

The art of connection

UCAS October 2023

Agenda

A short intro to SMRS

Effective communication in HE

Understanding who our audiences are

Understanding their challenges and expectations

How to reach them on the right channels



Hello

For 25 years, we've been solving the problems that matter. Our 125 talented people bring ideas, strategies and values to life.

We deliver strategic marketing campaigns, research and consultancy that have an impact in the UK and all around the world.

Whether we're exploring or finding, planning or creating, we move heaven and earth to help our clients change for the better.

Certified



®

Corporation



Effective

communication in HE



**Our rich and
varied university
landscape**





Research findings from the University of Utah neuroscientists assert that there is no evidence within brain imaging that indicates some people are right-brained or left-brained.

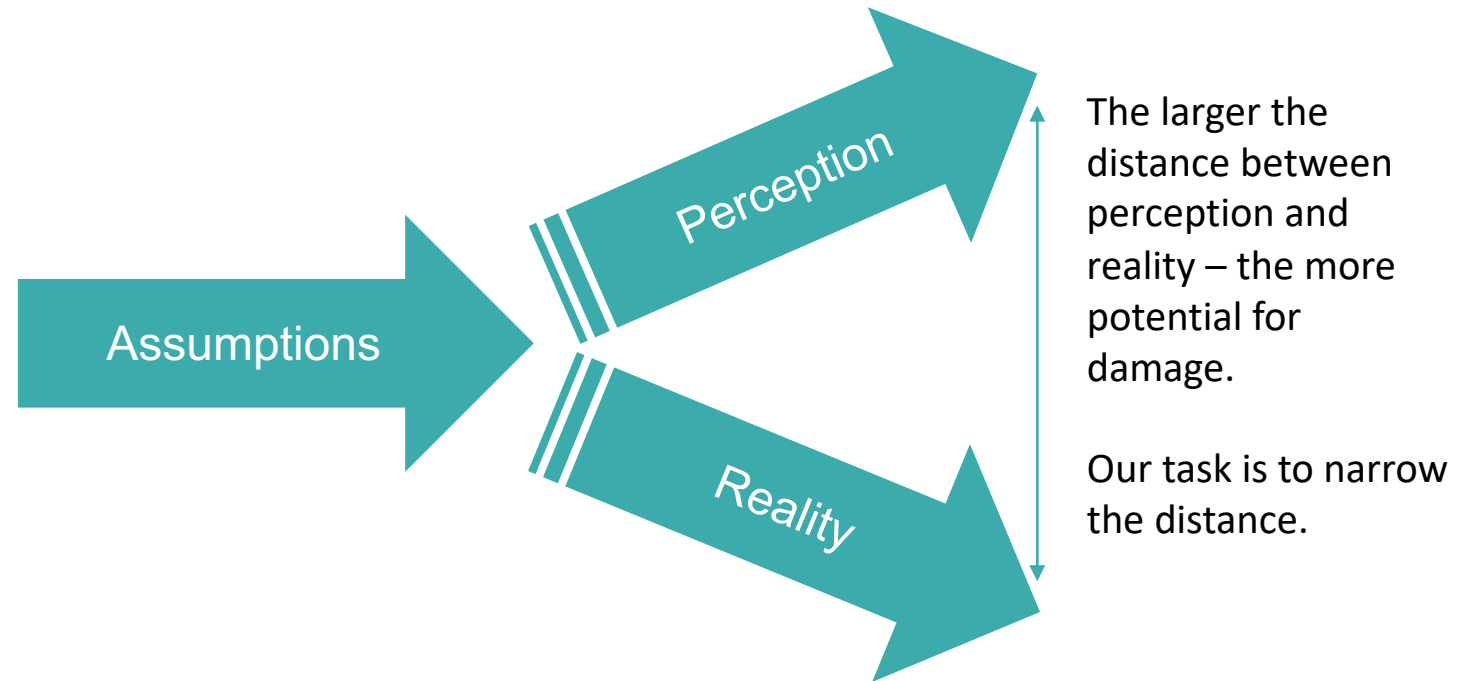
For years in popular culture, the terms left-brained and right-brained have come to refer to personality types, with an assumption that some people use the right side of their brain more, while some use the left side more.

ARE ASSUMPTIONS BAD?

Not necessarily – they are often required.

But basing assumptions on dated stereotypes can be damaging.

- Brand image
- Wasted resource



A person wearing a yellow beanie and a grey hoodie is seen from behind, standing in a forest. The person is looking towards a large tree trunk. The background is filled with green foliage and tree branches, creating a natural, outdoor setting. The lighting is soft, suggesting a slightly overcast day.

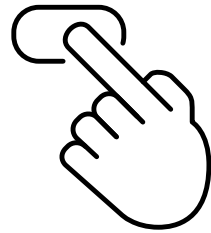
Data enhanced

understanding

**How can we
communicate more
effectively with our
audiences?**

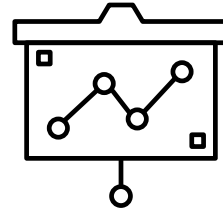


The benefits of an audience-centric approach



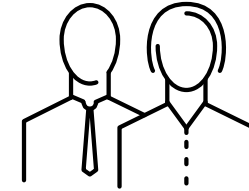
Increases engagement

Deliver more relevant messaging to active and passive audiences that will generate response.



Improves brand perception

Deliver joined up and appropriate experiences that meet audience needs and overcome challenges before they arise.



Aligns internal activity

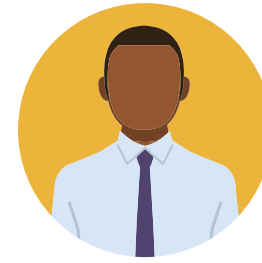
Provide a single and accurate view of your audience that all teams can get behind, to enable focus and consistency.

What is a persona?

A fictional representation of your audience.

Although fictional, they should be based on real people and detailed insight.

They are a critical tool in developing tailored and impactful communications and experiences.



What makes an effective persona?

