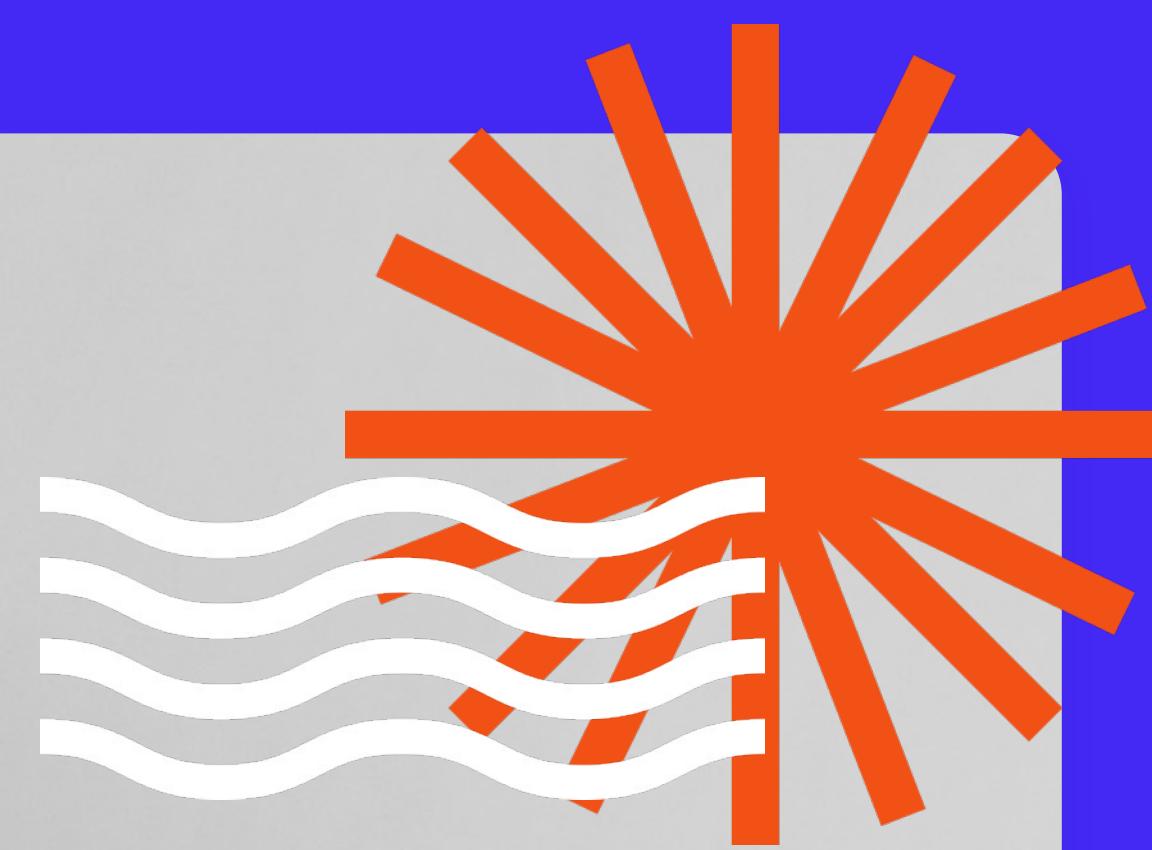


# SOUNDS PROFITABLE

THE  
BUSINESS  
OF  
PODCASTING

## Ad Nauseam

June 12, 2024



# SOUNDS PROFITABLE

THE  
BUSINESS  
OF  
PODCASTING

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NETWORK

libsyn ads

Paramount

npr

SignalHill  
Insights





# Methodology

## Goals

Ad Nauseam was designed to learn how people perceive **ad quality and quantity in podcasting**. Most people will say that they skip or ignore ads in any medium, but we also know that ads work! Ad Nauseam is a more nuanced look at what kinds of ads people skip, and their tolerance for repetition.

## Sample

Ad Nauseam is based upon an online survey of **1,011 Americans**, ages 18+, who indicated that they had listened to at least one podcast in the last week. The data was weighted using data from the US Census and Sounds Profitable's 2023 study, **The Podcast Landscape**.

## Methods

Respondents took an online survey designed to ascertain their tolerance for advertising in podcasts in a variety of ways, including the number of ads per podcast, the number of ad breaks in a podcast episode, drivers for ad skipping, and the effect of repetition.

## Direction

Ad Nauseam was designed by **Sounds Profitable's Tom Webster**, who has been the driver for nearly two decades of podcasting studies and a leading expert in audience research. The study was produced in partnership with leading audio research firm **Signal Hill Insights**.



## Podcast Ads Work.

---

Sounds Profitable Ad Research:

After These Messages

...We'll Be Right Back

Safe and Sound

The Medium Moves the Message

Sound You Can See

The Ad Bargain

Ad Nauseam



### The Right Audience

Podcast listeners are more than a generation younger than radio and TV consumers, more likely to subscribe to ad-free content, and more likely to be affluent decision-makers.

### The Right Medium

Because podcast listeners are less inundated with messages, they pay more attention to the messages they choose to be receptive to - with podcasts leading the way.

When was the last time you heard a podcast that had advertisements in it?

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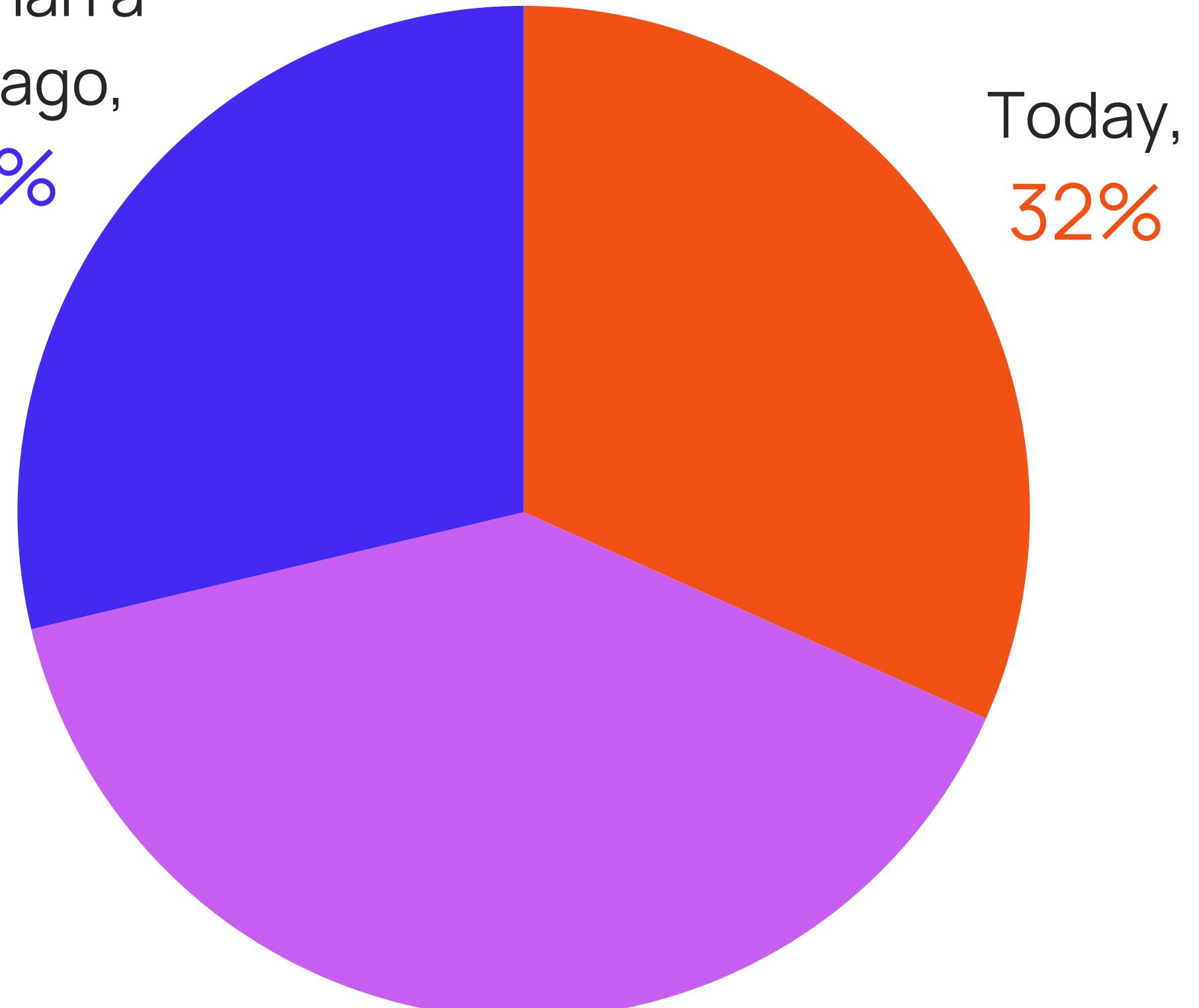
libsyn ads



ESPN Podcasts



Less than a week ago,  
29%



A pie chart illustrating the distribution of responses regarding the last time they heard a podcast with ads. The chart is divided into three segments: a purple segment representing 40% (labeled "Yesterday, 40%"), an orange segment representing 32% (labeled "Today, 32%"), and a blue segment representing 29% (labeled "Less than a week ago, 29%").

Time Since Last Heard Ads	Percentage
Yesterday	40%
Today	32%
Less than a week ago	29%

Yesterday,  
40%

Today,  
32%

When listening to a podcast, how do you feel about the ads?

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libsyn ads

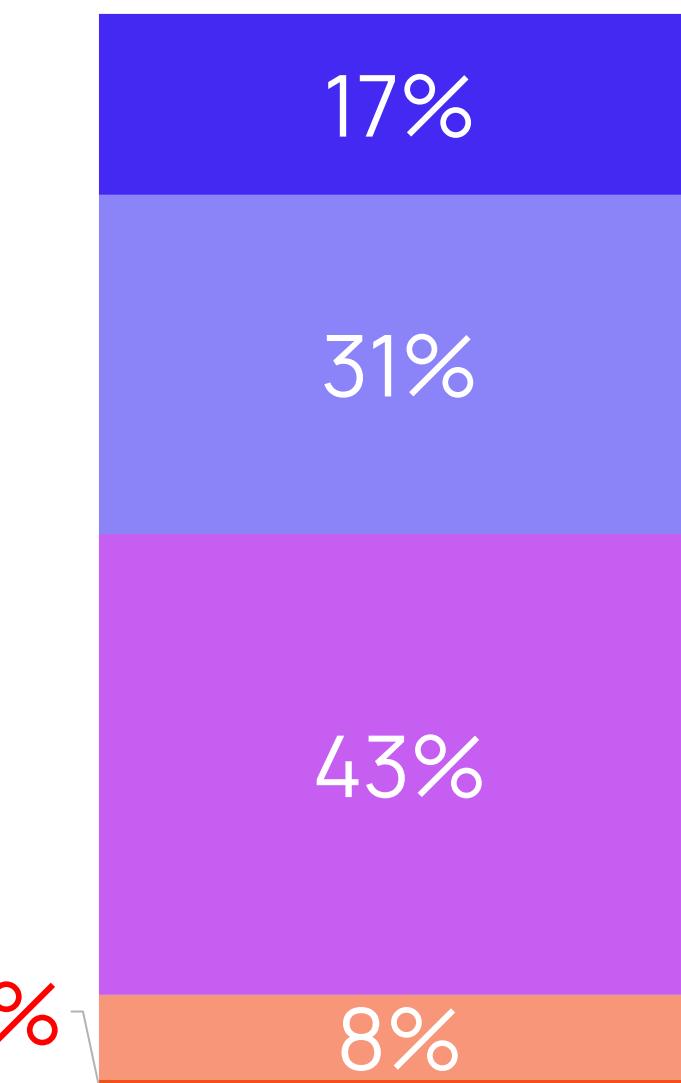


ESPN Podcasts



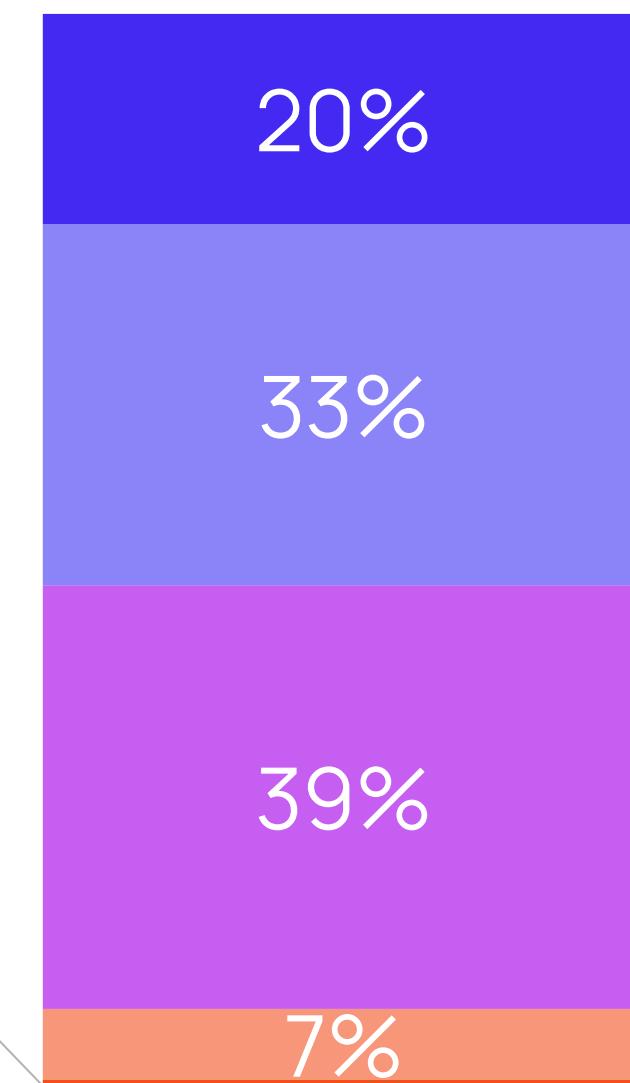
## TOTAL Enjoy/Don't Mind

48%

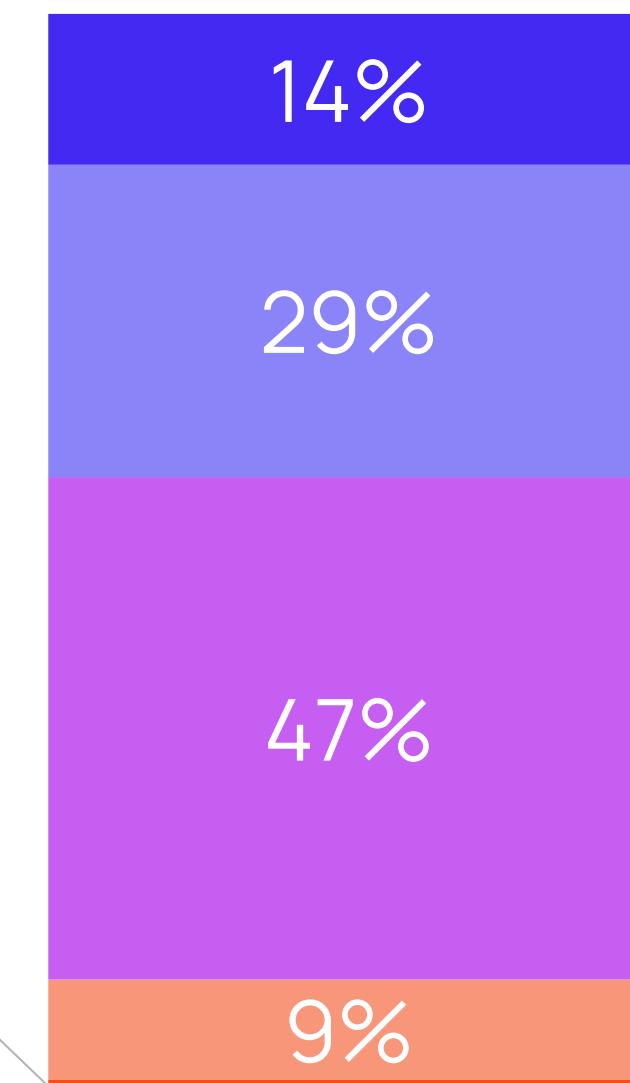


By gender

53%



43%



TOTAL

Male

Female

- Generally enjoy them
- Slightly annoying but tolerable
- Intolerable
- Don't mind them
- Disruptive and barely tolerable

When listening to a podcast, how do you feel about the ads?

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libsyn ads

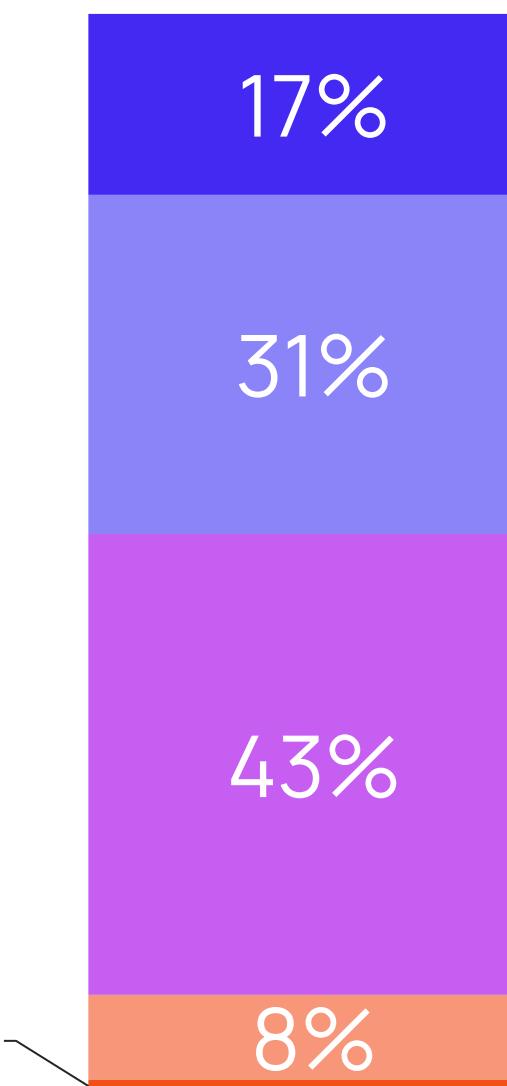


ESPN Podcasts

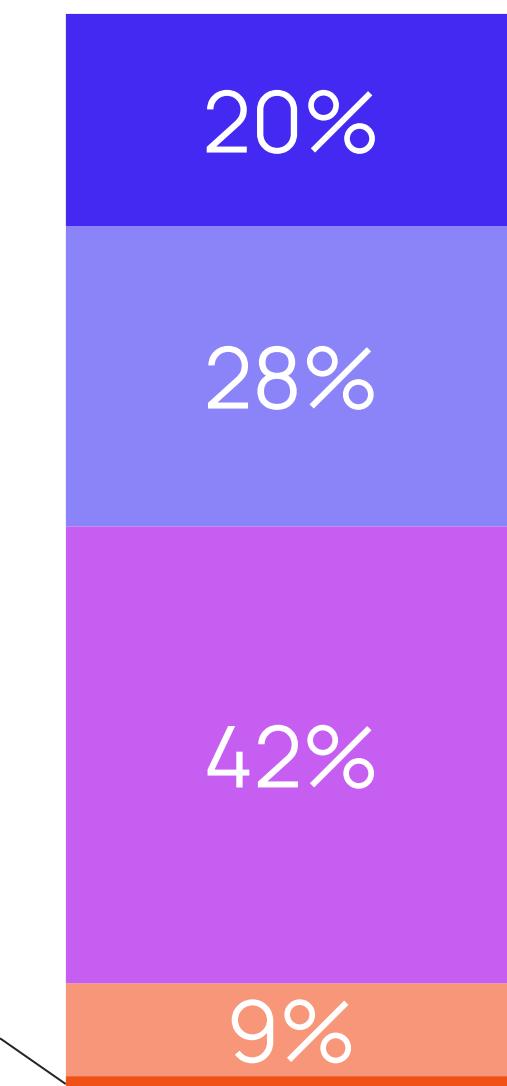


## TOTAL Enjoy/Don't Mind

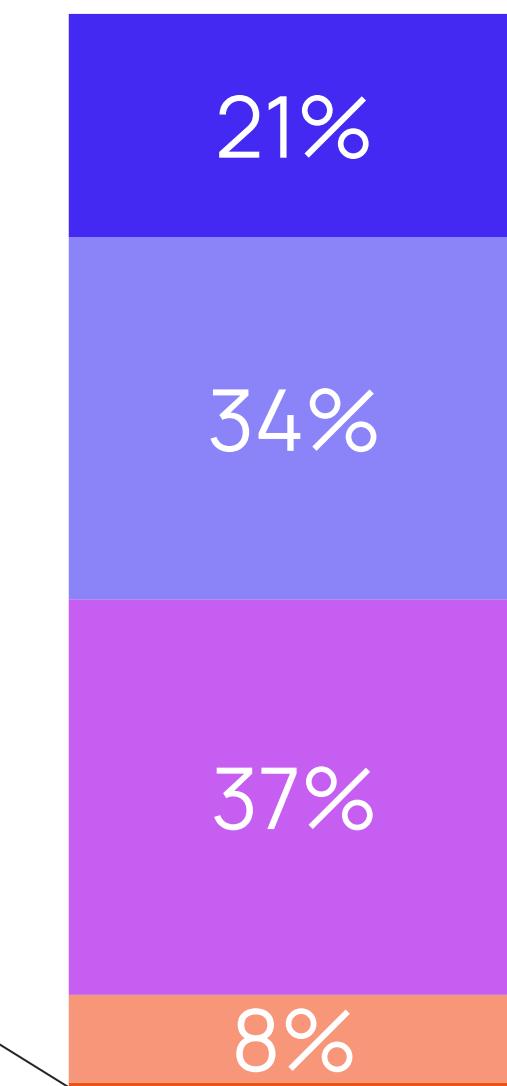
48%



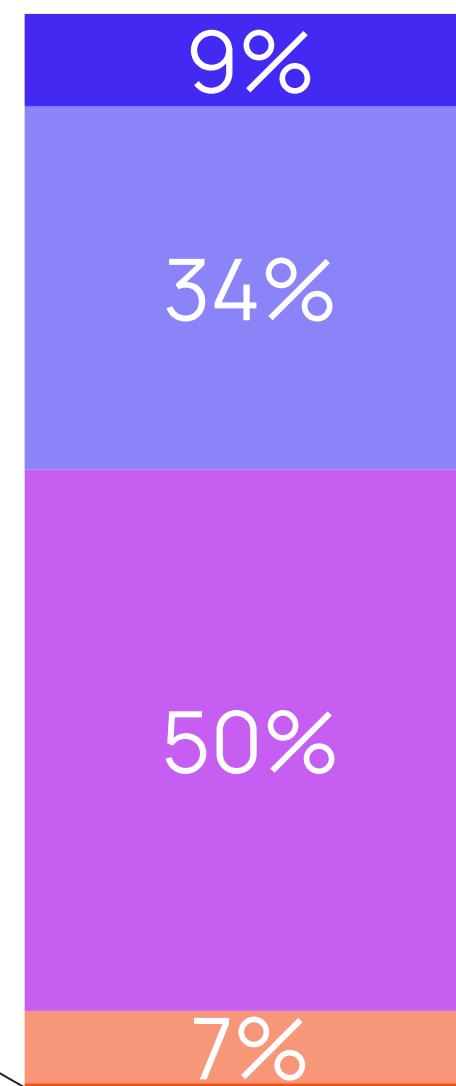
48%



55%



43%



By age

TOTAL

Age 18-34

Age 35-49

Age 50+

■ Generally enjoy them

■ Slightly annoying but tolerable

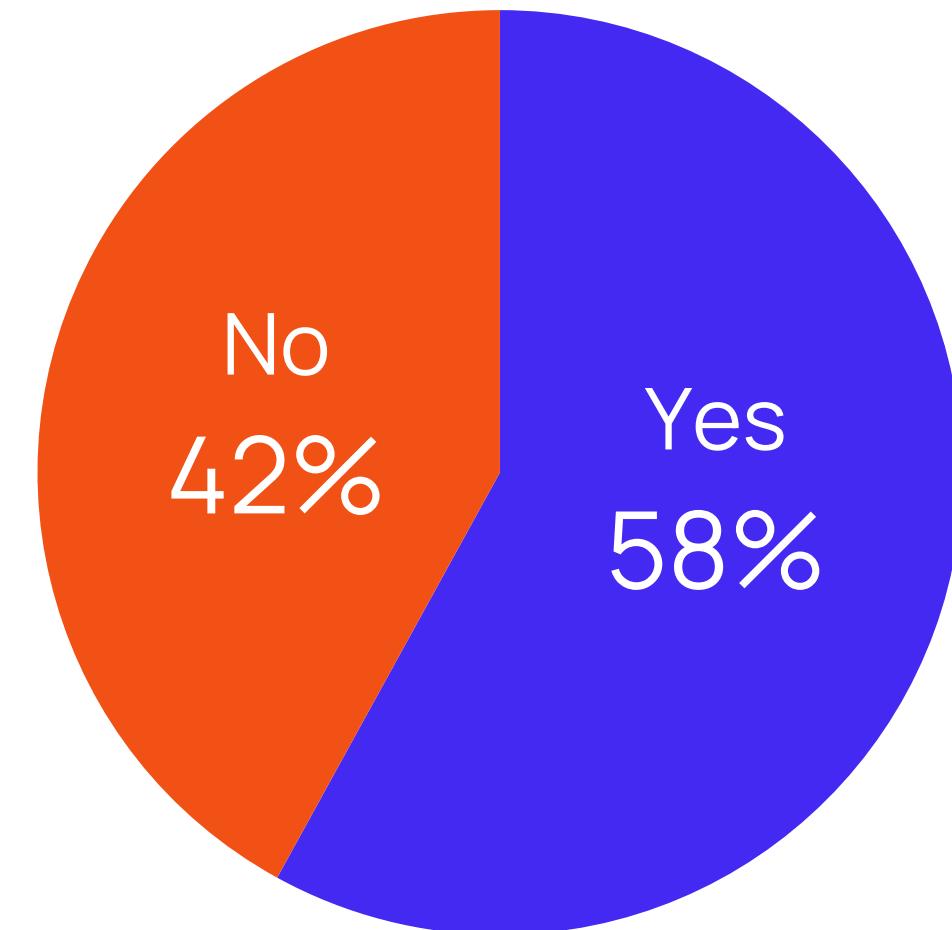
■ Intolerable

■ Don't mind them

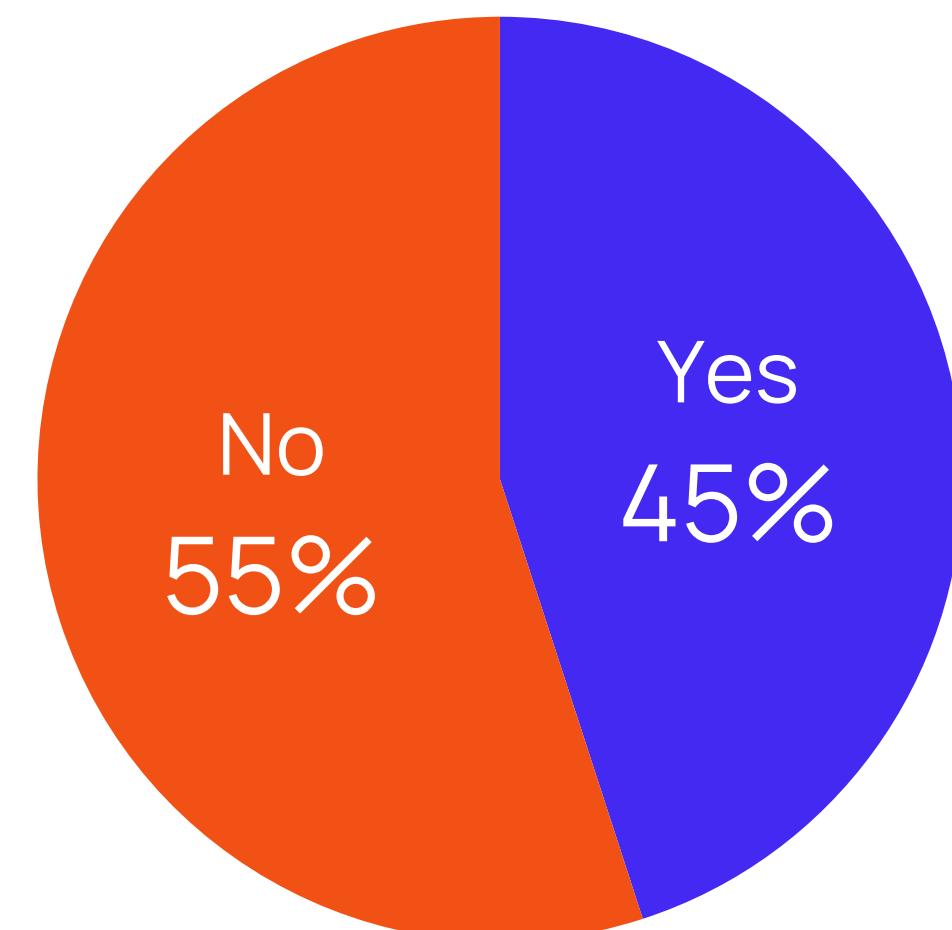
■ Disruptive and barely tolerable

# Have you ever...

...discovered a product or service you liked through a podcast ad?



