

# YouTube is where sports come to life



A marketer's playbook for the  
**2026 sports season**

There's only one



# The Pitch Report

Live

14M

views



Non-Live

300M+

views over  
1000+ videos

Understanding the evolving fandom landscape, the pitch isn't what it used to be.

Legacy thinking assumes the "game" happens only when the ball is in play. But for the fan, a live match is just one part of a 24-hour cycle of intent.

# Fandom is bigger than ever and it's evolving

## 50Cr fans

Including millennial men, women,  
Gen Z, and rural audiences at scale



**12Cr**

Millennial  
males



**15Cr**

Women



**21Cr**

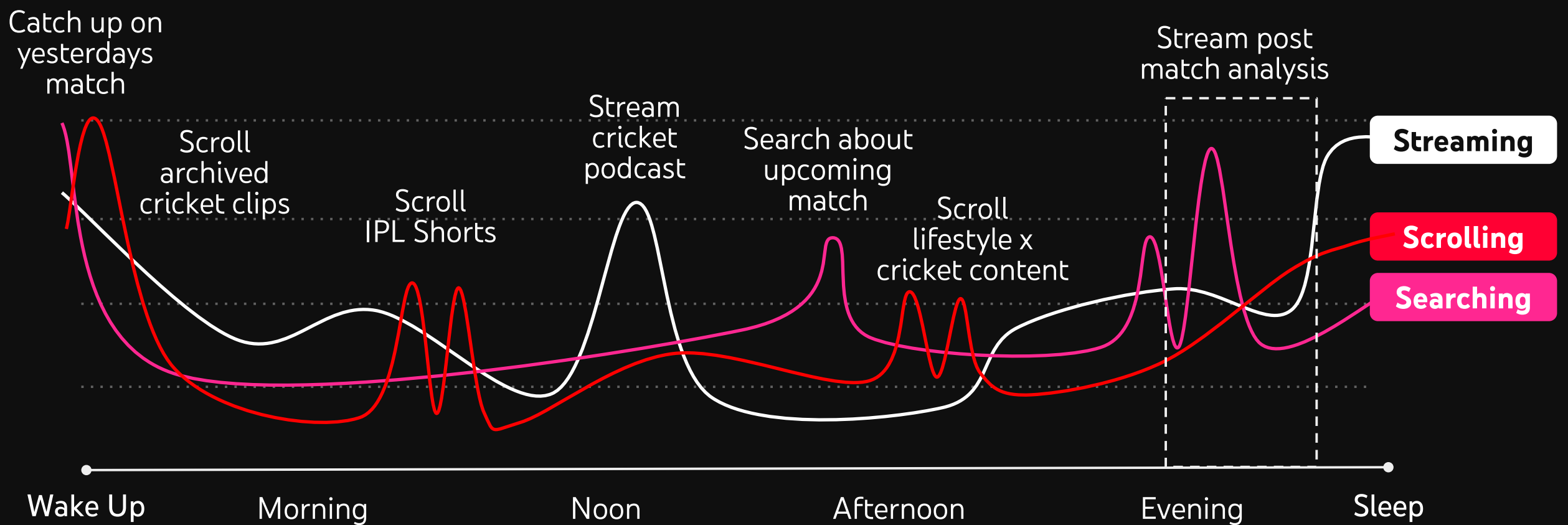
Gen Z



**28Cr**

Rural

Fans have moved from passive spectating to total immersion. There is the Anticipation, for the game, the Action, during the game, and the Aftermath post the game. Within these three phases, fans are **searching, streaming, scrolling, and shopping** all the time.



**90%**

are active on another screen while watching live sport

**Non-Live**

**Live**

**34%**

**66%**

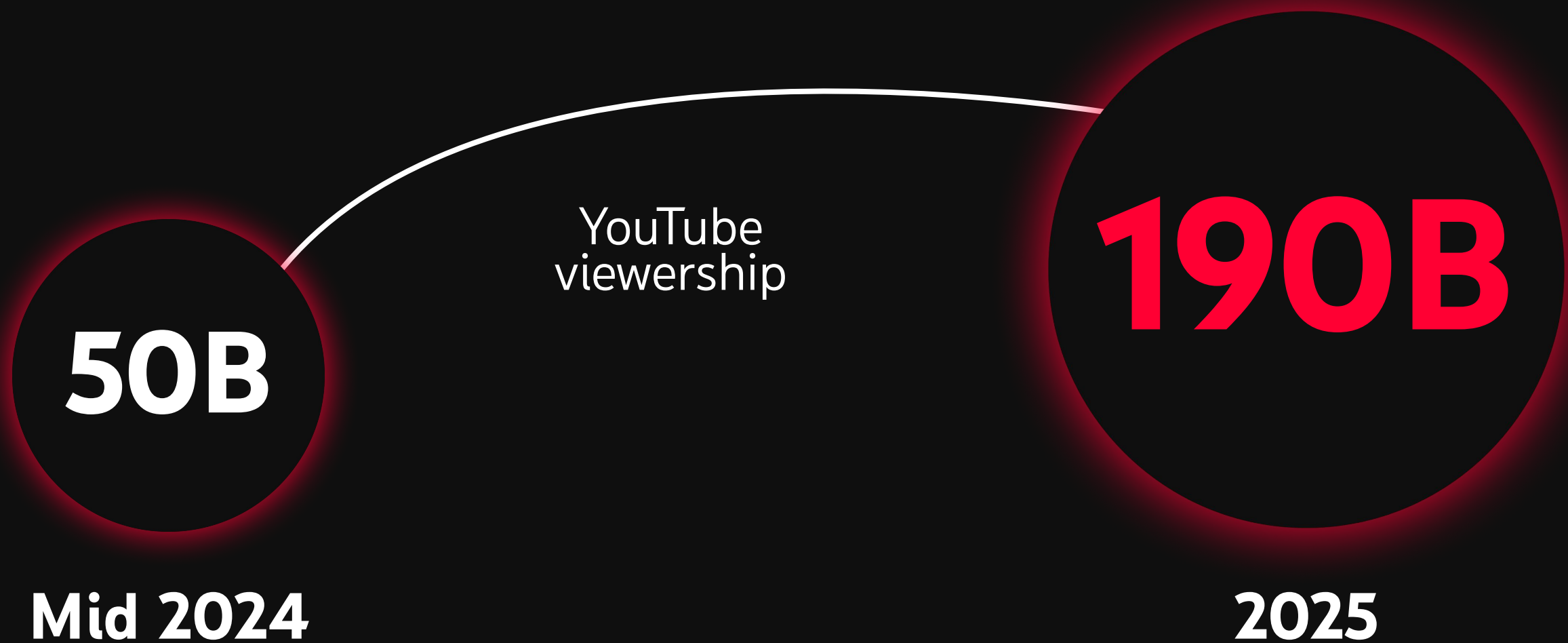
Share of time spent consuming cricket content

“

The celebration is not happening on the broadcast.  
The celebration is not happening in the ad break.  
The celebration is happening in those 21 hours post the game.”

– Gaurav Kapur [YouTube Creator, Presenter]

Fans are now consuming content on their own terms. On YouTube, we have seen cricket-related content views rise exponentially.



**67%**

viewers in India watch sports content on YouTube vs. 48% on OTT and 53% on social

**#1**

YouTube Shorts is the #1 short-form video platform for sports content compared to other platforms

“

Sports is just the subject. I don't need to be a fan to be able to enjoy the content.. The moment we understand that, we start looking at all the content that's getting created very differently.

– Ashwin Padmanaban (COO, WPP Media)

**YouTube is where sports comes to life**

# The Game Plan



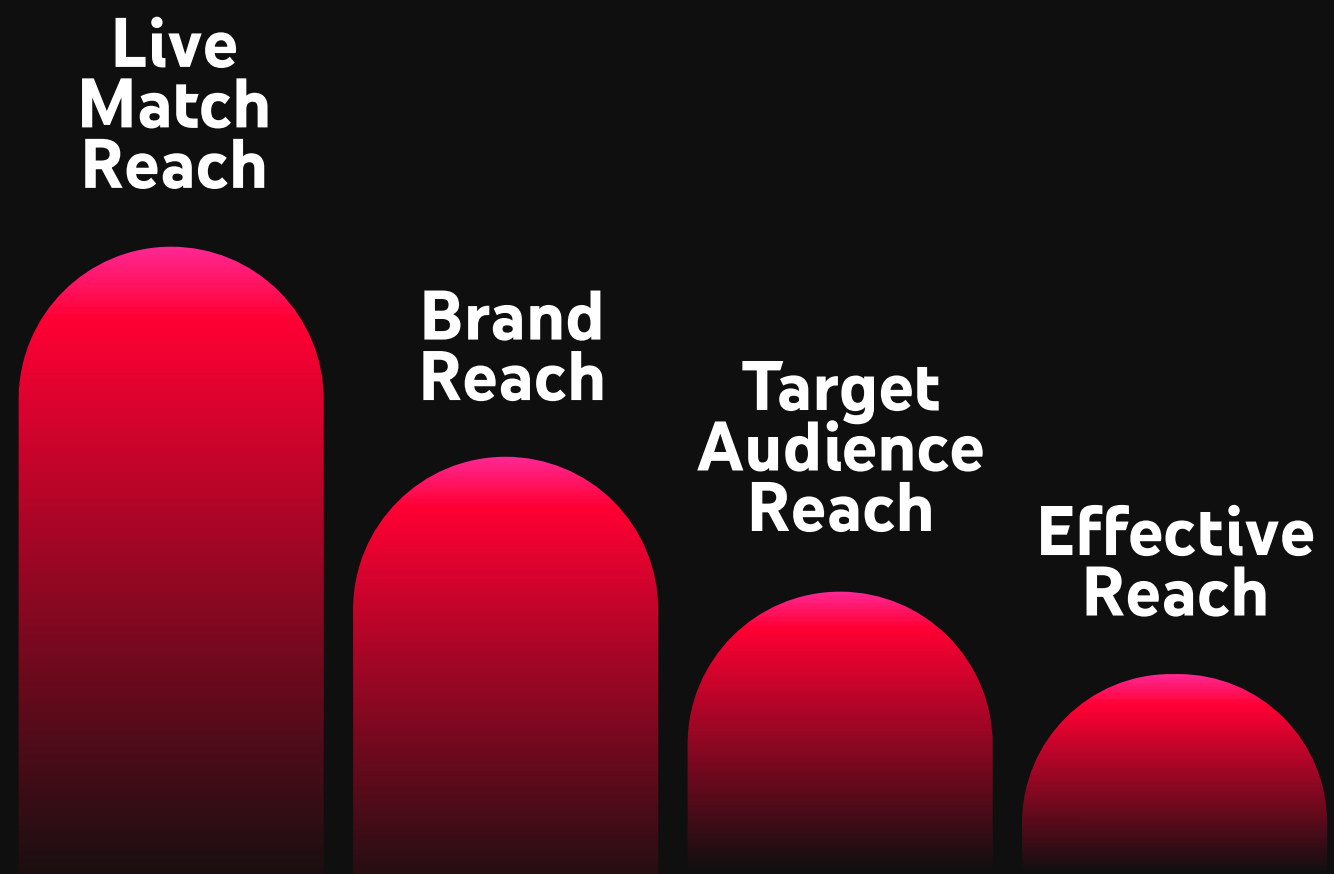
With a 180-day long cricket season, brand fatigue and market clutter are inevitable.

To navigate this evolving landscape, leading CMOs shared their strategies for winning **this sports season.**

# The Game Plan: Team Selection

Selecting the right **media** channels isn't just about being everywhere; **it's about ensuring every rupee is an investment, not an expense.**

**Reach on Live  
is becoming  
an illusion**



While the spike in any of the tournament especially like cricket can give you the initial excitement, the presence on non-live inventory will give you the whole season

— Anuraj Gupta [CGO, LS Digital]

Hence, this season your **budget strategy** should follow one of two distinct playbooks

# The Challenger Strategy

[Budget: < ₹20 Cr]

Rather than spreading yourself thin, the Challenger can win by **choosing battles they can dominate.**



## Avoid the noise

Sidestep the high-cost clutter of Live where impact is diluted by noise.



## Own the surround

1. **Dominate the digital ecosystem** to capture the fan's undivided attention outside the match window.

2. **Own high impact platforms** such as **YouTube Connected TV or Shorts** to reach your relevant target audience at high frequency.

3. **Focus on specific geographies and demographics** vs spreading too thin pan-India.

# The Leading Brand Strategy

[Budget: ₹50 Cr+]

When you own the market, your strategy needs to shift from simply buying media to **owning the fan's lifecycle.** Hence, you need to adopt a **hybrid approach**, use Live for the peaks of mass attention and Digital for the depth of cultural relevance.



## Selective presence on Live

To maximize ROI, adopt a selective flying strategy—concentrating spend on the tournament's bookends and high-stakes marquee matchups.



