



rain

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MEDIA IMPACT REPORT

The Marketing Impact of the 2026 FIFA World Cup

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/BRIEFING ROOM

From Viewership to Viral Campaigns: The Marketing Impact of the 2026 FIFA World Cup

By **Mark Brown**, Executive Lead, and **Rachel Baker**, SVP, Head of Video Investment and Partnerships

For decades, the FIFA World Cup has drawn massive global audiences, but domestically in the United States, interest in the sport the rest of the world calls “football” has historically lagged. That appears to have changed in 2026, as World Cup fever swept the country this summer. One driver is geography: North America hosted the tournament, with 75% of the matches taking place in the U.S. The tourist influx proved impossible to miss, and fans’ energy was contagious—from Norwegians rowing up escalators to Scots drinking Boston dry. Another factor was the success of the U.S. men’s team, which won more games (3) and scored more goals (11) in a World Cup tournament than any previous U.S. men’s squad. Together, that excitement created a major opportunity for marketers.

The first lift came from television viewership. FOX retained English-language broadcast rights for \$485 million through an extension of its 2022 tournament deal, covering linear broadcasts on the FOX Network and streaming on Tubi and FOX platforms. NBCUniversal secured Spanish-language rights for \$600 million, with linear coverage on Telemundo and streaming on Peacock. Soccer has traditionally been harder to monetize than sports like football, basketball, and baseball because the action has few natural breaks, limiting ad inventory largely to pre-game, halftime, post-

game, and in-game interstitials. This year, FIFA gave broadcasters—and players—a boost by adding three-minute hydration breaks in each half, creating new in-game advertising opportunities.

Have the networks’ combined \$1.085 billion investment paid off? It has. Viewership for the 104 match tournament more than nearly doubled from the 2022 tournament in Qatar. FOX reported an average of 7.7 million viewers per match, up 116%, while Telemundo/Peacock’s Spanish-language coverage averaged 6.3 million viewers per match, up 146%. The championship match on Sunday, July 19, featuring Spain and Argentina, became the most-watched soccer match ever in the U.S., drawing an average of 38.9 million viewers on FOX and more than 23.9 million viewers for the Spanish-language coverage on Telemundo and Peacock. At its peak, FOX drew 51.7 million viewers, which put this World Cup in a ratings realm only reached by the NFL playoffs and Super Bowl.

The final was only one part of the viewership story. U.S. team matches delivered strong results for FOX, averaging 9.8 million viewers per game and peaking at 33 million for the team’s round-of-16 loss to Belgium.

Beyond ratings, marketers tapped into World Cup enthusiasm with creative campaigns. Official FIFA World

Top Broadcast TV Shows				
Week of Jul. 06 – Jul. 12, 2026				
PROGRAM	RANK	VIEWERS P2+ (000)	HHLD RATING	ORIGINATOR
FIFA MEN WC R16 7/6 – USA VS. BELGIUM	1	33,087	13.1	FOX
FIFA MEN WC QTRFINAL – NORWAY VS. ENGLAND	2	21,796	7.7	FOX
FIFA MEN WC QTRFINAL 2 – ARGENTINA VS. SWITZERLAND	3	18,152	6.9	FOX
FOX FIFA MEN WC TODAY – WK	4	12,533	4.8	FOX
FIFA MEN WC QTRFINAL – FRANCE VS. MOROCCO	5	10,252	4.3	FOX
FIFA MEN WC R16 7/6 – PORTUGAL VS. SPAIN	6	10,049	4.2	FOX
FIFA MEN WC QTRFINAL – SPAIN VS. BELGIUM	7	9,867	4.2	FOX
FIFA MEN WC R16 7/7 – SWITZERLAND VS. COLOMBIA	8	8,818	3.7	FOX
ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT	9	8,291	4.9	ABC
FIFA MEN WC R16 7/7 – ARGENTINA VS. EGYPT	10	7,308	2.8	FOX

Source: Nielsen National TV Ratings. U.S. audiences. Ranked by total viewers P2+. Ratings are the percentage of TV viewers in the U.S. that tuned into a specific television program.

Cup sponsors such as Adidas, Frito-Lay, and Visa amplified their rights investments by featuring current and former stars including Lionel Messi, Jude Bellingham, and Christian Pulisic. David Beckham was nearly unavoidable, appearing in 10 World Cup-themed ads for brands including Adidas, Home Depot, Pepsi, Stella Artois, SharkNinja, and others. Several U.S. Men's team players also stepped into the spotlight, most notably in Michelob Ultra's campaign alongside Messi and other U.S. and Argentinian players.