...purchased a product because of an ad you heard on a podcast?



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Insights



# Ad Skipping

Most consumers tend to overstate how often they skip ads when asked hypothetical questions. Digital video recorder researchers have been aware of this phenomenon for decades!

01

skip

How do you typically react when an ad starts playing during a podcast?

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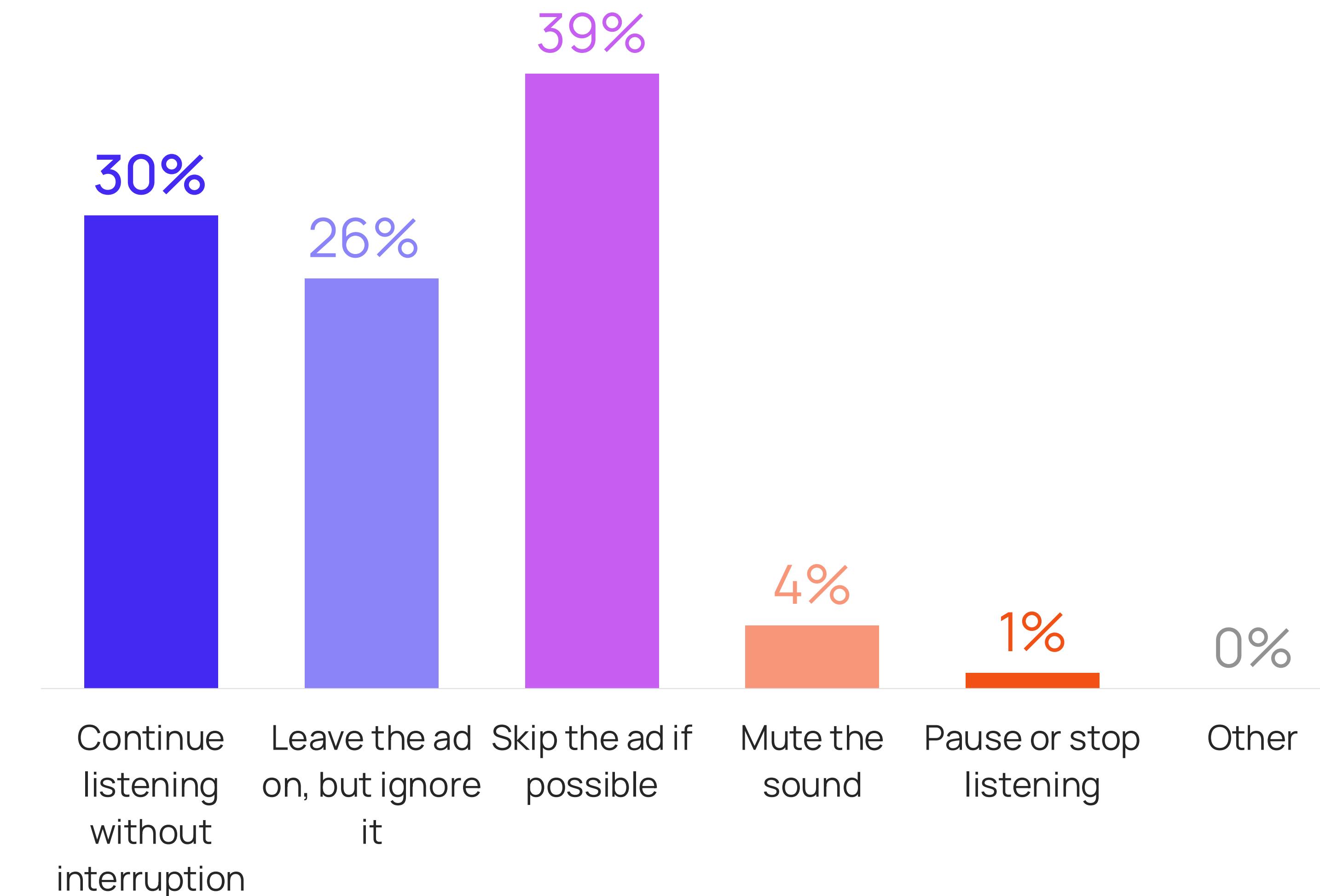
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Insights





# Ad Skipping

...however, grounding the question in a specific, familiar podcast reveals a different result.

01

skip

Think of the last podcast episode you listened to that contained ads. How did you react to them?

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libsyn ads

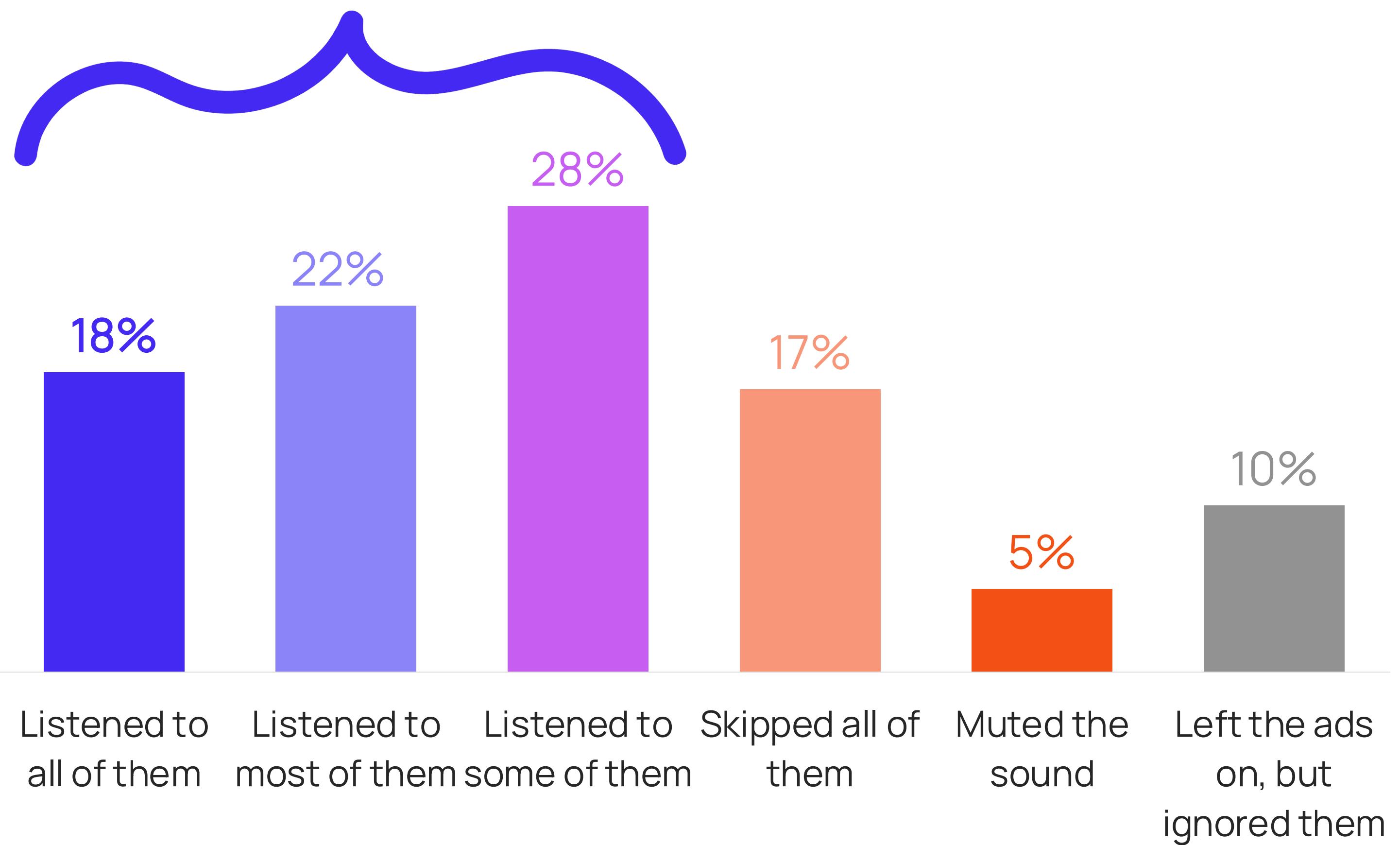
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Insights

68% listened





# Ad Skipping

Still, ad skipping does occur, as it does in any ad-supported medium.

01

Ad  
Skipp

# How often do you skip ads on your favorite podcast?

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ESPN Podcasts

 betterhelp

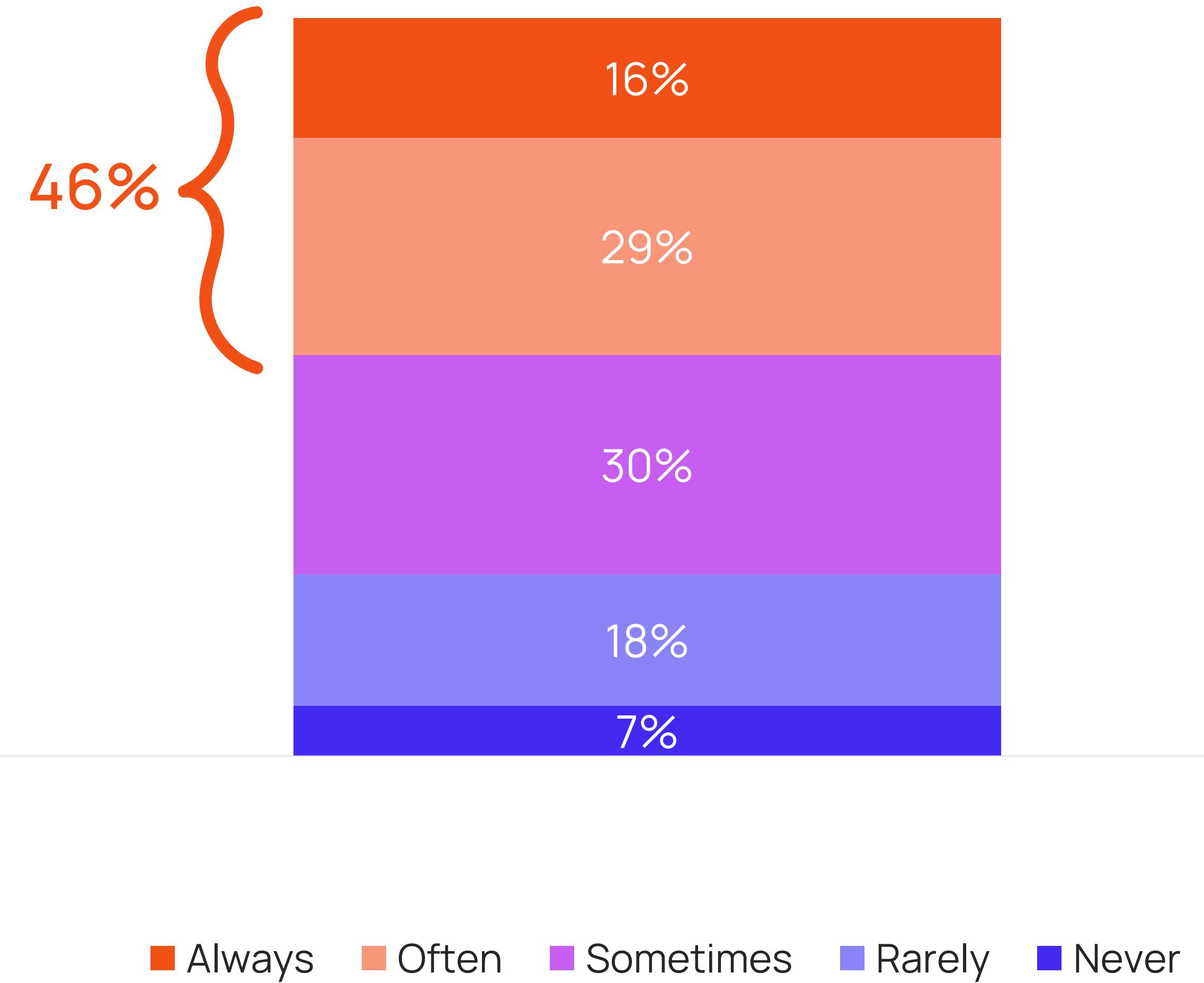
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 Paramount

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# How often do you skip ads on your favorite podcast?

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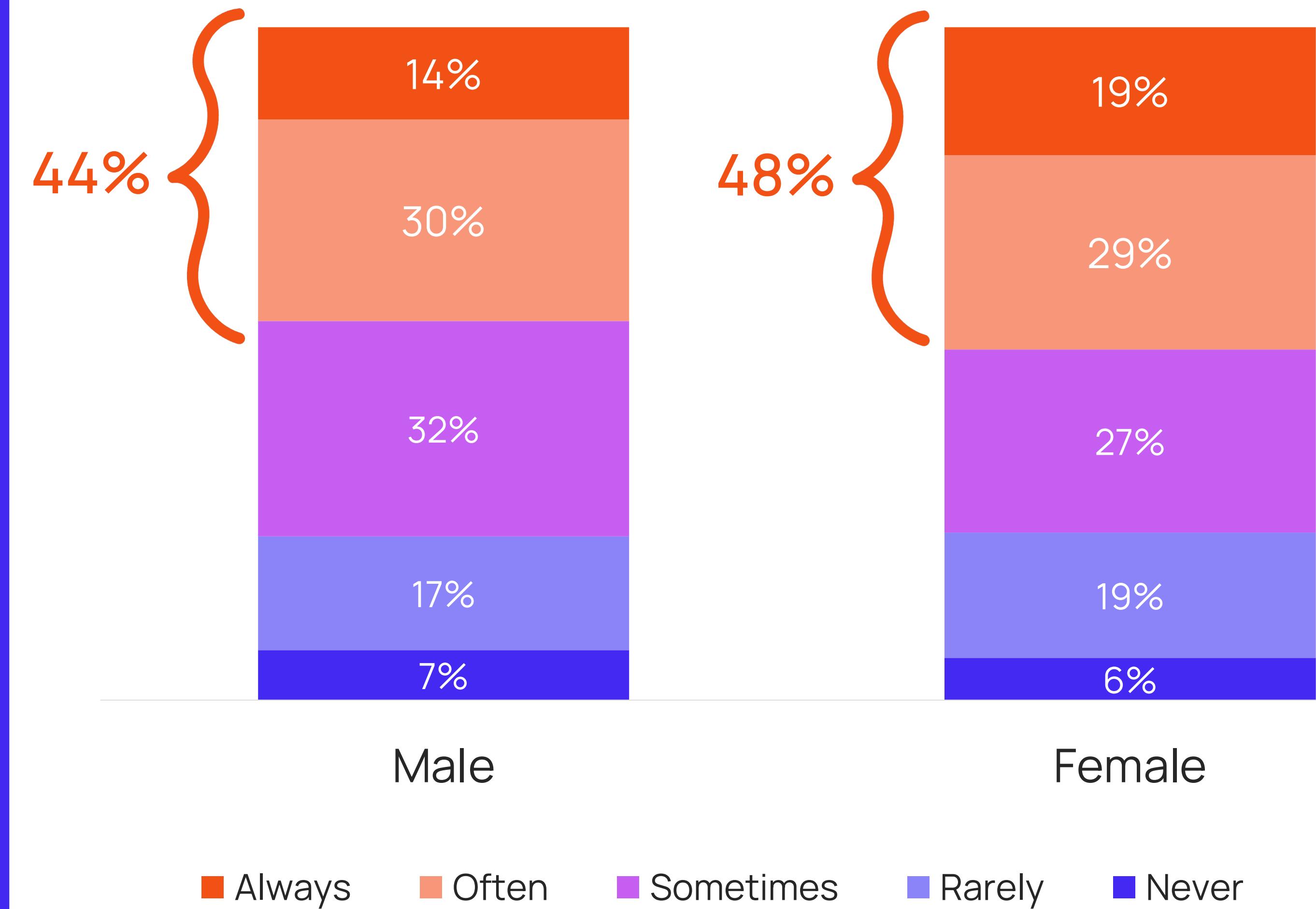
ESPN Podcasts



libsyn ads



By gender



How often do you skip ads on your favorite podcast?

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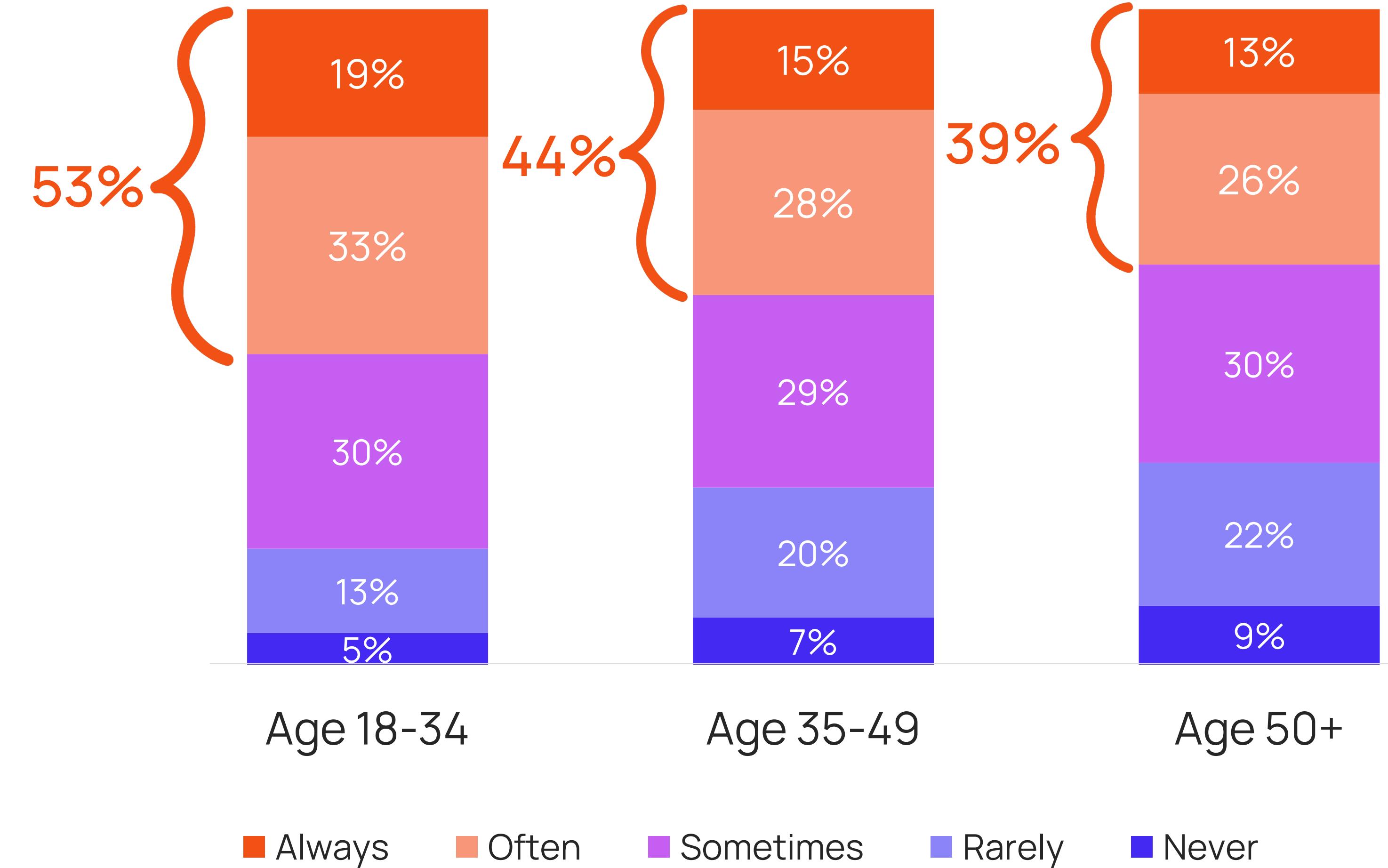
libsyn ads

Paramount

npr

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Insights

By age





# Ad Skipping

The reasons behind ad skipping are myriad and not solely down to a single motivation. The creators and hosts themselves, however, do play a role.

01

skip

Are you more likely  
to skip ads in your  
favorite podcast  
compared to podcasts  
you've just started  
listening to?

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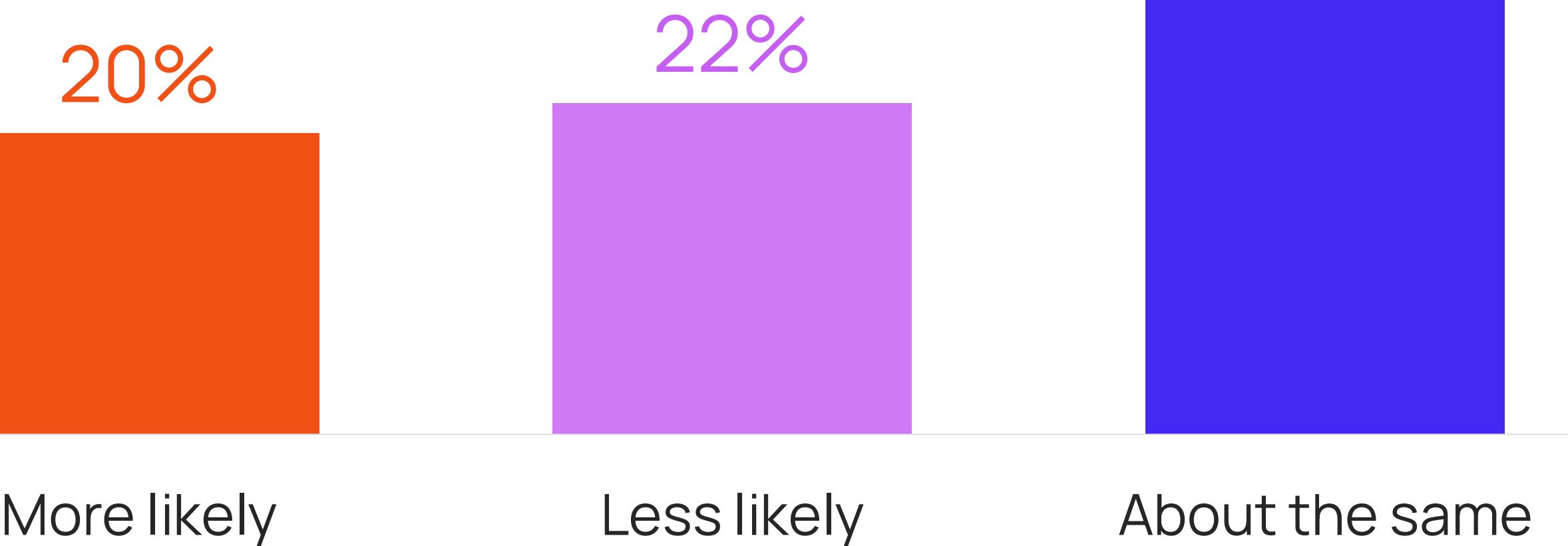
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Do you believe skipping ads affects your support for your favorite podcast?

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25%

59%

16%

Yes, it might reduce financial support for the podcast

No, it doesn't affect my support

Unsure



# Ad Skipping

Ultimately, when asked about how often they **pay attention** to ads, podcast listeners are the *most* attentive media consumers

01

skip

Users of each medium who “watch or listen to all of the ads” they encounter on...

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Spreaker  
From iHeart

WONDERY

ESPN Podcasts

betterhelp

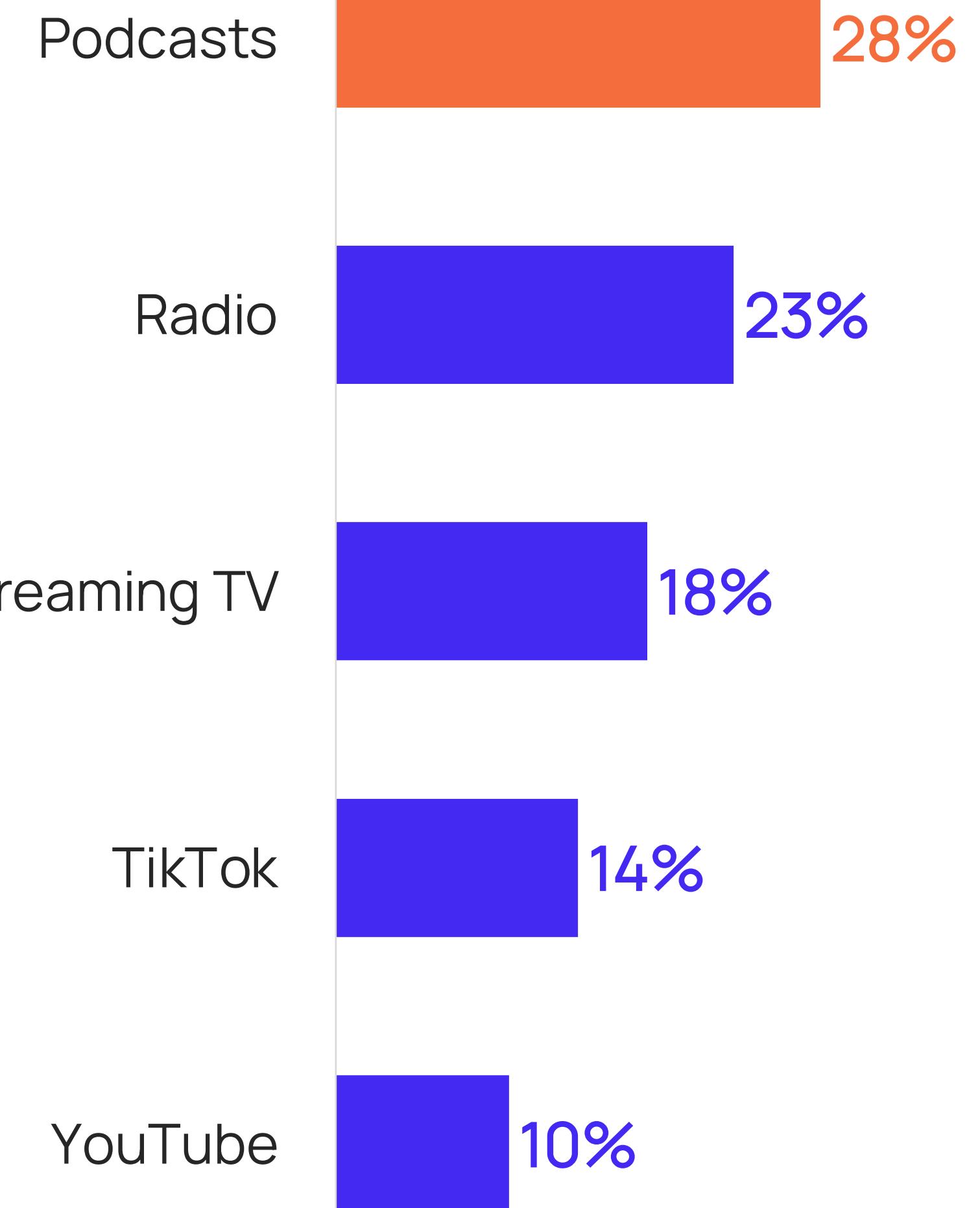
SiriusXM PODCAST  
NETWORK

libsyn ads

Paramount

npr

SignalHill  
Insights



Source: *The Ad Bargain*, Sounds Profitable (2024)



## Ad Quantity

When it comes to “how many is too many,” there may not be one single answer, but there are consumer expectations of this number that need to be considered.

02

ad  
sp  
n

Have you ever stopped listening to a podcast altogether because you felt it had too many ads, in general?

