Nielsen Hits Back After VAB Says Big Data + Panel Has Gone 'Worst-Case-Scenario'

The ad industry won't get a Silent Night ahead of the holidays, as Nielsen and the VAB go toe-to-toe over big data + panel.

Today, the Video Advertising Bureau (VAB), an organization representing the interests of the TV and premium video industry, released a new report calling Nielsen's big data + panel (BD+P) product "unstable, inconsistent, and destabilizing." Meanwhile, Nielsen says the analysis is "seriously flawed and manipulated."

What VAB says…

According to the VAB, its report on audience data from Sept. 15 to Oct. 12, which spans 33 networks across broadcast, Spanish-language, and cable, found "severe variability" between Nielsen's big data + panel – the offering the company endorses for use as a currency – and its panel only (PO) data, which was the previous industry standard.

Among the findings, the VAB said 45% to 58% of total hours had over a 20% audience variance on big data + panel vs. panel-only in several key buying demographics. In addition, between 16% and 40% of hours with NFL games had double-digit audience variances, which VAB said could mean the loss of hundreds of thousands of viewers in demos.

VAB president and CEO Sean Cunningham said the offering has "already gone to worst case scenario on early returns."

“There is deep instability on the big volume trading demos of 25-54, 18-49, and 18-34, as audience guarantees were set on a systemically defective BD+P foundation that is now showing pervasive audience volatility across the 33 networks we analyzed. It appears nobody was spared, not even the live NFL games,” Cunningham said.

What Nielsen says…

A Nielsen spokesperson called the VAB report “seriously flawed and manipulated.”

“From what we have seen, the VAB incorrectly pulled our data, and the bureau does not know how to do a proper ratings analysis,” the spokesperson said. “For example, they pulled data for live sports without accounting for the same games airing in different time zones across the U.S. The VAB is wasting the time and money of its members.”

Nielsen ran its own report over the same dates (Sept. 15 to Oct. 12) using live + same day program data and said that more than 70 networks showed gains in that time range, comparing big data + panel to panel-only data. Similar trends hold across other demos, according to the findings.

How things stand with currency…

Nielsen has had issues with its big data + panel product stemming back to the latest upfront, with inconsistencies and changes in methodology leading to extensive delays in advertising negotiations. Speaking anonymously, one prominent buyer told ADWEEK the Nielsen situation was “ a shit show.”

However, several media buyers also told ADWEEK that competitors such as VideoAmp haven’t done enough to supplant Nielsen as the dominant currency, so the big data + panel product would be the industry’s go-to offering moving forward.

Nielsen has also acknowledged its issues with big data + panel

and noted it’s working to improve the offering.

“A currency change is much different than a data change,” Nielsen CEO Karthik Rao told ADWEEK at Cannes Lions in June. “It’s a workflow change. It’s a work process change.”

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