- Based on research from your actual audience - not assumptions
- A clear purpose – focused on addressing the business needs/challenges you want to overcome
- Robust segmentation – large enough to be measured, stable enough over time and reachable in clear ways
- Actionable – useful insight that will transform your strategy and tactics



Survey

Motivations

- Primary and secondary motivators for study

Drivers

- Drivers of choice and decisions
- Influencers

Needs

- Areas researched
- When needs arose
- Additional needs

Interests

- Affiliation to interest groups

Background

- Funding
- Pre-study situation

Demographics

- Age
- Gender
- Country
- Mode
- Course
- Faculty

Challenges

- Challenges while applying
- Most prominent challenge

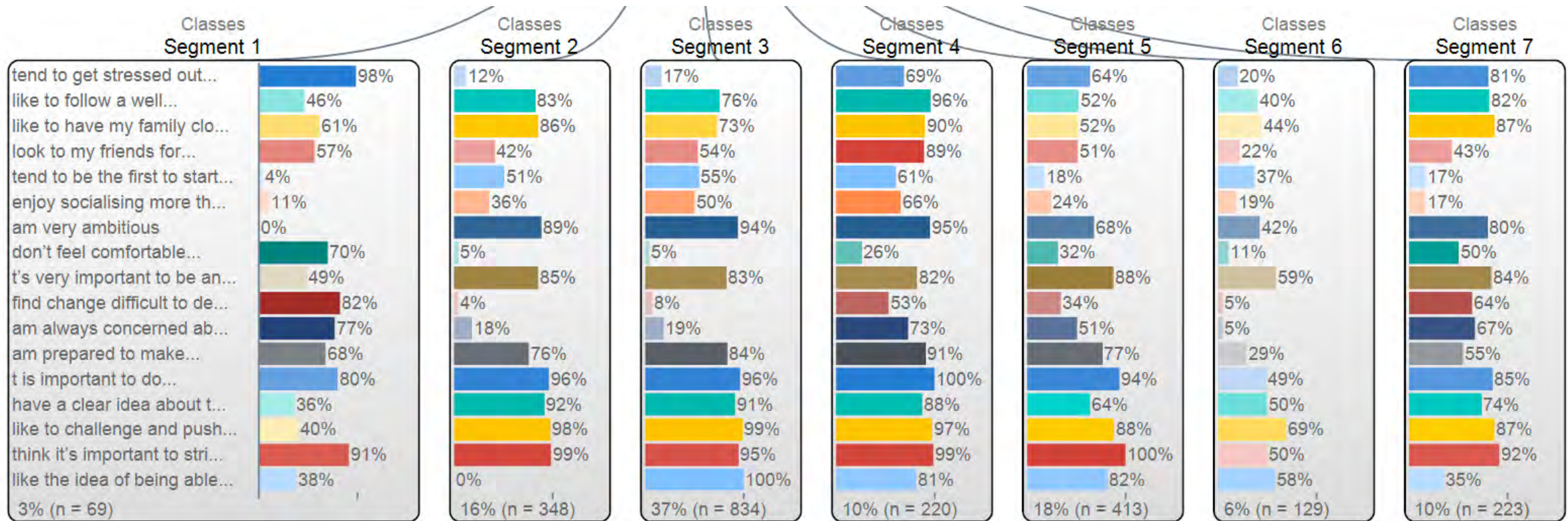
Behaviours

- Length of decision-making
- No. of unis considered
- No. of applications made
- Research behaviour

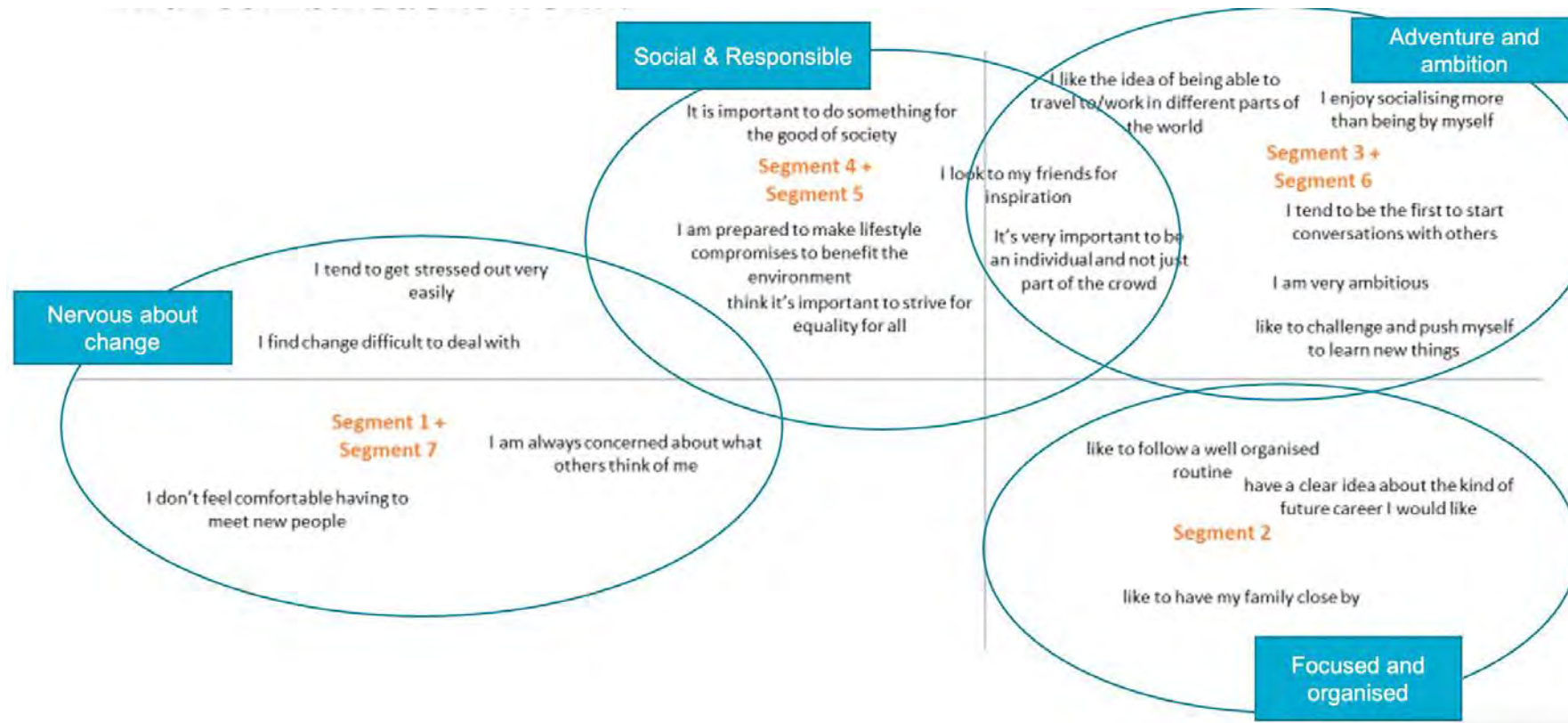
Preferences

- Social channels used
- Frequency/value of social channels
- DM expectations
- Channel, media and device preference
- View of advertising

Latent class analysis: attitudinal statements (to develop the clusters)



Latent class analysis: attitudinal statements (to develop the clusters)



Persona outputs

The examples presented contain research from previous projects and are therefore the property of the clients and can't be shared.

