



BENCHMARK REPORT

The state of airline social customer care 2026

Exclusive benchmark data on AI adoption, response performance, and peak-season resilience across Facebook, Instagram, and X.

Based on exclusive Emplifi platform data · January 2024 to June 2026





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE STATE OF PLAY

Airlines are entering a new era of customer service

With 10.2 billion passengers expected to travel in 2026, and passenger volumes projected to nearly double by 2045, the pressure to deliver fast, scalable customer care has never been greater.¹

This report analyzes exclusive Emplifi data from airline brands worldwide across Facebook, Instagram, and X between January 2024 and June 2026. The findings show that airlines continue to lead all industries in social customer care while rapidly expanding the use of AI to manage growing conversation volumes.

By mid-2026, AI was resolving up to 31% of Facebook direct message conversations without human intervention, while Instagram emerged as the industry’s highest-volume customer care channel. The data also shows that the most successful airlines aren’t replacing human agents, they’re combining AI with human expertise to deliver faster, more resilient customer experiences during periods of peak demand.



As passenger expectations rise, AI is no longer just a tool for efficiency. It is becoming a competitive advantage for modern airline customer care.

Key findings

21*



Faster than the average brand

Airline Instagram comment response speed versus the all-industry average.

31%



Resolved by AI

of Facebook conversations, with no human support.

3*



More care on Instagram

Airline DMs on Instagram versus Facebook.

PEAK RESILIENCE

AI helps airlines scale support and manage complex cases during peak season.



1. Airports Council International (ACI World), Airport Traffic Forecasts 2025–2054
Performance and automation metrics: Emplifi platform data, January 2024–June 2026



01: THE BENCHMARK

HOW AIRLINES COMPARE

Airlines set the benchmark for social customer care

Before examining how automation is evolving, it is worth establishing where airlines stand relative to the general corporate landscape. On social comment response times, airlines consistently outpace standard brand categories across every major public platform.

Based on response-time data during the first half of 2026, airlines operate at a more accelerated pace than regular consumer brands, particularly on platforms like Instagram where real-time care is rapidly becoming the consumer standard.

Platform (June 2026)	Global Airline Median Speed	All-Industry Av. Brand Speed	Performance Advantage
Facebook comments	1.19 hrs	11.50 hrs	~10× faster
Instagram comments	0.46 hrs (~27 min)	9.75 hrs	~21× faster
X (Twitter)	1.44 hrs	0.59 hrs	Seasonal volume shift

Source: Emplifi platform data. Analysis of airline brand profiles across Facebook, Instagram, and X, January 2024–June 2026

~10×



Faster on Facebook

1.19 hours versus an 11.50-hour brand average.

~21×



Faster on Instagram

Airlines respond to Instagram comments in about 27 minutes, against a 9.75-hour all-industry average.

Response time performance gap between the airline industry and other consumer-focused brands is not an accident. It reflects years of targeted investment in social care infrastructure, dedicated community management workflows, and increasingly, specialized AI-assisted response tools. The airline industry has set an operational standard that few sectors can match.

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02: AUTOMATION

AI AT SCALE

Automation is scaling and delivering results

The most significant development in airline social care over the past three years is the introduction of AI-powered tools that can automate customer care tasks, including responding to direct messages and managing customer inquiries.

In 2024, global airlines resolved approximately 2–7% of Facebook DM conversations exclusively through automated responses. By 2026, that figure has grown to between 25% and 31%, a roughly fourfold increase in three years.

On Instagram, bot-only resolution has climbed from low single digits to between 9% and 20% across the first half of 2026, with March reaching 16.4% and June at 20.1%.

Combined across both platforms, global airlines are now resolving more than a quarter of all direct message conversations through automation alone, handling routine queries, flight status checks, and policy questions at scale without human agent involvement. This growth reflects a fundamental shift in how airlines are deploying AI. Automation is no longer a supplementary tool, it is becoming a core layer of the customer care operation.

