



Consumer Patience Index 2026

How repetition, wait times, and automation impact consumers' brand loyalty.



Customer service automation has a trust problem.

Customer service automation is stuck a decade behind modern technology, and consumers have had enough.

Earlier this year, Parloa ran an agent-led study to uncover the technical state of agentic customer experience across the enterprise. The findings were dismal: broken chat systems, long call wait times, systems that were designed to deflect the customers go-to-market teams worked so hard to earn.

The research confirmed our hypothesis:

Most enterprises have not modernized their customer experience systems to deliver on customer expectations in 2026.

These findings brought a few new questions to mind:

1. How much of an emotional impact do these poor customer experiences have on customers?
2. To what extent do bad customer experiences influence brand loyalty?
3. Looking forward, will consumers trust automation to efficiently solve their problems?



To answer these questions, we surveyed 1,001 US consumers. We asked about their frustrations, their tolerance thresholds, and their expectations around automated customer service. What we found was a population exhausted by broken automation, skeptical of meaningful improvement, and ready to act on their frustration.

But it's not all bad news.

While consumers are clearly dissatisfied by automation, they're not avoidant of it. They just need proof that it can work. The findings of this survey suggest that if companies take the time to modernize their existing support systems, they'll turn unsubscribers into raving fans of their brand.



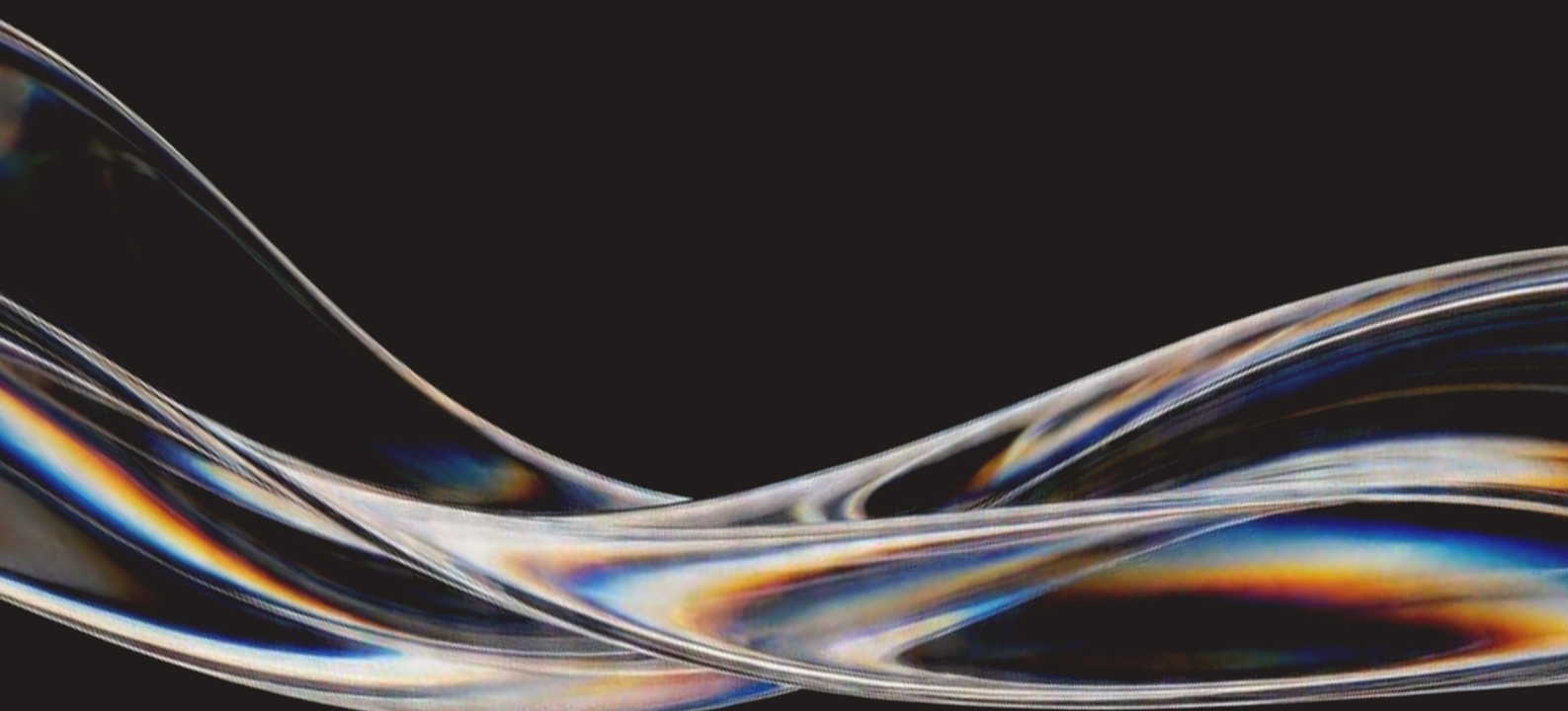
Latané Conant

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Table of Contents

Key findings	5
1. The comprehension gap	6
2. The patience window	8
3. The voice premium	11
4. The emotional support tax	13
5. The AI hesitation	16
6. The agentic expectation	20
Looking ahead	22
Methodology	23





