

# HeyOrca Community Benchmark Report 2025

What 267 Social Media Managers told us  
about the future of community.





# HeyOrca

Hi there! We're HeyOrca, a social media management tool for social teams and agencies that's loved by 40,000 users and counting!

Oh, and we're also \*obsessed\* with community-building.

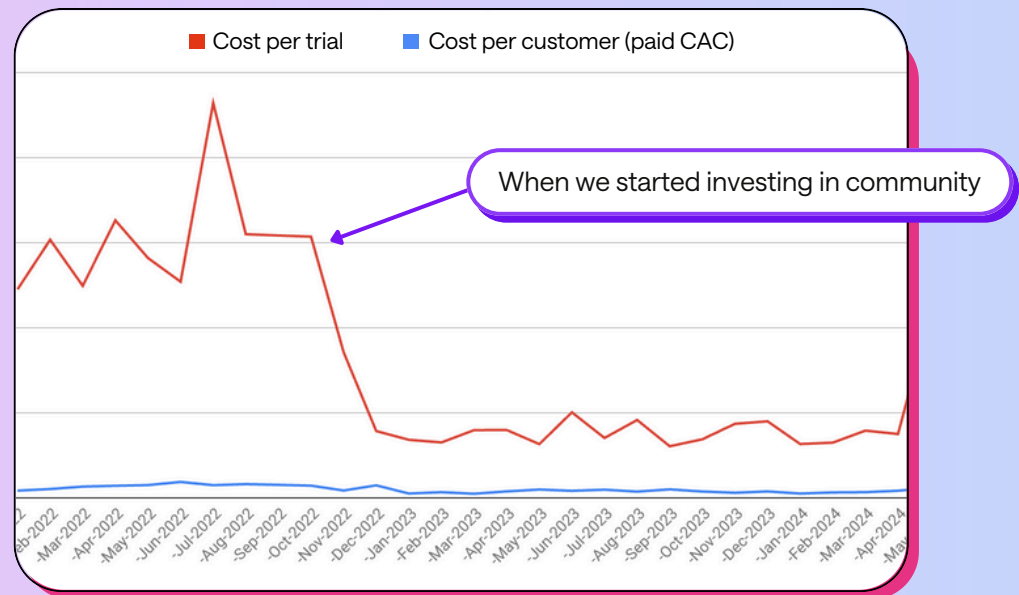
It all started in 2022 when we were battling our increasingly expensive cost-per-acquisition. Our experiment? Go all in on community (aka, building relationships over prioritizing transactions).

And well, the results speak for themselves! We've seen a 300% increase in impressions, a 5900% increase in post clicks, an 80% decrease in cost per acquisition, and our community consistently shows up and advocates for us online.

And it's not just us – brands like Notion, MorningBrew, Glossier, and the Social Media Managers that participated in this survey are seeing the same outcomes after investing in their communities.

So we're going to make it official: the future of social media marketing is community. And good news: it's not too late to get started on yours.

To our amazing community – thank you. Your creativity and collaboration made this possible. We hope this report inspires new ideas and reminds you you're not alone. Let's keep building together.





# Table of contents

This report is about the community builders themselves and the communities they're building. It highlights the real challenges you're facing on a day-to-day basis as well as what's actually working in the industry.

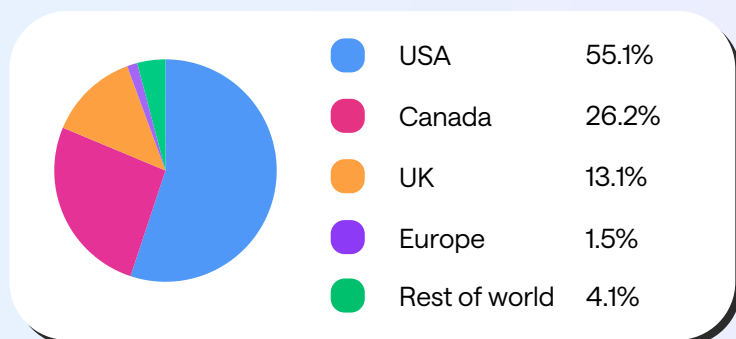
<a href="#"><u>Page 4</u></a>	<b>Where is this data coming from?</b>
<a href="#"><u>Page 5</u></a>	<b>Community as a growth strategy</b>
<a href="#"><u>Page 12</u></a>	<b>The mental state of social teams</b>
<a href="#"><u>Page 15</u></a>	<b>Salary and career growth</b>
<a href="#"><u>Page 22</u></a>	<b>Where does AI fit into this?</b>
<a href="#"><u>Page 24</u></a>	<b>Report summary</b>

