

The Future of Watching Sports

How personalization, AI, and new
experiences are reshaping digital fandom.



How do fans really feel about sports content?

Sports media is in competition with the best digital experiences across all industries. Fans expect immediacy, personalization, and when it comes to buying — offers that make sense to them. When content is relevant, engagement converts. When it's generic, attention goes elsewhere.

The future of sports media will belong to the organizations that can connect content, distribution, data, and monetization into a continuous system that learns and improves.

Executive summary and takeaways

This report examines how fandom is evolving, and what that means for rights holders operating in an environment where content is always on.

The findings reveal an industry ripe for change. Digital engagement is high, but satisfaction leaves room for improvement. Here are some of the big takeaways:

- **More than half** of fans describe today's content as innovative, nearly **1 in 3** say they feel functional, overwhelming, or outdated
- **Over 54%** say that oftentimes they experience new features that feel irrelevant
- **70%** of respondents said they would spend more for better personalization

The fans have spoken. Now it's on rights holders to orchestrate content creation, distribution, data, and commerce into a connected system that improves with every interaction.

Methodology

This report is based on a February 2026 survey of 350 U.S. sports fans across age, gender, income, and region. The study looked at digital sports experiences, innovation, AI adoption, personalization, and the link between relevance and commercial behavior. Percentages may reflect combined response categories to clarify overall trends.

Content overload, or bad content overload?

The sports industry has a content crisis on its hands, but creating *more* of it isn't the issue...

46% say there is too much irrelevant content **39%** struggle to find the moments they actually care about

These were the top two responses when asked, "When watching or following sports digitally, what frustrates you most? (Respondents could record 2 answers)."

In short: more content doesn't solve the discovery issue, and can even make it worse.

Innovation is about fast access, not new features

Spoiler alert: our next question revealed deeper frustration with constant feature releases — which work well if focused on speed of delivery and personalization.

When asked what "innovation" in sports actually means today, these were the top 2 responses:

40% want faster access to moments **39%** want more personalized experiences

Other answers that topped the list: 39% want more personalized experiences, while 32% want more control (e.g. angles formats, choices). 29.3% want better storytelling and context, 22.9% want tech that simplifies, not complicates and 13.78% wants new formats or platforms.

Sports fans value the moment and speed of delivery

When asked what matters most in highlights, fans prioritize the moment itself above everything else.

47% say the moment: (the play, goal, or action) matters most **18%** prioritize speed of delivery

Together, these responses show that fans place the highest value on seeing key moments quickly.

Most fans are experiencing “feature fatigue”

Fans say sports brands add irrelevant features; less than half see meaningful improvement.

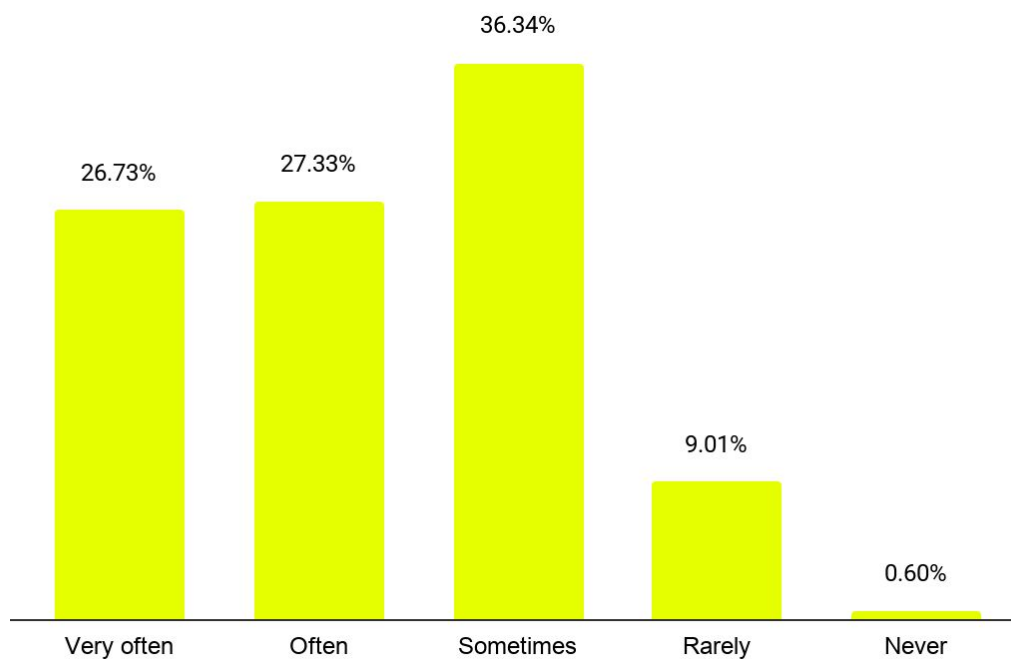
Top fan frustrations

- Complex UIs
- Constant updates
- Content scattered across multiple platforms

What actually matters

- Features that improve delivery and personalization
- Proven value
- Owned platforms for improved discovery and measurable fan engagement

How often do new features feel irrelevant to you?



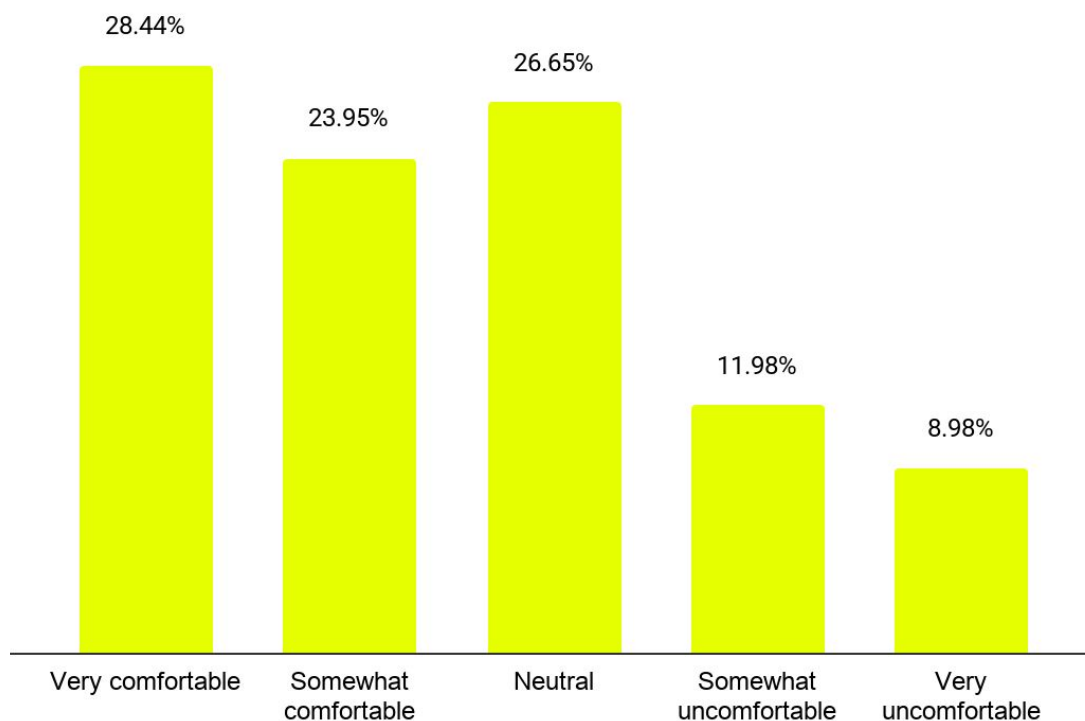
Fans are open to AI, but 50% reject it when it feels intrusive

Fans are mostly comfortable with AI, but prefer it operating behind the scenes to improve the experience. Authenticity and a human voice are irreplaceable.

52% are comfortable with AI being used in the background

66% say they're positive or cautiously open to its role

How comfortable are you with AI being used behind the scenes in sports experiences?



AI and personalization vs. manual control

Fans want control, but not added complexity. When asked how much control they want over their sports experience, most fans favor a balance between automation and control.



Only a small minority prefer minimal or no control — which isn't really the way most people consume content. Today's social media platforms are much more controlling over what their users watch. And that's a big opportunity for sports organizations.

Effective personalization uses automation, but keeps control in the user's hands. That balance reduces friction and builds trust with your fanbase.

The revenue connection

Personal relevance translates directly into action, with a clear majority of fans indicating they would engage after viewing content tailored to their interests, while only a small minority say they are unlikely to respond.



We all know that feeling you get when you come across a video that seems like it was destined for you — whether it brings you back to a specific moment, or teaches you something new about your favorite player or team. That's the content that gets a like or comment from the most passive users.

The message: personal connection is a force multiplier for immediate engagement, and long-term spending behavior.

Where's AI the real MVP? Fast delivery.

When asked where AI could genuinely improve digital sports experiences, fans named practical improvements that make content easier to find and faster to access.

47% say AI could improve experiences through better personalization

49% want smarter content recommendations

Is sports keeping pace or lagging behind when it comes to innovation?

