

## **Navigating New Currents: Highlights from ARF's AUDIENCExSCIENCE 2024**

The latest [Advertising Research Foundation](#) (ARF)'s annual [AUDIENCExSCIENCE conference](#), held virtually and in-person at the Warner Bros. Discovery offices in NYC, served as a pivotal gathering for industry leaders, offering actionable insights and innovations shaping the future of marketing, advertising, media and audience measurement. Scott McDonald, ARF's President & CEO, set the stage by emphasizing the organization's mission of advancing the field through scientific research, highlighting principles of objectivity, transparency and empiricism as foundational to everything that the ARF and its sister organizations, [MSI](#) and [CIMM](#), does.

### **Enhancing Consumer Connections & Measurement Through AI**

One of the key themes from the event was AI's transformative influence on advertising strategies and measurement practices. Rex Briggs, Chief AI Officer (Claritas) and co-author of *The AI Conundrum*, kick-started the conference by delving into AI's role in understanding consumer behavior to create accurate personas, while stressing the importance of ethical AI practices and consumer data control. Kli Pappas (Colgate-Palmolive) and Helen Wolf (Colgate-Palmolive) offered a concrete example of AI's transformative power in traditional sectors like CPG. Their approach to product development and competitive analysis through AI, as well as the integration of AI throughout their organization, marks a significant shift towards a data and people-led culture.

Signal loss is a massive industry challenge, and Rachel Gantz (Proximic by Comscore) highlighted the adoption of AI in navigating ID-free advertising and contextual targeting. Experiments revealed a doubling of advertisers' reach and a higher cost efficiency. Brett Mersmann (NCSolutions) shared experimental findings that showed that Machine Learning (ML) techniques demonstrated superior accuracy in advertising effectiveness measurement, offering actionable insights for campaign optimization. These sessions illustrated that it's not humans vs. AI but how to best integrate the two.

### **Driving Effectiveness & Outcomes Through Attention**

Attention and impression quality also took center stage as industry experts explored how these factors impact ad experience, effectiveness and media planning. Bill Harvey (Harvey Consulting), Elizabeth Johnson (Wharton), Michael Platt (Wharton) and Audrey Steele (FOX) discussed how specific brain measurement dimensions were predictive of sales. They also found that the value of context is enormous with ads shown in premium channels resulting in sustained attention and memory. Karen Nelson-Field (Amplified Intelligence)'s analysis of passive and active attention illustrated the nuanced effects of attention on brand choice and outcomes.

Exploring the emotional drivers behind the long-term effectiveness of YouTube ads, Manuel Garcia-Garcia (Ipsos) and Ariane Pol (Ipsos) shared findings that digital media like YouTube can be a prime brand building vehicle and that highly pleasant emotions account for 28% of long-term brand growth. Pedro Almeida (MediaProbe) also found that emotion boosts

effectiveness with enhancing the emotional impact of an ad correlating with increased brand recall. Jeff Bander (eye square), Sandra Schumann (RTL Data & Screenforce) and Marvin Vogt (eye square) discussed how to leverage attention data to align ad creative with usage scenarios to optimize impact. Duane Varan (MediaScience) shared that co-viewing influences ad attention and memory encoding, and thus, should be considered for accurate ad measurement and optimization. As measurement techniques continue to evolve, the insights gleaned from attention metrics have great potential to drive more effective, engaging and impactful media campaigns.

### **Forecasting the Future of Audience Measurement**

Discussions on the future of audience measurement underscored the need for innovation in capturing the nuances of how, when and where content is consumed. The integration of big data with traditional panel data was highlighted as a promising approach to achieving more accurate and representative audience insights. In addition, industry leaders from different parts of the TV ecosystem talked about how they use the [ARF DASH Television Universe Study \(DASH\)](#) in their business. The panel included Leslie Wood (iSpot.tv), Brian West (NBCU) and Justin Fromm (Samsung Ads), and was moderated by the ARF's Paul Donato and Jim Meyer. They shared that the ARF DASH study, a nationally projectable enumeration study which records, in granular detail, how Americans connect to and consume TV, serves as a foundational element for measurement, media planning and content strategy within these organizations. Data quality is paramount as research by Mihkel Jäätma (Realeyes), Scott Jones (Realeyes) and Nick Sutton (Kantar Profiles) showed that 30% of surveys in the market are fake.

Another lively panel discussion, moderated by Jon Watts (CIMM) with panelists Josh Chasin (formerly VideoAmp), Colleen Fahey Rush (Paramount), Noelle Huynh (Warner Bros. Discovery) and Divya Kaur (Kinesso), explored predictions about the TV market and the measurement landscape in 2028. The panel unanimously agreed that investment in advertising against emerging/alternative currency providers would significantly increase by 2028 (exceeding \$25bn), reflecting a shift towards more diversified and sophisticated measurement solutions. Despite differing opinions on specific predictions, there was a general consensus on the need for more flexible, accurate and comprehensive measurement techniques to keep pace with changes in viewer behavior and technological advancements.

### **Exploring Evolving Audiences, Understanding the Impact of Privacy Regulations and the Importance of Increasing Diversity & Inclusion**

Other significant discussions revolved around the dynamic nature of media consumption with audiences increasingly favoring digital and streaming platforms, often with preferences to binge-watch. However, as Radha Subramanyam (CBS) pointed out, the death of linear TV is over-exaggerated as data showed that linear viewing impressions for the top three broadcasters' prime-time averages grew 274K from 2023 at 13.5M to 13.8M in 2024.

Privacy was another hot topic with Ali Goli (University of Washington) sharing key learnings from a body of academic research which showed that current privacy regulations may lead

to unintended negative consequences, impacting targeted marketing and innovation, which may exacerbate disparities between rich and poor consumers.

The conference also addressed the vital need for more inclusive advertising with 73% of consumers saying that diversity, equality and inclusion is important in advertising, according to research presented by Denya Chinquee (Paramount) and Michelle Green (Paramount). Insights revealed disparities in representation across marginalized groups and the positive impact of authentic representation on brand perception, loyalty and purchase intent. Gen Z's preference for authenticity and inclusivity highlighted the need for brands to prioritize diversity and engage in honest dialogue to build trust and loyalty, according to Tarya Weedon (Horowitz Research) and Yatisha Forde (ANA).

As the conference concluded, the path forward appeared both challenging and ripe with opportunity. The integration of AI, the refinement of attention measurement and the evolution of audience measurement practices all point towards a future where data-driven but human monitored insights fuel creative and strategic decisions. However, this future also demands a concerted effort to address ethical considerations, privacy concerns and the need for industry-wide collaboration to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing media and marketing landscape.