

Global State of Social Media 2026



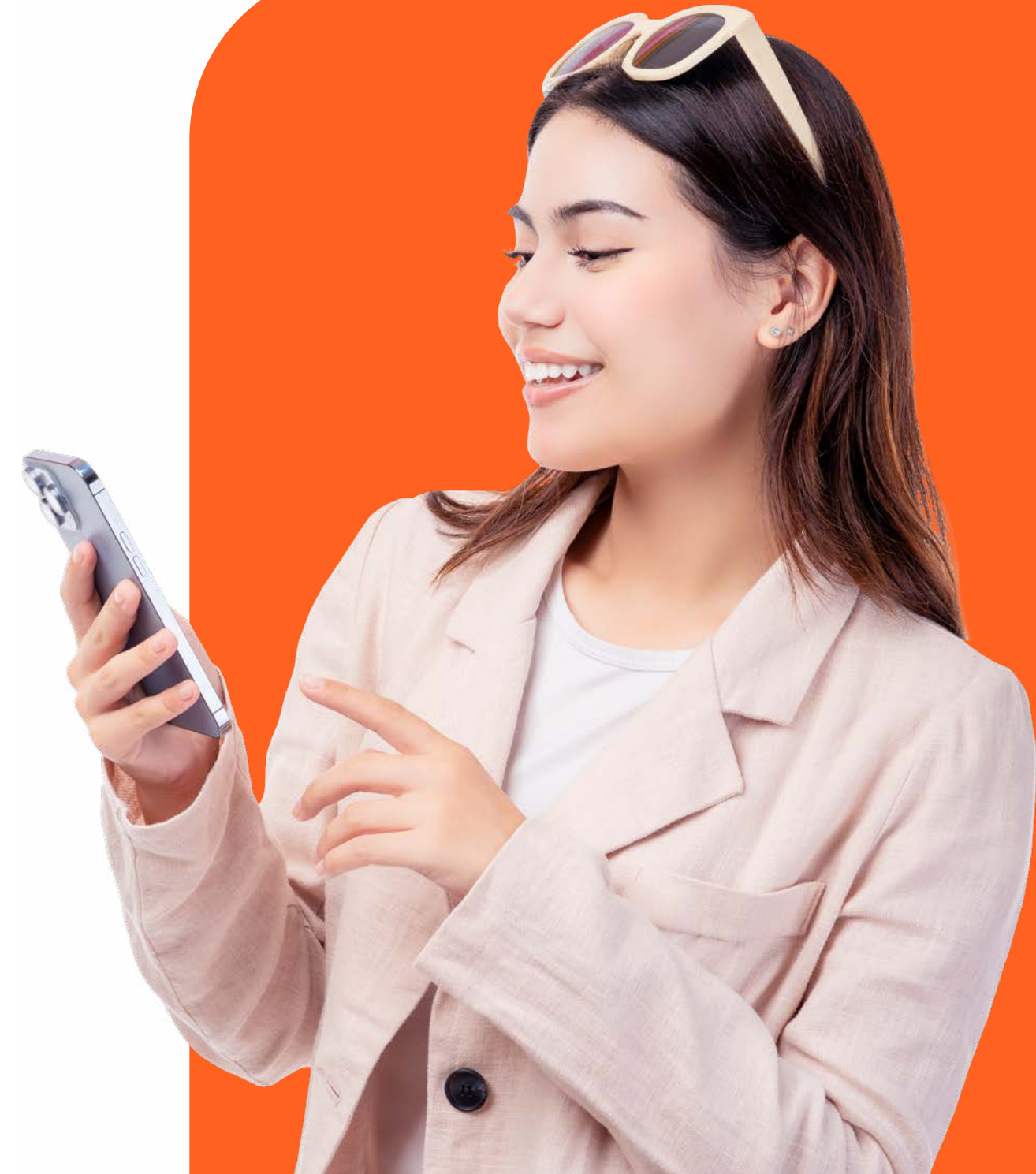
Introduction

The digital landscape continues to undergo changes with the proliferation of AI, and social media is along for the ride. But even with the constant flux and rapid transition, social media use continues to steadily rise, reaching **5.66 billion in 2025** — a 4.8% increase year over year.

This means businesses need to know how to react. Not only because your 22-year-old intern is insisting on it, but because if you don't, you're leaving money on the table. **72% of internet users use social media for brand research**. That's a lot of purchase power among those growing online audiences.

Meltwater's annual State of Social Media Report aims to identify the trends that will help you formulate a strategic, data-backed plan of attack for 2026, based on survey responses from over 1,500 marketing professionals around the world.

Learn where your peers are focused, what goals to prioritize, which channels offer previously unmet opportunities, and keep adapting to shifting online behaviors in a deliberate and intentional way.



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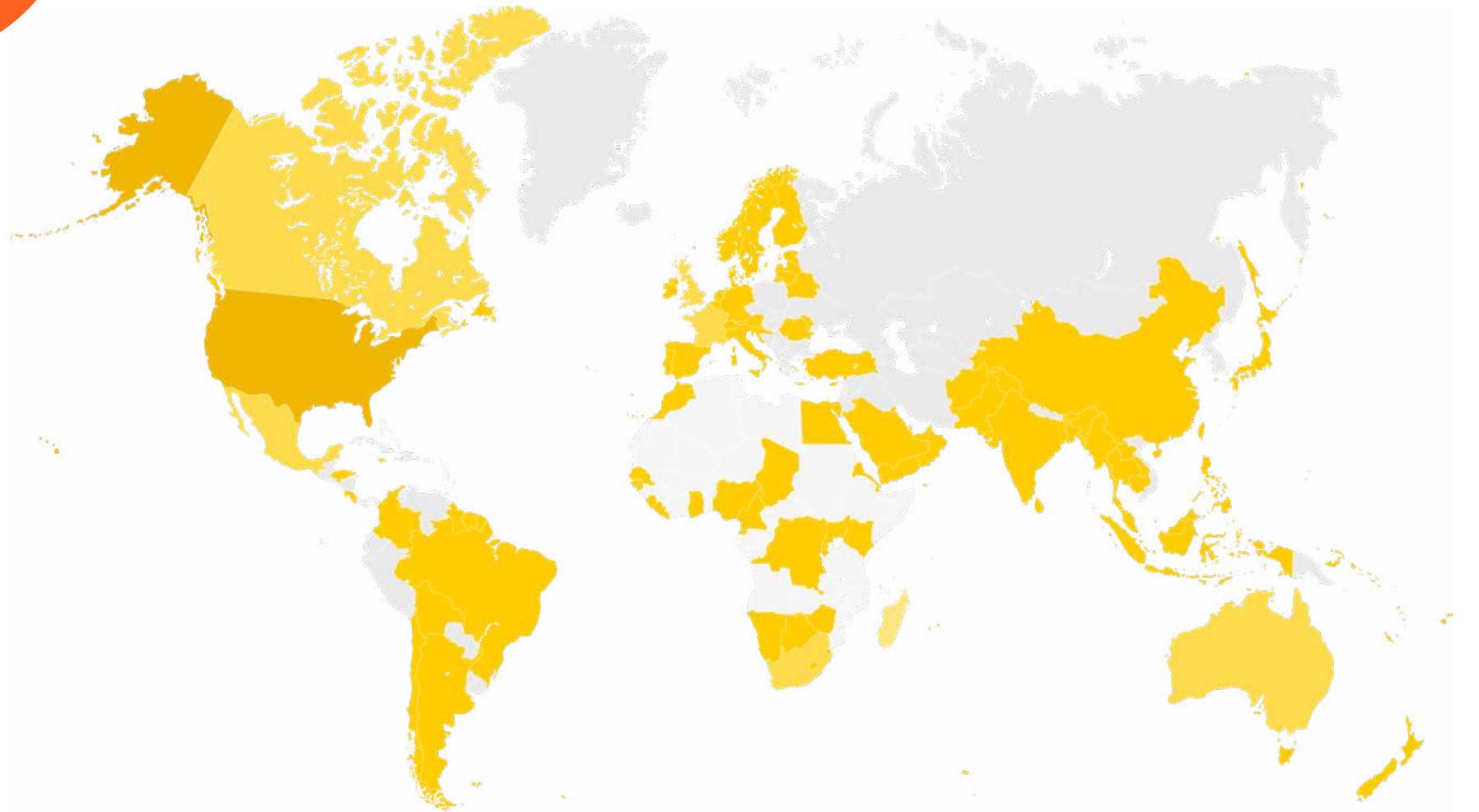
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Global Survey Coverage

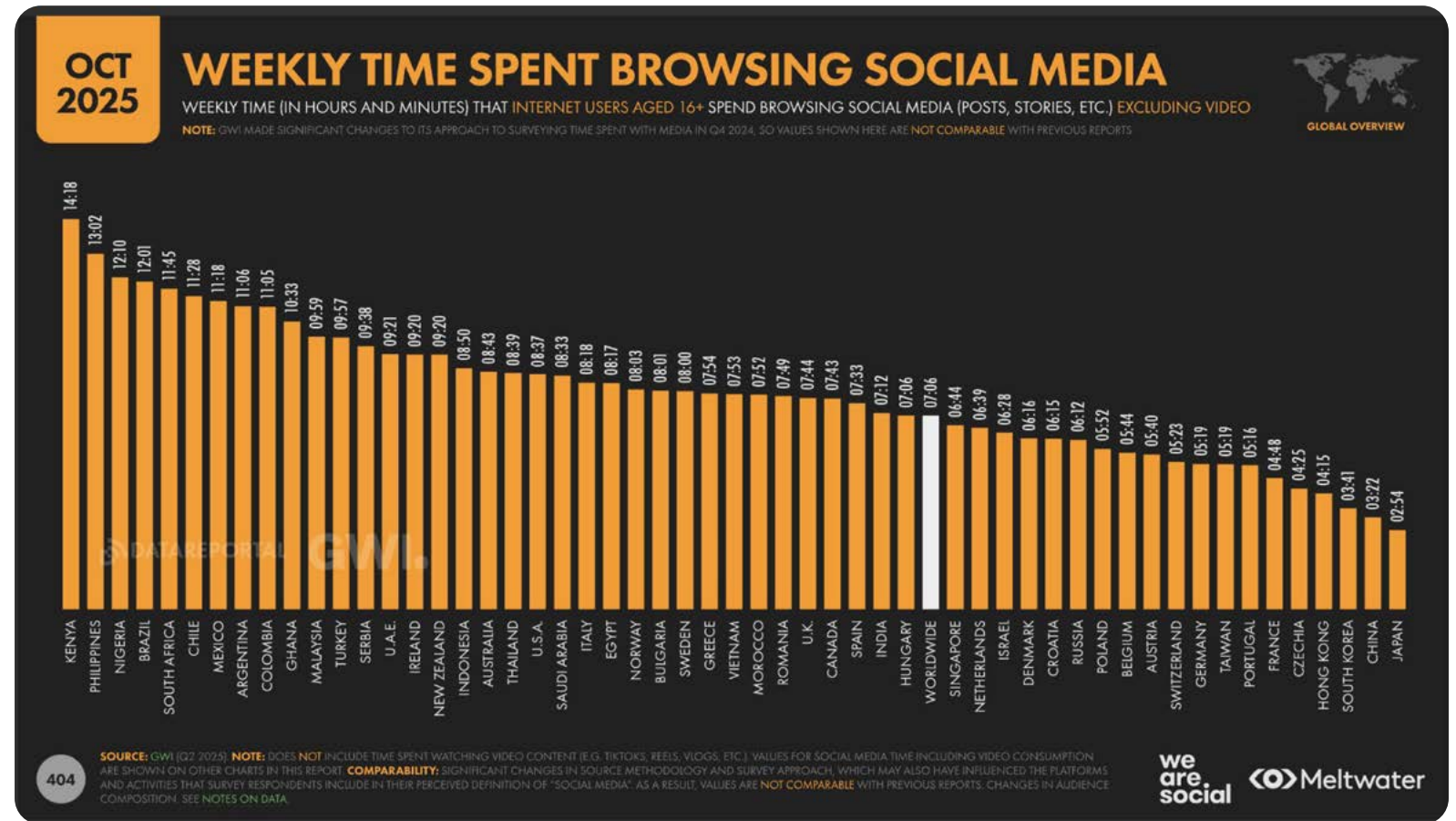
To gather as comprehensive an understanding of the global state of social media as possible, we invited marketers from around the world to participate.

Over 1,500 marketing professionals completed the survey. This global report includes input from countries like the United States, Canada, the Philippines, China, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, Germany, Italy, South Africa, and more.



Social Media Usage Worldwide

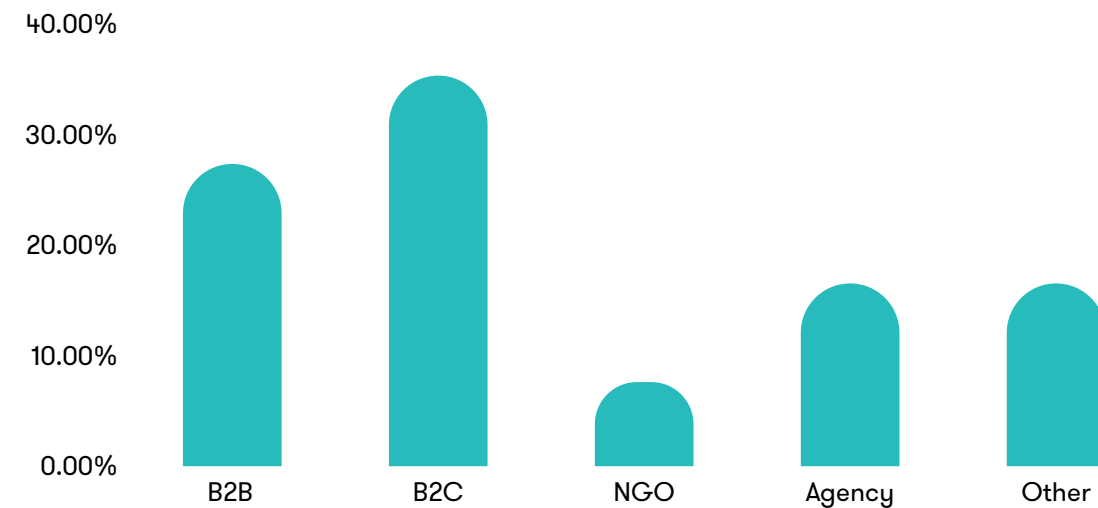
The State of Social Media Report looks at how companies are approaching their social media programs, but it's crucial to also be aware of how user behavior is changing. The [Global Digital Report](#), published by Kepios in partnership with We Are Social, is your go-to resource, covering social media and digital trends in detail (600+ pages of data!). Some relevant facts from the report are included in the State of Social Media, but we encourage you to download the Global Digital Report where you can gather even more context, applicable to your specific use-cases, needs, and interests.



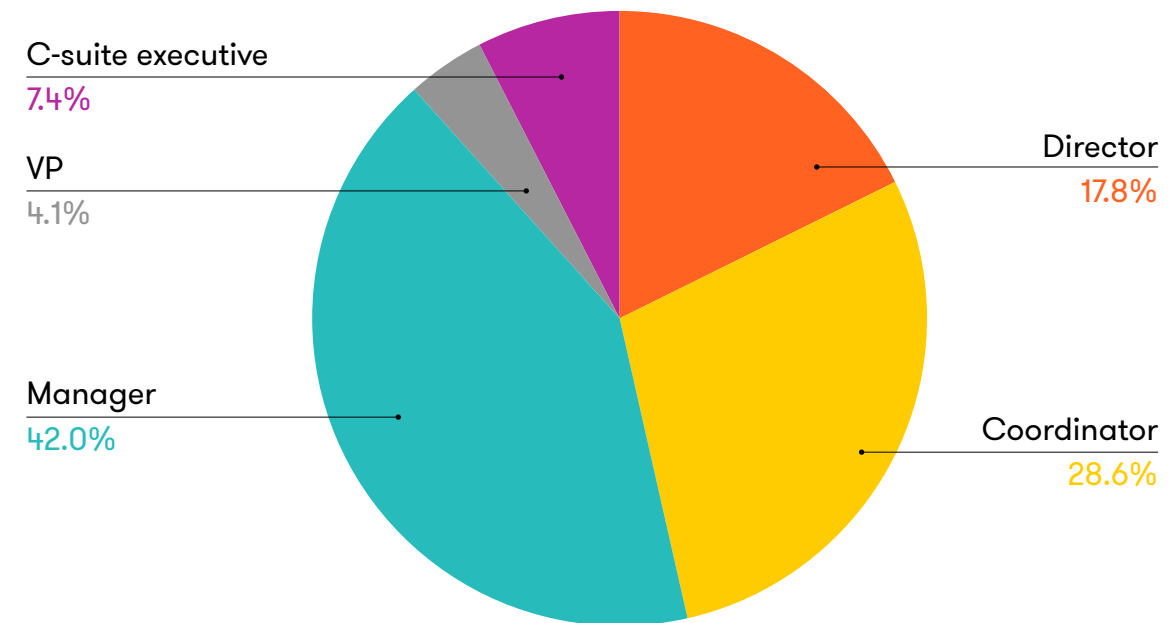
Company Type & Role Breakdown

The ways in which distinct business types approach social media can vary greatly, due to differing goals and tactics. B2C companies often have more latitude when using channels like TikTok and Reddit, while B2B are often more active on LinkedIn. In the 2026 survey, responses from B2C companies were greater than in previous years, which is reflected in the data.