Global Facebook bot-only resolution rate (2024 vs. 2025 vs. 2026)



Percentage of total responded DM sessions resolved exclusively by automated tools

2024 BASELINE 2025 BASELINE 2026 SHIFT



Source: Emplifi platform data. Airline brand profiles, Facebook, January 2024–June 2026. Values shown as percentages

~4x



Growth in three years

Facebook bot-only resolution, 2024 to 2026.

31.3%



June 2026 peak

Facebook DM sessions resolved with zero agent touch.



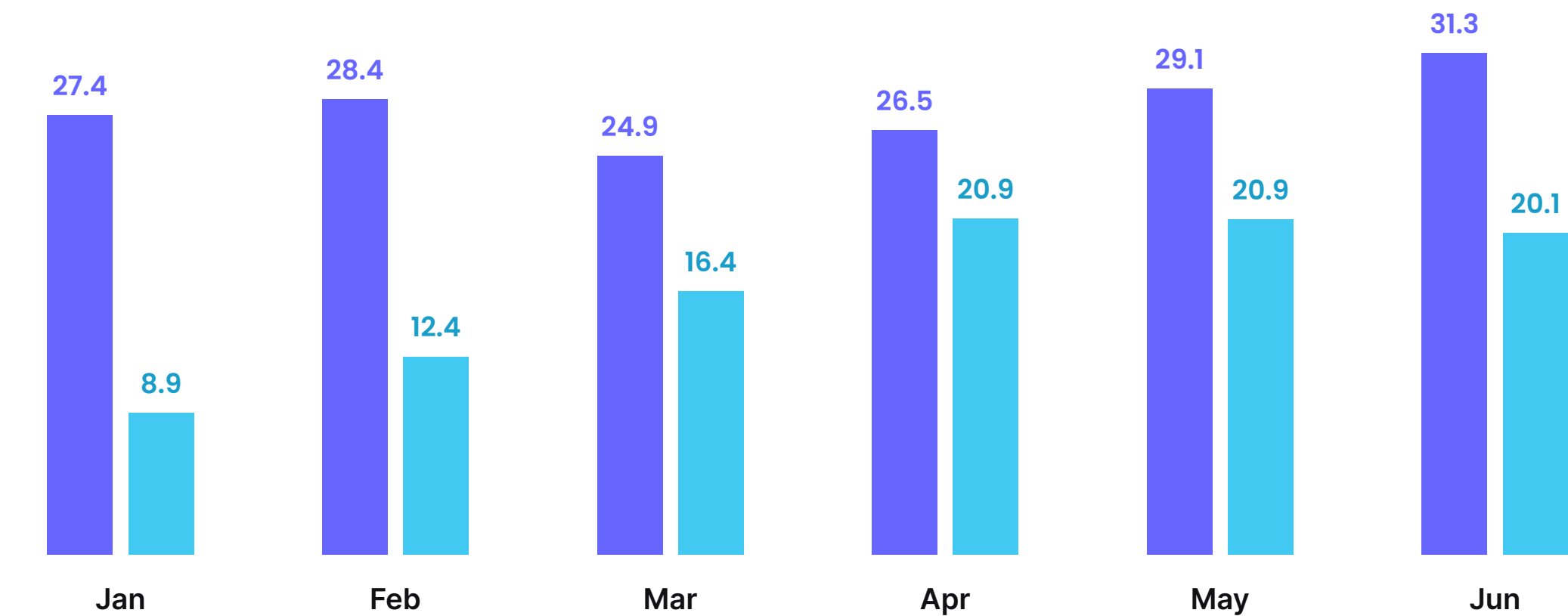
02: AUTOMATION

AI AT SCALE

Global cross-channel AI resolution performance (2026)

Monthly bot-only resolution rate by messaging platform

f Facebook @ Instagram



Source: Emplifi platform data. Analysis of airline brand profiles across Facebook, Instagram, and X, January 2024 - June 2026

126%

Instagram’s AI resolution rate more than doubled from January (8.9%) to June (20.1%).

31.3%

Facebook achieved the highest overall bot resolution rate in June, consistently leading Instagram throughout the first half of the year.

Automation is no longer a supplementary tool. It is becoming a core layer of the airline customer care operation.



