

The Weekly Listen: Shopping on Amazon is changing, ad-free TikTok and Instagram, and Toys- R-Us's comeback

Audio



On today's podcast episode, we discuss why shopping on Amazon is changing, the proposal of ad-free TikTok and Instagram subscriptions, how much Amazon's AI chatbot shopping assistant can move the needle for customers, whether Toys-R-Us can make a successful comeback, the share of women in leadership roles and more. Tune in to the discussion with our vice president of content Suzy Davidkhanian and analysts Blake Droesch and Bill Fisher.

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Episode Transcript:

Marcus Johnson:

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Hello everyone, and thanks for hanging out with us for the Behind the Numbers Weekly Listen, an eMarketer podcast made possible by Intuit MailChimp. This is the Friday show that has convinced Bill he's a part-time superhero. Bill, if you were, who would you be? Don't say Batman, for the love of God. He's just rich.

Bill Fisher:

I don't class him as a superhero. He doesn't have a superpower.

Marcus Johnson:

Yes, Bill. My guy.

Bill Fisher:

I'd be The Invisible Man.

Marcus Johnson:

Is that a superhero?

Bill Fisher:

It's melting into the background.

Marcus Johnson:

Wasn't the Hollow Man just a Kevin Bacon film in the '90s? That's what you chose? And nevermind, Bill's clearly not a superhero. In today's show, has shopping on Amazon changed?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

It's not utilitarian anymore in terms of search, because you can't even find what you're looking for. And so, is it going to lose that search bag? Because it's certainly not a place to go discover what you want or be inspired.

Marcus Johnson:

Is ad free TikTok and Instagram a good idea?

Bill Fisher:

You've got to consider age demographics as well, particularly TikTok, Instagram to a degree, less so Facebook. But on those short video platforms, younger consumers, do they want to pay for an ad free version? No, I would say they definitely don't. My kids don't want to pay. I'm not paying for them.

Marcus Johnson:

Can Amazon's AI chatbot shopping assistant help you?

Blake Droesch:

An AI search is really not going to do anything to improve the customer experience if the core of the products being offered is declining or the core issue is that the quality of the products that are being offered are declining.

Marcus Johnson:

Is Toys R Us back, back? And what share of women are in leadership roles? Join me for this episode. We have three people. Let's meet them. We start with our vice president of content, based in New York City, she also covers plenty of retail and e-commerce things on the side. It's Suzy Davidkhanian.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Hi, thanks for having me.

Marcus Johnson:

Hello, there. We're also joined by someone else on that retail and e-commerce team, senior analyst. Based in New York as well. We refer to him exclusively as Blake Droesch.

Blake Droesch:

Hey, everybody. Good to be here.

Marcus Johnson:

And finally, our principal analyst who covers everything UK, dabbles in a bit of Europe on occasion, and also can be referred to as the Hollow Man. The Invisible Man's not a real thing, Bill.

Bill Fisher:

It is.

Marcus Johnson:

Okay, fine. On the south coast of England, it's Bill Fisher, aka, The Invisible Man.

Bill Fisher:

Hello. Great to be here.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

I kind of like The Invisible Man idea. Can you imagine being a fly on the wall, any conversation ever.

Marcus Johnson:

If I was like, "What superpower would you like?" And you said being invisible, that's one thing. But The Invisible Man's not a real thing. Let's check it out. If Bill's right, I'm going to be furious.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Can you do, what superhero do you want to be? I want to be the genie that grants wishes to myself every day, all day, all the time.

Marcus Johnson:

What?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

The genie. Be a genie superhero that grants herself wishes.

Marcus Johnson:

No, I was looking for a real superhero, people. Okay, The Invisible Man was a 2020 horror film. Bill?

Bill Fisher:

Look, I'll be Superman then. For you, I'll be Superman.

Marcus Johnson:

Better. It's going to be a terrible show.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

I think I'm sad it's not a game, because I was going to be a winner and now there's nothing to win.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh yeah, Suzy nearly left the call after she realized that we're not playing the game today. It's the debate, instead.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

I was had.

