OFFICIAL MEDIA INTELLIGENCE SUPPLIER

THE GAME BEHIND THE GAME

THE FANS BEHIND THE GAME:

FIFA WORLD CUP 2026™ EDITION

EVERY GAME MATTERS

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KNOW THE FAN, WIN THE TOURNAMENT

Our last FIFA World Cup 2026™ report mapped the viewership opportunity. This report uses Nielsen Sports expertise to go deeper into the audience itself: who the North American soccer fan is, what fuels their passion, and how that passion translates into the attention and engagement that every brand at this tournament is aiming for.

Mexico, Canada, and the United States each bring a distinct fanbase to 2026, different in history, habits, and what draws them in. This report spotlights all three, with a closer look at the U.S., as the newest chapter in this story, where a new generation of soccer fandom is being built in real time.

The momentum is hard to overstate. 64% of U.S. soccer fans expect their interest in the sport to keep climbing, and 56% point directly to the FIFA World Cup™ as the reason. Even outside the existing soccer fanbase, 33% of the general U.S. population expects their interest in soccer to grow through the tournament and beyond.[1] With the FIFA Women's World Cup™ headed to Brazil's favorable time zones in 2027, the LA Olympics in 2028 and the FIFA Women's World Cup 2031™ also coming to U.S. soil, the audience that emerges in 2026 is the foundation of a generation of soccer fandom in America.

Soccer is already a top 5 sport in the U.S. but its fanbase looks different from any other major U.S. league. They're younger, more diverse, gender-balanced, and uniquely receptive to the brands that show up alongside the teams.

[1] Source: Nielsen Fan Insights, Sept 2025 - Feb 2026

NORTH AMERICA IS READY FOR THE HOME ADVANTAGE

+11% growth in North American soccer fandom, 2020–2025

Mexico: **67%** the general population interested in soccer, the highest of any North American market

Canada: FIFA World Cup 2026™ interest at **43%**, with soccer as the #3 sport

62.5M U.S. soccer fans - the 5th largest fan population in the world

76% of U.S. soccer fans are Millennials or Gen Z

Source: Nielsen Fan Insights, Sept 2025 - Feb 2026; FIFA-Nielsen North American Report, 2025

SECTION 1:

THE FAN PROFILE

THE MOMENTS THAT MADE THE AMERICAN SOCCER FAN

American soccer fandom didn't arrive with the FIFA World Cup 2026™. It was built over decades, one cultural turning point at a time, and the data behind each one tells the story.

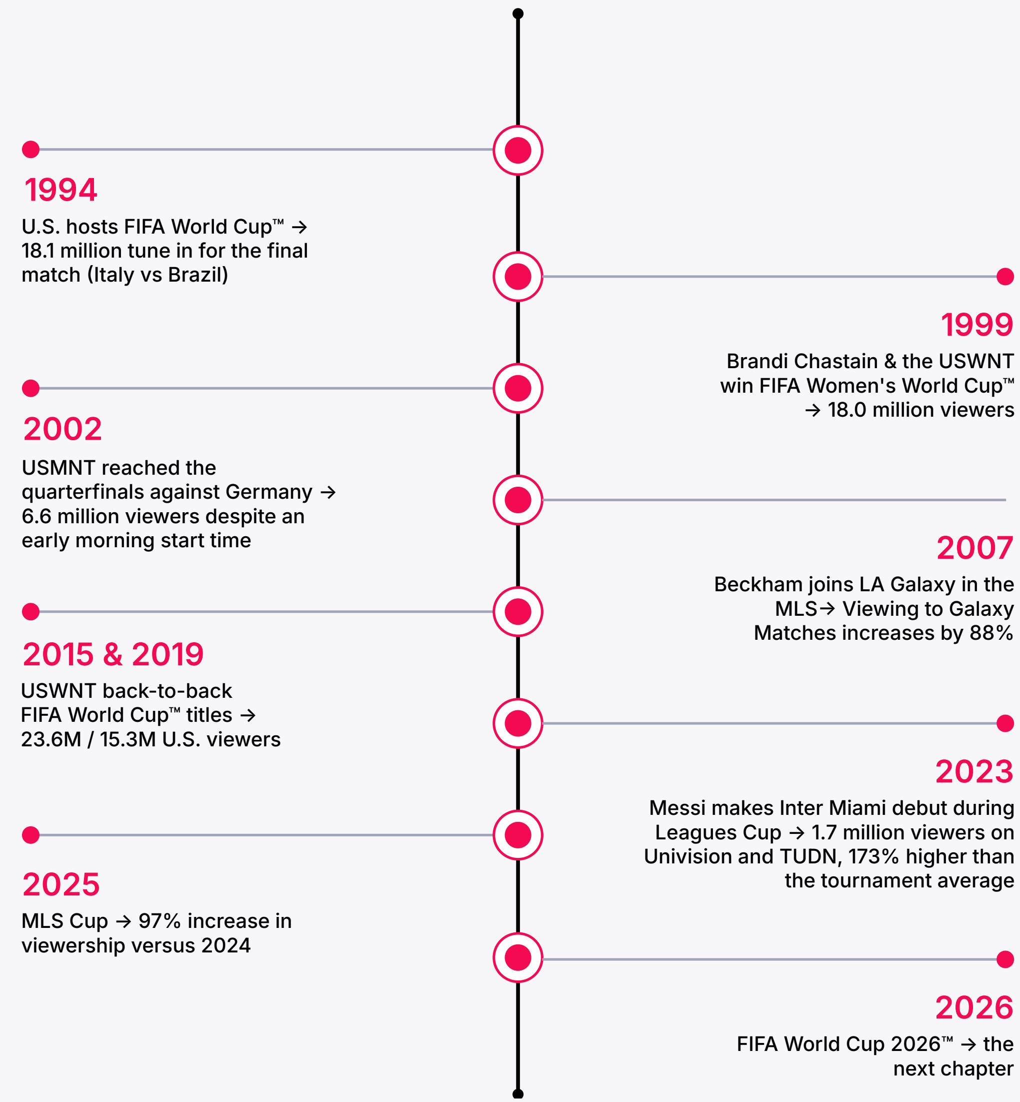
Moments like Brandi Chastain's iconic celebration in 1999, when 18 million U.S. viewers tuned in to watch the U.S. Women's National Team (USWNT) win their first Cup, put women's soccer at the center of American sports culture.[2] David Beckham's arrival in Los Angeles in 2007 proved Major League Soccer (MLS) could attract global stars, and more than 15 years later, his Netflix documentary totaled over 500 million minutes viewed in its opening week.[3] The USWNT's back-to-back FIFA World Cup™ titles in 2015 and 2019 drew 24 million and 15 million U.S. viewers respectively, cementing the team as a competitive juggernaut. Lionel Messi's debut for Inter Miami CF in the 2023 Leagues Cup drove a 173% surge in linear viewership compared to the tournament average. And in 2025, the MLS Cup saw a 97% increase over 2024 with Inter Miami's victory, proving that domestic soccer is reaping the benefits of increased interest as well.[4]

