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Gartner for Customer Service & Support Leaders

Four Data Findings to Inform Your Customer Experience Strategy



Customer service leaders face pressure to reduce costs while improving the customer experience. This research shares four customer behavioral insights to help leaders strengthen CX while pushing efficiency in their channel strategy.

Overview

Key findings

- Customers respond to agent promotion of self-service. Unfortunately, 60% of the time, agents don't mention self-service at all.
- Customers who used the phone in their last service experience are least willing to adopt your generative AI (GenAI) digital assistant.
- Customers unlock more self-service success using third-party platforms, like YouTube and Google Search, compared to your digital channels — and they do not penalize you for the effort they expend using these platforms.
- Younger customers' conversational preference is to type, not to talk to you, even as the smartphone is their device of choice for service.

Recommendations

- Incentivize agents to promote self-service — start by using insights from quality assurance (QA) to coach agents to stop the negative and even neutral comments they make about self-service.
- Encourage customers to use GenAI digital assistants by embedding them in the interactive voice response (IVR) system, where your customers already are. Focused use of the digital assistants gives every customer a chance to self-serve and get routed to live help when needed.
- Prepare for more customer use of third parties by investing in your knowledge base. Top search tools like Google Search are turning into AI answer platforms. Capitalize on this transformation by making sure your customers get the right answers where they are.
- Simplify the service journey by starting all customers in the same conversational interface. An "intelligent front door" can capture intent in text or speech, resolve issues, facilitate transactions or route users to an agent, depending on what's right for the customer.

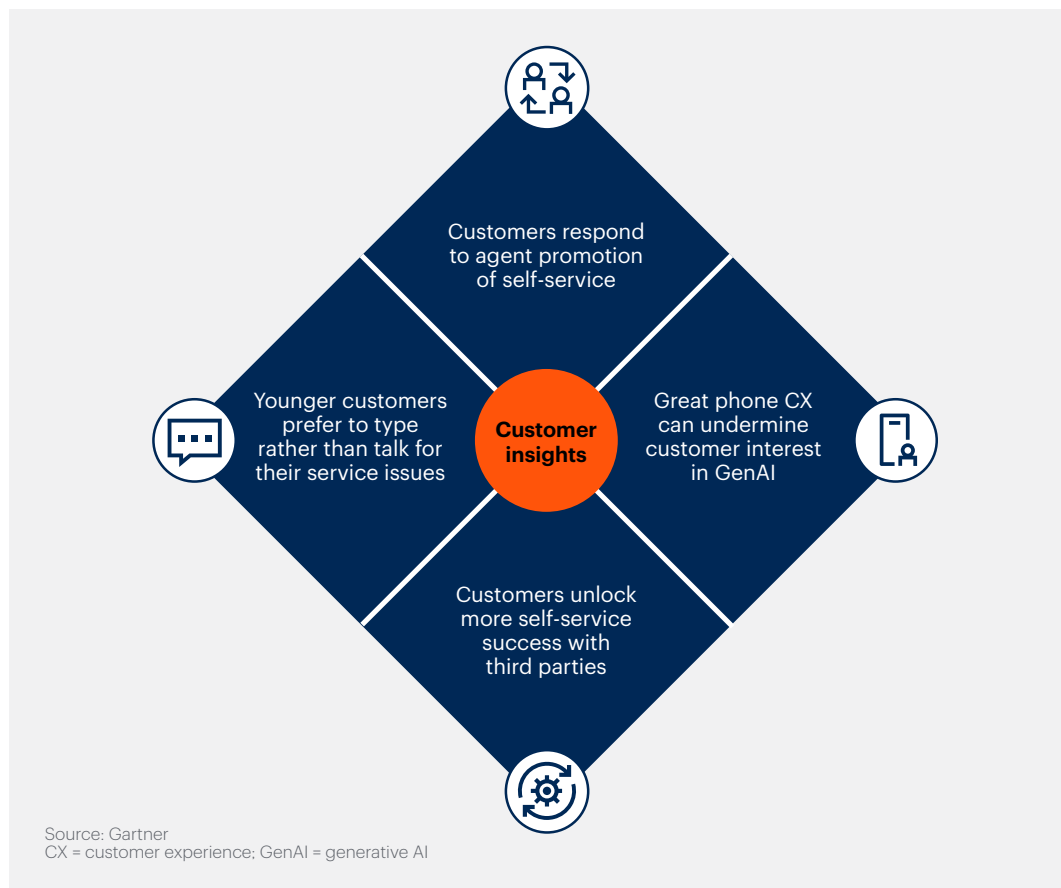
Data Insights

Introduction

Keeping costs under control while improving the customer experience is a perennial concern of service and support leaders. This year, leaders seek to progress their channel strategy while protecting customer experience (CX), knowing they cannot afford to make the wrong tech investments or misallocate limited resources.

The following customer insights keep those constraints in mind, showing leaders how real improvements in the service journey are still possible, even as demand for efficiencies rise (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Customer Data Insights to Improve CX in Service



