EMEA

Customer Engagement Review

2026

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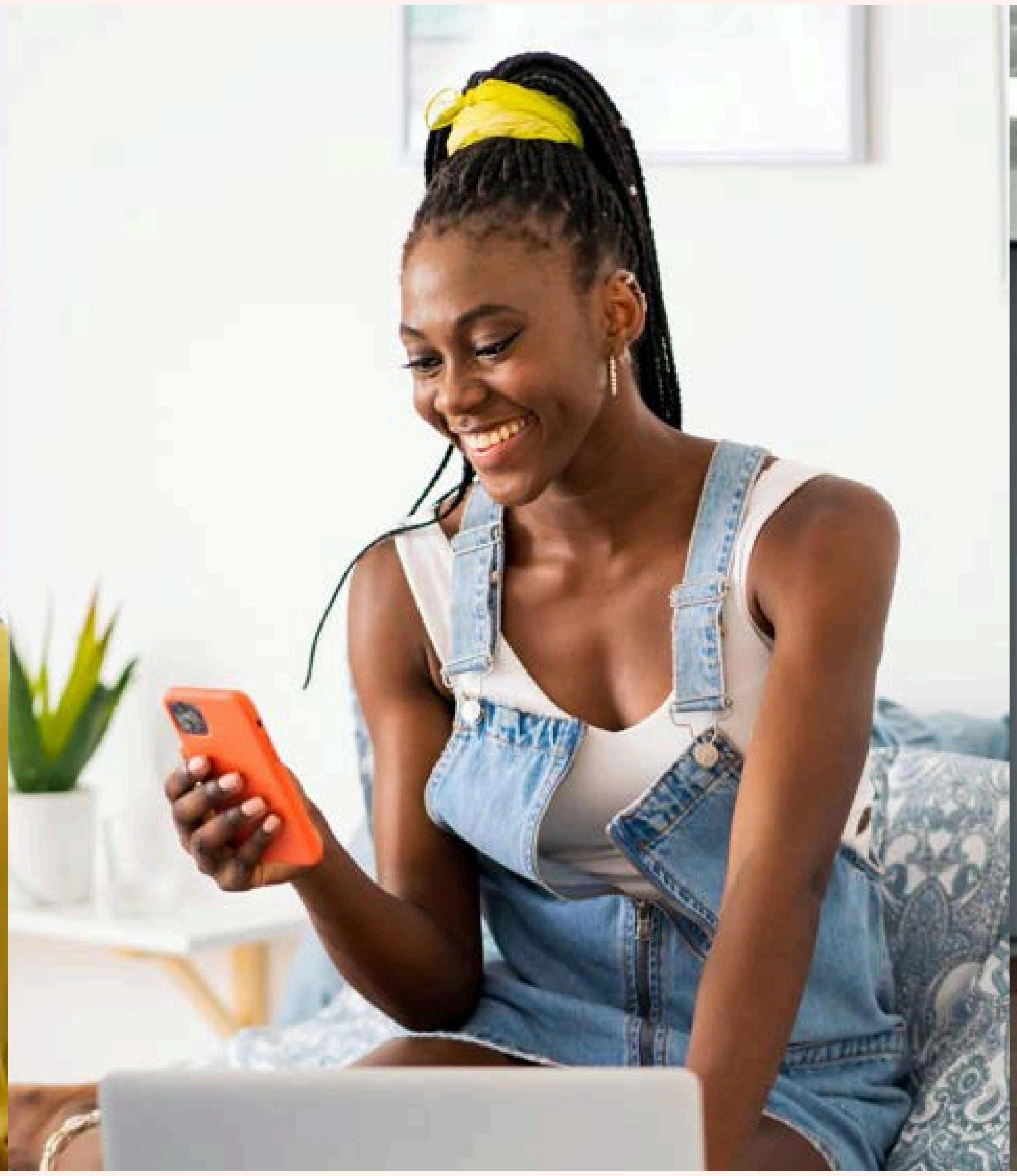
ABOUT THIS REPORT

We surveyed marketing executives and consumers in the Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) region and found three important customer engagement trends LEADERS should prioritise in 2026.

