

# State of the Nation

Programmatic OOH 2021

## UK white paper





## Executive summary

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**VIOOH partnered with MTM to survey 1,000 senior agency and advertising executives across the US, UK, Germany, France and Australia on their perceptions of programmatic out of home (OOH), comparisons to other media, approaches to planning and buying, and the future of programmatic OOH.**

Drawn to the flexibility offered by programmatic channels during the COVID-19 pandemic, agency and advertising executives are positive about the role programmatic OOH can play and expect to increase their investment in future.

Programmatic OOH investment is being driven by strengths in targeting, measurement and ROI, the latter increasingly important as marketing budgets come under more scrutiny. Further, programmatic OOH is seen as a truly versatile channel, able to support brand and performance goals, and executives rank it competitively against other digital channels.

As the buying audience for programmatic OOH expands, there is more work to do, with knowledge gaps and a lack of consistency in how programmatic OOH is planned and bought, which risks it being overlooked or used inefficiently.

The overall outlook is positive however, with executives planning to invest in programmatic OOH expertise and integrate this new media buying method more frequently into multi-channel campaigns, which will drive further innovation and growth.

# Programmatic OOH – The future is promising



**As we covered in our previous State of the Nation reports, programmatic has been a major theme in digital advertising over the last decade. In this new report, we see that programmatic has proved increasingly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, as advertisers continue to seek more flexibility in their marketing.**

Programmatic has continued to gain traction in out of home advertising as advertisers, agencies, DSPs and media owners embrace the digitisation and programmatic capabilities of OOH: more control and flexibility offered to budget holders, greater opportunities to complement multi-channel campaigns, and the ability to target desirable audiences at key moments.

This year's white paper, expanded to include additional markets, explores key questions about programmatic OOH and its future: How widely has it been adopted and how is it being used? How is programmatic OOH planned and bought, and how is it integrated into multi-channel campaigns? What is driving investment and what would unlock further spend?

VIOOH partnered with MTM to survey 1,000 senior executives from media agencies and brands across Australia, France, Germany, the UK and USA, and also conducted interviews with key media agency executives, to understand the industry's perceptions of programmatic OOH, how it is being used and where there are opportunities for greater adoption.

This year, we expanded the sample to include more people with a programmatic background, regardless of whether they have prior experience in OOH, to reflect how programmatic OOH is viewed by both digital and OOH buyers.

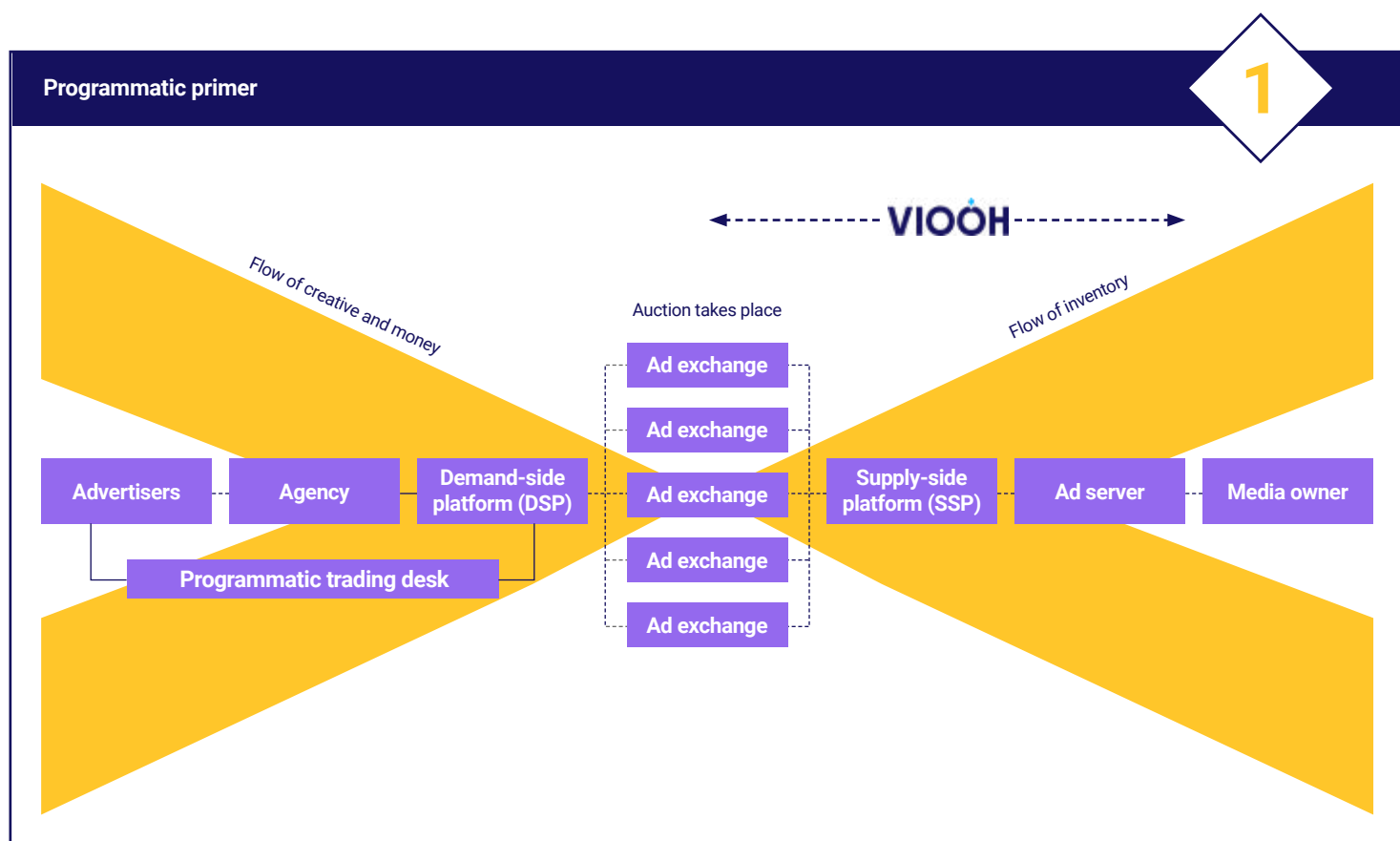
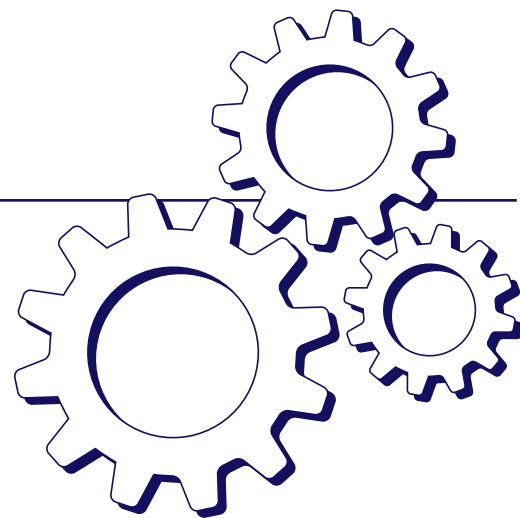
This multi-market approach provides an unparalleled perspective from five major advertising markets to understand the State of the Nation of programmatic OOH. This version focuses specifically on the UK results and looks at how the UK compares with the global averages.

# How programmatic OOH works

Firstly, what is programmatic? Simply put, it's an automated buying and selling process using various technology platforms and data to transact in real-time, enhance flexibility and reduce barriers to entry.

