The Importance of the Host
&
The Power of Trust

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What We'll Cover Today

Five findings from The Podcast Study 2026 | *n = 1,205 total sample*

1. **The host is the reason they tune in**
   Why 82% say the host is a big part of, or the only reason for, their listening.

2. **What happens when the host leaves**
   The retention risk in a host departure — and how a vacation does not break the bond.

3. **Host-read ads carry more weight**
   How a host endorsement changes brand recall, trust, and purchase intent.

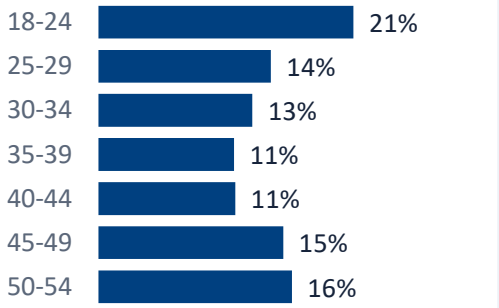
4. **Host trust drives discovery**
   Why the host rivals social video clips as the reason listeners try something new.

5. **How hosts can improve audience conversion**
   Listeners rarely give a second chance to a podcast they try…better host execution converts more new listeners.

Who We Talked To

Q1-4, Q16-17 Sample Profile of n=1,205 respondents — age, gender, region, ethnicity, employment, and work location

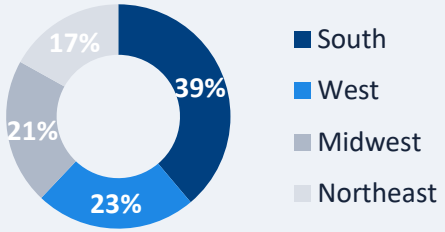
AGE



GENDER

Female	Male	Non-binary
51%	48%	1%

REGION



PODCAST USAGE

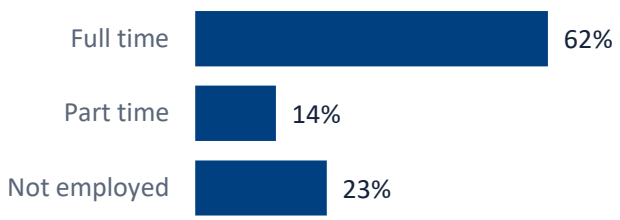
100%	Monthly (required)
87%	Weekly
40%	Daily

ETHNICITY

White	57.6%
Hispanic	20.2%
Black	13.2%
Asian	6.1%
Other	2.9%

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Not a screening requirement



"Unwilling to say" (0.7%) omitted

WORK LOCATION

Not a screening requirement

74%	15%	11%
On-site every day	Hybrid	Work from home

Base = employed only, n = 918

Podcast Momentum

The Podcast Audience…
In Their Own Words

What They Like Most
What They Would Change

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the PODCAST STUDY.com

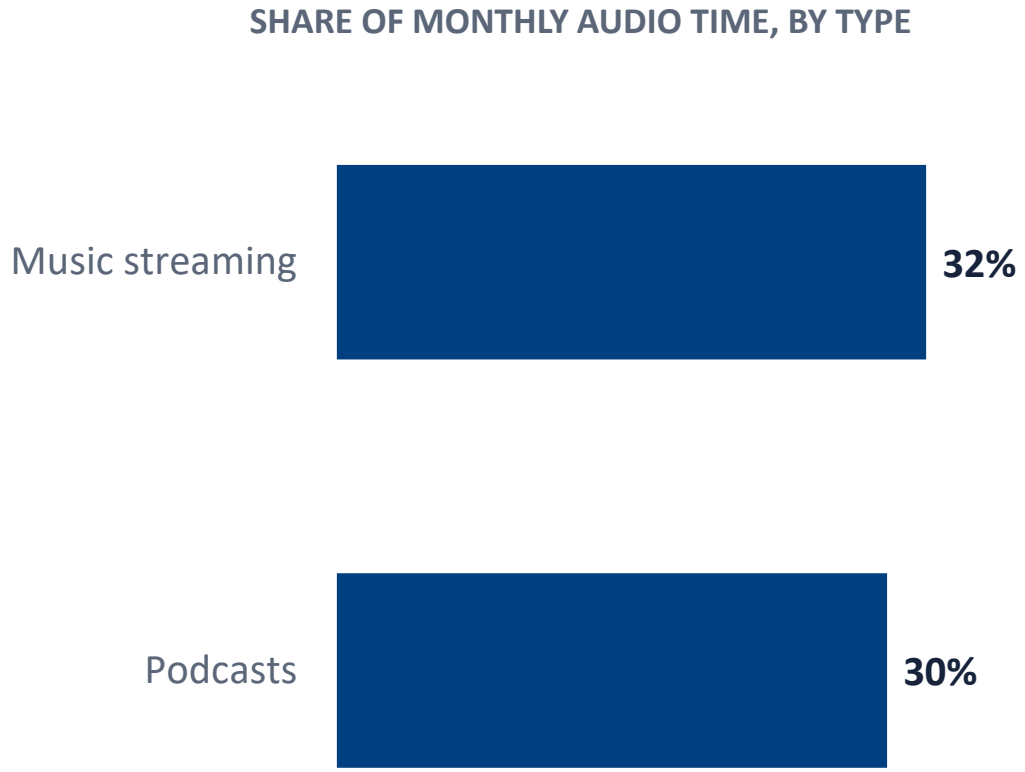
POINT To POINT

Podcasts Now Rival Music Streaming for Usage

Q12, Q7 Share of monthly listening time by audio content type | *n = 1,205 total sample*

30%

Of monthly audio time goes to podcasts — nearly tied with music streaming



Momentum Is Real

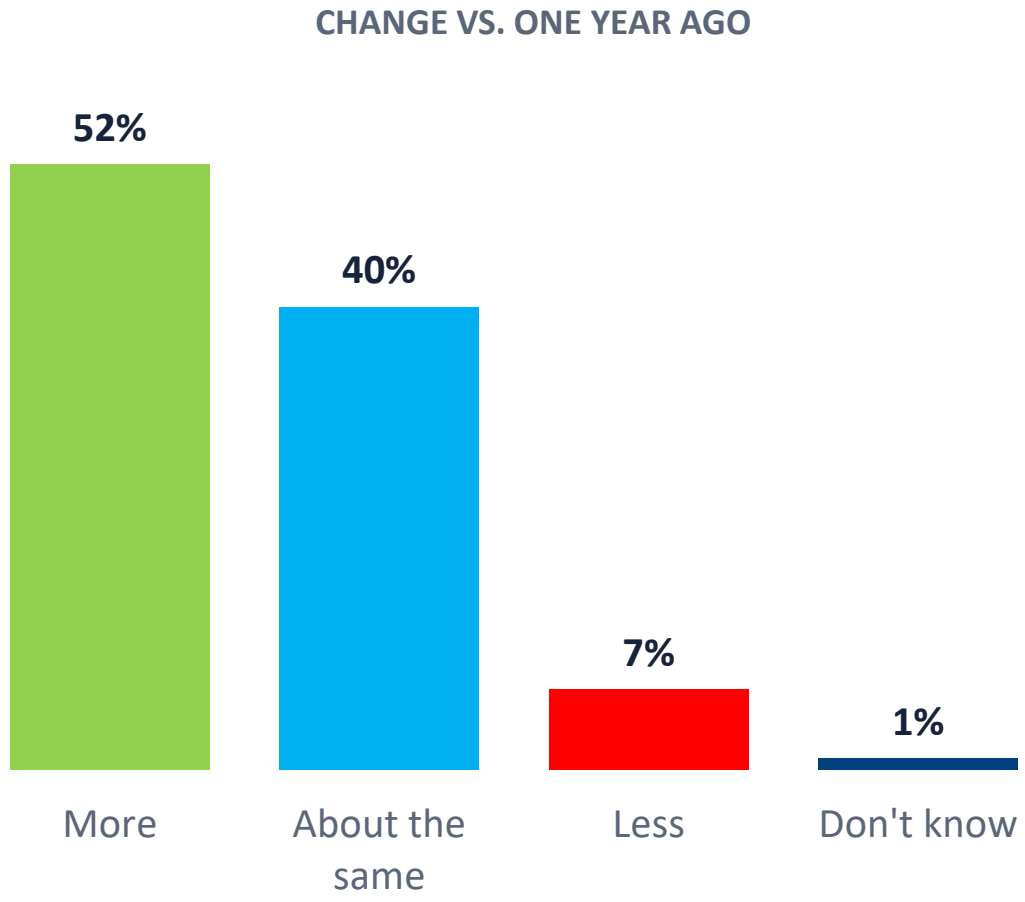
Q10, Q14-15, Q23-24 How podcast listening has changed, and where the growth is coming from | *n = 1,205 total sample*

52%

Listen more than a year ago (only 7% less)

