



# It's time to solve the customer experience trilemma

How ease of resolution, rapport, and relevant communications  
can transform customer loyalty—and your bottom line

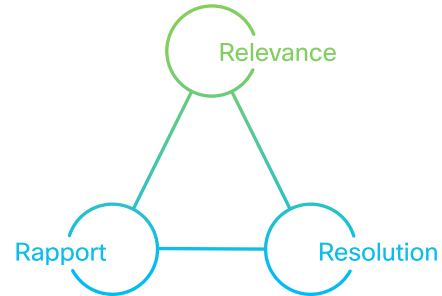
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## If you want to succeed, every customer experience (CX) must include three elements:

- 1. Resolution:** how quickly and conveniently can a customer solve issues and get the information they need about your products and services?
- 2. Rapport:** do your customers feel like they can connect with you in a meaningful way?
- 3. Relevance:** can you deliver the right experience to the right customer at exactly the right time?

We are calling these three areas the CX trilemma.

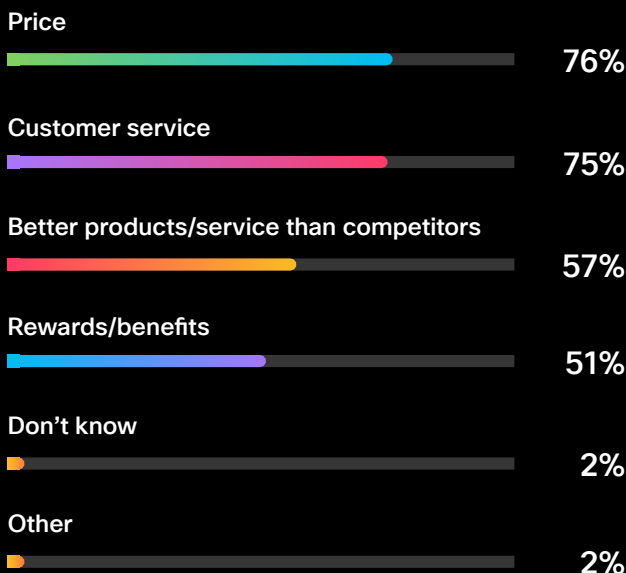


So, how do you build these three elements into every aspect of your customer experience? And how can you do so in a way that helps you stand out from the competition?

imimobile, part of Webex, spoke to over 2,000 consumers to understand what’s most important to them in their experiences with different brands. And we found that it’s not enough to do one thing well: you need to excel in every element of the CX trilemma to truly keep customers coming back.

## Reasons for being a repeat customer

(fig.1)



(fig.2)



Beyond repeat business, CX has the ability to generate revenue. 61% tell us they’re willing to pay more for products and services if they think they’ll receive a higher standard of customer service. And 55% would change brands to shop with a company that would offer a better customer experience.

## Customer experience is now a boardroom-level issue

Our research reviewed how consumers feel about the way businesses interact with them – looking at the channels used, preferences, and common challenges that consumers face. However, one point came through loud and clear across all the answers respondents gave us: great customer experiences aren't just nice to have; they're crucial for businesses looking to thrive and grow.

75% see good customer service as a reason to be a repeat customer with a business – making it just as important a factor as price (76%) – *fig.1*. By comparison, just 57% say that offering a better product or service than competitors is enough to make them shop with a brand again.

So, if CX is truly so important to driving revenue and profit, it must be a conversation that breaks out of marketing, customer service, and operations departments and into the boardroom. And it must make this move soon, as CX is only becoming more vital to business success.

47% of respondents say they believe good customer service is more important now than it was 12 months ago. And it's easy to see why this is happening. As retail, hospitality, travel, healthcare, and organizations in all kinds of other industries have had to shift their communication strategies due to the pandemic, having clear, joined-up paths of communication in the physical and digital worlds is crucial.

CX is clearly becoming more important to consumers. So, there's never been a better time to act than now. Brands need to ensure they deliver resolution, customer rapport, and relevance across all customer touchpoints – and they need to start today if they want to solve the CX trilemma.

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“I received a call at 1 a.m. in the morning and they booked me in to see the clothes in the sale the next day. It made me feel like a brand ambassador, so I always recommend the brand to my colleagues and friends.”

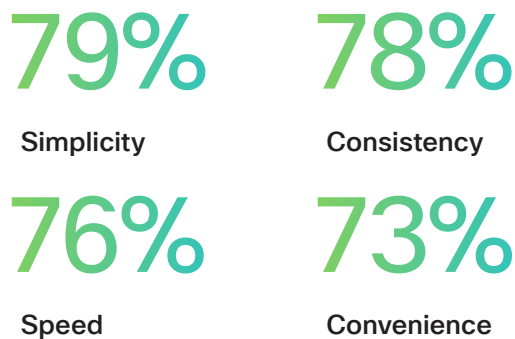
A 25–34-year-old consumer based in the UK

# Resolution: the cornerstones of CX success

Solving customer problems, answering queries, and being proactive in updating customers on services and products are the cornerstones of a great CX.

