

2020 Content Preferences Study

B2B Buyers Increasingly Look For Credible 'Show-And-Tell' Experiences To Drive Buying Decisions



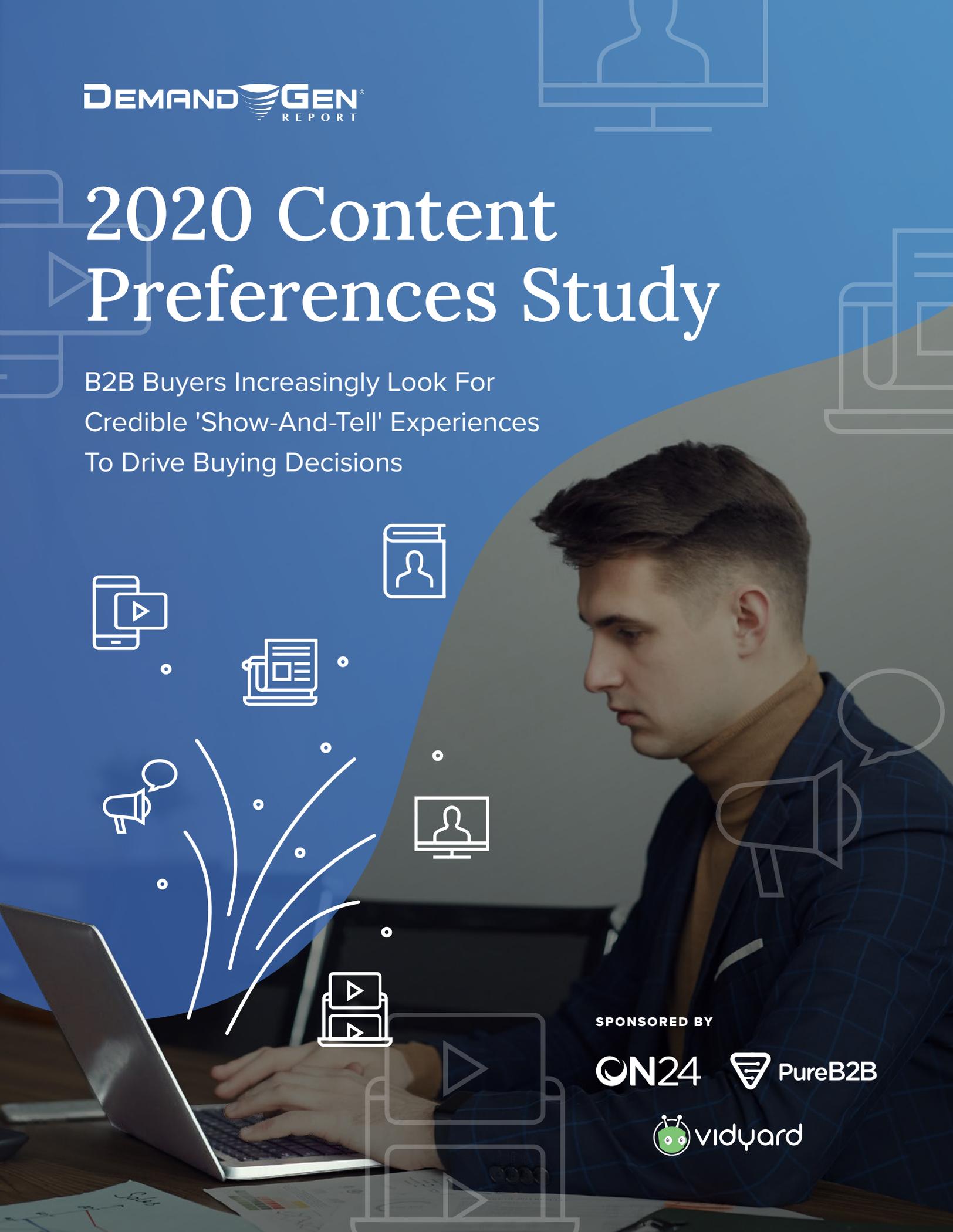
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67% of respondents said they rely even more on content than they did last year to research and inform purchase decisions.

Executive Summary

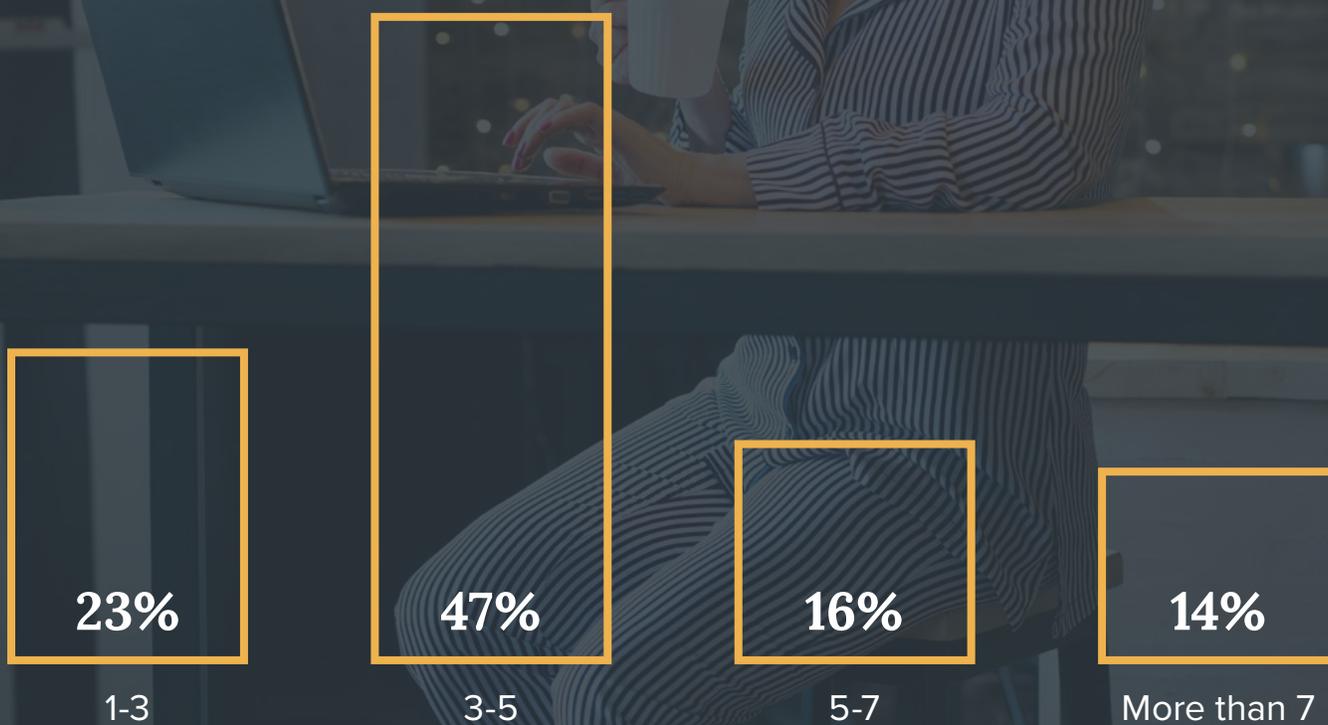
During a time of “social distancing,” where in-person engagement and education is being replaced with digital alternatives, content has become an even more critical tool for B2B buyers to research new areas and find solutions to business challenges.