# Where is this data coming from?

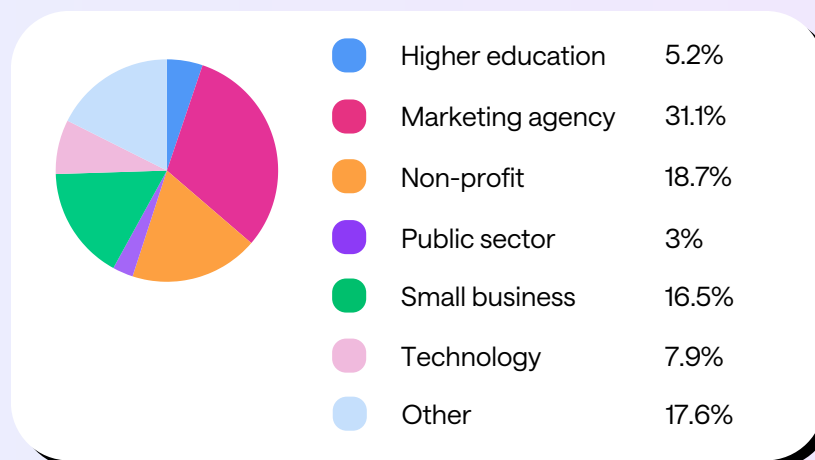


Our survey was filled out by **267 Social Media Managers** from the HeyOrca Community in Q1 2025. These Social Media Managers ...

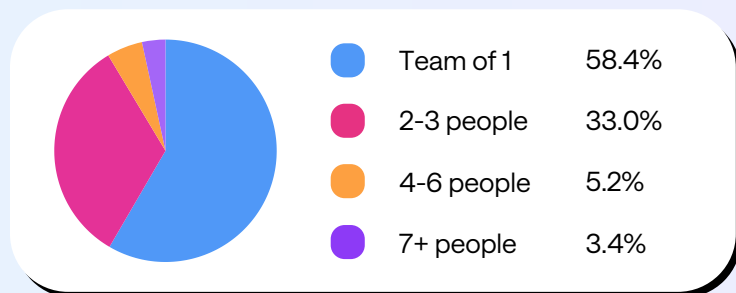
\* ...are worldwide



\* ...work in a variety of industries



\* ...are part of varying team sizes





# Community as a growth strategy

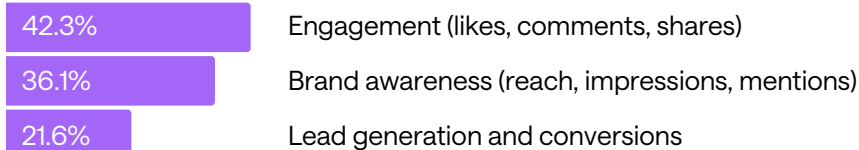
Social media plays a role at every stage of the funnel, from building brand awareness to driving engagement, conversions, and loyalty. Invest in your community and you're investing in your entire business.

# What is social media success anyway?

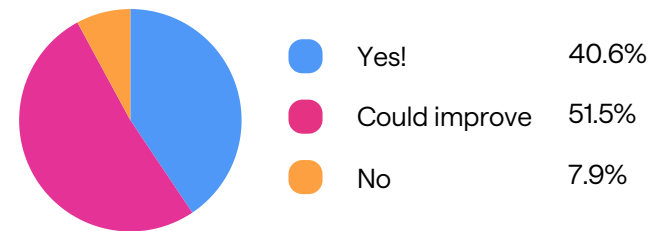


There's a disconnect between what Social Media Managers and leadership consider successful social media.

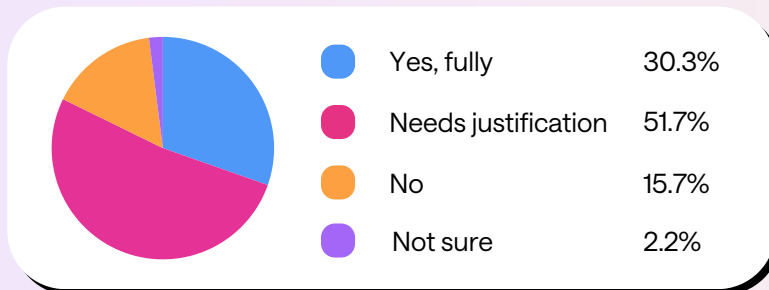
## \* How Social Media Managers define success



## \* Is there alignment between social and business goals?



## \* Do leadership or clients understand the impact of social?



Leadership and clients in non-profits, technology, and marketing agencies are the most likely to understand the impact of social.

## Recommendations

Shift the conversation to community success.

- Tie engagement metrics to business outcomes such as advocacy and customer retention.
- Educate leadership on the importance of UGC, referrals, and customer lifetime value and how social plays into these.

# The business reasons to focus on community



Here's why we recommend a community-driven approach (and follow it ourselves!).