That’s why they’re the first crucial factor in the CX trilemma: **Resolution**.

There were four clear areas that consumers identified as either extremely or very important:



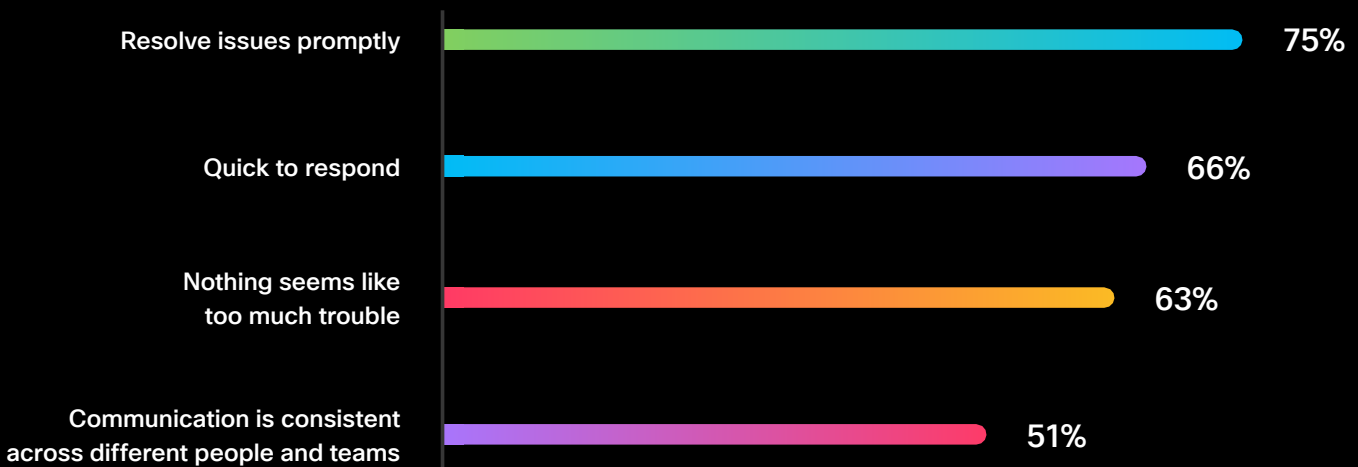
It can be tempting to see a fast resolution as a successful one - as this is often the key metric for organizations. But there’s more to it than just acting fast; brands also need to deliver a consistent level of service, offer convenient and open communication channels, and make it as easy as possible for customers to engage with service channels.

Excelling in all these areas is vital to acquiring and retaining customers:

- 75% say they’d definitely return to a company in the future if it resolved their issues promptly
- 66% say the same for companies that are quick to respond
- 63% say they’ll return to companies where ‘nothing seems like too much trouble’

## Factors that would influence you to use the same company again

(fig.3)