We've included rough templates on the following slides.

Bio:
Level of study?
Department/faculty studying in?
Region/currently live?
Funding their studies?
Before uni?
Biggest influence?
Challenging factors?
Outside of studies?
Type of person q?

Cluster Q:
Motivation study



Uni
Why did you decide uni of G?
Beyond Uni Qs – plan to stay? Plan to continue study after grad? Other unis considered?



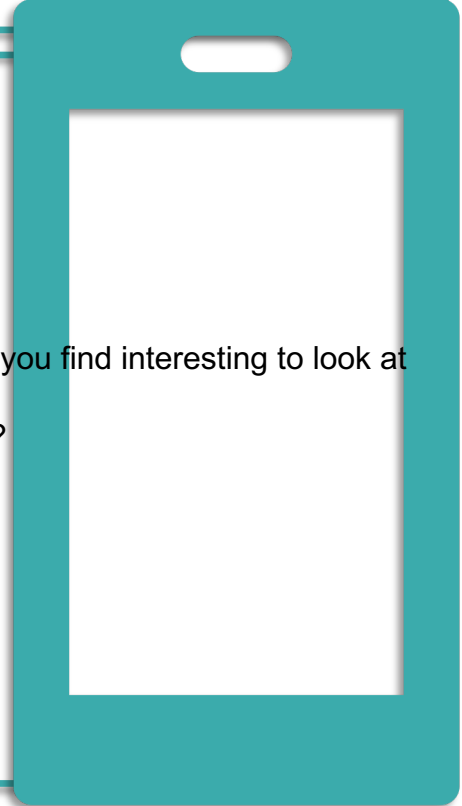
Key Demographics:



Age
Gender

Social media:
Which social media do you use
Type of user
What university related content do you find interesting to look at on online channels?
Social media used to research uni?
Any advertising seen?
Frequency of comms
Satisfied with the comms

Application Journey:
How did you first hear about the uni?
How did you first make contact?
When researching and applying – did you engage with the uni
Rate these interactions
Advertising impact?



297
out of
600

Knowledge Seekers

Knowledge seekers are at university because of their passion for learning and interest in the subject area.

They are currently studying at PG level and are likely to be studying business related courses. Knowledge seekers mostly fund their studies via government loans and were studying at undergrad level prior to this. They aren't usually influenced by others. However, knowledge seekers find family commitments to be the biggest challenge to studying at university.

Typically, knowledge seekers spend their time reading bookings and exercising when the opportunity arises.

Motivators:

90%

I enjoy learning

87%

Interest in the subject area



Uni

- Why did you decide uni of G?
- Beyond uni Qs – plan to stay? Plan to continue study after grad? Other unis considered?



30 - 35



White (English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British).



Northern Europe



Female

Social Media Usage

Typically, knowledge seekers use Tiktok, Instagram and Facebook as a follower to keep up-to-date with what's going on.

They often use online channels to discover expert interviews, career guidance and academic resources.

Knowledge seekers use LinkedIn and Facebook to research the university. Individuals in this group see advertising of the university on educational websites, and on online platforms.



18%



29%



38%

Application Journey: Knowledge seekers first hear about the university via study portals and first contacted the university at a higher education fair. Throughout their journey of researching and applying to university they typically engaged with the university's website and visiting the campus.



Media Usage

Frequency of social media platforms



38%

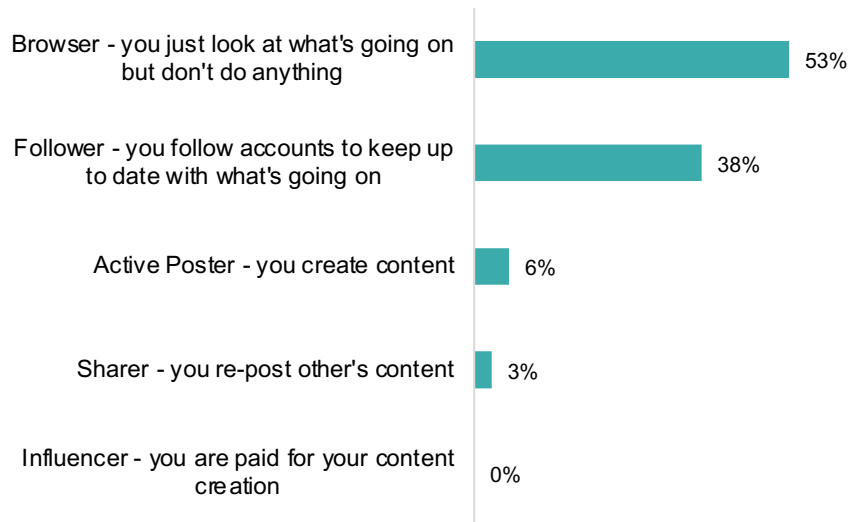


29%



18%

Type of User



Social media:
Which social media do you use
Type of user
What university related content do you find interesting to look at on online channels?
Social media used to research uni?
Any advertising seen?
Frequency of comms
Satisfied with the comms
Advertising impact?

Social media preference researching universities?



21%



21%



12%



9%



6%

Application Journey

- Application Journey:
 - How did you first hear about the uni?
 - How did you first make contact?
- When researching and applying – did you engage with the uni
 - Rate these interactions



Key milestones and moments plotted



How do we improve the customer experience?



Approaches to measurement

Strategic snapshot

Suitable for reporting and longer-term improvements

20-30 min.

Confidence

Quality

Capability

Belonging

Motivation

Experience

Application

Open days

Offer decision

Results

Enrolment

Check-ins

Suitable for real-time understanding and engagement.

4-5 min.

Confidence

Touchpoint
experience
Wellbeing

4-5 min.

Quality

Touchpoint
experience
Wellbeing

4-5 min.

Capability

Touchpoint
experience
Wellbeing

4-5 min.

Belonging

Touchpoint
experience
Wellbeing

4-5 min.

