cimm

Coalition for Innovative Media Measurement

ARF

Quality Matters: Navigating Quality in Media Buying and Measurement

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About CIMM

The Coalition for Innovative Media Measurement (CIMM) is a non-partisan, pan-industry association focused on advancing measurement, currency development, new metrics, and data collaboration across the media and advertising ecosystem. Its role is to convene market participants, clarify emerging issues, and support more informed industry decision-making.

About the Authors

Erez Levin spent more than a decade at Google in senior roles spanning both supply and demand, where he developed an early focus on attention and quality as predictive signals for advertising effectiveness – work he began formalizing as early as 2017. He contributed to the IAB's reclassification of in-stream video and has continued to develop frameworks for quality-based media evaluation. He is the founder of Emet Advisory, where he works with media and technology organizations on quality strategy, product development, and go-to-market planning.
https://www.linkedin.com/in/erezlevin/

Gabriel Dorosz is a media and advertising strategist with more than 30 years of experience across publishers, agencies, and industry organizations. At The New York Times, he helped launch the Times's Attention Measurement practice and led research identifying the advertising value of high-engagement audiences. He is Global Advertising Initiative Lead at INMA (International News Media Association) and Principal of Mighty Blackbird, an advisory practice focused on advertising strategy, data and signals, and revenue innovation for publishers. He was lead author of the CIMM and IAB Attention Measurement Playbook for Marketers.
https://www.linkedin.com/in/gabedorosz/

Jon Watts is the Managing Director of CIMM, with more than 30 years of professional experience in media, advertising, entertainment and technology.
https://www.linkedin.com/in/jonwatts1/

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Core Team and Key Contributors

- Tracy Adams, ARF
- Claire Browne, Adelaide
- Evan Cohen, CIMM
- Paul Donato, ARF
- Gabriel Dorosz, Mighty Blackbird
- Joan Fitzgerald, ANA
- Bill Harvey, Research Measurement Technologies
- Erez Levin, Emet Advisory
- Scott McDonald, ARF
- Jon Watts, CIMM

Interview Participants and Contributors

- Pedro Almeida, Mediaprobe
- Laura Baehr, thinktv
- Travis Flood, Comcast
- Mike Follett, Lumen
- Ken Gilbert, The Trade Desk
- Brian Jacobs, BJ&A
- Yan Liu, TVision
- Fabien Magalon, xpln.ai
- Valérie Morrisson, CESP
- Karen Nelson-Field, Amplified
- Jeff Tetrault, Dumbstruck
- Tristan Webster, TVision

Research Objectives and Approach

This paper was commissioned by the Coalition for Innovative Media Measurement (CIMM) to address a growing gap in the market: the absence of a clear, shared framework for understanding how placement-level characteristics (i.e., non-user-specific attributes of the advertising environment) influence marketing effectiveness. While the industry has made significant advances in audience targeting and attribution, the role of placement-level conditions – such as prominence, context, and exposure environment – remains inconsistently defined, measured, and applied.

The paper examines whether these placement-level characteristics can be treated as reliable, empirical inputs into effectiveness, rather than as subjective or purely contextual factors.

Media Quality can be treated as a predictive signal of effectiveness, enabling more consistent valuation of impressions, particularly as identity-based signals become less reliable across open-web and programmatic environments.

The analysis draws on three primary sources. First, it synthesizes established research in marketing effectiveness, attention measurement, and econometric modeling, including work from the ARF, CIMM, and broader academic and practitioner literature. Second, it incorporates input from structured working sessions conducted through CIMM's Innovation in Media Metrics, Programmatic, and CTV working groups. Third, it reflects perspectives gathered through interviews with senior practitioners across advertising, media, measurement, and technology.

Based on these inputs, the paper has three objectives: to define Media Quality as a distinct and actionable concept; to set out practical approaches for incorporating quality signals into planning, buying, and measurement; and to identify the conditions required for broader market adoption.

The paper is intended as a strategic and practical guide and a catalyst for debate, not as a technical standard or a comprehensive review of vendor solutions. References to specific tools, methodologies, or case examples are illustrative. The conclusions reflect the authors' synthesis of available evidence and industry input and do not represent formal positions of CIMM or any individual contributor.

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Executive Summary

The advertising market does not systematically price impressions according to their true economic value.

While it is widely accepted that placement-level characteristics – such as visibility, context, and exposure environment – materially influence effectiveness, these factors are not consistently defined, measured, or embedded in pricing and allocation decisions.

This paper argues that Media Quality (MQ) must evolve from a secondary optimization variable into a form of market infrastructure: a set of measurable, transactable signals that enable the market to distinguish, value, and price differences in advertising opportunity.

As identity-based targeting and attribution signals become less reliable, the absence of such a signal becomes more consequential. Markets require alternative mechanisms to assess value. MQ can perform this role – but only if it is consistently defined, transmitted, validated, and acted upon across the transaction chain.

The central question is not whether Media Quality matters, but whether it can function as a trusted, scalable, and governable market signal.

The paper argues that:

1. **Not all impressions are equally valuable.** The measurable, non-user-specific attributes of a placement – what this paper defines as Media Quality – are meaningful predictors of advertising effectiveness and remain systematically underweighted in buying and pricing decisions.

2. **Better aligning media cost to true value,** particularly in CTV where the stakes are highest and the infrastructure is still being built, requires industry-wide alignment on shared definitions, better measurement frameworks, and coordinated action across buyers, sellers, and platforms.

3. **Better alignment between cost and quality benefits the full market.** Advertisers can allocate budget toward placements more likely to drive both short-term results and long-term brand effects. Publishers can secure fairer valuation for environments that invest in user experience and editorial quality. The industry can establish more consistent standards, RFP expectations, and buying norms, with CTV as the most immediate proving ground.

Evidence from attention research, brand lift studies, and econometric analyses indicates that higher-quality media environments are more likely to outperform lower-quality placements on outcomes such as recall, brand association, and purchase intent. Measurement frameworks are also moving beyond binary thresholds such as “viewable or not viewable” toward more probabilistic assessments of impression value. This matters especially in Connected TV, where CPM variation is wide and delivery metrics such as viewability and completion rates provide only a partial account of likely effectiveness.

The argument also rests on two established principles of marketing effectiveness. First, most advertising contributes to both **short-term sales and long-term brand building**, so over-optimizing for immediate efficiency can undermine future growth and profitability. Second, because most consumers are not in market at any given moment, media investment must also build **mental availability** so the brand is more likely to come to mind when purchase occasions arise.

Defining Media Quality (MQ)

This paper focuses primarily on **Media Quality (MQ)** – the attributes or characteristics of an advertising placement that are not tied to an individual user, but help predict how effective that placement is likely to be. MQ is one of three drivers of effectiveness alongside Creative and Audience Quality – what we call the **Quality Trifecta** – but this paper concentrates on how media attributes themselves influence outcomes. The two most important MQ dimensions are **Placement Prominence** (signals indicating how likely an ad is to be noticed) and **Contextual Receptiveness** (signals reflecting the environment’s likely receptivity). Critically, MQ is a spectrum, not a binary filter – impression value is relative and probabilistic, not a simple pass/fail threshold.

Executive Summary

Immediate Next Steps for Market Participants

To move Media Quality from concept to market practice, stakeholders should take a set of near-term, practical actions. These do not require full standardization, but they do require deliberate changes to planning, buying, and measurement workflows.

1. **Audit Current Exposure to Quality Variation:** Advertisers should analyze recent campaigns – particularly in CTV – to assess how spend, impressions, and CPMs are distributed across key quality dimensions such as time of day, content type, and geography. The objective is to identify whether current allocation reflects expected differences in value.

2. **Introduce Quality as a Pricing and Allocation Variable:** Media Quality should be incorporated as a continuous input into buying decisions, not only as a threshold filter. Even simple implementations – such as adjusting bids or allocations by daypart or content type – can begin to align cost with expected effectiveness.

3. **Embed Quality into Measurement Frameworks:** Measurement approaches, including MMM, incrementality testing, and campaign reporting, should explicitly account for Media Quality. Where quality is not parameterized, its effects are likely to be misattributed or averaged out, limiting decision accuracy.

4. **Establish a Structured Testing Agenda:** Organizations should implement a combination of lightweight in-flight tests and more rigorous experiments to evaluate the impact of quality-based buying. The goal is to build an internal evidence base linking Media Quality adjustments to both short-term performance and long-term outcomes.

5. **Require and Validate Quality Signals in Transactions:** Buyers should specify required quality signals – such as placement characteristics, ad load, and contextual data – in RFPs and deal structures. These signals should be validated through reporting, third-party measurement, or direct publisher engagement.

6. **Align Commercial Incentives with Quality Outcomes:** Progress depends on aligning pricing with value. Buyers must be willing to pay for demonstrably higher-quality inventory, while publishers must expose signals in ways that enable differentiation without undermining yield.

7. **Prioritize CTV as the Primary Implementation Environment:** Given its high CPMs, wide quality variation, and evolving infrastructure, CTV should be the initial focus for quality-based buying, testing, and standardization efforts.

Executive Summary

Key Takeaways from the Paper

Media Quality Is a Foundational Signal of Value: As identity-based targeting and attribution become less deterministic, Media Quality – defined by the characteristics of the placement itself – emerges as a foundational signal for assessing impression-level value and expected impact.

Effectiveness Requires a Dual Horizon: Media investment must be managed across both short-term performance and long-term demand creation. Over-weighting short-term optimization undermines future demand, pricing power, and sustainable growth.

Quality Must Be Systematically Integrated into Decisioning: Media Quality signals, including placement prominence and contextual factors, should be explicitly incorporated into planning, buying, and pricing decisions to enable more accurate valuation and more efficient allocation of spend.

Quality Must Be Treated as a Continuous Variable: Media Quality exists on a spectrum, not as a binary state. Moving beyond threshold-based metrics toward continuous quality ranges enables more precise control over investment and more effective optimization.

Quality Must Be Operationalized Within Measurement Frameworks: Media Quality should be treated as a measurable, empirical input into effectiveness – defined by the extent to which placement characteristics predict outcomes – and continuously tested, validated, and refined within broader measurement and optimization systems.

CTV Is the Priority Implementation Environment: Connected TV represents the most immediate and consequential environment for applying quality-based buying. High CPMs, significant variation in inventory quality, and evolving programmatic infrastructure mean that decisions taken now will define how value is priced, transacted, and measured.

Introduction: Navigating Quality

The advertising industry is increasingly confronting a basic question: what makes one impression more valuable than another, independent of audience identity?

That question has become more pressing as identity-based targeting and attribution signals have become less reliable across open-web and programmatic environments. At the same time, buyers and sellers are paying greater attention to placement-level conditions – such as visibility, context, ad load, and receptiveness – that shape whether advertising is likely to be noticed and remembered.

Research across attention measurement, brand lift, and controlled studies suggests that these conditions are meaningfully associated with differences in outcomes. Yet the market still lacks a common framework for defining, measuring, and valuing them. Quality is widely discussed but inconsistently defined and often dismissed as subjective.

Skepticism is understandable but incomplete. Some aspects of quality are already reflected in pricing, especially in premium environments. But many relevant signals are not consistently available, comparable, or actionable in buying systems, particularly in programmatic workflows. Pricing also tends to reflect channel-level averages rather than meaningful variation within channels. The result is a market in which quality is partially priced, but not systematically or precisely enough.

This is not simply a measurement gap. It is a market design problem, reflecting how the market is structured to recognize and act on value.

Without consistent signals that reflect differences in placement-level quality, pricing mechanisms default to averages and proxies, limiting the market's ability to allocate spend efficiently. Today, Media Quality remains underrepresented in how value is determined, even where its importance is widely acknowledged.

Defining Quality

Quality is not an aesthetic judgment. It is an observable driver of effectiveness: the extent to which placement characteristics influence the likelihood of a desired outcome.

Two dimensions are especially important. The first is **Placement Prominence**: signals such as time on screen, player size, audibility, and screen share that affect the likelihood that an ad is actually seen and processed. The second is **Contextual Receptiveness**: signals such as time of day, device, geography, and content environment that affect how receptive the audience is likely to be at the moment of exposure.

These dimensions are measurable. Their relative importance will vary by objective, category, and context, but the underlying question is evidence-based rather than interpretive.

Lessons from Programmatic Display

The programmatic display ecosystem illustrates both structural weaknesses and areas of progress. Industry analyses of the evolution of programmatic supply quality have documented successive "quality reckonings," in which new forms of low-quality or misrepresented inventory emerge and are subsequently identified and addressed. Early issues such as domain spoofing and toolbar traffic were followed by the proliferation of Made-for-Advertising (MFA) sites, and more recently by concerns around ID bridging and bid duplication. Each phase has been driven by buy-side demand for greater transparency and performance, and has typically resulted in a redistribution of spend rather than a contraction of the overall market.

Yet fundamental challenges persist. The programmatic infrastructure was constructed in ways that prioritized user identity over inventory description. This created an environment where ad slots became largely commoditized, where the primary determinant of CPM was the user ID rather than the quality of the advertising opportunity. As a result, some publishers compete by increasing ad density, duplicating requests, and bridging identities, rather than improving placement quality. MFA has thrived not because buyers wanted low-quality inventory, but because the system lacked sufficient signals to distinguish high quality from low.

Introduction: Navigating Quality

The display market has made measurable progress in incorporating quality into buying and measurement practices. Attention-based metrics, in particular, are increasingly used as leading indicators of effectiveness, informing both brand lift and broader outcome-based analyses. Evidence from attention measurement and performance analysis shows that upstream signals – such as inventory quality, data integrity, and placement characteristics – can materially influence campaign performance and efficiency when applied systematically.

However, these advances have been uneven. The underlying architecture of programmatic display remains heavily oriented around user identity and audience targeting, rather than the intrinsic qualities of the advertising opportunity itself. Combined with persistent fragmentation and limited transparency across the supply chain, this has constrained the consistent application and standardization of quality-based approaches at scale.

The market has already begun to reprice toward quality. By 2024, more than 80% of programmatic display spend transacted through private marketplaces and programmatic guaranteed channels, reversing the open auction dominance of only a few years earlier.[1] In CTV, the ANA's 2024 *Programmatic Transparency Benchmark* reported a 59%–41% split in favor of private marketplaces.

This shift is not incidental. It reflects a structural move by advertisers toward environments that offer greater transparency, control, and supply integrity, even at the expense of lowest-cost access. In effect, the market is signaling that baseline quality, defined by clearer provenance, safer environments, and more predictable delivery, is no longer a premium feature, but a requirement for transactable supply.

In addition, the buy-side is increasingly focused on supplementing baseline metrics like viewability to identify and value environments that offer reduced ad load and greater transparency – signals of quality – and publishers who are leaning into this opportunity are seeing demand and CPMs increase significantly.

The CTV Imperative

Connected TV operates under fundamentally different conditions. With CPMs that can range from single digits to triple digits depending on content, context, and environment, the financial and effectiveness implications are materially greater. From premium live sports and scripted drama to FAST channel filler and autoplay background noise, **the quality variance is much wider** (especially when factoring in the inflation of CPMs, on a relative and absolute basis). And in a world where screens are generally on, ads play full-screen, and most inventory is unskippable, **traditional metrics alone are insufficient** – viewability and completion rates provide a useful delivery baseline, but cannot tell buyers whether an ad captured attention or drove meaningful impact.

CTV also presents a unique window of opportunity. Unlike display, where quality frameworks must be retrofitted onto legacy infrastructure, CTV's programmatic ecosystem is still being built. The decisions made now about what signals are surfaced in bid requests, how quality is defined and measured, and how pricing reflects true value will shape the channel's trajectory for years to come.

Attention measurement studies consistently show that CTV environments generate higher attention levels than mobile and desktop formats, reinforcing the importance of correctly valuing placement quality in this channel. But these benefits are best realized when buyers can identify and access quality inventory, and when the market's pricing mechanisms actually reflect quality differences.

The alternative is that the channel may fail to realize its full potential for brand-building, as undervaluing quality inventory can lead to a shift in spend toward lower-quality supply in pursuit of cheap reach and short-term sales boosts.

[1] eMarketer, *Private Marketplace and Programmatic Guaranteed Transaction Share* (2025)

Introduction: Navigating Quality

The Path Forward

This paper builds on prior work from the ARF, CIMM, IAB, and industry practitioners to propose practical frameworks for identifying, measuring, and valuing Media Quality across planning, buying, and measurement. Its focus is especially on CTV and streaming, where the commercial stakes are high and the underlying infrastructure is still taking shape.

The objective is to align pricing mechanisms with the true drivers of advertising effectiveness by establishing Media Quality as a **consistent and actionable input for planning, buying and measurement**.

This paper advances a three-stage argument.

First, Media Quality is an empirically grounded driver of advertising effectiveness.

Second, despite this, it does not currently function as a consistent market signal due to structural constraints including information asymmetry, signal fragmentation, and misaligned incentives.

Third, resolving this gap requires treating Media Quality not simply as a measurement construct, but as market infrastructure – requiring standardization, validation, and governance.

The following chapter sets out why this gap persists – and why resolving it matters.