Each of these moments raised the bar for American soccer fandom. The FIFA World Cup 2026™ is the next one, and it's primed for record engagement as today's fanbase leverages every platform at their disposal to follow the action.

[2] Source: Nielsen National TV Ratings, Live. English language and Spanish language coverage where applicable.
[3] Source: Nielsen Streaming Content Ratings
[4] Source: Nielsen National TV Ratings, Live+Same Day. English language and Spanish language coverage where applicable.

Figure 1.1

THE U.S. CHAPTERS OF THE NORTH AMERICAN STORY



Source: Nielsen National TV Ratings, Live viewing before 2006, Live+Same Day viewing after. Includes both English language and Spanish language coverage where applicable.

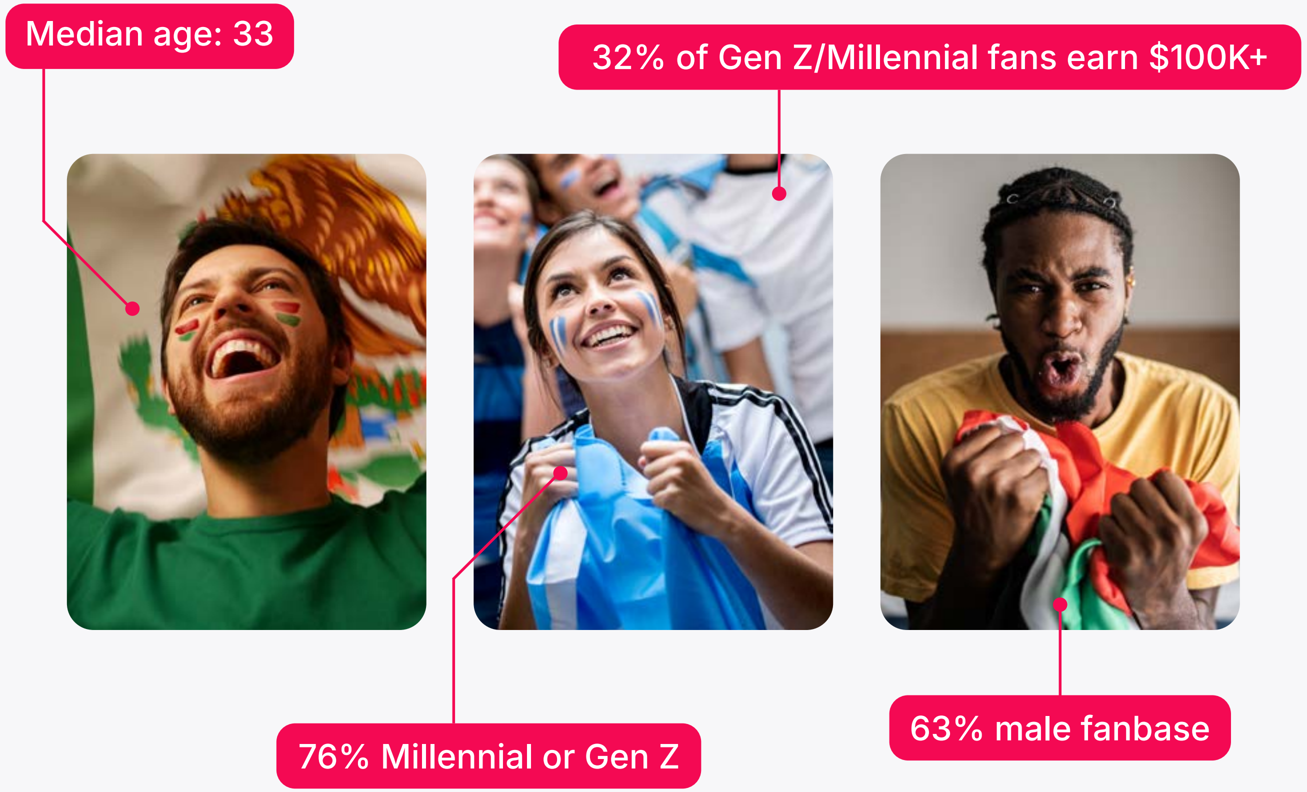
A FANBASE UNLIKE ANY OTHER IN AMERICAN SPORTS

Building a media plan usually means you can't have it all. But the U.S. soccer fan collapses every tradeoff into a single audience. You can reach a young, broad, and diverse audience at scale.

