

The impact of user feedback on the continuous improvement of the documentation

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Université Paris Cité, June 2025

“This paper explores the role of user feedback in the continuous improvement of technical documentation. As documentation increasingly serves as a primary point of contact between users and technology, its quality and relevance are paramount. We argue that user feedback—ranging from user-submitted help requests (often referred to as support tickets) and direct comments to usage analytics and AI-generated insights—is a key driver in identifying gaps and ensuring documentation meets user needs. By examining prevailing definitions and discussions around documentation quality and user expectations, we analyze how these factors shape the way information should be delivered. To understand how organizations collect and respond to feedback, we conducted a survey and interviews with technical writers from a range of industries. Our findings show that while many companies gather user input through various channels, its integration into documentation workflows remains inconsistent. We also explore the emerging use of AI in managing and interpreting feedback. This research highlights the importance of treating user feedback not just as support data, but as a central component of documentation strategy.”

Keywords : *User feedback management, Docs-as-product, Technical documentation, Documentation improvement, Artificial Intelligence*

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Introduction

Technical documentation plays an important role in the user experience of modern products, particularly in software and digital services. While traditionally seen as a supporting resource, documentation is increasingly recognized as a product in its own right: one that must deliver value, clarity, and usability to its readers. Like any product, documentation benefits from iteration and improvement, especially when guided by those who use it most: the users themselves.

This research examines how user feedback contributes to the ongoing development of technical documentation. Our investigation is grounded in two core ideas: first, that documentation must meet user needs to be effective, and second, that feedback, whether in the form of questions, comments, or support interactions, can reveal shortcomings in content, structure, or usability.

Defining what makes documentation “high-quality” is complex. Qualities such as clarity, accuracy, and consistency are widely valued, yet users bring diverse expectations and varying levels of technical knowledge. There is also a natural tension between offering broad coverage and providing precise, targeted information. In this context, feedback becomes a valuable tool for navigating these competing demands and refining the way information is delivered.

To explore how organizations gather and act on user feedback, we reviewed existing research and conducted a qualitative study involving a survey and interviews with technical writers. Our goal was to uncover current practices, challenges, and the evolving role of technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, in this space. Ultimately, we aim to show that structured feedback loops are not just helpful but essential for maintaining relevant, user-centered documentation in today’s fast-changing digital environments.

Literature Review

Our core statements

As mentioned in the introduction, our work is based of two core statements that led us throughout our research:

1. Technical documentation is a product in itself which must meet its users needs.

This statement implies that technical documentation cannot be improved without user feedback, as users are technical documentation customers and it is the technical writer's duty to meet their needs.

2. There are no bad users, only bad interfaces.

This statement implies that any user feedback (questions, comments, reviews, UGC...) can point out a lack in the technical documentation and a need for improvement.

I. What should we consider as qualitative documentation?

Defining quality

Linking user feedback and technical documentation's quality ultimately implied a deep research on our keywords. At the beginning of our research, we focused on trying to define what made a technical documentation qualitative.

In *Quality of technical documentation*, Michaël Steehouder mentions the difficulty to define what is qualitative documentation as every user will have different quality standards and expectations regarding the documentation. To sustain this thesis, he mentions Patricia Wright's work. In *Quality or Usability? Quality writing provokes quality reading*, Wright highlights "the fine interplay between the design features of a document and the proper strategies that readers use". Therefore, the literature shows that it is quite difficult to give a single definition for qualitative technical documentation.

However, as future technical writers, we believe that it is in fact possible to define qualitative criterias allowing a wider audience to access information more effectively. For example, simple clauses are easier to understand than complex clauses.

Therefore, in *Principles that Guide Technical Writing*, Folasayo Samuel Olayemi mentions that a qualitative documentation requires clarity, accuracy, conciseness, structure, audience awareness, usability and consistency.

Our angle: putting the stress on the informative quality of the documentation

The definition of documentation quality led us to question our keyword: improvement. We realized our focus of interest was not the improvement of the writing quality, but rather of the informative quality of the documentation. Is the content exhaustive to the users? Can they find what they are looking for easily? To us, the best way to know the answer is to focus on user feedback, which is “qualitative and quantitative data from customers on their likes, dislikes, impressions, and requests about a product”. To make sure to effectively improve the documentation, we decided to do some research on the expectations of the users regarding technical documentation.

II. What do users expect from technical documentation?

Coverage vs precision

In *What users say they want in documentation*, David G. Novick and Karen Ward put the stress on a deadlock. They interviewed 25 users about their needs and preferences regarding technical documentation of software systems. If most users agreed on the need for easy navigation and language clarity, and therefore on the form, they disagreed on the content; on desired levels of technical complexity of explanation. Therefore, the researchers highlighted “a possibly inherent tension between coverage and precision”.

Allowing users to search for what they need: The syntactic barrier of helpdesks

In the light of Novick and Ward’s paper, we wondered if the creation of a “one-doc-fits-all” type was even possible. We then thought that an exhaustive documentation combined with a search bar and keywords would allow us to reconcile these two divergent points of view on technical documentation’s complexity levels. Therefore the focus would not be about improving the “quality” of the documentation, but its accessibility.

However, as explained by Michaël Steehouder in *Quality of technical documentation*, “users give names to functions and operations which usually differ from those used in the manual and its index”. Thus, this lack of homogenization in the language could prevent them from finding the right information in the documentation. In 2025, this issue could be tamed with AI. LLM would now be capable of understanding what the user refers to even though the term is not

correct. But AI is still not widely used in the Technical Documentation world, as shown later in this paper's survey results.

