



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

July 2025



## How Brands Can Engage with Women's Sport (and Why they Should)

In 2022, women's football in the UK finally had its watershed moment as the England side brought the Euros trophy home. This presented a marked change for advertisers, fans and players alike. The Euro 2022 final had a peak audience of 17.4m, a whopping 49% increase on the previous record, England's 2019 World Cup semi-final loss to the USA. Audiences were watching, listening, engaged.

At the following year's Women's World Cup, England's matches delivered strong performances against the most sought-after TV buying audiences, such as 16-34 ads and ABC1 ads, with viewers split almost evenly between genders. This combined with an impressive reach of 42% of light TV viewers further highlighted the potential of women's sport to reach mass TV viewing audiences.

England's opening match of the 2025 Euros on 5<sup>th</sup> July attracted a peak audience of 3.9m on ITV, lower than the 2022 curtain-raiser (which was boosted by being on home soil) but still an impressive reach given the match competed directly with both Wimbledon and the FIFA Club World Cup.

### As we hope for the Lionesses to repeat their heroics, how can brands reach the growing audience?

While partnerships with official broadcasters are the most obvious route, they come at a premium. For smaller brands, there are plenty of other opportunities to show support for the women's game.

There has been huge growth in partnerships and brand deals with star players – among them Lucy Bronze and Lauren James – since the last Euros. Equally, there are women's football creators, analysts and influencers like Ally Flan and Nancy Baker covering the tournament. These figures present ample opportunities to create social content in the lead up to and around the matches.

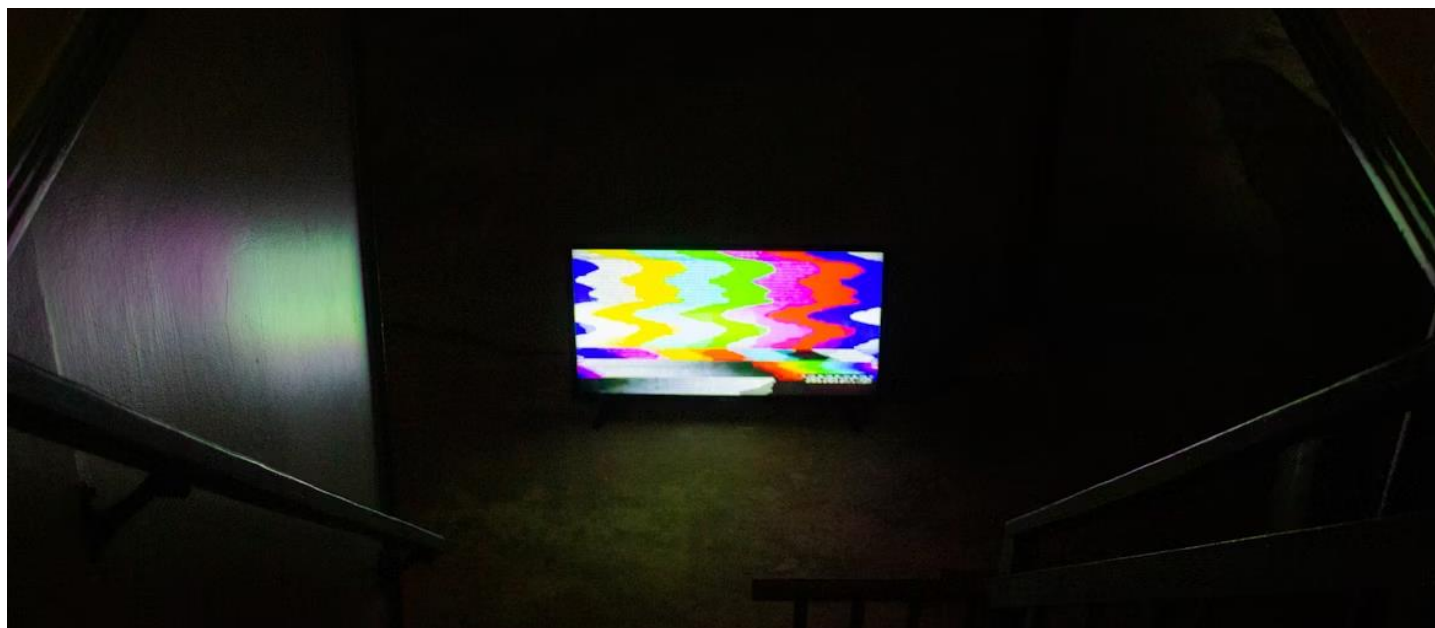
Like much of the sporting world, women's football has seen a surge in experiential partnerships. What once was reserved for grassroots communities in major cities is now accessible to the masses through a rise in live streaming and virtual gaming experiences on platforms including [Roblox](#).

Early champions of women's football – among them *The Guardian*, *Telegraph*, and sports titles like *The Athletic* – offer opportunities to co-create branded editorial content. At the same time, podcasts such as *Big Kick Energy* and *Counter Pressured* have attracted dedicated fanbases. Each of these presents an opening for brands to build presence in women's football through trusted voices.

Such partnerships can exist beyond tournaments and matches, driving lasting social purpose. A memorable example of this is *Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)*, which collaborated with England star Fran Kirby on its memorable [Unseen Signals](#) campaign, cutting through the buzz around the Women's World Cup to draw attention to suicide rates among young women.

The economic case for investment in women's football is strong. UEFA predicts that the commercial value of the women's game in Europe [will reach](#) €686m (£585m) over the next decade. [84% of fans](#) perceive women's football as being 'more progressive, less money-driven and more family-oriented'. Brands that may be hesitant to get involved in sport can align with women's football on values.

What's more, the market is far from saturated, meaning brands that go all in now can still be viewed as pioneers. Women's football presents an opportunity for brands to deliver purpose-based strategies alongside the sporting world's rising stars.



## Sky, Channel 4, ITV & Comcast: A New Era for SME TV Advertising

The UK advertising landscape is set for a significant shift. Sky, Channel 4, ITV and Comcast [have announced](#) a groundbreaking partnership to launch a unified premium video advertising marketplace, scheduled to go live in 2026. This initiative aims to make TV advertising more accessible, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), by offering a self-serve platform, for broadcaster video-on-demand (BVOD) campaigns.

**What's changing?** For the first time, advertisers will be able to run a single campaign across all three major UK broadcasters' on-demand services via a user-friendly, self-serve platform powered by Comcast's Universal Ads technology. Key features include:

**Unified campaign management:** Brands can independently plan, buy, measure, and report on campaigns spanning Sky, Channel 4 and ITV, significantly streamlining the process.

**Self-serve simplicity:** Designed with SMEs and digital-first advertisers in mind, the platform will offer biddable pricing and a digital-style buying experience, lowering the barrier to entry for TV advertising.

**Access to premium BVOD inventory:** Advertisers will be able to access high-quality, on-demand and streaming video inventory, which has traditionally been reserved for agency-led or larger campaigns.

**What does this mean for brands?** For most brands, the immediate impact of this new marketplace is expected to be minimal. The platform is specifically targeted at 'new-to-TV' advertisers — primarily SMEs who have not previously used TV as a channel. Importantly, this product will only provide access to BVOD inventory, not linear TV. Therefore, brands focused on traditional, fame-driving linear TV advertising will be unaffected.

At this stage, details on pricing are limited, referring only to 'biddable pricing', suggesting a model similar to digital ad auctions. As with any private marketplace, CPMs will be influenced by inventory availability and competition. Brands that benefit from direct or programmatic guaranteed (PG) buys will retain access to the highest premium inventory. The new self-serve platform is likely to offer inventory that remains after agency and direct bookings, meaning our clients' access to top-tier placements is unlikely to be impacted.

### Looking ahead

Should this first-of-its-kind partnership between the UK's biggest commercial operators ultimately widen access to broadcast content, it could prove beneficial to an array of smaller brands. However, the immediate impact on existing advertisers is minimal, with the most premium inventory likely to be preserved. We will continue to monitor developments as more details emerge and stay informed of any changes that may affect upcoming campaigns.

*Clients with any questions about how this new platform might fit into your media strategy are encouraged to reach out to the 7stars' AV team on [AViary@the7stars.co.uk](mailto:AViary@the7stars.co.uk)*





## Cannes Lions Shows Power of Social Purpose – and the Cost of Dull

As we reach the halfway point of the year, many in the world of marketing and advertising will still be processing the celebration of creativity that is Cannes Lions. As afterparty hangovers subside and the last stragglers depart the French Riviera, industry focus turns to processing the big winners and losers of the illustrious awards, with sights already set on 2026.

This year, one theme that stood out was the impact of brands aligning with social causes and its implications for long-term brand building. Several of the global Grand Prix winners delivered impactful campaigns that dealt with prescient global issues in a thoughtful way.

In France, AXA, the 'instant and unanimous' [winner](#) of the Dan Wieden Titanium Lion, drove awareness of domestic violence by highlighting its policy coverage for women affected by violent relationships. Meanwhile, the Grand Prix for Industry Craft winners, Idomed and Artplan Sao Paulo, created an app [which highlighted](#) institutional racism in the Brazilian healthcare system.

As the7stars detailed in [Giving Media Back Its Mojo](#) earlier this year, consistent devotion to a cause is more important than simply aligning with one. Consumers are increasingly critical of brands that are seen to be inauthentic or jumping on the bandwagon of popular causes, whilst recognising that consistency of message signals unwavering commitment.

This was clearly in the minds of the judges. As Tara McKenty, Innovation jury member at Cannes, notes, 'A key question we asked ourselves was, will this still be in the world in 5 to 10 years' time?'

Groundbreaking research presented at Cannes by Dr Karen Nelson-Field highlighted the extraordinary cost of dull advertising. The research categorised over 80,000 ads from System1's emotion tracking into four quartiles of 'dull'. Just 30% of ad views cross the Attention-Memory Threshold, meaning that impressions in the lower two 'dull' quartiles will face long-term challenges in building memorability among consumers.

The research highlighted that for dull creative to simply match the effectiveness of non-dull creative would require an additional media investment equivalent to the GDP of Greece.

Lashantay Richards, Strategy Director at the7stars, reflects, "The industry is at a turning point. Purpose-led narratives paired with emotional nostalgia won big, while trust and brand safety became strategic imperative. Outcomes ruled over impressions resulting in ROI and creative flair.

"Now more than ever, this signals a time for brands to drive impact by making bold decisions. We must all think smarter or be outsmarted by those who invest beyond the dull."

As this year's Lions show, brands which align themselves with social causes – showing genuine compassion and understanding of a prevailing issue – are cutting through with memorable creative amidst a landscape littered with 'dull' ads. If media is to truly get its mojo back, social causes shouldn't be seen as something to exploit, but something to champion.



## A New Milestone in Accessibility: The Rise of Closed Captioning in Advertising

The advertising sector has been on a long journey towards accessibility. Four decades since the introduction of live subtitles on British television, most ads delivered in the UK are still not being subtitled. A [Clearcast study](#) in Q1 2025 showed that one in four advertisers did not intend to subtitle their TV ads, despite wide support for making advertising more accessible to consumers.

As Cannes Lions draws to a close, there is hope that the tide may finally be turning. In the Design and Digital Craft categories, FCB Chicago scooped [the Grand Prix](#) at the festival for its 'Caption with intention' campaign for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

The campaign, which followed 10 months of research with the d/Deaf community, took closed captioning to another level. Animated on-screen text is closely synchronised with speech and displays 'intonation, different characters and volume of voice through bold lettering and colour'.

The FCB campaign spotlights the potential for accessible advertising to both improve the viewing experience of the deaf community and to drive memorability among the broader population. But while advanced closed captioning offers new potential for bold advertising, much of the industry continues to forego even the most basic form of subtitling in its ads.

