

# Beyond the branded moment: What makes a pop-up connect?

**DASHING** × **ideally**





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# Dashing x Ideally White Paper on the True Value of Brand Activations, 2025

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In a world thick with digital noise, brands don't just compete for attention, they compete for memory. The pop-up, the activation, the 'brand experience', they're everywhere. But here's the problem: most activations are experienced by few and remembered by even fewer.

This is not another celebration of clever giveaways or foot-traffic stats. It's a challenge: If we know how rare a real connection is, how do brand activations move away from feeling generic, transactional, or instantly forgettable?

Dashing x Ideally set out to answer this. What sets apart a pop-up that keeps buzzing in group chats and Instagram feeds from one that fades from memory long before the branded tote bag ever does?



# 01.

## Presence vs. Memory — What the data really says





# Presence vs. Memory — What the data really says

Walk through any shopping centre or major event, and it's easy to be impressed by the sheer presence of brands: bold logos, branded walls, queues for free samples, an endless churn of pop-ups all jostling for a slice of attention. But when the crowds fade and the hashtags disappear, the real question surfaces - did anyone actually remember?

We set out to answer a deceptively simple question: Should brands be spending on presence, or curating for memory?

OROTON

61%

Distinctiveness

14%

Above benchmark



Presence is  
ubiquitous.  
Memory is rare.

The data gives us a clear signal. Orotan didn't just show up - it stood out, with a Distinctiveness score of 61%, soaring 14% above the benchmark. That's not just visibility, it's a cultural imprint, resonating especially with women and higher-income consumers.





Pandora also claimed its own space, emerging as the most memorable among younger, financially secure shoppers, not by being loud, but through laser-focused personalisation:

“You could get your Pandora jewellery specifically engraved.”

In a world bursting at the seams with branded moments - these custom and connected activations are what continue to set brands apart.



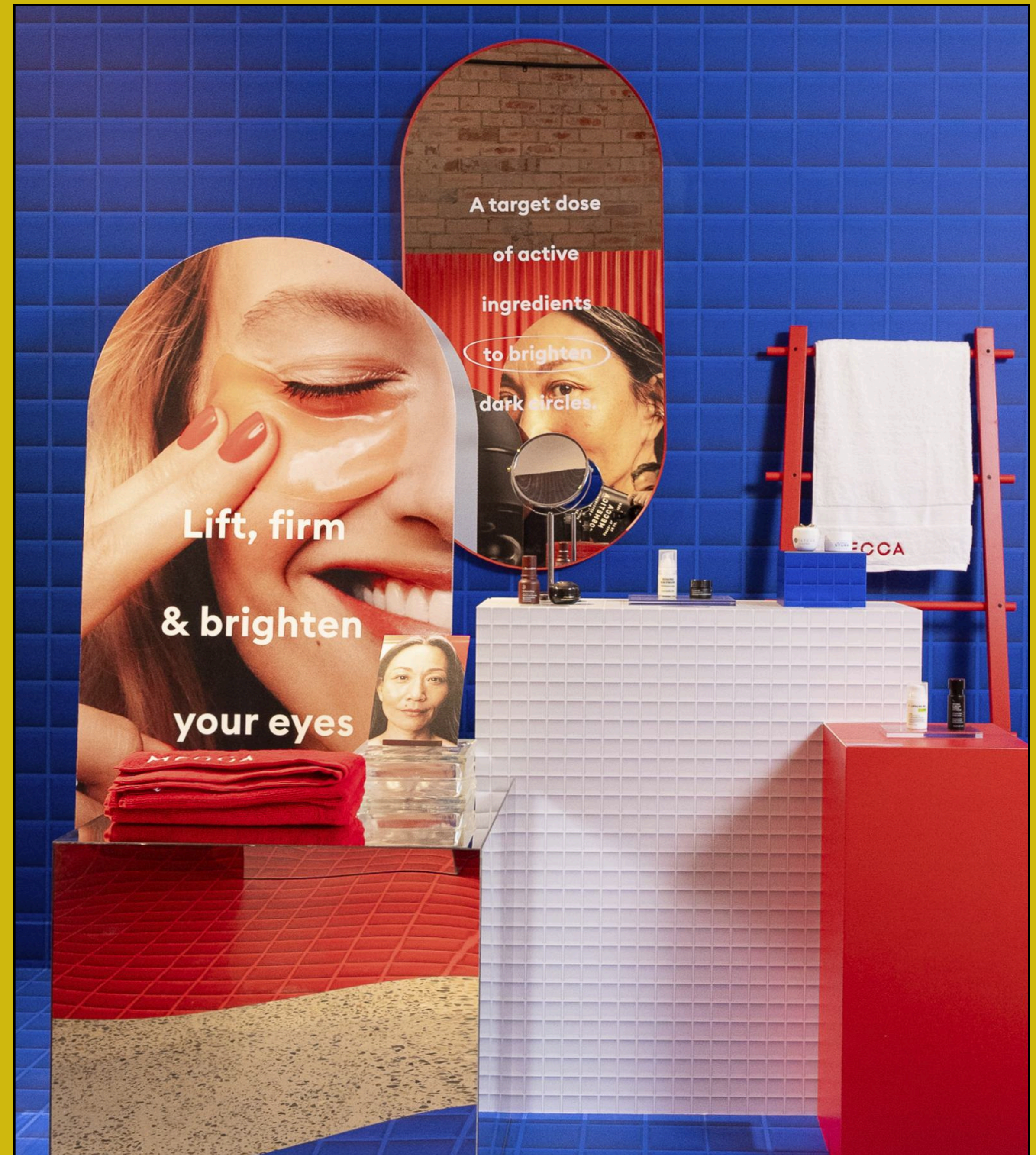
In today’s retail landscape, being seen is easy. Being remembered is rare.

