

RESEARCH BRIEF

The State of Self-Service Content Experiences

Analysis into B2B users' technical content experiences and how they compare to their own expectations and those of CX and support executives.

The background features a dark blue gradient with several large, semi-transparent blue arrows pointing upwards and to the right. There are also faint, light blue grid lines and data visualization elements, such as vertical bars and a network of dots connected by lines, suggesting a technical or data-driven theme.

As the world becomes increasingly digitized and customers better equipped than ever, across industries there is an overwhelming preference for customers to self-serve the information they need to use products to their fullest extent.

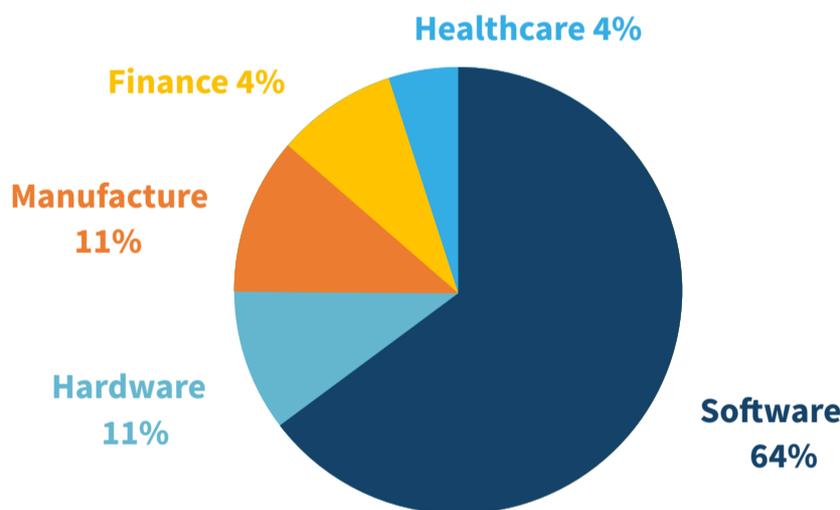
This is especially true in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the shift to digital processes, with consequences that will long outlive the pandemic itself. In a world where more consumers than ever have grown accustomed to the at-your-fingertips convenience of ecommerce and applications, a business’s reputation – and its ability to effectively compete – are increasingly determined by how easy it is to onboard, understand, and use its products.

With industry giants like Amazon and Netflix leading the charge in defining new norms of effortless customer experiences, customer expectations are evolving. But how does this compare to B2B standards, which have typically lagged far behind?

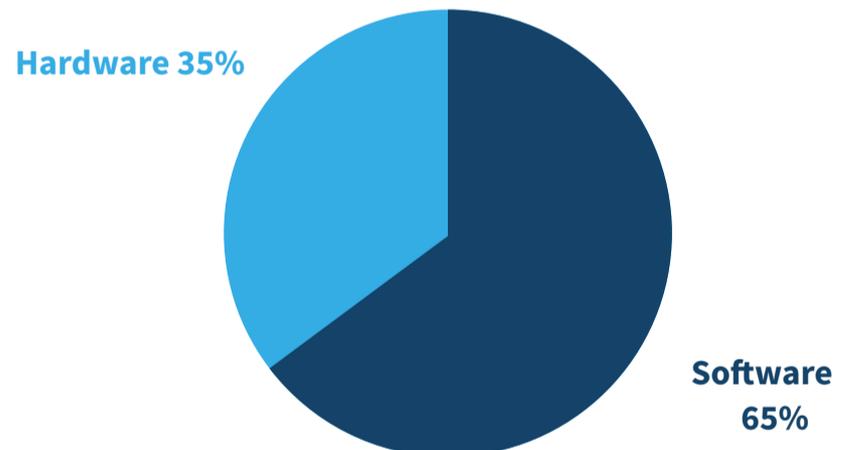
In order to assess the state of self-service content experiences, knowledge orchestration provider Zoomin and research firm Frost & Sullivan conducted research into the experiences of technical content users and how they fare against their expectations. The research also surveyed Customer Experience (CX) and Customer Support (CS) Executives to explore whether their perception of the content experiences they’re providing align with the views of end users.

