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Empathy, amplified.

7 fascinating facts every customer service team must know today

Customer service is one of the few direct connections between consumers and brands. When a consumer reaches out for customer service, they have a challenge to solve - whether it's answering an availability or delivery question, communicating a complaint or it's to understand more about a product or service before they buy, brands simply can't afford to neglect their customer service offering.

Brands may feel that they understand the importance of good customer service, but do they understand just how quickly customer expectations around service are evolving? Having a finger on the pulse of the customer is key to being able to deliver a seamless, timely and outstanding customer service. And, CX leaders know that great experiences build advocacy, deepen customer loyalty, and ultimately increase profit.

Shellie Vornhagen
CXO, Emplifi

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Introduction

Consumers today want — and expect — instant gratification. They also expect brands to adapt to their preferences, not the other way around. Perhaps no department comes directly face-to-face with customers' changing expectations than the service center.

As consumer expectations evolve, brands must keep up. But to meet or exceed these expectations, brands must first truly understand them. At the end of the day, if brands don't rise to the occasion, their customers will not hesitate to switch to another brand that can.

So, what exactly do consumers expect from their support experiences today, and how do they differ across generations? How well are brands meeting these expectations, and how can they ensure the seamless, positive experiences across the customer journey?

This report aims to answer these key questions and provide contact centers, customer service teams, and consumer relations teams with key insights to help guide their efforts to provide the experiences their customers are looking for today.

The findings in this report are based on the results of a November 2021 survey by Harris Interactive commissioned by Emplifi. View the appendix at the end of this report for a complete view of the data referenced.

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FACT ONE

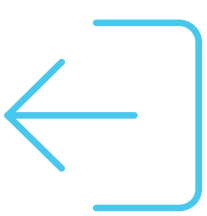
4 in 5 consumers would leave a brand they love after as few as two poor experiences

The customer experience has become a vital battleground for brands, as consumers expect more speed, convenience, and personalized service than ever before.

Our research confirms the impact of every experience on consumers' relationships with the brands they love:

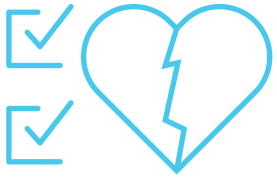
- **More than half of consumers** have abandoned a favorite brand in the past year due to poor experiences
- Large majorities across age groups (including 85% among Gen X) are **ready to abandon brands they love after as few as two experiences**
- Around 15% will leave a brand **after just one bad experience**

To stay ahead of the competition, brands need to step up their CX through every stage of the customer journey. That includes having the right means in place to quickly and effectively assist customers with questions and solving problems before, during, and after a purchase.



53%

have left a brand they were previously loyal to in the past 12 months due to poor customer experience



81%

would leave a brand to which they are loyal after as few as two poor customer experiences

Q. "Have you left any brands you had previously been loyal to in the past 12 months due to poor customer experience?" and "How many instances of a poor customer experience would it take for you to leave a brand you had previously been loyal to?"

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FACT TWO

Consumers value 24/7 availability and fast response times above other key criteria

56% feel customer service quality has a larger impact on positive brand perception than the other criteria examined

	Gen X	Millennials	Gen Z
24/7 customer service	30%	29%	27%
Quick responses	31%	26%	25%
Share my values	17%	19%	22%
Provide recommendations	13%	12%	15%
Ask for my feedback	9%	14%	11%

Q. Please rank these from 1-5 where 1 is most likely to make you feel positive about the brand through to 5 being least likely to do so. (% of "1" answers shown)

Experiences that directly impact customer service are most likely to shape how consumers feel about brands. At the top of the list are **24/7 customer service availability and fast replies** to customer messages.

Expectations are consistent across age groups, with a couple of notable differences:

- **Gen X** consumers are more likely to feel positively toward brands that provide 24/7 availability and quick responses (61%).
- Brands who **"share my values"** strike a bigger chord among younger generations.

Today's consumers expect timely assistance to their inquiries, any time of day or night. These demands can place a very difficult burden on customer service teams dependent on manual workflows.

To ease this burden and meet demand, brands need practical, cost-effective ways to deliver fast, always-available customer service at scale — without sacrificing the human touch.

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FACT THREE

Consumers expect responses in minutes, but 2 in 5 have to wait hours

When consumers message brands via digital channels, they want a quick reply. In fact, more than half of US consumers surveyed expect a response within one hour of reaching out to a brand.

Expectations are fairly similar across all age groups, though Millennials (58%) edged out Gen Z (50%) and Gen X (49%) consumers in this regard.

This leaves brands with very little room for error. However, our research suggests **brands are falling short of these expectations**, with 2 in 5 consumers reporting typically having to wait at least two hours for a response, and for some, even more than 24 hours!

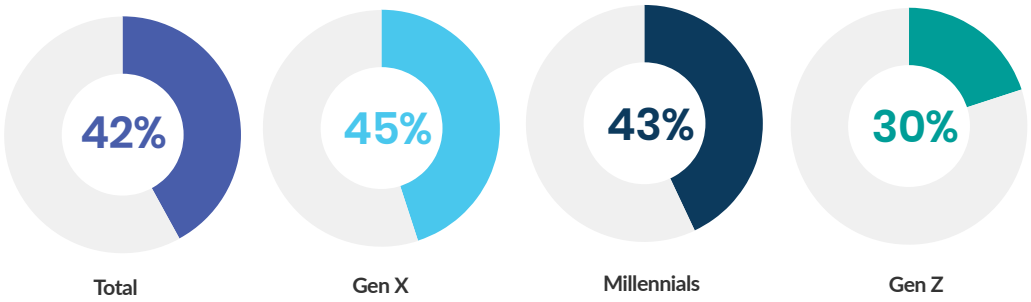
Overall, brands still have room to improve when it comes to response times. To meet consumers' near-real-time expectations, **brands can benefit from exploring automated solutions** that can either:

- Help consumers troubleshoot their inquiries themselves
- Help customer service agents process incoming queries via email, chat, social media (and other sources) quicker, and identify possible solutions with less effort

Q. "How quickly do you expect a brand to respond to a message you have posted on one of its digital channels e.g. website, social media etc.?" and "In your experience, typically how quickly do brands actually respond to messages you have posted on their digital channels e.g. website, social media etc.?"

% who rate the empathy they receive from brands as being optimal

(Median across 11 product categories examined*)



Top 3 product categories

1. Book and stationary (49%)
2. Health, beauty & baby care (46%)
3. Food (45%)

Bottom 3 product categories

1. Media items (36%)
2. Home furnishing & décor (36%)
3. Electronic devices (38%)

Q. "On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate the brands you interact with and buy from in these product categories in terms of empathy towards you as consumer? By empathy, we mean they cater to your needs, understand your frustrations and challenges, and understand your needs and wants."
*% of "9-10" answers shown above.

FACT FOUR

Most consumers don't feel they receive high levels of empathy from brands, especially younger consumers

Beyond speed and convenience, **empathy plays a vital role in the customer service experience**. Consumers want companies to feel like they understand their unique individual needs, challenges, and frustrations.

Are brands delivering on these expectations? Findings suggest mixed performance.