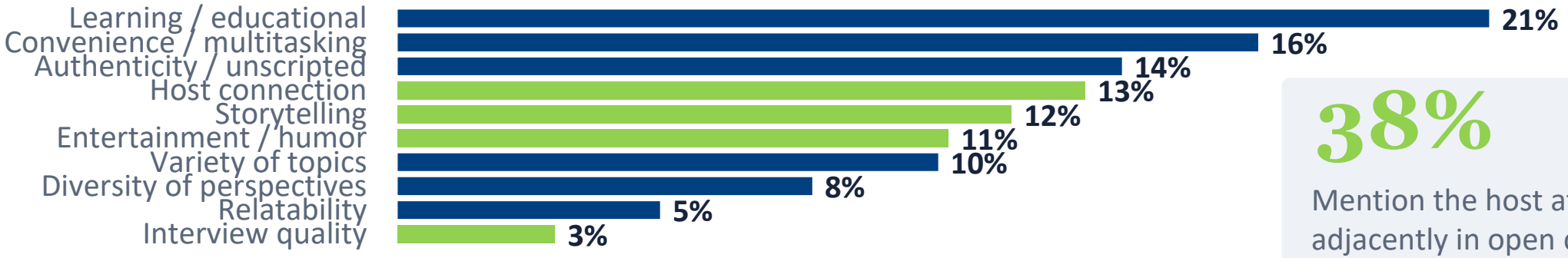
40%

Expect to listen even more next year — only 6% expect less



What They Like Most About Podcasts

Q19 The ONE thing the audience likes most about podcasts (open-end, coded) / *n = 1,205 total sample*



38%

Mention the host at least adjacently in open comments

> *"It is intimate — I feel like the podcasters I listen to are talking to me, which makes me more loyal."*
>
> **— 44, M, Virginia**

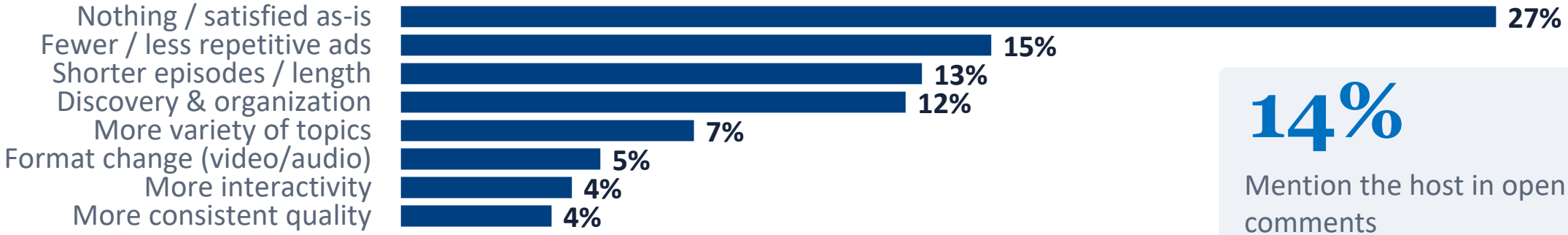
> *"It's very personable because the people make you feel like you get to know them, and getting to know the hosts or guests makes me want to listen to it more often."*
>
> **— 22, F, Tennessee**

> *"I like being personally involved, like being part of the conversation and feeling right there with the hosts. I usually have conversations later with people about the topics I hear on the podcast."*
>
> **— 53, M, MIchigan**

> *"The hosts are what I like most about podcasts because they feel like friends, and that makes me want to come back to those podcasts."*
>
> **— 27, F, Colorado**

What They'd Change About Podcasts

Q20 The ONE thing the audience would change about podcasts (open-end, coded) | *n = 1,205 total sample*



14%

Mention the host in open comments

> *"…less small talk and less talking off subject, because when hosts spend too much time off topic, I lose interest and don't catch the whole show."*
>
> **— 42, M, Indiana**

> *"I want to have live chat features, it should also be easier to call in on air, and I want to be able to communicate with the hosts."*
>
> **— 36, F, North Carolina**

> *"Make podcasts have more consistent hosts… I have stopped listening to a podcast because when the hosts changed, it started feeling less funny and entertaining."*
>
> **— 22, F, Florida**

> *"I would like more personal info, specifically for podcast hosts to share more about their own lives."*
>
> **— 48, M, Oklahoma**

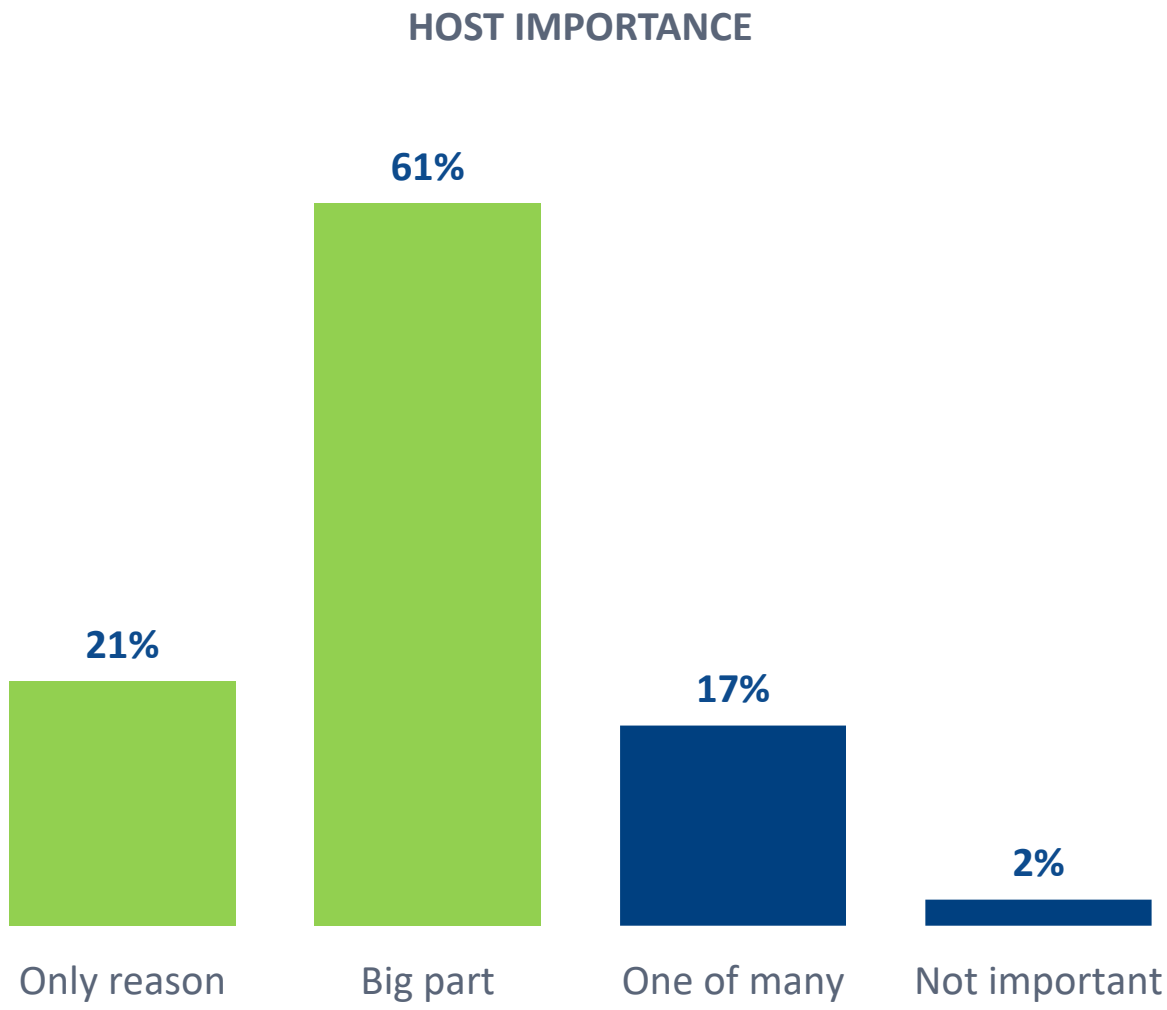
Host Dependency

The Host Is a Key Brand Attractor

Q47 How important the host is to why the audience tunes in at all / *n = 1,104 (base: has a favorite podcast)*

82%

Say the host is a big part of, or the only reason for, their consumption



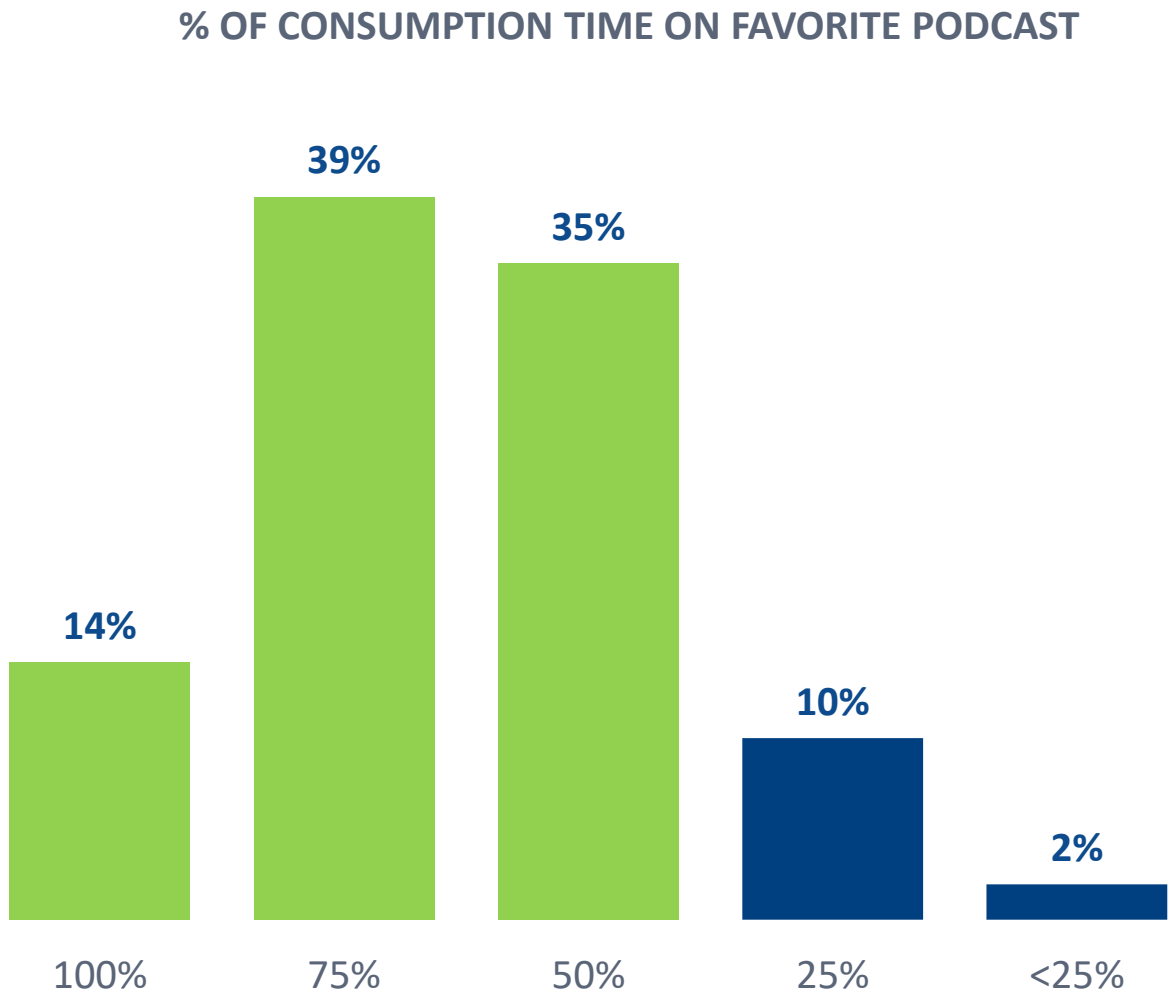
It's Critical To Be Their Favorite Podcast

Q43-46, 47 What % of podcast consumption is with their favorite | *n = 1,104 (base: has a favorite podcast)*

88%

Spend 50%+ of all podcast consumption on their single favorite podcast.

As we just saw, the host is a critical factor in driving first choice.



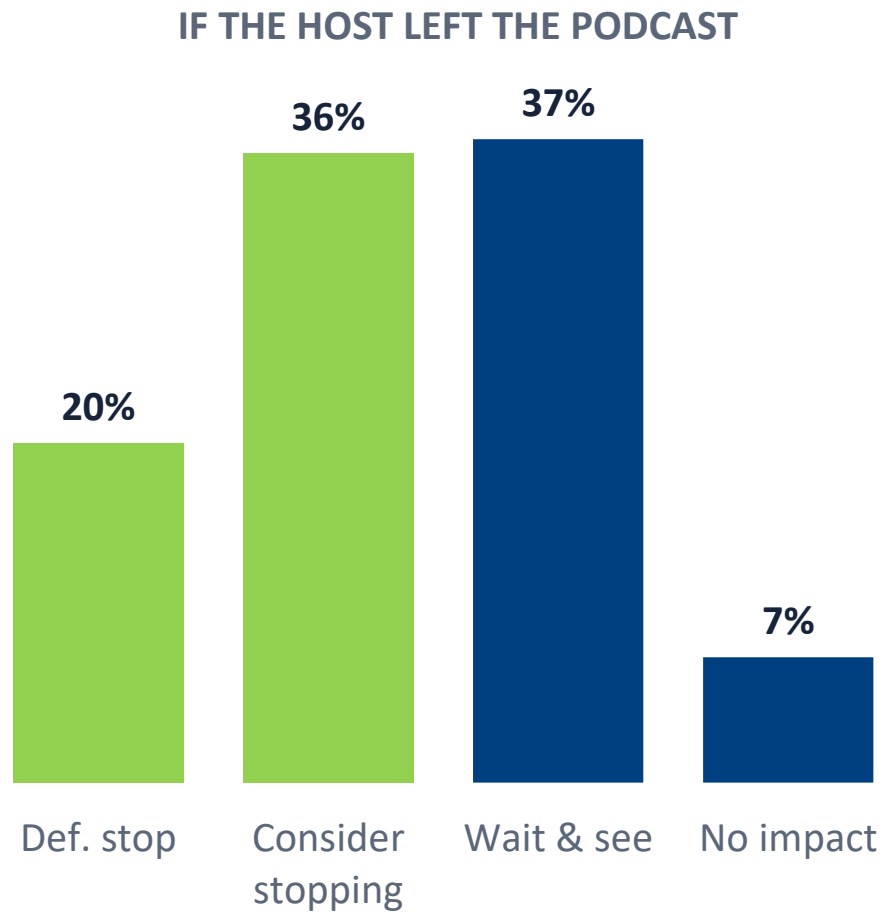
If the Host Left the Podcast

Q49 What audience says they would do if their favorite host departed (N=1,104 has a favorite podcast)

56%

Would definitely stop or seriously consider stopping to listen/watch if the host left

n = 1,104 (base: has a favorite podcast)



BOTTOM LINE

A host departure is a real retention risk…additional data pointing to the vital role the host plays.

The Vacation Test: Loyalty in the Host's Absence

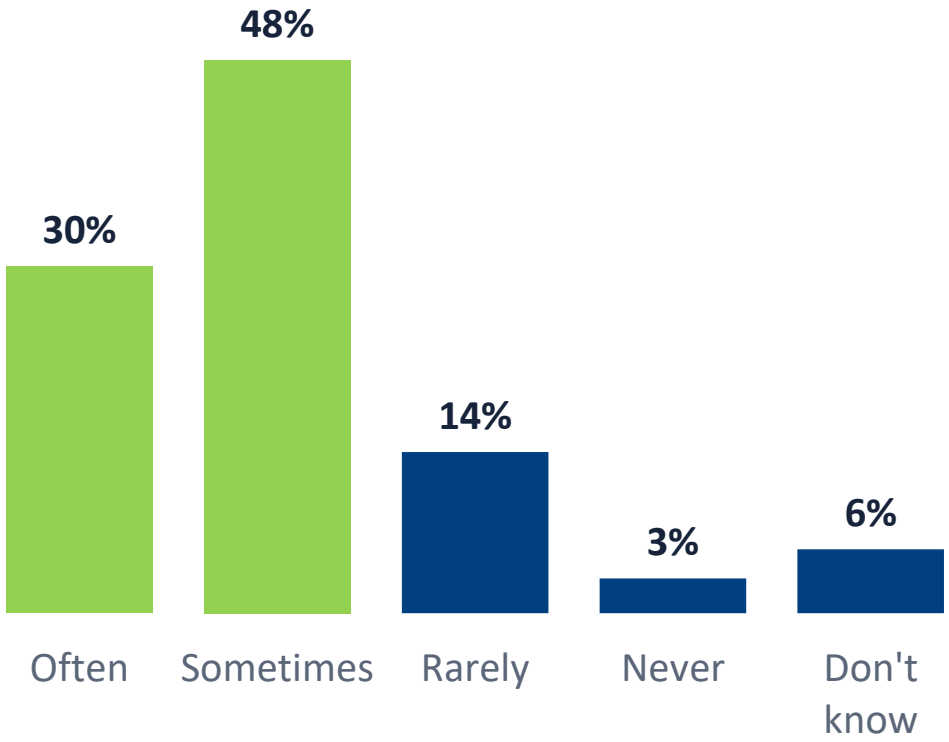
Q48 What happens to consumption when the host takes a break (N=1,104 – has a favorite podcast)

78%

Would still often or sometimes continue listening if the host is on vacation

n = 1,104 (base: has a favorite podcast)