03: PEAK SEASON

RESILIENCE UNDER PRESSURE

Peak season: Where AI investment is tested most



Passenger volumes peak between June and August, and with them comes a surge in customer care complexity. Flight disruptions, rebooking requests, compensation claims, and policy exceptions replace the routine queries that automation handles most effectively.

Flight disruptions in US aviation have become structurally more frequent. [According to data from Hopper Technology Solutions \(HTS\)](#), more than 58 million seats scheduled to depart from US airports were affected by significant disruptions in 2025, up from 50 million in 2019, and the frequency of significant disruption days has roughly doubled in the last six years.

This is the environment in which airline social care teams operate during peak season, and it is where the resilience of AI investment is truly tested.

The data shows that automation performance varies as travel demand and conversation complexity change throughout the year.

During periods of disruption, airlines receive a greater share of rebooking requests, compensation claims, and policy exceptions, increasing the proportion of conversations that require human expertise.

While some periods show temporary dips in bot-only resolution, others demonstrate that mature AI systems can maintain or even improve containment as automation capabilities evolve.

Rather than handling every interaction, effective AI identifies routine inquiries that can be resolved automatically while escalating more complex cases to human agents.

2. Hopper Technology Solutions (HTS), disruption data reported by Fortune, May 2026

58M

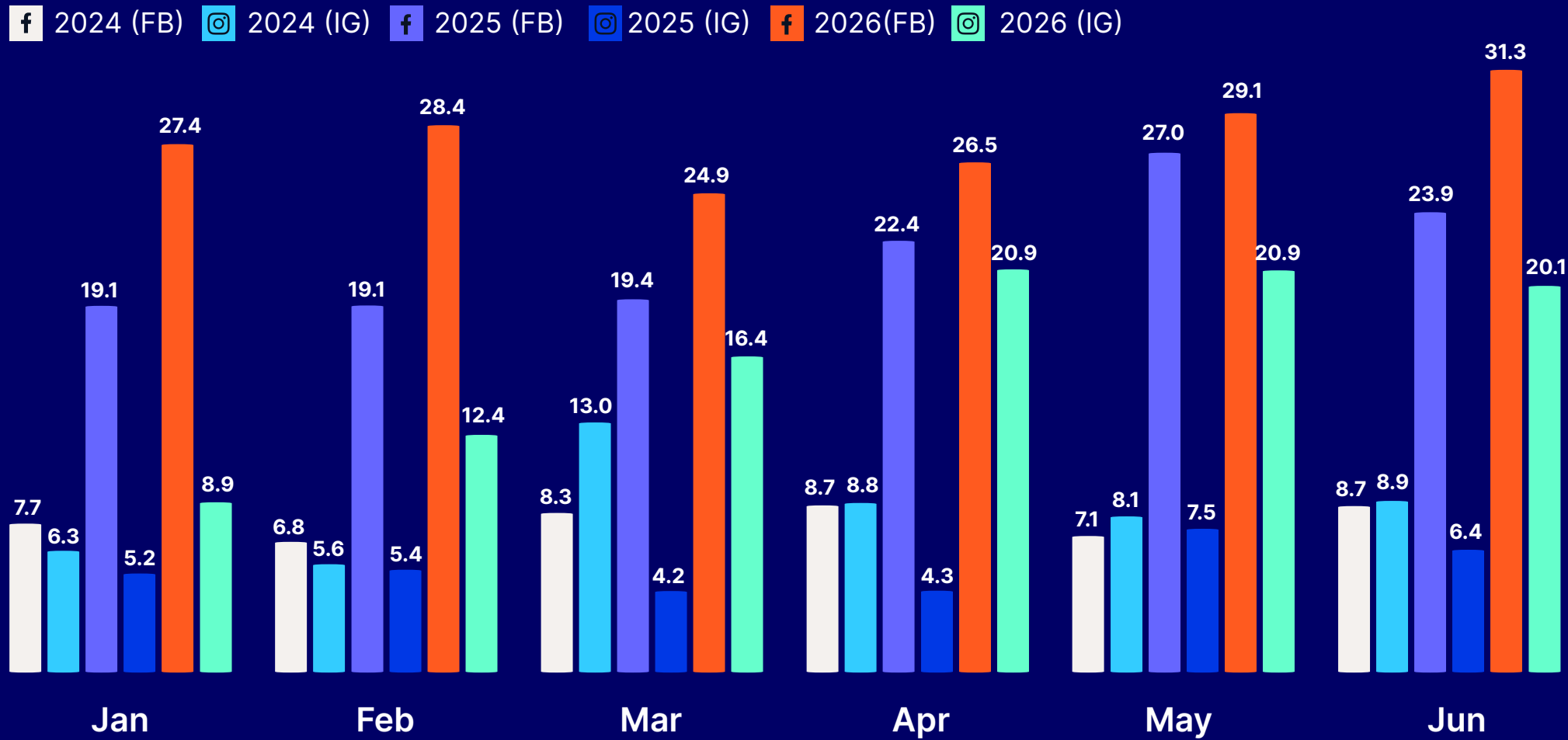
US seats disrupted, 2025
up from 50M in 2019.