The average U.S. soccer fan is 33 years old, about four years younger compared to the fan bases of top U.S. sports. 76% are Millennials or Gen Z. Among those younger fans, 32% earn more than $100K annually. 63% of the U.S. soccer fanbase is male, outpacing the male engagement of American football (59%), basketball (61%) and baseball (61%). Throughout North America, female engagement is a defining feature with **women making up 43% of North American soccer fans, seven points higher than in Europe.**[5]

Figure 1.2

THE U.S. SOCCER FAN EDGE:



Source: FIFA-Nielsen North American Fandom Report, 2025; Nielsen Fan Insights, April-June 2025

[5] FIFA-Nielsen North American Fandom Report, 2025; Nielsen Fan Insights, April-June 2025

FANDOM IS PEAKING AT EXACTLY THE RIGHT MOMENT

Across North America, soccer fandom grew 11% from 2020 to 2025. Roughly a quarter of today's fans came on board in just the last five years. Among existing U.S. fans, 68% say their interest has increased over the past three years, and 64% expect it to keep climbing.[6]

But the most striking signal sits outside the existing fanbase entirely. 11% of Americans who don't currently consider themselves sports fans of any kind expect their interest in soccer to grow leading into 2026.[7]

[6] Source: FIFA-Nielsen North American Fandom Report, 2025
[7] Source: Nielsen Fan Insights, Nov 2025

Figure 1.3

THE U.S. FANDOM CURVE:

↗ **26%** of fans came on board in the last 5 years

↗ **68%** of existing fans report rising interest over 3 years

↗ **64%** of fans expect their interest to keep climbing

↗ **11%** of non-sports fans expect their interest to grow ahead of 2026

Source: Nielsen Fan Insights, Nov 2025 & Feb 2026; FIFA-Nielsen North American Fandom Report, 2025

THE HEART OF U.S. SOCCER FANDOM

Hispanic audiences have been at the heart of U.S. soccer fandom and the engine behind the sport's cultural foothold. 38% of all U.S. Hispanics identify as FIFA World Cup™ fans, jumping to 47% among first- and second-generation U.S. Hispanics.[8]

In fact, Hispanic fans are leaders on every dimension of fandom that brands care about. 67% of first- and second-generation Hispanic fans plan to engage with the FIFA World Cup™ on social media.[9] U.S. Hispanics are 102% more likely than the general population to have already watched a FIFA World Cup™ qualifier in the past 12 months.[10] And when sponsoring brands show up authentically, 46% of Hispanic soccer fans will recommend them and 47% will stay loyal.[11]

[8] Source: Nielsen Fan Insights, Jan-March 2026
[9] Source: Nielsen Fan Insights, April-June 2025
[10] Source: Nielsen Scarborough USA+, 2025 R2
[11] Source: Nielsen Fan Insights, Jan-March 2026

Figure 1.4

THE U.S. HISPANIC FAN IMPACT:

67%
of 1st and 2nd generation Hispanic fans plan to engage with the tournament on social media

102%
more likely to have watched a qualifier match in the past 12 months

238%
more likely to be avid MLS fans

46%
more likely to recommend sponsoring brands

47%
more likely to stay loyal to sponsoring brands

In Mexico, the host market with the deepest roots, **75%** of fans say soccer plays a significant role in their daily lives.

Source: FIFA-Nielsen North American Fandom Report, 2025; Nielsen Fan Insights, April-June 2025, Jan-March 2026; Nielsen Scarborough USA+, 2025 R2

THREE HOST NATIONS, THREE DISTINCT FANS

For the first time, the FIFA World Cup™ is co-hosted by three nations, and the fan in each one is genuinely different.

Mexico: The mature market. Soccer is the #1 sport, and the fandom runs deep, 14 years on average, and 75% say it plays a significant role in their daily lives.

Canada: The club driven market. Young with loyalty to the clubs. 50% rank international club football #1.

U.S.: The youngest and fastest-growing. The shortest average fandom of the three, with a quarter of fans joining in the last five years. The market with the most room to grow.

Figure 1.5

THE NORTH AMERICAN FAN, MARKET BY MARKET

	Canada	Mexico	USA
How long they've been fans on average	13 years	14 years	11 years
Top format (Ranked #1)	International club football (50%)	National team football (49%)	Nearly tied: National team (40%) & International club (39%)
Where they watch live	Highlights & social-led	90% watch in-home; 51% watch weekly	60% watch out-of-home
What first drew them in	Friends & local popularity	Family, playing & attending games	Players, TV & video games

Source: FIFA-Nielsen North American Fandom Report, 2025

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE FAN PROFILE

- The American soccer fanbase has been built over decades through a series of cultural moments, each one raising the floor of viewership and passion.
- U.S. soccer fans are young, and diverse, offering a unique profile compared to other major American sports and collapsing the demographic tradeoffs marketers usually face.
- Hispanic fans are the cultural engine of U.S. soccer fandom, with depth of connection, digital fluency, and brand loyalty that compound throughout the tournament.

