

***HUFFPOST***

# **Why Brands Belong in News.**

**Why HuffPost.**

**Why News.**

**Why Now.**

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What the industry built to protect brands,  
and what it accidentally kept them from.

A HuffPost Strategic Analysis, 2026.

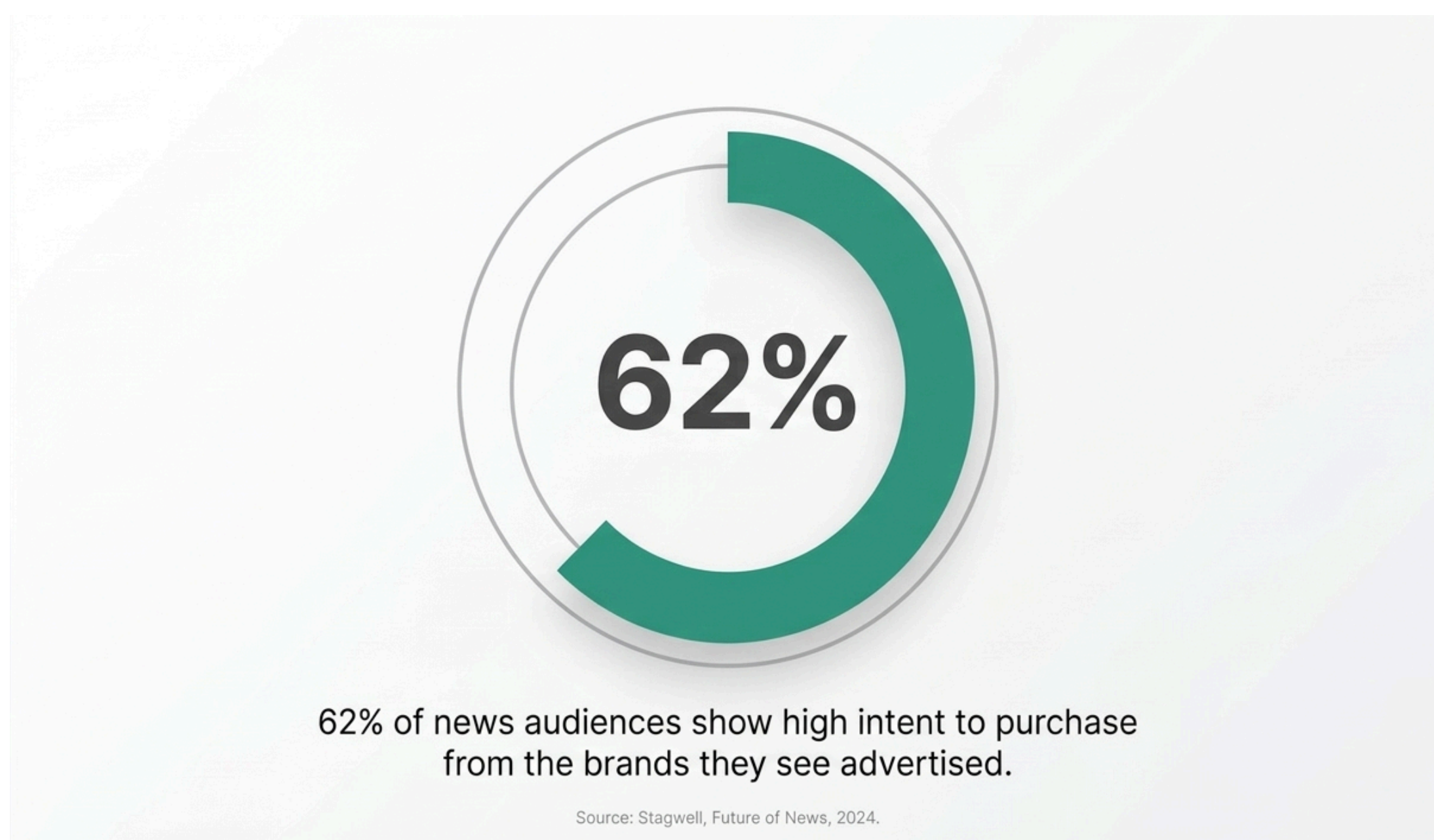
## THE MISUNDERSTANDING

### **Brand safety protected brands from things that genuinely deserved to be avoided.**

The internet was filled with content that had no business being near a brand. Misinformation. Outrage bait. Pages built to generate clicks, not meaning. The industry responded by building walls, blocklists, category exclusions, and verification tools.

But the filters were blunt. Safety parameters began to overreach, and soon, even objective news was categorized as 'harmful'.

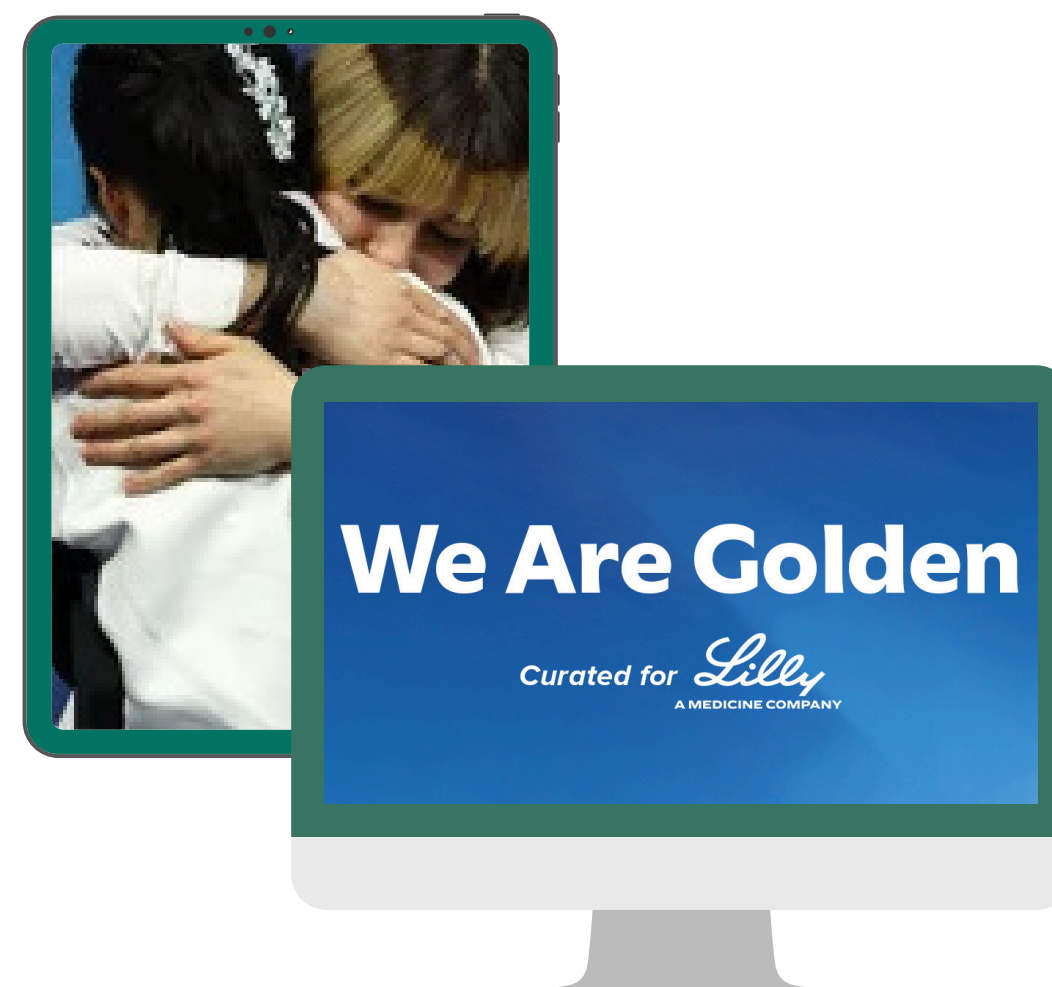
Brand safety was built to *protect* brands from harmful content. But somewhere along the way, it started protecting brands from **credibility**.



**The question worth sitting with is not whether news is safe. It is what the context does to a reader before your ad even loads.**

## THE MECHANISM

When people believe where they are, they believe what they see. Always.



