

7 key consumer expectations impacting social media success today

“Social media is fast becoming the place where brands build and maintain relationships with their consumers. Consumers are discovering products and events on social, they’re gathering recommendations and inspiration from people they trust on social, they’re purchasing on social and, surprise surprise, they’re also looking to social for their post-purchase care and support. Entire customer journeys are happening on social media.

No two consumers are the same, and no two customer journeys are the same. Brands need to invest time in understanding what consumers expect from them, so they can guarantee an outstanding customer experience at each and every touch point.”

Shellie Vornhagen
CXO, Emplifi





Introduction

More and more, social media is becoming the gateway that allows consumers to become closer to their favorite brands. In an age where consumers have access to more information and options at their fingertips than ever before, being able to forge deeper relationships with audiences – and to be more than just a product or service provider – is critical.

No two consumers are alike. It's time for brands to ditch one-size-fits-all CX strategies, and truly understand what their audiences need and expect from their social media experiences and adapt to them, at every stage of the customer journey, from product research to purchase to service and support.

This report explores what consumers expect from their social media experiences and brand interactions, and also how social media marketers can adapt their strategies to better meet these expectations. It will also highlight any significant differences in consumer expectations across age groups (Gen X vs. Millennials vs. Gen Z).

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.



Social media platform preferences change across age groups

For any social media strategy to excel, it's crucial to first understand where and how your different audiences are spending their time. With the amount of social media platforms out there, it's essential to focus your time, effort, and resources on the ones your audiences are truly using.

Overall, YouTube (71%) and Facebook (67%) see the highest daily usage levels of all the social platforms. Digging a little deeper, we begin to see how preferences vary between age groups:

- Instagram and TikTok are notably more popular among younger age groups, particularly Gen Z (65% and 51%, respectively).
- Facebook is notably more popular among Gen X (76%) than Gen Z (43%).
- YouTube (71%) and Twitter (28%) see similar engagement across all age groups

These findings underscore the importance of factoring in age when shaping buyer personas and CX initiatives into your social media strategies.

Notable differences in daily platform usage vs. other age groups

Gen X: 76% Facebook

Gen Z: 65% Instagram
51% TikTok

Similar daily usage across age groups: YouTube and Twitter

Q. How often, if at all, do you use these social media platforms?

What makes for amazing CX? Quick response times and 24/7 availability.

It's critical that brands understand what truly delights their audiences and consumers in order to meet and exceed expectations with every interaction — from questions to complaints.

To no surprise, today's consumers want the information they need how they want it, when they want it. Traditional business hours are a thing of the past.

When asked to pick one item that drives positive brand perceptions the most, consumers rated **24/7 customer service availability (29%)** and **quick response times (28%) as the top two items**, showing the critical role of a solid, always-on customer care infrastructure on all channels.

So, what role can a strong social media strategy play in meeting these expectations? First, we must understand how consumers are using social media today, and what they expect from their favorite brands on this channel.

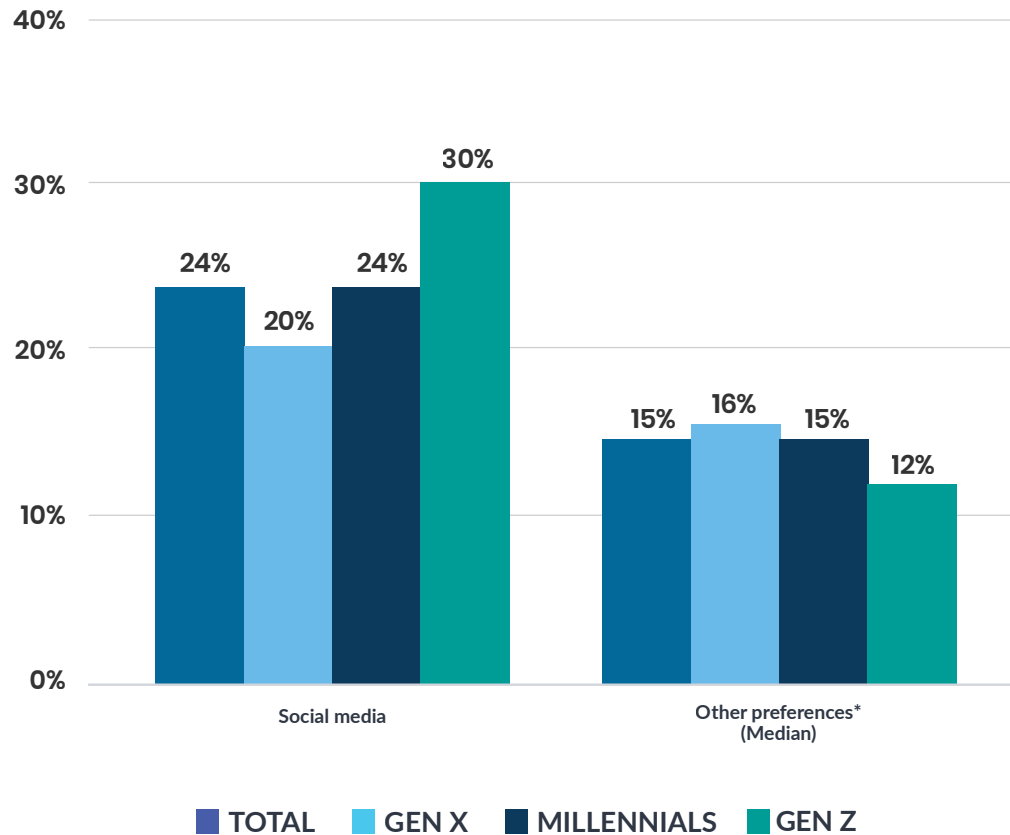


feel customer service quality has a larger impact on brand perception

than if brands “share my values” (19%), “provide additional recommendations” (13%), or “ask for my feedback” (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)

Preferences for communicating with brands



*Combines "Visit a physical store," "Telephone," "Email," "Website chat," and "Website contact form." Median data shown.

