

February 2026

what marketers are asking



“How many people online are fake?”

VAB



Over 50% of internet traffic comes from non-human sources

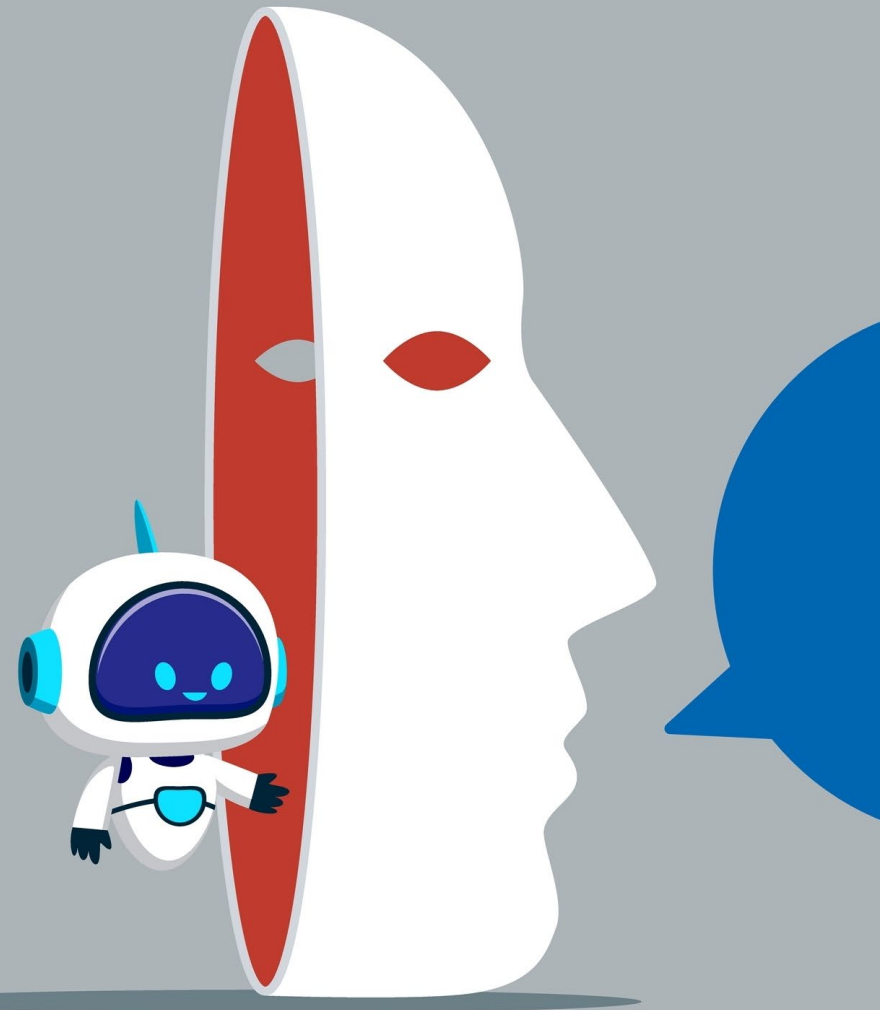
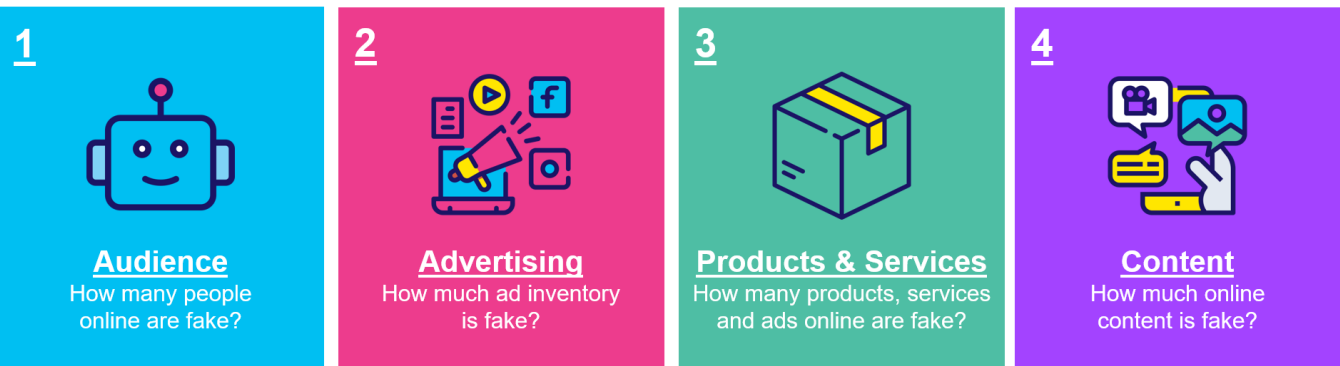
The internet is facing a crisis of reality and much of what is online today - whether its audiences, advertising, products & services and even content itself - **is not real.**

