

Subtitling Randomised Control Trial

Understanding the negative impact of subtitles on UX



This deck is a summary of the RCT run by Nesta and GCSEPod in 2020/2021

GCSEPod were interested in having subtitles enabled as default for their collection of 8,000+ educational videos. They were convinced by the educational benefits, but were keen to see how users reacted to subtitles set on as default before making the shift

The aim of this trial was therefore to ascertain empirically whether the addition of subtitles to the videos had any negative effects. Specifically:

- Q1 Do children dislike subtitles - do they turn them off?
- Q2 Does having the subtitles on reduce watch time?
- Q3 Does the addition of subtitles lead to any complaints?

GCSEPod

- Digital education publisher
- Award-winning content and assessment
- 8,000+ videos
- 1 in 3 UK Secondary schools
- 40+ countries
- 1 million+ students

Nesta

- National Endowment for Science Technology & the Arts
- The Innovation Foundation
- Launched with a £250m endowment
- Exists to bring good ideas to life
- Focuses on academic research and practical implementations

The Trial

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Start date

4th
December
2020

End date

13th
January
2021

All GCSEPod subscribing schools were randomly assigned to one of two groups*

* Technical note: This was a two-arm randomised controlled trial clustered at the school level

Treatment group

The video subtitles were switched on by default for 225,000 users

①



②

Control group

The video subtitles remained off by default for 225,000 users

Over 1 million
videos accessed

450,000
users in the trial

The Results

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Treatment group

98.5% of users who had subtitles defaulted to on, kept their **subtitles on**

Control group

98.1% of users who had subtitles defaulted to off, kept their **subtitles off**

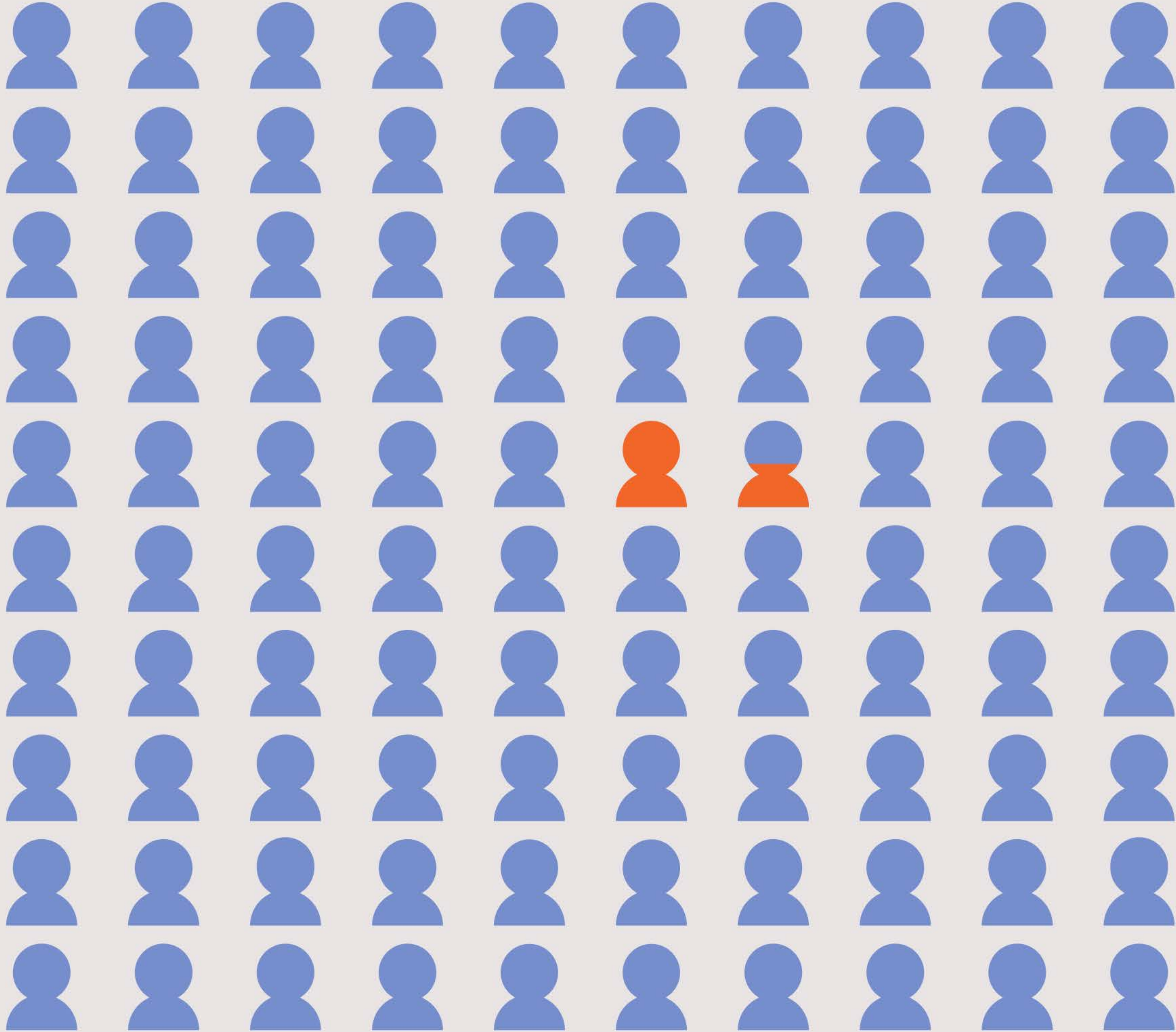
Our Takeaways

Children don't mind having the subtitles on (it is currently very easy to alter the setting, yet they didn't)

Those that did not have the subtitles on by default did not turn them on; defaults matter

