

Canary!

Vital Strategies

From Stadiums To Screens

Coca-Cola's Sportswashing
at the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup
March 2026



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Executive Summary

Football, or soccer as it is known in some countries, is the world's most popular sport. Major tournaments held by FIFA, the governing body of world football, attract billions of viewers worldwide, creating unparalleled branding opportunities. (1-3) "Big Soda" companies are well aware of these opportunities; Coca-Cola, for example, has been a long-standing FIFA partner.

This first-of-its-kind brief exposes how Coca-Cola's Club World Cup sponsorship was transformed into massive digital exposure across social media in the 2025 tournament.

Canary, Vital Strategies' real-time digital media monitoring and reporting service for health-harming products, was used to analyze marketing linking Coca-Cola to the tournament on social media platforms in Brazil, Mexico and the U.S. leading up to, during and after the event (June 1-July 31, 2025).

Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the FIFA Club World Cup is a prime example of "sportswashing" (4, 5): exploiting the credibility, emotion and cultural power of football to normalize products that, when consumed in excess,

are linked to obesity, Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and other noncommunicable diseases. (4, 6-10) As sponsors of global sporting events, Big Soda creates associations between harmful sweetened beverages and athleticism, unity and community, following Big Tobacco's playbook—but without the regulations that eventually curtailed tobacco's reach. (4-6)

Our findings underscore the need for comprehensive action: clear sponsorship standards and public-health-aligned governance to prevent the promotion of unhealthy products through sports environments, alongside comprehensive marketing regulations that expand across in-person and digital environments. (11, 12)

Key Findings:

- 1. Sports sponsorship now operates as a global, multi-channel marketing system that extends in-stadium branding into population-level exposure.** During the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup, Coca-Cola-linked content generated an estimated 3.6 billion potential impressions across 795 posts in three countries. Branding embedded in match footage, interviews and stadium environments was repeatedly recirculated through highlights, replays and social sharing, allowing a limited set of branded moments to reach audiences far beyond live matches. This broadcast-to-digital pathway illustrates how modern sports sponsorship is designed for cross-platform amplification, not isolated advertising placements.
- 2. Brand and incidental marketing account for much of the observed exposure.** Most captured content featured logos, brand extensions and background placement during high-attention match moments rather than direct product promotion. Every in-person logo placement is strategically designed to be amplified online, reaching millions beyond stadiums. As a result, regulatory approaches that solely focus on specific products or formal advertisements do not address the primary sources of exposure at scale.
- 3. Immersive fan experiences represent emerging marketing strategies that integrate physical fan spaces with digital circulation, extending sponsorship beyond traditional media channels and deliberately blurring the distinction between online and offline brand presence.** Coca-Cola's branding was embedded into fan zones, retail activations and other experiential settings designed to encourage social sharing. These approaches reinforce digital circulation and allow sponsorship to persist across physical and online environments.
- 4. Children and adolescents are exposed to sweetened beverages through sports content on social media.** Youth-oriented narratives, influencer partnerships and replay-driven viewing patterns ensure that sports-linked branding is circulated in spaces widely accessed by younger audiences. This exposure is largely missed by regulatory frameworks that narrowly define child-directed marketing.

Call to Action:

- 1. Implement and/or bolster comprehensive national marketing regulations across all environments.** Governments must urgently create regulations that extend to both the physical and the digital food environment. Regulations must also address streaming, cross-platform exposure, influencer content and incidental brand exposure.
- 2. Apply marketing restrictions to transnational and digital sports ecosystems.** Global sports governing bodies—including FIFA—must prohibit sport sponsorships by unhealthy product companies, including sweetened beverages, and align global sports governance with [public health standards](#) for responsible sponsorships. Sponsorship bans are key to disassociating sports and athletic ability from unhealthy products.
- 3. Expose sportswashing and build public demand for change.** Strengthen counter-marketing and public awareness campaigns to expose how unhealthy commodity companies like Coca-Cola use “sportswashing” and corporate social responsibility-driven marketing to hide the risks their products pose and undermine restrictions.

Why this matters now:

The 2026 FIFA World Cup is projected to be the most-watched sporting event in history, with nearly six billion fans expected to engage with the tournament. (13) Regulatory action is needed now to prevent Coca-Cola from deploying these same tactics on an even larger scale, exposing billions more viewers, including millions of children and adolescents, to marketing that obscures serious health risks. (14)

About Canary!

This cross-sectional analysis was conducted using Canary, Vital Strategies' real-time digital media monitoring and reporting system for the marketing of health-harming products. The Canary platform, initially launched in 2021 as TERM (Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement), leverages artificial intelligence combined with expert human analysis to identify and track harmful product marketing online.

Canary documents examples of industry marketing on social media and news sites to identify campaigns and patterns and translates these into dashboards with actionable insights for stakeholders. The analysis offers a descriptive snapshot of publicly visible marketing activity. It does not capture paid or targeted advertisements shown only to specific user segments, and it does not estimate total marketing volume or population-level exposure. Canary was used to systematically track and analyze Coca-Cola-linked digital marketing activity associated with the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup across Brazil, Mexico and the United States, the three most populous countries in the Americas with high levels of internet and social media use and a significant presence of transnational food and beverage corporations. Coca-Cola was selected due to its long-standing FIFA partnership and high visibility during global football events. Findings should be interpreted as evidence about the operation of sports-linked marketing in this context, rather than as a comprehensive representation of all sweetened beverage companies.

Between June 1 and July 31, 2025, Canary identified 2,232 publicly available social media posts referencing the tournament. Of these, 795 posts that contained both FIFA Club World Cup content and Coca-Cola branding were included in the final analytic sample. Data collection and monitoring were supported by Ipsos's Synthesio.AI, a social media analytics platform integrated into the Canary workflow, with content identified using predefined inclusion criteria and relevant keywords.

Boolean keywords—such as FIFA, Coca-Cola and “take it to the world”—and marketing accounts were identified by local researchers and purposively sampled for tracking. A total of 358 social media accounts were tracked across multiple platforms, including 188 globally managed, official FIFA and Coca-Cola accounts and a variety of athletes, football teams, leagues, sports influencers, broadcasters and other related accounts from the focus countries, totaling 35 from the United States, 44 from Mexico and 91 from Brazil. All posts captured were generated in one of these three countries. The analysis was restricted to posts containing both Coca-Cola or its sub-brand Powerade, and FIFA Club World Cup 2025 branding or products and does not represent all posts or marketing activity during the event. Data was human coded, using a theory-driven codebook informed by prior research and refined by digital marketing experts (20, 36, 37), assessing categories including the origin of the post, the marketing tactic used, message framing, and product presence, type and logo, among others. The analytics sample was restricted to content in English, Spanish and Portuguese. [For more information, please see the technical appendix—methodology.](#)



When TNT Sports Mexico shared this goal celebration, Coca-Cola's pitch-side logo traveled with it, demonstrating how broadcaster accounts transform embedded sponsorship into repeated digital exposure beyond the live event. Source: TNT Sports Mexico via Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/1040058431628953/posts/1058433873124742>

Background

Big Soda's Sportswashing Playbook: Exploiting Football to Normalize Sweetened Beverages in Sports

When billions tune into the FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) World Cups, they are not only watching football, but they are also being enlisted in one of the largest corporate marketing platforms in global sport. FIFA reported that the 2025 Club World Cup drew in an estimated 2.7 billion fans, and preliminary reports anticipate more than double that for the 2026 World Cup tournament. (2, 13)

For decades, Coca-Cola, one of the world's largest producers of sweetened drinks (part of an industry collectively referred to as Big Soda), has used sport, and particularly football, to promote its products. These marketing efforts span global youth, men's and women's tournaments, leagues, teams and players. (15) The company's long-standing partnership with FIFA showcases the scope and reach of its sports sponsorship. Coca-Cola has sponsored the FIFA World Cup, which is the world's most watched sporting tournament, since 1978 and has employed stadium advertising at every tournament since 1950. (15-17)

Coca-Cola's history of sports advertising—particularly through football—taps into the fan experience, leveraging the emotions of football to engage fans. This practice is known as “sportswashing”—**a term increasingly used to describe how corporations use sports partnerships to enhance their reputations and deflect from health and environmental concerns.** These intentional actions transform sports sponsorship into an integrated, normalized form of marketing that builds brand loyalty through positive association with sports.

