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Factors Contributing to the Establishment of Trust Between the Hosts of Sports Podcasting and Proactively Engaged Sports Fans

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ABSTRACT

Podcasting has risen in popularity in the last 10 years due to the flexibility of the format and the fact that anyone can start a podcast from anywhere. However, despite the growth and influence of podcasting, there remains a glaring gap on why listeners trust podcasters to share their knowledge. The key factors contributing to the establishment of trust between the hosts of sports podcasting and proactively engaged sports fans are studied in this qualitative research. The chosen research design is a multi-case analysis of the factors affecting trust. Accompanying this research design is a pre-selection survey and semi-structured interviews. The population of the research was sports fans who listen to sports podcasts three to four times a week, between the ages of 18 and 24, and are University students. The geographical location of this study is in the Netherlands. A Structural Topic Model was used as an enhanced thematic analysis to identify and analyze the collected data into themes. The findings resulted in 12 themes that are the same as the 12 trust types in the theoretical framework: Affect, Emotional, Relational, Cognition, Competence, Deterrence, Knowledge, Intuition, Integrity, System, Calculus, and Institutional. This allowed the researcher to explore the factors affecting trust between listeners and podcast hosts. Marketing insights are also provided for media and podcasting companies to learn how to use this trust to increase revenue.

Keywords: Podcasting, trust, sports, fans, multi-case study

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The 1920's and 1940's were the golden ages of radio (Bay, 2017). This is when radios rose in popularity, becoming a new form of absorbing information. Numerous people switched from reading newspapers to listening to the news on the radio in the morning whilst showering or driving to work. Now, over a century later, podcasts have become the new radio (Lindgren, 2021). People absorb not only news but life stories from podcasts. Through the help of companies such as Spotify, which is getting closer to complete domination of the podcast space (Quah, 2020 as described in Schlütz & Hedder, 2021), being a 'podcaster' can now also be a job. This has given rise to many new podcast hosts, especially athletes who are using this as a new career option once they retire (Louis, 2023). This has also been followed by the rise of sports podcasting due to them having created a space for providing coverage that is otherwise overlooked in traditional media, creating new connected communities (Markman & Sawyer, 2014). With the rise of sports podcasts comes the following of sports fans. Every year, billions of fans spend time and money supporting their favorite teams (Vallerand et al., 2008). Now these fans can evolve into being proactive and follow their team's podcasts such as *Locked on Heat* and *Last Word on Spurs*.

A recent study by Spotify in 2019 revealed that 81% of podcast listeners took action after hearing an advertisement during a podcast (Salveson, 2024) driven by the audience's 'connection' with the podcast host. This 'connection' mentioned in the study is scientifically known as a parasocial relationship which are one-sided connection where an individual will know a lot about a person and interact with the person while the other person does not know the other party (Dibble et al., 2015 as described in Louis, 2022). This perfectly encapsulates the essence of a podcast. The 81% statistic regarding advertisement engagement can be attributed not only to the aforementioned parasocial relationship but also to a podcast host's trust. In the marketing context, trust has been defined as a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence, and it has been measured based on three dimensions – ability, integrity, and benevolence (Gefen, 2002). Due to scarce information existing regarding a podcast's rare ability to create a unique connection (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021) owing to the trust between listeners and podcast hosts (Brinson & Lemon, 2022) paves the way for new research.

Problem Statement

With podcasting becoming increasingly more popular with roughly 68 million people listening to podcasts weekly in the USA (Edison Research, 2020) more needs to be known about

listener motivation (Lindgren, 2021). The success and rise of these US podcasters can be attributed to this focus on personal narratives as well as podcasts creating a special sense of intimacy (Lindgren, 2016). This intimacy and familiarity between the host and the listener makes the regular listeners feel as if they know the host better and are hence more able to trust the information given. However, Brinson and Lemon (2022) mention that to date no studies have examined the degree to which podcast listeners associate trust with their favorite podcast hosts. The specific problem is the lack of understanding of what key factors contribute to the establishment of trust between the hosts of sports podcasting and proactively engaged sports fans.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study (Davies & Hughes, 2014) is to explore the key factors contributing to the establishment of trust between a proactively engaged fan and a podcast host. A multi-case study (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2021) is conducted in this exploratory research with semi-structured interviews to establish and analyze the case studies. The study is set in Europe, more specifically in the Netherlands. Using a pre-selection survey, participants were selected based on Dutch or international nationality, being students, listening to podcasts, and being sports fans. The ages of the participants will be between 18 and 24. The aim of this study is to provide insights into how podcast and media companies can increase and take advantage of the trust between listeners and hosts. Understanding the factors affecting trust can lead to higher audiences, more revenue, and more opportunities for expansion. The scope of this study could then further be applied to similar parasocial relationships involving trust in other industries.

Research Question (RQ)

What are the factors contributing to the establishment of trust between the hosts of sports podcasting and proactively engaged sports fans?

Significance of the Research

Podcasting has an essential role in today's society by bringing back to life forgotten tropes (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021) and discussing marginalized content often forgotten by traditional media (Sherwood, 2019). Since 2015 after the rise of *Serial*, podcasts increased in popularity (Mchugh, 2016) however, much still needs to be learned about podcasting on how to effectively use it to generate revenues. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 800 million dollars were invested in podcast advertising and a projected 1 billion for 2021 (Brinson and Lemon, 2022). Considering the number of companies and industries that suffered a financial setback during the COVID-19 pandemic,

these are important revenue streams to keep an eye on. The trust, intimacy, and relationship created between the host and the listener explain why consumers are switching to podcasts as their trusted news source instead of traditional news media (Lindgren, 2023). However, a lack of research on the trust that forms the relationship between the host and the listener (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021) eliminates potential revenue. These findings will help build the lacking literature on the subject of trust between podcast hosts and listeners within the realm of sports podcasting.

Overview of the Thesis Manuscript

This research paper includes five chapters. Chapter 1 contains an introduction, problem statement, and purpose of the study. The latter two emphasize the relevance and importance of the study. Following there is the research question and significance of researching the sports podcasting industry with regards to trust.

Chapter 2 includes a literature review to give context to this research. This is accompanied by a strategy and presentation of the literature landscape. The theoretical foundation is introduced with the Challender, Farrell, and McDermott (2019) trust theory.

Chapter 3 regards the research methodology and design, containing details of pre-data collection, data collection, post-data collection process, and a description of how the analysis will be executed.

Chapter 4 presents the research findings, through an analysis done with thematic analysis and the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2. The Chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings and the key analysis.

Chapter 5 states the conclusion of the research compared to the literature landscape. In this chapter, the main research question is answered along with explanations regarding the implications for marketing professionals and recommendations for future research and relevant industries.

The Appendix is present at the end of the research paper, including tables, figures, and documents regarding this study. For ease of reading, references to the Appendix sections are mentioned throughout the thesis.

CHAPTER 2: THE LITERATURE LANDSCAPE

Literature Research Strategy

The following search engines were used to find articles with those themes: Google Scholar, Jstor, and ResearchGate as well as the AI search engine Perplexity AI which is an alternative to traditional search engines due to its AI function. Within these search engines keywords used to find academic articles included: *"sports podcasting", "sports fans", "sports loyalty", "team loyalty", "parasocial relationships", "parasocial relationships in podcasting", "trust in podcast hosts", "theories of trust", "trust in podcasting", "trust in the news", "trust in journalism", "why people trust online", "fandom", "superfans", "why do people support sports teams", "trust online", "trust in online relationships", "multi-case analysis in podcasting", "e-trust"*. Once articles were found thanks to the keywords, the credibility of the articles was analyzed by making sure the majority of the articles came from established review journals and were between the years 2020-2024. However, articles could not be limited to that time frame due to many theories and definitions originating from the late 80's and 90's.

Literature Review Process

Literature review strategy. After establishing the research question, the researcher split the question into different sections based on the different parts of the research question. This resulted in the following sections: trust, podcasting, and fans. The researcher then placed these words into the search engine along with the keywords mentioned above to read a myriad of articles regarding the main parts of the research question. To then determine which of these articles and literature would be included was based on the relevance to the research. A quality assessment of the collected research based on the criteria mentioned above was done. Once the chosen research was established, a mind map was created to divide all the literature into the three sections originally selected (Figure 1).

Literature Review Overview (Mind map)

Through this mind map (Figure 1 below) the reader is able to understand the main themes of the research and a more in-depth description of these themes to understand the research better. The mind map (Appendix A) was split into three main themes (Podcasts, trust, and fans) that dissect the main research question. Inside each theme, there are different topics that the researcher found when going over the literature. The theme 'podcast' contains five sub-topics: history of podcasts, popularity, evolution into sports podcasting, the rise of athlete podcasts, and parasocial relationships. Trust was divided into 5 sub-themes: e-trust, online relationships, trust in parasocial

relationships, trust in the news, and trust in podcasts. Finally, fans contains 3 subtopics: loyalty, superfans, and sports fans. Some of the subtopics are related to each and hence in the figure below this is shown by a line connecting them.

Figure 1

Literature Review Overview Mind Map
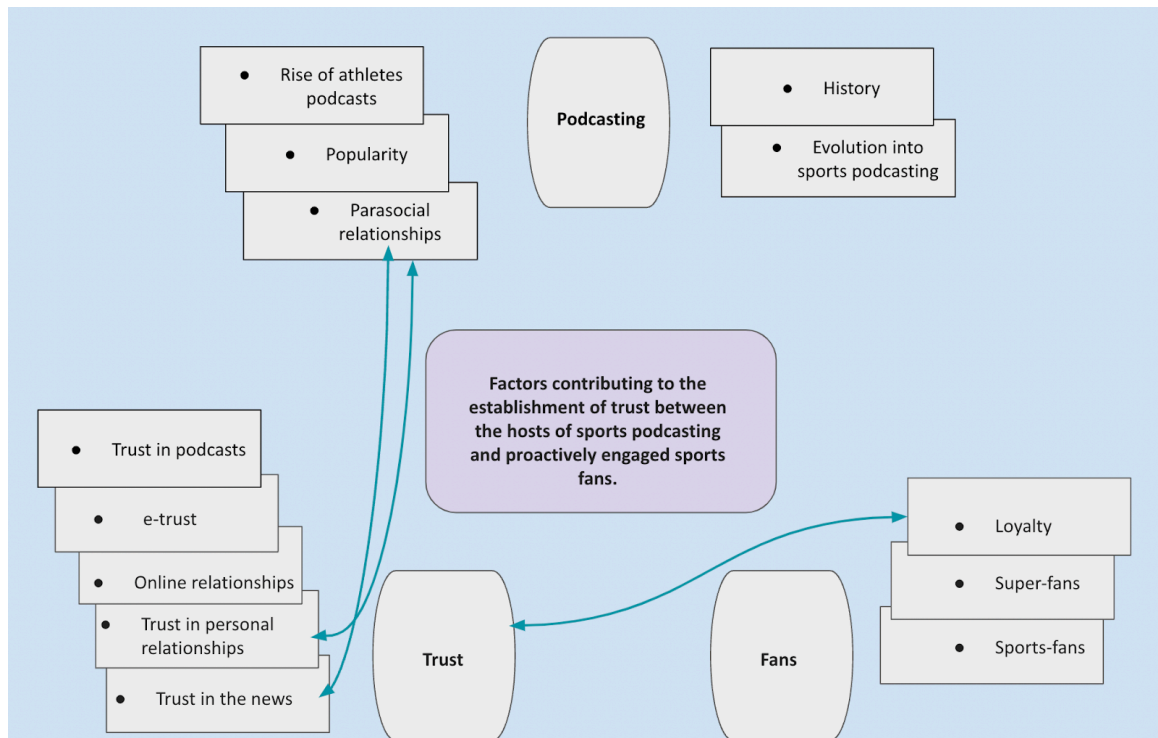
Note. This figure is self-created by the researcher.

Key Themes in the Literature Landscape

History and evolution of podcasts. Podcasting officially came to life in 2004 (Mchugh, 2016) due to it creating a connection between podcast hosts and listeners (Waldmann, 2020). This new communication form has evolved into a distinct medium that can be seen as a transformation of radio (Lindgren, 2021). One of the main advantages and perhaps reasons as to why it has become popular is due to its flexibility and lack of set criterias needed to follow (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). Anyone can start a podcast about any topic they desire. However, not everyone can consider themselves the reason podcasting is where it is today. In 2014 the podcast Serial came into the

industry and completely revolutionised podcasting (Whipple et al., 2022). This true crime investigative series served to legitimize podcasting as a lasting impactful form of storytelling (Wyant & Steinberg, 2023). Based on statistics from 2020 there are 92 million people across the United States of America and the United Kingdom (Tobin & Guadagno, 2022) that listen to podcasts about a range of subjects. Audiences can listen to anything from meditation sounds to book reviews.

This brings forth the question of why people listen to podcasts and why have they become so popular. According to research by Tobin and Guadagno (2022), this is due to podcasts providing informational and social gratification. This diverges from typical social gratification that is often derived from either social interaction or social media with likes, comments, and shares (Bharath et al, 2024). However, depending on personality types, social gratification can also be derived from podcasts when people have a high need to belong (Tobin & Guadagno, 2022). In podcasts, this is further reinforced by the sense of community that is created. As episodes of *Serial* were released, listeners would gather on forums such as Reddit to discuss the mysteries that were happening (Mchugh, 2016). In further regards to the informational aspect, Tobin and Guadagno (2022) further linked it to the openness personality trait as podcasts allow people to pursue a range of topics.

One further point to potentially answer the questions mentioned above relates to another social aspect of podcast listening which includes feelings of connection to the host (Tobin & Guadagno, 2022) creating a parasocial relationship. In the realm of podcasts, a parasocial relationship is between the listener and the host. To build on this connection, podcast hosts often use an informal conversation style (chatty, affable, laid back) and a myriad of other techniques such as: anticipating audiences' reactions or installing in-call sessions (Horton & Wohl, 1956) to make the listener feel as if they belong to the inner circle (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). In fact, according to Lindgren (2016), podcasts perfectly encapsulate the idea of parasocial relationships: "Over the course of the series, the personalities of the hosts are developed to create the impression that the listener knows them, and could even be friends with them" (Lindgren, 2016: 10). This parasocial relationship then helps build audience loyalty as in research by Schlütz and Hedder (2021) had results that showed respondents who reported greater parasocial relationships used podcasts more frequently (and vice versa). This can be linked back to people's need to belong since

as previously stated, feeling connected to the host causes people to form stronger parasocial relationships with their favorite tv personalities (Tobin & Guadagno, 2022).

Sports podcasts. Within podcasting, sports podcasting has grown over the last years with over 39,000 sports podcasts existing as of 2020 (Cridland, 2021). The rise in podcasts overall has helped sports podcasting in the competitive sports journalism field (English, 2020). Although it is still a small category in the podcasting world with only 9% of people found listening to sports podcasts (Park, Fisher, McGuinness, Lee & McCallum, 2021) there is still much to be said regarding it. Sport has often been an early adopter of new media technologies, especially in the digital era, including live reports, social media use, and blogging (English, Burgess & Jones, 2022) causing it to do the same with podcasting. The appeal of sports podcasting is that it resembles an after-game conversation in a pub (English et al., 2022). Furthermore, the listeners' pre-existing bond with a certain team or sport can more easily be translated towards a loyal relationship between the listeners and the content being produced by trusted sources such as podcast hosts (Ratts & Benedek, 2021 as described in English et al., 2022). Another reason as to why sports podcasts have risen in popularity in recent years is the greater focus on providing coverage otherwise overlooked by traditional sports media (Markman & Sawyer, 2014). For example: women's sports content was often marginalized before several women created independent sports media putting more attention towards it (Sherwood, 2019).

Sports podcasting cannot be discussed without the rise of former athletes transitioning into podcast hosts. Depending on the sport, athletes can make a lot of money during their career; so much so that it can often not be justified (Matsushita, Nascimento & Da Silva, 2021). However, once they retire, financial trouble can come in. Lack of money management causes 60% of NBA players and 78% of NFL players to experience financial hardships within the first five years of retiring (Hood, 2018). Therefore, these athletes have to learn to make money elsewhere and one profession that is on the rise is being a podcast host (Louis, 2023). Audiences engage with this as it gives them more context about the athlete and their personal lives (Louis, 2023). Prior athletes would have had to write a book or go to a reporter (Cooke, 2010). Therefore, this parasocial relationship benefits both the host and the listener.

History and evolution of fans. The phenomenon of fandom was first used by sports and theatre before being adopted by other fandoms such as science fiction literature enthusiasts (Hellekson & Busse, 2006). Nowadays most people are fans due to the continuous technological,

social and cultural changes (Grey, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2017). Over time fandom evolved into the term 'fan' as a common description of political supporters and activists (Grey et al., 2017). Now, the word fan can be used to describe anything ranging from music groups to TV shows (Bang & O'Connor, 2022). However, the formal definition of a fan is defined as a zealous supporter with a strong emotional connection to the object of their support (Bang & O'Connor, 2022). Within sports being a fan means more specifically spending time, energy, and money to support their favourite team (Vallerand et al., 2008). This entails cheering their team on or having aggressive discussions regarding who's better Lebron James or Michael Jordan. Grey et al., (2017) studied the reasons behind the fans' motivations to act this way and they believe that one of the reasons is due to passion. However, Vallerand & Verner Filion (2020) differentiated between two types of passions: one associated with adaptive outcomes (sharing positive experiences) and one with maladaptive outcomes (the opposite). Through this passion, people essentially transform from cheering for a team to cheering for themselves making passion a way to define the person (Vass, 2003). This passion isn't always good as it can become obsessive (obsessive fans) which is when a person cannot help but put themselves in a passionate activity (Vallerand et al., 2008). Information on the psychological motivation of being a sports fan is minimal and fans are most often stereotyped as being on the two extremes: fair weather or the die-hard fan (Bang & O'Connor, 2022) leaving open potential research in the middle of the two extremes. Superfan (die-hard fan) is a term used to describe highly engaged fans who are seen as the most important to reach (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021). Therefore, this is why when brands need fan engagement to bridge the gap between the community and the brand (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021) they enlist the help of superfans due to their much deeper connection with the brand (Bang & O'Connor, 2022).

Chosen definition of trust. A term used widely in many scenarios and hence its definition varies depending on its use (Challender, Farrell & McDermott, 2019). This researcher decided to define trust as a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence, and it has been measured based on three dimensions: ability, integrity, and benevolence (Gefen, 2002). To use this in the research these three pillars of trust will also be defined. Ability can be described as consistency in task fulfillment and if it is not present trustworthiness will be removed (Blakey, 2020). Integrity implies honesty, openness, and being fair (Blakey, 2020). Finally, benevolence comes from the Latin word 'bene' meaning good, and 'volent' meaning wishing creating 'wishing

well' (Blakey, 2020). In the research by Brinson and Lemon (2022), they used these three terms to test the effect of trust on podcast hosts as no other studies have examined how podcast listeners associate these traits with their favorite podcast host.

However, this trust is not guaranteed as sports podcasting has emerged at a time when there are varying perceptions of audience trust in journalism (Newman, 2021). Specifically, sports journalists have noted a lack of trust being a threat to the industry, potentially weakening the long-term connections between audiences and traditional media (English, 2021). People now have access to a much wider variety of news sources such as news from people they trust (Fletcher & Park, 2017), intermediaries that offer news aggregation to make source selection quicker (Lees, 2014), and gathering information from other news consumers via social media (Lee & Ma, 2012). Credibility and trust have become synonymous when it comes to trust in the news (Kiousis, 2001). Prior, the credibility of a source was established by the trustworthiness of the individual who created the message (Hovland and Weiss, 1951). Today the credibility of the news organisation is also considered (Fletcher & Park, 2017). Finally, trust in the news can be reduced to trust in the process of journalism selection (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Meaning that consumers trust journalists to select the most relevant information (Coleman, Morrison & Anthony, 2012). Furthermore, trust can also influence behavior such as how much a citizen participates in society (Fletcher & Park, 2017). For example, a study by Matthes (2013) stated that low-trust individuals tend to not participate and voice themselves when confronted with a hostile opinion environment.