Marcus Johnson:

You weren't going to win anyway, okay? But yes, there's going to be a debate in the middle, trivia at the end. But we start, of course, with the story of the week. Has shopping on Amazon changed, is what we're talking about. If shopping on the site feels different now, that's because it has, suggests former executive editor of news at Wired, Brian Barrett. In a recent Atlantic article, he complains about having to sift through all the sponsored listings. "What happened to Amazon?" he questions. He writes that the company no longer excels at the thing it's supposed to be, at shopping. It's unparalleled convenience and cost helped turn it into an e-commerce juggernaut, one that now faces an antitrust suit from the Federal Trade Commission over alleged anti-competitive practices. Now, around every corner lies a brand you've never heard of, selling a product you are not sure about. Good deals on name brands are harder to come by. Amazon's dominance has also transformed it into a different kind of company.

See, one of the things he's complaining about here is just when you search for something, you have to scroll through a bunch of sponsored listings before you get to the organic search results, as well as saying that there's just lesser known brands on the platform. Suzy, let's go to

you first on this. What's your take on his question of whether shopping on Amazon has changed?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

I couldn't agree more with the writer. I, earlier this week, was trying to participate in the Amazon Prime deal days and it was a disaster. And I always knew it was, but it's even more so than ever before. On your phone, you're scrolling through all these ads before you even get to, I'm looking for a laptop, before you even get to a laptop that you have actually tried to filter for. And so there's that. The idea that there are all these random brands that are coming up top because there is some sort of user generated content gamification that's happening. So at the end of the day, you're not seeing the things you thought you were going to see, like you once did. I don't necessarily agree with the idea that Amazon always put the customer first, but it's certainly not thinking about the customer experience in any way, shape or form right now. It's just thinking about, how can they make more money more quickly?

Marcus Johnson:

So the article was noting that Washington Post reported last year, it was an e-commerce research company called Profitero. They found, across 70 search terms, Amazon displayed nine sponsored ads on the first results page alone. That'd be twice as much as the average Walmart site. Blake, is there something to this or is this a bit overblown?

Blake Droesch:

Yeah, so as a consumer, I've definitely noticed this Amazon search results kind of present like an illusion of choice at this point. When you take away the search results that aren't ads, that aren't Amazon branded products and that aren't the dwindling lot of other items that are available for Prime shipping, there really isn't that much choice. And I've noticed this for a lot of very, very broad categories. I mean, things like socks and chargers, things that Amazon really used to do well in providing a really good variety of options at different price points available on Prime. It really does seem to be going away. So I think the ad load is probably the most immediate issue affecting the customer experience. But even if you've removed it, they reduce the ad loads by half. I think it's becoming more of a product selection choice as well. And I don't have any exact data to back this up, like I'm saying. But just from consumer standpoint, I do find the comparison of what happened to Google search results and how ineffective they've become, I've noticed basically the same thing happening on Amazon.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

The thing is, I don't know what it's like in the UK, but I never felt like I had that many options of products. Once you get rid of all of the random garbage that isn't allowing me to get to what I want, they didn't carry. Now they're starting to carry more brands, like vertically integrated brands and more real brands. But up until maybe five years ago, they really just relied on random 3P sellers. And I mean, the author even talks about it, and we forecast it as well. It's truly like a messy bazaar. 60% of what they're selling is from third party sellers that are randomness that you can't even compare to other things.

So I don't know that that's any different. I just think the experience is so poor. And Amazon has been known to be a place to go and search, but I'm not really sure that it's going to continue to be. It's not utilitarian anymore in terms of search, because you can't even find what you're looking for. And so, is it going to lose that search bag? Because it's certainly not a place to go discover what you want or be inspired, but now it's kind of missing the mark on finding what you're looking for when you already have a product in mind.

Bill Fisher:

It is the same in the UK. And I think what's happening here is this idea of trust. I would go to Amazon as a trusted retailer or even as a marketplace and know that what I was searching for, I was going to get a trusted merchant selling, giving me the product. And I'm not sure that that's happening anymore. And so, that sort of trust is degenerating a little bit.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

But I will tell you that as the experience continues to get poorer, on the other hand, the flip side, there are marketplaces that are trying to beef up their services. The missing link I think is delivery, like the author talks about, and speed of delivery. It's not so much the number of products, but the speed of delivery. There's going to be a point where, I don't know about you guys, but I feel this resistance like it's so easy, Amazon knows me, they know what I want to buy, they surface it. I can just repeat my purchases. There's going to come a point where that switching, that resistance to switch to a different marketplace is going to go away and the experience is going to matter.