Programmatic OOH is a subset of digital OOH, and refers to a method of trading digital out of home inventory rather than the broader media channel definition.

For more details on programmatic technology in OOH check out our informative video ['How to buy programmatic OOH'](#).





# The state of play

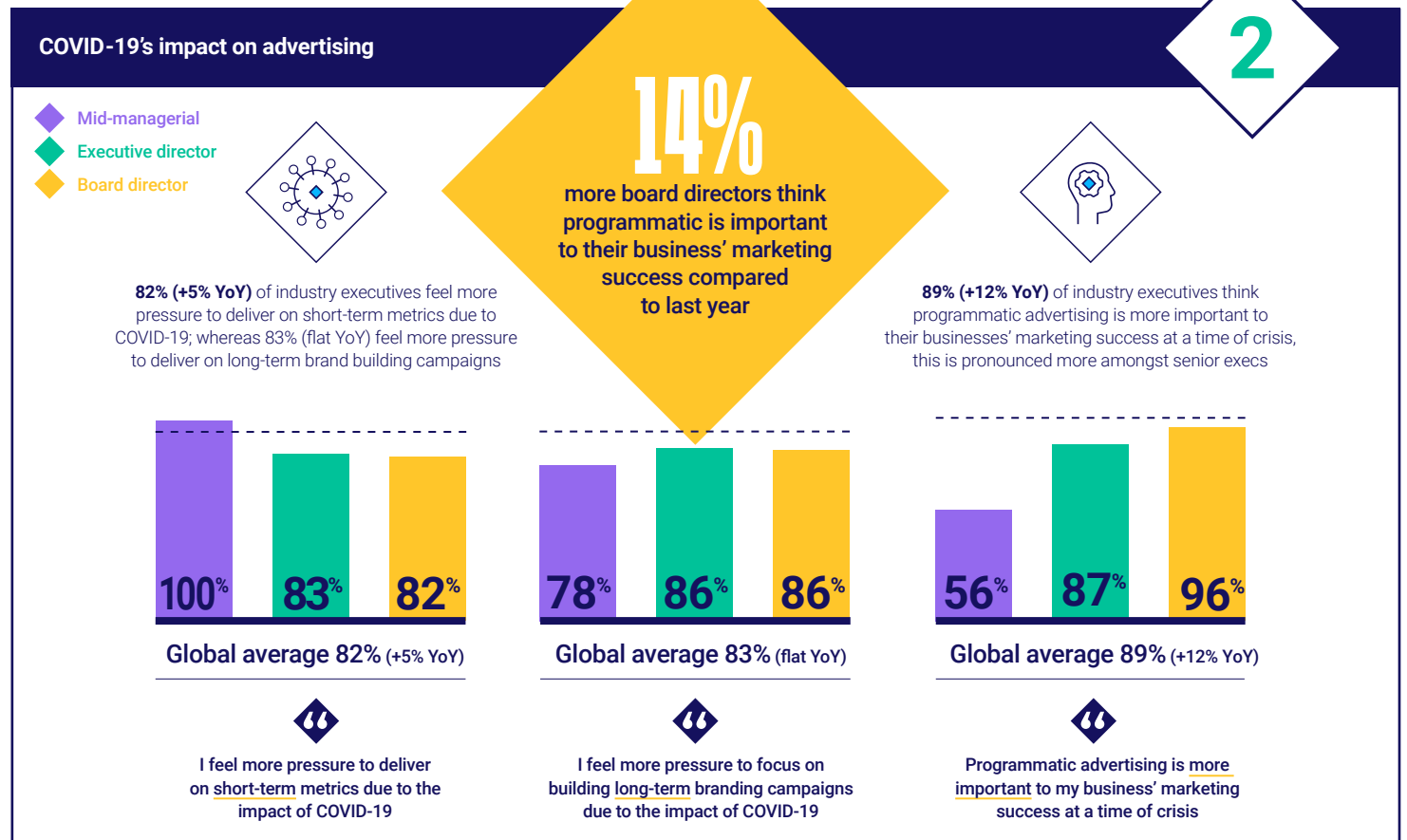
# Programmatic advertising is increasingly important following COVID

As the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in early 2020, businesses had to rapidly adapt their marketing strategies, with many cutting or reallocating budgets across brand and performance marketing. In our Q4 2020 report, executives reflected on the uncertainty around advertising in general but were positive about programmatic channels and the role they could play in the next 12 months.

They predicted correctly, with executives reporting programmatic advertising as increasingly important to their businesses in the last 12 months.

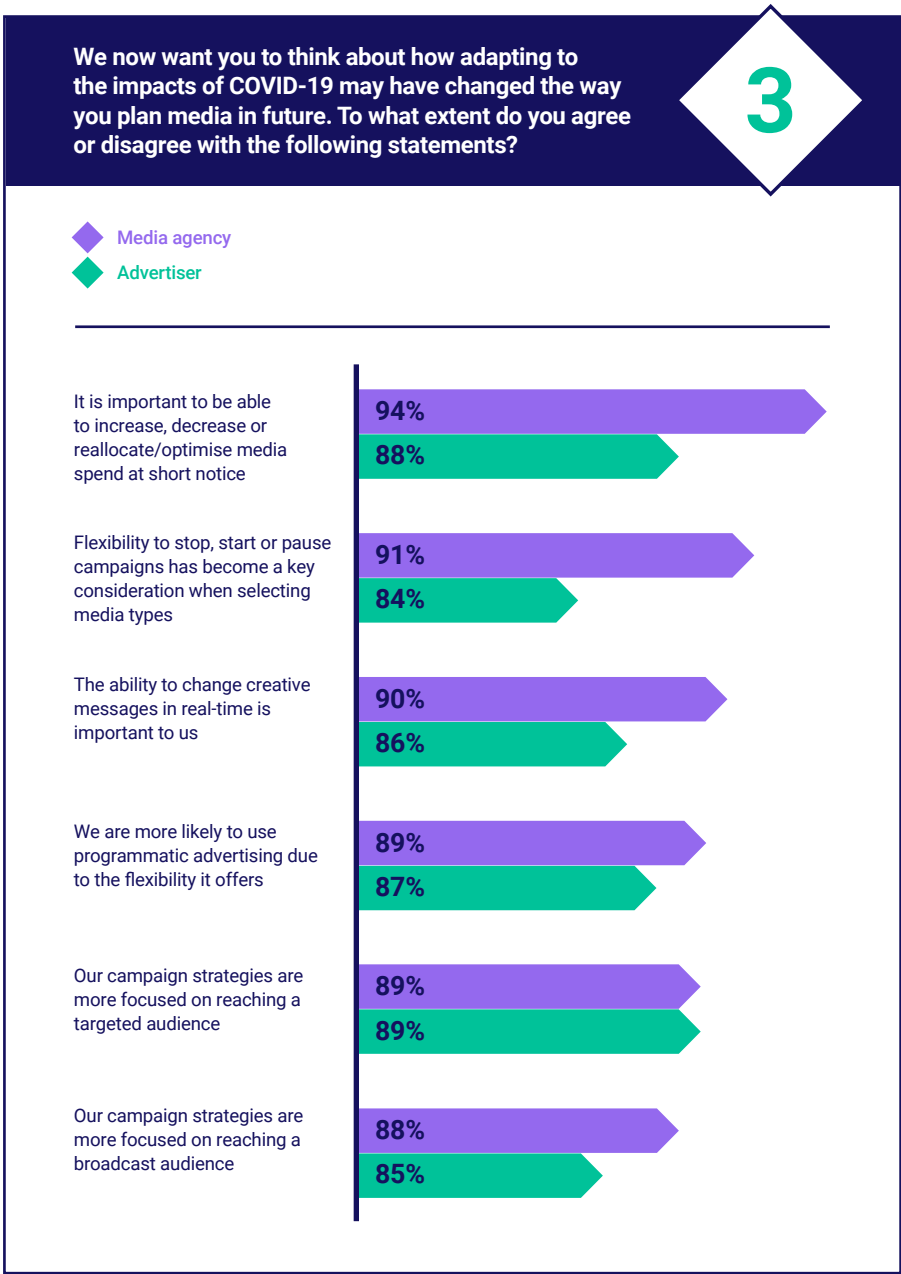
In the UK, 89% of executives see programmatic channels as more critical to their business in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, in line with the global average (89%), and up 18% compared to our 2020 UK results. This increases to 96% for UK board directors (93% global average), showing strong senior support (see Exhibit 2).

