

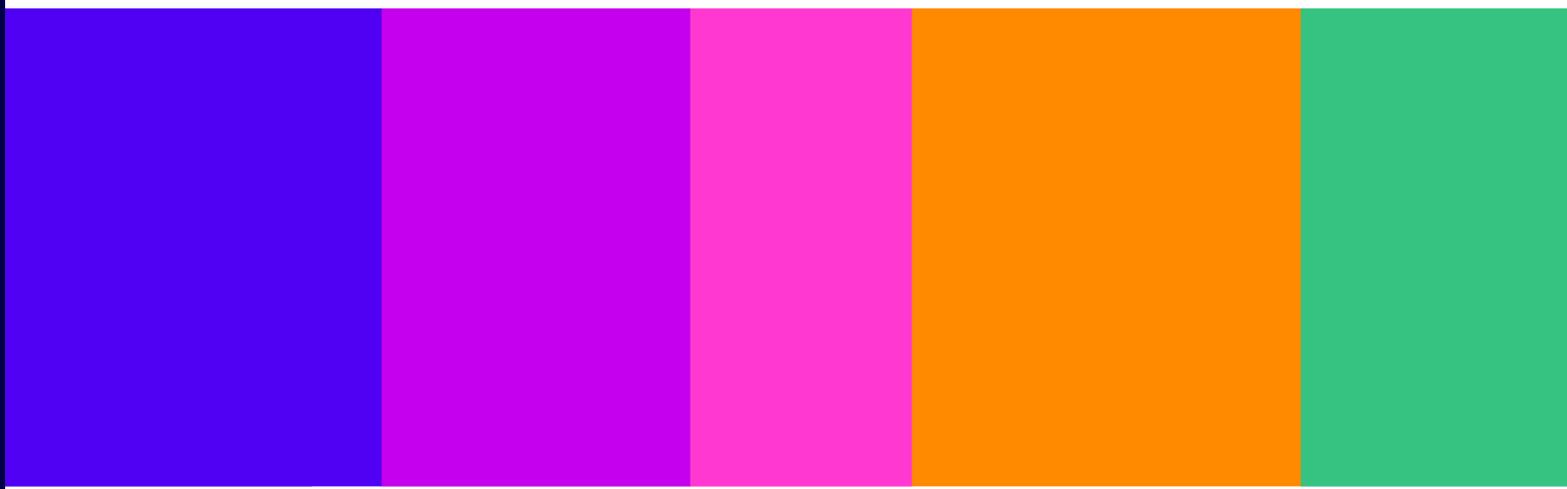


Audio listening in the UK

2024

Report

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Overview

This report outlines the findings from Ofcom research into people's audio habits: what they listen to, how they're listening and why

With more choice than ever before, listeners' needs and expectations of audio services are changing. Once limited to live radio and physical formats like vinyl, cassettes and CDs, online streaming means that people can now choose from a near-infinite range of specially curated playlists, podcasts and radio stations across a number of online services.

This summary report primarily focuses on findings from our annual Audio and Podcast Surveys, which ask people about their use of and attitudes towards different types of audio. Additional insights from RAJAR and other sources are also included for context. This is a complementary publication to our annual [Media Nations](#) report, which looks more broadly at the wider radio industry and market developments.

Technical reports, with more information on how our surveys are conducted, and full data tables are available to download from the [Ofcom statistical release calendar](#).

What we have found – in brief

- Audio plays an important role in our everyday lives, with over nine in ten of us listening to some sort of audio content each week. Music radio is the most popular in terms of weekly reach of adults, followed by online music services and online music video. Younger listeners aged 16-34 are more likely to listen to online music services and music video services, while older listeners are more likely to tune in to music radio.
- RAJAR data indicates that most radio listening is through an analogue or a DAB radio set, but when it comes to different types of online-only audio people use a range of services. Our research shows that Spotify is the most commonly used service for music and podcasts, reaching 61% and 37% of listeners who listen to each of these types of audio respectively, BBC Sounds for online radio (42%) and Audible for audiobooks (34%).
- A fifth of adults listen to podcasts each week, with reach higher among the under 35s and those in higher socioeconomic groups. Those who do listen to podcasts listen to an average of five per week. The most popular genres listened to each week are entertainment, news and current affairs, comedy and discussion shows.
- The most popular time for listening to podcasts is while doing housework. Over three in ten said they listen to them while cooking or cleaning etc. (34%), while travelling in a car (32%) or while walking (32%).

