



RESEARCH INITIATIVES

WHEN MEDIA BECOMES COMMERCE: MEASURING THE IMPACT OF SHOPPABLE ADVERTISING

BY THE ARF ATTRIBUTION WORKING GROUP OF
THE CROSS-PLATFORM MEASUREMENT COUNCIL

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Principal Author: **Chip Godfrey**
(J.D. Power, Team Lead of the Shoppable Ads Team)

ARF ATTRIBUTION WORKING GROUP CURRENT AND FORMER MEMBERS

Sunil Soman (Co-Chair) BLUE MOON MEDIA RESEARCH	Michael Ryan* ROKU
Alyson Sprague (Co-Chair) SAMBA TV	Farrah Singh MEDIAHUB
Chip Godfrey* J.D. POWER	Jeremy Slick OPTIMINE
Ankur Jain* AMAZON	Aaron Slotnick TRANSUNION
Jeremy Jones* KANTAR	Dana Strype* PARAMOUNT
Ajete Junuzi ISPOT	Rachel Sweet ST. JUDE
Ross Link MARKETING ATTRIBUTION	Steve Altieri IPSOS (Young Pros Officer)
Jeremy Lyons UM WORLDWIDE	Matthew Yoli TRANSUNION (Young Pros Officer)
Jared Oliver* OCEAN SPRAY	

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* *Member, Shoppable Ads Team*

The ARF Cross-Platform Measurement Council's Attribution Working Group has been interested in how various new advertising channels and formats are being measured. In late 2024, they added questions to a proprietary omnibus survey of agency and advertiser executives conducted by Advertiser Perceptions on degrees of interest in a range of new channels and formats. Based on the results, the Working Group selected five channels/formats to investigate further through interviews with knowledgeable industry practitioners. One of these formats was "Shoppable Ads."

This report is based on a set of nine In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) conducted by members of the Attribution Working Group on how leading organizations are working with and thinking about "Shoppable Advertising." The organizations span social media platforms, traditional media companies, retailers and consumer brands.

WHAT ARE SHOPPABLE ADS?

The Working Group's research found that there is no clear consensus defining Shoppable Ads. Some organizations lack an internal definition for Shoppable Ads altogether. Others consider any ad that enables commerce or moves the consumer further down the purchase funnel, including traditional (clickable) static display ads, as Shoppable Ads. For others, Shoppable means ads with some type of interactivity or that feature automatic add-to-cart functionality to remove or lower friction from the purchase process. Some companies define these as contextually relevant ads, allowing consumers to buy items visible in a TV show or social media post, whether furniture, clothing or something else. One ARF interviewee viewed Shoppable Ads as a tech-driven evolution of direct response advertising. Given this wide range of advertising products potentially labeled as

shoppable, it is critical that marketers ask for specifics and definitions when negotiating media buys with shoppable inventory included.

More advanced companies sell specific "Shoppable Ad" products or inventory with premium pricing to match the technology. These ads may offer features such as a product carousel, which allows consumers to browse multiple items within a single display, often with details like colors, shapes or sizes. Another example is ads that help consumers find where to purchase the featured product by listing retailer options and prices for both online and in-store. Smart versions use real-time data to ensure only retailers with current stock are shown and that the prices that are displayed are current.

Examples of different types of Shoppable Ads appear below.

