

The social media habits of teachers



Commissioned by Susan Higgins,
Director of Communications,
Edge Foundation

About Edge

The world is changing fast and education needs to keep up. Edge is an independent, politically impartial education foundation. We want education to be relevant to the twenty-first century. We gather evidence through research and real world projects and partnerships and use this to lead the debate and influence policy and practice.

Edge believes all young people need to be equipped with the skills that today's global, digital economy demands, through a broad and balanced curriculum, high quality training, engaging real world learning and rich relationships between education and employers.

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About the Education Comms Network

The Education Comms Network is a mutually supportive network of over 100 marketing and communications leaders working across the education sector. It was founded in November 2020 with support from the Edge Foundation. The network meets once a term online to learn, hear from experts and share their work.

Through the Education Comms Network, Edge is helping support and improve the overall effectiveness of education comms teams across the UK. The network offers a valuable opportunity for members to pause and reflect, connect, learn from each other, and become stronger professionals.



Foreword

This report was commissioned by the Edge Foundation for the Education Comms Network.

When planning this report we wanted to find out four things.

- 1. How educators are using social media when they are in work mode**
- 2. What platforms are most popular with educators**
- 3. The content educators are looking for on social media**
- 4. Which platforms and influencers educators trust**

Education is not a cash-rich sector. Budgets for marketing and comms are modest, and that means comms professionals are under pressure to spend their budgets wisely. Understanding the behaviour of educators helps us to streamline our efforts so we provide the right content, on the most appropriate platforms, with the greatest impact. Increasing our shared understanding of teacher social media habits can help individuals working in education comms to have a greater impact.

As new social media platforms emerge, it's important to monitor where the education audiences are active so that we can position ourselves in the right places. The situation is constantly changing in this regard. We've seen many more education institutions with profiles on TikTok and the change of ownership for Twitter has led to education users setting up profiles on Mastadon. Unless you have a large comms team and can maintain a presence on lots of social media platforms, it makes sense to prioritise the platforms where educators are most likely to be.

The use of influencers is common in other sectors to boost sales and amplify message reach, but do they get cut-through with educators? In this report we dig a little deeper to find out what qualities teachers look for and who they trust most.

I hope this study provides valuable insight for colleagues and helps in planning comms activities and campaigns that have real impact.

To those who are finding us for the first time, we invite you to **join the Education Comms Network** to connect, share and support others working in education marketing and communications.

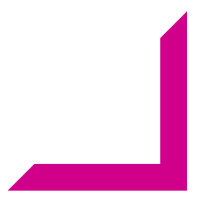


Susan Higgins
Director of Communications
Edge Foundation
SHiggins@edge.co.uk

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Summary



This study provides a unique window into the lives of educators and their use of social media. We also look at podcasts and what they feel about influencers.

In contrast to consumer trends, where Instagram and TikTok dominate, Twitter is the most common platform educators use when in work mode. This is followed by WhatsApp and then Facebook. Digging deeper, educators in the north west use Twitter the most; primary are more likely to use Facebook than secondary; and headteachers are the greatest users of Twitter.

Reflecting its dominant use, Twitter is most trusted by educators for education content. Interestingly, trust in Facebook is much lower, although drilling down into the data does show variation between different groups. For instance, primary teachers are more likely to trust education content on Facebook than secondary teachers. Educators are less likely to trust Instagram and TikTok for education-related content.

Educators were asked what they felt made influencers authentic. They told us that influencers needed to work in a school or MAT and to be using their platform for good. Being honest was also important. Interestingly, respondents didn't feel they would be more interested in a story if it had been flagged by an influencer.

Less than half of educators listened to education podcasts, suggesting this is still an emerging area of media consumption. Headteachers and others in SLT are more likely to listen to a podcast, but even within this audience two fifths don't listen to education podcasts.

This fascinating and insightful survey also highlights differences in behaviour and attitudes between specific groups of educators which are worth noting. These include distinctions between men and women, between early years/ KS1 respondents and the rest of the sample, and regional trends.



Terminology

Where we refer to educators, we include all those who were surveyed:

- > Classroom teachers
- > Middle leaders
- > SLT (not headteachers)
- > Headteachers

Methodology

The findings in this report are based on surveying more than 5000 teachers, headteachers, other senior leaders, and middle leaders. Teacher Tapp undertook the survey on 11th and 12th December 2022. Five multiple choice questions were asked:

1. When using social media for work, which of the following activities do you do most often?
2. Which social media platform do you trust most for education-related content?

3. If you listen to education podcasts, what type of content do you like?
4. Are you more likely to be interested in a story if an "education influencer" flags it?
5. What makes an education influencer authentic?

In addition, we used the findings from two back catalogue Teacher Tapp questions from May 2022 which were:

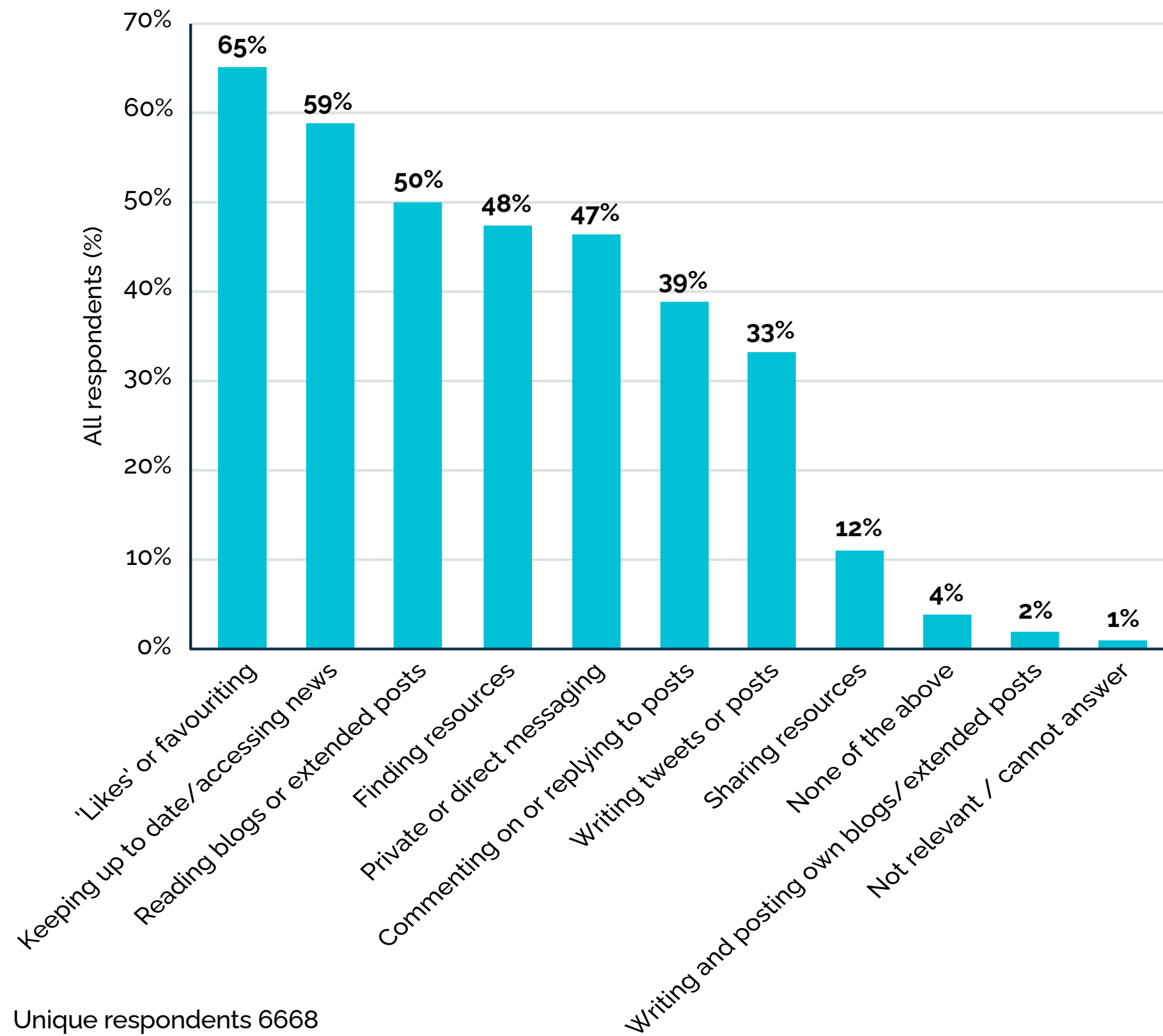
1. Which of the following social media platforms have you used for "work-related activities" in the past week?
2. Thinking of the time you have spent on social media in the past week, which of the following have you done?