Motivation

Touchpoint
experience
Wellbeing

Application

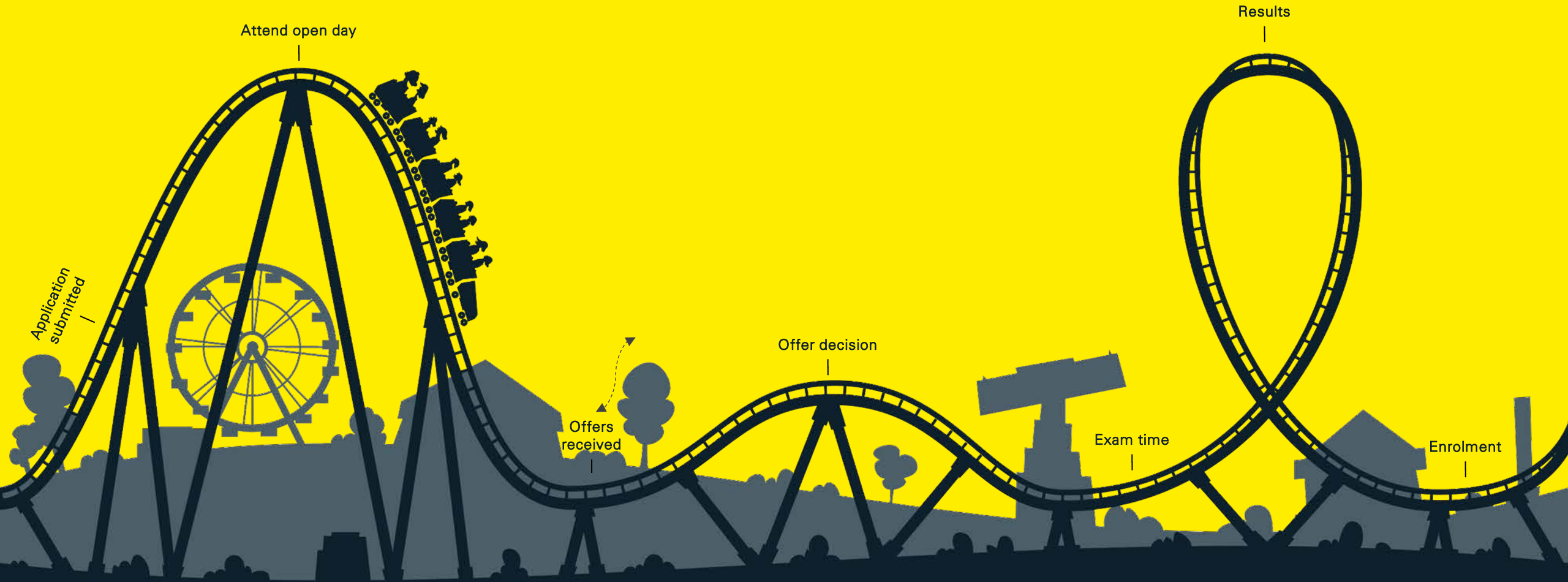
Open days

Offer decision

Results

Enrolment

Reflecting back on the journey doesn't provide a true picture of what it was really like



studentpulse

1	Jan-Jun	Application received
2	Feb-Mar	Applicant days/open days
3	Mar-May	Offer decision
4	July	After exams
5	Aug	Exam results/confirmation
6	Sept	Enrolment
7	Oct	Induction/freshers
8	Nov	Reading week
9	Dec	Pre-holidays

Your first check-in ✓

To be able to support you the best way possible the upcoming months, we want to know a few things about how you are feeling right now! Your answers are anonymous and will only be used to lead you in the right direction.

[READ LESS](#)

- Approx. 4 questions
- Up to 2 minutes
- 100% anonymous

[Tell us what you think](#)

6.0/10	Experience
4.7/10	Capability
8.0/10	Competition
9.0/10	Cost
5.6/10	Decision making
8.0/10	Fit
5.2/10	Offer quality
4.6/10	Well-being

Working with


student minds

Automated and appropriate interventions

NEW CHAT STARTED
Open from 8.00AM - 6.00PM

Write your question here...

Send message



Mental health and wellbeing →
20 RESOURCES

Find out what you can do to look after your physical and mental health.



**Free access to
CV builder**

**June '23
Job Fair**

We encourage you to contact
us when you need us.

**LinkedIn
Workshop**

Career Advisor
Open from 8.00AM - 6.00PM



**Knowing where to
connect with our
audiences.**



Understanding media consumption

- Media engagement data
- Third-party tracking services
- Web Analytics
- Social Analytics

Unanswered questions...

- What is the online / offline channel mix?
- Why do people use the channels they do?
- Are there any demographic variances?

That's where media consumption research comes in.



The problem with AMP's

- Incomplete Data
- Unrepresentative
- Cost

KANTAR

GWJ.



Ipsos MORI



Nielsen

So, we set out to solve this...

- Primary research
- Representative response base
- Scale
- Relevant channels
- Online / offline

Respondent overview

- Over 3,000 participants
 - 64% prospective students (enquirers/applicants)
 - 57% of respondents were aged between 16-18
 - 35% were between 19-21 years old.
- Representative of HE participation across all UK regions, including Northern Ireland.
- Focused on media usage patterns during university journey
- Useful demographic profiles



**What media is used
in their free time?**

Social media and streaming occupies most time when online.



Social media

83%



Music streaming

57%

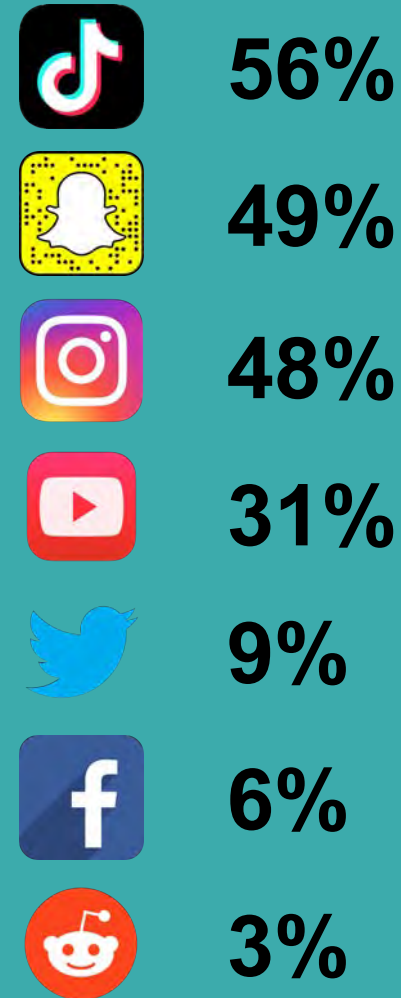


Video streaming

47%

*What do you spend most of your time doing when online in your free time?
N = 3,059*

TikTok dominates time spent on social channels.



Which social media channels do you use the most in your spare time?
N = 2,086



**What social media is used
for university discovery?**

TikTok is the preferred social channel to research universities of interest.

