

February 2026

# what marketers are asking



*“How much online content is fake?”*

VAB

# Online piracy and illegal streaming costs U.S. content producers \$30 billion annually

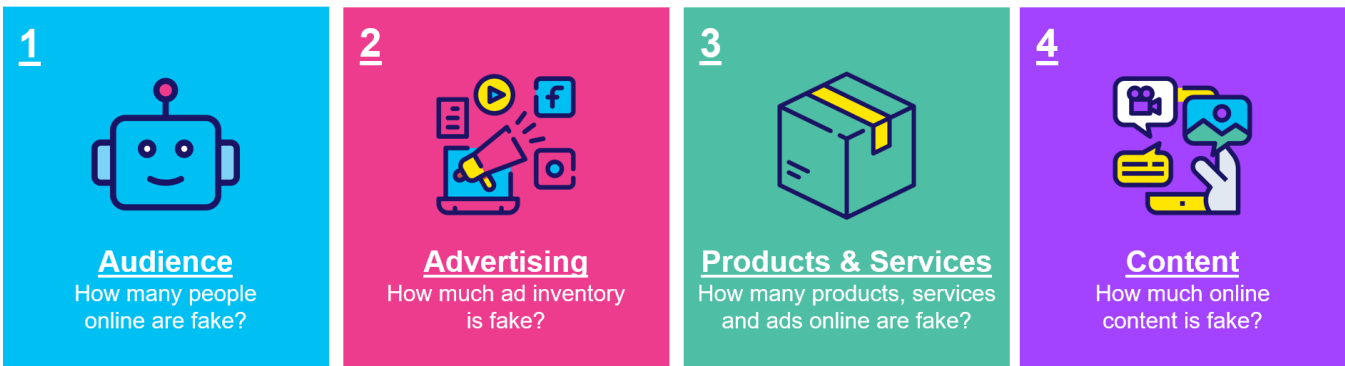
The internet is facing a crisis of reality and much of what is online today - whether its audiences, advertising, products & services and even content itself - **is not real.**

**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 analyze the breadth of content-related scams and spam and size the issues of AI slop, deepfakes, online piracy and illegal streaming.

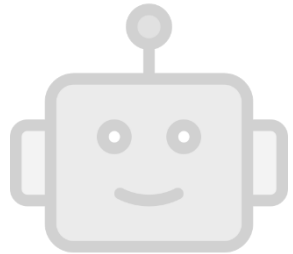
Download our full report [‘The Illusions of the Internet’](#) to learn more

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



# How much online content is fake?

1



## Audience

How many people online are fake?

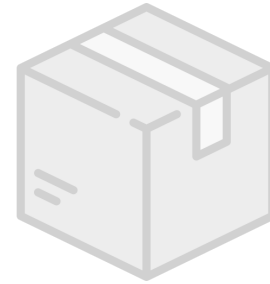
2



## Advertising

How many 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 Content on the Internet

1 <u>Audience</u> How many people online are fake?	2 <u>Advertising</u> How much ad inventory is fake?	3 <u>Products &amp; Services</u> How many products, services and ads online are fake?	4 <u>Content</u> How much online content is fake?
Bots & 'Bad Bots'	Opaque Ad Placements	Consumer Scam Impact	Scams and Spam
Proliferation of 'Bad' Bots	Cost of Digital Ad Fraud	Cost of Social Media Scams	AI Slop
Fake Accounts on Social Media	Ad Fraud Impact on Brands	Social Media Scam Ads	Deepfakes
	Programmatic Ad Fraud	Platform Revenue from Scams	'Made-For-Advertising' Sites
	App Store Ad Fraud	Counterfeit Goods	Pirated Content
	Ad Blocking	Online Marketplace Scams	

# YouTube exemplifies the breadth of scams that exist in online content based on what they are forced to remove from their platform each year

## YouTube Removals for 'Spam, Misleading and Scams' Six Year Time Period: 2019-2024

### Videos



**33 Million**

**videos removed** for spam, misleading and scams

Accounted for **18%** of total removed videos

### Accounts



**126 Million**

**accounts removed** for spam, misleading and scams

Accounted for **91%** of total removed accounts

### Comments



**16 Billion**

**comments removed** for spam, misleading and scams

Accounted for **71%** of total removed comments

Source: VAB analysis of Google Transparency Report, YouTube Community Guidelines enforcement, as of 7/8/25. \*Note: Aggregated removals by topic are estimated based on the percent of topic by total removals per quarter within the time period. To learn more, [click here to download 'Deleted Scenes: Analyzing How Much 'Unsafe' Content YouTube Removes From Their Platform'](#).