## Win the game beyond the Live broadcast

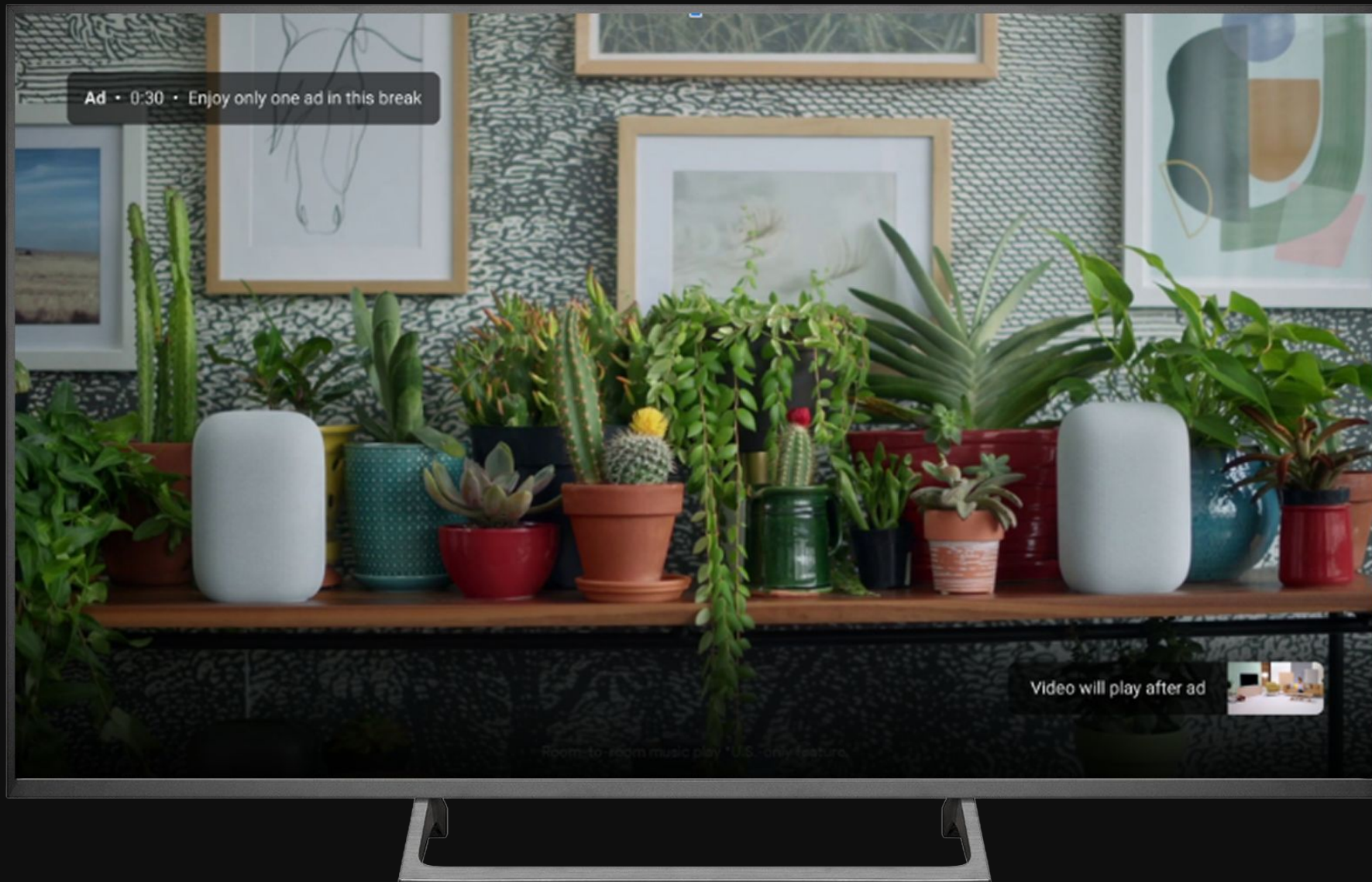
Fans don't just watch; they search, scroll, and stream. Capture this by activating non-live channels like **YouTube and Search** and tap into distinct user behaviors pre, during, and post-match. Combine high-impact **Connected TV (CTV)** inventory with authentic **creator partnerships** to ensure you engage the full spectrum of the audience—from hardcore loyalists to casual flirts.



## Focus on Depth over Dilution

Resist the urge to be everywhere. Instead of fragmenting your budget and risking a diluted presence, **concentrate your spend on 2-3 key platforms.**

# Own these high impact moments: YouTube Connected TV



01

## Own big-screen attention on YouTube

From cricket creators to entertainment and music - place your brand in high-attention viewing moments

02

## Leverage existing assets

Use your existing 30s to reach cord cutters that can't be reached on linear TV

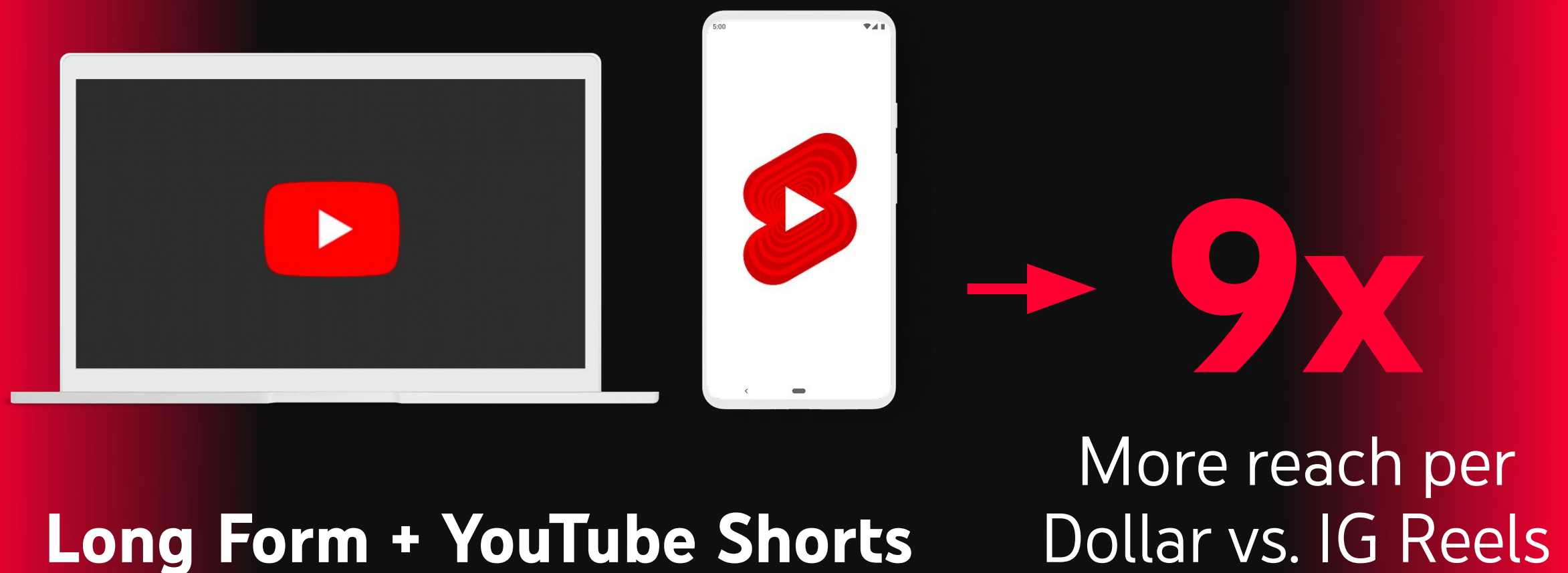
03

## Drive brand awareness

As viewers stream their favourite YouTube Select Content

# Own these high impact moments: YouTube Shorts

Achieve faster reach with the benefit of dual creative within the YouTube ecosystem



**Long Form + YouTube Shorts**

More reach per Dollar vs. IG Reels

Shorts helped a leading OTT reach **74%** Incremental users over regular Instream campaign

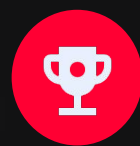
# The Game Plan: Shot Selection

Your **creative** determines whether you hit the six. This season, **shift from “interrupting”** the fan experience to **“integrating”** within it through these tactical plays:



## Make Content Not Ads

Don't let storytelling be limited by 10-15 sec, make content that ensures your brand and value proposition are effectively communicated.



## Fuel the Fan Communities

Cricket is built on loyalty and opinions. Don't just talk at the fans; give them a reason to talk to each other. Facilitate the communities and conversations

## Creators are masters of these tactics

**87% Indians**

**agree YouTube creators are the most trusted for product recommendations**



# Tap into the creator ecosystem with creator-led IPs to build salience throughout the season

## Breakfast with Champions



2.1M Subscribers

## Khaane Mein Kya Hai



650K Subscribers

## Cricket and the City



650K Subscribers

## 2 Sloggers



473K Subscribers



If you walk along with the consumer, they don't mind it. But if you hit the consumer on the head with your brand, the consumer moves on.

— Harsha Bhogle [YouTube Creator, Cricket Commentator]

# Leverage creator trust with Partnership Ads to Drive Performance



**+20%**

**Higher conversion** on the Shorts feed than ads with advertiser branding alone

**+10%**

**More Clicks** to the advertiser website

## Get started with **4 steps: Find, partner, boost, measure**

### Step 01

**Find** the right creators

Discover existing sponsored content or find new creators to partner with basis the **brand brief**. If you have a creator you're working with, move to step 2.

### Step 02

**Partner** on sponsored content

Enable the partnership with **video linking**, the essential bridge between creator content and Google Ads.

### Step 03

**Boost** as Partnership Ad


Boost authentic creator content across the full funnel using high-performance **Partnership Ads**.

### Step 04

**Measure** the impact

Boost authentic creator content across the full funnel using high-performance **Partnership Ads**.

# The Powerplay Summary



The two non-negotiables for winning this sports season

## Move from “Match Exposure” to “Fan Immersion”

Brands that win in 2026 **own the surrounding conversations**, the pre-match hype, and the post-match analysis.

## Efficiency is the New Reach

Whether you are a Leader or a Challenger, aim to **eliminate empty reach**.

By consolidating spend on immersive and high-intent platforms like **YouTube and Google**, you ensure every rupee drives a measurable action.

# Proven on the field



Strategies are merely theories until they are tested. Explore the impact of how brands can win the **Sports season using YouTube and Google.**



Achieved a **118% better CTR** and a **53% VTR**, significantly exceeding campaign targets

**Approach:** Leveraged YouTube Select to target cricket fanatics via specific lineups and reserved inventory.



SWIGGY

Achieved **3.5x incremental ROAS** on YouTube

**Approach:** Integrated 1P data with Ads Data Hub and Data.ai to quantify brand impact during cricket season. Measured repeat behaviour uplift and benchmarked city-level market share against cricket-heavy competitors.

For CPG,  
YouTube ROI was

**3x**

of OTT platform  
ROI & 2.4x of TV

YouTube Drives

**2.3x**

Incremental ROAS  
compared to social  
media



Source: In an MMM meta-analysis we commissioned with Nielsen, on average, YouTube effectiveness was 24.11 times greater than Linear TV effectiveness across Total CPG MMMs that measured YouTube, Other Digital, and Linear TV from Jan'20- Sep'23 in India

According to a meta analysis of CPG MMM Studies by Analytic Edge in India, YouTube ROI was 3.0x of OTT Platforms ROI (2021-2024)  
Equity-to-Sales



Achieved a **50% decrease in CAC** and drove **2x scale on iOS**

**Approach:** Deployed App Campaigns for Installs (iOS + Android), utilizing SKAdNetwork (SKAN) event integration and ATT prompts to optimize iOS conversion values.

**POCO**

Achieved a **3.14% awareness lift** and a **1.77% consideration lift**

**Approach:** Executed a full-funnel YouTube strategy using non-skips, VVC campaigns, and Demand Gen to drive traffic to Flipkart.



Groww drives **5x higher conversion rate** with YouTube's AI-powered full funnel strategy

**Approach:** Executed a full-funnel YouTube strategy focused on high-intent Finance and Investment content, supported by feature-led creatives across Mutual Funds, Stocks, and F&O, and a multi-LOB app campaign to drive conversion.

PMax delivers

**8%**

higher ROAS & 10% higher sales effectiveness compared to only Search strategies



Source: In an MMM meta-analysis we commissioned with Nielsen, on average, YouTube effectiveness was 24.11 times greater than Linear TV effectiveness across Total CPG MMMs that measured YouTube, Other Digital, and Linear TV from Jan'20- Sep'23 in India. According to a meta analysis of CPG MMM Studies by Analytic Edge in India, YouTube ROI was 3.0x of OTT Platforms ROI (2021-2024) Equity-to-Sales

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 YouTube