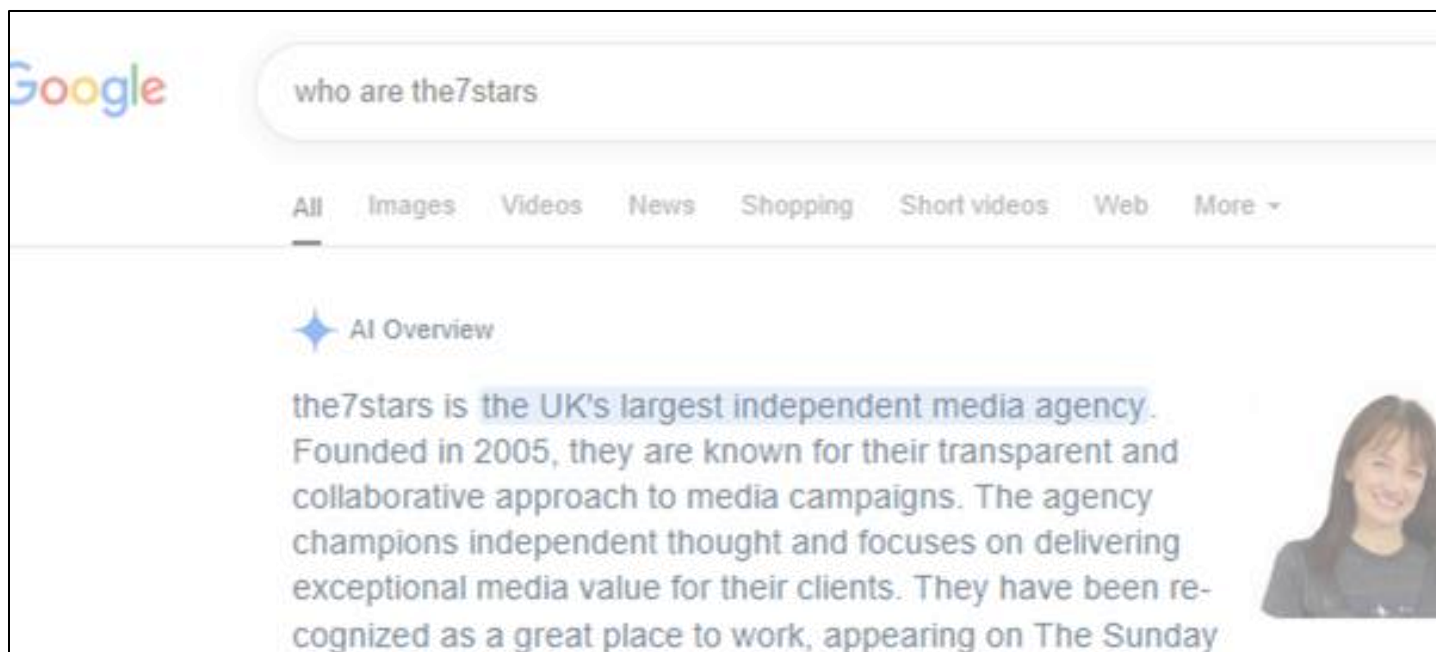
Initiatives are underway to change this. Earlier this year, Channel 4 [announced](#) its aim for closed captioning to be available on all campaigns on its airtime by 2026. This follows accessibility initiatives by the public broadcaster during last year's Paralympic Games – targets that were ultimately not met after 40% of advertisers failed to deliver on captioning for creative assets.

The industry has a responsibility to meet the needs of the UK's d/Deaf community, who number some 18 million people with varying degrees of hearing loss. However, as proprietary research [from the7stars](#) has shown, it is not just the d/Deaf community who stand to benefit from closed captioning in adverts. According to the7stars' *Power of Words*, released in collaboration with Differentology and Walr, 61% of 18-24-year-olds prefer to read text while watching video content.

This is a win-win for brands: the age demographic least likely to be affected by hearing loss stands to benefit alongside the quarter of UK adults who are among the deaf community.

Under controlled A/B testing methodology, ads with subtitles drew a 3%pt. increase in brand salience and consideration, and a 4%pt. increase in likeability – uplifts which were even more pronounced among 18-34s. While basic subtitles can be beneficial for brands, campaigns which seamlessly incorporated captioning into their creative – such as Cunard – stood to gain the most.

For advertising to truly become accountable, accessibility concerns will need to be addressed. While subtitling should be a simple step for brands to reach the d/Deaf community more effectively, the benefits to brand salience of incorporating seamless subtitles outweigh concerns about the cost of captioning. Perhaps, more than four decades on from the first live subtitles on Great British telly, we will soon finally have a country in which all can experience our content.



## Ads Arrive on Google AI Overviews as Competition Intensifies

Alphabet has announced the introduction of adverts to Google AI Overviews, one of several major announcements at the 2025 Google Marketing Live EMEA conference. This marks a seismic shift in the AI and search landscapes, with performance marketers watching closely to assess its impact.