What type of organization do you work for?



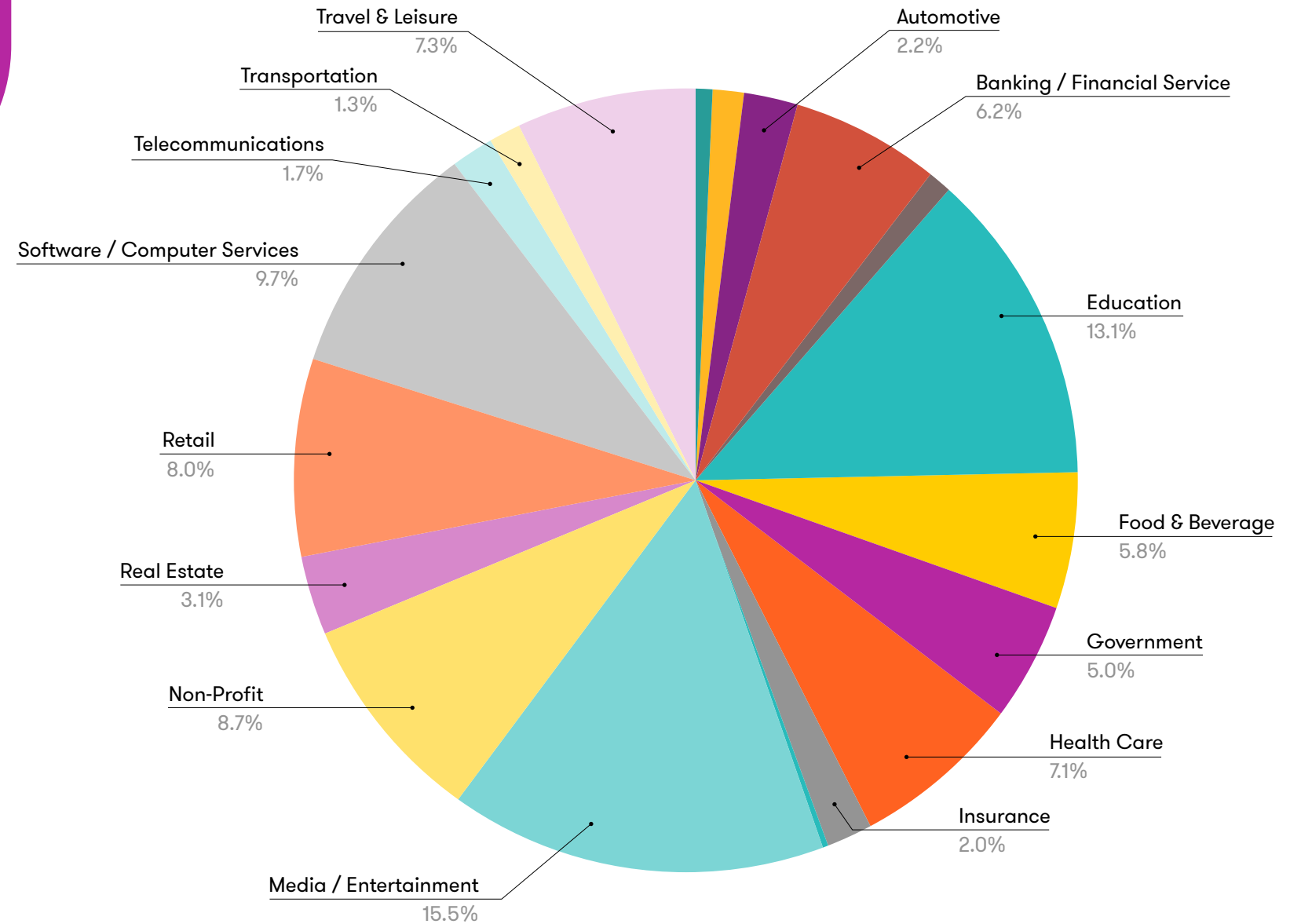
What is your job level?



Industry

In a new addition to this year's survey, we asked respondents what best describes their industry. Responses show a wide variety, with the majority coming from Entertainment, Education, and Software.

What best matches your industry?

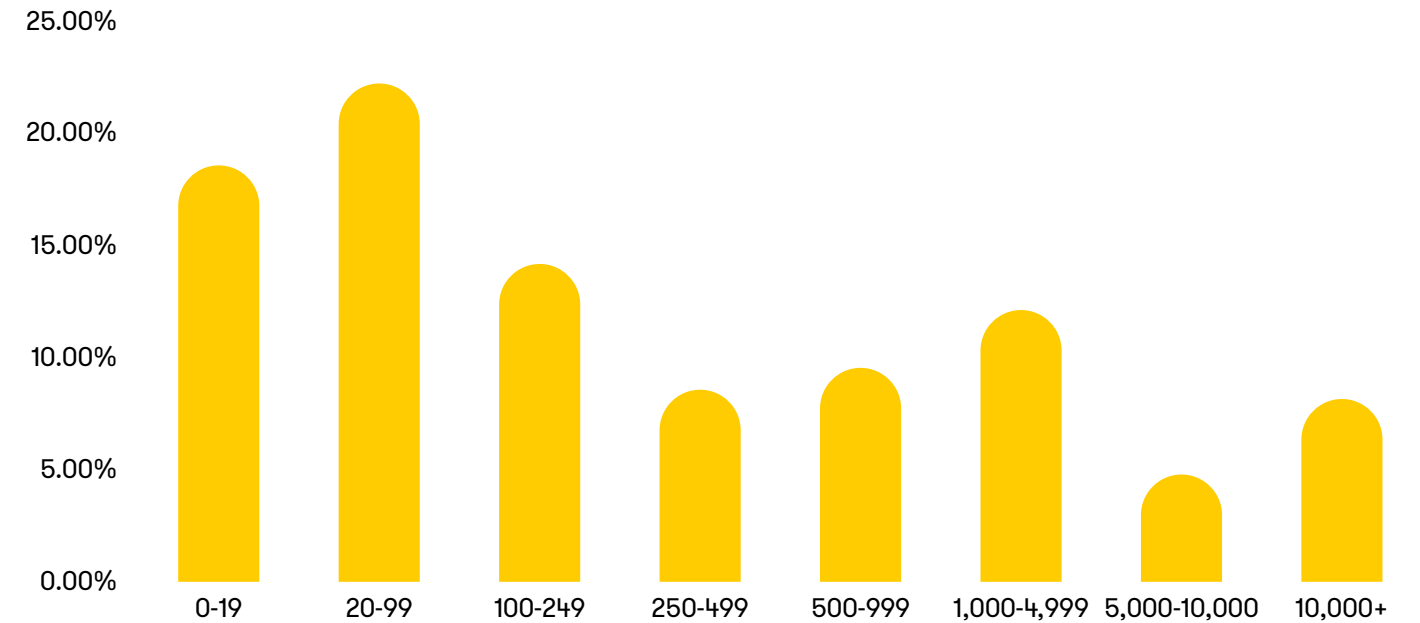


Social Media Team Size

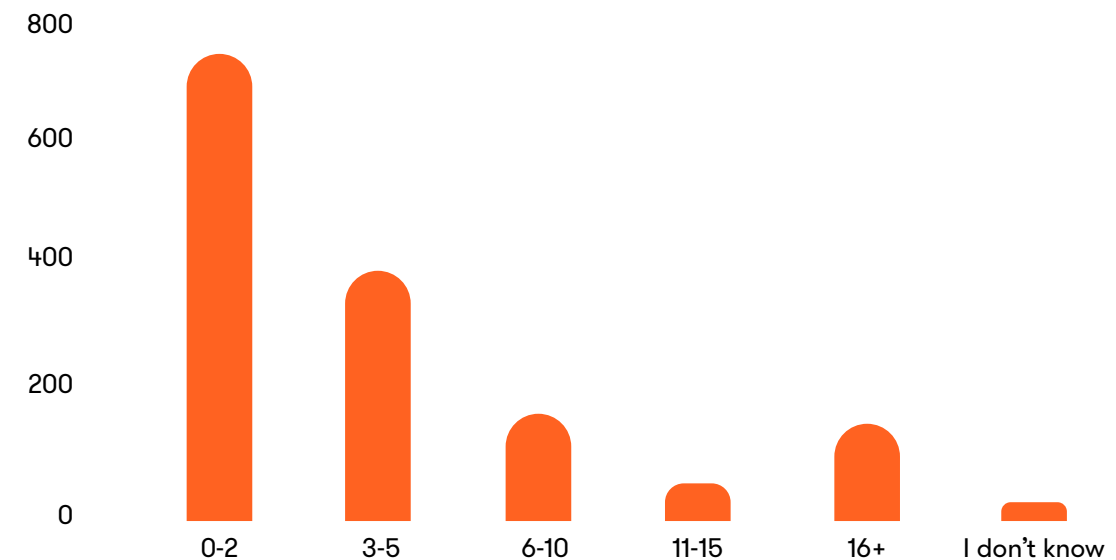
While respondents' company sizes varied, the majority of survey respondents are operating with small social media teams (0-2 members). While this limited bandwidth is consistent with last year's findings, it should be noted that a higher number of organizations say they are operating with a more advanced social program year over year.

See page 11 for more!

How many employees does your company have?



How many people work in social media at your organization?



Optimize your impact with social listening

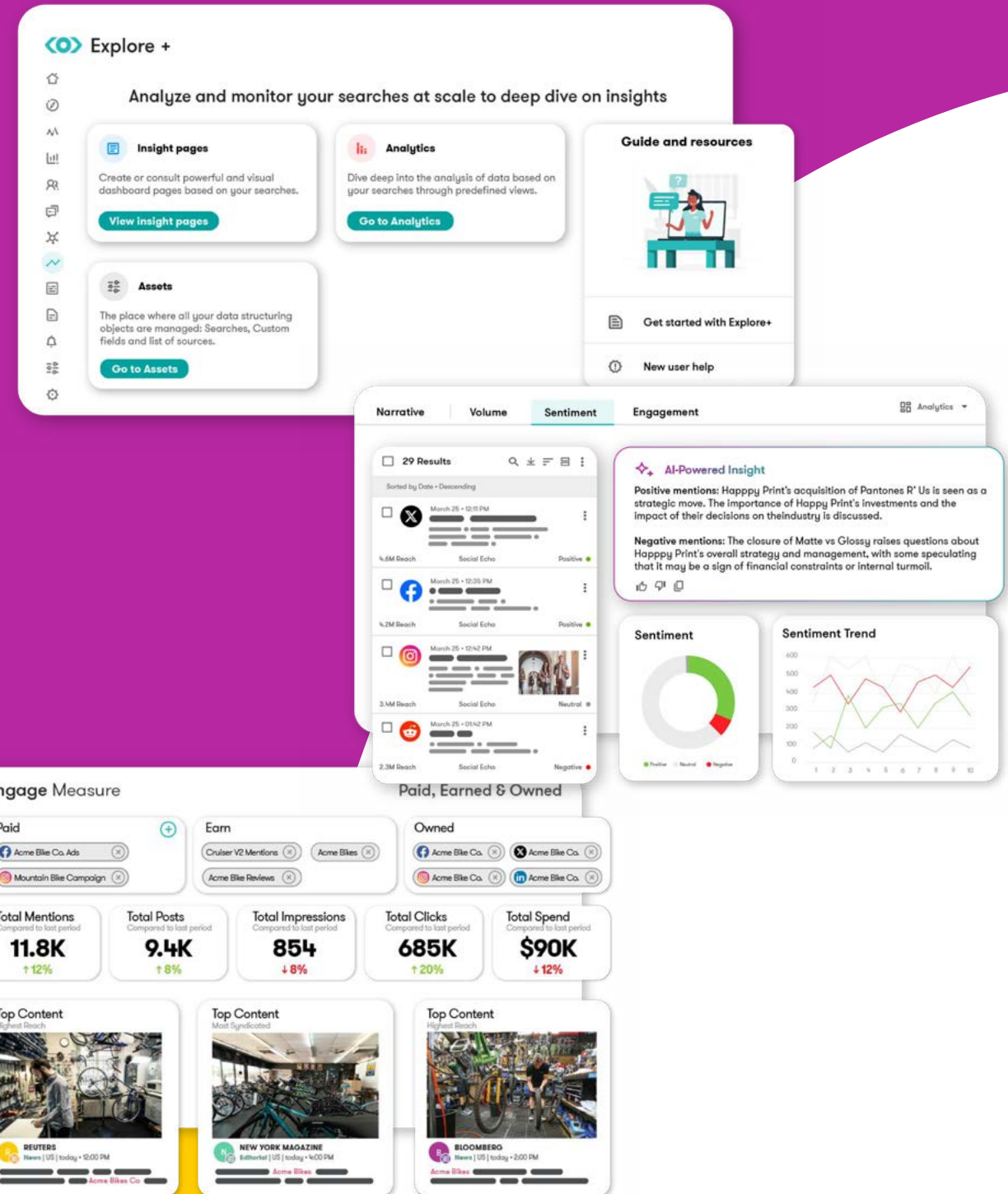
Comprehensive **social listening software**, like Meltwater, can help you see the big picture like never before. By incorporating important insights into your marketing strategy, you can drive more meaningful results, stay attuned to changing industry trends, and monitor competitor activity.

Save your team time with AI-powered insights that process over 1.3 billion social media posts, news articles, and blog posts every day.

With Meltwater, you can focus in on what's important, capture the mentions that matter and uncover the insights you've been missing.

Learn how in a demo with one of our product experts!

[Request a demo](#)



Survey Results: **Organic Social Media**

Social Program Status

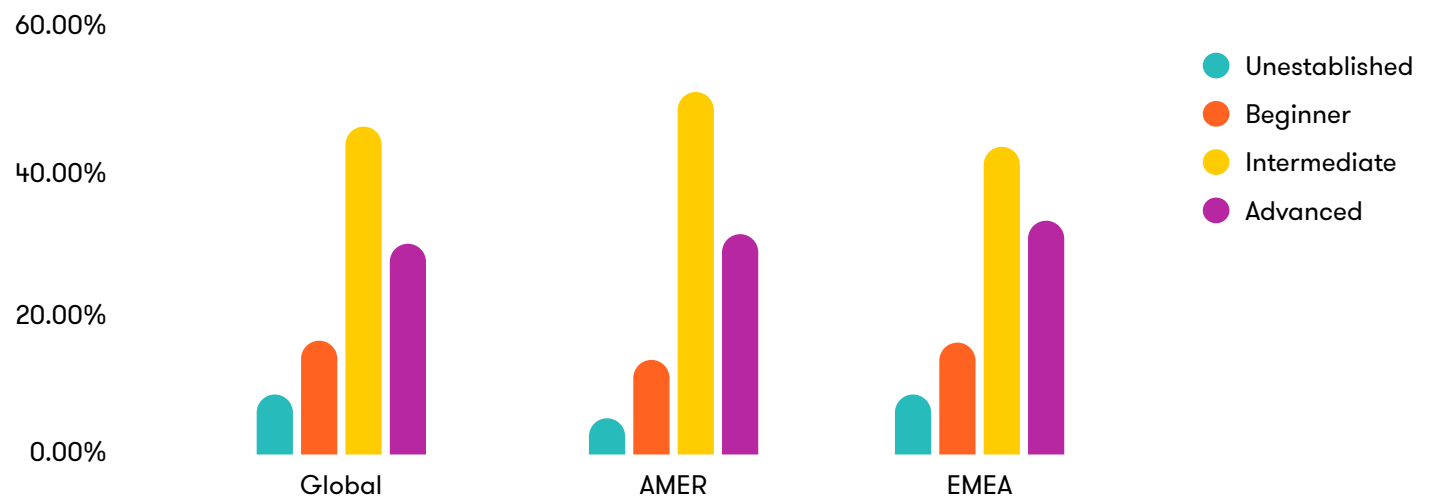
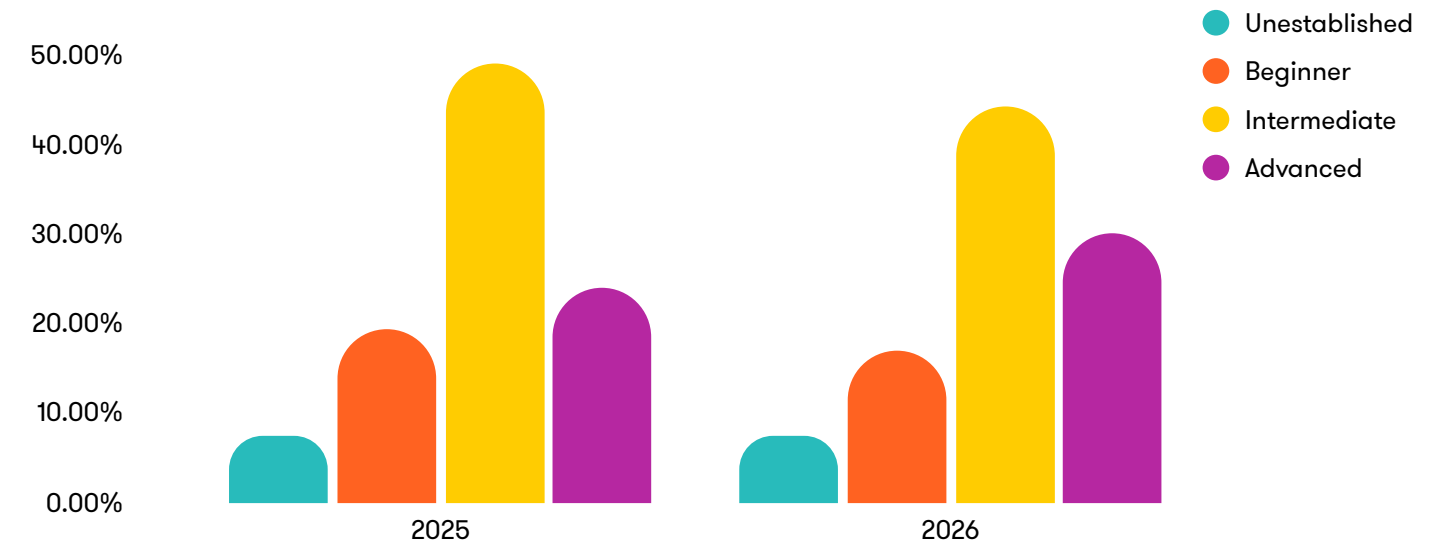
In an effort to understand the maturity of respondents' social strategies, we asked survey participants how they would define their current social program:

- **Unestablished:** We don't have a dedicated social media team
- **Beginner:** We have a team but are still defining our strategy
- **Intermediate:** We have a strategy but lack the resources needed to execute it
- **Advanced:** We have a full team and strategy mapped out

Nearly half (45%) answered "Intermediate," which echoes the previous year. However, between 2025 and 2026 we see a much stronger indication that companies are taking social more seriously, with 29% stating their program is Advanced and fewer companies characterizing their programs as Beginner.