The scale, longevity and deep integration of Coca-Cola into global football make it a particularly visible example of Big Soda's sportswashing dynamics. While this report focuses on Coca-Cola as a case study, the tactics described here—brand-first sponsorships, digital amplification of broadcast content and youth-gearred sports marketing—reflect a broader industry playbook used across the sweetened beverage sector, drawing directly on tactics previously employed by the tobacco industry.



Coca-Cola's Marketing Mix: Focus on Digital

Companies regularly use sports sponsorship as part of their broader marketing strategies to reach and engage varied audiences. Coca-Cola heavily invests in marketing to build loyalty for its brands. (18) In recent years, the company has spent between \$4 billion and \$5 billion dollars annually on marketing. (18) Similar to other unhealthy food and beverage companies adopting a more digital-forward approach, Coca-Cola has increased its marketing budget allocation for digital platforms—65% of Coca-Cola's total media spend in 2024 was on digital media, up from 30% in 2019. (19) This shift toward digital platforms allows unhealthy food and beverage companies to reach children and adolescents where they spend their time—and where regulations are weakest.

Big Soda and What Tobacco Sponsorship Teaches Us About Modern Sports Marketing

The history of tobacco sponsorship in global sport offers an important governance lesson. When formal sponsorship bans are introduced, marketing does not simply disappear. It evolves. The last tobacco-sponsored FIFA World Cup took place in 1986, after which FIFA ended official tobacco sponsorship amid growing health concerns. Yet [Canary's monitoring in India, Mexico and Indonesia during the 2022 FIFA Men's World Cup](#) shows that tobacco- and nicotine-related promotions continued online, often through indirect and digitally mediated tactics that are less visible than traditional sponsorship.

The relevance of this experience lies in corporate strategy rather than product equivalence. Tobacco and sweetened beverages differ in product use patterns, regulatory histories and pathways to harm. However, in both cases, companies have used sport to associate their brands with athleticism, national pride and celebration. In the context of the FIFA Club World Cup, Coca-Cola's marketing illustrates how similar association-based strategies operate today, amplified through digital distribution and immersive fan experiences.

The lesson from tobacco is not simply that sponsorship can be restricted, but that marketing systems adapt when regulation targets only the most visible forms of promotion. Without approaches that address brand-level association, digital recirculation and immersive environments, sponsorship-driven marketing is likely to persist in new forms, reinforcing the need for regulatory frameworks that learn from the experience of other health-harming industries and anticipate adaptation rather than react to it.

The Digital Food Environment: Where Marketing Meets Young Audiences



Repeated exposure to unhealthy food and beverage marketing can influence perception that these products are a normal part of daily consumption. Among children and adolescents, repeated marketing exposure is associated with:

- Higher consumption of marketed products,
- Greater likelihood of choosing those products, and
- Stronger preferences for these items over healthier options. (21)

The rise in the digital environment has made this exposure more pervasive than ever. Digital media has transformed how people interact with the commercial world, creating expansive online spaces where high levels of interaction take place. Within this broader digital environment, food and beverage companies have found new opportunities to reach consumers at greater scale and frequency. Researchers describe this as the “digital food environment”—the online spaces where marketing meets everyday choices about what people buy, eat and drink. (22, 23) In sports marketing, this has broadened opportunities to display food and beverage branding beyond television broadcasts and stadium billboards to social media, mobile apps and streaming platforms where many people, including children and adolescents, spend their time. The line between stadium and digital advertising is blurred, as stadium advertising can now circulate and live in perpetuity in digital spaces alongside other online content.

Marketing Sweetness: Shaping Habits, Driving Noncommunicable Diseases

Marketing practices that encourage and normalize unhealthy consumption have direct consequences for public health. Each year, poor diets contribute to an estimated 11 million preventable deaths—roughly one in five deaths worldwide—placing a significant burden on people, governments and health systems. (24) Sugar-sweetened beverages are a major contributor: for each 250 milliliters increase in daily sweetened beverage consumption—about three-quarters of a standard soda can—the risk of obesity increases 12%, Type 2 diabetes by 19%,

cardiovascular disease mortality by 13% and all-cause mortality by 4%. (9, 10) In addition, sugar-sweetened beverage consumption is associated with increased risk of dental caries and erosion. (8) Each sip may seem small, but over time, the cumulative impact of sweetened beverages adds up to measurable increases in disease risk. Monitoring how unhealthy foods and beverages, such as sweetened beverages*, are promoted online and enacting policies that restrict their reach are critical steps toward a healthier future.

* The term “sweetened beverages” is used to encompass sugar and nonsugar sweeteners and their health implications. When citing sources, authors’ original terminology (e.g., “sugar-sweetened beverage,” “sugary drink”) is retained.




Marketing, according to [WHO](#), refers to any form of commercial communication, message or activity aimed at boosting recognition, appeal and/or consumption of products and services. This includes a wide range of strategies, such as advertising, product placement, sponsorship, direct marketing, product design and packaging, and point-of-sale displays, among others. (12)

Digital Marketing and the Regulatory Gaps that Enable Exposure

Despite growing evidence of the harms of unhealthy food and beverage marketing, regulation has not kept pace with the evolving digital media space in the three countries studied and beyond, leaving policies and enforcement limited or inconsistent. (25, 26) Stronger monitoring and regulation of this marketing is key to reducing the disease burden associated with unhealthy products. (27) Without mandatory regulations, young audiences will continue to be exposed online to marketing that undermines both health and the integrity of sports.

The United States, Brazil and Mexico—being the three most populous countries in the Americas—are key contexts for this study due to their high levels of internet and social media use and the significant presence of transnational food and beverage corporations.