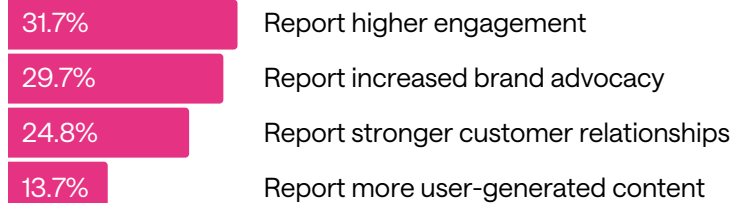
## First... what is community-building?

Community building is the intentional effort to grow and engage a group of people connected by shared interests or brand loyalty. It prioritizes relationships, interaction, and belonging over transactions. And it leads to an increase in advocacy and a strong brand.

The key elements:

- Create spaces (online or offline) for people to connect.
- Encourage two-way interaction between brand and community.
- Support members with helpful, inspiring content.
- Reward loyalty and participation.
- Turn engaged members into advocates through shared purpose.

## \* Social teams that invest in community see



And as you might read on page 2, since investing in community in late 2022, HeyOrca has noticed all these benefits and more (like a reduced cost per acquisition)!

69% of Social Media Managers have at least somewhat incorporated community-building into their social strategy.

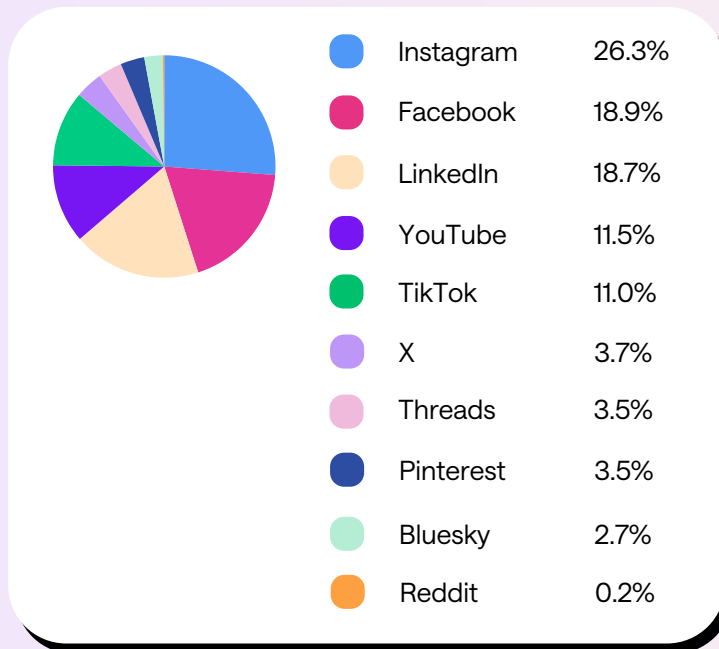
But 71% of Social Media Managers also say that measuring and proving ROI is the biggest challenge.

# Where do brands build community on social?

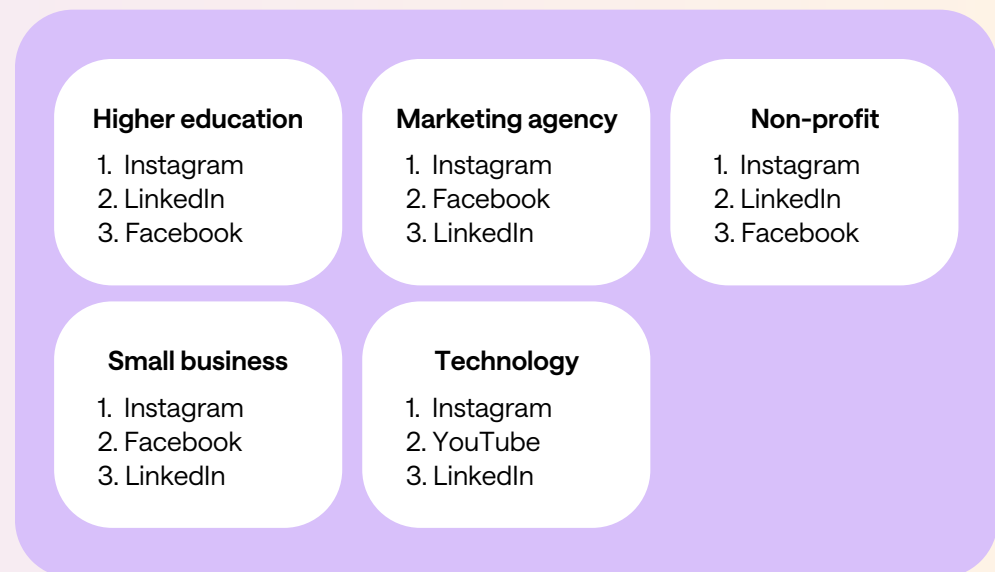


Here's which platforms are being prioritized in 2025.

## \* Which platforms brands are on in 2025



## \* And now the top-used platform by industry



We didn't collect enough data to report on the public sector.