Bot-driven traffic, ad fraud, fake products, consumer scams and low-quality AI-generated material shape large portions of the online landscape and create an illusion of scale while fostering questionable ad environments even among the largest digital platforms.

In this piece, we size the 'audience' of non-human traffic and examine the proliferation of 'bad bots' across major online platforms.

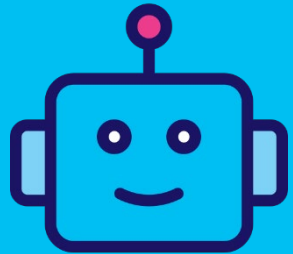
Download our full report '[The Illusions of the Internet](#)' to learn more

A Crisis of Reality: When It Comes to the Internet, How Much of it is Fake?



How many people online are fake?

1



Audience

How many people online are fake?

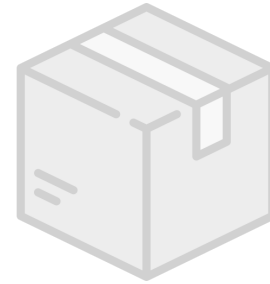
2



Advertising

How much ad inventory is fake?

3



Products & Services

How many products, services and ads online are fake?

4



Content

How much online content is fake?

Uncovering the Realities of Audiences on the Internet

1

Audience

How many people online are fake?

Bots & 'Bad Bots'

Proliferation of 'Bad' Bots

Fake Accounts on Social Media

2

Advertising

How much ad inventory is fake?

Opaque Ad Placements

Cost of Digital Ad Fraud

Ad Fraud Impact on Brands

Programmatic Ad Fraud

App Store Ad Fraud

Ad Blocking

3

Products & Services

How many products, services and ads online are fake?

Consumer Scam Impact

Cost of Social Media Scams

Social Media Scam Ads

Platform Revenue from Scams

Counterfeit Goods

Online Marketplace Scams

4

Content

How much online content is fake?

Scams and Spam

AI Slop

Deepfakes

'Made-For-Advertising' Sites

Pirated Content

Over half of internet traffic comes from non-human sources, with much of that invalid traffic coming from 'bad bots'

51%
of internet traffic comes from **non-human sources**

37%
of internet traffic comes from **'bad bots'** that are prone to a host of **malicious activities***

What is General Invalid Traffic (GIVT)?
Traffic generated from **non-threatening sources** such as measurement and analytics crawlers, data and brand safety bots or traffic from unknown (but real) browsers.

What is Sophisticated Invalid Traffic (SIVT)?
Malicious web traffic generated to click/view ads to increase ad revenue, hijack devices, manipulate location data, spoof domains and more.

Source: Imperva, *Bad Bot Report 2025*, April 2025. *Bad bots execute tasks like data scraping, credential stuffing, account takeovers, transaction fraud, denial-of-service attacks and other security, performance and business outcomes.