SECTION 2:

THE PASSION POINTS

WHAT SOCCER MEANS TO FANS

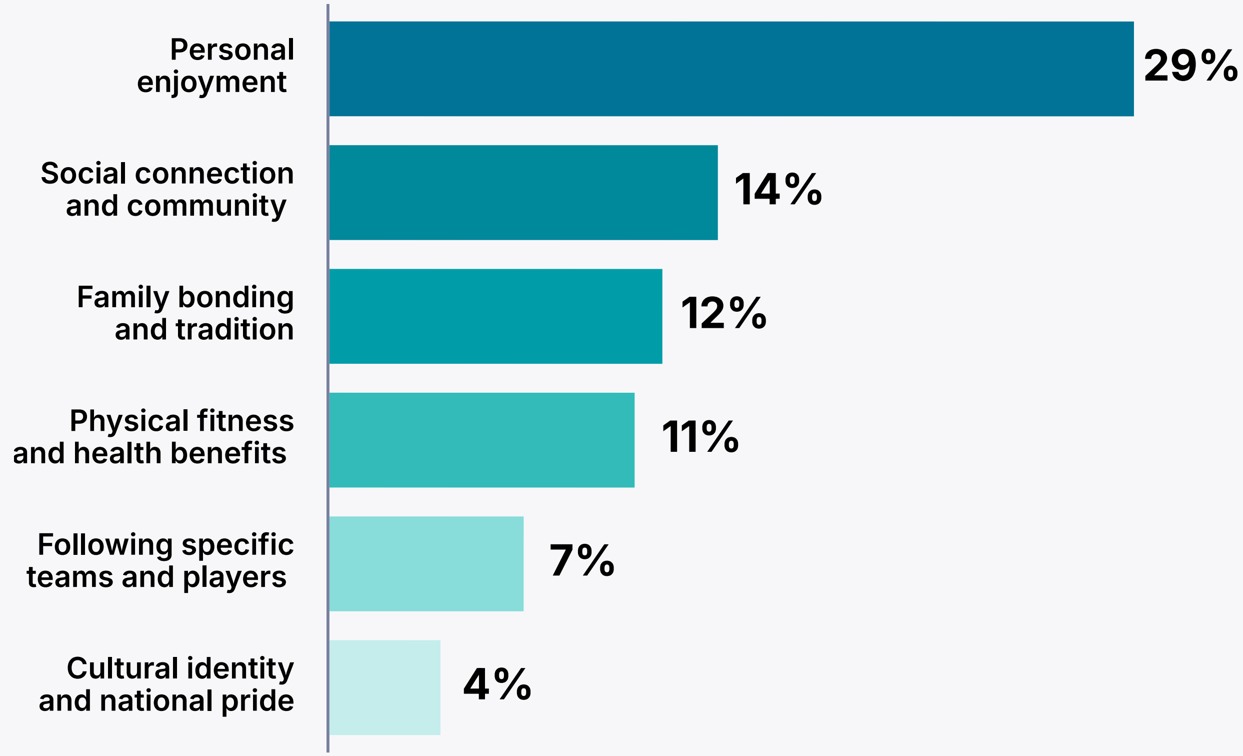
For 60% of North American soccer fans, the sport plays an important role in their day-to-day life, woven through how they socialize, connect with family, and express their identity.[12]

When fans are asked how soccer shows up in their lives, the top answers go well beyond the game itself: personal enjoyment leads, but social connection, family bonding, and cultural identity round out the picture. The ability to spend time with friends and family are the second and third most important roles soccer plays in a fan's life. This is a consistent theme across Canada, Mexico and the U.S.

[12] Source: FIFA-Nielsen North American Report, 2025

Figure 2.1

HOW SOCCER SHOWS UP IN NORTH AMERICAN FANS' LIVES:



60% of soccer fans say the sport plays an important role in their day-to-day life

Mexico over-indexes sharply: 75% say soccer plays a significant role

Source: FIFA-Nielsen North American Fandom Report, 2025

HOW FANS GET IN THE GAME

In the U.S., access to the game through media, personal play or breakout athletes is essential. U.S. fans overindex on the importance of TV programming, fantasy leagues and even video games as gateways to their soccer fandom. Stars like Trinity Rodman and Christian Pulisic create entry points that are entertainment-driven and loyalty-flexible, different from the inherited club loyalty common in Europe and Latin America. Notably, nearly one in four U.S. fans are interested in youth soccer, and the U.S. shows higher interest in high school and collegiate soccer than other North American markets.[14]

In Mexico, the path is fundamentally different. 51% of Mexican fans first became interested through family and friends.[15] For any campaign running across the three host nations, that distinction is critical: a star-driven creative that resonates in Dallas may need a community-driven counterpart for audiences in Mexico City or Guadalajara.

[14] Source: FIFA-Nielsen North American Report, 2025
[15] Source: FIFA-Nielsen North American Report, 2025

Figure 2.2

PATHWAYS INTO FANDOM:

	Canada	Mexico	USA
Top soccer interest driver	Watching a match on TV (39%)	Introduction by friends & family (51%)	Watching a match on TV (42%)
Top team fandom driver	Player appeal (31%)	The team's history (43%)	The team's history (33%)
% of fans whose interest is shaped by social media	53%	59%	64%
% of fans whose interest is shaped by fantasy gaming	43%	41%	54%

> Mexico fans lead North American markets in the importance of TV coverage to maintain their interest