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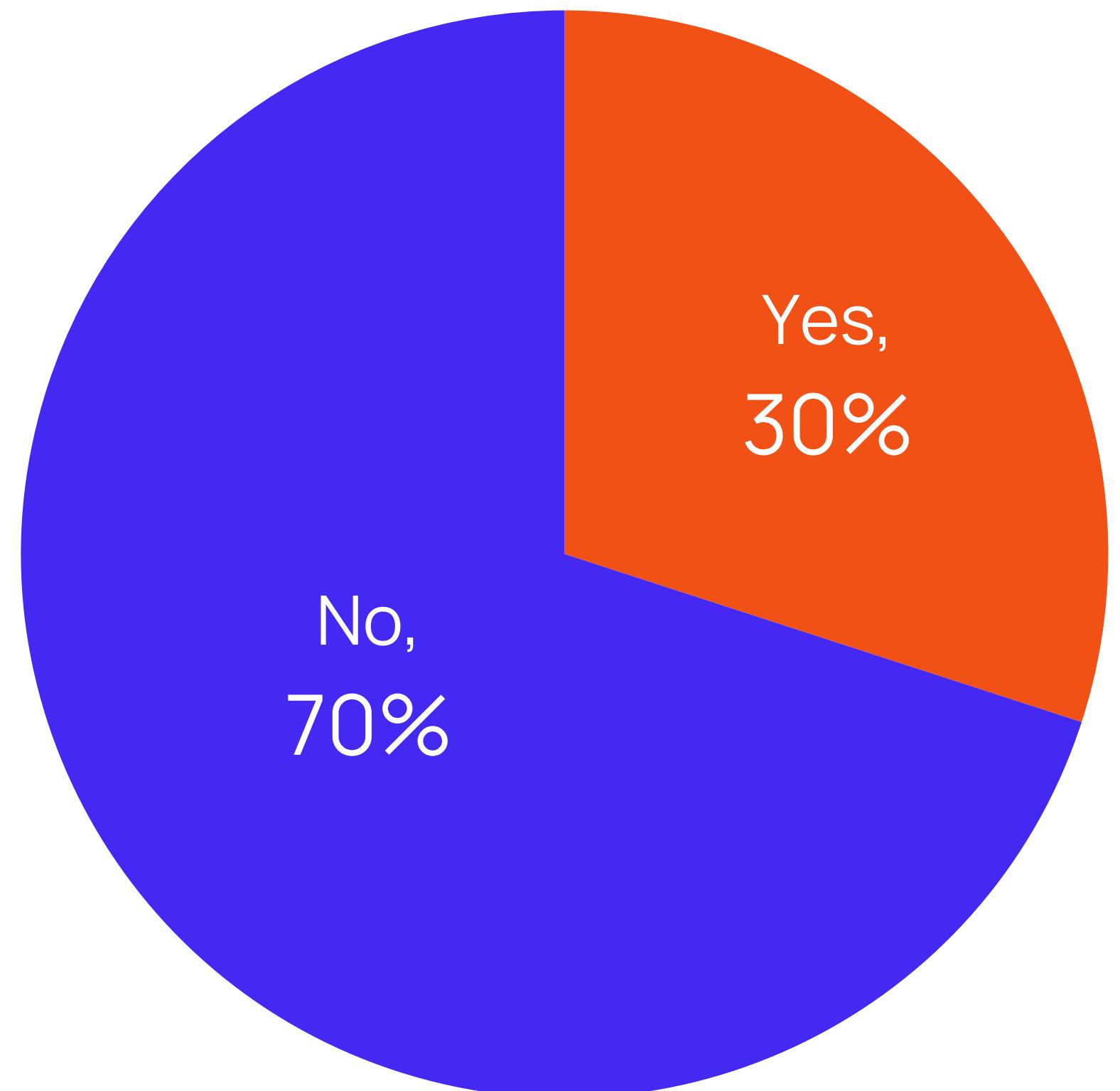
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How many ads do you recall hearing in the last podcast episode you listened to that contained ads?

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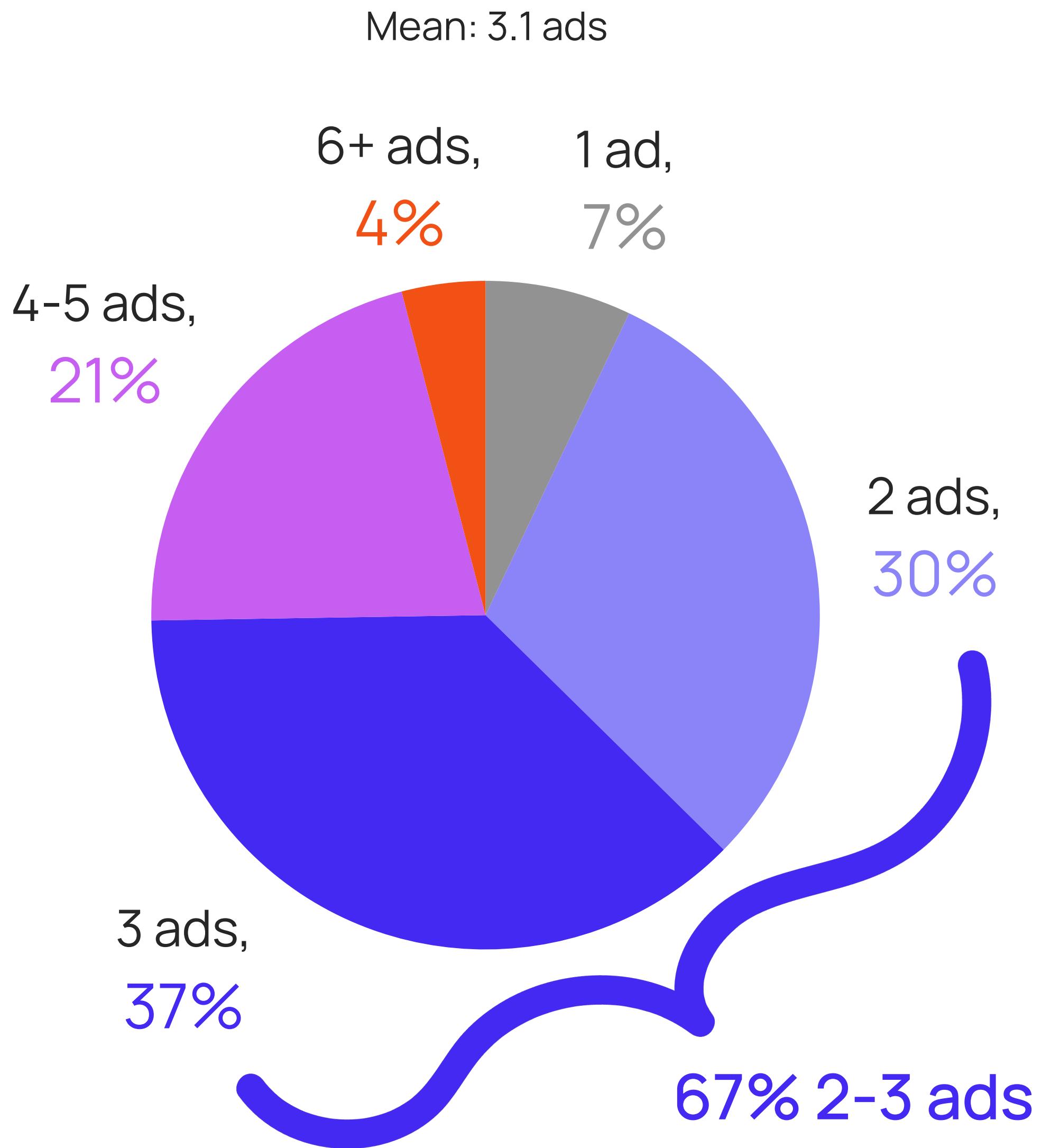
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libsyn ads



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Thinking again of the last podcast episode you listened to that contained ads. In your opinion, were there too many, fewer than expected, or just the right number of ads?

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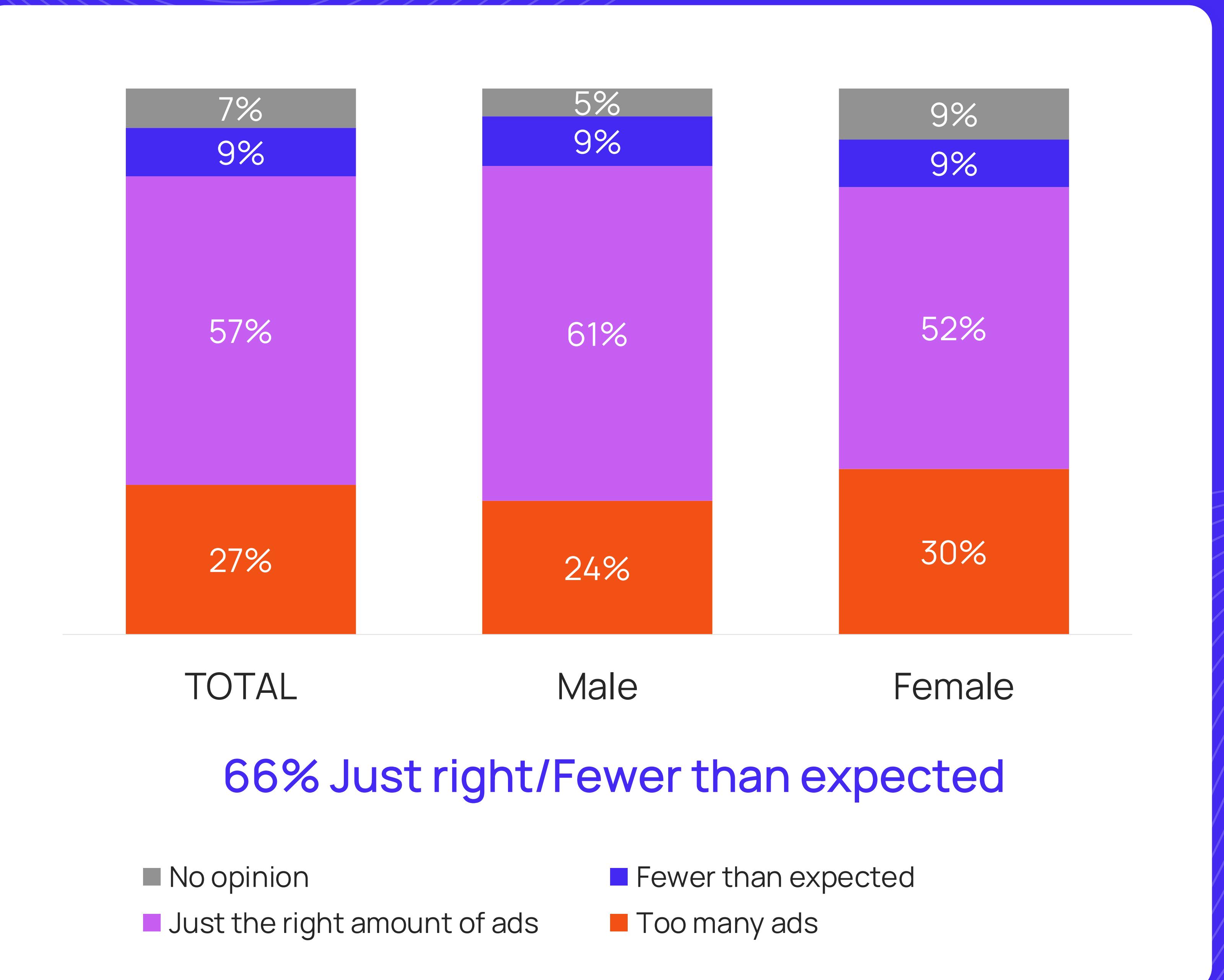
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libsyn ads



npr



In your opinion, were there too many, fewer than expected, or just the right number of ad breaks?

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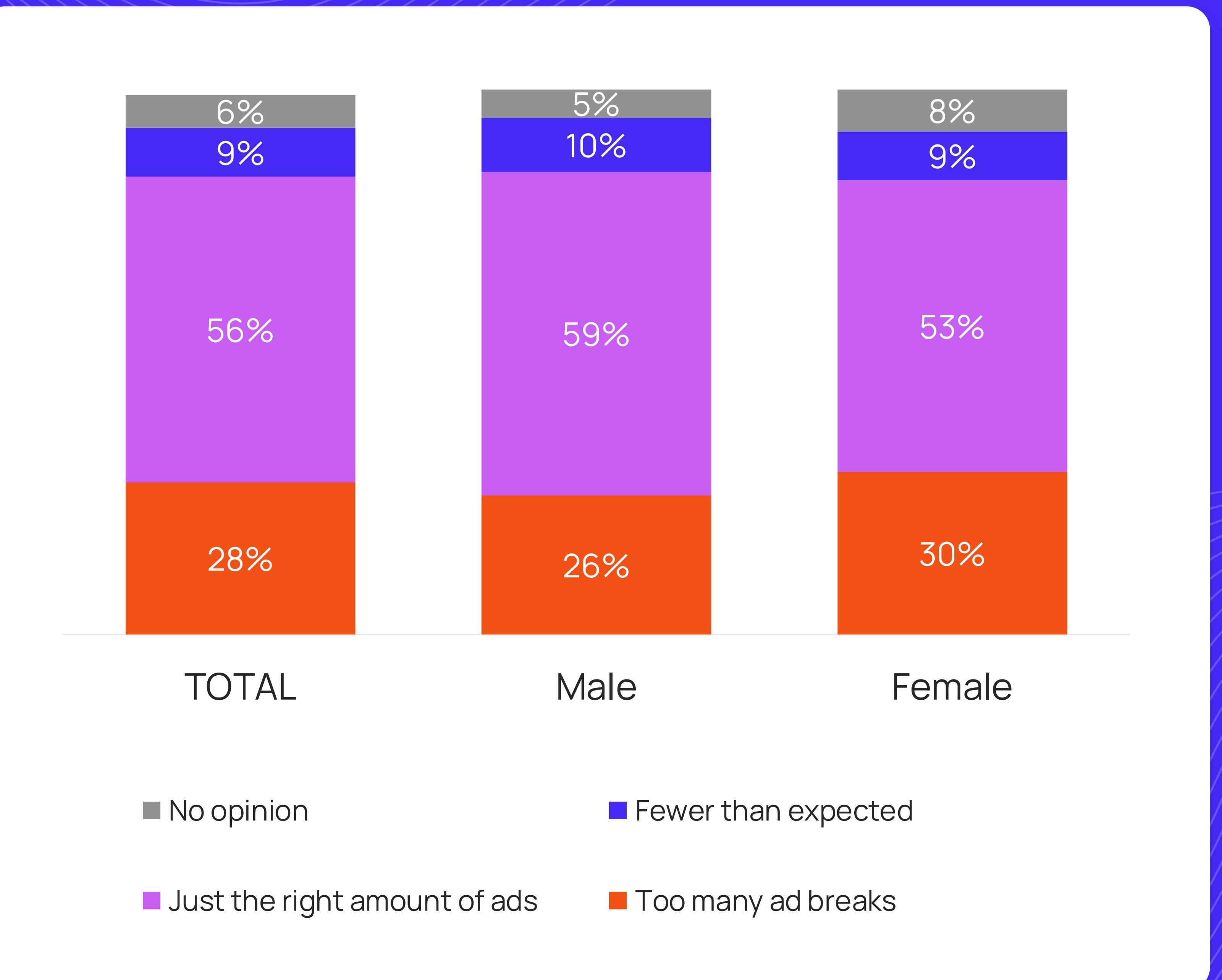
libsyn ads

npr

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Think about your favorite podcast that also has ads. How many total ads do you expect to hear in a typical episode of that podcast?

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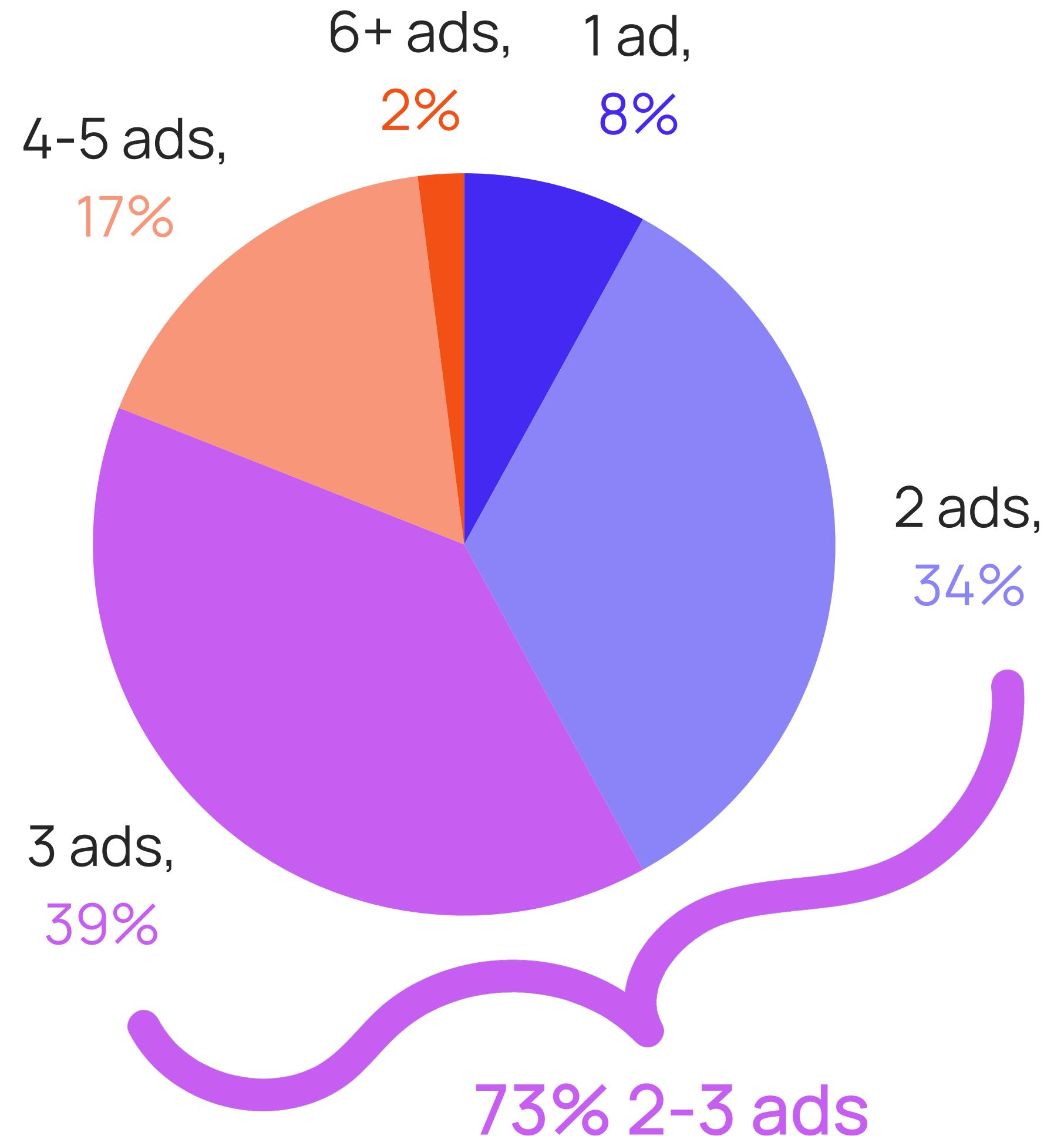
libsyn ads



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Mean: 2.9 ads





02

## Ad Quantity

While the actual number of ads that feature in a listener's favorite show may exceed that, the general sense is that perceiving 2-3 in a typical episode is "just right"...but consumers are forgiving.

If an episode of your favorite podcast had more ads than you expected, what would you likely do?

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SiriusXM PODCAST NETWORK

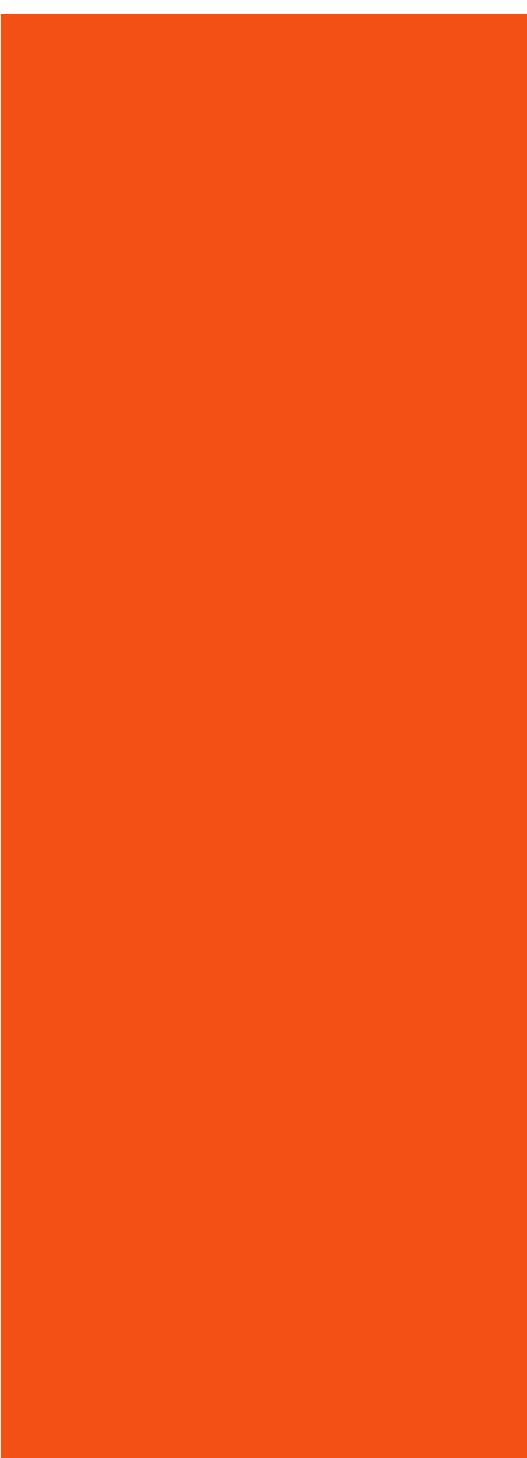
libsyn ads

Paramount

npr

SignalHill  
Insights

74%



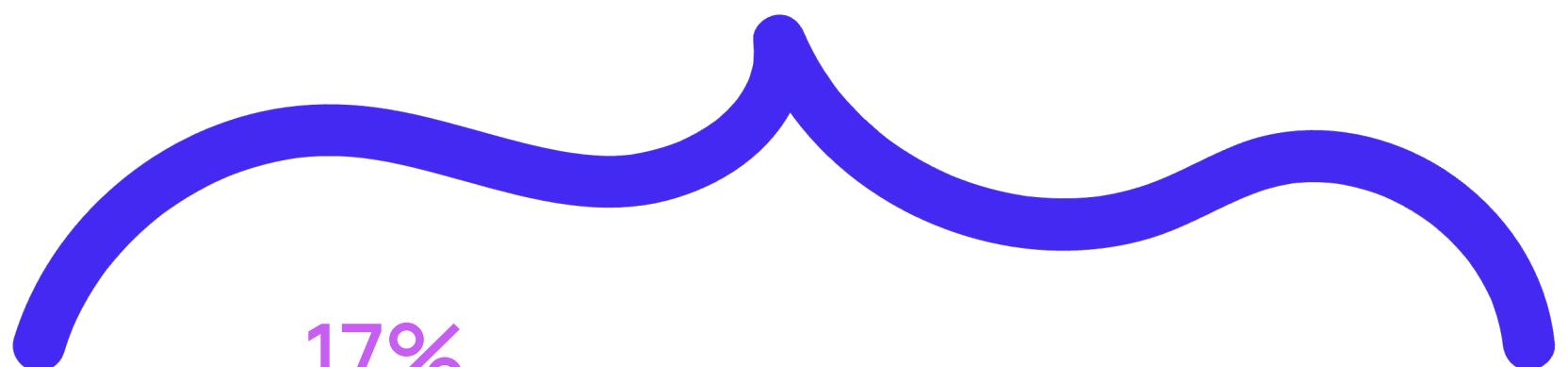
Listen as I normally do

17%



Stop listening to that episode

26%



9%



Consider unsubscribing from the podcast

Imagine your favorite podcast has an episode that is twice as long as usual, but you hear more ads compared to a typical episode. How would this impact your listening?

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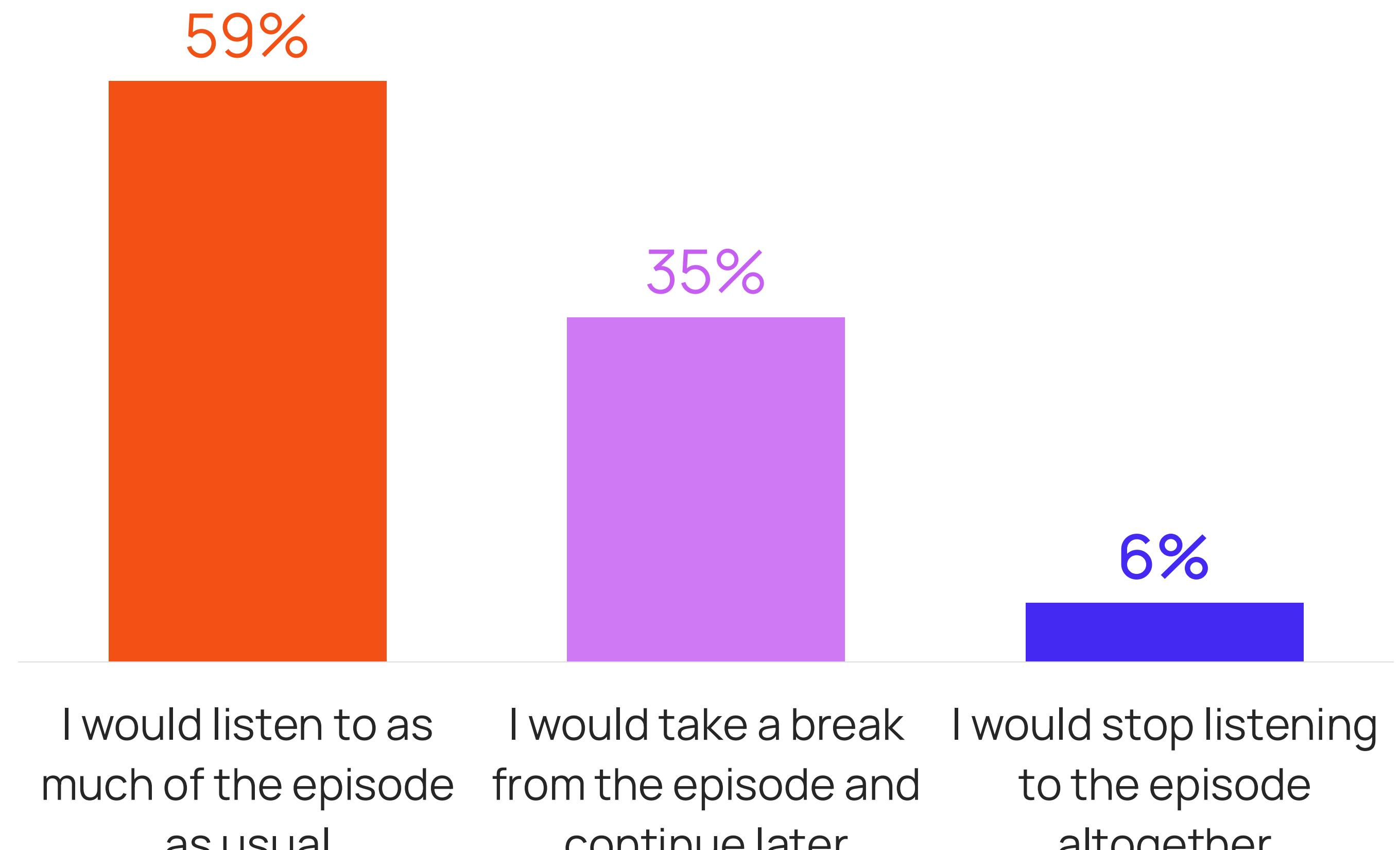
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NETWORK

libsyn ads

Paramount

npr

SignalHill  
Insights





# Structure and Positioning

Consumers are not reliable narrators of the quantity of ads in a given piece of content, however. One factor that influences perception is how ads are placed in the context of a show.

03

Sp  
u  
x

How many times was there an ad break in the podcast episode that you heard?