LIKELIHOOD TO LISTEN/WATCH IF THE HOST IS ON VACATION



BOTTOM LINE

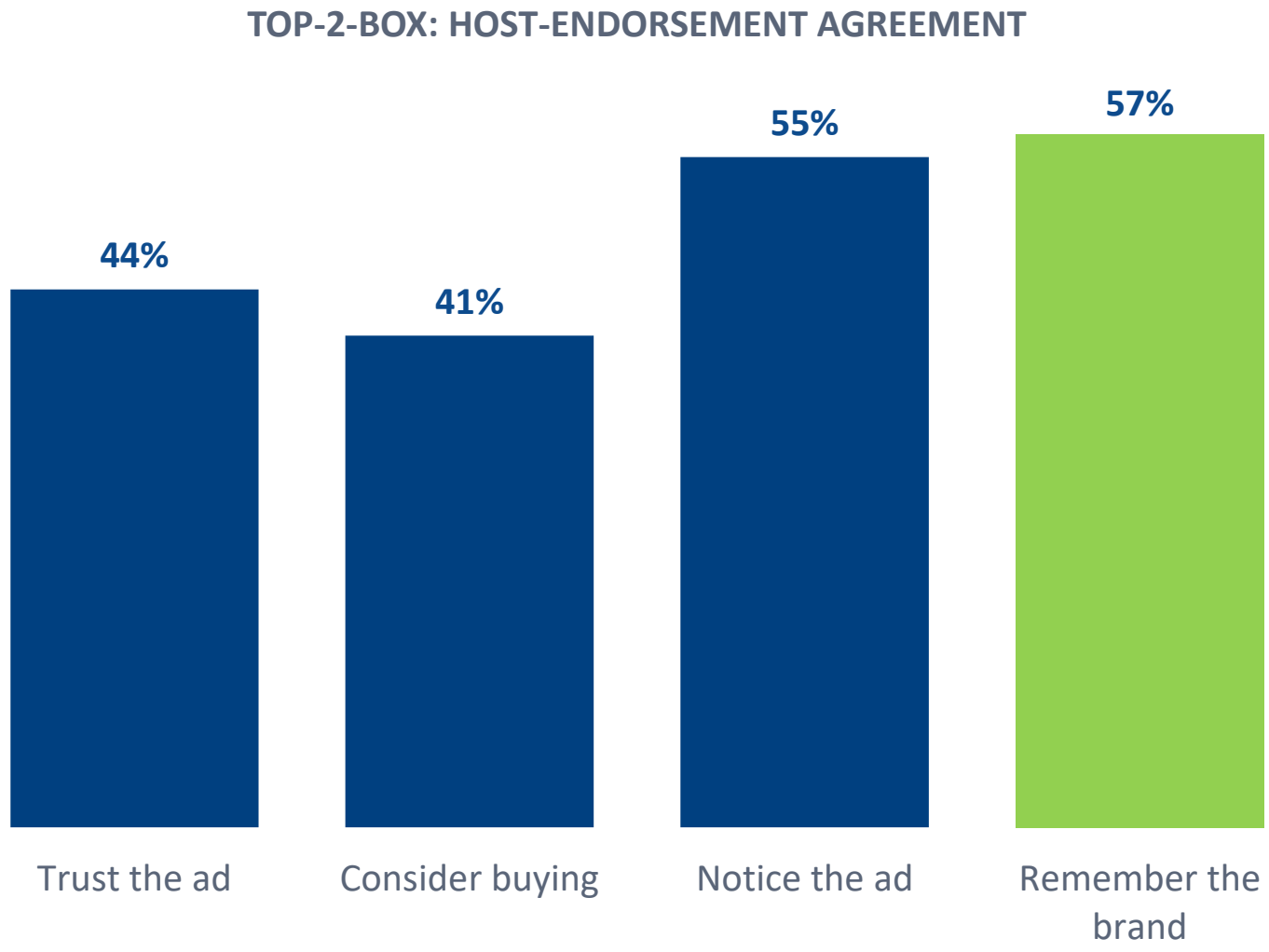
Absence doesn't break the bond — host loyalty survives even a full vacation.