Consumers (especially younger ones) prefer to communicate with brands on social media

If given only one choice, consumers want to communicate with brands via social media above all other channels.

This is especially true among Gen Z consumers, who strongly prefer to engage brands on social media than other age groups, compared to other methods like contacting them by phone, email, or visiting a physical store.

Social media marketers can embrace audience preferences to not only curate a strong social media presence, but to extend CX efforts into their social strategy.

Responding quickly to messages and social posts with brand mentions is one way that marketers can quickly up their social media game.

2 in 3 consumers want to use social media at key points in the purchase process

Over 4 in 10 US consumers already engage with brands on social media during the purchase process, whether it's while researching products, to make a purchase, or to get customer support post-purchase.

When also asked how they would like to start engaging brands on social media in ways they are not currently doing, the findings show **the growing role of social media in these key stages of the customer journey** (see right).

These findings suggest that CX on social media can be enhanced by dedicating the resources and strategy to support continuous customer communication.

If brands don't make themselves readily available to answer questions and offer support, their customers will switch to competing brands that do.

How consumers **currently use** (or would like to use) social media platforms to engage with brands



68% Ask questions before making a purchase



64% Make a purchase



59% Get post-purchase customer support

Q. "Do you currently use social media platforms to engage with brands in any of the following ways?" 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?"

Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok the biggest sources of purchase inspiration

A highly targeted approach to social media marketing is no longer an option – it's a necessity.

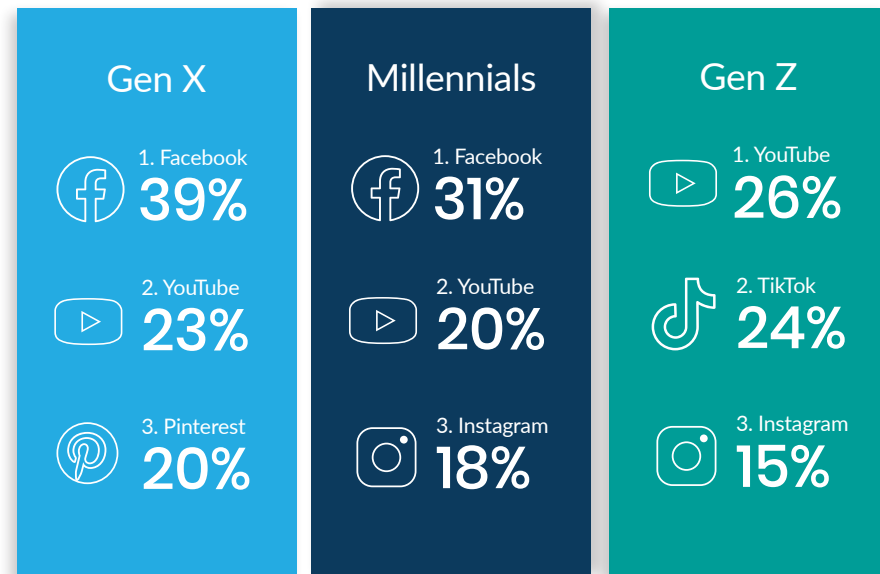
Whether inspiration is driven by ambassadors, influencers, branded content, or paid ads, marketers need to know which channels to focus their time and money on.

Knowing where their customers turn for purchase inspiration will help marketers shape social strategy, and our survey findings show that these can vary based on audience age:

- **Facebook** ranked #1 in terms of purchase inspiration overall, with a notable skew towards older age groups
- **YouTube** ranked highly across all age groups
- Gen Z shoppers gravitate towards **TikTok** significantly more than other groups.

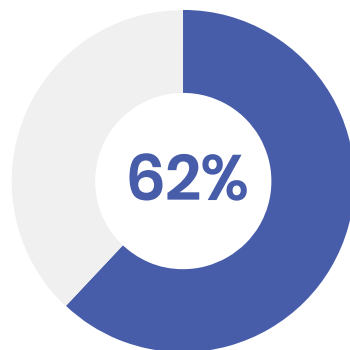
Leveraging your social platforms to build customer relationships and sell products and services in a way that aligns with those expectations will benefit your brand.

Top 3 social media networks for purchase inspiration

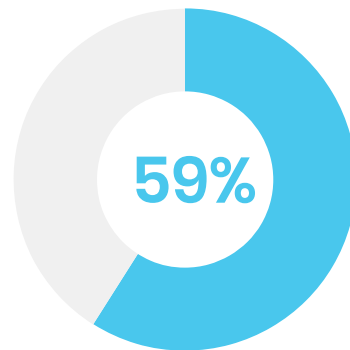


Q. Which of these social media platforms do you get inspiration from for any purchases that you make? Ranked from 1 to 9, with 1 being the platform from which they get the most inspiration. "1" answers shown above.

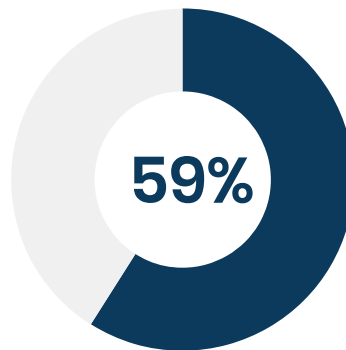
Percent who don't believe they currently receive excellent CX on social media when making a purchase



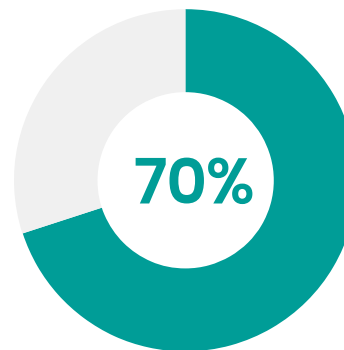
Total



Gen X



Millennials



Gen Z

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)

6 in 10 are underwhelmed with the CX they get on social when making a purchase

Many brands focus their attention on social media around promotion and growing their followers. However, many miss the opportunity to offer customer service on their social platform at another critical moment in the customer journey.