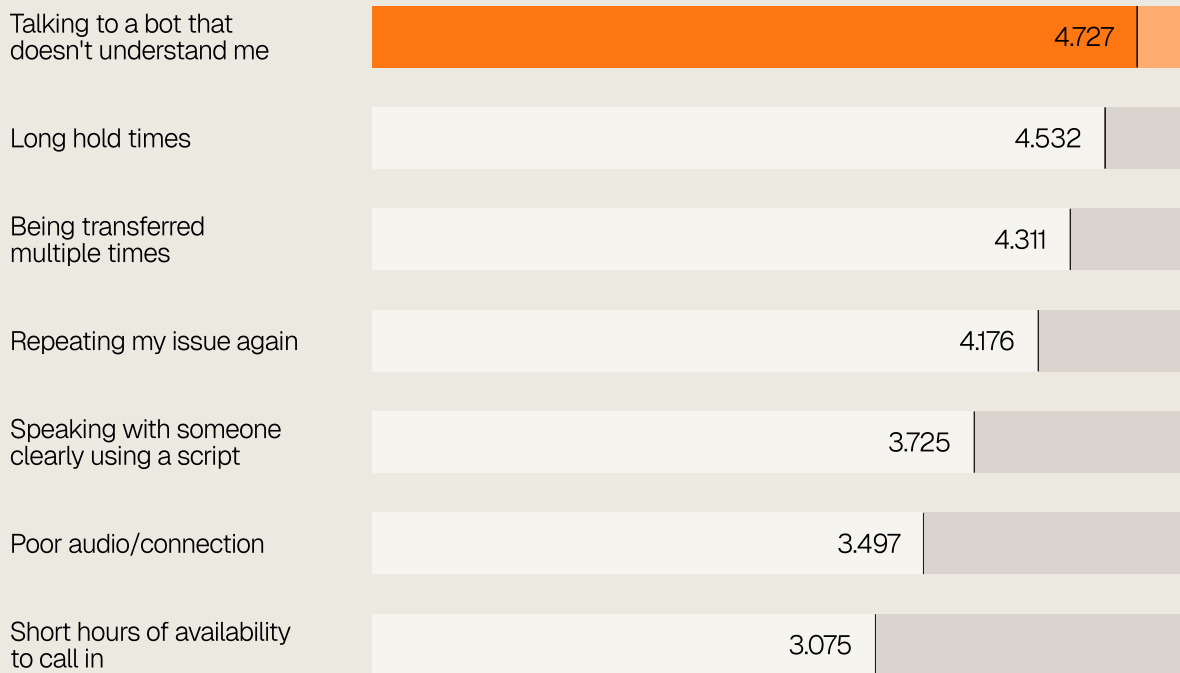
Key findings



Consumers don't feel understood...

Whether it's marketing, sales, or support, at the end of the day customers just want to feel like someone (or something) understands them. When ranking their most frustrating support experiences, "Talking to a bot that doesn't understand me" ranked number one.

Which of these customer experiences do you find the most frustrating?



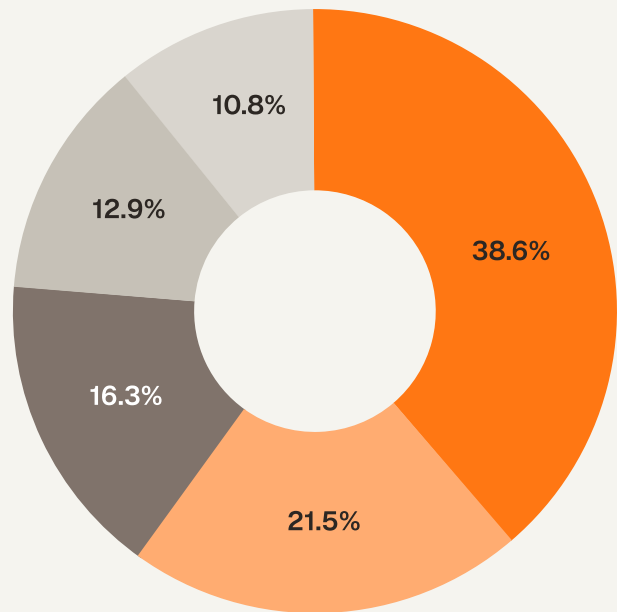
Number of answers

And consumers have little tolerance for repeating themselves to help the bot understand. 60.1% of respondents said they'd tolerate repeating themselves only once. 10.8% said they wouldn't bother to repeat themselves at all.



How many times will you repeat information to a chatbot or IVR system before hanging up or demanding a human agent?

- 0 - I exit the system immediately
- 1
- 2
- 3
- As many as it takes



Combined, seven out of 10 customers are less than two failed comprehension loops away from abandoning the interaction entirely.

...but they want to be.

When asked how “feeling understood” weighed into their satisfaction with automated support, 46.1% of customers labeled it as “extremely important.” Another 40.6% said it was “somewhat important.”

46.1%
“extremely
important”

86.7%

40.6%
“somewhat
important”

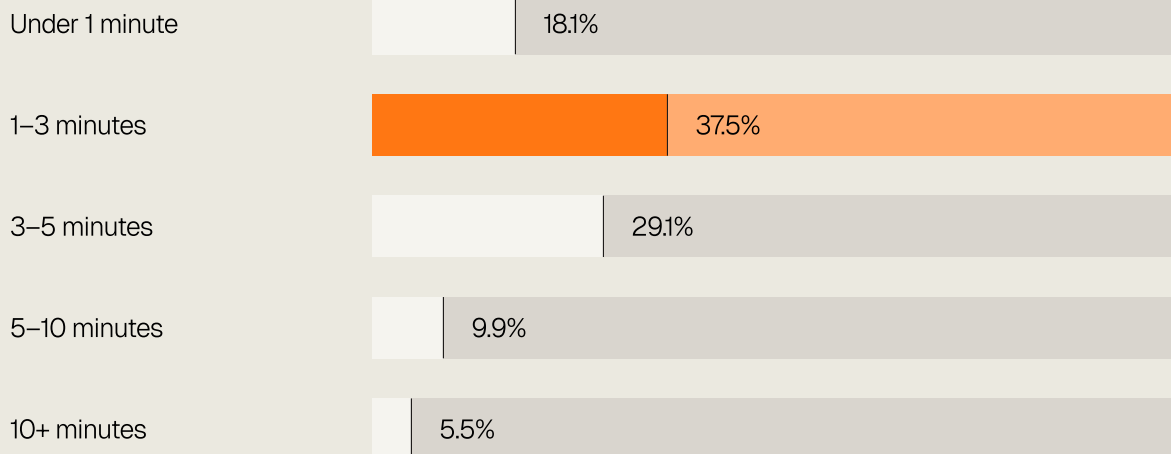
of customers consider a feeling of understanding as important to their support experience, even when automated.



