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Viewability: An Exaggerated Crisis

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Viewability: An Exaggerated Crisis

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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Candidate for Bachelor of Science

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Table of Contents

Abstract	Page 3
Executive Summary	Page 4
Viewability: An Exaggerated Crisis	Page 7
Highest Scrutiny: Online Media	Page 12
Flaws in MRC Accreditation	Page 14
Vendor Measurement Discrepancies	Page 15
Viewability's Inability to Add Context	Page 18
100% Viewability: Illusion of Progress	Page 19
Case Study: Where High Viewability Matters	Page 21
Contents of a Multi Touch-Point Campaign	Page 22
Relation to Viewability and Fraud	Page 24
Fraud and its Effect on Metric Hub Measurement	Page 26
Case Study: Mercedes Online Display Campaign	Page 27
Potential Solutions	Page 29
<u>Marketers</u>	
Development of Corporate Specific Standards	Page 29
Matching Verification Vendors to Campaign Objectives	Page 30
<u>Publishers</u>	
Website Redesign and Optimizations	Page 32
Expansion of Viewable Ad Real Estate Offerings	Page 33
<u>Organizations</u>	
Fraud a Pernicious Problem	Page 34
Agencies Drive the Viewability Conversation	Page 35
Final Thoughts	Page 36
Figures & Diagrams	Page 38
Works Cited	Page 48

Abstract

This thesis addresses the ongoing debate surrounding Viewability within the digital advertising industry. Since advertising is the lifeblood of many publishers and sites across the web, it is vital that brands and marketers derive value from this relationship. The Media Rating Council and Making Measurement Make Sense Movement both over exaggerate the value of Viewability in the digital advertising marketplace. By examining a plethora of articles and regulatory standards, I have been able to conclude that Viewability is a soft metric that does not provide media insights into the success of a given campaign. By conducting interviews and reviewing articles from the advertising trade press, I have determined that marketers, advertising agencies and publishers must work in tandem to achieve a solution that is both sustainable economically and administrable on a mass scale. The implementation of corporate-specific Viewability standards for marketers would lead to a greater autonomy over the analysis of the success of a particular campaign. Publishers' refocus on website redesign and roll out of innovative advertising units can drastically contribute to value generation for marketers. In addition, both the MRC and 3MS pivot towards traffic fraud would warrant greater fiscal control over industry media spending and an improved analysis of campaign data. Viewability across the digital advertising industry is simply a singular cog in the wheel of digital media injustice. If the MRC and 3MS refocus their efforts towards fraudulent traffic while adopting a laissez faire approach to tackling Viewability, both organizations will greatly aid in the growth and prosperity of a free and open Internet

Executive Summary

Ad units are a type of digital real estate. With each media buy, marketers are hopeful that prospective customers engage with a given ad at a particular time and location on the Internet.

Viewability is defined as a purchased ad unit that appears on a web page that is both in-view and in-focus to a user for one continuous second. A large debate has ensued over the notion that marketers believe that they should be only charged for the impressions that were served to users. Publishers have reservations about this notion, claiming that an increase in Viewability is directly correlated to higher ad unit costs on a particular site. The Media Ratings Council (MRC) is currently waging this Viewability battle in an effort to regulate the digital advertising industry. These regulations have led to the development of the collaborative working group called the Make Measurement Make Sense Movement (3MS). Both the MRC and 3MS-led Viewability debate over exaggerates the applicability of Viewability to both marketers and publishers by overregulating the industry.

The stakes for ensuring a safe and fair marketplace for purchased media online are extraordinarily high. A trustful relationship between marketers, ad agencies and publisher is pivotal to restoring trust in the economic viability of a free and open Internet for everyone.

The MRC's Viewability definition is positioned directly in conflict with the creative and strategic objectives of online display campaigns. The broad definition asserted by the MRC and 3MS is a core rationale for the problems associated with defining a campaign's legitimacy on Viewability. The lack of planning the MRC has exhibited has resulted in the

accrediting of sixteen impression verification vendors. The multitude of vendors has led to large discrepancies in inter-vendor verification data.

The further portrayal of Viewability as a soft metric showcases its inability to add depth to campaign insights and ineffectiveness to accomplish marketer objectives. The multi-touch attribution emanating from a cohesive consumer journey better approximates the engagement level of the creative messaging of banner ads and value of publishers' ad unit real estate. Even while multi-touch attribution takes hold across the industry, there is simultaneously an increased pressure from top marketers to only engage in media buys with 100% assured Viewability. Many brands incorrectly believe that 100% Viewability is directly correlated with a greater advertising return on investment (ROI); rather, a greater campaign value is derived from the use of multiple touch-point engagement.

On a macro level the Viewability debate is foolish because the online advertising industry does not revolve around the viewing of a singular ad. Since online ads have the ability to leverage numerous touch-points, it is possible to accomplish a wide variety of marketer objectives.

The impact of Viewability is overstated mainly because forms of fraudulent traffic can more acutely impact the bottom-line of marketers. Fraudulent traffic has the ability to devastate site analytics and corrupt future media buying insights.

Solutions to combating the over exaggeration of Viewability by the MRC and 3MS include a multi-tiered approach spanning marketers, ad agencies and publishers. There are several solutions that seek to place equal onus on all involved parties to ensure even contribution to the economic functionality of the advertising-supported Internet.

The standards established by the MRC and 3MS fail to benefit marketers, advertisers or publishers. Long-term implications will be felt because the self-regulatory organizations' Viewability standard does not measure the actual impact of a campaign. In addition, a lack of focus on pernicious bot traffic fraud will plague the future economic models of the industry.

Marketers must generate their own campaign-specific Viewability standards that match marketing objectives. In addition, the selection of a verification vendor that fits a specific campaign's objectives is integral in order to create metrics that are reciprocal between publishers and advertisers.

Publishers must work to increase the Viewability of their sites through redesigns such as the implementation of scaffolding sites. The implementation of these site changes will allow for enhanced Viewability of ad units as well as increased user engagement.

Both the MRC and 3MS must pivot their attention to the growing threat of bot traffic fraud. This threat can permeate campaign analytics and corrupt media budget forecasting. In addition, both organizations must work to develop a quantitative scale for auditing verification vendors for better transparency.

Viewability is a soft metric and is highly variable based on marketers' objectives. However, Viewability is simply a singular cog in the wheel of digital media injustice. If the MRC and 3MS refocus their efforts towards fraudulent traffic while adopting a client-centric approach to tackling Viewability, both organizations will greatly aid in the growth and prosperity of a free and open Internet.

Viewability: An Exaggerated Crisis.

Key Identifier: *John is a typical Internet user and is used throughout this paper to humanize the parameters of an Internet web browser. John is not a bot designed to emulate human browsing behaviors; rather, he is a person with real intentions as he browses the web.*

The Internet runs on advertising. Whether browsing a news site, reading a blog post or scrolling down your social media feed, advertisements accompany the web experience across both major publisher sites like the *New York Times* and small blogs like *Thrifty Nifty Mommy*. Sometimes John views advertising as intrusive and a pollutant to his web browsing experience. However, the goliath that is Digital Advertising Spending reached \$49.5 billion during 2014 (eMarketer, 2015). Digital advertising spending is the lifeblood of the online information economy, and it is poised to take over television spend in 2016 and will account for 36% of advertising budgets by 2019.

Advertising units are a form of digital real estate. Similar to a prospective homeowner searching for “The Perfect Home,” marketers are on a perpetual quest to purchase the perfect ad space that directly aligns with set parameters. The media buy hopefully leads to prospective customers seeing the ad at the optimal time and location in an effort to induce engagement with the brand and ultimately a purchase.

Today, both marketers and publishers worry about the value of purchased ad real estate due to the industry’s swirling Viewability debate. The term Viewability refers to the amount of time and actual portion of the advertisement that appears in-view, in-focus to be seen by the user. Many marketers assert that they should only be charged for 100%

viewable impressions served to users. Most publishers argue that ensuring 100% ad Viewability will drastically increase the cost of an ad unit on a their site. This higher cost is induced by a publisher's reduction in supply of available ad inventory to sell. This tussle between marketer buyers and suppliers has led to industry regulation currently being led by the Media Ratings Council (MRC) [FIGURE 1].