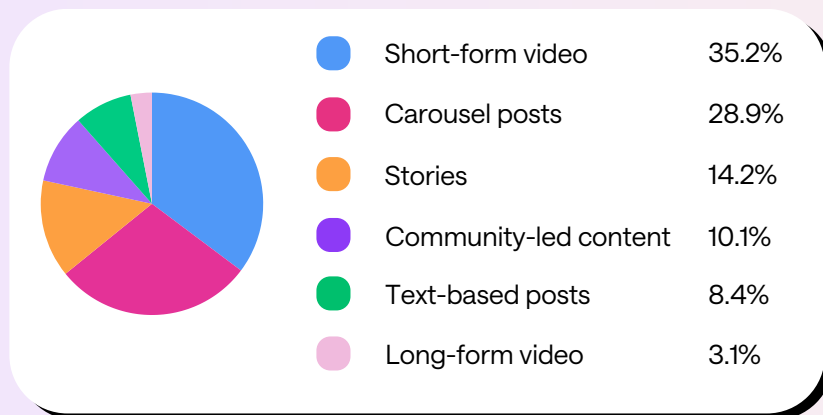


# Which content formats work best on social

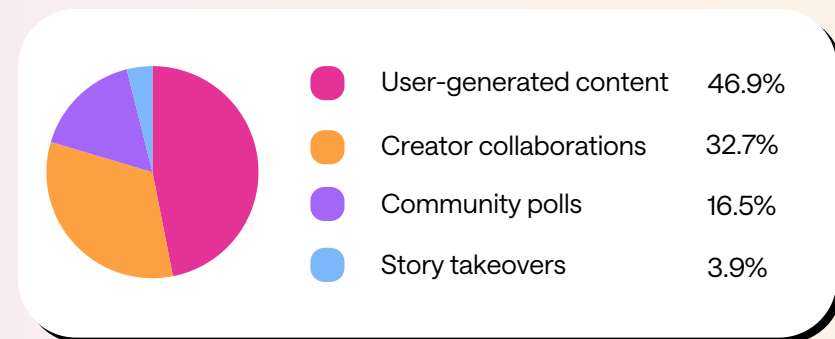


Spend your time building content that performs.

\* Here are the top-performing content formats



\* And the top-performing community-driven content



Non-profits were the only industry where community-led content cracked the top 3 performing formats.

For tech, it was text-based posts in the top 3 that stood out – another unique outlier.

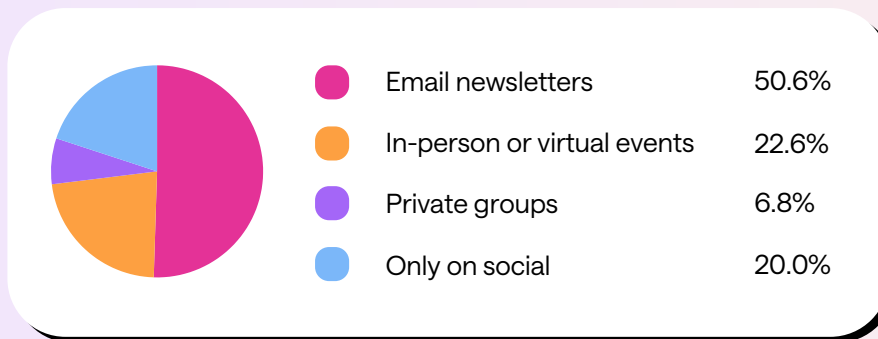
Everywhere else? Short-form video, carousels, and stories continue to dominate the leaderboard.

# And what about off-social spaces?



80% of Social Media Managers are engaging with their community off-social.

## \* Where are brands engaging with their community?



Events are the most popular option for higher education, public sector, small business, and technology industries.

Email newsletters are the most popular options for marketing agencies and non-profits.

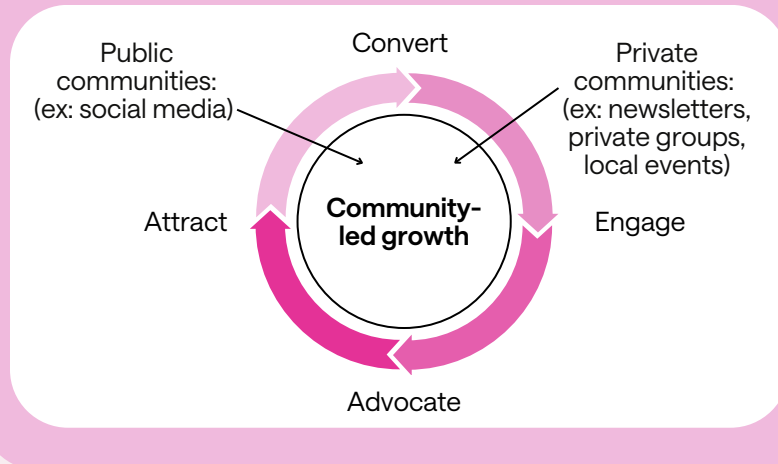
## Takeaways

Brands that complement public social spaces with private ones are best positioned for community-led growth.

Social media is essential for attracting like-minded people who resonate with your brand's values.

Owned environments are the perfect place to build relationships, not just reach.

And working together, followers turn into advocates.



# What about the future?



We asked Social Media Managers about the #1 trend for 2025.

“Community engagement.”

“Relatability in intimate spaces.”

“Emphasis on community.”

“Community-based content. It's only going to get more and more important.”

“Personalization of online experiences, bringing social media back to its community roots.”

“Increased alignment with owned channels (e-newsletter, blog, substack) vs. non-owned channels (social media platforms).”

“Authenticity and approachability.”

“Development of smaller, highly moderated, niche communities.”

## Takeaways

Community is the new marketing operating system – focused on retention, engagement, and belonging over reach, impressions, and broadcasting.

It turns followers into advocates and attention into trust.

## Recommendations

- Build out your social media goals with a community-driven approach, paying special attention to attaching it to overall business goals.
- Shift the mentality from audiences to communities and begin building relationships.
- Create spaces on social and off social and encourage your community to connect.



# The mental state of social teams

Now that we have our community-building strategies, let's check in on the ones doing the hard work.

# Typical work-life balance in the field



There is a high turnover rate in social media marketing.

## \* The average work-life balance

**6.68**  
/10

1 = extremely poor  
10 = excellent

## \* The average work-life rating by team size

Team of 1	6.53 / 10
2-3 people	7.09 / 10
4-6 people	6.21 / 10
7+ people	6.0 / 10

## \* The top contributors to burnout



The demand to be "always on"	31.5%
High volume of content creation	29.4%
Unrealistic expectations	21.4%
Lack of career growth	17.7%

Unrealistic expectations from leadership or clients were most common in the public sector and tech.

The pressure to be "always on" led in agencies and small businesses.

Higher education saw a tie between the two.

And for non-profits, the main cause was the high volume of content creation.

# And what we can do about it



We asked Social Media Managers what they wished leadership and clients understood about social media.

“The amount of time it takes to plan effective campaigns and the equal amount of time it takes to create content with minimal time, budget and resources.”

“The amount of work that goes into it. I feel like leadership often brushes my work off as ‘the silly social girl’ but my position is so much more than editing little videos and sharing news.”

“How much work we actually put in.”

“How difficult it is and how much time it actually takes.”

“The time, effort, and skill it takes to create content. It's still misunderstood.”

“That a good social media strategy takes time and more than one person, especially when that person manages other non-social media based things.”

## Takeaways

Social media teams need clearer boundaries, stronger executive buy-in, and better workload management tools and processes to prevent burnout.

## Recommendations

- Connect brand social media goals to overall business goals to better understand the impact of social and community-building on the brand.
- Build and honour clearly defined work hours and after-hour policies.
- Find community support to share challenges, learn from peers, and get emotional support.



# Salary and career growth

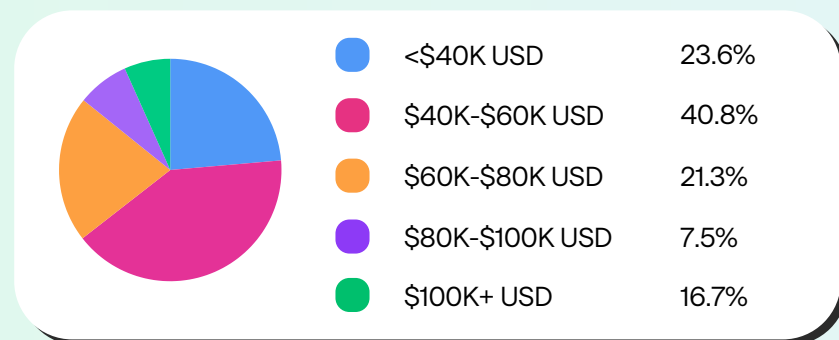
Today's Social Media Managers are tomorrow's Chief Marketing Officers. Let's see what compensation and career growth look like in 2025.

# What is a typical Social Media Manager salary?



Are you being paid enough for the impact you bring to the table? The answer: probably not.