At a time when many industries were struggling with coronavirus, forcing the cancellation of face-to-face conferences, buyers continued to become increasingly reliant on content to inform and influence their research, consideration and evaluation stages.

And based on new results from *Demand Gen Report's 2020 Content Preferences Study*, buyers are not only leaning even harder on content to educate themselves, but they are also demanding and expecting richer content experiences from the brands they are engaging.

Illustrating these trends, 67% of respondents said they rely even more on content than they did the year prior to research and inform purchase decisions. And when asked what type of content they consumed as they engaged with vendors, respondents showed a growing preference towards more visual, engaging formats.

How many pieces of content have you typically consumed before engaging with a salesperson when you are amid making a purchase decision?





For the first time in the history of the survey, video topped the list of formats for buyer consumption, with webinars remaining another popular format B2B buyers are gravitating towards.

TOP CONTENT FORMATS B2B BUYERS HAVE ENGAGED WITH DURING THEIR BUYING PROCESS

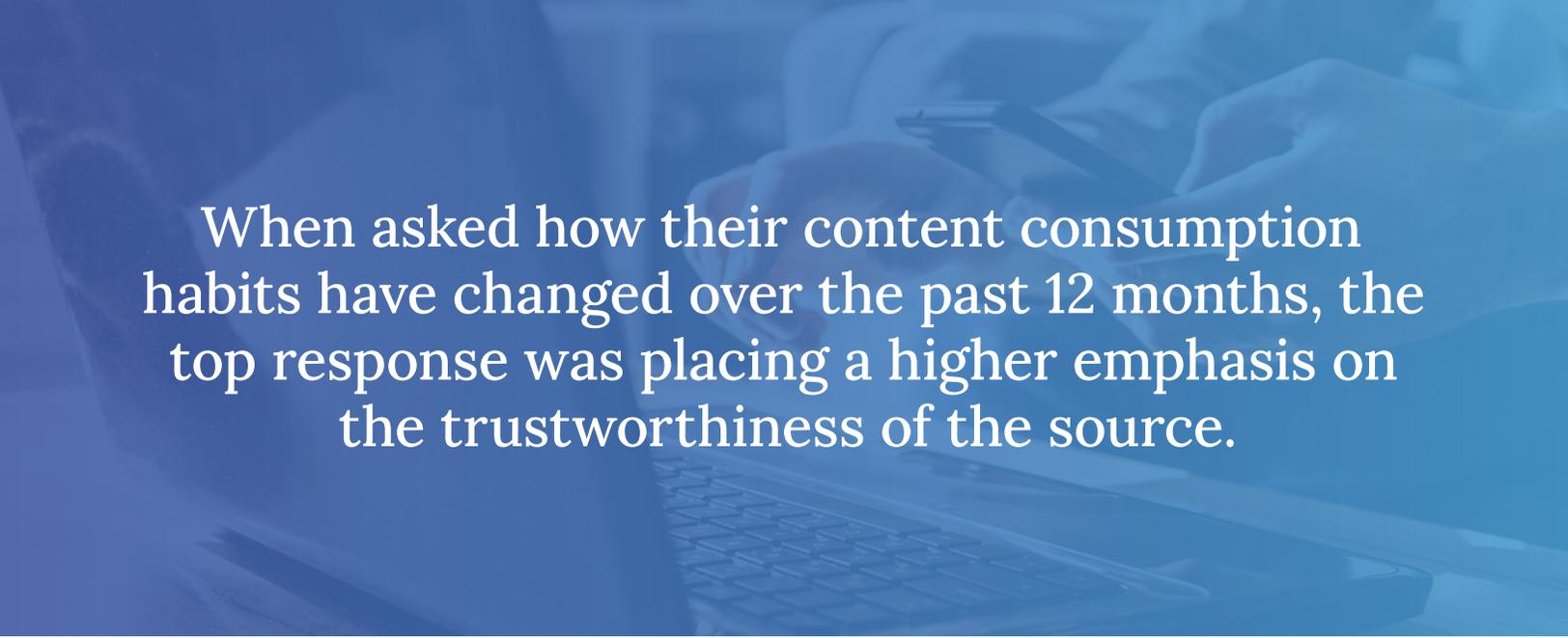
- **65%** Video
- **60%** White Papers
- **56%** Blogs
- **54%** Webinars
- **54%** Case Studies
- **54%** Research/Survey Reports
- **48%** E-books



Video also ranked as the content format B2B executives were most likely to share, finishing just ahead of white papers, blog posts and research reports.

In the following report, we will provide a deep dive into the survey results, providing specific analysis into:

- **How content preferences have shifted** to a higher preference in mobile-optimized content over the past 12 months;
- The growing need for **peer-to-peer content influence**;
- The **most popular formats** for early, middle and late stages of the modern buyer journey; and
- Top content formats buyers **share with peers and colleagues**, and the key platforms they are using to share.



When asked how their content consumption habits have changed over the past 12 months, the top response was placing a higher emphasis on the trustworthiness of the source.

Changes In Content Consumption Patterns

Since content is becoming a more important validation point during the buying process, the survey showed B2B audiences are putting more emphasis on the credibility of the content they are downloading.

When asked how their content consumption habits have changed over the past 12 months, the top response was placing a higher emphasis on the trustworthiness of the source.

