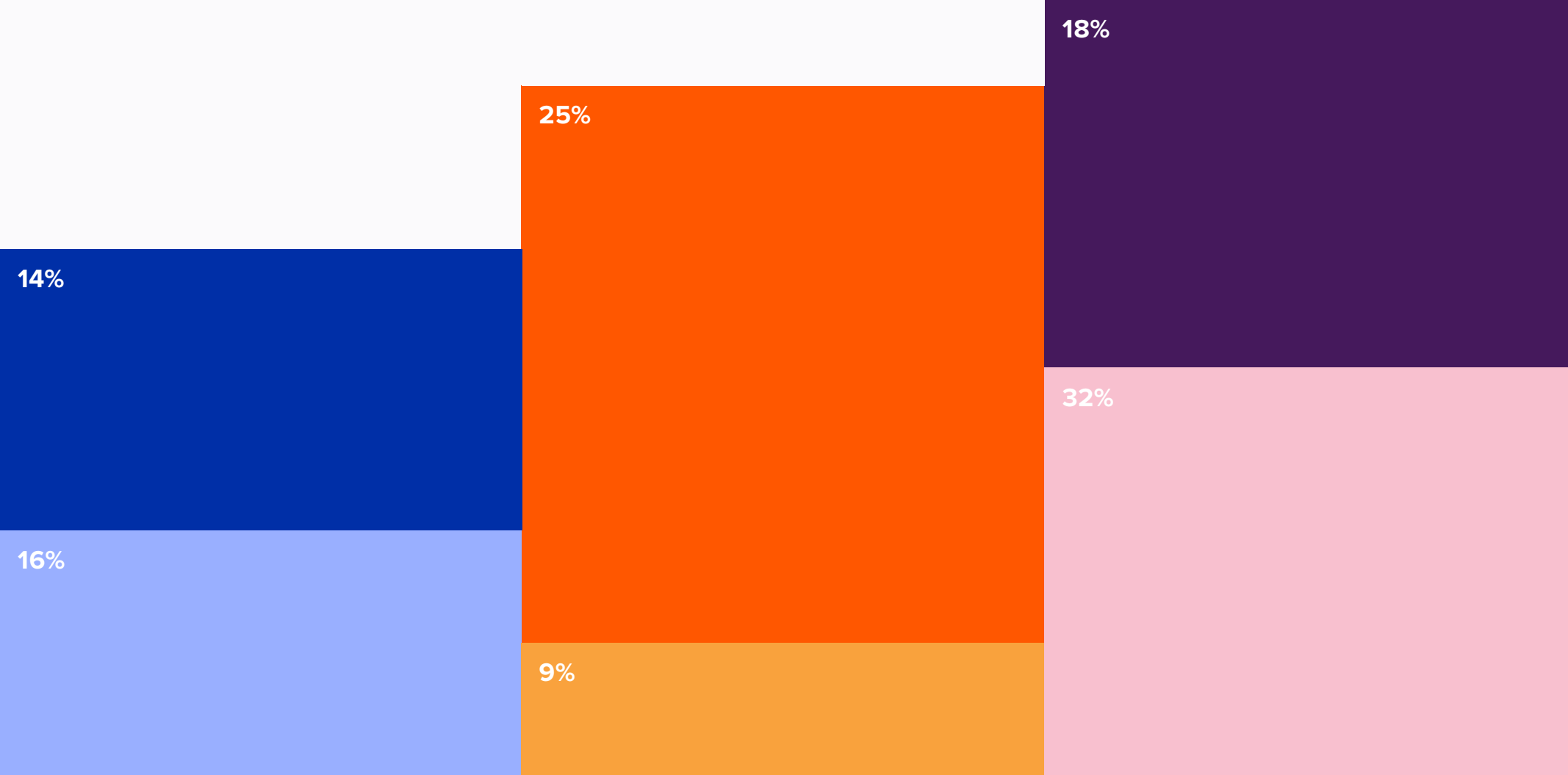


# THE 2020 CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW

A survey of how consumers prefer to communicate with businesses



The background features a white central area with blue and orange geometric shapes on the left side. The shapes include a large blue rectangle at the top left, a dark blue vertical bar, and an orange shape at the bottom left. The main text is in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.

# **WE'RE COMMUNICATING WITH BUSINESSES OVER MORE AND MORE CHANNELS EVERY DAY.**

Let's just say picking up the phone isn't the only option anymore.

Now, we can email, live-chat, even text businesses to get answers to our questions. But those forms of communications go the other way too—businesses can now text their customers (and prospects), email them with offers and promotions, and, of course, call them.

But is this actually good for business? Or is it just annoying and alienating customers (and potential customers)?

In this report, we'll look at consumers' preferences when it comes to communicating with businesses and dig into how businesses can reach out in a way that's actually productive and effective.

# A FEW THINGS WE'LL LOOK AT...

How different industries are performing

How people's communications preferences change after a purchase

Consumers' motivations for calling companies

Consumers' phone call experiences

And more...

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**A QUICK SUMMARY**

**05**

**METHODOLOGY**

**07**

**AGE GROUP COMPARISONS**

**09**


**DETAILED FINDINGS**

**15**

**ABOUT RINGCENTRAL**

**39**

# **A QUICK SUMMARY**

The background consists of several overlapping rectangular blocks in white, light blue, and dark blue. The white block is in the top-left corner. A light blue block is positioned below and to the right of the white block. A dark blue block is in the top-right corner. Another light blue block is below the top-right dark blue block. A large light blue block is in the bottom-left area. A dark blue block is in the bottom-right area, overlapping the light blue block below it.

# A QUICK SUMMARY

- Perhaps surprisingly, consumers regard a broad array of industries as delivering well on customer service expectations.
  - This is more strongly felt among those under age 56.
- The ability to speak to a human is key to delivering a good customer experience, both during the purchasing stages as well as for support afterwards.
  - Talking to someone is highly important when making an important service decision or large purchase.
  - After a purchase has been made, many consumers accept other modes of communication besides the phone.
  - Two-way communication is strongly preferred to other options like FAQs, videos, and Twitter.
- At the same time, mode and frequency of contact is often specific to needs; for instance, texts are welcomed for confirming appointments, while phone calls for sales/marketing are far less so.
- Consumers look for prompt replies especially via voicemail, email, and web forms.
- Expectations are pretty high for telephone-based support:
  - Customers won't hold for than 2-3 minutes in general and will just hang up if frustrated.
  - Long hold times and repeated transfers are the most irritating problems, followed by messaging, music, and surveys (younger consumers are more bothered by these issues).
  - Most people have elevated their call to a manager at least once because their problem was not resolved by the first rep.

# METHODOLOGY

The image features a minimalist design with a white background. At the top left, the word "METHODOLOGY" is written in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font. Below the text, there are several large, solid-colored geometric shapes. A large, light blue rectangle occupies the middle-left and bottom-center areas. To its right, a darker blue rectangle extends from the top right towards the center. At the bottom, there are two dark blue rectangular blocks, one on the left and one on the right, which appear to be part of a larger, more complex shape.

# METHODOLOGY

## HOW

Online survey conducted in partnership with Bredin, an award-winning consultancy specializing in original search and custom content.

## WHO

500 US consumers who are 18+ years old and who had called a company's customer service number within the past six months

Note: You might see certain letters called out in the graphs later, like (AB) or (C). This just means that there's a significant difference between the responses for the specified age group and the others.

## WHEN

March 10-18, 2020




# AGE GROUP COMPARISONS



# LET'S TALK (AND CHAT... AND WRITE...)

- Don't call it a comeback, because it looks like phones never left. Phone calls are among the most popular channels of communication for all three age groups, both before and after a purchase.

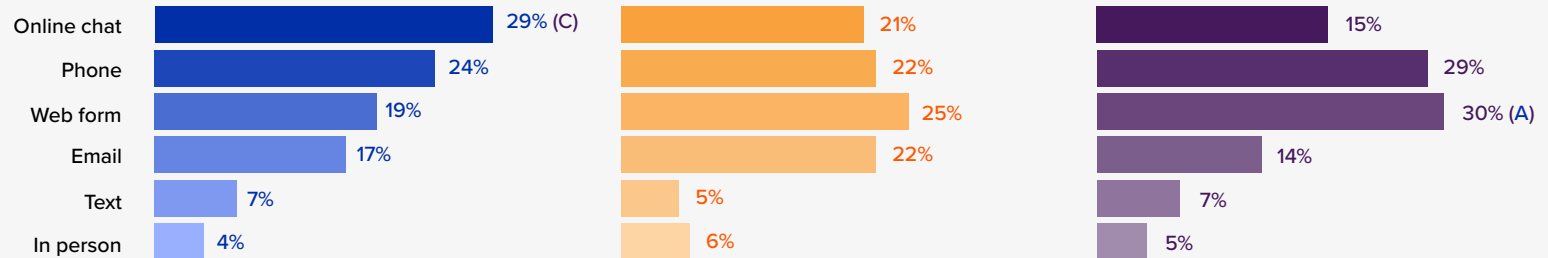
 **The takeaway here?** Make sure you have an [inbound calling strategy](#) and a [business phone system](#).

## AGE 18 TO 39 (A)

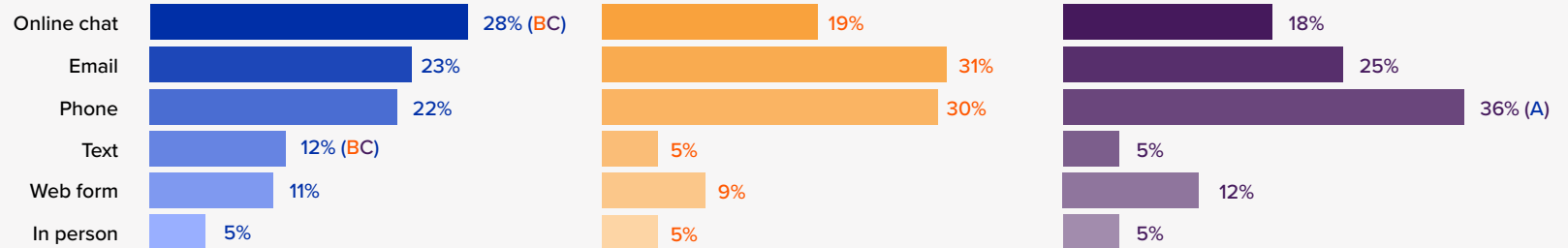
## AGE 40 TO 55 (B)

## AGE 56+ (C)

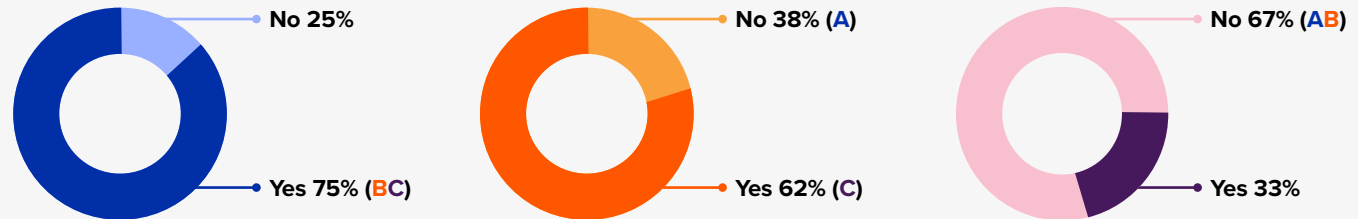
### Preferred communication before purchase



### Preferred communication after purchase



### Expect a chatbot option?



## A CLOSER LOOK

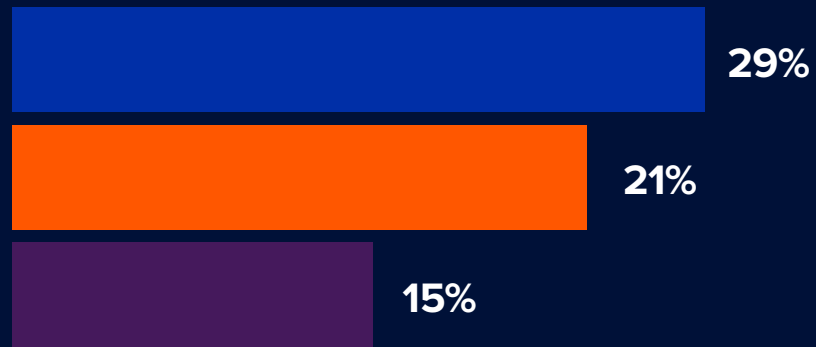
### Preferred communication before purchase

- Before making a purchase, online chat is the most popular way for younger demographics to get in touch, while web forms are more popular for older demographics.
- In contrast, people don't really want to meet in person or text before they buy.

