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As Selection Sunday nears, Americans across the country ready themselves for another NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament. The average consumer will spend 6 hours watching the games at work, and more than $10 billion will be wagered on games. For advertisers, March Madness represents an enormous opportunity to reach a highly-engaged audience across multiple channels and platforms.

In 2018, the 68-team men's NCAA tournament once again dominated the month of March, drawing in 8.6 million US viewers on opening weekend and 16.5 million viewers for the championship game on TBS, TNT, and TruTV. Television advertising revenue alone surpassed the $1 billion mark in 2017. And what supposedly began with 80 people in a bar in Staten Island, New York, in 1977 has evolved into a global phenomenon, with an estimated 70 million tournament brackets being filled out in 2017, with a total of 10.4 billion in bets.

But it isn't just the advertising revenue that makes March Madness such a compelling story for brands. The average worker will spend six hours monitoring March Madness games at work (25.5 minutes per day), either checking game scores and team rankings, watching games live, or chatting about games with co-workers, creating incredible value for brands who want to connect with consumers who are locked in to the action.

Even in its own right, the March Madness craze has led to a tenfold increase in demand for merchandise during the event, with over 100,000 jerseys being sold during the course of the tournament.

To help marketers prepare for March Madness 2019, we've compiled some information on March Madness viewing and digital activity in 2018, and some thoughts on how this information can be used to improve marketing initiatives around next year's tournament.
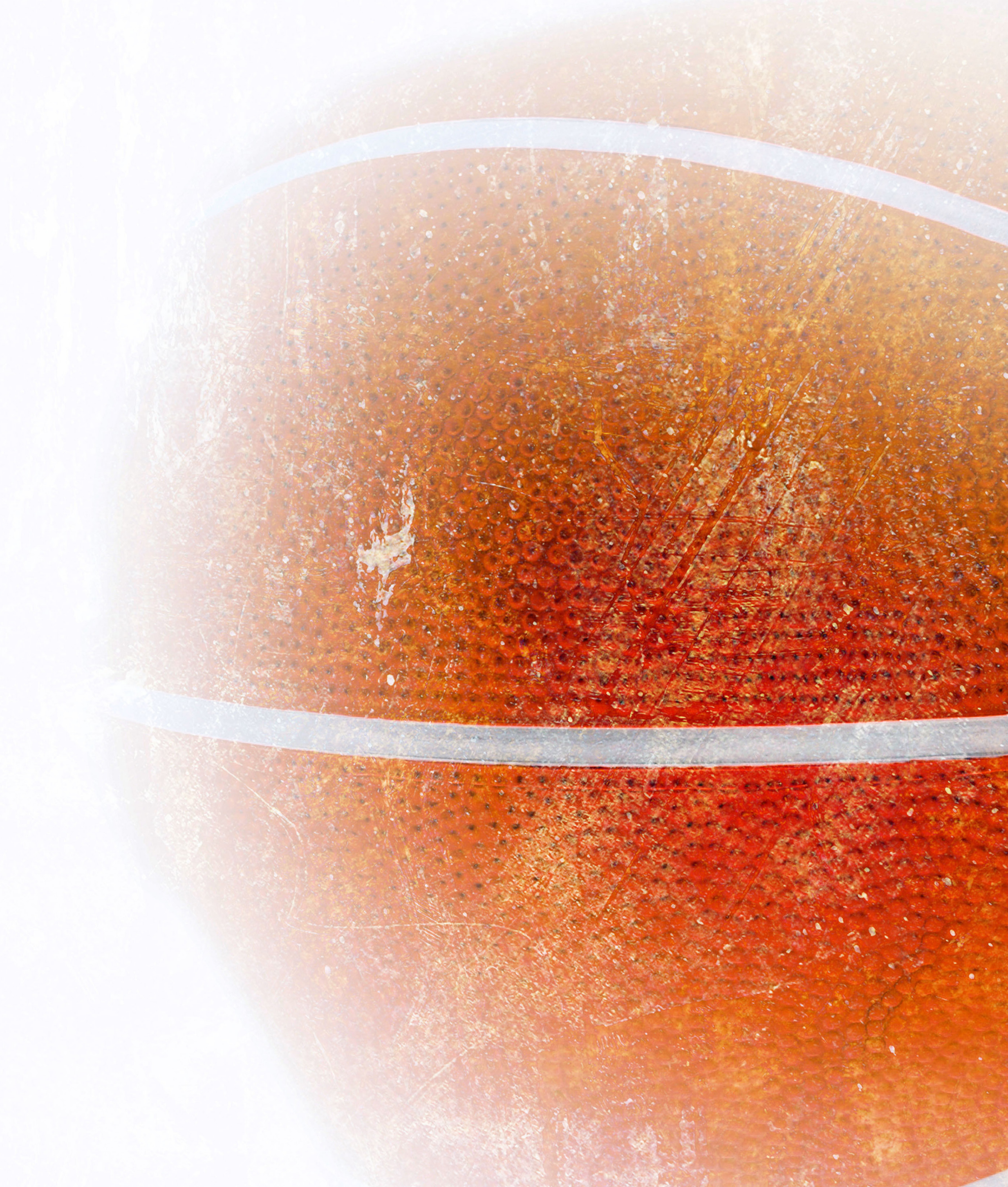
THE THREE TYPES OF MARCH MADNESS VIEWER

By segmenting the March Madness audience based on the amount of time they watched, we developed a better understanding of the differences between viewers in our 13-million person sample.

Looking at those viewers who watched more than five minutes of March Madness programming in 2018, we were able to identify three key audience segments:

Spectacles

Casuals

Fanatics

March Madness Audience Clustering
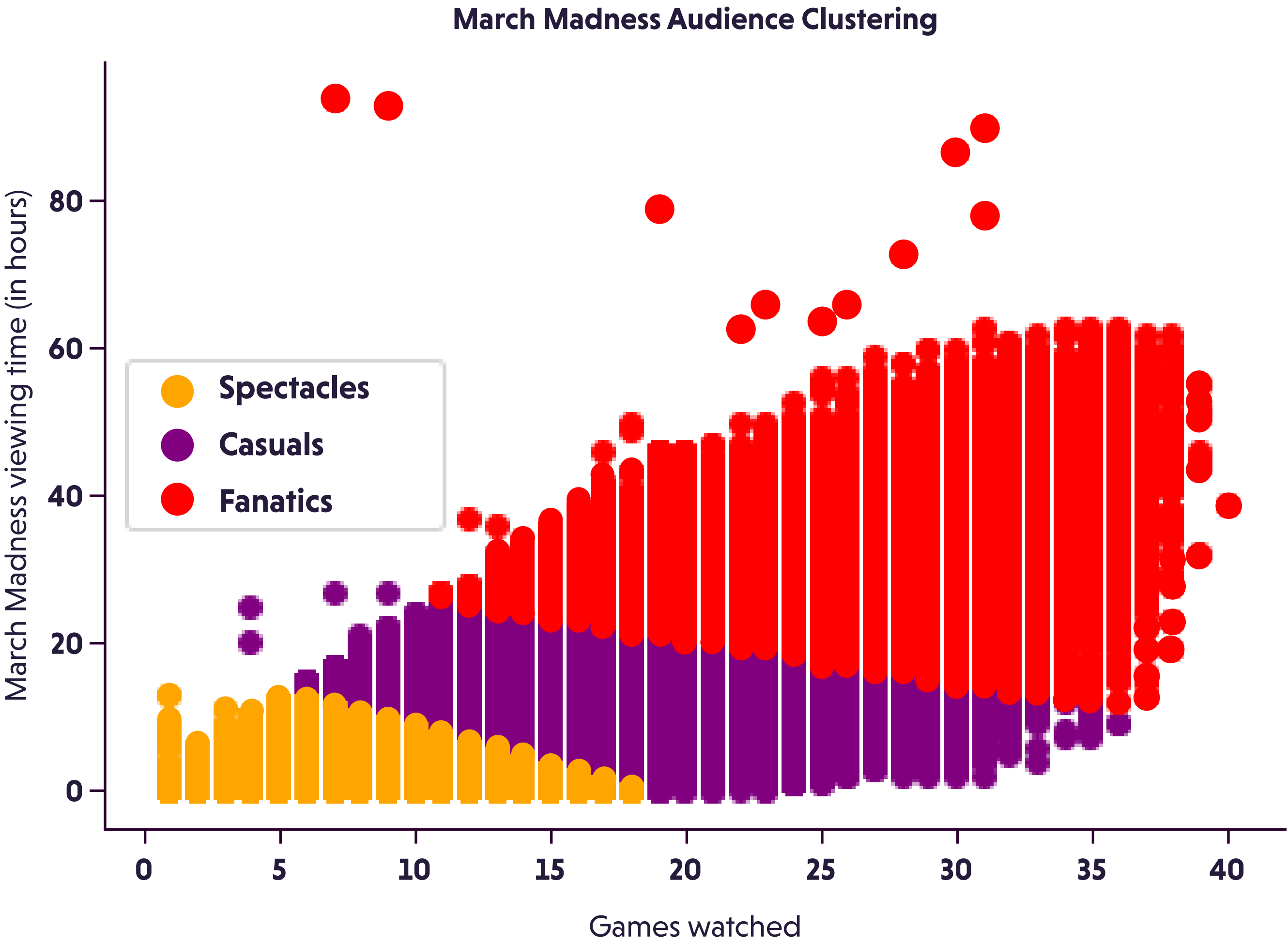
SPECTACLES

The largest segment of March Madness viewers, making up 55% of the event's TV audience, are there purely for the spectacle. Most Spectacles (63%) will watch only one or two games during the tournament, typically during the later rounds. On average, they'll watch four games during the entire event, averaging 40 minutes of viewing time. They have the least loyalty to a local team. Unlike Fanatics and Casuals, Spectacles are equally likely to be women as men, and includes a disproportionate segment of older viewers (55+).

As Spectacles watch the least amount of March Madness on TV, they're the most likely to remain unexposed to a particular TV ad, and so are more likely to be prime targets for video ads featuring the same creative.

TARGETING THIS AUDIENCE:

- **Demographic profiles:** adults aged 45+, female sports fans

- **Content profile:** entertainment-related content, occasional live sports viewing on TV (focus on major events), technology content online

- **Offline location -** Grocery stores, big box retailers, Walmart (weekends and evenings)

CASUALS

Casuals are heavy viewers of March Madness content, but also likely to watch the NBA playoffs and other basketball-related content on TV. They account for 31% of the March Madness viewing audience, and tend to watch an average of 15 games during the event. They are primarily men between the ages of 35 and 44 and over-index to employment in finance or marketing-related fields. They tend to watch more news content on TV (such as CNN or FOX news), averaging 37 minutes per day. They're also likely to be fans of other sports, with just under a third also watching NFL football. Casuals are also likely to be following a specific team as they watch games, usually the team local to their geographic region.

Casuals are likely to see most of the ads that air during March Madness' televised games, but may not reach oversaturation on a particular ad. As such, they're potentially prime targets for follow-up or sequential messaging.

TARGETING THIS AUDIENCE:

- **Demographic profiles:** men aged 35 to 44

- **Content profile:** NBA fans who watch 5+ games during the playoffs, other sports fans, Super Bowl viewers

- **Offline location:** Department store visits, particularly on weekdays between 6pm and 8pm

FANATICS

Fanatics go big on March Madness, watching an average of 25 games during the event and engaging with an average of 31 hours March Madness content online. These hardcore viewers make up 14% of the March Madness TV audience and are predominantly men between the ages of 35 and 45. They're unsurprisingly big TV sports viewers overall, and spend an average of 32 minutes per day watching sports-related content on TV.

These viewers also engage heavily with sports content sites like ESPN.com and SI.com (Sports Illustrated), where they spend an average of 21 minutes a day poring over updates and articles. Because they watch the most TV content, they're likely to have seen the same TV ads multiple times, and as a result, are likely to be the best fit for digital direct response messaging.

