

The Travel & Hospitality Marketing AI Impact Report

AI Ambition, Adoption, and Critical Disconnects in Travel & Hospitality Marketing



The AI Decisions Made Today Will Determine Tomorrow's Winners

AI has officially rewritten how travel and hospitality consumers buy and marketers sell. Discovery now starts in AI-native interfaces, and booking decisions unfold through a zigzag of clicks, conversations, and AI-driven interactions. All the while, travel and hospitality marketers are adopting AI to engage, track, optimize, and connect every touchpoint along the way.

The result is a buyer journey that rewards brands using AI to connect first-party signals end-to-end and penalizes those still treating AI as a side project. Over 80% of survey respondents stated that the AI winners in their category will be determined within the next 12 months, indicating that travel and hospitality marketers understand this is a leaderboard moment, not a pilot year.

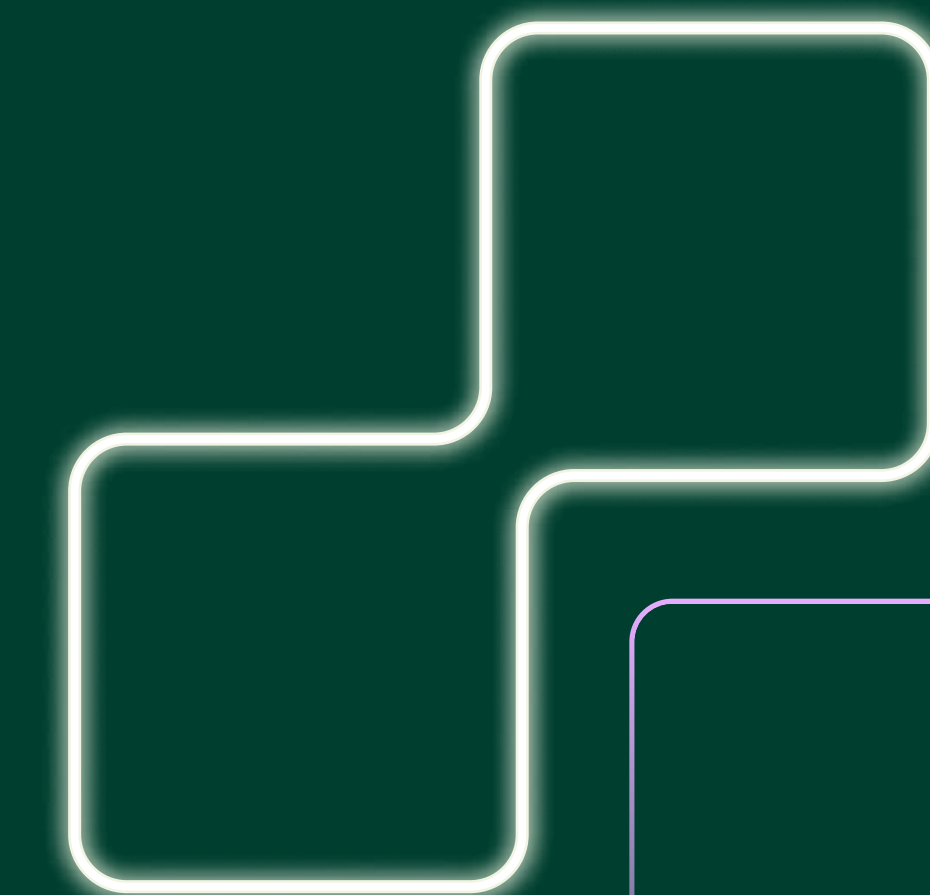
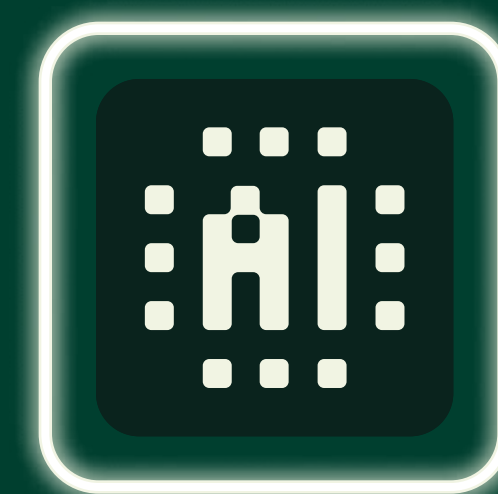
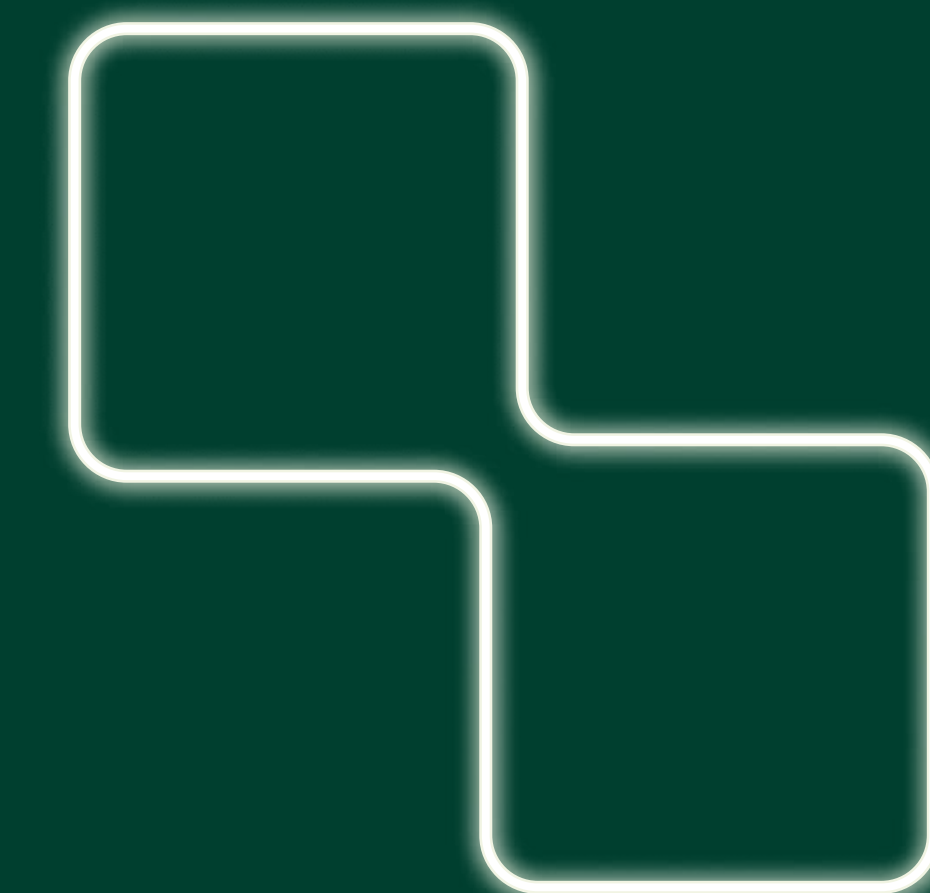
But this urgency often outpaces reality. A majority of respondents believe that pausing AI would jeopardize 2026 targets. However, most travel and hospitality organizations still allocate a minority of the martech budget to AI, and over a quarter think current AI spending is already too high. That disconnect signals less a lack of belief than a struggle to turn investment into measurable outcomes.

Many also fail to execute on first-party, unstructured data sources and take action on that data in real time, making it difficult for them to meet the demands of the new AI-powered buyer journey. Buying journey optimization is only as strong as the weakest link, and this lack of first-party data execution is creating a critical gap.

At the same time, overconfidence is compounding the risk of overlooking these shortcomings. A statistically improbable majority say they're adopting AI faster than competitors. This fuels a bias for speed and tolerance for risk, which can be a powerful asset or lead to significant blind spots.

We surveyed 600 marketers, including 100 U.S. travel and hospitality marketing professionals, for The Marketing AI Impact Report to provide marketing leadership with a clear view of the industry's trajectory. The report quantifies where ambition, budgets, and capabilities diverge; where operational latency undermines ROI; and where perception breaks from customer reality.

The results of the survey show that strategic decisions made today about AI investment, adoption, and integration will unequivocally define your market position tomorrow. It's clear that it's time to make bold AI moves, but not without being informed of the hurdles, potential pitfalls, and sentiment on the ground floor.





The Prevailing Mindset Is An Atmosphere Of Optimism And Urgency

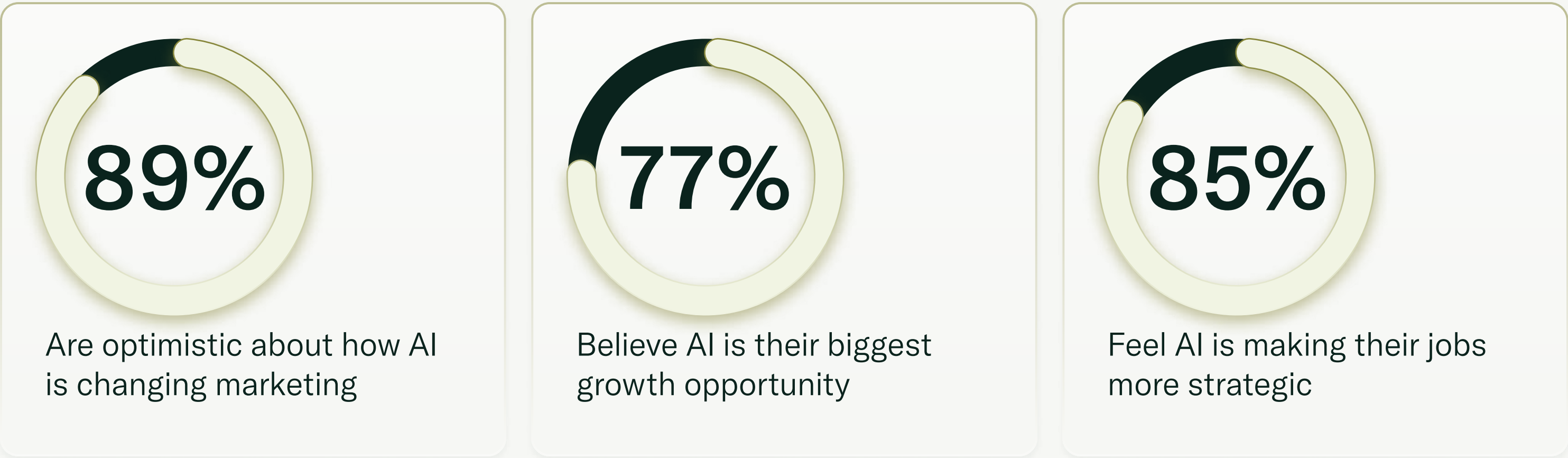
To understand the current state of AI in travel and hospitality marketing, one must first grasp the collective mindset of its practitioners. This combination of powerful optimism, intense competitive pressure, and personal stress is the primary engine driving the rapid pace of AI adoption and shaping critical investment decisions. This psychological landscape is not merely a backdrop; it is the force propelling the industry forward.



Overwhelming Optimism Is The AI Catalyst

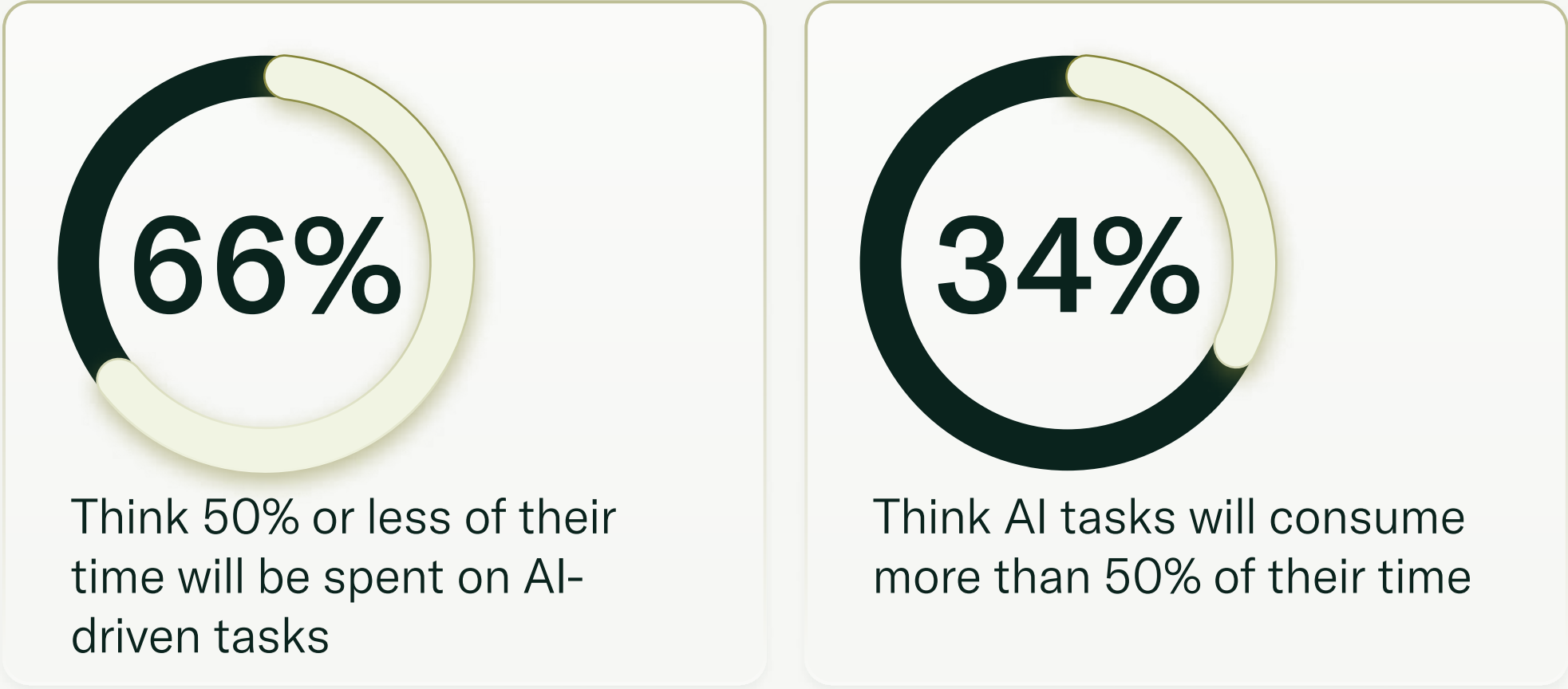
Travel and hospitality marketers are not just accepting AI; they are embracing it with remarkable enthusiasm, viewing it as a transformative force for both their organizations and their personal careers. This optimism serves as a powerful catalyst for change and investment.

An overwhelming 89% of travel and hospitality marketers are "very" or "somewhat" optimistic about how AI is changing the marketing landscape. Travel and hospitality marketers also see AI advancing their careers, as 77% believe it is the single biggest growth opportunity in their careers and 85% report that it is already making their work more strategic.



Humans Will Stay In The Loop

While travel and hospitality marketers are optimistic about AI, they firmly believe humans will stay in the loop. The majority believe that 50% or less of their time will be spent using AI tools to do their jobs, and 34% think that AI-driven tasks will take up more than 50% of their time.



However, this represents a notable difference from the overall B2C sample (75%), suggesting travel and hospitality marketers expect AI to play a larger role in their daily work.

The High-Stakes Race For AI Supremacy

Beneath the surface of this optimism lies an intense sense of urgency. The industry perceives the current moment as a make-or-break window for establishing AI leadership. This belief has created a high-stakes environment where inaction is seen as the greatest risk.

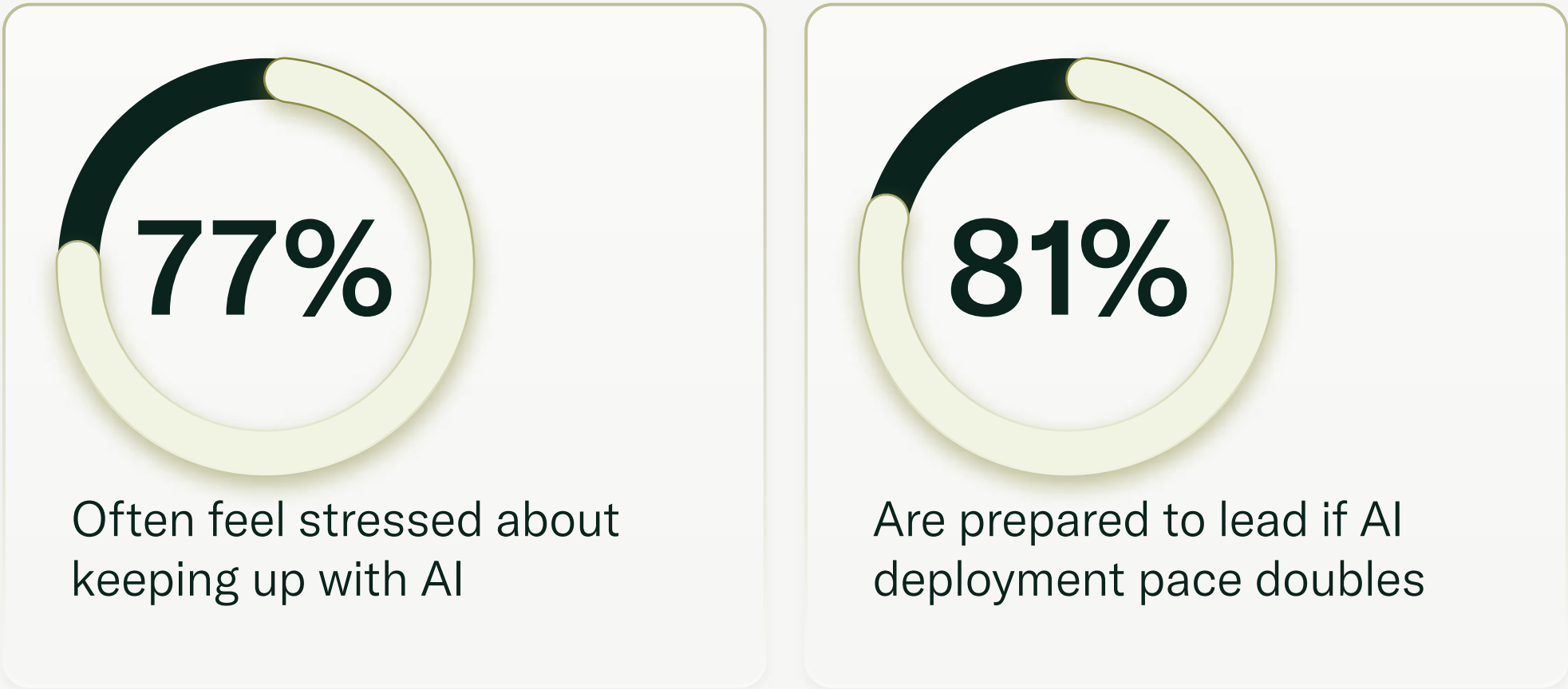


The data reveals a widespread conviction: 83% of travel and hospitality marketers believe the next 12 months will determine the AI winners in their category, and 79% report that their leadership is pressuring them to demonstrate AI wins quickly.

The Personal Toll Of The AI Revolution

This industry-wide sprint comes with a significant personal and professional toll. While travel and hospitality marketers feel equipped for the challenge, the relentless pace of innovation is a considerable source of pressure.

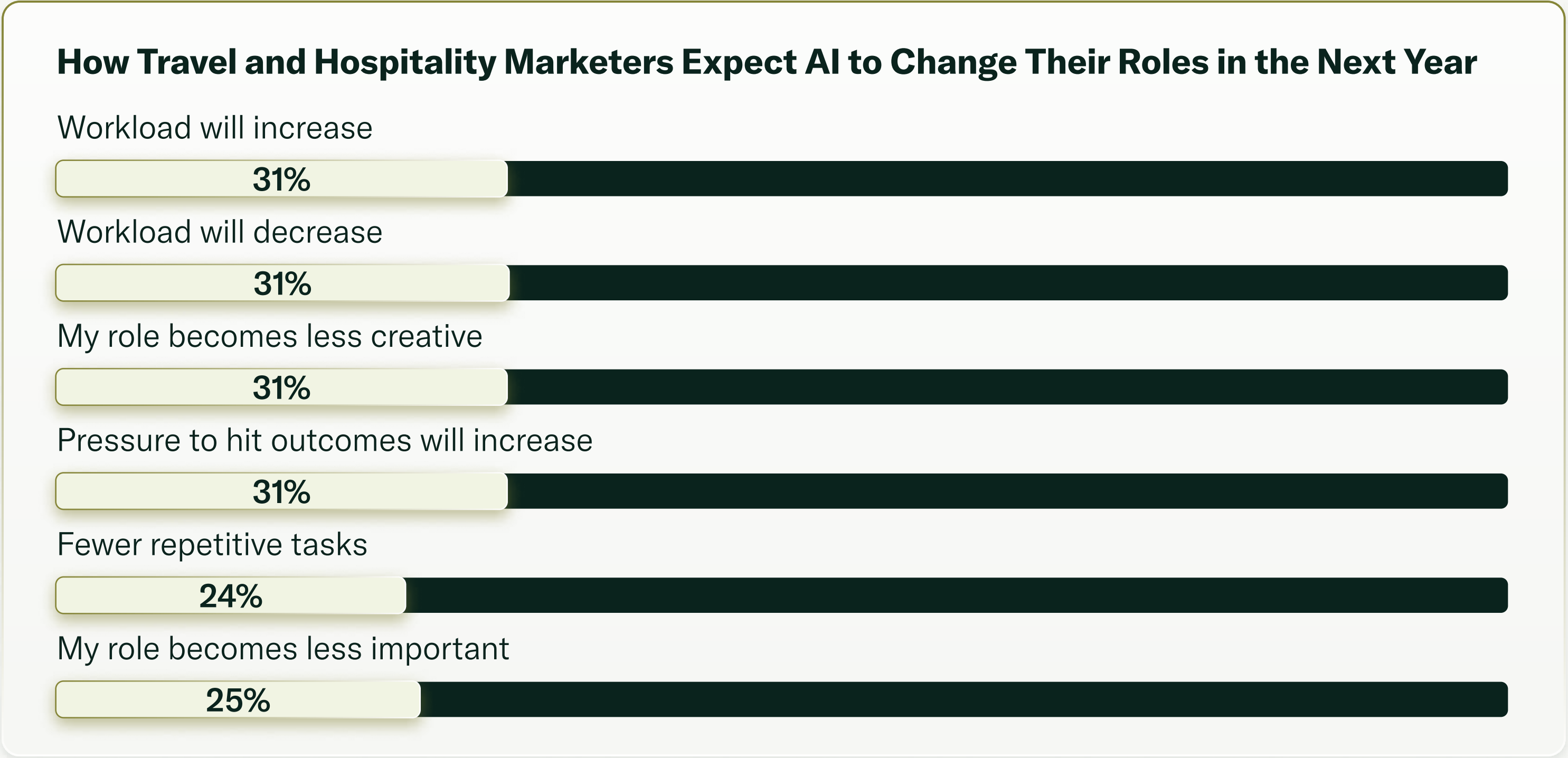
A significant majority (77%) report that they "often" or "very often" feel stress or urgency about keeping up with AI.



In a testament to their commitment, this stress is contrasted by a high level of personal readiness, with 81% feeling prepared to lead or contribute effectively even if their organization were to double its pace of AI deployment.

Travel And Hospitality Marketers Have Mixed Feelings About Job Impacts

While travel and hospitality marketers are very optimistic about AI, they have mixed expectations about how it will impact their roles. About 30% expect their workload to decrease, and 24% expect fewer repetitive tasks. However, 31% report that AI will increase their workloads, render their roles less creative, and heighten pressure to meet their goals. A quarter also think there's a danger that it will make their roles less important.



This potent psychological cocktail of ambition and anxiety is the driving force behind strategic decision-making, setting the stage for major financial commitments.

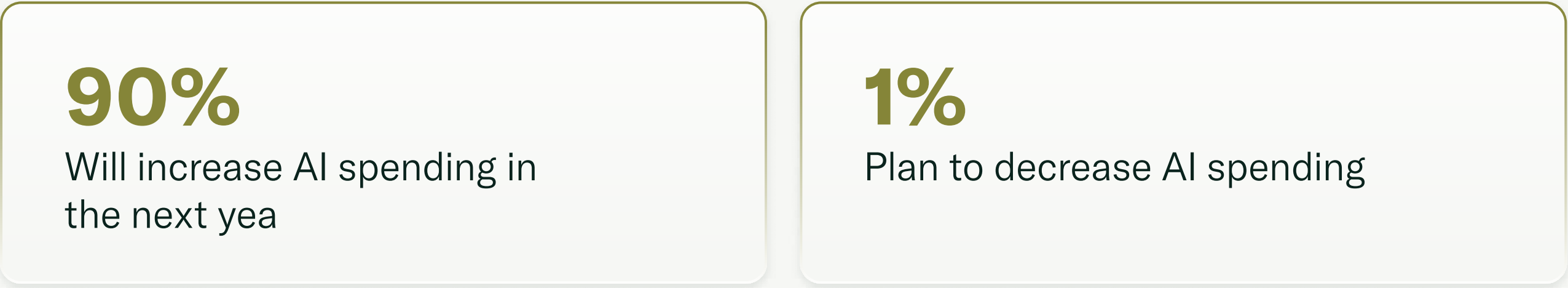


How Travel And Hospitality Marketers Are Reconciling Ambition With Budget Allocation

While sentiment is a powerful motivator, an organization's true priorities are ultimately revealed in its budget. The survey data uncovers a series of contradictions between the stated strategic importance of AI and the actual financial resources being allocated, highlighting a critical disconnect between ambition and action.

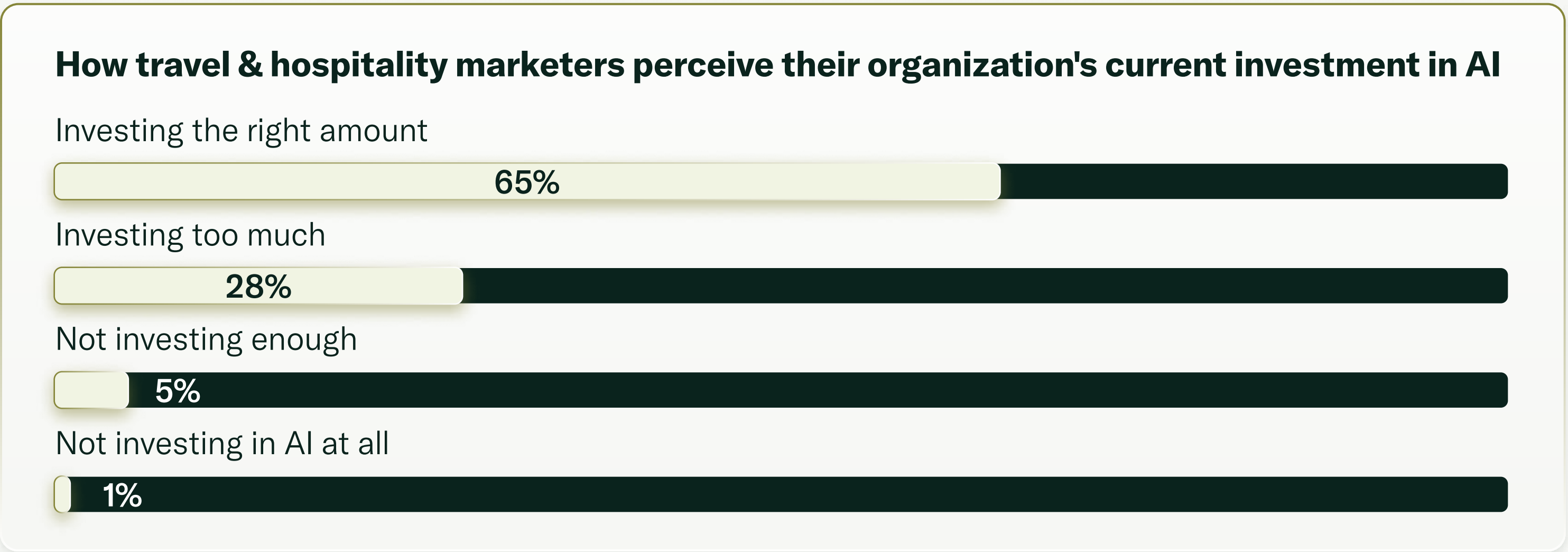
Unwavering Commitment To Increased Investment

At a high level, the commitment to AI appears absolute. A commanding 90% of travel and hospitality marketing organizations plan to increase their investment in AI over the next 12 months. In contrast, just 1% plan to decrease spending, signaling near-unanimous agreement on the necessity of continued investment.



A Contradiction In Perceived Spending

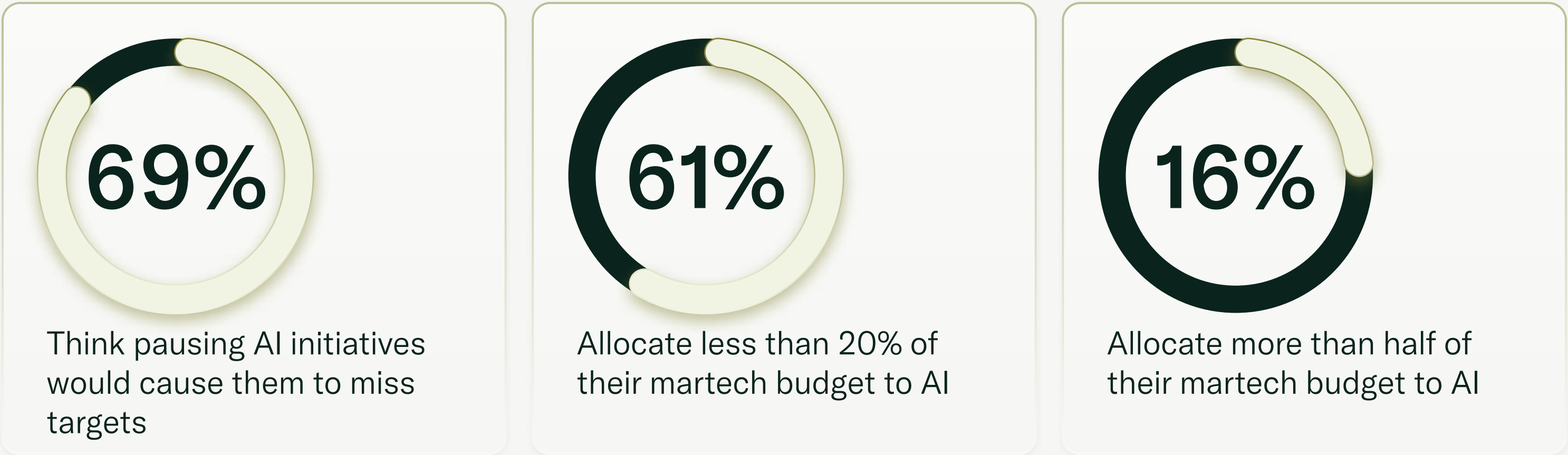
Despite the overwhelming consensus to increase spending, there is a telling disconnect in how travel and hospitality marketers perceive current investment levels.



While a majority (65%) believe their company is investing the "right amount," over a quarter (28%) feel they are investing "too much." Conversely, only 5% feel their organization is not investing enough. This suggests the issue may not be the amount of investment, but a perceived lack of efficiency or a disconnect between central AI spending and the tangible tools available to marketing teams.