Blake Drosch:

I agree. I think it's just the quality of the marketplace as well. And put discovery and search aside, there have been many times where I've gone to Amazon to rebuy something that I purchased there over and over again, only find that the availability of the item has changed or the price has changed or it's no longer qualifying for next day shipping. So even Amazon as a sort of a location for these repeat services is kind of dwindling in quality. And I think Suzy's exactly right. I mean, if there's one thing that's going to loosen up Amazon's cling on this large base of Prime subscribers, that hold on long base of Prime subscribers, it's going to be the deterioration of that convenience.

Marcus Johnson:

Looking at the third party line item, in Q2, third party seller services accounted for 60% of its online shopping line item. 60% of that line item. In 2019, it was close to 35. So online seller services in terms of if you stack it up side by side with their online stores, net sales, it used to be 35% a few years ago. Now it's close to 60%. So you are starting to see that shift, and it's starting to be quite noticeable. I think, Bill, it's a good point that maybe that trust, that reliability is starting to become a bit diluted. Mr. Barrett saying that along the way, the famously customer obsessed company has lost track of what its customers actually want. Final thought here from anyone who wants to jump in, is that something that's easy to snatch back or is that gone forever now because Amazon is so big and things have become so cluttered, whether it's products or ads?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Well, I think given all the headlines that Amazon is in, it's an uphill battle, right? You have a bad experience, you hear about other people having a bad experience, you see it in the news about how they're getting in so much trouble. You start to really feel like they care more about making money than having a satisfied customer. And at some point you break up. Loyalty wanes.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. All right folks, that's all we've got time for the story of the week. We set that aside. Move, of course, to the debate of the week. Today's segment, Make the Case. Our panel, Blake, Suzy, and Bill will present the for and against arguments for each of the following questions based on three news stories. Two contestants face off per question. Also, the

following takes don't necessarily reflect the analyst's personal views. Their job is just to present the best case regardless, and offer objective analysis. Question one.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Wait. So there are no points?

Marcus Johnson:

Victoria, can you talk to her please? I can't when she's like this.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

I'm really sad.

Victoria:

Why are you trying to make me the bad guy? Please don't involve me. Suzy, if it were up to me-

Marcus Johnson:

I've told you a million times, Suzy.

Victoria:

I would give you all of the points that your heart desires.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

And the championship belt. Thank you.

Marcus Johnson:

Don't do that. You'll encourage her.

Victoria:

I think everybody deserves a participation ribbon because everybody on the show is so intelligent.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

No, we don't believe in participation ribbons. We just believe in winning.

Victoria:

I think everybody's input is equally as wonderful.

Marcus Johnson:

Victoria.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

True.

Marcus Johnson:

Ever the diplomat. Well played. There's no game, Suzy, okay?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Fine. Very sad.

Marcus Johnson:

Question one.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

I'm going to complain to Stu.

Marcus Johnson:

Ad free TikTok and Instagram. Meta plans to charge \$14 a month for an ad free version of Instagram or Facebook, notes Sam Schechner of the Wall Street Journal. According to a proposal to regulators, the social media giant wants to charge Europeans for monthly subscriptions if they don't agree to let the company use their digital activity to target ads. So basically, Meta considering offering an ad-free version of Instagram or Facebook for \$14 a month just in Europe because the laws are stricter there and they're trying to get around that.

In similar news, TikTok is reportedly testing the waters for an ad-free monthly subscription service, notes our very own Jeremy Goldman. The short video company has yet to confirm this, but code strings were found in the latest version of the app, according to Android Authority. They also say that it would be about \$5 a month if it becomes a thing. Question is, are ad free versions of TikTok, Facebook and Instagram a good idea? Blake is going up

against Bill. Blake will go first. So Blake, you are arguing that ad free versions are a good idea, ad free versions of TikTok, Instagram, Facebook are a good idea. 60 seconds on the clock, make the case.

Blake Droesch:

Yeah, I would say they are a good idea for both individual companies for individual reasons. For Meta, it's a direct response to legislation. I think privacy legislation is most advanced in the EU, but it's continuing to spread. And it's a good idea to have an alternative revenue stream instead of relying just on advertising, in case new legislation goes into effect in places like the US and elsewhere where it makes advertising less lucrative. Plus it's always a good idea to have options. It just makes for a good customer experience for heavy users of the app, you don't want to see ads. TikTok, same reasons as for Meta. But if TikTok wants to enter more into commerce and having their own fulfillment networks, then building up a subscription customer base and adding features to it, different benefits can also help bolster different parts of their business over time.

