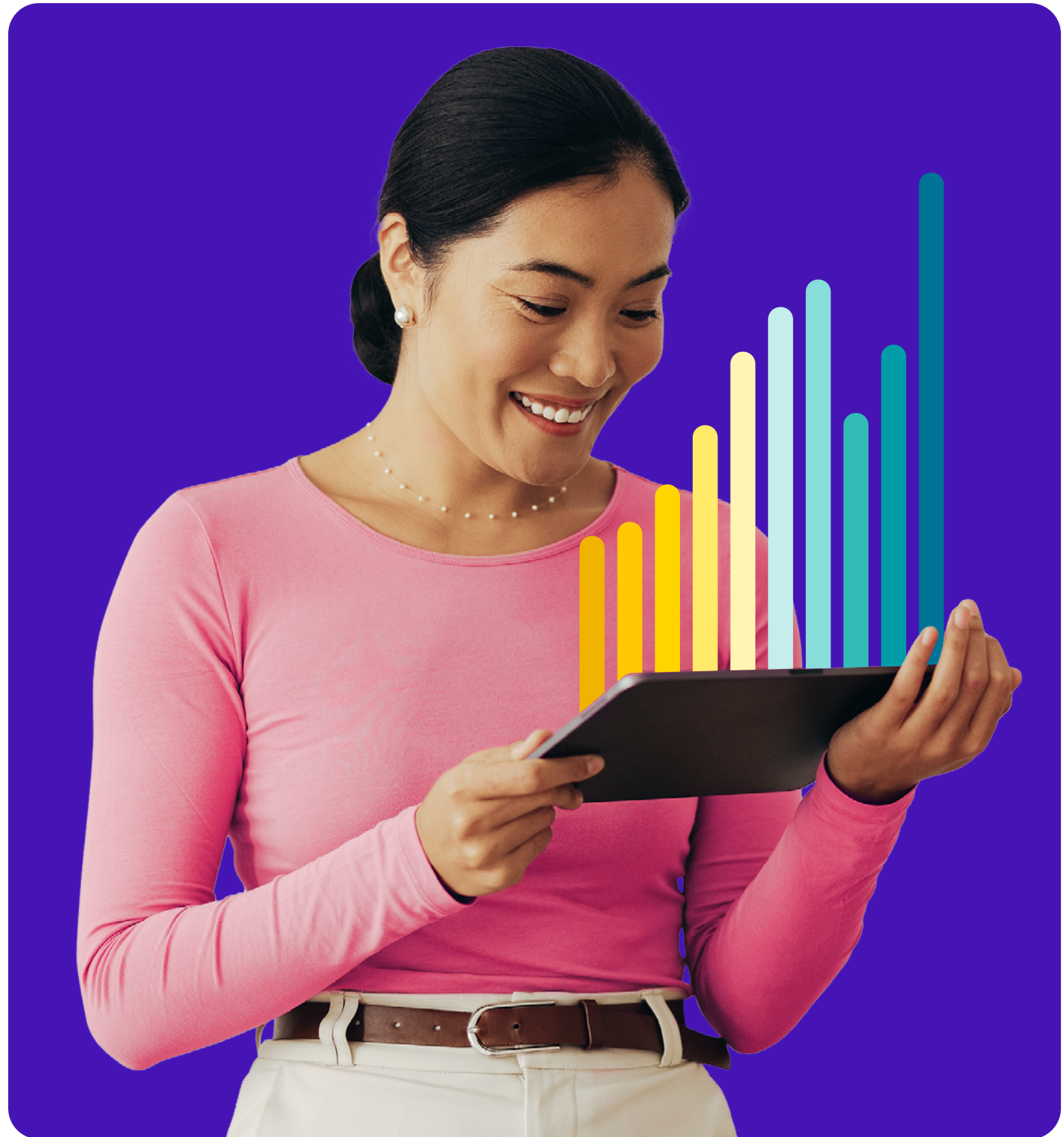


Defy Media's Gravity

Your guide to cross-media and
audience insights for the 2025-2026
Upfronts/NewFronts planning season



Introduction

New ad-supported platforms, experimental ad formats, landmark media rights, radical shifts in viewing behavior. We're not in Kansas anymore, are we? If you're feeling like advertising today is a bit like defying gravity, you're not alone.

It's a difficult balancing act, for sure. For a while now, streaming and linear TV have been pulling television in different directions—competing for viewers' attention, media dollars and lucrative sports rights. The competition is fierce, with digital media also vying for share of the total media mix. But with increasingly programmatic capabilities, TV is growing more digital by the day and holding its own in terms of winning audiences' time.

At the heart of it all are people, who are looking for content (and advertising) that speaks to them and their unique experiences. As TV and digital merge, addressable cross-media marketing strategies will require audience segmentation that goes beyond traditional age and gender groups to reach the audience that matters with the right message.

To navigate the complexity, you'll need the right data to understand how audiences are really spending time across media so you can plan and negotiate with confidence.

Let's lift the curtain and review important industry trends to help you ahead of the 2025-2026 Upfronts/NewFronts.



Table of contents

Section 1: Changing Media

The forces driving the video universe today

4

Section 2: Changing Audiences

Are you hanging with the right cohorts?

11

Section 3: Changing Ecosystem

Standing out in a cluttered advertising world

18

Conclusion

25

About Nielsen

26

Section 1: Changing Media

The forces driving the video universe today



TV is converging

For years, streaming was a source of uncertainty for media executives. Viewers were tuning in to a type of television that featured little to no advertising, causing major **budget realignments** from top advertisers and concerns that TV advertising had become **irrelevant**.

Not anymore. Most major TV networks offer streaming services of their own. Ad-supported streaming (AVOD and FAST TV) is growing **faster** than SVOD now, and connected TV (CTV) advertising is expected to **grow 10% annually** through 2027. Some even anticipate CTV ad revenues to **double within five years**. Some of that growth is coming at the expense of linear TV, but not all of it, as many advertisers that would never have considered TV advertising before are drawn to a medium that's looking more like digital every day.

The pie is growing, and to make the most of the **convergent TV** opportunity at this year's Upfronts and NewFronts, you need to understand what forces are driving the TV universe today.

“The once-crisp lines between linear and streaming have blurred. Convergent TV is the new normal.”

Alison Gensheimer
Nielsen's Head of Marketing



CTV isn't done growing

At this time [last year](#), we were wondering whether CTV adoption in the U.S. might reach a plateau in 2024, considering the enduring allure of live sports on linear TV and how confusing (and expensive) it was getting for consumers to keep track of so many different streaming platforms.

We now see that CTV's reach has continued to grow this year, albeit at a slower rate, and that the gap in reach between CTV (77%) and linear TV (68%) is growing as well. Pricing bundles, FAST TV and the quick adoption of ad-supported tiers from top streaming players have kept the momentum going.¹

