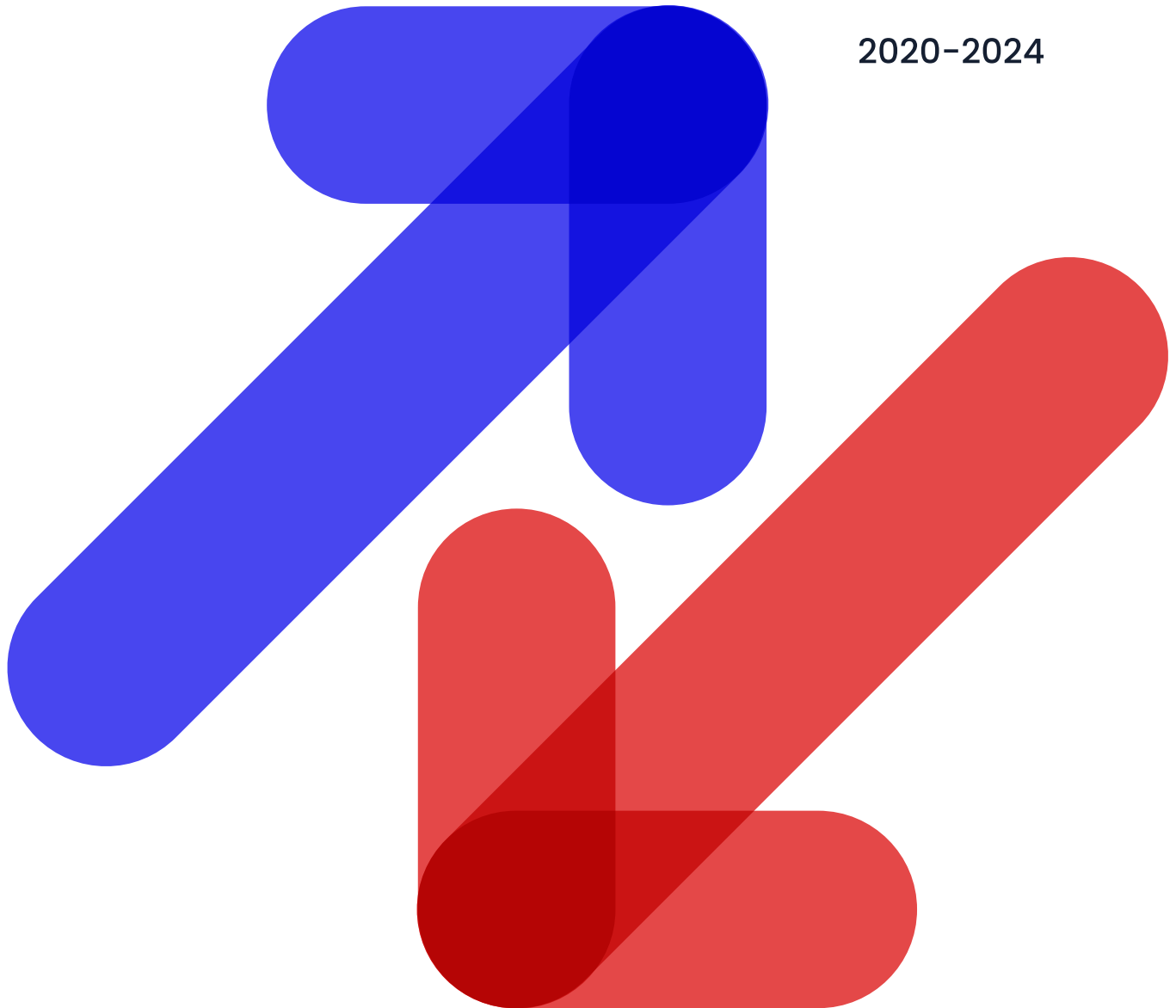


# CX Leaders and Laggards

in the U.S. Café &  
Restaurant Industry

2020-2024



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The Invisible Threat: Why Thousands of Restaurants  
Are Losing Market Share Without Realizing It





# Introduction

The U.S. restaurant industry is poised to surpass \$1 trillion in annual sales,\* yet for many operators, simply opening the doors and serving meals no longer ensures success. Beneath familiar pressures – rising costs, evolving consumer tastes, and intense competition – lurks a subtler threat: a silent erosion of market share driven by overlooked gaps in customer experience (CX).

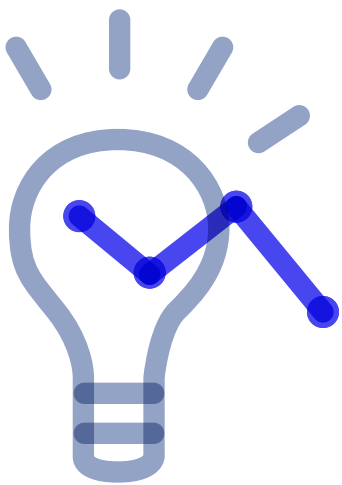
At the heart of this challenge is customer satisfaction, the most direct reflection of operational health. From staffing and training standards to menu execution and on-premise hospitality, every aspect of a restaurant's operations shapes how guests perceive – and ultimately choose – a brand. As a result, restaurants that ignore why customers leave effectively concede market share. By contrast, those that leverage CX insights can outperform their competitors by 1.5 to 2 times in foot traffic and overall market share.

We'll explore how delivering high-impact experiences boosts foot traffic, accelerates store expansion, and cements a brand's position in an increasingly crowded market. By contrasting these “leaders” with “laggards” – those who overlook or undervalue the customer perspective – we illustrate the operational fundamentals that separate sustained growth from silent decline.

## Hypothesis

Multiple studies, including McKinsey's, have highlighted a strong link between superior customer experience and improved business performance. In this research, we aim to validate those findings specifically for the café and restaurant sector. Drawing on data from 50,000 U.S. restaurant brands (encompassing over 60% of national café and restaurant traffic), we hypothesize that consistent investment in CX directly drives higher foot traffic, larger average checks, and sustained market share gains. If true, this would confirm that the same principles recognized in broader CX research hold just as powerfully for cafés and restaurants – making customer satisfaction not just a barometer of operational excellence, but a proven catalyst for profitable growth.

\* National Restaurant Association, 2024





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# Methodology



## Scope

This analysis covers 50,675 brands encompassing 353,241 outlets across the United States, representing over 60% of U.S. restaurant market foot traffic from 2020 through 2024. The dataset spans quick service, fast casual, and full-service dining segments, segmented by chain size and price tier. The multi-year span captures both the pandemic impact and recovery period, providing a comprehensive view of trends in customer experience and performance.



## Data Sources & Validation

All data is sourced from Realytics' foot traffic, location, pricing and customer satisfaction analytics, aggregated at market segment level by year. We rigorously validated our metrics against external benchmarks. For example, Realytics' market share trends closely align (>0.9 correlation rate) with Technomic's sales data, both in growth rates and in identifying top performers.



## Key Metrics Defined

We evaluated each brand on several performance and customer experience metrics:

### CSAT (Customer Satisfaction)

Average customer satisfaction score for each brand (as measured by Realytics, on a standardized scale). Brands ranked in the top 30% by CSAT are categorized as "CX Leaders," whereas those in the bottom 30% are designated as "CX Laggards" for the purpose of comparative analysis.

### Market Share (Foot Traffic)

A brand's share of total recorded foot traffic in the dataset. This reflects the proportion of customer visits a brand commands relative to the market (within the 50k+ brands sample).

### Local Traffic Share

The share of visits a location captures within its immediate trading area (defined as roughly a 10-minute walk radius) relative to competitors in that area. This indicates local market penetration and preference when the brand is present.

### Average Check

The average transaction value (in USD) per customer for each brand. This serves as a proxy for revenue per visit, illustrating differences in customer spend across brands.

### Outlet Share

The percentage of total outlets in the dataset that belong to the brand. This gives a sense of brand footprint relative to the industry.

### Number of Outlets

The count of physical locations for the brand. This is used to classify chain size (small 1–10, medium 11–100, large 100+ outlets) and to track expansion or contraction trends over time.

### Index to Fair Share

This metric shows whether an outlet is capturing more or fewer visits than its “fair share” in a given area. By “fair share,” we mean the hypothetical portion of total visits each outlet would get if they all performed equally well.

An index of 1.0 means the outlet’s share of visits is precisely what it would be if every outlet captured the same number of visits.

A value above 1.0 indicates the outlet is attracting more traffic than the average nearby competitor.

A value below 1.0 implies underperformance compared to other outlets in the same area.

### Competitor Count (Local Competition)

The average number of other restaurant outlets within a 10-minute walk of each location (a proxy for local competitive intensity). A higher competitor count means a more crowded local marketplace.

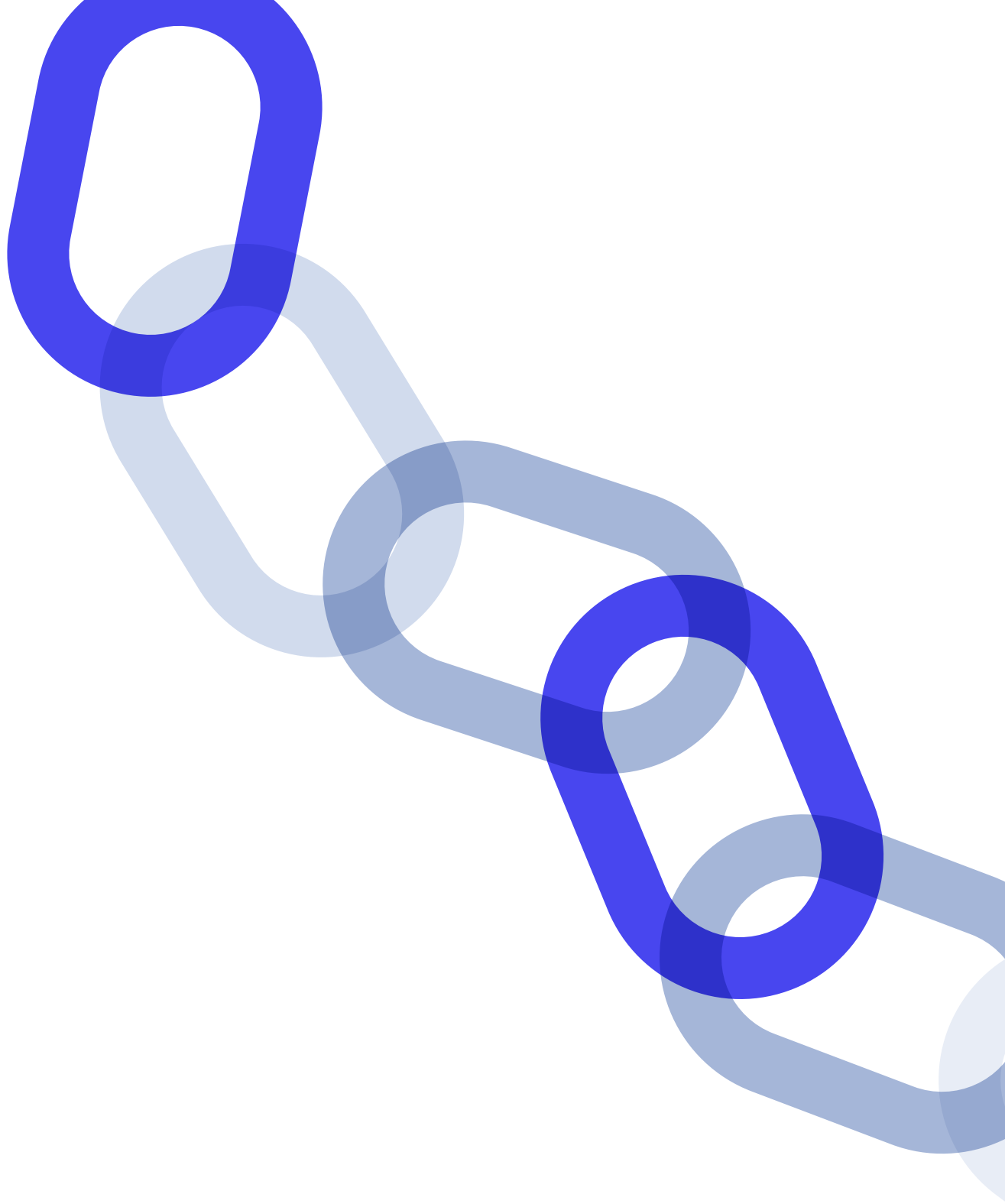


## Segmentation Approach

For analytic comparisons, brands were segmented into CX Leaders (top 30% by CSAT) and CX Laggards (bottom 30% by CSAT). This segmentation was applied within each chain size category to examine performance differences among small, medium, and large chains. Price categories were defined by typical per-ticket spend: \$ (value), \$\$ (mid-range), and \$\$\$ (premium).

Wherever relevant, performance metrics were analyzed across these segments to identify patterns.

This methodology ensures a robust, apples-to-apples comparison of performance metrics, with a large sample size and multi-year data providing high confidence in the observed trends. All findings are empirical and data-driven, without modelled projections or assumptions beyond the collected data.



# Large Chains

**100+ outlets**

If you'd like to access the full list of leaders and laggards,  
please send a request to [research@realytics.com](mailto:research@realytics.com)



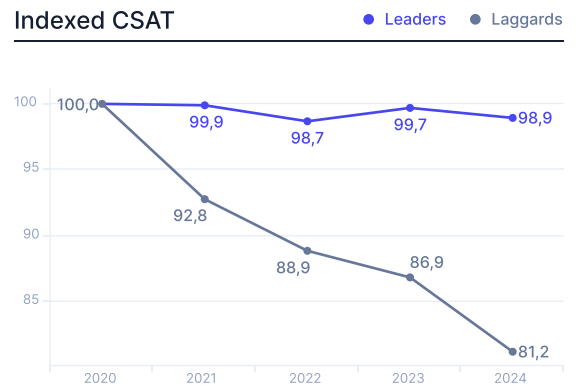
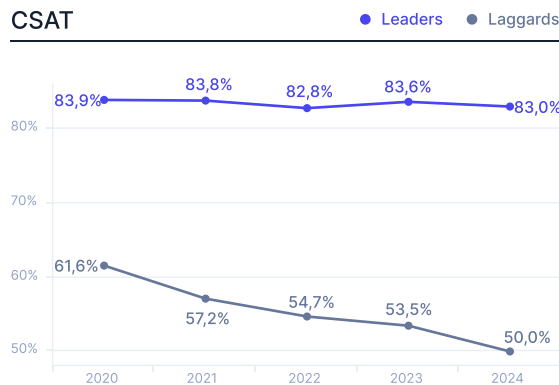


# Large Chains

## All Price Tiers Combined

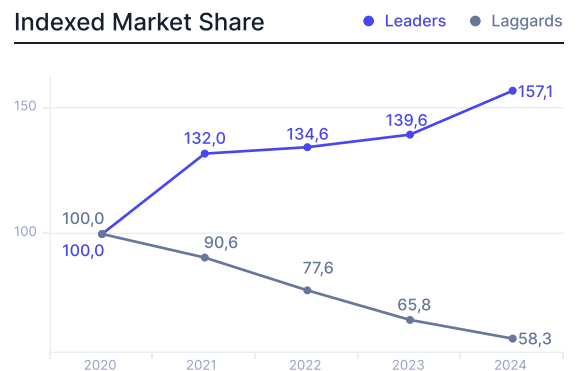
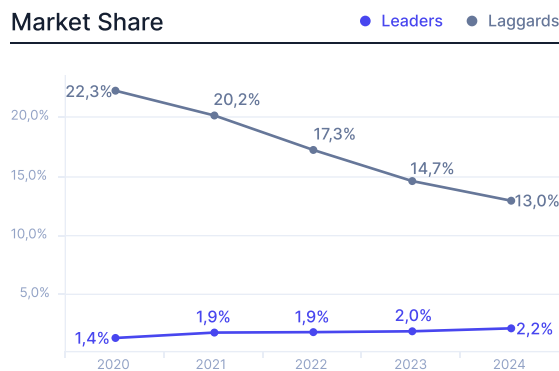
### CSAT

Large chains often cluster near average industry CSAT, but the top 30% and bottom 30% still differ significantly. Leaders hover around 83.0%, while Laggards drop from 61.6% to 50.0%. Achieving consistent customer experience across hundreds or thousands of locations is challenging; those who succeed capture more repeat business.