## \* Global Social Media Manager salary breakdown

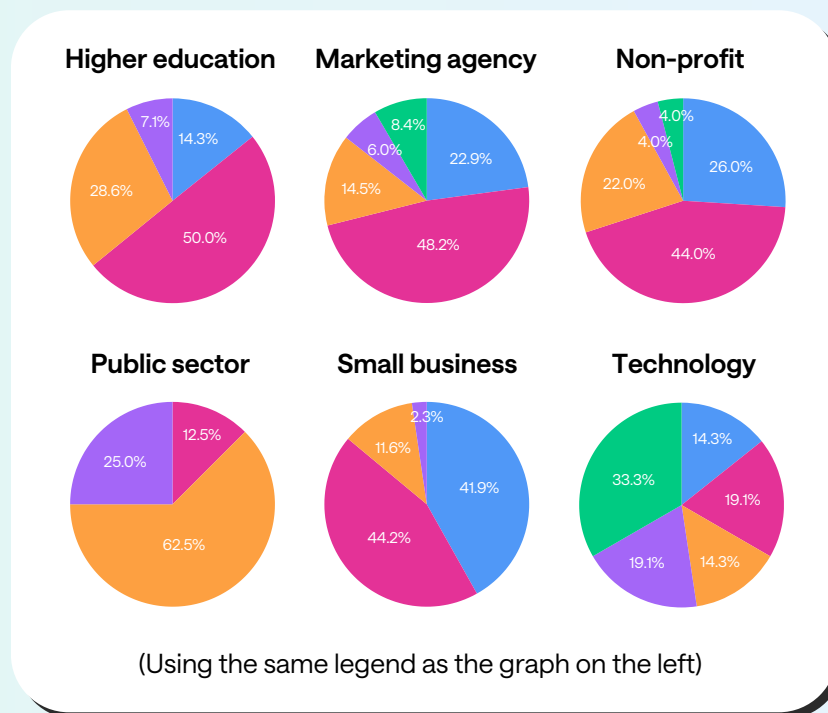


**The average Social Media Manager salary is \$57,770 USD/year\*.**

Those earning \$100K+ mostly work in tech while those earning under \$40K are largely in small businesses.

\*Estimated based on midpoints as well as \$35K for <\$40K and \$110K for 100K+.

## \* And how that looks by industry





# Who is satisfied with their pay in this field?



Half of Social Media Managers believe they're underpaid.

\* How Social Media Managers rate their salaries

**18%**

feel fairly paid

Of those who said they're fairly paid, 6 earn less than \$40K USD, 12 fall in the \$40K–\$60K USD range, 15 earn between \$60K–\$80K USD, 6 make \$80K–\$100K USD, and 9 earn over \$100K USD.

**50.9%**

believe they're underpaid

While Social Media Managers across all salary brackets selected this reply, most earn \$40K–\$60K USD.

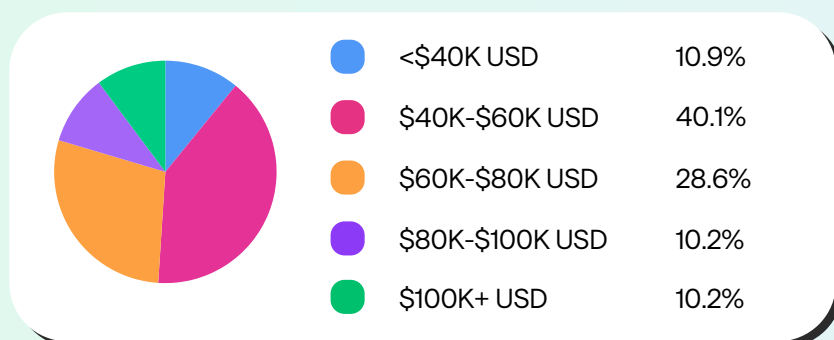
Social Media Managers at marketing agencies feel the most underpaid, followed by those at small businesses.

# USA and Canada social media salaries



Let's break down salaries by location, starting with the USA and Canada.

## \* USA-based salaries

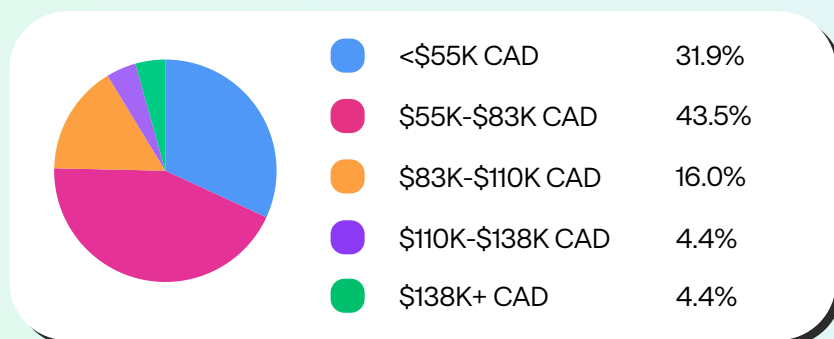


147 USA-based Social Media Managers took our survey.

Of those earning \$100K+ USD, 40% work in tech and 33% at marketing agencies. Two non-profit Social Media Managers also reported \$100K+ USD salaries.

Among those earning <\$40K USD, 56% work at marketing agencies, 67% of which feel underpaid. Another 13% work at small businesses, and 13% at non-profits.