Chapter 1: Why Quality Matters

The industry broadly accepts that impressions are not equally valuable. Yet this variation is not consistently reflected in pricing, allocation, or measurement. The result is a structural disconnect: Media Quality is widely recognized in principle, but it does not operate as a reliable market signal shaping transaction decisions.

This gap is not simply analytical. It reflects a deeper limitation in how the market recognizes, compares, and prices differences in advertising value. As long as these differences remain weakly encoded in buying systems and measurement frameworks, their influence on outcomes will remain constrained.

Reframing the Role of Media Quality

In the pre-digital era, buyers placed greater emphasis on differences in media environments and exposure conditions. The rise of programmatic buying shifted attention toward audience identifiers and attribution signals, often treating them as more precise than they were, while underweighting the characteristics of the placement itself.

That balance is now shifting. As identity-based signals weaken and established performance metrics show their limits, placement-level factors are re-emerging as critical determinants of effectiveness. The underlying logic is straightforward: some impressions are more valuable than others because the conditions of exposure make them more likely to generate impact.

These differences are not subjective judgments. They are observable, measurable attributes that correlate with outcomes. Evidence from attention measurement, brand lift studies, and econometric analyses consistently shows that characteristics of the media environment influence both short-term response and long-term brand effects.

This paper addresses a practical question: how can these differences be systematically understood, measured, and applied to improve marketing effectiveness?

Objectives

The aim is to move Media Quality from a conceptual idea to an operational input into buying and measurement decisions. The paper focuses on providing usable guidance for market participants, particularly advertisers, while maintaining relevance for publishers and intermediaries.

Three principles guide the approach.

First, the analysis is grounded in **commercial reality**. It prioritizes areas where quality differences are economically material, with particular attention to Connected TV, where variation in quality is wide, pricing is high, and measurement and buying infrastructure are still evolving.

Second, the framework is designed to be **practical rather than purely theoretical**. The objective is not only to clarify what Media Quality is, but to show how it can be applied in real-world decision-making.

Third, the paper **balances current applications with future developments**. It reflects how buying, measurement, and signal availability are changing, and anticipates how Media Quality will become more important as these shifts continue.

Chapter 1: Why Quality Matters

Defining the Scope of Media Quality

Advertising effectiveness is shaped by three broad factors: audience, creative, and media. This paper focuses on the third of these.

Media Quality is defined as **the attributes of an ad placement that are independent of the individual user, but help predict how effective that placement is likely to be**.

These attributes can be grouped into two primary dimensions:

The first is **Attention (Placement Prominence)**. This captures the extent to which an ad is likely to be noticed and processed. Relevant signals include time on screen, player size, audibility, and format characteristics.

The second is **Situational Context (Receptiveness)**. This reflects the environment in which the ad appears and the audience's likely receptivity. Signals include content type, time of day, device, and viewing context.

Together, these dimensions provide a practical lens for understanding why otherwise similar impressions can differ significantly in their effectiveness.

Chapter 2 develops this framework in detail, expanding the set of attributes and demonstrating how they can be applied in buying and measurement.

Scope and Boundaries

This paper is designed for broad applicability, rather than edge cases. It focuses on mainstream use cases relevant to most advertisers, while remaining useful to more advanced practitioners.

The analysis concentrates on Media Quality, while recognizing that outcomes are also shaped by audience and creative factors, often in interaction with media conditions. The intent is not to isolate Media Quality from these influences, but to clarify its distinct role.

No single framework will apply universally. Differences in category, campaign objective, and market conditions mean that Media Quality must be applied with judgment. The goal is therefore to provide structured guidance, not prescriptive rules.

The framework is most relevant to advertisers balancing short- and long-term objectives. Some elements may be less applicable to campaigns and marketers focused exclusively on immediate response.

Finally, there are practical limits to optimization. While additional quality signals can improve decision-making, excessive constraint can reduce effectiveness by limiting available supply. The objective is to improve allocation, not to over-engineer it.

Where robust research already exists, particularly in attention measurement, this paper builds on that work rather than duplicating it.

Chapter 1: Why Quality Matters

Media Quality and Marketing Effectiveness

Any assessment of Media Quality must be grounded in a coherent view of marketing effectiveness. While media channels, formats, and technologies continue to evolve, the underlying principles of effectiveness have remained relatively stable.

Advertising typically operates across both short- and long-term time horizons. Short-term effects are often more immediately observable, but an exclusive focus on them can come at the expense of longer-term outcomes. Sustained growth depends on building brand equity, which in turn supports pricing power and future demand.

One of the most robust empirical relationships in marketing science is the link between share of voice and market share. Brands that maintain a share of voice above their share of market – often described as Excess Share of Voice (ESOV) – tend to grow over time. This highlights the importance not only of how much advertising is delivered, but where and how it appears.

A further constraint is that most consumers are not actively in-market at any given time. This makes the role of advertising less about immediate conversion and more about maintaining mental availability, ensuring that the brand is salient when purchasing decisions arise.

These principles provide the foundation for understanding Media Quality. If advertising effectiveness depends on both reach and the conditions under which exposures occur, then differences in placement quality become central to how value is created.

Appendix A provides a fuller review of the evidence underpinning these principles.

From Concept to Application: Operationalizing Media Quality

Recognizing that Media Quality matters is not sufficient. The central challenge is to translate this insight into a framework that can be consistently applied in buying, measurement, and evaluation. This requires moving from general principles to clearly defined attributes, standardized signals, and practical methods for assessing relative value across impressions.

The next chapter addresses this shift from concept to application. It sets out a structured framework for Media Quality, defining the core dimensions, identifying the key signals within each, and establishing how these can be measured and compared. It also begins to bridge the gap between theory and practice, showing how Media Quality can be incorporated into real-world decision-making, rather than remaining an abstract consideration.

Chapter 2: Defining Quality

Media Quality needs a definition that is precise enough to guide buying and measurement, but flexible enough to apply across channels and use cases. This chapter sets out that definition and the principles needed to use it consistently.

Beyond definition, the critical requirement is that Media Quality functions as a set of **transactable signals** – one that can be consistently interpreted, valued, and acted upon across different market participants. Without this, MQ remains an analytical construct rather than a driver of market outcomes.

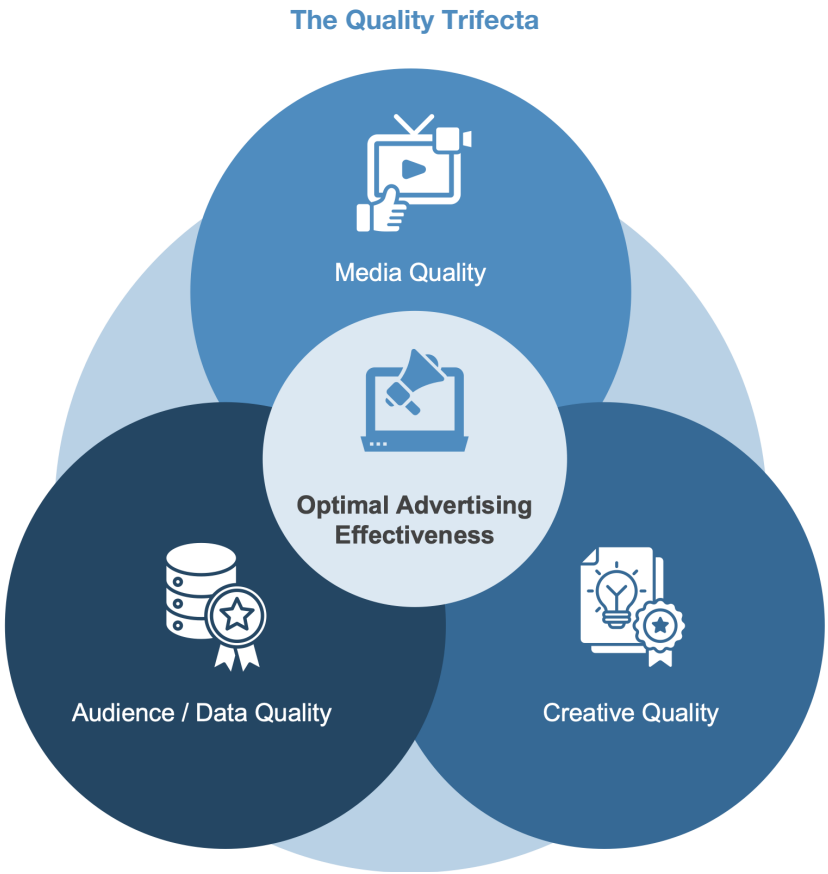
Principles and Frameworks

The Quality Trifecta

Advertising effectiveness depends on three interacting levers: media, creative, and audience. Each can be assessed separately, but outcomes are strongest when they work in combination.

This paper focuses on Media Quality because it has often been underweighted relative to audience targeting and creative optimization. That focus does not imply that audience context is irrelevant. In practice, some signals sit at the boundary between media and audience context, as discussed later in the chapter.

Figure 1: The Three Pillars of The Quality Era: Media, Creative and Audience



Three Ways to Win in The Quality Era:

1. The companies that **have** higher quality media, higher quality audiences/data, and/or can **create** higher quality creative.
2. The companies that can help **differentiate** between high, medium, and low quality within any one of these three pillars.
3. The companies that can help **orchestrate** across these pillars, with quality accounted for.

Source: Erez Levin.

Chapter 2: Defining Quality

A campaign that fails to consider all three Quality pillars will be less effective than one that does – for example:

- A captivating and emotional ad served within a low-attention placement, or served to a less receptive audience, will not be maximally effective.
- The highest attention media (e.g. during the Superbowl, World Cup) featuring an unmemorable creative will not be maximally effective.
- An ad targeted to the exact right user, but served in a low-attention placement, or with an uncaptivating creative, will not be maximally effective.

Crucially, none of these scenarios result in a completely ineffective campaign. The strongest outcomes typically arise when media conditions, creative execution, and audience relevance reinforce one another. Audience alignment is often probabilistic rather than deterministic, but the principle is the same: effectiveness depends on the interaction of the three pillars, not on any one of them in isolation.

The Increasing Importance of Media Quality

Buyers typically rely on two broad categories of signals:

1. **Identity-based signals**, used mainly for audience targeting and attribution; and
2. **Media Quality signals**, which describe the advertising opportunity itself rather than the individual exposed to it.

Throughout the programmatic era, buyers used a combination of these two signal sets for buying and measurement. Reliance on identity signals grew over time, often at the expense of Media Quality signals. As the Introduction established, ongoing ecosystem changes are reducing the reliability of those identity signals – making Media Quality a critical input for buyers.

Chapter 2: Defining Quality

Figure 2: Distinguishing Identity-Based Signals from Identity-less Media Quality Signals

As Identity Signals become more scarce & probabilistic, Identity-less Media Quality Signals become more valuable

There are 2 sets of signals which inform ad buying & measurement. One of them, unlocked by the internet at scale, is getting significantly eroded.

Identity-Based Measures* – Users & Conversions

Identity signals enable audience targeting & consumer-level outcome attribution.

Identity-less Measures – Media Quality

Attributes of media that are not tied to back to individual identifiers but can help signal the *relative* value of that media compared to other media with different attributes.

Combination of Identity & Media Quality signals

Buyers layer Identity & "Quality" signals together in across buying & measurement decisions, with one of two approaches:

1. Use "Quality" signals as multipliers on top of identifier/conversion signals
2. Evaluate media based on BOTH its short and long-term value, considering the appropriate balance to be targeted for each campaign.

* Increasingly, there will be very few advertisers & campaigns who are able to rely on ID-based targeting & measurement alone. The exception will be advertisers who exclusively advertise in Walled Gardens, though even they will face challenges if they advertise in multiple Walled Gardens. Everyone else will need to rely on Quality signals to strenghten their buying & measurement.

Source: Erez Levin.

Chapter 2: Defining Quality

Core Media Quality (MQ) Attributes

Media Quality must be distinguished from audience targeting and outcome measurement. At its core, Media Quality refers exclusively to the characteristics of the advertising placement itself. It is not a proxy for who is being targeted, nor a retrospective measure of outcomes. Instead, it is a forward-looking assessment of how the conditions of exposure influence the likelihood of effectiveness.

What are the core attributes of Media Quality?

First, Media Quality is **independent of user identity**. It deliberately excludes user-level identifiers and conversion signals, focusing instead on placement characteristics such as format, context, timing, and presentation. This distinguishes it from identity-based targeting and attribution systems, which infer value based on who is reached rather than how the ad is experienced.

Second, Media Quality **operates as a modeled contributor to outcomes**, reflecting patterns observed across aggregated data rather than deterministic effects at the impression level. Its relationship to outcomes cannot be isolated with certainty at the individual impression level. Instead, it reflects the degree to which certain placement characteristics increase the likelihood of attention, processing, and response, based on observed patterns across aggregated data and experimental evidence.

Third, Media Quality is **campaign-specific**. The relative importance of different quality signals will vary depending on campaign goals, category dynamics, creative strategy, and market context. For example, a brand-building campaign may prioritize high-attention, premium environments, while a time-sensitive promotion may place greater weight on receptiveness signals such as time of day or context.

Fourth, Media Quality is inherently **relative in value**. It does not produce absolute measures like ROI or conversion rates, but instead provides a framework for comparing the expected effectiveness of different impressions. This implies that media should be priced and allocated according to differences in quality, rather than treated as interchangeable units.

Fifth, Media Quality is **multi-dimensional and dynamic**. No single signal can fully capture quality. Effective application requires combining multiple attributes – such as placement prominence, context, and exposure conditions – to form a more complete view. These signals must also be periodically recalibrated, as media environments, user behavior, and platform dynamics evolve over time.

Finally, Media Quality is **non-binary**. It exists on a spectrum, not as a simple pass/fail condition. Treating quality as a threshold – such as “viewable” versus “non-viewable” – obscures meaningful variation within inventory. A more accurate approach recognizes that each impression carries a different expected value, which may vary continuously based on its attributes.

Together, these attributes define Media Quality as a distinct dimension of advertising effectiveness.

Figure 3: Core Media Quality (MQ) Attributes

Attribute	Definition	Implication for Measurement and Use
Placement-Centric (Not Audience-Based)	Media Quality refers exclusively to the characteristics of the advertising placement, not the audience reached or outcomes achieved.	Separate Media Quality from targeting and attribution; evaluate inventory based on how ads are delivered, not who is reached or what converts.
Independent of User Identity	MQ excludes user-level identifiers and conversion signals, focusing on format, context, timing, and presentation.	Avoid conflating identity-based targeting with quality; maintain clear separation between placement quality and audience data.
Forward-Looking Indicator	MQ assesses how exposure conditions influence the likelihood of effectiveness, rather than measuring outcomes retrospectively.	Use MQ as a predictive input in planning and buying decisions, not as a substitute for outcome measurement.
Modeled Contributor to Outcomes	MQ reflects probabilistic relationships between placement characteristics and outcomes, derived from aggregated data and experimental evidence.	Interpret MQ signals as directional and probabilistic; integrate with other methods (e.g., MMM, experimentation) for validation.
Campaign-Specific	The importance of different MQ signals varies by campaign objective, category, creative strategy, and market context.	Calibrate MQ models and weightings to specific use cases; don't over-rely on universal scoring frameworks.
Relative Measure of Value	MQ does not produce absolute outcomes (e.g., ROI), but enables comparison of expected effectiveness across impressions.	Apply MQ to pricing and allocation decisions, differentiating inventory based on relative quality rather than treating impressions as interchangeable.
Multi-Dimensional	MQ is derived from multiple attributes, including placement prominence, context, and exposure conditions.	Combine multiple signals to form a holistic assessment; avoid reliance on single metrics.
Dynamic and Evolving	MQ signals and their relationships to outcomes change over time as media environments and behaviors evolve.	Regularly recalibrate models and assumptions to maintain predictive accuracy.
Non-Binary (Spectrum-Based)	MQ exists on a continuum rather than as a pass/fail condition.	Move beyond threshold metrics (e.g., viewability); adopt range-based or continuous scoring approaches.
System-Level Role	MQ operates as one dimension within the broader system of advertising effectiveness.	Integrate MQ alongside audience, creative, and outcome measurement within unified decision frameworks.

Source: Erez Levin.

Chapter 2: Defining Quality

Quality: Thresholds vs. Value Ranges

Media Quality can be operationalized in two fundamentally different ways: as a gating mechanism or as a valuation signal. These approaches serve distinct purposes and should not be conflated.

Thresholds (or filters) define minimum acceptable standards. They are typically used to exclude inventory that fails to meet baseline criteria – such as brand safety, viewability, or geographic relevance – and function as hygiene controls to reduce risk. This binary approach determines whether an impression is eligible for inclusion in a campaign or a line item.

Value ranges, by contrast, treat Media Quality as a continuous variable. Rather than determining whether an impression is acceptable, they assess how valuable it is relative to other opportunities. This enables buyers to adjust pricing, bidding, and allocation decisions based on differences in expected effectiveness across impressions.

