

February 2026

what marketers are asking



“How much online ad inventory is fake?”

VAB

Over \$1 out of every \$5 spent on digital ads is fraudulent

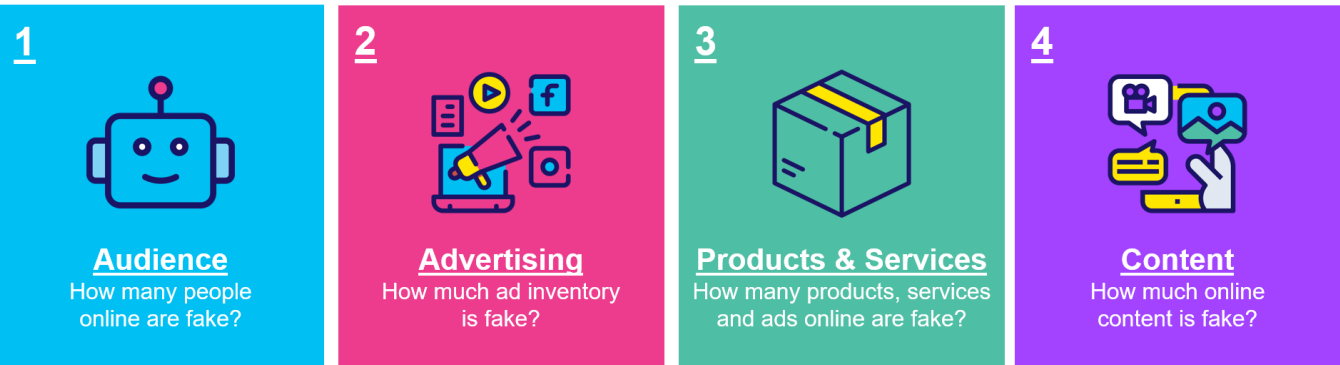
The internet is facing a crisis of reality and much of what is online today - whether its audiences, advertising, products & services and even content itself - **is not real.**

Brands and consumers are both deeply affected by the persistent issues on the internet including massive deceptions and online fraud, which collectively adds up to over \$100 billion in losses to bad actors, scammers and criminals across websites and social media platforms

In this piece, we examine the transparency issues surrounding opaque ad placements and size the growing digital ad fraud marketplace

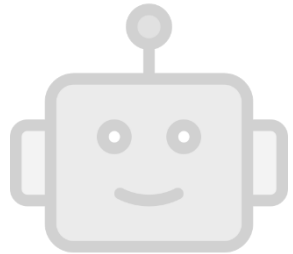
Download our full report '[The Illusions of the Internet](#)' to learn more

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



How much online ad inventory is 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 Advertising 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

Ad placements masked under 'audience networks' or 'other' line items make it difficult for marketers to understand what is real in their media buys

Google's ad revenue from 'undefined platforms'* is more than global print media spend and much more than outdoor or radio
(Estimated Global Advertising Revenues by Media - 2025)



*Google Network & 'Other'

