

AI vs. Human Audiobook Narration: A Blinded Survey of 1,000 Listeners



SPOKEN
The AI Audiobook Company™

edison
research at **ssrs**

In Our Blind Comparison:



Listeners who heard
Human Narration
rated single-narrator
exposition higher



Listeners who heard
Spoken AI Narration
rated multi-character
scenes higher

1,005 fiction audiobook listeners; respondents were not told the study was exploring AI before rating
1005 U.S. Audiobook Fiction Listeners age 18+ randomized into Spoken Multi-Cast™ narration or human narration. May 2026



Who We Are



Spoken, the AI Audiobook Company™, enables authors and publishers to create immersive, multi-voice audiobooks at a fraction of the cost and time of traditional production.

Purpose-built for storytelling, Spoken Multi-Cast™ layers proprietary agentic AI with emotionally nuanced voice synthesis to deliver high-quality, character-driven performances.

Authors can choose from custom AI-generated voices crafted exclusively for their characters or AI-cloned voices from professional narrators, each of whom gets paid with every use. Spoken's mission is to help storytellers tell stories in ways never before possible.

Learn more at www.spoken.press.



Edison Research at SSRS is the leading audio, media, and trends market research practice in the world.

Through survey research and innovative measurement approaches, we provide landmark data and insights on consumer behavior and emerging trends in the U.S. and more than 66 countries worldwide.

Our world-renowned studies include Share of Ear®, the only single-source measure of all audio consumption in the U.S.; Edison Podcast Metrics™, the only survey-based measure of podcast listening in the U.S.; and The Infinite Dial®, the survey of record for media and technology trends since 1998.

Learn more at ssrs.com.





Survey Methodology



Survey Conducted May 2026

- 1,005 Online Surveys
- U.S. Adults Age 18+
- All Respondents Reported Ever Listening to a Fiction Audiobook



Respondents were randomly assigned to hear excerpts from either a professional human actor or Spoken Multi-Cast™

- N = 502 Heard Human Narration
- N = 503 Heard Spoken AI Narration

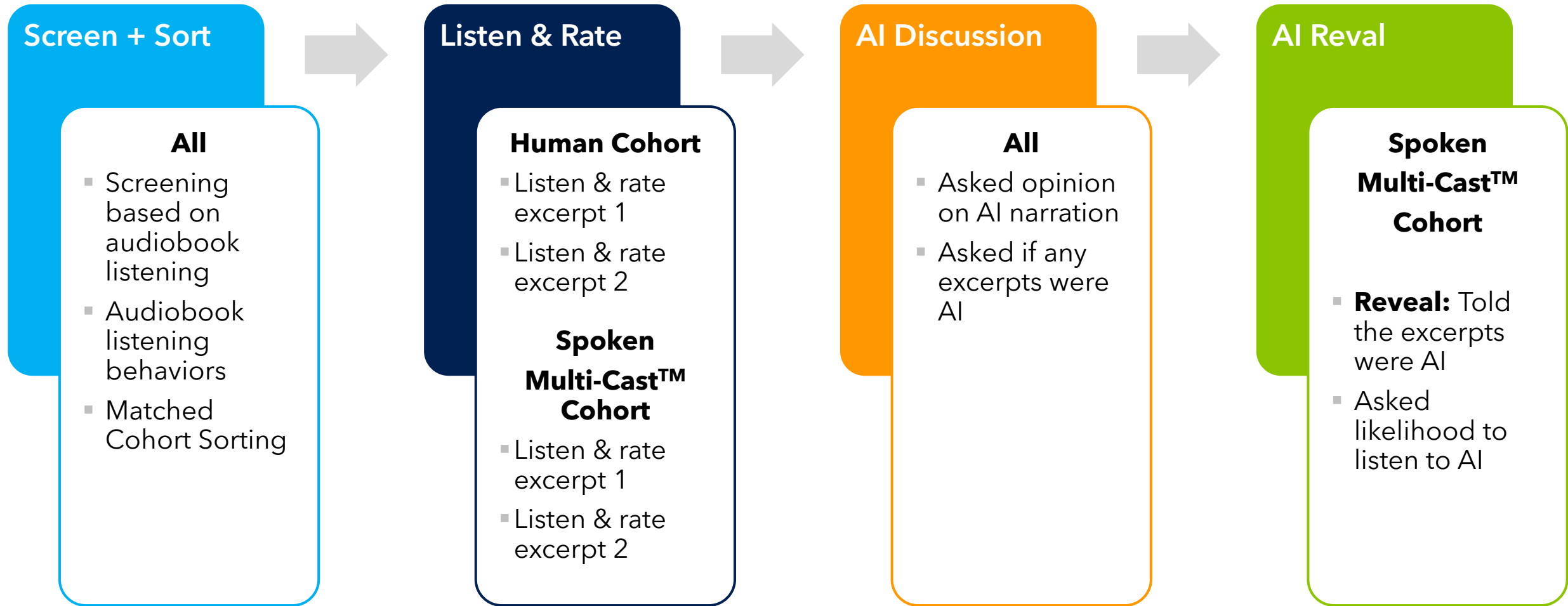
** Respondents were not told in advance what method was used, and no advance notice at time of sample playback that the survey related to AI*