What 2025 users expect from technical documentation

Finally, we found an article from 2013 describing what users will expect from 'customer support' and technical documentation in the near future. In *Evaluating usage and quality of technical software documentation: an empirical study*, Golar Garousi declares that "users will expect tailored information. They want a straight answer to their individual questions and needs. As opposed to 'documentation', the helpdesk might well be a better metaphor for technical documentation in the future. And, secondly, users will expect communication rather than documentation. As opposed to 'documentation', dialogue would seem to be a better metaphor for technical communication in the future". It is evident that Garousi's predictions were accurate. 2025 users want quick and precise answers, as seen with the emergence of chatbots. Thus, 2025 users can be compared to Jean Anouilh's Antigone:

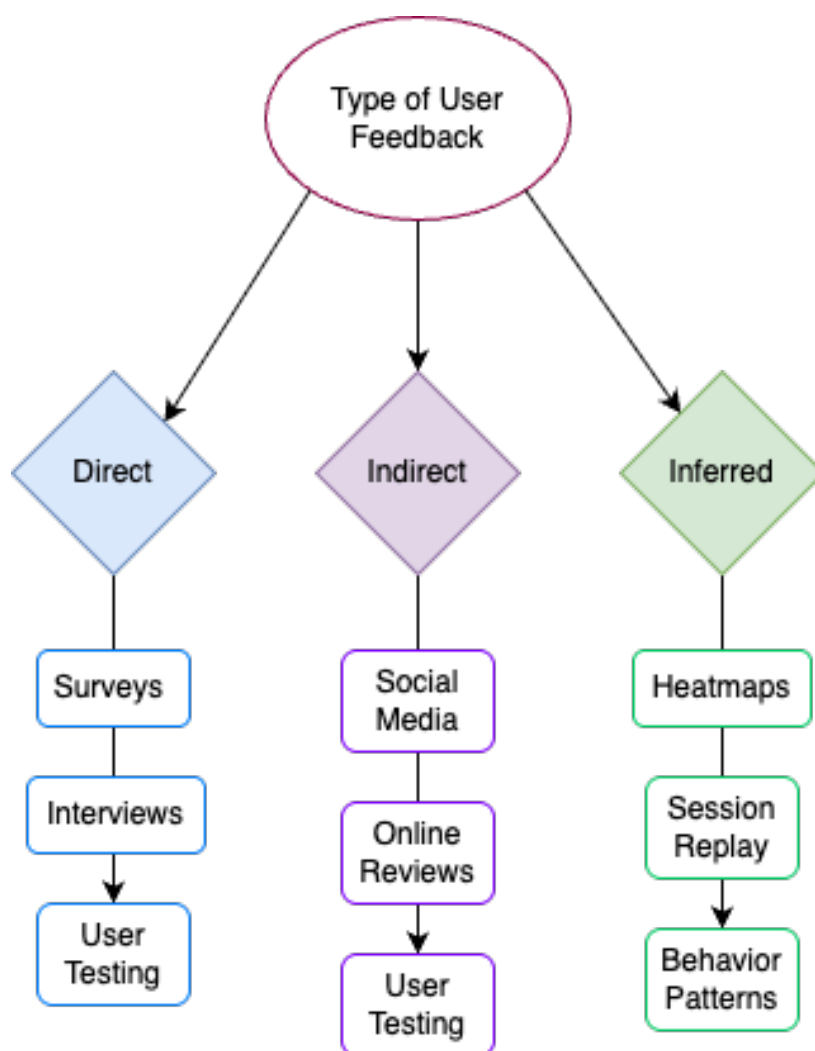
"I want everything, and I want it all now—and I want it whole.
Otherwise I refuse!"

III. How to meet the users' expectations?

As Garousi's paper helped us conceptualize the users' needs, we then turned to technical documentation teams. How to meet users' expectations? To us, the best way to do so is to collect user feedback. But how?

User feedback collection methods

As shown by the image below, there are several types of user feedback:



The diversity of user feedback inherently leads to several types of collection. Here are a few methods we encountered in research papers:

Some methods are rather simple and accessible, as explored by D. Pagano and W. Maalej in *User feedback in the app store: An empirical study*. The researchers collected and compared user feedback written in Apple Store and Google Store.

Other methods are focusing on the machine. In *Understanding Documentation Use Through Log Analysis: An Exploratory Case Study of Four Cloud Services*, Daye Nam and Andrew Macvean decided to study the user's interactions with the documentation page through logs from four cloud-based industrial services. This helped them identify patterns according to the user's context (internet expert, newcomer, regular customer of the product...). This data collection method can be compared to HotJar, a UX Design tool allowing developers to analyse the behavior of users on their website.

User feedback and documentation improvement

Once the user feedback is collected, it is essential to analyze it to determine whether it reveals a documentation gap or simply reflects an isolated issue. For example, if a user reports difficulty locating a widget because of a faulty screen, the problem is specific to their device, their feedback is linked to an individual experience that shouldn't lead to a documentation update. However, if a user contacts I.T. support because they can't find the reset button and the documentation doesn't mention it, this indicates missing information and should lead to a documentation update.

We did not find existing literature addressing this distinction. That is why we chose to investigate further by conducting a survey and interviewing technical writers on four main questions.

Conclusion

Thanks to our research around documentation improvement via user feedback, we were able to conduct a survey focusing on four questions that framed our research:

- a. How is user feedback collected?
- b. How to answer user questions?
- c. Is AI already used in companies?
- d. What type of user feedback leads teams to improve their documentation?

Methods

Poster

After our research on the existing literature, we created a poster depicting our subject's main themes. For detailed information, please refer to the poster included in the [Appendix](#) (see p. 20).