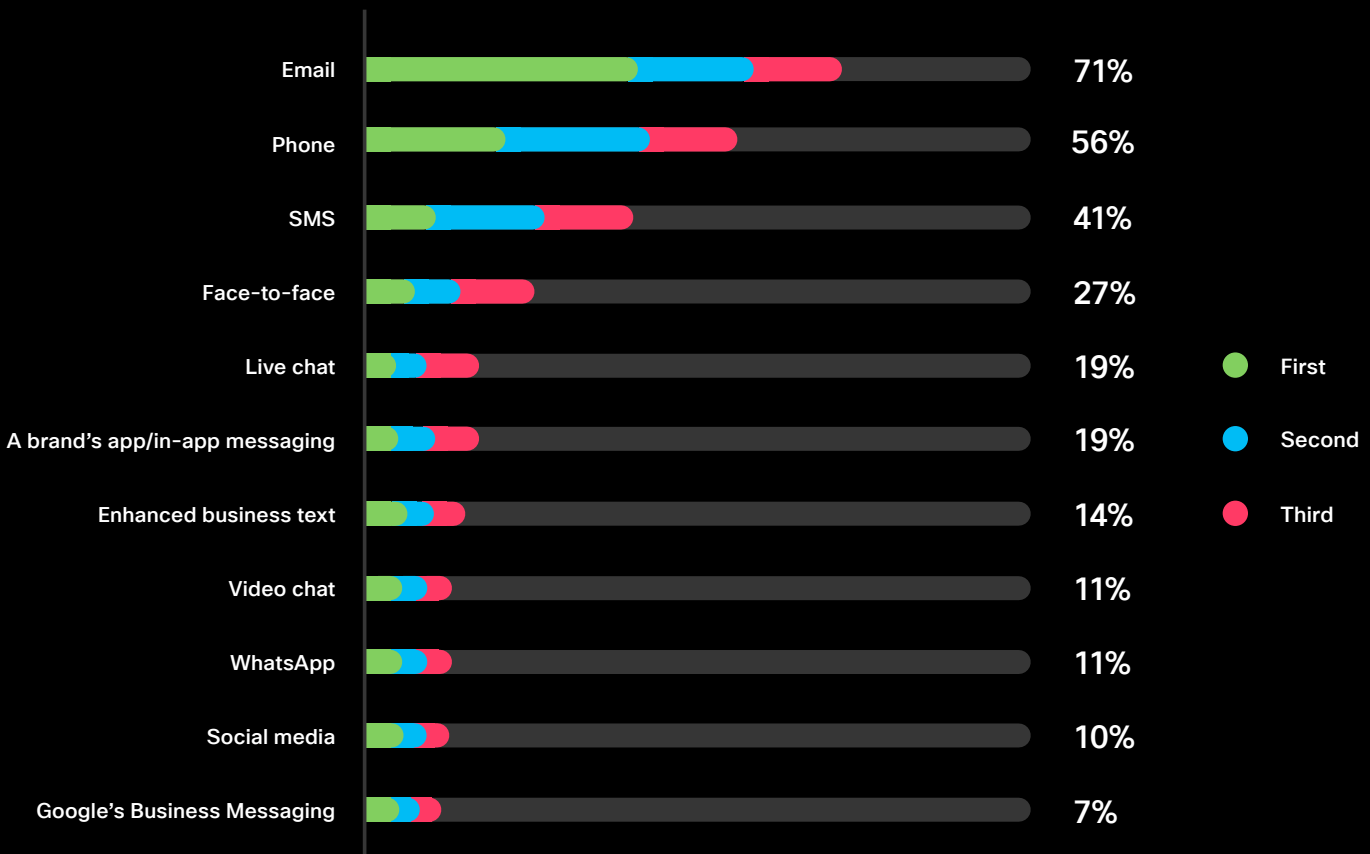
## Great resolution has different definitions across different channels

The trouble with understanding what great resolution looks like is that it doesn't have a single definition. What great looks like can shift depending on the channels you use to communicate with customers.

When contacting a business, 67% put the phone in their top three preferred channels, right next to email at 64%. However, the phone shifts down to second place when a business contacts the customer: 56% put the phone in their top three channels in this context, with 71% opting for email.

## Three most preferred methods when a business contacts you

(fig.4)



“I recently ordered some vinyl records but they arrived extremely warped. They had an online process for filing a claim. It was pretty easy, and soon after, I got an automated response that they were sending a replacement. I would definitely use the company again.”

### A 45-54-year-old consumer based in the USA

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Our survey respondents also show how different channels support the key elements of successful resolution:

#### **Simplicity**

82% say they prefer email as it's easy. 82% feel the same about live chat. And 75% prefer the simplicity of in-app messaging.

#### **Speed**

60% prefer live chat when they want a quick response. 55% say the same for face-to-face communications, and 51% enjoy the speed of video chat. Digital channels rank highly for speed as well, with 46% appreciating rapid responses via messaging apps.

#### **Convenience**

74% prefer email as it's 'convenient for any time of day or night.' 67% prefer live chat for the same reason, and 66% prefer in-app messaging. Other digital channels score well for convenience, including SMS/Verified SMS (48%) and video chat (43%).

While individual channels can help you deliver speed or convenience, and others can bring simplicity or consistency, you need to offer consumers a range of channels to deliver all four elements of successful resolution simultaneously.

Whatever mix of channels you decide to adopt, it's worth making the most of a communications platform to help you centrally navigate the channel complexity. These platforms support intelligent automation and extensive channel management in order to help you deliver high levels of speed, consistency, and convenience. While automation is possible using more conventional channels (e.g., Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and callback systems on phone lines), newer digital channels have more advanced features that support seamless automation across a broad range of use cases, and can generally offer a superior customer experience.

# Rapport: creating the emotional connection

While the technical, hard side of resolution is vital, great CX also has a softer, empathetic side. This empathy is often forgotten as organizations focus on driving improvements to response times.

This is the second ‘R’ of the CX trilemma: **Rapport**.

Many survey respondents identified how issues with the ‘human’ side of communications (such as a lack of empathy and honesty or not understanding frustrations) can lead to poor customer experiences that put them off a brand for good.