Data weighted to match demographics of audiobook consumers as established by The Infinite Dial® 2026 by Edison Research at SSRS and SiriusXM Media

Each treatment group was also weighted to match each other by age, gender, ethnicity, and interest in Sci-Fi/Fantasy audiobooks

How the Blind Test Worked





Key Findings

What do audiobook listeners want from narration?



- Distinct voices for each character, especially among frequent listeners
- Quality and immersion more than cost or celebrity

How do human and Spoken AI narration perform in a blinded test?



- Human narration was rated higher for narrator exposition
- Spoken AI narration was rated higher for multi-character scenes
- Listeners who heard Spoken AI narration were just as likely to buy the audiobook as listeners who hear Human narration
- Most couldn't tell the difference between human and Spoken AI narration

What happens after we reveal they listened to AI?



- Willingness to listen to an AI audiobook rose after hearing
- Hearing AI narration changed minds

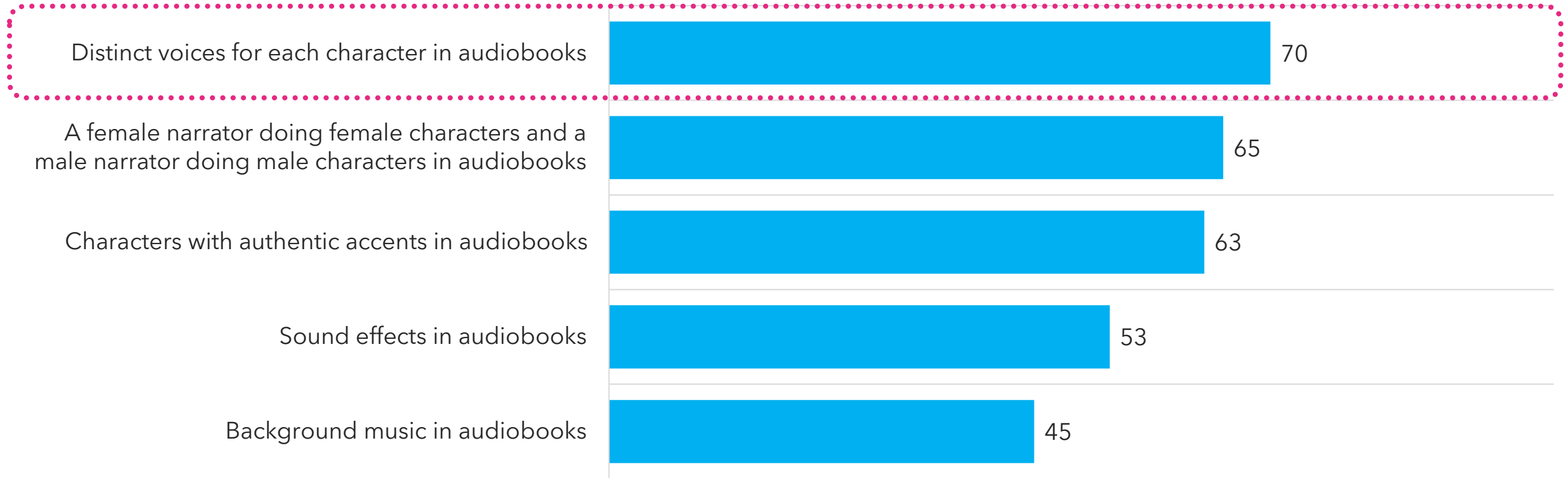
What do audiobook listeners want from narration?