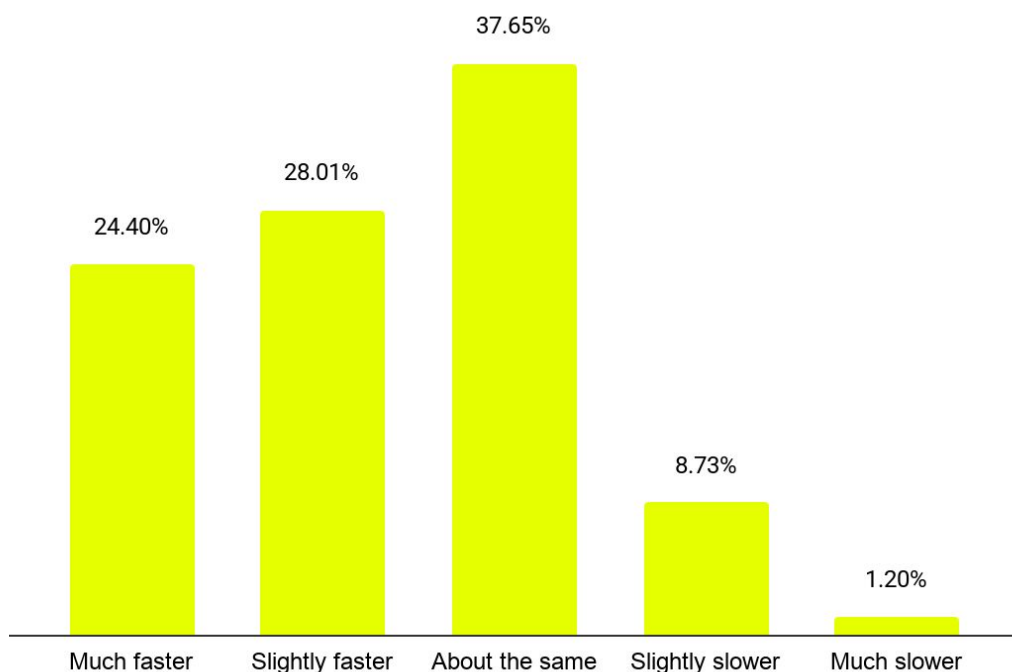
It's nearly a dead heat — which is an "L" when you're competing against the top media and entertainment companies in the world. As fan expectations continue to increase and become more digitally sophisticated, there's a lot of room for sports organizations to grow.

When asked whether sports media is innovating fast enough compared to other digital industries:

52% Say it's moving slightly or much faster

66% say they're positive or cautiously open to its role

Do you think sports media is innovating fast enough compared to other digital industries?



Personalization and commercial relevance

Tailored content and revenue generation go hand-in-hand.

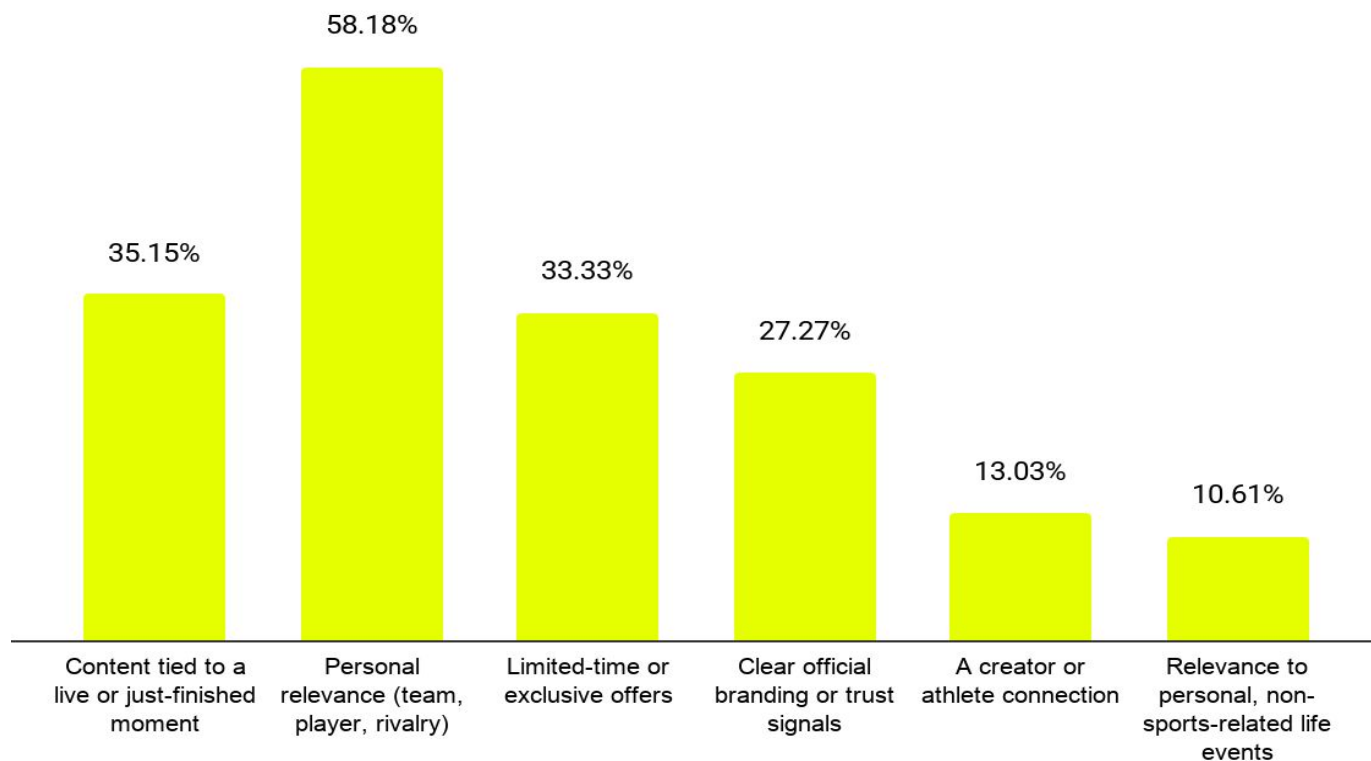
When asked how important personal relevance is for offers shown alongside highlights:

54% say it's very important or essential

14.9% feel it's unimportant or actively dislike it

When asked what would make them more likely to engage with a purchase opportunity, personal relevance ranks highest. Fans also point to offers tied to live or just-finished moments as a key driver of engagement.

Which would make you more likely to engage with a purchase opportunity?
(Select up to 2)



The structural change in sports media

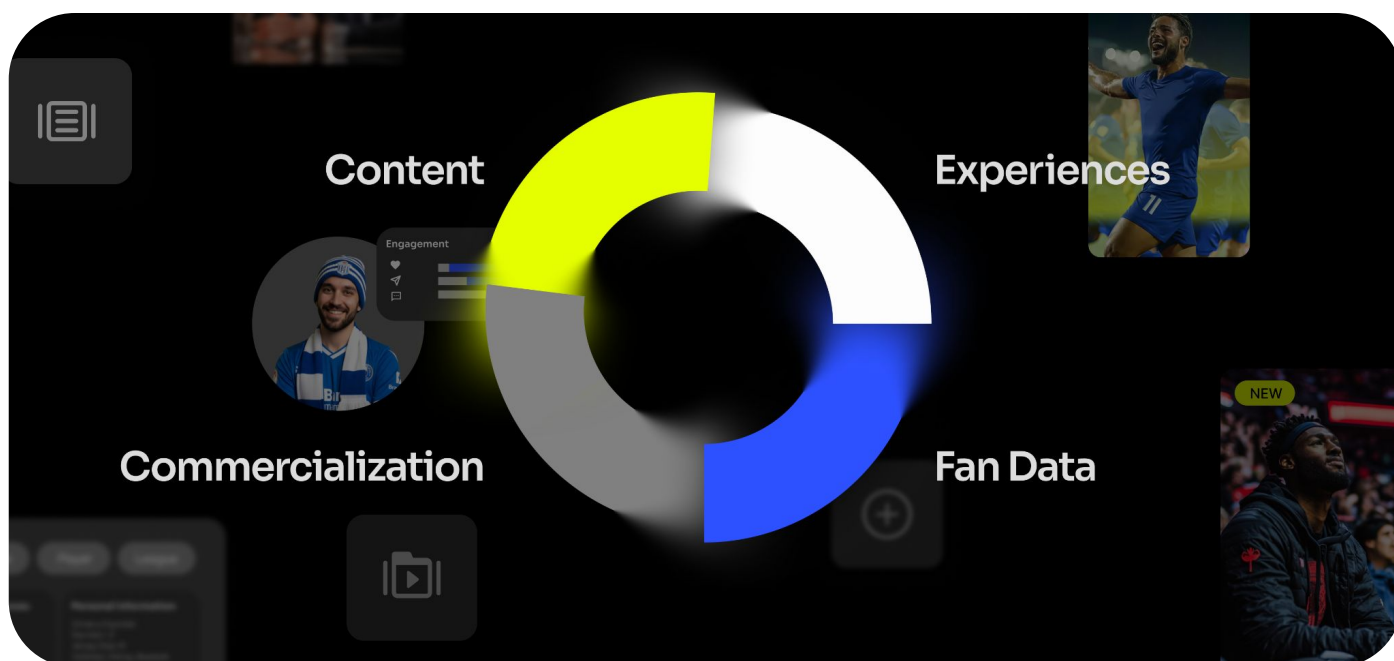
Across the report, several findings are consistent:

- **Content relevance drives engagement amongst fans.** Not more content or features — just content that they relate to and love.
- **Fans say they want the right play / goal / steal / assist as quickly as possible.** Speed matters but when it's cluttered, forced, or just plain doesn't work it loses value.
- **Fans are open to AI,** but only when it improves discovery, surfaces the right content, and doesn't feel like its infringing on the content. They tend to push back when it loses that human touch.

