Acquia

EXPERIENCE DIGITAL FREEDOM

DESIGN RESILIENT DIGITAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES IN DISRUPTIVE TIMES

Customer Experience Trends Report, UK Edition

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INSIGHTS FROM UK MARKETERS AND CONSUMERS ON THE CHANGING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE FOR 2021 AND BEYOND.

As COVID-19 rapidly brought changes to the way we live and work, both consumers and brands were affected. UK consumers experienced a shift in the way that they make purchases, buying more online and purchasing more from trusted digital channels such as Amazon.

While UK brands took a variety of steps to improve the customer experience (CX), including creating more content and making tone adjustments, there

is still a significant opportunity for technology implementations to help scale and smooth the digital CX.

UK marketers report being on par with the global average for implementing personalisation, artificial intelligence and machine learning solutions – but fall behind the curve in areas such as customer data platforms (CDPs), content management systems (CMS), marketing automation, and low-code/no-code development tools.

As noted in the global edition of this report, a recent survey found 70% of executives expect the pandemic to accelerate digital transformation. That signals big changes for marketers and the technology they rely on to create unforgettable customer experiences (CX).

Brands developing a resiliency roadmap for the UK market can deliver a winning customer experience by focusing on technology, talent, and touchpoints:

Technology
Implementing key technologies such as customer data platforms, content management systems, and marketing automation can help UK brands scale their digital CX. Open platforms provide digital flexibility, easier personalisation and greater interoperability to eliminate commonly cited challenges to growth.

33%

OF UK ORGANISATIONS REPORT A WORKFORCE SHORTAGE DUE TO COVID-19.
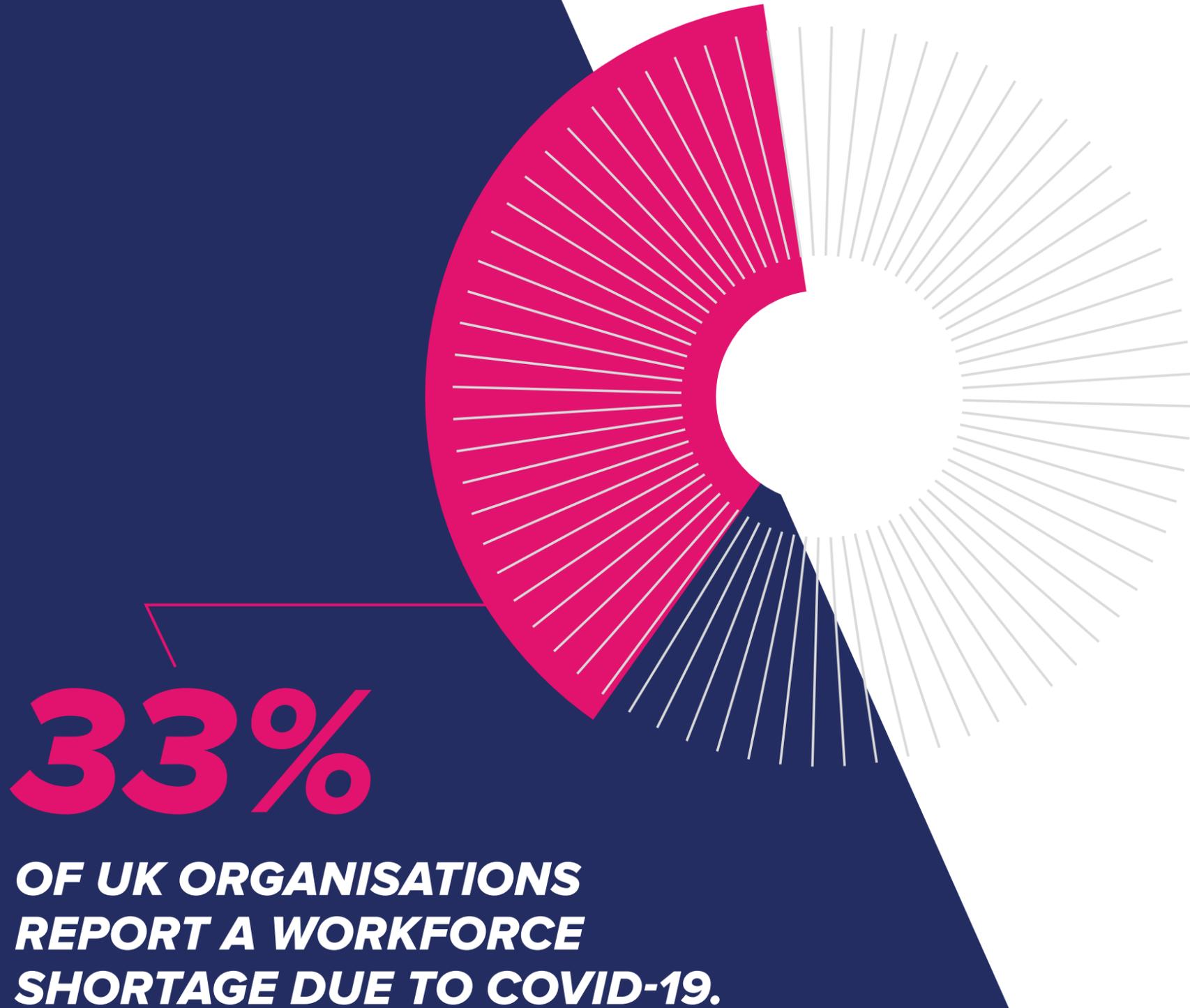
/ Talent

One third of UK organisations report a workforce shortage due to COVID-19. As marketing departments find ways forward, technology can help. Over half of UK organisations report relying on their CMOs to set the CX vision, and marketers identified significant talent shortages in areas ranging from data science to web development. Explore how technology can extend capabilities and close talent gaps.