Marcus Johnson:

So yeah, to over-explain Blake's point, give folks a bit of extra context. Mr. Schechner was pointing out that the proposal here is an attempt by Meta to navigate the EU, European Union's rules that threaten to restrict its ability, Meta's, to show users personalized ads without first getting their consent, which would jeopardize their main source of revenue. And so this would give them a way to get around that and charge people instead of showing them ads. Bill, you're going to argue for us, ad free versions aren't a good idea. Make the case.

Bill Fisher:

Yeah, terrible idea. I'll concentrate primarily on TikTok because listeners of the show will know I'm a big fan, I'm a heavy user. And generally speaking, the TikTok experience is already positive for me with ads included. I've spoken about how my sons engage with the platform, how they quickly identify videos they want to engage with those they want to ignore very quickly, aka ads, and swipe past them. You've got to consider age demographics as well, particularly TikTok, Instagram to a degree, less so Facebook. But on those short video platforms, younger consumers, do they want to pay for ad-free version? No, I would say they definitely don't. My kids don't want to pay. I'm not paying for them. And of course, this will have some kind of impact on the algorithm.

So in the EU it's about getting consent, right? So this is going to monkey with the algorithm, because they don't know what their users are engaging with. Take that away. You're not getting the algorithm. And I asked my kids, "Would you pay because they're taking information on you?" And they said, "Why would I stop them taking info so they know what to show me? The algorithm is great, don't get in the way."

Marcus Johnson:

Interesting. Bill, a little primary research. You don't hate that? Your kids must hate you. Every time you're on the show they're like, "Oh God, what is it now, Dad?" Like, "Just fill out the questionnaire, okay. Just fill out the questionnaire and just bring it back up to my office."

Bill Fisher:

Their friends at school listen to the podcast, I should say.

Marcus Johnson:

Do they really?

Bill Fisher:

They do.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

That's adorable.

Marcus Johnson:

Shout out.

Bill Fisher:

And so I let them know when I've mentioned them so they listen in.

Marcus Johnson:

Thank you, Bill's kids, and friends of Bill's kids. Shout out to you guys.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

You should also tune into the Weekly Listen when there's a game.

Marcus Johnson:

You don't have to. Suzy, any thoughts here about an ad free TikTok or Instagram?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

You know what? To be honest with you, I would never pay, but I'm also the one who's paying more on the Hulu ad supported platform because I'd rather get a couple ads than pay more than the \$8, so I think if you think about sample size of one. Although I'm pretty sure Bill's kids and I are not the only ones who don't want to pay for this service. The other thing I would say is, if they're trying to do it to get around legislation, the alternative is that there are no ads and people don't pay. So I'm not really sure how they're going to convince people to pay the \$15 to monitor the ads when, by law, it seems to me like they're not going to be able to show the ads anyways.

Marcus Johnson:

The price point here is interesting because apparently, again, this is just somewhat speculative, some investigation here in terms of what TikTok is going to do. And we think, according to Android Authority, that an ad free version could come out at \$5 a month, 60 bucks a year. That's very different from \$14 a month for an ad free Instagram or Facebook.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

But that also makes sense based on the users, right? TikTok users are younger, so they're using their pocket money probably versus Instagram folks are probably in their forties. The average user age.

Marcus Johnson:

They'll have more money. But then with all the other streaming services that they might subscribe to, prices going up, it does start to bite. But Meta does have a huge audience in Europe. They say that nearly 260 million monthly active users on Facebook, and the same number, 260, on Instagram in the first half of the year in the EU. That's almost the same number of US adults. So it's a big audience. TikTok could look to make money a different way, provide a different revenue stream, but they're doing pretty well with ads at the moment. TikTok made \$6 billion in the US in ad revenue according to us, looking to make 8 billion next year. And it's growing very healthily indeed after that.

Let's move to our second question. Question two is what it would be called. Amazon's AI chatbot shopping assistant, Suzy against Blake. Amazon plans to incorporate an AI chatbot feature into its search capabilities to offer users more personalized, relevant product recommendations, per Insider, notes our retail briefings analyst, Rachel Wolf. She explains that shoppers could use the chat feature to get recommendations, product comparisons, review summaries, and ask follow-up questions. The feature is currently being tested internally and could launch in the US in January. The question is, will an AI chatbot shopping assistant move the needle for its customers, for Amazon's customers? Suzy's going first, arguing that Amazon's chatbot will move the needle for its customers. 60 seconds, make the case.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

So I think it depends on how we describe and define move the needle. I think we just talked about the horrible online experience on Amazon. So, do I think it's going to help people find what they're looking for faster because it's a smart machine that is trying to, assuming that there are no ads and there are no random brands in the chatbot system, do I think it's going to help? Yeah. Do I think it's going to help if you can also load my previous purchase history and help suggest things that I'm going to need that are adjacent to what I'm asking for as a follow-up? Yes. Are these things that they're already doing in terms of people who bought this also bought that, or other products you should consider in this vein? I think so. I just think it'll be more contained. So do I think it's going to move the needle? If it's a really thin sewing needle, yes, in that it'll definitely make a little difference.

