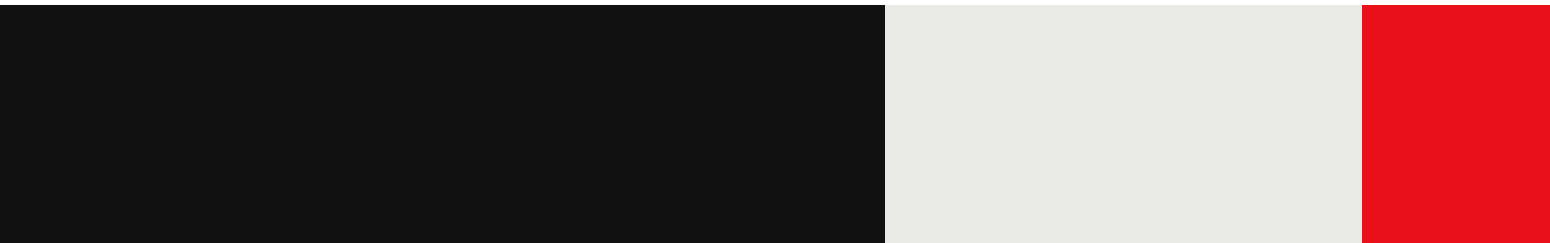# The Weekly Listen: How influential AI-generated ads will be, TikTok's chatbot Tako, and VR in your car

Audio

On today's episode, we discuss what AI-generated ads will look like, TikTok testing a new AI chatbot called Tako, Formula One finding a new way to advertise on its cars, ESPN offering its channel as a standalone streaming service, what using VR in a car will look like, visualizing the US workforce as 100 people, and more. Tune in to the discussion with our forecasting writer Ethan Cramer-Flood, director of forecasting Oscar Orozco, and analyst Max Willens.

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Episode Transcript:

Marcus Johnson:

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and a rigorous contextualization process that ensures our clients make better decisions for their business. Join more than 100,000 subscribers and learn what Insider Intelligence can do for you.

Hey, everyone, and thanks for hanging out with us for the Behind the Numbers Weekly Listen, an eMarketer podcast. This is the Friday show that Mrs. Victoria, she's gone somewhere and we're adrift without her. This is Victoria who edits the show. There's only one. Who are we kidding? I'm your host, Marcus Johnson. In today's show, AI-generated ads.

Max Willens:

They can basically take that cost and that challenge out of advertisers' hands and just solve that problem for them. This presents huge problems for creative ad agencies, but it also, I think, helps protect the relationships that they have with lots of long tail advertisers.

Marcus Johnson:

TikTok tests an AI chatbot.

Oscar Orozco:

But of course, you see the potential for increased engagement for TikTok and all of the dollar signs, et cetera, et cetera, but it doesn't feel like a realistic thing that will really pick up steam.

Marcus Johnson:

Formula One racing finds a new way to advertise on its cars.

Max Willens:

Out-of-home in general is doing well and digital out-of-home is doing even better than that. And this is just one more piece of that puzzle. Probably the F1 part is relatively small, but in general this is one of the trends of the time.

Marcus Johnson:

ESPN to offer its channel as a standalone streaming service, Meta thinks people can't wait for in-car VR and what jobs do most people in the country do? Joining me for this episode, we have three people. Let's meet, then we start with. One of our directors of forecasting. Based out of New York, it's Oscar Orozco.

Oscar Orozco:

Hi, everybody.

Marcus Johnson:

Hello, hello. We're also joined by one of our senior analysts covering digital advertising and media. Based out of Pennsylvania, ladies and gentlemen, it's Max Willens.

Max Willens:

Yo.

Marcus Johnson:

What's Gucci? That's the first time I've said that, and I don't think it went well. We're also joined by one of our senior forecasting writers. He's based out of New York, and we call him Ethan Cramer-Flood, ladies and gentlemen.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Strike one, Marcus. Already.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, no, it's not good. I told you, Victoria's out. It's going to be a dumpster fire for the episode. Let's see how it goes.

We start with the Story of the Week, and we're starting with AI-generated ads. We then move to the Game of the Week, where we give away a pretend championship belt to the person with the best answers. And finally, Dinner Party Data. That's a random trivia bit. But let's start, of course, with the Story of the Week.

AI-generated ads. Emma Roth of The Verge outlines how the digital ad giants of Google, Facebook and now Amazon, when you're talking digital ad giants, are using AI to help advertisers advertise. CNBC was recently reporting Google is planning to use its PaLM 2 AI language model to help advertisers generate assets that they can then use in their ads. Meta, they just launched the AI Sandbox, which is a testing playground for the early versions of AI-powered ad tools like background generation, image outcropping and text generation to help advertisers create different messages for certain audiences, as they say. And the information, says Amazon the third in the trio, is working on a way to generate photos and videos for

companies looking to create ad campaigns on the platform. Max, you cover ads for us. Help us understand what, if anything, is going on here and where we're at with AI-generated ads.