Host Endorsements = Force Multiplier

Q63-66 The impact of host endorsements (5pt scale), top-2-box

57%

Say they're more likely to remember the brand

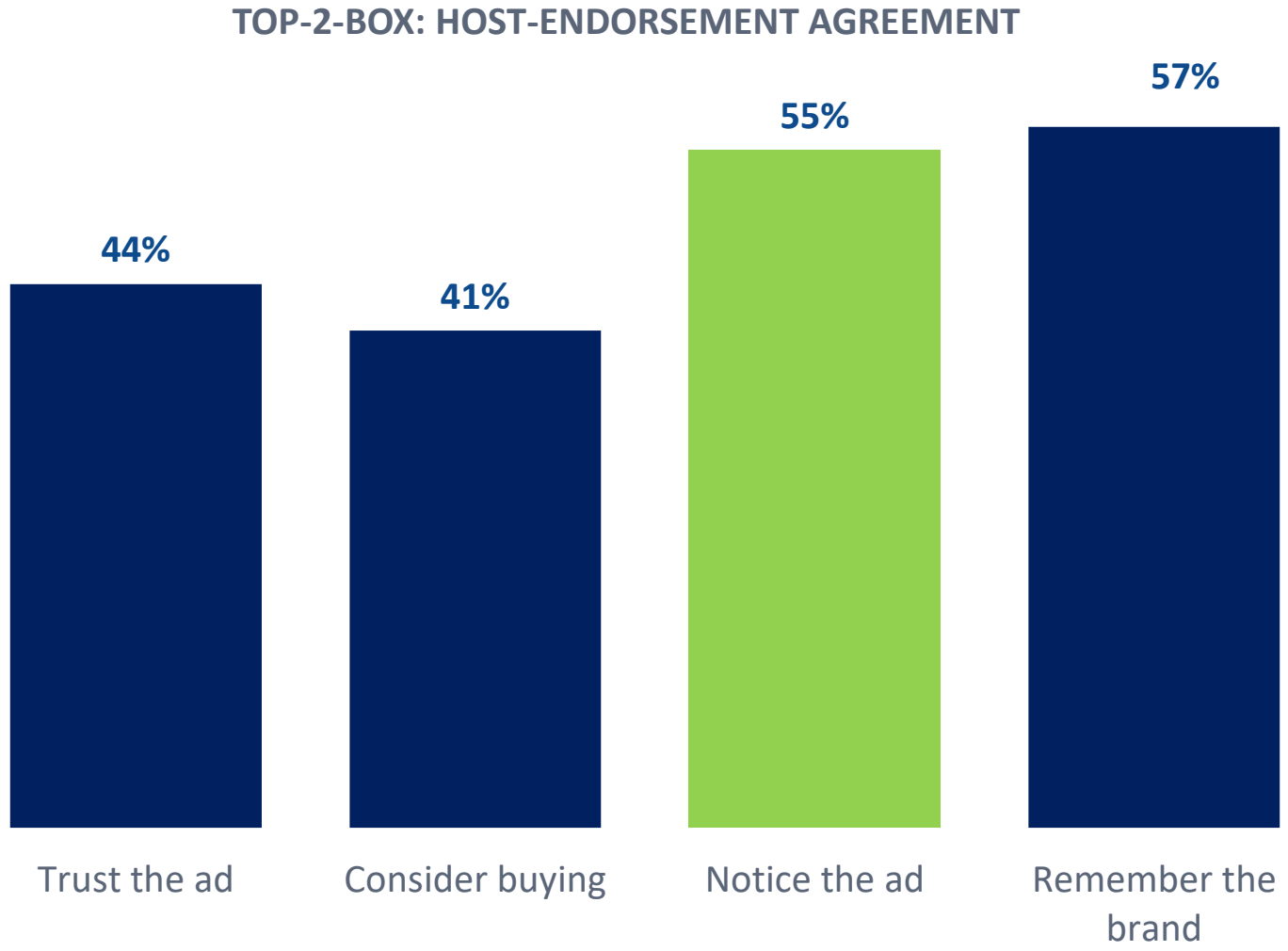


Host Endorsements = Force Multiplier

Q63-66 The impact of host endorsements (5pt scale), top-2-box

55%

Say they're more likely to notice the ad again after a host endorsement



Host Endorsements = Force Multiplier

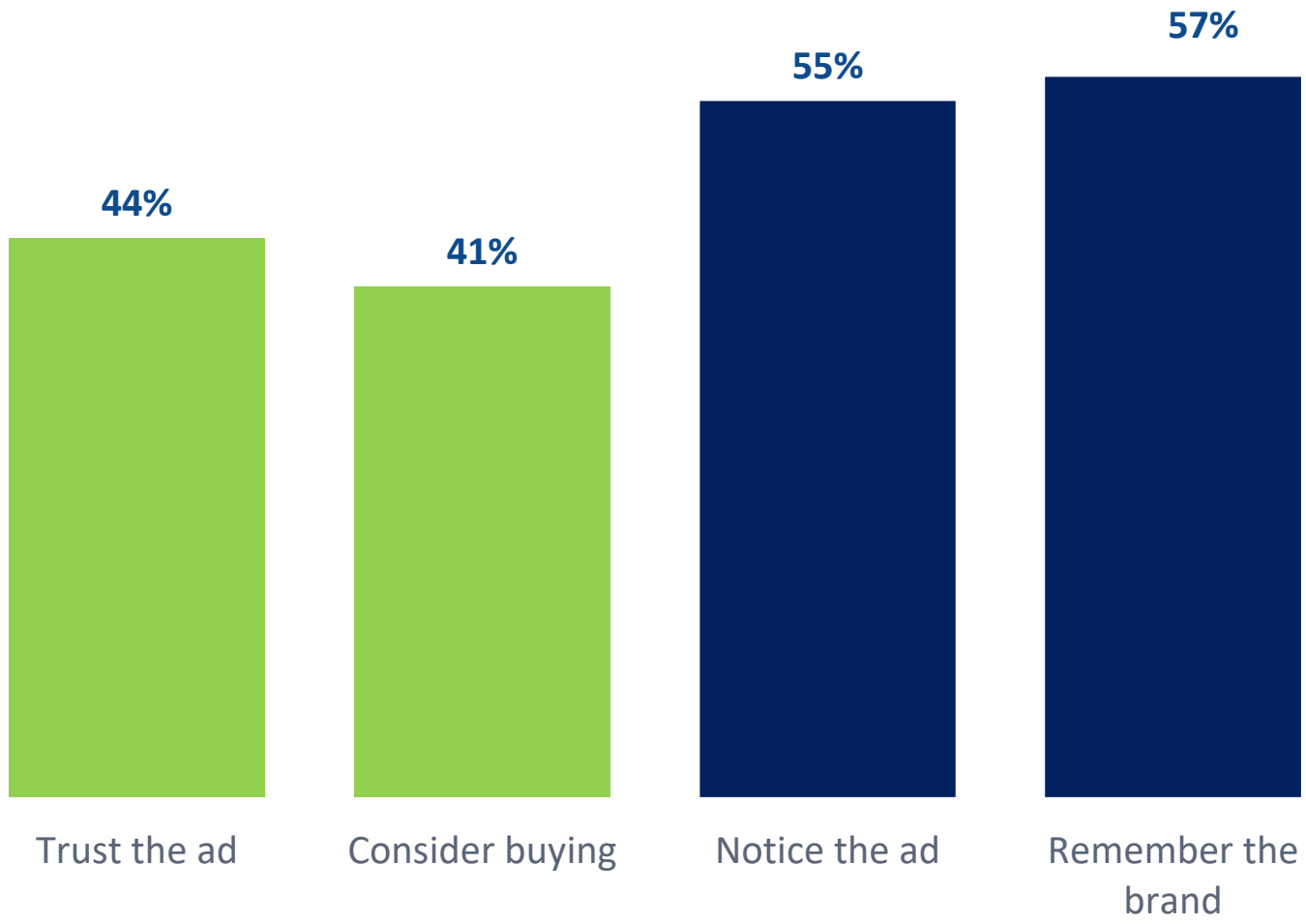
Q63-66 The impact of host endorsements (5pt scale), top-2-box

44%

Say they're more likely to trust the ad

41%

Say they're more likely to consider buying the product

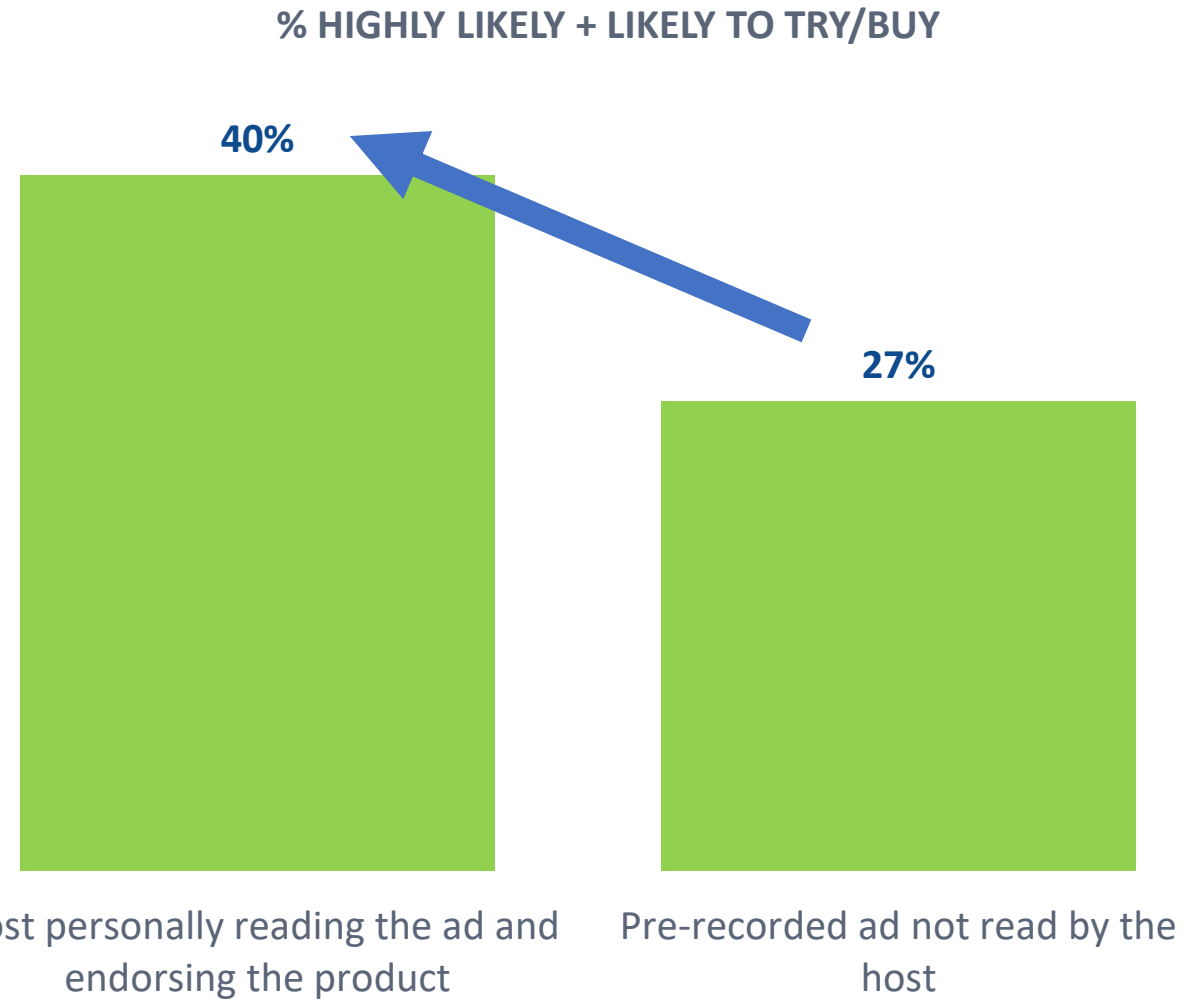


Host Endorsements = Force Multiplier

Q63-66 How likely they are to try or buy based on hearing/seeing a pre-recorded ad not read by the host vs a host-read ad

48%

More influence of a host-read ad compared to a standard ad



BOTTOM LINE

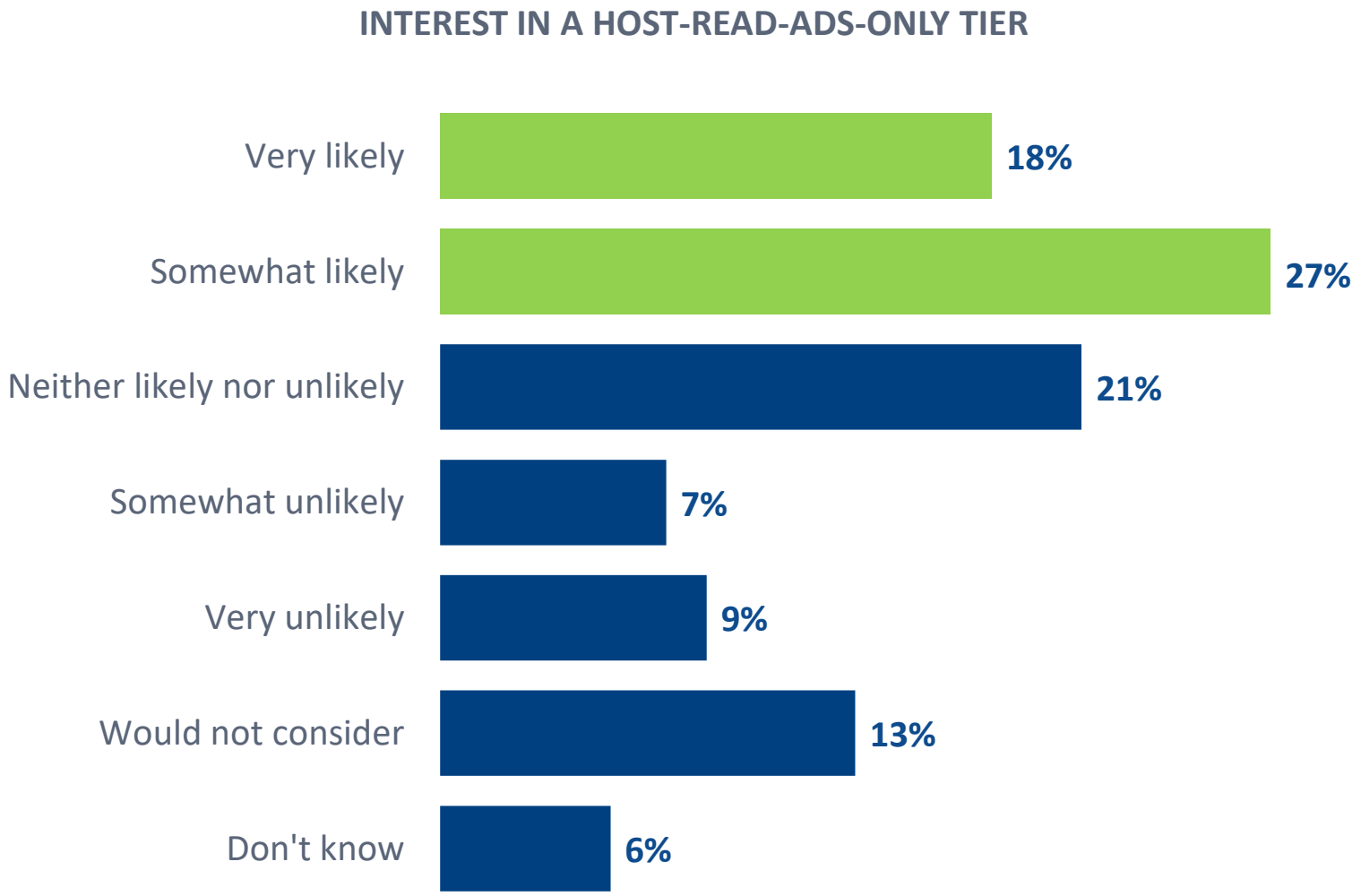
A host's recommendation of a product or service can sway the audience.