A key reason for this is a need for flexibility in planning and running advertising campaigns. Most UK executives (89% agency, 87% advertiser) agree that they are more likely to use programmatic advertising in general due to the flexibility it offers. This is slightly higher than the global averages (84% agency, 82% advertiser).



Key aspects of flexibility that drive interest include the ability to stop, start or pause campaigns, and the ability to reallocate and optimise media spend at short notice, which allows advertisers to respond to market events that are outside their control (see Exhibit 3).

A related factor that executives also value is the ability to adapt creative messages in real-time.



The UK executive we spoke to agreed that flexibility has become a major consideration and has helped accelerate programmatic OOH adoption.

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We saw [the adoption of] programmatic OOH really accelerate during the pandemic. You could be more agile, you didn't have to pay penalties if you reneged... buying programmatically took a lot of stress away from placing OOH.

Global Lead for Digital OOH, Media Agency, UK

They also predict that this behaviour will stick even as the world returns to normal.

“

People have become used to the agility that buying OOH programmatically gives you, in future if you could buy programmatically and meet your objectives then why wouldn't you.

Global Lead for Digital OOH, Media Agency, UK

# Targeting, measurement and ROI are key drivers of investment in programmatic OOH

The increasing importance of programmatic technology in general also applies to OOH media specifically. Digital OOH now has widespread adoption with 58% of UK executive respondents (compared to 62% globally) saying they had planned, bought, or placed digital OOH in the last 12 months<sup>1</sup>. Of those, 72% had traded OOH programmatically, well above the global average (61%)<sup>2</sup>.

Echoing our 2020 results, executives identified the same key reasons for investing in programmatic OOH (see Exhibit 4).

The precision offered by trigger-based buying is one of the key attributes programmatic buying offers. Importantly, these results also say that **programmatic OOH is a channel that can help deliver strong business results** (ROI) and crucially, executives are confident that they can measure and prove this. These strengths were reflected in our discussions with executives.

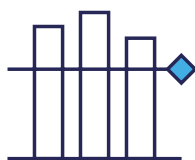
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There is a lot of precision [in buying programmatic OOH] e.g. buying on an hourly basis versus a two-week block... it gives you a lot of levers to pull to make your media spend work harder.

Global Lead for Digital OOH, Media Agency, UK

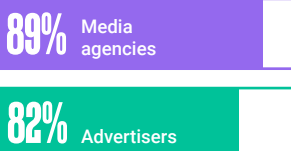
## Most important factors in determining investment in programmatic OOH

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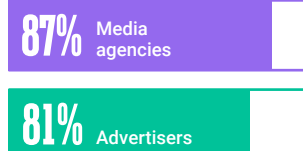
### Measurement

The ability to measure campaign performance across multiple digital channels



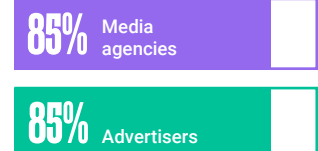
### Value

Providing value for money or effective returns on investment



### Trigger-based buying

Buying impressions based on events, news, promotions, moments in time, locations, audiences as they move, weather, and environmental conditions



<sup>1</sup>Survey question: Which of the following media have you planned, bought, or placed in the last 12 months?

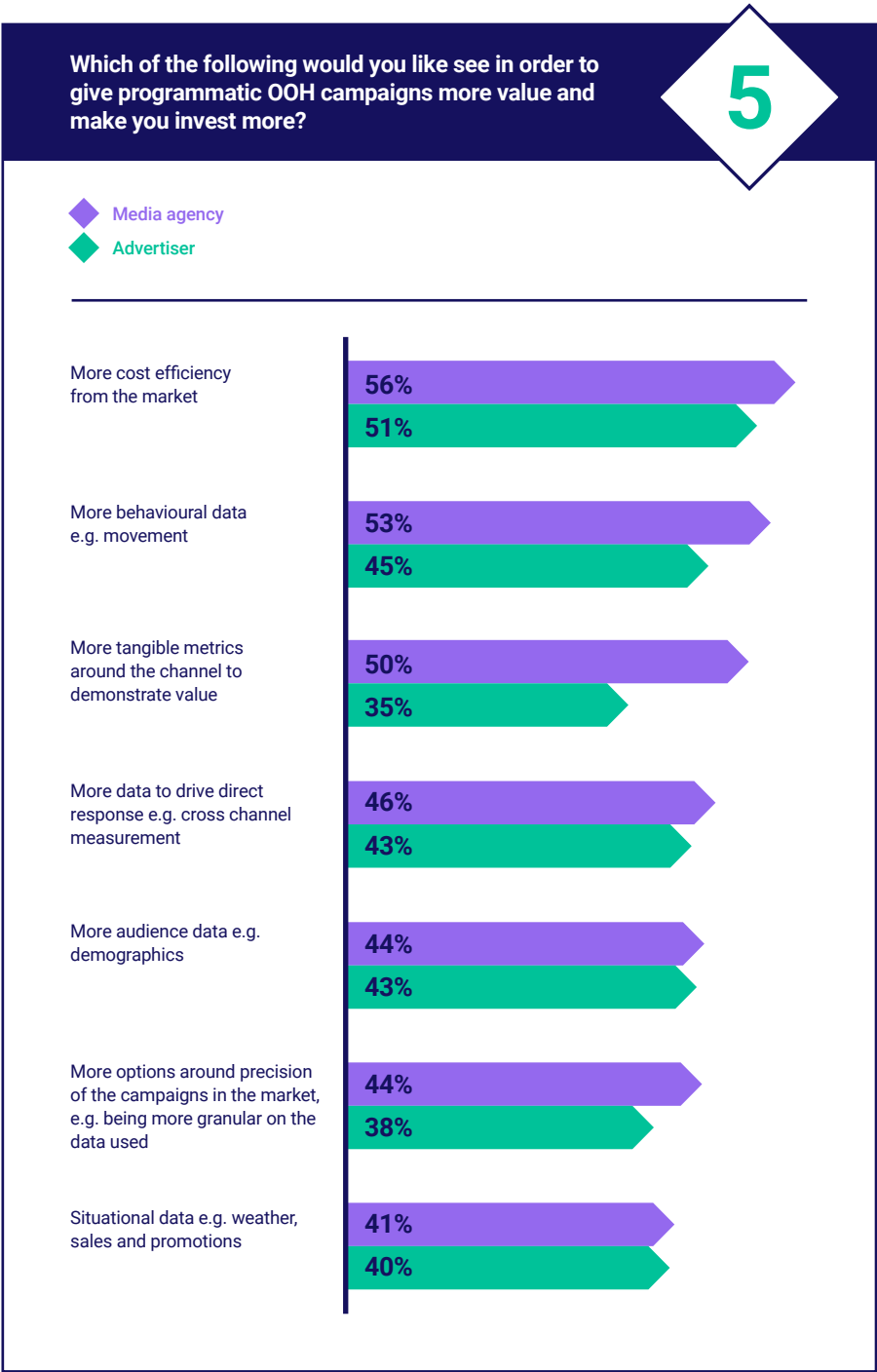
<sup>2</sup>Survey question: Now thinking about programmatic advertising, which of the following media have you placed/planned or bought programmatic advertising for in the last 12 months?