The Budget-Expectation Mismatch

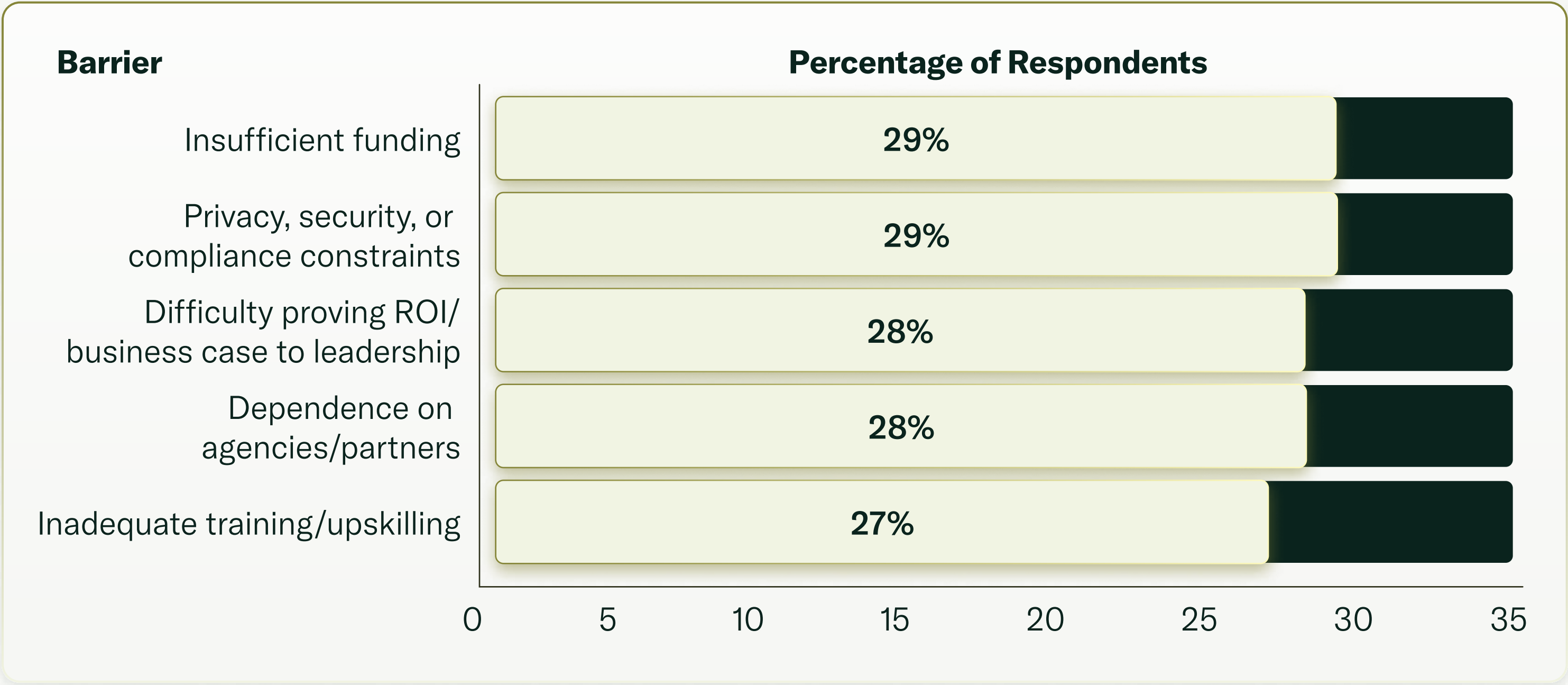
A paradox emerges when comparing strategic expectations to martech budget allocations. A significant 69% of travel and hospitality marketers believe that pausing AI initiatives for just 12 months would likely cause them to miss their key 2026 targets—notably lower than the overall B2C sample (80%), suggesting travel and hospitality marketers may be less convinced of AI's immediate criticality.



Yet, this perspective is not fully reflected in budget planning. A majority (61%) of travel and hospitality organizations allocate 20% or less of their Martech budget to AI, though this is lower than the overall sample (68%), indicating slightly higher budget allocation. Still, only 16% dedicate more than half of their budget to these critical tools.

Identified Barriers To AI Advancement

This mismatch may be explained by the significant hurdles travel and hospitality organizations face in scaling their AI efforts. The primary obstacles are not a lack of will but a complex mix of financial, regulatory, and organizational challenges.



This investment paradox reveals the first critical disconnect: the ambition for AI leadership is not yet matched by the reality of budget allocation.



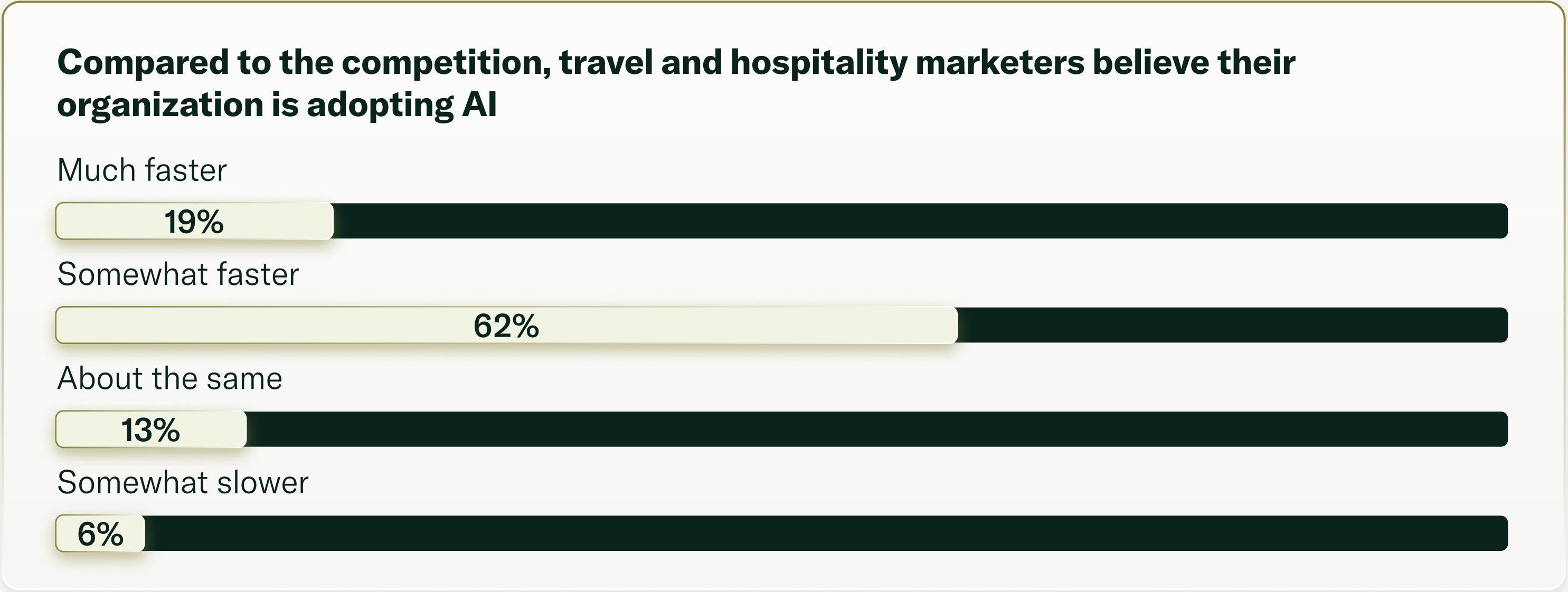
The Confidence Conundrum: A Widespread Overestimation Of AI Prowess

Organizational self-perception can be a powerful asset or a significant strategic blind spot. The survey data reveals a striking level of confidence among travel and hospitality marketers—so high, in fact, that it suggests a widespread overestimation of both competitive positioning and internal expertise. This confidence gap could lead organizations to underestimate emerging threats and miscalculate strategic risks.



The "Ahead Of The Pack" Illusion

The data points to a systemic overestimation of competitive maturity, a statistical improbability where 81% of respondents believe their organization is adopting AI "much faster" or "somewhat faster" than its closest competitors.



The strategic implication is clear: a vast majority of the market may be operating with an inflated sense of their competitive advantage, potentially leading to complacency and a failure to recognize the true pace of innovation set by rivals.

A More Sobering View Of Internal Expertise

While confidence in competitive pace is exceptionally high, self-assessments of internal AI expertise are more grounded, though still optimistic. While ratings vary by specific capability, such as personalization or ad optimization, they generally cluster with a minority of firms self-identifying as top-tier.

Compared to the competition, travel and hospitality organizations' AI capabilities are

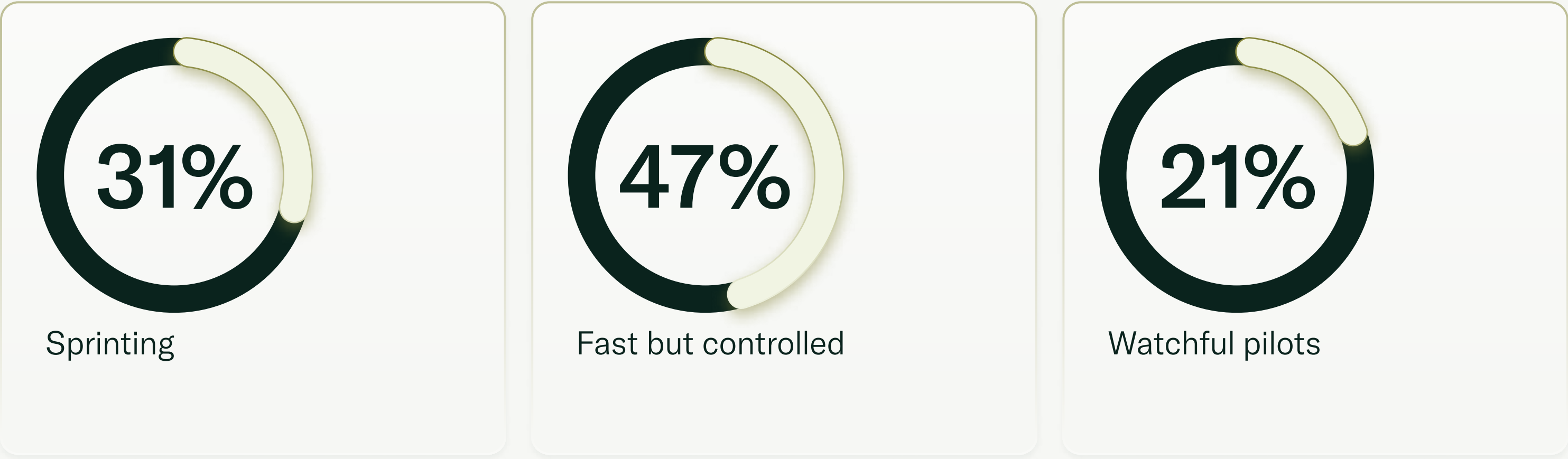


Notably, travel and hospitality marketers rate their personal expertise at nearly identical levels, indicating a strong alignment between perceived individual and organizational capabilities.

