



# ujet

## Optimizing Channels for Customer Support

Why Brands Need to Pivot Towards Building a Future of  
Identical Support Experiences



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## The Next Stage of Modern Customer Support Is Already Emerging

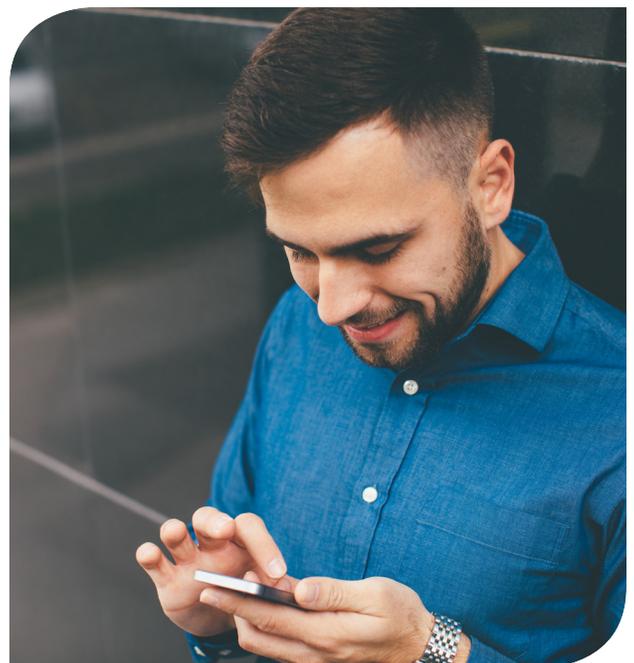
For years now, businesses have been evolving toward multichannel customer support — aiming to provide their customers with a range of options, from web chat to mobile texting to in-app messaging, for communicating with the brand if they have a question or complaint. Most have been successful in terms of adding channels, though not as successful in promoting those channels or delivering a seamless customer support experience across them.

A “seamless” experience, in the context of modern customer support, is about much more than technology, although that is obviously a crucial component. For consumers, “seamless” also has a human side. Consumers want to interact with a brand through their channel of choice, and regardless of that choice, know that they will receive a support experience that is professional, efficient, expedient, effective, and on-brand — and most of all, makes them feel like a VIP.

Businesses that aren’t yet providing that experience — or are only just forming a multichannel support strategy — face the challenge of time. In this white paper, UJET shares research that suggests a seamless customer support experience is no longer a nice-to-have offering or a “we’ll get there someday” prospect for brands. It is already essential to meeting many consumers’ expectations about modern customer support. Other data shows that most consumers (91%) prefer brands that offer multiple service channels.<sup>1</sup> And, as our research suggests, consumers have high expectations for the future of support through those channels.

Findings from our online survey of U.S. consumers shed light on customers’ preferences and expectations for modern support. The following are two main takeaways from our research:

- **Consumers are embracing new tools — when they know they are available.** Consumers in different age groups prefer specific channels for reaching out to and interacting with customer support, but the overall trend toward messaging (SMS, website chat, and in-app messaging) shows that all customers are learning about more efficient channels of support communication. Additional support communication channels, like in-app messaging, can be leveraged effectively by brands for delivering modern, seamless support, provided that customers are aware they are available.
- **Consumers across age demographics are moving toward text-based channels for support.** Phone calls are the most commonly used channel for support, followed by email. But consumers across age demographics are moving toward using SMS/MMS, in-app messaging, or live website chat on company websites. Those channels are all text-based, and they take advantage of devices and platforms. SMS/in-app messaging works well on smartphones, while live website chat and emails work well on desktops.



<sup>1</sup>“2019 eCommerce Customer Service Experience Study” infographic, Aircall.io, 2019: <https://aircall.io/blog/research/customer-service-channel-preferences-infographic/#infographic.wv>



## About Our Survey

Partnering with data analytics firm YouGov, UJET's online survey of consumers, conducted in Fall 2019, included 500 people in the United States, ages 18-64. Of the respondents, 49% identified as male, and 51% identified as female. Consumers from all 50 U.S. states were represented in the survey.