The Host-Read-Ads-Only Tier: Interest & Price

Q56 Likelihood to subscribe if host-read ads only / *n = 1,205 total sample*

45%

At least somewhat likely to pay for a tier that removes all ads except host-read ones



Targeted Ads & Host-Read Ad Behavior

Q53 Behavior when host reads an ad

33%

Stay through a host-read ad because they enjoy the host

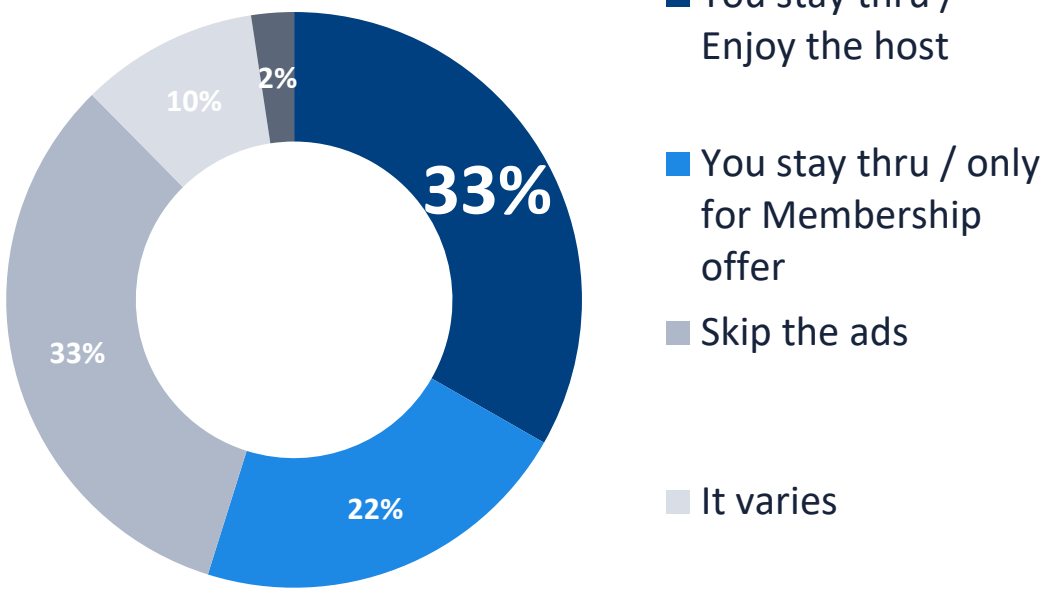
n = 117 (base: Heavy, 10-14 hrs/week)

45%

Of Heavy Users (10-14 hrs/wk) stay through a host-read ad because they enjoy the host

n = 117 (base: Heavy, 10-14 hrs/week)

HOST-READ AD REACTION (TOTAL SAMPLE)



n = 1,205 total sample

BOTTOM LINE

The more engaged a consumer is with the host, the more receptive they are to host-read ads specifically. The host's equity is extremely valuable.

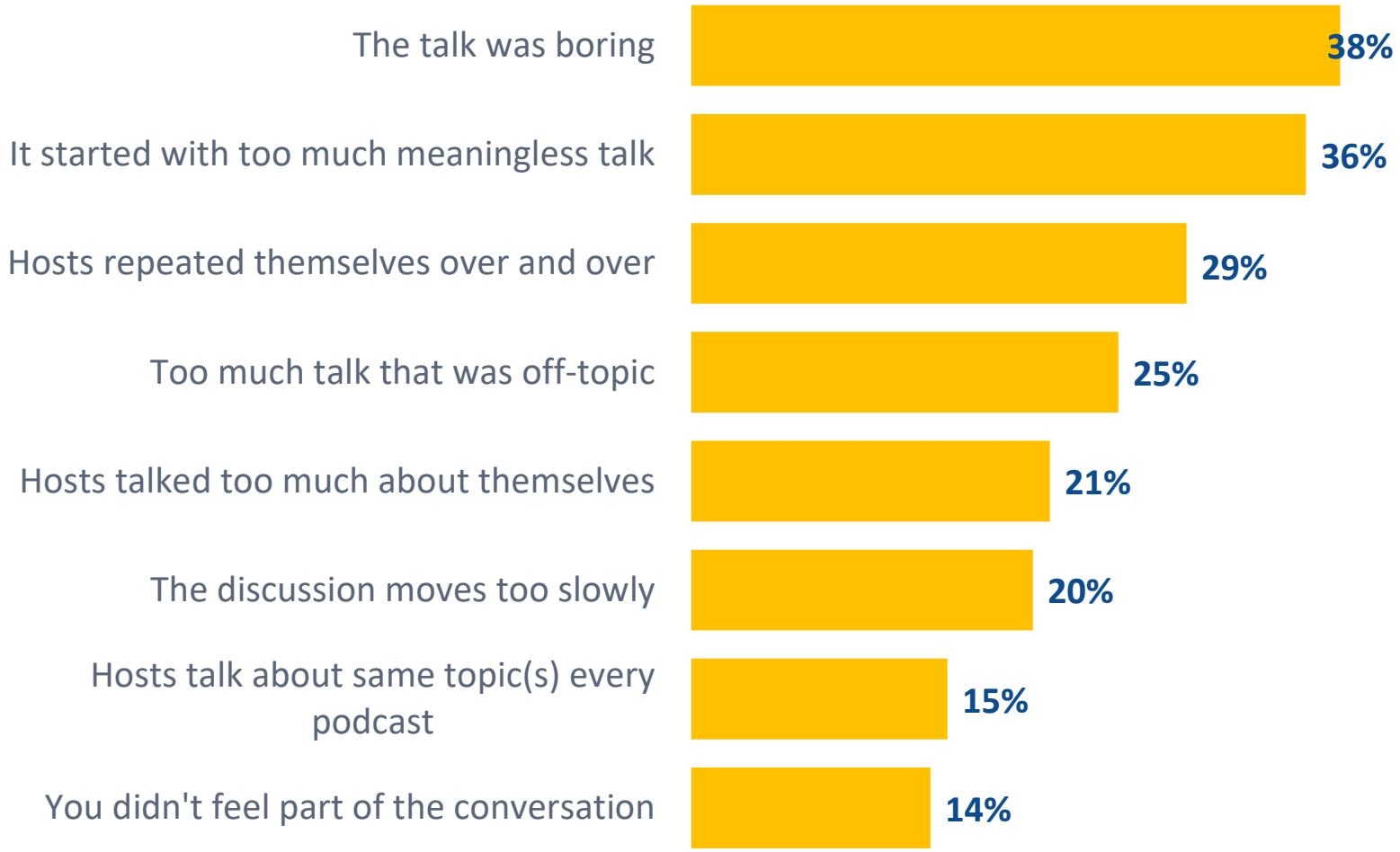
Reasons They Give Up On a First Try

Q80 Reasons for giving up on a first try / *n = 1,205 total sample*

92%

Give up while trying a podcast due to errors in content execution by the host.

