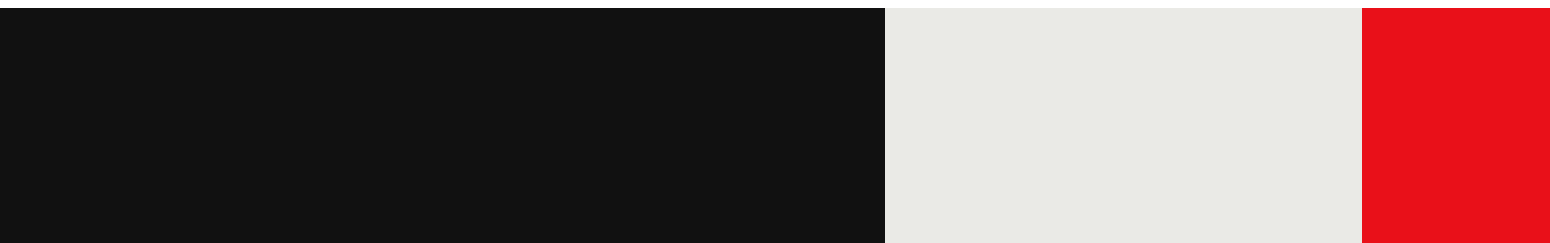



# What is the difference between brand suitability and brand safety?

Article



Last week, **YouTube announced excluded themes** at **Brand Safety Summit**, providing a way for advertisers to keep their ads from showing up next to news, gaming, health, or political content by checking a box. The updates should help brands looking to avoid unsavory contexts when serving ads, though this relies on YouTube's ability to classify these categories correctly.

While it's vital that brands pay attention to safety, focusing on brand suitability can be useful as a way not only to avoid unsavory contexts, but also to select for uplifting and useful contexts. Here's a look at how the two concepts diverge.

**Brand safety** refers to avoiding content or contexts that are harmful to a brand's reputation.

Brand safety is often applicable across brands—what isn't safe for one brand probably fits into the bucket of unsafe content for another brand. Racist, sexist, or otherwise prejudicial content would all generally be deemed unsafe for brands. The same goes for content that promotes illegal activities.

**Case study:** X (formerly Twitter) has been at the center of brand safety conversations which came to a head last year after **ads mistakenly ran** alongside content related to child sexual abuse. The solution for some advertisers was cutting back on ad spend from a platform they deemed risky. These issues contribute to our projection that X's 2023 US ad revenues will fall by more than 50% YoY.

**Stay safe:** Brand safety goes beyond sticking with trusted platforms.

- Work with reputable programmatic partners to ensure ads don't end up in undesirable places.
- Have clear policies on content and keywords that need to be excluded.
- Stay familiar with brand safety standards such as those from the **American Association of Advertising Agencies** and the **Interactive Advertising Bureau**.

**Brand suitability** refers to avoiding content or context that is not aligned with a brand's values, voice, or audience. On the flip side, brand suitability also refers to finding and prioritizing content that matches those factors.

Brand suitability differs from brand to brand. For example, a beer brand wouldn't want to advertise next to content targeting children, both because it could hurt the company's reputation and because it's a waste of the brand's ad dollars. But for a toy company, that kids' content is likely the ideal context.

**Case study:** Some **20% of ad breaks targeting children** worldwide included unsuitable content, such as alcohol, casinos, gambling, adult hygiene, pharmaceuticals, and foods with high sugar/fat content, according to data from ad platform GumGum reported by Advanced Television.

**Stay suitable:** Beyond excluding keywords and contexts, brands need to focus on where they are placing ads.

- Focus on premium content (i.e., content that a given audience considers high quality but may also come with a high price tag). However, be sure to recognize that what premium content is to one industry or advertiser may not be premium to another. Identify what premium content is for your brand, like specific YouTube creators or streaming platforms, and focus on advertising there.
- Targeting smaller audiences can help brands make sure ads are running alongside relevant content. This tactic is harder to scale but can help reach people who are more likely to buy a specific product.
- Take advantage of platform suitability tools like YouTube's or the ones **Meta recently announced for Reels**.
- Make sure both brand and performance marketers understand your brand voice and values so ads aren't misplaced.

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