Only about 40% of consumers feel they are receiving excellent CX on social when trying to make a purchase, with Gen Z showing the most frustration in this regard.

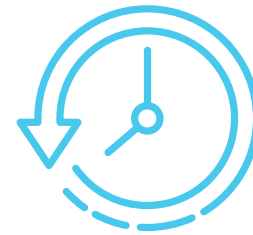
While customer service has traditionally been provided by email, phone, or in-store, needs and expectations are changing. As the data shows, there is a lot of room for improvement, and brands must be equipped and staffed to be able to meet consumers' ever-growing desire for fast and efficient customer service. Otherwise, switching brands or making a purchase elsewhere is easier than ever.

There's a notable gap between expected and actual response times that must be addressed

As seen earlier in this report, receiving high-quality CX and fast response times are top priority items for US consumers when engaging with their favorite brands, especially when they are in the purchase stage.

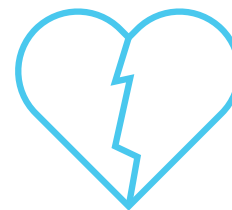
But what exactly do they consider a "good response time?" **52% of consumers surveyed expect to receive a response to their questions within an hour, with 32% expecting to hear back within 30 minutes.** Shockingly, about 20% of consumers report that they typically have to wait at least 24 hours to receive a response.

To meet the demand for fast response times, brands need to adopt an "always on" approach when it comes to social media interactions. This can be achieved with a dedicated staff, that is focused on interacting with customers across social media channels.



52%

of consumers expect to receive a response to their questions within an hour.



39%

report typically having to wait more than two hours to receive a response.

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 "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.?"



Speed, convenience, and engagement are key to social media success

Consumer expectations are always evolving, and, as illustrated by this report, can vary by market and by age group. However, one thing remains constant: consumers want to do what they want, when, where, and how they want to do it.

As consumer expectations and the role of social media in the customer journey continues to grow, social media marketers and managers must continue to find ways to elevate and scale CX across social media channels. This could include AI-driven solutions that can quickly flag high-priority posts and even help identify the content that will resonate most with a brand's audience.



One thing remains constant: consumers want to do what they want, when, where, and how they want to do it.

With the right tools and strategies in place, social media provides an avenue for brands to deliver on ever-expanding customer expectations, and most importantly, to create deeper connections with their customers at a time when switching brands is easier than ever.

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

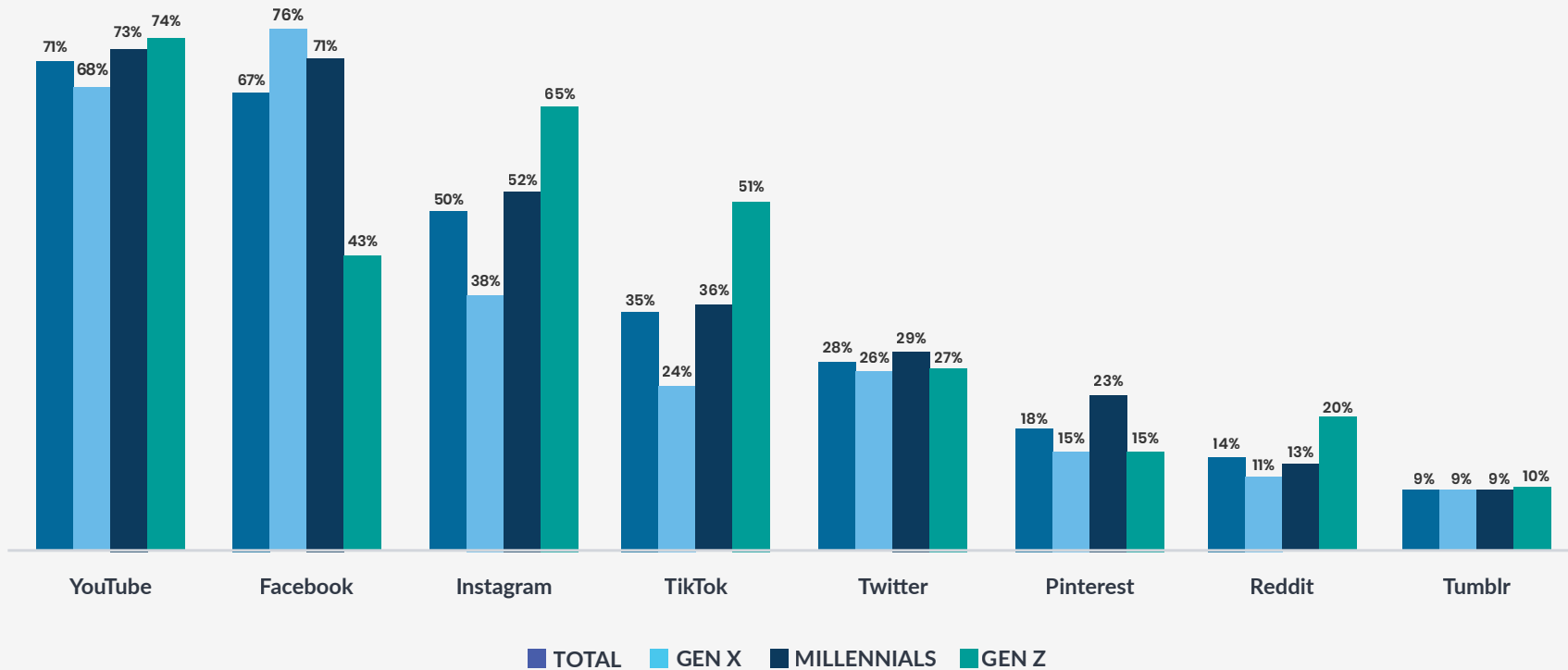
Are you...	
	US
Male	50%
Female	50%
I identify in some other way	<1%
I prefer not to answer	<1%