Nobody sits down at a news site thinking 'I'm open to advertising.' They sit down because something is happening in the world, and they want to understand it, which is what makes the environment valuable. **Trust** does something enjoyment and agreement never will. Trust is the reason anyone does anything with information.

There is a measurable difference between borrowed attention and *chosen* attention. The average attention span on an Instagram post is 0.4-2.5 seconds. Facebook reported video attention at approximately 2 seconds. **Brands only receive a glance, no consideration.**

[\(Ethan Hilman, ResearchGate, October 14, 2024.\)](#)

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# 84%

of consumers approach a brand positively when its ad appears next to content they trust. Not content they enjoyed or agreed with.

[\(IAB News Trust Halo Report\)](#)

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Every media plan asks whether the environment is safe.  
Almost no one asks whether the reader believes in it.  
Belief is the only thing that makes an ad mean something.

## WHERE THE ATTENTION ACTUALLY IS

# The news audience is not shrinking. It is intensifying.

There is a common assumption that digital news readership is fading. The data says otherwise. Direct news consumers — those who seek out news platforms specifically rather than discovering it via social media — have grown from **11.1%** to **13.8%** of the total U.S. adult population in a single year. That is approximately 7.2 million additional people choosing to read more deeply, more regularly, and with greater intent.

Nearly **60%** of this group reports following the news more closely than they did a year ago.

[\(Stagwell, Future of News, 2024\)](#)

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# 25%

of all Americans identify as ‘news junkies’: affluent, high net worth, with measurably greater purchasing power than the general population.

[\(Stagwell, Future of News, 2024\)](#)

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The question was never whether the news audiences were valuable. It was whether the industry's tools were sophisticated enough to find them.

## WHAT MEDIA PLANS ARE MISSING

# The tool was built in 2015. The plan is still running in 2026.

Keyword blocklists are ghosts in the machine. They were designed to catch harmful terms. In practice, they catch everything around those terms, too.

### Taylor Swift Spills Tea On Rerecording, Getting Canceled In Time Person Of The Year Profile

"Make no mistake — my career was taken away from me."

By Paige Skinner

Dec 6, 2023, 01:48 PM EST



*When Time named Taylor Swift as the Person of the Year and published a piece on the “war on feminism,” advertisers missed the placement entirely. The word “war” was **blocked**.*

[\(When Brands Block the News, Journalism Takes A Hit\)](#)

81% of Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) survey respondents agreed that advertising on responsible news journalism platforms positively impacts an advertiser's brand.

Media Intelligence doesn't ask: “Is this domain safe?”

It asks: “Where is the reader's head when your ad appears?”

## THE AD ENVIRONMENT DOES HALF THE WORK

# Your ad does the other half.

Most ad measurement focuses on the ad; very little on what the reader was doing before the ad appeared. That gap is where most campaign performance is actually won or lost.

*A 2025 randomized eye-tracking study published in the Journal of Marketing Research found that heightened attention to news articles creates measurable spillover attention to the ads on the same page, directly increasing both brand recall and purchase probability.*

Context matters as much as language. When someone is reading about rising rent, student debt relief, parenting burnout, or economic uncertainty, they are thinking about their own lives. Their attention has weight to it. It is personal.

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# 63%

of U.S. consumers hold brands directly accountable for where their ads appear. 52% say their perception of a brand drops after seeing it in a low-quality environment. 62% say they would stop buying from that brand entirely.

[\(The IAS Ripple Effect Study\)](#)

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**Ads get seen everywhere. They get remembered almost nowhere. The ones that stick were always standing next to something that mattered.**

## A FINAL LENS

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# The environment has always done the work your creative couldn't.

Every decision in a media plan reflects a theory about where attention lives and what it is worth. Most of those decisions were built for a different era.

*But the research moved. The audience moved. The understanding of what context does to a reader, and to a brand, moved.*

A growing number of American adults are reading more closely, following more deliberately, and spending more meaningfully across the categories advertisers target hardest.

They were *never* hard to find.

There is one publisher where these readers have been showing up *every single day* for twenty years.

***YOU ALREADY KNOW THE NAME.***

*(We don't just place ads; we build trust with context and credibility.)*

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