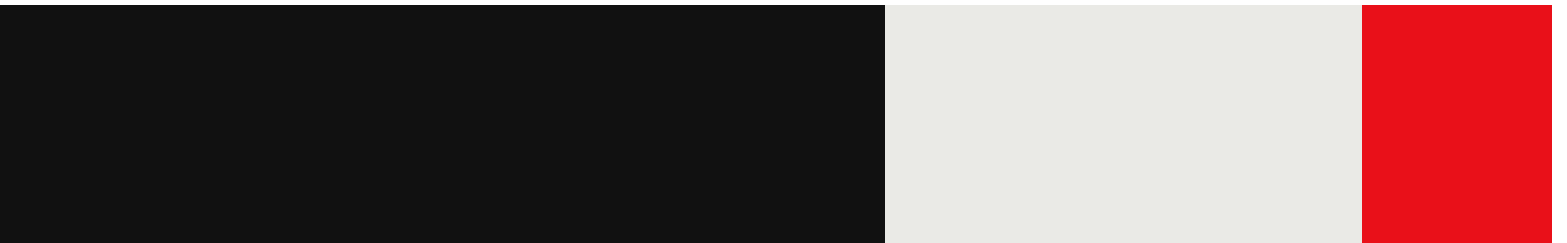


The Weekly Listen: Bad digital ads, TikTok's parent moves on VR, and people like the Grammys again

Audio



On today's episode, we discuss why some folks think digital ads are getting worse, whether things are looking up for Uber, TikTok's parent company ByteDance challenging Meta on VR, why Warner Bros. Discovery will continue Discovery+, the Grammys rebounding from the pandemic's effect on viewership, the surprising most littered plastic item in the US, and more. Tune in to the discussion with our vice president of Briefings Stephanie Taglianetti and analysts Suzy Davidkhanian and Max Willens.



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Episode Transcript

Marcus Johnson:

Hello everyone, and thanks for hanging out with us for the Behind the Numbers Weekly Listen, an eMarketer podcast made possible by Tinuiti. This is the Friday show that reviews the most. Listen to this, media and retail news series of the week. I'm your host, Marcus Johnson. In today's show, Bad Digital Ads.

Max Willens:

One thing that has happened in the last, let's call it 18 months, is there's been this huge proliferation of ads in spaces that we're not used to seeing them.

Marcus Johnson:

Uber reports revenue and profit growth.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Yes, it is the convenience factor which people learnt through the pandemic, but it's also the cost of getting the new customers is so much lower because they're already in-house. So not a surprise that they're doing well. I think they're trying really hard to be the New American super app.

Marcus Johnson:

TikTok's parent company ByteDance gets in on virtual reality.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

It's my impression that the VR market in terms of ownership really hasn't had its explosion yet. There's a lot of data showing that big growth's not going to really happen till 2026.

Marcus Johnson:

Warner Brothers Discovery will continue Discovery Plus, Grammy viewership rebounds, and what are the most littered plastic items in the US?

Join me for this episode. We have three people. Let's meet them. We start with our vice president of everything briefings, based out of New Jersey, it's Stephanie Taglianetti.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Hey Marcus.

Marcus Johnson:

Hello. Hello. We're also joined by our principal analyst who heads up our retail and e-commerce team based out of New York, it's Suzy Davidkhanian.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Hi everyone.

Marcus Johnson:

And finally, we have one of our senior analysts on the digital advertising and media team based out of Pennsylvania is Max Willens.

Max Willens:

Yo.

Marcus Johnson:

Hello. Hello. He's not an Eagles fan folks, so don't feel bad for him.

Max Willens:

I would never.

Marcus Johnson:

He's a Knicks' fan though, so I feel a bit bad for him, like a little bit.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

How did we already start on sports?

Marcus Johnson:

Because you won't stop talking about it, Suzy. Enough. We must continue with the show.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

I think I know what the most littered item is, by the way.

Marcus Johnson:

Really?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Yeah, plastic bottles.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

No spoilers.

Marcus Johnson:

Plastic bottles, you couldn't be any more wrong.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

That is not true. Oh, plastic bags.

Marcus Johnson:

We're off to a flying start. Negative two for Suzy. No, that's also horribly wrong. Negative four for Suzy. Let's start the show. Not a good start for you, Suzy. Not a good start.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Thanks, I'm trying.

Marcus Johnson:

We start with the Story of the Week, that's where we'll begin, bad digital ads and digital ad reckoning perhaps, then we move to the Game of the Week where Suzy will lose badly. She's already four points down. So really a game between Stephanie and Max to see who can give the best takeaway from the four stories we have with you. Suzy will sit on the sidelines and watch. We then finish with Dinner Party Data and we'll talk about the most interesting thing

that we've learned this week, and we will talk about how plastic bags and water bottles are not at the top of the list. We start of course with the Story of the Week.

Bad digital ads and a digital ad reckoning. "Why Are You Seeing So Many Bad Digital Ads Now?" questions Tiffany Hsu of the New York Times. She writes that scrolling past ads has rarely been enjoyable, but in recent months people say the experience seems so much worse. She anecdotally writes that recent ads on Twitter, as described by users, have made the platform feel like a tabloid magazine. On Instagram, ads from Amazon promote unrecognizable contraptions from obscure merchants. Max, I'll start with you. You happen to be on our digital advertising and media team. Has digital advertising gotten worse? If yes or no, why?

Max Willens:

I think this is a very strange story to be honest. I understand that there's lots of parts of the digital ad experience that are pretty weird and lots that are unpleasant, but the story leans pretty heavily on people complaining about ads on Twitter, and Twitter is in the middle of us fight for its life. As many as half of its advertisers paused spending since Elon Musk took the platform over, and when half of your biggest spending advertisers stop spending money, you have to get money from somewhere and so you just let in any crazy thing you can possibly imagine.

And that is true, ads on Twitter right now are pretty wacky, but to use that experience, which is not universal and not really representative I would say of digital as a whole, stand in for digital as a whole, you wind up with some pretty weird results. I also think, too, that it's important to point out that digital ad spending is going through a lot of strange transitions right now, but to sort of save and paint with a broad brush that the entire market, it's not even really one market anymore, it has gotten wackier or unpleasant in the last few months, just feels like a kind of strangely shoddy and scattered shot.

Marcus Johnson:

I mean, so yeah, Max, to what you're saying, she kind of explains big marketers pullback spending, destroy our platforms after lower prices and then less familiar folks take those discounted ad spots. Ad prices on Facebook and Instagram falling nearly 25% in Q4 year-on-year, according to investment bank. Piper Sandler. Corey Richardson, VP at ad agency fluent360 was quoted saying, "Major social media platforms are now like the mall in your

hometown that used to be the good mall, but now there's no longer a Macy's there, it's just a calendar store and a place selling beepers." Stephanie, what's your position on whether digital ads have gotten worse as of late?

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Well, again, not an expert by any means, but my first thought was if it's true that ads are perceivably getting worse, I was wondering how big of an impact the Apple update and privacy updates may have on tracking there. I mean, there must be some correlation with having more barriers around tracking people and then that creating a sort of double-edged sword because better privacy equals worse targeting for ads and maybe perceivably more annoying ads.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. It's like when you log out of YouTube and you're like, "What are all of these recommended videos and ads?" And it just looks so foreign from what you're used to, the brands you're used to seeing, the videos you're used to seeing, but that's because it's less targeted one could argue. Suzy, agree, disagree?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Well, I'm definitely not the expert, but I am certainly a user and so I think from my perspective, ads have never been good. Digital ads have never been super targeted, and I think it's a backend issue on the brand and or retailer side that they don't know how to connect all of their different data points to really understand who their consumer is. So they're having an issue to begin with, and then you add all of these cutting the prices so anybody can get in the game. You add new vehicles, like Max was saying, like retail media networks where you can't even tell if this is a sponsored ad, an item that the retailer is selling or if it's part of their retail media network. And so all of a sudden you're starting to see so many more places where brands are putting advertisements that are starting to creep into the regular content. So of course that makes for a bad experience.

Max Willens:

I will say in favor of all of this, and Suzy's observation about retail media is what kind of shook it loose for me, one thing that has happened in the last, let's call it 18 months, is there's been this huge proliferation of ads in spaces that we're not used to seeing them. So across Meta's

platforms, they have openly described the fact that they are upping the ad load on their platform. There's lots of reasons for that.

But also you look at Amazon, I mean to me, opening Amazon either on mobile or desktop is just being blasted with a fire hose of advertising. Every square inch of the screen is advertising and a lot of retailers aren't going that extreme, but they are starting to follow the lead, and a lot of people when they go looking to buy something on Target or Walmart or any of these other retailers websites, there are ads there, but that part of the experience is getting more pronounced and I'm sure that there are a lot of people, because most people do not like ads, have kind of noticed that and it is starting to kind of cloud that experience.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

I feel like on the retailer platform it's harder to tell outside of the banner ad that it's an ad versus part of the offering. But if you think about Instagram, it's like every third post on Instagram on my wall is an ad, and I'm like... And it's things that make absolutely no sense. If they knew who I was then they would not be... they're really wasting their money. But I do think one of the other questions, cause one of the articles was talking about digital ad spending versus ad spending, I think money is just moving around and budgets are tighter to begin with and it's trying to really understand as a brand, where are you going to get your best return on investment? And the retail platforms are probably a really good place cause people were already looking for something, so they're actively shopping, they're ready to consume and so you're probably getting a better return on investment and so then it becomes even more cluttered. Once you start to show the results, then you can get more people to buy in from a brand perspective.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. Amazon being a huge beneficiary slash corporate of that. Miss Hsu in the New York Times also saying some publishers, Bloomberg Media, starting to avoid third party brokers and automated auctions of ad space, the deal with large volumes more likely to miss low quality ads. So some folks taking action may take action based on the way things are trending. But Suzy, to your point, digital ads have always been not great. Banner ads, I'm sorry, but I'm looking at you. And they've not been great, but money's been flowing to digital ads, particularly banner ads as well. However, "Arete Research Predicts a Reckoning for Digital Ads in 2023," writes Ad Exchanger's Anthony Vargas. They expect, Arete Research,

they expect digital ad revenue to decline between five to 10% this year because of what they call demand destruction. That is according to Arete research.