Marcus Johnson:

Blake, Amazon's chatbot won't move the needle for its customers regardless of what kind of needle it is. Make the case.

Blake Droesch:

I think we know how Suzy really feels about this issue.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Sorry about that.

Blake Droesch:

But I agree. I think for all of the reasons that we've discussed at the top of the episode, an AI search is really not going to do anything to improve the customer experience if the core of the products being offered is declining, or the core issue is that the quality of the products that are being offered are declining. The search options are limited and not complex, so they don't require a complex solution to enhance them. Also, when you bring in these other types of AI capabilities that are supposed to ask questions and give you answers and compare different products, the AI is inherently going to be pulling information from the product listings from the products that are being sold on the marketplace, which are inherently inaccurate. And Amazon, as of now, does not have a way to control the quality of information being provided from their merchants on the marketplace. So basically, moving that further into the hands of a computer to monitor and feed back information, it seems like kind of a disaster to me.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Sounds like garbage and garbage out.

Blake Droesch:

Yeah.

Marcus Johnson:

You had one job, Suzy.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

I did such a good job.

Marcus Johnson:

Argue for Will. You'd be a horrible lawyer. Is your client guilty? Probably. I mean, look at him.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

I didn't do well in my negotiation class, to be honest with you.

Marcus Johnson:

Shocker, shocker. Bill, any thoughts?

Bill Fisher:

I don't trust chatbots. I don't like them. I don't think they like me.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, personal. It's personal. What happened, Bill?

Bill Fisher:

I never get to where I want to get. They never answer the question I have. I get taken down a rabbit hole. I never get the answer.

Marcus Johnson:

Are you like, "How'd you make a lasagna?" And they're like, "Paris." How wrong?

Bill Fisher:

Well, I asked them, "Can you give me a superhero?" And they give me The Invisible Man.

Marcus Johnson:

Okay, you didn't ask.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Nice one.

Marcus Johnson:

Enough with blaming the robots on this show. It must end. It was your choice. You picked a horror film. Very disturbing. Let's move to our third question and we're going Bill against Suzy. We're talking about Toys R Us. Are they back? Well, our senior retail analyst, Zach Stambaugh, explains that Toys R Us have mapped out an aggressive comeback strategy that includes opening up two dozen flagship stores and developing an immersive new retail format that will appear in airports and cruise ships. Can Toys R Us mount a successful comeback, is the question. Bills up first. Toys R Us will make a successful comeback. We put 60 seconds on the clock. By we, I mean Victoria. Thank you. Make the case.

Bill Fisher:

I was parachuted into this call, not being the retail specialist. But when I heard the question was Toys R Us is back, I thought, isn't it back already? So from a UK perspective, Toys R Us

has a presence in the UK already. It's back. It's not back in its initial guise. So where you find it now is on the UK high street, so in the town centers on the high street as opposed to these big out of town superstores that it used to inhabit.

There was a void that wasn't really filled. Again, from a UK perspective, we've got The Entertainer, Toy Barnhaus in the UK, but they weren't as big, they weren't as impressive as Toys R Us. The comeback has already begun. Can it be successful? There's precedent for this in other areas. So HMV went bankrupt in the UK several years ago. It was successfully bought out and relaunched. It kind of reinvented itself a little bit and it's hanging around and doing pretty well. I think Toys R Us can do the same.

Marcus Johnson:

So little translation for the Americans. HMV, they used to sell DVDs, CDs, vinyl.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Cassettes.

Marcus Johnson:

Video games, cassettes. Yeah, so that's that store. And then when Bill says high street, it's main street, same thing. Very nice. Suzy, Toys R Us won't make a successful comeback. Make the case.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

It makes me very sad to say this. There are so many happy memories associated to that giant giraffe. Bill's not wrong in the US too.

