

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE 2026 WORLD CUP

One Tournament. Millions of Experiences.



WELCOME TO THE BIGGEST WORLD CUP EVER.

With 48 teams, 16 host cities, and millions of fans experiencing the tournament in different ways, World Cup 2026 will be unlike anything we've seen before.

The 2026 FIFA World Cup will dominate sports, yes. It will also dominate feeds, group chats, creator content, city culture, and internet conversation for six straight weeks.

This POV looks beyond the matches themselves to understand how people will truly experience the tournament, and what that means for brands trying to show up within it.

Over the next six weeks, our World Cup Pulse Series will track the tournament as it unfolds, capturing the fan behaviors, creator trends, cultural moments, and emerging storylines shaping conversation in real time.

IN THIS POV



Global Overview
of World Cup 2026



5 Cultural Shifts
shaping the tournament



Creator & Media Impact
influence meets the tournament



What It Means For Brands
participation over brand interruption



Expert POVs
from across the industry

THROUGHOUT THE TOURNAMENT

WORLD CUP PULSE SERIES

Opening Rounds

Group Stage + Round of 32
Who is everyone discovering?

Knockout Stage

Round of 32
What are fans rallying around?

Quarterfinals

What becomes culture?

Semifinals

What captures the world's attention?

Finals

What we'll remember

ONE TOURNAMENT. INFINITE WORLD CUPS.

The World Cup used to feel centralized.

One host nation. One atmosphere.
One shared experience.

Not anymore.

In 2026, the tournament stretches across continents, time zones, cultures, feeds, fan bases, creators, and cities all happening simultaneously.

The match still matters, but the way people experience the World Cup has fundamentally changed.

This tournament won't live in one stadium. It'll live everywhere all at once.



YOUR CHEAT SHEET

48 Teams
104 Matches
16 Host Cities
3 Host Countries

June 11 – July 19,
2026

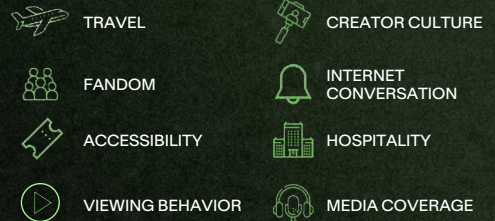
First men's World Cup hosted across Canada, Mexico, and the United States.



Hosted across multiple time zones and cultures simultaneously.

WHAT THIS ACTUALLY MEANS

The 2026 World Cup is effectively being hosted by a continent, not a country... and that scale changes everything:



**This isn't just a tournament,
and an infrastructure now.**

▶ THE READ

This isn't just a tournament, it's an infrastructure now. And with the Women's World Cup continuing its global rise ahead of Brazil 2027, football's cultural footprint is only getting bigger.

THE WORLD CUP IS ALREADY BREAKING OUT OF SPORTS

ENTERTAINMENT IS ENTERING THE TOURNAMENT

With Shakira, Madonna, and BTS attached to the World Cup halftime show, it's clear the conversation is already moving beyond football. Already music, entertainment, celebrity, and creator culture are becoming part of how people experience the tournament.



CREATORS ARE HELPING SHAPE ATTENTION

IShowSpeed's World Cup (Champions) release is already generating conversation across platforms, with fans debating everything from view counts to its potential as the tournament's anthem. Alongside that, teams, federations, and FIFA are using creator content, player announcements, and cultural storytelling to build excitement months before kickoff.

PLAYER NARRATIVES ARE DRIVING ENGAGEMENT

The first match hasn't even happened yet, but fans are already invested in the stories about the players.

Squad selections, surprise omissions, and coaching decisions are fueling debate across fan communities, turning roster news into some of the tournament's earliest cultural moments.



▶ THE READ

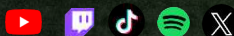
Long before kickoff, fans are engaging with the World Cup through entertainment, creator culture, and player storylines, reinforcing that the tournament's cultural footprint extends well beyond the matches themselves.

WHERE THE TRUE WORLD CUP EXPERIENCES LIVE

The match is only one part of the experience.

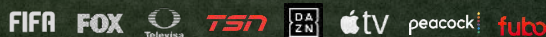
CREATOR COMMENTARY

The people translating the tournament in real time. **Trusted endemic and non-endemic voices.**



WHERE TO WATCH LIVE MATCHES

Broadcast still anchors the match, but it no longer owns the experience.



