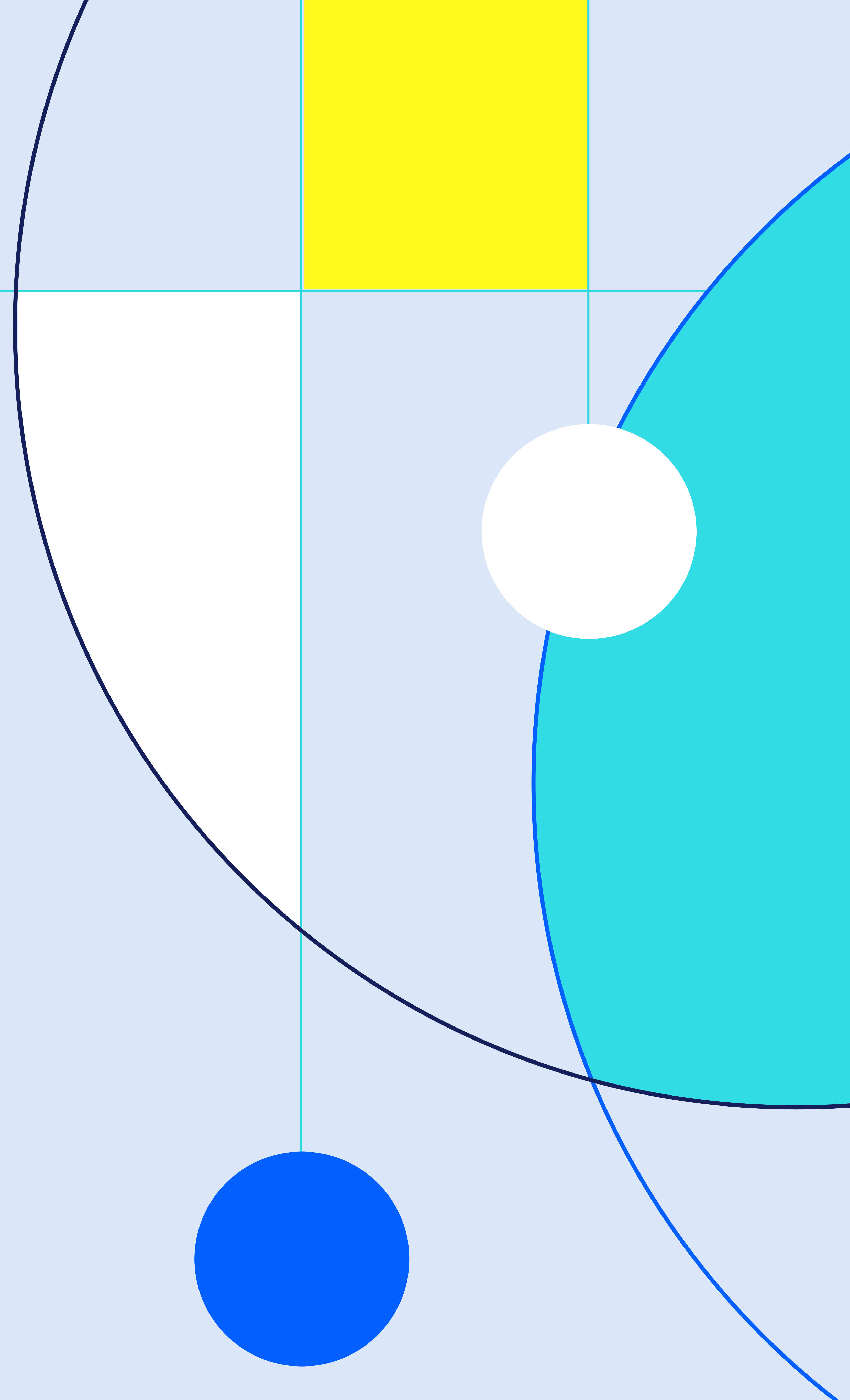
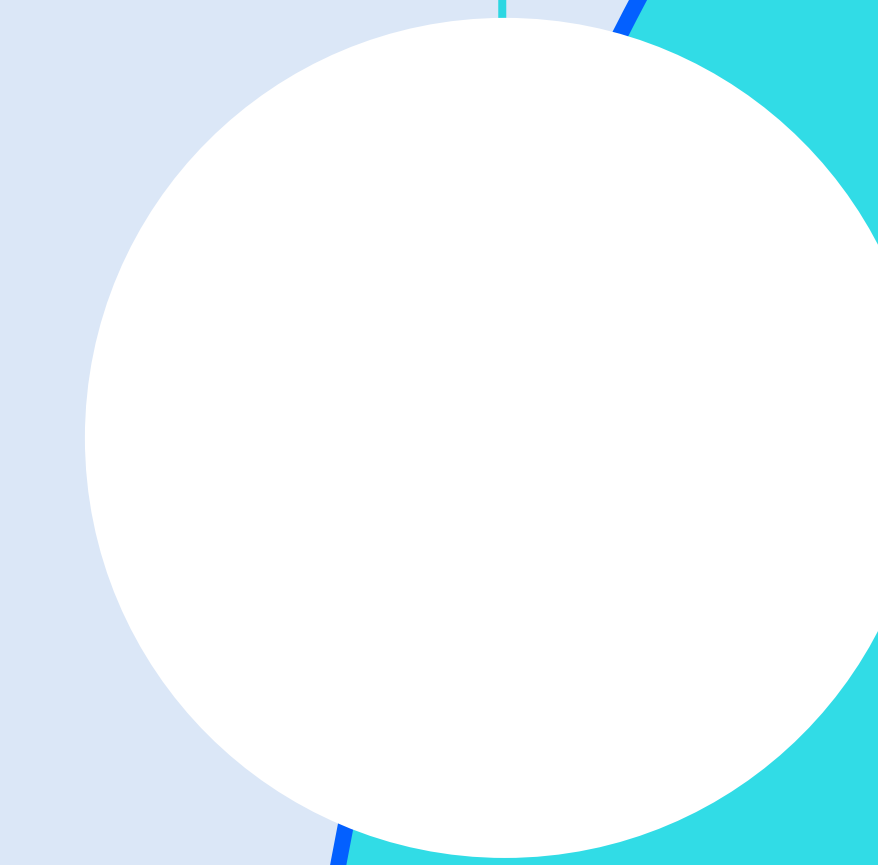
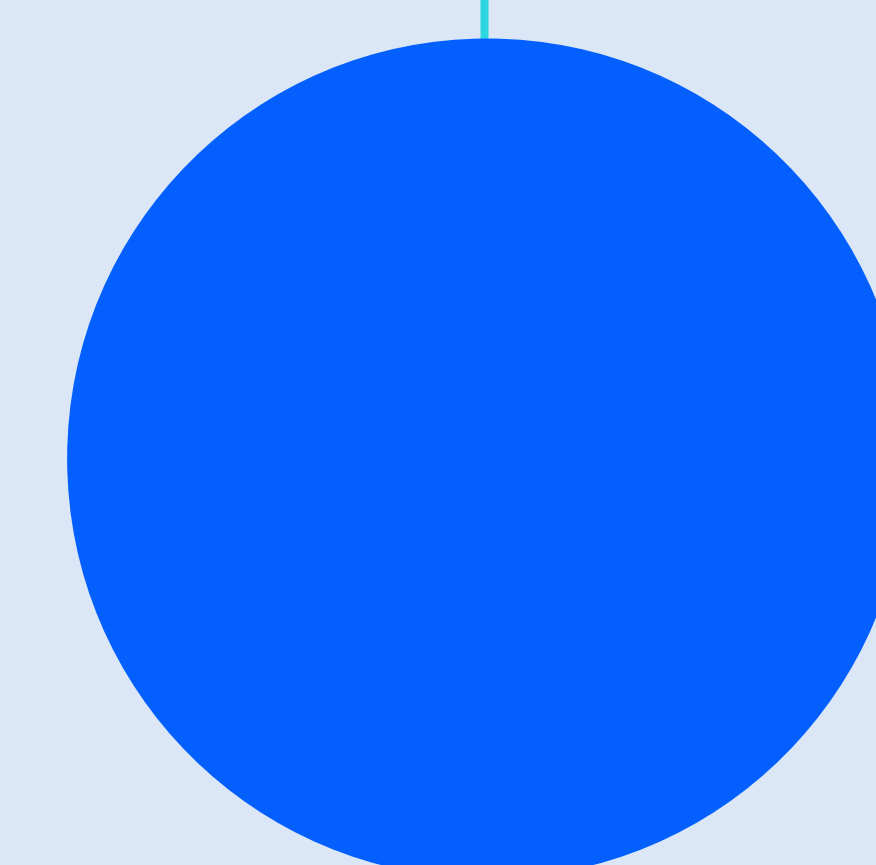
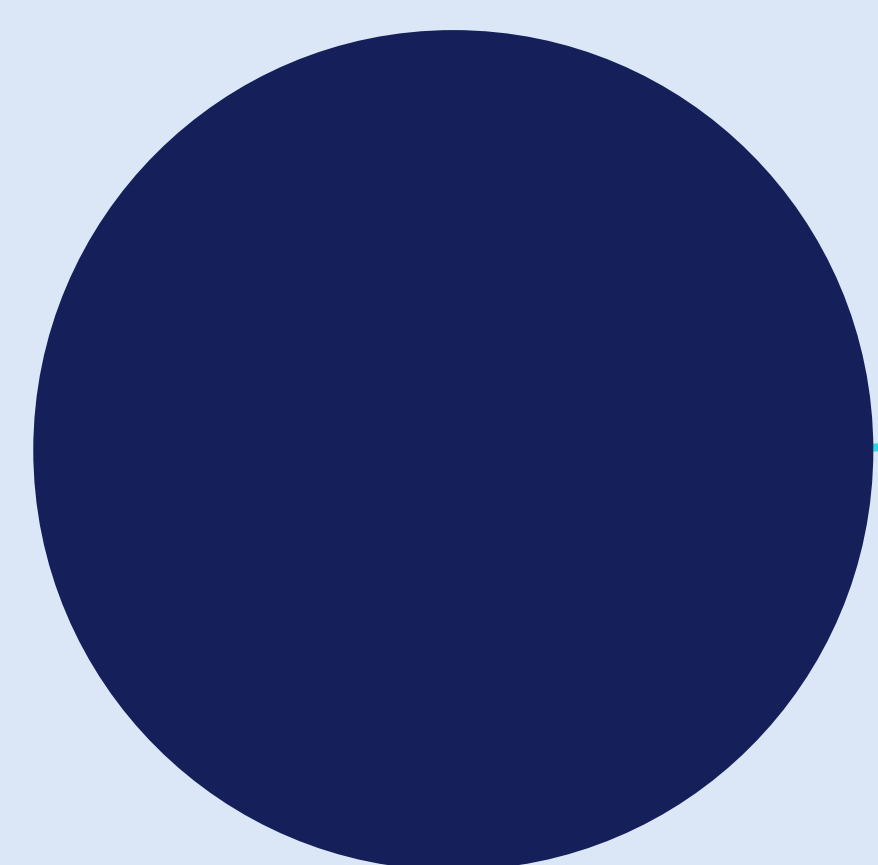


CISION®

Inside PR 2026:

Trends, challenges, and what's next

How PR pros are evolving
their strategies for a new era



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Executive Summary

The Inside PR 2026 report pulls back the curtain on the state of PR today, and what it reveals about where the industry is headed.

Based on insights from nearly 600 PR professionals across job levels and industries, the report looks at the challenges, opportunities, tools, and trends shaping the industry, empowering PR industry professionals with the intel they need to prepare, prioritize, and plan effectively for the year ahead.

Key Findings

The PR industry is in a state of flux:

PR professionals are grappling with shifting media dynamics, tighter budgets, and rapid technological change. While the media landscape and resource pressures are the top challenges, they also represent the biggest catalysts for innovation. Teams that can adapt quickly and strategically will lead the way.

Brand awareness reigns, but ROI is on the rise:

Brand awareness remains PR's north star, but the push for measurable business impact is growing stronger – especially among executives and agencies. As communications teams face mounting pressure to connect their work to the bottom line, proving ROI is no longer optional.

AI and human connection are both critical:

AI and automation are viewed as PR's biggest opportunity, with professionals embracing generative tools and analytics to save time and uncover insights. Yet human creativity, relationships, and storytelling remain irreplaceable. The future of PR belongs to those who balance machine efficiency with human authenticity.

Agility gaps reveal operational friction:

Executives perceive their teams as highly agile, but staff on the ground report structural barriers that slow responsiveness, from team size and hierarchy to limited data access. True agility will come from streamlining approvals, right-sizing teams, and investing in real-time insights that enable faster, smarter decision-making.

Storytelling, strategy, and skills drive success:

Storytelling and content creation continue to top the list of most valuable PR skills, followed closely by media relations and strategic planning. The best PR pros will merge creativity with analytics and align storytelling directly to brand and business outcomes.

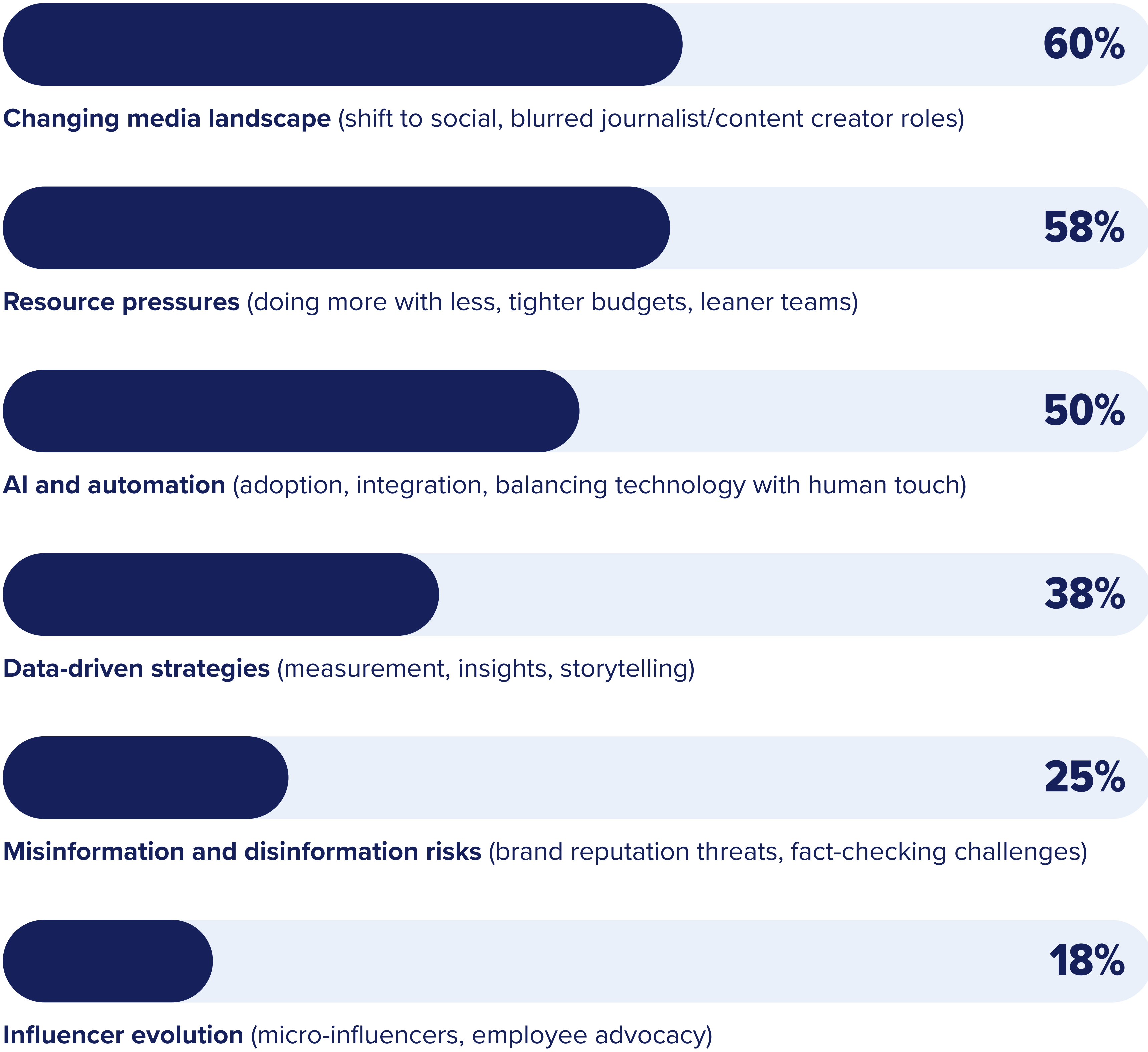
PR Pressure Points: Media & Resource Challenges

We begin our report with a look at the industry’s biggest challenges right now, as understanding these obstacles is essential to charting a path forward.