### Market Share

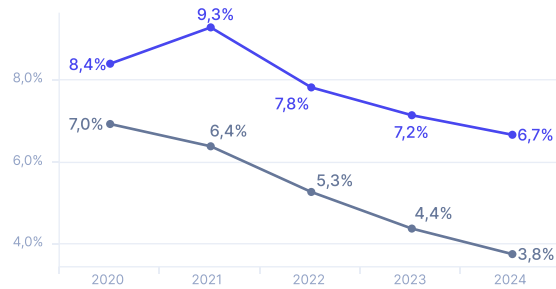
Large brands account for the majority of traffic, and within this group, Leaders climbed from 1.4% to 2.2%, whereas Laggards declined from 22.3% to 13.0%. Even fractions of a percentage point represent millions of visits.



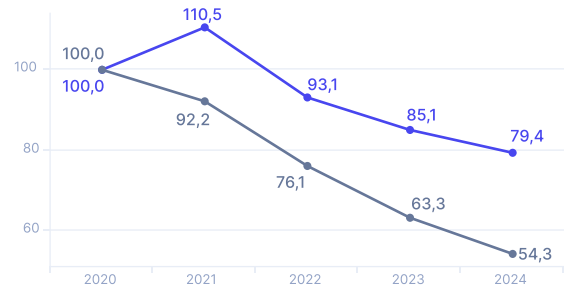
## Local Traffic Share

Leaders peaked in 2021 (e.g., 9.3%), then dipped to 6.7%, still ahead of Laggards' continuous decline (7.0% to 3.8%).

Local Traffic Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



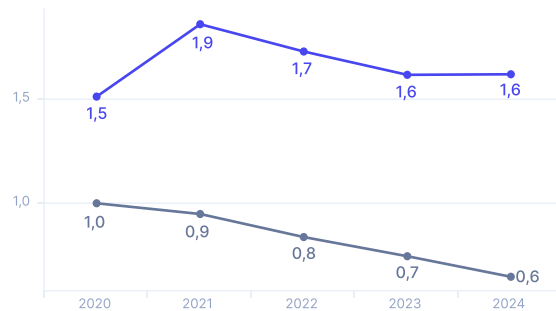
Indexed Local Traffic Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



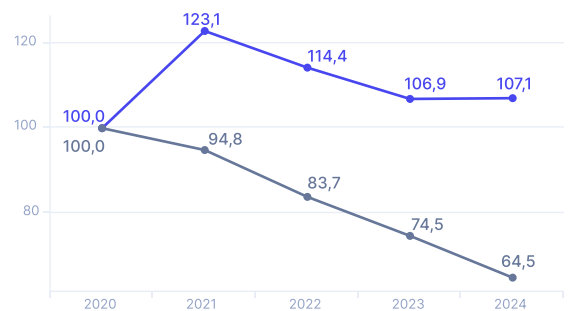
## Index to Fair Share

Leaders rose from 1.5 to 1.6 (peaking at 1.9), indicating robust visit-per-outlet performance at scale. Laggards sank from 1.0 to 0.6.

Index to Fair Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



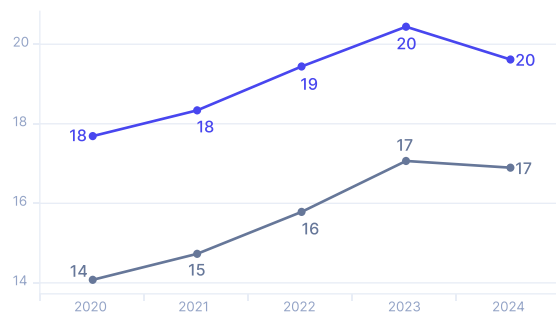
Indexed Index to Fair Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



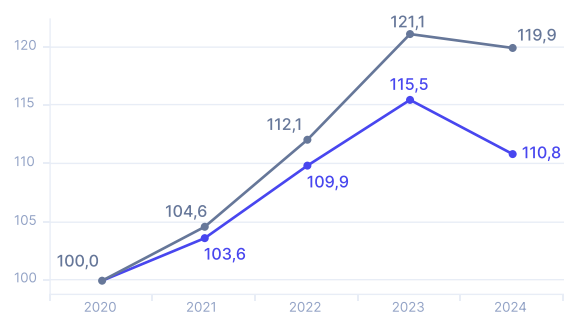
## Competition

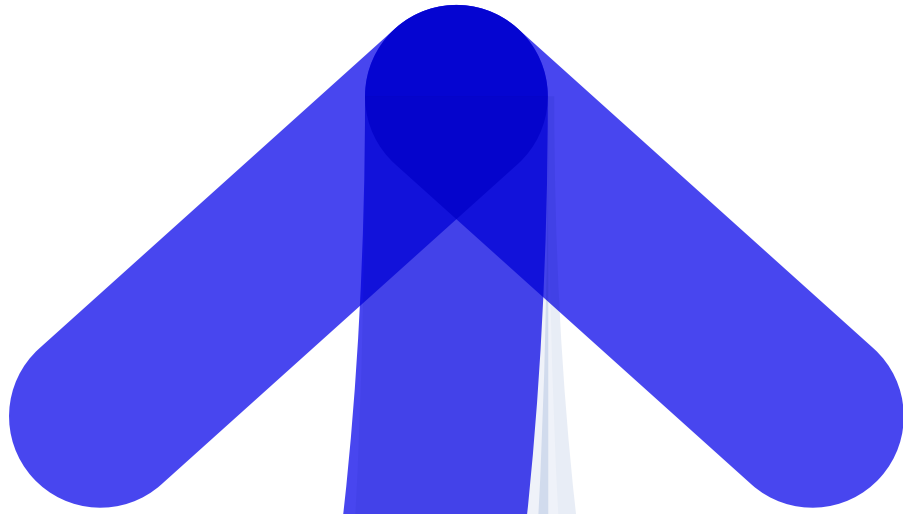
Both subgroups face higher rival counts, though big brands often compete more nationally. High CSAT fosters brand loyalty even in saturated markets.

Competition ● Leaders ● Laggards



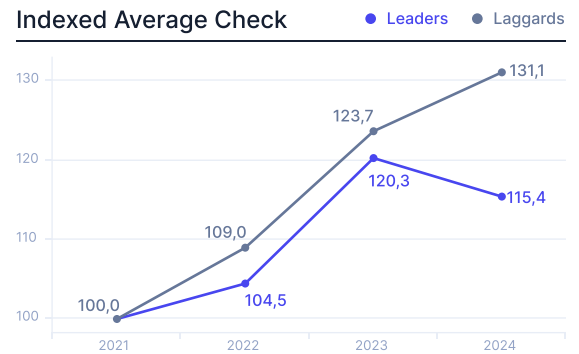
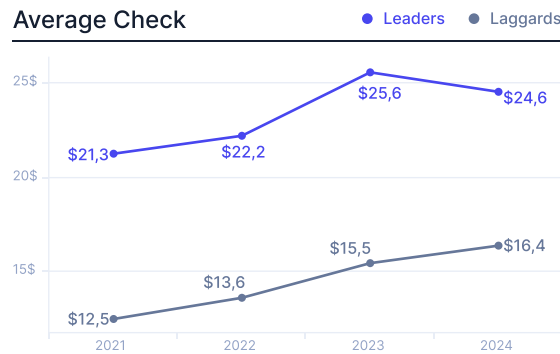
Indexed Competition ● Leaders ● Laggards





## Average Check

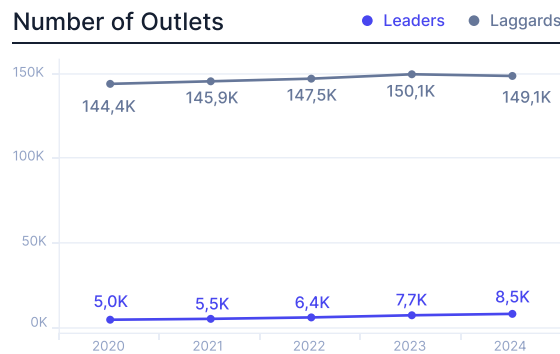
Leaders increased checks from \$21.3 up to a peak of \$25.6, settling at \$24.6. Laggards rose from \$12.5 to \$16.4 – less in absolute terms. With millions of transactions, even small differences compound into major revenue gains or losses. Superior CX also promotes repeat visits and willingness to spend more.



## Outlet Growth

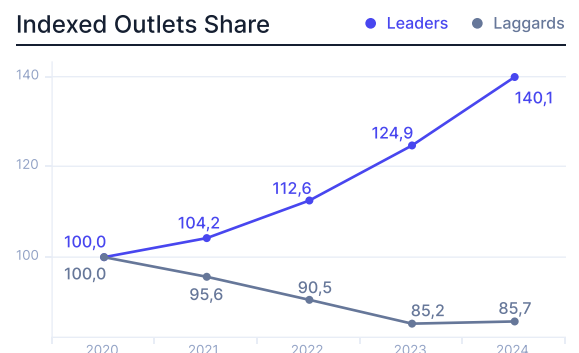
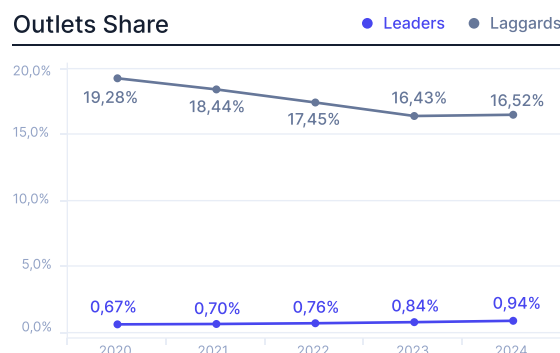
### Number of Outlets

Leaders expanded aggressively (5.0K to 8.5K), while Laggards grew modestly (144.4K to 149.1K). This skew accentuates the success of brands that earn top satisfaction, as they open new stores quickly and capture closed competitor locations.



## Outlets Share

Leaders rose from 0.67% to 0.94%, while Laggards slipped from 19.28% to 16.52%. More locations plus higher foot traffic per location creates a formidable advantage for CX Leaders, whereas Laggards see diminished influence over time.





# Medium Chains

**11-100 outlets**

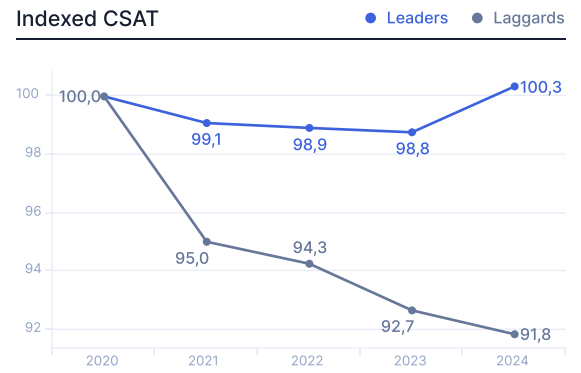
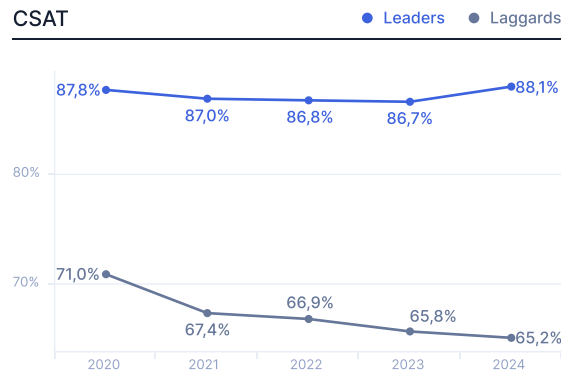
If you'd like to access the full list of leaders and laggards,  
please send a request to [research@realytics.com](mailto:research@realytics.com)



# Medium Chains • \$ Price Tier

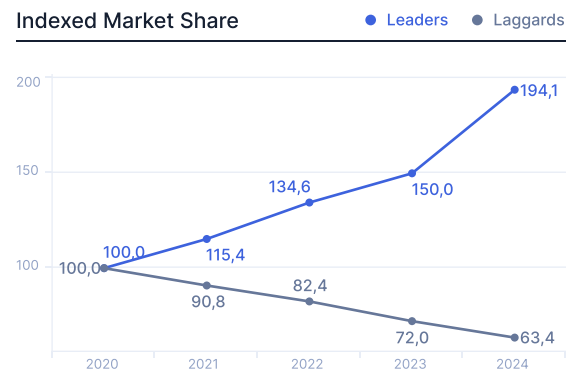
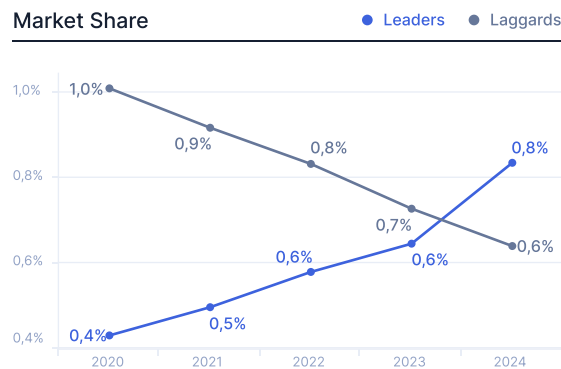
## CSAT

Among medium chains with lower price points, CX Leaders kept satisfaction in the upper 80% range (87.8% to 88.1%), while Laggards dropped from 71.0% to 65.2%. Being able to replicate friendly, quick, and reliable service across dozens of stores is the hallmark of these Leader brands.