## \* Canada-based salaries



70 Canada-based Social Media Managers took our survey.

Of those earning \$110K+ CAD, 50% work in tech and 33% at marketing agencies.

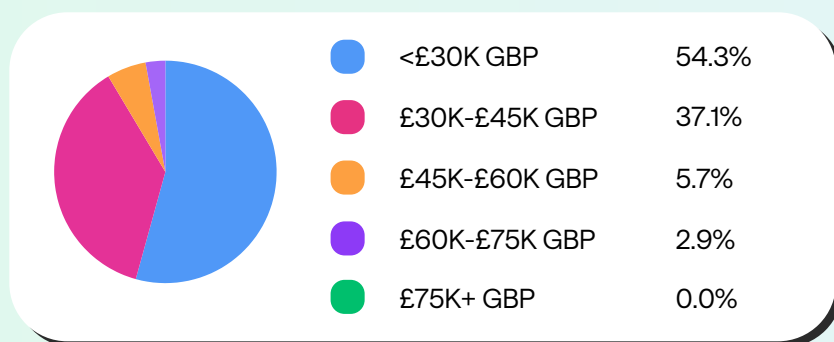
Among those earning <\$55K CAD, 36% work at small businesses, 27% at non-profits, and 27% at marketing agencies.

# UK social media salaries



Let's see how those compare to the UK.

\* UK-based salaries



35 U.K.-based Social Media Managers took our survey.

Among those earning under £30K, 31% work at small businesses.

The one respondent earning £60K-£75K works at a marketing/advertising agency.

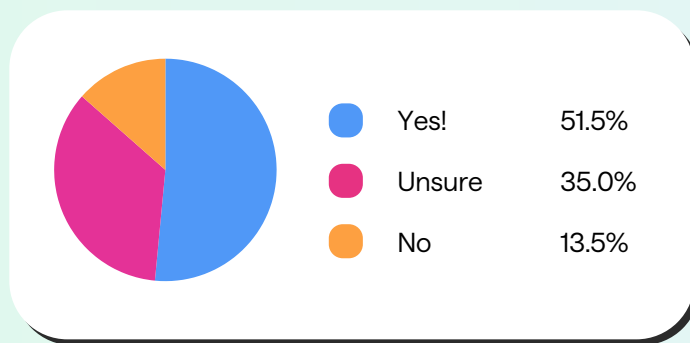
Not enough data was collected from Social Media Managers in Europe and the rest of the world to provide accurate salary benchmarks.

# To stay or not to stay, that is the question



Let's look now at retention within the role.

## \* Will you continue with social media marketing?



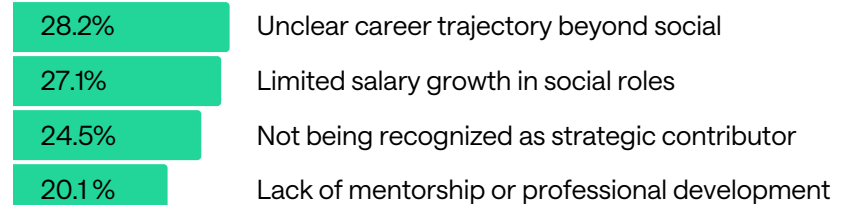
Social Media Managers working at marketing agencies bring in the highest number of “Yes!” responses followed by those in non-profits and then small businesses.

But, Social Media Managers at agencies also make up the biggest group looking to leave the field.

## Career progression

Looking at all industries, only 16.1% of Social Media Managers have a plan for their growth. 43.6% are unsure what's next, and 20.6% feel stuck in their role.

## The biggest challenges



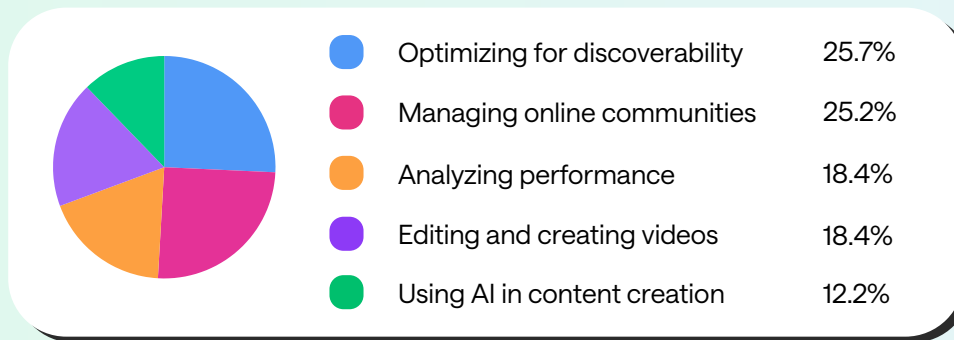
Social Media Managers at marketing agencies, non-profits, the public sector, and in tech say their biggest challenge is an unclear career path beyond social. Those in higher education say it's not being recognized as a strategic contributor. And those in small businesses say it's the limited salary growth in social media roles.