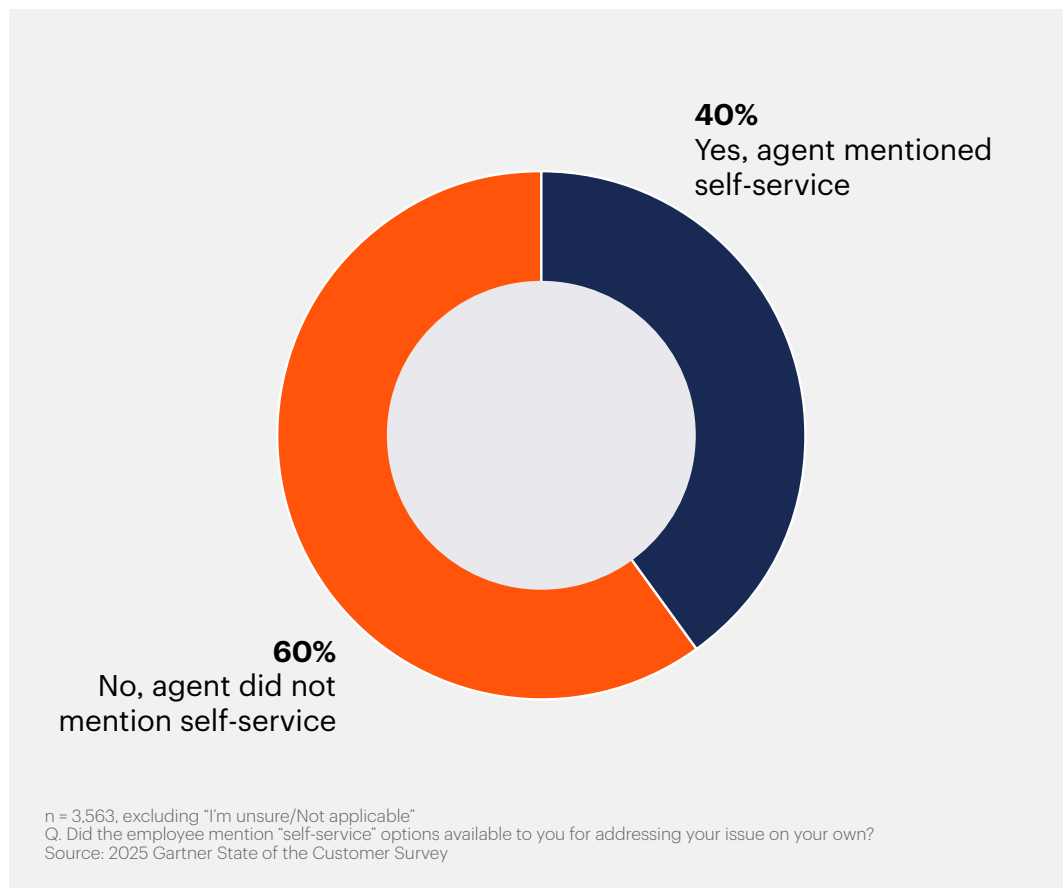
To keep customer service and support leaders informed about the latest in customer behavior, Gartner surveyed nearly 6,000 customers globally. Our analysis of the 2025 Gartner State of the Customer Survey reveals four customer insights to keep service leaders informed as they develop their CX strategy.

Insight: Agents are the best self-service adoption strategy you're not using

Service and support leaders must best utilize the resources already available. One action they should take today is to ensure their agents are making customers aware of self-service options.

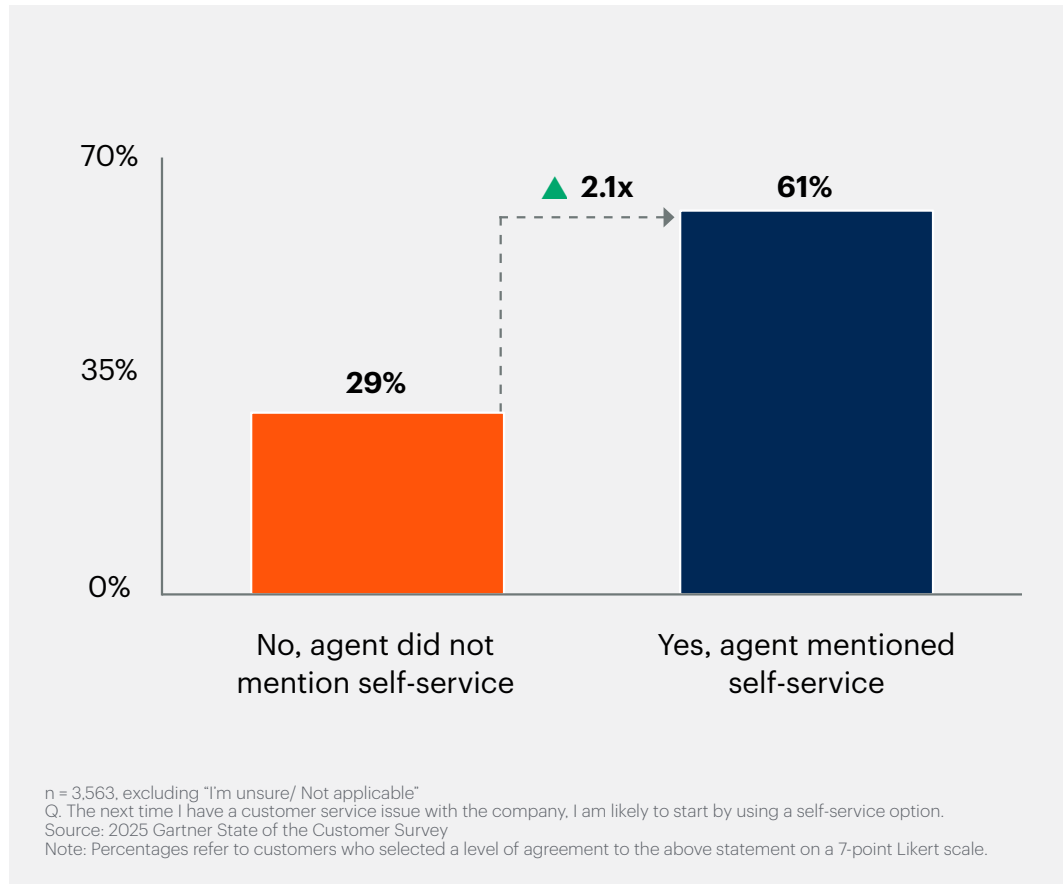
Agents are the human face of the company. What they say, and how they make customers feel, can make an impact. With this in mind, we investigated how frequently agents mention self-service to customers. It turns out, 60% of the time, agents fail to mention self-service at all (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Agent Mentions of Self-Service to the Customer



However, the **frequency** of self-service promotion is different from its impact. When we compare customers who receive self-service promotion to customers who receive none, the difference is striking. Customers who receive self-service promotion from an agent are far more likely to say they will adopt self-service the next time they have a service issue with the company. Agent promotion is associated with a doubling of the number of customers who are likely to adopt self-service next time (see Figure 3).