Source: FIFA-Nielsen North American Report, 2025

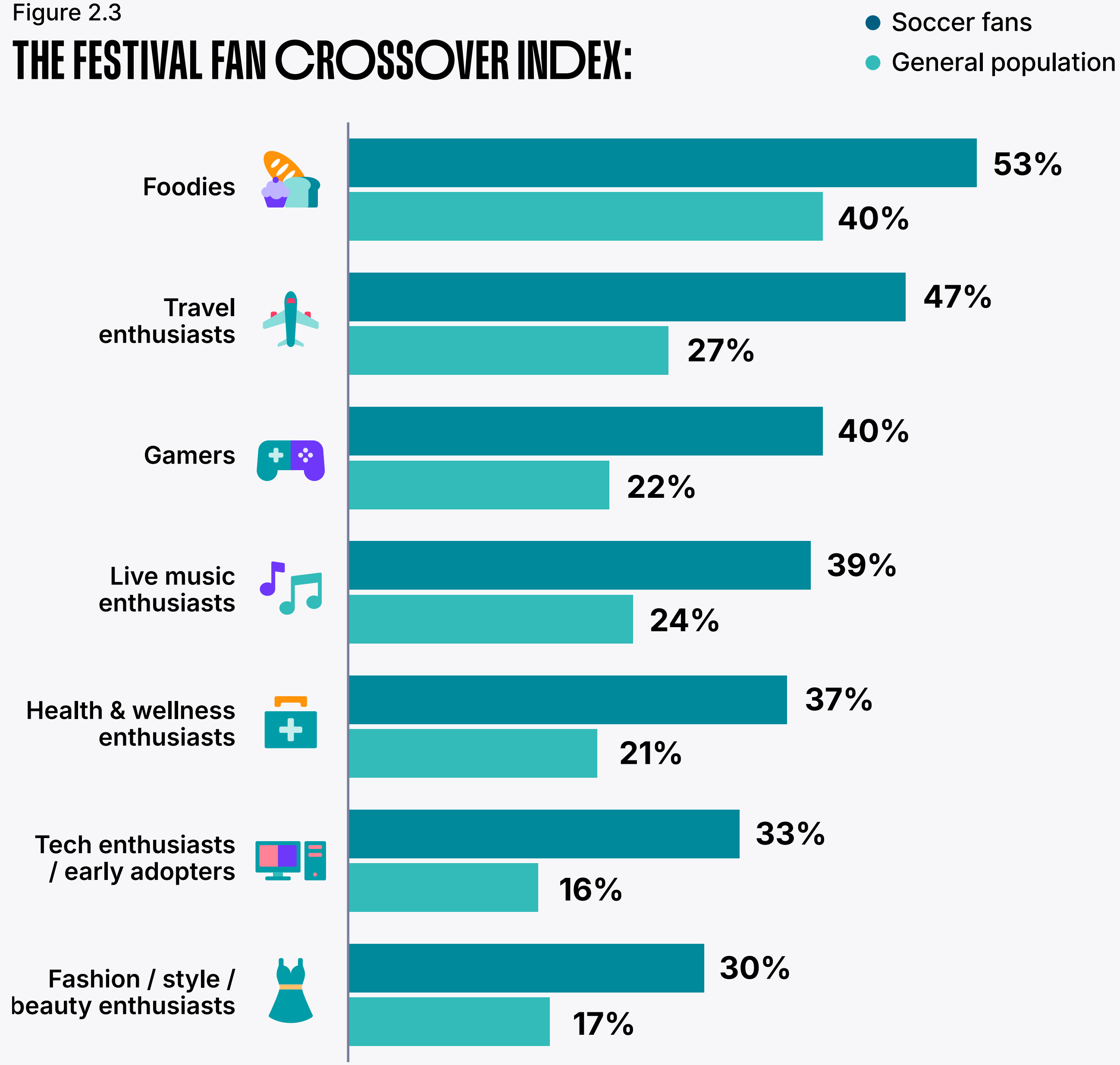
BEYOND THE 90 MINUTES

During the FIFA World Cup 2026™, fans will lean into a multi-week cultural moment. They are treating the tournament the way music fans treat a major festival: travel, food, fashion, fan zones, after-parties, brand activations, and constant online conversation woven through the whole thing.

This crossover behavior is what makes the FIFA World Cup™ audience uniquely valuable for non-endemic categories. Soccer fans over-index on travel, music, food, gaming, fashion, finance, and tech. With the U.S. hosting major tournaments for the first time in a generation, brands well outside traditional sports categories have a clear seat at the table.

Figure 2.3

THE FESTIVAL FAN CROSSOVER INDEX:



Source: Nielsen Advanced Audience Attitudes Study, 2025

WHAT FANS WILL ACTUALLY DO IN JUNE

The picture is one of total immersion, and it stretches far beyond the living room.

65% of U.S. FIFA World CupTM fans plan to watch full games (compared to 27% of the general population, signaling this is a mainstream cultural event). 59% plan to engage on social media and FIFA World Cup™ mobile apps. 18% plan to attend matches live, with 24% intending to attend surrounding entertainment like concerts and 23% planning to visit fan zones. Among attendees specifically, 23% plan to explore the host city, 20% plan to tailgate, and 19% plan to engage with brand activations on-site. Crucially, fans aren't choosing between these - they're stacking them. Watching, scrolling, attending, exploring and buying are all happening at once.

Figure 2.4

THE FAN ACTIVITY MAP:

Watching

65%
plan to watch full games compared to 27% of gen pop

18%
plan to attend matches

Engaging digitally

59%
plan to engage on social

24%
plan to attend surrounding entertainment

Showing up in person
(among those attending)

23%
visit fan zones

20%
plan to tailgate

Exploring & spending
(among those attending)

23%
interact with host city

19%
interact with brand activations

Source: Nielsen Fan Insights, Jan-March 2026

FANDOM IS IDENTITY

For U.S. soccer fans, fandom is all encompassing. 76% of soccer fans say they're more likely to connect with a fandom that embraces or reflects their identity, compared to just 60% of the general population. This is the foundation for a different kind of brand relationship.

This is why soccer fans are so receptive to brands that show up authentically in their world. 68% are more likely to make a purchase when a brand partners with creators and organizations connected to their fandom. They're also 50% more likely than the general population to buy from these partnerships. For advertisers, this signals that partnering with the people, platforms, and culture the fan already trusts is the best move.

Figure 2.5

IDENTITY-DRIVEN FANDOM:

76% of soccer fans are more likely to connect with a fandom that reflects their identity (vs. 60% gen pop)

68% are more likely to purchase when brands partner with creators and organizations tied to their fandom (vs. 45% gen pop)

50% more likely than the general population to buy from these partnerships

70% of soccer fans want to watch a show or movie based on a favorite podcast or YouTube creator (vs. 49% gen pop)

Source: Nielsen Advanced Audience Attitudes Study, 2025

THE WOMEN'S GAME SUPPORTS THE FOUNDATION

Interest in women's soccer is highest in Mexico (39%), ahead of Canada (25%) and the U.S. (22%). In the U.S. however, the passion fueling the sport has been uniquely shaped by the women's game. The USWNT's five Olympic golds and four FIFA Women's World Cup™ titles, combined with the launch and growth of the NWSL, created an important cultural foundation.