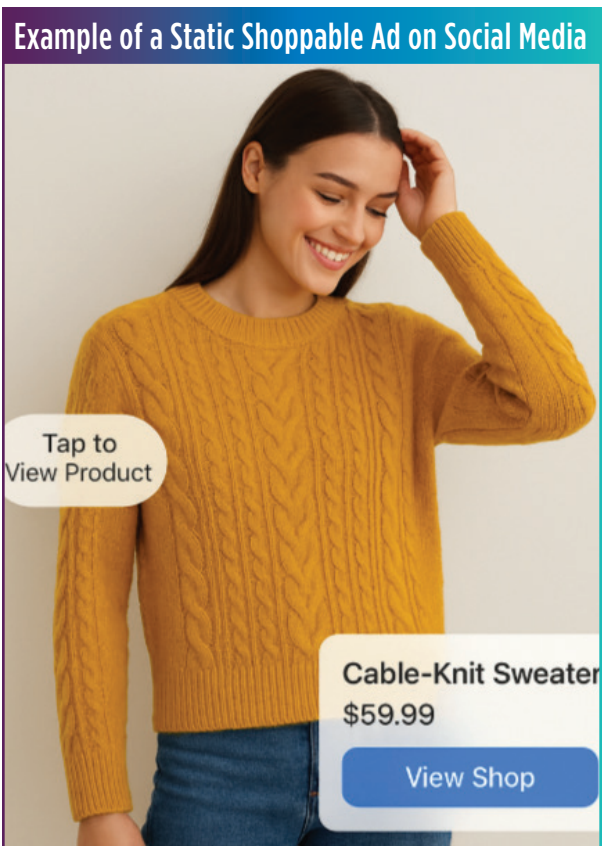


Image credit: Copilot, 2026

Example of a Shoppable Ad in Streaming Video with the Opportunity to Take Action Through a Button on Screen Selected With a Remote