While the changing media landscape and resource pressures emerged as near-equal top challenges overall (60% and 58% respectively), a deeper dive into how answers vary by job level reveals that concern about resources intensifies as you move down the hierarchy. Executives prioritize the changing media landscape (64%), while managers, who must execute with constrained budgets and teams, cite resource pressures most frequently (67%).

Agency and in-house PR teams face parallel but distinct challenges. Agency teams are navigating external disruption – 71% cite the changing media landscape and 60% cite AI as top concerns – while in-house teams are fighting internal battles, with 63% citing resource pressures and 49% struggling with data-driven strategy demands. These gaps reveal how business model differences shape daily priorities.

What are your team’s top three challenges right now?
(All Respondents)



67% of managers named **resource pressures** as one of the biggest challenges vs. just **45%** of executives.

The Road Ahead: PR Challenges for 2026

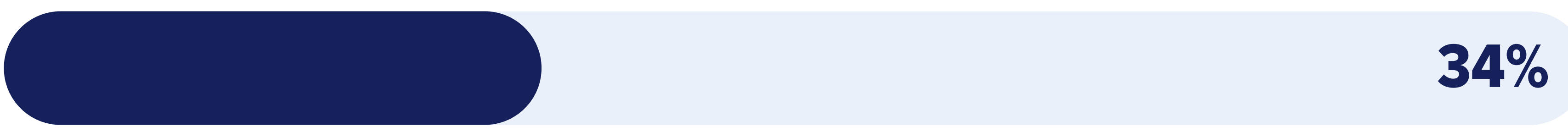
When asked to choose the biggest anticipated challenge ahead, resource pressures – doing more with less, tighter budgets, leaner teams – emerged as the biggest hurdle to clear in 2026 (chosen by 34% of survey participants) among all participants, with the changing media landscape close behind (chosen by 21%).

One notable difference when comparing answers by organizational type: For agency teams, the top two predicted challenges are swapped, with 32% citing the changing media landscape and 27% citing resource pressures.

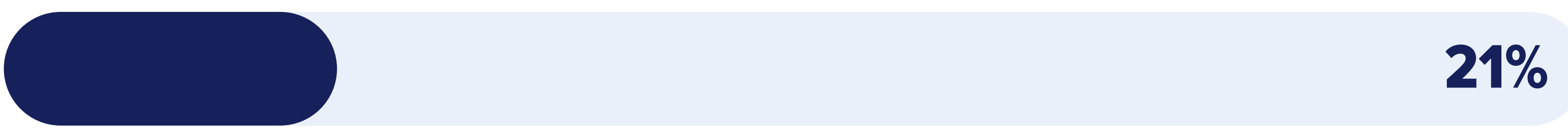
These findings make it clear that PR professionals are navigating a period of intense transformation. With the media landscape in flux and resources stretched thin, many teams are under pressure to do more with less.

The rise of AI and automation adds another layer of complexity; however, it’s also creating opportunities. Those who embrace technology strategically and focus on agility, efficiency, and continuous upskilling will be best positioned to thrive in this evolving environment.

Which trend will be your No. 1 challenge in 2026?
(All Respondents)



Resource pressures (doing more with less, tighter budgets, leaner teams)



Changing media landscape (shift to social, blurred journalist/content creator roles)

The Agility Gap: Perception vs. Reality

From the ability to respond quickly in the face of an emerging crisis to the capacity to react to breaking news and jump on materializing trends, agility is key in PR.

While the majority of PR professionals feel they are equipped to move quickly when needs and opportunities arise – 57% of respondents describe their teams as “very” or “extremely agile” – there’s more to the story: Executives rate their teams as “extremely agile” at twice the rate of their colleagues (33% versus 14%), which suggests leadership overestimates organizational responsiveness.

There’s also a stark contrast when comparing agency and in-house teams: 29% of agency professionals rate their teams as “extremely” agile – more than twice the amount of in-house PR professionals at 13%.

Meanwhile, structural barriers seem to prevent true agility: 63% of respondents cite team size and structure, and 53% point to slow executive decision-making speed – a finding that was consistent across job levels.

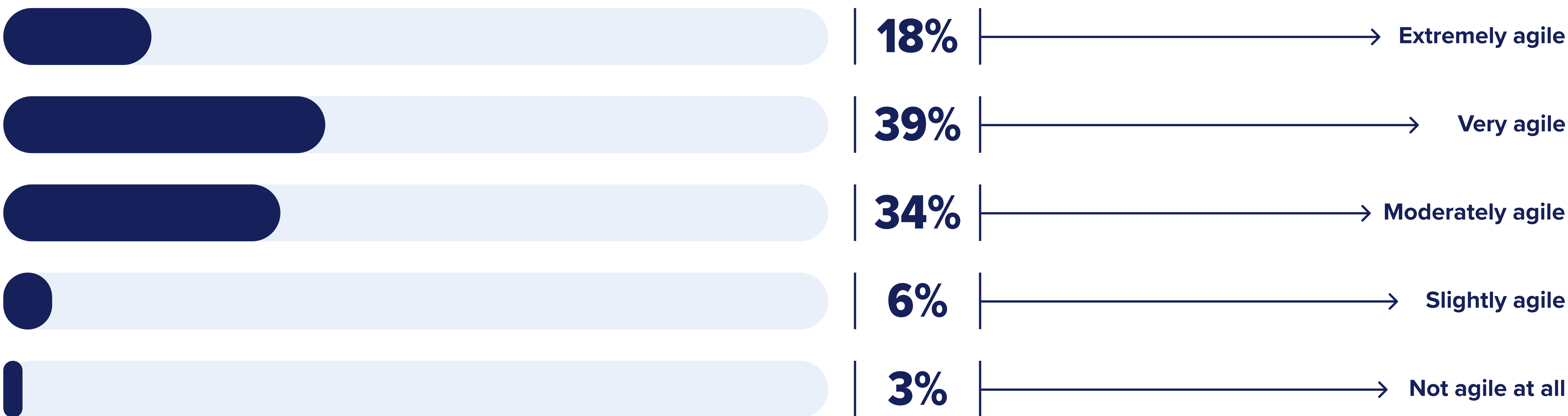
A closer look at how agency versus in-house teams answered this question, however, revealed some distinct differences: While team size and structure took the top spot for agency teams, in-house teams see access to real-time

data (or lack thereof) as the main factor getting in the way of their ability to act quickly.

Another outlier: Agency teams were remarkably more likely than their in-house counterparts to cite skill diversity (42% vs. 24%) and access to the right tools and technology (32% vs. 4%) as hindrances to their team’s agility.

The gap between perceived agility and structural barriers represents a clear opportunity: Organizations that address structural impediments – optimizing teams, streamlining approvals, investing in real-time data infrastructure – can transform strained responsiveness into genuine strategic agility.

How agile is your team when responding to unexpected events or opportunities?
(All Respondents)



Priorities for 2026: Brand Awareness and the Bottom Line

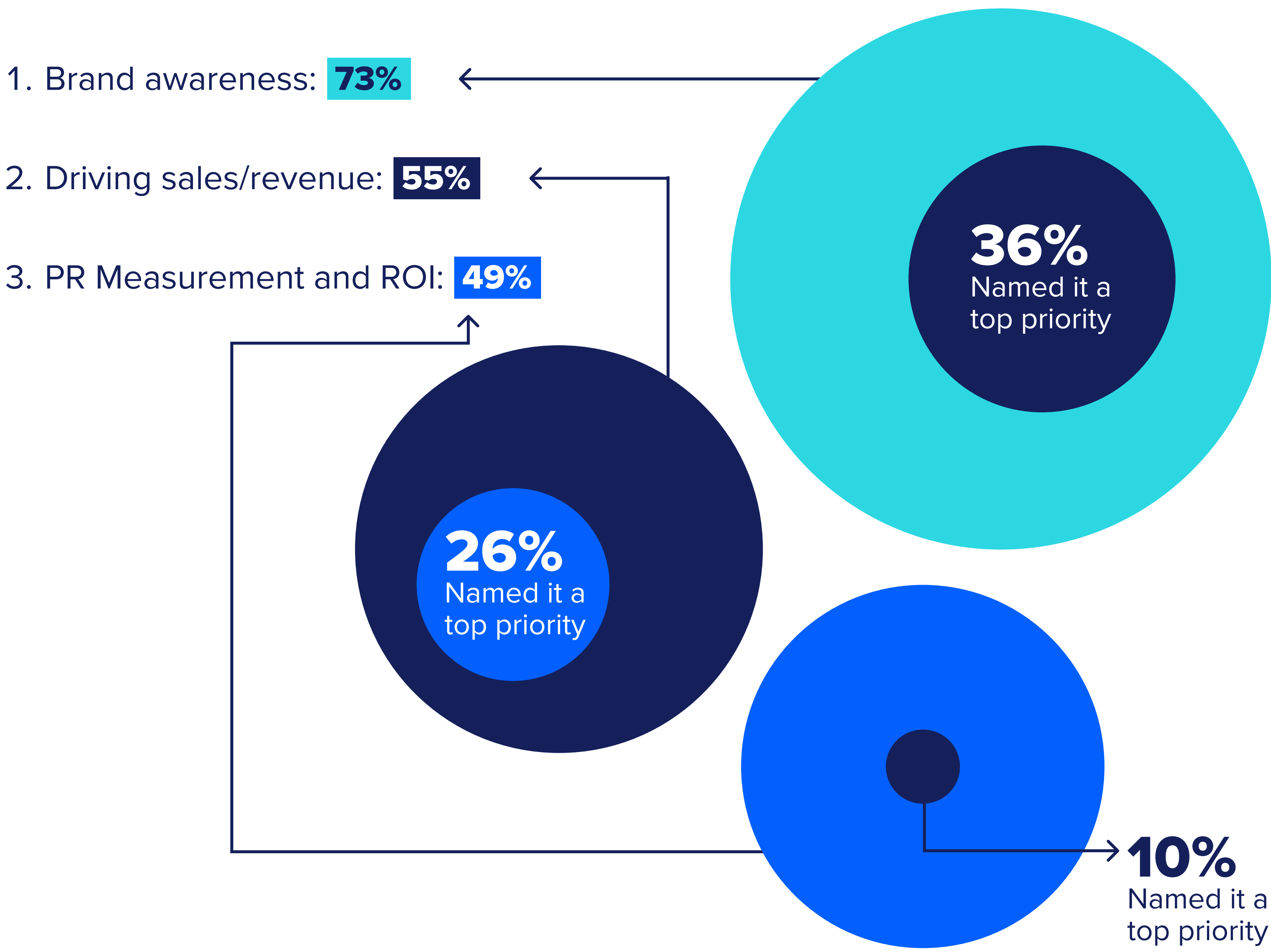
For PR leaders setting their strategies for the year ahead, knowing what others in the industry are prioritizing can help them benchmark their own plans, allocate resources more effectively, and ensure they’re staying competitive in a rapidly evolving landscape. When asked about their top priorities for 2026, brand awareness remains the name of the game for PR, with 36% calling it their top priority, followed by driving sales and revenue (26%).

An even closer look at the results reveals slightly different priorities for executives, who are more concerned with driving sales and revenue than their brand-awareness-minded colleagues. This discrepancy suggests a potential misalignment between what leadership wants PR to deliver and what practitioners see as the profession's core value.

A similar gap exists between agency and in-house teams: While agencies consider driving sales and revenue their top priority (likely because they are often evaluated by short-term client results and ROI), in-house teams, who tend to take a longer-term view of reputation, are far more focused on brand awareness.

Top priorities: (All Respondents)

When we asked PR professionals across all levels and organizations to rank their top three priorities for 2026, these were the findings:



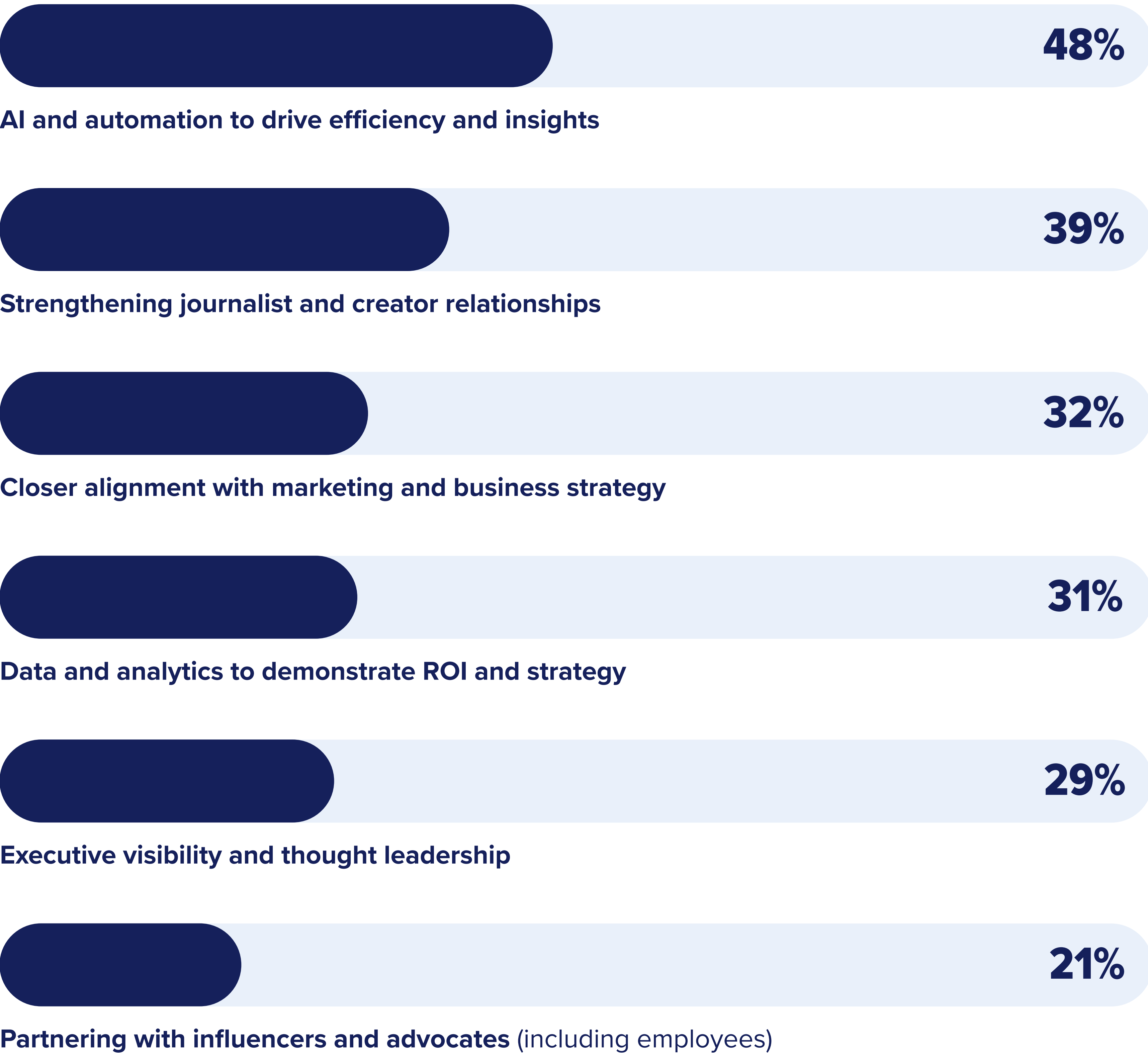
AI, Authenticity, and Alignment: PR's Biggest Areas of Opportunities

Looking ahead, there is a clear focus within the industry on technology, relationships, and strategic alignment. When we asked PR professionals to select the areas where they saw the greatest opportunity for their teams in 2026, AI and automation emerged as the definitive top answer at 48%, followed closely by strengthening journalist and creator relationships (39%) and closer alignment with marketing and business strategy (32%).

