



What's Hot?!

November 2025



'Go Big or Go Home!' Urges IPA Effectiveness Conference

One of the most eagerly anticipated dates on the marketing calendar, the IPA Effectiveness Conference, returned last month, with no shortage of attention-grabbing headlines. The chief among them saw effectiveness stalwart, Les Binet, and Will Davis schooling the industry for what they saw as too much focus on short-term thinking.

Advertisers should 'focus less on efficiency, more on effectiveness', argued Binet, noting that media ROI has increased post-pandemic while incremental profit has fallen. This comes as the proportion of brand revenue allocated to marketing spend fell to 7.7% in 2024, a decline from 11% in 2019.

While much of the focus in recent years has been on 'doing more with less', the duo argued that such short-termism inevitably leads to profit erosion and adds incremental strain to each successive year's marketing budget. Rather, they suggested, brands should think big – maximising reach and putting significant investment behind creative before retiring it.

The long and the short of budget

Armed with survey data showing that CMOs typically place greater emphasis on ROI than on budget-setting, Binet argued this was symptomatic of the industry's fixation with driving short-term efficiencies. But as rising production costs demand yet higher efficiency for campaigns simply to break even, budget is now 'eight times more important than ROI'. This does not mean intermediate metrics like ROI are meaningless. Rather, marketers should develop a framework to understand how these efficiency metrics interact with scale. This will help brands to foster a culture of effectiveness.

Experiment to be effective

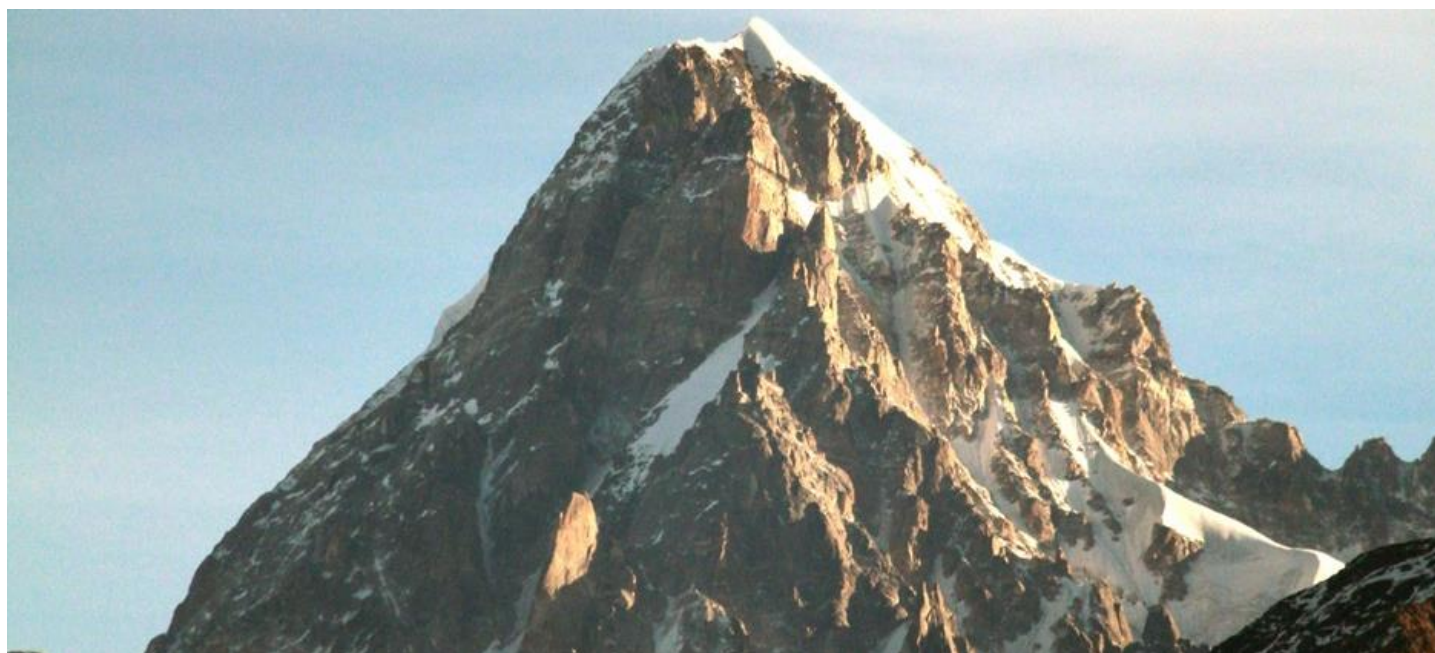
In his presentation, Davis cited Laithwaites' award-winning campaign as an example of a brand 'going big' in action. Crucial to its success was the use of controlled regional experiments.

Too often, brands can become trapped inside 'local optimisation exercises' moving around a short-term equilibrium, typically modelled on backwards-looking data and short-term effects. The antidote is national-scale experimentation. Through forecasting tools like Investment Planning, brands can shift out of this short-term bubble and move to bigger, newer equilibrium scales.

Brands including Gousto have used experiments to their advantage. In a learning agenda, Gousto mapped out their opportunities into a prioritisation matrix based on the size of the effectiveness opportunity and the certainty of success. As a result, Gousto increased the volume of experiments from 4 to 12. This ultimately de-risked a shift of investment towards mid-funnel and a broader AV mix – successfully maintaining Gousto's growth trajectory across brand and commercial metrics.

Defeat the bad and the boring

As marketing gurus like Rory Sutherland have often argued, the enemy of brands is sameness. Constantly tinkering with small optimisations may drive moderate impacts in the short-term, but long-term effectiveness requires bold new thinking. That's why at the7stars we created our *Power of Independent Thought* framework. By breaking free from category norms and archetypes, brands can inspire exceptional creative thinking – and defeat the bad and the boring.



Has Social Media Usage Really Peaked?

A recent GWI study commissioned by the FT [has suggested](#) that social media usage has plateaued globally. The international study, which surveyed the media habits of 250,000 adults in more than 50 countries, found that the average individual spends just over two hours per day on social media platforms – a decrease of 10% from its 2022 study.

Notably, the study found that social media time was declining faster in Asia-Pacific, more modestly in Europe, and not at all in North America, where time spent with social media is 15% higher than in Europe. Indeed, its usage is still increasing in the US.

The report points to a trend of users 'switching off' from their apps and being more selective about the content they consume on social platforms. But in the UK specifically, the evidence for whether social media usage has indeed peaked remains mixed.

For one thing, different data sources reveal conflicting stories. The latest [IPA Touchpoints](#) release, published earlier this year, found that mean time per day spent with social media rose by nearly 20% year-on-year, from 1.29 hours to 1.54 hours in 2025. These two surveys deploy different methodologies, which may explain the differing results: Touchpoints respondents fill in a regular media day diary over the course of one week, while FT/GWI ask 'a battery of questions' to unpick users' social media habits.

Moreover, while the FT study finds that 16-24s spend more time with social media than any other cohort, this group is also seeing the most pronounced decline in time spent. This may be a reflection of younger users cutting back on some apps while increasing their time with others. A UKOM/Ipsos Iris report in May 2025 [found](#) that just three brands – YouTube, TikTok and Snapchat – account for half of this cohort's time online.

Conversely, the UK's over-55s continue to increase their daily time spent with social media, with no plateau in sight.

Whether or not social media usage in the UK has indeed peaked, the latest signals do point to a growing *desire* to cut back on screen time. This concern is consistent with findings from [numerous studies](#) previously conducted. As the competing data points reflect, it is entirely plausible for a respondent to express frustration with the amount of time they spend staring at their phone, while simultaneously increasing that time with each passing year.

Only time will tell whether social media usage has really peaked. For now, and for many more years to come, it remains an essential part of most consumers' lives, with a weekly reach comparable to live TV and a share of our media day bettered only by OOH. Likewise, for advertisers, social media will continue to be a pivotal channel for reaching consumers at mass scale. Nevertheless, brands should be considerate of the paradoxical nature of scrolling habits and prioritise environments where users are consciously choosing to engage – not defaulting to autopilot.



Why Diverse Voices Should Always be in the Room

It doesn't take long for the now [banned](#) and widely panned Sanex advert to take a problematic turn. Those watching the ad when it first aired in August 2025 were immediately drawn to the apparent metaphor as the ad compares two sets of models: two black-skinned models shown with a host of skin problems, and the other with flawless white skin.

The ASA was quick to act, upholding two complaints which stated that the depiction 'could be interpreted as suggesting that white skin was superior to black skin', a sign that the industry regulator is alert to the problem. Yet the feeling remains that this glaring mistake should not have been allowed to weave its way onto our screens, especially in 2025. From creative development to C-suite sign-off, there were myriad opportunities for course correction. But it never happened.

This raises the question: *why?* The answer lies in representation. While progress has been made, C-suite roles across the industry are still disproportionately occupied by white men. Creative UK released a new report in September [that found](#) only 11% of C-suite positions in advertising are occupied by people from ethnic minorities. Overall, the ethnic diversity of adland mirrors the national average at 18%, [according to](#) 2025's All In Census. But only when people of diverse backgrounds occupy positions of authority can a real difference be made.

Not only do diverse voices help companies avoid catastrophic mistakes, but they also provide unique insights that can transform campaigns into something truly distinctive. Vaseline released [a creative](#) entitled 'Mntana Ka Gogo' in South Africa, and it immediately resonated with consumers who recognised the long-held tradition of black elders applying Vaseline onto children. Without diverse voices at all levels, it may not have made it out of the boardroom. The cultural meaning behind the campaign was unlikely to be understood by white marketers, and it took someone who recognised the message from firsthand experience to provide crucial context. What initially looked like a risky creative copy soon became a beautiful campaign that celebrates a ritual embraced by its community.

This was achieved not only because someone with diverse representation was in the room, but also because they felt empowered to speak up. Moreover, the proof that representation is more than just a nice-to-have can be found explicitly in sales data. According to the Unstereotype Alliance, ads which practise inclusivity [increase](#) long-term sales by 16%.

It can be all too easy to dismiss banned ads like that of Sanex as a one-off, but unfortunately these mistakes remain all too common. Swatch [recently apologised](#) after airing a campaign image with an Asian male model pulling his eyes back to achieve a 'slanted' look. This is not the first time such a controversy has arisen: [Gucci](#) and [Dior](#) have also come under fire for promoting stereotypes of Asian models.

When racial stereotypes become embodied by brands on multiple occasions, we should no longer consider it a mistake but an endemic problem. The time to change is now. The way to change is clear. Brands and agencies alike benefit from hearing representative voices as much as possible.



What OpenAI's For-Profit Transition Means for Brands

Even in the rapidly changing technological era in which we find ourselves, the past few months have seen a high number of major changes involving the market leader in generative AI, OpenAI. This includes the release of the [Sora video app](#), which allows users to place their own likeness into highly realistic AI video content – the product of which is already proliferating across many social media sites.

But perhaps the most significant shift is one which is not immediately apparent from opening up social media: OpenAI's [transition](#) into an entirely for-profit entity. While Microsoft retains a 27% stake in OpenAI and will continue to use its models until at least 2032, it signals a fork in the road at which both parties will pursue competing commercial ventures in the AI space.

The move also paves the way for OpenAI, formerly a not-for-profit research entity, to eventually become a publicly listed company. With a market valuation that [recently reached](#) half a trillion dollars, all eyes will be watching for signs that the tech giant is planning an IPO in 2026 or later.

But while OpenAI is breaking records for a tech startup, it remains extremely unprofitable. The company plans to reach profitability by 2029, which is a lofty goal given its current losses; it reportedly loses as many as \$3 for every \$1 it gets back in revenue. To achieve profitability, the company will need both to expand its current revenue streams greatly and to open new ones.

One such attempt is the move to an [agentic commerce](#) model, with a trial of one-click purchasing currently underway in the US through ChatGPT's Instant Checkout feature. This would allow users to make purchases directly from the ChatGPT app. Products would be scraped organically from sellers who opt in, while merchants hand over a cut of their proceeds to OpenAI for any sales made through the app.

This trial is currently limited to US Etsy purchases but, if rolled out further, could have lasting impacts for brands. Such product listings currently cannot be sponsored, meaning brands may have less influence over where their products show up in response to user queries. If users indeed shift their shopping habits to platforms like ChatGPT, this could have a sizeable impact on advertisers' e-commerce strategies. Still, the largest marketplaces, including Amazon, have so far resisted the move to agentic commerce, setting up a potential battle for the future of ecommerce.

HOLD FOR MON SLATER QUOTE

Amidst all the changes, the past month has also brought [warnings](#) from the Bank of England, International Monetary Fund, and other reputable bodies that we may be in the midst of a new dotcom bubble. Sam Altman and other tech leaders strongly dispute this. Wherever brands sit on the AI optimism scale, they should be watching OpenAI's moves – and the way consumers react to them – carefully. If October 2025 is anything to go by, the pace of change in the AI landscape shows no signs of letting up.



How Brands Can Futureproof Audio Experiences

There should be no doubt about the importance of audio ads to any omnichannel marketing approach. The channel offers advertisers a unique opportunity to meet users in their daily routines. Whether they are listening to podcasts during their commute or a favourite radio station while preparing dinner in the kitchen, audio is a natural extension of our days, the soundtrack of our lives.

As such, audio ads represent an opportunity for brands to align with their targets' contexts in an intimate and non-intrusive way, building greater brand trust and equity. As audience needs evolve, there is an ever-present push for greater precision and personalisation in audio advertising. Ad tech, publishers and agencies are meeting this challenge with a series of exciting new additions to the advertiser toolkit which, if used in the right contexts, can strike a chord with target audiences.

A Million Ads' [Dynamic & Synthetic Voice](#) uses AI text-to-voice transcriptions coupled with their creative Studio product to offer deep creative personalisation to advertisers at every budget level. Their solution can generate up to one million audio ad variants from text scripts in a self-serve UI, offering an alternative route for advertisers from studio bookings and VO artists. Combined with targeting options including time of day, weather and location, advertisers can meet users in the contexts of their lives.

AdsWizz's [AudioPixel](#) addresses the longstanding issue of attribution within the digital audio space. Using aggregated IP and device IDs with third-party cross-device graphs, AdsWizz has developed a solution that attributes on-site conversions back to digital listening. This is achieved through modelling, with their solution specifically designed for the rigours of cross-device listening. Their pixel can also be used for second-screen retargeting, serving a display or video ad after a user has listened to an audio message. Combined, this tech is giving advertisers the tools to bring audio closer into their wider digital mix, both in attributed effectiveness and storytelling through retargeting.

Additionally, [Sonar](#), AdsWizz's predictive audience solution, uses AI to transcribe podcast episodes. This combines with Comscore and IAB interest segments to determine users' contexts, alongside their historical listening habits. Users can be targeted on mood and moments which advertisers can use to hyper-personalise ad experiences – think easy Sunday soul versus hard rock workout.

There is no one-size-fits-all in the audio landscape, but what is certain is the channel offers a unique and powerful way for advertisers to speak to users, personalised to the ways users themselves interact with media. Of course, technological advancements alone are not sufficient for a brand to forge a successful campaign: they must be paired with a deep appreciation of the target audience's mindset and wants. When the right balance is struck, brand trust can be built at a highly competitive price.



ASA Using AI to Detect Ads That Breach Rules

In October, the ASA published [the results](#) of its trial of a new AI tool for identifying breaches of alcohol advertising restrictions, with interesting results for the No and Low sector. Trialling the new Ad Monitoring System, the ASA analysed nearly 6,000 assets promoting alcoholic drinks, no and low alcohol products, and sales and promotions within the category.

Ads were first screened by advanced AI models to identify potential rule violations, then reviewed by human experts for accuracy. 96% of alcohol advertisements reviewed were likely to comply with the relevant advertising restrictions, but this dropped to just 52% of ads for alcohol-free products, with just under half of ads reviewed being flagged for potential breaches. Most of these breaches among low and no products were found to relate to missing or inaccurate ABV % labels.

The ASA will continue to develop the new tool following the trial and hopes that this will allow ads to be more efficiently and effectively reviewed, 'combined the scale and speed of AI with expert human judgement to ensure accuracy'.



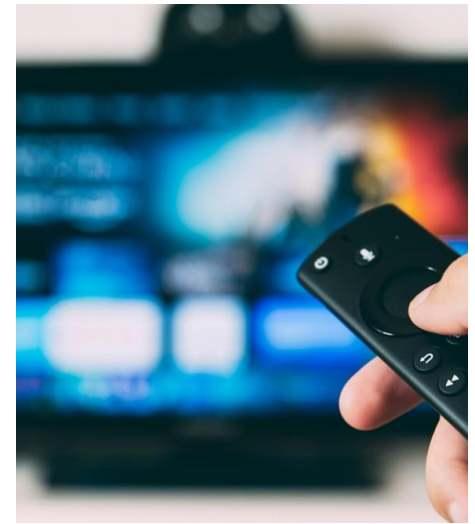
ITV and Sky in talks over sale

ITV, the UK's largest commercial public service broadcaster, [has confirmed](#) rumours that it is in talks to sell its media and entertainment business to Sky. Under the terms of the deal, ITV's production and distribution arm would not be sold and would become a separate entity.

If the proposed deal – which will be subject to intense scrutiny from the UK's Competition and Markets Authority – is successful, Sky's parent company Comcast would control over 70% of the UK's linear TV ad market.

Such a move would be the most significant shake-up to the UK's AV landscape in years. As Comcast, which also owns NBCUniversal and other properties, is US-owned, the deal would mean the two largest UK-owned broadcasters – BBC and Channel 4 – are both owned by the government.

The news comes after ITV [forecasted](#) that total ad revenue would decline by 9% in Q4 2025.



Amazon Grows Prime Video Ad Tier by 15%

The proportion of Brits accessing Amazon's ad-supported streaming service, Prime Video, [has surged](#) by 15% over the last year and now reaches over 22 million adults. This compares to 5.5 million households accessing Netflix's ad tiers (up 700,000 year-on-year).

Unlike Netflix, which was originally ad-free before debuting a lower-cost, ad-supported entry level, Prime Video moved all base users onto an ad tier early last year, requiring viewers to pay a premium to access content without ads. This was a gamble which appears to have paid off, with Prime Video's audience remaining loyal and more users now accessing the ad-supported tier.

The results were revealed at the recent Amazon Upfront event, where marketers mingled with talent including Jimmy Carr and Kaleb Cooper. With both Prime Video and Netflix now firmly competing with broadcasters, many of the UK's most-watched programming over the last year has been native to streaming platforms.