

What Is...

Clarifying marketing topics and terms



Brand Safety

A Look Into Critical Issues
Impacting Marketers Today

February 2024



Brand Safety

Untangling and simplifying marketing topics and terms

A brand's reputation is one of its most valuable assets. According to a study conducted by Forbes and the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB), **20% of a company's enterprise value is based on their brand.**¹ A brand's reputation fuels how customers think and feel about your brand at every interaction and a positive reputation can attract new customers, drive customer loyalty and increase sales and revenue.

Brand Safety & Suitability strategies are essential to maintaining a positive brand reputation and protecting a company's revenue stream from losses that could be tied to inappropriate ad placements not aligned with a brand's values and belief system.

A lack of transparency and the proliferation of unregulated and unsafe content in digital environments has brought brand safety and suitability into focus. In fact, **brand marketers and agencies professionals ranked 'ads delivered alongside risky content or misinformation' as their top challenge for digital media** going into 2024.²

Brand Safety & Brand Suitability Defined

Brand Safety

Broad guidelines used to ensure an ad will not appear adjacent to or in a context that can **damage an advertiser's brand.**³

Brand safety solutions enable a brand to avoid content associated with hate speech, violence, illegal drug consumption and other topics or behaviors which are deemed inappropriate for any advertising.⁴

Brand Suitability

Specific targeting parameters unique to each brand that are determined by its values.⁴

Brand suitability solutions enable a brand to *avoid* content that is inappropriate for its unique set of values (but may be appropriate for another brand) or *allow* content that is aligned with a brand based on its context, sentiment, tone and other qualifying factors.⁴

Sizing the Importance of Brand Safety

80%

of marketing professionals believe **brand safety is a major concern**⁵

+233%

lift in conversions for brand safe impressions vs. non brand safe impressions⁶

Common Tactics for Implementing Brand Safety & Suitability

Basic Brand Safety Tactics



Blocklist / Blocking: Preventing an advertisement from appearing in, or near, a piece of content that has been deemed objectionable or inappropriate. Can include a list of domains, keywords and content that advertisers have deemed unacceptable to appear in or near.



Safelist: A list of pre-approved domains or keywords that a brand finds acceptable, or safe, for its advertising to appear on or near, regardless of other brand safety settings that may already be in place

- *Related Terms:* Allow List, Inclusion List

Advanced Brand Safety Tactics



Contextual Targeting: Ad placements that are based on the type of content within the media environment. Implemented by identifying and matching categories or keywords that are relevant to the brand/product advertising.



Semantic Targeting: A more advanced form of contextual targeting, that involves the use of machine learning to understand the meaning of content, rather than just identifying matching keywords on a page.