\$44.8 Billion



Print

\$43.0 Billion



Outdoor

\$35.9 Billion

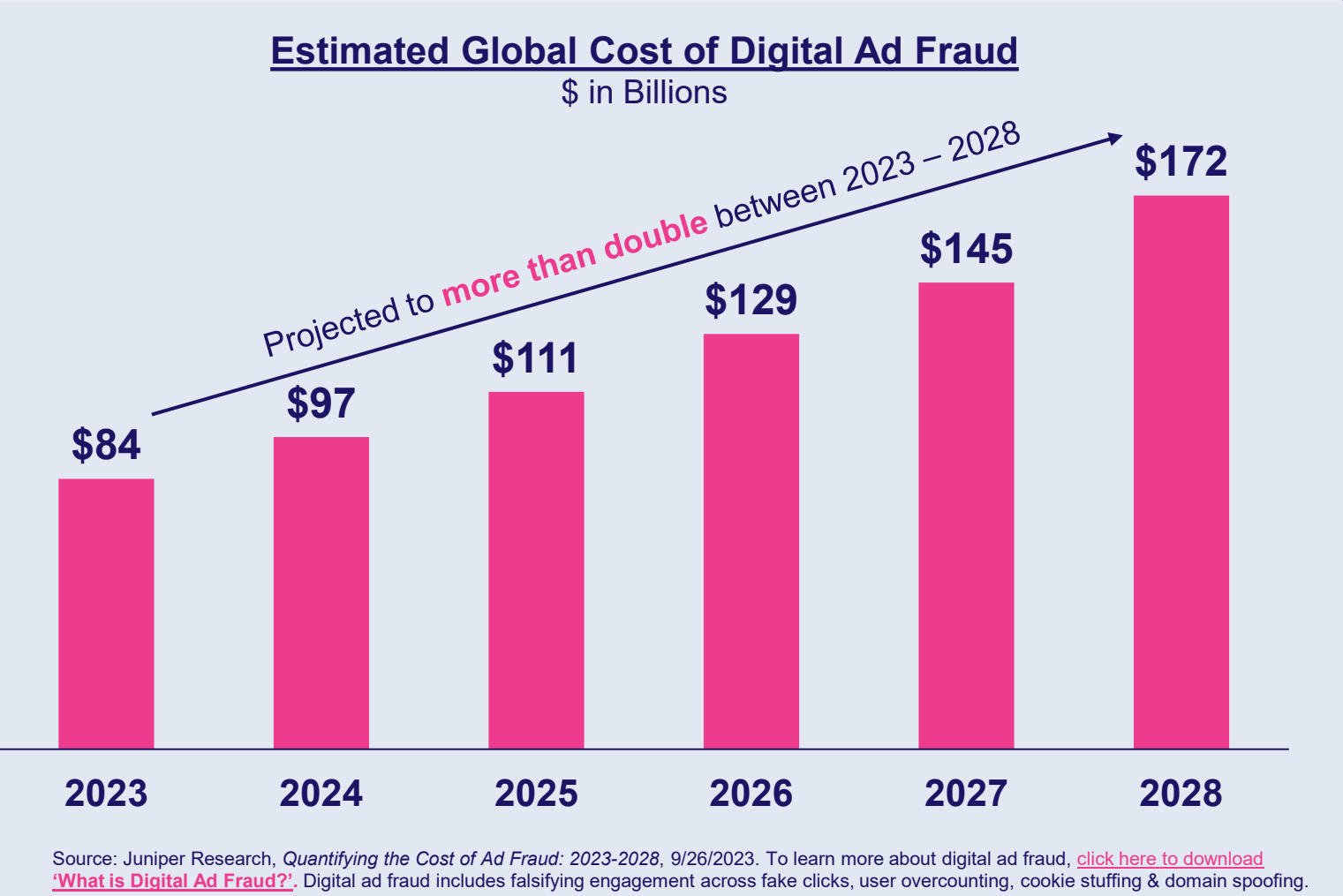


Radio

\$28.7 Billion

Source: Alphabet SEC company 10-K filings via SEC Edgar Search, for fiscal year ended 12/31/25. 'Google Network' includes revenues generated on Google Network properties participating in AdMob, AdSense, and Google Ad Manager. Reflects gross revenue which includes the dollars that Google pays in traffic acquisition costs (TAC) to partner sites. Adalytics Research LLC, ['Does A Lack of Transparency Create Brand Safety Concerns For Search Advertisers?'](#) report, November 2023. Note: 'Other' represents the estimated 6.7% of examined Google search campaign ad budget was spent on Google Search Partners & Display Expansion per Adalytics Research. S&P Global Market Intelligence Kagan, *Global Advertising Expenditure Forecasts*, December 2025. [To learn more about opaque ad placements, click here to download 'Where do ad dollars go when they're spent with Google?'](#).