Methodology:

186 users of technical content were surveyed from the following industries:



57 CX/CS Executives from companies with over 1000+ employees were surveyed from the following industries:

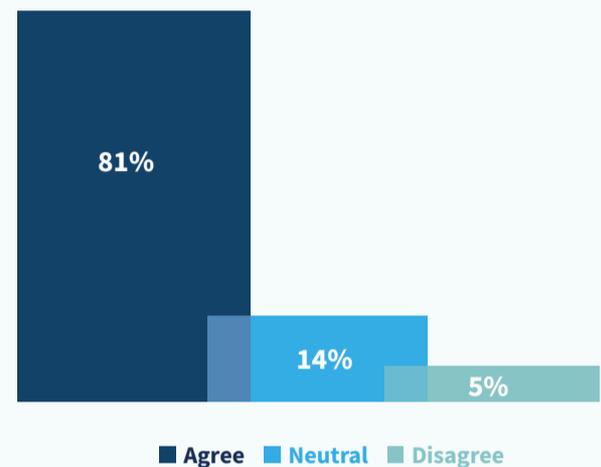


The Findings:

Customers want to self-serve

The research confirmed what has been a growing trend for a number of years: customers WANT to self-serve. No matter how good the live support offering is, customers are showing an overwhelming preference for self-led resolution, with 81% of the research's B2B technical content users saying they would like to resolve technical issues by themselves. In fact, only 3% of users stated that they contact customer support immediately when confronted with a product problem.

"I prefer finding answers in documentation portals on my own without having to reach out to support"



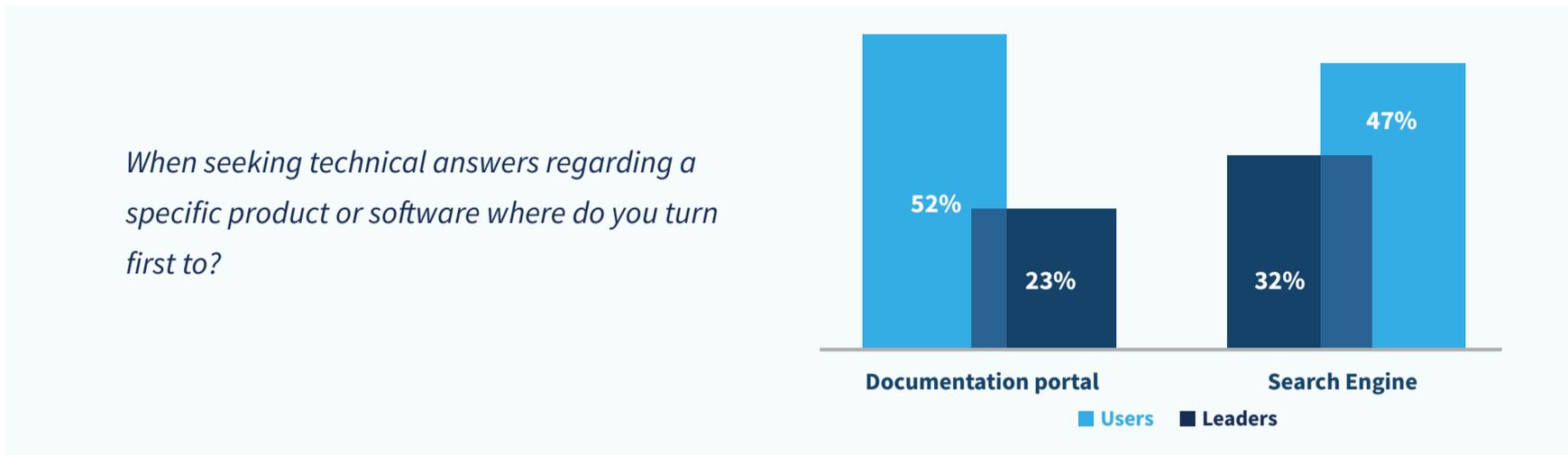
Looking for answers is a painful experience