David Beckham starring in a World Cup ad for Home Depot, 2026.
Source: Home Depot

One brand turned a sponsorship limitation into a viral win. Levi's Stadium hosted several matches, including the U.S. vs. Paraguay group-stage game. But because Levi's was not an official sponsor, FIFA's clean-stadium policy required the brand to cover its iconic logo with

a white tarp and use the temporary name "San Francisco Bay Area Stadium" during the tournament. While other venue sponsors complied quietly, Levi's turned the restriction into a campaign. The brand covered the logo but preserved its recognizable shape, changed its social media profile picture to the covered version, and extended the idea to storefronts worldwide. One TikTok generated 9 million views. What began as a naming-rights constraint became Levi's most commented-on and shared post ever, driving a 44% increase in mentions and nearly quadrupling engagement.

What can marketers learn from this year's World Cup success?

- Tentpole events still matter, and sports remain among the most powerful. Because these audiences are still largely reached through linear TV, linear remains an important part of the media mix—especially for brands seeking incremental reach.
- Marketers should tap into cultural moments with relevant creative, using event-related themes, stories, and talent.
- Brands do not need official sponsorship status to participate effectively; well-executed cultural activation can still deliver outsized impact.

World Cup fever returns next summer with the FIFA Women's World Cup in Brazil from June 24 to July 25. While the 2027 tournament will not have the same home-field momentum as the men's event, it will feature a U.S. women's team currently ranked second in the world and with a record four Women's World Cup medals. And it will be televised exclusively on Netflix, a historic first that is sure to be a subscription and advertising boon for the streaming service. Don't miss the moment!

Sources:

1. World Cup final smashes U.S. TV records on both Fox and Telemundo. [*New York Times*](#).
2. FOX Records 38.937 M Viewers for FIFA World Cup 2026™ Final, Most-Watched Soccer Telecast in U.S. History, [*Fox Sports*](#).
3. Telemundo and Peacock Redefine Soccer Fandom in the US with Record-Breaking Audiences for Spanish-Language Coverage of FIFA World Cup 2026™, [*NBC Sports*](#).



/NOTEPAD

Faster Insight, Same Standard: Optimizing Converged TV

By **Mark Budnick**, Associate Director, Analytics

Converged TV gives us a clear path into the living room: reach the household across Linear, OTT, and YouTube as one audience rather than three disconnected buys. While the strategy is sound, executing that strategy presents measurement and optimization challenges.

Campaign data now comes from multiple platforms, publishers, buying models, reporting systems, and measurement partners. A single converged campaign can generate data at a pace that exceeds a team's ability to analyze it. The window to optimize is shrinking while the work required to identify optimization opportunities is growing. By the time the analysis is complete, the moment to act has often passed.

This is where AI plays a critical role shortening the time between data collection and actionable insight, enabling optimization while the opportunity still exists.

The Line that Matters

Most confusion about AI in measurement comes from blurring two different jobs:

- **Optimization insight**—what changed, what's off, what to do next. Fast, tactical, directional. This is where AI adds the most value.
- **Contribution measurement**—what drove the outcome, and what would have happened anyway. Causal, rigorous, slow by design. Here AI assists; it does not decide.

AI can flag that a CTV line is missing its frequency target and recommend a reallocation by morning. It can't tell you what that reallocation contributed in incremental conversions. That still comes from a validated MMM, MTA, and geo-experiment system, built by people who understand its assumptions. AI changes the speed of the work. It doesn't change the standard of the truth.

Our Operating Principles

1. **Customize to the decision.** The right amount of AI depends on the optimization needed, not a one-size widget.
2. **Iterate frameworks, don't replace them.** AI refines measurement tooling faster; it doesn't substitute for the measurement.
3. **Keep humans in the loop.** Expert review is where context and category knowledge enter—part of the method, not optional polish.
4. **Guardrails.** Guided prompts, bounded data, and validation against known results are what make AI output actionable.

Three Paths, Matched to Need

- **Prebuilt dashboard insights**—the workhorse. Standardized daily/weekly reads of what changed and what to do. Fast and dependable, but limited flexibility.

- **Custom daily/weekly outputs**—trade scale for depth. We control formatting, data, and model choice; internal teams shape the output. Higher cost to maintain.
- **Advanced AI models**—reserved for genuinely hard, infrequent questions like path-to-conversion modeling, audience segmentation, and signal mining. Often cost-prohibitive; requires statistical literacy. The discipline is knowing what question you have.

Where This Is Heading

AI will continue to reshape Converged TV planning, activation, and reporting. New tools are emerging rapidly, from AI-first dashboards to automated workflow systems and more interoperable measurement platforms.

The teams that win won't have the single best tool. They'll have a reliable process for evaluating the next one.

The Rain Position

Converged TV doesn't need less rigor because AI arrived. It needs the same rigor, delivered faster, with judgment applied where it counts. AI handles the speed. We handle the standard. That's how a converged campaign gets optimized while the optimization still matters—without confusing a fast answer for a correct one.



/QUICK HITS



An Insider's Look at How Telemundo Scored Viewership Goals During World Cup

[\[Adweek\]](#)



Netflix Says Live Events Bolster Ads But Affect Viewer Engagement

[\[MarketingDive\]](#)



SheScales Call For Application 2026-2027 Cohort

[\[PRNewswire\]](#)

Need More Guidance?



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