



# ***What's Hot?!***

**April 2025**



## Are we Redefining our Relationship with Tech?

For the first time, [global smartwatch sales have declined](#), with 7% fewer devices being shipped in 2024, according to market research experts, Counterpoint.

In the past five years, the market has been disrupted by the likes of Whoop and Oura, with many ditching their wrist-screens in favour of sleek rings and screen-free bracelets. This, combined with intense competition from Chinese competitors including Huawei, has seen Apple's share of the global smartwatch market fall from 25% in 2023 to [22% last year](#).

Conversely, in 2024, Oura reported that they expected [sales](#) of their fitness tracking ring – which prioritises heart rate variability, accurate body temperature checks and eight days of battery life – to jump to \$500 million. That is a 100% increase in sales on the year before.

Similarly, Whoop – a wearable which places emphasis on recovery and strain, and is backed by the biggest name in sports – has [soared in value](#) following more than \$400m in investment.

The main difference between these wearables and their Apple, Google and Samsung competitors is the lack of screen. Whilst those who run with an Apple Watch may be tempted to constantly look at their pace, heartrate, and distance, challenger brands like Whoop and Oura seek to add an intentional action to the process of opening apps.

Likewise, Touch Grass, a screentime management and productivity [app](#) launched on 14th March by a 29-year-old London developer, has already seen exponential interest.

In an X post announcing the launch, the developer, [Rhys Kentish](#), encourages people to get up and photograph themselves literally touching grass, garnering over 1.2 million views.

These developers hope that, by requiring users to choose to engage rather than passively taking in information, they will help people to break free from patterns of endless scroll.

Indeed, a shift towards people spending less time looking at screens, and towards more 'intentional' consumption of social media, could have long-term ramifications for media planning and buying – with high-attention channels like AV and Cinema likely to play a prominent role.

Whilst it's too early to say if recent trends in smartwatch sales are merely a short-term blip or the first signs of a realignment in consumer attitudes towards tech, they demonstrate that the media landscape is ever-evolving – and that the world would look very different if we all went out and touched grass.



## The Power of Words: Why Subtitles Are the Next Untapped Advantage in Advertising

For years, the advertising industry has carefully measured the impact of sight and sound across formats – from print and outdoor to TV and digital. But one core element has often been left out of the conversation: words – and, more specifically, subtitles. A new white paper from the7stars and Differentology reveals that 7 in 10 Brits choose to watch content with subtitles or captions.

As attention becomes harder to capture, and as viewers increasingly consume media in low-volume environments, the rise of words on screen offers an opportunity for brands to connect with audiences more clearly, more accessibly, and with greater impact.

**Subtitles Are Now a Viewer Expectation:** Once seen as a niche accessibility feature, subtitles and captions have become a cultural mainstay, embedded into everything from TV and streaming content to social media, music, and even podcasts. According to the7stars' research, streaming platforms lead the way, with two-thirds of Brits using subtitles on streaming services at least some of the time. More than half (53%) say the same about social media content, and a third use subtitles even when listening to audio content such as podcasts.

Among younger audiences, the behaviour is even more pronounced: 61% of 18–24-year-olds prefer to read text while watching video content. This is not just a matter of convenience or personal preference – it's a cultural shift.

**Why It Matters for Advertisers:** The implications for advertisers are significant. In the7stars and Differentology's research, three-quarters of Brits who expressed an opinion said they feel positively about subtitles and captions, with 66% believing brands that use them are more trustworthy and engaging. For 18–34s, that positivity rises even higher – nearly 9 in 10 say they view brands that use subtitles as more caring.

Subtitles don't just boost brand perception. They enhance ad effectiveness, too. the7stars tested creative from Cunard, The Cotswold Company and Iceland with and without subtitles, and found that ads with subtitles saw a +3% point increase in brand consideration, and a +4% point rise in likeability, vs. the same ads without subtitles.

**From Access to Impact: Opportunities for Brands:** There are 12 million people in the UK who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing. For this audience, subtitles are not a bonus – they are essential. Yet research from RNID shows that many people still face barriers when subtitles aren't available, with 85% saying they've stopped watching a programme due to the lack of captions.

In recent years, broadcasters have sought to raise awareness of these barriers, such as ITV's successful 'silent ad breaks', and Channel 4's commitment to subtitling all content available on its streaming service. Indeed, as the use of subtitles grows across all media formats, brands have the opportunity to both promote inclusivity and drive impact. If subtitles are not already part of a brand's creative toolkit, now is the time to act – not just as an afterthought, but as a meaningful part of a content strategy. The power of words has never been more visible – or more valuable.

the7stars and Differentology's white paper, *The Power of Words*, can be downloaded in full [here](#).