In this poster, the thesis presented adopted a broader scope than the final version, as we deliberately kept the research window wide at first. The subject was introduced through a series of mobile messages exchanged among three junior technical writers. The conversation revealed an initial issue in Sara's fictional company: users asked questions in a technical documentation forum when they could not find answers in the documentation but received no answers. This

situation highlighted a lack of user feedback management and made us wonder about how our companies, and more specifically I.T. Support and Technical documentation teams, handle the collection, response, and integration of user feedback to improve technical documentation.

We were able to present this poster at the 13th International conference on Technical Communication at Université Paris Cité. The feedback we collected on our thesis was that we were not targeting the right teams as some technical writers did not have access to their users' feedback. Some technical writers were also suggesting that the documentation improvement was indeed intimately linked to either new functionalities of the product or user feedback. Therefore, we reformulated our thesis, focusing on the improvement of the documentation via user feedback, without mentioning a team in particular.

Survey

In order to discover what were the methods used in companies to handle the collection, response, and integration of user feedback to improve technical documentation, we created a survey in English. It was shared to our networks via a LinkedIn post and to the former UPC students via an email list.

The participants were asked to fill in the survey.

We were able to collect 19 answers from 16 different companies.

Interview

To explore how real-world feedback improves documentation, we interviewed members of a documentation team at a technology company. We grouped their insights into three main areas: feedback collection and processing, prioritization of updates, and AI adoption and perception.

Feedback collection and processing

Most feedback comes through the company's support team, either directly from customers or via updates to the internal FAQ. The team identifies recurring issues by scanning for keywords and patterns. "*We look for keywords and patterns to help figure out what might need improvement in the docs,*" one team member

explained. Once identified, these issues are shared with the documentation team and logged as JIRA tickets for tracking and prioritization.

Prioritization of updates

Not all feedback results in changes. Updates are made when the feedback is both relevant and impactful for the intended audience. “We try to be selective — it depends on how important the issue is, how many people it’s affecting, and whether it matters to the audience we’re writing for,” one respondent said. The team’s guiding question during review is: Would adding or missing this information confuse users? If the answer is yes, the update becomes a higher priority.

AI adoption and perception

The team has not yet integrated AI into its documentation authoring or publishing process, using it only in limited roles such as powering a chatbot for quick queries. Participants expressed concerns about AI-generated documentation, noting it often lacks context and human nuance. *“AI-generated content often feels a bit off... it can lead to confusing or badly structured content, which makes it harder to trust,”* one participant observed. While AI is seen as a useful supplementary tool, it is not considered ready to replace human-authored documentation.

The interview findings show a feedback loop driven largely by the support team, a selective approach to applying changes based on user impact, and cautious adoption of AI. Human judgment remains central to ensuring clarity, context, and trust in the documentation.

Results

Table 1 - Information on the survey participants:

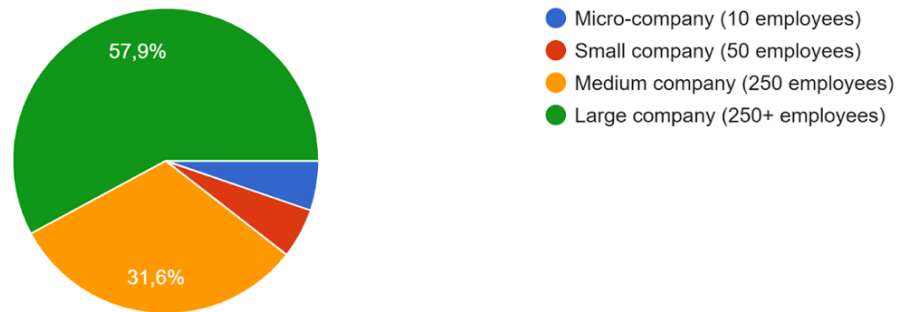
| Role | Company Size | Sector | Number |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| <i>Technical Writer</i> | <i>Large Company</i> | <i>Education Technology</i> | <i>2</i> |

| | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|---|----------|
| <i>Technical Writer</i> | <i>Medium Company</i> | <i>Information Technology</i> | <i>1</i> |
| <i>Technical Writer</i> | <i>Medium Company</i> | <i>Software and IT Services</i> | <i>2</i> |
| <i>Technical Writer</i> | <i>Medium Company</i> | <i>Information Technology</i> | <i>1</i> |
| <i>Technical Writer</i> | <i>Large Company</i> | <i>Defense and Engineering</i> | <i>1</i> |
| <i>Technical Writer</i> | <i>Medium Company</i> | <i>Cybersecurity</i> | <i>1</i> |
| <i>Technical Writer</i> | <i>Large Company</i> | <i>E-commerce Solutions</i> | <i>1</i> |
| <i>Technical Writer</i> | <i>Medium Company</i> | <i>Information Technology</i> | <i>2</i> |
| <i>Technical Writer</i> | <i>Large Company</i> | <i>Cloud Services and Infrastructure</i> | <i>1</i> |
| <i>Technical Writer</i> | <i>Large Company</i> | <i>Sound Systems and Speaker Technology</i> | <i>3</i> |
| <i>Technical Writer</i> | <i>Large Company</i> | <i>Artificial Intelligence Solutions</i> | <i>1</i> |
| <i>Technical Writer</i> | <i>Medium Company</i> | <i>Customer Experience and Contact Center Solutions</i> | <i>2</i> |
| <i>Technical Writer</i> | <i>Micro Company</i> | <i>Consulting Services</i> | <i>1</i> |

Question 1:

How large is your company?