National Approaches to Regulating Unhealthy Food and Beverage Marketing

 <p>United States</p>	<p>No federal laws comprehensively regulate digital marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to the public, including children or adolescents. (28)</p>
 <p>Mexico</p>	<p>Mexico has regulations on unhealthy food and beverage marketing to children, yet significant gaps exist, particularly in the digital environment. (29)</p> <p>Products with front-of-package warning labels (regulated through Norma Oficial Mexicana 051) (30) cannot be advertised on television during hours when children are likely to be watching, and in cinemas for movies classified for children and families (Guidelines disclosing the nutrition and advertising criteria for food and non-alcoholic beverages) (31) under the Regulations of the General Health Law on Advertising. (32) In addition, advertising for products with warning labels cannot feature athletes, characters or animations, along with other elements designated as appealing to children. However, content not officially classified as children's programming—including sports broadcasts—remains exempt from these restrictions. Streaming platforms are also not explicitly covered under current marketing regulations.</p> <p>Digital media is only partially regulated: products displaying front-of-package warning labels require a permit from the government's regulatory agency COFEPRIS before being advertised. However, the criteria for what constitutes permissible digital advertising, the approval and monitoring processes, and the age thresholds for audience protection are not clearly defined. This regulatory gap creates a loophole that permits the promotion of sweetened beverages and other unhealthy products on platforms such as YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), Meta, TikTok, Twitch, or any other platform.</p> <p>Brand advertising (such as the use of logos) and corporate social responsibility campaigns also represent a gap in both television and digital marketing regulations, meaning a company can promote its logos and brands without clearly showing the product that requires front-of-package labels.</p>
 <p>Brazil</p>	<p>Brazil's Consumer Protection Code prohibits misleading and abusive advertising, defining "abusive" to include advertisements for products harmful to health or the environment and those directed at children. The National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (Conanda) defines what marketing techniques are considered "abusive" for children and adolescents (Resolution 163/2014) (33) and establishes their rights in the digital environment (Resolution 245/2024). (34)</p> <p>However, lack of enforcement and procedural barriers make it difficult for consumers and organizations to file complaints, limiting the effectiveness of these protections. (35)</p>

Section A. Scale and Reach of Exposure

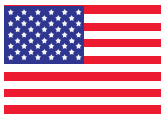
How often, where and under what conditions Coca-Cola branding appeared

1. Coca-Cola Achieved High Global Exposure Concentrated in the U.S. and Brazil

3.63 billion

795 posts featured Coca-Cola branding generated an estimated 3.63 billion potential impressions across platforms.

Observed activity from posts



U.S. (49%)



Brazil (45%)



Mexico (6%)

During the two-month monitoring period, 795 posts that featured Coca-Cola branding generated an estimated 3.63 billion potential impressions across platforms (Table 1). Most observed posts came from accounts based in the United States (49% of posts) and Brazil (45%), while accounts generating content in Mexico accounted for a substantially smaller share of observed activity (6%) (Table 2).

Several factors may help explain the lower observed exposure in Mexico, including the early elimination of

both Mexican teams before the quarterfinals, indicating probable lower public interest and audience engagement in Mexico overall. Differences in advertising intensity may provide an explanation for observed exposure patterns. In 2025, per capita advertising investment (online and offline) in the United States reached approximately \$1,327 (U.S. dollars), compared with \$86.35 in Brazil and \$83.48 in Mexico. (38) Internet penetration was broadly comparable across countries, with 83.3% in Mexico and 86.2% in Brazil, compared with 93.1% in the United States. (38) This suggests that differences in digital access alone are unlikely to account for Mexico's markedly lower observable activity.

In addition, the policy context in Mexico may provide a plausible explanation. Since 2023 in Mexico, companies are required by law to obtain government permits to advertise products with front-of-package warning labels on all media, including digital platforms and social media, although compliance with these requirements has been reported as limited. Additional restrictions limit the use of celebrities, athletes and other promotional elements appealing to younger audiences for products with front-of-package labels. These constraints are particularly relevant for sports-linked marketing and sponsorship activity, although additional regulation for advertising activity led by content creators or influencers remains a gap. Given this regulatory environment, it is possible that marketing in Mexico has already gone underground. According to local experts, a future broader review of digital and social media activity would help identify the more covert and indirect promotion via content creators, celebrities, third-party

Table 1. Social media metric terms

★ Engagement	Total user interaction (Likes + Comments + Shares + Views)
📊 Impressions	The potential reach of a post, or the number of times content may have appeared on users' screens. This metric estimates exposure rather than confirmed viewing or engagement. Impressions are automatically calculated by Synthesio.AI based on the number of account followers/subscribers, assuming all followers have seen each post. Impressions should be interpreted as an estimate of potential exposure, not confirmed viewing, recall or behavioral impact.

Note: A single individual may generate multiple impressions, views or engagements.

Table 2: Overview of posts, engagement and reach by country and total

	Brazil	Mexico	USA	Total
Posts (Volume)	360	45	390	795
Engagement	1,191,614	1,373,689	957,958	3,523,261
Potential impressions	2,968,932,922	118,630,167	538,773,340	3,626,336,429

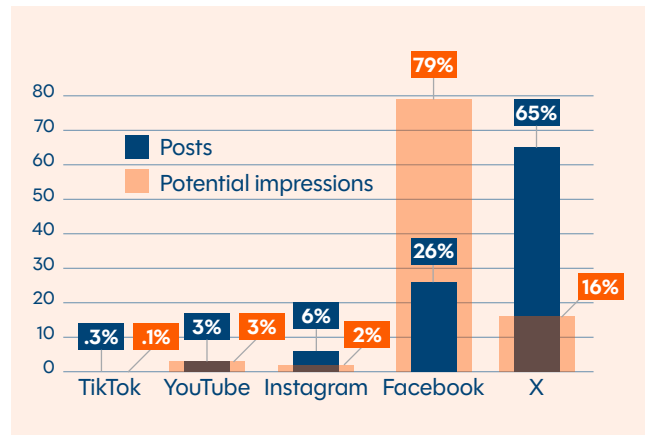
accounts, offline activations, retailer-led promotions or mobile-enabled marketing formats not captured by this monitoring. The findings should therefore be interpreted as differences in observable digital exposure rather than definitive evidence of reduced marketing effort. Future analyses could triangulate social media monitoring with paid media libraries, ad spend estimates, retail promotion tracking and platform-level advertising transparency data to assess whether reductions in observable activity reflect net decreases or channel substitution.

Platform patterns observed during the tournament suggest differences in how Coca-Cola branded content appeared across channels, with higher volumes on X and more visually oriented content on Instagram and YouTube (Figure 1). Because Canary relies primarily on text-based searches, marketing on visual-first platforms may be underreported, particularly where posts consist mainly of images or videos with limited or no accompanying text.

- **X (Twitter) hosted 65% of posts** but generated only 16% of total impressions, driven largely by real-time match commentary, tournament narratives and high-volume conversation.
- **Facebook hosted fewer posts (26%)** yet delivered 79% of total impressions, making it the channel that provided large-scale, repeated exposure—especially in Brazil.
- **Instagram (6%) and YouTube (3%) hosted smaller volumes** of content and contributed few impressions, relying on highly visual formats centered on athleticism, behind-the-scenes moments and influencer-led promotion.
- **TikTok accounted for only 0.3% of content** and a very small share of impressions, but featured immersive, fan-centered posts.