Our research focused on understanding customer support expectations, preferences, and commonly used channels in three industries:

- E-commerce
- Transportation
- Food delivery

As part of our survey, respondents were asked to identify which companies from the following list, if any, they had contacted for assistance within the past three months.

Customer support was described in the survey as asking the company for help for any reason, either by phone, text, email, in-app messaging, online chat, or online form submission.

Respondents were permitted to choose more than one answer to this question. Their top responses were as follows:

**Respondents identified companies they had contacted for assistance within the past three months.**

### E-commerce

Amazon: 59%

eBay: 21%

Apple: 20%

### Transportation

Uber: 27%

Lyft: 16%

### Food Delivery

Uber Eats: 16%

Grubhub: 14%

DoorDash: 14%

# What Consumers Want Most in a Customer Support Experience

The findings from our survey about how consumers reach out to and interact with brands when they need customer support does not necessarily reflect how they would like to engage with brands when seeking assistance, especially in the future. The data presented earlier provide insight into what channels are generally available now to consumers who are seeking support, as well as what channels consumers are likely to gravitate to, whether it's out of necessity, convenience, or personal preference.

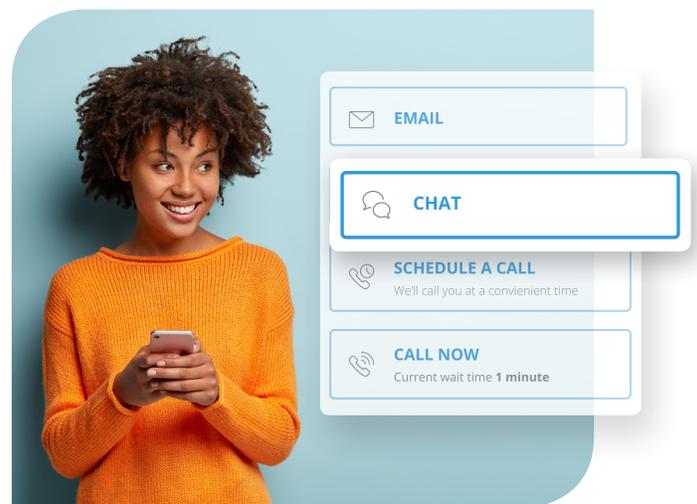
We asked survey respondents what features and applications they thought would be most likely to improve their customer support experience in the future. Their top 10 answers, shown below, help to reveal the gaps in the customer support experience provided by many brands today:

1. Text with a live agent in real time: **72%**
2. Email support with a question or an issue description and receipt of a reply with a solution and instructions: **70%**
3. Use of in-app messaging and chat: **70%**
4. Text support with a question or an issue description and receipt of a reply with a solution and instructions: **69%**
5. Ability to click a button in-app or on a website and have an agent call at a convenient time: **68%**
6. Upload and share a photo so that an agent can visually understand the issue: **67%**
7. Upload and share a screenshot: **66%**
8. Upload and share a video: **55%**
9. Use fingerprint or facial recognition to identify and authorize an account: **43%**
10. Chat with an agent using live video: **42%**

The features and applications that many consumers seek in a modern customer support experience reflect the capabilities of smartphones, including photo and video sharing and texting, all in real time.

Looking at age-specific responses to our survey, it's clear that U.S. consumers in different age groups have different preferences as to what specific mobile device features and apps they believe would most improve their customer support experience in the future:

- **Consumers between the ages of 55 and 64** said they would most welcome text support with a question or an issue description and the ability to receive a reply with a solution and instructions, as well as the ability to text live with a support agent in real time (69% each).
- **Consumers in the 45-54 age group** said they would most like to have the ability to send a text message with a question or a description of their issue and receive an immediate reply with a solution or instructions (68%).
- **Consumers in the 35-44 age demographic** report that they would most like the ability to upload and share a photo so that an agent can visually understand their issue (79%).
- **Consumers between the ages of 25 and 34** said they would most like the ability to send a text message with a question or description of their issue and receive an immediate reply with a solution or instructions (80%).
- **Consumers in the 18-24 age group** report that they would most like to have the ability to upload and share a screenshot so that reps can see what they are seeing on their mobile device (71%).