Broken down by region, **EMEA companies** lead the way in Advanced programs at 32%, while **Americas companies** have the most Intermediate level programs.

How established is your social media program?

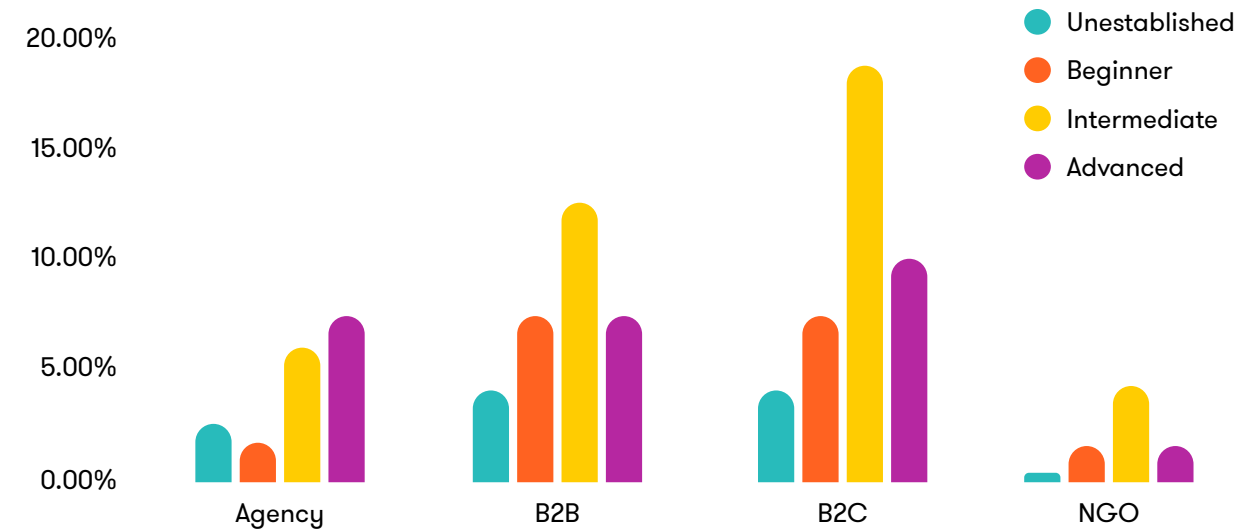


Social program status (cont.)

Breaking it down by company type, B2C companies have the most robust social programs overall, with a combined 25% of respondents classifying their programs as either Intermediate (16%) or Advanced (9%). These B2C results are understandable, given that social media often acts as a direct sales channel for B2C brands.

It's important to note that "Advanced" doesn't necessarily mean "more personnel", though that is a fair first assumption. Particularly with the help of AI tools for social, an advanced social program could conceivably be run by one or two people. Check out our [Guide to AI for Social Media Management](#) for ways to optimize social when bandwidth is thin.

Social program status by company type

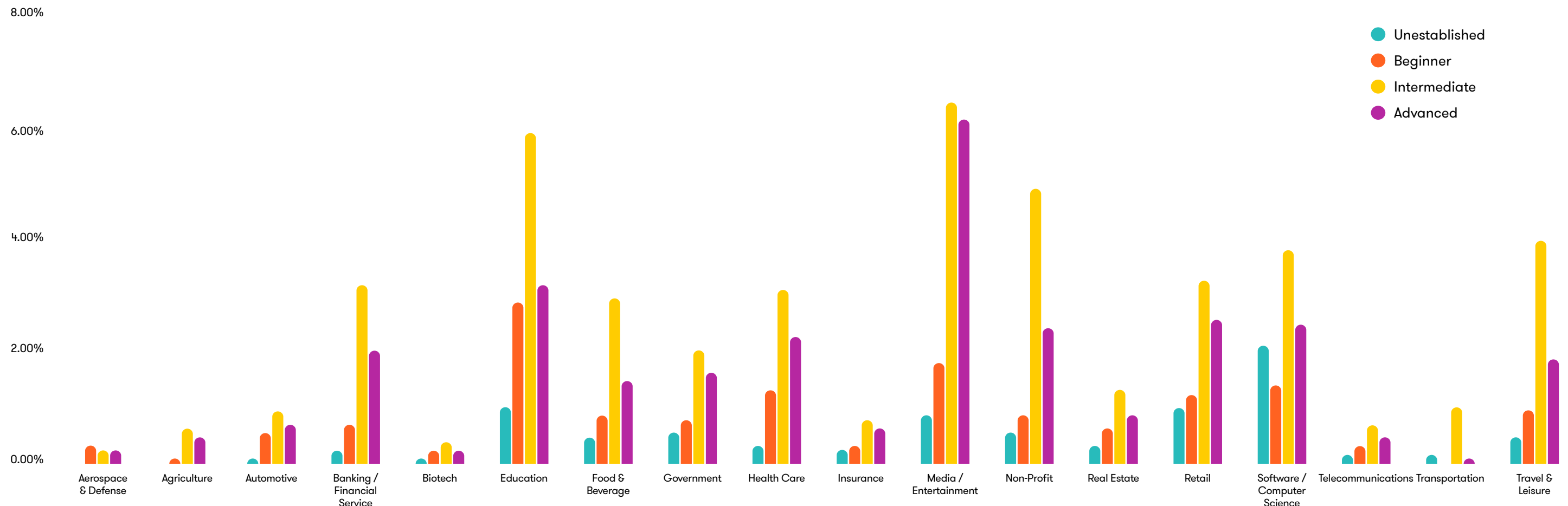


Social program status (cont.)

If we look at social program status by industry, the Education sector has the most Beginner level social media programs, and the second highest number of Intermediate programs. Educational institutions are increasingly using social media to connect with current and prospective students, and faculty and staff. The approach is still relatively new, but clearly of import as these teams grow in scope, scale, and sophistication.

The leader in Intermediate and Advanced is the Entertainment industry, where campaigns perhaps require catering to much larger and more widespread demographics, leading to the need for a robust social approach.

Social program status by industry



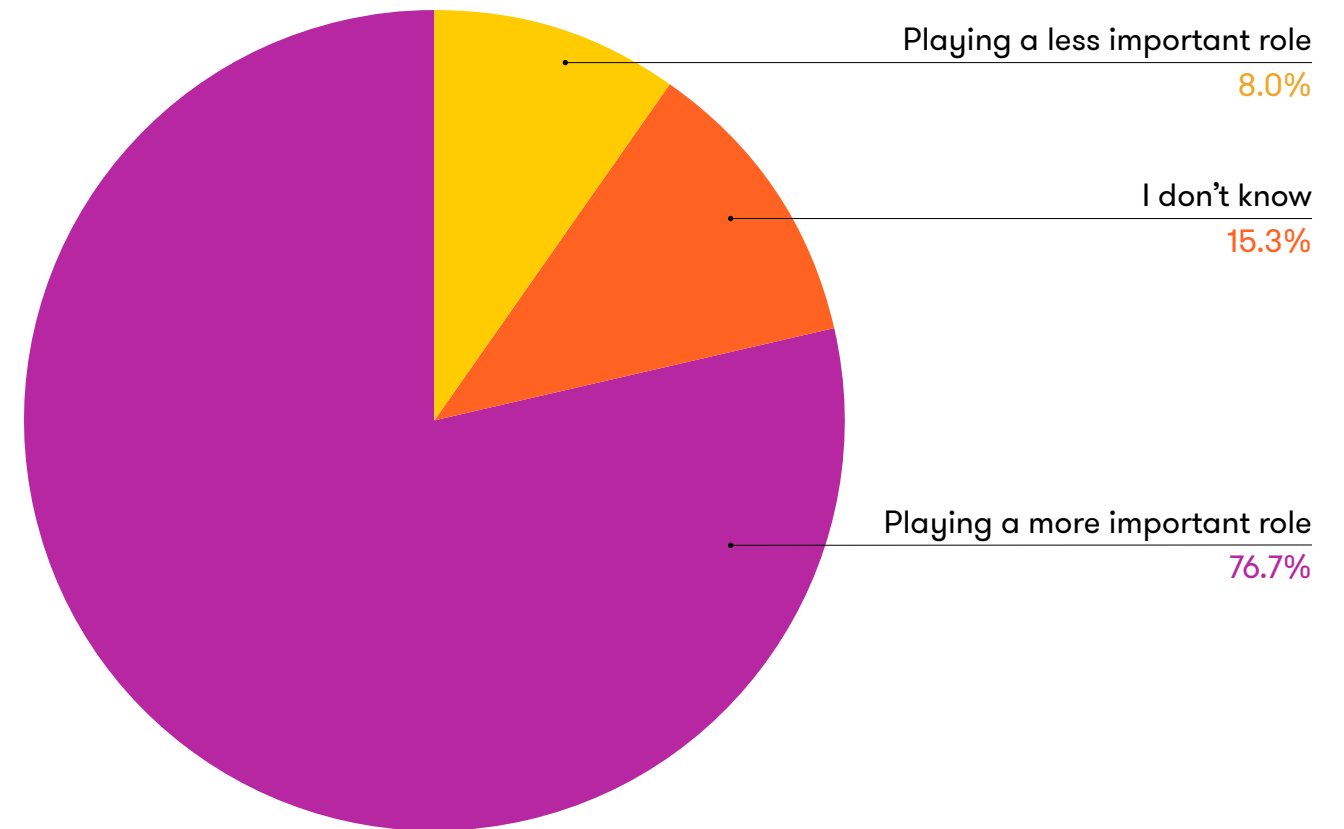
The Role of Social Media in 2026

A majority of companies believe that social will play a more important role in the coming year, consistent with our findings last year.

However a much larger percentage are also expressing uncertainty on the future of their social programs, with more than 15% saying “I don’t know” in 2026 vs. 11% in 2025.

This is in line with the budgeting trends we’re seeing this year, which are on the more cautious side. This uncertainty also matches the continued YOY trend of social teams remaining on the smaller side.

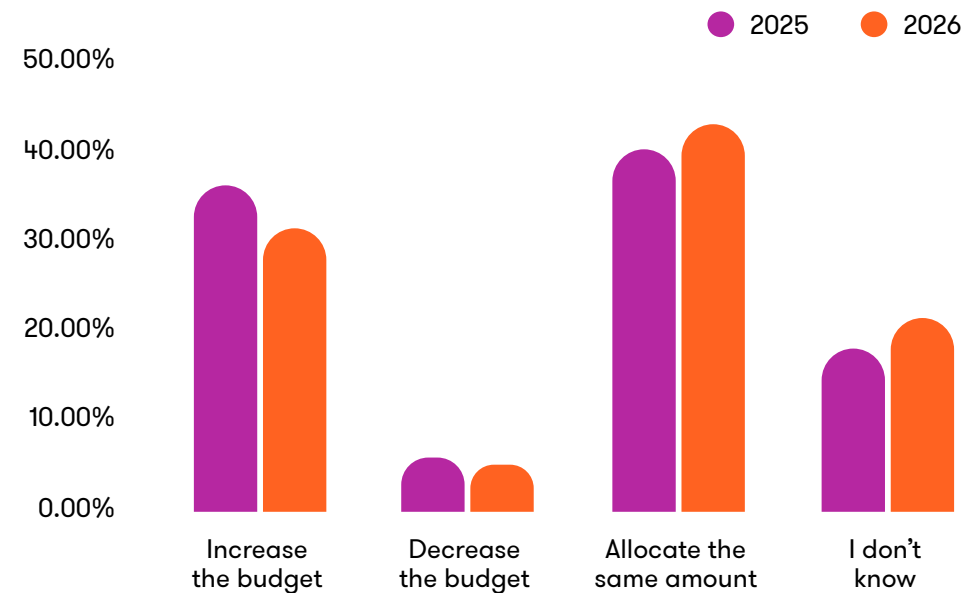
How do you see the role of organic social media developing at your company in 2026?



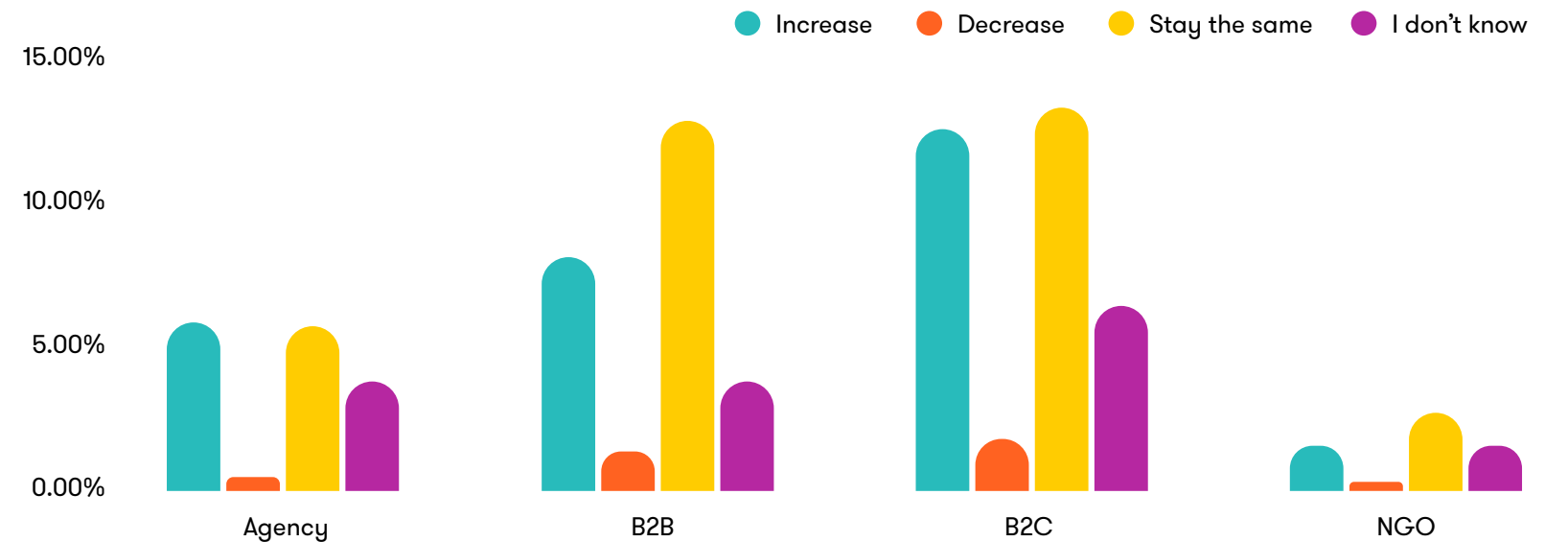
Social Media Budgets

Most companies are planning to keep their social media budgets the same in 2026, while 31% are hoping to increase them. B2C companies are favoring a more enterprising approach, with 12% interested in increasing their social media budgets in 2026. However, the overall number of companies looking to invest more in social is down YOY, demonstrating some economic trepidation.