The other shifts in consumption over the past 12 months showed a continued trend away from traditional copy-heavy content associated with B2B marketing, and a migration towards offers that can engage on a variety of screens and encourage buyers to self-navigate through content experiences.

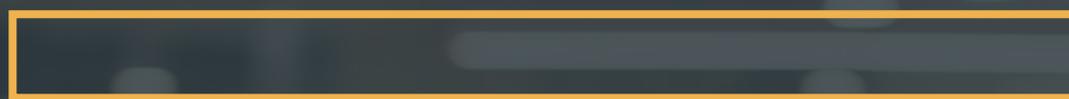
Additional top responses reflecting changes in content consumption behavior included:

- **44%** prefer mobile-optimized content-
- **43%** prefer content from industry influencers
- **43%** prefer shorter formats
- **39%** get more content from social/peers
- **34%** prefer more interactive content

How have your B2B content consumption habits changed over the past year? (Check all that apply)

I place a higher emphasis on the trustworthiness of the source

51%



I prefer mobile-optimized content to access on my smartphone or tablet

44%



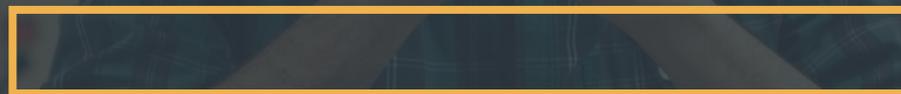
I prefer credible content from industry influencers

43%



I prefer shorter formats

43%

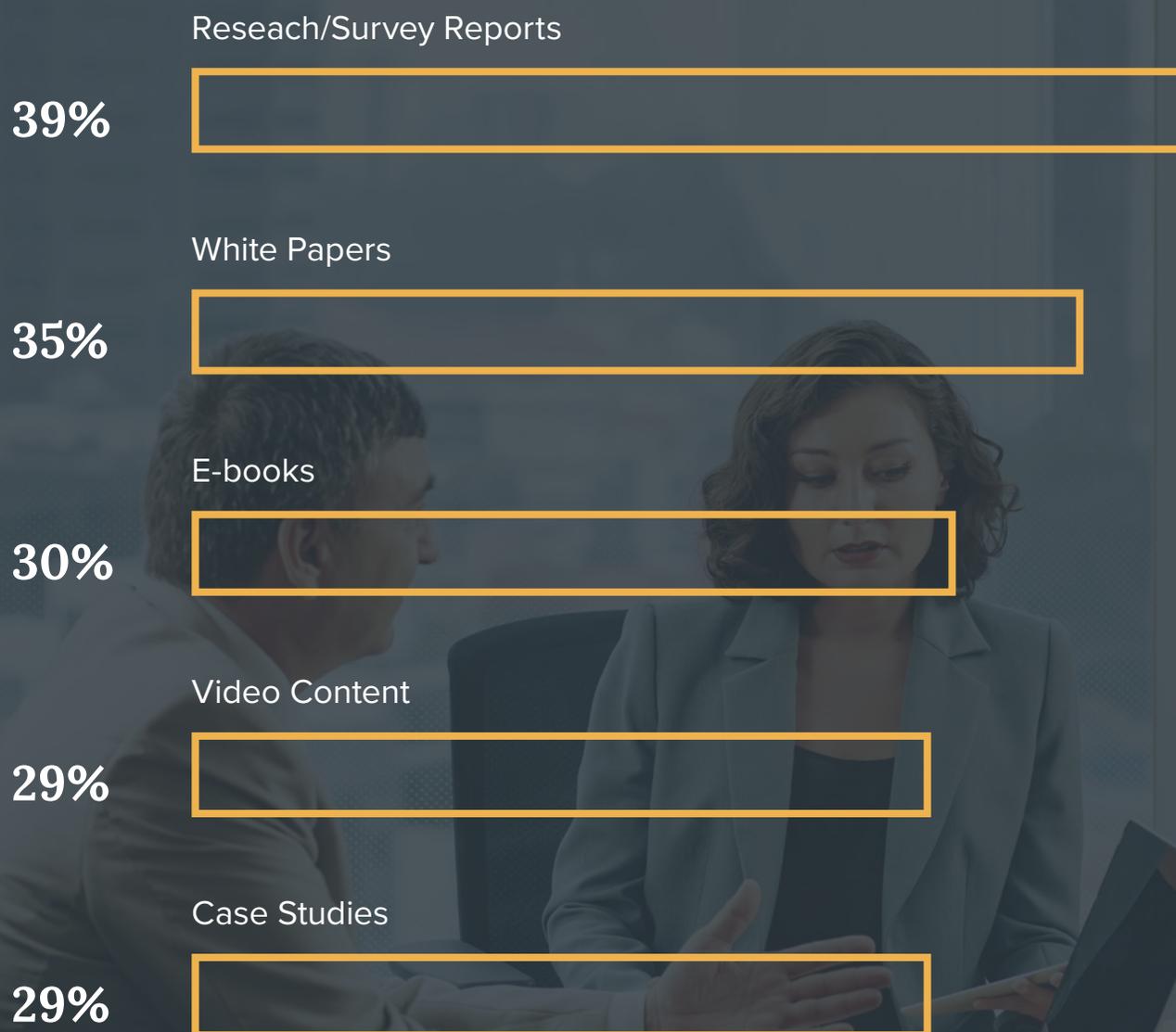


I get more of my content through social networks or peer recommendations

39%



What are the most valuable content formats and sources for researching your B2B purchases?





81% of respondents said they share business-related content with their LinkedIn network.

The Growing Peer-To-Peer Influence Of Content

The survey showed B2B executives are not only engaging content for their own research but are increasingly sharing it with their networks via email and social channels. LinkedIn remained the dominant platform for sharing B2B content, with 81% of respondents saying they share business-related content with their network.