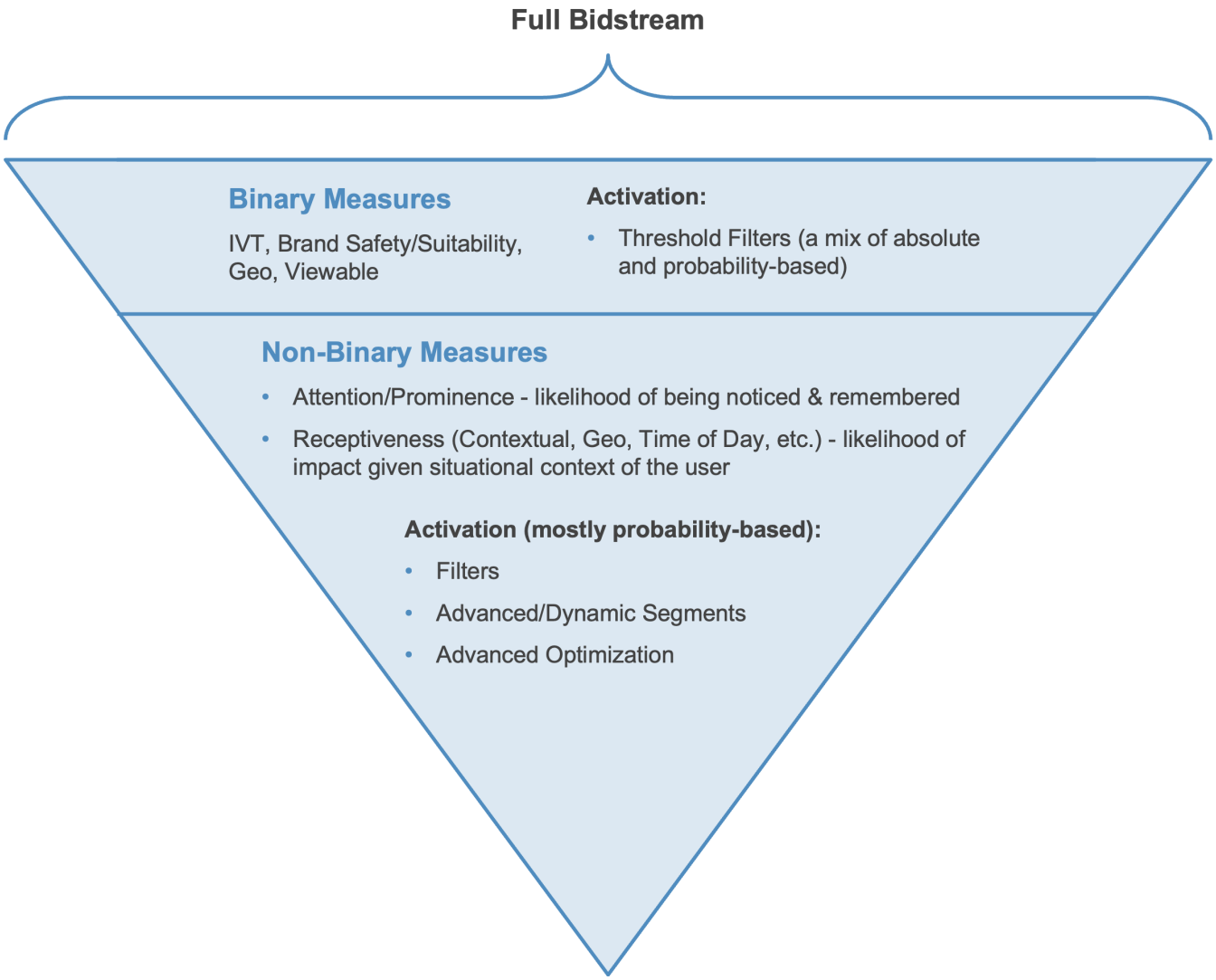
Historically, most media buying has relied heavily on thresholds and averaged quality signals. This approach was sufficient in environments where variation in quality was narrower, less visible or less actionable. However, as channels such as CTV and programmatic video expose wider variation in placement characteristics, these averaged and binary approaches obscure meaningful differences in value.

A more granular, non-binary approach allows buyers to “de-average” inventory – identifying where higher-quality impressions justify increased investment, and where lower-quality exposures should be discounted or deprioritized. This does not replace the need for thresholds, which remain essential for managing risk and ensuring baseline standards. Rather, it extends them, enabling quality to function not just as a filter, but as a driver of pricing and allocation.

For example, while advertisers may exclude geographies where they do not operate, they may not want to assign equal value to all remaining regions. Differences in market conditions, audience behavior, and campaign objectives may warrant more nuanced pricing and investment decisions at the state, DMA, or even more granular levels. A value-range approach enables this kind of differentiation dynamically, without requiring rigid segmentation into separate campaigns.

Taken together, thresholds and value ranges represent complementary tools. Thresholds protect against unacceptable risk; value ranges unlock the ability to align cost with expected performance. The latter is where Media Quality begins to function as a true market signal.

Figure 4: Two Approaches – Quality Filters and Thresholds vs. Non-Binary Ranges



Source: Erez Levin.

Chapter 2: Defining Quality

Valuing Quality Via Attention and Audiences

A useful way to frame media value is through the interaction of two dimensions: the attention potential of the placement and the quality of the audience that is likely exposed, including the audience data attached to it. This is not a complete model of value, but it helps explain why some inventory commands higher prices and why scarcity and demand vary across placements.

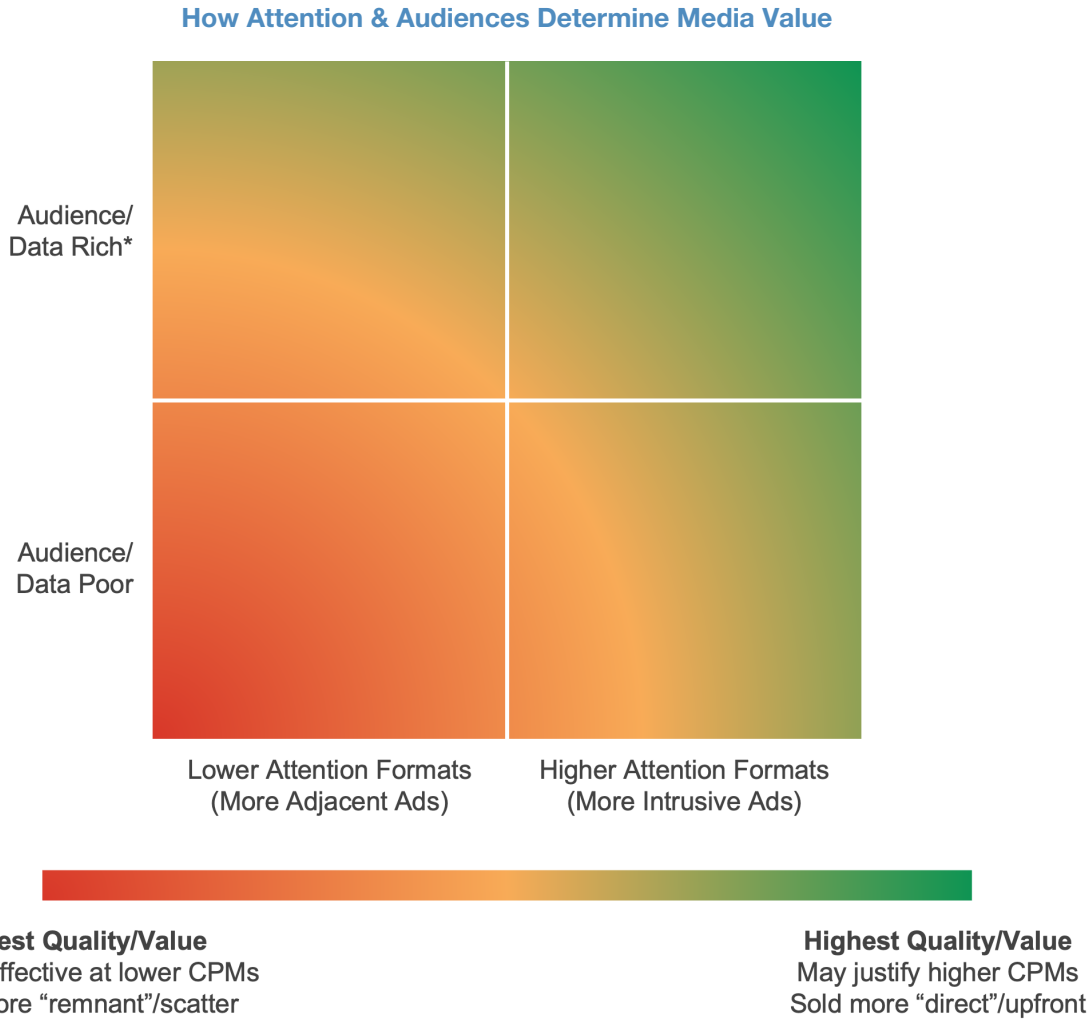
These two axes of quality are:

1. **Attention:** What are the potential and/or likely attention levels of the placements? For example, are they 'seamlessly' inserted at logical places in the content to minimize viewing disruption, do they force users to notice them to access desired content, or are the ads adjacent to content and part of a peripheral consumer experience?

2. **Audiences:** Which audiences are being exposed to the placements? Are they deterministically known based on user identifiers or probabilistically deduced to infer broad audience categorization? How specific and accurate do these attributes match the advertiser's audience targets?

The higher a placement scores on both of these dimensions, the higher the demand and the scarcer the supply will be. This balance of supply and demand determines the price of that inventory, as well as the dynamics of how and where it is sold and bought.

Figure 5: How Attention and Audiences Determine Media Value



Source: Erez Levin.

Importantly, this framing can also extend to cases where audience data is particularly rich, making the advertising valuable even in a lower attention placement. The inverse is also true: an exceptionally high-attention placement, even with almost no discernible audience data, can still be very valuable. Examples include:

Data Rich: An impression opportunity with precise deterministic data about a user (e.g., rich affinity or intent data) that indicates high prospective value to a marketer could be valuable even on low-attention placements. In these cases, Media Quality often matters *less*.

High Attention: Super Bowl ads are some of the highest attention large-scale ad placements in the world. Even if the placements reach both high- and low-intent audiences, they have tremendous value due to the attention quality dimension.

The Intertwined Media and Audience Contexts

Media Quality excludes user-level identifiers, but some signals still carry both media and audience meaning. Examples include:

- **Placement descriptors** such as URL, device type, ad size, and page keywords, which can signal both media context and likely audience composition.
- **Temporal and geographic context** such as time of day, day of week, and geography, which may affect both the audience reached and the likely receptiveness of that exposure.

In practice, these dimensions are often best understood together. What matters is whether the context of exposure changes the expected value of the impression.

Key Video Media Quality Signals

For most marketers, the most decision-relevant video quality signals include:

- Time of day
- Geo
- Day of week
- Content attributes (publisher, app, channel, network, genre, length, etc.)
- Device type
- Device make
- Video placement type
- Pod attributes (e.g., position, duration, timing, etc.)
- Livestream
- Time on screen (TOS)

In the next section, we will explore use cases demonstrating how to apply these key quality signals to video buying decisions.

Chapter 2: Defining Quality

Media Quality: Online Video Placement Types

The online video ecosystem provides a clear illustration of what happens when Media Quality is not explicitly incorporated into buying and measurement. Different placement types exhibit materially different levels of value, driven primarily by their prominence, visibility, and ability to capture attention and encode memory. These differences are structural, not marginal, and have direct implications for effectiveness.

However, commonly used metrics, such as viewability, video completion rates, and view-through conversions, often fail to adequately differentiate between these environments. As a result, placements with fundamentally different levels of attention and effectiveness can appear comparable within standard reporting frameworks.

This variation was reflected in an indicative survey conducted for this study, in which participants were asked to score ad placements on a 0–10 scale based on their likelihood to be noticed and remembered. While directional rather than definitive, the results showed a consistent hierarchy of perceived value across placement types, reinforcing the importance of placement characteristics as predictors of impact.

This measurement gap has had clear market consequences. Low-prominence, muted, in-feed video placements – highly scalable and easy to replicate – have proliferated rapidly. In many cases, these placements have been monetized at CPMs that converge toward those of significantly higher-quality inventory, despite delivering materially lower levels of attention and expected impact.

The outcome is a persistent mispricing of inventory, driven by the under-utilization of placement-level quality signals within buying and measurement systems.

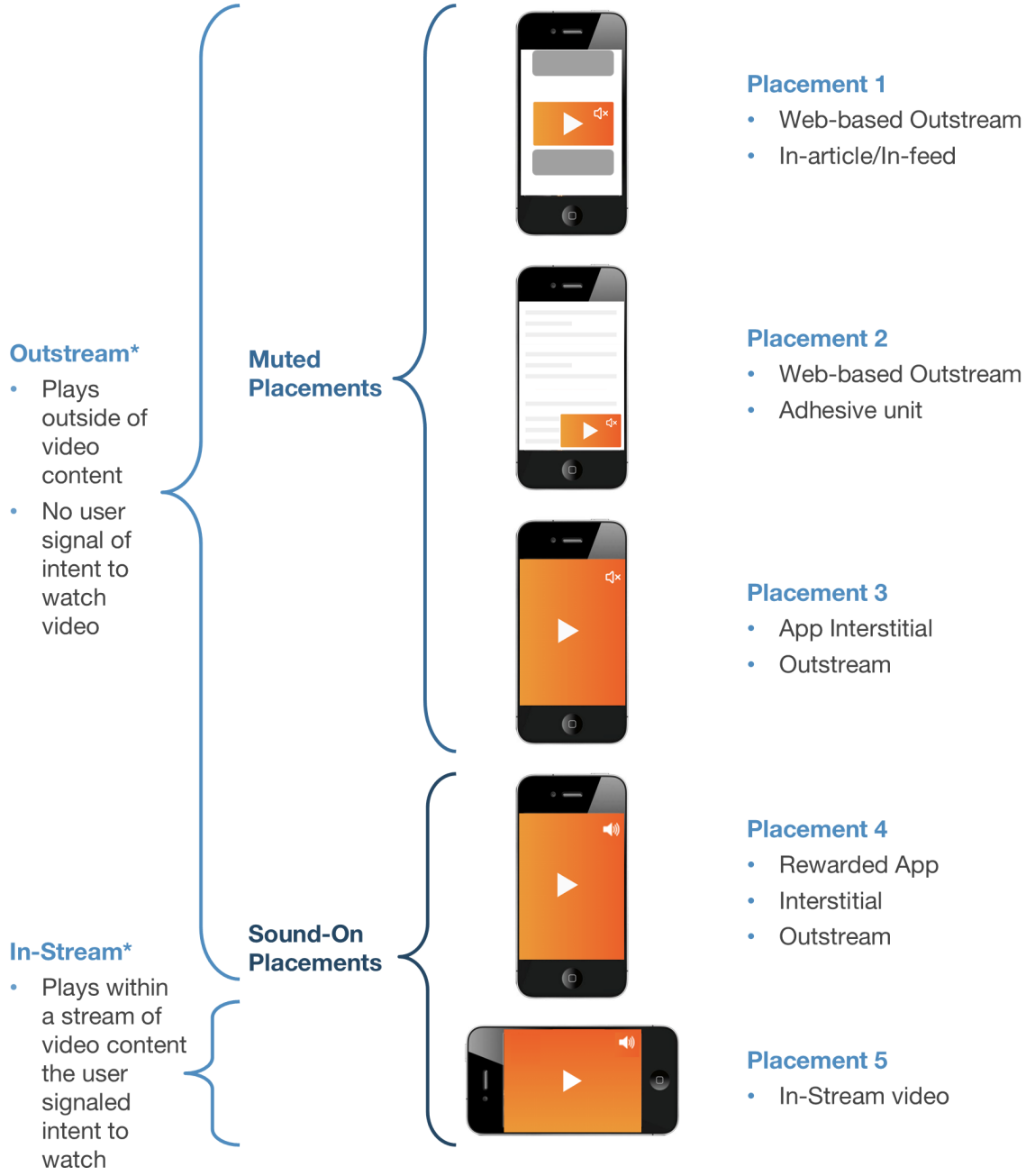
The figure below presents survey-based evidence on placement-level quality, ranking video formats by their likelihood to be noticed and remembered. The results demonstrate a pronounced disparity in expected impact across placement types, underscoring the extent to which standard metrics such as viewability fail to capture meaningful differences in attention and effectiveness.

Chapter 2: Defining Quality

Figure 6: Understanding Video Placement Quality

Understanding Video Placement Quality aka "Attention" Proxies

Consumer surveys assessing the attention/quality and value of placements reflects the same directional insights proven by Attention measurement vendors, which standard metrics like viewability fail to capture.



	Placement 1	Placement 2	Placement 3	Placement 4	Placement 5
Avg. Score	2.3	1.3	4.7	6.5	8.2

*Autoplay muted "sticky" placements are often declared as "In-stream", in violation of the OpenRTB 2.6 spec requiring Default "Sound On" for In-stream.

Source: Erez Levin.

Chapter 2: Defining Quality

Media Quality: Channel and Format Quality Bands

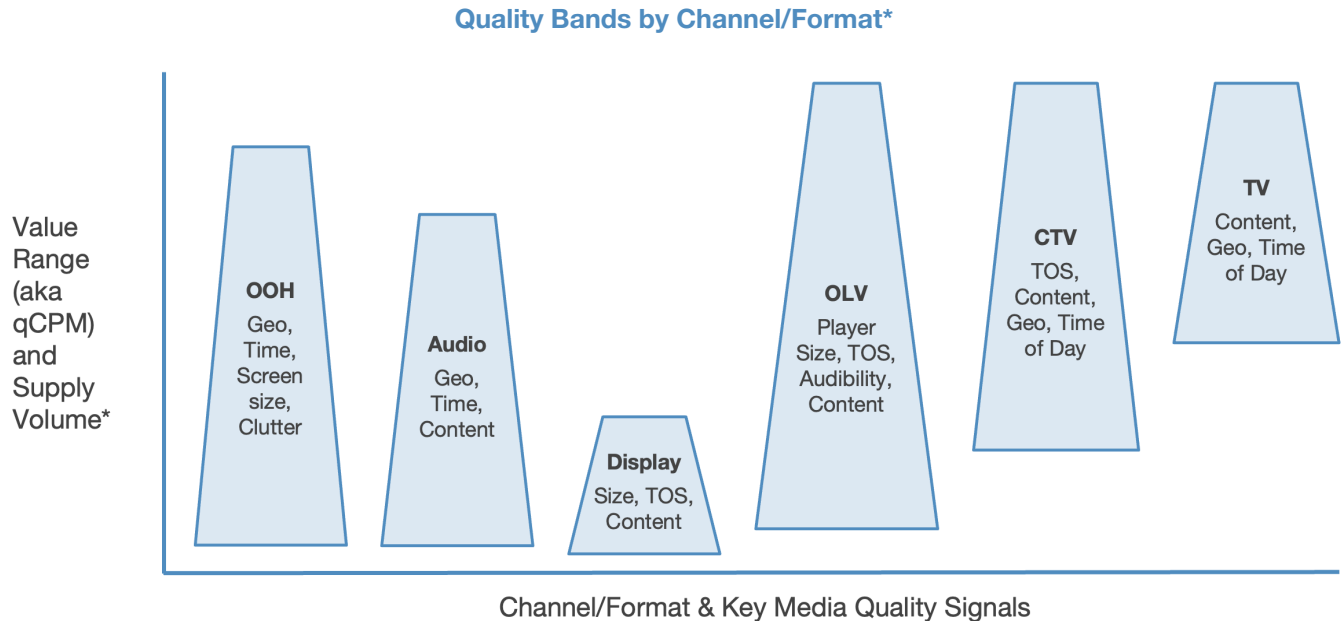
Media Quality varies materially within every channel and format and should not be treated as a fixed or average characteristic. Each channel comprises a distribution of impressions, ranging from a relatively small volume of high-quality, high-value exposures to a much larger share of lower-quality inventory.

Within each channel, quality spans a wide range, shaped by factors such as placement prominence, context, and delivery conditions. While the specific drivers differ by channel, the underlying pattern is consistent: a limited concentration of high-quality supply sits alongside a long tail of impressions that deliver materially lower levels of attention and expected impact.

This has important implications for measurement and pricing. Channel-level averages obscure this variation, masking meaningful differences in value between impressions that are treated as equivalent within standard reporting frameworks. As a result, buying decisions based on aggregated metrics risk systematically overvaluing lower-quality supply and undervaluing high-quality inventory.

Channel-level averages are insufficient: within each format, quality exists as a distribution, not a single point. A relatively small share of impressions delivers the highest value, while the majority sits within a lower-quality long tail. The signals that determine this variation differ by channel but consistently drive material differences in outcomes.

Figure 7: Quality Bands by Channel/Format and Key Media Quality Signals



*Levels and ranges not based on specific research. For illustrative purposes only.

Source: Erez Levin.

Social Channel and Format Quality Bands

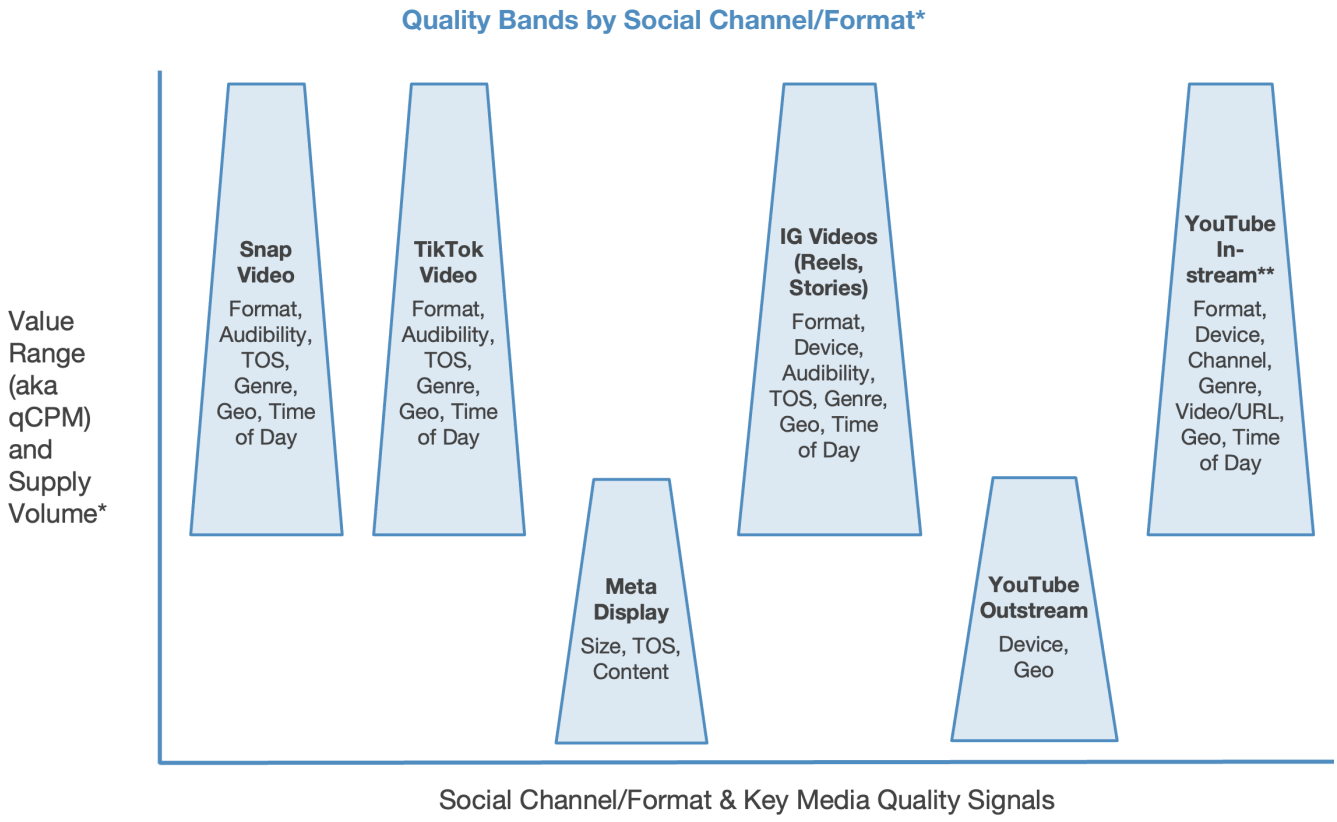
A similar distribution exists within social channels and formats. Although buyers may have more limited control over impression-level allocation and pricing within platform environments, the same underlying variation in quality and value applies.

This places greater importance on evaluating performance across quality dimensions rather than relying solely on platform-reported aggregates. Buyers should assess how spend is distributed across placements, how pricing aligns with underlying quality, and how performance varies across these dimensions, ideally using incrementality-based measures where possible.

Where meaningful misalignment is identified, buyers should seek to reduce exposure to lower-quality inventory through available controls or pricing adjustments. Where such controls are constrained, reallocating spend toward environments where quality can be more directly observed, measured, and priced may offer a more effective route to optimization.

The same quality band frameworks can be applied to social environments, illustrating how variation in placement characteristics drives differences in value, even in more controlled platform ecosystems, and why these differences should be reflected in evaluation and investment decisions.

Figure 8: Quality Bands by Social Channel/Format and Key Media Quality Signals



*Levels and ranges not based on specific research. For illustrative purposes only.
**Cost Per View buying is not easily comparable, partly because performance is largely driven by creative & audience quality.

Source: Erez Levin.

Chapter 2: Defining Quality

From Correlation to Causation

A central risk in applying Media Quality is over-reliance on correlation. Many high-quality environments are associated with better outcomes – but association alone is insufficient for decision-making at scale.

The relevant question is whether MQ signals operate as causal drivers, mediating variables, or proxies.

The available evidence indicates that all three mechanisms are present, though not uniformly across contexts or methodologies:

- **First, exposure mechanics.** Signals such as screen dominance, audibility, and duration directly affect the probability that an ad is actually processed. These are not merely contextual correlations – they are structural conditions of exposure.
- **Second, cognitive processing.** Experimental research, including eye-tracking and controlled exposure studies, demonstrates that attention and context directly influence memory encoding, brand recall, and persuasion. Media environments that increase attention are not just correlated with outcomes – they are part of the causal pathway.
- **Third, experimental validation.** Where controlled experiments have been conducted – particularly in CTV and premium video – higher-quality placements consistently tend to produce stronger brand and business outcomes, even when controlling for audience.

While not all MQ signals are equally causal, the aggregate evidence supports a clear conclusion: Media Quality is not merely descriptive – it operates as a directional causal influence on advertising effectiveness, helping to align cost and value.

In practical terms, this means that impressions are not only valued imprecisely – they may be systematically mispriced. Incorporating MQ into decision-making is not simply an analytical refinement; it is a necessary step toward aligning market prices with the underlying drivers of effectiveness.

Quantifying the Value of Quality

Quantifying Media Quality precisely is difficult because its value is relative, campaign-specific, and distributed across both short-term and long-term effects. Even so, buyers need a more disciplined way to estimate its contribution. In practice, that means testing how quality-adjusted buying changes outcomes against the advertiser's own objectives, and then using those findings to refine future buying decisions.

Chapter 2: Defining Quality

Attention Within a Media Quality Framework

Attention measurement is closely related to Media Quality, but it is not synonymous with it. Within this paper's framework, attention is best understood as one of the most developed and operationally useful dimensions of Media Quality. Many attention metrics are not direct measures of verified human attention at the individual impression level. Rather, they are modeled estimates derived from human observation studies, proxy signals, or combinations of both, and are used because they help predict the likely effectiveness of an advertising exposure.

That distinction matters. Attention itself is not the end goal. The value of attention metrics lies in their ability to serve as indicators of downstream outcomes such as memory formation, brand recall, persuasion, and sales impact. In practice, attention metrics are best treated as **modeled indicators of effectiveness**, rather than definitive measures of value.

This also means that attention measurement is inherently composite and context-dependent. It is typically inferred from a mix of signals, including visibility, audibility, time on screen, placement conditions, creative attributes, and surrounding media context. The relevance and weighting of those signals will vary by advertiser, campaign objective, creative format, and channel.

Attention should be understood as a relative and model-based indicator, not a direct or complete measure of effectiveness. Its value lies in its ability to improve prediction, rather than to serve as a standalone proxy for outcomes.

At scale, attention measurement is necessarily modeled. There is no privacy-safe, scalable method for verifying human attention for every individual impression. As a result, scaled attention metrics rely on extrapolation from human-based samples, such as eye-tracking or panel studies, and on proxy signals shown to correlate with outcomes. Their reliability depends on methodology, calibration, and continual validation. As media environments and viewing behaviors change, these models must be regularly recalibrated if they are to remain useful predictors of effectiveness.

Within a Media Quality framework, then, attention should be treated as a valuable but bounded concept: not a direct readout of person-level attention, and not a standalone objective, but a modeled indicator of the quality of an advertising opportunity and its likely capacity to drive business and brand outcomes.

A common critique is that MQ signals may simply reflect underlying audience or creative effects rather than independently driving outcomes.

This critique is valid in cases where measurement does not adequately control for confounding variables. However, controlled experiments – particularly in video and CTV – demonstrate that even when audience and creative are held constant, placement-level conditions materially affect outcomes.

The implication is not that MQ operates independently, but that it functions as part of a causal system of interacting variables.

Figure 9: Attention Within a Media Quality Framework

Dimension	Summary	Implication for Measurement and Use
Conceptual Role	Attention is a key dimension of Media Quality, but not synonymous with it.	Treat attention as one component within a broader Media Quality framework, not a complete representation of quality.
Nature of Measurement	Most attention metrics are modeled estimates, derived from human studies and proxy signals rather than direct observation at the impression level.	Interpret attention metrics as directional indicators, not verified measures of individual attention.
Purpose and Value	The value of attention lies in its ability to predict downstream outcomes such as memory, recall, persuasion, and sales.	Use attention as a predictive input into effectiveness models, rather than as an end metric in itself.
Measurement Composition	Attention is inferred from multiple signals, including visibility, audibility, time on screen, placement, creative, and context.	Recognize that attention is inherently composite; methodologies must integrate and weight multiple inputs.
Context Dependence	The relevance and weighting of attention signals vary by advertiser, objective, format, and channel.	Avoid standardized or one-size-fits-all attention benchmarks; calibrate to campaign context.
Relative, Model-Based Nature	Attention is a relative indicator, not a complete or absolute measure of effectiveness.	Position attention within a range-based or comparative framework, not as a definitive score of value.
Scalability Constraints	There is no privacy-safe, scalable way to directly verify human attention for every impression.	Accept modeled approaches as necessary at scale; focus on robustness and transparency of methods.
Reliance on Modeling and Calibration	Scaled attention metrics depend on extrapolation from panels and proxy signals, requiring ongoing validation.	Ensure continuous recalibration of models to reflect evolving media environments and behaviors.
Role Within Media Quality	Attention is a bounded concept: a modeled indicator of the quality and likely effectiveness of an exposure.	Use attention as one input among multiple Media Quality signals when assessing inventory value.
Causality and Confounding Factors	Attention metrics may reflect audience or creative effects if not properly controlled.	Apply rigorous controls in analysis to isolate placement effects from confounding variables.
Evidence from Controlled Studies	Experiments show that placement conditions affect outcomes even when audience and creative are held constant.	Validate the independent contribution of Media Quality signals through controlled testing where possible.
System-Level Interpretation	Media Quality, including attention, operates as part of an interacting system of variables rather than in isolation.	Integrate attention into holistic models that account for interactions between placement, creative, and audience.

Source: Erez Levin.

Chapter 2: Defining Quality

Working with Incomplete Quality Signals

Buyers: Indicate the Quality Supply and Signals You Value

The universe of Media Quality (MQ) signals is broad, but most marketers will have a smaller set of signals that are worth operationalizing first. The priority should be those signals that are both materially relevant to campaign effectiveness and available at sufficient scale to justify the operational effort required to use them.

In some channels, particularly emerging environments such as CTV, some signals are highly valuable to buyers but are not consistently available in the bidstream. Content-level data is a clear example. Publishers are often reluctant to expose such signals fully, in part because greater transparency can enable buyers to isolate the most desirable supply without paying a price that reflects its relative value. This is not simply a data availability problem; it is also a market design and incentive problem.

Where important quality signals are not readily available through standard transaction pipes, buyers should work directly with publishers to develop commercially workable arrangements. In practice, that may involve negotiated access to more granular signals, curated deal structures, or post-campaign reporting that provides greater visibility into the quality of delivered inventory. The objective is not maximum transparency at any cost, but terms under which buyers can act on meaningful quality differences while publishers are appropriately compensated for higher-value supply and able to protect overall yield.

Buyers should also verify that the quality signals provided by partners are accurate and reliable. Where signals are misrepresented, buyers can either adjust their buying and measurement assumptions to reflect verified quality levels or shift spend toward supply that is more transparently and consistently represented.

Chapter 3 sets out practical examples of how pricing and allocation can be adjusted across Media Quality dimensions.

Publisher Signal Strategy and the Transparency – Value Trade-off

A central market dynamic in Media Quality is not just which signals exist, but which publisher-owned signals are made available to buyers, and under what conditions. Decisions about signal exposure are shaped as much by economics as by technology or privacy. Publishers have valid reasons to limit full transparency in the bidstream: unrestricted visibility can enable buyers to isolate the highest-value impressions without paying prices that reflect their relative quality, undermining overall yield.

This creates a structural trade-off. Greater transparency improves buyers' ability to differentiate and value inventory, but it can also concentrate demand on a narrow subset of supply. As a result, the effective use of Media Quality signals depends on aligning commercial incentives, not simply increasing data availability.

As buyers become more explicit in how they value quality – and reflect that in pricing, allocation, and deal structures – publishers have a clearer basis on which to expose and package their signals. In practice, this creates two primary levers for publishers:

Shaping supply: Improving the underlying quality of inventory, for example by reducing ad load or improving placement conditions, to increase its value to buyers.

Structuring access: Packaging inventory and signals in ways that enable differentiation while preserving yield across the full range of supply, rather than only the highest-quality segments.

In CTV, this dynamic is particularly visible. Publishers are often reluctant to expose show-level data in the open bidstream. However, where buyers demonstrate a clear willingness to value that information, publishers can provide access through curated deal structures, selective bidstream signaling, or post-campaign reporting with greater granularity. The objective is not full transparency, but commercially sustainable transparency.