In the past 5 years trust in the news has been declining however this has been favorable for podcasts (Newman, 2023). News consumers with low trust in media are more likely to use non-traditional sources of news such as online news and blogs and are more likely to engage with them (Fletcher & Park, 2017). Dowling and Miller (2019) explain this is due to news podcasts being a form of more personalized journalism departing from typical journalism with disembodied reporters, emphasizing self-reflexivity and transparency in the reporting process. Furthermore, reporters using their own emotions as part of the narrative further differs from print (Lindgren, 2021).

E-trust. Further distinction must be made on the difference between trust and e-trust. The latter occurs in environments where physical contact does not take place, where moral and social pressures can be differently perceived, and where interactions are facilitated by digital devices (Taddeo, 2011). Due to podcasts being an online platform, it is a matter of e-trust. This has given

rise to much literature stating whether trust can even exist online due to three main problems (Taddeo, 2011). Trust varies amongst different cultures therefore in an online environment that is filled with multiculturalism a standard definition of trust cannot exist. The second obstacle consists of the ability to remain anonymous which potentially strips away all sense of responsibility and hence creates a lack of trust due to a lack of identity. Finally, the last problem concludes with 'trust needing touch'. However, as technology advances all of these problems can be rebutted, and e-trust is possible but is still a major debate. Therefore, although e-trust is the technically accurate term, for clarity and simplicity the researcher opts to simply use 'trust' moving forward.

How people trust online. As mentioned above e-trust is different to trust, so how do people trust online? Bekmeier-Feuerhahn and Eichenlaub (2010) state that technological advancement caused trust to move from interpersonal to systemic trust. This is due to interpersonal trust working via face-to-face interactions (Wang & Emurian, 2004). However in the modern era, with the prominence of smartphones, personal encounters are becoming increasingly more scarce (Groarke, 2014) paving the way for systemic trust to overtake interpersonal trust. Systemic trust relies on confidence in certain principles within a system, providing reliable expectations on an abstract level making it so that trust is no longer solely vested in individuals (Bekmeier-Feuerhahn & Eichenlaub, 2010). Furthermore, online trust also differs per individual for example some individuals are willing to trust anyone and anything with limited information whilst others need more information to form trusting beliefs (Salam, Iyer, Pavia & Singh, 2005). Empirical studies on the influence of a person's natural tendency to trust on the formation of online trust show mixed results. Some studies, like those by Gefen (2000) and Teo & Liu (2007), suggested that a higher propensity to trust positively affects online trust formation however it varies across cultures due to long-term social influences. However, Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa (2004) found no statistical evidence that propensity to trust affects initial online trust in a company, arguing that without prior experience, customers base their trust on perceptions of the company and its website. Lee and Turban (2001) instead found in their research that an individual who has a natural tendency to trust others will positively impact other trust factors leading to consumer trust. Therefore further research still needs to be done on why people trust online.

Gap in the Literature

There is a wide variety of research on trust online trust (Bekmeier-Feuerhahn & Eichenlaub, 2010) however, little research has been made on the trust between a podcast listener and the host (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). Additionally, Brinson and Lemon (2022) mention that to date no studies have examined the degree to which podcast listeners associate personality traits with their favorite podcast hosts. Furthermore, there is much research on trust in e-commerce sites however less in other online industries such as podcasting (Beldad, Jong & Steehouder, 2010). Regarding sports fandom, a wide variety of research has gone into the psychological reasons behind being a fan (Bang & O'Connor, 2022), however little has been done on how team loyalty affects trust in podcasts. Research by English, Burgess, and Jones (2022) researched listeners of a single sports podcast, leaving a gap to study listeners of a team sport. Furthermore, regarding specific podcast types, there has been some research on medical podcasts for example (Malecki, Ginsburg & Quinn, 2018) but little on sports podcasts. This leaves the opportunity open to study the factors contributing to the establishment of trust between the hosts of sports podcasting and proactively engaged sports fans. See Appendix B for the comprehensive table of the gap in the literature.

Theoretical Framework

Before examining and beginning the research process, it is essential to have a clear theory that helps navigate the main research question. Based on the main theme of this research revolving around trust, the theory will be based on one of the many theories of trust. The theory selected was the one that encapsulates many of the theories above.

Based on the multitude of trust theories and definitions in research papers it gives rise to the possibility that trust is multi-dimensional, developing over time depending on emotions and contexts (Jones & George, 1998). Therefore trust cannot be simply measured by whether an individual trusts or not (Lewicki, Bies & McAllister, 1998). This is due to relationships themselves being multifaceted and multiplex causing individuals to have strengths and weaknesses resulting in a mix of trusting and distrusting qualities (Challender & al., 2019). Therefore, due to this multi-dimensionality Challender et al., (2019) have elaborated on a trust theory centered around 12 trust types to better encapsulate a wider spectrum of the elements of trust. Due to these 12 trust types being easily adaptable to multiple contexts, there is no hierarchical structure to the types mentioned by Challender et al., (2019) apart from relational and knowledge-based trust which are said to be

the ones that could represent the highest level of trust. Meanwhile, affect, intuitive and emotions-based trust are all related to feelings and emotions that cause trust. Competence and cognition-based trust are also related due to the competence of a person influencing cognition-based trust. Finally, the last four trust types are all related to societal and organizational norms. During the gathering of data, these trust types will then be used to analyze which types of trust are used by the listener. Challender et al., (2019) have created 12 trust types and therefore questions during the interview will revolve around those 12 types to come to conclusions. The 12 trust types consist of: cognition-based, affect-based, system-based, knowledge-based, institution-based, competence-based, emotional-based, deterrence-based, relational trust, integrity-based, calculus-based, and intuitive-based (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2

Modified and adapted version of the 12 Trust Types Theory
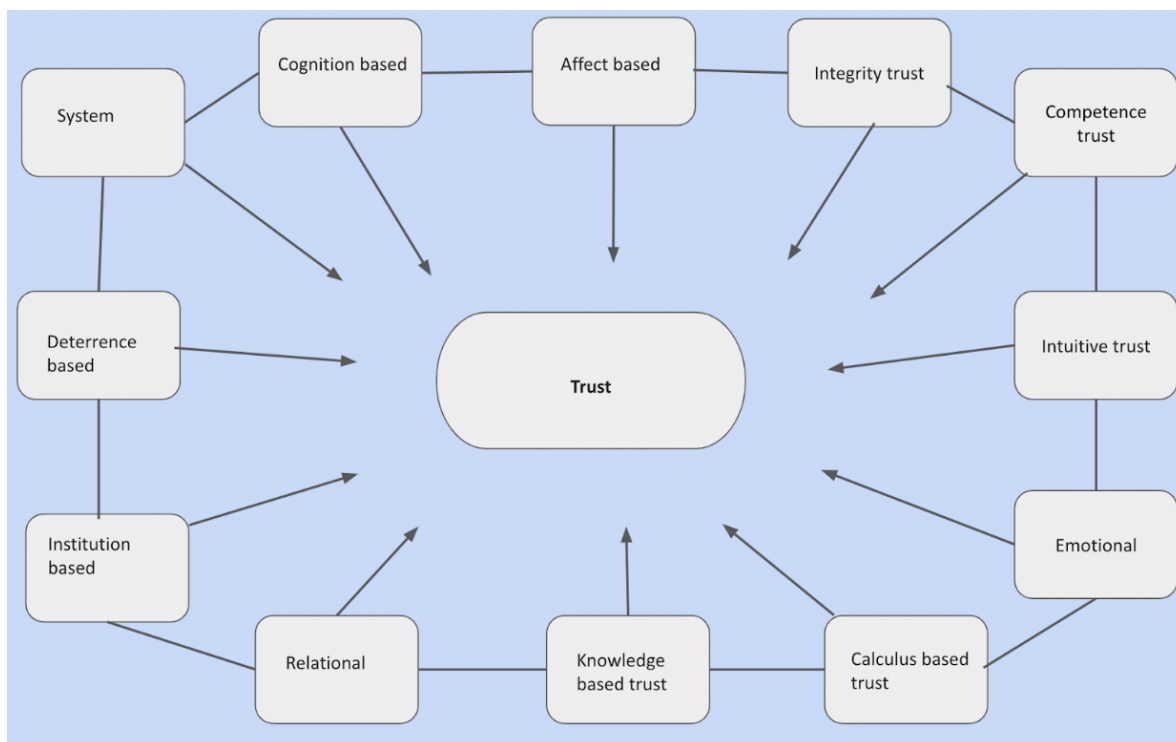
This figure is self-created by the researcher based on the 12 trust types by Challender et al., (2019)

Competence – This trust type is established by the belief that the other party has the ability to perform the work assigned (Hartman 1999, as described in Robert, 2015) influenced by their ability, experience, and qualifications as well as their competencies and skills (Challender et al.,

2019). This means that listeners will trust that their podcast host will perform their duties as a podcast host such as uploading episodes regularly, based on their expertise, skills, and qualifications.

Cognition – According to Parayitam and Dooley (2009, as described in Challender et al., 2019) cognition-based trust is based on the competence cognition mentioned above. Cognition-based trust is then further linked to factors such as reputation, track record, and financial status (Wong, Cheung, You & Pang, 2008). Therefore a listener will base their cognition trust on the competence trust mentioned prior, along with the host's financial status for example.

Affect – This trust type is related to personal feelings and emotions and is linked to thoughtfulness, care, and concern for others (Challender et al., 2019). Parayitam and Dooley (2009, as described in Challender et al., 2019)) found that affect-based trust involves members trusting one another based on their personal relationships. As mentioned above, even though it is one-sided the host-listener dynamic is a relationship (parasocial relationship. Therefore this trust type is relevant for this study. This type of trust can occur when one party is benevolent towards another or considers the interests of others (Challender et al., 2019). McAllister (1995) describes affect-based trust as being grounded in reciprocated interpersonal care and concern. The listener will then let their feelings and emotions guide themselves along with their personal relationship to determine whether they trust or not the host.

Intuitive trust – This trust type is similar to affect-based trust as it is based on the emotional feeling that one party can trust the intentions and actions of the other party (Hartman 1999, as described in Challender et al., 2019). However, there are slight differences between the two, one being that this trust type is more influenced by long-term relationships rather than short term (Hartman 1999, as described in Challender et al., 2019). Another is that according to Pinto, Slevin and English (2009), it is based on a 'gut feeling' which is absent in affect-based trust.

Emotional – The last of the three trust types inexplicably linked by feelings and emotions is emotional-based trust. This differs from affect-based by associating the feelings and emotions listeners get from the podcast host to the personalities of the host and hence perception of compatibility depending on similarities or differences in personality types (Challender et al.,

2019). Furthermore compared to intuitive trust it lacks the 'gut feeling' aspect (Challender et al., 2019).

Integrity trust – This trust type is often referred to as 'ethical trust' due to it being based on the values and morals (Challender et al., 2019) that a podcast host could have and how they relate to the listener. Furthermore ethical trust or the belief that one party will routinely look after the interests of another party (Hartman 1999, as described in Robert, 2015).

Calculus-based trust – Calculus trust is based on rational choice and economic incentives, therefore trust will emerge when one party believes the other party will perform a beneficial action (Rousseau, Camerer & Sitkin, 1998) and is maintained by weighting the outcomes for sustaining the relationship in comparison to the costs of severing it (Zhao, Shi, Xin & Zhang, 2019). Listeners will weigh the pros and cons of listening to the podcast and the host in their minds causing them to trust the podcast host as they consistently keep choosing to listen.

Knowledge-based trust – As opposed to cognition and competence-based trust which as mentioned above is linked to knowing all about the podcast host's reputation, track record, experience, and qualifications this trust is about how well the two people know each other personally (Lewicki & Bunker 1994). Due to the parasocial relationship, only how well the listener knows the host will be evaluated in this research.

Relational trust – Achieved through repeated interactions allowing emotions to come into play creating a certain comfort level (Rousseau et al., 1998). The more a listener immerses themselves in a podcast the more emotions (mentioned in affect-based trust) will enter and form trust. Not all trust types can cause and create the same level of trust, however relational and knowledge-based trust are among the two that have the highest level of trust (Shapiro et al. 1992, as described in Challender et al., 2019).

Institution-based trust – In the past, this trust type was linked to the role played by legal institutions, to dictate cultural and societal norms in promoting trust within a country (Rousseau et al., 1998). There has been concern about whether this type of trust is more of a form of control based on institutional measures (Challender et al., 2019), however, in this research, it wasn't considered as a form of control due to it contradicting trust. Furthermore in Challender et al., 2019

this trust type was used to determine how cultural and societal norms influence the trust between organizations. Therefore, for this research, the same was done with the podcast being the organization.

Deterrence-based trust – This trust is linked to individuals keeping their word to avoid sanctions for violation (Lewicki and Bunker 1996, as described in Challender et al., 2019). In this research, this trust type will be involved by asking respondents how they feel about their podcast host regarding ' keeping their word to avoid sanctions for violation'.

System-based trust – The final trust type is based on believing in the systems, the organizational structures, and good channels of communication (Challender et al., 2019). Therefore this trust is established by the listener believing in the system (podcast), its organizational structure, and the hosts' communication.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Method

The selected research method for this study is a qualitative approach. This can be inferred by the research question being phrased to collect descriptive data. This can be seen from the main research question regarding the factors influencing trust between two people (listener and podcast host). Due to the basic elements of a quantitative approach to research being measuring things that you can count and gathering enough data for statistical analysis (Phakiti, De Costa, Plonsky & Starfield, 2018), as the researcher is not collecting statistical data, this method was not chosen. The last potential research method consisted of mixed methods research that employs both quantitative and qualitative methods to better understand a given phenomenon (Phakiti et al., 2018). Due to the author only being interested in a qualitative research method, this method was not chosen.

Research Design

A multi-case study based on the theory by Challender et al., (2019) was the selected research design to answer the main research question. The decision of a multi-case analysis was supported by (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2021) which states that a major advantage is the ability to compare the findings of the individual cases, thus making the results more robust. Careful considerations of the conditions set by Yin (2009) regarding multi-case analysis were done to make sure the research fits the three criteria: "What?" "How?" and "Why?" should be used to answer the research question, behavioral events hold no relevancy in controls, the research focuses on current events. In this study each case is represented by an individual interview, making the individual participant the unit of analysis. This allows for a detailed examination of each participant's perspectives and experiences, as well as the identification of common themes and differences across all 9 interviews. Furthermore, Gustafsson (2017) states that multiple case studies enable a larger exploration of the theories and literature presented as well as the research question. Prior to having selected a multi-case study, other research methods were considered such as a survey. This was discarded due to research by Vaske (2011) stating that surveys have the tendency to have low response rates and need multiple follow-up emails or nudging for participants to complete the online survey. Due to time constraints, this method was eliminated.

The multi-case analysis was accompanied by a pre-selection survey and by semi-structured interviews where the raw data will be stored securely for five years. Semi-structured interviews were chosen due to the limitations mentioned in the research by Brinson et al (2022) stating that

open-ended answers did not provide the researchers with the ability to ask follow-up questions or probe for more important details. They further stated that further studies might consider the use of interviews. Doing a netnography study was also considered by the researcher due to the nature of podcasts being an online interaction. However, according to the study by Bowler (2010) all community members that the researcher talks to need to be contacted and given an informed consent as well as a member checking process. However due to the anonymity and passiveness of people online this would have been difficult to achieve. Therefore use of a multi-case study with a pre-selection survey and semi-structured interviews was the chosen research design.

Population. The population of people selected was sports fans who listen to sports podcasts frequently (three to four times a week) between the ages of 18 and 24. The selected age was decided due to those being the ages who listen to podcasts the most (Newman et al., 2020 as described in Whipple, Ashe & Chacón, 2023). Therefore, University students will be selected as they fit in that age bracket. There was no discrimination between the sports the participants followed as in this research no distinction has been made on the different types of fans based on the different sports.

Sampling method. A pre-selection survey (Appendix C) was used to derive the sample from the population through convenience sampling due to it being the easiest method of sampling due to participants being selected based on availability and willingness to take part as well as obtaining useful results (Shantikumar & Barratt, 2018). Furthermore, this sampling method is less costly and needs less time to finish up (Datta, 2018). Therefore, convenience sampling was more efficient considering the time and resources as well as taking into account the lack of expertise of the researcher. The survey helped establish which participants made up the sample based on questions: "Are you a sports fan", "Do you listen to sports podcasts?" and once that was established further convenience sampling was used to select the final participants.

Sample characteristics and size. Based on the main research question the proposed sample consisted of respondents who are sports fans. This specifically means that the respondent had to follow a specific team and support that team. This is essential for the research due to it being about sport podcasting therefore not being a sports fan would not have satisfied the area of research. This was not limited to one specific sport. Furthermore, these sports fans also had to listen to a sports podcast and be between the ages of 18 to 24. There was a mix of Dutch and

international students due to being a resident of the Netherlands and that being the population demographic.

The number of participants selected in this study was based on the saturation. Three levels of saturation (data, theme and code saturation) needed to be met to be able to stop interviewing and not lead to over-saturation (Rahimi & Khatoony, 2024) due to the themes reoccurring. Theme saturation was reached once no new information was given in the interviews and therefore interviews were stopped. This is supported by Hennink, Kaiser and Marconi (2017) who stated that theme saturation is an iterative process meaning that researchers keep sampling, analyzing, and collecting data. According to Baker and Edwards (2012) the ideal number of participants for a thesis to interview decided between researchers is 15. Therefore 15 participants were selected and after each interview, new topics that emerged were noted (Appendix N) to keep track of the saturation. If less than 15 participants were needed to achieve saturation then interviews would have been stopped once no new themes emerged after an interview.

Data collection technique

Prior to gathering participants, a pre-selection survey was created through Qualtrics (https://www.qualtrics.com, 2024), an online survey platform (Appendix C). The survey consisted of open questions regarding their age, email address, and nationality. Only the age was needed to fit into the criteria (between 18 and 24) and the others were just for ease of communication and to gather information on their background. The final three questions contained all yes or no questions to make sure that participants fit the selected criteria for the research. The fifth and seventh questions needed to be answered yes for the participants to be selected.

An email was sent out to participants to ask for their participation in this study (Appendix D). Two participants replied that they would prefer to do the interview in their native language (Italian and French) therefore these transcripts were translated into English using DeepL (DeepL, 2019). Once the sample had been selected, the researcher sent out a consent form (Appendix E) to the participants. Interviews followed the interview protocol (Appendix G). This protocol was based on the four-phase process to interview protocol by Castillo-Montoya (2016). Phase one ensures that the interview questions are aligned with the research question. All main questions in the interviews were based on the theory mentioned in the theoretical framework to ensure this. The second phase includes creating an inquiry-based conversation. This means including: introductory

questions, key research questions and closing questions. These were all used in the interviews as well as pre-planned follow-up questions to questions that when the pilot test was executed, the participant had some trouble answering the question and needed help. The third phase regards feedback on the interview protocol. Researcher triangulation (Appendix R) concluded this phase (explained further in the triangulation section). The last stage involves a pilot test. As mentioned before this was done once the interview questions were established to ensure participants would be able to answer the question. With the help of the pilot test follow-up questions were added (See Appendix G part 1 for the interview protocol).

Furthermore, the researcher collected the data anonymously, and will not use the data for uses other than this research. The data will not be distributed to third parties. The topics of the interviews were not intrusive or invasive. During the interview writing phase, the researcher ensured that the questions were clear to avoid respondents answering wrong due to misunderstandings with the help of a pilot test. Furthermore, there were no leading questions.

The researcher opted for interviews due to their power to gather narratives from participants through unique access to their lives (Kvale, 2003). However, according to Hermanowicz (2002) they are very difficult to execute and interviewees need time to develop their skills due to the interviews being very easily shaped by the questions asked, the perception of the interviewer, and societal norms (Hammersley & Gomm, 2008 as described in Alshenqeeti, 2014). Once all participants agreed and all forms were signed the semi-structured interviews began. The semi-structure allows the researcher to incorporate structure at the beginning and then follow up with open-ended questions to expand upon earlier mentioned points (Phakiti et al., 2018). The advantage of these interview types is that they are adaptable to almost any research setting (Phakiti et al., 2018). A disadvantage to this method as explained by Wengraf (2001, as described in Phakiti et al., 2018) is that if not prepared correctly as if they were fully structured novice researchers might make mistakes.