Exhibit 4 Survey question: How important are the following in determining your investment in programmatic OOH? Results shown: Top three ranked out of 14 options by those who selected 'Very important' or 'Quite important'.



Exploring what would unlock even further investment in programmatic OOH, executives pointed to cost efficiency, increased behavioural data and more tangible metrics around programmatic OOH to help prove its values - see Exhibit 5. This indicates that while positive on the value (ROI) programmatic OOH provides, executives believe there are opportunities to use more data and improve efficiency and effectiveness.

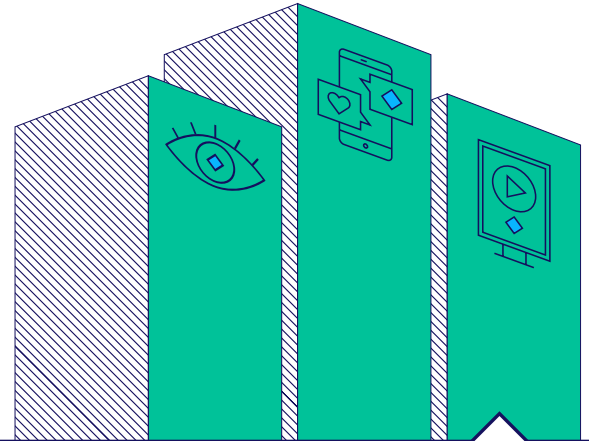
In the interview, the UK agency executive also referred to the need for a consistent supply of programmatic inventory giving them the potential to scale campaigns as and when needed.



“It’s important that there is always enough to buy programmatically, clients have the impression from other programmatic channels that there is seemingly limitless inventory and while that may not be realistic, it needs to be consistently available.”

Global Lead for Digital OOH, Media Agency, UK

# Programmatic OOH ranks highly compared with other digital channels



Programmatic OOH compares well with other digital channels, ranking in the top three on a wide range of attributes.

Perhaps most importantly, UK industry executives ranked programmatic OOH third on increasing sales, reinforcing the view that it delivers strong business results for clients.

Focusing on its capabilities, executives ranked programmatic OOH third for delivering accurate location targeting, targeting the right people at the right time, and for providing dynamic creative opportunities (see Exhibit 6).

Together, these points highlight the ability of programmatic OOH to fulfil several roles for advertisers effectively.

We will now show you a list of attributes and digital media types. Please choose any of the media you feel deliver against these attributes.

6

## Increasing sales / performance

- 1 Social media
- 2 Digital video advertising
- 3 **Programmatic digital OOH**
- 4 Digital audio
- 5 Search
- 6 In-app advertising
- 7 Display
- 8 Mobile
- 9 Connected TV

## Delivering accurate location targeting

- 1 Social media
- 2 Digital audio
- 3 **Programmatic digital OOH**
- 4 Digital video advertising
- 5 Display
- 6 Mobile
- 7 Search
- 8 In-app advertising
- 9 Connected TV

## Targeting the right people at the right time

- 1 Social media
- 2 Digital video advertising
- 3 **Programmatic digital OOH**
- 4 Digital audio
- 5 In-app advertising
- 6 Search
- 7 Display
- 8 Mobile
- 9 Connected TV

## Providing dynamic creative opportunities

- 1 Social media
- 2 Digital video advertising
- 3 **Programmatic digital OOH**
- 4 In-app advertising
- 5 Digital audio
- 6 Display
- 7 Search
- 8 Mobile
- 9 Connected TV

## Generating return on investment

- 1 Social media
- 2 Digital video advertising
- 3 Digital audio
- 4 **Programmatic digital OOH**
- 5 In-app advertising
- 6 Display
- 7 Search
- 8 Mobile
- 9 Connected TV

## Flexibility/efficiency to display when the right conditions are met

- 1 Social media
- 2 Digital video advertising
- 3 Digital audio
- 4 **Programmatic digital OOH**
- 5 In-app advertising
- 6 Mobile
- 7 Display
- 8 Search
- 9 Connected TV

## Increasing brand awareness

- 1 Social media
- 2 Digital video advertising
- 3 Digital audio
- 4 **Programmatic digital OOH**
- 5 Search
- 6 In-app advertising
- 7 Display
- 8 Mobile
- 9 Connected TV

## Triggering a positive emotional response

- 1 Social media
- 2 Digital video advertising
- 3 Digital audio
- 4 **Programmatic digital OOH**
- 5 Display
- 6 In-app advertising
- 7 Search
- 8 Mobile
- 9 Connected TV

# Programmatic OOH is seen as highly versatile

One of programmatic OOH's key strengths is its versatility – reaching broadcast and targeted audiences, and supporting both brand and performance marketing goals.

UK executives highlighted that it was key for their advertising campaigns to reach both broadcast (**88% agency, 85% advertiser**, compared with 87% agency, 82% advertiser executives globally) and targeted audiences (**89% agency, 89% advertiser**, compared with 87% agency and 81% advertiser respondents globally). This was very important to them, particularly after the impact of COVID-19<sup>3</sup>.