2×

More disruption days
rise in frequency over six years.

Seasonal macro trends in automation containment (2024–2026)

Median monthly inbound DM sessions by social network



Source: Emplifi platform data. Analysis of airline brand profiles across Facebook, Instagram, and X, January 2024–June 2026

The measure of AI maturity is not whether bots resolve every conversation. It is whether the combined AI and human workflow keeps performing under pressure, resolving routine inquiries automatically while escalating complex cases to human agents.



04: THE CHANNEL SHIFT



VOLUME MEETS SPEED

Instagram is emerging as the high-volume care channel

One of the clearest trends in the 2026 data is the growing importance of Instagram as a customer care channel, and the scale difference relative to Facebook.

In June 2026, global airlines handled a median of 673 Facebook DM sessions per brand. On Instagram, that figure was 2,096, more than three times higher. Instagram volumes have remained consistently high across the first half of 2026, ranging from 1,317 to 2,174 sessions per brand per month.

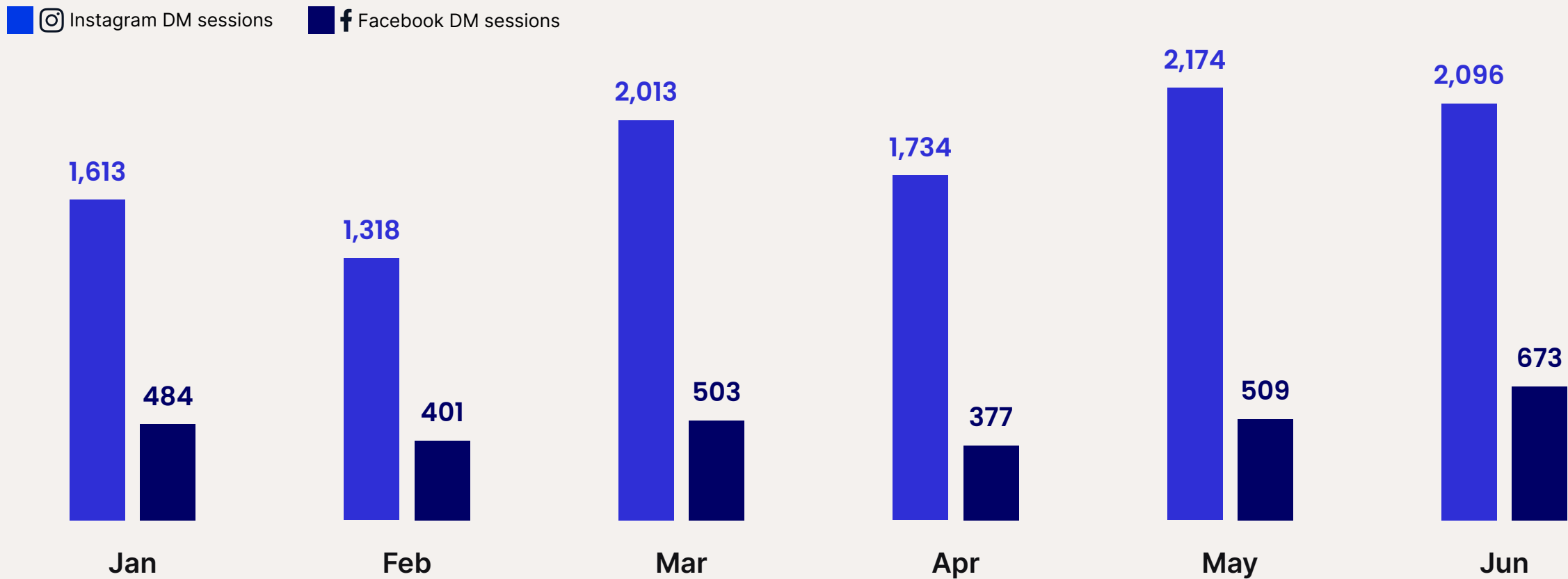
Facebook volumes, while lower than Instagram’s high baseline, have shown steady growth year-over-year, moving upward from a median of 562 sessions in June 2024 to 673 sessions in June 2026 globally, with wider variation by region.

This channel shift reflects broader consumer behavior. Emplifi’s own consumer research found that 47% of frequent social media users turn to Instagram for customer service.³ Among younger audiences, Instagram is increasingly the primary channel for interacting with brands. For airlines, this means a growing share of high-volume, time-sensitive customer conversations are happening on Instagram, making it essential for automation strategies to keep pace.

3. Emplifi, The Social Pulse: The State of Consumer-Brand Social Engagement in 2025 (2025)

Global inbound DM session volume breakdown (2026 monthly)

Median monthly inbound DM sessions by social network



Source: Emplifi platform data. Analysis of airline brand profiles across Facebook, Instagram, and X, January 2024–June 2026





04: THE CHANNEL SHIFT



SPEED UNDER PRESSURE

X remains the fastest channel, with growing question volumes

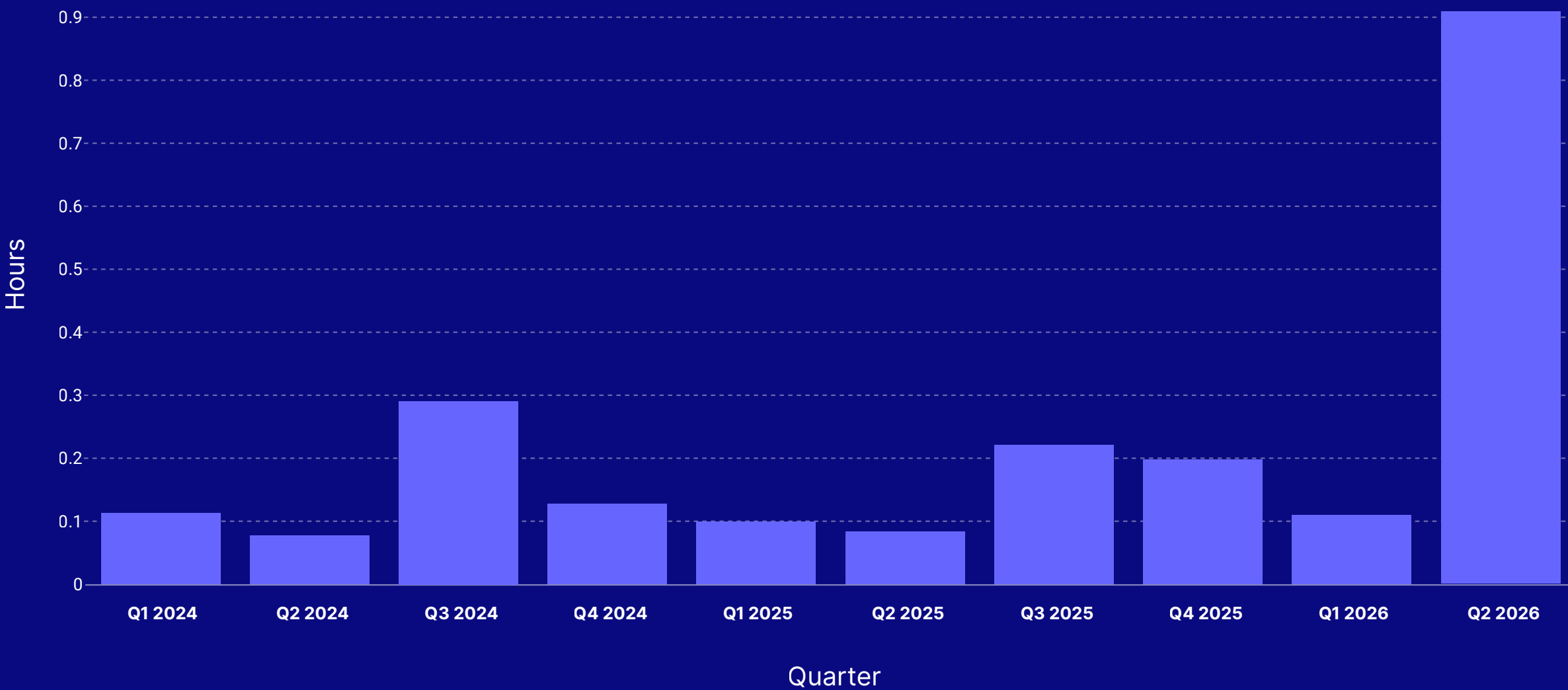
X (formerly Twitter) has long been the channel where airline customers expect the fastest responses.