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Interest in Audiobook Narration Effects

"How interested are you in hearing **(item)** in audiobooks?"
% Interested (Giving a "4" or "5" on a 5-point Scale)



Frequent Audiobook Listeners Gravitate to Multi-cast Narration

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Among Frequent Audiobook Listeners...



81%

are **Interested** in
Hearing Distinct
Voices for Each
Character

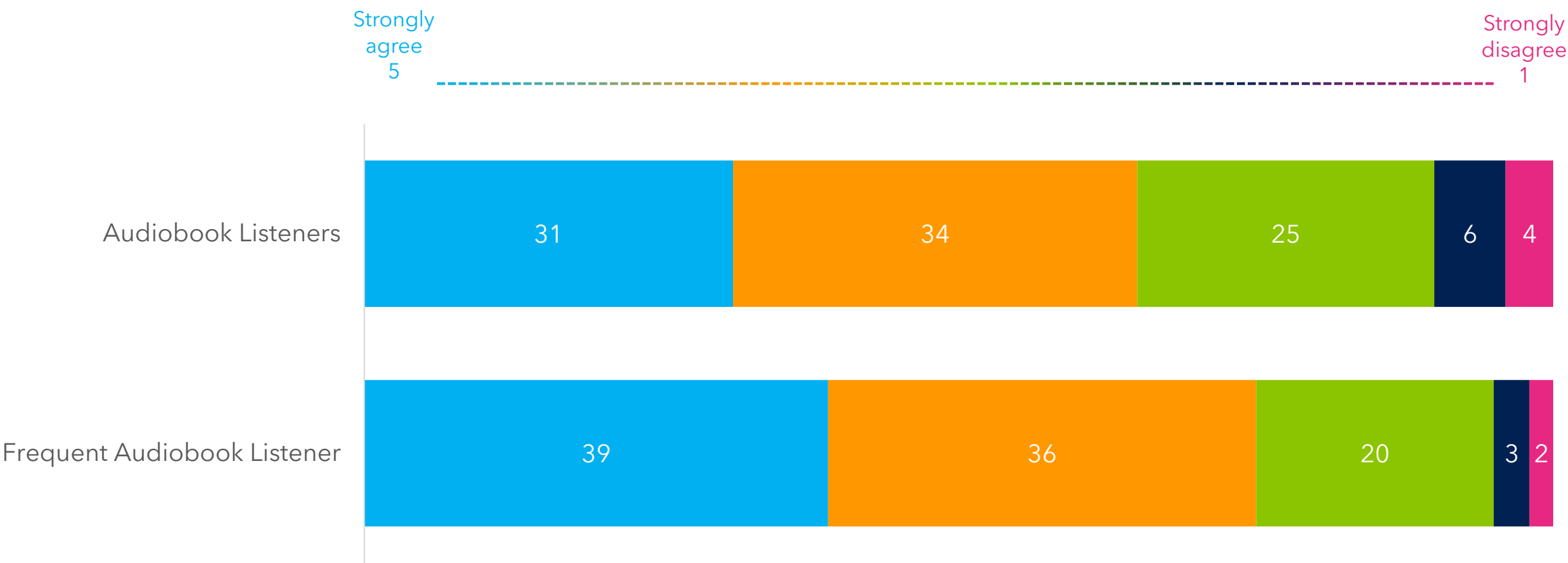


51%

are **Very Interested**
in Hearing Distinct
Voices for Each
Character

Audiobook Narration Agree/Disagree

"You prefer audiobooks that feature a unique voice for every speaking character, such as with a full cast production."



Narration Quality and Immersiveness are More Important than Lower Cost or Celebrity Voices

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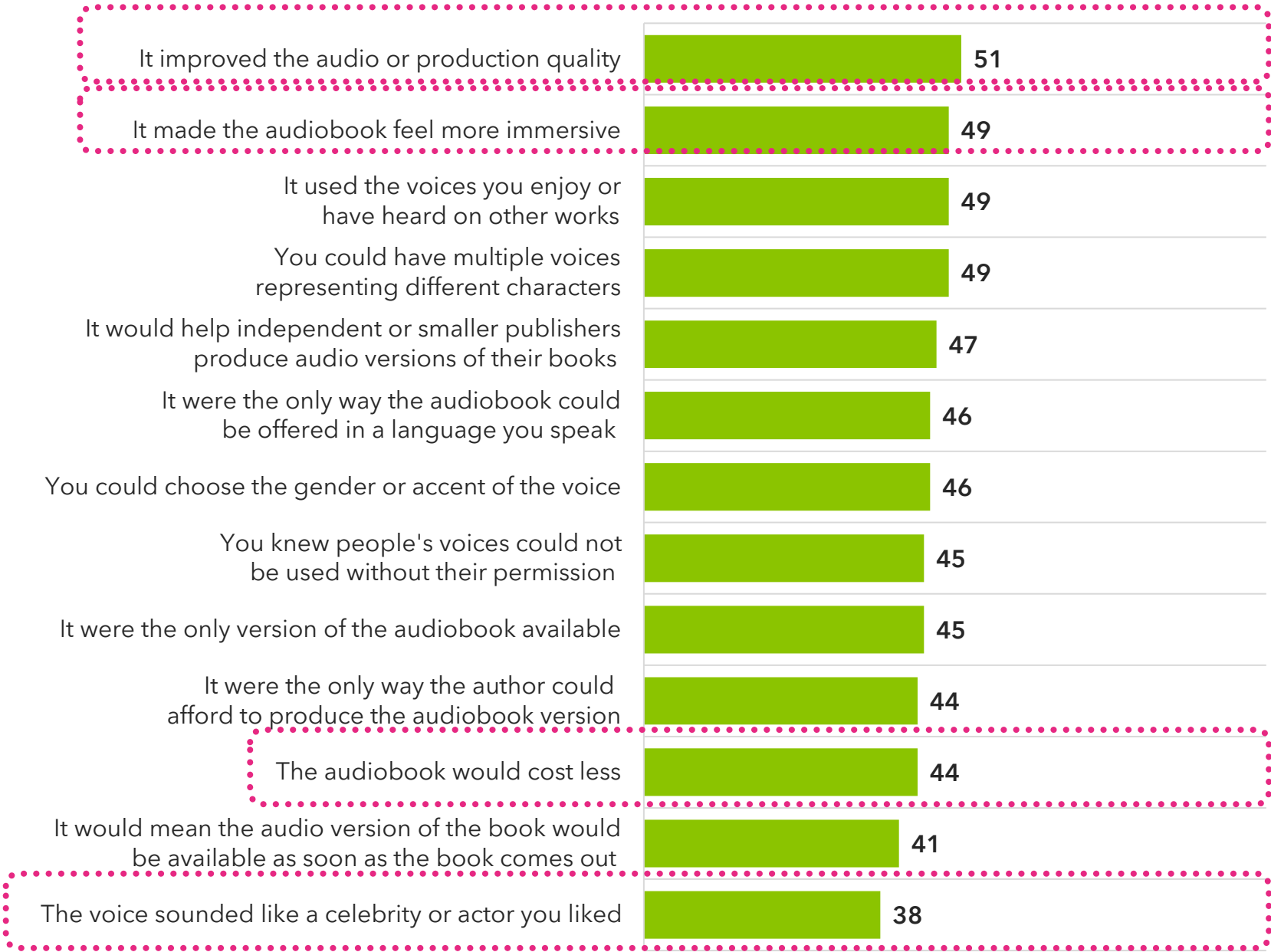




Factors Affecting Likelihood to Listen to AI Narrated Audiobooks

“How likely would you be to listen to audiobooks narrated using digital (AI voice) narration if...?”

% likely (giving a “4” or “5” on a 5-point scale)



How do human and Spoken AI narration perform in a blinded test?

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Key Finding

In Our Blind Test:



Listeners who heard
Human Narration
rated **narrator exposition**
higher.



Listeners who heard
Spoken AI narration
rated **multi-character**
scenes higher.