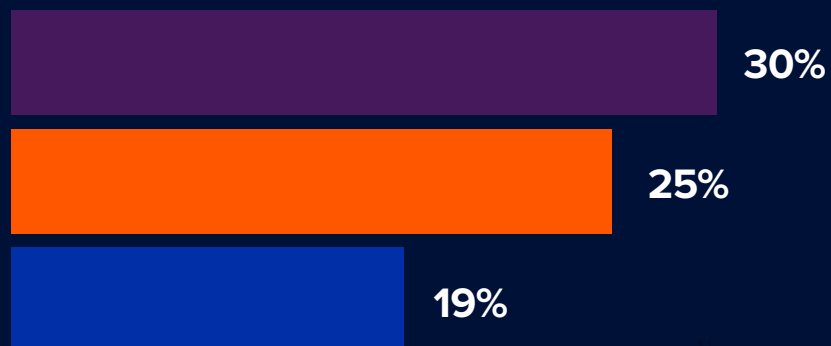
## MOST POPULAR

■ Age 18 to 39   ■ Age 40 to 55   ■ Age 56+

### Online chat



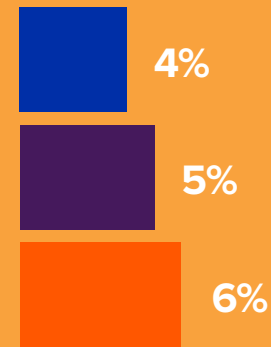
### Web form



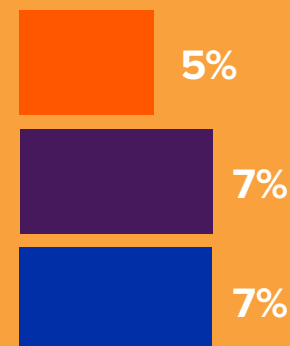
## LEAST POPULAR

■ Age 18 to 39   ■ Age 40 to 55   ■ Age 56+

### In person



### Text



# MOST POPULAR

■ Age 18 to 39   ■ Age 40 to 55   ■ Age 56+

## Online chat



## Email



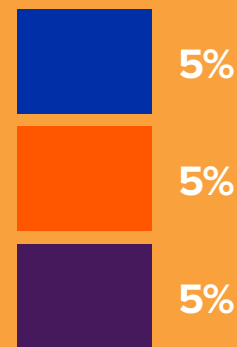
## Phone



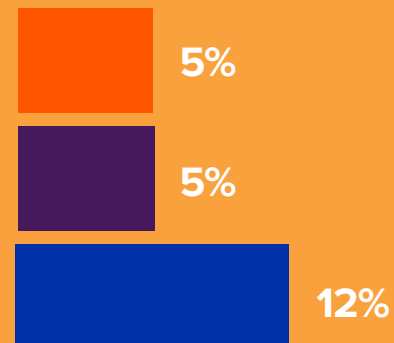
# LEAST POPULAR

■ Age 18 to 39   ■ Age 40 to 55   ■ Age 56+

## In person



## Text



# WHAT'S OKAY AND WHAT'S NOT?

- Every age group is overwhelmingly okay with receiving texts to confirm appointments—but while the 18-55s are fine with receiving texts about deals and sales as well, the 56+ age group is much less likely to want to receive texts about sales.
- The 18-39s would rather not make purchases over the phone, preferring to do it online or in store. The two older age groups are more comfortable using the phone here, with the 56+ group preferring both phone calls and in-store visits over buying online.



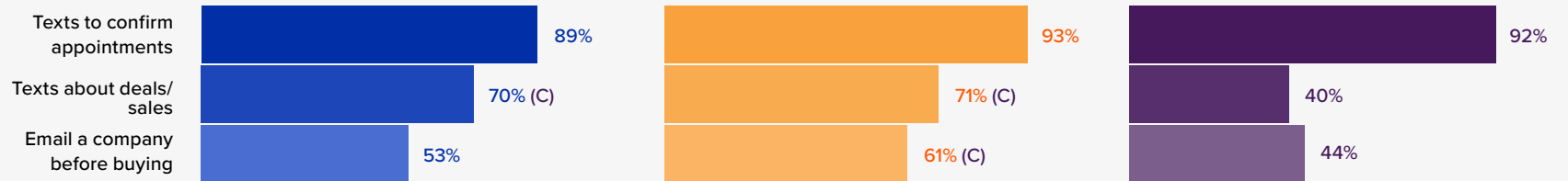
What's noteworthy is that all three groups prefer to get customer support on the phone, with the 56+ group preferring that significantly over all other channels. The 18-39 group is more accepting of a range of different support channels.

## AGE 18 TO 39 (A)

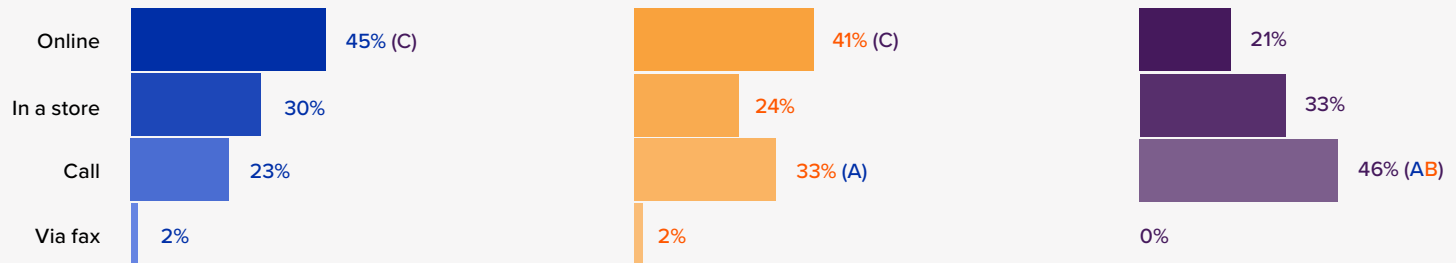
## AGE 40 TO 55 (B)

## AGE 56+ (C)

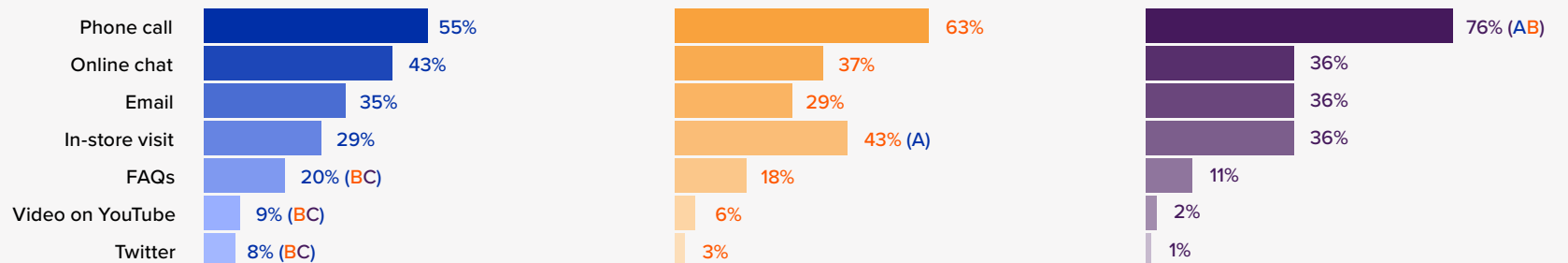
### Acceptable contact methods



### Preferred purchase methods



### Preferred service support methods



# ON THE CALL

- The call taking too long is the most common reason for hanging up, for all three age groups. Interestingly, poor call quality and general frustration were also key secondary reasons why people hang up on businesses.

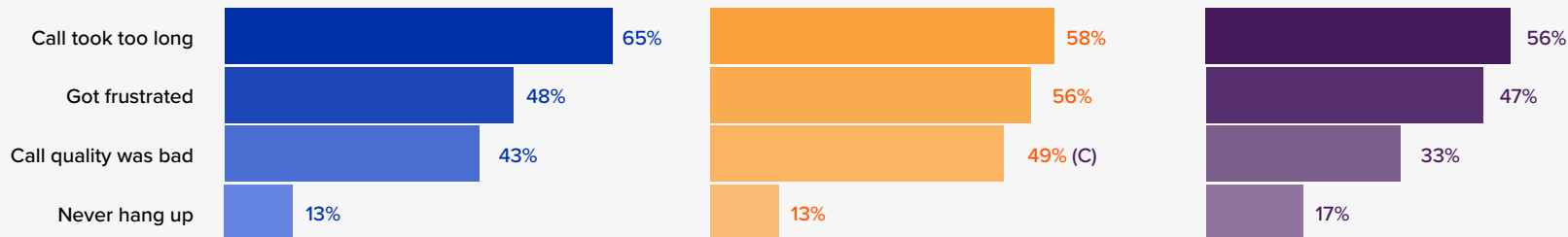
- Most people have requested to speak to a manager before—surprisingly. 18-39s are the most likely to have never requested to speak to a manager (11%), while only 5% of 40-55s have never requested to speak to a manager before.

