

MAY 2025



# FROM CLICKS TO KEYS

Social Media's Role in  
Apartment Searches

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# About J Turner Research

J Turner Research is an independent research company focused exclusively on the multifamily industry for two decades. It is the only company to monitor the online reviews and ratings of 145,000+ properties nationwide. J Turner pioneered the Online Reputation Assessment (ORA®) score, which serves as the multifamily industry standard to measure, benchmark, and compare a property/company's online reputation. J Turner is the national leader in enhancing resident satisfaction through intelligent resident and prospect survey programs, AI-driven data analysis, quantifiable action plans, customized training, social media and listings management, and review response service. <http://www.jturnerresearch.com>.



J Turner Research has produced several groundbreaking national research studies highlighting emerging trends, shifting demographics, industry best practices, and new market opportunities in the multifamily industry. To download our research, please visit <https://jturnerresearch.com/resources>.



# Executive Summary

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This report examines the critical role of social media in the multifamily industry, revealing its evolving influence on both prospective and current residents' satisfaction. While traditional marketing methods retain importance, particularly for older demographics, a robust and adaptable social media strategy is now essential for success in today's digital landscape. The survey highlights a generational divide in how social media is used for apartment hunting and delves into its impact on resident satisfaction, underscoring the need for a nuanced approach.

Key findings demonstrate that younger generations (Millennials and Gen Z) rely heavily on social media for apartment searches. While **Facebook often serves as a primary search tool across generations**, these younger groups increasingly turn to visually-driven platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to explore property aesthetics, community atmosphere, and resident experiences, prioritizing visuals and resident testimonials. Older generations (Boomers and Gen X), while active on social media, prioritize practical information like pricing, property conditions, and neighborhood details, often seeking this information through more traditional channels. However, across all generations, authenticity is paramount. Real photos and videos, transparent information on pricing and amenities, and genuine resident experiences are crucial for building trust and driving engagement.

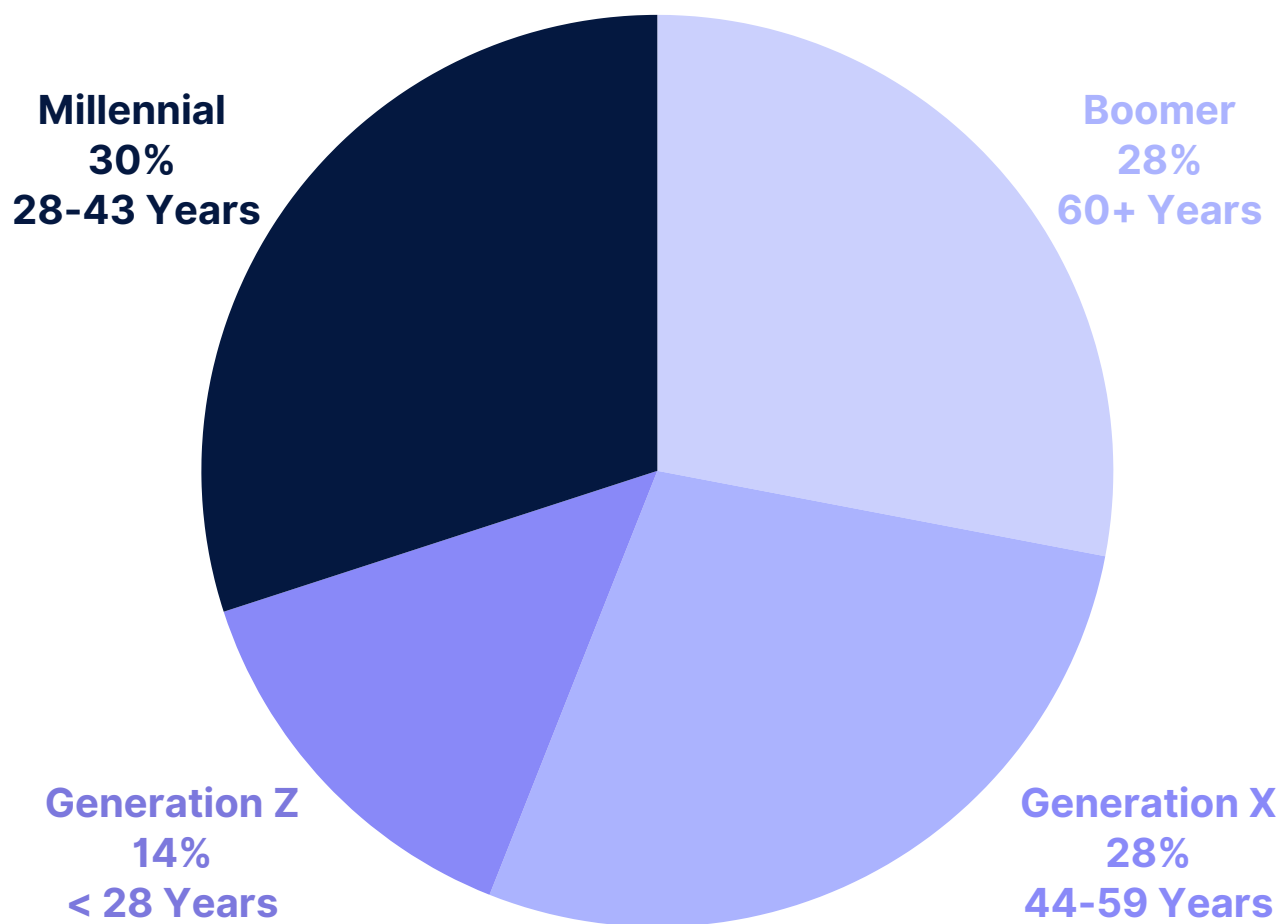
Beyond attracting prospects, social media offers significant opportunities to enhance resident satisfaction. Proactive communication, timely maintenance updates, local neighborhood guides, and resident event information contribute to a positive living experience and foster a sense of community. A strategic social media presence allows property managers to build stronger relationships, address concerns effectively, and cultivate a thriving online community.

This report provides actionable insights into leveraging social media to reach different demographics effectively. By understanding generational preferences and prioritizing authenticity, the multifamily industry can optimize its social media strategies to attract prospective renters, improve resident satisfaction, and ultimately thrive in the increasingly competitive digital landscape.



# Demographics

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This social media survey drew participation from over 1,000 respondents, composed of current and prospective residents. The average age of respondents was 47.5 years.

# Key Findings

## Reaching Today's Renters Through Strategic Social Media Engagement

This report reveals that social media is a pervasive force in the lives of today's renters, although generational preferences shape platform usage and desired content. Understanding these nuances is crucial for attracting prospective residents and fostering satisfaction among current residents. By tailoring social media strategies to resonate with each generation, apartment communities can maximize their reach and build stronger resident relationships.

**A Universal Language with Generational Dialects:** While nearly everyone uses social media daily, generational preferences dictate platform choices. Boomers and Gen X gravitate towards Facebook and YouTube for news and entertainment. Millennials expand this repertoire to include Instagram, seeking visual inspiration and lifestyle content. Gen Z, the most digitally native generation, embraces YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, prioritizing short-form video and interactive experiences.



**Boomer Bytes:** Boomers, with 49% residing in their apartments for over 5 years, leverage social media primarily for staying connected and informed. They use it less for apartment hunting exclusively (24%).



**Gen X's Digital Domain:** Gen X, with a more even distribution across residency durations, shows increased reliance on social media for apartment searches (42%) compared to Boomers.



**Millennial Media Mania:** Millennials, with a shorter average residency, heavily utilize social media (90% daily use) and overwhelmingly rely on it for finding apartments (61%), favoring visually-driven platforms like Instagram alongside Facebook and YouTube.



**Gen Z's Zoom:** Gen Z, the newest wave of renters, predominantly uses social media (89% daily) for apartment hunting (58%), with a strong preference for Instagram and TikTok, reflecting their affinity for visual and short-form content.

# Key Findings

**Tailored Content for Each Generation:** Social media's effectiveness in attracting renters hinges on delivering relevant content to the right audience. While all generations value property photos, neighborhood information, and virtual tours, generational nuances influence content consumption and engagement motivations.