19 réponses

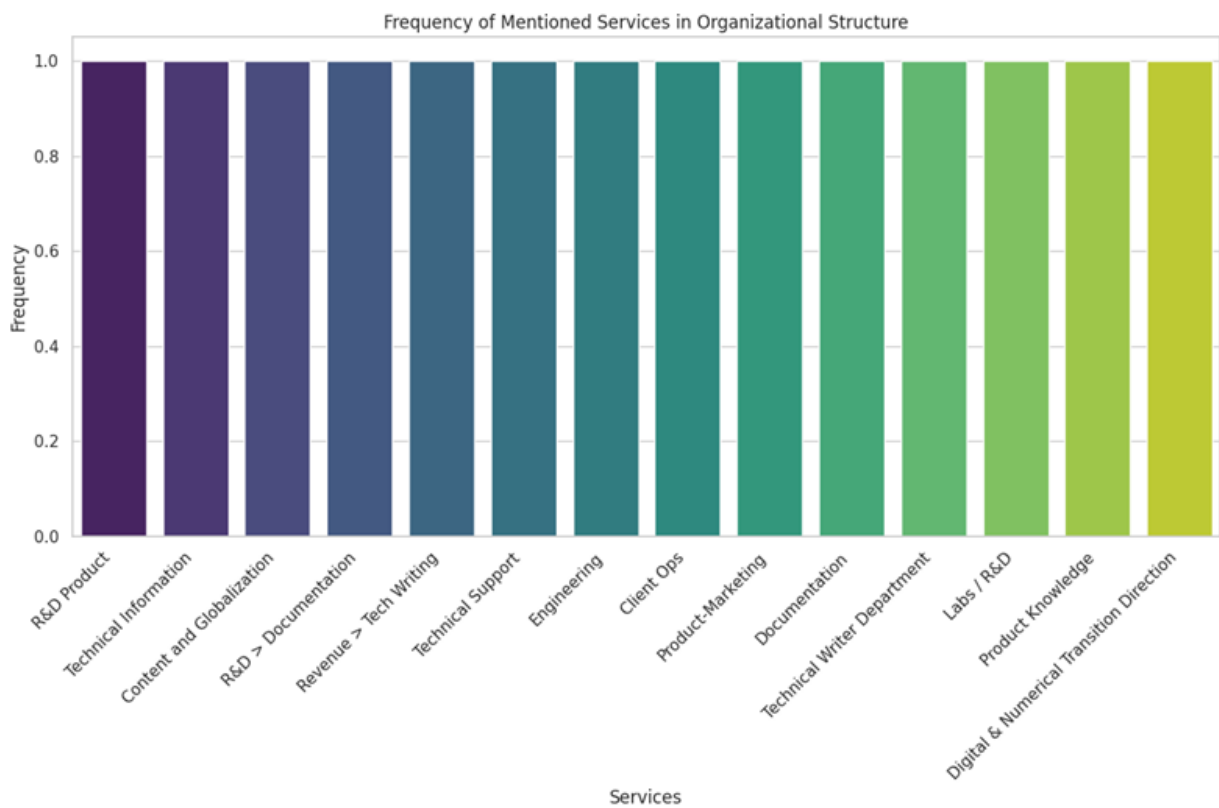


GRAPH 1 - Company size distribution

19 responses - 15 June

Question 2:

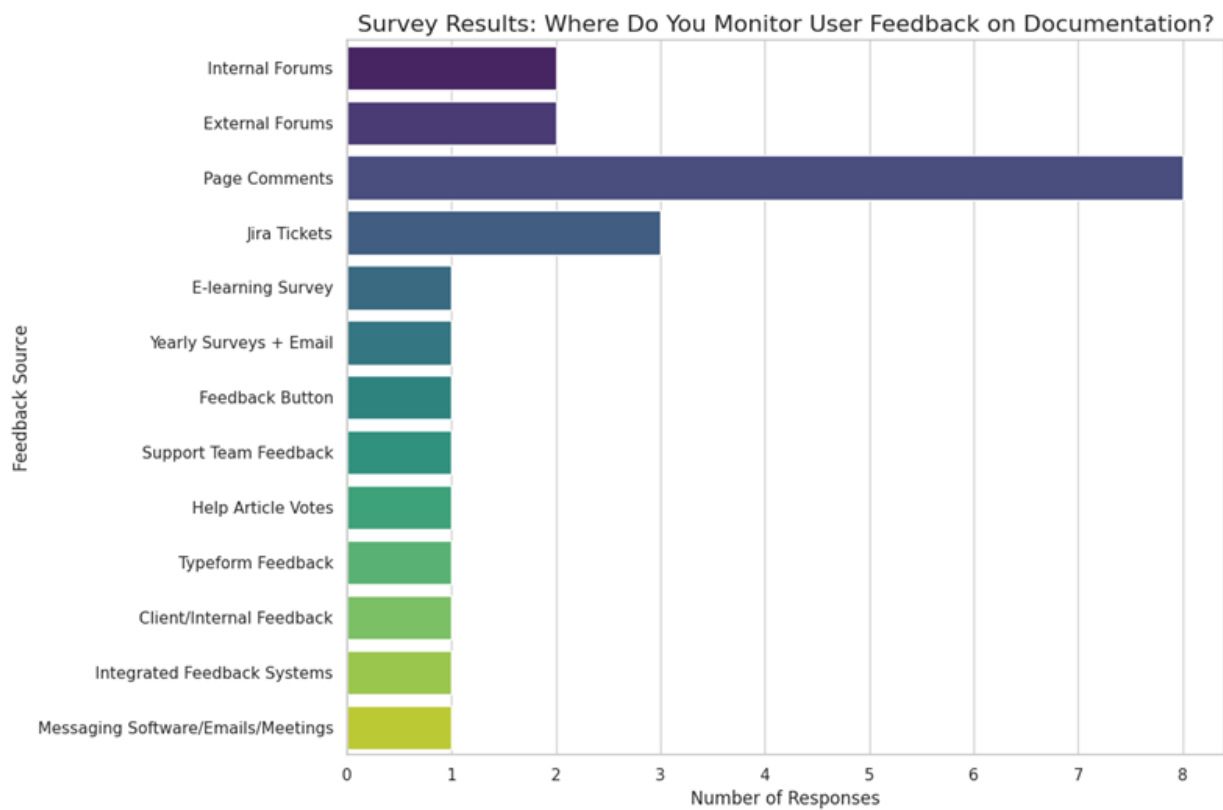
To which department are you attached in your company?