These findings are based on responses to this question: "In the future, whenever you communicate with customer support, how likely would it be for these features to improve your experience?" Here's a look at all the responses by age demographic:

## When you contact customer support in the future, which features would improve your customer experience?

Ages	18-24 (%)	25-34 (%)	35-44 (%)	45-54 (%)	55-64 (%)
Ability to upload/share a screen shot (i.e., so the rep sees what I'm seeing on mobile)	71	71	76	56	58
Ability to upload/share a photo so the rep can visually understand my issue	66	73	79	60	57
Ability to upload/share a video so the rep can visually understand my issue and/or surrounding environment	57	64	63	43	49
Chat with the rep using live video (i.e., FaceTime)	41	46	48	32	42
Use fingerprint or facial recognition to quickly identify myself as an authorized account holder	51	46	55	31	37
Send a text message with a question or description of the issue, and receive and immediate reply with a solution or instructions	70	66	71	68	69
Text with a live customer support rep in real time	67	73	78	71	69
Email support with a question or description of the issue, and receive a reply with a solution or instructions	61	80	72	67	66
Ability to use messaging or chat within the company's app for real time interaction	70	72	75	67	64
Ability to click on a button within the company's app or website, to have a customer service rep call at a time that is convenient for you	64	70	71	59	74

Source: UJET consumer survey, Fall 2019

As mentioned earlier, providing a seamless multichannel support experience isn't all about technology. The human side of support also plays an important role in delivering experiences that result in high customer satisfaction and deeper brand loyalty. That is evident from the top response that survey respondents provided when asked what element of customer support they believe has the greatest positive influence on the overall support experience:

- **Helpfulness of agent: 19%**
- **Speed of initial contact: 16%**
- **Thoroughness of resolving the issue: 14%**
- **Ease of finding and reaching an agent: 14%**
- **Overall length of time to resolve the issue: 12%**
- **Knowledge and competence of agent: 11%**
- **Reliability and dependability of support: 8%**
- **Overall experience felt personalized: 6%**



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## **“Helpfulness of agent” was also among the top three responses for consumers in all age groups that were represented in our survey:**

### **18-24:**

Helpfulness of agent/Speed of initial contact: **20%**

Thoroughness of resolving the issue: **17%**

Ease of finding/reaching agent: **12%**

### **25-34:**

Helpfulness of agent: **21%**

Speed of initial contact: **15%**

Overall length of time to resolve the issue: **14%**

### **35-44:**

Helpfulness of agent/Ease of finding and reaching an agent: **15%**

Overall length of time to resolve the issue: **15%**

Reliability and dependability of support: **14%**

### **45-54:**

Speed of initial contact: **23%**

Helpfulness of agent: **18%**

Thoroughness of resolving the issue/Knowledge and competence of agent/Ease of finding and reaching an agent: **13%**

### **55-64:**

Thoroughness of resolving the issue: **19%**

Helpfulness of agent: **18%**

Ease of finding and reaching agent: **16%**

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The above findings suggest that consumers of all ages appreciate at least some level of positive human interaction in a customer support experience. When seeking help from a brand in resolving an issue, they look for empathy and respect from the customer support agents they are connecting with — no matter what channel they use.



## The Channels: How Consumers Are Contacting Customer Support

So, what channels are consumers using to contact customer support?

UJET's survey data shows that nearly half of all consumers (46%) across demographics will still pick up the phone or send an email (32%) when reaching out to brands for customer support. These methods of outreach are often tied to more traditional commerce, where phone or email are the top channels for support because they are the only options the brand provides. However, some on-demand delivery services also focus more on voice and email as channels for support, rather than real-time, in-app messaging.

Phone and email have long been the primary channels for customer support for established e-commerce companies, as well — again, as the default options to a large degree. These methods of providing customer support have become institutionalized over time, making it difficult for companies to introduce newer channels effectively. Some are also complacent, believing that customers are so loyal to the brand that an unsatisfactory customer support experience won't dissuade them from doing business with the brand in the future.