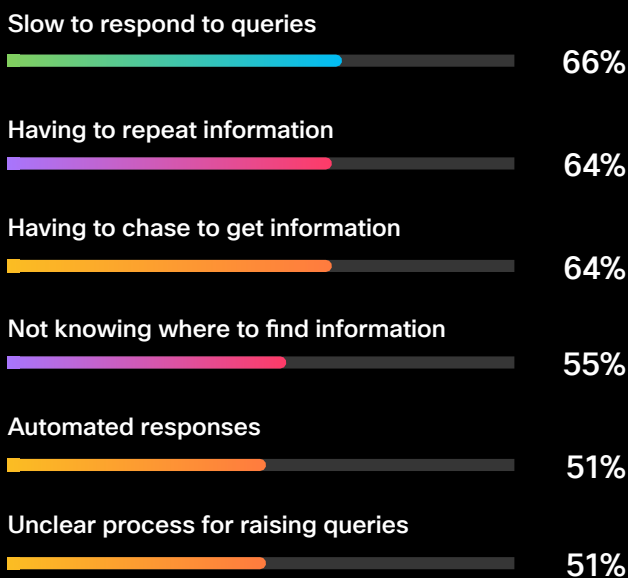
For example, when asked about the factors leading to poor CX:

- 64% say ‘having to repeat information to different teams and people’
- 64% say ‘having to chase to get information’

Missing these softer elements can harm the rapport between consumers and brands, but it also has a tangible effect on the bottom line. When asked what they do after a bad experience, 64% of consumers say they stop buying products or services from that brand, and 51% say they complain to the company and seek compensation for poor service – *fig.6*. Both situations lead to direct financial loss.

## Factors of a poor customer service experience

(fig.5)



## Actions likely to take after a bad customer experience

(fig.6)





The other responses we see also have an indirect impact on potential revenue opportunities - *fig. 6*:

- 59% say they tell friends and family, leading to word-of-mouth publicity that tarnishes brand reputation
- 40% say they leave a bad review, and 22% say they complain publicly on social media, negatively affecting a brand's online image

The key to avoiding these types of negative experiences is to develop relationships with your customers based on empathy and understanding.

But while building deeper, more empathetic interactions into your customer journeys is crucial, it can be an uphill battle depending on the communications channels you and your customers primarily use. For example, many two-way communication channels enable more human interactions that are fantastic for building rapport between customers and brands, but these can be difficult to scale and less convenient than automated, one-way communications.

Adopting a blend of channels and truly understanding customer preferences can help organizations strike the right balance.

**In the survey, we asked consumers what defined a great customer experience. Here's what they had to say: Great customer experiences start with...**



“Listening to the customer and not reading from a script. Being honest if they don't know the answer, but refer the customer to someone who can help.”



“Not badgering you to buy products, letting you know what they're doing, and following up with written communication.”



“When service agents are attentive to your needs and questions, and are knowledgeable about all the products and services the company provides.”

We asked respondents their top reasons for preferring to communicate with businesses over certain channels and found that:

- 54% prefer face-to-face contact as it creates a good relationship with a brand
- 43% feel the same way about video chat
- And 28% say the same of phone calls

It's clear that consumers are more likely to feel a rapport with businesses when they can see and talk with company representatives directly. This might explain why fewer respondents find digital channels like live chat (13%) create a good relationship with a brand.

The question then is, if you want to give consumers the convenience of digital channels, how do you also bring empathy to those digital interactions?

## Reasons for preferred method to contact a business

(fig.7)

(% pulled out are the highest per row)



The answer is to deploy the right channel at the right time - and be quick to move customers to a different channel when appropriate. With advanced tools like Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Natural Language Understanding (NLU), you can automatically identify and interpret customer reactions to know precisely when it's time to shift to a different channel.

For example, while the likes of live chat are appropriate for frequently asked questions and simpler queries and questions, a customer complaint may not land as well on a text-based channel. If agents and customers are both

able to seamlessly move the conversation to another, more personal channel (without having to repeat any information), you create an opportunity to build more meaningful connections and better solve any issues the customer might have.

This helps you get the best of both worlds: with the convenience of automated, always-on digital channels, but with the option to seamlessly transfer to synchronous conversations with a live agent where appropriate.



# Relevance: communicate the way customers want

The final and increasingly important element of the CX trilemma is: **Relevance**.

This is about delivering the right experiences, to the right customer, in a way that’s meaningful to them.