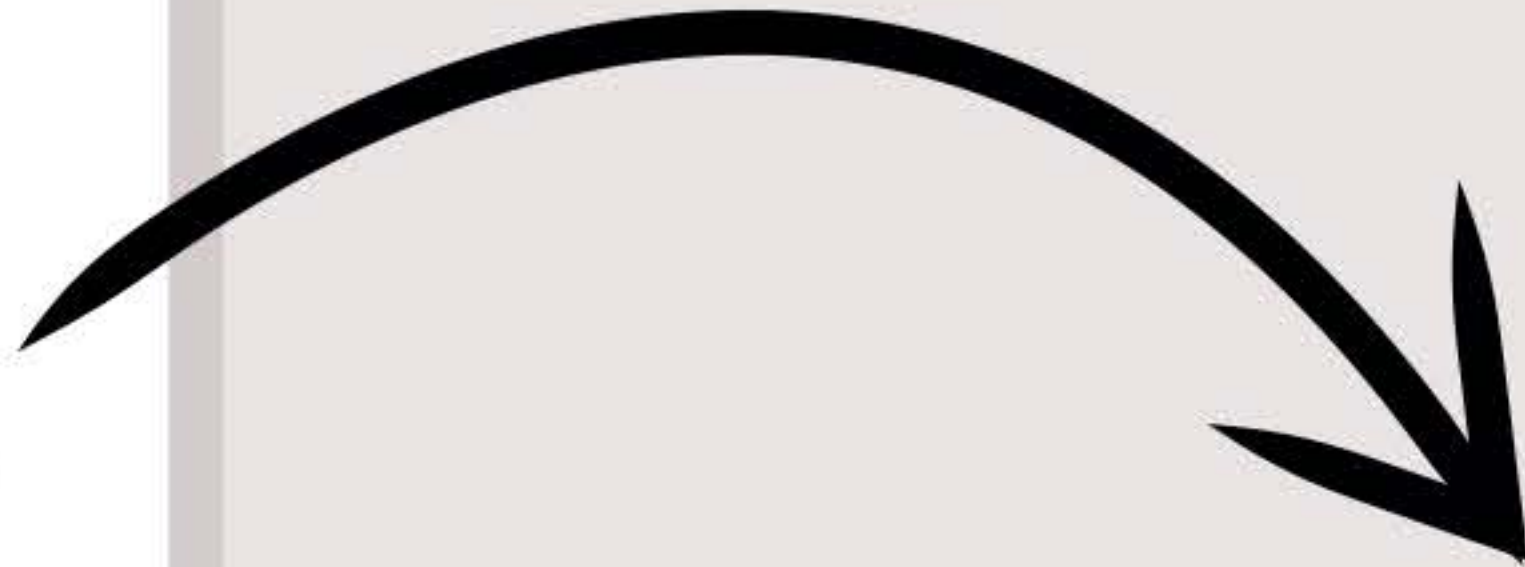
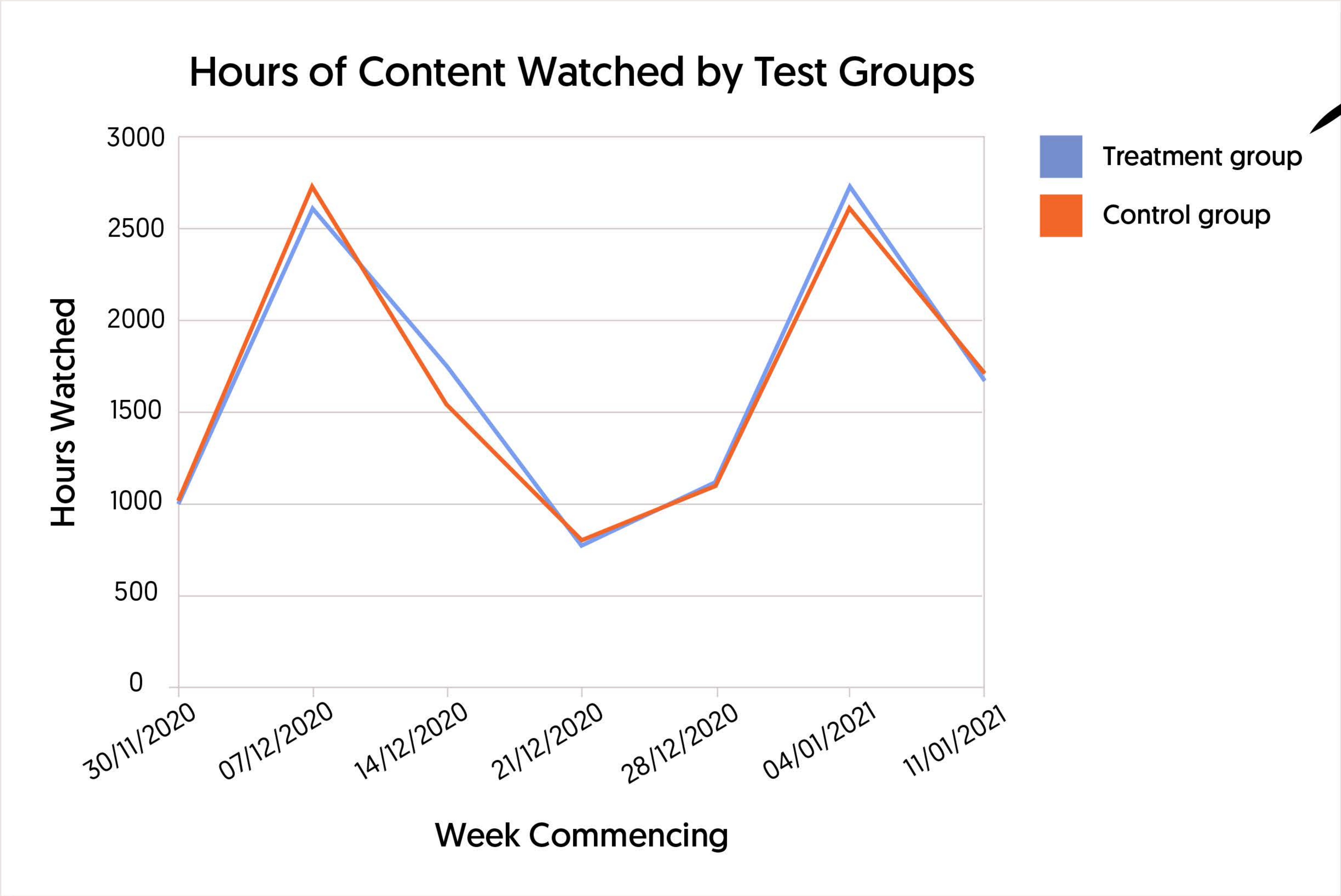
* Technical note: Only users who streamed at least 30 seconds of content were included