However, other findings from our survey, which we explore later in this paper, suggest that this

mindset will need to change, as more consumers embrace text-based channels. There is a real risk for companies that customers will shift their loyalty to competitors that offer more — and more modern, efficient and personalized — ways to interact with the brand in real time.

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### Channels of Communication for Contacting Customer Support, All Communication

Phone: 46%

Email: 32%

Live website chat: 29%

In-app messaging: 28%

Text/SMS: 25%

Online form: 12%

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Source: UJET consumer survey, Fall 2019

The largest group of respondents reporting that the phone is their top channel for contacting customer support are in the 55-64 age demographic (69%). Among all demographic groups included in our survey, consumers in the 35-44 age range are the least likely to pick up the phone to contact support; they said that email and in-app messaging are their go-to tools.

Nearly half (47%) of respondents ages 18-24 — consumers in the Generation Z demographic — said they prefer to contact customer support by phone. This is logical, given that essentially all Gen Z consumers have a smartphone,<sup>1</sup> and rely heavily on these devices for communication. Efficiency is also likely a factor: Gen Z customers seeking resolution to an urgent matter will simply call customer support directly to save time and effort.

An interesting connection between the oldest demographic group in our recent survey (55-64) and the youngest group (18-24) is that they were the only age groups to identify “Text/SMS/Live website chat” as one of their top three channels for reaching out to customer support. Thirty percent of consumers ages 18-24 and 25% of consumers between the ages of 55 and 64 reported that they use this channel to contact support.

This connection is easy to understand, though, when you consider that 90% of adults over age 50 use technology — smartphones, desktops, laptops and tablets — for communication, including text, instant messaging and email, according to a 2019 report from AARP.<sup>2</sup> Also, 80% of Americans ages 50-64 have smartphones.<sup>3</sup>

So, while Gen Z consumers are often thought of as being mobile and digital savvy, brands need to recognize that consumers in the baby boomer demographic are, too — and that text-based channels for customer support appeal to both of these groups.

<sup>2</sup>“Gen Z – Will the Smartphone Generation Change the Way We Work,” by Marissa Delisle, Digital Turbine, 2019: <https://www.digitalturbine.com/blog/gen-z-will-the-smartphone-generation-change-the-way-we-work/>.

<sup>3</sup>2019 Tech and the 50+ Survey, AARP, January 2019: [https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys\\_statistics/technology/2019/2019-technology-trends.doi.10.26419-2Fres.00269.001.pdf](https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys_statistics/technology/2019/2019-technology-trends.doi.10.26419-2Fres.00269.001.pdf).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

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## Channels of Communication for Contacting Customer Support, by Age Group

### 18-24:

Phone: 47%

Text/SMS/Live website chat: 30%

In-app messaging: 29%

### 25-34:

Email: 40%

Phone: 36%

In-app messaging: 35%

### 35-44:

Email: 35%

In-app messaging: 34%

Phone: 30%

### 45-54:

Phone: 49%

Email: 32%

Live website chat: 27%

### 55-64:

Phone: 69%

Live website chat: 27%

Text/SMS/Email: 25%

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Source: UJET consumer survey, Fall 2019

Overall, our recent survey finds that nearly one-third of all consumers across demographics choose to engage with customer support with brands through live website chat (29%) and in-app messaging (28%). And more than one-quarter of consumers prefer to use the text/SMS channel. The message here for brands is that significant percentages of U.S. consumers want access to an interactive customer support experience in real time through text-based channels.

## Customer Support Expectations and Channels: E-commerce

Consumers' preferences and expectations for customer support vary across the three industries included in our survey — e-commerce, transportation, and food delivery. That is likely due to consumers' general expectations about their interactions with brands when they are ordering products and services from them. While a consumer might be able to wait more than a day for a book or computer to arrive, for example, they would expect to receive a ride or a meal much more immediately — often, in 30 minutes or less.

E-commerce is a mix between brick-and-mortar and online purchases, and most consumers expect, and accept, a time delay between when they make and receive an order. Even though the time between order placement and delivery can be within the same day now, there are measured expectations.

Modern e-commerce can also be a 0:1 interaction. Everything can take place in-app, without any direct interaction during the transaction between the customer and the brand/shipper.