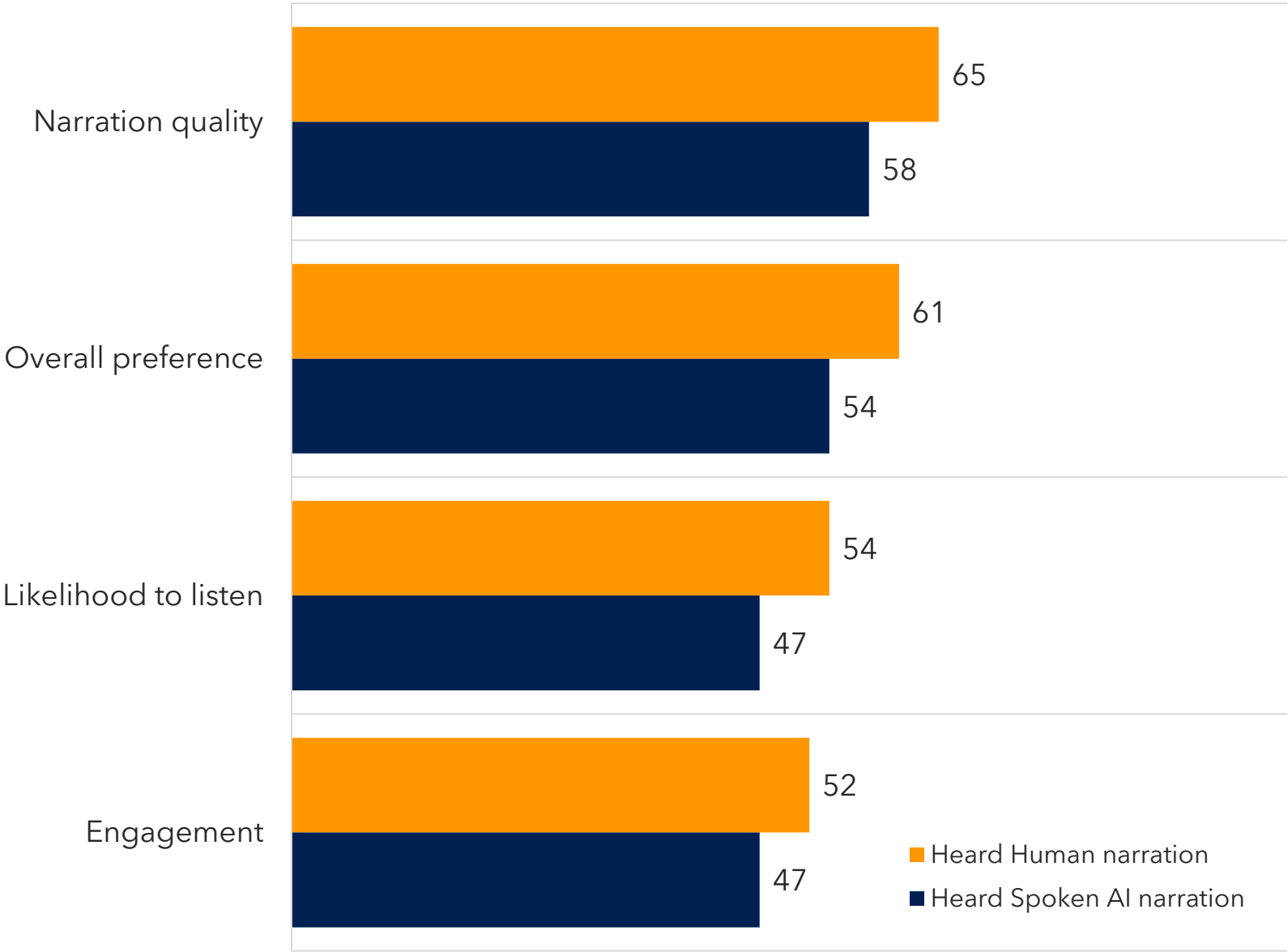
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Narrator Exposition

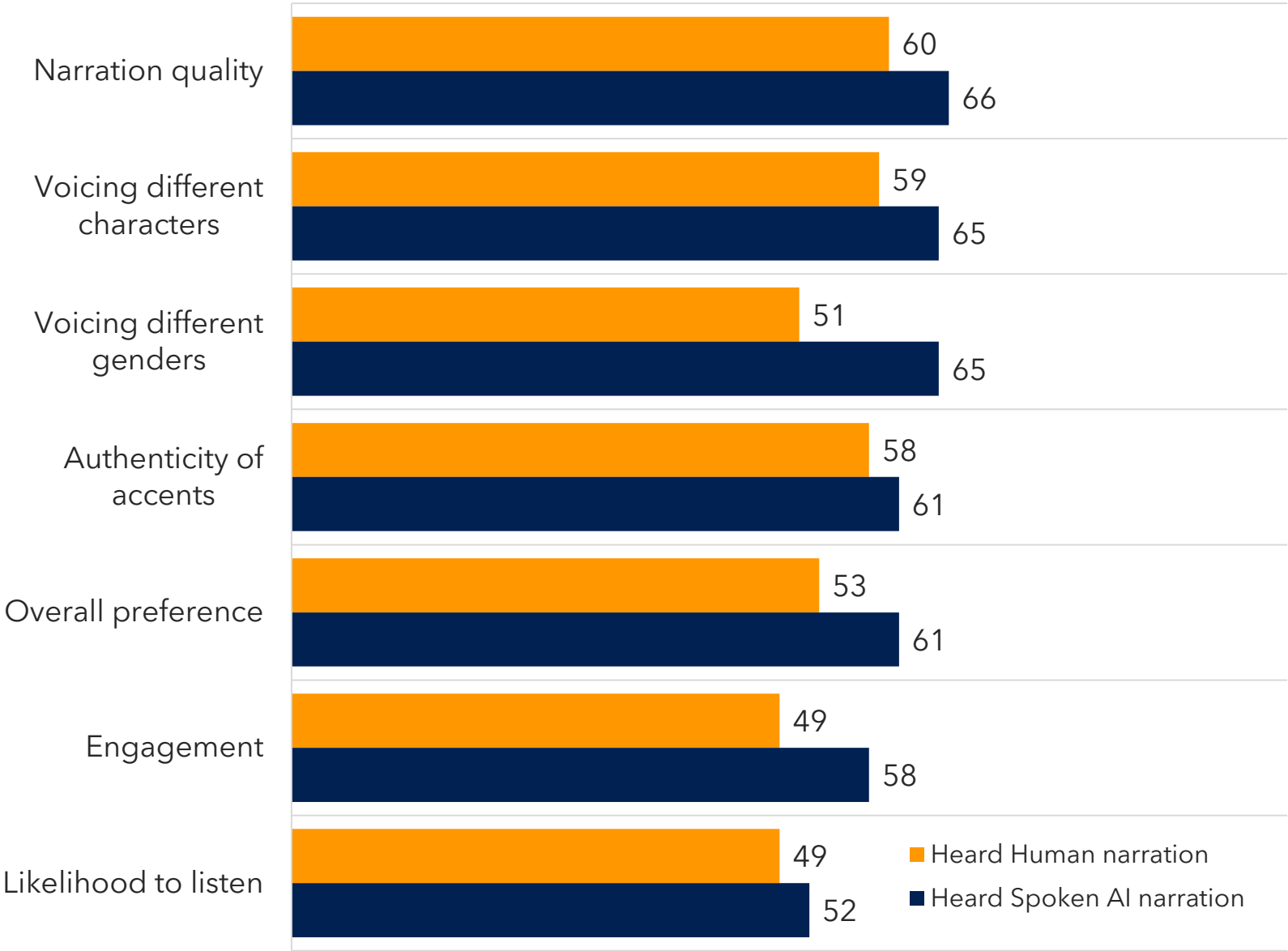
% giving a "4" or "5" on a 5-point scale





Multi-Character Scene

% giving a "4" or "5" on a 5-point scale



Listeners are Equally Likely to Buy Audiobook Based on Spoken AI Narration as Human Narration

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Likelihood to Purchase this Audiobook Based on Samples



46%

of those who heard the
Spoken Multi-Cast™ narration
said they were likely to purchase
the audiobook after hearing any
of the excerpts