The sports content flywheel

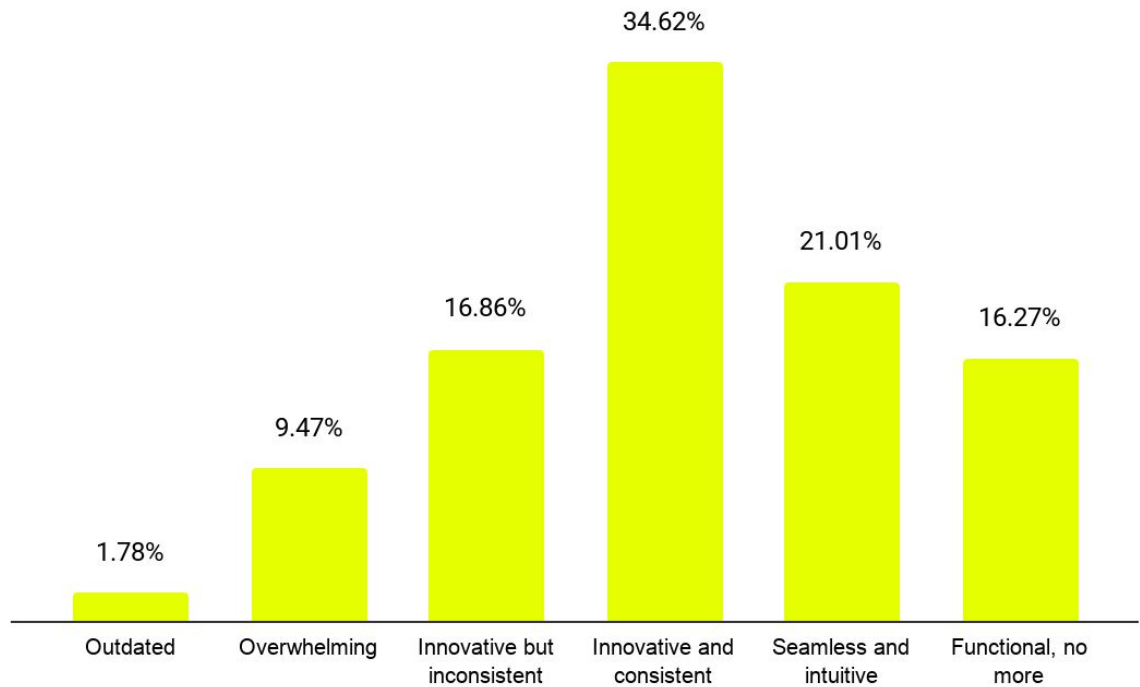
Set these things in constant motion for a competitive advantage:

AI is increasingly viewed as a necessity in content infrastructure. Its value is measured by how effectively it improves speed, discovery, and contextual relevance. The organizations that implement AI to help everything flow in one, coordinated system will be in the best position to win.

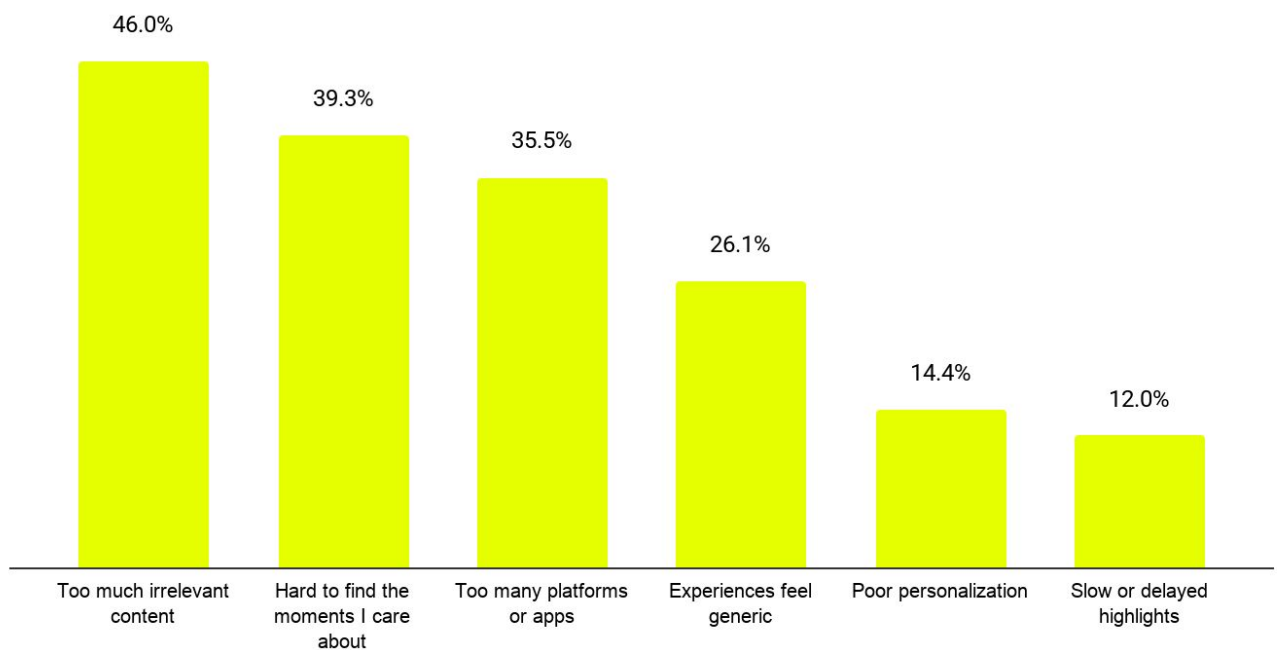


Appendix

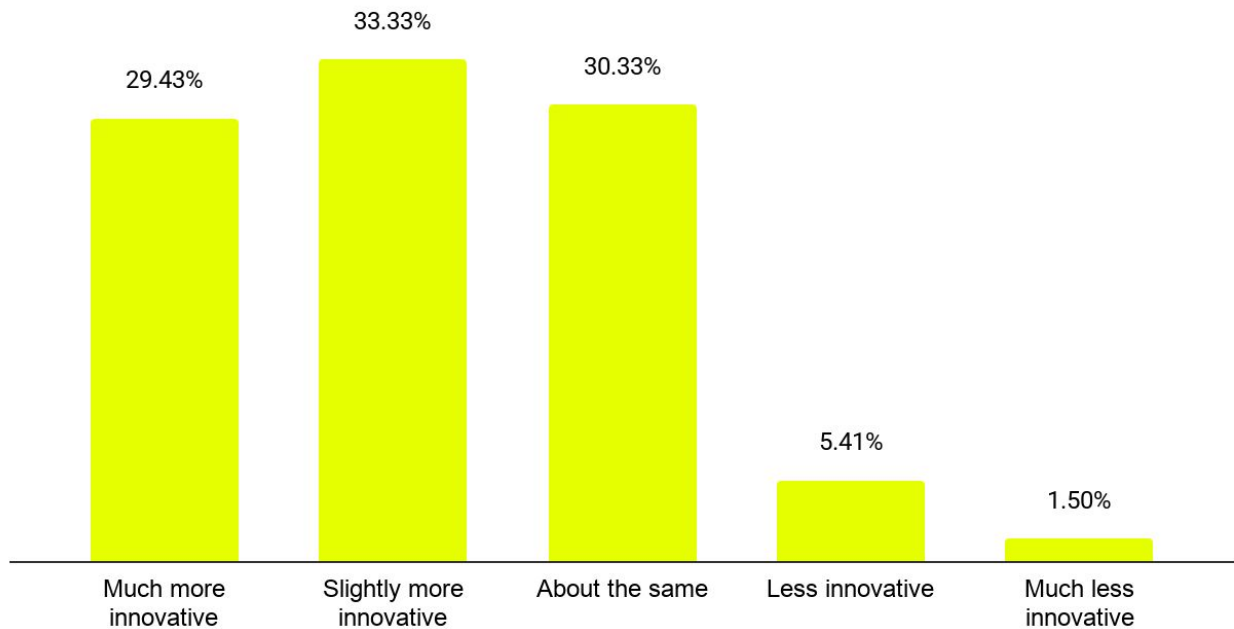
Q2 – Which of the following best describes how digital sports experiences feel today?



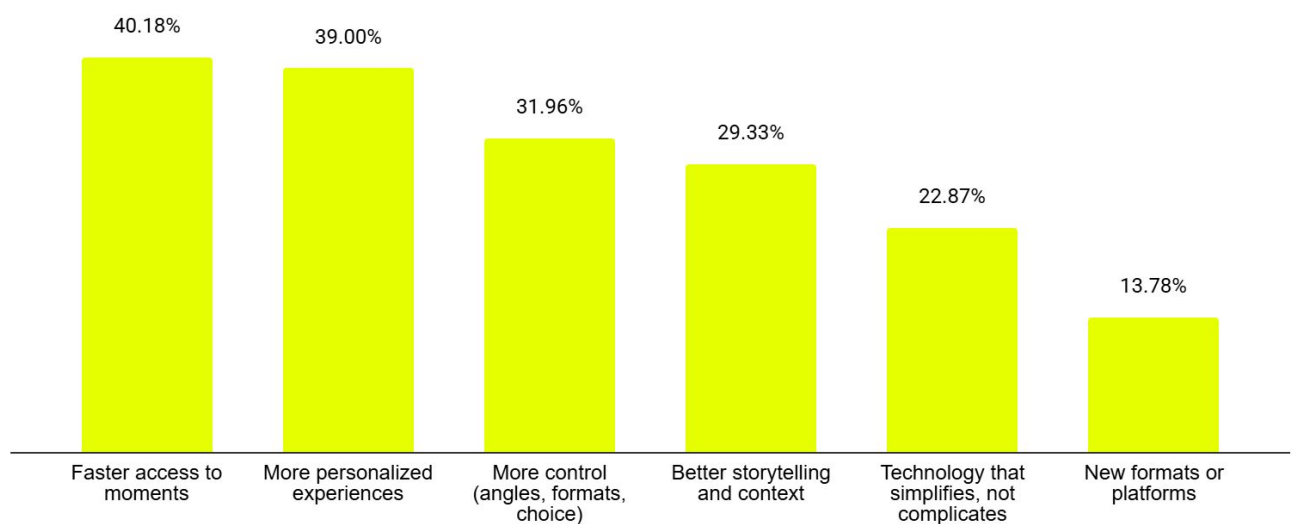
Q3– When watching or following sports digitally, what frustrates you most? (Select up to 2 answers)