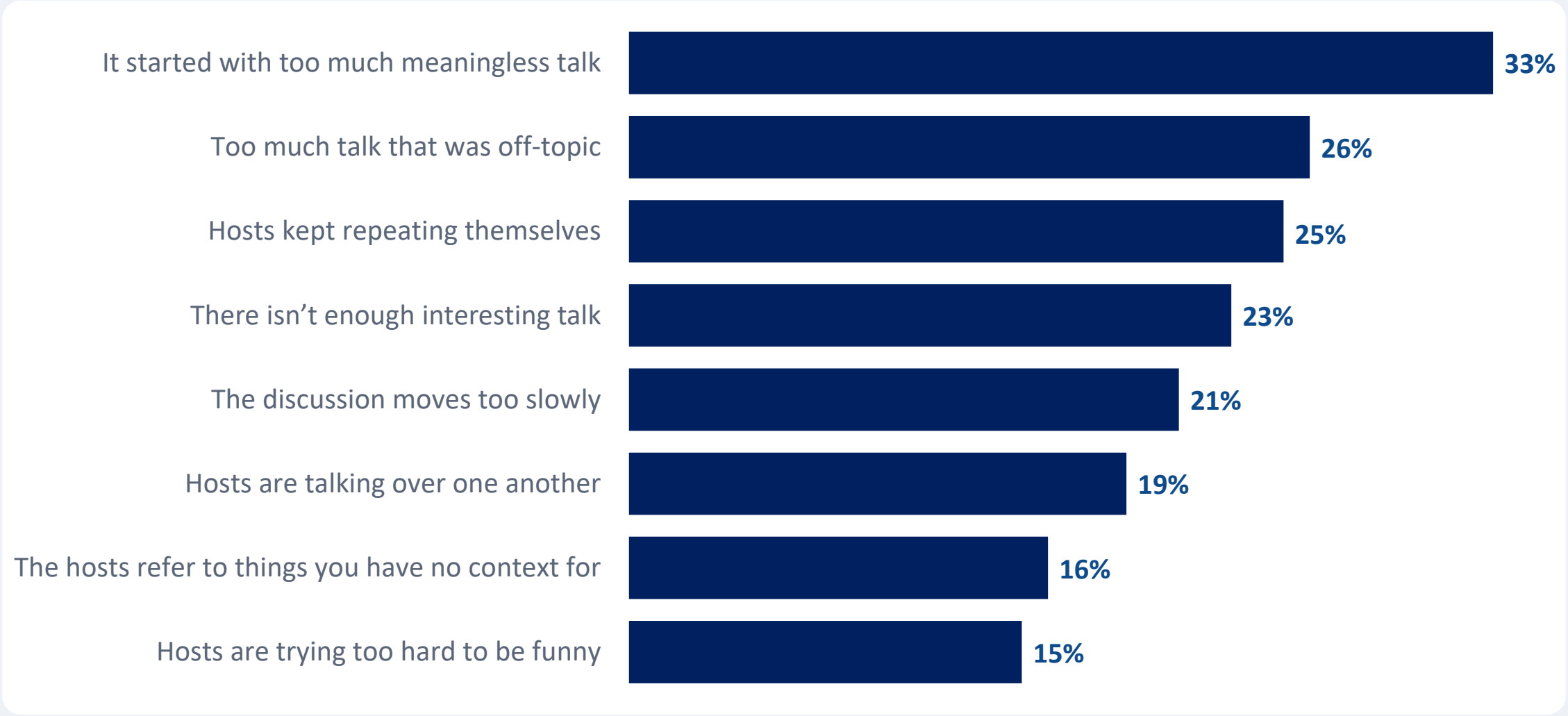
REASONS FOR PRESSING STOP ON A PODCAST THEY ARE TRYING (multi-select)



Why They ‘Stop’ Early (2025)

Q80 Reasons for giving up on a podcast in general

REASONS FOR PRESSING STOP ON A PODCAST IN GENERAL (multi-select)



Host Trust As A Discovery Engine

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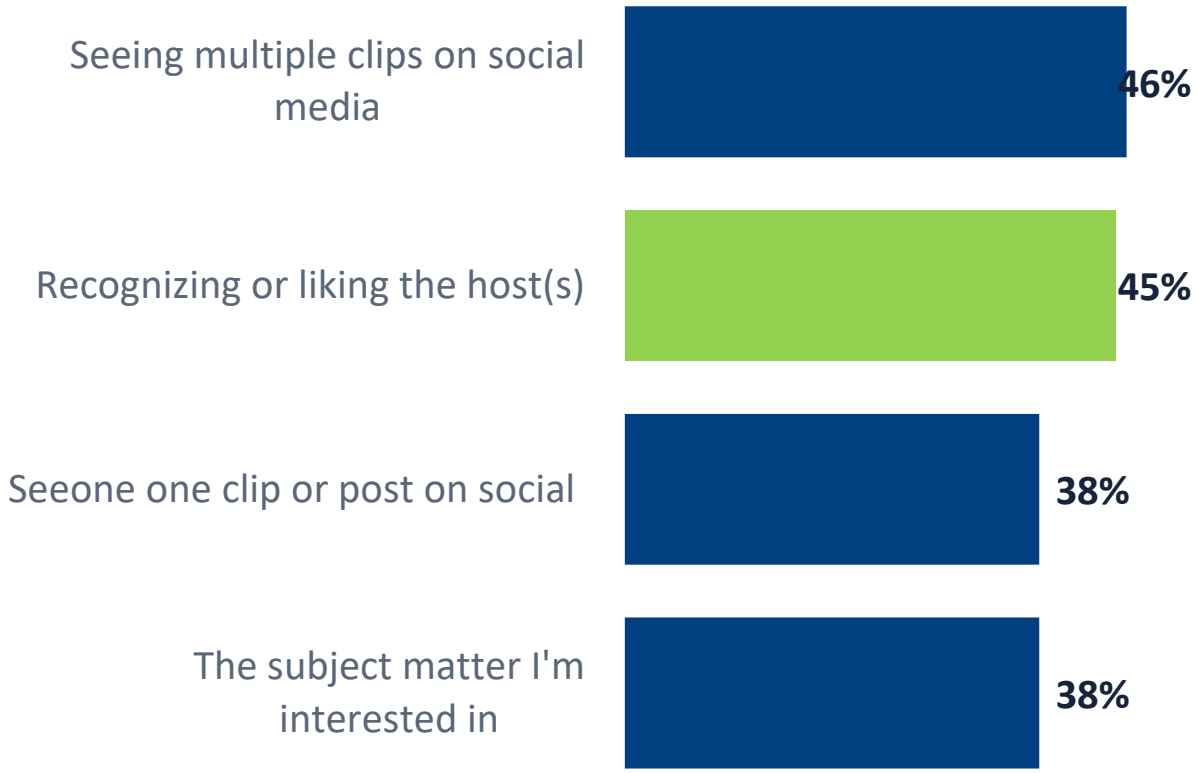
What Drives the First Try

Q72 What influences trying a new episode | *n = 1,205 total sample*

45%

Recognizing or liking the host(s) is nearly as strong a driver as clips.

OUTCOME OF FIRST TRIES IN THE PAST 3 MONTHS



BOTTOM LINE

Host familiarity exceeds content as a driver of trial.

Loyalty Builds Over Time – What Drives That Funnel

Q43-46 How favorite podcasts are chosen and how usage time concentrates | *n = 1,104 (base: has a favorite podcast)*

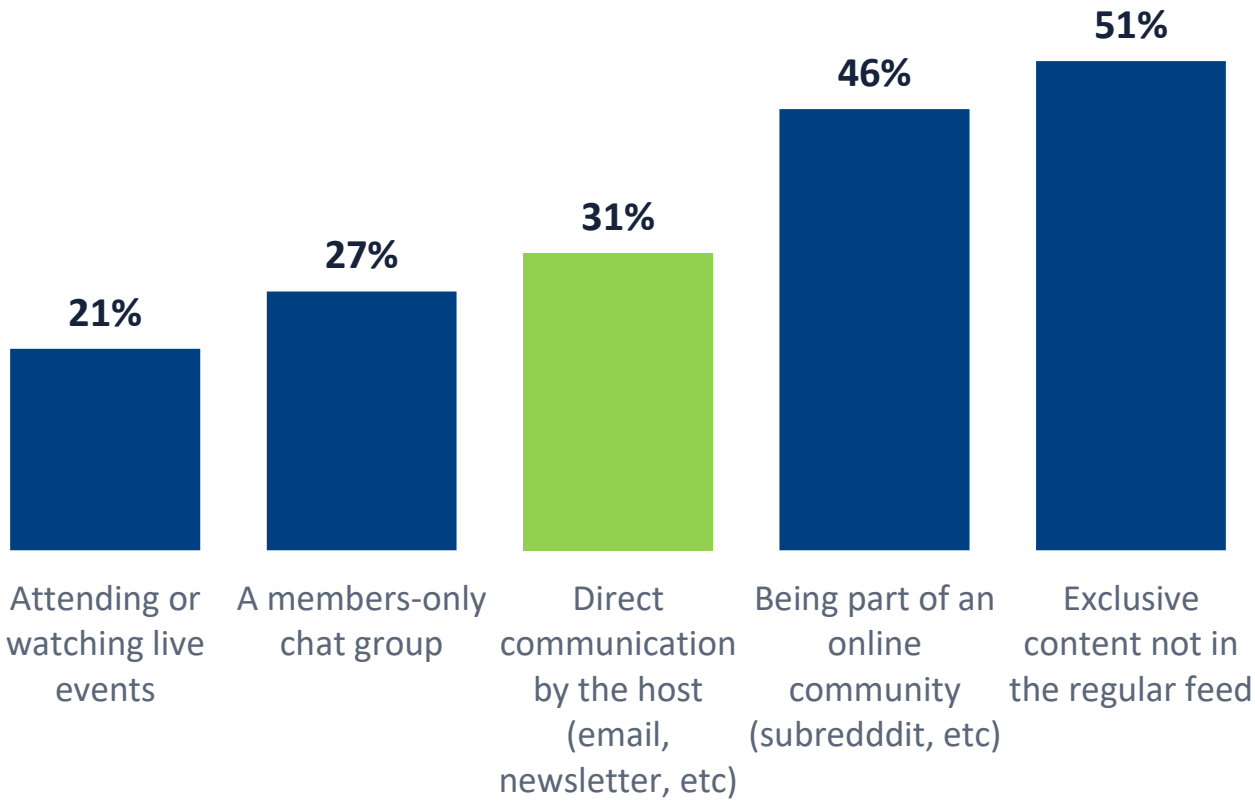
54%

Grew to love their favorite over time (vs. 44% loved it from episode one)

31%

Say “direct host communication” plays a key role in a podcast becoming a favorite

WHAT BUILDS CONNECTION TO FAVORITE PODCAST



Conversion isn’t always instant — for the majority, the relationship with a favorite podcast is built, not love-at-first-listen.