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

Appendix

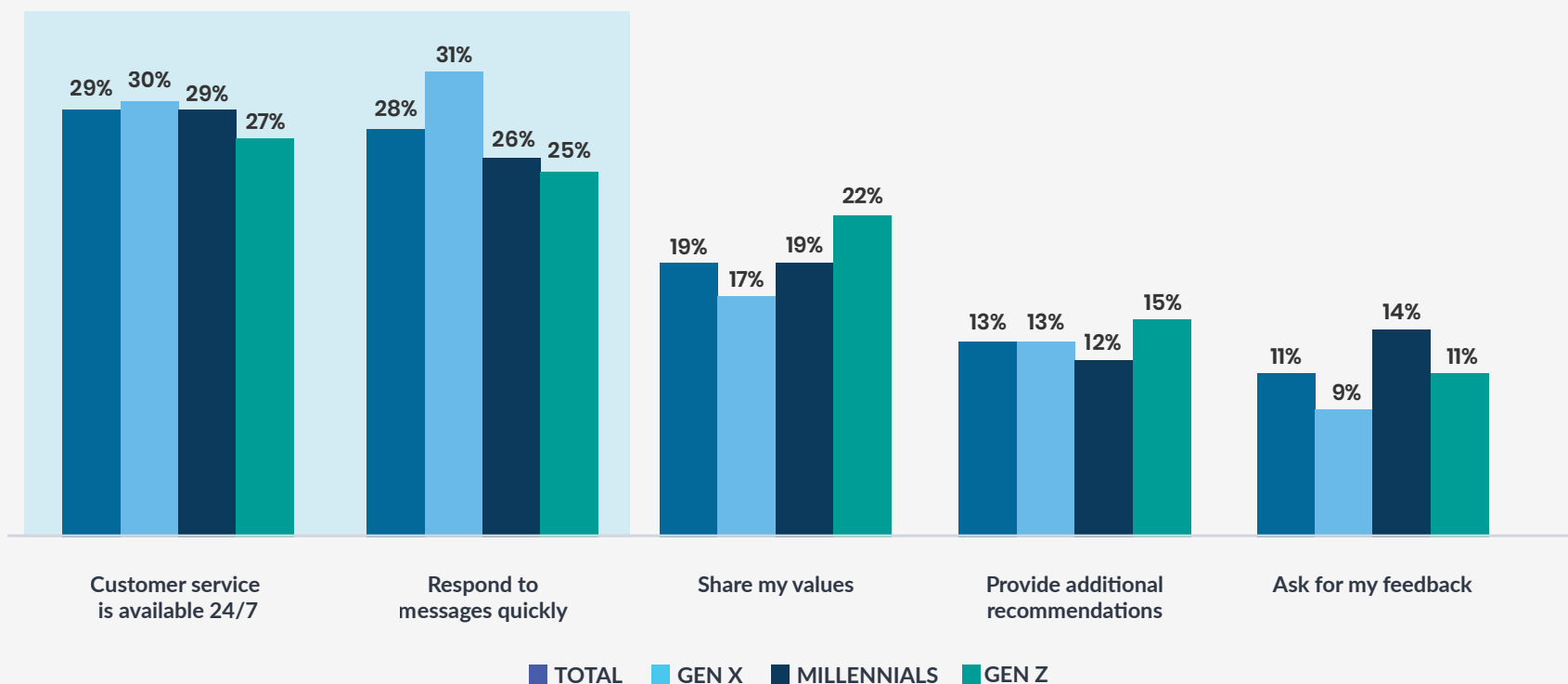


Daily use of social media platforms (for any purpose)



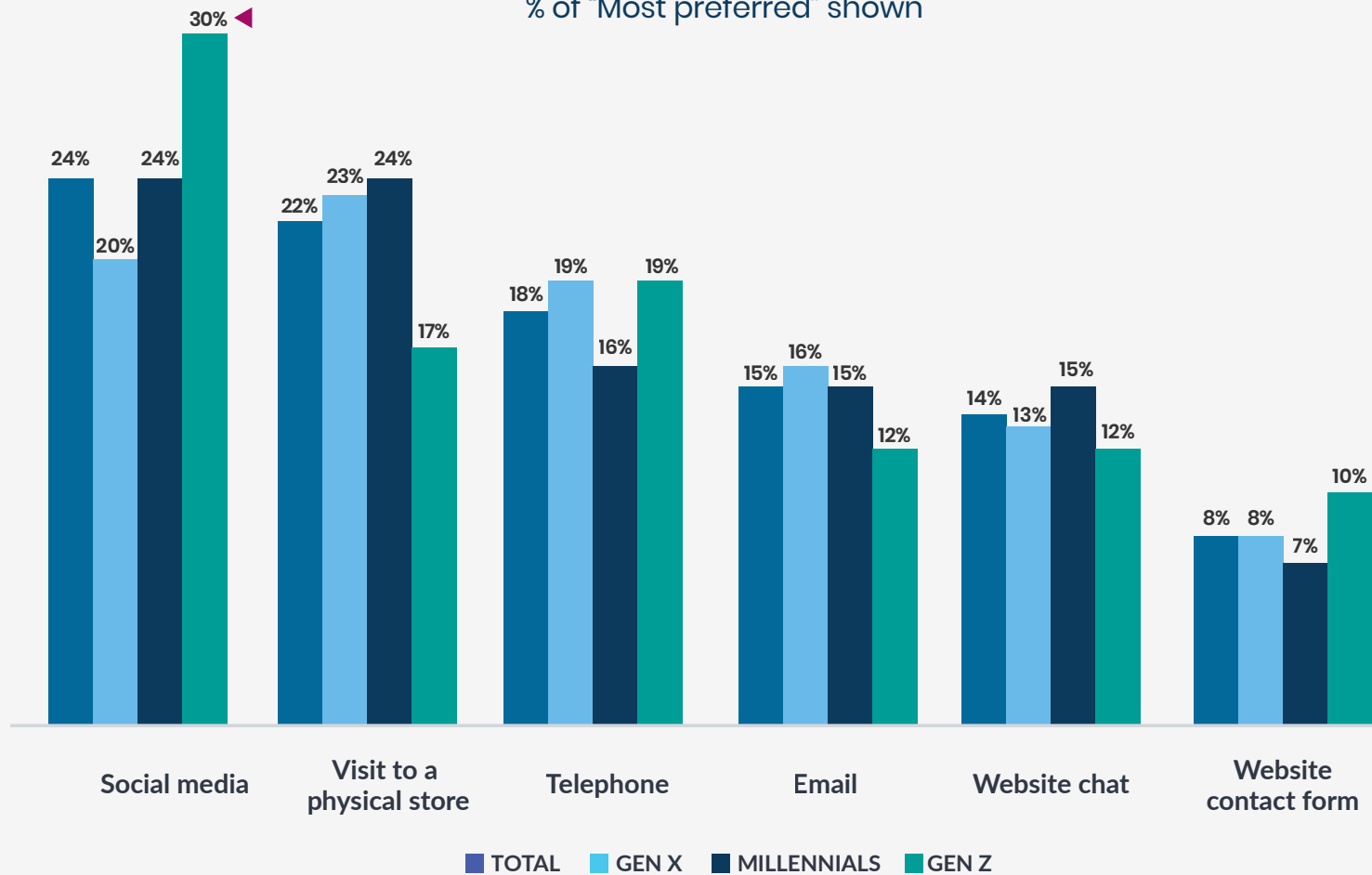
Customer experience examples that make consumers feel **positive** about a brand.