Audio listening

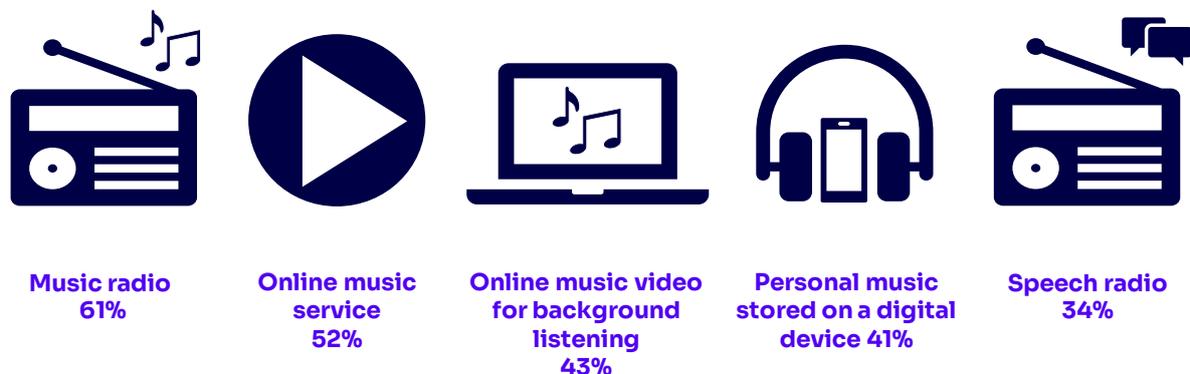
What are people listening to?

Audio plays an important role in our everyday lives, with over nine in ten of us listening to something each week

Whether it's the radio in the morning, an audiobook on a jog or a podcast while doing the dishes, listening to content is firmly embedded in the fabric of our daily lives and routines. Just over nine in ten of us (92%) listen to some sort of audio content each week on average, peaking at 97% of 35–44-year-olds.¹

Radio, the most traditional source of audio, continues to be the most popular among all adults.² The majority of radio stations play music which is the type of content listeners say they particularly value (76% of radio listeners, increasing to 84% of local radio listeners³). This is also reflected in our research, with six in ten respondents tuning in to a music station each week compared to just over three in ten (34%) listening to speech-based stations. The second most popular source of audio is online music services such as Spotify or Amazon Music (52%) followed by online music video websites or apps used for background listening (43%).

Figure 1: Top five audio types used each week



Source: Ofcom Audio Survey 2024. Base: All respondents aged 16+ (3,333)

Radio – and music radio in particular – is typically thought of as a ‘lean-back’ listening experience, which was evident in our research when we asked about why people gravitate to different types of audio. The most popular reason for listening to music radio was for background listening, with over half of listeners saying they use it in this way (54%). In contrast, music streaming was mostly used for entertainment (58%) and then relaxation (51%), which perhaps indicates a more intentional

¹ Ofcom Audio Survey 2024

² RAJAR Q4 2023. The radio industry audience measurement body, RAJAR, indicates that 88% of UK adults listen to the radio for at least 5 minutes each week.