Additionally, digital ad fraud costs marketers over \$100 billion each year, with over \$1 out of every \$5 spent on digital ads being fraudulent



% of Global Digital Ad Spend Lost to Ad Fraud
in 2023, by platform



22%

of **digital** ad spend



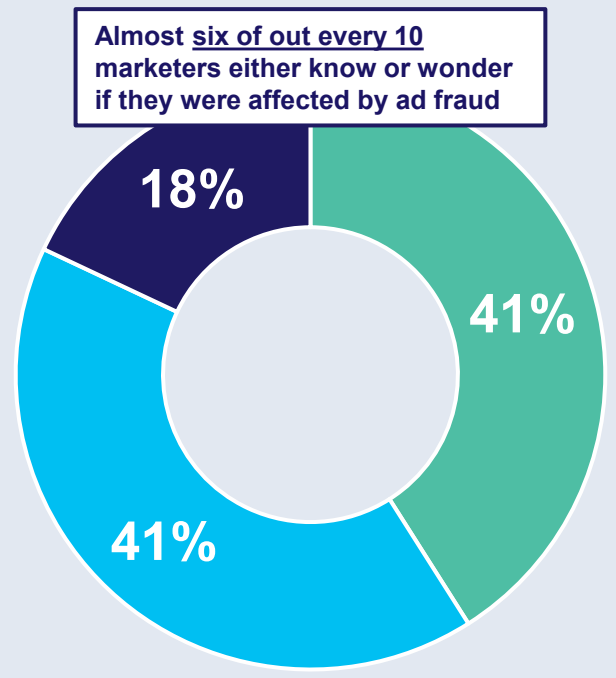
30%

of **mobile** ad spend

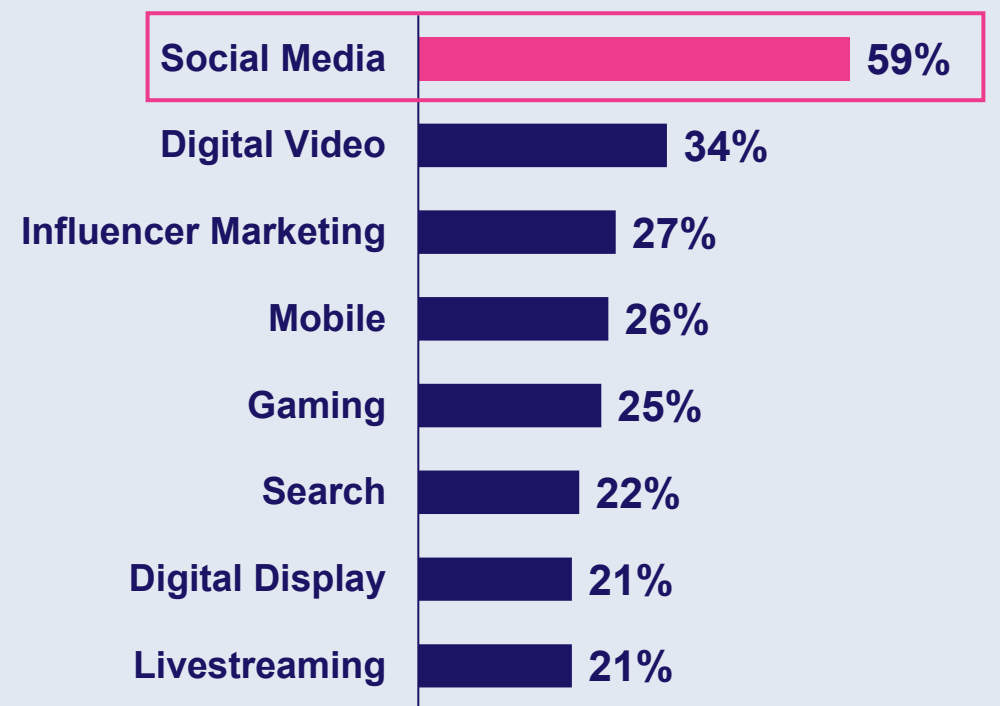
Over four in ten marketers know their brand has been affected by ad fraud, and the ad industry agrees that social media is the most vulnerable platform

Has digital ad fraud affected [your/your client's] brand?
% of respondents

■ Yes ■ No ■ Not Sure/Don't know



Media types most vulnerable to ad fraud in the next 12 months*
% of ad-tech, advertiser, agency and publisher experts who agree



Source: VAB / Advertiser Perceptions 'Marketer Sentiment on Ad Fraud' Survey, November 2023. Survey base: Marketer and agency contacts from the Advertiser Perceptions 'Senior Marketer' and 'Streaming Video' online communities. Q7. Had digital ad fraud affected [your/your client's] brand? Base = Total Respondents. *Integral Ad Science, *The 2025 Industry Pulse Report*, Dec 2024. [To learn more about digital ad fraud, click here to download 'Exposed: 5 Inconvenient Truths We Learned From Marketers'.](#)

Opaque supply chains and ad placements are driving significant ad fraud in the programmatic digital advertising marketplace

Share of Programmatic Ad Fraud



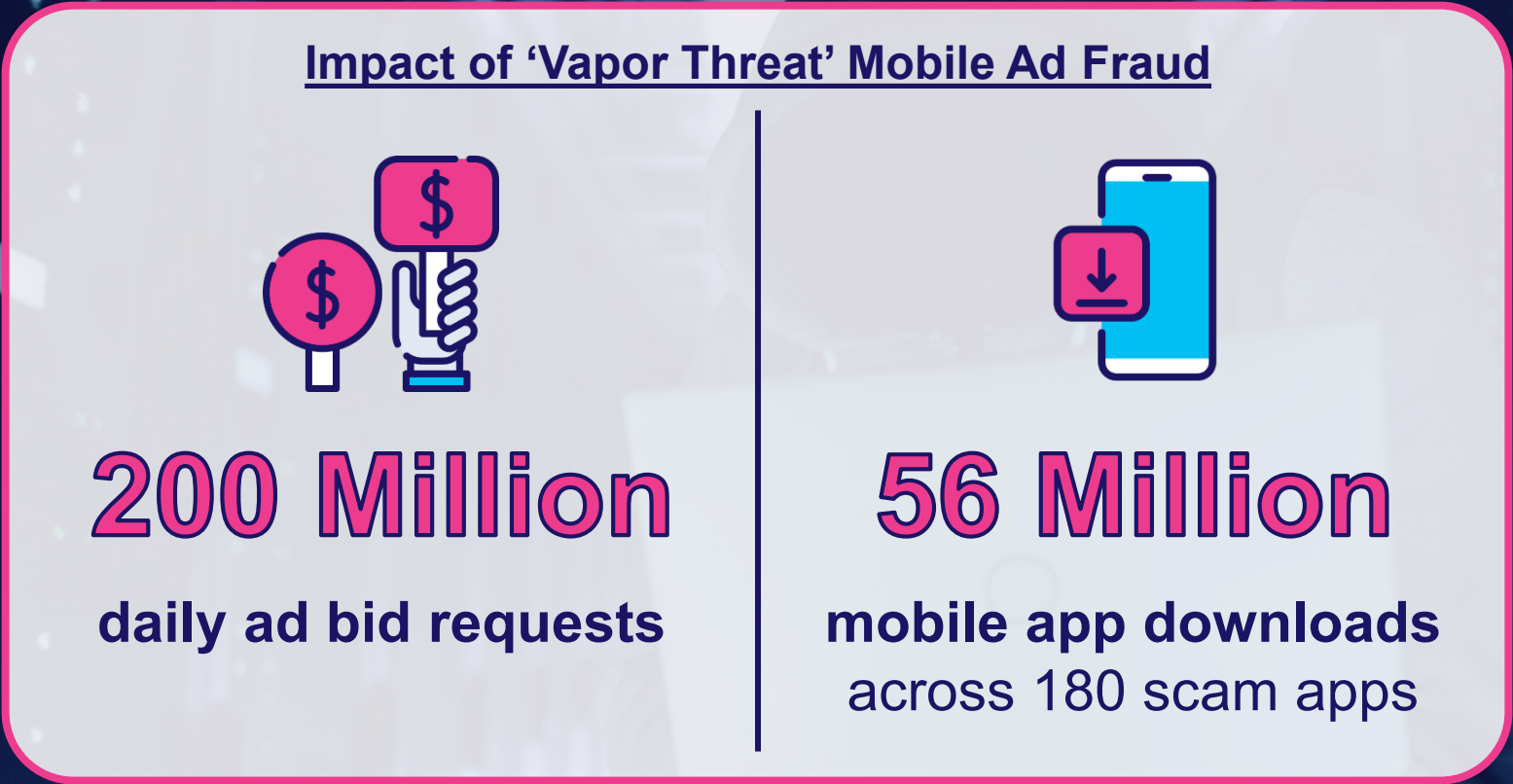
Source: Pivalate, Q3 2025 Global Invalid Traffic (IVT) & Ad Fraud Benchmarks Report, November 2025. *ANA, Programmatic Transparency Benchmark Q3 25, November 2025. Note: Programmatic digital ad spend includes Web, Mobile and 'Other' sources, but excludes CTV.



26%
of programmatic digital ad spend was wasted on **unproductive media placements**
(invalid traffic, non-measurable ads, non-viewable ads and Made-For-Advertising sites/apps)

Criminals have even infiltrated mobile device app stores, scamming marketers and platforms by siphoning off ad spending to fraudulent apps

▶ One example of mobile app advertising fraud known as ‘Vapor Threat’ used fake Android apps to deploy endless and intrusive full-screen interstitial video ads



Source: Integral Ad Science, Vapor Threat Report, March 2025.

Even when a real digital ad can reach a real human, nearly half of online consumers might not see it anyways due to their use of an ad blocker

▶ The widespread usage of ad blockers limits audience reach and obscures digital measurement metrics for marketers



45%

of U.S. consumers have **installed or used an ad blocker** on their **web browser or mobile device**



500+ Million

global downloads for AdBlock Plus, not accounting for downloads of other popular ad blockers like AdBlock, uBlock Origin, etc.*

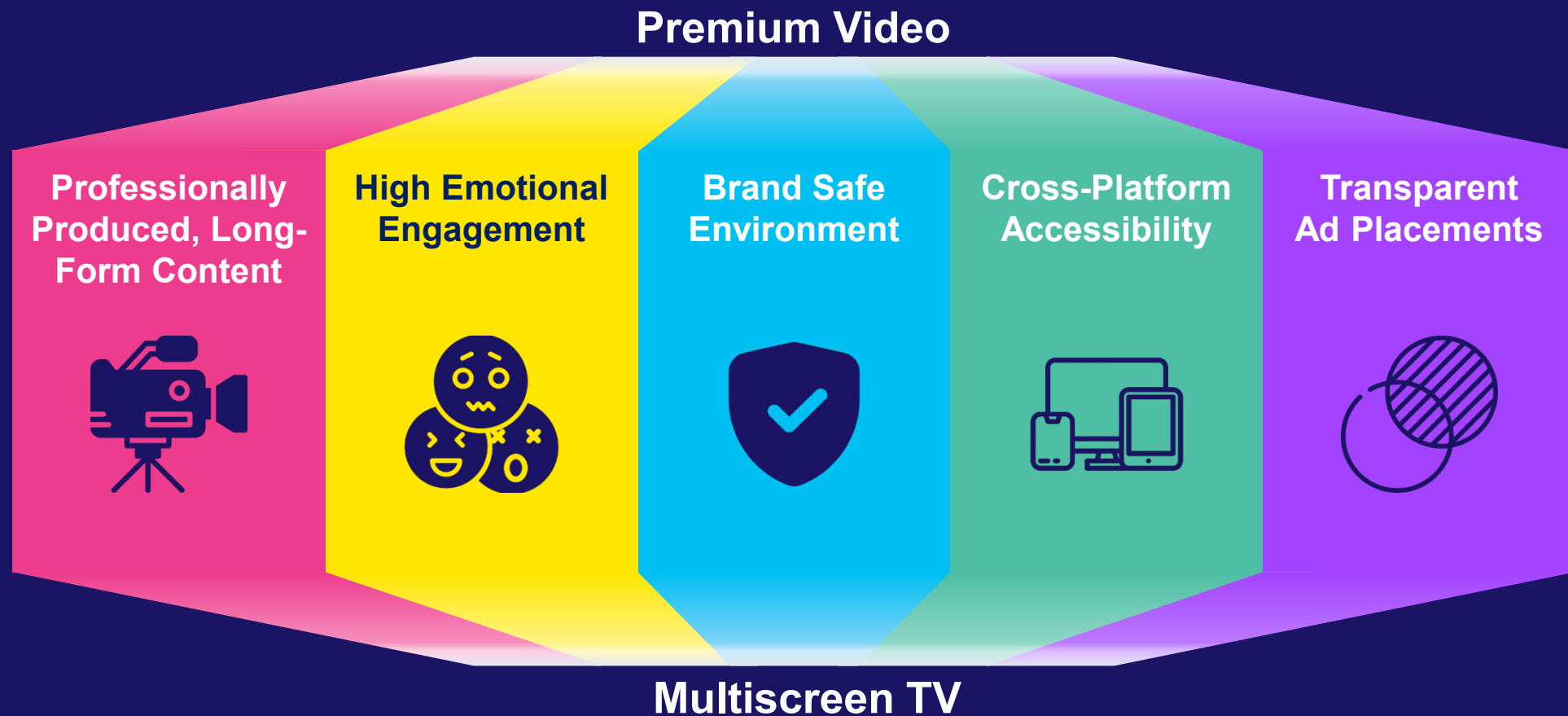
Source: YouGov, 48 market research – Two in five consumers don't use ad blockers, April 2024. *Google Play Store, Adblock Plus - free ad blocker, as of 1/22/26.

By contrast, Premium Video has **real advertising placements** in trusted, transparent media 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

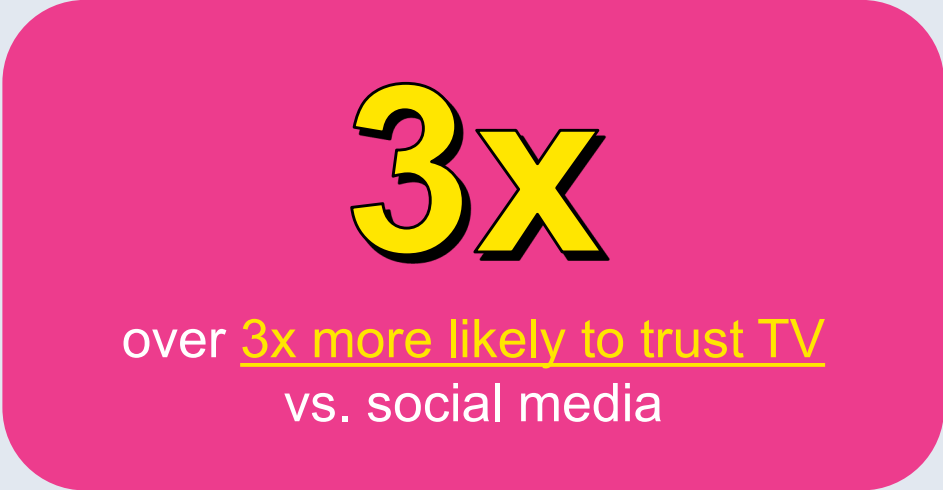


Multiscreen TV is the most trusted media platform by consumers, who are also three times more likely to trust TV over social media

“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 offer trillions of opportunities to connect annually with real audiences through placements in transparent media environments

P2+ Impressions on Ad-Supported TV
National Broadcast & Cable TV, CY 2025

5.0 Trillion
Reported P2+ Impressions
(Equivalentized)

Source: VAB analysis of Nielsen AdIntel, 1/1/25-12/31/25, C3, Panel Only, P2+, Sources: Network TV, Spanish Language Network TV, Cable TV, Spanish Language Cable TV & Syndicated TV. Excludes Promos and PSAs. Impressions are equivalentized.

Multiscreen TV platforms attract over 12,500 legitimate brands nationally which builds and enhances the reputation of other TV advertisers

Advertisers on Ad-Supported TV

National Broadcast & Cable TV, CY 2025

12,699 Brands

Sampling of Top U.S. National TV Advertisers



Source: VAB analysis of Nielsen Ad Intel, Brand Variants, 12/1/25-12/31/25. Sources: Network TV, Spanish Language Network TV, National Cable TV & National Spanish Language 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 background is filled with a pattern of small, overlapping 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 background is filled with a pattern of small, overlapping triangles.

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

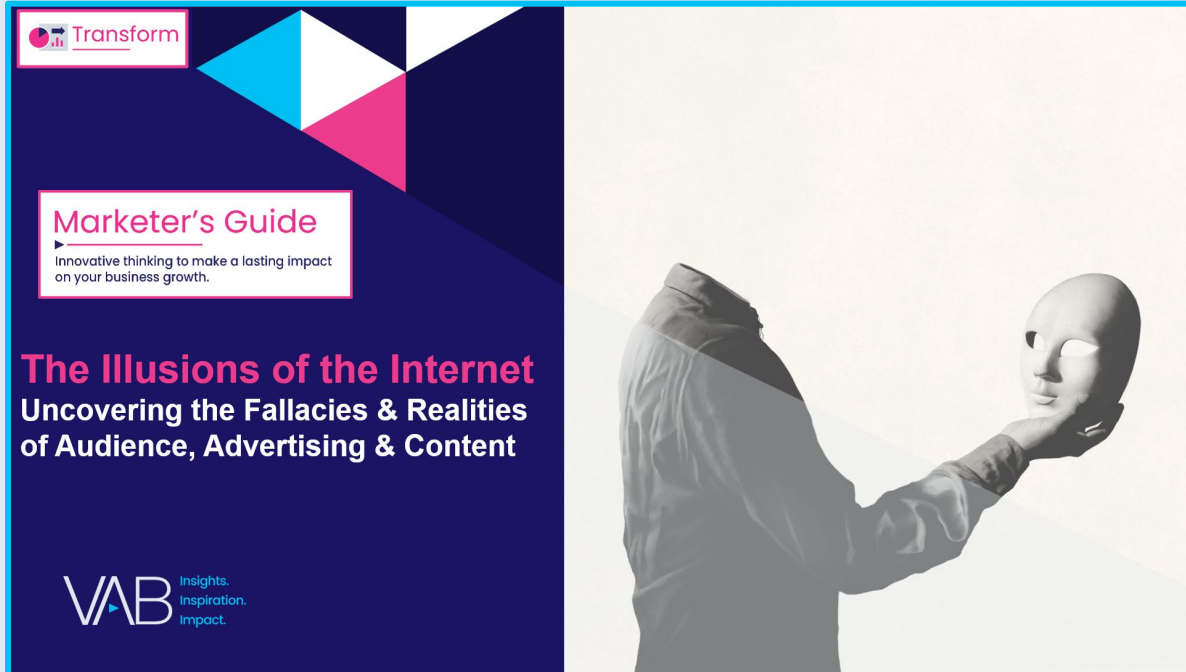
A graphic with a dark blue background and a teal-to-cyan gradient triangle on the left containing the word "Insist" in white. The background is filled with a pattern of small, overlapping triangles.

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 background is filled with a pattern of small, overlapping 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	338M videos removed from YouTube for spam, misleading and scams
One in 10 Instagram accounts are fake (93 Million bots)	Over \$7 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.



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