Max Willens:

So the way I see it, the generative piece of this is meant to complement and continue feeding the other piece of those companies' ad systems, which are themselves in increasingly automated. And the easiest way to continue feeding and powering an AI-driven targeting interface is by giving it lots and lots of stuff to test and use to evaluate effectiveness. In the old days of making advertising, that meant going to your creative agency, making them cut another spot or come up with new visual assets to feed into either a traditional channel like a print ad campaign or on a television or in the modern format into the pipes of a social network. But by moving into an automated environment and structure like this, they can basically take that cost and that challenge out of advertisers' hands and just solve that problem for them. This presents huge problems for creative ad agencies, but it also, I think, helps protect the relationships that they have with lots of long tail advertisers.

So if you're a small business, one of the millions that advertise on Google or Meta products, the prospect of having to come up with lots and lots and lots of creative assets is not realistic for you. It's not something that you have time to do or the resources to do. But if you can just let the magical elves inside of these products do it for you, then you can just continue to spend money with those platforms without having to worry about it too much. So that's why they're pursuing this approach, all of them.

Marcus Johnson:

So you can save time and you can save money by doing this, but you can also hyperlocalize a lot of these efforts. So you can have ads for basically every local market. So Daniel Thomas at the Financial Times just wrote that one of the world's largest ad groups, so WPP, has teamed up with chip maker Nvidia to use generative AI to produce ads at scale for its clients, doing weeks of work in minutes. He explains that a new platform will combine 3D imaging software that can produce a fully accurate, photorealistic image of, say, a car if you're trying to advertise a car that could be placed in a desert or a rainy street, with the car adapting to its surroundings.

So if you put it in the desert, it would have the reflective glare. If you put it on a rainy street, it would appear wet. And the speed of production means that ad campaigns can be rapidly

adapted for different markets or countries. So you could put the car into the streets of Hong Kong, into New York. So you could customize the ad for every environment in the world, creating 10,000 versions in minutes. So in theory, gents, you could see a car ad with that car driving around your local home market.

Oscar Orozco:

Listen, it makes a ton of sense to me from obviously the advertiser's perspective, as Max just mentioned, with local advertisers. Obviously, the platforms themselves, it's on the business side. But I can't help but keep thinking just about ethically, right? When these ads are out in the world and consumers are viewing them, do we think that it should be very clear that it should be attributed to... That it's an AI-produced ad, inorganic, that this is not an ad as we've all come to expect. Is that something that we should expect from this? Should we-

Marcus Johnson:

It's interesting, because I feel that way with articles, Oscar. I feel that way when you start reading an article, I want to know whether a human wrote it or not. And Ian Bogost of The Atlantic had a piece where he was writing about generative AI. And the first three paragraphs, you read through and then you get to the fourth and he says, "Oh, by the way, the first three were written by a chatbot." And I felt quite deceived. So with articles, I felt that way. Do people want that with ads as well?

Oscar Orozco:

Exactly. I mean-

Marcus Johnson:

With music, maybe they will. I don't know.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

It's probably not as sensitive, to be honest. But I mean, every time I see one of these headlines in our world, I have the same reaction. It's equal and opposite. It's a binary, polar opposite reaction just that the AI tidal wave is coming for the digital advertising ecosystem in exactly the same way it's coming for every other industry. And you always get a simultaneous wave of anxiety, on the one hand, for all of the possible negative ramifications, whether that has to do with job losses, ethical dangers, liability, the possibility that none of this is going to be any

good, the possibility that companies or clients will dive into this and maybe the results won't be what they want or it'll be a big fiasco, or the platforms in question will have spent a whole heck of a lot of money developing these tools and they won't pay off. It's just as easy to have the opposite reactions like, "Oh, this is brilliant. This is going to help a lot. This is going to make-"

Oscar Orozco:

Exactly.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

"... otherwise tedious or unaffordable activities available to everyone." To Max's point, you're going to save a lot of time and energy. And there's a good chance that for all of the agencies and creatives out there that are doing this now, it'll still be them doing it. Just it'll be easier and more productive.

Also, it strikes me that in this particular case with these platforms developing these tools that shifts around some of the anxiety in terms of liability for inadvertent IP infringement, copyright infringement, they're giving you these tools, which presumably means they're taking on some of the responsibility of ensuring that whatever these tools spit back out for you is kosher, right?

Marcus Johnson:

Mm-hmm.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

You're on their system. They're giving it to you. They're spending the money to make sure that it works so that you will spend money with them. It does seem like a pretty clear win-win, unless you are the person who is no longer needed on staff because the thousands of hours they save is what you used to do.

Max Willens:

I will say to the point that Oscar and Marcus both raised, though, I think it's quite possible that there will be calls to label when and in fact an ad has been produced artificially, especially because advertising has been shown over and over again to shape people's opinions of themselves and their own standards of body image, for example. I was thinking a lot about

how I think in it was either France or England, about 10 years ago they passed a law requiring that all images in editorial magazines that had been photoshopped include language that explained that it had been photoshopped. Because if you're a person who consumes a lot of women's media and all you see are women and men who have been airbrushed into shapes and hues and dimensions that are just idealized to the point of not being realistic, that's going to start to eat away at your own self-esteem. And I could see a way in which VR could perform a similar function on steroids.