GRAPH 2: Departments responsible for documentation improvement

19 responses - 15 June

Question 3:

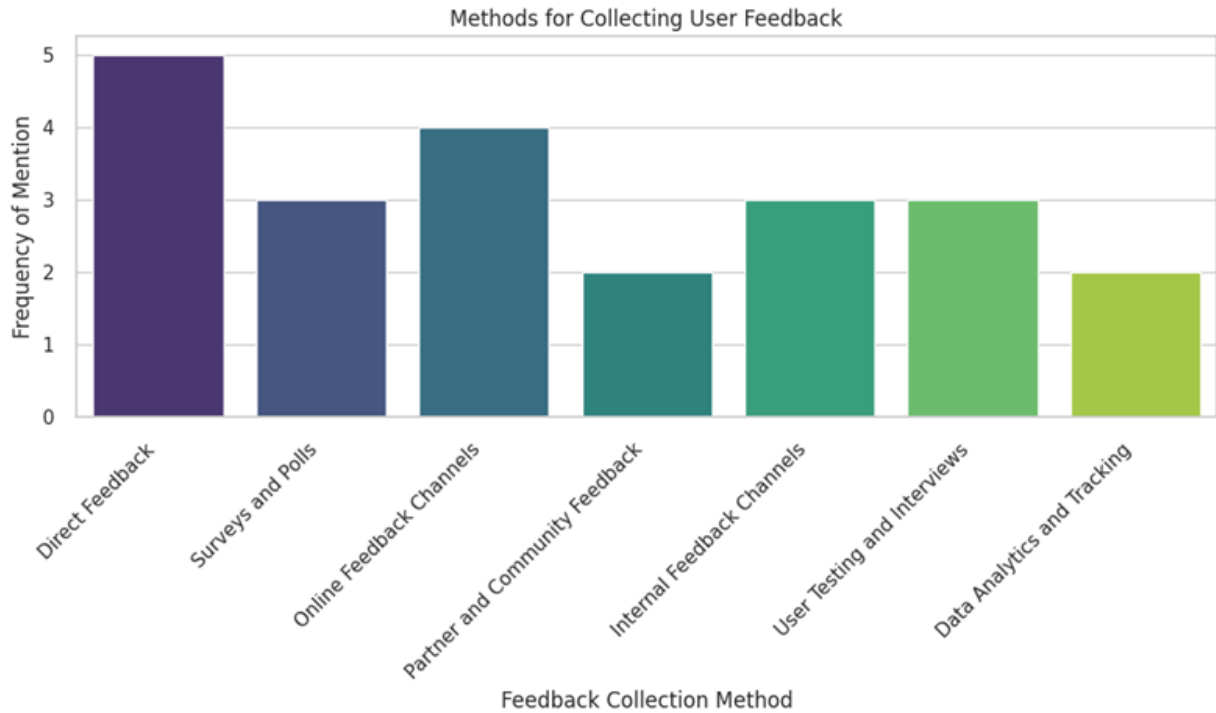


GRAPH 3: *User feedback monitoring*

19 responses - 15 June

Question 4:

What does your company do to collect user feedback on its products or services?



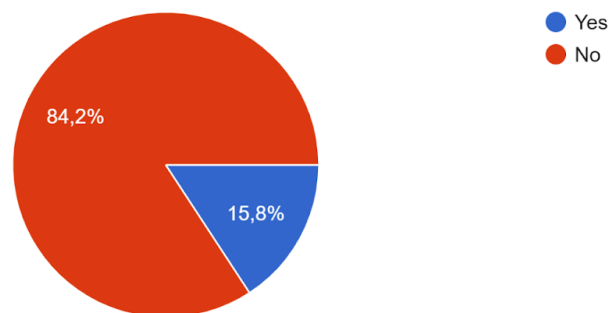
GRAPH 4: *Methods used to collect feedback*

19 responses - 15 June

Question 5:

Does your company use AI to analyze user questions and feedback?

19 réponses



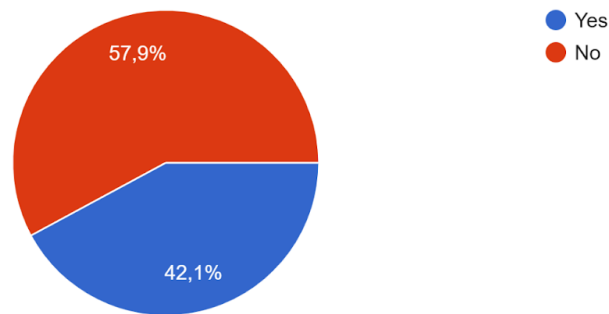
GRAPH 5: *Use of AI to analyse feedback*

19 responses - 15 June

Question 6:

Does your company use AI to answer user questions?