## Generation Gap: Media has a Vital Role to Play in Reversing Regressive Attitudes

For decades, an individual's generation has acted as a relatively strong predictor of their social and political views. If a well-known quote, often misattributed to Winston Churchill, is to be believed, people are expected to be more liberal in their younger days, before gradually turning more conservative as they get older.

Recent years have seen a substantial challenge to this conventional wisdom. While young women [express](#) strongly progressive views, the gap to their male counterparts is widening. According to analysis from the *FT*, a wide [ideology gap](#) is emerging between Gen Z men and women globally.

This shift in beliefs among younger men is evident in more than just exit polls. According to Kantar TGI data, the proportion of men aged 15-24 who take regressive viewpoints towards women is growing year-on-year. While over 80% of adults and 70% of men in Britain believe that 'women are just as capable as men at being leaders', the proportion of 15-24-year-old men who share this sentiment has fallen by over 30 % points in just five years.

There is no single cause behind this trend, nor is there an easy solution. Nonetheless, media has a vital role to play in instilling positive attitudes in young men. Here are three ways brands can do their bit.

**Relatable Role Models:** As the media landscape has grown increasingly fragmented, young men have turned to influencers including Andrew Tate and Joe Rogan to fill the void left by traditional media. These creators have amassed audiences that are [overwhelmingly male](#), with over 80% of listeners to – and 90% of guests on – the Joe Rogan Experience estimated to be male. This lack of diverse viewpoints creates the perfect conditions for 'callous, manipulative and toxic influencers' to prosper, [according to](#) the former England Men's manager, Gareth Southgate.

Advertising wields enormous power to spotlight emerging content creators to a wider audience. By collaborating with influencers to whom young men can relate, brands can facilitate authentic, open discussion about the role of young men and women in society.

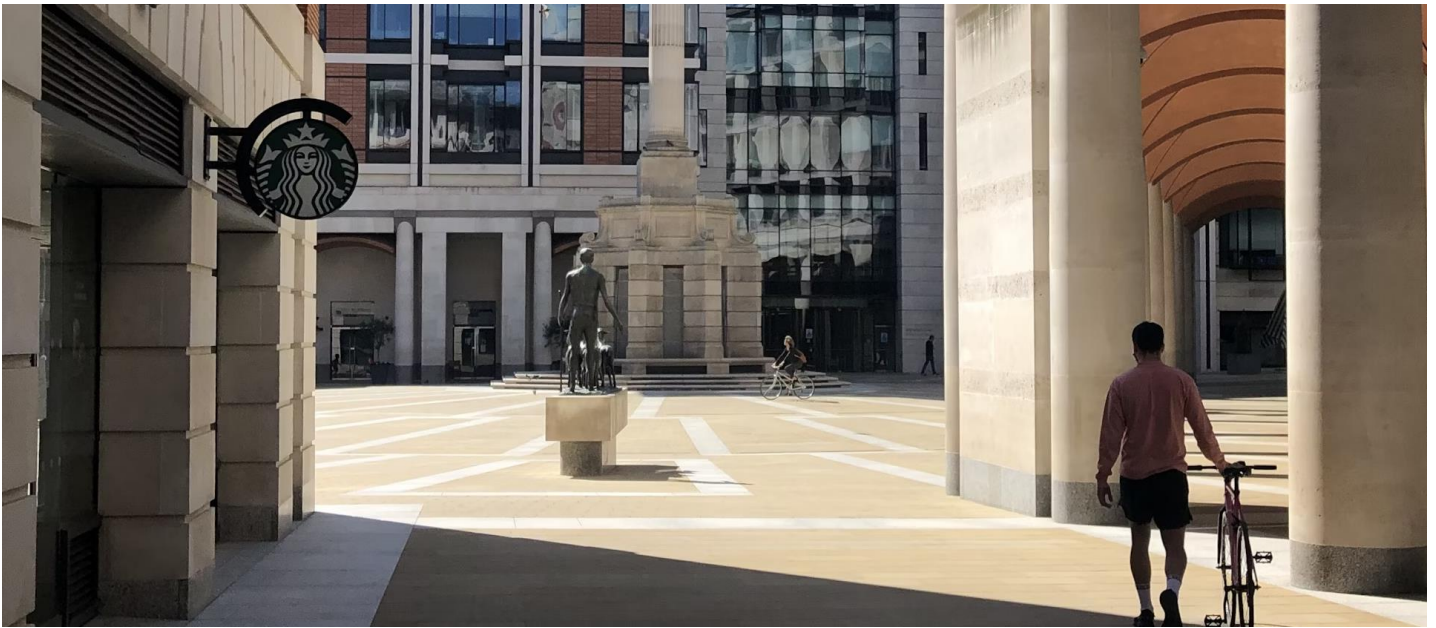
**Making Representation Seamless:** In a world in which terms including 'woke' have become commonplace in young men's online discourse, media has a major role to play in making representation the norm once more. Indeed, many of the campaigns most successful at driving attitudinal shifts were those which made inclusion feel seamless – such as Dove's iconic [Campaign for Real Beauty](#), or Always [changing the colour](#) of period blood in its ads from blue to red.

For brands to be successful in reinforcing positive attitudes among Gen Z men towards women, themes ranging from stay-at-home male parents to women in senior leadership roles should feel ubiquitous – not as a gimmicky campaign designed to drive sales.

**Redefining Brand Safety:** Due to the perceived proliferation of negative content on platforms, many high-profile brands have pulled advertising from the very places most appealing to Gen Z men. While brands are right to be wary about appearing next to hateful content, sweeping block lists mean that impactful, inclusive campaigns risk missing the very demographic most in need of influence. Adam Foley, CEO of Bountiful Cow, [warns against](#) the 'utterly ruinous' potential for keyword lists to block ads from otherwise harmless content.

If media is to do its bit in reversing regressive attitudes among young men, brands need to engage with audiences in the spaces they call home – or risk their messaging missing an entire generation.





## Five Years On... How Advertising and Agencies Have Evolved Since Lockdown

Offices slammed shut. We stayed at home. Streaming was king. Social was everything. Advertising as a whole industry, and the culture, practices and stalwarts within it, were forced to adapt. Campaign [recently shared](#) that changes have been widely seen across pitching processes, working patterns and starting salaries, but beyond the agencies, advertising itself has changed.

the7stars is no stranger to these changes, but our mantra of 'people above process' and commitment to doing things independently of the herd sets us apart. Here are just some of the ways in which agency life, and advertising more broadly, have changed since the pandemic.

**OOH and Experiential:** Once we began to re-enter the world without restrictions, experiential and OOH marketing boomed with spaces like Outernet London being taken over by brands. Campaigns like Charli xcx's London Eye-colour change have dominated headlines and created cultural moments.

**Influencer Marketing:** TikTok and Instagram had a captive audience during lockdown and since their impact has continued to swell, with agencies and brands alike putting more cash into influencer marketing. With the rise of niche content, more targeted-to-audience advertising, micro-influencers and brand partnerships, the tide of influencers is unlikely to change anytime soon.

**Generative AI:** Our relationship with technology shifted massively during lockdown, using it for remote work, education, and socialisation. But, in that time, generative AI tools like ChatGPT have been widely adopted. The media ecosystem has also faced a huge shift because of these technologies, with generative AI helping to create, perfect, and imagine campaigns.

**Flexibility:** Remote work and flexibility in the return to work have created a fundamental change in the intense worlds of media and advertising. At the7stars, this has meant the wide uptake of our Star Day scheme – a mandatory day off, once a month, on top of uncounted holiday – and an acceptance of both the importance of flexible working arrangements for people from all walks of life, and the collaborative nature of our office.

**Using spaces intelligently:** With lockdown showing we can work from anywhere, some agencies made cuts to in-person spaces. At the7stars, we welcome clients and collaborators into our London office to improve collaboration as many of them now work remotely, and ensure we only have two floors open on Fridays, when fewer people are in, to reduce our energy consumption.

**Increased benefits and salaries:** With an increased focus on work-life balance and pressure to return-to-work in-person, employers across the industry have made a conscious effort to raise starting salaries, improve benefit offerings and make the office an attractive place to be. At the7stars, we have daily breakfast provisions, the opportunity to take longer lunches for exercise, summer nine-day fortnights to make the most of the longer days, and free career coaching for staff at all levels.

While working life will never be quite the same as it was pre-lockdown, one thing will always hold true: brands and agencies that put people's wellbeing at the heart of decision-making will ultimately produce the best, most impactful and most creative work.





## The Rise of Influencers in FMCG

Unilever recently announced plans to exponentially increase social media spend – raising investment in the channel from 30% to 50% of marketing budget and boldly committing to recruit ‘20 times more influencers’ than before. This move underscores growing confidence in the power of content creators, but it also highlights the evolving role of social within a broader, integrated marketing strategy.

