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## How Brands Benefitted from the Women's World Cup

Spain's hard-fought victory over England in the FIFA Women's World Cup Final marked a record-breaking tournament this year. Attendance records were shattered before the knockout phase had even begun. Globally, [more than a billion people](#) watched the tournament from home, with hospitality revenues [up 534%](#) from 2015.

This and other hallmarks – such as the [50th anniversary](#) of the US Open offering equal pay to male and female players – illustrate the recent elevation of women's sport. Until 2019, athletes were not compensated for taking part in the Women's World Cup, whilst the FA Women's Super League (WSL) lacked a competition prize pot. Most clubs relied on their men's teams being willing to spare funds.

Brands have played a significant role in reducing pay inequality in women's sport. The WSL was able to turn fully professional due largely to its [multi-year, multi-million](#) sponsorship with Barclays. The FA now lists 17 commercial partners in the women's game, up from 6 in 2017, with women's sport [being described](#) as a 'sponsor's dream' in some circles.

The benefits for brands in backing women's sport come to light in three main areas:

### Community

In [a survey](#) by consultancy Revolt, 50% of fans said being a women's football supporter was central to their identity. Fans of women's sport are 24% [more likely](#) to think positively of a brand sponsoring their favourite team vs. fans of men's sport. And, [according to data](#) from World Cup hosts Australia, these benefits are even more significant among Gen Zers.

### Value

Since commercial rights to women's football started to be sold separately from men's partnerships – a process known as 'unbundling' – investment has more than doubled, according to Nielsen. Typically, such sponsorships are offered to brands at just 10-20% of an equivalent men's sponsorship. As interest in women's sport grows, price tags are set to rise but, for now, brands can forge connections to fans at a fraction of the price.

### Social Purpose

Women's football today is thriving. Yet years of under-investment have created long-term inequities, like sub-par facilities for players and fan frustrations with accessibility. Brands who invest in women's sport can use their platform to push for further narrowing of the opportunity gap, as did Barclays when highlighting the poor condition of WSL pitches compared with those used by men's Premier League teams.

Combining these three elements can foster brand legacy in women's sport, and opportunities are not limited to periods when the women's sport spotlight is at its brightest, such as the Women's World Cup or International Women's Day. During the Men's World Cup in 2022, Adidas devoted its Equal Play campaign to highlighting gender inequality, [resulting in](#) an 11.7% increase in brand buzz and a 149% rise in online conversations. Likewise, Vodafone launched its 'I Exist' partnership with football club Besiktas on a platform of improving women's social conditions in Türkiye, [culminating](#) in a 13% boost to its reputation in the country.

As these examples show, the recent World Cup has merely accelerated the unstoppable rise of women's sport globally. As the dust settles on a memorable tournament, the onus is firmly on brands to forge long-term successful partnerships with fans and together drive lasting social change.





## **The Rise of Brand Activism & Taking A Stand**

It's no secret that the last few years have been turbulent, increasing the level of discussion and divisiveness across a whole range of social, environmental, and political issues. At the same time, pressure is increasing on brands to publicly take a stance on key subjects.

Patagonia's founder, Yvon Chouinard, believes that "if you are not upsetting 50% of the people, you are not trying hard enough." It seems like some form of backlash to corporate activism is almost guaranteed these days, with many brands finding it a tough path to navigate. However, if done authentically – taking a stance can be a powerful way to build trust, brand equity, and drive change.

### **Activism vs Slacktivism and the Need to Follow Through**

In this day and age, staying silent and steering clear of hot-button issues is no longer the default position of brands and their CMOs. Recent research from Sprout Social reveals that two-thirds of individuals surveyed feel that it's important for brands to take a public stance on leading social and political issues. The benefits of purpose-driven efforts can also be twofold, as brands are able to promote positive and necessary social outcomes while also driving growth.

An annual study by Edelman found that 63% of consumers choose to switch, avoid, or boycott a brand based on its stand on societal issues. While this figure should be a powerful motivator for brands, failing to back up this marketing with any tangible actions can backfire significantly and hurt the brand more than if they never chose to engage in activism at all.

This fine balance can be seen in the [recent shareholder criticism of Unilever](#) – with major investors questioning management's 'obsession' with publicly displaying sustainability credentials at the expense of focusing on the fundamentals of the business. With the company's sales growth lagging, there is pressure for CEO Alan Jope to prove that Unilever's activism and commitment to sustainability are a key driver of strong financial performance.

### **Wagamama's Stance on Slow Fashion**

With an aim to 'tread more lightly on the earth,' [Wagamama's latest eco-friendly uniform collaboration with PANGAIA](#) is a natural progression in the company's sustainability journey. The new collection provides Wagamama employees with slow-fashion workwear that aims to set new standards for the industry – with a focus on sustainable materials and a future recycling scheme.

Looking at this campaign in a vacuum, it might be easy for some people to label the initiative as just another example of inauthentic corporate 'greenwashing.' However, Wagamama has been working hard to commit to sustainable practices across the entire business – from pledging to make 50% of their menu plant-based, reducing the plastic in their packaging to tackling food waste in their restaurants.

There might be the temptation to look at some of the incredible work that brands are doing in the activism space and immediately jump on board. However, brands need to be truly committed to the issue to properly speak on it – having done the groundwork to represent this in their own policies rather than just their marketing campaigns.

Professor Gage from The School of Marketing at UNSW sums up the growing feeling perfectly – "So we are saying, 'look, fine, you want my money? That's perfectly okay. But I want to know who you are. What do you stand for?' Because brands are expected to do more. And this is not a fad; this is not something that will go away."





## **Online Freeview and the Growth of Content Consumption**

### **"Freely"**

Britain's major public-service broadcasters (PSBs) will launch a free, Internet-only TV service next year for broadband-only homes. The new service, called Freely, will be built into the next generation of smart TVs in the UK upon its launch in 2024 and will feature a lineup of PSB content and other free-to-air channels with the aim of building upon the Freeview TV viewing experience and platform. This marks the first time that British viewers will be able to browse and watch live TV channels together with on-demand content streamed to their smart TVs via the Internet for free. Their aim with Freely is to enable viewers to "seamlessly" browse channels through a "modern and intuitive" programme guide and use functions that are designed to make it easier to find and explore new shows directly from live TV.

### **The Big Merge**

EveryoneTV rebranded from Digital UK in January, having merged with Freesat in 2021 to bring the UK's two free-to-view TV services now under the leadership of one organisation. Freeview, which allows people to receive digital TV transmissions via analogue aerials, was launched in 2002 as a joint venture between the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5, and Sky and expanded the platform for a wider selection of channels and, therefore, content for the viewer. Through this merger, it represents how viewing habits have evolved and the desire to consume a broad selection of content has increased with the times, coinciding with all the various platforms and offerings from providers.

### **The Evolution of Content Consumption**

By first having the traditional 5 channels on terrestrial TV, then expanding the landscape via the Freeview merger up to 70, the choice in which viewers have had has been as big as it's ever been (at a free cost standpoint), not to mention SVOD services add to this landscape with the likes of Netflix, Disney+, Prime, to name a few. With this on-demand viewing experience, able to watch content at any time away from live TV, viewing will shift from live to online and possibly offer more in-depth targeting capabilities as we already have on BVOD suppliers with ITVX, All4, and Sky Go. While details are still to follow, with the launch coming sometime in 2024, this represents how the landscape has evolved and will only continue to evolve.





## The Importance of Transparency with AI in Content Creation

In a world where AI is reshaping the landscape of content creation, the recent announcement [by TikTok regarding their in-stream labels for AI-generated content](#) brings forth a crucial question: How important is it for brands to be transparent with their audience about their content creation practices? This query resonates not only with brands but also with a society navigating the blurred lines between technology and authenticity.

### AI's Growing Role in Content Creation

From [generative AI tools crafting social media copy](#) to virtual influencers amassing legions of followers, evolving digital media is increasingly ingrained in both brand content creation and audience content consumption. With this rapid evolution comes a growing concern: How can users distinguish between content created by technology and that crafted by humans? The lines are blurring, and users fear that they might not be able to differentiate between the two.

[A recent poll conducted by YouGov and NewsGuard](#) found that 73% of 18-25-year-olds were concerned about misinformation, a figure that surged to 81% among UK adults aged 55 and above. This highlights the pressing need for brands to enhance transparency in their content creation to maintain audience trust. Across the board, social media users are yearning for more context about the content they consume, creating both a challenge and an opportunity for brands.

### The Dark Side of Evolving Digital Media

While evolving digital media unlocks creative potential, it has also given rise to the proliferation of fake images and videos capable of manipulating public opinion. Consider the 2020 incident involving [a deepfake video](#) of Belgium's then prime minister, Sophie Wilmès, discussing the COVID-19 pandemic. This video, which was shared widely, left many viewers unaware of its falseness, sparking a mix of outrage and admiration. Brands that provide context behind AI-generated content help preserve the trust painstakingly built with their audience. Offering transparency empowers the audience to make informed decisions about their engagement with AI-driven content, while also showcasing the brand's innovation.

### Maintaining Accountability to the Audience

Brands can harness evolving digital media and AI while remaining accountable to their audience through several strategies:

- 1. In-stream AI Labels:** Embrace the latest developments on social platforms, such as TikTok and [Instagram's](#) in-stream labels. These labels instantly convey to your audience that the content they're consuming involves AI, fostering transparency and informed engagement.
- 2. Provide Context:** Educate your audience on when and how AI is used in content creation. By demonstrating the collaborative effort between humans and AI in crafting innovative content, you enable those who seek AI-driven content to appreciate and engage while distinguishing your brand as forward-thinking.
- 3. Implement Feedback:** Actively engage with your audience and integrate their feedback into your content. This approach demonstrates your brand's commitment to tailoring content experiences that resonate with your audience's preferences.

With [nearly three-quarters of UK consumers](#) advocating for brand transparency in their use of AI-generated content, it's imperative for brands to embrace a transparent approach to evolving digital media. In embracing transparency, brands not only bridge the gap between technology and trust but also position themselves as ethical pioneers in the evolving world of digital media.







## How Barbenheimer Has Taken Over the Cinema World

On July 21st of this year, we entered the world of Barbenheimer which is made up of Greta Gerwig's Barbie and Christopher Nolan's Oppenheimer. Vue International said it was the biggest weekend for UK cinema tickets in the last 4 years (partly due to COVID). The cinema chain stated that a fifth of its customers had purchased tickets to see both films on the same day, a testament to the scale and hype around these two films and the coincidental timing of their release. They even confirmed that 2,000 of their cinemas had completely sold out of seats for the launch of Barbie.

Many months prior to the launch, the Gold, Silver and Bronze spots were sold for both films. In DCM cinemas, Dyson nabbed the Gold spot before Barbie, with Levi's and Google Pixel grabbing Silver and Bronze. For Oppenheimer, Samsung took the prime position whilst Sky Glass and Peugeot grabbed the two prime spots before screening.

As of August 2023, the total box office revenue surpassed £104m which is 67% higher than the same month in 2022. Year-to-date revenue is also up 10% compared with the period between January and the end of August 2022. For brands, there is one major takeout from these stats. Results serve to highlight how important cinema is to the overall media plan, even if it's not quite as big as both Barbie and Oppenheimer themselves.

Both agencies and advertisers can learn a lot from this cinema phenomenon. Positioning your message with a big film is one thing, but creating a cohesive plan, where all media works together and aligns with a key focus, can allow you to stand out and become recognised as the main associate brand with a film. Social media and natural word of mouth also play key parts in the process and add further value. Having the public talk about a blockbuster film, with which your brand is associated, extends your reach into conversations that cost you nothing more. We call that a win-win for everyone.

As mentioned, their mutual success was thanks in part to an idea, popularised on social media ahead of the films' shared opening weekend in July. The suggestion of making an event of attending both films as a double feature caught the public's imagination. Whether the two films, alongside big April performer The Super Mario Bros Movie, will be enough to continue to lift the cinema industry through the rest of the year is less certain.

We can thank three more films for the box office boost this Summer:

- Mission Impossible: Dead Reckoning Part One
- Meg 2: The Trench
- Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem,

So far, numbers are a massive +65% ahead of August 2022 with one week still left to report.



## This month's mini stories

Netflix is expanding into the gaming industry as part of its strategy to remain relevant. The streaming giant quietly introduced mobile games to their platform, with some tied to popular Netflix franchises like Stranger Things. Whilst the games are currently available only on mobile devices, tests are underway for compatibility on TVs and computers. Netflix aims to connect their shows, movies, and games to create a unified experience. Partnerships, like the one with Ripstone Studios for The Queen's Gambit chess simulator, reflect their commitment to gaming as a form of entertainment.



Elon Musk hinted at the possibility of charging users a small monthly fee to access the X platform, citing it as a measure to combat bot activity. Although he didn't explicitly confirm this move, Musk has previously suggested the importance of paid social media due to the rise of generative AI-driven bots. This proposal has been circulating for some time, with Musk even contemplating a complete paywall. Users have expressed opposition to the idea in polls, and X may explore alternative methods like identity verification for revenue. X Premium has seen limited adoption, primarily because many users are passive readers.

Sky has called on the UK government to adopt five key policy priorities aimed at injecting an additional £10 billion into the UK economy and boosting the creative industry. The TV giant's report suggests that with increased investment and collaboration, the sector could be worth £53 billion by 2033, up from £43 billion in 2021, creating 40,000 new jobs. Sky highlights the demand for British content and its potential for export revenue, with international demand set to increase by 50% by 2033. The company has urged the government to focus on innovation, skills development, incentives, studio infrastructure, and connectivity to harness the industry's growth potential.