A few things. Number one, signal loss from Apple's app tracking transparency, which stops iOS users being tracked by default. Number two, more signal loss from the upcoming Android 13 update, which expects to crack down on using device IDs for targeted ads. They also expect a Google reckoning. Instead of getting broken up though, they see Google's end-to-end model being emulated by the rest of the ad tech ecosystem because of signal loss and increased regulatory scrutiny over customer data use. It has to be said though that Arete's pessimistic, they might argue realistic, projection differs from folks like Magna and Group M who expect a three to 5% increase in ad spend. Max, we'll come back to you to finish out the Story of the Week here. What's your take on Arete Researcher's take that there's a reckoning for digital ads this year?

Max Willens:

So I think that there's definitely a lot of stuff that feels precarious within the digital market in ways that it simply didn't a couple of years ago. You mentioned the prospect that Google might get broken up. I mean that's years away, just as an aside. That's not happening this year, similarly, Google's changes to support for third party cookies and so on. But there is very real possibility that you might start to see some consolidation in corners like ad tech. Maybe over the next couple of years you might start to see consolidation in and around retail media and the ways that CTV gets measured, things like that. But I just take issue I guess with the premise that this money will kind of disappear, partly because I just don't know where else it will go.

If you look at our own numbers, not to put them in conflict or up against Arete's, but by our numbers this year, three quarters of all ad spending in the United States will go to digital. And so if you take that out, I don't know where it will go. Are you going to put it back into billboards? Are you going to-

Marcus Johnson:

Print.

Max Willens:

... buy some-

Marcus Johnson:

Finally.

Max Willens:

We're going to... have a party, Condé Nast. But yeah, no, I mean this is the thing, and no marketer, no CMO is going to say, "You know what? I don't actually need to spend all that money this year. Just cut my budget by 15%." And so there's really kind of nowhere else for that money to go, and I do think it's an open question whether some of the money that was just naturally going to go into social for example, or just naturally going to go into display advertising might not go somewhere else. But I sort of reject the premise that there's going to be this kind of eradication of demand because of ongoing [inaudible 00:12:57] or challenges in the SME market.

As an aside, it was not something that you flagged specifically in your lead up, Marcus, but one of the things that these guys talk about is the idea that a big problem is that small and medium-sized advertisers who do deliver most of the money in this ecosystem are going to stop spending because of macroeconomic problems. And that's an interesting thing to think about, but I also feel like the macroeconomic picture is highly fluid. I mean even just two weeks ago people were talking about inflation as... or rather recession practically as a near certainty. The job market seemed terrible because of all the layoffs in the tech sector, but you look at it now and the likelihood of a recession, among some banks at least, has diminished, job numbers for the country overall are looking good. So to me, it's not a given that all the SMEs that pour lots of money into meta and Google are going to stop spending money.

Marcus Johnson:

They're going to snatch it back out again. Yeah, and to your point, I mean 75%, three quarters of all ad spending on digital, as you mentioned, that's a \$280 billion business in the US this year and seeing growth of 12% this year, 12% next year. So that looks pretty healthy according to our forecasting team. I mean, maybe they spend less on marketing and advertising and more on customer service. We've seen folks like Tesla preach that strategy, but I don't know if you could snatch enough the billions and billions out of ads and put them into customer service. I don't think there's going to be a huge shift of dollars in that direction even though there might be some.

Good or bad though, banner ads are here to stay according to our forecasting team. US display ads make up nearly 60% of all digital ads, and the display ad portion is \$160 billion and

growing, 180 next year. Most of that 160 this year is video, 57%. Banner ads are about 30% of display. Banner ads' share of display is flat in the US but the dollars are going up, \$52 billion on banner ads in the US this year. 58 billion next year. That's where we'll leave the Story of the Week for this week. We move now of course to the Game of the Week. Today's game, What's the Point? What Suzy asks herself every time she plays. Suzy jokes.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

You're not wrong.

Marcus Johnson:

This is the game where I read up-

Suzy Davidkhanian:

I actually wonder why you ask me to keep coming back to be honest.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. It's a... this is a conundrum, to say the least.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

I hear you. We just need representation from other countries.

Marcus Johnson:

Exactly, yeah, everyone else is busy.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

From Commonwealth...

Marcus Johnson:

This is the segment where I read out four stories and have contestants Suzy, Stephanie and Max tell us what they think is the main takeaway of the story. Okay answers get one point, good answers get two, and answers that give you the same feeling as free stuff, answers that leave you with that feeling, they get you three points. Stephanie agrees.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

I do.

Marcus Johnson:

Each person gets 20 seconds to answer before they hear this. Oh, let's do it again. There it is. That's better. Run long, it's a technical foul, Suzy, and minus two points. Two technical gets you ejected, Suzy, from the game. Whoever has the most points, not Suzy, wins and gets the last word. Let's play. Round one, we start with Stephanie. "Uber Reports Revenue and Profit Growth," notes Sarah E. Needleman of the Wall Street Journal. The ride hailing company said Q4 revenue hit \$8.6 billion, that's a near 50% increase, five zero percent increase year-on-year. The company made \$600 million in profit down from last Q4, but still in the black. So that's good. Uber Eats was up 20% year-on-year. Stephanie though, Uber reporting revenue and profit growth. What's the point?