Together, these activities resulted in recurring, multi-channel brand visibility during the tournament. Monitoring these patterns helps illustrate how digital ecosystems can amplify marketing visibility. Because branded content can circulate across multiple platforms, the findings suggest that **regulatory approaches need to consider digital environments in a coordinated way to be effective.**

Figure 1. Posts and impressions by platform



Note. The analysis includes **795 posts**, with a **total potential impressions of approximately 3.63 billion.**



2026 Watchpoint: Influencers and Platform Amplification

In January 2026, FIFA announced a formal partnership with TikTok ahead of the 2026 World Cup, signaling a deeper integration of creator-led content into the tournament's digital ecosystem. (39) As influencer-driven coverage becomes central to how fans experience major sporting events, sponsorship embedded in match footage, fan activations and behind-the-scenes content may circulate through creator networks in ways that are less visible than traditional advertising and more accessible than ever before. Although TikTok represented a small share of captured posts in this 2025 analysis, its expanded role in the upcoming 2026 tournament suggests that influencer-led amplification may become a more significant pathway for brand exposure. Continuous monitoring will be especially important in these environments, where marketing can be integrated into entertainment and creator content rather than appearing as conventional advertisements.

2. Coca-Cola Maintained Sustained Presence Throughout the Tournament

Coca-Cola branding and Powerade product promotions appeared frequently throughout the tournament across multiple contexts, including pre- and post-match interviews, press conferences, hydration tables, stadium boards and broadcast backgrounds. As shown in Figure 2, captured posts featured Coca-Cola branding on a near-daily basis across the monitoring period, with few extended gaps in visibility once the tournament began. This pattern indicates that branding was commonly visible within the broader football viewing environment rather than limited to standalone advertisements. In some countries, embedded branding was enhanced around specific matches or tournament moments.

- **In Brazil**, Coca-Cola branding was consistently present throughout the tournament, with notable peaks on June 28 (Palmeiras vs. Botafogo) and July 5 (following quarterfinal matches by both Fluminense and Palmeiras on July 4), driven largely by fan discussion around these games (Figure 3).
- **Mexico** showed a distinct pattern. Coca-Cola-related posts remained low and flat across the observation period, with only small increases during global highlight moments also visible in Brazil (Figure 3). Mexico's flat pattern in the dataset is consistent with a market in which regulations constrain overall media visibility and the type of content being marketed (Figure 3).
- **The U.S.** showed steady volume of Coca-Cola branding throughout the tournament, with two peaks coinciding with the tournament kickoff and the second stage playoffs (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Dominance of Brand Marketing vs. Product Placement Throughout the Tournament (June 1 - July 30, 2025)

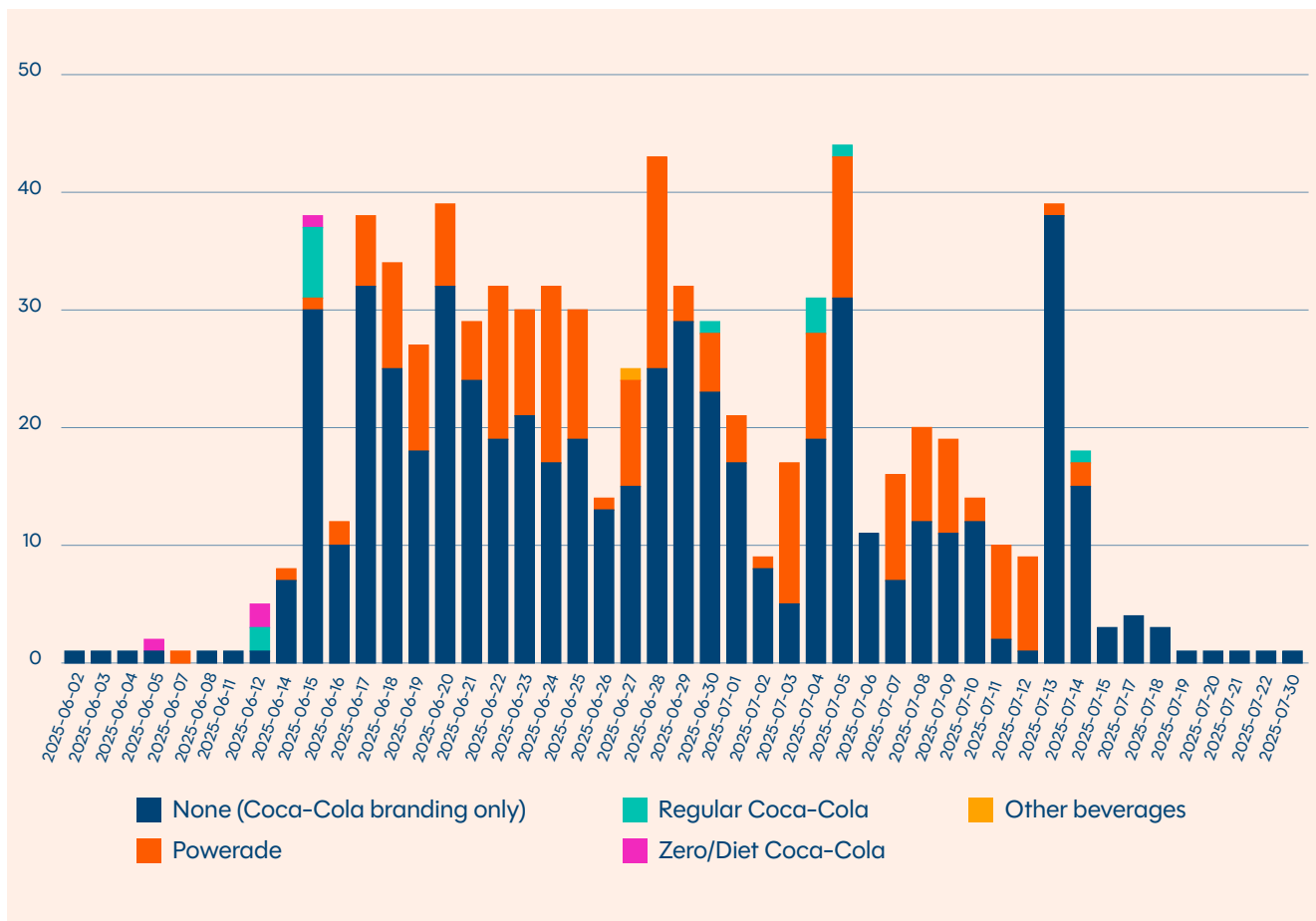
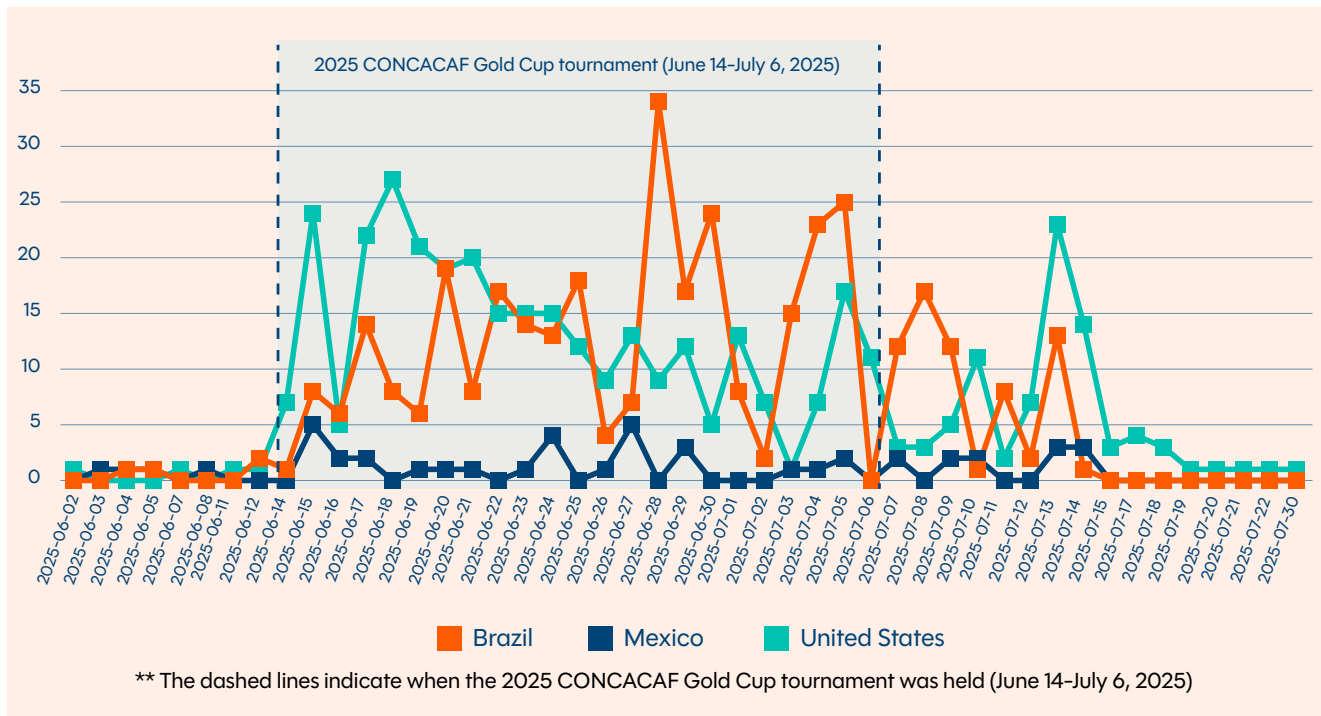


