

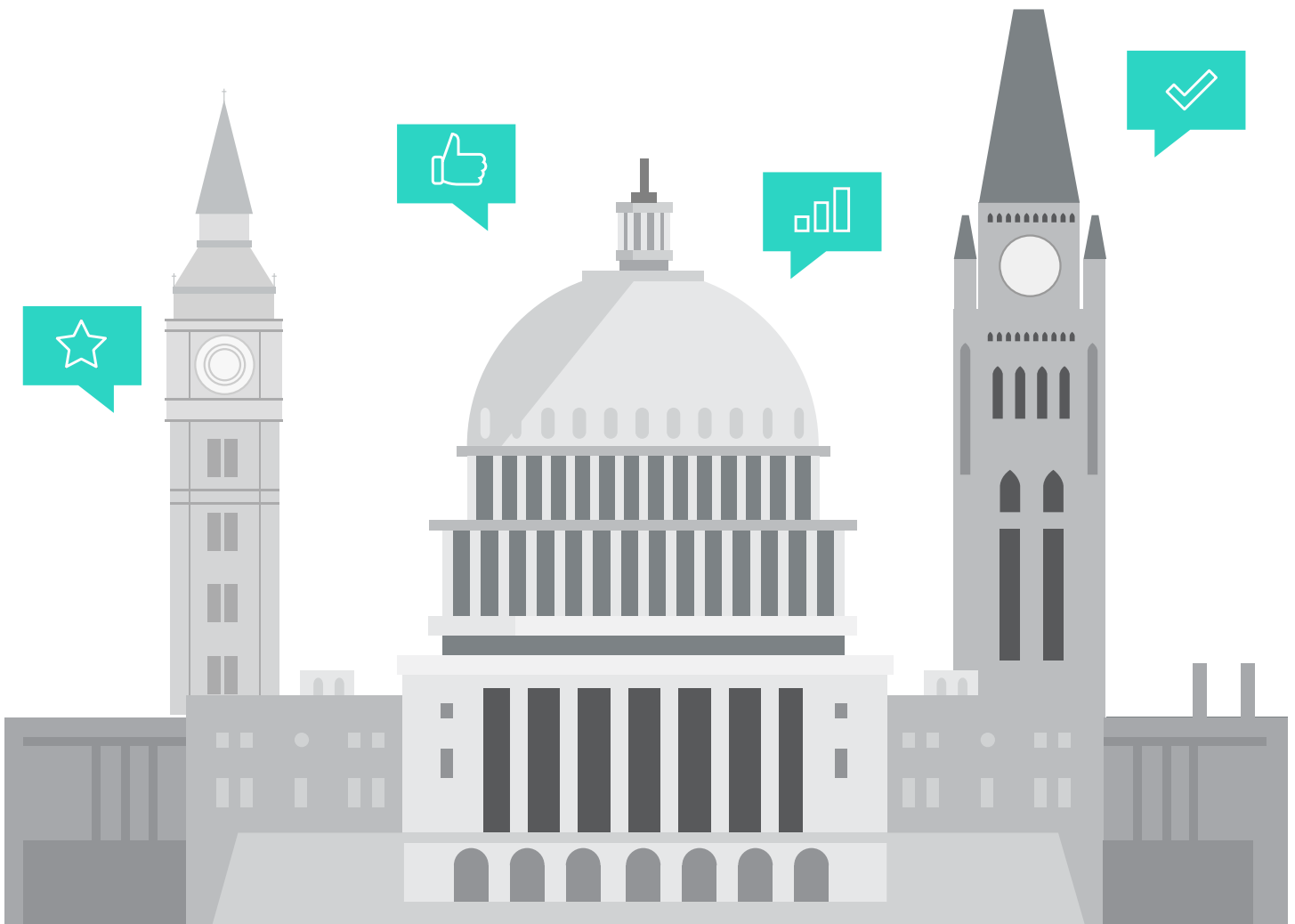
RESEARCH BRIEF

# The Social Government Benchmark Report 2018

Challenges and opportunities for governments adopting social media



Hootsuite®



# Executive Summary

Encouraging constituents to sign up for health care insurance. Alerting commuters to outages in public transportation. Helping students in need access free lunches during the summer. Educating travelers about the spread of a deadly virus. Sharing resources to ensure citizens are prepared in the case of a natural disaster.

These are just a few of the use cases where government must quickly reach the citizens it serves to give them critical information.

But reaching and interacting with citizens can be incredibly costly for governments. Federal agencies spend about \$1.5 billion on public relations per year. And while other communication channels like call centers and websites can be effective, they can also be expensive and inefficient.

With governments under pressure to reduce workforces and streamline operations while delivering excellent citizen experiences, a growing number are turning to social media as a platform for effective engagement.