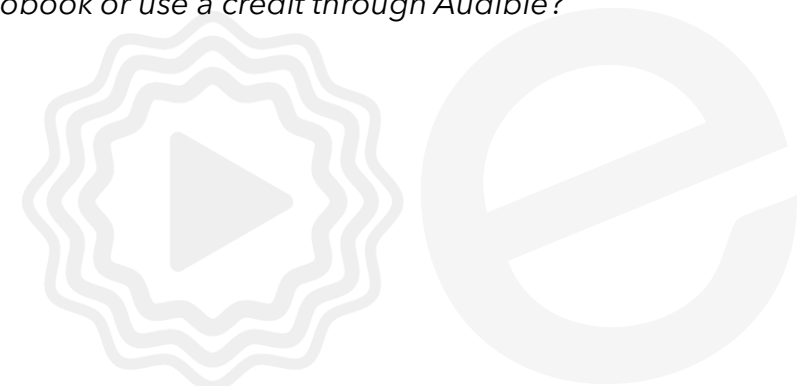
49%



of those who heard the
human narration
said they were likely to purchase
the audiobook after hearing any
of the excerpts

"If this were the only sample of the audiobook that you heard, how likely would you be to purchase this audiobook or use a credit through Audible?"

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Most Audiobook Listeners Couldn't Tell the Difference Between Spoken AI and Human Narration

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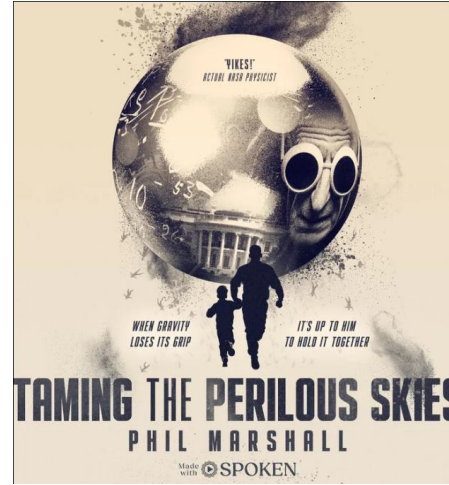




Narrator Exposition (Version A)



Narrator Exposition (Version B)



Multi-Character Scenes (Version A)



Multi-Character Scenes (Version B)

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Overall AI Narration Identification

“Do you think any of the audio clips you heard earlier were digital (AI voice) narration?”

% Saying Yes



Heard Human narration



35



35%

of those who heard human narration incorrectly identified it as AI

Heard Spoken AI narration



39



61%

of those who heard Spoken AI narration incorrectly identified it as human

What happens after we reveal they listened to Spoken AI?

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Willingness to Listen to AI Narration Rose After Exposure

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Stages of Change



Likelihood of listening to AI narrated audiobooks among those who heard Spoken AI Narration (Rated 4 or 5):

31%

Baseline

"Suppose an audiobook you wanted to listen to was generated using digital (AI voice) narration. How likely would you be to listen to this audiobook?"

65%

Post-Exposure but Pre-Reveal (Before revealed it was AI):

"How likely would you be to listen to an audiobook with this narration?" (users who answered 4 or 5 after either of the Spoken samples heard)

110%

Increase
Over
Baseline

41%

Post-reveal

"The audio clips you heard were digital (AI voice) narration. Now that you know this, how likely are you to listen to an audiobook produced with digital (AI voice) narration?"