Users may be heading to technical content as their first port of call to find information and resolve issues, but that doesn't mean they are able to do so with ease. The research finds that companies are too often forcing users into frustrating and high-effort user experiences. Almost half of users (46%) say that looking for answers in technical documentation is generally a painful experience. Respondents expanded on the journey they have to undertake to find information, citing that they have to search across an average of three separate channels (for example, support community, documentation portal and corporate site), before landing on the information they need. This reality directly contradicts expectations of "a single and integrated source of content" which 81% of respondents cited as being anywhere from important to crucial.

The painful journey doesn't stop at finding the right channel. Respondents said they have to perform at least three searches to find the answer they're looking for. In 51% of cases, this answer is hidden in lengthy PDFs which by nature provide poor search functionality.

Customers don't have confidence in the content experience

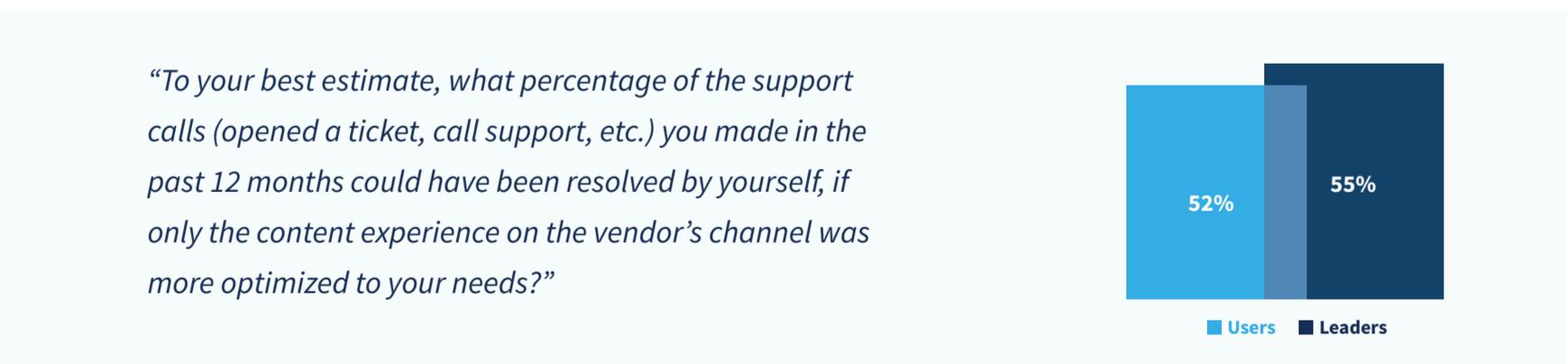
It's not just a time-consuming search experience that is frustrating users. Concerningly, users state that on average 40% of the time their searches lead them to either irrelevant or out-of-date product content. This does not include content that users may not realize is out of date. Particularly problematic is that less than 6% of users found the answers they need on their first search attempt.



Poor content experiences significantly impact support case volume

CX/CS leaders and users agree: More than half of support calls (52-55%) could have been avoided through a better content experience