This report analyzes the results of a survey of public-sector employees currently involved in social media strategy and execution within their agency. It explores issues around proving the value of social media, identifies key benefits of improving agencies' social strategy, and shares insights from Ben Cathers, principal solutions consultant at Hootsuite, about best practices for planning and implementing enterprise level social media management for government.

## Methodology

Hootsuite partnered with GovLoop, the knowledge network for government connecting over 272,000 federal, state, and local government innovators, to poll 169 public-sector employees currently involved in social media strategy within their agency.

In terms of survey methodology, GovLoop and Hootsuite collaborated on a survey aimed at understanding perception and use cases of social media in the public sector. This survey was then emailed out to GovLoop audience members who are actively involved in social media in their agency, and we received 169 complete responses to the survey.



# How governments are using social media today

To establish a baseline view of how governments are using social media—and the results they’re seeing—we polled the GovLoop community of government professionals on a variety of topics, including:

- What level of government they serve
- Their key use cases for social media
- Tools they’re using to manage social media
- Benefits they’re seeing from their use of social media
- How they envision the future of social media

Representation of local, state and federal respondents was broadly in line with the relative sizes of the workforce, with nearly 70 percent working for state and local government, while 30 percent work at the federal level.

Overall, the majority of respondents (87 percent) feel their social media programs have room for improvement. Only 40 percent report that their agency has a clear plan moving forward with social media strategy, and only 43 percent say their executive team views social media as a strategic area of focus.

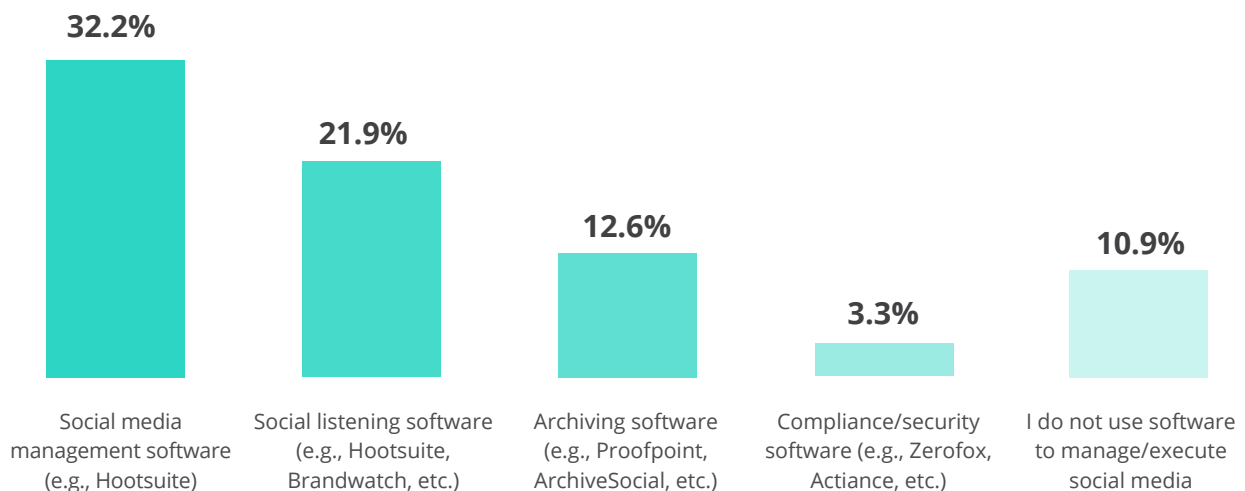
As for tools, 11 percent of respondents post to social networks “natively” without any social media management tools, whereas 32 percent of respondents are using a social media management platform such as Hootsuite to coordinate their social efforts.

Twenty-two percent of respondents use social listening tools to monitor topics and conversations on social media. Only 12 percent use archiving solutions, and just 3 percent report using a solution to support regulatory compliance on social media.

As governments begin to adopt social media for an increasing number of use cases, overall adoption of more sophisticated strategies and tactics around analytics, security, and archiving compliance remain low. Social media teams in government face many external challenges in moving toward a mature, integrated social media strategy, as we’ll explore later in this report.

**FIGURE 1:**

Which, if any, of the following software does your agency use to manage/execute social media?



# Top use cases for social media in government

Respondents use social media across a variety of departments for multiple use cases—not just for public affairs—and are seeing distinct benefits across these different areas.

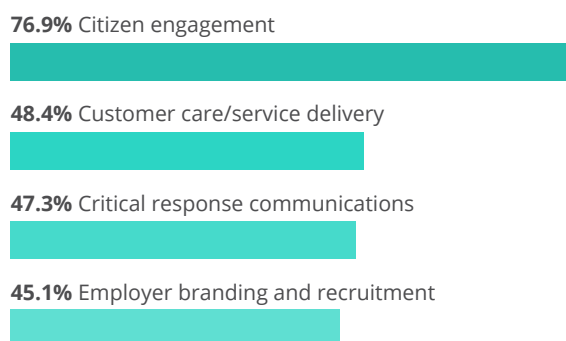
While social media is still the purview of the public affairs team within many government agencies, shifts in other industries suggest that a realization of broader value is on its way. This trend is supported by survey responses, with 54 percent of respondents reporting that social media is used by several teams at their agencies.