## Market Share

Leaders expanded national market share from 0.4% to 0.8%; Laggards slipped from 1.0% to 0.6%.

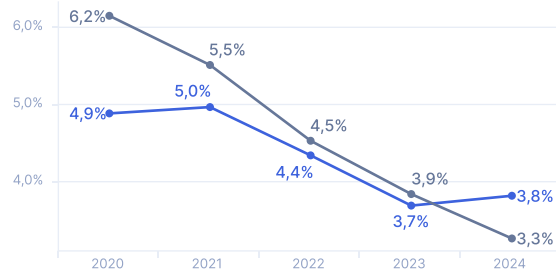




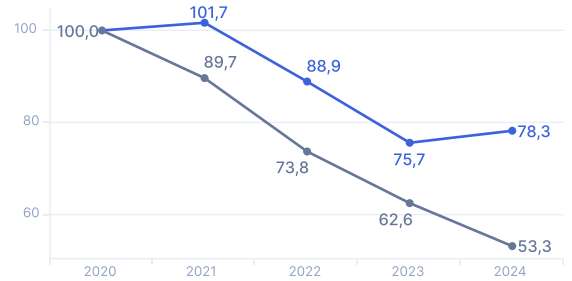
## Local Traffic Share

Leaders remained relatively stable (around 4 – 5%), while Laggards declined more sharply.

Local Traffic Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



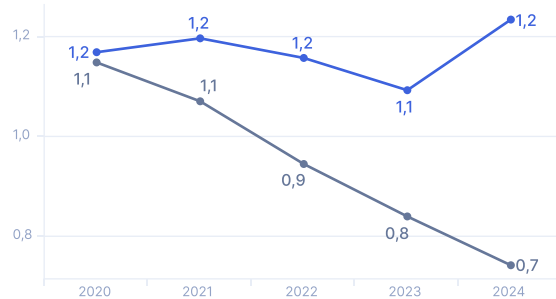
Indexed Local Traffic Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



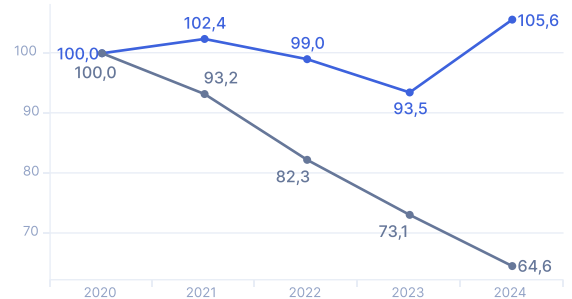
## Index to Fair Share

Leaders stayed near or above 1.2, indicating above-average traffic per outlet; Laggards slid toward 0.7.

Index to Fair Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



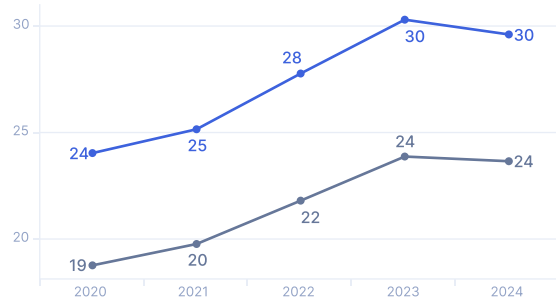
Indexed Index to Fair Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



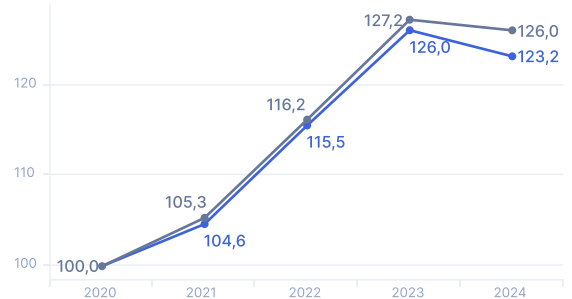
## Competition

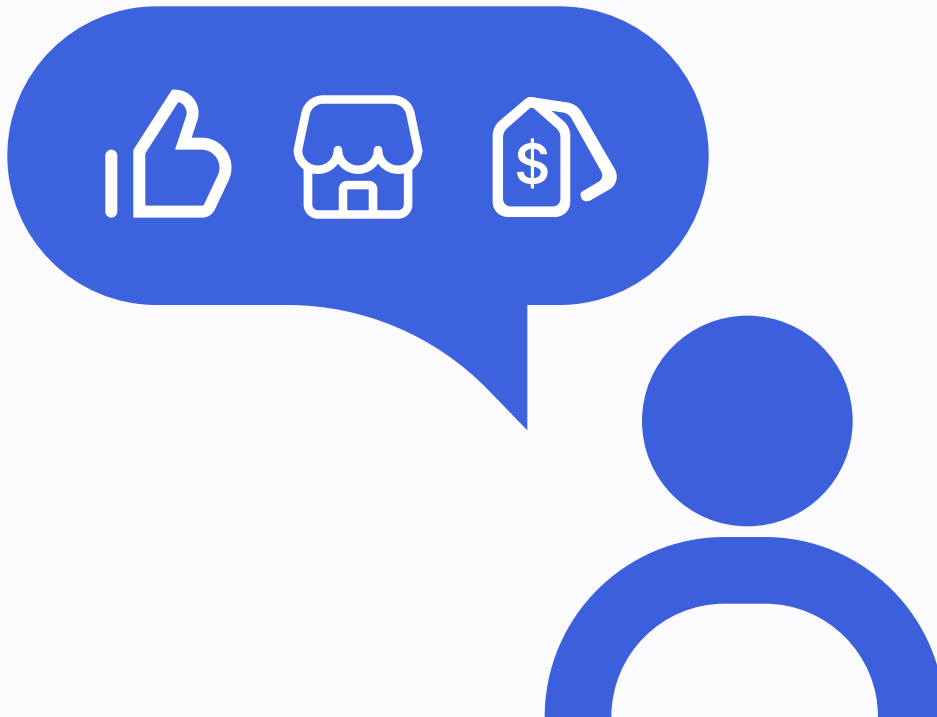
Both categories faced slightly more competition over time. However, strong CX players differentiate themselves, converting store count into higher visitation rates.

Competition ● Leaders ● Laggards



Indexed Competition ● Leaders ● Laggards

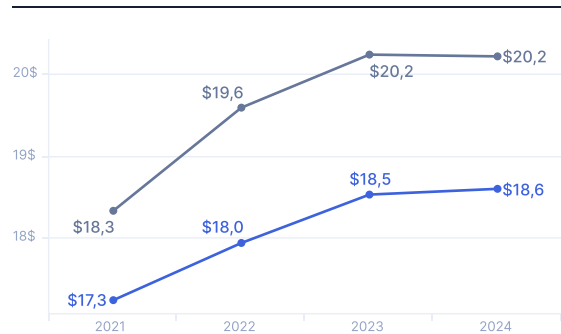




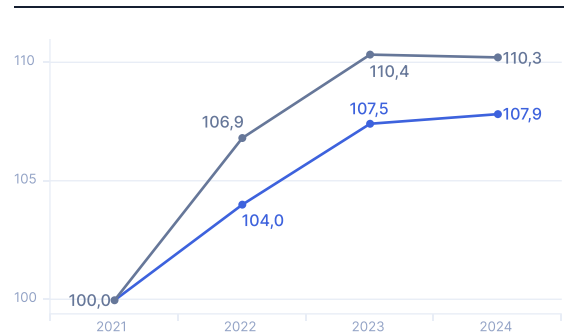
### Average Check

Leaders' checks rose slightly (e.g., \$17.3 to \$18.6). Laggards reported a higher final ticket (\$20.2), but because they see lower foot traffic, market share can still lag. Solid loyalty, even at a budget price, leads to higher share for CX Leaders.

Average Check ● Leaders ● Laggards



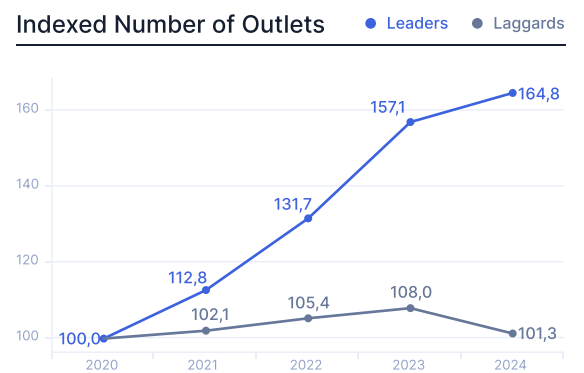
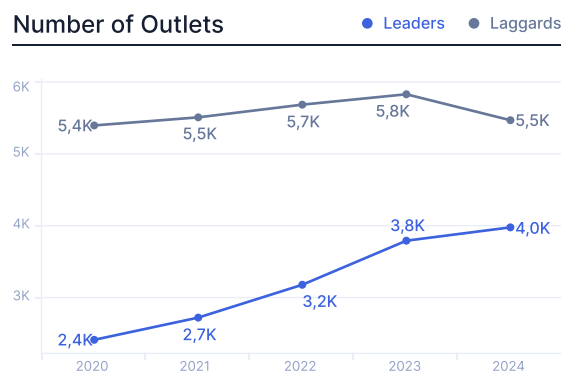
Indexed Average Check ● Leaders ● Laggards



## Outlet Growth

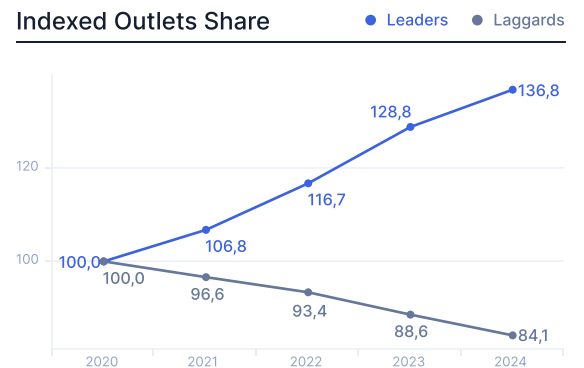
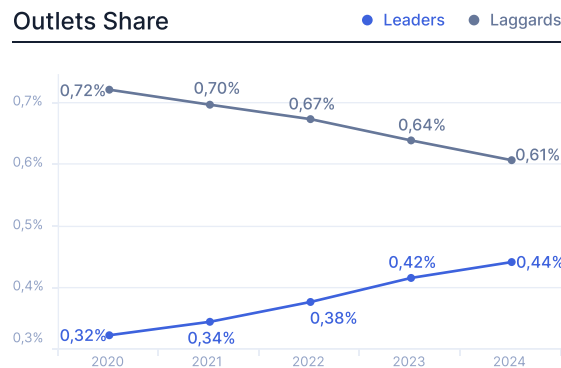
### Number of Outlets

Leaders grew from 2.4K to 4.0K outlets, while Laggards barely budged (5.4K to 5.5K).



### Outlets Share

Leaders increased from 0.32% to 0.44% of industry outlets, whereas Laggards fell from 0.72% to 0.61%. The ability to open new stores successfully, in part, stems from a high satisfaction reputation that eases market entry.

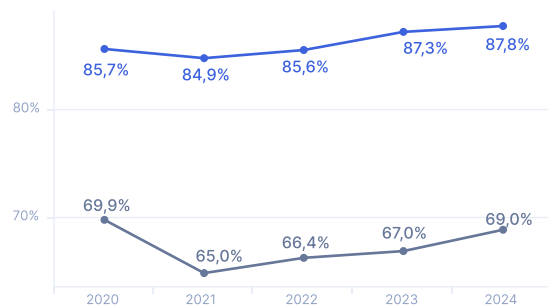


# Medium Chains • \$\$ Price Tier

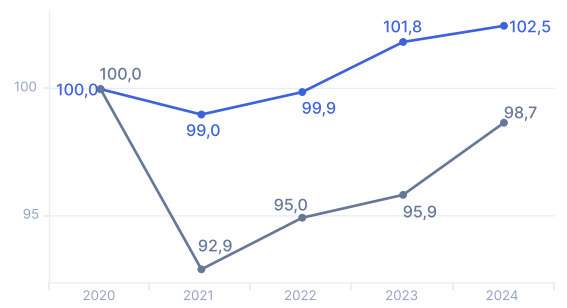
## CSAT

In the mid-priced medium segment, CX Leaders rebounded after a dip to about 87.8% by 2024, while Laggards hovered in the high-60s. Achieving consistency at 10–100 units, while offering mid-range prices, requires tight operational controls; those that succeed earn customer loyalty.

CSAT Leaders Laggards



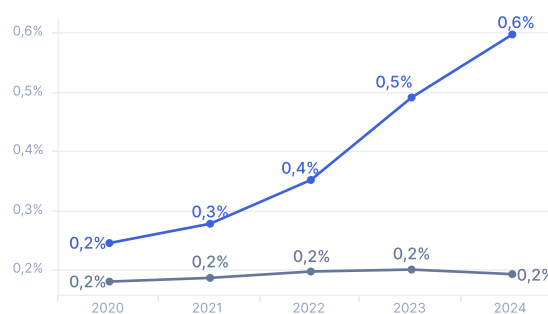
Indexed CSAT Leaders Laggards



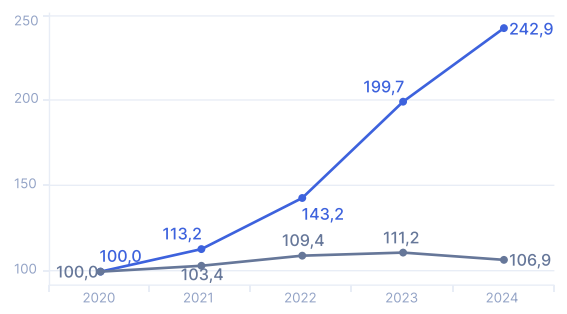
## Market Share

Leaders saw steady share gains from 0.2% to 0.6%; Laggards remained around 0.2%.

