



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

August 2025



## Exploring the Next Regulatory Frontier as HFSS Looms

As 2025 ticks on, details of the incoming HFSS ban are trickling in. The government [has confirmed](#) that brand-led advertising is to be exempted from the ban. The regulations, originally set to come into force on 1<sup>st</sup> October, will now be delayed until 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026.

Despite the delay, the industry is committed to a self-imposed ban in October, prior to the regulations becoming law. And while there will continue to be tussles over exactly what constitutes a 'brand' ad, most affected brands have already laid the groundwork for their media strategies in a post-HFSS world.

### Uneven ramifications

The regulatory changes will be felt across the category, but brands' capacity to adapt to the legislation will vary. Many non-HFSS compliant brands have invested heavily in AV campaigns prior to the deadline, with FMCG brands a 'major contributor' to the recent rebound in TV adspend, [according to](#) Thinkbox. The demand for premium inventory may lead to higher AV inflation, impacting brands in and out of category.

Outside of AV, OOH is not subject to the national HFSS restrictions and is likely to play a major role in FMCG brands' fame-driving strategies moving forward. While Outdoor has long been a bastion of food campaigns, brands may find themselves in increasingly hot competition for the most valuable adspace.

The shift in emphasis towards brand-led advertising is another area that will impact brands in disparate ways. Some HFSS brands can count on a recognisable brand identity; McDonald's 'Raise your Arches' campaign of 2023 would almost certainly be HFSS-compliant if it ran today. Others will be virtually starting from scratch. Indeed, from the [cigarette bans](#) of the 80s to the gambling regulations of the 00s, history tells us that when new legislation comes into force, brands will be forced to innovate to deliver attention-grabbing campaigns under tighter restrictions.

### The Next Course

With the HFSS deadline set, attention immediately turns to the next industry in the firing line of public health regulation. Alcohol is a likely contender, even after the government recently [declined](#) to pursue a HFSS-style ban. Despite hints of a delay, the UK's neighbour, Ireland, is [set to introduce](#) cigarette-style health warnings on alcoholic products in 2026. Should this policy be enacted, British eyes will surely be watching from across the Irish Sea for signs of a similar policy announcement.

Beyond alcohol, some dietary groups [have called](#) for tighter regulations on the marketing of caffeinated drinks to children. A leading cause of this was Prime, the highly caffeinated drink backed by KSI and Logan Paul. While a [collapse](#) in Prime sales may have shifted the regulatory focus onto other product categories for now, its initial success brought increased scrutiny to influencer marketing targeting children. As influencer marketing in the FMCG category [grows](#), this could present a future target for legislation.

While the HFSS debate is far from settled, its impending implementation will create ripple effects throughout the industry. Ultimately, both in this shake-up and the future regulatory changes that will surely follow, brands that fully embrace creativity will be those to thrive in a changing landscape.



## How Brands Can Better Portray Young Men in Media

Since *Adolescence* hit screens earlier this year, and with research suggesting a [loneliness epidemic](#), problems facing young men are firmly in the public eye. In the latest instalment of its 'Mirror On' series, Channel 4 explores the challenges of [modern masculinity](#), highlighting a need to better represent young men in advertising and suggesting ways brands can adapt to tackle this challenge.

According to Channel 4's research, the younger the man, the more alienated from masculine identities he is likely to feel. While three-quarters of young men feel 'proud' to be a man, only four-in-ten believe that society treats masculinity positively. The crux of the issue lies in the media they consume. Just 26% of men aged 18-34 say that they see the 'kind of man they want to be' in advertising. This suggests the industry must portray more positive role models to young men, no matter how challenging.

The role of men in society has evolved in recent decades. As dual-income households have increased, men's traditional role as economic provider has eroded. And while a slim majority of young men still believe their role is to be a 'breadwinner' and 'leader', they value integrity and being a loyal family man more highly. This helps to explain why several admirable campaigns seeking to positively influence young men's behaviour, such as Gillette's *The Best a Man Can Be*, have failed to land among precisely that audience. The notion of portraying young men as anything but compassionate, family-oriented men runs counter to what most already perceive themselves to be.

In short, what young men see in media is often defined by extremes: either misguided portrayals urging them to change, or cynical marketing that plays up outdated behaviours, selling sex and primal masculinity as symbols of success.

To navigate this complex landscape, brands must take an audience-centric approach. By listening to how this audience describes itself, media can more accurately portray the values to which young men aspire, yet feel are missing from most depictions.

Feeling the world is out of control, this cohort increasingly turns towards making incremental improvements, from gym routines to hard work. While reflecting that drive to improve, it is equally important to showcase progress over perfection as many young men don't feel they have earned the 'right' to be a man. Charisma is highly valued. Young men admire those with 'aura'; the confidence to step up and take the lead socially, make people laugh or engage with others.

While two-thirds of those surveyed by Channel 4 agreed that 'a real man controls his emotions', they also felt they don't see enough emotionally open men in the media. By depicting charismatic young men, brands can thus convey emotional openness in a positive light.

At a panel launching the research, Simon Gunning, CEO of CALM, highlighted that male characters in advertising are often older. With trust in institutions facing a steep downward decline, there is a clear opportunity for adland to provide positive, grounded portrayals of young men.

Applying these pillars should not only drive greater brand affinity, but more importantly will lead to positive changes in the way young men see themselves.





## IPA Touchpoints 2025: the More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same

In an industry with no shortage of data and frequent reports on changes in the media landscape, IPA Touchpoints continues to be among the most eagerly anticipated releases. For, amidst all the forecasting and trend predictions, few resources are better than consumers themselves to tell us what's changing in the world around us.

The 2025 Touchpoints release, officially [launched](#) with speakers including OMG's Vicky Fox and Ogilvy's Rory Sutherland, offers many such clues. Yet, it also shows us that change is both rapid and incremental: a gradual evolution that somehow feels like everything, everywhere, all at once.

To explain this paradox, we must look back. A decade ago, there were far fewer channels claiming sizeable chunks of our media time. Despite vastly different content preferences, the media channels used by young people were not broadly dissimilar to those used by over-55s. The media itself was less commercial; as recent [Barb](#) and [RAJAR](#) figures have shown, the BBC's share of our AV and Audio time has waned since then.

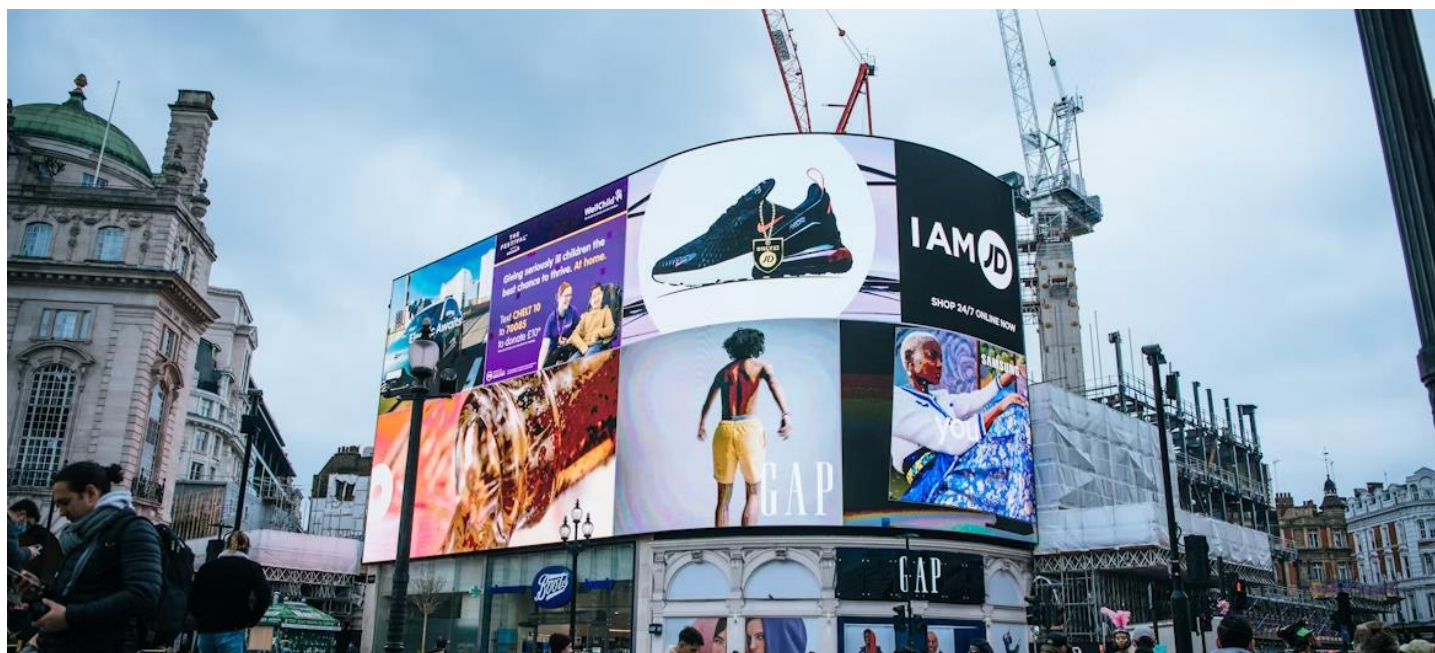
These shifts have not happened overnight. They are the continuation of movements in the media landscape which, with each Touchpoints release, create stronger and stronger currents. From year to year, the changes amount to a drop in the ocean; in a decade we encounter a tsunami.

And yet, Touchpoints data also reminds us that, for all the changes under the surface, the things people do with their eyeballs and ears rarely, if ever, change. Excluding the lockdown-induced hysteria of 2020 and 2021, the graph of what we do throughout the day — be that reading text, watching some form of video, listening to audio or travelling out of the home — is virtually indistinguishable from a decade ago. The media that deliver these experiences have evolved greatly, but the underlying needs that fuel them have not.

That is what makes the Touchpoints data so powerful: it serves as a reality check on the industry. This is evident from the headline stat of the 2025 launch: that commercial time spent with a mobile phone has finally overtaken time with a TV set for all adults. This trend seemed inevitable for years, yet it is also emblematic of the power of AV that it has taken so long to finally occur.

Still, the landscape remains muddled. As Barb [announced](#) last year, TV sets have overtaken smartphones as the primary mode of YouTube viewing. Even as our media time shifts increasingly to the palm of our hands, the big screen is far from dead.

Resources like Touchpoints may only come around once a year, but they are a timely reminder that we must follow the trail left by consumers — or risk being carried away by the tides of change.



## Out of Sight, Out of Mind: The Creative Advantage in a Noisy World

In today's saturated media landscape, forgettable content is not just a creative failure — it is a commercial one. Dull media, often driven by safe strategies and automation, floods our feeds but does not connect. It wastes budgets, erodes trust, and is too easily ignored. As attention spans shrink and audiences become more selective, bland content is becoming a liability.

The recent Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity proves the most successful brands are not those that play it safe — they embrace bold, distinctive, and emotionally resonant storytelling.

It has been nearly two decades since *The Long and the Short of It*, the seminal work of Les Binet and Peter Field, first embedded the 60/40 brand-building effectiveness split into a generation of media effectiveness professionals. And while the media landscape has undergone seismic shifts in that time, its core argument — that long-term brand building is worth more to brands than short-term sales uplifts — remains true.

That finding is reflected in epic terms in the latest collaboration from Peter Field, Dr Karen Nelson-Field and Adam Morgan, [The Eye-Watering Cost of Dull Media](#). Their research finds that just 17% of ads cross the two-second attention threshold. Building upon their earlier landmark study that exposed the pitfalls of dull creative, the researchers conclude that even good creative, when paired with dull media, is destined to fail.

Research from System1 and Effie Worldwide, [The Creative Dividend](#), further demonstrates that creativity is an asset for brands: campaigns that blend emotional appeal, brand fluency, and consistency deliver up to 21 times more profit than low-quality, functional ads. Creativity is not a luxury, it is a growth multiplier.

the7stars' approach reflects this thinking. We believe creativity is not a cost — it is capital. And in a noisy, fragmented environment, standing out is not optional; it is essential. Campaigns that cut through and connect meaningfully drive stronger ROI, brand affinity, and long-term equity.

This is backed by the 2025 [Kantar BrandZ report](#), which highlights how innovation, trust, and cultural relevance underpin the world's most valuable brands. It shows that the businesses winning today are those that adapt with purpose, clarity, and creative boldness. BrandZ's methodology — blending consumer perception with financial performance — proves that intangible elements like sentiment and storytelling have measurable commercial value.

Of course, creativity comes with challenges: longer lead times, bigger up-front investment, and no instant wins. Yet brands that invest in creativity gain a lasting competitive edge — one that risk-averse strategies simply cannot deliver.

For brands, the message is clear: media that fails to make an impact is media that fails. Dull content disappears. Smart brands are shifting away from formulaic campaigns towards distinctive, human storytelling. The future belongs to those who dare to stand out.





## Should Brands Get on Board with TfL's New Tube Sponsorships?

Transport for London (TfL) [recently announced](#) an unprecedented opportunity: exclusive sponsorship of the entire **Waterloo & City line**. For brands and their agency counterparts, this marks a shift from tactical OOH placements to **full-line brand ownership** — and it has divided Londoners in almost equal measure.

The Waterloo & City line is the Tube's shortest, linking just two stations, Bank and Waterloo, and carrying around **15 million passengers annually**. Under TfL's new proposal, a brand could integrate itself across every commuter touchpoint — trains, platforms, signage, maps, and experiential activations — creating an immersive takeover unlike any previous London transport sponsorship deal.

The economic argument for greater Tube sponsorship is clear. TfL faces a [budget shortfall](#) that jeopardises vital infrastructure improvements. Two lines use rolling stock which is over half a century old, while several station upgrades are on hold awaiting funding. This clearly plays on the mind of Londoners, who tentatively support the sponsorship proposals while expressing concern the changes may confuse travellers.

A survey by the Evening Standard found that 53% of Londoners support the proposals, with 47% opposed. This polarisation stems partly from past controversies, such as Bond Street's temporary rebrand to 'Burberry Street,' which drew **57 public complaints**, and Old Street's renaming to 'Fold Street' for Samsung, which raised £250,000 but also caused some bemusement.

For brands, the new sponsorship proposition poses both opportunity and risk. On one hand, sponsoring the Waterloo & City line could offer great scale, frequency, and contextual alignment — particularly for the right brand looking to target city professionals. On the other hand, there is reputational risk if a takeover is perceived as intrusive or undermining civic integrity, especially among neurodivergent or disabled passengers who rely on consistent wayfinding.

TfL has clarified it will not permit a line or station name change under this sponsorship model, unlike the IFS Cloud Cable Car (formerly the Emirates Air Line). All branding executions will require an Equality Impact Assessment to safeguard passenger accessibility and avoid alienating London's diverse commuter base.

Nevertheless, the sponsorship landscape is shifting rapidly. Given its ongoing funding challenges, TfL has gradually opened new avenues for brand integration across the transport network, with this full-line sponsorship its boldest yet. The opportunity lies in balancing creative cut-through and brand fame with potential public perception risks and operational constraints to the tube network.

Ultimately, the Waterloo & City line sponsorship asks a crucial question for brands: is a **full transport takeover** worth the risk of potential backlash in an era of growing sensitivity towards the commercialisation of public spaces? While there are many unknowns, if approached with care for the Tube environment and its users, backed by an authentically aligned brand, the opportunity remains a bold and exciting one for advertisers.



## ASA Cracks Down on Weight-Loss Injection Advertising

Amid the rise of weight-loss injections in the UK, online pharmacies are no longer allowed to run adverts for the drugs, the advertising watchdog has ruled.

It is illegal to advertise prescription-only medications (POMs), which include all GLP-1 weight-loss drugs such as Wegovy and Mounjaro, to the public. However, a Guardian investigation previously found some online pharmacies either breaking these rules outright or exploiting loopholes in the ASA legislation.

The ASA has declared that pharmacies may continue to mention weight-loss injections within their websites, but not on their homepages. Further, adverts must not include the phrases 'weight loss injections' and 'weight loss pen'.

This comes after reality TV star Gemma Collins was reprimanded by the advertising watchdog for illegally promoting weight-loss jabs to social media users.



## New Attention Study Reveals Just 1.5 seconds is Enough for Ad Recall

Although 85% of digital ads reportedly receive less than 2.5 seconds' attention, a new study has revealed that ads can be recalled by viewers after as little as 1.5 seconds.

New research from VCCP Media has revealed that distinctive brand assets are key when it comes to ad engagement.

The study, *Hacking the Attention Economy*, was conducted in collaboration with attention platform, Amplified.

The study found that the majority (85%) of digital ads receive less than 2.5 seconds of attention. However, ads can be recalled by viewers after just 1.5 seconds if distinctive brand assets are deployed.



## Consumers More Likely to Buy from Brands that Sponsor Women's Sport

New Women's Sport Trust data reveals that 9.96 million consumers are more likely to purchase from women's sport sponsors, up 2% since 2023.

The news comes as brands look to capitalise upon the growth of women's football and rugby in a huge summer of sport, with both the Women's Euros and Rugby World Cup taking over our TVs.

The research found that 30% of consumers think more positively of brands that support women's sport through sponsorship, compared with just 20% for men's sport. The research surveyed a nationally representative sample of 2,080 UK adults.