TARGETING THIS AUDIENCE:

- **Demographic profile:** men aged 25 to 45

- **Content profile:** 15+ minutes of sports-related TV content on networks such as ESPN, TNT, TruTv, and 10+ minutes of sports content per day between 8am and 10 am on weekdays or 10am and noon on weekends

- **Offline location:** Sports bars, stadiums, Target stores (on the weekend)

Segment Viewer Count by Tournament Stage
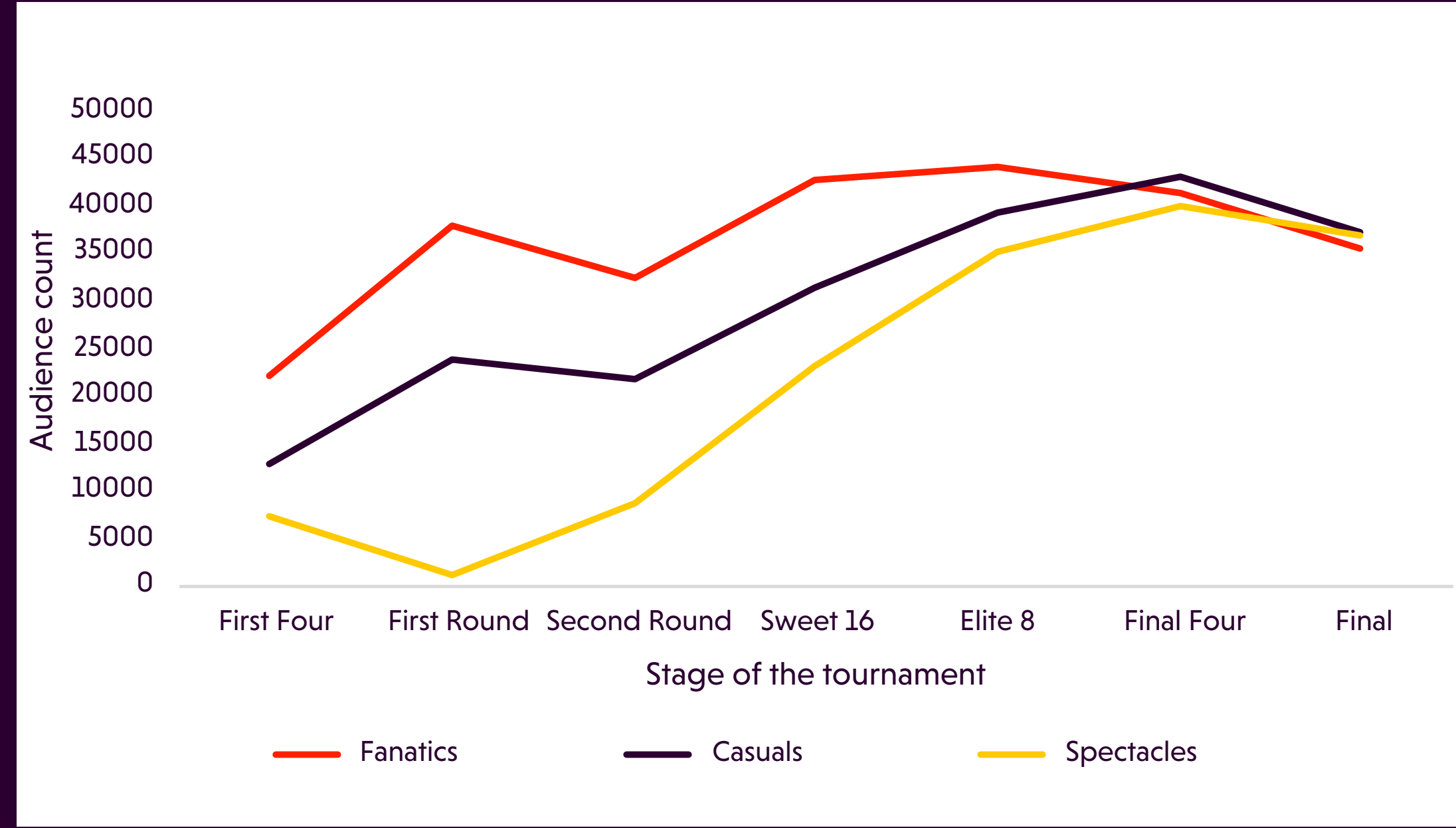
Percentage of Viewers by Segment and Tournament Stage
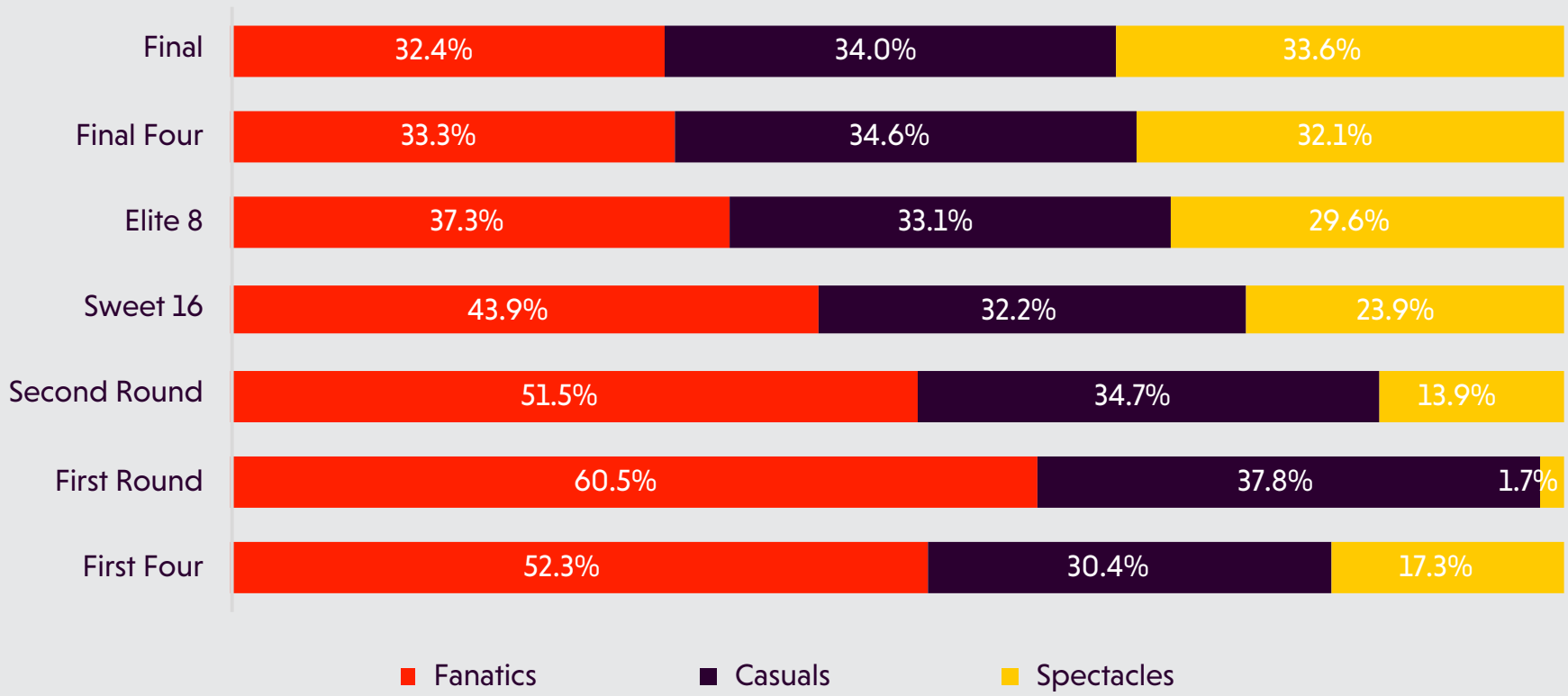
TV Content Preferences by Segment

WHY MARCH MADNESS FANS AREN'T LIKE NBA FANS

As a cultural event, the allure of March Madness reaches far beyond the standard college basketball audience. In order to understand how the M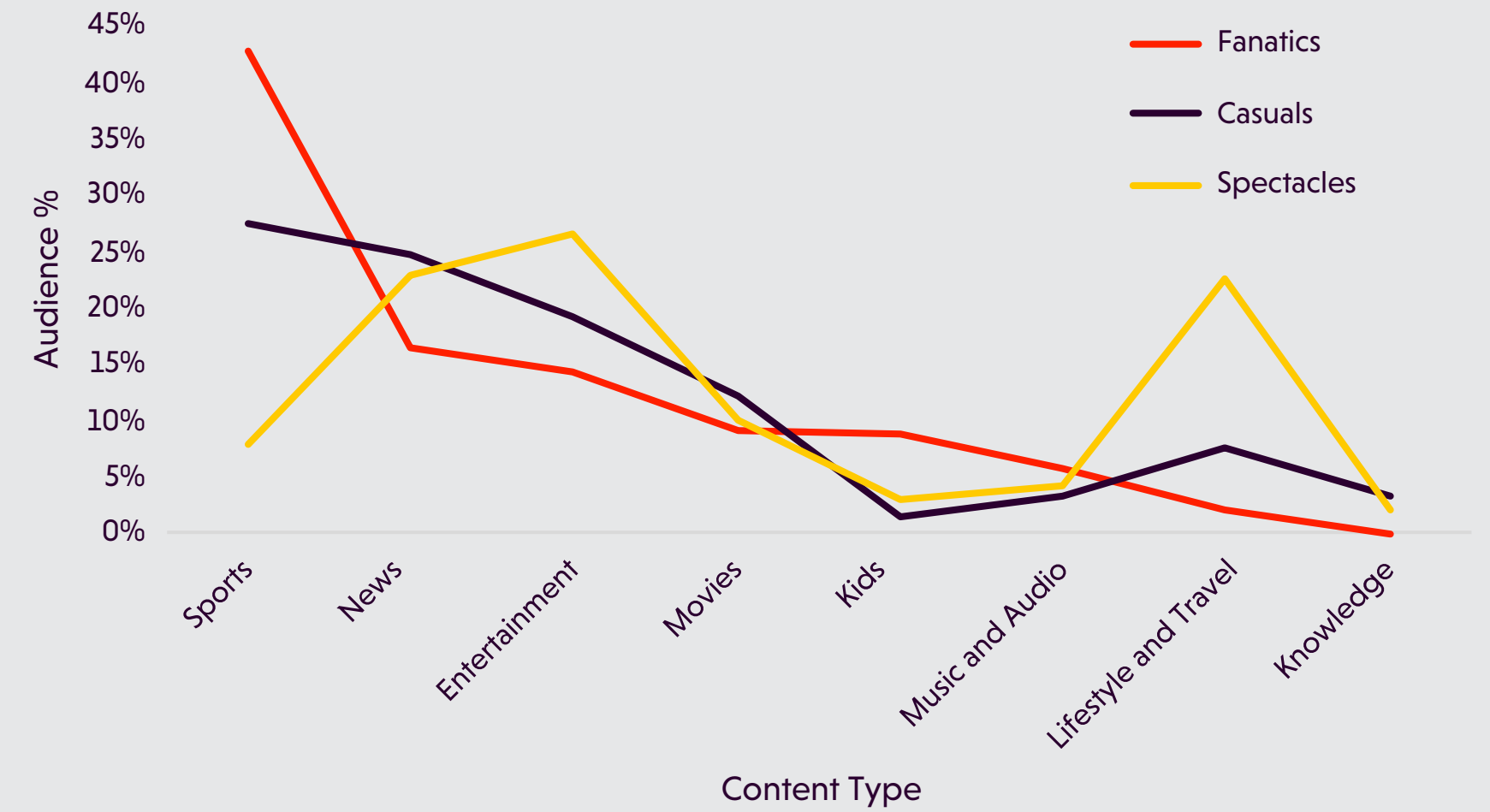arch Madness audience varies from standard college basketball and NBA fans, we looked at data from the 2018 college and NBA seasons (October and November, specifically), and compared those audiences to the March Madness audience from earlier in the year, creating three new segments that advertisers should consider:

1 MARCH MADNESS ONLY

These were the fans who only or primarily watched the tournament in March, but not college basketball or NBA games during the fall. Compared to the other two segments, this audience was relatively small, but still significant, consisting of about 27,000 distinct households in our sample (roughly 4%). The most important feature about this audience group was the way they engaged with the tournament:

▼ On average, these fans spent 1.4x longer watching March Madness games than the general tournament audience from the other two categories. They were intent on seeing more of the tournament, despite potentially only having a passing interest in regular season games.

▼ In terms of total games, fans in this group watch almost twice as many games as the general March Madness audience.

▼ Fans in this group also showed a higher regional loyalty, with 32% following their nearby regional college teams in games.

2 NBA ONLY

Basketball fans who only watch NBA games while ignoring or showing little interest in March Madness. As a result, efforts to reach NBA fans during March Madness or assumptions that you'll be reaching the same fans with messaging targeting both may be off-base. Fans in this audience make up about 27% of basketball fans watching a given contest on TV.

▼ Fans in this group are the most likely to be casual viewers, and the most likely to show up in basketball fan segments. They're often open to following more than one team, and will occasionally watch non-game basketball-related content on TV (think talking head shows or sports news).

▼ They're more drawn to NBA content for high profile and heavyweight games. They over index to viewership for marquee matchups like Golden State vs. OKC.

▼ On average, fans in this audience watch for longer periods of time and are more likely to watch an entire game. The average viewing time for these fans is about 112 minutes longer than it is for March Madness viewers.

3 ALL BASKETBALL

These fans follow basketball content across the board, whether it's college or professional level, and they also watch the tournament. Fans in this group make up about 67% of the fans who watched both March Madness and NBA last year. They're also the most likely to be exposed to ads that target basketball viewers.

▼ Fans in this group tend to be fans of more than just basketball, and should be considered sports fanatics in general, with almost half (43%) engaging with more than one sport on TV. The most common other sports they'll engage with are football and baseball.