Market Share Leaders Laggards

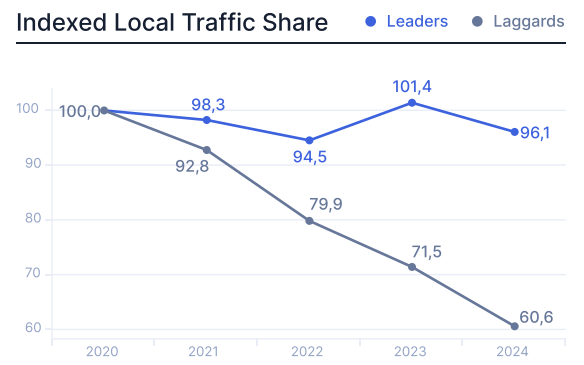
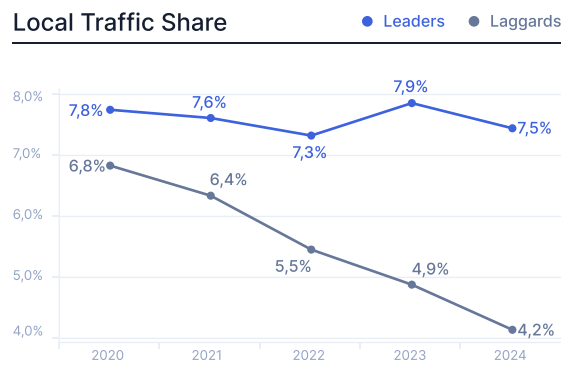


Indexed Market Share Leaders Laggards



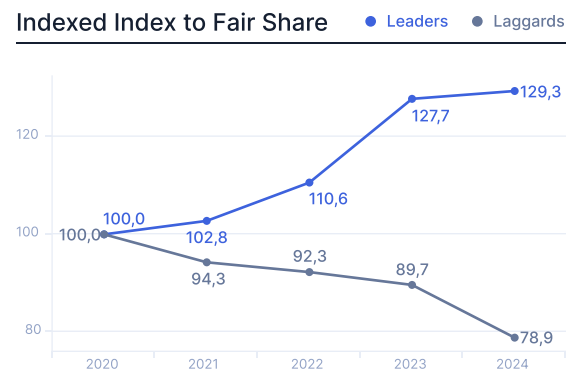
## Local Traffic Share

Leaders hovered near 8%, while Laggards declined from 6.8% to 4.2%.



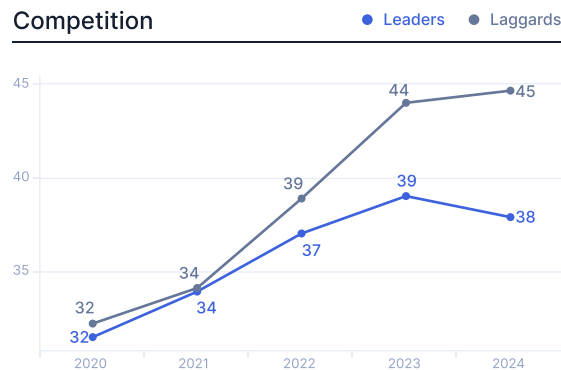
## Index to Fair Share

Leaders climbed from 2.5 to 3.2, showing strong traffic per store. Laggards dropped from 2.2 to 1.7.



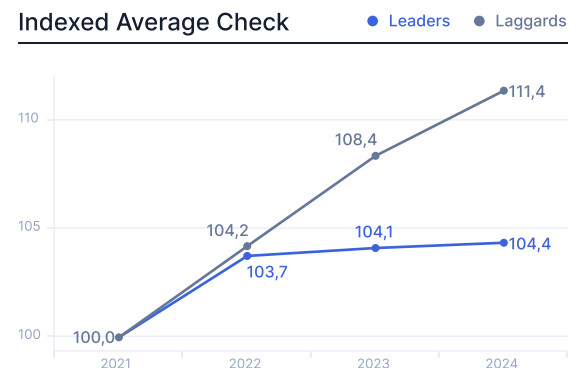
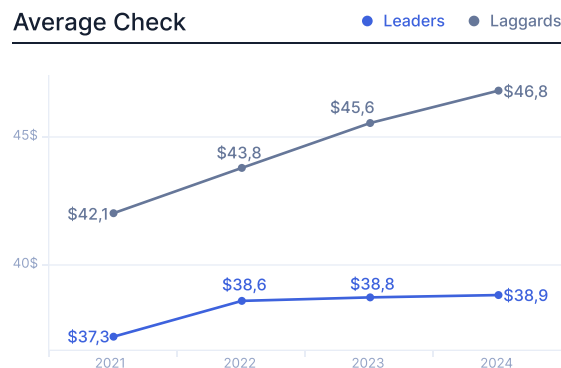
## Competition

Both faced growing rival counts (32 to 38 for Leaders, 32 to 45 for Laggards). Good CX helps Leaders differentiate, sustaining above-average visits.



## Average Check

Leader checks stayed around \$37.3 to \$38.9, while Laggards rose from \$42.1 to \$46.8. Laggards' higher check doesn't translate to higher market share, given their waning traffic.

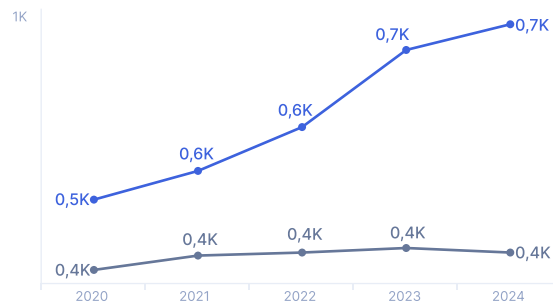


## Outlet Growth

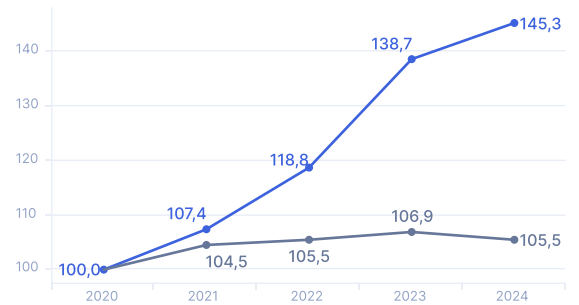
### Number of Outlets

Leaders surged from 0.5K to 0.7K; Laggards remained flat.

Number of Outlets ● Leaders ● Laggards



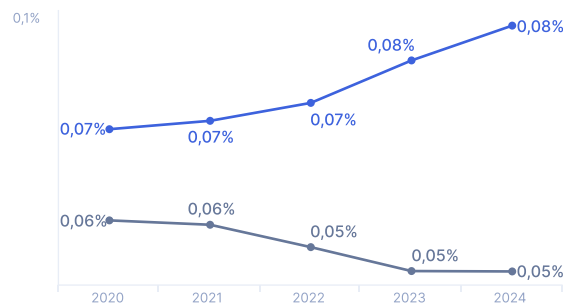
Indexed Number of Outlets ● Leaders ● Laggards



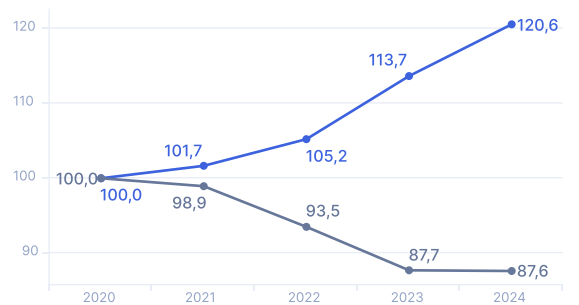
### Outlets Share

Leaders inched up (around 0.1%), whereas Laggards stayed minimal or declined slightly. Strong CX paves the way for new unit openings in more markets.

Outlets Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



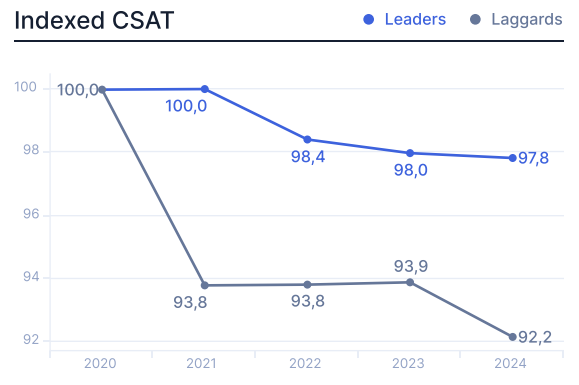
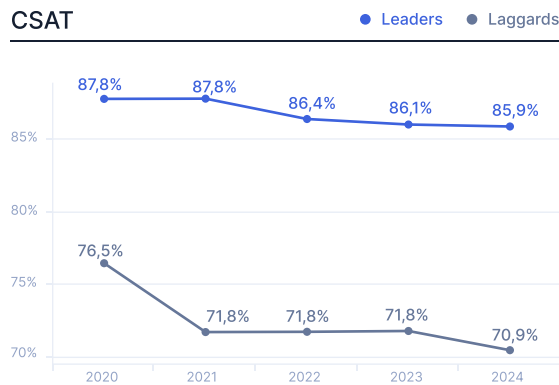
Indexed Outlets Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



# Medium Chains • \$\$\$ Price Tier

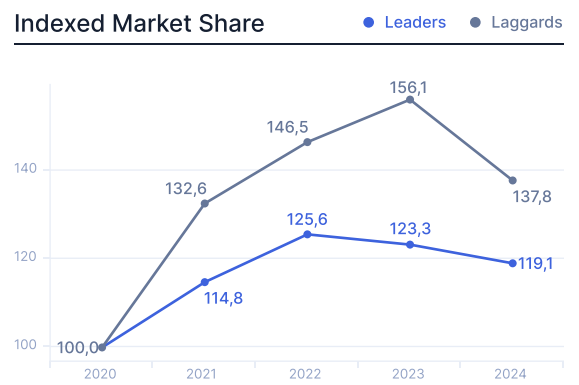
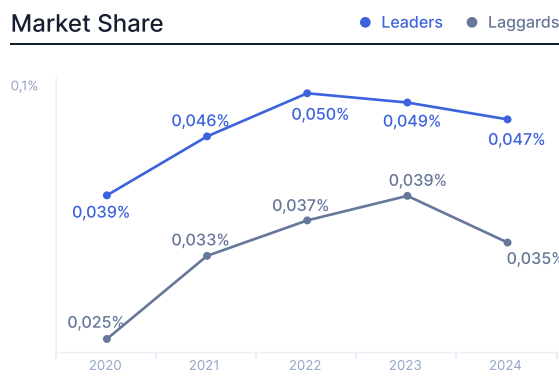
## CSAT

Higher-end medium chains often find it difficult to maintain top-tier CX at scale. Leaders dipped from 87.8% to 85.9%, while Laggards fell from 76.5% to 70.9%. Nonetheless, delivering a refined experience at dozens of locations still sets Leaders apart from less consistent competitors.



## Market Share

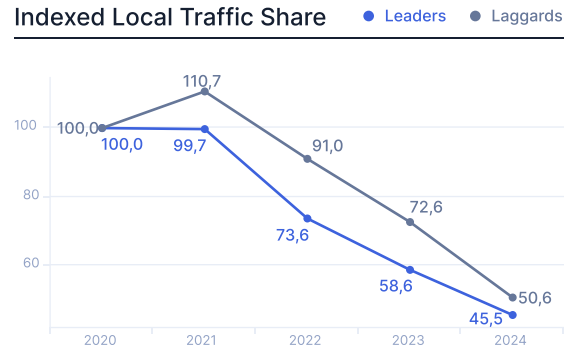
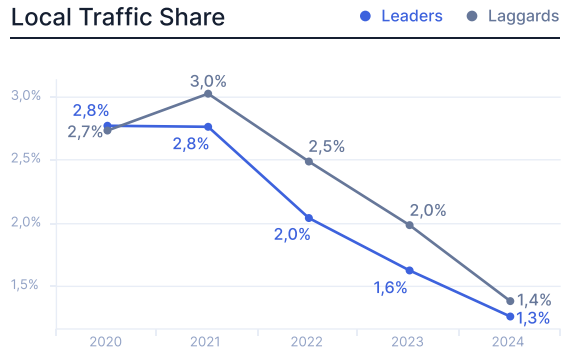
Both segments represent a small portion of the total market (near 0%).





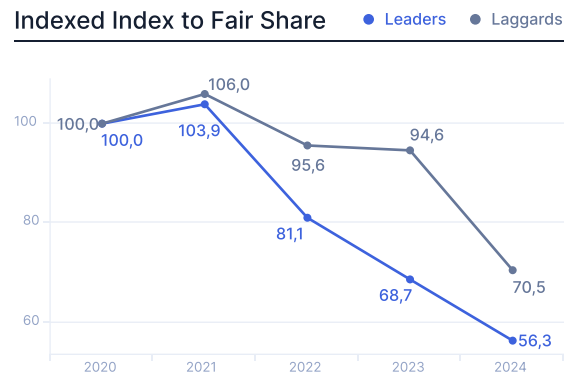
## Local Traffic Share

Both Leaders and Laggards show continuous decline – from around 2–3% down to 1%. Heightened rivalry and shifting consumer preferences may contribute to these drops.



## Index to Fair Share

Leaders and Laggards both slid after 2021 peaks (e.g., from 2.1 to 1.2 for Leaders, 1.7 to 1.2 for Laggards).



## Competition

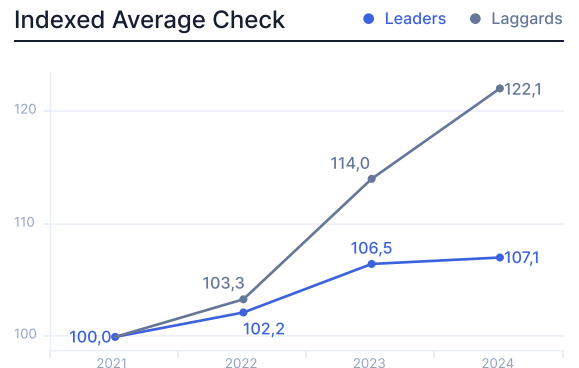
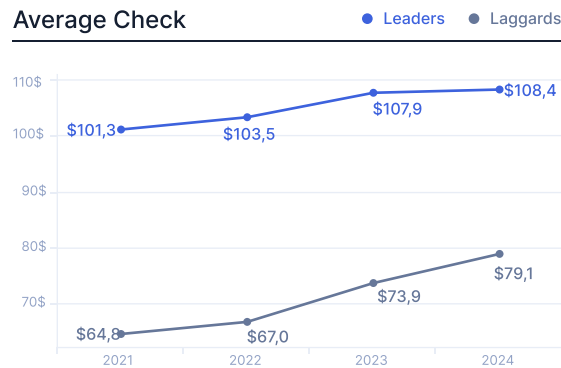
The number of competitors rose substantially (75 to 95 for Leaders; 62 to 81 for Laggards).





