

The biggest social media event of all time is on this June

By  Elizma Nolte

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The kick-off of the first match in the world's most anticipated football tournament this June will also signal the start of what will likely be the biggest mobile and social media event the world has ever seen. It's an unprecedented opportunity for marketers to engage with people about a subject they are truly passionate about.



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Looking back at what happened in 2014 in Brazil, more than 350 million people on Facebook shared an astonishing 3 billion posts, comments and likes related to the tournament. The final between Germany and Argentina remains the most talked about event on Facebook ever. And this year's event in Russia will no doubt be even bigger. Facebook knows that because since 2014, global Facebook Daily Average users have grown by 60%, with an impressive growth here in Africa as more people start to connect to the Internet via smartphones.

Facebook also knows that users love interacting with sports, of which football is by far the most followed. Today, Facebook has more than 500 million people worldwide across Facebook and Instagram who show their love for the beautiful game by following their heroes, football clubs and discussing the game.

How do brands and advertisers interact with this huge base of football fanatics? We've taken some time to learn more about football fans on Facebook and Instagram, whilst looking at the key trends that marketers should be aware of. Let's look at three key shifts we have seen in consumer media consumption over the past four years:



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The big game has moved to the small screen

When it comes to sport, the television in the lounge or the local pub is not the only screen that matters these days. Sports fans are watching their favourite teams and tournaments on multiple devices, especially their smartphones. And because mobile has no off switch, users are engaging with sports 24/7/365, not just during the big matches or events like opening

and closing ceremonies.

Research done by Facebook, across one million people in the US confirms that Facebook usage peaks during the ad breaks when there is a major event on TV as people turn their attention from the big screen to the small screen to discuss what they've just seen. Another study Facebook has commissioned in the US found 90% of people who watch sports use a mobile device while watching games. Of these people, 59% look at social media while the game is on.

That means marketers have a terrific opportunity to get involved in the event and engage with fans – and they can do so in a highly efficient and targeted manner. If you're not fortunate enough to afford the price tag of advertising around the game on TV, Facebook is a cost-effective manner of positioning your brand where the behind the scenes action is taking place. Recent research conducted by Kantar Milward Brown across 21 campaigns that ran across TV and Facebook showed that Facebook was nearly 10 times more cost efficient at driving reach than TV (based on average investment across channels and corresponding reach achieved). At the same time Facebook delivered similar brand uplifts to TV – nearly double that of print, and four times higher than radio, digital video or digital display.



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Get real or go home

Mobile is breaking down the barriers between people and their heroes. Gone are the days of carefully scheduled interviews or waiting for press conferences to hear from the players. On platforms like Instagram and Facebook, fans get to interact directly with their sporting heroes and have a first-hand glimpse into their world – whether it's on or off the field.

Today's sports fans demand authenticity above all else, thanks to the way that mobile and social media gives them 24/7 access to the teams, players and experiences they love. One of the most powerful tools in the marketer's arsenal is branded content adjacent to – and if possible promoted by – sporting heroes and influencers.

Video is our natural language

Mobile has evolved into the largest video platform in history. We now expect to see great video content on our Facebook and Instagram feeds. And this is especially true for sport, where fans are uploading and watching a huge amount of videos during major football tournaments, for example, videos uploaded to Facebook during Euro 2016 generated nearly 1 billion views.

Video is how people today communicate with each other. And it's how they expect brands to communicate with them, too. Video should be at the heart of every consumer strategy, especially when trying to reach sports fans.

Facebook has spent a lot of time researching how people consume video and building innovative ad solutions for mobile video – from short-format videos that work well with the sound off, to Facebook Live, Instagram Stories and full-vertical video.

The research has uncovered that people have different moods or modes that dictate the kind of content they'll watch. Most of the time they're on-the-go, looking for short, snackable content. Short videos or even a moving image is the best way to capture attention at this point. At other times, they have a bit more time to spend and it's your chance to get them to lean in and explore your content. And then you have those lean-back moments, on the couch, when they'll spend significant time watching content.

Closing words

This month, the biggest football stadium in the world will be mobile and social. But their benefit to marketers is not just about scale. Not only do they deliver a massive audience, they give you the opportunity to get under the skin of football fans and engage with them directly, ensuring you can deliver truly relevant, personal and attention-grabbing messages to your target audience at the very moment they're turning to the small screen.

ABOUT ELIZMA NOLTE

Elizma Nolte is Head of Business Marketing for Sub-Saharan Africa. She is passionate about media, technology and Africa - and finding ways to connect the three for positive change. Before joining the Facebook Africa team, she did so as Country Marketing Manager for Google South Africa and as media entrepreneur, journalist and publisher. She holds a B. Computer Science and BA Honours Journalism from Stellenbosch University, M.Sc Electronic Publishing from City University London and an MBA from INSEAD in France and Singapore.

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