Impact of Brand Safety for Marketers

58%

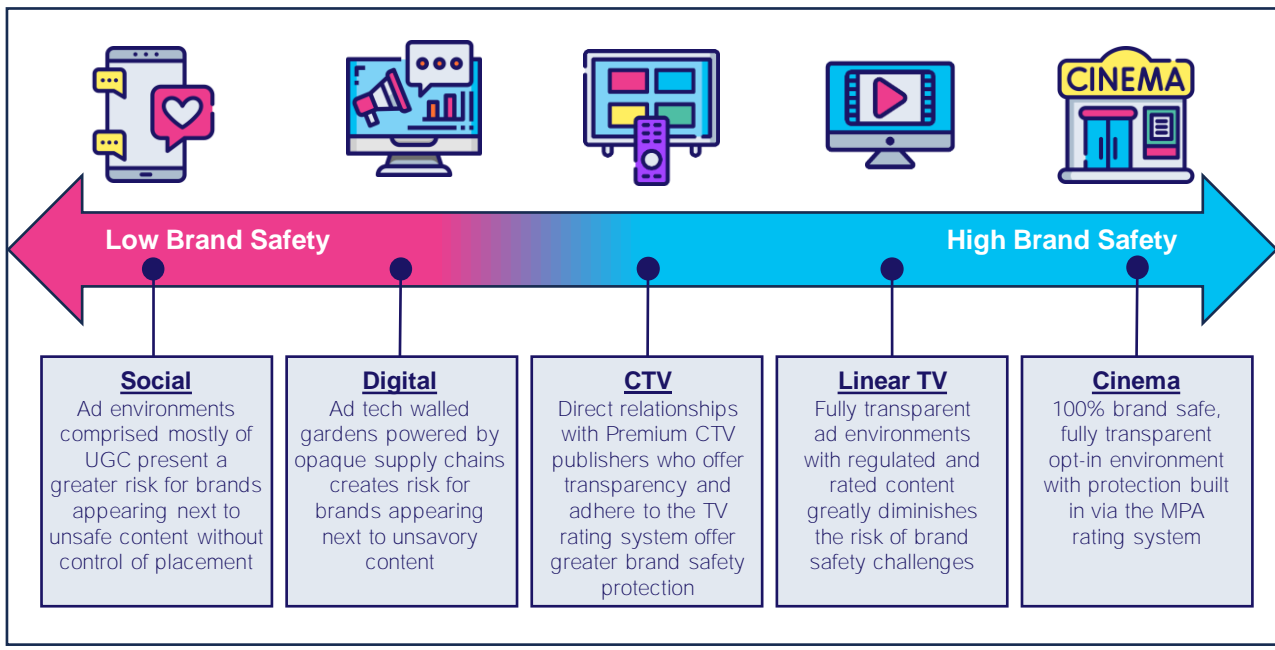
of senior advertising executives say they would **pay a premium for safe placements**⁵

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'Spectrum of Risk' to Brand Safety Issues Across Platforms



Parental Guidelines and Rating System for Long-Form Premium Video Content

The TV Rating System⁷

Established by the television industry, The TV Parental Guidelines help parents understand show content, **allowing marketers to target ads safely and appropriately**

Audience: Indicates the appropriate audience for a particular program

Content Descriptor: Indicating what a show may contain

TV PG
DSVLFV

TV Y All Children

TV Y7 Directed to Older Children

TV Y7 FV Directed to Older Children- Fantasy Violence

TV G General Audience

TV PG Parental Guidance Suggested

TV 14 Parents Strongly Cautioned

TV MA Mature Audience Only

Content descriptors

D – Sexual or suggestive dialogue (not used with the TV-MA rating)
L – Coarse or crude language **S** – Sexual situations
V – Violence
FV – Fantasy violence (exclusive to the TV-Y7 rating)

The Film Rating System⁸

Established by the Motion Picture Association in 1968, the rating system was created to help parents make informed viewing choices for their children, **enabling advertisers to place ads before a suitable audience while avoiding brand safety issues**

<p>G General Audiences</p> <p>All Ages Admitted</p>	<p>Nothing that would offend parents for viewing with children</p>	<p>Parental Strongly Cautioned</p> <p>PG-13 Check this Box for Specific Content Information</p> <p>Some Material May Be Inappropriate for Children Under 13</p>	<p>Parents are urged to be cautious. Some material may be inappropriate for pre-teenagers</p>
<p>Parental Guidance Suggested</p> <p>PG Check this Box for Specific Content Information</p> <p>Some Material May Not Be Suitable for Children</p>	<p>Parents urged to give 'parental guidance.' May contain some material parents might not like for their young children</p>	<p>Restricted</p> <p>R Check this Box for Specific Content Information</p> <p>Under 17 Requires Accompanying Parent or Adult Guardian</p>	<p>Contains some adult materials. Parents are urged to learn more about the film before taking their young children with them</p>



High Profile Instances of Brand Safety Issues on Major Digital Platforms

Major U.S. Brands Ads Shown Before YouTube ISIS Videos⁹ (2015)

Several major U.S. companies, including Proctor & Gamble, Toyota, and Anheuser-Busch, were unaware that their ads were featured before YouTube videos associated with the militant group, the Islamic State (ISIS) which prompted YouTube to remove the ads and videos due to policy violations.

