

**INDEPENDENT MONITORING REPORT TO THE  
ADVERTISING BUSINESS GROUP ON THE PROPOSAL  
EVALUATION PROCESS FOR THE UAE CROSS-MEDIA  
VIDEO AUDIENCE MEASUREMENT PROJECT**

**DATE OF FINAL REPORT: 22 MAY 2022**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

ABG issued the RFP for X-Media VAM Services in the UAE on 17 December 2020 to the interested Vendors who were shortlisted based on responses to the invitation to participate issued in November 2020.

Responses to the RFP were received from five Vendors on 28 February 2021. Based on an evaluation of the proposals and detailed presentations from these Vendors during March 2021 to the X-Media Sub-group of the Audience Project Committee constituted by ABG, a decision on shortlisting Vendors was taken in the Initial Partner Selection Meeting conducted by the X-Media Sub-group members on 8 April 2021. Ipsos was shortlisted as the primary service provider with Aqilliz as their technology partner. Ipsos/Aqilliz was then asked to submit the POC and revised commercial proposals.

As the revised proposal sent by Ipsos/Aqilliz in May 2021 did not address the brief of the X-Media Sub-group sufficiently, the X-Media Sub-group asked Ipsos/Aqilliz to send another revised proposal and also invited Nielsen – the Vendor that scored the second-highest score in the Initial Partner Selection Meeting - to submit their revised proposal. Aqilliz was asked to act as the technology partner for both Ipsos and Nielsen.

The revised proposals and subsequent presentations from both the sets of Vendors were evaluated by X-Media Sub-group members in the Second Partner Selection Meeting on 5 August 2021. Nielsen/Aqilliz received the highest score. Further extensive discussions by the X-Media Sub-group on the relative merits of the proposals and Vendors took place during the period August 2021 – November 2021. An evaluation of the final voting by the X-Media Sub-group to choose a preferred Vendor in the Final Partner Selection Meeting on 21 November 2021 resulted in a tie between both the Vendors. The ABG Board was then asked to intervene to resolve the tie.

Based on recommendation by the ABG Board, final revised commercial proposals were sought again from both the Vendors in accordance with common predefined technical criteria in January 2022. Ipsos/Aqilliz' proposal emerged the clear winner based on the final revised commercial proposals. Comments obtained from certain other key stakeholders during February 2022 – March 2022 based on the final revised proposals also favoured Ipsos/Aqilliz.

The next step for ABG will be to formally communicate the results to the winner and the relevant stakeholders and to ask the winner to submit the detailed POC proposal.

ABG had appointed Nishe Management Consultants (“Nishe” or “we” or “us”) as an independent monitoring body in February 2021 with the purpose of ensuring objectivity and transparency in the proposal evaluation process. We had issued a set of guidelines for the proposal evaluation process (the “Guidelines”) in February 2021. These Guidelines were used during what we call in this report as “the first phase” of the RFP process which lasted until the shortlisting of Vendors in the Initial Partner Selection Meeting in April 2021. Once the decision to approach both Ipsos/Aqilliz and Nielsen/Aqilliz was taken, the X-Media Sub-group asked us in June 2021 whether we will be willing to continue to perform our role as the independent monitoring body for what we call “the second phase” of the RFP evaluation process. We agreed to this request.

Accordingly, we monitored both first and second phases of the proposal evaluation process from the receipt of proposals up to the final outcome as summarised above. This report presents our observations.

In our view, the first phase of the proposal evaluation process was generally in compliance with the Guidelines issued by us. We also did not identify anything significant to indicate that the principles of transparency and objectivity were not adhered to at any stage in both the first and second phases of the proposal evaluation process. Our detailed observations are presented in the **OUR OBSERVATIONS** sections of this report.

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## **TRANSMITTAL LETTER**

22 May 2022

The Advertising Business Group  
Dubai  
UAE

We have completed our role as the independent monitoring body for the proposal evaluation process in relation to the RFP issued by ABG on 17 December 2020 for X-Media VAM Services. The purpose of our role was to ensure that fundamental principles of transparency and objectivity are met during the proposal evaluation process.