The introduction and background questions allowed the participant to adjust to the interview and get settled in. This allowed the interviewer to gather background knowledge on the participant to allow more ease when asking follow-up questions. The next set of questions were based on the trust types theory mentioned in the conceptual framework. Each trust type was created

around two or three questions (depending on the straightforwardness of the trust type) to determine which trust types most people associate with their podcast host. Many trials and errors were made to establish the interview questions. Firstly, preliminary questions were made based on the definitions of the trust types mentioned in Chapter 2. Questions were reworked to make sure they were open and not leading. Another round of checking was done to make sure the questions made sense with the trust types. The researcher adjusted for questions that would have been too difficult to answer. Multiple other rounds of checking were done to establish no repeated questions and make sure they flowed well together. Finally, a pilot test was done to have an external member check the questions. The interview questions were done via indirect questioning (IQ) meaning without mentioning the word trust. This is supported by research by Perri, Manoli and Christofides (2022) stating that IQ yields more reliable, valid, and realistic results since the data collected by the IQ techniques are assumed to be released truthfully by respondents. Lastly, participants were asked whether they had any final thoughts and feelings to express and suggestions for the host to foster a better connection. This was done to help gather insights into missing factors that could affect trust.

Finally, to ensure trustworthiness transcript review was used. In a transcript review (Appendix H) participants were provided with solely their transcript written word by word to verify accuracy, correct errors or inaccuracies, and allow the participants to express whether they were accurately represented (Hagens, Dobrow & Chafe, 2009).

Data Collection

To gather participants, the pre-selection survey was distributed through WhatsApp (2024) and Instagram (2024). Qualtrics (2024) was used to collect the results and display them on an Excel sheet. Based on the criteria mentioned prior the researcher manually selected which participants (Appendix J) were fit to do the research. This meant that these participants were sports fans between the ages of 18-24 and listened to sports podcasts frequently.

Once participants were selected based on the survey results, an email invitation (Appendix D) to participate in the research was sent out to conduct an in-person or online semi-structured interview. These interviews were scheduled and executed between June 25 to June 27, 2024 (Appendix I). For anonymity purposes and ease of analysis, all participants in the research were named 'participant' along with a number 1-9 based on the order of the interviews done. For example, the seventh participant who did an interview was named 'participant 7'.

Data Sorting and Organization. To avoid having to re-record interviews in case of a computer problem, all semi-structured interviews were recorded on two different devices: a laptop and a phone. Due to the phone recording being better quality, this was the primary source used to transcribe. Transcription was done through the website TurboScribe (2023). Each transcribed interview was pasted into a Word document totaling 9. After each transcription, the researcher went over the document to check for any spelling errors that the transcription website could have made. Furthermore, a journal entry (see example in Appendix L) was made after each interview. This method helped the researcher better comprehend unexpected research situations such as unexpected responses or personal biases and helped provide more understanding of the interview data (Meyer & Willis, 2019). The transcription was emailed to the participants for a transcript review (Appendix H). A transcript review is a process that allows participants to verify the verbatim statements they made during the interview to verify accuracy and correct errors (Hagen, Dubrow & Chafe, 2009). The total time of the interviews was 277 minutes with an average of 31 minutes per interview. The total number of pages for the transcriptions was 93 pages.

With the help of wordclouds. com(2024) data was able to be analyzed at a preliminary level (Appendix M). This technique allowed the researcher to find specific patterns and data based on the text (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014). For the word cloud of participant 1 the main themes that emerged were: "*friend*", "*frequent*", "*trust*", "*de-stress*" and "*routine*". The second word cloud had: "*reliable*", "*friends*", "*technical*", "*funny*" and "*narrative driven*". The third word cloud: "*reliable*", "*dedicated*", "*knowledgeable*", "*balanced*" and "*passionate*". The fourth word cloud: "*relaxing*", "*friends*", "*balance*", and "*critical thinking*". The fifth word cloud: "*watch party*", "*nuanced*", "*kind*", "*different opinions*" and "*good example*". The sixth word cloud: "*admiration*", "*calming*", "*easy*", "*friends*" and "*similar*". The seventh word cloud: "*community*", "*chosen*", "*my team*", "*same side*" and "*intensity*". The eight word cloud: "*interest*", "*admiration*", "*nostalgic*", "*influenced*" and "*past*". The last word cloud: "*unique*", "*admiration*", "*attentive*", "*passionate*" and "*detail*". This led to the three main patterns that emerged: "*friend*", "*reliable*" and "*admiration*".

Data Analysis. Data analysis was used on the respondents' interview answers related to the factors influencing trust between proactively engaged fans and podcast hosts. Due to recent developments in qualitative analysis of the recent years, the innovative structural topic model

(STM) was used to produce an enhanced thematic analysis. Rather than assume that topical prevalence (frequency of topic discussed) and topical content (words used to discuss a topic) are constant across all participants, the analyst can incorporate covariates over which we might expect to see variance (Roberts et al., 2014). The first step in this analysis involved was coding all responses to the open-ended question by condition (Brinson & Lemon, 2022). Therefore, respondents' answers were shortened to phrases related to the 12 trust types. During this first step open coding which is also referred to as "initial coding" is a provisional coding method where the researcher initially applies tentative codes during the first cycle of coding (Onwuegbuzie, Frels & Hwang, 2016). Next vivo coding was used which is a verbatim representation of participants' language using quotation marks (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2016). During this first round of coding 32 codes had emerged (Appendix O) allowing the researcher to narrow down the 100 pages of transcripts into provisional codes.

The second step involved collapsing and pairing repetitive codes using axial and selective coding. Both coding methods are more focused on identifying categories, central themes, and relationships and reducing the number of codes generated in the first round of coding (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2023). During this second and final round of coding, the 12 trust types had emerged allowing the researcher ease of access to compare to the theoretical framework.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness has a wide definition and hence researchers such as Lincoln and Guba (1985, as described in Nowell et al., 2017) have redefined the concept by introducing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to parallel the conventional quantitative assessment criteria of validity and reliability.

Dependability. Dependability is defined as a work repeated in the same context with similar methods and participants, the result would be similar (Janis, 2022). Transcript review was done by sending the transcript to participants to make sure no alteration of what the respondents said was made and allowed them to provide any clarifications (Hagens at al., 2009). Further steps were taken to establish dependability, including the creation of the interview protocol and word clouds to allowed consistency within each interview which ensured a smoother analysis.

Credibility. Credibility is defined as the moment when a researcher has taken necessary steps to ensure their interpretations are trustworthy, such as employing constant comparison, searching for negative evidence, and using member validation (Phakiti et al., 2018). To ensure credibility there needed to be constant comparison and searching of negative evidence that possibly disproves potential theories and not just ones that agreed with the findings (Phakiti et al., 2018) therefore researcher triangulation was used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as described in Nowell et al., 2017) to validate the findings. Furthermore, a transcript review (Hagens, Dobrow & Chafe, 2009) was employed to further ensure credibility.

Transferability. Transferability is defined as providing a "thick" or rich enough description of the research so that readers can assess the applicability of the study to their own situations (Phakiti et al., 2018). Therefore, in-depth descriptions were used to describe the methodology. Furthermore, an audit trail was used to ensure that another researcher with the same data, perspective, and situation could arrive at the same or comparable, but not contradictory, conclusions (Koch, 1994).

Confirmability. Confirmability is defined as establishing that the researcher's interpretations and findings are derived from the data, requiring the researcher to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations have been reached (Tobin & Begley, 2004 as described in Nowell, Norris, White, Moules, 2017). However, according to Guba and Lincoln (1989 as described in Nowell et al., 2017) confirmability is established when credibility, transferability, and dependability are all achieved. Therefore, an audit trail (Koch, 1994) and researcher triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as described in Nowell et al., 2017) allowed confirmability to be established.

Saturation. A point in the process of data collection and analysis where issues are fully understood and no new information about the meaning of codes or themes and their relationships emerges (Hennink et al., 2017). If one has reached the point of no new data, one has also most likely reached the point of no new themes; therefore, one has reached data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Code and thematic saturation have been reached once the data analysis stage reaches repetitive codes or themes, and no new information or relationships between them emerge (Hennink et al., 2017). A table (Appendix N) was made with new topics discussed after each interview to allow the researcher to establish when data and theme saturation had happened.

Triangulation. Triangulation can help ensure that fundamental biases arising from the use of a single method or a single observer are overcome. Triangulation is also an effort to help explore and explain complex human behavior using a variety of methods to offer a more balanced explanation to readers (Noble & Heale, 2019). In this research, triangulation was established through an external party with the necessary qualifications (a researcher who has taken a course on qualitative research at Erasmus University Rotterdam) who reviewed the data as well as the interview questions and provided feedback (See Appendix R). This allowed them to gain feedback and have areas of improvement. Through this feedback, the researcher is alleviated to some extent on their exclusive reliance (Archibald, 2015). Through the triangulation, the researcher was able to gain valuable feedback such as: 'Once the second round of coding is done all the codes fit perfectly into the 12 trust types of the theoretical framework', as well as areas to improve: 'Make sure the process is clear and easy to follow'. The researcher evaluated the feedback and made the necessary improvements.

Reflexivity. Reflexivity entails researchers critically reflecting on their personal and theoretical biases, considering their presence in the research, viewing themselves as tools for inspecting the entire research process (Phakiti et al., 2018), and acknowledging their voice as part of the text (Phakiti et al., 2018). Researchers are encouraged to keep a self-critical account of the research process, including their internal and external dialogue (Tobin & Begley, 2004 as described in Nowell et al., 2017). Therefore, to ensure credibility, a reflective journal was kept throughout the research phase (Appendix L).

Audit Trail. An audit trail provides readers with evidence of the decisions and choices made by the researcher regarding theoretical and methodological issues throughout the study, which requires a clear rationale for such decisions (Koch, 1994). The purpose is so that another researcher can arrive at the same comparable but not contradictory conclusions (Koch, 1994). To ensure an audit trail a myriad of steps were taken: interview protocols (Appendix G), a sample interview transcript (Appendix K), word cloud (Appendix M), tracking saturation of data collected (Appendix N), and a literature gap analysis (Appendix B).

Ethical Considerations. Informed Consent (*Informed Consent*, n.d.) refers to the intent that human participants can enter research freely (voluntarily) with full information about what it

means for them to take part (Appendix E), and that they give consent before they enter the research. Therefore, information regarding the research was divulged in the email sent before the interview asking participants whether they would like to participate in the research. However, due to this research being about trust the word 'trust' was left out and only mentioned sports podcasting and reasons for listening to podcasts. If participants wished to withdraw from the study, they could have simply replied that they would not like to participate or not reply to the email. A non-response would have been taken as a "no". Data will be stored securely for five years from when data was collected to protect the confidentiality of participants. No real names were mentioned in this research and were given code names.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions. Assumptions in a study are what is out of the researcher's control, but if they disappear the study would become irrelevant (Simon, 2011). It is assumed that listeners who listen to sports podcasts are true fans and not listening to learn about a sport. If false, this could have impacted results as the effect of sports loyalty would be diminished. By asking the question "Would you consider yourself a sports fan?" in the pre-selection survey should have satisfied this assumption. It is assumed that listeners are actively engaged and paying attention while listening to sports podcasts. If false, this would have influenced the results as passive listening could lead to different levels of comprehension, retention, and relationship. To address this, the researcher asked the participants questions regarding their favorite podcasts, which should have validated this assumption. Finally, it is assumed that the listener does trust the podcast host and is not simply listening for opposite reasons or is just a casual listener. If this assumption would not hold then the hypotheses and variables of the research needed to be revisited. This assumption was satisfied by asking about the frequency of listening in the pre-selection survey to eliminate any casual listeners.

Limitations. Limitations of any particular study concern potential weaknesses that are usually out of the researcher's control, and are closely associated with the chosen research design, statistical model constraints, funding constraints, or other factors (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). Due to the population being in the Netherlands, the majority of the people interviewed could have been football fans. This was seen from the largest sport organization in the Netherlands the Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbalbond (KNVB) which has 1.1 million football players (Van Steen & Pellenbarg, 2008). Therefore, this could have perhaps ignored the effects of different sports.

The researcher has tried to address this by limiting the number of Dutch people interviewed and including international students. Limited time and resources impacted the number of participants gathered and hence reduced the potential scope of the research. Furthermore, some participants had less time at their disposal to do their interviews due to other engagements which could have reduced the findings. The researcher will then have to mention that this research cannot easily be generalized. The researcher had limited knowledge regarding STM specifically along with the limited literature regarding this topic causing the researcher to feel unsure on how to rigorously conduct this research (Nowell et al., 2017).

Delimitations. Delimitations are consciously set by the authors themselves. They are concerned with the definitions that the researchers decide to set as the boundaries or limits of their work so that the study's aims and objectives do not become impossible to achieve (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). While thematic analysis is flexible, this flexibility can lead to inconsistency and a lack of coherence when developing themes derived from the research data (Nowell et al., 2017). Furthermore, this study is limited to students between the ages of 18 and of 24 living in the Netherlands. Although the researcher made a conscious choice to select Dutch and international students to increase the geographical scope, however, due to there being only nine participants and all living in the same city there were still boundaries. For ease of data collection, the timeline of being a sports fan was ignored due to time not necessarily correlating with the degree of fandom. However, the timeline of this research is still limited to the months between May and July as the research was done within those months.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research Findings

Through the use of thematic analysis, 12 themes emerged linked to the 12 trust types according to Challender et al., (2019)'s trust theory (see figure 2). These themes are showcased, assessed and analyzed in the following section.

The theoretical framework was divided into 12 trust types. To gather information on each of them, three to four questions were asked to participants based on each of the trust types. Typically the first question of each trust type was a general question based on the essence of the type. This allowed participants to settle in with the questions and be more comfortable. Then more in depth questions were asked to understand why the participant trusts the host based on that trust type. This allowed for the following themes to emerge:

Theme 1: Affect Based Trust. How participants trust based on feelings and emotions. Firstly, through the use of the wheel of emotions (Appendix S) respondents gave a wide variety of emotions to describe their hosts. Some words repeated such as: "*joy*", "*trust*", "*anticipation*", "*interest*" and "*amazement*". Looking at the wheel, all emotions mentioned are part of the top, top right and bottom right section of the wheel. These emotions are characterized into: optimism, love, submission and awe. All emotions mentioned were described as positive emotions apart from: "*pensiveness*", "*vigilance*" and "*apprehension*". Pensiveness was used by one of the participants due to the nature of the podcast being a reflection on the current situation of things. Vigilance is linked to the complexity of the podcast and therefore the listener has to remain vigilant whilst watching. Finally, apprehension was mentioned by one participant due to the podcast being about their favourite team therefore they are apprehensive about what the podcasters could say about the team. The emotion mentioned the most was "admiration" which was mentioned by five out of the nine participants. This admiration towards the podcast host was explained by the participants differently. Some participants described it as an admiration of how difficult the job is "*it's not an easy thing to do*" (participant 5). This led the participants to believe that because of the difficulty of the job podcast hosts "*show that they care about their job*" (participant 5). This participant further linked this to trust due to "*if you like what you do, there's a higher chance that you're willing to go the extra mile to get good information*". Another participant's admiration for the difficulty of the job caused a connection.

Theme 2: Intuitive-Based Trust. How participants trust based on a gut feeling. Out of the participants, one of them stated that their gut feeling had no effect on their listening habits and trust for the host as they consume a lot of podcasts anyway, and therefore its more about familiarity than gut feeling. Four participants stated that their gut feelings told them this was a podcast worth trusting and worth listening to. One participant stated that "*you've been listening to them for a long time*" (participant 8) therefore there must be a reason for it. Another participant stated the opposite that their gut feeling told them that this was going to be "*something for the long run*" (participant 7). Two other participants didn't explicitly mention a gut feeling, however, mentioned that they had an intrinsic feeling of trusting and listening to this podcast host was the "*correct thing to do"*(participant 3 and 6).

Theme 3: Emotional-Based Trust. How participants trust based on personality and compatibility. When asked what aspects of the host's personality respondents liked they stated positive and ones that people would describe as good personality traits to have. The host's patience and people skills were mentioned which "*made the host caring*"(participant 2). Two participants mentioned that because their podcast had two podcast hosts it allowed for a good mix of personalities. Drive was mentioned which once again the participant linked to "*shows he cares and is dedicated*" (participant 3). One participant mentioned the host being "*down to earth which makes him relatable*" (participant 8). Brightness was the last personality trait mentioned.

Optimism was mentioned by a multitude of participants however, one participant specifically connected this optimism to being the opposite of how sports fans or other sports podcasts normally act. Qualities mentioned regarding their podcast hosts included: "*role model*", "*patient*", "*organized*", "*integrity*", "*good character*", "*confidence*", "*self-assertiveness*", "*understanding*" and the "*ability to joke and know when to be serious*". One participant mentioned the host's neutral tone as being something they appreciate due to it making the host "*more relatable and more trustworthy*"(participant 2). Politeness was mentioned making the participant feel more connected as it is welcoming. Finally, the last quality mentioned was the soft-spoken nature of the host which was once again linked to how it is the opposite of normal sports fans "*angry and neurotic*"(participant 2). When stating those qualities the participants emphasized that they mentioned them or admired those qualities about the host due to themselves not having those qualities.

Humor was an aspect often repeated. When asked about whether similar personalities are needed between the listener and the host three people said yes and the rest said no. The reasons for the yes were "*I think you're more likely to listen to people who are similar to you*"(participant 6) and '*the thing with having two hosts you're able to find a little bit of yourself in both of them*'(participant 6). The third person who said yes expressed further the former sentiment stating that the similarity allows them to "*relate to them or it makes me feel emotionally connected*" (participant 9). Out of the no's one person said the opposite by stating that the differences make them want to listen more. One participant explained that it was because a podcast host has some inherent qualities needed for a host such as "*outgoing and talkative*"(participant 5). The other no's stated that as long as there is respect and trust having similar or different personality types doesn't matter.

Theme 4: Competence-based trust. How participants trust based on the experience, skills and qualifications of the podcast host that allows them to perform the work assigned. The level of experience between the podcast hosts varied. On one end of the spectrum lays a podcast that has two podcast hosts who both have played in the NBA, allowing them to speak from experience. In between there is a podcast host that the participant "*wouldn't consider them a world-renowned football expert*" (participant 4) but because they surround themselves with experts in the field that boosts their expertise and shows they are willing to learn. On the other end of the spectrum is where participants based the host's expertise on their own expertise. Three participants stated that the host having more experience than them was enough. One participant stated that the host had similar expertise to them on the sport allowing them to "*don't have to put too much effort into listening to what they say*" (participant 8).

In terms of qualifications, one participant mentioned that their host is "*one of the most referenced NBA journalists in the last few years*" (participant 6). Another participant mentioned "*he has 14 Best MMA Journalist Awards in a row, so I think that would make him an expert*" (participant 3) . Finally, one participant stated that due to their not being an accredited journalist "*I don't take their word as gospel*" (participant 2).

One participant stated that they believed their host on technical points but less when opinions are stated. A later participant had a solution to this issue stating that their host's opinions are backed up with evidence. Finally, three people stated that the tenure of being a podcast host

such as watching and keeping up with the team is what makes the participant trust what the host says.

Theme 5: Cognition-Based Trust. How participants trust based on the host's reputation and financial status. Participants had contrasting opinions on how reputation impacted their trust in the podcast hosts. One participant stated that they liked their podcast host more before they had a reputation as it made it "*feel like they were just talking because they wanted to talk about basketball*" (participant 8). The next participant linked reputation to the types of people that listen to this podcast which are novice listeners. Therefore because of the type of listener the reputation doesn't matter. One participant stated that the podcast hosts had a good reputation among the fans of the team the podcast covers but not so much for the rest of the league (NBA). The next participant stated that their host does have a good reputation as they are friends with many players in the league (NBA). The statement made about reputation was done by a participant stating that because they were chosen to do this job "*makes me think they have a good reputation*" (participant 5).