The persistent proliferation of bots is a problem across nearly every major digital platform including Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube and Wikipedia

 May 20, 2025

95 Million Bots: One in Ten Instagram Accounts Is Fake

 November 4, 2025

Cybercriminals have built a business on YouTube's blind spots

 Jan 22, 2026

Experts warn of threat to democracy from 'AI bot swarms' infesting social media

 February 12, 2025

A Platform Problem: Hate Speech and Bots Still Thriving on X

 August 5, 2024

WhatsApp bans 6.8m accounts linked to scam

 April 2, 2025

Wikipedia Faces Flood of AI Bots That Are Eating Bandwidth, Raising Costs

 May 28, 2024

How Fake Accounts and Bots Are Ruining Facebook

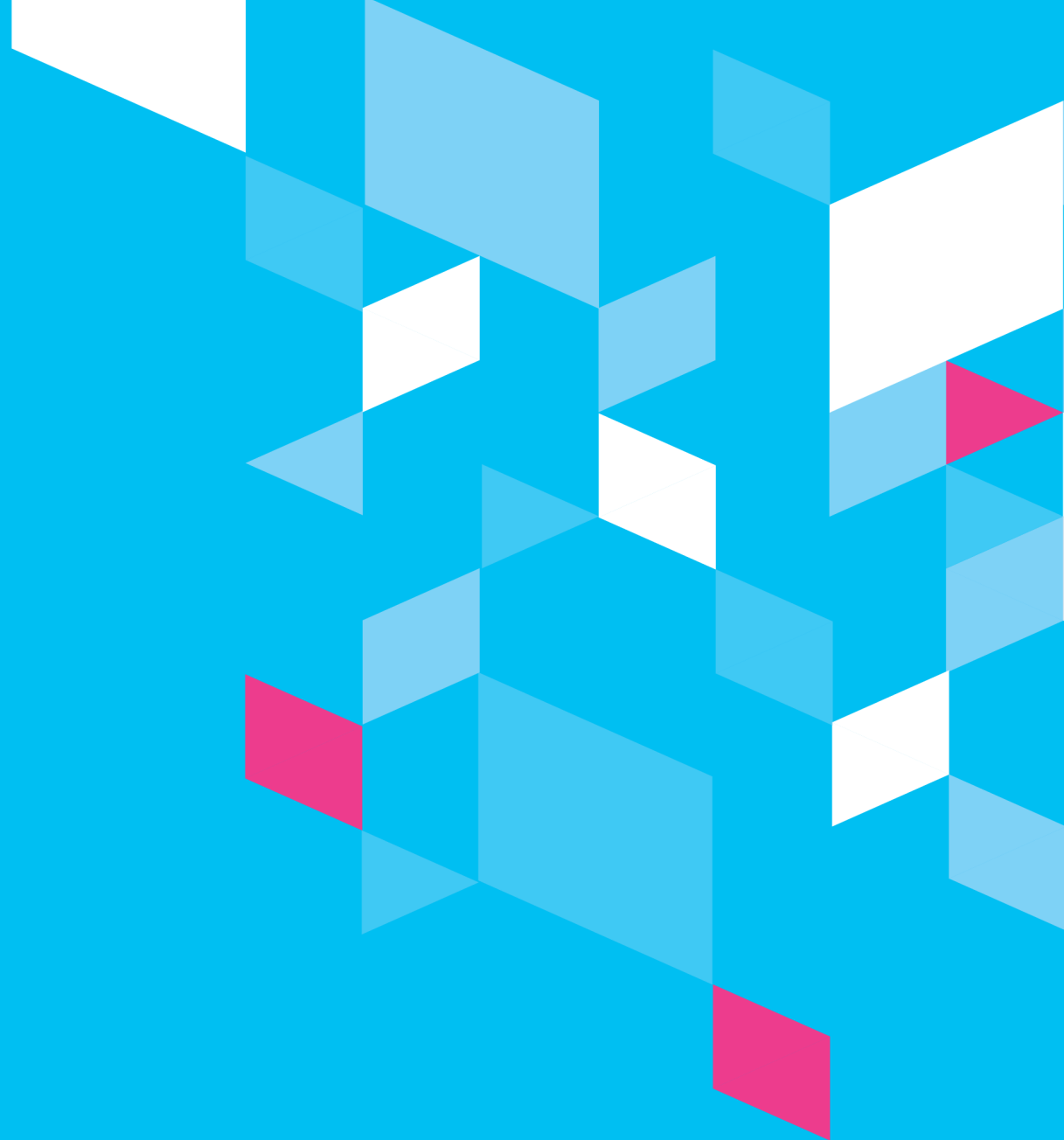
The problem of bots stands out on Facebook where the number of fake accounts banned annually is equivalent to over half the world's population