Brands Yank Ads from Google's Platform Amid Extremist Video Controversy¹⁰ (2017)

Google faced a severe backlash as major brands like AT&T and Verizon halted advertising on YouTube after their ads were shown alongside extremist content. Amid calls for greater accountability, Google apologized and stated that they would offer more control to advertisers as the industry continued to grapple with transparency issues among the digital walled gardens.

Major Advertisers Cease Spending on 'X' Following Controversial Comments and Ad Placements¹¹ (2023)

After antisemitic conspiracy theories were promoted by Elon Musk on the platform and ads appeared next to pro-Nazi content, advertisers from Adobe, University of Maryland Football, New York University Langone Health, Apple, IBM, Coca-Cola, Uber, Airbnb and more paused spending on X and stopped using the app as a brand platform.

Meta Caught Placing Corporate Ads Next to 'Clearly Illegal' Content¹² (2024)

Meta is accused in a New Mexico lawsuit of displaying ads from major brands like Tinder and Walmart alongside "clearly illegal" content, including child sexual abuse material and violence against women. The suit also raises concerns about Instagram's child safety measures and highlights potential faults in Meta's platform tools.

Consumer Outlook on Brand Safety

nearly
90%

of consumers feel that **brands bear responsibility** for ensuring their ads run beside content that is safe¹³

82%

of consumers say it is important that a brand's ads appear on **content that is safe, accurate and trustworthy**¹³

67%

of consumers would be likely to **stop using the brand** if they viewed the brand's digital advertising beside false, objectionable or inflammatory content¹³

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Mitigating the risk of Brand Safety begins with the partnerships you make

Establishing and activating direct relationships with trustworthy and premium publishers can reduce and even eliminate brand safety risk

Examples of Brand Safety Focused Companies

As Brand Safety & Suitability concerns increase due to rising instances, so does the number of companies who are working to protect brands



Learn more about these Brand Safety & Suitability providers by clicking the logos above

Brand Safety Floor and Suitability Framework

Brand Safety Content Categories¹⁴

Content not appropriate for any advertising support

Global Alliance
for Responsible
Media

GARM

- ▶ Adult & Explicit Sexual Content
- ▶ Arms & Ammunition
- ▶ Death, Injury or Military Conflict
- ▶ Online Piracy
- ▶ Terrorism
- ▶ Crime & Harmful Acts to Individuals and Society / Human Rights Violations
- ▶ Hate Speech & Acts of Aggression
- ▶ Debated Sensitive Social Issue
- ▶ Obscenity and Profanity
- ▶ Spam or Harmful Content
- ▶ Illegal Drugs / Tobacco/e-cigarettes/ Vaping/Alcohol

The Global Alliance for Responsible Media (GARM) developed a **Brand Safety Floor and Suitability Framework** for consistent and understandable language to help address the challenge of harmful online content that persists across the digital supply chain. The suitability framework further addresses the nuance of the brand safety floor by further elaborating and defining aspects that are High, Medium or Low Risk.

Industry Perspectives

1. “The **first step is for brands to define safety and suitability standards**...These standards should build on **core safety standards** to include brand suitability. Brands should then syndicate standards with media partners and technology vendors to **ensure transparency around expectations**.”- *Marc Brodherson, Senior Partner, McKinsey & Co.*¹⁵
2. “**Brands want safety - always**. The business leaders running brands have a fiduciary responsibility to ensure the safety of brands. That means **avoiding risks and not courting controversy** that could **hurt a brand's financial position**. Media that expose brands to risks will be avoided as a matter of good business. It's not about positions on social issues. It is **simply about keeping brands safe from financial risks**.” – *J. Walker Smith, Knowledge Lead, Kantar*¹⁵
3. "The industry continues to transform at break-neck speed toward a more data-driven, automated approach to buying and selling advertising...As this transformation accelerates, **the value of trusted, transparent and engaging viewing environments has never been more important**." - *James Rooke, President, Comcast Advertising*¹⁶
4. “Working media cannot afford to chase audiences into dark alleys, especially in an uncertain economy. In 2024, there should be **no ambiguity** in upholding this standard of investment. In a modern media planning and buying strategy, **advertisers shouldn't be taking any risks around fraudulent inventory, brand-impairing adjacencies or opaque sales channels**.” – *John Vilade, Head of Sales, Premion*¹⁷

