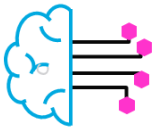
RADII GROUP

THE AGE OF DISRUPTION

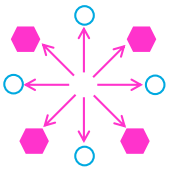
Signals in the Static:

Decoding Shifts in Communication and Media Services

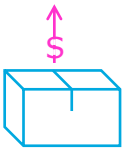
- The **Maverick Consumer** is changing legacy behaviors and consumption, forcing businesses to change products/lineups and/or invest/acquire
- Ad buyers are shifting budgets toward challenger brands and new categories, **driving experimentation in media spend** while ad suppliers are supporting brand tests of new formats and placements with less revenue certainty



- The **Artificially Intelligent Firm** is making businesses re-evaluate budgets while setting high solutions expectations
- Ad buyers are increasing spend while expecting **personalized outcomes and real-time optimization**; ad suppliers are using AI tools to boost yield, but struggling to maintain differentiation while ad facilitators offer user-friendly tools that demonstrate clear business impact



- The **Decoupled Buyer's** shift in media engagement and information consumption is scrambling traditional go-to-market models
- Using self-serve platforms and in-house teams, ad buyers are **reducing reliance on agencies** and ad suppliers are gaining share as digitally native platforms while ad facilitators help clients manage **complex go-to-market media execution paths**



- The **Pricing Era** is scrambling every sector as business try to take advantage without falling victim to eroding profits
- Ad buyers are **reallocating spend to manage trade impacts** and protect margins while ad suppliers **are losing international ad revenue** as brands shift priorities and ad facilitators are supporting **rapid reprioritization of markets and budgets**

Introduction

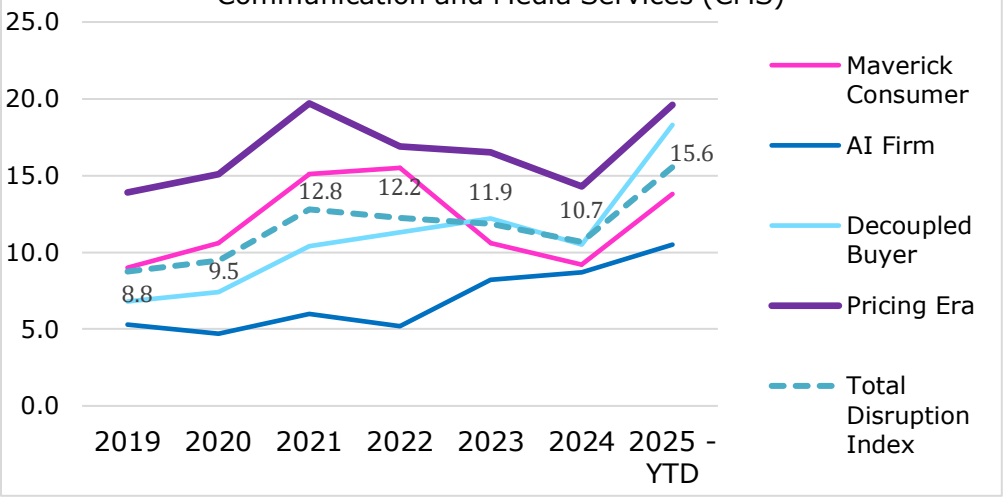
The Age of Disruption is getting lots of airtime in the Media. As part of our data-driven consulting work, **Radii Group** continuously analyzes trends impacting our existing, prior and potential clients to find options to capitalize on or mitigate their impacts. This month, in adjacency with **Cannes Lions**, we're diving into companies in **Communications and Media Services (CMS)** a sector that's already seen multiple waves of disruption in the last two decades (e-

commerce, digital advertising, programmatic, social, data proliferation, and more) and which may see the largest wave yet in the form of the AI tsunami. In the span of just a few years, the language used by leading firms in financial disclosures and earnings calls has evolved dramatically — a reflection and recognition of deeper shifts in market dynamics, technological disruption, and consumer behavior we see by analyzing thousands of documents and transcripts from across the sector.

