Online Conferencing
Participant preferences for networking and collaboration

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To develop effective methods to encourage communication and collaboration between online conference participants, a better understanding of preferences and attendance trends is required.

194 online conference registrants were surveyed to evaluate the networking and collaboration trends amongst online conference participants. Findings included participant perceptions towards online conference formats as well as preferences for networking and collaborating using social media.

The conference was delivered through the web conferencing system, Blackboard Collaborate, and ran non-stop for 48 hours, with consecutive handovers between partners in Australia, the United Kingdom and Canada.
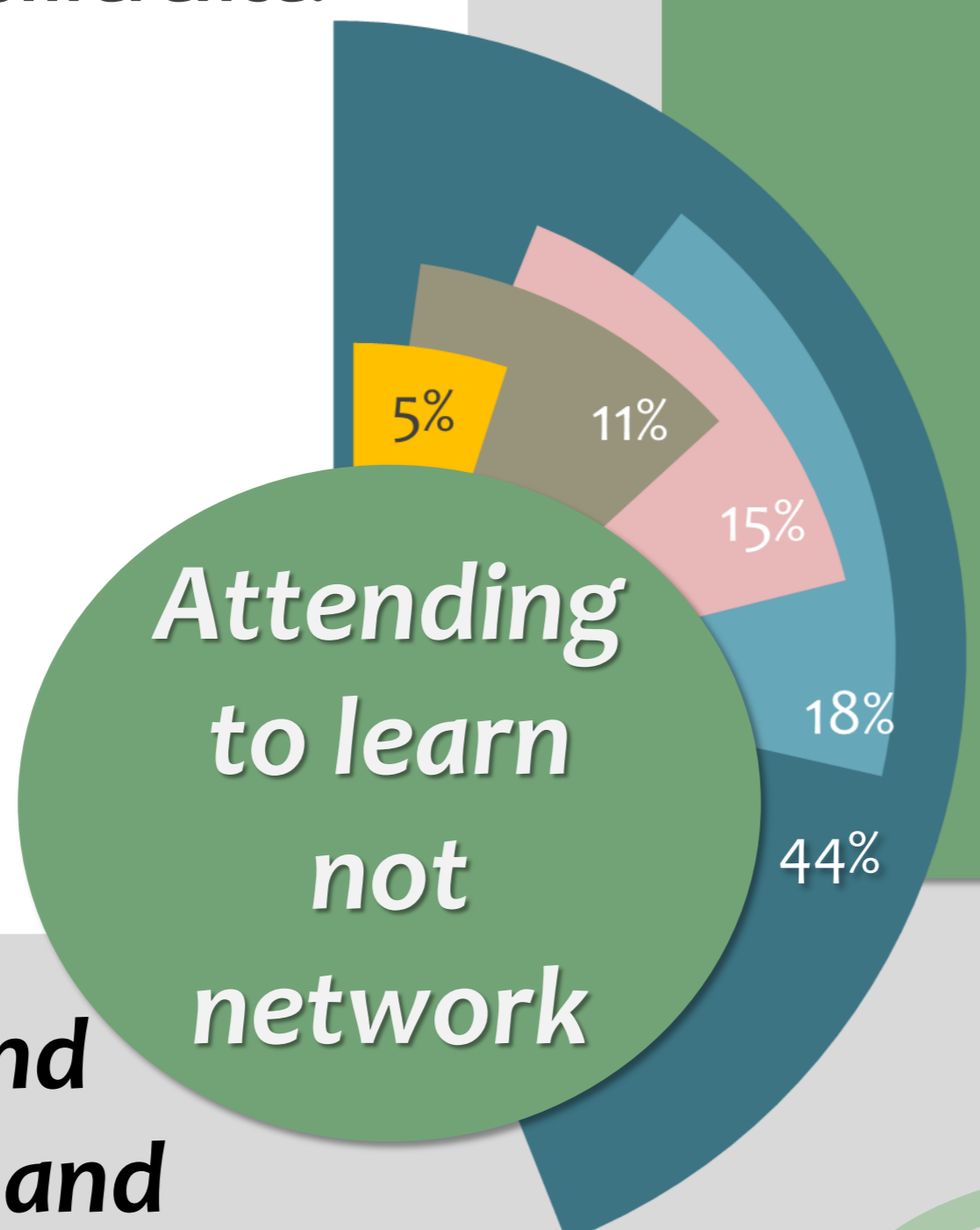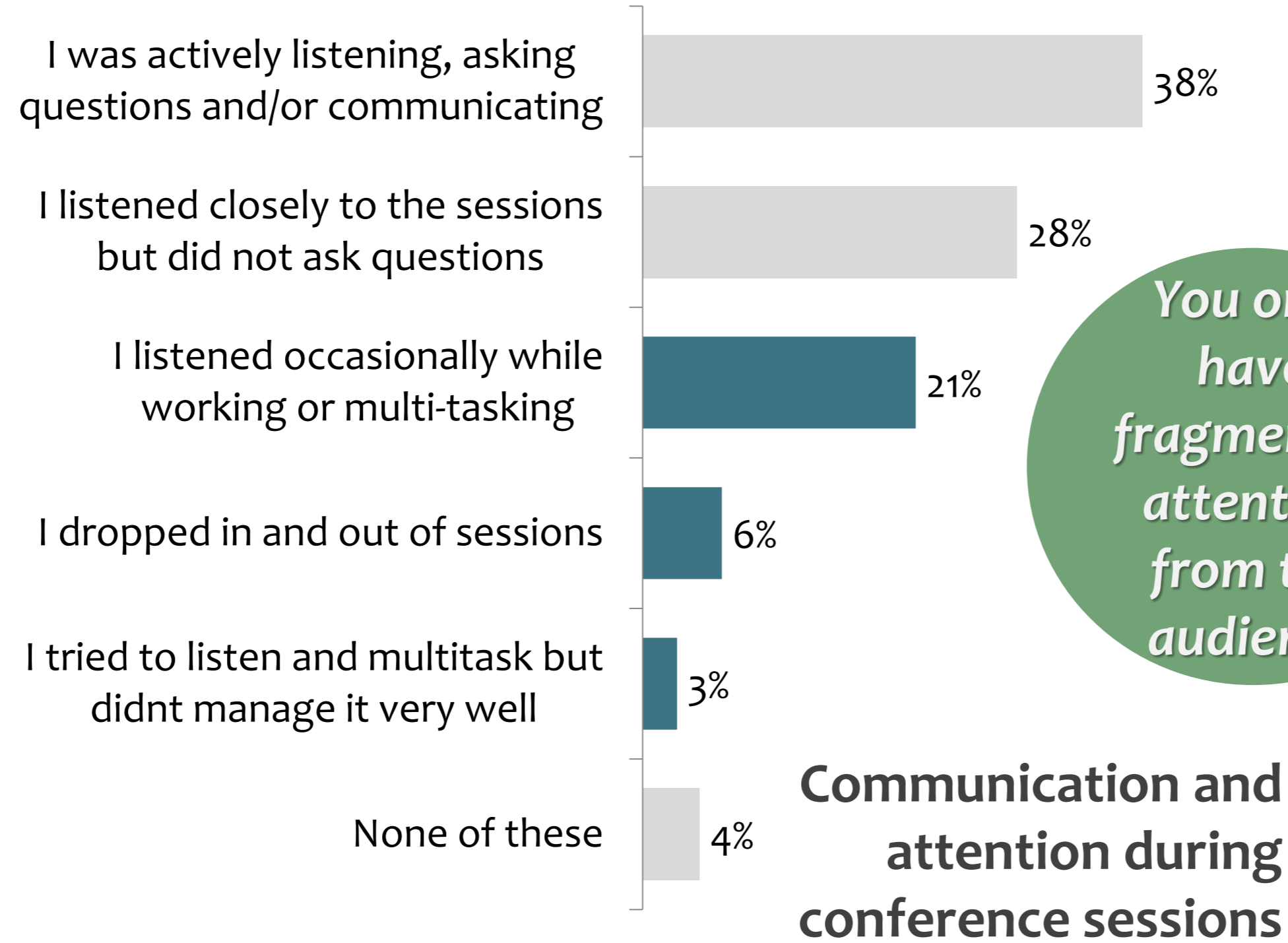
What is the primary reason why you were interested in attending the online conference?