Please select the social media channels that you prefer to use when researching universities, you are interested in? Please select your top 3.
N = 3,059

Researching universities



1. Tik Tok



2. YouTube



3. Instagram



4. Snapchat

Noticing universities



1. Instagram



2. TikTok



3. YouTube



4. Facebook

Channel used in free time



1. Tik Tok



2. Snapchat



3. Instagram

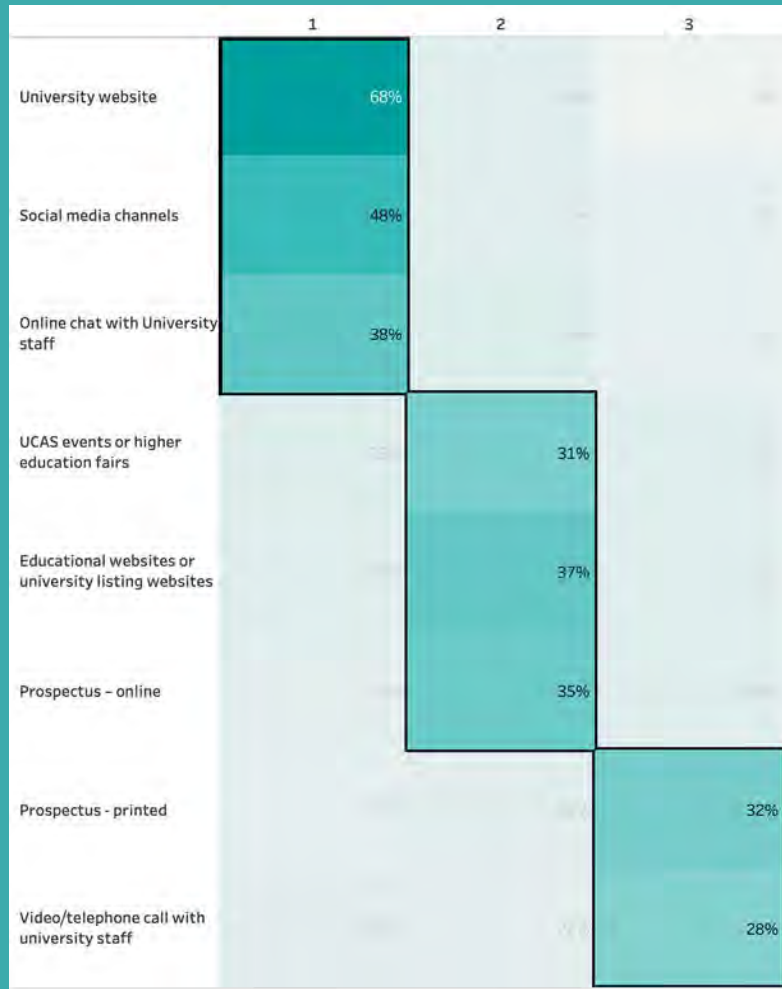


4. YouTube



What media is used for university research?

The first step of discovery



If you wanted to find out about a university that you have no or very limited prior knowledge of, where is the first place you would go?

N = 3,052

Top channels for initial engagement

- Website
- Social media
- Online chat

Secondary choices:

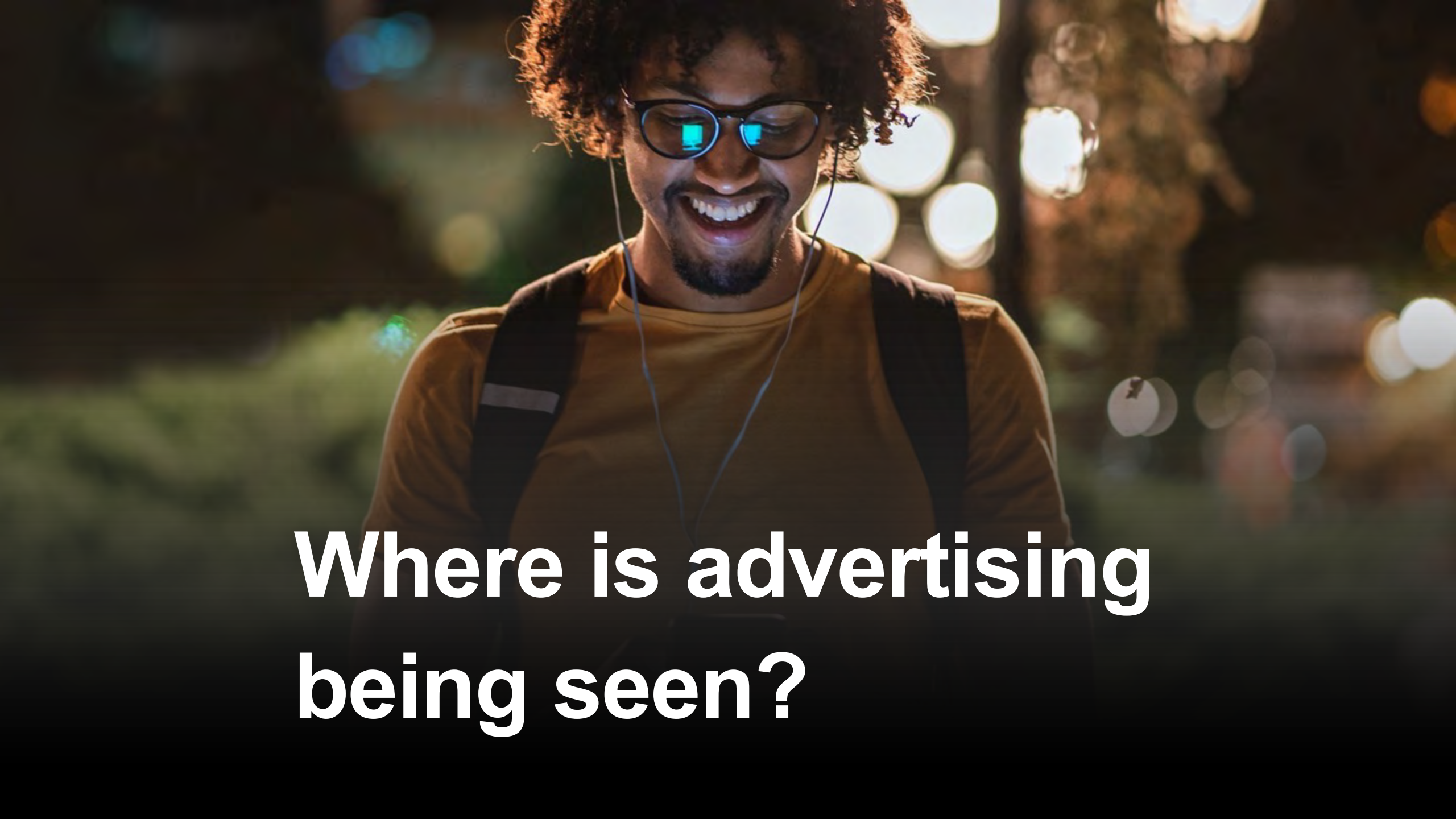
- UCAS fairs
- Education channels
- Online prospectus