Figure 3. Trend of Marketing Activity by Country



3. Coca-Cola's Visibility was Amplified Through Media, Broadcast and Influencer Accounts

In the observed sample, most posts in Brazil (79%), the United States (60%) and Mexico (58%) were posted by sports streaming partners (DAZN Football) and sports/entertainment broadcast accounts (ESPN Deportes, SporTV, TNT Sports, TNT Sports Brasil, etc.). For the 2025 Club World Cup, DAZN, a global sports streaming platform, secured the international broadcast rights and streamed it for free. Through match highlights, replay clips and commentary reels, Coca-Cola branding was circulated widely on digital feeds (Figure 4).



Caption: A collage image of players who scored goals in a FIFA Club World Cup match with the Coca-Cola logo captured in the background. This was posted by DAZN, the streaming network with rights to internationally broadcast tournament matches. Source: daznfootball via Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DLkC6RRtva3/>



Caption: Thiago Silva celebrating after his team (Fluminense) defeated Al Hilal 2-1 to advance to the semifinals of the tournament, with Coca-Cola's logo featured in the background of his celebration. This was posted by ESPN Brasil via Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/1088011462684717/posts/1339874537498407>



Caption: Manchester City Coach Pep Guardiola does a post-game interview with the Coca-Cola logo displayed behind him and a bottle of Powerade in front of him. This was posted by Planeta do Futebol, a Brazilian football-focused entertainment social media outlet. Source: Planeta do Futebol via X, https://x.com/futebol_info/status/1936784578783429033#193500696

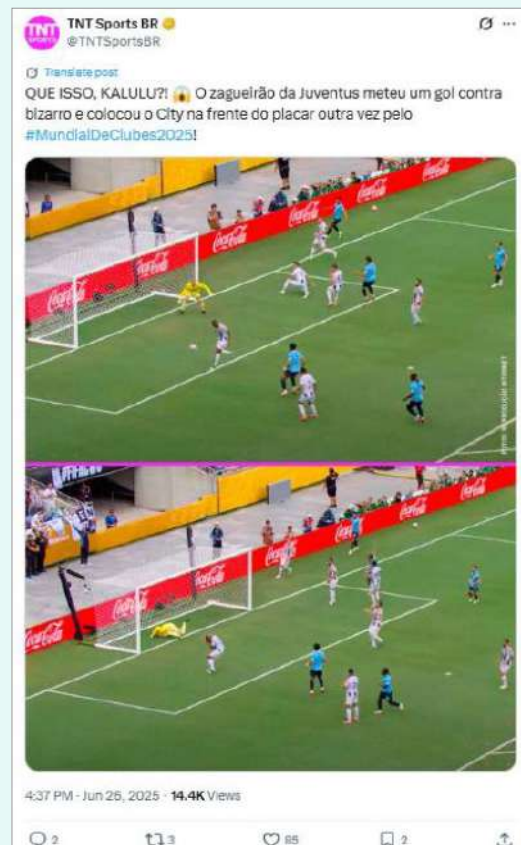
While advertising that appears in stadiums, on broadcasts or through streaming once only reached viewers in real time, digital media fundamentally changes this. Match highlights and replay clips featuring Coca-Cola logos and Powerade bottles can continue to circulate online long after games end, repeatedly exposing new audiences to the brand through what is largely unregulated, amplified advertising. When these clips are shared or reposted, the branding remains visible to people who did not watch the match live. These online spaces have fewer regulations than traditional advertising, and limited protections for young people.

Cross-border digital streaming presents additional challenges for existing marketing regulations. When matches are streamed on global platforms such as DAZN rather than domestic channels, the regulatory frameworks that apply to traditional broadcasting may not operate in the same way. These dynamics suggest a need to review how government marketing standards function in global digital spaces, especially where children and adolescents form part of the audience.

Incidental Marketing* is No Accident

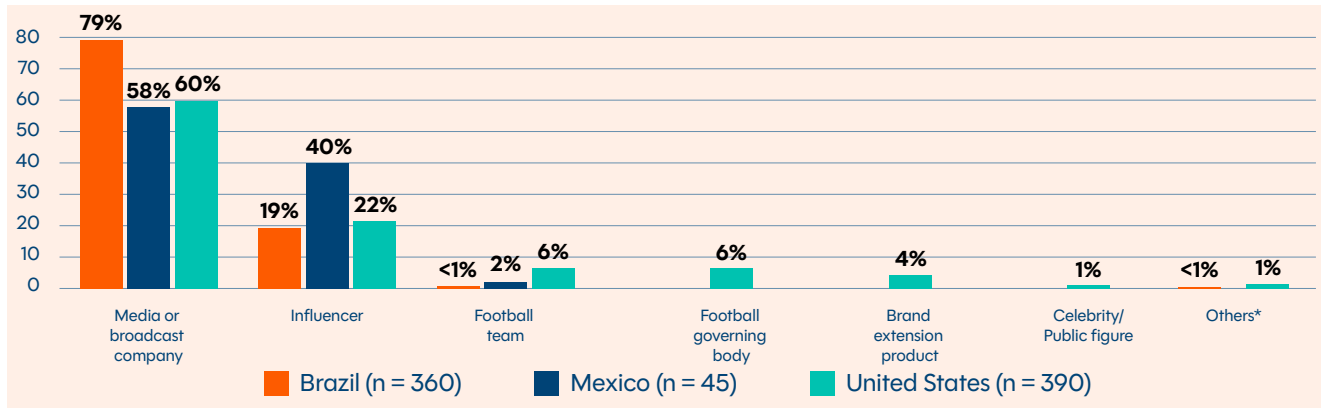
Coca-Cola's logos shown during broadcasts, streaming, post-game interviews and in-stadium displays are not coincidences—they are strategically and deliberately placed to be amplified on digital media. This deliberate “digital first” advertising approach underscores the blurring of lines between traditional and digital media. Every in-person logo placement is designed to be amplified online, reaching millions beyond stadiums. Without regulating this incidental brand marketing, brands can continue embedding themselves in football while avoiding safeguards meant to protect young audiences. This makes the case for comprehensive restrictions across all platforms and all types of marketing.