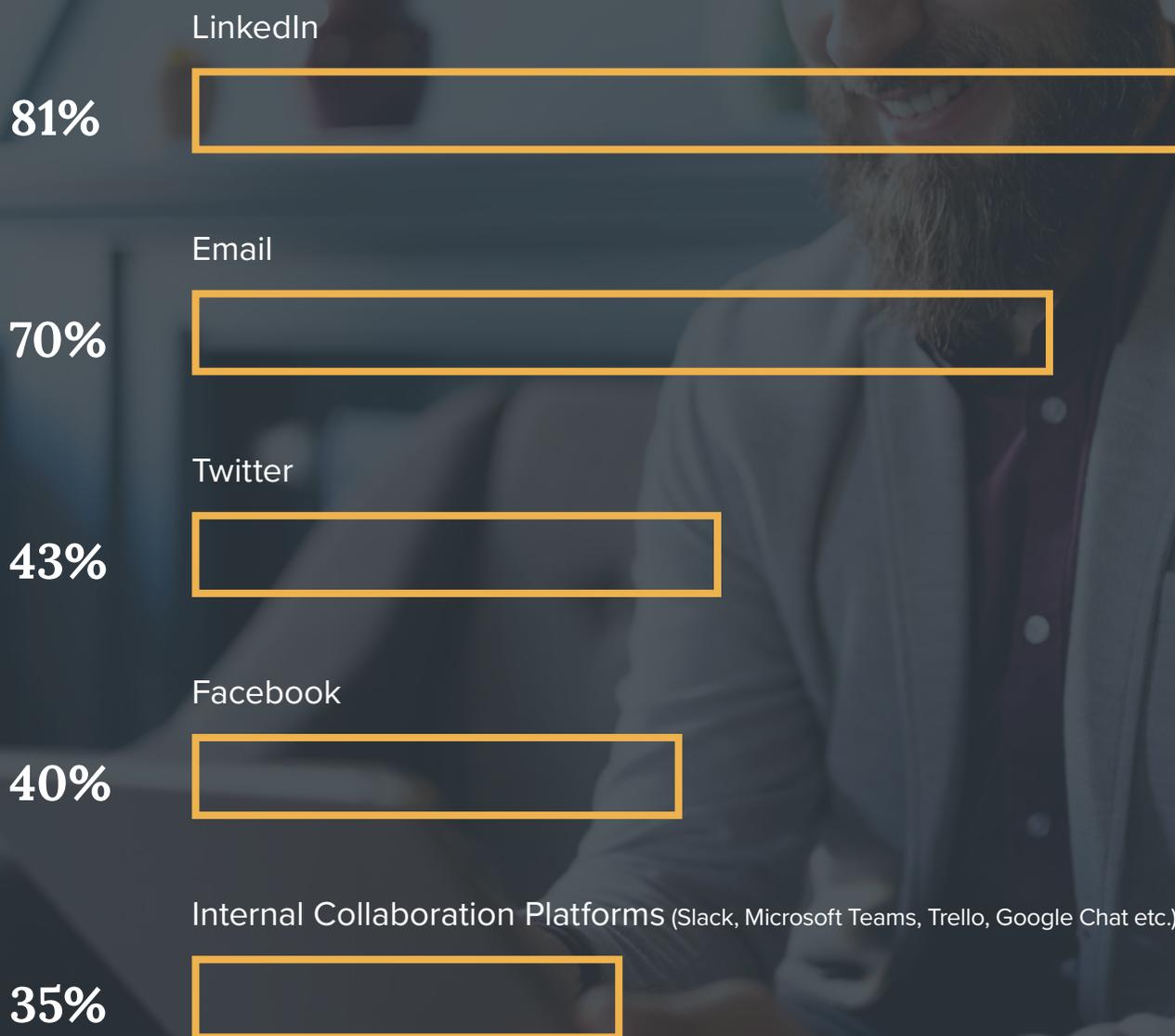
Passing along content is also fairly common on other social networks, with 43% of respondents saying they share resources on Twitter, 40% share on Facebook and 22% on Instagram.

Email was the second most popular medium for sharing content, with 70% saying they pass along content to peers and colleagues. The study also showed increased sharing on the growing number of collaboration platforms used by B2B organizations, including Slack and Microsoft Teams, with 36% noting they post pieces to those mediums. Another 11% indicated they share assets on partner portals such as Bloomfire.

In another indication of the growing influence of peers on content consumption, respondents said they are turning to user-generated content as they conduct research on new solutions. More than half (57%) said they are relying on social feedback and commentary as they navigate new solutions and vendors, while 49% said they are using review sites such as G2 and TrustRadius to source information.

Given the added weight buyers are putting on credibility, it was no surprise that 49% said they are turning to analyst reports as a key part of their content research.

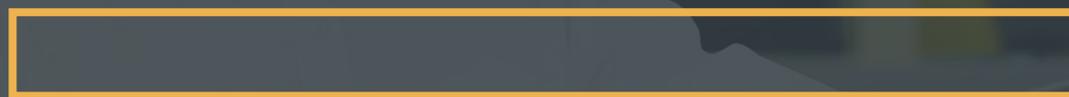
Which channels do you use to share business-related content? (Check all that apply)



I share the following content types with my colleagues: (Check all that apply)

Video Content

42%



White Papers

41%



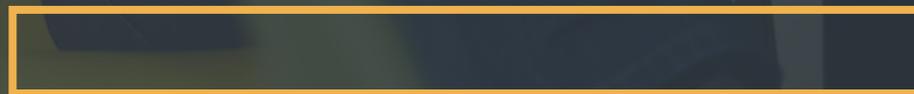
Research/Survey Reports

40%



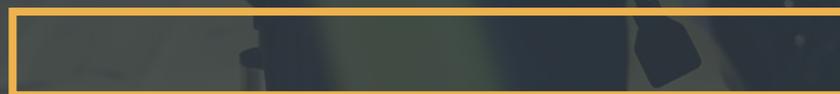
Blogs Posts

36%



E-books

33%





Quick-hitting content such as listicles & infographics showed to be more popular earlier in the journey when buyers are just gathering initial information on a topic.

Buyers Engaging With Various Content At Different Stages

While more visual and immersive content proved more popular overall, the survey also showed that buyers are turning to different formats at different stages of their journey.

For example, quick-hitting content showed to be more popular earlier in the journey when buyers are just gathering initial information on a topic.

MOST POPULAR FORMATS FOR EARLY-STAGE RESEARCH

1. Listicles **81%**
2. Infographics **72%**
3. Blogs **66%**
4. Video **62%**



During the mid-funnel, where buyers are looking to get a deeper understanding of a topic, they showed a preference towards more immersive formats such as webinars, interactive content and assessments.