Least favorable options

- Printed prospectuses
- Phone calls to university

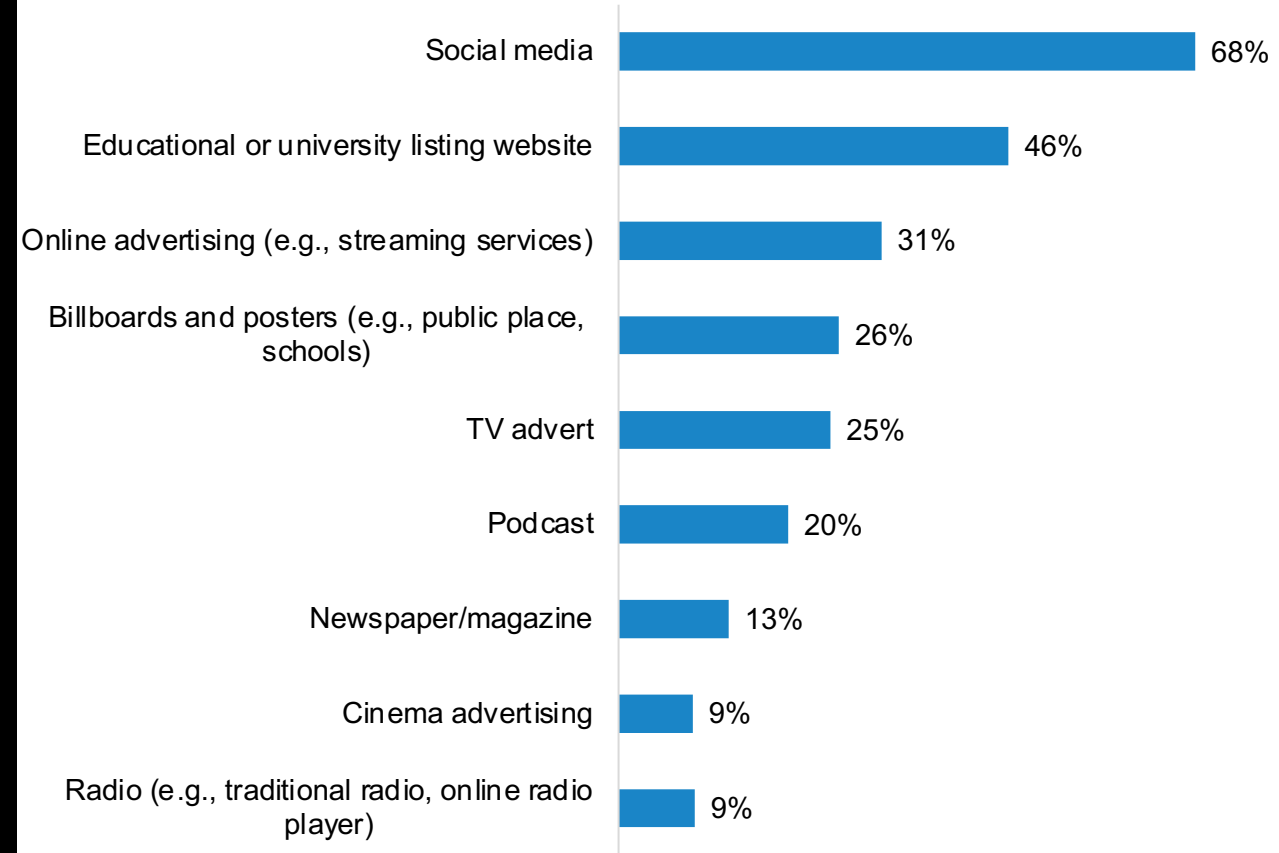
Digital platforms are preferred for initial contact.

Physical events and resources are considered as supplementary options.

A young man with curly hair and glasses, wearing a backpack and headphones, is smiling while looking down at a device in a city at night. The background is dark with bokeh lights from street lamps or buildings.

**Where is advertising
being seen?**

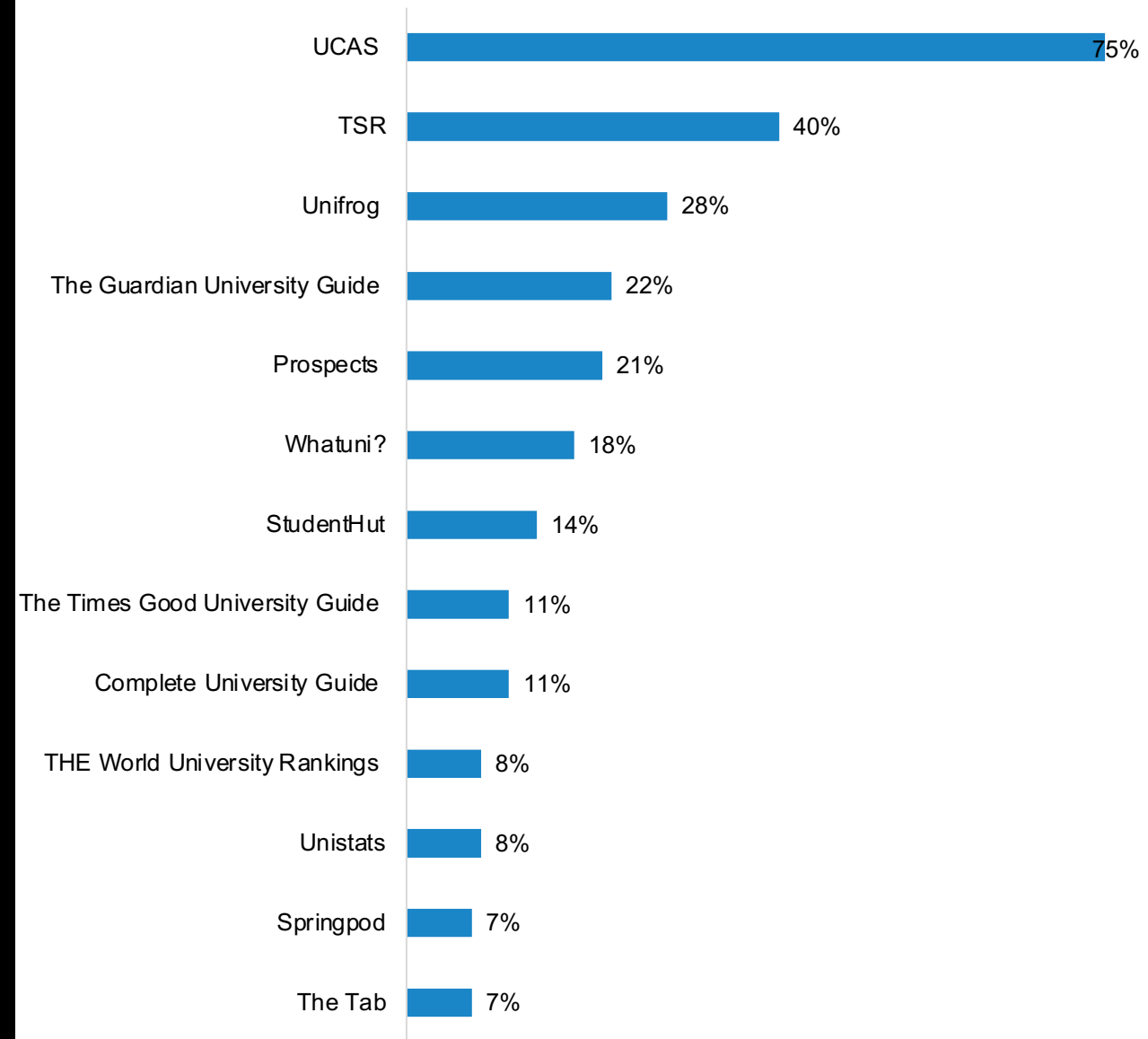
Where is university advertising being seen?