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### E-commerce Brands Respondents Contacted for Support in 3 Months Prior to Survey

Amazon: 59%

eBay: 21%

Apple: 20%

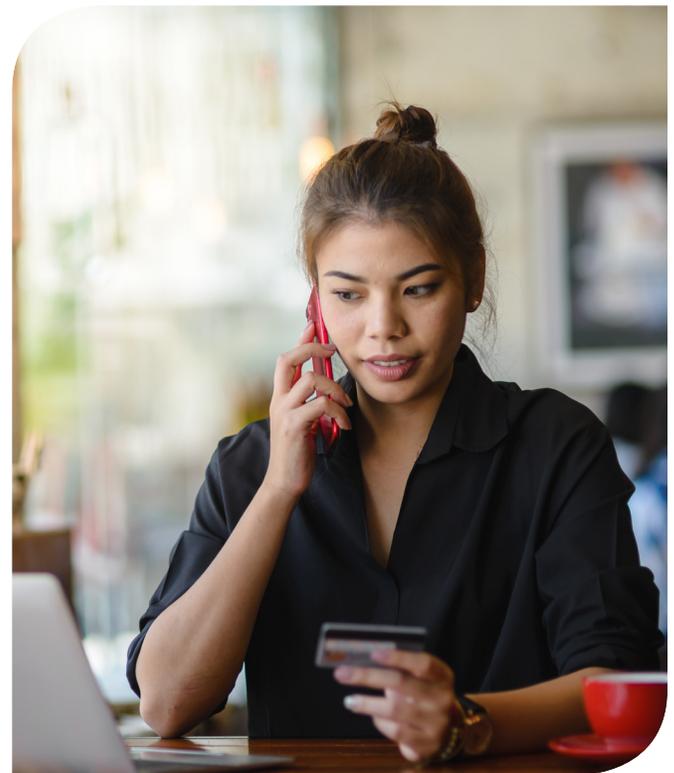
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Source: UJET consumer survey, Fall 2019; multiple responses were permitted.

## The Top Methods for Contacting and Interacting with E-commerce Customer Support: Phone, Email, and Live Chat

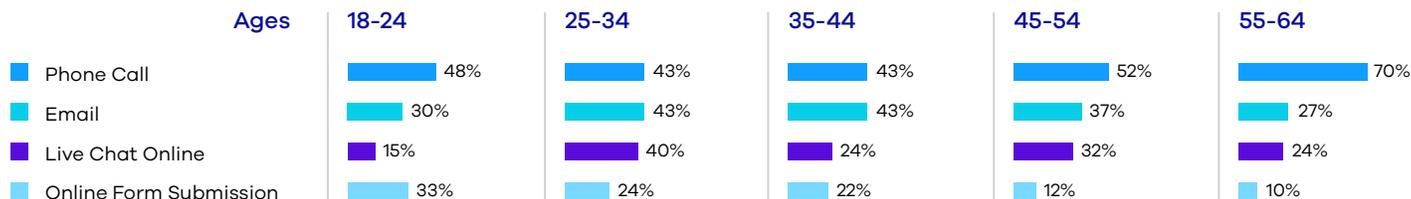
We asked consumers how they interacted with an e-commerce brand that they had sought customer assistance from in the three months prior to our survey. More than half of all respondents (53%) said the phone was their primary method of communication with the brand's customer support function. Thirty-six percent said they used email, and 28% reported that they used live chat online on the company's website. Only 9% of all respondents said they used Text/SMS while receiving customer support assistance from an e-commerce brand.

How customers select a channel for contacting a brand is often based on what options they encounter first in apps and websites. They may need to dig deep into those apps and sites to find information about how to get assistance from the brand. Often, the first options they'll find are phone or email, so they default to one of those methods — ending up in either a long queue for phone support or waiting for hours or days to get a response to an email request for support.