Citizen engagement is the number one use case, with 77 percent identifying it as their top priority with social media. This holds particularly true for state and local governments, with nearly 90 percent reporting that they use social media for citizen engagement.

Three other use cases share roughly equal weight in second place, with customer care/service delivery at 48 percent, critical response communications at 47 percent, and employer branding and recruitment at 45 percent.

**FIGURE 2:**

For what purposes does your agency currently use social media? Select all that apply.



## Citizen engagement

### Understanding, informing, and connecting with constituents on social

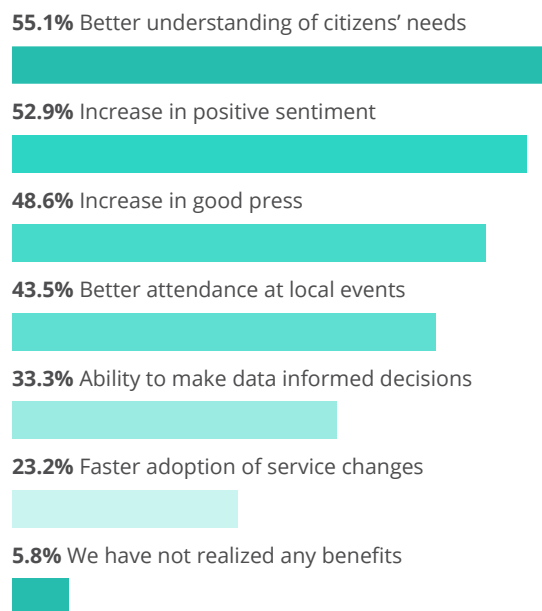
When asked if they are seeing benefits from using social media for citizen engagement, the answer from the GovLoop community is a resounding “yes,” with 94 percent of respondents identifying that they have realized benefits from social.

At 55 percent, the top benefit cited is a better understanding of citizens’ needs. Other top benefits reported include increased positive sentiment (53 percent), attendance at local events (44 percent), and good press (39 percent).

Comments from respondents on the benefits of social media included “We now have a better informed constituency,” and “We have increased awareness about programs and services.”

**FIGURE 3:**

Which, if any, of the following benefits has your agency seen as the result of using social media for citizen engagement? Select all that apply.



## Service delivery

### Generating efficiency and cost savings with social

Social media empowers government customer service teams to quickly identify and engage with unhappy or unsatisfied constituents through searching hashtags, agency mentions, and relevant keywords. Cost savings are possible if governments integrate social media as a real-time channel for responding to individuals, rather than relying on a ticket-based help desk or call center.

New York City's 311 service is a compelling example of how governments can use social media to support an effective service delivery strategy. As an example, city residents are encouraged to file complaints digitally to report potholes, damaged roads, missed garbage collections, and similar issues.

For use cases related to service delivery, respondents to GovLoop's survey report benefits including increased efficiency and cost savings. Forty-eight percent of respondents cite faster average response times as the main benefit when using social media for service delivery, while 43 percent have seen a reduction in volume of calls as an important benefit. Thirty-one percent identify cost savings as an important benefit they have seen from social media in service delivery. (See Figure 4)

It's unlikely that digital services will ever completely replace in-person services in government. But if governments can redirect some funding from traditional call centers toward social media management platforms, they can

#### FIGURE 4:

Which, if any, of the following benefits has your agency seen as the result of using social media for customer care/service delivery? Select all that apply.

**48.3%** Faster average response times



**42.5%** Reduction in volume of calls



**31%** Cost savings



**18.4%** We have not realized any benefits



cut customer wait times, increase customer satisfaction levels, and save both governments and taxpayers money, all while serving citizens where they are already active—on social media channels.

## Critical response communications

### Taking control of a critical communications channel

Agencies know that traditional press releases no longer cut it in a crisis. Government agencies and emergency response teams need to speak directly to the people via the most efficient channels: social media. A strong critical response plan, directed through social media, can be a mitigating factor in containing and managing a crisis—and can save lives.

According to Ben Cathers, principal value consultant at Hootsuite, "Critical response should be a number one use of government social media, simply because during a time of crisis, people turn to social channels first."

Nearly 84 percent of respondents to GovLoop's survey identify keeping citizens better informed as the number one benefit of social media for critical response communications. Rumor control and faster response times also rank highly, at 60 and 50 percent, respectively.

Only 6 percent of respondents state they have not seen any benefits using social media for critical response communications.

#### FIGURE 5:

Which, if any, of the following benefits has your agency seen as the result of using social media for critical response communications? Select all that apply.