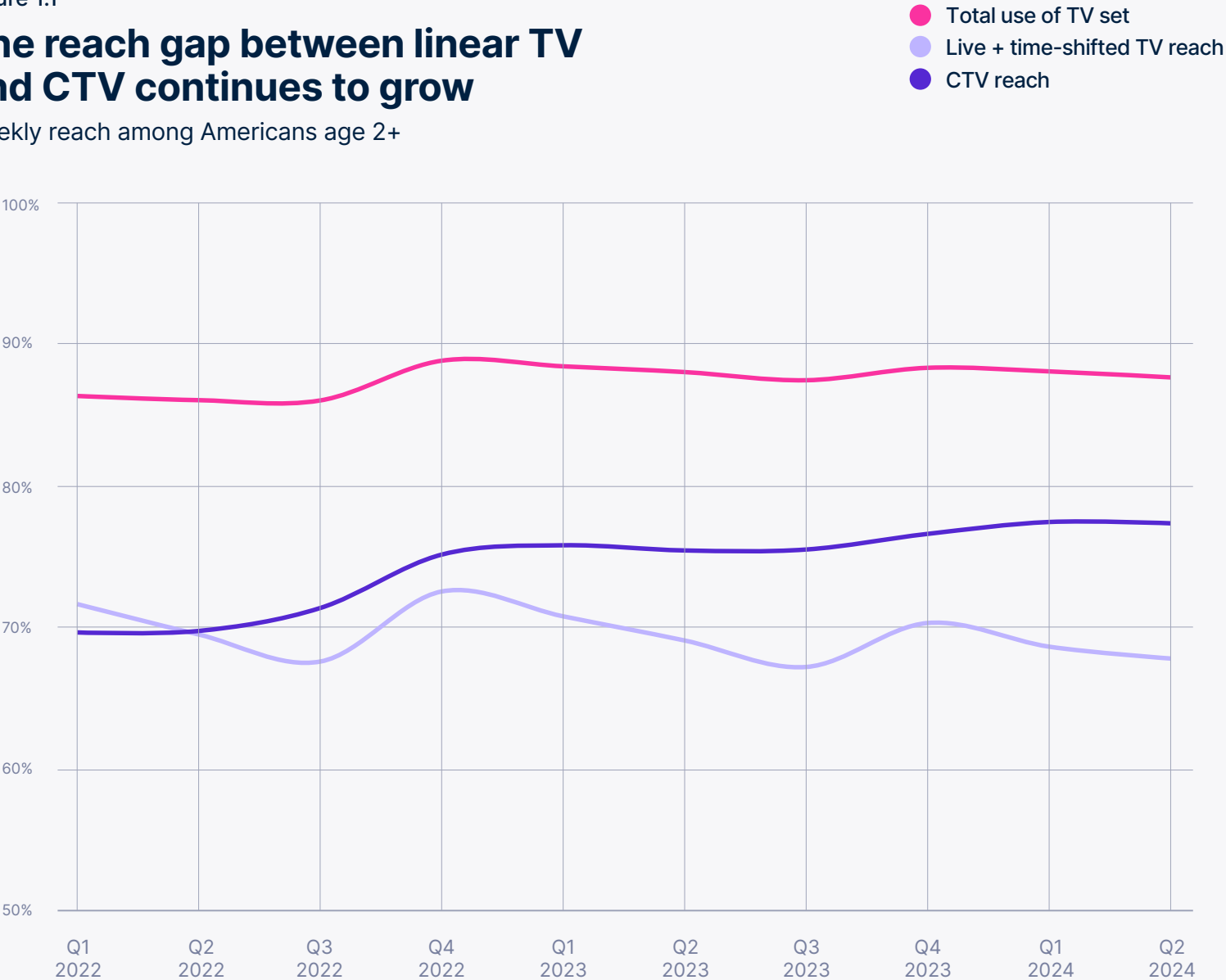
TV as a whole remains ubiquitous: 88% of U.S. viewers of all ages are using TV in any given month, a figure that has remained virtually unchanged over the past 18 months.

¹ According to the [ARF](#), the penetration of paid AVOD services has jumped from 17% in 2022 to 63% in the Spring of 2024.

Figure 1.1

The reach gap between linear TV and CTV continues to grow

Weekly reach among Americans age 2+



Note: The analysis includes all CTV viewing minutes, not just those supported by advertising.
Source: Nielsen National TV Ratings, Persons 2+



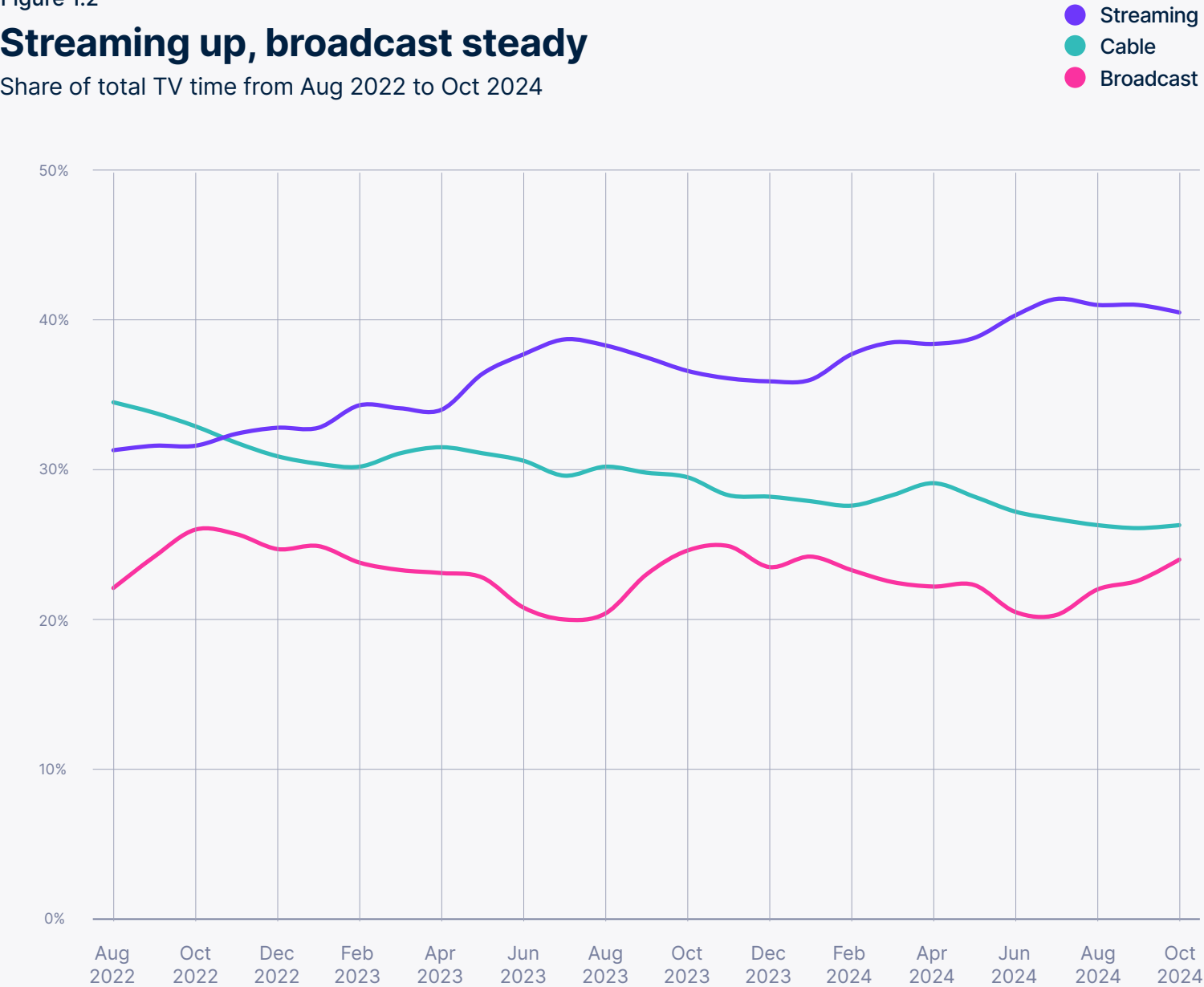
Streaming gains share of total TV time

Figure 1.2 shows how total time spent with TV has evolved over the past two years. The rise of streaming (from 31% to 41% of total TV time) is clear.

Time spent with broadcast had its ups and downs (dipping in the Summer and rising in the Fall when new series come out and the NFL is in full swing) but remained steady year to year.

Cable has seen share decrease, but it continues to hold more than a quarter of total TV on an annual average basis. Streaming platforms have targeted niche programming and sports rights that have been long-standing cable specialties. But cable continues to offer something streaming is still figuring out—ad space.