### Average Check

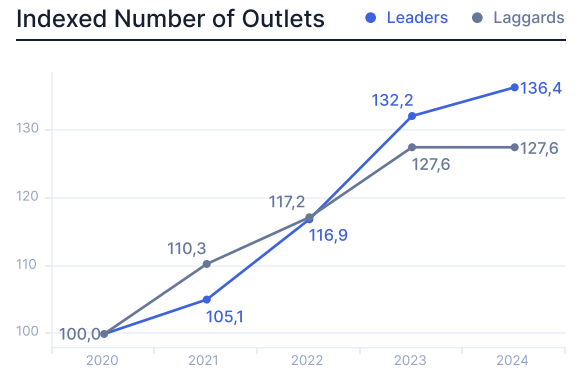
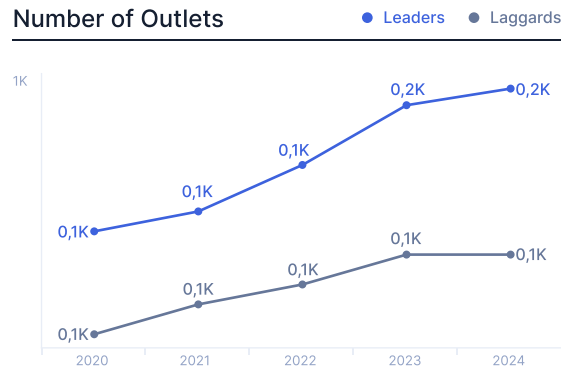
Leaders maintained very high checks, rising from \$101.3 in 2021 to \$108.4 in 2024. Laggards, starting much lower (\$64.8), escalated to \$79.1, possibly trying to position themselves more upscale. But declining traffic share indicates difficulty attracting steady patronage at these higher prices.



## Outlet Growth

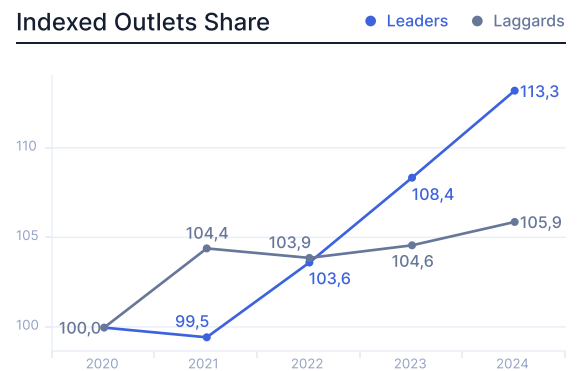
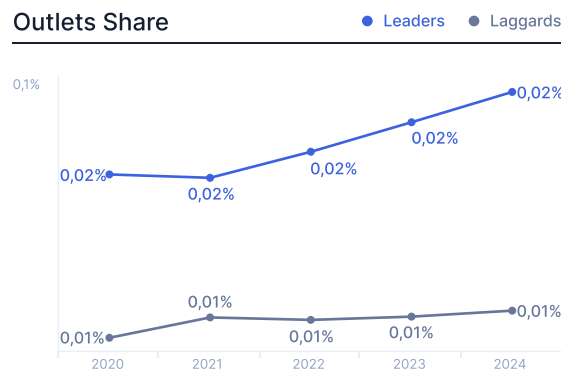
### Number of Outlets

Leaders increased from roughly 0.1K to 0.2K, while Laggards also grew but at a similarly small scale.



### Outlets Share

Both remain minimal yet stable. Premium positioning makes expansion cautious; those who maintain high CSAT can still open new sites successfully.





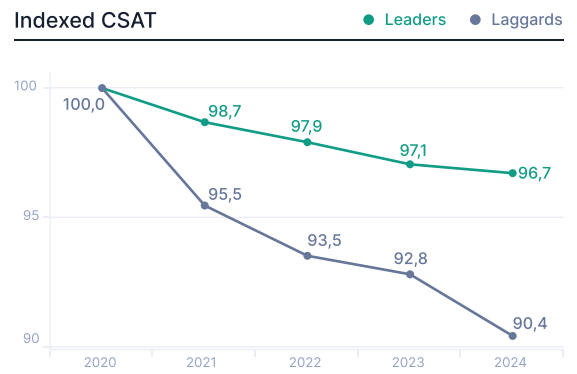
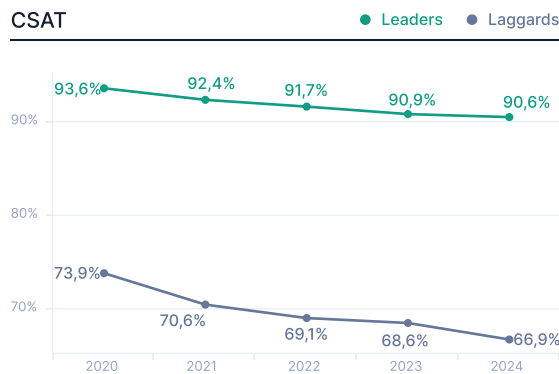
# Small Chains

1-10 outlets

# Small Chains • \$ Price Tier

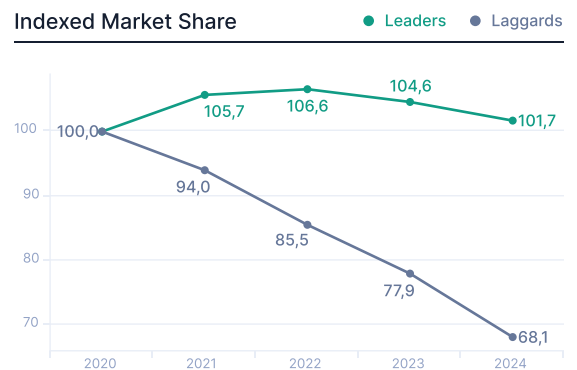
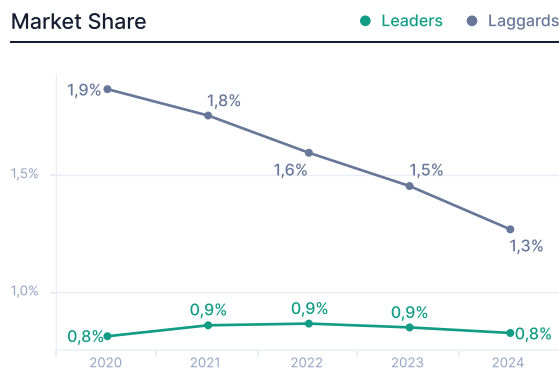
## CSAT

By definition, small CX Leaders have notably higher satisfaction than Laggards in this segment. While both groups showed some decline from 2020 to 2024 (e.g., from 93.6% to 90.6% for Leaders vs. 73.9% to 66.9% for Laggards), the gap remains substantial. Satisfied customers are more likely to return and recommend, giving Leaders a strong base of loyal patrons. Laggards, on the other hand, typically suffer from inconsistent quality or service that dampens loyalty.



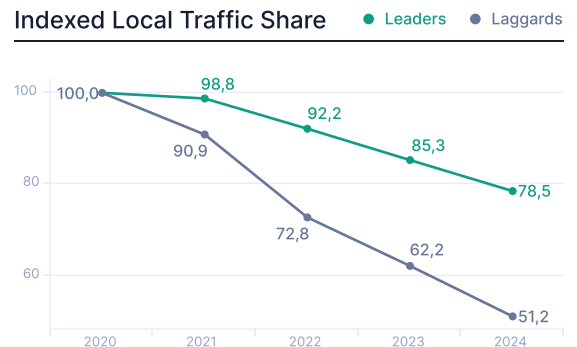
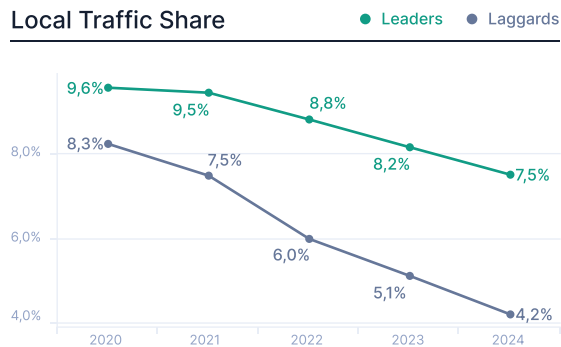
## Market Share

Both Leaders and Laggards experienced a slight drop in national market share (e.g., Leaders from 0.9% to 0.8%, Laggards from 1.9% to 1.3%). Despite small footprints, high-CSAT brands “punch above their weight” locally.



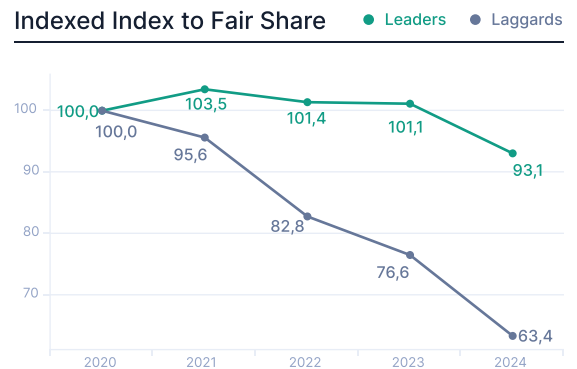
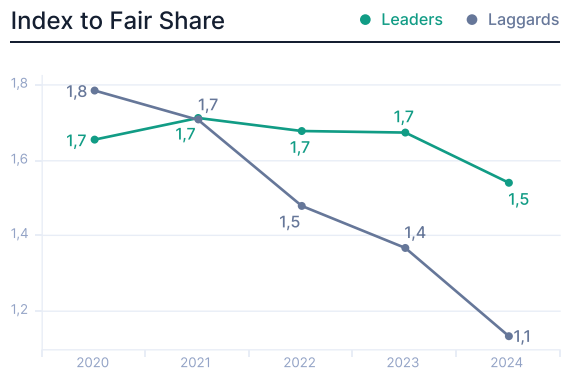
## Local Traffic Share

Leaders' local traffic share decreased from 9.6% to 7.5%, but still outperforms Laggards (which went from 8.3% down to 4.2%).



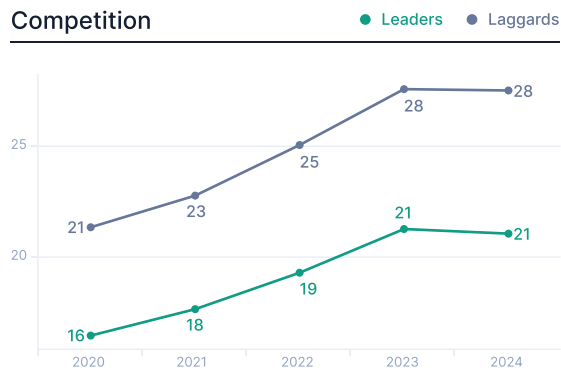
## Index to Fair Share

Leaders' index dropped from 1.7 to 1.5 but stayed above 1.0, indicating they capture more visits per outlet than their store counts would predict. Laggards fell more steeply, from 1.8 down to 1.1.



## Competition

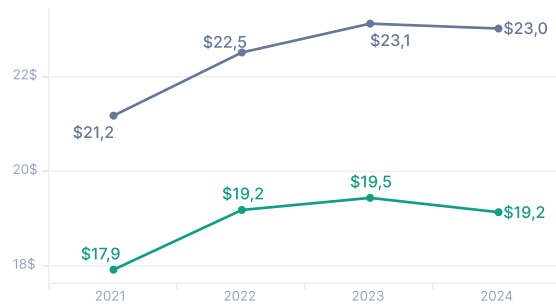
The average number of competitors rose for both groups (16 to 21 for Leaders; 21 to 28 for Laggards), intensifying the battle for each consumer visit. High satisfaction helps Leaders stand out in crowded local markets, while Laggards struggle to draw share.



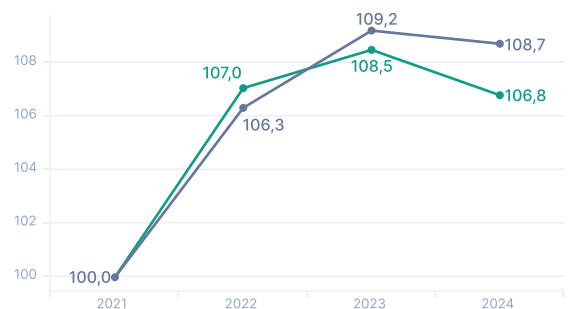
## Average Check

Leaders in the \$ tier saw the average check rise from \$17.9 to \$19.2; Laggards climbed from \$21.2 to \$23.0. Despite Laggards' higher ticket in absolute terms, Leaders' stronger repeat traffic multiplies their revenue advantage. Satisfied patrons tend to spend more frequently on premium or add-on items. Laggards often rely on fewer, larger checks or discounting to stay competitive, which can limit overall margins.

Average Check ● Leaders ● Laggards



Indexed Average Check ● Leaders ● Laggards



## Outlet Growth

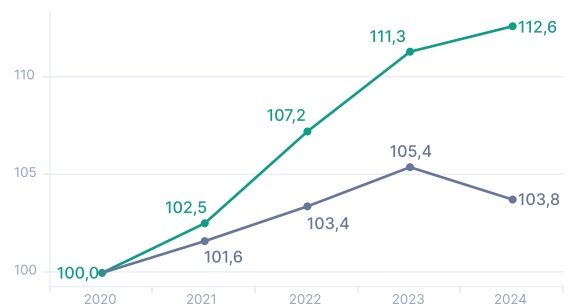
### Number of Outlets

Leaders grew from 2.9K to 3.3K; Laggards from 6.6K to 6.8K. Leaders expand more aggressively due to strong local reputations fueling new openings.

Number of Outlets ● Leaders ● Laggards



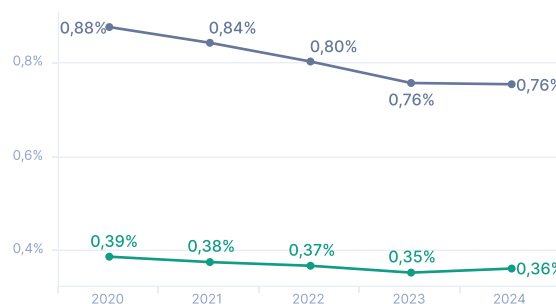
Indexed Number of Outlets ● Leaders ● Laggards



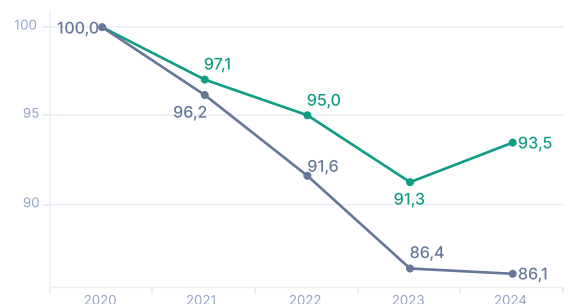
## Outlets Share

Leaders leverage every new store effectively, while Laggards struggle to maintain share: Leaders' outlets share dipped slightly from 0.39% to 0.36%, while Laggards declined from 0.88% to 0.76%.