By integrating ads into its AI Overviews, Google hopes to continue its long line of success stories in introducing new ad formats, from the first Google Search ads in 2000 (for a small business selling mail order live lobsters) to the launch of YouTube ads in 2007. Since the rollout of AI Overviews for many search queries, Google says it has seen increased user satisfaction, with more complex queries becoming the norm. These developments should now appeal to brands looking for meaningful ways to reach consumers who are actively in-market.

But while the changes are certain to excite advertisers, several questions remain. For one, OpenAI poses a threat to Google's monopoly on information that is unprecedented since Google first established dominance in Search decades ago. According to UKOM/Ipsos Iris data, OpenAI has a more than 25% monthly reach among 15-24s, whilst its biggest growth audience is 35-44s. As many abandon search entirely in favour of using ChatGPT for even simple queries, it remains to be seen whether Google's advanced AI summaries will be sufficient to win lapsed users back.

Indeed, whilst the introduction of ads to AI summaries may seem inevitable, it has been a long time coming. From the moment ChatGPT launched in late 2022, sending shockwaves around the world as users grappled with the new technology, there has been [debate](#) as to whether – and when – GPT models would start to roll-out advertising. OpenAI has [openly mulled](#) the possibility of incorporating ads into its products, though has so far resisted.

### What does this mean for brands?

It is important to note that, despite the changes, many brands will not notice immediate changes in their search landscape. According to [analysis](#) by Adthena of 10.4 million search engine results, Google's AI Overview appears mostly on longer search queries. But there is variance between categories, with AI Overview triggering for 40% of one-word healthcare searches, versus just 1% of travel queries. Likewise, for retail, AI Overview is only likely to appear on queries of 8+ words.

With the exception of healthcare, queries in each of the four categories tested were highly unlikely to return AI Overviews when branded terms are used. This means that most brands' organic search strategies are unlikely to see immediate effects following the introduction of ads.

Xanthe Pickford-Avery, the7stars' Head of Search, notes that for brands to successfully navigate the complex Search landscape, they should refrain from putting their eggs all in one basket. The introduction of ads into Google's AI will impact some brands, including those in categories most susceptible to AI Overviews, but it represents just one component of a successful search strategy.

Whether Google's new strategy will prove to be successful remains to be seen, but it may be the first of many new integrations as advertisers grapple with new forums to reach their consumers.





## Reuters Report Highlights Fragmentation of News

The 2025 [Reuters Digital News Report](#) has revealed that engagement with traditional media sources such as TV, print, and news websites continues to fall, while dependence on social media, video platforms, and online aggregators continue to grow. News use across online platforms is increasingly fragmented, with six online networks now reaching more than 10% weekly with news content.

Video reigns supreme. Across all markets, the proportion consuming social video has grown from 52% in 2020 to 65% in 2025, while consumption of any video has increased from 67% to 75%.

On a positive note, trust in the news (40%) has remained stable for the third year in a row, reaffirming the value of newsbrands to advertisers.



## ITV Unveils New Ad Tech Suite

On June 12th, ITV announced the launch of their new Ad Tech Suite at a Manchester showcase, revealing three innovative tools designed to help advertisers maximise ROI.

The standout new interactive format, *Lead Gen Ads*, offers a minimally intrusive way to capture user engagement. Viewers click a button on their remote to 'express interest' in an ad. This consent triggers the sharing of pre-filled contact information from the user's ITV account with the advertiser. Beta testing includes brands such as Pandora.

*ITV YouTube Affinities* uses Google's YouTube Audience and Search data with ITV's premium content to deliver more granular, brand-safe audience targeting.

*Outcomes Planner*, developed in partnership with ITV's Measurement Innovation Team and Viewers Logic, is designed to be easy to use and tailored to support SMEs in the TV advertising space.



## WhatsApp Introduces Ads

Advertising is set to launch on WhatsApp, appearing in the app's 'Updates' section. According to Meta, this should not affect those only using WhatsApp for messaging.

Information shared via private messages will not be used for advertising purposes. However, those who have linked WhatsApp to their Facebook and Instagram accounts will receive personalised advertising.

WhatsApp joins the ranks of previously ad-free platforms like Netflix and Google AI Summaries. According to Pulse data, 38% of Brits are less willing to use apps that follow this trend. However, WhatsApp's head Will Cathcart sees it as a 'natural extension of messaging services'.