people are saying about your agency, peers, and industry

2 Let social be the long game

With all this experimentation, you should give social (and yourself) the space and time to dial in your winning tactics.

Don't rush into "smashing those goals" or "crushing those targets." Social is best for building brand equity, which takes time—and that's okay.

More importantly, don't start getting impatient and reverting to your old, self-promotion-y ways. We've already established that no one likes a hard sell. Letting them flock to you will be so much more effective in the long run.

And when you *are* talking about yourself (because that's just inevitable), just make sure you're warm, authentic, and relatable. Position your promotion with a human experience, so it becomes more personal and meaningful.

3 Make social relationships the foundation of your ROI

Paying attention to what your citizens want and actually giving it to them? Well done. That's the first step.

Tracking engagement across your social initiatives? Another leap in the right direction.

Now, measure how far those engagements go beyond social and across your larger departmental goals. Things like, did that viral post move the needle and increase your social share of voice after the Twitterverse (X-verse 🤔) gave it so much love? Are you seeing more web traffic after a constituent shared your post to her bajillion followers? Are more likes on your Facebook posts translating into higher inquiries about your programs?

Making sure your social content connects with departmental goals gives your social media efforts a higher purpose. And putting your constituents' desires at the heart of those efforts keeps them rooted in the value of authentic relationships.



AI joins the social team in government institutions

With generative AI on the rise,
governments toe the line between
efficiency and authenticity on social media.

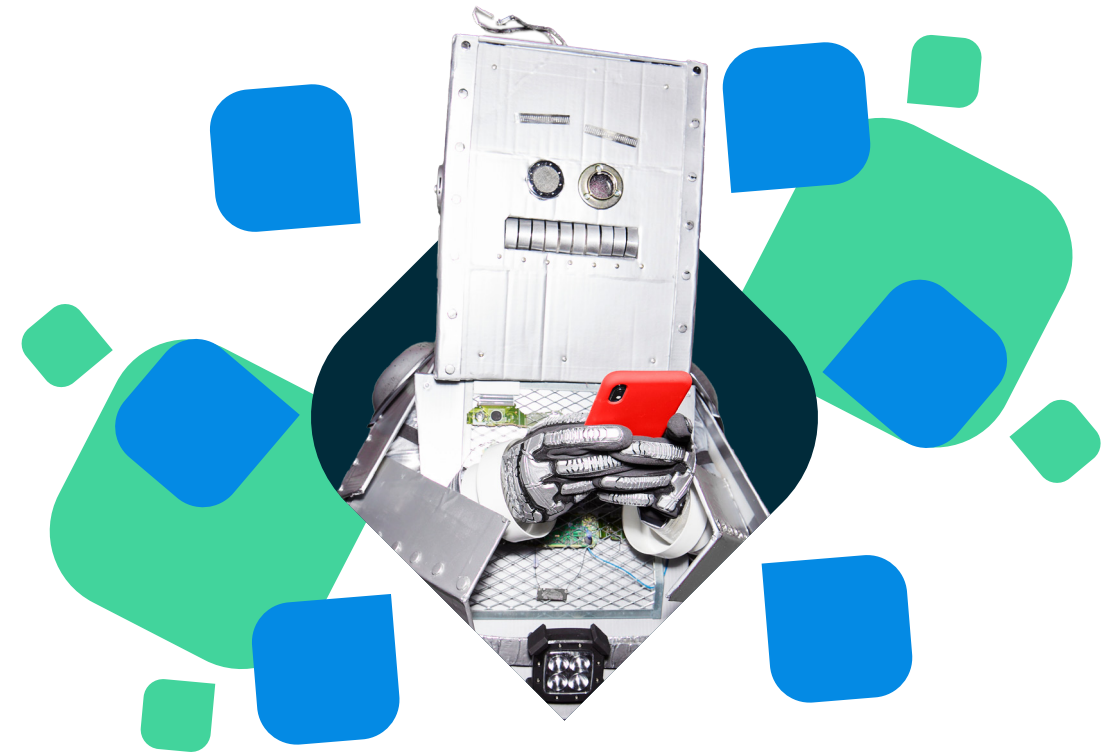
Generative AI created a seismic shift when it broke into the mainstream in 2022, sparking a whole range of emotions typically reserved for fellow humans.

