Beyond the Preroll: Revenue Opportunities Beyond Traditional Commercials

strategicsolutions RESEARCH

the PODCAST STUDY.com

POINT To POINT

Special Thanks To:

CROOKED

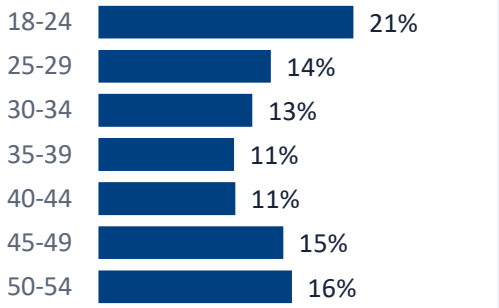
npr

PRX

Who We Talked To

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

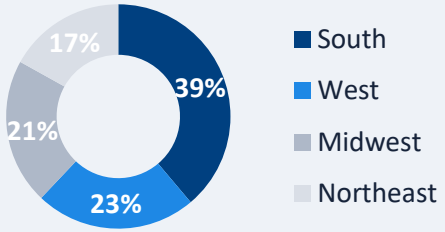
AGE



GENDER

Female	Male	Non-binary
51%	48%	1%

REGION



PODCAST USAGE

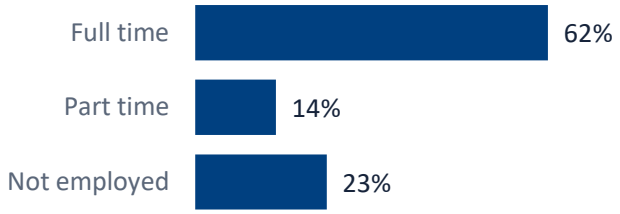
100%	Monthly (required)
87%	Weekly
40%	Daily

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

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

Base = employed only, n = 918

What we'll cover

1. **The ad climate**
   More than half say there are too many ads, and 39% are already pulling back.

2. **Making ads work harder**
   Host reads outperform pre-recorded spots, and social media drives discovery.

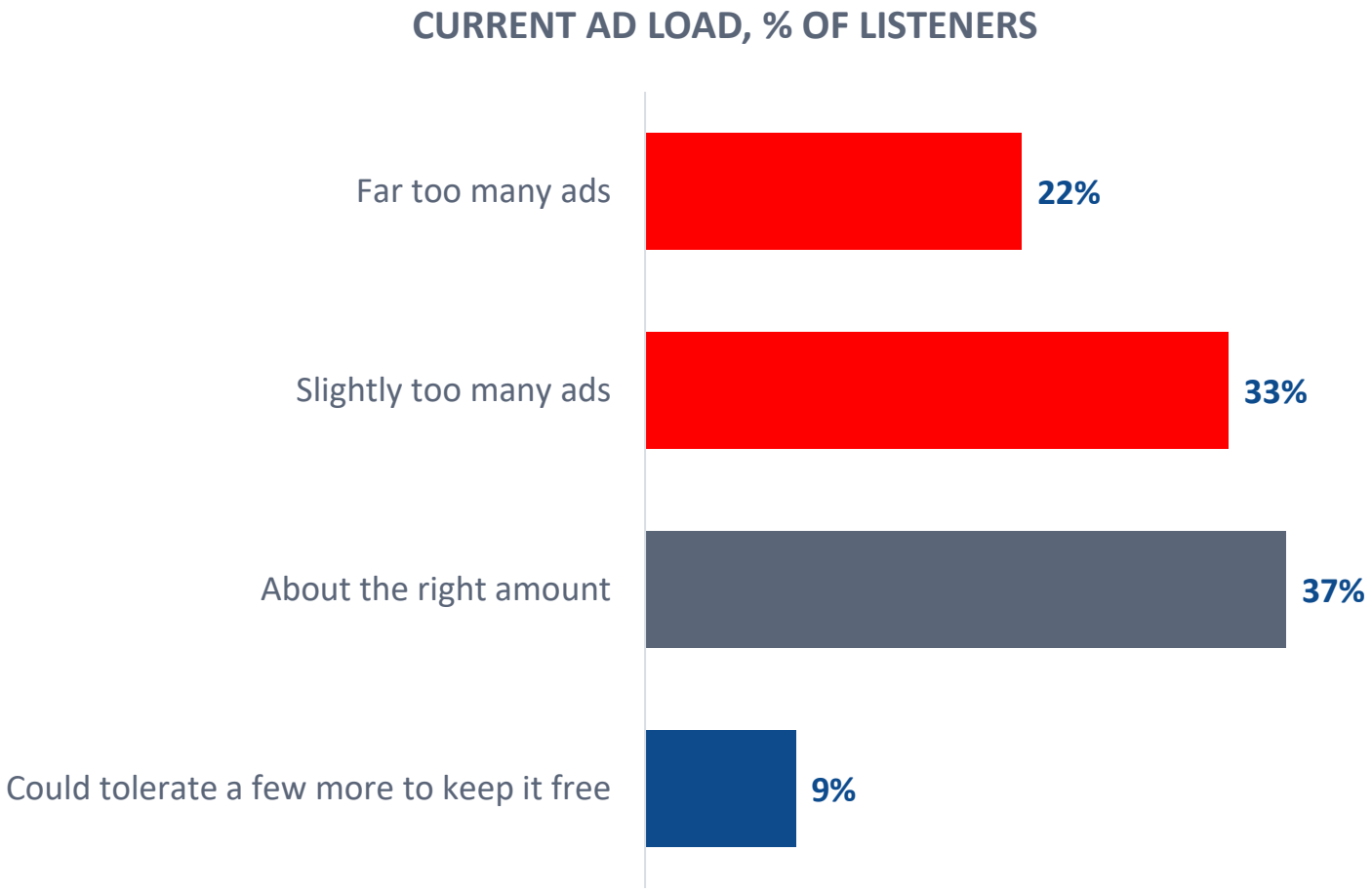
3. **The engagement funnel starts free**
   A free VIP club is the easiest first ask and the on-ramp to paying.

4. **What listeners will pay for**
   A host-read-only tier and the $3-$5 sweet spot, plus Patreon, merch, events and email.

5. **Who to ask, and what to do next**
   Superfans and Prime Prospects, where age and gender matter, and an action playbook.

The Ad Climate

Ad load has little room to grow: only 8.6% would accept more ads

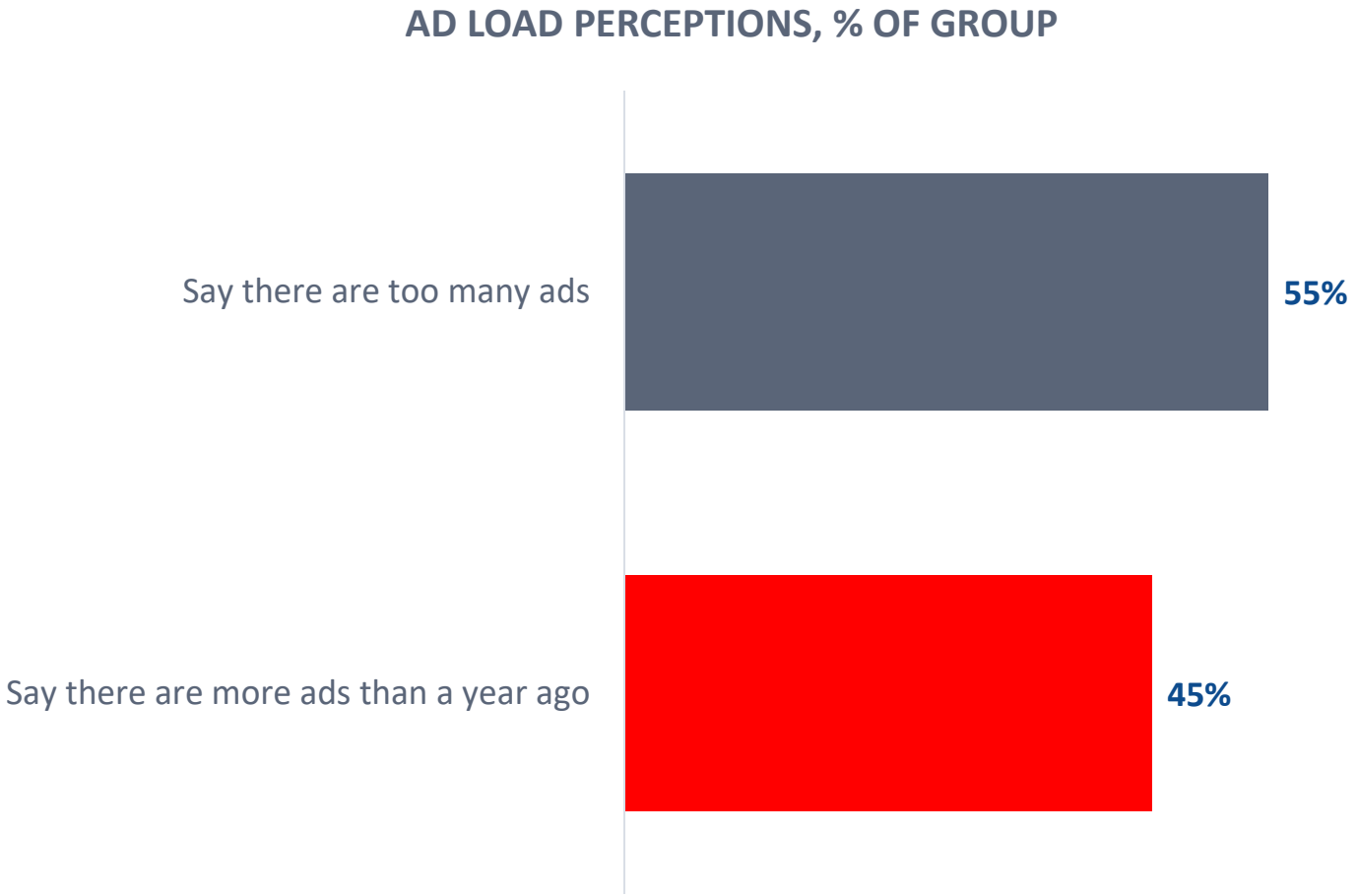


55%

Say too many ads; only one out of three are satisfied with the ad load.

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted. Actions: select all that apply.