Regarding financial status, three people said that the host's financial status does impact their feelings towards it, four said no and two had an in-between answer. All of the participants who stated yes meant that it positively impacted them. For example, one participant stated that a higher financial status will mean more money invested back into the podcast. Another participant seconded that opinion and added that it would also be better for the host as well. Out of the no's one person stated that "*I don't think it would be very nice to value an opinion based on how much money they make as opposed to something else*" (participant 6). Finally, the ambiguous answers stated "*if they had a higher financial status, they probably wouldn't be doing this podcast*" (participant 5) and another said that a higher financial status wouldn't matter due to their "*humble beginnings*"(participant 8).

Theme 6: Calculus-based Trust. How participants trust based on rationality and weighing whether the benefits outweigh the cons. Participants listed a myriad of rational reasons for this being their favorite podcast. One participant stated that the podcast replaces the watching experience of the game which is supported by another participant that stated "I *feel like you have a watch party*" (participant 2). Another stated that it turned a solo activity (watching a game by yourself) into a social one (listening to the podcast). Five other participants mentioned benefits that fit into the emotional well-being and stress relief category: distraction, relaxing, des-stressor

(mentioned twice), and upping of moods. One participant felt like the podcast gave them more content about their favorite player (who is the podcast host).

The next participants mentioned benefits that are directly linked to their favorite team or sport. For example, benefits linked to the team included: getting nuanced perspectives, being able to keep up with the team, getting information, having someone talk about the team, and hearing all opinions of the team. The last sentiment was further repeated by another participant stating that they were able to listen to opinions from other fans. Regarding fandom, one participant stated that it helps them endure the tough times of being a fan. Focusing on the sport, two participants stated that it increased their knowledge of the sport and one said that it increased their enjoyment of the sport. Finally, the last participant stated "A*nd just like feeling like I'm closer to the sport I love*" (participant 1).

Theme 7: Knowledge-Based Trust. How participants trust based on how well they know their podcast host. When the researcher asked the respondents how well they knew their podcast hosts, two participants said they knew the host "*pretty well*" whilst the rest of the participants ranged from "*not well*", "*not well at all*" to "*no connection, I don't know them*". When the researcher further asked whether knowing the podcast host mattered only two said yes and the rest of the participants said no. The two participants that said yes were the ones that said they knew their host "*pretty well*". One participant stated that the more they knew the podcast host the more they started listening to them as they "*felt a stronger connection*" (participant 3). The other participant said yes because knowing more about a person makes you "*start empathizing with someone… in their personal life*" (participant 6) and makes you feel like you have some sort of connection. Of the participants that said no, all but one agreed that it doesn't matter because of the nature of the podcast. One participant explained that because the podcast talks about the history of the game and past events, knowing about the hosts in the present would break the timeline. Three participants stated that because "*this isn't a talk show podcast*" (participant 5)there is no need to know the podcast host. Finally, the last participant stated that "*other stuff is more important*" (participant 8). When asked about what that "*other stuff*" was, the participant replied that the bond between the podcast hosts was more important.

Theme 8: Relational-based trust. How participants trust based on repeated interactions. Participants explained that they achieved these repeated interactions with the host by making it become '*part of a routine*' (participant 8). This routine includes "*listening to it every morning*

when I wake up" (participant 5) and "*listen to it on the way to university every day*" (participant 8) for example. When asked further whether this repeated interaction helped with fostering trust and a connection, all respondents said yes. One participant explained that it was because '*the more I've listened to them the more I've gotten to know their personality*" (participant 8). Another explained that seeing them more often makes them a presence in their life. This participant further linked this to how friendships are formed. One participant referred to the knowledge theme stating that knowledge isn't important but the frequency of listening is. Finally, one participant stated that "*if the frequency of the uploads lowered then I would probably stop listening*" (participant 7).

Theme 9: Institution-Based Trust. How participants trust is based on cultural and societal norms. With regards to cultural and societal norms respondents were asked whether their hosts adhere to them or not. The majority stated that they do not adhere to these norms. When asked to expand on how this makes them feel two stated that they liked that the host didn't adhere as this way the host talked about niche topics that normally traditional media would avoid talking about such as the WNBA or smaller countries in the World Cup. One participant stated that their host did not adhere, however, that's why they liked that podcast as it was different and unique compared to other podcasts. Two people stated that their podcast host does adhere to the cultural and societal norms and they stated that's the reason they like the podcast. The explanation was that they shared similar norms with the host.

With regards to whether or not the host has a hidden agenda, there were a variety of answers. One participant stated that yes the host had a hidden agenda for doing this podcast but stated that he didn't care. Important to note that the participant laughed whilst answering this question as he stated that everyone in the basketball world knows about this hidden agenda. Two participants stated that the host doesn't have a hidden agenda and even if they did it wouldn't matter as long as they can freely "*express himself*" (participant 7). One participant stated that it depends on the size of the hidden agenda "*if there was a bigger hidden agenda*" (participant 2). Finally, this participant stated that because this podcast is about their favorite team, if the host had a hidden agenda they would stop listening.

Theme 10: Deterrent-Based Trust. How participants trust is based on trusting to avoid violations. Respondents were asked questions regarding how their trust is impacted depending on whether the host took action in order to avoid negative repercussions and sanctions. Four people

stated that their host did not take action to avoid negative repercussions. Two participants stated that they felt "*amazement and admiration*" (participant 4 and 8) as many other hosts made comments or shared opinions to avoid any negative repercussions. One participant stated that going against the grain and speaking without thinking about the repercussions and specifically what the podcast is about. One participant stated that if the host does or doesn't take action won't influence his opinion as sometimes you have to say things to make people happy and be able to grow as a podcaster.

      Theme 11: System-Based Trust. How participants trust is based on the system, organization, and channel of communication. Regarding the organization of the podcast, some participants like that the podcast is structured and some prefer an unstructured podcast. Regarding the structured podcast, one participant explained that it was because it made the podcast feel planned which "*makes me believe okay I trust what they say because to have it this planned*" (participant 4). They further developed that the structure allows the host to start the podcast always the same way. For the participants that liked an unstructured podcast, one explained that it felt more genuine as they would just say whatever comes to mind, and where the conversation leads them that's where they'll go. Another person shared this opinion by stating that the loose format made the listener feel "*very similar to them in a way because it's just them talking*" (participant 8). Further comments made about the organization of the podcast included: organized (twice), fast-paced and easy to digest. Furthermore, one participants stated that because the host uploads every day it "*shows a love for the work*" (participant 5). One participant stated that knowing that the host has editors and isn't doing everything himself improves the organization. Lastly, the ingenuity of the host to come up with new segments every once in a while to keep the podcast fresh and entertaining was mentioned by one participant.

      Regarding the communication aspect, words such as polite and friendly tone were used. The use of high vocabulary was also mentioned by one participant as it "*makes me feel more confident in their ability because they sound more well-spoken …your mind makes an association that oh they must know what they're talking about*" (participant 2). Moving onto the tone of the host, one participant explained that because the host uses different tones depending on the situation or who he's talking to increases the reliability. Finally, one participant mentioned that the confidence and the fact that they stand by their answers "*that shows like okay whatever they say*

they truly believe it and so to me that's uh reliable not reliable in terms of their knowledge or expertise but reliable in terms of I can trust that what they say" (participant 4).

Theme 12: Integrity-Based Trust. How participants trust is based on ethics, values and morals. Participants were asked about their host's ethics, values, and morals, and whether they match. Regarding the matching, all but two participants stated that their ethics, values and morals matched with their host. The one participant who stated no explained that they are very different from their podcast host and that they don't care about these things unless the podcast host is doing "*something bad*" (participant 1) then that would make them stop listening. One participant was unsure as the host really leaves no space to talk about those. Out of the participants that said yes there was a variety of information as to how this impacts them. One participant stated that because they match it isn't a problem however if they didn't match then it would be a problem as it would cause friction and "*would cause you frustration*" (participant 5). This friction argument was shared by one participant who stated the listener would constantly have disagreements with the host in their head. One participant stated that morals and ethics are very important to her therefore if they wouldn't align she would stop listening. Another participant stated that disagreements and differences can happen between people but "*something like basic morals is too integral to how a person operates… for it to be different with someone you regularly interact with in some way like a podcast host.*" (participant 4) This regularity was further mentioned by another participant that with someone whom you listen to daily and weekly and is part of your routine you need to align with ethics and values. Finally, one participant stated that because the podcast is linked to their sports team if the hosts had bad morals and ethics that would reflect badly on the team.

Discussion of the Findings

The 12 trust types (Challender et al., 2019) structured the research findings of the reasons listeners trust their podcast host in sports podcasting. Three main findings emerged from the interviews. The type of podcast within the realm of sports podcasting influences many different trust types. In the **affect-based trust** type, the emotions that people used to describe the podcast varied depending on the podcast type. Furthermore, in the **knowledge-based trust type,** the majority of participants stated that they didn't know their podcast host very well but that it doesn't matter. Participants further explained that this is because of how the podcast is done. This suggests that if the podcast was centered around technical aspects of the sport and the host then knowledge

isn't needed for trust. In the **competence-based trust** type, different participants wanted different levels of experience based on their podcasts. This suggests that to establish trust based on experience, the highest level of experience isn't necessarily always needed. This was further established in the **cognition-based trust** type where reputation varied in importance. Therefore depending on the listener and the podcast type such as more talk shows or more technical, trust can be established more or less easily.

The next main finding regarded the similarities between the host and listener. The findings suggest that participants are confused about whether similarities are needed and influenced. In the **emotion-based trust** type, the majority concluded that similar personalities were not needed to establish trust. However, in the **institution-based trust** type similar cultural norms and beliefs are needed. This was explained by one participant who explained it was due to ethics and beliefs being basic morals suggesting that it is an essential aspect needed for trust and a relationship to form. In the **system-based trust** type when mentioning the communication aspect of the podcast host similarities in the communication style were mentioned to help create a connection. Finally, in **integrity-based trust,** the majority of participants stated that their values and morals are similar to those of their host however the similarities don't matter for the trust. Therefore this suggests that participants want to believe that similarities don't matter however when it comes to trust it does play a role.

The final key finding relates to how team loyalty really affects trust. This aspect was found in many different trust types and from the participants' answers there seemed to be a strong influence of loyalty. In **knowledge-based trust,** one participant (who has their favorite player as their podcast host) stated that they already knew the host prior and that is the reason why they started listening to the podcast. In **calculus-based trust,** one of the benefits mentioned was that it allowed the participant to be closer to the game they love. Furthermore, one participant whose favorite podcast revolves around their favorite team associated the podcast directly with the team. Therefore any question asked about the podcast host regarding the trust type was answered thinking about the team. This suggests that team loyalty can be helpful or detrimental to trust.

Sequentially to the key findings, some minor findings are also worth mentioning. Due to there being 12 trust types, it is apparent that some trust types will influence more than others. **Relational-based trust** is said to be one of the most important trust types according to the participants. Meanwhile, one trust type is said to have no effect such as **deterrence-based trust**.

Finally, some trust types were harder to determine their effect than others. When asked about **intuitive-based trust**, participants were often dismissive about its effect. However, many participants eventually come back to this trust type subconsciously by not stating it directly. In the end, this suggested that this type does have an effect.

Limitations of the findings may include the strength of the participants' favorite podcast. During the sampling selection process, one of the problems that occurred was finding participants who listen to podcasts specifically sports podcasts. Enough participants were found however some participants indeed had a favorite podcast but only listened to two other podcasts. This potentially decreases the strength of this favorite podcast as opposed to some of the participants who listened to a multitude of podcasts. Another limitation is that having participants with many different podcasts caused (as seen in the findings above) the difference in the podcasts to influence the results. For example, some podcasts being talk show podcasts about sports and some being more analytical will have more variables involved making it harder to determine the factors influencing trust.

Linking Findings to the theoretical framework

The theory displayed in Figure 2 (in the Theoretical Framework section) shows the adapted model of Challender et al (2019). The themes found through coding perfectly match the trust types allowing for a seamless comparison to the theoretical framework. Theme 1 is linked to the affect-based trust type where the emotion admiration (towards the work the podcast host puts in) was the one that created the most trust. Theme 2 is intuitive-based trust which from the findings suggests that this gut feeling has a less noticeable effect on trust but is still present. Theme 3 is emotional-based trust and amongst the many qualities the hosts possess, the compatibility of personality types is what created the most interesting findings. Theme 4 is competence-based trust which resulted in different people needing different experience levels from their podcast host to establish trust. Theme 5 is cognition-based trust which led to contrasting opinions about how reputation and financial status impact trust. Theme 6 is calculus-based trust which the findings suggest that the main benefit participants get from a podcast is it being a de-stressor along with furthering the connection with their team or sport. Theme 7 is knowledge-based trust which resulted in knowing your host not being important for trust as most participants stated that they don't know them well. Theme 8 is relational-based trust which the findings suggest is a very important factor that influences trust as many participants would stop listening otherwise. Theme 9 is institution-based

trust and was found that the majority of the podcast hosts don't adhere to cultural and societal norms however that is why the podcast is liked and the host is trusted. Theme 10 is deterrence-based trust and findings suggest this is not one of the factors influencing trust. Theme 11 is system-based trust which resulted in the organisation having contrasting opinions. The communication aspect instead is found to be a mix of admiration for the host's communication skills and finding similarities between the host and the listener. Finally, theme 12 is integrity-based trust, resulting in ethics and morals needed to match to increase trust.

Key Summaries of Key Analysis

The key analysis of this research follows the structure of the theoretical framework through 12 themes. Relational-based trust was found to be very important in establishing trust between host and listener. Institution-based trust is also found to be important in establishing trust due to ethics and beliefs being the foundation of a relationship. Experience (competence-based trust) and reputation (cognition) are needed for trust however not the highest levels need to be achieved. Intuitive-based trust is also found to be important. Depending on the podcast type more experience level or a higher reputation is needed to establish trust. Participants would state that a talk show-type sports podcast would need less experience and a lower reputation for trust to be established. Knowledge-based trust and deterrence-based trust are found to not be important. Furthermore, team loyalty was found to be an important aspect influencing trust. Some participants would be more accepting of the host at the beginning of their listening journey due to the shared connection of the team or sport. However, participants were also more skeptical with regards to the host due to the connection with the team and this could be detrimental to the trust.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Findings: Literature Landscape

The literature landscape allowed for the display of relevant findings of previous studies related to this research, allowing for a comprehensive context on the key topics of this paper. Firstly, the rise of podcasts and why they have become so popular in recent years. According to the study by Schlütz and Hedder (2021), it is due to the organizational structure of the podcast being flexible and lacking a set of criteria. Furthermore, the rise in popularity can be attributed to two main factors. The first is podcasts providing informational and social gratification (Tobin & Guadagno, 2022) with a slight diversion from the standard social gratification gathered from social media through likes, shares, and comments (Bharath et al, 2024). The second is that people need to belong which in podcasts is said to be reinforced by the strong sense of community (Tobin & Guadagno, 2022). Podcasters are said to do this through the use of an informal conversational style such as chatty and laid-back (Horton & Wohl, 1956). These techniques help build on this parasocial relationship (Lindgren, 2019) that is said to help the listeners feel as if they belong to the inner circle (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021).

English et al (2022) focused their studies specifically on sports podcasting and found that one of its main appeals is that it resembles an after-game conversation in a pub. Ratts and Benedek (2021, as described in English et al., 2022) further studied this topic with regards to the pre-existing bond of a team or sports and found that this bond can be easily translated into a relationship between host and listener. Markman and Sawyer (2014) and Sherwood (2019) found that this popularity is due to the greater coverage done by podcasts on topics and sports overlooked by traditional media. Furthermore, sports' tendency to constantly evolve has been translated into sports podcasts (English, Burgess & Jones, 2022)

for example the rise of athlete-led podcasts (Louis, 2023). Research by Cook (2010) studied the reason for this being that it gives more in-depth information about the athlete than prior listeners would've had to get from a book for example.

Sports cannot happen without fans and that is why Vallerand et al's (2008) research regarded people's passion for sports and how it isn't necessarily always a good thing as it can lead to obsession. Further research by Bang and O'Connor (2022) studied that most often fans are stereotyped as either being die-hard fans or a fair weathered ones with no in-between.

Newman (2021) studied the current trust that people have in journalists with findings that suggest a varying audience trust. This is further studied in sports journalism by English (2021) who noticed a lack of trust in this area as well. Further research by Kohring and Matthes (2007) and Coleman, Morrison, and Anthony (2012) found that trust in the news is based on consumers trusting that journalists select the most relevant information. In 2023 Newman further did another study similar to his previous one but with an emphasis on trust in podcasts and found that whilst in journalism it has been declining, in podcasts it is favourable. Dowling and Miller (2019) studied the potential reasons for this and found that it is due to podcasts being a form of personalized journalism. This is further supported by Lindgren (2021) who explains that it is due to the podcasters using their own emotions to their advantage.

After all this discourse of trust in the news Taddeo (2011) wanted to investigate whether e-trust is indeed possible. According to his research, it is not possible due to three reasons: trust varies amongst different cultures, the ability to remain anonymous, and the need for touch. Wang and Emurian (2004) disagree with the previous research by stating that online trust can work due to the evolution from interpersonal trust to systemic trust. Finally, Salam et al., (2005) stated that trust online is more easily established by some individuals than others due to some people needing more information to trust.

Key Findings: Current Study

The findings of this study are divided into 12 themes. Listeners trust their podcast host on a variety of different trust types. Some participants liked the unstructured (system-based trust) nature of a podcast making it fresh, whilst others preferred structure to give them a routine (relational-based trust). Benefits gained from the podcast (calculus-based trust) include: turning a lonely activity into social, gathering more knowledge about the chosen sport, and feeling like a sense of community (intuitive-based trust). Quality needed for a podcast host (emotional-based trust) include respect, positivity, and patience. The original bond a participant has with their team creates an automatic connection with the host through a shared experience and love however it also makes the participant more skeptical. The same can be said with athlete-led podcasts as the original bond that person had with the athlete translates into an already existing relationship. Not following cultural and societal norms (institutional-based trust) is found to help establish trust. There are found to be pre-conceived notions as to what a sports fan acts like (loud, screams) and participants trust the podcast host more when they do not act in that manner. Amongst the podcast

hosts, not all were credited journalists however this did not influence the idea that the listeners would trust their host on facts but not on their opinions. Finally, much experience and knowledge are not needed for the participants to trust the host as different people need different levels of both to establish trust.

Comparison: Literature and Study Findings

The assumption that podcasts had become popular due to their flexibility and lack of set criteria (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021) is somewhat supported by the findings as some participants liked the unstructuredness of the podcast (system-based trust). Both the research by Markman and Sawyer (2014) and Sherwood (2019) regarded how the popularity of podcasts was due to providing coverage of marginalized content. This was supported by the findings as not adhering to cultural and societal norms such as talking about the WNBA helped build trust (institutional-based trust). Further theories about the popularisation of podcasts were due to providing information (Tobin & Guadagno, 2022) and social gratification (Bharath et al, 2024). Both theories have been supported by the findings. In calculus-based trust, it was found that more knowledge of the sport was one of the benefits people received from podcasts. In terms of social gratification, listeners would describe another benefit as the idea of turning a solo activity (listening to a podcast) into a social one by making it into a type of 'watch party'. This supports English et al's (2022) theory of resembling an after-game conversation in the pub. Regarding the research by Horton and Wohl (1956), no mention of informal conversation style was mentioned and instead, qualities such as patience, respect, and positivity (emotional-based trust) were. However, what was mentioned regarding tone was how participants would prefer hosts who scream less and have a lower volume as described to be how typical fans are. This matches with the research of Bang and O'Connor (2022) regarding how most research only mentions two types of fans.