Figure 1.2
Streaming up, broadcast steady
Share of total TV time from Aug 2022 to Oct 2024



Note: The analysis includes all streaming viewing minutes, not just those supported by advertising.
Source: Nielsen National TV Ratings, Persons 2+



Many streamers are drawing viewers

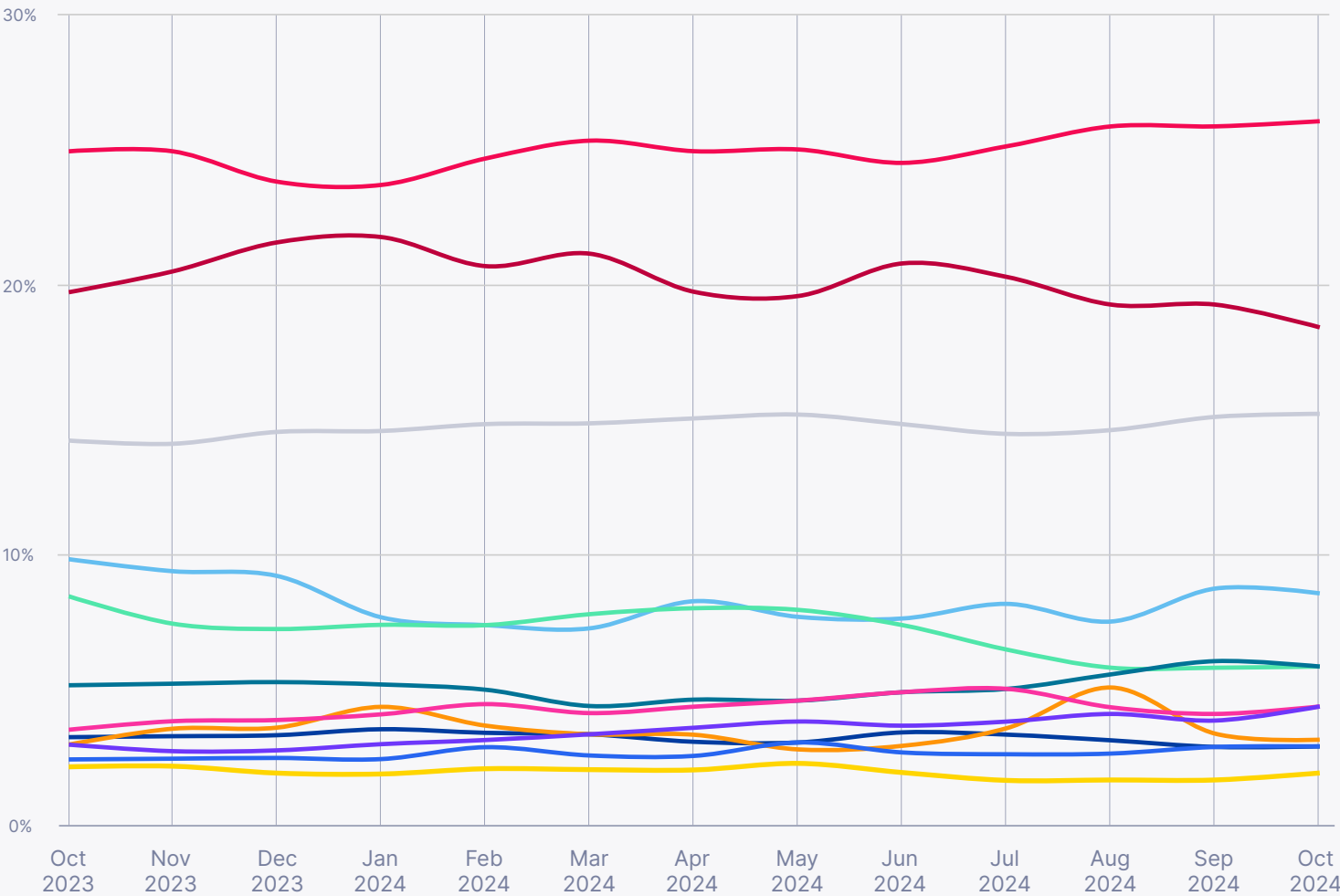
Who is dominating streaming at the moment? YouTube and Netflix are certainly leading the pack, but they're not running away with it. YouTube accounted for 24.9% of total streaming time in October 2023 and 26.0% in October 2024, while Netflix dipped slightly from 19.7% to 18.4% in the same time span.

The initial takeaways from figure 1.3 are that U.S. viewers seem to enjoy having a broad selection of platforms at their fingertips, and that streaming companies don't necessarily need massive scale to thrive.

One challenge for streaming providers will be navigating their subscription and ad offerings. While ad-supported streaming remains small, it's a focus for growth—particularly with advertisers that may be new to TV.

Figure 1.3
The streaming landscape remains fragmented
Share of streaming time from Oct 2023 to Oct 2024

- YouTube
- Netflix
- Other streaming
- Amazon
- Hulu
- Disney+
- Max
- Peacock
- Pluto
- Tubi
- Roku Channel
- Paramount+



Note: The analysis includes all streaming viewing minutes, not just those supported by advertising.
Source: Nielsen National TV Ratings, Persons 2+



Sports programming is the great equalizer

One of the reasons why broadcast TV is holding its own is that it remains the top destination for live sports. While sports viewing is seasonal, fans can show up in a big way. Figure 1.4 shows that sports accounted for 26.4% of all broadcast viewing time in the third quarter of 2024 (in large part because of the Olympics and the start of the NFL season).

By comparison, sports are a much more steady driver of viewing on cable, averaging an 8.8% share of viewing on the platform during a 12-month period (and only 1 point higher in the second quarter of 2024 when March Madness and the NBA Finals were on).

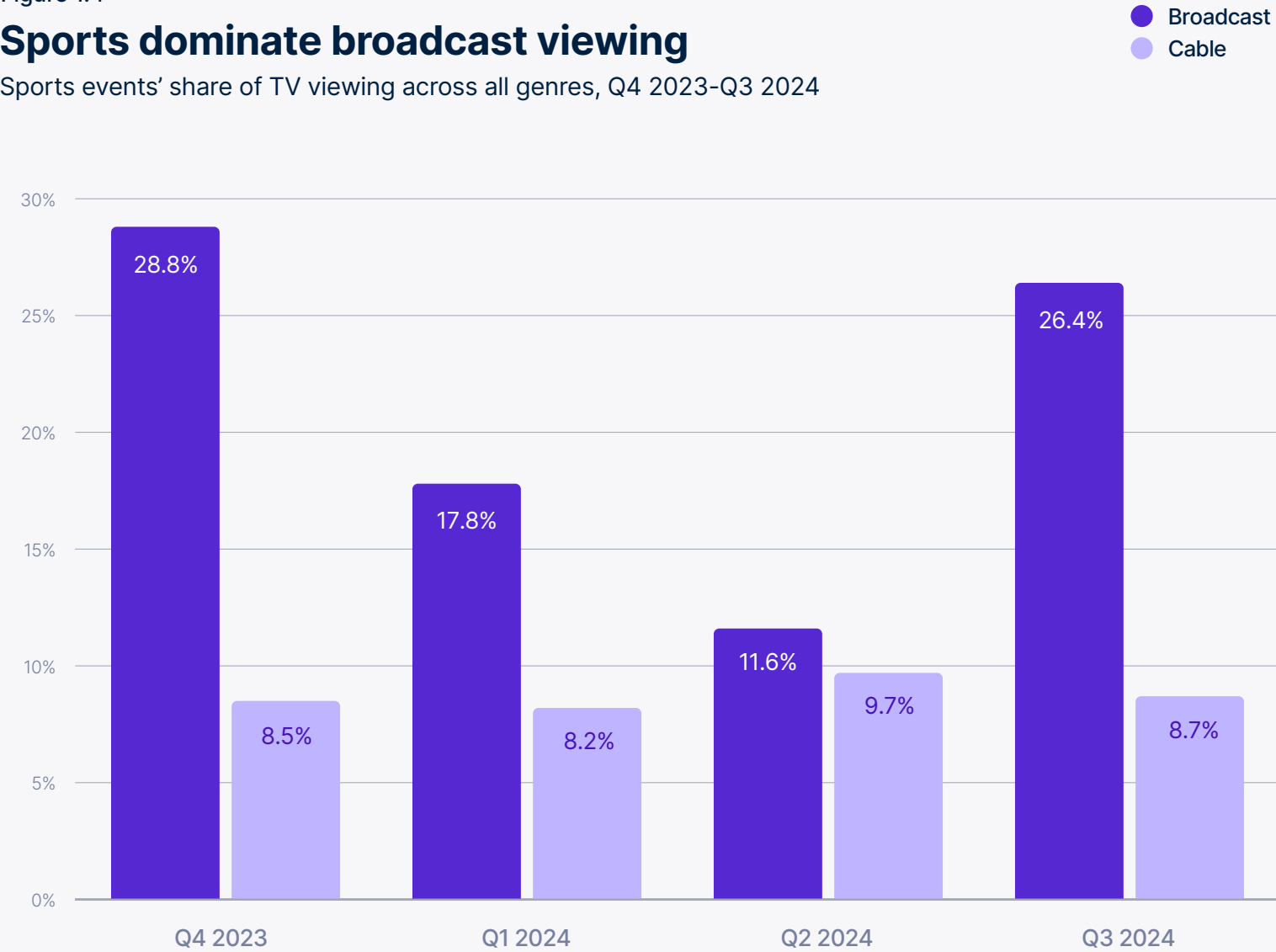
Over the last year, we’ve seen publishers make big plays for sports rights contracts on streaming. Viewership of these games is growing. Take the two NFL games hosted on Netflix on Christmas 2024. With average audiences of 27.2 million and 25.8 million, the Baltimore Ravens versus Houston Texans and Kansas City Chiefs versus Pittsburgh Steelers were the most-streamed NFL games in U.S. history. However, viewership was lower than the top 10 sports programs in 2024.

With the current broadcast-heavy contracts for the NFL and NBA set to expire in 2033 and 2036, respectively, broadcast TV appears to be on solid ground.

Figure 1.4

Sports dominate broadcast viewing

Sports events’ share of TV viewing across all genres, Q4 2023-Q3 2024



Source: Nielsen National TV Ratings, Persons 2+



Key takeaways

Streaming and linear TV are not dueling forces, but two arms working together to take TV—and TV advertising—to the next level. How can the viewership trends we shared help you better optimize your plans?



For buyers

- CTV is growing, but linear TV remains a reliable way to reach audiences. Consider how Americans are watching TV across **media distributors**. The best media plans will recognize that they're **two sides of the same coin** and use one to supplement and amplify the other.
- There are a lot of ad-supported streaming platforms on the market today. When considering the best partner for you, **scale cannot be ignored, but it shouldn't be the only consideration**.
- Live sports programs continue to draw massive audiences on linear TV², but they're not cheap. Proceed if scale is important and sports offer **the right advertising context for your brand**.

For sellers

- Lean in on your linear TV assets. They remain invaluable, especially for advertisers looking to **reach engaged audiences** during live sports and news programming.
- What makes your streaming offerings unique? Advertisers want to use CTV to connect with **audiences that match their customers**. Increasingly, that match is more important than scale.
- Recognize that your advertising clients are starting to see linear TV and streaming as a single channel. Can you sell it as such and help them **measure performance consistently across platforms**?

Don't go into negotiations without the right data and insights.
See how Nielsen's comprehensive suite of cross-media solutions can help at the **end of the report.**

² A Internal Nielsen analysis shows that sports programs captured 52% of all broadcast TV media spend from Oct 2023 to Sep 2024, against 22% of viewing time.

Section 2: Changing Audiences

Are you hanging with the right cohorts?

Audiences are advancing

Advertising is all about matching brand messages with the right audiences—“hanging with the right cohorts,” Glinda would say. As TV converges, advanced audience profiles that go beyond age and gender groups can help marketers create addressable marketing strategies across platforms.

Like other digital channels, TV can offer sophisticated segmentation and targeting, [first-party data onboarding](#), direct activations, biddable private marketplaces, and precise [outcomes measurement](#). According to the IAB, [75% of all CTV transactions are already programmatic](#). But these capabilities will only help if buyers and sellers center their strategies on the people behind the screen.

So let's explore audiences in this section. How can advanced audiences help advertisers find the right media partners for their brand? The audiences spotlighted here should help spark ideas on how you can discover deeper audience insights to guide your planning.

“Behind the data, there are people in front of screens. Advanced Audience data can help you reach these people with the right message.”

Pete Doe

Nielsen's Chief Data and Research Officer



The media habits of High Earners

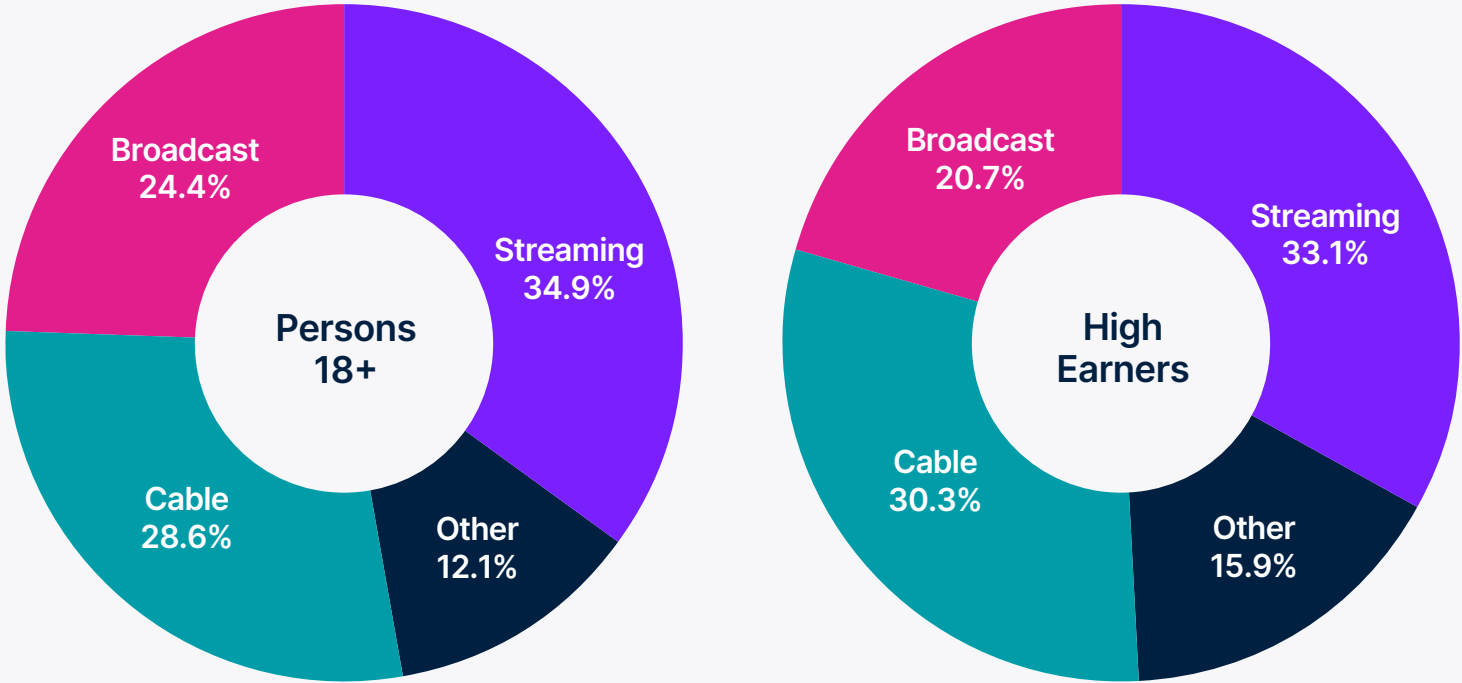
With advanced audience profiles that go beyond age and gender demographics, marketers can reach more specialized audiences in their planning.

To illustrate the benefits, let's consider High Earners. This audience includes households earning \$100,000 or more and makes up 46% of the total population. While a larger segment, they cut across all age, gender and race groups, so they can't be easily approximated using these traditional demographic categories.

As Figure 2.1 shows, streaming makes up the largest share of viewing for High Earners, though they trail U.S. adults overall. Meanwhile, High Earners over index all U.S. adults in their shares of cable (106) and other viewing (131).

Other viewing includes, among other things, niche platforms, audio streaming, gaming and DVD playback device use—many of which require subscriptions at a cost. Advertisers should look into paid-for programming, like cable, to reach these high-income consumers.

Figure 2.1
Share of TV time for High Earners compared to the general adult population
September 2024



Advanced Audience: High Earners (U.S. Households with income above \$100k)
Note: The analysis includes all streaming viewing minutes, not just those supported by advertising.
Source: Nielsen National TV Ratings augmented by Streaming Platform Ratings, September 2024



Representation matters

Measurement of real people amplified by large datasets is critical to check our assumptions and lead with the facts.

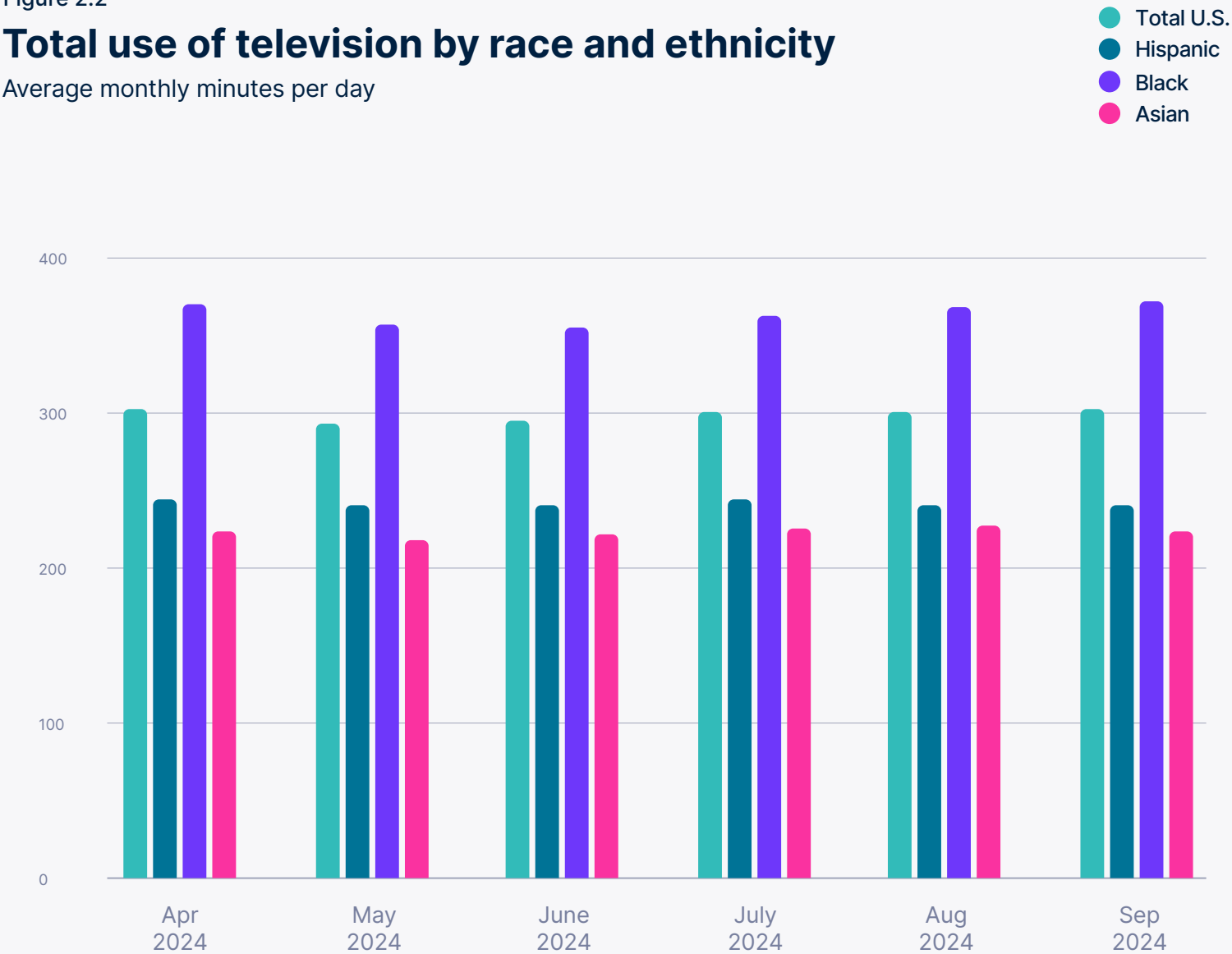
Nielsen has included Black, Hispanic and Asian American audiences in its media measurement for decades and is uniquely positioned to help brands understand how these diverse audience segments spend time with media.

To better understand the nuances of advanced audiences, we looked at total use of TV in the in the second and third quarter of 2024 by race and ethnicity.

Consider [Asian Americans](#). With a median household income over \$100,000, many in this segment could also be High Earners. But adults in this segment spend considerably less time with TV, including streaming, on the days they watch, compared to U.S. adults overall. In fact, they spent an hour and 18 minutes less in September 2024.

It's important for marketers to have access to the unique media habits of this audience—and other diverse audience segments—to ensure their plans reach and resonate.

Figure 2.2
Total use of television by race and ethnicity
Average monthly minutes per day



Advanced Audience: Asian Americans, Black Americans, Hispanic Americans (Persons 18+)
Source: Nielsen National TV Ratings, Persons 18-99, April-September 2024

The media habits of New Moms and buyers of a diaper brand

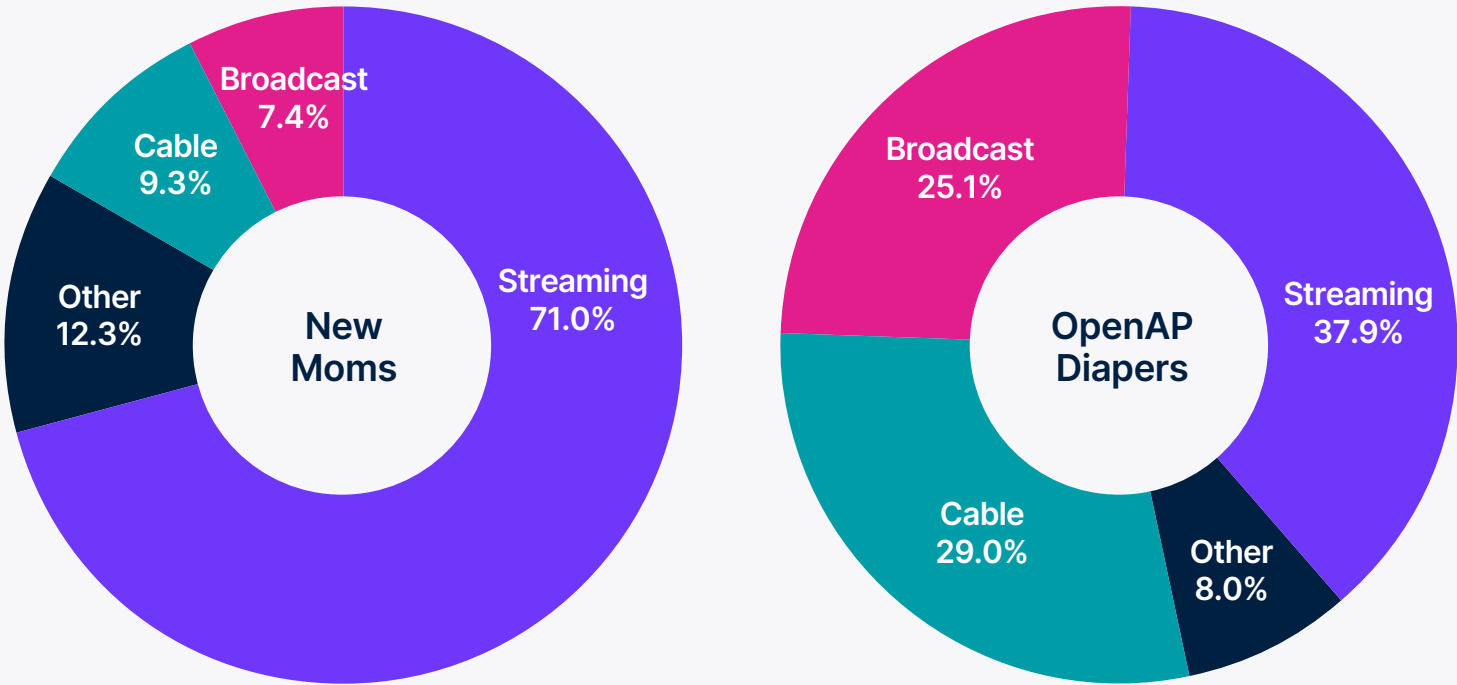
To better understand the power of advanced audiences, we looked at the viewing habits of an audience segment, New Moms, and buyers of a specific diaper brand, with data provided by OpenAP.

In our [On-Target Report](#) published last year, we first explored New Moms’ media habits. These women 18-44 with a child under 2 are heavy streamers, spending 71% of their total TV time with streaming (compared to 35% of all U.S. adults) in September 2024.

When we compare their habits to those of the OpenAP Diaper Buyers’ segment, we see some unique differences. Streaming makes up a larger share of OpenAP Diaper Buyers’ media time compared to all U.S. adults, but significantly less than New Moms.

While there is likely some overlap between OpenAP Diaper Buyers and New Moms, buyers of a diaper brand can span ages and genders. Unlike New Moms, OpenAP Diaper Buyers could include a dad shopping for their child or a grandparent pitching in. As a result, media habits will differ between the two groups.

Figure 2.3
Share of TV time for New Moms and OpenAP Diaper Buyers
September 2024



Advanced Audience: New Moms (women 18-44 with a child under 2);
OpenAP Diaper segment (buyers of a specific diaper brand based on data provided by OpenAP)
Note: The analysis includes all streaming viewing minutes, not just those supported by advertising.
Source: Nielsen National TV Ratings augmented by Streaming Platform Ratings, September 2024



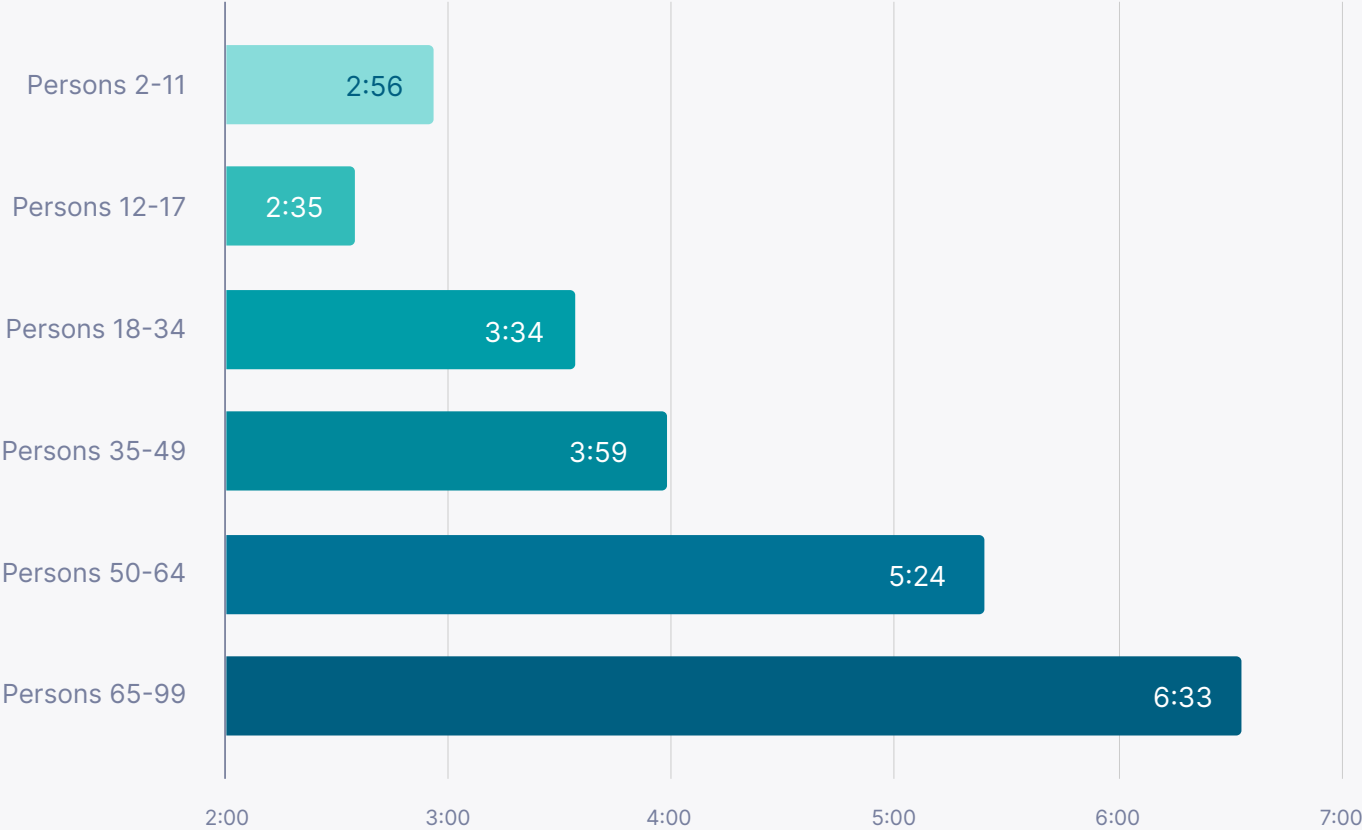
Age and gender remain foundational

As we saw with New Moms and OpenAP Diaper Buyers, age and gender remain valuable ways to segment audiences to better understand nuances in media habits.

While New Moms spend a significantly larger share of their total TV time with streaming compared to the total population, their age bracket watches significantly less TV than older viewers. In September 2024, U.S. viewers 18-49 spent an average of 3 hours and 47 minutes with TV, including streaming, on the days they watched—about an hour and a half less than viewers 50-64.

As marketers work to incorporate more specific audience profiles into their plans, age and gender remain foundational.

Figure 2.4
Daily time with TV per day used by age
Hours: Minutes, September 2024



Source: Nielsen National TV Ratings, Persons 2+, September 2024



Key takeaways

Traditional audience strategies are evolving. How can the audience trends we highlighted help you build advanced audiences profiles for your customers?



For buyers

- Start collaborating with your media partners to reach advanced audiences that **match your targets** and can help you **improve business outcomes**.
- Never stop **checking your assumptions** about your audiences. While New Moms might buy a lot of diapers, a brand-specific diaper segment can have a more diverse group of buyers. Race, ethnicity, age and gender are all factors to consider as you define your audience segments.
- Ask for **transparent, deduplicated, cross-media measurement** from your media partners to help you see the big picture.

For sellers

- Understand the overlap between your linear TV and CTV audiences. CTV isn't a mere extension of your linear TV business. It's an opportunity for you to **develop a portfolio of advanced audiences** that can help you stand out from competitors—and command higher CPMs in the process.
- Advertisers want to collaborate with you to meet their business objectives. Media buying isn't just about raw impressions anymore. Take the time to **understand their needs** and take a vested interest in their success.
- Help your clients manage the complexities of today's advertising ecosystem. Provide them with **seamless ad tech integrations** and a **comprehensive view of their campaign performance**.

Nielsen can help you transition from age and gender planning to advanced audiences. See how at the [end of the report](#).

Section 3: Changing Ecosystem

Standing out in a cluttered advertising world



Advertising is complex

TV doesn't exist in a vacuum. Consumers spend between 9 and 10 hours a day with media, depending on the season, and only half of that time is with TV. Advertisers are not just looking to promote their brands on TV, but build exposure across all channels—and do so in a way that's cohesive and well coordinated.

To place their TV transactions in the right context, TV buyers and sellers need to stay on top of major trends affecting not just TV but digital advertising too—like new ad tech developments and the rise of retail media. They also need to monitor macroeconomic conditions and keep a close eye on what their peers are doing. Are they confident in the future? Are they spending more, hedging their bets, or battenning down the hatches?

Let's review some of those trends in this third and final section.

“With rising ad spend and an evolving media landscape, strong competitive intelligence is now essential for staying ahead and making data-driven decisions.”