There are two critical elements to delivering relevant communications:

1. Communicating with customers on the channels they want to use
2. Delivering relevant, personalized communications while keeping customer data safe

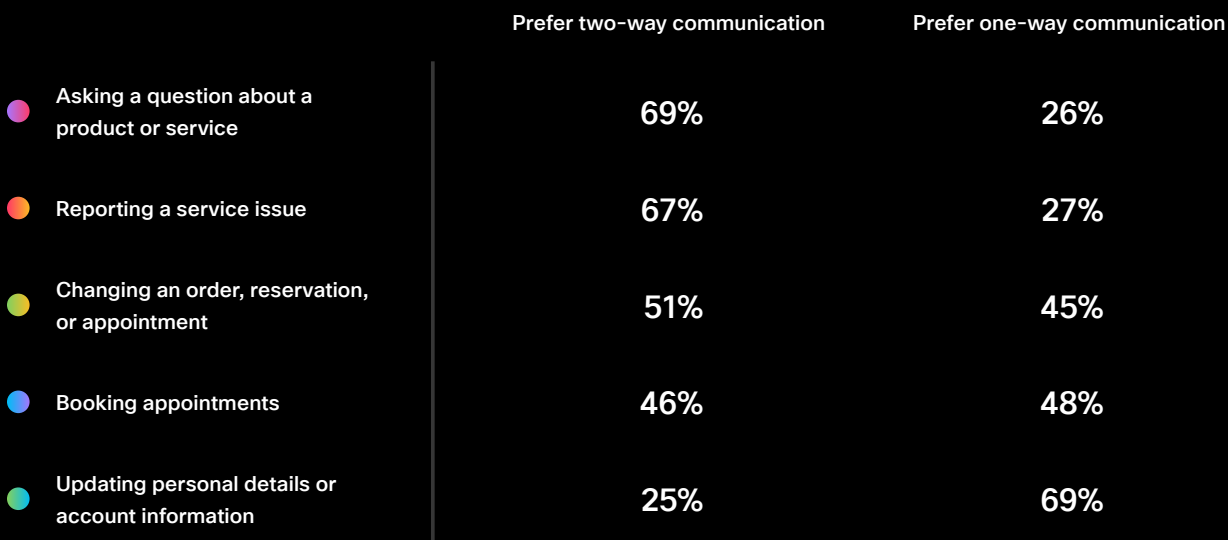
To achieve this first element of relevant communications, you need to understand how customers prefer to communicate with brands.

Do they prefer one-way communications like text messages or two-way channels like the phone and face-to-face? The answer is mixed and quick to change depending on context. When a customer contacts a brand:

- 55% want two-way communications, while 37% say they’re happy to read a one-way communication (as long as they get the answers they need), and 8% say they don’t know
- However, among those that say they typically use digital channels, 46% prefer one-way and self-service channels

## The preference also shifts based on why a brand and consumer are communicating

(fig.8)



It also varies significantly for situations where a business contacts a consumer.

While many prefer one-way communications when a company notifies them about something, some notifications are better done on a two-way channel. We saw several respondents prefer two-way communications when hearing about service updates (43%) and security updates (49%) as it gives them an opportunity to respond to businesses.

To add yet further granularity, the things that consumers find frustrating about communicating with brands differs based on whether they contact the business, or a business contacts them:

- 44% say that any difficulty in unsubscribing from unwanted communications is one of their top three frustrations when a business contacts them
- 29% express similar frustration when they're contacted through a channel they don't think they've agreed to use

When it comes to a consumer contacting a business, the top frustrations are - *fig.9*:

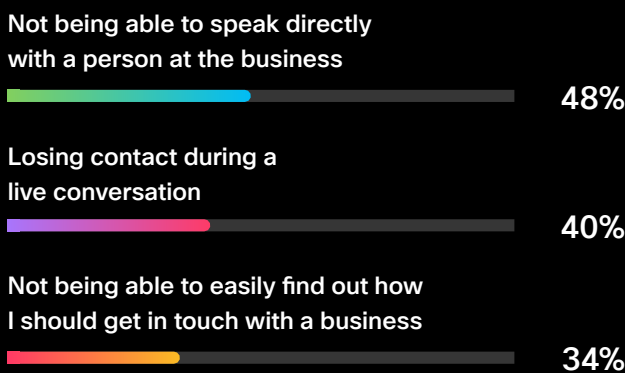
- Not being able to speak directly to a person (48%)
- Losing contact during a live conversation (40%)

With such differences in preference across the board, it's clear that relying on a standardized approach and a single channel will fail to satisfy your customers across all their interaction scenarios.

Only with an end-to-end customer journey approach, a mindset that pushes the boundaries of CX, and the use of a broad mix of channels can you communicate with customers in the most consistent and relevant way.

## Top 3 most frustrating scenarios when contacting a business

(fig.9)



(fig.10)



## Delivering relevant, personalized communications while keeping customer data safe

The second key element to offering relevant communications is about what you communicate rather than how you do it. Consumer responses to our research have shown just how important it is that the brands they interact with deliver relevant, personalized communications:

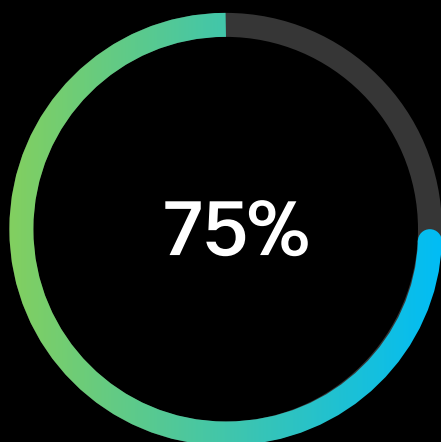
- 67% say that relevant communications (recognizing previous interactions and preferences) are extremely or quite important
- 60% say the same about communications that are personalized and tailored to them

Yet, despite this desire for personalized communications, few customers are willing to share their personal data in pursuit of greater personalization:

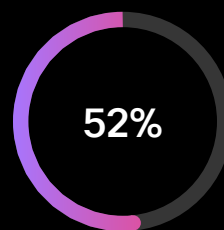
- 75% worry about how much personal data they share with businesses
- Only 59% generally trust businesses to store their personal data securely
- 74% believe sharing personal data benefits organizations over consumers

## People are worried about sharing data and don't understand how it is used

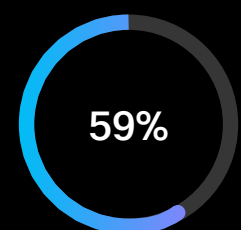
(fig.11)



often worry about how much personal data they have shared with a business, particularly those less familiar with interacting with businesses digitally



typically opt-in to share their data but don't read how it will be used



generally trust businesses are storing their personal data securely

The contradiction between wanting personalized communications and willingness to share data can be explained by the 52% that say they typically opt to share their data but don't read how it will be used. In addition, only 55% say they understand regulations around how businesses can collect, store, and use personal data. The clash between desires for privacy and personalization can be explained by a lack of knowledge, with many consumers reporting they don't understand how data protection regulations work, and what companies can and can't do with consumer data.

While these numbers seem high, they still show that a significant proportion of consumers do not know how to verify the authenticity of their communications.

We see a small generational split across many of these answers, with Gen Z and Young Millennials generally being more confident in their knowledge on data protection – and more comfortable sharing data in exchange for personalized communications.

**“If I felt a company had misused my data, I would probably quit using that company altogether. They're already profiting from me purchasing their products and services, so I wouldn't like it if they were selling my data.”**

### **A 45-54-year-old consumer based in the USA**

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While brands, of course, can't force consumers to read data privacy policies, they could work to better educate those that don't understand the regulations in place to protect personal data.

Businesses face a similar education challenge around verification and security, with 78% telling us they believe businesses have a higher responsibility than customers to protect personal data.

But when it comes to protecting themselves, consumers lack confidence; while 75% look for signs of verification when communicating with a business, just 55% report knowing what icons and information to look for.

But it's clear that brands communicating across generations must consider educating their customers on security and verification features – and using channels that offer branding, authentication processes, and verification ticks—to help balance consumers' dual desires for data privacy and personalization.

# The rise of digital channels helps solve the CX trilemma

When it comes to meeting the three elements of the CX trilemma head-on, your approach to designing and implementing end-to-end customer journeys and the choice of communication channel is crucial. But there's no one size fits all. You must meet customers on the channels they choose - not the ones that your business is most comfortable with.

