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MEDIA IMPACT REPORT

How Men are Helping Fuel the Boom of Women's Sports

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Amazon Is Becoming a Search Engine. Is Your DTC Strategy Ready?



/BRIEFING ROOM

How Men are Helping Fuel the Boom of Women's Sports

By Susan Boland, SVP, Brand Strategy

For the last decade, the dominant story around women's sports has been equity—closing the gap in investment, visibility, and respect compared with men's leagues. But if you look at who is driving viewership and spending today, a different story emerges: men are helping fuel the women's sports boom in ways the industry has been slow to recognize.

Rain's HypeHer™ research shows that women's sports fandom is now one of the most gender balanced properties in sports media, with about half of fans identifying as male and half as female. External studies echo this, finding that two-thirds of viewers for events like FIFA Women's Soccer and NCAA Women's Basketball are men, and about half of WNBA viewers are male.

For marketers, this is not just a demographic nuance. It is a signal that women's sports have quietly become one of the few environments where you can authentically reach high-value male and female audiences at the same time—without sacrificing values, brand safety, or performance.

A New Kind of Male Fandom

Traditional narratives have framed men's interest in women's sports as curiosity or as spillover from big cultural moments: the World Cup, the Olympics, or the Caitlin Clark effect. HypeHer's profiling of avid women's sports fans tells a different story:

- The "super fan" cohort skews majority male (about 57% male, 42% female)
- They are young to midcareer adults, often Gen Z and Millennials, with household income of $100K+ and strong professional trajectories
- One-third spend 7+ hours per week with women's sports and follow multiple leagues and athletes across platforms, from streaming and league apps to social content and podcasts

Crucially, they do not separate performance from principle. Super fans describe women's sports as both high-level competition and a cultural movement—supporting equity, representation, and the future of the game—with many saying that "what I watch, where I go, and what I buy helps grow this."

Not Just Women Watching: A Dual-Gender Growth and Economic Engine

Meanwhile, metrics at the league level have become impossible to ignore:

- WNBA viewership has grown by triple digits, with tens of millions of unique viewers total
- NCAA Women's Basketball championships are outdrawing or rivaling marquee men's events

- NWSL continues to post record growth with expanding media distribution

The increase in viewership doesn't just increase the ratings for women's sports. HypeHer's research shows these super fans are a serious economic engine:

- They spend 2.5x more than casual fans on tickets, merchandise, and sponsors
- About 86% are likely to purchase from brands promoted by female athletes
- More than half (57%) report buying specifically because a brand supported women's sports

Even in the broader women's sports fan base, the pattern holds:

- General fans are 53% more likely to buy from brands that promote women's sports
- One-third have already made purchases explicitly because of a brand's support for the space

In other words, the men and women helping grow women's sports are not passive eyeballs. They are high LTV, values-driven consumers who see their spending as part of how they "vote" for the future of the game.



From "Moment" to Market Maturity

The early chapter of women's sports marketing revolved around visibility—get games on air, get athletes in campaigns, and prove that people will watch. The current chapter is about scale: record-breaking viewership, expanded media rights, and surging investment.

When men show up, alongside women, not just as incidental viewers but as committed, high-spend advocates, it tells us women's sports have crossed the line from "emerging niche" to mainstream entertainment property.

For media companies, leagues, and advertisers, the takeaway is simple but profound: women's sports are core growth strategy with dual-gender reach and strong commercial upside.



Five ways smart brands should respond:

1. **Plan for a dual-gender audience, not a women-only one.**
   With super fans skewing 57% male and general fans close to 50/50, media plans that treat this space as a women's-only one are missing half the audience that shows up. Brief creative, targeting, and media-buying teams to plan for a mixed-gender growth channel, not a women's-only one.
2. **Treat women's sports as a platform, not a one-off, and make support tangible and visible.**
   Super fans respond to long-term commitments and look for evidence that a brand is not just here for the moment but is part of the movement to grow the game. Across both fan and super fan segments, large shares report purchasing specifically because a brand supported women's sports. Being explicit about rights deals, grassroots investments, or equal pay initiatives turns sponsorship into a reason to buy, not just a logo impression.
3. **Lean into athlete-centric storytelling.**
   Women's sports fans are significantly more likely to follow athletes as well as teams, and female athletes generate double the social engagement of

male athletes. Partnering with athletes unlocks both performance and purpose, especially among male super fans who see those endorsements as cues for where to spend.

4. **Design for multiplatform journeys.**
   Fans experience women's sports across broadcast, streaming, social, short-form highlights, podcasts, out-of-home, and communal viewing. Male super fans are streaming- and mobile-first, juggling OTT, league apps, clips, and social communities, so campaigns need to be architected for the full ecosystem, not just in linear TV.



5. **Recognize women's sports as a brand-safety and values advantage.**
   In a fragmented media landscape, women's sports offer a rare combination of high-stakes competition, positive cultural associations, and audiences who want brands to be there. It is one of the few environments in which a brand showing up is perceived as an act of support.

Source: Rain HypeHer Women's Sports Engagement, Wave 1 & Wave 2

Source: ***Winning Her Way***

Source: ***Parity***

/QUICK HITS



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/NOTEPAD

Amazon Is Becoming a Search Engine. Is Your DTC Strategy Ready?

By Sarah Brennan, Director of Growth & Development, Rainstorm Direct

For years, search marketing meant Google. Changing consumer behavior is opening up new opportunities for marketers to reach consumers who are actively searching for products and brands.

According to a study by eMarketer, more than 57% of consumers now begin their product search on Amazon, making the retail giant one of the most influential search platforms in the purchase journey. As Amazon gains share of search advertising dollars and Google's dominance softens, direct-to-consumer (DTC) brands need to rethink how they approach media, measurement, and customer acquisition.

Search Is Bigger Than Google

Consumers increasingly bypass traditional search engines and head directly to Amazon when they're ready to buy. As a result, search engine marketing (SEM) can no longer be viewed as a Google-only strategy.

Amazon has evolved beyond an e-commerce marketplace into a powerful search engine where consumers research products, compare options, read reviews, and make purchasing decisions. For brands, Amazon is no longer just a sales channel, it's a critical demand-capture platform.

TV Doesn't Just Drive Search, It Drives Amazon Search

Marketers have long known that TV drives branded search activity. Increasingly, that search is happening on Amazon.

We've seen one advertiser intentionally direct consumers from TV to Amazon rather than its DTC site. The result: nearly 80% of monthly sales flowed through Amazon, with an 88% correlation between TV investment and Amazon sales.

Another TV-heavy advertiser launched on Amazon and experienced an almost one-to-one shift in sales from its DTC channel to Amazon. Demand wasn't necessarily growing, it was shifting where consumers chose to purchase.

But that's not necessarily a problem.

The real question isn't whether Amazon is taking share from DTC. It's whether the combined impact of DTC, Amazon, and retail is greater than focusing on DTC alone.

Consumers increasingly choose where they want to buy, whether that's direct, through Amazon, or in-store. If awareness-driving media is working as intended, broader brand demand should create growth across all channels, helping offset some natural DTC erosion.

For brands investing in TV, Amazon performance shouldn't be measured in isolation. It should be evaluated as part of total business growth.

If Amazon is part of your brand's distribution strategy, consider mentioning it directly in your creative. A simple cue that your product is available on Amazon can reduce friction and improve conversion.



Winning on Amazon Requires a Strategy

Amazon's scale is compelling, but brands must balance growth with profitability and customer ownership.

Protect Your Margins

Amazon seller fees, fulfillment costs, and media competition can quickly pressure profitability. Develop a pricing strategy that accounts for the true cost of selling through the platform.

Differentiate Your Product Portfolio

Consider reserving premium products, innovations, and exclusive bundles for your DTC site while offering value-focused or legacy products on Amazon. This allows brands to leverage Amazon's scale without sacrificing channel differentiation.

Own the Customer Relationship

One of Amazon's biggest trade-offs is limited access to customer data. For brands that rely on repeat purchases, subscriptions, or lifetime value, that's a meaningful challenge.

Packaging inserts, loyalty programs, exclusive offers, and product registrations can help bring Amazon customers back into your owned ecosystem and strengthen long-term customer relationships.

The Bottom Line

The future isn't DTC versus Amazon, it's total demand generation.

Too many brands are still measuring sales channel performance when they should be measuring business growth. Consumers will ultimately decide where they want to buy: direct, in-store, or through Amazon. The brands that win won't be the ones trying to force customers down a single path. They'll be the ones that create demand everywhere, capture it anywhere, and build strategies that maximize the value of every purchase, regardless of where the transaction occurs.

As Amazon has evolved from a retail marketplace into a search, discovery, and commerce engine, marketers must broaden their definition of success. The question is no longer whether Amazon is taking share from DTC. The question is whether your marketing investments are generating more demand, reaching more buyers, and growing the business overall. In the next era of commerce, the most successful brands won't optimize for channels, they'll optimize for customers.

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