This report draws on the following sources

Decision-maker survey

Insights into marketers' goals, attitudes, and strategies based on a global survey of **2,200 VP+ leaders**, including **700 from the EMEA region**.



Consumer survey

Research on consumer behavior, perspectives, and preferences based on a US/UK survey of **4,000 adult consumers**.

Braze data

Our research leveraged aggregated data from **6 billion** global users, offering insight into customer behaviour and what makes brands successful.

Customer stories

We interviewed leading EMEA brands across industries to explore top-performing customer engagement strategies.

The Customer Engagement Index

Assessing customer engagement maturity across data usage, AI utilisation, messaging, and other key factors:

Activate

32% of EMEA brands vs 36% globally

LEAST MATURE

Brands focused on one-off campaigns or channels and basic (or no) AI usage.

You're likely to fit here if you craft single channel messaging with basic personalisation.

Accelerate

49% of EMEA brands vs 47% globally

MID-MATURITY

Brands focused on campaign-level execution and moderate AI usage.

You're likely to fit here if you craft multi-channel journeys optimised with multi-variate experiments.

Ace

19% of EMEA brands vs 17% globally

MOST MATURE

Brands that have embraced AI-driven, customer-centric approaches to engagement.

You're likely to fit here if you leverage advanced personalisation with predictive and agentic AI decisioning.

AI and customer engagement in EMEA

In EMEA, AI adoption is a balancing act between marketers' ambitions and public appetite. Rigorously regulated and privacy-conscious, EMEA nations walk a tightrope between the dual challenges of compliance complexity and customer opinion.

EMEA businesses are continuously reviewing their use of AI to mitigate backlash and compliance concerns—even though it may temporarily slow progress towards AI personalisation compared to global peers. This suggests that the region is creating a clean data environment that is more trustworthy for future AI agents.

Despite these constraints, EMEA confidence in AI's long-term impact on customer engagement is high. Marketing leaders expect AI to deliver positive outcomes by 2030—particularly around originality and impact.

But the current focus is on laying essential foundations in security, governance, and brand protection. This combination of optimism and accountability should shape a robust, ethical, and publicly accepted approach to AI in the coming years.

Top trends for customer engagement in 2026

1

The activation imperative

EMEA marketers have strong data capabilities —now they need to activate the insights.