The research by Ratts and Benedek (2021, as described in English et al., 2022) matched with the findings with regards to having a pre-existing bond with a team as the sport aspect couldn't be tested due to all participants being sports fans. However concerning the team; participants whose podcast was about their favorite team, linked the podcast directly with the team, establishing a relationship between the two. This was also found through athletes, as one participant had his favorite athlete as his podcast host which is described by the research by Louis (2023) and the podcast allowed him to gather more information which supports the research by Cooke (2010).

Regarding the lack of trust in journalism mentioned by English (2021), not all podcast hosts in the research were journalists therefore this statement cannot be fully supported however the research regarding the trust for journalists to select relevant information by Coleman, Morrison, and Anthony (2012) and Kohring and Matthes (2007) is supported by the findings that participants trust their hosts when stating facts but not when stating opinions. The research by Newman (2023) regarding the decline in trust in journalists but the rise in trust in podcasts was explained by Lingren (2021) and Dowling and Miller (2019) due to hosts using their emotions. This is supported by the affect-based trust type.

With regards to Taddeo's three theories as to why e-trust can't work, one has been debunked by the findings. The need for touch is unnecessary to establish connection and trust as none of the participants have 'touched' the host and still trust them. Finally, research by Salam et al., (2005) regarding how different people need different levels of information to trust has been proved in this research.

Answering the Research Question

In this thesis, the main research question to be answered is: What are the factors contributing to the establishment of trust between the hosts of sports podcasting and proactively engaged sports fans?

The main factors found to contribute are the constant and repeated interactions found in relational-based trust. This allows the participant to create a routine around the podcast and interact with the host many times simulating how friendships evolve over time. The second most important factor is found to be integrity-based trust, meaning having similar ethics and beliefs. Participants state that this is the basic foundation of any relationship and without it, trust cannot be established as constant disagreements will happen. Intuitive-based trust caused participants to have a feeling of correctness when listening to the podcast, contributing to the building of trust.

Whilst both cognition and competence-based trust are important, the degree of reputation and expertise needed differs by person and by the type of podcast. Similarities of personalities (emotional-based trust) are not needed to establish trust as there was a divide among the participants regarding this aspect. Knowledge-based trust is found to be not an important factor when establishing trust. With regards to emotions (affect-based trust), the strongest emotion found to impact is the admiration felt towards the host.

Lastly, team loyalty is found to be an important factor influencing trust. This pre-established connection with a team allows participants to relate and already have a shared connection with the host. In calculus-based trust, it is seen that one of the main benefits is the gathering of more information about the team or sport. Furthermore, these sports podcasts mimic an after-game conversation at a bar with a friend, allowing a solo activity such as listening to a podcast to turn social.

Implications: Marketing Professionals

The implications of this research is that podcast hosts themselves and media companies can use these insights to increase audience engagement and brand loyalty. The key elements of marketing discussed in this study that marketers and people in the podcast industry should consider are:

1. Frequency and consistency of uploading podcasts need to be maintained to establish relational-type trust.
2. A high level of expertise and reputation is not needed to establish trust depending on the podcast type.
3. Knowledge of the host is not needed to establish a connection.
4. Having qualities such as: patience, positivity, and respect is preferred by listeners.
5. Listeners prefer that podcast hosts do not adhere to cultural and societal norms.
6. Listeners and hosts need to share the same ethics and moral beliefs.
7. Implementing strategies to play on the listeners' need to belong.

Recommendations: Future Research Directions

Future research could investigate the effectiveness of implementing the findings and compare the findings of the 12 trust types. Furthermore, a quantitative study done by conducting audience surveys in the United States could give more statistical insights into the population due to the higher popularity of podcasts and sports podcasts in that country. Additionally testing a different trust theory with regards to sports podcasts could gather a wider range of factors along with this research on the effects of trust. A comparative study done on different types of fans could help build on the lacking literature on types of fans and the implications with regards to trust. Replicating the research on podcast hosts instead of listeners could provide greater insights into the other side of the relationship.

Future research could replicate this qualitative study by employing semi-structured interviews within a multi-case study framework but with different primary components of the MRQ. For example, studying a different podcast genre, different location, or different method. This could expand the current research on the current findings of trust between a host and a listener.

Recommendations: Relevance to Industries

The findings of this research are highly pertinent to media companies that own podcasts and independent podcast hosts. The findings and insights found in this study are relevant for these institutions to establish a connection between the host and listener to foster customer loyalty. Training and research such as this study regarding the effects of trust can help foster and improve the connection. The concept of fostering a connection between a host and a listener of a podcast can positively influence the podcasting industry by attracting more listeners and growing its popularity.

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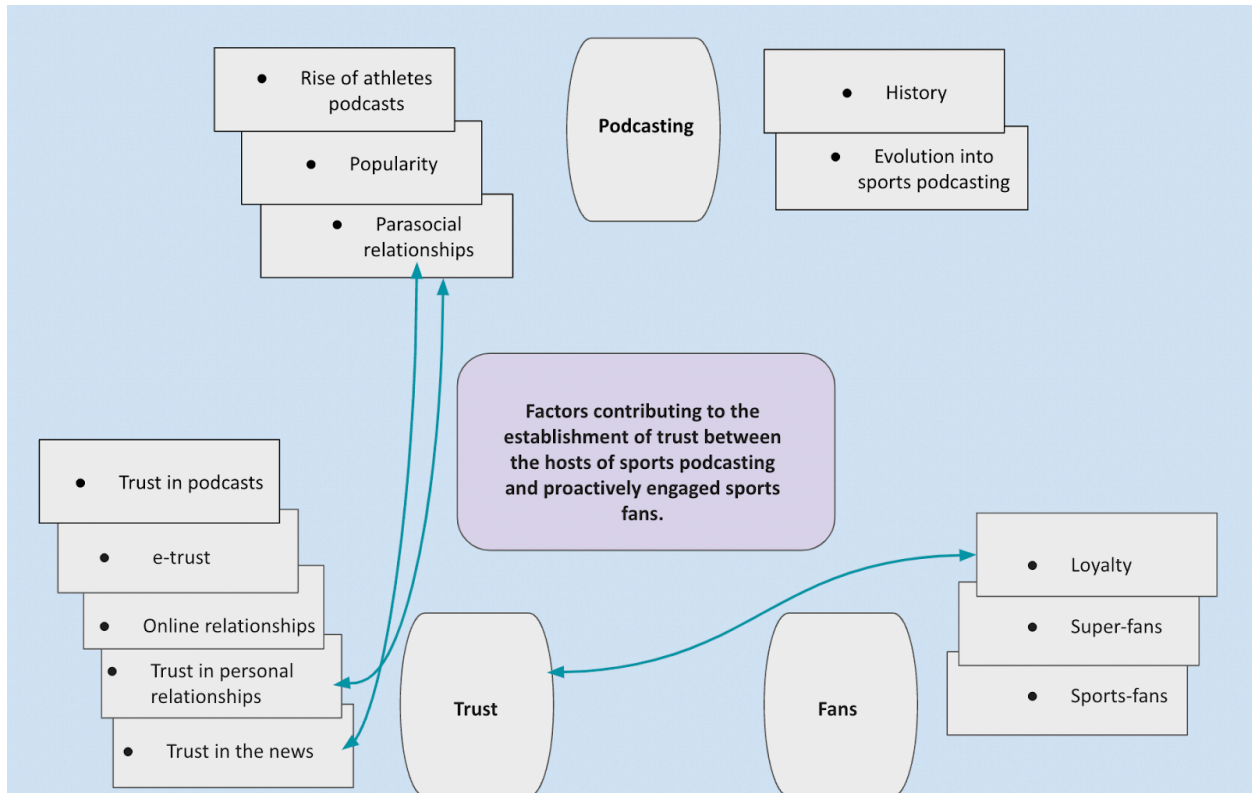
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Literature Review Mapping

Figure 1

Literature Review Mind Map

Appendix B: Literate Gap Analysis

Table 1

Literature Analysis Gap

Article	Article Topic	Author(s)+ Year	Categories of research gap
1	Reasons for listening to podcasts	Tobin & Guadagno (2022)	Due to the chosen research methodology (online questionnaire) being cross-sectional this prevented them from establishing causational outcomes. Therefore further research should consider panel data instead for causal estimation.
2	Qualitative study on a type of podcast	Malecki, Ginsburg & Quinn (2018)	This study only interviewed listeners of one specific medical podcast limiting transferability. Therefore, further research should consider gathering participants that listen to different podcasts.
3	Online trust factors	Bekmeier-Feuerhahn & Eichenlaub (2010)	In this research the focus was only on one single factor influencing the development of trust however numerous factors such as power, reputation and commitment can influence trust genesis. Therefore further research could broaden the scope by including other factors.
4	Trust in news media	Fletcher & Park (2017)	Findings discovered in this research were contradicting previous literature. Researchers explained this could have been caused by low trust individuals reluctant to participate in the research due to a most likely low trust towards others. Therefore further research should find a way to include these low trust individuals in their research.
5	Sports fans	Bang & O'Connor (2022)	This research bore a sampling bias due to an unrepresentative sample. Most sports fans' interest in their research was above the average common spectator. Therefore further research should have a more encapsulating sample to improve the external validity of the study.
6	Sports podcasting	English, Burgess & Jones (2022)	The survey conducted in this research consisted of listeners of only single sport podcasts. Further research should consider surveying participants of multiple sports to ensure a better representation of media systems around the world.
Categories of research opportunities			

7	Literature review on the antecedents of online trust	Beldad, Jong & Steehouder (2010)	There is an abundance of research on e-commerce trust however not its non-lucrative counterpart, including podcasting.
8	Host trust in podcast advertising	Brinson & Lemon (2022)	Excluding this article, no studies have examined the effect of the traits: ability, integrity and benevolence (trust definition) on the relationship between podcast hosts and listener.
9	Host listener relationships in podcasts	Schlüts & Hedder (2021)	Few studies have studied the ability of a podcast to create an intimate experience between host and listener by engaging the listener.
10	Podcast perceptions	Whipple, Ash & Chacón (2022)	In this research there was no distinction made between the different genres of podcasting to gather a wider spectrum of information. However further research is encouraged to create a greater gap between the genres for example by isolating one specific genre to gather more detail on the gratifications and journalistic functions listeners associate with podcasts.

Appendix C - Pre-selection survey - Questions

Survey - Being a Proactively Engaged Fan Listening to Sports Podcast

Q1 Welcome to the research study

This study is interested in understanding what factors influence listeners to listen to that specific sports podcast. You will be presented relevant questions regarding this topic and you are asked to answer them based on your opinion.

For your consideration, this is a pre-selection survey to determine whether you fit the criteria to be selected into the semi-structured interview related to this study. Once your answers are evaluated you will be contacted by the researcher on whether you fit the criteria or not.

The survey in question should take no longer than 2 minutes with voluntary participation. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, without judgement. Your response will be kept strictly confidential and your personal information will only be used for the researcher. If you want to contact the researcher of the study please contact Sofia Bertasi with the email 557808sb@eur.nl.

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are above 18 years of age, and you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

      I consent to the study; I wish to participate (1)
      I do not consent; I do not wish to participate (2)

  Q2 What is your email address? (This will only be used as a method of communication regarding the study)

      _____

  Q3 What is your age?

      _____

  Q4 What is your Nationality?

      _____

  Q5 Would you consider yourself a sports fan?
      Yes
      No
  Q6 Do you support a sports team?
      Yes
      No
  Q7 Do you listen to sports podcasts frequently?
      Yes
      No

Appendix D - Pre-selection survey - Letter of invitation to express an interest.
Survey: Get to Know X
Dear [name],
I trust this message finds you well. My name is Sofia Bertasi, and I am a third year
Bachelor's student at Erasmus University, studying International Economics and Business
Economics. I am excited to embark on a research journey on how the presence of sports loyalty
heightens the influence of host trust within podcast advertising.
I invite you to participate in a short online survey to kickstart this endeavour. This survey aims to
gather insights on your favourite sports podcast. Your information will be confidential and only
accessible to me.
Please take a moment to complete the survey using the link below. Your input is invaluable to
our research.
[Survey Link]
To ensure participation, please submit your responses by [Day, Date] at [Time, Time zone].
Your contribution to this survey marks the first step in our research journey. Stay tuned for
further updates as we explore and enhance this team's culture further.
Thank you in advance for your valuable contribution.
Warm regards,
Sofia Bertasi
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Appendix E: Personal Interviews - Informed Consent Form

Title of Research: Factors contributing to the establishment of trust between the hosts of sports podcasting and proactively engaged sports fans

Principle Investigator, Affiliation, and Contact Information:

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

This study aims to provide insights on key reasons regarding trust between proactively engaged fans and host in the realm of sports podcasting, by researching fans' attitudes, experiences and preferences.

Description of the Research

This study adopts a qualitative approach to investigate the factors contributing to the establishment of trust between a proactively engaged fan and the podcast host. The researcher has opted for a multi-case analysis approach of sports podcasting in exploring the different trust types that affect the reason for the listening.

Subject Participation

This study's participants consist of individuals interested in sports, listen to sports podcasting frequently and are between the ages of 18-24.

Interview duration:

The interview will take thereabouts 30 to 40 minutes.

Potential Risks and Discomforts

To the best of my knowledge, there are no known risks.

Potential Benefits

This study will help build on the little research there is regarding the reasoning for the trust between podcast host and listener within the scope of sports podcasting for proactively engaged fans.

Confidentiality

Interviews will be recorded followed by a transcript. The anonymity of the interviewee (you) will be kept. After each interview the audio file will be saved with a code name which will also be used in the research. Therefore, your name will not appear in my research. Once the transcript has been made the audio file will be deleted. There will be no identifying details in the transcript. For the purpose of an audit trail for future researchers the transcripts will be kept on a hard disk for five years from the date of the interviews. Once those five years have elapsed the transcript will be deleted.

Compensation

If you would like, we can provide you with a copy of the published bachelor thesis with your contributions inside. No remuneration will be provided for participants in this study.

Withdrawal from the Study and/or Withdrawal of Authorization

As a participant in this study, you are free to withdraw your participation at any time.

Authorization and confirmation	Initials
I authorization to audio record the interview	

I authorize the use of the output of my interview for further education, research and publication of the findings	
Voluntary Participation and Authorization **I voluntarily agree to participate in this research program**	
I understand that I will be given a copy of this signed Consent Form.	

Name of Participant (print)	Signature	Date

Note: A copy of the signed, dated consent form must be kept by the principal Investigator(s) and a copy must be given to the participant.

Appendix F: *Personal interviews - Example Invitation letter to participants*

Dear (name of person),

I hope my message reaches you in good health. My name is Sofia Bertasi, and I am a bachelor student at Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands. I am doing research on the factors influencing the reasons for proactively engaged fans to listen to their preferred podcast. Therefore, I wanted to contact you to ask whether you would like to participate in my research due to you completing the pre-selection survey making you fit for the population criteria of this research. If you agree, then we will engage in a semi structured interview. This will be done in English unless that is a problem for you. This interview can be done online or in person depending on your preferences. Details and informed consent form will be sent in advance.

Thank You,

Have a great day!

Sofia Bertasi

Appendix G: Personal Interviews - Interview Protocol and Interview Questions

1.Interview Protocol

<div align="center">

[Sofia Bertasi] [Participants' ID#] [Interview Date and time]

</div>

Before the interview:

Ensure the place chosen for the interview is quiet and is in a non-distracting environment for optimal video and audio quality. 24 hours prior to the interview send the Consent Form to the interviewee to ensure they are aware about their rights and what they are agreeing onto beforehand. This will also serve as a reminder to the interview. 2 to 3 hours prior to the interview check on audio and video equipment.

Before starting the interview:

Give a short introduction to give more information to the interviewee and thank them for participating. To break the ice ask how the person is feeling and what they have prior to this interview. Introduce the interview procedure.

Hello! How are you today? Thank you for taking the time to do this interview.

I'm excited and very interested to speak to you regarding your thoughts on sports podcasting. Allow me to tell you a bit about my research topic – This study aims to investigate the feelings and reasonings on why proactively engaged sports fans chose a certain sports podcast as their favourite.

I hope that with this knowledge and information I am able to better understand the factors influencing why fans choose those specific podcasts and why they listen.

The study used a qualitative research method to investigate the factors influencing why fans listen to podcast in the sports podcasting world. The research design involved a multi-case study of sports podcasting in exploring the personal and factual elements that attract proactively engaged fans. The research design involves a pre-selection survey and a semi-structured interview. The sample selection will be based on convenience sampling consisting of individuals that listen to sports podcasting frequently, consider themselves a sports fan and are between the ages 18-24.

The purpose of this interview is to gather informative answers therefore follow up and clarification questions will be used. This interview will be transcribed and then it will be sent to you for the transcript review in case there are any changes you would like to make to any of the statements you said. Once that has happened the analysis will begin. Please ask any questions that you have now, otherwise we will start the interview.

During the interview:

● Record the interview with the laptop and phone in case of a malfunction and for backup.

● Test the audio on both devices at the beginning of the interview and then proceed

● When the participant is speaking, make sure to listen and not spend the whole time looking down at the notes or writing.

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- Use probing questions when necessary

- Make notes of facial and body expressions

To end the interview:

- Turn off the recording device on both phone and laptop

- Thank the interviewee for doing the interview once more

- Remind about the trasncript review

- Ask for suggestions, feedback and ways to improve on the next interview

After the interview:

- Save the recordings

- Transcribe the interviews

- Send transcripts to the participants for transcript review

2.Interview Questions

1) Opening/introduction (5-10 minutes) – Not recorded

Establish rapport:
My name is Sofia, and I am 21 years old. I am studying Economics and Business Economics at Erasmus University Rotterdam with a specialisation in marketing. I am in my final year of my bachelors degree. I'm Italian and I have lived in the Netherlands for around 4 years.

Purpose of research/time frame
I want to ask some questions about your podcasting listening habits as a proactively engaged sports fan. As previously stated this should take around 30 minutes.

Second check for consent for recording the interview
Hand the respondent the information sheet and the informed consent form. Summarize the main parts.

Turn on the audio recording.
(Transition: Allow me to ask you some questions regarding ...)

2) Background information
Introductory questions
1. Where are you from?
2. What do you study?
3. What's your favourite hobby?

4. How old are you?

Transition into topic-related questions
(Order will be established after approval of research proposal)

Topic Introduction
1. What sports do you follow?
2. Do you have a favourite team?
3. Do you have a favourite podcast? Could you describe a bit about what it is about?
4. How often do you listen to this podcast?
5. Could you explain why this is your favourite podcast?
6. Who is the host of the podcast and could you describe them for me?

Affect Based Trust

1. Could you name some feelings you feel towards your podcast host? (show wheel of emotion (Seen in Appendix N) to interviewee)
Probing: Could you explain and give examples as to why you feel this way?

2. If you can recall what were your initial feelings regarding your podcast host at the beginning of your listening journey?

3. Can you share a moment when the podcast host's empathy made you feel personally connected to them?

Intuitive Based Trust

1. What role did your instinct or gut feeling play when you decided to continue listening to this podcast?

2. How do your emotional responses to the host's discussions reinforce your intuitive sense of belief in them?

3. How do your emotional responses to the host's interactions reinforce your intuitive sense of belief in them?

Emotional Based Trust

1. What aspects of the host's personality makes you emotionally connected to them?
Probing: Can you share a moment where the host's personality made you feel emotionally connected to them?

2. What aspects of the host's behaviour makes you feel emotionally connected towards them?

3. How would you compare your personality to that of your host?
Probing: Why is that important

Competence Based Trust

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1. Would you consider your host an expert in their field from a scale of 0 no experience to 10 a world known expert in the field?

Follow up: What makes them an expert in the field?
Probing: Depending on the answer how does this make you feel about them?

2. Depending on the answer how does that lack of experience or experience [D9] influenced your perception on certain topics?
Probing: would you consider this a positive or negative and explain why?

Cognition Based Trust

1. How would you describe your podcast hosts reputation?

Probing: How does that make you feel towards them?