As part of our role in both first and second phases of the proposal evaluation process, we became involved in an integral manner in all key communications with the Vendors, observed all Vendor presentations, compiled the scores and votes awarded by the X-Media Sub-group members and presented our compiled work and observations to the X-Media Sub-group members in the Vendor selection meetings.

In addition, during the first phase, we issued a set of guidelines to be followed for the proposal evaluation process and reviewed the technical and financial evaluation criteria developed by the X-Media Sub-group.

During the second phase, we were also involved in communications and discussions with certain other key stakeholders. We presented on the conduct of the proposal evaluation process and results in front of the ABG Board and certain key stakeholders at the request of the X-Media Sub-group. We also provided our independent views on several key matters to the X-Media Sub-group and the ABG Board from time to time.

This report presents our observations on the conduct of the proposal evaluation process.

We confirm that we have remained independent of the ABG including its Audience Project Committee and X-Media Sub-group, the Vendors and any other key stakeholders throughout our involvement in the proposal evaluation process.

We take this opportunity to note that our involvement in the proposal evaluation process has been entirely pro bono. It has been our pleasure and honour to be a part of this ground-breaking initiative intended to raise transparency and accountability in the UAE media sector. We extend our appreciation to the ABG and the members of the Audience Project Committee and the X-Media Sub-group for their assistance and co-operation during the process.

**Nasheeda CC**  
Managing Director  
Nishe Management Consultants

## **BACKGROUND**

ABG constituted the Audience Project Committee in April 2020 with the objective of developing a Cross-Media VAM system in the UAE. A X-Media Sub-group was also formed as a working group under the Audience Project Committee.

ABG issued the RFP for Cross-Media VAM Services in the UAE on 17 December 2020 to six interested Vendors who were shortlisted based on responses to the invitation to participate issued in November 2020. Vendors were asked to respond to the RFP by 28 February 2021. ABG's objective was to identify the final Vendor(s) for the purpose of producing a POC by the end of June 2021.

Though the proposal evaluation process was completed as planned and ABG shortlisted Ipsos as the primary service provider with Aqilliz as their technology partner in the Initial Partner Selection Meeting conducted in April 2021, the X-Media Sub-group decided in June 2021 to invite Nielsen also to submit their revised proposal because the revised proposal sent by Ipsos/Aqilliz in May 2021 did not address the brief of the X-Media Sub-group sufficiently. Aqilliz would remain the technology partner for both Ipsos and Nielsen.

For the purpose of this report, we have considered the period from the issuance of the RFP in December 2020 until the shortlisting of Ipsos/Aqilliz in the Initial Partner Selection Meeting in April 2021 as "the first phase" of the proposal evaluation process. The period from the decision to approach both Ipsos/Aqilliz and Nielsen/Aqilliz in June 2021 until the final decision on the preferred Vendor in May 2022 is considered as "the second phase".

ABG appointed Nishe as an independent monitoring body in February 2021 with the purpose of ensuring objectivity and transparency in the conduct of the proposal evaluation process. In June 2021, we confirmed our willingness to continue in the same role for the second phase upon X-Media Sub-group's request.

Our scope of work for the first phase is published on the ABG website. No specific scope of work was defined for the second phase as it was understood by all parties involved that Nishe's role would remain the same as in the first phase.

## **CRITERIA FOR THE PROPOSAL EVALUATION PROCESS**

We had issued the Guidelines for the first phase of the proposal evaluation process in February 2021. These Guidelines have been published on the ABG website.

As part of our monitoring role, we verified that the Guidelines were being followed throughout the first phase of the proposal evaluation process. Over and above this, we also considered, using our professional judgement, whether the fundamental principles of transparency and objectivity were adhered to at every stage of the proposal evaluation process by all parties involved.

## CONDUCT OF THE FIRST PHASE OF THE PROPOSAL EVALUATION PROCESS

Of the six interested Vendors, all except Oracle Corporation submitted their proposals before the midnight of 28 February 2021 in response to the RFP. The proposals received were circulated to all the members of the X-Media Sub-group on 1 March 2021 and the fact of the receipt of proposals was communicated to the remaining members of the Audience Project Committee on 4 March 2021.