# Upskilling opportunities for 2025



There's almost a tie for first place!

\* The top 5 skills for 2025 according to Social Media Managers



Community-building topped the list for Social Media Managers in higher education, agencies, and tech. In the public sector, video creation/editing was the priority. And for non-profits and small businesses, it was optimizing for discoverability.

## Takeaways

Social Media Managers are often underpaid, not because their work lacks value, but because leadership teams often overlook the strategic impact they bring to the table.

In reality, social media touches every part of the marketing funnel from brand awareness, engagement, conversions, and advocacy. And Social Media Managers have a direct connection to your community.

## Recommendations

- Connect brand social media goals to overall business goals to better understand the impact of social and community-building for the brand.
- Build out clear growth paths for Social Media Managers. They're tomorrow's CMOs.
- Don't be shy to talk about salaries and pricing – it keeps the community fairly paid.
- Explore professional development opportunities.



# Where does AI fit into this?

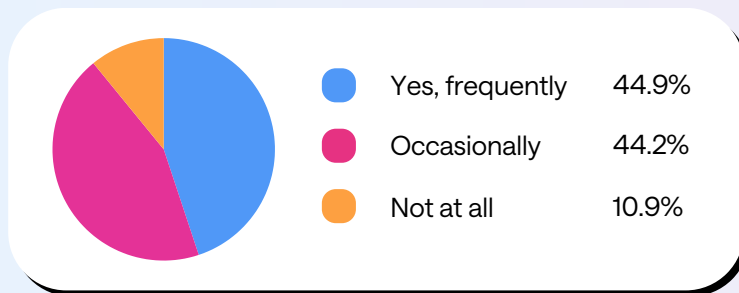
Good news: you're not being replaced!

# AI's role in social media management



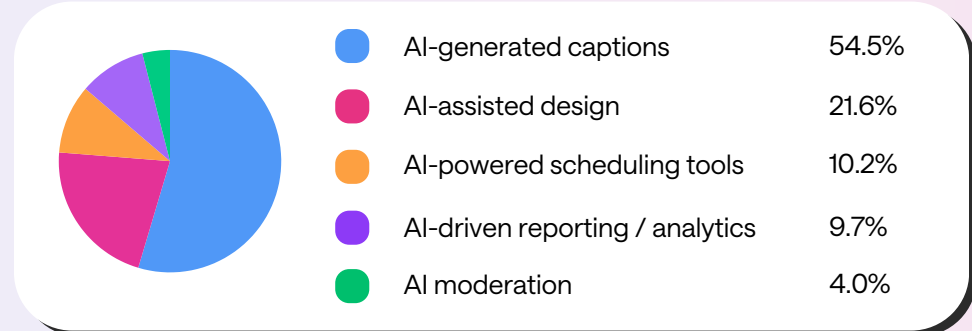
74.4% of Social Media Managers do not believe they'll be replaced by AI but that it will make tasks easier.

\* Here's how often Social Media Managers use AI in their workflow



53% of Social Media Managers in marketing agencies use AI frequently compared to only 25% in the public sector.

\* And which AI-powered tools are most popular



## Takeaway

AI should be a complement, not a substitute for social media managers.

## Recommendations

- Stay up to date with the latest AI capabilities.
- Automate repetitive tasks such as scheduling and reporting.
- Keep strategy, creativity, and community-building human-led.
- Be mindful of perceptions of AI when creating content for your brand.



# Report summary

The message is clear: building communities is the future of social media. When you invest in community, you create more than customers – you create advocates. In an age of noise, it's connection that cuts through. And community is what drives that connection.

## **Social Media Managers, you are leading this movement.**

Use this data to advocate for strategies that prioritize community over content volume. Show how meaningful engagement drives retention, loyalty, and advocacy. And as AI becomes part of our workflows, use it to enhance your creativity – not replace it. Your unique voice and ability to build relationships are irreplaceable.

Thank you for contributing to this year's report! Your insights are shaping the future of our industry.

## **Marketing leaders, community-led marketing isn't just a buzzword.**

It's a strategic growth driver. Brands with strong communities enjoy higher customer lifetime value, organic growth, and long-term brand equity. It's time to shift from short-term engagement metrics to long-term relationship-building. And most importantly, see your social media team not just as executors, but as strategic partners helping you build trust at scale.





# Feeling inspired?

If this report sparked something for you, pass it on. Share it with a fellow Social Media Manager, tag your team, or start a conversation. The more voices we bring in, the better we all grow.

[Share this report](#)

# Join our community

We would LOVE to connect! And we've got options.

Find us on [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#), in our [private group for Social Media Managers](#), or our [daily social media newsletter](#)!