The ad climate: more than half of listeners say there are too many ads



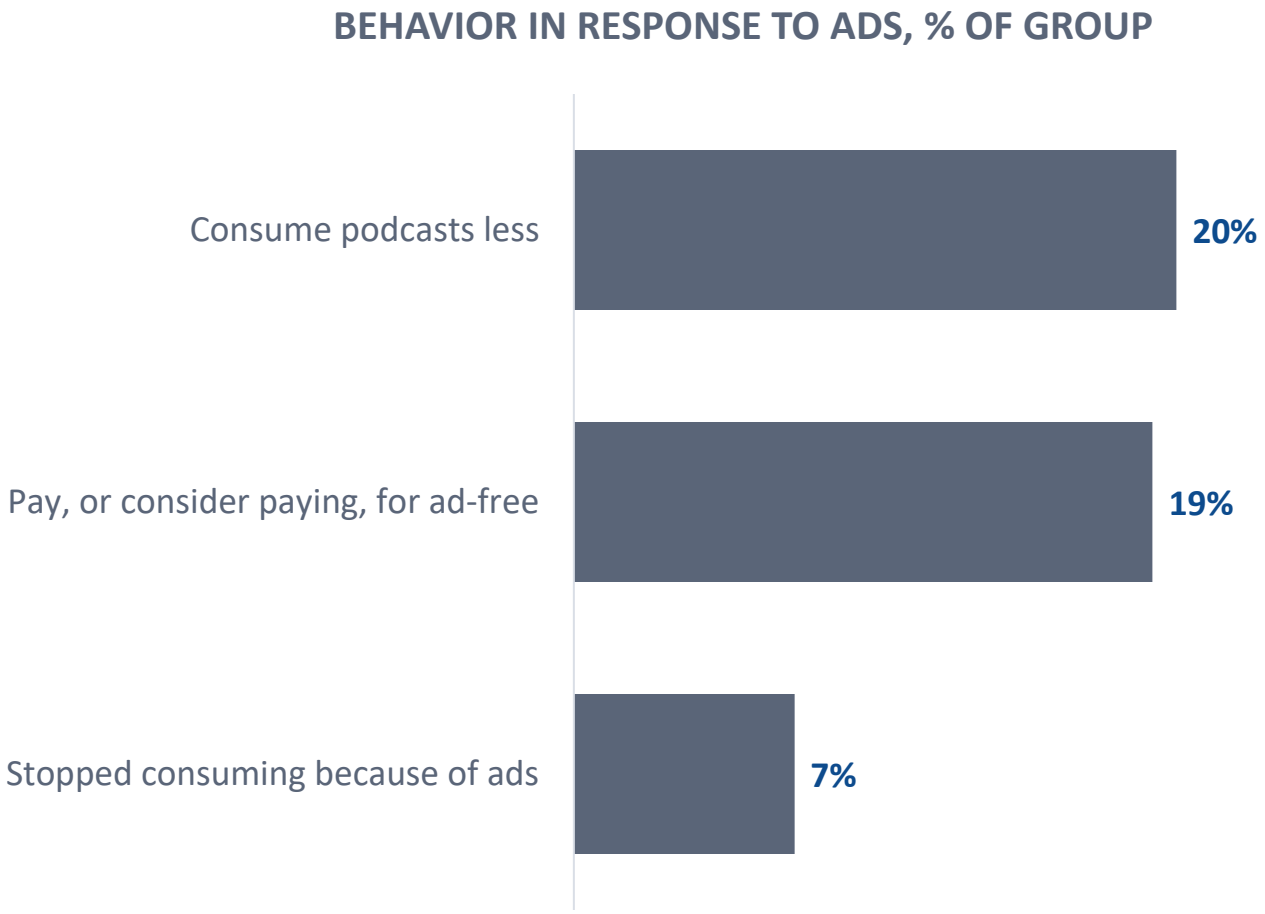
45%

Say there are more ads than a year ago.

Ad fatigue is broad; driven even more by 25-44s.

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted.

The cost of ad load: skipping, listening less, walking away



39%

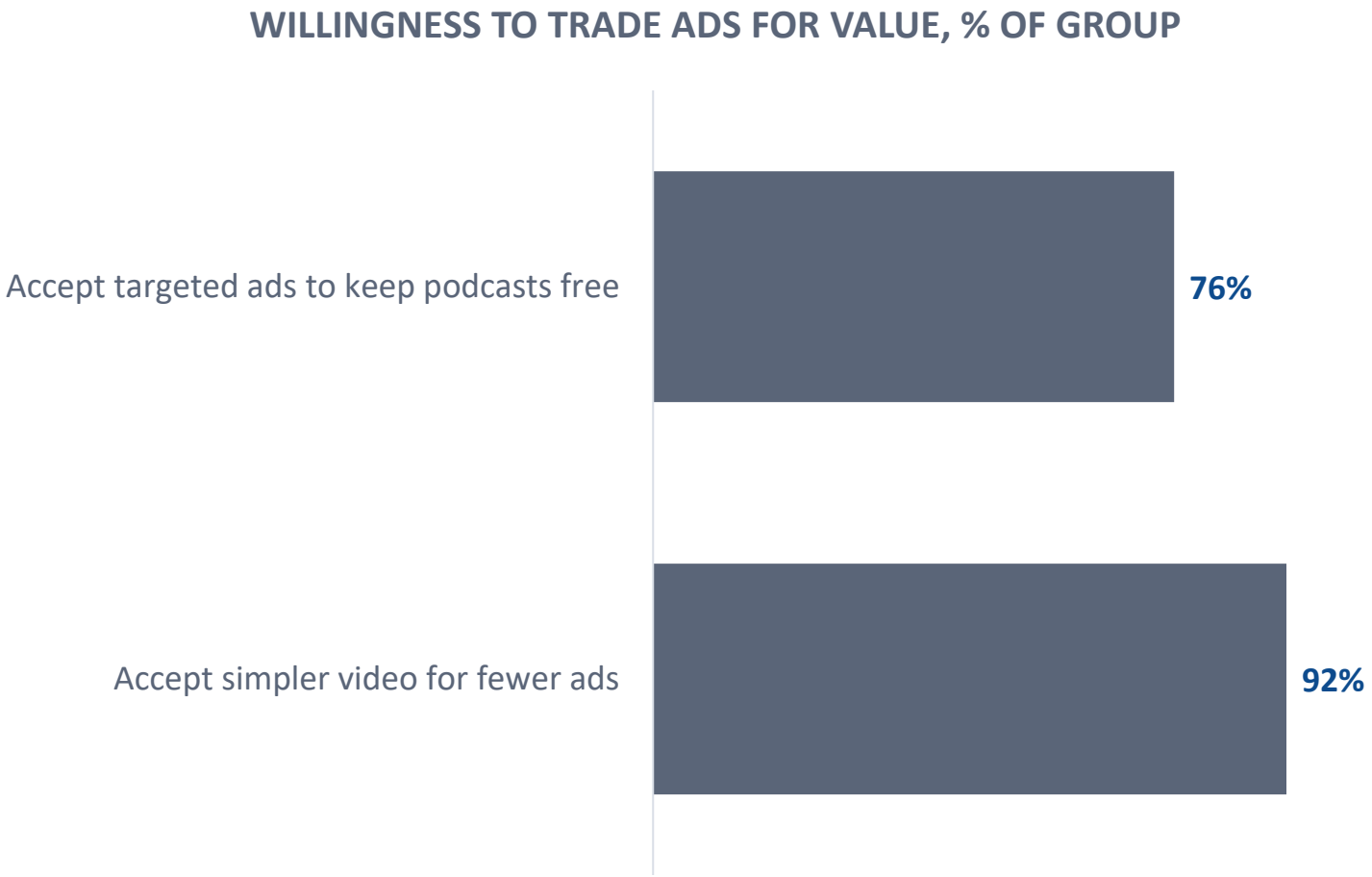
Either listen less, consider paying for an ad-free version or have stopped listening.

Few have outright stopped consuming – suggestion erosion – not abandonment.

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted.

Opportunities

Listeners will trade ads for value when the exchange is clear



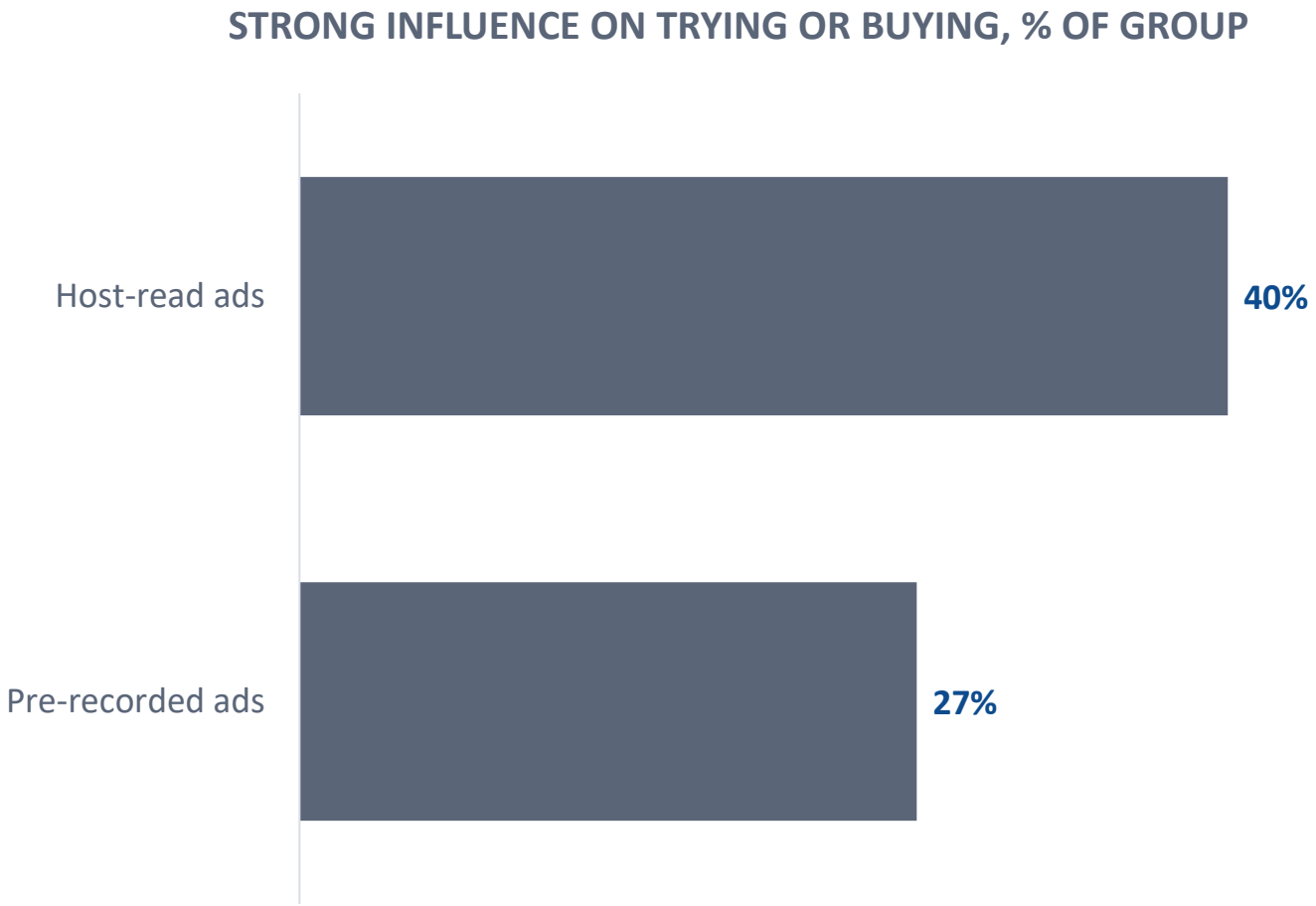
Targeted Ads, Simpler Video

The great majority of the podcast audience understands that good content needs to be supported.

They embrace targeted ads and also give permission for simpler video production to keep production budgets in-check.

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted.