Dates for detailed presentations were agreed within X-Media Sub-group and circulated to all the five Vendors.

The X-Media Sub-group members reviewed the proposals and raised a number of questions. These questions were compiled and shared with the respective Vendors ahead of the presentation dates.

The presentations were held virtually and were followed by Question & Answer sessions wherein attendees asked additional questions to the presenters. Recordings of the presentations were taken and circulated to the members of the X-Media Sub-group for the benefit of those members who missed attending the presentations.

The Vendors who responded, their respective presentation dates and the names of the X-Media Sub-group members and others who attended the presentations are as below:

Vendor	Date of presentation	X-Media Sub-group members <sup>1</sup>	Others
Nielsen	15 March 2021	(1) Asad Rehman (2) Olivier Sage (3) Omar Katerji (4) Ravi Rao (5) Shadi Kandil (6) Walid Yared	Ankur Jalan <sup>2</sup> Charlotte Fernandes <sup>3</sup> Houda Koussa <sup>4</sup>
Immetrica	16 March 2021	(1) Asad Rehman (2) Olivier Sage (3) Shadi Kandil (4) Walid Yared	Charlotte Fernandes Houda Koussa Mathieu Yarak <sup>5</sup>
Ipsos <sup>6</sup>	22 March 2021	(1) Asad Rehman (2) Olivier Sage (3) Shadi Kandil (4) Walid Yared	Ankur Jalan Charlotte Fernandes Houda Koussa Mathieu Yarak
Aqilliz	23 March 2021	(1) Asad Rehman (2) Omar Katerji (3) Shadi Kandil (4) Walid Yared	Houda Koussa Mathieu Yarak
Firebolt	24 March 2021	(1) Asad Rehman (2) Walid Yared	Houda Koussa Mathieu Yarak

<sup>1</sup>The X-Media Sub-group comprises of 8 members.

<sup>2</sup>A member of the Audience Project Committee who expressed interest in attending two of the presentations.

<sup>3</sup>Secretary in ABG.

<sup>4</sup>A consultant appointed by ABG to assist with the Audience Measurement project.

<sup>5</sup>A technical observer who was asked to attend at the specific request of a member of the X-Media Sub-group.

<sup>6</sup>Ipsos's proposal in the first phase is jointly with Kantar. In the second phase, the relevant parties agreed that Ipsos/Aqilliz will take the proposal forward and will use Kantar's technology.

Vendor	Technical	Financial
Nielsen	5	6
Immetrica	4	5
Ipsos	5	6
Aqilliz	5	6
Firebolt	4	3

Following the presentations, Houda Koussa and the members were asked by the X-Media Sub-group to submit their technical and financial evaluations by 4 April 2021. The evaluations were performed using templates prepared by Houda Koussa and circulated within the X-Media Sub-group. The table to the left provides

the number of evaluations received against each Vendor.

These evaluations were compiled and summarised to arrive at consolidated technical and financial scores for each Vendor which were circulated to the members of the X-Media Sub-group on 7 April 2021. The consolidated scores for each Vendor are provided in the adjacent table.

Vendor	Technical score (out of 4)	Financial Score (out of 3)
Ipsos	3.30	2.46
Nielsen	3.02	2.08
Aqilliz	2.66	2.01
Immetrica	2.22	1.38
Firebolt	2.16	2.18

X-Media Sub-group members	Others
(1) Asad Rehman	Charlotte Fernandes
(2) Olivier Sage	Houda Koussa
(3) Omar Katerji	Mathieu Yarak
(4) Shadi Kandil	
(5) Walid Yared	

The members of the X-Media Sub-group had an Initial Partner Selection Meeting on 8 April 2021 wherein they extensively discussed the consolidated scores and the relative merits and demerits of each Vendor. The names of the attendees of the meeting are given in the adjacent table.

As an outcome of this meeting, the X-Media Sub-group shortlisted two Vendors and decided to ask them to jointly explore if they could provide a joint POC and a revised commercial proposal.