▼ Fans in this group tend to be voracious consumers of the sport. The most avid fans in this group (the top 10 percent) watch almost twice as much basketball as the average NBA fan or March Madness viewer.
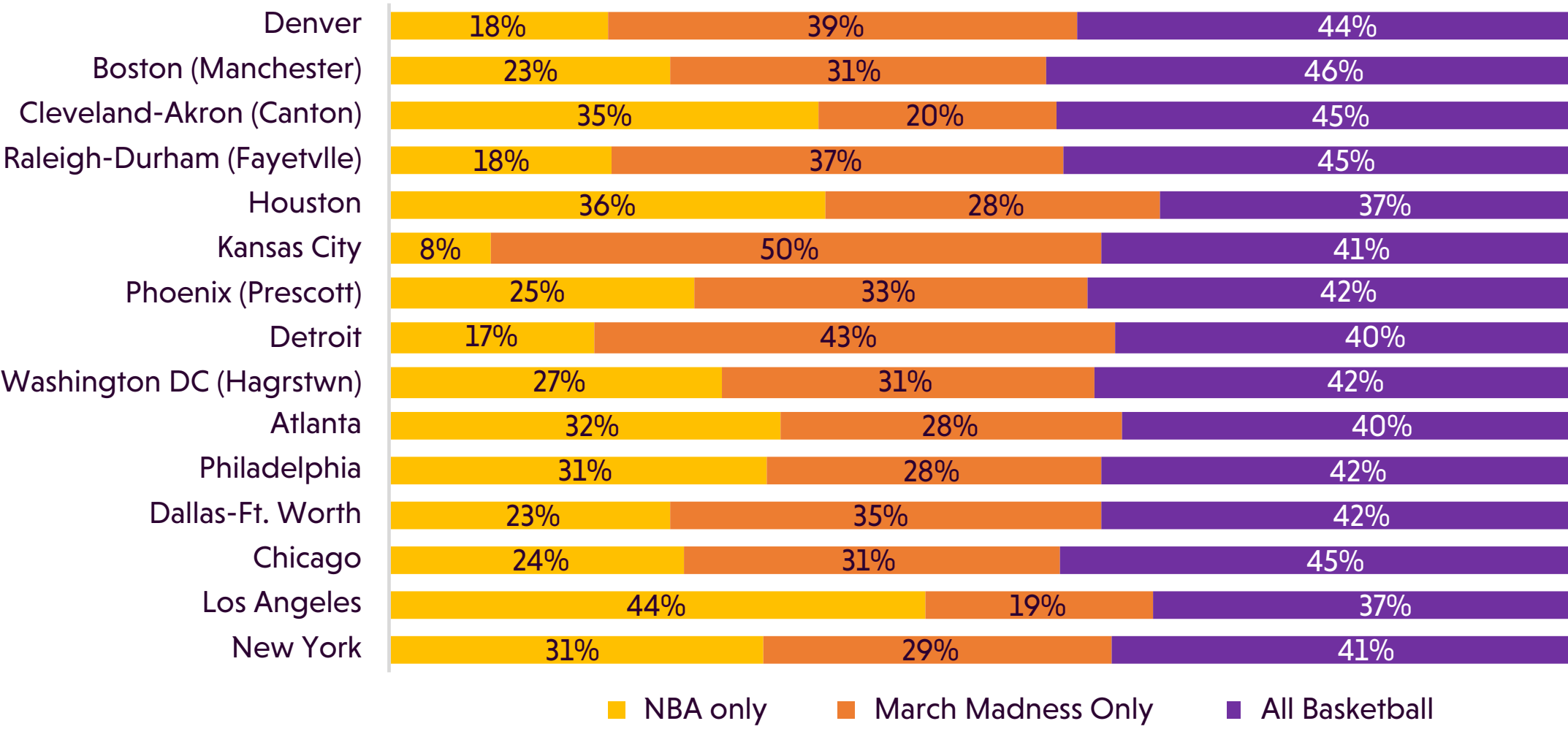
THE MARCH MADNESS ONLINE AUDIENCE

We tracked 4.31 million March Madness fans online over a one-week period in March 2018. During that time, they created a total of 1.18 billion impressions. These fans tend to skew younger (nearly half are between the ages of 25 and 44) and male (men are 1.5x more likely to follow March Madness online than women). They are also slightly more likely than the average online consumer to have a college degree or have completed some college, and as a result, are more likely to have an annual household income of $75000+ per year. Online March Madness fans online are slightly more likely to own a desktop PC, laptop, or tablet than the average consumer, and slightly less likely to own a TV.

Behaviorally, March Madness fans have a large affinity for local and regional sports news, and over-index to sports blogs and school-specific sports sites that provide more detailed coverage of college teams than ESPN will typically deliver. (Though note that March Madness fans also eagerly visit major sports news sites as well.) When it comes to online shopping, March Madness fans over-index to and are more likely to visit target.com and kohls.com, but under-index to visitation for walmart.com, bestbuy.com, and ebay.com.
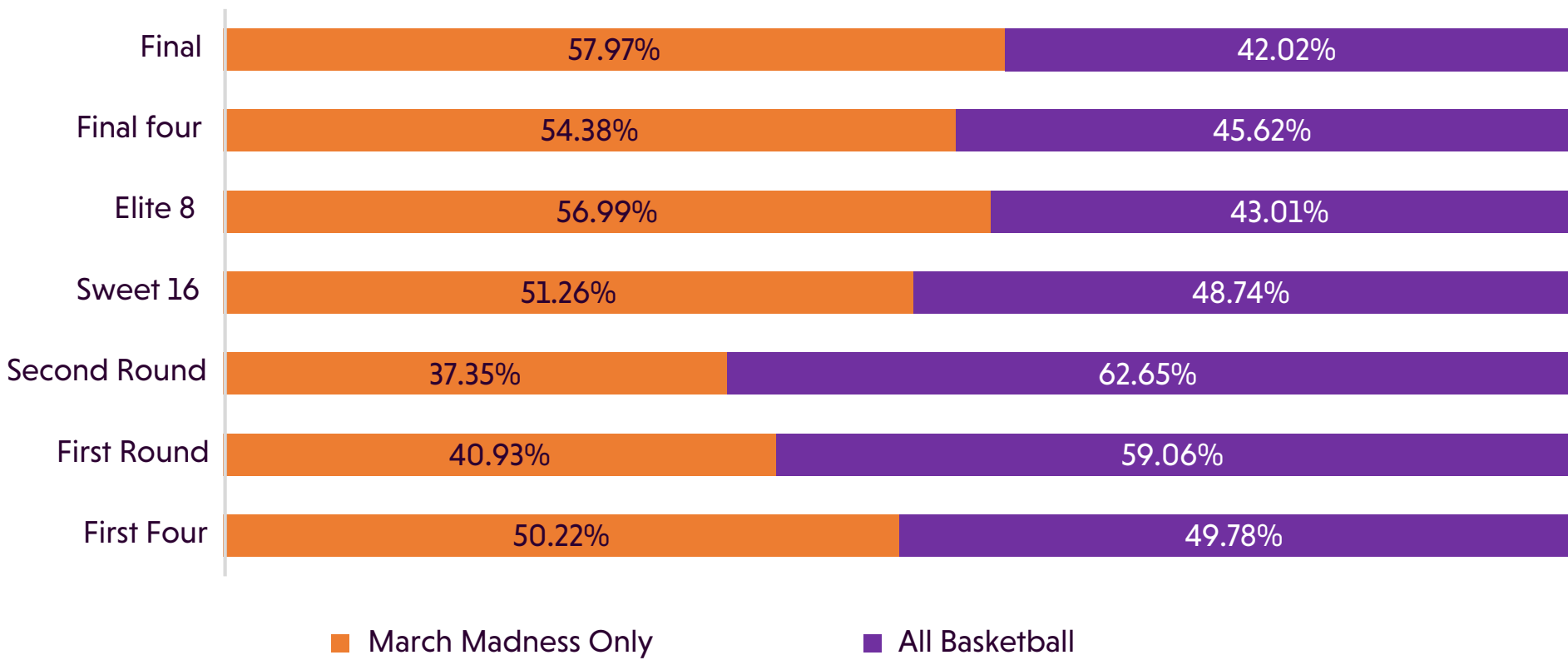
Regional Audience Split in the Top 15 DMA

DMA	NBA only	March Madness Only	All Basketball
Denver	18%	39%	44%
Boston (Manchester)	23%	31%	46%
Cleveland-Akron (Canton)	35%	20%	45%
Raleigh-Durham (Fayetvlle)	18%	37%	45%
Houston	36%	28%	37%
Kansas City	8%	50%	41%
Phoenix (Prescott)	25%	33%	42%
Detroit	17%	43%	40%
Washington DC (Hagrstwn)	27%	31%	42%
Atlanta	32%	28%	40%
Philadelphia	31%	28%	42%
Dallas-Ft. Worth	23%	35%	42%
Chicago	24%	31%	45%
Los Angeles	44%	19%	37%
New York	31%	29%	41%

■ NBA only ■ March Madness Only ■ All Basketball

Tournament Stage Viewing Time by Segment

STAGE OF THE TOURNAMENT	MARCH MADNESS ONLY	ALL BASKETBALL
First Four	37 min	43 min
First Round	39 min	41 min
Second Round	2 hr 36 min	1 hr 37 min
Sweet 16	2 hr 42 min	2 hr 07 min
Elite 8	2 hr 36 min	2 hr 28 min
Final Four	2 hr 14 min	1 hr 42 min
Finals	2 hr 07 min	1 hr 32 min

Viewer Segment Proportion by Tournament Stage

Stage	March Madness Only	All Basketball
Final	57.97%	42.02%
Final four	54.38%	45.62%
Elite 8	56.99%	43.01%
Sweet 16	51.26%	48.74%
Second Round	37.35%	62.65%
First Round	40.93%	59.06%
First Four	50.22%	49.78%

■ March Madness Only ■ All Basketball

TUNING IN ACROSS MULTIPLE DEVICES

The majority of hoops fans prefer to watch March Madness games at home (76%) or at the home of a friend or family member (25%) , though note that these options are not mutually exclusive given the length of the tournament.

Although fans prefer to watch the games on a TV via traditional cable, more than one-fifth (22%) prefer to stream games. Twenty six percent of viewers will watch one or more games on a PC or laptop and 17% will watch games on a smartphone. Streaming viewership continues to increase, with streams of the tournament increasing by 28% in 2018 and streams of the first round averaging 8.2 million viewers. Overall, streaming hours through the NCAA March Madness Live app increased by 14% over 2017.

'NCAA March Madness Live' app usage

There were 1.4 million downloads for the NCAA March Madness Live app in March 2018, an increase of 9.9x over 2017, with an average of 163,000 distinct people viewing March Madness events at any one time. On average, viewers spent 31 minutes consuming content through the app, and app users were likely to visit three different pages when using the app on game days. Other popular apps among NCAA March Madness Live users were the ESPN, NSL, and Twitter apps.

**Preferred Location for March Madness Viewing, 2018**
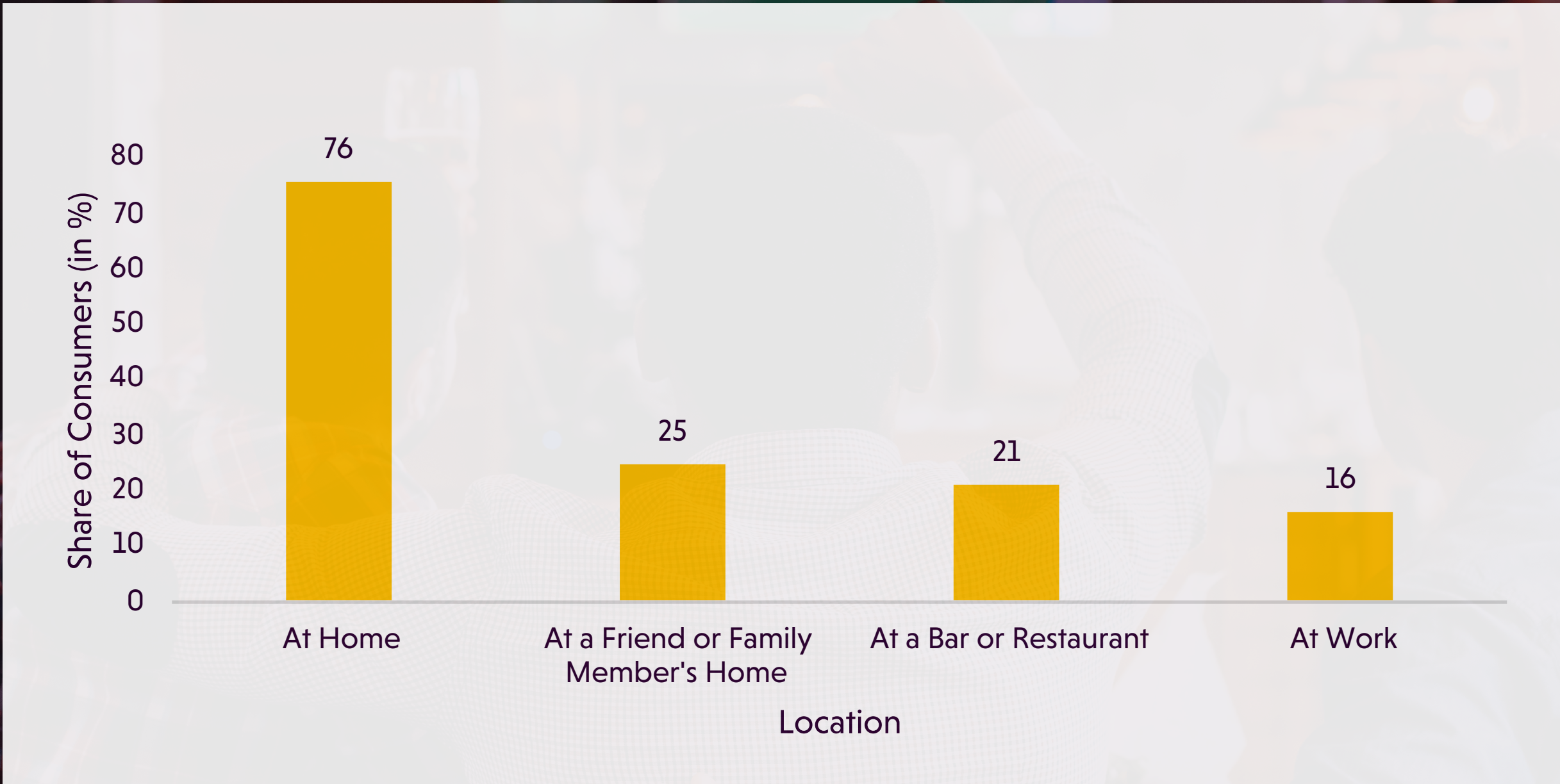
SEARCH INTEREST

Search interest for college basketball in March 2018 was highest in Kentucky and Kansas (both of which hosted high-seeded teams), while the lowest search indices were observed in New Hampshire and North Dakota. When it comes to March Madness and team-related merchandise, interest skyrockets in March, second only to the holiday shopping season.