When asked about their experiences with brands across 11 different product categories, **less than half of all consumers surveyed feel they receive high levels of empathy** when interacting with brands, although some industries perform better than others.

Across product categories, **Gen Z consumers find brands' empathy levels to be notably lower than do Gen X or Millennials**.

So how can brands tackle this empathy gap? Let's explore in more detail.

FACT FIVE

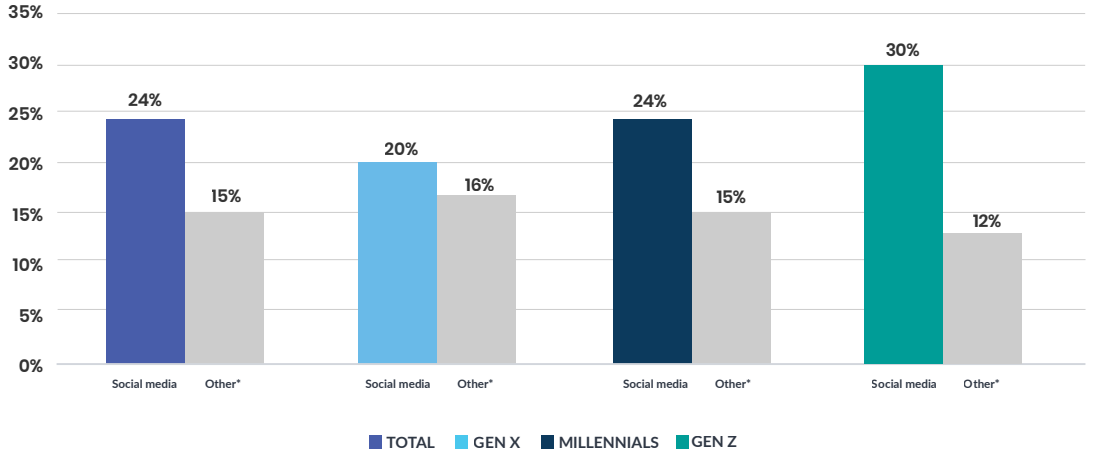
Social media is a vital customer service channel throughout the buying journey

When asked to pick only one channel through which they prefer to engage brands, **US consumers were more likely to pick Social Media above other channels like email, phone, and website chat**. This was especially seen among younger consumers.

Notably, about 2 in 3 consumers said they would turn to social media customer service to get answers before making a purchase, to help them through during the purchasing process itself, and to obtain post-purchase support.

Social media customer care is becoming an increasingly essential way to elevate experiences throughout the customer journey. More and more, great CX is likely to involve high-quality customer service and support on social media platforms, both before and after a purchase.

Preference for communicating with brands



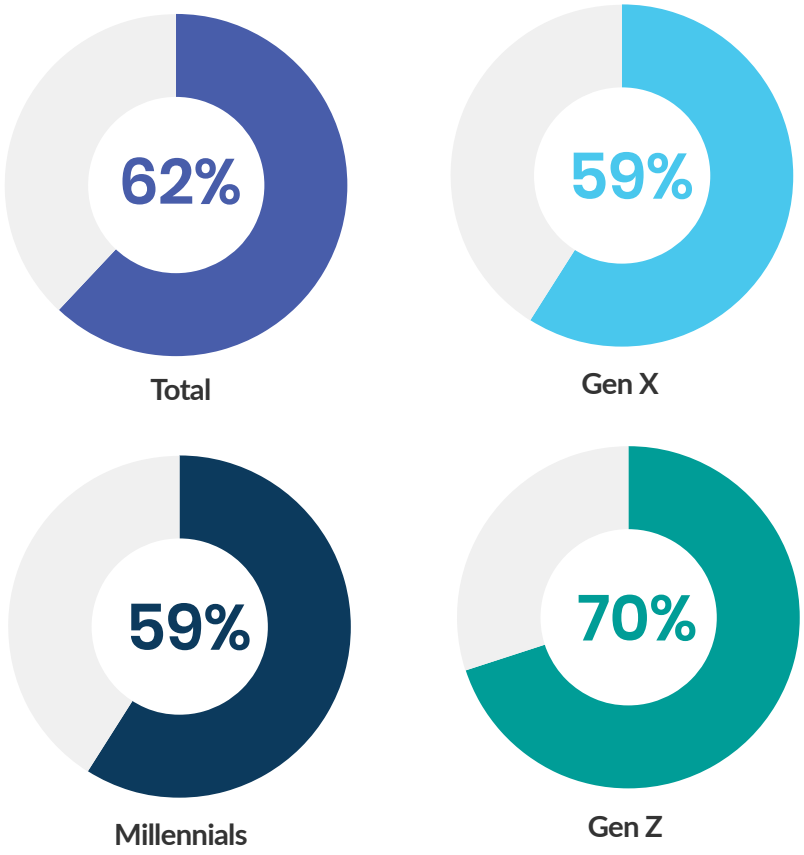
Q. "Nowadays, there are many different ways in which people can communicate with brands. Please rank these options from 1-6 where 1 is your preferred option and so on through to 6 being your least preferred option." *"Other" combines: "Visit a physical store", "Telephone", "Email", "Website chat", and "Website contact form". Median data shown.

How consumers currently use (or want to use) social media platforms to engage with brands

Ask questions before making a purchase	**68%**
Make a purchase	**64%**
Get post-purchase customer support	**59%**

Q. "Do you currently use social media platforms to engage with brands in any of the following ways? Please select all that apply." and "Would you like to use social media platforms to engage with brands in any of the following ways that you are not doing so currently? Please select all that apply." "Would you like to use social media platforms to engage with brands in any of the following ways that you are not doing so currently? Please select all that apply."

% who don't believe they currently receive excellent customer experience on social media when making a purchase



Q. How would you rate the quality of the social media customer experience you receive from brands when making a purchase? (Scale from 1-10 used, % of answers from "1-8" shown)

FACT SIX

Expectations for excellent social media customer service during the buying process are not being met

As more and more customer journeys take place within social platforms, consumers put higher value than ever on the ability to find quick, satisfying solutions through social channels.

However, fewer than 2 in 5 consumers report that they receive what they would consider excellent customer service on social media. This highlights **a clear experience gap between what customers want and how well brands are able to deliver on this channel**.

To close this gap, brands must ensure the right processes and workflows are in place to ensure the best social media customer service at any point across the customer journey. This includes ensuring high-priority posts and messages can be automatically flagged and routed to the right team or agents with full context, so that they can be addressed quickly and effectively.

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FACT SEVEN

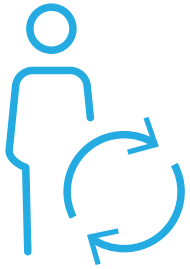
The majority of consumers want a self-service option

While the human element plays a crucial role, many common issues don't necessarily require direct live communication with a customer service agent.

In such cases, consumers often prefer the convenience of finding their own solutions. In fact, **3 in 4 say it is important for brands to provide a fully self-serve option for customer care**, with Gen X, Millennial, and Gen Z consumers all placing very similar levels of importance in having this option.

With advances in technology like conversational AI, brands can empower their customers more than ever to resolve a growing number of challenges on their own via solutions like **AI chatbots**.