The MRC in June 2014 worked to update Viewability standards in collaboration with the Interactive Advertising Bureau Emerging Innovations Task Force to define Viewability. The impression definition states: 50% of the ad must be in browser focus for one continuous second after rendering and have the opportunity to be seen by a human. In other words, satisfying the minimum pixel requirement should precede the measurement of the time duration (MRC Viewable, 2014). The formation of the Make Measurement Make Sense Movement (3MS) initiative was born out of the notion that digital advertising measurement had become an economic threat to all parties [FIGURE 2]. The 3MS organization is a collaborative attempt at self-regulation designed to unite measurement policies and regulations.

Marketers, publishers and advertisers have met the resulting Viewability policies with mixed reactions. The digital advertising industry's Viewability debate administered by the MRC and 3MS over exaggerates the applicability of Viewability to both marketers and publishers by overregulating the industry.

The current standards do not benefit marketers and advertisers (50% for one second) and do not benefit the consumer (they are still seeing significant ad clutter). While publishers may see short-term benefits from increased ad prices, the long term ramifications would upend the economic model of digital advertising online. The long-term

impact will be felt because the MRC's Viewability standard does not measure the actual impact of a campaign and fails to address the real problem of bot traffic fraud. Bot traffic fraud can corrupt campaign data, inhibit the insight-gathering process and pollute media budget forecasting. The "Perfect Home" for a digital display placement is one that resonates with a target consumer at the optimal time and place. Simultaneously this placement should be evaluated with accurate and reconcilable standards that are rooted in actual goals and marketing activities.

The stakes to ensure a safe and fair marketplace for purchased media online are extraordinarily high. A stable relationship between marketers and publishers must be built on mutually-assured trust, and it is integral to the sustainability of the free and open Internet everyone enjoys today. Clear articulations of campaign success metrics become part of a media plan selection process and negotiations with potential partners. These campaign metrics are organized within a "metric hub" which will serve as a central point of campaign development, measurement and optimization. The underlying objective of a metric hub is to ensure that John's browsing actions align with the goal-orientation of the site [FIGURE 3].

The current MRC's Viewability definition is directly in conflict with the creative and strategic objectives of digital display campaigns. Since a broad definition of a viewable impression fails to address marketers' varying campaign objectives, a new strategy and definition of Viewability is needed. Further, the strategy the MRC has used to homogenize the measurement of impressions on sites has over complicated the campaign evaluation process while concurrently making it less accurate. The inconsistency between the

methodologies of the sixteen impression verification vendors is emblematic of a lack of vision for the future of measurement across the digital advertising industry.

The focus on a soft metric such as Viewability as a core tenet of ensuring better measurement is overplayed because it fails to add depth or take primary marketer campaign goals into consideration. Multi-touch attribution emanating from a cohesive consumer journey better approximates the engagement level of the creative messaging of a display ad and value of the publisher's unit real estate.

The Association of National Advertisers (ANA) is a group of the largest 600 United States-based brand marketers. The organization has recently released a set of parameters that they will buy media against. They are calling for 100% Viewability for all media buys. Across the industry the Viewability debate has led to an overarching sense of accountability for impressions. Currently, the IAB reports that it is only possible to attain 70% Viewability for media buys online in 2015 (State of Viewability, 2015). The added concern about the impression currency has allowed all parties across the digital advertising space to think critically about the value of brand messaging in the eyes of John.

While marketers have built multi-touch attribution models to evaluate campaigns, there is still significant pressure from top marketers to only engage in media buys if 100% Viewability can be guaranteed. This false sense of assurance of increased advertising return on investment (ROI) is polluted because the flimsy MRC-backed definition of Viewability does not clearly articulate the connection between sound standards based in a metric hub.

While this debate is taking place in the digital realm, television is also subject to measurement standards, but GRPs, as a measurement, do not represent the number of impressions that are viewed. These impressions have long been recognized merely as

“opportunities to see.” It is not fair to scrutinize digital advertising based on Viewability because television cannot nearly deliver a similar caliber of targeting granularity. On a macro level the Viewability debate is foolish because the online advertising industry does not revolve around just simply seeing an ad. Since online ads can have numerous touchpoints and goals, it is possible to have either top-of-funnel or bottom-of-funnel objectives. Therefore, the digital ad industry is held to an unfair level of scrutiny when compared to television (still the most purchased medium today).

While the Viewability debate rages on, it serves as a distraction to the even bigger issue of fraudulent traffic. The accounting for non-human web traffic more acutely impacts the bottom-line of marketers. Fraudulent traffic can devastate digital media buys while simultaneously corrupting analytics data. The pernicious threat of bot traffic has the ability to greatly inhibit media investments online on a level far greater than Viewability.

In order to combat the over exaggerated Viewability debate, solutions must span organizational, marketer and publisher realms. Marketers should engage in an internal Viewability dialogue that establishes corporate metric standards that aid the designing and evaluation of a campaign. Publishers must redesign their sites and develop original ad units in order to ensure greater Viewability and higher engagement levels for John.

Organizationally it would be helpful for the MRC and 3MS to shift their focus toward education about the dangers of bot traffic fraud. Since Viewability affects several vested parties, an all-encompassing string of proposed solutions will equalize the burden of solving this economic dilemma.

Highest Scrutiny: Online Media

Viewability is a proxy measurement for campaign effectiveness. Striving to achieve 100% Viewability for purchased ad units illustrates the high measurement scrutiny of online advertising. The marketer and the campaign's objectives best define the value of Viewability. If awareness were a primary campaign objective outlined in the metric hub, then Viewability would be in accordance with the marketer's goals. However, Viewability is an unwise debate to engage in because the online advertising industry revolves around multiple user-initiated touch points. Whether that means scroll depth, hover time, CTR or click-trial, these metrics showcase how the online advertising industry is subject to multiple layers of measurement scrutiny because of the behavioral nuances a user can initiate while browsing the Internet.

The MRC regulates the measurement of the television industry by approving suitable rating agencies. The predominant unit of measurement for television is the Gross Rating Point (GRP). Therefore, the nature of television as a medium has led to the establishment of standards that cannot specifically measure each individual in a particular room. Measurement units such as reach, frequency and GRPs are important to a media buy; however, in reality, ratings firms like Nielsen use a sample population to compile data from people meters across the United States. In addition, television stations are not held responsible if a human did not see those GRPs. It is also important to note that the attentiveness of a viewer during a commercial break is not measurable unless a study is conducted in a highly controlled environment.

Further, the viewing of ads on traditional television is victim to an imprecise advertising ROI scrutiny [FIGURE 4]. Television media buying success metrics are largely evaluated using market mix marketing. This means that television ads are at least in part

evaluated by determining the quantity of incremental sales the campaign drove. Therefore, the marketer asserts that any advertising campaign investment's ultimate objective is driving sales for the product. The flaw in this measurement philosophy is the fact that television rarely is a bottom funnel channel and further apportioning incremental sales and crediting them to a particular ad is fundamentally an archaic view of the measurement landscape, especially for television media.

The online advertising industry is held to more stringent standards due to the fact that the Internet allows for the granular tracking of each individual on a webpage and the dynamic delivery of creative messaging [FIGURE 5]. Both hard and soft metrics within a metric hub can lead to a more responsible sales attribution model. Leveraging multi-touch attribution to individually attribute sales to particular campaigns and particular ad units is possible with digital advertising. Digital advertising has led to the ability to track attribution throughout the purchasing funnel. Ecommerce sites have the ability to track dozens of touch points that all correspond to a particular individual's psychological and actionable location within the purchasing funnel. This process of plotting a consumer's journey within the purchasing funnel is made possible by multi-touch attribution and a dashboard that closely mimics the purchasing process. The right MRC/3MS guidance can transform the digital advertising industry into the medium that can achieve unparalleled targeted granularity and precise advertising ROI.

Flaws in MRC Accreditation

A common misconception of the Viewability conversation is the notion that abysmal display ad click through rate (CTR) metrics signify the unilateral obsolescence of the ad format. Key shareholders– publishers, agencies and marketers– ideally would all stand to benefit from stringent metrics that are rooted in a campaign metric hub. MRC and 3MS Viewability standards fail to address that while the objectives of advertisers, marketers and publishers are often divergent, that does not mean that Viewability regulation should come in the form of a one-size-fits-all solution.

This broad definition put forth by the MRC does not account for marketers' varying objectives and goals for digital display campaigns. While some campaigns are optimized to drive John to a site to engage in an ecommerce environment, other campaigns may simply want to make John aware of an upcoming event in his area. The MRC impression definition inadequately determines the value of that impression to the marketer, since each brand may have different aspirational goals for a campaign.