College Basketball - Search Index Popularity


Normalized Index
0.21   1
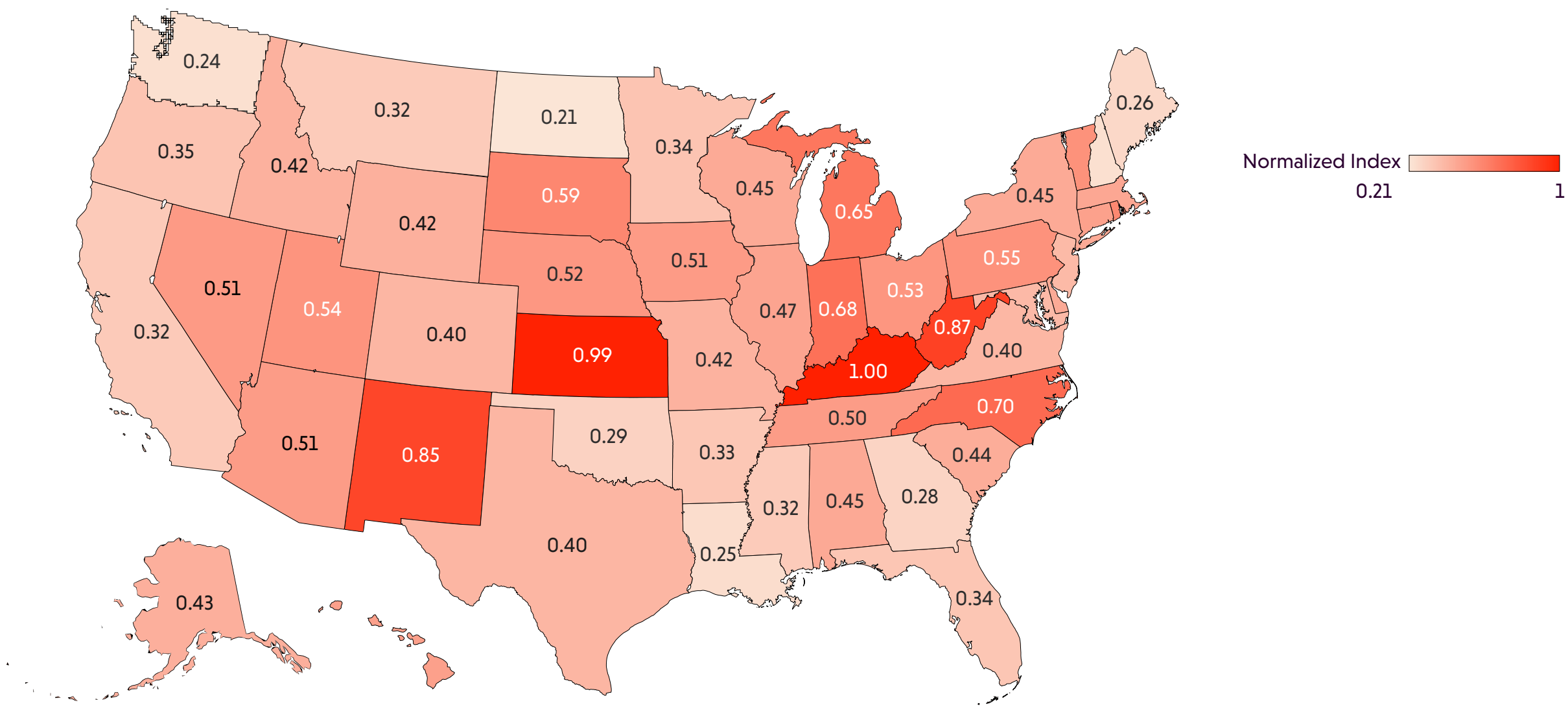
Overall interest waxes as the event enters the Sweet 16 and Elite 8 tournament stages, where search interest and content consumption nearly triples compared to prior rounds, but decreases heading into the Final Four and Finals as the field is whittled down and popular teams are removed from contention.

## Tournament Popularity Index, by Day
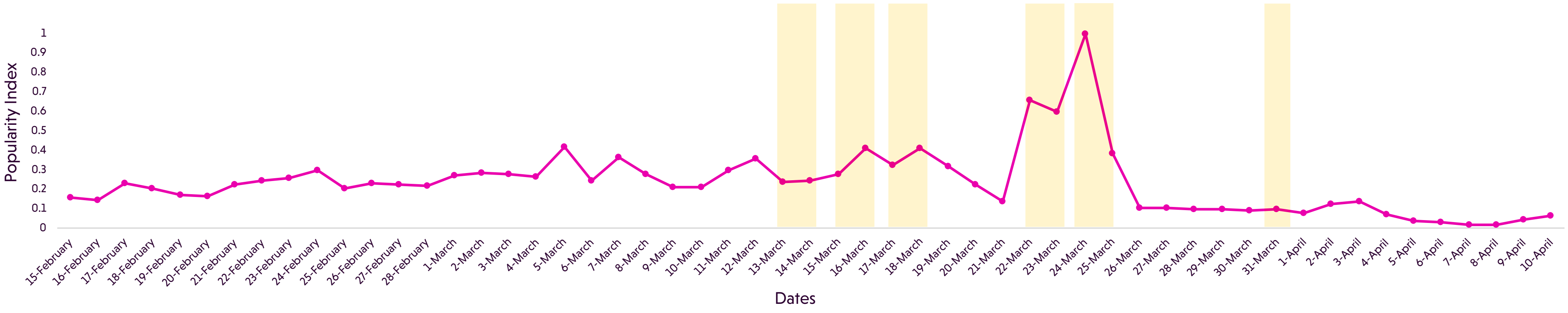
Search interest will also increase immediately before each game, with search activity increasing by an average of 23% during game time. Social interaction likewise increases, typically peaking at halftime and the end of the game. Unsurprisingly, betting sites also benefit from this increased interest, experiencing on average a 72% increase in traffic on game days during the tournament.


Search Volume by Game Timer, Tournament Stage
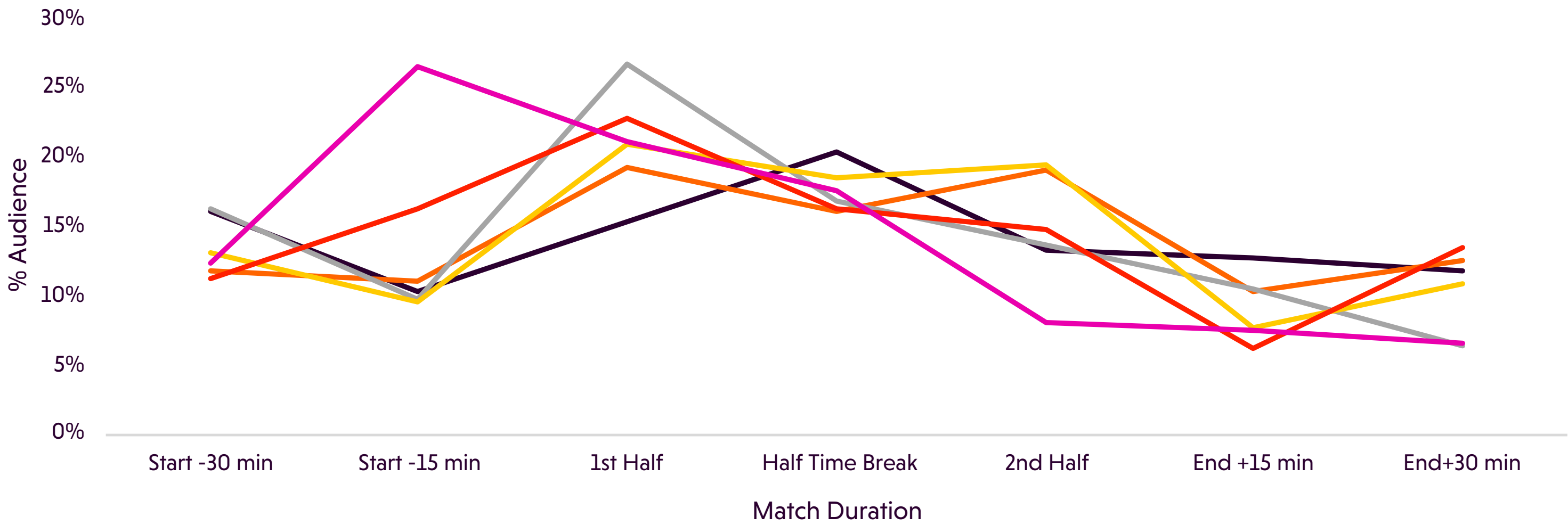
Social Activity by Game Timer, Tournament Stage

First round
Second round
Sweet 16
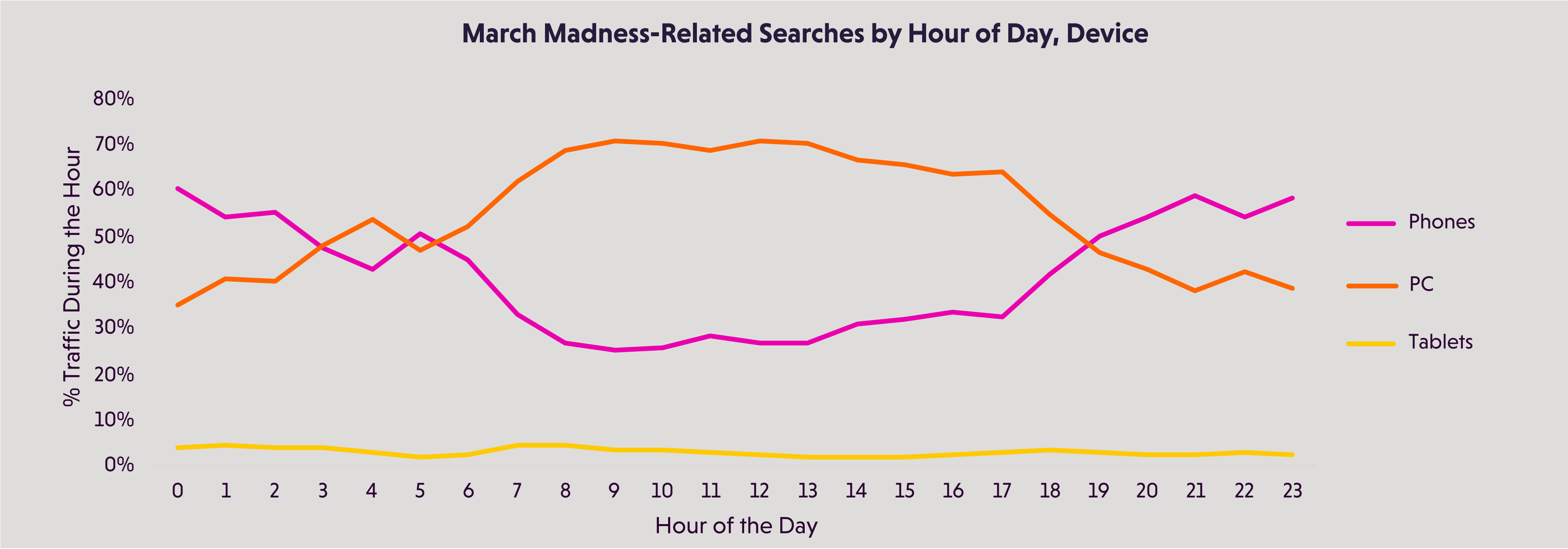Elite 8
Final Four
Championship Game
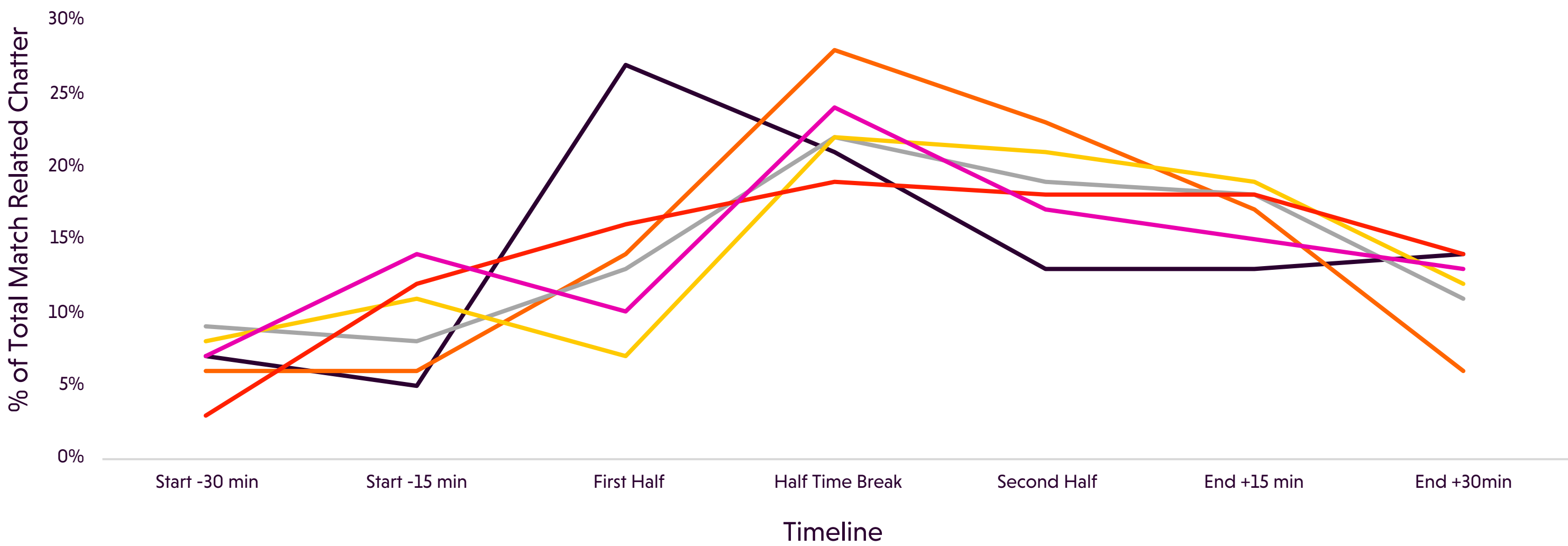
As the tournament progresses, there's a steady rise in the amount of related content consumers read and search for online, leading to an increase in available impressions for the audience and increased opportunities to reach a given March Madness fan on game day. In the first round of the tournament only around a quarter of the March Madness viewers can be reached with more than a single ad on a relevant subdomain during a game. But that increases to more than a third (36%) during the finals.

Available Ad Opportunities per Viewer for March Madness Viewers by Tournament Stage

Legend:
- First Four
- First Round
- Second Round
- Sweet 16
- Elite 8
- Final four
- Championship Game

Y-axis: % March Madness Audience

X-axis: Number of Trackable Impression Opportunities on Game Day
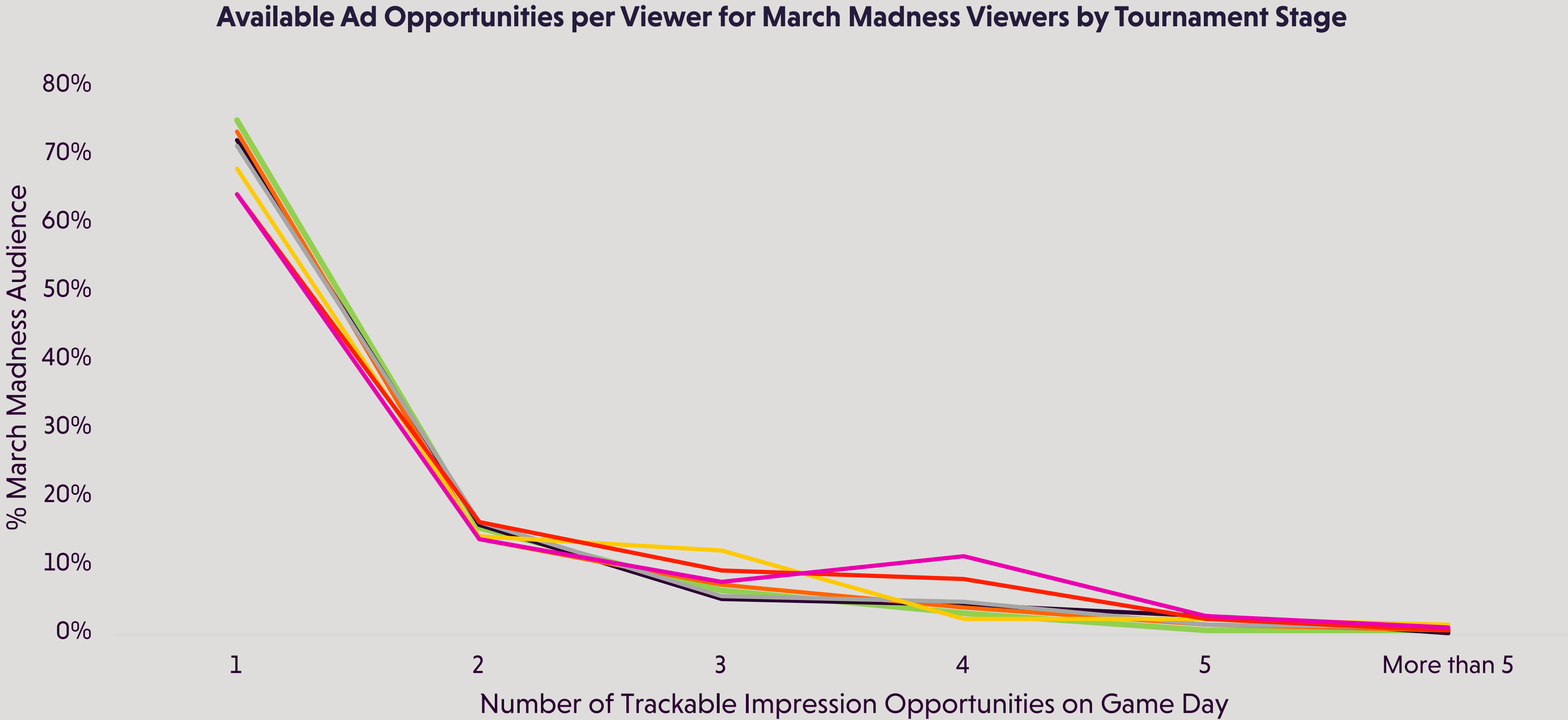
Searches related to March Madness happen primarily on PC in the early rounds of the tournament, but mobile searches dominate during the Sweet 16 and Elite 8. This is partly because mobile devices are used more often for searching and viewing outside of work hours and later-round games are more likely to be shown in prime time.

Search Preference by Device Type, Tournament Stage

Legend: Mobile, PC, Tablets

% Audience (y-axis), Stage of the Tournament (x-axis)

Stage	Mobile	PC	Tablets
First Four	21.54%	76.54%	1.91%
First Round	34.39%	63.31%	2.30%
Second Round	48.54%	48.26%	3.20%
Sweet 16	81.63%	17.52%	0.85%
Elite 8	84.85%	13.93%	1.22%
Final Four	16.41%	80.51%	3.08%

March Madness-Related Searches by Hour of Day, Device

Legend: Phones, PC, Tablets

% Traffic During the Hour (y-axis), Hour of the Day (x-axis)

CAST (CONNECTED TV INSIGHTS)

Using data collected from our Vizio integration, we identified around six million consumers who followed March Madness during any part of the tournament in 2018. In total, that's 1.8 million households generating a total of 27 million TV viewers during the tournament. Roughly 420,000 of these consumers tuned into the teamcast and press conference events.

Overall, 73% of US households have a non-TV device which can be reached

via programmatic advertising during a March Madness game, a total of 36 million connected devices in our sample, of which 63% are mobile.

On an average, a viewer following March Madness on TV was likely to watch at least three different matches, though 29% of viewers only watched a single game. Among these viewers, 23% were in the local market (and likely to be fans of) a team eliminated from the tournament in that game.

Although viewership, like search interest, dipped for the Final Four games, it peaked for the championship, where measured viewership was 1.4 times higher than the average audience size for any other stage of the tournament.

Measurable Viewing Audience by Tournament Stage
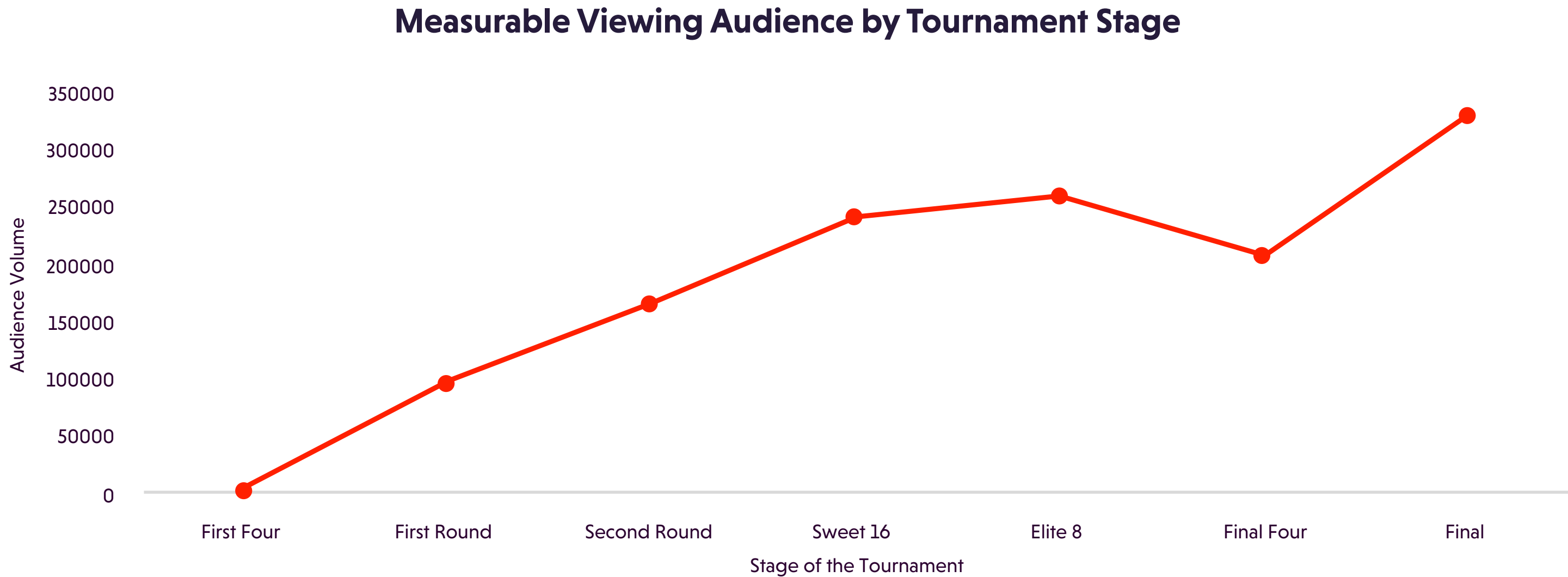
TARGETING MARCH MADNESS AUDIENCES WITH CAST

There's little to differentiate the March Madness viewing audience segments from each other demographically, as most skew male and between the ages of 25 and 44. They tend to share many interests as well, and a propensity to respond favorably to digital campaigns for financial products such as credit cards and home loans. They tend to prefer playing basketball when they aren't watching it. Yet we know their viewership and device habits are different, and we know that, strategically, we can't count on reaching every March Madness viewer in the same way with the same message and retaining effectiveness across all of them. So how can we differentiate and target these audiences?

One answer is through MiQ's connected TV offering, Cast, which lets brands to unlock the full potential of their digital and TV ad campaigns by giving them the ability to combine digital profiles of consumers with the content those consumers watch on TV. By doing this, brands can identify different sports fan segments within the March Madness audience (or any sports audience), and how they vary in interest and viewing habits. By combining these data sets and tracking digital activity after exposure, marketers can build the Marketing Intelligence necessary to build effective campaigns that deliver real ROI at scale.

TEAM POPULARITY

Using the average TV audience size for NCAA teams, we established a popularity index for teams that participated in the 2017 tournament, giving us an idea of how audience sizes might scale for advertisers who want to target only specific teams' fans. Perennial contenders Kentucky and Ohio had the largest TV audiences, particularly compared to the eventual winner — UNC ranked 21st in terms of TV viewership index. In terms of team loyalty, Michigan had the best game-to-game retention, with 74% of the fans who watched Michigan in the first round going on to watch every one of their tournament games. (Michigan made the Sweet 16.)

Teamwise Viewership by Match
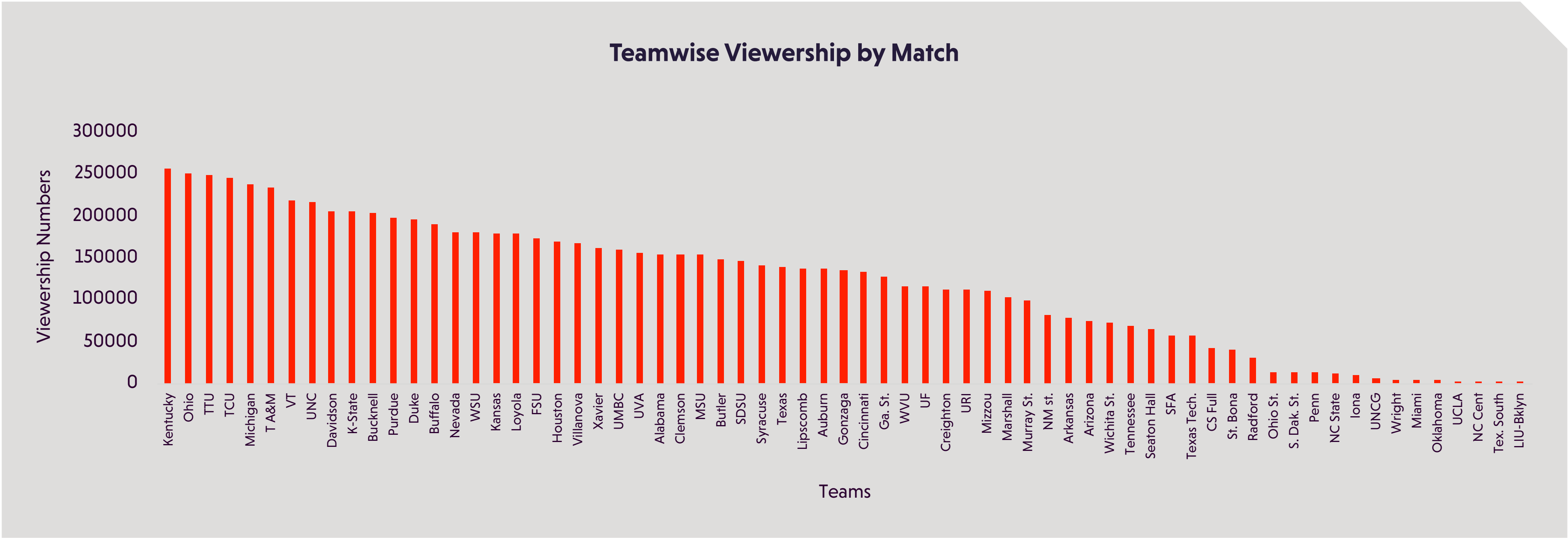
TV ENGAGEMENT

Looking at the TV audience for the championship game, we can get an idea for how audiences moved in an out of viewership over the course of the game. Most of the game's viewers came in during the pregame show and 1st quarter, though fans would trickle in and out throughout the game. A sizeable 39% of the audience watched the entire game, but only 7% of the pregame audience watched the postgame show, indicating that advertisers looking to reach consumers around the finals would be smart to consider both shows for incremental reach purposes.