Of course, there will always be questions that require a higher level of assistance. As such, brands must still **ensure consumers can easily escalate to a live agent at any time**. As important, when these questions reach agents, they must be given all the context they need to ensure the entire customer service experience remains seamless.



75%

find it important for a business to provide them with a fully self-service customer care option.

Q. How important to you is it that a business provides a fully self-serve customer care option, meaning that there is no direct live communication with a customer service agent to resolve your issue? (% of 7-10 answers shown)

Delivering fast, effective, and empathetic customer care in the age of CX

What customers expect from their customer care experiences is nothing new. But as illustrated by this report, **expectations have reached a level that leaves brands little room for error**.

Customers want support from brands when, where, and how they want it and brands must continually explore ways to cater to their preferences. Customer care plays a critical role throughout the customer journey.

Brands must be prepared to offer the same level of service across all their channels, and especially on social media, as this report highlights. For example, AI-driven solutions like chatbots offer an effective way for customers to access the information they are looking for, instantly. At the same time, equipping customer care representatives with tools that centralize all of the information they need in one place can help them navigate and resolve any incoming query more easily.

Customers want support from brands when, where, and how they want it.

With the right tools and strategies in place, brands will be able to not only **deliver on ever-expanding customer expectations**, but most importantly, **create deeper connections with their customers** and convert them into loyal brand advocates.

Methodology and survey info

Emplifi commissioned Harris Interactive to conduct primary research to understand consumer sentiment and expectations around the customer experience.

The survey was conducted online in November 2021, and sampled social media users age 16-55 who are familiar with the concept of customer experience.

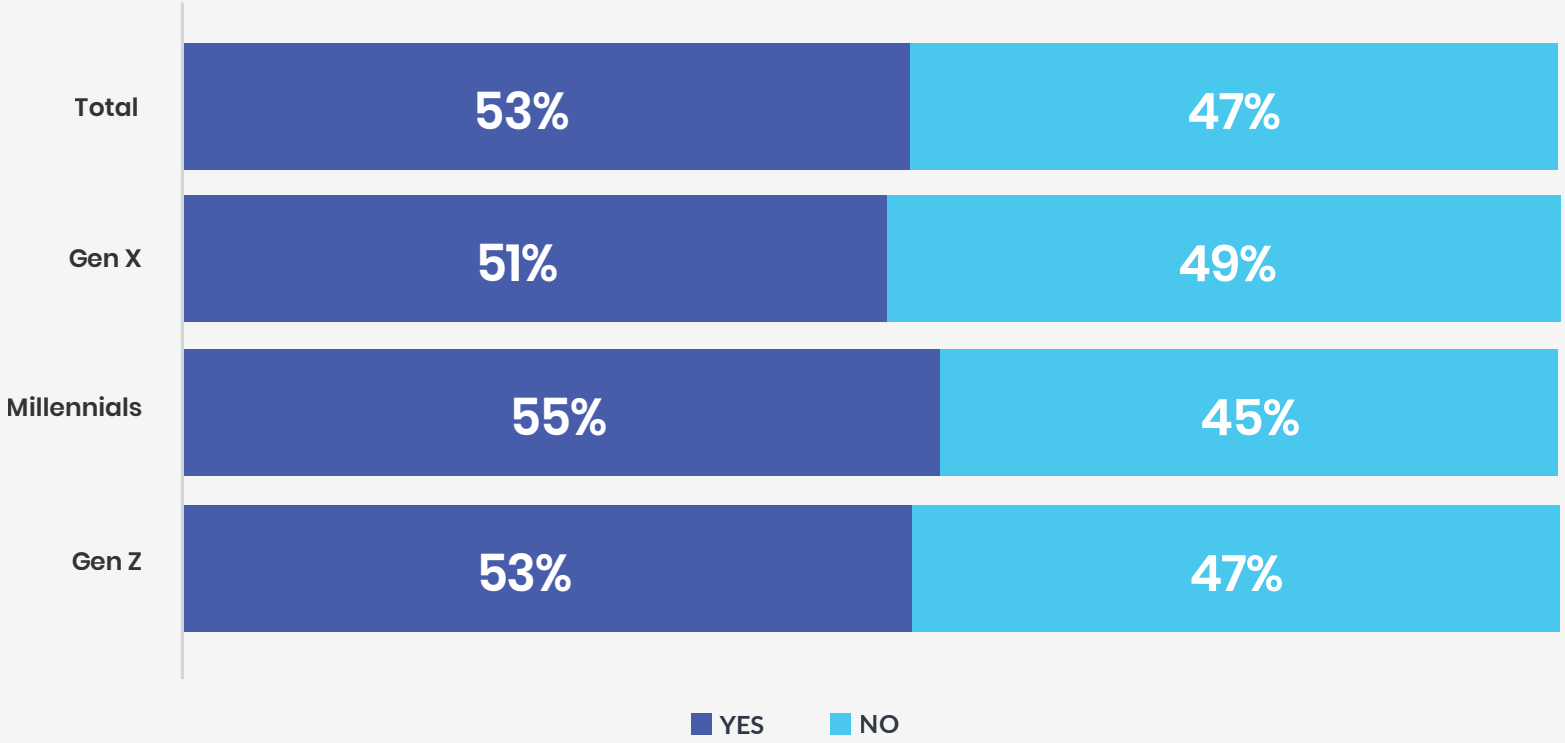
Geography	
US	1,064 responses

Are you...	US
Male	50%
Female	50%
I identify in some other way	<1%
I prefer not to answer	<1%