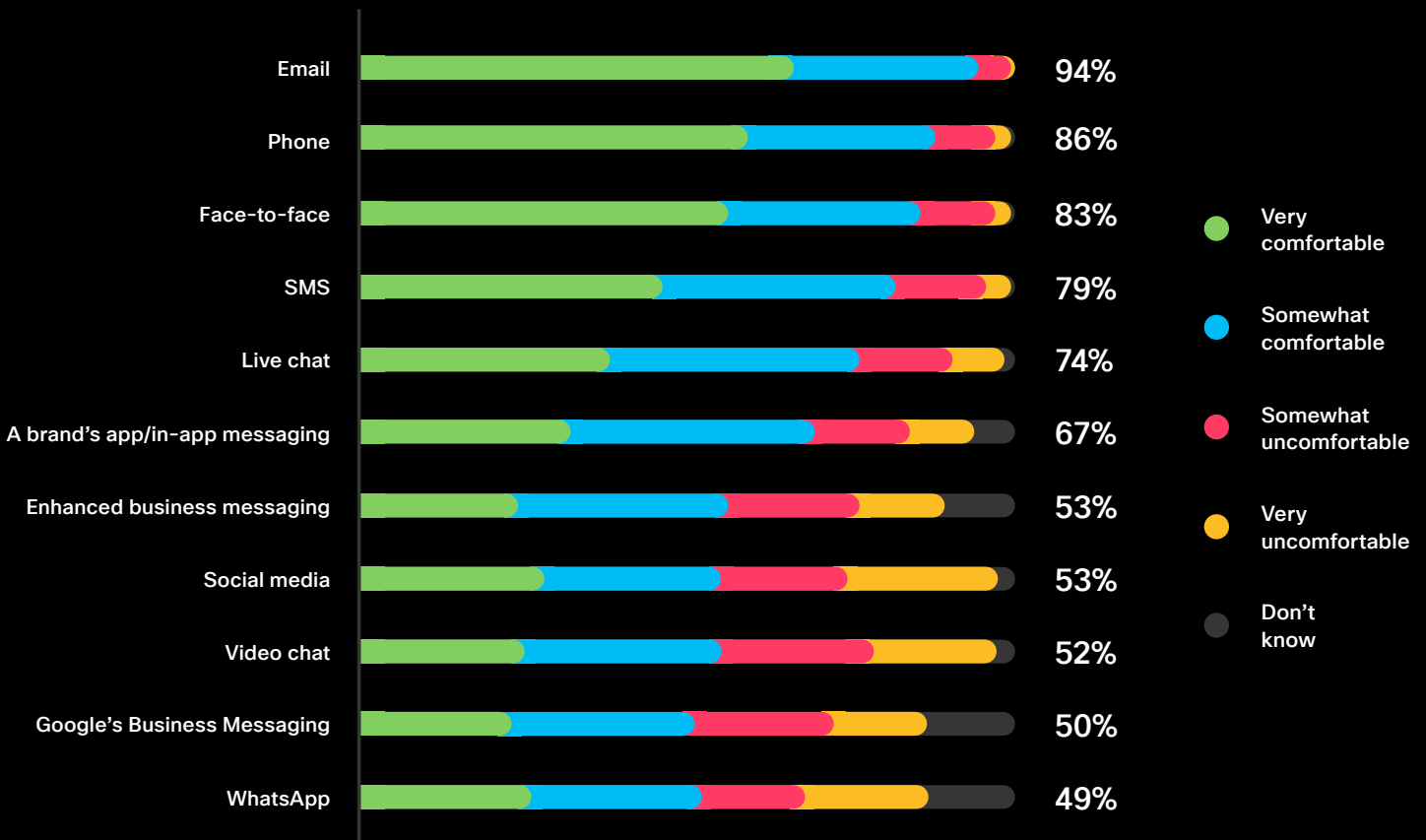
We see consumers want to communicate on their preferred channels clearly in the results. 72% say they

want to choose their channel of preference to speak with a business, while only 21% are happy to let the business decide the communication channel. Nearly half of consumers say not being able to talk to a company through their chosen channel leads to a poor CX.

The challenge is that the preferred channel shifts depending on the age of the consumer and use cases across different industries.

## Level of comfort interacting with a business on a channel

(fig.12)





“My preferred method is live chat because you’re not having to go through a series of selections on your phone and then waiting in a queue for someone to answer.”

A 41-55-year-old consumer based in the UK

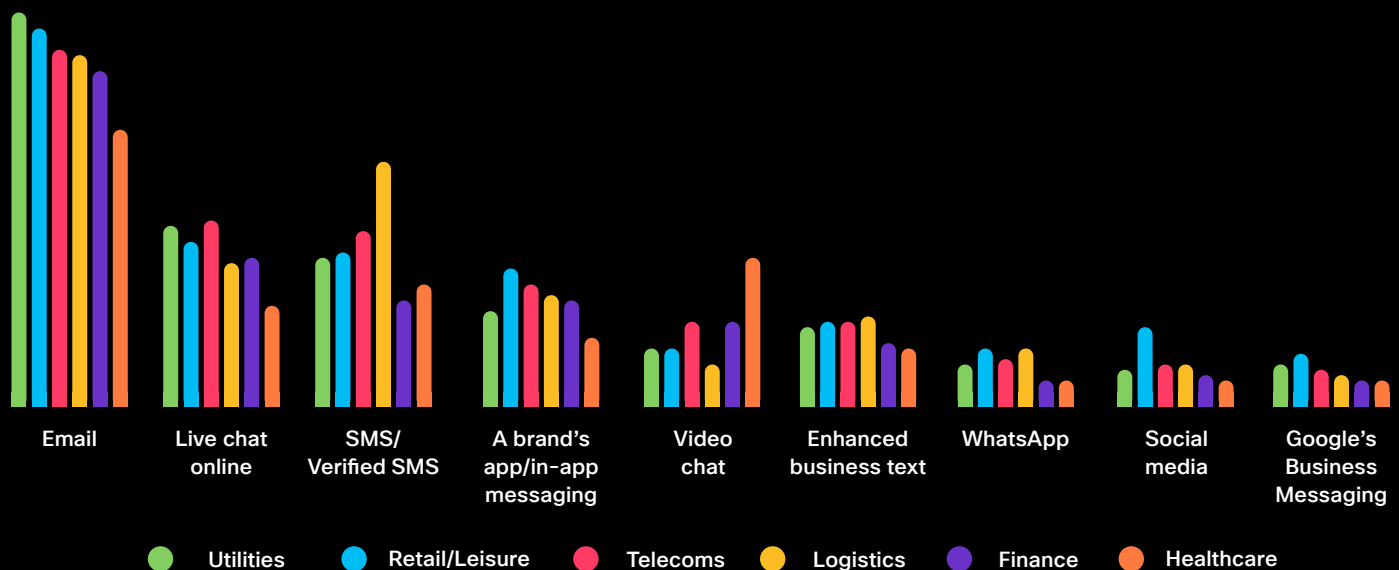
For example, while a significant majority are very or somewhat comfortable using email (94%) and phone (86%) compared to more modern digital channels like WhatsApp (49%) and video chat (52%), this shifts for younger generations.