Interest was so high that from 2022 to 2023, topics on learning about AI increased by 550%, according to an analysis we conducted of over 15,500 news articles and blogs.

And social marketers in government have jumped on the bandwagon.

With social media often being juggled alongside other communications tasks, it's no surprise that “reducing staff workload” was chosen as the top motivator for using AI in the government industry. Staying up-to-date with the latest tools and innovations was another leading motivator, highlighting just how much hype AI is creating in the world of government.

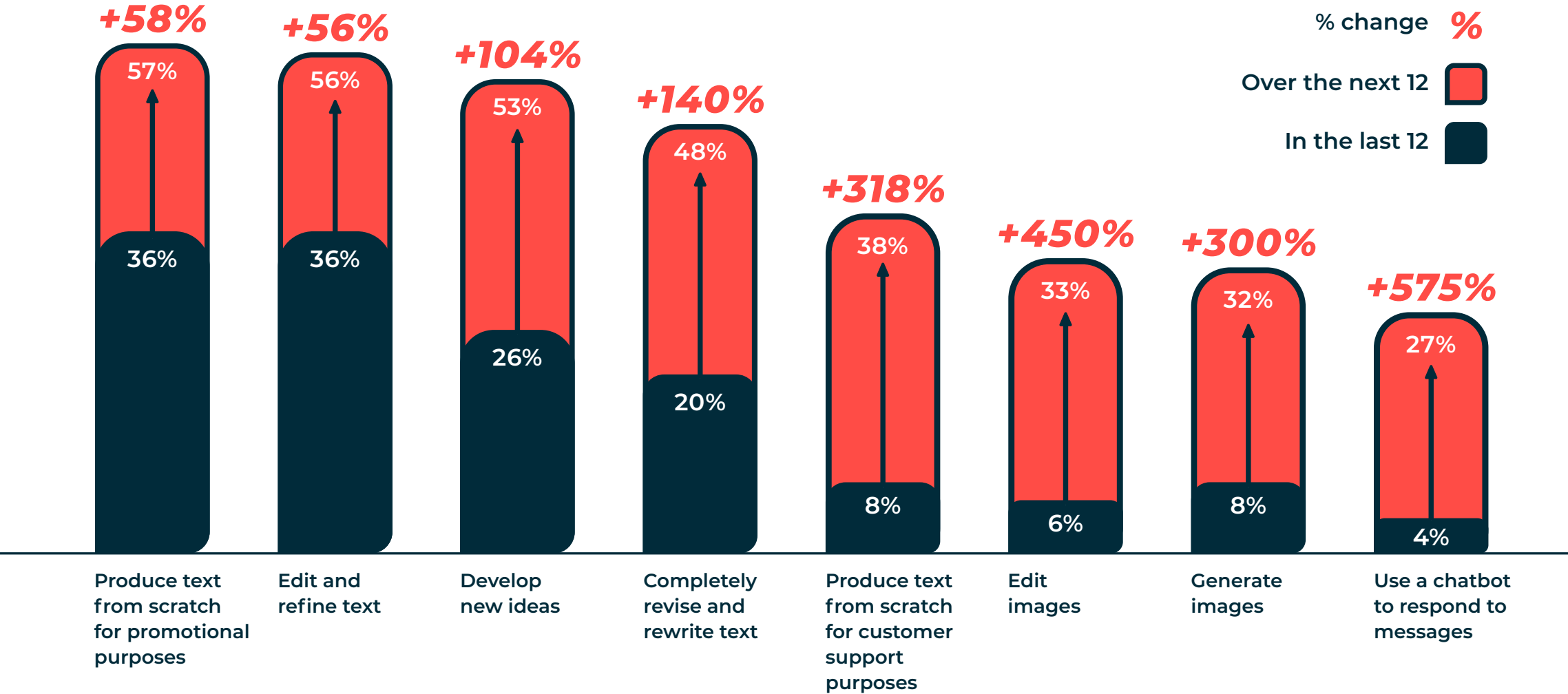
So just how much are government agencies planning to increase their AI use in 2024? A *lot*—up to even 6x their current use for some activities. The biggest increases will be in editing images and using chatbots to help with student support.