Budget planning YOY



Budgeting for 2026 by company type



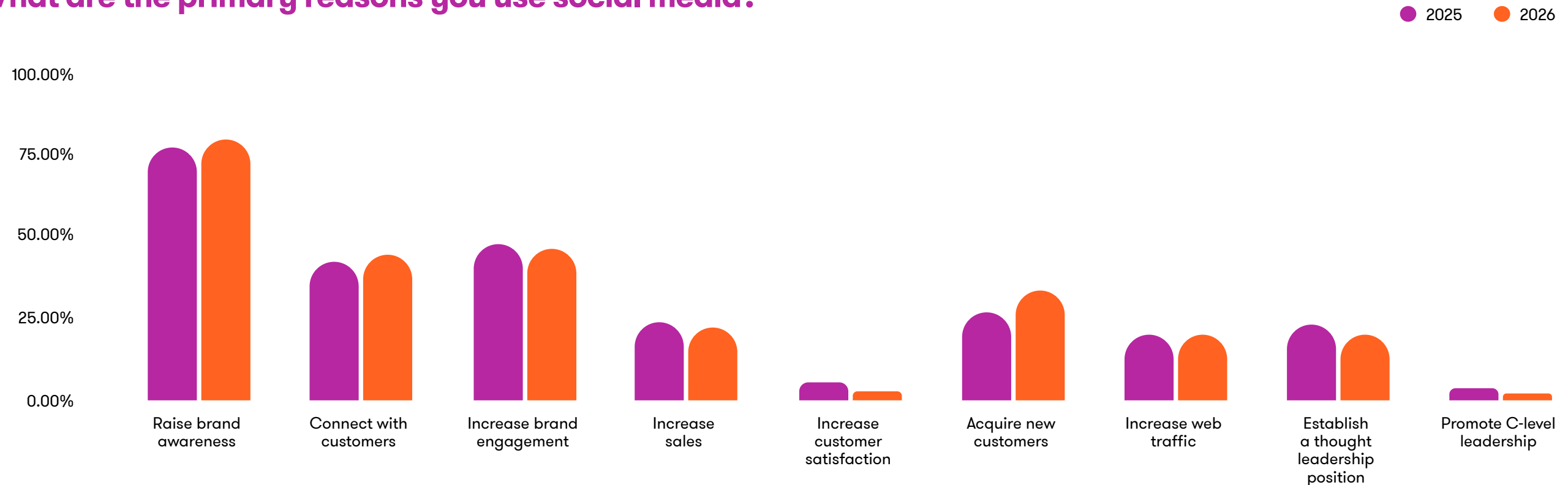
Social Media Goals

For the third year in a row, we've found that respondents mainly use social media to increase brand awareness and get their message in front of new potential customers.

The second most common reason is to increase brand engagement, though it has decreased slightly in importance this year. On a global scale we see companies less intent overall on connecting with customers than in the [Americas market](#), where our regional report shows a 16% increase YOY for this goal, compared to 7% worldwide.

In an interesting shift from 2025, more companies will be focused on acquiring new customers in 2026, over investing in thought leadership which shows a decline in urgency YOY.

What are the primary reasons you use social media?



Social media goals by company type

Although thought leadership is taking a backseat based on the global data overall, when we drill down by company type, it's clear that this is still a key priority for B2B companies. B2C companies lead the charge on all other goals, demonstrating the wide range of benefits that B2C companies hope to achieve from social, as opposed to B2B which seem more hesitant on where they want to focus.

What are the primary reasons you use social media?



Social Program Management

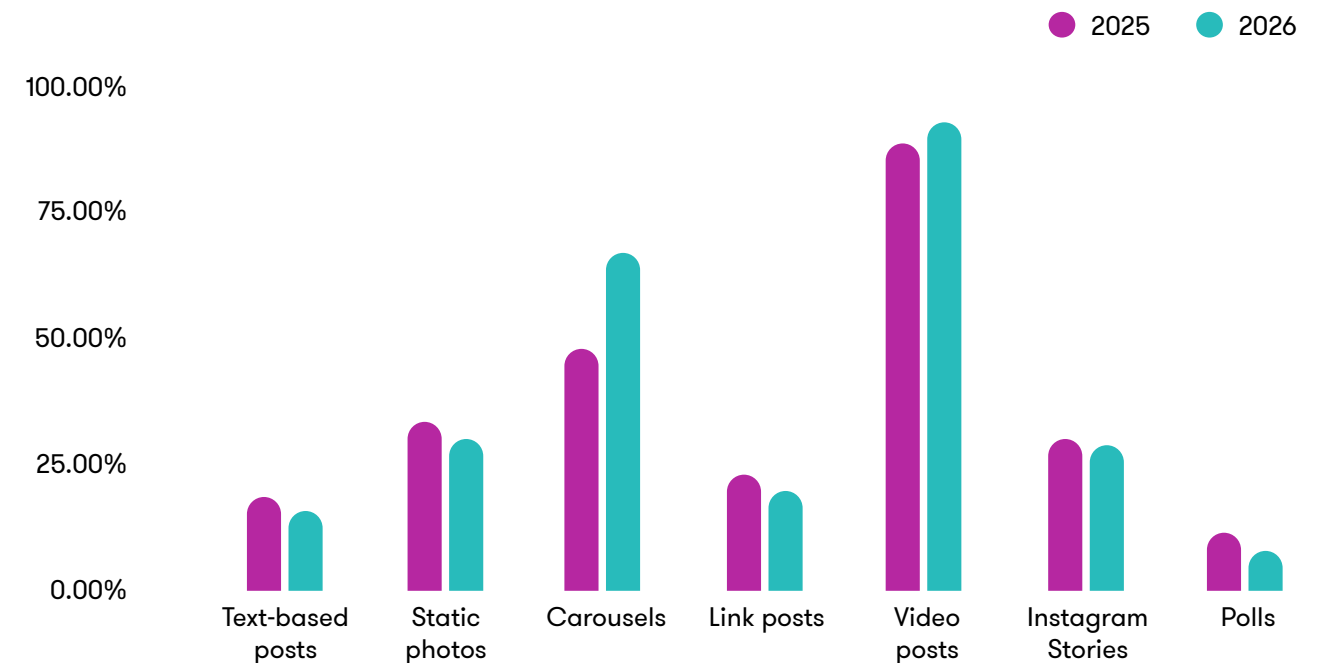
Video continues to be the most popular content format, which aligns with users' evolving viewing habits. Globally, the average user spends **6 hours and 39 minutes** each week watching short videos such as Reels or TikToks, and **4 hours 51 minutes** per week enjoying longer form video content.

([Global Digital Report](#))

That said, there is clearly still a place for non-video posts, with static photos remaining the 3rd most popular content type.

Carousel posts have jumped in popularity, increasing by 24% YOY. Carousels have been available on Instagram for many years, and they are a common approach on LinkedIn. A static slideshow format has also been an option on TikTok since 2022. The platform has been encouraging creators to utilize this feature, favoring them on the coveted FYP and claiming that photo posts can garner more engagement.

Prioritized social media content formats

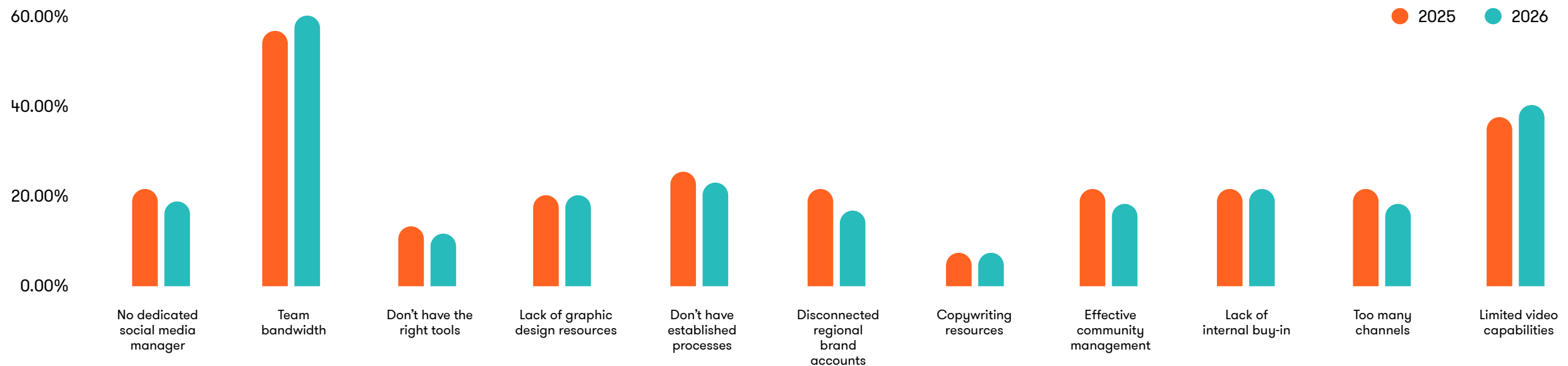


Social Media Challenges

When it comes to the roadblocks preventing social media growth and engagement, most companies agree that team bandwidth is one of the biggest obstacles. The second biggest struggle is limited video capabilities — reinforcing the fact that video is highly regarded as an important content type to drive engagement.

Fewer companies this year are concerned about not having established processes, which is an interesting shift but one that makes sense considering we also see a larger percentage of companies with Advanced social media programs already in place heading into 2026.

What are your main social media challenges?



3 compelling reasons to invest in video

Wondering which challenge to prioritize addressing this year? Even though static imagery still has its place, the importance of video content cannot be understated. Here's why:

- **39% of internet users worldwide watch how-to videos or educational content**

Opportunity: Promote subject-matter expertise from your company with videos that answer user questions. Leaning into brand authority and proficiency is also a commonly recommended tactic for GEO. By demonstrating unique brand-led data and in-depth content, you can improve your LLM presence and information accuracy.

- **52.5% of internet users listen to podcasts each week**

Opportunity: Podcasts are not just audio-only anymore. Many creators also film the recording and post snippets to TikTok or the full video to YouTube, offering users more choice as to how they consume their favorite media. Consider starting a company podcast to strengthen your thought leadership program and grow brand awareness.

- **On average, users spend 1 hour 37 minutes on TikTok per day, seeking out funny or entertaining content**

Opportunity: Take advantage of TikTok trends and popular audios. Remember that TikTok is a space where unpolished, authentic content thrives. No professional video set up? No problem. All you need is a smartphone and some willing participants to start establishing a TikTok presence. Lean on your younger co-workers to understand the trends — don't dismiss them.

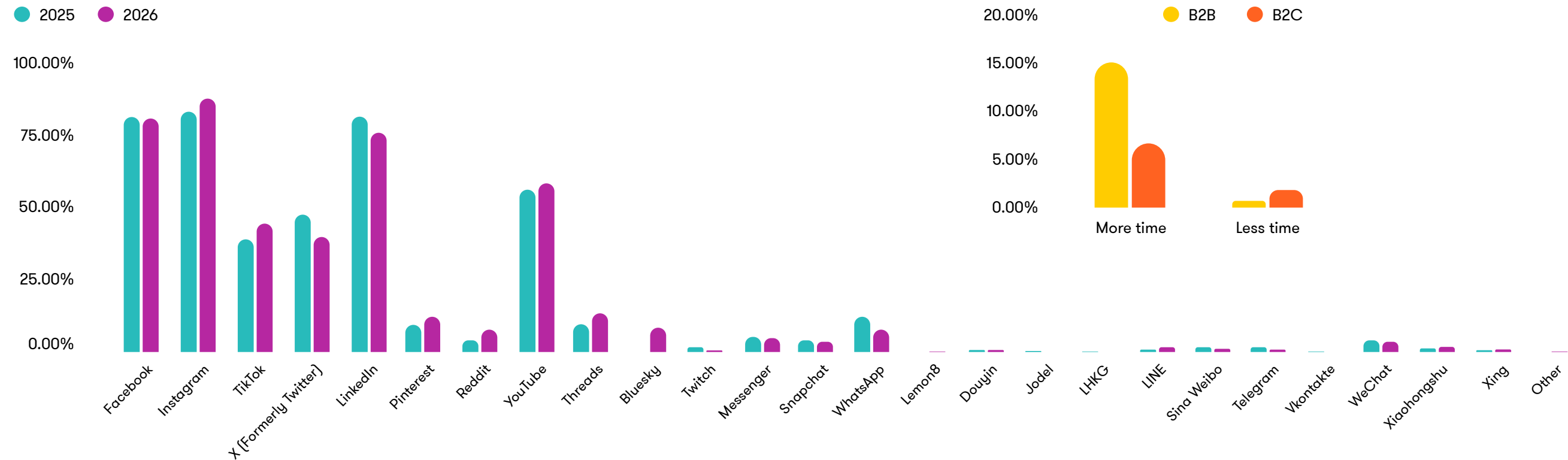
Channel Usage Overall

The most popular channel used across the board is Instagram, which shows a strong lead, increasing by 5% YOY. LinkedIn is showing a somewhat surprising decrease in usage with a 7% drop globally. This is partly due to the higher percentage of B2C respondents in this year's survey. (In [EMEA](#), however, LinkedIn usage remains constant YOY).

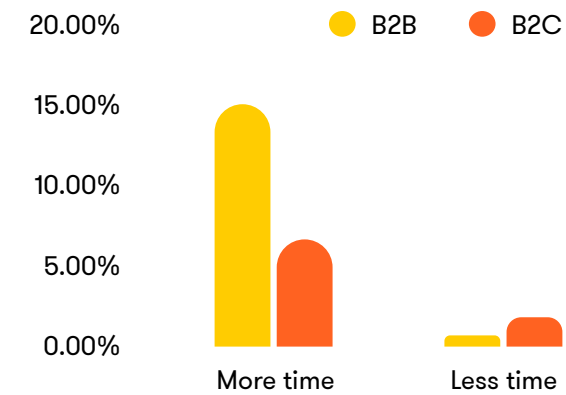
The decrease in LinkedIn usage could also help somewhat explain the diminished focus on thought leadership content from page 17, as LinkedIn has traditionally been the place to promote more industry-heavy content.

According to the [Global Digital Report](#), LinkedIn is the top platform used for keeping up with news and current events and the least popular for brand research, among major platforms, so it follows that brands may not be seeing the desired results from LinkedIn.

Which social media channels do you use?



B2B and B2C LinkedIn goals



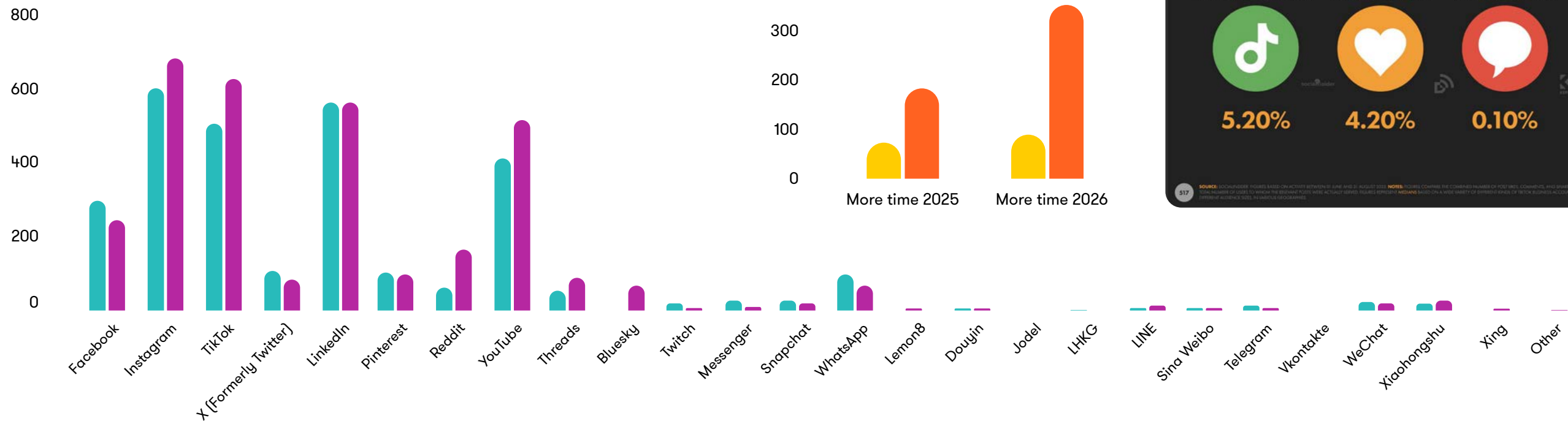
High Priority Platforms

Instagram shows the most interest on a YOY basis, followed by TikTok which has sprung up from the 3rd highest in priority in 2025 to 2nd place in 2026. This speaks to a growing interest in the platform, led by B2C companies, but B2B are still expressing an increasing desire to invest in TikTok. Companies that are looking to up their game on TikTok have plenty of incentive. The platform shows a **17.6% increase** YOY in ad reach (1.9 Billion), and business accounts show reasonable engagement.

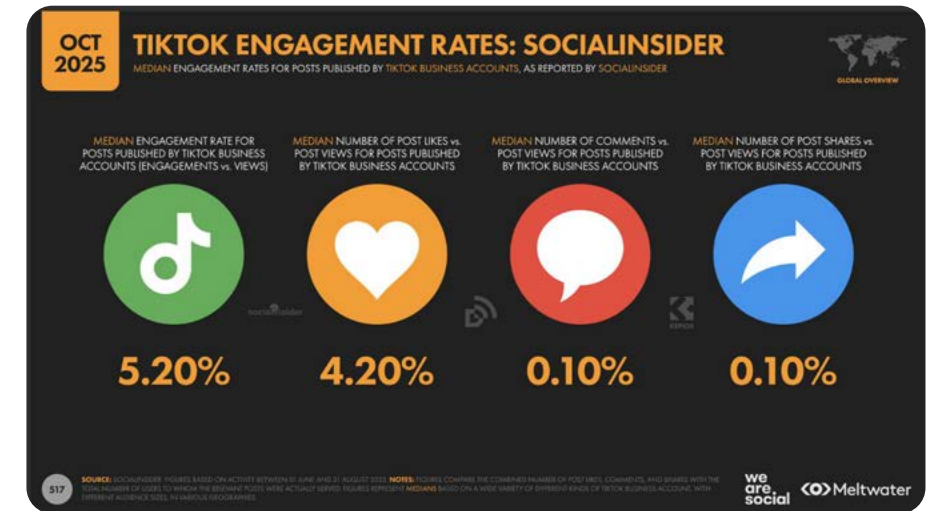
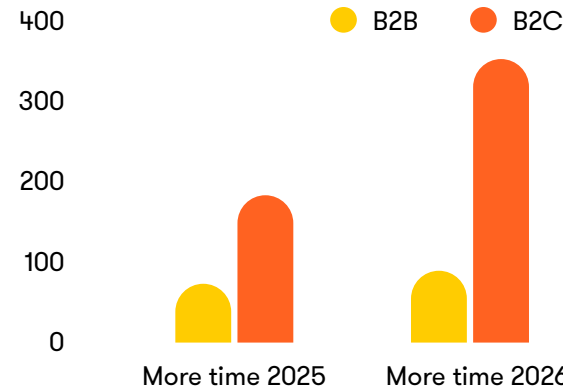
Also of note is the surge in popularity for Reddit YOY. We have more analysis on the Reddit phenomenon on page 27!