Several powerful themes emerge from this landscape. The rising **Maverick Consumer** is forcing brands to rethink legacy models and fuel investment in alternate products, all requiring significant marketing and media spend. At the same time, the **Artificially Intelligent Firm** is reshaping the nature of that spend: AI-enabled tools are raising the bar on personalization and yield optimization, brands/buyers are experimenting with self-serve platforms and in-house capabilities, and in doing so disintermediating traditional agencies. Meanwhile, the **Decoupled Buyer**'s non-traditional media and information consumption are breaking the traditional connection between standard content, context, and conversion leading to newer/interesting selling models. Coupled with the continued volatility of the **Pricing Era**, where global trade pressures and shifting priorities are pushing advertisers to reallocate spending with urgency, the media ecosystem is under enormous pressure, yielding unexpected outcomes.

Through a data-driven lens, our paper maps how different groups — from ad buyers and suppliers to facilitators — are reporting on these trends and adapting. Whether a market participant seeks sharper signals or an investor is looking to understand where value is building, our analysis illuminates strategic pivot points shaping the next phase of growth in communication services.

Chart 1: Disruption Index - Weighted Score per Document/Call
Communication and Media Services (CMS)



The latest data shows **disruption mentions in Communication and Media Services** (CMS) sector reaching their **highest levels in over five years** as of 6/5/25. The Total Disruption Index for CMS – a weighted score derived from key term trends across financial documents and earnings calls – has surged past levels seen during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 (Chart 1). While the 2021 COVID period saw a notable spike in disruption due to acute uncertainty, the current surge in 2025 reflects broader, more structural changes — including technological transformation, consumer empowerment, and macroeconomic and government policy volatility. Key drivers of this elevated disruption include

- A populace seeking to be healthier through changes in consumption (younger folks consuming less alcohol), medicine (GLP-1, etc.) and policies (MAHA moves)

- An increasingly bifurcated media environment, with consolidation among key platforms and walled gardens (Time Warner, Comcast, etc.) and fragmentation among insurgent players (podcasts, livestreaming, etc.)

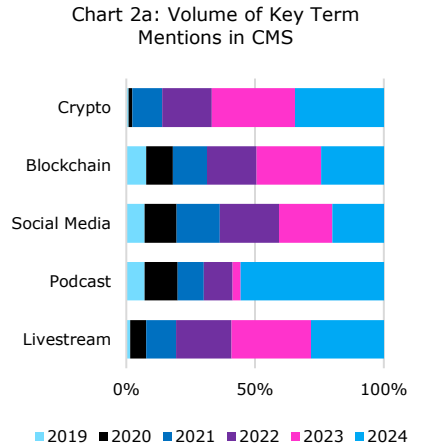
- Accelerated tech disruption through AI and Crypto with a boost from political support

Radii Group's composite index makes clear: today's disruption is not just more intense — it is more strategically consequential.

Our Methodology

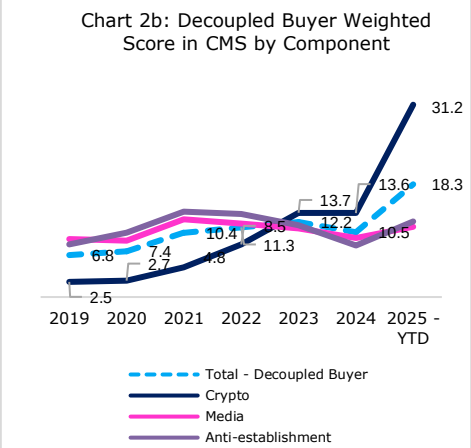
Radii Group's nuanced, data-centric approach captures the level of disruption in the economy by identifying key topical terms appearing in publicly submitted financial documents and statements, then weighting their source document based on criticality/legal veracity and weighted the terms based on their relevance to the topic*. Below, one can see how communications and media companies are accounting for the Decoupled Buyer, seeking out alternate forms of information, entertainment and payments in the wake of sentiment in favor of decentralization.

Crypto, Alternative Media terms increasing…



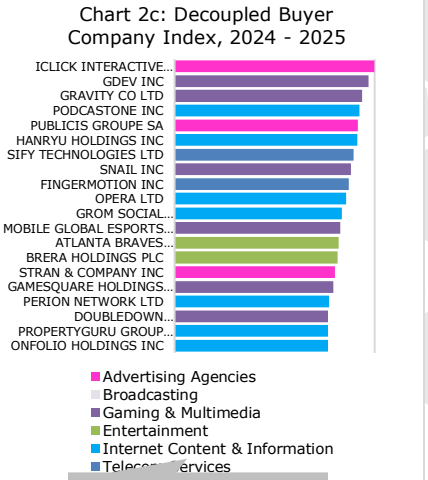
Multi-year scrapes of key terms from SEC filings and earnings calls…

…leading a spike in mentions per SEC filing…



… yielded importance/relevance weighted index of key trends

…with interesting companies communicating impacts



… and normalized score/ranking of companies overall and by cohort

**Methodology Note: This analysis is based on public mentions in financial documents and earnings calls only; companies could be doing more in AI, for example, but may not be as forward about it in financial documents or calls. However, we generally believe that directionally companies talk about the areas they think will most impact the business even if they don't share the detail.*

The Maverick Consumer

The Maverick Consumer—a digitally native, values-driven, and self-optimizing audience that defies traditional expectations around brand loyalty and consumption is setting a new standard for how companies must operate and communicate to stay relevant. These consumers are proactive, discerning, and fast-moving, forcing Communications and Media services (CMS) companies to help brands play catch up in where to invest.

Today's Maverick Consumer is deeply invested in **wellness, longevity, and cognitive performance**. Topics like **GLP-1 drugs**, **biohacking**, **personalized medicine**, **supplements**, and **mental acuity** are increasingly mainstream—and are shaping everything from media consumption patterns to purchasing decisions. These consumers are not just buying products; they are curating lifestyles, with high expectations for transparency, personalization, and real-world outcomes. Companies are citing increased churn, fragmented loyalty, and demand for faster, more meaningful personalization as critical challenges.

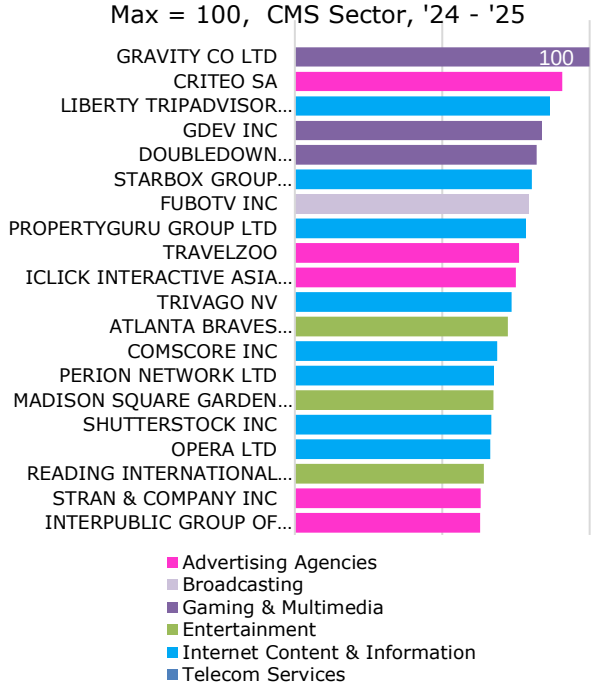
Across the CMS ecosystem:

- **Ad buyers** are shifting budgets toward challenger brands and new wellness-aligned categories, often tied to performance lifestyles and digital-native communities. These shifts are driving experimentation in media spend and real-time campaign testing.

  Ad suppliers are adapting by supporting new ad formats and placements tailored to wellness and health-conscious consumers, while facing lower revenue predictability.

- **Ad facilitators** are being asked to deliver more granular insights across increasingly nonlinear consumer journeys—from TikTok wellness influencers to telehealth platforms—while navigating budget constraints and execution complexity.

Chart 3: Consumption Shift Company Index
Max = 100, CMS Sector, '24 - '25



As highlighted in Chart 3, which tracks the Consumption Shift Index across the CMS sector, firms such as **Gravity Co., Criteo, Liberty TripAdvisor**, and **GDEV** are showing the most pronounced activity in response to these new consumer dynamics. These companies—spanning gaming, online content and digital advertising —are at the forefront of adapting to fragmented demand signals, rapid platform-switching, and rising expectations for cultural alignment.