These findings were consistent across all job levels and organizational types, signaling an industry-wide commitment to blending creativity with data, and tactical execution with business insight. PR professionals recognize that AI-powered tools can free up time for strategy and creativity while improving targeting and measurement. Yet even as technology takes center stage, human connection remains core to effective communication.

Meanwhile, “closer alignment with marketing and business strategy” points to a continued convergence between PR and other disciplines. In the year ahead, the most successful PR strategies will balance automation with cross-team collaboration and authentic outreach.

Where do you see the greatest opportunity for your team in 2026?
(All Respondents)



The Tools and Tech Driving PR Success

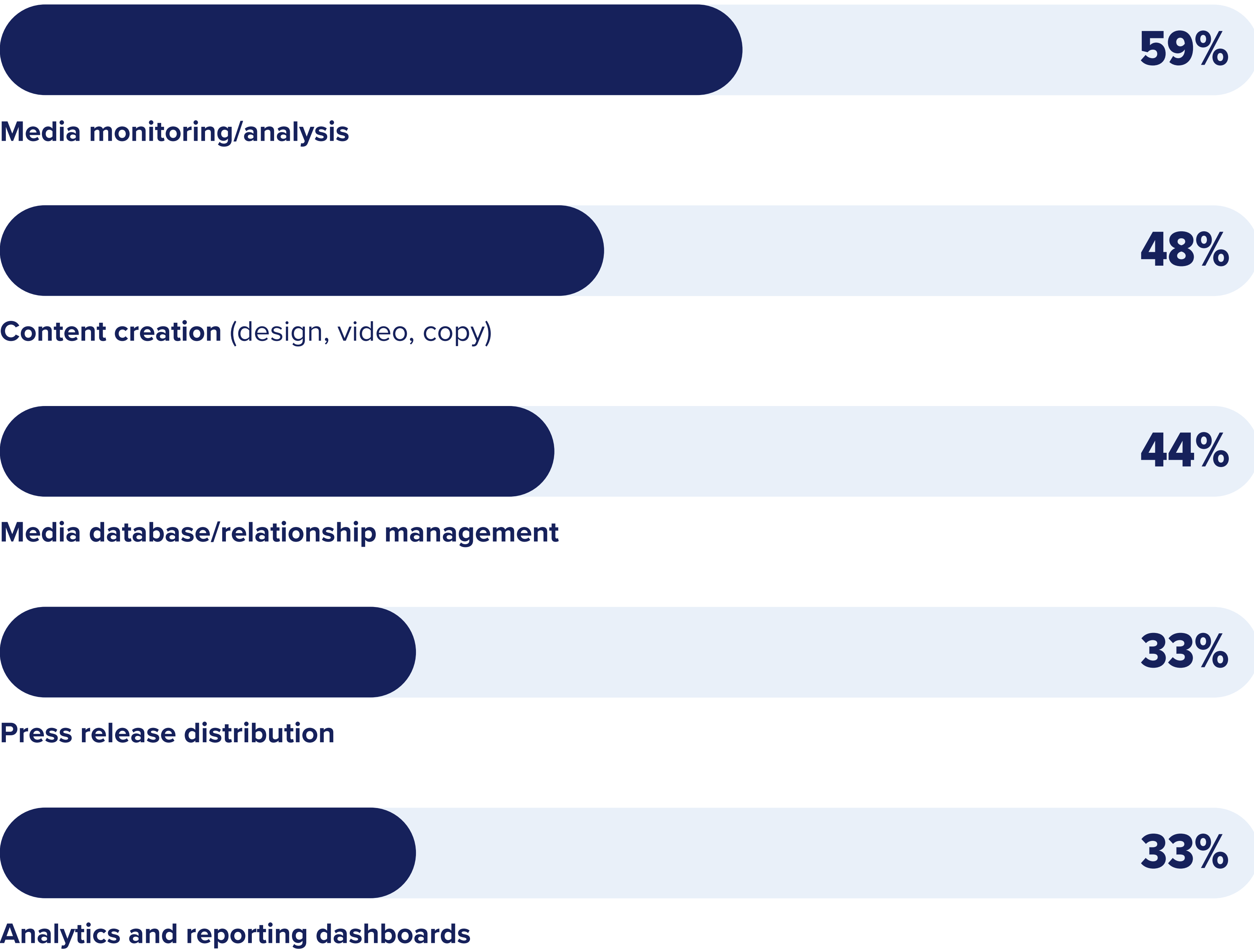
For PR teams, understanding which tools their peers and competitors depend on most isn’t just a curiosity – it’s a strategic move. It reveals where the industry is investing, where competitive advantages are emerging, and how to future-proof your own communications toolkit. According to our survey, media monitoring and analysis tools are considered most critical to success, cited by 60% of respondents. Content creation tools followed at 49%, with media database or relationship management tools rounding out the top three at 44%.

Together, these findings highlight a clear industry emphasis on data-driven intelligence, efficient content development, and effective relationship management as the cornerstones of modern PR and comms.

When broken down by job level, specialists and individual contributors

place even more value on media monitoring than their superiors, particularly the C-suite (64% versus 52%, respectively). These findings indicate that those on the front lines rely heavily on real-time insights to guide tactics and execution while their superiors are focusing more on overarching strategy and business alignment.

Top five tools PR teams say are critical to success.
(All Respondents)



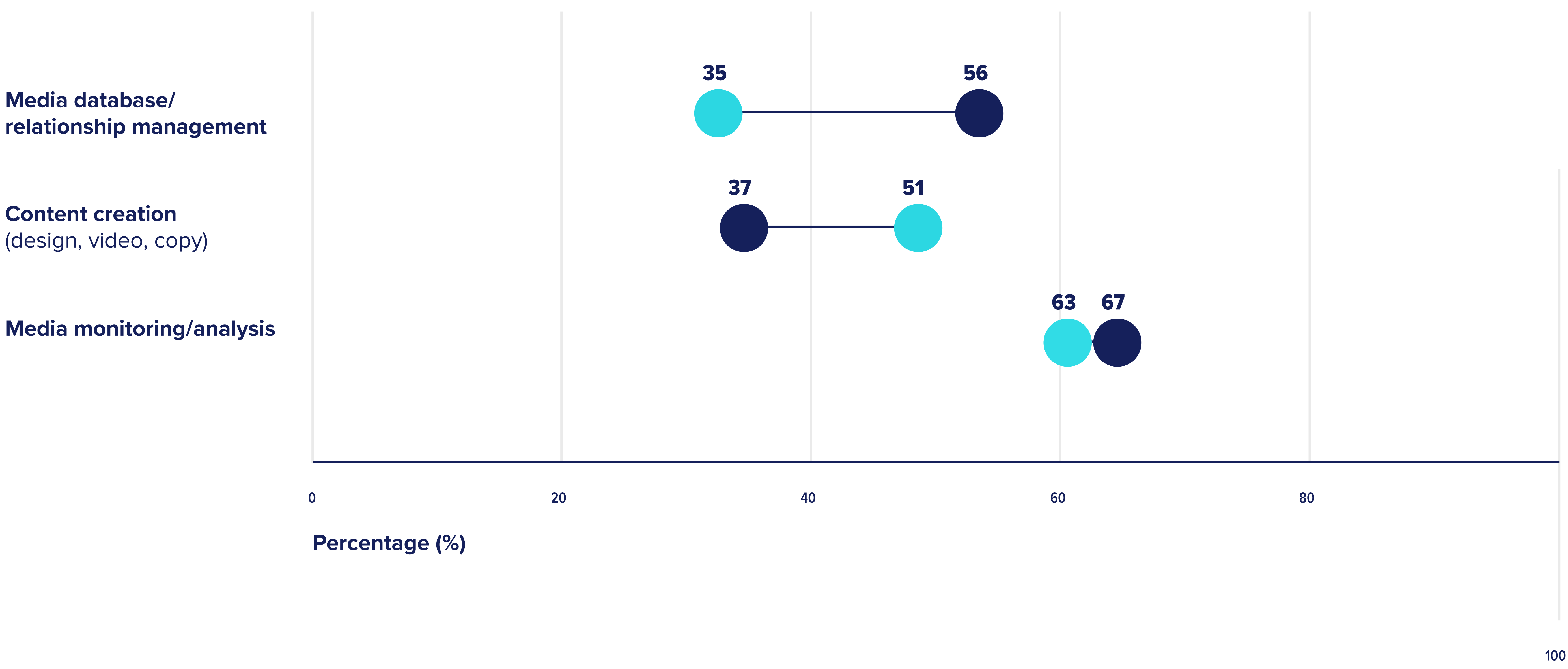
The Tools and Tech Driving PR Success, continued

After media monitoring, agency teams place much higher value on media database/relationship management tools and less emphasis on content creation tools than in-house teams. This contrast could stem from the differences between agency and in-house models: agency teams must sustain broad journalist and influencer relationships to meet the needs of diverse clients, whereas in-house teams prioritize brand storytelling and owned content that advance awareness objectives.

Another factor could be that many in-house teams have already cultivated a strong core group of media contacts, reducing their reliance on relationship management tools and freeing them up to focus on crafting compelling narratives, branded content, and integrated campaigns.

Which tools are critical to your team’s success?

In-House Agency



Skills In Demand: Comms, Creativity, Connection

With new technologies reshaping how PR work gets done, professionals are doubling down on the core skills that set them apart. When asked about the skills that will get PR professionals ahead in 2026, 59% named “storytelling and content creation,” making it the top answer, followed by “media relations” (44%). “Strategic planning” and “AI integration” nearly tied for third place (34% and 32%, respectively).

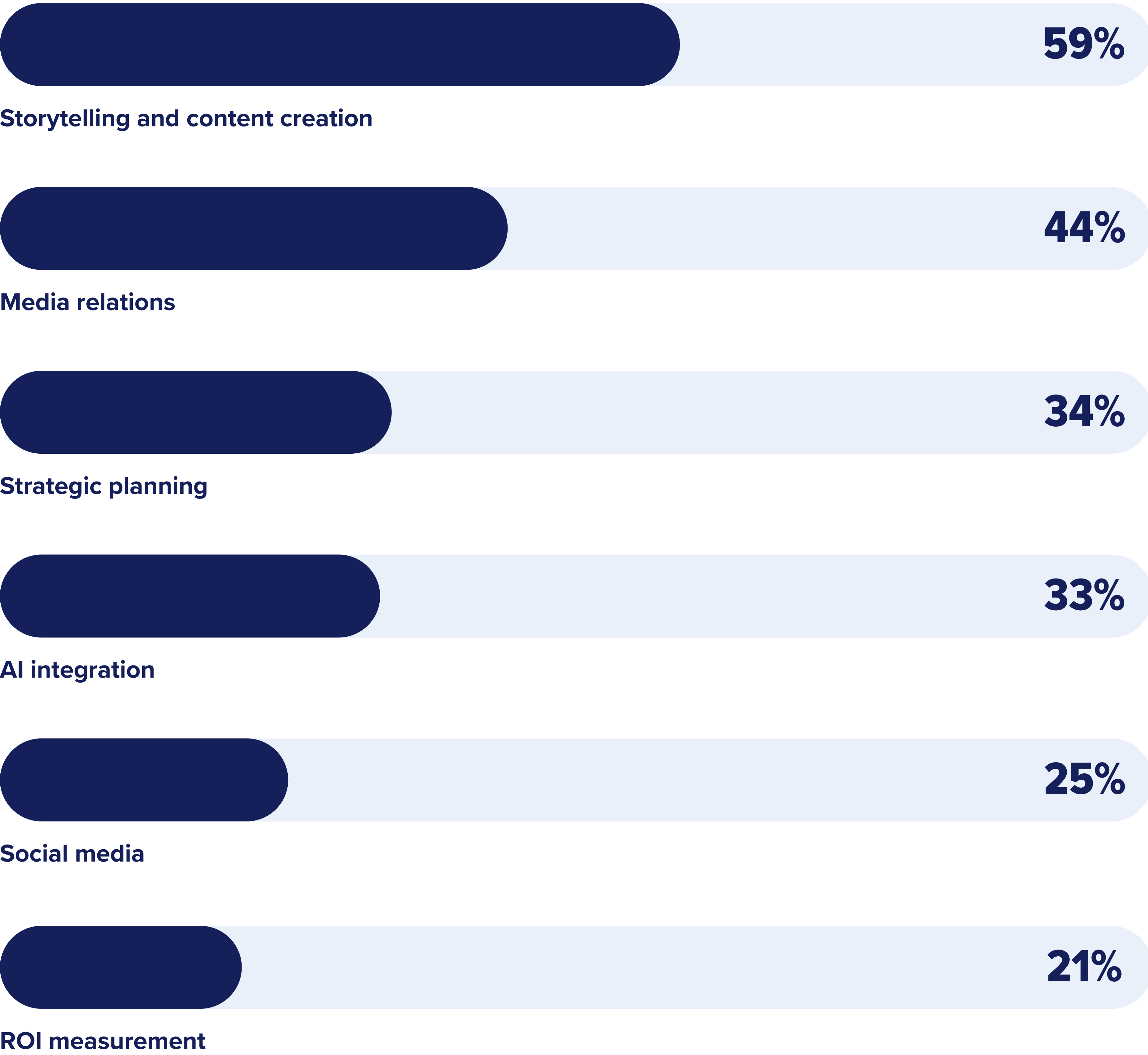
These findings indicate that, despite the many challenges PR pros face, storytelling is still at the heart of what they do. The ability to illustrate what a brand does, the benefits it brings, and what it stands for, will remain critical in 2026 and beyond.

There are similar results when broken down by job role, with storytelling coming in first place across all levels of seniority. However, for specialists and individual contributors, media relations (at 51%) is a very close second to storytelling (52%), which suggests that those on the front lines of PR

are focused on cultivating relationships and building their networks while their senior counterparts are taking the lead on shaping strategy and storytelling.

Media relations again features prominently when looking at agency and in-house teams. However, agency pros put a far greater emphasis on it (named by 60% vs. 35% of in-house teams), indicating that their need to juggle multiple clients with many audiences (and sector-specific journalists) makes it a must-have skill.

Which skills matter most in 2026?
(All Respondents)



From Ideas to Output: AI’s Role in PR

Today, there’s no separation between the future of PR and the topic of AI. The fact that AI adoption is both a challenge and an opportunity for PR teams underscores this notion. We wanted to shed light on how PR teams are using AI now to understand where more opportunities lie.

Forty percent of PR pros surveyed noted that they used AI-powered media monitoring tools, and 31% said AI features were part of their analytics and reporting dashboards. In terms of specific AI use cases, 72% said they use generative tools like ChatGPT to brainstorm ideas, and 67% are working with AI to write or refine press releases, pitches or other content.

One data point of note: A mere 8% say they don’t use generative AI tools, indicating that the technology has fast become ubiquitous across the industry.

When splitting the responses by agency and in-house teams, 73% of in-house PR pros say they use AI to write press releases, more than agencies at 66%.

This may reflect that in-house teams are further ahead in their AI journeys, possibly because they are better equipped to implement AI into their workflow without client constraints, or because they are turning to AI as a way to offset smaller budgets and leaner resources.

In terms of job roles, those in senior positions are using AI more to write press releases, pitches, or content. This may be an indicator that they lean more on AI for the heavy lift of creating content to free up time so they can focus on other work. A stat that jumps out: 80% of managers are using AI to brainstorm ideas and 60% using it for research on topics, journalists and trends. This skews higher than other job seniority level.

How is your team currently using generative AI tools? *(All Respondents)*



Final Thoughts

The findings in this report point to a profession navigating both tradition and rapid transformation. Storytelling and trust-building remain essential, but PR teams must adapt to evolving tools, expectations, and pressures.

To stay ahead, leaders and practitioners alike should focus on aligning strategy with execution, removing barriers to agility, embracing AI with intention, strengthening data and storytelling capabilities, and maintaining the human relationships that remain at the core of effective communication.

Ultimately, the future of PR will reward those who move quickly, think strategically, and pair creativity with measurable impact. The challenges ahead are significant, but so are the opportunities for teams willing to evolve, collaborate, and lead with insight and authenticity.

Methodology

Cision conducted its Inside PR 2026 report survey in September and October of 2025, collecting responses from 561 industry professionals across the U.S. and UK. Surveys were emailed to our database of customers and subscribers, as well as shared across our social media channels and newsletters.

Survey respondents represented all job levels – from executives (C-suite, founders, principals, etc.) and senior leadership (VPs, directors, etc.), management level and individual contributors – and came from agencies, in-house teams, nonprofits, and the public sector, spanning small organizations (<50 employees) to global enterprises (500+).

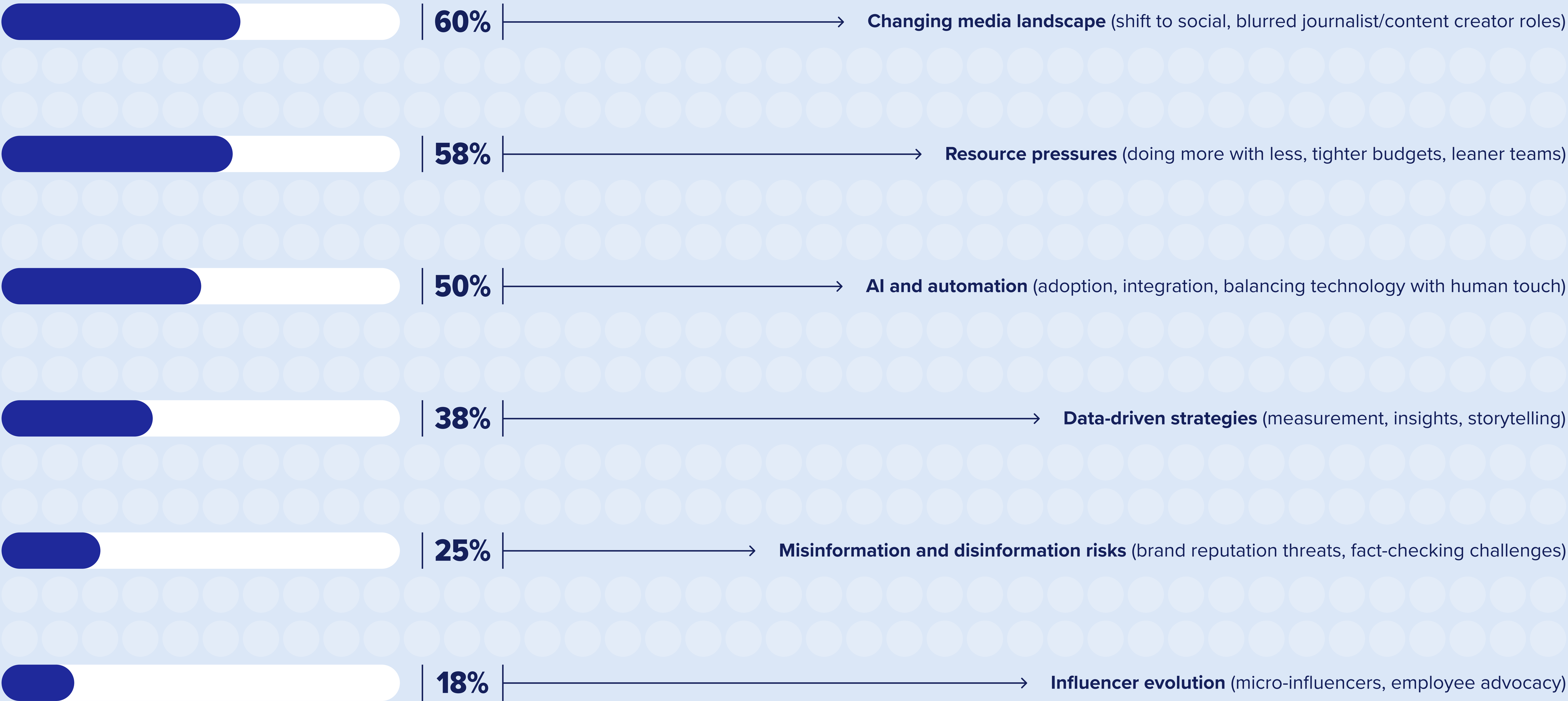
For select questions throughout this report, respondents were permitted to choose more than one answer, resulting in percentages exceeding 100%. A portion of the questions asked in the survey were also optional, so some questions may have been skipped by participants, resulting in percentages less than 100%.

Want a deeper dive? The appendix that follows includes the complete survey results. This section features the full set of charts, including data from all respondents, breakouts by job level, and comparisons between agency and in-house teams.

Appendix

Which industry trends are your team's top challenges right now?

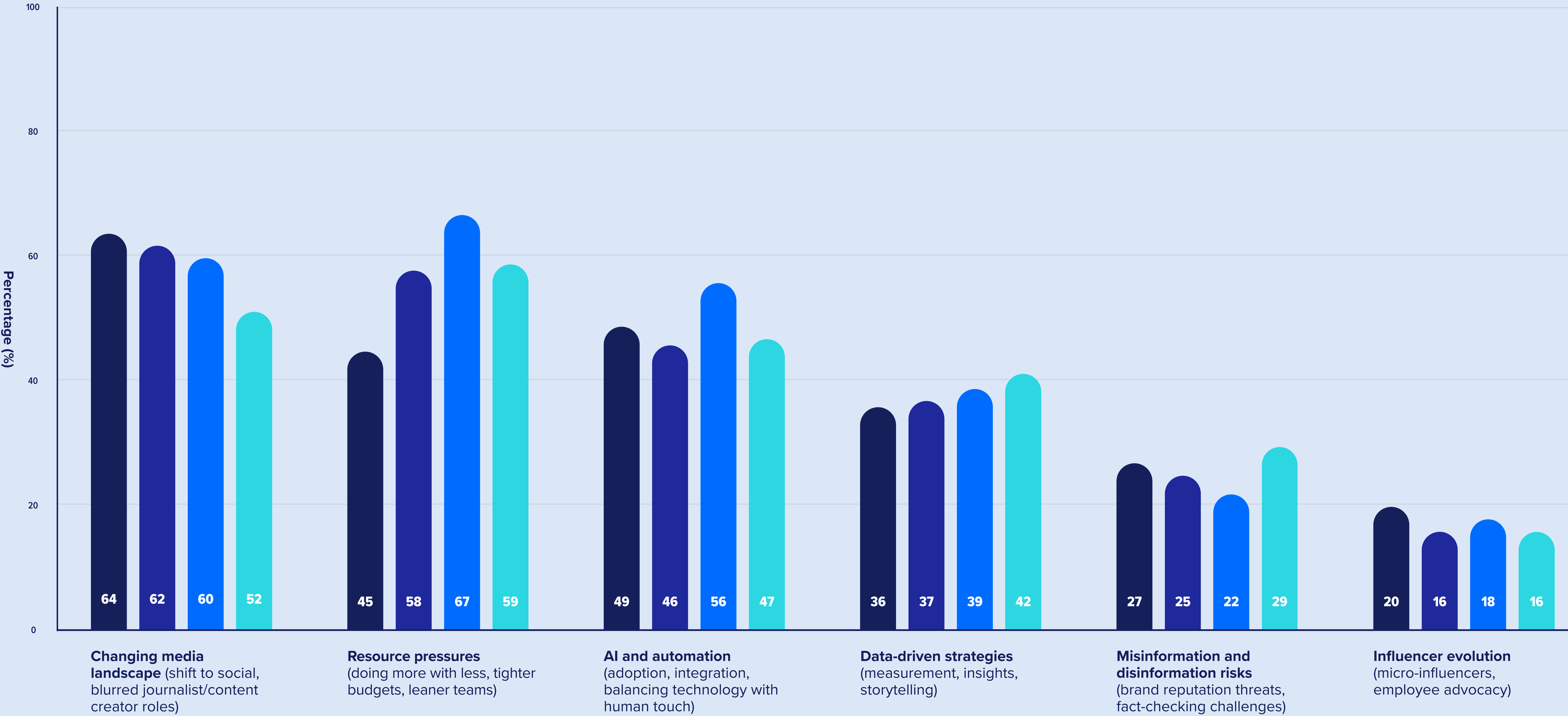
(All respondents)



Which industry trends are your team's top challenges right now?

(By job level)

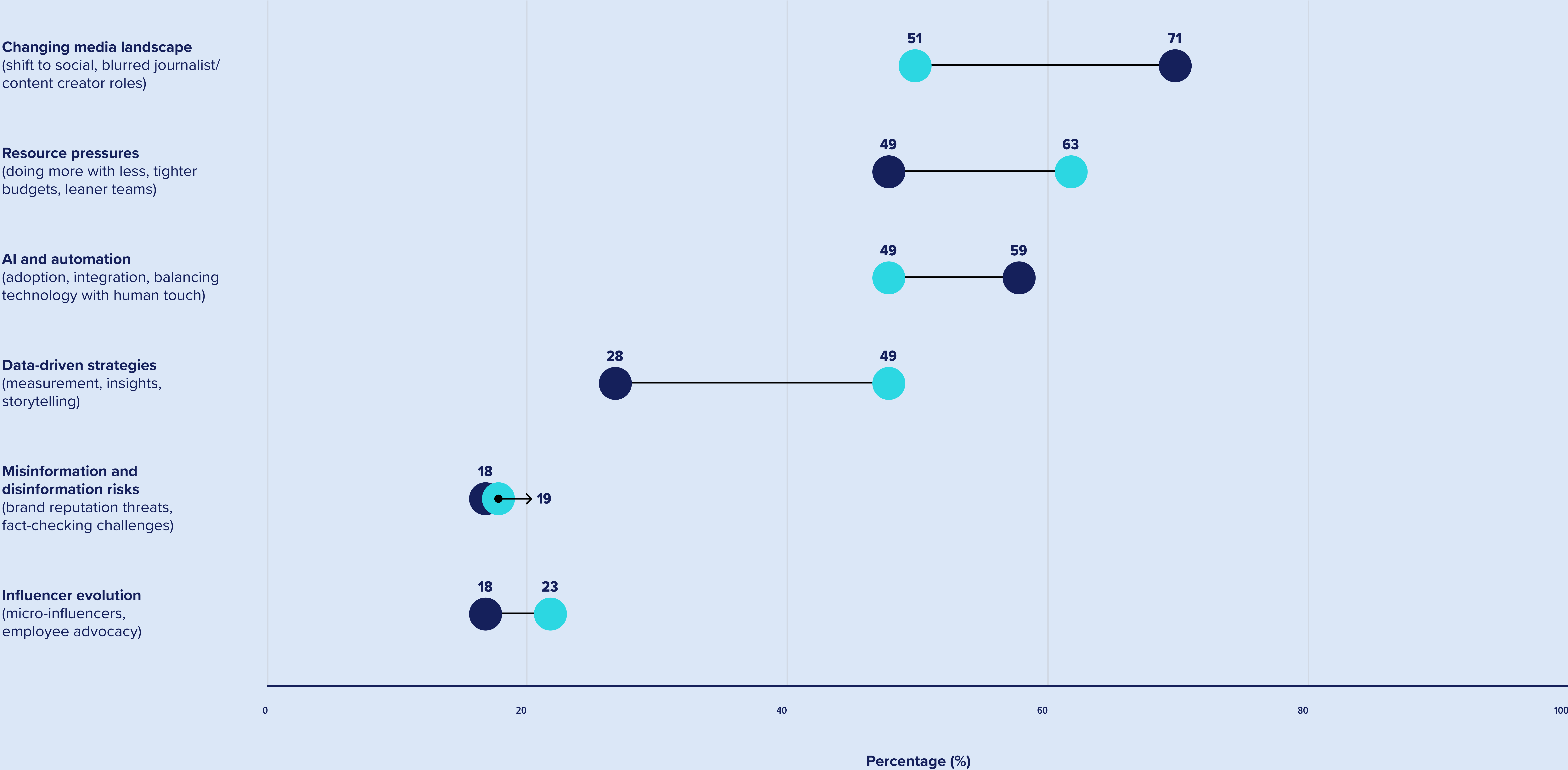
● Exec/C-Suite ● Senior Leadership ● Managers ● Specialist/Ind. Contributor



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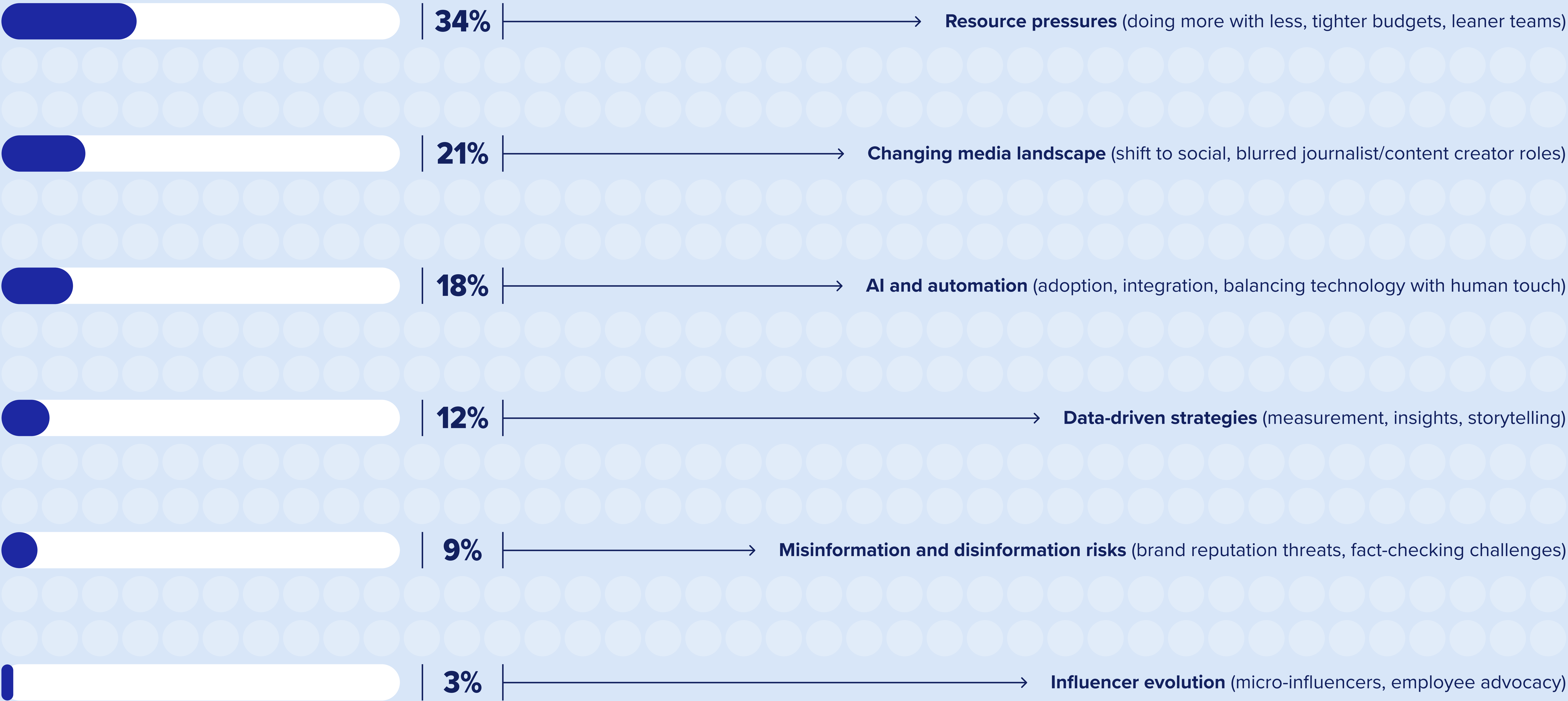
(Agency vs. in-house teams)

In-House Agency Both



Which of these trends will be your No. 1 challenge in 2026?

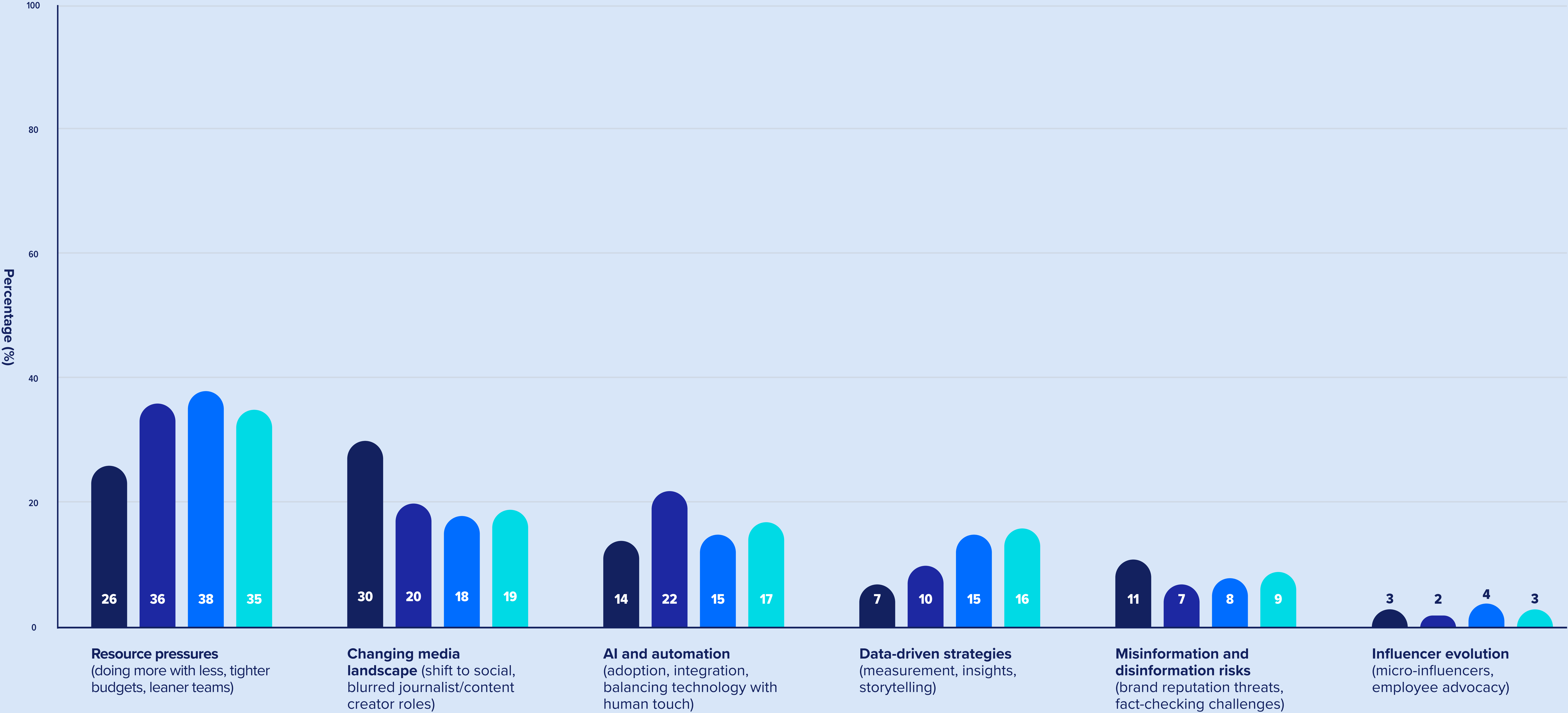
(All respondents)



Which of these trends will be your No. 1 challenge in 2026?

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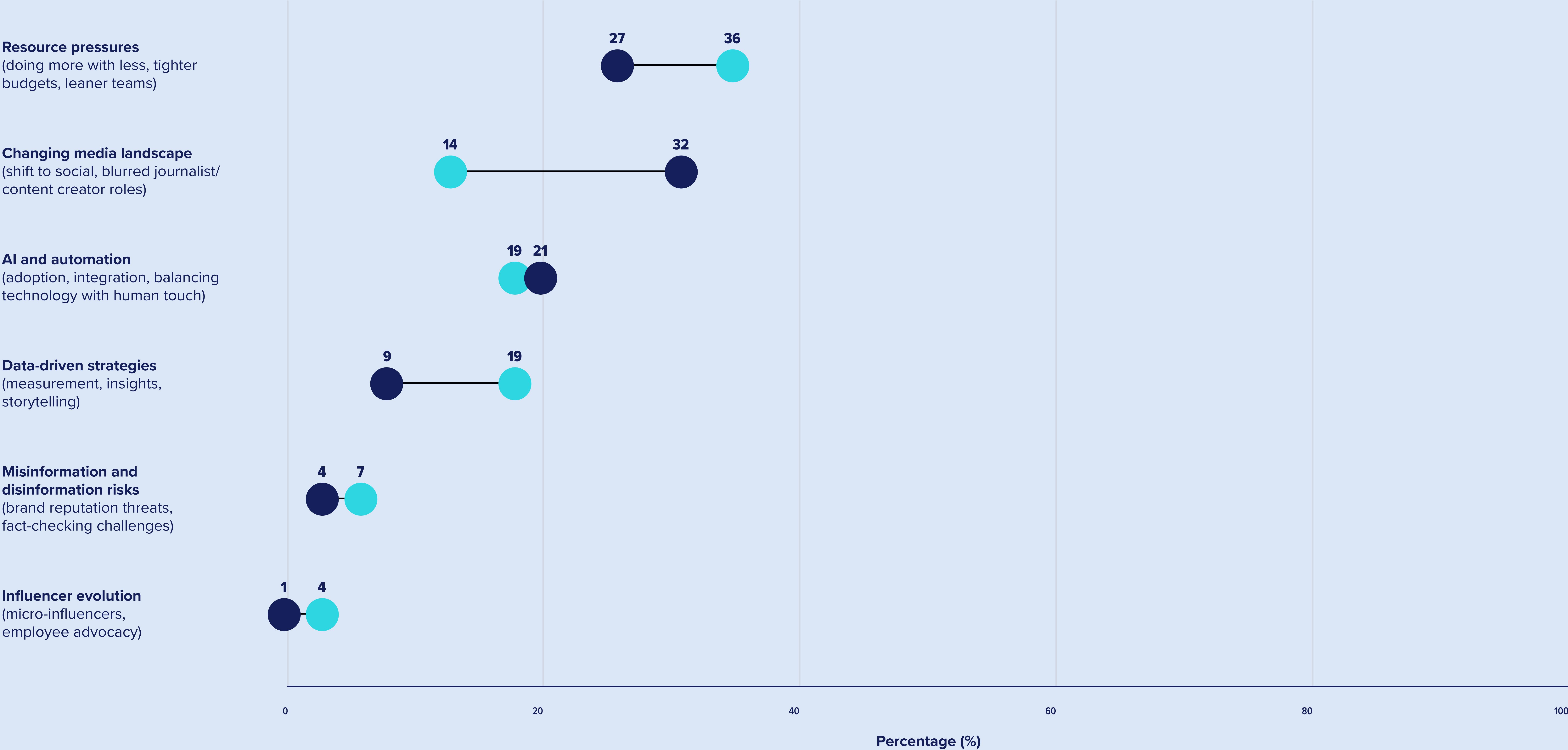
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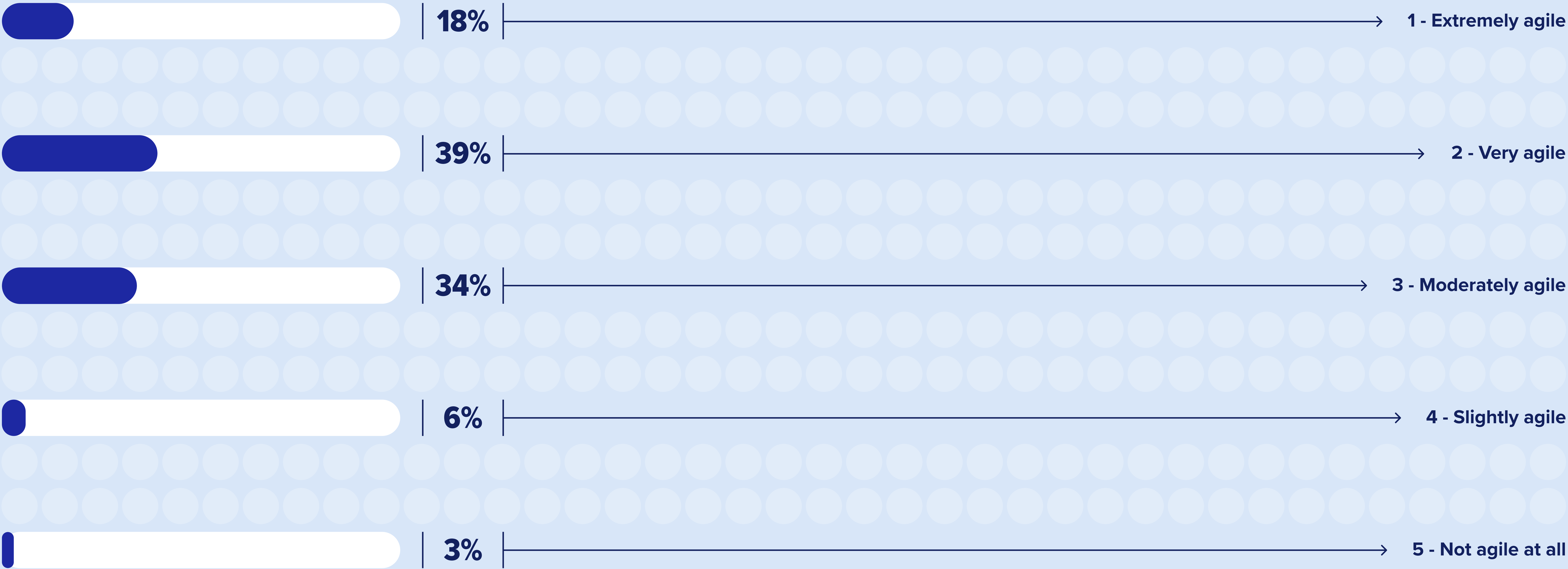
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(Agency vs. in-house teams)

In-House Agency Both

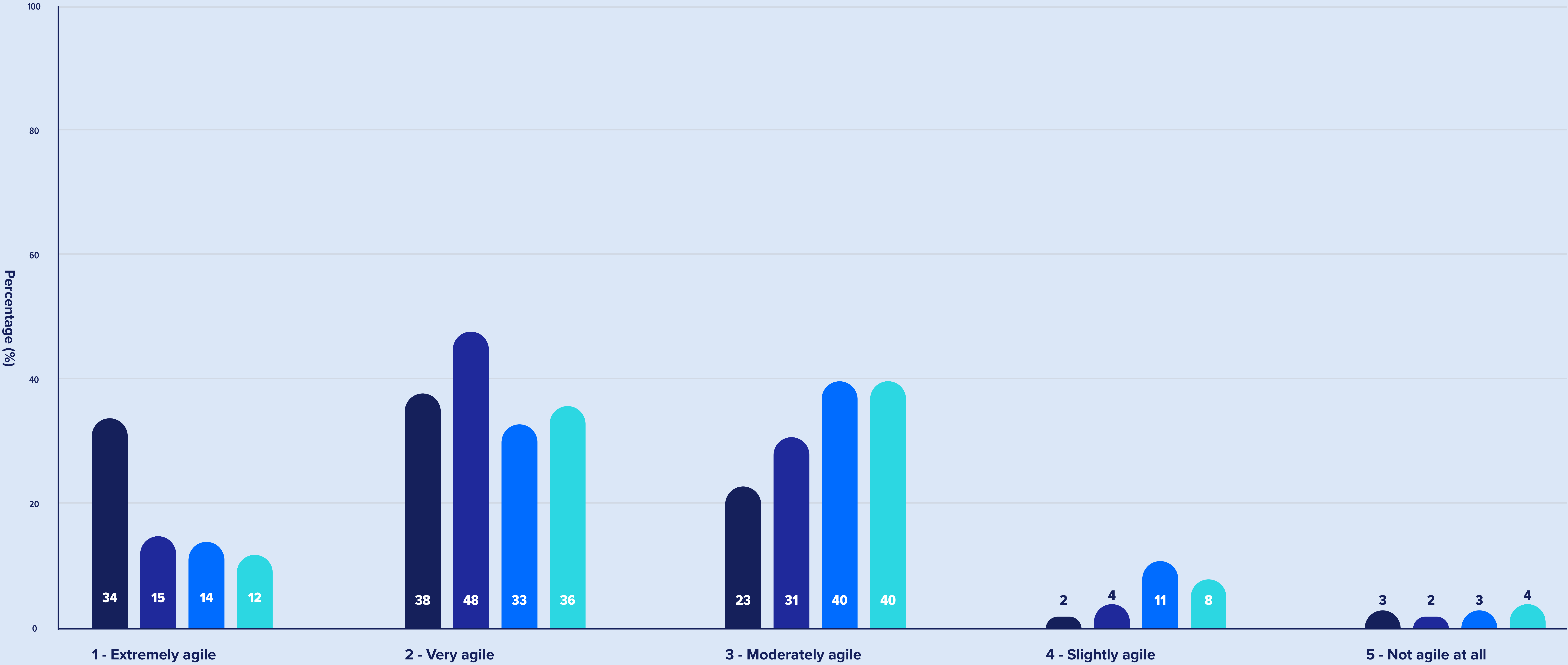


On a scale of 1 to 5, how agile is your team when responding to unexpected events or opportunities?
(All respondents)



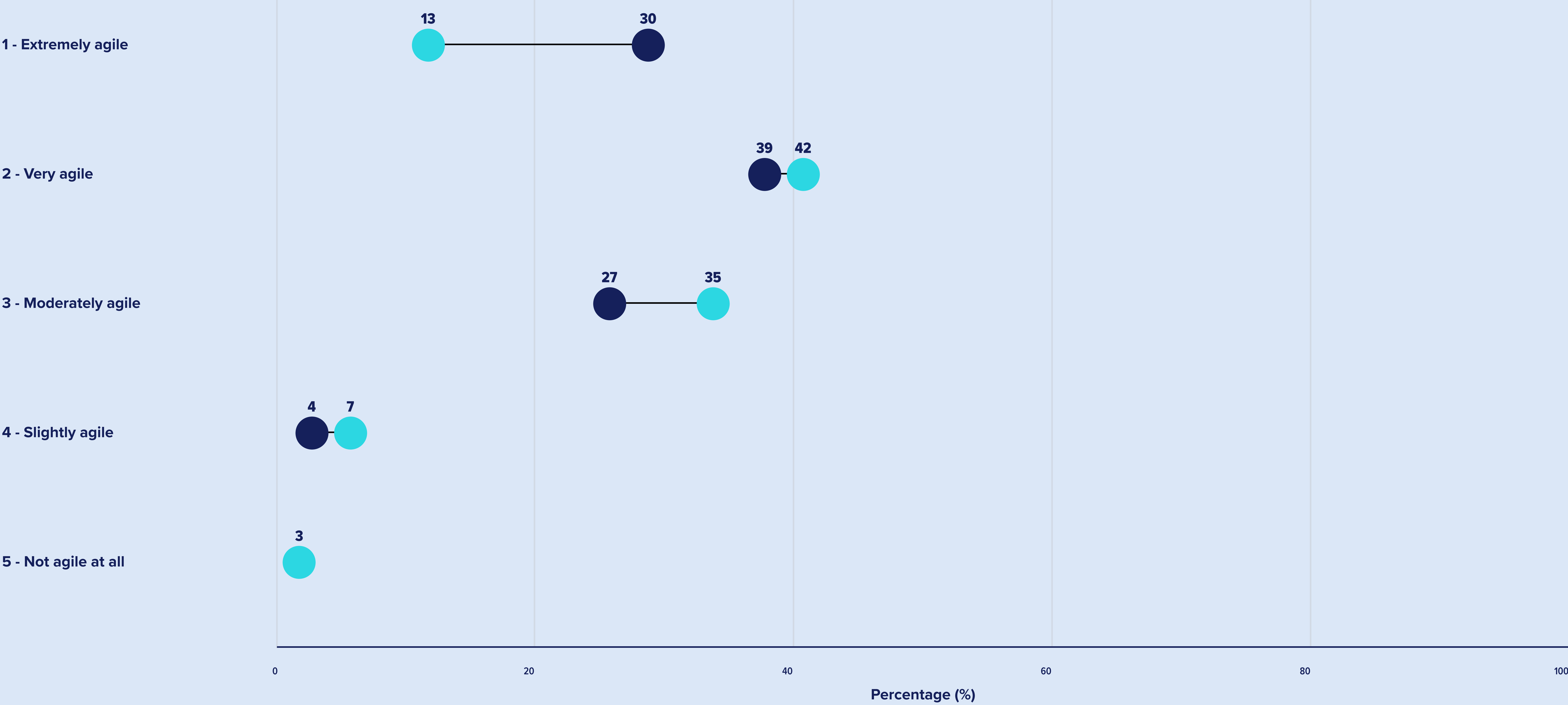
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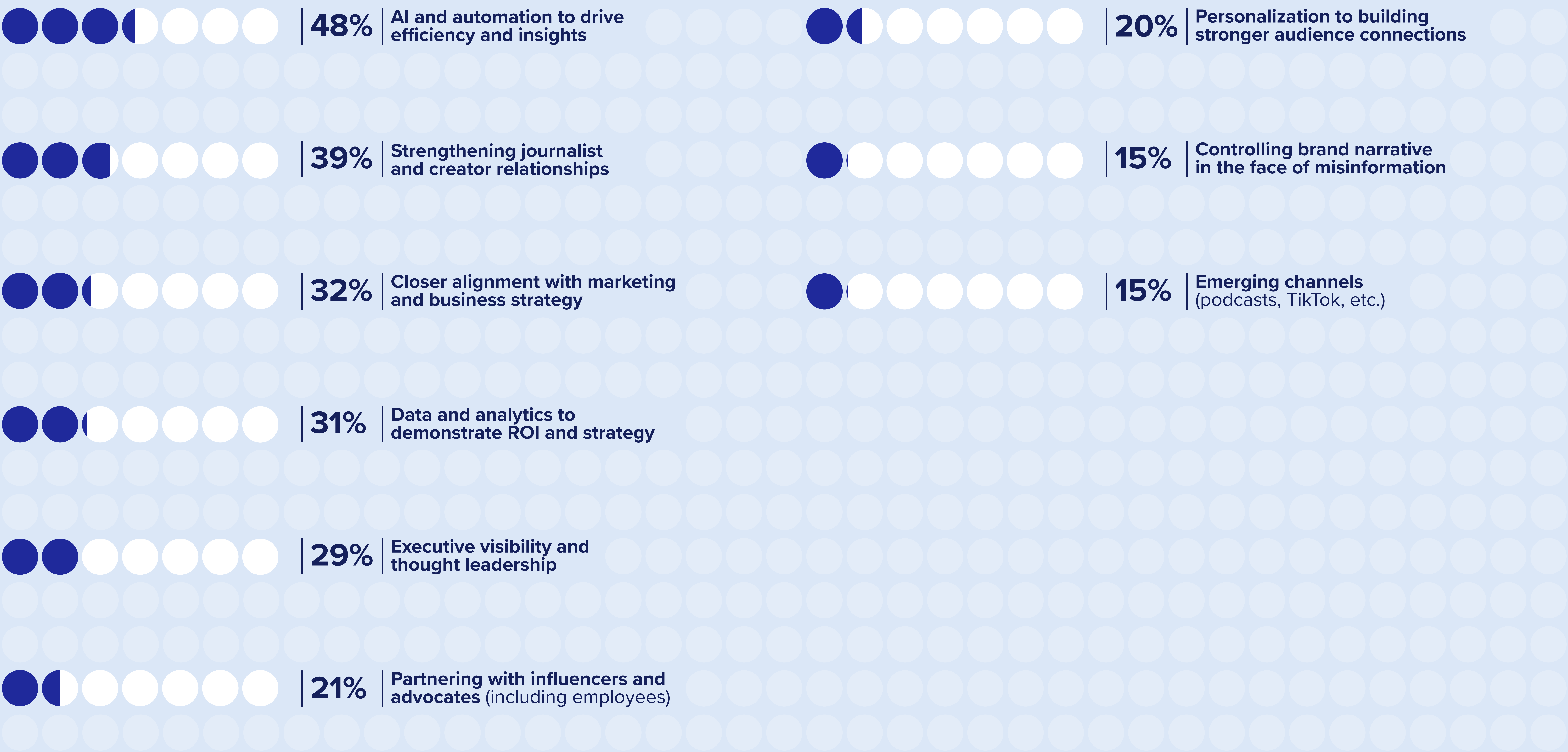
On a scale of 1 to 5, how agile is your team when responding to unexpected events or opportunities? *(Agency vs. in-house teams)*

In-House Agency Both



Where do you see the greatest opportunity for your team in 2026?

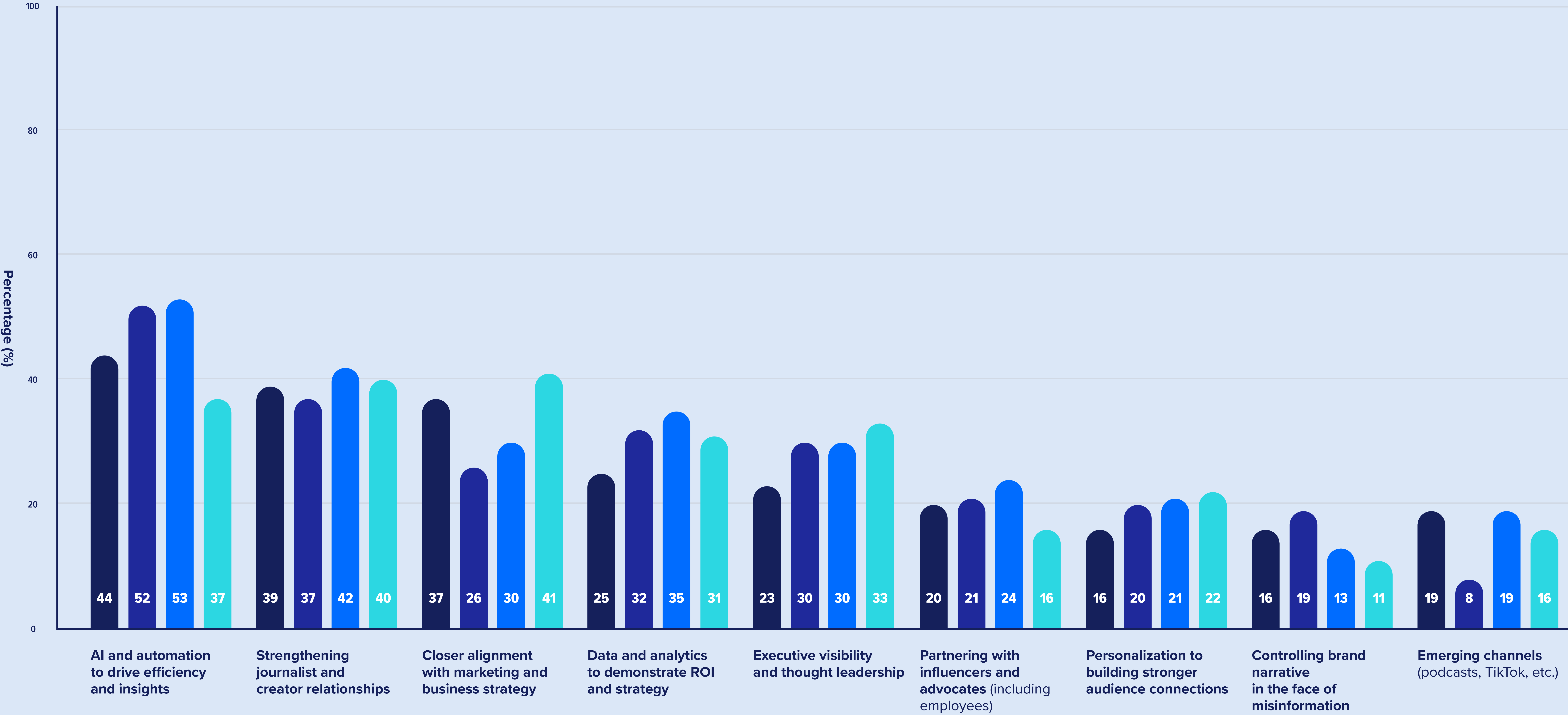
(All respondents)



Where do you see the greatest opportunity for your team in 2026?

(By job level)

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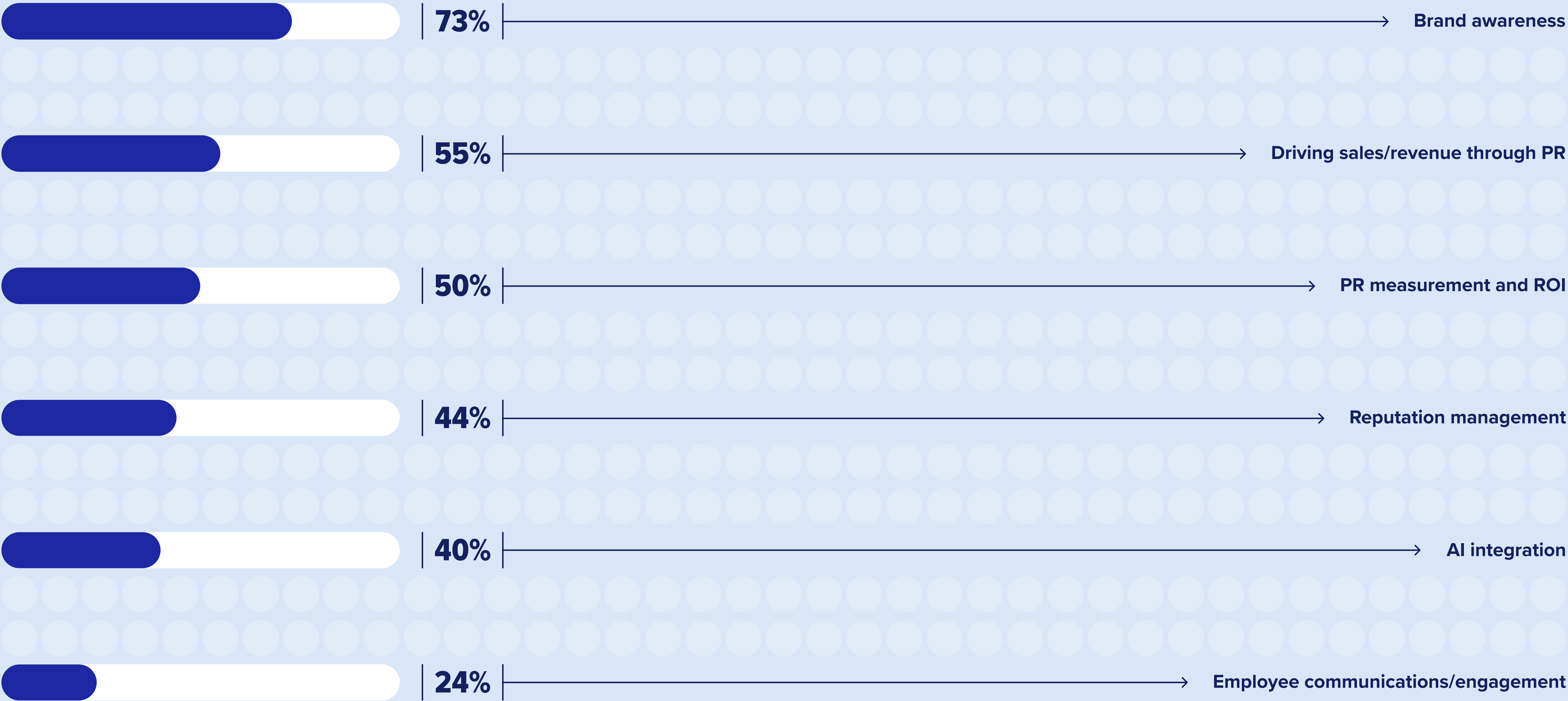
(Agency vs. in-house teams)

In-House Agency Both



What are your team's top priorities for 2026?

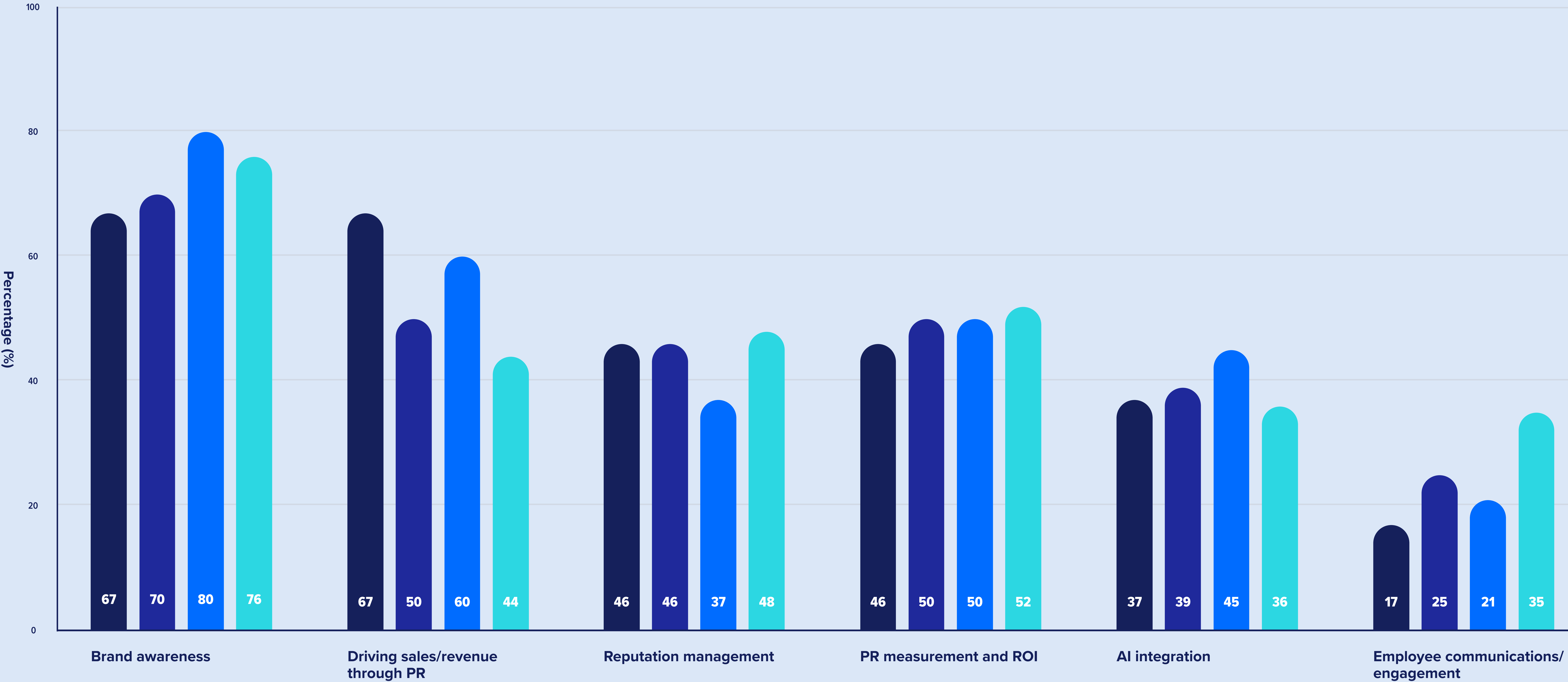
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(By job level)

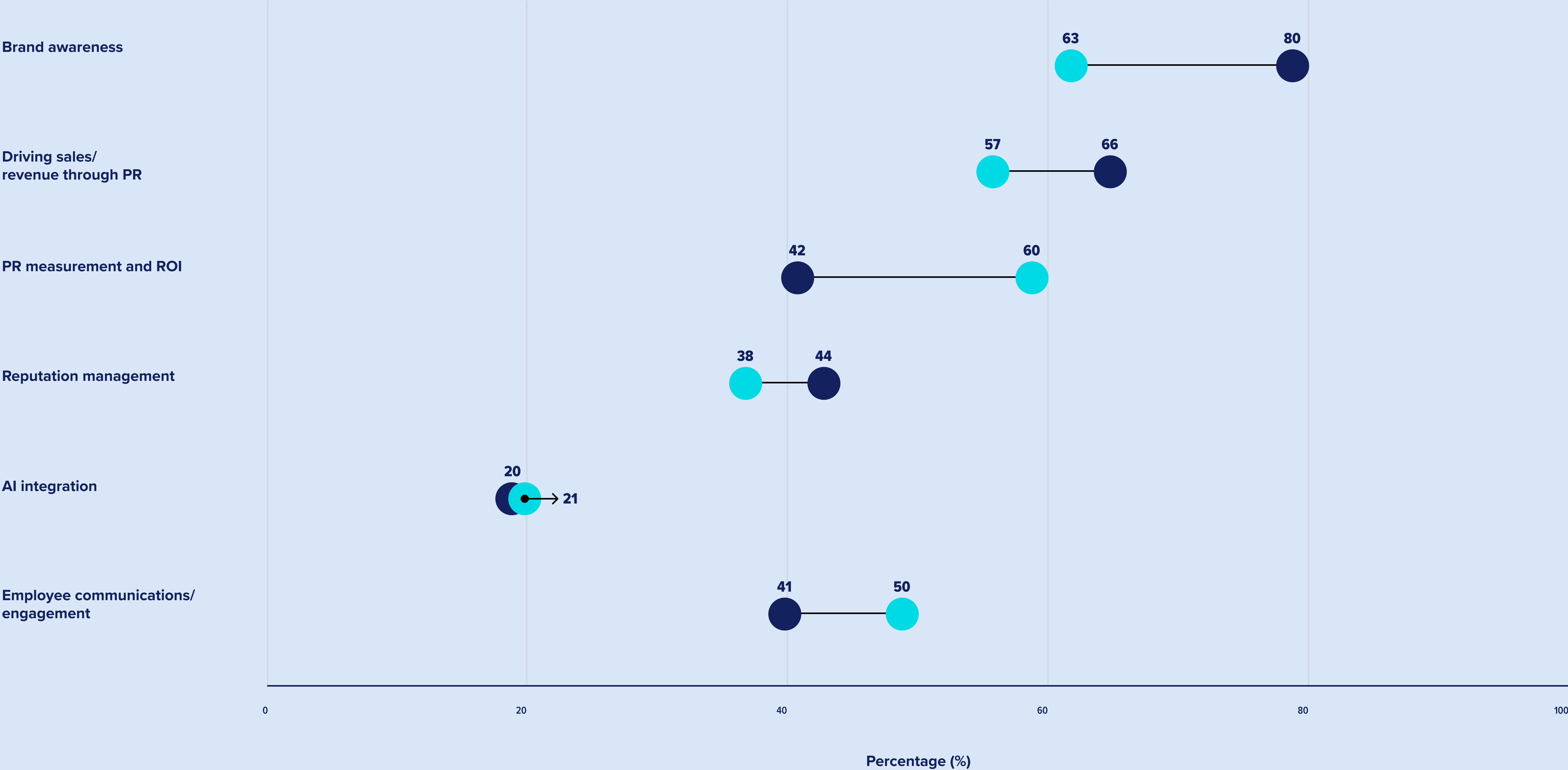
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What are your team's top priorities for 2026?

(Agency vs. in-house teams)

In-House Agency Both



Which tools are critical to your team’s success?

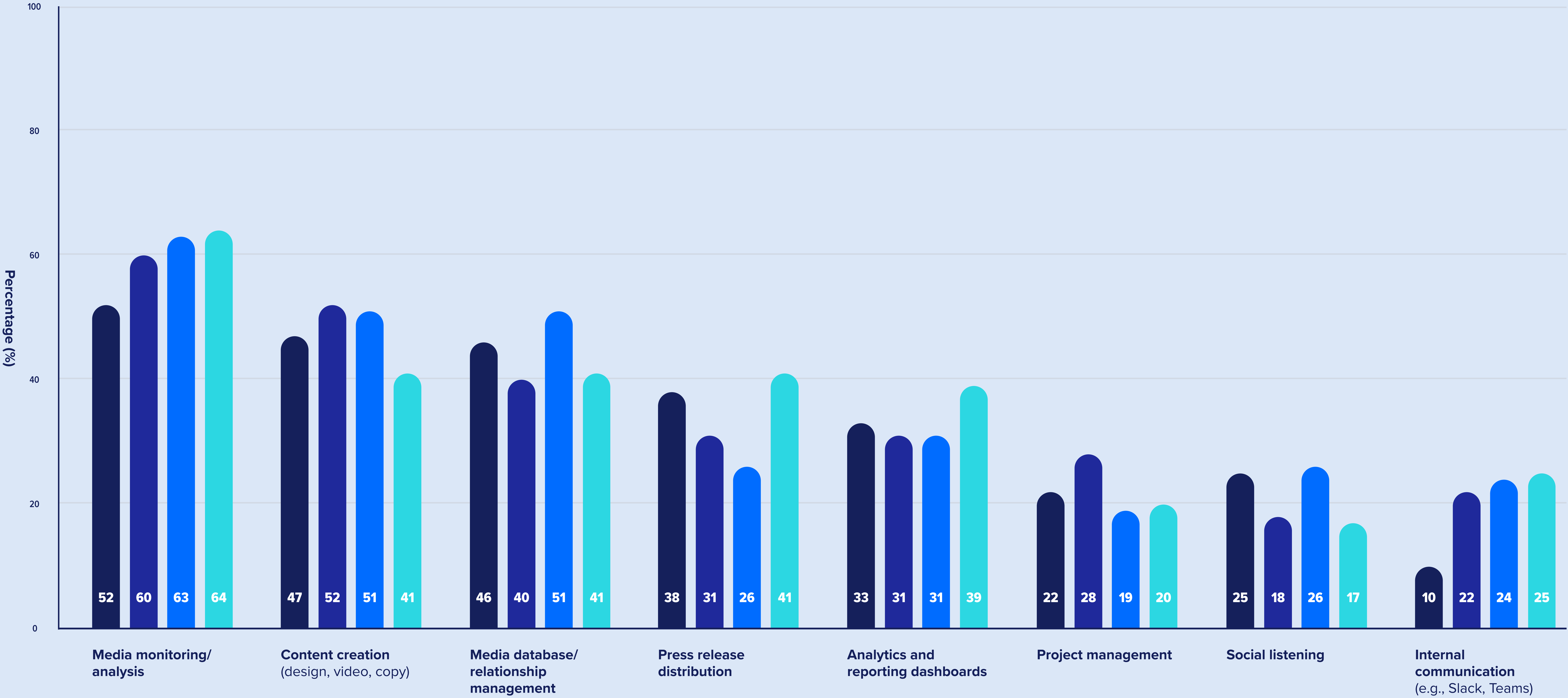
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(By job level)

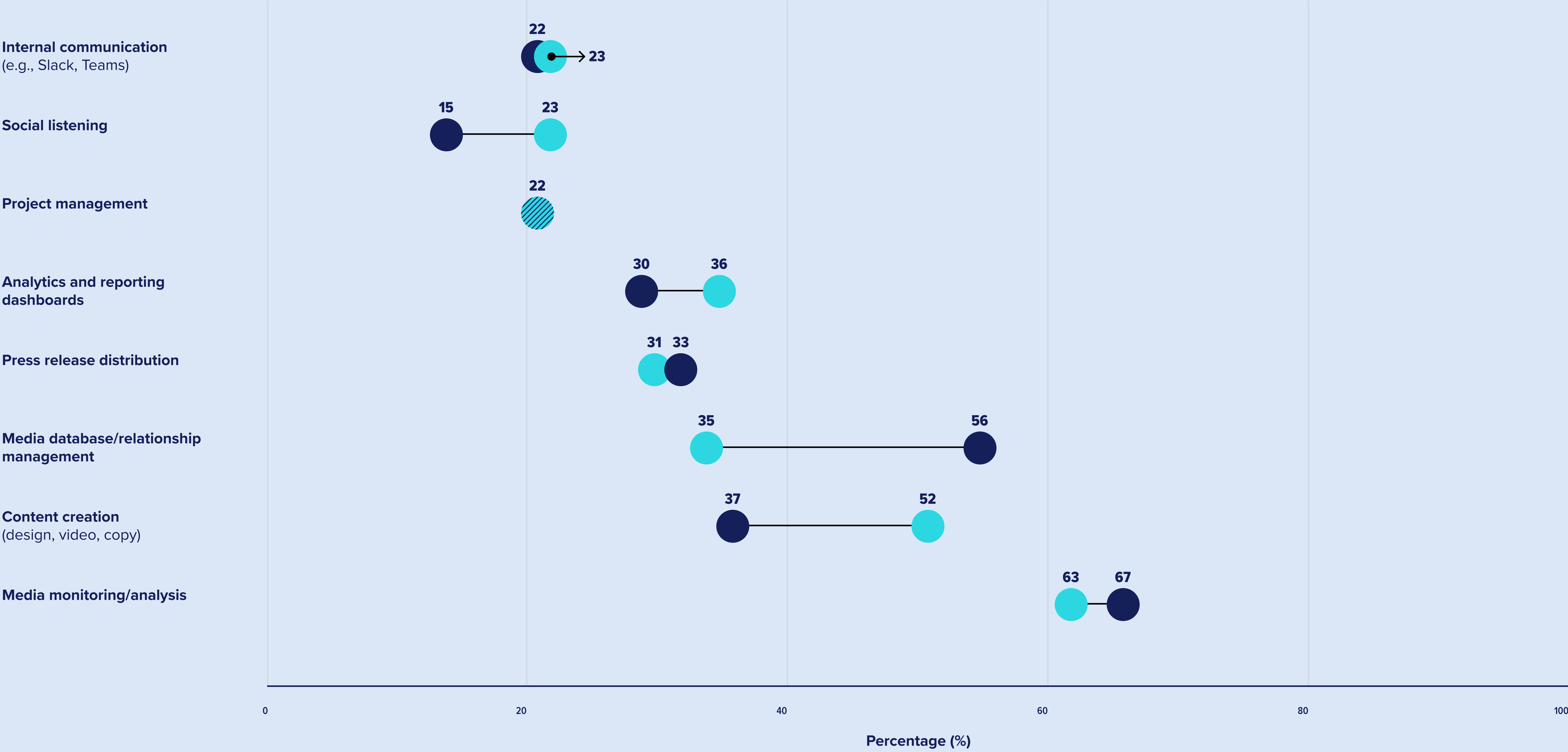
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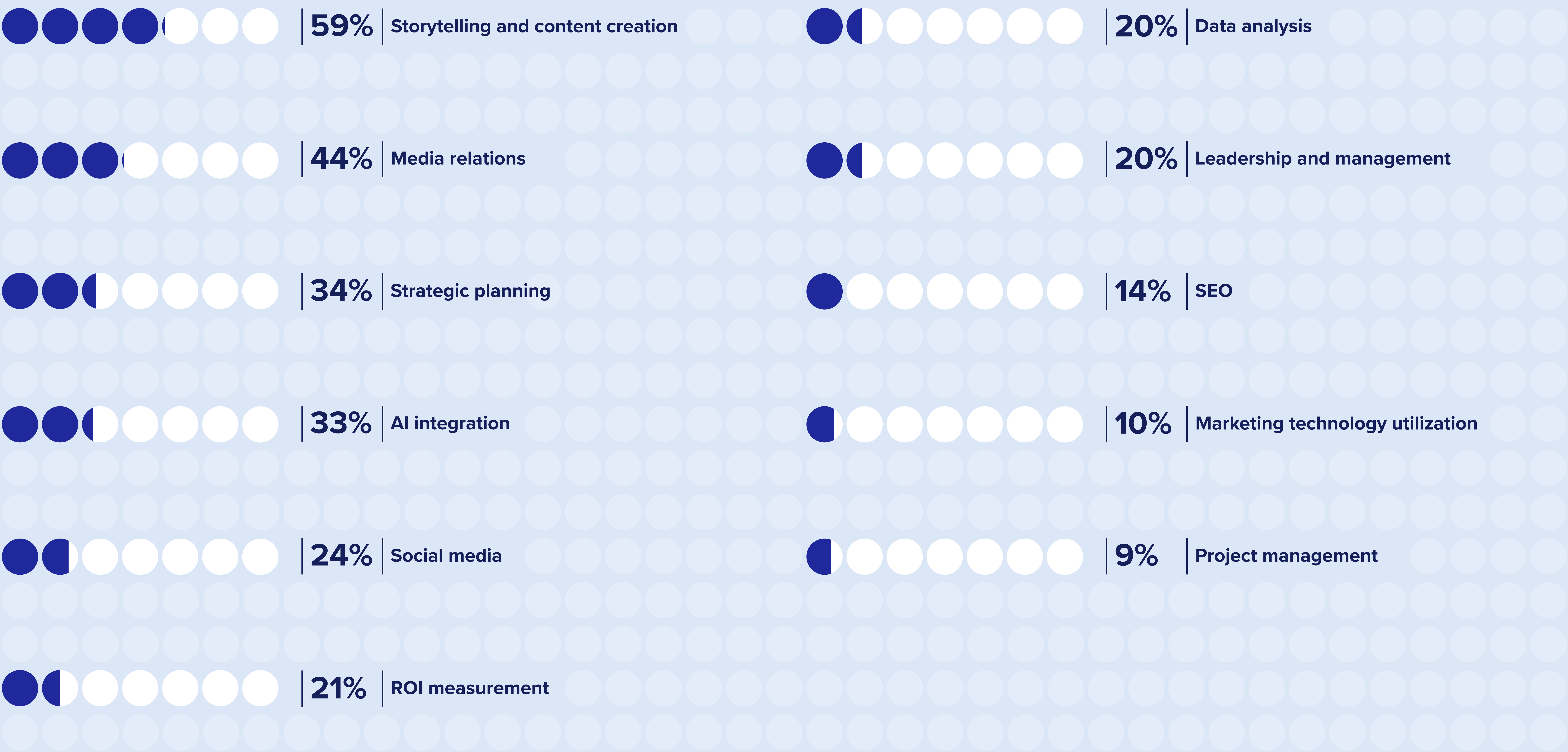
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In-House Agency Both



Which skills will matter most in 2026?

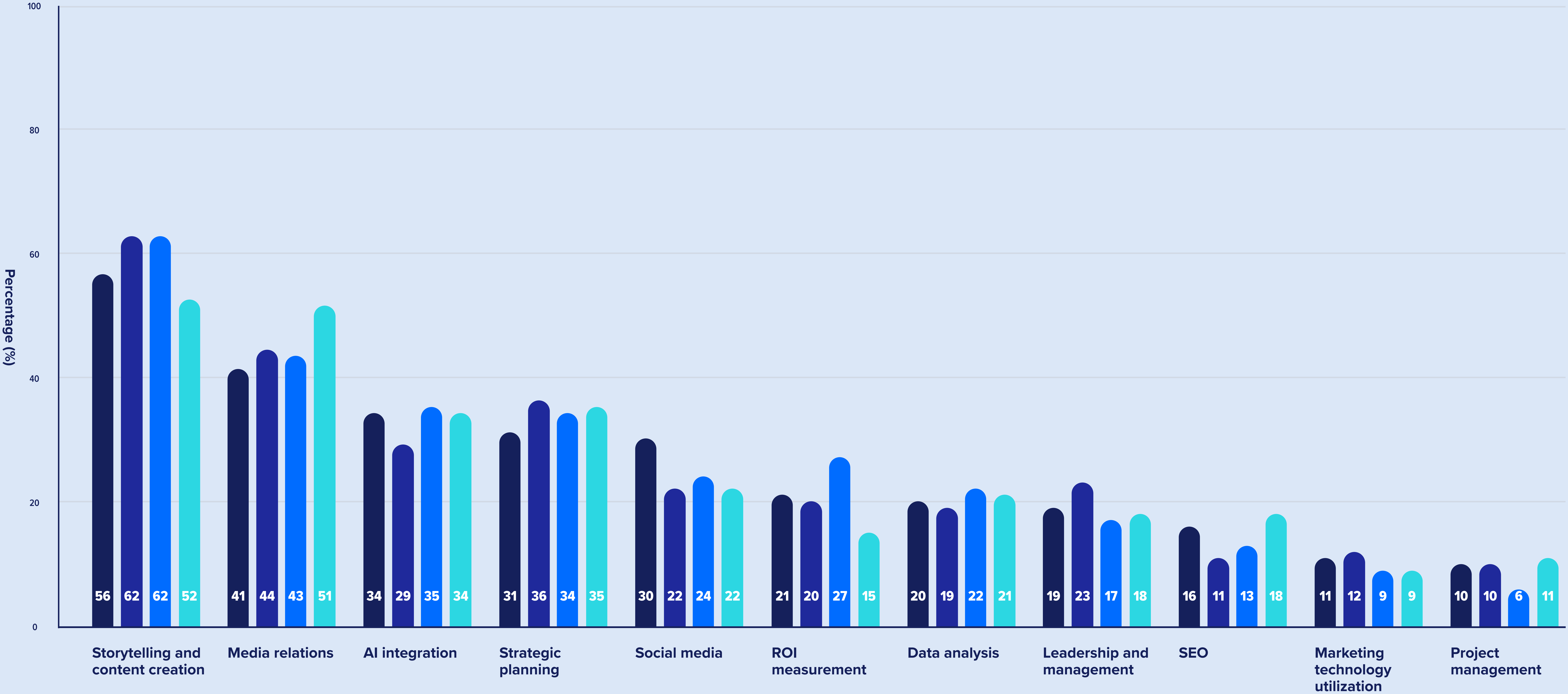
(All respondents)



Which skills will matter most in 2026?

(By job level)

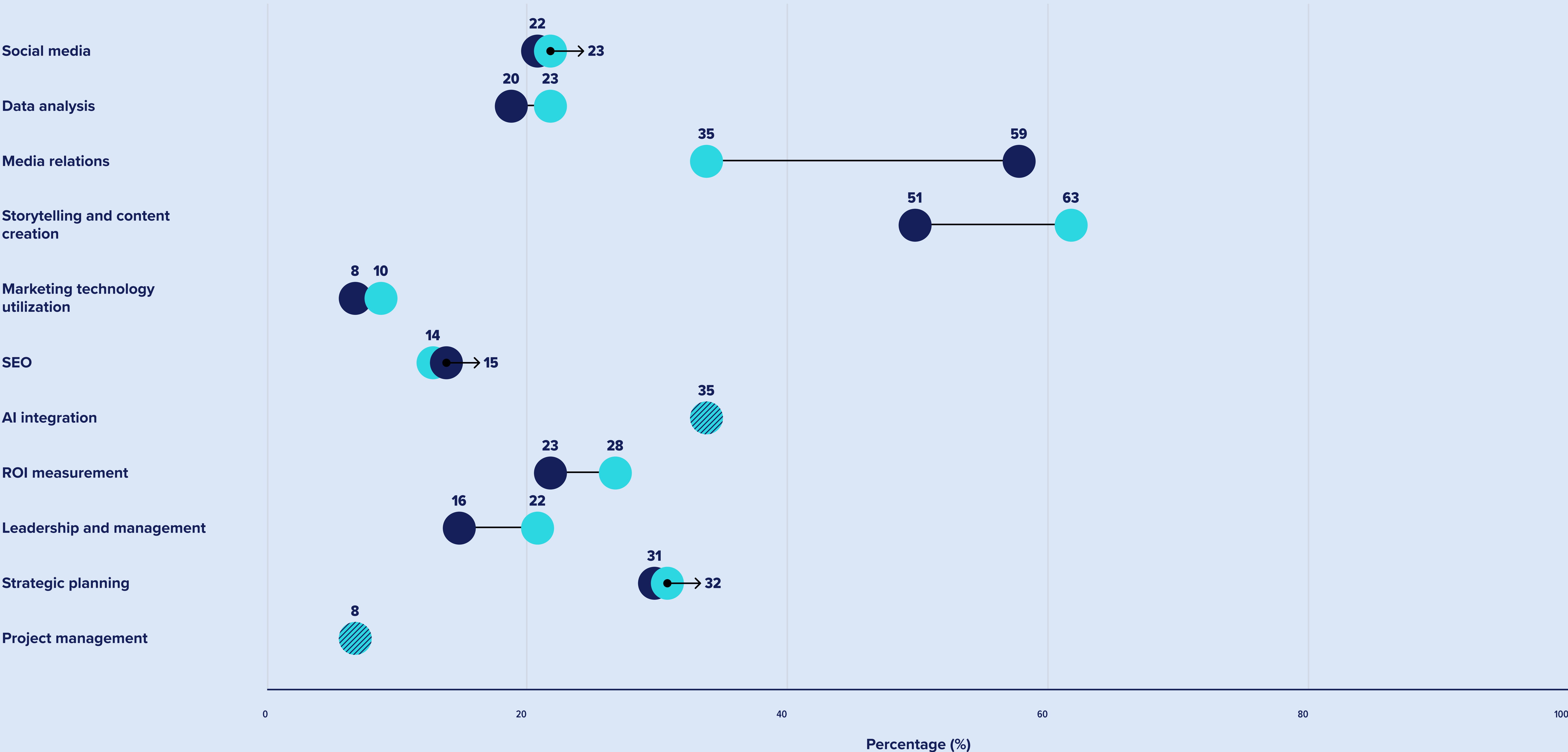
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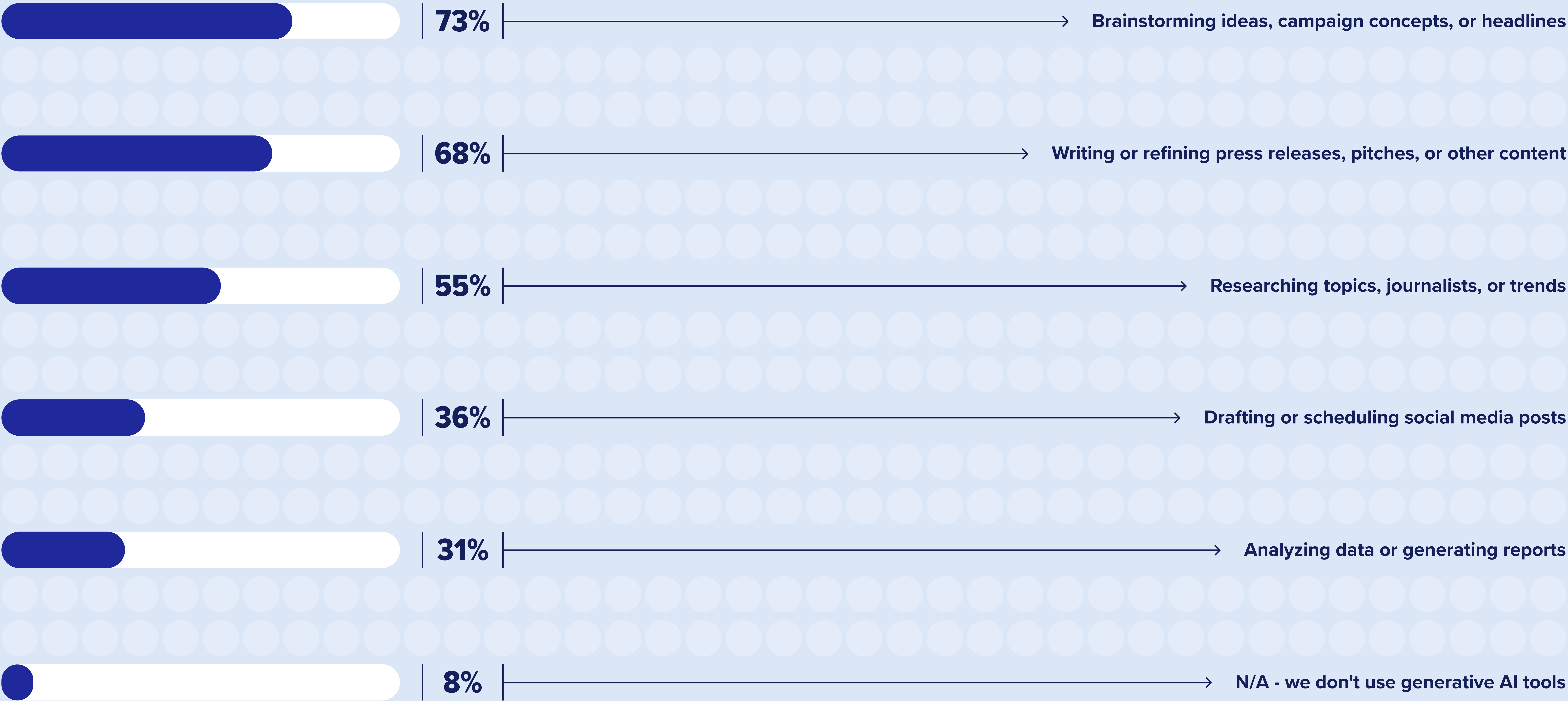
(Agency vs. in-house teams)

In-House Agency Both



How is your team currently using stand-alone generative AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude)?

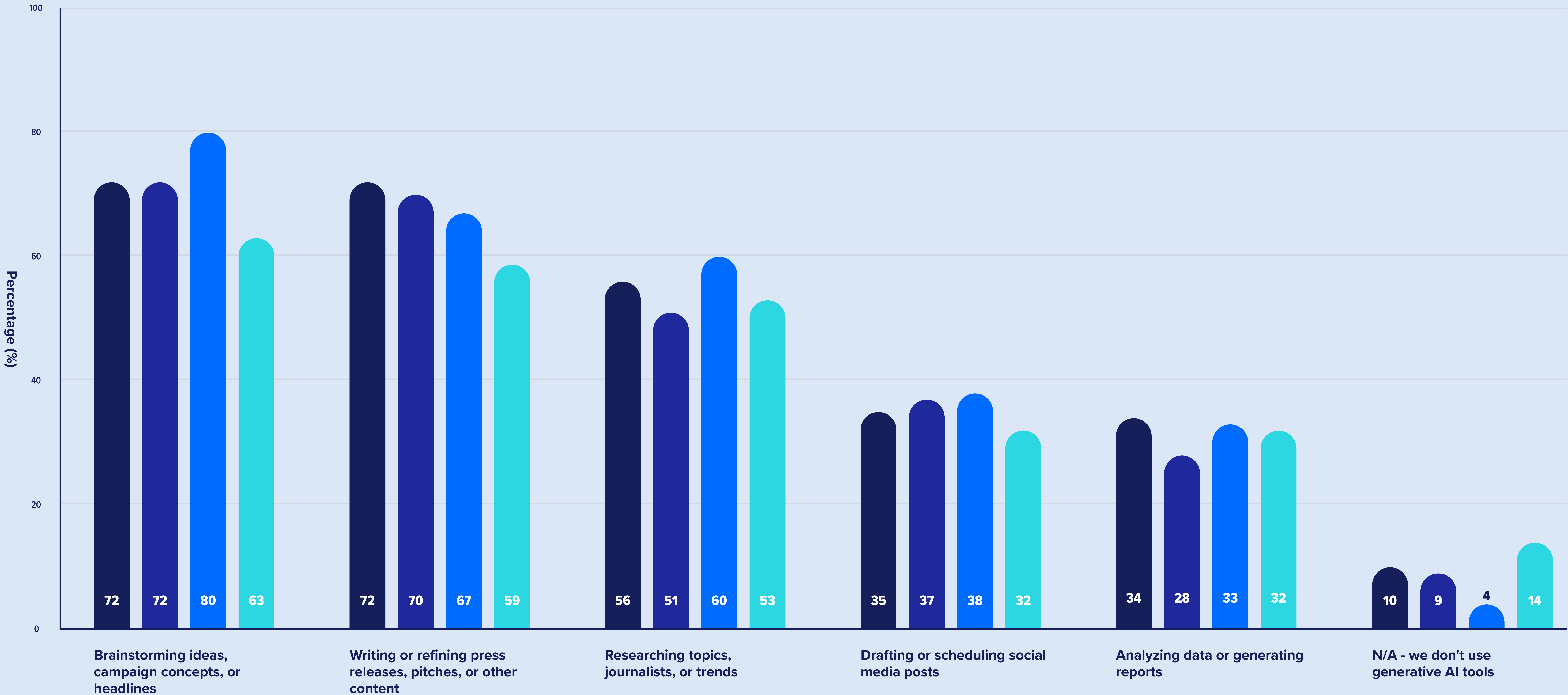
(All respondents)



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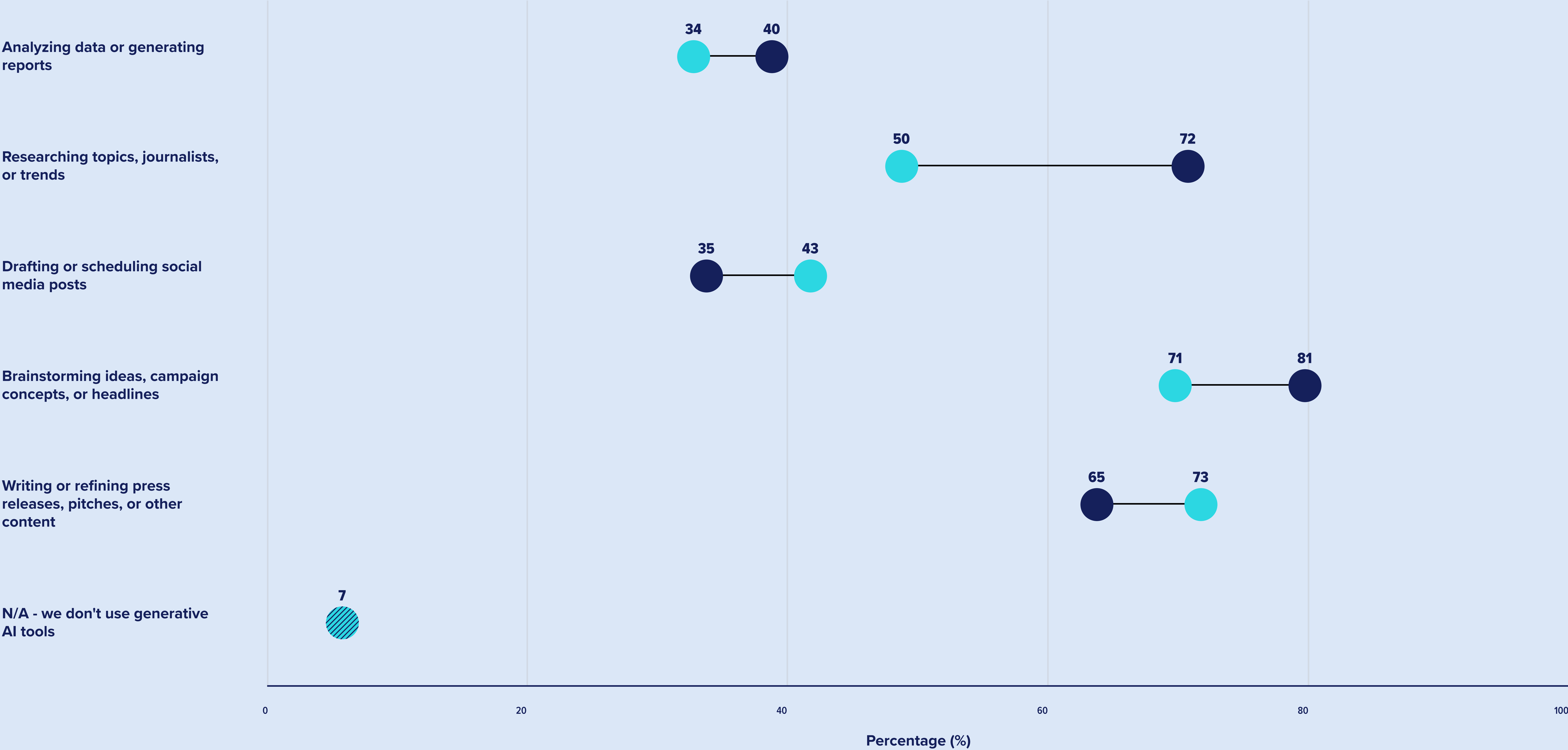
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How is your team currently using stand-alone generative AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude)?

(Agency vs. in-house teams)

In-House Agency Both



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Cision is the global leader in consumer and media intelligence, engagement, and communication solutions. We equip PR and corporate communications, marketing, and social media professionals with the tools they need to excel in today's data-driven world. Our deep expertise, exclusive data partnerships, and award-winning products, including [CisionOne](#), [Brandwatch](#), and [PR Newswire](#), enable over 75,000 companies and organizations, including 84% of the Fortune 500, to see and be seen, understand and be understood by the audiences that matter most to them.

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