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

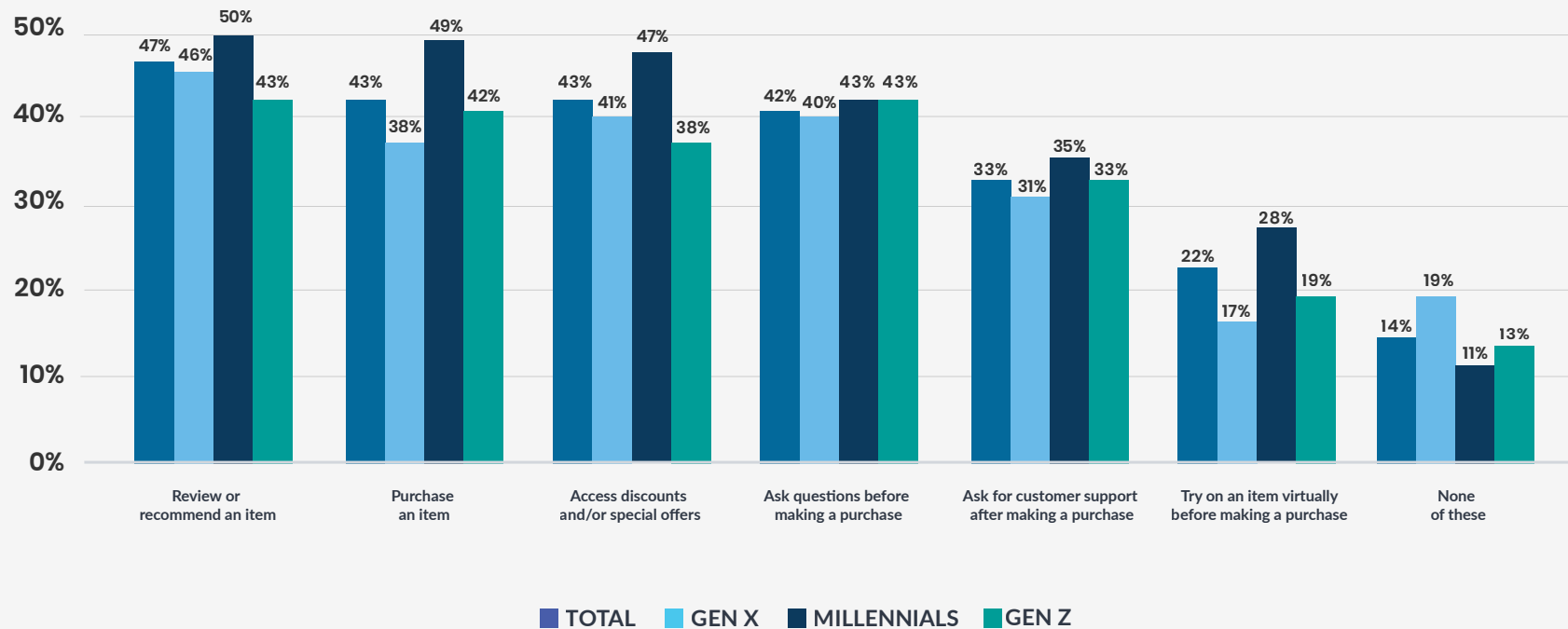


Preference for communicating with brands

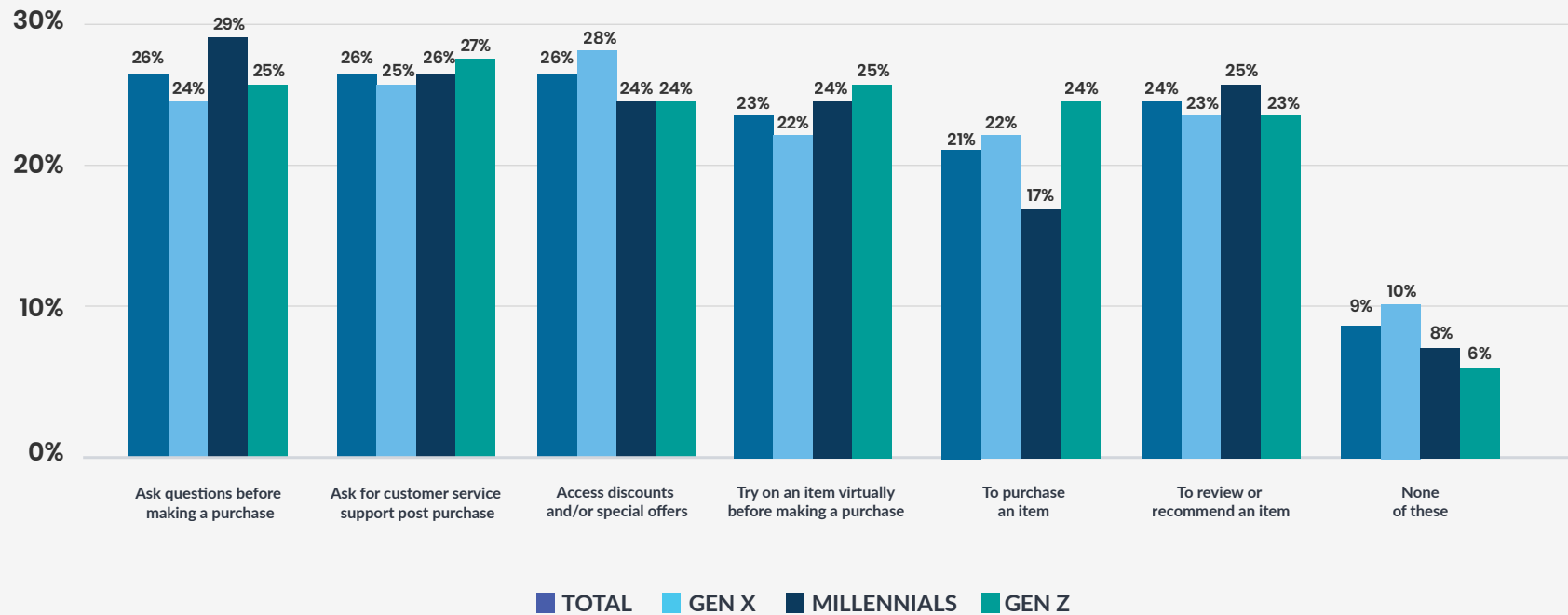
