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## **Reading from Paper or Reading from Screens. What do Consumers Prefer?**

**A survey of U.S. consumers undertaken by Two Sides, May 2015**

As the world of communication becomes increasingly digital, news, magazines, books and other forms of communication are frequently read on screen.

There have been many studies conducted to find out if people prefer reading from screens and whether the convenience and immediacy of digital communication is forcing a change of reading habits.

This survey explores how consumers feel about reading on paper or screens and reveals that print and paper is still preferred by many. The survey also reveals concerns about learning and literacy in an increasingly digital world.

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## Executive Summary

The survey was commissioned by Two Sides and carried out by international research company Toluna in May 2015. Over 1000 U.S. and 500 UK consumers were asked their opinion on a variety of issues relating to the switch from paper-based to digital media.

The following report details the responses from U.S. consumers and reveals fundamental concerns which consumers have about the digital reading experience. Results are shown as the total result for all age groups as well as separate results for each of the five age groups surveyed (i.e. 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-64, 65 and over). The results of the UK survey are published in a companion report.

The results of the U.S. survey have lessons for all those who choose the way in which information is distributed, particularly advertisers and educators. While on-screen reading occupies an increasing amount of consumer time, people's preferences are still for a print on paper which they believe is more informative and less distracting.

It is not evident that younger ages are significantly different from older groups. While acceptance of digital media is stronger among younger ages, a preference for print on paper still exists for all ages.

There is also concern that the increasing time spent with electronic media is believed to be damaging to health.

## Key Findings

1. 88% of respondents believe that they understand and can retain or use information better when they read print on paper. There were only minor differences between age groups. Reading on screen shows lower preference with the lowest being 41% indicating that mobiles and smartphones were useful for understanding and retaining information.
2. When given a choice, 81% indicated that they prefer to read print on paper. These percentages drop to 39% for screens, laptops and PCs, 30% for e-readers and 22% for mobiles or smartphones. The preference for print on paper is seen across all age groups and is strong at over 77%.
3. 81% indicated they are most relaxed when reading print on paper. Age group differences were minor. Mobiles or smartphones are seen as the least relaxing way to read with only 30% preferring this method. Younger age groups indicated that they are more at ease with reading from screens than the over 45 age groups.
4. 71% indicated that they were more relaxed and receptive when reading a newspaper in print compared to 36% who felt more relaxed and receptive when reading a newspaper from a screen. There were differences across age groups, however even younger age groups clearly preferred print over online.
5. 75% indicated that they were more relaxed and receptive when reading a magazine in print compared to 26% when reading a magazine on screen. Differences among age groups were minor, with over 73% of all age groups preferring to read a magazine in print.

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6. 80% stated a clear preference for reading print on paper for complicated materials in contrast to only 13% preferring to read complicated materials on a computer screen. Mobiles and smart phones were preferred by only 3% for reading complicated materials. Reading on screens showed a much lower preference than print at below 16% across all age groups.
  7. The preference for reading long documents in print was also clear with only 32% indicating they prefer reading documents of 3 pages or more on screen.
  8. Only 23% indicated that they are easily distracted when reading print on paper whereas electronic media showed higher distraction ranging from 66% for mobiles and smartphones to 42% for e-readers.
  9. Many respondents print out documents. The main reasons are:
    - 74% believe printed documents are easier to read
    - 55% believe printed documents are more secure
    - 56% believe printed documents are better for storage and archiving
    - 47% believe printed documents are less likely to be lost
  10. The preference for printing increases with increasing age. However, over 68% across all age groups indicated that they print because it is easier to read.
  11. 44% to 57% indicated that they prefer paper bills by mail for their financial services, utilities, telecoms, mobile or smartphone and TV. The over 45 age groups showed a higher preference for paper bills than the under 45 groups.
  12. Advertisements in print are clearly given more attention than their online equivalent:
    - a. 64% pay more attention to advertising when reading magazines in print / 26% pay more attention to advertising when reading magazines on line
    - b. 60% pay more attention to advertising when reading newspapers in print / 29% pay more attention to advertising when reading newspapers on line
    - c. 48% pay more attention to advertising when reading leaflets received by mail or dropped at the door
    - d. 26% pay more attention to general online advertising
  13. There are clear concerns that switching from printed books to digital methods is affecting education:
    - 68% believe that books are more likely to encourage learning and the development of other skills than using screens
    - 63% worry that children are not going to learn as much without books
    - 59% believe that learning from books is the best way to learn
    - 58% would insist that their children learn from books
    - 42% believe that learning from screens, PCs, tablets etc. is just as effective as books
  14. 62% of mobile or smartphone users, 59% of computer users and 50% of e-reader users are worried that these devices may be damaging their health (ex: eyestrain, headaches, insomnia). Reading in print was had least health concerns with a 21% response.

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## About Two Sides North America

Two Sides is an independent, non-profit organization created to promote the responsible production, use and sustainability of print and paper. Two Sides is active globally in North America, Europe, Australia, South Africa, Brazil and Colombia. Our members span the entire print and paper value chain, including forestry, pulp, paper, inks and chemicals, pre-press, press, finishing, publishing, printing, envelopes and postal operators. For more information about Two Sides North America, please contact us at 1-855-896-7433 or [info@twosidesna.org](mailto:info@twosidesna.org). Visit the Two Sides website at [www.twosidesna.org](http://www.twosidesna.org) and follow Two Sides on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

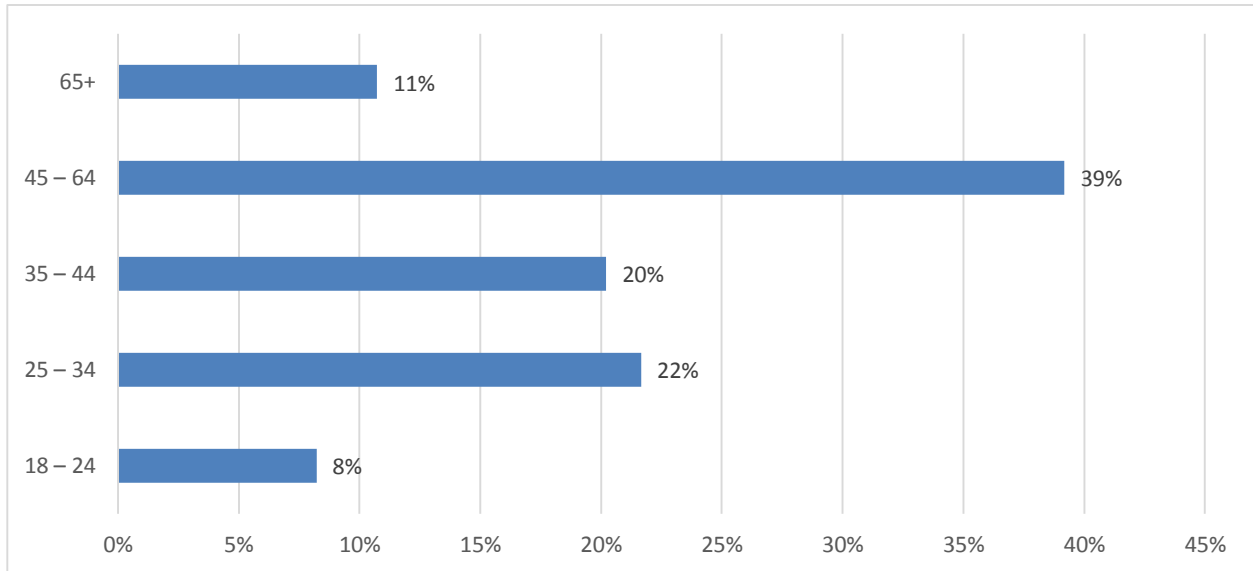


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## The U.S. Survey

### Sample size and breakdown

The survey was conducted by independent research organization Toluna with 1129 U.S. consumers in May 2015. The split in each age range of consumers was as follows:

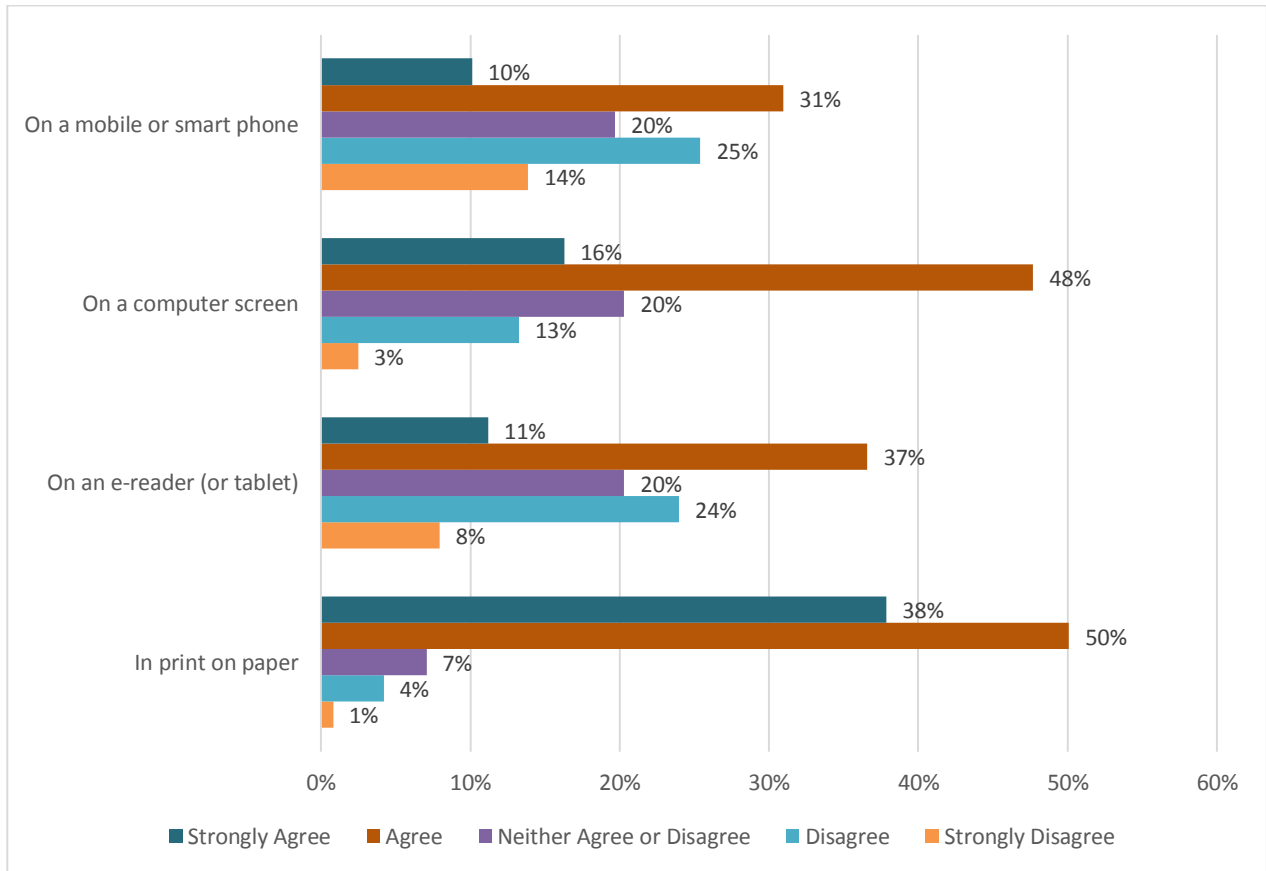


32% of the consumers were male and 68% female. None of the individuals questioned worked in paper, printing or allied industries.

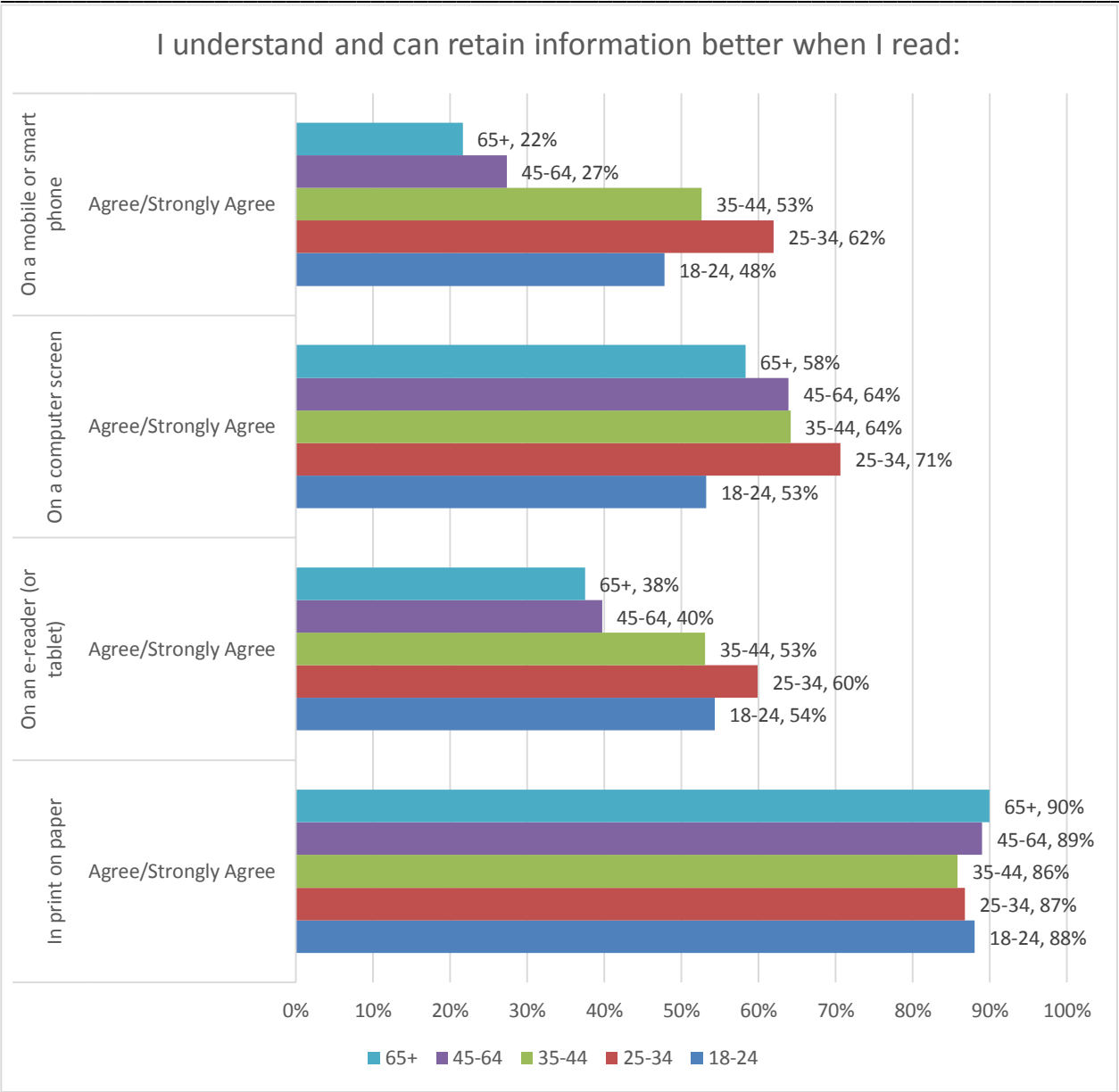
Consumers were spread across the U.S.