**AGE 18 TO 39 (A)**

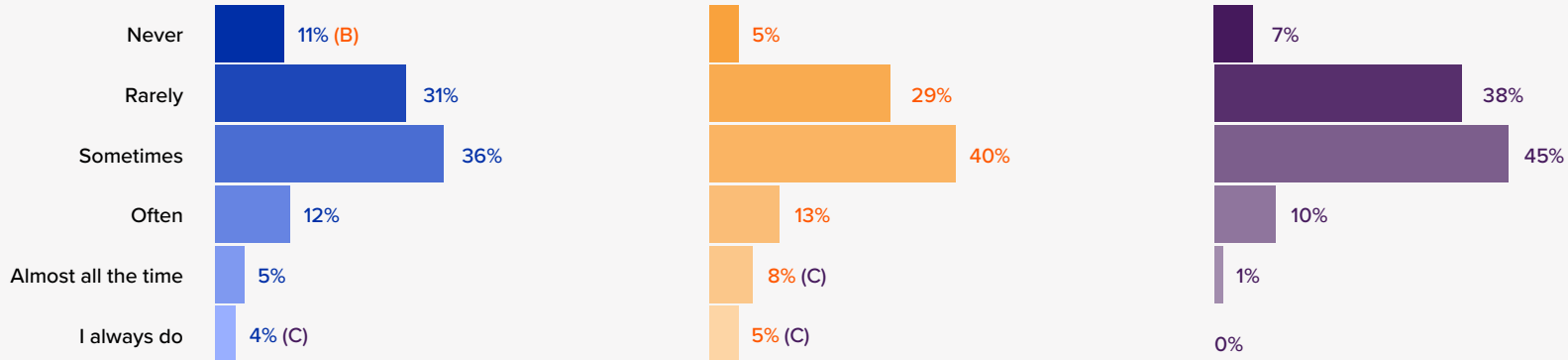
**AGE 40 TO 55 (B)**

**AGE 56+ (C)**

## Reasons for hanging up



## Requested to speak with the manager

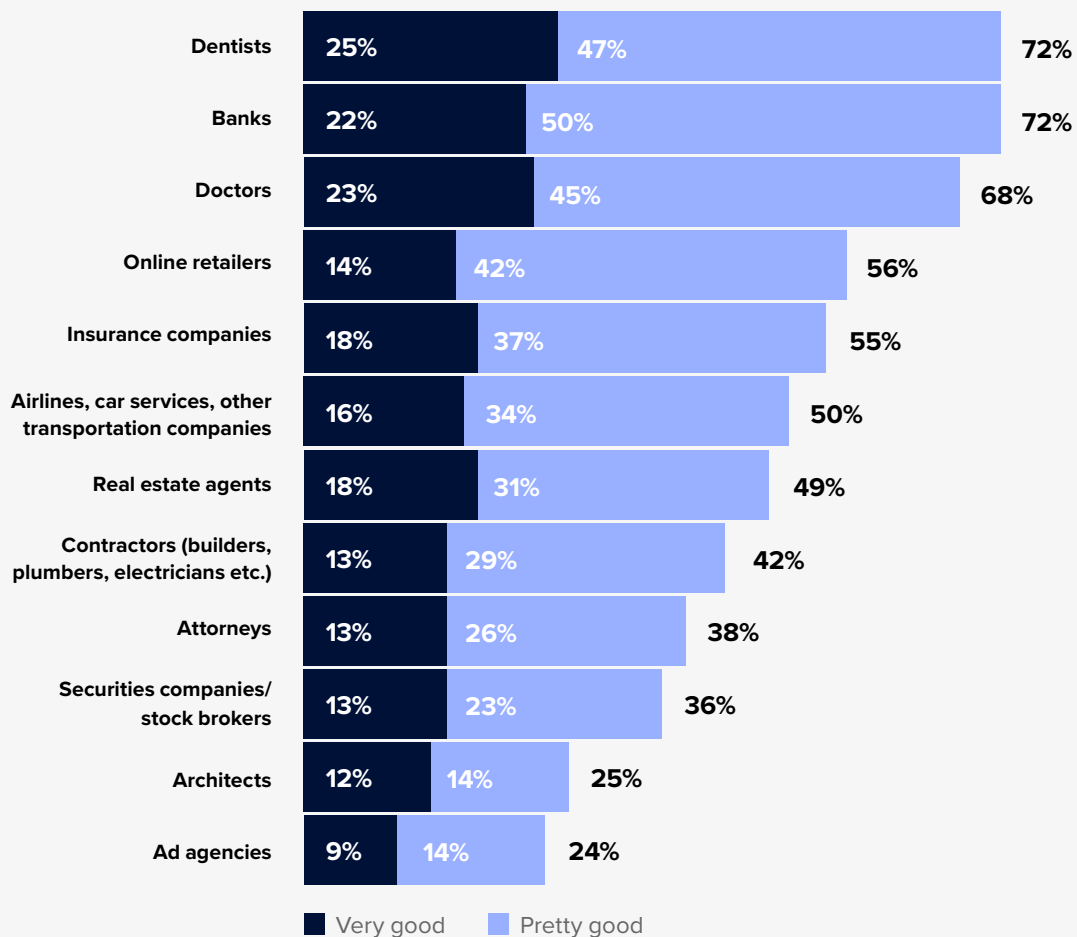


# DETAILED FINDINGS



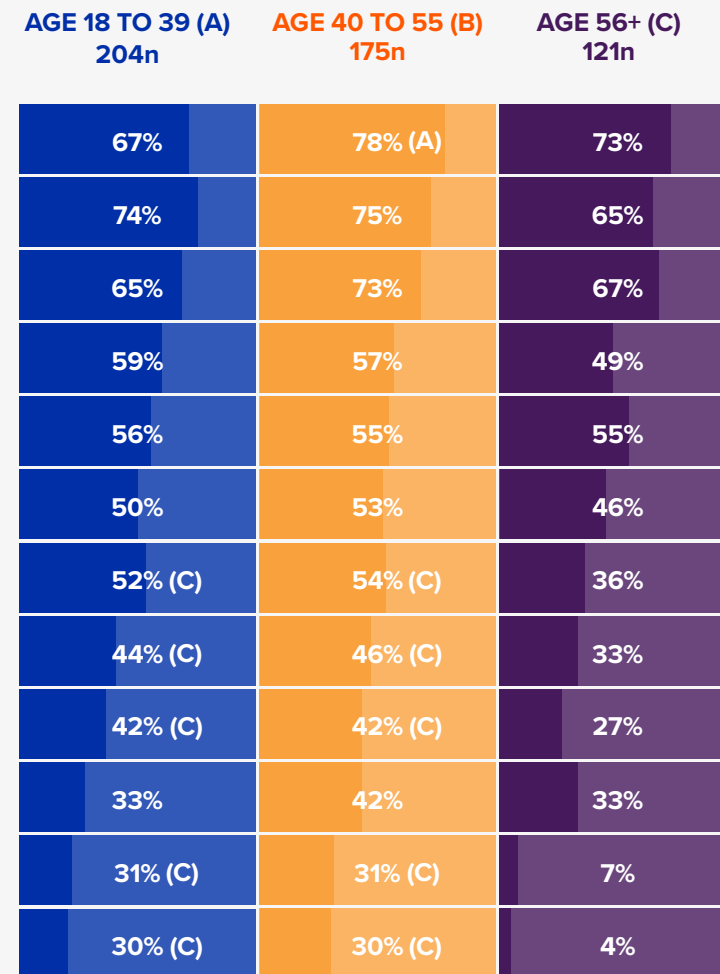
# CUSTOMER SERVICE RATINGS

In your experience, how would you rate each of these industries on their customer service?



**Takeaway:** Ad agencies, architects, attorneys, and securities companies/stock brokers rank the lowest in customer service.

Combined percentage of respondents in each group who answered “Very good” or “Pretty good”



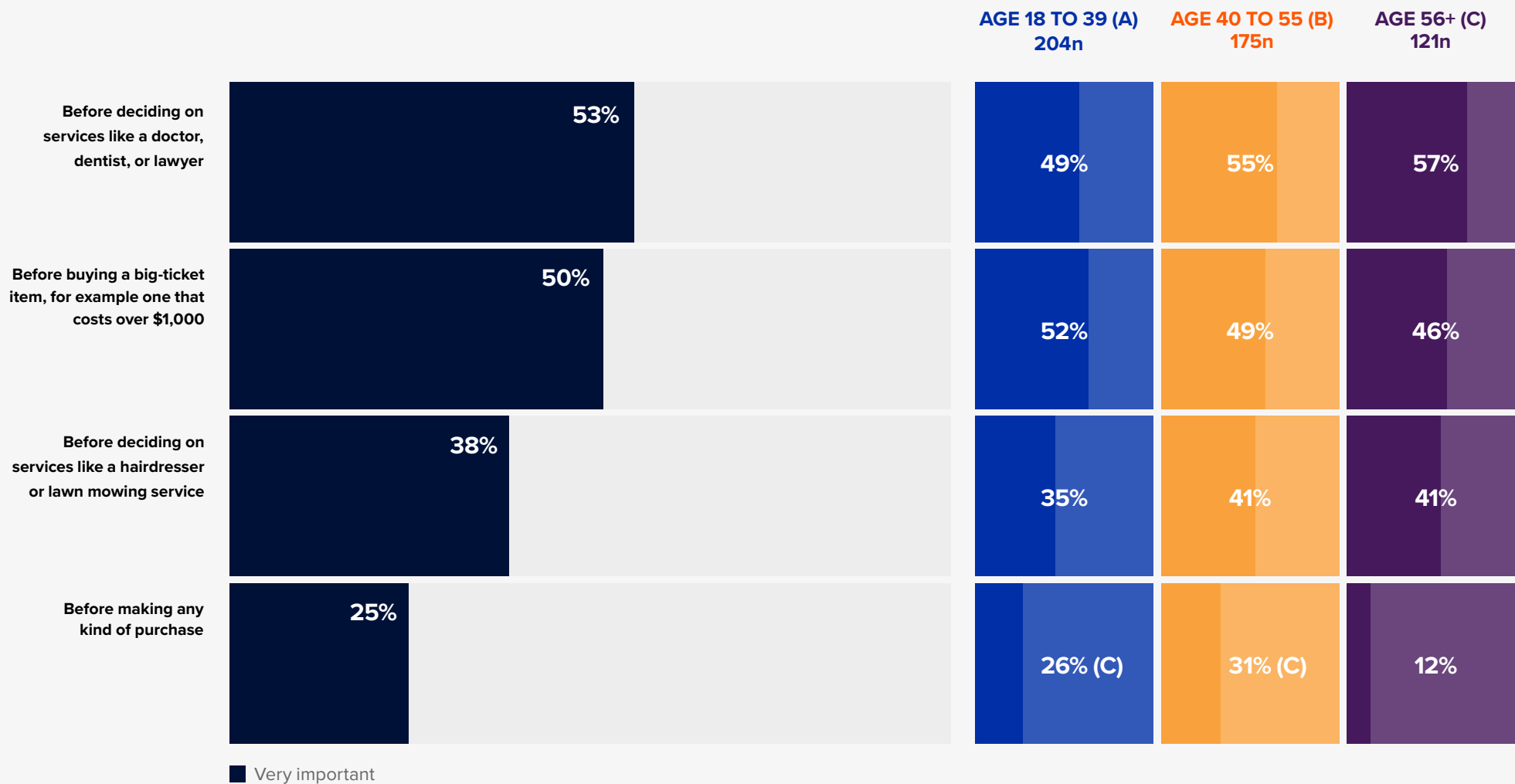


# IMPORTANCE OF SPEAKING TO A HUMAN...

## How important is it to speak on the phone to someone at a company in these situations?

- Surprisingly, a significantly larger percentage of the younger demographics see it as very important to be able to speak to someone on the phone before making *any* kind of purchase.

**Takeaway:** The phone isn't going away anytime soon. Especially if you're in a relationship-based business (or if you're selling something expensive).



## IMPORTANCE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE FROM A HUMAN

When you call a company for customer service, how important is it to talk to a person as opposed to an automated system?

4 in 5 respondents strongly prefer talking to a person over interacting with an automated system for customer service.

**Takeaway:** Whether you use an [interactive voice response](#) phone menu or not, you should ultimately have a way for your caller to reach a human.

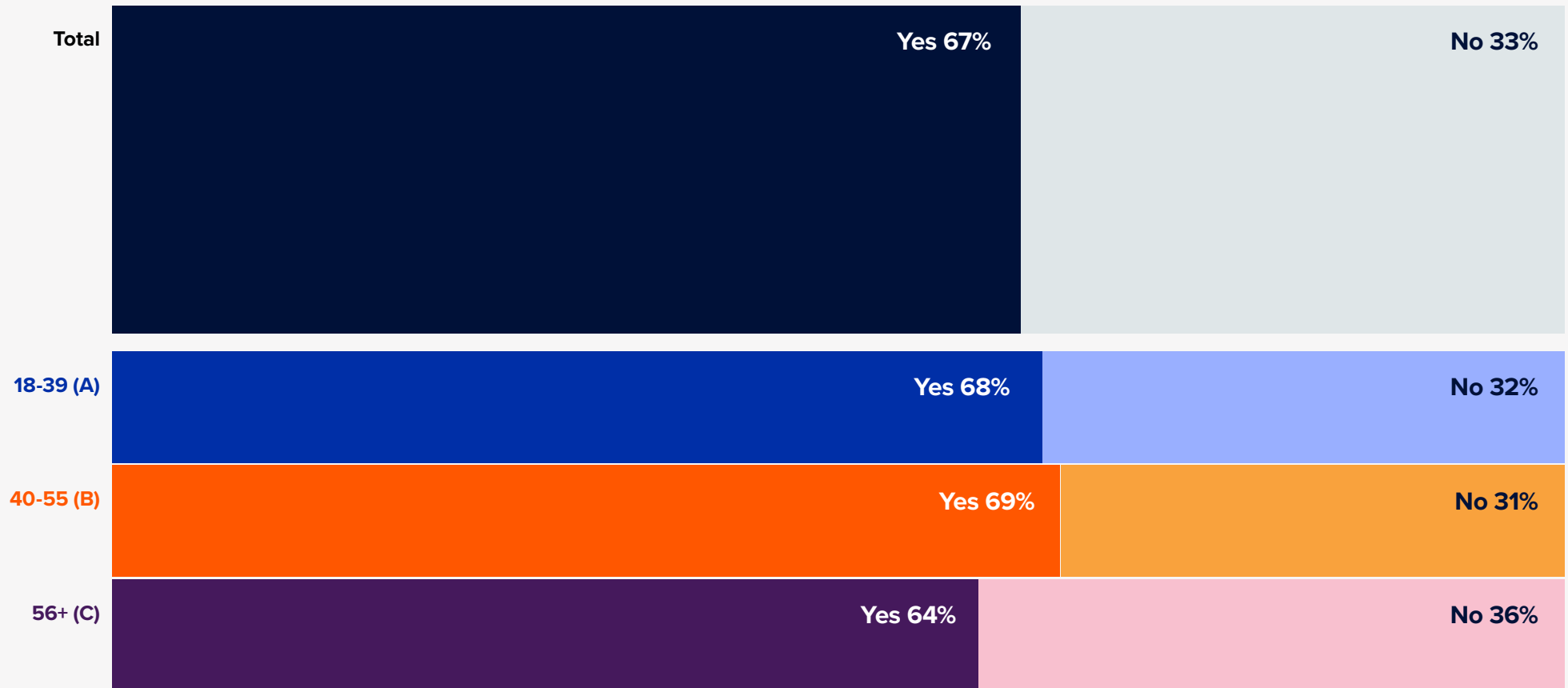


## LOSING CUSTOMERS

### Have you ever stopped being a customer of a company because of their customer service?

- 2 in 3 respondents have ended their relationship with a company because of their customer service.