Akhil Parekh

Nielsen's Chief Solutions Officer for Digital Products

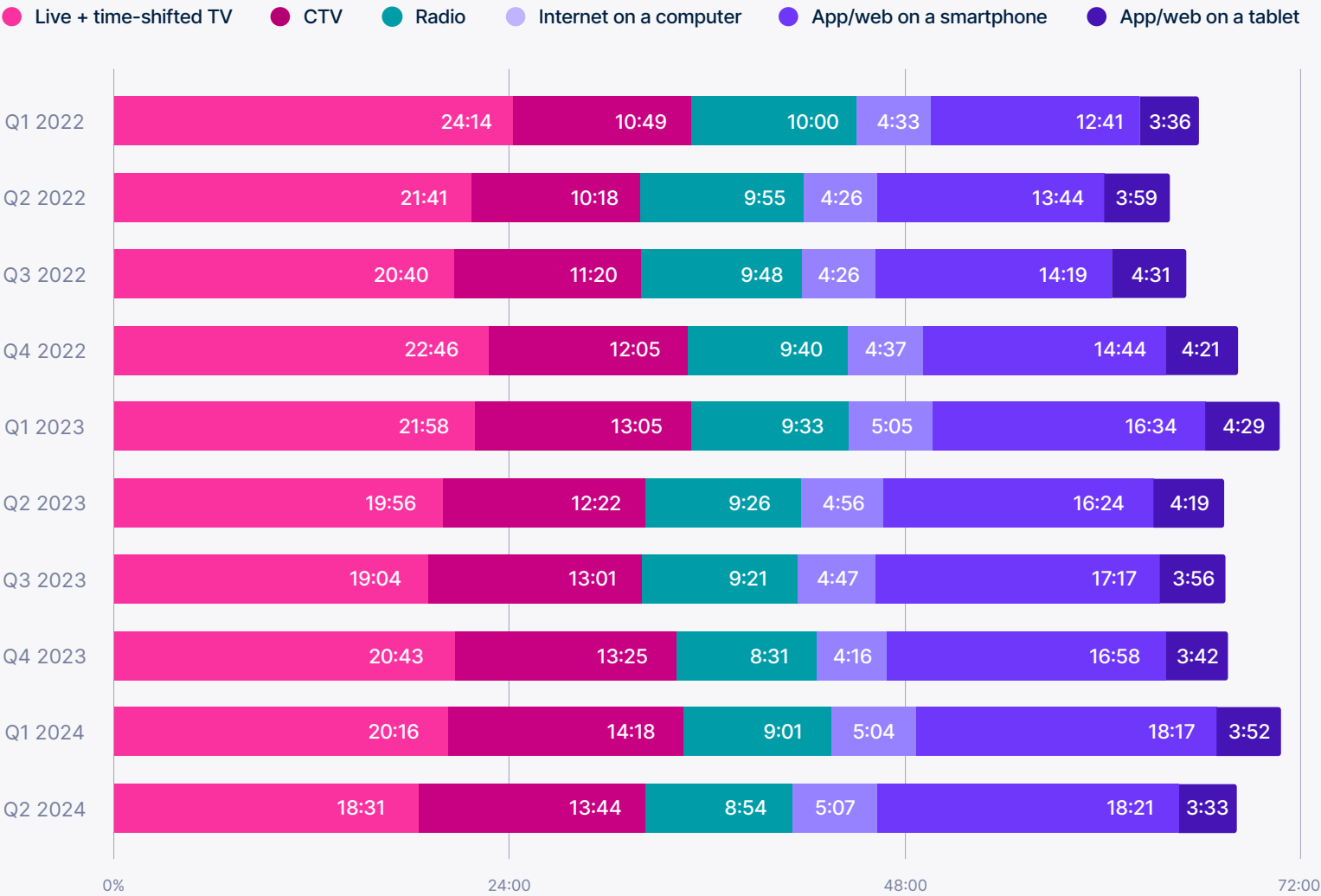


For today's advertisers, TV is only half of the equation

There are only so many hours in a day, but the time we spend with media continues to grow year after year. Figure 3.1 shows that in the first quarter of 2024, Americans spent over 20 hours a week with linear TV, 14 hours with CTV, 9 hours with radio and 27 hours on digital channels (two-thirds of which on a smartphone). All combined, that was a staggering 70 hours a week—or 10 hours a day.

The fastest growing activity has been smartphone usage, gaining over 44% in a two-year span, but it hasn't come at TV's expense. As a percentage of total media time, TV (linear and streaming combined) has held relatively steady, from 50% in the second quarter of 2022 to 48% in second-quarter 2023, and 47% in second-quarter 2024.

Figure 3.1
The time we spend with media
US, adults 18+, weekly time, hours : minutes



Source: Nielsen National TV Ratings, Persons 2+



Retail media is catching up to the hype

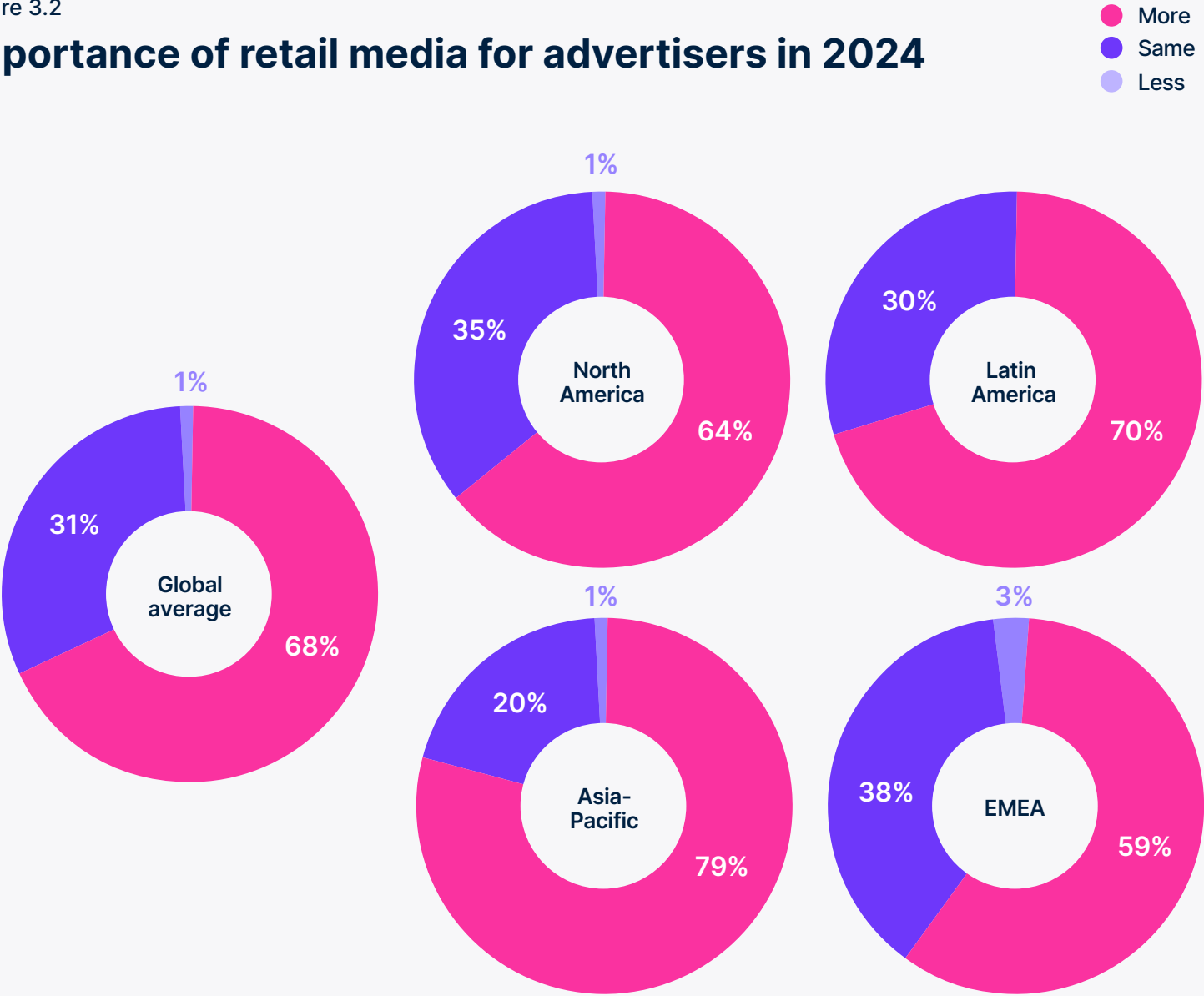
One of today's most exciting digital channels is **retail media**. With onsite and offsite targeting capabilities, enticing lookalike audiences defined by shopping behavior, and the promise of closed-loop measurement, it's an **intoxicating value proposition** for brands looking to reach their customers at or near the point of purchase.

Retail media started with retailers (like Amazon, Walmart and Kroger) but has now expanded to many other industries (like travel and financial services). As figure 3.2 illustrates, most marketers around the world see it as a crucial piece of their media mix going forward, and its intersection with CTV is already producing breakthrough innovations like shoppable TV ads and connected second-screen experiences.