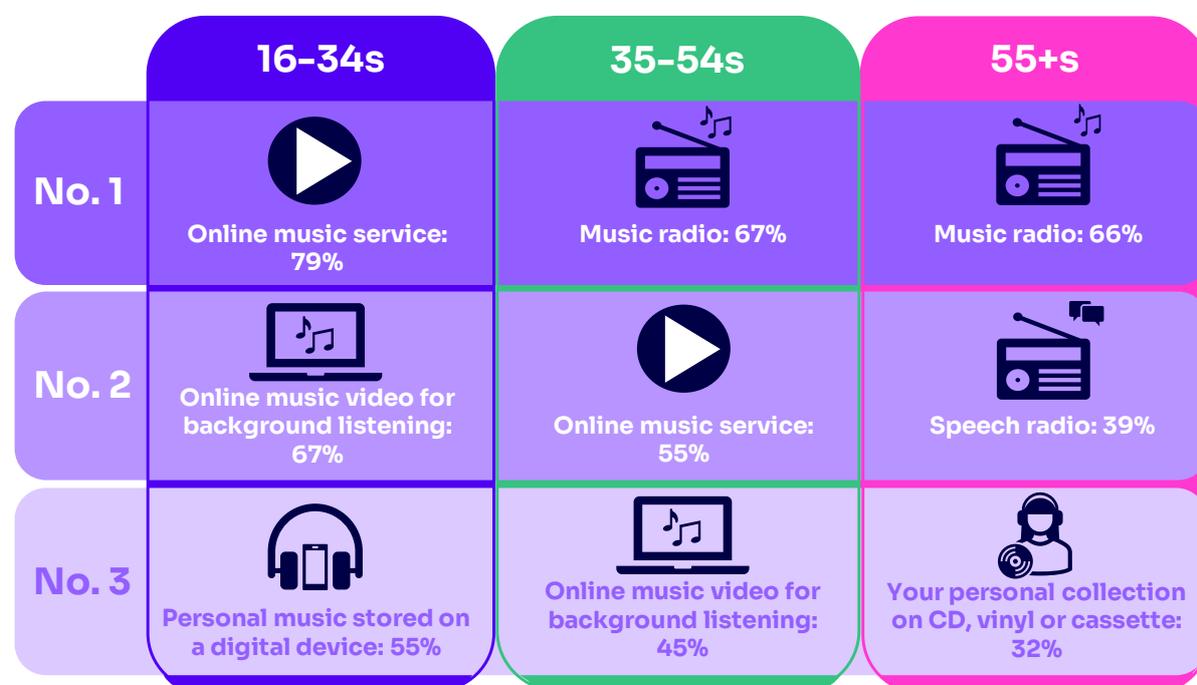
³ IPA TouchPoints 2023 Superhub. Percentages refer to proportion of weekly listeners who say they value music played on the radio.

approach. Over a third of listeners also say they use online music services to discover new music (35%) – more than double the proportion of music radio listeners who say this about radio (16%).⁴

Younger people are more likely to listen to online audio than older listeners

The type of audio people listen to varies depending on age. Those aged 16-34 are most likely to listen at least weekly to nearly all types of online audio compared to other age groups, while older listeners, especially those aged 55 and over, are more likely to choose radio. This could reflect the devices people use to listen, as well as what people want to get from their listening experience. For example, speech radio is the second most popular audio type for the over 55s, who mainly use it to catch up on news (46%) and learn something new (42%) – we know from our annual News Consumption Survey that younger adults are more likely to say they get their news from social media and other online sources.

Figure 2: Top three audio types used each week by age group



Source: Ofcom Audio Survey 2024. Base: All respondents (3,333)

How are people listening?

The radio set continues to be the most likely way to listen to the radio, though this is shifting in home

RAJAR indicates that most radio listening is through an analogue or a DAB set, accounting for 72% of all listening hours. However, there are some differences depending on where people are when they're listening. At home, for example, the proportion of hours listened online is higher than listening on AM/FM (32% compared to 26%). In cars, vans and lorries, 93% of listening continues to

⁴ Ofcom Audio Survey 2024. Base: All who listen at least monthly to a radio station that plays music (1,653) / an online music service (1,439)

be on digital or analogue through the radio set (55% DAB, 38% on AM/FM) while online accounts for just 7%.⁵

Younger people are more likely to use Spotify, YouTube and Apple music services than the average listener

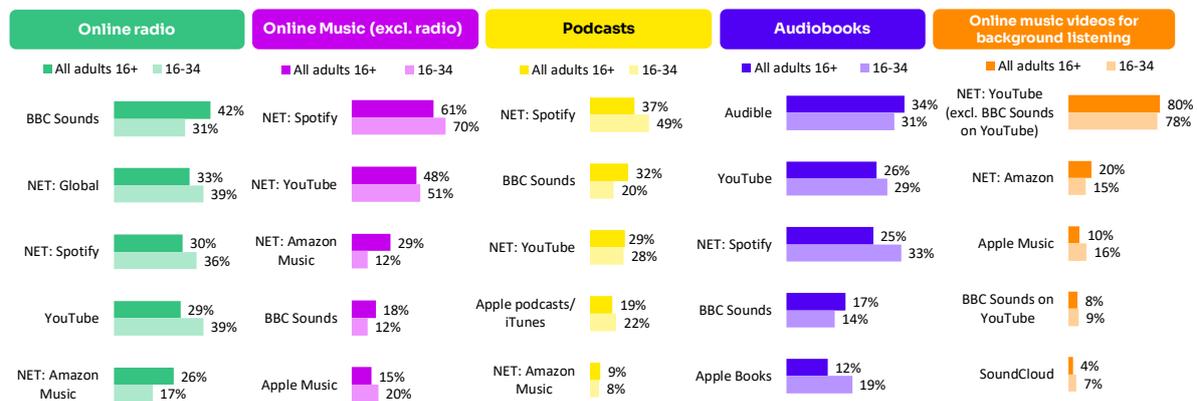
Turning now to focus on online audio, YouTube and Spotify are the most commonly used online audio services, used by 47% and 37% of UK adults each week, while BBC Sounds is the most popular online audio service from a traditional broadcaster, reaching just over a fifth of all adults (21%).

BBC Sounds’ weekly reach is relatively consistent across age groups while other online audio services tend to skew more towards the younger demographic, reaching more people under the age of 35 each week compared to the average. The most notable examples of this are Spotify, with a weekly reach of 63% of 16-34s compared to average reach of 37%, YouTube (62% vs. 47%) and Apple Music (22% vs 11%).

Looking more closely at what people are using these services for, our research shows that Spotify is the most used for online music and podcasts, BBC Sounds for online radio and Audible for audiobooks. Unsurprisingly, YouTube⁶ comes out top for music videos as background listening, with eight in ten adults saying they use it this way.

Again, there are some differences by age group. Over 55s who listen to online radio and podcasts are more likely to use BBC Sounds for these activities than younger listeners (58% use BBC Sounds for online radio listening and 59% for podcasts). Under 35s, meanwhile, are more likely to use Global stations or YouTube (both 39%) for online radio, and Spotify to listen to audiobooks (33%) and podcasts (49%) compared to the average adult.

Figure 3: Most popular audio services, split by audio type: Adults 16+ vs. 16-34



Source: Ofcom Audio Survey 2024. Base: All respondents who listen to the Radio online (838), Online music (1,439), Podcasts (999), Audiobooks (565), Music video websites or apps for background listening (1,372). Note: ‘NET: Global’ includes Globalplayer and individual Global station websites or apps

In previous waves of this research, respondents would add Spotify and Amazon Music under the ‘other’ option for radio online, presumably due to their ‘Radio’ and ‘Stations’ functionality, which is why we now list these as options for this audio type.

⁵ RAJAR Q4 2023

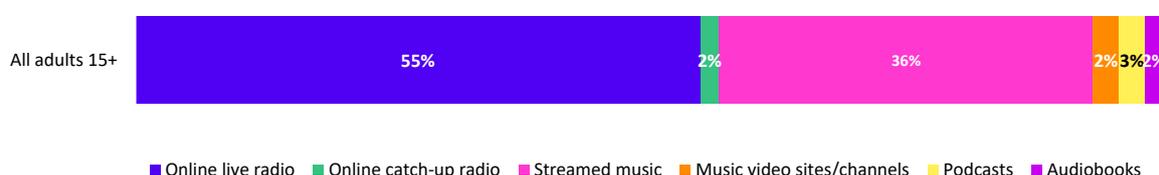
⁶ Excluding BBC Sounds content on YouTube, such as Radio 1’s Live Lounge or Glastonbury sets, for example.

Smart speaker listening

Ofcom’s [Technology Tracker](#) showed that 42% of households had a smart speaker in 2023. Listening to music through a streaming service and listening to live radio are the most common activities people use these devices for, with 60% and 58% of users using them in this way. Other typical uses are searching for answers to questions (37%), weather reports (36%), alarms and reminders (35%) and news (26%).

Looking in more detail at audio listening on these devices, online live radio has the greatest share, accounting for just over half of time spent listening (55%). Streamed music is next, accounting for over a third (36%), while catch-up radio, podcasts and audiobooks each account for between two and three percent of online listening time.

Figure 4: Share of listening on voice-activated devices (e.g. Amazon Echo, Apple HomePod)

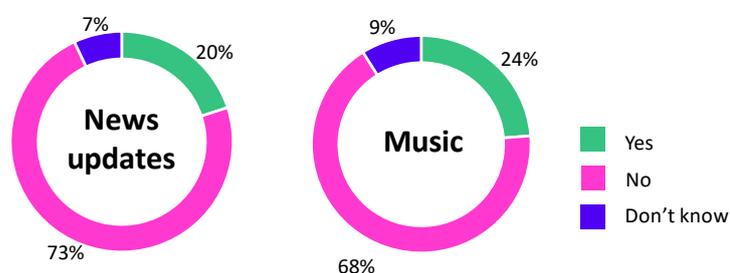


Source: IPA TouchPoints 2023 Superhub

In our Audio Survey we ask about people’s awareness and experience of using different features on these devices. When smart speaker users were asked how aware they were of the sources their device used for news updates, around half (48%) indicated they had some awareness of the original source, either ‘always’ (13%) or ‘sometimes’ (35%). Around one in ten users (9%) said they were ‘never aware’, while four in ten said they never used their device for news updates (40%).

The majority of smart speaker users said they have never changed the default settings to a preferred provider for the news updates (73%) or music (68%). A fifth said they had changed their settings to select a preferred provider for news updates, and slightly more – just under a quarter (24%) – had changed their settings to an alternative provider for music.

Figure 5: Proportion of smart speaker users changing default settings for providers of news updates and music



Source: Ofcom Audio Survey 2024 Base: All respondents who have a smart speaker and use it for news updates (614) / All respondents who have a smart speaker (1,023)

Nearly half (49%) of smart speaker users who used their device to listen to the radio said their smart speaker had started playing the wrong thing in response to a request for a particular station or programme. However, an almost identical proportion said they hadn’t experienced this (48%).

Podcast listening

What is a podcast?

There is no agreed definition of a podcast, but in essence they are episodic speech-based content, primarily audio-only although increasingly some have accompanying video content. They lend themselves to the current era of convenience: they are generally relatively short and can be streamed or downloaded for consumption whenever and wherever suits. The range of organisations and individuals publishing podcasts, their genres, business models and production schedules are all very broad, as is the range of services they can be listened through.

This variety is in part what makes measuring podcast listening – crucial for advertisers – so challenging. Listening to the long tail of episodes available across different services is currently immeasurable: there is no single industry standard for allowing us to see which are the most listened to podcasts. [Edison Podcast Metrics](#) releases a snapshot report ‘Top 25 Podcasts in the UK’ each quarter, based on Edison’s own research, and individual services release occasional ‘top 10s’ but it’s not always clear how these are compiled and how comparable they are. For example, some may rely on the number of downloads or subscribers, while others track streams of a certain length.

In our research we ask about people’s overall podcast listening habits and attitudes, including the number and nature of podcasts they listen to, the services they use and what they’re doing while listening.

Who is listening to podcasts?