19 réponses

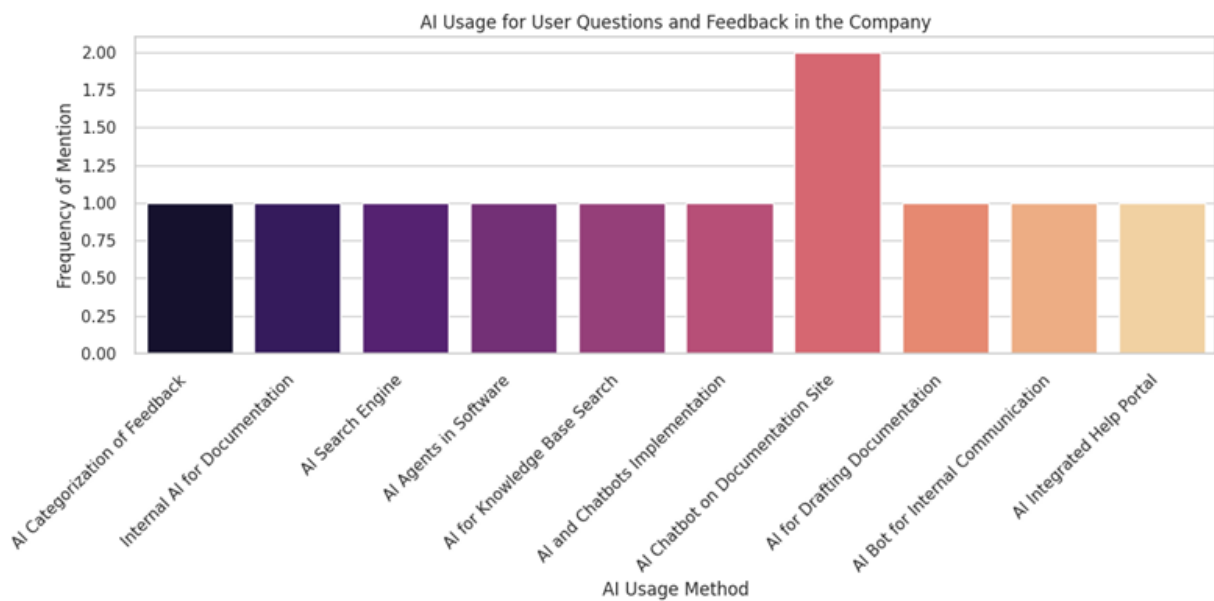


GRAPH 6: Use of AI to answer user questions

19 responses – 15 June

Question 7:

Can you give us more details about the use of AI for user questions and feedback in your company?

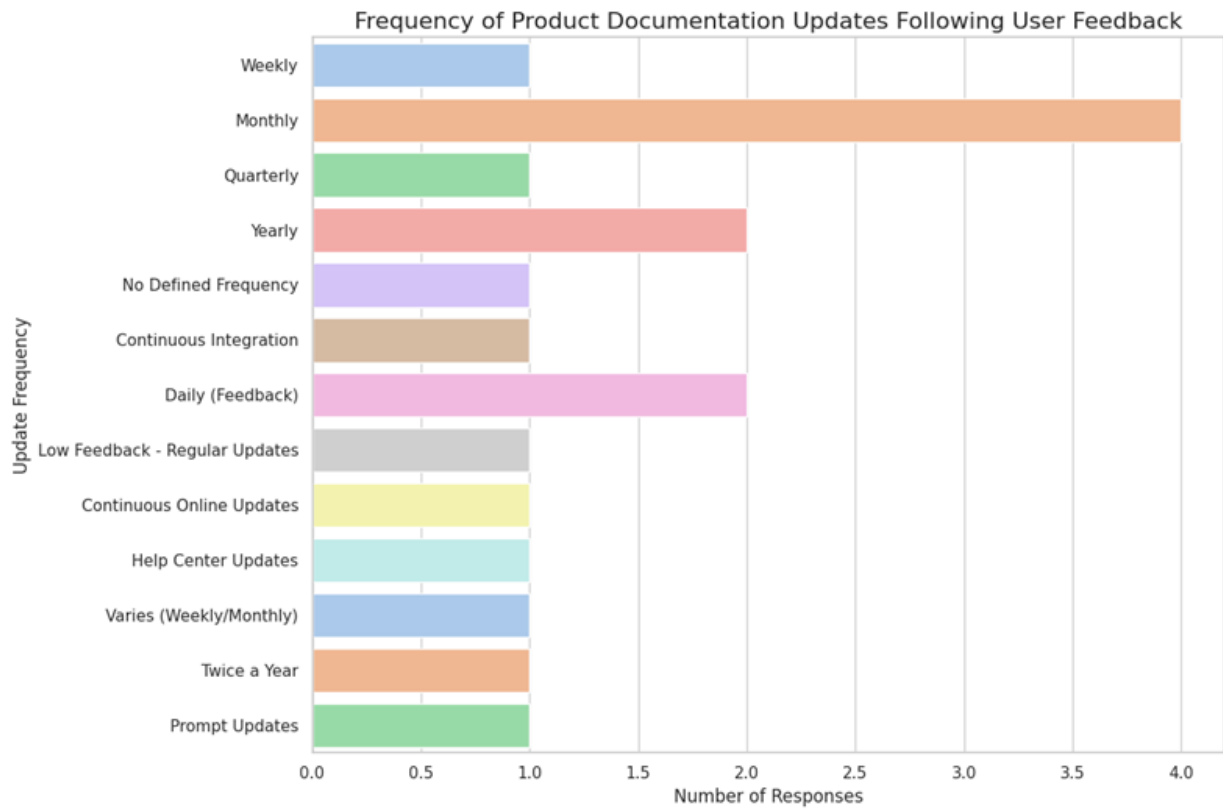


GRAPH 7: AI Usage Methods

19 responses - 15 June

Question 8:

How often do you update your product documentation following user feedback?

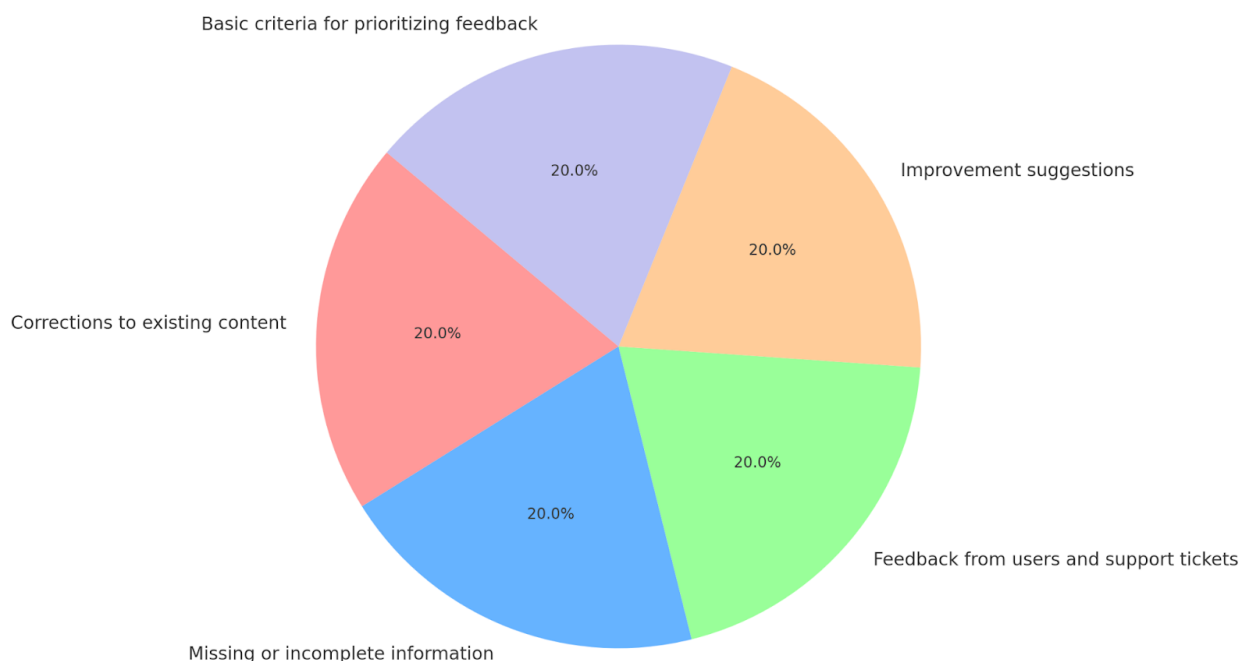


GRAPH 8: *Frequency of documentation updates based on feedback*
19 responses - 15 June

Question 9:

What type of user feedback leads you to update your documentation?

Types of User Feedback Leading to Documentation Updates



GRAPH 9 : Types of user feedback leading to documentation updates
19 responses - 15 June*

*As we got a lot of detailed answers to this question, we decided to sum up everything that was mentioned underneath this graph:

1. Corrections to existing content (inaccuracies, outdated info, wrong procedures), critical to any documentation workflow.
2. Missing or incomplete information (steps, use cases, undocumented features), highly relevant to users and content teams.
3. Feedback from users and support tickets, this grounds the updates in real-world use and shows responsiveness.
4. Improvement suggestions (screenshots, navigation, structure), valuable to readers interested in UX/content strategy.
5. Basic criteria for prioritizing feedback (impact vs. effort, constructive input), shows a realistic view of how feedback is handled.

Discussion

This research highlights both the importance and the complexity of using user feedback to improve technical documentation. As documentation shifts from compliance-oriented deliverables to user-centered products the role of feedback becomes increasingly central to ensuring relevance, clarity, and usability. This is especially true considering Graph 1, with 57.9% of our survey respondents working in large companies, where the complexity of the documentation ecosystems often requires strong feedback loops.

One of the most striking findings emerging from the data is that nearly a 1/3 of the user's questions are already addressed within the existing documentation. This indicates that the challenge lies not solely in content gaps, but in content discoverability and user engagement. This is further supported by the feedback collection data (see Graph 3), where comments on documentation pages were the most common source. This is showing that users do interact with docs, but often only when something is unclear. Many users, particularly from younger demographics, prefer to ask directly rather than search through documentation. This behavior aligns closely with Garousi's 2013 prediction in *Evaluating usage and quality of technical software documentation*, stating that future users would demand "dialogue rather than documentation." This behavioral trend is prompting to move toward more interactive and conversational documentation experiences, such as AI-powered chatbots, embedded FAQs, and contextual help systems.

However, the way feedback is collected and processed varies across sectors. In highly regulated sectors such as healthcare, feedback often passes through multiple intermediaries before reaching documentation teams, diluting its immediacy and clarity. In contrast, software companies tend to receive more direct user input, yet struggle with fragmented feedback channels. This fragmentation is reflected in Graph 3, where feedback is collected through a wide variety of sources like Jira tickets, forums, emails, internal platforms and more, with no single dominant channel beyond page comments. This dispersion makes it difficult to extract insights systematically.