AI use among government agencies will skyrocket in 2024

In the last 12/next 12 months, how has/will your organization use(d) AI to assist with social media activities?



Sample: 203 respondents
Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Survey

So is generative AI a source of hope for busy social media managers in government like you? The numbers seem to say so.

But it's not without risks. Our survey reveals that different generations have different levels of trust towards AI-generated content.

Gen Z, for example, are more likely to claim they know what's real and what's created by AI than other generations. They're also more likely to trust and engage with AI content. On the other hand, baby boomers are the opposite on all accounts: less confident in their ability to tell if something is created by AI, and less likely to trust and engage with it if it is.



62%

**of consumers say
they are less likely
to engage with and
trust content if they
know it was created
by an AI application**

Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Consumer Survey

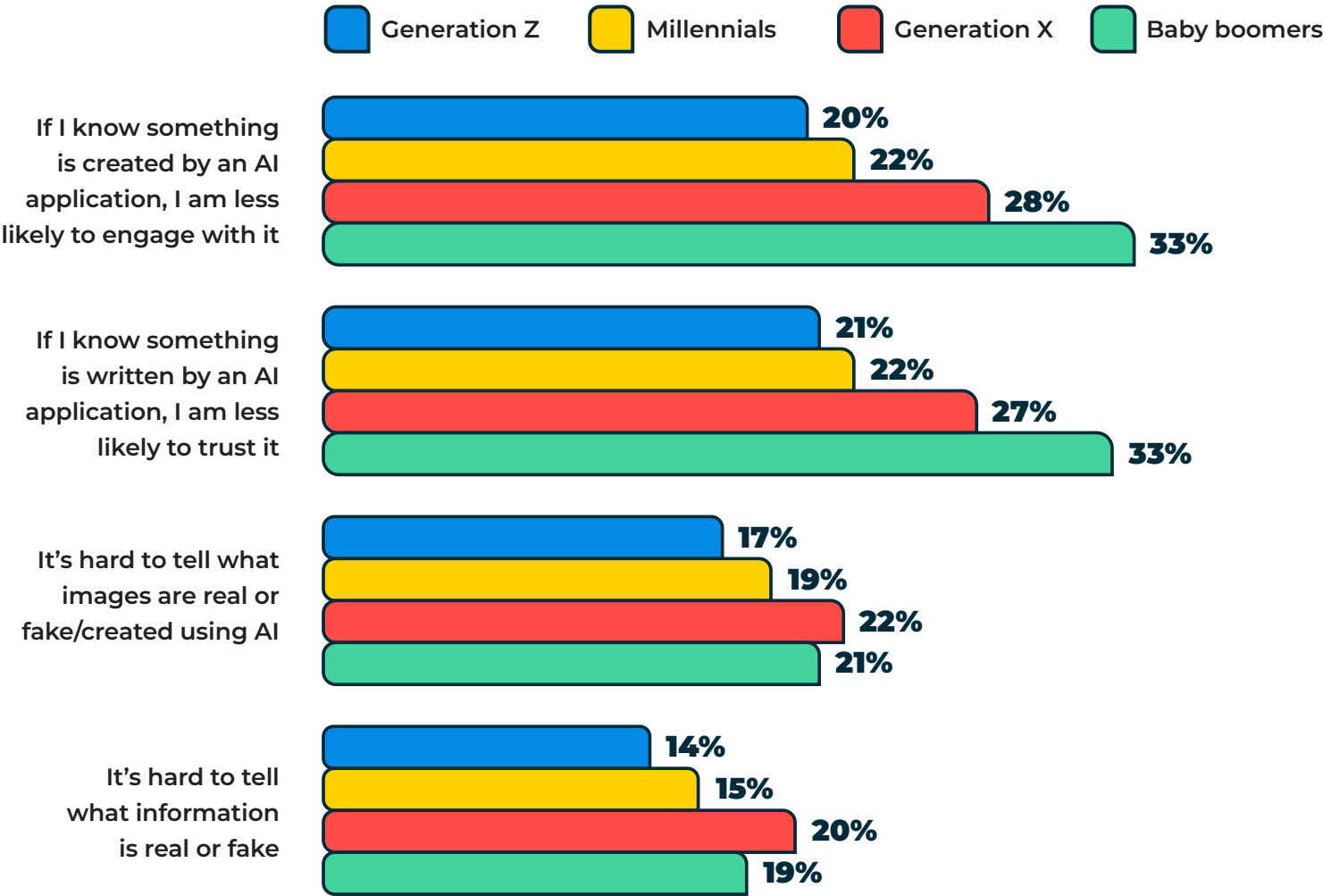
These are important considerations when using AI to create content, especially for government agencies and politicians looking to attract younger audiences and voters.