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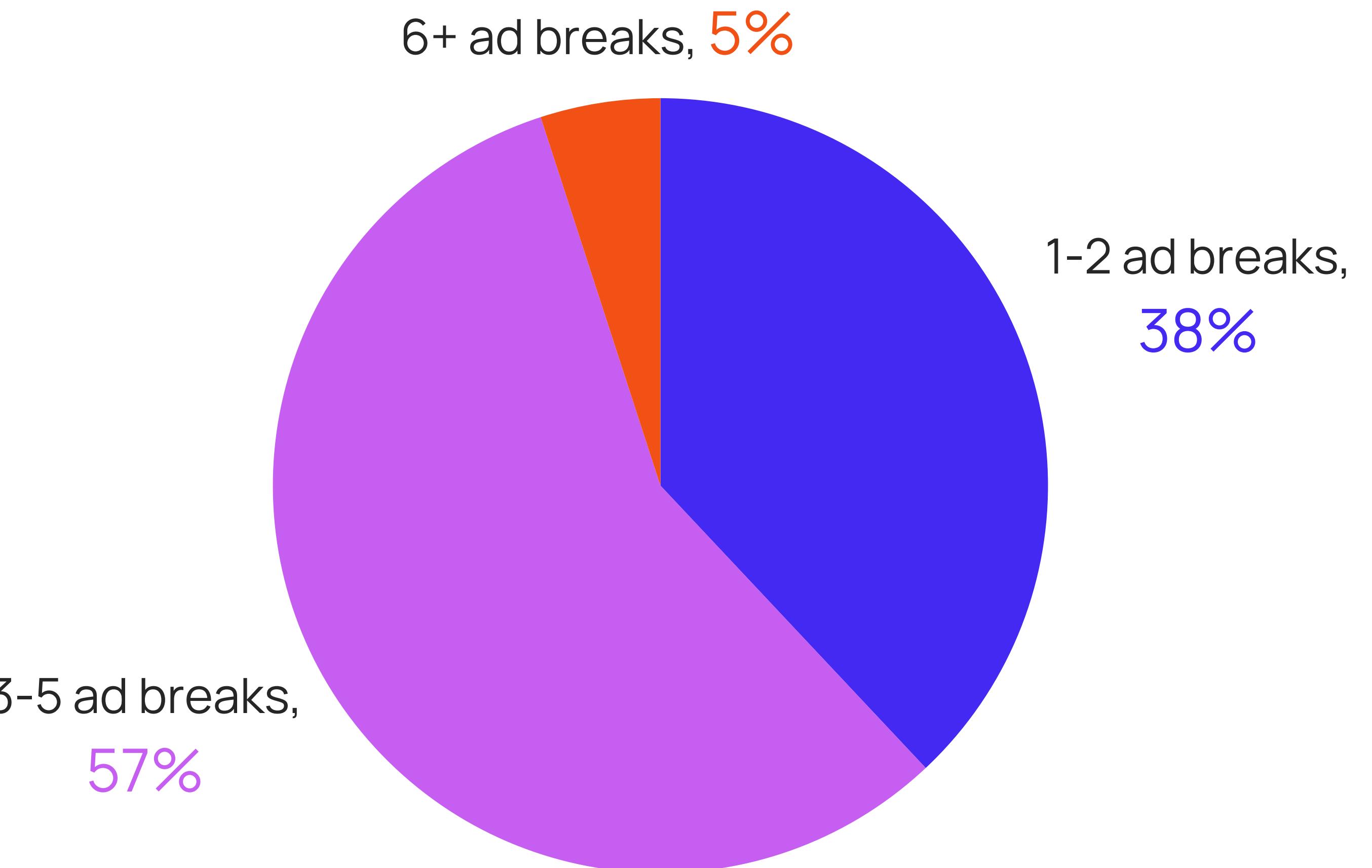
libsyn ads

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Among those hearing 2 or more ads in last podcast



Where do you prefer to hear podcast ads?

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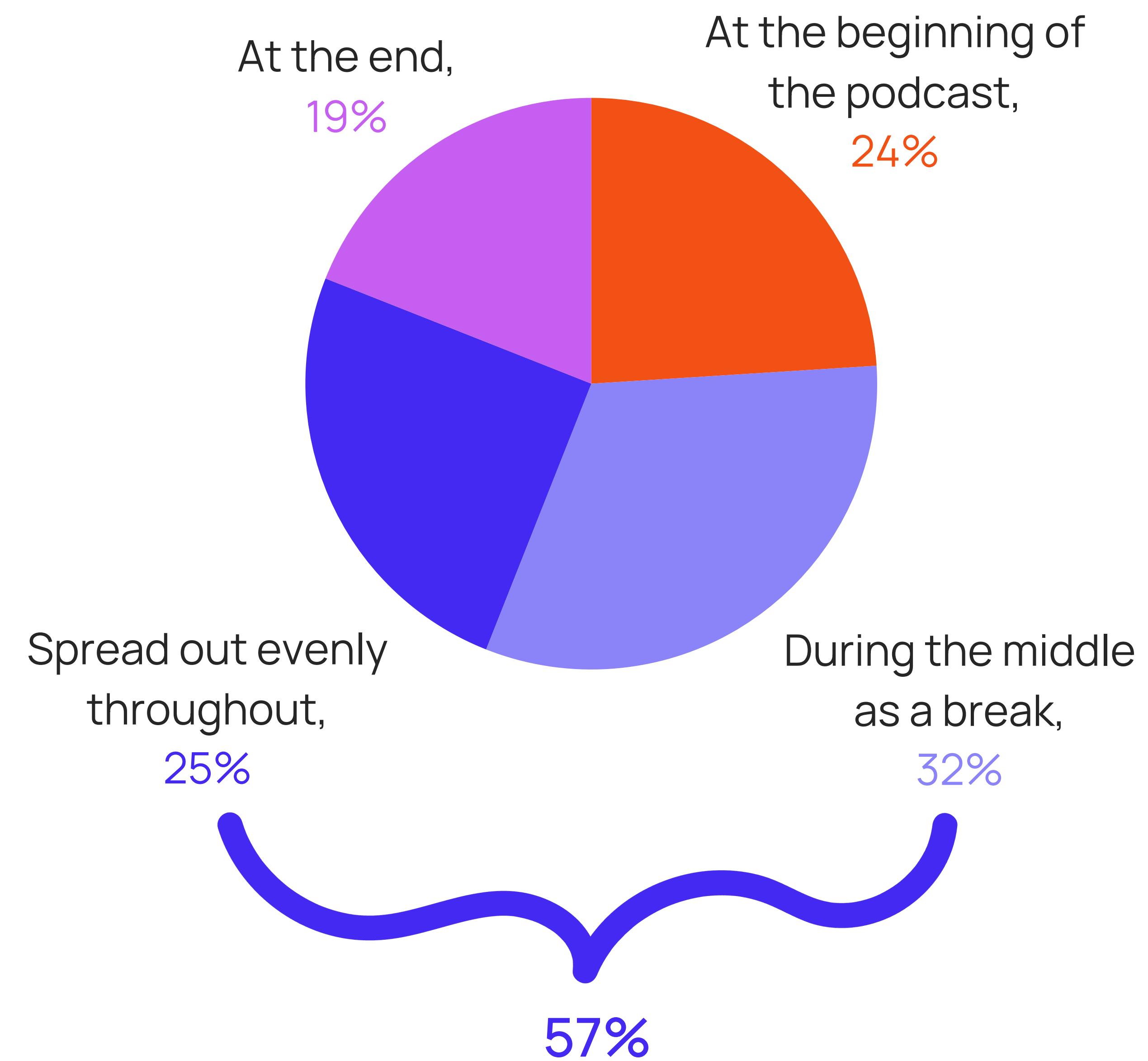
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Paramount

npr

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# Structure and Positioning

Consumers prefer to have ads “sandwiched” within the content they enjoy – and when that happens, they are certainly tolerant and even expectant of two ad breaks.

03

Sp  
u  
x

How many times do you expect a 30-minute podcast episode to take a break for ads?

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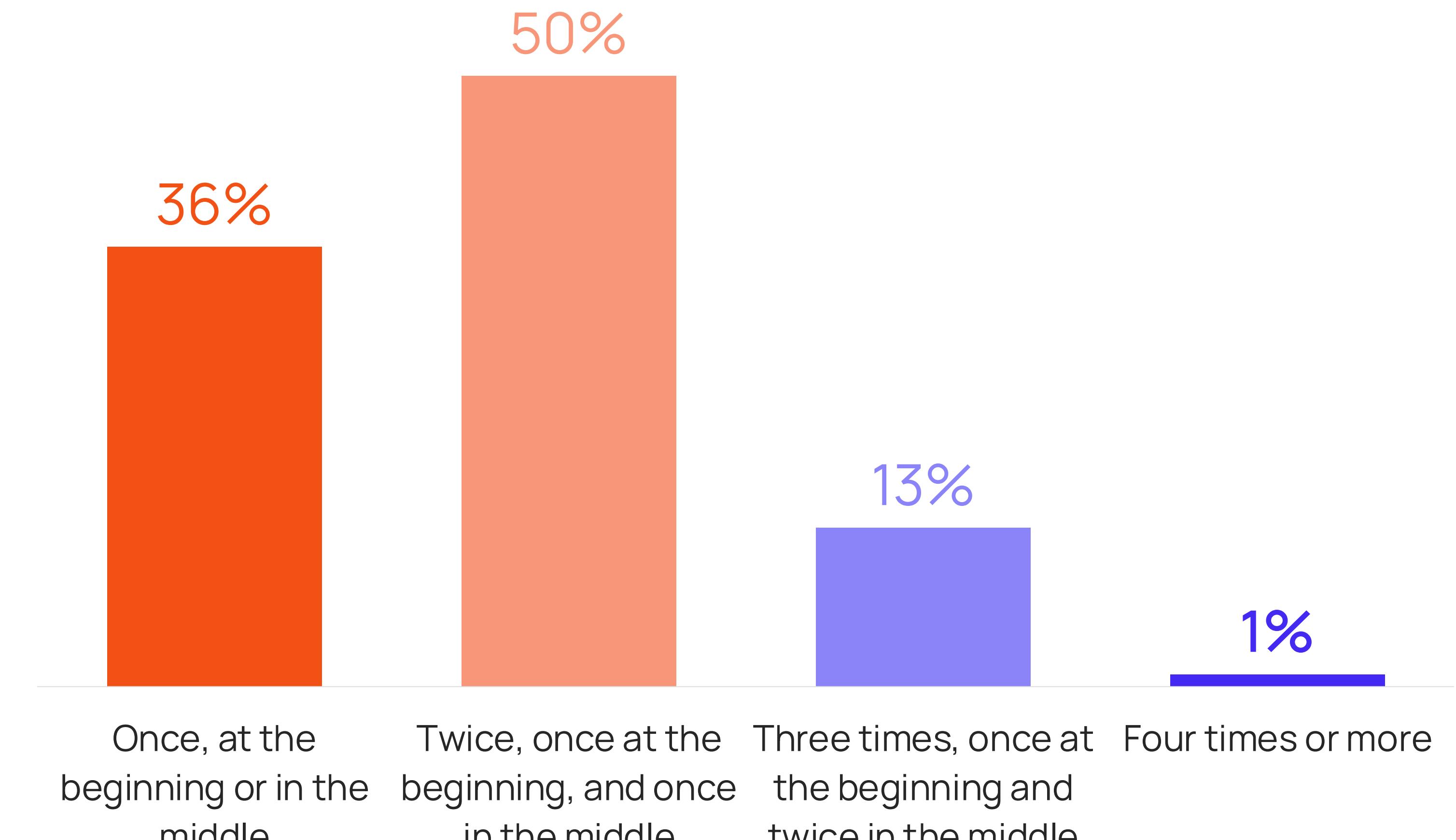
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04

## Frequency and Repetition

You can have too many ads. More importantly, it can feel like there are too many ads when people hear the same ads – and the same creative execution – multiple times in an episode.

su  
Sp  
n

Have you ever stopped listening to a podcast episode because you heard the same ad too many times?

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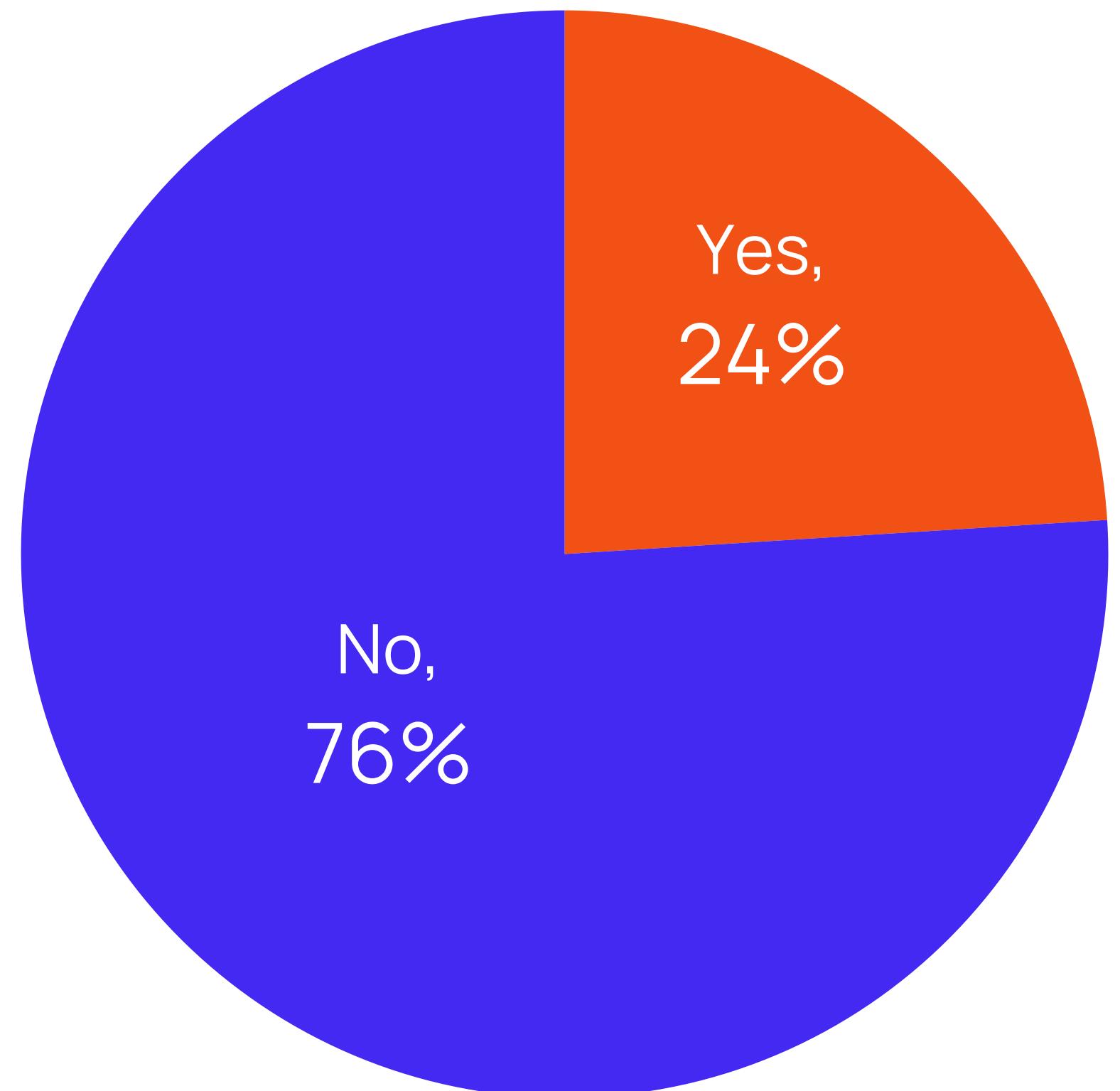
libsyn ads

npr

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How do you feel about hearing the same ad more than once in a single podcast episode?

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**ESPN** Podcasts

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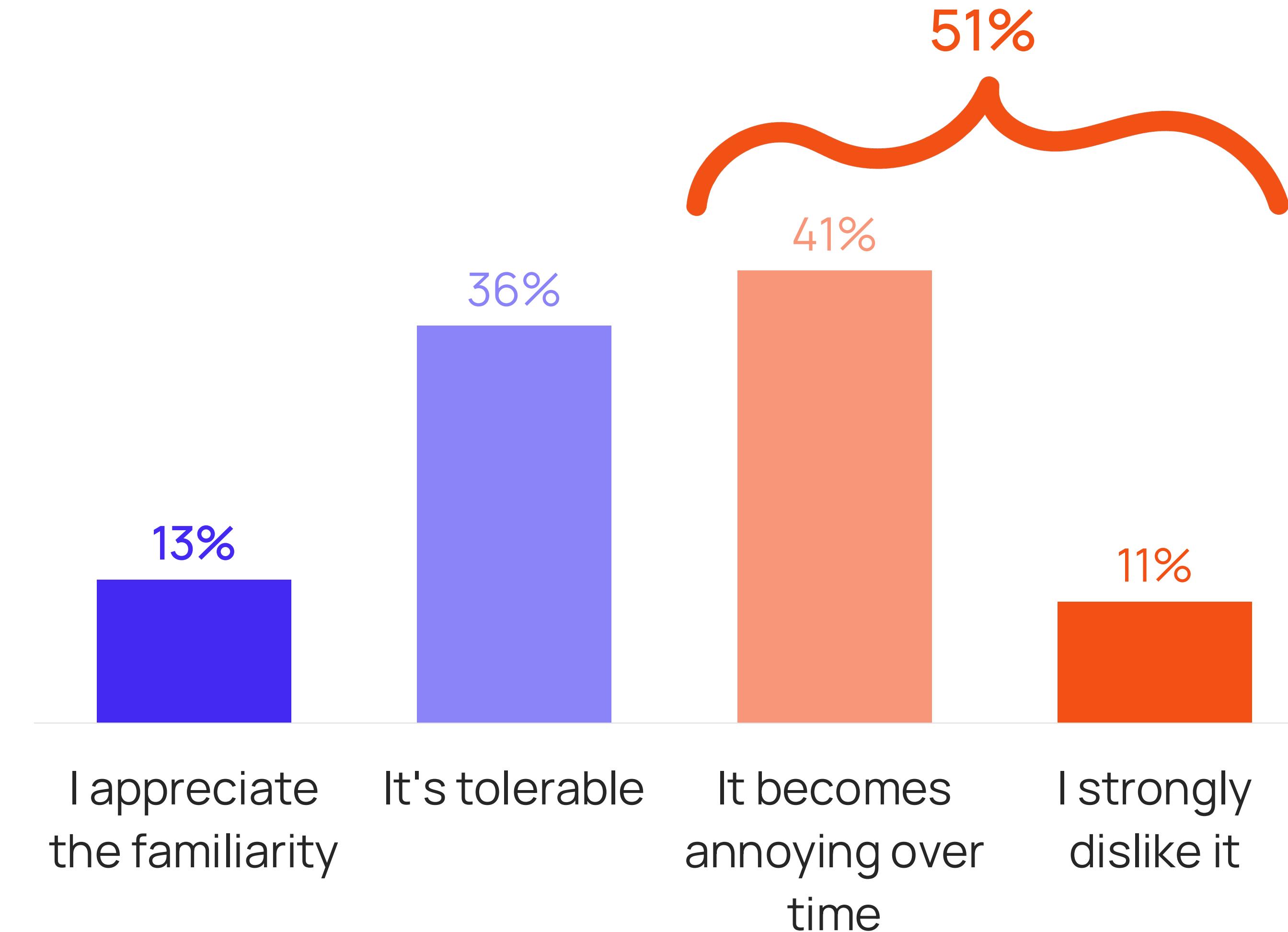
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How do you feel about hearing the same ad more than once in a single podcast episode?

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libsyn ads

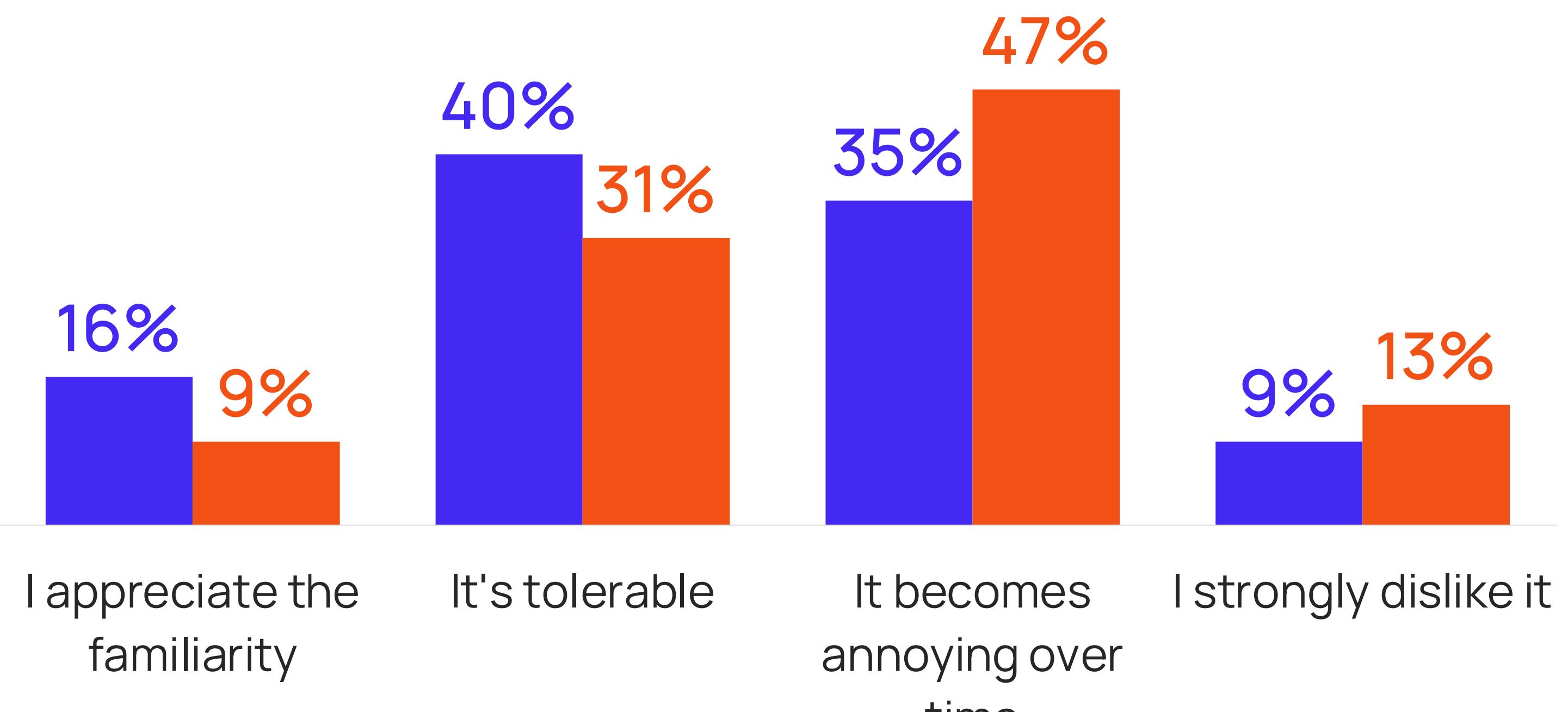
Paramount

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Insights

By gender

Male Female





04

## Frequency and Repetition

Opinions are split on the number of times it is acceptable to hear the same ad in an episode (one or two, but not three or more).

In your opinion, what is an acceptable number of times to hear the same ad during a single podcast episode?

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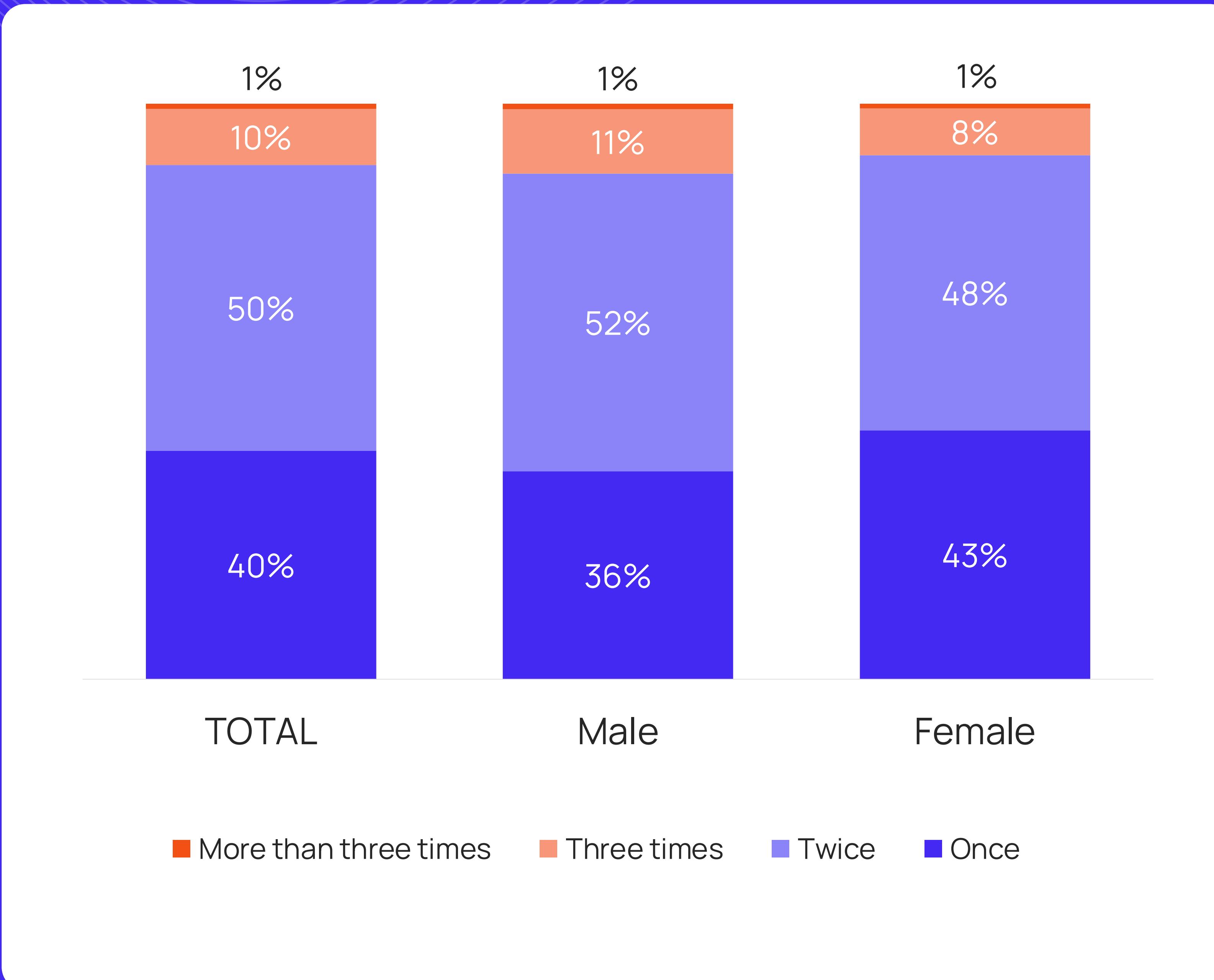
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04

su  
Sp  
np



## Frequency and Repetition

Perceptions of repetitive ads initially affect consumer attitudes about the product or service advertised, but over time can also erode perceptions of the podcast itself

How does hearing the same ad more than once in a single podcast episode affect your perception of the advertised product/ service?