GROUP CHATS AND HOT TAKES

Matchday conversation moves between group chats, Discord, workplace chats, and fan communities, and it's often faster than the broadcast itself.



SECOND SCREEN VIEWING

Match moments now travel far beyond the broadcast, turning into reactions, debates, memes, and commentary within minutes.



AFTER HOURS

After the broadcast is over, analysis, reactions, debates, and storytelling continue for days.



FAN ZONES, WATCH PARTIES & WORKPLACE VIEWING

The World Cup is increasingly phygital, with fans moving between physical and digital experiences throughout the tournament.



WATCH FOR

- Discord becoming the digital supporters section
- Podcasts replacing postgame shows
- Threads finding its World Cup moment
- Reality TV stars crossing into football culture
- Creator led watch parties at scale

FIVE SHIFTS SHAPING THE TOURNAMENT

From access and fandom to creator culture and national identity, these are the five shifts shaping how people will experience World Cup 2026.

01 EVERY CITY GETS ITS OWN WORLD CUP

02 THE NEW COST OF FANDOM

03 FANDOM BEYOND THE STADIUM

04 THE CREATOR COMMENTARY CUP

05 NATIONAL IDENTITY REMIXED



EVERY CITY GETS ITS OWN WORLD CUP

With dozens of World Cup atmospheres unfolding at once, every host city is building its own version of the tournament.

It'll feel like multiple tournaments unfolding simultaneously across cities, cultures, time zones, and fan communities. For the first time ever, the men's World Cup stretches across three countries, 16 host cities, and 104 matches, creating a version of the tournament that feels less like a single destination and more like a moving cultural system. And each city will shape its own version of the experience.

Because they'll be responsible for shaping their own versions of the tournament, in 2026, host cities are responsible for more than just hosting matches.

The World Cup used to revolve around one host nation. In 2026, the tournament becomes fragmented in the best possible way.

EXPERT POV

"More teams means more nations represented, more communities, and more stories to tell. The multiplication of teams creates more 'small stories' within the larger narrative of the tournament."



RAPHAEL DUPRAZ
Account Director,
Havas Play France

WHAT'S KICKING CONVERSATION



CITIES SELLING ATMOSPHERE,
NOT JUST MATCHES



FAN FESTIVALS
BECOMING THE
GATHERING SPACES



FASHION, NIGHTLIFE,
AND CREATOR CULTURE
SHAPING CITY ENERGY



SUPPORTER GROUPS
RESHAPING CITY
ATMOSPHERE



FANS CHOOSING CITIES BASED ON
VIBE, NOT SCHEDULE



MEDIA TREATING HOST CITIES LIKE
PERSONALITIES

THE READ

The World Cup has one schedule and infinite experiences. What happens in Mexico City won't look like Miami, Kansas City, Los Angeles, or Toronto.



THE NEW COST OF FANDOM

02

The biggest World Cup ever is also becoming one of the most expensive to experience in person.

Between ticket pricing, resale inflation, hotel costs, hospitality packages, and cross-country travel demands, many fans are starting to feel like the tournament is becoming harder to physically access even as it gets bigger.

And while the challenge is getting a ticket, it's also gaining access to the atmosphere, energy, and community that make the World Cup feel like the World Cup.

The conversation around this World Cup is moving beyond scale and toward who gets to participate in it firsthand.



WHAT'S KICKING CONVERSATION



TICKET PRICING AND RESALE FRUSTRATION, BECOMING THE STORY



HOST CITY COSTS PRICING OUT FANS
SUPPORTER GROUPS PUBLICLY CRITICIZING ACCESS CHALLENGES



LOGISTICS BECOMING PART OF THE EXPERIENCE
GROWING TENSION BETWEEN "REAL FANS" AND LUXURY EVENT CULTURE



WHO GETS TO BE THERE?

WHAT THIS COULD MEAN FOR BRANDS

As attendance becomes harder to access, brands have an opportunity to create new ways into the experience for fans who won't be there in person.

▶ THE READ

The World Cup is getting bigger, but for many fans getting there is harder than ever.

FANDOM BEYOND THE STADIUM






Most people will not experience the World Cup from inside a stadium.

They'll experience it from bars/pubs, fan parks, creator livestreams, group chats, Discord servers, EA FC matches, Football Manager saves, and second screens everywhere else.

What's changed is that none of that feels secondary anymore. The modern sports fan doesn't just watch the World Cup. They react to it, meme it, debate it, clip it, simulate it, and experience it collectively in real time with people around the world.

The stadium may still host the match. But the scale of the World Cup now comes from how millions participate remotely. That's the shift fundamentally changing what fandom looks like.

WATCH FOR

-  EA FC engagement spikes
-  Creator-led simulation tournaments
-  Football Manager prediction culture
-  Twitch watch-alongs
-  Gaming introducing new fans to football



WHAT'S KICKING CONVERSATION



FAN PARKS TAKING OVER HOST CITIES

WATCH PARTIES BECOMING REAL GATHERING SPACES



THE WORLD CUP BECOMING PLAYABLE

EA FC, TWITCH, AND SIMULATION CULTURE



CREATOR LIVESTREAMS AS THE SECOND SCREEN

REAL TIME REACTIONS AND WATCHING TOGETHER



GROUP CHATS & MEMES

DRIVING MATCHDAY CULTURE



ATMOSPHERE MATTERS MORE THAN ACCESS

BELONGING OVER TICKET OWNERSHIP



EXPERT POV

"Fans don't just want to consume the World Cup anymore. They want to co-create it."



RAPHAEL DUPRAZ
Account Director,
Havas Play France



THE READ

Most fans won't experience the World Cup in person, but that doesn't make them any less engaged, influential, or important to the conversation.

THE CREATOR COMMENTARY CUP 04

The World Cup has become one of media's biggest content engines.

Every goal, upset, controversy, and celebration now creates a second layer of participation across podcasts, livestreams, TikTok feeds, and creator communities.

Earlier, we talked about how broadcast no longer owns the entire experience. The same is true of the conversation surrounding it.

Fans still watch the match through traditional coverage, yes, but more of the context, debate, and storytelling is living with creators and online communities who are helping make sense of the tournament.

WATCH FOR

- Streamers becoming match companions
- Reality stars entering football culture
- Independent voices like Pablo Torre entering football conversations
- Creator rivalries becoming storylines



EXPERT POV

"No brand is considering activating without creators, and even broadcasters are adapting. The creator layer is becoming part of how people experience the tournament."



RAPHAEL DUPRAZ
Account Director,
Havas Play France

WHAT'S KICKING CONVERSATION



CREATORS BECOMING STORYTELLERS
NARRATIVES OVER HIGHLIGHTS



ENTERTAINMENT TALENT ENTERING THE CONVERSATION TOO
TREVOR NOAH LAUNCHING A CREATOR-LED WORLD CUP WATCH PARTY ON YOUTUBE



PODCASTS REPLACING POSTGAME SHOWS
THE ANALYSIS LIVES EVERYWHERE



FAN CREATORS DRIVING THE DISCOURSE
REACTION BECOMES COVERAGE



FOOTBALL ENTERS EVERY FEED
FASHION, LIFESTYLE, AND ENTERTAINMENT JOIN THE CHAT



MEMES BUILDING PLAYER MYTHOLOGY
MOMENTS BECOME LEGENDS

THE READ

Creators, podcasts, and fan communities are becoming just as important to the experience as the match itself.

NATIONAL IDENTITY, REMIXED 05

Few sporting events carry the same emotional weight as the World Cup.

The difference in 2026 is how those emotions move between wins, losses, rivalries, and moments of national pride. The difference in 2026 is how those emotions move beyond the pitch and play out across social, creator communities, fashion, memes, and internet culture.

As throughout the tournament, national identity becomes something people actively participate in online. Dramatic wins can reshape how a country is perceived for a week. A player's celebration can become a meme. And like with most sports, rivalries can spill far beyond the pitch and into feeds, group chats, and everyday conversation.

Bottom line, the World Cup still reflects identity, but that identity is being remixed, amplified, and shared through the internet in real time.