2

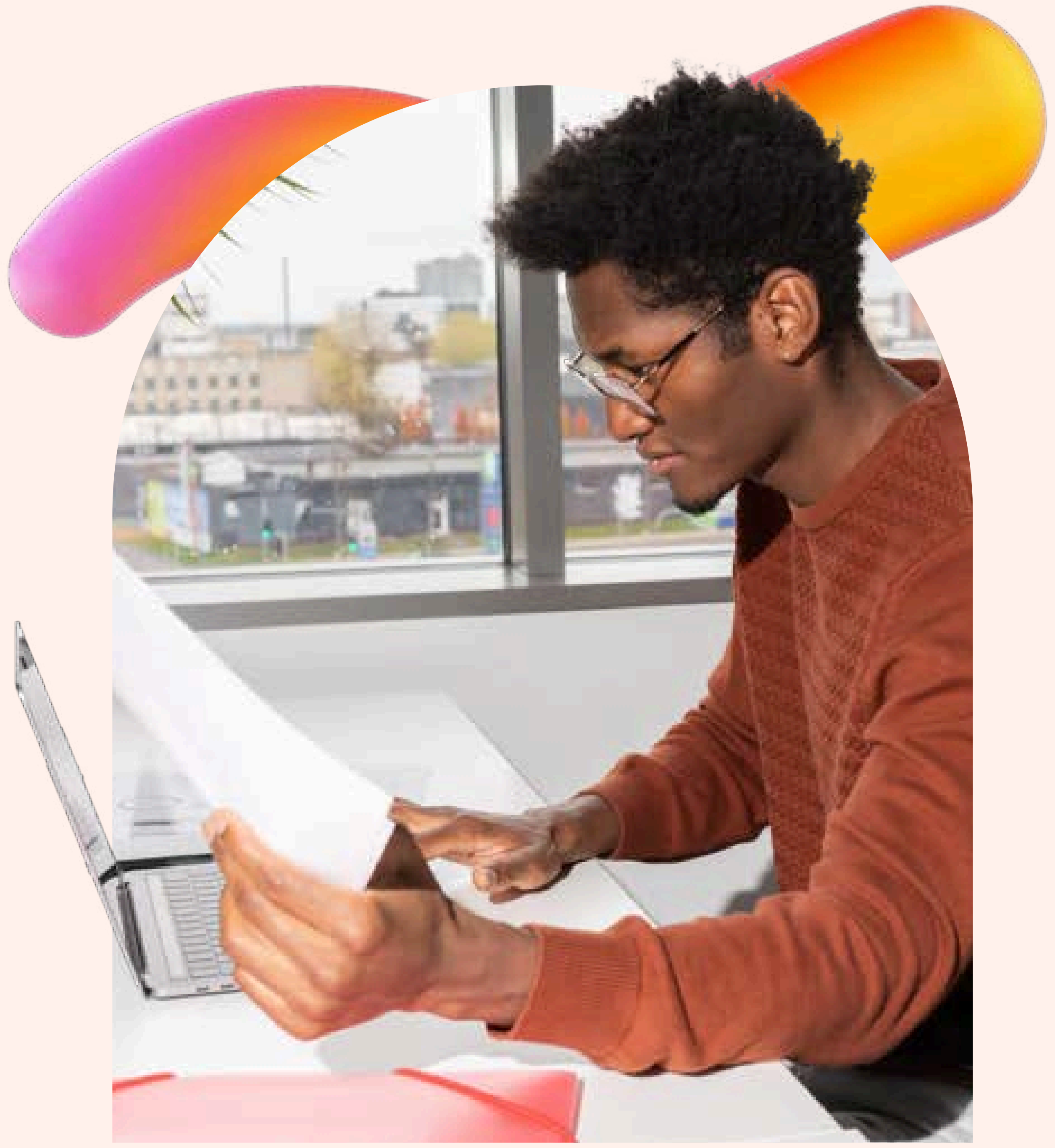
The trust tightrope

In the savvy but skeptical EMEA, technology isn't the barrier to AI adoption; trust is.

3

The automation alienation paradox

EMEA consumers want the human touch, but are adopting AI intermediaries too.



TREND 1

The activation imperative

EMEA marketers are leading in real-time data streaming for live customer insights—but lag in activating that data to engage customers in moments that matter.

Where we are today (and where we are going)

Data streaming architecture has given marketers unprecedented access to real-time data that can unlock live engagement in moments that matter—but unearthing insights isn't the same as acting on them.

57%

of EMEA marketers say data is updated and leveraged in real time through data streaming architecture

but **only 29% send messages moments after users take a specific action on their app or website**

29%

A missing customer engagement layer between data and execution leaves marketers unable to act on the live data insights their stack is designed to capture. Without the ability to orchestrate and trigger messaging across multiple channels, personalisation and relevance lag.

EMEA BRANDS: DATA MATURITY

40%

ACTIVATE

execute campaigns via multiple channels that have channel-specific solutions, like an email marketing service or SMS provider, creating operational barriers to live cross-channel engagement

40%

ACCELERATE

use multiple channels, each with separate campaigns planned and managed manually through a single interface vs 35% globally, which makes real-time engagement more viable

13%

ACE

activate data through multiple channels orchestrated across campaigns and customer lifecycle stages, and managed through a single interface vs 17% globally—giving them the highest chance of content and channel relevance

How brands can prepare

To set themselves up for success, marketers should stop assuming that leveraging AI is all it takes to understand their customers in a deep, meaningful way. Instead, they should do these three things:

Balance investments across the data cycle.

Invest evenly in technology across the data lifecycle, including capture, activation, and feedback loops so insights are fully leveraged to improve customer experience in an ongoing, automated cycle.

Unify and activate data in a single platform.

Use a comprehensive platform to unify your proprietary data in one place and activate it to drive business-specific outcomes. Share data securely with other parts of the organisation to deliver cross-functional consistency for customers.

Apply AI for automated 1:1 optimisation and relevance.

With your technology and data aligned, use AI decisioning to determine the best next step for every customer at a 1:1 level. Using reinforcement learning, AI automatically optimises messages, channels, offers, and timing to achieve specific goals such as revenue, retention, or engagement.

Advice from leading brands

"One of the biggest trends always has been, and always will be, hyper-personalised experiences, talking to customers on a 1:1 basis. AI is accelerating a lot of businesses towards this at pace, but to get there you need to have solid fundamentals, which Braze has helped us nail. Things like journey orchestration, data management, and segmentation enable me and my teams to build solid customer experiences and add that AI layer on top which enables it to be truly best-in-class.

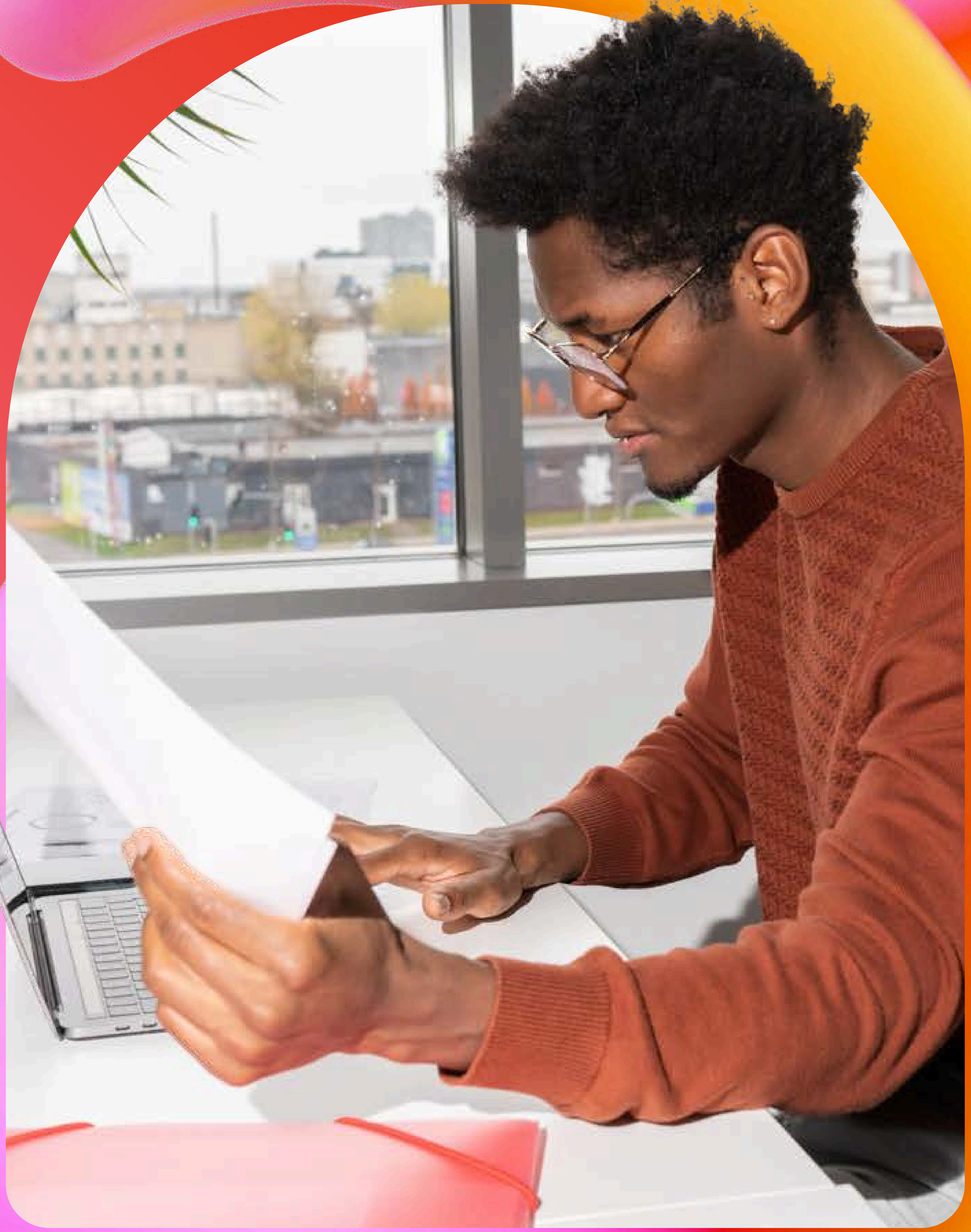
Dominic Bloxam, Head of CRM

Moneybox

TREND 2

The trust tightrope

Skeptical EMEA consumers are wary of AI and its recommendations, but trust grows and resistance lowers when brands deliver seamless experiences that increase convenience.



Where we are today (and where we are going)

AI adoption for customer engagement is slower in the EMEA region due to concerns around regulatory complexity and consumer backlash. In the EU, home of the GDPR, many consumers distrust data sharing and dislike AI recommendations.

41%

of UK consumers say AI recommendations limit their choices rather than offering a wide range of options

Only **37% say AI recommendations surprise them** with products or services they didn't know they wanted

37%

but

68%

of EMEA brands say they have seen an improvement to customer satisfaction scores thanks to AI predicting customer needs

The promise of convenience, paired with transparent policies, could be enough to overcome qualms. With a seamless customer experience ranked top for trust-building, AI is well-placed to deliver.

53% of EMEA companies are concerned about customer backlash when adopting AI, the same number concerned about compliance

42% of UK consumers are unwilling to share personal data, even if it means products and ads are personalised to them

And **1 in 4** of UK consumers that use agents do so specifically to protect their data and privacy

#1 But the **#1 consumer trust factor was seamless and fast customer experiences,** ranking 3 percentage points ahead of clear data policies—ideally brands should prioritise both.

How brands can prepare

To set themselves up for success, marketers should stop panicking about the rise of AI intermediaries and their potential impact on their customer relationships. Instead, they should prepare for this shift by doing these three things:

Be transparent about data and AI use.

Clearly communicate company policies around data use, particularly in relation to AI-powered processes. UK customers indicate that compliance with external regulations and internal policies are both important for trust.

Increase convenience with AI.

Customers care about convenience and time-savings; something AI excels at facilitating. To win over skeptics, focus AI use cases on delivering what customers really want—relevant, seamless, secure, and speedy communication.

Build foundational trust first.

If customers can't trust you to remember their preferences and interactions across different channels, how can they trust you or your AI agents with their data? Get the foundations right now, for higher trust when you advance your strategy.

Advice from leading brands

"The biggest challenge facing customer engagement today is cutting through the noise with relevant experiences. If we're not contextual and timely, we're not providing value and we're at the risk of being ignored. Braze really gives us the agility and intelligence to deliver data-driven experiences for customers—to not only reach them but to truly engage with them.

Chris Stephenson, formerly Senior Marketing Automation Manager

B&Q

TREND 3

The automation alienation paradox

It isn't just personal data that concerns EMEA customers, it's personal connection. Customers fear companies will use AI to increase operational efficiency to the detriment of customer experience. And yet many are adopting AI agents themselves.

Where we are today (and where we are going)

Despite consumers' love of convenience, they also love genuine human connection. As companies implement more AI-powered interactions, consumer acceptance is lagging.

52%

of EMEA brands favor self-service and automation over high-touch human service at 48%

62%

of UK consumers believe brands are most likely to use AI mainly to save time and money, rather than improve customer experiences

45%

of marketers are training AI to simulate empathy, yet 28% of consumers feel frustrated by these non-human interactions

66%

of UK consumers would accept slower service if it meant more personalised interactions with a real human

At the same time, 14% of consumers are embracing AI agent intermediaries, bypassing brands' owned channels entirely—expected to increase to 37% in the next year. In 2026, AI is both the challenge and the solution: One which, counterintuitively, can improve human connection.

59% of EMEA brands believe that AI intermediaries have weakened their ability to connect with customers and maintain a direct relationship

92% of EMEA brands say their use of AI helps them understand their customer preferences, behaviours, and future actions with more accuracy

59% of EMEA brands are doubling down on advanced personalisation across owned channels to combat the risk of AI intermediation

*AI intermediation is when a consumer interacts with a brand via an LLM, AI agent, or other autonomous AI solution, rather than engaging directly.

How brands can prepare

To set themselves up for success, marketers should stop treating AI as a panacea for their customer relationships. Instead, they should amplify its ability to meet consumers needs by doing these three things:

Balance automation with human connection.

Prioritise AI where it can scale and accelerate processes that positively impact the customer experience, without taking away the high-touch human moments customers continue to value. The BrazeAI Operator™ is like having a copywriter, data analyst, and developer on call—so you can do your best work, faster.

Transition from simulated to augmented empathy.

Customers want to feel seen and supported. And, while many still associate that with human conversations, it isn't exclusive to people-powered interactions. EMEA leaders are leveraging AI to increase personalisation and deliver 1:1 customer experiences that feel individually tailored and relevant to each user, increasing trust, anticipating needs, and improving customer satisfaction.

Don't just beat AI intermediaries, engage them.

The availability of AI intermediaries doesn't necessarily mean losing direct traffic. It can mean gaining an acquisition channel. Integrate Braze with ChatGPT to create custom brand portals within the AI platform, and engage customers showing an interest in your brand via ChatGPT.

Advice from leading brands

Braze really helps us tackle our challenge of cutting through inbox clutter through the use of AI Liquid Assistant and AI Copywriting Assistant. These two tools help us engage on a more personalised basis and tailor our messaging to each individual user. Another way is Intelligent Timing, which allows us to make sure our emails and SMS messages are reaching customers at the right time so they're ready to engage with the comms and more likely to convert and interact with the brand.

Manisha Patel, CRM Operations Senior Executive

ESTĒE LAUDER

Reaching success in AI marketing

EMEA brands must embrace AI's ability to amplify marketing impact while supporting genuine connections with customers.

AI CAN HELP IN THREE KEY WAYS:

1. Activating and learning from customer data across every channel
2. Building trust through seamless, highly personalised experiences
3. Creating human connection at scale, on owned and external platforms

Dive even deeper

Download the full 2026 Global Customer Engagement Review and explore how AI is changing customer engagement—and how brands should respond.

DOWNLOAD NOW

Methodology

WAKEFIELD SURVEY DATA*

Wakefield Research conducted research among 2,200 marketing executives with a minimum title of VP, working at B2C companies with an annual revenue of at least $10M across 17 countries in 3 global regions: the Americas (Brazil, Canada, Mexico, and the US), EMEA (France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, the UAE, and the UK), and APAC (Australia, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, and Thailand). The survey was conducted November 18–December 1, 2025, using an email invitation and an online survey. Out of the 2,200 marketing executives surveyed globally, a total of 700 were based in the EMEA region.

BRAZE CUSTOMER DATA

For this analysis, Braze examined anonymised and aggregated behavioural data from 779 Braze customers across our Americas, APAC, and EU clusters to analyze app activity, message engagement, and purchasing trends by industry. These statistics span January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025 and include over 6 billion points of data from user profiles across 24 sub-industries. The raw data has been cleaned using volume and company count checks so that no one brand or group of brands is over-represented. For all purchase- and messaging-related stats, only brands tracking the relevant information have been included so as not to skew the analysis. All uplift figures greater than 100% are rounded to the nearest decimal point, and all uplift figures below 100% are rounded to the nearest whole percent. When comparing two rounded numbers, percent change metrics are calculated as the difference between the two numbers after rounding.

BRAZE-RELATED ACE DATA

The Braze Ace Impact metrics were measured by selecting the top 50th percentile of Braze customers compared to the full data set (and within a given industry in the report's industry-specific sections) in terms of likelihood of a user making a purchase, likelihood of a buyer making a repeat purchase, average sessions per user, average user lifetime, and message engagement for the period of January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025. All industries had message engagement used as a criteria to select Ace brands. For industries where purchase behaviour is less often used as a key performance indicator, purchasing metrics were not included in Ace brand selection process. For industries where purchasing activity was more often associated with brand success, purchasing metrics were included, while session engagement and user lifetime were excluded.

* NOTE: The Braze Customer Engagement Index was updated this year to reflect the growing use of AI for customer engagement; accordingly, the Activate, Accelerate, and Ace results in this report have a different composition than in previous years.

Get in touch to learn more

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