Host-read ads outperform pre-recorded ads

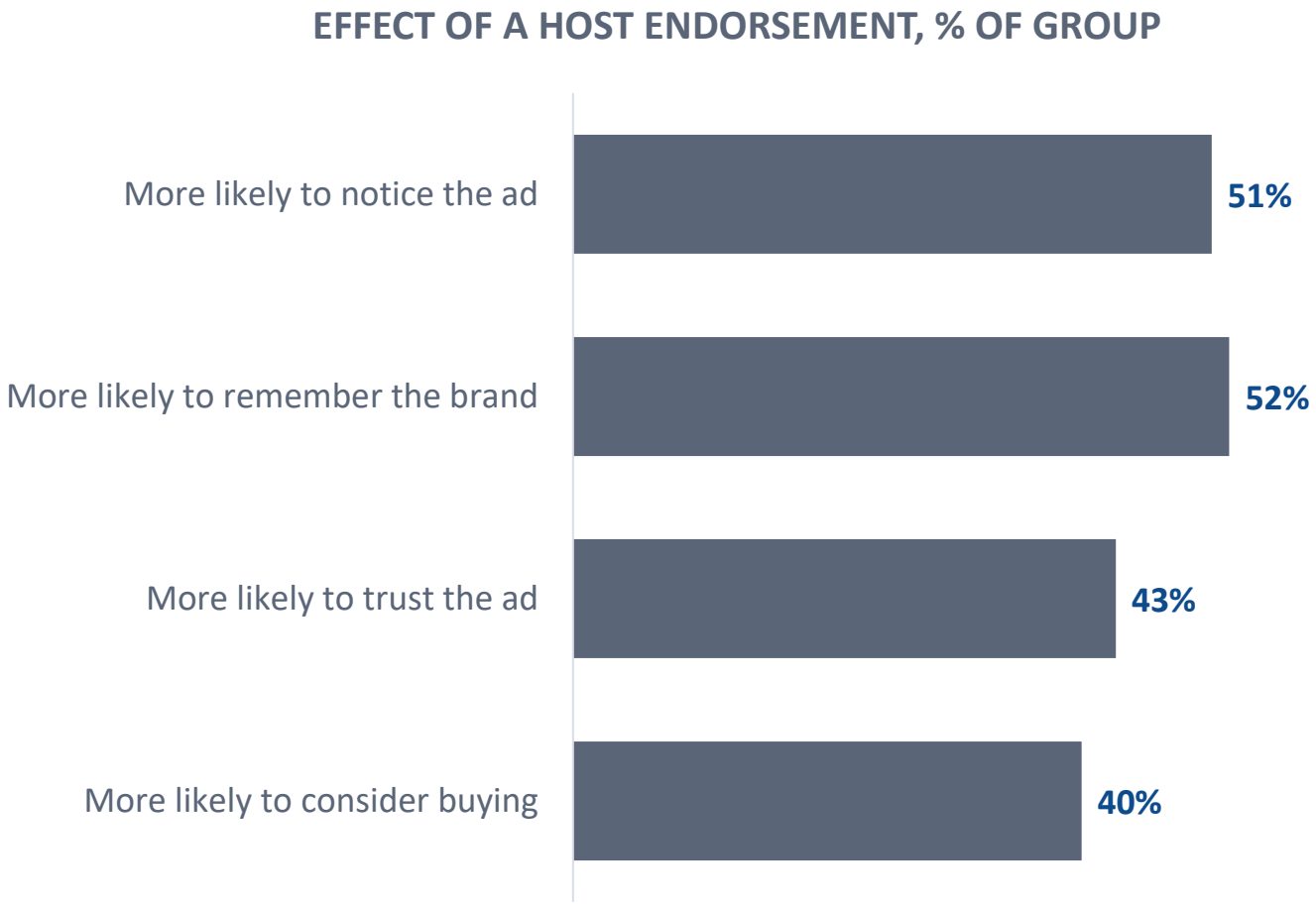


40%

Are influenced strongly by host-read ads, driven by 35-44s and Men

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted.

Host endorsement lifts attention, recall, trust and purchase intent



51%

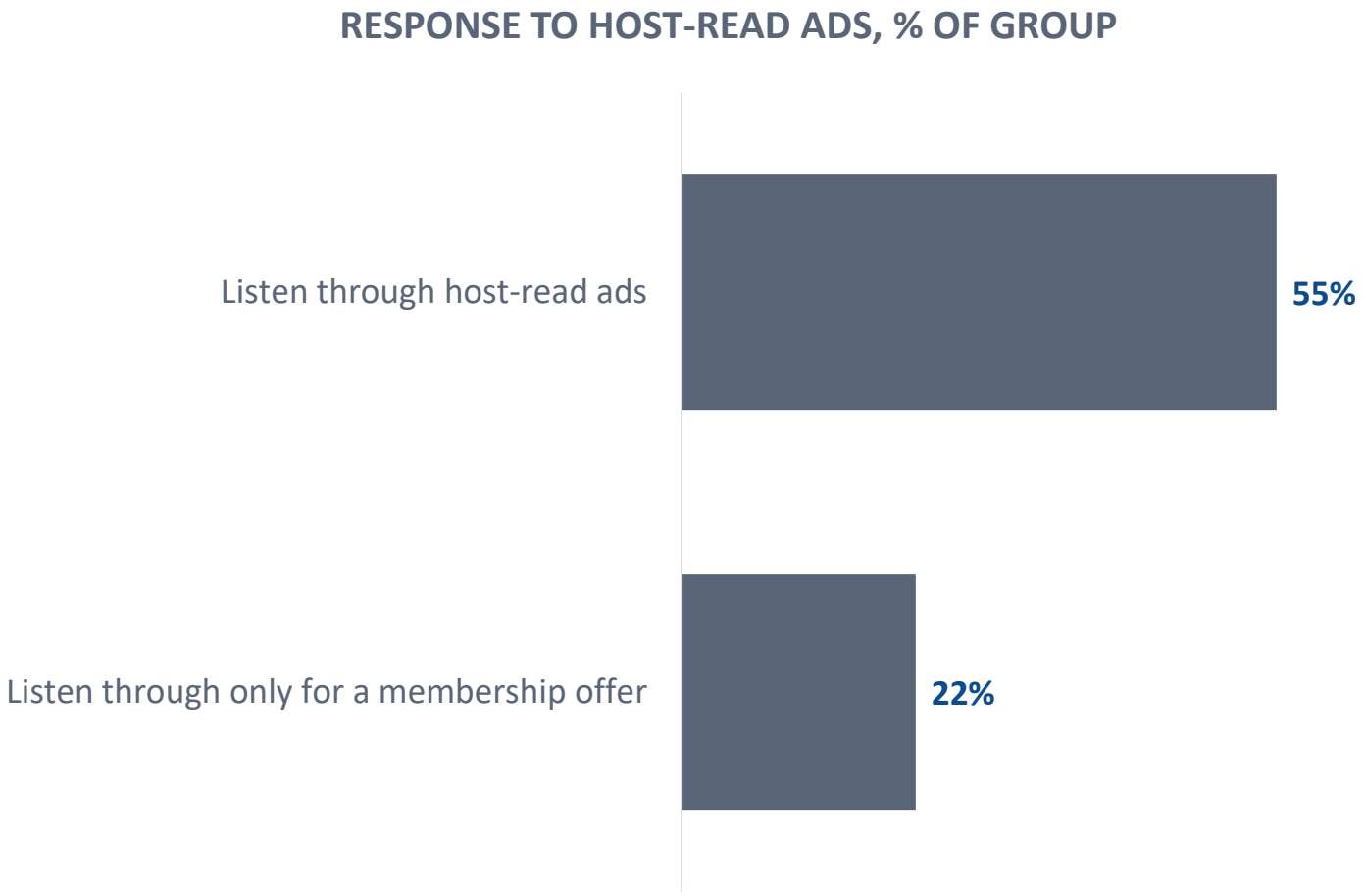
Are more likely to notice a standard ad later after first hearing a host-read ad.

40%

Are more likely to consider buying a product after a host endorsement.

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted.

Most listeners stay through host reads

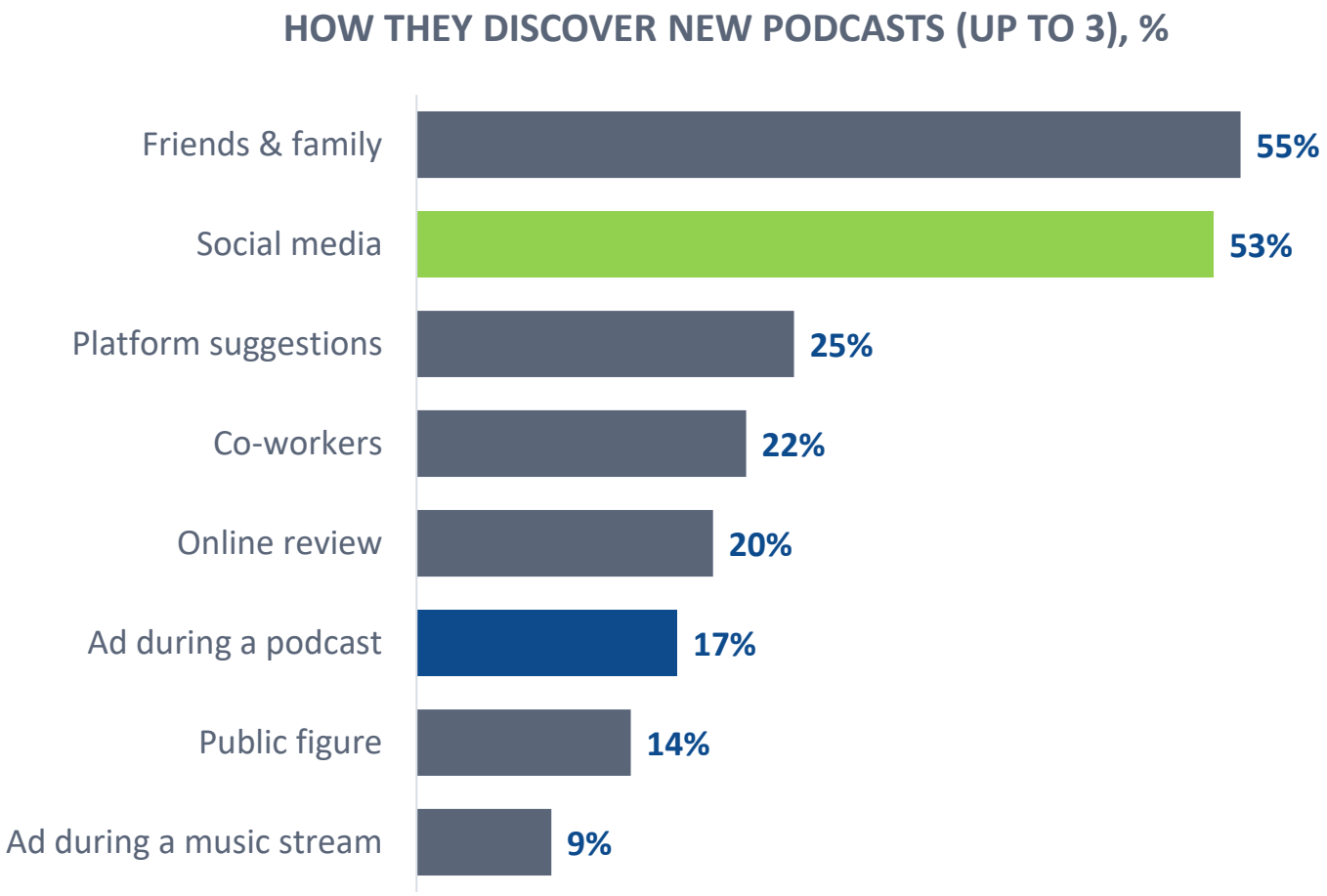


55%

Stay through host reads!

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted.