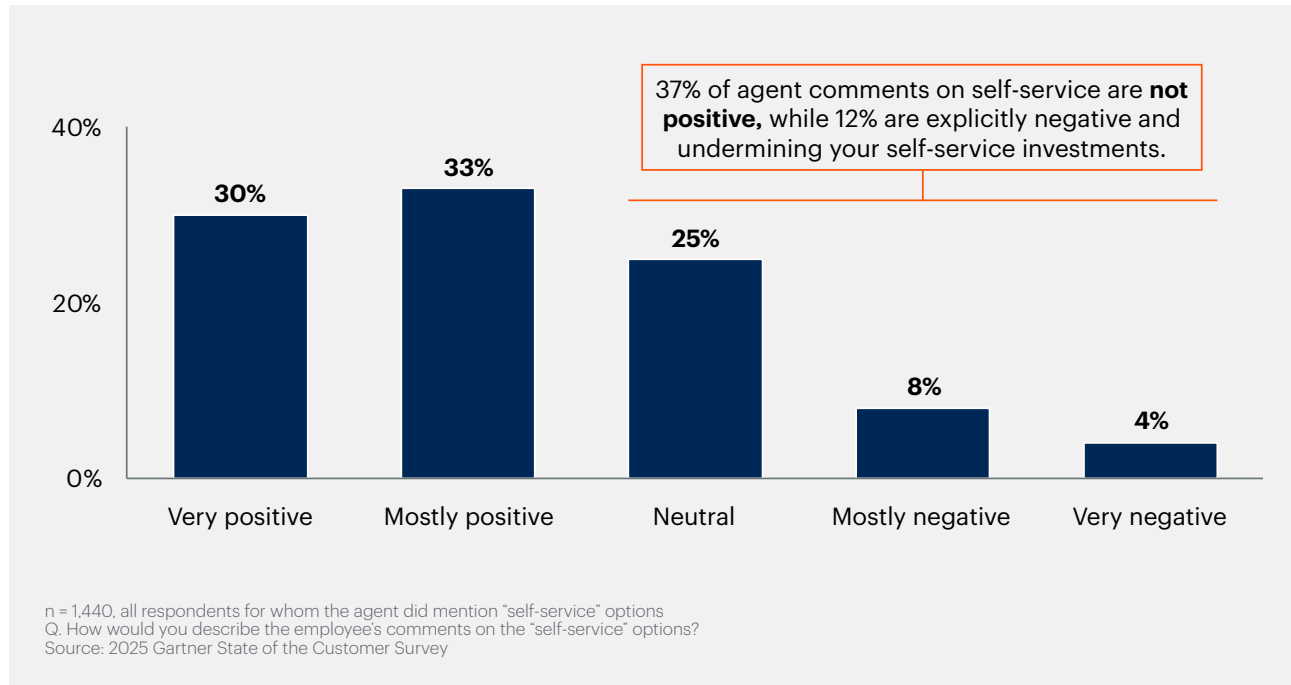
Figure 3: Percentage of Customers to Adopt Self-Service Next Time



Given the effect of merely mentioning self-service, we wanted to better understand the type of comments agents typically make. First, agents deserve their due.

They mostly support your self-service investments with positive comments. However, of agents who mention self-service, 37% do not make positive comments, according to customer survey respondents. Most concerning, 12% of agents make explicitly negative comments (see Figure 4). Agents may not even be aware. For example, when an agent casually mentions that some help articles on the website are outdated, customers notice.

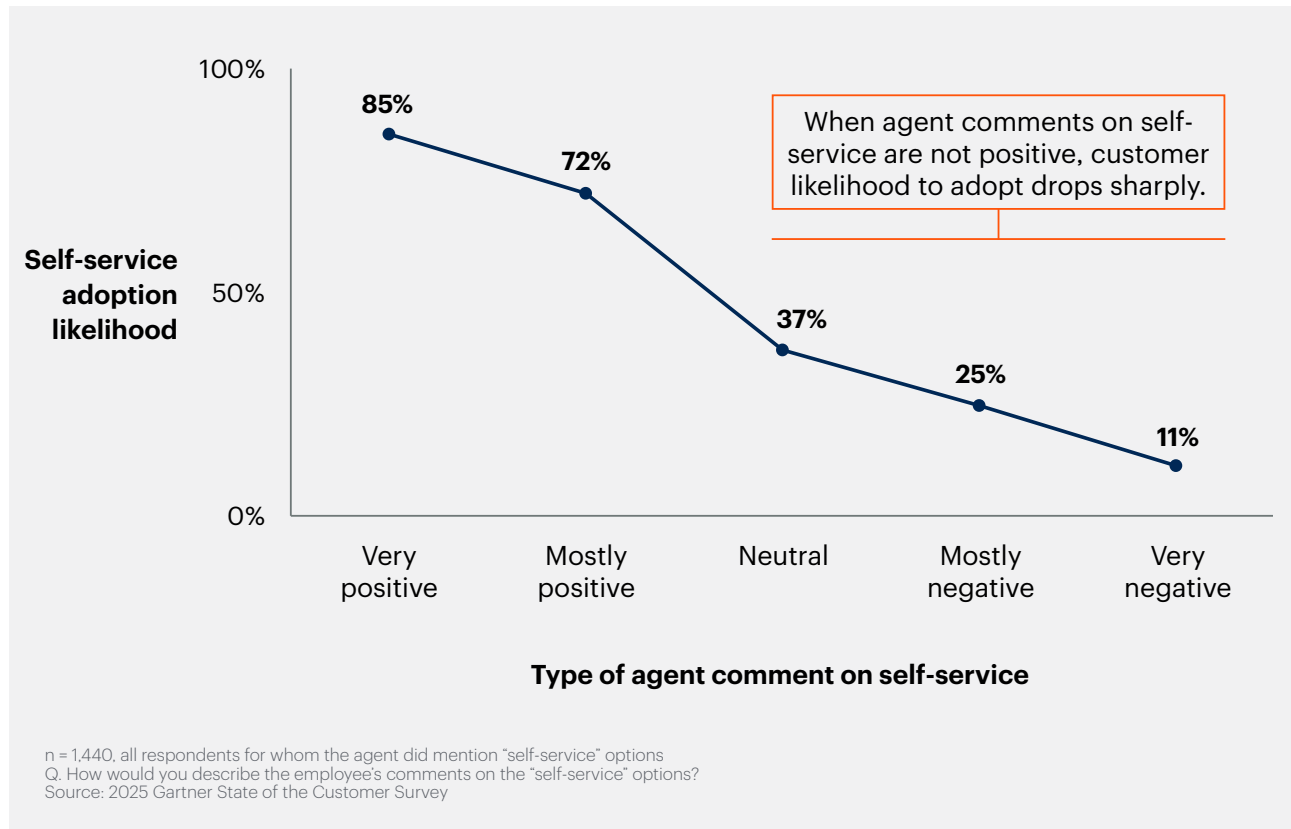
Figure 4: Type of Agent Comment to Customers on Self-Service



The fact that 12% of agent comments are negative is cause for concern. Agents aren't just successful promoters of self-service, they are superb detractors. Customer likelihood to adopt self-service declines as agent comments turn from positive to neutral, then nosedive when they turn negative (see Figure 5).