SHOPPABLE AD



**WIRELESS
EARBUDS**

\$99.99



 **SEND TO PHONE**

Image credit: Copilot, 2026


Example of a Shoppable Ad with an Interactive Product Carousel

Shop Now


Scan to Learn More




Running Shoes
★★★★★
\$49.99



Leather Bag
★★★★★
\$120.00



Wireless Headphones
★★★★★
\$89.99



Smart Speaker
★★★★★
\$35.99

>

Image credit: Copilot, 2026

Example of a Shoppable Ad with Automatic Add-to-Cart Capability

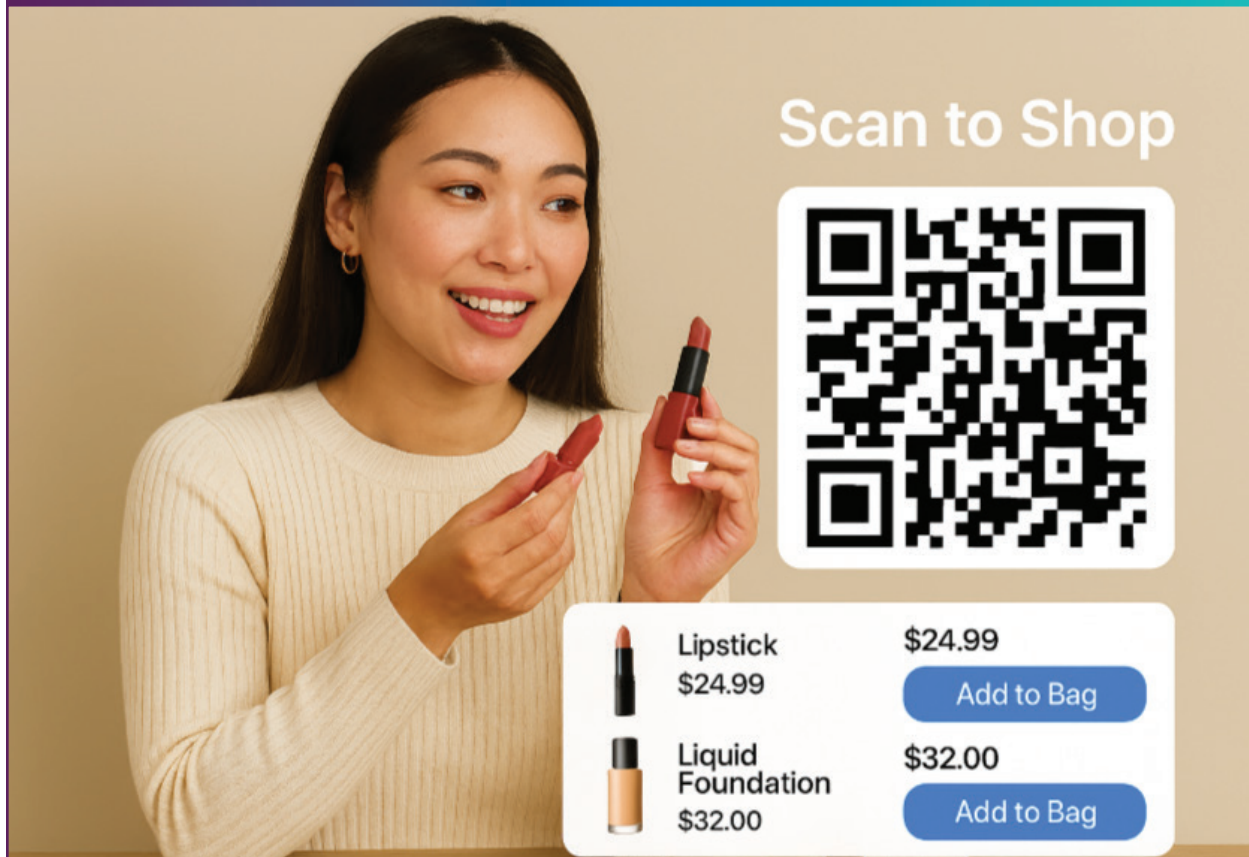


Image credit: Copilot, 2026

Regardless of its definition, the consensus is that Shoppable Advertising is growing; the question is just how much or how quickly. One platform the Working Group interviewed reported that its Shoppable Ads for retailers have contributed to a 40% year-over-year increase in outbound clicks, with clicks growing by five times over the past three years. Another platform noted that Shoppable Ad products typically deliver higher ROAS than traditional ads, sometimes significantly above \$10. On the brand side, some companies are allocating up to 10% of their performance marketing budgets to shoppable inventory. One brand described Shoppable Ads as a “hot commodity,” while a platform confirmed strong adoption of new shoppable inventory products.

Most interviewees indicated they are still in the early stages of using this tactic. While

initial results have been promising, one brand the Working Group spoke to was a bit more cautious, saying that these ad types work for specific use cases but are not always worth the investment, and it’s still such a small portion of their marketing that it is hard to measure and compare to other advertising. Nearly all the organizations the ARF spoke to were excited and positive about Shoppable Ads, though one company did feel they were not effective enough to justify their pricing, or at least that the utility was too vague compared to other options.

USE CASES

When should you use Shoppable Ads? The prevailing advice is that the use case should align with business needs. Shoppable Ad

inventory is generally more expensive than traditional inventory (one interviewee called it a “premier” product), and so, brands need to weigh campaign goals, costs/CPM, reach, audience targets, strategic fit and measurability as meaningful factors to consider in planning. One interviewee said they may align shoppable inventory with innovation products. Another said shoppable inventory is good when the client is looking to engage consumers with interactivity to drive exploration and discovery. These ads should also have strong measurability, so that they make sense for performance advertising or any context where accountability is especially high. (See section “Metrics and Measurement” for a discussion of the difficulties in measuring Shoppable Ads.) To that point, a platform respondent suggested that Shoppable Ads increasingly rely on algorithmic budget optimization and allocation, rather than format-specific budgets, to optimize spend.

Multiple interviewees noted the value of using Shoppable Ads to capitalize on seasonal campaigns. One said they recommend this inventory for upper funnel/high-reach campaigns, especially for tentpoles, seasonal ads, new product launches and for engaging new audiences. Another said they capitalize on this format when the campaign is seasonally or contextually relevant, instead of using it for everyday advertising.

METRICS AND MEASUREMENT

The Working Group consistently received similar responses from interviewees on the metrics and insights associated with Shoppable Ad campaigns. Most platforms provide copious, detailed post-campaign data and insights, and many also track information while the campaign is live. These include metrics such as impressions, CPMs, clicks, click-through rates, add-to-carts,

conversions, conversion rates, sales, average order value, purchase intent, purchase intent value, ROI/ROAS, QR code scan rates, time spent and top purchased/engaged products. Interviewees also shared a few other examples of interesting insights they might provide (as platforms) or receive (as brands). One platform interviewee mentioned that they share information with their clients about the products that are trending on their platform, enabling the advertiser to promote complementary items in their Shoppable Ads. Another interviewee shared that they provide insights on which content segments (e.g., sports, home improvement) were driving the best results.