It's very much in the platform's best interest to not do that, but we've seen over and over again that the platform's ability to rein in or control a lot of these systems completely is pretty limited or pretty spotty. So it'll be really interesting to see if and how that comes out in the wash.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

And we can safely assume that the European Union regulatory bodies will be out in front of this far before the US is, but the same platforms will have to comply with however that goes. And that, in turn, could migrate back to the US. It doesn't always. Sometimes it does.

Oscar Orozco:

I think there's already bipartisan support for and fear behind this when we speak politically, just like what we're seeing with TikTok. So I wouldn't be surprised if there's more cohesion there with the eurozone, more than we would expect.

And my last point would just be there's such a fine line between automation and when we talk more creative and creating ads. And one of the articles, Marcus, you showed us indicated that marketers are already using AI to automate parts of the process. So that fine line is where I'm unclear on, and then I think that needs to be looked at responsibly.

Marcus Johnson:

Speaking of that fine... I mean, it seems like there needs to be some kind of definition when we talk about this includes AI, this doesn't. I liken it to with driverless cars, and you have six levels of driving automation. You have everything from no automation to partial, conditional, et cetera, and it goes all the way up to full automation. And I'm starting to think that maybe there should be some kind of guidelines for when we say, "This has AI," what level of AI does it include and making that clear, to Max's points.

Yeah, I mean ethically it's interesting because ads the match your search, could they be seen as manipulative? So Paresh Dave of Wired was noting one of Google's new features takes the words that someone uses to search for something. So this is AI search ads. It takes the words that someone uses to search for something on Google. So if you Google skincare for dry, sensitive skin, it would generate an ad for skin cream with the auto-generated text, "Soothe your dry, sensitive skin," which increases the chances of users clicking on it. Before, algorithms would select from texts that are from a collection of pre-made responses. But now, it would take the words that you've actually asked about and put them into the ad like that. [inaudible 00:13:27]-

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

That degree of instantaneousness adds lots of risk, right?

Oscar Orozco:

Yeah.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

If you end up relying on that and you gain confidence over time and then you let your brand roll with this, and then one day it spits out something disastrous.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, yeah. That's a great point.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

That's on you.

Marcus Johnson:

There's definitely brand safety questions. The final thing here in terms of AI-generated ads is a chatbot ad assistant. Mr. Dave of Wired noting Google is using its text generation technology to offer a chatbot to advertisers to get suggestions for search keywords worth advertising against and text to go in those ads. So lots of way that AI is finding its way into the world of advertising. That's all we've got time for, for the Story of the Week. Time now for the Game of the Week.

Today's game, what the hell is the point? Where I read out four stories and Ethan, Oscar Max, give us the main takeaways. Okay, answers get one point, good answers get two and answers that leave you with the same feeling as not setting an alarm clock. Oh, the rush. Answers that leave you with that feeling get you three points. 20 seconds to answer before they hear this. Run long, you get docked two points. Keep running long and Victoria will send you a strongly-worded Slack message. She would normally, but she's not here. So you'll probably just get away with it. Most points wins, gets the last word.

Round one. We start with Ethan. TikTok is testing an AI chatbot called Tako, we think. Maybe Tako. T-A-K-O. That can help users find content and recommend videos based on what people ask it, notes Alex Heath of The Verge. This is an early-stage test with select users in the Philippines. But Ethan, TikTok testing an AI chatbot called Tako, what's the point?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Didn't we just do this dance with Snapchat and it was a-

Marcus Johnson:

Yes.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

... complete fiasco and everybody hated it and their valuation plummeted? That's not the point though. The point, to me, is where is this AI coming from, and is it a ByteDance-developed system? And if so, this is TikTok being very slow learners because they're going to introduce this at the worst possible time. Another way that TikTok will be essentially recording the data of all of the US users and getting involved with their privacy. And unless they can prove that they're using some outside AI, to me it just seems pretty likely this is probably a ByteDance thing, and they're just going to get themselves in even more trouble.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, to Ethan's point, we don't yet know what technology is powering this chatbot. Oscar.

Oscar Orozco:

I mean, I completely agree. I think you mentioned it, Marcus. It was at the end of the article, but they mentioned it's only being tested in the Philippines, which makes you wonder about potentially grievous privacy issues. And it really is hard to imagine this product making its way

here to the US or even the EU anytime soon. It would be fought. But of course, you see the potential for increased engagement for TikTok and all of the dollar signs, et cetera, et cetera, but doesn't feel like a realistic thing that will really pick up steam.

Marcus Johnson:

Mm-hmm. Yeah, we'll see. So Watchful Technology, the company that first uncovered this TikTok development, they were saying that the chatbot's placement on the top right corner of the app above other icons signifies its importance. We'll see if they're reading too much into this and whether Oscar's right and that this doesn't really go anywhere. Max.

Max Willens:

Yeah, I mean I think that both Ethan and Oscar have made really strong points here. I guess the only thing that I would add is just the idea that to look at Snapchat, I mean one of the things that's quietly been going on in the US when it comes to social media usage is that among users, time spent really isn't growing very much. We're at this weird spot where far from being the shiny new way to waste your time, social platform places in our lives have solidified, and that's created an engagement problem that all these platforms are having to try to solve. And it'll be interesting to see if or how AI can reverse that trend for any of the platforms. It seems clear that it hasn't for Snapchat.

I think I'm with Oscar that this will never get anywhere near the United States unless it comes out that they're using LLaMA or something. But one of these platforms is going to try to find a way to turn this into just one more claw to hold users inside their platforms for a little bit longer, and we'll have to see which one cracks that code first.

Marcus Johnson:

Let's move to round two. We're talking about Formula One racing. So Formula One racing, known as F1, Drive to Survive if you watch that, that's what we're talking about. The highest class of international racing for open-wheel, single-seater formula racing cars. That's the sport we're discussing. Formula One racing finds a new way to advertise on its cars, writes Ian Parkes of the New York Times. He notes that racing team McLaren has installed digital panels by the cockpit that displays different ads during the race. The company behind the technology, Seamless Digital, said four more teams will soon follow suit. Cars are typically festooned with multiple brands, but this new method lets teams show additional ads to home viewers, because TV cameras installed behind the driver allow for a range of ad messages

over the course of a Grand Prix race weekend. These are similar to the rotating ads that you see projected onto a basketball court when watching on your TV.

But let's start with Oscar. Formula one racing finding a new way to advertise on its cars, what's the point?

Oscar Orozco:

I think it's a brilliant idea. I also think it speaks to the incredible growth we're seeing in connectivity in vehicles and really the tremendous opportunity that there is there for advertisers. And I think we're already seeing this. We're going to see more and more of it on the road with regular cars here in the States.

We've seen Uber, for example, adopt car top advertising and venturing into that. And Lyft also, I believe it was a new venture called Halo, where it's programmatic out-of-home advertising, also car top ads. So we're seeing more of this, and it makes a lot of sense to see it in Formula one of course.

Marcus Johnson:

Max.

Max Willens:

I think what's interesting to me about this is that it underlines just how important and integral monetizing TV is rather than the in-person experience for sporting events. I just wonder how long it is before F1 as a governing body just says, "Right. You all have to have these in your cars," as a way of shutting down any hesitation they might have about these little things adding too much weight to the cars.

I was really blown away in the piece by just how light they've managed to make this technology to make this possible. The fact that you can have a thing that projects ads on that weighs I think it's under 200 grams is crazy. But yeah, we'll see how that goes.

Marcus Johnson:

Ethan.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

The point of this is that Oscar and the team of forecasters were spot on when they listed digital out-of-home ad spending as one of the very small handful of categories that are-

Marcus Johnson:

Oscar clapping.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

... still growing like gangbusters. Yeah, Oscar must've been too humble to say, "Well, we knew this was going to work [inaudible 00:20:47]."

Marcus Johnson:

Not too humble to clap for himself, though, during the recording.

Oscar Orozco:

Clap quietly, clap quietly.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

They've got that metric shooting up. Out-of-home in general is doing well, and digital out-of-home is doing even better than that. And this is just one more piece of that puzzle. Probably the F1 part is relatively small, but in general this is one of the trends at the time. I can't wait until I'm watching the NFL three years from now and everybody's helmets are just changing. Every short [inaudible 00:21:12] play, it'll be like the logos are changing.

Marcus Johnson:

That's definitely coming soon.

Oscar Orozco:

That's happening. Yeah.

Marcus Johnson:

The halfway mark, Max out in front with five, Oscar and Ethan both have four. Oscar should have two. I should've docked you points for congratulating your own forecast. But [inaudible 00:21:31]-

Oscar Orozco:

Can't help it.

Marcus Johnson:

We checked the replay booth and we decided it wasn't a flagrant. So he stays on four points with Ethan all to play for at the halfway mark.

Round three. We start with Max. ESPN to offer its channel as a standalone streaming service, writes our senior director of briefings Jeremy Goldman. Disney, who owns ESPN, say they'll continue to offer the channel in the usual places as well. ESPN+, which you may have heard of, isn't actually ESPN, in case you're getting confused yet. Instead, ESPN+ gives you access to some sports like hockey, baseball, UFC, some international soccer, as well as sports documentaries and other shows as well. ESPN channel is ESPN the channel that you are used to seeing. But Max, ESPN to offer its channel as a standalone streaming service, what's the point?

Max Willens:

So I think the important thing to realize here is that this is going to help them protect some of the cable subscriber fees that they're losing, but it's not going to protect them from the people who never watched a second of ESPN but were paying for it as part of their cable bundle. So this is going to help them a little, but not a lot.

I cannot imagine that this is going to go over very well with some of the rights holders that they have partnerships with. But the key here is that this is not going to be a panacea in their cord-cutting woes.

Marcus Johnson:

Ethan.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Now, this strikes me as a potentially monumental turn of events. I have a feeling it's going to take a while for this to play out. But for that small handful of people like myself that have not cut the cord, it's pretty much entirely live sports that is keeping me there. And the ESPN family of networks, if that was to suddenly become available as part of some package with Disney+ and Hulu and whatever, some big thing, that would go a long way. Although not far enough, but it would go a long way to getting people like me over that cliff that we haven't

been willing to jump over yet. I don't think I would do it because, of course, they're not going to have the Knicks and the Yankees, any of that, but this would be a monumental alternative events and it would be... We've been talking about the death knell for television for a long time, but ESPN being just freely available without cable would be oof. That's bad news for TV.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, the price would be fascinating to see how much they price it out at. Oscar.

Oscar Orozco:

Yeah, I mean I agree with the guys here. I mean, it also speaks to the massive impact the news about the NFL partnership with YouTube has had on the industry. And that's impacted many of our forecasts on the team. And I think ESPN's had to make some sort of move like this.

You made the joke about it, though, at the beginning, Marcus. They do need to clarify, well, what's happening with ESPN+? What is the relationship there? Because if they were to bundle all of that together, even bigger game-changer. But it's a bit unclear what's happening with the standalone ESPN+ streaming platform.

Marcus Johnson:

Mm-hmm. ESPN+, it came out and there wasn't really any expectation that it was going to do great when it came out. People thought, "Oh, well they don't have... It's not the regular ESPN. Why would I go to this for some sports, which aren't the major sports in the country, and some documentaries that I could probably watch somewhere else?" We forecast 3 million ESPN+ users in 2018. That went up to 13 million in 2019. So still really small, but we estimate that over 50 million Americans watch, that is aren't subscribed to, watch ESPN+ today. That's good enough for a third, 33% of live sports viewers. And by 2027, we think that 44% of live sports viewers will watch ESPN+. So if ESPN+ was able to do that, ESPN the channel, you imagine, would be able to do pretty well. I think they said in the article it's like 70 million households have access to ESPN. Ballpark.

Oscar Orozco:

Sounds about right.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. Anyway, let's move to round four. Double points round four, of course. And Max still ahead by one point. So all to play for, he's got seven. Oscar and Ethan tied with six. As we move to round four, we start with Ethan.

Mark Zuckerberg seems to think people can't wait for in-car virtual reality, writes Richard Lawler of the Verge. You would think that a moving vehicle plus virtual reality headset would equal motion sickness. But Meta and BMW think they have solved it by blending inertial motion sensor, IMU, data from a BMW in real time with the tracking system in Meta's Project Aria research glasses. A demo video shows a digital airplane that you can control. So you're sat in the car with this headset on and it's a digital airplane. You can control the moves alongside the car out the window as you try and make it collect coins. It's basically a game you can play not if you're driving, if you're in the back of the car or maybe a passenger in the front. But Ethan, Mark Zuckerberg thinking people want VR in car, what's the point?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

You shouldn't have gone first with those of us that live in New York City and don't drive. But the point for me is that he's still not making what we really need, which is a VR headset we can use on the subway that will allow us to completely block out the reality of what's going on around us while we're riding around. I mean, I feel like if I'm in the backseat of a car driving around America, you can enjoy the view. You can talk to people. And you're probably in the car with-

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, yuck.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

... your friends and family. Yeah. But man, give me one of these things that works on the 6 train and then we'll have a conversation.

Marcus Johnson:

If anyone around New York City sees someone on the subway with their VR headset on, that's Ethan. He works here-

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Hopefully.

Marcus Johnson:

... at the company. Oscar, what you got?

Oscar Orozco:

I mean, I had the same, well, one of the points Ethan made which is why do you need it in a car? There's so much to look at out the windows, people. Isn't this meant for when you're locked inside or playing video games or trying to travel somewhere else? That's what you're doing when you're in a car. So a bit weird.

I also was confused. I hope the drivers wouldn't be using this, right? It's not drivers, right? It's passengers.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah.

Oscar Orozco:

And just even backseat drivers, they're confused. They're confused about what they're seeing if it's real world or just what they're seeing in the VR world and they're yelling things out to the driver. It's a bit of a mess.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Wait, is this really just to put something on your kids' face so that they'll shut up in the back seat [inaudible 00:27:49]?

Oscar Orozco:

Is that what it is?

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. I mean, it's the next version of... Remember we used to have TV screens in the back of seats and that was-

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Yeah.

Marcus Johnson:

... a big deal years ago? I think this is the next version of that.

Oscar Orozco:

Yeah, yeah. It's a little weird.

Marcus Johnson:

But to your point, Oscar, there's a safety element.

Oscar Orozco:

Kids yelling and [inaudible 00:28:01]. Yeah.

Marcus Johnson:

Kids yelling and screaming and flailing their arms around in the back.

Oscar Orozco:

Exactly.

Marcus Johnson:

Trying to kill zombies whilst you get them from A to B safely.

Oscar Orozco:

Ugh, terrible.

Max Willens:

Yeah. I think the idea of a... Basically, the problem that Mark Zuckerberg has had ever since he rolled these helmets out is finding reasons for people to put them on their faces. And they tried with virtual travel. They tried with Horizon World, which is a complete disaster. They have made inroads into work, which I continue to be of the belief that the thing that's going to shove these into our lives is going to be the requirement made of us to wear them while we work. But putting them on in cars in a way that won't make us all projectile vomit while we're going someplace, I'm sure something that they think of as being a possible area to explore. But doing anything that's virtual when you can't move is really, really tough. And fundamentally, unless we're talking about re-imagining what the inside of a car looks like,

you're basically just going to be sitting there immobile as well. And so I see this as one more failed attempt by Meta to improve the viability of this side of their business.

Marcus Johnson:

Mm-hmm. Cool in theory, shocking in practice. Yeah, we have VR headset user numbers, but 35 million people in the country who have a VR headset but not necessarily people who are wearing it in the car, or some maniacs who wear it on the subway like...

Oscar Orozco:

Oh, man. Mainly for gaming, right? That's pretty much [inaudible 00:29:37].

Marcus Johnson:

Right, right. Exactly. Gaming folks. Yeah, 36 million, 35, 36 million today. I mean, that's pretty flat as well. It's not really going anywhere, much to the dismay of Meta and others. That's all we've got time for, for the Game of the Week. Count the points and Max is this week's winner of the Game of the Week. 11 points to Oscar and Ethan's 10 apiece. Congratulations to Max. He wins the championship belt and the last word.

Max Willens:

Whoo. I yield the belt to my time.

Marcus Johnson:

[inaudible 00:30:07].

Oscar Orozco:

What was that?

Max Willens:

We're allowed to yield last word? I never have a last word prepared either. And then I get made fun of.

Marcus Johnson:

What, you yielded it.

Max Willens:

I whooped and then I yielded the balance of my time.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh. Anyone got anything to... Has anyone seen the Super Mario Brothers movie?

Oscar Orozco:

Oh. Actually, I'm interested. Have not, have not.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Have not, but everybody else did.

Marcus Johnson:

It's so good.

Oscar Orozco:

Any good? Have you seen it?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

You're a fanboy.

Marcus Johnson:

Yes. It's brilliant. Maybe. I'm trying to work out, though, what's the best Mario game of all time. It is Mario Kart, right?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Yeah.

Oscar Orozco:

Mario Party.

Marcus Johnson:

N64. Mario Party? No.

Oscar Orozco:

It's a good game, but maybe not the best ever.

Marcus Johnson:

What do you mean maybe? It's certainly not the best ever.

Oscar Orozco:

It's a shot. Maybe.

Marcus Johnson:

D plus.

Max Willens:

Are they going to start making dozens of those movies now? Because, I mean, that movie did Marvel numbers. Now, they have to make two, three, four more. Maybe every iteration, like Mario Kart, will get its own movie.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, perhaps. They're definitely making more, aren't they? I didn't realize... So Fast and the Furious, I was like, "Oh, it's Fast and Furious X." And then someone was like, "No, no. It's 10."

Oscar Orozco:

Oh, gosh.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Yeah.

Oscar Orozco:

They got to stop at three.

Marcus Johnson:

Nine too many. That's all we've got time for, for the Game of the Week. It stopped at three, did you say?

Oscar Orozco:

Yes.

Marcus Johnson:

No.

Oscar Orozco:

And then was-

Marcus Johnson:

It stopped at... This is what my friend said. "No, it stopped at two, max. Tokyo Drift was an abomination."

Oscar Orozco:

Oh, I love that one. I love that one, I must say.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, it's so bad.

Oscar Orozco:

Must watch, listeners. Watch it.

Marcus Johnson:

It's definitely not one of the classics. Don't let him fool you. I told you this episode was going to go off the rails. Victoria, come back. That's all we've got time for, for the Game of the Week. Time now for God knows what. Dinner Party Data. Let's do that instead.

This is the part of the show where we tell you about the most interesting thing we've learned this week. We start with Max because he won the Game of the Week.

Max Willens:

Yeah. Maybe it's just-

Marcus Johnson:

What are these noises?

**Max Willens:**

... finally being able to be outside for extended periods of time, but this has renewed my interest in solar power which I still feel like is one of the great untapped opportunities as we hopefully try to navigate toward more sustainable sources of energy. And so I gathered up some stats about solar usage and also installation in the US, and the thing that really leapt out at me... So the good stuff first. About 5% of our overall capacity in the US is electric, which is small but it's growing healthily and in a way that I think is cause for cautious optimism. It represents 17% of global renewal energy comes from solar. That's behind wind and hydropower. But the thing that really leapt out at me that alarmed me is that the price of EV photovoltaic installation in the US is going up, which to me seems like a completely crazy own goal of a mistake by I guess just the federal government.

They should be putting all their thumbs on all the scales to make this kind of thing as cheap as humanly possible. And I know that there are a lot of entrenched interests that are interested in slowing the role of solar, but that to me seemed like a really strange and really dismaying change. So boo, federal government.

**Speaker X:**

Is this because of just some, or maybe a small percentage because of the tariffs on China? Because a significant portion of this supply chain is coming out of China and we... That's a classic on goal. You have a trade war, you slap tariffs on your geopolitical enemy, and then you shoot yourself in the foot because they're making something really positive that you need, like solar panels.

**Marcus Johnson:**

Yes.

**Oscar Orozco:**

Yeah.

**Ethan Cramer-Flood:**

A hundred percent.

**Marcus Johnson:**

They just look ugly on your house. There, I said it.

Max Willens:

That's-

Oscar Orozco:

[inaudible 00:34:10].

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

[inaudible 00:34:11].

Marcus Johnson:

It's hard to get away from especially if you've got an old cottage and you just... It's fine if you're using modern materials. But when you put them on a stone building, it's hard for them to blend in.

Max Willens:

Somebody's got to come up with a stained glass version or something you paint, maybe.

Marcus Johnson:

There you go. There you go. Stain glass all the panels.

Oscar Orozco:

It's true.

Marcus Johnson:

Forget this podcast stuff. Let's go into business, gents, with Ethan's idea. Ethan, what have you got for us? Your next. Let's go. Let's go.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Oh, yeah. So this one is going to be painful for some of our listeners, but I'm delighted to report. So there's a professional basketball team wearing the color green up in Boston that calls themselves the Celtics. They did not have a good day-

Marcus Johnson:

Yuck.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

... earlier this week.

Marcus Johnson:

Yes.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

For those who don't know-

Marcus Johnson:

Yes, they did. I'm so happy.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

... or don't follow the National Basketball Association-

Marcus Johnson:

Sorry, [inaudible 00:34:58].

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

... the Celtics almost made history, almost did something completely incredible. They almost came back from a 3-0 deficit in a best of seven series, which has never happened before in the history of professional basketball. And had they won, it would've been a glorious moment. But instead, they lost in spectacular fashion, much-

Marcus Johnson:

So good.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

... to the delight of all New York fans-

Marcus Johnson:

Marcus.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

... and really most of the country, I would imagine. But my statistic is not that they lost, because everybody knows that, but what I was interested to find out is had anyone even ever gotten to that point? I couldn't remember if a team had ever forced a game seven after being down 0-3 in the NBA. I do have recollections of this happening in other sports. We're not going to talk about that. But in the NBA, so my stat is actually even more humiliating for Boston, so I'm happy to report.

They're not the first to have forced game seven. There's four times in the history of the National Basketball Association a team has comeback from down 0-3 to force a game seven. They have now all lost. So no one has successfully completed the miraculous comeback, but Boston is the first team to lose game seven at home. All the other ones-

Oscar Orozco:

It's so good.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

... at least made it to game seven and lost on the road. They had a home game and they just got robbed. And that is my delightful stat of the day.

Oscar Orozco:

You guys are so giddy. So giddy and excited.

Marcus Johnson:

I'm a Lakers fan. I'm so sorry, Boston folks, but it's so good. You did well.

Look, to be fair to them, Jayson Tatum doesn't twist his ankle on the first play. We'll see. So I'll give them that. Fair play to him for powering through. That looked really painful, but so happy you lost. And mainly, it was Jimmy Butler as well. You can't not like Jimmy Butler.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Oh, he's great.

Marcus Johnson:

Best of luck to the Heat and the Nuggets who knocked out my Lakers, but they deserved it. Very nice. Oscar, you're up.

Oscar Orozco:

Great. So I came across this article this weekend on weddings from Axios. Axios, great, great site. It really resonated with me since I've already been to two weddings this year and I have three more to go. Pure madness. Five weddings.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh my gosh.

Oscar Orozco:

Yeah, 2023.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Wow, it's old school.

Oscar Orozco:

It is. Yeah, really old school. It's pretty much dictating all of my vacation plans this year, which is great. I'm so excited just in case my friends are listening. So-

Marcus Johnson:

Uninvite.

Oscar Orozco:

Uninvite. It might happen. So it talks about the return of weddings after the pandemic-induced backup. They call it pent-up demand, and it's just come roaring back. So according to IBISWorld, the wedding services business is booming. It grew 10% last year to $71 billion. So it's a lot of money. A lot of money spent.

So in terms of almost every aspect of planning, hosting, attending weddings, the price is going up. Apparently, according to a study from The Knot, even guests are going into wedding debt to attend weddings. Guests. It's crazy.

So a couple numbers here. The average cost of a wedding is up $1,000 from 28,000 to 29,000 in 2023. This is according to Zola. So inflation is having its part in this, but it's also again the high demand of the price of weddings overall. So what else is up in terms of prices? DJ prices. They're up almost 25%. Makeup and flowers, 20%. Wedding dresses, 19. So a lot of prices are up. Venue prices are up only 7%. I thought that was pretty reasonable, while the wedding cakes are only up 2%.

Now, coming back to this trend... Oh, and actually a quick thing. You know what? The only thing that is not up in cost? It's the declining trend in how formal grooms are dressing. So grooms, actually the price of that whole thing is just your tuxedos and outfits. That's actually down, so that's the only thing that is down in price.

Now, the last point I talked about how even guests are going into debt to attend weddings. So this comes from a recent survey from LendingTree. They found that 40% of people who've gone to weddings in the past five years have gone into debt to be there. It also jumps to 62% if someone was a part of a bridal party. So much goes into this, right? Bachelorette parties, bachelor parties, all of that. I have a dear friend who had to buy two suits this year. Not rent, buy. So for anyone listening-

Marcus Johnson:

For one wedding?

Oscar Orozco:

... to this... Yeah, for a wedding. Well, for different weddings. Different weddings.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, oh. Different weddings.

Oscar Orozco:

But it just so happened that he-

Marcus Johnson:

Wardrobe change.

Oscar Orozco:

Yes. So if you have an upcoming wedding, consider this. It's a day of fun, but they can be expensive.

Marcus Johnson:

Your friends are broke.

Oscar Orozco:

Yes.

Marcus Johnson:

Try not to ruin them financially.

Oscar Orozco:

Try not to ruin them too much.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. Fascinating. Anecdotally, I hear that all the time, so that's fascinating to have some numbers support that. Yeah, Oscar, best of... Oscar's going to have to pick up a second and third job this year.

Oscar Orozco:

[inaudible 00:40:00].

Marcus Johnson:

[inaudible 00:40:00] to attend.

Max Willens:

Be a wedding DJ. I hear you can charge whatever you want.

Oscar Orozco:

Apparently. That's great.

Marcus Johnson:

Ah, too good. I've got one for you real quick, folks. Visualizing America's workforce as a hundred people. So if America just had a hundred people in the country, where would people work? So there's a recent Visual Capitalist called by Pallavi Rao, who was noting that last year there were 330 million Americans. About 60% were employed in various jobs and sectors in the US economy. But what do they do? Mr. Rao used data from the National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, so that's where these numbers come from, and found that if America contained a hundred people, most of them... Any guesses, folks? What category would people work in? Most folks, 13 of these hundred people.

Max Willens:

Retail?

Marcus Johnson:

Retail, no.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Service is too broad. Retail would've been my next guess. [inaudible 00:41:03].

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, I would've guessed both of those, actually. So office and admin.

Max Willens:

Okay.

Marcus Johnson:

So customer service people, receptionists, things like that, they would be 13 of the 100. 11 of the 100 would be health workers, doctors, nurses, care aides. Nine would be in transport, warehouse workers, bus drivers, truck drivers. Nine would be in sales, but that includes corporate sales but also, I guess, two of those nine would be cashiers. So anything sales, there'd be nine people. Eight would work in food, preparers, servers, bartenders. And those five categories, admin, health, transport, sales and food, would be 50% of folks right there. So half of workers would be in those categories.

The smallest category, just two of the 100 people, would be protection people, cops, firefighters, security guards. So if the world was a hundred people, it'd just be one cop and one firefighter. And just three people work in custodial work, cleaning, groundskeeping. Three work in data and tech. A few other quick, interesting quirks in the data. If you broke out artists, writers, designers, and athletes, there would be just one of the 100. So you wouldn't even be able to have a sports composition because it'd just be the one athlete.

The highest and lowest-paid jobs. The highest-paid category is management. Six out of 100 people were in management. In that category, that's $130,000 a year on average. The lowest-paid category is people working in food. That's eight out of the 100 people making $32,000 a year on average, so over four times less than the management. And the fastest-growing sector in the last five years was health support, up 60%. Hospitality, rather unsurprisingly, fell nearly 50%, interestingly.

Oscar Orozco:

Very fascinating.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Transportation was the one that was surprisingly high. I think all the rest of those lined up with expectations, but I'm surprised that transportation is third.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. I think truck driving, that specific job, has the 40th most workers in that occupation in the country.

Oscar Orozco:

Wow.

Marcus Johnson:

Just for truck drivers alone. Yeah. So you throw in warehouse people, bus drivers, yeah, transport. Nine of a hundred. Surprised me as well.

Oscar Orozco:

That makes sense in a way, by the way. I've seen is a 60 Minutes on the whole issue with supply chain, and they were attributing it mostly to the fact that there weren't enough truck drivers

and trucks and just limitations there. So.

Marcus Johnson:

Really?

Oscar Orozco:

Knowing that, it does make sense that it would be that high.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah.

Oscar Orozco:

Yeah.

Marcus Johnson:

Oscar, you should apply.

Oscar Orozco:

Yeah, I need need it. I need it. Just for the summer. Get me through all these weddings.

Marcus Johnson:

Podcast hosts? None of the hundred people. So if the world was a hundred people and I was one of them... Or if the US was a hundred people and I was one of them, I'm not really bringing a lot to the party.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

You wouldn't be here. You're not there.

Marcus Johnson:

I could host the country for a little entertainment. No, I'd probably get kicked out. That's all we've got time for, for this episode. Thank you so much to my guests. Thank you to Oscar.

Oscar Orozco:

Thanks for having me, Marcus.

Marcus Johnson:

Thank you to Ethan.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Always a pleasure.

Marcus Johnson:

And thank you to Max.

Max Willens:

Always a pleasure, Marcus.

Marcus Johnson:

And thank you to Victoria who edits the show. She'll be back to edit this one. Thank goodness. James who copy edits it and Stuart who runs the team. Thanks to everyone for listening in. You can head to behindthenumbers_podcast for outtakes, extra additional insights that we discussed before we hit record and some pretty damn cool charts as well. We'll see you guys on Monday, hopefully, for the Behind Numbers Daily, an eMarketer podcast.

Happy weekends. They're going to feel real short after last week, but we'll get through it because you had a short week this week, people. Don't be greedy.

Oscar Orozco:

Be grateful.

Marcus Johnson:

Listen, by people, I mean people in England because you had three bank holidays. Okay, enough.