Where are you planning to invest more time in 2026?

● 2025 ● 2026



Interest YOY in spending more time on TikTok

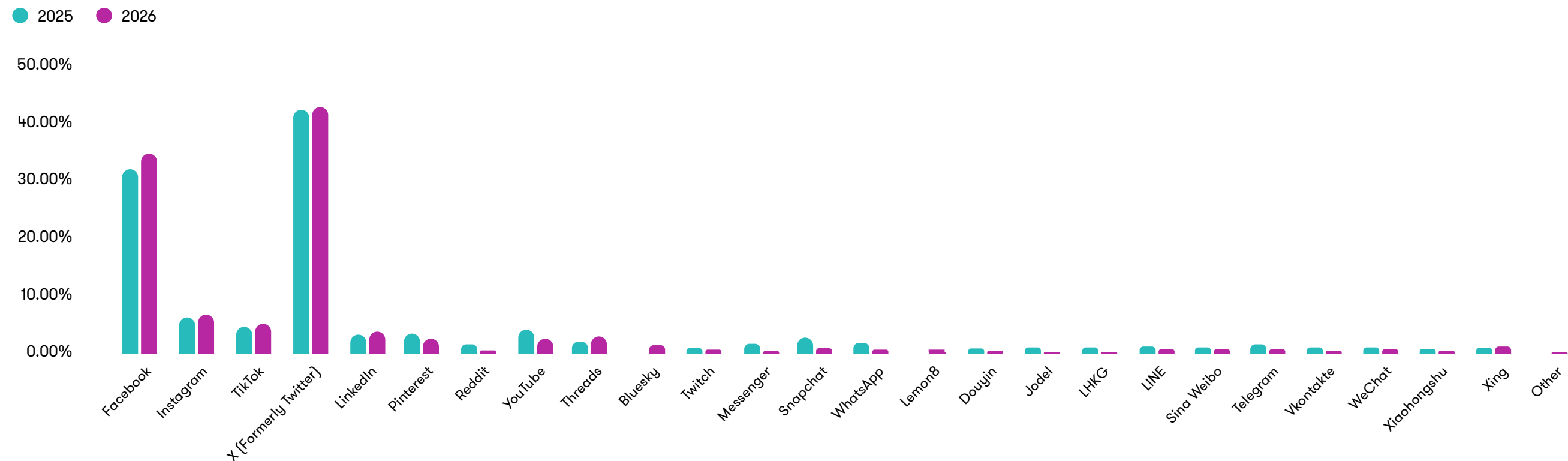


Low Priority Platforms

Facebook and X are the two platforms that companies express the least interest in focusing their efforts on in 2026, echoing the trend from the previous year. Before continuing to de-prioritize Facebook, however, businesses should consider the fact that the platform has actually seen a **5.7% increase in reported ad reach** YOY.

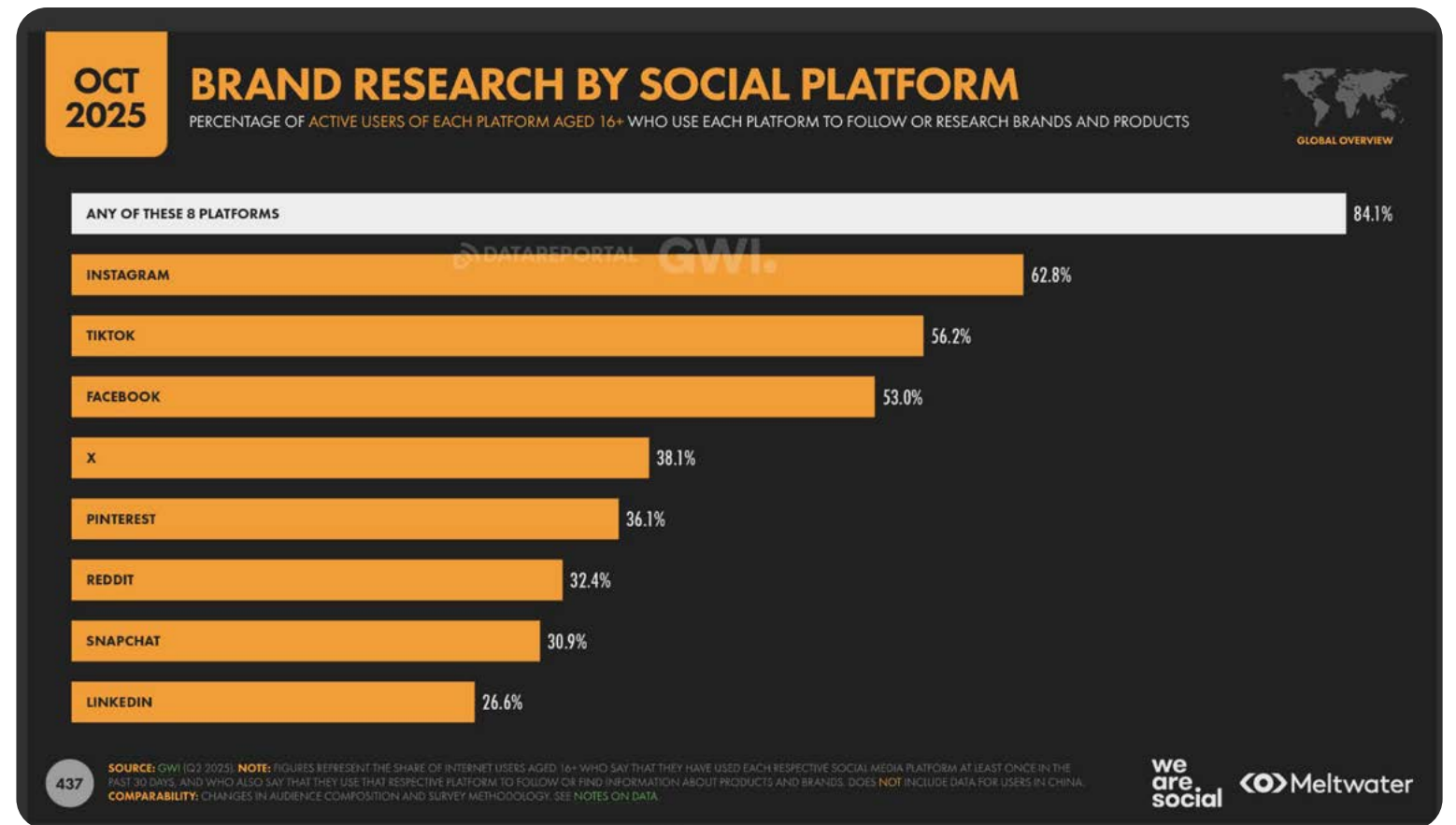
As discussed earlier, we can see an interesting rise in companies actively planning to reduce their LinkedIn marketing activities, however this is partly due to the types of companies included.

Where do companies globally plan to spend less time in 2026?



Where does the most brand research take place on social media?

As we mentioned in the intro, 72% of internet users conduct brand research on social media, looking for information that influences purchase decisions. When it comes to the top platforms for this kind of research, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook lead the way — another reason to consider rethinking the de-prioritizing of Facebook.



Posting Cadence & Priority

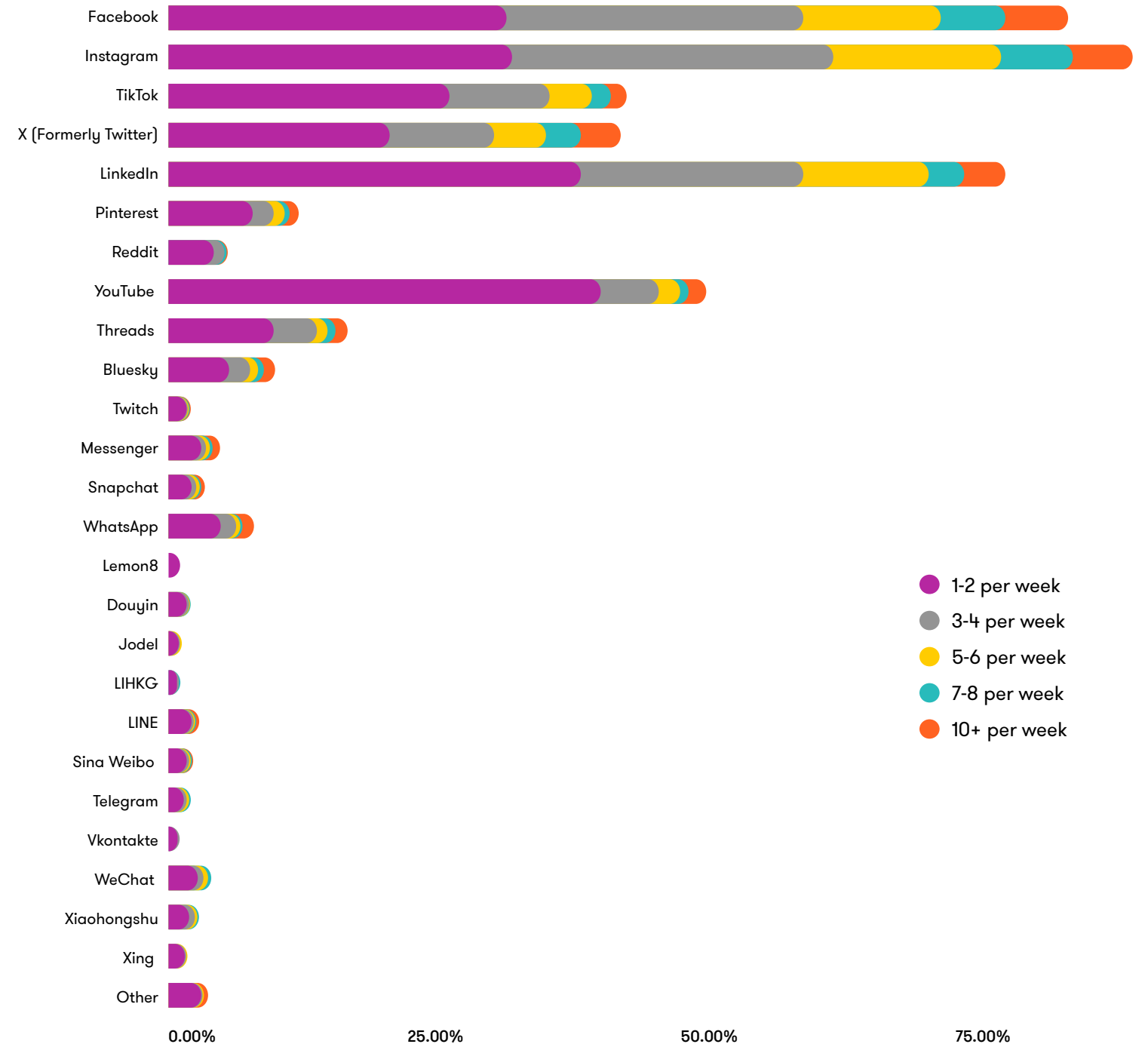
Similar to our 2025 findings, most companies favor posting either 1-2 times a week or between 3-4 times.

The platforms with the most activity are Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and TikTok.

TikTok and YouTube are seeing some of the biggest jumps in posting regularly, with TikTok increasing by 7%, and YouTube by 8% for 1-2 times a week. This is indicative of the continued appetite for video from social media users.

Each platform is now offering more ways to appeal to wider audiences, like the aforementioned TikTok carousels and YouTube Shorts.

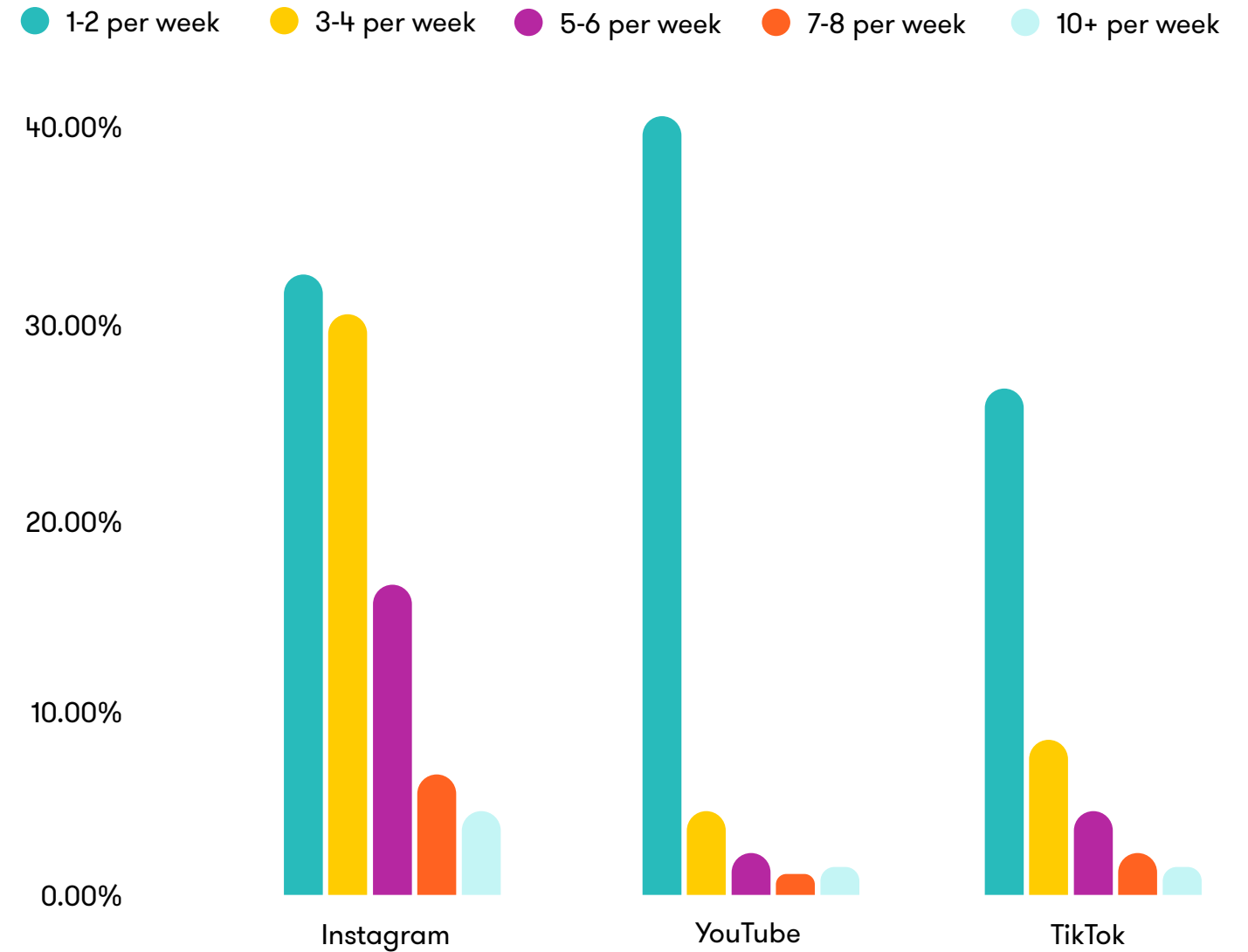
How often do you post per channel?



How often are companies posting to top video platforms?

While it's difficult to know for sure as our survey did not separate them out, it's conceivable that those companies posting 1-2 times a week on YouTube are including Shorts in that number. The same goes for Instagram, where Stories and Reels are sometimes quicker to produce than a more polished static post to add to your grid.

Posting cadence on top video platforms



Posting cadence & priority: Reddit

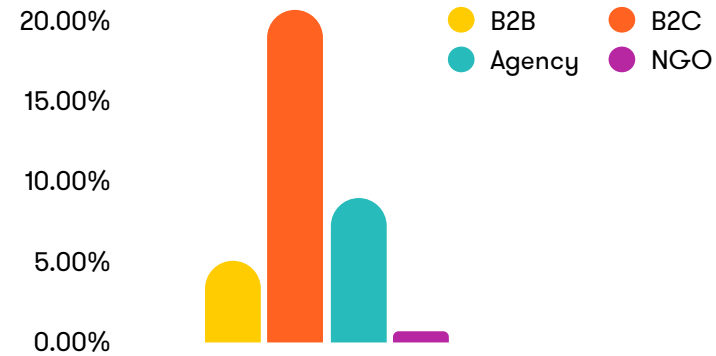
Companies in 2026 are taking a more serious approach to Reddit. Our survey shows an astounding 42% increase in the number of social teams posting on that platform between 1-2 times a week. This surge is driven largely by B2C companies and agencies.

Reddit's strong presence in LLM results, and ability to influence consumer behavior both in-app and from an SEO perspective, is clearly catching on.