This leads to a broader point: transparency and control exist on a spectrum, and optimal solutions rarely sit at either extreme. Some buying models offer high transparency but limited control; others offer strong control but limited visibility. For many advertisers – particularly those balancing short-term performance with long-term brand objectives – effective decision-making requires a workable level of both.

In practice, this can take different forms. A CTV buyer may restrict campaigns to a defined set of content categories and rely on sampled reporting to verify delivery, accepting partial transparency in exchange for access to higher-quality supply. In other cases, a buyer may have full log-level visibility but rely on relatively blunt controls, such as blocklists, to manage quality. Neither model is inherently superior; each reflects a different balance of transparency, control, and commercial terms.

Multiple mechanisms exist for communicating and verifying quality signals, including bidstream fields, curated deals, platform reporting, third-party measurement, and log-level data. Not all signals can be seamlessly transmitted end-to-end, and some require additional operational effort to access and apply. In most cases, however, the primary constraint is not technical feasibility but incentive alignment. Where buyers are willing to pay for quality and publishers are confident that value will be recognized, more transparent and actionable signal frameworks tend to emerge.

The Quality of Publisher Environments

Publisher user experience is an increasingly measurable dimension of Contextual Receptiveness. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that audiences are more receptive to advertising in editorial environments that prioritize low ad density, trusted content, and a coherent user experience.

The Guardian's 2025 *FAME* study (*Fewer Ads, More Effective*) found that readers report substantially higher trust in publishers operating low-ad environments than in those operating high-ad environments – a gap that translates into measurable gains in brand favorability and ad recall. Kantar's 2025 *Media Reactions* study, in parallel, found that The New York Times ranked first among all US media brands for advertising receptivity, reflecting how a premium editorial environment shapes audience openness to the messages delivered within it.

Kantar's broader finding is the operative principle: campaigns are more impactful among receptive audiences. The environment, and what it signals to the reader, is part of what creates that receptivity in the first place. This has direct implications for how Media Quality is defined and valued: receptiveness is not solely a property of the audience or the moment, but of the environment itself.

The Interplay of Creative Quality and Media Quality

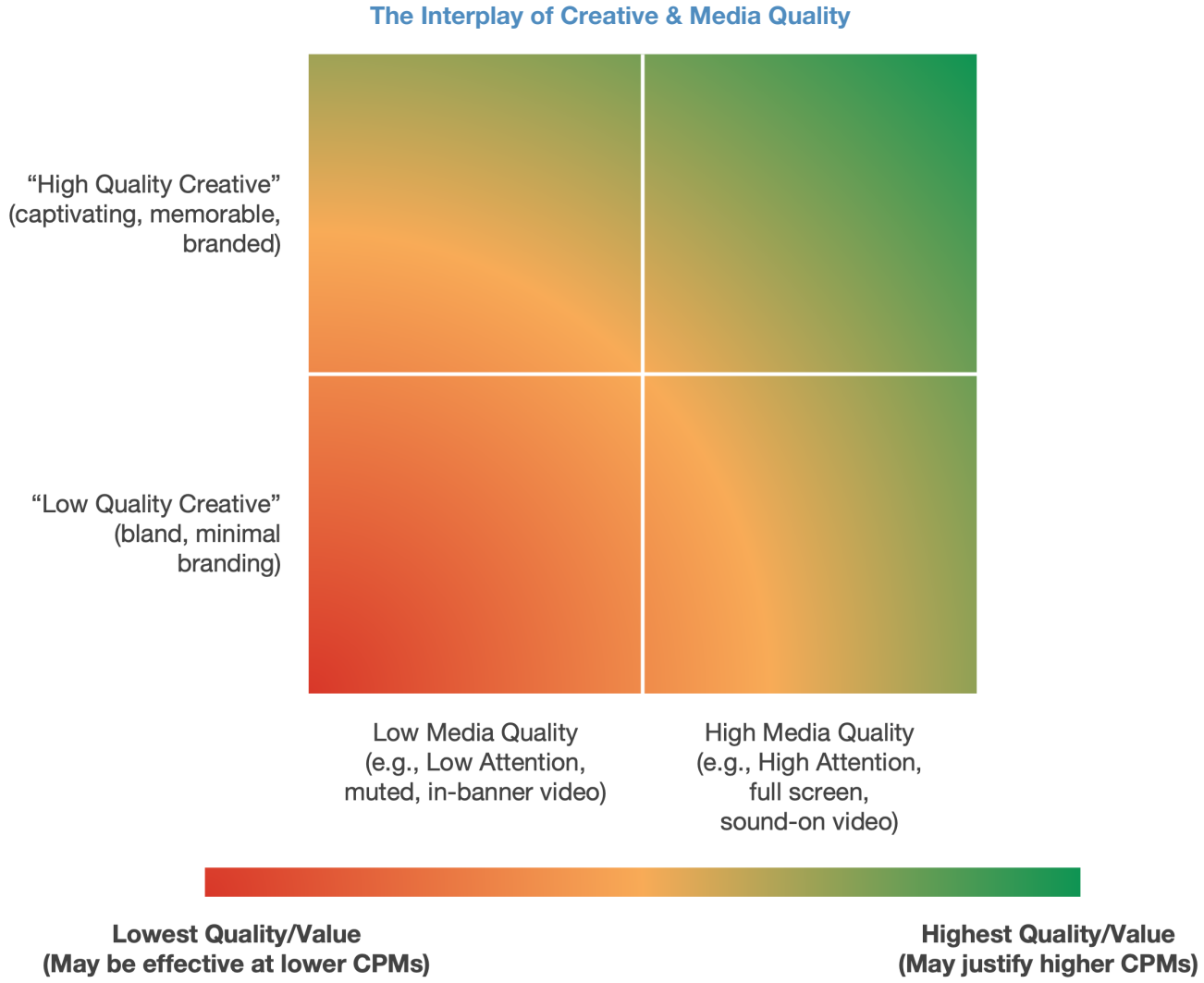
Creative Quality and Media Quality are distinct but interdependent. Creative can be evaluated in isolation, but its performance cannot be fully understood without considering the environment in which it appears.

Media Quality defines the conditions of exposure – whether an ad is seen, how it is experienced, and the degree of attention it receives. High-quality environments allow strong creative to deliver its full impact, while low-quality environments can suppress or fragment that impact, regardless of the creative itself.

As a result, the same creative asset can produce materially different outcomes depending on where and how it is delivered. Effectiveness is not simply a function of creative quality or Media Quality in isolation, but of their interaction.

This reinforces a broader principle introduced in the Quality Trifecta: optimal performance is achieved not by maximizing each dimension independently, but by aligning media, creative, and audience conditions to reinforce one another.

Figure 10: The Interplay of Creative Quality & Media Quality



Source: Erez Levin.

Why Markets Do Not Fully Price Media Quality

If Media Quality is measurable and predictive, why is it not consistently reflected in pricing?

The answer lies in three structural constraints.

- First, **information asymmetry:** many quality signals are controlled by sellers and are not fully observable to buyers.
- Second, **signal fragmentation:** MQ indicators are inconsistently defined and transmitted across platforms, limiting comparability.
- Third, **misaligned incentives:** buyers seek granular differentiation, while sellers must preserve yield across a broader range of inventory.

These conditions prevent MQ from functioning as a fully efficient market signal, even where evidence of its value is strong.

Throughout this paper, Media Quality should be interpreted as a probabilistic and relative signal of expected value, not a deterministic predictor of outcomes at the individual impression level.

Having defined Media Quality as a measurable and relative construct, the next question is operational: how these signals can be embedded into real-world planning, buying, and optimization decisions.

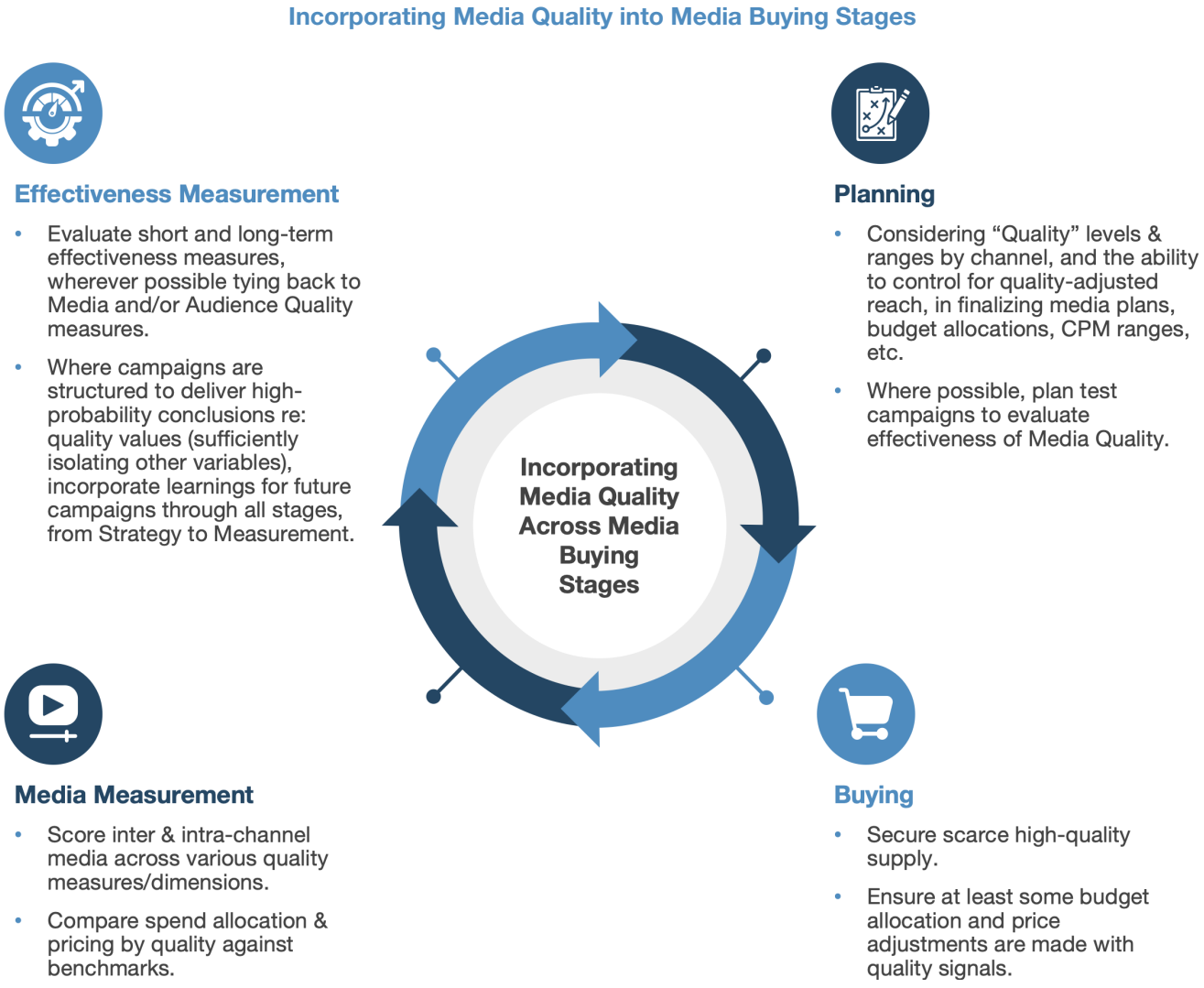
Chapter 3: Applying Quality to Planning, Buying, and In-Flight Measurement

Media Quality is most useful when it is applied as a practical decision variable within media buying. In operational terms, that means using quality signals to inform pricing, allocation, pacing, and optimization across planning, buying, and in-flight measurement. This chapter focuses on the most commercially relevant applications of that idea, with particular emphasis on CTV, where relatively high CPMs, meaningful variation in inventory quality, and increasingly flexible buying tools make quality-based decision-making especially consequential.

Incorporating Media Quality Across Media Buying Stages

Media Quality should be incorporated across the full buying process, from communications strategy and media planning through execution, optimization, and post-campaign assessment. Its role is not to override other decision variables, but to improve how buyers distinguish between higher- and lower-value supply within and across channels.

Figure 11: Incorporating Media Quality into Media Buying Stages



Source: Erez Levin.

Chapter 3: Applying Quality to Planning, Buying, and In-Flight Measurement

Impression Quality vs. Media Quality

If the impression is the atomic unit of advertising, Media Quality (MQ) refers to the average quality of a set of impressions, while Impression Quality (IQ) refers to the characteristics of individual exposures.

In practice, most planning and measurement decisions operate at the MQ level – across channels, formats, or campaigns – because this is where budgets are allocated and performance is evaluated. However, advances in programmatic buying and optimization increasingly allow buyers to act at the impression level, using IQ signals to differentiate value in real time.

These two levels are complementary rather than interchangeable. MQ provides the strategic lens for planning and evaluation, while IQ enables more granular execution in biddable environments. The relative importance of each depends on the buying context: impression-level granularity is most actionable where real-time decisioning is possible, while aggregated MQ remains essential across all channels.

Figure 12: Impression Quality vs. Media Quality

Impression Quality vs. Media Quality Usage within the Buying & Measurement Cycle

Stage	Impression Quality (IQ)	Media Quality (MQ)
Planning	• N/A	• Consider MQ levels & ranges by channel, and the ability to control for quality-adjusted reach, in finalizing media plans, budget allocations, CPM ranges, etc.
Buying	• Within biddable environments, assign value to media using IQ signals and adjust filters, bids, and budgets accordingly.	• Secure scarce high quality supply with direct buys and deals. • Allocate budgets across channels and deals based on quality levels and ranges.
Media Measurement	• Evaluate IQ and price at the most granular levels of Impressions that make sense. Ensure impression costs reflect quality and value.	• Evaluate MQ levels and ranges, with price differences, within and across channels. • Analyze spend & impression distribution based on MQ levels.
Effectiveness Measurement	• Where granular incremental attribution is available, tie back effectiveness measures to IQ dimensions.	• Evaluate campaign effectiveness across cohorts of media grouped by quality dimensions and levels.

Source: Erez Levin.

Chapter 3: Applying Quality to Planning, Buying, and In-Flight Measurement

Applying Quality to CTV Buying

CTV is the clearest near-term use case for quality-based buying. It combines relatively high prices, significant variation in inventory quality, and a buying infrastructure that increasingly allows buyers to express differentiated preferences through bidding, pacing, allocation, and custom optimization. The examples below illustrate how Media Quality can shape commercial decisions in practice, covering:

- Incorporating quality-based buying into biddable and fixed-price environments.
- Time-of-day pacing and bidding.
- Geography-based pacing and bidding.
- Professionally produced versus UGC-heavy environments.
- Addressable CTV: targeting, measurement, and attribution.
- National, local, and hyper-local buying.
- Within-channel and cross-channel quality assessment.

Incorporating Quality-Based Buying into Biddable vs. Fixed-Price Environments

Quality-based buying affects either price, allocation, or both. In biddable environments, buyers can adjust bids dynamically in line with their priority quality signals, increasing bids where expected value is higher and reducing bids where inventory appears less valuable. This creates the possibility of identifying pricing inefficiencies, including cases where higher-value impressions are not yet fully priced as such.

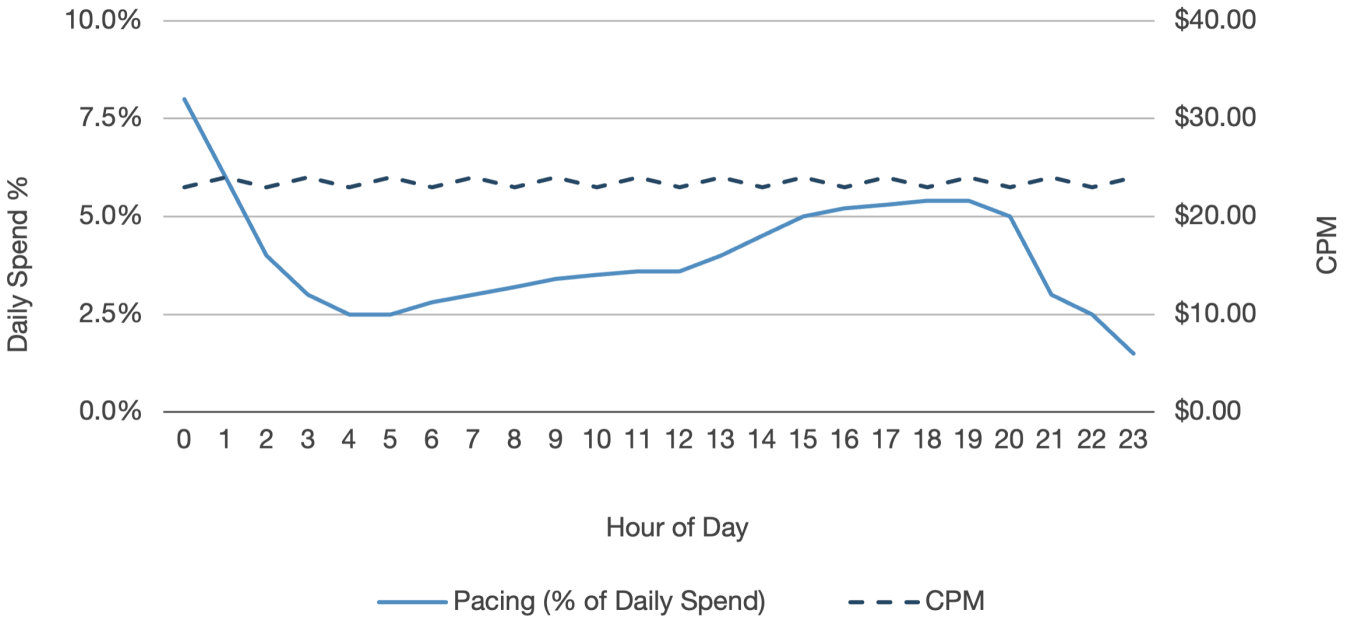
In fixed-price or otherwise constrained environments, buyers have less flexibility to express value through dynamic bidding. However, quality can still shape outcomes through negotiated allocation: shifting spend away from lower-value inventory and toward supply that better matches the advertiser's objectives, even where CPMs are fixed in advance.

Time of Day

Standard DSP pacing logic, particularly in constrained CTV supply environments, often prioritizes delivery against budget and impression goals rather than the relative value of different dayparts. In practice, this can push spend toward overnight and daytime inventory because it is easier to clear, even when those impressions are less likely to deliver strong outcomes. The result is a recurring mismatch between price, distribution, and expected value.

A quality-based approach treats dayparts not as interchangeable delivery windows, but as environments with different expected levels of attention, receptiveness, and commercial value. In biddable environments, more advanced buying tools, including custom algorithms, can assign relative values to different dayparts and adjust pacing or bidding accordingly. In fixed-price environments, buyers can negotiate for a more valuable allocation mix in advance, while sellers may seek higher prices for scarcer, higher-quality supply. In both cases, the objective is the same: to align spend more closely with expected value rather than default delivery logic.

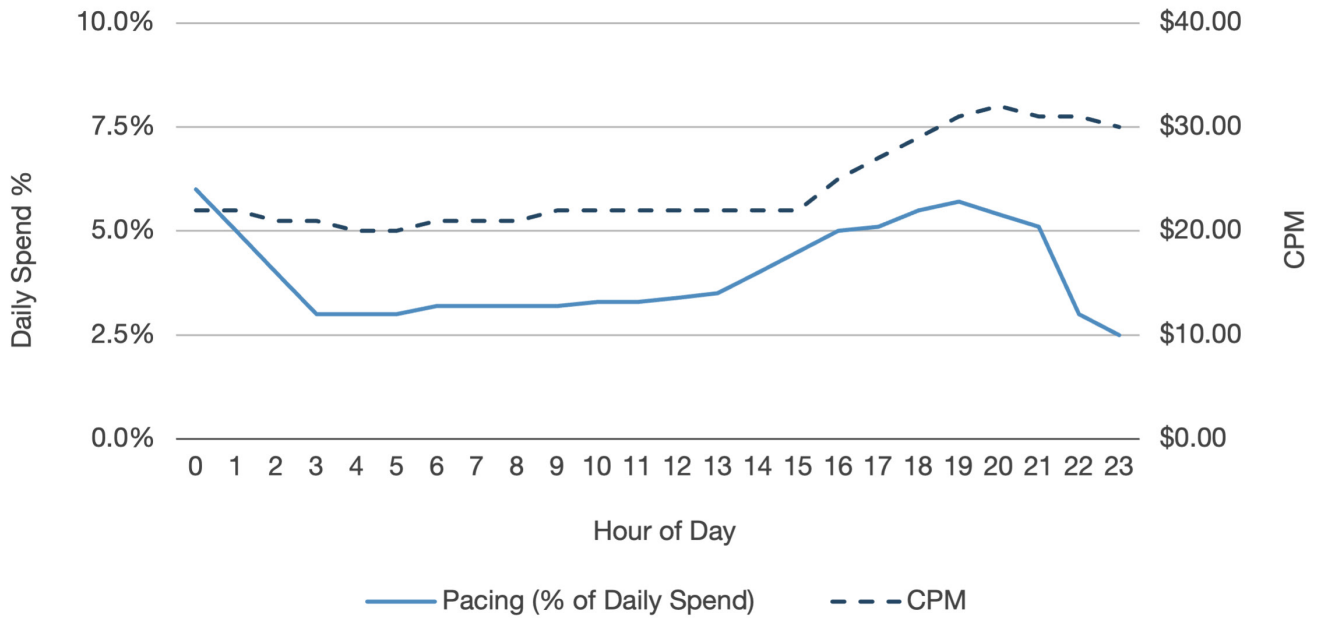
Figure 13: Illustrative CTV Time of Day – Default Pacing and Pricing



With more advanced buying solutions (e.g. custom algorithms), an advertiser can set relative values for each daypart, letting the algorithm analyze supply and demand trends to match price to value and maximize the total value of inventory purchased.

Source: Erez Levin.

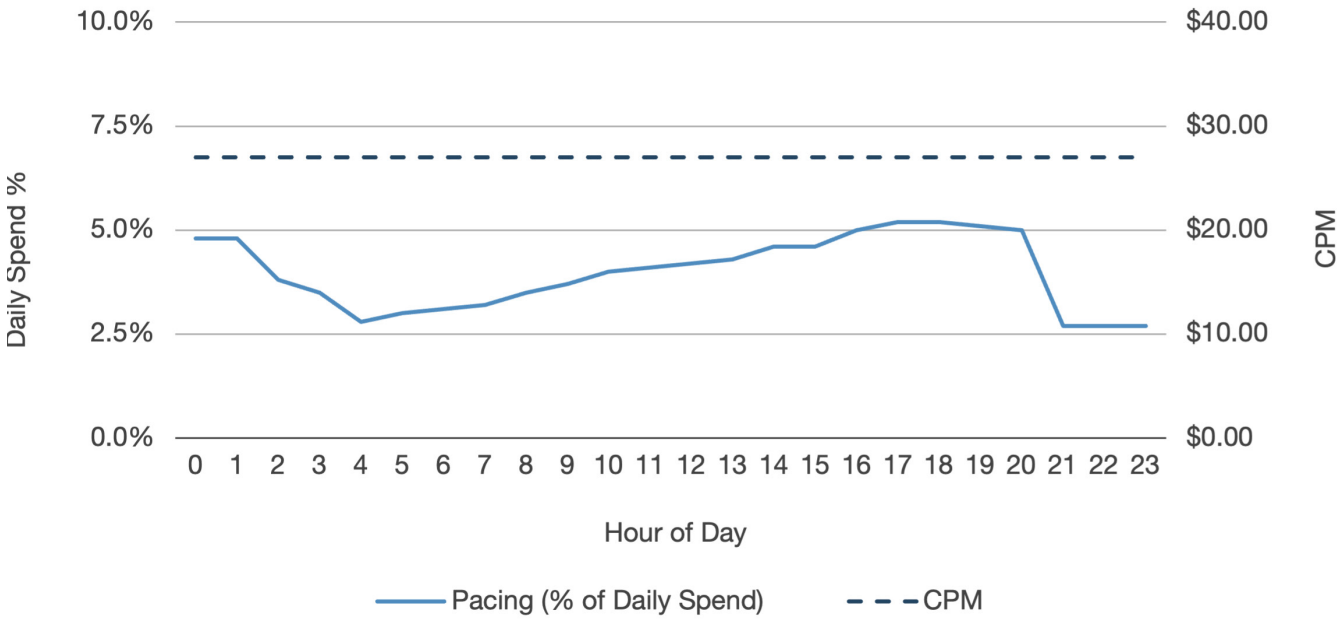
Figure 14: Illustrative CTV Time of Day: Optimized Pacing and Pricing



In a fixed-price scenario, a buyer can negotiate in advance the allocation of impressions/spend across dayparts. Publishers can demand more favorable terms and higher CPMs to sell that scarcer and higher quality supply.

Source: Erez Levin.

Figure 15: Illustrative CTV Time of Day – Optimized Pacing, Fixed Pricing



Source: Erez Levin.

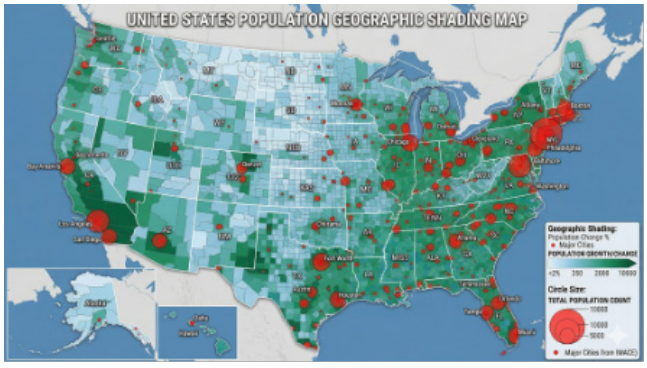
Geographic Optimization

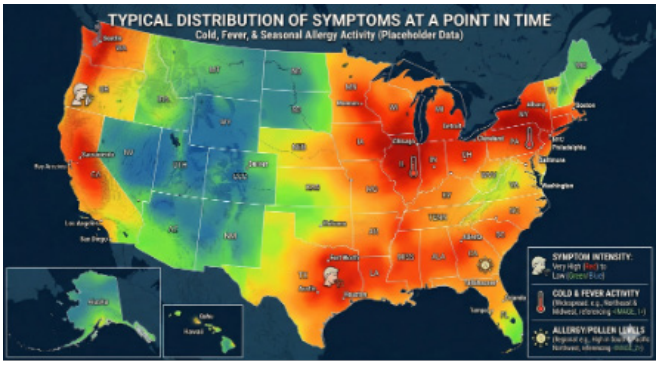
National campaigns often distribute impressions broadly in line with population or inventory availability. In some cases that is appropriate. In others, advertisers may have clear reasons to value one geography more highly than another, whether because of differences in brand penetration, growth priorities, retail footprint, competitive conditions, or the role of local media in the wider plan.

Quality-based buying allows those differences in expected value to be expressed more directly. More advanced approaches, including custom algorithms and multi-dimensional bidding systems, can encode relative geographic priorities into pacing and pricing decisions. The result can be a spend pattern and CPM structure that more closely reflect campaign objectives than a default distribution driven primarily by scale or ease of delivery. For national campaigns, that can produce substantial reallocations of budget across markets.

Figure 16 below illustrates how a standard, nationally-targeted campaign would allocate budget evenly based on population density, compared to a campaign for cold medicine that is optimized to dynamically adjust bids and/or budgets based on a population-weighted distribution of geos experiencing higher levels of cold and flu symptoms.

Figure 16: Spend by Geography: Default Budget Allocation vs. Optimized Allocation/Pricing [Cold Medicine Geographic Seasonality Example]





Source: Erez Levin.

Chapter 3: Applying Quality to Planning, Buying, and In-Flight Measurement

Professionally Produced TV vs UGC-Heavy Environments

The industry often frames professionally produced CTV content and UGC-heavy environments as a binary choice. In practice, the distinction is less absolute. Some platform-level differences may matter consistently, but the relative value of each environment depends on the advertiser, the objective, the creative, and the broader context of exposure.

Media Quality provides a more disciplined way to compare these environments. Rather than assigning inherent superiority to one category, buyers should assess how placement-level factors – such as attention conditions, context, time of exposure, and audience alignment – affect expected effectiveness in each case.

For example, a luxury brand may determine that professionally produced CTV content is likely to deliver stronger outcomes on a large screen, given higher average attention and contextual alignment with brand positioning. However, that advantage is not absolute. A low-receptiveness CTV exposure (e.g., overnight) may deliver less value than a high-receptiveness exposure in a UGC environment during peak viewing hours. In this case, time-of-day and audience context may outweigh format-level assumptions.

Similarly, an established beauty brand may prioritize broad reach and sustained frequency across high-attention CTV environments to build and maintain mental availability. At the same time, a separate campaign introducing a new product line to younger audiences may benefit from incorporating UGC-heavy environments where those audiences are more engaged and responsive, even if average placement quality differs.

The implication is that format-level labels – “premium” versus “UGC” – are insufficient proxies for value. Effective decision-making requires evaluating the underlying drivers of Media Quality within each environment and weighting them against campaign objectives.

Addressable CTV: Targeting, Measurement, and Attribution

The digitization of TV has made far more granular audience targeting possible and has, in some cases, enabled outcomes to be linked back to ad exposures. That creates genuine opportunities, but also encourages conceptual slippage between targeting precision and evidential certainty.

Addressable CTV can be valuable when an advertiser needs to reach more tightly defined audiences, including audiences thought to be in market. In those cases, even probabilistic matching can have practical utility. But many advertisers will also need broader reach to build mental availability beyond currently in-market consumers. The relevant question is therefore not whether broad or narrow targeting is inherently superior, but how each serves a particular objective.

The same distinction matters even more in measurement. While audience identifiers can help connect outcomes to exposures, attribution claims should be treated cautiously. Separating the effects of targeting, creative, Media Quality, and prior demand is methodologically difficult. So too is establishing genuine incrementality and avoiding an undue bias toward short-term, easily observed outcomes. For that reason, granular targeting capability should not be confused with robust causal measurement.

Chapter 3: Applying Quality to Planning, Buying, and In-Flight Measurement

Figure 17: CTV Audience Targeting and Measurement - Broad vs. Narrow

Targeting Type	Targeting (Who is Reached)	Measurement & Attribution
Broad (e.g., Geo, Channel, Daypart, etc.)	• Reach all potential customers (e.g., both In and Out of Market).	• Inherently probabilistic • Effectiveness measured through experiments and proxies.
Narrow (ID/IP or Interest-based)	• Primarily Reach In-Market Audiences (remarketing or based on known and modeled audiences).	• Some deterministic but typically leverages probabilistic modeling too • Risk of false sense of precision, over-attributing effectiveness (non-incremental).

Source: Erez Levin.

National vs. Local vs. Hyper-Local TV

In the pre-digital television market, buying was generally structured at national or local DMA level. Digital TV buying has introduced much finer geographic granularity, allowing campaigns to be targeted nationally while still being shaped at the level of states, cities, ZIP codes, or smaller local zones, often in combination with household- or device-level data.

For smaller advertisers, or for campaigns concentrated on a limited set of priority markets, this additional granularity can improve efficiency by reducing waste outside the target geography. For larger advertisers, however, the objective may be different: to maintain broad reach across a wide potential customer base while still weighting investment toward higher-priority areas. Here again, Media Quality is not a case for ever-narrower targeting by default. It is a framework for making more deliberate trade-offs between breadth, precision, efficiency, and expected value.

Buy-Side and Sell-Side Roles

Quality-based buying will initially be driven primarily by the buy side, because buyers have the strongest incentive to improve allocation decisions and reduce spending on lower-value supply. However, the sell side also has an important role in making quality more legible and commercially usable. Publishers and platforms can support this by exposing relevant signals, improving transparency around inventory characteristics, and, in some cases, incorporating independent quality measures into packaging, sales narratives, and reporting.

Attention measurement provides one example. Some publishers are already using third-party evidence to demonstrate the relative quality of their inventory. More broadly, the sell side's role is not simply to claim that inventory is premium, but to make the underlying drivers of value more visible in ways that buyers can incorporate into planning and buying systems.

Chapter 3: Applying Quality to Planning, Buying, and In-Flight Measurement

Assessing Quality Within and Across Channels

As the earlier discussion of quality bands makes clear, quality varies materially within every channel and format. In most cases, the supply curve includes a relatively limited share of higher-quality impressions and a much larger volume of lower-quality inventory. That makes channel-level averages a poor guide to value and complicates both cross-channel comparison and optimization.

In practice, buyers should set quality expectations within channels before trying to compare performance across them. That may mean defining target quality ranges, establishing channel-specific benchmarks, and allowing some flexibility in execution as market conditions change. In formats such as OLV and CTV, parts of this process can increasingly be automated. Custom algorithms can combine multiple signals, estimate the relative value of impressions, and sort inventory into differentiated quality tiers for buying purposes. The point is not to create a false sense of precision, but to make quality more operational in planning, pricing, and allocation decisions.

Figure 18: CTV and OLV Custom Algorithm (Illustrative) – Quality Signals and Inventory Tiering

CTV & OLV Custom Algo {Sample}

Tier	Category	Quality Dimensions	Weight/Score*
1	CTV – High Attention	Channel/Site, Time of Day, Ad Pod, Genre, etc.	100
2	CTV – Med Attention	Channel/Site, Time of Day, Ad Pod, Genre, etc.	70
3	CTV – Low Attention	Channel/Site, Time of Day, Ad Pod, Genre, etc.	40
4	Web/App OLV – High Attention	Time on Screen, Player Size, Audibility, etc.	80-100
5	Web/App OLV – Med Attention	Time on Screen, Player Size, Audibility, etc.	40-60
6	Web/App OLV – Low Attention	Time on Screen, Player Size, Audibility, etc.	2-10

* All weights are relative to each other; the numbers presented here are sample placeholders for illustrative purposes. Buyers can use historical/ proprietary performance data along with data from 3P quality/attention measurement vendors, effectiveness measurement vendors, and research firms to determine the tiers, quality signals, and weights for each.

Source: Erez Levin.

These examples show how Media Quality can be translated into practical buying decisions. The next question, addressed in Chapter 4, is how those decisions can be measured, validated, and refined with enough rigor to support broader adoption.

