

Alison.Ai

FINAL-WEEK REVIEW & OPTIMIZATION · JULY 2026

The Final Third.

What 33 Days Taught Us. How to Win the Final Week.

The quarter-finals are done and four teams are left: France, Spain, England, and defending champion Argentina. Brazil, Portugal, and all three co-hosts are out. This is what 33 days revealed about creative performance, and the playbook for the highest-stakes, highest-CPM window still to come.

FIFA WORLD CUP 2026 · THE KNOCKOUTS

4 teams left

33 days played. 6 to go.

33

Days played of 39

6

Days left to the Final

4

Teams still standing

30M

Most-watched US soccer telecast (Fox, USA v Belgium)

THE STORY SO FAR

Down to the Final Four. The Favorites Held.

Thirty-three days in, the field is down to four. Brazil and Portugal went out in the Round of 16, the host United States were knocked out 4-1 by Belgium in a match that still set an all-time US television record, and the quarter-finals then sent Norway, Morocco, Belgium and Switzerland home. For the first time ever, the semi-finals feature the four top-ranked teams on earth: France, Spain, England and defending champion Argentina. For advertisers, every one of those swings was a live creative moment, and the ones built to react captured them.

MOST-WATCHED SOCCER TELECAST IN US HISTORY

30M

USA v Belgium, Round of 16, July 6, on Fox. The single biggest soccer audience the country has ever recorded.

GROUP STAGE AVERAGE, US AUDIENCE

5.1M

Across 72 matches on Fox, FS1 and Tubi. Up 92% versus 2022, a record English-language group-stage average.

CREATOR EARNED MEDIA ON #FIFA, FIRST 3 WEEKS

\$2B

Nearly two billion dollars of EMV across more than 250,000 creator posts. The conversation dwarfs the ad breaks.

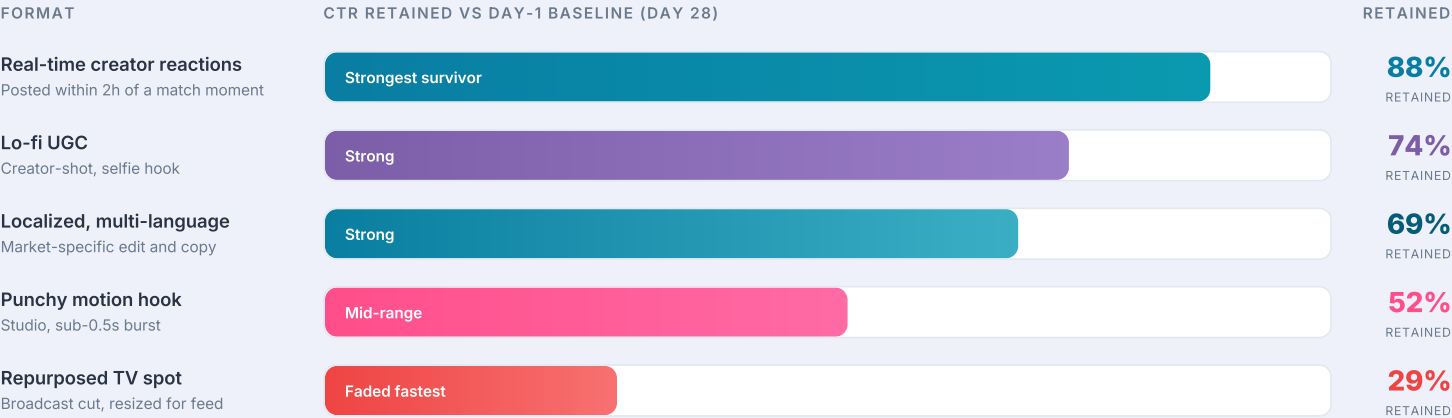
PROJECTED WORLD CUP CPM BAND

\$60-120

A Messi knockout match sits at the top of that range. Peak inventory is now, and it is unforgiving of tired creative.

What Actually Won the First 28 Days

Across Alison.ai's World Cup-adjacent campaign corpus, the formats that held their click-through rate deepest into the tournament were the ones closest to how fans themselves post. Real-time creator reaction content held CTR longest. Recut broadcast spots faded fastest. Here is CTR retention measured against each format's own Day-1 baseline, tracked through the first 28 days.



Alison.ai first-party data. CTR retention measured against each format's own Day-1 baseline across World Cup-adjacent social campaigns, June 11 to July 8, 2026.

The brands that treated the tournament like a broadcast bought fatigue. The ones that treated it like a **live conversation** bought reach that compounded with every upset.