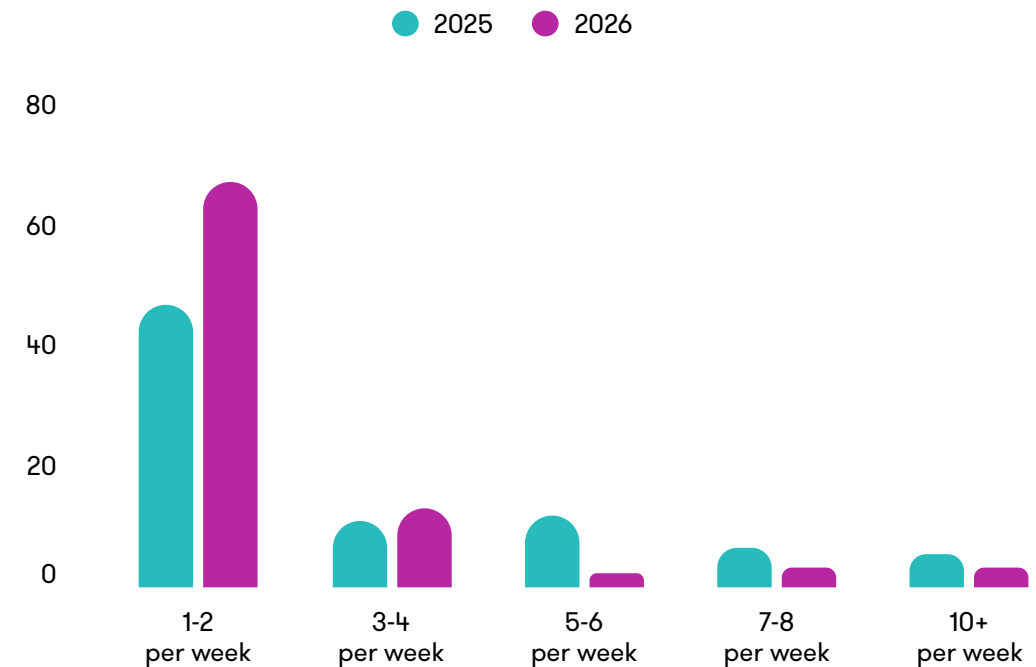
And for good reason. According to the [2026 Global Digital Report](#):

- Potential ad reach on Reddit is 765.2 Million. That's up YOY by 189%
- People spend an average of 19 minutes per day on Reddit, which is indicative of its powerful use-case as a search engine result.
- Reddit is the second most popular social platform for researching brands or products, behind Pinterest.

Reddit use by company type



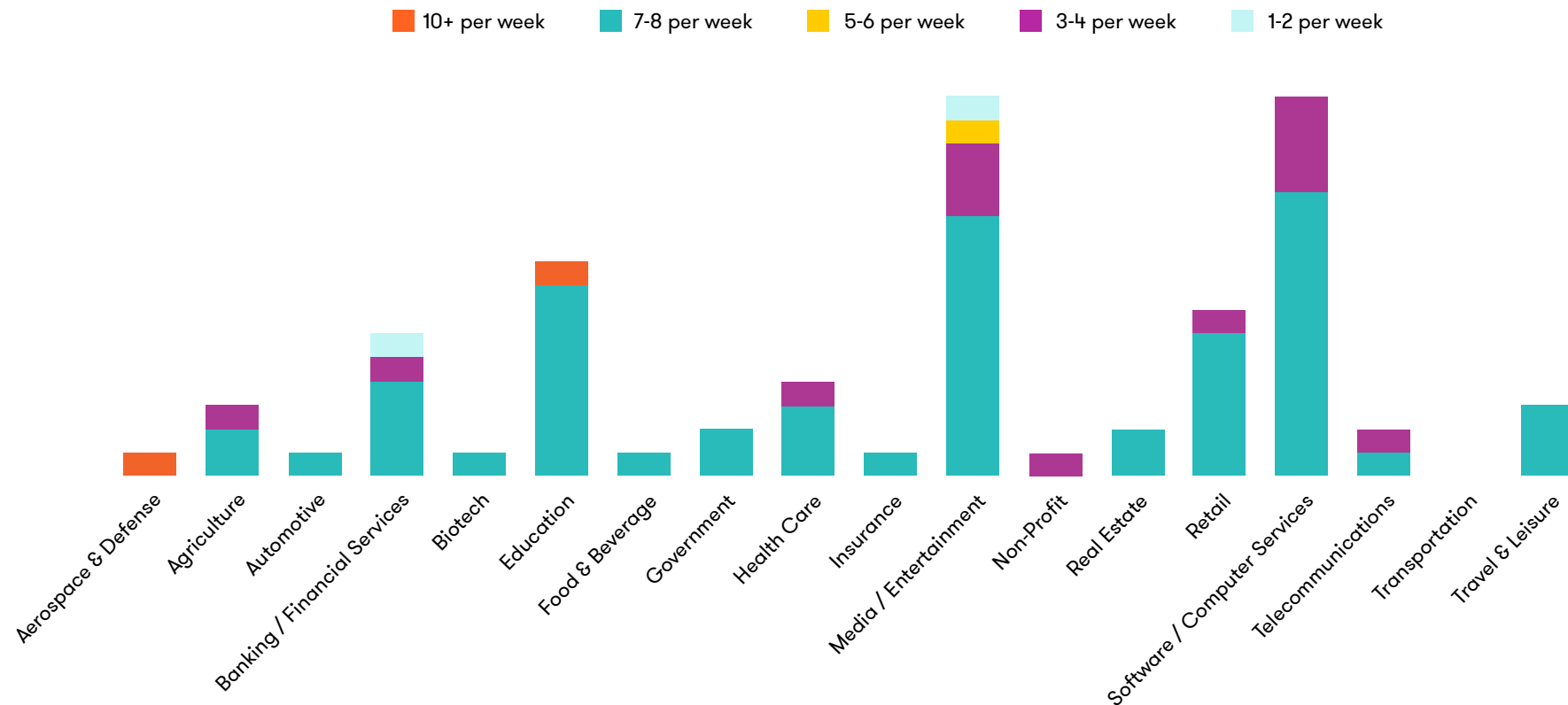
Companies using Reddit shows strong growth year over year



Which industries are using Reddit the most?

The remarkable thing about Reddit is that there is a community for everyone. Whatever sector you're in, whatever type of company, there are Reddit users asking questions and participating in conversations that are relevant to you. The trick is finding them and learning the best ways to turn those conversations into meaningful outcomes — whether that's UGC, influencer partnerships, or contributing to brand awareness KPIs.

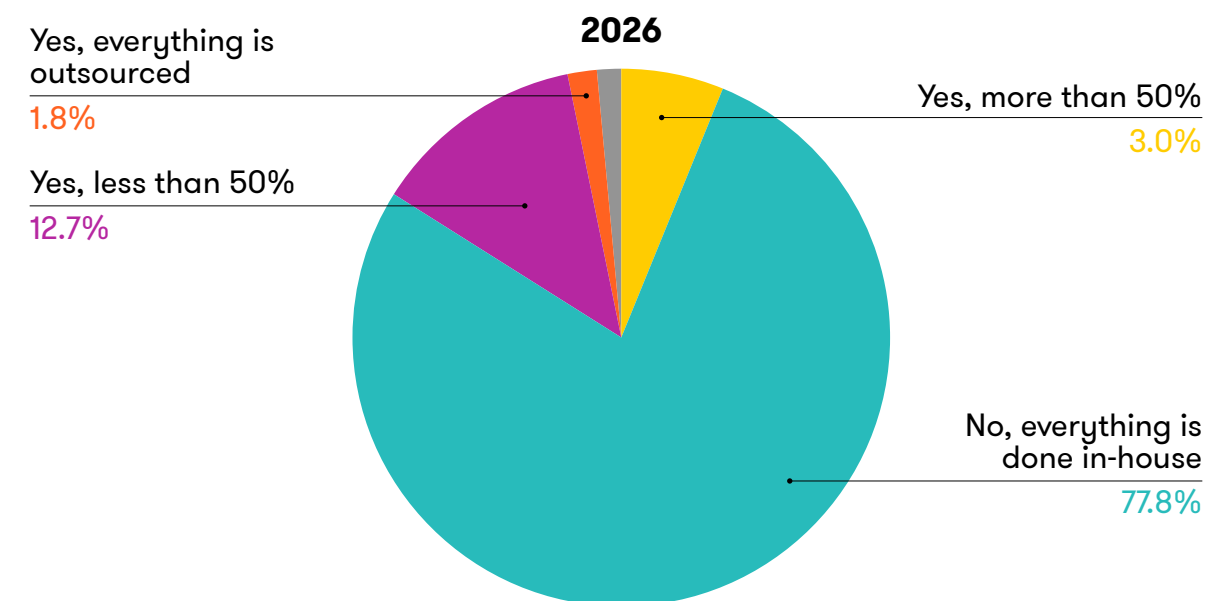
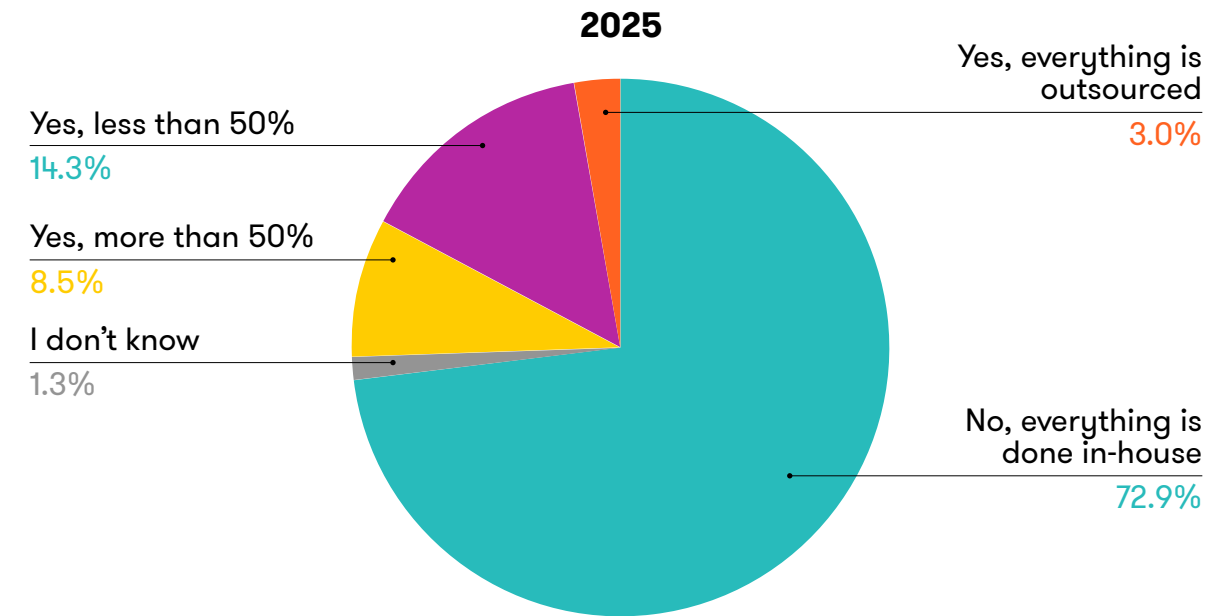
Current industries taking the most advantage include Entertainment, Software, and Education, with Software leading the way in posting between 3-4 times per week. Finding a niche on Reddit, and earning the trust of users conversing in your space, can lead to posting more frequently; perhaps you're able to answer questions in brand-run AMAs or make meaningful contributions to various subreddits.



Outsourcing vs. In-House Social Management

Most companies are still preferring not to outsource any aspect of their social media management, up YOY — another indication that budget concerns could be driving decision making.

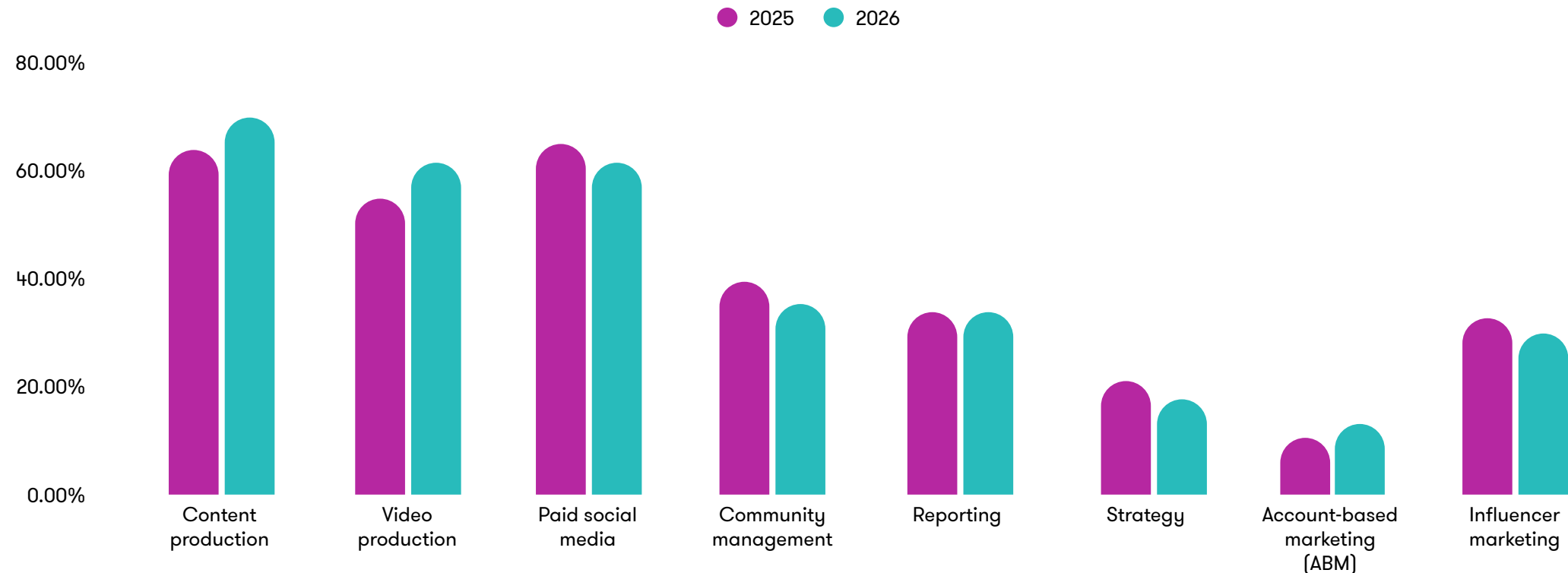
Do you outsource the management of your social media channels to a third party or agency?



Social Media Services Outsourced

Of those companies that do outsource, in a similar trend to last year, content production remains the most desired service by companies globally. Video production is also seeing more interest, with a 9% increase YOY.

Key areas that show a downward trend YOY include paid social and influencer marketing, but the biggest drop (-28%) is for community management services. There could be a number of reasons for this, but an interesting one to consider is the heavy move toward DM communication among social media users (or “Dark Social”), which makes traditional community management harder to implement and scale. Notably, community management is not seeing a drop based on the data in our Americas report, so the decline is being driven largely by EMEA and APAC countries.



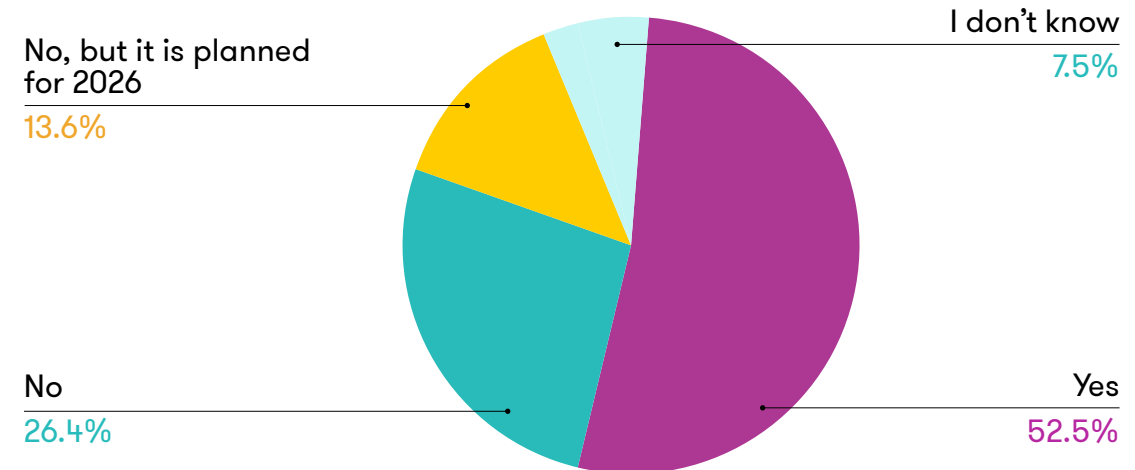
Survey Results: **Social Listening**

The Role of Social Listening

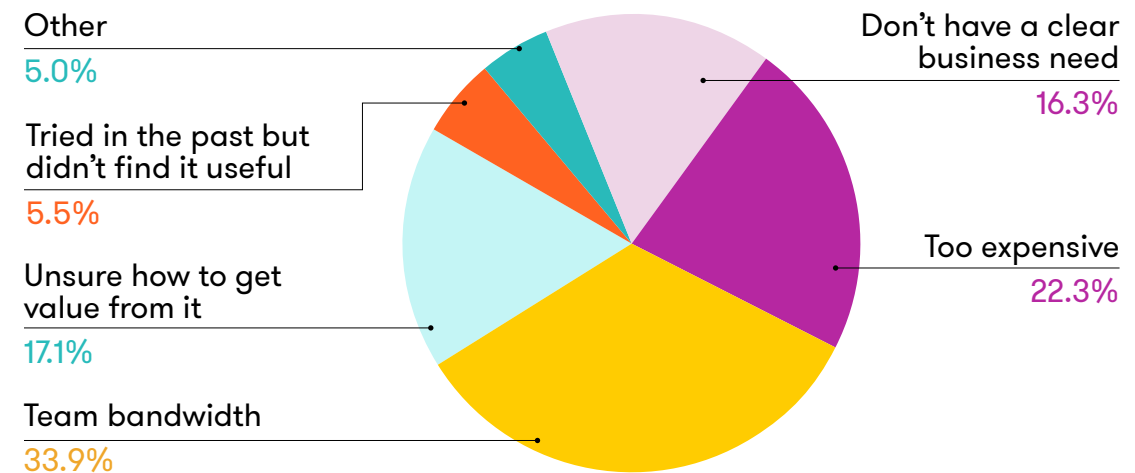
When asked if companies used social listening as a part of their social media strategy, just over half (52%) said “Yes,” while 26% said “No,” a 10% increase YOY.