Special thanks go to Anna Pedroza, Pedroza Communications, who analysed the data and wrote the report, and to Jessica Shepherd, Sparrowhawk Communications, who provided additional input.

Spending time on social media



General use of social media



Graph 1: All responses

Thinking of the time you have spent on social media in the past week, which of the following have you done?

The breakdown reflects how respondents use social media generally, encompassing leisure and work time.

Liking and favouriting is the most popular activity – possibly because it is low effort. 70% of respondents in their 20s will favourite/like compared to 61% of those over 50 years old. The most likely to favourite/like are English teachers with 71% saying they have done this in the past week.

Keeping up to date/accessing news is the second most popular activity. Bear in mind that respondents are talking about keeping up to date generally rather than specifically for work – it could be the latest football scores as much as education-related news.

Reading blogs is also popular and half of respondents do this. Most noticeably, those in senior roles are more likely to read blogs with almost two thirds of SLT and headteachers doing so. Reading blogs is also more popular with those in their 30s or over. Just 37% of those in their 20s read blogs but this climbs to 56% for those in their 40s.

Given the question is about general use of social media, it's not surprising that finding resources comes fourth overall. However, it ranks third for those who are classroom teachers, aged in their 20s, or have less than 5 years' experience. In contrast, respondents from secondary independent schools are less likely to be finding resources and ranked this in fifth position.

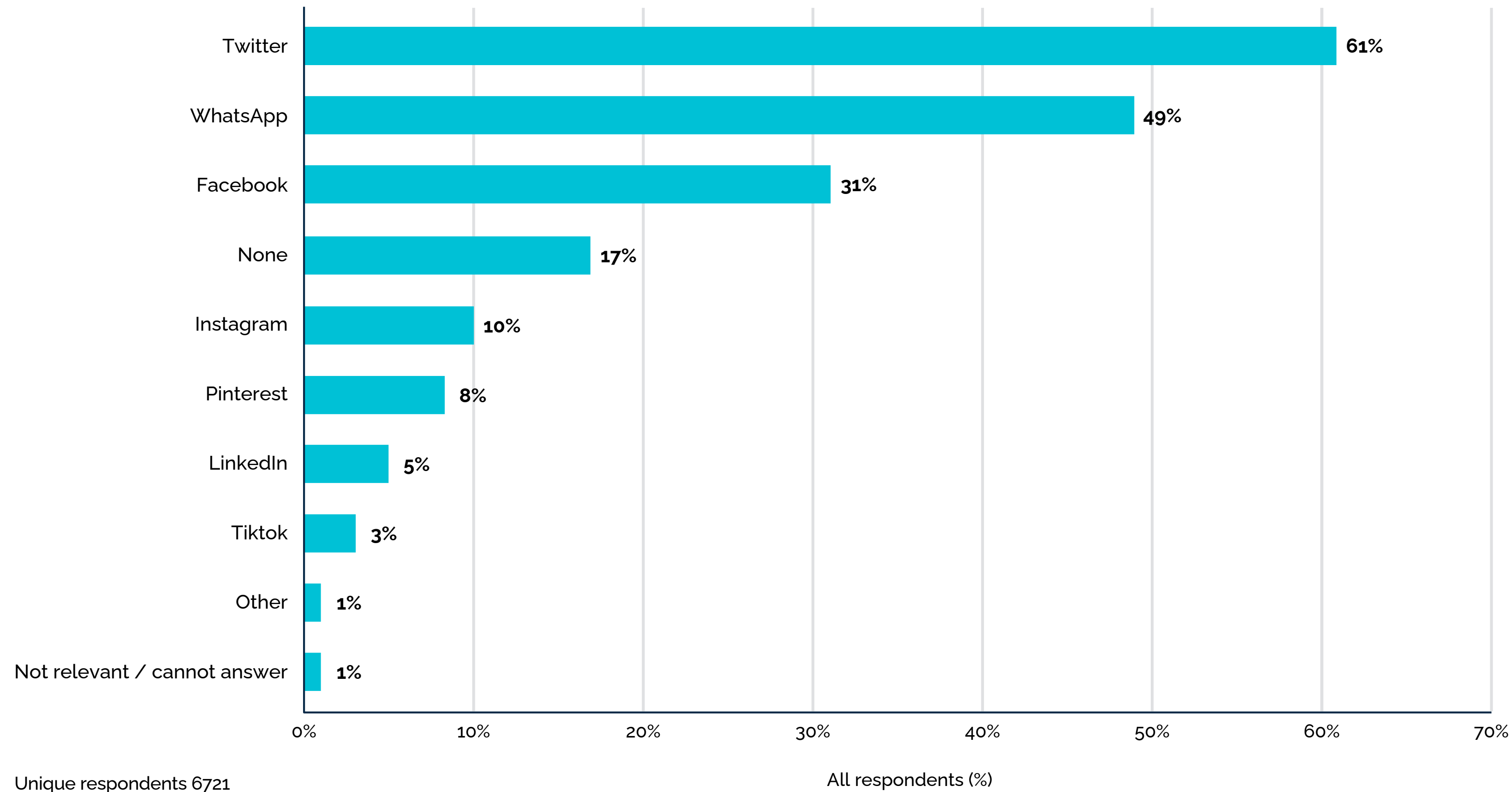
What does it mean for communicators?

Respondents are keen to keep up to date and a large number are looking for resources. For communicators, this means social media is a good way to promote and share resources, news and information. Communicators should note that a compelling blog promoted on social media is a particularly effective way to reach SLT.

Using social media for work



Use of different social media platforms



Graph 2: All responses

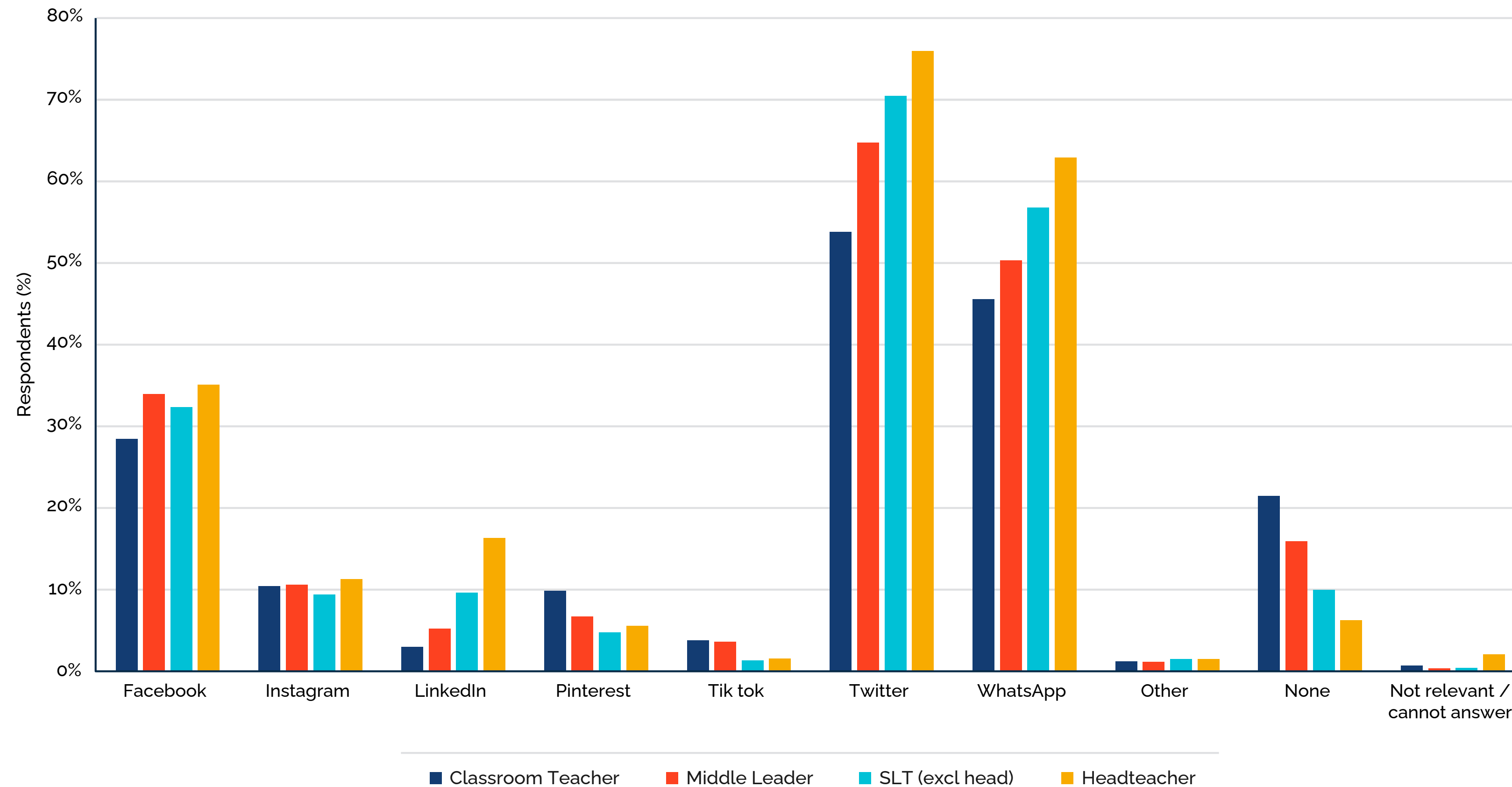
Which of the following social media platforms have you used for 'work-related activities' in the past week?

Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp are the platforms most used by most educators. However, almost a fifth (17%) don't use any social media for work related activities. Interestingly, this is slightly higher for those who have taught for less than 5 years (21%) and similarly for classroom teachers.

Headteachers and SLT are more likely to use social media for work-related activities than classroom teachers. This may be because they are less likely to be teaching themselves.



Use of different social media platforms



Those in primary are more likely to use Facebook (37%) for work-related activities compared to those in secondary (26%). This is reversed for use of Twitter where those in secondary (66%) are more likely to use the platform than those in primary (56%)

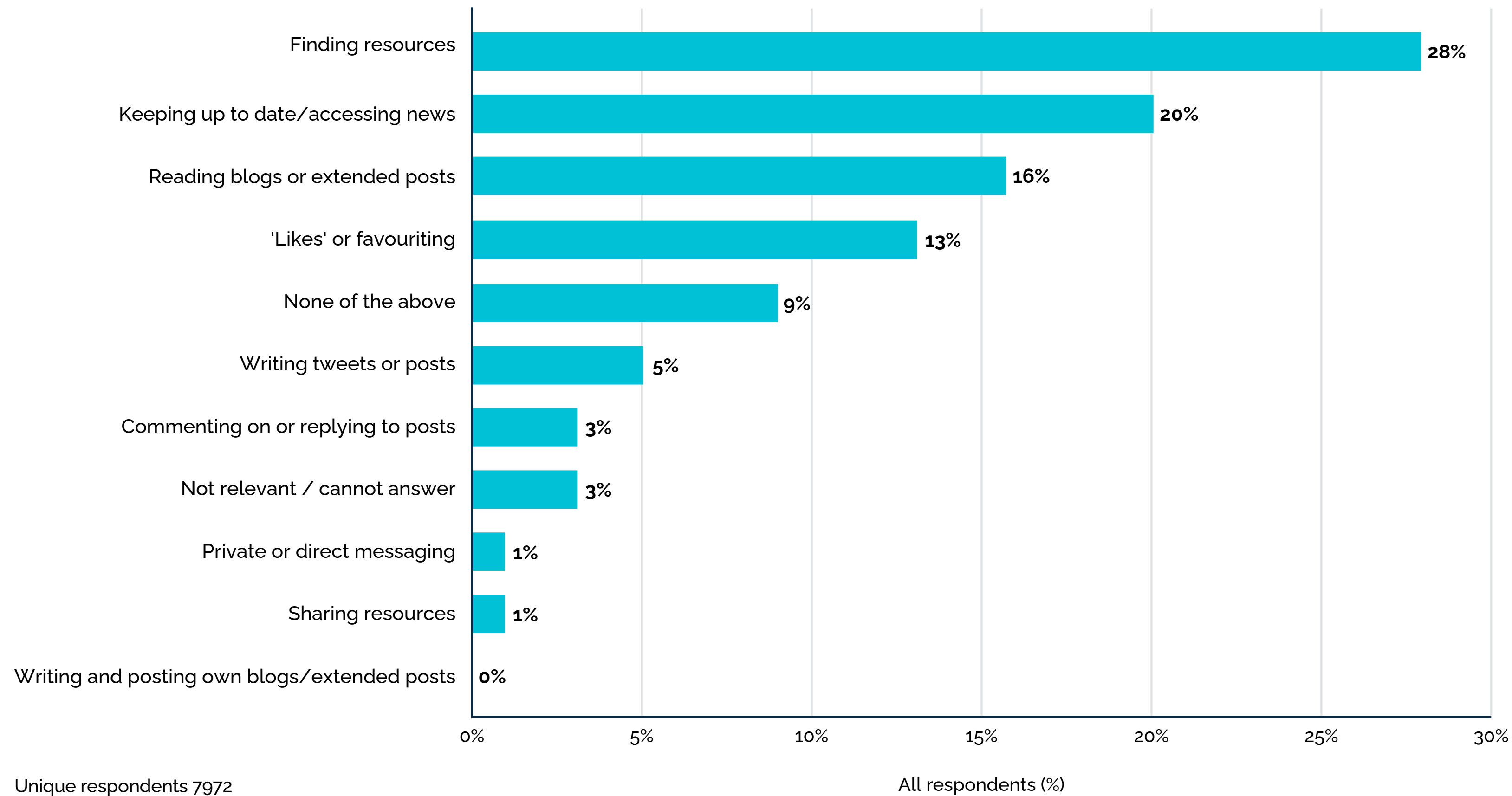
Women are more likely (34%) to use social media for work related activities than males (23%).

Regionally, Twitter is used more often in the North West (69%) than in London (54%), those in London are also less likely to use Facebook (21%).

Graph 3: Platform usage by seniority

Which of the following social media platforms have you used for 'work-related activities' in the past week?

Social media activities



In work mode, finding resources is the activity that respondents do most often. Unsurprisingly, younger teachers, and those with less experience, are more likely to be looking for resources.

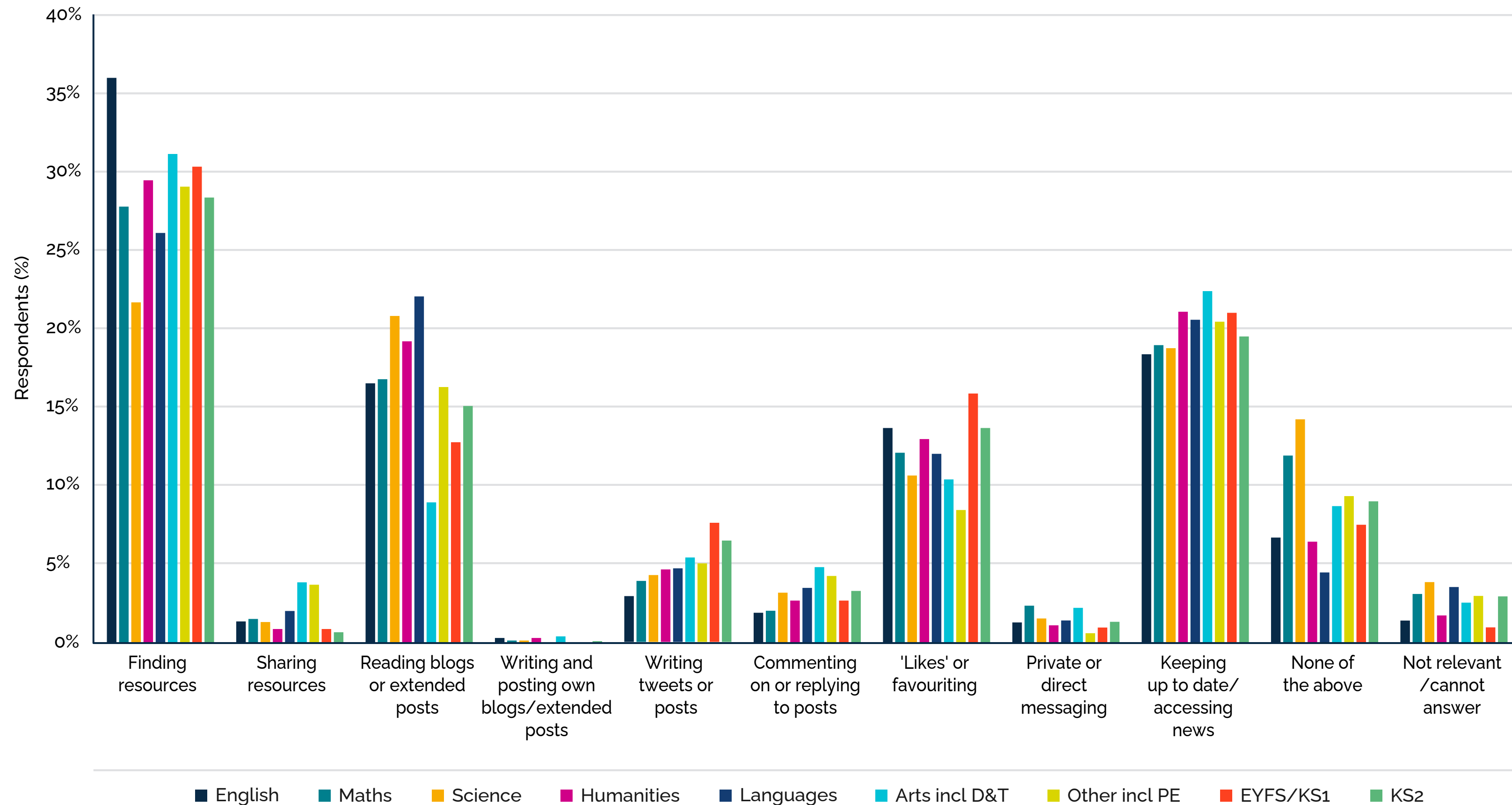
At a subject level, science teachers are least likely to look for resources using social media (22%) and English teachers are most likely (36%). The differences in subject level behaviour could be influenced by a number of factors. How much does teaching the subject rely on resources being available? Are there lots of resources produced for the subject? Are those teaching the subject likely to use social media to find resources?

Women are more likely to use social media to find resources (30%) than males (23%). Similarly, those working at state funded schools are also more likely (29%) than independent schools (22%).

Graph 4: Activities

When using social media for work, which of the following activities do you do most often?

Social media activities



No respondents reported writing and posting on their own blogs. Writing tweets was also very low, although headteachers were higher (11%) than those in other roles (5%).

What does it mean for communicators?

The dominance of Twitter and Facebook make these platforms important for communicators. It is also interesting to see the popularity of WhatsApp, particularly for headteachers (63%), but much of this is likely to be participation in closed groups, so little potential for those wanting to engage educators.

When in work mode, activities using social media are quite diverse and there isn't one activity that dominates. However, women are more likely than men to use social media in work mode. For communicators, this may mean targeting a number of small audiences, with more tailored messaging.

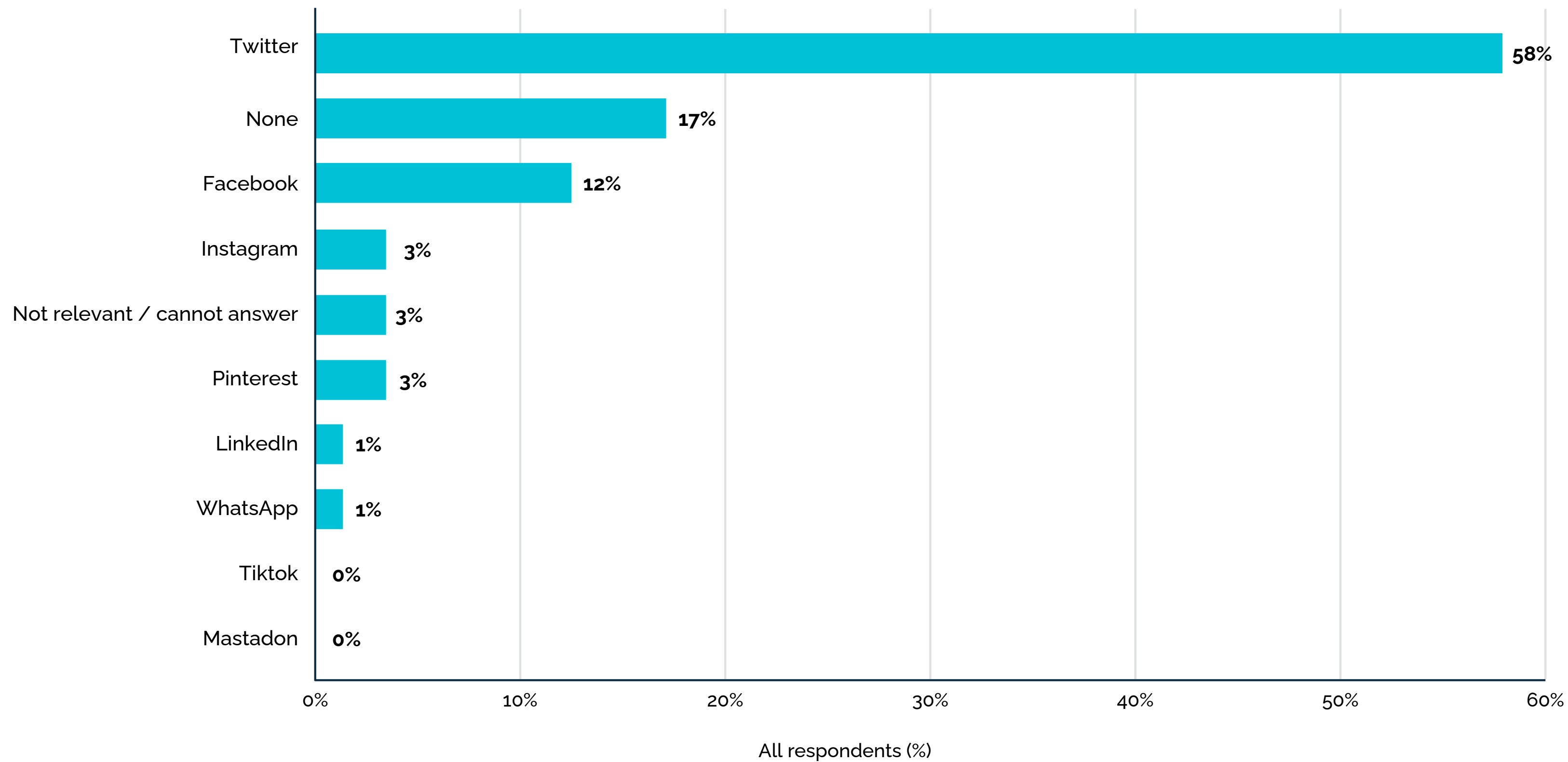
Graph 5: Activities by subject

When using social media for work, which of the following activities do you do most often?

Trust in social media



Trust by platform – overview



By far the most trusted platform for education-related content is Twitter. However, almost a fifth (17%) trust none. Of these, science teachers, those over 50 years of age and those in London were more likely to not trust social media for education related content.

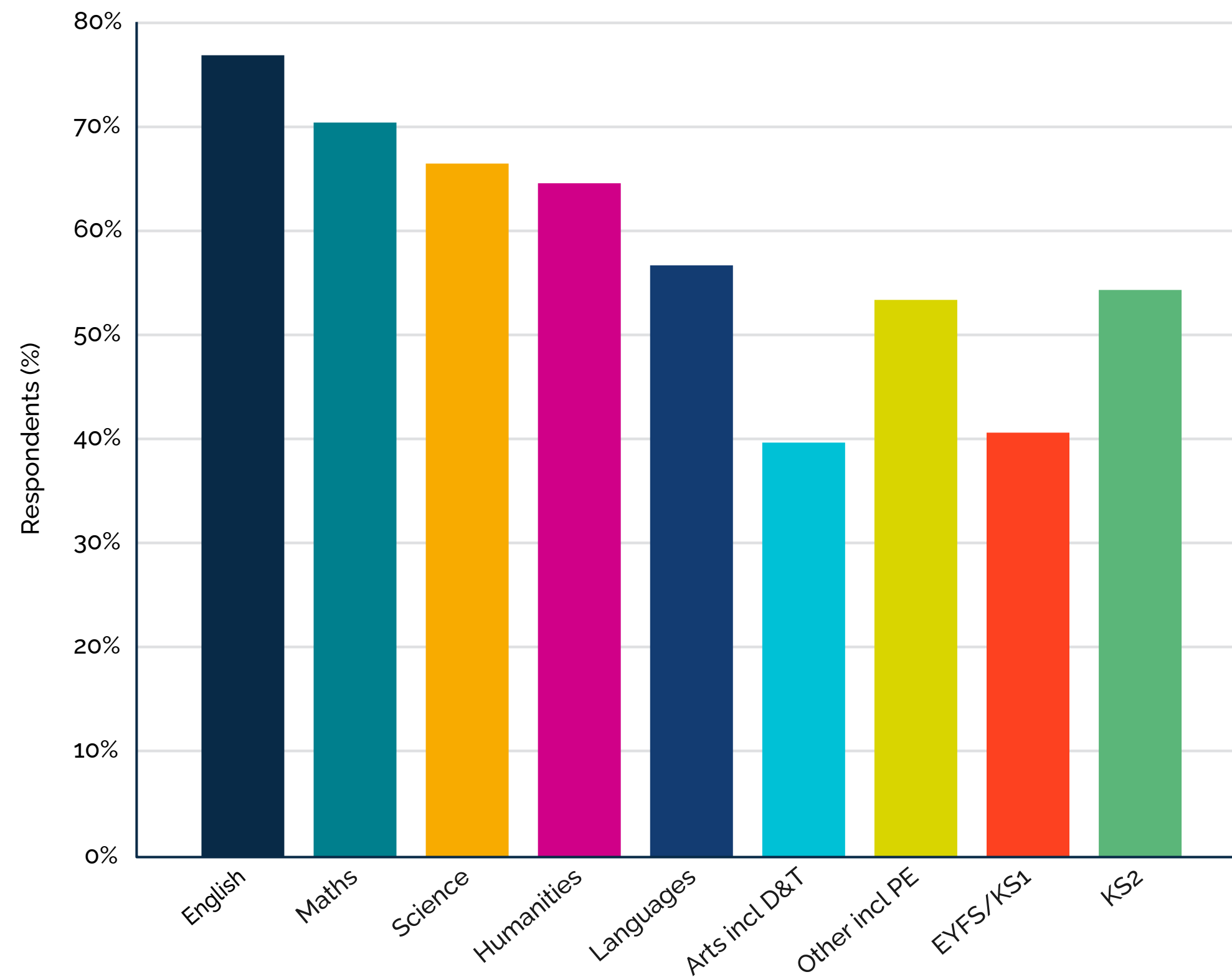
Interestingly, trust in Facebook for education related content is just 12%. This may be because activity on Facebook is more focused on interaction than on sharing content.

LinkedIn, Instagram, and Pinterest aren't platforms educators appear to trust for education-related content.

Graph 6: Trust in social media

Which social media platform do you trust most for education-related content?

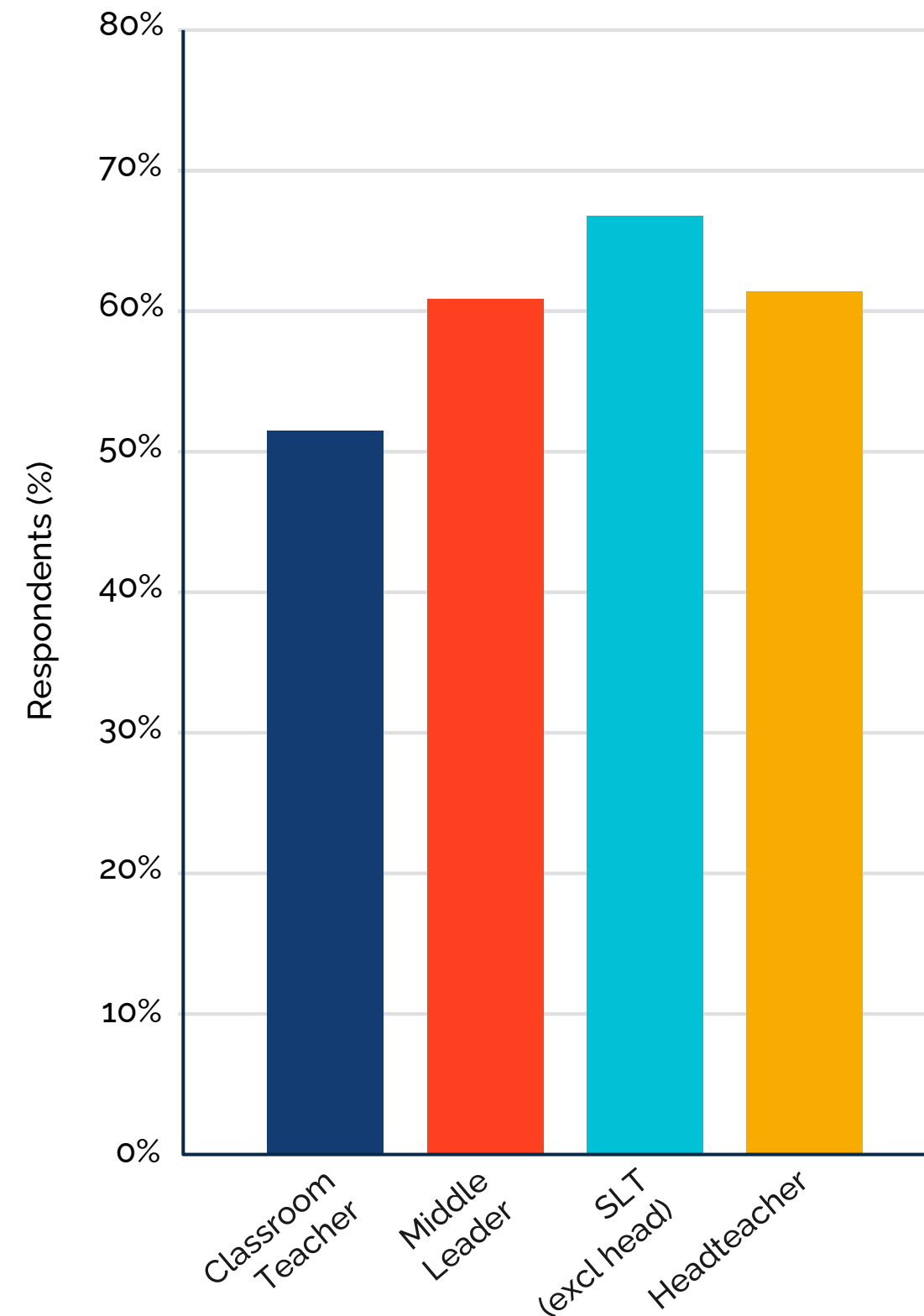
Trust in Twitter



Unique respondents 7972

Graph 7: Trust in Twitter by teacher subject/class

Which social media platform do you trust most for education-related content?



Graph 8: Trust in Twitter by seniority

Which social media platform do you trust most for education-related content?

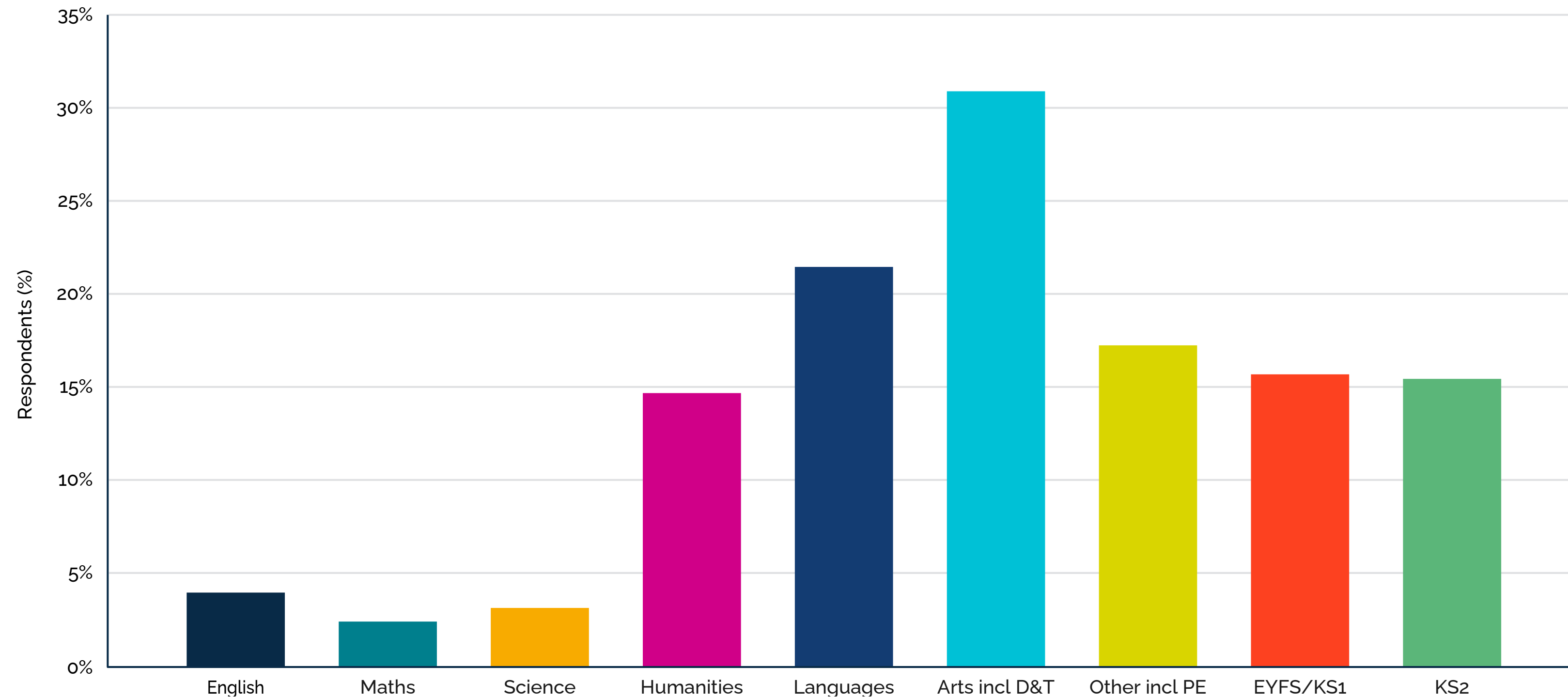
Trust in Twitter is higher for secondary school respondents (66%) than for those in primary (50%). For Facebook this is reversed with higher trust from those in primary (15%) than secondary (9%).

There are also some clear trends when it come to Twitter use by teacher subject/class. In particular, teachers of English, maths and science are more likely to trust Twitter than arts/D&T teachers and those teaching EFY/KS1

Twitter is trusted most by SLT and headteachers and more by men (66%) than women (55%).



Trust in Facebook



Women are twice as likely to trust Facebook (14%) for education-related content than men (7%). Teachers of the Arts (including design and technology) trust the platform more than other subject areas, and at 31% this is significantly higher than the overall average of 12%.

Those working in primary and EYFS are more likely to trust Facebook.



Graph 9: Trust in Facebook by teacher subject/class

Which social media platform do you trust most for education-related content?

What does it mean for communicators?

Twitter is the most important platform when it comes to engaging educators. Despite the turmoil at Twitter HQ during autumn 2022, and when we surveyed educators, it appears that it is still a trusted platform for education-related content. In particular it is a good channel for communicators to reach SLT.

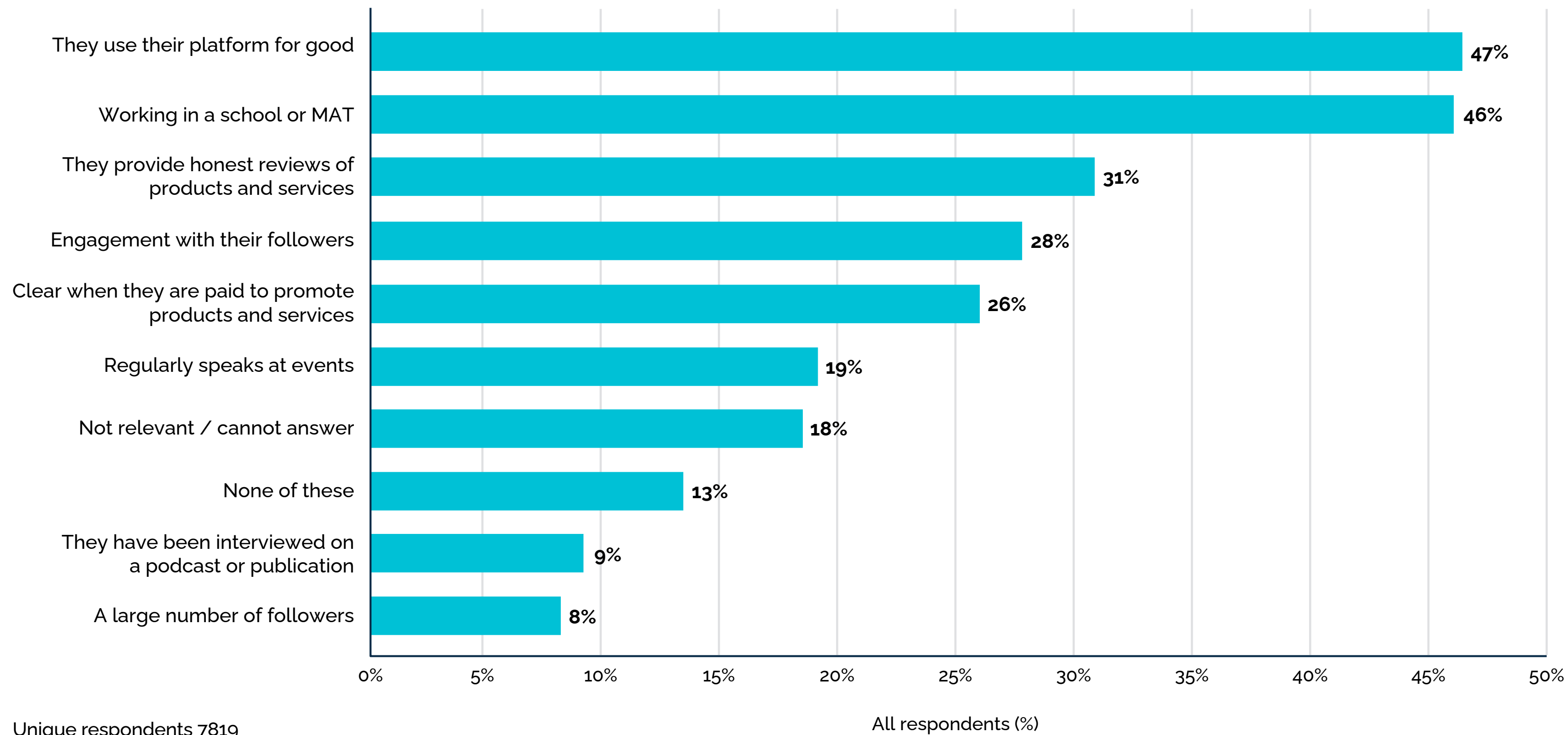
Trust in Facebook for education-related content is significantly lower. Communicators need to consider this when planning to use the platform. Educators' trust in LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok and Pinterest for education-related content is almost nil so communicators should avoid prioritising these channels when promoting education-related content. However, these platforms may still be valuable for engaging educators on matters beyond content, for instance LinkedIn might be a good platform if you want to engage with educators about career progression.



The role of education influencers



Attitudes to education influencers



Graph 10: All responses

What makes an education influencer authentic?