If it’s geared towards Gen Z or millennials, AI-generated content might be better received. But for older citizens, it might be best to tread carefully. Otherwise, you may risk compromising trust and relationships.

In 2024, government organizations that find the balance between using AI for productivity and efficiency while remaining authentic will thrive amidst the shifting social media landscape created by this exciting (sometimes terrifying) new technology.

AI for the ages

Thinking about social media content generated by AI, rate your agreement with the following statements



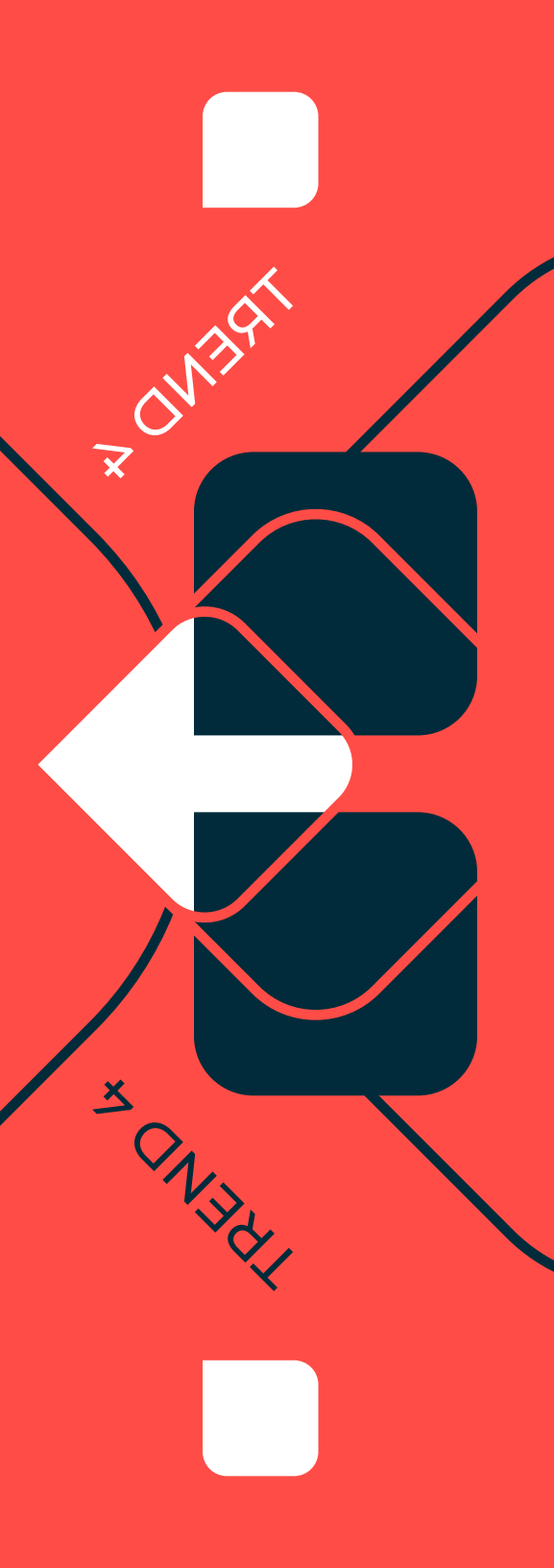
Response = Strongly agree

Sample: 4,420 respondents (filtered to those who strongly agree)
Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2024 Consumer Survey



Government agencies are a key pillar of their social content mix

Agencies hit the mark with content that prioritizes services and support.



In 2020, government agencies were forced to ramp up—or establish—their social media presence to provide essential updates (and dispel myths) about COVID-19, while highlighting what they were doing to help their communities and individual citizens.

People couldn't get enough of it.

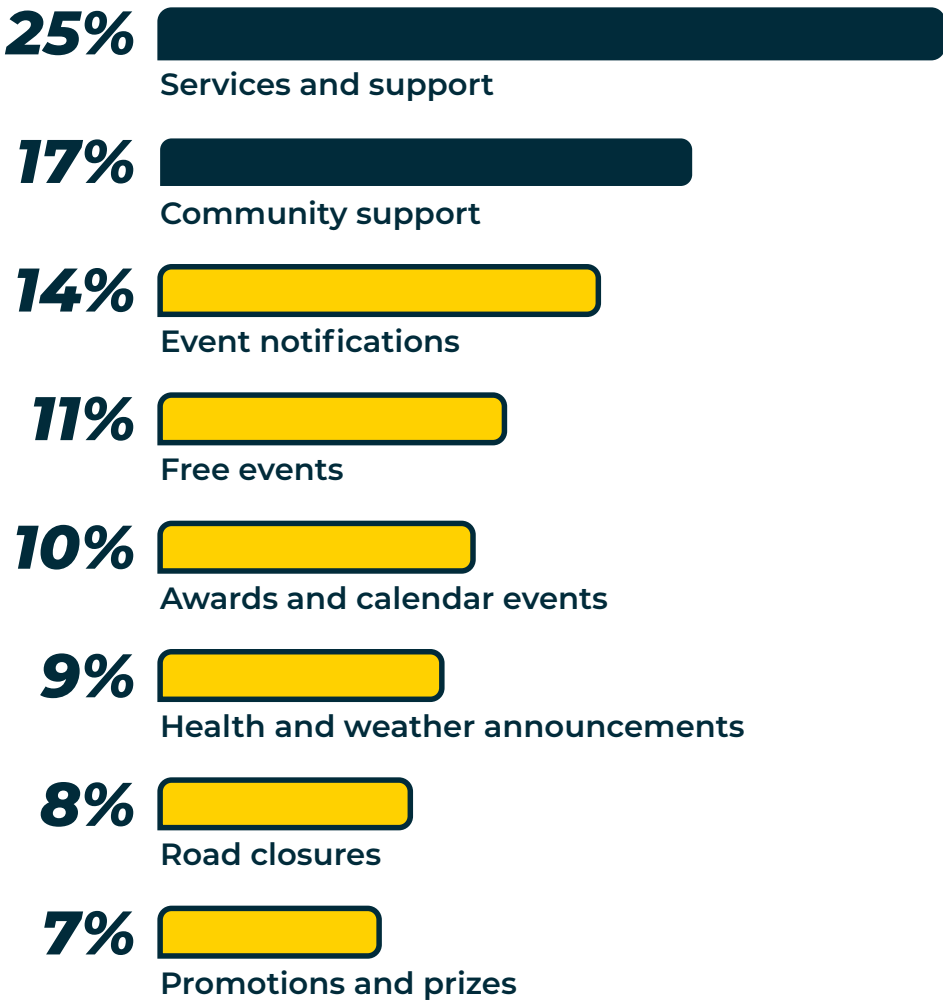
But in a post-pandemic world, government organizations had to find ways to keep their audiences engaged on social. Many agencies decided to take a page from their pandemic playbooks by continuing to do what worked: make announcements and share the different ways they offer support to their communities (awareness themes we call “services and support” and “community support”).

Today, 42% of all social posts from government agencies fall into these two buckets, as per our analysis of 200,000 posts from government accounts connected to Hootsuite.

It makes complete sense that posts about services and community support make up almost half of government agencies' social content. Many agencies (39%) even post service announcements or alerts multiple times a week. And it's a good move—because it's the primary reason citizens follow them.

Agencies prioritize services and support on social

Percentage of social media posts centered around each theme



Based on an analysis of 200,000 anonymous posts from government accounts in the Hootsuite platform

In 2024, social-savvy government agencies will continue to keep their audiences informed while providing value. They'll also focus on the information their followers can't get from anyone else. They'll concentrate less on sharing information like events, weather, and road closures (which can easily be found on local news sites and social accounts), and lean more into the angles that are unique to them.



If your organization is already posting about services and community support nearly half the time, and seeing positive social media results:

You're on the right track. Just be sure to keep your content interesting by finding fresh ways to present it. Our [Social Media Toolkit for Fresh Ideas](#) can help give stale updates an exciting new spin.

If you're coming up short on social despite regularly featuring services and support messaging:

You may want to use [social listening](#) strategies to get a clear understanding of what your audience really wants to see from you.



Facebook and Twitter/X have been the most popular platforms for services and support content. But LinkedIn and Instagram are starting to gain traction (and typically generate the [highest engagement rates](#) for government agencies). Try them out for posts with these themes.

If your posts rarely fall into the top two buckets we've identified:

There's a strong opportunity for you to capture your community's attention (and provide the info they crave) by making some adjustments to your content plan. Here's a [step-by-step guide](#) on how to do it.

The background is a vibrant red. A large, dark blue diamond shape is centered, with its vertices pointing towards the corners. Inside the diamond, the main title is written in white and dark blue. The title is flanked by two identical graphic elements on the left and right. Each element consists of a dark blue square with a white arrow pointing towards the center, overlaid with a red line that forms a stylized 'S' or 'Z' shape. In the corners of the red background, there are white squares and the text 'TREND 5' and 'TREND 2' in white, rotated 45 degrees.

Social marketers in government shake their compliance jitters

With the right tools in place, leading agencies prioritize compliance without sacrificing social media success.

When you work in government, dealing with strict compliance standards is, well, standard. But these regulations make every aspect of a social marketer’s job more challenging—even some of the simpler tasks, like writing captions, responding to comments and messages, and creating graphics.

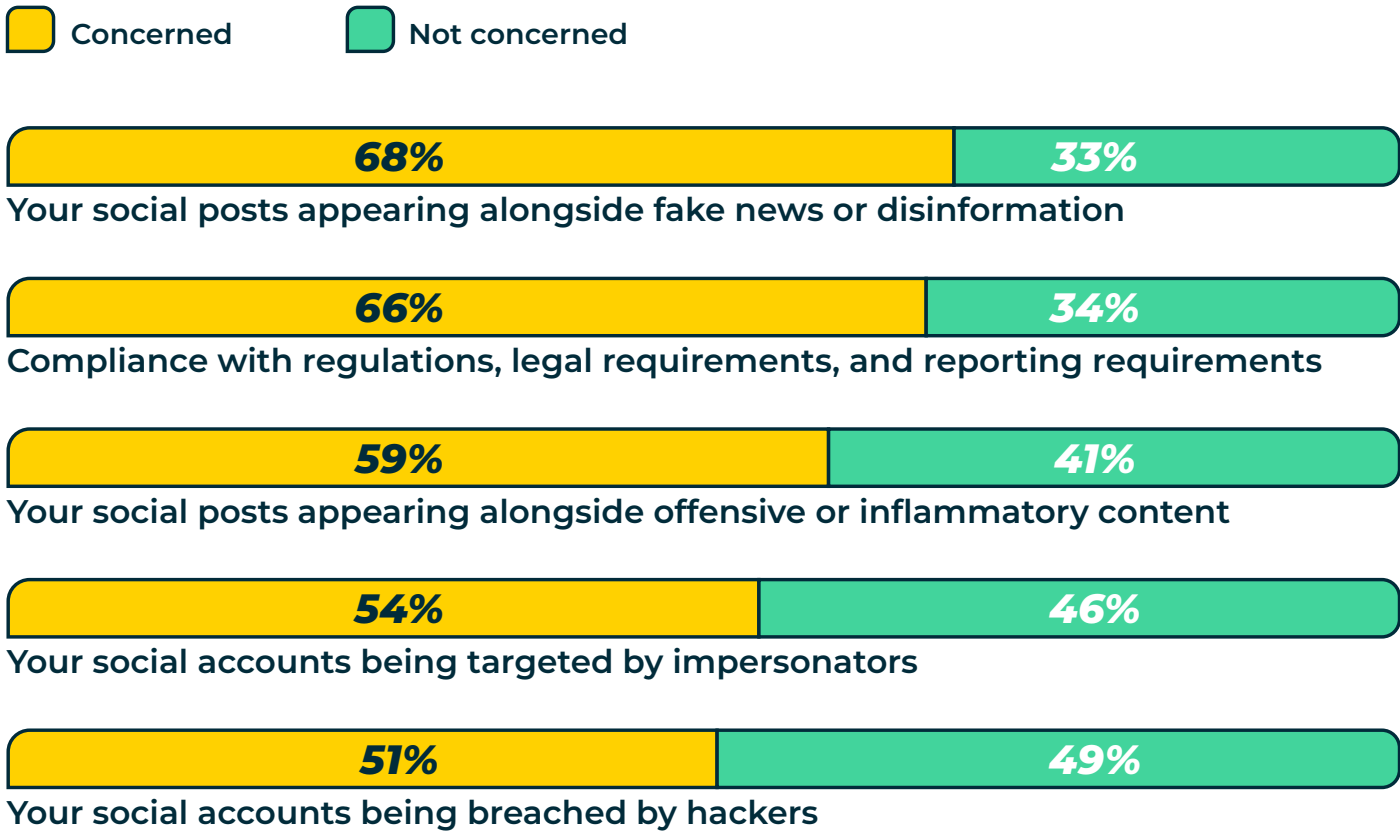
In fact, 44% of social media managers in government admit that industry regulations make their already-tough jobs tougher, according to our [2023 Social Media Management Career Survey](#).

But no matter how tough staying compliant may be, dealing with the consequences of non-compliant messaging can be a whole lot worse. That’s why compliance is still among the top social media safety concerns for two-thirds of government organizations.

This ongoing concern reflects the critical role of compliance in government, and how seriously it’s taken by those who work in the industry. When it comes to social media, in particular, 60% of government agencies even have corporate policies around what employees are able to post to their personal accounts.

Compliance is a top social media safety concern for government agencies

How concerned is your organization about the following risks to brand safety on social media?



Staying compliant shouldn't compromise your social strategy. But for many government organizations, regulatory requirements still hinder their ability to do their best work and meet key goals on social.

Insert here: Your own example of a seemingly simple post idea that was practically unrecognizable after running through your compliance checklist

Can't pick just one? That's a clear indication that something has to change. (Spoiler alert: It won't be the regulations.)

In 2024, agencies that want to prioritize compliance without sacrificing social media success will invest in compliance tools that provide peace of mind—so they can have the time (and mental capacity) to execute their strategies as planned and reach their full potential on social.



They'll also implement approval processes that add another layer of protection and boost efficiency. Right now, less than half of government organizations have approval workflows for social media content, which is surprising, mainly because following a consistent process to vet posts is just a logical way to go about it.

[Hootsuite's compliance integrations](#) allow you to save pre-approved content, create custom permissions for users, and set up approval workflows so social posts can get compliance-approved (even by an entire team) and out the door quicker.



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