On average, viewers watching the championship game on TV for more than one hour changed the channel an average of three times during the broadcast.

Number of Channel Switches Made

Championship Game Audience Flow
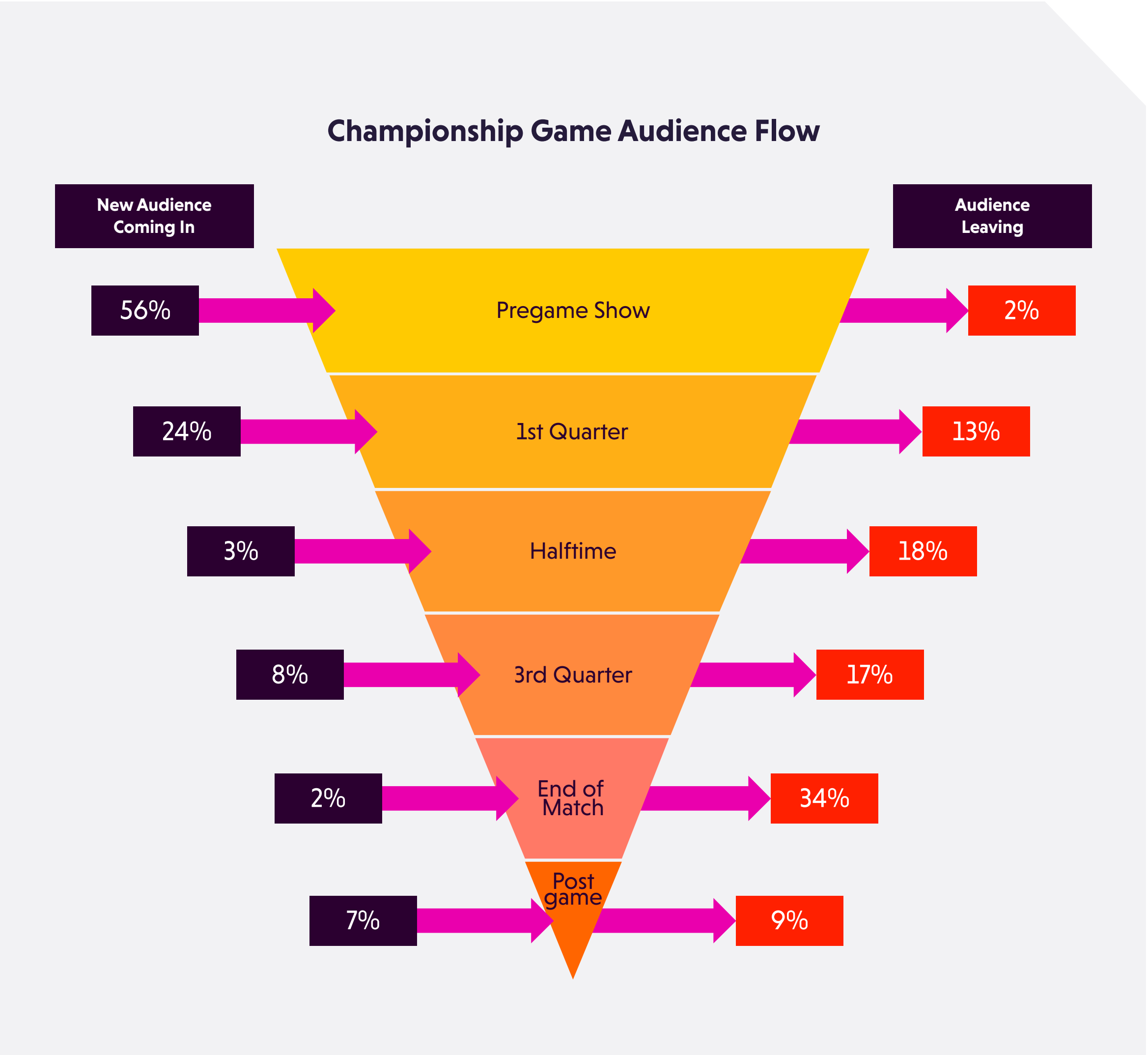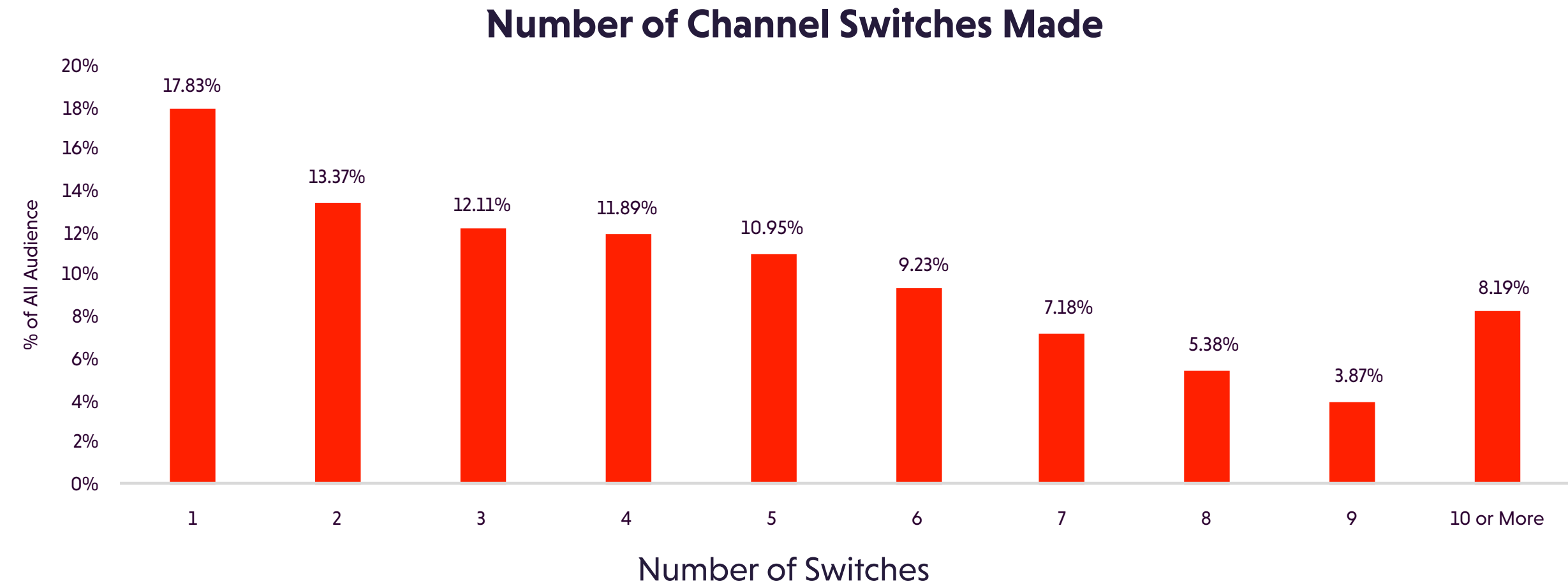
VIEWERSHIP BY ROUND

Viewership increased throughout the tournament, where more than half of the audience (53%) spent more than an hour viewing the game. During this time, the average viewer was exposed to at least 12 different TV commercials. Comparatively, the second round was the best time for advertisers to increase delivery, as this was when time spent viewing per viewer peaked, with more than one third of the audience (35%) watching three to four hours of March Madness-related TV content.

March Madness Viewing Time by Round

| TIME SPENT (IN HOURS)	FIRST FOUR	FIRST ROUND	SECOND ROUND	SWEET 16	ELITE 8	FINAL FOUR	CHAMPIONSHIP GAME
0 - 1 hour	59%	59%	48%	60%	53%	58%	47%
More than 1 hour	41%	41%	52%	40%	47%	42%	53%
More than 2 hours	29%	29%	43%	25%	33%	16%	23%
More than 3 hours	19%	17%	35%	13%	21%	1%	12%
More than 4 hours	12%	8%	29%	3%	2%	1%	2%
More than 5 hours	9%	3%	23%	0%	1%	0%	0%
More than 6 hours	7%	2%	18%	0%	0%	0%	0%
More than 7 hours	4%	1%	12%	0%	0%	0%	0%
More than 8 hours	2%	1%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%

MiQ SPORTS SYNC

Using real-time sports data from Stats.com, MiQ can connect major sports events to marketing messaging and media delivery almost instantly. That means advertisers can push key promotions and sponsorships to digital fans during the game's most memorable moments. Whether it's three-point buzzer beaters, local team wins, or major upsets, MiQ Sports Sync means advertisers can connect their brands to consumers' emotional states during the moments that matter most.

THE LIVE STREAMING AUDIENCE

Looking at data for live streaming audiences on ESPN, we can see some interesting viewership patterns that affect how March Madness viewers approach viewing games online. Around 40% of fans will spend an hour or more watching live streams of a sports event before leaving the site or viewing a different tab. This jumps to 56% on weekends, when viewers are 1.3x more likely to watch an entire game compared to weekday viewers.
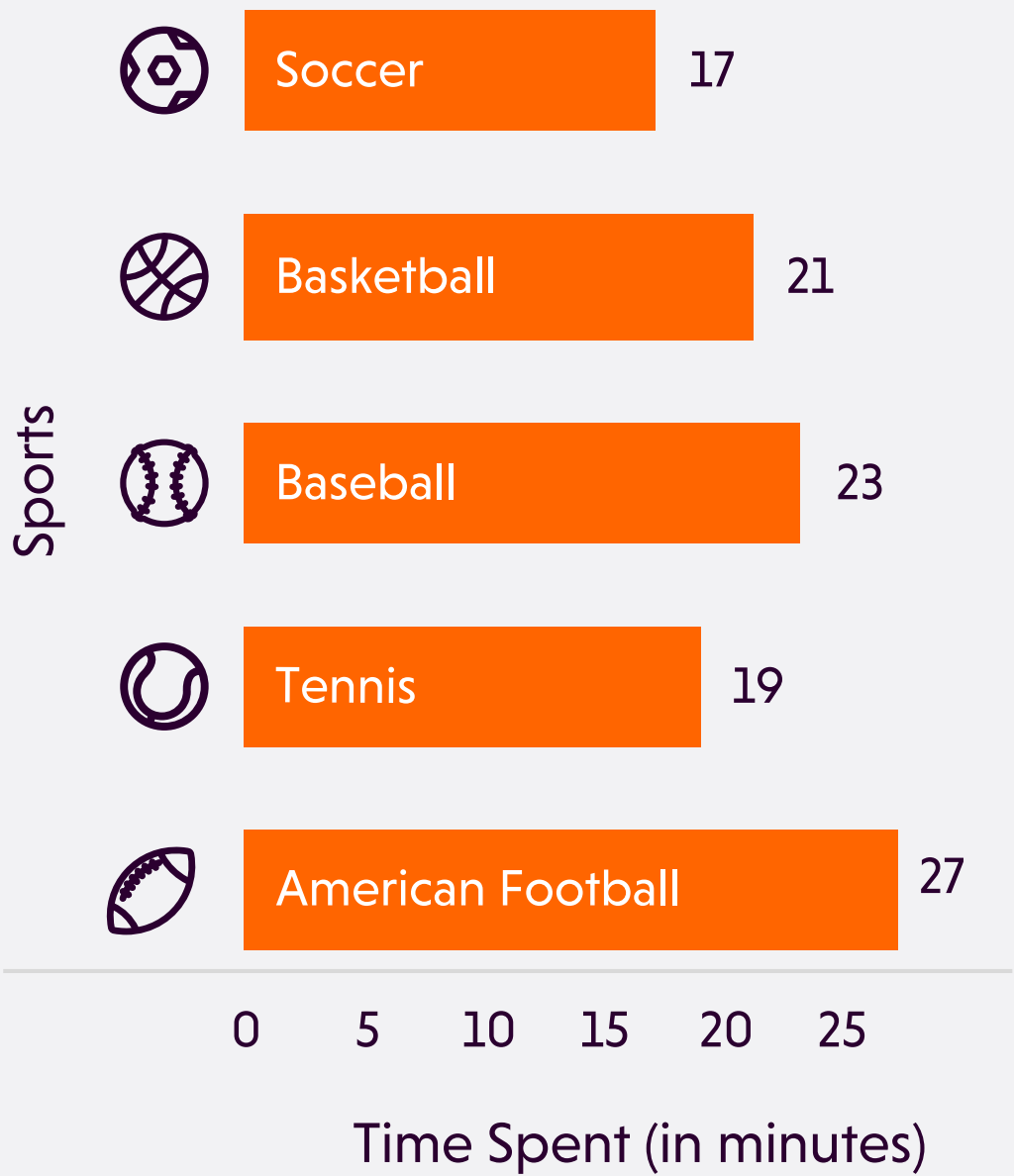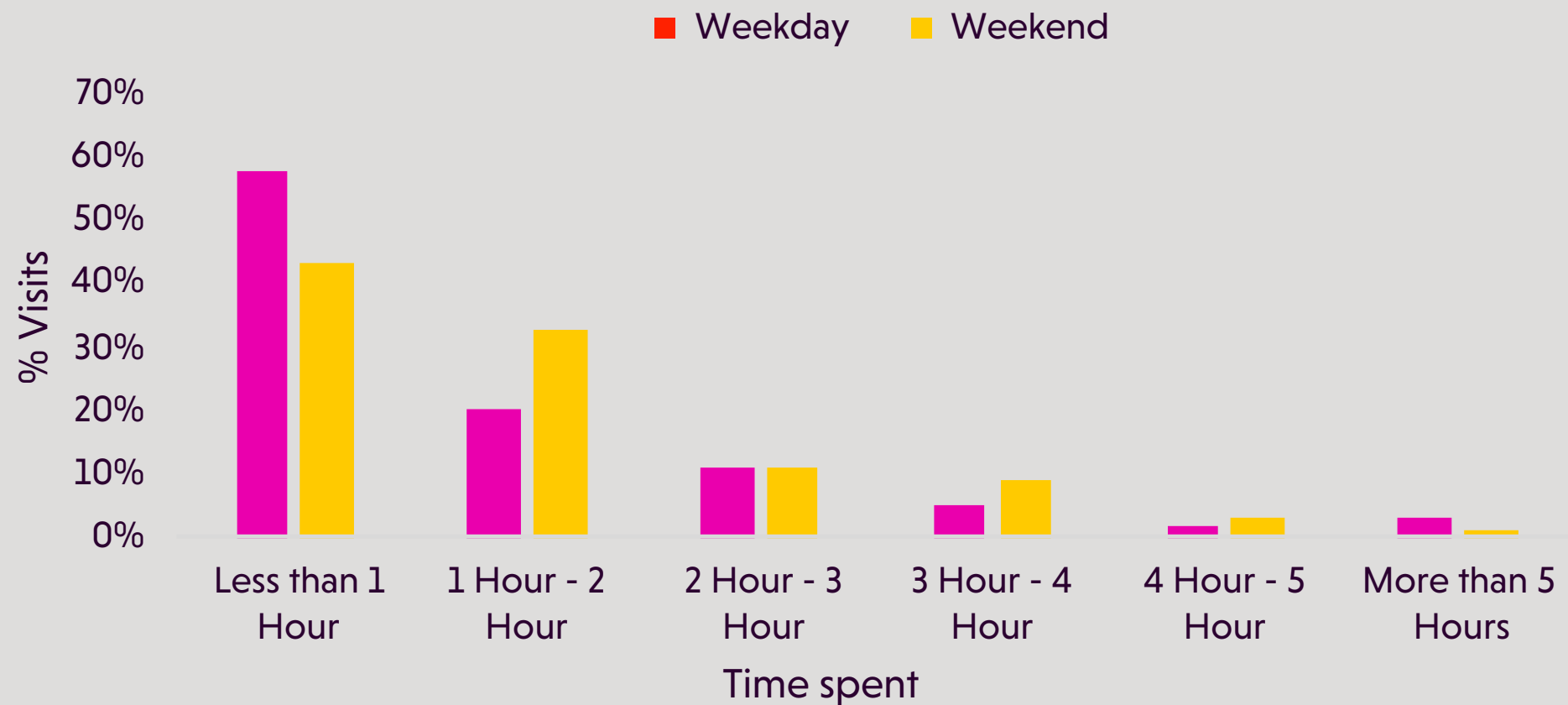
Ad seen by user on a streaming site