*Incidental marketing—Subtle brand exposure within other content that relies on consumers processing the brand while focus is elsewhere, unconsciously creating positive associations.



The broadcaster TNT Sports BR shared match highlights from the FIFA Club World Cup 2025 showing a Juventus own goal that put Manchester City ahead. The images clearly display Coca-Cola branding on digital perimeter boards behind the goal, embedding sponsor visibility within a high-engagement match moment. Source: TNT Sports Brasil via X, <https://twitter.com/TNTSportsBR/status/1938320659584631006#15911679>

Figure 4. Account Types by Country Behind Posts Captured During the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup



Note. Brand-extension products are a separate product line that use the established brand name or trademark of a company. For example, Powerade is categorized in this report as a brand extension of Coca-Cola. The category “others” includes brand-affiliated community groups, athletes, diversified companies and retailers.

Influencer Amplification

While broadcast media accounts generated most of the coverage on social media, influencers also played a significant role. Influencers promoted Coca-Cola by wearing branded merchandise at games or related events and recreating match moments, while tagging or referring to Coca-Cola in their posts. Two of the most popular influencers’ posts together generated more than 45,000 engagements.

These findings indicate that regulations must cover:

1. Direct broadcast and online streaming content
2. Digital amplification of broadcast content (largely unregulated)
3. Influencer partnerships and sponsored content (entirely unregulated)



Argentine actor, comedian, presenter and internet personality Grego Rossello was among the influencers who supported Coca-Cola’s advertising strategy during the Club World Cup. He presented the toss coin to the referee during one of the matches, wearing company apparel. Source: gregorossello via Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/p/YWwr5x-B1/p/DLYWwr5x-B1/>



@meganlinkeofficial who describes herself as a “Soccer Mom Influencer” showcased a vintage Palmeiras Jersey with the Coca-Cola logo. In this post, the influencer is supporting Palmeiras in the match against Botafogo (both Brazilian teams). Source: meganlinkeofficial via Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DLaRyIWgDln/>

Section B. Strategic Placement and Integration

How branding is integrated into sports media and sustained through regulatory gaps

4. Strategic Brand Placement Drove Constant Exposure Tied to Match Moments

Across all posts:

- 71% of all captured posts featured Coca-Cola branding embedded in match highlights, goal celebrations, hydration breaks and post-match interviews—moments of peak viewer engagement that maximized brand visibility (Figure 5).
- 26% of posts featured Powerade product placements during media interviews, as well as activation events including those aimed at young athletes, strategically aligning Coca-Cola Company's sugar-laden sports beverage brand alongside themes of athleticism and performance (Figure 5).
- Less than 3% of captured posts displayed Coca-Cola product variants (including regular and diet products) (Figure 5).



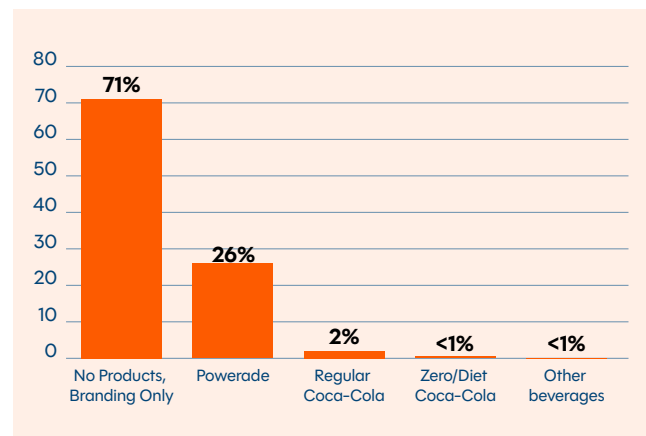
Caption: Coach of the Fluminense team Renato Gaúcho provides a post-match interview featuring Coca-Cola's logo in the background and a Powerade prominently displayed in front of him. Source: Fútbol de Primera via X, <https://x.com/fdpradio/status/1942295598956220738#57726541>:

The majority of the advertisements captured in this study are in-stadium Coca-Cola logos rather than products. In Mexico, this is not restricted under the marketing regulation for TV or digital media; only products featuring warning labels are restricted from using child-appealing techniques on the front of the package—meaning Coca-Cola remains ever present in football coverage in the Mexico context. In addition, the marketing regulations restrict the use of athletes to market products with front-of-package labels, yet the use of a brand logo alongside athletes is not restricted. Although fewer posts featuring logos were captured in Mexico than in the U.S. or Brazil, these types of loopholes—the use of logos and branding alongside athletes—allow companies to strategically maintain presence in the spaces of youth and children.

In addition, during football matches, digital overlay technology is used to swap advertising on virtual perimeter boards by region. Streamers and broadcasters, such as DAZN, receive market-specific ad feeds, and the boards viewers see are digitally replaced in real time. (40) The practice is known as virtual advertising, digital overlay or virtual replacement perimeter technology. This allows companies like Coca-Cola to deliver market-specific content to viewers that is not replicated in all geographies.

Effective regulation must restrict all forms of brand presence, which includes logos—not just product placement.

Figure 5. Posts Containing Products and/or Logos (% of Total)



Note. Base (N) = 795

Brand Families and Surrogate Marketing: Why Product-Level Restrictions May Be Insufficient

Many global beverage companies operate through brand families spanning multiple product types—sodas, sports drinks, energy drinks, ultra-processed protein drinks and adjacent categories. Marketing that appears to promote a single product often reinforces the broader brand identity across the entire portfolio.

Powerade illustrates this dynamic. Marketed as a sports performance drink and positioned alongside elite athletic achievement, Powerade products commonly contain added sugars or nonsugar sweeteners and sit within the same Coca-Cola corporate portfolio as its other sweetened beverages. Promotion of the Powerade brand—through logo placement, athlete integration or fan activations—strengthens overall brand recognition that extends well beyond any single formulation.

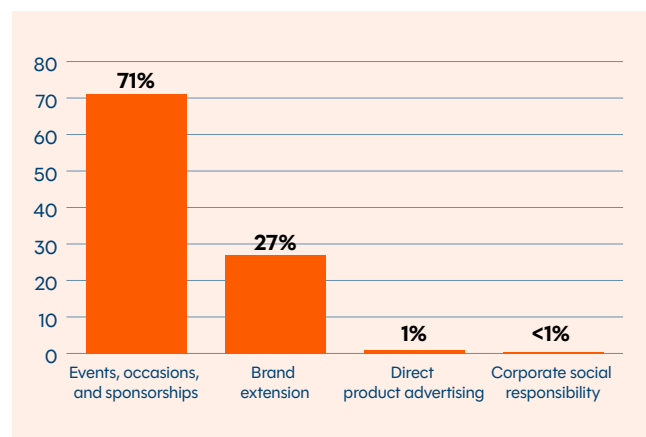
This pattern is not unique to sports drinks. Beverage companies routinely use brand extensions and umbrella branding to maintain visibility even where specific product advertising is restricted. In some cases, companies promote a product variant or affiliated brand that falls outside narrow regulatory definitions while still reinforcing the parent brand's identity—a strategy known as surrogate marketing, documented across industries selling health-harming products.