Have you seen any university advertising on any of the following channels?
n:2,836

On what education sites is university advertising being seen?

Please select the educational or university listing websites where you have seen advertising about any university?
N:1,305





What impact does advertising have?

Advertising impact

1

Raising awareness

- Education listing websites
 - Social media
 - Out of home

2

Elicit a positive response

- Podcast
- TV advert
- Online advertising

3

Nudging

- Radio
- Out of home
- Social media

4

Elicit a negative response

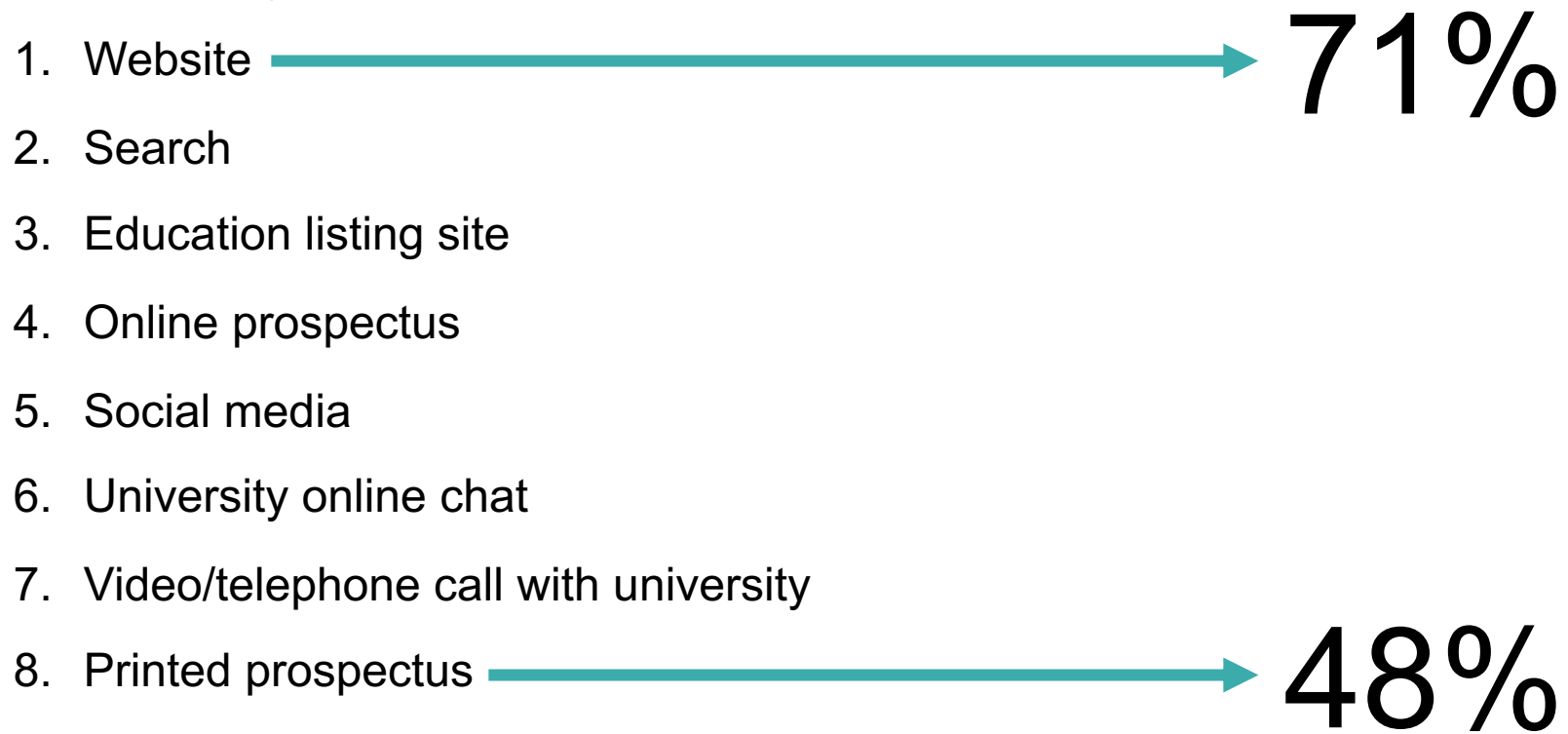
- Cinema advertising
- Newspaper/magazine
 - TV advert



**What media is used when
finalising decisions?**

Influencing final decisions

Channels by rank of importance



Recap of key findings



Dominance of TikTok

TikTok is the preferred social channel for university research and entertainment during free time.



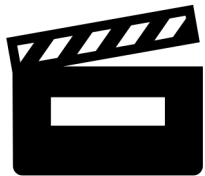
Trust in university websites

Websites are the primary choice for accurate, reliable, and comprehensive information.



Traditional channels remain relevant

Despite the digital age, traditional channels continue to have an impact on prospective students.



Advertising drives action

Ads successfully motivate prospective students to reach out to universities.