The data shows the halo effect: 48% of soccer fans also follow at least one women's professional sports league, compared to just 20% of sports fans overall. Female engagement in North American soccer (43%) sits seven points higher than in Europe (36%). And the NWSL added nearly 9 million fans between 2023 and 2025, momentum that flows directly into FIFA World Cup 2026™ engagement.

Figure 2.6

THE WOMEN'S GAME EFFECT:

48%
of soccer fans also follow a women's pro league
(vs. 20% of sports fans overall)

43%
female engagement in North America
(vs. 36% in Europe)

+9M
new NWSL fans, 2023–2025

5 Olympic golds, 4 FIFA World Cup 2026™ titles
for the USWNT - the most decorated team
in women's soccer history

Source: Nielsen Advanced Audience Attitudes Study, 2025; FIFA-Nielsen North American Fandom Report; Nielsen Fan Insights, 2023 - 2025

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE PASSION POINTS

- Fans are stacking activities throughout the tournament - watching, scrolling, attending, exploring - making total-immersion media planning the new baseline.
- For soccer fans, fandom is identity, and they reward brands that partner authentically with the creators, platforms, and culture they already trust.
- The depth of women's soccer fandom is a uniquely U.S. asset that pre-fuels passion for the men's tournament.

SECTION 3:
THE BRAND OPPORTUNITY

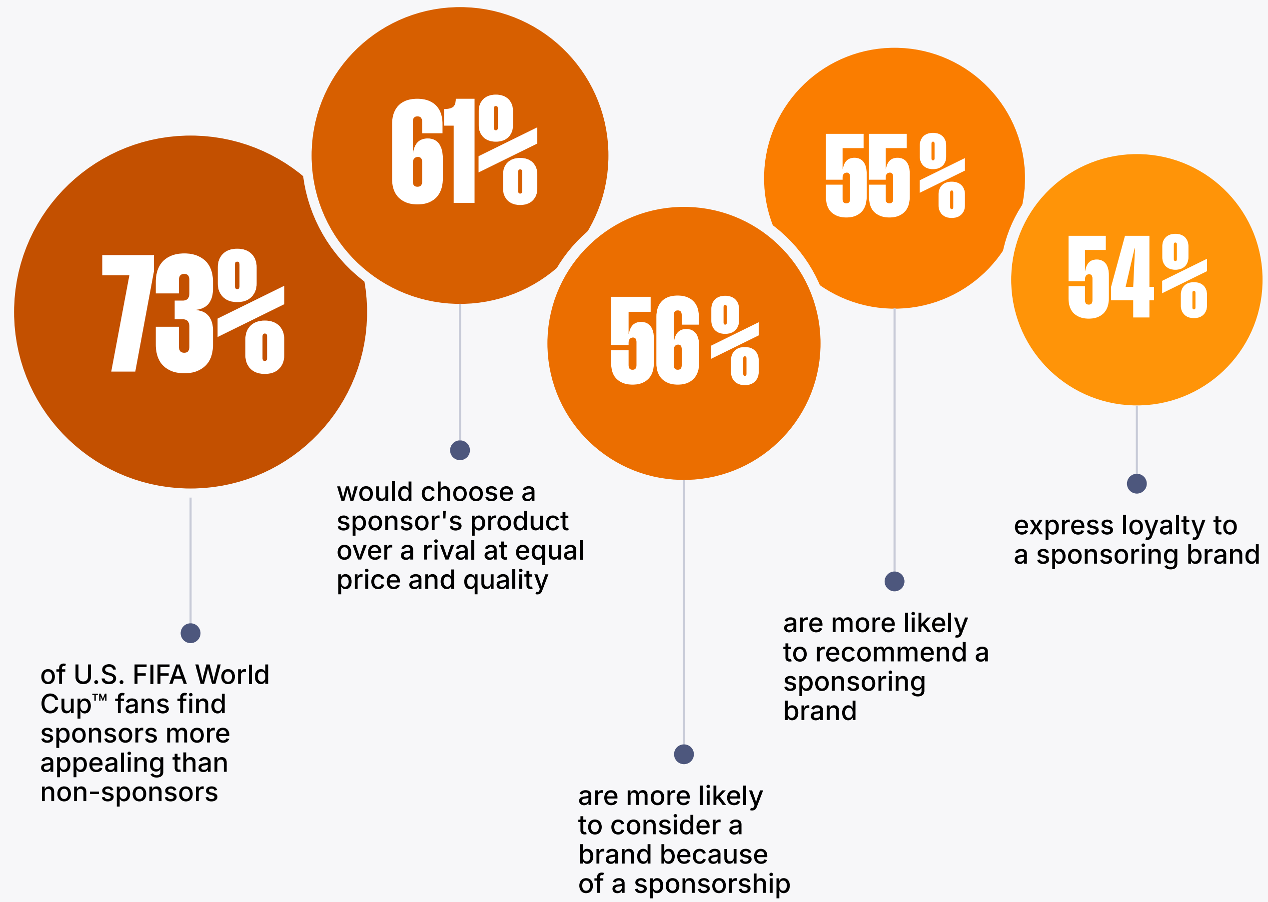
SOCCER FANS ARE BRAND FANS

In an era of ad-blockers and ad-skipping, U.S. soccer fans are the outlier. They are more receptive to sponsorship and brand partnership than fans of any other major U.S. sport - NFL, NBA, and MLB included. They view sponsors not as interlopers, but as partners helping the sport grow.