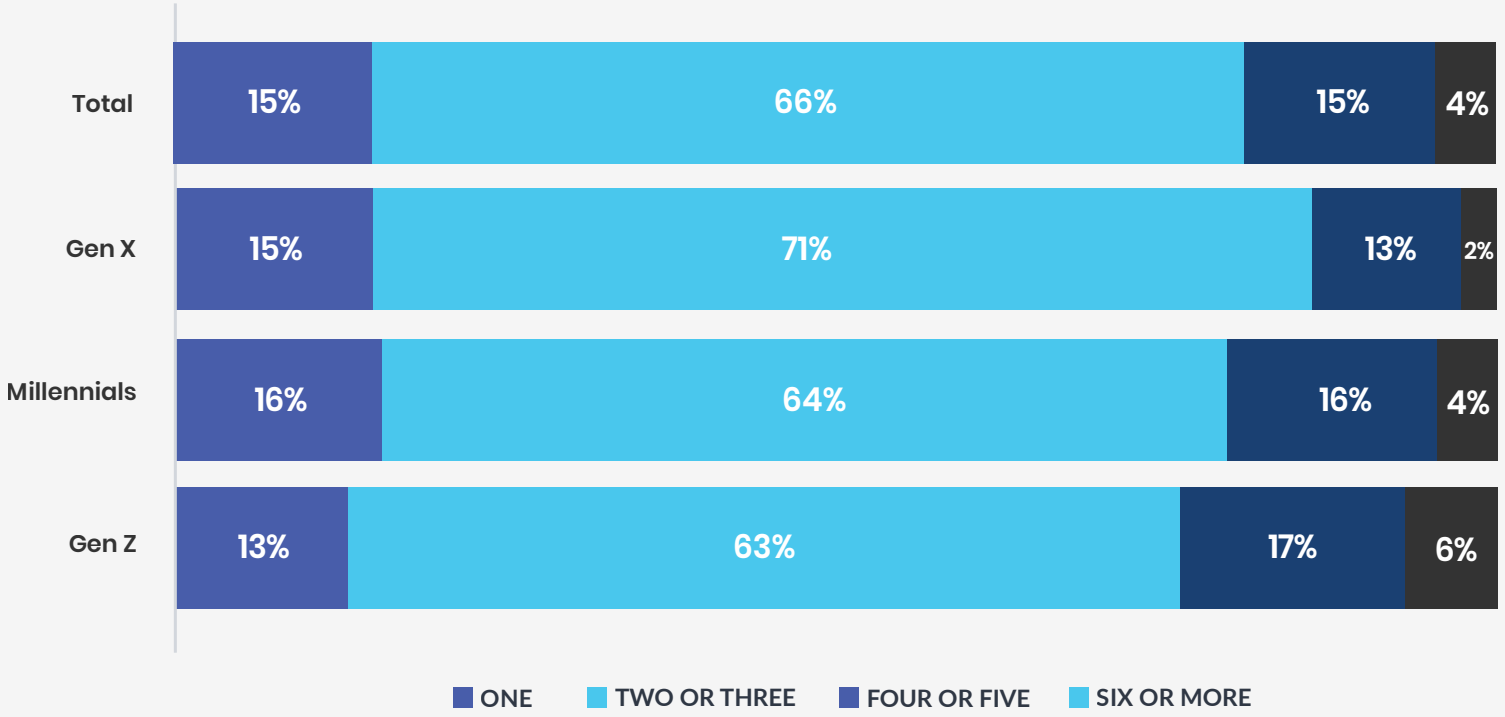
Age	US
Gen X (Ages 41-55)	408
Millennials (Ages 25-40)	409
Gen Z (Ages 16-24)	247

Appendix

Have you left any brands you had previously been loyal to in the past 12 months due to poor customer experience?

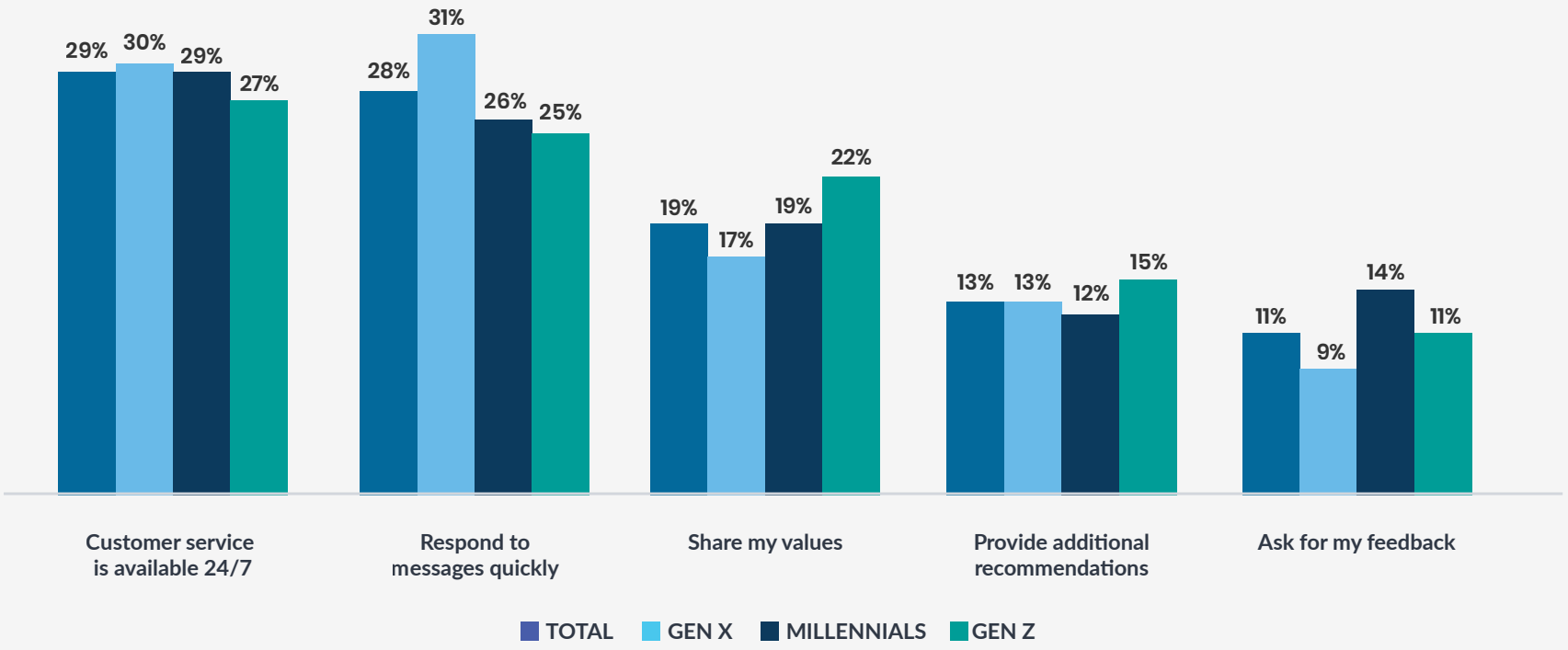


How many instances of a poor customer experience would it take for you to leave a brand you had previously been loyal to?