But siloed measurement and a crowded marketplace are already making it hard to track investments. Without independent, third-party measurement of retail media networks, advertisers will struggle to gauge how effective their campaigns are in the context of their larger media plans.

Figure 3.2

Importance of retail media for advertisers in 2024



Read as: 68% of global marketers say retail media is more important to their media strategies in 2024 than a year ago.
Source: 2024 Nielsen Global Annual Marketer Survey

Growth in total media spend is uneven across categories

When we surveyed U.S. marketers at the end of 2023, 70% were feeling optimistic about the year ahead and planning to increase their media budgets in 2024 (especially on digital channels like paid search, retail media and paid social).³

But not all product categories shared that enthusiasm, it turns out. As of September 2024, only half (51%) of the 2,311 product categories we’re monitoring with Nielsen Ad Intel showed an increase in media spending. With half going up and half going down, overall media spend barely budged year over year (+1%).

Understanding the trends in your industry are critical. Among product categories with at least \$1 billion in media spend this year, insurance (+50%), autos (+43%) and telecom (+43%) had the largest budget increases, while online travel (-35%), apparel retailers (-26%) and business services (-19%) declined the most.

³ Nielsen 2024 Annual Marketing Report: Maximizing ROI in a fragmented world

Figure 3.3
Total U.S. media spend in 2023 and 2024 for 2,311 product categories



Source: Nielsen Ad Intel



Key takeaways

The advertising landscape is more complex than ever.
How can the trends we highlighted help you win share in today's crowded marketplace?



For buyers

- TV is not a standalone channel anymore. You should build audiences, analyze strategic opportunities and set objectives across all channels. Planning TV alongside other channels, at equal footing with digital and in line with your campaign objectives, will help you **get the most value out of your investments**.
- As the retail media market fragments, ensure you get what you pay for across siloed platforms. Ask partners to show success with **independent third-party measurement**.
- **Keep an eye on your competitors' media activity**. This will tell you what industry trends you should jump on and where your peers are missing the boat.

For sellers

- TV commands half of people's media time but a much smaller share of advertising revenues. It's not because TV is not an effective channel. Advertisers need **comparable metrics** to make sense of TV's performance alongside other channels. Help them bridge that gap and see the value you offer firsthand.
- Provide clients with the tools they need to evaluate your audiences and use their **first-party data** to target consumers on your platforms.
- Retail media is becoming a critical piece of the puzzle for advertisers. Make it happen for them by **connecting the dots between top media networks and your CTV platforms**.

Nielsen has the tools and expertise to help you see through the clutter and outsmart your competitors.
See how on **the next page**.

How Nielsen can help

With data you can trust, we offer a range of tools and services to help you understand how consumers spend time with media, so you feel confident in your media planning and drive measurable results.



Unlock cross-media marketing

Confidently build audiences, plan and measure across channels, and connect to business outcomes—all in one place. **Nielsen ONE** is your solution for enabling impactful campaigns in today's fragmented media industry.

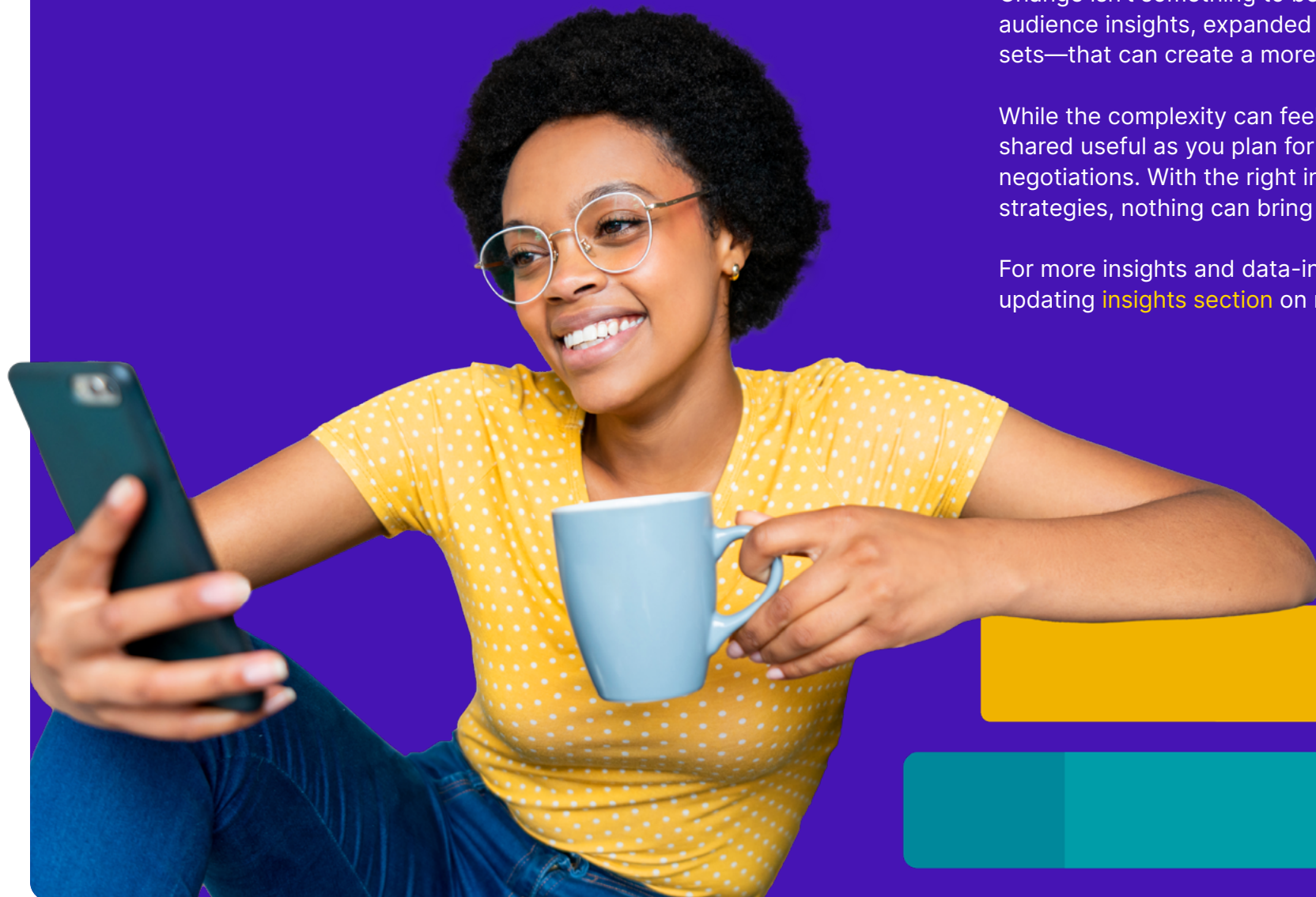
Connect with advanced audiences

Define and create custom audience segments beyond age and gender based on your first-party data and needs, enabling precise planning and measurement for the perfect target audience with **Nielsen Advanced Audiences**.

Compete in today's crowded ad landscape

Gain deep insights into the competitive media advertising landscape and discover how to differentiate your brand from competitors with **Nielsen Ad Intel**.

Conclusion



Defying gravity is about challenging the status quo—the forces that have powered advertising for decades. Yes, TV is changing, but so is the rest of the media universe. As a result, advertisers' expectations are shifting across all platforms.

Change isn't something to be afraid of. It's unlocking new opportunities—deeper audience insights, expanded programmatic capabilities and robust first-party data sets—that can create a more effective advertising ecosystem for buyers and sellers.

While the complexity can feel daunting, we hope that you'll find the analyses we shared useful as you plan for the year ahead and head into Upfront/NewFront negotiations. With the right insights, data and tools to support your marketing strategies, nothing can bring you down.

For more insights and data-informed recommendations, explore the constantly updating [insights section](#) on [nielsen.com](#).

About Nielsen

Nielsen is a global leader in audience measurement, data and analytics. Through our understanding of people and their behaviors across all channels and platforms, we empower our clients with independent and actionable intelligence so they can connect and engage with their global audiences—now and into the future. Learn more at www.nielsen.com and connect with us on social media (X, LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram).