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A CX Leader's Guide to AI-Moderated Interviews

Where AI interviews make sense, where they don't, and how to use them to scale your customer research the right way.



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Introduction

The Qualitative Bottleneck

CX teams rely on customer research to inform strategy and make better business decisions. The power of a customer interview cannot be overstated, however, a traditional interview takes a lot of time and resources to complete effectively. By the time the findings arrive, the decision they were meant to inform has often already been made.

Due to their time-intensive nature, customer interviews have proven to be a strong candidate for AI automation. The 2026 GRIT Insights Practice Report¹, the market research industry's largest ongoing study of itself, finds that AI has moved out of experimentation and into everyday research workflows.

The promise is real. So are the limits. The same GRIT research calls out governance as a critical gap: teams are adopting AI tools faster than they are building the discipline to use them well.

This guide is written to help CX and insights leaders close that gap.

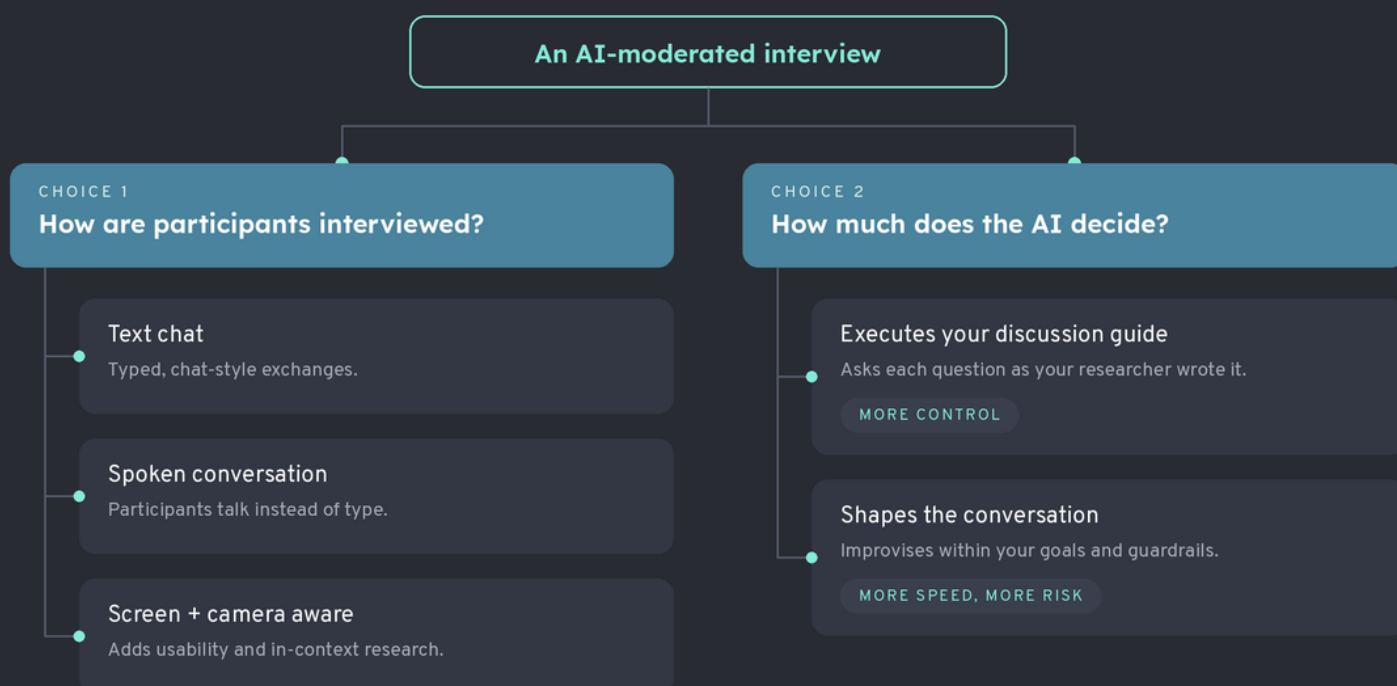
CHAPTER 1

What an AI-Moderated Interview Actually Is

An AI-moderated interview is a live conversation in which an AI agent asks a participant questions, listens to the answers, and decides what to ask next based on what it hears.

That last part separates the method from a survey. An AI moderator can notice a vague or confusing answer and ask probing questions.

Tools in this category vary along 2 dimensions: **how the participants interact** and **how much the AI decides**.



CHAPTER 2

Where AI Moderation Works

Scale without the scheduling

A skilled human moderator can hold 1 conversation at a time. An AI moderator can hold hundreds at once, and participants complete them whenever it suits them (on a phone, at 10 pm, in a waiting room).

Fewer language and time zone barriers

Multilingual studies traditionally require translators, local moderators, and calendars that bend across continents. AI moderators conduct interviews in dozens of languages and timezones.

Consistency

Teams increasingly run AI-moderated interviews alongside surveys rather than in place of them. The structured questions stay consistent across participants, which preserves comparability, while the AI probes each answer for reasoning.

Candor

Studies² found that people disclose more in computer-administered assessments than they do face to face. For sensitive CX topics (billing disputes, claim denials, embarrassing service failures), an AI moderator can sometimes hear what a human never would.

CHAPTER 3

Where AI Moderation Doesn't Work

— Depth still belongs to humans

AI moderation performs best in short, focused conversations. Longer sessions tire participants, partly because there is no face across the table to sustain the social energy.

— Recruitment still decides quality

Screeners, panel quality, and fraud checks matter as much as they always have, plus a new wrinkle: some participants are put off by talking to an AI, so willingness itself now belongs in your screener.

— The technology is young

Researchers who use these tools report familiar rough edges: the AI that moves on when a participant pauses to think, the follow-up misses an emotional cue a human would have caught.³

— Speed creates distance from the data

Qualitative research has always been immersive. The researcher absorbs the customer's world by sitting in it, interview after interview. When AI conducts the interviews and drafts the synthesis, that immersion disappears unless you rebuild it deliberately.

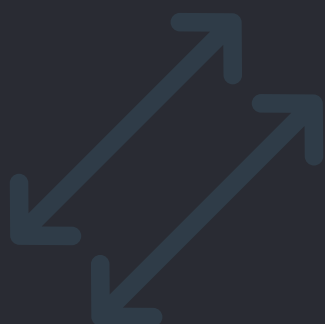
CHAPTER 4

5 Practices for Adopting AI Moderation Without Losing Rigor



1. Define the research questions first

The golden rule of research: choose the method after you know what the study must answer. Access to an AI moderator does not mean every question needs 300 conversations. Use the scale when the scale serves the goal.



2. Pilot in parallel, and start low-risk

Run an AI-moderated study alongside a human-led study on the same topic and compare. You will learn the tool's strengths and blind spots against your own customers.



3. Set participant expectations at recruitment

Being interviewed by an AI is still a novel experience. Tell participants up front, describe what the conversation will feel like, screen for willingness, and plan for some drop-off. Where the platform allows it, give participants a choice of formats and let comfort drive the assignment.

CHAPTER 4

5 Practices for Adopting AI Moderation Without Losing Rigor



4. Stay close to the raw conversations

Before accepting an AI-generated theme, read transcripts and watch highlight clips until the pattern feels earned. Synthesis should compress what your team knows. It should never substitute for knowing it.



5. Choose vendors on research rigor

As AI moderation becomes a standard feature across research platforms, the differentiator shifts from the technology to the research thinking around it. Ask how research best practices are built into the product, what guardrails protect quality, which modalities are strong today, and which kinds of teams the vendor has actually supported. A partnership mindset will outlast any single feature.

CHAPTER 5

Where This Fits in a CX Research Program

Our customer research team treats AI-moderated interviews as the front door of qualitative work: an exploratory pass that maps the terrain before the more expensive instruments come out. AI-moderated conversations surface the themes. Human-led, in-depth interviews then go deep on the themes that matter.

The 2 methods answer different questions, and the sequence lets each do what it does best.

That sequencing lives inside a larger discipline.

A CX RESEARCH DISCIPLINE

AI Interviews Are One Piece of the Picture

01 Customer Lifecycle Mapping & Moments of Truth

Decide which interactions deserve research attention in the first place.

02 AI-Moderated Interviews

Explore at scale, fast, and surface the themes worth going deeper on.

03 Human-Led, In-Depth Interviews

Go deep on the themes that matter, with judgment AI can't replicate.

04 VoC Capability Maturity Model & Follow-Through

Fit the work into your infrastructure, then stay through implementation.

Sources

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2.Lucas, G.M., Gratch, J., King, A., & Morency, L.P. (2014). It's only a computer: Virtual humans increase willingness to disclose.

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[interviewers](https://nngroup.com/articles/ai-interviewers)

Andrew Reise

Let's Talk About Your Customers

Andrew Reise helps organizations build customer research programs that combine the reach of AI with the judgment of senior researchers.

If you are weighing where AI-moderated interviews fit your VoC program, let's talk.



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