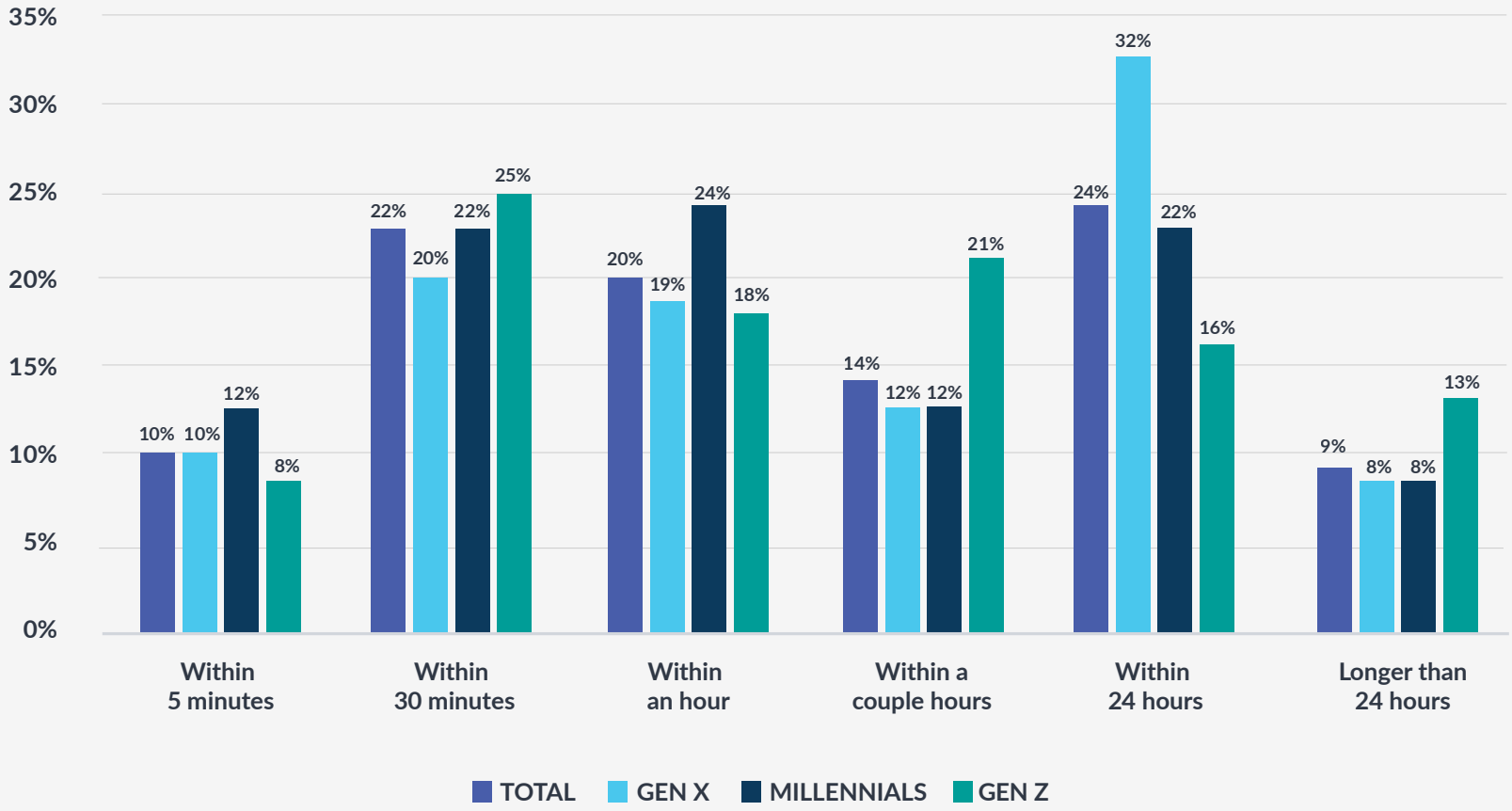


Customer experience examples that make consumers feel positive about a brand

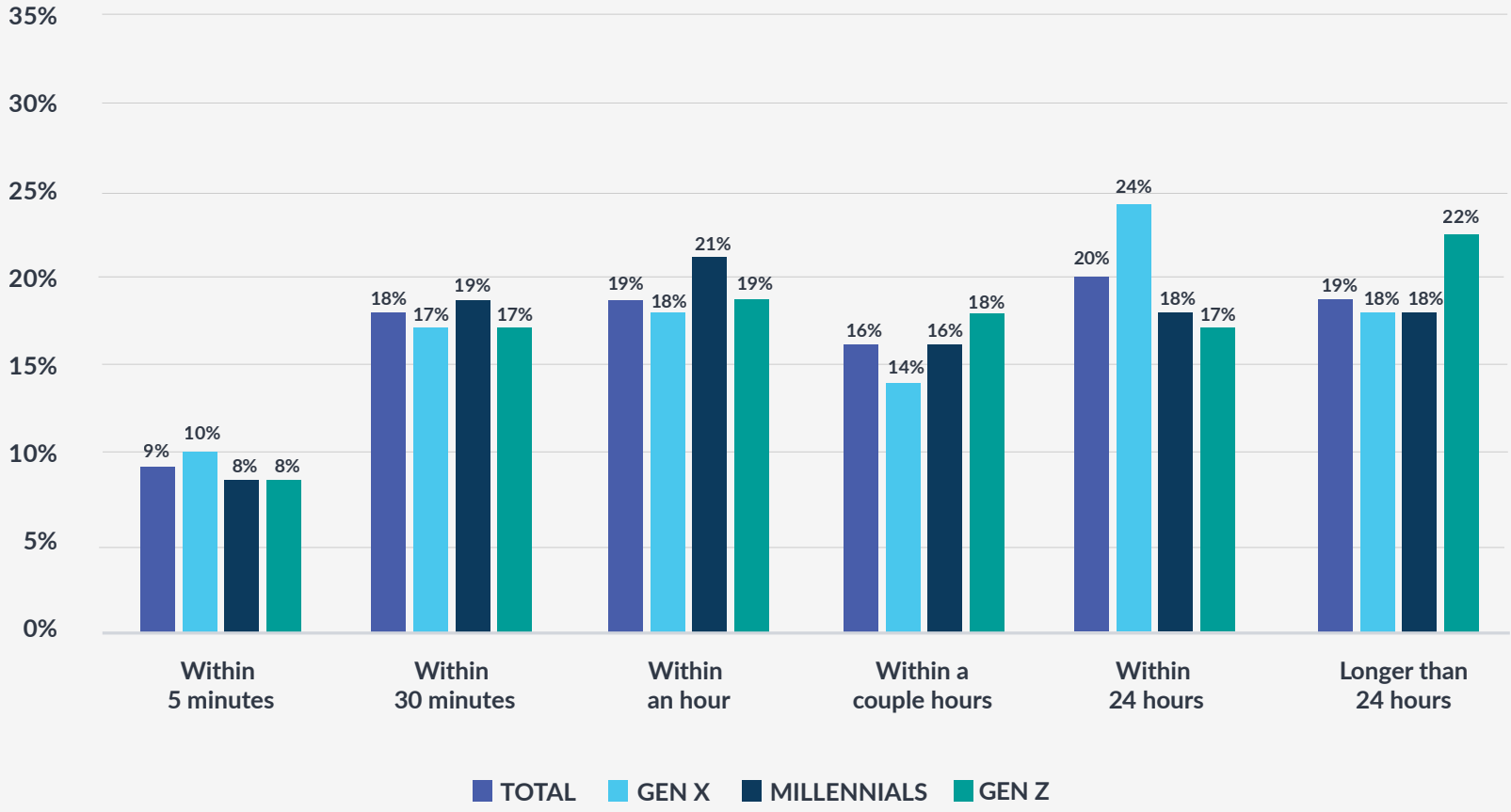
Ranked 1-5 where 1 is most likely to make you feel positive. % of "1" answers shown.