Stephanie Taglianetti:

So I want to reiterate a point that Rachel raised in this briefing post about the cost of convenience and how much people are actually willing to pay for that, particularly around food ordering. I have lots of anecdotal mentions about friends of mine paying \$20 to Uber eats fries and a soda from McDonald's and being more than okay, even just a soda sometimes. And so I actually think that the convenience factor is interesting, that the economic climate hasn't had as much of an impact there as I would've thought, including on our own forecast where Uber Eats sales are going to continue to grow through 2024.

Marcus Johnson:

Suzy?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

What's the time limit?

Marcus Johnson:

Oh my goodness. For you, five seconds.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

No, cause I heard you say 25 seconds, but it used to be 60 seconds.

Marcus Johnson:

It never used to be 60 seconds.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

I thought it used to be 30.

Marcus Johnson:

No. No. Okay, so here's what happened. 60 seconds is for the Debate of the Week, which Suzy I don't think you've been on, so I don't know why you think it's 60, and 30 seconds is what it really is, but I tell you 20 because everyone goes over.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

So then I'm going to just limit it to one thing, which is I'm not surprised Uber is doing well now, especially this quarter, because the pandemic has brought on all these behavioral changes and it has also brought on company changes. So every company realizes that they need to have multiple revenues and that is what they're doing. And Uber started with a ride-share, which I would say is their flywheel, the middle of their flywheel, and as they grow the different parts of their business like Uber Eats. Yes it is the convenience factor, which people learnt through the pandemic, like, "Who cares? Let's just do it." But it's also the cost of getting the new customers is so much lower cause they're already in-house. So not a surprise that they're doing well. I think they're trying really hard to be the new American super app.

Marcus Johnson:

Max.

Max Willens:

I think it's hilarious that people are framing this as a win for Uber when they still have absolutely miserable margins and I would say pretty miserable prospects for improving those margins. Their stock price is still below what they IPOed at and the things that they can look to to I think improves their margins, things like driving up the prices of rides, driving up the prices of Uber Eats, increasing the ad loads inside their cars, I'll put them at risk of losing business to Lyft or Waymo or other competitors. I mean they're not losing truckloads of money every quarter anymore, but I still just think that it's crazy that people are treating this as a success story when they're barely hanging on at the moment.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, fair points folks. Couple of bright spots. Uber's driver shortage appears to be over, the article was noting. So that's a positive for the company. More folks, more drivers having the opportunity to earn money by placing ads on their vehicles, even though to Max's point, that may not be what consumers want per se. Rachel was noting as well the number of active advertisers on Uber's platform grew 80% in 2022 and they were trying to capitalize on the Super Bowl LVII with Uber Eats introducing post-checkout ad placement, let's brands advertise as customers monitor their progress of their orders. And then finally the "Uber One membership program boosting delivery spend, frequency and loyalty for Uber Eats" writes Emma Liem Beckett of Restaurant Dive. 40% of us Uber Eats bookings came from the Uber One subscription, which offers \$0 delivery for \$10 a month, 100 for the year.

We move to our second round. We start with Suzy. "TikTok's parent company ByteDance takes on Meta in Battle for VR market" writes Meghan Bobrowski and Stu Woo of the Wall Street Journal. They know Chinese startup Pico, which was bought by ByteDance two years ago, has increased shipments of VR headsets, making it a small but fast rising number two to Meta worldwide. According to International Data Corp, Meta held in 90% share a year ago, by Q3 of last year its share had fallen to 75%. Pico's grew threefold in that time to 15%. No other VR headset maker held over a 3% share. Pico's consumer headsets aren't yet available in America, but Suzy, "TikTok's parent company ByteDance taking on Meta in the battle battle for VR," what's the point?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

So I think this is really interesting. Once you have a certain market share, it's so hard to maintain and or grow. So the fact that they're not 95% now, Meta, shouldn't be a surprise. That they dipped so much I think is the surprise and it's the red flag, but it can't be all coming out of one company. It's impossible. I love that their spokesperson said something like, "We love competition, it's good for creators." What I would say the point here is the more VR companies that come together, the more content is being created and then you start to see the network effect, which is similar to a platform like a Hulu. You join the platforms and the subscriptions and you buy the things that give you what you're looking for.

Marcus Johnson:

Max.

Max Willens:

To me, the thing that leapt out to me about this story was the anecdotes from people that have owned both Oculus Quests and Pico headsets and they say that Pico's better. That to me is something that would make me sit up straight if I was working in Meta's virtual reality divisions. TikTok and ByteDance don't need to be in this space. They don't do gaming, they don't do business, but this way they're not going to be caught flatfooted if VR actually does take root and it sounds like they've got a great core product.