## Questions and Responses

### 1. I understand and can retain or use information better when I read (Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements):



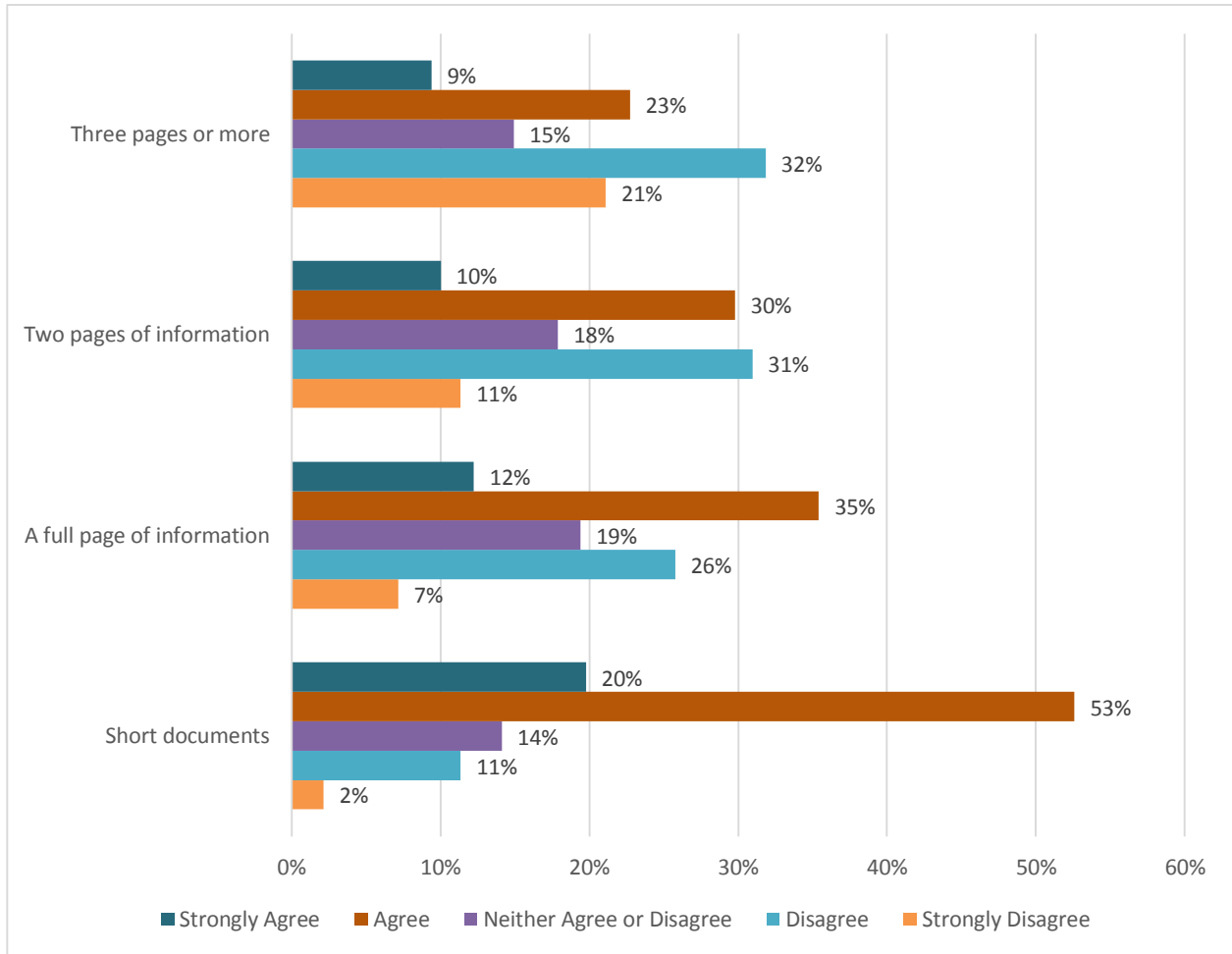
88% of respondents believe that they understand and can retain or use information better when they read print on paper. Computer screens came next at 64%, and e-readers followed with 48%. Lastly, 41% thought mobiles and smartphones were useful for understanding and retaining information.



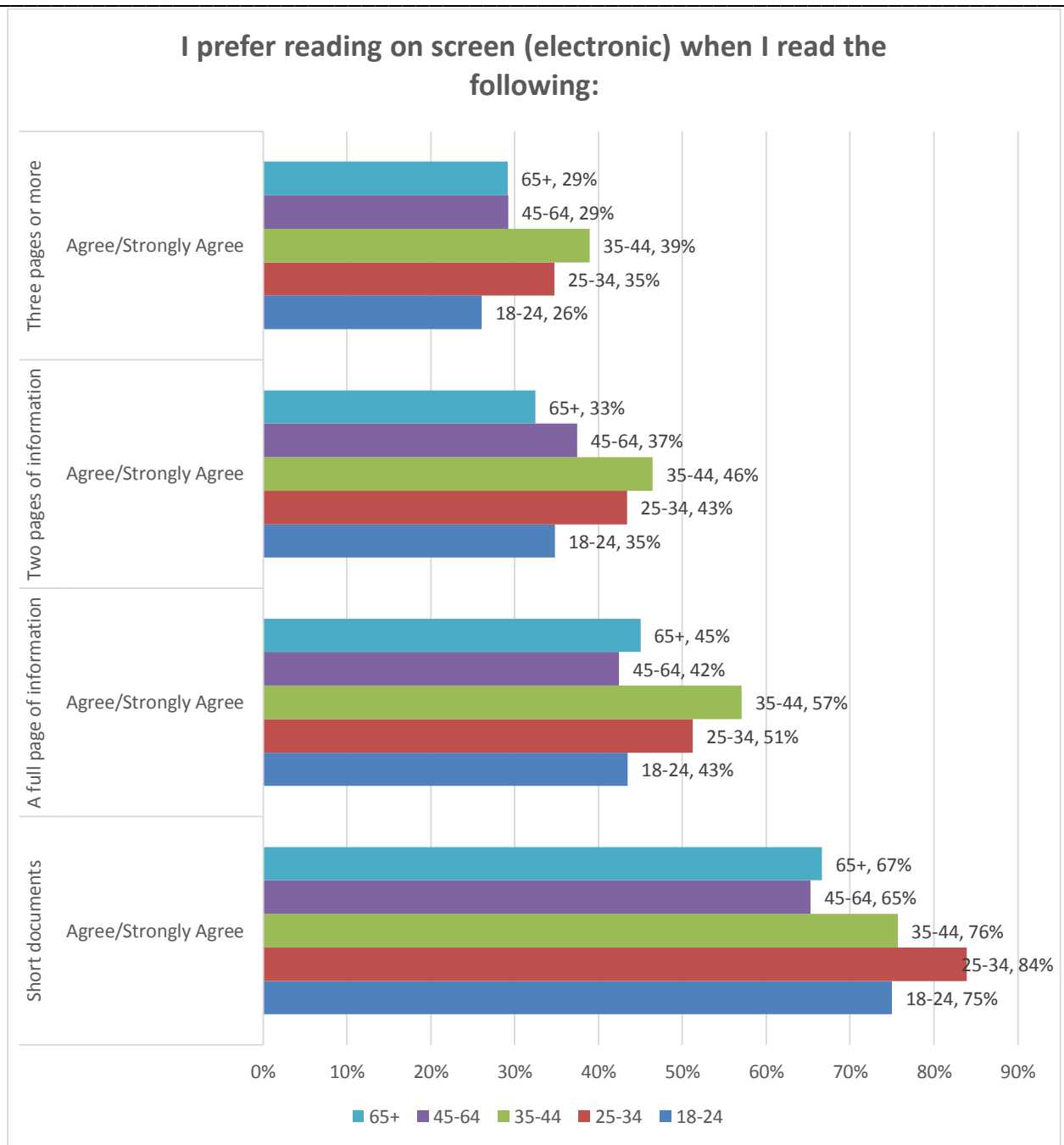
For all age groups the preference for paper for understanding, retaining and using information is clear. When it comes to reading from screens, computer screens were preferred to e-readers/tablets and mobile devices which showed a marked decline in appreciation by older age groups.



**2. I prefer reading on screen (electronic) when I read the following:**

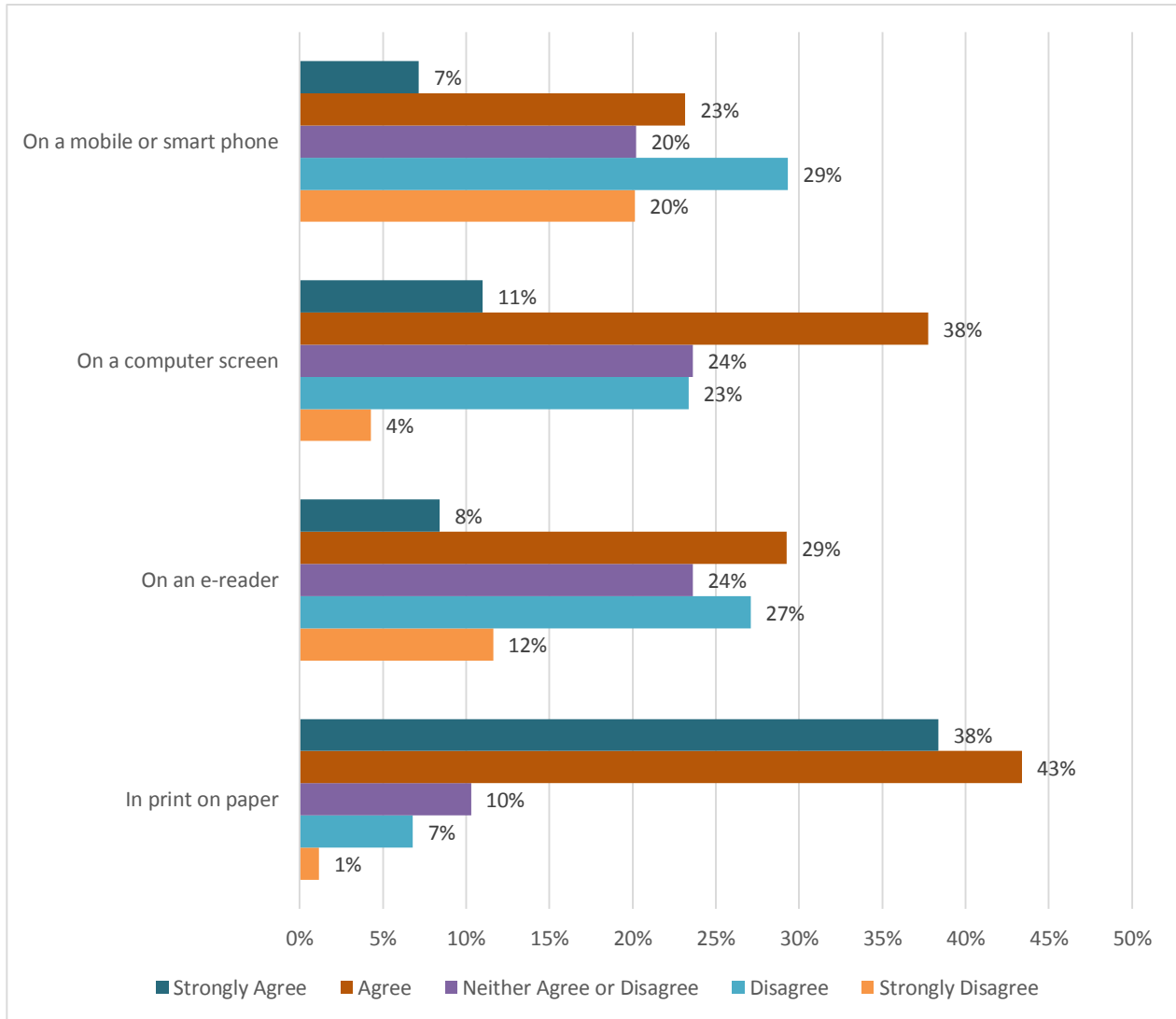


73% prefer reading short documents (less than a page) on screen, but this percentage decreases quickly for documents of one page or more. Only 32% indicated that they prefer reading documents of three pages or more on screen.