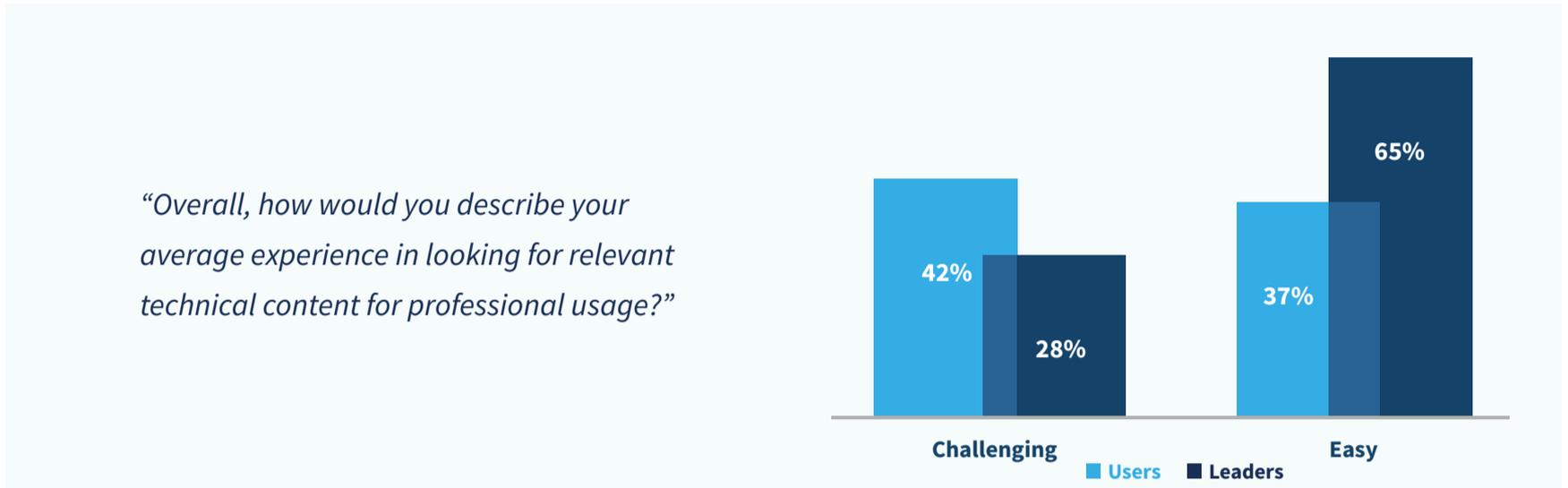
The survey found that both users and CX/CS leaders agree that more than half of support calls (52% for users and 55% for CX/CS leaders) made in the past 12 months could have been resolved independently by users through a better content experience. Both groups were asked what percentage of actual support calls made in the past 12 month were resolved by being directed to relevant content with the end users estimating 53% while CX/CS leaders estimated as high as 58%



Users estimated that 53% of support calls they made in the past 12 months were resolved by directing them to existing content

CX and CS Executives are overestimating the experience they are providing

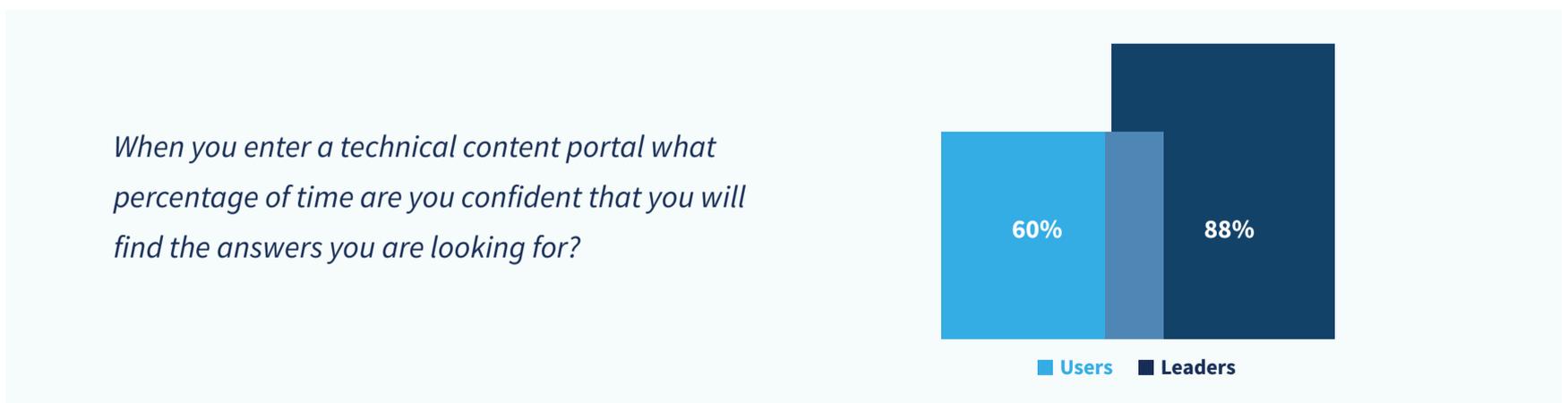
The research points to a significant perception gap between the experience users are having and that which CX and CS Executives believe they are providing. Roughly two-thirds of executives believe that looking for technical content is easy, while only 37% of users feel the same way.



While 65% of CX/CS leaders believe that looking for technical answers is easy only 37% of users agree

CX/CS leaders also seem to be not fully aware of the journey their customers are undertaking while looking for answers. 52% of users named documentation portals as the first destination they will look for answers and 23% said search engines. But 47% of CX/CS leaders believe search engines are the first place users look, with documentation as second with 23%. Moreover only 60% of users said they are confident that they will be able to find answers by themselves.

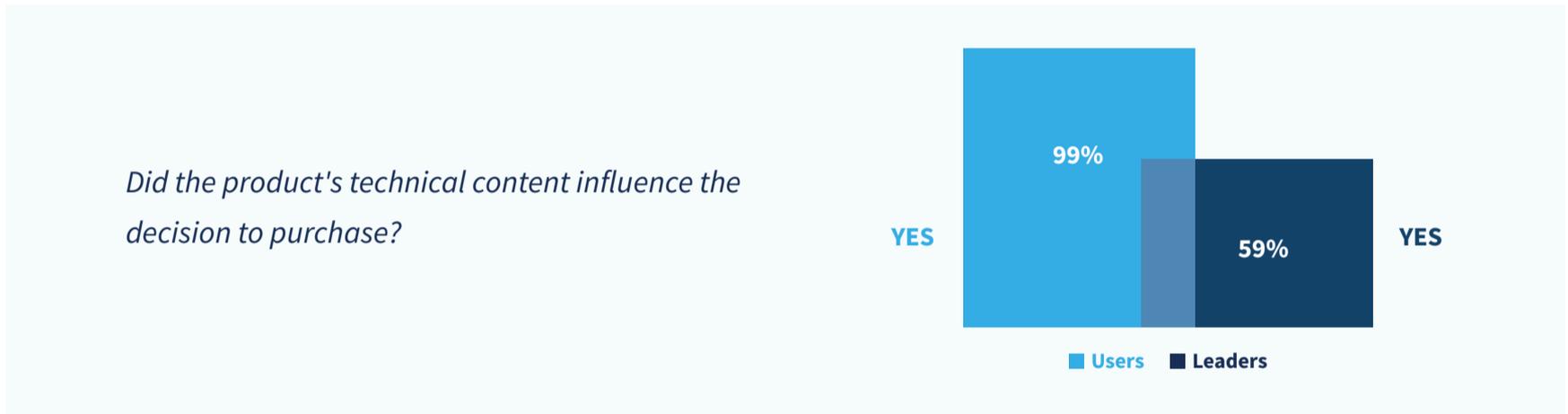
But CX/CS leaders estimated customers’ level of confidence to be almost 50% higher, with 88% of executives saying they believe their customers are confident they will be able to find answers by themselves. With this perception gap it is then perhaps not surprising that only 28% of CX/CS leaders believe that looking for answers in technical content is challenging in contrast to 42% of users.



Content is influencing the pre-sales process - but many execs aren't even aware

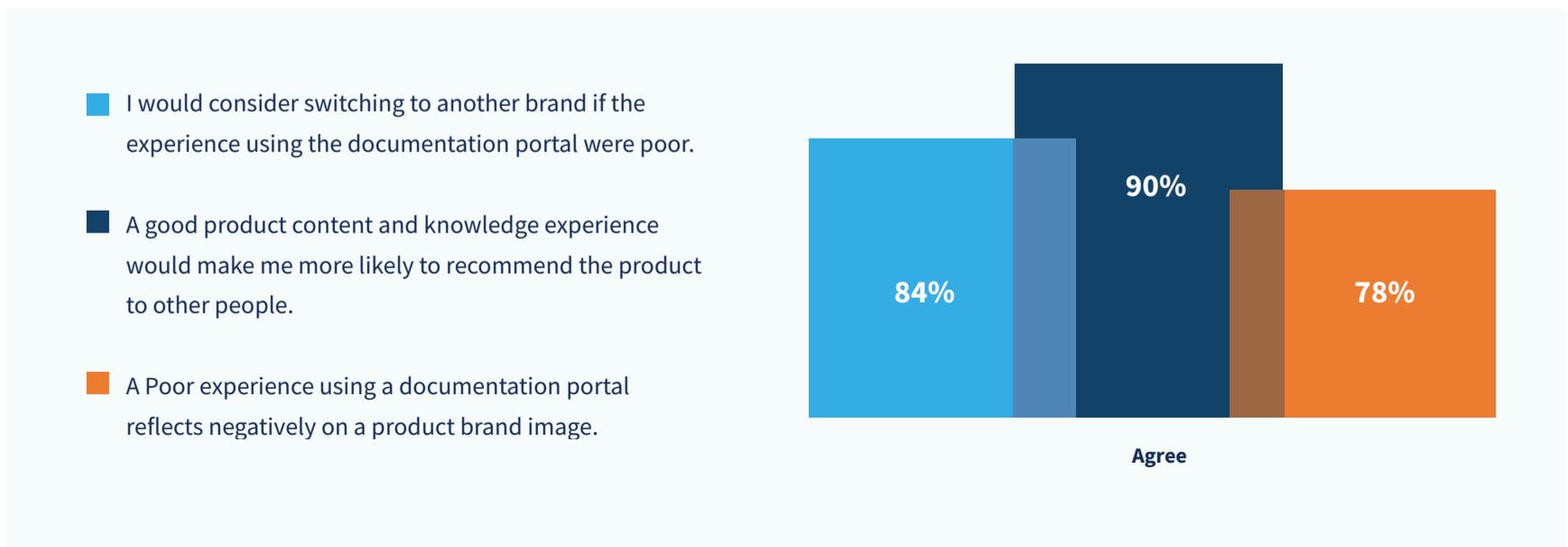
99% of users say technical content is a primary or secondary criteria in the decision to purchase!

The research suggests that technical content may well play a significant role in converting prospects - without executives realizing it. Only 59% of CX/CS executives believe that customers reference their content before making purchasing decisions; however the report found that 99% of users who are involved in purchasing say that a vendor's technical content is a primary or secondary criteria in the decision to purchase. This is critical, as it means that technical content is one of the primary drivers of customer perception of a product and may even supersede the importance of marketing materials during the purchasing process.



Poor Content Experiences lead to churn

This disparity in perception may have significant business impact, as when self-service solutions are either not provided or fail to meet user expectations, brand reputation suffers. This is evidenced by 84% of users stating that they would switch to another brand if their experience using the documentation portal to answer their product questions was poor. Meanwhile 90% of these users agree that a good content experience would them more likely to recommend the product to others.



Conclusion

The research points to a broken experience in the customer journey with far-reaching business impact. Customers are signalling a clear preference to resolve issues independently without reaching out to support. And practically every user of technical content references this content prior to making purchasing decisions. However, there appears to be a significant gap between the experience customers expect and the one they are given. Despite a willingness to self-serve, customer confidence in the self-service experience remains low due to the frequency with which users encounter incorrect, outdated or irrelevant content. Customers almost never find the information they need upon their first search and must often search across multiple channels.

The cost of these high-effort experiences to business is significant, with users and CX/CS executives indicating that **over 50% of support queries could be deflected** through better content experiences, which could translate into **millions of dollars in cost savings** for support organizations as well as increased efficiency. With customers indicating they would switch brands over the quality of the content experience and almost every respondent confirming that a good experience would make them more likely to recommend a product, the research suggests that companies who invest in their content experience stand to make significant retention and conversion gains.