Deployment Posture Is Past The Pilot Phase

This high confidence is reflected in the industry's operational posture. The era of cautious AI experimentation is largely over.

AI deployment posture



The data shows that only 21% of travel and hospitality organizations are in a "watchful" AI pilot stage. The vast majority are moving decisively, with 47% describing their approach as "fast but controlled" and another 31% "sprinting" to secure a competitive advantage, accepting the risks that come with that velocity.

This confident, aggressive posture directly informs how organizations are approaching the inherent risks of a fast-moving technological revolution.

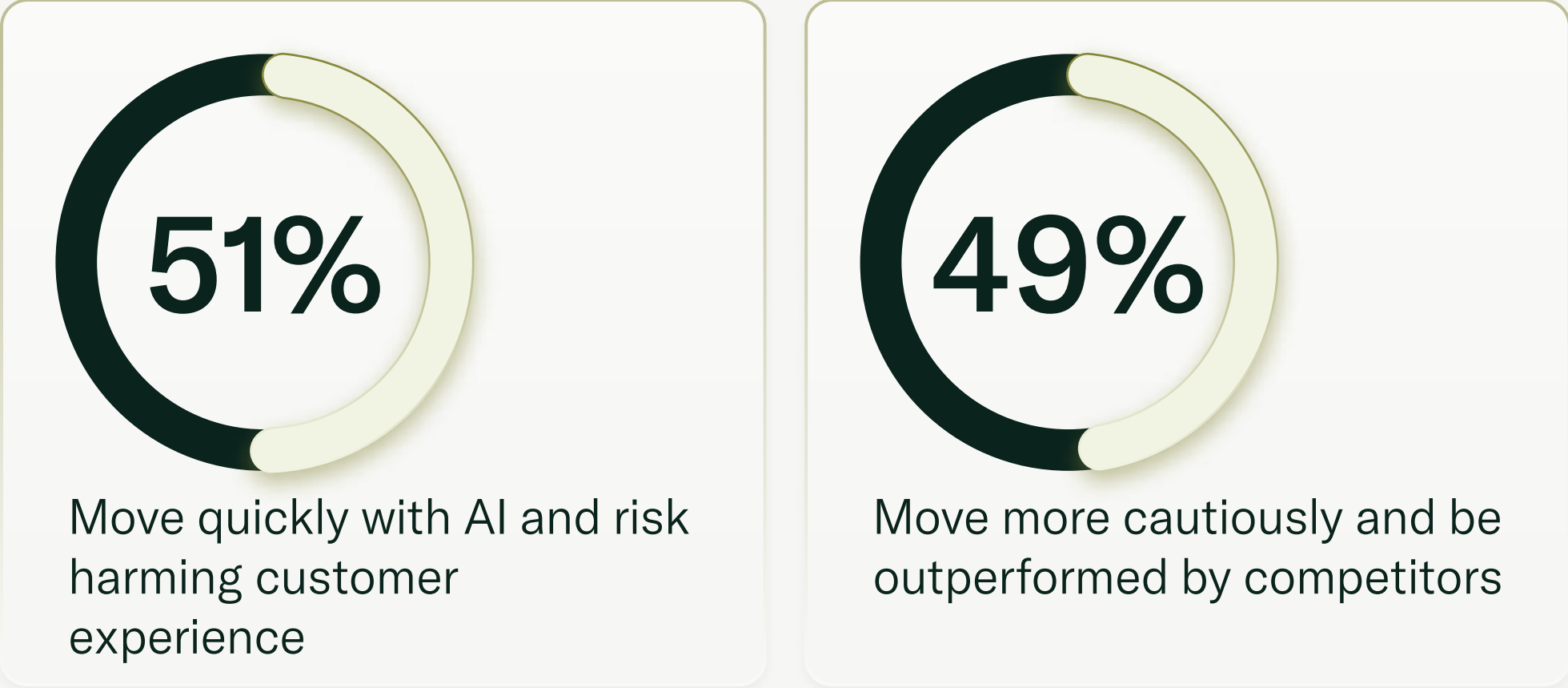


High-Stakes Strategy: The Industry's Gamble On Speed

Travel and hospitality marketing leaders today face a classic strategic dilemma: move fast to capture a first-mover advantage, or move cautiously to protect brand reputation and customer experience. The survey reveals that in the high-stakes race for AI supremacy, the industry is prioritizing speed, creating a dynamic where risk tolerance is high and potential consequences are significant. The strategic question is how to gain speed without committing avoidable errors.

Prioritizing Pace Over Perfection

The most stark finding on risk tolerance comes from a direct choice presented to travel and hospitality marketers. When forced to decide between two negative outcomes, a slight majority (51%) stated they would rather accept the risk of harming customer experience and brand trust than be outperformed by competitors (49%). This represents a more cautious stance than the overall B2C sample (56% willing to move fast), suggesting travel and hospitality marketers are slightly more conservative about protecting customer experience.



The Risk-Confidence Paradox

This reveals a cognitive dissonance at the heart of AI strategy: travel and hospitality marketers simultaneously acknowledge the risk of rapid deployment while expressing confidence in their ability to avoid it. First, a significant majority (80%) agree with the statement, "Rushing AI risks hurting our customer experience"—notably higher than the overall sample (74%), indicating travel and hospitality marketers are more concerned about this risk.

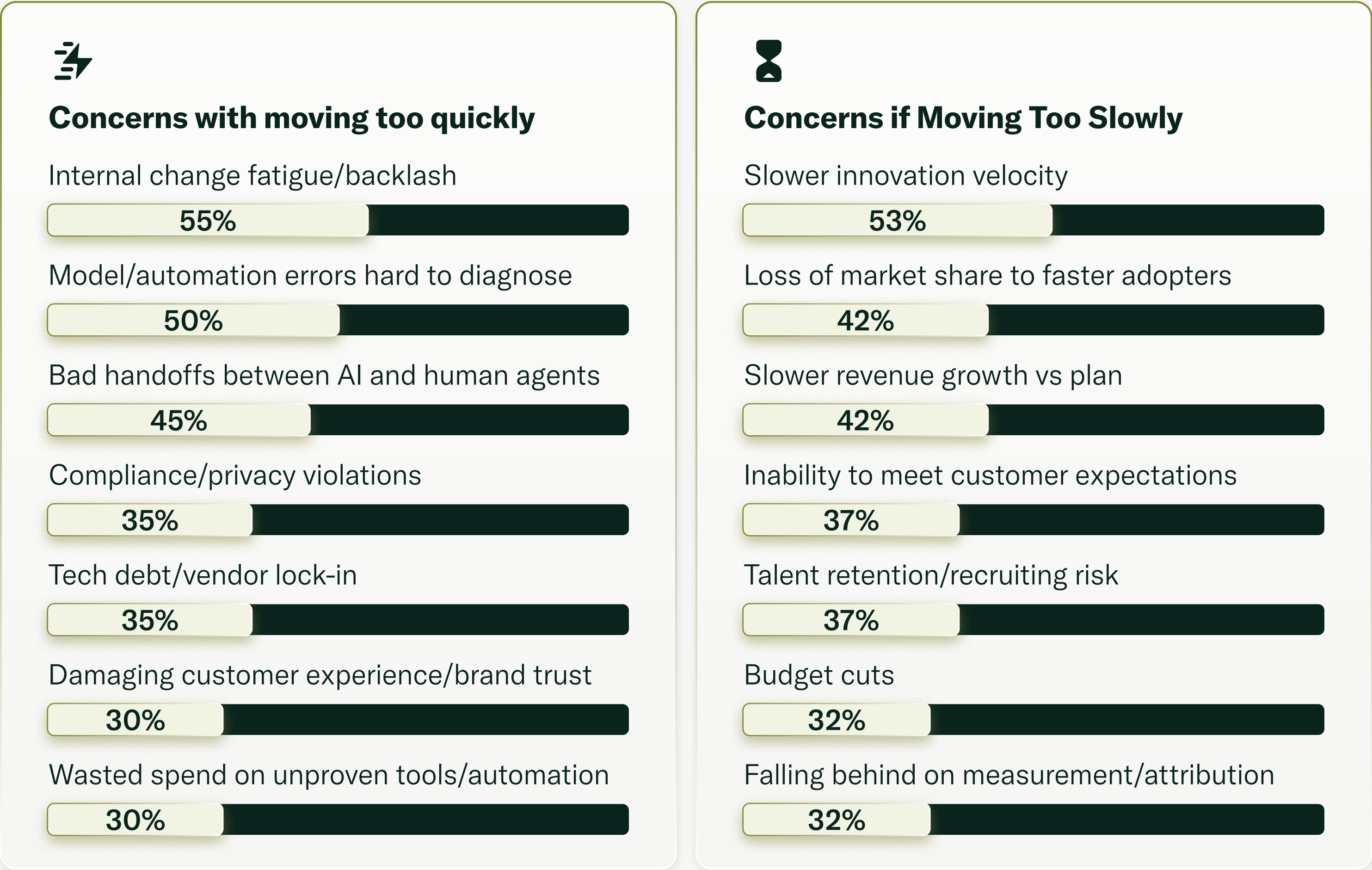
Yet, in a seemingly direct contradiction, a large majority (77%) is confident that their organization "can scale AI quickly without harming customer experience or brand."



This belief that "risks apply to others, not to us" is likely a direct consequence of the widespread, statistically improbable belief that 81% of organizations are ahead of their competitors.

Dueling Concerns: The Risks Of Moving Too Fast Vs. Too Slow

The specific anxieties diverge based on an organization's perceived AI pace, with slow movers fearing market loss and fast movers fearing internal breakdowns. It is concerning to see that fear of damaging the customer experience or brand ranks low among concerns about moving too quickly.



Travel and hospitality marketers show notably different concerns compared to the overall market. When moving too slowly, the inability to meet customer expectations ranks prominently, while concerns about damaging customer experience when moving too quickly are present but not the top concern.

This strategic balancing act between speed and safety ultimately depends on how effectively AI is being operationalized within the marketing function.



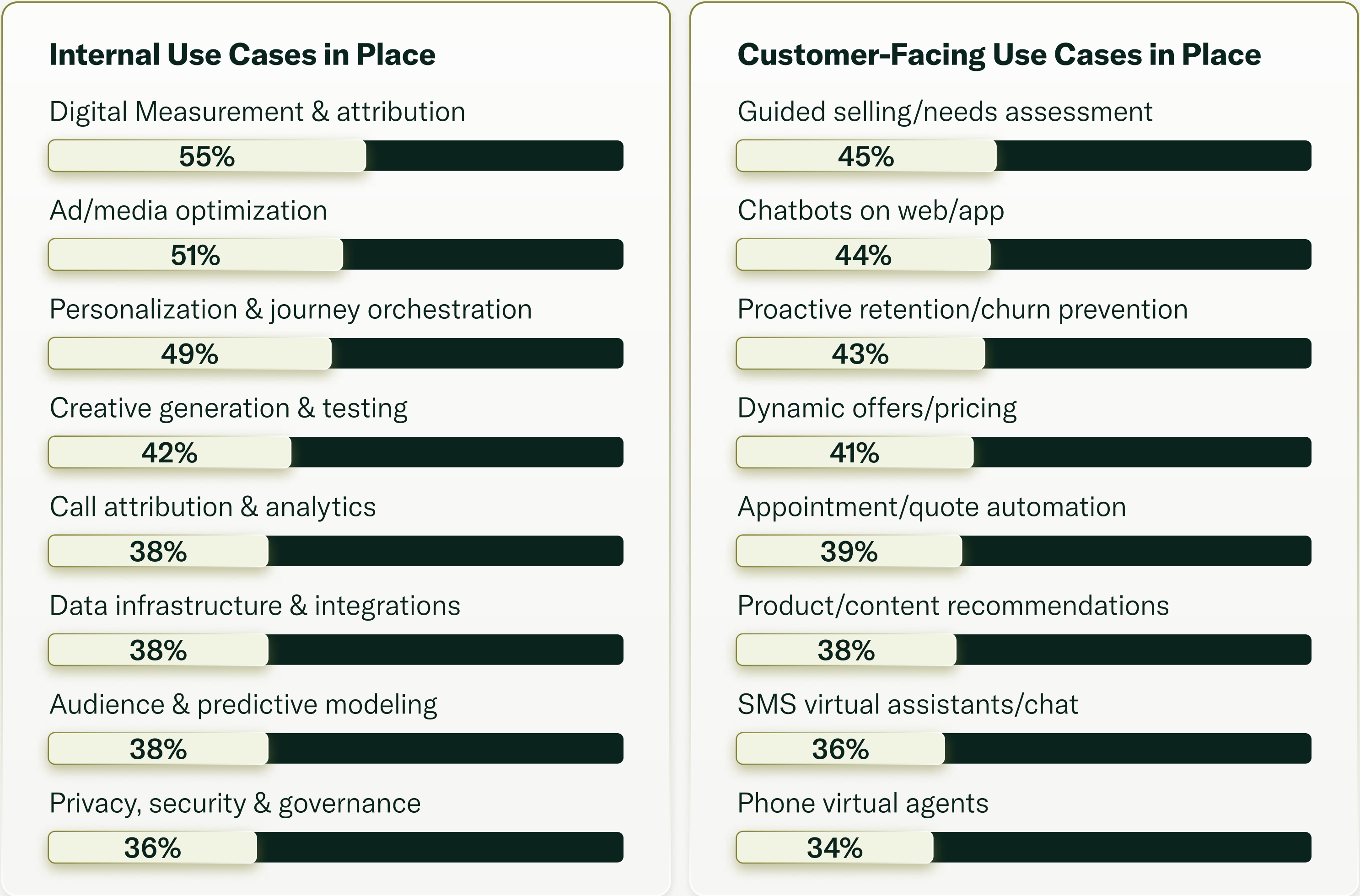
Gaps In Application And Insight Activation Are The Operational Reality



Strategy and ambition are meaningless without effective execution. The ultimate value of AI is determined not by the size of the investment but by how deeply it is embedded into daily workflows and, most importantly, how quickly insights can be transformed into action. This section identifies key areas of AI application and reveals critical latency gaps that are leaking value from the marketing funnel.

Current AI Deployment Across The Buying Journey

AI is being applied across a wide range of marketing functions, with a relatively even split between internal process optimization and direct customer-facing interactions.



The Unstructured Data Opportunity Gap

While travel and hospitality marketers are actively using AI to mine a variety of data sources, a significant opportunity is being underutilized. Organizations are highly likely to analyze text-based sources, such as website search queries (61%) and email inquiries (59%), but less likely to mine the rich, high-intent data contained within call recordings and transcripts (35%).

Unstructured data sources travel and hospitality marketers are actively mining with AI

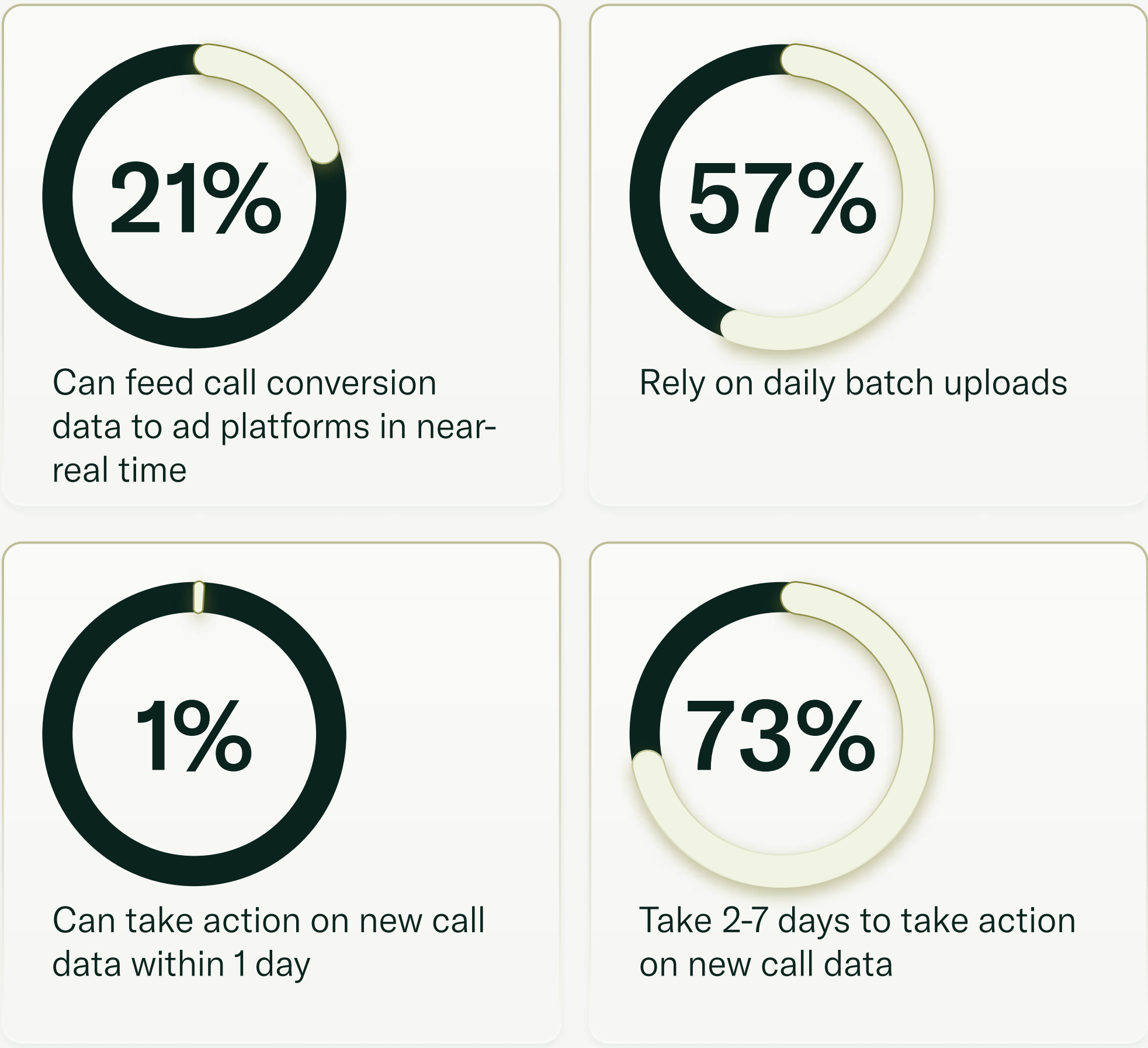


This gap is a strategic vulnerability, as calls contain the unfiltered voice of the customer—their explicit intent, objections, and sentiment—data that is orders of magnitude richer than clicks or form fills. Buying journey optimization is only as strong as the weakest link, and this lack of first-party data creates a critical gap in understanding qualification, objections, conversion drivers, and revenue attribution.

The Critical Latency Problem

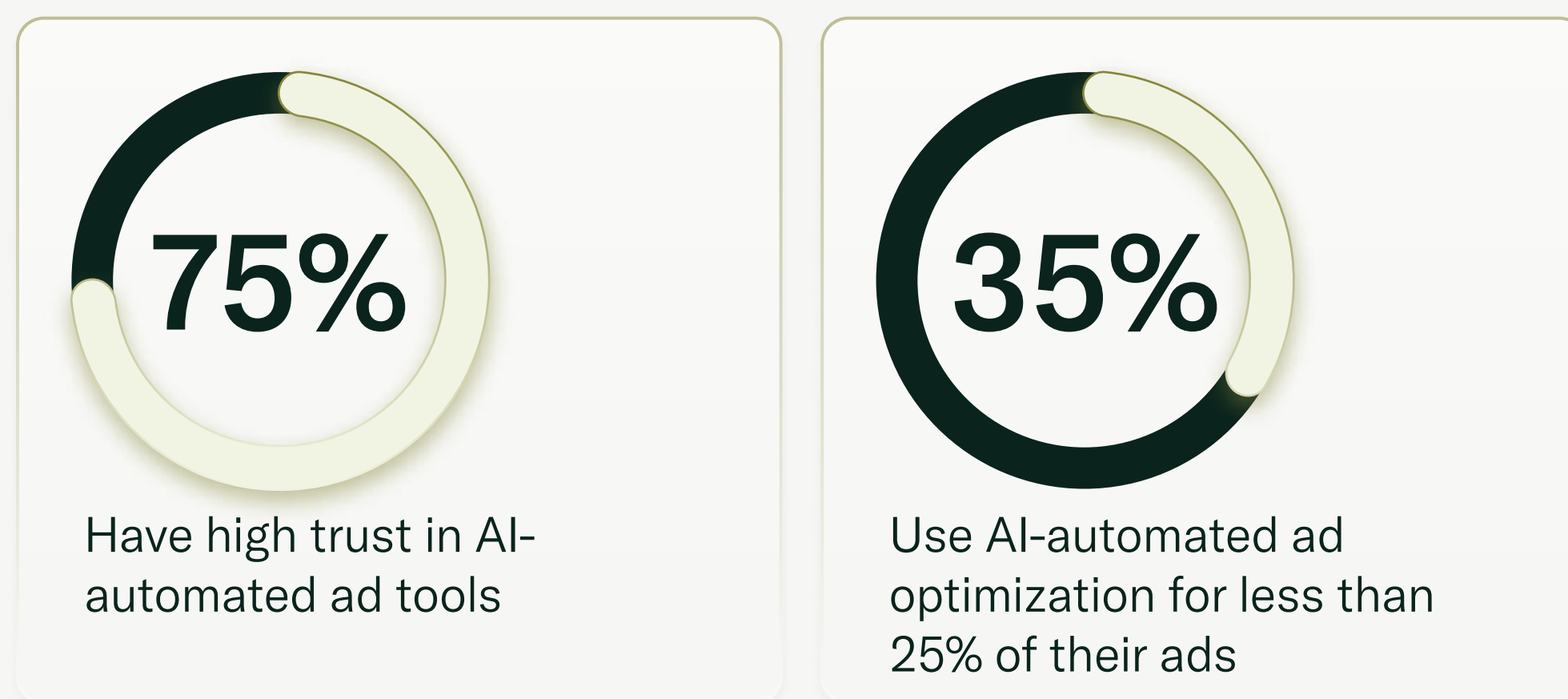
Perhaps the most significant operational failure identified is the "insight-to-action" gap—a major leak in the marketing funnel. The data reveals a costly delay between when an insight is discovered and when it can be acted upon. When optimization signals are delayed, budget is spent on yesterday's picture of demand.

We found that only 21% of travel and hospitality organizations can feed call conversion data to ad platforms in near real-time, which is essential for agile optimization. A majority (57%) still rely on slower daily batch uploads.



AI Advertising Optimization Confidence Is High, Utilization Could Be Higher

Digital advertising platforms, such as Google and Meta, utilize powerful AI systems that can automate the management of ad campaigns. While travel and hospitality marketers trust this technology, a gap exists between their confidence in the tools and their actual usage.



The data reveals a core tension: 75% of travel and hospitality marketers have "High" or "Full" trust in AI-automated ad tools like Google Performance Max, Smart Bidding, and Meta Advantage+. Yet over a third use them to optimize 25% or less of their total ad spend.

This gap suggests travel and hospitality marketers are comfortable ceding tactical execution to AI but are reluctant to surrender strategic control.

What Travel And Hospitality Marketers Need To Increase AI Ad Automation

Travel and hospitality marketers want more oversight—a glass box, not a black box. So, what's holding them back from handing over more control? Travel and hospitality marketers say they need more transparency and better guardrails to feel comfortable scaling up.

This operational friction leads directly to the final, and most critical, disconnect: the chasm between how travel and hospitality marketers believe their AI is performing and how customers are actually experiencing it.



The Great Disconnect Of Marketer Perception And Consumer Reality

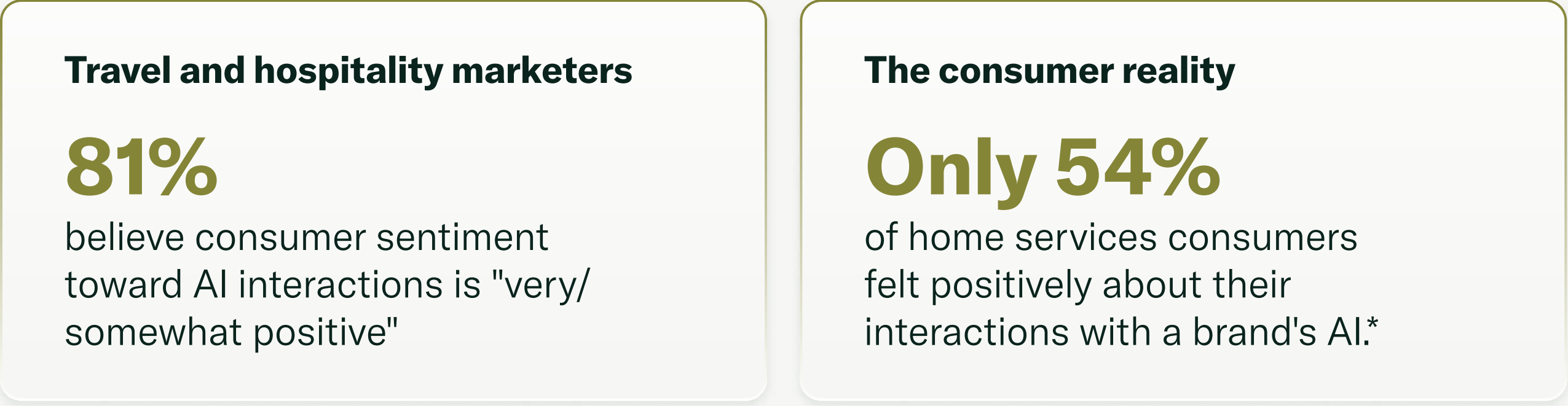
The gap between internal perception and external reality represents one of the single greatest risks in any business strategy, and AI is no exception. The survey data, when compared with consumer reporting, reveals a profound disconnect between how travel and hospitality marketers perceive their AI-driven customer interactions and how consumers actually experience them.

This blind spot has the potential to erode brand trust and undermine the very customer experience that AI is intended to improve.



Perception Vs. Actual Consumer Sentiment

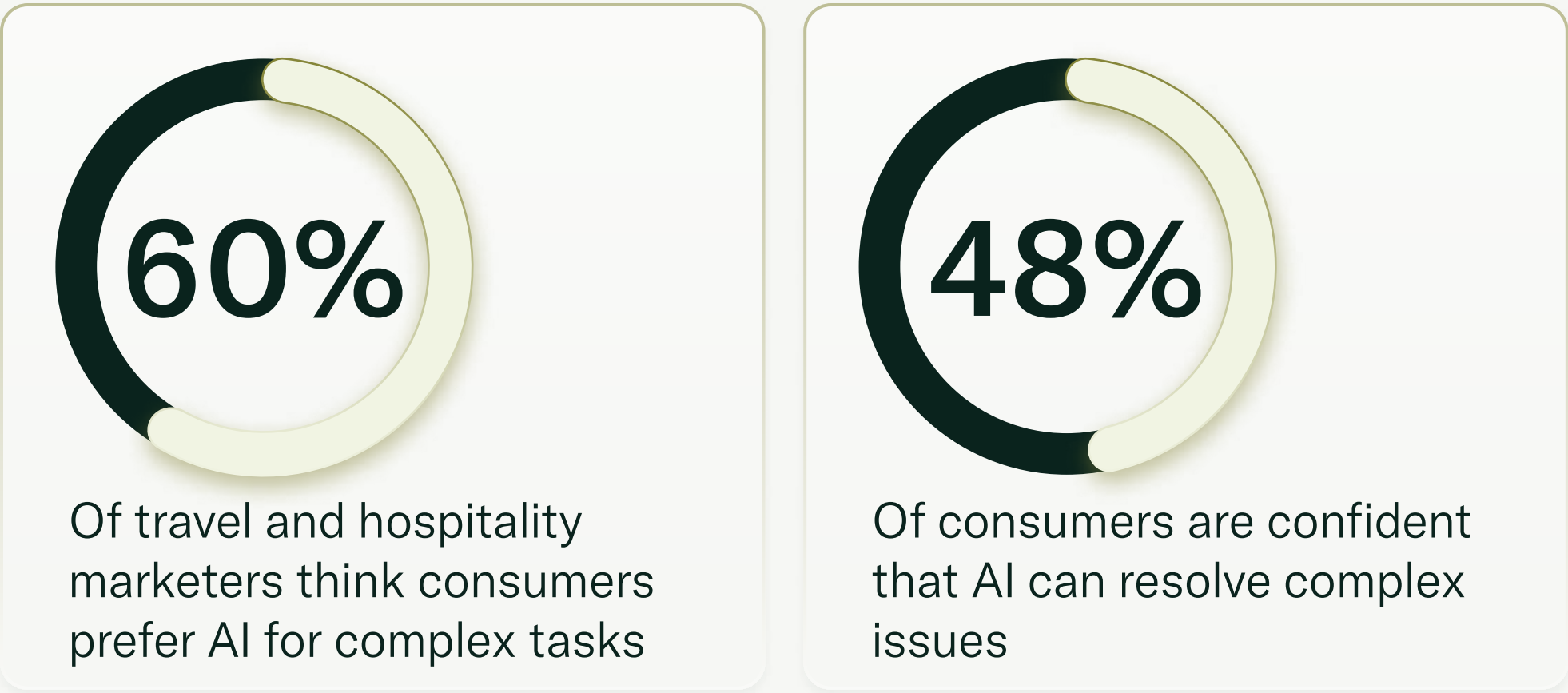
Travel and hospitality marketers are overwhelmingly confident that their AI-powered tools are creating positive experiences for customers. Consumers, however, report a starkly different reality.



*Source: [Travel Consumer Experience Report, Invoca, 2025](#)

Misalignment On High-Stakes Interactions

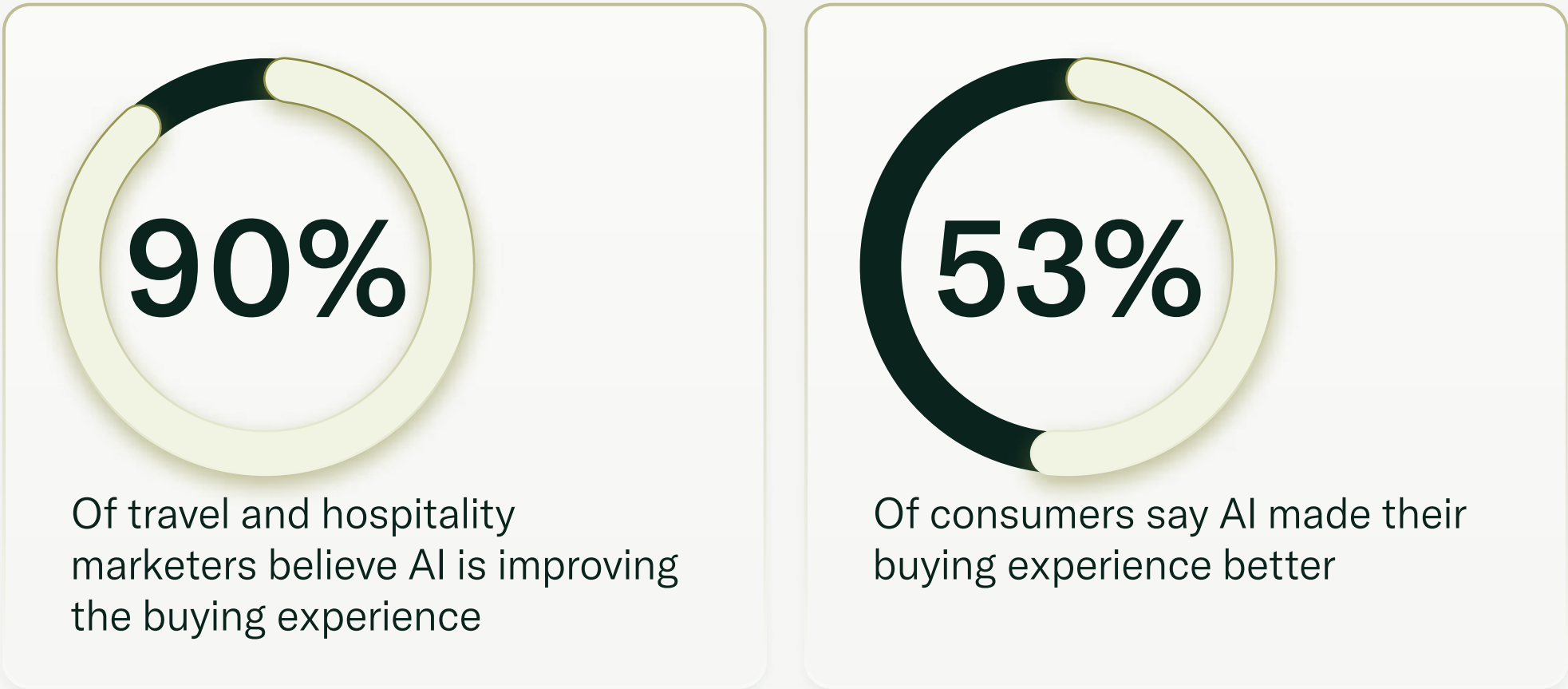
This disconnect extends to how AI should be used for different types of customer needs. Travel and hospitality marketers believe consumers are ready to trust AI with significant decisions, but consumer confidence remains low for complex issues.



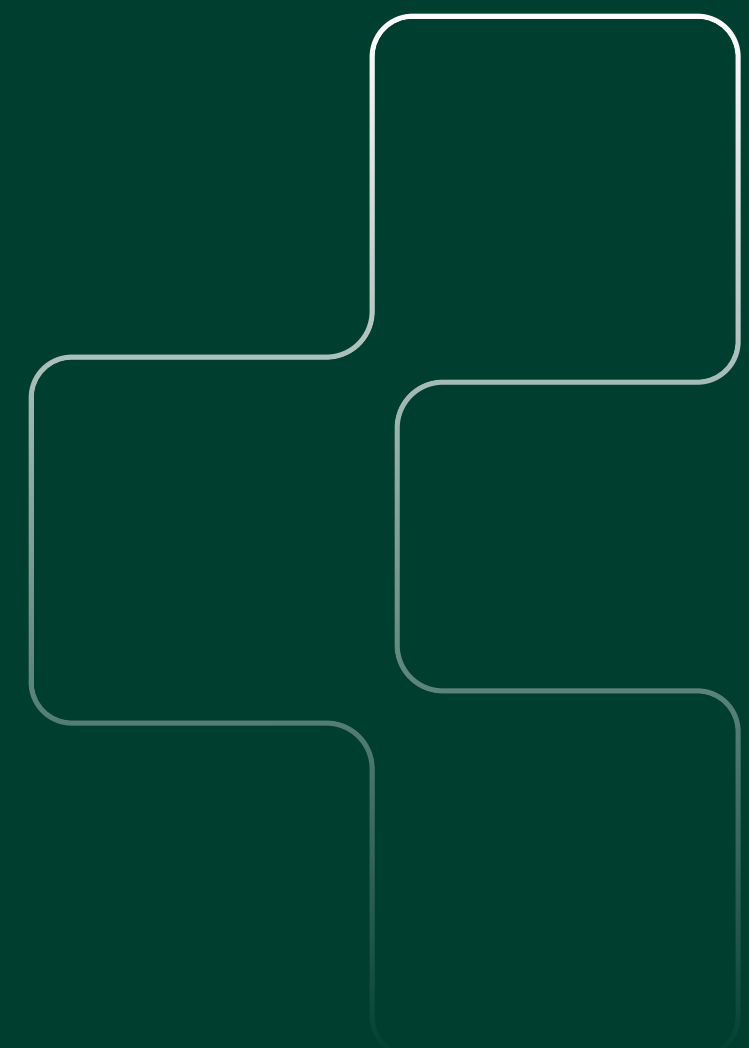
Three in five travel and hospitality marketers (60%) believe consumers prefer AI for helping with complex tasks when making high-value purchase decisions. This stands in direct contrast to consumer survey findings, which indicate that only 48% of consumers are confident that AI can effectively resolve complex issues.

The Bottom-Line Impact On Customer Experience

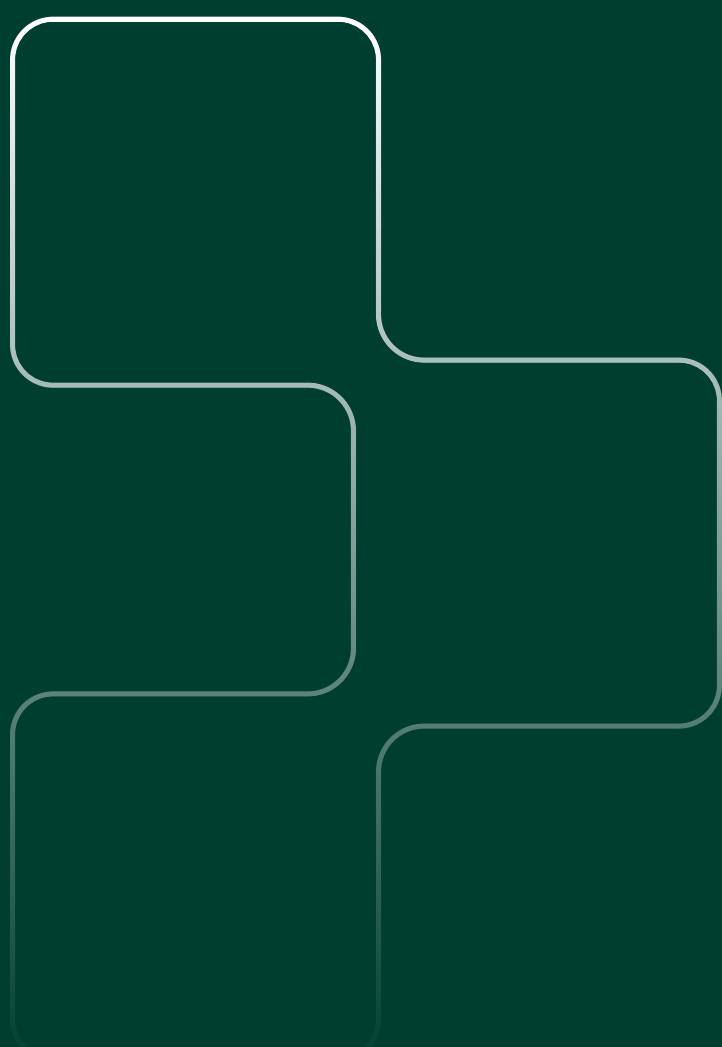
The ultimate measure of success is whether AI is enhancing the buyer journey. On this point, the disconnect is most severe. A remarkable 90% of travel and hospitality marketers believe AI is improving the customer experience across the buying journey. This optimistic internal assessment is directly contradicted by consumer feedback, where only 53% of consumers report that AI actually made their buying experience better.



This chasm between belief and reality is not a minor discrepancy; it is a fundamental strategic threat that requires immediate and decisive action from leadership.



Strategic Imperatives For Travel & Hospitality Marketing Leadership



The findings of this report reveal a market in a state of productive turmoil. It is an industry fueled by immense optimism and urgency, but simultaneously plagued by strategic blind spots, operational friction, and a dangerous disconnect from its customers. To navigate this landscape successfully, travel and hospitality marketing leaders must move beyond ambition and address these challenges directly. The following imperatives provide a clear and actionable framework for closing these critical gaps.

Mandate An Objective Reality Check On Competitive Standing

The belief held by 81% of travel and hospitality marketers that they are outpacing the competition is a statistical fallacy and a significant strategic risk. Leadership must challenge this internal assumption and commission a formal, data-driven competitive intelligence review. Grounding AI strategy in the reality of the market—not in collective optimism—is the first step toward building a sustainable advantage. Failing to do so means navigating the market with a dangerously distorted map.

Bridge The Investment-Ambition Gap

There is a fundamental misalignment between the strategic importance placed on AI and the budgets allocated to it. If 69% of leaders believe AI is essential to hitting 2026 targets, then allocation models where 61% of firms spend less than 20% of their MarTech budget on AI are unsustainable. Budgets must be critically re-evaluated and realigned to match the strategic imperatives the organization has identified, or ambitions must be scaled back to reflect reality.

Prioritize The "Insight-To-Action" Workflow

Insight latency is a primary inhibitor of AI's value. The multi-day delay between data discovery and campaign activation neutralizes the speed advantage AI should provide. Leadership must prioritize investments in the technology and processes required to close this gap. A specific focus should be placed on integrating high-value, first-party unstructured conversational data—currently mined by only 35% of travel and hospitality organizations—and enabling near real-time optimization, a capability just 21% possess today. First-party conversation data must be part of the control system for AI. Combine digital interactions, conversation data, and confirmed conversions to ground models in real outcomes, in real time.

Ground AI Strategy In Validated Customer Feedback

The profound disconnect between marketer perception and consumer reality is the most significant threat to brand trust revealed in this study. Leadership must immediately institute closed-loop mechanisms for validating every AI initiative against actual customer sentiment and preference data. Relying on internal assumptions is no longer acceptable when the stakes are this high. Without this validation loop, the organization is not innovating; it is merely guessing at the customer's expense.



Charting A Course For AI-Driven Growth

The findings from this research present a clear verdict on the state of the travel and hospitality marketing sector. The landscape is defined by a potent combination of competitive urgency, widespread overconfidence, and a willingness to move quickly on AI, even if it means sacrificing the buyer experience. This mindset has created a critical disconnect between internal beliefs about AI's success and the market's actual experience—a gap rooted in operational failures to activate the most valuable customer data across the entire buying journey.

The true AI winners will not only be the fastest adopters, but the most astute. They will be the organizations that ground their AI strategy not in ambition alone, but in operational excellence and an unwavering commitment to using data to understand and enhance the actual, not perceived, buyer experience. The capital and brand equity lost by today's overconfident 'sprinters' will become the market share acquired by the more deliberate, customer-obsessed organizations of tomorrow.

Report Methodology

100 full-time travel and hospitality marketing professionals with manager or higher titles at U.S. travel and hospitality companies with 100 or more employees were surveyed. Results may not total to 100% due to rounding and multiple selection options. The field survey was performed by Sago Online Research.

Demographics