That perception translates directly into purchase intent. 73% of U.S. FIFA World Cup™ fans find brand sponsors more appealing than non-sponsors. 61% say they'd pick a sponsor's product over a rival if price and quality were equal.

Figure 3.1

THE SPONSORSHIP TRUST PIPELINE:



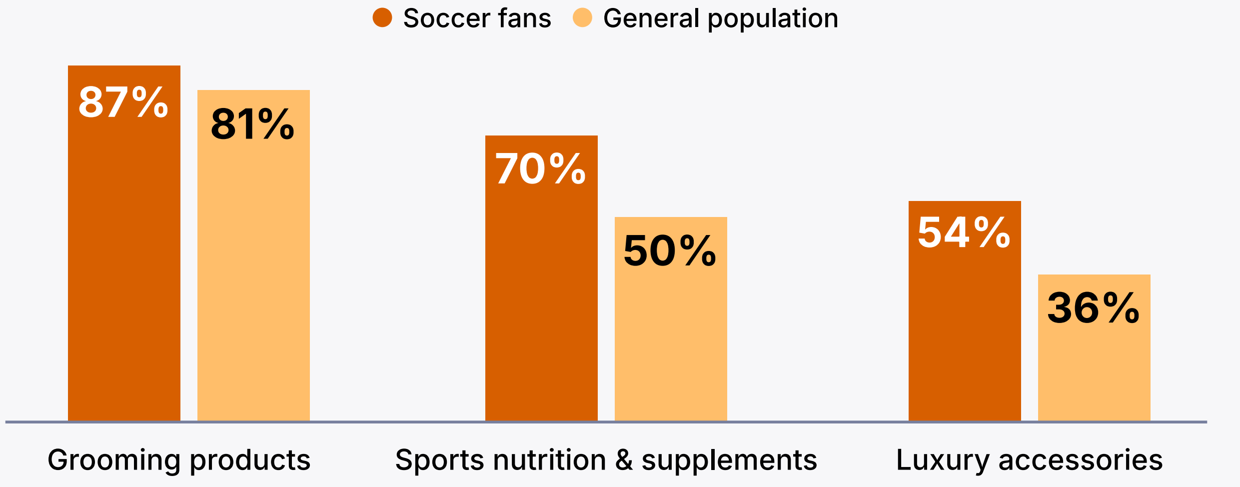
Source: Nielsen Fan Insights, Jan-March 2026

WHERE SOCCER FANS ARE READY TO SPEND

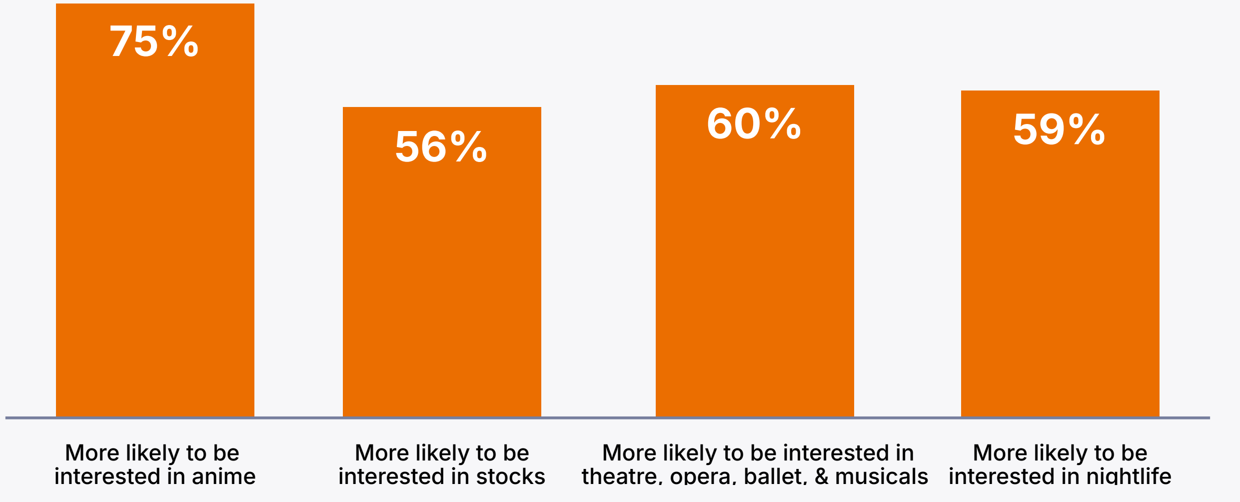
Soccer fans look favorably on sponsors of the sport and more than a quarter have already bought a brand after seeing a sports sponsorship. Across multiple categories, soccer fans show meaningfully higher purchase intent than the general population over the next six months. For categories with natural cultural ties to the sport, like grooming, the indexing is strong. For aspirational categories like luxury accessories, it's even stronger.

