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Emotional Fatigue of Consumers as a Key Factor in Rethinking Customer Centricity in 2026

In 2026, consumer emotional fatigue will become one of the main barriers to traditional customer-centric approaches. The constant flow of messages, excessive personalization, digital overload and the fast pace of life lead to the fact that people feel exhausted from interacting with brands. Instead of wanting more attention from companies, consumers are looking for peace, relevance and respect for their emotional state. This forces a rethink of customer-centricity: from maximum contact to reasonable restraint, from intrusiveness to empathy. In the end, those approaches that do not exhaust, but help restore human energy, will win.

Today, consumers wake up to dozens of notifications, scroll through a feed of perfectly curated offers, and receive recommendations in every app. What used to be called customer-centricity – attention to every detail, constant personalization – is now often perceived as a source of stress [1].

Emotional fatigue is not just irritation from advertising, but a deeper state: cognitive overload, emotional exhaustion, and a desire to isolate oneself from unnecessary information. In 2026, this condition becomes systemic and is even called the “great burnout” – a collective burnout from polycrisis, digital noise, economic uncertainty, and constant pressure. People don’t want “more personalization” – they want less, but better. They want brands to respect their emotional resource, not deplete it. That is why emotional fatigue forces us to radically rethink customer-centricity: to move from quantity of interactions to quality, from intrusiveness to empathy.

Emotional fatigue occurs when a constant stream of information exceeds a person’s ability to process it. This leads to reduced attention, emotional distancing,

and a refusal to interact with brands. Today, overload is exacerbated by hyperpersonalization: offers become so precise that they sometimes cause a feeling of control or obsession. Add to this the rapid change of trends, constant updates in applications, social networks where everything is sold, the constant expectation of a quick response and the need to constantly make decisions – and we get chronic fatigue. People are starting to unsubscribe en masse, ignore messages, switch to competitors or simply turn off notifications. This is not a temporary phenomenon, but a new reality of consumer behavior, where digital detox is turning into a real luxury, and slow life is a radical protest against the constant “always on” [2].

Consumers are now actively avoiding over-communication. Many unsubscribe from several brands each month due to repetitiveness and high volume of messages. Email, which used to be a favorite channel, is also becoming the most annoying when overloaded. People experience choice fatigue: too many options lead to purchases being postponed or canceled altogether. Overload causes not only irritation, but also apathy – the desire to simply switch off from everything. In 2026, this is joined by artificial intelligence fatigue: when content looks monotonous or too “perfect”, trust drops. Consumers are beginning to value simplicity, silence and moments when a brand does not “press” but gives a respite. They are looking for a balance between convenience and peace, between technology and humanity. This is especially noticeable in such trends as: the desire for a “digital detox” as a new form of luxury and status; an interest in slow living and “slow punk” - radical slowness as a way of living more gently; the search for “glimmers” - small moments of joy and peace that counteract burnout; a preference for brands that offer not constant promotions, but real respites and emotional clarity; an avoidance of “polished” content in favor of authentic and “imperfect” [3].

Traditional customer-centricity, which focused on the maximum number of touchpoints and deep personalization, now often works against brands – it accelerates fatigue. The new model of 2026 is built on different principles: relevance instead of volume – it is better to send one precise message at the right time than a dozen

unnecessary ones; consumers are more loyal to brands that do not bombard, but help accurately.

Customer-centricity is becoming “human-centric”: an emphasis on empathy, authenticity, small joys instead of constant pressure. Artificial intelligence is not here for greater intrusiveness, but for a more precise understanding of when silence is better than speaking. Brands that offer “calm” experiences, “safe spaces” without pressure, and moments of true relaxation are becoming real winners in the era of “great exhaustion.” Consumer emotional fatigue in 2026 is not a temporary crisis, but a signal for profound change. Brands that ignore this state and continue “more contacts” risk losing loyalty. Those who understand that the best marketing is the one that is almost unnoticed, because it does not exhaust, but supports, will gain a real advantage. The future does not belong to technology per se, but to empathy in its use. In a world where human energy is the most valuable resource, the one who helps to preserve it, not deplete it, will win [4].

Literature:

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