MOST POPULAR FORMATS FOR MID-STAGE RESEARCH

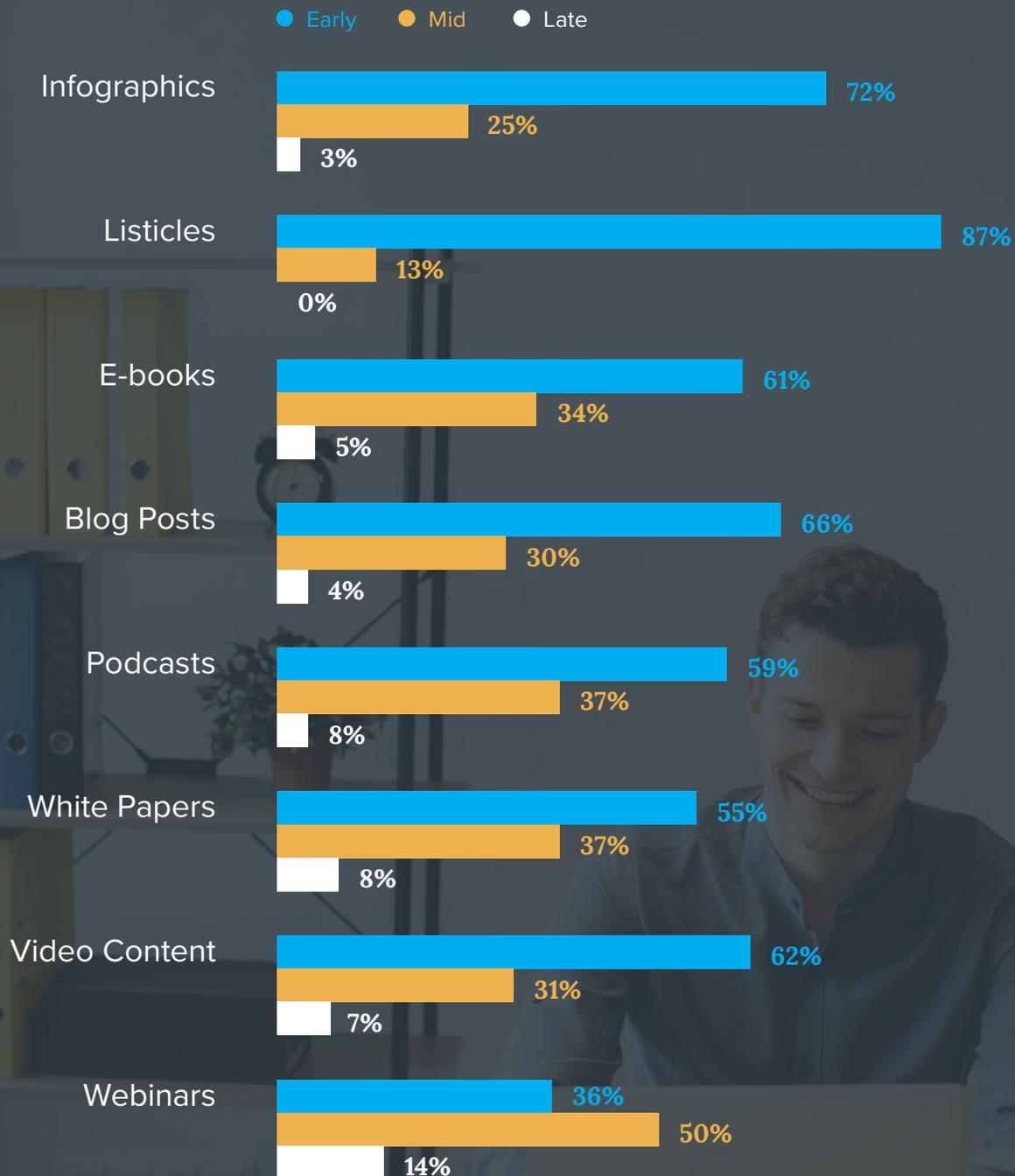
1. Assessments **58%**
2. Webinars **50%**
3. Case Studies **40%**
4. Interactive Content **40%**

And when buyers are in the evaluation, validation stage towards the end of the journey, they are relying more on peers and industry influencers.

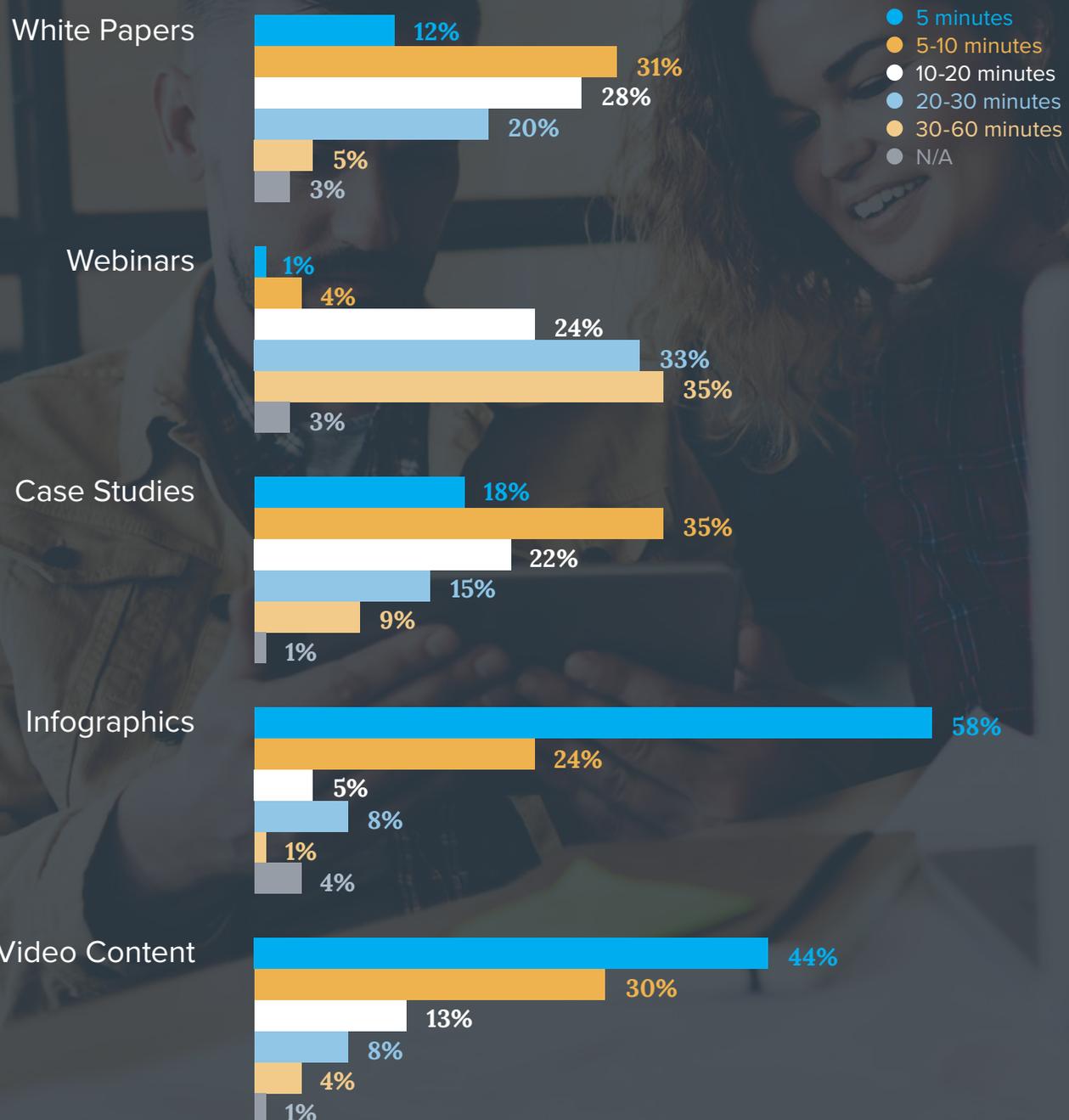
MOST POPULAR FORMATS FOR LATE-STAGE RESEARCH