2. What aspects of the host's achievements or background contribute to your confidence in their information and insights?

3. How would you describe your podcast hosts financial status?

Probing: How does this impact your feelings towards them?

Calculus Based Trust

1. If you are no longer able [D12] to listen to this podcast, how would you feel?

2. What are the specific benefits that you receive from listening to this podcast?
Probing: Is there a specific aspect that if removed it would make you stop listening?

3. Have you ever considered not listening to this podcast anymore?
Probing: could you explain what caused that feeling and why?
Probing in case of I don't know: What event will cause you to cease listening to the podcast and why?

Knowledge Based Trust

1. Do you follow your podcast host outside of the podcast, for example on Instagram, X…?

Probing: could you explain where and why this decision?

2. How well do you know your podcast host?
Probing: What makes you say that?
Follow up: Is it only from what you hear in the podcast or through other sources?
Follow up for no: is there anything the podcast host could do to make you know them better?
Follow up: Is there anything that you could do so you can get to know them better?

3. Does how well you know the host impact your listening habits?

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Relational Based Trust

1.   Have your views and emotions about the host evolved over time?
Probing: Could you describe the evolution?
Follow up: if yes to the question, what main factor influenced this evolution of emotion?

2.   What specific moments from the podcast have contributed to building a strong emotional connection with the host?

3.   Do you have any specific routines or behaviours related to when and how you listen to this podcast?
Probing: In what ways has the host's familiarity and regular presence in your listening routine impacted your perception of them?

Institution Based Trust

1.   How would you say your podcast host adheres to cultural and societal norms? Him talking about wnba
Probing: Could you describe if this influences your feelings towards them

2.   Do you believe your host has a hidden agenda? (such as making this podcast or being on this podcast?)
Probing: does this influence your feelings towards them?

Deterrence Based Trust

1.   Can you describe a time when the podcast host demonstrated accountability for their statements or actions to avoid negative repercussions?
2.   How do you perceive the host's efforts to adhere to industry standards or community guidelines to avoid criticism or sanctions?

3.   In what ways has the host shown that they are aware of potential consequences for not meeting audience expectations, and how does this impact your feelings towards them?

System Based Trust

1.   What aspects of the podcast host's communication style or organisational structure make you feel confident in the reliability of the information they present?

2.   Can you share a specific instance where the host's ability to adapt or respond to changes in the podcast content or format reinforced your belief in their credibility?

Integrity Based Trust

1.   How would you describe the morals and ethics of your podcast host?
Probing: Can you describe a situation where the podcast host's ethical stance or moral judgement significantly influenced your perception of them?

2.	What examples can you provide of the host consistently looking after the best interests of their listeners or community? Teal locker room

3.	How would you say the morals and ethical beliefs of the host match with yours?

Probing: If they don't match is this a problem and why, if they match do you see it as an added positive and why?

Closing Questions

1. Do you have any final feeling or thoughts you would like to express regarding your podcast host or anything mentioned in this interview?

Probing: Would you like to discuss any final thoughts?

2. Do you have any suggestions to your podcast host to foster a better connection or make a better podcast?

Probing: What changes would appeal to you or make you think many more people would listen?

Summary:
Shorty summarise the key points that you got out of the interview (1-2 minutes).

Thanks:
Thank you very much for taking time to do this interview and answer my questions

Turn off recording

Probing Questions
- Could you give further details?
- Can you expand on that?
- What makes you say that?
- How does that make you feel?

Appendix H: Personal Interviews – Letter for transcript review

Dear (participant name),

Thank you once again for participating in my research and doing the interview. As discussed, here is the transcript of your interview. Please have a look to see whether there are any changes you would like to make or have any new comments. I understand this will take up some of your time therefore I appreciate it as it is part of the transcript review procedure.

If you do have some comments or changes I will add them to the analysis. Simply add comments on the word document so I am able to see both the original and the new changes. Due to time constraints I will give you 5 days to reply, otherwise I will proceed with the analysis and assume the transcript is correct and up to your standards.

Thank You. If you would like, I will keep you up to date with my research findings. Best regards,
Sofia Bertasi

Appendix I: Personal Interviews -Schedule for interviews

Table 2

Interview Schedule

Participant #	Scheduled Date of Interview	Scheduled Time of Interview	Scheduled Location	Duration of Interview
1	June 25	10:00	Online	33 minutes
2	June 25	15:00	Online	25 minutes
3	June 25	18:00	Online	36 minutes
4	June 26	10:00	Online	42 minutes
5	June 26	15:00	Online	27 minutes
6	June 26	18:00	Online	27 minutes
7	June 27	10:00	Online	28 minutes
8	June 27	15:00	Online	33 minutes
9	June 27	18:00	Online	26 minutes

Appendix J: Personal Interviews - Participants Profile – Pre-selection survey data

Table 3

Background of participants

Respondent	Age-Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
1	22	Comorian/Tunisian	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	19	Dutch	Yes	Yes	No
3	22	Chinese	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	20	Hungarian	Yes	No	No
5	23	Portuguese	No	No	No
6	21	Belgian	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	24	Dutch	Yes	Yes	No
8	19	Belgian	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	21	Dutch	Yes	No	Yes
10	22	Italian	Yes	Yes	No
11	22	English	Yes	Yes	Yes
12	20	Dutch	Yes	No	No
13	19	German	Yes	Yes	No

14	21	French	Yes	Yes	Yes
15	18	Albanian	Yes	Yes	No
16	18	Irish	Yes	Yes	No
17	19	Spanish	Yes	Yes	Yes
18	20	German	Yes	No	Yes
19	20	Indian	No	No	Yes
20	18	Indian	Yes	Yes	Yes
21	19	Curaçaoans	Yes	Yes	Yes
22	18	Dutch	Yes	Yes	Yes
23	24	Azerbaijani	Yes	Yes	Yes
24	23	Polish	No	No	No
25	21	Italian	Yes	Yes	Yes
26	22	Brazilian	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Participants that were selected for the research are highlighted in purple

Appendix K: Personal Interviews - Interview Transcript Example

Start of the interview

Researcher
Hi, thank you for doing the interview.

Interviewee
No problem.

Researcher
Where are you from?

Interviewee
I am from Belgium.

Researcher
And what do you study?

Interviewee
I study marketing.

Researcher
Very nice. What's your favourite hobby?

Interviewee
I would say playing the guitar.

Researcher
Okay, and how old are you?

Interviewee
I am 19 years old.

Researcher
Now we're going to go on with the introduction questions regarding the topic of sports podcasting. What sports do you follow?

Interviewee
I follow mainly football and MMA.

Researcher
Do you have a favourite MMA player or a favourite football team?

Interviewee
Yes, my favourite MMA fighter would be Islam Makhachev

Researcher
Okay, very nice. Do you have a favourite podcast?

Interviewee
Yes, it's called the MMA Hour by Ariel Helwani.

Researcher
Very nice, and could you describe a bit what the podcast is about?

Interviewee
It's a podcast that covers the latest news in the MMA world, mostly the UFC. It talks about current storylines, makes predictions and also does a lot of interviews with current and past fighters, other people around the sport.

Researcher
Could you explain why this is your favourite podcast?

Interviewee
Because it's the one that has the most reliant information and it's the one that is the longest also.

Researcher
The longest in terms of time?

Interviewee
In terms of show length.

Researcher
Could you describe a bit the podcast host for me?

Interviewee
The host is called Ariel Helwani and he is a very well-known and respected journalist around the MMA world. I would describe him as caring for the sport, very well informed and perhaps a bit of an ego problem at times.

Researcher
Why would you say he's caring for the sport?

Interviewee
Because he's been covering the sport with the same diligence for a long time. Even back in the early 2000s when the sport wasn't as well received worldwide or even considered a sport, or there wasn't a lot of money to be made in the sport as a journalist, he still covered it because he saw the beauty in it.

Researcher
Could you name some feelings you feel towards the podcast host based on this wheel of emotion that I'm showing you?

Interviewee
I would say interest, anticipation and trust.

Researcher
Could you explain why you feel those emotions?

Interviewee
Interest and anticipation because a lot of the times to build up the arrival of new fight nights or something like that, I will watch that podcast to up my interest or anticipation for the bout. Trust also because I believe the information he says is reliable when in the MMA world a lot of the time media can be very click-baity or just make rumours sound like truth.

Researcher
Why do you believe his information to be reliable?

Interviewee
Because he's been proven in the past to have been reliable so you can see past times where he might have been doubted, he always ends up coming out with the truth in comparison to others.

Researcher
Could you recall what were your initial feelings regarding your podcast host at the beginning of your disney journey?

Interviewee
I remember not being able to discern him from the rest of the MMA world. I thought he was just another reporter kissing up to the big companies or something like that. I didn't really see the personality in himself yet or know much about his personal life.

Researcher
What made that opinion change?

Interviewee
Probably over time the more you listen, the more you discover about the person and about the way they work and you see if it matches what you like or what you want from it.

Researcher
Could you share a moment when the podcast host's empathy made you feel personally connected to them?

Interviewee
Yes, there was one time where a fundraiser was created through the program and it was for Alzheimer's research. It was a long live stream done on YouTube and all revenues from it were donated to an Alzheimer's Foundation and there were merch created for that event that were also donated.

Researcher

So that's the charitable aspect, you really liked that he did that.

Interviewee
Yes, because it shows that he's not just out to make money but also do good.

Researcher
What role did your instincts or gut feeling play when you decided to continue listening to this podcast?

Interviewee
My gut instinct told me that the quality of reporting I got from the first time I listened to it would apply to other events throughout the year or other fighters and sometimes the other sports they might cover. So if I thought that it would be just a one-off episode that was really good, I don't think I would have kept listening. But my gut told me that it seemed like a well-rehearsed platform and formula so I trusted it would keep the same quality.

Researcher
How do your emotional responses to the host's discussions reinforce your intuitive sense of belief in them?

Interviewee
The discussions are always well balanced because a lot of time it can just be seen that the main MMA company, the UFC, is doing really good economically so everything must be fine.
But the host does a good job at seeing other ways they could be capitalising on the sport or things that are done negatively or talk about the lack of competition without the different MMA companies.

Researcher
What about the host interactions?

Interviewee
There are a lot of host interactions within the show because even if there is one main host, he has a lot of people working with him and a lot of time they bounce back and forth on different topics. And even though the host believes very strongly in his own opinions, he always considers the others as well and gives them the room to express themselves even though they're not as famous as he is and it is his show.

Researcher
What aspect of the host's personality makes you emotionally connected to them?

Interviewee
I would say his drive. Whenever he's speaking about the sport or his job as a journalist, you can tell that he really cares for it and he's very dedicated at his craft and he knows what he's doing.

Researcher
What aspect of the host's behaviour makes you feel emotionally connected to them?

Interviewee
I would say how knowledgeable he is. It makes me feel more connected to him because with the MMA being a young sport, you need sources to learn about its history in an accurate way and in a fast way. And him being around the UFC and MMA overall for a long time and just how knowledgeable he is by being a first-hand source at it, I feel the respect towards him because of that.

Researcher
How would you compare your personality to that of your host?

Interviewee
I would say he seems very passionate about MMA and I can relate to that. He can see the artistic value behind it and just the beauty in the storylines, the ebbs and flows of the drama which I can really relate to.

Researcher
Would you say that passion is important in a podcast host?

Interviewee
I would think so because if someone isn't passionate towards what they're reporting on, you have less interest to care about it.

Researcher
Would you consider your host an expert in the field? For example, if you had to rate them on a scale of 0 from no experience to 10, world-known expert, how would you rate them?

Interviewee
I would definitely give them a 10.

Researcher
What do you think makes them an expert in the field?

Interviewee
Both how long of a tenure they've had as a reporter in the field, but also how successful he has been in working with different companies or receiving awards. I think he has 14 Best MMA Journalist Awards in a row, so I think that would make him an expert.

Researcher
How do these awards and this experience make you feel about them?

Interviewee
It makes me respect them more because I know I'm aware of the overall media sphere in MMA, so I'm aware of other people who report like him and who could be eligible for those awards. The fact that he wins them year in and year out makes me gain a lot of respect for him.

Researcher

Do you think respect is important when it comes to the relationship between a podcast host and the listener?

Interviewee
Personally for me, yes, because if I don't respect someone's opinion on the subject, then I wouldn't listen to them for a podcast. From a podcast, I'm trying to get informed, so I would have to consider the host as some kind of expert in the subject, or else I would not be really watching them consistently.

Researcher
Has his experience influenced your perception of certain topics?

Interviewee
Oh yes, I can't quite recall individual moments, but I feel like most of the day-to-day storylines about certain fights or whether they might be happening or not, a lot of my information ended up relying on him. Naturally, if I take those as truth, then I am shaped by his opinions as well to some extent.

Researcher
Would you consider this a positive or a negative, or how does that make you feel?

Interviewee
I think most of the time it's a positive, because I believe that he has fair intentions mostly, but I also am aware that I don't want my opinion to be shaped by just one person, so that's why I also listen to other media sources regarding MMA.

Researcher
How would you describe your podcast host's reputation?

Interviewee
I would say it depends from which perspective. From the fans' perspective, I would say he is very well regarded, and as I said before, probably the most famous media person in the MMA community. But from the sports perspective, the UFC doesn't like him very much, and they had a splitting apart in the past, so it's weird to see someone so respected by fans and athletes and people around the sport.But the actual main running company has a strong distaste for him.

Researcher
Why does the main company have a distaste for him?

Interviewee
Because he revealed a while back a certain return of a fighter when the company did not want it announced yet, so he was just doing his job as a journalist to break news and storylines and things he has been told, but the company did not take it kindly, and ever since have been against him.

Researcher

How did this situation impact your opinion about him, as in what happened, how he went against the company, and how the company doesn't like him?

Interviewee
I think it all depends on the person, but me personally, I don't feel any strong ties to the company per se. I care about their contractors, their fighters, so the fact that the company went against him did not surprise me because they are pretty hands-on and they like to keep things in-house. But I understand the responsibility of a journalist, of having to break news, so I don't think any morals were broken with what he did, so I saw him as having an injustice done towards him more than he had done something badly.

Researcher
And what aspects of the host's achievements or background contribute to your confidence in their information and insights?

Interviewee
Well, on top of having all the awards that I mentioned before, I think the fact that he can consistently get interviews with most of the stars in the sports and always have the right guests for up-and-coming bouts and getting to have the opinions of the fighters themselves is always an added value. And I don't know anybody else in media right now that can consistently get us the questions that we want directly to the people that we want.

Researcher
Why do you think he's able to get all the fighters on his show while other media fail to do that?

Interviewee
That's something he's talked about personally, is he works really hard at establishing trust in his job and these interviews that he gets are a lot of the time due to a life-to-year-long relationship that he's been investing into. So people feel comfortable speaking to him and they know also how large of an audience he has, so it's a beautifully beneficial relationship for the guest and the host.

Researcher
How would you describe your podcast host's financial status?

Interviewee
I would probably say he is wealthy in comparison to other journalists in combat sports because I know he's worked at big companies like ESPN and has left them on a personal basis now that he got fired. And now he's working basically on his own platform being independent and still generating millions of views and clicks, so I'm assuming he must be pretty financially competent.

Researcher
And how does this impact your feelings towards the host?

Interviewee

I think this intensifies my feelings towards him in a positive way because I can see the money being put back into the show, so the show's success allows it to have better access to different people around the world. The show is able to go live in different places, crossover to other sports like boxing and etc. Because of the show's newfound status they can hire more editors, more sound technicians, etc. So a lot of the revenues are being put back into the show and creating a better experience for the listener.

Researcher
Okay, so you're saying that because he puts some of the money back into it, he's not just taking it all for himself and not improving the company. Also, to go back with you to what you said about how the players trust him and that's why they do interviews with him. Why would you say that they trust him compared to other hosts or other journalists?

Interviewee
I think there's a guarantee with him that what will be said on record will be said and what is said off record won't be said. That's a guarantee that they can't necessarily find from other journalists. And also, he has the biggest platform in the sport, so going to him to break news about your personal fights or personal ventures you might be doing, that's the best way to reach more fans. So it's a win-win.

Researcher
If you're no longer able to listen to this podcast, how would you feel?

Interviewee
Probably a little bummed out because a lot of my UFC news I get from him, but I think over time I might get over it. Because there are other outlets that I listen to and that I care for and that cover the sport in a similar fashion, minus a lot of interviews. I think I'd maybe miss the interview aspect of the platform, but maybe not something else.

Researcher
Are there specific benefits that you receive from listening to this podcast?

Interviewee
Just improving my knowledge of the sport more thoroughly and getting to discuss it with my friends or something like that.

Researcher
Is there a specific aspect that if removed it would make you stop listening?

Interviewee
I think the mentioned interviews. If all of a sudden the show became just about discussing the latest headlines or talking about if a fight is good or not.So much of MMA content creation is already tied to talking about rumours and stuff like that, that he would just become another voice in the crowd.

Researcher

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Have you ever considered not listening to this podcast anymore?

Interviewee
At a certain time, yes.

Researcher
Why?

Interviewee
It was because of an ongoing feud with a certain fighter who had made claims that the journalist had been requesting monetary pay in exchange for interviews. So when that situation hadn't been cleared up yet, I saw it as a break of journalistic ethics. So I wasn't sure about it, but it got cleared up in the end and I just kept listening to the podcast.

Researcher
When his ethics were put to question, why did you continue listening to the podcast?

Interviewee
Because I put my trust in him, because he hadn't had a chance yet to explain the situation or say it from his perspective.And I already didn't have a lot of trust in the fighter for his words to be seen as the truth. So I was just cautious until the next episode when things were explained and then I made my decision.

Researcher
How did he regain the trust that was lost or to show that the ethics were correct?

Interviewee
By doing what the other fighter didn't do, which was providing evidence alongside examples, which were screenshots from personal conversations or statements from past employers and things like that.And he basically went about and disproved every single point the fighter had made with irrefutable and verifiable proof.

Researcher
Do you follow your podcast hosts outside of the podcast, for example on Instagram or on X?

Interviewee
Yes, I follow them on X.

Researcher
Could you explain why?

Interviewee
Because they're very on the nose of the day-to-day sporting events across multiple sports. And a lot of the times when the show can't be recorded all of a sudden, because it takes a lot of people to set it up. So minor news might be broken through X first, before we talked about more thoroughly on the show. So I want to get it as soon as possible.

Researcher
And how well would you say you know your podcast host?

Interviewee
In comparison to maybe other podcasts I listen to, I would say I know them pretty well.

Researcher
And compared to people you know, how would you compare that?

Interviewee
Then at that point I would say decently well. Because I have an overall idea of his past, like where he's from. I know of his marital status, I know of how many kids he has. When he goes on vacations or things like that, he might share stories with the audience. So there's not a big wall in between the host and his audience.

Researcher
How does that make you feel knowing that you know the podcast host decently well and they know nothing about you?

Interviewee
I feel like the inherent relationship between a host of a podcast and a listener is kind of expected to be one way. Because I'm assuming he has a lot of other fans like me, while he is one of one. So he can't entertain a personal relation with every single one of his fans. But I know he is friendly towards the fans, because when he answers questions given by the community, it's always in a respectful manner and in a friendly way.

Researcher
Does how well you know the host impact your listening habits, do you believe?

Interviewee
Yeah, I would say I probably listen to it more frequently now than before, because I feel a stronger connection to the host now as compared to the past. I don't just see it as, let's listen to the latest MMA news, it's more of, let's listen to what Ariel has to say.

Researcher
So do you think the more you know a podcast host, the more you know someone, the more you will be willing to listen to them?

Interviewee
I think so. As long as your feelings are positive towards them.

Researcher
Have your views and emotions about the host evolved over time?

Interviewee

Yes, I would say so. I think they went from neutral, when I didn't know anything about it first, to fully positive. When I saw a bit of the show and how good it was, to then being slightly more nuanced now, because I've seen him sometimes have a bit of an ego problem or just his emotional reaction to certain subjects. He is a human being, everybody has a spectrum. So yeah, I'd say they're nuanced but positive.