/ Touchpoints

Personalisation is key to succeeding in the UK market, as consumers report diversifying and spending more time on disparate digital channels. While 68% of marketers believe consumers trust them with data, just 57% of consumers agree. The trust gap is less significant than in other markets, yet still underscores the need for thoughtful ongoing data transparency and management.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

To gain a perspective on these topics through a global lens, we collected the views of 8,000 consumers and 800 marketers across Australia, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The survey explores how marketing and consumer behaviour have shifted to adapt to the new landscape. In this piece, we take a deep dive into the specific insights gathered from UK respondents, which included 1,000 consumers and 100 marketers.

SECTION 01

CONSUMER EXPERIENCE SHIFTS IN THE FACE OF DISRUPTION

83%
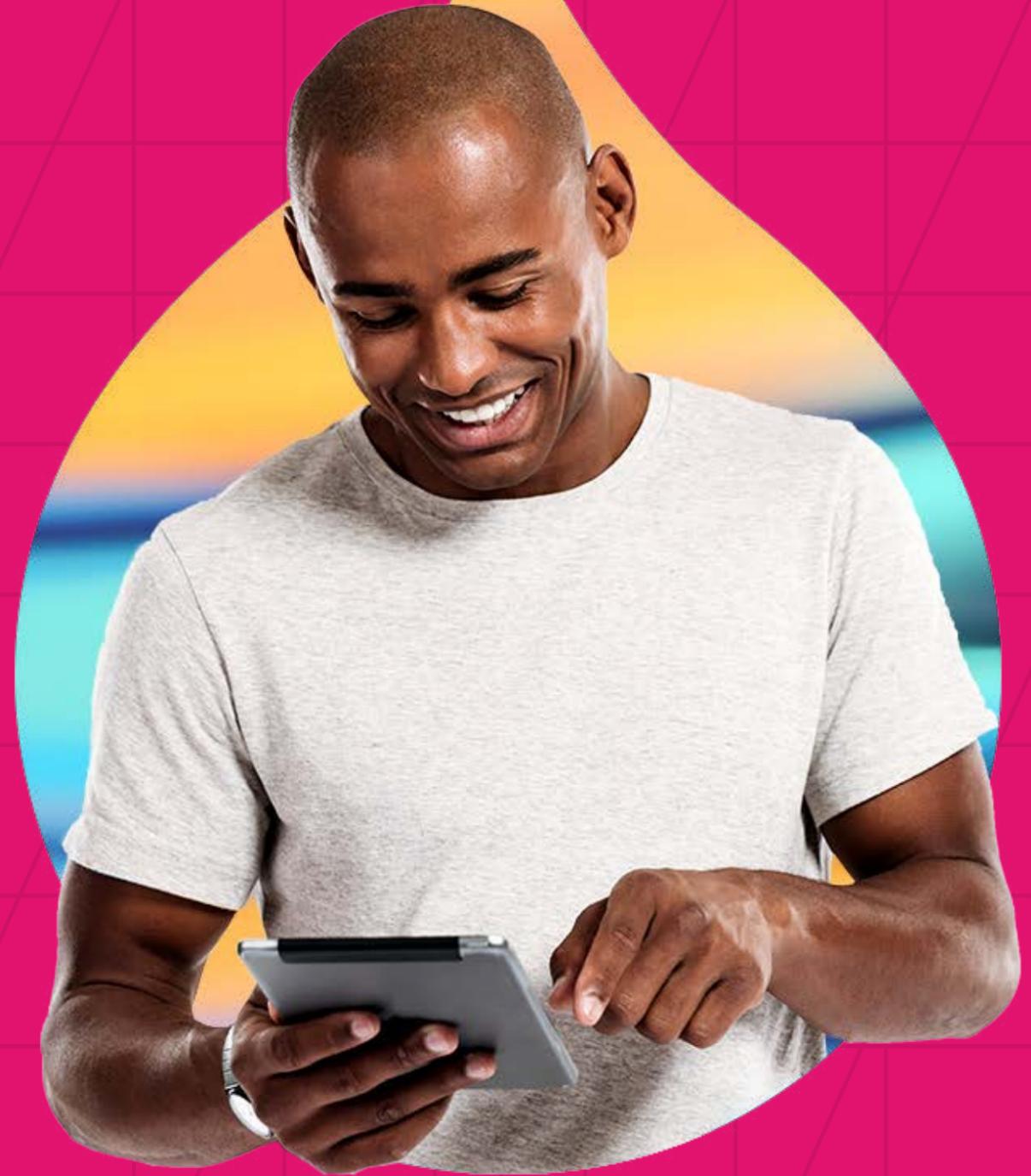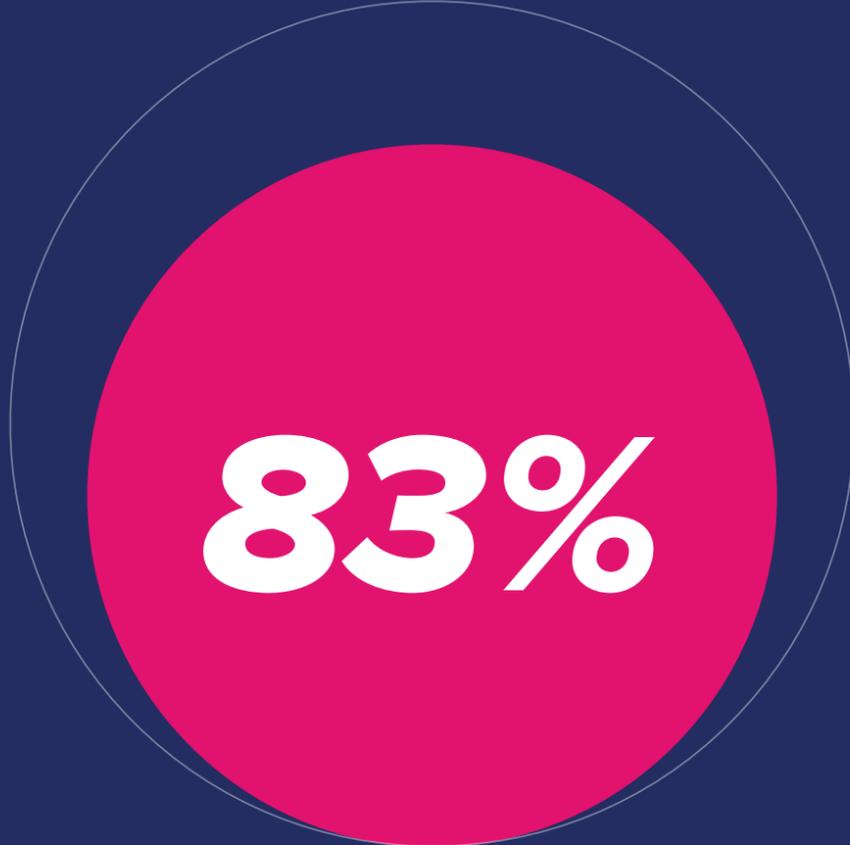
OF UK BRANDS FELT THEIR ROI ON MARKETING AND CX TECHNOLOGY IMPROVED OVER THE PAST YEAR.