Banned Fake Facebook Accounts' Share of Global Population

	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>
Fake Accounts Banned by Facebook	3.34B	6.50B	5.80B	6.50B	5.80B	2.62B	4.33B
Global Population*	7.73B	7.81B	7.89B	7.95B	8.02B	8.09B	8.16B
Fake Accounts Banned % Share of Global Population	43%	83%	74%	82%	72%	32%	53%

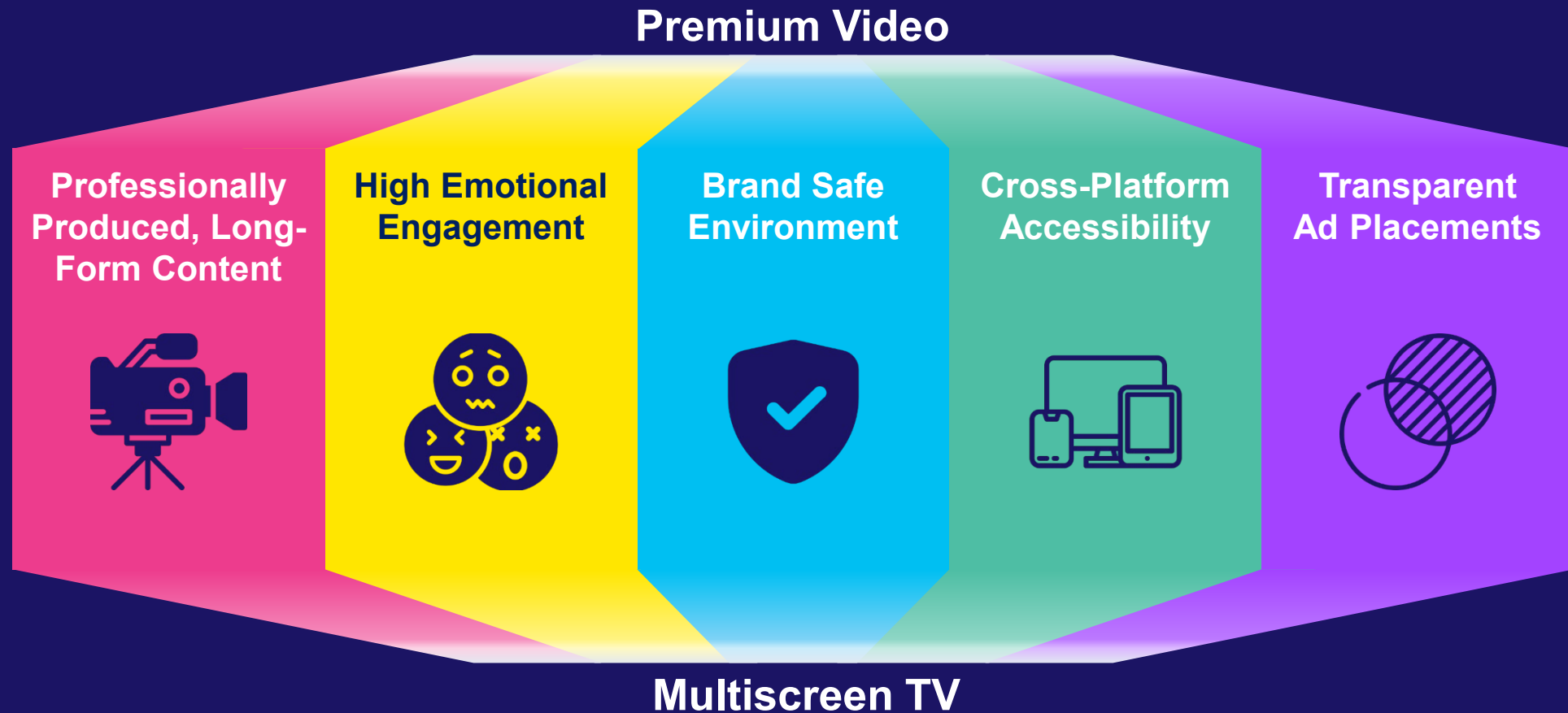
Source: VAB analysis of Meta Transparency Center, Fake Accounts – Facebook, Accounts Actioned, as of 5/15/25. *VAB analysis of United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024), World Population Prospects: The 2024 Revision, custom data acquired via UN Data Portal – Population Division website. 'Accounts Actioned' refers to fake accounts banned. [To learn more about fake accounts, click here to download 'How Many Fake Accounts Does Facebook Remove Each Year?'](#)

By contrast, Premium Video delivers
real audiences at scale in trusted,
high-quality environments



The defining pillars of Premium Video align directly with the marketer benefits of Multiscreen TV

Professionally produced, long-form content with high emotional engagement in a brand safe environment regardless of platform or device and through transparent media partners

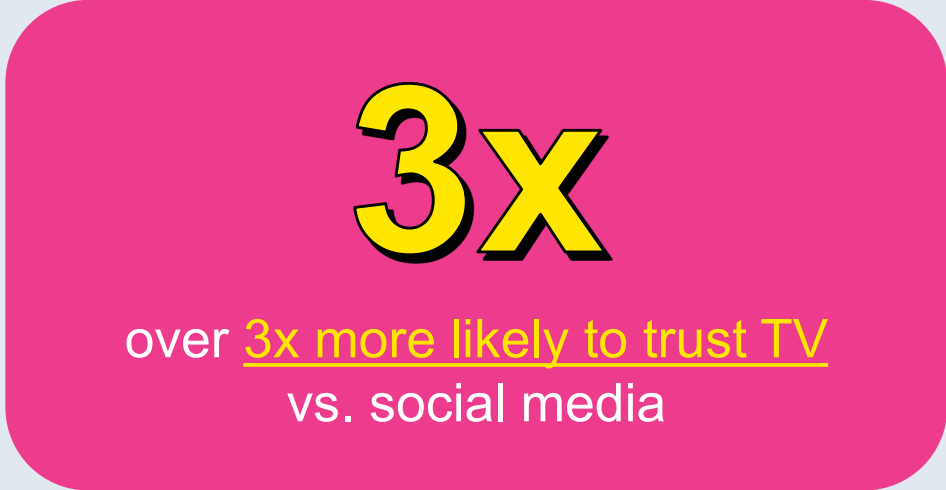


Multiscreen TV is the most trusted media platform by consumers, who are also three times more likely to trust TV over social media

“Trust is very important for brand marketing. It’s the driver for purchasing behavior for most consumers. A lot of the time, trust is going to play a different role in the relationships consumers have with brands.”

- Matt Prince, Head of PR, Taco Bell
Taco Bell's Matt Prince on how trust ties brands to new consumers, WARC, 9/24/24

TV is the #1 trusted media platform among adults, and they are...



Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons Fall 2025 USA Study, A18+. Q: What is the media you trust the most? (pick one: TV, radio, podcasts, mobile internet, internet on computer, social media, magazines, newspapers).