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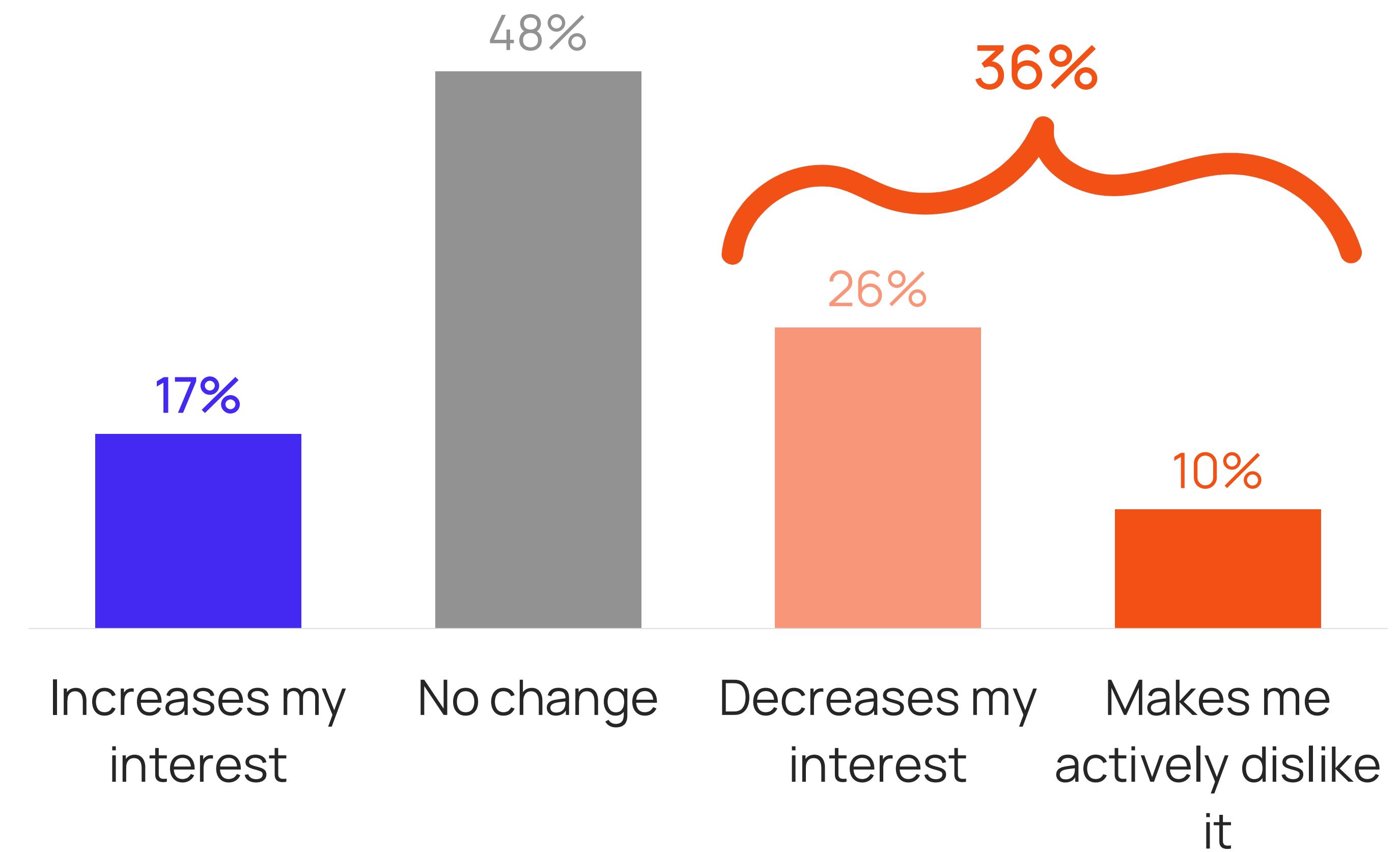
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Thinking about your favorite podcast that has ads, does hearing the same ad more than once affect your overall attention to that podcast?

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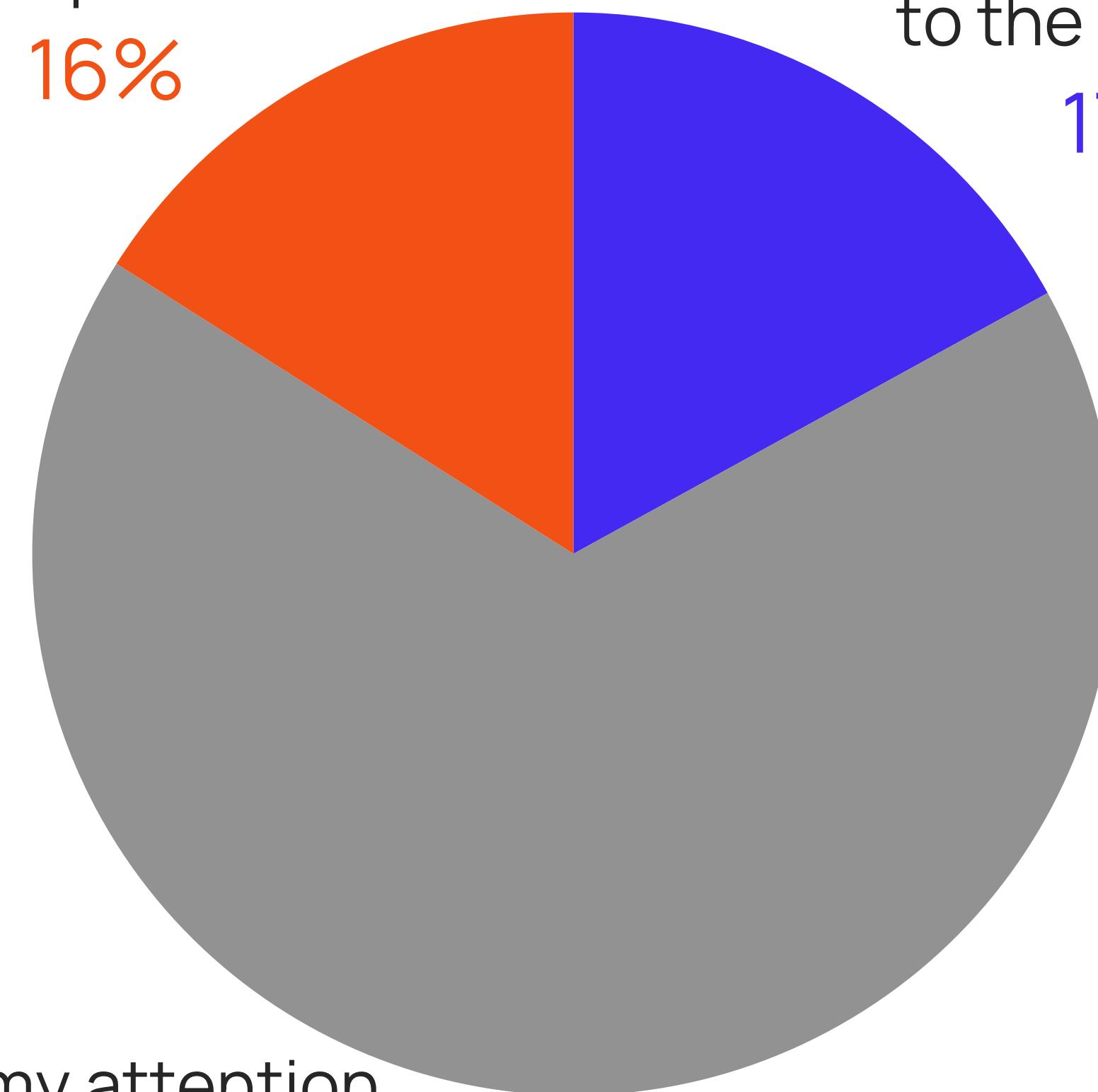
Paramount

SignalHill  
Insights

Decreases my attention  
to the podcast,

16%

Increases my attention  
to the podcast,  
17%



No effect on my attention  
to the podcast,  
67%

Does the repetition of the same products or brands affect your overall attention to your favorite podcast that has ads?

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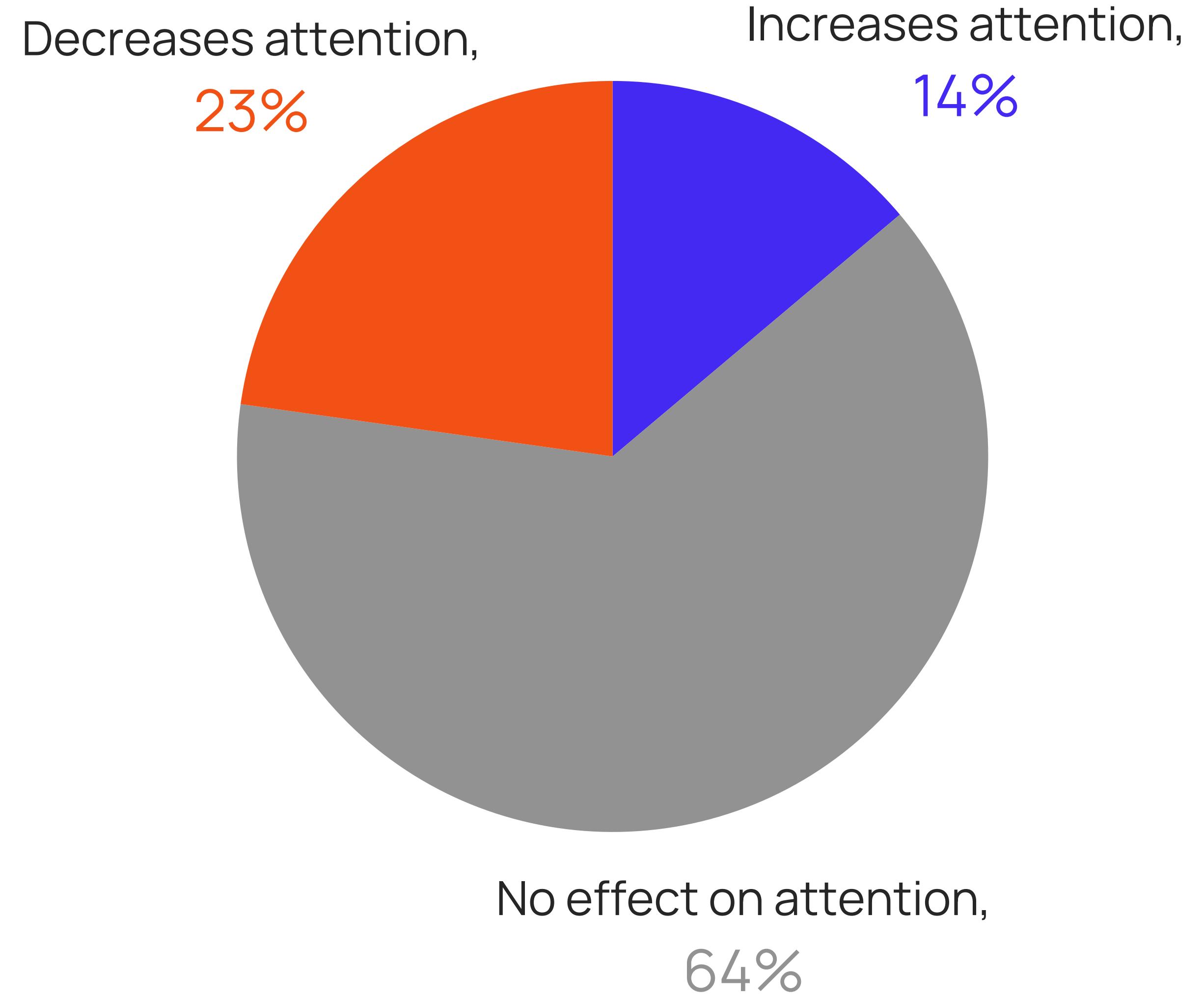
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If you start to notice more frequent repetition of the same product or brand in your favorite podcast, how does your reaction change over time?

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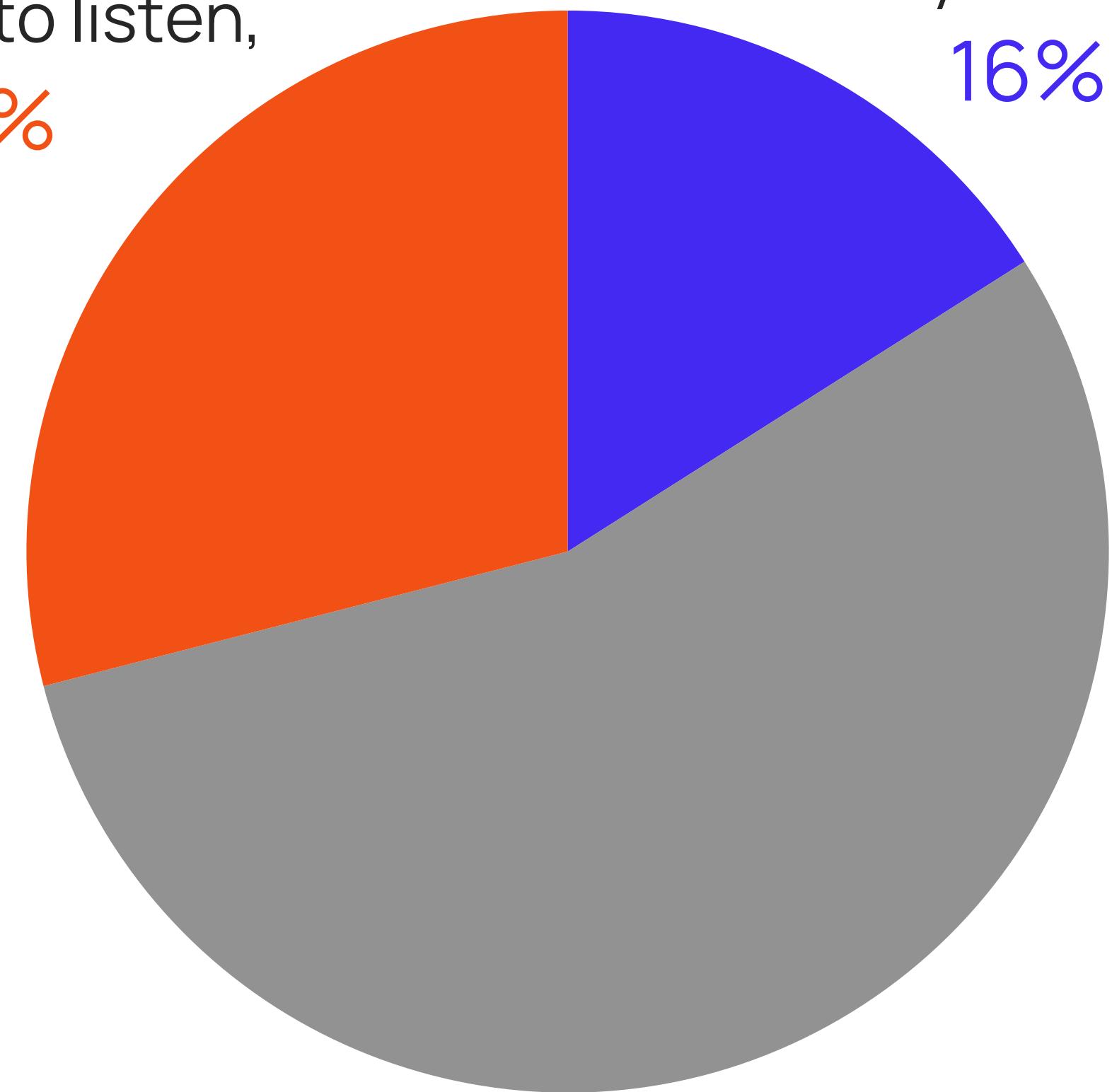


SignalHill  
Insights

Become more annoyed/  
less likely to listen,

29%

Become more  
likely to listen,  
16%



No change in  
behavior,  
55%



## Frequency and Repetition

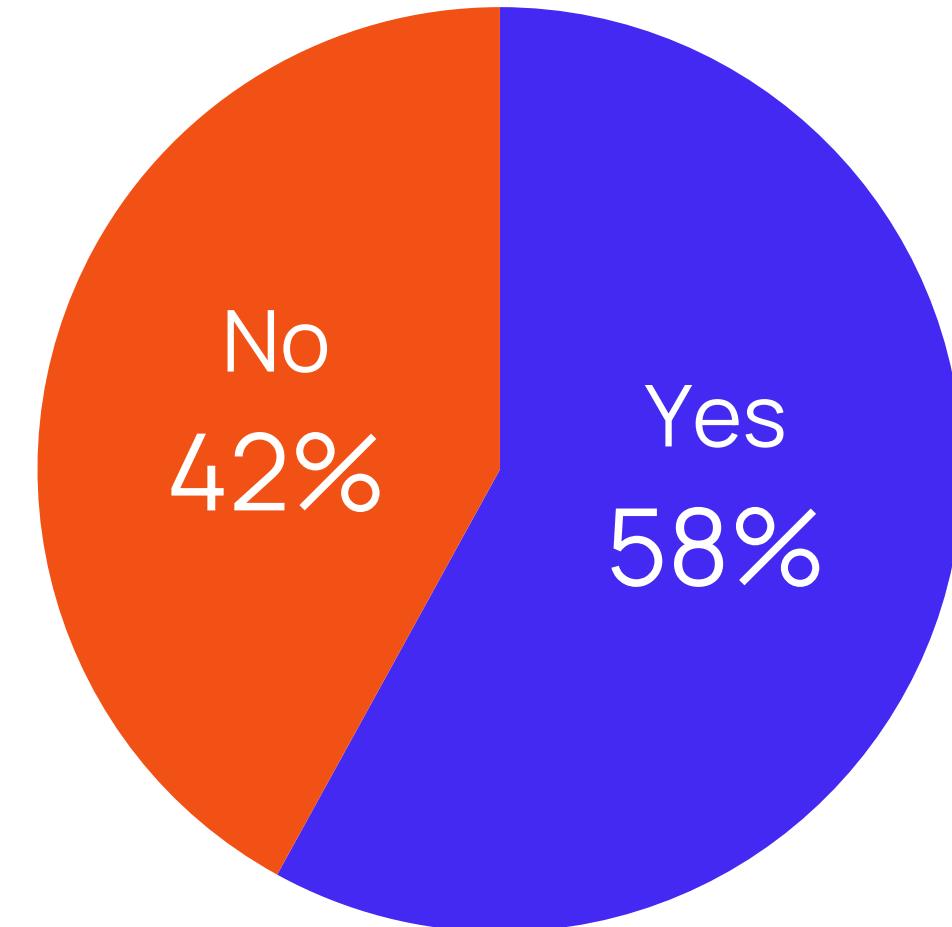
Frequency obviously plays a role in driving action...

04

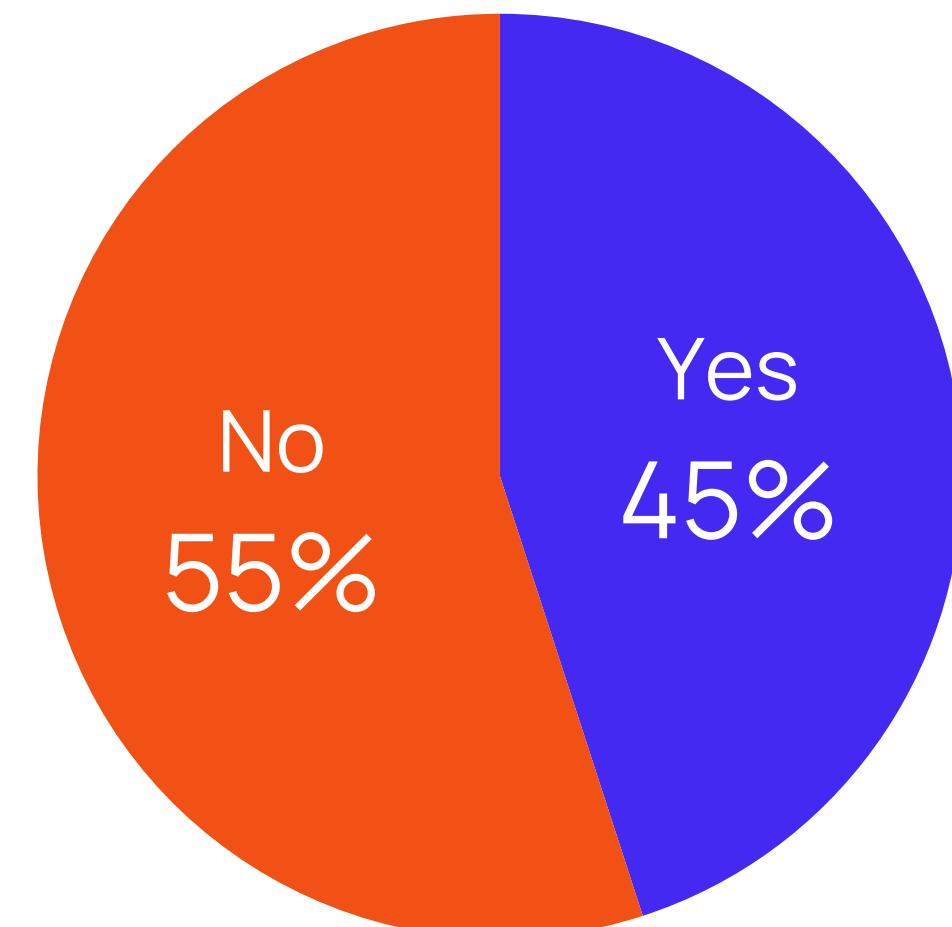
du  
Sp  
nq

# Have you ever...

...discovered a product or service you liked through a podcast ad?



...purchased a product because of an ad you heard on a podcast?



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Before making the purchase, how many times do you estimate you heard the ad?

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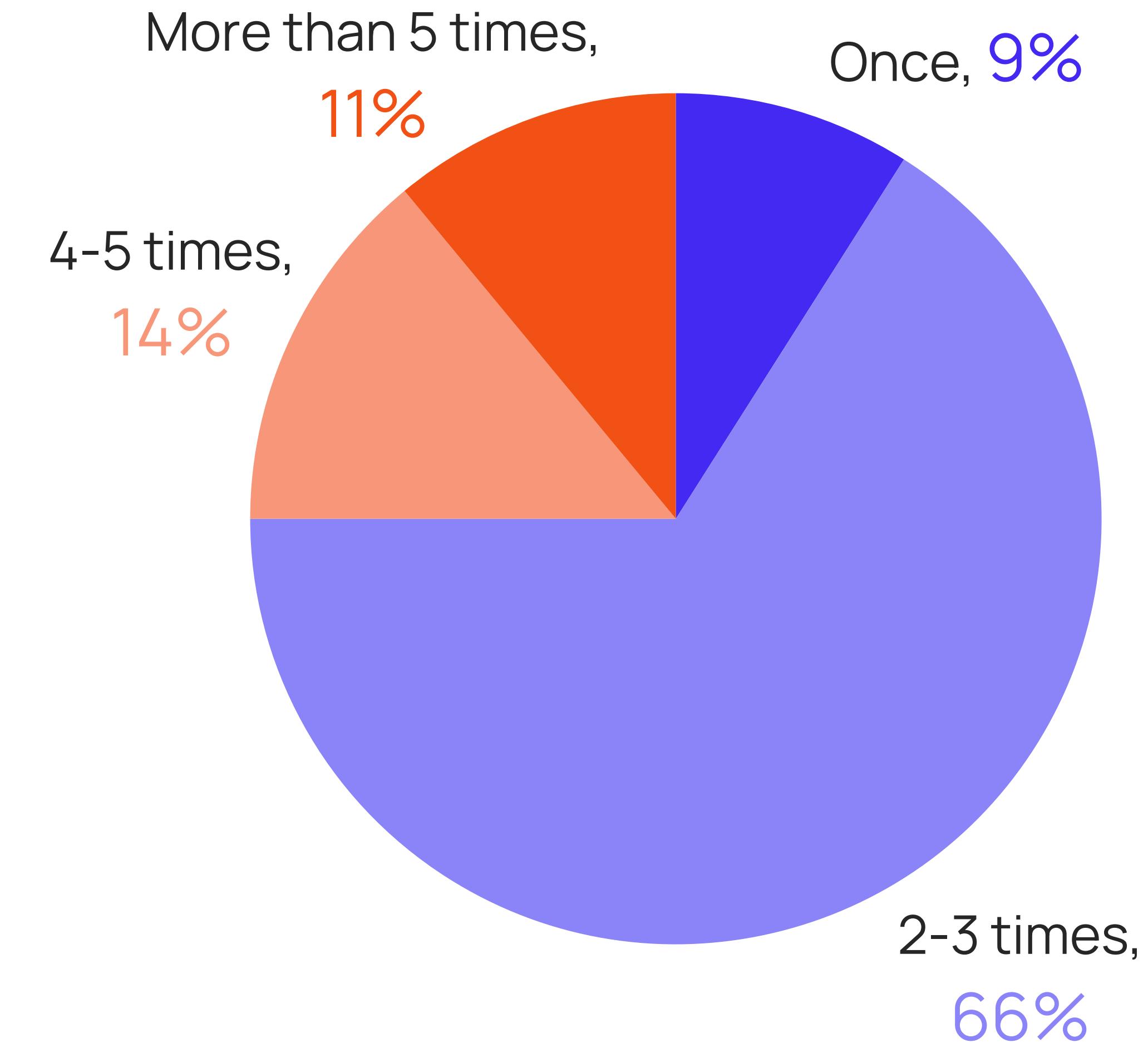
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Among purchased product or service due to ad in podcast



# How long after hearing the ad for the last time did you decide to make the purchase?

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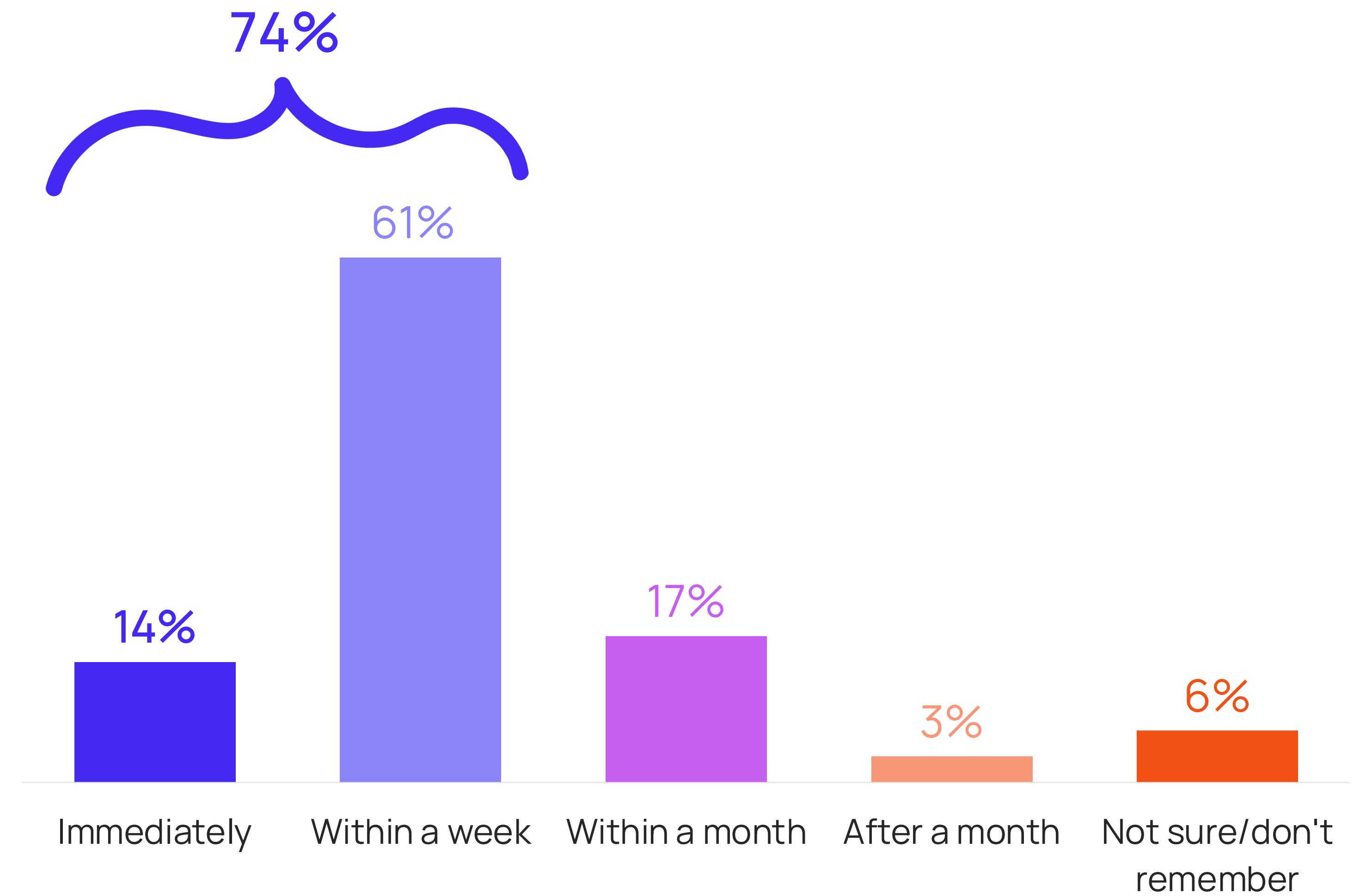
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Among purchased product or service due to ad in podcast





04

## Frequency and Repetition

...but we can never forget a holistic view of the listener, and planners must consider the entire campaign when gauging frequency.

su  
Sp  
nq

Did you hear that ad on just one podcast, or on multiple podcasts?