Uniqlo’s vibrant design and youth-driven collaborations demonstrated strong appeal among younger shoppers, pointing to opportunities for even deeper engagement through hands-on, personalised experiences.



# 02.

## The emotional effect — What resonates and why

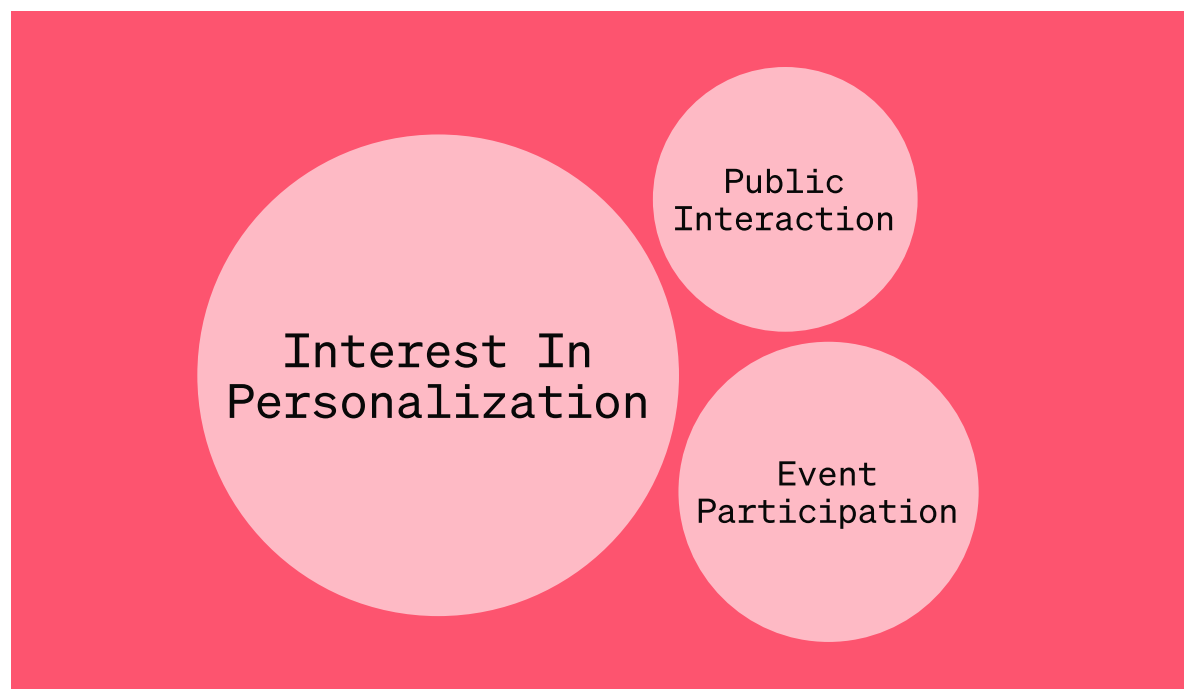




# The emotional effect — What resonates and why

While presence can get a brand noticed, it's the emotional anchors that make it stick. The Dashing x Ideally research revealed that distinctiveness isn't just about aesthetics or noise, it's about creating moments that feel personal and meaningful. Opportunities for participation, such as engraving your chosen piece of jewellery stood out, that feeling of having something made just for you. Emotional engagement transforms a fleeting encounter into sharing stories IRL.

The research also showed what doesn't work: cluttered visuals, generic giveaways, or experiences that feel copy-pasted. The difference between a memorable activation and a forgettable one is often as simple as whether it felt genuinely crafted for the person in front of it.



## KEY INSIGHTS

In short, resonance isn't about reach... It's about relevance, emotion, and experience. That's how activations move from just being seen, to truly being felt.

Most brand activations compete for attention. Few compete for lasting emotion, or enduring resonance

The lesson is old and new: Brands that evoke a personal response leave a deeper footprint than those who show up with colour and noise. Emotional effect isn't an add-on, it's the main event.



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# 03.

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Do, don't just show  
– From passive  
to participating





# Do, don't just show — From passive to participating

What separates a fleeting impression from genuine engagement? Participation. The study found that the most effective activations didn't just offer something to look at, they offered something to do.

## 30%

of people who engaged with a brand activation went on to make a purchase

The difference was tangible: customisation, live demonstrations, and real-world involvement made attendees feel like participants, not just passersby. As one respondent put it, "Being able to try a product without actually purchasing it," turned a simple encounter into an experience worth remembering.