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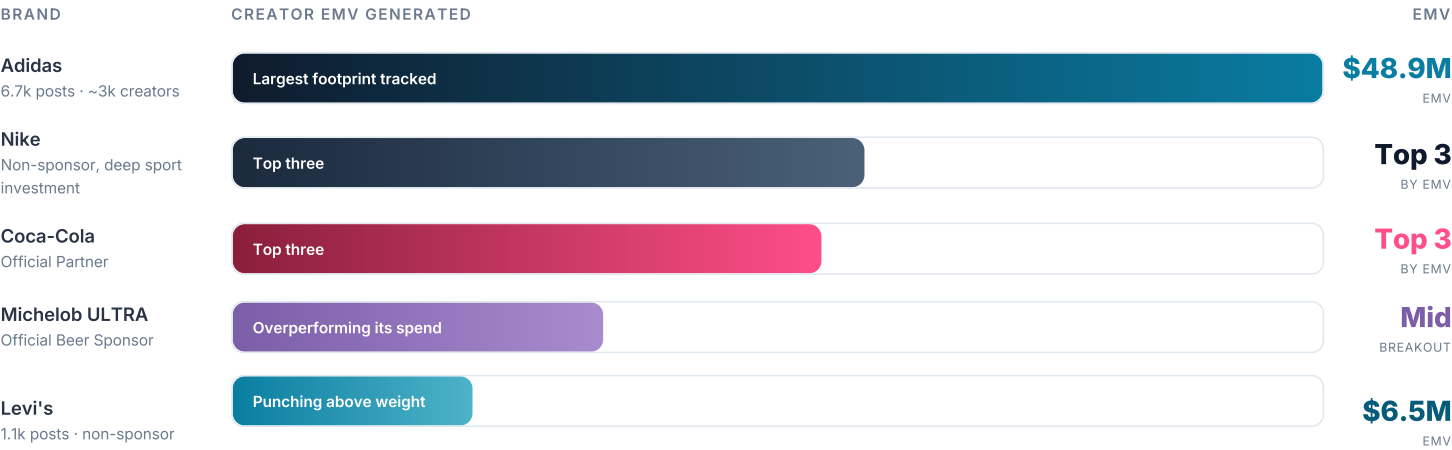
THE SECOND SCREEN

The Tournament Is Being Won on the Second Screen.

While broadcast set records, the decisive battleground moved to creators. Fans are watching the match and the reaction content at the same time, on TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and Twitch. Per Nielsen's 2025 Global Sports Marketing Report, younger audiences now experience the tournament through fragmented creator ecosystems rather than linear TV alone, and per WARC, creator-led advertising is growing faster than every other digital category. For non-sponsor brands, this is the opening: creators let you belong in the conversation without a FIFA badge or a nine-figure rights deal.

Brand earned media leaderboard

Global creator EMV, June 1–21, 2026. Sponsors lead, but mid-tier challengers are punching above their spend.



Source: CreatorIQ World Cup brand EMV tracking, June 1–21, 2026. EMV is earned media value.

The four athlete archetypes brands are buying

A player tag is now a media buy. Each represents a different partnership play, and a different price.

THE LIVING LEGEND Lionel Messi Impressions (10 posts) 751M Owned-media EMV \$2.5M The single most valuable name in the tournament. A Messi tag remains in a category of its own, and Argentina are into the semi-finals.	THE GEN Z ICON Jude Bellingham Impressions (2 posts) 31.5M Reach / post 15.8M Setting Messi aside, the most impression-efficient in the dataset: 31.5M reach from just two posts. England are into the semi-finals.
THE RELIABLE PREMIUM PARTNER Harry Kane Profile Consistent Risk Low The dependable, brand-safe option. Not the viral spike, but the partner that delivers steady value across a long run.	THE BREAKOUT STAR Lamine Yamal Current partners Adidas, Beats The window Closing Still accessible enough to sign, but momentum says the price only goes up. Adidas, American Eagle, Beats by Dre and Oppo already moved.

Source: CreatorIQ World Cup athlete owned-media EMV, June 1–21, 2026. Team status current as of July 13, 2026.

How the smartest activations are built

The winners are not buying one voice for millions. They are building many creators talking to many communities.

Unilever: the "many-to-many" model More than 35 brands activating through a creator spectrum that spans athletes, semi-pro footballers, fan-community leaders and micro-influencers. Anchored by "The Locker Room," a 24/7 social hub on TikTok and YouTube, plus "House of Fresh" creator spaces in Mexico City, New York and Miami. Unilever has publicly committed to shifting half its global media budget into social and creator marketing.
Adidas: "Backyard Legends" A film built for culture, not just sport, starring Messi, Lamine Yamal, Jude Bellingham and Trinity Rodman alongside Timothée Chalamet and Bad Bunny, on the "You Got This" message. The largest creator footprint of any brand tracked this tournament.
DoorDash: "Deliver Us To Fútbol" The brand's first global campaign, pairing football legends Ricardo Kaká and Alex Morgan with creator Khaby Lame, spanning DoorDash, Deliveroo and Wolt across markets.

Sources: Marketing Dive and Ad Age (Unilever); Brand Innovators FIFA World Cup Ad Tracker 2026 (Adidas, DoorDash).

The brands pulling ahead are not buying one hero spot. They are running a system that turns every match moment into on-brand creative at the speed of the feed, the difference between reach that fatigues and reach that compounds.