How quickly consumers expect a brand to respond to a message posted on one of its digital channels

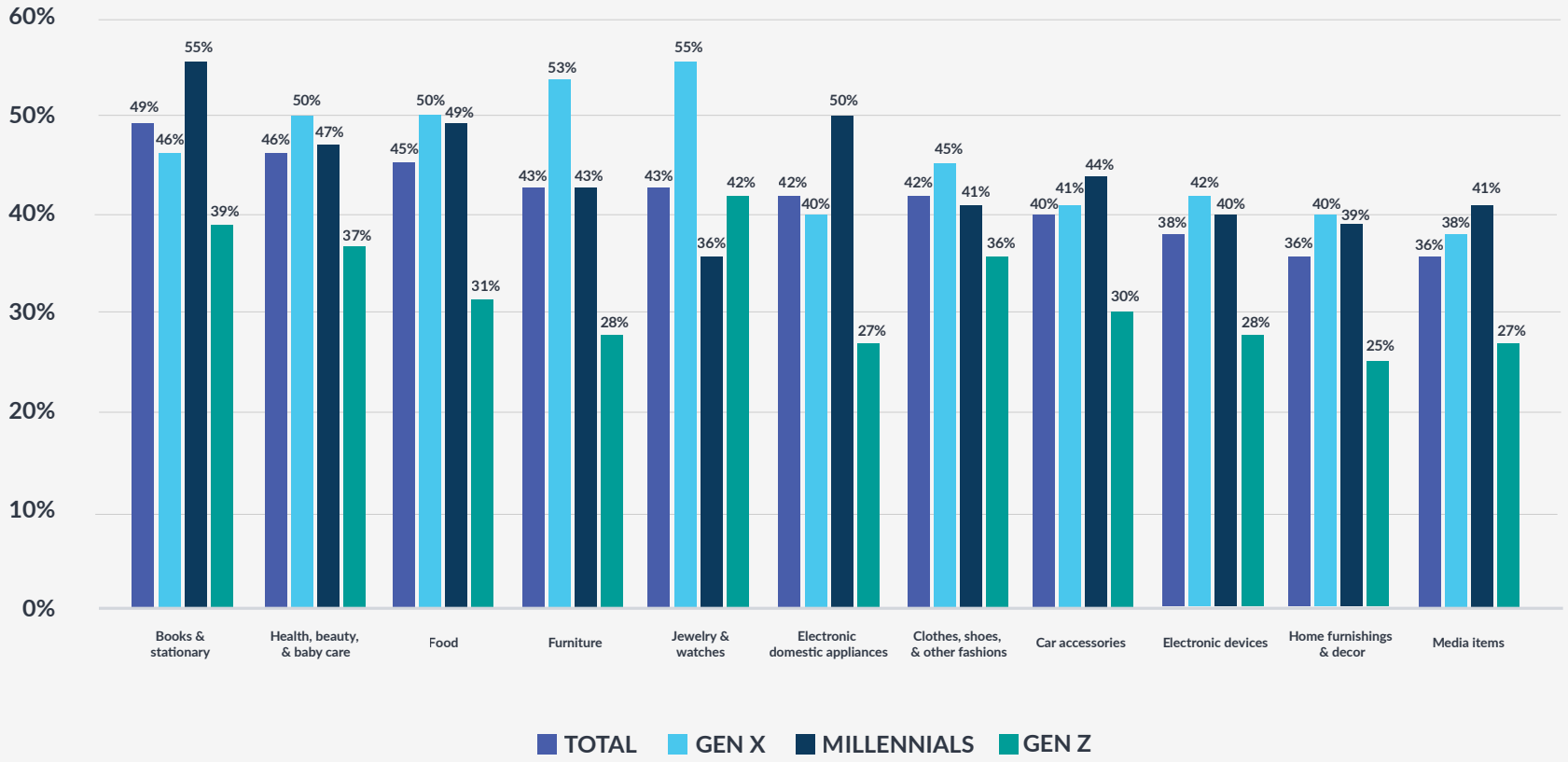


Typically, how quickly do brands respond to a message posted on one of their digital channels



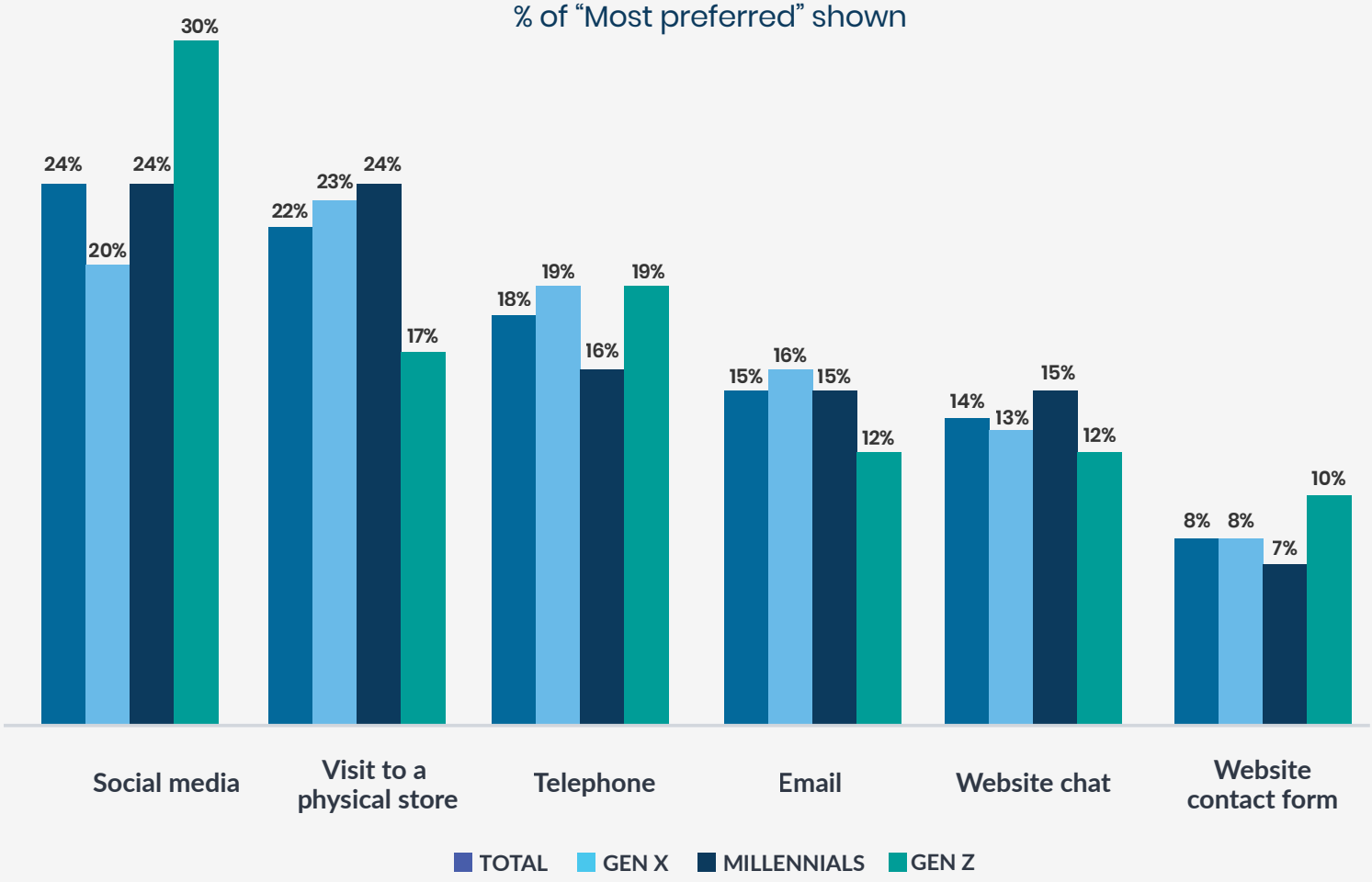
On a scale of 1–10, how would you rate the brands you interact with and buy from in these product categories in terms of empathy towards you as consumer?