Understanding brand-family dynamics is important for regulatory design. Restrictions that apply only to individual products may leave broader brand-level promotion untouched. Where brand identity is shared across ultra-processed products, including those containing sugars or nonsugar sweeteners, marketing of one product can reinforce consumption of others within the same portfolio. Regulatory approaches may permit the promotion of healthier product options within a company's portfolio; however, it is important to ensure that such marketing does not function as a surrogate for ultra-processed or regulated products within the same brand family, allowing brand spillover to reinforce consumption of less healthy offerings.

5. Exciting Tournament Moments Used to Promote Brand

The majority (71%) of posts linked Coca-Cola branding to emotionally charged tournament moments—creating connections between the brand and sports excitement (Figure 6). The remainder (27%) featured Powerade, Coca-Cola's sports beverage brand that is high in sugar, rather than namesake Coca-Cola brand or products (e.g., Coca-Cola, Diet Coke), strategically repositioning the company around athletic performance. Together, these tactics normalize the presence of sweetened beverages, both through Coca-Cola and Powerade, as integral to the sport experience and athletic performance. Banning sponsorship at the FIFA and government levels is critical to removing Coca-Cola branding and products from key tournament moments.

Figure 6. Posts by Marketing Tactic



Note. Base (N) = 795

Marketing tactic: The approach or strategy used to promote products and achieve marketing objectives, such as driving sales or building brand loyalty.

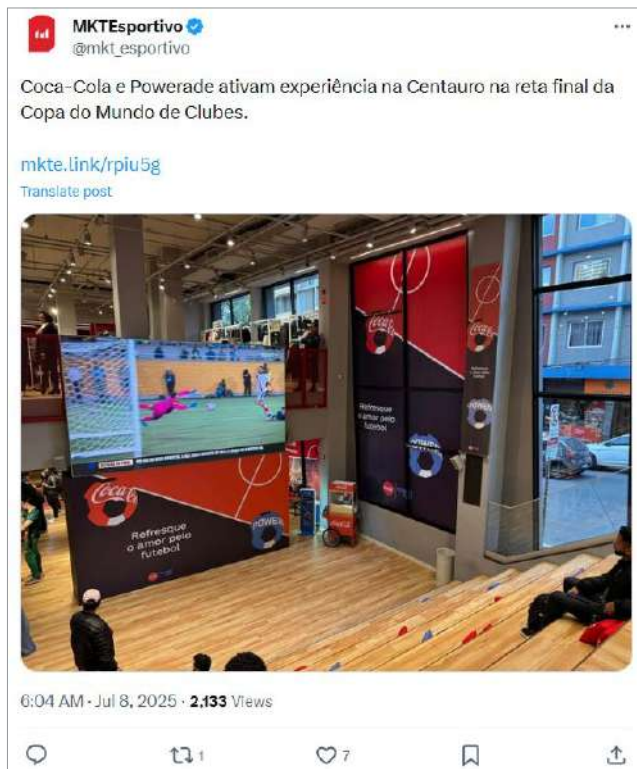
6. Coca-Cola's Influence Extended Through Immersive Fan Experiences

Coca-Cola created immersive, branded physical environments: lounges, fan zones and other activation spaces. These experiential activations serve to:

1. Create memorable in-person brand interactions.
2. Generate shareable digital content that extends beyond the stadium.

By combining brand exposure and experience, Coca-Cola shifts from being merely a beverage brand to a full sensory experience, deepening consumers' emotional attachment, enhancing brand recall and generating continuous streams of digital content that sustain visibility long after the match ends.

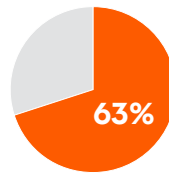
Sports sponsorships now function as integrated systems where physical presence guarantees digital amplification. Therefore, regulations must extend across physical and digital environments, since the line between them is blurred.



Coca-Cola and Powerade take over Centauro, a sports retailer in Brazil, with a full Club World Cup fan zone blending retail, sports marketing and brand immersion. Source: MKT Esportivo via X, https://x.com/mkt_esportivo/status/1942358970204893489#33320098

Section C. Narrative Strategies and Emotional Appeals

7. Coca-Cola Branding is Embedded in Football Emotion and Tournament Culture



Nearly two-thirds (63%) of captured posts used emotional framing to tap into fans' team pride, dramatic match moments, cinematic football imagery and the cultural significance of football.

These posts showed supporters and players celebrating wins or lamenting defeats, often with Coca-Cola's branding prominently visible in the background, turning moments of football emotion into brand promotion.

Nearly one-third (30%) of posts were informational, focused on tournament updates and national competition and match highlights—high-engagement content where branding placement is particularly impactful (Figure 7).

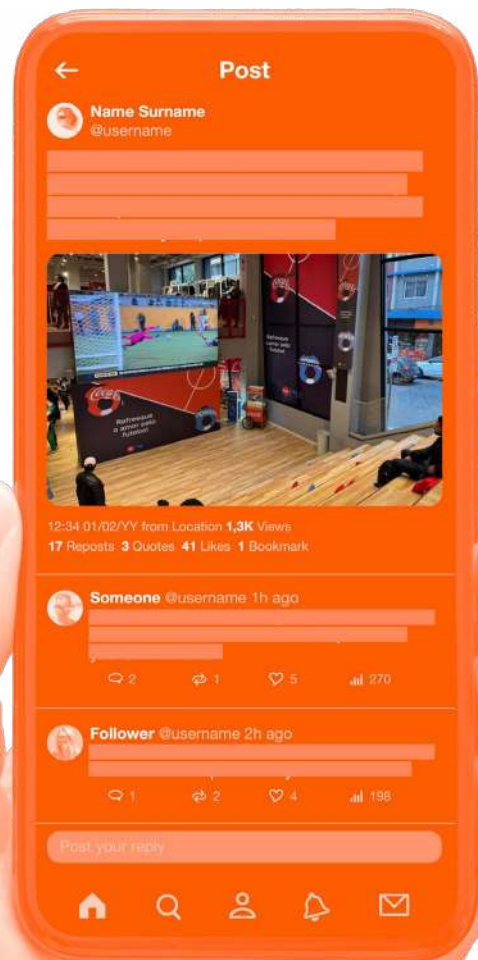
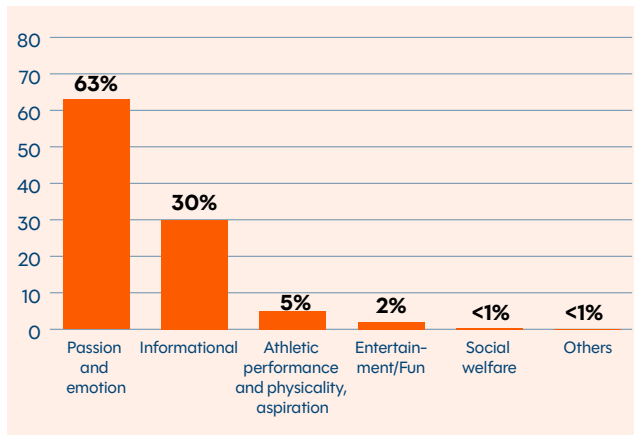


Figure 7. Posts by Message Framing



Note. Base (N) = 795

Message framing: Underlying theme around which content is built.