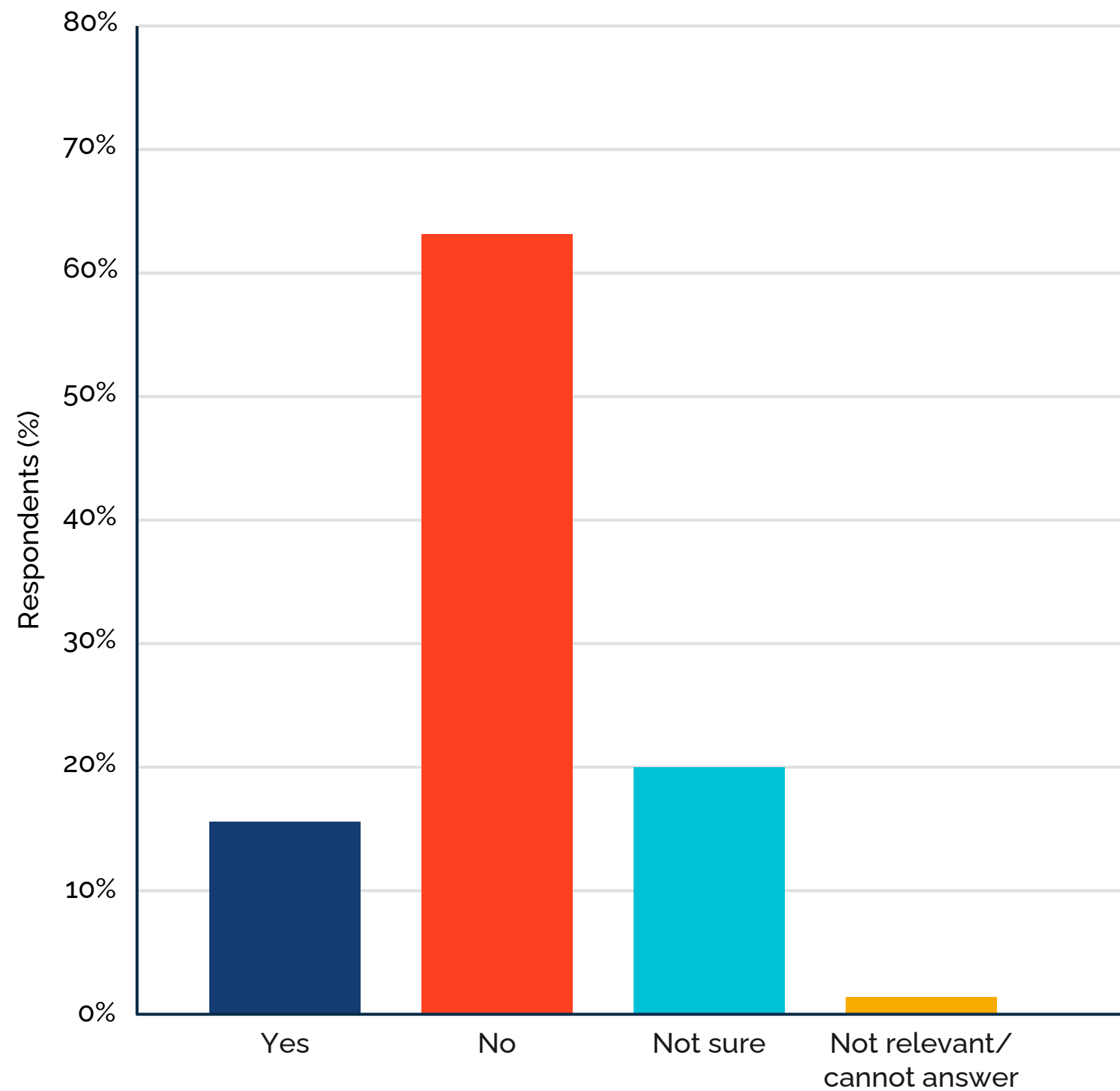
Direct experience of schools, doing good and being honest are valuable influencer characteristics. Whether an influencer has a larger following or is interviewed in the media is much less important for educators.

Women are more likely to feel these qualities are important than men, for instance 49% of females feel working in a school or MAT makes an influencer more authentic, but this drops by 10 percentage points to 39% for males. The trend is the same for the importance placed on whether an influencer uses their platform for good.

Younger educators (55% in their twenties) believe influencers are more authentic if they still work in a school or MAT, this drops by 18 percentage points for those in their fifties.

However, if an education influencer promotes or flags a story there is no guarantee this will increase the interest from educators.

Attitudes to influencers by role



Unique respondents 7909

Graph 11: All responses

Are you more likely to be interested in a story if an influencer flags it?

What does it mean for communicators?

Influencers can provide valuable promotion, but getting the right influencer is essential for them to cut through to educators. Communicators should emphasise an influencer's direct experience in schools to resonate with educators. Trust is also key, whether that is about influencers understanding the job, being honest or doing good.

The digital reach or media profile of an influencer is unlikely to be enough to impress educators.

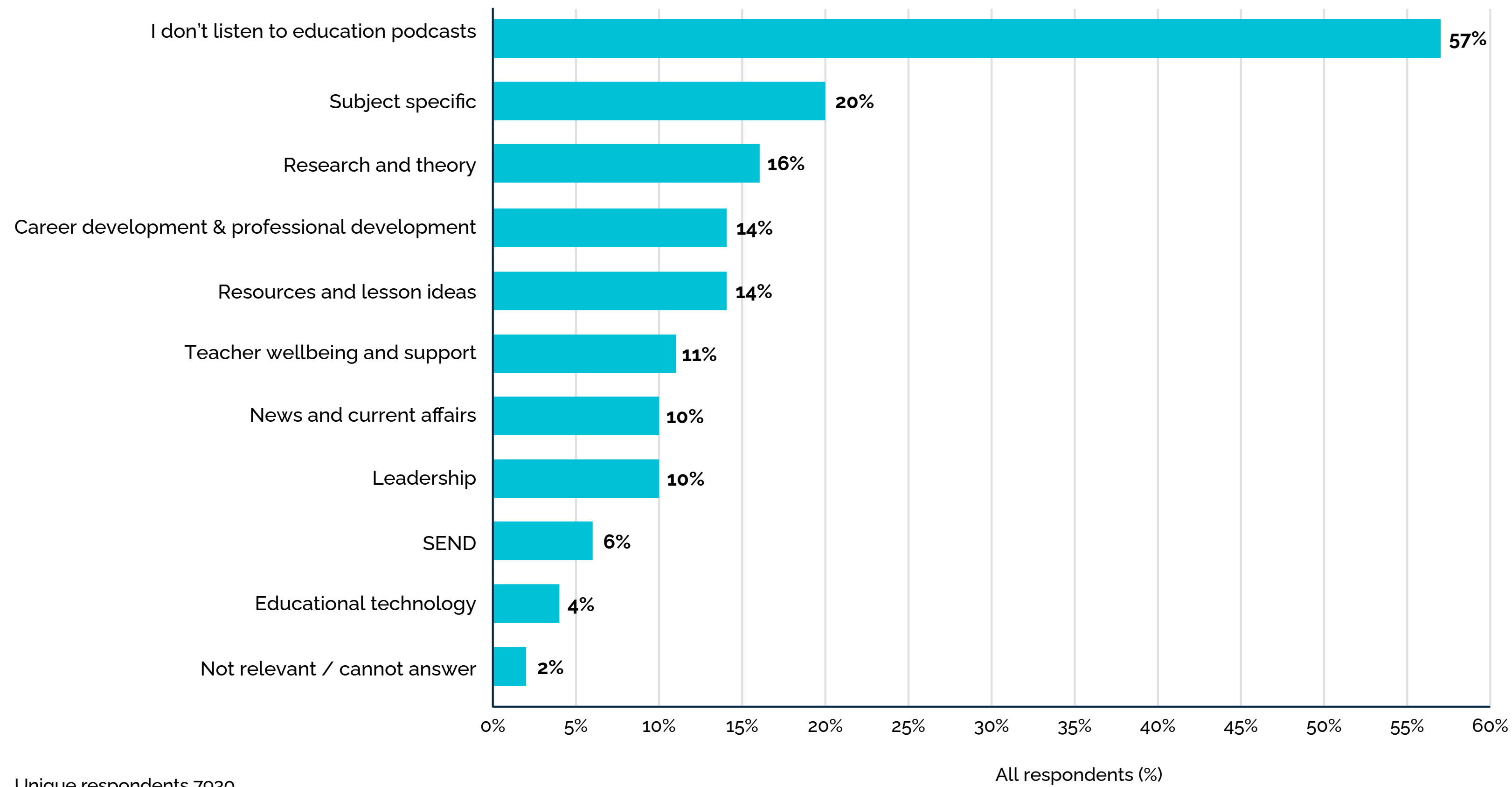
Finally, a sizeable number felt the question wasn't relevant to them, or couldn't answer it, so communicators need to accept that for some of the schools workforce it will be hard to engage them through work with influencers.