Average time spent watching, in minutes
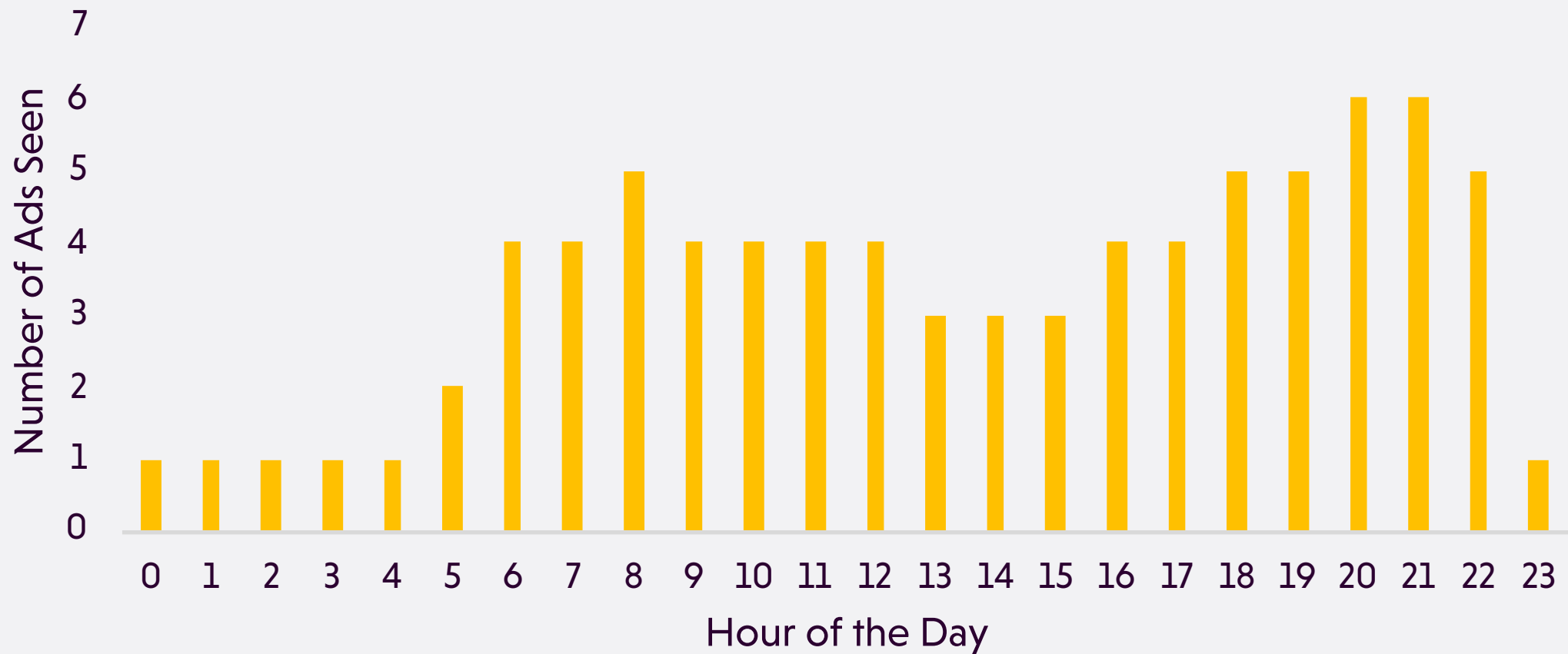
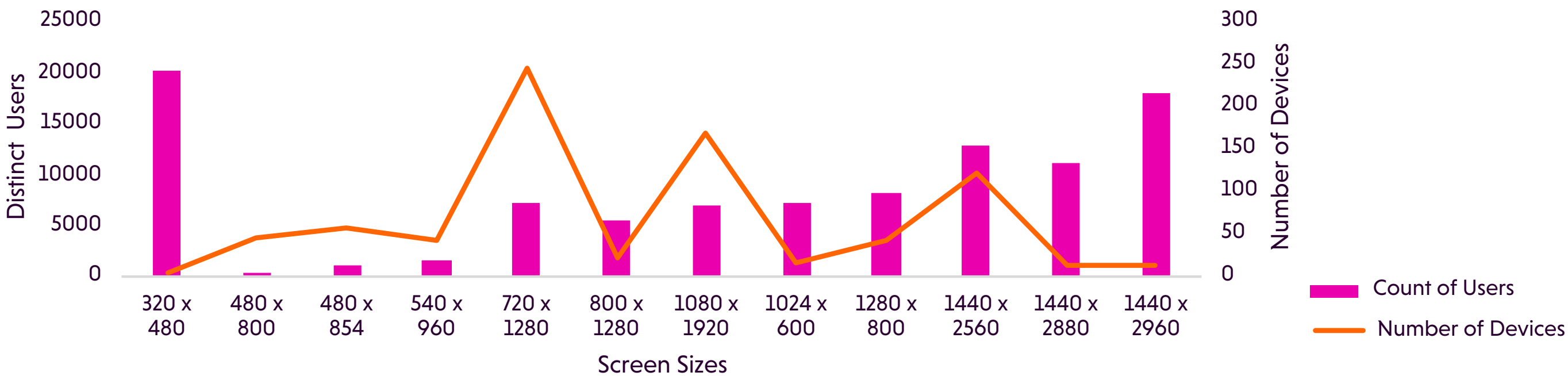**Average time spent watching March Madness**

DEVICE PREFERENCE VARIES BY CONTENT

Sports fans prefer to stream live games on larger screens, with roughly a 12% increase in viewership for every increasing inch of screen size. As a result, 58% of streaming viewers watch events on a PC or laptop, compared to a more even split when it comes to reading articles or written content about the event. Game and event highlights, on the other hand, are primarily consumed on mobile devices—82% of sports fans watched highlights on a mobile device.
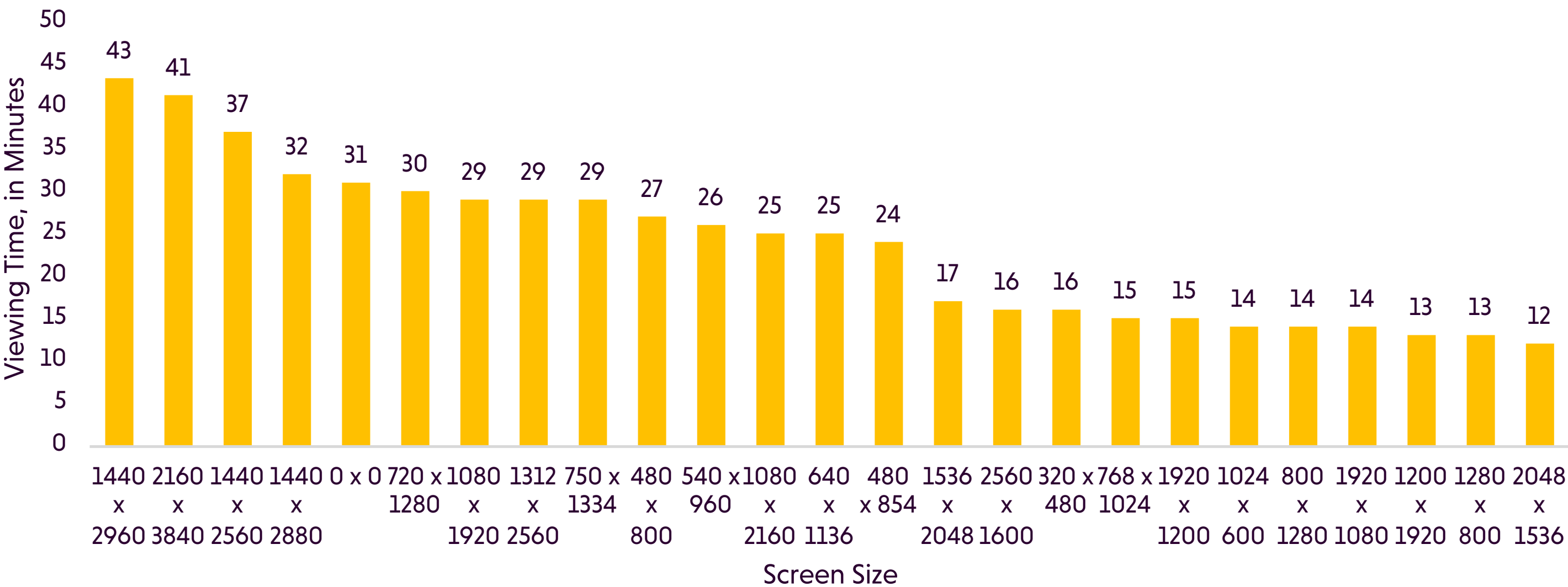
Screen Size Vs Distinct Users

Distinct Users / Number of Devices

Screen Sizes: 320 x 480, 480 x 800, 480 x 854, 540 x 960, 720 x 1280, 800 x 1280, 1080 x 1920, 1024 x 600, 1280 x 800, 1440 x 2560, 1440 x 2880, 1440 x 2960

Count of Users
Number of Devices

Average Time Spent Watching in Minutes, by Device

Device	Time Spent, in Minutes
PC	31
TV	30
Mobile	29
Gaming Console	26
Tablet	15
Media Player	12

Time Spent, in Minutes

Normalized Viewing Time by Screen Resolution, in Minutes

Screen Size	Viewing Time, in Minutes
1440 x 2960	43
2160 x 3840	41
1440 x 2560	37
1440 x 2880	32
0 x 0	31
720 x 1280	30
1080 x 1920	29
1312 x 2560	29
750 x 1334	29
480 x 800	27
540 x 960	26
1080 x 2160	25
640 x 1136	25
480 x 854	24
1536 x 2048	17
2560 x 1600	16
320 x 480	16
768 x 1024	15
1920 x 1200	15
1024 x 600	14
800 x 1280	14
1920 x 1080	14
1200 x 1920	13
1280 x 800	13
2048 x 1536	12

Screen Size

SOCIAL ACTIVITY

March Madness activity on Twitter from 2018 suggests that chatter among fans is actually higher before and after the tournament than during. Game days see social activity increase by 12% in regions whose teams are playing.