# AI has ushered in a new era of risky online content, with the advent of low-effort 'slop' that is ruining consumers' trust and experience with platforms



## What is AI Slop?

**Low-quality, mass-generated content produced by AI** that feels generic, repetitive, or poorly fact-checked.

It often lacks originality, nuance, or human relevance and is typically **created in high volume with little oversight**, leading to a flood of mediocre or misleading content across the internet.

*the Current* September 10, 2025

**YouTube's AI slop problem might be too big to stop**

*The New York Times.* December 8, 2025

***A.I. Videos Have Flooded Social Media. No One Was Ready.***

December 5, 2025

**Expert's urgent warning about YouTube 'AI slop' that could rewire your child's brain**

October 23, 2025

**More Articles Are Now Created by AI Than Humans**

**WIRED** December 5, 2025

**AI Slop Is Ruining Reddit for Everyone**

**science** alert\* September 6, 2025

**'AI Slop' Is Turning Up Everywhere. An Expert Explains What's at Stake.**

August 28, 2025

**'AI slop' videos may be annoying, but they're racking up views — and ad money**

**Futurism** March 11, 2025

**The Entire Internet Is Being Polluted by AI Slop**

**Forbes** February 17, 2025

**YouTube Is Flooded With AI Slop — And It Will Get Worse**

# The use of 'Deepfake' AI videos, which feature the likeness of famous people to cause misinformation and scam consumers, is also proliferating

# 33%

of consumers believe they have been the target of a deepfake scam



# 27%

of those consumers were scammed successfully

Tech Transparency Project\_ October 1, 2025


**Meta Awash in Deepfake Scam Ads**

 January 27, 2026

**Facebook led in deepfake-related fraud in 2025**

 March 4, 2025


**Scammers seem to be using deepfake and AI-generated influencers on TikTok to sell you wellness products**

 August 4, 2025

**How users are losing money to deepfake ads on Instagram**

 February 27, 2025

**The Threat Of Deepfakes: We Need Collaboration To Combat It**

 February 3, 2025

**The Deeply Complicated Issues Surrounding Deepfakes**

Source: Sift, Q2 2025 Digital Trust Index: Navigating Digital Trust in the Age of AI, August 2025.

# 'MFA' websites are often filled with spam, clickbait and stolen content which creates negative brand associations and wasted ad dollars



# \$1.7B

estimated **ad spend** lost to **MFA sites** in 2025

## What Are 'Made-For-Advertising' Sites?

**Low-quality websites created primarily to generate ad revenue rather than provide real content.**

Unlike legitimate publishers who invest in creating meaningful content and fostering loyal audiences, **MFA sites prioritize ad impressions and clicks, frequently employing low-cost traffic and AI-generated or plagiarized content** to attract users.

### Scale of Made-For-Advertising (MFA) in Digital\*



**18,273**  
MFA Websites



**1,508**  
MFA Mobile Apps

Source: VAB analysis of ANA, Q3 2025 Programmatic Transparency Benchmark, November 2025 & Emarketer, Total Media Ad Spending – U.S., December 2025. MFA ad spend estimated from 0.4% share of total U.S. ad spend (\$427.45B). \*Pixilate, Made for Advertising (MFA) Websites & Mobile Apps Benchmarks Reports - Q3 2025, December 2025.

Online piracy and illegal streaming cost content producers \$30 billion annually which also impacts hundreds of thousands of jobs in the U.S.

**\$30 Billion**

in lost U.S. revenue from **piracy & illegal streaming**, costing the country up to **250,000 jobs**

Source: Bloomberg, *Streaming Pirates Are Hollywood's New Villains*, January 2024.