Listening to education podcasts



Types of education podcast



More than half of educators (57%) don't listen to education podcasts. For those that do, subject specific ones are the most popular whilst education technology is the least popular podcast theme.

Seniority impacts on tastes. Headteachers are more interested in current affairs and, unsurprisingly, leadership. Those in SLT are more interested in research.

Significantly more maths teachers listen to subject specific podcasts (35%) than the average (20%). However, this may be influenced by the large number of maths teachers listening to the long running and popular Mr Barton Maths podcast.

Those in EYFS/KS1 are 8 percentage points more likely to listen to a podcast about wellbeing than the average (11%).

Graph 12: All responses

If you listen to education podcasts, what type of content do you like?

What does it mean for communicators?

Listening to education podcasts is an emerging area of media consumption, which means communicators can only reach a limited proportion of educators. If you want to target school leaders, then podcasts could be a good way to engage them, particularly with content linked to school leadership and current affairs.

Content is not evenly spread across all education topics, so access to good content may well influence whether educators listen to podcasts, or not. Certainly, podcasts could be an important channel for those wanting to engage with maths teachers.



Spotlight on roles





	Headteachers	Early years and KS1	Men and women
	<i>Big users of social media</i>	<i>Distinct and different to other educators</i>	<i>Contrasting behaviours</i>
Use of social media	Heavy users of Twitter and WhatsApp. Compared to other roles at school, headteachers are more likely to use social media for work-related activities.	Most likely to use social media to find resources. Twitter is still the most popular platform, but more likely to use Facebook than other groups. EYFS/ KS1 staff are the highest users of Instagram and Pinterest for work-related activities.	Men prefer using Twitter for work-related activities. Women also use Twitter a great deal, but they make greater use of Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.
Social media trust	Headteachers are more likely to trust Twitter for educational content than Facebook. Most likely to read posts or extended blogs and to keep up date or access news.	Almost a fifth (19%) don't trust educational content on social media. In particular trust in Twitter is much lower than the average.	Men are more likely to trust Twitter than women. Women are more likely than men to use social media to find resources, although it remains the most likely activity for both.



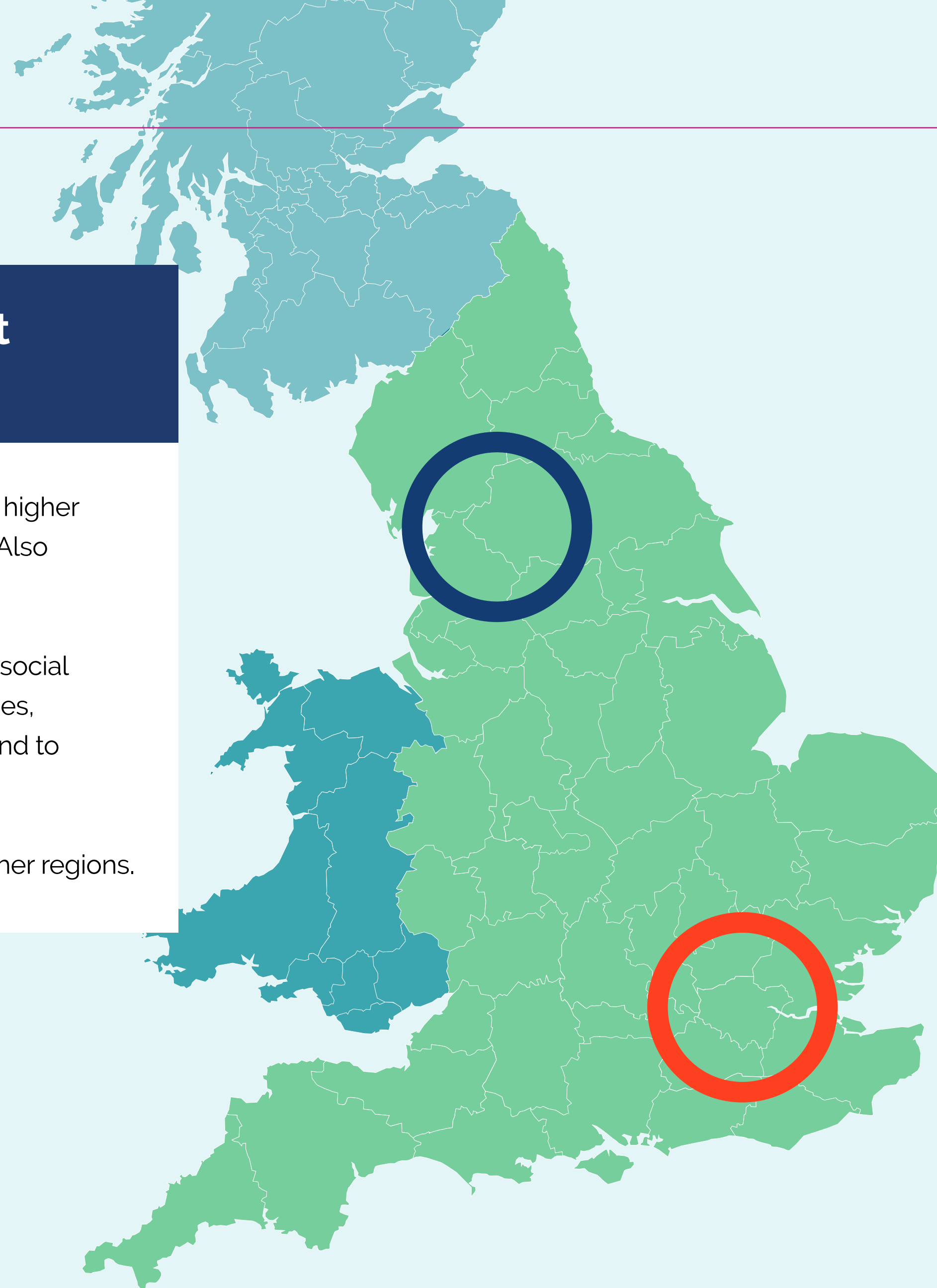
	Headteachers	Early years and KS1	Men and women
	<i>Big users of social media</i>	<i>Distinct and different to other educators</i>	<i>Contrasting behaviours</i>
Influencers	Unlikely to trust content because it has been promoted by an influencer. Working in a school, using their platform for good, and providing honest reviews makes them feel an influencer is authentic.	Compared with the average, slightly more likely to be interested in a story because an education influencer has flagged it. More likely than the average to want influencers to work in a school or MAT, to use their platform for good, and provide honest reviews of products and services.	More women than men believe that education influencers are authentic when they work in a school/MAT, use their platform for good, and provide honest reviews of products and services.
Podcasts	Much more likely to listen to podcasts about leadership. More likely to listen to podcasts than classroom teachers and middle leaders.	More likely to listen to podcasts about teacher wellbeing and support. Less likely to listen to subject specific podcasts.	Women are more likely to listen to podcasts about teacher wellbeing and support than men.

Spotlight on regional trends



North west educators most socially engaged

- > Greater use of Twitter than other regions - higher than the average by 8 percentage points. Also greater trust in Twitter than other regions.
- > More likely than other regions to be using social media to look for resources, share resources, to read blogs, to write tweets and posts, and to like or favourite others' posts.
- > Most trust in social media compared to other regions.



London educators less socially engaged

- > Compared to the average, less likely to use Twitter and Facebook for work related activities, but more likely to use WhatsApp.
- > Less trust in social media compared to other regions, particularly with regard to Twitter and Facebook
- > Less likely to be looking for resources or sharing them via social media compared to other regions.
- > Less likely to comment on posts or like or favourite others' posts. However, more likely than other regions to access news via social media.



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