The Results - Treatment Group



Just over 1 person in 100 chose to turn their subtitles off in the treatment group

The Results - Subtitle Usage

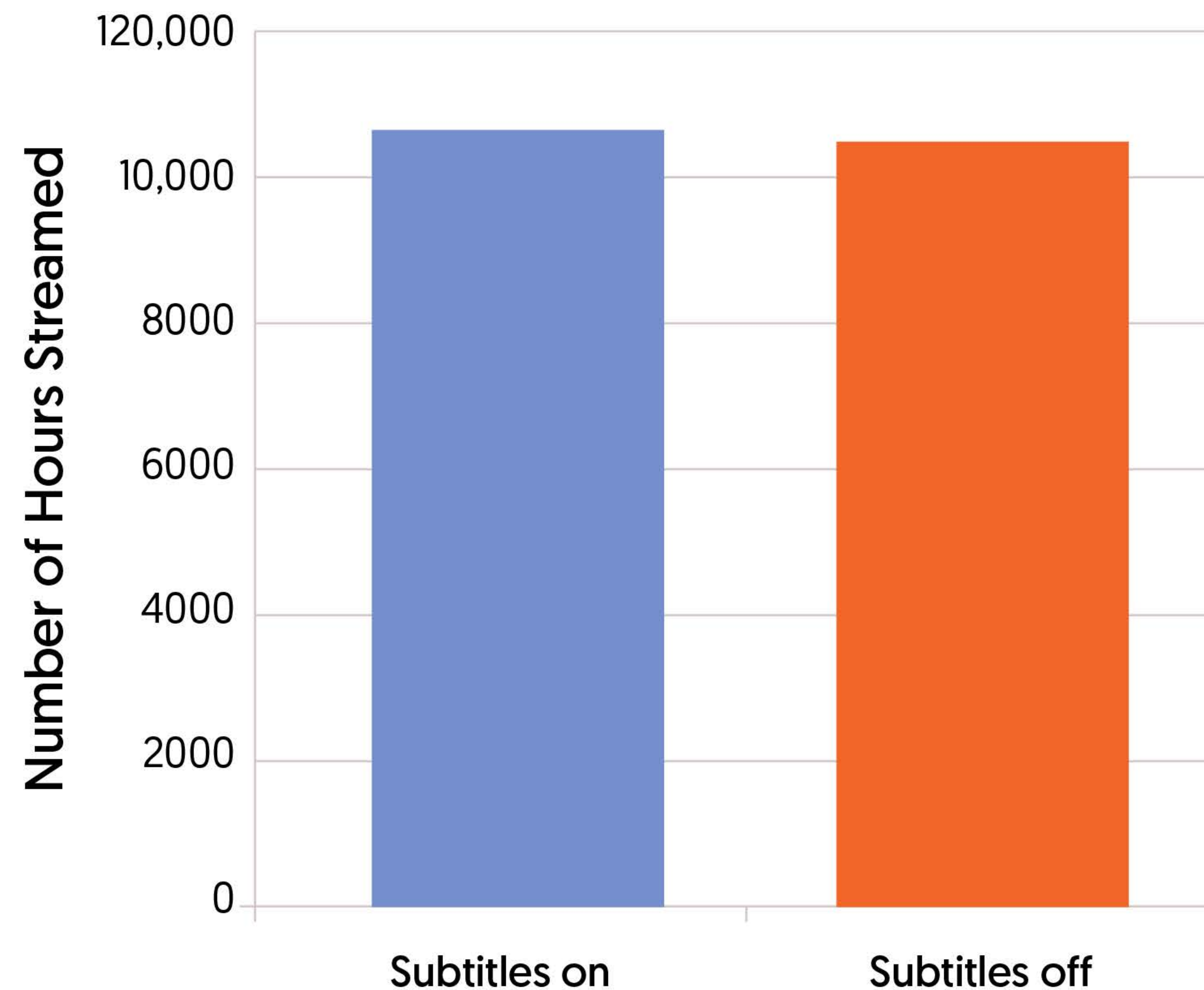


Only active users were counted

Every user had the opportunity to turn subtitles off - but chose not to