% of "Most preferred" shown



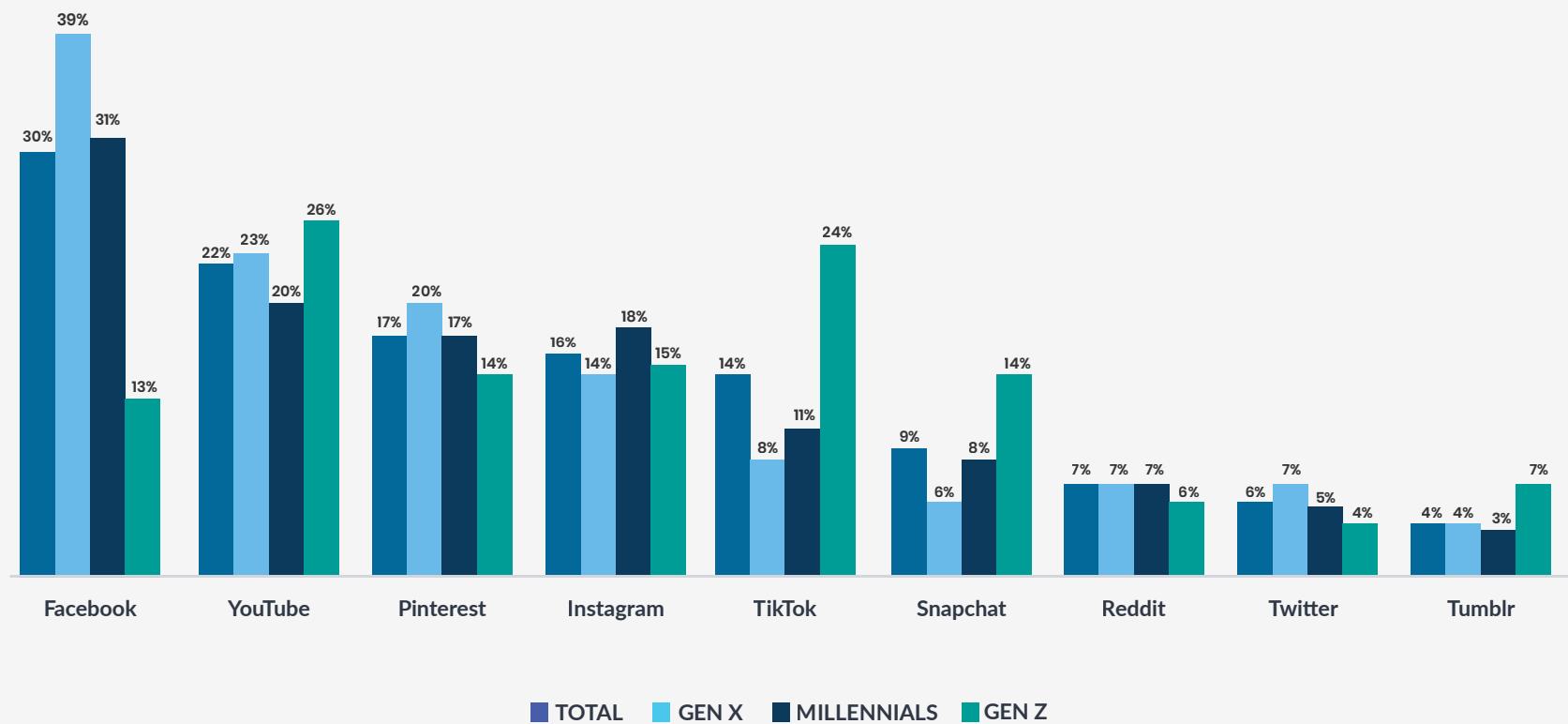
Ways in which consumers currently use social media platforms to engage with brands