The short-listed Vendors included Ipsos who would be the primary service provider. Ipsos had scored the highest consolidated rating for the robustness of their measurement framework amongst all the Vendors. Ipsos would be supported by Aqilliz as their technology partner. Aqilliz, whose proposal had scored the highest consolidated rating as the most innovative proposal from amongst all the Vendors, would help the shortlisted Vendors build a future-proof cross-platform solution in line with the guidelines of World Federation of Advertising. The members of X-Media Sub-group who attended the Initial Partner Selection Meeting were broadly aligned that given the unique nature of the Audience Measurement project, this combination of Vendors is most likely to succeed.

The proposed decision was first circulated to the platform members of the X-Media Sub-group by email on 8 April 2021 to ensure they are in alignment since they had not attended either the presentations or the Initial Partner Selection Meeting. The decision was then separately communicated to Ipsos and Aqilliz and they were asked to confirm their willingness to work with each other. Both shortlisted Vendors confirmed their willingness to work together by 13 April 2021.

## **CONDUCT OF THE SECOND PHASE OF THE PROPOSAL EVALUATION PROCESS**

On 20 April 2021, the X-Media Sub-group sent a 'Request for POC and revised commercial proposals' to Ipsos/Aqilliz. Ipsos/Aqilliz sent their revised proposal on 20 May 2021. The X-Media Sub-group evaluated the proposal and concluded that the revised proposal sent by Ipsos/Aqilliz did not address the brief of the X-Media Sub-group sufficiently.

Therefore, the X-Media Sub-group decided to ask Ipsos/Aqilliz to send another revised proposal. The X-Media Sub-group also decided to invite Nielsen (who was the second short-listed Vendor) to submit their revised proposal.

Accordingly, a similar 'Request for POC and revised commercial proposals' was sent to Nielsen on 6 June 2021. Aqilliz would act as the technology partner for Nielsen as well. On the same date, an email was sent to Ipsos/Aqilliz asking them to submit their revised proposals after addressing the key gaps highlighted to them.

The first set of revised proposals that were received from both Vendors were circulated to the X-media Sub-group members on 11 July 2021.

An evaluation checklist was shared by Houda to the X-Media Sub-group members for evaluating both the proposals and the members were asked to send their questions to the Vendors ahead of their scheduled presentations. The checklist covered technical and commercial criteria. The presentations were conducted by Ipsos/Aqilliz on 2 August 2021 and Nielsen/Aqilliz on 3 August 2021.

The X-Media Sub-group members were asked to send their post-presentation evaluation to Nishe by 4 August 2021 ("the August 2021 evaluation"). Nishe received and compiled evaluations from 8 evaluators including Houda Koussa. Only one X-Media Sub-group member did not submit their evaluation. Nielsen/Aqilliz scored a cumulative average score of 3.04 while Ipsos/Aqilliz scored 2.50.

We presented the evaluation results in the Second Partner Selection Meeting on 5 August 2021 to the X-Media Sub-group. As agreed in a prior X-media Sub-group meeting, the evaluations and scores were anonymised for presentation. The X-Media Sub-group extensively debated on the relative merits and demerits of both proposals and a decision was taken to ask both the Vendors to provide some more context around their capabilities to deliver their proposed solution without any publisher's collaboration based on the recommendation from one of the X-Media Sub-group members.

The additional information provided by the Vendors in response to the above request were compiled by Houda Koussa and presented to the X-Media Sub-group members. The X-Media Sub-group members met on 10 August 2021 to discuss this additional information. At this meeting, the X-Media Sub-group members extensively debated further on both the proposals. The X-Media Sub-group members were of the opinion that the revised proposals from both the Vendors were technically broadly similar and that the Vendors had different relative merits and demerits.



The X-Media Sub-group therefore considered asking both Ipsos and Nielsen to jointly propose along with Aqilliz as the technology partner. Though concerns were raised by some members on complexities arising from having several parties involved, the X-Media Sub-group ultimately unanimously decided to go ahead with further exploration of the joint approach.

Subsequent to this meeting, there were several X-Media Sub-group meetings held on 22 August 2021, 8 September 2021, 13 September 2021, 19 September 2021, 27 September 2021, 14 October 2021 and 28 October 2021. The key matters covered during these meetings were the following:

- a. **Further exploration of the joint approach:** The X-Media Sub-group explored multiple possibilities of both the Vendors working jointly. Both the Vendors were separately involved in such explorative discussions. After extensive considerations around the practicality of such a collaboration, one of the Vendors rejected the approach;
- b. **Detailed technical and commercial aspects:** Several technical aspects of the proposals were discussed in great detail in order to ensure that the final selected Vendor is capable of meeting the requirements of all key stakeholders. Discussions also focused on the differences in commercial approaches of both the Vendors and their relative practical implications including considerations around whether the Vendors would be willing to bear the cost of the POC;
- c. **Geopolitical factors:** There were extensive discussions around the acceptability of both the Vendors to the key stakeholders considering factors such as their involvement in other projects in the region; and
- d. **Next steps:** The X-Media Sub-group also commenced discussions around the next steps to be taken once the preferred Vendor is finalised. Such discussions included various matters such as arriving at further clarity around project and POC scopes and costs, the most appropriate monetisation model and other practical contracting and administrative matters.

There were divergent, and at times, conflicting views on many of the above matters during these meetings and there were extensive discussions and debates and outreaches to external stakeholders and knowledgeable parties with the objective of arriving at informed consensus. The substantiality of the geopolitical considerations was particularly contentious. Discussions were held with the Saudi media broadcasters to understand and assess the approach taken and progress made in relation to their similar endeavour in KSA to help form an informed decision. Decision was also taken to hold discussions with Dubai and Abu Dhabi media broadcasters. Internal voting was resorted to from time to time to arrive at the X-Media Sub-group's decisions when divergent conclusions were expressed by the members.

In the meeting on 28 October 2021, it was agreed that all X-Media Sub-group members will cast their final votes to decide the preferred Vendor by sending in their votes to Nishe on or before 14 November 2021 (“November 2021 voting”). We compiled the votes and presented the votes to the X-Media Sub-group members in the Final Partner Selection Meeting on 21 November 2021. The outcome of the November 2021 voting is summarised in the table below:

	<b>Nielsen/ Aqilliz</b>	<b>Ipsos/ Aqilliz</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Both</b>
2 in favour of August 2021 evaluation	2	-	2	-
Remaining 7*	2	4	6	2
	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>

The following explanation will enable a better understanding of the above table:

- / All the 8 X-Media Sub-group members and Houda Koussa voted in the final voting. Thus, in total there were 9 votes.
- / Of those who voted, two evaluators believed that the August 2021 evaluation results should remain the final outcome. Accordingly, we considered that their November 2021 vote is for Nielsen/Aqilliz.
- / Of the remaining 7 evaluators, 6 indicated a preference for a specific vendor. Of these 6, one evaluator also indicated a preference to obtain POCs from both the Vendors. The 7<sup>th</sup> individual did not indicate preference for a specific vendor, but indicated a preference to obtain POCs from both the Vendors resulting in two votes for “Both” category.

As the November 2021 voting resulted in a tie between both the Vendors and the attempts to break the tie were unsuccessful, a decision was made by the X-Media Sub-group to approach the ABG Board for their recommendations on the final decision. Further, as some of the evaluators had voted to obtain POCs from both the Vendors, a decision was also taken to ask both the Vendors whether they would be willing to offer the POC for free even if they were in competition to win the final project.

We presented on the proposal evaluation process and the results to the ABG Board which met on 12 December 2021, the minutes of which are published on the ABG website. Divergent viewpoints were raised and discussed during the Board meeting. The Board concluded that as both Vendors are equally competent technically, both the Vendors should be asked to submit their final commercial proposals based on a common set of criteria which can then be used as the basis for final Vendor selection.

Accordingly, the X-Media Sub-group arrived at a set of common criteria and requested both Vendors to submit their final commercial proposals based on these criteria. The final proposals were obtained from both the Vendors on 17 January 2022. We prepared a summary of the final commercial proposals which were shared with X-Media Sub-group on 19 January 2022. Based on the final commercial proposals, Ipsos/Aqilliz emerged as the clear winner as the five-year total cost proposed by them was approximately 80% of the five-year total cost proposed by Nielsen/Aqilliz.

The X-Media Sub-group also proceeded to obtain views and recommendations on the Vendor proposals from both Dubai and Abu Dhabi broadcasters on 23 February 2022. Accordingly, details on the proposal evaluation process and the final technical and commercial proposals were shared with both the Dubai and Abu Dhabi broadcasters for their feedback and comments. The comments from these key stakeholders also favoured Ipsos/Aqilliz.

The next step will be for ABG to formalise Ipsos/Aqilliz's appointment for submitting the POC and invite relevant stakeholders who have not been involved in the proposal evaluation process for a two-week industry consultation. ABG will also publicly announce Ipsos/Aqilliz's appointment and issue relevant communications to the winning Vendor, the World Federation of Advertisers and other relevant internal and external stakeholders. The winning Vendor will be asked commence working on submitting a detailed POC proposal for the X-Media VAM Services in the UAE.

## **NISHE'S ROLE IN THE PROPOSAL EVALUATION PROCESS DURING THE FIRST PHASE**

We drafted the Guidelines to be followed for the conduct of the first phase of the proposal evaluation process. These Guidelines have been published on the ABG website. We also reviewed both the technical and financial evaluation criteria developed by Houda Koussa during the first phase and provided our comments which mainly focused on the principles of transparency and objectivity in addition to documentability. For avoidance of doubt, we did not review or comment on the appropriateness of the presence or absence of specific sub-criteria or the weightage given to each sub-criteria.

All the Vendors who responded to the RFP copied designated members of Nishe when they submitted their proposals. These designated members were also copied in all the key communications with the Vendors. Two members from Nishe team attended all the Vendor presentations.

The members of the X-Media Sub-group sent their technical and financial evaluations directly to the Nishe team. We compiled the scores and arrived at consolidated technical and financial scores for each Vendor which were then shared with the members of the X-Media Sub-Group along with our observations ahead of the Initial Partner Selection Meeting.

In the Initial Partner Selection Meeting conducted in April 2021, we presented the technical and financial scores to the attending members of the X-Media Sub-group explaining the work done by us to arrive at the consolidated scores and our related observations.

## **NISHE'S ROLE IN THE PROPOSAL EVALUATION PROCESS DURING THE SECOND PHASE**

Nishe was originally appointed until selection of a Vendor which, as per the original plan, would have been completed in the Initial Partner Selection Meeting in April 2021. Subsequently, when the X-Media Sub-group decided to seek revised proposals from Ipsos/Aqilliz and Nielsen/Aqilliz, the X-Media Sub-group approached us in June 2021 and asked us if we would be interested in continuing to perform our role as the independent monitoring body for the second phase of the proposal evaluation process. We agreed to this request.

There were no specific guidelines developed for the second phase. However, the essence of the Guidance developed for the first phase were followed for the second phase as well.

Similar to the first phase, two designated members from Nishe were present in all the meetings of the X-Media Sub-group including in the internal meetings as well as the meetings with the Vendors and other key stakeholders. These same members of Nishe was also involved in all related communications internally among the X-Media Sub-group members, with the Vendors, and with key stakeholders.

All evaluations by the X-Media Sub-group members in August 2021 and in November 2021 were sent to us and we were responsible for compiling and presenting them. We were also responsible for compiling the final revised financial proposals sent by both the Vendors in January 2022 to be shared among the X-Media Sub-group members.

Nishe presented on the conduct of the proposal evaluation process and results to the members of the ABG Board on 15 December 2021. Nishe also made a similar presentation to the Abu Dhabi Media on 15 March 2022 as part of an overall update to them on the RFP and the proposal evaluation process by specific X-Media Sub-committee members, and we were involved in all subsequent discussions and communications with them on this matter. It may be noted that we were not directly involved in the discussion with the Dubai broadcasters, however, we have seen the correspondence from the Dubai broadcasters which contained their views.

While our role as an observer during the first phase was more or less passive, our involvement in the second phase was a lot more active. We voiced our observations and recommendations on a number of matters during the X-Media Sub-group meetings and the ABG Board meeting.

## **OUR OBSERVATIONS ON THE FIRST PHASE**

### **Scoring**

The RFP indicated that the technical criteria have a weightage of 70% and the financial and time criteria have a weightage of 30%. Although the Guidelines envisaged computing a total score (incorporating both technical and financial scores) for each Vendor, we determined that a consolidated total score for each Vendor was not feasible. This was because many evaluators did not score on many sub-criteria in the financial scoring template. We understood from the evaluators' comments accompanying their scoring that this was primarily because the information provided by the Vendors in their proposals were insufficient to meet all the evaluation requirements in the financial scoring template. This affected the quality of the financial scores received, resulting in us having to do certain judgmental adjustments to the individual scores in order to arrive at a total financial score for each Vendor.

Though we also noted some minor omissions in the technical scores provided by the evaluators, these omissions did not affect the relative ranking of the Vendors. The evaluation during the Initial Partner Selection Meeting was thus performed solely based on the technical scores. The members of the X-Media Sub-group also agreed to ask shortlisted Vendors for a revised commercial proposal.

### **Involvement of the X-Media Sub-group members in the process**

While all the members of the X-Media Sub-group did not attend the presentations and/or provide the technical and financial evaluations in the first phase, we noted that efforts were undertaken to ensure that the X-Media Sub-group is broadly aligned with the actions and decisions. Such efforts included:

- / multiple email communications to the members informing them of the progress of the proposal evaluation process and requesting their participation;
- / sharing of the recorded presentations with those who could not attend;
- / extensive deliberations by the members who attended the Initial Partner Selection Meeting before making the decision on shortlisting Vendors;
- / emails to the platform partners who were absent from all the presentations and evaluations to inform them and align them on the decision made; and
- / the alignment within the X-Media Sub-group on the text of the draft communication to the shortlisted Vendors informing them of the decision.

### **Adherence to the Guidelines**

At all stages in the proposal evaluation process, we noted that the Guidelines were strictly followed in most instances. However, a few exceptions were noted such as omissions to provide certain confirmations required and to follow certain prescribed communication formats as per the Guidelines. Since these requirements were purely administrative in nature, we do not believe that these exceptions are material enough to affect the transparency and objectivity of the proposal evaluation process.

## **OUR OBSERVATIONS ON THE SECOND PHASE**

### **Establishment of and adherence to a process and structure**

The first phase followed a structured and predetermined process from start to end. The second phase followed a relatively structured process until the August 2021 evaluation was completed in accordance with the evaluation criteria set by Houda Koussa.

However, the discussions in the X Media Sub-group meetings in the subsequent months were substantially unstructured. Further, no Guidelines were issued by us for the second phase. This was because the second phase was not originally intended as a part of the proposal evaluation process, but was a considered addition due to the first phase not producing the intended result of arriving at a final preferred Vendor. Further, the overarching objective of the RFP and the proposal evaluation process was to arrive at an innovative and workable solution acceptable to diverse stakeholders for a hitherto unaddressed problem and this necessitated a non-rigid approach.

We do not believe that the lack of structure was a flaw in the second phase of the proposal evaluation process. While the lack of structure resulted in a significant delay in the final decision-making as opposed to what was planned and expected by ABG, it also allowed sufficient and appropriate consideration of several critical factors and risks which we believe will have a positive impact on the likelihood of success of the final solution developed for X-Media VAM Services in the UAE.

### **Involvement of the X-Media Sub-group members in the process**

We observed that the involvement of the X-Media Sub-group members was in general much higher in the second phase compared to the first phase. This was evident in the number of X-Media Sub-group meetings that took place, the high level of member participation in such meetings both in terms of their presence and their engagement, the frequency and extent of email communication among the X-Media Sub-group members and the high member involvement in evaluations and voting.

### **Consideration of multiple viewpoints**

As the second phase involved much more detailed discussions around various matters compared to the first phase, divergent viewpoints often arose. In our observation, there were genuine and consistent efforts by the X-Media Sub-group to consider and address all the viewpoints, which were sometimes conflicting and contentious, that were raised and to bring as much consensus as possible. We do not have any reason to believe that fair consideration was not given to all the views and opinions of all the members. We also believe that both the Vendors were given equitable opportunities.

### **Nishe's views and observations on specific matters**

Due to conflicting viewpoints in certain areas and the absence of a predetermined process, we were asked by the X-Media Sub-group in multiple instances to proffer our views on various matters. In addition, where we noted certain points that we felt were not adequately or appropriately covered in the discussions, we offered our viewpoints at our own volition. In all such instances, we took special care to ensure that we stayed fully objective and neutral in our observations.

It is important to stress that we did not offer any views on the relative merits or demerits of any Vendor or their proposal. Our views and comments were solely limited to matters relating to the conduct of the proposal evaluation process.

### **Approach to the resolution of the tie in November 2021 voting**

In our opinion, the decision by the X-Media Sub-group to approach the ABG board when the November 2021 voting resulted in a tie was appropriate and the solution offered by the ABG Board to resolve the tie was well-considered, objective and transparent.

## **OVERALL COMMENTS AND CONCLUSION ON BOTH THE PHASES OF THE PROPOSAL EVALUATION PROCESS**

The inclusion of Houda Koussa's evaluations and votes in decision-making was flagged as inappropriate by a member of the ABG Board in the ABG Board meeting in December 2021. We note that Houda Koussa was consistently involved as a part of all the evaluations and voting in both the first and second phases and no concerns were raised in this regard by the X-Media Sub-group members in the X-Media Sub-group meetings throughout the proposal evaluation process. We also note here that exclusion of her evaluations and votes would not have changed the final outcome.

Overall, we have no reason to believe that the principles of transparency and objectivity were not adhered to at any stage in both the first and second phases of the proposal evaluation process.

## **LIMITATIONS OF OUR SCOPE OF WORK AND REPORT**

The objective of our monitoring role is strictly to assist ABG in ensuring, and to provide the UAE media sector an independent assessment of, the transparency and objectivity of the proposal evaluation process for the UAE X-Media VAM services. The purpose of this report is to present our observations on the conduct of the proposal evaluation process in the context of the above objectives. This report is neither fit nor to be used for any other purpose.

The procedures that we have performed do not constitute either an audit or a review in accordance with International Standards on Auditing or International Standards on Review Engagements or any other similar standards and accordingly, this report does not constitute or contain an audit opinion or a review opinion.

Our report is solely based on our involvement in the proposal evaluation process as described in the **NISHE'S ROLE IN THE PROPOSAL EVALUATION PROCESS DURING THE FIRST PHASE** and **NISHE'S ROLE IN THE PROPOSAL EVALUATION PROCESS DURING THE SECOND PHASE** sections. We are not aware of any communication relevant to the proposal evaluation process that may have taken place without our involvement with the Vendors and/or among members of the X-Media Sub-group, Audience Project Committee, ABG and other key stakeholders and we have not performed any specific procedures to identify if any such communication have taken place.

While we understand and accept that this report will be made publicly available, we do not take responsibility to any party other than ABG for the contents of this report.

## KEY TERMINOLOGIES AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABG	Advertising Business Group
Audience Project Committee	UAE Audience Measurement Committee constituted by ABG
POC	Proof of Concept
RFP	Request for Proposal
VAM	Video Audience Measurement
X-Media	Cross-Media
X-Media Sub-group	Cross-Media Sub-group of the Audience Project Committee
Initial Partner Selection Meeting	Meeting conducted by X-Media Sub-group members on 8 April 2021 to shortlist Vendors after receiving their proposals and their presentations
Second Partner Selection Meeting	Meeting conducted by X-Media Sub-group members on 5 August 2021 to choose between Ipsos/Aqilliz and Nielsen/Aqilliz
Final Partner Selection Meeting	Meeting conducted by X-Media Sub-group members on 21 November 2021 to choose between Ipsos/Aqilliz and Nielsen/Aqilliz