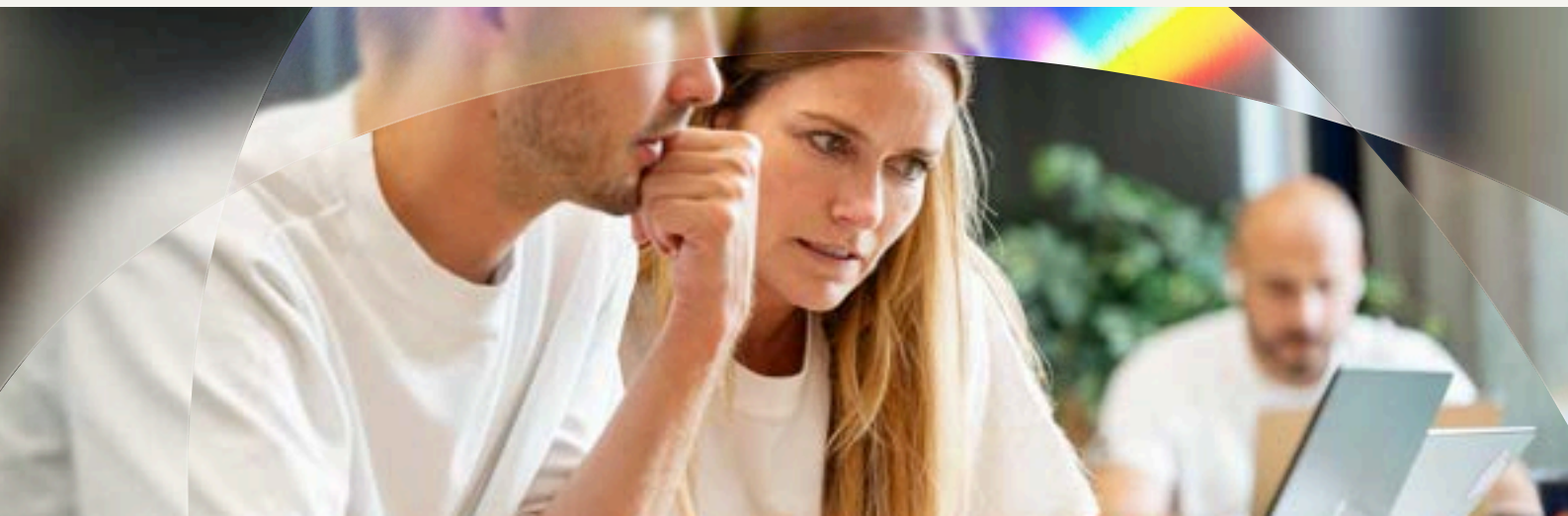
Time is of the essence...

Not only do support solutions need to demonstrate understanding, but they also need to do so quickly. More than half of respondents (55.5%) said they'd disengage from an automated system within three minutes if it wasn't resolving their issue. Nearly one in five (18.1%) set that threshold to under a minute.

When faced with an automated assistant, how long are you willing to interact before demanding a human agent?



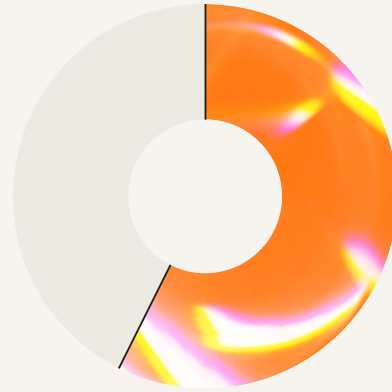
When automated resolution isn't happening fast enough, **53.6% of consumers admit to deploying tactics on chatbots and IVR systems to be routed to humans faster.**





61.2%

of respondents have yelled at automation in order to be routed to a human.



...but companies are on their own schedule...

Respondents indicated that only 10% of their standard service interactions have been resolved with automation in under two minutes. The vast majority fell within 2-10 minutes, indicating a large gap between customer expectation and reality.

Automation is moving slower than customer patience.

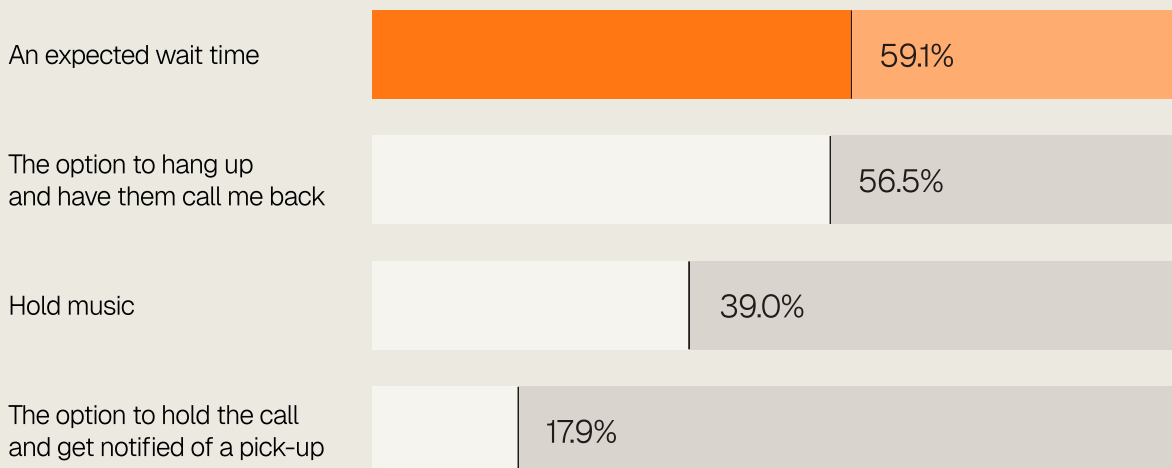




...and hold music isn't the bandage.

When asked about hold features they prefer, 20% more consumers selected an expected wait time over hold music.

When on hold for a customer experience call, what features do you like?



When presented with alternatives to being put on hold, customers are willing to make remarkable sacrifices:

31.2%

will endure advertising.

29.9%

will switch brands entirely.

21.1%

will wake up at 5 AM.

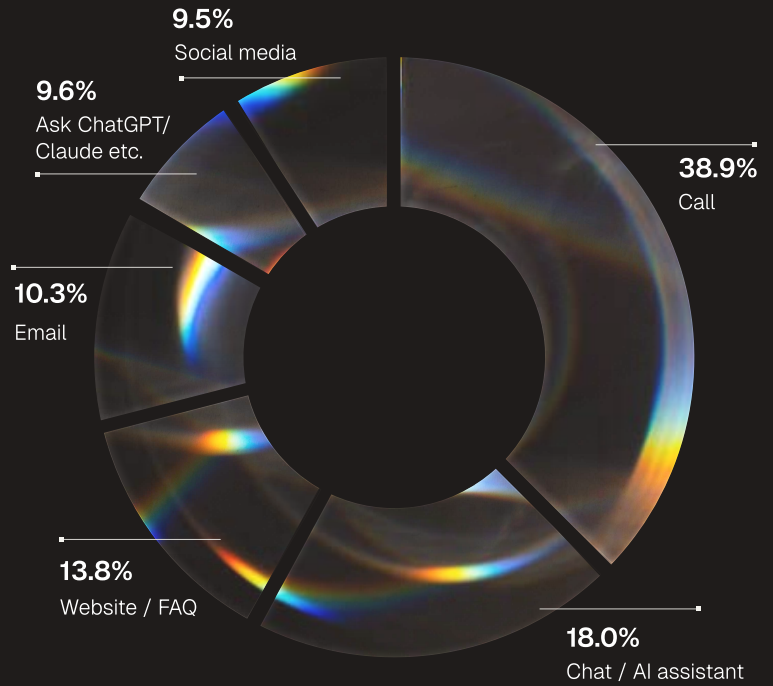
12.0%

would rather text an ex.