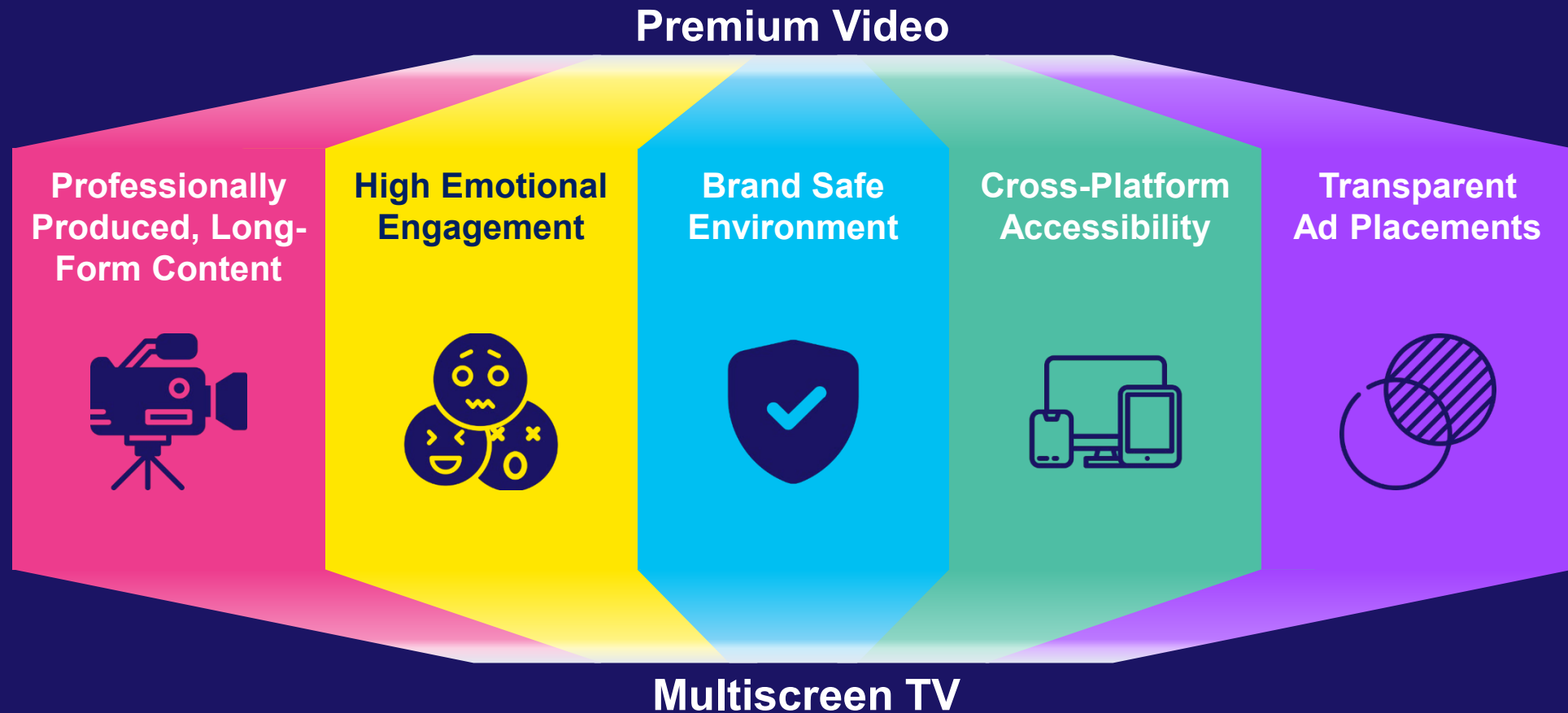
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By contrast, Premium Video delivers  
**professionally-produced content** that  
creates emotional connections across  
highly engaged audiences of all ages



# 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

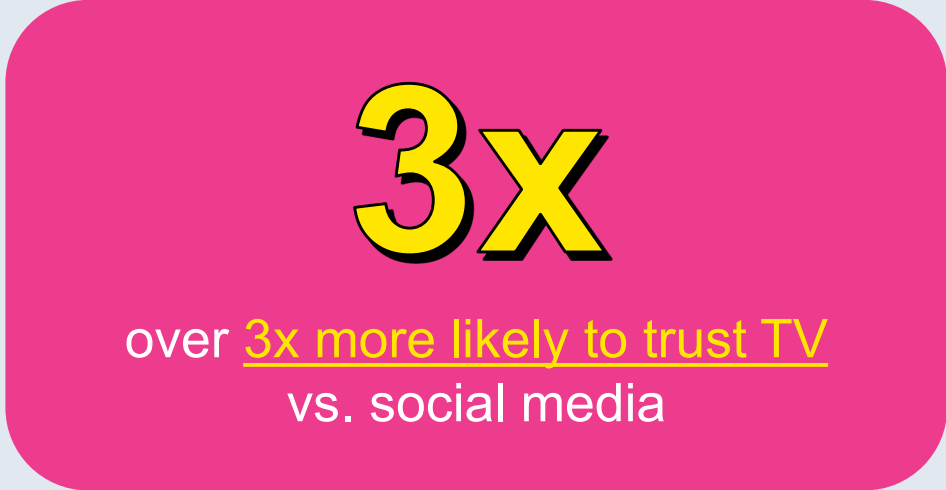


# Multiscreen TV is the most trusted media platform by consumers, who are also three times more likely to trust TV over social media

“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).