In terms of measurability, the consensus from the interviews leaned towards such ads being as hard as or harder to measure, overall, than more established ad types, even though the quantity of available metrics tends to be high. Shoppable Ads do provide information about the metrics noted above. In fact, they create an opportunity to provide more data and detail, because they can capture the same types of metrics that digital ads already do, plus new data on ad interactions. The difficulty comes from closed-loop measurement and, in some cases, capturing conversion data. Depending on how the ad is designed, the conversion funnel often breaks when a user clicks through (such as selecting “add to cart”), which prevents closed-loop measurement and leaves advertisers without conversion data. Since products may be added to the cart across multiple retailers, the purchase data is disaggregated. And, of course, sales that occur in physical stores after ad exposure are not captured.

Brands emphasize the need for developing an API capable of aggregating data across multiple retailers, noting that it is essential for achieving true closed-loop measurement. However, challenges may continue to exist through walled gardens. One thing

that brands say would be helpful is an API that could connect to multiple retailers simultaneously and re-aggregate their data, providing closed-loop measurement across retailers. Additionally, these challenges do not resolve the broader issue of inconsistent measurement results across methodologies from marketing mix modeling (MMM), multi-touch attribution (MTA) or site analytics.

While the post-campaign period is well covered, there is some desire for more information before and during campaigns. For example, advertisers would like to know more about who the campaign will target and then how it is delivering against the target while it is in flight. Incrementality benchmarks for shoppable inventory would also be a welcome addition. One advertiser suggested that it would be helpful to have A/B testing capabilities built into Shoppable Ads inventory, such as heavy versus light

buyers, or mobile versus desktop shoppers.

Those selling Shoppable Ads talk about not just the ability of this inventory to drive outbound clicks, but also store visits and sales. Clicks and conversions (and ROAS, where available) are seen as strong proof points for this technology. These companies are still developing best-practice playbooks to share with advertisers, but for non-retail advertisers, these ads can provide new insights on add-to-cart and sometimes even conversions. Some platforms also look at the synergy impacts of combining Shoppable Ads with “sponsored product” ads and/or coupons. Platforms also say that Shoppable Ads can be very efficient for small businesses, because they can sell through social platforms and receive sales analytics, without having to invest in creating their own ecommerce sites.



THE FUTURE OF SHOPPABLE ADS

Looking ahead, the industry has high hopes for Shoppable Ads and a lot of ideas for improvements to help get the industry there. Platforms want to continue to move towards a seamless integration of content and shopping, so that shopping is as natural to the entertainment experience as pausing a video or adding a comment. Integrating directly with retail partners will facilitate this transition through frictionless checkout experiences that, ideally, don't take consumers off the platform to complete the purchase. This may even become an "always on" feature of entertainment platforms, where they get paid a commission of sales from retailers, supplemented by sponsored links. Similarly, the future will have increased adoption of visual search via AI (e.g., a consumer seeing a character wearing a sweater in a sitcom, and AI identifying stores that carry it), making it easier for consumers to purchase anything (clothing, furniture and more) that catches their eye in the content. Advertisers have an interest in using Shoppable Ads to better understand (and communicate with) consumers who are neutral or negative about their offerings so that they can improve and be responsive to their desires.

The future of measurement for Shoppable Ads will require alignment among advertisers, retailers, platforms and entertainment companies. APIs will allow for data integration and ongoing, consistent measurement. This will create full funnel, closed-loop measurement from ad exposure to conversion, regardless of the retailer, the device or the environment (app vs. web). This measurement should be always-on, involve little to no effort to get back to brands automatically, and be comparable with other ad formats. A feat that's easier to achieve would be to receive more granular, consistent data, like add-to-carts at the level



of campaign, by DMA by date by retailer. It would also be desirable to increase the ease of A/B testing to measure the incrementality of this format.

All of these capabilities could be transformative if the measurement data are automatically fed directly back into the activation machine, improving campaign results in real time by, for example, changing regional campaign investments or not promoting certain products in areas with low inventory. If the industry can get to the point where the measurement of Shoppable Ads is on par with traditional formats, and if the optimization loops described above are built, Shoppable Ads should grow rapidly and become a solid fixture in the larger media mix landscape.