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Four Platforms, Six Days Left

Audience behavior has shifted since kickoff. Group-stage discovery energy is gone. What remains is a smaller, more intense, higher-intent audience watching single-elimination drama. Here is where to put creative for the knockouts.

TikTok · reaction speed wins

The upsets drove the spikes. Brazil out, Ronaldo out, the Messi comeback. Post inside 2 hours of a result. Have Semi-Final and Final reaction templates pre-built now.

Instagram · original only

Since April 2026, Instagram no longer recommends unoriginal content to new audiences. Reposted broadcast clips will stall. Ship original creator edits or lose distribution.

YouTube · the long story

Highlight pre-roll and 15–30s story arcs. This is where the emotional Final narrative lives. Bottom-third CTA at the 75% mark.

Meta · rotate now

Anything running unchanged since the group stage is four weeks old and fatigued. Throttles hit at frequency 4-plus. Swap before the Semis, not after.

Instagram recommendation change announced by Instagram (April 2026). Platform behavior notes: Alison.ai first-party observations, 33-day cohort.

CASE EVIDENCE

The Brands That Reacted vs. The Brands That Didn't

The upsets separated the field. When Brazil crashed out to Norway, one kind of brand had a reaction live within hours. The other was still running a hero film shot in May. Same tournament, opposite outcomes.

✓ The Reactor

- Creator roster on standby with pre-cleared usage rights
- Reaction content live within 2 hours of the Brazil and Ronaldo eliminations
- Localized variants per host-market audience, not one global cut
- Rotated creative before CTR crossed the fatigue threshold
- Original social-first edits, not resized broadcast

→ Held CTR through the knockouts, compounding reach with each upset

✗ The Broadcaster

- One polished hero film locked in June, no variants
- Could not react to a single upset or storyline in real time
- Same creative running into weeks three and four, fully fatigued
- Reposted broadcast clips stalled under Instagram's originality rule
- Paying peak knockout CPMs for creative fans had already scrolled past

→ CTR eroded fast, worst efficiency at the most expensive window

Alison.ai first-party, illustrative of patterns across the 33-day World Cup cohort.

THE CREATOR CONVERSATION

\$2B

in #FIFA earned media value so far, across 250,000+ creator posts and 40,000+ creators.

Source: CreatorIQ, 2026 World Cup creator tracking.

Your Creative Plan for the Final Week

Three rounds remain, and they carry the highest CPMs and the highest intent of the entire tournament. This is the window that pays back a strong creative system or punishes a tired one. Print it and put it on the wall.

WHEN	ROUND	CREATIVE ACTION	FATIGUE WATCH	PLATFORM
Jul 14–15 Semi-Finals	SF	France vs Spain (Tue) and England vs Argentina (Wed). Match-reactive variants, result-specific captions, creator content within 2 hours of each whistle. This is peak second-screen volume.	Rotate every 3–4 days minimum.	TikTok priority
Jul 18 Third-Place	BRONZE	Lighter-touch, warm and human tone. Lower CPM than the Final, useful for testing the angle you will scale on the 19th.	Fresh variant, do not recycle SF creative.	Meta + YouTube
Jul 19 The Final, NY/NJ	FINAL	Save your boldest, most culturally reactive creative for this window. Short, punchy, unforgettable. The audience could reach a scale no ad moment in 2026 will match.	Peak CPM of the year. Max impact per impression.	YouTube + TikTok

Schedule per FIFA and Fox Sports (July 2026). Creative guidance: Alison.ai. The Final could draw close to 7% of global internet traffic, per Bank of America.



THE ROAD TO THE FINAL

July 19.

New York · New Jersey Stadium.

Six Rules for the Home Stretch

01

Group-stage creative is already dead

Four weeks of high-frequency exposure has fatigued anything launched in June. Retire it before the semi-finals, not after you see the CTR fall.

02

Reaction speed is the new production value

Real-time creator content held 88% of its Day-1 CTR through 33 days, per Alison.ai. The upsets rewarded brands that posted within 2 hours, not the glossiest film.

03

The tournament lives on the second screen

CreatorIQ tracked nearly \$2B in creator EMV on #FIFA alone in three weeks. You do not need a rights deal to be in the conversation, you need the right creators.

04

A player tag is a media buy

Messi, Bellingham, Kane and Yamal are four different price points and risk profiles. Match the archetype to the goal, and move on breakout talent before the window closes.

05

Original or invisible on Instagram

Since April 2026, Instagram will not recommend unoriginal content to new audiences (per Instagram/Meta). Reposted broadcast clips will not travel. Ship original edits.

06

Spend your best creative on the Final

July 19 carries the highest CPM and highest intent of the year. Running tired creative into that window is the most expensive mistake left on the calendar.

The Final Is in 6 Days.

See how your live World Cup creative is holding up, where fatigue is setting in, and which variants deserve your knockout-round budget. Alison.ai is the optimization and intelligence layer that learns from your own campaign performance, reads the competitive landscape, and puts your performance, media and creative teams on the same page, in time to act before the Final.

[Optimize My World Cup Creative](#)

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