- Particular interest in learning technologies
- General interest in the topics presented
- The content is directly related to my discipline
- Relationship with one of the participating host organization
- **Opportunity to network**

44%
18%
15%
11%
5%

Attending to learn not network

To what extent do people attend online conferences to network and collaborate?

Use social media to reach audiences

Online conference participants are frequent users of social media

	Daily	Once a week or more	Once every two weeks	Once a month	
Facebook	35	25	10	4	7	20
Twiter	26	16	7	4	11	36
Blog	16	20	10	12	16	26
Curating tool	21	14	5	4	12	43

Legend:
- Daily
- Once a week or more
- Once every two weeks
- Once a month

Three in ten people are multi-tasking or dropping in and out during sessions

- I was actively listening, asking questions and/or communicating — 38%
- I listened closely to the sessions but did not ask questions — 28%
- I listened occasionally while working or multi-tasking — 21%
- I dropped in and out of sessions — 6%
- I tried to listen and multitask but didnt manage it very well — 3%
- None of these — 4%

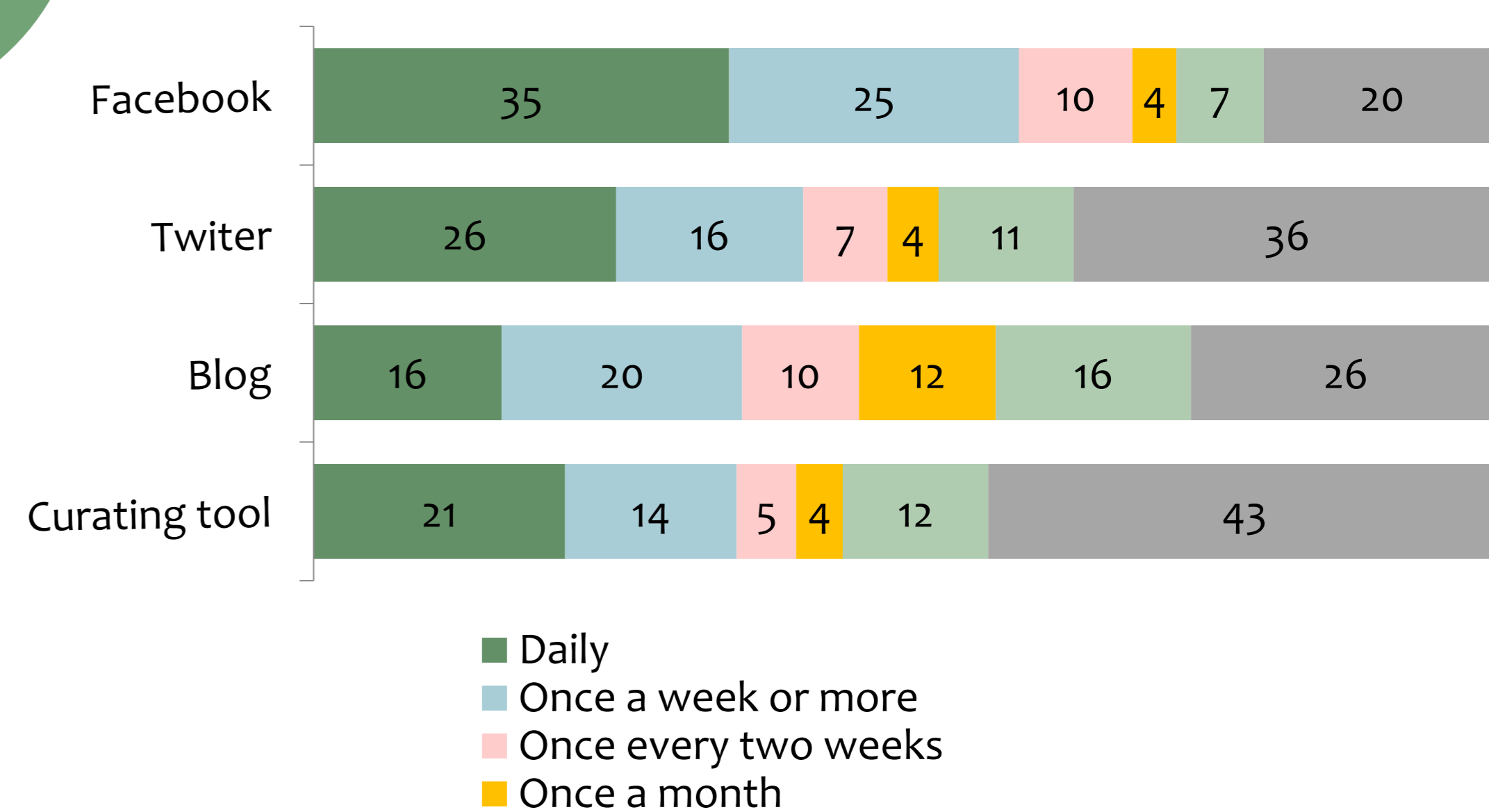Communication and attention during conference sessions