**83.7%** Citizens are better informed



**60.5%** Rumor control



**50%** Faster response times



**34.9%** Better coordinated teams



**5.8%** We have not realized any benefits



## Employer branding and recruitment

### Attracting and engaging with candidates on social

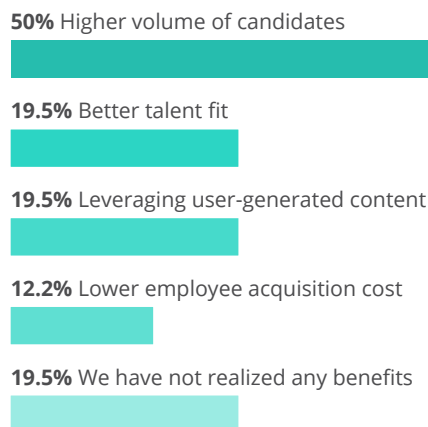
Social media enables open, transparent, and real-time interactions that give citizens an unfiltered understanding of the opportunities and benefits that exist within government.

“Governments struggle to recruit,” says Cathers, “and the problem is only going to get worse as more people move towards retirement. Right now, social media is often just used to posts jobs in the hope that somebody applies. Its creative capabilities have not been realized yet.”

Asked about the benefits of social media for employer branding and recruitment, 50 percent of survey respondents report a higher volume of candidates as a key benefit, while 20 percent report better talent fit. Nearly 20 percent of respondents said they have seen no benefit in this area, indicating untapped potential in the area of using social media for employee branding and recruitment.

#### FIGURE 6:

Which, if any, of the following benefits has your agency seen as the result of using social media for employer branding and recruitment? Select all that apply.



## AI and chatbots

### Exploring opportunities for innovation and automation

The field of artificial intelligence (AI) has advanced to the point where citizens can ask questions and receive answers from automated services like chatbots without human interaction.

This type of service delivery could be a boon for a cash- and staff-strapped department trying to scale up its social media, but much of the potential of this emerging field is yet to be realized.

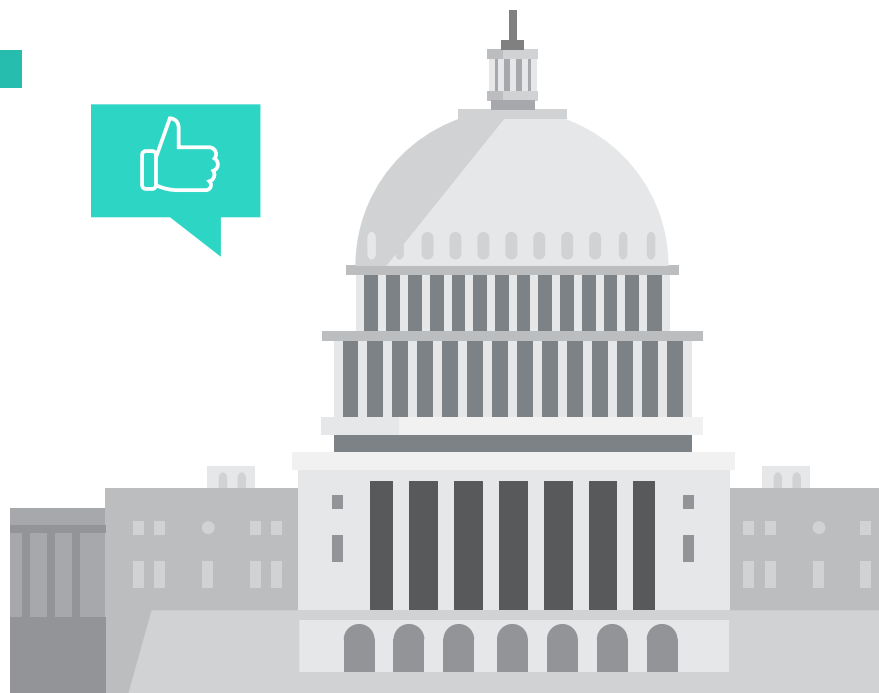
Only 20 percent of respondents expect to integrate AI into their social media strategy in the next two years, with chatbots only slightly more likely at 22 percent. Fifty-nine percent report that they don't expect either of these tactics to become part of their strategy anytime soon.

#### FIGURE 7:

Which emerging technologies do you see being integrated in your social media strategy within the next two years?

20%  
AI

22%  
Chatbots



# Critical challenges in adopting social media

While governments are making progress integrating social media into their overall strategy, they continue to experience challenges in realizing its full value.