Yet, not every activation succeeds. The research revealed that generic giveaways or static displays, no matter how visually appealing, rarely translate into meaningful action. The key is interaction, transforming the audience from spectators to active contributors. When people get hands-on, brands become stories rather than scenery.

## 24%

visited the brand's website



In today's experience-driven landscape, brands that invite participation don't just get noticed, they get chosen.



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# 04.

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## Serve the Few, Not the Many





# Serve the Few, Not the Many

The temptation in experiential retail is to please everyone. The research says: focus on who cares. But the data suggests real impact comes from focusing on those who are most engaged. Young adults (25–34) and high-income earners showed the strongest appetite for activations.

34%

of the younger group and those on higher incomes expressing strong interested responses

9%

of 'Older Family' households say they were "very interested." Older families and lower-income households were far less interested in pop ups

Rather than stretching an activation thin in hopes of pleasing the crowd, the most effective experiences double down on relevance for their core audience. It's not about mass reach, it's about meaningful resonance. The brands that leave a mark aren't those that try to be everything to everyone, but those that crafted moments for the people most likely to care - and to share.

## ANALOG IN A DIGITAL WORLD



In an era saturated by screens and digital noise, what truly cuts through is often analog. The Dashing x Ideally research found that personalised and hands-on experiences - think tactile samples, or physical keepsakes - were some of the strongest drivers of distinctiveness and likability, especially among younger adults. Digital touchpoints matter, but it's the real, tangible moments that people take away, and talk about.

**In a world of hashtags, it's the feel of something real that lingers.**

To boost reach and exposure, design experiences that not only resonate in person, but are irresistible to share.



# 05.

## Let Customers Tell the Story



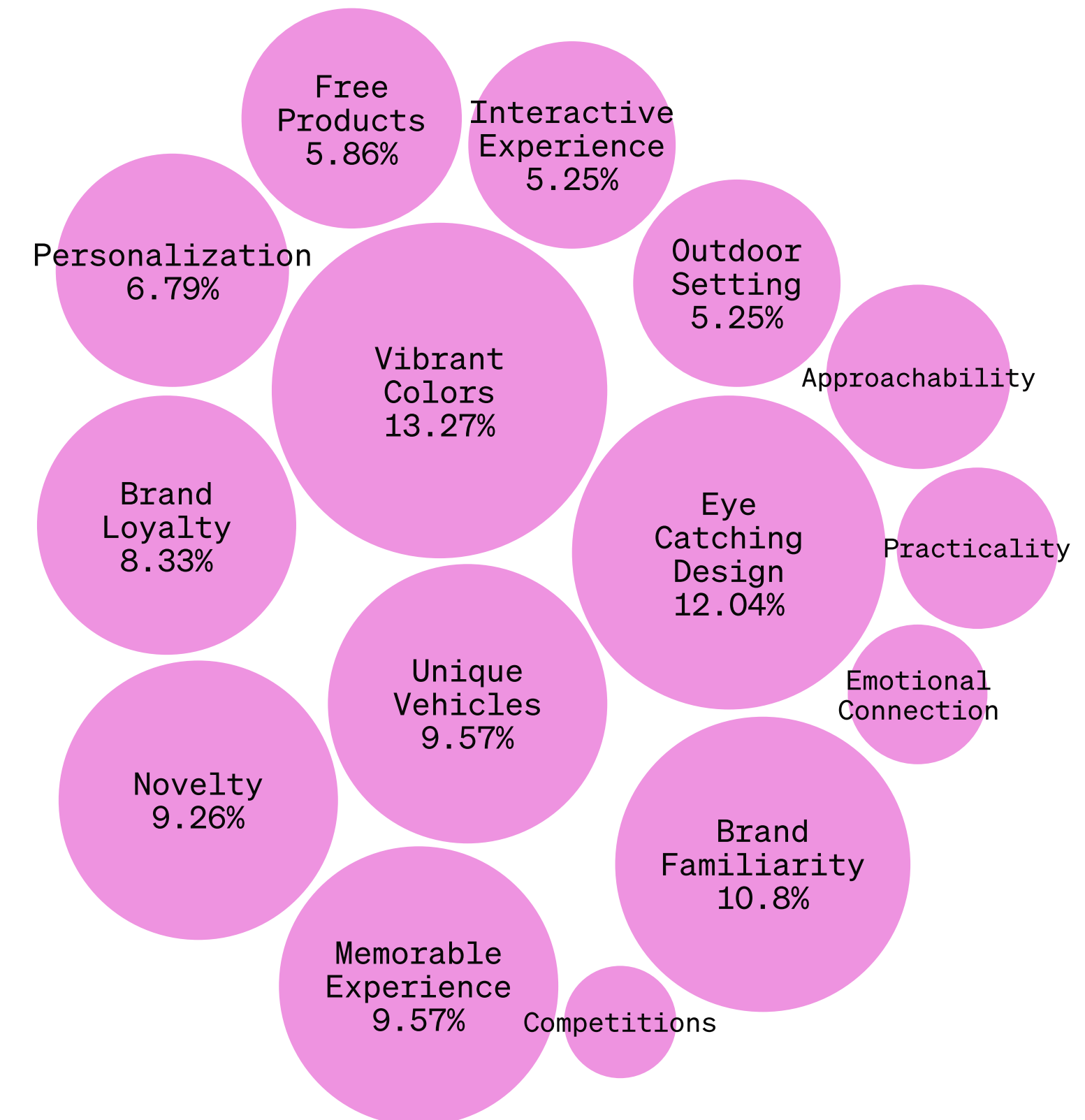


# Let Customers Tell the Story

The most credible, resonant advocacy doesn't come from the brand itself, it comes from real people in their own words. As respondents told us: "It makes me happy and super intrigued," and, "Great idea. Stands out and good viral marketing viewably as it gets lost online." These are the moments that get shared, retold, and remembered. The lesson?

Craft activations people want to talk about, and let their voices become your best marketing platform.

Please describe why it was most memorable to you, or why you liked it the most?



INSIGHTS POWERED BY IDEALLY



# 06.

## Playbook: How to Build for Memory





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# Playbook: How to Build for Memory

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1.

Start with  
emotion:

Aim for a feeling, not just attention.

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2.

Invite  
participation:

Turn audiences into active players,  
not just spectators.

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3.

Curate for  
memory:

Focus on what will be retold, not just  
what's seen.

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4.

Serve your  
core:

Invest in the audience that actually cares.

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5.

Edit for clarity:

Kill the clutter; keep one memorable idea.

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6.

Stay analog  
where it counts:

Give people something real to hold onto.

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7.