Multiscreen TV platforms give marketers an opportunity to reach real, verified human audiences at scale in premium environments

Monthly P2+ Viewers and Reach % on Ad-Supported TV

National Broadcast & Cable TV, December 2025

249 Million

P2+ viewers

77%

P2+ reach

Source: VAB analysis of Nielsen, NPower Reach & Frequency Time Period Report, 12/1/25-12/31/25, Updated Big Data + Panel, Live+7, P2+, Sources: Ad-Supported National Broadcast & Cable TV.

Marketers should always ask questions of their media partners to ensure their ads are placed in trusted, transparent and accountable platforms

A graphic with a dark blue background and a pink-to-purple gradient triangle on the left containing the word "Know" in white. The rest of the triangle is filled with a pattern of smaller triangles.

Know precisely where your video ad campaign is running and exactly who is watching it.

A graphic with a dark blue background and a yellow-to-green gradient triangle on the left containing the word "Stop" in white. The rest of the triangle is filled with a pattern of smaller triangles.

Stop considering any ad video “premium” that lacks a fully transparent ad process.

A graphic with a dark blue background and a teal-to-cyan gradient triangle on the left containing the word "Insist" in white. The rest of the triangle is filled with a pattern of smaller triangles.

Insist on campaign transparency from all your video ad partners.

A graphic with a dark blue background and a light blue-to-cyan gradient triangle on the left containing the word "Trust" in white. The rest of the triangle is filled with a pattern of smaller triangles.

Trust multiscreen TV to always be fully transparent, accurate and accountable.

Download our [full guide](#) to learn more about the realities of multiscreen TV's 'Premium Video Advantage' for marketers

Transform

Marketer's Guide
Innovative thinking to make a lasting impact on your business growth.

The Illusions of the Internet
Uncovering the Fallacies & Realities of Audience, Advertising & Content

VAB Insights. Inspiration. Impact.

The Realities of Multiscreen TV's 'Premium Advantage' for Marketers

Uncovering 20 Realities Across the Four Main Components of the Internet

1 Audience How many people online are fake?	2 Advertising How much ad inventory is fake?	3 Products & Services How many products, services and ads online are fake?	4 Content How much online content is fake?
31% of internet traffic is non-human, 37% is 'bad bots'	\$44.8 billion is spent on 'undefined platforms' through Google	72% of adults have experienced at least one online scam or attack	33MM videos removed from YouTube for spam, misleading and scams
One in 10 Instagram accounts are fake (93 Million bots)	Over \$1 out of every \$5 spent on digital ads is fraudulent	\$1.9B in consumer losses from social media scams in 2024	Although difficult to quantify, the internet has been flooded by 'AI slop'
4.3 billion fake accounts were banned by Facebook in 2024	Social media is most vulnerable to fraud, says 59% of ad industry	70% of new FB & Insta advertisers were promoting scams or bad goods	33% of consumers believe they have been targeted by a deepfake scam
	26% of programmatic digital ad spend is on unproductive media	\$16 Billion of Meta's revenue came from scam ads and banned goods	\$1.7B estimated ad spend lost to 'Made-For-Advertising' sites in 2024
	One fraud led to 50MM mobile app downloads across 180 scam apps	21% of online counterfeit goods cases now start on social media	\$30B in lost U.S. revenue from piracy & illegal streaming
	45% of consumers have installed or used an ad blocker	TikTok Shop faces deluge of 70MM products that violated its terms	

Multiscreen TV's 'Premium Advantage'

- \$100+ Billion annual investment in truly premium video content
- 75% of all adults say they love watching TV and streaming content
- The #1 most trusted media platform by consumers
- Habitually reaches real, verified human audiences at scale every day
- Massive opportunities to reach real audiences in transparent media environments
- Advertising environment provides a 'halo effect' that uplifts brand reputation

PAGE 38 This information is exclusively provided to VAB members and qualified marketers

Click here to download 'The Illusions of the Internet'

Download our three other 'What Marketers Are Asking' reports based on [The Illusions of the Internet](#)



How many people online are fake?



How much ad inventory is fake?



How many products, services and ads online are fake?



How much online content is fake?

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.**