People crave voice support...

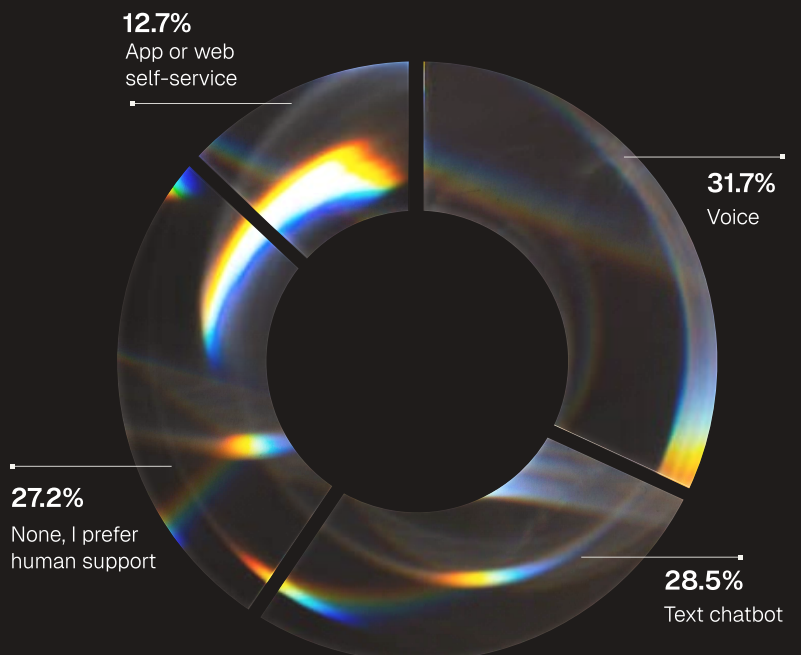
Despite the development of new communication channels over the past few decades, phone remains the preferred channel for support. When asked what their first step to customer service is, 38.9% of the survey's respondents answered "call." The next largest sector, Website/FAQ, garnered only 13.8% of the votes.

What's your first step when you have a customer service issue?



When asked about automation, voice also took the lead position, beating out text and even human support.

Which automation type do you prefer interacting with?



...that companies fail to deliver.

The channel customers crave the most is also the most universally criticized.

Just 7% of respondents said IVR consistently resolves their issues. For the other 93%, the experience ranges from partial effectiveness to complete failure.

How often do you feel the IVR phone menu actually supplies options that meet your needs?

Sometimes - but rarely can an automated menu resolve my issue fully

45.4%

It depends - easier issues get resolved easily, but complex issues break down

33.8%

Never - the pre-scripted options are useless

14.2%

Always - I don't have issues with this style of automation. It resolves my concerns!

6.7%

Only 24.6%

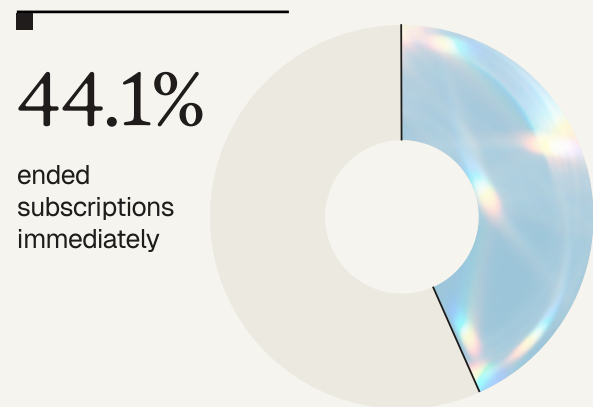
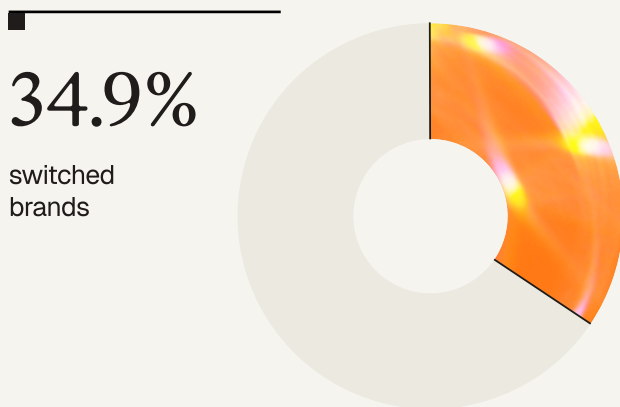
of respondents indicated being remotely happy with IVR technology.



Customer sentiment drives the bottom line...

People forget what you say, but they never forget how you made them feel, and that sentiment drives action.

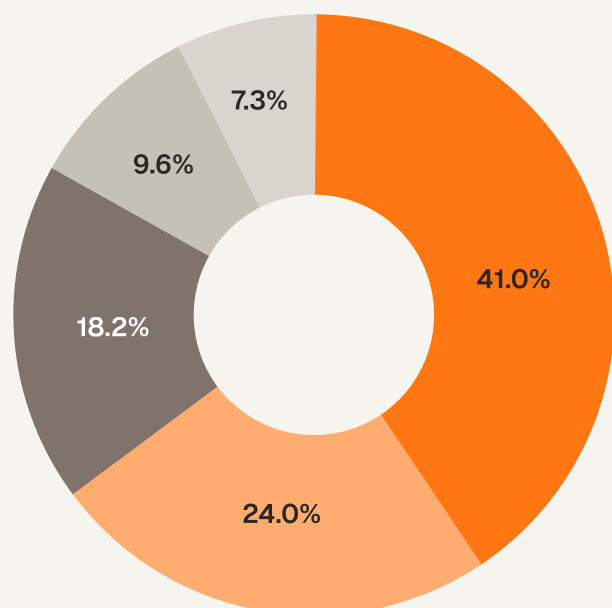
After experiencing bad customer experience, 34.9% of respondents reported switching brands, with 44.1% saying they ended subscriptions immediately.



Similarly, when asked how customer experience channels influence their perception of a brand, 83.2% of respondents said their service experience directly impacts their loyalty. For 18.2%, a single bad experience is enough to drive them to a competitor.

Do you feel the customer experience channels impact how you view a company?

- Yes, a good customer experience is necessary in my eyes
- Yes, it generally impacts how loyal I am
- Yes, one bad customer experience would push me to find alternative options
- No, I don't really notice
- No, I am generally forgiving when something goes wrong

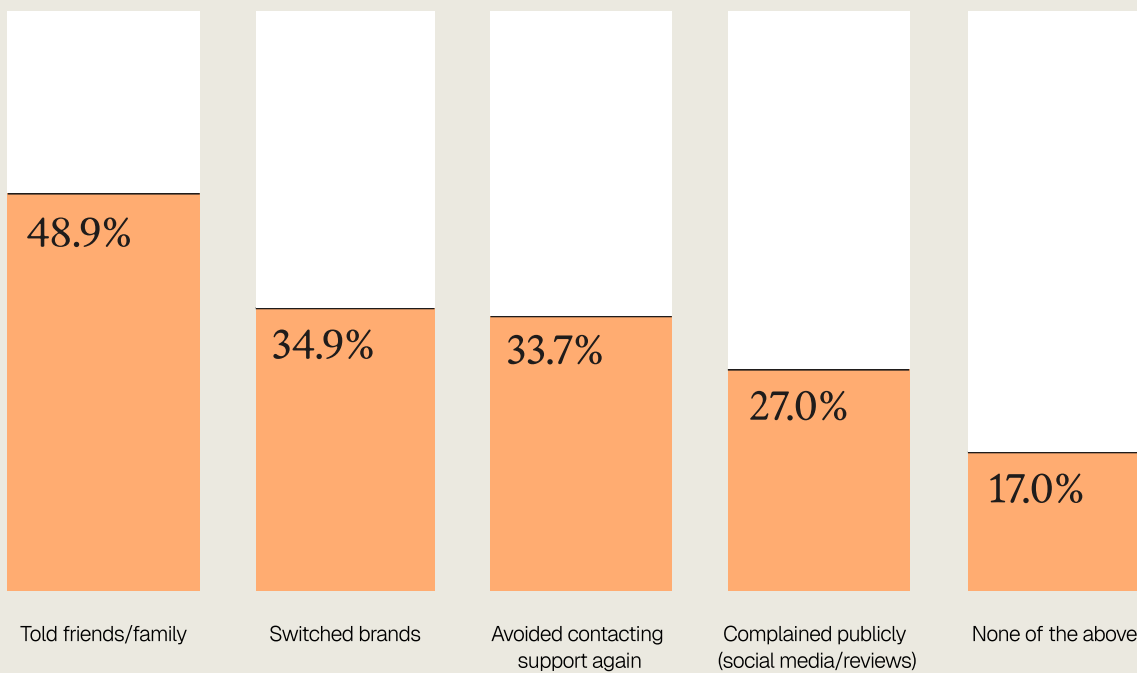




...in more ways than one...

These moments of outrage tend not to stay contained within the individual situation. After experiencing bad support, 48.9% of respondents reported telling friends and family about it, and 27% shared their story on social media.

Have you ever done any of the following after a bad customer experience?



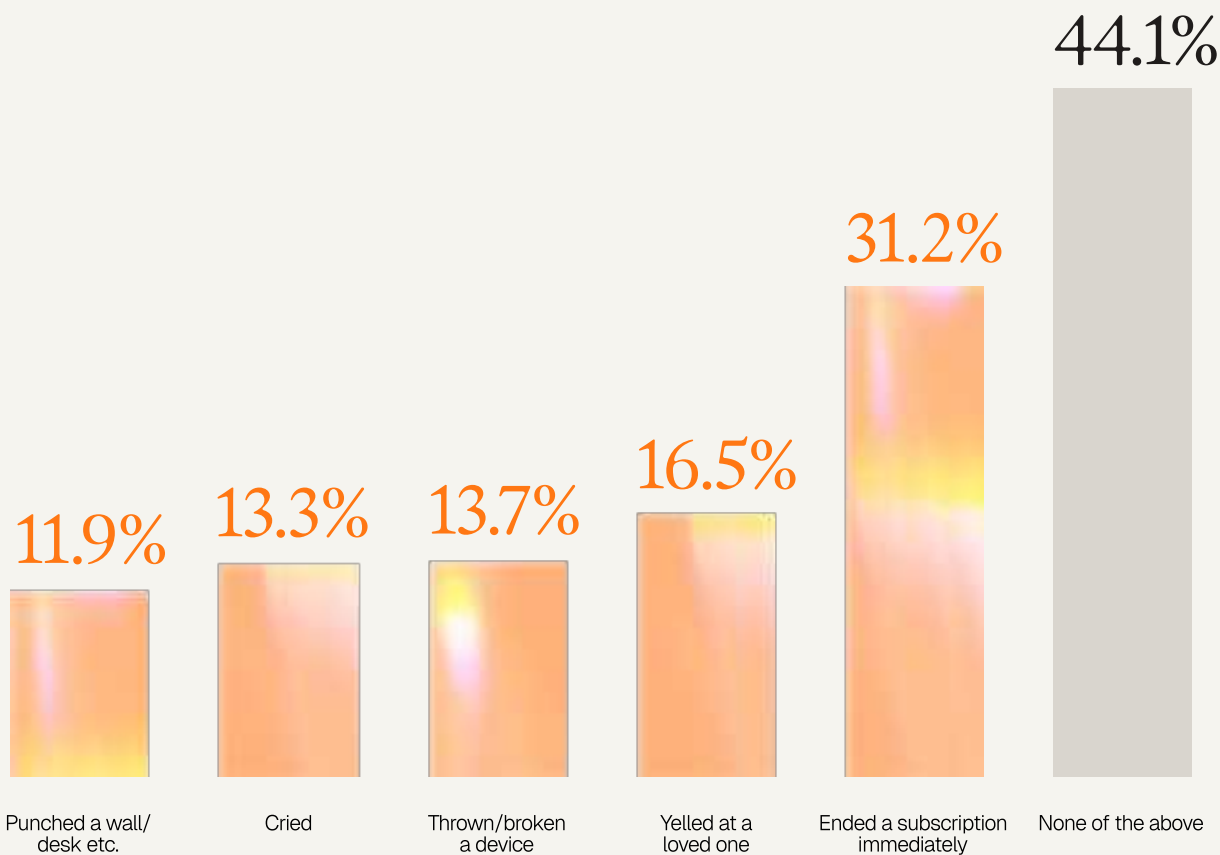
Bad customer experiences don't just lead to churn risks, they close the door to new revenue before companies even have the chance to crack them open.



...yet companies are raising their own support taxes.

Despite the impact to the bottom line, companies continue to deliver poor experiences to their customers. About **one-third of all respondents** reported negative feelings after a customer service interaction, with crying, yelling at loved ones, punching walls, and/or throwing devices admitted by **55.4% of respondents**.

Have you ever experienced an extreme emotional reaction due to a frustrating chatbot or phone menu?





Customers assume automation will fail...

Poor automation experiences breed lasting hesitation. Only 7.8% of respondents said they were extremely confident in automated systems' ability to understand and resolve requests accurately. When asked why respondents felt the need to talk to a human in a support case, 22.9% blamed it on a lack of trust in IVR technology.

50.7%

of respondents assumed their issue would be too complicated for automation.





Bad experiences have led customers to assume bad technology.

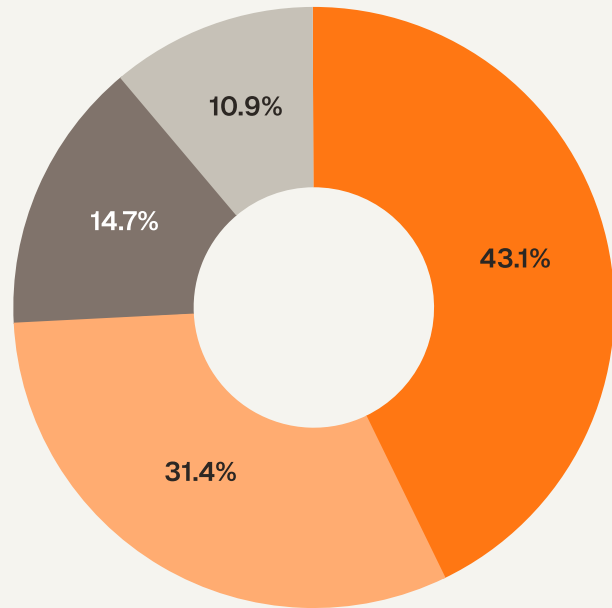
When automated systems transfer customers to humans, and the humans are forced to restart their conversation from scratch, 85.4% of respondents said they are forgiving to the service rep because they expect the automation to fail from the start.





If an automated system transfers you to a human agent who must restart the process, how forgiving are you of that experience?

-  Somewhat forgiving - it's annoying, but it's how it always goes
-  Forgiving - I don't like the system, but I am nice to the customer service rep since it's not their fault
-  Not forgiving - I shouldn't have to waste my time because the company's system is bad
-  Very forgiving - I understand the creation of a better system would be difficult



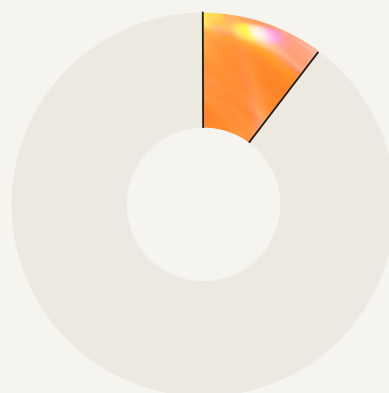
...and are hesitant about the future...

The lack of automated success in the past gives humans pause for the future.

Looking forward, nearly half of respondents expect automation to either make no difference to customer support or make things worse.

Just 10.3%

believe future automation will make customer care much better.

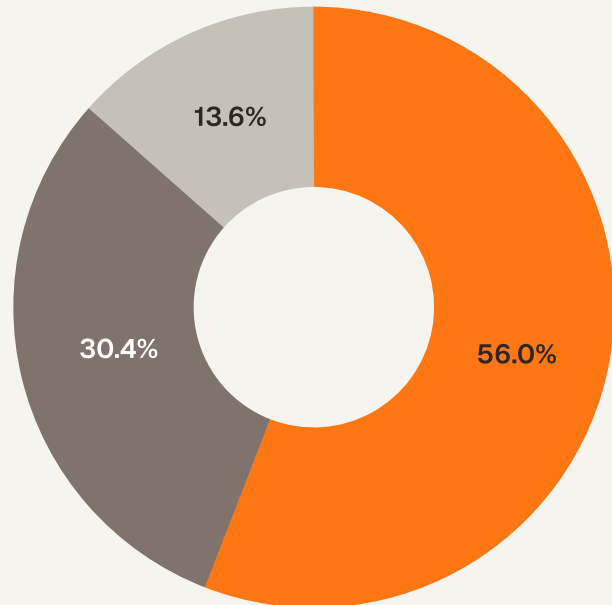




Similarly, the majority of respondents (56.0%) said they only somewhat trust AI to handle complex customer service issues, while 30.4% have no trust in AI's ability to handle detailed service interactions at all.

How much do you trust that future AI systems (voice or chat) will handle complex service requests better than humans?

- Somewhat trust
- No trust
- Complete trust

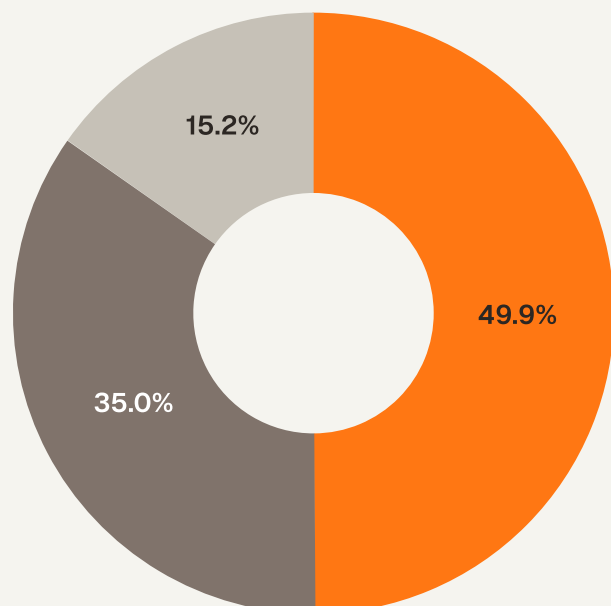


...but they don't want to be.