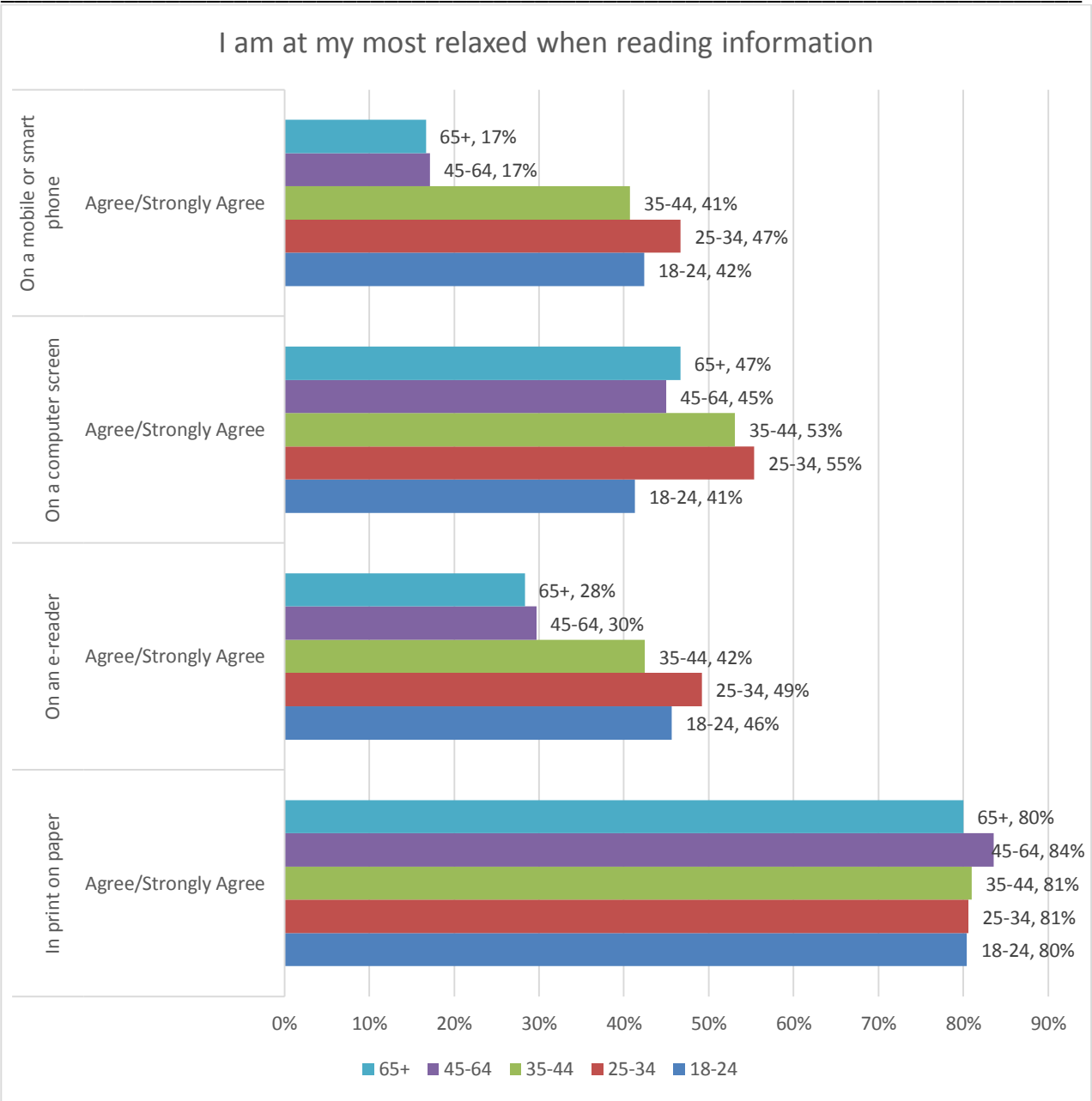


The preference for reading short documents on screen (less than 1 page) declines with age, with the under 45 age groups showing a higher preference than the over 45 age groups. For documents longer than one page, the 25 to 45 age groups showed a higher preference than other age groups.

**3. I am at my most relaxed when reading information:**

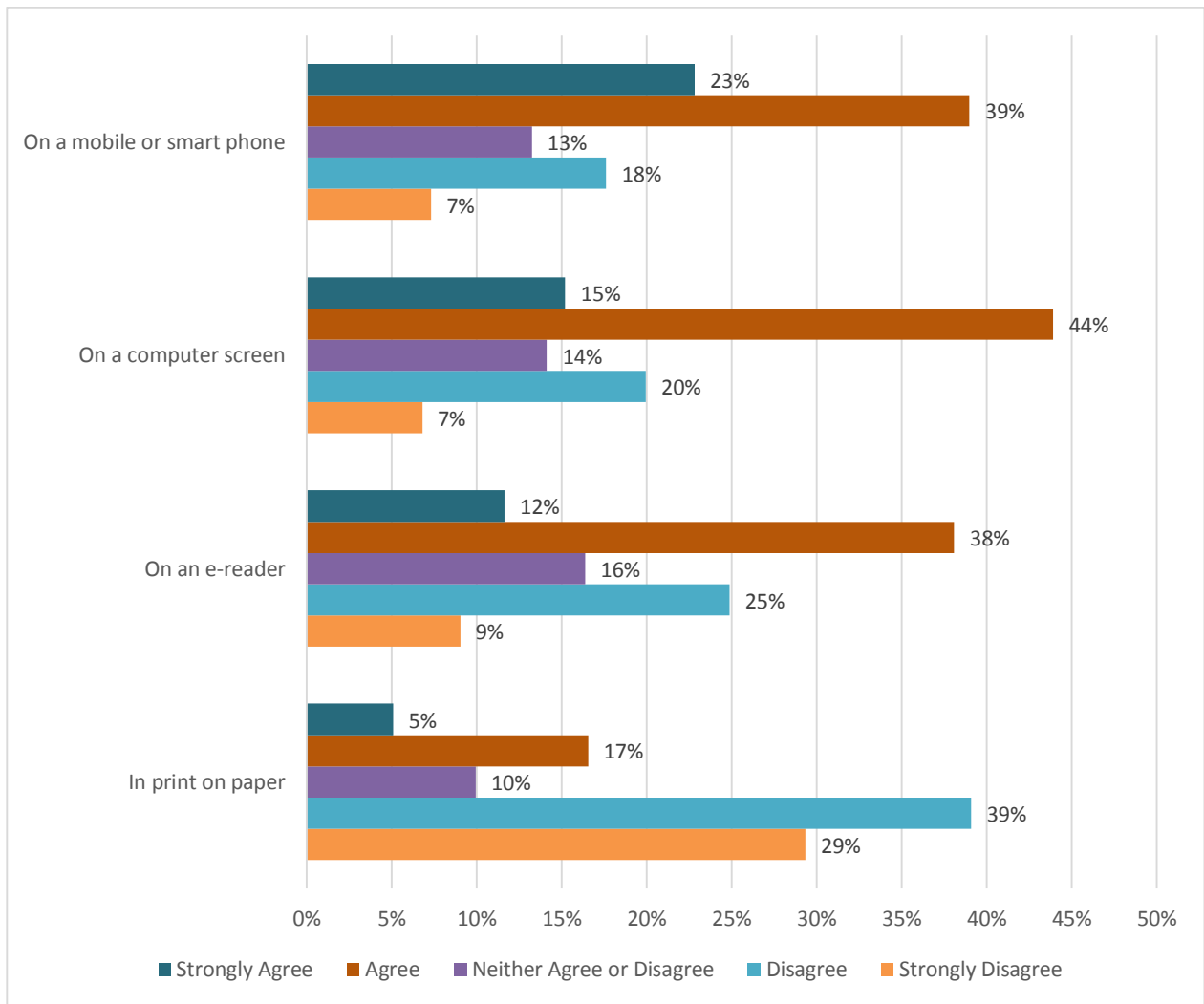


83% indicated that they are more relaxed when reading print on paper. This percentage decreases with digital media. Mobiles or smartphones are seen as the least relaxing way to read with only 30% preferring this method.



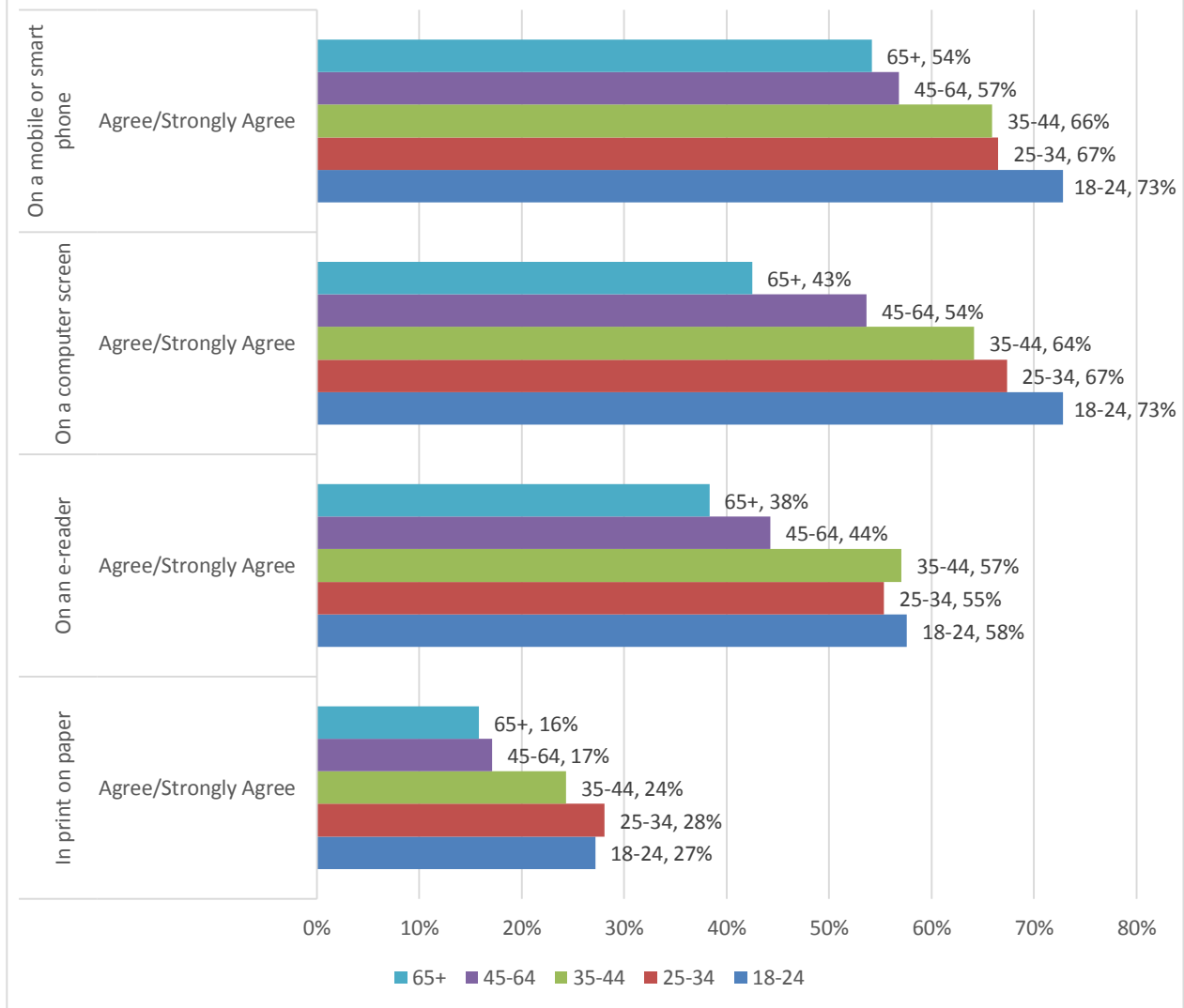
The preference for print and paper as the most relaxing way to read is universal across age groups with over 80% showing a preference in all age groups. Younger age groups (under 45 years old) appear to be more at ease with digital media than the 45 and over groups. For example, over 40% in the under 45 age groups indicated that they are more relaxed when reading information on smartphones, compared to less than 17% for the over 45 groups.

**4. I worry that I might be damaging my health (ex: eyestrain, headaches, insomnia) when I view or spend too much time reading:**



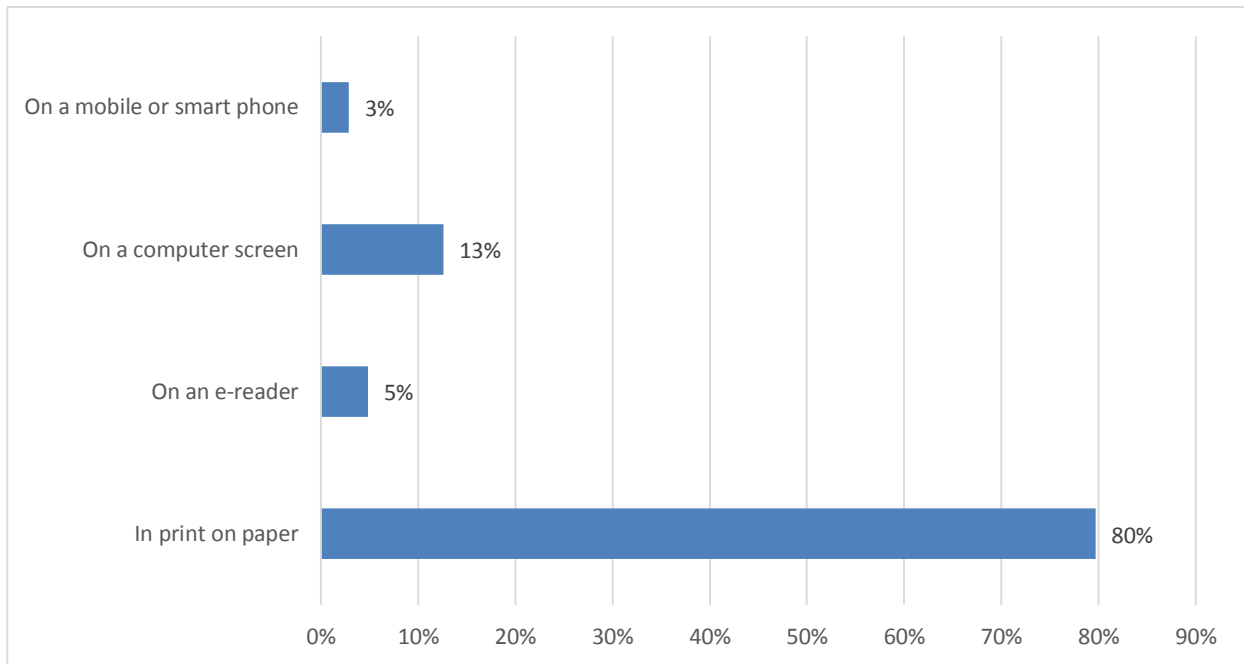
There is concern about the potential health effects of using electronic media compared to print and paper, with 62% of mobile or smartphone users, 59% of computer users and 50% of e-reader users, worried that they may be damaging their health.