How to Navigate Brand Safety & Suitability:

As the advertising ecosystem continues to evolve, so too are the advertisers who are leaning further into brand safety and suitability strategies. **New learnings and technologies are empowering marketers** to go beyond simply avoiding negative associations by leveraging brand suitability techniques that ensure their brand messaging resonates accurately and effectively with the appropriate audience in the right context.

Even with greater controls around brand safety and suitability now available, **brands should be vigilant and adopt a full picture approach to protecting their reputation**.

Transparency First

Partner with trustworthy, transparent publishers to ensure you know exactly where your ads will run and not leave brand safety up to chance. Transparent publishers provide a full picture look at where your ad will appear and will verify your ad landed where it was intended.

Focus on Quality

Prioritize premium quality environments that publish content based on a clear and regulated ratings system. Ratings guidelines enable marketers to place ads in suitable content that keep their brand safe.

Leverage Innovative Technologies

New brand safety and suitability technologies can help brands to implement a more tactical approach to protecting their reputations. Innovations in targeting that utilize AI and ML technologies are enabling brands to align their message with relevant content based on aspects such as tone and sentiment.

Related Terms

- **Ad Experience:** A consumer's experience of ads in media environments, including percentage of ads versus content, the size and format of each ad, and the functionality of each ad.
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** Machines or computers that can learn and make decisions in a human-like way through intelligence simulation. A common example would be text prediction on your cellphone.
- **Brand:** A name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that distinguishes one seller's good or service from those of other sellers.
- **Brand Compliance:** internal strategies brands use to ensure that their messaging doesn't negate or stray from the business's core brand standards, values, and visual identity.
- **Brand Identity:** Unique characteristics that influence a brand's perceived personality, appearance and behavior. A brand's identity encompasses tangible and intangible elements, including its history, name, personality, and visual identity.
- **Brand Partners:** A mutual agreement between two or more businesses or organizations with the purpose of helping one another to increase brand exposure, customer loyalty and sales.
- **Brand Risk:** The potential harm that a company's reputation and financial performance may face as the result of negative public opinion, regulatory actions or other external factors.
- **Conscious Media Investment:** deliberately choosing to invest in quality and inclusive media and actively ensuring they defund media that promote dangerous narratives.
- **Consumer Privacy Issues:** A variety of social, legal and political issues that can arise from the interaction of the public's potential expectation of privacy and the collection and dissemination of data by businesses or merchants.
- **Content IDs:** Digital fingerprints that are used to classify the topic(s) and characteristics of a program. These can be used for both targeting and content management.
- **Context:** Encapsulates the full environment where an ad appears and includes media type, platform, content type time, landing pages, program, proximity to other advertising and others.
- **Digital Ad Fraud:** Refers to an individual, group or organization maliciously and intentionally falsifying engagement with a digital advertisement, often by impersonating human behaviors or knowingly miscalculating measurement metrics (e.g., fake clicks, overcounting users, cookie stuffing, domain spoofing, etc.)
- **Emotional Analysis:** A way to judge the emotional tone of the context in which an ad is placed.
- **Fake News:** Any website or web page that is actively creating and/or distributing deliberately inaccurate content (including misinformation or disinformation) as factual news.
- **Harmful Content:** Non-safe content which can damage brand reputation and trust if advertised alongside.

Related Terms (continued)

- **Inventory Quality Content:** A set of attributes that differentiate types of content, enabling advertisers to make educated choices about the ad placements they are buying. Content classifications include categories such as "Unmoderated User Generated Content," "Breaking News," and "Mature Audiences."
- **Media Transparency:** full disclosure of relevant information related to the purchase of ads including placement, placement type, context, platform, landing pages, media type and other relevant information which is fully disclosed or not intentionally obscured. This information is required for informed and intelligent decision-making, so that an advertiser has full access to the information necessary to assess the value of a media purchase and the associated margin.
- **Machine Learning (ML):** The practice of teaching computers to recognize patterns through data and algorithms. Machine learning systems can be prescriptive or allow for self-learning and evolution.
- **Private Marketplace (PMP):** A programmatic auction that offers real-time-bidding in a closed, invitation-only auction. When handled appropriately by responsible sell-side partners, it can offer assurance to buyers that they are not buying fraudulent inventory and it can also offer a "first look" opportunity into quality – and sometimes exclusive or rare - inventory that cannot be found in the open auction.
- **Programmatic Advertising:** The automated buying and selling of media, as opposed to more traditional methods of transacting that rely heavily on manual data entry in multiple systems by multiple people and tools external to campaign planning and execution systems, such as Excel. In programmatic advertising, buyers and sellers can take advantage of "pipes" connecting many platforms across the ecosystem to remove some of the inefficiencies of the process.
- **Programmatic Direct:** The striking of a deal between a brand or agency and publisher, rather than the buyer going through intermediaries. The deal could be for a guaranteed, fixed budget, or it could be for a non-guaranteed budget for an agreed upon bid floor. The key benefits of a buyer working directly with a publisher, as opposed to buying indirectly, is reduced "tech tax" - the amount of budget that goes towards paying various intermediaries - which puts more budget toward working media and the knowledge that the inventory being purchased is clean and fraud-free.
- **Revenue Reclamation:** The process of recouping advertising expenses due to misalignment, through improper ad placement, questionable content or incorrect ad metrics.
- **Sensitive Topics / Sensitive Social Issues:** Areas of content in which brands should consider the impact of advertising their product or service against.
- **Sentiment Analysis:** The process of identifying and extracting subjective information from text, allowing advertisers to gauge how their brand or advertising is perceived.
- **Tracking Pixel:** A 1x1 pixel-sized transparent image that provides information about an ad's placement, such as whether an ad has been served, the domain the ad served on, whether the ad was viewable.
- **Viewability:** A metric that measures the number of impressions viewed by real, human users. A served impression does not necessarily count as a viewed impression, as it could be served outside a live window or served to a bot. The Media Rating Council publishes an official industry definition of what should be counted as a viewable ad, based on the percentage of the creative and the duration in seconds that it is in an active browser or screen.

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Interested in understanding the ramifications of a non-transparent ad marketplace?

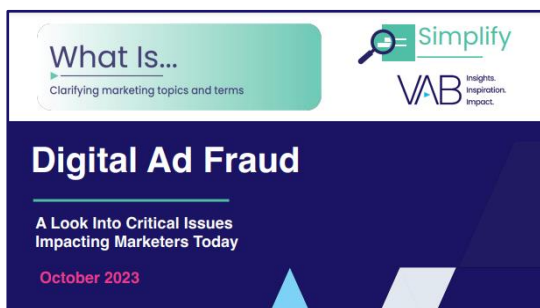
Download **'Hidden Costs'** below to learn more about the three critical business impacts that digital ad fraud can have on brands



Click the cover above to download

Want to learn more?

Click on the images below for the content



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Looking for industry terminology? VAB's [advertising glossaries](#) cover topics like **AI & Machine Learning, **Web3**, **audience-based buying**, **video measurement**, **streaming** and **data**.**

About VAB

VAB plays a dual role in the video advertising industry. We are leading the change to bring about a more innovative and transparent marketplace. We also provide the insights and thought leadership that enables marketers to develop business-driving marketing strategies.

Drawing on our marketing expertise, we **simplify** the complexities in our industry and **discover** new insights that **transform** the way marketers look at their media strategy.

We are committed to your business growth and proud to offer VAB members, brand marketers and agencies **complimentary access** to our continuously-growing Insights library. **Get immediate access** at [theVAB.com](#).

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