Let stories  
travel:

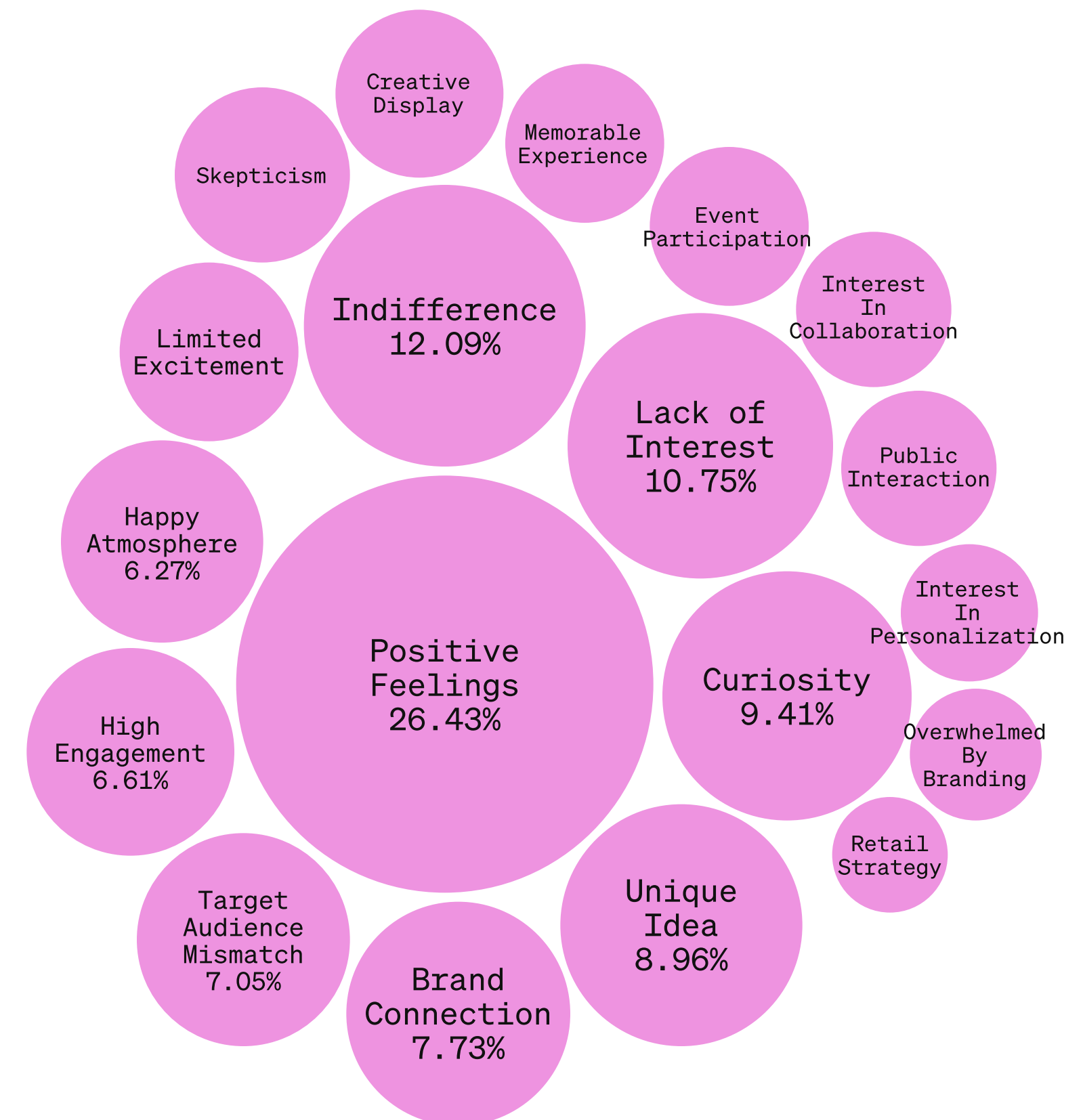
Build moments worth quoting, sharing,  
and reliving.



# 07.

## Final Word: Be the Brand They Remember

Please describe how you feel after seeing this experience?