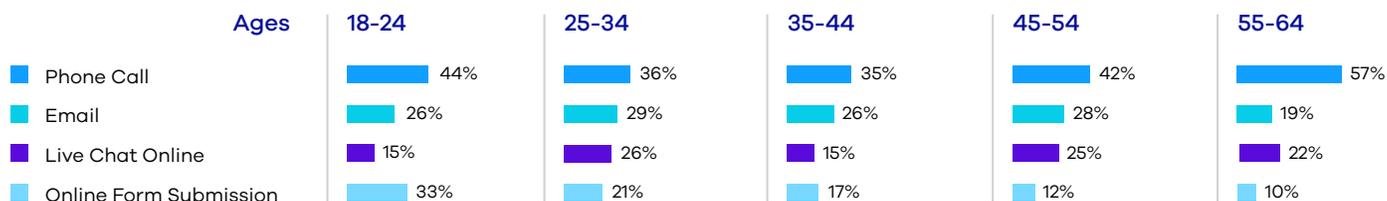
Consumers were asked, "While getting customer support from [E-COMMERCE BRAND], which of the following methods did you use to interact with them?"



Source: UJET consumer survey, Fall 2019; multiple responses were permitted.

As for the initial channel of contact they used when seeking help from the e-commerce brand about the same customer service issue, 44% of respondents said they used the phone. One-quarter (25%) of all consumers surveyed reported that they used email and 21% turned to live chat online on the company's site.

Consumers were asked, "Which method did you use first to make initial contact with [E-COMMERCE BRAND] regarding the same issue?"



Source: UJET consumer survey, Fall 2019

## Customer Support Expectations and Channels: Transportation

On-demand rideshares are a 1:1 interaction between customers and drivers. The ride request is placed in-app, the app connects the customer to an available driver, and the ride begins within a short time after the ride request. And once the ride is over, the interaction ends.

The process is time-sensitive: Consumers typically expect a driver to pick them up within minutes of their request, and also expect the driver to get them to their destination in a timely fashion. Consumers also expect the ride to be pleasant and safe.

UJET’s survey asked consumers about their experiences with commonly used ridesharing brands like Uber and Lyft. However, it’s important to note that on-demand transportation is a fast-growing industry that also includes services such as bike-sharing, car-sharing and scooter-sharing. And it’s a safe bet that consumers using those services also have high expectations for customer service.

## Transportation Brands Respondents Contacted for Support in 3 Months Prior to Survey

Uber: 27%

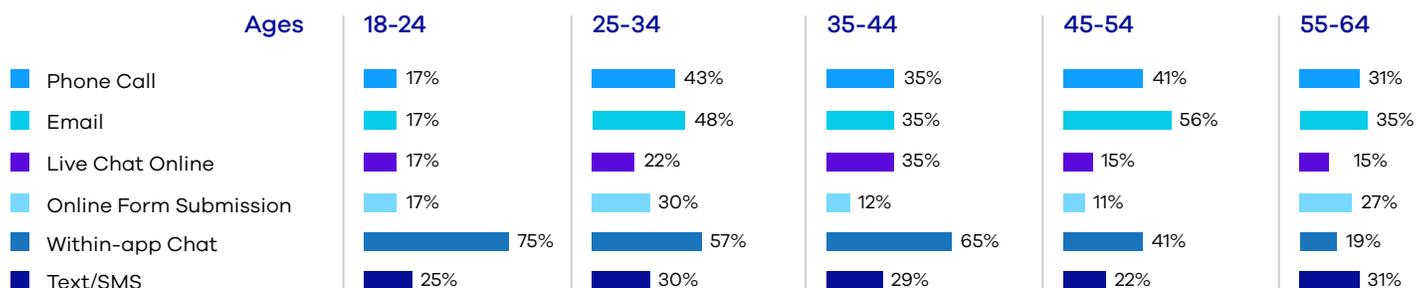
Lyft: 16%

Source: UJET consumer survey, Fall 2019; multiple responses were permitted.

## In-App Messaging and Chat Is the Top Method for Contacting and Interacting with Transportation Customer Support

The on-demand rideshare business is app-centric, and findings from our survey underscore that. Nearly half (47%) of consumers who needed to reach out to a transportation brand for assistance in the past three months said they used in-app messaging or chat to interact with customer support. Email (41%) and phone (35%) rounded out the top three responses.