Marcus Johnson:

Tell the children why they won't get Toys R Us back, Suzy. Tell them.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Well, I am telling them.

Marcus Johnson:

And all millennials as well.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

It's already-

Marcus Johnson:

This is the least... Go on, least popular argument you could possibly make. Good luck.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Thank you. To Bill's point, it actually is already here, right? So the question is, can they come back in a way that they were before? Right now they're just in Pop-up stores at Macy's. They were at like 700 stores, and now they went bankrupt. They got bought by someone else and now they're trying to figure it out. They are global, they are in other markets, including Canada. And so we all know and love this brand. There is a lot of brand equity, but they're moving into 30 stores. And as we know, when you lose a customer, it's so hard to get them back. And the cost to get them back is so high that people moved from Toys R Us to Walmart, Amazon, Target, just to name a few.

Toys or toys, right? There is a little bit of branding that goes around a toy, but it's hard to know what's going to be the next it toy. So I think Toys R Us not only has a customer issue, but it also might have an inventory margin issue. If they don't bank on the right toys of the season, outside of the Monopolies of the world, they're going to be left over with so much inventory and they won't be able to absorb that like a big box retailer can. I did see that they're thinking about cruise ships and airports. So Lego has a vending machine in airports. That, I think, is going to work, to be honest with you, because you are in a place where people are in a bind. They really are not price sensitive. They just need a toy to keep their kid happy, and so they're going to buy it there. Overall though, can it reinvent itself to what it was like before? Absolutely not.

Marcus Johnson:

So yeah, curious to know whether the FAO Schwartz and the Hamleys of the world, toy stores in New York and London respectively, how much of a bump they got when Toys R Us closed, and whether that bump has continued or whether they are also struggling because people are buying toys in different places now. There's still a gap, technically. No one has moved into that space. And Zach was noting, "Since Toys R Us closed its stores five years ago, no one's really replaced them." Replaced them, if you will, in terms of being the go-to toy store. However, toy

sales, he points out, just spread among mass merchants, Amazon, Walmart, Target. But they'll need an e-commerce strategy, it seems, regardless. Because just under half of toy sales are online today, it'll be two thirds by 2027, according to our forecast team.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

If you think about that statement, that in the last five years nobody has appeared as the toy destination that is a standalone toy store, that probably says a lot, right? That there is no market for that. So they're going to have to really think through what is their purpose. It sounds like they're going to do like FAO Schwartz, I don't know. I only know one store. There must be more than one store, but it's very limited, and it is about that piano and it's about the movie and Tom Hanks. And it's really about a destination. Toys R Us, like Bill was pointing out before, you had to drive to get there. Traffic was not easy. So I think they're just going to have to rethink about what they're doing. But there's room for more people because toy sales are doing well. But Monopoly is Monopoly. It doesn't matter where you buy it. So price becomes important as well.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, I wonder, because Toys R Us, they're trying to, these flagship stores, lean on experience, letting people play with toys whilst they're in the store. So that gives people a reason to come. It used to be so you could scan all the toys and it was a fantastic day out for a kid. But they've got to try to figure out a way to get people to convert in the store, not walk away knowing what they want and then go buy it on Amazon. Or maybe they can convince them to buy it on Toys Us. Maybe there's a membership program there. Maybe you get a free toy a year for a certain amount of money. But there's still the same age-old problem of going in store, doing your window shopping and then going and buying it cheaper somewhere else online. Blake, any thoughts, mate?

Blake Droesch:

Yeah, the experience is all about the kid. But they still need to convince their parents to take them there. And every five-year-old knows how to use an iPad. So if you're the parent and you're busy, you don't want to spend a Saturday driving all the way out to the toy store, give them an iPad with an Amazon page to scroll through, and the kid's going to have a great time picking out a toy because they don't really know that there's another experience.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. All right, folks, that's where we'll leave the debate of the week. Very nice arguments today. Must move to dinner party data. This is the part of the show where we tell you about the most interesting thing that we've learned this week. We start with Suzy.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

As if I won.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, because it was a consolation.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Thank you. I wanted to talk about volunteering the last two weekends. I volunteered at completely different activities for different groups, different nonprofits. So then I wanted to do a little bit of study because everyone's like, "That's so nice of you." But the truth is that it actually does have a lot of positive benefits for the individual but also for the world. So, the government does a study every two years with Americorp, and their last study was started in 2021, I guess, and it just published in '23. Do you know, in the US, how many hours of service people do? 4.1 billion hours.