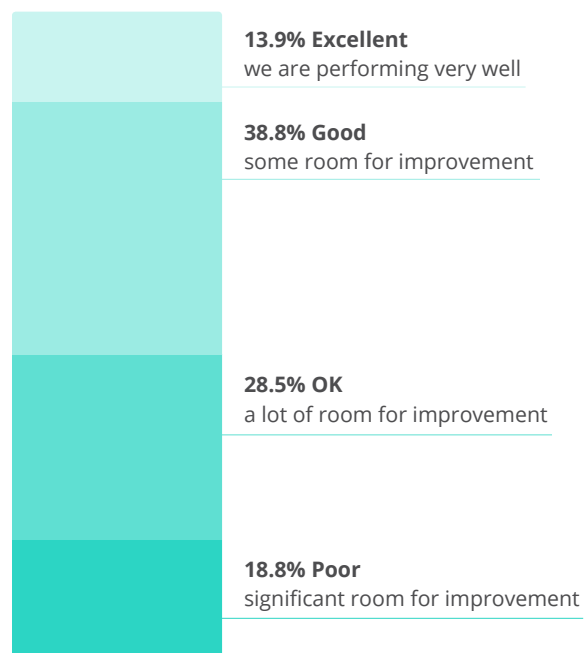
When asked how they would rate their agency's use of social media, only 14 percent of respondents feel they are doing very well. Thirty-nine percent say they have room for improvement, and 47 percent report either "significant room" or "a lot of room" for improvement.

Respondents report facing challenges in three broad categories, which we'll explore in more depth in this report:

- Skills, resources, and strategy
- Measuring return on investment in social
- Managing security and compliance

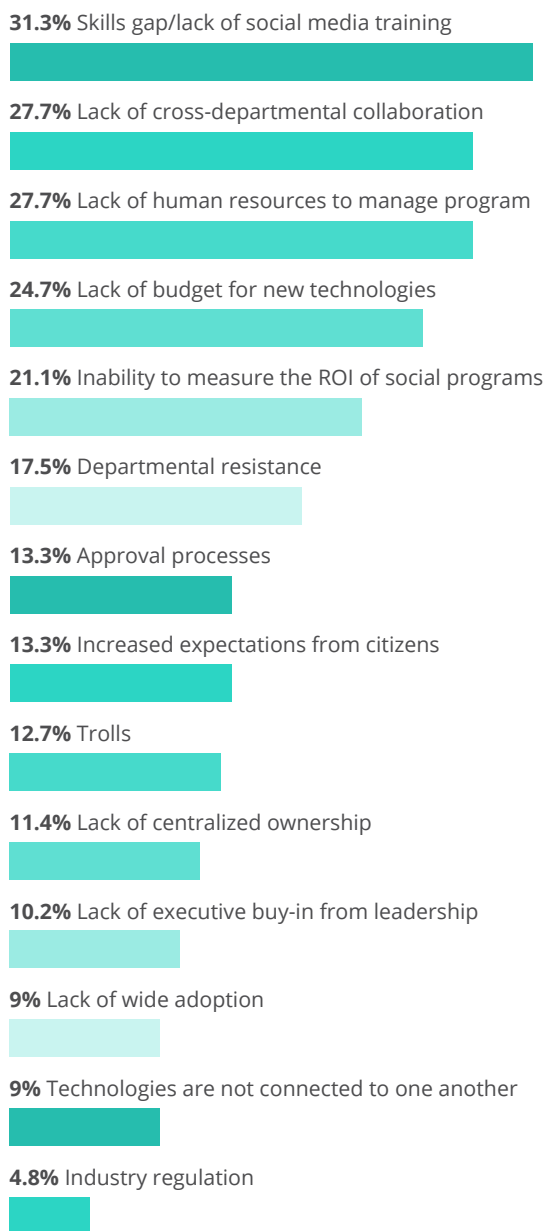
**FIGURE 8:**

How would you rate your agency's use of social media?



**FIGURE 9:**

What are the top challenges you face with social media that inhibit your success?



We haven't been able to identify why [social media] is needed and exactly how we are going to use it effectively."

Survey Respondent

## Skills, resources, and strategy

Across agencies and levels, respondents report challenges ranging from a skills gap (31 percent) and a lack of human resources (28 percent) to a lack of cross-departmental collaboration (28 percent) and lack of budget for new technologies (25 percent).

"Time and staff is an issue—there is not a role dedicated to only social media," wrote one survey respondent.

Other common challenges across government include silos and lack of cross-departmental collaboration. These issues prevent development of a social media strategy that can address agency-wide issues while maintaining one voice and a consistent brand presence.

"These challenges are not unique to government, but they can be difficult to overcome without the right strategy, tools, and stakeholder support," says Cathers. "It can be difficult to expand and advance a social media program if there is no budget or staff to dedicate to it, or if there is no buy-in from leadership to have social media built into the communications strategy."

## Measuring return on investment in social

Proving the value of social media programs is a critical step toward social media maturity. Yet many governments are still using basic social media "vanity" metrics to justify investment in social media, without connecting results to core agency goals.

"Metrics are often hard to understand and capture," Cathers explains. "Success is sometimes still about getting 10,000 Facebook followers. Big numbers sound exciting. But what do these metrics actually mean?"

Engagement metrics such as likes, retweets, and comments are the most commonly measured, with 52 percent of respondents reporting using these metrics. Follower count is close behind at 48 percent, followed by consumption metrics (such as photo or post views) at 43 percent.

Overall, federal governments report a somewhat more sophisticated use of metrics, ranking higher in share of voice, sentiment analysis, conversions, and influenced revenue. However, 26 percent of respondents are unable to say whether their social media efforts are being measured at all.



Much of the value of social media for large agencies and organizations comes in its ability to integrate with other technology, yet nearly 80 percent of respondents reported not having integrated social media with any other solutions. This means most agencies are missing opportunities to leverage social data and analyze it alongside other data sets to inform better strategic decisions.

Of the 20 percent that report integrating social media software within their technology stack, the most popular integrations were web analytics such as Google Analytics (55 percent) and content management systems like Wordpress (38 percent).

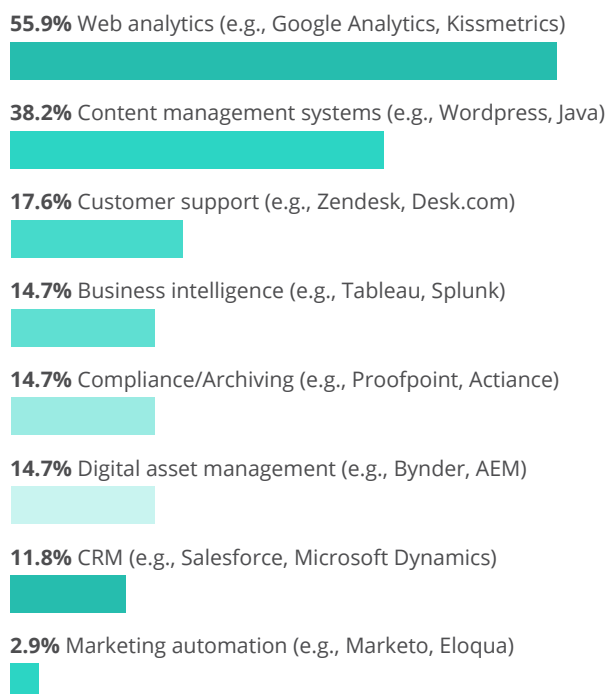
**FIGURE 10:**

Do you integrate your social media with other software?



**FIGURE 11:**

Do you integrate social media with any of the following? Select all that apply.

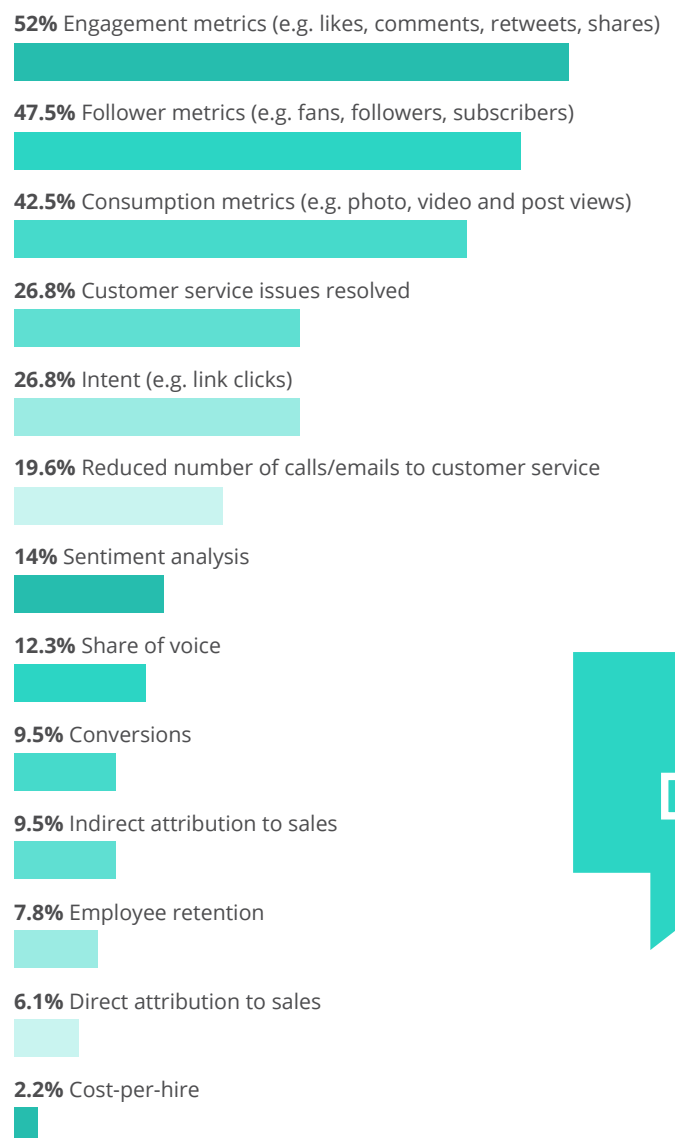


In my experience in government, the metrics programs that are the most valuable are the ones that have been primarily citizen-served. So asking yourself, 'What is the number of citizens that we can service or help on a particular channel?' is a good place to start truly proving value."

**Ben Cathers,**  
Principal Solutions Consultant, Hootsuite

**FIGURE 12:**

Which of the following metrics does your organization use to measure the success of social initiatives? Select all that apply.



## Managing security and compliance

Imagine a hacker gaining access to the social media account of a prominent government figure or a large federal agency and distributing incorrect or inflammatory content that could put citizens or the markets at risk.

Government agencies in the early stages of adopting social media tools can struggle with issues around ensuring security. Overall, respondents to the GovLoop survey report confidence regarding data security, despite the fact that 22 percent of respondents are aware of attempts at hacking or phishing on their organization's social media accounts.

When asked if they have strong security measures in place, 75 percent agree, as do 74 percent of those asked if they are confident in the data practices of their agency.

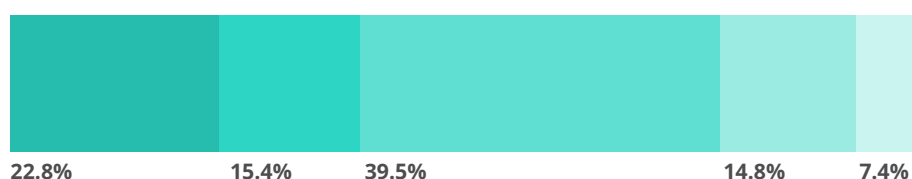
Government communications are regulated by a number of bodies and standards, such as the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which requires that government entities make public records—including social media posts—available to citizens.

"It is critical that government does this," says Cathers. "A lot of them have records retention policies they're not aware of, and they may not know if it also includes outbound private communications or not. So you need a system that can cover all of that without you having to think about doing it manually."

When asked, "Is your agency archiving all social media communications?" 34 percent of respondents report that they are not archiving at all. Twenty-eight percent report "some" archiving, while just 38 percent are complying with all archival of social media.

**FIGURE 13:**

There have been attempts at hacking or phishing on my organization's social media accounts.



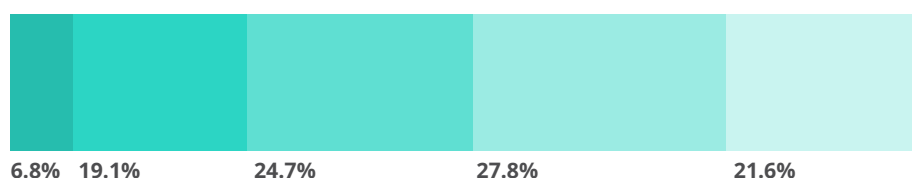
**FIGURE 14:**

I have strong security in place to protect my social media platforms from hacking or phishing.



**FIGURE 15:**

I am confident in the data practices of your agency.



■ Strongly disagree
 ■ Somewhat disagree
 ■ Neither agree nor disagree
 ■ Somewhat agree
 ■ Strongly agree

**FIGURE 16:**

Is your agency archiving all social media communications?



# Three key strategies for social government

Social media is an area of vast opportunity for government. From driving government-wide efficiencies and delivering effective crisis communications to restoring declining trust in government institutions, there are many areas where governments can realize real improvement.

Based on top challenges identified in responses to GovLoop's survey, here are three key opportunities for governments to improve their use of social media:

- Empower teams with skills, tools, and strategy
- Prove and improve return on investment
- Take control of social media security

## 1. Empower teams with skills, tools, and strategy

From a skills gap and lack of human resources to a lack of cross-departmental collaboration and budget for new technologies, government agencies face a broad spectrum of challenges in enabling teams to succeed with social media.

To begin to face these challenges, agencies must prioritize enabling teams to develop and execute on an effective cross-departmental social media strategy that connects to broader agency goals.

### How Hootsuite Helps

Hootsuite's industry-recognized courses and certifications were developed in partnership with Syracuse University's renowned Newhouse School to equip your teams to succeed with social.

Hootsuite Academy teaches students to confidently contribute to their organization's social media strategy and covers everything from content strategy and influencer marketing to Social ROI tracking. Almost 400 government agencies employ Hootsuite-certified professionals.

To learn more, visit [education.hootsuite.com](https://education.hootsuite.com)

## 2. Prove and improve return on investment

Agencies need to see a positive return on their investment in social because time and money are valuable resources. If there's no clear benefit to spending them, there isn't a justifiable reason for continuing to do so.

Proving the ROI of social will justify your efforts and help you build a business case for further investment. It will also help you:

- Change the perception of social within your organization
- Show the potential impact social can have across multiple departments outside of public relations
- Discover where your efforts and resources are being used most effectively
- Adjust efforts in areas where efforts and resources aren't being used effectively
- Identify gaps in your overall strategy, key messages, and content
- Better understand constituent perceptions, preferences, conversations, and motivations

### How Hootsuite Helps

Hootsuite Impact makes it easier for organizations to clearly prove the return on their investment in organic and paid social media.

An executive dashboard shows exactly how social media channels and campaigns are driving mission-critical conversions in customized dashboards with graphs, tables, and KPI summaries. You can use social data to optimize organic and paid strategies, get real-time strategy insights, and even benchmark the performance of other organizations and agencies on social.

To learn more, visit [hootsuite.com/impact](https://hootsuite.com/impact)

## Take control of social media security & compliance

Social media security threats continue to grow year over year. Scams on social media grew by 150 percent across Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn in 2016. And Proofpoint's 2017 Quarterly Threat Report shows a trend toward more diversified and sophisticated attacks on social.

If you're not implementing processes, tools, and educational programs to keep your agency brand protected and secure on social, you'll be much more vulnerable to social media risks and threats. By understanding the threats, and by automating your compliance requirements, you can safely and securely run your social media accounts.

### How Hootsuite Helps

Agencies must be prepared to respond to public records requests—but manual archiving is time-consuming and prone to human error.

Free your agency from manual archiving with solutions like Smarsh and Proofpoint. These solutions integrate with Hootsuite, giving you the efficiency benefits of a unified social media management platform while ensuring all your social media content is archived and compliant agency-wide.

To learn more, visit [hootsuite.com/platform/security](https://hootsuite.com/platform/security)

## Case study Scaling social media to serve 1.1 million constituents

Ranked first among American counties of its size in a Digital Counties Survey, Fairfax County, Virginia is recognized for its advanced use of technology to improve government services and boost efficiencies.

The county wanted to use social media to better understand citizen concerns, share feedback with internal teams, and use that feedback to inform future government priorities.

Read the case study to learn more about how Fairfax County successfully scaled its social media to better serve constituents.



## Social media use in the United Kingdom

As well as analyzing the results of 169 government employees working in social media in the United States, GovLoop also offered the same questionnaire to 93 government employees in the United Kingdom. In light of technology, privacy, and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) law coming into force in the European Union, there are some interesting differences to note in the findings.

Overall, a larger majority of respondents (94 percent compared to 87 percent in the United States) feel their social media programs have room for improvement. Just over half of respondents, 54 percent, report that their agency has a clear plan moving forward with social media strategy, and 55 percent say their executive team views social media as a strategic area of focus. Both of these results are higher than those in the U.S. survey.

When it comes to social media tools, respondents in the UK are almost three times more likely to post “natively” to social media networks: 28 percent compared to 11 percent in the United States. Only 27 percent of respondents

are using a social media management platform such as Hootsuite to coordinate their social efforts.

The effects of recent GDPR legislation are being felt by government agencies in the UK. Approximately 48 percent of respondents say that their organization is planning on making changes to its social strategy based on the legislation, and 50 percent say they have already made changes. Meanwhile, respondents seem confident overall in the privacy and compliance strategies of their current social media approaches. Sixty-eight percent say they have strong security in place to protect social media platforms from hacking or phishing, and 72 percent say they are confident in the data practices of their departments.

At its core, GDPR is a new set of rules designed to give EU citizens more control over their personal data. GDPR requires Hootsuite users, as data controllers, to engage data processors that deploy appropriate safeguards. Hootsuite carried out an in-depth GDPR readiness project for its users, analyzing each product offering as well as internal policies with a view to becoming GDPR ready. As of May 2018, all Hootsuite products and services are GDPR-ready.

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## The journey to social government

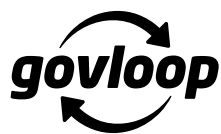
The power of social media to quickly and efficiently share information with citizens and stakeholders is clear. This dynamic has changed the way government engages with citizens, replacing traditional one-way communication with two-way conversations.

Today, more than ever, agencies are leveraging social media to improve their communications strategy, mission-core objectives, and information delivery.

There is still much to be done, especially in an era that demands efficiency, modernization, and rapid response. By adopting social media strategies and tools that can improve collaboration, remove silos to social media success, and provide deep insights, governments can continue taking steps to transform their operations and take the social advantage.

### Sources:

- Government Executive
- New York City Case Study
- Proofpoint, Social Media Brand Fraud Report
- Proofpoint, Social Quarterly Threat Report, Q1 2017



## About GovLoop

GovLoop's mission is to "connect government to improve government." We aim to inspire public-sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 270,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to connect and improve government.

For more information about this report, please reach out to [info@govloop.com](mailto:info@govloop.com)



## About Hootsuite

Hootsuite is the most widely used social media management platform. Our battle-tested technology, extensive ecosystem, and social DNA help government organizations understand, inform, and engage citizens through a centralized, secure, and scalable social media platform.

**Learn more:** [hootsuite.com/government](https://hootsuite.com/government)