**I worry that I might be damaging my health (ex: eyestrain, headaches, insomnia) when I view or spend too much time reading:**

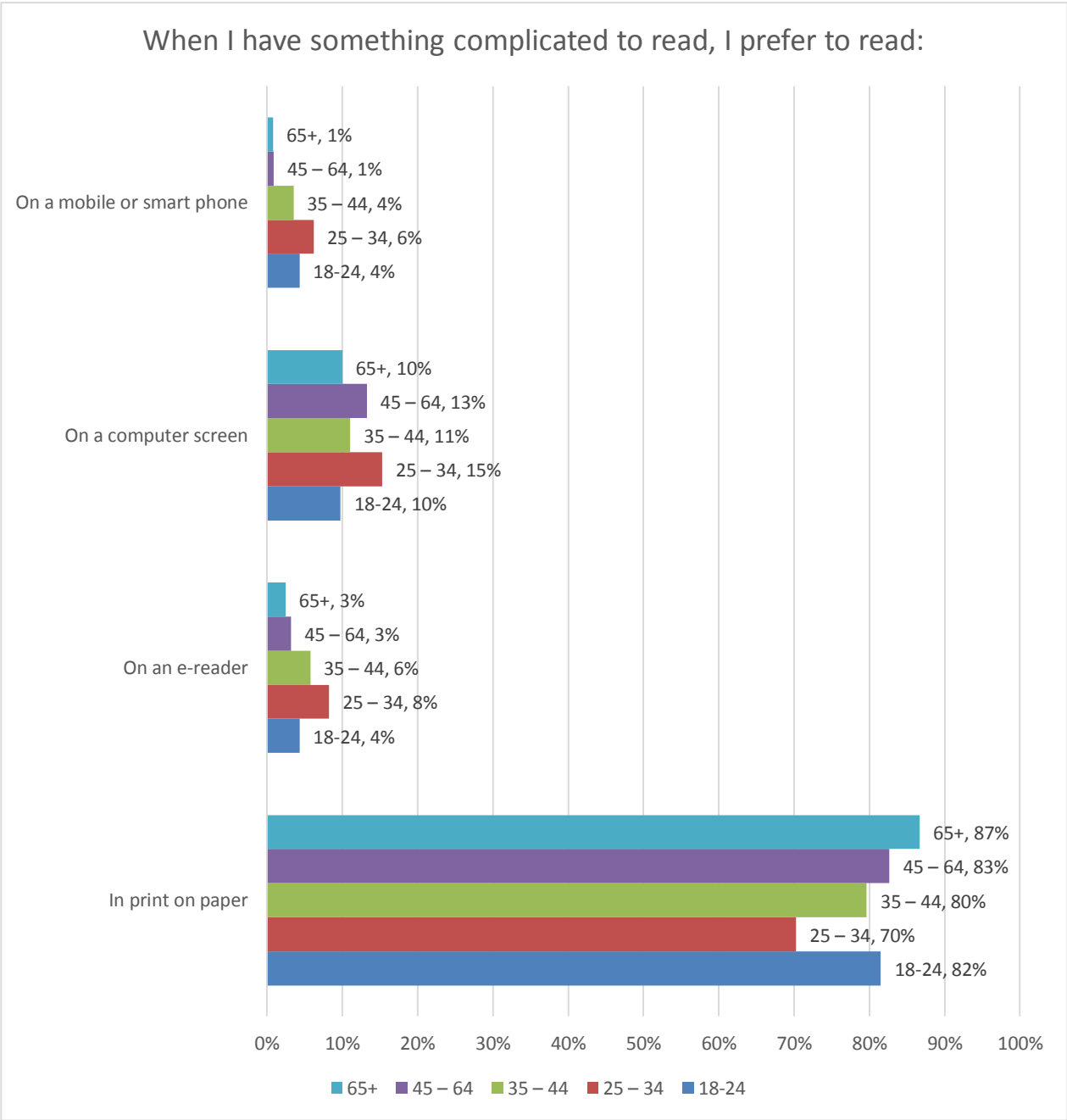


Younger age groups (under 45 years old) appear more concerned about the potential health effects of using e-media. The highest concern is when using computers and smartphones, with over 64% in all age groups under 45 indicating that they worry about health effects. Overall there is much lower concern about health effects when reading print on paper, with less than 29% across all age groups indicating that they are worried about this.

**5. When I have something complicated to read, I prefer to read:**



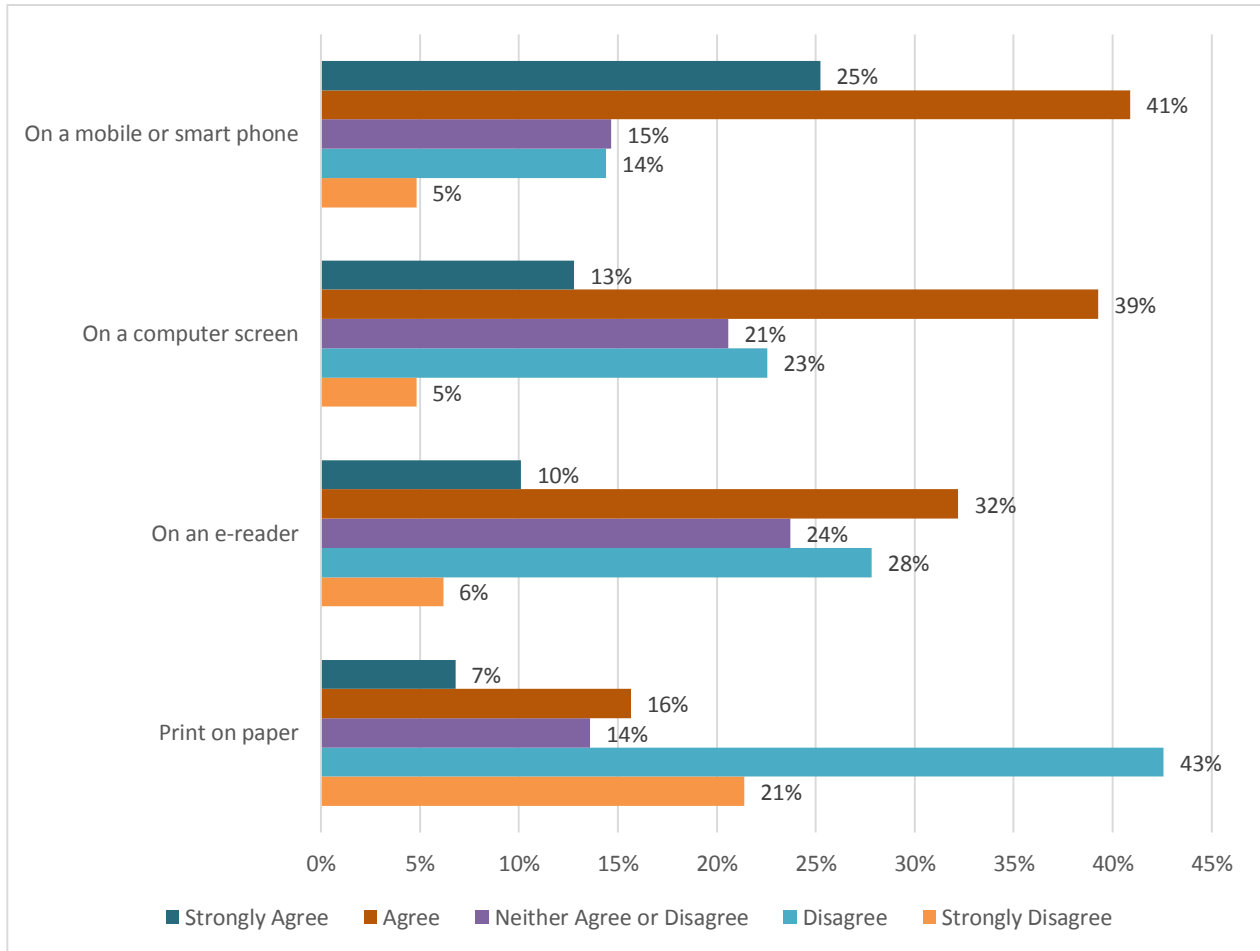
80% stated a clear preference for reading print on paper for complicated materials in contrast to only 13% preferring to read complicated materials on a computer screen. Mobiles and smart phones were preferred by only 3% for reading complicated materials.



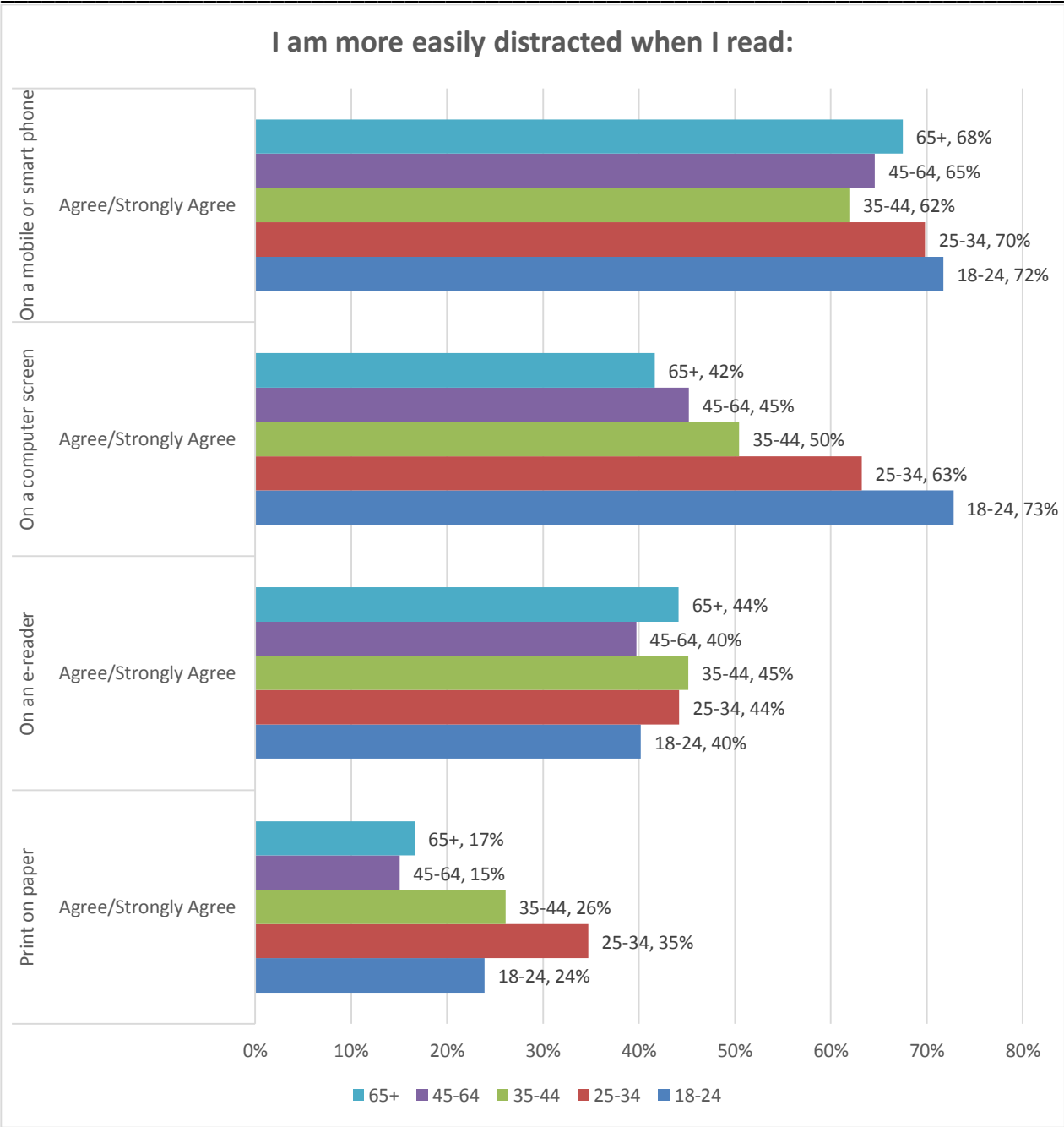
82% of 18 – 24 year olds prefer print on paper for reading complicated documents. All age groups showed at least 70% preference for print on paper. Smartphones were the least preferred with only 1% to 6% having a preference. All digital media showed a much lower preference than print at below 16% across all age groups.