1. Case Studies **39%**
2. User Reviews **38%**
3. Analyst Reports **36%**
4. ROI Calculators **28%**

Of the following content formats, which do you find most valuable for early, mid and late stages of the buying process? (Ranking/Matrix: Early, Mid, Late)



When researching a B2B purchase, how much time do you typically spend reviewing content in the following formats?





In addition to leaning more on different content formats at different stages, the survey also revealed that buyers see contrasting value in different formats. They are spending more time with certain formats and are willing to supply different amounts of information on themselves to access those assets.

For example, buyers indicated they were willing to invest the largest amount of time to consume webinars, with 35% saying they are willing to spend 30 to 60 minutes, and 33% saying they will spend between 20 to 30 minutes.

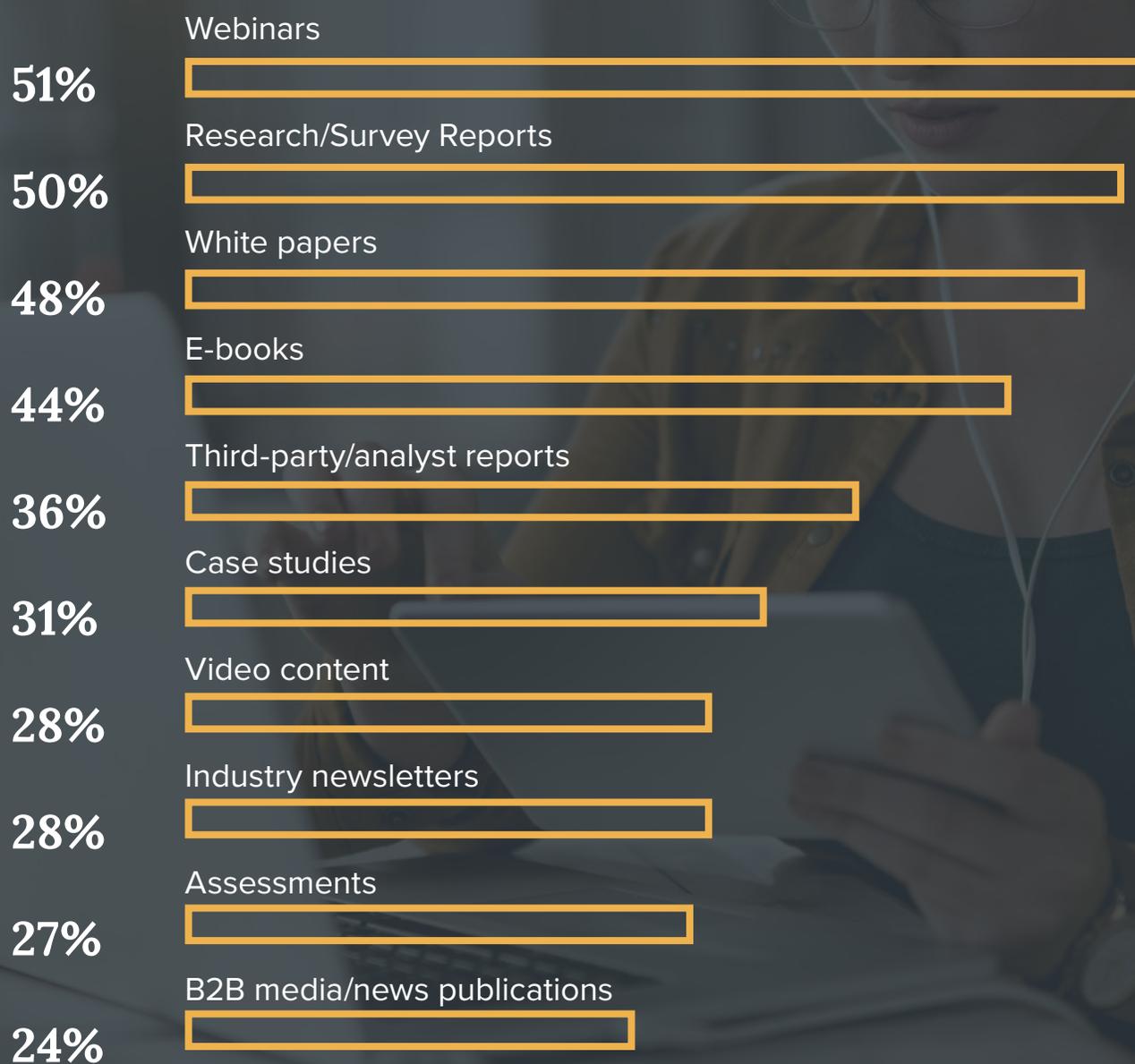
By comparison, 58% of respondents said they typically spend less than five minutes consuming video content and 44% spend the same amount of time with videos.

Webinars also proved to have the highest currency in the amount of information buyers were willing to share to access the content.

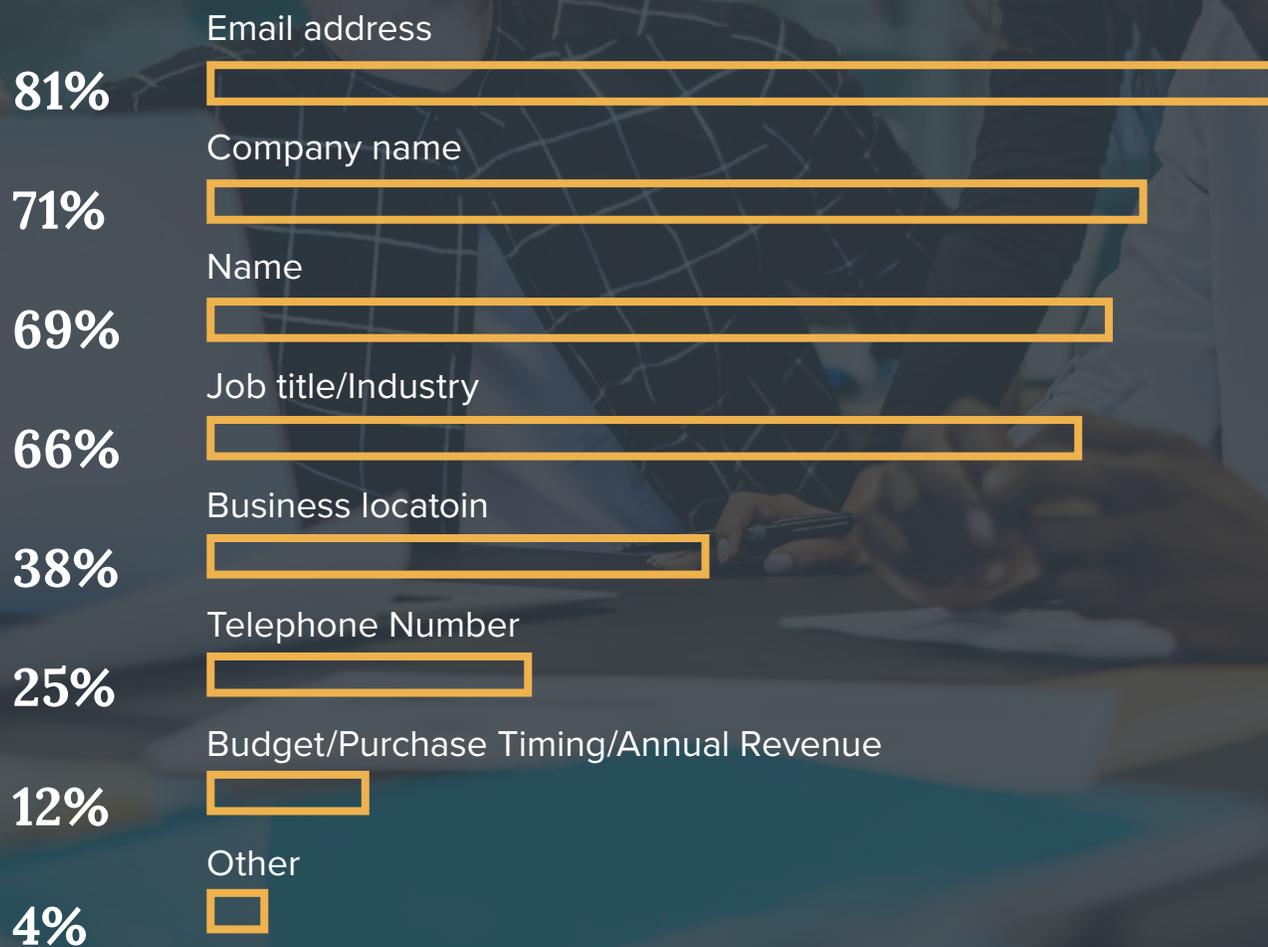
TOP CONTENT FORMATS BUYERS ARE WILLING TO REGISTER FOR:

1. Webinars **51%**
2. Research reports **50%**
3. White papers **48%**
4. E-books **43%**

Which types of content assets are you willing to register for and share information about you and/or your company? (Choose all that apply)



When you are willing to share information in exchange for content, what information are you willing to share about yourself? (Choose all that apply)





48% of respondents said they engaged with between three and five pieces of content before actually having a conversation with a salesperson.

Easy Access To Content Emerging As Competitive Differentiator

Content's role in forming the initial impression of a brand has only heightened over the past year. And with fewer opportunities to physically get in front of clients in the current climate, B2B buyers are turning to all stages of their purchasing journey and expecting content on a variety of topics and in different formats.

That deep engagement with content was supported by the finding that 30% of respondents said they engaged with five or more pieces of content before even engaging with a salesperson from a solution provider, and 48% said they engaged with between three and five before actually having a conversation with a salesperson.

The increased reliance on content and higher expectations from these resources was reinforced by respondents' feedback on how they would like to see content organized on vendors' websites. B2B executives pointed to a desire to easily access content:

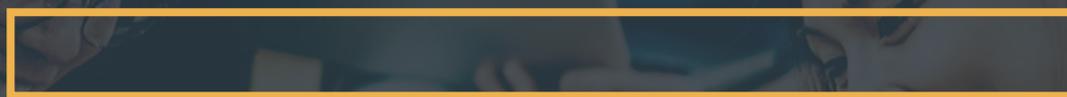
- By topic **(56%)**;
- By pain point **(53%)**;
- By industry/vertical **(50%)**; and
- By role **(33%)**.

The survey clearly points to a need/opportunity for B2B brands to provide more customized and relevant content experiences and resource center organization in the future.