The Results - Watch Time

Number of Hours Streamed During the Trial



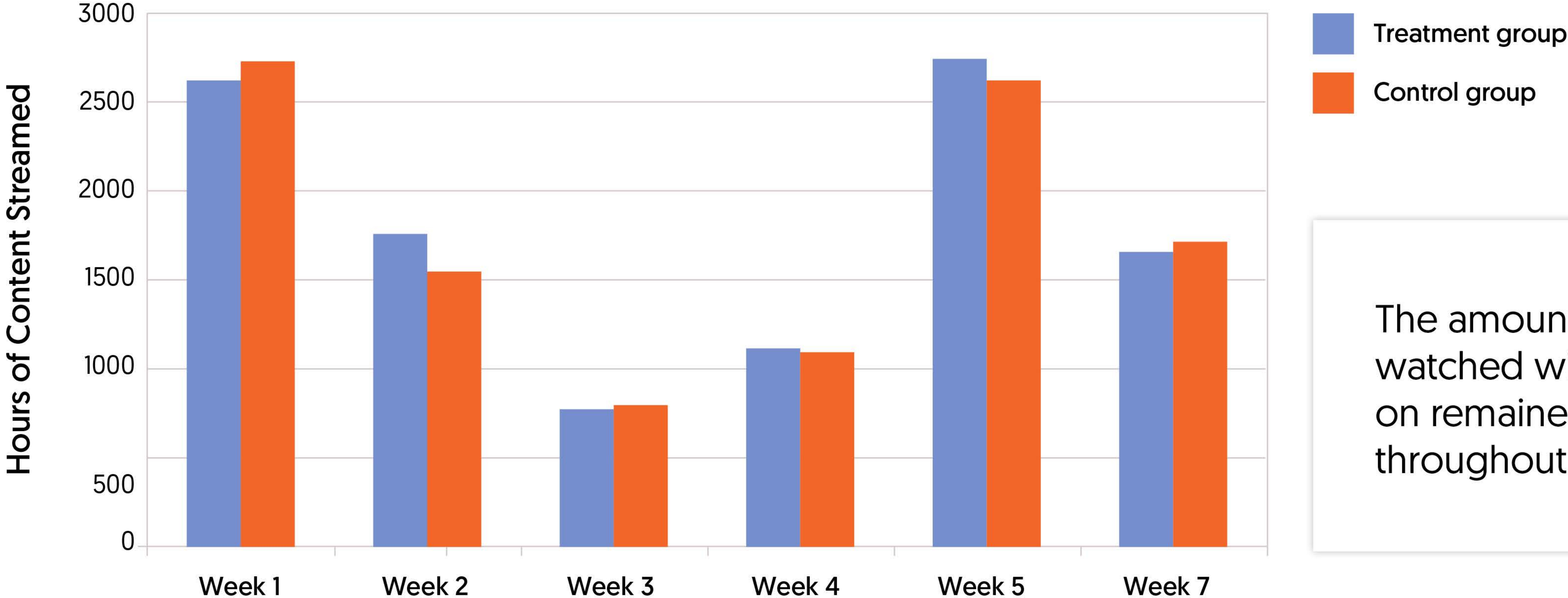
- Subtitles had no effect on the amount users watched
- There is no additional risk of customer churn

In fact, slightly more content was streamed with **subtitles on** during the trial