**6. I am more easily distracted when I read:**



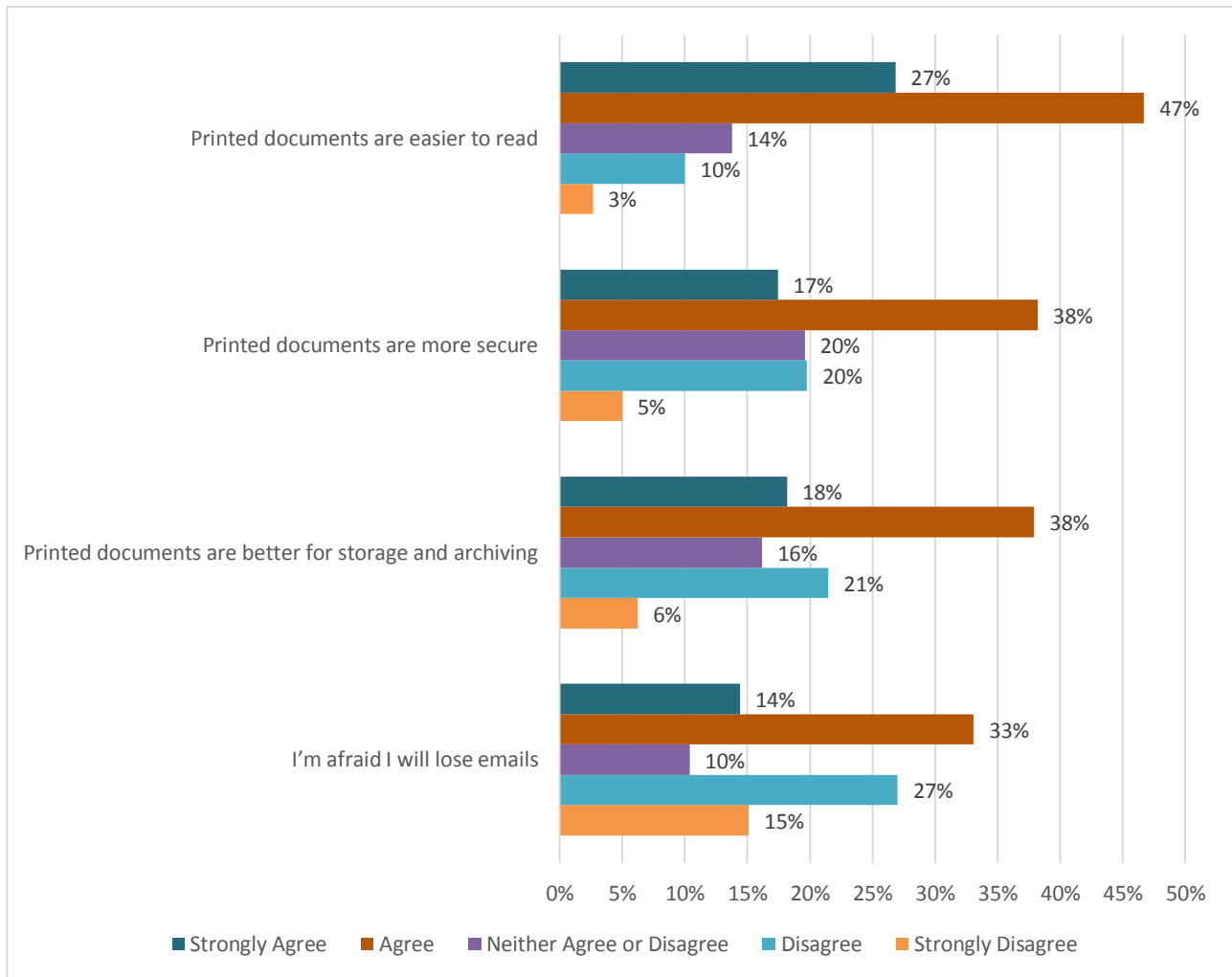
Print on paper is the most immersive medium with only 23% being easily distracted. Electronic media shows higher distraction, with 66% indicating that they are easily distracted when reading on smartphones, and 42% for e-readers.



Under 35 year olds indicated they are more easily distracted when reading on a computer screen (over 63% vs under 50% for over 35 year olds).



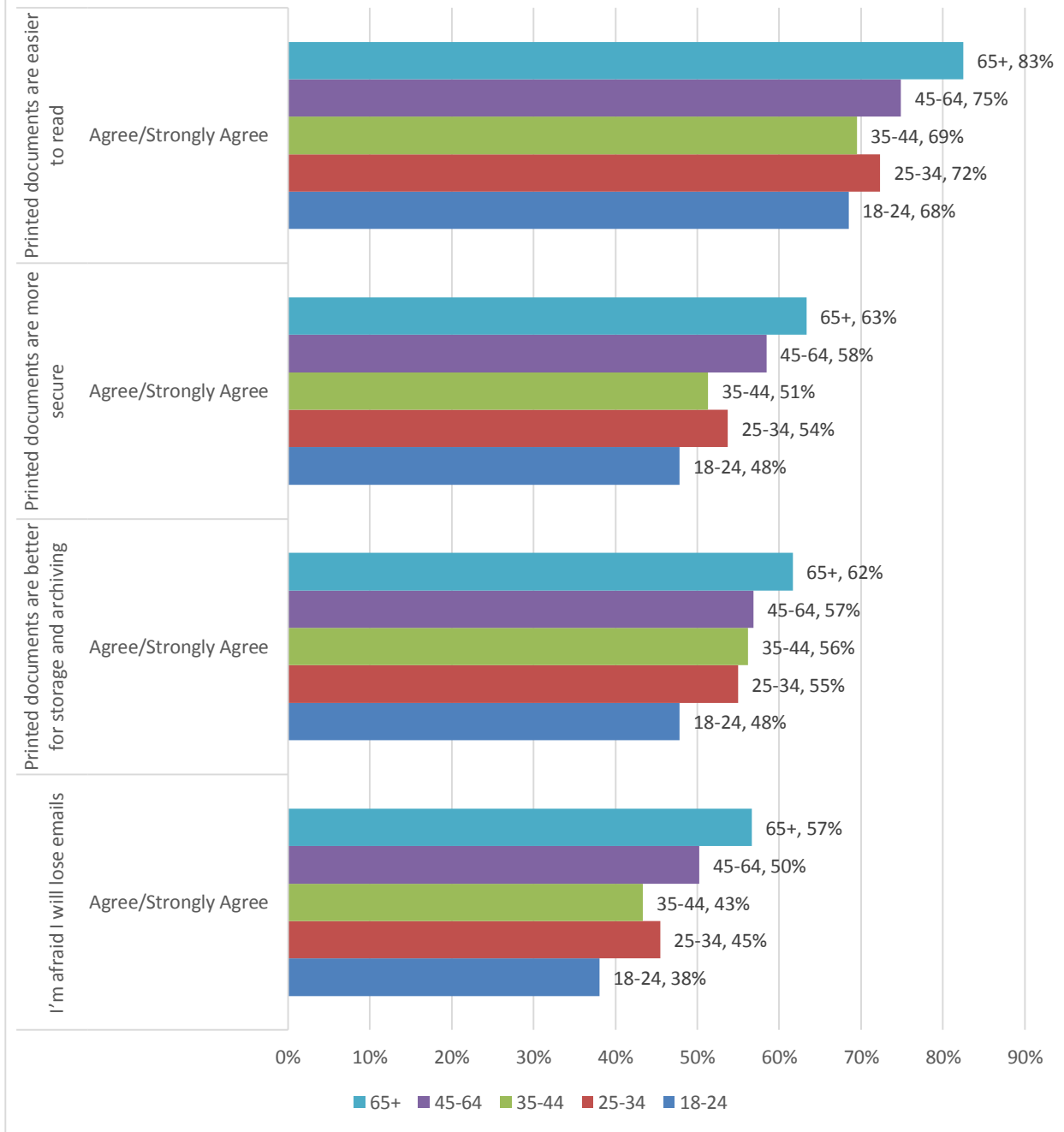
**7. I often print out complicated documents; financial information; important information because:**



Many respondents print out documents. The main reasons are:

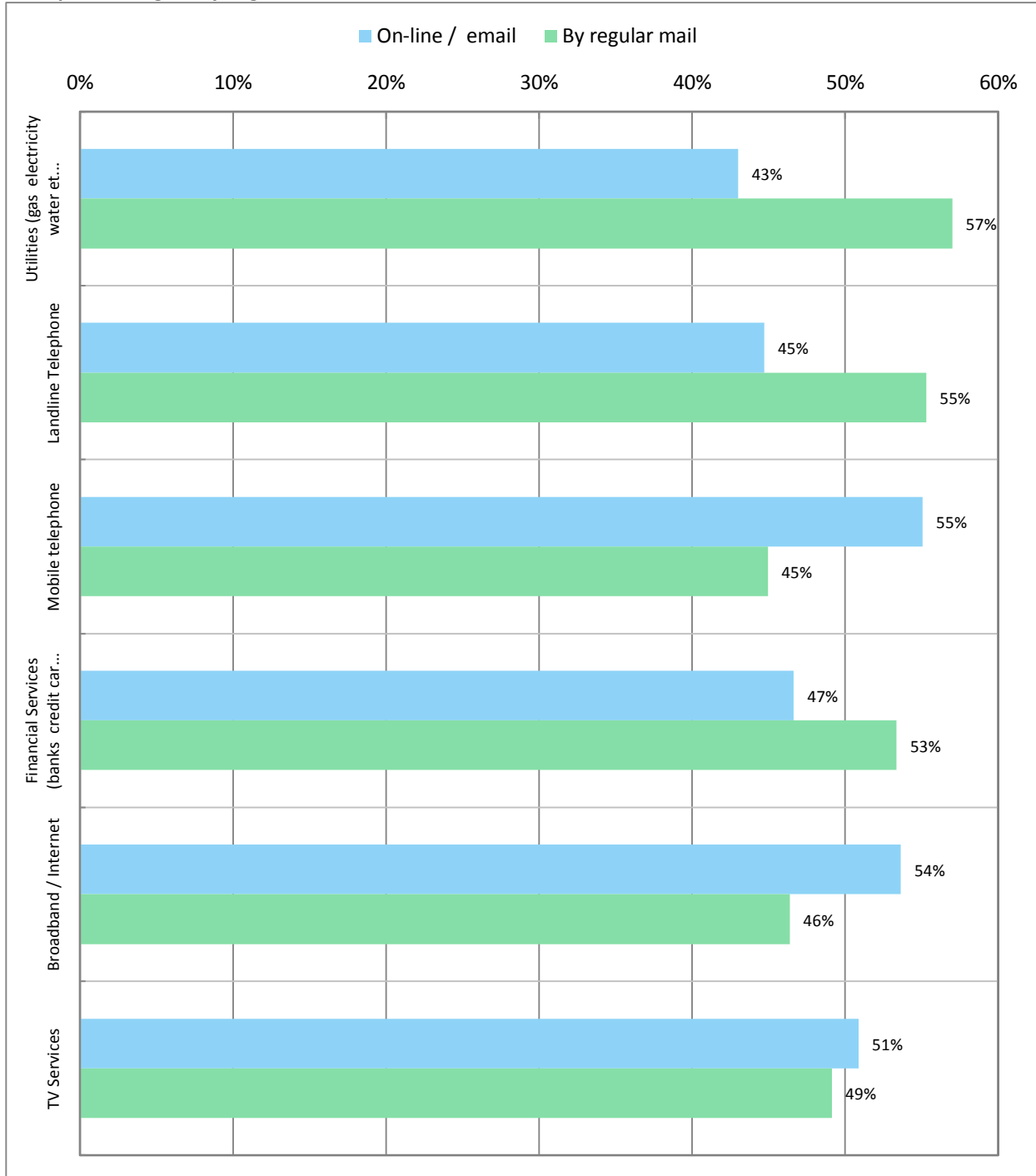
- 74% believe printed documents are easier to read
- 55% believe printed documents are more secure
- 56% believe printed documents are better for storage and archiving
- 47% believe printed documents are less likely to be lost

## I often print out complicated documents; financial information; important information because



The preference for printing increases with increasing age, as well as the concern that electronic documents will get lost. Younger respondents print less than older ones across all the above categories, showing less reliance on print. However, over 68% across all age groups indicated that they print documents because they are easier to read.

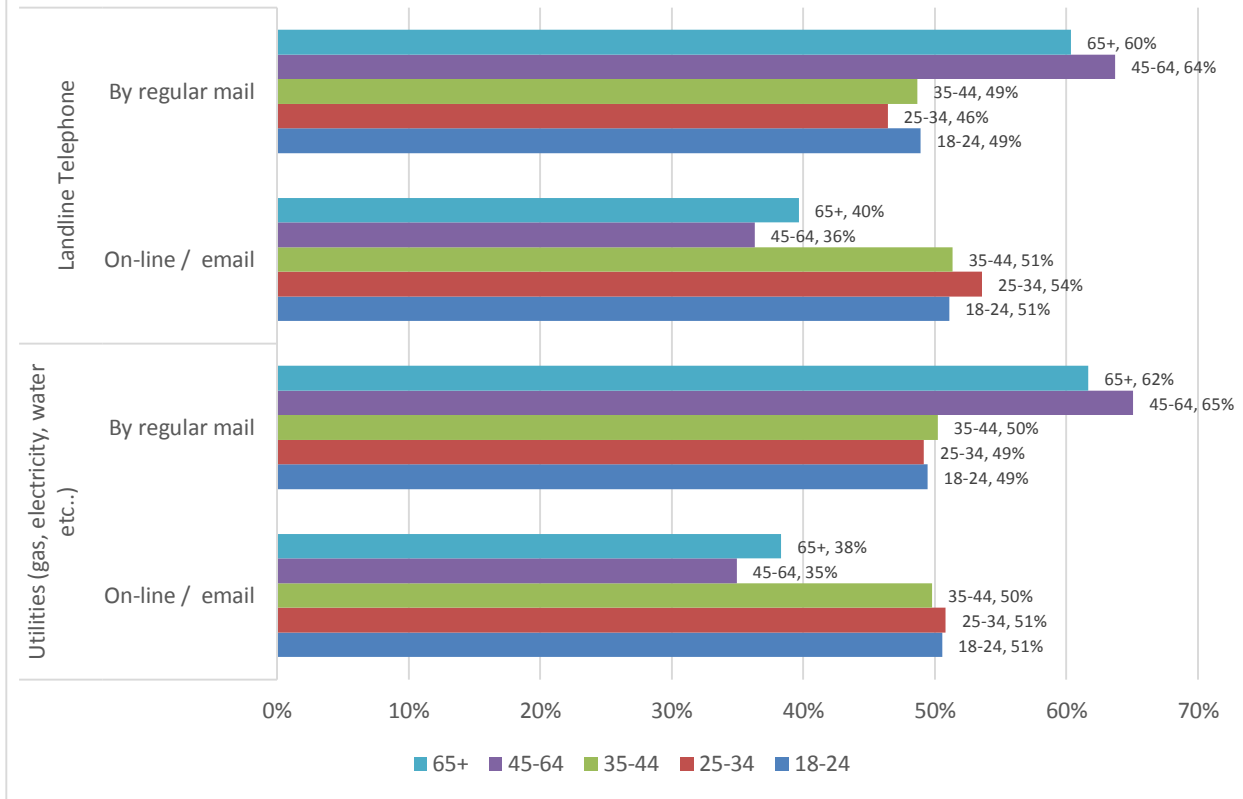
**8. I prefer to get my regular bills and statements:**



Although online billing is well established, the preference for paper bills and statements is still evident. 44% to 57% indicated they have a preference for paper bills.



## I prefer to get my regular bills and statements:

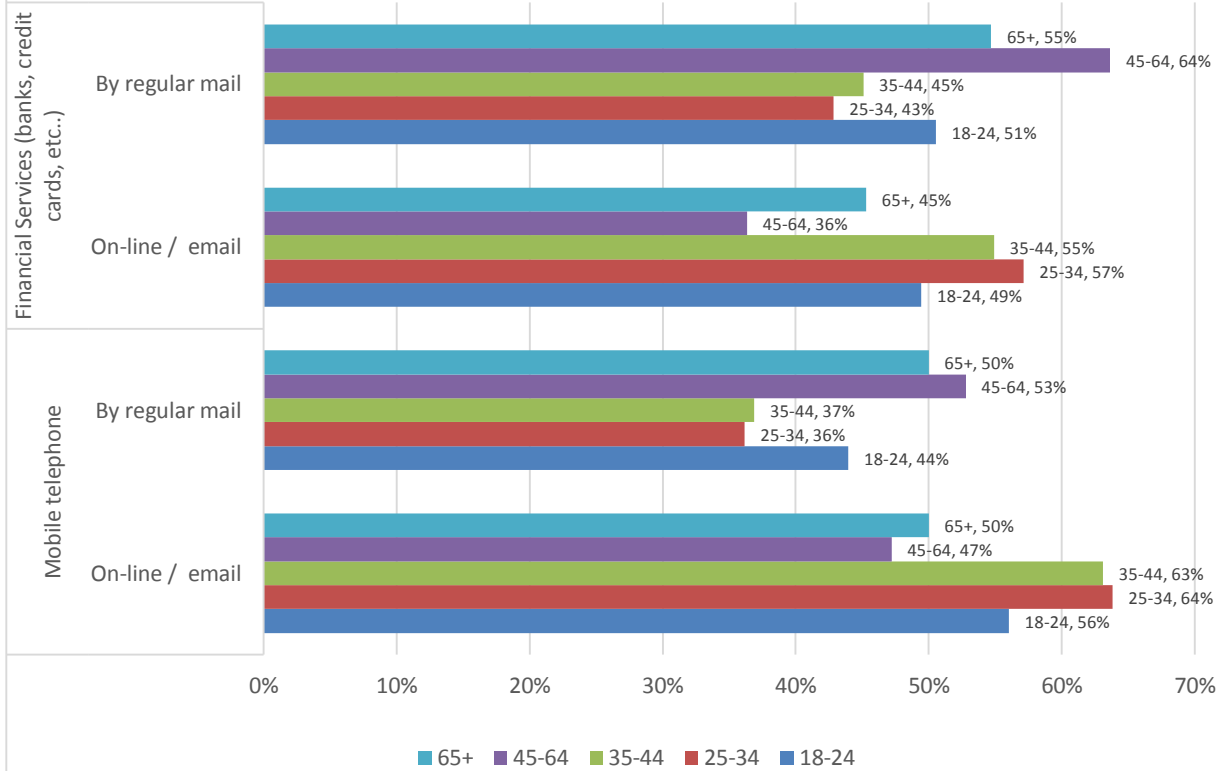


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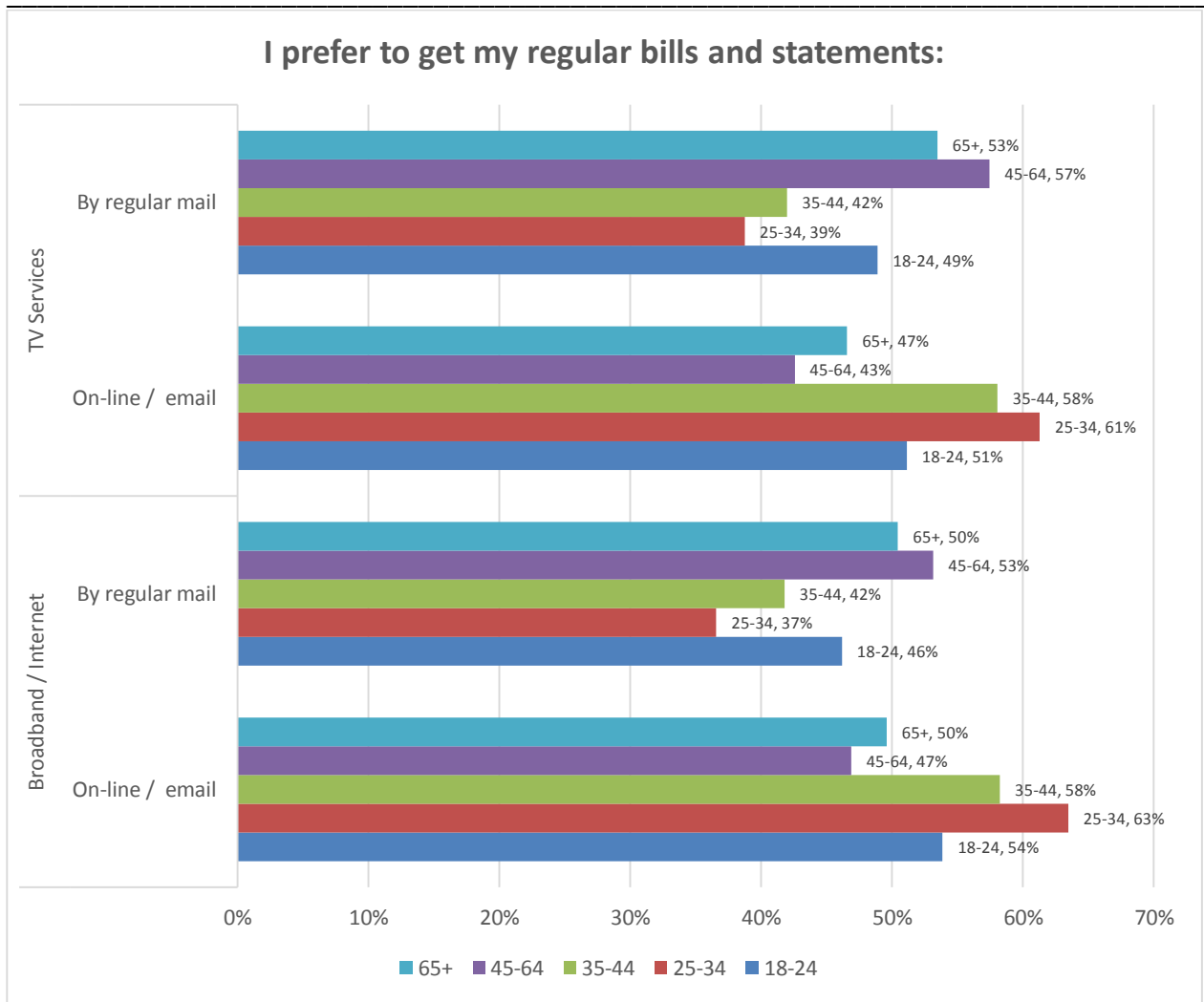
## I prefer to get my regular bills and statements:



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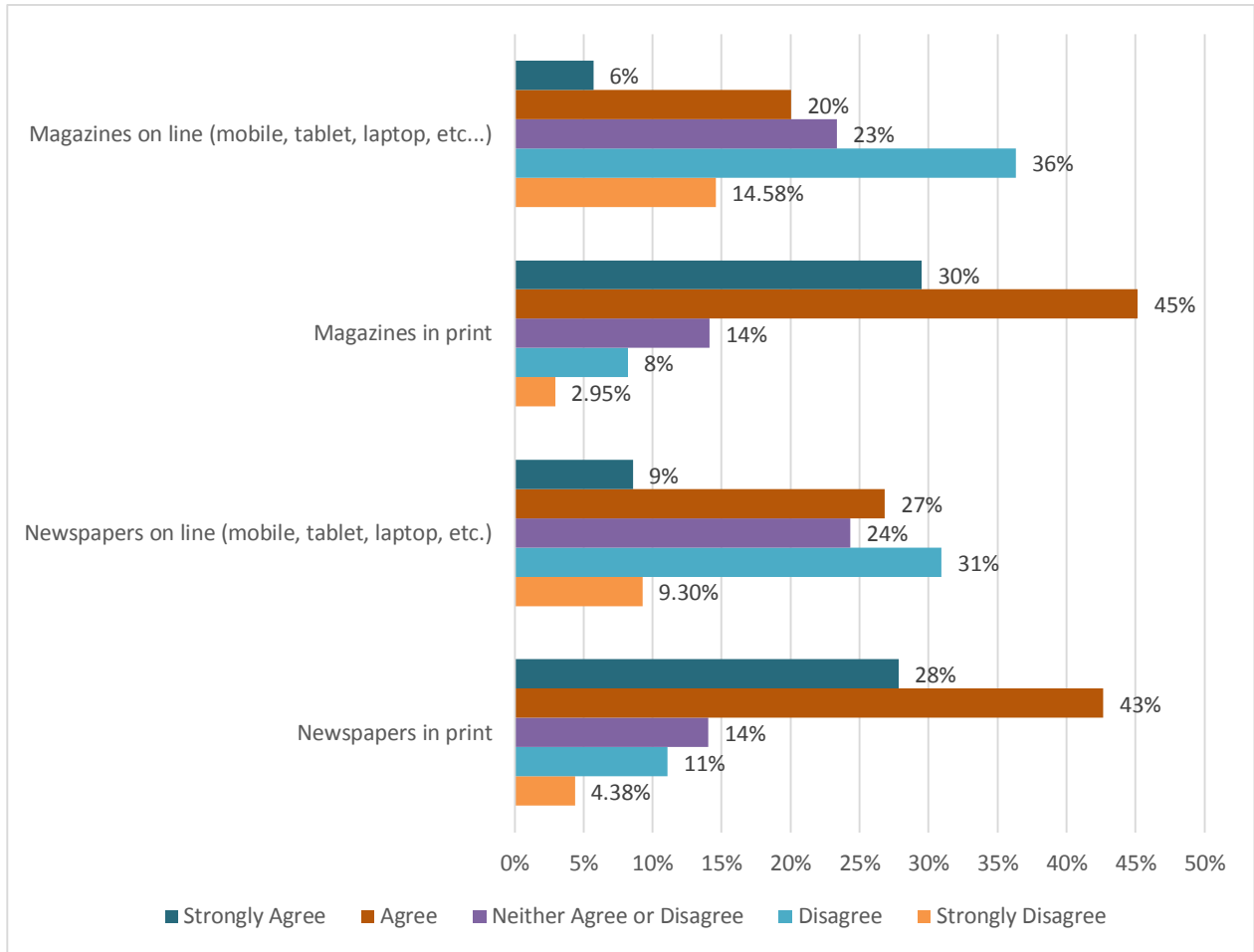
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The over 45 age groups show a higher preference for receiving bills in the mail compared to online. Conversely, the under 45 age groups show a stronger preference for receiving bills online.