Chapter 4: Applying Quality to Post-Flight Measurement and Validation

Testing Frameworks

Adopting Media Quality as a decision variable requires more than introducing new metrics. It requires evidence that quality-informed buying improves outcomes relative to existing approaches. In practice, this depends on a disciplined approach to testing that can isolate the impact of quality signals on both short-term performance and long-term effectiveness.

There are two complementary routes to building that evidence, which differ primarily in rigor, speed, and organizational investment.

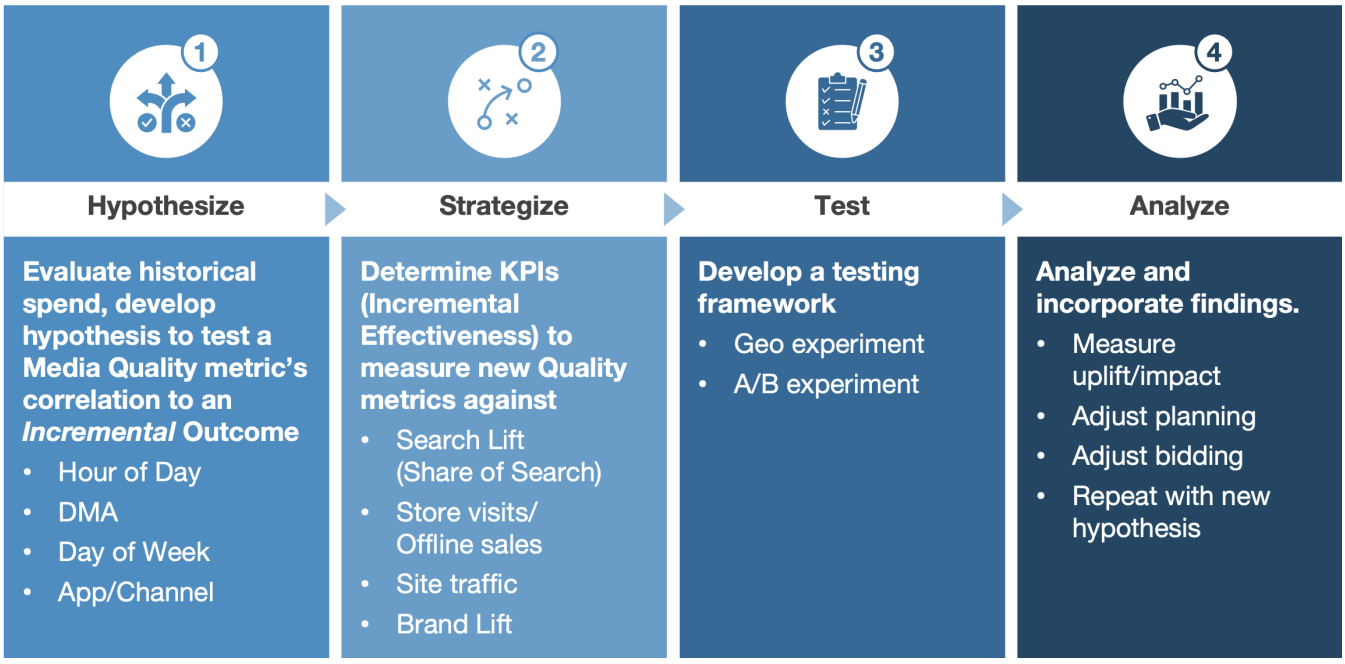
The first is structured experimentation. This involves deliberately designed tests – often using randomized or quasi-experimental methods – that isolate specific Media Quality variables (such as placement prominence, context, or timing) and measure their impact on outcomes. When executed well, these approaches provide the most reliable evidence of causality and are particularly important where investment decisions are material or where results need to be generalized across campaigns, brands, or markets. However, they require coordination, methodological expertise, and sustained organizational commitment.

The second is practical, campaign-level testing. These are more lightweight interventions embedded within live campaigns – for example, adjusting spend across dayparts, geographies, or placement types based on institutional knowledge, available data, or hypothesized quality differences, and comparing resulting performance. While less controlled, these tests can still produce directional evidence of value, particularly when they are repeated across campaigns and interpreted in aggregate. They are often the most effective way to build initial confidence and internal alignment before scaling into more formal experimentation programs.

Both approaches are necessary. Structured experimentation establishes credibility and causal understanding; practical testing enables faster iteration and broader adoption. Together, they provide a pathway for integrating Media Quality into planning, buying, and measurement decisions with increasing confidence over time.

Figure 19: A Simple CTV Testing Framework for Quality Measures

A Simple CTV Testing Framework



Source: Erez Levin.

Chapter 4: Applying Quality to Post-Flight Measurement and Validation

Though lightweight tests can be invaluable on their own terms, they are ideal for developing a proof of concept to secure additional investment for a larger learning agenda, e.g. testing multiple brands and campaigns over a longer time horizon. This can then be used to gather additional actionable insights, as outlined in The Case For Experimentation.

Two conditions are essential for valid quality testing:

1. **Causality:** Effectiveness should be measured through incrementality or another method not easily distorted by a high volume of cheap exposures.
2. **Time horizon:** Quality should be assessed against both short-term and long-term outcomes wherever possible, rather than only one or the other.

Measurement Frameworks in a Media Quality Context

Marketers typically rely on a combination of three measurement approaches: Marketing Mix Modeling (MMM), Multi-Touch Attribution (MTA), and incrementality experiments. Each offers a different lens on performance, and each has distinct limitations when applied to Media Quality.

MTA, which depends on user-level identifiers, has become less reliable as those identifiers degrade. While Media Quality signals can be incorporated into MTA models to improve how value is assigned across touchpoints, they do not resolve its core limitation: MTA primarily captures correlation rather than robust causal inference. As a result, it can misattribute performance, particularly in environments with large volumes of low-quality impressions.

Marketing Mix Modeling (MMM) is particularly important in this context because it operates at the level where Media Quality effects are most likely to be visible: aggregated, probabilistic, and distributed across both short-term and long-term outcomes.

However, most MMM implementations today do not explicitly parameterize Media Quality. Instead, they treat media exposure as a blended input, implicitly averaging quality differences within and across channels.

As MMM becomes more deeply embedded within planning platforms, optimization systems, and AI-driven decisioning workflows, this omission becomes more consequential. If Media Quality is not explicitly modeled, its effects will either be misattributed to other variables or systematically undervalued – limiting the model's ability to accurately inform allocation and pricing decisions.

In practice, no single methodology is sufficient. MTA can offer directional, granular insights where identity signals remain usable, while MMM and incrementality testing provide more robust evidence of causal impact. The key requirement across all approaches is the same: Media Quality must be explicitly accounted for in the measurement design, rather than treated as an unobserved or averaged factor.

Figure 20: Measurement Methodologies: Pros and Cons for Assessing Quality

Methodology	What it Provides	Strengths	Weaknesses	Quality's Role
MMM (Marketing Mix Modeling)	Channel-level impact over time.	Can account for multiple factors and dimensions.	• Slower. • Requires lots of data. • Only as granular as macro channel groupings (an issue for channels with a wide range of quality).	• Where possible, break out channels based on coarse Quality bands. • Evaluate performance per channel based on distribution across key known Quality bands.
Experiments/ RCT (Randomized Control Trials)	Test & Control (Geo or Audience-based) to prove causal impact.	Can prove true causal impact.	• Slow to produce results. • Can only test a small # of treatments concurrently.	• Develop Experiments to isolate and explicitly evaluate Quality dimensions and their relative value for driving incremental impact. • Ensure Quality controls on all test arms to ensure Experiment results are not skewed.
MTA* (Multi-Touch Attribution)	Attribution connecting outcomes to multiple advertising touchpoints.	Granular, near real-time insights.	• Difficult to identify incremental/ causal attribution. • Dependent on user/device identifiers (favors "addressable" media). • Models become less reliable with more probabilistic data, which isn't always transparent.	• Quality-based media measures can be layered on as a check on MTA accuracy, or to inform MTA models.

* MTA, with its predilection for proving correlation rather than causation, and its reliance on user/device identifiers favoring digital/"addressable" media, is becoming less reliable as a measurement methodology outside of some tightly controlled use cases.

Source: Erez Levin.

A practical tension arises at this point. Higher-quality media environments often carry higher costs and may not optimize as efficiently against short-term, observable metrics such as conversions or attributed sales.

As a result, quality-informed buying may appear less efficient in the short term, even where it generates greater long-term value through improved attention, memory formation, and brand effects.

This creates a structural bias in many optimization systems, which tend to favor lower-cost, high-volume impressions that perform well against immediate metrics but may underperform in terms of total business impact over time.

Addressing this requires explicitly incorporating longer-term outcomes, incrementality, or calibrated effectiveness measures into evaluation frameworks, rather than relying solely on short-term efficiency metrics.

Given the complexity of applying Media Quality across various campaigns, the following exercise offers a concrete starting point for measurement validation – grounding the frameworks above in a real campaign before scaling to a broader testing agenda.

This limitation reflects a broader issue: Media Quality is not yet systematically represented within the industry's core measurement and decisioning systems. As those systems increasingly shape market outcomes, incorporating MQ explicitly becomes not just an analytical improvement, but a structural requirement.

A Practical Starting Point for Media Quality Evaluation

A practical starting point is to review a recent nationally targeted CTV campaign and examine how spend, impressions, and CPMs were distributed across two high-value quality dimensions: hour of day and DMA. The immediate question is whether spend and pricing aligned with the advertiser's own view of likely value.

That review should test three issues. First, whether the advertiser has evidence that some dayparts or geographies are more valuable than others for the campaign objective. Second, whether actual spend distribution reflected those differences in value. Third, whether CPMs moved in ways that made commercial sense relative to expected effectiveness.

Where misalignment is visible, buyers should adjust pacing or pricing and then validate the change through a lightweight experiment. The aim is not only to improve distribution, but to establish whether quality-informed buying improves business outcomes.

Chapter 5: Putting Quality into Practice

This paper's premise extends beyond the observation that impressions are not equally valuable. It argues that Media Quality is a **missing component of market infrastructure** – a set of signals that is necessary for aligning pricing with true advertising value, but is not yet consistently embedded in how the market operates.

The preceding chapters have set out why that matters, how Media Quality should be defined, and how it can be applied in practice.

Evidence from attention research, brand lift studies, and econometric analyses suggests that higher-quality media environments are associated with improved outcomes, including recall, brand association, and purchase intent. While the magnitude of these effects varies by methodology and context, the direction of impact is sufficiently consistent to support the use of Media Quality as a decision variable. Measurement frameworks are also evolving beyond binary thresholds such as "viewable or not viewable" toward more probabilistic assessments of impression value – an important shift in environments such as Connected TV, where traditional delivery metrics and any outcomes directly attributed to specific exposures generally provide only a partial account of effectiveness.

From Practice to Market Infrastructure

For Media Quality to meaningfully influence how media is priced and traded, it must move beyond isolated use cases and become embedded in the market's operating logic. Today, most applications of Media Quality remain fragmented. Individual advertisers test quality-based buying approaches within specific campaigns. Some publishers selectively expose quality signals. Technology platforms offer partial tools to act on them. These efforts demonstrate value, but they do not, on their own, change how the market systematically values inventory. Pricing continues to rely heavily on averages, proxies, and legacy constructs that do not fully reflect variation in placement-level quality.

Shifting from localized adoption to market-wide impact requires coordination across the ecosystem. Media Quality must be consistently recognized, transmitted, and acted upon throughout the transaction chain – from signal creation to pricing to measurement. That, in turn, depends on aligned evolution across four areas.

Advertisers must incorporate quality explicitly into decision-making, moving from volume-based buying toward value-based allocation, where differences in placement conditions are reflected in both pricing and budget distribution.

Publishers must make quality legible in commercially viable ways, exposing signals that allow differentiation while ensuring that increased transparency is matched by pricing structures that sustain overall yield across their inventory.

Technology platforms must treat quality signals as core inputs to bidding, optimization, and reporting systems, rather than optional overlays or post-hoc analytics. This requires integrating quality directly into decisioning logic at scale.

Industry bodies and standards organizations must establish common definitions, taxonomies, and validation approaches so that quality signals are interpretable, comparable, and trusted across buyers, sellers, and platforms.

Chapter 5: Putting Quality into Practice

Stakeholder Incentives and Constraints

The transition to quality-based buying affects stakeholders asymmetrically.

Advertisers benefit from improved allocation efficiency, but face increased operational complexity, greater data requirements, and the need for more rigorous measurement frameworks.

Publishers benefit where quality is clearly recognized and priced, but face risks of demand concentration on a narrow subset of inventory and potential erosion of yield across the broader supply base.

Technology platforms face both technical and commercial challenges in integrating Media Quality signals into core decisioning systems, particularly where doing so may disrupt existing optimization logics or marketplace dynamics.

Measurement providers gain relevance as demand for validation increases, but must address persistent challenges around comparability, methodological transparency, and independent verification.

These differing incentives create coordination challenges that cannot be resolved through technical solutions alone. Effective adoption depends on aligning commercial incentives with measurement frameworks and transaction design.

Absent this alignment, Media Quality is likely to remain an analytical concept and a tactic leveraged by only advanced marketers rather than a market mechanism.

Even with alignment, adoption will be constrained by several structural factors. Many high-value signals – particularly in CTV – are not consistently available within transaction systems. Incentives are often misaligned, with publishers cautious about exposing granular signals and buyers hesitant to pay premiums without standardized validation. Measurement approaches remain fragmented, limiting comparability across channels and vendors. And operational complexity increases as more signals are incorporated into planning and execution workflows.

For Media Quality to operate as market infrastructure, it must meet three conditions.

- First, **comparability**: quality signals must be defined using common taxonomies so that they can be interpreted consistently across buyers, sellers, and platforms.
- Second, **auditability**: measurement approaches must be sufficiently transparent and verifiable, enabling market participants to assess the reliability of quality signals and the claims derived from them.
- Third, **enforceability**: there must be commercial or institutional mechanisms that ensure these signals are actually used in pricing, allocation, and decision-making, rather than remaining optional or inconsistently applied.

These conditions are not yet fully met, particularly in programmatic CTV environments, where signal fragmentation, limited transparency, and misaligned incentives continue to constrain adoption.

These requirements are not unprecedented. Comparable governance challenges have been addressed in other areas of advertising measurement through institutional mechanisms such as Joint Industry Committees (JICs) and accreditation frameworks established by bodies such as the Media Rating Council (MRC). While Media Quality does not require identical structures, it raises similar questions around standardization, validation, and market trust. In particular, the need for shared definitions, independent verification, and credible oversight suggests that MQ may ultimately require a more formalized governance layer than currently exists – whether through adaptation of existing institutions or the development of new, fit-for-purpose frameworks.

Chapter 5: Putting Quality into Practice

Figure 21: Conditions for Media Quality to Function as Market Infrastructure

Condition	Definition	Practical Implication
Comparability	Shared definitions and taxonomies for Media Quality signals.	Enables consistent interpretation across buyers, sellers, and platforms.
Auditability	Transparent, validated, and verifiable measurement methodologies.	Builds trust in quality signals and supports independent validation.
Enforceability	Mechanisms ensuring signals influence pricing, allocation, and decisions.	Prevents MQ from remaining optional or inconsistently applied.

Source: Erez Levin.

The transition to quality-based buying will not be immediate. It will occur incrementally, as evidence accumulates, incentives align, and infrastructure evolves. The direction of travel, however, is clear: Media Quality is likely to increasingly shape how value is defined and how media is priced across the ecosystem.

This tension is particularly acute for advertisers. While quality-based buying improves alignment with long-term effectiveness, it often introduces short-term trade-offs in measurable efficiency and operational simplicity. Adoption is constrained not only by signal availability or standardization, but by the difficulty of reconciling short-term performance pressures with longer-term value creation within organizational decision-making frameworks.

What Marketers Should Do Now

Marketers should begin by auditing their current exposure to quality.

A useful starting point is to analyze a recent CTV campaign, examining how spend, impressions, and CPMs are distributed across key quality dimensions such as time of day and geography. This analysis should assess whether investment aligns with where the advertiser believes the highest value lies – and whether pricing reflected it.

From there, buyers should move beyond binary quality filters. Treating quality solely as a pass/fail condition – such as viewability or brand safety – limits its value. Instead, quality signals should be incorporated as continuous variables that inform pricing and allocation decisions, even if the first implementation is relatively simple.

At the same time, measurement frameworks must explicitly account for both short- and long-term effectiveness. Over-optimizing toward short-term outcomes risks undervaluing higher-quality environments that contribute to brand equity and future demand.

Marketers should also anticipate that quality-based adjustments may initially reduce apparent efficiency on short-term metrics. This should not be interpreted as underperformance without broader evaluation. Instead, changes should be assessed against a wider set of outcomes, including incrementality, brand impact, and longer-term return, to ensure that investment decisions reflect total business value rather than immediate efficiency alone.

Progress also requires greater transparency. Buyers should require access to the placement attributes that determine quality – such as content type, ad load, time of day, and format – and incorporate these requirements into RFPs and trading agreements where possible.

