

A Recovery of Olympic Proportions

**With the help of streaming, AI,
and a lot of optimism, Paris 2024
delivers for athletes, fans,
marketers, and networks**

Introduction

Heading into the Paris 2024 Olympics, all involved were hoping for a games that would mark a return to normalcy after Tokyo 2020 was severely disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Games were delayed a year and had no live audiences in the stands to watch them. Heading into the games, GroupM predicted that this year's games would outpace the \$2 billion advertising revenue from Tokyo 2020, solidifying the Paris 2024 Games as the leading sporting event for ad revenue, well above the Men's FIFA World Cup. These hopes, however, were tempered by global and political unrest as well as economic uncertainty.



But it became clear quickly that Paris 2024 was going to deliver. From the Opening Ceremony onwards, **viewership numbers from around the world exceeded expectations as sports-hungry fans tuned in to linear TV and new streaming offerings** — some of it powered by AI — to cheer for their home countries and favorite athletes.

And while social media has been around in some shape or form for decades, this was the first games where athletes were (mostly) allowed to engage unfettered by IOC rules.

The Allure Of Sports

It's no secret why networks and advertisers love sporting events. Live sports guarantee something increasingly rare in a fractured media environment: massive live audiences.

But what about consumers? As Kate Scott-Dawkins wrote in GroupM's *This Year Next Year Midyear Report*, it's a hunger for collective experiences in a world of hyper-individualized media diets. "Sports," she wrote "will continue to be important opportunities for brands to be a part of 'collective effervescence' — the psychological concept advanced by Émile Durkheim to explain the sense of unity when a community or society participates in the same activity."

Wearing a team jersey (perhaps festooned with brand patches) or tuning in to the big match provides many people with the connection to others, and the ability to be part of the cultural conversation, that has faded with the shift away from appointment viewing on broadcast TV.



The First (Truly) Streaming Olympics

Fans of a certain age will remember tuning into Olympic Games and getting only what the broadcast network deemed worthy. The proliferation of cable channels allowed carriers to offer more options, but even then, editorial decisions had to be made. Do you give over the entire day to live sports at odd hours? Will anyone tune into primetime programming if the live event happened 12 hours earlier? It was frustrating for fans and the networks and advertisers trying to reach them.

This was the year that media companies around the world had the platforms to open up the spigot. It seemed the sort of rising tide that lifted all boats, with ratings/viewership exceeding expectations across linear and streaming. For marketers, it provided opportunities to go after audiences both broad and niche.

In the U.S.

Across the entire Olympics, NBCUniversal reported an average daily Total Audience Delivery (TAD) of **30.6 million viewers with 4.1 million coming from streaming** & digital properties.

- The Paris Olympics overall averaged 13.93 million P2+ viewers on NBC Primetime, up 9.0% from Tokyo and +50% from Beijing.
- NBCU delivered over 1,800 hours of linear coverage of the 2024 Paris Olympics bolstered extensively by the addition of 2 linear networks, Paris Extra 1 and Paris Extra 2. Coverage was also carried on Golf, USA, E! And CNBC.
- Over 175 billion hours of Olympics coverage were consumed across all NBCU linear networks and streaming properties
- The 23.5 billion viewing minutes streamed eclipses the streaming totals for every previous Olympics combined.





In the U.K.

Coverage in the U.K. was split between the BBC and WarnerBros. Discovery. WBD also sub-licensed the European rights.

WBD reported that more than 215 million people in Europe watched the Olympics via its platforms, which included Discovery+, Eurosport, and Max among others.

WBD streamed more than 7 billion minutes over the course of the game

BBC doubled the number of its Olympic views online to

218 million

Live viewing on TV sets totaled 36.1 million, or 59% of the U.K. population, according to Deadline.

In Australia



9Network reports a “National Total Television Reach” of 19.5 million across Channel 9, 9Gem, and 9Now.

9Now offered over 40 live streams, along with on-demand and live streaming of Channel 9 and 9Gem, and achieved a 16% incremental reach, with

2.7 million

viewers tuning in exclusively to the Olympics through 9Now.





In France

- France Télévisions reported a reach of 59.2 million individuals aged 4+.
- On average, each French person watched more than 24 hours of the Olympic Games on France Télévisions (equivalent to 1.6 billion hours viewed).

france.tv platform recorded over

200 million

video views during the entire event.

- 39 million video views for the "france.tv Paris 2024" digital channel during the Olympic Games and over 11 million unique visitors.
- 1 billion video views for video highlights published by France Télévisions' accounts on social media.

In China

- CMG (China Media Group, CCTV's parent unit) amassed a cross-media viewership nearing 77 billion, engaging an audience of 1.049 billion across platforms, encompassing game broadcasts and associated news coverage.
- Media analytics indicate that the cumulative TV viewership during the Olympics surpassed 39.818 billion, with CCTV-5, among the broadcasting channels, achieving the highest viewership share of the past five Olympic Games.



China Media Group Mobile executed over 7,000 live event broadcasts, amassing a total online viewership and engagement tally of over

14.5 billion

with peak viewership for a single event hitting more than 70 million.

AI and the Games

Whatever region they were in, viewers likely saw a number of campaigns for AI-related offerings. Google made a big push for its Gemini product, including ads featuring Olympic athletes. But Google's efforts went well beyond advertising. In the U.S., a wide-ranging sponsorship deal with NBC and Team USA meant its AI products were not only woven into coverage, but helped create content as well. "Explain the Games" showcased Google Search's AI Overviews. "Try It With Google Gemini" saw NBC Commentator and SNL alum Leslie Jones using Gemini to learn new sports or come up with custom moves.

And in "One Day in Paris," Olympians and Paralympians were featured in social videos and late-night promos as they explored the host city aided by Google Lens, Circle to Search, Immersive View in Google Maps and Gemini, highlighting their AI-powered features.

Meanwhile, Peacock used AI to power an offering called "Your Daily Olympic Recap." Available on laptops and mobile devices (but not TV), it allowed viewers to select the top three sports and top two themes they were interested in. Using large language models and other technology, it created a daily recap custom tailored to the viewer – and narrated by an AI version of NBC's Al Michaels.

On the field, AI was used to help with analysis and media coverage. It's also reportedly being used to help identify potential Olympic athletes in Senegal.

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To keep pace with developments in AI, the IOC launched what it calls "The Olympic AI Agenda," which sets out a governance and oversight framework "to identify and mitigate risk, and ... will be a continuous process to leverage the insights and experience of prominent experts to support the deployment of AI for the Olympic Movement."

Gold-medal memes

One of the reasons the Olympics felt like a return to a shared social experience was social media. Deadline reported that according to TikTok, “there was a near-2000% rise in TikTok posts about the games when compared with Tokyo, while 233,000 people created content using the Olympics hashtag.”

Some of those people creating content happened to be Olympians themselves. And that has made a massive difference, according to The New York Times. Released from the extremely rigid rules of previous games, “the prolific posting has fueled Olympic memes and TikTok trends, contributing to a sense that the Games are everywhere. The South Korean pistol shooter Kim Ye-ji went viral for her cool composure. The Norwegian swimmer Henrik Christiansen introduced the world to the chocolate muffins in the Olympic Village. The American gymnast Sunisa Lee jumped on a viral TikTok trend, mocking her jarring fall off the balance beam.” NBCU, which flew in a team of 27 creators — dubbed the “Creator Collective” — to craft social content, found that when it came to new Olympics viewers,

“**36%**

said they tuned in
after watching events
in social media clips.”

U.S. rugby player Ilona Maher fast become a social-media star even before the team won bronze at the games. Turkish shooter Yusuf Dikec was an early meme favorite, particularly among GenX. Chinese gymnast Zhou Yaqin won hearts around the world when she bit into her silver medal after seeing her fellow medalist do the same. (According to Jing Daily, the hashtag #ZhouYaqin has received over 44 million views on Xiaohongshu.) Simone Biles wrote on Threads (after she was done competing), “I know tequila hate to see me coming.”

