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GEN Z AND THE WOMEN'S WORLD CUP —HOW BRANDS CAN REACH THE EVENT'S MOST CONNECTED FANS

Athletes' skills, social impact initiatives and philanthropic efforts represent the generation's values and aspirations



By [Fernanda Alexia Albanus](#). Published on August 16, 2023.



Sweden stopped Japan, 2-1, in the Women's World Cup quarterfinal round. Credit: FIFA

Gen Z Voices is a new series exploring the Gen Z perspective on marketing, technology, social media and the future of the ad industry. [Submit your essays here.](#)

There's been a buzz surrounding FIFA Women's World Cup, and Gen Z is at the heart of the excitement. Born in the age of digital connectivity, Gen Z's influence on the world of sports, especially women's soccer, cannot be ignored.

Women's football has evolved from a humble 12-team tournament in 1991 to a global phenomenon, with the 2023 Women's World Cup witnessing a record 32 nations competing. The tournament sold more than 1.5 million tickets in six days in July, surpassing expectations and marking a milestone in its growth.

The 58% increase in avid followers of the Women's World Cup, from 929 million in 2019 to 1.472 billion in 2023, demonstrates the sport's surging popularity. The rise can be attributed to factors including increased accessibility to information and strides toward equality and inclusion compared to men's football.

Another significant factor lies in expanded media coverage and investment in the sport. Extensive broadcasting and sports networks have showcased matches and celebrated female athletes, elevating the sport's status to a broader audience. Brands and organizations recognized the marketability of women's football, and provided substantial financial backing, enhancing the sport's quality and creating more opportunities for female players.

Ad Age Gen Z Contributor Column

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Gen Z: Key players in the game

Gen Z, born between the mid-1990s and early 2000s, has grown up in a world shaped by technology and social media. As digital natives, Gen Zers' preferences and behaviors significantly impact how they engage with sports content and events such as the FIFA Women's World Cup.

Research shows that Gen Z represents a significant portion of the audience, with preferences differing from traditional fans. YouTube (43% for Gen Zers, compared to 30% for all ages) and Instagram (31%, versus 13%) are now more popular means for 16- to 24-year-olds to engage with sports than TV (30%). Besides that, the growing influence of short-format video has significantly impacted how this generation interacts with sports content, with snappy highlights, behind-the-scenes moments and player interviews shared on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and TikTok.

Social media plays a key role in engaging Gen Z with women's football. Not only does it offer game-based content and statistics, but also compelling storytelling, including original player and fan content and inspirational stories from grassroots to professional football. Social media platforms are their virtual stadium, where they can cheer for their teams, debate match outcomes and interact with players and fellow fans.

Streaming channels are also significant in this context. CazeTV, a Brazilian streaming channel, has achieved a world record in viewership for women's football on YouTube with an impressive milestone of 1 million simultaneously connected devices during the debut of Brazil in the 2023 Women's World Cup. This significant number of viewers highlights the growing interest and engagement with women's football and promotes a deeper connection with players and the sport.

Creating communities and fostering authenticity

Gen Z's sense of community and belonging drives their intention to watch games in social settings. In fact, 74% of young people aged 18-34 expressed their interest in watching the game outside of their homes. In comparison, of 57% of those age 35 and older share the same intention. Additionally, research shows that women are more likely to watch the matches with friends and family than on their own. Creating shared experiences becomes a powerful way to connect with this generation.

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Furthermore, Gen Z's social consciousness demands authentic and purpose-driven efforts from brands participating in the Women's World Cup. They value real stories, emotions and meaningful initiatives that promote inclusivity, diversity, and create positive change. "Gen Z is more compassionate and willing to help one another with differences whether they understand them or not," said Loran Jarett, an associate professor of marketing at the University of South Florida.

This generation has interests that extend beyond the game itself, and seeks a deeper connection with athletes, teams and brands. They see athletes as people who are not

above moral standards and admire them not only for their on-field prowess but also for their off-field stories, social impact initiatives and philanthropic efforts. Aligning with these values allows brands to get closer to Gen Z, creating an emotional connection that goes beyond mere consumption.

A legacy for the future

By embracing authenticity and social responsibility, the Women's World Cup can leave a lasting legacy on Gen Z. It becomes more than just a sporting event; it is a meaningful experience that represents their values and aspirations. Nurturing this connection will ensure women's football continues to inspire and empower generations to come.

The Women's World Cup's growth and popularity among Gen Z are clear indicators of its increasing relevance. By embracing digital platforms, creating authentic content, fostering a sense of community and promoting social responsibility, the tournament can build a legacy that resonates with this generation and leaves a lasting impact on the world of women's football.

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Fernanda Alexia Albanus

Fernanda Alexia Albanus is a global communications analyst at SAP.

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