You only have fragmented attention from the audience

35% of participants are using social media or digital technologies during the conference to communicate or connect with other delegates
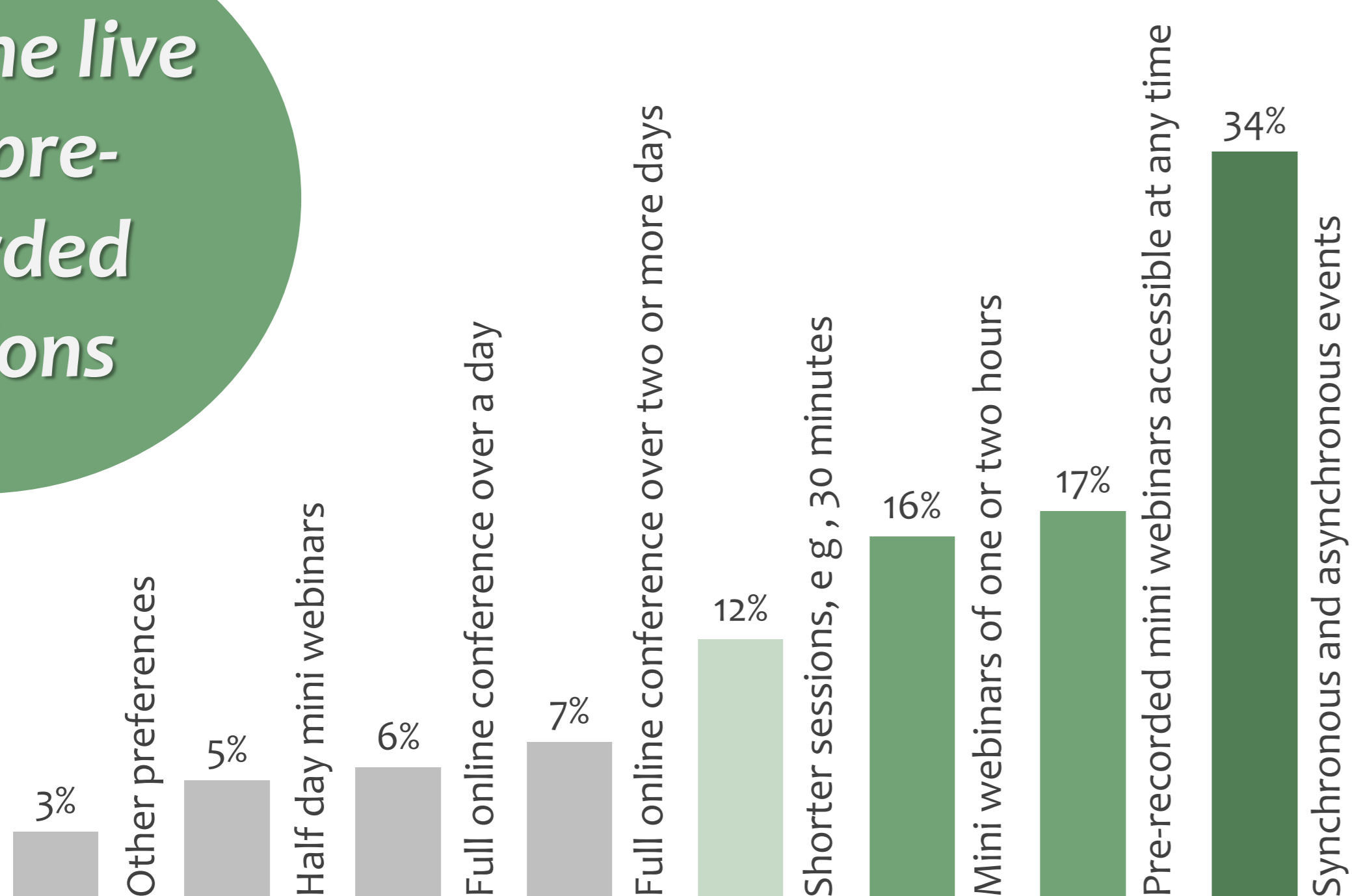
The increasing use of social media platforms and the availability of interactive spaces has increased opportunities for dispersed participants to collaborate, share and network long after completion of the event.

Twitter is considered by participants to be a social media tool for work and is therefore most appropriate for engaging conference attendees.

	Twitter	Curating tool	Blog	Facebook
Disseminate new information or content directly related to my career or work	85%	65%	68%	36%
As a medium to deliver my own opinion on topics or events	71%	22%	64%	45%
Marketing or promotion of my own research or work	56%	25%	52%	24%
Marketing or promotion of my university or organisation	45%	22%	40%	29%
Sharing personal information with friends or family	20%	14%	25%	89%
For my own private use only	13%	48%	28%	20%

Web conferencing software enables synchronous, internet-based collaboration and communication. Consequently, they are ideally suited to enabling the interaction between facilitators and participants valued in traditional face-to-face conferences.

Combining pre-recordings with live questions is the ideal format for online conference participants

Combine live and pre-recorded sessions

- Other preferences — 3%
- Half day mini webinars — 5%
- Full online conference over a day — 6%
- Full online conference over two or more days — 7%
- Shorter sessions, e.g., 30 minutes — 12%
- Mini webinars of one or two hours — 16%
- Pre-recorded mini webinars accessible at any time — 17%
- Synchronous and asynchronous events — 34%

20% Find that opportunities to network and establish connections during online conferences are limited

45% Think that the online format makes it difficult to establish new contacts