



MEDIA IMPACT REPORT

From the Sidelines to the Center Stage: Why Women's Sports is the Ultimate Brand Opportunity

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Use of AI in the Social Space



Image source: nike

/BRIEFING ROOM

From the Sidelines to Center Stage: Why Women's Sports is the Ultimate Brand Opportunity

By [Susan Boland](#), VP, Communications Strategy & [Julia Shabow](#), Senior Market Research Analyst

In an era where consumers demand more than just great products—they want purpose, representation, and relevance—women's sports have emerged as one of the most compelling platforms for modern brand engagement. No longer sidelined, women's sports now command national attention, generate cultural conversation, and offer a unique space where values and value meet.

The Cultural Momentum Behind Women's Sports

The numbers speak volumes. In 2024 alone, the global women's sports market generated \$1.88 billion in revenue. Viewership jumped 131%, and ad effectiveness rose 56% year-over-year—outperforming primetime averages by 40% in terms of consumer engagement. For example, the 2025 WNBA season, driven in part by the “Caitlin Clark Effect,” is shattering previous attendance and viewership records.

The opportunity is deeper than viewership. According to Rain the Growth Agency's HypeHer research, today's fans engage emotionally and socially—across demographics and generations. They don't just watch the games; they follow the athletes, share the moments, and influence their communities.



Source: Instagram @paigebueckers @wingstop

Values That Resonate: Empowerment, Representation, and Community

Women's sports are uniquely positioned to embody the values today's consumers prioritize. Supporting women's sports signals alignment with:

Empowerment: Elevating female athletes as leaders, creators, and role models

Representation: Supporting equity across gender, race, and identity

Community: Building authentic, cross-generational connections through shared passion

These are not peripheral benefits—they're central to brand relevance. The HypeHer study found that fans of women's sports are significantly more likely to purchase from brands that support female athletes, with 86% of "super fans" likely to do so, compared to 47% of general fans.

Marketing to Women's Sports fans

Women's sports don't just raise awareness—they drive behavior across the entire customer journey.

- **Upper Funnel:** Marketing in national moments like the NCAA Women's Final Four generate cultural buzz and mass visibility.
- **Mid Funnel:** Social media activations featuring athletes offer authenticity and connection.
- **Lower Funnel:** Endorsements and event sponsorships convert attention into action, especially among Gen Z and Millennials, who are most likely to reward brands with their wallets.

This isn't just a feel-good cause—it's smart business.



Source: nike

Athletes as Media. Fans as Advocates.

Female athletes today are more than competitors; they're cultural icons, creators, and storytellers. The HypeHer research found that fans increasingly follow athletes on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, drawn to both their athleticism and personal stories—from activism to motherhood to mental health.

For brands, this means partnerships with female athletes offer powerful, multi-dimensional storytelling potential, especially when paired with creator strategies and cross-channel rights packages. Brands should have a relevant connection with the athletes it partners with as fans also prioritize authentic content from brands and athletes alike.

Don't wait—lead.

Perhaps the most compelling insight from the HypeHer study is this: while big brands like Nike and State Farm are starting to dominate mindshare in this space, many consumers still struggle to name brands that actively support women's sports. The white space is real, but diminishing as more brands enter. And, with emerging sports, there is lower cost-to-entry to define the narrative.

Women's sports are connective, athlete-centric, and here to stay. For brands, this is more than a sponsorship opportunity—it's a strategic imperative. The chance to show up authentically. To build preference. To turn cultural relevance into commercial growth.

In short, supporting women's sports is not a trend—it's a defining brand decision.

Have more questions about the HypeHer women's sports fan research? Contact us at hypeher@rainforgrowth.com.



/UPDATES

AI Infusion into Paid Social

By [Ankit Jadav](#), Associate Director, Paid Social, [Lohgan Brock](#), Assistant Specialist, Paid Social and Influencer & [Amanda Keithley](#), Specialist, Paid Social & Influencer

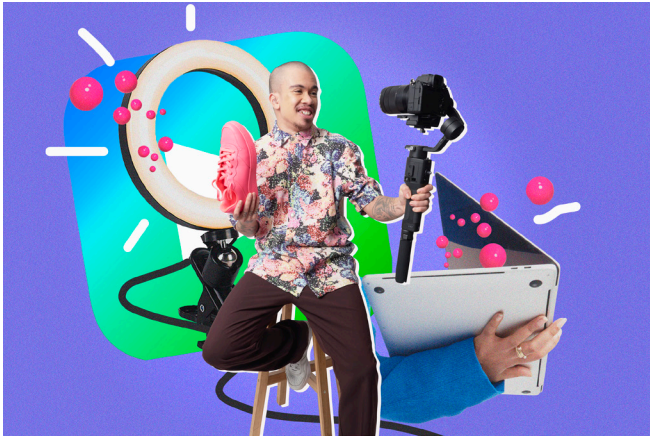
Buying paid social media effectively is challenging, to communicate hard vs. easy with AI, pushing the performance needle forward and increasing efficiency for agencies and their client partners has never been easier. In the last five years AI has seen a massive usage in marketing, and social media platforms were early adopters of the new technology. These new AI-powered tools are rewriting the way advertisers build marketing strategies, set up campaigns, and think about creative adaptations. However, AI is not a cure-all for advertising needs—now more than ever, the industry needs the expertise of media buyers to add nuance and strategy to marketing campaigns.

Meta was early to adopt AI-forward features when they rolled out the Advantage+ campaign setup in 2022. This revolutionary advertising tool automatically optimizes budget, audiences, and placements, resulting in a 9% improvement in cost per conversion [according to a global test](#). Automated setup has since become a standard practice for the industry, with other advertising platforms including TikTok and Snapchat have adopted similar campaign features. Automated campaign setups have been a great response to ever tightening targeting and privacy parameters being implemented industry-wide, allowing advertisers to make the most of their advertising dollars while optimizing campaign performance.

Tools Continue to Disrupt the Paid Social Industry

As AI progresses further, so do the tools made available to advertisers. Recent industry disruptors include the ability to expand images, create ad copy iterations, and even predict trends and campaign performance in real-time. TikTok recently rolled out a campaign type called [Smart+ Campaigns](#) where advertisers can input creative assets, KPIs, and target audience and the platform will automatically output the rest of the campaign creation process including campaign objectives, creative combinations, and CTAs. While many like to consider AI-integrated tools to be “fool-proof,” adoption of these features can be complex. These features can be used as a low-cost stop-gap for advertisers working on a restricted timeline or smaller budgets, but they cannot replace the hand-on-keyboard workflow of expert media buyers to ensure brand consistency.





Influencer Marketing and Social Listening

AI is rapidly transforming influencer marketing by streamlining workflows, improving targeting, and boosting campaign performance. AI tools analyze vast amounts of data across social media platforms to identify influencers whose audience demographics, engagement rates, and content style align with a brand's goals. This eliminates much of the manual research and guesswork as AI can evaluate an influencer's followers for authenticity, sentiment, location, interests, and even purchase intent. A prime example of this social listening.

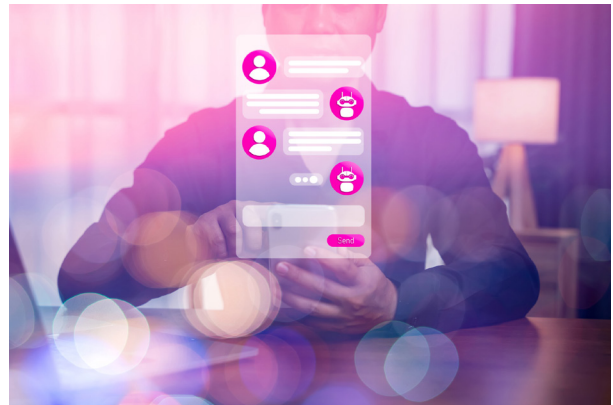
Social listening is the process of monitoring and analyzing conversations, trends, and mentions across social media platforms and online channels to understand what people are saying about a brand, industry, product, or topic. It goes beyond simply tracking likes or comments—it's about gathering insights from public sentiment, keywords, hashtags, competitor activity, and emerging trends.

AI advancements have transformed social listening from a time-consuming luxury into a mission-critical tool for brands and marketers. Before AI, social listening required manually combing through posts, comments, and hashtags—making the process slow and labor-intensive. Now, AI-powered platforms can process millions of conversations in real time, across languages, geographies, and channels, instantly surfacing actionable trends and sentiment shifts. This agility turns what was once reactive into a proactive advantage. Brands can act faster and smarter—pivoting messaging, responding to emerging conversations, or capitalizing on viral trends before competitors. AI usage in influencer marketing and social listening is making the space more data-driven, efficient, and performance-focused.

Understanding Risk

As new features and products roll out, there will always be some level of investment and risk for testing. The success of AI integration is contingent on high quality data signal passthrough, as well as human oversight for execution. Since many of these tools rely on the transmission of user data, industries such as healthcare may run into hurdles when trying to adopt some features while maintaining user privacy. Additional risk also comes from the unknown nature of AI algorithms and how they actually work. Many clients have reservations about removing audience control altogether, which would ultimately give the algorithm free reign to deliver ad dollars to the users it deems most fit.

Brands should understand that AI is not a replacement for hands-on-keyboard workflow but should be seen as a partner. AI automation allows marketing teams to work more efficiently and focus on higher level strategy and creative development. With the use of campaign automation and optimization, advertisers can spend more time focusing on big picture needs instead of time consuming manual tasks.



/QUICK HITS



WNBA Sponsor Deals Jump 52% Since 2022, According to Report
[\[AdWeek\]](#)

Top 10 Networks: TV Ad Reach Keeps Climbing For Those On Top

Rank	Network	H1 2025 TV Ad Impressions SOV	Rank Change YoY	Ad Impression Change YoY
1	CBS	8.10%	—	+2.37%
2	Fox News	7.10%	+2	+35.13%
3	ABC	6.36%	-1	+1.85%
4	NBC	5.70%	-1	+5.80%
5	ESPN	4.03%	—	+6.13%
6	ION	2.33%	—	-9.64%
7	HGTV	2.28%	—	-5.26%
8	Univision	2.19%	+1	+0.45%
9	CNN	2.04%	+4	+10.08%
10	Hallmark	2.04%	-2	-9.39%

Source: Spot

Linear Retains 86% Share Of Ad Impressions Even As Streaming Grows
[\[Mediapost\]](#)



Prime Day Grows Up
[\[AdExchanger\]](#)

Need More Guidance?



Rachel Baker
SVP, Head of Video Investment & Partnerships
rachel.baker@rainforgrowth.com



Robin Cohen
EVP, Integrated Media Investment & Planning
robin.cohen@rainforgrowth.com

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