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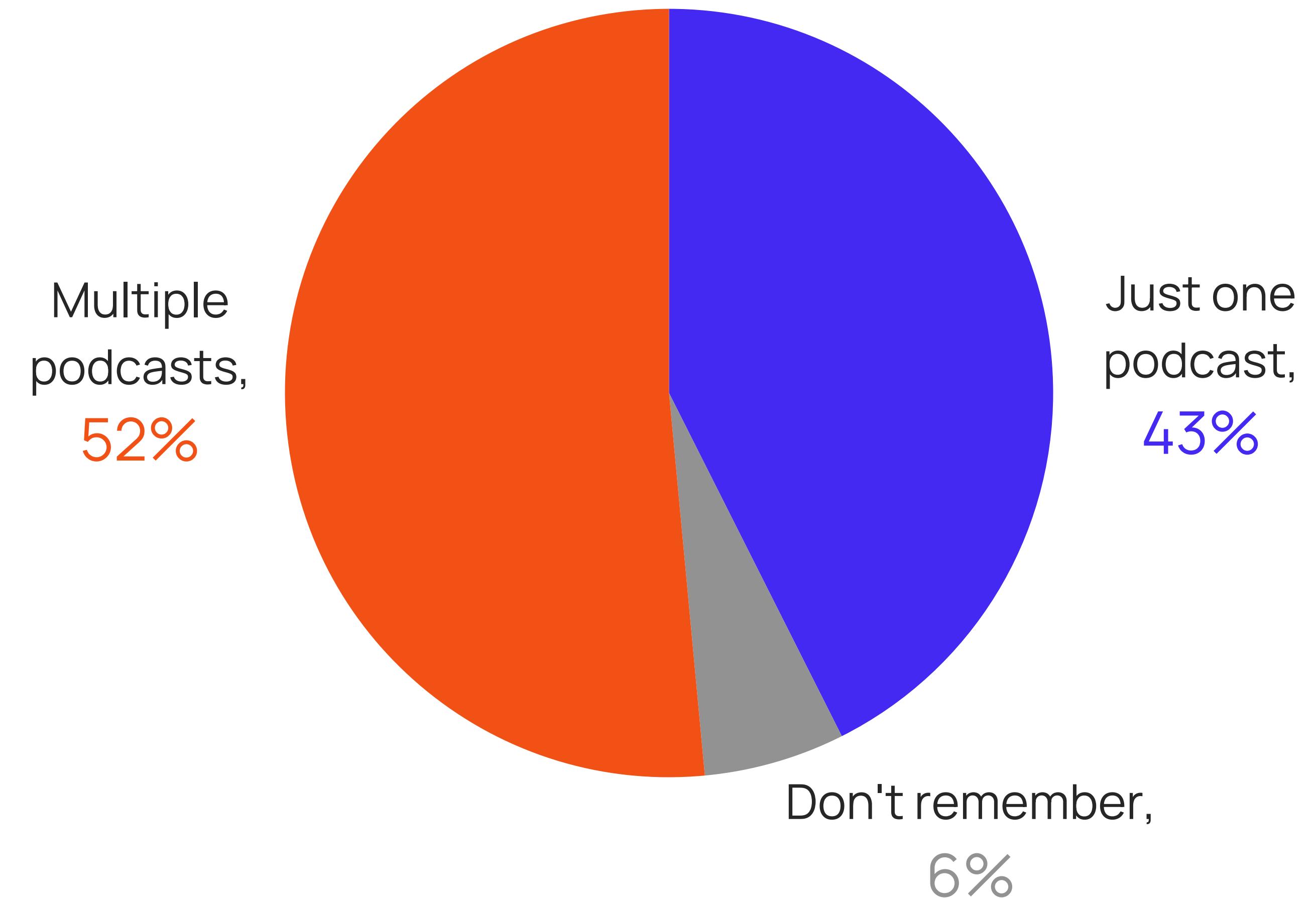
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Among purchased product or service due to ad in podcast



Did you encounter an ad for the product/service on other channels?

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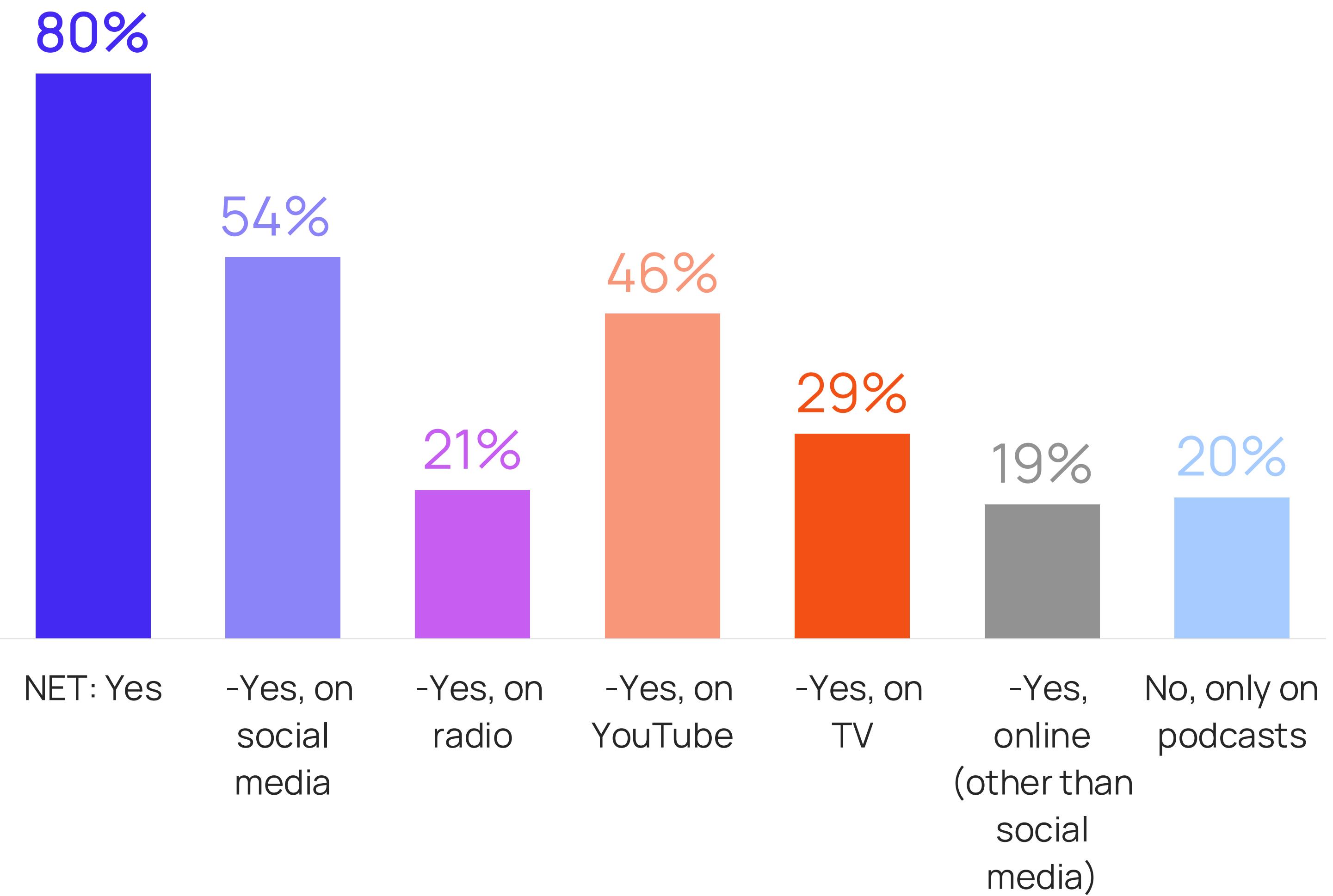
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Paramount

npr

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Among purchased product or service due to ad in podcast





04

## Frequency and Repetition

Ultimately, if we don't annoy the listener, they are very likely to credit the podcast ad for their interest in a product, even in a multi-channel campaign.



How influential would you say the podcast ad was in your decision to purchase?

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libsyn ads

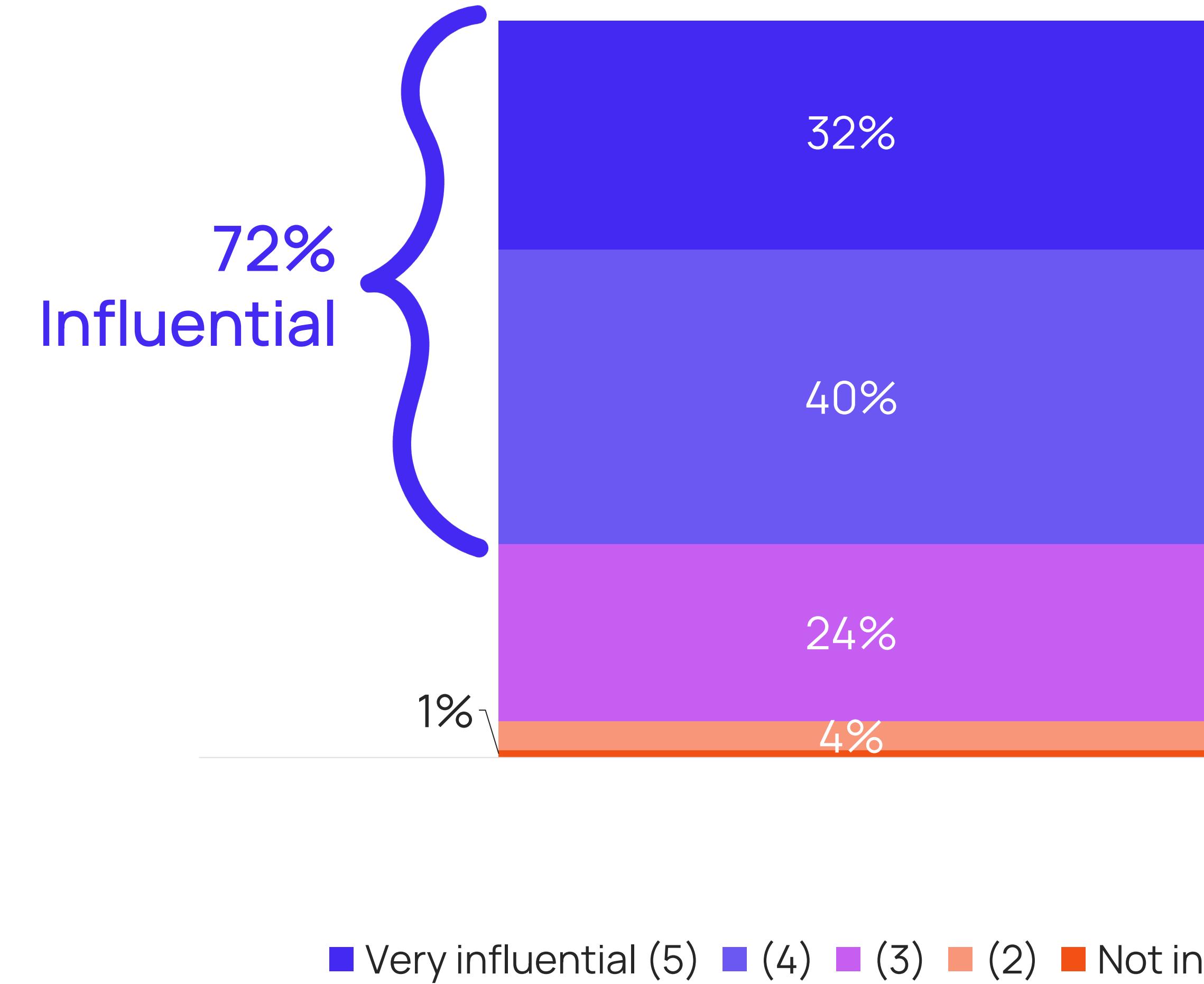
npr

ESPN Podcasts



SignalHill  
Insights

Among purchased product or service due to ad in podcast





## The Promo Code

Finally, some repetition can be forgiven...if it results in remembering a good deal!

05

du  
Sp  
nq

# What makes it more tolerable to hear an ad repeatedly?

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libsyn ads

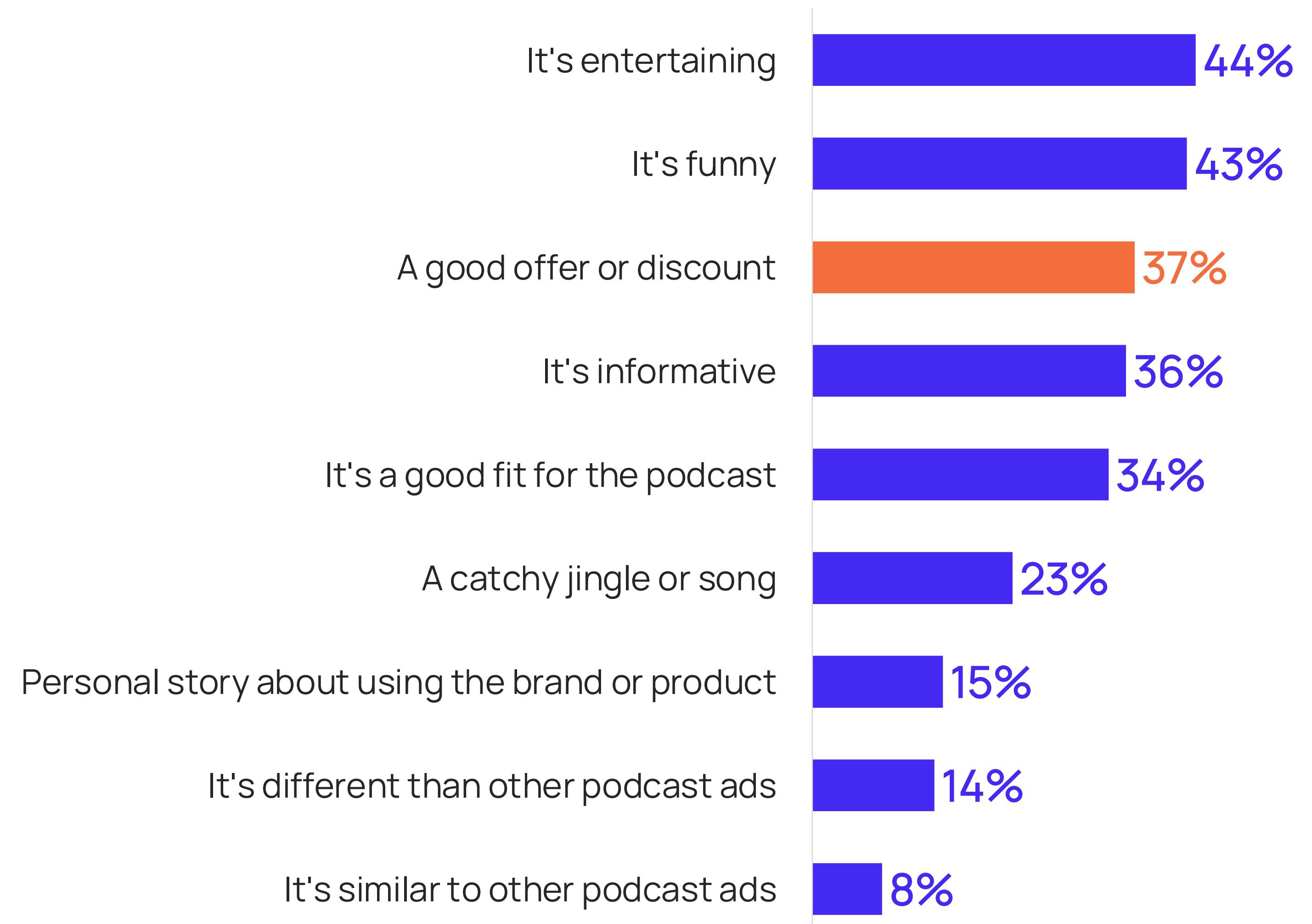
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Among listeners who hear the same ads or brands too much



Have you ever used a promo code you heard in a podcast ad?

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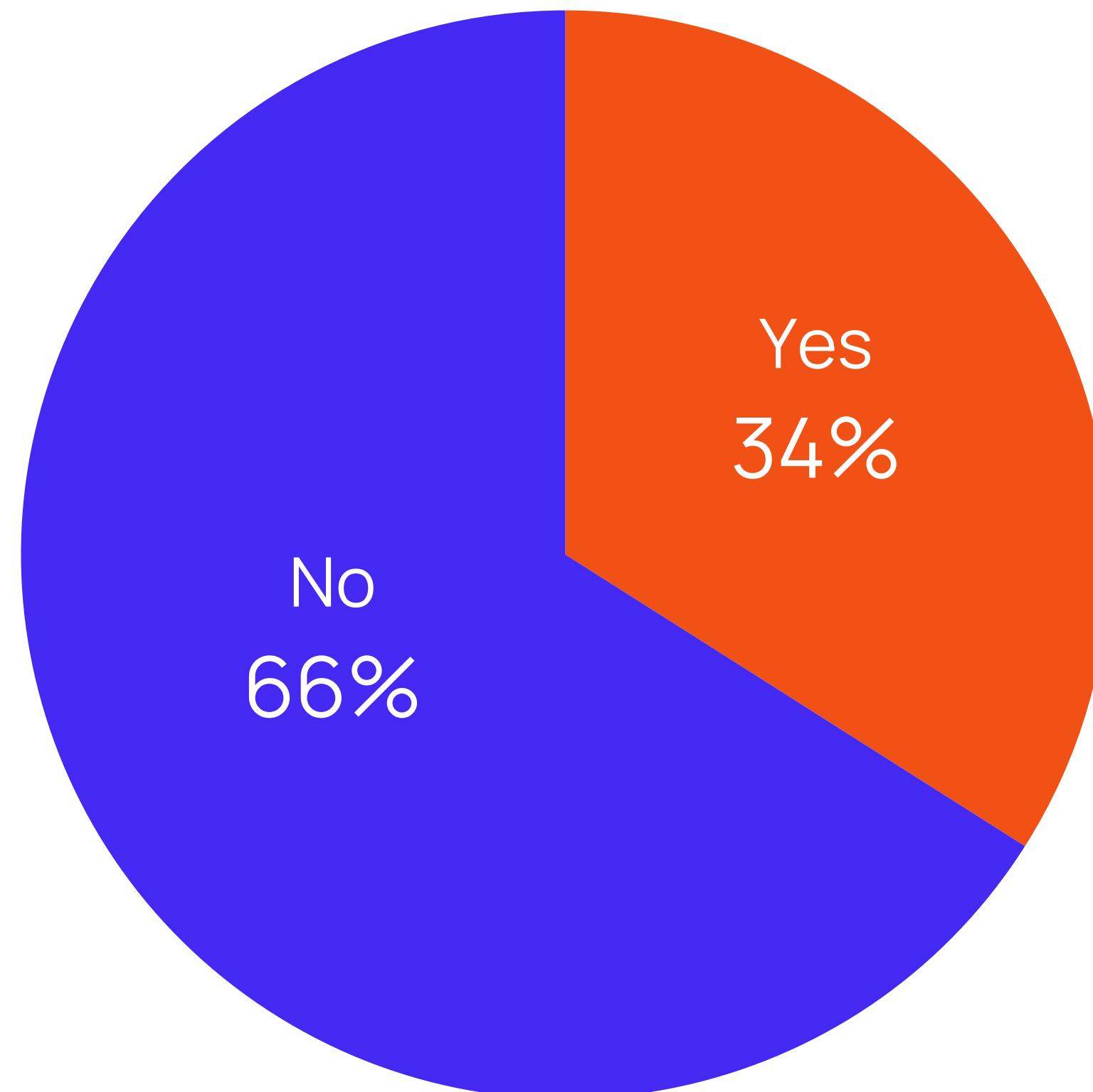
libsyn ads

npr

ESPN Podcasts



SignalHill  
Insights



Have you ever used  
a promo code you  
heard in a podcast  
ad?

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ESPN Podcasts

betterhelp

SiriusXM PODCAST  
NETWORK

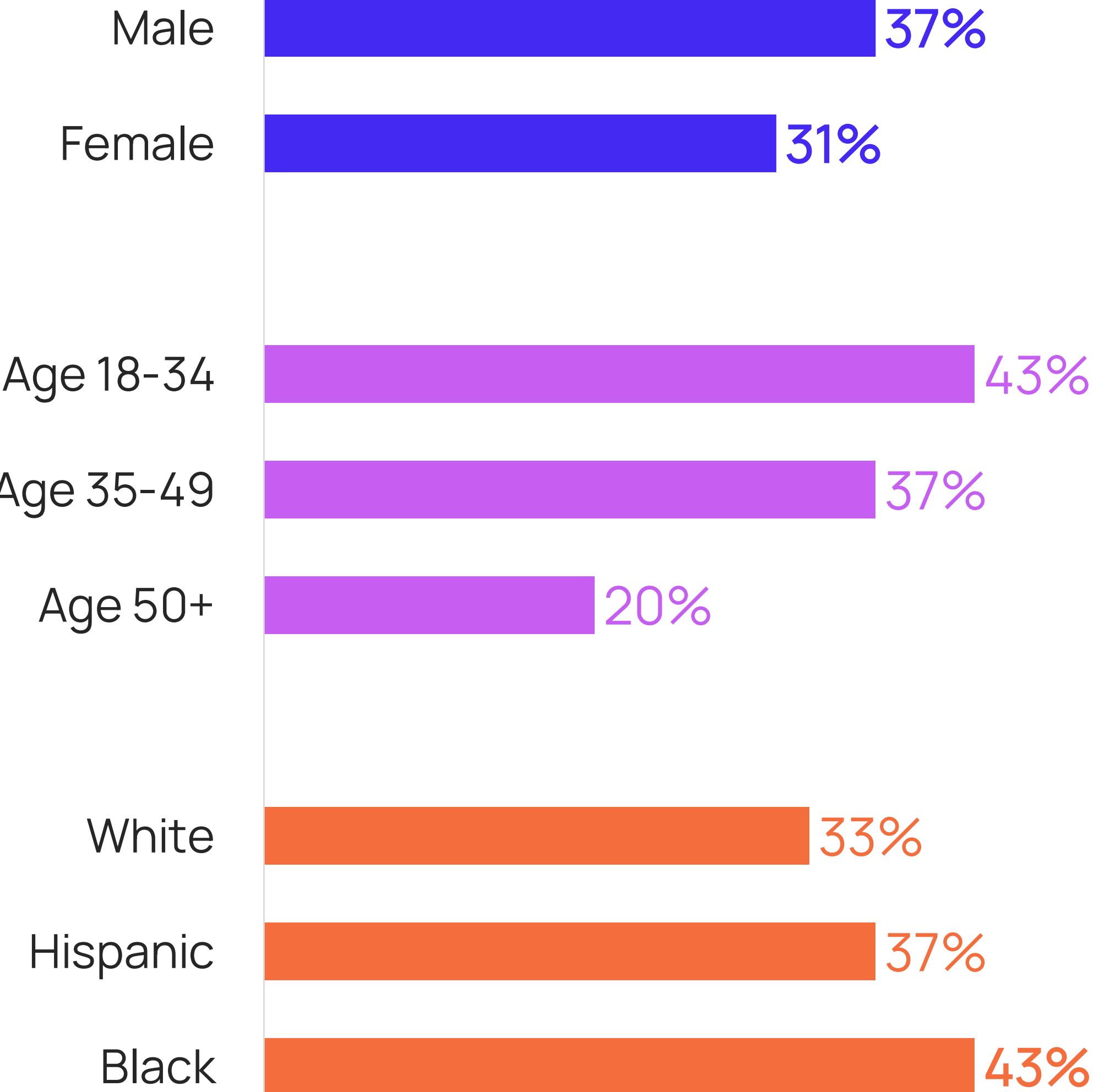
libsyn ads

Paramount

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Insights

% Yes



# When was the last time you used a promo code you heard in a podcast ad?

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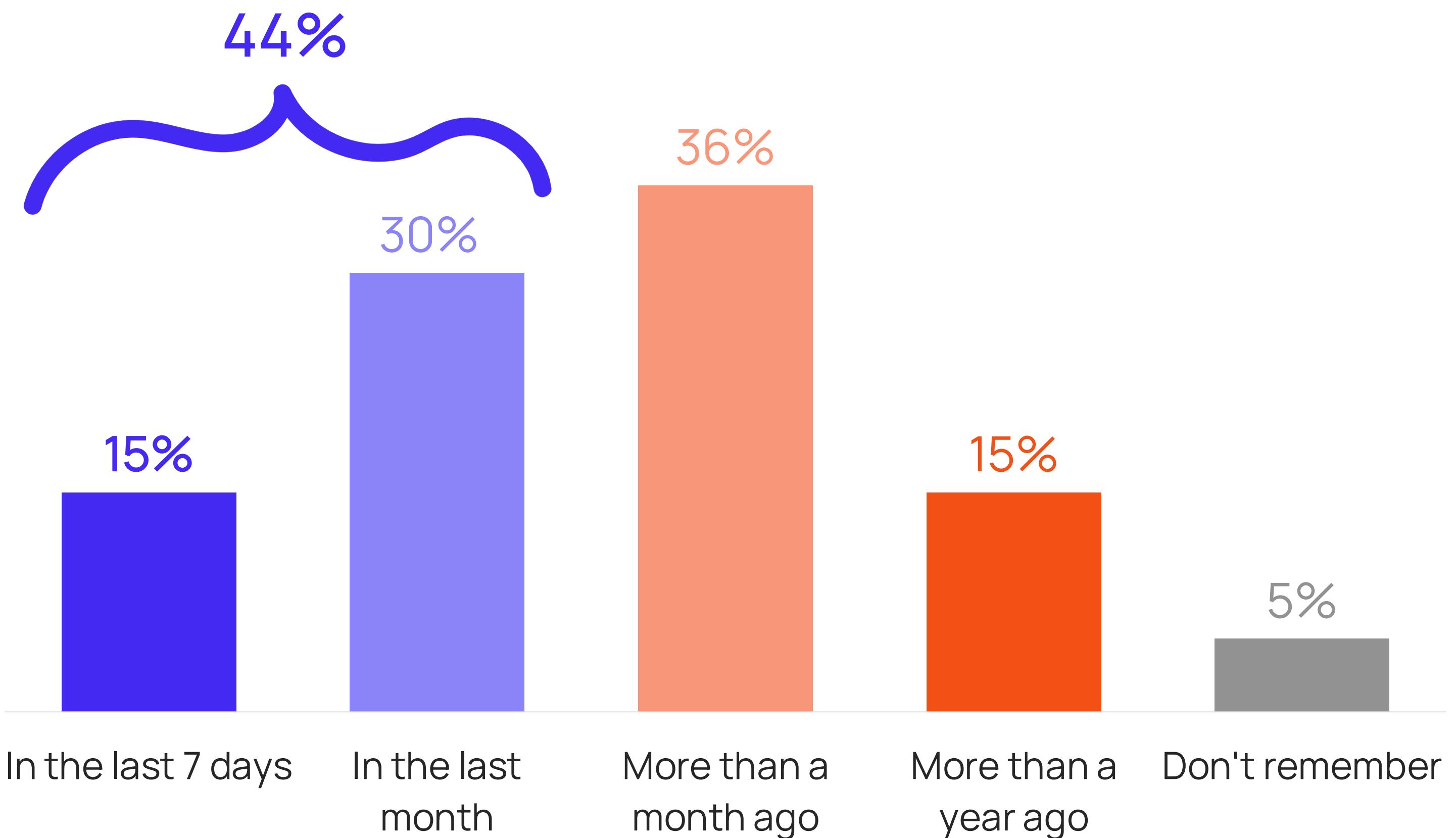
libsyn ads



ESPN Podcasts



Among used promo code heard in podcast ad



# How did you remember that last promo code?

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libsyn ads

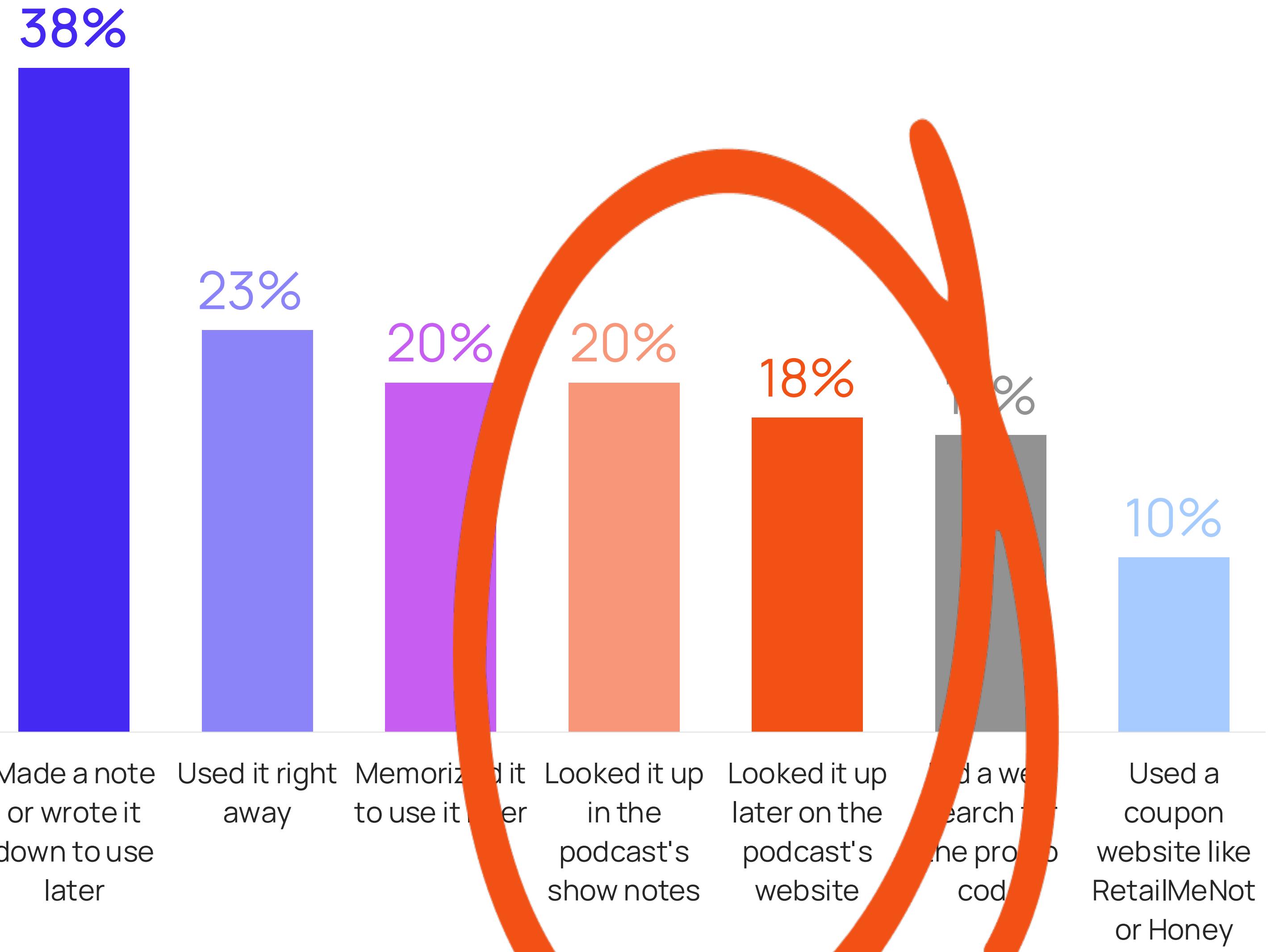
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Among used promo code heard in podcast ad





## The Promo Code

Creators and hosts need to do a better job tying the performance of these codes and discounts to the success and continued production of the show.

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# Why did you choose to use the promo code?

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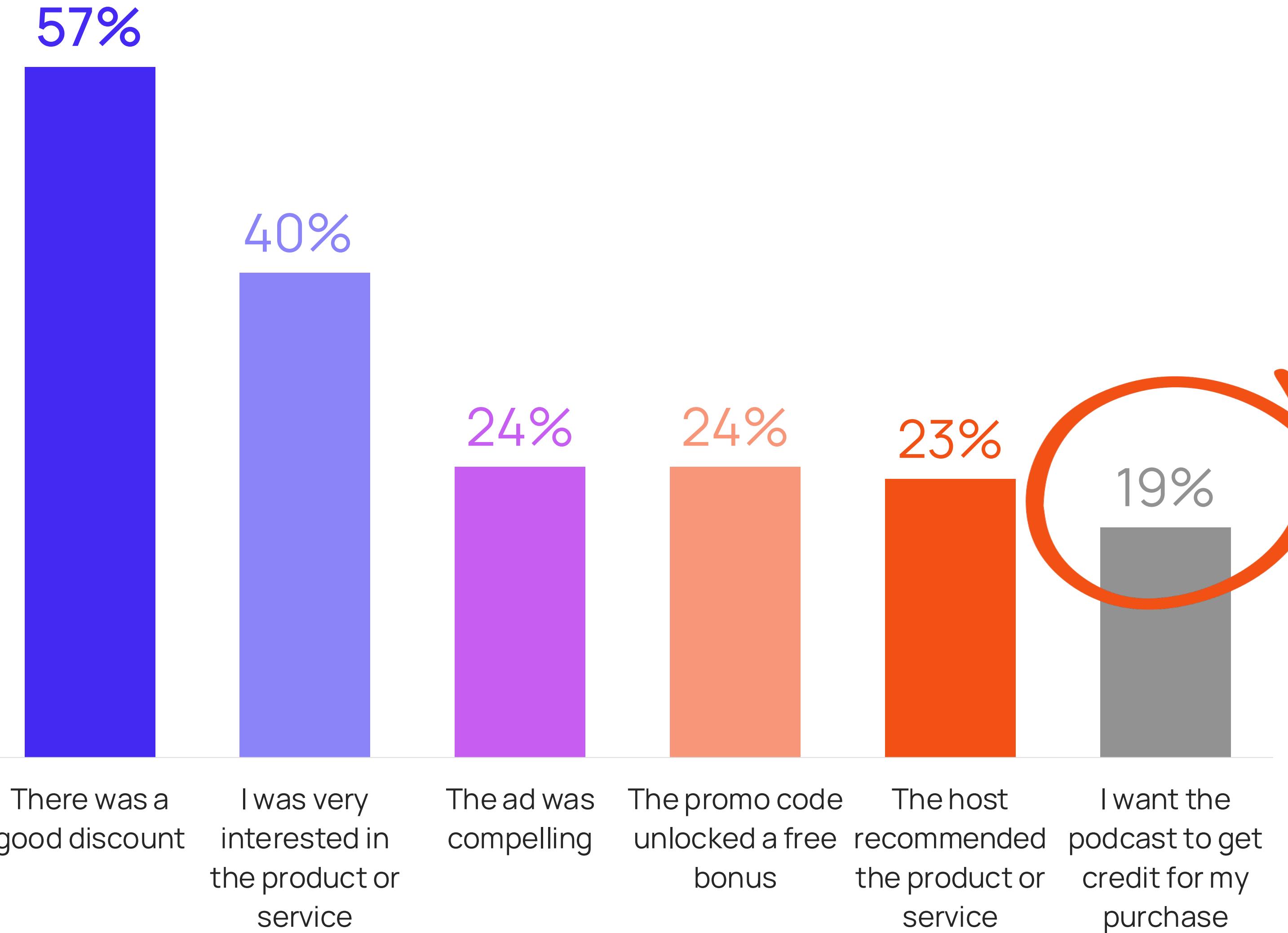
libsyn ads



ESPN Podcasts



Among used promo code heard in podcast ad



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# Creative Execution

Turns out, ad quantity is less important than ad *quality*. Just as consumers will remember a great ad, a lousy ad will dramatically influence ad skipping and perceptions of ad quantity. Let's tackle these one by one!



# What primarily motivates you to skip ads in your favorite podcast?

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libsyn ads

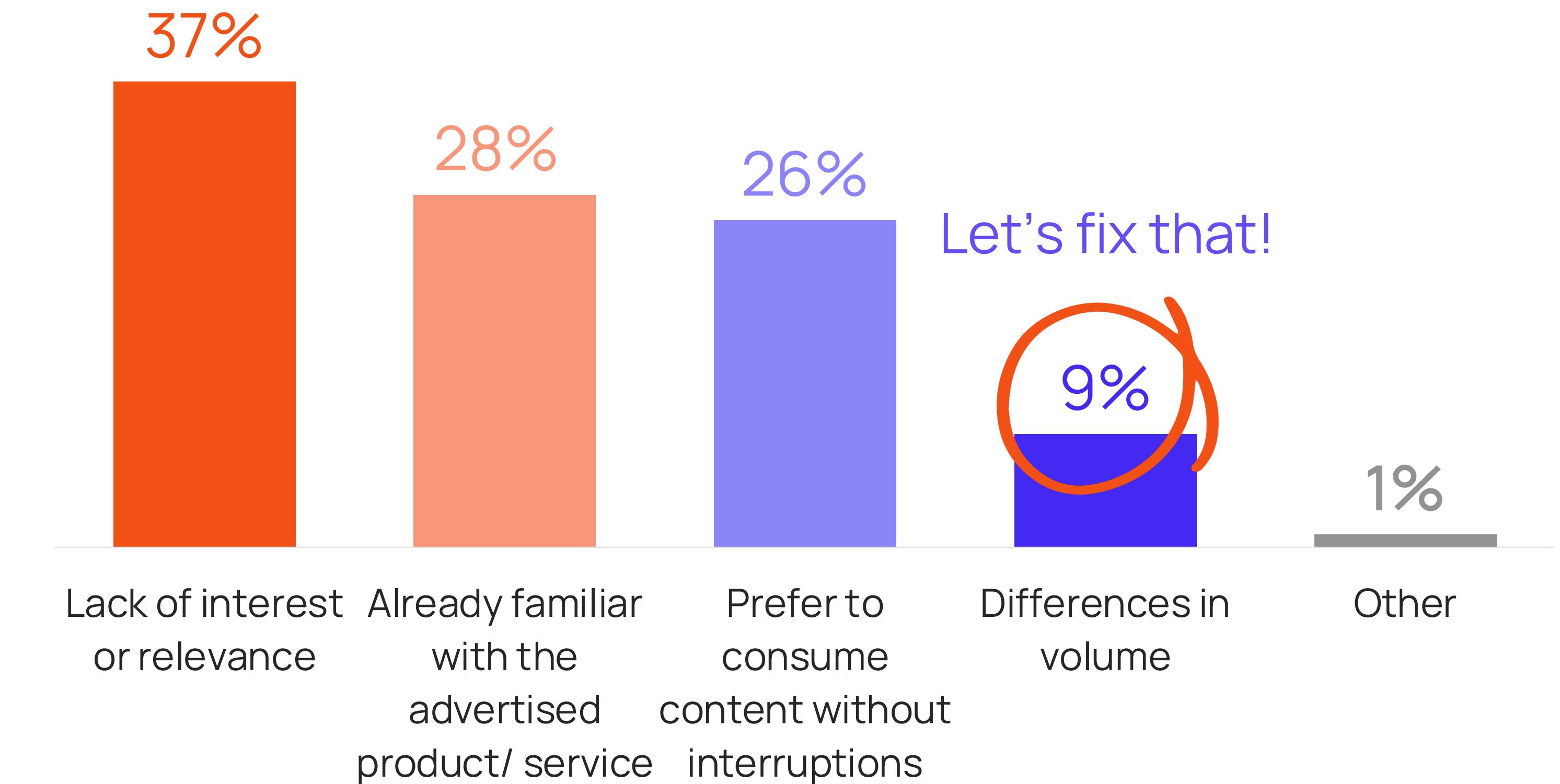
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Insights

Among listeners who ever skip ads





# Creative Execution

Some people just don't like *any* ads – but podcasting has fewer of those than other media options.

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# What primarily motivates you to skip ads in your favorite podcast?

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libsyn ads

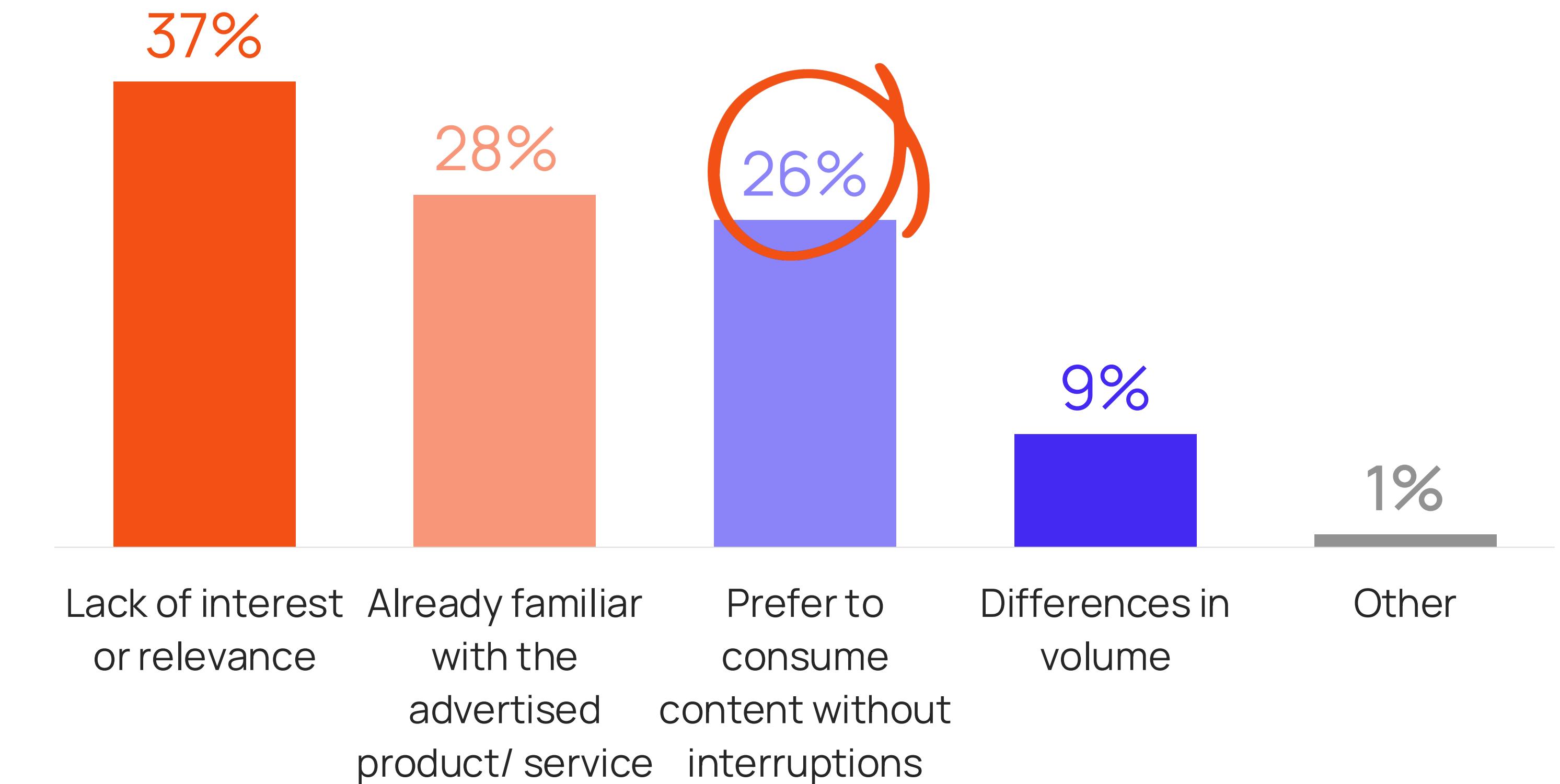
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ESPN Podcasts



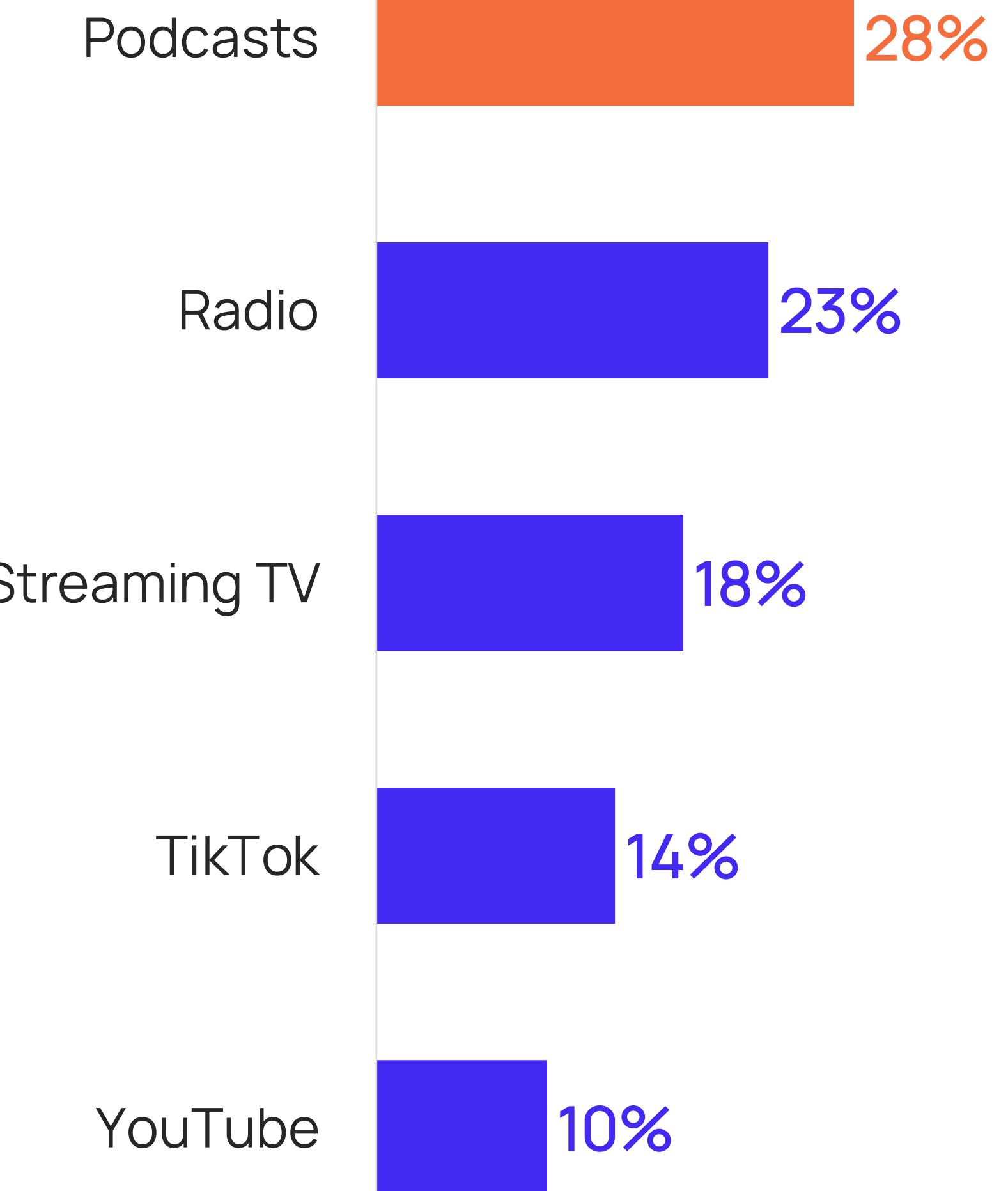
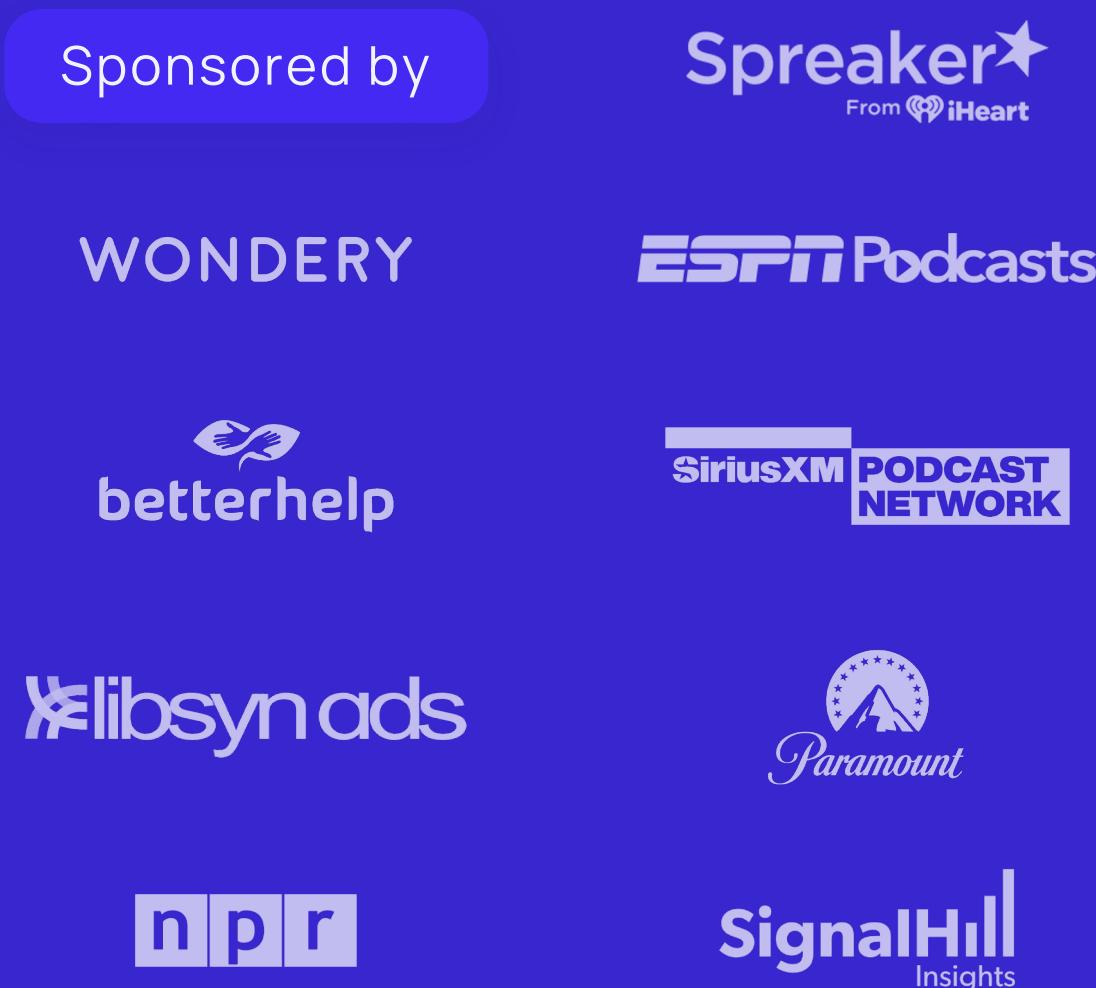
SignalHill  
Insights

Among listeners who ever skip ads



Users of each medium who “watch or listen to all of the ads” they encounter on...

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Source: *The Ad Bargain*, Sounds Profitable (2024)



# Creative Execution

We can never forget the top reason many people come to the medium: to learn something new. Excessively repeated executions of the same ad violate that expectation.

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## What primarily motivates you to skip ads in your favorite podcast?

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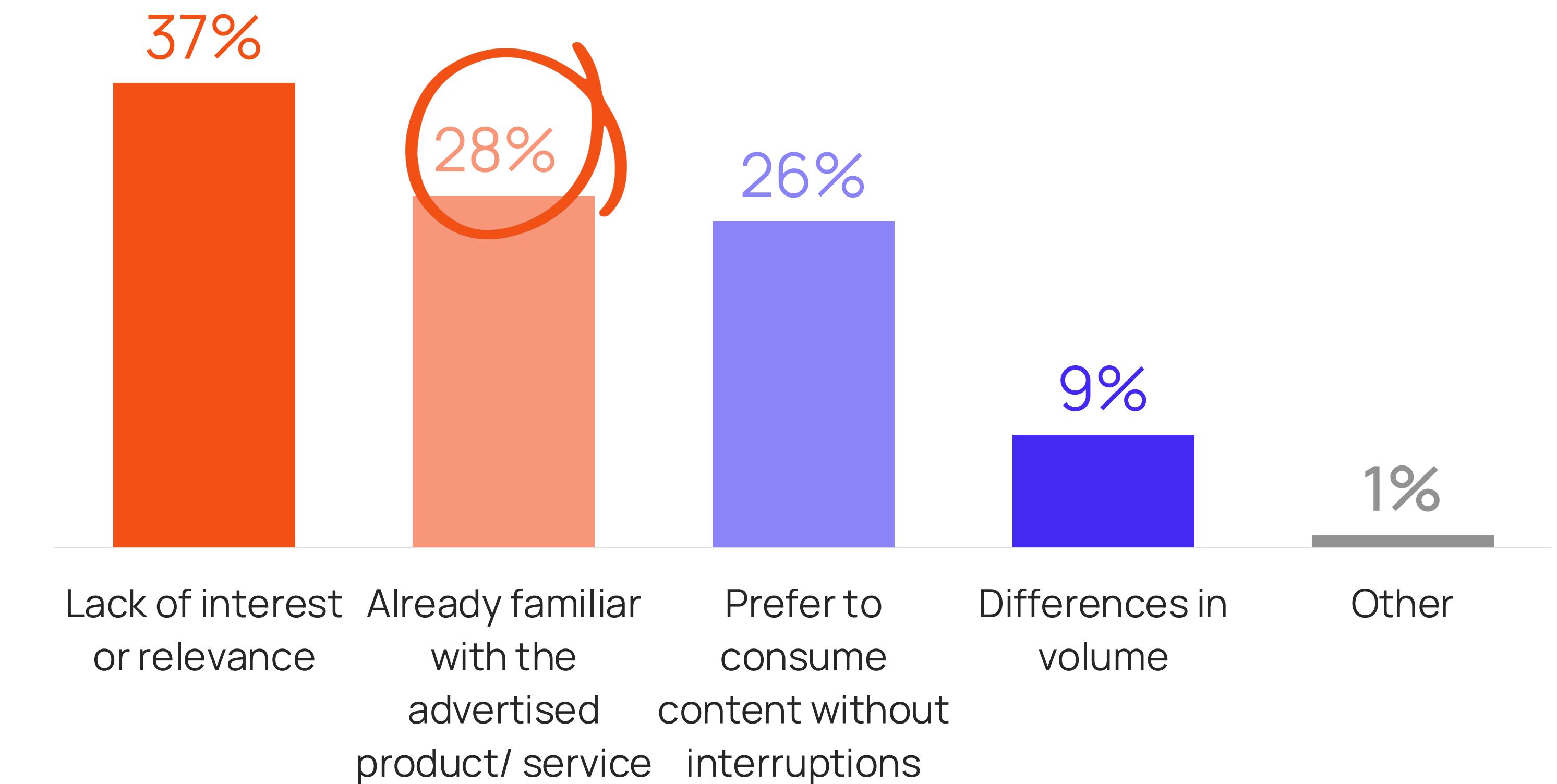
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Among listeners who ever skip ads



Thinking about the brands and products you hear advertised on podcasts, do you agree or disagree with the following?