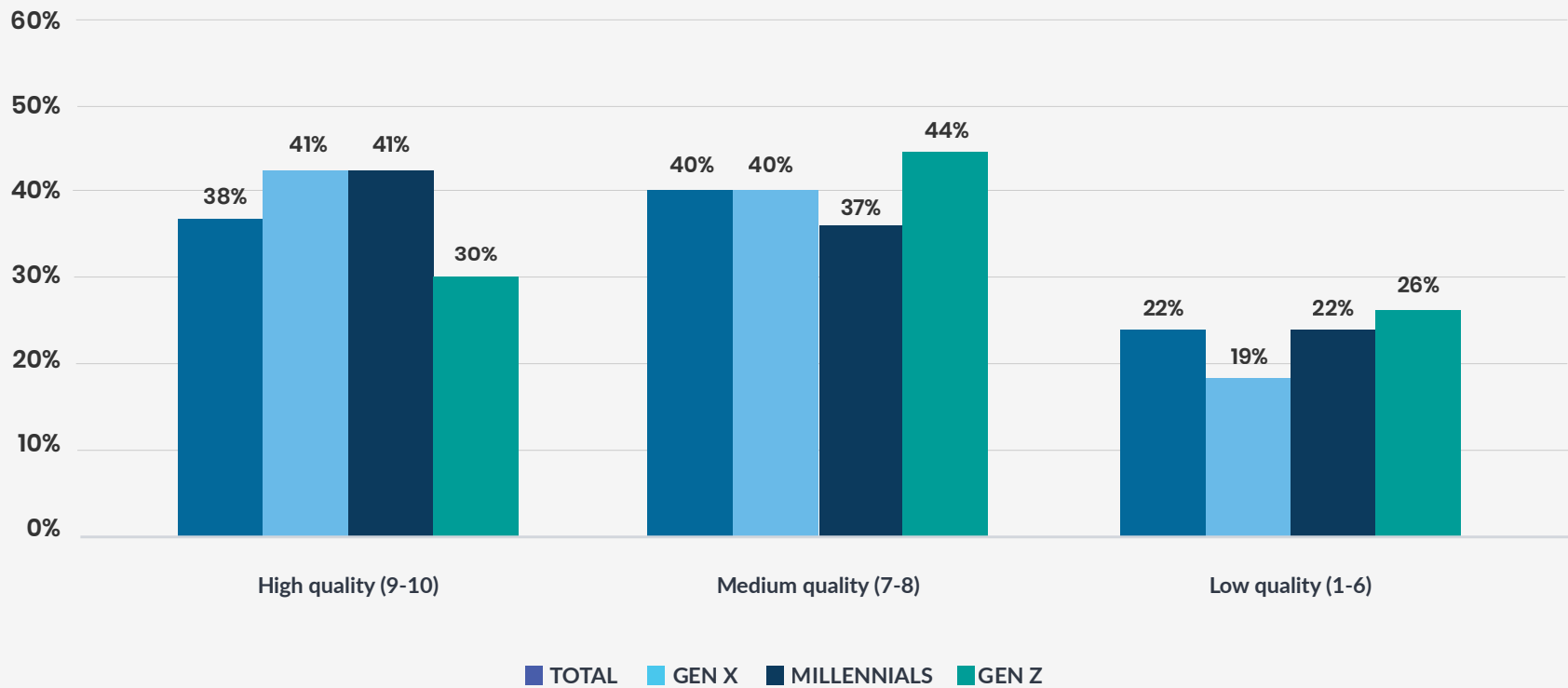
Ways in which consumers would like to use social media platforms to engage with brands (in which they are not doing so currently)



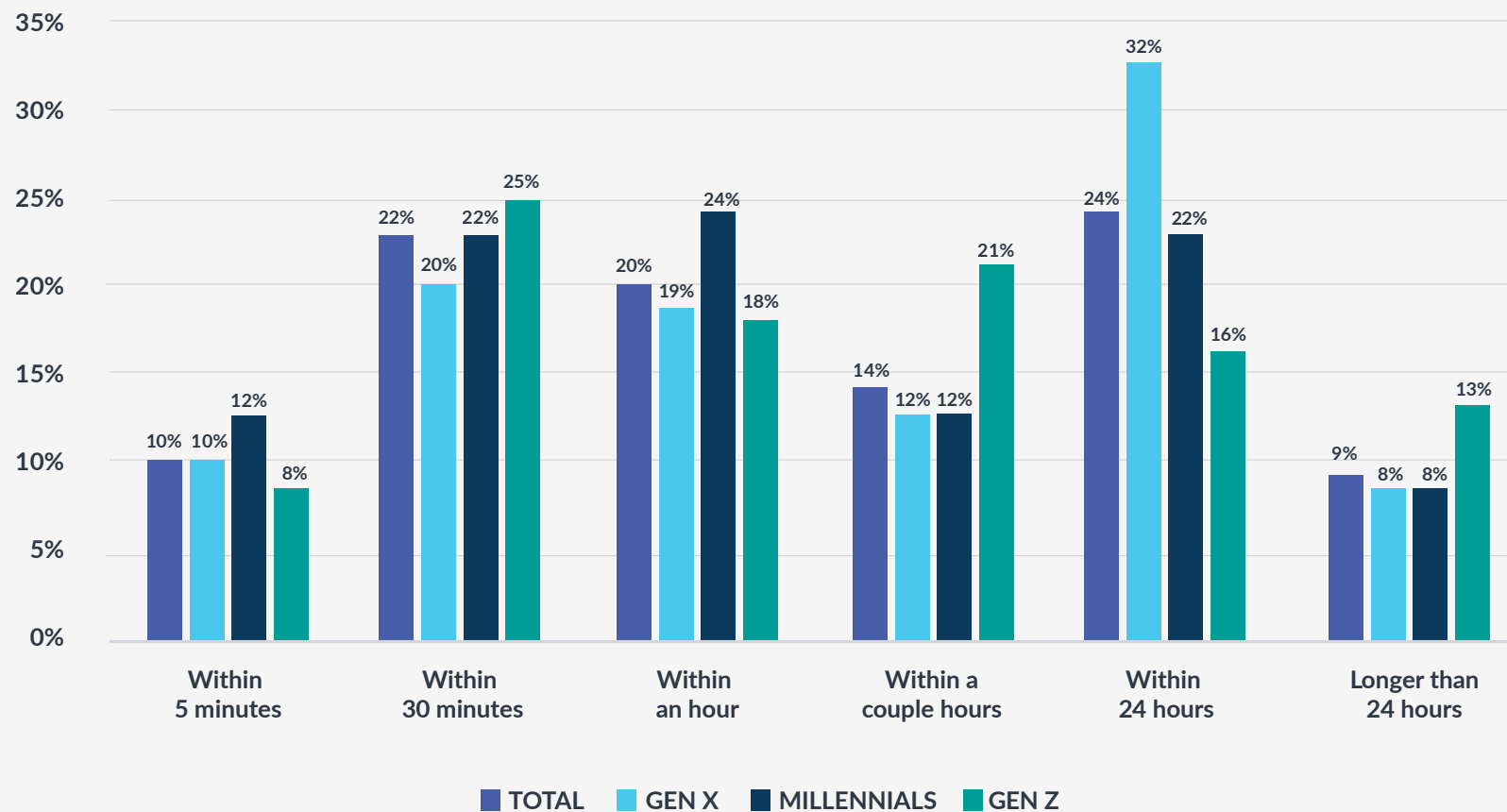
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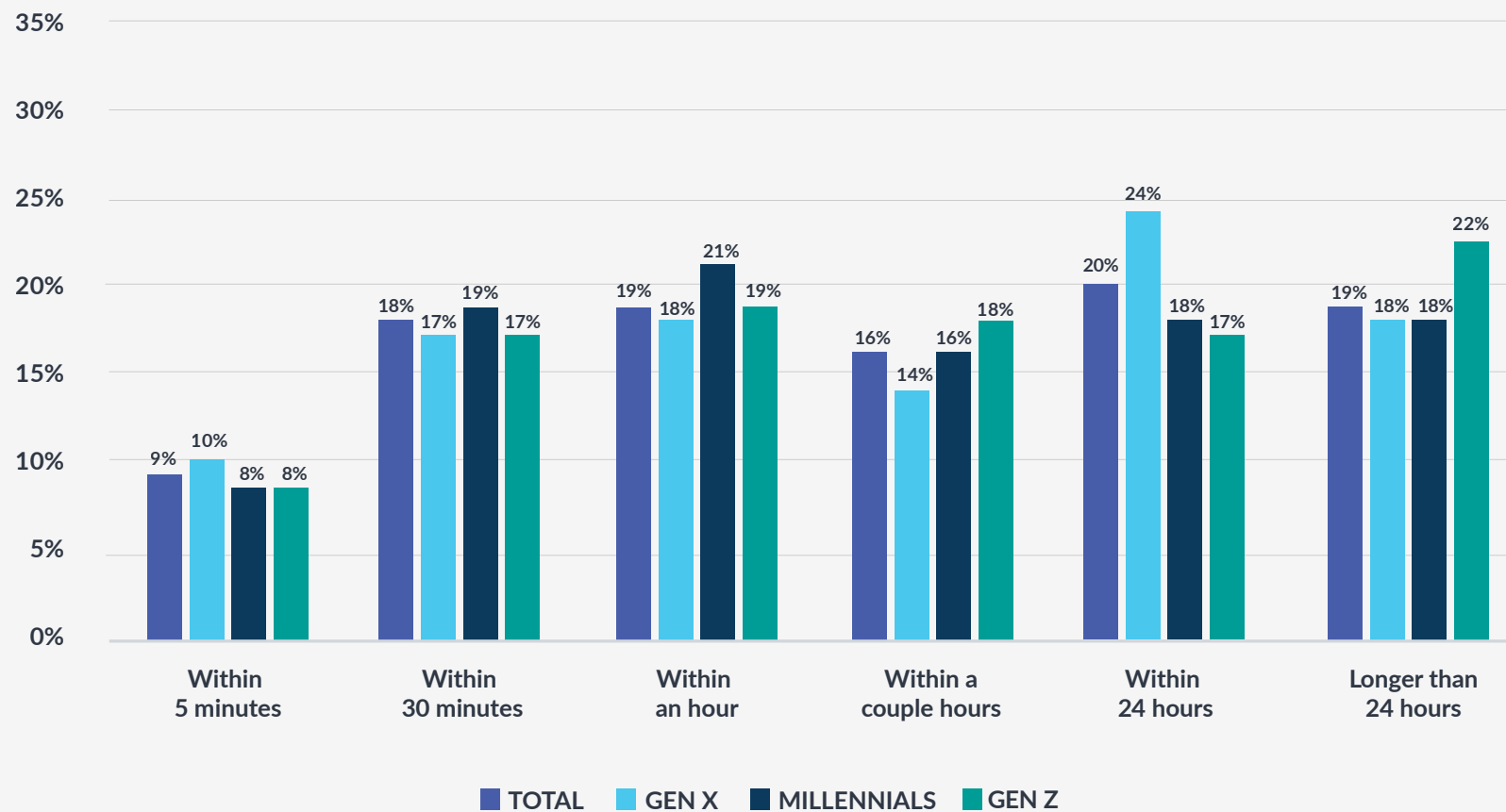
Quality of social media customer service received from brands when making a purchase



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



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