The data confirms that airlines continue to deliver remarkable speed, particularly early in the year where median response times started at a rapid 0.06 hours (under 4 minutes) in January 2026. But, as the year progressed into the busier spring and summer periods, response times on X lengthened to 0.92 hours in April and reached 1.44 hours by June.

Question volumes on X show a notable spike in March 2026, averaging 118.7 questions per airline brand, compared with roughly 12–30 questions in surrounding months. While the dataset does not identify the underlying cause, the increase illustrates how X continues to function as a real-time customer care channel during periods of heightened demand and rapidly changing travel conditions.

Median response time to user question in comments on X

All regions: Jan 2024 - June 2026: Airlines



Source: Emplifi platform data. All brands: Profiles: 238 User comment questions: 178,232. Jan 2024 - June 2026

<4 min

January 2026 speed on X

Median response time of **0.06** hours at the start of the year.

118.7

March 2026 question spike

Questions per brand on X, compared with roughly **12–30** in surrounding months.



05: CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

PROOF IN PRACTICE



Scaling customer care with a unified ACX platform

The challenge

Growing social engagement and rising customer expectations made it difficult to deliver fast, consistent support across channels.

The solution

Aeromexico centralized social engagement and customer care with Emplifi, enabling faster responses, streamlined workflows, and better visibility across the customer journey.

See how Aeromexico transformed customer care

Read the story

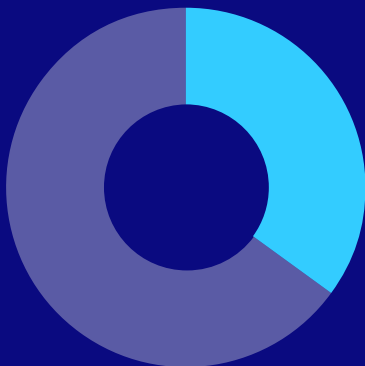
The results

786% increase in social media engagement after unifying care.



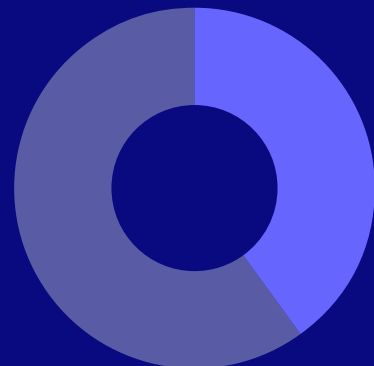
40%

Community growth
growth in social community size.



35%

Greater efficiency
fewer content pieces, with more impact.



4 days to hours

Response times cut from around four days to just a few hours.

Source: Emplifi customer results, Aeromexico. Metrics reflect outcomes after centralizing social engagement and customer care on Emplifi.

Why it matters

Aeromexico’s success demonstrates how a unified customer care platform helps airlines scale service, improve responsiveness, and deliver better customer experiences during periods of growing demand.

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06: BUILT TO PERFORM

AIRLINE CUSTOMER STRATEGY

What resilient AI for airlines looks like across channels



The strongest airline customer care strategies don’t replace human agents. They combine AI automation with seamless human support to deliver fast, accurate resolutions across every social channel.

**Facebook**



Automates routine DM conversations.



Frees agents to focus on complex customer issues.

**Instagram**



Supports the industry's highest-volume customer care channel.



Enables teams to scale growing message volumes.

**X**



Helps maintain the rapid response times customers expect.



Supports real-time engagement during periods of high demand.

Consumer expectations are changing

51%

value fast issue resolution over whether AI or a human responds first.⁴

71%

are satisfied with AI-supported customer care experiences on social.⁴

49%

believe travel is an industry that would benefit most from AI-powered customer service.⁴

Better care drives business results

59%

purchased from a brand again after a positive resolution experience.⁵

45%

are more likely to buy from brands that stay responsive on social during peak periods.⁶

Speed and resolution, not the responder, are what earn loyalty.

4. Emplifi, AI in social media 2025: what consumers want 5. Emplifi, Digital authenticity in the age of AI: 2026 Consumer Report 6. Emplifi, The retail marketer's guide to peak season 2026



07: WHAT'S NEXT

THE ROAD TO 2045

Looking ahead

Global passenger volumes are projected to reach 18.8 billion by 2045, bringing greater customer expectations, higher conversation volumes, and increased operational complexity for airlines.¹

The findings in this report show that airlines are well positioned to meet that challenge. They continue to lead every major industry in social customer care performance while rapidly scaling AI across customer service operations.

The airlines that will lead the next decade won't be those that automate the most interactions; they'll be those that combine AI with human expertise to deliver fast, seamless, and personalized customer experiences across every channel.

What to look for in an AI-powered customer care partner



Autonomous resolution that handles routine travel inquiries without agent intervention.



Unified customer context across every social channel and customer touchpoint.



Intelligent AI-to-agent handoff for complex travel and service issues.



Scalability under pressure during disruptions and peak travel periods.



Continuous optimization through AI insights, reporting, and performance analytics.

The airlines that lead the next decade will not be those that automate the most interactions. They will be those that combine AI with human expertise to deliver fast, seamless, personalized experiences across every channel.

18.8B

Projected passengers by 2045

nearly double today's annual volumes.¹



1. Airports Council International (ACI World), Airport Traffic Forecasts 2025–2054



Emplifi is the only **Autonomous CX** platform unifying social marketing, commerce, and customer care for more than 20,000 brands worldwide. Powered by Fuel AI, built on more than 5T of data, and recognized as a leader by leading industry analysts, Emplifi helps enterprise teams orchestrate connected customer journeys and deliver personalized experiences at scale, turning every customer touchpoint into a competitive advantage.

Ready to modernize your airline customer care?

See how leading airlines use Emplifi to scale AI-powered customer care while keeping human agents focused on the conversations that matter most.

[Book a demo](#)

METHODOLOGY

Analysis is based on direct message and comment data from airline brand profiles on the Emplifi platform, covering January 2024 through June 2026 across Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) worldwide. Bot-only conversation resolution rate reflects the share of responded DM sessions resolved exclusively through automated responses, with no human agent involvement. Industry response-time comparisons are based on median Facebook comment response times across brands on the Emplifi platform. Consumer statistics are drawn from Emplifi proprietary research. Industry demand figures are sourced from ACI World, and disruption data from Hopper Technology Solutions via Fortune.

SOURCES

1. Airports Council International (ACI World), Airport Traffic Forecasts 2025–2054
2. Hopper Technology Solutions (HTS), disruption data reported by Fortune, May 2026
- 3, 4. Emplifi, AI in social media 2025: What consumers want
5. Emplifi, Digital authenticity in the age of AI: 2026 Consumer Report
6. Emplifi, The retail marketer's guide to peak season 2026

All platform performance metrics: Emplifi platform data, January 2024–June 2026