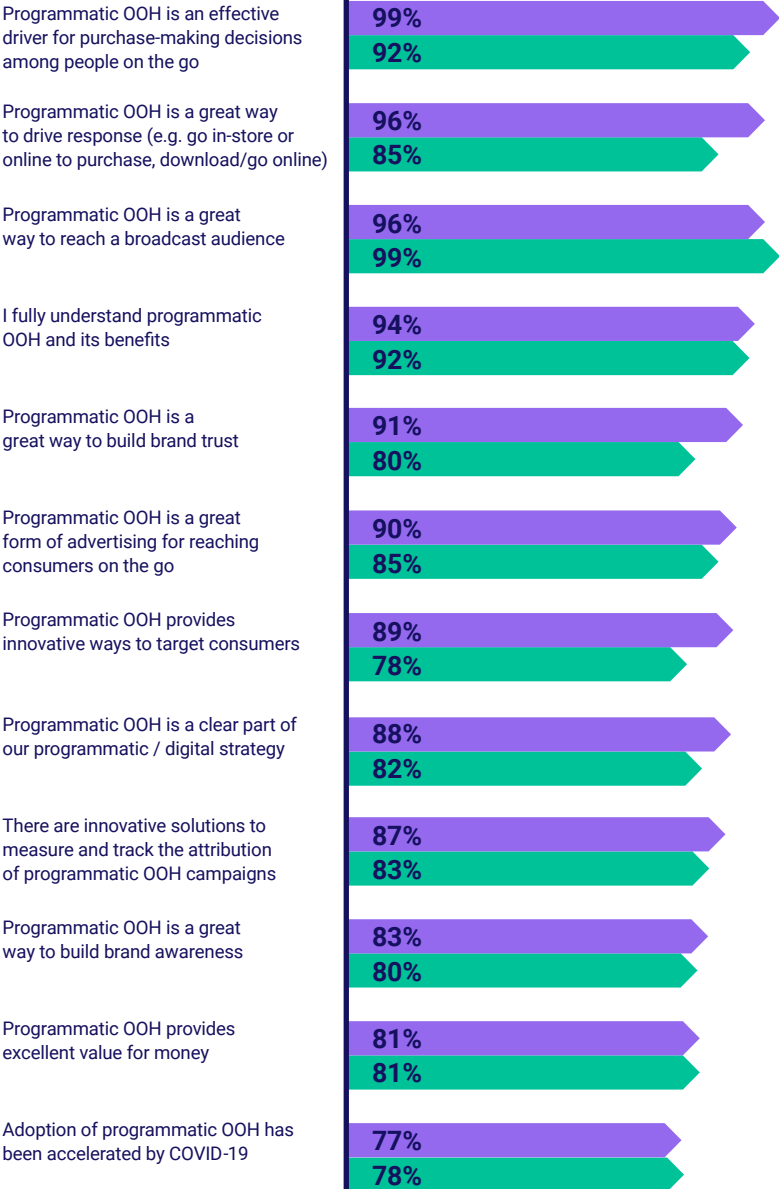
Programmatic OOH delivers on both fronts. Most UK executives see it as a great way to reach a broadcast audience (**96% agency and 99% advertiser**, compared with global averages of 94% agency, 91% advertiser).

They also see it as an effective driver for purchase-making decisions on the go (**99% agency and 92% advertiser**, compared with global averages of 93% agency, 88% advertiser).

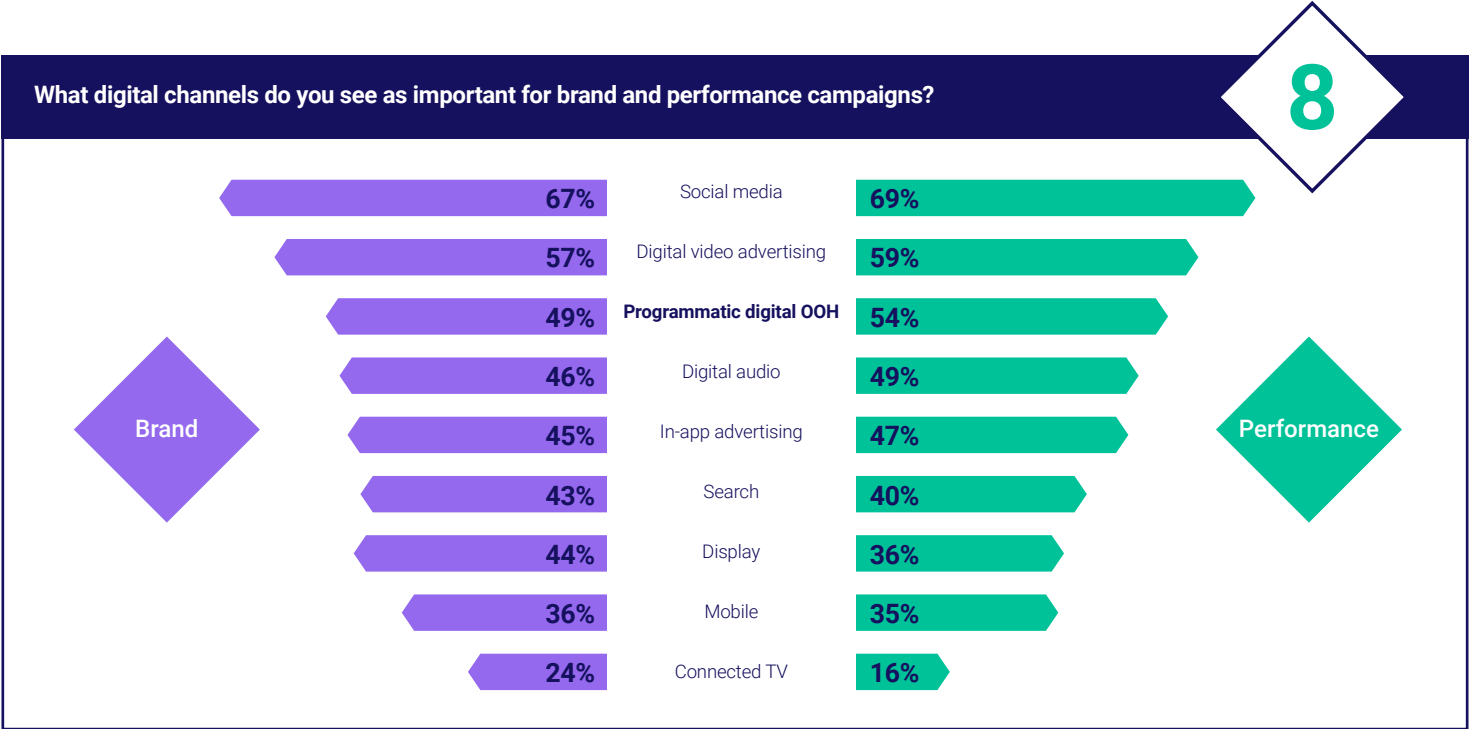
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about programmatic OOH advertising?

7

Media agency  
Advertiser



<sup>3</sup>Survey question: 'We now want you to think about how adapting to the impacts of COVID-19 may have changed the way you plan media in future. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: "Our campaign strategies are more focussed on reaching a broadcast audience"; "Our campaigns strategies are more focussed on reaching a targeted audience".  
Exhibit 7 Survey question: We will now show you a list of statements. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about programmatic OOH advertising?



Related to this ability to deliver against campaigns with a targeted or broadcast approach, programmatic OOH is also seen as highly relevant for both brand and performance campaigns, ranking third across digital channels for both (see Exhibit 8). Comparing this to last year's study, programmatic OOH has stepped ahead of digital audio.

On the brand side, most UK executives (83% agency, 82% advertiser) believe that programmatic OOH is a **great way to build brand awareness**<sup>4</sup>, above the global averages of 80% agency and 75% advertiser respectively.

On performance, 96% of UK agencies and 85% of UK advertisers see programmatic OOH as a **great way to drive response** e.g. driving people to go in-store or online to make a purchase or download<sup>5</sup>, well above the global averages (82% agency and 78% advertiser executives).

These findings were reflected in our interviews, with the UK executive explaining how programmatic OOH was well suited to both brand and performance objectives.

This helps explain programmatic OOH's rise in usage and its broad appeal, and implies a significant opportunity to tap into both brand and performance budgets, potentially playing numerous roles on multi-channel digital campaigns.

It also highlights the degree of complexity in how media agencies and advertisers manage programmatic OOH.

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We use it to build awareness, for example supporting new launches, and as a high-quality alternative to digital video and display. It's also good for performance [e.g.] to drive footfall or app installs.

More clients are seeing it as a performance buy due to the measurement and attribution possible.

Global Lead for Digital OOH, Media Agency, UK

<sup>4</sup>Programmatic OOH is a great way to build brand awareness; see Exhibit 13 for numbers by market.  
<sup>5</sup>Programmatic OOH is a great way to drive response (e.g. go in-store or online to purchase, download/go online); see Exhibit 13 for numbers by market.  
Exhibit 8 Survey question: Which channels do you see as important for brand-led campaigns? Which channels do you see as important for performance-led campaigns?