Most organizations still lack structured feedback workflows. Updates are often reactive, based on repeated user confusion or missing content, with limited

governance or tooling. The diversity of update rhythms appears clearly in Graph 8. While some teams update their documentation monthly, weekly, or even daily, others do it only yearly or twice a year. This inconsistency suggests a lack of formal processes for integrating feedback into documentation cycles. Some teams work around this by running internal workshops or collecting feedback during training, as shown in Graph 4 where user testing, internal channels, and surveys are noted methods, but each only used by a minority.

AI presents promising ways to scale and streamline feedback analysis like retrieving answers directly from document content, clustering similar feedback, or detecting usage patterns. Yet, 84.2% of companies reported not using AI to analyze feedback (see Graph 5), highlighting a major underuse of technology in this area. Interestingly, 42.1% do use AI to answer user questions (see Graph 6), with implementations ranging from AI search engines to documentation drafting assistants and chatbots (see Graph 7). However, these tools rely on high-quality documentation and human review to avoid inaccuracies or bias. Used well, AI can enhance, but not replace, editorial judgment.

Ultimately, user feedback is essential for continuous improvement. But to have a real impact, it must be treated as a structured, ongoing process, and not as an afterthought.

Conclusion

Our findings demonstrate that user feedback significantly contributes to the improvement of technical documentation, especially when processes for collecting and responding to it are well integrated. As expectations around digital products evolve, documentation must do more than inform it must guide, adapt, and engage users.

However, this potential is often undermined by fragmented feedback channels, unclear responsibilities, and a lack of prioritization frameworks. In many cases, documentation teams operate reactively, updating content only when prompted by support tickets or internal requests, rather than proactively engaging with user insights. While AI tools offer new ways to process and surface patterns, their effectiveness depends on reliable content and continued human oversight.

In short, documentation must be treated as a living product, shaped by feedback, cross-functional collaboration, and strategic content design. Those who fail to adapt risk delivering content that's irrelevant, hard to find, or out of sync with real user needs.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, several recommendations appear for companies aiming to improve their documentation thanks to user feedback. Firstly, feedback collection must be made visible, accessible, and user-friendly. This includes integrating contextual feedback mechanisms directly into the documentation platforms, and exploiting multiple channels such as interactions, user interviews, and training sessions to capture a broad range of input.

Secondly, feedback must be centralized and processed through a structured workflow. Instead of letting feedback get lost in emails, teams should use shared platforms with tags and tracking tools.

Thirdly, the responsible use of AI should be encouraged. AI tools can play a powerful supporting role in detecting trends, clustering user feedback, and enhancing search interfaces. However, these systems must be trained on curated data, and their outputs should be reviewed by human experts. Moreover, documentation teams need to be trained in the use of these tools and aware of their limitations.

Finally, companies must create an environment where documentation is seen as a strategic asset and not as an afterthought. This requires investing in feedback analysis and ongoing collaboration between product, support, and content teams.

Mapping our findings to industry frameworks

To make our findings more actionable for technical communication, we compared them to the ISO 26514 standard, which defines the requirements for user documentation. This standard emphasizes aspects such as audience analysis, navigability, structured content, and maintenance planning. Our research supports many of these principles, particularly the need for improved content discoverability. For instance, our data shows that users often raise questions

already answered in the documentation, suggesting the issue often lies in how easily information can be located rather than in the content's accuracy.

Additionally, ISO 26514 promotes planning and review cycles for documentation updates. However, our results show that updates are frequently reactive rather than integrated into a formal review process. This indicates that while companies may fulfill some aspects of the standard in practice, they often lack the structured processes ISO recommends.

We also compared our findings to the documentation maturity model informally used by the Write the Docs community, which outlines the evolution of documentation practices across four stages: Initial, Emerging, Structured, and Optimized. Most companies in our study appear to fall between the Emerging and Structured stages. While feedback is gathered through various channels, its integration into documentation workflows is often inconsistent, and AI tools for analyzing feedback remain underused.

This suggests that many organizations are progressing in their approach to user-centered documentation, but have not yet reached a point where feedback drives continuous and proactive improvement. Mapping our findings to this maturity model highlights where efforts are concentrated today and where further development is needed.

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Appendix

Poster

Sara TIBINI - Merve Nur KARACAN - Naïs ANSALDI

WHAT DO TECHNICAL WRITING AND I.T. SUPPORT TEAMS DO WITH THE USERS' QUESTIONS ?

User forums | User Feedback Management | Users' questions collection | Documentation Updates +

Hey Sara, how's your onboarding going? You haven't told us anything!
10:10

Hey! It's going great, thanks! :)
I've already updated and published some docs for our software, "The Last CTM".
Here's the link: <https://the.last.ctm.doc.com>
10:12 ✓

Wow, looks amazing! Great doc!
10:14

Wait... There are so many unanswered questions?
10:16

Introduction is typing...

Oh yeah, that's surprising... I should address that. Questions could highlight missing info in my doc! Do you know how your companies deal with questions?
10:17 ✓

I have no idea...
10:19

Me neither!
10:22

Methodology is typing...

Let's investigate!
We could survey and interview companies on:

- How they collect user questions.
- How I.T. support teams respond.
- Whether questions help improving the docs.

10:25 ✓

I'm down! :)
10:39

References are typing...

Hey girls, I've been taking some time to reply because I was searching for resources!
I found these 5 articles to help us out while waiting for the companies' answers:

- FRITH, Jordan. Forum moderation as technical communication: The social web and employment opportunities for technical communicators. *Technical Communication*, 2014, vol. 61, no. 3, pp. 173-184.
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16:30

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Sociétés et Humanités
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