% of "9–10" answers shown

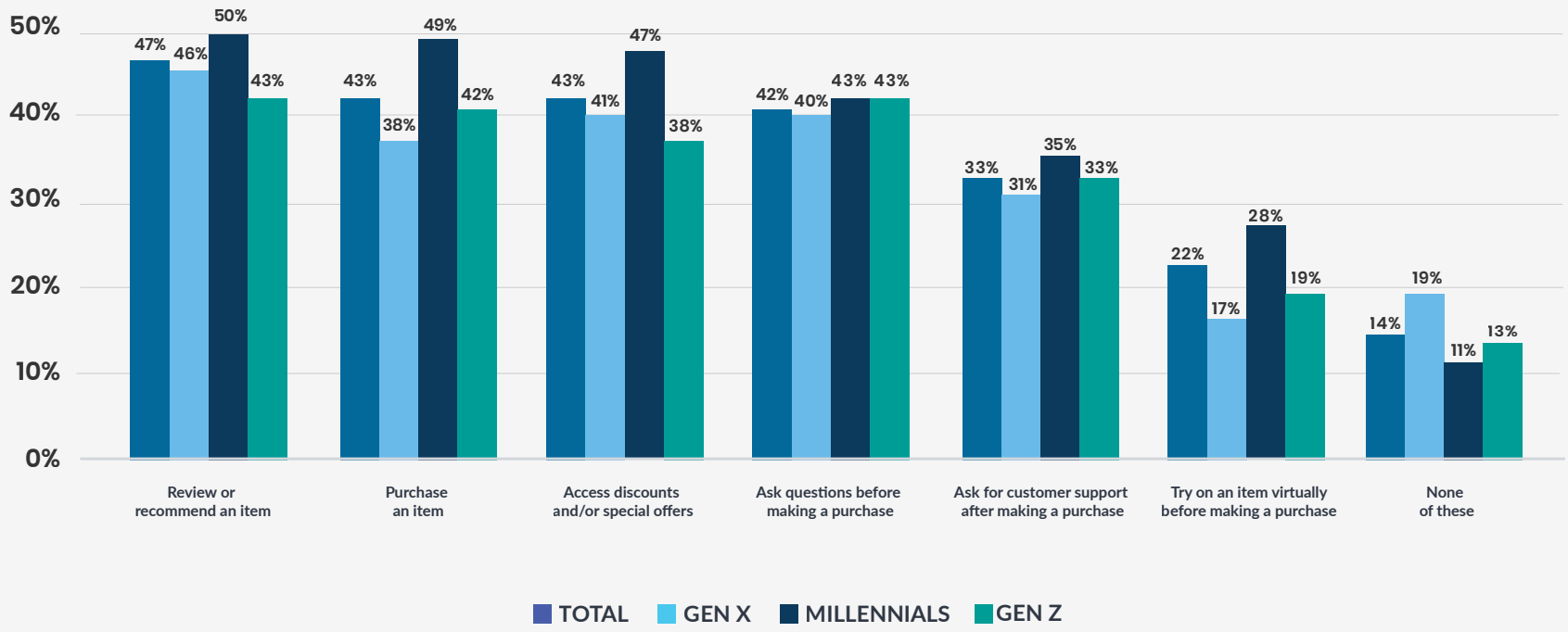


Preference for communicating with brands

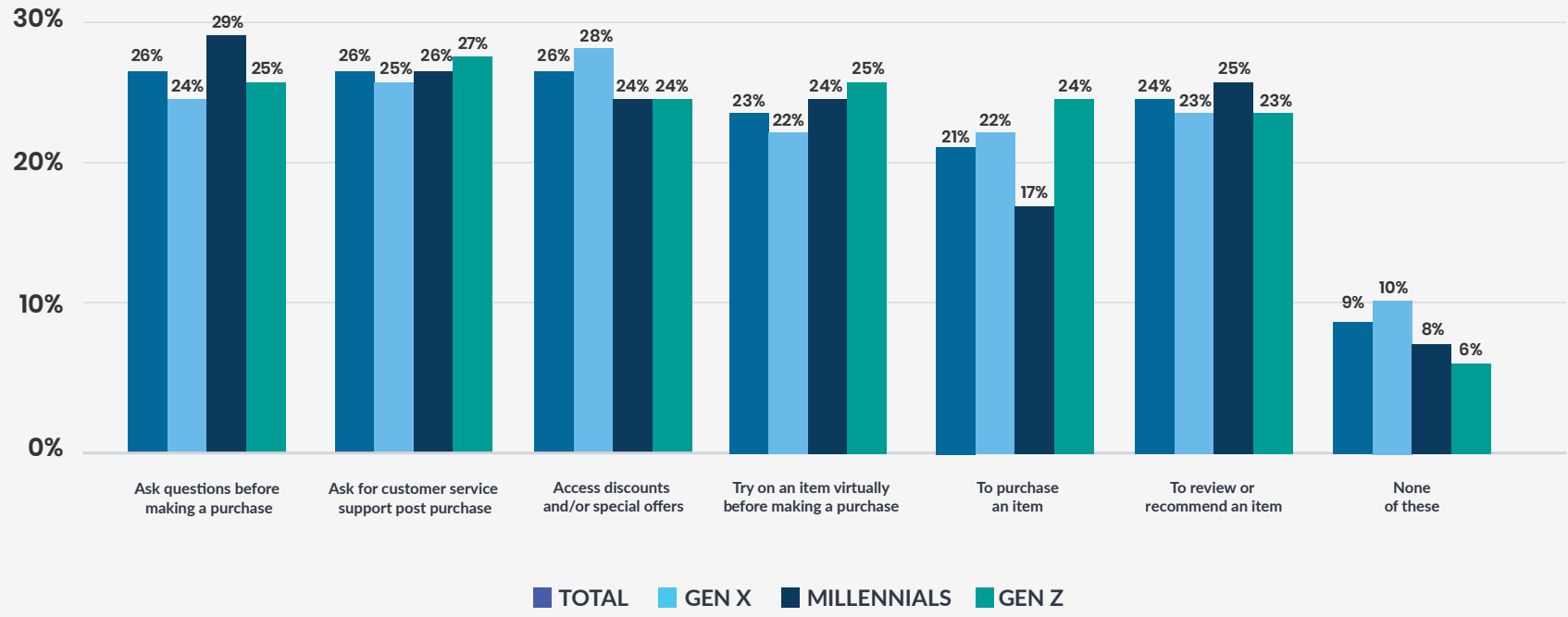
% of "Most preferred" shown



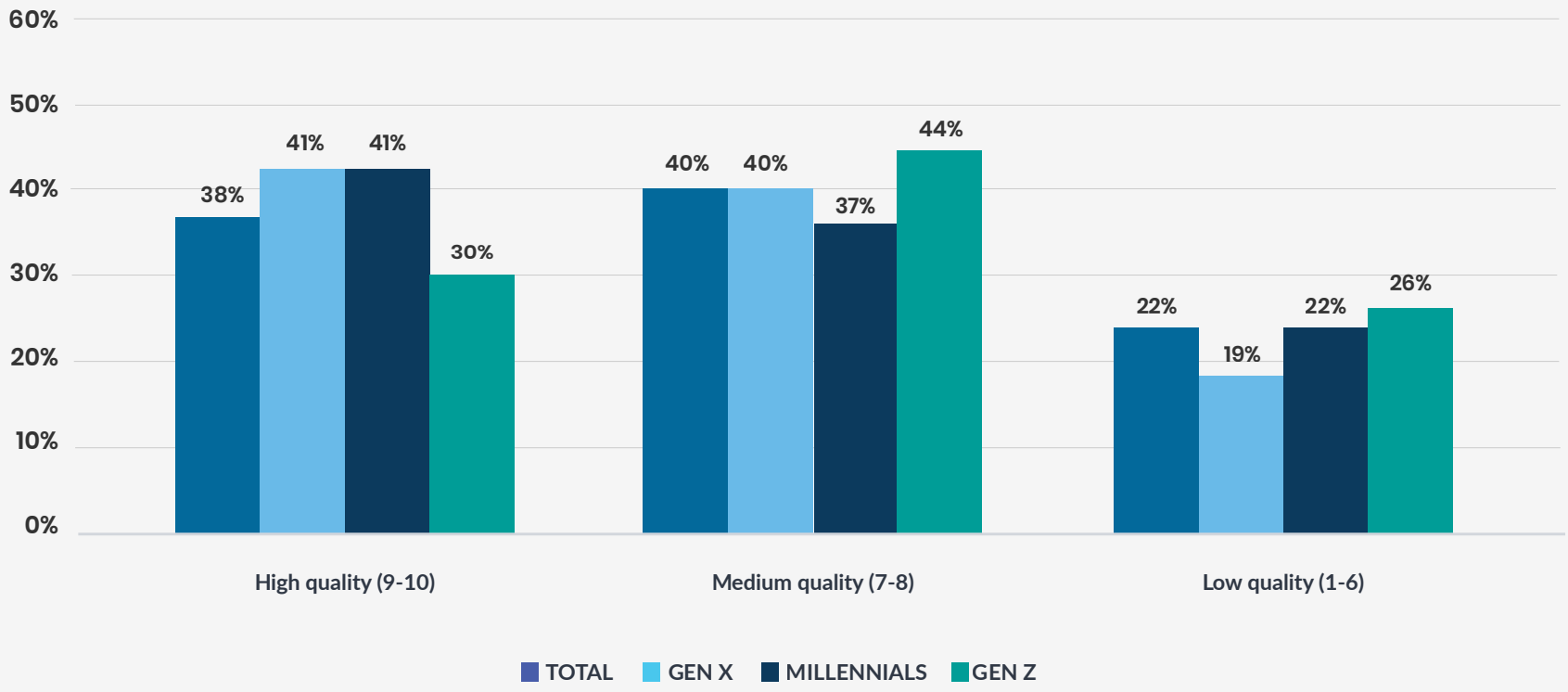
Ways in which consumers currently use social media platforms to engage with brands



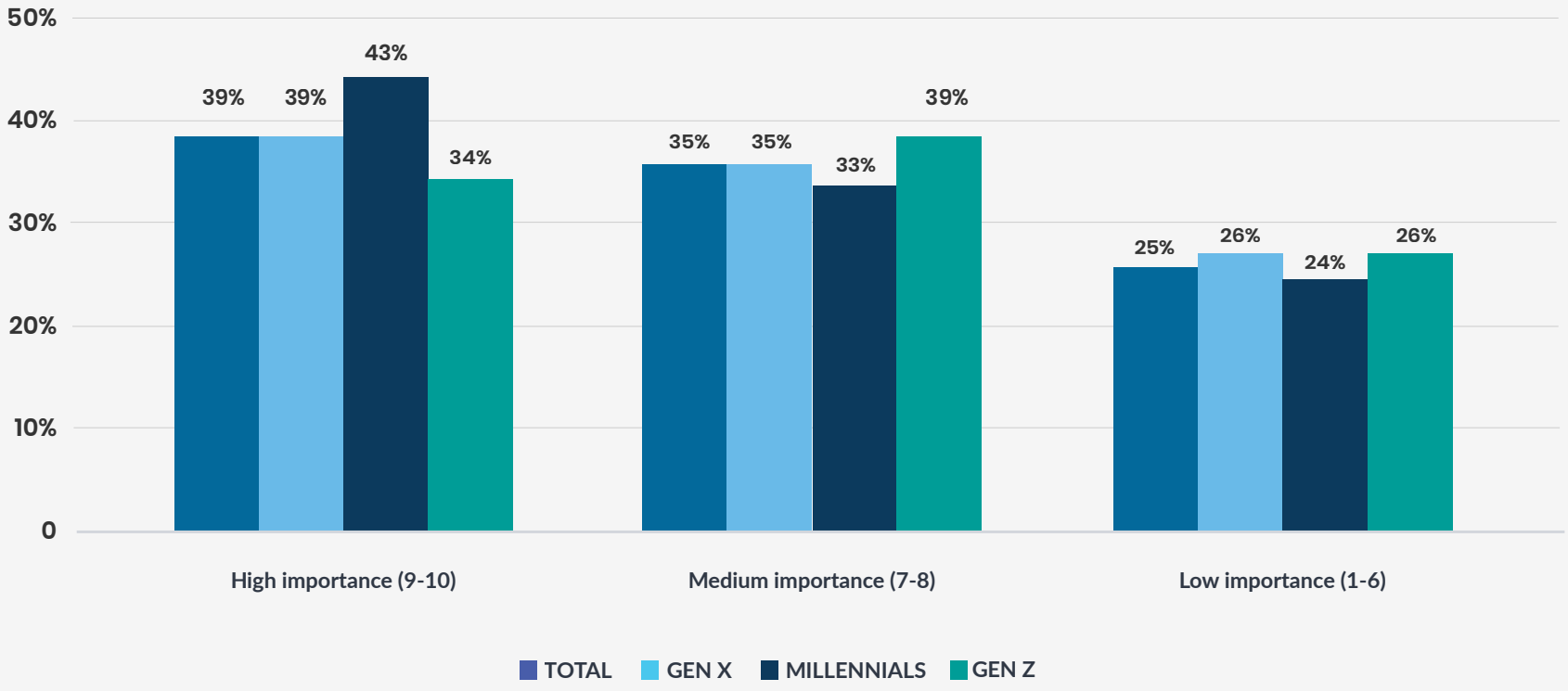
Ways in which would like to use social media platforms used to engage with brands



Quality of social media customer service received from brands when making a purchase



How important to you is it that a business provides a fully self-serve customer care option?*



*Meaning that there is no direct live communication with a customer service agent to resolve your issue.

About Emplifi

Emplifi is the leading unified CX platform that brings marketing, commerce, and care together to help businesses close the customer experience gap. More than 7,000 brands, such as Delta Air Lines, Ford Motor Company, and McDonald's, rely on Emplifi to provide their customers with outstanding experiences at every touchpoint.

For more information, visit emplifi.io