Marcus Johnson:

Stephanie.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Yeah, I mean it's my impression that the VR market in terms of ownership really hasn't had its explosion yet. There's a lot of data showing that big growth's not going to really happen till 2026. It's going to be like six times as big in terms of shipments as compared to today. So I think there's a lot of opportunity to earn brand loyalty and I don't know if it's so much of a battle just yet for that.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, Microsoft, obviously in this game it was mixed reality headset called HoloLens. We're still waiting for Apple to launch its, what we think is going to be an AR headset this year. So yeah, the most of this... the explosion of growth we're expecting to happen, to Stephanie's point, in a couple of years time. Folks in Europe and Asia, where Pico headsets are available, gravitated to the company partly in response to a recent \$100 price increase to the Quest, notes Jitesh Ubrani, research manager at IDC. The article noted also total revenue in Meta's reality lab segment was down 17% in Q4 because of lower Quest 2 headset sales. But maybe that's not a referendum on virtual reality in its entirety, at least not yet.

We move to our third round at the halfway mark. It is Max out in front with five, Suzy and Stephanie with four apiece. We start with Max for round three. "Warner Brothers Discovery will continue Discovery Plus as a standalone service" writes Insider Intelligence's director of briefings Jeremy Goldman. HBO Max and Discovery Plus, both owned by Warner Brothers Discovery, were set to be smashed together pretty soon, but Warner has decided against it, continuing to sell Discovery Plus separately, according to the Wall Street Journal. Jeremy explains the revised strategy is to keep Discovery Plus available, even when a newly rebranded combo service debuts in the spring. It is expected that HBO Max will change its

name to Max to better reflect its expanded subscriber focus and inclusion of non-HBO content. Max, how do you feel about that, about them changing... about them using your name Furious. Furious.

Max Willens:

Well, I'm waiting for the checks.

Marcus Johnson:

Exactly.

Max Willens:

I'm waiting for the checks to come rolling in. That is how that works, right? It's my name, so.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

It's trademarked.

Marcus Johnson:

Or all the people called Alexa made bank. Max, Warner Brothers Discovery continuing Discovery Plus as a standalone service. What's the point?

Max Willens:

Well, Jeremy's article about this gets it exactly right. It was dumb of Warner Brothers Discovery to presume that they could get people who were paying \$7 a month for something to happily pay \$16 or maybe more for a service. A lot of people are price sensitive, a lot of people just don't want that content. Maybe they just don't want to watch White Lotus or any of the WBD Vault stuff. And so there's no point in angering a big percentage of your audience by forcing them to pay more for something they don't want.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, to Max's point, to give you those numbers one more time, so Discovery Plus, as you mentioned, cost \$7, \$5 with ads. HBO Max is double that, more than double that, 16, or 10 with ads after a recent price increase. We weren't sure what the combined service was going to cost, but more than likely it wasn't going to be seven or five with ads what Discovery Plus

is. So people probably going to have to spend more if you were Discovery Plus folks.
Stephanie.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Yeah, I mean agree. At a time when most people are considering to either cut back on the number of streaming services they're subscribed to, or have done so already due to cost concerns, consolidating two streaming services that have vastly different niches, vastly different demographics, and then asking people to pay more for that makes absolutely no sense.

Marcus Johnson:

Suzy.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

So I think the lesson here is bundling and what you bundle together is critical and so you have to understand who your consumer is and that's whether it's streaming or whether it's retailers. You have to understand who your consumer is and meet their needs so that they're willing to pay for what you're offering and that if you don't get the subscription right and they don't feel like they're getting their money's worth, they're not going to buy in. So not a surprise it didn't work.

Marcus Johnson:

All right. Heading into double points round four. Max still out in front but only by one point. He's on seven, Suzy and Stephanie with six apiece. Round four. We start with Stephanie. "Grammys rebound from COVID years to reach over 12 million viewers," notes the Associated Press. Folks tuned into the 65th annual Grammy Awards at the crypto.com arena, where the LA Lakers lose multiple games, to watch performances from Harry Styles and someone who is managing to pull off the name Bad Bunny. Lizzo took home record of the year and Senior Styles nabbed best album. The pandemic affected Grammys broadcast of 2021, pulled in 8.8 million viewers, and 2022 pulled in 8.9, according to Nielsen. So this year's over 12 million viewers were up nearly 40% year-on-year, but not quite back to pre-pandemic levels of nearly 19 million seen in 2020 right before the pandemic really hit early 2020, that is. Stephanie, the Grammys rebounding from COVID years to reach over 12 million viewers. What's the point?

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Yeah, I mean really interesting viewership right now. I mean even coming on the back of the Super Bowl, that top last year's view still at a high right now. The Grammys though could be an outlier in terms of the entertainment awards. The Academy Awards have been declining year after year. The Golden Globes in January had its lowest viewership I think since 1996. So the Grammys managed to make a recovery, but it's still not anywhere near its pre-pandemic levels. So I'll be watching out for the Academy Awards this year. Maybe if people expect more drama like the Will Smith slap, they'll tune in and see if something like that's going to happen.