At the same time, just because automation has failed in the past doesn't mean customers aren't willing to keep trying it. 84.9% of respondents said they'd be likely to continue using automated systems if those systems resolved their issues consistently.

If an automated system solved your issue instantly 9 out of 10 times, how likely would you be to continue using it instead of waiting for a human?

- Somewhat likely
- Very likely
- Very unlikely





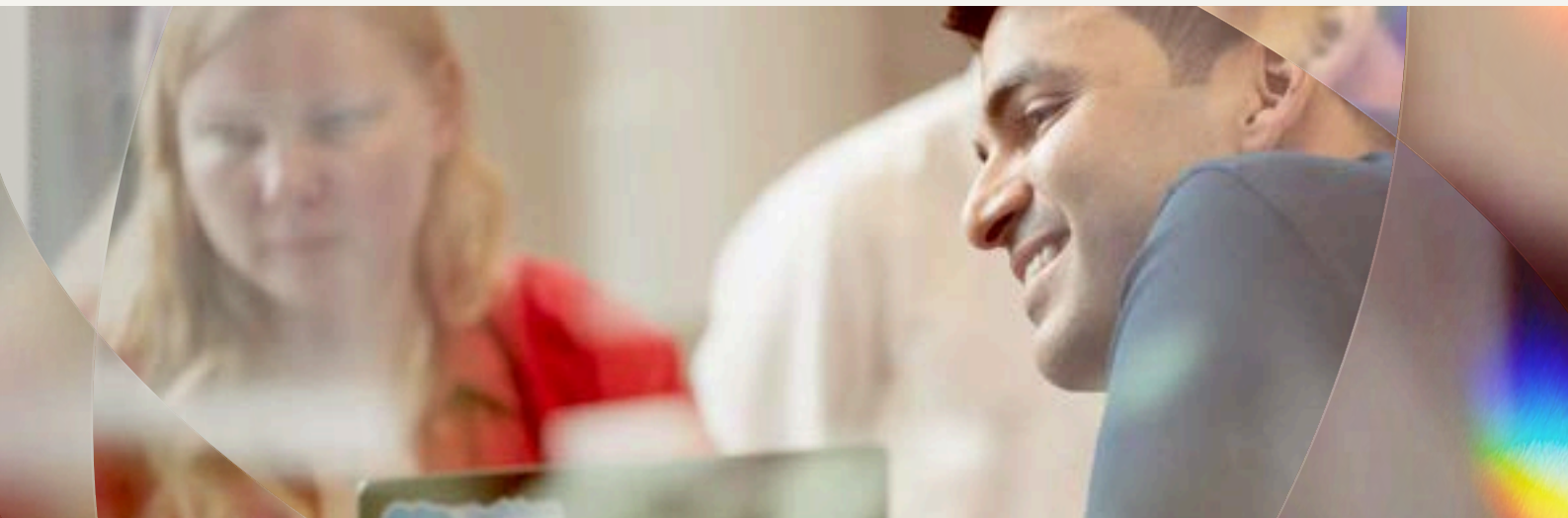
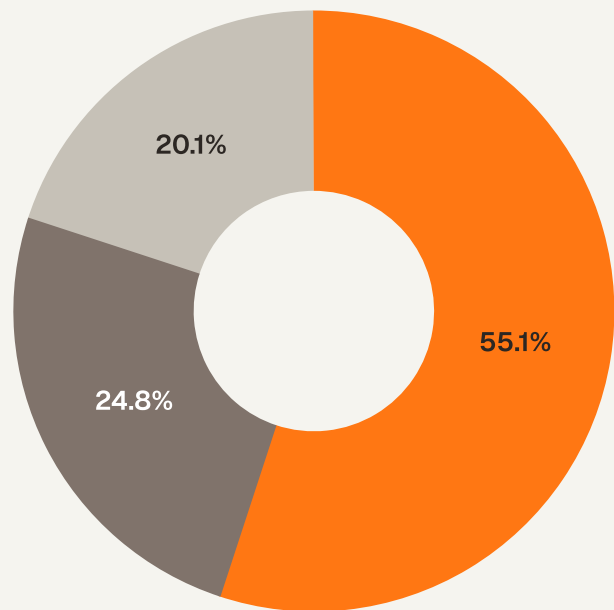
Relatedly, 68.2% of respondents reported interest in using AI assistants that personalize service, and 75.2% said they'd prefer automated service if it could anticipate needs and be proactive.



of respondents reported interest in using AI assistants that personalize service.

How likely are you to prefer automated service if it anticipates your needs or provides proactive help?

- Somewhat likely
- Not likely
- Very likely



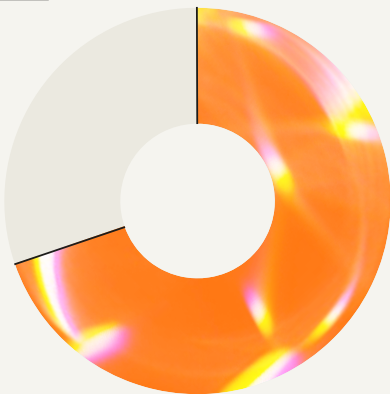


Expectations for agentic CX are high...

Despite the hesitation around AI, most respondents are not closed to the technology. They're just waiting for consistent evidence that it works, and they expect that to be soon.

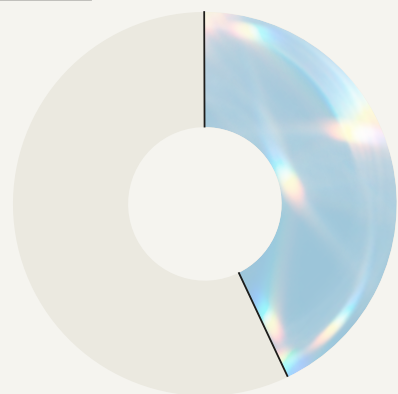
69.6%

of respondents believe that future AI systems will handle complex service requests better than humans.