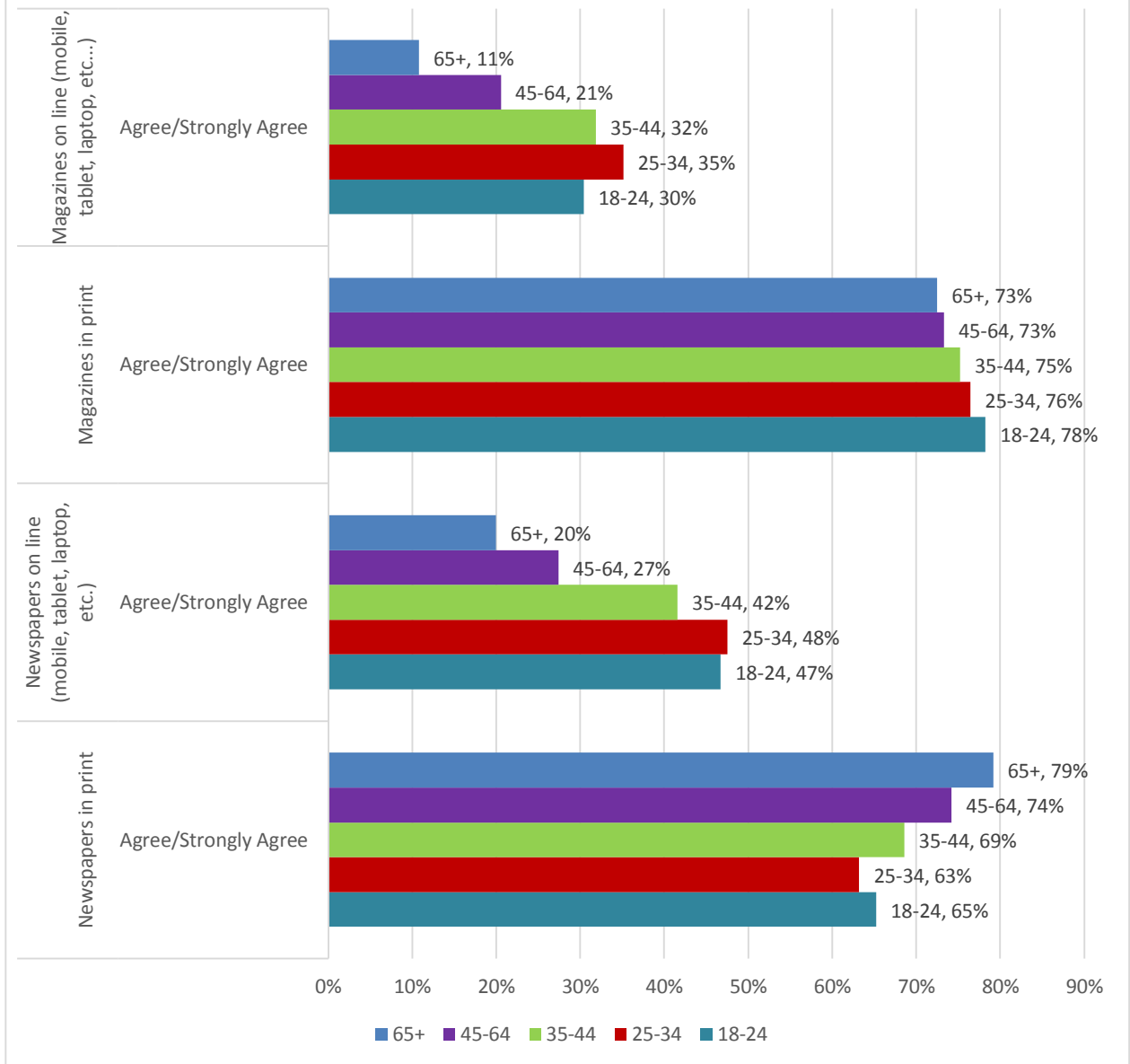


**9. I am more relaxed and receptive when I read:**



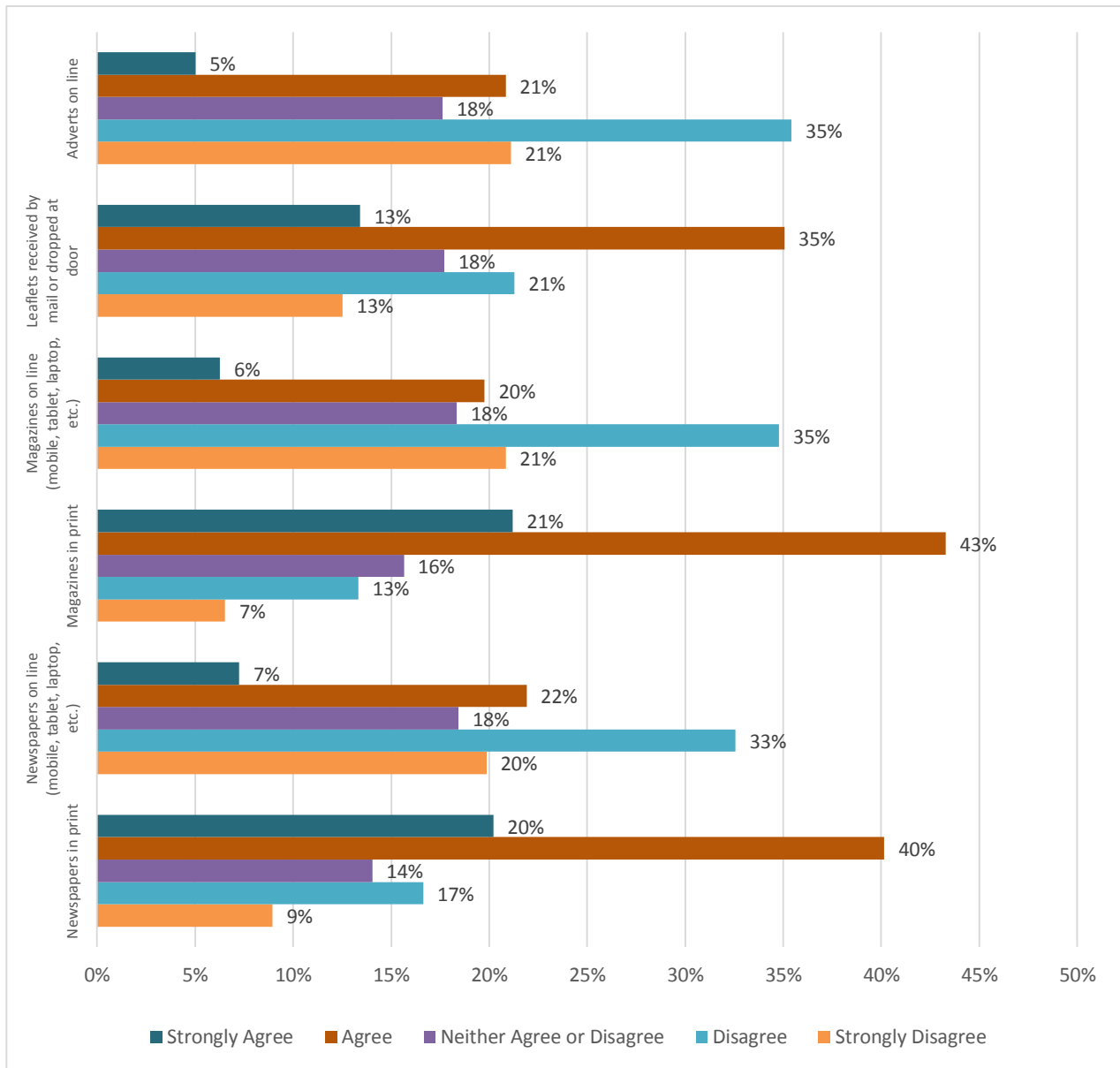
A clear preference for print emerges when reading newspapers and magazines and when considering relaxation and receptiveness. 71% indicated they were more relaxed and receptive when reading a newspaper in print compared to 36% who felt more relaxed and receptive when reading from a screen. 75% indicated that they were more relaxed and receptive when reading a printed magazine compared to 26% who felt more relaxed and receptive when reading from a screen.

## I am more relaxed and receptive when I read:



The opinion that reading newspapers and magazines in print makes readers more relaxed and receptive is held by all ages with over 63% showing a positive response across all age groups. The over 45's have a stronger response for newspapers in print than the under 45's and over 73% of all age groups preferred to read magazines in print. Interestingly, the younger age groups have a higher preference for magazines in print than the older age groups. The under 45 age groups are clearly more comfortable reading the news and magazines online than the over 45's.

## 10. I pay more attention to advertising when I read:



Advertisements in print are clearly given more attention than their online equivalent:

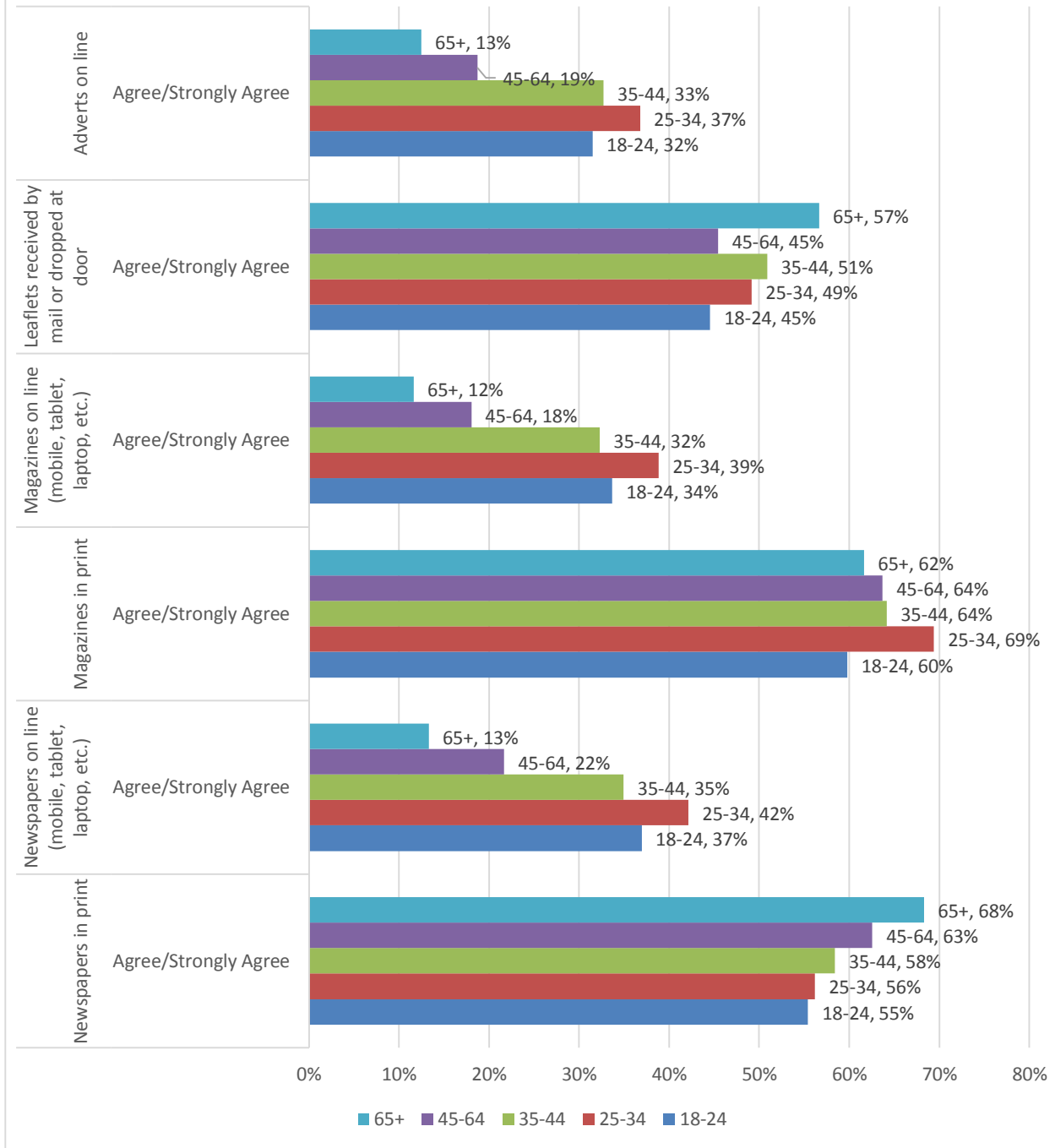
- 64% pay more attention to advertising when reading magazines in print / 26% pay more attention to advertising when reading magazines on line
- 60% pay more attention to advertising when reading newspapers in print / 29% pay more attention to advertising when reading newspapers on line
- 48% pay more attention to advertising when reading leaflets received by mail or dropped at the door
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## I pay more attention to advertising when I read:



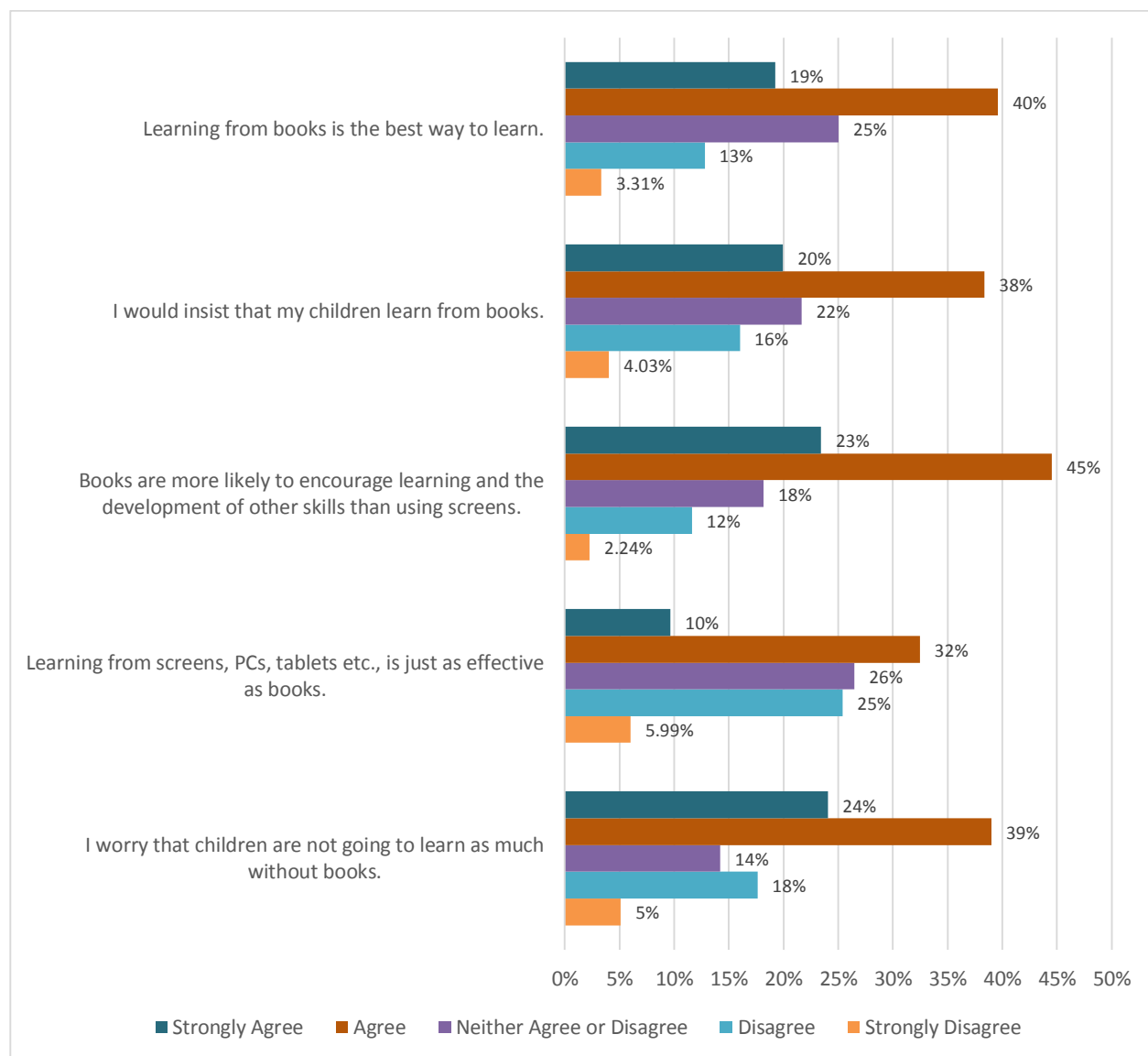
In general, the over 45 age groups indicate that they do not pay as much attention to online advertisements as the under 45 age groups. The older the respondents, the more attention they pay to ads in newspapers. This age difference is not seen for magazines, with the 25-34 age group showing the highest response for ads in printed magazines (69%).