In other words, for all their physical prowess, athletes let their human sides show.

Social media also allowed viewers to make sponsorship suggestions to brands. And Italian gymnast Giorgia Villa went viral because of an older sponsorship deal with the Italian cheese company Parmigiano-Reggiano.

Even brands got in on the act. McDonald's in France joked that it was going to discontinue curry sauce after France lost to a U.S. team led by Stephen Curry's dominant performance in the gold-medal game. After a bit of controversy in fencing between Hong Kong and Italian athletes, Pizza Hut's Hong Kong and Macao branch had a little fun at Italy's expense by taking to Facebook and offering customers free pineapple-topped pizza (a culinary crime in Italy).

Adidas On The Podium

While Adidas had a slate of TV, VOD, OOH, social and digital activations across Paris and the Olympics and Paralympics, on top of celebrating its 40th anniversary with Team Great Britain this year, the brand made a pretty good showing on the field as well. A small sampling:



Noah Lyles
U.S



Tamirat Tola
Ethiopia



Benson Kipruto
Kenya



Tigst Assefa
Ethiopia

On the ground

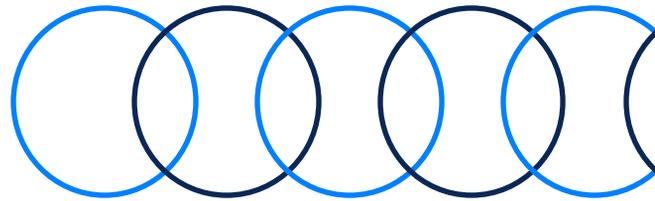
One place where relatively rigid rules are still in effect is on the ground. Unlike what we're used to in traditional sports with brands seemingly everywhere and on everything, you don't find any that at the Olympics. The absence of overt branding within the stadiums was striking. This forced brands to think creatively, leveraging the iconic Parisian backdrop to make their mark and transform the city into an interactive showcase.

Alibaba's futuristic shopping experience on the Champs-Élysées which invited spectators to share their likes, dislikes, and hobbies with a virtual assistant driven by Qwen, Alibaba Cloud's large language model. By doing so, Qwen then allowed spectators to customize their own avatars with personalized makeup, clothing and more.

OMEGA built its own activation, OMEGA Pavilion, alongside the Seine River and welcomed spectators to test their speed against digitally induced Olympic and Paralympic athletes on the 10m running track, while also showcasing OMEGA's Olympic history, and highlighting their ambassadors' biographies throughout the space.

Surrounding the venues, Visa and The Coca-Cola Co. were seamlessly integrated into the fan experience, authentically weaving their products throughout the games. Visa, as the exclusive payment technology partner, integrated their contactless payment technology across 3,500 points of sale in 48 Olympic and Paralympic venues. Coca-Cola, an official Worldwide Partner, had a diverse portfolio of their products available to all athletes, officials, and spectators throughout the Olympic Village and venues.

Dell, meanwhile, had OOH running throughout Paris with branded taxis as buses as well as tramway stations and underground.



Embracing the full scope of the Games

Coca-Cola showed how a brand can fully maximize such a sponsorship. Aside from sponsoring two international teams – Team Coca-Cola and Team Powerade – the company rolled out major branding campaigns and on-the-ground activations.

For Coke, the company unveiled an emotive, unifying campaign showcasing the power of sport to embrace differences and foster cross-cultural connection. The creative-centerpiece of the multi-channel campaign was the hug. This included a brand film, package redesign, and dynamic digital content capturing real-time hugs and shared through social.

Powerade's new campaign featured Simone Biles as well as other Team Power athletes that were part of the larger Team Coca-Cola. Powerade also created an Olympic Village experience that enabled athletes to prepare mentally and physically for competition. It also introduced Powerade Gold, a product specially designed for the Olympic and Paralympic Games Paris 2024.

Wonder women

Perhaps one of the most striking stats of this year's games was that if the U.S. women were their own country, they would have won the third most medals in the Games.

Of the

126

medals won by the U.S. – which led the overall medal count – women were responsible for

67.

And 26 of the 40 gold medals.

As it turns out, this is the fourth consecutive summer games where U.S. women have won more than the men.

This was just part of the larger picture in which the IOC said it had achieved “full gender parity on the field of play” this year. This was accomplished by setting a quota to distribute competition spots equally among male and female athletes.

As part of this moment, GroupM and NBCU partnered to create themed pods of women's sports where brands could buy ads and tout their support of women's sports. NBCU aired them during the women's gymnastics all-around and individual finals and during women's beach volleyball and water polo, with more to come. Coca-Cola, Google, Target, Unilever and Universal Pictures were among those who bought ad time.

Homefield advantage

01

France won **64 medals overall** and **16 gold medals.**

02

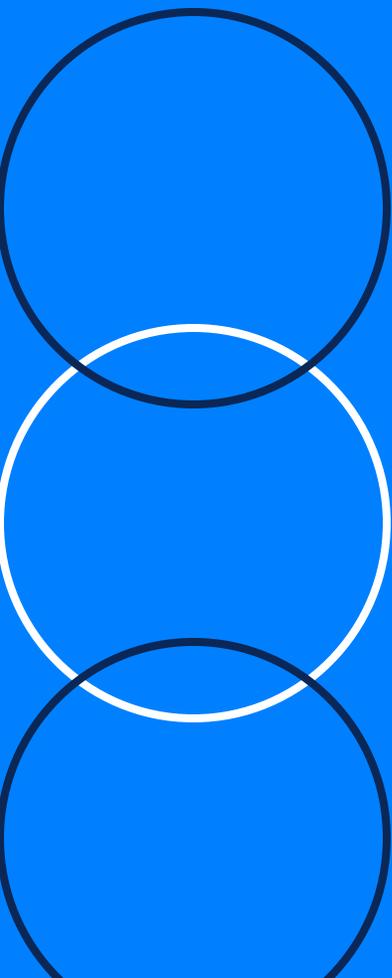
In Tokyo, the country finished with **33 overall** and **10 golds.**

03

This is the country's most medals – and **most gold medals – since 1900**

Conclusion

The Paris 2024 Games proved a return to form for the Olympics. Technology, social media, celebrity, the thrill of victory and agony of defeat all played a part – and provided marketers with plenty of space to work within. With winter games coming up in two years in cultural and culinary center like Milan and summer games in 2028 in entertainment capital of the world Los Angeles, there will be more than ample opportunities for brand activations.



That's to say nothing of technological developments that may happen between then and now. The games continue to prove their ability to deliver broad, mass audiences. That said, with streaming offerings combined with new targeting methods across a variety of media, brands can go broad, niche, and in between. Niche brands once considered non-endemic to sports marketing can likely also find a home, and maybe grow new audiences by supporting sports and athletes that are typically overlooked.

The key is to identify opportunities as early as possible and work those sports marketing muscles throughout the cycle.

As Kate Johnson, global marketing director for sports and entertainment at Google, told Sports Business Journal, "For these things to make sense there has to be an always-on component. Where I see lots of opportunity for the sports themselves is to make sure that when brands are looking at auditing their investment portfolio, they're able to say, 'Well, let's help you right size. And by the way, there's this huge moment in four years that you can talk about, but actually on the way there, that's where we really need you.'"

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Written by **Ken Wheaton, GroupM**

Contributors:

Ronnie Beach, U.S. Sports Lead, Wavemaker

Michael Borone, Senior Partner, Director of National TV, GroupM

Grace Fong, Research Associate, GroupM

Nicolas Grand, Executive Director, Price & Valuation Creation, GroupM

Jeff Grande, Associate Director, Sports & Live, Wavemaker

Patrick Nonnan, Senior Director Global Investment, GroupM

Ryan Wallis, Research Analyst, GroupM

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