33%

Increase
Over
Baseline

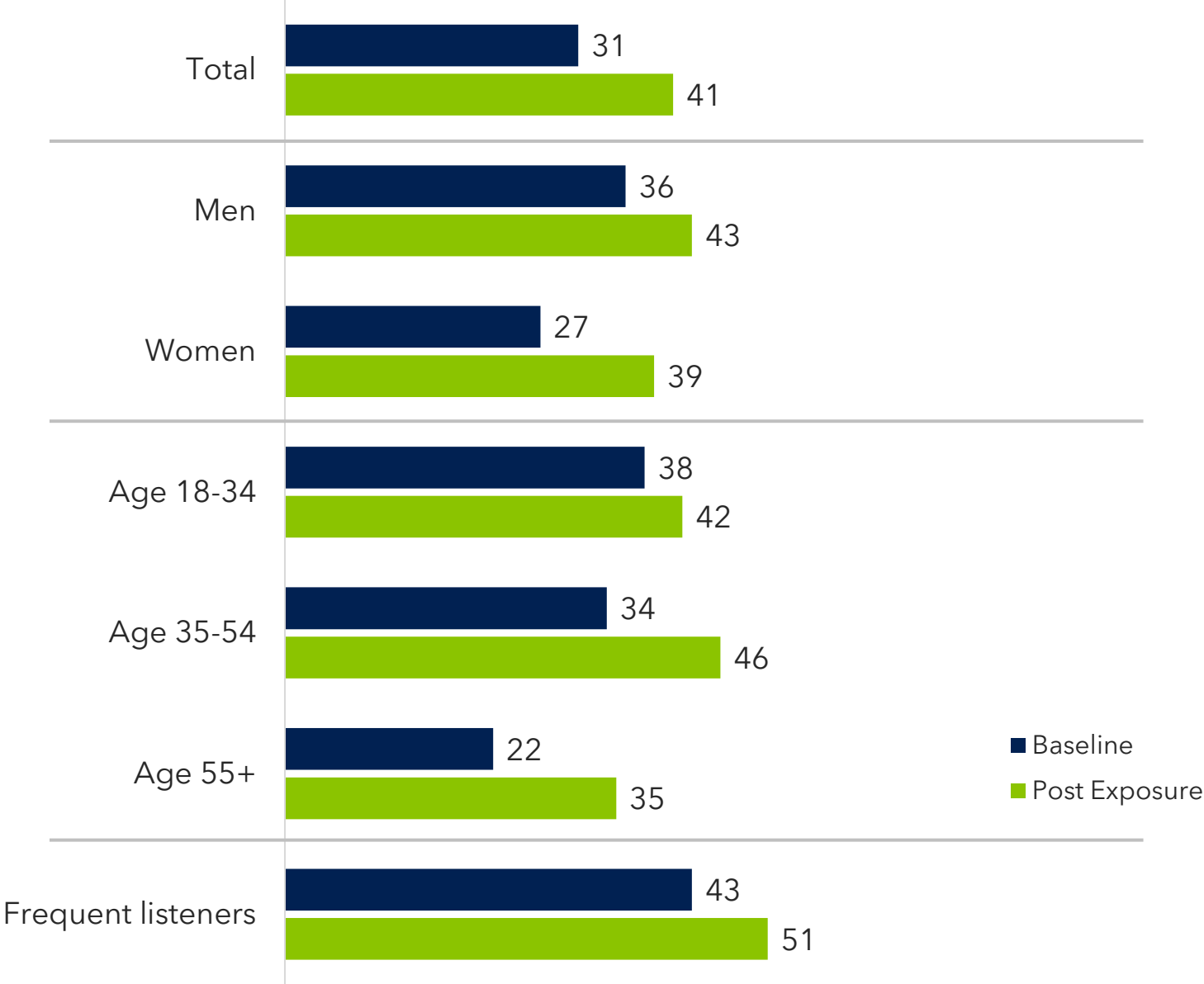


Likelihood of Listening to AI Narrated Audiobooks (Total Baseline vs. Post Exposure)

Baseline: "Suppose an audiobook you wanted to listen to was generated using digital (AI voice) narration. How likely would you be to listen to this audiobook?"

Post Exposure: "The audio clips you heard were digital (AI voice) narration. Now that you know this, how likely are you to listen to an audiobook produced with digital (AI voice) narration?"

% likely (giving a "4" or "5" on a 5-point scale)



Key Finding

Hearing AI narration changes minds.



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Perception of AI Narration Before and After Exposure

Baseline: "In general, what are your feelings about audiobooks that are generated using digital (AI voice) narration?"

Post Exposure: "Now that you have heard examples of digital (AI voice) narration, what are your feelings about audiobooks that are generated using digital (AI voice) narration?"

Gender	Age Group	Baseline opinion	Post Exposure opinion
Male	Age 55+	Doesn't sound authentic	There may be some I can listen to
Female	Age 55+	Totally fake	My opinion has changed. I could not tell that the voices were AI generated. I would listen to these audio books. Very clear diction.
Male	Age 35-54	I want to hear a real voice	I'm surprised how real it sounds
Female	Age 55+	They sound so impersonal and mono-tone	These were actually very good AI voices, better than most



Implications

1

Whether human or AI generated, **multi-voice is an opportunity in the audiobook space**

2

Market the listening experience **(quality & immersion)** over other characteristics

3

Audiobooks' most engaged listeners **are most open digital (AI voice) narration**

4

Note: This research covers one title in one genre. The industry could benefit from **more research in this area.**

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