Marcus Johnson:

Suzy.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

So I think there are very few live events that really build a community that people feel like they need to be watching live. And then I think when you add the last three years and the rise of TikTok, consumers are just more interested in 32nd outtake clips and just, "Give me the cliff notes version of what happened." And so it's not a surprise that it is the events like the Super Bowl where it's nail-biting and you don't want to know the score... you don't want to know the score and then watch the outtakes versus the Grammys or other sort of award shows where it's like who cares really? That's very professional. Maybe we should take that out.

Marcus Johnson:

We'll keep it.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Who cares.

Marcus Johnson:

We'll keep it.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

No, come on.

Max Willens:

I think that the important thing to flag here is that they're still 30% off their pre-pandemic numbers and the Grammys are still trying and still failing to solve a problem that they have been wrestling with for a long time, which is that music is just too diffuse and the kind of communities that love it are too numerous to create something where everybody can kind of get on board and want to participate and watch it live, like Suzy said. Every year there's kind of a Tweet or a social post that typifies this, but this year it was all the young people being like, "Who the hell is Bonnie Raitt?" after she won an award that they expected Taylor Swift to win. And I know who Bonnie Raitt is and I think that it's crazy that someone who likes Taylor Swift doesn't know who Bonnie Raitt is or like her, but this is a problem that they have been trying to solve for 20 years and they are no closer to solving it now than they were in the '90s.

Marcus Johnson:

That's it for the Game of the Week. Let's count the scores. And hit the drum roll. Max is this week's winner of the Game of the Week. Congratulations to Max.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Shocker. Shocker.

Marcus Johnson:

13 points for Max. Stephanie and Suzy tied with 10 in a joint second place. Great game though, folks. Very [inaudible 00:29:51] indeed.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Wait, how many did Max have?

Stephanie Taglianetti:

We know... Suzy had negative four, let's not forget.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, sorry, good point. Negative four.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

No wait, so I'm actually the winner if I didn't have the negative four because I would be 14.

Marcus Johnson:

Okay, six. Six for Suzy in a distant third.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

He didn't account for it.

Marcus Johnson:

Also known as last.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

No, he totally did. That's how I only have 10.

Marcus Johnson:

Last place for Suzy. Max.

Max Willens:

Max number one.

Marcus Johnson:

One, yes. So Max, you get the championship belt and the last word, what you got for us.

Max Willens:

Max is number one. I have no last word. I guess I would just say that-

Marcus Johnson:

No one ever does. Super Bowl comment?

Max Willens:

No, it's terrible. I mean, I should... The right team won.

Marcus Johnson:

The right team did win. Miss me with this holding call. He had a whole touchdown that was taken away because he didn't have... the receiver didn't establish himself in making a football move.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Yeah, I hated when that happened. That was the worst.

Max Willens:

Get out of here with that.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

That was terrible.

Marcus Johnson:

Stephanie, who are you pulling for? Talk to us, Stephanie.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Who was I pulling for? Rihanna. Rihanna.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh my goodness. She wasn't even playing. Congratulations to Max. He wins this week's Game of the Week. It's time now for Dinner Party Data. It's the part of the show where we tell you about the most interesting thing that we've learned this week. We start with Max because he was indeed number one. Max, what do you got for us?

Max Willens:

Thank you Marcus.

Marcus Johnson:

You're welcome.

Max Willens:

So because we are all... or most of us in the US are about to have a four-day week thanks to President's Day, it got me thinking about the four-day work week, which is something that I go to bed dreaming about all the time. And I realized that there's actually a nonprofit based out of New Zealand that is trying to sort of build global support for this idea and they finished off a six-month study and released the findings in late December last year. And there was a bunch in there that I thought was really interesting. There was a lot of unsurprising stuff, including the

fact that 97% of the employees involved in this study said they wanted to keep doing it. But the kind of most interesting thing was the change in workload intensity.

So a lot of the companies that participated in this did so with the expectation or the hope that it wouldn't affect productivity, "We'll cut down the number of days that you have to clock in or whatever, but you still have to do 40 hours worth of work." And you would think that that would mean you've got four maybe more intense days and then you get three days to recuperate from that intensity. But only a third of the respondents to the survey that they did after conducting this study said that the intensity of their work increased and the remaining third said either things stayed the same or their workload intensity actually declined, which to me is really fascinating. It speaks a lot to the kind of what's described as theater of work, how many meetings that are conducted when there could just be in exchange of emails, things like that. So TLDR, let's have a four-day work week everybody.

Marcus Johnson:

I'm with you.

Max Willens:

Let's do it.

Marcus Johnson:

To hell with this five day nonsense. I'm sick of it.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Agreed.

Marcus Johnson:

Unless Stuart's listening, because he's my boss and thank you so much, Stuart. I love working with you every day.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

But four days would be nice.

Marcus Johnson:

Four would be nice, yeah. Let's be real.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Every day, weekend's included.

Marcus Johnson:

Why not? Stephanie, you're up.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

I have some Super Bowl spending data.