Finally, adoption should be grounded in testing and iteration. Whether through controlled experimentation or structured A/B testing, marketers should build an internal evidence base demonstrating how quality-based adjustments affect both performance and long-term outcomes, and then scale what proves effective.

Chapter 5: Putting Quality into Practice

What the Industry Must Do Together

Industry-wide progress requires coordinated action across stakeholders. Advertisers must signal demand by incorporating quality into pricing and allocation decisions. Publishers must expose and package quality signals in ways that are both usable and commercially sustainable.

Technology platforms must integrate these signals into core decisioning systems, rather than treating them as optional enhancements. Industry bodies must establish shared definitions and validation frameworks to enable interoperability and trust. Without alignment across these groups, adoption will remain fragmented.

Figure 22: Putting Quality into Practice

Marketer focus areas	• Audit current exposure to quality. • Incorporate quality signals as continuous variables to inform pricing and allocation decisions. • Balance focus on short-term vs long-term effectiveness. • Push for greater transparency on placement attributes that determine quality, and incorporate these into RFPs where possible. • Build internal evidence base around quality-based ad effectiveness through controlled experimentation or structured A/B testing.
Industry-wide embrace of quality metrics	• Advertisers must signal demand by incorporating quality into pricing and allocation decisions. • Publishers must expose and package quality signals in ways that are both usable and commercially sustainable. • Technology platforms must integrate these signals into core decisioning systems, rather than treating them as optional enhancements. • Industry bodies must establish shared definitions and validation frameworks to enable interoperability and trust.

The Opportunity Ahead

The advertising industry stands at an inflection point. In Connected TV – the fastest-growing and highest-CPM digital channel – the programmatic infrastructure is still being built. The quality frameworks, measurement standards, and pricing mechanisms established in the coming years will determine whether CTV fulfills its potential as the premier channel for brand-building at scale, or follows Display down a path where quality publishers are undervalued and low-quality inventory crowds out premium supply.

The market already has enough research, practical frameworks, and implementation tools to make meaningful progress. What is still required is coordinated adoption across buyers, sellers, and platforms.

CIMM, working with its industry partners and working groups, can play a useful role in that process by helping develop common frameworks, supporting further research, and encouraging more consistent practice.

Adoption of Media Quality as a market signal is likely to follow a staged progression.

- In the near term, implementation will occur through **buyer-led experimentation and bilateral deals**, where quality signals can be tested and valued within controlled environments.
- In the medium term, **platform integration** will enable more systematic application, embedding MQ signals into bidding, pacing, and reporting systems.
- In the longer term, **standardization and governance mechanisms** – including shared taxonomies, validation frameworks, and potentially audit structures – will be required for MQ to function as a consistent market-wide signal.

The question is no longer whether Media Quality can be measured. It can. The question is whether the market will organize itself to use that measurement – embedding MQ into pricing, decisioning, and governance frameworks.

If it does, Media Quality could become a core component of how advertising markets function.

If it does not, the industry risks continuing to operate with incomplete signals – leading to persistent mispricing, inefficient allocation, and under-realization of value.

Appendix A: Research-Backed Fundamentals of Marketing Effectiveness

This appendix outlines the core principles of marketing effectiveness underpinning the paper's argument. These principles are well-established in academic and practitioner literature and remain highly relevant in a media environment undergoing structural change. They provide the foundation for understanding why Media Quality matters to both short-term performance and long-term growth.

The Dual Effects of Advertising: Short-Term and Long-Term Impact

A central finding in marketing effectiveness research is that advertising operates across two time horizons simultaneously. It can generate immediate, short-term responses – such as sales, clicks, or conversions – while also building longer-term brand equity that influences future demand.

Frameworks developed by Les Binet and Peter Field, and extended by subsequent research, demonstrate that these effects are complementary rather than competing. Short-term activation captures existing demand, while long-term brand building expands future demand by increasing mental availability and strengthening brand associations. Over time, the cumulative impact of brand investment often exceeds the immediate returns generated by performance-focused activity alone.

This dynamic is illustrated in models such as *The Long and the Short of It* and later extensions including WARC's *The Multiplier Effect*, which show how brand and performance advertising interact over time to drive both sales and profit growth. The evidence consistently indicates that campaigns designed to balance these effects outperform those optimized exclusively for short-term outcomes.

Brand and Performance Are Complementary, Not Substitutes

Research across econometric studies and industry analyses reinforces that brand-led and performance-led strategies are most effective when deployed together. Brand advertising creates the conditions for future demand by shaping perceptions and memory structures, while performance advertising converts that demand into measurable outcomes.

Studies drawing on large-scale datasets, such as Analytic Partners' ROI Genome, show that advertisers combining brand and performance investment achieve superior results compared to those focused primarily on performance alone. This "brand advantage" reflects the compounding effect of sustained brand-building activity on conversion efficiency and long-term profitability.

This has practical implications for media planning. Campaigns should not be evaluated solely on immediate return metrics, nor should media environments be valued only for their short-term efficiency. Media Quality becomes particularly important in this context, as higher-quality environments are more likely to support both attention and memory formation, thereby contributing to long-term brand effects alongside short-term outcomes.

Appendix A: Research-Backed Fundamentals of Marketing Effectiveness

Diminishing Returns and the Limits of Efficiency Metrics

A further consistent finding is that marketing effectiveness cannot be reduced to efficiency metrics such as ROI, CPA, or ROAS. While these measures are useful, they are inherently incomplete. ROI can often be improved by reducing spend rather than increasing impact and does not necessarily correlate with growth or profitability.

Large-scale meta-analyses, including the *Profit Ability 2* study, demonstrate that as spend increases, marginal ROI typically declines while total profit contribution increases. This reflects diminishing returns: each additional unit of investment generates less incremental return, but overall business impact continues to grow.

These findings highlight a critical distinction between efficiency and effectiveness. Efficiency focuses on cost per outcome, while effectiveness assesses whether marketing investment achieves broader business objectives, including revenue growth, market share, and long-term profitability. Over-optimizing for efficiency can lead to underinvestment in higher-quality media environments that contribute disproportionately to long-term value.

Excess Share of Voice (ESOV) and Market Share Growth

The relationship between advertising investment and market share is often captured through the concept of Excess Share of Voice (ESOV). ESOV measures the difference between a brand's share of advertising investment and its current market share. Decades of research show that brands with positive ESOV – those that invest above their share of market – tend to grow market share over time.

Although digital fragmentation has made share-of-voice measurement more complex, the underlying principle remains robust. Visibility drives mental availability, which in turn drives choice at the point of purchase.

However, ESOV must be interpreted in the context of Media Quality. Not all impressions contribute equally to share of voice. High volumes of low-quality exposures may inflate apparent reach without generating meaningful impact. As a result, ESOV calculations are most meaningful when adjusted for differences in Media Quality, ensuring that investment reflects not just quantity of exposure, but its likely effectiveness.

Reach, Creative Strength, and Consistency

Evidence from large-scale studies, including the ARF's *Advertising Works* research, underscores three consistent drivers of effectiveness: broad reach, strong creative execution, and sustained exposure over time. Campaigns that combine these elements are more likely to influence both short-term behavior and long-term brand equity.

Media Quality interacts directly with these drivers. High-quality placements are more likely to deliver attentive reach, enabling creative to be seen, processed, and remembered. Conversely, low-quality environments can undermine creative effectiveness, even when reach and frequency targets are achieved.

Implications for Media Quality

Taken together, these principles reinforce the central argument of this paper. Advertising effectiveness depends not only on how much media is bought or who is targeted, but on the conditions under which exposures occur.

Media Quality affects those conditions directly. It influences whether advertising is noticed, how it is processed, and whether it contributes to both immediate outcomes and longer-term brand effects. As such, it should be treated as a core input into planning, buying, and measurement – not as a secondary or residual factor.

The challenge for the industry is not to rediscover these principles, but to operationalize them more consistently in a media environment where variation in quality is both greater and more measurable than ever before.

Appendix B: Additional Quality Framings

This appendix outlines additional perspectives on Media Quality that provide useful context for industry application. These framings are not central to the core definition of Media Quality developed in the paper, but help clarify how quality operates across planning, buying, and measurement decisions in practice.

Media Quality as a Multi-Sided Construct

Media Quality is not defined by advertisers alone. It reflects the interaction between advertiser value and consumer experience, which are not always aligned.

Consumers may perceive environments with lower ad load, less intrusion, and higher content quality as more valuable. Advertisers, by contrast, may assign higher value to placements that maximize attention, visibility, and responsiveness – even if those conditions do not always align with consumer preferences. Media Quality is inherently multi-dimensional. It reflects a balance between user experience, attention conditions, contextual alignment, and commercial outcomes. Effective frameworks must account for this tension rather than assuming a single, universal definition of quality.

CTV: Brand Channel, Performance Channel, or Both

The digitization of television has expanded its capabilities, particularly in audience targeting and attribution. However, this does not fundamentally change its primary role.

For most advertisers, CTV remains a full-funnel channel, where the majority of value is driven by broad reach and sustained exposure that builds mental availability over time. While addressable targeting and attribution can support performance use cases, these represent a relatively smaller share of total value.

This raises a structural question: as traditionally “brand” channels become more measurable and targetable, do they become performance channels by default? The evidence suggests they do not. Instead, they remain primarily brand-building environments for upper and mid-funnel objectives, with expanded capabilities to support selective performance applications.

Understanding this distinction is critical. Overweighting short-term performance signals in inherently brand-driven environments risks undervaluing the long-term contribution of high-quality media exposures.

Media Quality Across Short- and Long-Term Objectives

Media Quality plays a role in both short-term and long-term effectiveness, but its relative importance varies by campaign objective.

In campaigns focused on immediate response – such as customer acquisition, high-churn products, or time-sensitive promotions – audience targeting and intent signals often dominate decision-making. In these cases, Media Quality may appear secondary, particularly where large volumes of impressions can be optimized toward conversion.

However, even in performance-driven contexts, Media Quality can materially influence outcomes. Higher-quality placements can improve conversion efficiency, reduce wasted exposures, and enhance the durability of customer relationships.

In campaigns with a longer-term focus, Media Quality becomes more central. Environments that support attention, memory formation, and positive associations are more likely to contribute to brand equity and future demand.

In practice, most advertisers operate across both time horizons. The implication is not that Media Quality should replace other signals, but that it should be incorporated deliberately, rather than left to be indirectly inferred through automated optimization.

Appendix B: Additional Quality Framings

Is Supply Path Optimization (SPO) Part of Media Quality?

Supply Path Optimization (SPO) introduces a related, but distinct, set of considerations. Attributes such as supply path, intermediary involvement, and transaction efficiency are not tied to user identity and can influence buyer decision-making.

In some cases, SPO decisions are driven by quality-related concerns, such as reducing fraud risk or prioritizing more reliable supply. In others, they are driven by efficiency, cost, or operational considerations.

While SPO can be framed as part of a broader definition of Media Quality, it is treated separately in this paper because its primary use cases differ. Core Media Quality dimensions focus on the conditions of exposure and their impact on effectiveness, whereas SPO is often concerned with how inventory is accessed and transacted.

Alignment and Orchestration

The ultimate objective for marketers is not to optimize Media, Creative, and Audience Quality in isolation, but to orchestrate them in combination.

In ideal conditions, granular signals allow advertisers to match creative to specific contexts and audiences with precision. In practice, such granularity is often incomplete. Even so, marketers can use probabilistic approaches to improve alignment – ensuring that creative execution, media environment, and audience context are directionally coherent.

This highlights an important point: improving effectiveness does not rely solely on increasing the quality of individual components or adjusting price. It also depends on how well those components are coordinated. Media Quality is not only a standalone variable, but a critical input into broader campaign orchestration.

Appendix C: Selected Case Studies and Evidence Base

Many advertisers already incorporate elements of Media Quality into their buying and optimization practices, often through proxies such as viewability thresholds, brand safety filters, or manual adjustments to placement and context. However, these approaches are typically applied in coarse or binary ways and do not fully capture the variation in quality across impressions.

More advanced applications of Media Quality are emerging through two primary areas: attention-based measurement and algorithmic optimization frameworks. These approaches attempt to quantify differences in placement conditions more precisely and incorporate those differences directly into pricing, allocation, and performance evaluation. A growing body of case studies suggests that, when applied systematically, these methods can improve both short-term efficiency and longer-term effectiveness.

The purpose of this appendix is not to evaluate individual vendors or endorse specific methodologies. Instead, it provides access to a representative set of publicly available case studies from organizations working in these areas. These materials offer practical examples of how Media Quality signals are being applied in live campaigns and how their impact is being measured.

Readers are encouraged to review these sources as part of a broader evidence base, recognizing that results will vary depending on methodology, data inputs, campaign design, and market context.

Selected Sources (Alphabetical):

- Adelaide
- Amplified
- Chalice AI
- DoubleVerify/SciBids
- Greenbids (Perion)
- Lumen
- MediaProbe
- RMT
- TVision
- xpln.ai

Appendix D: References and Resources

This appendix consolidates the core evidence base underpinning this paper. Sources are organized into thematic categories to support further exploration and practical application. Where possible, primary research, peer-reviewed studies, and widely cited industry analyses are prioritized.

1. Foundational Marketing Effectiveness Literature

- The Long and the Short of It – Les Binet and Peter Field. IPA (2013).
- Effectiveness in Context – Binet & Field. IPA (2018).
- How Brands Grow – Byron Sharp. Oxford University Press (2010).
- WARC (2020–2024). *The Multiplier Effect series*.
- Analytic Partners (2022–2025). *ROI Genome Reports.*
- Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (2024). *Profit Ability 2: The New Business Case for Advertising*.

2. Media Quality, Attention, and Context Research

- Advertising Research Foundation (2023–2025). *How Advertising Works Today; Attention Measurement Validation Initiative*.
- Journal of Advertising Research (multiple issues). *Impact of Media Context on Advertising Memory*.
- System1 Group (2020–2024). *The Creative Dividend*.
- Lumen Research (various studies). Attention and eye-tracking research.
- TVision (2023–2025). Attention and co-viewing studies.
- Amplified Intelligence (2022–2025). Attention and memory encoding research.
- Adelaide (2023–2025). AU-based quality scoring frameworks.
- The Guardian and Differentology (2025). *FAME: Fewer Ads, More Effective*. theguardian.com
- Kantar (2025). *Media Reactions 2025: US Edition*. kantar.com

3. CTV, Video, and Media Measurement Standards

- Interactive Advertising Bureau & IAB Tech Lab (2023–2025):
  - *CTV Programmatic Guide*
  - *Video Ad Serving Template (VAST)*
  - *Open Measurement SDK (OM SDK)*
- Media Rating Council (ongoing). Viewability and measurement standards.
- Coalition for Innovative Media Measurement (2023–2026):
  - *Attention Measurement Playbook for Marketers*
  - *Identity Resolution Buyer's Guide*
  - *Plugging the Gaps: Local TV Measurement*
- Google (2025). *Meridian Measurement Framework Documentation*.
- Meta (2024–2025). *Robyn MMM Analyst Guide*.

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4. Marketing Measurement Methodologies (MMM, MTA, Incrementality)

- B2B Institute (2023–2025). *The Case for Experimentation*.
- Marketing Architects (2024–2025). *TV Attribution and Measurement Guides*.
- Rockerbox (2024). *Unified Marketing Measurement (UMM)* frameworks.
- Fairing (2024). *Triangulation in Marketing Measurement*.

5. Industry Analyses and Effectiveness Thought Leadership

- WARC (2024–2025):
  - *TV as a Full-Funnel Channel (with LIONS Advisory, Marketing Architects*)
- CreativeX (2024). *ESOV and Creative Effectiveness Studies*.
- Thinkbox (ongoing). TV effectiveness research.
- ANA (2024–2025). Cross-media measurement initiatives (e.g., Aquila).

6. Academic and Experimental Evidence Base

- Peer-reviewed literature across:
  - *Marketing Science*
  - *Behavioral Economics*
  - *Cognitive Psychology*

Key themes include:

- Attention and memory encoding mechanisms
- Contextual influence on persuasion
- Incrementality and causal inference methods

Representative journals:

- Journal of Marketing
- Journal of Advertising Research
- Marketing Science Institute

7. Programmatic, Supply Chain, and Quality Transparency

- DoubleVerify (2023–2025). Media Quality and fraud reports.
- Integral Ad Science (2023–2025). Media Quality benchmarks.
- The Trade Desk (2024–2025). SPO and supply quality frameworks.
- Perion / Greenbids (2024–2025). Algorithmic optimization case studies.
- eMarketer, *Private Marketplace and Programmatic Guaranteed Transaction Share* (2025).
- Association of National Advertisers (ANA). *Programmatic Transparency Benchmark Study*. 2024.

Appendix D: References and Resources

8. Additional Practitioner and Educational Resources

- Mark Ritson – *MiniMBA in Marketing* (ongoing).
- School of Marketing – ESOV analysis resources.
- INMA – media strategy and attention research.

Notes on Use

- These sources collectively reflect **converging evidence** from academic research, industry experimentation, and applied measurement practice.
- No single methodology or dataset is definitive; **triangulation across methods** (MMM, experiments, attention metrics) is essential.
- Results are **context-dependent**, varying by category, creative, channel, and campaign design.


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