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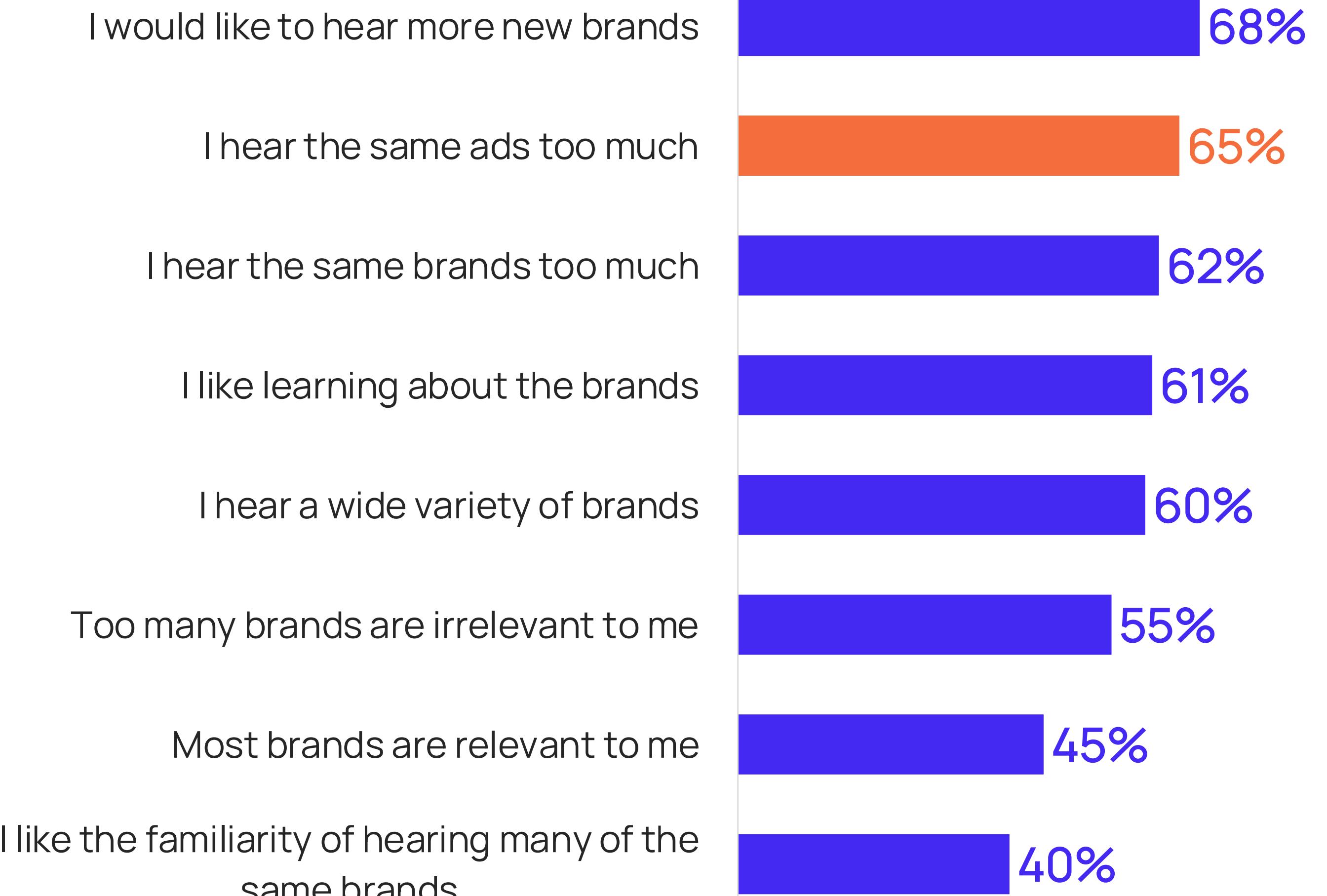
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% agree



# Why are you tired of hearing the same ads?

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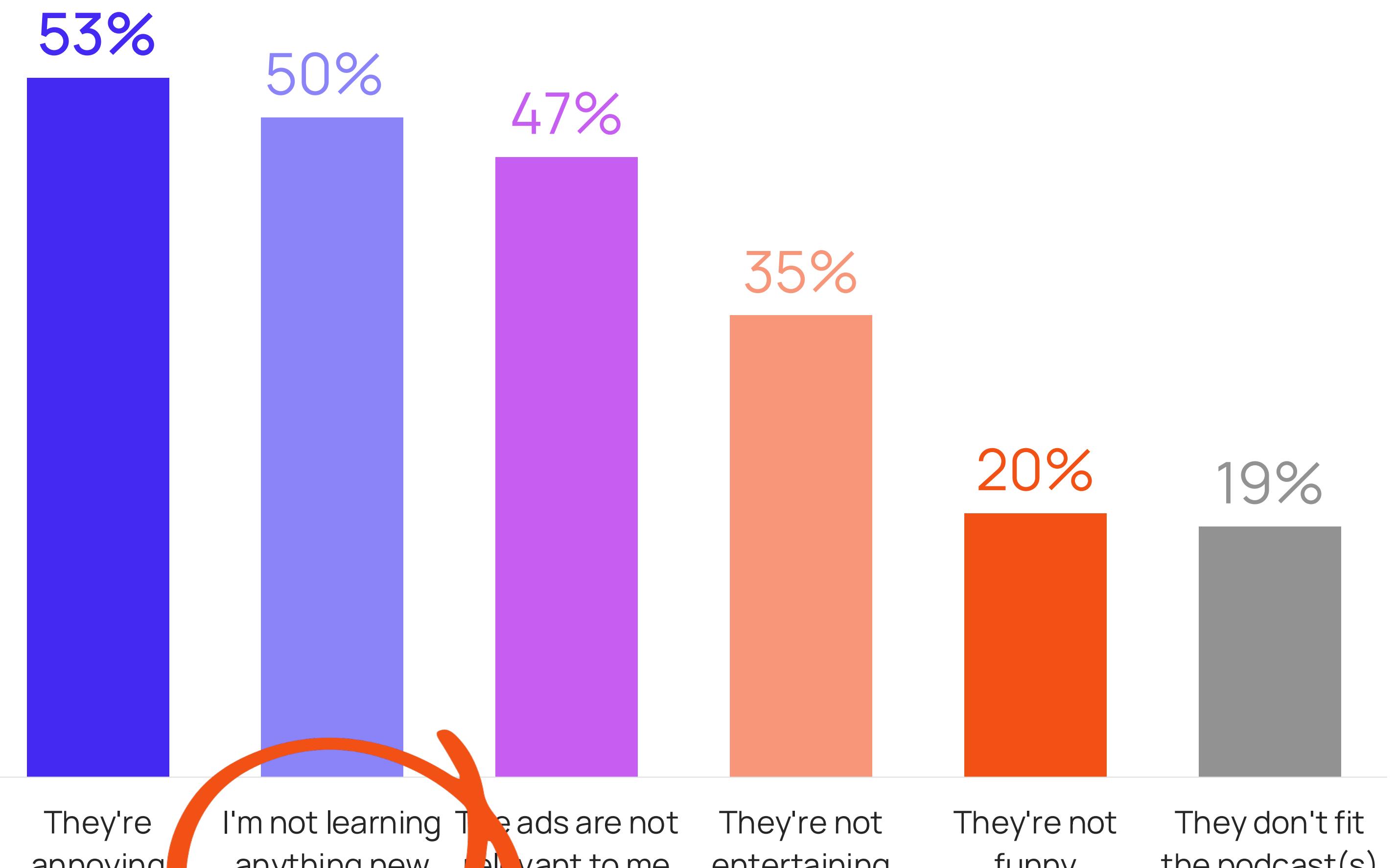
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Among listeners who hear the same ads too much



Thinking about your favorite podcast that has ads, would you prefer more variety in the products or brands advertised even if it means a higher number of ads?

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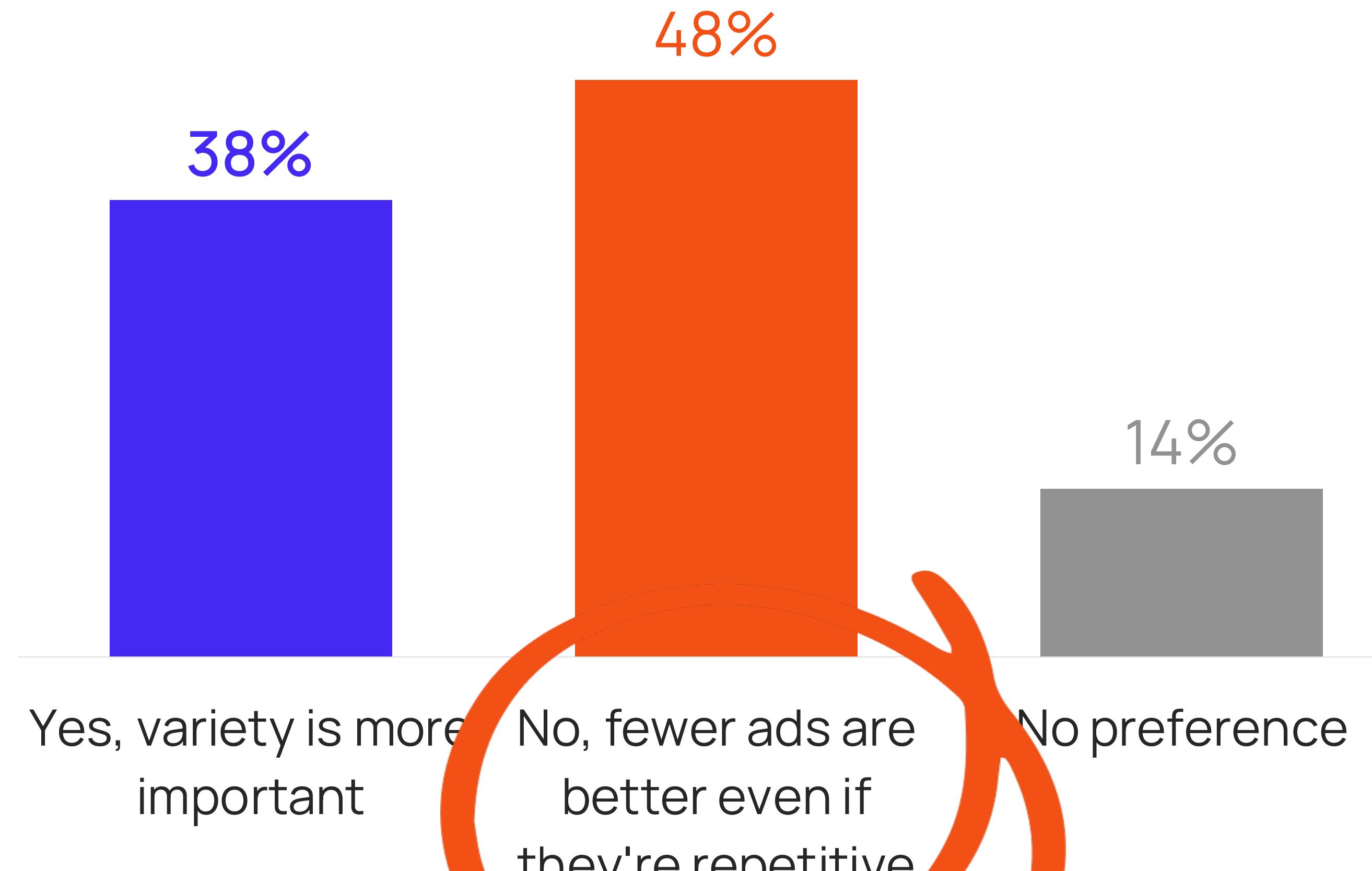
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## Creative Execution

Finally, podcasting is *entertainment*. Creators put a lot of effort into making 26 minutes of every :30 entertaining, funny, and interesting. The best we can do is to hold our ads to the same standard!

# What makes it more tolerable to hear an ad repeatedly?

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Among listeners who hear the same ads or brands too much



## What primarily motivates you to skip ads in your favorite podcast?

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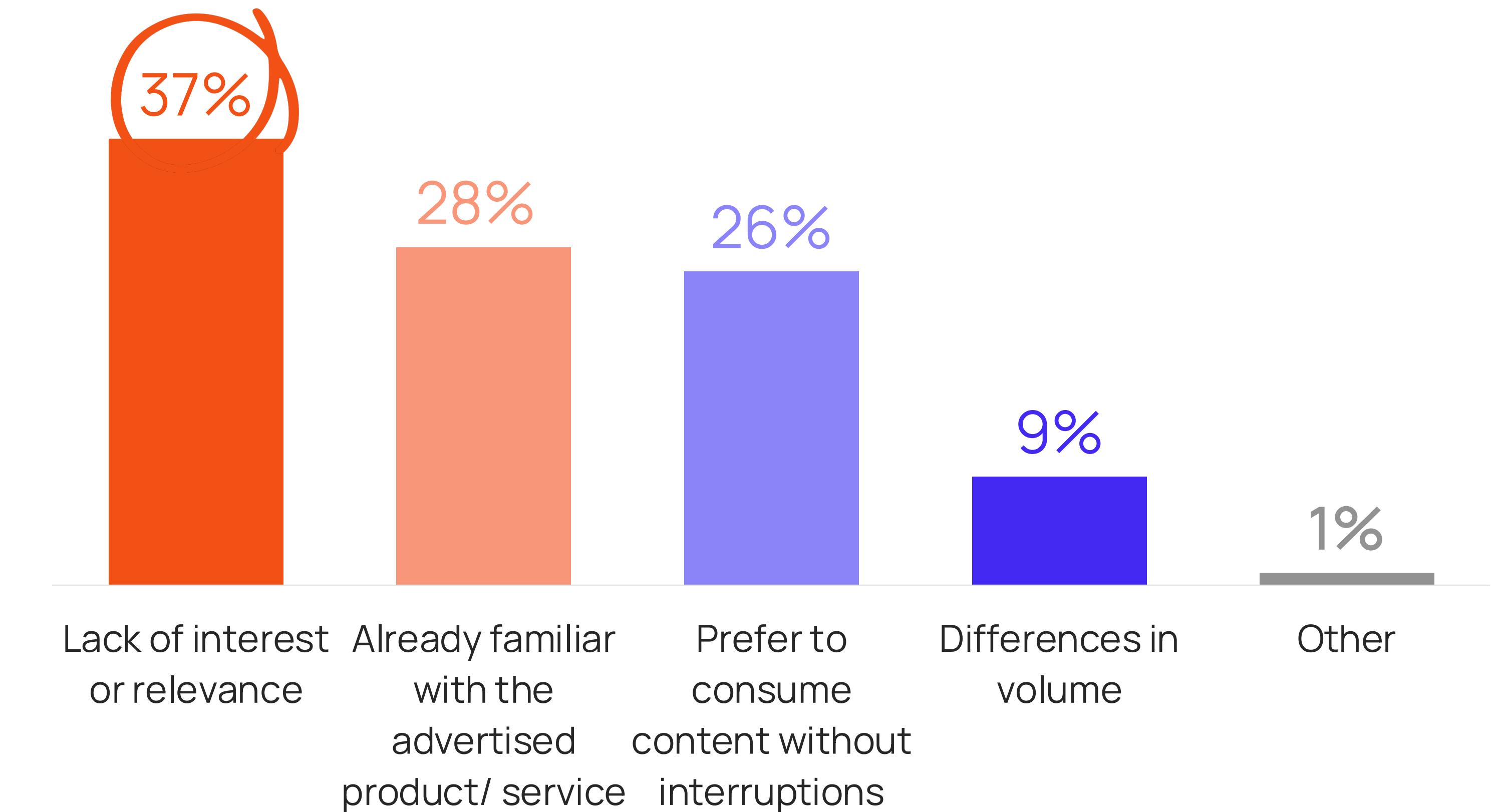
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Among listeners who ever skip ads



Think about the last podcast ad you remember hearing. What made it memorable?

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# Creative Execution

One solution? Variety in form.

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Think about an ad you're tired of hearing, what type of ad is it?

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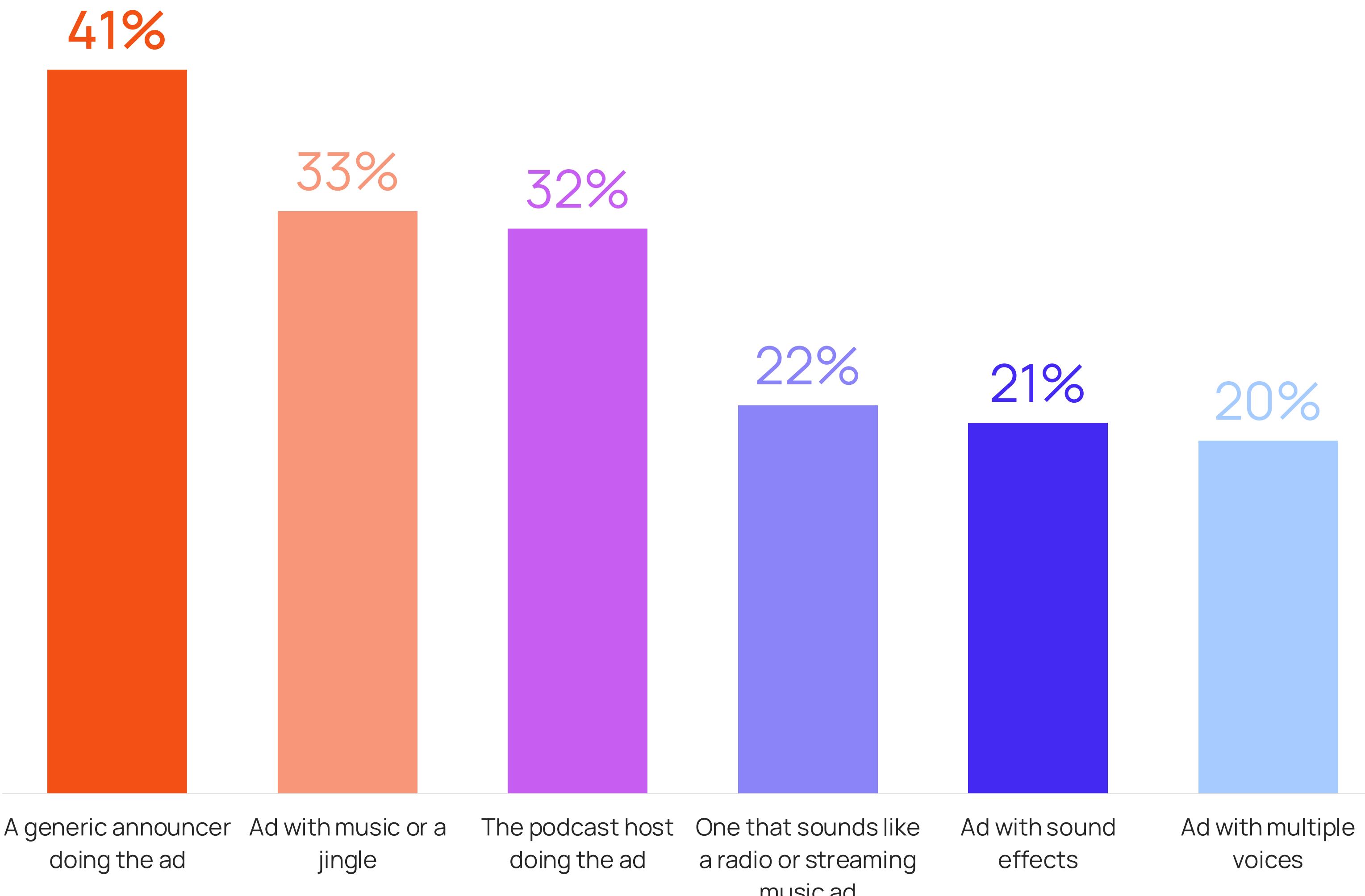
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Among listeners who hear the same ads or brands too much



Would you be more tolerant of ads in podcasts if they were different than what you typically hear (e.g., a mini-drama, a song, a quick interactive segment)?

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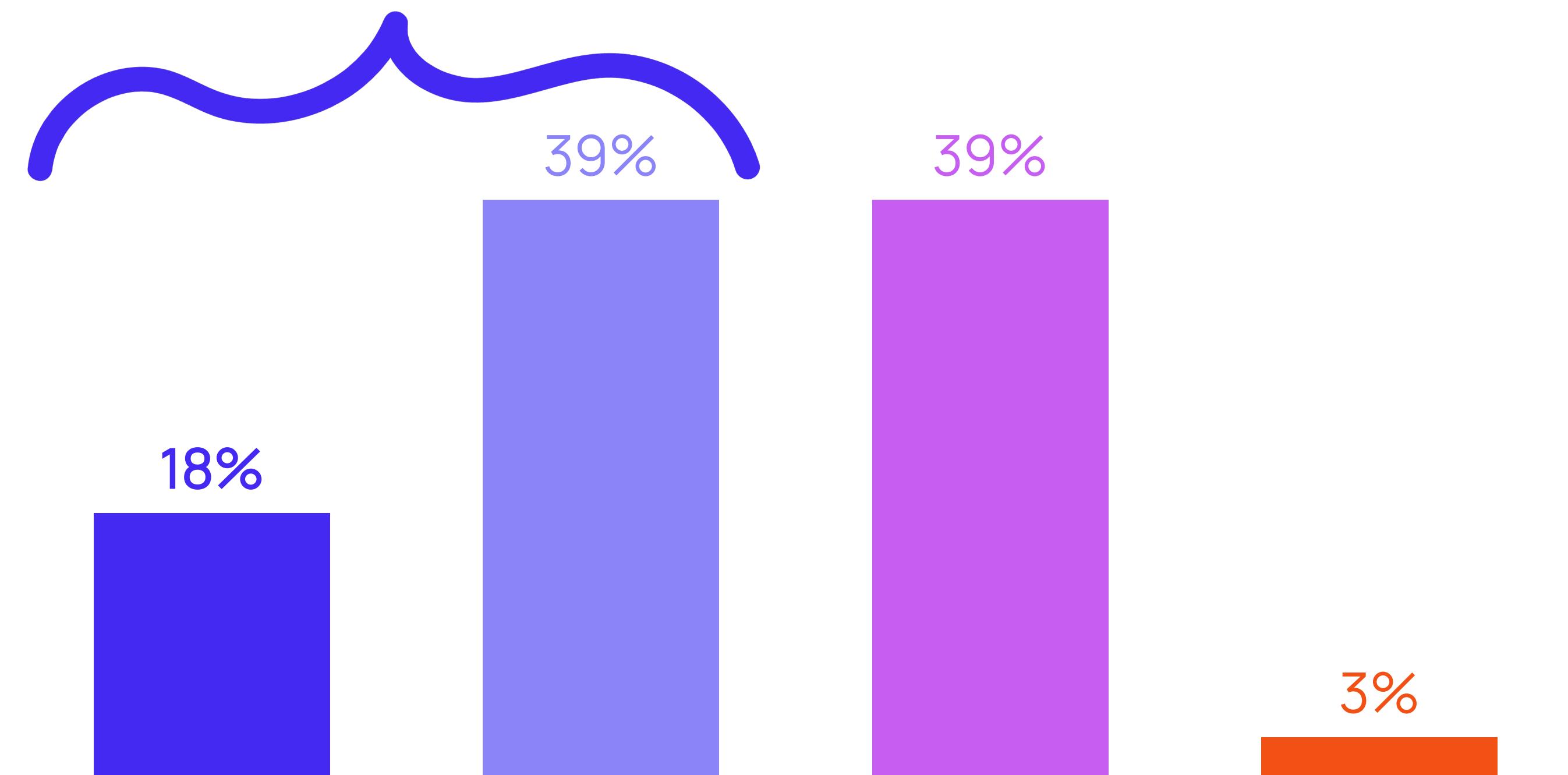
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57% more  
tolerant



Much more  
tolerant

Somewhat  
more tolerant

About the  
same

Less tolerant

# SOUNDS PROFITABLE

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# Key Findings

## Ad Effectiveness

58% have discovered a product/service they liked through a podcast ad, and 45% have made a purchase because of a podcast ad.

Most listeners (66%) heard an ad 2-3 times before making a purchase, with 75% purchasing within a week of last hearing the ad.

Podcast ads were influential in the purchase decision for 72% of those who bought a product/service advertised.

34% have used a promo code heard in a podcast ad. Of those, 19% did so to credit the creator or podcast. Promo codes are often searched later in show notes or the website.

## Ad Skipping

46% of listeners say they “always or often” skip ads on podcasts. When asked about the last specific episode they consumed, however, that percentage dropped. 68% listened to at least some of the ads on their last episode.

28% of listeners say they listen to “all of the ads” on podcasts, the highest percentage among all media channels tested.

Lack of interest/relevance (37%) and familiarity with the advertised product/service (28%) are the primary motivators for skipping ads.

# Key Findings



## Ad Frequency

67% of listeners recall hearing 2-3 ads in the last podcast episode with ads, with an average of 3.1 ads perceived.

Most listeners (56-59%) feel the number of ad breaks in their favorite podcast is just right.

73% expect to hear 2-3 ads in a typical episode of their favorite podcast, with most preferring 1-2 breaks.

Distributed within the content is the expected positioning for ad breaks.

## Ad Repetition

51% find hearing the same ad more than once in a single episode annoying or strongly dislike it.

90% think hearing the same ad once or twice in one episode is acceptable, with 40% agreeing on once.

Ad repetition decreases interest in the advertised product/service for 26% of listeners and decreases attention to the podcast for 23%.

29% become more annoyed and less likely to listen when noticing frequent repetition of the same product/brand.

# Key Findings

## Creative Execution

The top reason for ad skipping is a lack of interest or relevance of the ad (37%) followed by already being familiar with the product or service (28%).

Listeners don't find interesting, funny, or novel ads fatiguing. They do find a lack of variety in form and repetition of the same brand/message tiresome.

While host-read ads are singled out as preferred, 75% felt that skipping ads on podcasts did not actively affect "support" for the show, and 19% used promo codes to ensure the show got credit, the lowest cited reason for using them.

Most podcast listeners hear the same ad on multiple podcasts (52%) and four in five perceive encountering the same ad in other media.

The podcast ad is credited by 72% of consumers as "influential" in their decision to purchase a product or service they heard about on a podcast, even if it was encountered in other media.





AD NAUSEAM

# Actions

## One

Don't push it with quantity. There may not be a "right" answer for the number of ads, but there are expectations, and we violate them at the risk of both show and sponsor.

## Two

People strongly remember two types of ads: really great ones, and really terrible ones. The quality of the creative has a significant impact on perceptions of quantity and repetition.

## Three

Filling in unsold inventory with "value added" spots for the same ad likely doesn't help the brand, or the show.



# AD NAUSEAM

# Actions

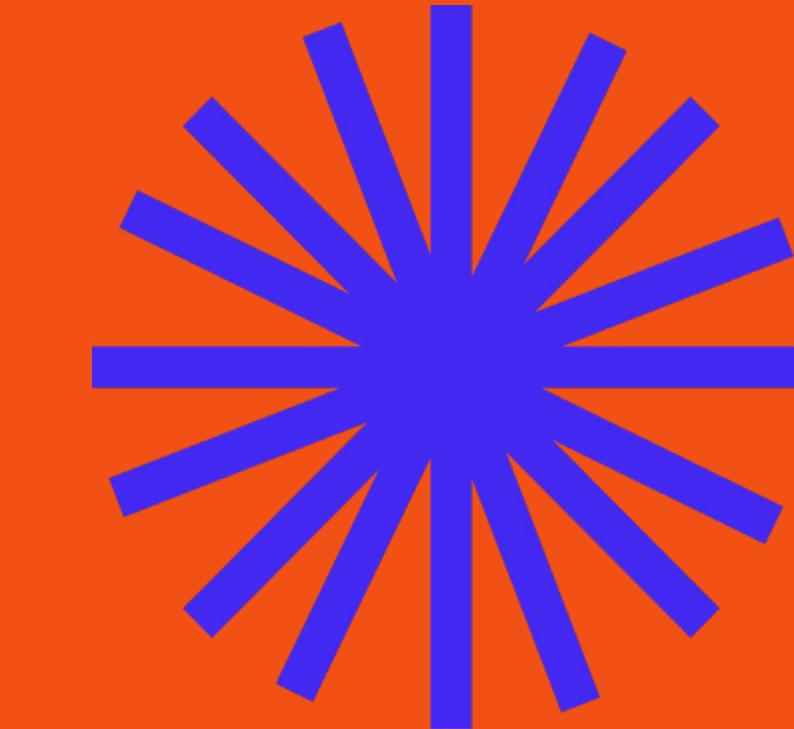
A black and white photograph of a person's face, partially obscured by a grid of blue dots. The person has dark hair and is looking slightly to the right. The background is dark and textured.

## Four

We have a great gift in the podcast listener. They aren't afraid of ads, and they won't reject them – in fact, they will pay more attention to them if we apply the same filter to the ads as we do the content: ads should help someone learn something new that is *genuinely* interesting, be entertaining, and be unafraid to challenge traditional advertising forms.

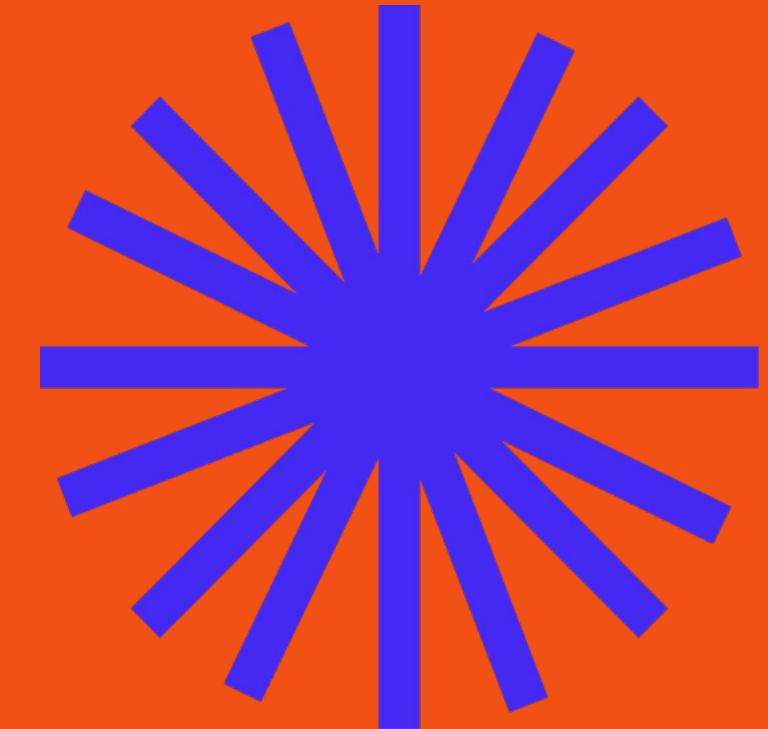
# Five

Hosts and creators need to do a better job explaining how this whole advertising deal works. If they don't love them, and tie their success to the show, the listeners won't either.



Podcast listeners  
don't skip ads.

They skip crap.



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