Marcus Johnson:

Yes.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

So I was looking at a survey fielded on a little over 2000 US consumers on plans for the Super Bowl. People were planning to spend more on Super Bowl Sunday this year than last year. \$115 on average, up from 88 last year. A lot of that has to do with the amount of people hosting watch parties for the Super Bowl. 52% of Americans planned to watch it at home and 20 were hosting watch parties, which was actually an 82% increase over last year the number of people hosting watch parties. Naturally, 66% of people will be putting all of that money towards food and drinks. And Marcus, I jokingly said that I was rooting for Rihanna, but when people were asked why they were going to tune into the Super Bowl, 16% of people agreed with me. They were tuning in just for Rihanna. 15% of people were tuning in because they actually wanted to watch the corresponding commercials. 43% said primary reason was sports related, and 4% just simply felt obligated that they had to.

Marcus Johnson:

Peer pressure.

Max Willens:

That's right.

Marcus Johnson:

Yes.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

And water cooler conversation.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, that's very true. Watch parties, that makes a lot of sense that that's up because believe it or not, somehow Omicron was like 12 months ago or as it was starting to calm down a little bit, at least in the US. So yeah, very different world that we were living in just 12 months ago. Good numbers. Suzy, you're up.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

So this weekend I planted lettuce seeds in pots and I have my own little garden in the city. On my windowsill, I have three tomato plants that have grown, but there's no tomatoes yet.

Marcus Johnson:

This is the most interesting thing that you learned this week was that you planted?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Yes. Because I wanted to know how quickly... do you know how fast the lettuce will harvest?

Marcus Johnson:

That's not really what the segment's about. Okay. Yeah, go on. Okay, here we go. No, I have zero idea.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Can anybody guess how long it takes?

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Three weeks.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Four weeks. And tomatoes, I missed the mark on this one though, 60 to 80 days from seed to... I can't tell from the Googling whether it's seed to plant-

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Or fruit.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Or seed to actual tomato. Yeah.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Yeah.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

I can't tell. And I also have basil, but I bought it already grown. So I feel really good about that. And the truth is everybody should put plants in their house because there are many studies that show that it improves your mood, reduces fatigue, so talking about COVID and the past three years of stress, it helps reduce stress and anxiety and there are many, many, many other things.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

But how many of those people are cat owners whose cats will eat said plants and cause you stress and anxiety for having to clean up after that?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Well, you have to think of different mechanisms to reduce stress, or you need to buy planters with the hooks so you can have them hanging from the ceiling. NASA recommends-

Marcus Johnson:

Then it's just a game for the cats.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Can you imagine how many plants-

Marcus Johnson:

Go on.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

... you should have, according to NASA, yes NASA the space people, they recommend that you should have... can you guess how many plants you should have per 1,000-

Marcus Johnson:

Is that on the sign as you're driving in? NASA, the space people. Sorry, go on, Suzy. Sorry, sorry,

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Can you guess how many plants plans they recommend that you have for 1,800 square feet house?

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Five.

Marcus Johnson:

Why is NASA giving recommendations?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Because-

Marcus Johnson:

You've got other things to worry about.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

... having plants helps with the oxygen and the air and decarbonization and a bunch of other good for the environment things, which they are worried about.

Marcus Johnson:

Okay, that's fair. All right, fine. I see the link. I see the link.

Max Willens:

I'm going to say 10.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

15 to 18 plants.

Marcus Johnson:

What?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

In 1800 square feet, and from a different study-

Max Willens:

Ain't nobody got time for that.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

... there is something called a breathing zone. So if you really want to have all of the maximizing benefits of the plants, you have to be six to eight square feet away from it.

Marcus Johnson:

See if you get... when I've tried to buy plants, they die-

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Yeah. Can't keep them alive.

Marcus Johnson:

.... incredibly, like offensively fast, and so it's-

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Should I show you my tomato?

Marcus Johnson:

No. It's bad enough we have to deal with it at Christmas.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

That was the wrong answer.

Max Willens:

Asked and answered.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Send a picture.

Marcus Johnson:

Is it going to be on... we'll put it on Instagram for people to judge harshly.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

No, I want to show you right now. I'm very...

Marcus Johnson:

It felt like a question. It felt like you were asking whether you want to see it and when I said no, you're still going to show. Here we go. All right. Oh, all lined up. That's nice.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Right?

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Very nice.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

And you can't see the tomato... I mean the lettuce, because that's just... they're different pots. It's a whole garden I'm doing over here.

Max Willens:

Very nice.

Marcus Johnson:

Well played. Garden's generous. She's got two. There's two plants on a windowsill. All right. I've got one for... check our Instagram, BehindtheNumbers_Podcast and you can see them, Suzy's non-garden. All right, Dinner Party Data, what do I have for you? Top 10 most littered plastic items in the US, recent question.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Food containers.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Straws. Straws.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Oh yeah, straws. That's a good one.

Marcus Johnson:

Nope.

Max Willens:

I think-

Marcus Johnson:

But good guess.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Food container.

Max Willens:

Cigarette butts.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, Max.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

No, that's not plastic, but there is-

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Plastic-

Marcus Johnson:

It is indeed plastic.

Max Willens:

What do you think the-

Marcus Johnson:

All right, so hang on one second. Let me set this up and then we'll get into what it is because Max may or may not be, but he definitely is right. A recent question answered by Chris Dickert of Visual Capitalist-

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Woo, number one again.