Only 13% state that social listening is planned for 2026, citing team bandwidth and cost as their main concerns. This surprising 27% drop from 2025 indicates a real trepidation amongst companies worldwide when it comes to the cost benefit of using social listening as part of their broader social strategy.

Is social listening part of your social media strategy?



Why are you not currently using social listening?

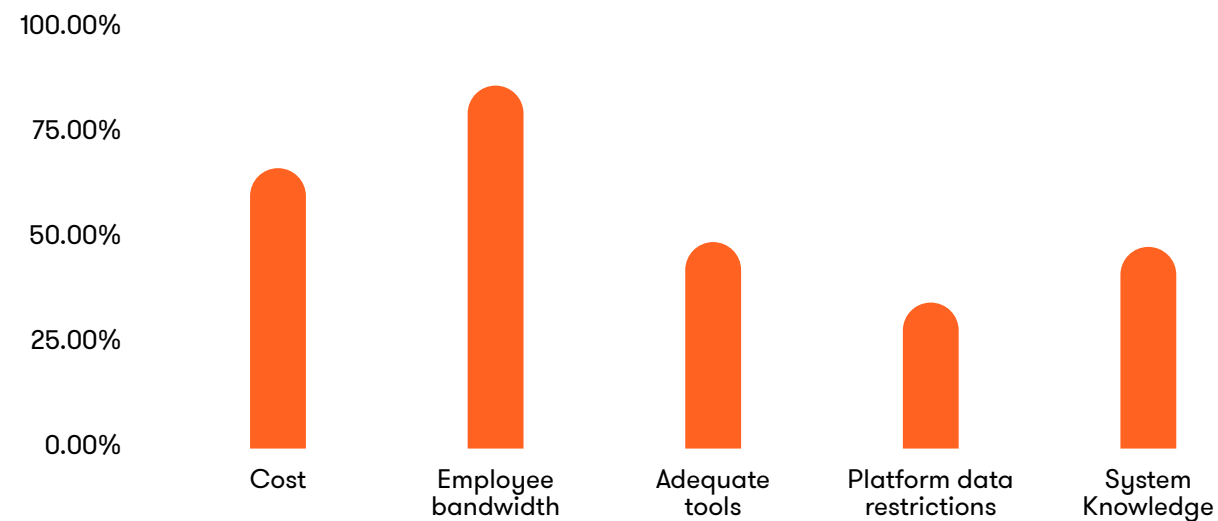


Investment in Social Listening

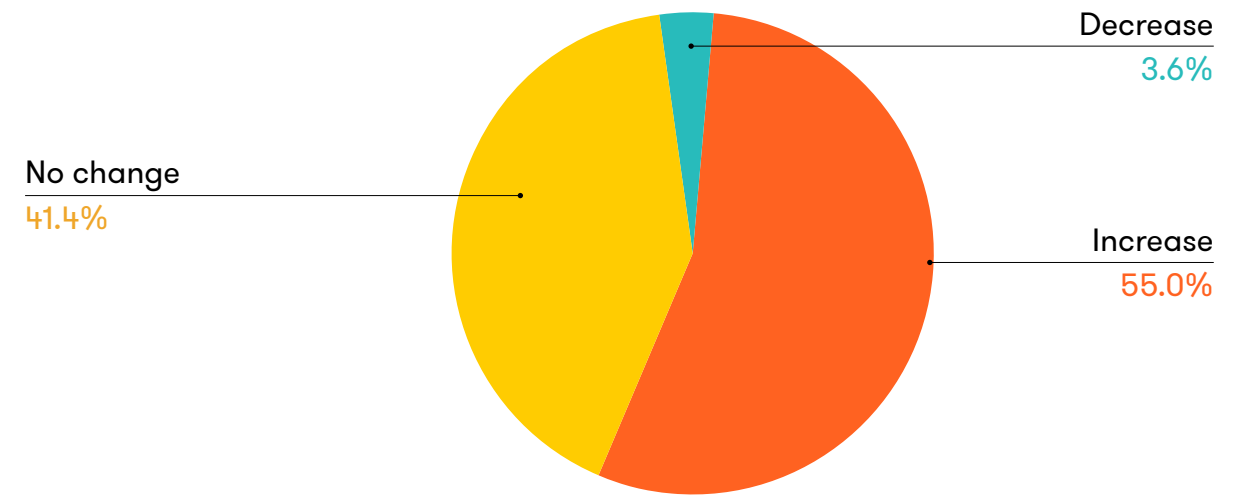
Of those companies who are using social listening, the biggest obstacles to maximizing their efforts mirror those preventing other companies from setting up a social listening strategy: bandwidth and cost.

Given that over half of survey respondents plan to increase their social listening activity in the coming year, despite these restrictive factors, it's clear that companies are very aware of the competitive advantages social listening offers; and they are interested in pursuing a more in-depth approach.

What are the most restrictive factors to maximizing your social listening?



Do you expect to increase or decrease your time and resources dedicated to social listening in 2026?

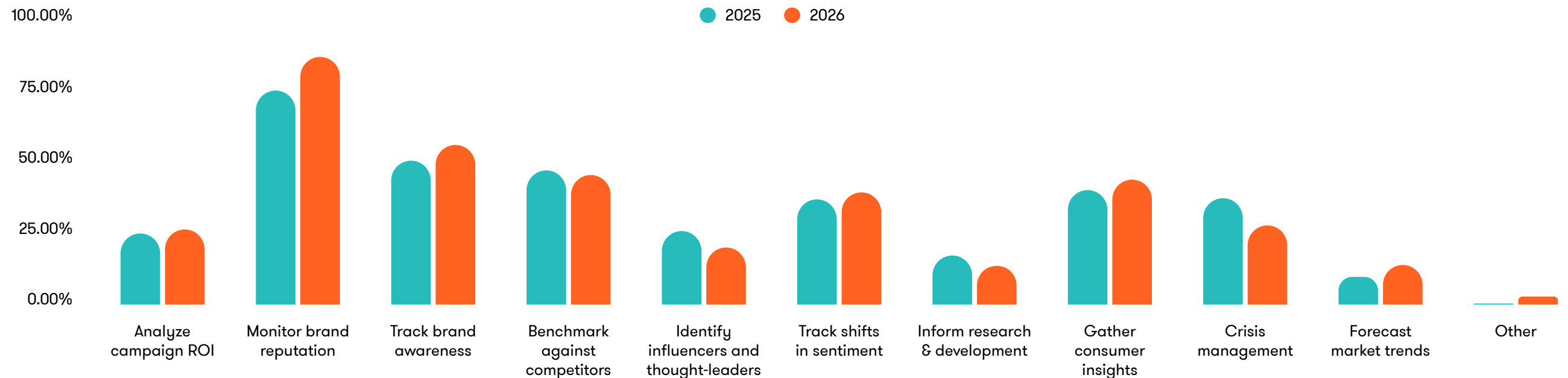


Why Companies Use Social Listening

There are numerous advantages to social listening, but monitoring brand reputation is the top goal for 87% of marketers globally, a 15% increase YOY. Social listening allows for faster responses in times of crisis, and enables brands to more effectively manage areas of reputational risk, as well as reinforce positive aspects by diving into the nuances of customer conversations to understand public perception.

Which leads us to the 56% who say they use social listening for tracking brand awareness. Social listening allows you to get a real sense of market permeation. By benchmarking against industry topics and competitors, gathering and analyzing consumer insights, and tracking shifts in sentiment (other top uses based on global survey response) you can create a social marketing strategy based on real insights — skipping the guesswork and moving forward with data-backed intuition.

Primary goals of social listening

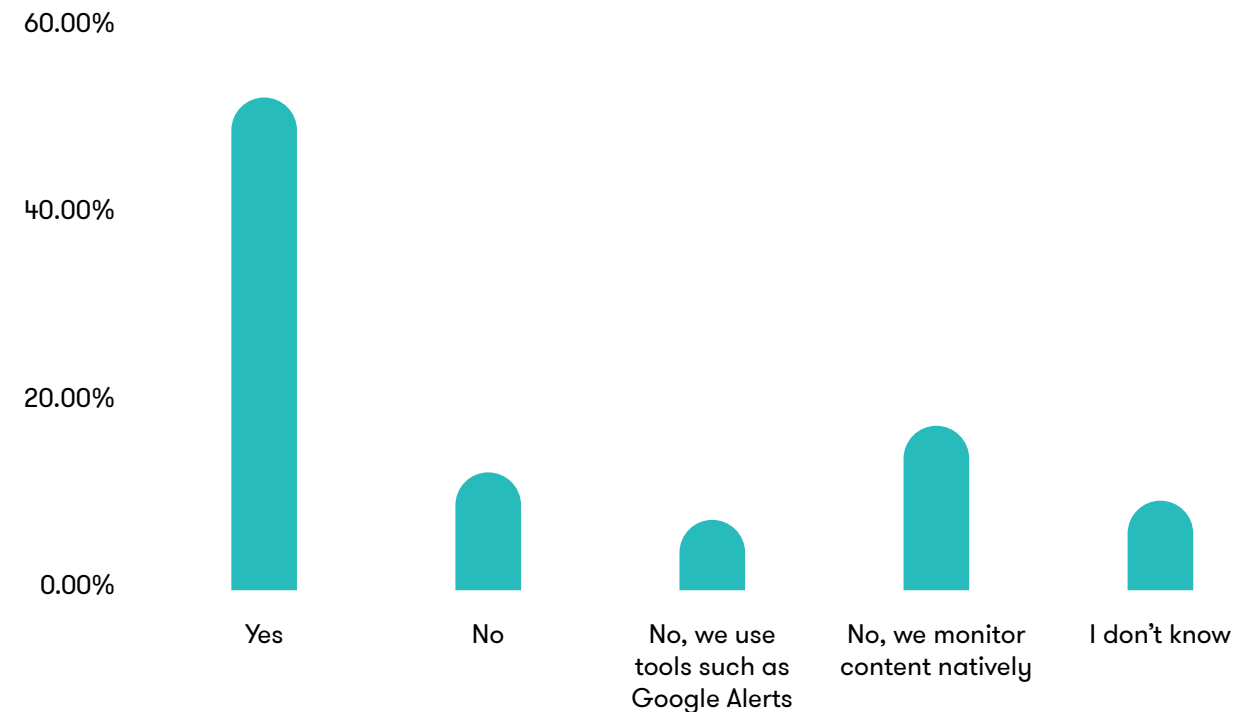


Ways of Conducting Social Listening

There are a number of ways that social listening can be conducted, though a software solution is the recommended route for the most comprehensive overview of your brand health, sentiment analysis, audience activity, industry conversations, and competitor benchmarking. Of the respondents that already leverage social listening, software is the preferred method. Interested in learning more? Check our [Definitive Guide to Social Listening](#) or the [Social Listening for Benchmarking Guide](#)!

Those who use other means tend to prefer to monitor natively rather than using tools like Google Alerts, consistent with last year's responses.

Are you currently using, or planning to use, social listening software?



Get the full digital picture

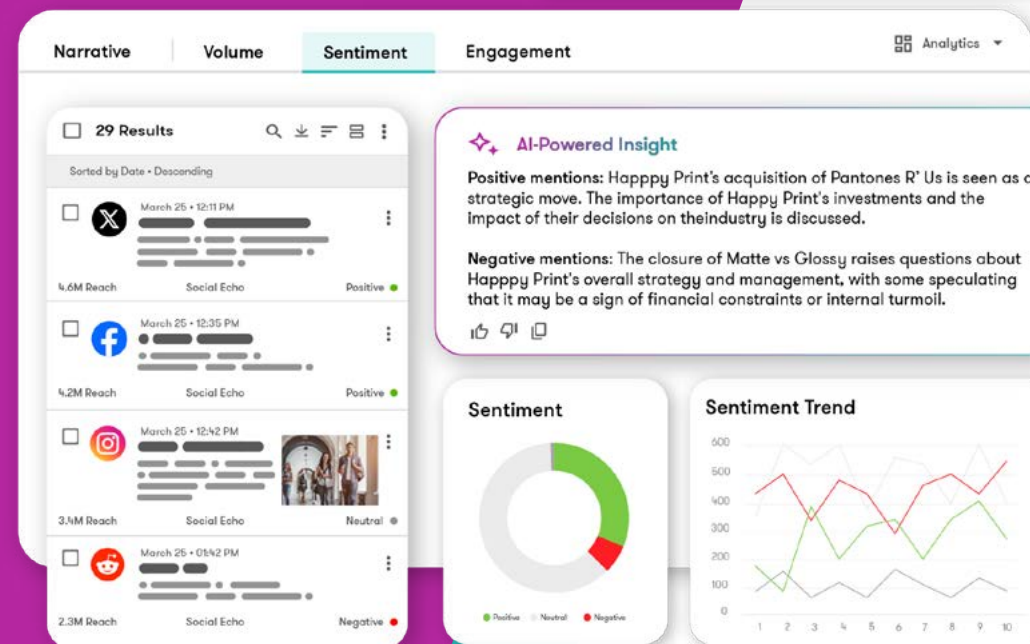
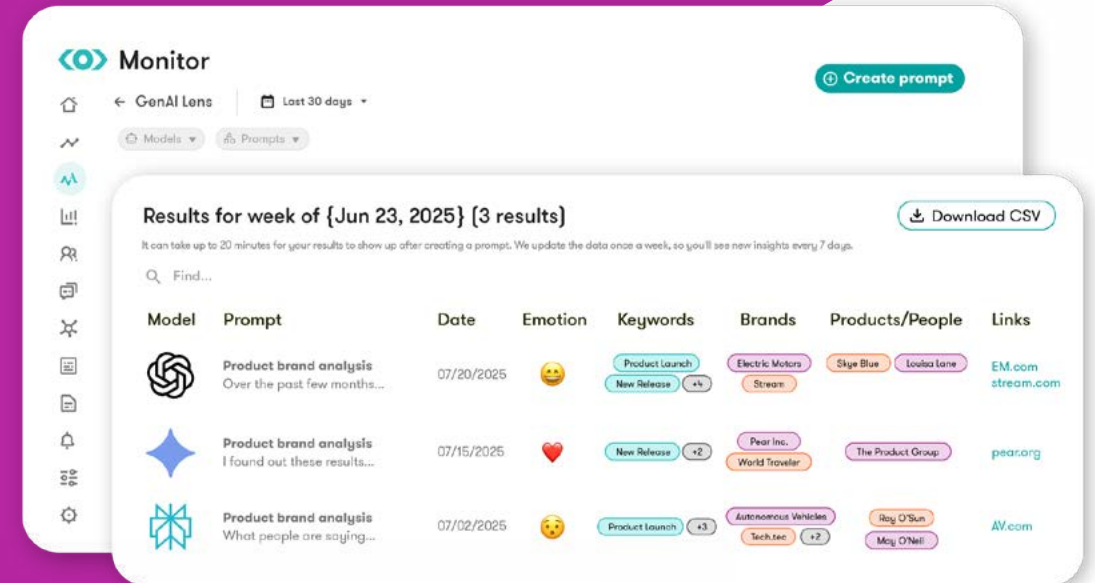
The clear growing desire to monitor brand reputation could speak to the growing uncertainty around how your brand is showing up in LLM results.

With **Meltwater's GenAI Lens**, you can leave some of that uncertainty behind, with greater visibility into your brand presence on LLMs, including the sources that these AI assistants pull from when delivering outputs about your brand.

See inside the black box of LLM search and ensure that you're safeguarding your brand reputation in this rapidly growing channel. Access comprehensive social listening coverage, real time alerts, sentiment analysis, and more with Meltwater.

Learn how in a demo with one of our product experts!