Figure 3.2

PURCHASE INTENT: SOCCER FANS VS. GENERAL POPULATION



"BEYOND THE OBVIOUS" CROSSOVER



Source: Nielsen Fan Insights, Jan-March 2026

VISIBILITY DRIVES RECOGNITION

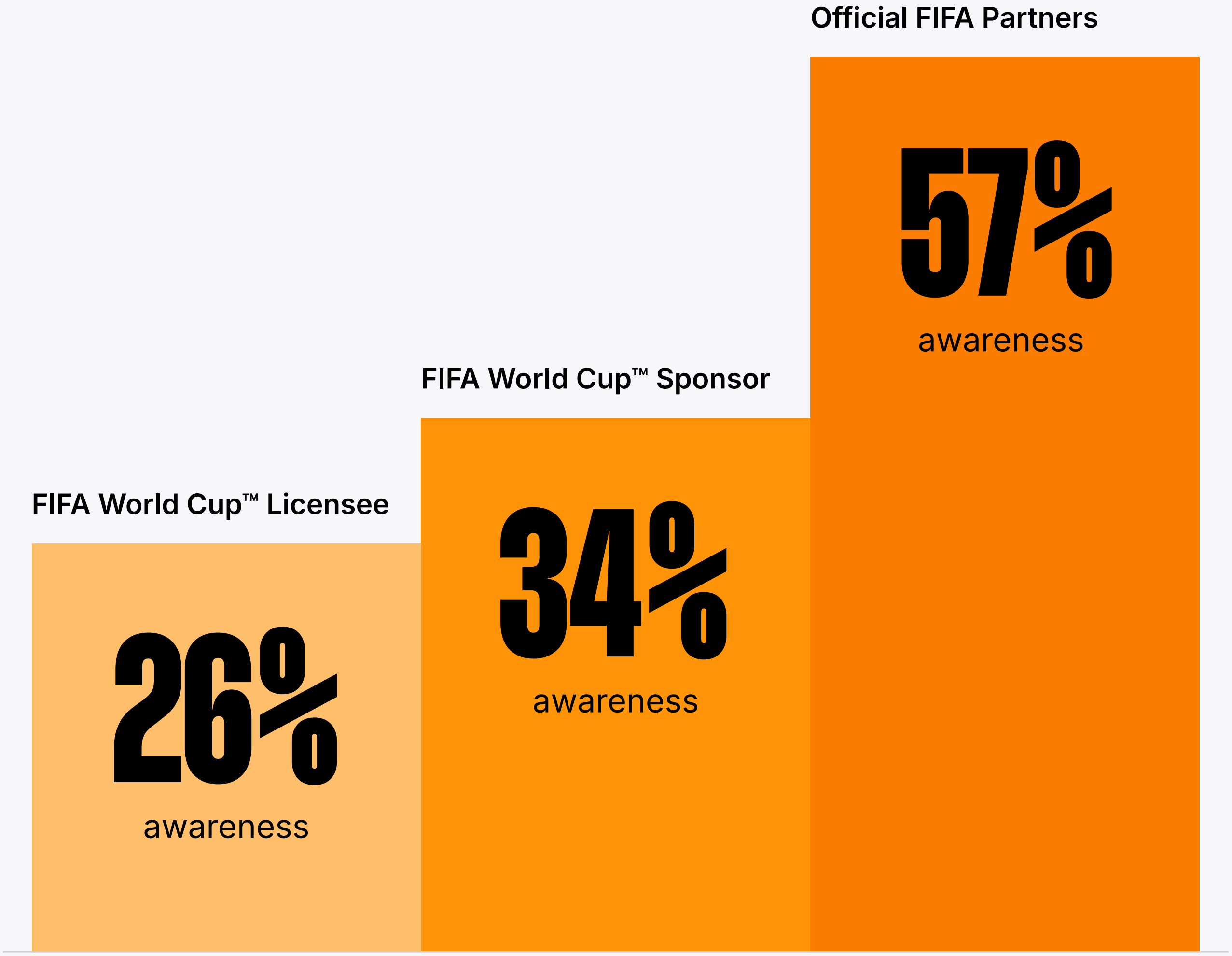
Among FIFA World Cup 2026™ fans, the brands earning the highest recognition are those with the most visible, top-tier commitments to the tournament.

The data shows a clean pattern: Official FIFA Partners earn an average of 57% fan recognition, FIFA World Cup™ Sponsors land at 34%, and FIFA World Cup™ Licensees at 26%. Brands at the top tier earn roughly 1.7 times the recall of brands one level down. It's a principle that holds across every major sport: the deeper and more visible a brand's commitment to the game, the more fans associate that brand with it. The fan-brand relationship is built through the relationship a brand has with the league, the team, or the tournament itself.

Figure 3.3

HIGHER VISIBILITY, HIGHER RECALL:

Fan awareness of brands that engage with FIFA as licensees, sponsors or partners



Source: Nielsen Sponsorship Media Valuation, FIFA Brand Tracker Feb 2026 (Gen pop audience across 21 markets)

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE BRAND OPPORTUNITY

- U.S. soccer fans are the most sponsor-receptive audience in American sports - a rare environment where brand presence is welcomed.
- Purchase intent is significantly elevated across both endemic categories (beer, grooming) and aspirational ones (luxury, finance, tech), opening the door wide for non-endemic advertisers.
- Brand recognition rises with visibility: Tier 1 Official FIFA Partners earn roughly 1.7x the fan recognition of Tier 2 Sponsors, reflecting a dynamic that holds across every major sport. The deeper and more visible a brand's commitment to the game, the more it pays off in mental availability with fans.

HOW NIELSEN CAN HELP

With data you can trust, we offer a range of tools and services to help you understand how consumers spend time with media, so you feel confident in your media planning and drive measurable results.

INSIGHTS FOR ACTION

Our industry-leading linear and streaming measurement products provide a unified, trusted view of the evolving television landscape. This gives you the real-time data you need to track exactly how audiences are shifting their media habits and where you can reach them.

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YOUR FULL-JOURNEY PARTNER

Leverage continuous innovation to stay ahead in a complex advertising landscape. Nielsen delivers a full suite of advanced solutions for audience discovery, media planning, optimization, activation, and measuring tangible outcomes.

Let's talk

About Nielsen

Nielsen shapes the world's media and content as a global leader in audience measurement, data and analytics. Through our understanding of people and their behaviors across all channels and platforms, we empower our clients with independent and actionable intelligence so they can connect and engage with their audiences—now and into the future.

Nielsen operates around the world in more than 55 countries. Learn more at www.nielsen.com and connect with us on social media (X, LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram).