

Maximizing clarity for healthcare professionals in medical communications.

Matthew Booth, Alex Taylor, Katherine Chaytor, Nico Simplicio, Sophie Long, and James Williams

ApotheCom, London, UK

Positive manner and using the active voice are preferred by HCPs to the complex, passive and negative comparisons traditionally used in scientific content

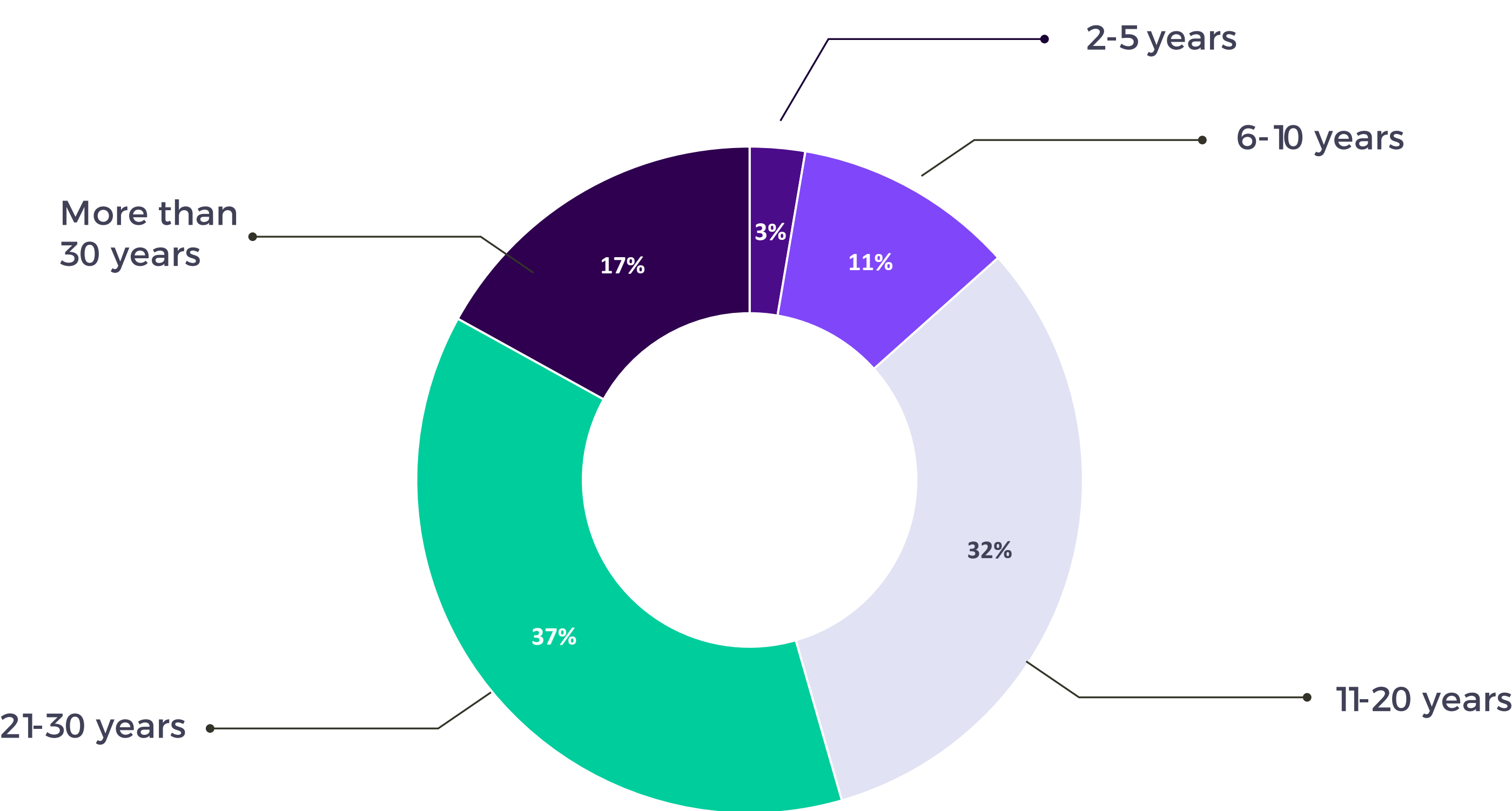
Background

- How content is presented linguistically can influence how the audiences processes the meaning and can consequently affect behaviours and beliefs.
- Common linguistic frameworks used in scientific and medical communications that could have an impact on comprehension and clarity include:
 - Positive vs Negative
 - Active vs Passive Voice
 - Complex vs Concise
 - Statistical Framing of Comparison of Percentages vs Fractions vs People
- Comprehension of evidence-based content can be influenced by the way it is framed linguistically, and a previous survey¹ found there are preferences for what makes a scientific statement clear, impactful and effective in an unspecialised population.
- As such, there is a need to further evaluate linguistic frameworks to build an evidence base for understanding how communications can be refined to maximise comprehension and minimise ambiguity with regard to scientific data, medical concepts and other content relevant to effective communication with healthcare professionals (HCPs).

Objective

- As medical communications professionals regularly develop materials for HCPs, our aim was to understand this population’s preferences to maximise clarity and understanding of evidence-based content.

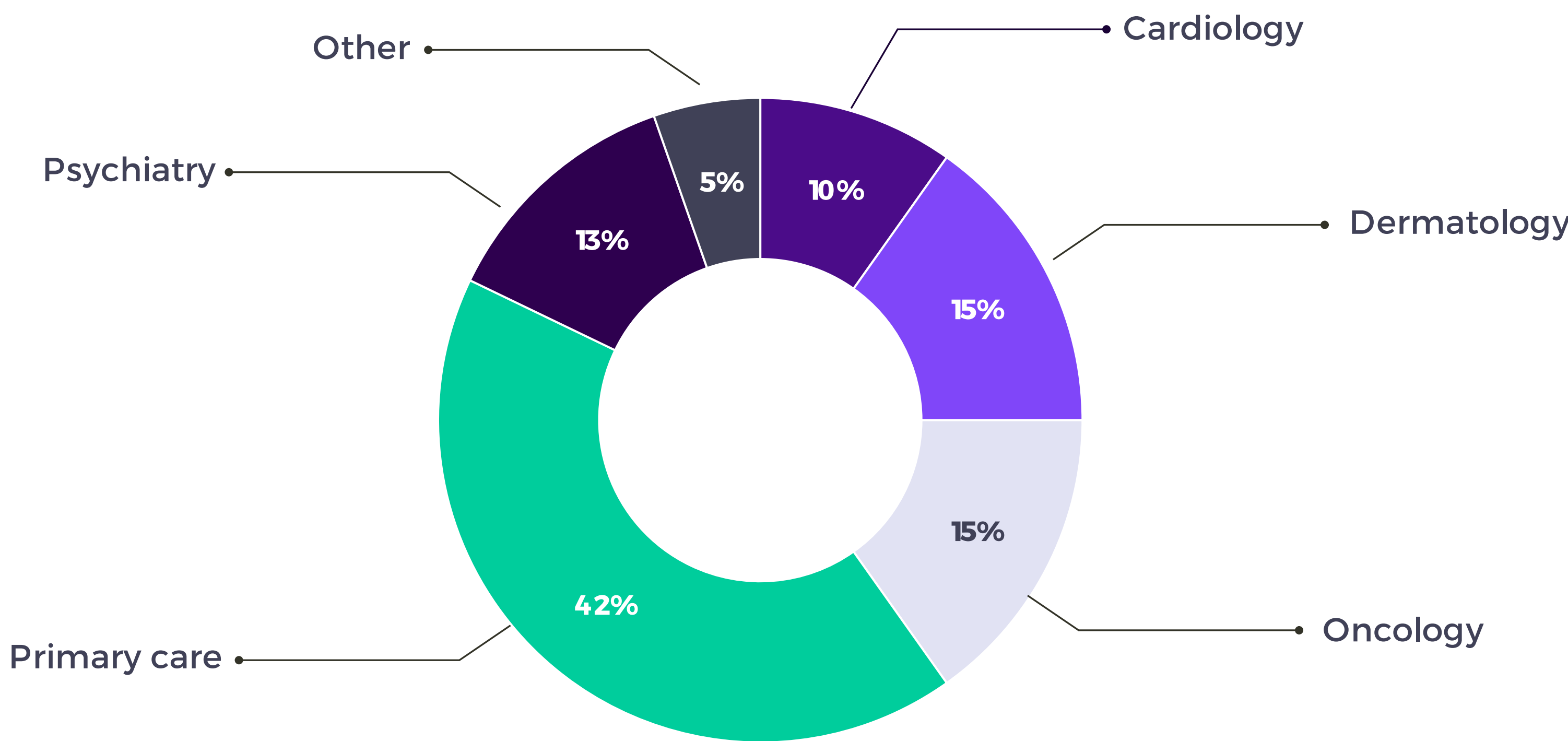
Figure 1. Years of experience as an HCP



Methods

- HCPs (n=112) with a range of experience and primary therapy areas (Figure 1; Figure 2) completed an online questionnaire in which they were presented with 55 statement-pairs taken from a schizophrenia scientific communications platform. Statement pairs were categorised as follows: Complex vs concise, positive vs negative, active vs passive, and percentage vs fraction vs number.
- Participants were instructed to choose which statement they prefer based on ‘clarity, impact and effectiveness’. A similar survey (of unspecialised agency staff and clients) previously found a significant preference for positive, concise and active statements.

Figure 2. HCP primary therapy area



Results

- Chi-squared tests showed that HCPs preferred scientific content to be positive, concise, and using active voice, and preferred data to be presented as percentages over fractions or number of patients; all preferences were significant (P<0.001, Figure 3). The only comparisons that were not significant was for expressing data as fractions vs patient numbers (P=0.16). These results are consistent with that previously observed in the unspecialised population.
- No statistically significant differences were observed between respondents based in the US (n=60) compared with the UK (n=52) using a chi-squared test (Figure 4). There was a slight trend towards more negative, passive and concise framing in the US compared to the UK, however, these were non-significant (P=0.52, P=0.34 and P=0.13, respectively).
- No substantive observable trends were found with respect to years of experience or primary therapy area of HCPs.

Figure 3. Mean framework preference among HCPs. Mean respondent preference refers to the mean individual preference towards the first framework mentioned (i.e. 67% of respondents preferred positive compared with negative framing). *p<0.001, chi-squared test

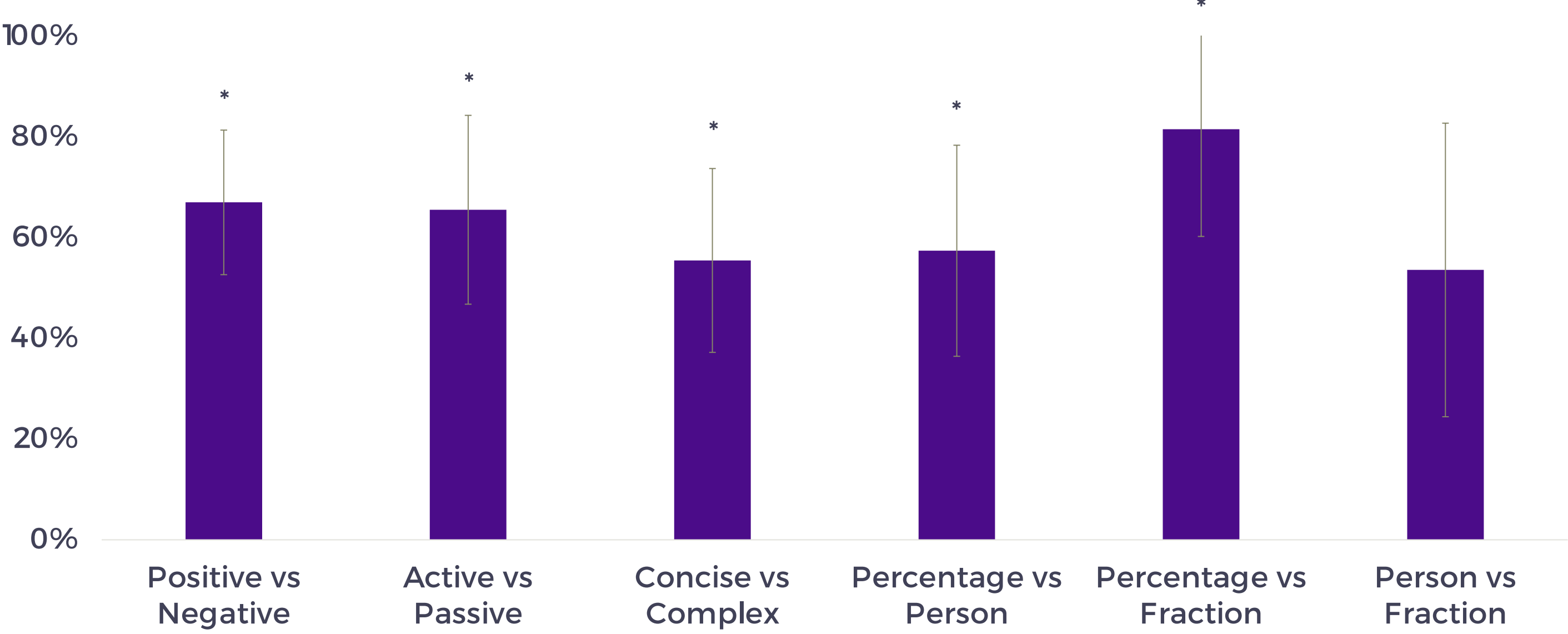
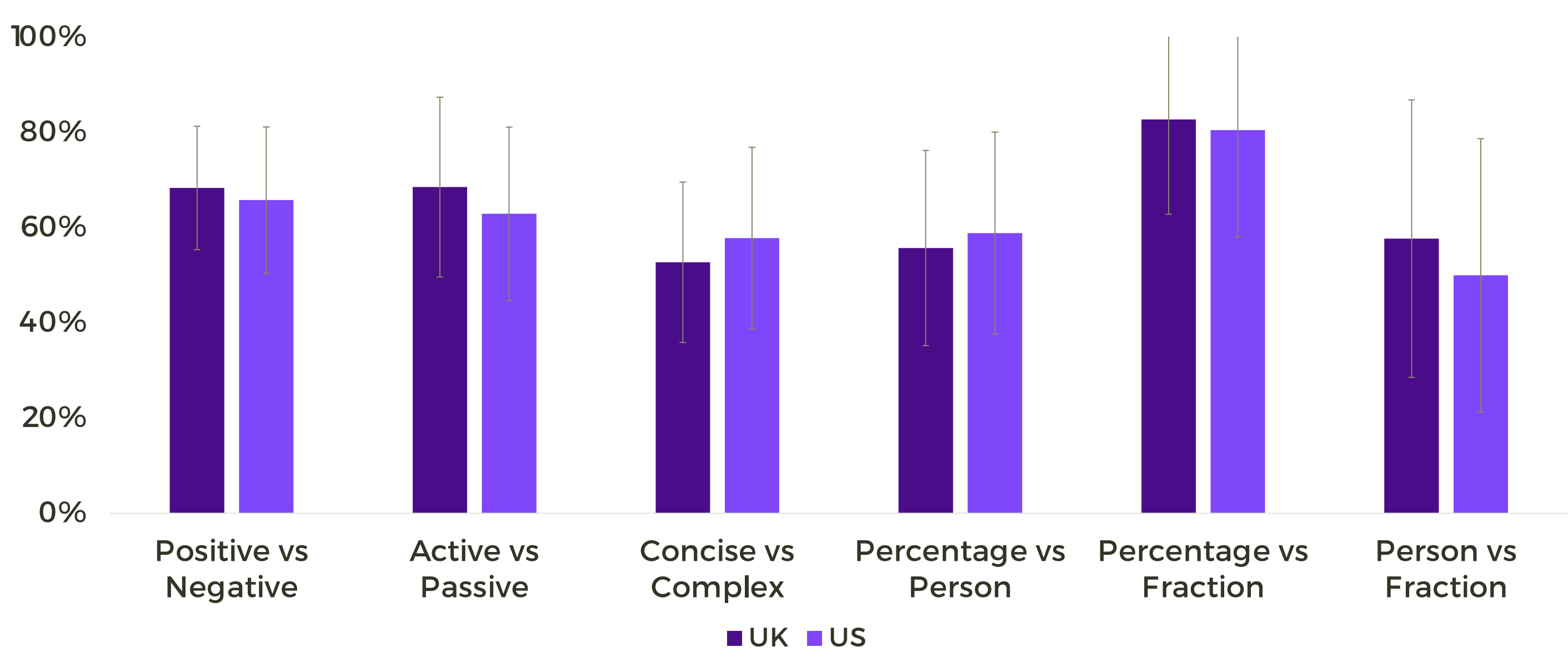


Figure 4. Mean framework preference among HCPs in the US compared with the UK. Mean respondent preference refers to the mean individual preference towards the first framework mentioned (i.e. 68% of UK respondents preferred positive compared with negative framing).



Conclusions

- HCPs have similar linguistic preferences as we previously found for medical communications agency staff and pharmaceutical company employees
- Positive manner and using the active voice are preferred to the complex, passive and negative comparisons traditionally used in scientific content.
- These findings can be used as an evidence base to maximise comprehension and minimise ambiguity for HCPs when developing medical and scientific content.

References

- Williams et al. Maximizing comprehension and minimizing ambiguity in medical communications. Current Medical Research and Opinion 2022; 38(S1):S15 <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007995.2022.2055262>

Disclosure statement

- The survey (including statistical analysis) and medical writing was funded and performed by ApotheCom.

Corresponding author:

Matthew Booth
Matthew.Booth@apothecom.com