# Consumers' passion for content on multiscreen TV reflects its ability to foster deep emotional connections and enduring appeal



## Adult's Passion for Premium Video Across Screens

A18+



Linear TV

**75%**

say that they  
**'just love watching TV'**  
(A18-34: 74%)



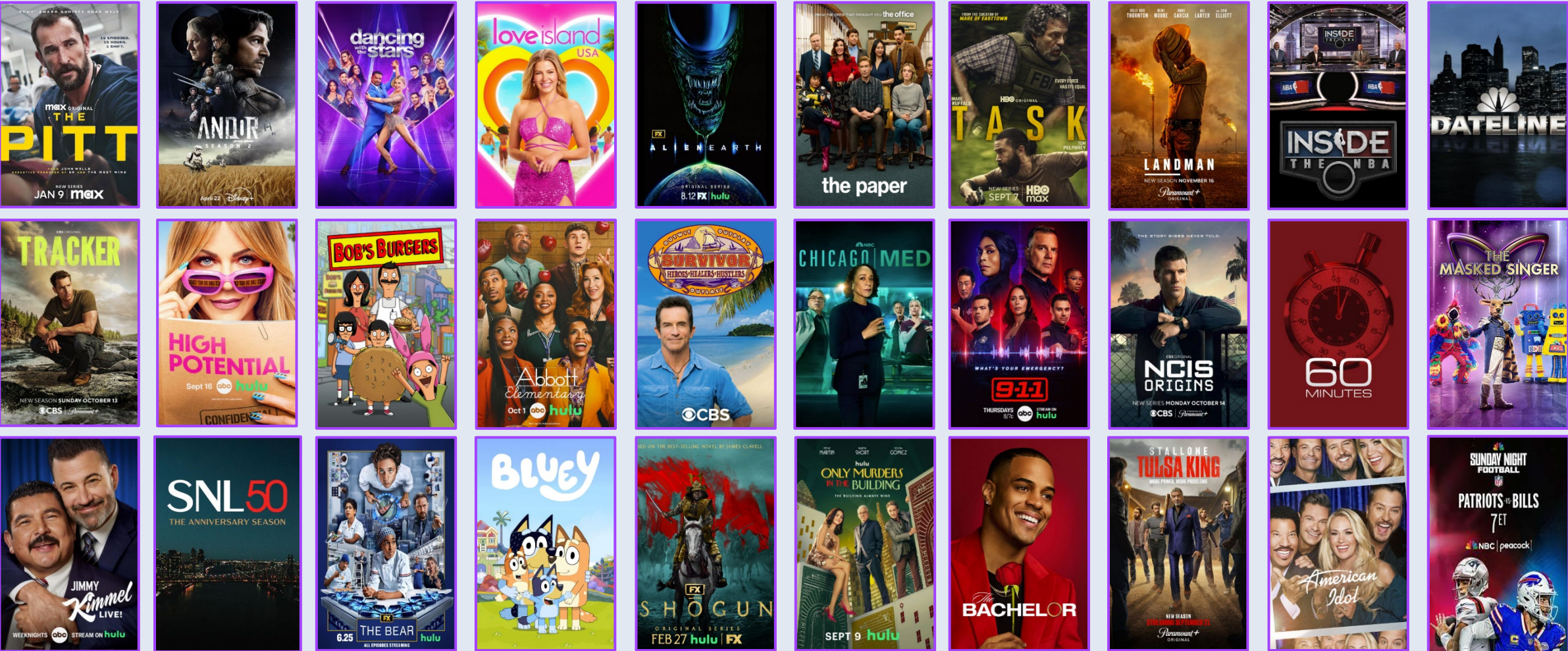
Streaming

**75%**

say that they  
**'love streaming TV shows'**  
(A18-34: 80%)

Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons November 2025 Cord Evolution Study. Based on A18+ respondents, 'any agree.'

# Multiscreen TV platforms spend over \$100 billion each year to create truly premium, emotionally engaging video content



# 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

**VAB**

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](https://theVAB.com).**