INSIGHTS POWERED BY IDEALLY



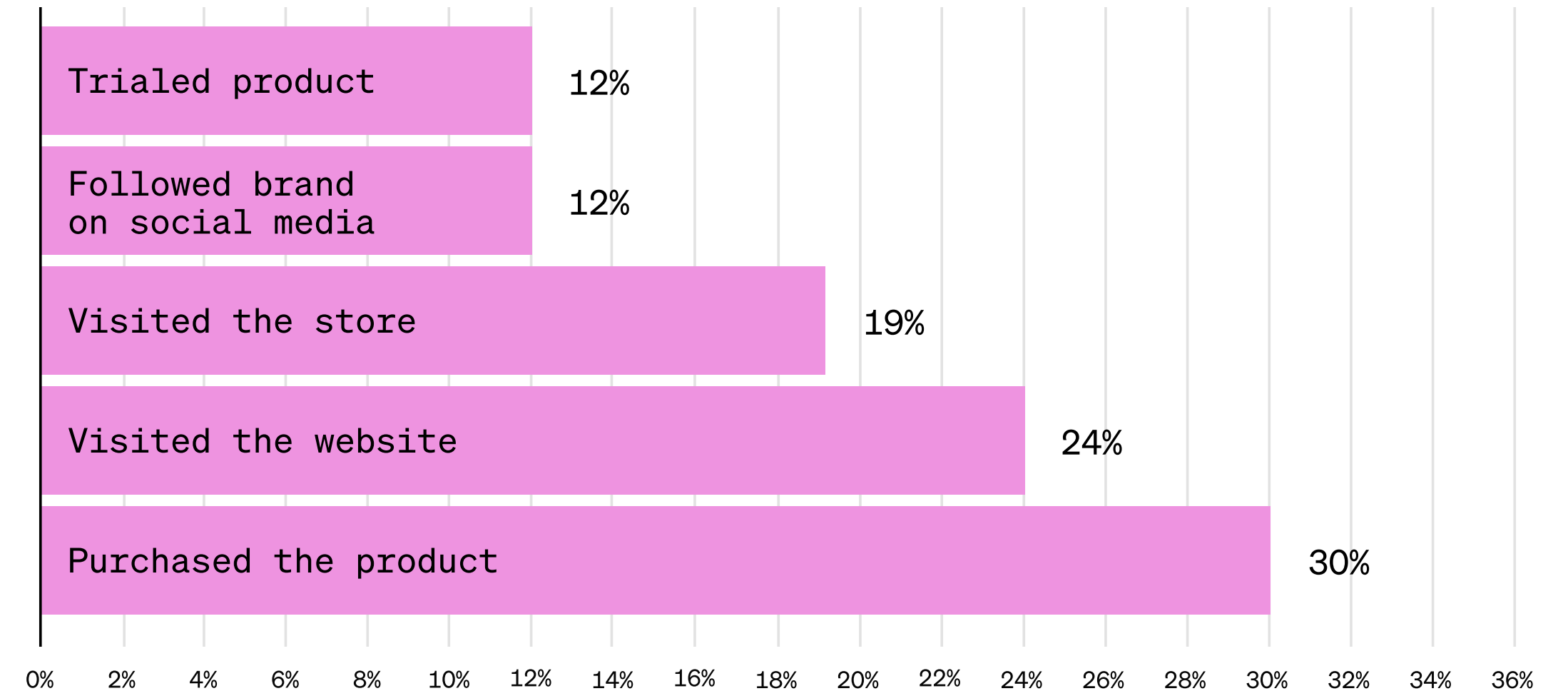
# Final Word: Be the Brand They Remember

In a retail landscape overflowing with pop-ups and branded experiences, presence is easy to buy, but memory is hard to earn. The activations that matter aren't the ones with the biggest footprint, the loudest colours, or the cleverest giveaways. They're the ones that spark emotion, invite participation, and leave people with something real to talk about. The research makes it clear:

Being noticed is table stakes;  
being remembered is the win.

In a world chasing the next big moment, the brands that last are those that curate for memory, edit for meaning, and trust in the power of genuine human connection.

What action did you take as a result of the brand's communication?



“Our research shows that the decisive tipping point in brand activation is transforming audiences from passive observers into active participants, engaging them in experiences they’re eager to share and discuss long after the event ends.”

Jemma Caprioli,  
Group Director of Strategy at Dashing



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