As the human face of the company, if agents don't support self-service, why should your customers?

Figure 5: Percentage of Customers to Adopt Self-Service Next Time, by Agent Comments on Self-Service



Service and support leaders should incentivize agents to be advocates and not saboteurs of their self-service investments. They can start by using QA to flag negative comments about self-service and use coaching to raise agent awareness of the neutral comments that go unnoticed.

Remember that promotion of self-service is about saving money going forward. When agents encourage customers to engage in self-service first, it creates various efficiencies later, even in cases when customers seamlessly transition from self-service to an agent.

The agent plays a critical role in self-service customer promotion, education, training and recovery efforts from failed self-service attempts.

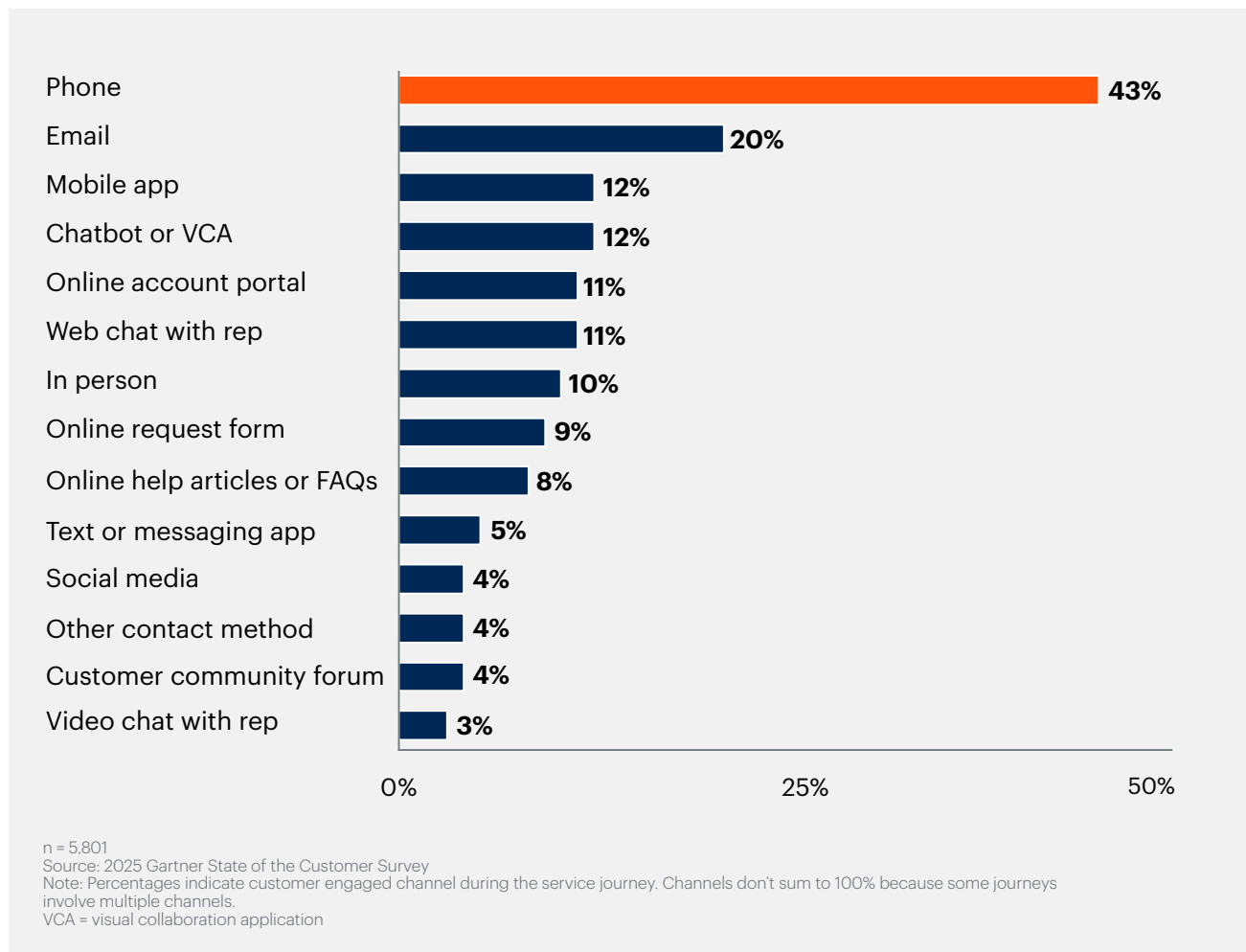
The service organization should be realistic in how it advises agents to promote self-service. Keep the interests of the agent in consideration and how they align with the customer. The agent, like the rest of the company, is ultimately downstream of the customer. When the customer is satisfied, the company, including the agent, does well. Customer adoption of self-service means fewer simple contacts for agents that needlessly waste time, an increased ability to attend to complex issues and fewer customers upset that a transactional issue requires a call.

Insight: Great phone experiences can disincentivize genai use

The most consequential new investment that service leaders are making involve GenAI. The initial wave of GenAI use cases involved internal-facing applications, but that's changing. According to a Gartner survey, 55% of service leaders report exploring a customer-facing GenAI chatbot in 2025, in addition to the 16% who are piloting this use case and 18% who have already deployed a solution. To start, service and support leaders should take stock of where their volume currently stands. The phone remains the most commonly used service channel by customers (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: Customers' Total Channel Use in Service Interactions

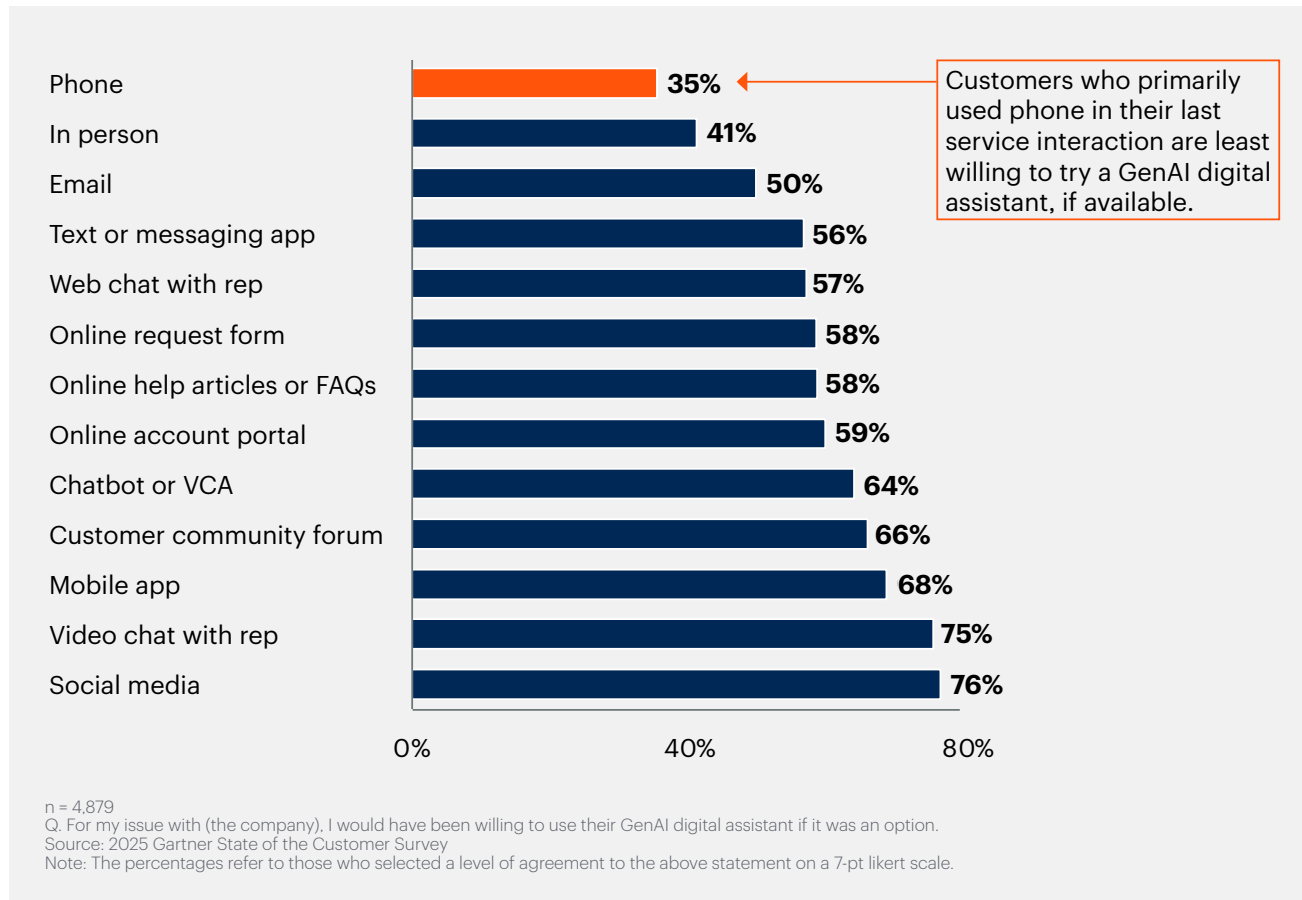


Given the ongoing investment in GenAI to automate self-service, leaders may be concerned about whether customers who are comfortable using the phone will be willing to accept or adopt a GenAI digital assistant. That is, a type of technology that customers will associate with Apple's Siri or Google Assistant and leverages GenAI technologies like large language models to engage customer queries in a more natural and contextual manner.

The good news is that 50% of customers agree when asked if they would be willing to use a GenAI digital assistant in their service interaction.

The bad news is that when we break down that answer by the primary channel customers' use, we see a lot of variation, and customers who last interacted via the phone are the least willing to adopt a GenAI digital assistant (see Figure 7). Only 35% of those customers agreed they would be willing to use the technology if it was an option.

Figure 7: Customers' Total Channel Use in Service Interactions
 Percentage of customers who agree by the primary channel used in their last interaction



Keep in mind that these are customers who just received resolution by directly speaking to an agent. If customers already find success on the phone, why would they risk adopting a GenAI digital assistant next time?

Instead of asking customers to risk their time by seeking out an untested digital assistant — especially when their prior experience has shown the phone works — focus instead on meeting them where they are: on the phone. This approach doesn't mean keeping customers from human agents. It means clarifying for the customer that the digital assistant can do two things — it can solve their issue in self-service, and if that doesn't work, it can route them directly to an agent who can help. To read more, see [Signature Study: How GenAI Changes Your Conversations With Customers](#).



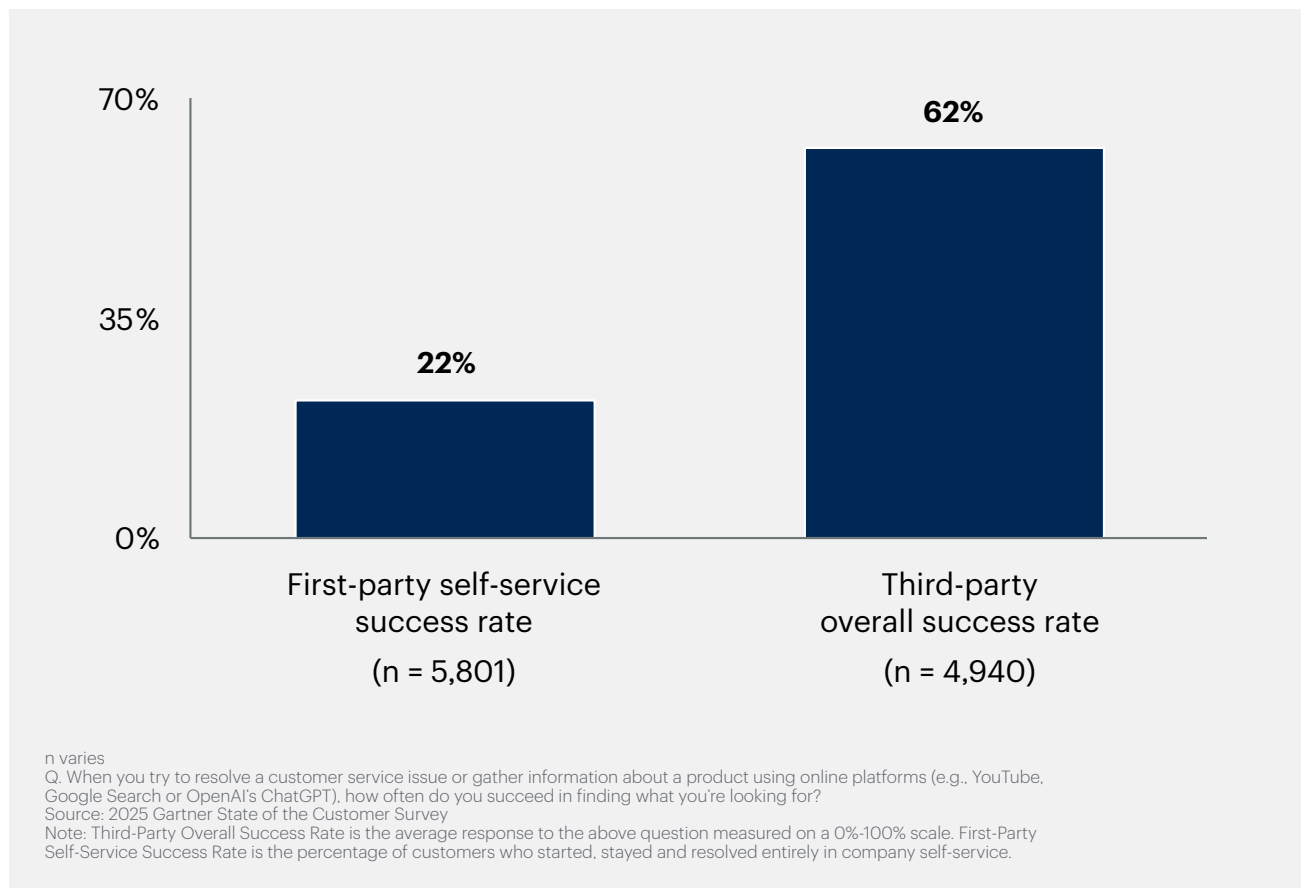
Insight: Customers unlock more self-service success on third-party platforms

Service and support leaders know that customers today have more options than ever to find answers. Yet they struggle to measure the frequency of their customers' use and success on sites like YouTube and Google.

We specifically asked customers who have not had a recent customer service interaction how successful they are in achieving resolution on external sites. We asked these customers because they are the very ones who might be underrepresented on first-party company channels due to their disproportional third-party success.

It turns out, these customers do unlock more self-service success on third-party platforms than on official company self-service channels. Customers report that, on average, 62% of the time they are successful at finding what they need with third parties like YouTube or Google Search (see Figure 9). In contrast, when we look at how customers use first-party company channels, only 22% start, stay and resolve entirely using self-service.

Figure 9: Comparison of Customer Resolution in First-Party Digital Self-Service to Third Parties



Search platforms like Google still dominate customer use of third-party sites. However, younger customers use a greater variety of third parties and exhibit more overall use (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Third-Party Platforms Customers Use Before Contacting Service, by Generation

	Silent	Baby boomer	Gen X	Millennial	Gen Z
Search engines (e.g., Google, Bing)	9%	14%	24%	34%	36%
Customer reviews (e.g., Amazon, Yelp)	4%	4%	11%	21%	21%
Social media sites (e.g., Facebook, X, TikTok)	1%	2%	8%	21%	22%
Generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini)	2%	4%	10%	19%	17%
Video sites (e.g., YouTube)	1%	3%	7%	15%	17%
Digital assistants (e.g., Siri, Google Assistant)	1%	2%	7%	15%	15%
Community forums (e.g., Reddit, Quora)	1%	2%	7%	12%	18%
Other	6%	9%	5%	3%	2%
I did not use any of these	82%	71%	56%	33%	26%

n = 5,801
 Q. Before contacting (the company), did you use any of the following platforms to research or try to resolve your issue?
 Source: 2025 Gartner State of the Customer Survey

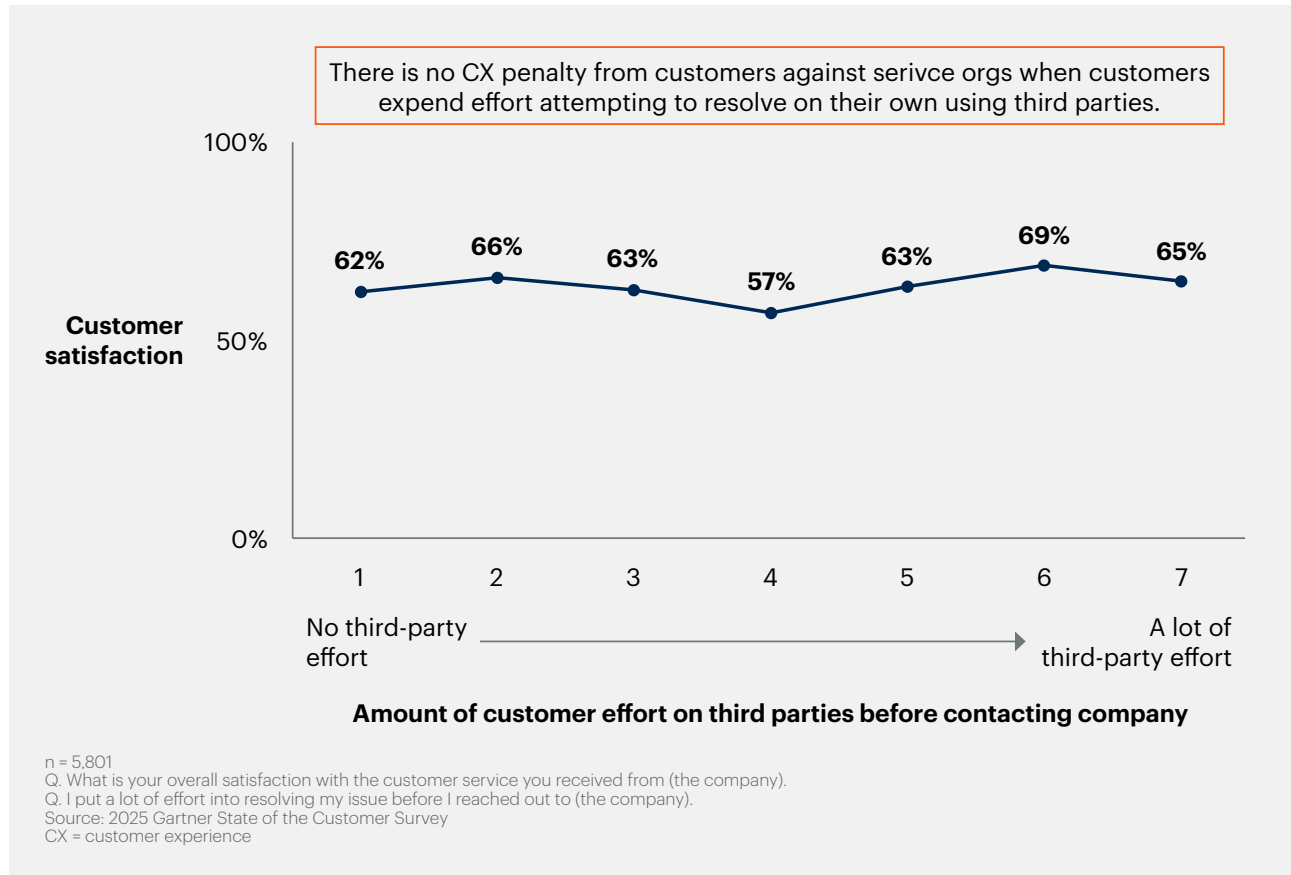
Additionally, third-party use is not just a B2C phenomenon. While 48% of B2C customers report using a third-party before their last service interaction, 71% of B2B customers reported the same. In reality, this difference isn't surprising, since B2B customers tend to be more digitally savvy.

Service and support leaders struggle to respond to third-parties. After all, what happens to those customers who fail to resolve on third-party platforms? When customers waste their time unsuccessfully looking for an answer to a problem that your company caused, they may penalize your organization, fairly or not. We explored the CX penalty that service organizations must pay when their customers waste effort on third parties.

What we found is surprising: There is no correlation between the amount of effort a customer undertakes of their own volition and their satisfaction with the service provided by your company (see Figure 11).

In short, customers do not penalize you for the effort they incur trying to resolve an issue using external sites. You lose nothing but frequently benefit from unseen zero-cost resolution.

Figure 11: Customer Satisfaction With Service by the Amount of Effort the Customer Spent on Third Parties



It may be tempting to take an “if it’s not broken, why fix it” attitude. However, third parties are still poised to affect your service organization.

GenAI is quickly transforming the most common third-party — search sites — into AI answer platforms.

This technology will further transform how your customers reach answers from your organization.

Among Generation Z, GenAI applications like OpenAI's ChatGPT are now just as commonly used as popular video sites like YouTube before the service interaction.

Prepare for this transformation by investing in your public-facing knowledge base. Regardless of whether customers are accessing self-service through your first-party channels or through AI search, your knowledge remains the essential asset.

Stay aware of future options, like direct data-sharing partnerships with AI companies, to get the right answers in the places your customers consume them. To start, simply monitor the answers that appear on external platforms to make sure you're aware of how your knowledge is being used.

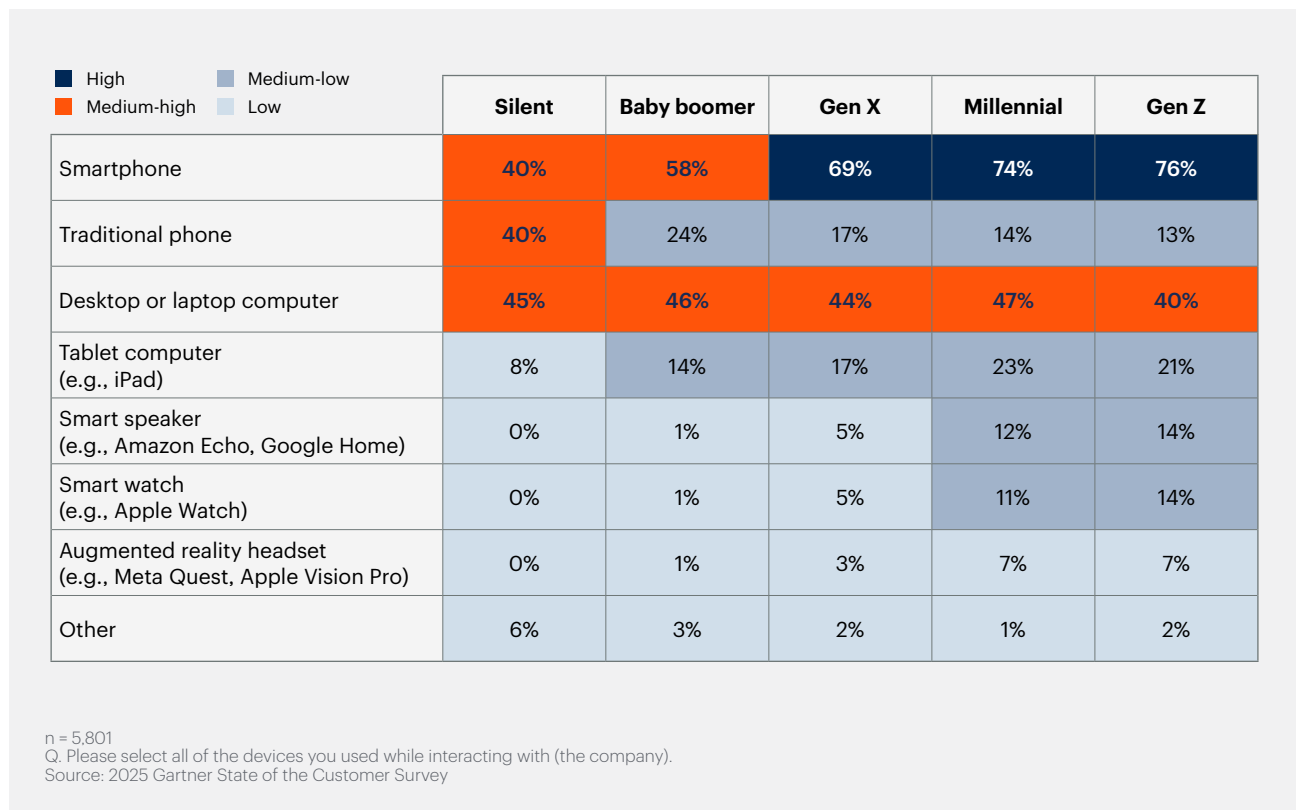


Insight: Smartphone is favored device, but customers less interested in talking

Customer-centricity means understanding the service journey from the customer’s perspective. One underappreciated feature of the journey is the device customers use to access service. When we turn to the devices used for service, smartphones dominate — and are most typically paired with use of a computer. In all, nearly half (46%) of customer service journeys involve more than a single device. Younger customers are also leaning into other “smart” devices — including smart speakers and smartwatches to access service (see Figure 12).



Figure 12: Devices Used by Customers During the Service Interaction, by Generation

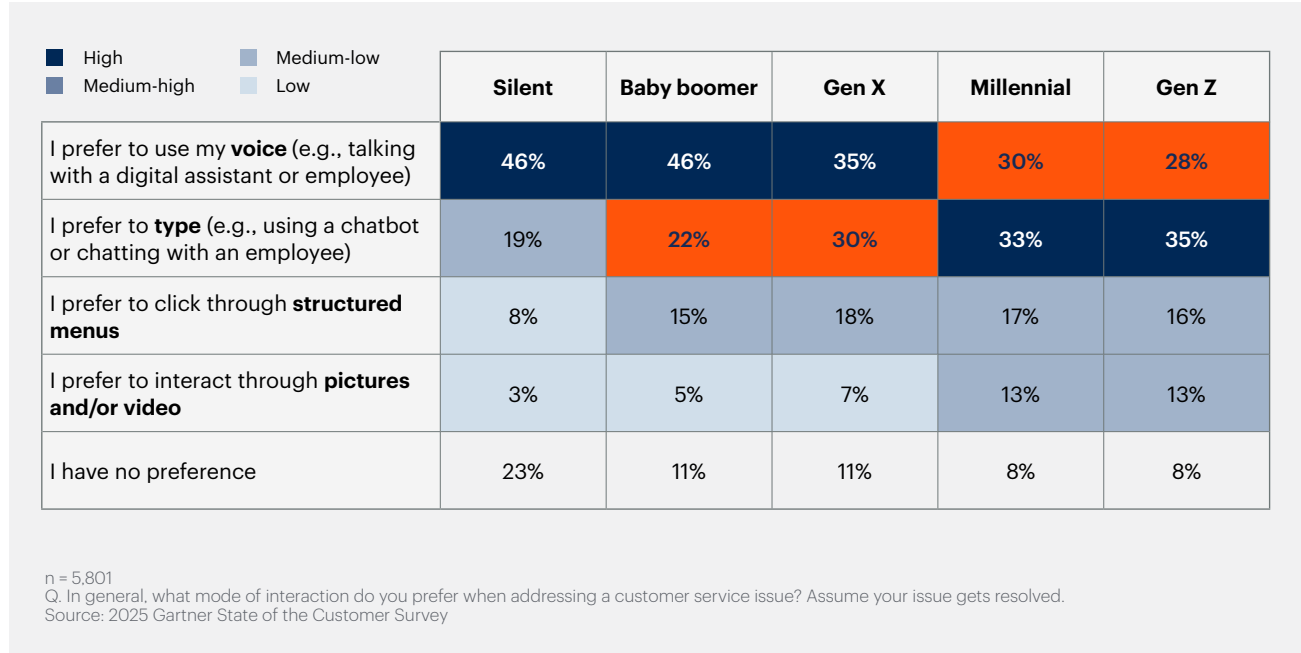


While we understand the devices, how customers prefer to use their device is less well-understood.

Since smartphones are used just as easily for typing as talking — and given the rise of conversational digital assistants like Apple’s Siri and Amazon’s Alexa — we investigated customer preference for the mode of service engagement. In other words, putting aside devices, we asked customers if they preferred using their voice or typing, or something else entirely, when addressing a service issue.

Younger customers are open to different modes of addressing a service issue and even have a preference for typing (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Customers’ Most Preferred Modality When Addressing a Service Issue, by Generation



Openness to various devices and modalities means, in short, if you offer it, they will use it. This opportunity can be a danger to the service organization. Offering too much choice puts customers’ attention on channel selection and navigation. Service organizations can needlessly create a confusing, “choose your own adventure” channel experience — not to mention a costly channel portfolio — by blindly following customer behavior.

Instead, take control of the service journey by starting customers in one place. Build an intelligent front door (IFD) to provide a single entry point to the organization. An IFD provides a common, conversational interface for customers that uses speech, text or images to capture intent. At that single entry point, a centralized intelligence can then decide if the contact is best addressed by generating an answer, enabling customers to transact or connecting customers to agents. An IFD provides consistency to the service experience rather than allowing proliferating channels to muddle the customer experience.

Actionable, objective insight

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Explore how trends in technology and shifting customer behaviors will impact the future of customer service.

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