50.3%

The Results - Watch Time

Hours Streamed Week by Week



The amount of content watched with subtitles on remained consistent throughout

The Results

gcsepod

nesta

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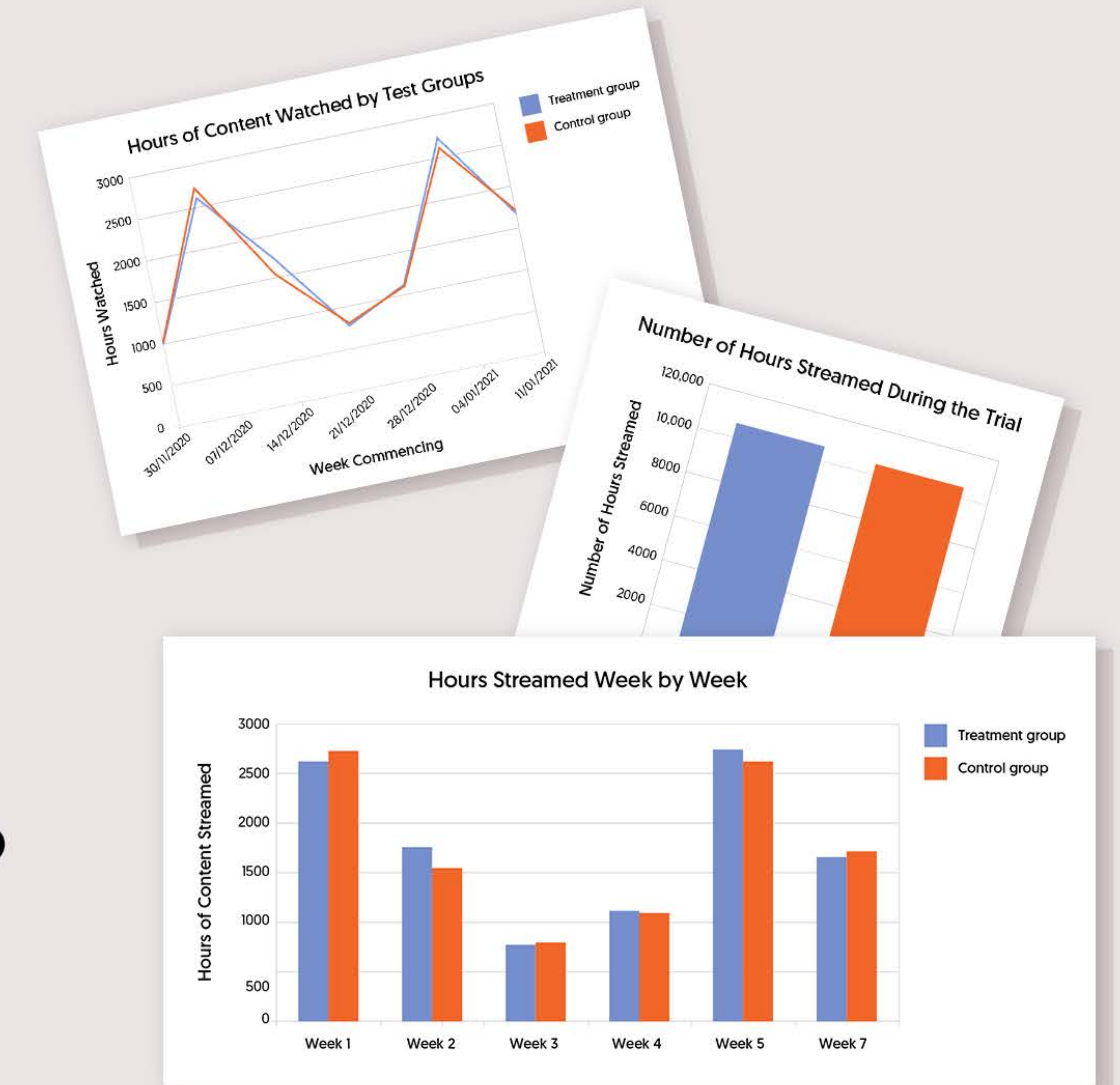
Throughout the
course of the trial
we recorded no
complaints at all

In Conclusion

Q1
Answer | Do children dislike subtitles - do they turn them off?
They do not mind, UX appears to be unaffected

Q2
Answer | Does having the subtitles on reduce watch time?
No, in fact it marginally increases it

Q3
Answer | Does the addition of subtitles lead to any complaints?
They do not mind, UX appears to be unaffected



As a result GCSEPod will be updating it's policy with immediate effect, all videos will now default to subtitles on to support children's literacy