76% of Gen Z and 77% of Young Millennials report feeling comfortable with social media channels - a far higher percentage than other generations.

As younger generations grow older and acquire more purchasing power over time, their preference for modern digital channels will make it vital for businesses to communicate through social media, WhatsApp, Apple Messages for Business, and other modern messaging platforms.

## Most appropriate channels of communication per industry (those that typically use digital interactions)

(fig.13)



But it isn't all just a case of age demographics. To add further complexity, consumers also see different channels as more or less appropriate for different use cases across industries – *fig.13*:

- While 46% felt SMS/Verified SMS messages are appropriate for shipping and delivery notifications, just 20% saw the channel as suitable for communications from financial services providers
- 28% see video chat as suitable for healthcare, but only 11% consider it appropriate for utilities companies

“If you're on the phone with a live person or in person, it takes up more of your time. So the convenience and accessibility of digital channels is really important.”

A 34-40-year-old consumer based in the USA

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And even for respondents that say they're happy to use digital channels, many only feel comfortable using them in specific ways - *fig.14*:

- 11% will use social media to ask about a product or service, but only 3% feel comfortable using social channels to change an order, reservation, or appointment
- 20% see SMS as suitable for booking an appointment, but only 13% see the channel as appropriate for updating personal details or account information

To add yet more granularity, different generations feel comfortable using different channels for different service needs:

- 19% of both Gen Z and Young Millennials would use social media to ask questions compared to just 4% of Baby Boomers
- 71% of Gen Z would use some form of digital communications channel to manage orders, reservations, and appointments compared to only 32% of baby boomers
- 62% of Baby Boomers are happy to book appointments over the phone compared to only 35% of Gen Z and 31% of Young Millennials

For organizations serving multiple demographics or offering a diverse set of services, one channel simply can't give every customer a satisfying journey.

## Most preferred channels of communication per scenario (those that typically use digital interactions)

(fig.14)



“I want something that’s in real-time and allows me to deal with an inquiry or problem in one go, and get closure without having to wait for them to get back to me.”

A 34-40-year-old consumer based in the USA

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If you want to get serious about CX you need a strong understanding of your customers, what they want to experience, and how this fits with your organization’s business systems and processes.

Your CX strategy will undoubtedly need the support of multiple channels and the ability to navigate the different rules, regulations, and best practices across all of them to support every customer.



# Know your customers, know the technologies available, and solve the CX trilemma

Brands that want to deliver the best customer experiences need to focus on the three elements of the CX trilemma equally. They must deliver rapid resolution, build rapport, and drive relevant experiences at every stage of the customer journey.

But solving this CX trilemma isn't just about getting all three of these components in place. You also have to excel in all three areas to deliver a comprehensive journey that offers every customer the experience they want.

Every generation, industry, and region has its preferences on what channel to use, when to be contacted, and how personalized each message should be. Finding the right communications mix for your audience requires two things:

1. A deep, nuanced understanding of your customers, the interactions they make with your business, and the communications that work best for all of them
2. The technical capabilities and expertise to orchestrate the end-to-end customer journey across multiple channels, so you're always ready to meet your customers on the channel of their choice

The first part comes from your own expertise and knowledge of your customers. The second comes from ensuring you have the right tools at your disposal. While you can support multiple communications channels manually, modern tools like Communications Platform as a Service (CPaaS) solutions make it easier to manage multiple channels, comply with regulations, and deliver a consistent, connected customer experience.

Delivering amazing customer experiences is paramount, as the data proves it isn't just customer satisfaction at stake: your bottom line hangs in the balance too.

Research statistics included in this report have been established from a primary research study commissioned by **imimobile** in November 2021. It was an online study with 2,000+ consumers across the UK and US, all of whom have interacted with customer service in the past 6 months.

January 2022



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