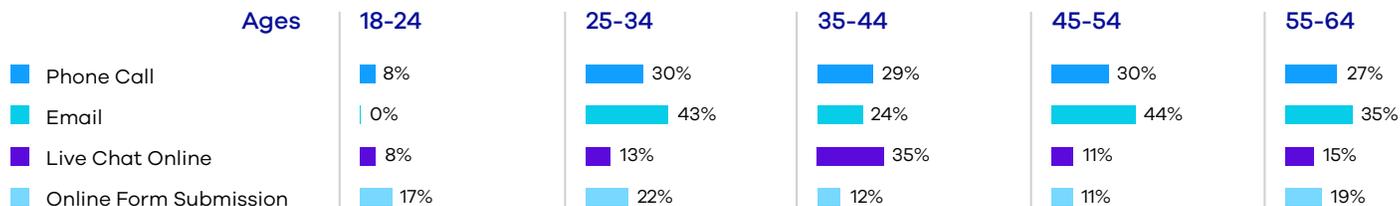
Consumers were asked, “While getting customer support assistance from Uber or Lyft, which of the following method(s) did you use to interact with them?”



Source: UJET consumer survey, Fall 2019; multiple responses were permitted.

In-app messaging or chat was also the initial channel of contact for 39% of consumers who said they had recently sought customer support from a transportation brand. One-third of respondents (33%) reported that they used email and 27% said they made a phone call.

### Consumers were asked, "Which method did you use first to make initial contact with Uber or Lyft regarding the same issue?"



Source: UJET consumer survey, Fall 2019



### Customer Support Expectations and Channels: Food Delivery

Food delivery is an interaction between customers, restaurants and drivers. Logistics between all three of these parties is complex and very time-sensitive: Customers place their order in-app, and the restaurant receives, and prepares the order. Drivers are notified about available deliveries, and then face the challenge of picking up the food and delivering it to the customer before food quality declines.

Customer expectations about the food delivery process, and the quality of the product they receive, are understandably high. If the food is cold or otherwise below the expected quality upon delivery, it lowers customer satisfaction.

### Food Delivery Brands Respondents Contacted for Support in 3 Months Prior to Survey

Uber Eats: 16%

Grubhub: 14%

DoorDash: 14%

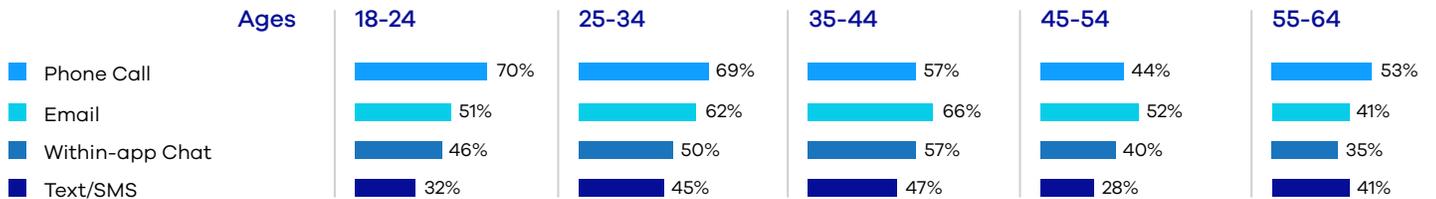
Source: UJET consumer survey, Fall 2019; multiple responses were permitted.



## The Phone Is the Go-To Channel for Contacting and Interacting with Food Delivery Customer Support

Food delivery issues require fast resolution and, no doubt, this is why most consumers (61%) use the phone when they need a food delivery brand to address an issue. The percentage of consumers who reported that they used email was almost as high: 57%. And about half of all consumers surveyed (48%) said they used in-app messaging or chat to interact with a food delivery brand's customer support.