Unilever are not alone in their direction of travel. 84% of brands now believe influencer marketing is effective, with many reporting that influencer-generated content outperforms brand-created assets on social. As social-first content reshapes the marketing landscape, ensuring the optimal allocation of budget across channels, audiences and objectives is more important than ever.

### The power of influencers

Today’s consumers are more sceptical of traditional advertising than ever. They seek authenticity, relatability and recommendations from trusted voices over corporate messaging. Influencers help bridge this gap – whether it’s a fitness expert promoting a training hack, a lifestyle vlogger sharing their travel essentials or an Instagram chef showcasing creative ways to cook with a new product.

For brands, influencers cultivate trust and credibility within established communities, offering an opportunity to build deeper relationships. Their content is engaging, shareable and seamlessly integrated into consumers’ lives – making products feel like a natural choice rather than a hard sell.

However, the most effective influencer strategies go beyond simply boosting reach. Influencers work best when integrated into the wider channel mix – from amplifying brand partnerships to enhancing paid media strategies. A hybrid approach to creative development – where influencers collaborate alongside traditional brand creative or production teams – ensures content aligns with both performance goals and platform-specific best practices.

### Beyond reach: the cultural shift to relevance

It’s no longer just about partnering with influencers who have the biggest followings. The most effective campaigns are built around cultural moments, niche communities and deeper storytelling – driving sustained engagement over time, rather than one-off spikes in visibility.

At the7stars, we help brands connect with culture through the people and platforms shaping it. We’ve recently revamped our influencer offering with a new team of influencer specialists who strategically develop activations at scale, ensuring creators, content trends and behaviours are leveraged effectively across the full channel mix.

### Social is crucial, but balance is key

Influencer marketing has evolved from a nice-to-have to a must-have, but success depends on strategic allocation rather than over-reliance on a single channel or approach. The future of marketing isn’t just about spending more on social – it’s about ensuring brands play an authentic role in the conversation while leveraging the right mix of media, partnerships and creative strategies.

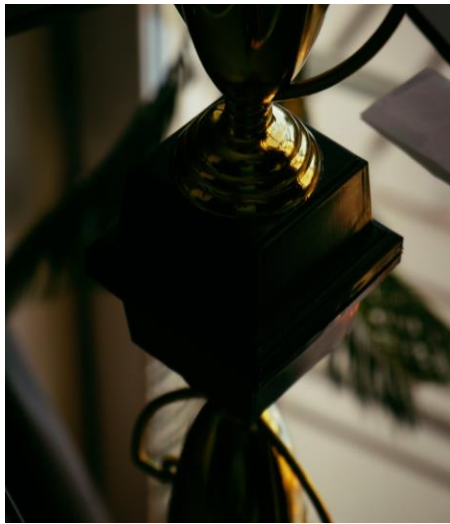
For a review of your influencer strategy, creative inspiration or a fresh perspective on integrating social-first content into your plans, there is no better place to turn for expert advice than the7stars.



## ITV Ad Revenue Rises +2% Marking a Return to Growth

ITV recently announced its total advertising revenue (TAR) has increased by 2% following two consecutive years of decline. This year's increase was driven by growth in digital advertising revenue, rising by 15% year on year to £482m; though linear advertising still made up 30% of the broadcaster's TAR, at £546m.

Looking ahead, it's likely that ITV's 2025 figures will face tough scrutiny, being compared against the Euros in June and July last year. Furthermore, the introduction of new restrictions on less healthy foods in advertising, coming into play this October, may negatively impact the broadcaster.



## 2024 was a Big Year for Digital Radio Adspend

In a year in which total commercial radio ad revenue grew by 3.2% to £738m, digital radio ad revenue now makes up more than a tenth of that spend – rising by 6.6% in 2024 to reach £77m.

This mirrors a wider trend within the Audio industry towards both commercial and digital channels. According to RAJAR's Q4 2024 results, more than 72% of all radio listening hours were consumed digitally, while Online Radio now reaches 44% of all adults, up two percentage points quarter-on-quarter.

Additionally, commercial radio's share of audio vis-à-vis BBC stations continues to grow each year.



## The All-In Census Returns

March saw the much-anticipated launch of the Advertising Association All-In census for 2025.

This industry-wide initiative is a crucial step in making advertising more inclusive, diverse, and representative and means that by taking part we are helping to shape a future where everyone's voice is heard and valued.

The last census, in 2023, uncovered that while the industry is majority-comprised of women, they are disproportionately lacking in Adland C-Suite. Additionally, the industry was found to be under-representing disabled and working-class people – leading to action plans to tackle this imbalance.