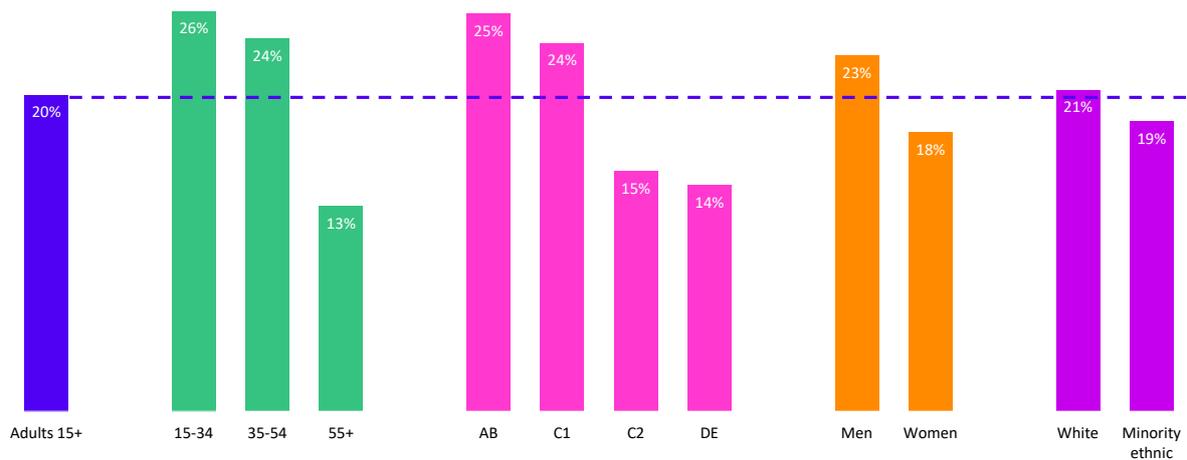
A fifth of adults listen to podcasts each week, with reach higher among the under 35s and those in higher socio-economic groups

According to the industry measurement body RAJAR, a fifth of UK adults listen to podcasts each week. This has only seen fairly gradual growth over time despite the number of new podcasts that are being released, especially from celebrities and established media brands. This could be accounted for by the point raised earlier about music radio generally being a lean-back listen: people tune in and have it on in the background, while they’re driving etc. Speech radio, by comparison, demands a more active way of listening, which is perhaps why it accounts for less than a fifth of radio listening hours.⁷ Given the similarities between podcasts and speech radio, this lean-in experience could explain why podcast listening isn’t as mainstream as we may have assumed.

Those that do listen to podcasts each week are more likely to be younger (26% of 25-34s listen weekly), in higher socio-economic groups (26% reach) and live in the South of England (25% reach). Reach drops to 15% for people in the DE socio-economic group and is even lower for those aged 55 and over (13%). Around four in ten people (44%) never listen to podcasts.

⁷ RAJAR Q4 2023

Figure 6: Weekly reach of podcasts by demographic



Source: RAJAR Q4 2023

What type of podcasts are people listening to?

The average podcast listener listens to five podcasts per week

The average podcast listener subscribes to around six series (mean average of 6.14) and listens to five podcasts each week.⁸ Podcasts are produced by radio broadcasters, news brands and a long tail of other independent production agencies. This is reflected in how much time is spent listening to these broad categories of podcast each week: 17% is to radio broadcaster provided podcasts, just 3% of time is to newspaper/magazine provided podcasts while 80% of time is spent listening to other podcasts.⁹

Entertainment, news and current affairs, comedy and discussion shows are the most popular types of podcasts listened to each week

Looking at what kinds of podcasts people are listening to, the most popular ones are entertainment, news and current affairs, comedy and discussion and talk shows, each reaching 45-50% of regular podcast listeners each week. A fifth of regular podcast listeners say they listen to news and current affairs podcasts daily, the highest daily percentage of any genre.

Again, there are some notable differences by age group, with older listeners more likely to listen to news and current affairs podcasts each week than the average listener. Earlier we highlighted that over 55s use speech radio to catch up on news (46%) and learn something new (42%), and there appears to be a similar pattern in podcast listening, with more listeners in this age group turning to podcasts focused on news and discussion than entertainment or comedy.

Unsurprisingly, given the higher levels of reach in this age group, 18–34-year-olds are more likely to listen to most types of podcast at least once a week compared to the average listener, including entertainment and comedy. Exceptions to this are podcasts focused on news and current affairs,

⁸ Ofcom Podcast Survey 2024. Base: all respondents who listen to podcasts at least once a month (1,006)

⁹ IPA TouchPoints 2023 Superhub

politics, and fiction and drama, all of which are more likely to have weekly listeners who use BBC Sounds or are over the age of 55.

Figure 7: Top ten types of podcast listened to at least weekly by age group

	18-34s		35-54s		55+s	
1	Entertainment	58%	Entertainment	50%	News and Current Affairs	55%
2	Comedy	54%	Comedy	49%	Politics	42%
3	Discussion and Talk Shows	54%	News and Current Affairs	45%	Discussion and Talk Shows	34%
4	News and Current Affairs	47%	Discussion and Talk Shows	42%	Health and Wellbeing	27%
5	Society and Culture	45%	True Crime	37%	Entertainment	26%
6	Health and Wellbeing	42%	Health and Wellbeing	36%	Society and Culture	26%
7	Hobbies	41%	Politics	35%	Comedy	25%
8	TV and Film	41%	Society and Culture	35%	Fiction/ drama	25%
9	Football	40%	Football	34%	Science and Technology	21%
10	True Crime	39%	Science and Technology	33%	True Crime	18%

Source: Ofcom Podcast Survey 2024. Base: all respondents who listen to podcasts at least once a month (1,006)

When are people listening to podcasts?

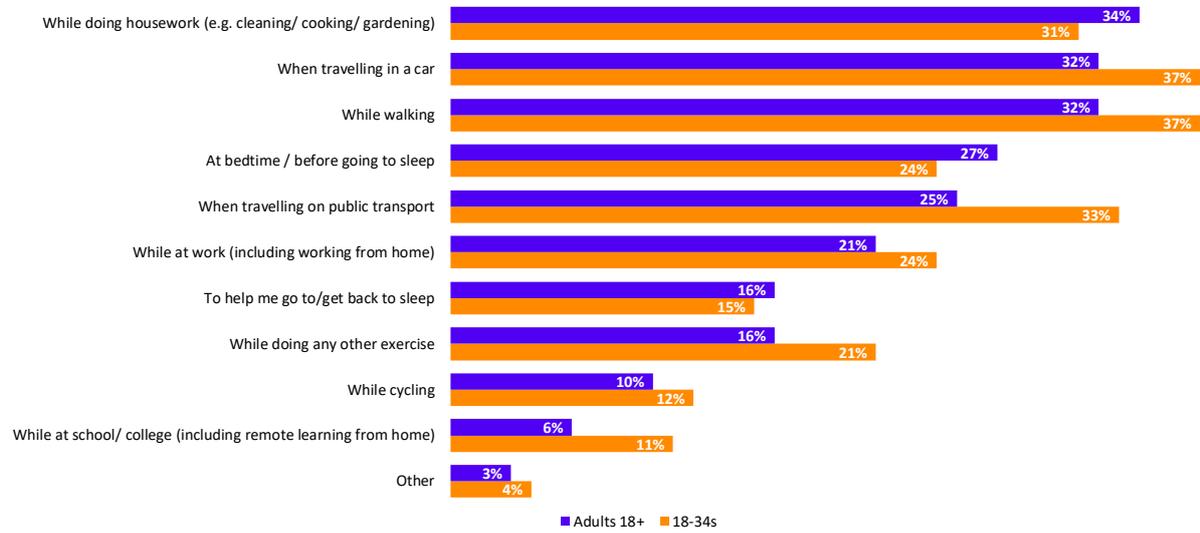
The most popular time for listening to podcasts is while doing housework

Convenience is key, and 83% of regular podcast listeners said they like the convenience of being able to listen to podcasts when it suits them.¹⁰ To understand more about the role of podcasts in people's everyday lives we asked listeners what kinds of activities they usually do while listening to them. Over three in ten said they listen while doing housework (34%), while travelling in a car – as driver or passenger – (32%) or while walking (32%). Listeners under the age of 35 are more likely to listen

¹⁰ Ofcom Podcast Survey 2024. Base: all respondents who listen to podcasts at least once a month (1,006)

while in a car or walking (both 37%), while on public transport (33%) and while exercising (21%) compared to the average listener.

Figure 8: When do you usually listen to podcasts?



Source: Ofcom Podcast Survey 2024. Base: all respondents who listen to podcasts at least once a month (1,006)