Advertising influences preferences

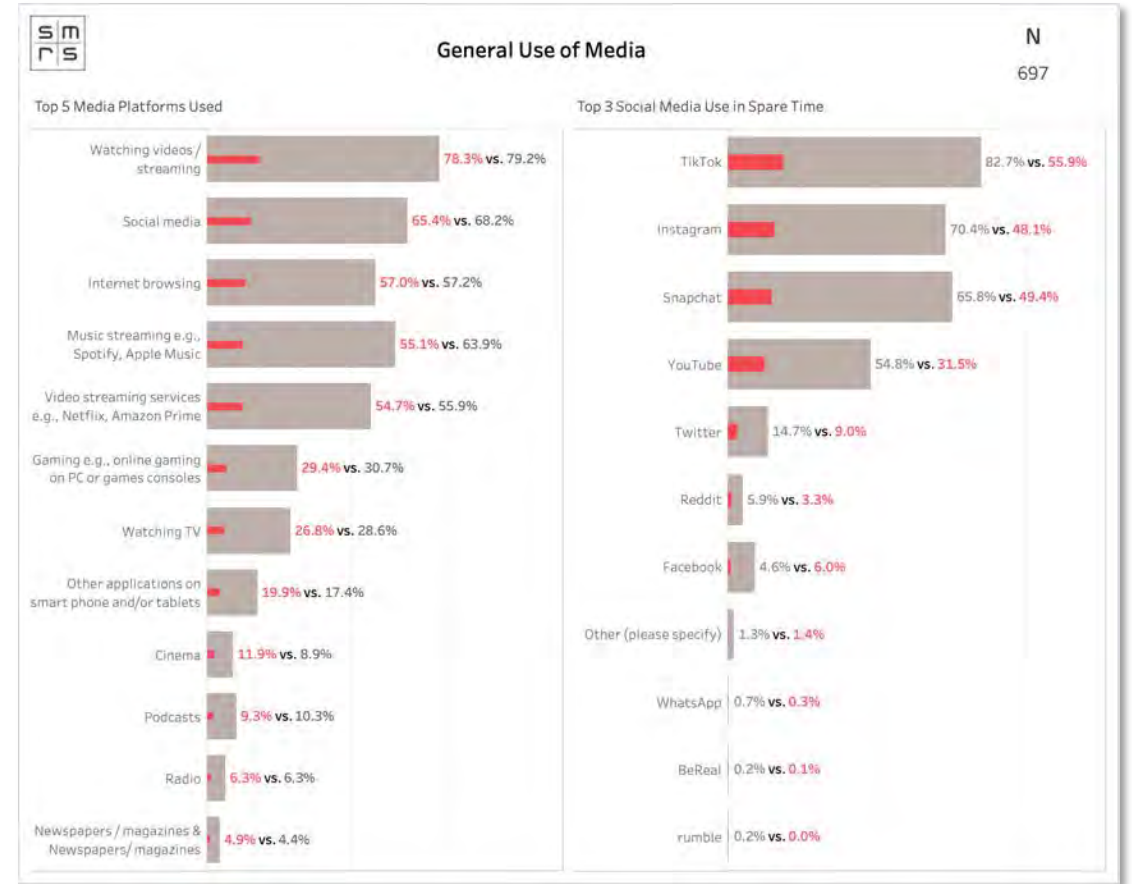
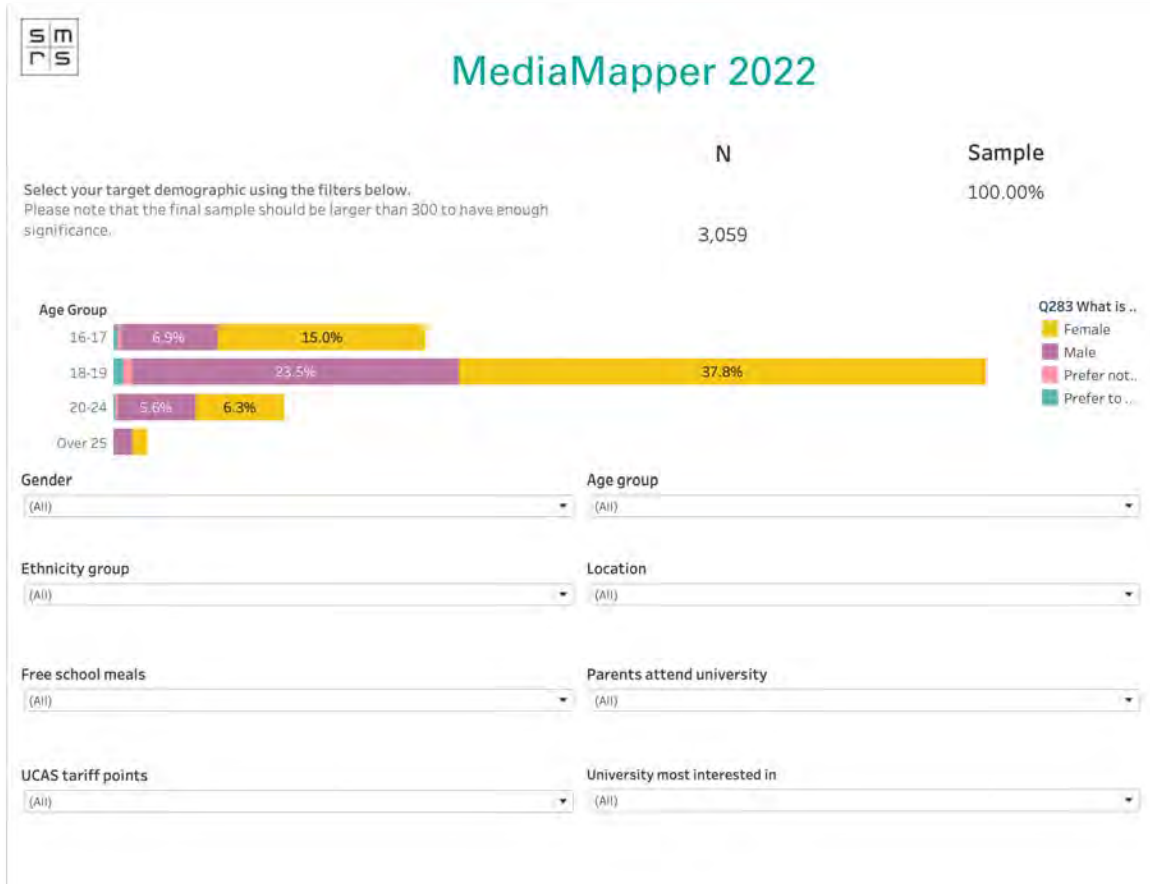
Advertising plays a role in boosting prospective students' interest in specific universities.



Final decision influencers

A wide mix of channels continue to play an important role in decision-making, right up to the last moment.

SMRS MediaMapper



Summary

- Successful connections require the alignment of a multitude of factors
- Our audiences are complex
- Start to identify how you can enhance your data and understanding
- Engage your audience to understand behavioural factors for personalisation and optimisation
- Reach your audiences using multiple channels & optimise your own channels



**Scan to follow up
with SMRS**





Thank you

Smita Chohan
smita.chohan@smrs.co.uk

Jon Kirk
jon.kirk@smrs.co.uk

smrs.co.uk