Outlets Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



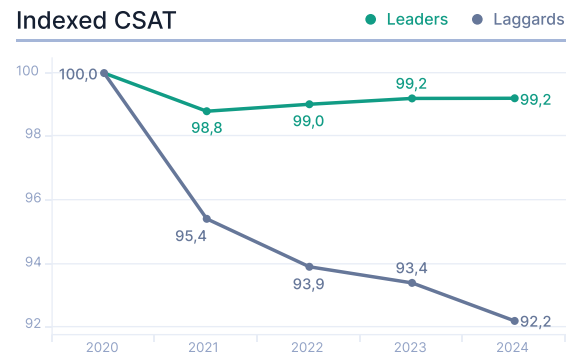
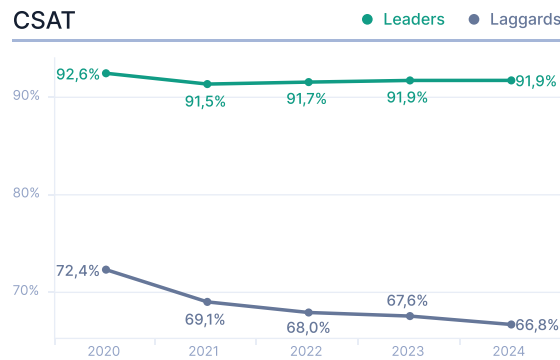
Indexed Outlets Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



# Small Chains • \$\$ Price Tier

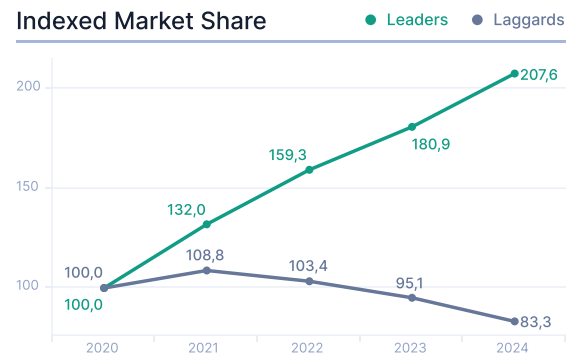
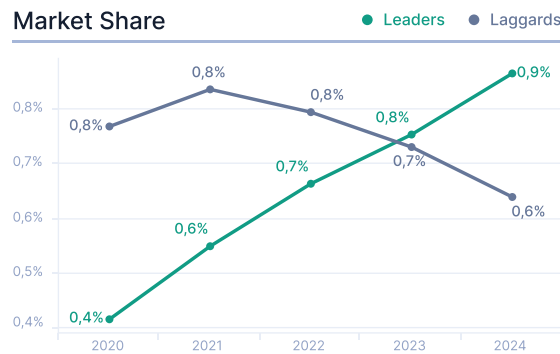
## CSAT

In the \$\$ bracket, small-chain CX Leaders maintained high customer satisfaction (92.6% to 91.9%), whereas Laggards slipped more steeply (72.4% to 66.8%). Niche brands that execute well on service and quality enjoy robust local followings, while inconsistent offerings erode patron loyalty.



## Market Share

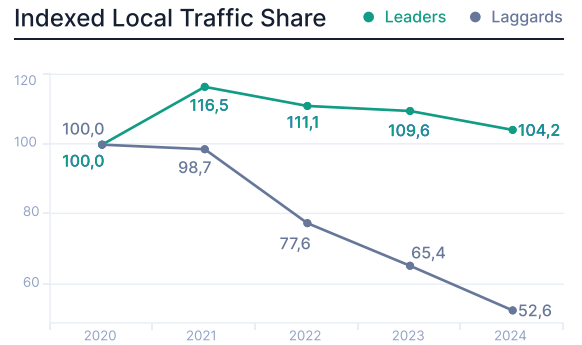
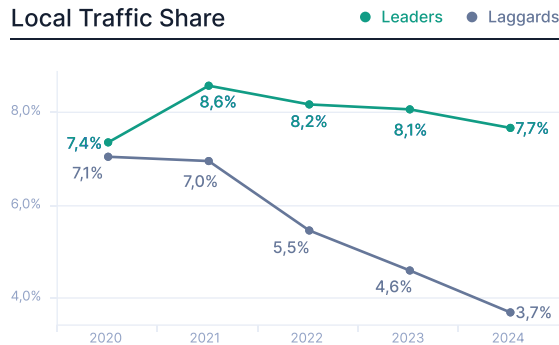
Leaders' market share improved from 0.4% to 0.9%; Laggards dropped from 0.8% to 0.6%. Locally, Leaders commonly secure a disproportionate share of traffic.





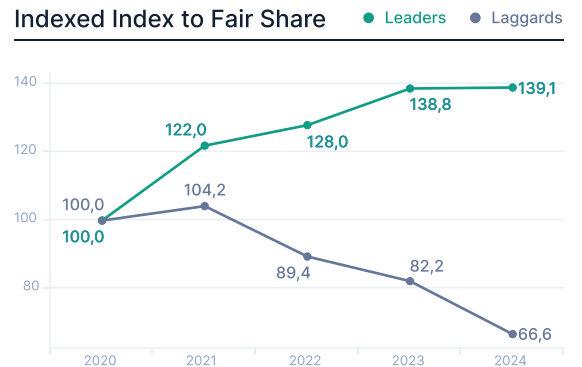
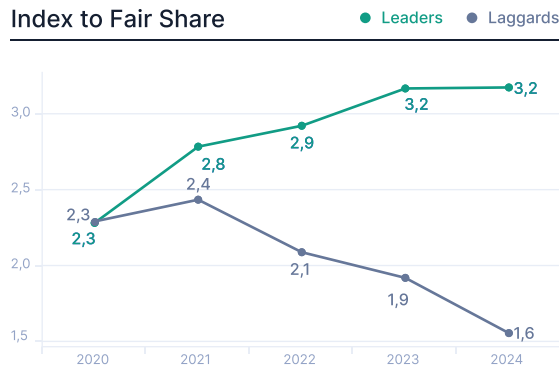
## Local Traffic Share

Leaders declined slightly from 8.6% to 8.3% (with a peak at 10.0% in 2021), still outpacing Laggards' steeper decline (7.3% to 3.8%).



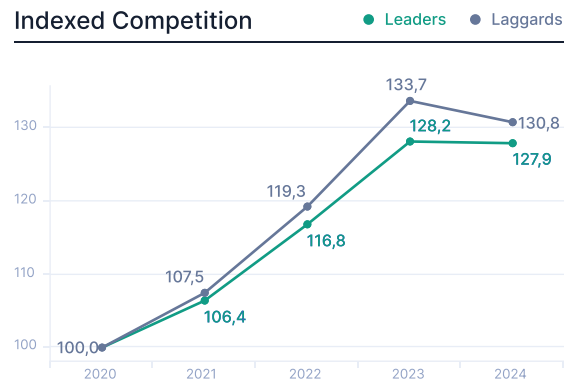
## Index to Fair Share

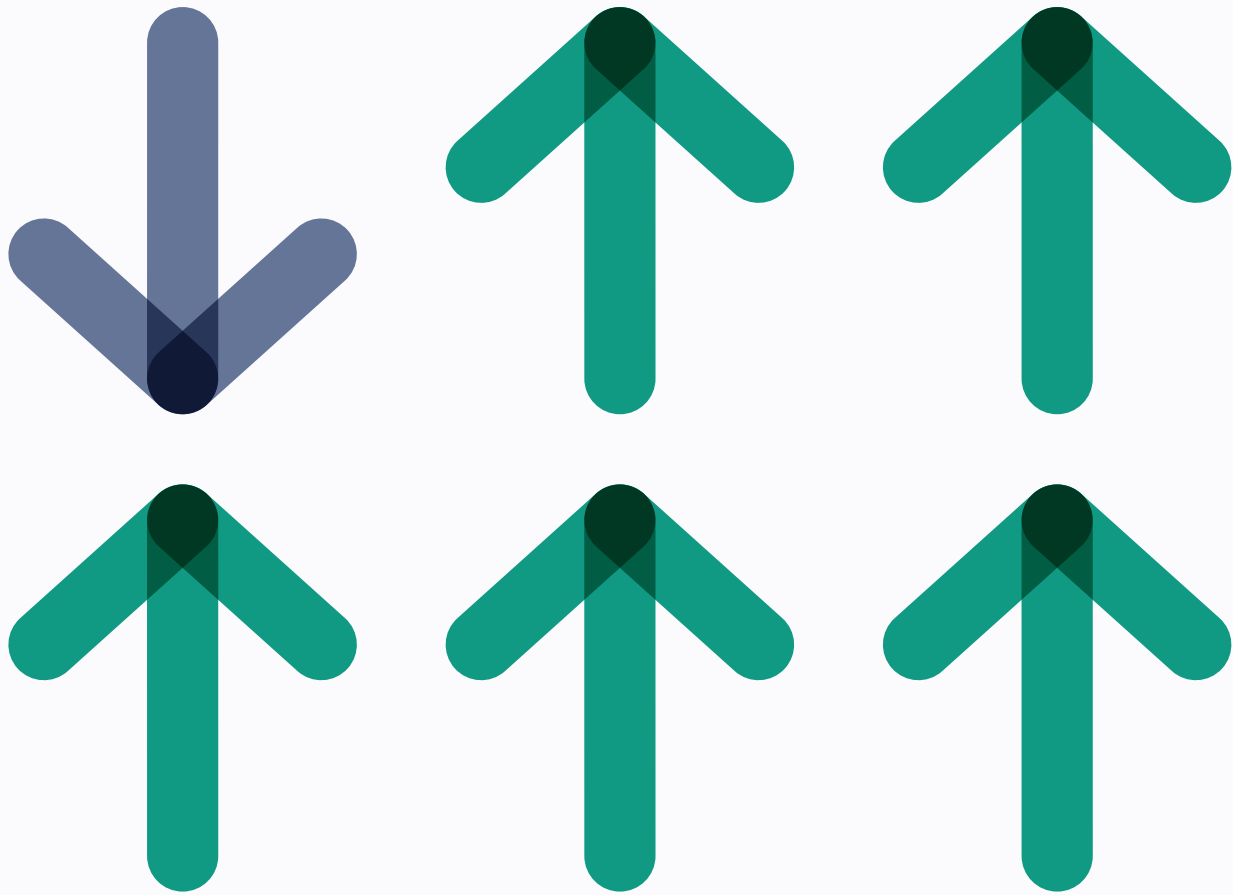
Leaders soared from 2.3 to 3.2, meaning they capture far more visits per outlet than the norm. Laggards slid from 2.3 to 1.6, reflecting an inability to attract traffic commensurate with their store counts.



## Competition

Both groups face more rivals over time (30 to 39 for Leaders; 33 to 43 for Laggards). Still, Leaders convert this competitive pressure into opportunities, leveraging superior CX to outperform local alternatives.

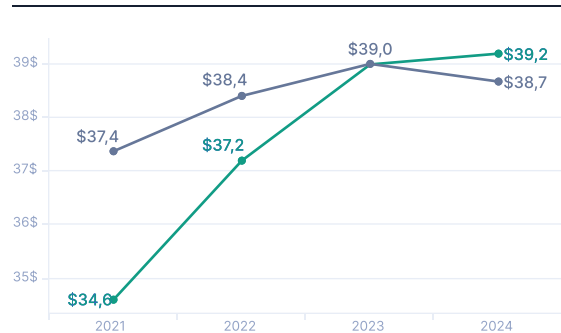




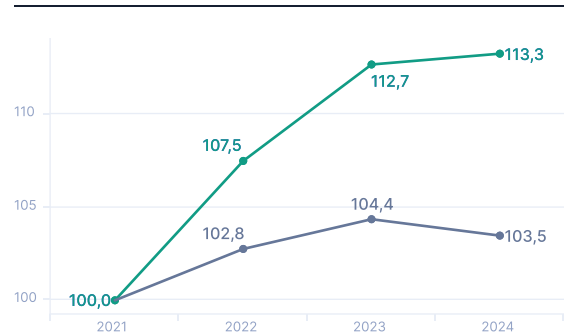
### Average Check

Leaders' average check jumped from \$34.6 to \$39.2, while Laggards went from \$37.4 to \$38.7. Restaurants with high customer satisfaction successfully justify higher prices, while laggards may raise prices but struggle to retain customers, confirming that superior experiences drive pricing power.

Average Check ● Leaders ● Laggards



Indexed Average Check ● Leaders ● Laggards

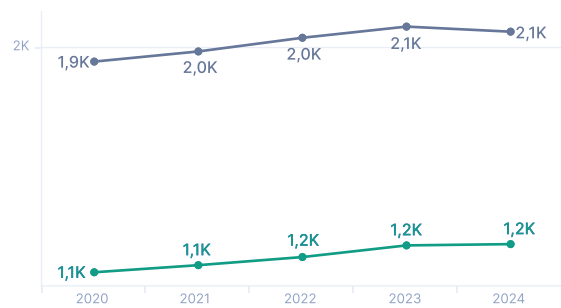


## Outlet Growth

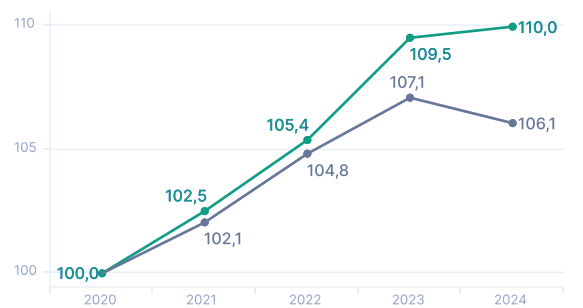
### Number of Outlets

Leaders rose modestly from 1.1K to 1.2K, while Laggards edged from 1.9K to 2.1K. Leaders' ability to open new stores successfully hinges on high satisfaction, which facilitates local market entry.

Number of Outlets ● Leaders ● Laggards



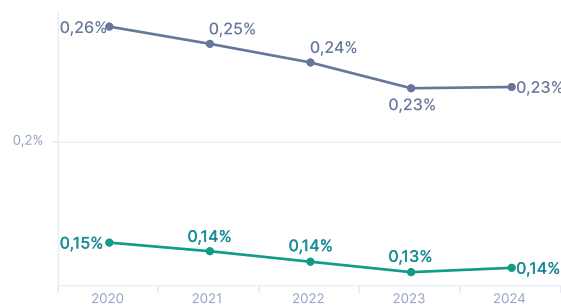
Indexed Number of Outlets ● Leaders ● Laggards



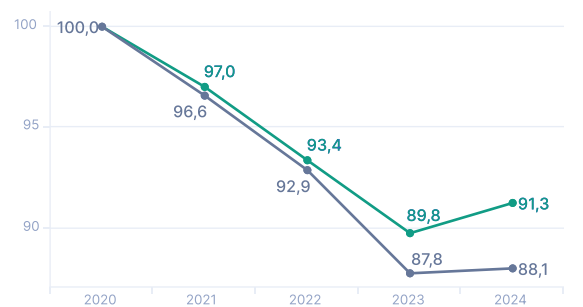
### Outlets Share

Leaders moved from 0.15% to 0.14%, and Laggards from 0.26% to 0.23%. Though both decreased, top CX operators typically offset that drop with stronger per-location performance.

Outlets Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



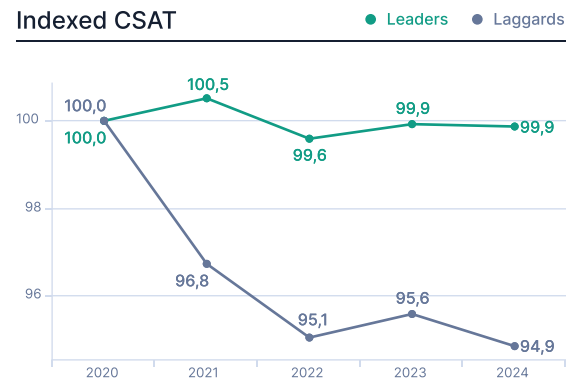
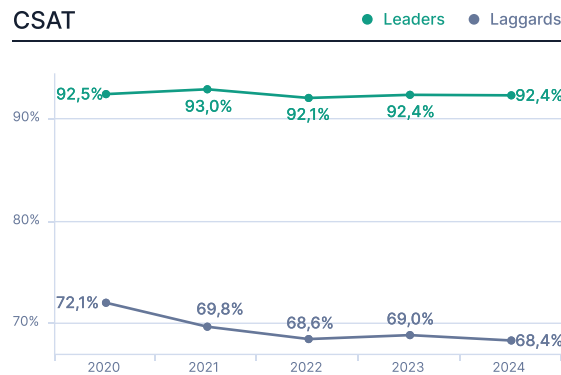
Indexed Outlets Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



# Small Chains • \$\$\$ Price Tier

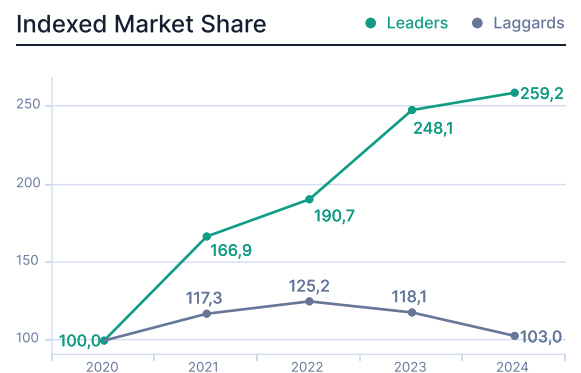
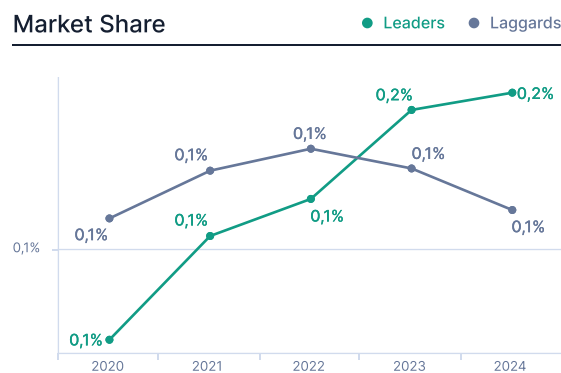
## CSAT

Premium-priced small chains see Leaders maintaining relatively stable CSAT (about 92.5% to 92.4%), while Laggards drop from 72.1% to 68.4%. Delivering an exceptional customer experience at a premium price point fosters repeat business and positive word-of-mouth. Subpar execution, however, is quickly punished in high-end segments.



## Market Share

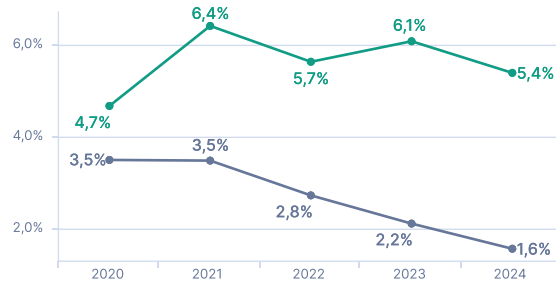
Though small overall, high-end Leaders raised their market share from 0.1% to 0.2%, while Laggards remained flat.



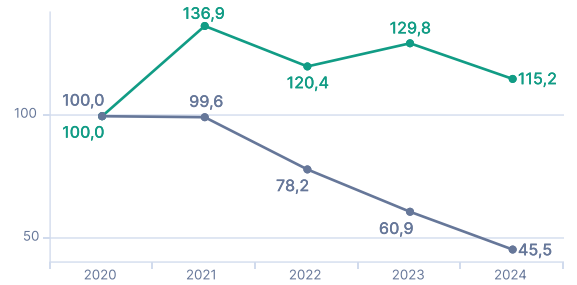
## Local Traffic Share

Leaders peaked in 2021, then settled around 5.4%, while Laggards slid sharply from 3.5% to 1.6%.

Local Traffic Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



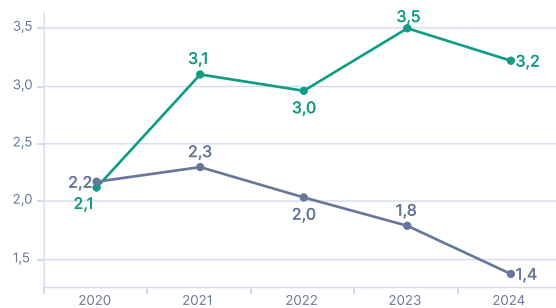
Indexed Local Traffic Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



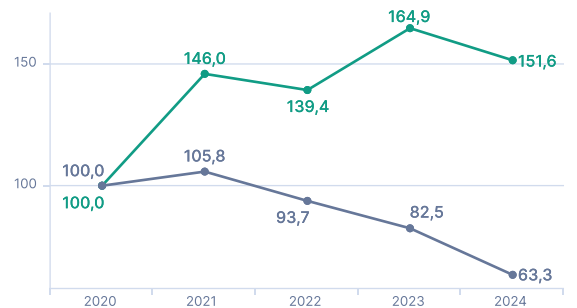
## Index to Fair Share

Leaders surged from 2.1 to 3.2, indicating a dramatic ability to attract visits relative to outlet count. Laggards dipped from 2.2 to 1.4.

Index to Fair Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



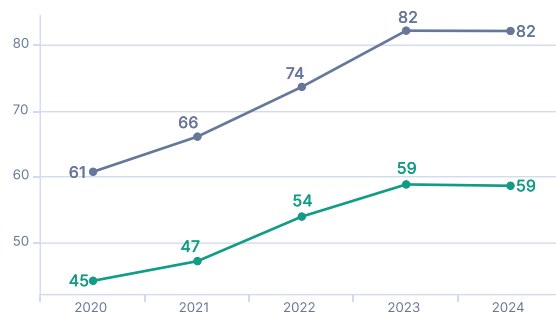
Indexed Index to Fair Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



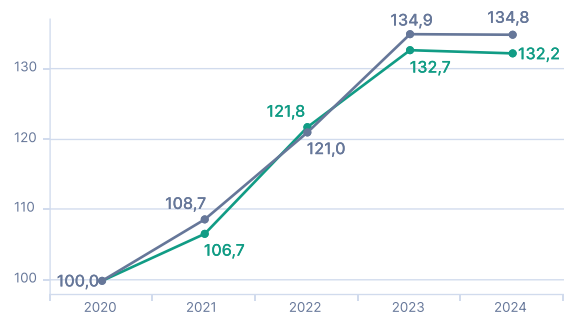
## Competition

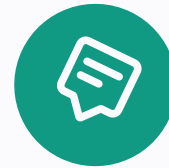
Both groups face escalating competition, with Leaders' rivals rising from 45 to 59, Laggards' from 61 to 82. Those excelling in CX stand out and command premium spending.

Competition ● Leaders ● Laggards



Indexed Competition ● Leaders ● Laggards

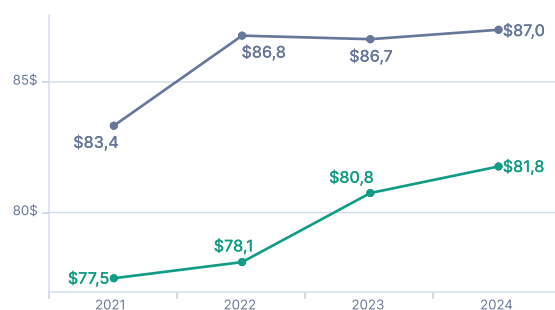




## Average Check

Leaders are catching up in absolute check size (from \$77.5 to \$81.8) while growing faster in indexed terms, suggesting better pricing strategies or improved customer spending. Laggards' growth has stagnated, implying potential price resistance or challenges in increasing customer spending further. Market positioning is shifting – leaders are becoming more competitive, closing the pricing gap while maintaining stronger growth.

Average Check ● Leaders ● Laggards



Indexed Average Check ● Leaders ● Laggards

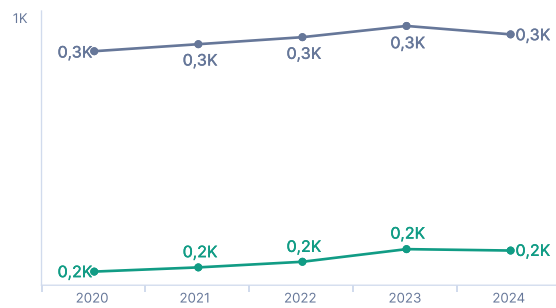


## Outlet Growth

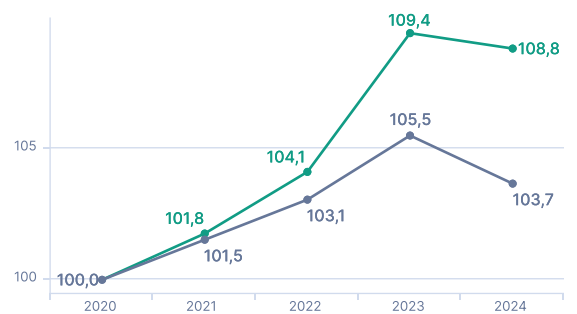
### Number of Outlets

Leaders marginally increased (0.2K to a bit more by 2024), while Laggards remained relatively stagnant. Premium small concepts with strong CX expand cautiously but effectively.

Number of Outlets ● Leaders ● Laggards



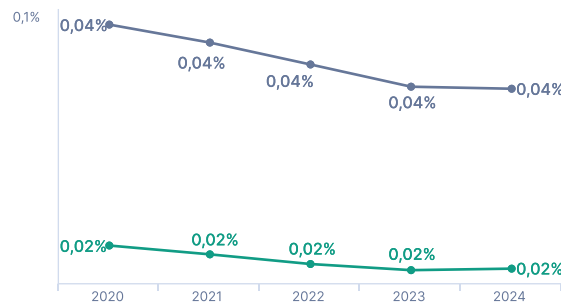
Indexed Number of Outlets ● Leaders ● Laggards



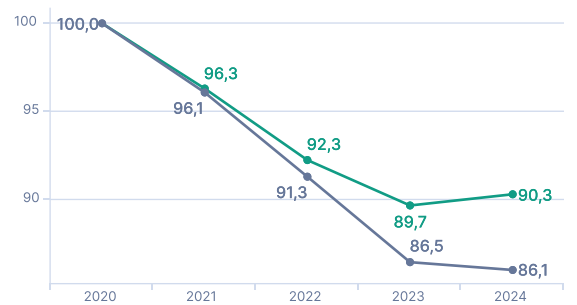
### Outlets Share

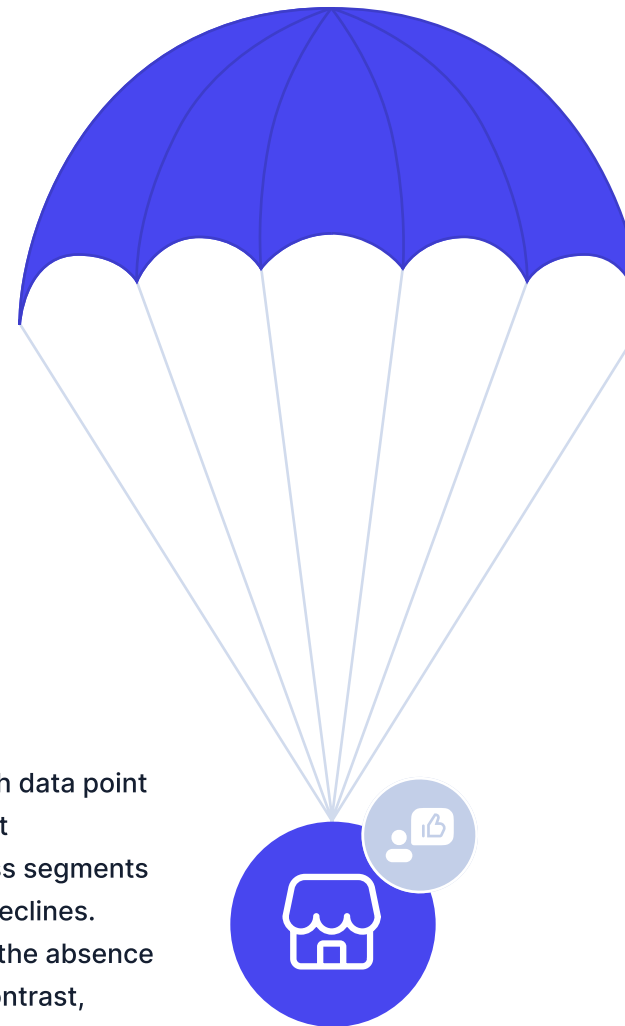
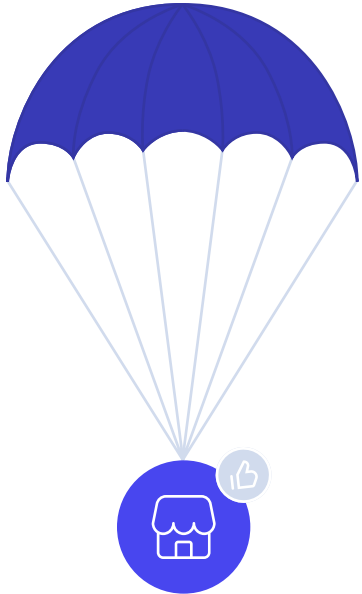
Both groups show minimal changes, reflecting niche positioning. However, Leaders who do open new locations often see strong performance right out of the gate.

Outlets Share ● Leaders ● Laggards



Indexed Outlets Share ● Leaders ● Laggards





## Conclusion

Taking a step back from the detailed metrics it becomes clear that each data point reveals the same overarching truth: restaurants that consistently invest in the customer experience (“leaders”) enjoy distinct advantages across segments and price tiers, while those that neglect CX (“laggards”) face steeper declines. Even when laggards attempt to raise checks or expand their footprint, the absence of high-satisfaction operations ultimately weakens their position. By contrast, leader brands that sustain or elevate CSAT – sometimes by only a few percentage points – manage to secure stronger local traffic, grow their store base at a faster rate, and command greater market share. This evidence underscores that in an industry driven by intense competition, small improvements in guest satisfaction can translate into outsized gains in both revenue and presence – reinforcing the central role of CX as the defining factor between silent erosion and sustainable growth.