Social media sells podcasts

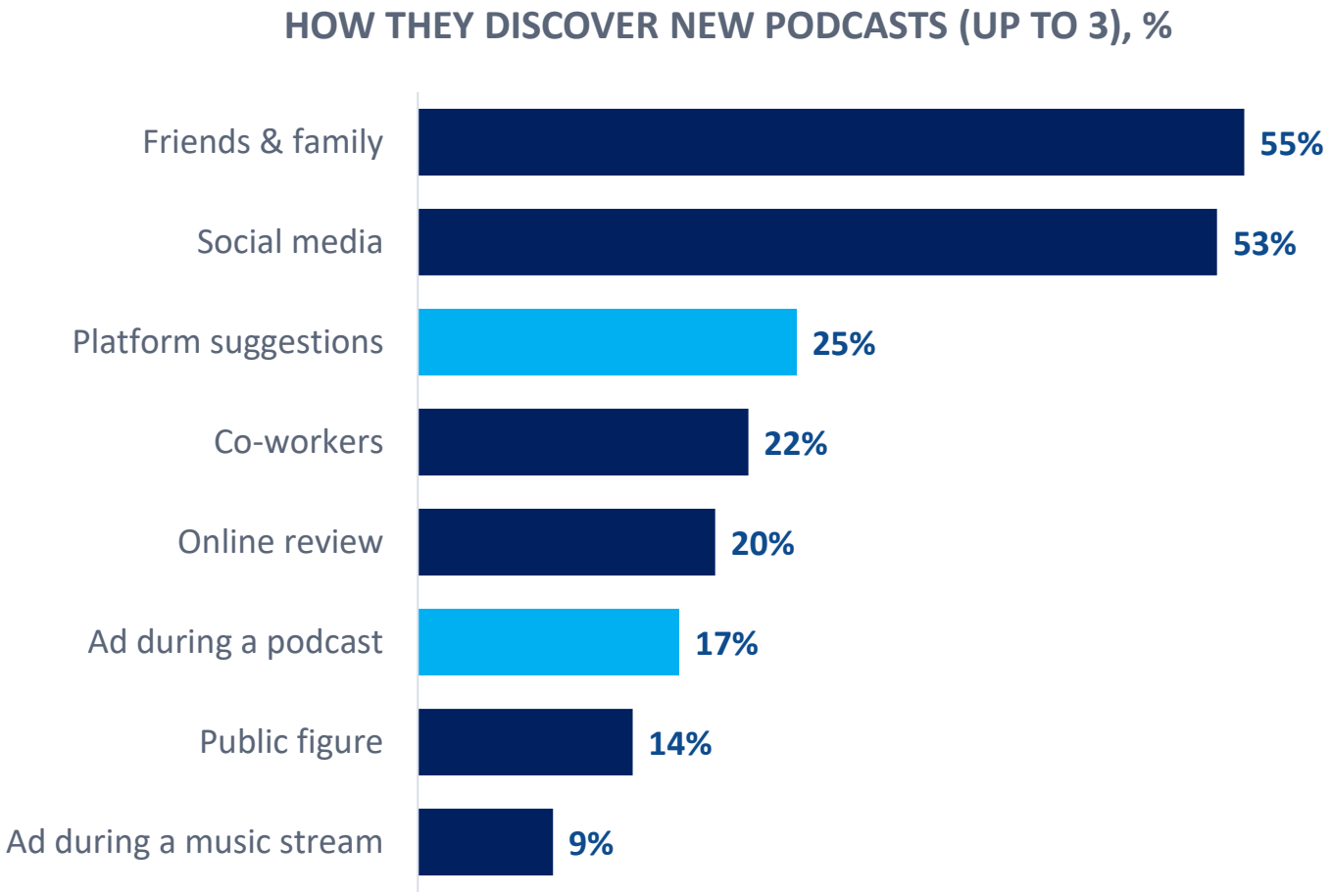


Social = 3x

Social media is 3 times more effective than placing ads in another podcast.

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted. Email drivers: base = non-recipients who said it depends (n=361).

Podcast ads also sell podcasts: 1 in 6 found a new show through one



25%

Platform suggestions and ads during a podcast do have an impact, but not to the degree of social media.

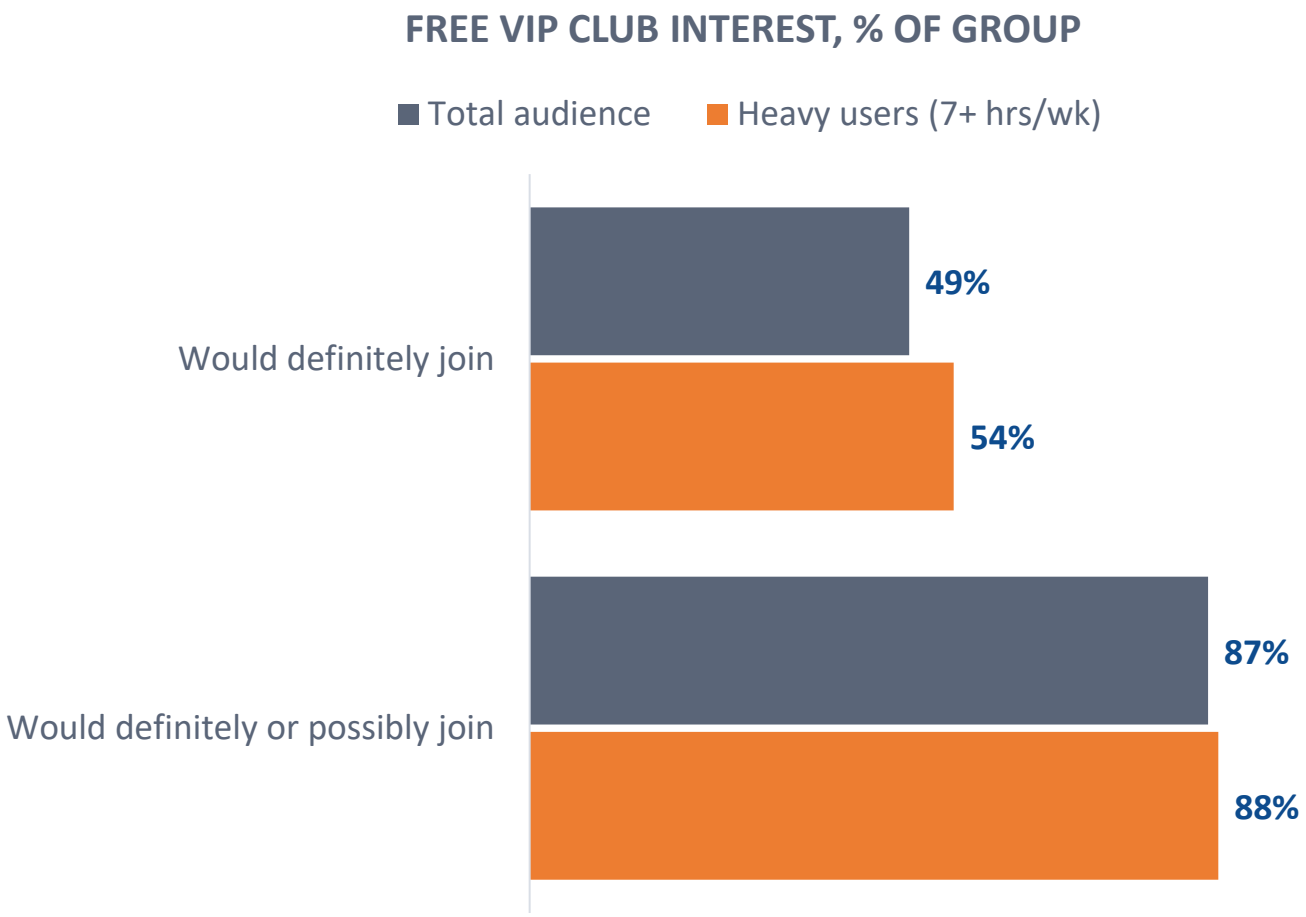
Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted.

Mapping the Engagement Funnel

strategicsolutions RESEARCH

the PODCAST STUDY.com POINT to POINT

A free VIP club is the easiest first ask

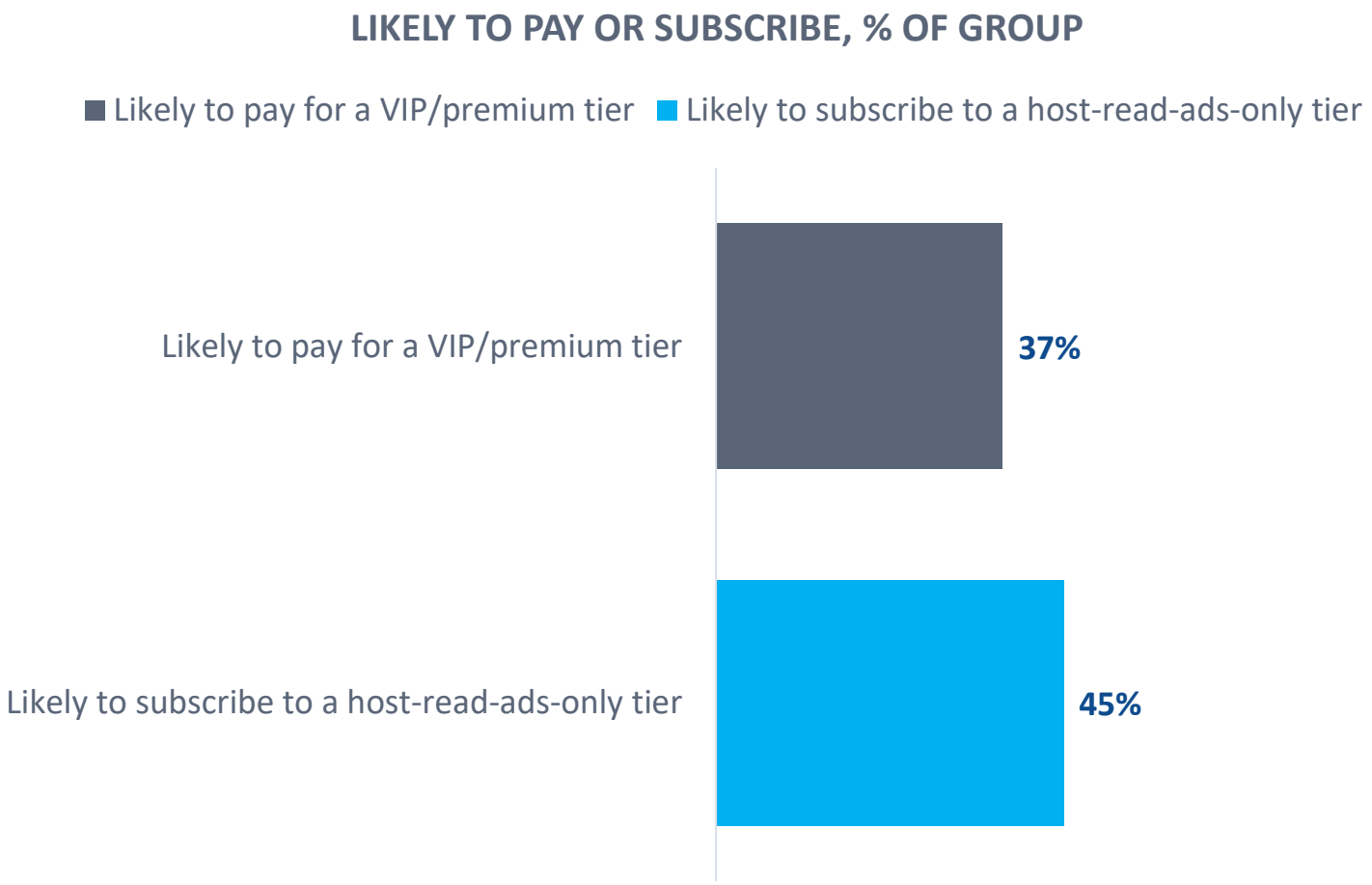


49%

Would definitely join a free VIP Club

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted. Heavy users = 7+ hrs/week (n=343).

A large minority would pay for a premium or host-read-only tier



37%

Likely to pay for premium tier

45%

Likely to subscribe to host-read-ads tier

Opportunity: men (43.0% premium, 50.3% host-read tier) and 25-44 (44.7% premium; 50.0% to 57.9% host-read tier).

Vulnerability: 45-54 (28.9%, 33.5%) and women (31.4%, 39.7%).

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted.

Reminder: Superfans and Prime Prospects

Superfans

Meets all four tests

1. **Heavy daily listener**
   Full episodes every day, 5+ hours a week

2. **Host-driven, and takes action**
   Host is a big reason they listen; supports via Patreon, merch, events or email

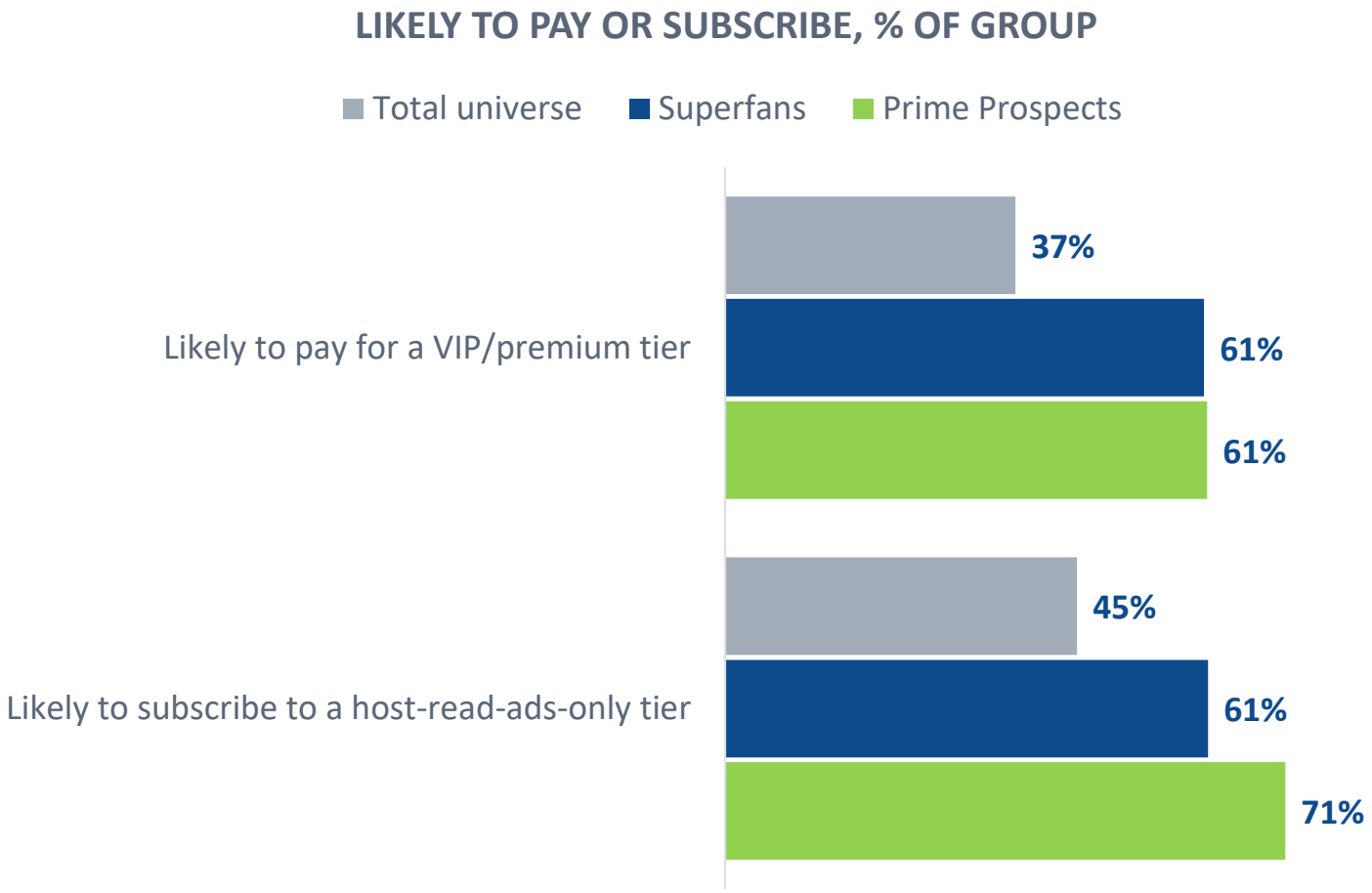
Prime Prospects

Not a Superfan, and meets all three tests

1. **Host-loyal and listening more**
   Host is a big reason they listen; listening is rising

2. **Ready to pay or participate**
   Likely to pay, contacted a host, or attended an event

Superfans and Prime Prospects are the most likely to pay for a premium or host-read-only tier



71%

Of Prime Prospects likely to subscribe to the host-read-ads tier

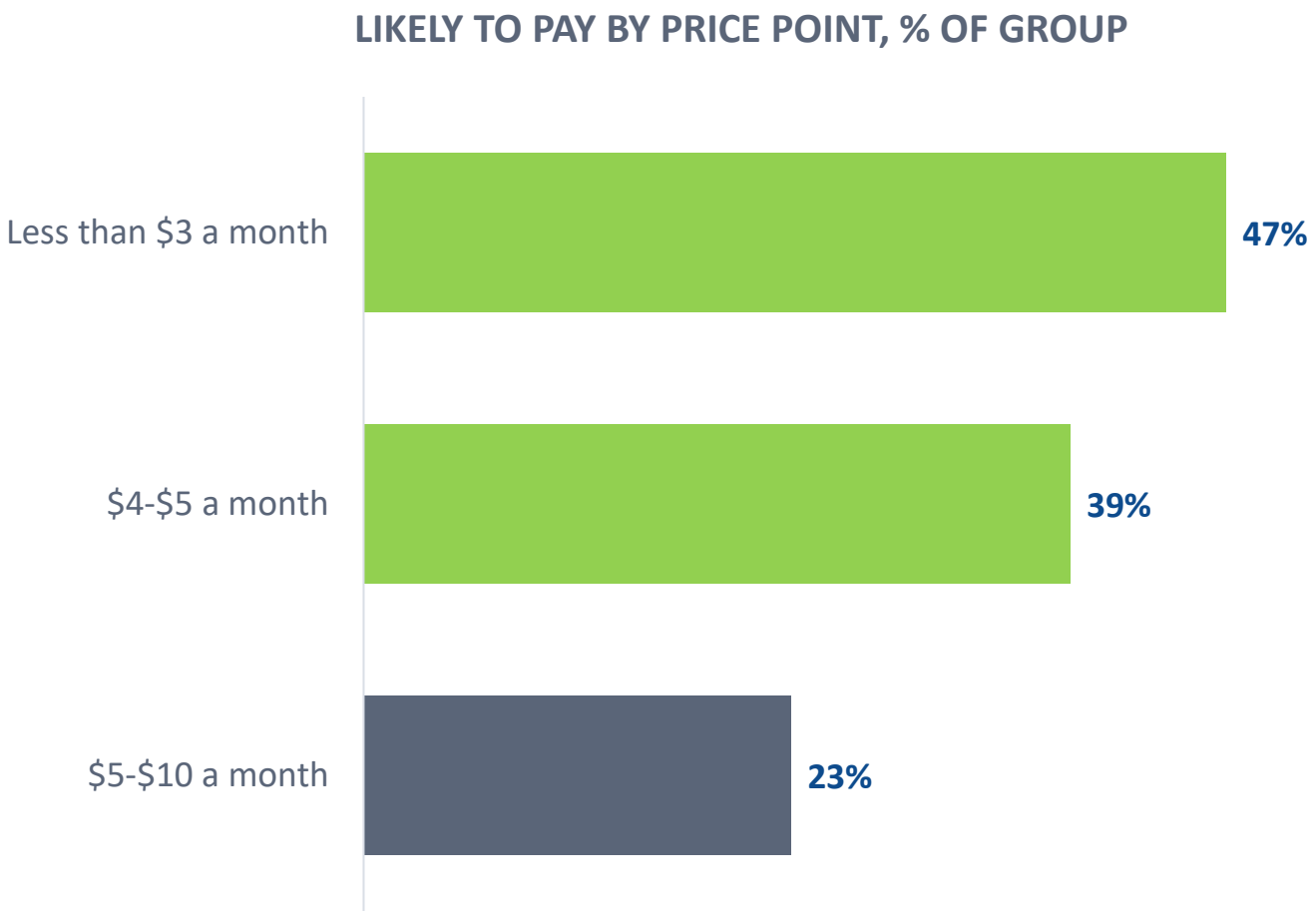
61%

Of Superfans likely to pay for a premium tier

Opportunity!

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents (Superfans n=201, Prime Prospects n=162), unweighted. Prime Prospects here are screened on participation only (contacted a host or attended an event).

Price matters: willingness to pay falls sharply above $5 a month

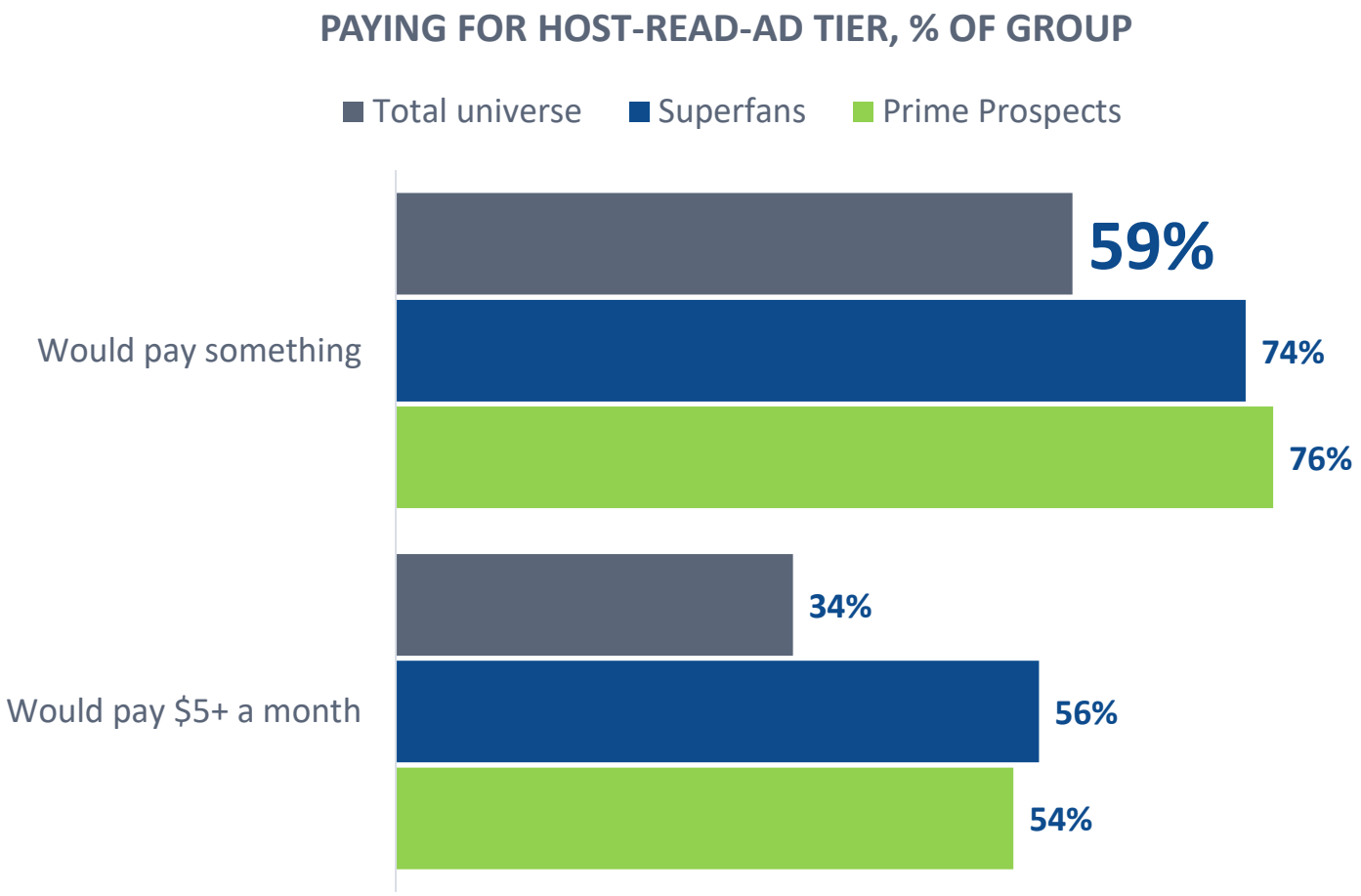


$3-5

Is the ‘sweet spot’ price point.

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted.

Paying to remove third-party ads: many would pay something



59%

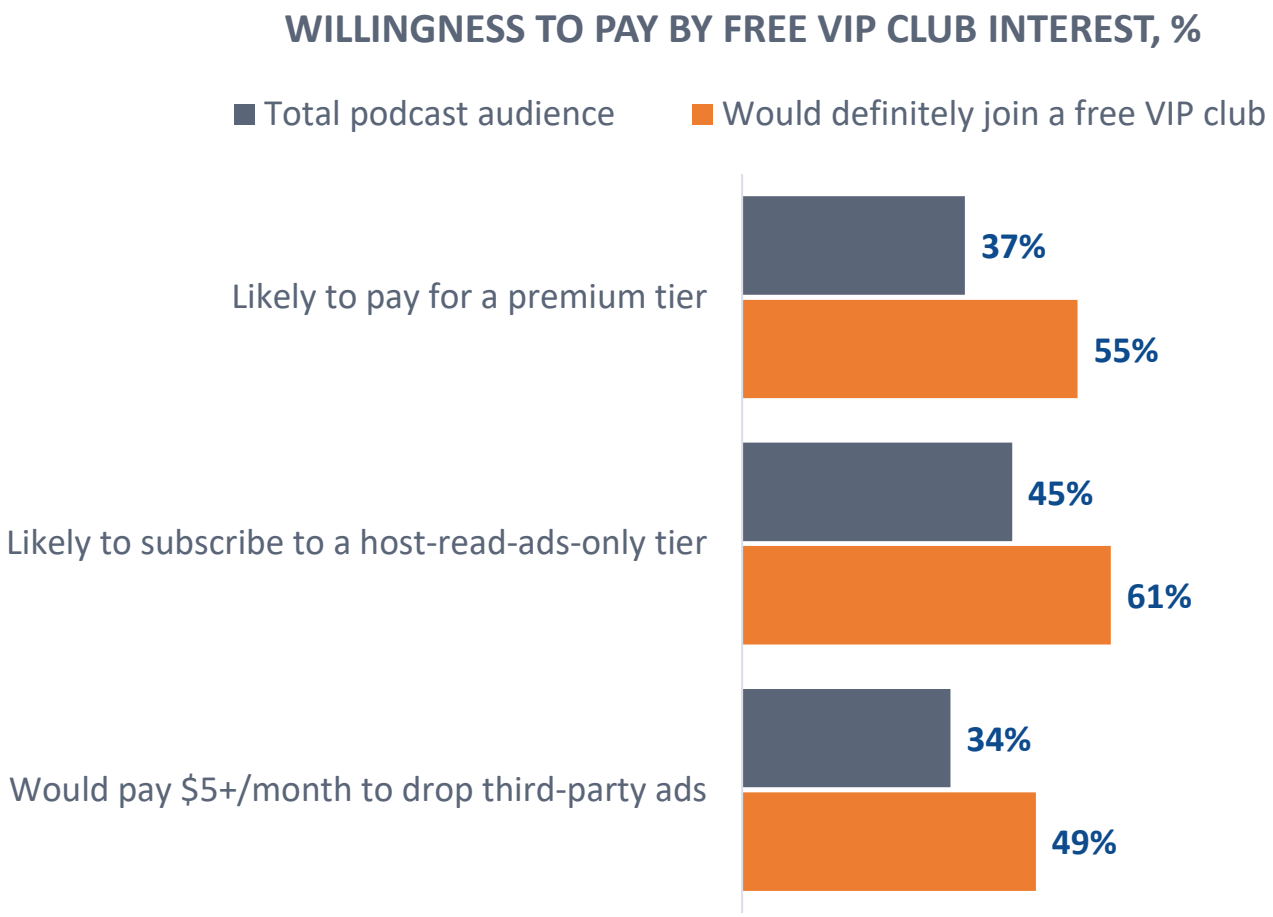
Would pay for a tier where the only ads they hear are host-read

34%

Would pay $5+ / month

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted. Superfans (n=201), Prime Prospects (n=217).

Listeners who would join a free club are the ones most likely to pay



73%

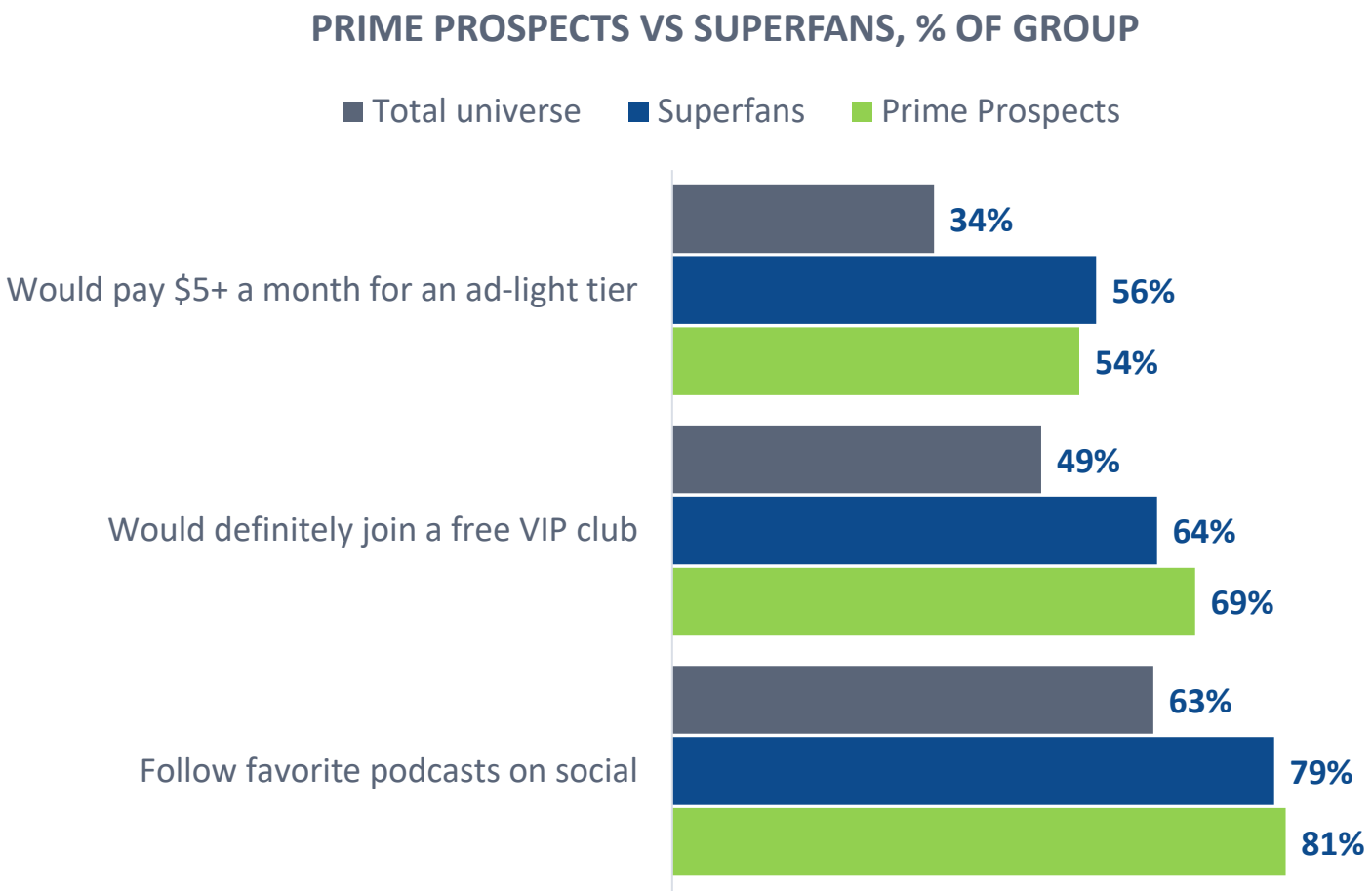
of listeners likely to pay for a premium tier would definitely join a free VIP club

1.5x

as likely to pay for premium as the total podcast audience (55% vs. 37%)

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted. Would definitely join a free VIP club (Q91) n=585. Pay questions: Q55, Q56, Q68.

Prime Prospects: the next wave of payers



Prime Prospects are Willing:

Prime Prospects match or beat Superfans on the free VIP club (68.7% vs 63.7%) and social follow (80.6% vs 79.1%); $5+ is 53.5% vs 55.7%.

The Habit Gap:

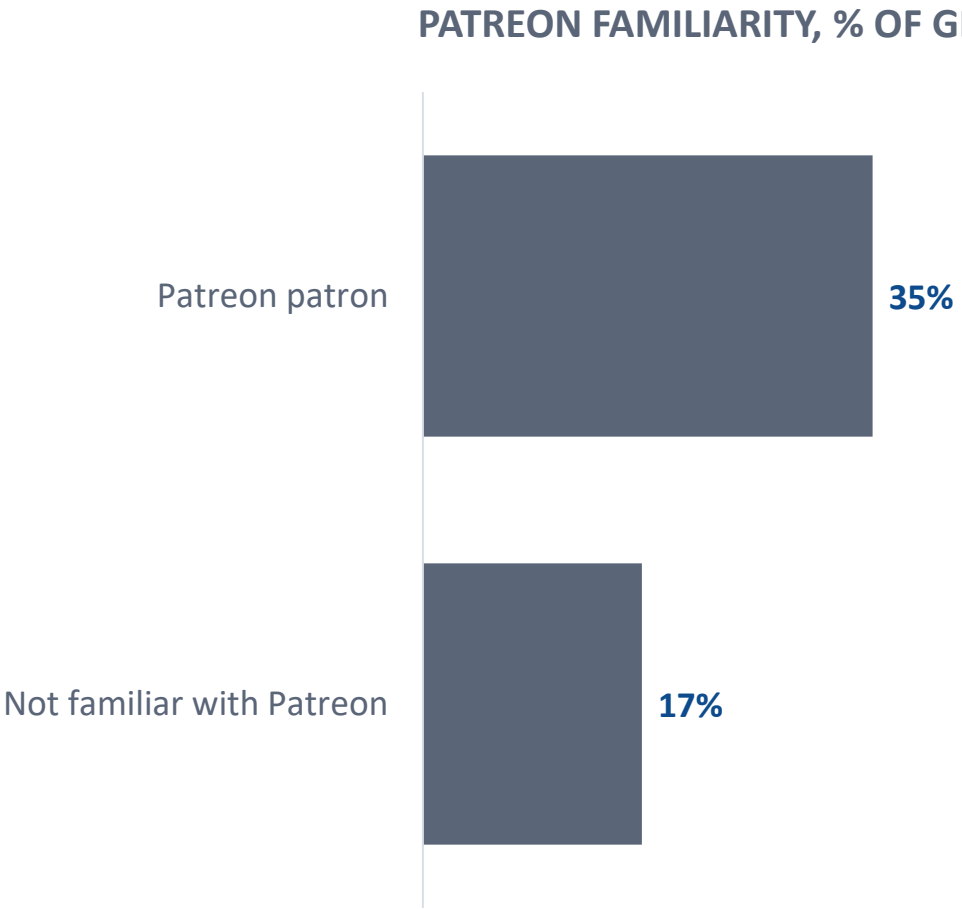
The majority are not daily users and listen less than five hours a week.

Where to reach them:

64.5% listen while getting ready in the morning and 55.3% while driving.

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted. Superfans (n=201), Prime Prospects (n=217).

Patreon is already familiar to most of the universe



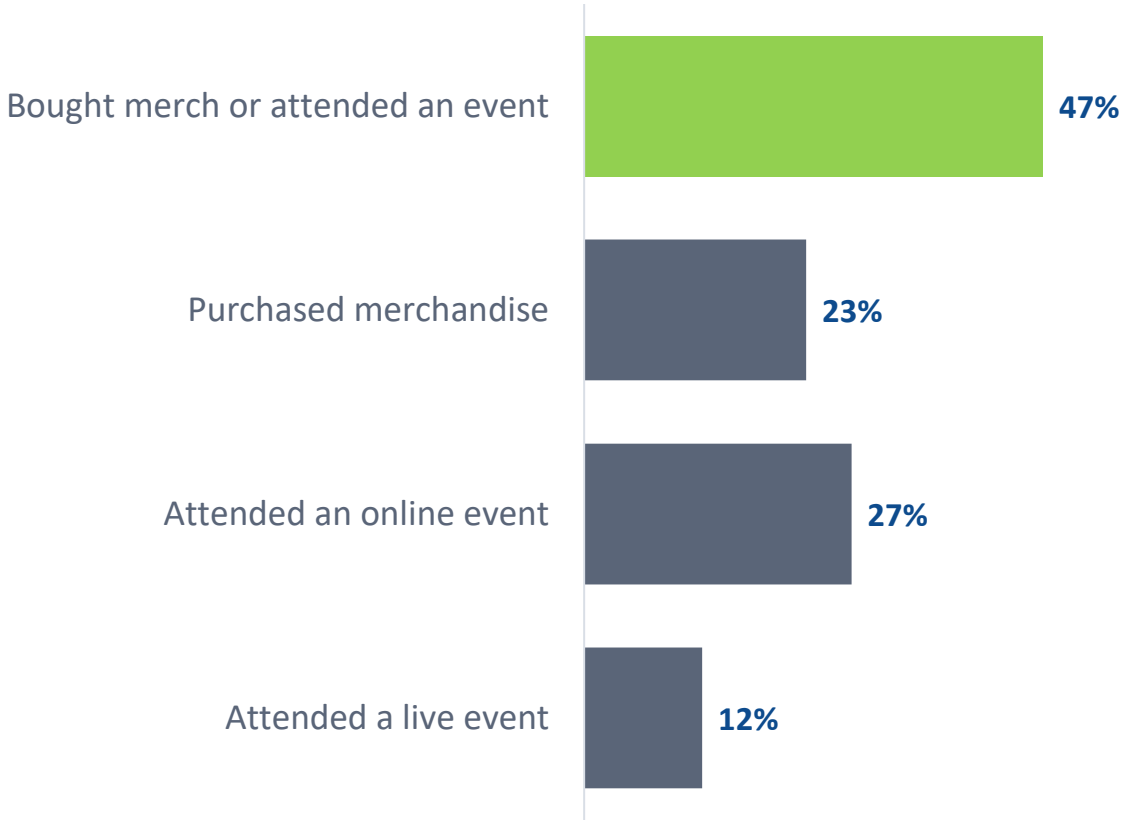
35%

Are already a Patreon patron

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted.

Fan commerce: nearly half have bought merch or attended an event

FAN COMMERCE, % OF GROUP



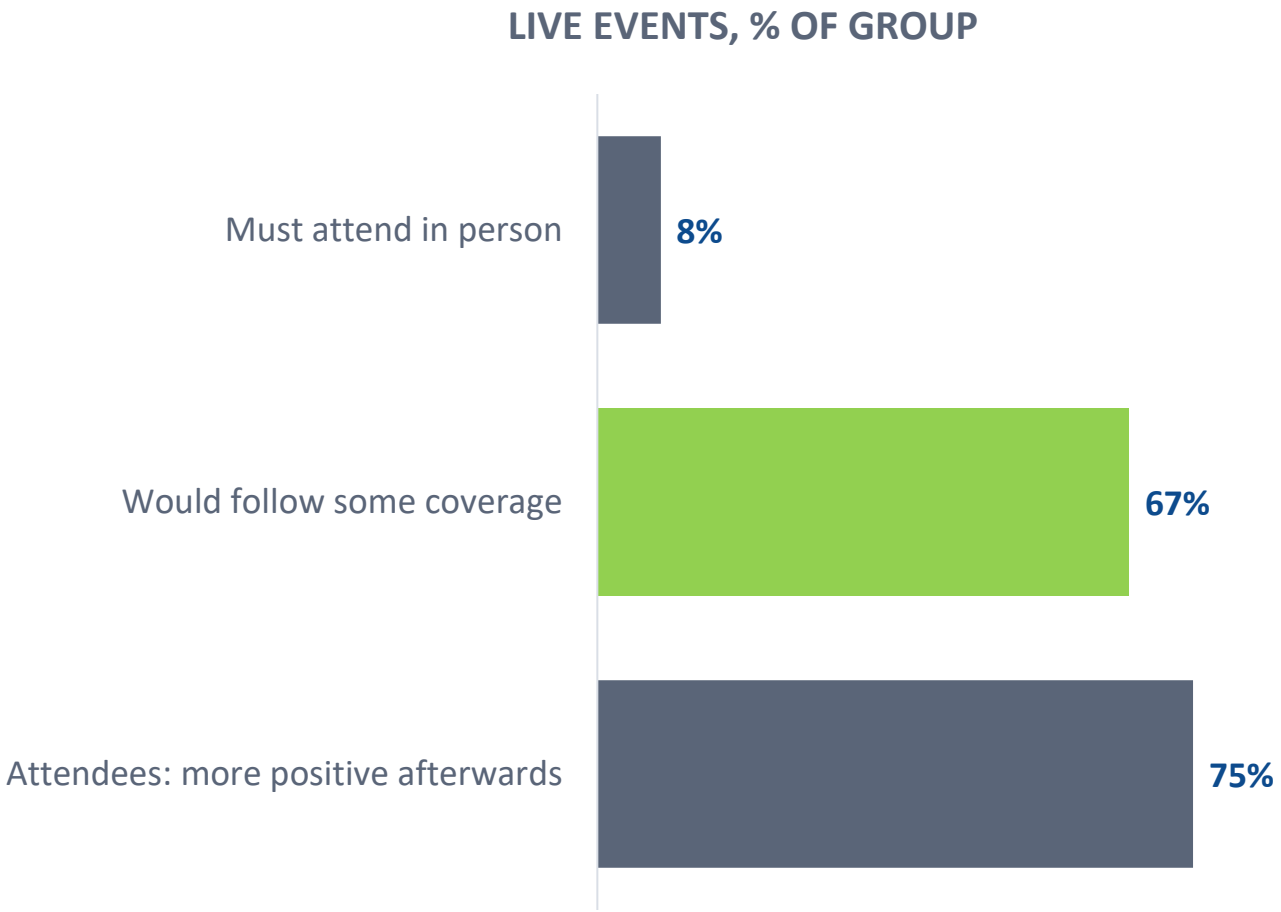
WHERE IT DIFFERS

47%

Bought merch or attended an event

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted.

Live events: the reach extends well beyond the room

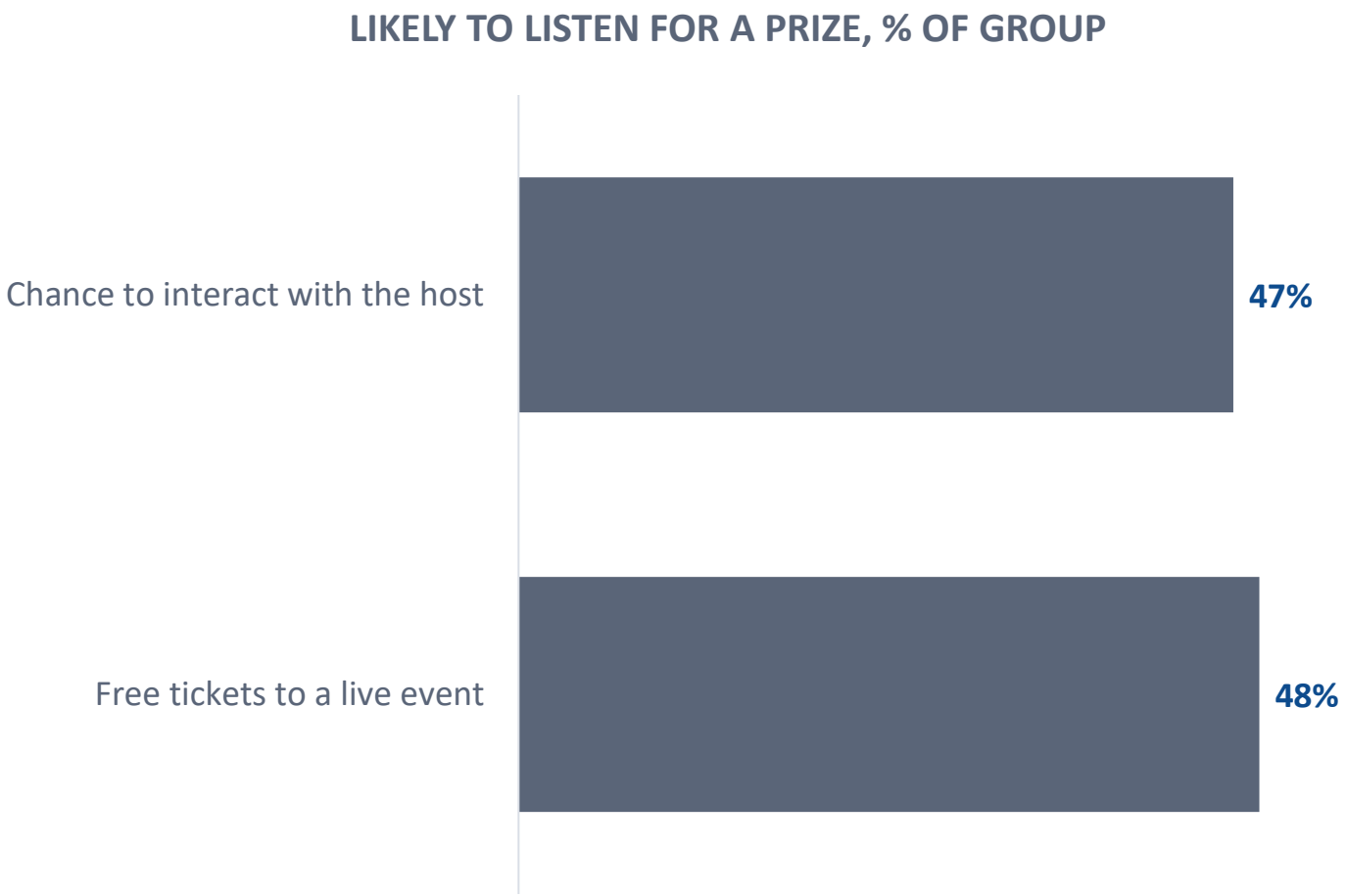


67%

The majority would follow coverage of an event even if they do not attend.

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted.

Prizes and access are a lever: tickets and host interaction



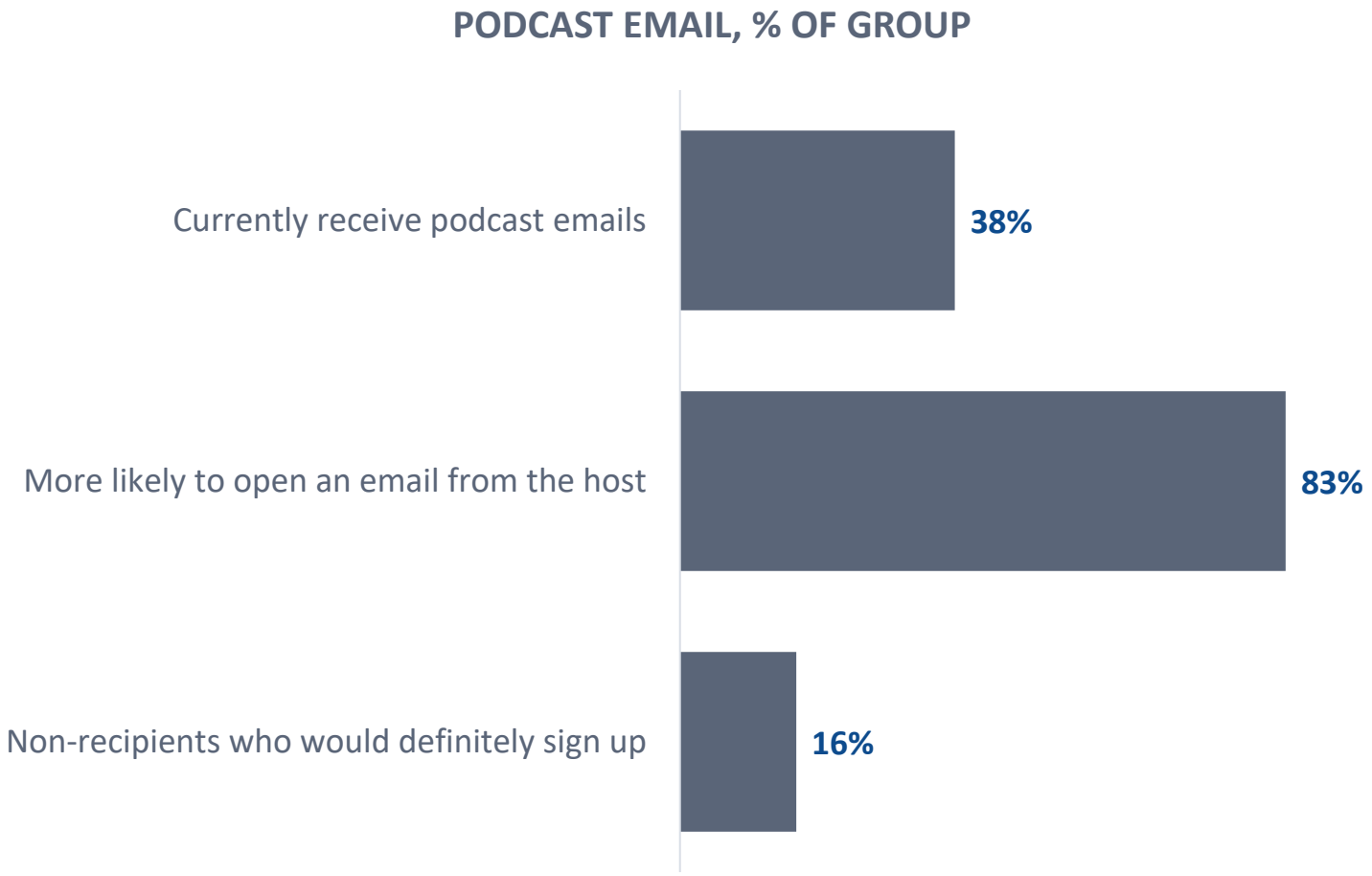
Nearly Half

Are likely to consume a podcast for a chance to win free tickets or even to interact with the host.

Contesting does not need to cost a lot!

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted.

Email: an under-used channel



38%

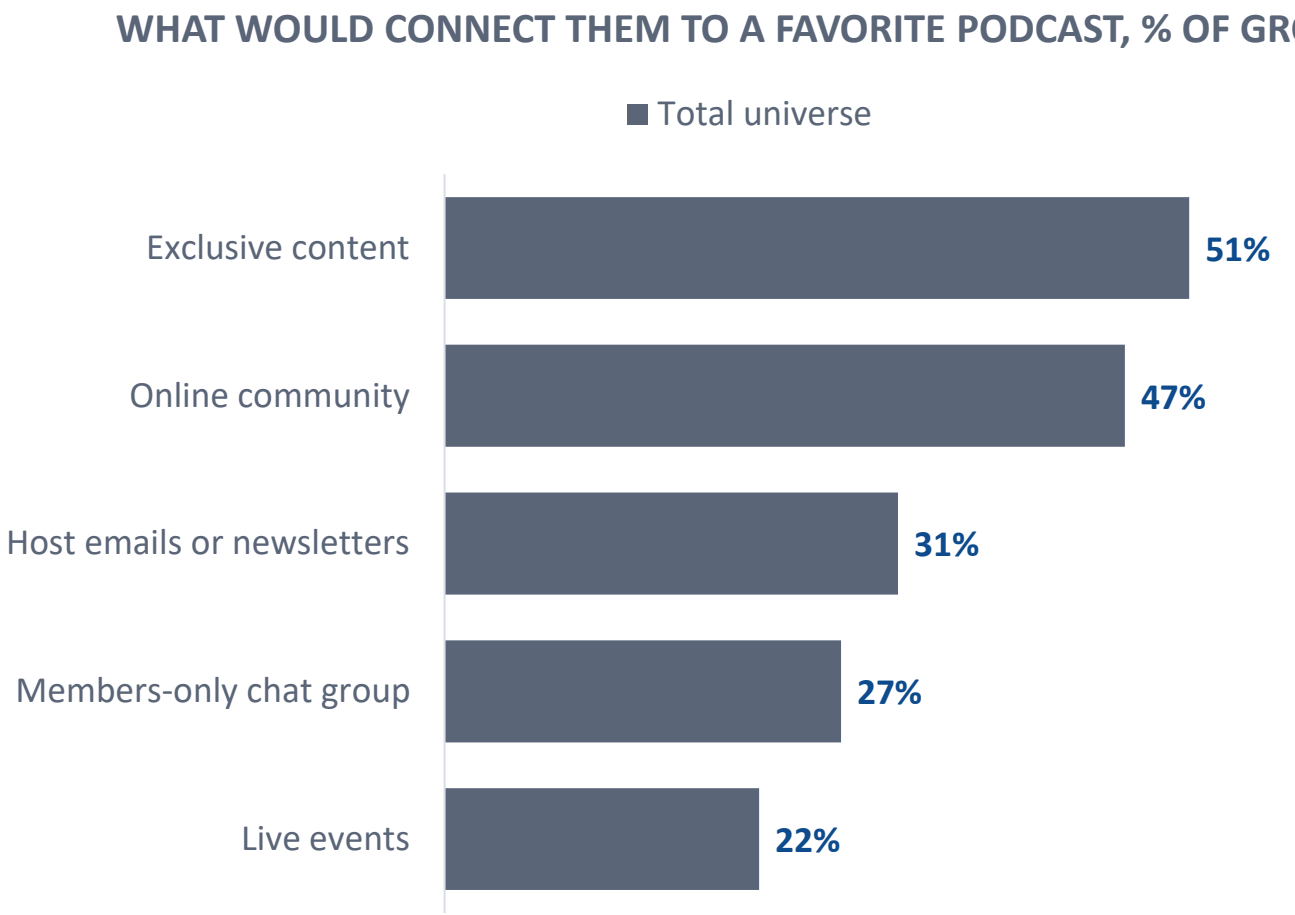
Currently receive podcast emails

16%

Of non-email recipientswould *definitely* sign up!

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted.

What deepens the bond: exclusive content and community



Half

Of the audience would feel more connected to a podcast with *exclusive content* and a feeling of *community*.

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, unweighted. Base: respondents with a favorite podcast (n=1,104)

Where age and gender change the picture

	Total universe	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	Male	Female
Likely to pay for a VIP/premium tier	**36.8%**	30.1%	**44.7%**	**44.7%**	28.9%	**43.0%**	31.4%
Would pay $5+/month to remove third-party ads	**34.4%**	30.1%	**40.6%**	**39.8%**	27.8%	**39.8%**	29.6%
Bought merch or attended an event	**46.7%**	**55.8%**	**53.8%**	**50.0%**	32.2%	**52.0%**	41.8%
Would definitely join a free VIP club	**48.5%**	**51.4%**	**56.6%**	**51.5%**	37.6%	**49.7%**	47.3%
Currently receive podcast emails	**37.8%**	37.3%	**43.8%**	**39.1%**	31.9%	**40.4%**	35.4%

25-44 and men: the most receptive groups, ahead of Total on every row.

45-54: lowest on every row.

18-24 and women: 18-24 lean to merch and events (55.8%); women trail men on payment intent (31.4% vs 43.0% for premium).

Source: The Podcast Study 2026, n=1,205 respondents, unweighted. Blue bold cells = above the Total universe on that row.

Summary of findings

1. **The ad load is near its ceiling**
   55% say there are too many ads, only 8.6% would accept more, and 39% have cut back or would pay to avoid them.

2. **Host reads make each ad work harder**
   40% are strongly influenced by a host-read ad vs 27% for pre-recorded; 55% stay through host reads.

3. **Social media drives discovery**
   Social is 3x more effective than podcast ads at driving discovery, but 1 in 6 found a show through a podcast ad.

4. **A free VIP club is the on-ramp to paying**
   49% would definitely join, and they are 1.5x as likely as the total to pay for a premium tier (55% vs 37%).

5. **Price falls off a cliff above $5**
   47% would pay under $3 a month and 38.5% at $4-$5, but only 23.3% at $5-$10.

6. **Superfans pay now; Prime Prospects are next**
   61% of Superfans are likely to pay for premium; 71% of Prime Prospects for a host-read-only tier (Total: 37%, 45%).

Action plan playbook

1. Protect every impression: cap the ad load; maximize the value of existing inventory
2. Shift inventory to host reads and price them above standard spots
3. Lead discovery on social; use your own ad breaks to sell membership
4. Start free with a VIP club and host email, then price the first tier under $5
5. Ask Superfans for premium; offer Prime Prospects a host-read-only tier

THANK YOU

Join us for our upcoming webinars

OCT 20 **What Radio Can Learn From The Podcast Study**

Special Thanks To: CROOKED npr PRX

strategicsolutions RESEARCH

the PODCAST STUDY.com

POINT To POINT

Connect with Hal

Connect with Tim