WATCH FOR

- Players building fandoms beyond national teams
- National team creators building loyal fandoms
- Meme accounts shaping narratives
- Celebrities adopting national teams
- National team merch becoming cultural uniforms



WHAT'S KICKING CONVERSATION



STAR PLAYERS
BECOMING CULTURAL PROPERTIES IN THEIR OWN RIGHT



KITS AS CULTURE
FOOTBALL FASHION MOVING BEYOND MATCH DAY



MEME PROCESSING EMOTION
WINS AND LOSSES BECOMING CONTENT INSTANTLY



FAN CREATORS DRIVING THE DISCOURSE
REACTION BECOMES COVERAGE



FOOTBALL ENTERS EVERY FEED
FASHION, LIFESTYLE, AND ENTERTAINMENT JOIN THE CHAT



EXPERT POV

"National pride remains one of the most powerful forces in the World Cup. It's what turns casual followers into active participants."



MEGGANE GRAND
Commercial Director of CA Sports, Havas Play



THE READ

National identity is just being made more visual by the World Cup.

WHY THE WORLD CUP STILL MATTERS

The World Cup remains one of the few events capable of delivering global scale, live attention, and cultural relevance at the same time. The true evolution is in how people are experiencing it differently.

Broadcasters still own the rights, but fans move fluidly between live coverage, creators, group chats, podcasts, gaming, social platforms, and local communities, creating a much broader ecosystem around the tournament.

For brands, the opportunity is increasingly tied to where fans gather, react, debate, and participate.

EXPERT POV

"The true impact of the World Cup won't be measured when the tournament ends, but by the new generation of fans it creates. Those fans will fuel participation, fandom, and growth in the U.S. long after the final whistle."



JEFF GAGNE
SVP, Sports Marketing
Havas Play



GLOBAL SCALE IS STILL RARE

Few events can deliver billions of viewers and simultaneous global attention.



RIGHTS CONTINUE TO GET MORE EXPENSIVE

The World Cup remains one of the most valuable media properties in the world.



PARTICIPATION EXTENDS FAR BEYOND SPONSORSHIP

Meaning brands have more ways than ever to enter the tournament conversation.



HOST CITIES CREATE NEW ENTRY POINTS

The tournament can now be approached locally, nationally, or globally.



THE OPPORTUNITY IS BIGGER THAN THE BROADCAST

The media buy is no longer the only way in.



5 BILLION
People engaged globally during the 2022 World Cup

1.5 BILLION
Viewers tuned in for the Final

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR BRANDS

World Cup 2026 won't have one audience, one experience, or one path to participation. Beyond simply sponsoring the tournament, brands have an opportunity to understand where fandom is forming and find ways to contribute to it.

01 ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

As attendance becomes more expensive and harder to access, brands can help more fans feel part of the tournament, whether they're in the stadium or following from somewhere else.

02 COMMUNITY OVER SCALE

Some of the most meaningful World Cup moments will happen inside creator communities, group chats, watch parties, and fan spaces where people gather around shared interests.

03 THINK CITY BY CITY

Brands have an opportunity to build programs that reflect how fandom shows up differently across cities, communities, and audiences.

04 BUILD FOR THE UNEXPECTED

The match is only one touchpoint as fans move between broadcasts, creators, podcasts, social platforms, gaming, watch parties, and community experiences throughout the tournament.

EXPERT POV

"The brands that succeed are those that truly understand football culture and contribute something meaningful to it."

Less pressure. More precision. Less fatigue. More desire.



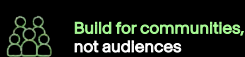
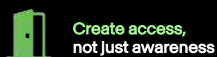
RAPHAEL DUPRAZ
Account Director,
Havas Play France

EXPERT POV

"The future of sports marketing isn't about owning moments. It's about enabling participation. The brands people remember after World Cup 2026 will be the ones that helped fans belong, connect, and experience the tournament in new ways."



ANDREA ISAAC
Managing Partner,
Havas Play



A FEW THINGS WE'LL BE WATCHING

World Cup 2026 won't be defined by a single fan experience. Between 16 host cities, creator communities, watch parties, fan parks, group chats, and broadcasts, people will experience entirely different versions of the same tournament.

With the Women's World Cup heading to Netflix and U.S. media rights beyond 2030 still up in the air, this summer may offer an early look at where sports media goes next. As attention becomes harder to earn, the brands that stand out will be the ones creating something fans truly care about.

Throughout the tournament, our **Pulse Series** will track how these shifts show up in real time, highlighting the moments, conversations, and behaviors that define World Cup 2026.



THE PULSE IS NEXT.

Our weekly **Pulse Series** will track how these shifts show up in real time, capturing the moments, stories, and conversations that define World Cup 2026.

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