# **Challenges programmatic OOH faces**

# Who is responsible for programmatic OOH?

Media agencies and advertisers are still adapting to programmatic OOH's rapid rise. That OOH is a traditional media channel with new programmatic capabilities, one that now delivers for both brand and performance campaigns, means that responsibility for programmatic OOH varies in current media agency and advertiser setups.

When asked how they planned and bought programmatic OOH, executives produced a variety of responses.

Firstly, UK advertisers are split between operating in-house (35% versus 37% global), outsourcing to media agencies (27% versus 20% global) and a combination of both (39% versus 43% global).

Adding to this, planning and buying programmatic OOH specifically can then sit with OOH teams, digital teams or separate teams altogether (see Exhibit 9).

The responses also show that within a given media agency, UK executives are taking multiple approaches – 53% (compared with 57% globally) have bought programmatic OOH via digital or programmatic teams in the last 12 months and 47% (55% globally) have done so via OOH teams, highlighting an overlap.

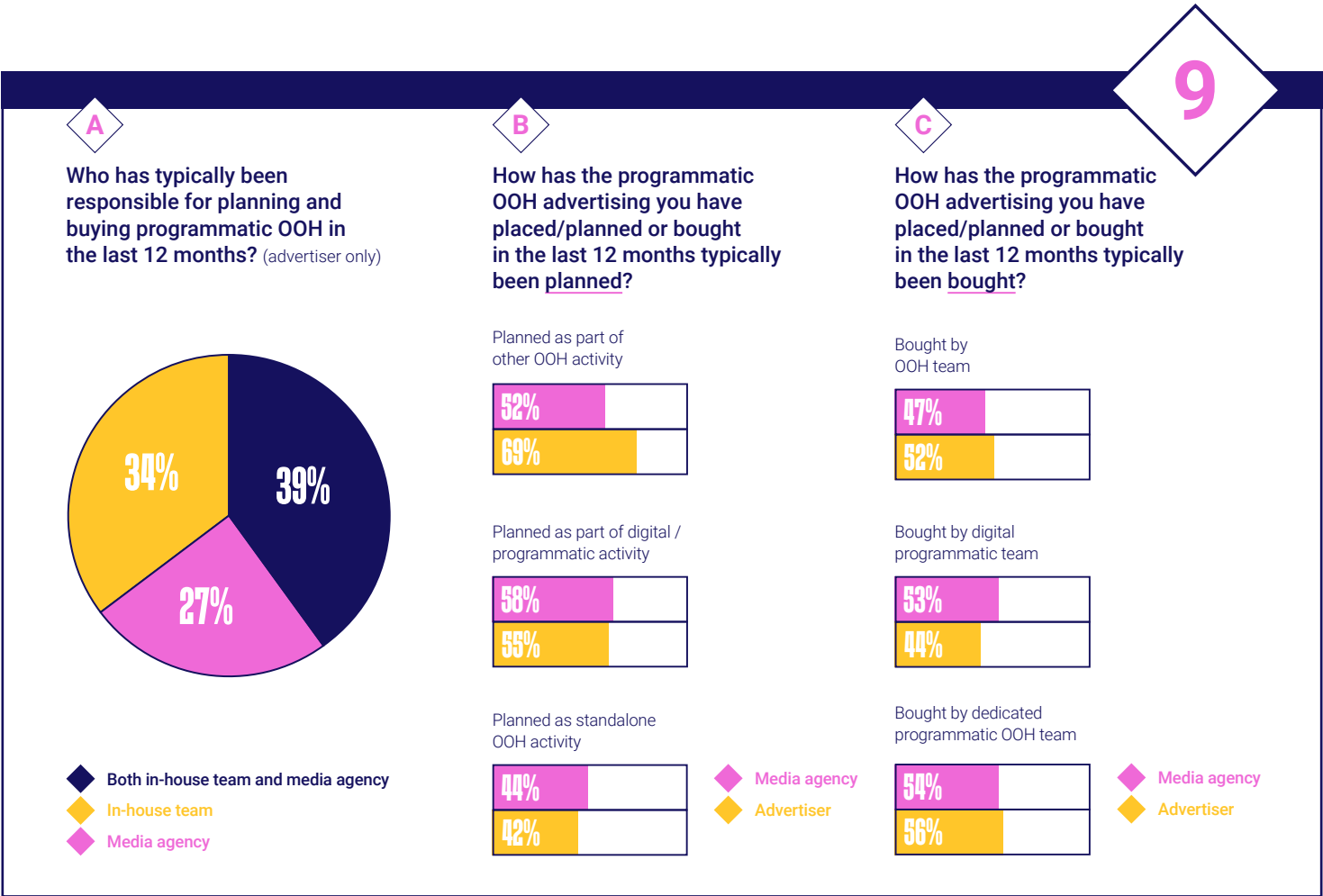


Exhibit 9 Survey questions: Who has typically been responsible for planning and buying programmatic OOH in the last 12 months? How has the programmatic Out-of-Home advertising you have placed/planned or bought in the last 12 months typically been planned? How has the programmatic Out-of-Home advertising you have placed/planned or bought in the last 12 months typically been bought?

This raises several issues.

Firstly, it implies that agencies and advertisers do not have a clear view on programmatic OOH at a strategy and comms planning level, risking it potentially being an afterthought rather than being fully integrated into large multi-channel campaigns.

Secondly, if responsibilities for planning and buying programmatic OOH are unclear (e.g. between OOH and digital teams), it could be overlooked or see activity duplicated, creating inefficiency.

Finally, it will be harder to build programmatic OOH expertise if activity is spread across multiple teams.

In our discussions with executives, we heard the case for buying programmatic OOH through experts in programmatic teams, but that they see variation when it comes to planning.



**Programmatic OOH is bought [exclusively] through specialists in the programmatic team, where they can build expertise and learn from each other. Budgets come from both OOH and digital and can originate from different client teams.**

Global Lead for Digital OOH, Media Agency, UK





# What's coming next



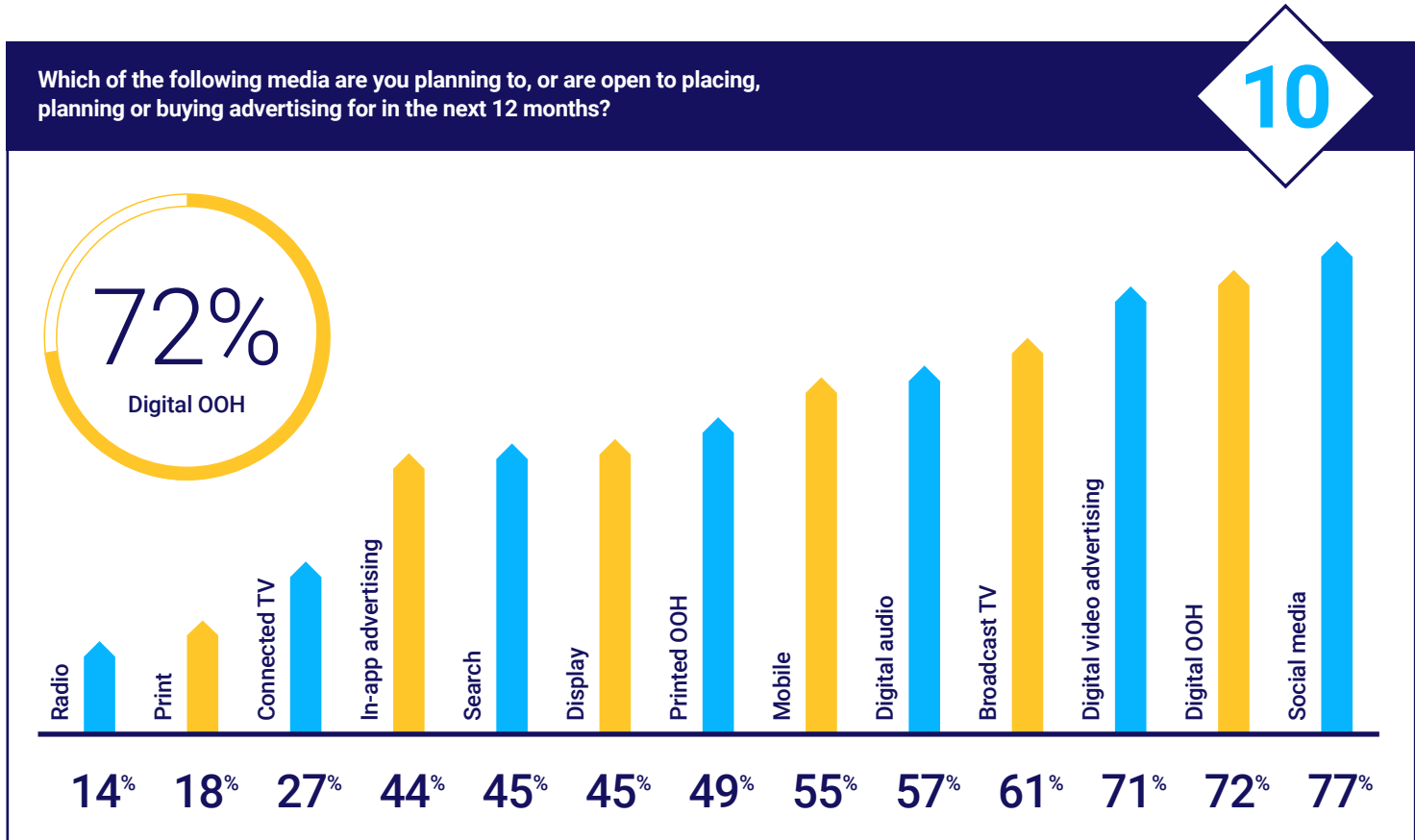
# Increased inclusion in multi-channel campaigns will drive widespread adoption of programmatic OOH

In the UK we've seen widespread adoption of digital OOH and, more importantly, we're seeing adoption of programmatic OOH grow with almost three quarters (72% versus 62% global) of executives who planned, bought or placed advertising on digital OOH screens doing so programmatically <sup>6</sup>.

Programmatic OOH really took off over the last couple of years and we fully expect that to continue.

Global Lead for Digital OOH, Media Agency, UK

Looking ahead, 72% of UK executives (compared to 68% globally) plan to use digital OOH in the next 12 months, with more saying they plan to use digital OOH than almost any other channel, signalling significant growth (see Exhibit 10) of both digital OOH and programmatic trading. This was echoed by the UK executive we spoke to who sees digital OOH and programmatic usage continuing to grow.



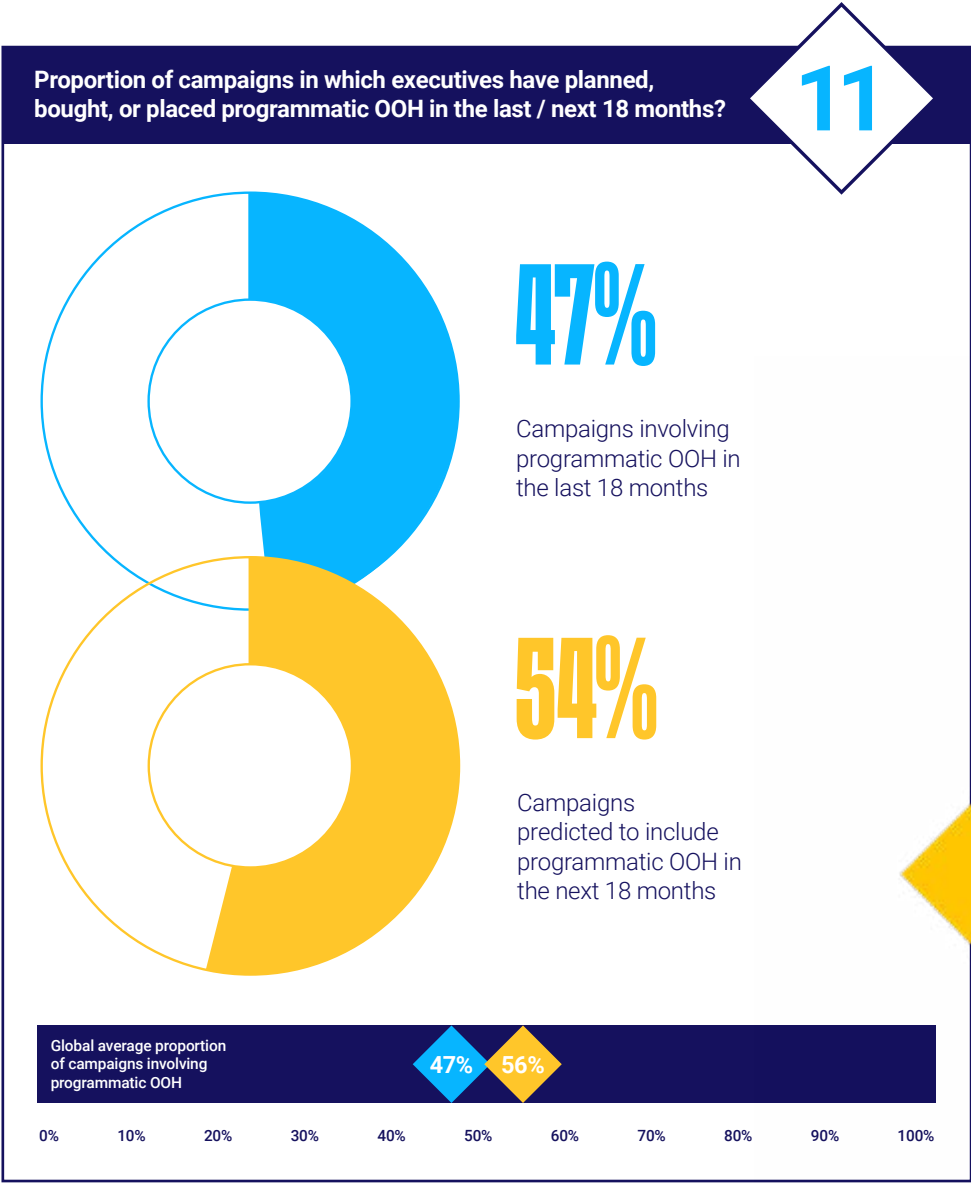
<sup>6</sup>Survey question: Now thinking about programmatic advertising, which of the following media have you placed/planned or bought programmatic advertising for in the last 18 months?

Exhibit 10 Survey question: Which of the following media are you planning to, or are open to placing, planning or buying for advertising in the next 12 months?


Programmatic OOH specifically was used in approximately 47% of UK respondents' campaigns in the last 18 months, marginally down compared to 50% in our 2020 report<sup>7</sup>, an expected decline during the COVID pandemic when OOH campaigns overall were impacted.

The growth lies when looking ahead, with UK executives expecting programmatic out of home to feature in 54% of all campaigns in the next 18 months, implying significant growth (see Exhibit 11).

This is a slightly more optimistic outlook than respondents gave in 2020 where, in a very uncertain market, they predicted programmatic OOH to feature in 52% of future campaigns<sup>8</sup>.



<sup>7</sup>UK specific figures.  
**Exhibit 11** Survey question: Think of the campaigns you've worked on in the past 18 months, for what proportion have you planned, bought, or placed programmatic OOH advertising?  
Now think of the campaigns you'll be working on in the next 18 months, for what proportion do you think you will plan, buy, or place programmatic OOH advertising?



Increased inclusion in multi-channel campaigns is likely to be a key driver of widespread adoption, with 89% of UK industry executives agreeing they plan to 'integrate programmatic OOH more closely into multi-channel campaigns', compared with 84% of global respondents.

With programmatic OOH being seen as relevant for multiple roles including supporting brand and performance objectives, it makes sense that executives are looking at better integration into their campaigns.

The UK executive we interviewed shared some of the ways programmatic OOH is used in multi-channel campaigns today, as well predicting more frequent integration in future.

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We typically use [programmatic] OOH at the start of a campaign to give a big splash and raise awareness and then combine this with mobile, audio, possibly connected TV and target the same people [exposed to OOH ads] based on device IDs.

We're finding new ways to use programmatic OOH in multi-channel campaigns, and I expect us to do more of this in future.

Global Lead for Digital OOH, Media Agency, UK

# Confidence is growing, but knowledge gaps on programmatic OOH need to be addressed

While UK executives are generally confident about their knowledge of programmatic OOH – 94% of agency respondents and 92% of advertisers (92% agency, 92% advertisers globally) agreed that they ‘fully understand programmatic OOH and its benefits’ – they still identify important knowledge gaps and most plan to invest in relevant expertise. In addition, they will likely need to address the issues of where programmatic OOH is planned and bought in their organisations.

When asking executives what they want to learn more about, ‘understanding how programmatic OOH fits within a multi-channel campaign’ was the top response globally.

This appears to have become a more pressing concern for executives in the last year, with relatively fewer respondents raising it in our previous study.

UK executives also highlight the importance of training and sector-specific insights for programmatic OOH.

Consistent with our previous report, UK advertising executives would also like more information and support on cross-channel measurement and attribution, audience insights and case studies (see Exhibit 12).

Which, out of the following, would help you learn more about programmatic OOH advertising?

12

Media agency  
Advertiser

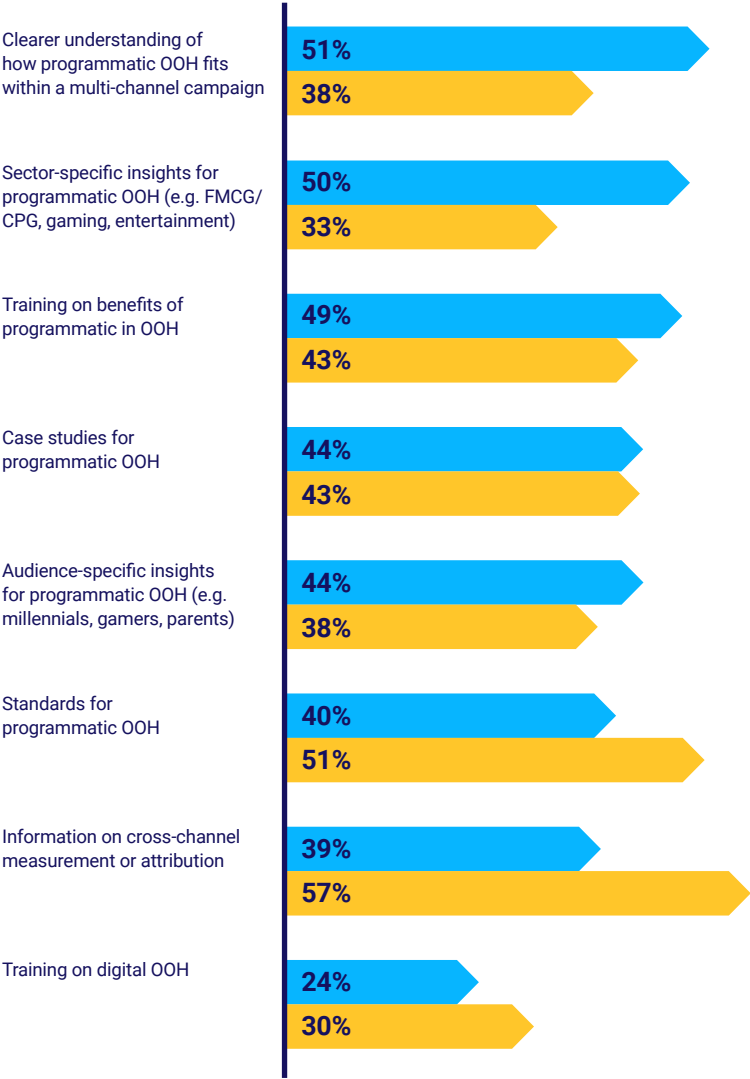


Exhibit 12 Survey question: Which, out of the following, would help you learn more about programmatic OOH advertising?

# Executives plan to invest in programmatic OOH expertise

Looking ahead, UK executives predict they will integrate programmatic OOH more closely into their multi-channel campaigns and make greater use of the dynamic creative opportunities. A key development in the industry is that the vast majority of UK executives (88% versus 84% globally) plan to invest in programmatic OOH expertise (see Exhibit 13).



88%

UK executives plan to invest in programmatic OOH expertise

Investment in programmatic OOH expertise will help address existing knowledge gaps and may also provide a solution regarding who is responsible for planning and buying programmatic OOH, assuming specialist resources are consistently placed within digital teams.

The executive we spoke with wants the UK to be at the forefront when using programmatic OOH and sees it as important to educate the broader market.

Other areas they plan to develop include making greater use of key programmatic OOH features, including trigger-based buying (86% UK, 86% global), and more sophisticated planning approaches such as making greater use of data to plan campaigns (86% UK, 85% global).



There's a lot to buying programmatic OOH and we're always looking for ways to innovate... we want to have experts.

We spend a lot of time educating comms planners in our agency and clients about the role programmatic OOH can play.

Global Lead for Digital OOH, Media Agency, UK





## Closing remarks

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**The future for programmatic OOH in the UK and globally looks promising. Growing adoption proves industry executives are positive about the value they get from programmatic OOH and there are truly compelling reasons to expect sustained growth in spend over the next few years.**

Versatility will be a key part of this, with programmatic OOH being able to compete for both brand and performance budgets. Another key factor will be the increasing integration of programmatic OOH into multi-channel marketing campaigns, establishing it as a critical component on media plans.

For widespread adoption to happen, media agencies and advertisers will need to clearly establish responsibility for programmatic OOH and build their expertise, most likely within digital and programmatic teams. This will address knowledge gaps and help establish the best practices in deploying programmatic OOH in and out of multi-channel campaigns.

Industry executives have shown intent to do this, with our report highlighting their plans to invest in building programmatic OOH expertise as well as taking more sophisticated approaches to planning and executing campaigns. This reflects the buy-side's confidence in programmatic OOH's potential and gives cause for optimism about its future.