[Request a demo](#)



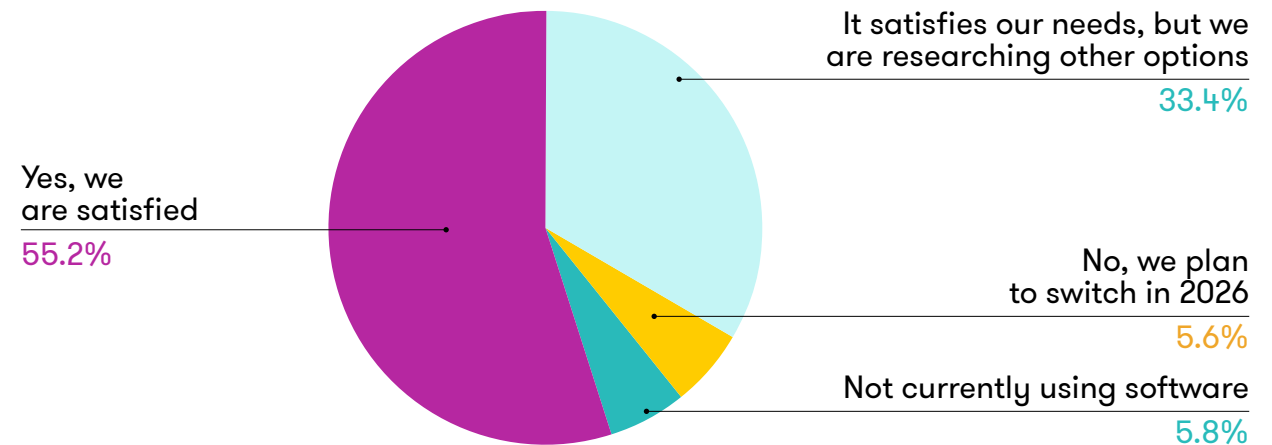
Effectiveness of Social Listening

While monitoring natively can certainly yield some insights, it's far too time-intensive and susceptible to human error. Who can keep up with thousands of alerts on a daily, or even weekly, basis? Plus, the capabilities are limited, so gaining deeper insights and analysis is far less available when employing native social listening efforts.

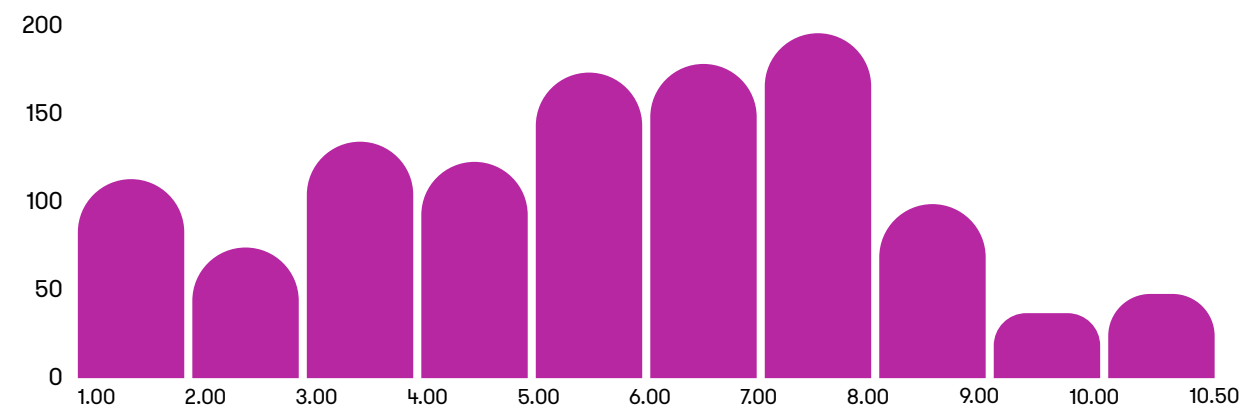
Going into 2026, while 55% of users are satisfied with their current social listening software capabilities, most have average levels of confidence that they are using those capabilities to the fullest extent.

A higher percentage of respondents this year say they will be researching other options for their social listening software needs.

Are you satisfied with your current social listening software?

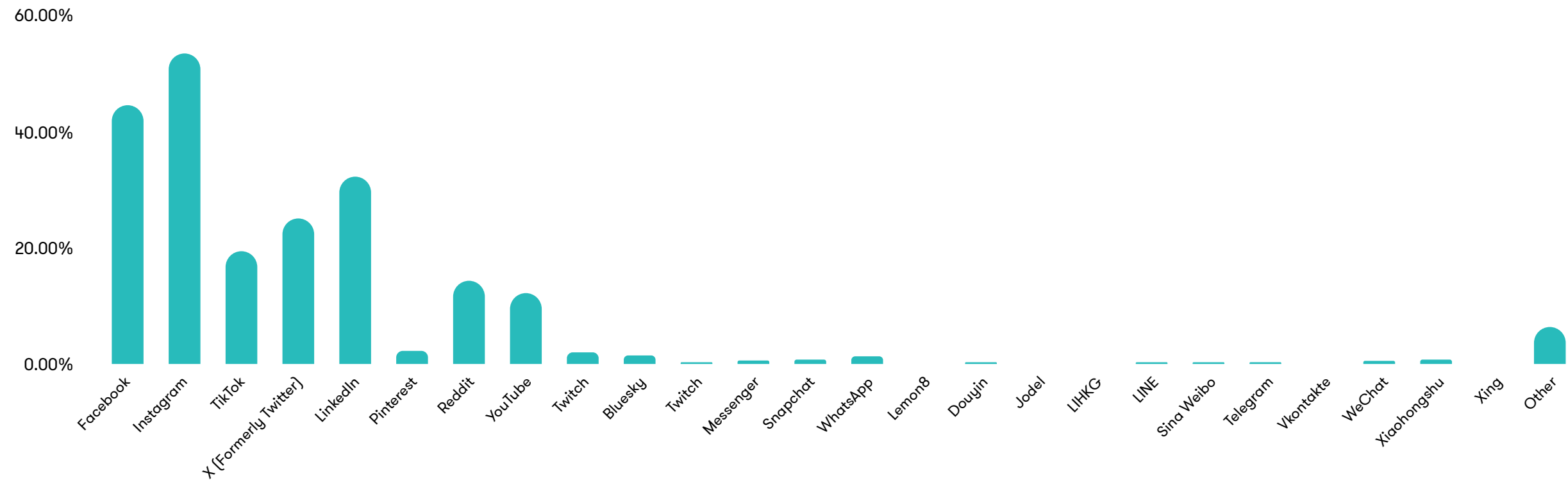


On a scale of 1 (not confident) to 10 (very confident), how confident are you that you're using social listening capabilities to the fullest?



Best Platforms for Native Social Listening

According to our survey respondents, these platforms have the best data for natively tracking and gathering social listening insights.



Customer Story: Neuro

As a science-driven company producing functional gum and mints for elevated mental clarity and focus, Neuro relies on strong data to do everything from developing products to building brand identity. It leveraged Meltwater's social listening solution as one of its tools to analyze the market and strategically target relevant audiences. The insights gleaned from Meltwater inspired 406% YoY sales growth and 1B+ impressions across all channels.

“We really wanted to figure out how to get the right audience segmentation data in a cost-efficient way. We landed on Meltwater social listening because it's an accessible way to garner insights within the energy management category.” Jennifer Chang, VP of Commercial and Head of Marketing at Neuro.

Neuro used Meltwater to analyze the market, mapping out target audiences based on opportunity size and relevance to the energy management category. Through that data, the brand identified the top incremental audience segments it needed to capture, which included gamers — validating an existing assumption and allowing them to pursue lucrative partnerships within that sector.

Ready to get started using Social Listening on your team? Schedule a demo with one of our product experts

[Request a demo](#)

A collection of Neuro products including a large blue pouch of Energy & Focus gum (Peppermint flavor), a smaller yellow pouch of Calm & Clarity mints, and several blue pouches of Energy & Focus mints (Peppermint flavor). The products are arranged on a white surface with some fresh fruit like lemons and mint leaves.

406% YoY sales growth
driven by Meltwater insights

1B+ impressions
across all channels

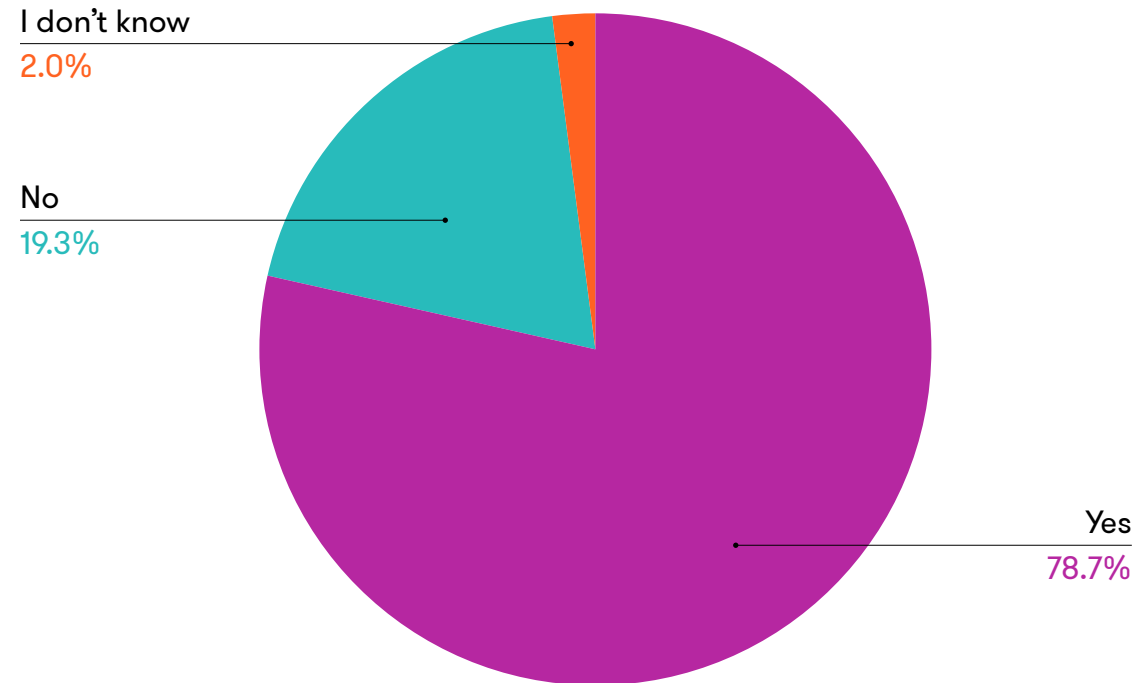
Survey Results: **Paid Social**

Paid Efforts On Social Media

A majority of businesses invest in paid ads on social media. Digital ad spend as a whole is growing exponentially, reaching \$862 billion in 2025 — a 9% increase YOY. ([Global Digital Report](#))

Paid advertising and boosted posts on social are a great way to increase your reach and get in front of relevant adjacent audiences who might not be aware of your brand, goods, or services. In fact **30.4% of internet users discover brands through ads on social media.** ([Global Digital Report](#))

Does your business run social media ads?



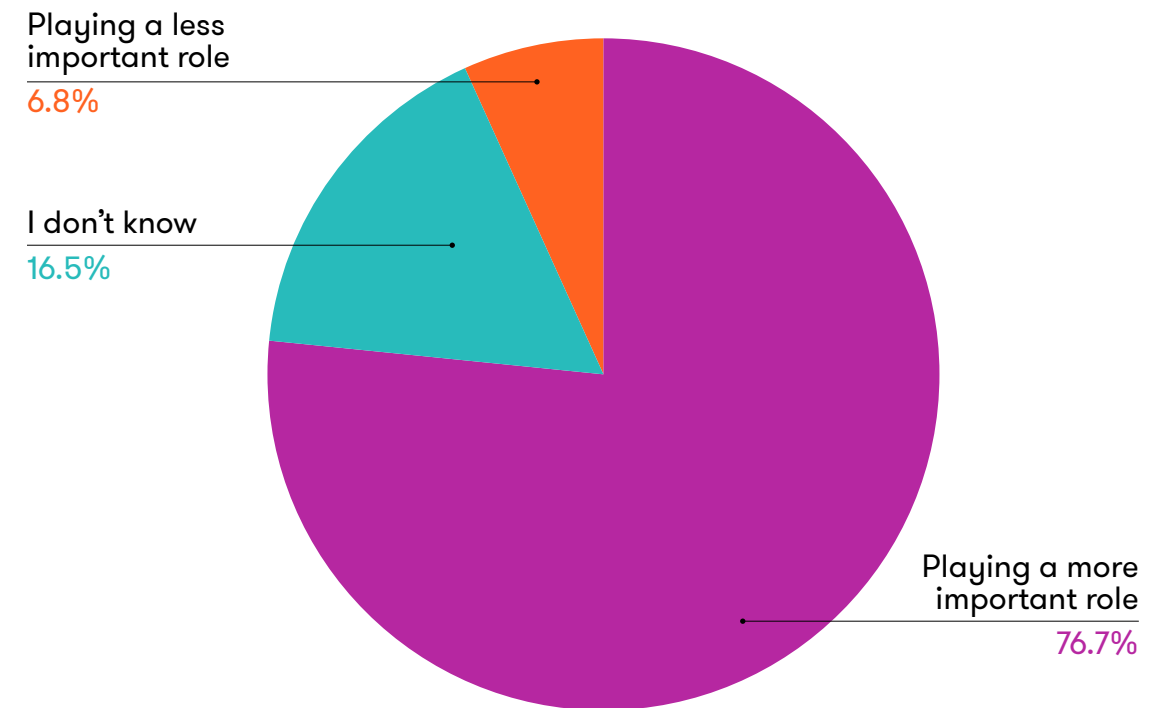
The Role of Paid Social in 2026

Most businesses are planning to increase their investment in paid social media.

This year, a slightly smaller percentage than we saw going into 2025 (6% vs. 7%) indicate that they think paid efforts will be less important in the coming year.

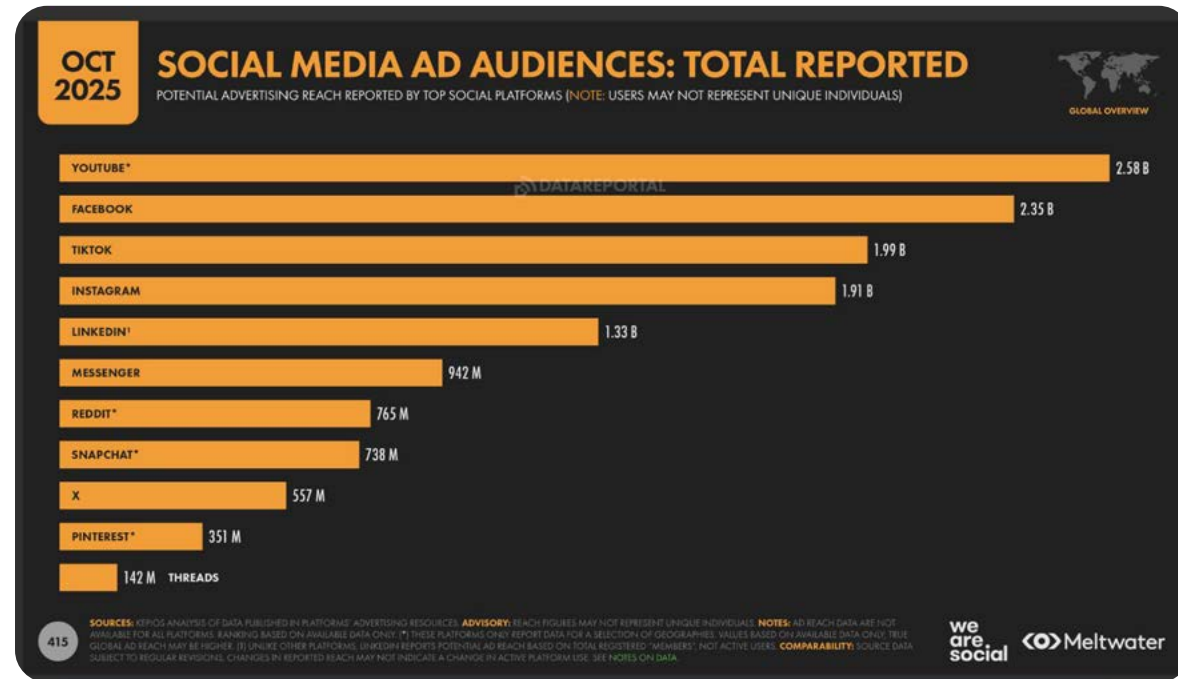
Given this trend, social media teams may want to assess the resources they are allocating to paid in order to stay competitive on social media.

How do you see the role of paid social developing in 2026?



The Biggest Players In Paid Social

Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn see the most activity when it comes to paid social media. The biggest channel is Instagram, narrowly beating out Facebook in a shift from 2025. YouTube remains a popular platform as well for paid ads, and TikTok is gaining traction, showing a 50% increase YOY. When it comes to the platforms offering the most potential ad reach, YouTube leads the way, followed by Facebook and TikTok.



Conclusion & Key Takeaways

Looking ahead to 2026, the trends show more companies with a heavier investment in social media already, but we can also see many shifting priorities:

- There's a 22% increase in companies that have Advanced social programs
- However, uncertainty about further investing in social media is growing: 15% say they don't know how social will develop at their company, a 24% increase
- Fewer companies YOY are investing in LinkedIn and thought-leadership as a goal
- Reddit usage is up 63%
- More companies YOY now handle social media management fully in-house

What does this mean for you? Maybe with a less crowded landscape on LinkedIn, this could be the year to launch your thought-leadership program. If you've been on the fence about incorporating Reddit into your social strategy, consider that your competitors are starting to see value there.

Let the data from this report help you determine key areas for developing and improving your social media strategy in 2026.



Use social listening and consumer insights to learn more about your audiences preferences.

Request a demo to see how



Our suite of social and media intelligence solutions provide customers with the insights they need to make better, more informed decisions.

Discover how our suite can help you succeed.

[Request a demo](#)

Build Your Suite



Media Intelligence



Social Listening & Analytics



Consumer Intelligence



Media Relations



Social Media Management



Influencer Marketing



Data & API Integration



Sales Intelligence