77% of UK respondents say their digital experience with brands has changed since the start of the pandemic.

Brands had made significant strides in their digital technology that helped them adapt fast: 81% of UK brands felt they were well-prepared for the shift. UK marketers reported being on par with the global average for implementing personalisation, artificial intelligence and machine learning solutions which helped smooth transitions. Indeed, 83% of UK brands felt their ROI on marketing and CX technology improved over the past year.
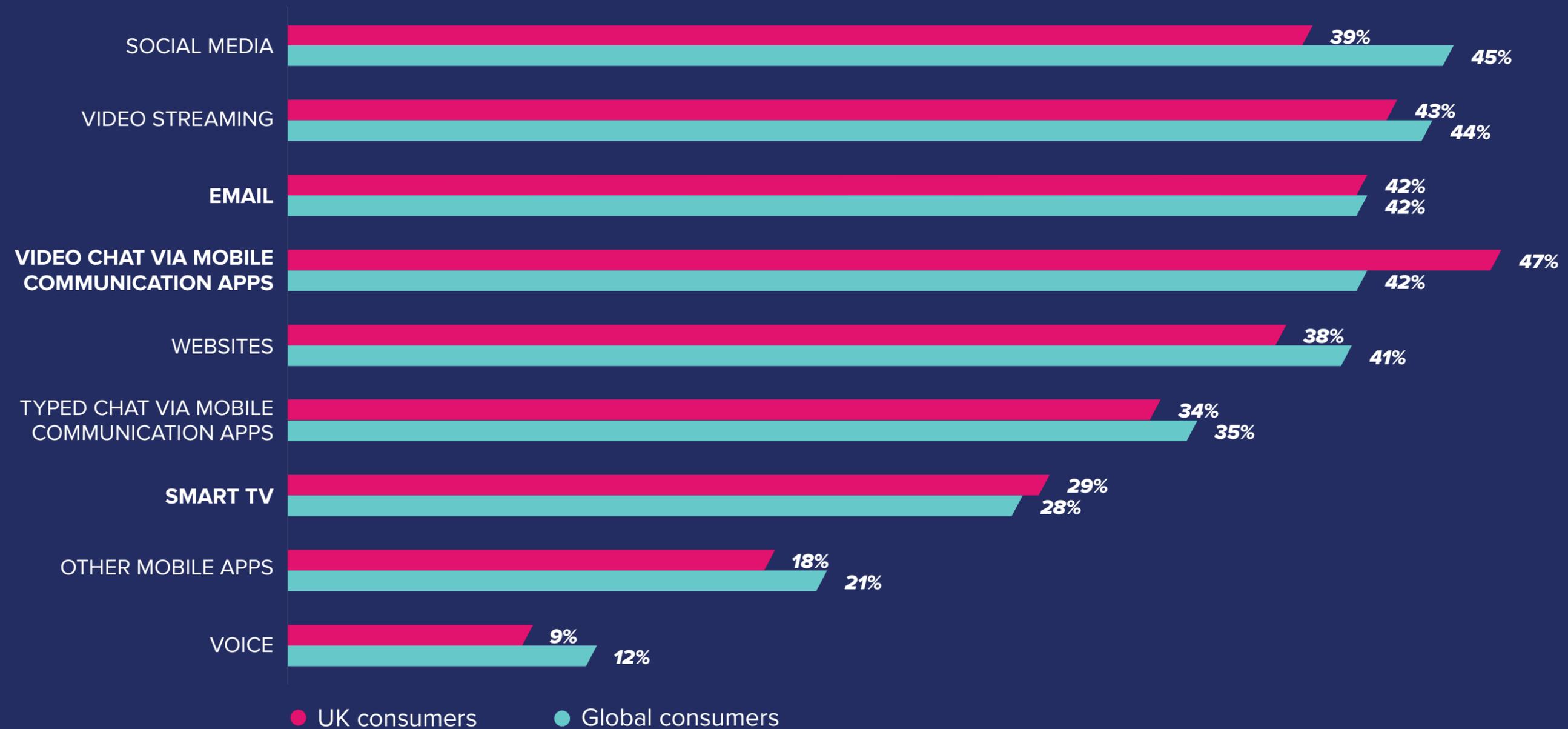
Overall, UK consumers faced significant adjustments to the way they shop and interact with brands. Over two-fifths (43%) of consumers buy more online than they did before. Specific channels also have received more activity, with 47% of consumers buying more from Amazon than they did pre-pandemic. Even the way consumers want to interact with brands has changed, with nearly one-fifth (18%) reporting they'd rather interact with brands online.

Another important shift that UK consumers report is expanding the channels they use and increasing the amount of time spent on different digital platforms. Not only can this point the way toward critical channels for brands' CX strategies, but it can open new avenues for marketing and connection.

**Digital channels that consumers report spending more time on:
UK consumers vs. Global consumers.**

Channels where UK increases exceed global average bolded for emphasis.

Channel	UK consumers	Global consumers
SOCIAL MEDIA	39%	45%
VIDEO STREAMING	43%	44%
EMAIL	42%	42%
VIDEO CHAT VIA MOBILE COMMUNICATION APPS	47%	42%
WEBSITES	38%	41%
TYPED CHAT VIA MOBILE COMMUNICATION APPS	34%	35%
SMART TV	29%	28%
OTHER MOBILE APPS	18%	21%
VOICE	9%	12%

● UK consumers ● Global consumers

As consumers and brands continue to adapt to the new landscape, the digital CX becomes increasingly visible. Nearly one-third (27%) of consumers stated that the digital experience is more important than ever. Technology gaps, staffing challenges, and difficulties with delivering cross-channel personalisation all require thoughtful response and planning.

It's also important to consider what happens when you're unable to deliver what customers need. The UK's brands have performed well to date but remain under pressure to continue innovating and solving challenges such as delivering greater personalisation and scaling their digital CX. A website glitch, payment problem, or other CX breakdown can lead to disappointed consumers. The stakes are still high. But the good news is that there are key steps UK brands can take to solidify their future.

As we explore these UK research findings and perspectives, we'll recommend ways that brands can architect for adaptability and develop unique CX strategies for the UK market by homing in on three areas:

TECHNOLOGY, TALENT, AND TOUCHPOINTS.

SECTION 02

UK BRANDS MUST EXPEDITE TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION AND EMBRACE OPEN PLATFORMS

CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

35% GLOBALLY

VS

26% UK

Technology implementation plays a key role in meeting the fast-changing customer needs in the COVID-19 landscape. UK brands report they are in line with global trends on adopting technology in two categories:

Personalisation
43% UK vs. 43% globally

Artificial intelligence and machine learning:
44% UK vs. 44% globally

However, marketers fall behind their global counterparts implementing other technologies such as:

Marketing automation,
60% UK vs. 63% globally

Customer data platforms:
53% UK vs. 54% globally

Content management systems:
26% UK vs. 35% globally

Low-code or no-code development tools:
17% UK vs. 24% globally

Implementing these technologies and shifting toward open customer experience platforms that offer greater flexibility and interoperability can help solve some of the most important challenges UK marketers identified.

Issues include adopting new marketing solutions (49%), getting existing marketing solutions to integrate with new ones (40%), testing new marketing channels (39%), and preparing websites for increased demand (43%). Budget was also a challenge for more than one-third of firms developing a roadmap forward.

AS UK BRANDS CONSIDER THEIR NEXT STEPS WITH TECHNOLOGY, THERE ARE A FEW KEY TAKEAWAYS TO CONSIDER:

Increase the adoption of key technologies: While the gaps are small, the reality is that UK brands report being slightly behind global peers in adopting key technologies such as marketing automation and customer data platforms. Investing in the right technology helps organisations pave the road for growth and improving the customer experience.

Open platforms: Consider an open platform that makes it easier to adopt new channels. Interoperability simplifies the communications process between key systems and shortens time to market when you adopt new digital channels.

Automation: Embracing marketing automation technology can not only help address staff shortages and skills gaps, but it can ensure consistent customer communication which brands identified as a core priority moving forward.

CASE STUDY:
HARLOW COUNCIL

Harlow Council is a government authority committed to serving 80,000 local residents and businesses of Harlow, a town and government district in Essex, England. Some of their main duties include recycling, rubbish collection, Council tax collections, land planning permits and housing applications.

Harlow Council's website serves as a tool for residents to complete essential services, such as schedule waste collection and acquire legal documentation, as well as a source of information about public life and community events. The Council's prior website had several accessibility issues, and was dated and confusing.

Drupal 8's flexible, open source architecture and the Acquia Cloud Platform allowed the Council to revamp their entire site experience and better manage content and improve responsiveness across all device types, including web accessibility standards.

After its launch, the Harlow Council website experienced a 30% increase in overall site visits in February 2020 compared to February 2019. The flexible and seamless interface on the redesigned website made it simpler for users to locate relevant content. Overall, Harlow anticipates long-term gains in the number of people turning to online channels at the start of their user journey. This helps the organisation cut down on resources and dedicate more of their limited staff's time to serving customers who may not have the option of digital communication.
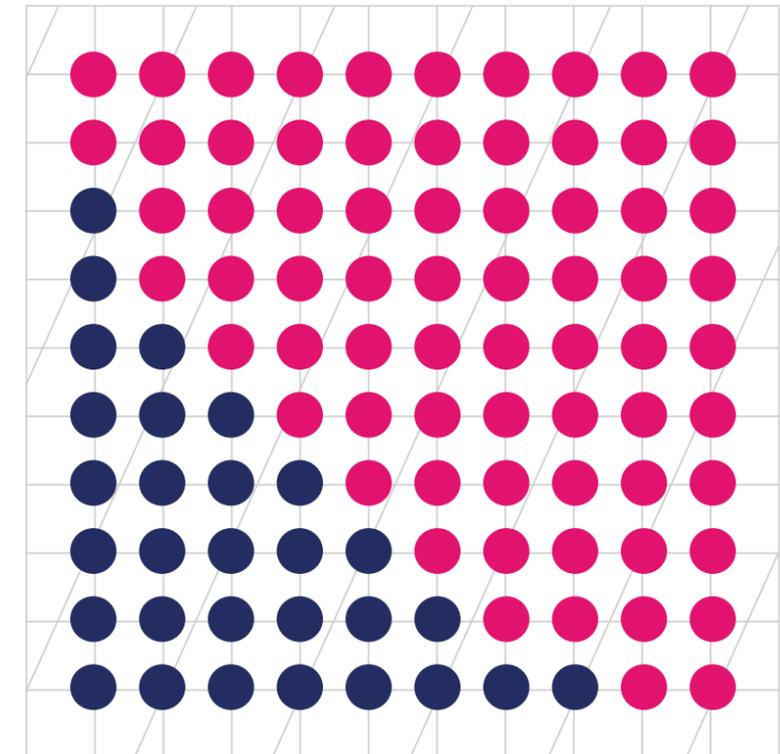
30% INCREASE IN OVERALL SITE VISITS IN FEBRUARY 2020 COMPARED TO FEBRUARY 2019

SECTION 03

CLOSE TALENT GAPS WITH TECHNOLOGY
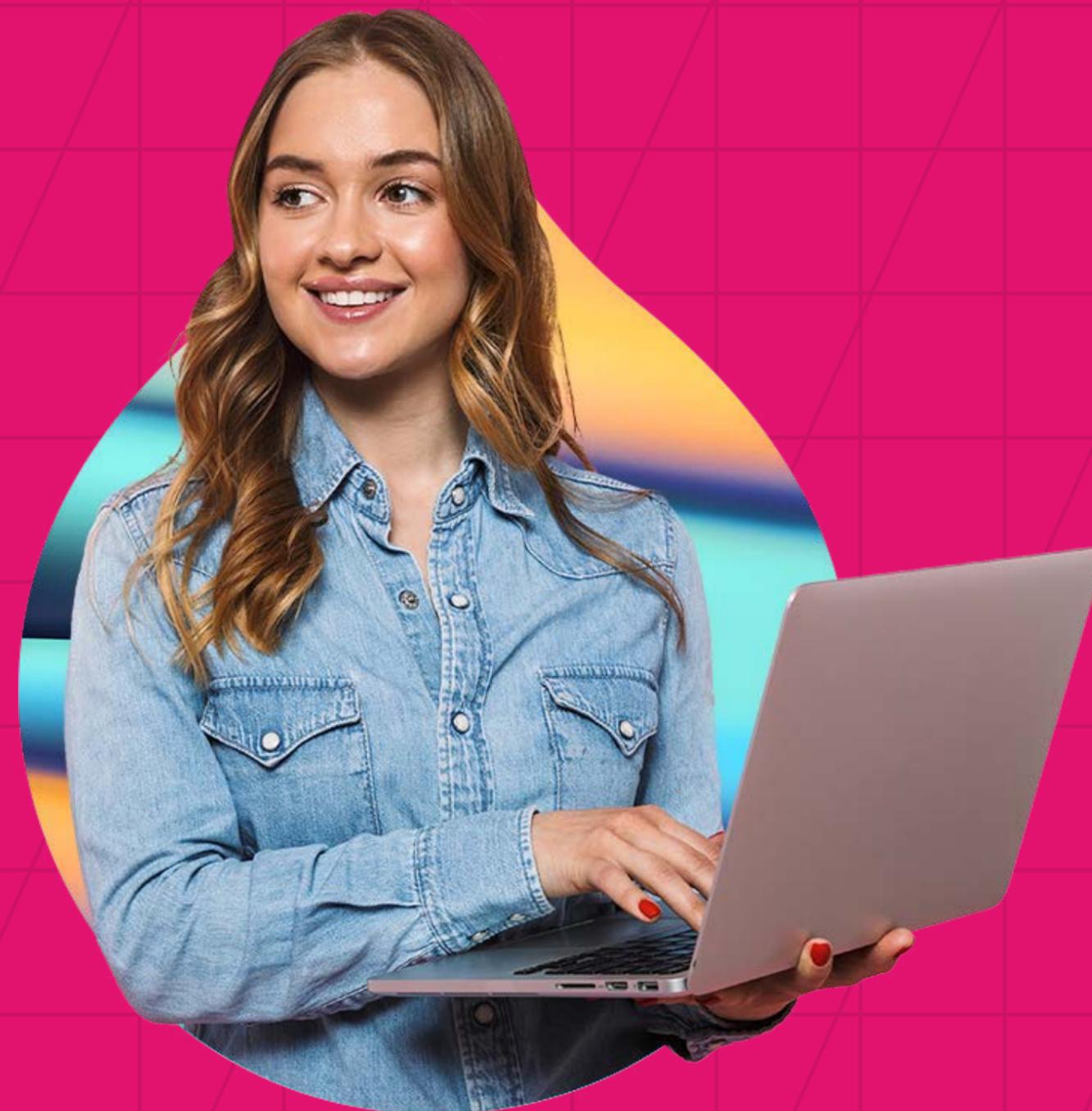
36% UK

WEB DEVELOPER TALENT

33% GLOBALLY

54% of UK brands rely on their CMO to set the CX vision for their organisation. UK brand CMOs are trying to accomplish audacious goals with a lean workforce and important skills gaps.

Nearly one-third (30%) of UK brands noted they're currently facing workforce reductions due to COVID-19. While UK marketers report they are significantly better off than their global counterparts for machine learning talent and growth marketers, skills shortages align with or exceed global averages in other areas such as:

Brand marketing leadership
44% UK vs. 44% globally

Digital customer service-related roles
43% UK vs. 44% globally

Data analysts or data scientists
42% UK vs. 43% globally

Web developer talent
36% UK vs. 33% globally
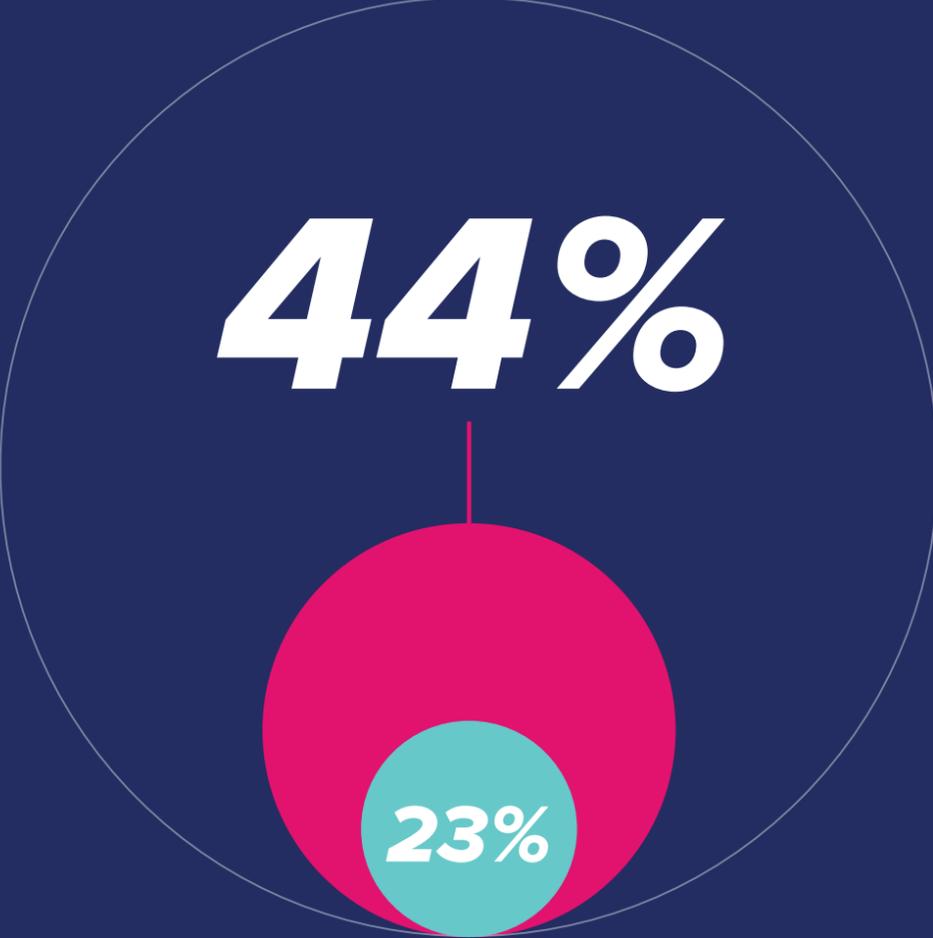
44%

23%

OF UK BRANDS NOTE THEY FACE A BRAND LEADERSHIP TALENT SHORTAGE AND 23% REPORT CONFUSION ON WHERE TO BEGIN THEIR CX TECHNOLOGY JOURNEYS.

To close skills gaps and support talent, UK brands can:

Close workforce shortages with automation: Automation can help streamline marketing delivery and get more done, even with a lean marketing team. Explore how automation technology can simplify the execution of your most important brand campaigns.

Improve technical capabilities with the right platform: Engineering, web development and data analytics talent shortages don't have to slow you down. Low-code platforms make it easier to build, deploy, and analyse campaigns without sophisticated programming knowledge.

Explore outside advisory partnerships: CMOs can leverage greater support in making their CX visions a reality. Nearly half of UK brands (44%) note they face a brand leadership talent shortage and 23% report confusion on where to begin their CX technology journeys. Partnering with an open customer experience platform can give brands access to the knowledge to assess current assets, develop an implementation roadmap, and avoid common challenges by employing CX best practices.

SECTION 04

# TOUCHPOINTS: GETTING TONE AND PERSONALISATION RIGHT

37%

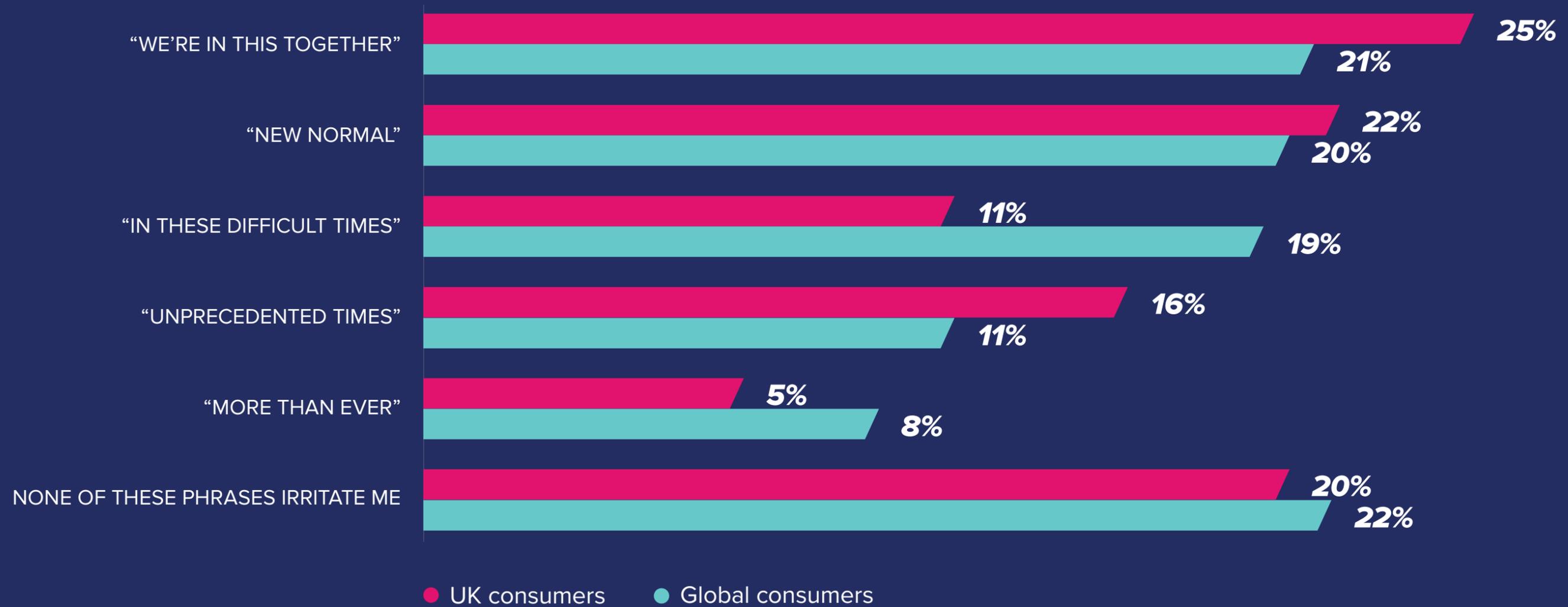## WELCOMING A HUMOROUS OR LIGHT-HEARTED TONE. LANGUAGE IS ALSO CRUCIAL IN THE COVID-19 LANDSCAPE.

As the digital touchpoints brands and consumers interact with continue to expand, UK marketers face important challenges in terms of striking the right tone and crafting messaging.

Tone matters: UK consumers indicate they're open to different approaches to marketing messaging, with 45% preferring an engaging/understanding approach and 37% welcoming a humorous or light-hearted tone. Language is also crucial in the COVID-19 landscape. UK consumers indicate they're most likely to embrace straightforward phrases such as "in these difficult times," while phrases such as "we're in this together" can feel annoying or overused.
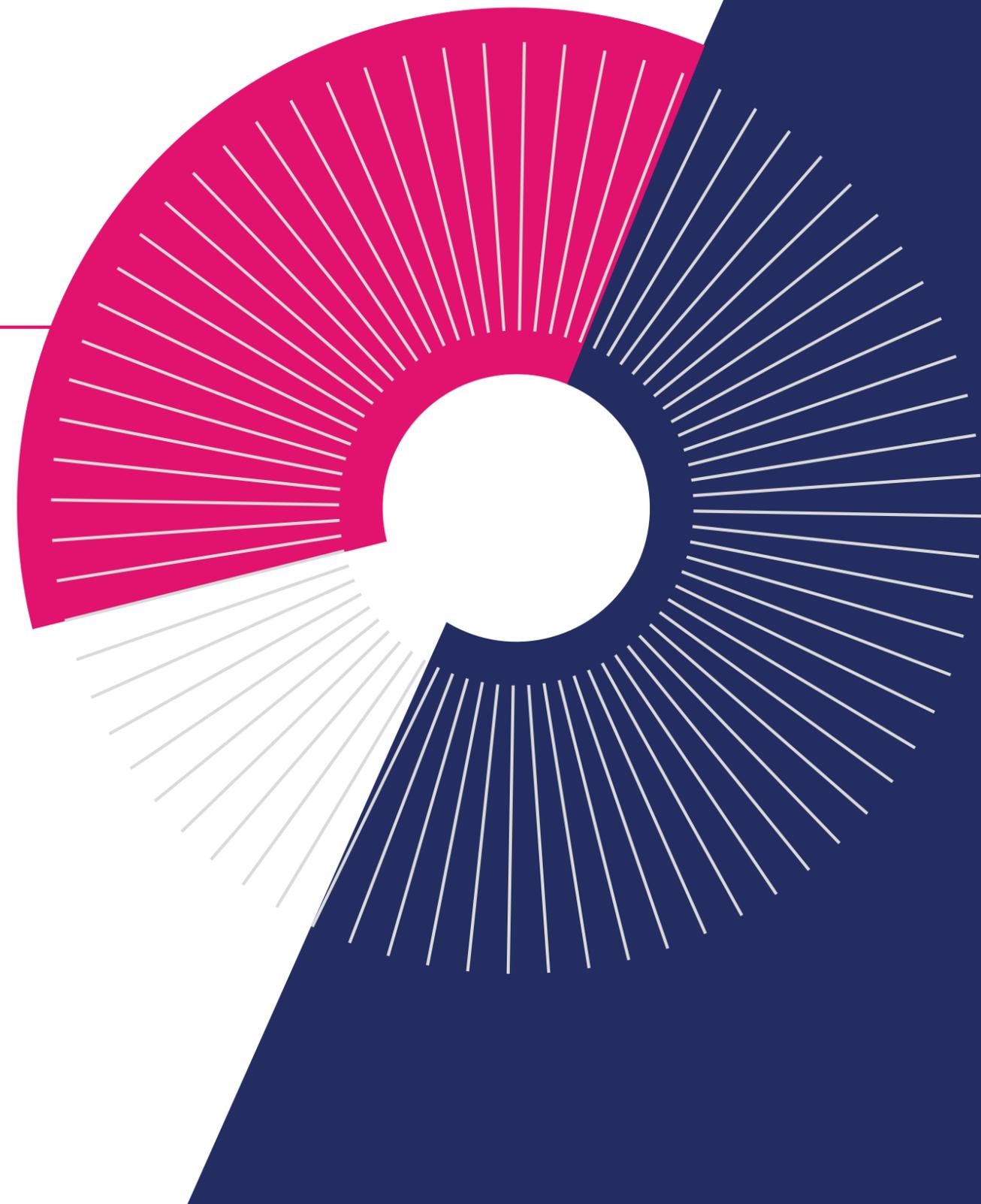
What phrases do you find annoying or overused? UK consumers vs. Global consumers.

"WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER"
- UK consumers: 25%
- Global consumers: 21%

"NEW NORMAL"
- UK consumers: 22%
- Global consumers: 20%

"IN THESE DIFFICULT TIMES"
- UK consumers: 11%
- Global consumers: 19%

"UNPRECEDENTED TIMES"
- UK consumers: 16%
- Global consumers: 11%

"MORE THAN EVER"
- UK consumers: 5%
- Global consumers: 8%

NONE OF THESE PHRASES IRRITATE ME
- UK consumers: 20%
- Global consumers: 22%

● UK consumers   ● Global consumers

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE
TRENDS REPORT, UK EDITION

While

68%

of marketers believe consumers trust them more with data, just

57%

of consumers agree.

NO MATTER WHAT DIGITAL CHANNEL YOU INTERACT ON, PERSONALISATION MATTERS.

Delivering personalisation requires consumer data – and there's a trust gap at play in the UK. While 68% of UK marketers believe consumers trust them more than last year with data, just 57% of consumers agree.

While the gap isn't as dramatic as other markets, it signals the importance of continuing to build on data privacy, transparency and security initiatives moving forward.

How can brands approach this disconnect?
Data from our 2019 survey provides insights:

Be transparent about data you're collecting and give consumers control over their information. 62% of UK consumers are not confident that brands have their best interests in mind when they use, share and/or store their personal data. Consumers who understand what information you gather, how it's being used, and how they can stop sharing data are more likely to trust brand intentions.

Make it easy for consumers to see that you comply with data regulations. Despite data regulations such as GDPR, many consumers still worry about data regulation and privacy. Whether due to a lack of clarity or the way they're presented, 74% of UK consumers find the "opt-in" and "accept" options used on websites to collect their data to be frustrating. Use clear language and simplify key aspects of your digital CX to show you comply with data regulations.

Deliver real value in exchange for information. Build trust with customers by showing an immediate return – such as meaningful personalisation, discounts, or relevant content.

SECTION 05

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Scaling a successful digital CX for the UK market requires embracing best practices:

1. Continue building a competitive edge with open customer experience technology: Ongoing technology investments will help UK brands scale the digital CX to meet consumer demand. Marketers can adopt essential technologies such as CDPs and content management systems to continue improving their CX. Open customer experience platforms eliminate commonly cited challenges while offering features such as greater interoperability and flexible digital deployments.

2. Close talent gaps with automation and other marketing technologies: UK brand leadership face challenges that include lean teams and key skills gaps. Strategically implement technology solutions – such as marketing automation – to increase your capacity and streamline campaign delivery.

3. Close the trust gap with a transparent data strategy: As brands push forward to expand personalisation, UK marketers must keep an eye on the data-driven trust gap. Continuing to prioritise transparency, data security, and clear value will encourage consumers to share their data over the long-term.

UK brands and consumers had to change rapidly in the face of COVID-19. Going forward, strategic steps to align technology, talent and touchpoints can ensure brands are positioned to deliver an unforgettable customer experience – no matter what challenges and opportunities lie ahead.

NOW, LET'S GET STARTED.

Brands need a partner committed to supporting them as they strive to do what's best for their customers. They also need a partner with a vision for CX and how open technology can support it. Learn why Acquia is that partner.

LEARN MORE ▶
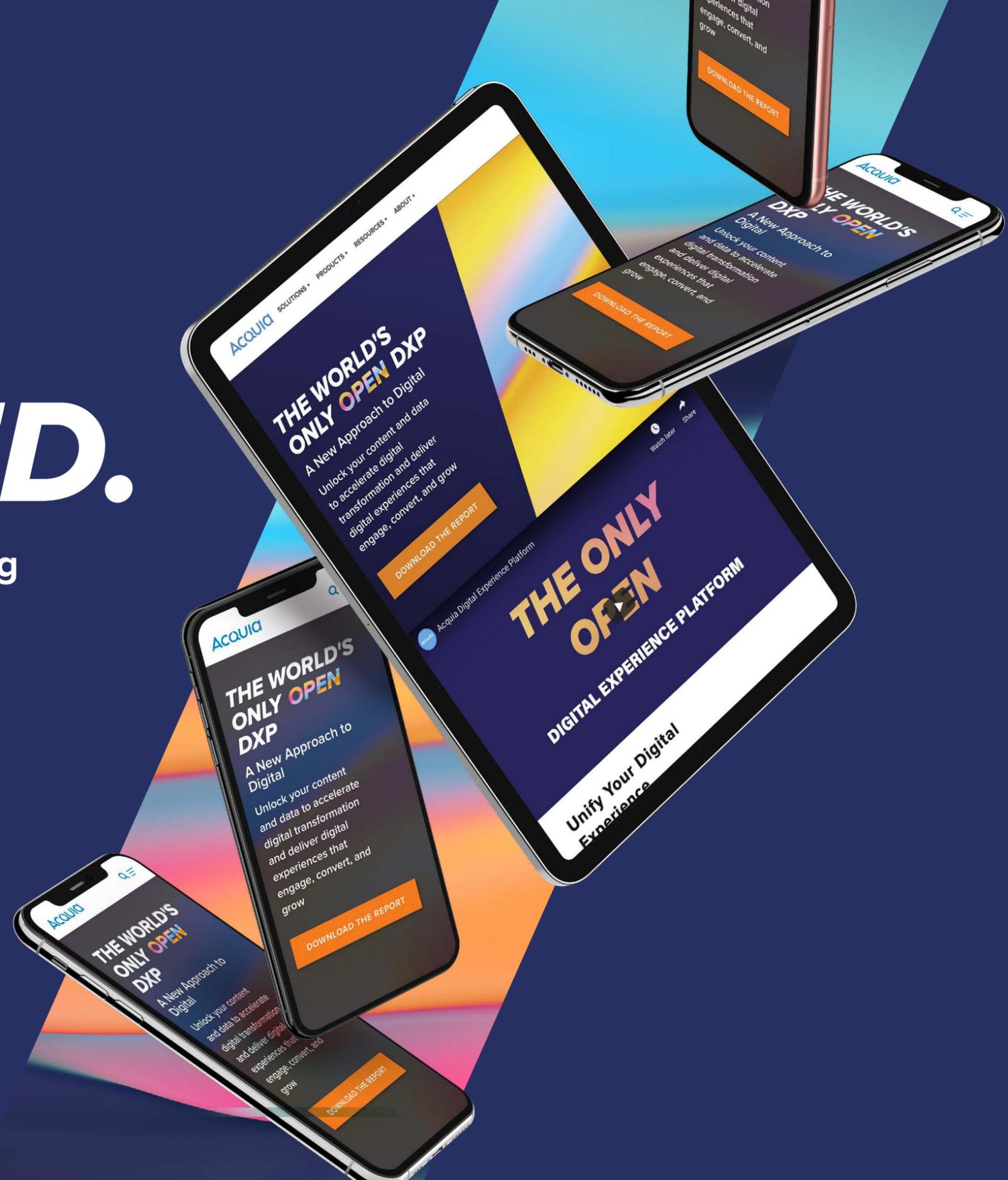
ABOUT THE SURVEY

"Design Resilient Digital Customer Experiences in Disruptive Times" was commissioned by Acquia and conducted by Vanson Bourne during June and July 2020. Respondents to the online survey were 8,000 consumers (1,000 from each location: Australia, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and 800 marketers, with 100 representatives from each of the same nations listed above.

ABOUT ACQUIA

Acquia is the open digital experience company. We provide the world's most ambitious brands with technology that allows them to embrace innovation and create customer moments that matter. At Acquia, we believe in the power of community – giving our customers the freedom to build tomorrow on their terms. To learn more, visit acquia.com.

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