

2026 FIFA World Cup Sets New Benchmark for Multicultural, Multiplatform Sports Engagement

New Horowitz Research reveals how multicultural audiences, streaming, and shared viewing shaped record engagement during the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

DALLAS, TX, UNITED STATES, July 29, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Irving, TX, July 28, 2026 — The 2026 FIFA World Cup concluded with a historic final and record-setting audience engagement of nearly 63 million Americans watching, according to Reuters.

In addition to the 38.9 million viewers turning into the English-language soccer telecast on Fox, an additional 23.9 million viewers watched the Spanish-language telecast on Telemundo, according to Reuters. At the same time, Telemundo and Peacock reported Spanish-language streaming engagement in the U.S, with group-stage digital average minute audience up 251% versus the tournament in 2022. These results reflect a broader transformation in the media landscape, where multicultural audiences and digital platforms are driving growth.

The 2026 World Cup confirmed what Horowitz's pre-tournament research suggested: fans would experience the event across languages, platforms, households, public spaces, and social channels, not only as a live sports broadcast.

A Multicultural Center of Gravity

The 2026 World Cup made clear that multicultural audiences are a central part of the sports audience. The scale of Spanish-language viewing and the outsized role of Hispanic fans highlight how deeply soccer is embedded in cultural identity and community connection in the U.S.



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Horowitz Research's latest study, *State of Media, Entertainment, and Tech: Viewing Behaviors*, which was conducted prior to the tournament, found that over half (54%) of Latinx consumers intended to watch the 2026 FIFA World Cup, significantly higher than the total market (42%). Those expectations were borne out in the intensity and consistency of engagement seen throughout the tournament.

Streaming Comes of Age for Live Sports

The 2026 tournament also marked a turning point for streaming as a primary platform for live sports. Digital viewership surged across matches and rounds, with fans seamlessly moving between traditional television and streaming services depending on context and convenience.

This behavior was anticipated by Horowitz's pre-event research, which showed that a majority of prospective viewers expected to stream matches live and use multiple devices beyond the TV set. The World Cup demonstrated that live sports can successfully operate in an ecosystem where linear and streaming are complementary.

The result is a new model for major sporting events, one that demands integrated distribution strategies across broadcast, streaming, mobile, and social platforms.

A Social and Cultural Experience, Not Just a Sporting Event

Beyond platforms and audiences, the 2026 World Cup reinforced the idea that sports fandom is inherently social. Fans gathered at home, in public venues, and online, engaging with content before, during, and after matches. Social media, second screens, and shared viewing experiences were not secondary behaviors but, rather, they were core to how the event was experienced.

Horowitz Research had identified this dynamic in advance, finding that large portions of viewers planned to watch with friends and family, attend viewing events, and engage with World Cup content across social platforms. The tournament brought those behaviors to life, with fans using the World Cup to connect across geographies, cultures, and generations.

"What we saw in 2026 is the full realization of trends we've been tracking for years," said Adriana Waterston, Executive Vice President, Insights and Strategy Lead for Horowitz Research. "The World Cup is where culture, community, and media converge. It is not just about the game on the screen, it is about identity, connection, and shared experience across platforms and languages. Our research at the intersection of cultural insights and sports is focused on helping media brands and their advertisers and sponsors maximize engagement among Hispanic audiences, multicultural audiences, and the sports audience overall."

Implications for Brands and Media

The scale and nature of engagement during the 2026 World Cup also reinforced the value of live,

multicultural sports environments for advertisers. High levels of attention, emotional investment, and cross-platform engagement create conditions that are uniquely powerful for brand impact.

Looking Ahead: From 2026 to the Next Global Stage

The momentum from the 2026 FIFA World Cup is already extending into the next chapter of global soccer. Horowitz's research suggests meaningful continued interest in global soccer events, including the FIFA Women's World Cup 2027.

For Horowitz Research, the takeaway is clear: The future of sports lies at the intersection of diversity, technology, and cultural connection.

"If 2026 showed us anything, it is that the playbook has changed," added Waterston. "The audiences driving growth are diverse, the platforms are fluid, and the experience is shared. The organizations that understand and embrace that reality will be the ones that win in the next era of global sports."

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This research was conducted independently by Horowitz Research and was not commissioned by, conducted for, endorsed by, or affiliated with FIFA or the FIFA World Cup.

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