**Picture Perfect:** High-quality photos and videos, including virtual tours, are essential across all generations. This aligns with **Gen X's** desire for "real" pictures and **Gen Z's** preference for authentic visuals.



**Neighborhood Narratives:** Providing information about the local area resonates with all age groups, but **Millennials** and **Gen Z** also crave insights into the community atmosphere, seeking a sense of belonging.



**Incentivize and Engage:** While affordability is a universal concern, **Gen Z** and **Millennials** are particularly drawn to promotions and contests, showcasing the potential of targeted advertising. This echoes open-ended feedback from these generations regarding the attractiveness of discounts and incentives.





# Key Findings



## **Cultivating Resident Satisfaction and Building Community Online:**

Social media provides a powerful avenue for boosting resident satisfaction by fostering a sense of community and facilitating communication. While younger generations show greater interest in property social media activity (41% of Gen Z and 35% of Millennials consider it important), all generations value practical information and responsiveness.



### **Maintenance Matters:**

Maintenance updates, a top content preference across all generations, directly address resident needs and demonstrate proactive communication. This was overly emphasized in the open-ended feedback from Boomers.



**Local Lens:** Sharing local neighborhood guides and recommendations fosters a sense of community and provides valuable information, appealing to all generations' interest in neighborhood information.



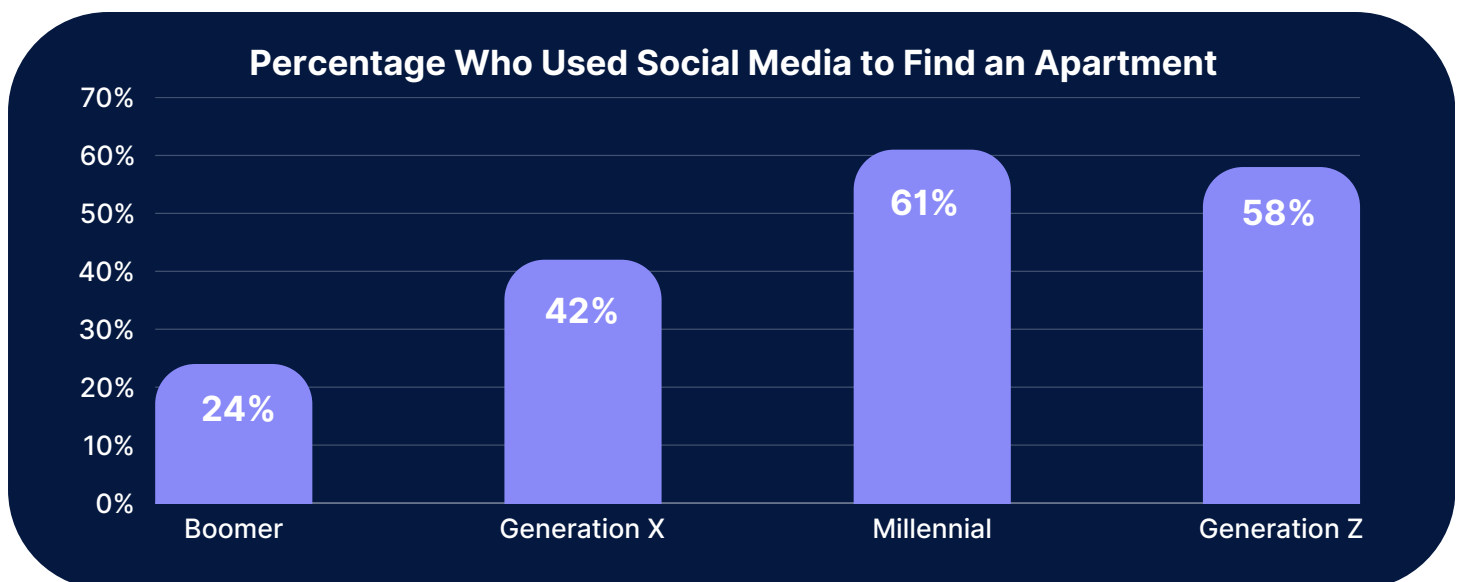
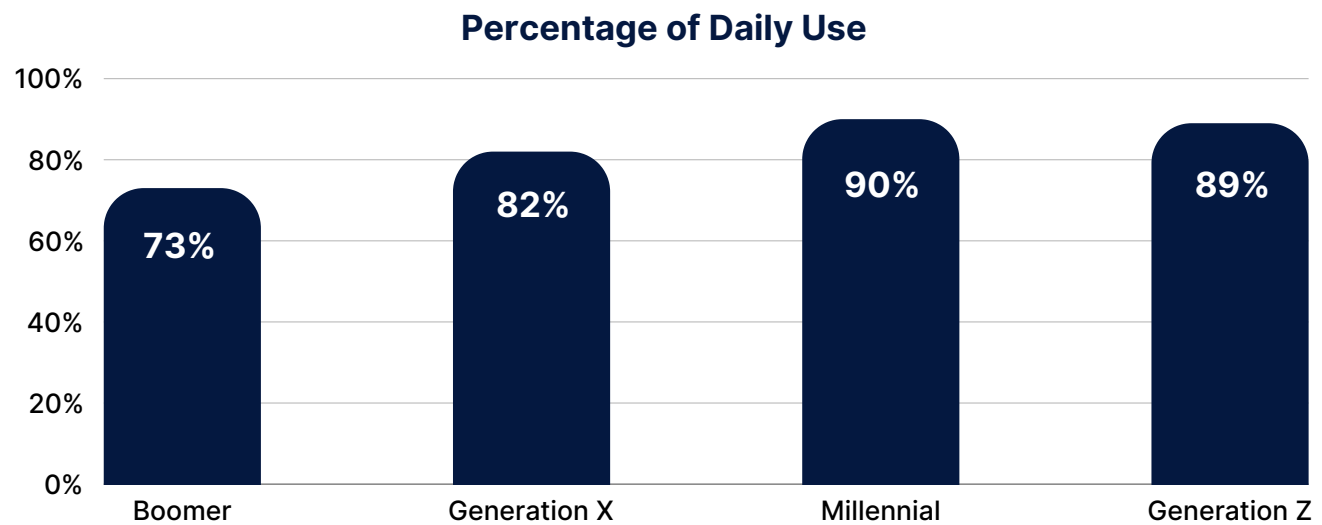
### **Eventful Engagement:**

Promoting resident events and activities cultivates social connections and strengthens community bonds, aligning with Gen X and Millennial feedback on community engagement and the open-ended feedback emphasizing community building.

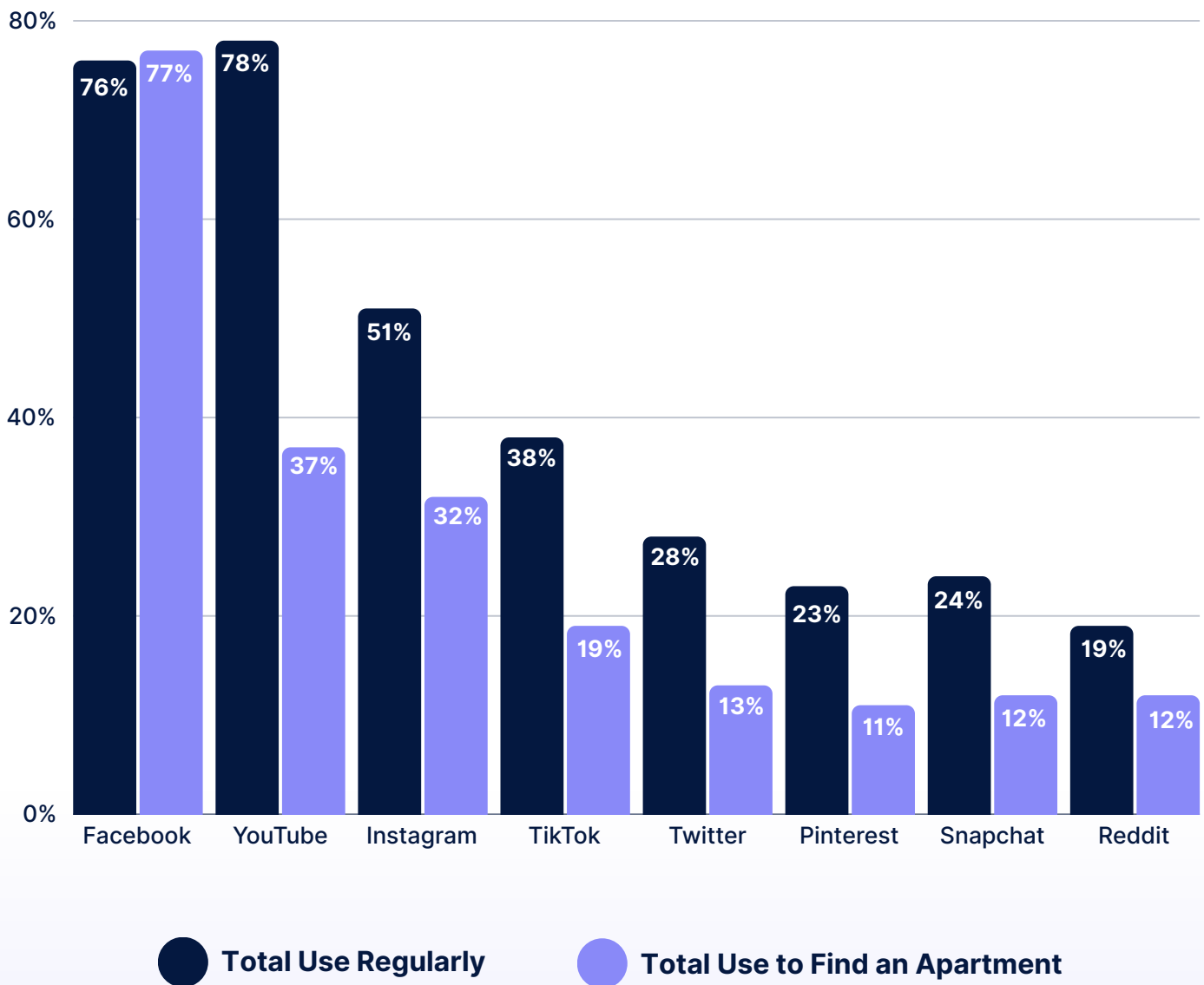
# A Universal Language

## With Generational Dialects

Social media has become ubiquitous in modern life, serving as a primary channel for communication, information gathering, and entertainment. This holds true for apartment residents and prospective renters. However, generational nuances shape how different age groups utilize these platforms, influencing their effectiveness for apartment searches and community engagement. The survey reveals distinct “dialects” with each generation, demonstrating unique preferences and behaviors.



While social media serves as a common thread across generations, the ways in which each group utilizes these platforms for apartment searching and engaging with their community are distinct. Understanding these generational “dialects” is crucial for apartment communities seeking to effectively reach and connect with prospective and current residents. Tailoring social media strategies to align with generational preferences will be key to maximizing engagement and driving positive results.

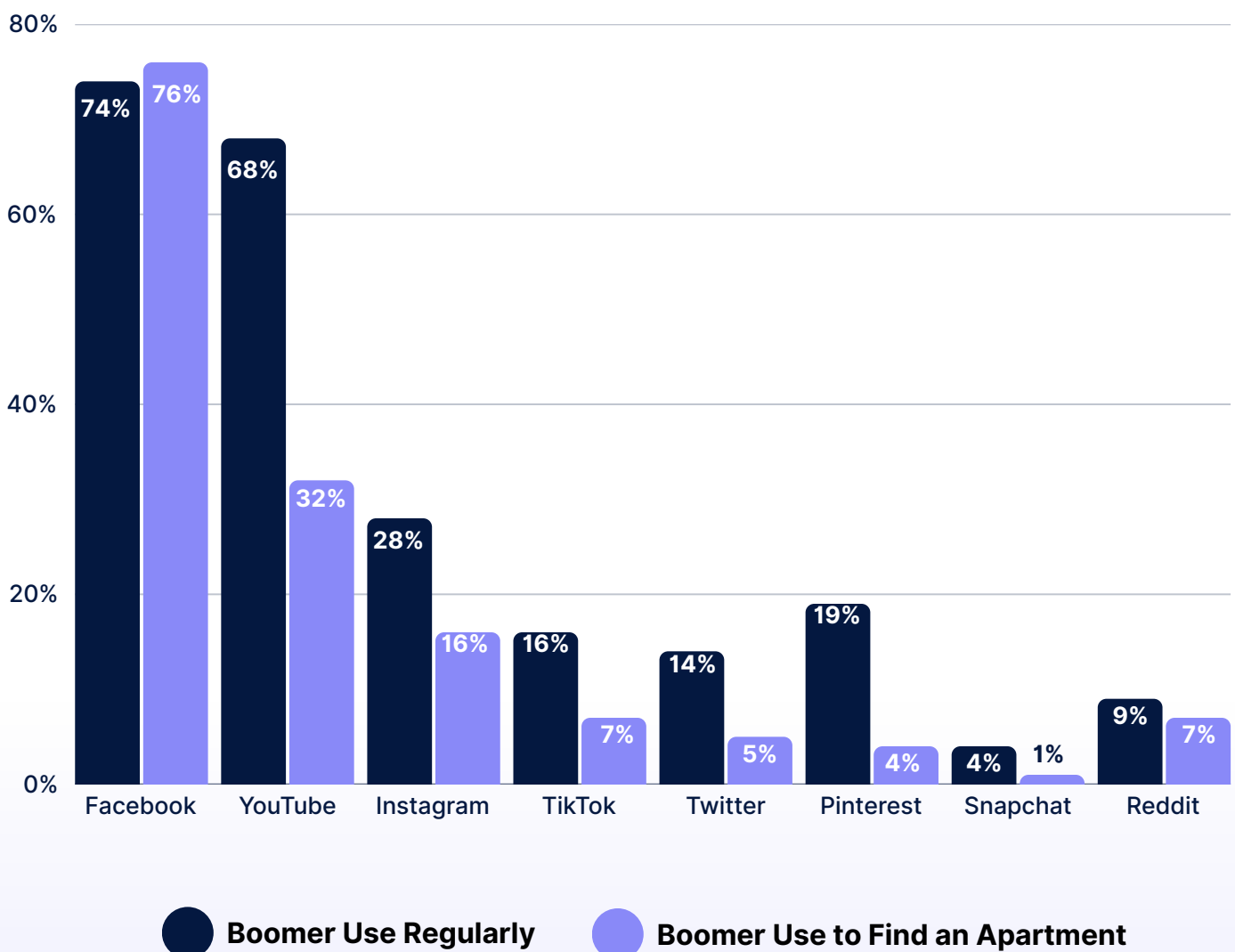


\*Total Use to Find an Apartment is percentage of those who indicated they use social media to find an apartment



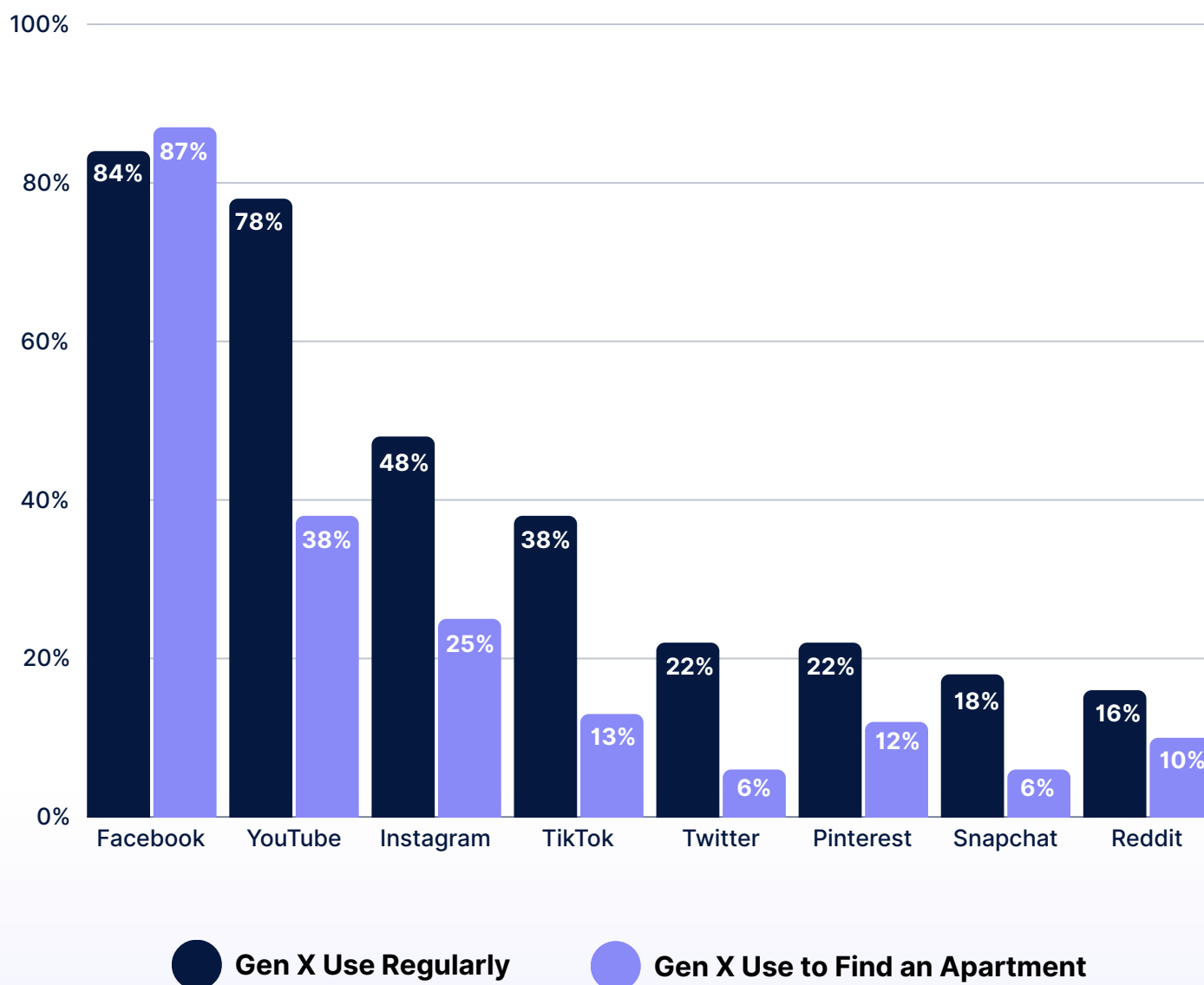
# Boomer Bytes

Boomers, the generation with the longest average residency (49% residing in their apartments for over 5 years), utilize social media primarily for staying connected with friends and family and keeping informed about current events. While they engage with social media daily (73% daily use), they are less inclined to use it for apartment hunting (only 24%). But when they do use it, Facebook dominates. This lower overall reliance may stem partly from a noted skepticism among some Boomers regarding the trustworthiness or relevance of social media for such significant decisions, underscoring why straightforward, factual content and demonstrable value are crucial when targeting this group. This suggests that traditional methods may still hold significant sway for this group when searching for a new home.



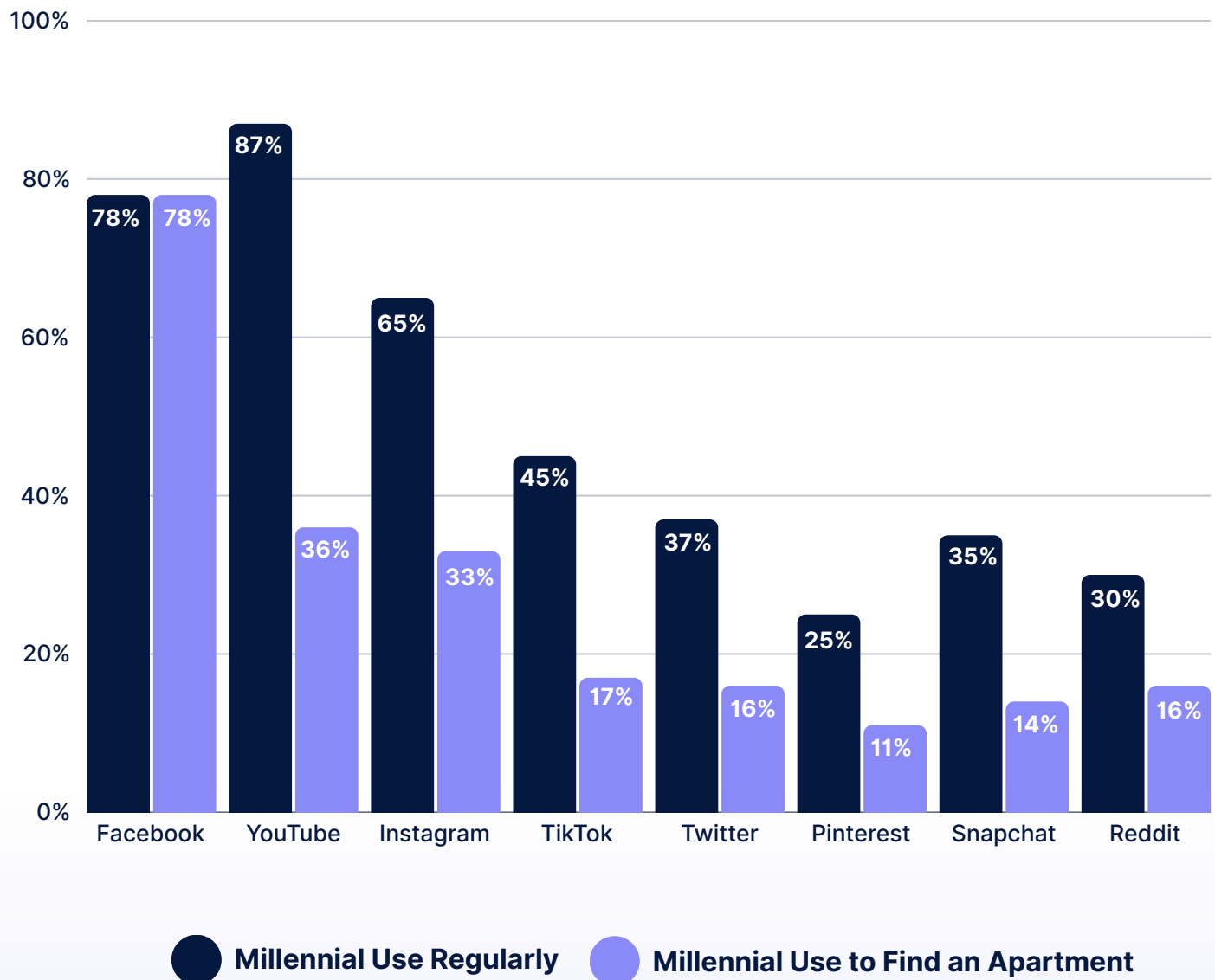
# Gen X's Digital Domain

Gen X, exhibiting a more balanced distribution across tenancy durations, demonstrates a growing reliance on social media for apartment searches (42%), surpassing Boomers in their digital approach to finding a new residence. While Facebook and YouTube remain central to their social media usage, they are more likely than Boomers to incorporate these platforms into their apartment search process. Both general usage and usage for apartment searches are up across all sites in comparison to Boomers.



# Millennial Media Mania

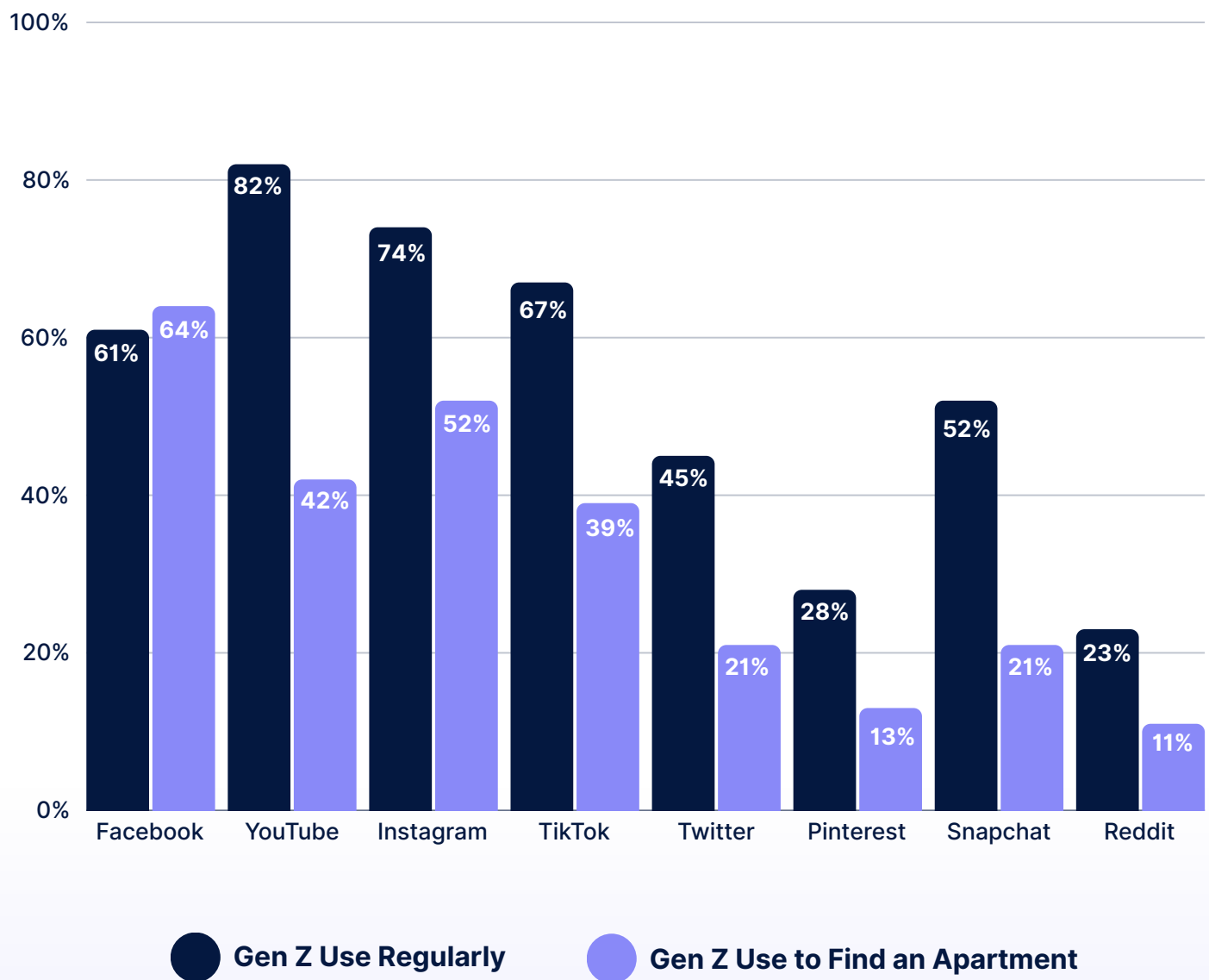
Millennials, characterized by shorter average tenancies and near-universal daily social media usage (90%), heavily rely on these platforms for finding apartments (61%). Their platform preferences expand beyond Facebook and YouTube to encompass visually-driven platforms like Instagram, reflecting a desire for lifestyle content and inspiration alongside practical information. Moreover, Millennials use Reddit more than any other generation, showcasing their uniquely hyper desire for authentic, resident-experience feedback. This generation truly embraces social media as an integral part of their apartment search journey.





# Gen Z's Zoom

Gen Z, the newest wave of renters, mirrors Millennials in their high daily social media usage (89%) and reliance on these platforms for apartment hunting (58%). However, their digital fluency extends further, embracing platforms like TikTok. This displays their preference for short-form video content and interactive experiences. This digitally native generation expects a seamless and engaging digital presence from apartment communities.



# Connecting with Future Residents

Attracting renters in today's digital landscape requires a nuanced understanding of how different generations interact with social media. While high-quality visuals and neighborhood information are universally appealing, generational preferences dictate the type of content that truly resonates and motivates engagement. The survey reveals key insights into how to effectively reach each generation through targeted social media strategies.

Across generations, and particularly emphasized by Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z in open-ended feedback, the call for authenticity was paramount. To them, “authenticity” means going beyond polished marketing and doctored images. They desire real, unedited photos and videos of actual available units and common spaces (not just models), transparent communication about property condition and rules, genuine resident testimonials, and even a glance into the human side of property management. It should be noted that it is not a desire for less professional media, but rather a request for sincerity in its content.

## Picture Perfect: Visuals that Speak Volumes:

High-quality photos and videos, particularly virtual tours, are paramount for attracting renters across all generations. This aligns with Gen X's desire for "real" pictures and Gen Z's preference for authentic visuals. Boomers, while less active on some platforms, also prioritize visual content when evaluating properties online. Investing in professional photography and videography is crucial for capturing attention and conveying the property's unique features and benefits.

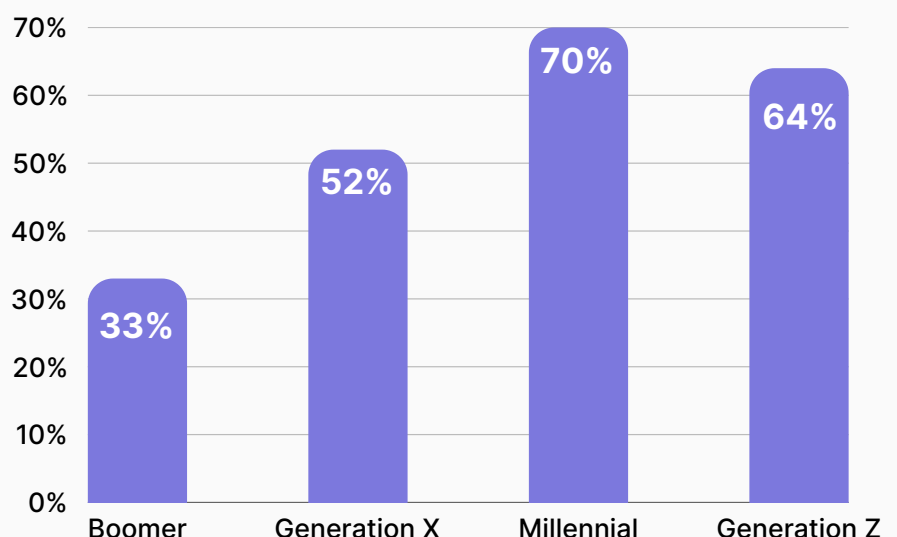
*What could rental properties do to improve their social media presence and attract potential renters like you?*

*“show more pictures”*

*“Use a lot more pictures”*

*“Include more photos of the grounds, the neighborhood and the amenities”*

Percentage Who Indicated Photos and Videos were Important When Searching

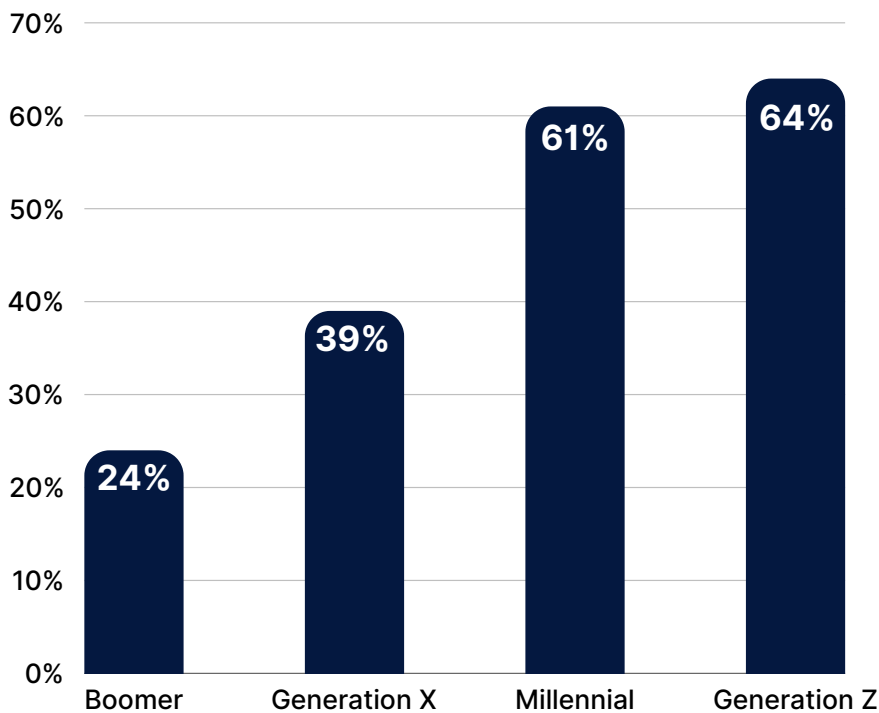




### Neighborhood Narratives: Building a Sense of Belonging

Providing information about the surrounding area resonates with all age groups. However, Millennials and Gen Z place a greater emphasis on understanding the community atmosphere and seek a sense of belonging. Content that showcases local businesses, events, and the overall vibe of the neighborhood will particularly appeal to these generations. While Boomers and Gen X also value neighborhood information, their focus may be more on practical aspects such as safety, amenities, and convenience.

**Percentage Who Indicated “vibe” and Atmosphere Were Important When Searching**



*What could rental properties do to improve their social media presence and attract potential renters like you?*

*“I want to see the overall vibe of the property. I want to see behind the scenes pictures from residents and hear stories and stuff from them that showcase what it is like to live there.”*

*“Always keep updated pictures and always include the vibe of the neighborhood.”*

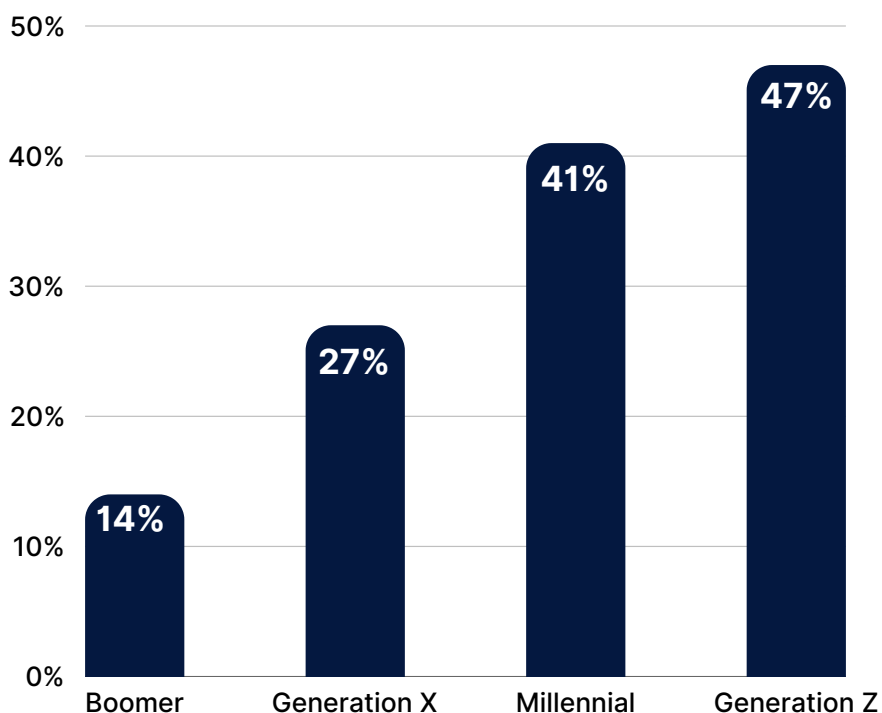


## Incentivize and Engage: Promotions and Targeted Advertising

While affordability remains a universal concern, the survey reveals that Gen Z and Millennials are particularly drawn to promotions and contests. Targeted advertising campaigns presenting discounts and incentives can be highly effective in capturing their attention. This echoes the open-ended feedback received, where these generations specifically mentioned the attractiveness of such offers. However, it should be noted that Gen Z is also more likely to be engaged through interactive content and authentic community building.



## Percentage Who Indicated “promotions and contests” Were Important When Searching



*What could rental properties do to improve their social media presence and attract potential renters like you?*

*“Promos and discounts.”*

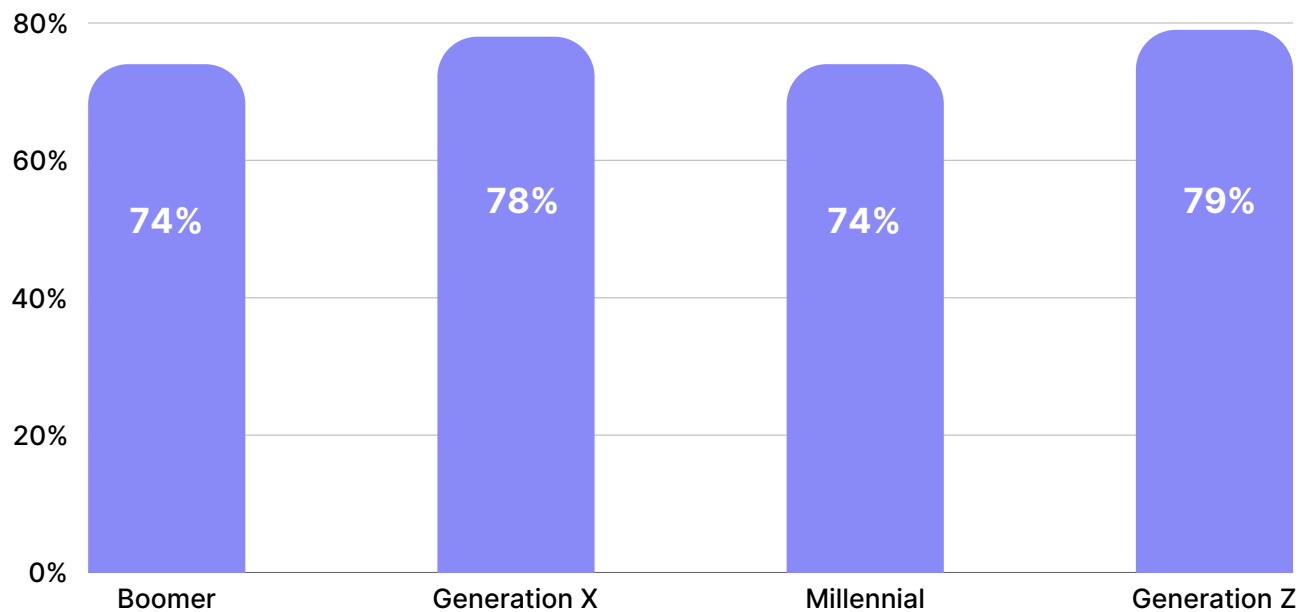
*“Have promotions.”*

*“Promote and deals.”*

The survey underscores the importance of a multi-faceted social media strategy that caters to the specific needs and preferences of each generation. By understanding these nuances, apartment communities can effectively leverage social media to attract a wider range of prospective residents. A blend of high-quality visuals, engaging neighborhood narratives, and targeted promotions will create a compelling online presence that resonates with each generation's unique desires. This is especially important since nearly three quarters of every generation indicated that they contacted a community based on what they saw on their social media.



**Percentage of Prospective Renters Who Reached Out to a Property Based on What They Saw on Social Media**



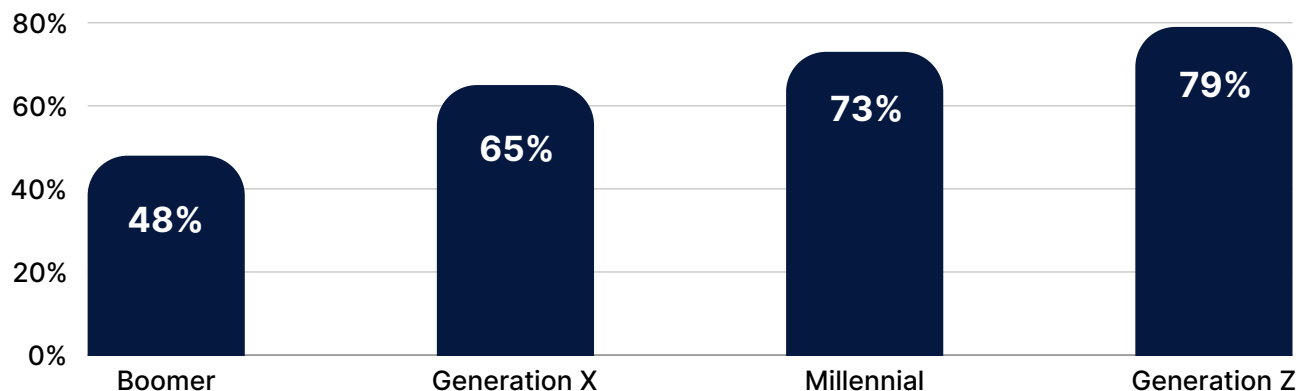
# Connecting with Residents

## Social Media as a Community Hub

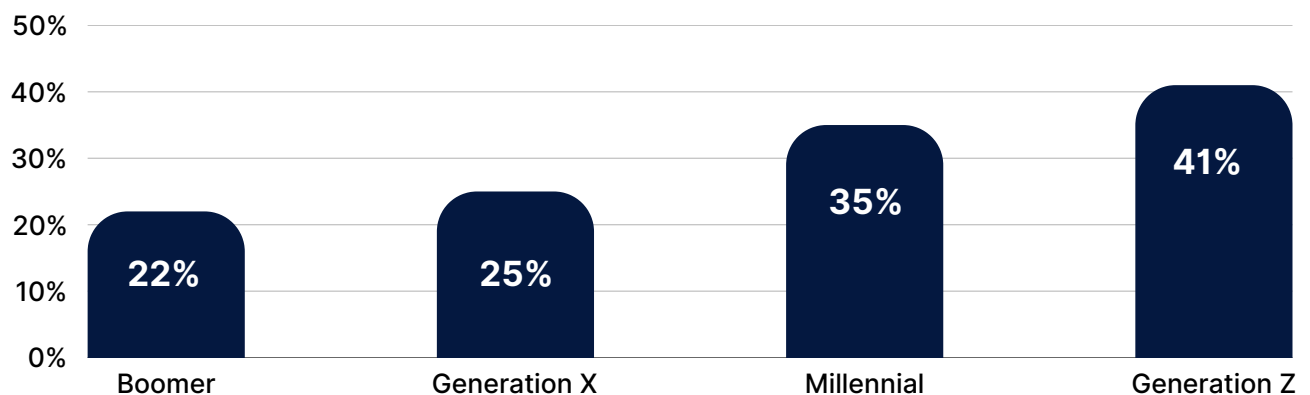
This section explores the role of social media in cultivating resident satisfaction and building community within multifamily properties. While appealing to prospective residents is essential, nurturing a sense of belonging among existing residents is equally crucial for long-term success. The survey reveals that social media offers a powerful platform to achieve both, with varying levels of interest across different generations. Younger residents, particularly Gen Z (41%) and Millennials (35%), place greater importance on property social media pages being very active.

Nearly half of all generations did indicate that having some level of presence is important with Boomers being the lowest (48%) and Gen Z being the highest (79%). The delta between presence and being active suggests that posting multiple times a day is not of great importance. Instead, a better path is focusing on posting quality content.

### Presence Has Importance to Residents

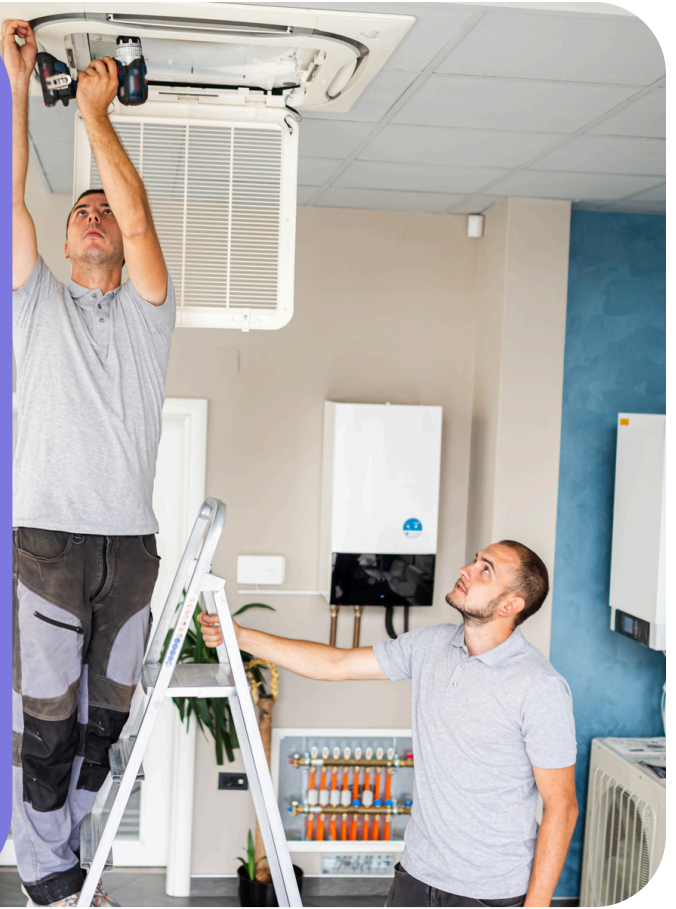


### Being Active on Social Matters to Residents

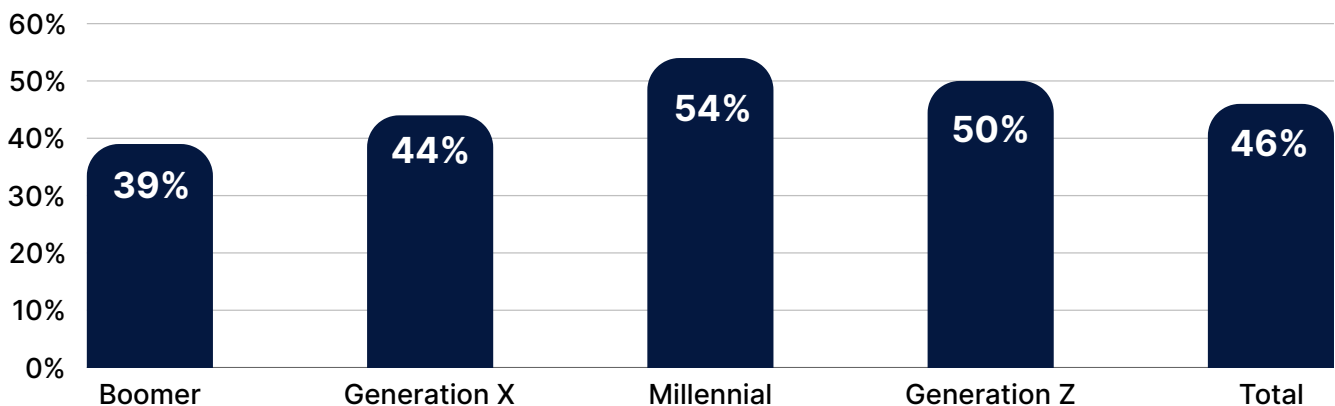


## Maintenance Matters:

Across all generations, updates regarding maintenance emerged as a top content preference. This quantitative finding strongly aligns with qualitative feedback; numerous open-ended responses, particularly from Boomers, stressed the importance of clear communication regarding property management and maintenance schedules. This promotes the importance of proactive communication and responsiveness to resident needs. Providing timely updates on scheduled maintenance, ongoing repairs, and completed projects demonstrates a commitment to resident well-being and fosters transparency.



## Percentage of Residents Who Want to See Maintenance Updates



*What could rental properties do to improve their social media presence?*

*“Social media presence that updates on important maintenance issues is the single most important use of social media to me from rental properties.”*

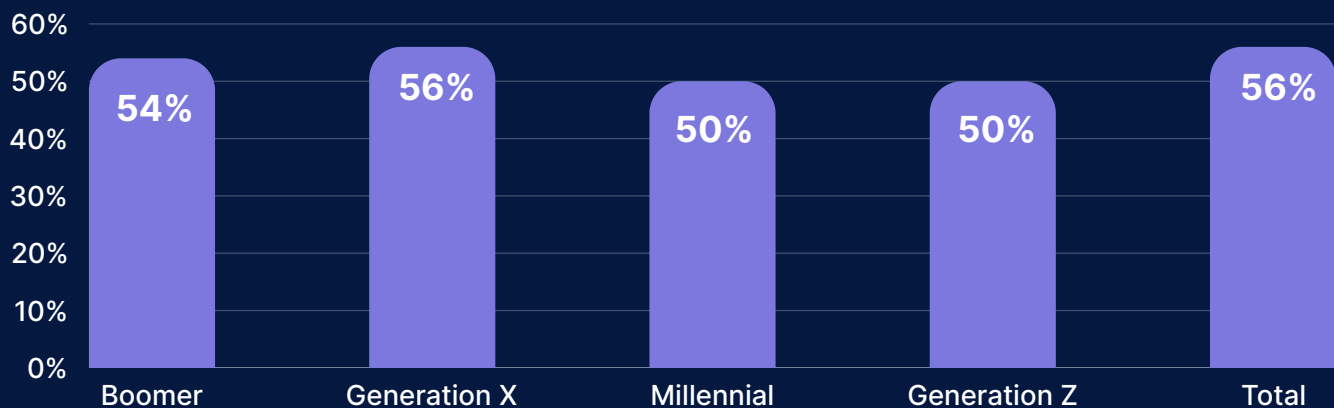
*“List events on Facebook and maintenance schedule.”*



## Local Lens: Neighborhood Guides and Recommendations:

Sharing local neighborhood guides and recommendations resonated strongly with all generations, reflecting a shared interest in connecting with the surrounding community. By providing curated content about nearby restaurants, shops, parks, and local events, apartment communities can position themselves as valuable resources for residents, fostering a sense of belonging and enriching their living experience. This approach taps into the desire for relevant and practical information that benefits residents' daily lives. Interestingly, this desire is even more profound amongst the two older generations.

### Percentage of Residents Who Want to See Local Events



*What could rental properties do to improve their social media presence?*

*“Have monthly giveaways for local businesses.”*

*“They could invite potential renters to get to know management/staff and recommend local spots around the neighborhood.”*

*“Local restaurant websites and recommendations.”*





Eventful Engagement: Fostering Social Connections

Promoting resident events and activities through social media provides an effective way to cultivate social connections and strengthen community bonds. This aligns with feedback from Gen X and Millennials who emphasized the importance of community engagement. By showcasing upcoming events, sharing photos and videos from past gatherings, and facilitating online discussions, apartment communities can create a vibrant online community that extends offline, fostering a greater sense of belonging and encouraging resident interaction. The open-ended feedback further reinforces this, with numerous respondents emphasizing the importance of community building.

*What could rental properties do to improve their social media presence?*

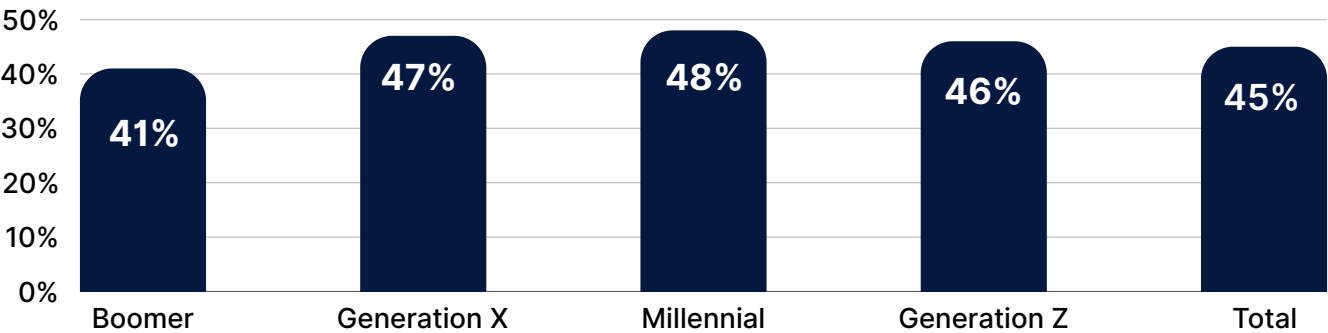
*“Showing community engagement and events.”*

*“Post community events in real time video (bingo).”*

*“Keep me posted on events”*

Beyond posting events, properties can further foster community through the more interactive elements suggested in the survey’s open-ended feedback. This includes featuring staff bios, sharing resident stories (with permission), or facilitating online Q&A sessions.

Percentage of Residents Who Want to See Community Event Information



Leveraging social media to cultivate resident satisfaction and build community requires a multi-faceted approach. By prioritizing maintenance updates, providing valuable local information, and promoting resident events, apartment communities can cater to the diverse needs and interests of their residents, fostering a stronger sense of belonging and enhancing the overall living experience. While younger generations exhibit greater engagement with social media, addressing these core content preferences across all generations is key to maximizing the impact of online community building. However, it should be duly noted that all of these top content preferences require posts unique to the property. Group posting, including posts across all properties within a portfolio, is less likely to resonate with current residents.

# Conclusion

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In today's dynamic multifamily landscape, social media is not merely a marketing channel; it is a critical nexus for attracting prospects and a vital hub for resident engagement and retention. This report, drawing insights from over 1,000 residents and prospects, confirms the pervasive reach of these platforms while illuminating the crucial generational differences that now dictate success. Ignoring these nuances is no longer an option.

Our findings reveal a fundamental truth: while social media usage is nearly universal, distinct generational "dialects" shape everything from platform preference (Facebook's continued search dominance vs. Instagram and TikTok's visual appeal for younger cohorts) to desired content (practical details vs. community vibe). Bridging these divides and effectively converting 'clicks to keys'—and keeping those keys happily in current residents' hands—requires moving beyond generic strategies.

Crucially, authenticity and transparency emerged as non-negotiable themes across the board, essential for capturing the attention of digitally native generations and overcoming the skepticism sometimes prevalent among older demographics. Slick marketing must increasingly yield to genuine representations of community life, realistic property visuals, and evidence of responsive, resident-focused management. Importantly, social media provides an incredibly accessible vehicle for property managers to communicate their authenticity and meet that desire if they are willing to put in the work.

Therefore, to thrive in this evolving digital ecosystem, multifamily properties must adopt a more sophisticated, multi-faceted approach:

- **Master Generational Segmentation:** Develop distinct social media content streams and campaign strategies tailored to the unique platform preferences, information needs (practical vs. atmospheric), and communication styles of Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z. Optimize content formats (video, high-quality images, text) and platform selection accordingly.
- **Prioritize Authentic, High-Quality Visual Content:** Invest in professional-grade photos and videos, especially virtual tours, but ensure they showcase the reality of the property—actual units, common areas, and the genuine neighborhood atmosphere. Leverage targeted advertising on platforms like Facebook and Instagram, using data not just to reach specific segments, but to resonate with them authentically.
- **Transform Social Media into a True Community Hub:** Utilize platforms proactively for essential resident communication like maintenance updates, local guides, and event information. Go further by actively fostering a sense of belonging: showcase resident life (with permission), facilitate interaction, respond promptly to inquiries and feedback, and demonstrate transparent management. This builds loyalty and turns satisfied residents into powerful advocates.

By strategically segmenting audiences, committing to authentic representation, and actively cultivating community online, multifamily properties can transform their social media presence from a simple broadcast tool or checkbox item into a powerful engine for attracting desirable residents and fostering lasting loyalty. In an increasingly competitive market, embracing these data-driven principles is no longer just a best practice—it is essential for achieving a distinct and sustainable competitive edge.

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Social Media's Role in  
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For any questions or information  
regarding this report, please contact  
us at [research@jturnerresearch.com](mailto:research@jturnerresearch.com)