Marcus Johnson:

4.1 billion. I was going to say that.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Obviously. And that's valued at around \$30, which makes it an estimated economic value of \$123 billion, which is kind of a lot. One in four Americans volunteer in a formal capacity. They also measure informal, like helping your neighbor if something happened, watching your neighbor's kid, whatever it is. One in two, 50% of people volunteer informally. Clearly more women volunteer than men. This one I thought was interesting. More households, parents with children in the household, volunteer versus if your kid is no longer at home. So it's almost like you're trying to set a good example. Obviously, New York did not make the top three states. Can you guys guess which state has the most percentage of formal volunteers? It's a hard one. Utah.

Blake Droesch:

Somewhere in the south. Oh, Utah?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Utah.

Blake Droesch:

Okay.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

41%, Wyoming.

Blake Droesch:

Or Midwest. Maybe I should have should guessed Midwest.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Wyoming, 40%. Minnesota came in third. New York City, 19% of the population of New York City formally volunteers. I'm part of that 19%.

Marcus Johnson:

It's pretty high.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

You think so?

Marcus Johnson:

Could be higher. But if you look at how many people are in New York, that's like however many, 1.5, 1.7 million people. It could be higher. But if you look at total people. Oh, New York State you're talking about as well?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

No, New York City.

Marcus Johnson:

New York City. Yes. It's got like a million people. It's like 1.7 million folks. That's surprising. Could be higher.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

It could be higher. I mean, it's just below the average US wide. Deloitte studies this. We know it's an effective way to improve your leadership, to reduce stress, improve your relationships, potentially find a new job. 80% of respondents to a Deloitte study said that volunteering, they believe that companies who offer that type of activity for their employees have a better overall working environment than those who don't. So there are also benefits to offering volunteer programs at work.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, I think in the UK it's like 94% of people volunteer.

Bill Fisher:

I think that's accurate.

Marcus Johnson:

I'm kidding.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

It can't be that high. But maybe it's more.

Marcus Johnson:

It's probably not.

Blake Droesch:

So can't Bill volunteer to do this podcast?

Bill Fisher:

Yeah.

Marcus Johnson:

Yes, that does count. This does count as charity work.

Bill Fisher:

Good deed for the week.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Missed on the superhero though.

Marcus Johnson:

Completely. Bill did step in literally the last second to do this. Thank you, Bill. Bill, you are now up, mate.

Bill Fisher:

Okay, from noble causes to nobility causes.

Marcus Johnson:

Great pivot.

Bill Fisher:

Something interesting. It's not something I learned. I knew this for some reason from this side of the pond. Do you guys know what the national Animal of Scotland is?

Marcus Johnson:

Unfortunately, yes. I'm livid. This really annoys me.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

It's definitely not a beaver because that's Canada.

Bill Fisher:

Correct. It's not a beaver. Do you want to have a go, Blake?

Marcus Johnson:

Hedgehog.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

A lamb. I think it's a lamb.

Bill Fisher:

That would work. That would work. But it's not. Go, on. What is it, Marcus?

Marcus Johnson:

So I've avoided using this as a fact of the day for years because every time I read it I'm like, bloody Scotland. It's a bloody unicorn.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Stop.

Bill Fisher:

It's a unicorn.

Marcus Johnson:

What are you doing up there, guys?

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Like Stonehenge and the myth of the lochness monster. I mean, there's a lot of unicorn style things happening.

Marcus Johnson:

They're out of control. Someone needs to go up there. I'll go.

Bill Fisher:

Those pesky Scots. But the reason for it, no one knows why, basically. But the best guess we can take is, in the 15th century, all the European nobility were adopting animals on their crests, on their emblems, and they went for wild and uncommon ones. So that's why we have lions in England, the three lions, all that kind of thing. In France, the kings of France went for the porcupine. Not a hedgehog, but a porcupine. And in Spain they went for something much better, an eagle. But in Scotland, James I, for some reason he went for a unicorn, and nobody can tell us why.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Well, they believe in the lochness monsters.

Marcus Johnson:

What are you doing? Avoided that for three years, Bill. Thanks for being on.

Bill Fisher:

Sorry.

Marcus Johnson:

Blake, you're up.