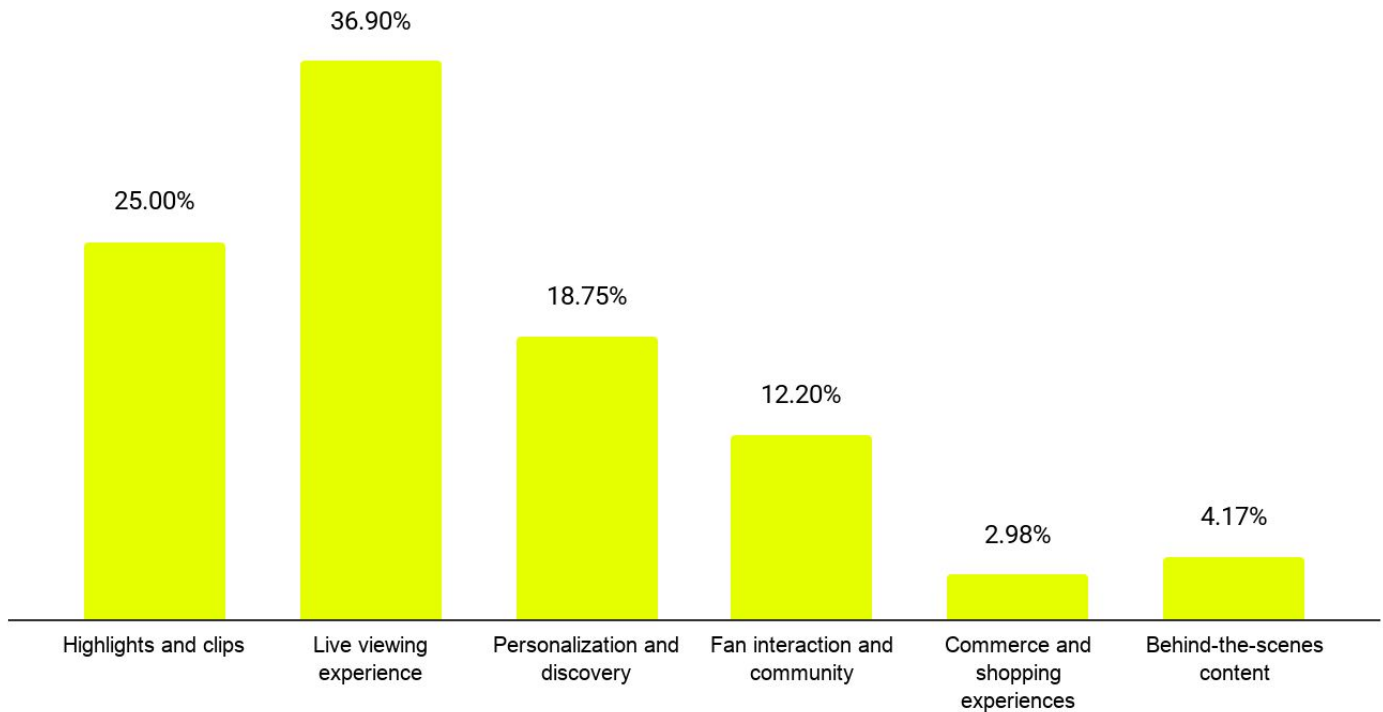
Q4 - Compared to two years ago, how innovative do digital sports experiences feel today?



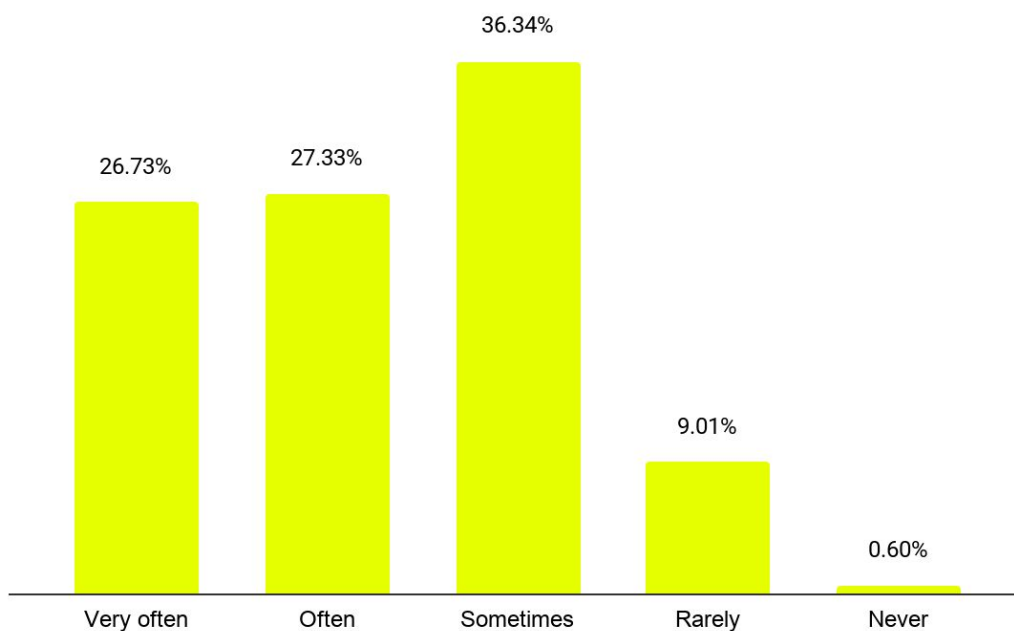
Q5 - What does “innovation” in sports actually mean to you today? (Select up to 2)



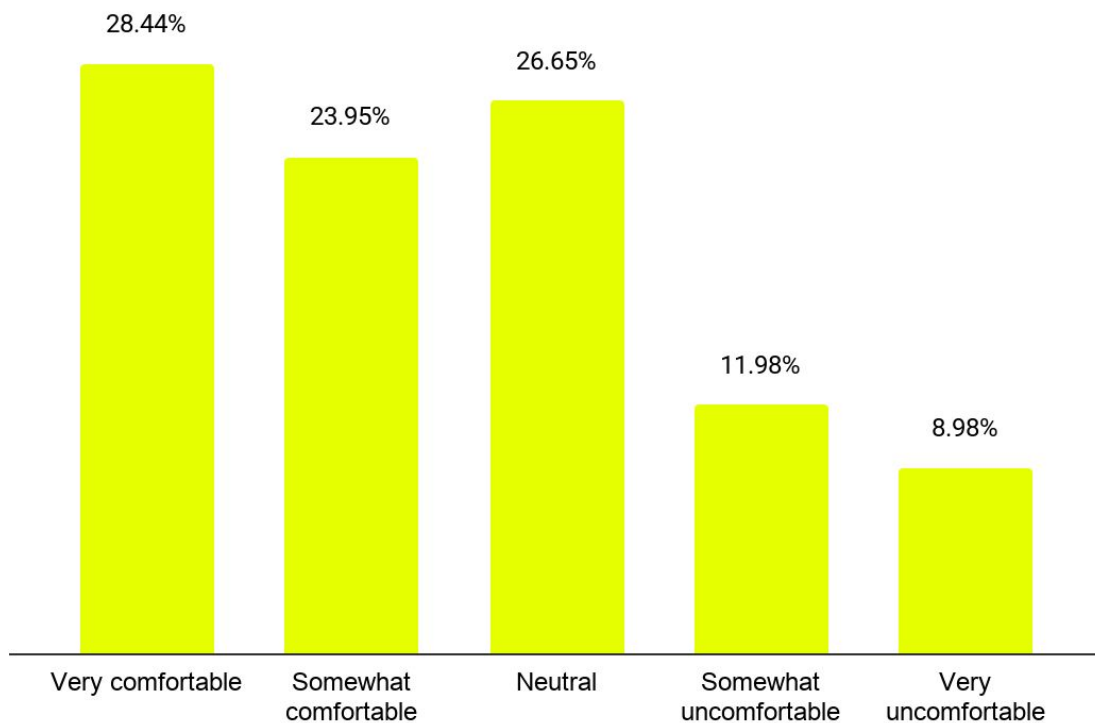
Q6 - Which area of sports media do you think needs the most innovation right now?



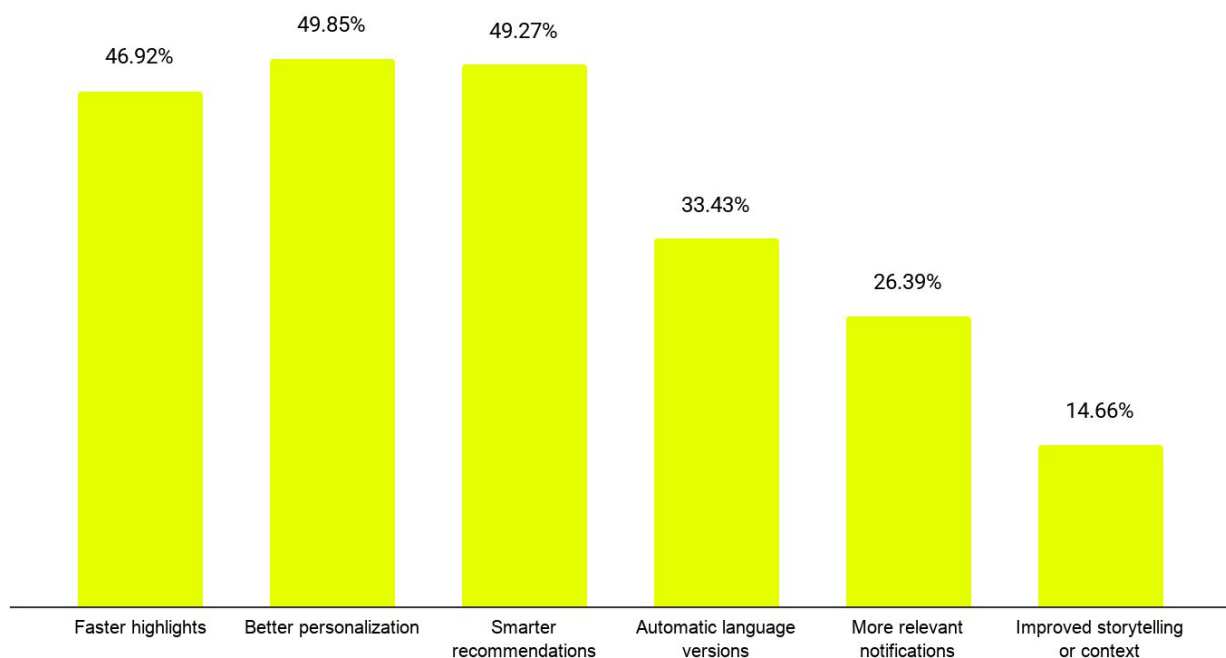
Q7 - How often do new sports products add features that feel irrelevant to you?



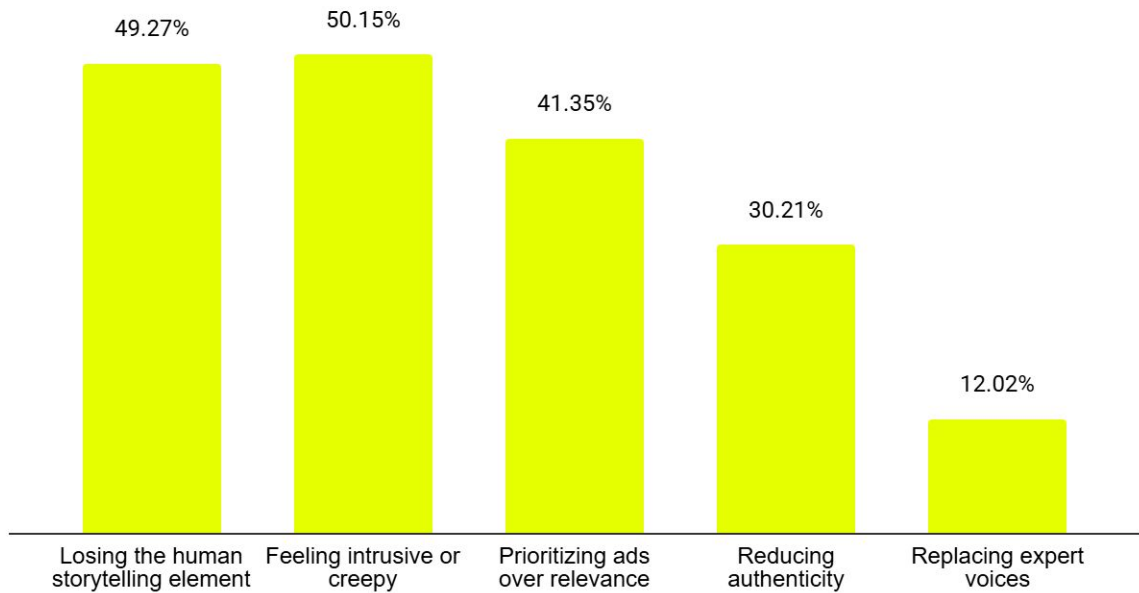
Q8- How comfortable are you with AI being used behind the scenes in sports experiences?



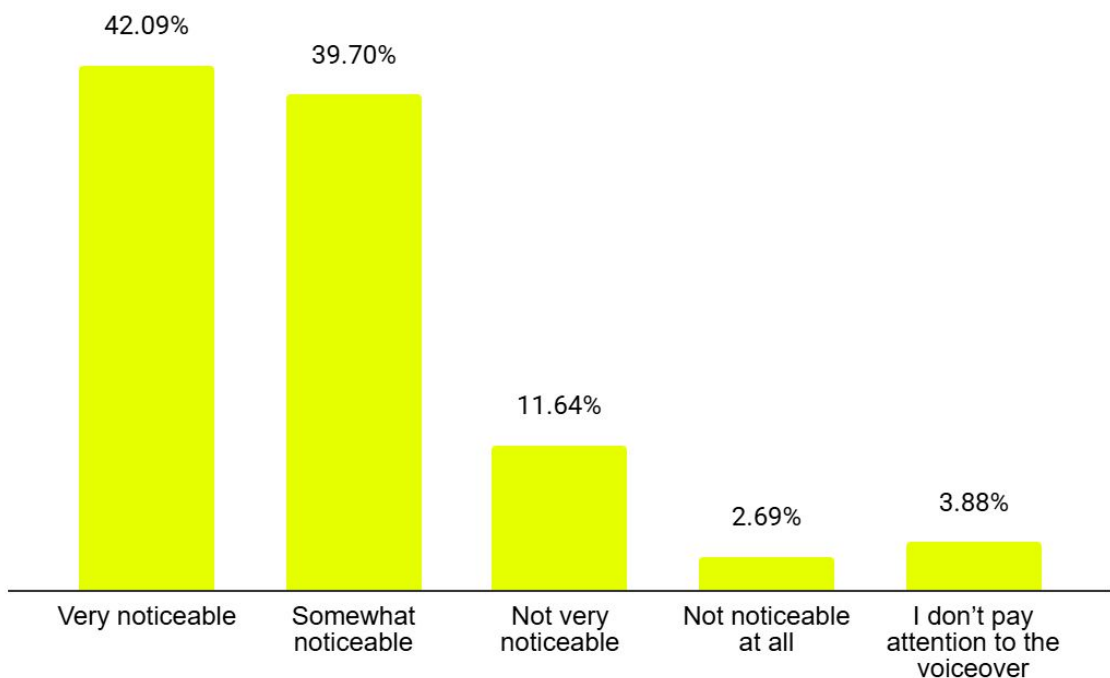
Q9- Where do you feel AI could genuinely improve digital sports experiences? (Select up to 3)



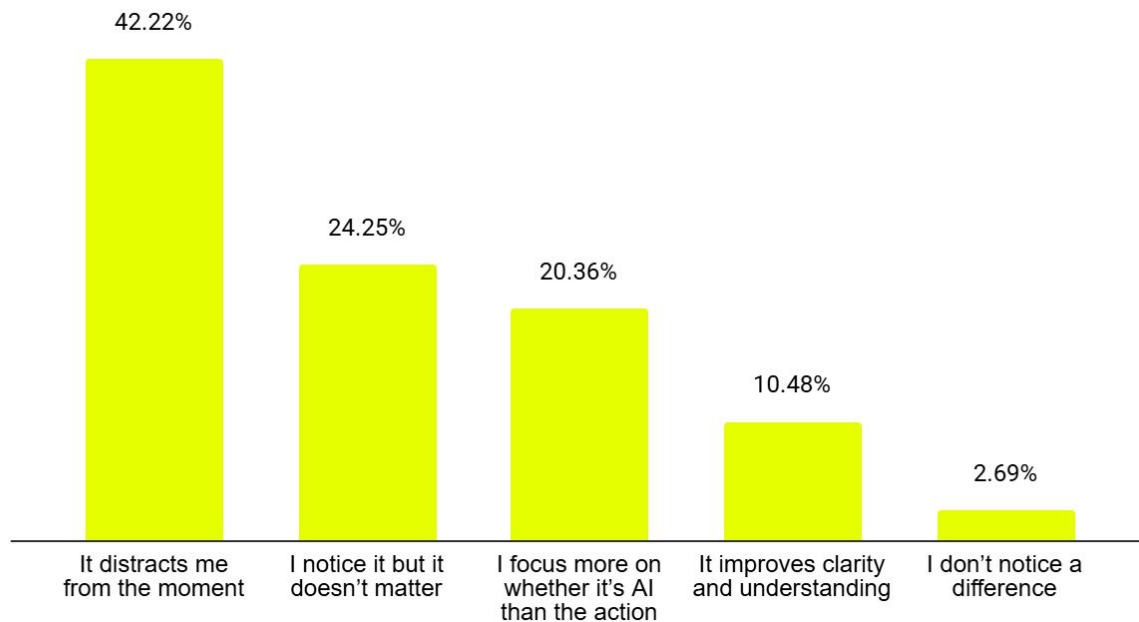
Q10 - What would make AI-powered sports experiences feel unacceptable to you? (Select up to 2)



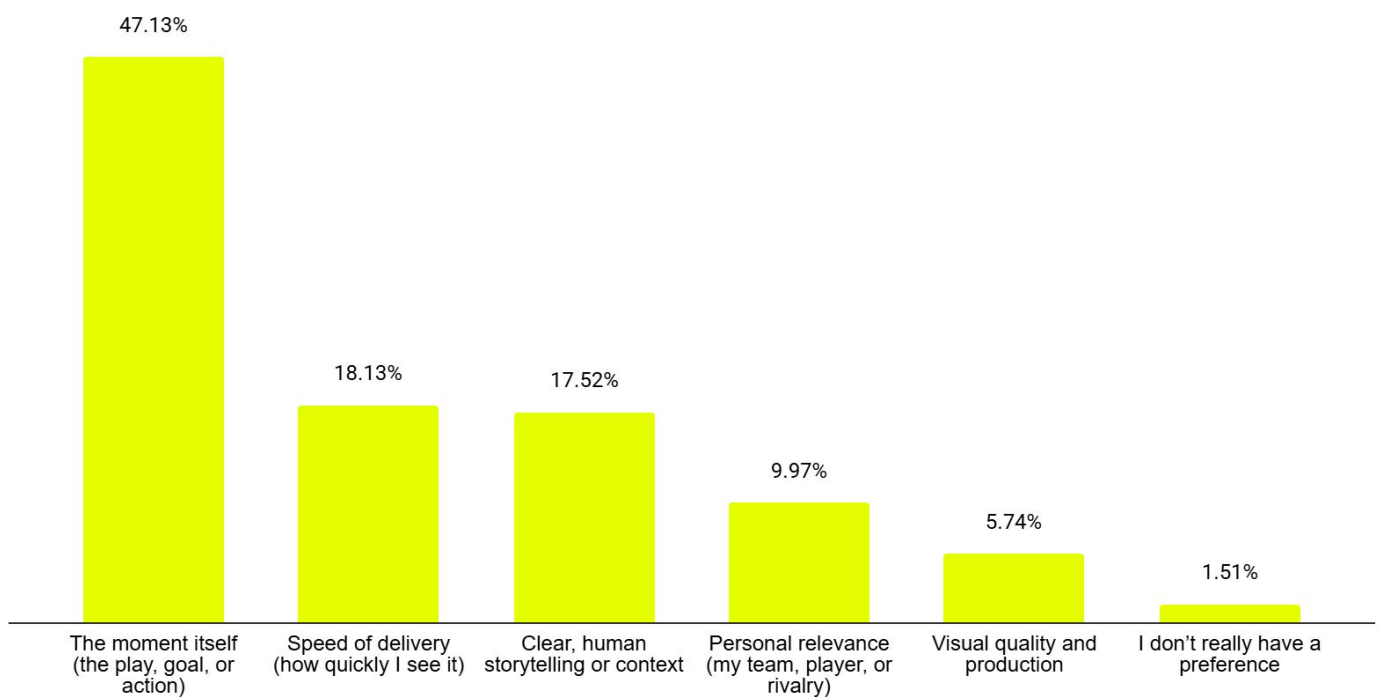
Q11 - When watching highlights, how noticeable is it to you if the voiceover is AI-generated?

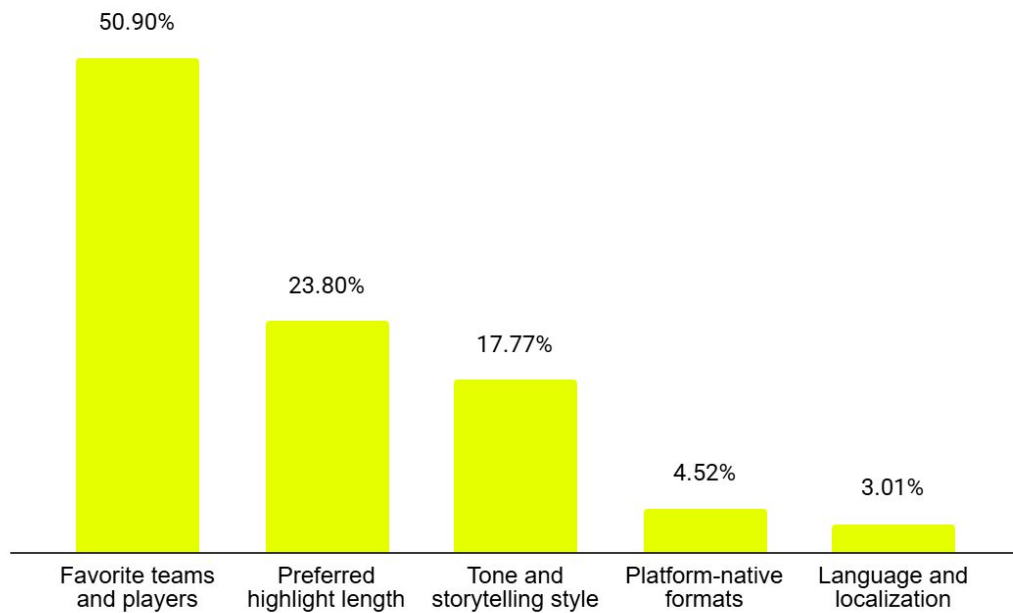
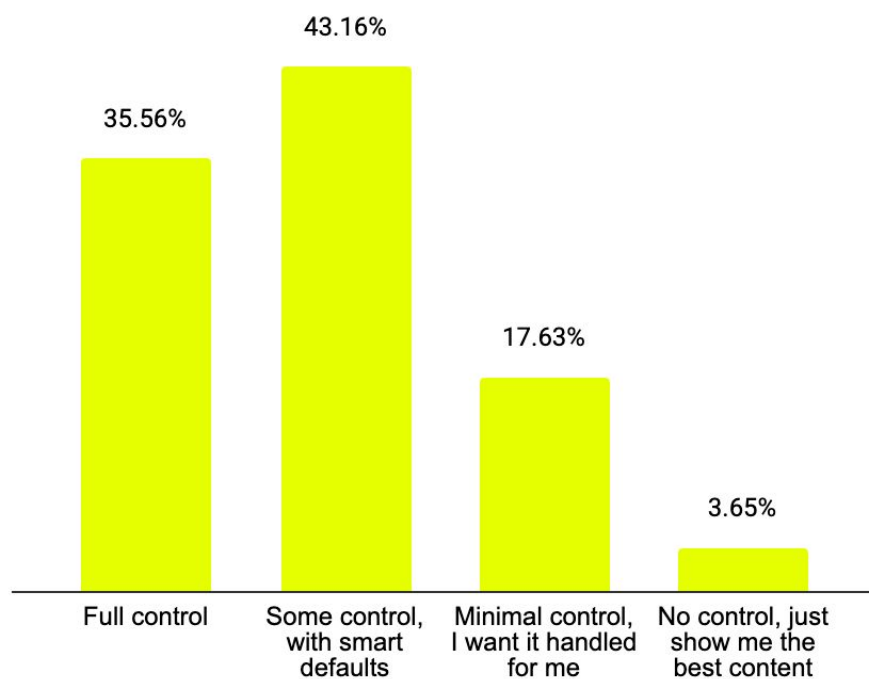


Q12 - When the voiceover in a highlight feels artificial, how does it affect your experience?

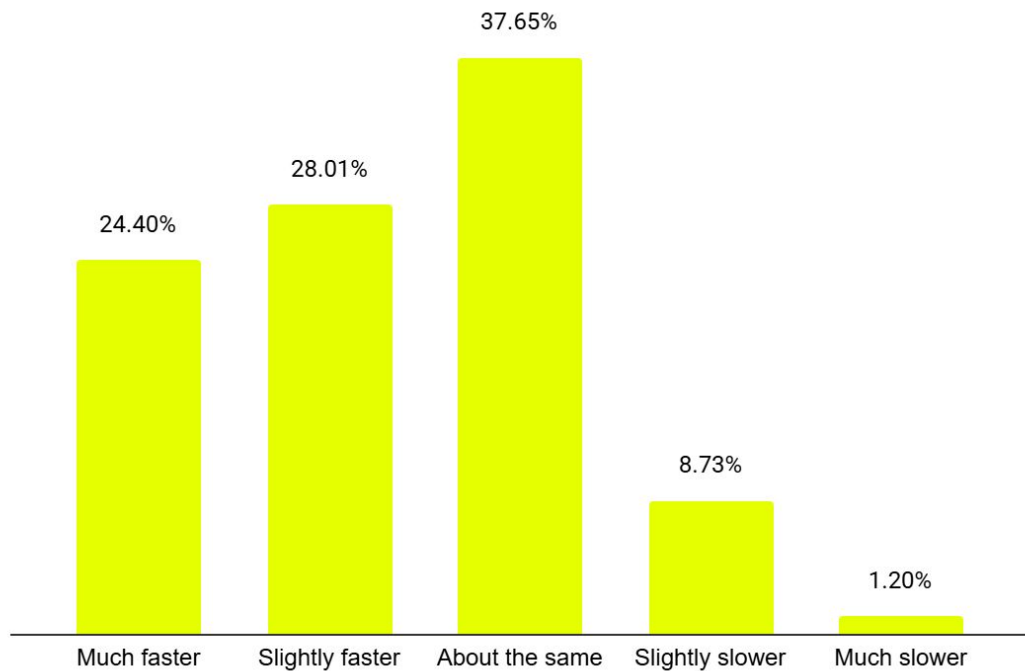


Q13 - Which matters more to you in a highlight?

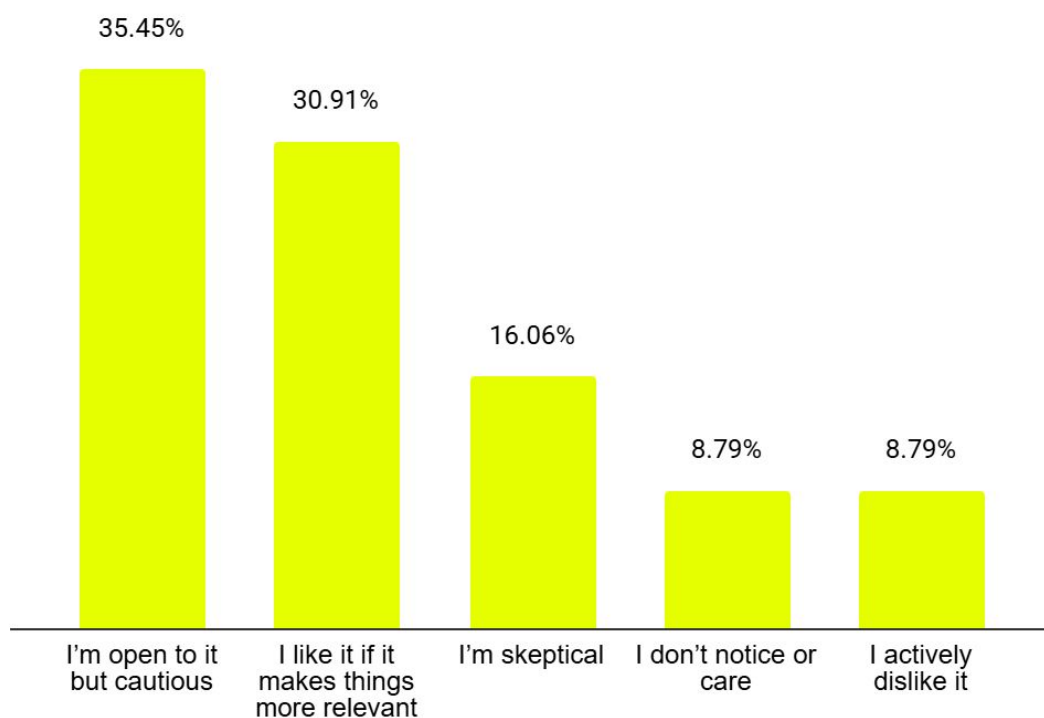


Q14 - Which type of personalization would you value most?**Q15 - How much control do you want over your sports experience?**

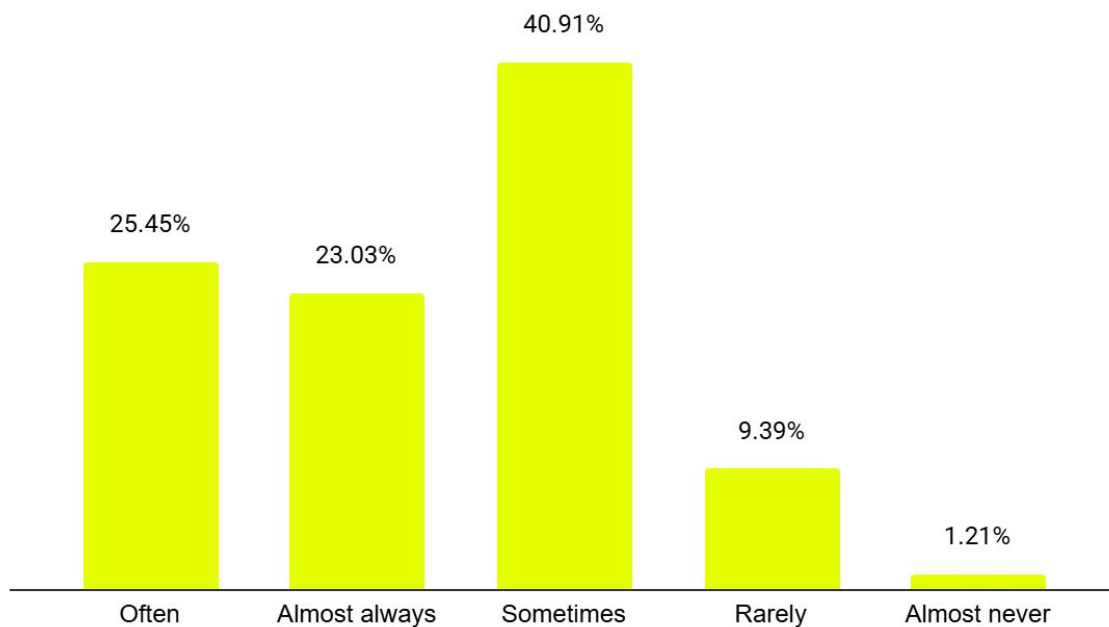
Q16 - Do you think sports media is innovating fast enough compared to other digital industries?



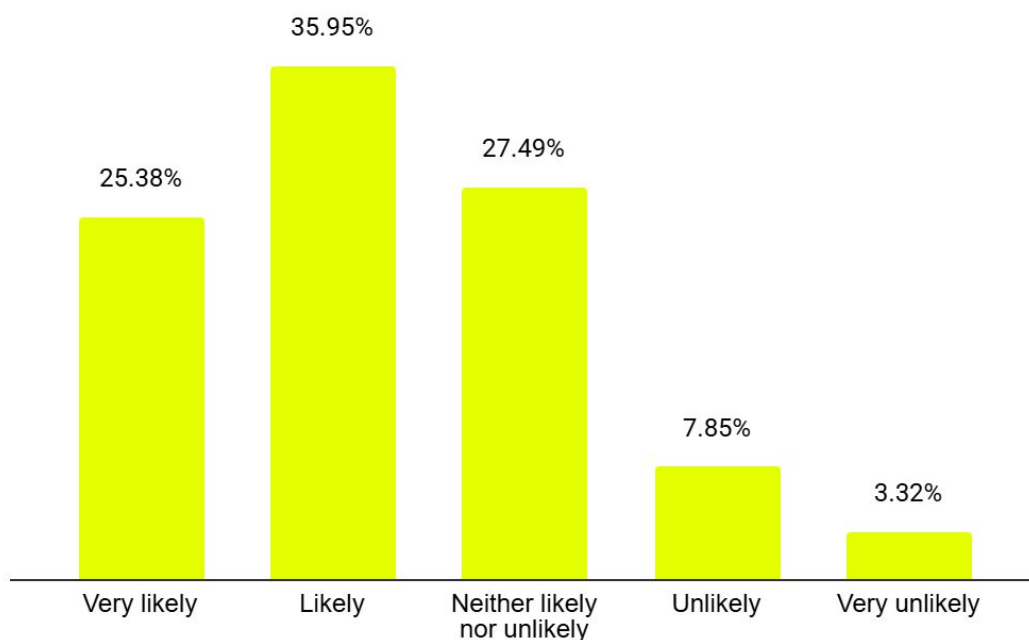
Q17 - Which statement best reflects how you feel about AI in sports experiences?



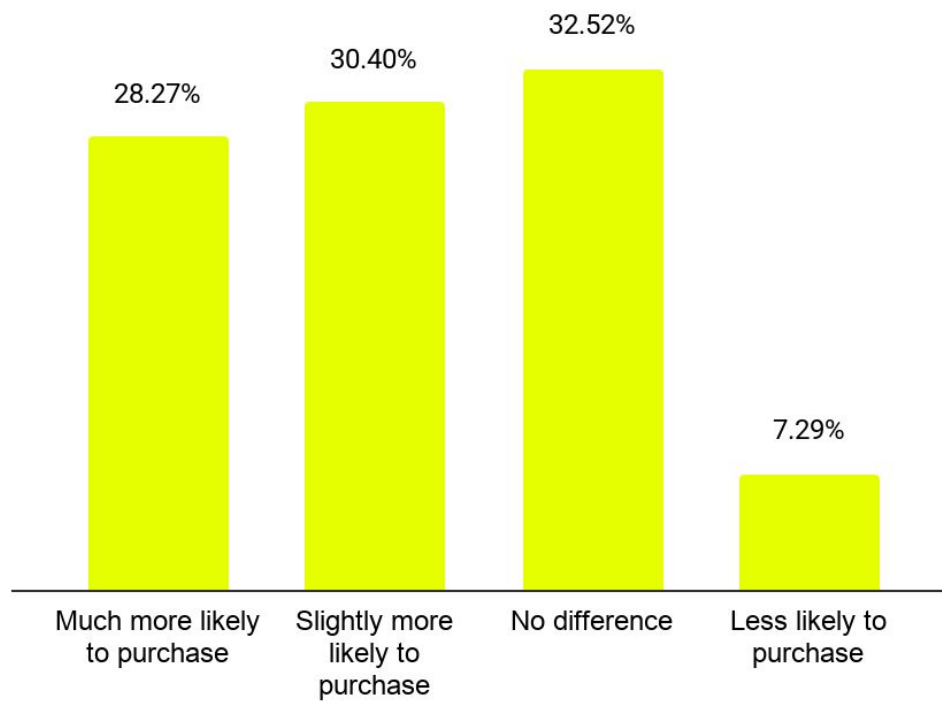
Q18 - When sports platforms introduce new features, how often do they make the experience better?



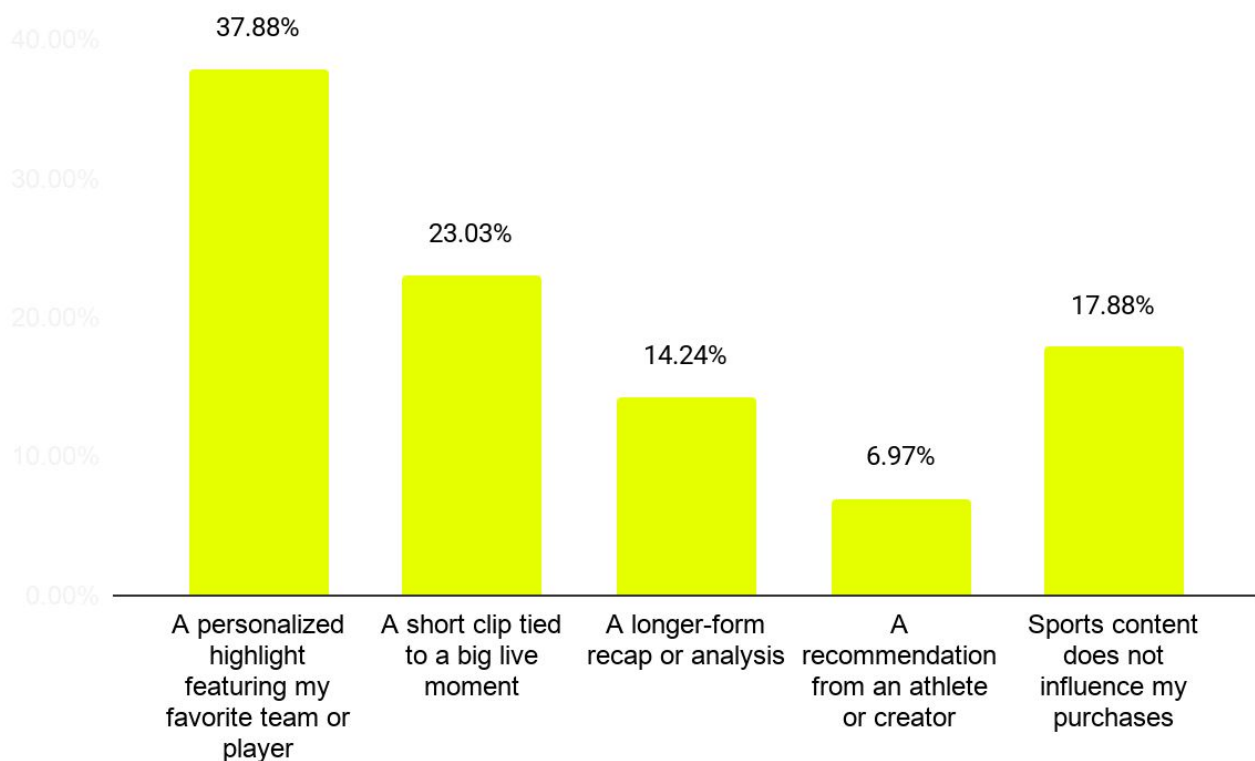
Q19 - How likely are you to take action (for example, buy merchandise or tickets) after watching sports content that feels personalized to you?



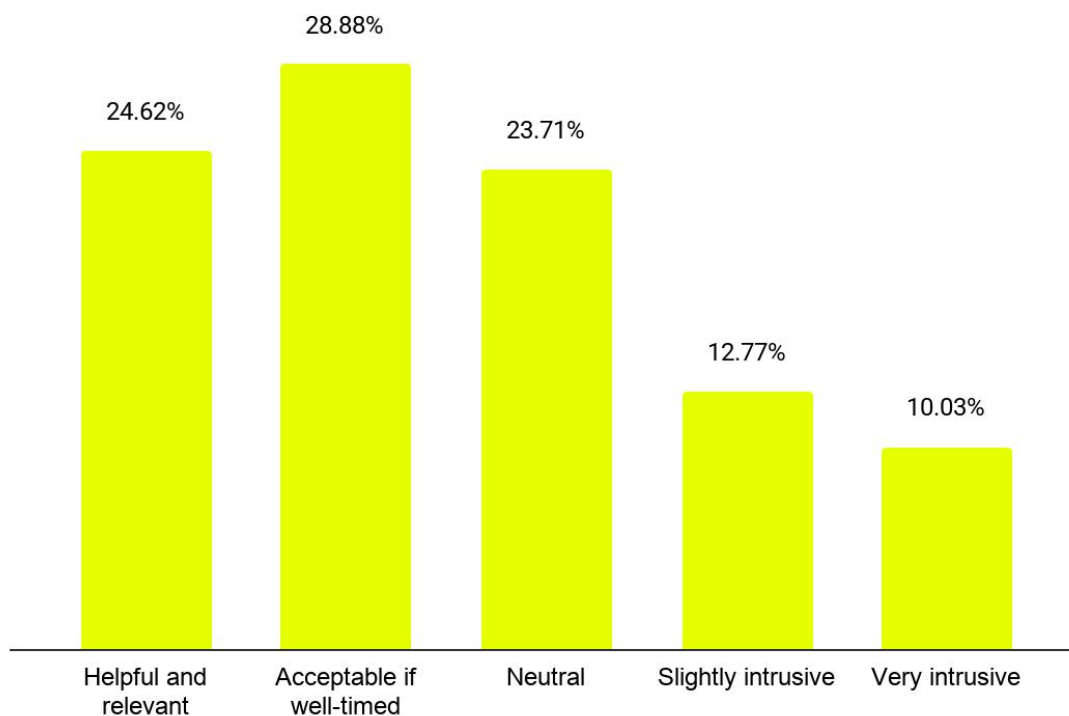
Q20 - Compared to generic highlights, how does personalized, bite-sized content affect your likelihood to make a purchase?



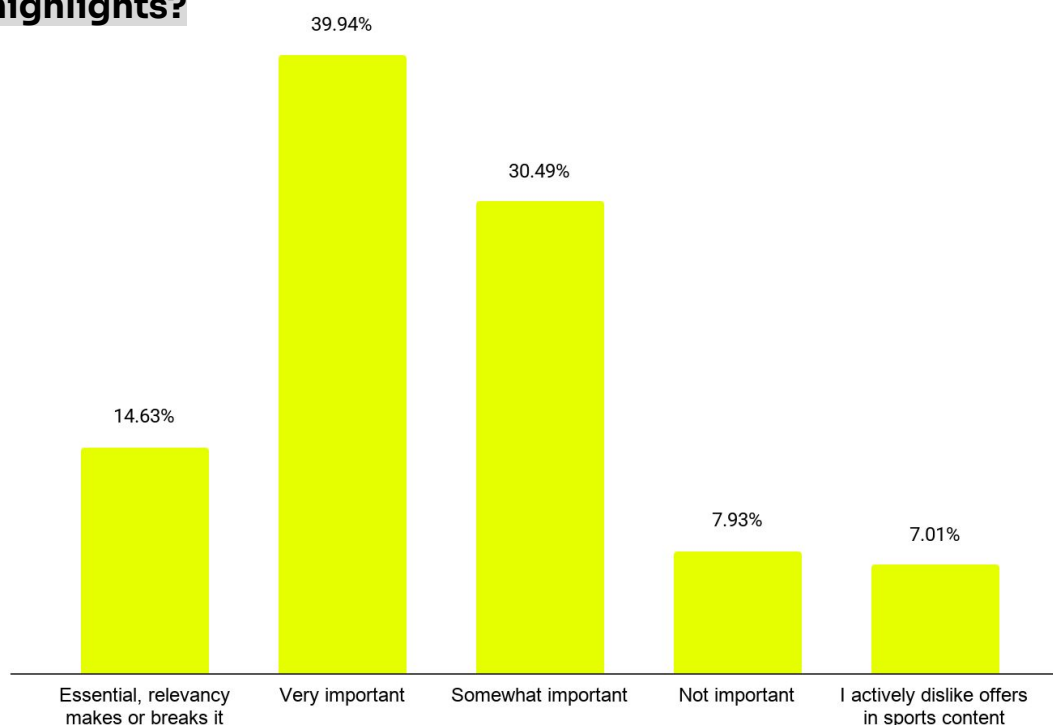
Q21 - Which type of sports content is most likely to influence you to make a purchase?



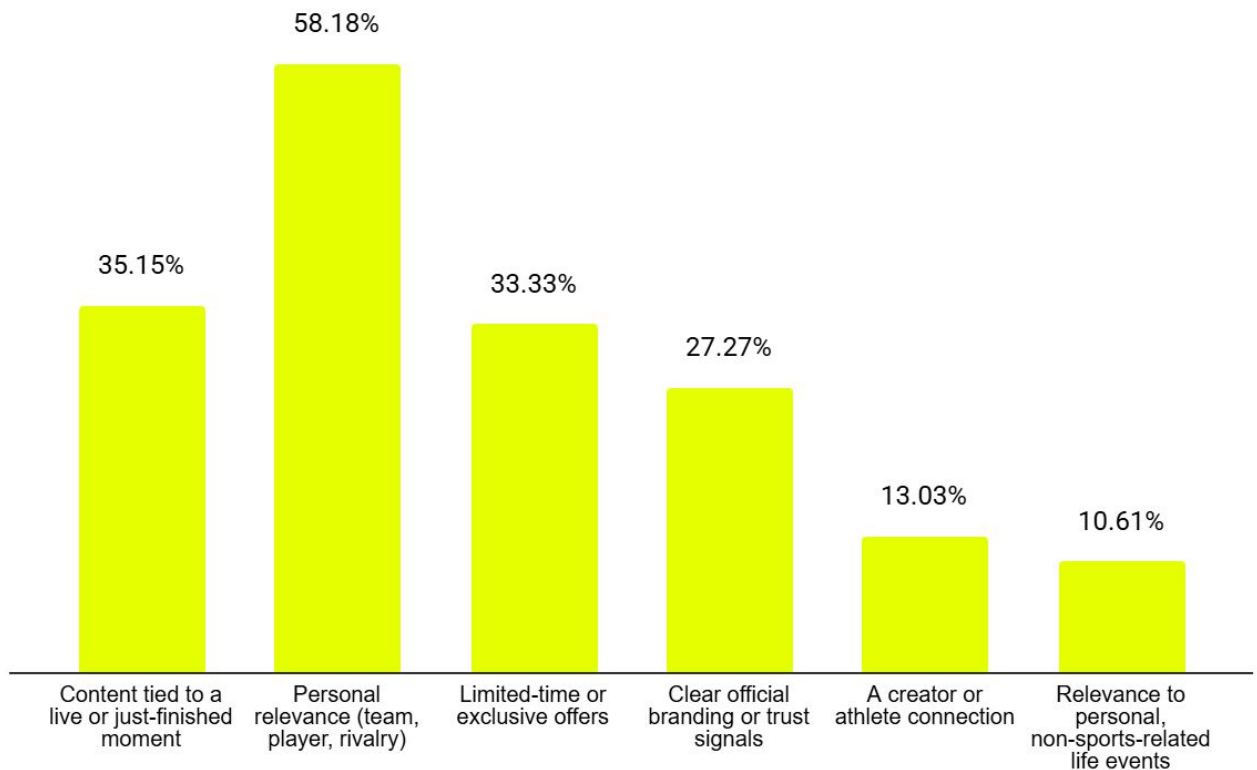
Q22 - When a contextually relevant purchase option (tickets, merchandise, subscription) appears alongside a highlight, how does it feel?



Q23 - How important is personal relevancy when it comes to offers shown alongside highlights?



Q24 - Which would make you more likely to engage with a purchase opportunity? (Select up to 2)



Q25 - If sports platforms understood your preferences better, how likely are you to spend more over time?