Researcher
What specific moments from the podcast have contributed to building a strong emotional connection with the host?
Interviewee
How he has dealt with crisis situation within the sports, like discussing touchy subjects like a lawsuit that the UFC had to face, or a video coming out of the president of the UFC being violently abusive towards his wife. Those are hard subjects to bring up or discuss, especially when the UFC is such a popular company. But he already doesn't have friendly terms with them, so he doesn't fear them, so he always gets to speak his truth. And seeing him navigate such touchy subjects and say things that others might be scared to say, makes me feel more connected to him.

Researcher
Do you have any specific routines or behaviors related to when and how you listen to the podcast?

Interviewee
Due to the length of the podcast, usually being around two and a half hours or even more sometimes, I tend to save it either for long tasks like chores like cooking or washing my clothes. And other times, if I don't have chores, I will just split the podcast into several listening sessions, or I will just listen to the parts that seem the most intriguing to me.

Researcher
Does the length of the podcast impact your listening habits in any way? Would you prefer that it be shorter?

Interviewee
I think I like how long it is, although the length is probably why I don't listen to it all in one go most of the time. I prefer it that way because then I get to choose what part I listen in what condition. And it also doesn't release that often, usually twice a week. So I get to spread out during the week how much of the content I listen to. So I get to go at my own pace, which I like, and I'm not scared of falling behind.

Researcher
And how would you say your podcast host adheres to cultural and societal norms?

Interviewee
Yeah, I think he knows very well how to communicate with strangers in respectful manners. Because even though sometimes a lot of the interviews are people he's known over the years, he also needs to create new relationships with new fighters or new promoters in the sports who are

becoming relevant. So the way you treat a stranger is not the same way you treat a longtime friend or something. And he manages to do both very well.

Researcher
How does he manage to do that?

Interviewee
Well, I think he knows he can get away with cracking jokes with people he's known for a while or having inside jokes with them. And maybe he maintains more of a respectful tone towards people he just meets, or more of a tone that would adhere, a more adhering tone towards them that will make them feel more at ease in the show.

Researcher
And how does this make you feel about the host?

Interviewee
I think that makes me feel good about them, because that's how I think you should navigate communicating with someone.I wouldn't expect someone to talk to my mom the same way they would talk to me if they've known me for a while.

Researcher
Do you believe that your host has a hidden agenda?

Interviewee
I don't believe so. I think he's just doing this because he likes it so much and he wants the sport coverage around it to improve.And the fact that he isn't working for any company anymore, and he is more free to run the show how he wants to be, it doesn't feel like he has a hidden agenda.

Researcher
Can you describe a time when the podcast host demonstrated accountability for their statements or actions to avoid negative repercussions?

Interviewee
In recent events, there was a fight that was in jeopardy and might have been cancelled. And he seemed to have some insider knowledge about the situation of the fight. But due to the information being revealed to him being off the record, he couldn't let us know immediately, but he was hinting at it. And once the information had become public, he had to explain to his fans that sometimes information off the records can be shared, even though you think it might get the most clicks or be juicy, because then you would ruin relationships and nobody would trust you anymore. So he had to put that trust over the sake of creating great content for his platform.

Researcher
And how did that make you feel?

Interviewee

Really good, because I think that's the righteous thing to do. It's much easier to just get the juicy bits that nobody else has and report on them and have all the clicks. The harder thing to do is to actually respect the wishes of the people who tell you things that are meant to be kept secret.

Researcher
And how do you perceive the host's efforts to adhere to industry standards or community guidelines to avoid criticisms or sanctions?

Interviewee
I think the host doesn't adhere to the standards that are currently set in the MMA world. Because a lot of journalism, they know they should probably not say a lot of things negative towards the UFC, or else they might lose access to shows or certain connections. But his connections are so long running, and he already has a pretty cold relation with the UFC, that he doesn't care about saying things that might come off as negative, if he thinks they're the right thing to say.

Researcher
And in what ways has the host shown that they are aware of potential consequences for not meeting audience expectations? And how does this impact your feeling towards them?

Interviewee
I think as of recent times he has said that he feels certain expectations because of how successful he has been. He knows that everybody expects him to have answers on the biggest subjects so he's always working really hard, maybe overworking himself at always being in the loop of things 24-7 about every fighter up and down the rankings. And that makes me feel like he's truly dedicated because sometimes someone might be dedicated to their craft until they reach the pinnacle of it or the mountaintop and then they get complacent. But that hasn't happened with him.

Researcher
What aspect of the podcast host communication style or organisational structure makes you feel confident in the reliability of the information they present?

Interviewee
Just how well he communicates through different mediums.Might it be written pieces or being half of an interview and being able to leave the floor space to a fighter or the person of interest to him being the only person of interest when discussing said interviews. Those are three completely different tones to approach and different emotions to navigate in order to be entertaining but still reliable. And you can tell he's been doing it for a while because he does it very seamlessly.

Researcher
Can you share a specific instance where the host's ability to adapt to respond to changes in the podcast content or format reinforced your belief in their credibility?

Interviewee

Yeah, there was a time where a big news had broken but he wasn't available to record a podcast and he let the podcast recording happen with just the assistance of the show and giving them the entire platforms for themselves. And that showed to me trust in the people he surrounds himself with. Trust that they know what needs to be said or can't be said and what needs to be done in order to have an entertaining program. He just let them run the whole show and everything went smoothly and nobody noticed his absence too badly.

Researcher
And how did you seeing him trust his assistance made you feel?

Interviewee
Well that showed to me that shows that he isn't someone with a lot of jealousy in his heart and he wouldn't he doesn't think that he's he wouldn't surround himself with people he thinks are lesser. And if you are working for him on the show that means he trusts your opinion or trust your professionalism or your ability to manage a crisis.

Researcher
How would you describe the moral and ethics of your podcast host?

Interviewee
I would say he probably has strong ethics very aligned to mine because as I've said before in discussing topics like physical abuse from the owner of the UFC or talking about perhaps some political influences that the UFC may have in the United States and whether that's right for that to have a place in the sport or not. These are all complicated subjects to maneuver through and I think he's done a great job at it and remaining neutral despite also stating his opinion.

Researcher
You said that the hosts ethics kind of match yours would you say that it's this that is important?

Interviewee
I would say that it is it is important only in the sense that if it comes up if your ethics are different but then that never that never comes up into what's being discussed then it doesn't matter because you don't have the chance to feel badly about it because it's never brought up.But if topics at hand deal a lot with ethics like politics or women abuse then I would expect our ethics have to be lined up or else I would feel too negatively towards the subject and the entire program.

Researcher
What examples can you provide of the host consistently looking after the best interests of their listeners or the community?

Interviewee
I think that would go back to the story of him being told something off the record because although he couldn't share the news directly with the fans he he did understand the fans needs of getting the news because a lot of people might have spent money on this fight happening or not so although he didn't exactly state if um if the fight was happening or not or the reason there

were a lot of hints that people could have put pieces together and come up with the answer themselves so in that way he was fair to the fan and he was fair to the people who had given him the information off the record.

Researcher
Okay thank you now we're going to move on to the closing questions do you have any final thoughts or feelings you would like to express regarding your podcast host or anything mentioned in this interview?

Interviewee
Uh no I don't think so.

Researcher
Okay and do you have any suggestions to foster for your podcast host to foster a better connection or make a better podcast?

Interviewee
I think he should be more willing at times to um although he does let his co-workers share the space with him a lot and understand that it's I think he could get away with it more often of having a show entirely run by the others like once a week or something and that would cut his workload a little bit because I feel like now the fans have also started developing personal connections with his co-hosts and not just him because the more he hires them and the more they appear the more we have personal connections with them as well.

Researcher
Okay thank you that's all thank you for doing the interview.

Interviewee
Yes thank you for having me.

End of the interview

Appendix L: Reflexive Journal – Interview 2

June 25, 2024

This afternoon's interview went smoother than the one of this morning. Probably the more I do the interviews the more I'll get the hang of it and the interviews will flow more smoothly. When participants state their favourite team or athlete ask some follow up questions about that as this participant seemed to ease up once this topic was brought up. The wheel of emotion is a great way to get participants to specifically identify emotions however, this participant for example took to name more than 6 emotions before I stopped him. From the next interview on I will ask participants to name four emotions so that they can develop their answers further instead of just listing emotions.

It was nice to see one theme already repeated from the previous interview as this way later these can easily be linked. I noticed that when I took down notes the participant seemed more tense. From the next interview on I should repeat prior to the interview that the notes I take are solely to keep track of interesting notes or themes that I notice in the moment are recurring. I need to be careful when participants answer a future question earlier so as to not ask the question double. This happened once in this interview and it didn't cause too big of a problem as the participant simply re-stated his opinion however I should try to avoid doing it multiple times as the participants could get annoyed or tired.

The gut feeling question needed further clarification once more (just like the last interview) therefore either the question is still too difficult to answer or not phrased well enough. However once I did explain the participant was able to answer therefore it could just be a difficult question to answer. Participant did laugh multiple times during the interview therefore the setting was calming enough.

Appendix M: Raw data – Word Clouds
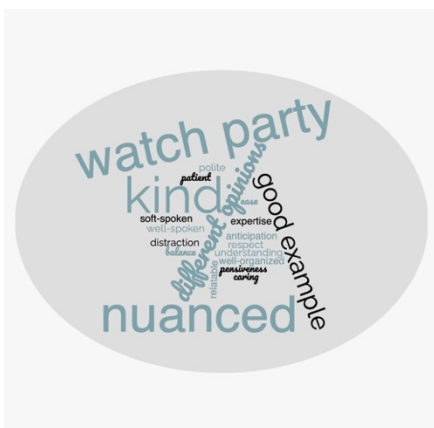

Participant 1 Transcript

Participant 2 Transcript

Participant 3 Transcript

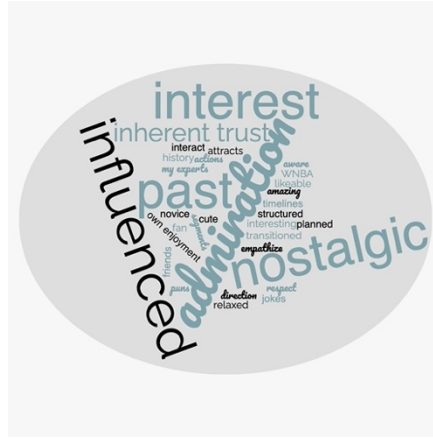**Participant 4 Transcript**

**Participant 5
Transcript**

Participant 6 Transcript

Participant 7 Transcript

Participant 8 Transcript

Participant 9 Transcript

Appendix N: Proof of Data Saturation

Table 4

Proof of data saturation

Summary of Interviews	
Participant	**New Topic Discussed**
Participant-1	-listening to this podcast is a good way to keep up with the team -easy format to digest that doesn't take up a lot of time -podcast is a mood enhancer -ability to keep fresh content intrigues the listener -with time passing listener is able to determine himself if podcast is reliable or not -when part of a larger network listener argues that it is harder to make a connection -personal anecdotes enhances trust -longevity of the podcast is important as it allows the listener to invest time since it'll be around for a long time -how guests are treated enhances trust -optimist view on things compared to negative enhances trust -relatable experiences enhance trust -ability to know when to joke and be serious, being genuine, consistent emotions -opinions backed up by evidence increase credibility and trust -tenure of being a host increases connection, consistent -podcast emulates the feeling of talking to a friend about sports -frequency is the main strength of this podcast -having some contact improves connection -associate frequency of listening to connection -podcast is seen as a form of educative content not entertainment -experiences linked to mutual supported team increase trust -doing more than the job required increased connection
Participant 2-	-podcast host is their favorite player so connection with the player is transferred to the podcast -hearing the host share the same emotions about a specific moment increases connection

	-podcast gives more knowledge about the host allowing for more connection -due to the nature of the podcast this requires commitment -uniqueness of the podcast engages the listener -relationship between the podcast hosts allows for authenticity and genuine -humor is a trait that the listener likes about the podcast host -expertise increases the credibility -reputation makes listener like the host more -financial status does not impact trust -podcast helps bridge the connection between listener and the sport -if character and integrity is questioned listener would not listen to the podcast -more informal conversational setting increases connection -inviting guests with a personal connection increases trust of the podcast hosts -speaking from personal experiences increases trust
Participant 3-	-being one of the first journalist to cover the sports during the early days increases the connection -comparing statements released by the different journalists and podcast hosts allows to listener to test for trust -showing that the host is doing the job not just for the money increases trust -the drive of the podcast host increases connection -a shared passion increases connection -respect is one of the main factors enabling the listener to have this as his favorite podcast -host allows easy access to resources, bridging the gap between athletes and fans -having the podcaster put some money made from the podcast back into the podcast increases trust -having the guests trust the host increases the trust of the listener as well -knowing more about the host increases the frequency of listening to the podcast -knowing how to navigate different relationships enhances connection

	-having the host trust the people he works with increases the trust with the listener
Participant-4	-relaxing vibe of the podcast makes the listener associate downtime with the podcast -being understand and having a fresh opinion increases the connection -having two different hosts with contrasting personalities listener is able to relate to a little bit of both of them by findings things from each -having similar personality types reinforces the listeners belief about what they say is correct -following the rise of the podcast and host by continuing to listen to him make the listener believe they made the right choice to listen to that podcast -how the listener likes the hosts personality makes them want to follow them on social media -anecdotes about the hosts covered the shared favorite sport enhances connection -understanding peoples different perspectives increases connection -dedication to the job increases trust for the listener -having more interactions with the host and listener i.e. via listener questions increases connection
Participant 5-	-having a podcast about your favorite team allows to share the same emotions about the team and build connection -being patient and organized are qualities that increases trust in the podcast host -listener believes no connection is needed for this to be his favorite podcast -podcast has a nice balance between the screening aspects of being a fan and informative -shared hobbies between listener and podcast host increases connection -balanced opinions about similar topics by just being one podcast host enhances trust - politeness of the host creates a more welcoming tone creating more trust - having the host be a good example for the listener enhances connection -having the podcast host be a fan and not a journalist makes it more relatable

	-hearing how the host is respected by his peers increases the trust
Participant 6-	-podcast host talk in a way that makes it easier to understand to easier for connection -due to the nature of the relationship (4 friends) makes it more relatable, as if listeners was doing this with their friends -podcasters strated did this the untraditional way causing more trust -familiarity enhances trust -unstructured way of the podcast increases connection -mention of topics that the listener would talk with her friends increases connection -relationship between hosts emulates listeners relationship with friends creating a connection -having similar expertise to the podcast host increases connection -experiences events live regarding the sport when the listener didn't bridges the knowledge gap and increases trust -listener has the podcast as part of their routine linking the podcast with tehir dialy life hence creating connection -confidence in the way they speak increases trust
Participant 7-	-inherent team connection between host and listener causes a bond -similar actions and behavior makes the listener feel more connected -scope of the podcast is limited therefore it is easier to trust the information -strong reputation among the fans of the same team so trust is built -part of a bigger network so had to be chosen to do this work and had to interview therefore listener trusts them -dependig on the podcast, knowing the podcast host is more or less important -creates the experience of after game talking with friends creating a connection
Participant 8-	-stage of fandom listener is at when listening to the podcast impacts connection -level difference in knowledge impacts the trust -talking about topics not often talked about in traditional media increases connection and trust

| Participant 9- | No new themes were discussed |

Appendix O: List of 1st Round of Coding

Table 5

List of 1st round of Coding

Quotes	First Round of Codes
'the second episode of the reactions and it kind of makes it feel like you have a watch party' 'as a fan you're just looking around for any help you can find and that podcast does a good job at either making you get your anger out or making you feel sad in a nicer way or just seeing the self-aligning of situations and looking more at the big picture instead of the individual game' 'Just having more nuanced perspectives on the players on my team' 'But it is really nice to hear opinions of fans who have been around longer than me' 'it's a good way of keeping up with the team' 'And that way, I get to just hear them talk about my team and the most interesting things that I would want to know mostly about basketball anyways' 'It would take away a part of me being a fan because then all the information that I get is gone. I just have to get it from other sources. But this way it was very concentrated' 'I would feel very sad because it's a nostalgic podcast for me because it's what got me into the sport' 'and just like feeling like I'm closer to the sport I love'	Podcast is preferred because it allows to keep up with the team
'an easy format to digest' 'the format is pretty loose so ...they let the conversation guide itself so every episode feels fresh'	Format
'the fact that they've been watching basketball before me gives me more trust yeah it makes me trust them more because they know more than I do they've been watching more than I have' 'they've been following the NBA for a long time so I think it's the how long they've been watching that's the experience that makes me believe in them' 'one of the most referenced NBA journalists in the last few years' 'how experienced the podcast host is at breaking news for the team and covering the team' 'Like when they do sometimes go opinion based and that's just opinions like obviously it's like they're still probably most the most reliable sources, but like opinions are opinions, preferences, a lot of times. But in terms of XS and OS technical stuff, yeah. Whatever they say builds' 'So I kind of have to take what they say for granted and just trust what they say because of the fact that they were there and I wasn't. So they have an inherent more knowledge than me' 'I guess because I started listening to them when I really had no knowledge, that for me, any experience would have been more experienced than me' 'how long of a tenure they've had as a reporter in the field'	Host is reliable because of experience
'joy, trust, admiration' 'trust consistency and reliability' 'anticipation and I feel admiration and serenity' 'anticipation, pensiveness and distraction' 'love, admiration, interest, anticipation, amazement' 'interest, anticipation and trust.' 'amazement, admiration, joy and trust' 'interest and admiration' 'amazement, vigilance, and admiration' 'interest, anticipation, and apprehension'	Emotions regarding the host
'really hard job to do to cover the team this closely and keep the content fresh and new when sometimes there might not be that much to talk about' 'that I really appreciate how diligently he's been reliably making these episodes for such a long stretch' 'must have been really hard as a journalist because some information is even hard to get for someone like him so you have to weigh your opinions what you know what you predict but it was all done very professionally' 'And seeing him navigate such touchy subjects and say things that others might be scared to say, makes me feel more connected to him.' 'Because amazement and admiration, because when they break down the complexity of the game itself and what a certain player or team does that might not be apparent to the eye, and they show you evidence of how it happens and why it happens, it's really surprising. And it's like, wow, there's this wealth of information that just went through my eyes when I watched the game and I wouldn't have been able to know it without this podcast'	Admiration towards the host due to difficulty in the job

'But this way they show that they care about that and they care about their job. Because they're willing to do this and it's not an easy thing to do at midnight, especially when one of them has kids.So it's not an easy thing to do. So I appreciate that and it makes me feel reliable because if you like what you do, there's a higher chance that you're willing to go the extra mile to get good information'	
'I think his patience and people skills.That makes me feel more connected to him because it just makes him come off as a kind and caring person' 'and their personalities don't clash but at the same time they're not exactly the same. So it's a good balance and mix' 'overall brightness in delivery of content' 'I would say his drive...you can tell that he really cares for it and he's very dedicated at his craft and he knows what he's doing' 'societally he'd want to have so he was willing to put in a lot of effort for something he didn't understand and that shows that he has a big heart' 'I like it because they have very different personalities to one another' 'think because they seem very down to earth and again, relatable'	Personality of the host
'makes me feel more connected to them because they're always quite upbeat and they're laughing and speaking in a very loud manner without being overbearing' 'having fun twists on segments or just delivering with an overall positive tone' 'so it wasn't perceived as false or too negative'	Optimistic view
'Personally for me, yes, because if I don't respect someone's opinion on the subject, then I wouldn't listen to them for a podcast' 'I think if you're not respected by the people you either work with or that are in your sphere, that just shows that either you're really not an expert and you don't know what you're talking about' 'I think for the sake of this podcast and how it really needs like a guiding force behind it, that's maybe more of a neutral tone' '? I think it's a definite added bonus to the podcast if you can see the host as someone you can look up to or take something away from' 'And especially when everybody else around him will be saying things that are petty, once again, neurotic or angry or very passionate. Having the transitional voice of the host be very polite and soft-spoken is very nice to hear. It makes you feel more at ease' 'I think he has a very overall polite tone, which makes me feel more connected to him because a polite tone to me is more welcoming.' 'a very patient person and a well-organized man' 'ability to know when to joke and when to be serious' 'think slightly positive emotions or more neutral emotions make me believe that the information is more reliable and more trustworthy' 'I think if they were things like, especially racial scandals, that would be pretty bad. Like it's more so to do with, I think the character and the integrity of the hosts like would be really put off by like some.' 'It means they're very confident in themselves and self-assertive' '? I think because they often apologize or say if they've made mistakes. So I like that about them because again, it makes them feel more real and attainable just like any other person. And it shows them that they care what people think and that they make mistakes because they're not, like they are experts, but they're not the sole truth in all of this' 'understanding and not quick to judge'	Quality needed for a host
'I wouldn't consider them a world-renowned football expert. The fact that they're consistently surrounding themselves with people with extreme knowledge in smaller niche areas, etc. It makes me feel good because it's like they've reached a high level of expertise, but they still want to learn more' 'opinions are backed up by empirical evidence as opposed to just being opinions on the story being broken'	Opinions are backed up by evidence due to expertise
'and it is my favorite podcast because of the fact that they kind of had similar expertise to me and that way I don't have to put too much effort into listening to what they say'	Expertise