## CSAT

### GENERAL DECLINE

In most segments, CSAT dropped compared to 2020

### EXCEPTIONS AMONG MEDIUM CHAINS (\$ & \$\$)

Leaders in the 10–100 outlet category for \$ and \$\$ segments showed slight CSAT growth (+0.3p.p. and +2.1p.p., respectively).

### LEADERS VS. LAGGARDS

- Leaders' declines from 2020 values rarely exceed 3.5p.p.
- Laggards can drop by up to 12p.p.
- In mid-sized restaurants, laggards in the most expensive and least expensive tiers saw the sharpest CSAT dips (-6p.p. and -5.8p.p., respectively), whereas the \$\$ tier decline was less severe (-0.9p.p.).
- Leaders in the same mid-size segment posted gains in \$ (+0.3p.p.) and \$\$ (+2.1p.p.).

### SMALLER CHAINS

Both leaders and laggards in these smaller formats recorded a stronger CSAT decline, especially in the \$ segment. Leaders' drops ranged from 0.1p.p. to 3p.p., while laggards' declines spanned 3.7p.p. to 7p.p., underscoring the resilience of high-CSAT brands even in tight operational settings.

## Market Share

### LEADERS' OVERALL RISE

Across all segments, leaders grew market share from 2020 levels.

### LARGE RESTAURANTS

- Leaders' share soared by +57% since 2020.
- Laggards contracted by over 41%.

### MID-SIZED RESTAURANTS

- In the \$ segment, leaders surged by 94%, while laggards tumbled by 36.6%, flipping the 2020 balance where laggards had held the bigger share.
- In the \$\$ segment, leaders rocketed +142.9%, whereas laggards posted a modest +6.9%.
- The \$\$\$ segment was the exception: laggards' share actually outgrew leaders' between 2020 and 2024 (-37.8% vs. -19%, respectively).

### SMALL CHAINS

Leaders' gains increase with price tier and consistently outpace laggards.

- In the \$ tier, leaders improved by +1.7% while laggards declined by -31.9%.
- In the \$\$ tier, leaders soared +107.6%, whereas laggards dropped -16.8%, allowing leaders to overtake laggards – opposite the 2020 positioning.
- In the \$\$\$ tier, leaders achieved the largest jump of +159.1%, again reversing the situation of 2020 when laggards had the upper hand.

## Local Traffic Share

### OVERALL DOWNTURN

Both leaders and laggards saw lower local traffic shares vs. 2020.

### BRIGHT SPOTS AMONG SMALLER CHAINS

- Leaders in \$\$ and \$\$\$ categories registered notable gains (+9.5% and +15.3% from 2020, respectively).
- Laggards in smaller chains experienced steep declines (-48.8% to -52.8%) regardless of price tier.

### LARGE RESTAURANTS

- Both groups fell from 2020 levels, but leaders' total drop was a modest -2.8%, followed by an uptick in the most recent year.
- Laggards declined year over year, reaching a -45% loss vs. the start of the period by 2024.

### MID-SIZED SEGMENT

- Leaders in \$\$ tallied the highest growth at +8.1%, while laggards there plunged over 42%.
- Both leaders and laggards in \$\$\$ showed sharp drops (-55.4% and -45.5%, respectively) since 2021, indicating sustained local traffic challenges in premium mid-tier formats.

## Index to Fair Share

### LEADERS' UPWARD TRAJECTORY

Except for the smallest \$ segment and the most premium \$\$\$ segment among mid-sized chains, leaders generally improved their Index to Fair Share.

### LARGE RESTAURANTS

- Leaders rose by over 7%, while laggards fell over 35%.

### MID-SIZED RESTAURANTS

- In the \$\$ category, leaders climbed nearly +30% from 2020; laggards dropped -21%.
- In the \$ segment, leaders posted a modest +5.5%, while laggards saw a -35% decline.
- In the \$\$\$ segment, leaders shrank by -43.6%, whereas laggards' decline was smaller, at -29.4%.

### SMALL RESTAURANTS

- Leaders in the \$\$\$ category recorded the biggest upswing (+51.6%), surpassing laggards who fell by -36.7%, despite laggards having had a higher fair share in 2020.
- In the \$\$ tier, leaders – previously on par with laggards – now exceed them by more than 2x.
- In the \$ tier, both groups declined, but laggards dropped more steeply (-36.6% vs. -6.9%), allowing leaders to go from trailing in 2020 to leading in 2024 (1.5 vs. 1.1).

## Competition

### LARGE RESTAURANTS

- Leaders operated in denser environments throughout the period (20 competitors vs. laggards' 17 by 2024).
- Laggards saw a bigger jump in competitor counts, but still faced fewer rivals overall.

### MID-SIZED RESTAURANTS

- The widest leader-laggard gap appears in the \$\$\$ tier: in 2020, leaders had 75 competitors vs. 62 for laggards; by 2024, leaders had 95 vs. laggards' 81.
- In the \$ and \$\$ tiers, laggards faced a higher growth rate in competition (45 vs. 38, for instance, in \$\$ by 2024).

### SMALL RESTAURANTS

- In \$ and \$\$ tiers, laggards saw faster-rising competitor counts (e.g., 21→28 vs. 17→21 for leaders in \$).
- Among \$\$\$ small chains, leaders stabilized at 59 competitors over the past two years, whereas laggards jumped to 82, amplifying existing performance gaps.

## Average Check

### LARGE CHAINS

- Laggards' checks grew more sharply since 2021 (+31% vs. +15.4% for leaders).
- In the most recent year, laggards added +6%, while leaders saw a -4% decline – yet leaders still held a higher absolute check overall.

### MID-SIZED RESTAURANTS

- Laggards again showed higher growth, particularly in costlier segments: +22% for \$\$\$, +12.3% for \$\$, +10.7% for \$.
- Leaders grew most in the \$ category (+8.1%) but least in \$\$ (+3.45%).

### SMALL CHAINS

- In the \$ tier, laggards led in both absolute check and growth.
- In \$\$ and \$\$\$, leaders posted bigger increases (+15.3% vs. +2.9% for laggards in \$\$, +5.5% vs. +4.4% in \$\$\$) and maintained a higher average check in \$\$ while overtaking laggards in \$\$\$ growth, though laggards still hold a slightly higher overall check in the premium tier.

## Outlet Growth

### UNIVERSAL EXPANSION

All groups increased outlet counts relative to 2020.

### LARGE RESTAURANTS

- Leaders recorded the highest jump, +68.7% vs. 2020, particularly accelerating after 2022.
- Laggards rose by only +3.2%, turning negative after 2023.

### MID-SIZED RESTAURANTS

- Both leaders and laggards posted strong growth in the \$\$\$ category: +36.4% vs. +27.6%.
- The gap was more pronounced in \$ and \$\$ segments, where leaders posted 64.8% (vs. 1.3%) and significantly outpaced laggards by over 40% in \$\$.

### SMALL CHAINS

- Leaders grew between +8.8% (\$\$\$) and +12.6% (\$) compared to 2020.
- Laggards stayed below +6.1% (notably in \$\$).

### IMPLICATION

Leaders show stronger expansion across mid-sized and large chains (especially in \$\$ and \$\$\$ segments), while laggards often stagnate or lose traction – particularly among smaller chains.

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## Outlet Share

### STRATEGIC EXPANSION

Leaders in mid-sized and large segments, especially in \$ and \$\$ tiers, actively broaden their footprint.

### LARGE CHAINS

- Leaders increased their share linearly, reaching +40% by 2024, while laggards shrank by -14.3%.

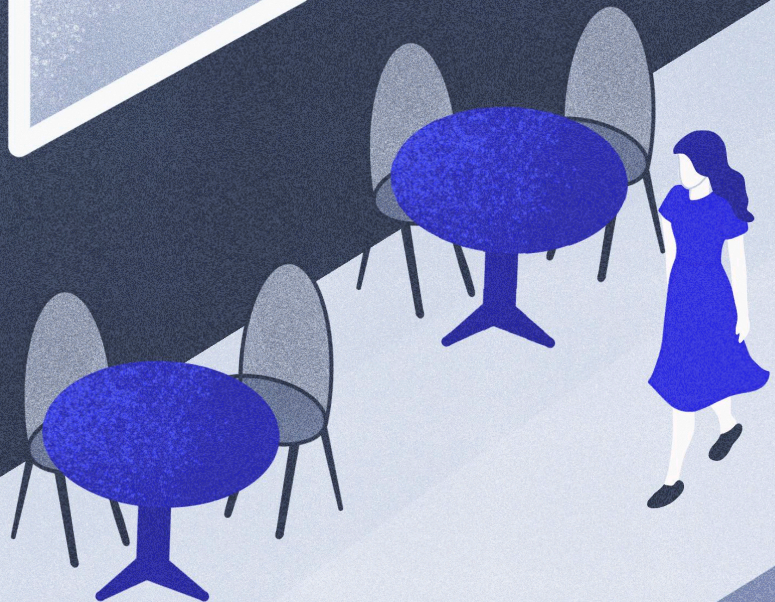
### MID-SIZED CHAINS

- Leaders show consistent growth, whereas laggards lag significantly. The gap is especially notable in lower-priced tiers, where leaders rapidly advance.

### SMALL CHAINS

- Both groups declined across segments, with leaders dipping -6.5% to -9.6% and laggards falling -11.9% to -13.9%, the decline becoming more pronounced in costlier categories.

In sum, these metrics illustrate a clear divide: leaders steadily improve or at least stabilize key indicators (CSAT, market share, fair share index, local traffic share) while pursuing balanced growth strategies – even amid rising competition. Laggards, on the other hand, struggle to retain traffic and expand meaningfully, often posting steep drops in satisfaction and share, despite various attempts at price adjustments or footprint changes.





# Focus on What You Can *Influence* to Accelerate Growth

Every business faces external events that can't be controlled, think economic slowdowns or natural disasters. Yet many factors are within your grasp. By optimizing operations, enhancing customer experience, refining pricing strategies, improving brand perception, strategically managing your locations, including careful site selection, targeted expansion, and optimized operating hours - you drive real, measurable results. Our advanced analytics show you exactly which levers to pull for maximum impact.

*That's where Realytics comes in.* Our advanced analytics show you the exact levers to pull for maximum impact. Instead of guesswork, you get clarity on what lifts revenue and loyalty, whether that's better service, menu improvements, or staff training. You see precisely how to become a "Leader" rather than a "Laggard."

Through our "Leaders vs. Laggards" analysis, Realytics reveals why top performers attract more customers, enjoy higher checks, and expand faster. We give you that same granular insight about your brand and any of your competitors, whether it's the café next door or a national giant, so you can pinpoint exactly what consumers need and value, replicate winning strategies, and drive tangible gains in foot traffic, average checks, and brand loyalty.

Our upcoming charts clearly highlights where the largest gaps exist between leaders and laggards. By pinpointing these critical differences in customer satisfaction, you can focus your efforts precisely where they'll drive the greatest impact. Let us help you leverage insights from your customers and competitors to improve operational efficiency, accelerate revenue growth, reduce costs, and maximize customer lifetime value.

## The Operations Edge: How Leaders Outperform Laggards in the U.S Café & Restaurant Industry

Note: The chart displays a selected set of topics.



# **Realytics: Driving HoReCa Excellence with *Complete Market and Consumer Intelligence***

Realytics is a real-time data analytics platform for Cafes & Restaurants that monitors consumer engagement and competitive dynamics across 215 countries – from cafes next door to global chains.

With a mission to help businesses learn from customers and competitors, Realytics unifies data on location, pricing, operations, brand perception, and customer experience into a single, integrated view.

Side-by-side comparisons deliver immediate, actionable insights on market performance. Updated in near real time, the platform flags shifts in consumer behavior as they occur, revealing which brands are gaining traction and which are losing ground.

This live visibility connects operational data directly to customer experience, capturing fluctuations in key metrics such as foot traffic and average check sizes, and ultimately transforms raw data into strategic insights for deeper analyses of loyalty and retention. All without integration.





## Market

- ✓ Market structure & growth rates
- ✓ Category leaders & fast-growers
- ✓ Q-commerce: delivery penetration



## Location

- ✓ Trade area assessment
- ✓ Outlet prioritization for investment allocation
- ✓ Business alignment with traffic trends & local demand



## Brand

- ✓ Operational performance management across locations
- ✓ Unified KPI setting & alerting
- ✓ Customer experience issues & root cause identification



Product Analytics



Market Analytics



Location Analytics



Brand Analytics



Realytics

Experience Analytics



Price Analytics



## Product

- ✓ Competitor assortment monitoring
- ✓ Local trends evaluation for NPD
- ✓ Cross-consumption analysis



## Price

- ✓ Trade area pricing assessment
- ✓ Geo-Pricing strategy optimization
- ✓ Price perception assessment



## Customer Experience

- ✓ Operational performance management across locations
- ✓ Unified KPI setting & alerting
- ✓ Customer experience issues & root cause identification



# Manifesto



**Tony Popov**  
Founder & CEO,  
Ex-Yandex

In today's market, online outpaces offline in data acquisition, analysis speed, and algorithmic sophistication.

Online businesses thrive with exponentially more data, capturing insights in real-time and leveraging advanced algorithms to stay agile and customer-focused.

For 25 years, our team has been building digital services that surpass offline experiences. Our expertise has been honed by a relentless pursuit of understanding each customer interaction in real-time, learning from every click, preference, and behavior.

We understand exactly how and why we achieved this. Each day, we collected increasingly comprehensive and precise data on customers and competitors and acted faster based on accurate insights. This is how the gap between online and offline grew.

Now, we're building Realytics to empower offline businesses to become data-driven and learn from both customers and competitors. Our strength lies in our ability to make sense of the offline market's overwhelming complexities, uncovering intricate relationships and emerging patterns to help our customers grow revenue and enhance customer lifetime value.

At Realytics, we believe offline businesses deserve the same level of insight, agility, and data-driven strategy as the digital world.

# Get in touch



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At Realytics, we know the domestic and global offline markets inside out – what’s happening with your brand and every competitor, from the shop next door to industry giants



**215**

Countries & territories



**25M**

Cafe & Restaurants



**250M+**

Consumer profiles



**1B+**

Reviews



**Historic data**

From 2020



**Weekly**

Updated Data



**No integration**

Out-of-box solution

**CX Leaders and Laggards  
in the U.S. Café & Restaurant Industry  
2020-2024**



[realytics.com](https://realytics.com)