Notably, advertising agencies and technologies are rising to meet this challenge as well. Within the top 20 of the Consumption Shift Company Index, companies like **Criteo, Travelzoo**, and **Interpublic Group** stand out for how they're recalibrating their offerings. These firms are leaning into performance media, retail media networks, and culturally nuanced targeting. Criteo's transformation from retargeting specialist to full-funnel commerce media platform is emblematic of this shift. Meanwhile, agencies rooted in Asia-Pacific markets, such as **iClick**, are capturing growth through hyper-localization and influencer commerce

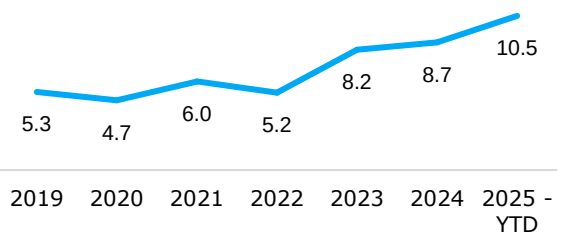
strategies tailored to mobile-first, Gen Z consumers.

The inclusion of legacy companies like **Interpublic Group** further signals that even incumbent players are under pressure to modernize audience planning, data modeling, and attribution frameworks in response to the Maverick Consumer.

The Artificially Intelligent Firm

From conventional machine learning to Generative AI to emerging AI Agents, few forces are reshaping the CMS sector more decisively than artificial intelligence. No longer confined to back-office automation, AI is now central to how firms engage audiences, allocate ad budgets, and deliver measurable business impact.

Chart 4: AI Weighted Score
CMS



As shown in Chart 4 (above), the AI Weighted Score for the CMS sector has more than doubled since 2022, climbing from 5.2 to 10.5 in early 2025. This signals a notable surge in both the frequency and depth of AI-related mentions across earnings calls, filings, and strategic briefings. In short, AI is no longer a future-facing bet—it's now an operational imperative.

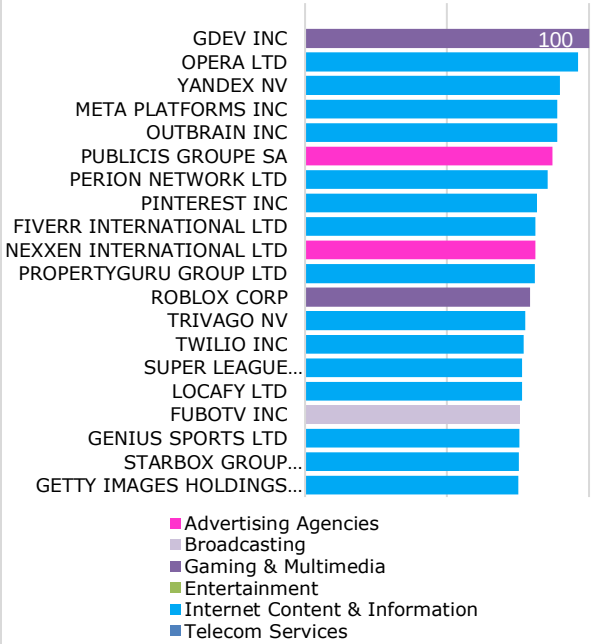
Across the ecosystem, the Artificially Intelligent Firm is driving a three-way transformation:

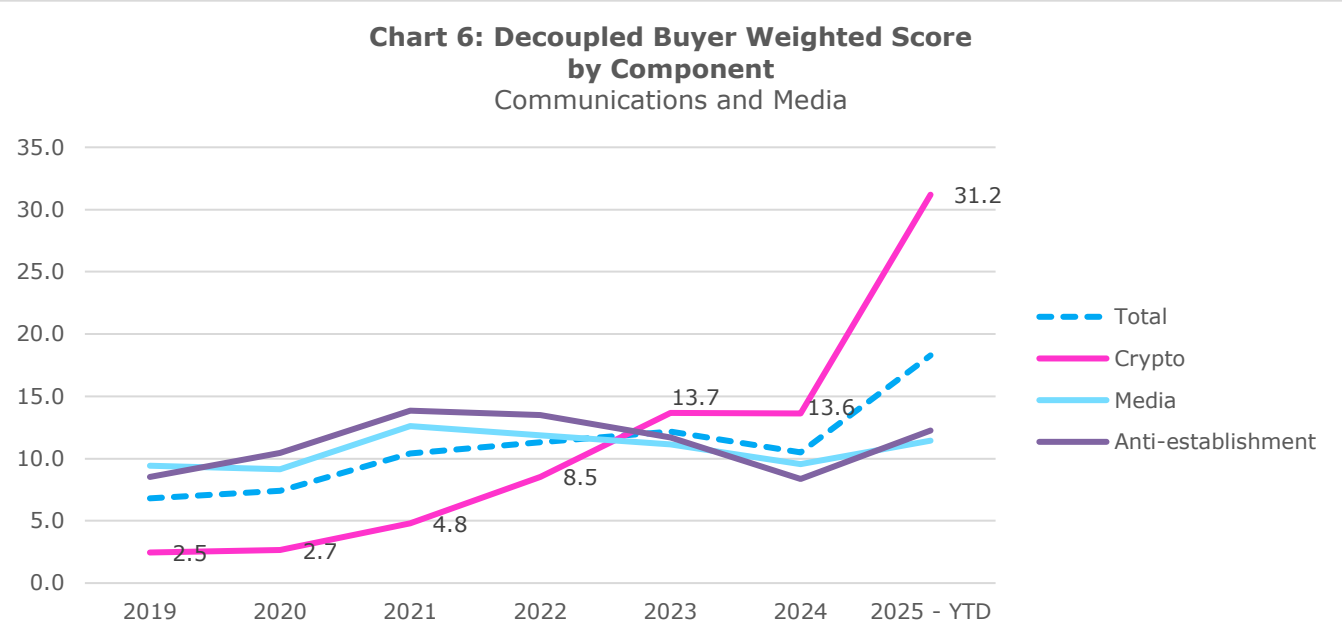
- **Ad buyers** are reallocating spend toward platforms and partners that promise personalized outcomes and real-time campaign optimization. These buyers are no longer just looking for audience reach — they're seeking proof of performance via AI-enabled insights and automation. Firms like **Publicis Groupe** are leaning into this demand with advanced AI-driven media buying and attribution platforms that appeal to marketers focused on precision and accountability.

- **Ad suppliers**—including content publishers, broadcasters, and game studios—are under pressure to boost yield and engagement through AI-powered targeting, creative optimization, and predictive analytics. But with core tools increasingly commoditized, they're struggling to maintain brand and value differentiation.

- **Ad facilitators**, such as MarTech vendors and media planning agencies, are shifting toward no-code AI tools, user-friendly dashboards, and outcome based models. Their success hinges on showing clear business impact—not just feature breadth.

Chart 5: AI Company Index,
Max = 100, Communications and Media, '24 - '25





Unsurprisingly, CMS sector firms in Internet Content and Gaming & Multimedia subsectors are leading the AI conversation, but Advertising agencies such as **Publicis Groupe** and Ad-Tech platform **Nexxen International** also show up in the Top 20 of our AI Company Index (Chart 5, left).

As AI adoption matures, success will favor firms that go beyond implementation to embed intelligence across the customer journey, linking creative to conversion through continuous learning loops. Companies that treat AI as a core strategic asset—not just a technical add-on—are emerging as leaders in a CMS landscape that increasingly rewards responsiveness, relevance, and results.

Decoupled Buyer

Beneath the surface of media and marketing disruption lies a deeper shift: the fragmentation of institutional trust and the redistribution of influence away from legacy power centers. What once flowed through tightly controlled pipelines—whether mainstream media channels, traditional advertising agencies, or government-endorsed messaging—is now diffused across a chaotic, decentralized ecosystem of platforms, creators, and algorithmic intermediaries. The **Decoupled Buyer** has emerged as both a symptom and a driver of this transformation.

As shown in Chart 6 (above), the weighted score for Decoupled Buyer signals—including Crypto, Anti-establishment, and Alternative Media themes—has surged in 2025, led by a remarkable spike in Crypto-related mentions. The total Decoupled Buyer index has risen so far in 2025, with the Crypto component more than doubling. This suggests that companies are increasingly forced to respond to market behaviors rooted in financial decentralization and cultural detachment from institutional gatekeepers.

This fragmentation is driving business model recalibrations, especially among CMS firms exposed to the Gen Z and millennial consumer bases, where authority skepticism and alt-platform adoption are most pronounced.

The company-level data in Chart 7 (below) underscores which players are most exposed—or most responsive—to these dynamics. Notably:

- **iClick Interactive** tops the list with a top score of 100, reflecting its positioning at

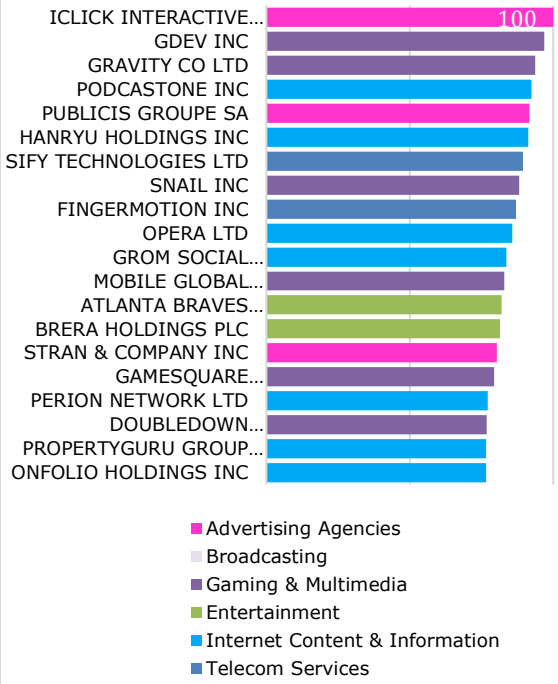
the intersection of decentralized ad tech and emerging Asian consumer platforms.

- **Publicis Groupe** and **Stran & Company**, both in Advertising, show elevated scores, highlighting how agency groups are navigating the challenge of message control in a market where buyers prize independence and subversion over scale.

- **PodcastOne**, an LA-based leading podcast platform, scores high as part of the alt-media landscape, where content creators often bypass traditional distribution structures entirely.

- **Gaming and Multimedia companies**—including **GDEV**, **Snail** and **Doubledown**—show consistently high index values, pointing to gamification and interactive engagement as pathways to loyalty among mistrustful buyers.

Chart 7: Decoupled Buyer Company Index, Max = 100, '24 - '25



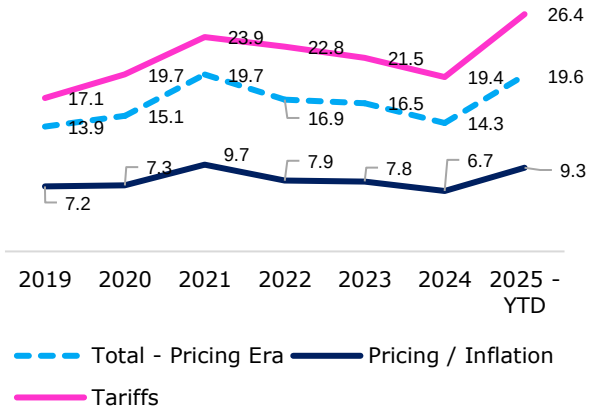
Pricing, inflation, and tariffs continue to shape strategic decision-making across the global economy. While inflationary pressures remain, fueled by prolonged supply chain adjustments and sticky input costs, it's the resurgence of tariff-related uncertainty that is drawing outsized attention in boardrooms and earnings call.

From Jan 20, 2025 with the return of the Trump administration to March 4, to April 2, CMS companies have been navigating rapidly shifting tariff policies. The speed and uncertainty of these moves has heightened concerns among firms with cross-border dependencies, including those involved in digital advertising, platform infrastructure and media hardware delivery, where indirect impacts on ad inventory, data center costs or consumer devices can ripple downstream.

Taken together, the data points to a CMS environment where consumer trust must be earned in new ways. Brands no longer gain advantage through incumbency or saturation; they must now compete in a landscape where value-alignment, platform fluidity, and user control reign supreme.

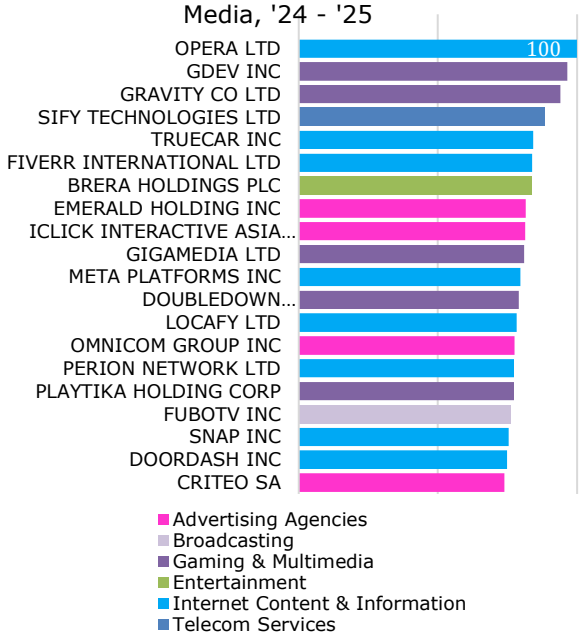
Pricing Era

Chart 8: Pricing &Tariff-related Score CMS by Component



As illustrated in Chart 8 (above), discussion of tariff-related issues has spiked dramatically among CMS firms in 2025, far surpassing the prior peaks seen during COVID-era trade

Chart 9: Pricing Company Index, Max = 100, Communications and Media, '24 - '25



tensions. The tariff component of our "Pricing Era" disruption score is at its highest in five years (26.4). By contrast, mentions of inflation, while still present, have moderated as companies adapt to a higher-for-longer pricing environment.

This trend reflects growing anxiety among CMS leaders about both direct cost impacts and indirect effects on advertiser behavior and platform economics. For instance, volatility in trade can erode margin certainty for global campaigns, delay launches of consumer tech products or create regional imbalances in Ad demand. In an ecosystem where pricing transparency and return on investment are paramount, even the perception of instability can trigger cascading shifts in spend allocation and strategy.

As CMS firms navigate these challenges, the path forward remains uncertain. Whether current tariffs signal a long-term trade reset or short-term leverage tactics, their disruptive force on the sector is clear—and accelerating.

A diverse set of CMS companies—ranging from Ad-Tech platforms to telecom service providers—is leading the conversation around pricing concerns as shown in our Pricing Company Activity Index (Chart 9). **Opera Ltd**, a Norway-based internet browser and platform, ranks highest signaling a focus on pricing-related risks and strategy in its recent financial disclosures. It's followed by Telecom service provider **SIFY Technologies** while online marketplaces and internet services companies (e.g., **TrueCar, Fiverr, Meta, Snap, DoorDash**) also shows sustained engagement, likely due to infrastructure cost exposure and consumer pricing sensitivity.

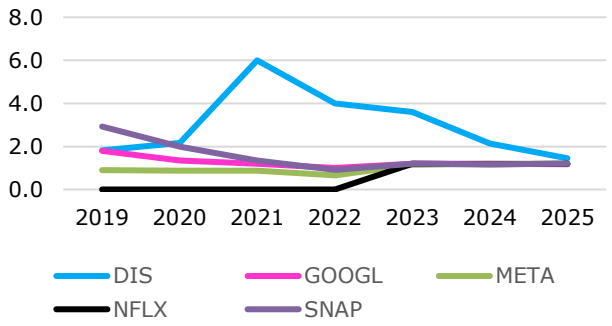
Interestingly, traditional advertising agencies such as **Omnicom** and B2B trade show and even organizers such as **Emerald** are also showing elevated activity, reflecting the cascading impact of pricing dynamics on client budgets and campaign strategies.

Meanwhile, Ad-Tech and digital advertising players like **Criteo** and cable TV replacement experience, **FuboTV**, also feature prominently, highlighting how pricing shifts—whether tied to ad inventory, data costs, or regional tariffs—are reshaping monetization models across the digital advertising landscape.

Industry Deep Dive: Ad-Tech

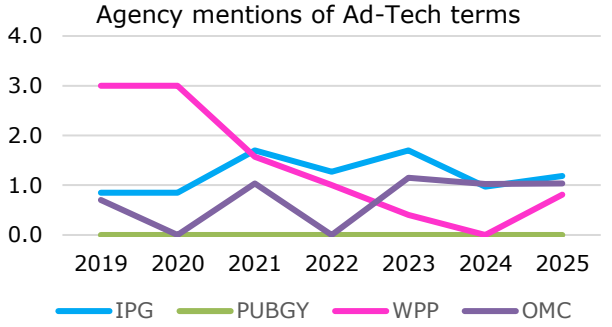
In addition to looking for our standard disruption terms and trends, we will also begin looking for industry-specific terms to highlight and benchmark firms against their peers. As a start, within the ad industry, we searched for a number of terms along the themes of Programmatic Ecosystem & Auctions, Ad Infrastructure & Delivery, Attribution & Measurement Models, Audience & Identity and Standards & Verification. More interesting, when we look at specific cohorts, we see data (or a lack thereof), indicating potential focus areas of particular firms.

Chart 10: Average Ad-Tech Mentions
Key Publisher Mentions of Ad-Tech terms



For example, when looking at key publishers (Chart 10 above), we can see Disney's mentions of ad tech terms spike, coinciding with the expansion of the Disney+ platform, with ad-supported plans launching in 2022. Meantime, walled garden/legacy digital platforms maintain a steadier stream of ad-related mentions, with Netflix appearing when they began offering ad-supported subscriptions.

Chart 11: Average Ad-Tech Mentions
Agency mentions of Ad-Tech terms



On another side of the value chain (chart 11 above), average agency mentions of more traditional ad-tech terms vary significantly over time, though generally in decline, indicating a shift in priorities. As mentioned above, several of these firms, Publicis in particular, appear to be focusing more on future solutions, particularly leveraging AI, as they to survive industry headwinds. Yet, if as indicated by the chart/mentions, they're looking to significantly move away from their core offerings, they may be ceding ground to smaller challengers and in-housing.

Radiintel: What can you do to navigate?

Communications and Media **organizations can no longer rely on the standard playbooks** to meet the content and advertising needs of brands adapting to **Maverick Consumers**. We will help our media clients not only understand these new consumers, but the direct and indirect effects on brand partners and how to better meet their evolving needs — through **smarter segmentation**; **data-enriched, agile go-to-market**; and **flexible, opportunistic growth strategy**.

Radii Group has also been ahead of the curve in the **AI revolution**, serving clients pre-pandemic on leveraging AI/automation applications, expanding into AI opportunities at Fortune 100s, and exploring AI use cases at media companies. We're excited to keep working with our clients to realize the opportunities and risks associated with this revolution, whether **incorporating AI into your product or go-to-market strategy**, leveraging it for your **support functions**, **commercializing your data**, or **marketing your AI solution**.

In tandem with maverick consumption, consumer behaviors around product discovers, purchasing and payments, have **decoupled** from singular access points into a **fragmented web of credible and noncredible information sources**, upending traditional marketing models. These behaviors, as well as shifting funding sources (government, banks, etc.) have led media companies to explore alternative business models through innovation and acquisition. Radii Group has a history of providing clients with targeted, rich primary research, in and expert-driven fact-bases to drive **B2B insights** to help fill the gaps in understanding being revealed by the fractured landscape, and drive toward action, whether through **investment or M&A**.

As **Pricing uncertainty** erodes margins and freezes investment, **advertising spend will serve as a particular band-aid** in the market to drive sales/growth in the inflationary vacuum. Radii Group already has a history of **partnering with top brands to build their pricing strategy** in inflationary non-inflationary environments, as well as marketing/sales strategies to mitigate pricing impacts. We're excited to work with clients to understand the potential scenarios/impacts of different pricing moves, the direct impact on brands, the secondary and tertiary impacts on ad budgets and agency usage, and further downstream impacts.

Please reach out to us to set up a call and learn more about how we can help your business: info@radiigroup.com