3MS's goal in 2012 was to make the sale of viewable ad impressions the mainstay currency of the industry (What is 3MS, 2015). In order to ensure the sale of reliable and viewable ad inventory on publisher sites, the MRC instituted an accreditation system to certify and "accredit" third party measurement ad-tech services for tracking Viewability. These ad-tech companies allow publishers, agencies and marketers to analyze data pertaining to the success of their campaign. Many of these companies tout their ability to measure and evaluate the Viewability of ad impressions served across the Internet for a campaign. As of January 5th 2015 the MRC has accredited sixteen different companies to track Viewability of display advertising (Digital Metrics, 2015).

These guidelines stipulated that each impression verification vendor had to subscribe to five regulations in order to achieve accreditation. The parameters outlined include: “1) the minimum granularity with which Viewability measurement ‘snapshots’ should occur; 2) the eventual elimination of ‘Count on Decision’ approaches to counting served ad impressions; 3) the order of processing and processes applied in viewable impression counting; 4) full disclosure of whether the ad itself, or the ad container/frame, was subject to the Viewability measurement; and 5) the application of a consistent approach in accounting for the viewable status of ads that may appear on ‘out of focus’ browser tabs” (Gunzerath, 2014). While this white paper does unite accredited impression verification vendors under a common set of parameters, the fragmentation resulting from accrediting sixteen vendors is problematic [FIGURE 6].

Vendor Measurement Discrepancies

The fragmentation across this burgeoning measurement industry has resulted in large disparities between MRC accredited vendors. This means that Marketer X monitoring their media buy on Publisher Y with Verification Vendor Z may have conflicting success metric measurements when compared to metrics reported from Publisher Y’s Verification Vendor H. These data discrepancies in impressions served, units clicked and CTR can vary as much as 30-40% between different verification vendors.

For example [FIGURE 7, FIGURE 8], if digital advertising agency DigitasLBi needs to track a campaign for Luminoa Butter on the *Financial Times* website, it may partner with DoubleVerify for impression verification. The *Financial Times* may measure the success of

the Luminoa Butter campaign as well, and they may use Comscore as their impression verification. Unfortunately, due to measurement discrepancies, the data collected by both DoubleVerify and Comscore will vary quite significantly.

Since the MRC's accreditation parameters are very broad, it is possible for several of the sixteen impression verification vendors to have drastically different measurement methodologies. For example, Upworthy uses ChartBeat to verify its metrics on its viral content. Instead of calculating traditional impressions, completed views and social network CTR, Chartbeat uses "engagement time" as a measurement of a particular user's engagement with the site's content (The Code, 2015). Since Upworthy has recognized that "engagement time" better encapsulates the behaviors of its users on their site, they have chosen to enlist Chartbeat to verify this consumer story. In Upworthy's case, captivating and engaging content is rooted in their mantra: "Compelling, meaningful, media – stories... and ideas that reward you deeply for the time you spend with them" (Upworthy About Us, 2015). The MRC's broad accreditation policy has led to a plethora of verification vendors with vastly different algorithms all touting distinct capabilities.

George Ivie, CEO, and David Gunzerath, senior vice president, of the Media Ratings Council both stated, "There are going to be variations between vendors, and we need to account for that." However, according to Forrester Senior Analyst Susan Bidel and Turn Director of Product Marketing Lori Gubin, the MRC promised to release a whitepaper codifying strategies on how to reconcile discrepancies in verification vendors, but there has yet to have been a document released. The reason for the delay is rooted in the substantial algorithmic and quantitative disparities between vendors (Bidel & Gubin, 2015). MRC

aspires to reach a goal of having less than a 10% variance in measurement discrepancies between impression verification vendors, but at this juncture there has been little progress.

The misguided priorities of the MRC exhibited by the failure to align verification vendors exemplify a lack of direction to policy making and industry regulation. Despite good intentions to accredit third party vendors to handle impression verification for marketers' campaigns, this venture has resulted in systematic issues that could potentially threaten the economic viability of publisher's sites and brand's marketing strategies. As a result of this turmoil within the verification vendor landscape, Ford Motor Co. is now seeking to have greater control of their measurement metrics. Ford has now moved away from using ad networks and exchanges and decided to create their own Demand Side Platform (DSP) in an effort to acutely monitor their ad campaigns and evaluate Viewability in-house. (Bidel & Gubin, 2015).

The industry's Viewability debate is misguided due to the fact that the measurement of a viewable ad is not dependent on the objective and goal of the marketer and varies significantly depending on the verification vendor that a brand or publisher uses. If Viewability is the cornerstone of a sound digital display campaign, then the industry is forgoing specificity and ignoring specific campaign goals in an effort to ensure the abstract promise of the MRC's impression definition.

Viewability's Inability to Add Context

Viewability is a one-dimensional metric defined as an ad placement viewable to John as he browses the Internet on his device. Viewability does not have the ability to bring legitimacy to digital display advertising because the metric does not add a layer of tangibility to a campaign. Viewability, in essence, is incapable of adding context or color to an interaction beyond ushering in a misguided notion of advertising budget accountability.

Shivan Durbal, Media Director at 360i, explained how Viewability metrics could be classified as “soft metrics” and are much more challenging to optimize because there are a plethora of goals that a client asks a campaign to meet. Having viewable ad impressions as the fulcrum of campaign measurement is naive due to the fact Viewability as a metric is highly volatile based on programmatically placed ads and chosen verification vendors. Conversely, collecting several touch points in a metric hub that mirrors a determined consumer journey better showcases a prospective customer’s behavior across ad placements and product landing pages. Durbal affirmed this sentiment and stated, “Interconnected metrics, who people are, where they spend the most time, how they interact with the brand, all in concert should add up to a desire and a conclusion.” This powerful statement proves that a collection of touchpoints in a metric hub more accurately measure the success of a particular goal-oriented campaign. Viewability is a flimsy metric incapable of accounting for the value of an ad placement as it pertains to a campaign’s success or overall resulting advertising spending ROI.

At the IAB Annual Leadership Meeting Anthony Risicato, the chief strategy officer at ad tech firm EyeView Digital, said, “It feels like we’re debating the wrong problem here, it’s not viewable versus unviewable, it’s the value of Viewability” (McDermott, 2015). The operative word “value” is a core component to both advertising executions and media buys.

John perceiving an ad as likable or remembering a brand name are two metrics that may denote the success of a campaign to a client. The value of Viewability to a marketer for a particular campaign changes drastically depending on the client and the predetermined campaign objectives laid out at the onset. Essentially, buying ads based on if John is seeing them does not necessarily encourage a user initiated action such as downloading a white-paper or signing up for a webinar. Having ads viewable satisfies the macro trend in the industry; however, clients' specific marketing goals will likely not be skewed in the direction of the Viewability of specific ads. Rather, as Durbal asserted, a concert of touch point-initiated interactions provides a more holistic picture of the site's users, their personalities and their intent.

100% Viewability: Illusion of Progress

Naturally, the premise of buying advertisements that are seen by John seems intuitive. On a macro level, a progression towards 100% Viewability would be advantageous for all players across the industry.

The viewable impression has been met with blowback from several publishers with concerns over website design overhauls and a worry that ad agencies and marketers will not pay an increased rate to ensure certain Viewability. Some marketers fear that unless Viewability is insured their campaigns will not garner as high of ROI. Several marketers in particular are now completely averse to paying for impressions that never reach John and are demanding make-goods on impressions that were not viewable.

In November 2014, Rob Master, the VP-Media for the Americas at Unilever, exclaimed that his company's media purchasing policy will include a mandate of 100% ad unit Viewability in browser. This bold statement by a leading marketer regarding Viewability is the first of its kind for the industry, therefore signifying the intensified perceived need for viewable served impressions. Master's assertion discredits the MRC definition of an ad impression (Neff, 2014). Media agency GroupM handles digital media investments for Unilever. Ari Bluman, the chief digital investment officer at GroupM, exclaims that Unilever's assertion is hyperbolic but the company is still interested in metrics that account for viewing longer than a single second (Neff, 2014). Unilever and GroupM realize that unless they themselves mandated strict digital display Viewability standards, their product lines would fall victim to a broad and ineffective measurement policy. Master claims that by setting a high baseline Viewability standard they ensure that the least possible media budget will be wasted on invisible, fraudulent, or out of focus ad impressions.