Blake Droesch:

Just looking at some data from civic science that's trying to gauge the impact that Taylor Swift's attendance at NFL games is making on viewership. And I thought it was surprising because I thought that it would actually increase viewership. And maybe it has, but the consumer sentiment is still pretty lukewarm because they asked, would Taylor Swift's attendance at an NFL game make you more or less likely to watch the game? 69% said it would not impact my decision to watch at all. But 9% said they were more likely to watch. But 22% said that they were actually less likely to watch.

Marcus Johnson:

What share of people said, who's Taylor Swift?

Blake Droesch:

I would imagine not many.

Marcus Johnson:

No one. Just me. Just me.

Blake Droesch:

It's weird though. Even when you look at 13 to 24 year olds, a quarter of them said that they would be less likely to watch a game if Taylor Swift was in attendance. Whereas 21% said that they were more likely to watch. So even among younger demographics, she seems to be maybe a more polarizing figure than all of hype would suggest.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. It's unfair to her to be honest, because she's not asking them to keep cutting to her every other play. If she was doing the national anthem before every game. Be like, "Oh, who's going to do it? Oh, she's back again. Jesus, it's the third day or week in a row." Then fair enough. But I feel kind of bad for her because the broadcasters just are obsessed with cutting to her in the box. It's not her fault.

Blake Droesch:

Yeah, it's a little odd. It's an odd phenomenon.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah.

Blake Droesch:

I'm interested just to know how long it's going to last. Because you're right, how many times are you going to cut to her during a game? I guess if it's a really bad matchup, you have to look at the Chiefs, who do they have on the rest of the schedule? It could be potentially an exciting one if they're playing the Broncos or something.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. All right, very good. I have one for you real quick. Women in leadership roles, according to Pew Research. Know the numbers are not good, spoiler, but they're getting better. So that is positive. We've got five numbers for you. We start with how many women are in the US House Senate or are governors? So in the last 20 years, a lot of these stats are going to be in the last 20 years. They had numbers going back further, but that's bleak. I thought just the 20 years, 2000 to 2020 was a nice little window.

So in the last 20 years, women have gone from accounting for 10% of US House Senate and governor positions to 25%. So from 10 to 25. Looking at cabinet positions secondly. In the last 20 years, women have gone from accounting to 20% of US cabinet positions to just under 50%. All these numbers are Pew Research. Shout out. So just under 50% of cabinet positions today. Number three, in the last 20 years, women have gone from accounting for 0.4% of CEOs of Fortune 500 companies to 10%. So from no percent to 10% CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. Board members, a bit more impressive, but not really, went from 10% to 30%.

Another number here, fourth one for you women leaders. 20 years ago, only 20 countries had ever had a woman leader. 20 countries. Today, 59 have. So there are close to 200 countries. That's about 30% of countries have ever had a woman leader. I think currently about 15 countries do have a woman as their leader. About 15. But 59 have ever. And the fifth number here is about college. Women do beat men in the share of those who graduate college. In 2014, in fact, more women graduated college than men for the first time in history. The gap is now 39% of women to 36% of men graduating college. So things are changing, just not bloody fast enough. That's what we've got time for for this episode. Thank you so much to all of my guests for being on. We first thank a huge thank you to Bill for stepping in last second and being on the show. Bill, thank you.

Bill Fisher:

No worries. Thanks for having me.

Marcus Johnson:

You can of course check him out on Around the World. Here's the host of that podcast for us, which is almost on the last Monday or Tuesday of the month. So Bill, what are you talking about this month?

Bill Fisher:

Global media intelligence.

Marcus Johnson:

So you check Bill out on that episode end of the month. Also. Thank you to Suzy.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Thanks for having me.

Marcus Johnson:

Thank you to Blake.

Blake Droesch:

Yep. Thanks for having me.

Marcus Johnson:

And thank you to Victoria who edits the show, James, who copy edits it, and Stuart who runs the team. Thanks to everyone for listening in. You could find us on Instagram, @Insiderintelligence, that's where we live. One word. We've moved, we're now @Insiderintelligence, one word, for all the behind the scenes content you can eat. We'll see you guys on Monday, hopefully for the Behind the Numbers Daily, an eMarketer podcast made possible by Intuit MailChimp. Happy weekend. What do you mean you were had? We sent you the show yesterday.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Not when you ask.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, you never.

Suzy Davidkhanian:

Not when you ask. Next time I need to know if it's a weekly listen with the quiz, game, winning potential or not.

Marcus Johnson:

Victoria. Suzy's changed, wouldn't you agree? You've changed.