43%

expect AI to handle full service journeys end-to-end within one to three years.



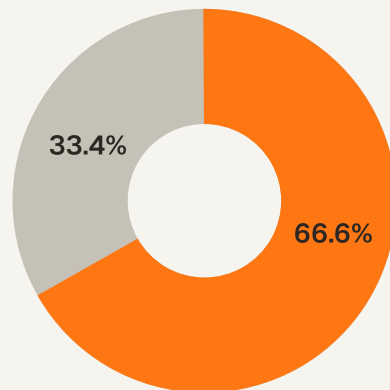
At the same time, 66.6% of respondents also reported that they won't trade automated help for accuracy, citing reliability as key criteria for AI support adoption.

66.6%

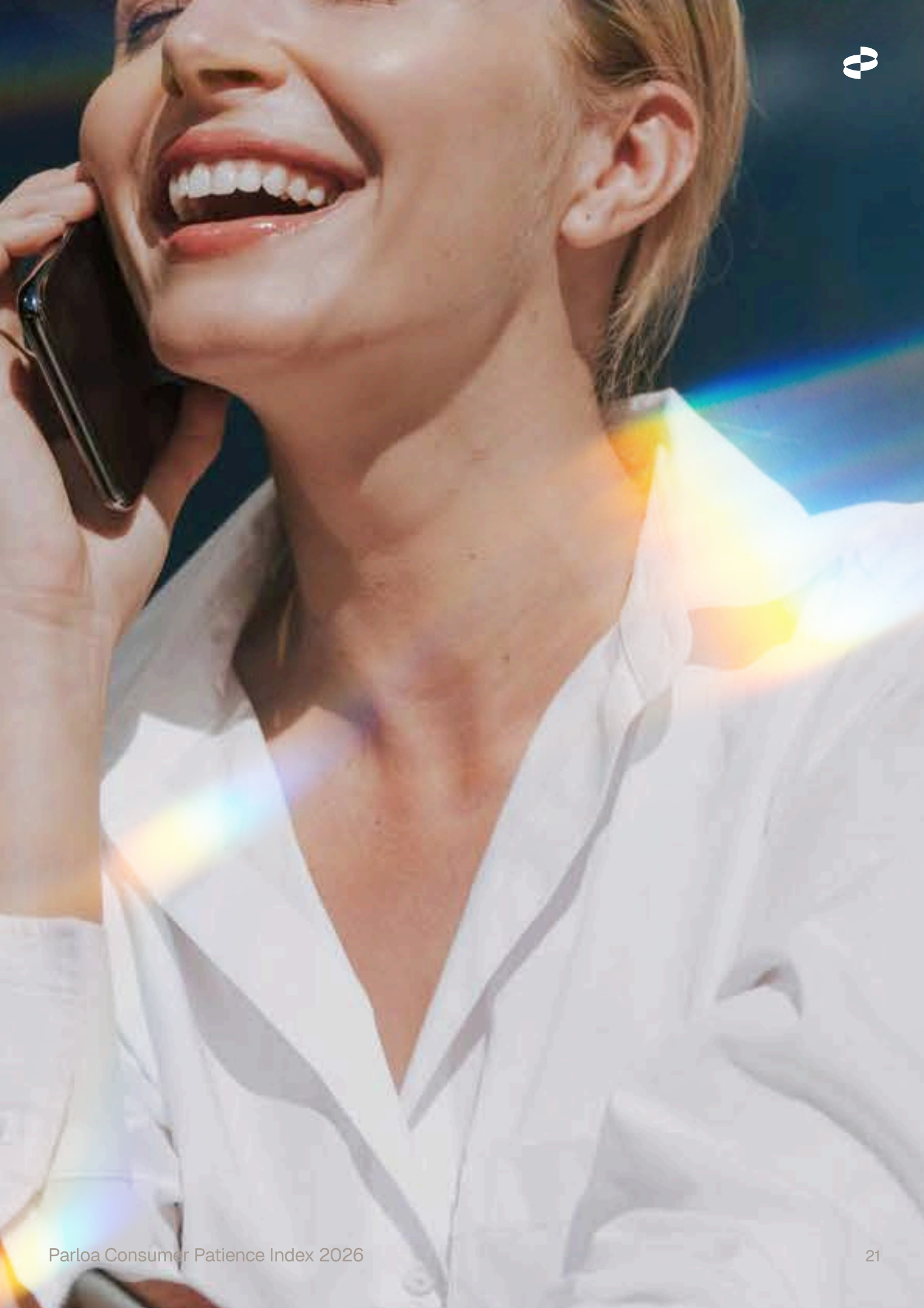
Wait longer for a human to ensure I stay on until my issue is resolved.

33.4%

Get faster automated help with minor accuracy trade-offs.



...and the opportunity for enterprises is massive.





The gift of high expectations

Consumer expectations for automated customer experience have never been higher. Knowing the technology available, consumers want real-time, reliable, secure service, and they're willing to switch brands to get it. The Consumer Patience Index paints a picture that CX leaders can't afford to look away from. The cost of bad customer service, measured not only in churn, but also stalled revenue, is high.

The good news is, brands don't have to guess what consumers' expectations are. This survey outlines exactly what brands need to deliver in order to earn customer loyalty. With the right AI in place, all of these expectations can be met.

But time is of the essence. With the volume of vendors available across industries today, customers don't need brands. One bad experience, and they'll just move on to the next. The companies that act quickly to meet consumer expectations will be the ones who successfully transform their support channels from being sources of churn to engines for revenue.

Are you ready to set the new standard for high-quality customer experience in your industry?

Talk to us



About this survey

This survey was commissioned by Parloa and conducted by independent research firm Propeller Insights in Spring 2026, with a sample of 1,001 consumers over the age of 18, residing in North America, and who had interacted with a company's customer service department in the prior 12 months. Data was collected via an online survey instrument.

For questions related to "beat the bot" workaround tactics, follow-up questions were administered only to respondents who indicated they had attempted to force a transfer to a human agent (n = 537). All other questions were asked of the full sample (n = 1,001).

Results are reported as percentages of respondents. Data was not weighted. Rounding may cause totals to vary slightly from 100%.

n = 1,001 · Survey conducted Spring 2026 · North American adults with recent customer service interactions



Customer Patience Index 2026

Survey conducted Spring 2026

North American adults with recent customer service interaction.

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