How would you like to see B2B vendors organize the content on their websites? (Check all that apply)

By topic

56%



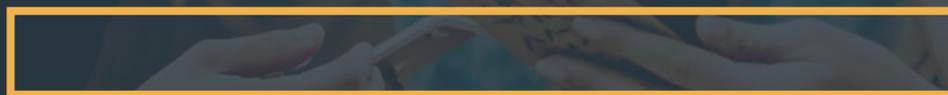
By issue/pain point

53%



By industry/vertical

50%



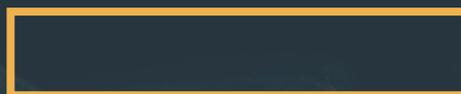
By business role

33%

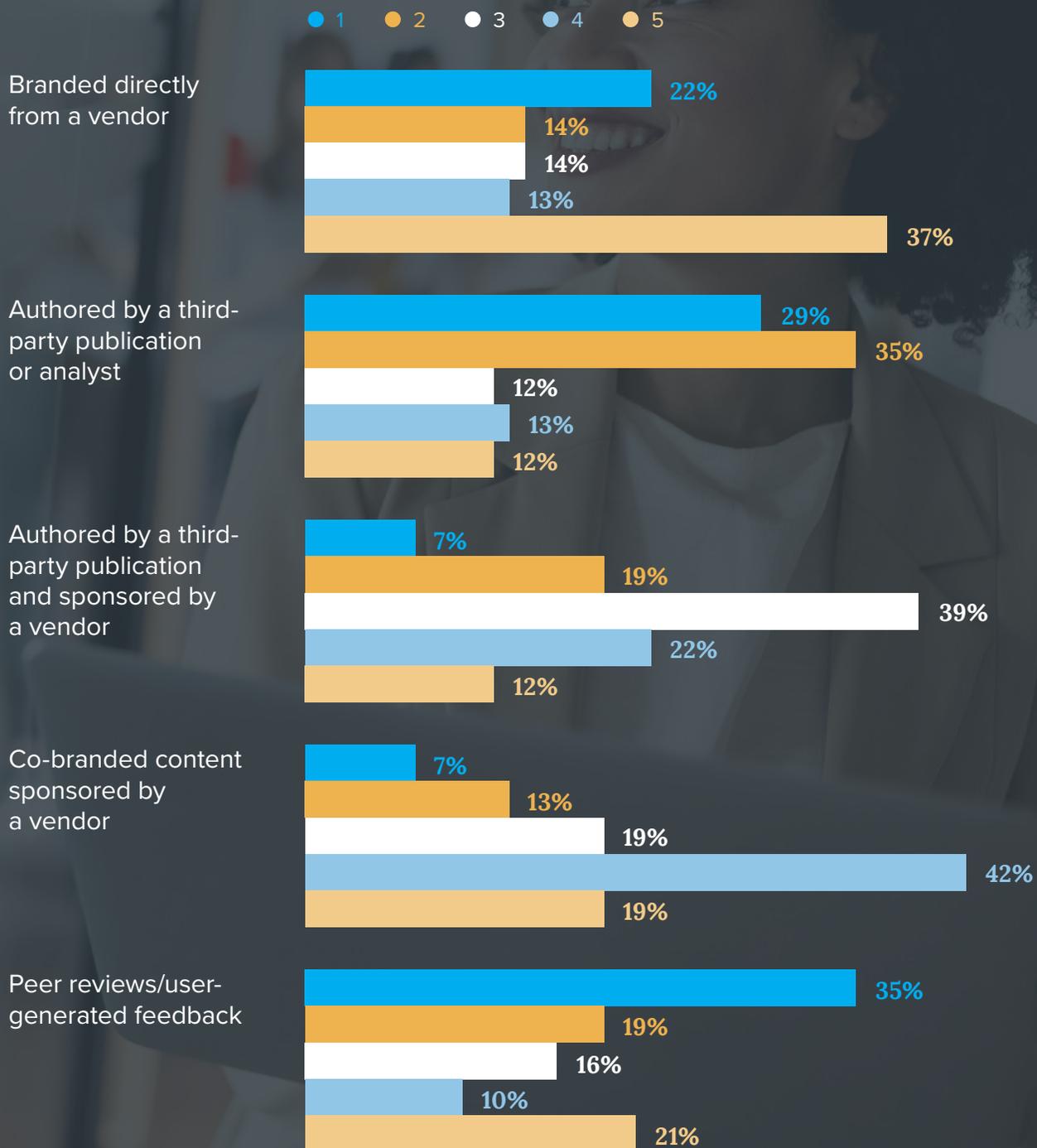


By content format

24%



Which of the following types of content do you give credence to? (Rate from 1 – 5, with one being the most credence)



What recommendations would you make to improve the quality of the content created/provided by B2B vendors? (Choose up to five if applicable)

Use more data and research to support content
47%

Curb the sales messages
43%

Create shorter content
40%

Add more insight from industry thought leaders/analysts
37%

Don't overload content with copy
37%

About The Survey

Demand Gen Report surveyed 214 B2B executives during the months of February and March 2020 from a variety of industries and company sizes to gauge their changing behaviors around content engagement.

THE BREAKOUT OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING INDUSTRIES:

- **44%** High Tech
- **43%** Professional Services
- **43%** Manufacturing
- **39%** Business Services
- **34%** Financial Services
- **34%** Telecom
- **34%** Media/Entertainment
- **34%** Healthcare
- **34%** Other

THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS ALSO REPRESENTED THE FOLLOWING MIX OF DIFFERENT SIZED ORGANIZATIONS (IN TERMS OF ANNUAL REVENUE):

- **37%** \$25 million and under
- **14%** \$25 million to \$50 million
- **12%** \$50 million to \$100 million
- **14%** \$100 million to \$500 billion
- **8%** \$500 million to \$1 billion
- **15%** More than \$1 billion

WHAT IS YOUR TITLE/ROLE IN THE ORGANIZATION?

- **32%** Manager
- **22%** Director
- **20%** C-Level
- **15%** Other
- **11%** Vice President

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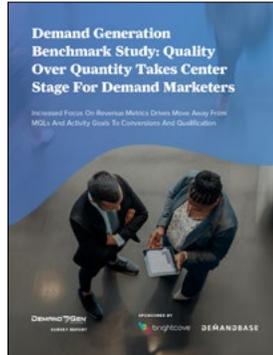
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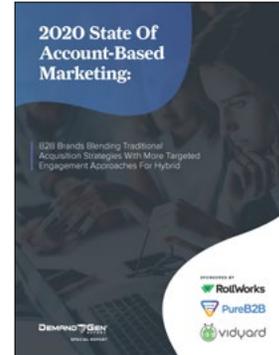
Additional Resources



2019 Content Preferences
Survey Report



2020 Demand Generation
Benchmark Study



2020 State of Account-
Based Marketing



Demand Gen Report is a targeted online publication that uncovers the strategies and solutions that help companies better align their sales and marketing organizations, and ultimately, drive growth. A key component of the publication's editorial coverage focuses on the sales and marketing automation tools that enable companies to better measure and manage their multi-channel demand generation efforts.

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