Unfortunately, Unilever's 100% Viewability strategy is misguided due to their distorted thinking about Viewability and its ability to solve wasteful media spend. While Viewability seems to be a high priority for Master, he does not specify the exact role Viewability will play within specific line-of-business (LOB) consumer journeys. Ensuring a single impression is served does not guarantee a form of engagement nor does it necessarily give the customer the impetus to purchase the product. Regardless of Unilever being a multinational conglomerate with numerous brands under its domain, it does execute media buys on behalf of specific brands. These brand-specific media buys for LOBs like Axe, Lipton and Ben and Jerry's all have specific goals for their respective Internet

browsers. Therefore, Masters' broad-based exclamation touting Viewability's importance only serves to support Viewability as the cornerstone, rather than outwardly touting the need for specific brand metric hubs.

Case Study: Where High Viewability Matters

Determining what is viewable by one brand on a specific type of site with a specific type of ad format may not be acceptable by a different brand with other marketing objectives. Sometimes Viewability should be directly tied to the campaign objective. For EA Sports' Madden NFL video game, an awareness-building campaign leveraged a top-of-funnel goal to display dynamic ads across the Internet in real time matching live NFL games. In EA Sports' case the targeted and precisely timed programmatic purchasing of placements across the Google Ad Network was part of the campaign's essence. EA Sports developed a campaign that used API-rich real-time programmatic buying to build awareness for the new Madden NFL video game. EA Sports' agency of record, Heat, partnered with the branding experience arm of Google "Art Copy Code" and was able to execute banner ads across the Google Ad Network after key moments in real NFL games. For example, after the Patriots score a touchdown, banner ads showcasing an animated GIF of computer generated Quarterback Tom Brady spiking a ball may be a creative message that was rapidly purchased and placed across the ad network after the exciting game moment (Art, Copy, Code, 2014).

The goal of these display ads was to drive awareness of the new EA Sports game, rather than push the viewer immediately through a purchasing funnel. Hence, Viewability would be of interest to Heat and EA Sports due to the goal of serving a high volume of impressions to targeted Internet users at a precise time. Viewability would be a worthwhile metric for the agency to report because the nature of the campaign revolves nearly entirely around both the prevalence of second screen experiences and impressions served within an acute timeframe. Clear campaign standards for Viewability are needed in order to achieve marketing objectives for brands. A clear Viewability definition agreed upon by both Heat and EA Sports has the potential to lead to better insights regarding consumers' progress through the purchasing funnel and progression along the consumer journey.

Contents of a Multi Touch-Point Campaign

Viewability is a soft metric and does not denote rich multi touch-point engagement within a campaign. Multi touch-point metrics collected within a metric hub help a marketer evaluate the success of a campaign while simultaneously providing insight into budgetary forecasting. The Viewability debate has overshadowed conversations that pertain to the creation of measurements that accurately convey the value of engaged and loyal customers.

Goal-orientation of this campaign is defined by the desired objective deemed central to your company's purpose [FIGURE 9]. In the context of a website, John filling out a form, playing a game, reading an article, downloading a white paper, purchasing a good or watching a video are all examples of final actions within a consumer journey. The core aspects to engineering a sound array of touch-points within a metric hub include

Behavioral, Cognitive and Emotional measurements. These measurement categories were developed by the IAB taskforce on measurement (Defining and Measuring, 2014).

Cognitive metrics are used to measure changes in awareness, intent and interest of a particular product or service. These metrics can be leveraged to help determine site goal-orientation. Emotional metrics play a critical role within the metric-hub by testing changes in brand loyalty or evaluating psychological ad responses (Defining and Measuring, 2014). These metrics play a role in helping determine the extent a brand experience is shaped and perceived by John.

Behavioral metrics lead to activating multiple touch-point attribution as a strategy for evaluating ads at a greater depth than just Viewability. The scalability of behavioral metrics tracking enables sites to acutely plan and weight the importance of a particular metric as it relates to the overall customer journey. Behavioral metrics can be measured through web analytics and verification vendors (Defining and Measuring, 2014). These Cognitive, Emotional and Behavioral metrics can all be manipulated through multiple campaign touch-points without the need of a 100% Viewability. Therefore, touting Viewability as a core measurement solution for the industry is false because the interlocking measurements within the IAB Engagement Continuum substantiate a captivated online audience. A focus on Viewability is naive because the soft metric fails to contribute a singular meaningful kernel of data to better enhance the knowledge of an engaged consumer.

Relation to Viewability and Fraud

The Viewability debate emanating from the advertising trade press has revolved around the notion that impressions not viewed by John should not count as purchased impressions from a site. Rather, literature regarding traffic fraud and its prevalence in the industry focuses on its potency and saturation through multiple mediums.

While Viewability has the ability to corrupt top-of-funnel metrics, bot traffic fraud has the ability to permeate a greater depth of the purchasing funnel and measurable touch-points. For example, if Capital One decides to create a campaign using targeted display ads to reach male homeowners ages 25-44 living in the top ten metros with a household income over \$200k they can serve dynamic creative ads that articulate a specific message (Durbal Interview). However, due to the pernicious nature of bot traffic fraud, up to 35-50% clicks or site visits from programmatically purchased media could simply be bots disguised as valuable consumers. Fraudulent traffic can pollute the quality of impressions served as well as the quality of leads generated through clicks or sign ups. In addition, dynamic creative utilizing A/B testing could be compromised if fraudulent traffic inaccurately substantiates the less compelling creative messaging (Durbal Interview). Subsequently, when these metrics are reported back to a marketer or agency, excess fraud permeated throughout the consumer journey may instill trepidation when thinking of increasing media buys and venturing into paid placements on new platforms. The pervasiveness of fraudulent traffic inhibits a company's ability to forecast future media investments while instantaneously increasing poor risk-taking.

The goal for a designated campaign is to progress an individual consumer through the consumer journey. According to 360i's Hierarchy of Media Well-Being, there are three tenets that govern responsible media buying: Quality, Verifiable and Effective [Figure 10].

Quality refers to the notion that purchased inventory should have a higher purpose and seek to impact a consumer's awareness, interest or purchasing intent of a particular product. It is within this tenet that the Viewability debate resides. If a media buyer purchases an exorbitant amount of impressions as a way to quickly blast out content, this in fact aids the fraudulent bot ridden traffic. Verifiable is built on Quality because ensuring that a given media buy is authentic requires a certification of its authenticity. Verifiable inventory is critical because with the partnership of verification vendors this allows for purchased media to be vetted by an extra source to ensure its legitimacy before the creative is served in the marketplace. The most substantive building block for media well-being is Effective buying. Effective media buying is the tenet that most acutely addresses the complex multidimensional threats of fraud in the marketplace (Belsky & Durbal, 2015).

By determining and examining if each media buy is effective, this results in a shift away from soft metrics like Viewability and a coalescence around narrowly defined and sophisticated value oriented (value chain) metrics. Value chain metrics allow an agency and marketer to seamlessly deduce the financial impact of the purchased media and make adjustments that calibrate to the desired marketing goal (Belsky & Durbal, 2015). By leveraging data authentication by third parties as well as first party data originating from site performance, it is possible to mitigate fraud especially if a sound metric hub mirrors the consumer's journey.

In order for sound media decisions to be made it is important for Effective media to be built upon Verifiable and Verifiable to be built upon Quality. This pyramid of media buying quality is in essence the rationale behind the importance of the "fraudulent traffic" in the media marketplace and the simultaneous dismissal of Viewability as problematic

within the media landscape. In 360i's Hierarchy of Media Well-Being, fraudulent traffic disturbs the fundamental economics and the consumer journey that make the media buying system tick. Viewability is just a surface level measurement quandary only polluting one level of the purchasing funnel.

While bot traffic and fraud can decimate deep media insights and forecasting techniques, Viewability still plays a role in corrupting brand based campaigns and draining large CPM based budgets. An emphasis on Viewability and ignorance of traffic fraud both can be detrimental to the development and execution of a sound marketer media campaign. The industry's Viewability debate and lobby for honest web traffic both rely heavily on the development of fundamental policies put forth by the MRC and 3MS. These two organizations have the ability to educate high-profile marketers, agencies and publishers in an effort to recalibrate the economics of the digital advertising industry.

Fraud and its Effect on Metric Hub Measurement

The presence of fraud has been persistent since the Internet's commercial infancy in the 1990s. Global advertisers are poised to lose \$6.3 billion to bots over the course of 2015. White Ops is a company specializing in bot detection and removal of malicious traffic sources. A White Ops report studied three million sites and revealed 67% of bot traffic came from residential IP addresses. In addition, programmatic ad buying has an increased rate of bot traffic especially in regards to video media buys. From a publisher or marketer economic standpoint, bots inflated the monetized audiences of common sites between 5-50 percent (The Bot Baseline, 2014). Furthermore, the prevalence of bots and malicious cyber

traffic has the power to severely skew targeting strategies due to malware and ad bots embedded in individuals' computers. Therefore, once bots are on residential computers they are able to mimic the identity of the devices they hijack. Bots today have the power to employ strategies such as impersonating human cursor movements and display ad hovering all in an effort to disguise and entice advertisers and publishers. White Ops has also found that when companies are engaging in sales or promotions there is usually an uptick in bot traffic to the company's landing pages. Since bots can be dynamic and disguise themselves as normal traffic this can be problematic for a media analyst and marketing professional (The Bot Baseline, 2014).

Case Study: Mercedes Online Display Campaign

Since many of the leading programmatic buying platforms are not transparent regarding the precise variables used in their algorithms, it is very tough for agencies to fully be aware of all the placements that are purchased. These long tail placements frequently reside on niche and fraudulent sites. Many large companies have fallen victim to having vast expanses of their online media budget consumed illicitly through fraudulent impressions and clicks. According to a Telemetry study on a Mercedes campaign, a British fraud detection company discovered that 57% of Mercedes' 365,000 purchased impressions were actually viewed by automated computer systems. Rocket Fuel, the firm that booked the advertising buy, was responsible for the wasted impressions (Cookson, 2014). While the firm did leverage pre-bid third party screening from Double Verify and Integral Ad Science, it is still possible for malicious bots to commandeer a reputable

campaign. The Mercedes example underscores the increasing prevalence of fraud across high quality campaigns. The increasing role of fraud has adversely affected the use of a metric-hub as a vehicle for quantifying the digital consumer journey.

A clear activation plan by MRC and 3MS is needed in order to thwart ad-blocking brokers and mandate greater transparency from programmatic (algorithm based) media buying. Strong and swift action is needed to not only address the traditional design-related qualms plaguing Viewability but also the parasitic players seeking to undermine the profitability of marketers, advertisers and publishers. Bot traffic fraud maliciously attributes to the tumultuous financial situation of many online publishers. The MRC and 3MS emphasis on Viewability is misappropriated after considering the vast challenges associated with ad blockers and fraudulent bots.

In this circumstance the Viewability debate gives credence to an ethical conversation surrounding whether viewable disruptive display advertising is more virtuous than censoring intrusive sponsored content. Regardless, the MRC and 3MS have a misguided focus rooted in creating a marketplace based on viewable impressions while they openly admit there are innate discrepancies in measuring, evaluating and analyzing Viewability. A pivot towards bot traffic fraud and ad blockers would tangibly lock the MRC and 3MS regulatory organizations into a battle that could tangibly result in saving billions of dollars in stolen revenues and the return of missing targetable users.

Potential Solutions

The Viewability debate has taken the digital advertising industry by storm by instilling a fear in marketers, ad agencies and publishers that unseen impressions correlate with a campaign's imminent failure. The MRC and 3MS must adopt a laissez faire approach by enabling marketers and publishers to take the regulatory lead by establishing their own detailed allowable standards for Viewability. This approach will prove that greater responsibility can lead to more accurate measurement and increase in overall advertising ROI.

Development of Corporate Specific Standards

In an effort to delve deeper into sales-related marketing goals, brands should have a conversation with their agency around the value of online engagement and how it should mirror sales objectives. The agency should simultaneously build out corresponding Viewability parameters and fraud monitoring standards that parallel the consumer journey as well as match the marketing objectives. In addition, the agency should partner with a third party verification vendor to custom code specific standards into the monitoring engine. By stipulating parameters such as percentage of ad in view, time viewed after rendering and cursor hover, it is possible to rein in exactly the measurement that suits the creative messaging. Adjusting metrics and measurement styles with each new campaign allows for data to be synthesized in a way that is directly applicable to the marketing goals of the client. After ironing out exactly how Viewability metrics will be measured, it is imperative to examine how these metrics will pull/push the end user through the purchasing funnel. By determining campaign behavioral/physical metrics such as dwell

time, cursor movement, completed views, customization time, or page depth, its possible to map out exactly how the client's consumer journey will take shape.

If corporate clients and agencies take an active role in the creation of campaign specific metric hubs, this will allow for strict monitoring of fraudulent bot traffic incursions and therefore improve the authenticity of data collect. In addition, mid funnel metrics within the metric hub will diminish the perceived value of first and last touch attribution models. A holistic mutually agreed upon metric hub stipulated by the client and agency is ideally entirely independent of the IAB/MRC regulations. Reciprocity between metric verification vendors is not problematic because detailed specifications of Viewability definitions and Fraud tolerance would lead the generation of metrics that only need to be client specific.

Matching Verification Vendors to Campaign Objectives

Since the MRC has allowed for the accreditation of sixteen vendors so far, this presents a dynamic challenge of the regulatory organization. On one hand, how can agencies, publishers and markers ensure measurement reciprocity if there are multiple 'currencies' flooding the market with their proprietary units of measurement? Rachel Herskovitz, global media manager at AmEx, asserted her dissatisfaction with the differing verification vendor methodologies and touting transparency as the single biggest characteristic she looks for when choosing a vendor (Joe, 2015). However, fragmentation of the measurement verification industry will indeed lead to agencies and publishers utilizing vendors that best accentuate their own competencies. For example, CNN may use AdLoox

to verify Viewability of ads on their site; however, the design of the site may in fact lead to the perceived appearance of greater Viewability for CNN. Therefore, a brand should match a verification vendor to the goals of a particular campaign. Defaulting to the verification vendor of record for the agency/client allows for data recorded from ad pixeling to be pertinent to the agency as they optimize the campaign. The verification vendor of the publisher should only be used for internal metric keeping and monitoring for the site's own metric hub.

When a publisher then is soliciting new business, I recommend interested verification vendors assemble quotes detailing their metric analysis capabilities for specific agency/client campaigns. Then the brand can choose a vendor that will align with the metric hub that was created for that campaign. This reorganization of the marketplace and reclassification of verification vendors as agents for hire by agencies/clients per campaign allows for agencies to examine the marketplace through the measurement lens of the particular chosen vendor. Coupling this vendor-agent system with specialty rating from the MRC would allow agencies/clients to make informed decisions regarding the comparative capabilities of each vendor [FIGURE 11]. This means that the MRC would be responsible for auditing each accredited verification vendor and identifying how they stack up against each other and outline key differences about how their algorithms are compiled. The MRC would have the opportunity to play a meaningful role in regulating verification vendors by moving beyond accreditation by comparatively ranking each vendor's capabilities.

Website Redesign and Optimizations

I strongly advise major site redesigns and optimizations that will lead to improved tracking of important metrics and improved monitoring of Viewability. One of the design strategies that can be implemented is the development of infinite scroll websites. Several sites including Quartz, Vox Media and Thrillist all have implemented sites that load as the user progresses down the page [FIGURE 12, FIGURE 13]. One of the reasons this recommendation will improve Viewability is the notion that ads ideally will only render when the site loads in browser focus, thus denoting the user has the potential to actually view the ad. The aforementioned sites also have worked to implement scaffolding sites that responsively adapt to different browser sizes and intuitive mobile optimization. Ensuring that content is not lost laterally within the browser provides a higher caliber of assurance that impressions are not wasted. A site redesign implemented with infinite scroll may result in reduced inventory. Less advertising real estate to sell will enable higher priced premium advertising units.

By instilling a linear hierarchy to the site, this allows for the development of ad units that either fit within the scrolling based environment or simply lock against a sidebar as the user scrolls. In addition, quicker load times will also be a result because only the in-view browser portion of a site renders for the user. According to Chartbeat, an infinite scroll site can allow for an increase in daily scroll depth as well as an increase to time on site (Moses, 2015). In addition, the implementation of a scaffolding site can allow for a better user engagement experience and easier device optimization.

Expansion of Viewable Ad Real Estate Offerings

I believe the expansion of acceptable ad units will lead to better Viewability and engagement metrics. As website redesigns occur, archaic ad dimensions seem like an intrusion and a dated left over from an early time in the internet's history. The IAB specified in 2002 an Ad Size Task Force to develop a process used to reduce the number of ad sizes that publishers use. The IAB designates publishers as Universal Ad Package (UAP) compliant if they provide advertisers with a least one to four of these ad unit sizes: 728x90, 300x250, 160x600 and 180x150. The rationale behind this regulation is to enable a multitude of advertisers the ability to reach the bulk of a publisher's audience.

The introduction of an expanded portfolio of sizes that cater directly to scaffolding sites would help increase the percentage of an ad that is in-view and in focus within a browser. For example, in early April 2015, ESPN.com updated their website with the purpose of enhancing Viewability and spurring greater user engagement with their ad units. By developing a four-pillar approach to their UAP, they created ad unit sizes that optimize automatically for desktop (Extra Large), laptop (Large), tablet (Medium) and smartphone (Small) (Faull, 2015). In addition to the desired boost in Viewability, the new ad formats acutely and naturally flow into the new design of the site [FIGURE 14].

ESPN.com also implemented an ad-sync sales policy for their online ads. Alan Fagan asserted, "With most publishers, unless you buy a homepage takeover, you buy one [ad unit] or another so often these ads are competing. But we're not selling that way. That doesn't mean you'll own them for the whole day but if you are buying on an impressions basis they are synced" (Faull, 2015). This means that ESPN will only sell ads to a single brand on any one page. This mandate will allow for skyscrapers to match leaderboards. The tactic that ESPN is introducing will aid many campaigns that are worried about buying

ads that are not viewable. Besides Viewability concerns, this expansion of the UAP will also likely lead to a more engaging site with less intrusive advertising since ad units will render to the size of the browser.

I also advocate for the use of new and innovative advertising formats as a strategy to employ to add touch-points to a consumer journey and depth to a metric hub. Both Thrillist Media Group and Quartz have developed their own advertising formats that natively reside within the hierarchy of the site. These ad formats are interactive in their composition by including animation and videos embedded. Each of these ads has multiple ways for John to interact with the content. Thrillist also employs a similar tactic by customizing skyscraper dimensions to increase their uniqueness and blend their design into the overall theme of the page.

Fraud a Pernicious Problem

The MRC is poised for a conversation pivot away from Viewability. Top industry marketers like American Express have come out against the singular conversation around Viewability. Herskovitz asserted, “Why should we pay more for something that needs to be seen? That doesn’t make sense.” There is a belief that viewable impressions should not warrant an upcharge from a publisher because it should not be economically possible to sell non-viewable impressions. Conversely, Carol Chung, SVP of media technology at Digitas, points out that depending on campaign goals inventory with disproportionately low Viewability can still perform satisfactorily (Joe, 2015).

The MRC has created a conversation that confuses publishers' economic models and complicates the execution of client-marketing goals all while situating agencies in the middle of a losing debate. If the MRC were to shift educational resources towards enlightening agencies and clients to the dangers associated with bot traffic fraud, this debate may encourage more progress across the industry. Showing how bot traffic fraud can permeate multiple levels of the consumer journey and corrupt an agency/client metric hub would serve illustrate the resiliency of this systemic problem.

Agencies Drive the Viewability Conversation

Through the purchasing of ad inventory on publisher sites, corporations control the media budgets for the digital advertising industry. A corporate focus on advertising ROI does not logically align with the rationale for ensuring greater Viewability of ad units. Since agencies are charged with the creation of a consumer journey and matching media plan, these entities are more apt to determine the value of each unit of ad real estate.

Ideally ad and media buying agencies should control the role Viewability plays in their clients' placements. By placing the Viewability debate in the hands of the agencies, this would guarantee that all actions taken would be in the best interest of enhancing the consumer journey. Ad agencies are oriented in such a way to support a brand's monetary assets through the creation of creative, strategic and media executions. Each agency client team may assign a different definition of Viewability to each business or each campaign based upon certain marketer objectives set by the client. Most importantly, agencies are situated in an omniscient viewpoint because they are between the client and the publisher;

therefore, they are able to determine the role Viewability should or shouldn't play for a given campaign.

Final Thoughts

The MRC and the 3MS regulatory organizations have greatly overstated the importance of Viewability and its applicability within the measurement realm. Marketers, advertising agencies and publishers are major players as well as potential victims from a continued one-dimensional emphasis on Viewability. My proposed solutions seek to place equal onus on all involved parties to make changes that contribute to the economic and functional sustainability of advertising supported content across the Internet.

MRC and 3MS supported client centric solutions to the Viewability debate would result in greater responsibilities doled out to vested parties. However, with greater autonomy it is possible to engineer Viewability and fraud traffic standards that better align with marketer objectives and campaign goals.

Marketer solutions are based on the notion that the creation of campaign specific Viewability standards should match a marketer's objectives. In addition, the choosing of a verification vendor that fits a campaign's objectives is imperative to create homogeneous reporting metrics between publishers and advertisers.

Publisher solutions emanate from site optimization for a multitude of devices that exist in the market today. Implementing site redesigns and offering an expansion of ad unit offerings will lead to both increased engagement and higher ad unit Viewability.

Organizationally, advertising agencies should assert themselves to the forefront of the conversation surrounding Viewability because of their omniscient view of both marketers and publishers across the industry. Additionally, the MRC and 3MS must work diligently to quantify on a continuum the algorithms of impression verification vendors for marketer and advertiser vendor selection. In addition, the reconciling of the vendor discrepancies associated with traffic fraud monitoring should be addressed and be the focus of organization attention. Fraudulent traffic can thoroughly permeate analytics data and a resounding effort by the MRC and 3MS can work to mitigate the impacts of this threat.

Viewability is a soft metric defined by the MRC and highly variable based marketer objectives. However, Viewability is simply a singular cog in the wheel of digital media injustice. If the MRC and 3MS refocus their efforts towards fraudulent traffic while adopting a client centric approach to tackling Viewability, both organizations will greatly aid in the growth and prosperity of a free and open Internet.

FIGURE 1
ouncil Information

- | | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Established in 1960s accordance with a Congressional House Committee |
| | |

FIGURE 2
3MS Information

- A cross industry initiative that was founded in cooperation with the American Association of Advertising Agencies, the Association of National Advertisers and the Interactive Advertising Bureau.

ion of these measurement tactics

FIGURE 3

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	DATA ANALYSIS	MEASURING PARAMETERS	OBJECTIVE						
[Blue]										
[Blue]										
[Blue]										
[Orange]										
[Orange]										
[Orange]										
[Gold]										
[Gold]										
[Gold]			<table border="1"> <tr><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td></tr> </table>							
[Gold]			<table border="1"> <tr><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td></tr> </table>							
[Gold]			<table border="1"> <tr><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td></tr> </table>			<p>rch terms</p>				

Social Shares Across Facebook/Twitter				
				e coupon and recipes to their mobile device

FIGURE 4

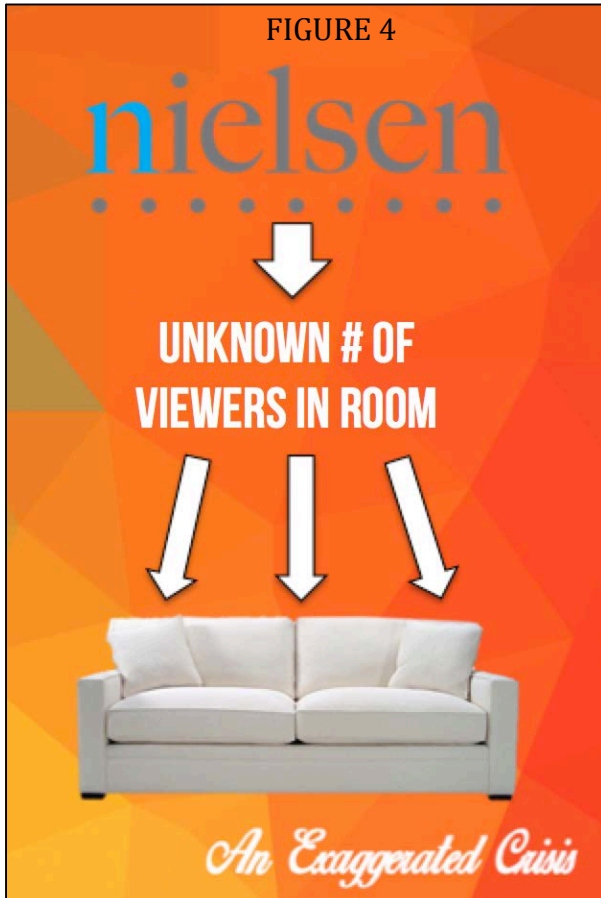


FIGURE 5



FIGURE 7

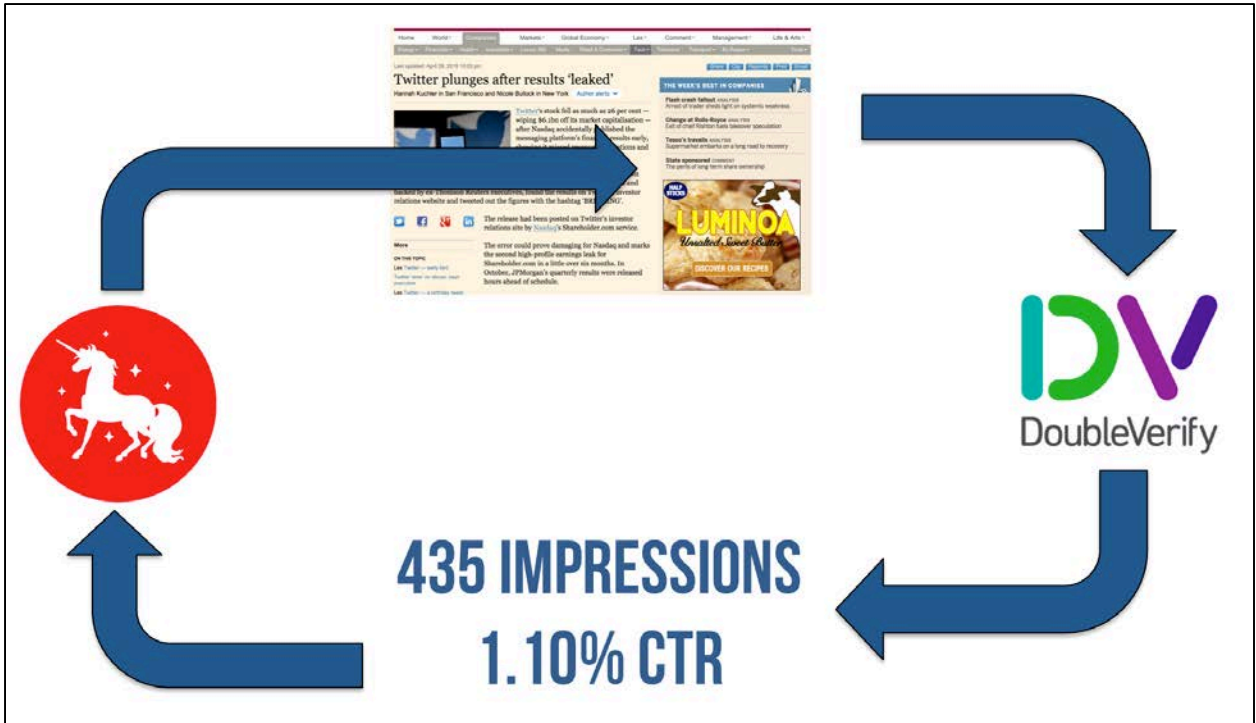


FIGURE 8

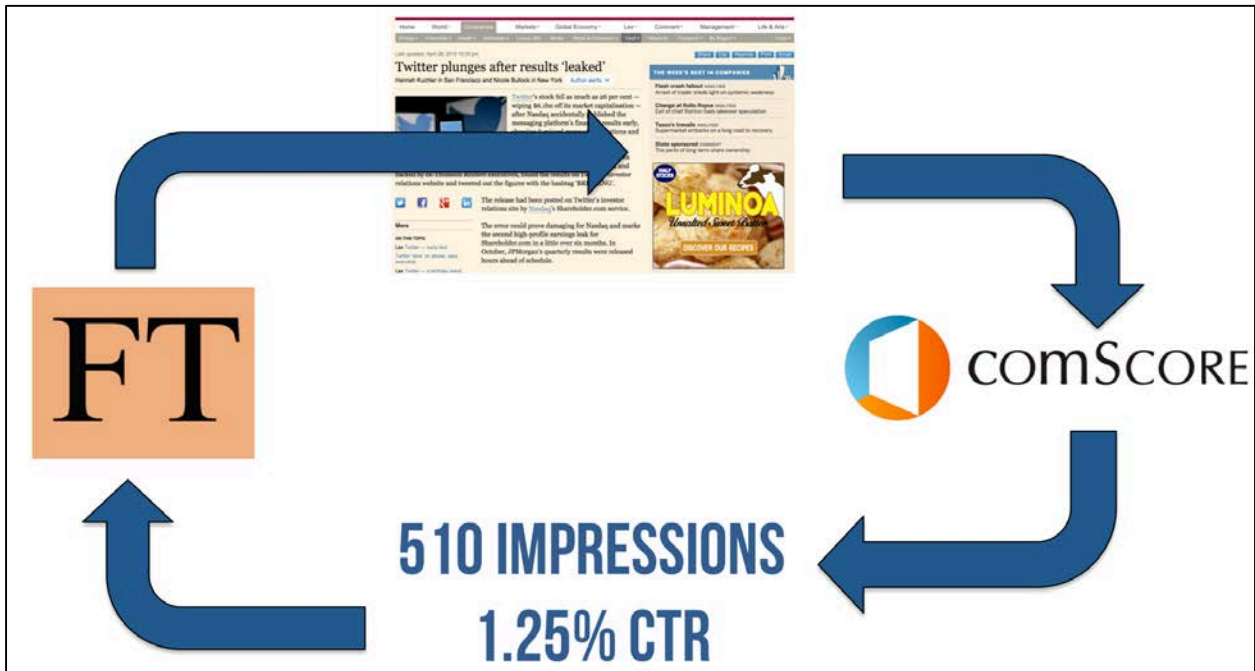


FIGURE 9

VIEWABILITY



GOAL: DRIVE SOCIAL DISCOVER ON FACEBOOK

GOAL: DRIVE TO SITE TO PLAY GAME FOR DISCOUNT

GOAL: ENGAGE WITH CONTENT ON AXE SITE

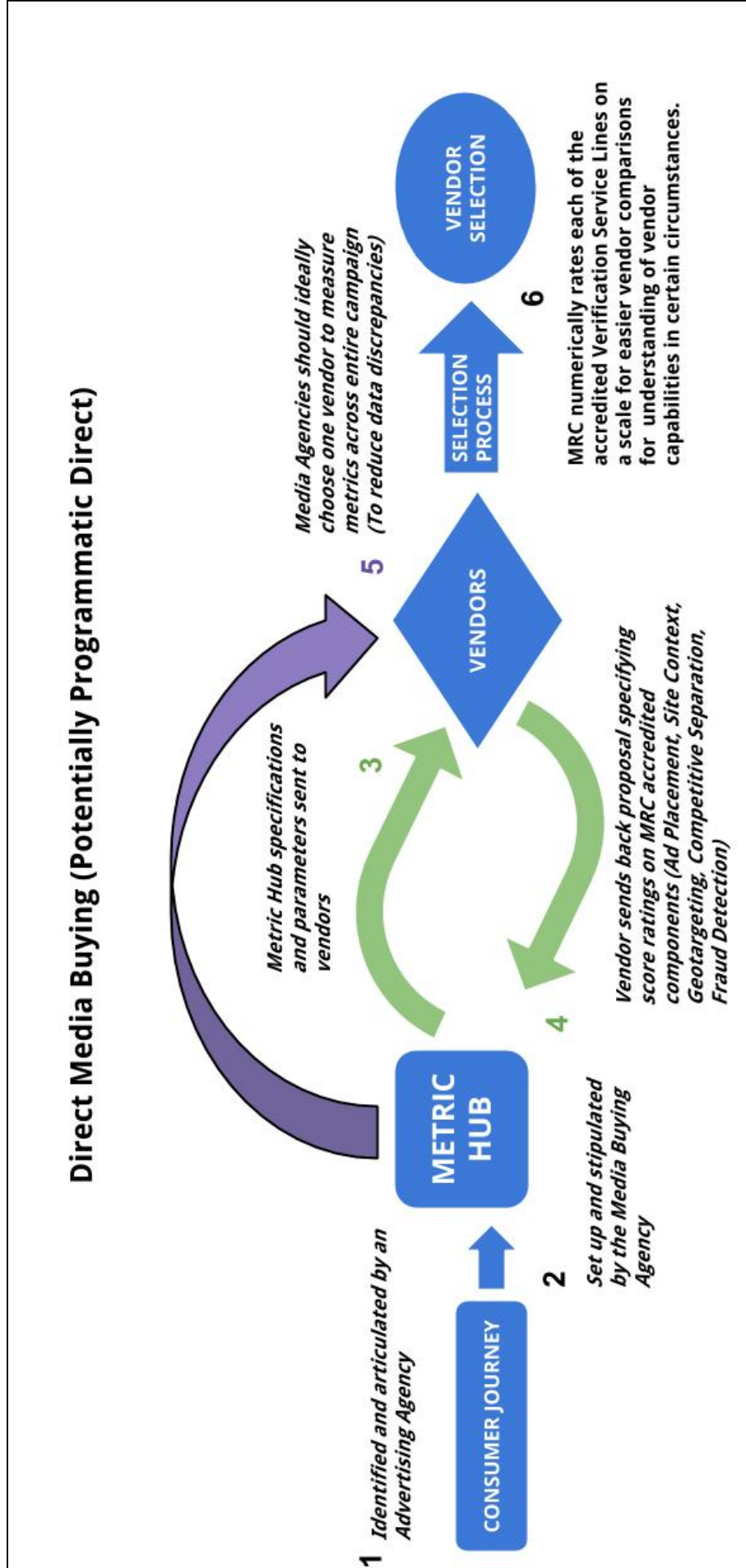
GOAL: DISCOVER ORIGINAL RECIPES USING HELLMANN'S

An Exaggerated Crisis

FIGURE 10



FIGURE 11



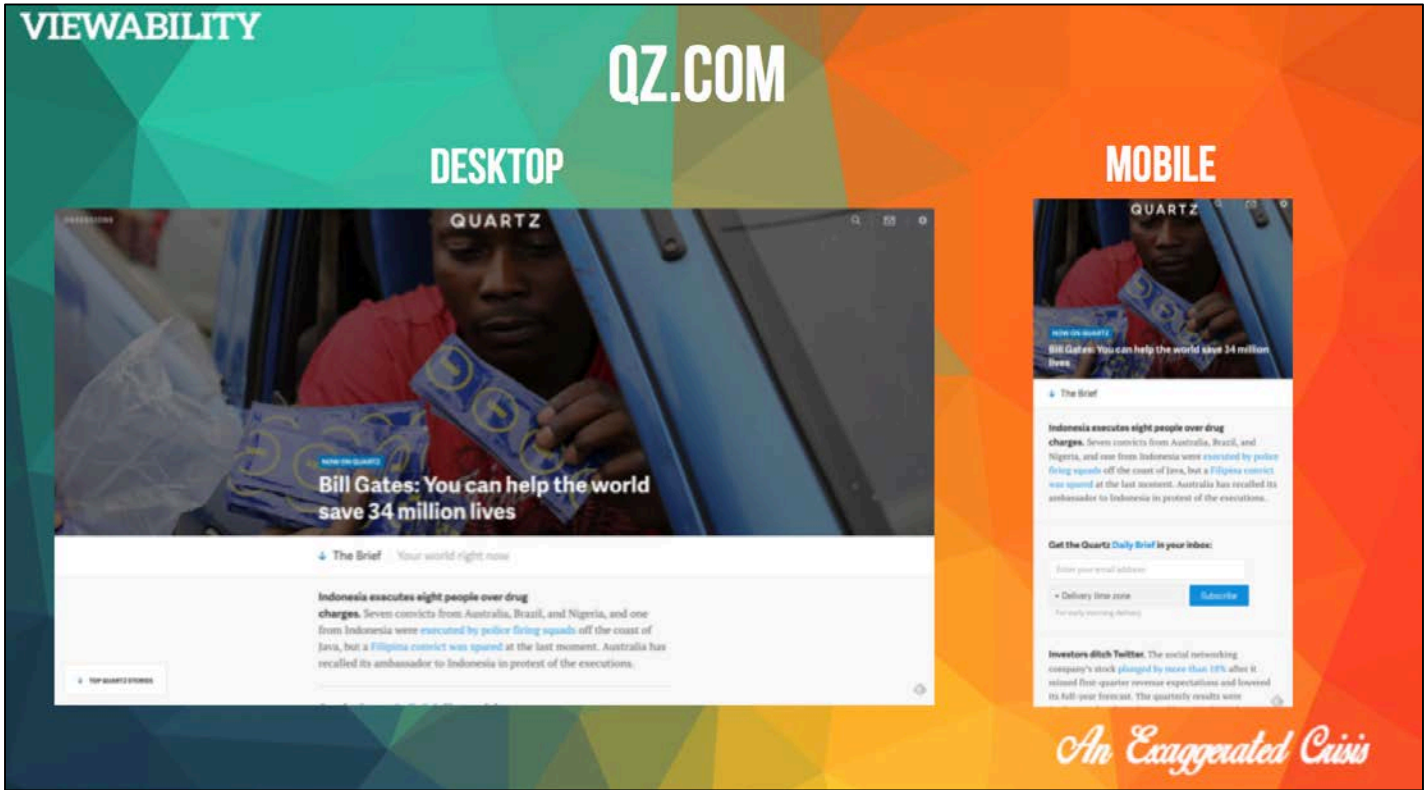
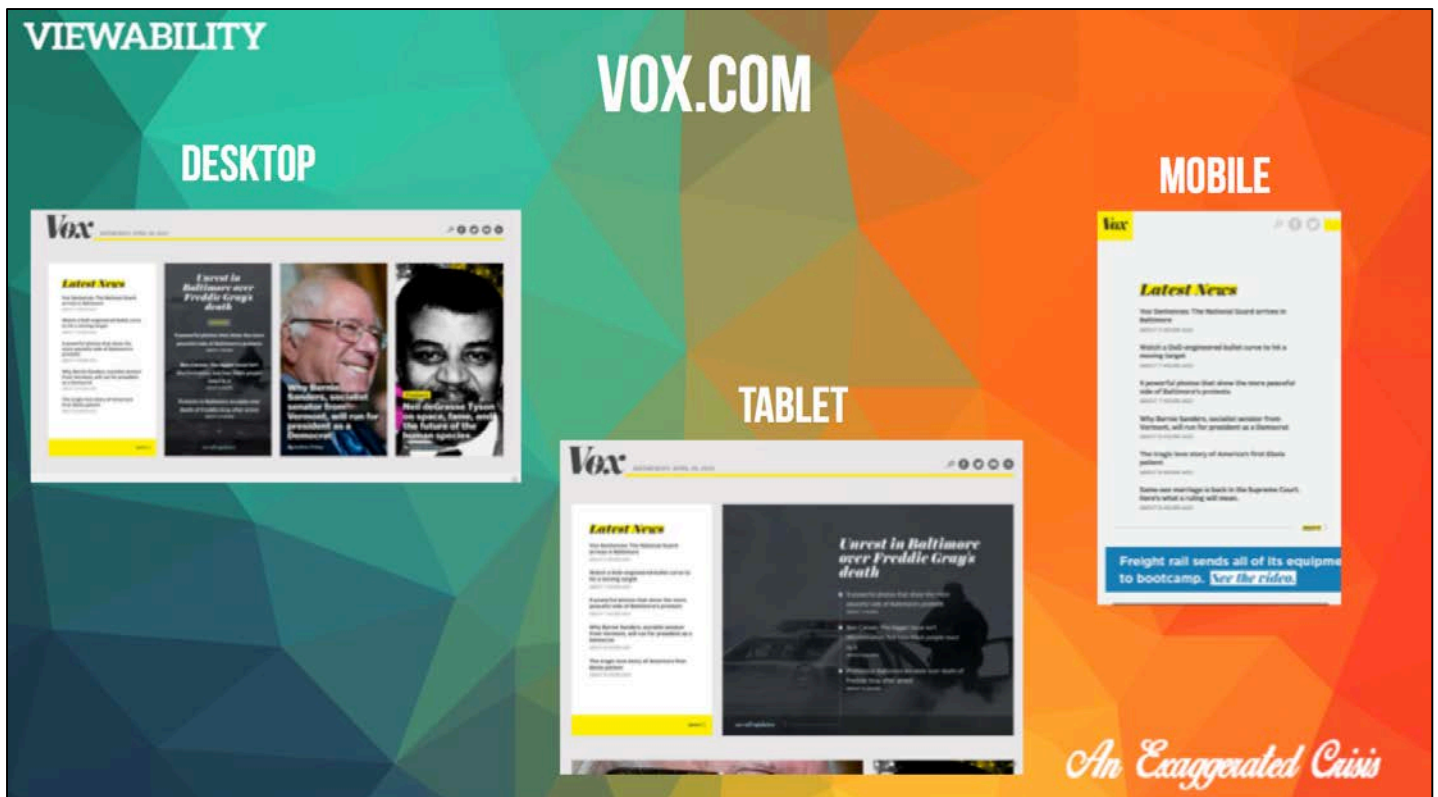


FIGURE 13



VIEWABILITY

ESPN.COM

DESKTOP



TABLET



MOBILE



An Exaggerated Crisis

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