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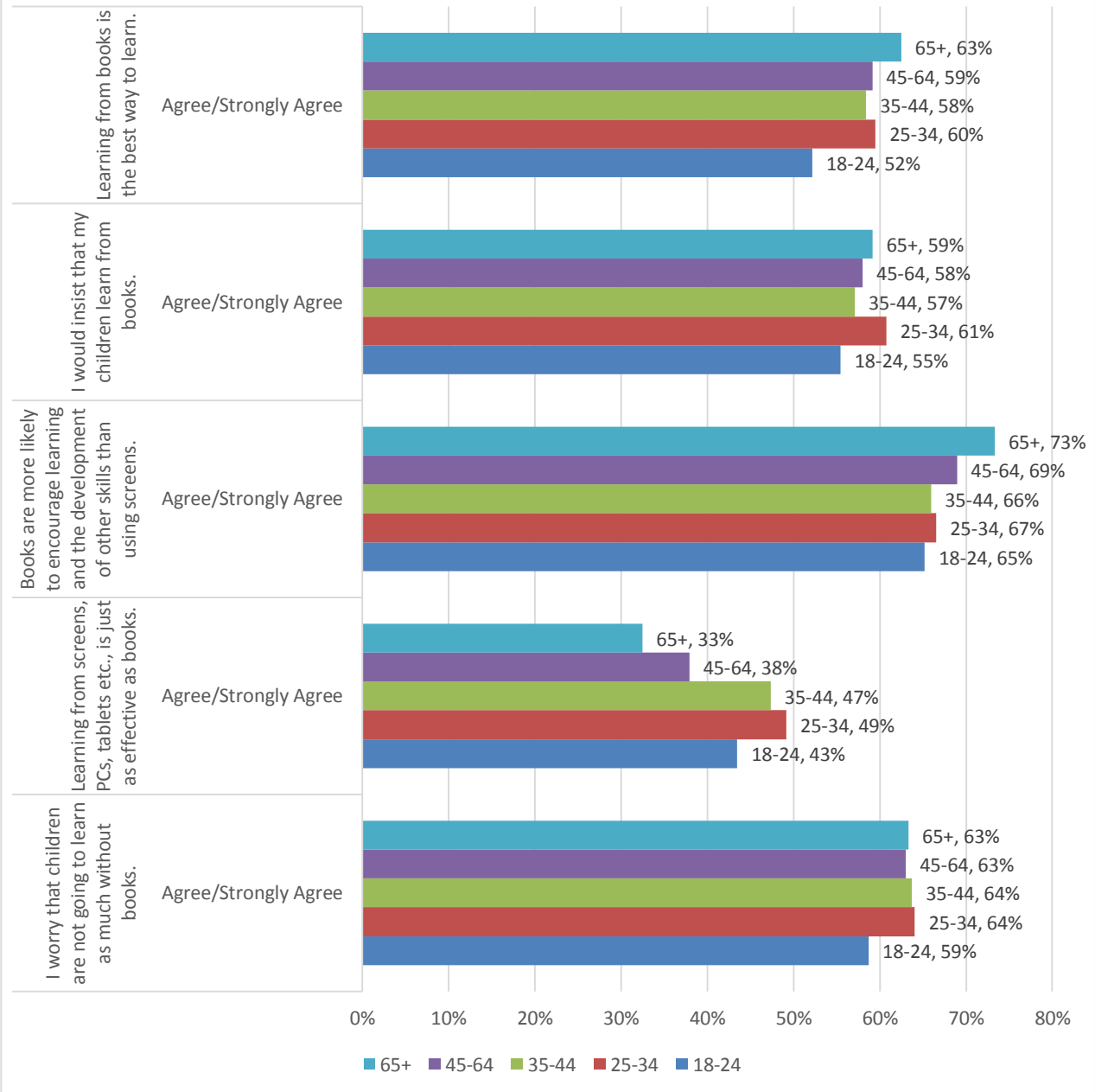
**11. Schools and other centres of learning are turning to on-screen learning and using printed books less.  
(Tell us how you react to the following statements)**



There are clear concerns that the drift away from books is affecting education.

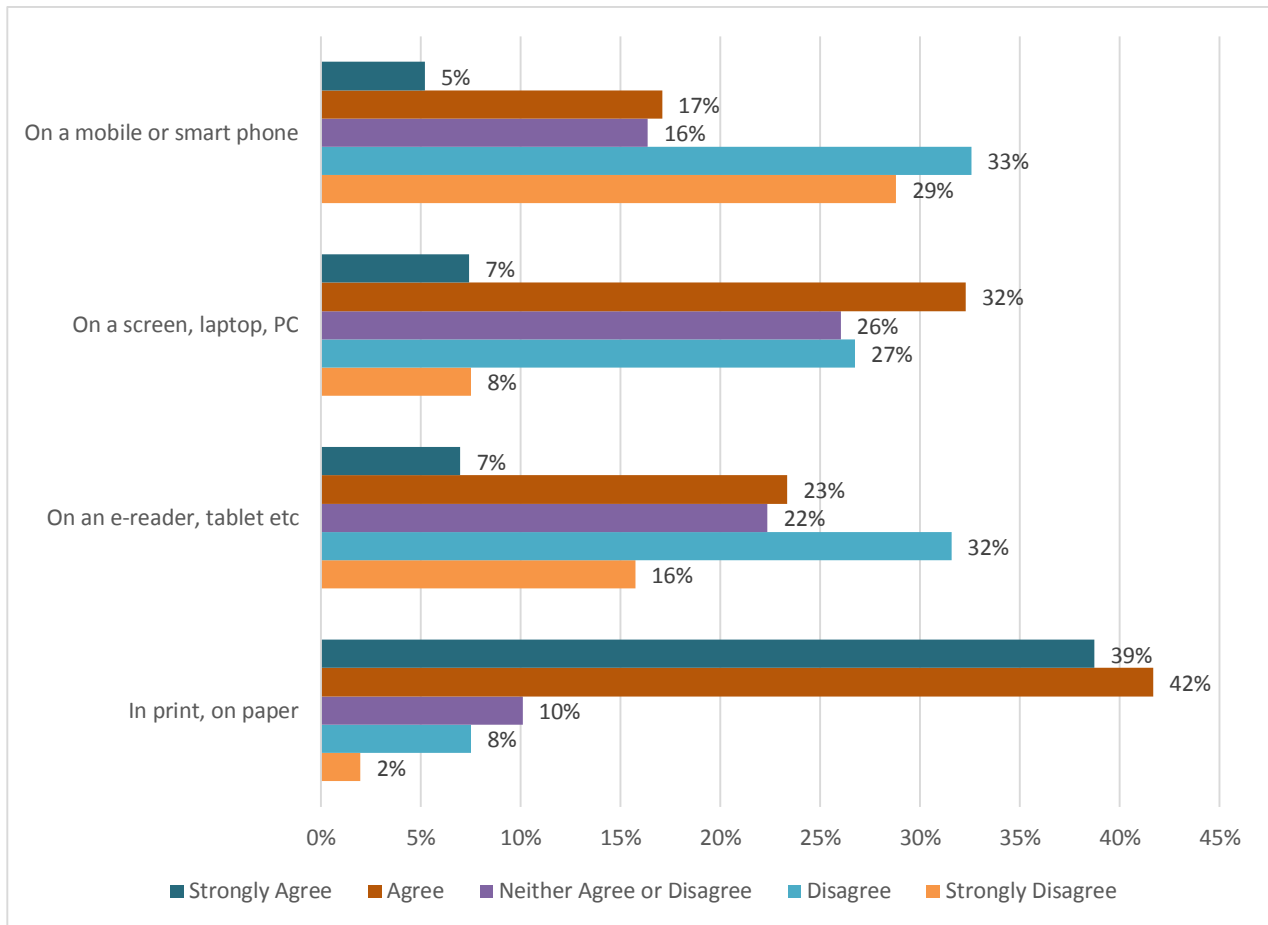
- 68% believe that books are more likely to encourage learning and the development of other skills than using screens.
- 63% worry that children are not going to learn as much without books.
- 59% believe that learning from books is the best way to learn.
- 58% would insist that their children learn from books.
- 42% believe that learning from screens, PCs, tablets etc. is just as effective as books.

## Schools and other centres of learning are turning to on-screen learning and using printed books less. (Tell us how you react to the following statements)

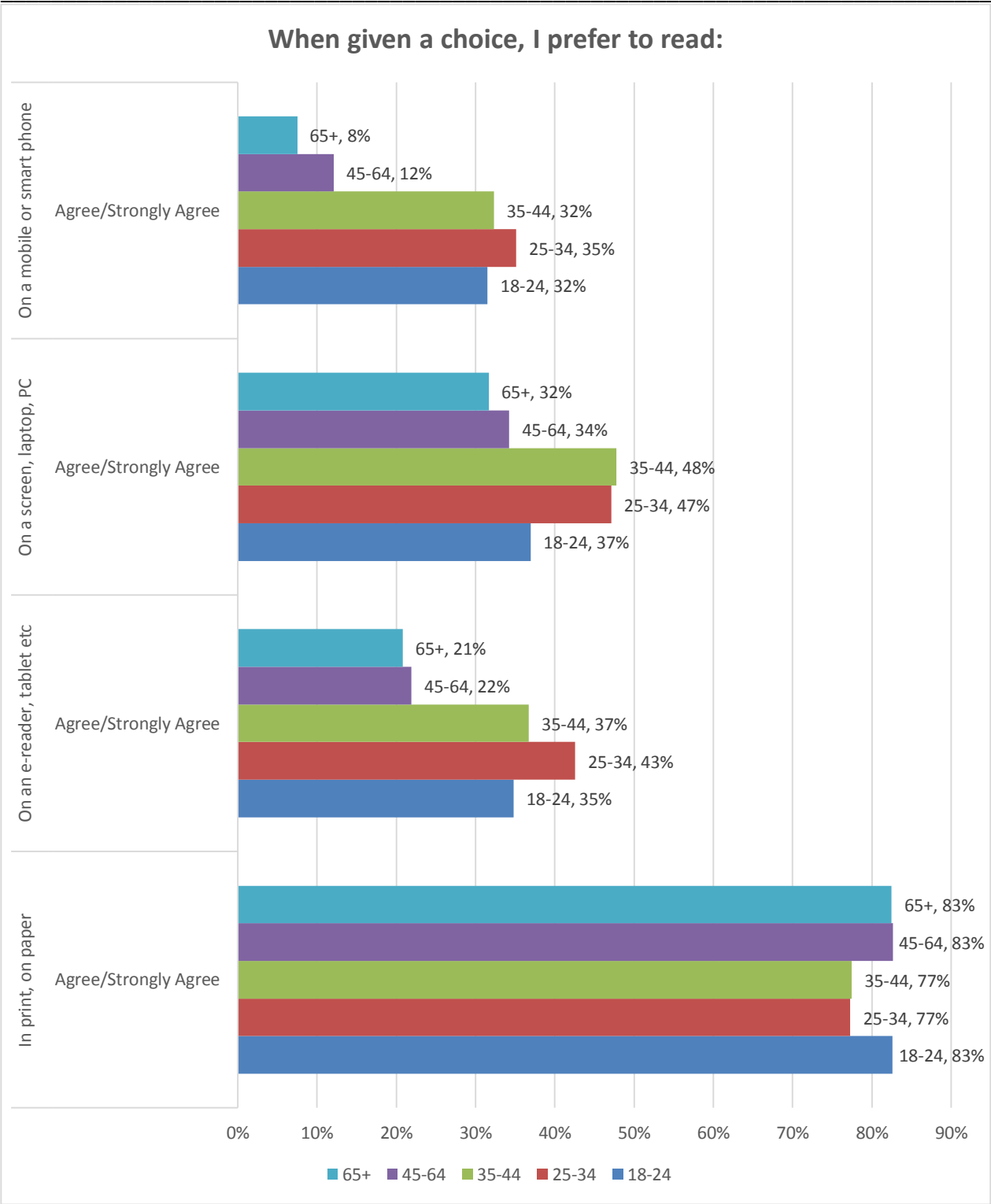


Books are favoured by the majority and even the younger generation who are far more digitally-savvy. The under 45 age groups appear more open to digital methods than older age groups. 65% to 73% across all age groups indicated that books are more likely to encourage learning and the development of other skills than using screens.

## 12. When given a choice, I prefer to read:



When given a choice, 81% prefer to read print on paper. These percentages drop to 39% for screens, laptops and PCs, 30% for e-readers and 22% for mobiles or smartphones.



The preference for print on paper is seen across all age groups and is strong at over 77%. The highest age group preference for reading on screen is at 48% for the 35-44 age group. The under 45 age groups show a stronger preference than the over 45's for reading on screens.