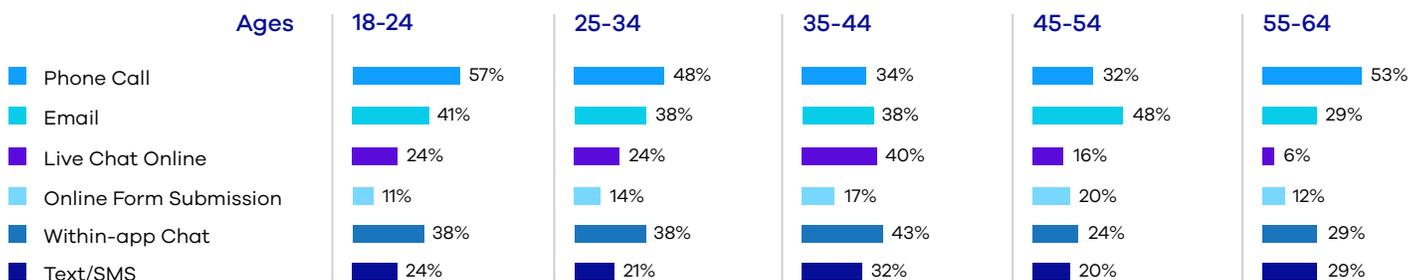
### Consumers were asked, "While getting customer support assistance from [FOOD DELIVERY BRAND], which of the following method(s) did you use to interact with them?"



Source: UJET consumer survey, Fall 2019; multiple responses were permitted.

The survey findings also show that the phone is the top tool for consumers when they are making initial contact with a food delivery service's customer support center (44%), followed by email (39%), and in-app messaging or chat (36%).

### Consumers were asked, "Which method did you use first to make initial contact with [FOOD DELIVERY BRAND] regarding the same issue?"



Source: UJET consumer survey, Fall 2019

## Conclusion

Messaging channels such as SMS, in-app messaging, and live website chat are becoming more popular with consumers across all age demographics. That is a reflection of the fact that consumers are more mobile and app-centric in most all of their everyday interactions. And, in line with that trend, our survey finds that most consumers visualize a future for customer support that embraces mobile device features and apps that can help facilitate communication and understanding between customers and agents, and improve the overall support experience.

Many companies are already providing text-based channels as part of their multichannel support strategy. However, in many cases, they are doing one of two things, if not both: not making consumers aware of these options, and not investing enough in all channels for support to ensure they are providing a quality experience through each.

Right now, when consumers do reach out through available text-based channels, they are often disappointed — as well as frustrated. They expect to receive a support experience that mirrors what they would get by picking up the phone and speaking directly with an agent (even if they had to wait in a long queue to talk to that agent). However, because the company has not invested enough to ensure it can provide a seamless, personalized and efficient customer support experience across all channels, it risks brand damage and customer loss.

Offering multichannel support takes more than just providing additional options for contacting the company; brands need to build and properly support the experiences of those channels, as well. That includes utilizing actionable data to improve the customer support experience by better understanding which channels their customers prefer to use. Providing optimized platforms to agents, so they can manage support requests more effectively and give their full attention to customers in the moment, is another strategy.

## Laying the groundwork for the “identical support experience”

As businesses work to provide a seamless support experience across numerous channels, including web, mobile and in-app messaging, they must also keep an eye toward the fast-emerging future of customer support. They must optimize all channels for customer support, including text-based channels, so that customers can interact with support in the same way that they communicate with each other in these same channels, in real time.

This next stage of customer support — the “identical support experience” — is the key to delivering unique and lasting support experiences that will delight customers and cement their brand loyalty. And it requires giving agents the features and options they need to offer a positive support experience, regardless of the channel a customer uses. That experience includes:

- Faster and more streamlined information-sharing between customers and agents
- More conversational customer service interactions
- Faster response and resolution time

The identical support experience also harnesses the range of features of smartphones and all the on-demand, internet-enabled, API-powered capabilities these powerful devices provide, from text input to media sharing. In the future, consumers will expect a positive experience across every channel, regardless of how they choose to communicate with a brand. But to make that future a reality, brands must start now to optimize the customer support experience across all channels, and build the right foundation of technology, and people, for delivering identical support experiences.

## About UJET

UJET is taking digital endpoints and their features and infusing them with intelligent automation in order to deliver a one-of-a-kind support experience where agents, supervisors, and executives have the tools they need to reduce costs, increase brand loyalty, and resolve their customers issues faster.

For more information about UJET or to see a product demo, visit [www.getUJET.com](http://www.getUJET.com).