Marcus Johnson:

... was answering this question about the most littered plastic items in the US. He noted that hailed as a miracle material when it first appeared, plastic has taken us to the moon, revolutionized medicine, and helped make computers and cell phones possible. But plastic has a darker side. The world generates over 350 million tons of plastic waste every year. Over one fifth of that is mismanaged. Mr. Dickert looks at a 2020 national litter survey that captured a snapshot of the problem breaking down the number of pieces of different types of litter. The number one culprit of the most littered single-use plastic items in the US, it's cigarette filters, which is the white bit inside the short orange bit. Nearly 10 billion, that's accounting for nearly 20% of all littered items. This is horrific as well, it's estimated 80%, four out of five, cigarette filters are littered.

Max Willens:

Oh yeah.

Marcus Johnson:

Cigarette filters are routinely the number one most collected item during the Ocean Conservancy's annual international coastal cleanup, and a very distant second, plastic film.

Max Willens:

Straws.

Marcus Johnson:

Plastic film, cling film, saran wrap that's not used to wrap food is in a very distant second, but still second. Plastic film used to wrap food is in third. Polystyrene for packaging and things is in fourth. Then it's plastic food packaging, I think Suzy might have shouted that out maybe, takeout containers, margarine tubs, yogurt pots, things like that. Then it's beverage packaging, iced drink containers, things like that, that's sixth. Polystyrene, but specifically for food is in seventh. And then the final three in the top 10, single serve wine and liquor bottles, then it's plastic bags in ninth, and water bottles in 10th place. This is items though, I don't know in terms of volume what that means, but the only research I could find was on items.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

I also think I was thinking about landfills versus just chucking something on the... again, not a nice word to use. Sorry. Putting something on the floor instead of in a garbage on a street littering. So it totally makes sense that cigarettes probably not by volume, but by item.

Marcus Johnson:

Food and beverage containers of various kinds were also the key source to plastic litter. Food and beverage containers represented half of the top 10.

Max Willens:

I smoked for a lot longer than I'd care to admit, and there is a weird kind of blindness in basically every cigarette smoker I have ever met where I'm somebody who really hates littering and hates seeing litter, which makes living in Philadelphia really hard. But I remember having a conversation once about how important it felt to me to not litter. And I think I absentmindedly flicked a cigarette as I was saying that just into the gutter and didn't even think about it, and my friend who was with me at the time, a non-smoker was like, "Well, what about those?" And I was just stopped dead in my track, so I was like, "Oh. Yeah, I probably should stop doing that." But it's just a thing that you don't even think about doing. I don't know whether it's movies or TV shows kind of making that slick cool or something, but it doesn't seem like littering, even though you're taking a piece of smelly plastic and just throwing it in the gutter or onto the street.

Marcus Johnson:

Maybe cause it feels like it's so small as well, even though it definitely adds up. That might be part of it. But you know the-

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Oh in your top 10, they were all small-ish. Like the first top five are all small things that you can scrunch up sort of and just sort of toss without anybody seeing.

Marcus Johnson:

That's a good point. One more horrendously sobering stat about the numbers I just gave you, cigarette filters account for more littered single-use plastic items in the US. If you add them up, they account for more than the next nine offenders combined. So 9.7 billion for cigarette filters if you added up two through 10, polystyrene, water bottles, plastic bags, et cetera, that's 9.5 billion. So it's still not quite as many as cigarette filters. On that horrendously depressing note, that's what I leave you. Have a great three-day weekend. Thank you so much to my guests for talking with me today. Thank you so much to Max.

Max Willens:

I feel like I need a cigarette. Thank you, Marcus.

Marcus Johnson:

This week's winner of the Game of the Week. Please don't start smoking because of me. Thank you so much to Suzy.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Thanks for having me.

Marcus Johnson:

Thank you to Stephanie.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

Happy to be back. Thanks for having me.

Marcus Johnson:

And thanks to Victoria who edits the show, James who copyedited it, and Stuart who runs the team. Thanks to everyone listening. Head to [BehindtheNumbers_podcast](#) for Suzy's non-garden and new behind the scenes segment called the James Question. We'll see you guys on Monday for the Behind the Numbers Daily, an eMarketer podcast made possible by Tinuiti.

Happy weekend, three-day if you're in America. Some of you might not have three-day if you're in America, I'm so, so sorry. I don't make the rules.

Max Willens:

Bye-bye.

Marcus Johnson:

Goodbye. Jersey, New York.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

When in doubt, what do you guess?

Marcus Johnson:

When in doubt. When in doubt, Connecticut.

Stephanie Taglianetti:

No, it's New Jersey.

Marcus Johnson:

Okay. Oh, that's true. I see what you mean now by when in doubt with this company. Yeah.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Victoria, I'm crying over here, just so you know.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh my goodness.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Please edit out the minus four.

Marcus Johnson:

The drama is real. I can literally see your face, Suzy. You do realize that this is video.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

I do.

Marcus Johnson:

It's like I'm crying with a big smile.