Kentucky and West Virginia had the highest concentration of March Madness tweets, and accounted for 14% of all March Madness-related Twitter interactions.

March Madness Tweets by Day, 2018

Tweets and Interactions by NCAA Team, 2018

Tweets Volume Index, by State
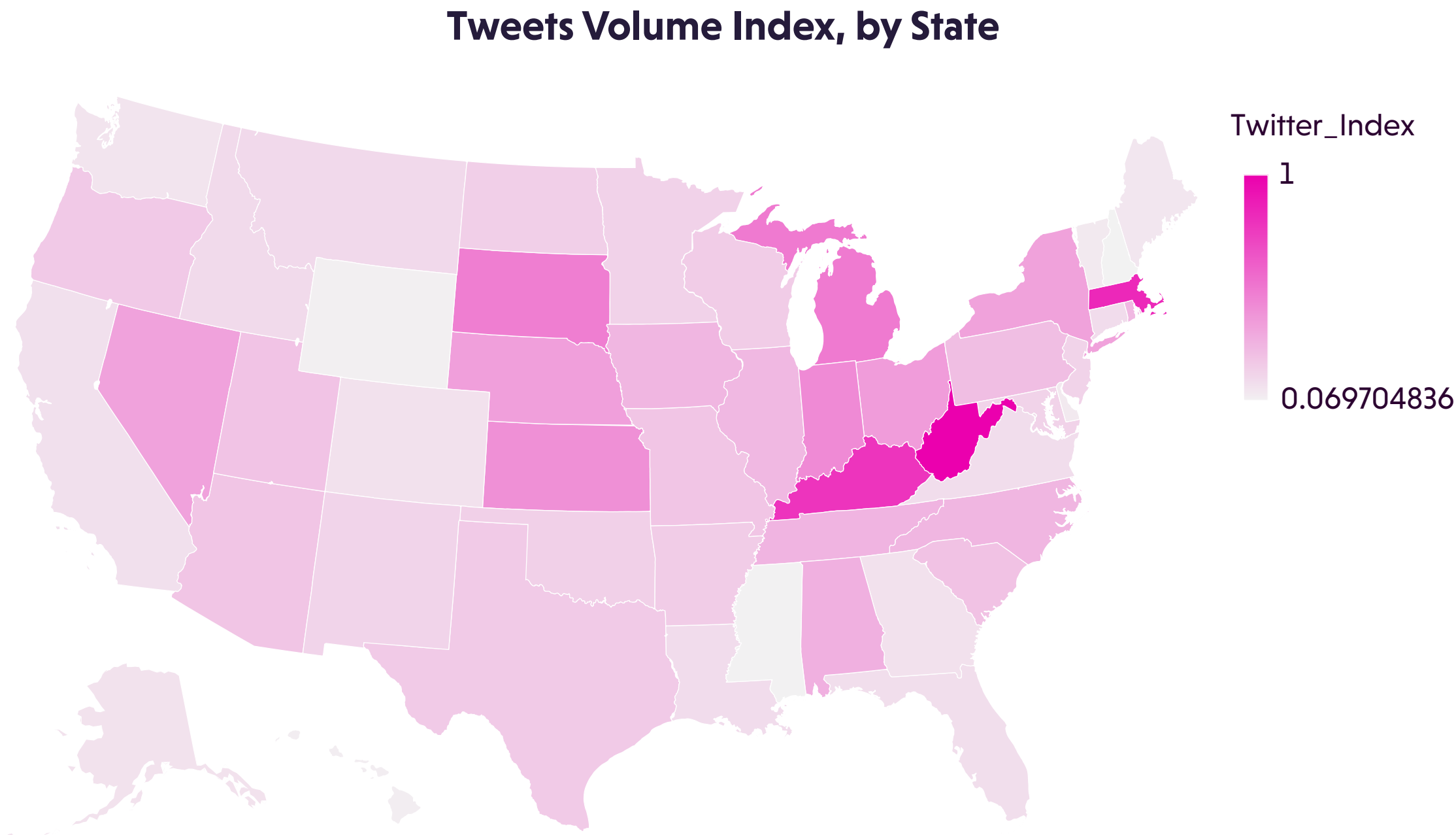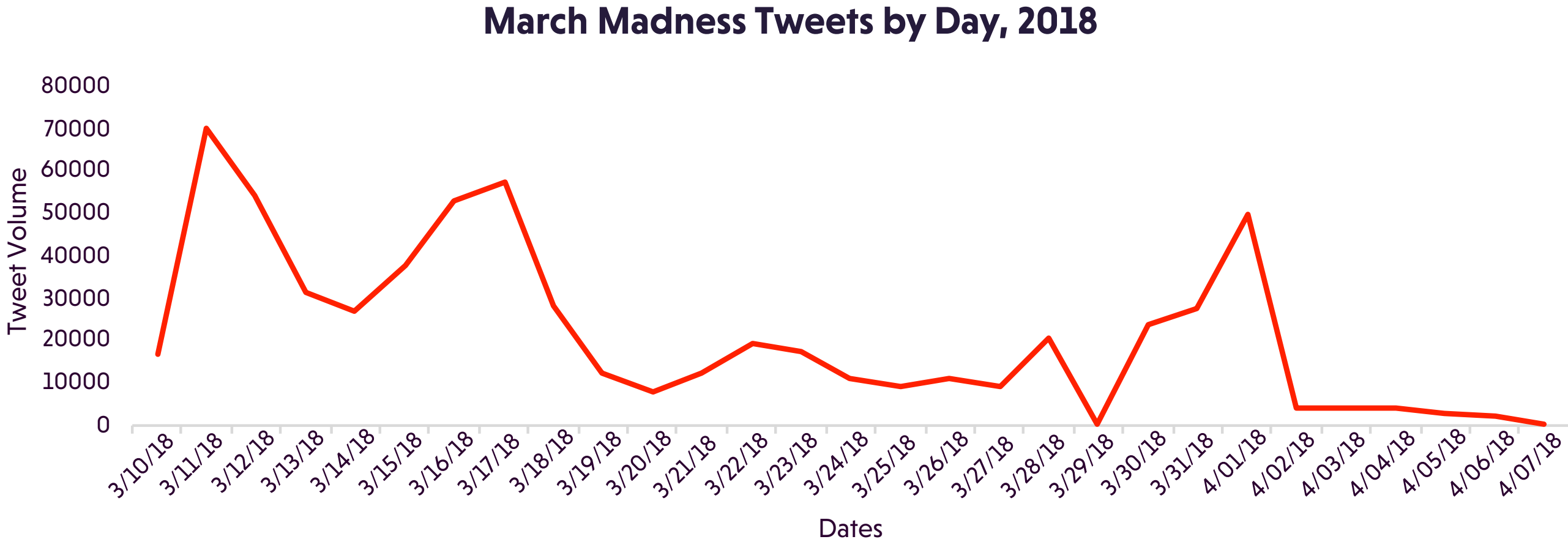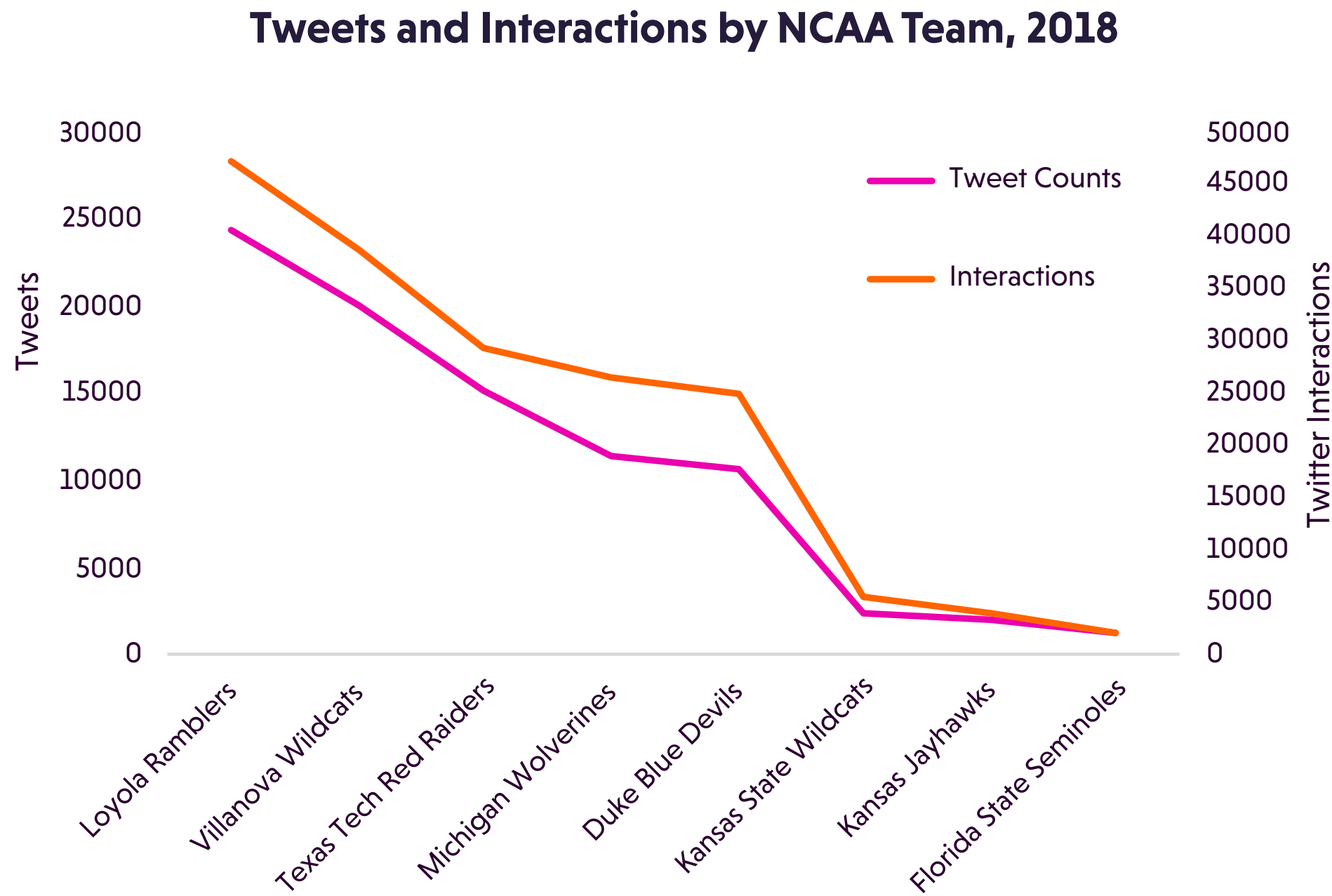
BUILDING BETTER MARCH MADNESS CAMPAIGNS

As advertisers go into March ready to reach sports fans, here are a few ways they can improve the effectiveness of their campaigns:

UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF MARCH MADNESS FAN - THEN MESSAGE ACCORDINGLY.

Not all March Madness fans are the same. As our clustering analysis showed, March Madness fans can vary in terms of their level of interest, and this impacts how they engage with the event. As such, a "one size fits all" strategy may not be be the right strategy for marketers. Instead, advertisers should look to build messaging that speaks to each of the March Madness audiences, incorporating other points of interest, particularly for those March Madness viewers who are there more for the spectacle than as general sports fans.

HAVE A PLAN TO ENGAGE DIGITALLY WITH FANS EXPOSED TO YOUR TV ADS.

Advertisers running TV ads during the event should have a plan to re-engage with exposed consumers online. One way to do this is work with a partner who can connect TV viewing data from opted-in smart TVs to digital data to retarget consumers exposed to TV ads with digital assets. When planning these initiatives, think about ways you can build on your TV messaging, either with additional CTAs for retargeted consumers or sequential messaging.

PLAN FOR TV FREQUENCY

In a similar fashion, just retargeting consumers who see your TV ad isn't enough. The different levels of engagement among fan clusters will mean some fans will see your ads dozens of times while others see those ads only a few times, if at all. Consider how this will affect your target audience's awareness and intent, and have a plan for following up with that segment of your audience.

For example, consumers who have seen dozens of ads are prime candidates for direct response-focused messaging, while those who have only seen a few ads are better-served seeing digital video or sequential messaging designed to drive them further down the funnel.

HAVE A WAY TO CONNECT YOUR EVENT-RELATED PROMOTIONS TO MEDIA DELIVERY

If you're running a promotion or campaign closely tied to the event or a specific team, consider a strategy where you are increasing delivery during and after major moments in the tournament, in order to place your brand in front of consumers when they are most amped about what they've just seen.

HAVE A MEASUREMENT PLAN IN PLACE FOR MARCH MADNESS INITIATIVES

Beyond using TV exposure as a means of closing the loop, have a plan to measure the success of your March Madness initiatives, either in terms of online purchases, site visits, brand lift measured via survey, or in-store visits measured through device location tracking. Combine these with TV exposure data to measure the full customer journey start-to-finish.

MIQ BOILERPLATE

MiQ is an independent marketing intelligence company with the people and technology that help businesses win. It is our vision to reimagine the value of marketing by connecting data and discovering insight to drive business outcomes.

Founded by Lee Puri and Gurman Hundal in 2010, MiQ currently employs over 550 people across 15 offices located in North America, Europe and APAC. The world's leading brands and media agencies such as American Express, Avis, Lenovo, Unilever, Microsoft, GroupM, Publicis and IPG work with MiQ. In the last year, MiQ has won various awards including Fastest Growing Tech Company of the Year at the Stevie Awards, Most Effective Use of Data at The Drum's Digital Trading Awards USA, and The Sunday Times International Track 200.

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