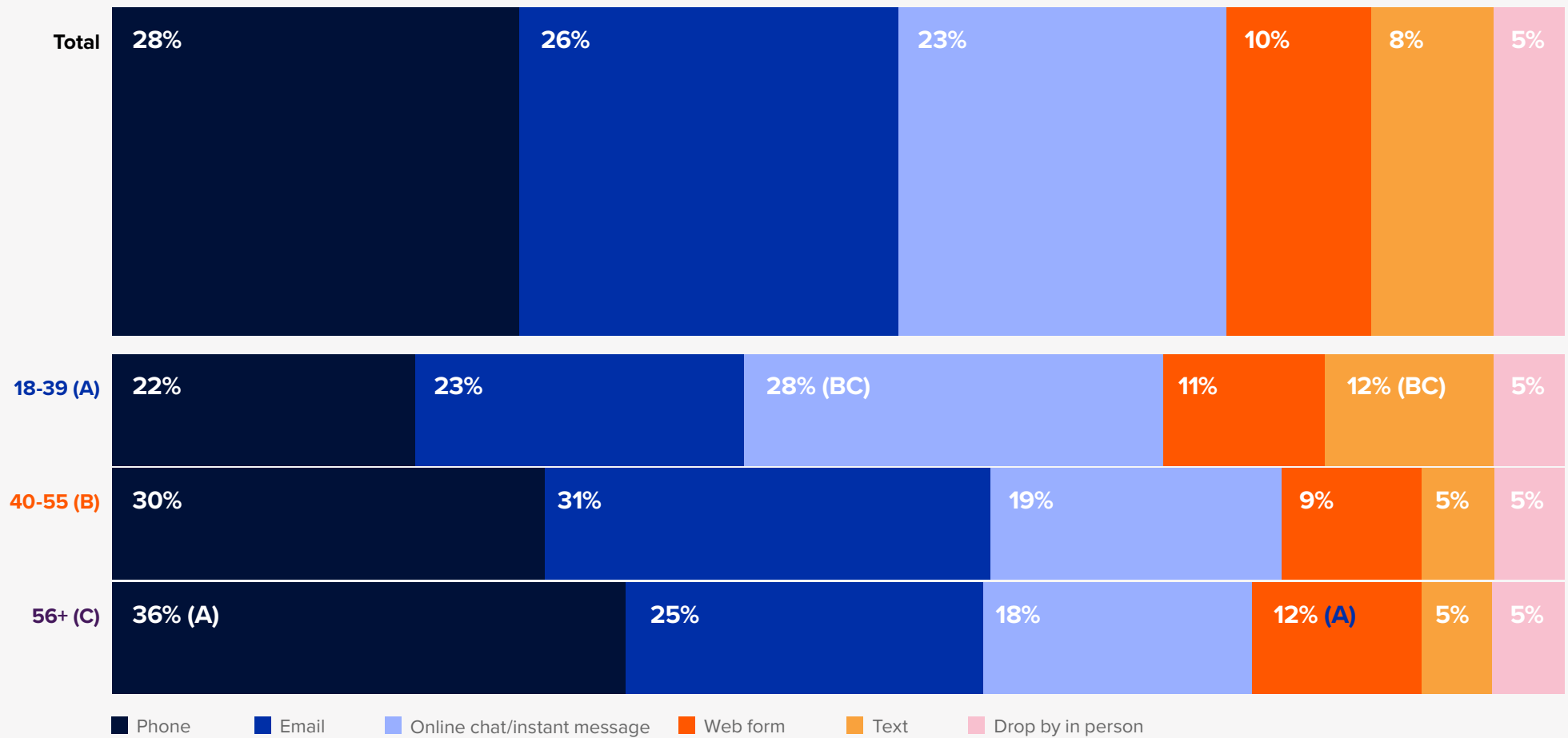
**Takeaway:** If your customer service is bad, people *will* leave. Don't take your customers for granted.



# COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES AFTER PURCHASE


## Which way do you prefer to communicate with a company after you have made a purchase/become a customer?

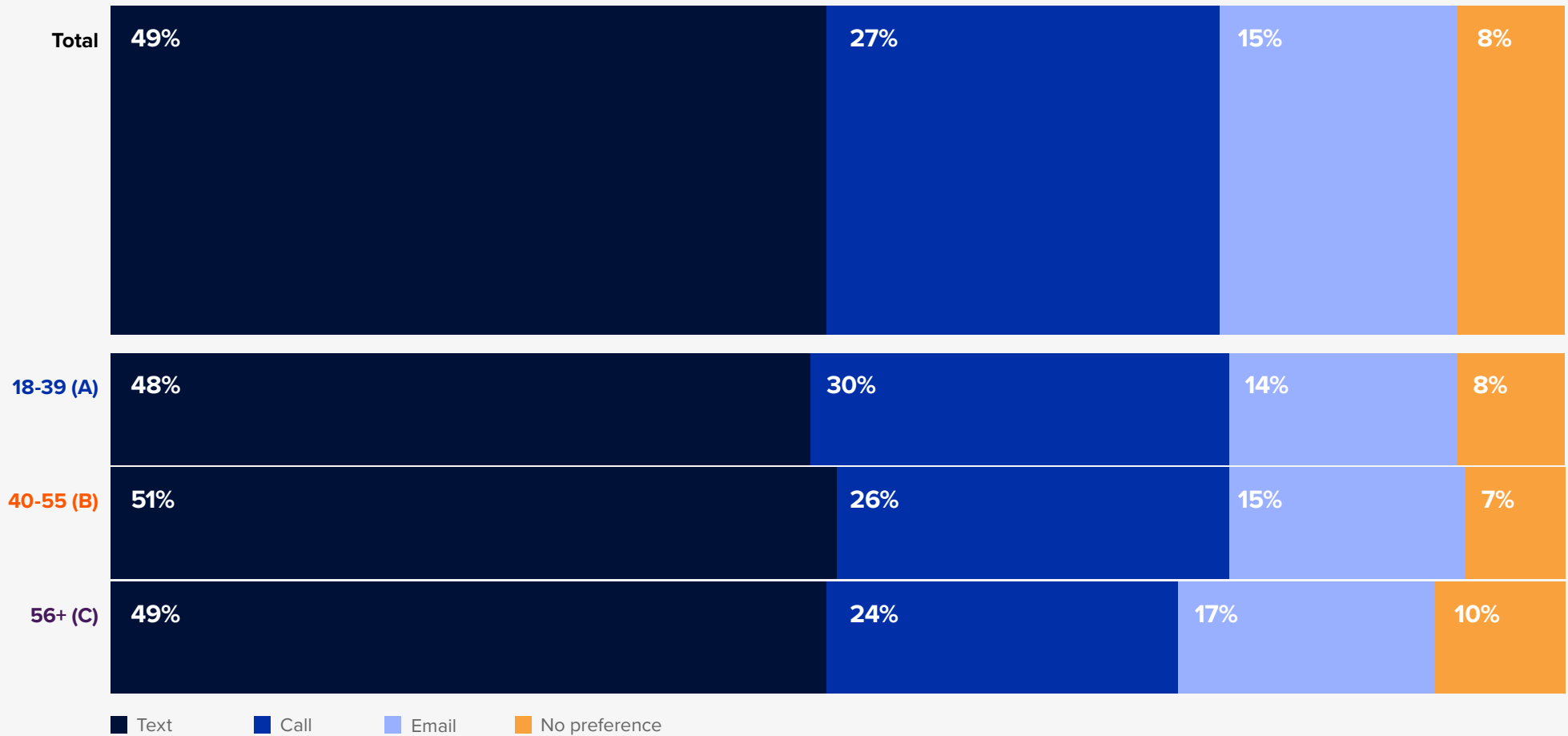
- After a purchase, respondents generally prefer to interact with companies via phone, email, or online chat.
- Younger respondents favor online chat, whereas older respondents prefer phone calls and emails.



# APPOINTMENT CONFIRMATION

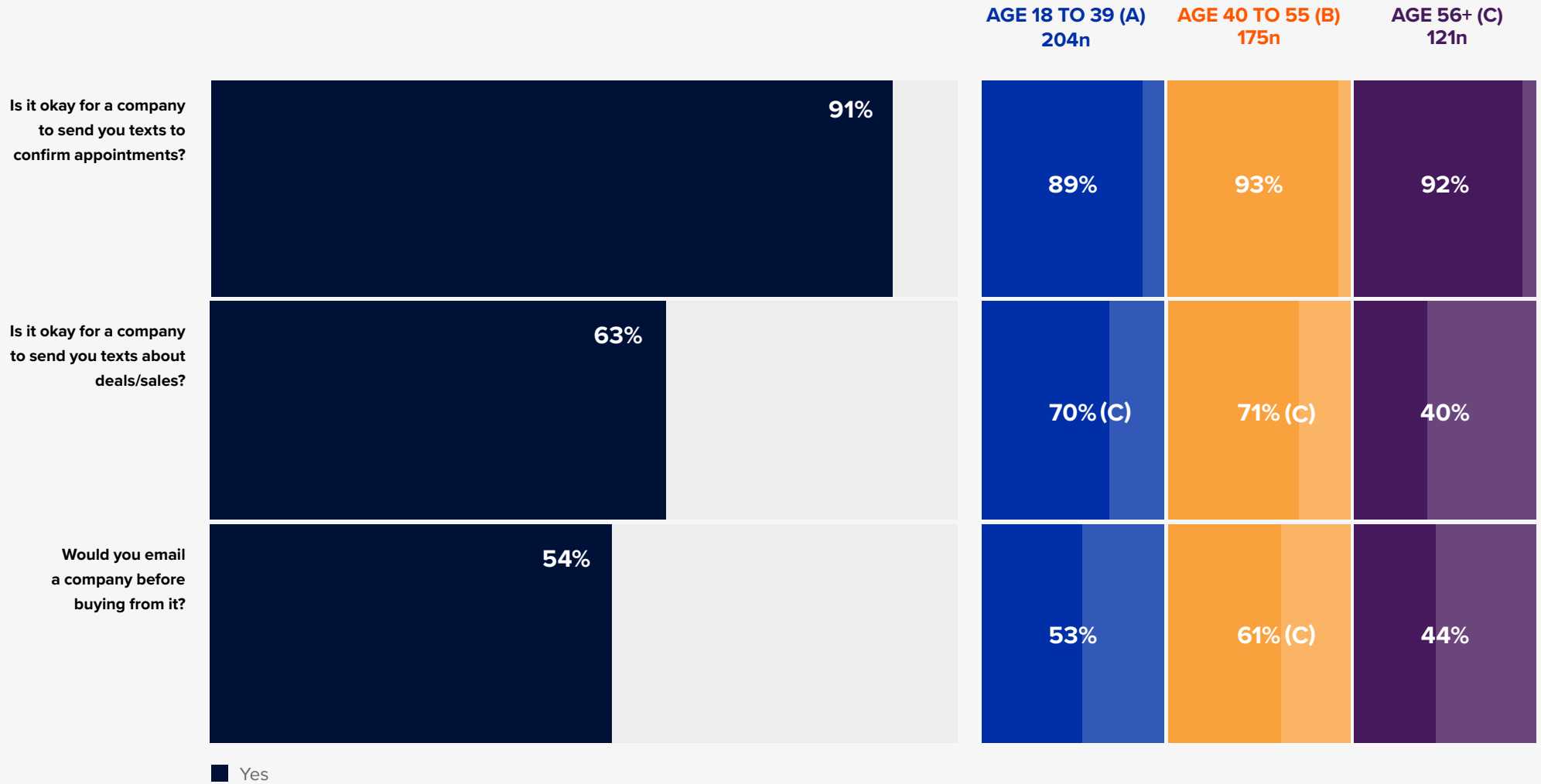
## How would you like a business to confirm an appointment with you? (Think of a doctor, electrician, or dentist.)

 **Takeaway:** Texting is by far the most popular method of confirming appointments, for all three age groups.



# IS IT OKAY IF... COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

- Again, receptivity to appointment confirmation texts is very high.
- Older respondents are much less accepting of promotional texts.



**91%**

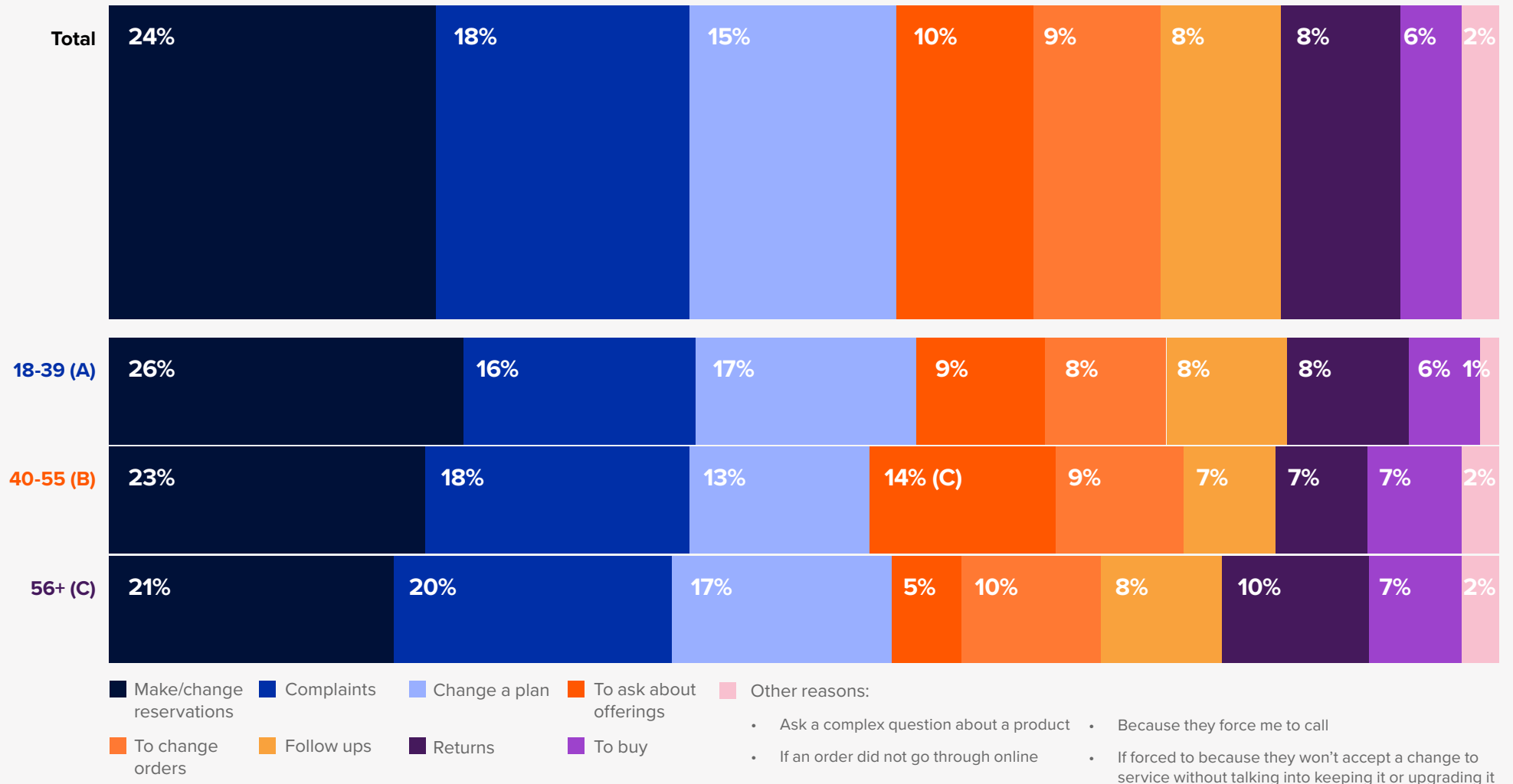
of people prefer to receive  
appointment confirmations  
through text messages.



# REASONS FOR CONTACTING A COMPANY

## Why are you most likely to call a company?

**Takeaway:** Respondents are most likely to call a company for changes or to complain, so the phone experience should be efficient and also sensitive to customers' likely not-great moods.

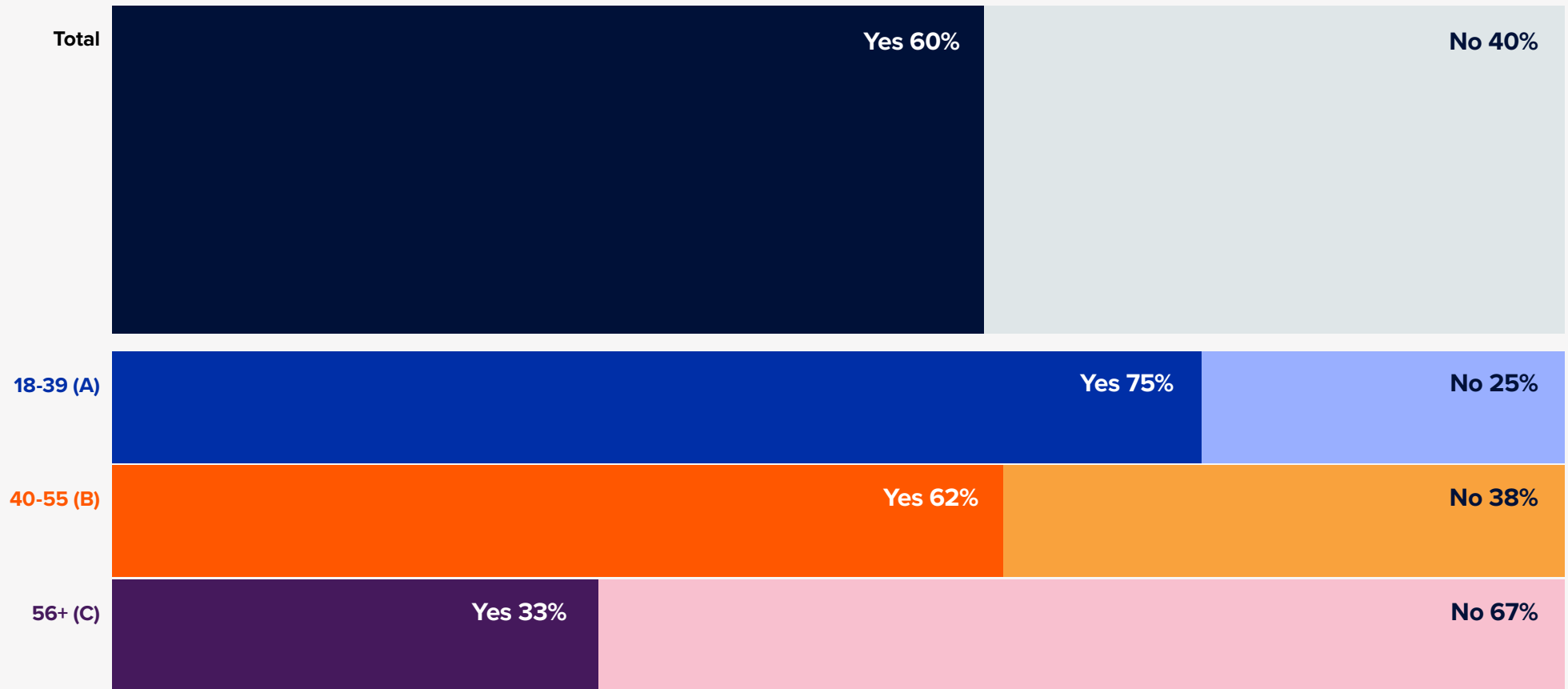




# INSTANT MESSAGE EXPECTATIONS

Do you expect to be able to instant message (like through a chatbot) with a company?

- Overall, 3 in 5 respondents expect to be able to IM a company.
- IM expectations decrease sharply with age.

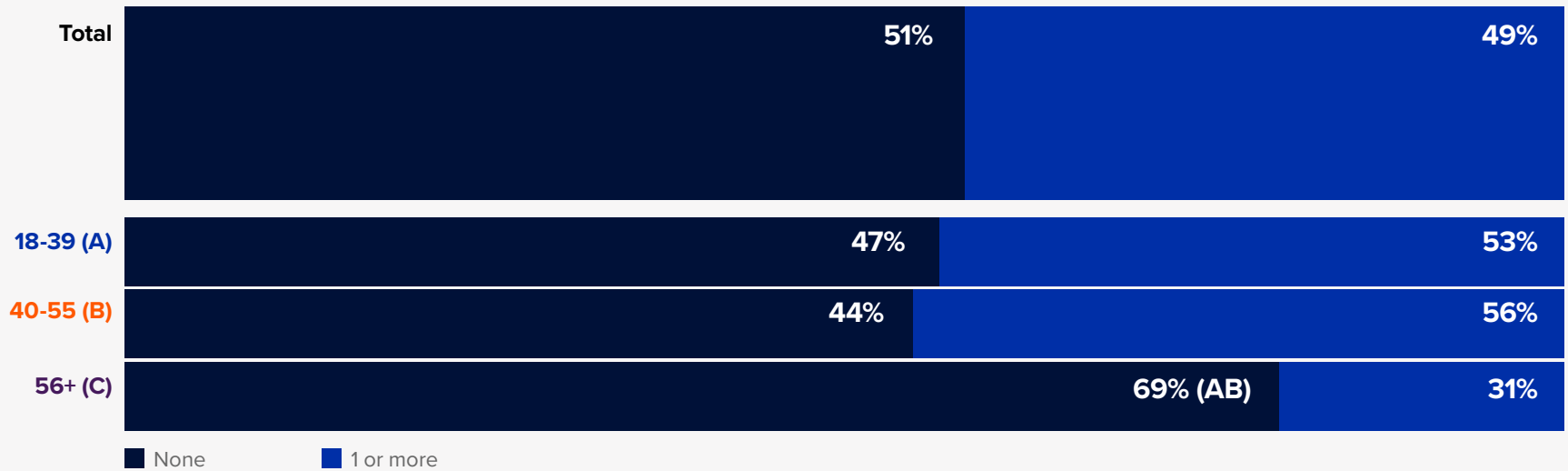


# ACCEPTABLE NUMBER OF CONTACTS

If you've expressed interest in buying from a company, how many phone calls/emails from the company are okay?

- About half of respondents said that companies shouldn't be calling them—even if they've expressed interest in that company. Almost 70% of the 56+ group said that it's unacceptable.
- On the other hand, all three groups are much more lenient with emails.

## Phone calls



## Emails

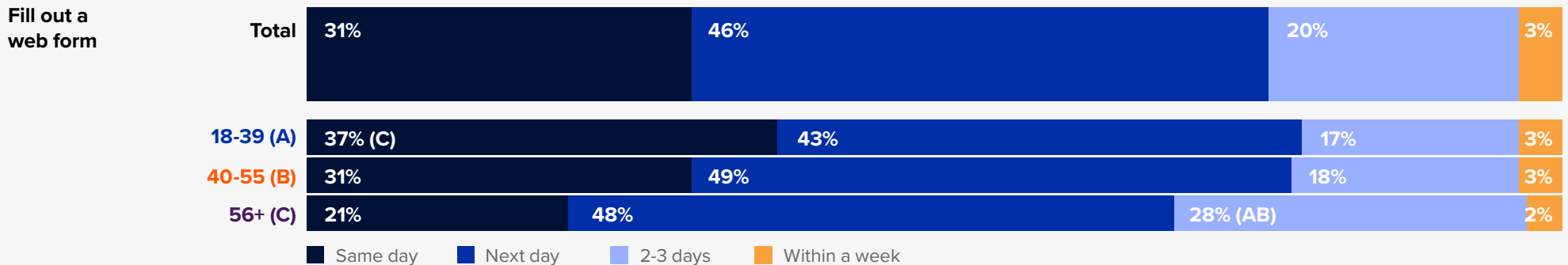
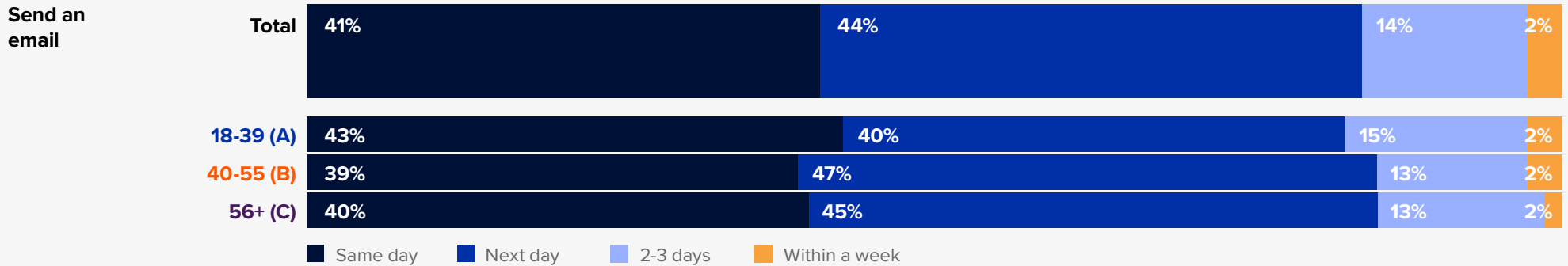
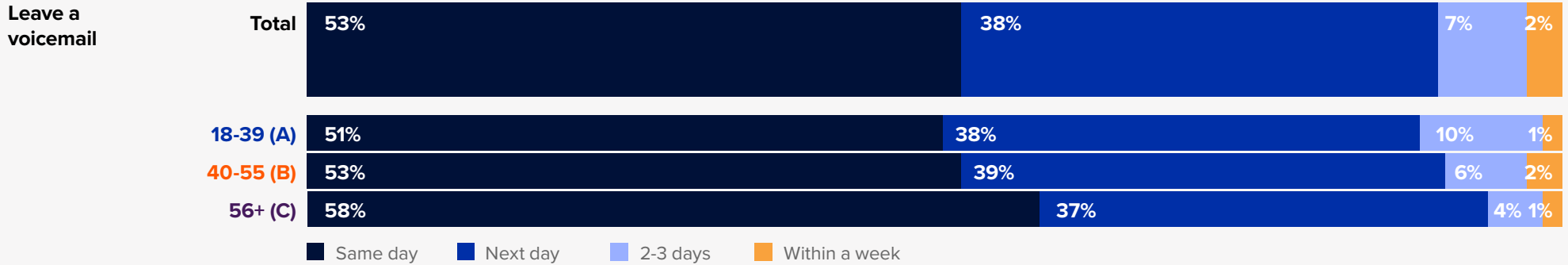


# REPLY TIMING

## How quickly do you expect a reply from a company if you:

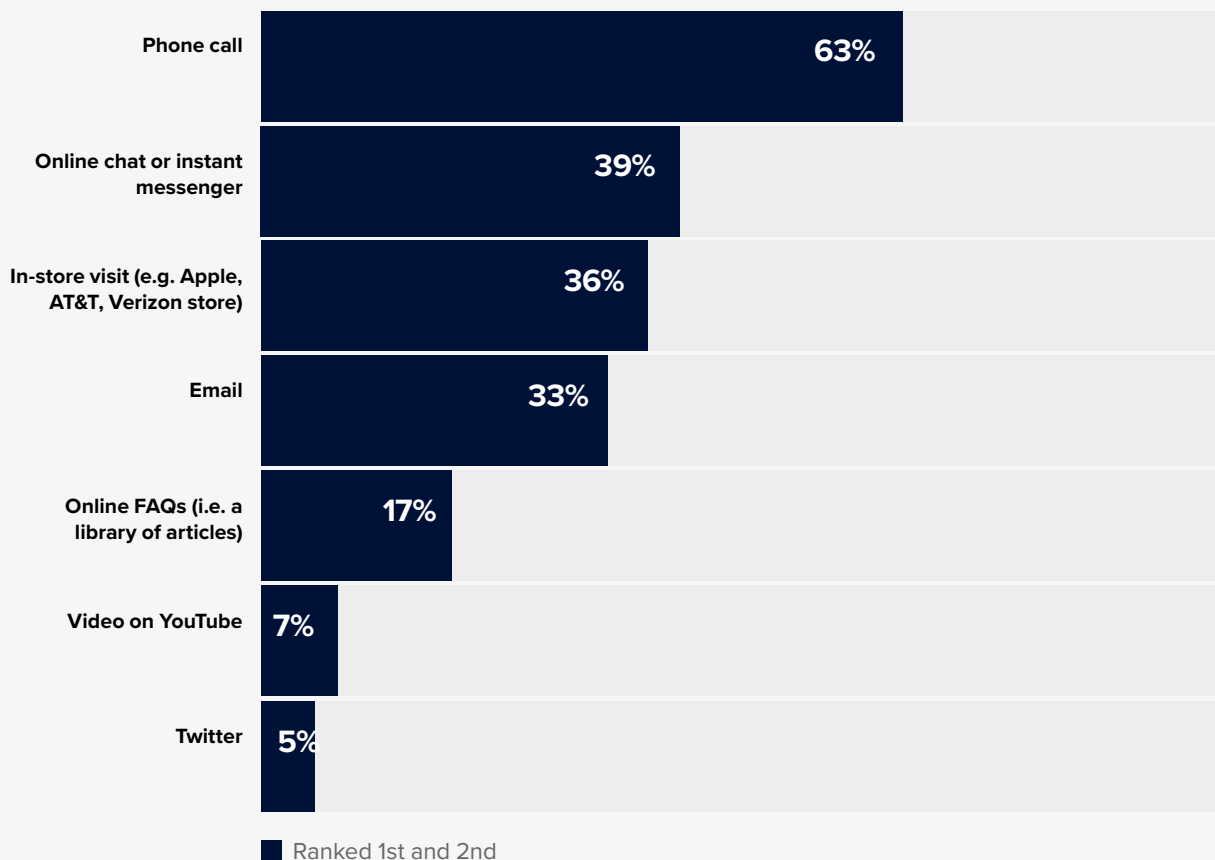
- Consumers expect replies by the next day—no matter which channel they’re using.
- A slight majority want a voicemail reply within the same day, while expectations for email and web form replies are a little more forgiving.

**Takeaway:** Your phone game has to be on point.



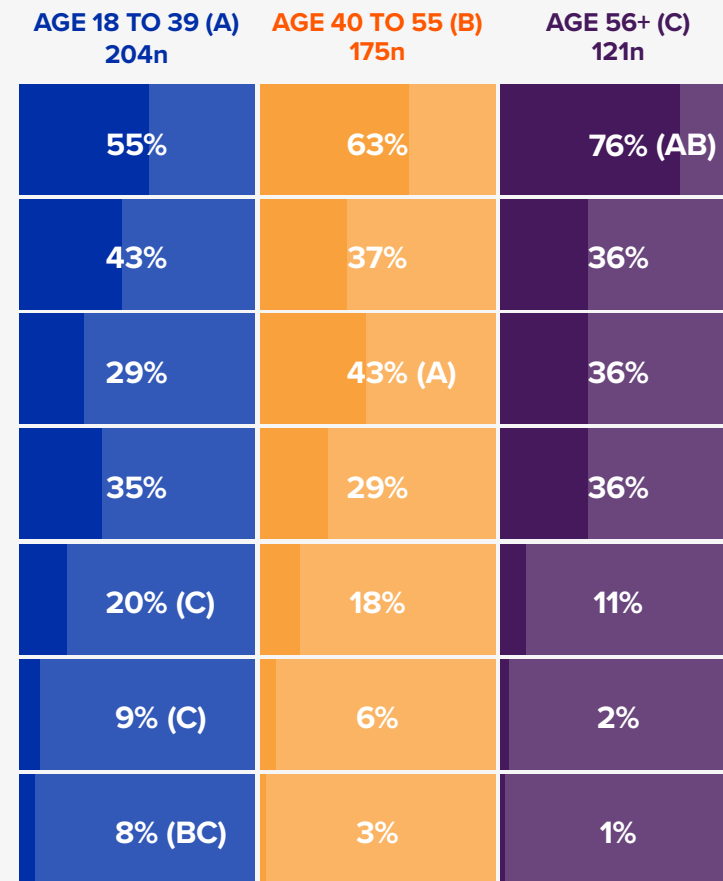
# CUSTOMER SERVICE SUPPORT PREFERENCES

## The most popular channels of customer support are...



- Phone-based support is the clear top choice among all age groups, followed by online chat, in-store visits, and email.
- Younger consumers are, perhaps unsurprisingly, more open to one-way communications such as FAQs, video, or Twitter than those 40+.

### Combined percentage of respondents in each group who ranked this channel #1 or #2



63%

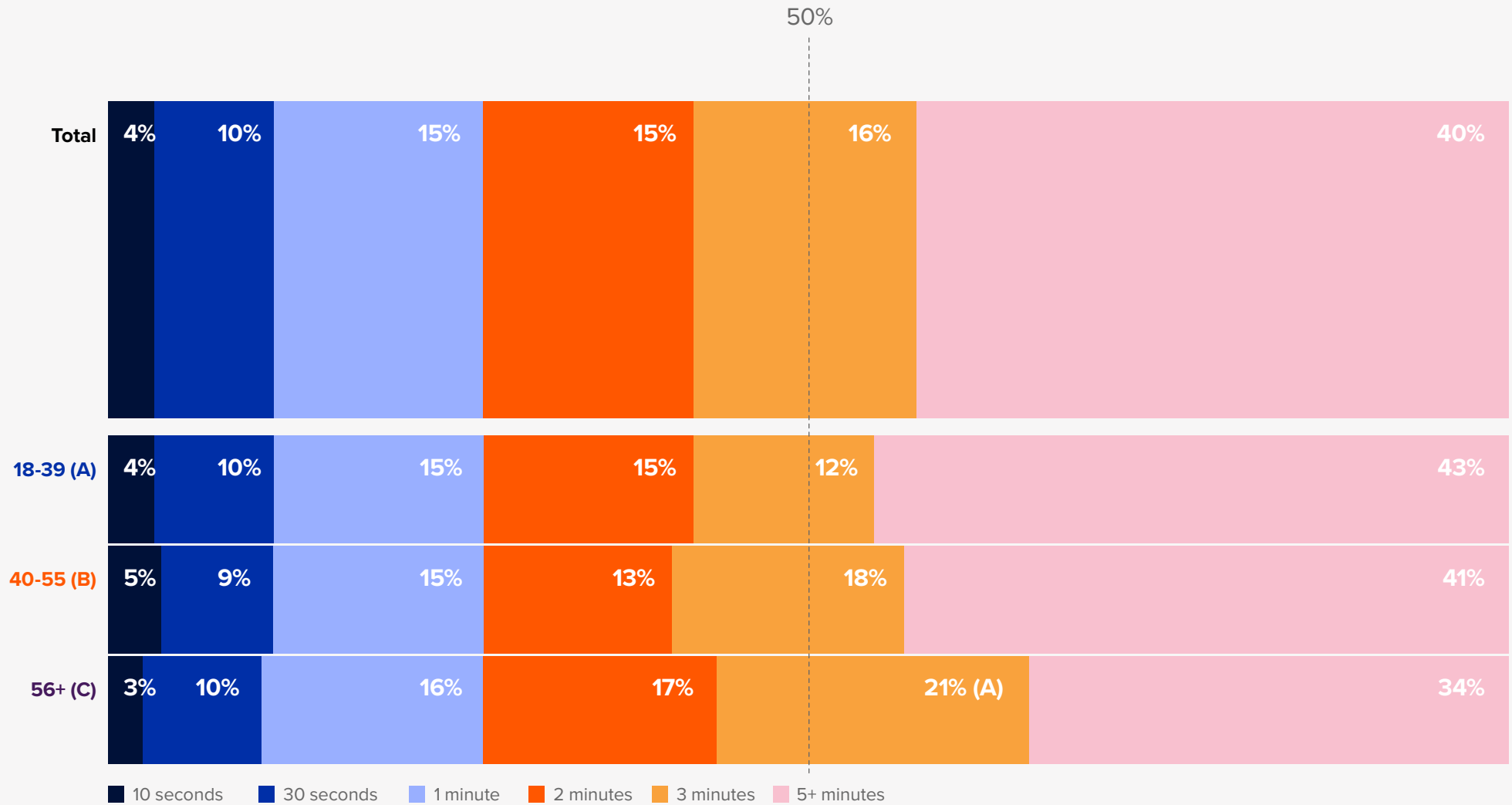
of respondents ranked a phone call as their #1 or #2 choice for receiving customer support.



## ON-HOLD TIMING EXPECTATIONS

When you call a company's customer service line, how long is too long to wait on hold?

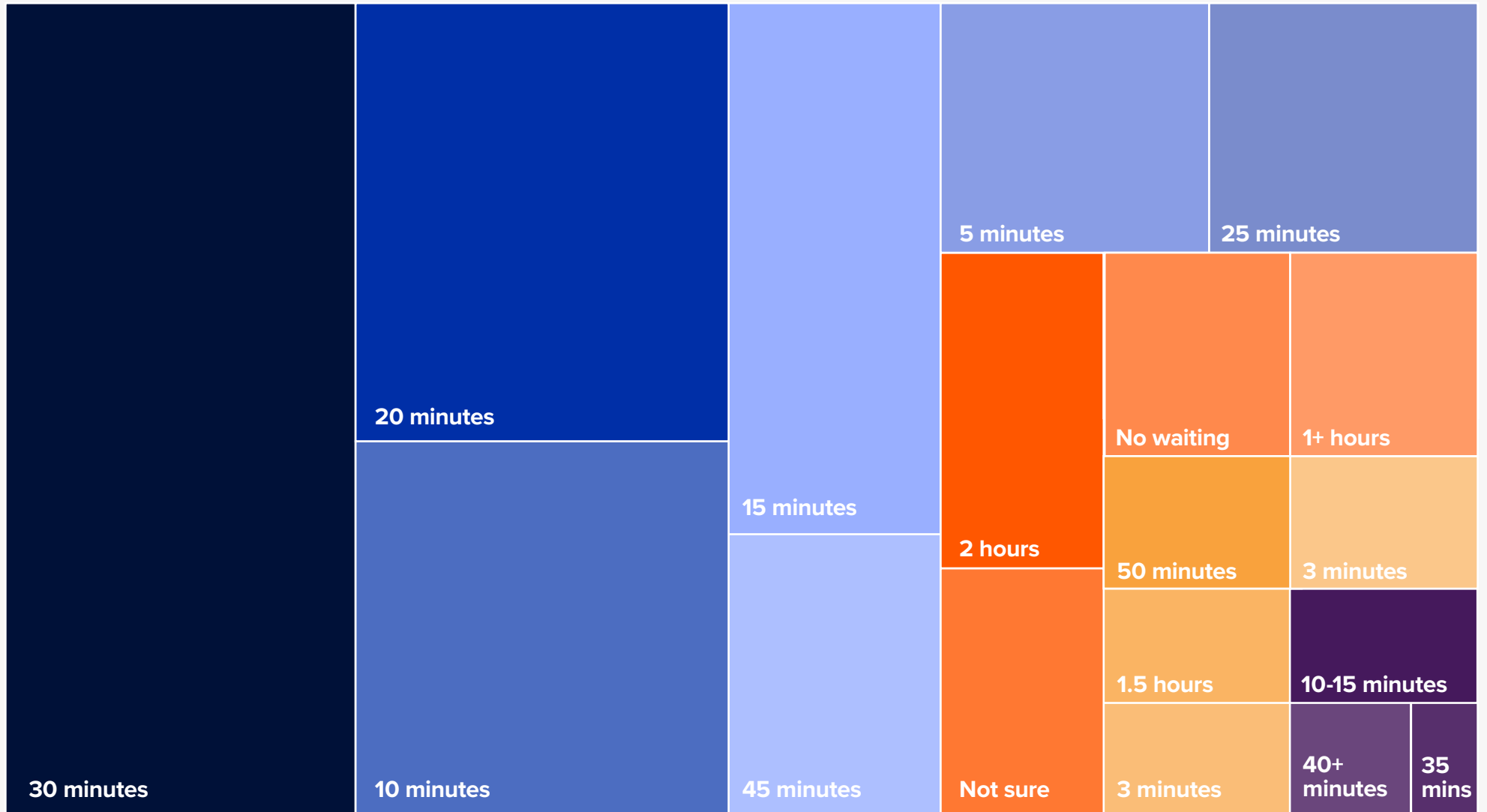
- Most respondents don't want to wait on hold past three minutes.
- The 56+ group is slightly less patient on the phone than the other respondents.



## ON HOLD DURATION

What would you say is the longest you've waited on hold to get customer service?

- The answers fluctuate widely, but it's not uncommon for people to wait over an hour on the phone with a company.



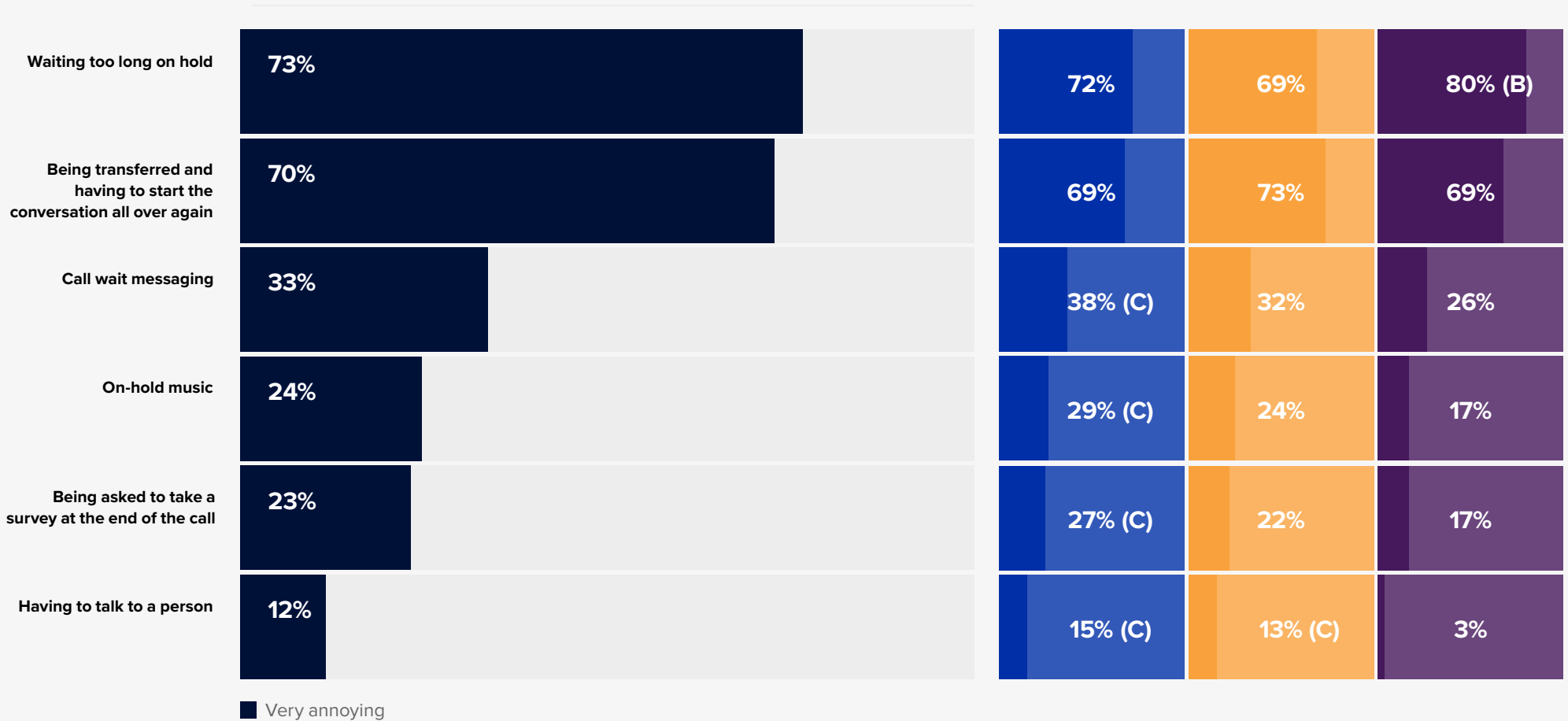
# THAT'S SO ANNOYING...

## Which of these aspects of calling a company's customer service line would you find "very annoying?"

- Waiting a long time on hold and being transferred back and forth rank as the top annoyances across all age groups.

**Takeaway:** People tend to have high expectations for their phone experience with you, so make sure you're covering your bases! (Don't make them wait too long on hold, and don't make them repeat information when you can log and find it yourself.)

Selected response rates for "Very annoying"





# 73%

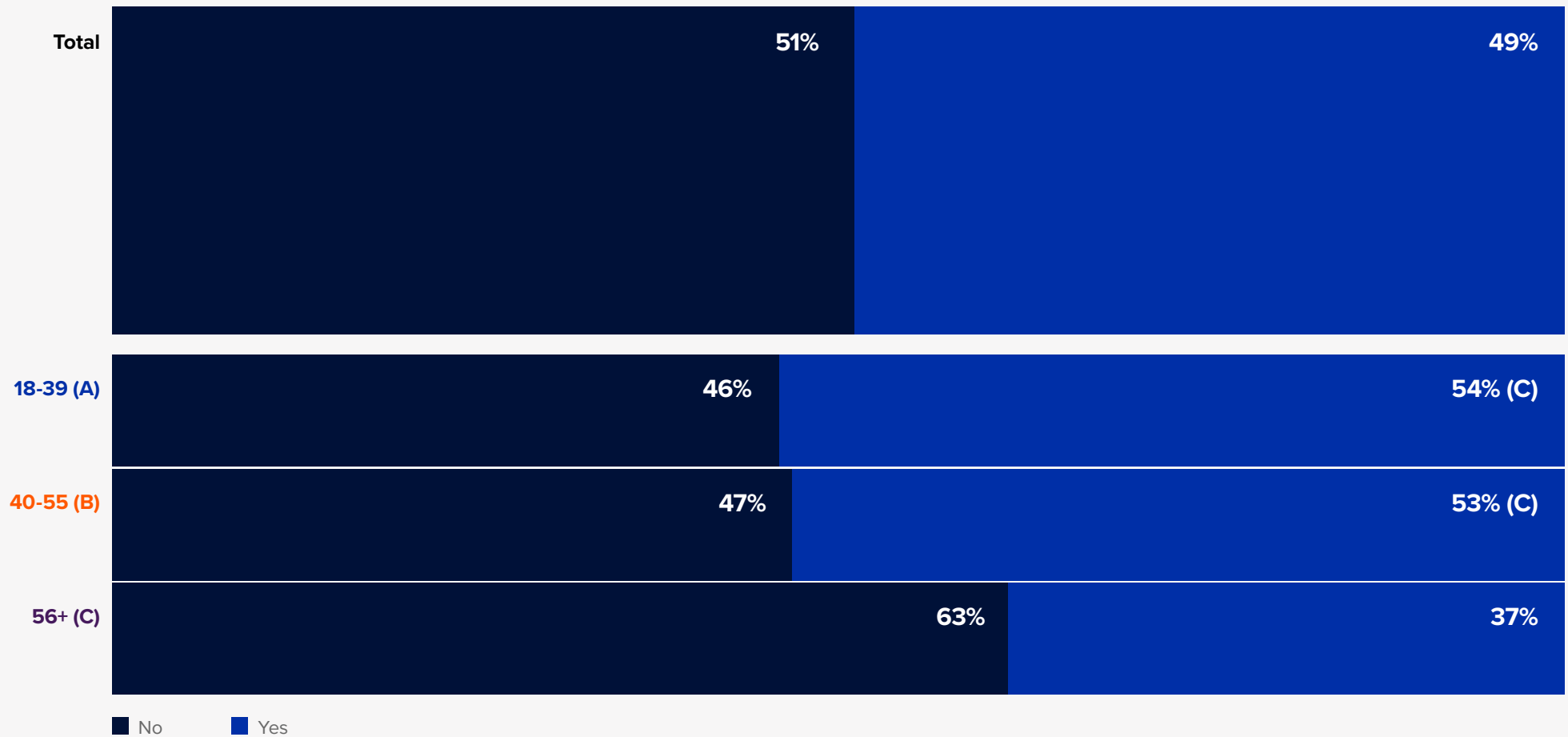
of people said that waiting too long on hold is the #1 “very annoying” thing about being on the phone with a company.



## DON'T GET TOO HUNG UP ON THIS...

### Have you ever hung up on a company because you were spending too much time on hold?

- About half of respondents have hung up because they were just spending too much time on hold.
- Interestingly, older respondents are less likely to have given up on a call.

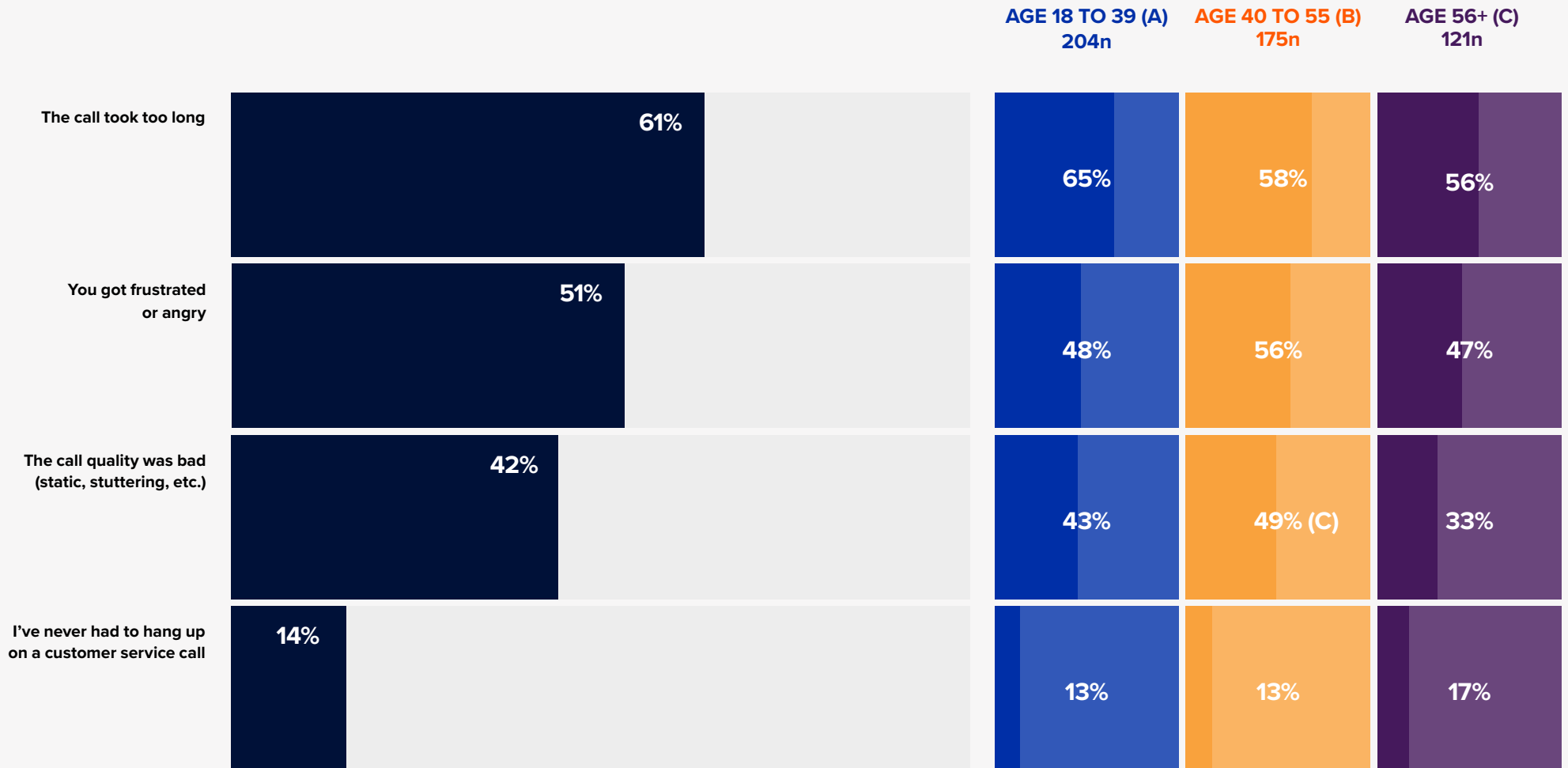


# WHY DID YOU HANG UP?

## Reasons for hanging up on a customer service call (multiple answers possible):

- 3 in 5 respondents have hung up on a customer service call because of an excessively long hold.
- Half have hung up on a call after becoming frustrated, with bad call quality a close third.

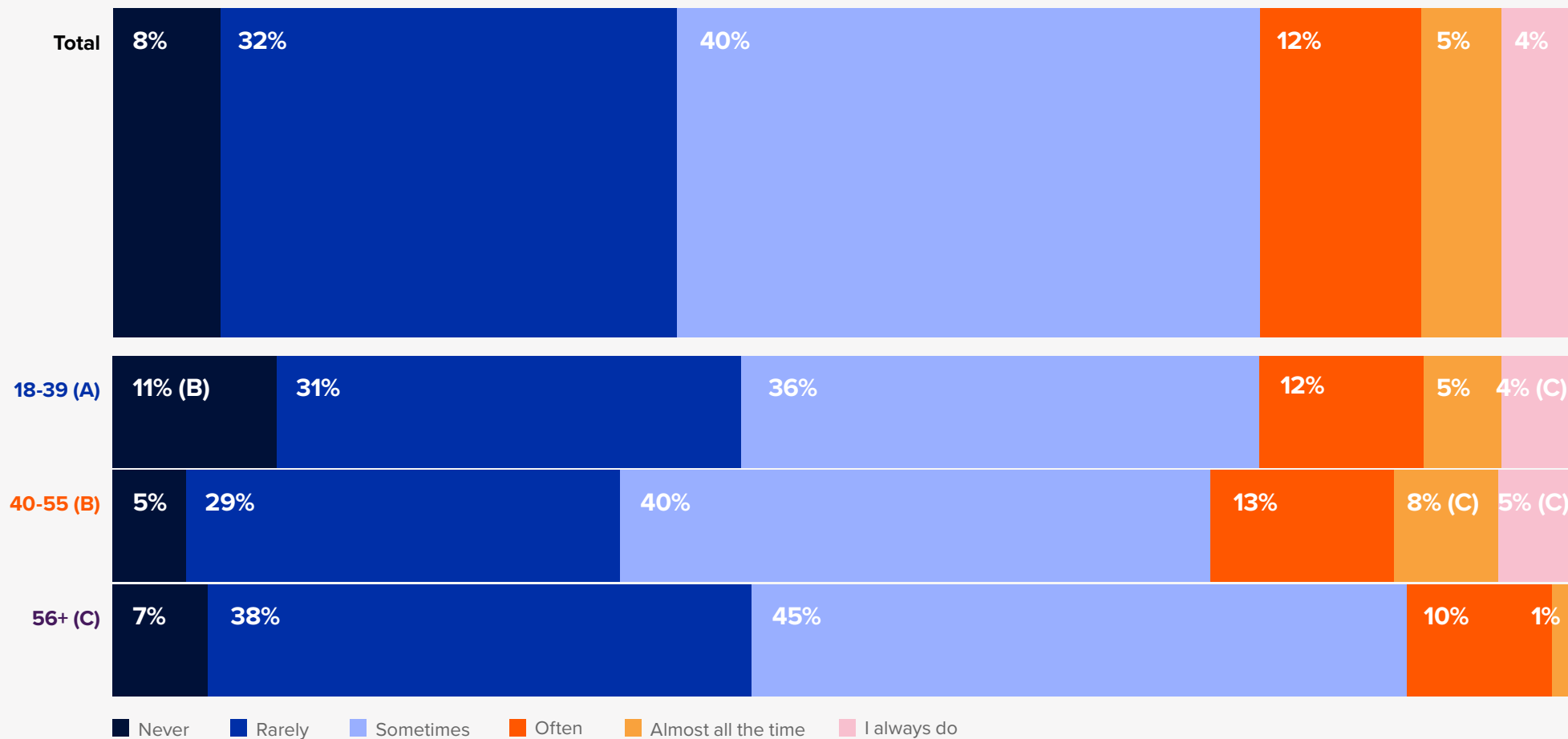
**Takeaway:** Almost everyone has hung up on a business before!



## CALL ESCALATION

When calling a company's customer service, how often have you had to ask for a manager or more senior person to get a problem resolved?

- The vast majority of respondents across every age group has had to escalate their issue to a manager before.



# PICK UP, PICK UP, PICK UP...

In your experience, how many times do you have to call a company before they answer your call? How many calls should it take for a company to pick up your call?

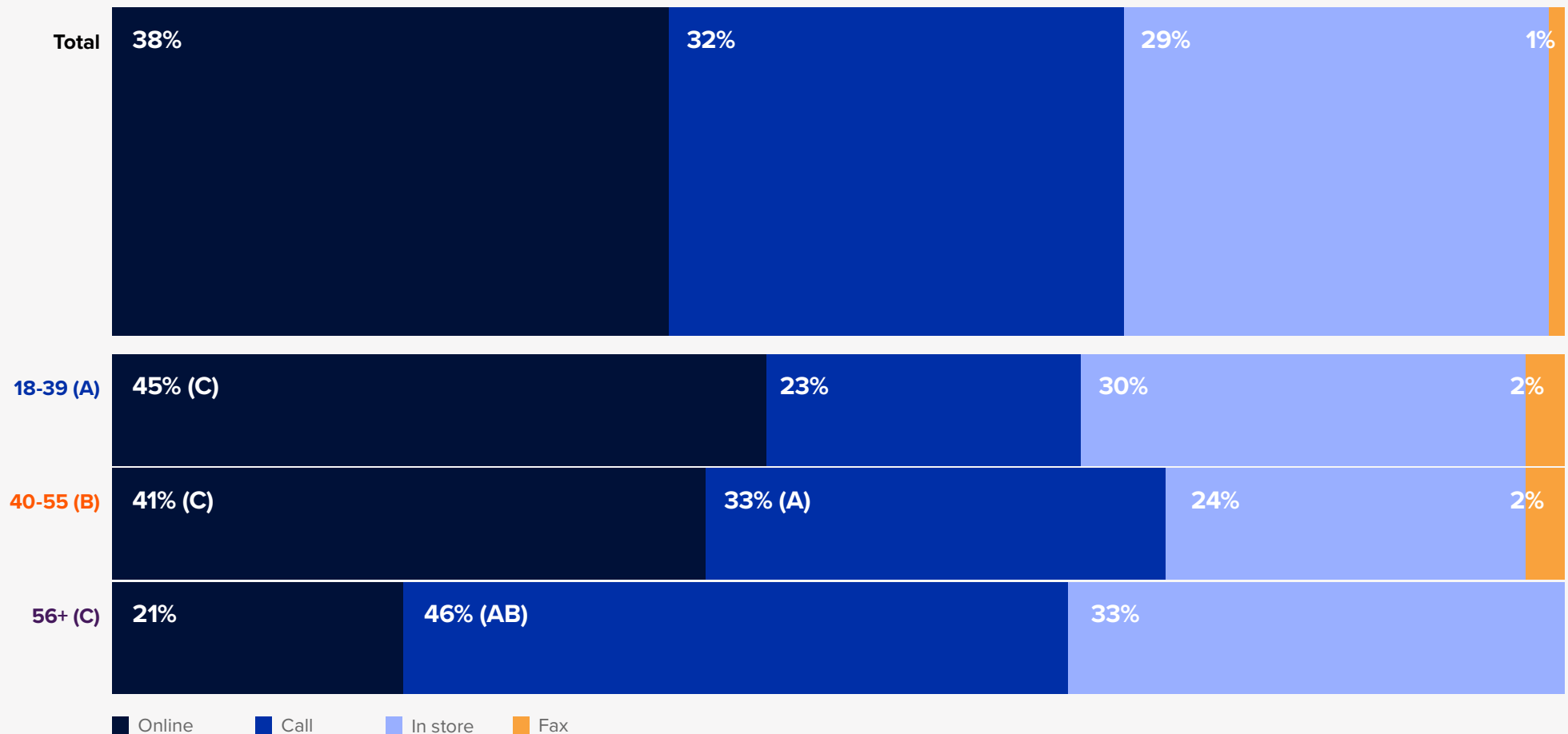
**Takeaway:** Looks like the 18-39s are a little more demanding here and expect to only have to call once to get an answer. Unfortunately, their expectations are less likely to be met compared to the other age groups.



# PURCHASE PREFERENCES FOR DIGITAL SERVICES

When you call a company's customer service line, how do you prefer to purchase digital services like wireless and cable?

- In general, people prefer to buy wireless and cable services online. But... 56+ respondents still prefer a phone interaction.
- Takeaway:** Selling a digital or online service? Then you'll need a web presence and a good [omnichannel contact center](#).



# ABOUT RINGCENTRAL

RingCentral, Inc. (NYSE: RNG) is a leading provider of global enterprise cloud communications, collaboration, and contact center solutions. More flexible and cost-effective than legacy on-premises systems, the RingCentral platform empowers employees to work better together from any location, on any device, and via any mode to serve customers, improving business efficiency and customer satisfaction. The company provides unified voice,

video meetings, team messaging, digital customer engagement, and integrated contact center solutions for enterprises globally. RingCentral's open platform integrates with leading business apps and enables customers to easily customize business workflows. RingCentral is headquartered in Belmont, California, and has offices around the world.

Learn more at [ringcentral.com](https://ringcentral.com)