Hosts are as much a driver of “love at first sight” as converting audience to core over a longer period of time.

Host Execution is critical

Q79-81 How quickly listeners give up on a new podcast, why, and whether they try again | *n = 1,205 total sample*

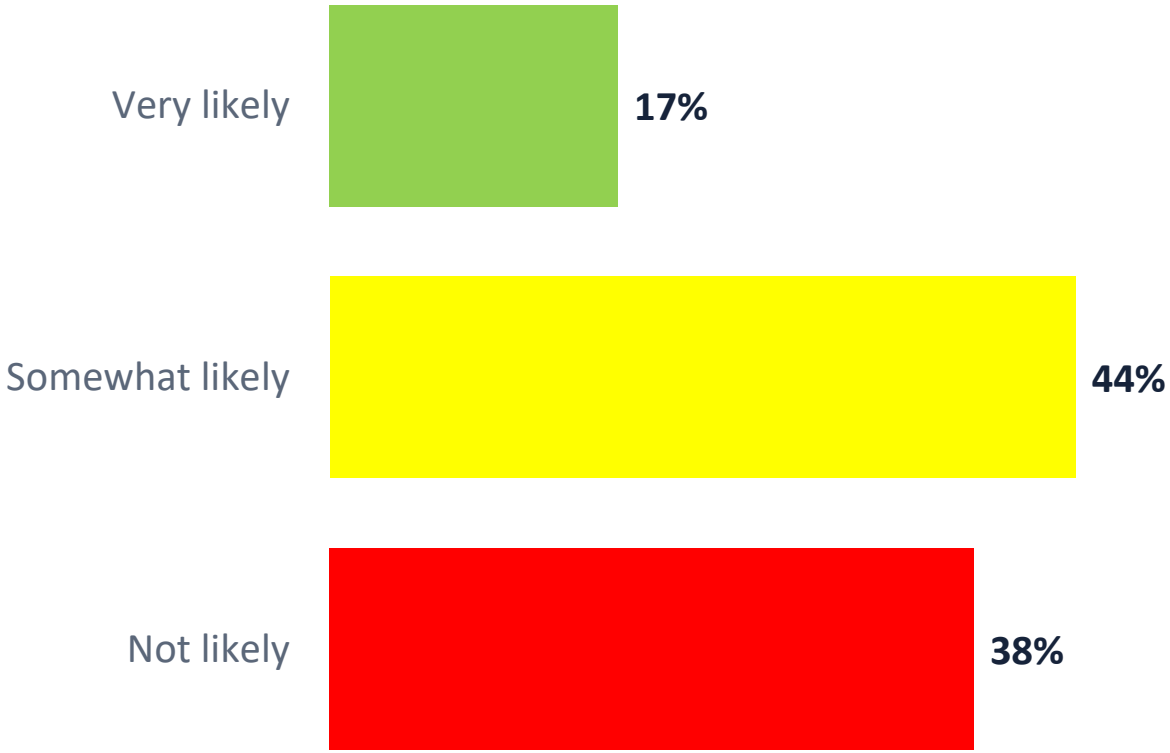
55%

Decide within the first 5 minutes of a new podcast (14% within 1 minute)

38%

Not likely to give it a second chance after trying it — only 17% very likely to

LIKELIHOOD TO GIVE DISAPPOINTING PODCAST A 2ND TRY



BOTTOM LINE

Start with a 'hook' in the first minute and keep the content moving forward - or risk losing the listener for good.

Feedback Channels & Social Platform Habits

Q82, 83 Whether listeners feel they can reach a host, experience giving feedback to a host

26%

Feel they have a direct line of communication to give feedback to a host

n = 1,205 total sample

64%

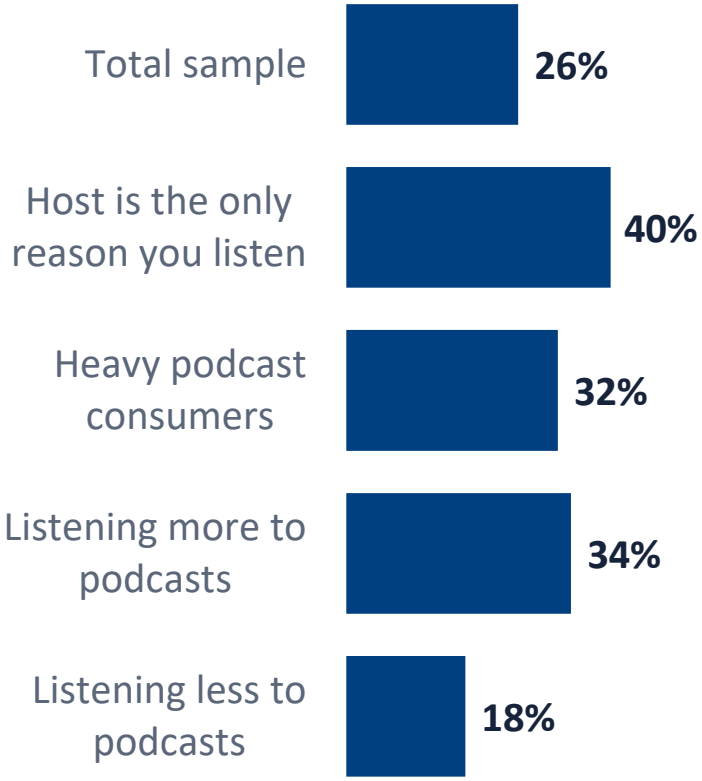
Have never contacted a podcast host at all – opportunity!!

n = 1,205 total sample

- There is a connection between a usage and communicate with the host: Those who feel they have a direct line of communication tend to be heavier users of the podcast.

- Of those who have reached out, the experience mostly pays off: 65% call it great vs. only 16% poor and 19% no response.

% SAYING THEY HAVE A DIRECT FEEDBACK LINE TO HOST



BOTTOM LINE

Offering direct channels to the host for your audience drives higher satisfaction and connects to higher usage. Podcasts have an opportunity to do more and connect with the larger fanbase.

Prizes & Contests

Q101-102 Likelihood to listen for a chance to win host access or event tickets | *n = 1,205 total sample*

47%

"Highly Likely" + "Likely" to listen for a chance to interact with the host(s)

- Nearly half of all podcast consumers are likely to listen to a podcast for a chance to interact with the host. (This equals the percentage who would listen to win tickets to a live event.)
- These fans who want to interact with the host tend to be more 18-44 than 45-54 and index higher for daily podcast users. This contest connects with those who use podcasts most.

Summary of Key Points

30%

Podcasts are a mainstream line item

30% of monthly audio time goes to podcasts, nearly tied with music streaming, and 52% listen more than a year ago.

82%

The host is why they tune in at all

82% say the host is a big part of, or the only reason for, their listening.

88%

Listening concentrates on one favorite show

88% spend half or more of their podcast time on one show — and 56% would stop if that host left.

57%

Host endorsements outperform standard spots

57% remember the brand better after a host endorsement, and 48% say a host-read ad carries more influence.

92%

Execution decides the first try

92% who quit a first try blame errors in content execution, and 55% decide within the first five minutes.

Suggested Actions

Tasks and discussion items coming out of the study

1. **Market the host, not just the show**
   Lead trailers, social clips, and cross-promos with the host's voice — 45% try a new podcast because they recognize or like the host.

2. **Write a host succession and vacation plan**
   56% would stop or consider stopping if the host left. Decide now who carries the show and how a handoff is introduced.

3. **Rebuild the first 60 seconds of every show**
   55% decide inside five minutes and 14% inside one. Audit each open for a hook and cut meaningless talk at the top.

4. **Price host-read inventory far above standard spots**
   48% say a host read carries more influence, and 45% would pay for a host-read-ads-only tier.

5. **Open a direct feedback line to the host**
   64% have never contacted a host and only 26% feel they could. Publish a channel, then answer it on air.

THANK YOU

Join us for our upcoming webinars

OCT 6 **Turning Listeners into Superfans**

OCT 13 **Beyond the Pre-Roll**

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POINT To POINT

Connect with Hal

Connect with Tim