'him being one of those media members makes me trust his opinion' 'He's been on very good relationships with former own player players, head coaching job, podcasting work for ESPN very like seems like a really like a credible person' 'I think he has 14 Best MMA Journalist Awards in a row, so I think that would make him an expert' 'Well, due to them not actually being accredited journalists or media members that follow the team all the time, I don't take the words as like gospel' 'that I know nothing of and they are said to be an expert, then I 100% just believe what they say about it. And I don't really doubt it because I don't see a reason of why I'd be lied to in that podcast. That doesn't seem to be their role to provide fake information.' 'But I think knowing that they've been chosen to represent the Miami Heat for this podcast, I think this makes me believe in them and makes me think they have a good reputation. And I think then I trust them more because like I said, they were chosen to do... They were chosen by other people to do this job'	Trust due to his job and qualifications
'A lot of times it's very emotional or done in exaggerated ways for either younger audiences or just for the sake of being more entertaining' 'tries to avoid conflict and not create it for the sake of um entertainment' 'even though you think it might get the most clicks or be juicy, because then you would ruin relationships and nobody would trust you anymore. So he had to put that trust over the sake of creating great content for his platform'	Doesn't take advanatge of people just for clicks
'they're like a seven because they've been following the team for a long time now' 'And they've been covering the team and football in this format for a good amount of time now that I would count as some sort of expertise to me' 'follows one team but he's followed them since their creation up until this day. So he's definitely an expert' 'they've managed to maintain this job as the host of the podcast for so long' 'him being around the UFC and MMA overall for a long time... I feel the respect towards him because of that'	Tenure of being a podcast host contributes to trust in what they say
'I think this intensifies my feelings towards him in a positive way because I can see the money being put back into the show, so the show's success allows it to have better access to different people around the world' 'to me it doesn't affect it at all i don't think financial abundance or lack thereof impacts my feelings towards a podcast host' 'no, not at all' 'I don't think it would be very nice to value an opinion based on how much money they make as opposed to something else' ''I think the better they can do financially, the better it'd be for the podcast because then the quality of the hosts and guests might improve from just fans to now we've gotten very famous journalists' ''But, and I feel like if they were had a higher financial status, they probably wouldn't be doing this podcast.And so I like that this way having a lower financial status, they take on this job of, yeah, working for a lower thing and just talk about the team. That way they can focus on that' 'they've come from humble beginnings so it seems like they wouldn't their personality wouldn't change as much because of their financial status so I feel like the podcast essence would remain the same no matter their financial status so I don't think it would impact my feeling towards them much'	Financial status doesn't impact feelings for host
'Because it kind of feels like it turns something that would have been a solo activity like watching a game by yourself into it tricks you into thinking there are more people with you' ''Distraction because I think that's what podcasts are to me' 'serenity….how it associates listening to that podcast with downtime and relaxing.' 'de-stressor' 'it always ups my moods' 'But just like, it feels like, you know, they're closer to me. And the game is closer to me and just more content than my favourite player' 'de-stressor because if I just focus on the podcast they just give off vibes really like life is everything's gonna be okay so just calming' 'if the podcast were removed ...but it would reduce my enjoyment of the sports and the team in general' 'And yeah, that way you kind of see all the spectrums regarding my team. And it kind of feels like I'm having, I guess, a debate between each of us. So it feels more like having an intellectual conversation.'	Benefits podcast gives you

Quote	Code
'So it kind of replaces the watching experience of the game, which helps since I can't watch the games live myself' 'it's just a widening of my understanding of football and also of how to express certain ideas or just making the games themselves more entertaining' 'Just improving my knowledge of the sport more thoroughly and getting to discuss it with my friends or something like that'	
'uh yeah if the podcast became something that would just cover the team on a monthly basis so if it was less frequent to me yeah if the frequency of the uploads lowered then i would probably stop listening' 'frequency of how much i've listened to the podcast hasn't changed'	Frequency of podcast make listener continue
'which I know I said knowledge about the podcast hosts isn't important but I feel like just the frequency of them being in my life that's what's important'	Associate frequency of listening to connection
'They're 30 to 45 minutes and they release one every day. I listen to them right in the morning where I wake up because also normally the games happen late at night in the US so I can't stay up to watch them. So that way when I wake up, I know the score, but I don't know anything that's happened about the game' 'Yeah because the podcasts are an hour long so that's more or less how long it takes me to get to university so normally I would always listen to them to go and to come back that way it's also a way to de-stress before I arrive at university and start studying' 'Yeah I feel like the more I've listened to them the more I've gotten to know their personality' 'made me feel like something was missing because I guess it's part of like a routine like I would always listen to it at a certain point during the week' 'but just seeing them more often makes me makes them be a presence in my life and has a routine so I think that's what's made the emotions evolve over time because I feel like that's the same with friendships or people in real life just seeing them more often will make you get closer to them'	Routine
'I would say they don't adhere to cultural societal norms of the podcast space because they like I said they didn't enter it via a traditional way and also they're not the traditional people that you see talk about this' 'I think this was one of the things that I also really liked about the podcast hosts was that most journalists or most sports podcasts or basketball podcasts talk about the NBA but not many talk about the WNBA. them too on the podcast they talk a lot about the WNBA' 'there is a tendency in some of the sports media to just focus on the bigger teams to give accurate breakdowns but they give very deep tactical analysis of countries like Venezuela or something that wouldn't make it far in the tournament but they still play the kind of football that deserves to be talked about' 'I would say they adhere to the same cultural societal norms that I adhere to so which is I guess is why I like their interactions is why I like listening to them because we have similar beliefs'	Cultural beliefs
'I feel like if there was a bigger hidden agenda like for example if all the ads were just for his friends or something that might make me feel somewhat differently about it because I think that comes off as more selfish in a way' 'that's not something you think of while listening to the podcast because it doesn't feel like they're restrained in any way' 'uh no not really i don't think it impacts how i feel towards them because um i understand it to be a normal consequence of things…this doesn't impact too much how the host expresses himself' 'no, oh no, I think its just funny' 'if they would have a hidden agenda, I think that would make me stop listening because you're doing this about my favorite team. So if you're really doing this for other motives and not just because you love the team or that's what you want to do, then it would decrease my trust and respect for them and also just feel betrayed because I thought you were doing this for the same reason that I like to listen to it'	Hidden agende doesn't impact trust as long as host is able to express himself

'I think the fact that the podcast is very structured such as it has many different segments that have like puns on basketball and that they always start in the same way and they have like the segment to start the middle segment the ending segment it feels it's very structured but that way it feels it's very planned out they know what they're going to say they've prepared beforehand that makes me believe okay I trust what they say because to have it this planned' 'Organizational structure is the fact that they upload every single day, like of the working day, right after the games. So that gives me confidence because that way they show, it kind of shows a love for the work because if they didn't like their work, they would have done it the day after and not care about their audience' 'It didn't feel like there was a fixed schedule as to what they were doing.' 'good job at coming up with uh little segments when things get stale that might be about the future of the team or the past of the team or overall nba stuff' 'and for how dense it is I appreciate it because you don't have time to waste with the podcast being not well organized if you're already focused on absorbing in so much new information' 'the podcast is fast spaced but still very well organized' 'How well he communicates through different mediums….. Those are three completely different tones to approach and different emotions to navigate in order to be entertaining but still reliable. And you can tell he's been doing it for a while because he does it very seamlessly'	Organization of the podcast
'But I just felt very similar to them in a way because it's just them talking' 'they they've never said something and gone back on it so that shows like okay whatever they say they truly believe it and so to me that's uh reliable not reliable in terms of their knowledge or expertise but reliable in terms of I can trust that what they say they mean' 'communication style being very polite and usually using a higher vocabulary register shows just makes me feel more confident in their ability because they sound more well-spoken about it so somewhere in your mind you make an association that oh they must know what they're talking about'	Communication style
'I would say that it is it is important only in the sense that if it comes up if your ethics are different' 'i think i definitely would i think for me this is a big uh a big area of importance if um if our morals and ethics aren't lined up then i don't think i can uh get positive enjoyments from the podcast' 'I don't like I I don't think we're similar in any way, not really so. And I don't really care so much. Like that's, you know, unless they're doing bad things or something like that. Then I probably care' 'Because although I think people are able to agree with each other despite different personalities and beliefs, but something like basic morals is too integral to how a person operates or reacts to the world for it to be different with someone you regularly interact in some way like a podcast host' 'Yeah I would think so because then you're just having disagreements in your head with the host if it's otherwise' 'I would care about the morals and ethics because maybe that would reflect the team because if the two people kind of chosen to represent my team have bad morals and ethics or ones that I really disagree of, I would associate it with the team' 'it's nice sometimes to listen to someone that has a different opinion or view from yourself but to listen to daily and weekly to have it in my routine I need to listen to someone that I agree with because of the and that way I can respect them because I truly understand their beliefs'	Ethics and beliefs
'I guess also a gut feeling that said maybe like okay since you've been listening to them for a long time and there was a reason you liked them so just give it a shot to see if you do like this new one and otherwise you can stop' 'No, wouldn't say so because it was 'cause. I normally consumed this kind of content anyways, so it's just like I saw on YouTube they were posting about it and I was like, yeah, I'm definitely gonna gonna be watching this' 'My gut feeling just told me that this seems to be like a tight-knit community of journalists that were all very a bit geeky and nerdy about football, yet very passionate' 'my instincts and gut feeling told me that this could be something for the long run' 'My gut instinct told me that the quality of reporting I got from the first time I listened to it would apply to other events throughout the year'	Instinct and gut feelings
'Yeah, I think they're quite funny, which in a very technical thing, you know, it's also quite enjoyable for them to to make a joke' 'I would say their humor, they're able to see the funny sides of storylines instead of spinning something that's negative'	Humour

'joy, because they always make me smile and laugh every time I listen to them because they always crack jokes and stuff'	
'I don't think knowing more about them would help me since probably because of the way that the podcast is set, it's set about things in the past. So it's not really focused on the present' 'So I really don't know much about them. But I think that's fine because the podcast isn't a talk show podcast. It's really a podcast just about the team.' 'No I don't think so I don't think knowing them impacts my listening habits because I think I listen to them because of their bond between them four not how well I know them' 'much feelings towards the podcast host even until really recently because he doesn't try to bring the attention to himself' 'OK, no it doesnt, OK.' 'because I think even if I knew them at a zero out of ten it wouldn't change because that's not I don't need to know them about them to be able to listen to them because I feel like how much I know about them how much they're willing to share about them is enough there's no need for more' 'Yeah, I would say I probably listen to it more frequently now than before, because I feel a stronger connection to the host now as compared to the past. I don't just see it as, let's listen to the latest MMA news, it's more of, let's listen to what Ariel has to say'	How much you know the podcast host
'Well, I think one of the genesis of the podcast they say is to break, I mean like industry standards because they often narrative driven content' 'Amazement and admiration, because these four guys, they didn't start off the traditional way to start a podcast or to go into the media.They really just were four friends, and they started this from their basement' 'not meeting industry standards.....but I don't think like for me I don't um that doesn't change my opinion about them because I understand that you can't do that or what you're improving your podcast that's also making it better for the the fans you're gonna ruin that by saying'	Break industry standards
'when they didn't have a reputation I liked it more...the fact that they didn't have a reputation before made the experience of listening just feel like they were just talking because they wanted to talk about basketball' 'But I think it doesn't really matter for them because I think the most people that listen to them are people like me that started listening to them when they just started watching basketball. So you don't need an expert in the field' 'I would say among the Miami Heat fans, these podcast hosts have a good reputation because there is the one chosen to report against the team. But among other teams or among the rest of the league, since there are many, many journalists in the NBA, less'	Reputation
'It gives you a feeling, okay, I'm listening to the right people because they're not doing this for the wrong reasons' 'Because I think it makes you feel like you're correct' 'Really good, because I think that's the righteous thing to do.' 'So it kind of makes you feel like you made the correct choice by listening to them.'	Gut Feeling
'Well, the thing with having two hosts you're able to find a little bit of yourself in the both of them' 'Yes, I think you're more likely to listen to people who are similar to you.' 'I think in this case, I don't think I would compare my personality. I don't think that matters because I think for the host, they should be more outgoing and more talkative than I guess me, that is the difference' 'I think with the comedian host, the fact that he always makes jokes, that aspect I can relate to them or it makes me feel emotionally connected because like that's also what I like to do.' 'Like I said that I didn't like him that much at the beginning, but then I learned to grow like to like him. So I think it showed that I don't need to like or have the same personality type with the podcast host.You just need to respect them and trust with what they say or like.' 'I think the fact that there are different personalities makes me want to listen to it more.'	Having similar personality types

Appendix P: List of 2nd Round of Coding

Table 6

List of 2nd round of Coding

Second Round of codes	12 trust types
emotions regarding the host admiration towards the host due to difficulty in the job	Affect based
Podcast is preferred because it allows to keep up with the team benefits podcast gives you	Calculus based
Format Organization of the podcast Communication style	System based
Personality of the host Optimistic view Quality needed for a host Doesn't take advanatge of people just for clicks Humour Having similar personality types	Emotional based
Host is reliable because of experience Opinions are backed up by evidence due to expertise Expertise Tenure of being a podcast host contributes to trust in what they say	Competence based
Trust due to his job and qualifications Financial status doesn't impact feelings for host Reputation	Cognition based
Frequency of podcast make listener continue Associate frequency of listening to connection Routine	Relational based
Cultural beliefs Hidden agende doesn't impact trust as long as host is able to express himself	Istitutional based
Ethics and beliefs	Integrity based
Instinct and gut feelings Intrinsic feeling of being correct	Intuitive based
How much you know the podcast host	Knowledge based
Break industry standards	Deterrent based

Appendix Q: Code Frequencies

Table 7

List of code frequences

Codes	code frequencies
emotions regarding the host	10
admiration towards the host for difficulty of the job	6
podcast s preferred because it allows to keep up with the team	9
benefit the podcast gives you	12
format	2
organization of the podcast	7
communication style	3
personality of the host	7
optimistic view	3
quality needed for a host	13
doesn't take advanatge of people just for clicks	3

humour	3
having similar personality types	6
behavior of host	1
host is reliable because of experience	9
opinions are backed up by evidence due to expertise	2
expertise	1
tenure of being a podcast host contributes to trust in what they say	5
trust due to his job and qualifications	6
financial status doesn't impact feelings for host	7
reputation	3
frequency of podcast make listener continue	1
associate frequency of listening to connection	2
routine	5

cultural beliefs	4
hidden agende doesn't impact trust as long as host is able to express himself	5
ethics and beliefs	7
instinct and gut feelings	5
intrinsic feeling of being correct	4
how much you know the podcast host	7
break industry standards	3

Appendix R: Investigator Triangulation Form

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

This study aims to provide insights into the factors affecting trust between podcast host and listeners in the sports podcasting industry, by studying podcasts users opinions and preferences.

Description of the Research

The research method selected for this research is a qualitative approach to study the factors affecting trust between proactively engaged sports fans and their podcast host. The research design uses a multi-case analysis.

Subject Participation

The participants of this study are sports fans who listen to sports podcasts frequently, are between the ages of 18-24 and students.

Triangulation to Prevent Researcher Bias

Please critically analyse my thematic analysis for my bachelor's thesis. The feedback is divided into: interview questions, set of codes and themes, thematic analysis process. For each of these sections there will be a strength (area that was done well) and area for improvement (opportunity to improve).

Authorization and confirmation	Initials
I authorize the use of the output of the researcher triangulation for further education, research, and publication of the findings.	
Voluntary Participation and Authorization I voluntarily agree to participate in this research program	
I understand that I will be given a copy of this signed Consent Form.	

Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

Version 0.4 - Last updated on August 13, 2024

Interview Questions Feedback

| Strengths	The questions try to get participants to answer questions reagrding trust
Opportunities	The participants might find it hard to answer some of the questions on the spot. Rephrasing some of the questions to make them easier could be done.

Set of Codes and Themes

Strengths	Once the second round of coding is done all the codes fit perfectly into the 12 trust types of the theoretical framework.
Opportunities	During the first round of coding there are a lot of quotes and themes that seem unnecessary. I would suggest eliminating the ones not related to the research.

Thematic analysis process feedback

Strengths	The thematic analysis method is well-aligned with the study's objectives, allowing for the identification and interpretation of key themes.
Opportunities	Make sure the process is clear and easy to follow.

Appendix S: Wheel of Emotions

Figure 3
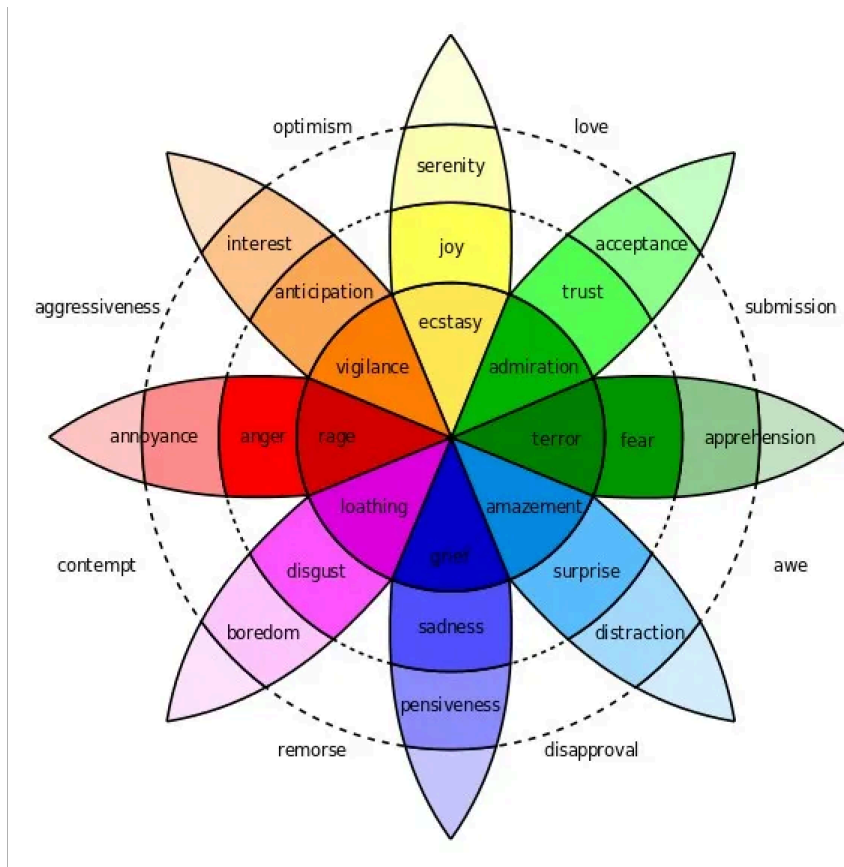
Note. This figure is shown during the affect based interview questions