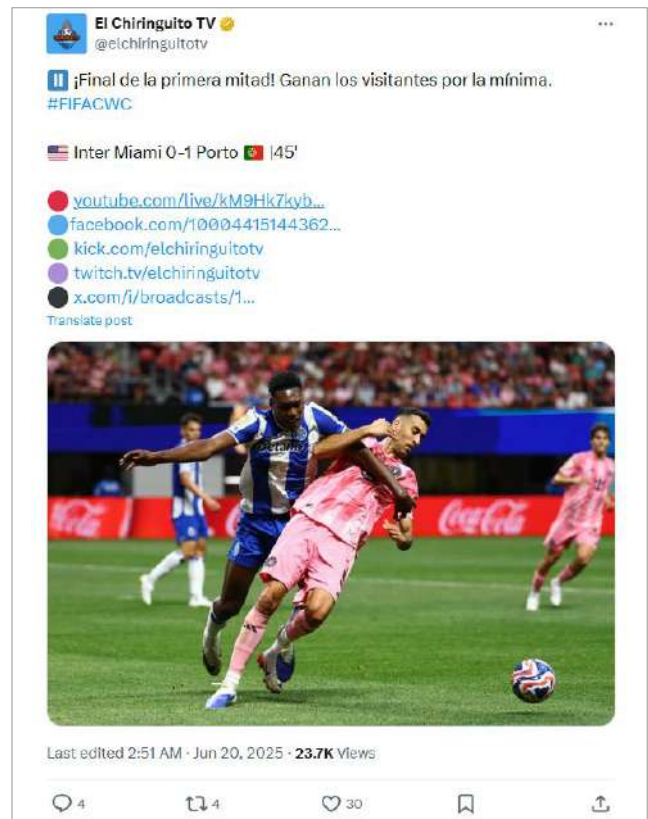
This strategic use of emotional, football-centered imagery embeds Coca-Cola within the fabric of the game. By reinforcing the psychological bond between the brand and the values of football—victory, resilience, unity—Coca-Cola products appear as a natural and inevitable part of sporting culture. **Sponsorship bans are therefore key to disassociating sports and athletic ability from unhealthy products.**

Passion and Emotion Message Framing



In-stadium Coca-Cola signage is featured amid Wydad fans' red smoke bombs, which were set off in celebration of the team's first goal in this match. This scene captures the excitement and passion of football and its fans, with Coca-Cola's logo front and center. Source: Wydad Athletic Club via Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/1278030560553355/posts/1285825293107215>

Athleticism Message Framing



Athletes challenge each other in an intense moment on the field, highlighting their strength and athleticism, while Coca-Cola's logo is prominently displayed in the background. Source: El Chiringuito TV via X, <https://x.com/elchiringuitotv/status/1935787543787876686#18905975>

8. Athlete Iconography Alongside Coca-Cola Branding Manufactures Trust and a "Health Halo"

Coca-Cola branding was frequently featured alongside internationally recognized athletes and coaches, making the brand visible during moments of elite athletic performance and competition. Logos appeared in interview areas and other official tournament settings alongside players and team staff.

The presence of Coca-Cola's branding in strategic stadium locations, often captured in the background of videos and images of internationally recognized athletes and high-performing icons, can build misleading associations between its sweetened beverages and peak athletic performance and success. This association has been shown to create a "health halo" where consumers perceive a product as healthier than it actually is based on the context in which they are exposed to it. (41) This juxtaposition is misleading and exploits the public's positive associations with athletic achievement to obscure the documented harms of sweetened beverage consumption. This is an example of an established marketing tactic that manipulates consumer perception.



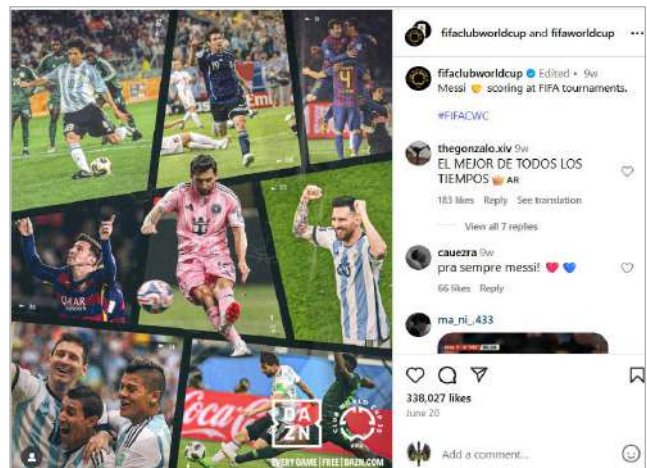
Chelsea star Cole Palmer, who was instrumental in the team winning the tournament, is shown with a Coca-Cola logo in the background. Source: Copa Mundial FIFA via X, https://x.com/fifaworldcup_es/status/1944482359081869665#142296675



Caption: This interactive carousel post includes Rodrigo from Real Madrid doing football drills around Powerade bottles, showing his athleticism and aligning it with Powerade. Source: Powerade via Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DLDE400xU2A/>



Multiple high-engagement posts featured Inter Miami's Lionel Messi—one of the most popular footballers in the world—in front of Coca-Cola signage. Messi is sponsored by rival Big Soda company PepsiCo. Source: H via X, <https://x.com/HQpct/status/1939382554727211307#1550895476538765313>



This post featuring Lionel Messi in action garnered strong engagement (224,588 likes and comments). Note the Coca-Cola banner in the background. Source: fifaclubfootball and fifaworldcup via Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DLGkxp1RNTt/>

Beyond borrowing the fame of elite players, posts highlighted relatable, everyday figures—"working athletes"—helping ground corporations as enabling ambition and excellence while staying rooted in everyday life.

Some posts featured athletes who also hold everyday jobs outside football, highlighting personal stories that connect sport with daily life. For example, coverage of Auckland City captain Mario Ilich noted his dual role as both a footballer and a Coca-Cola sales representative, reflecting the broader reality that many players balance sport with other employment. Such personal narratives place brand visibility alongside themes of work, perseverance and community life, which serve to obscure the health risks of these products behind feel-good messaging.

Global sport governing bodies, such as FIFA, should prohibit unhealthy beverage companies from sponso-

ring athletes, teams and sporting events—preventing these companies from leveraging athletic achievement to obscure health risks and other harms. This ban should be adopted and replicated at a national level to apply to national and local teams and leagues.



This post spotlights Mario Ilich, Auckland City's captain and a Coca-Cola sales representative, who is depicted both stocking products in-store and facing world-class players on the field. Source: Bolavip via X, <http://twitter.com/bolavipcom/status/1934292702134153446#510694346>

9. Corporate Social Responsibility to Legitimize the Company and its Brands

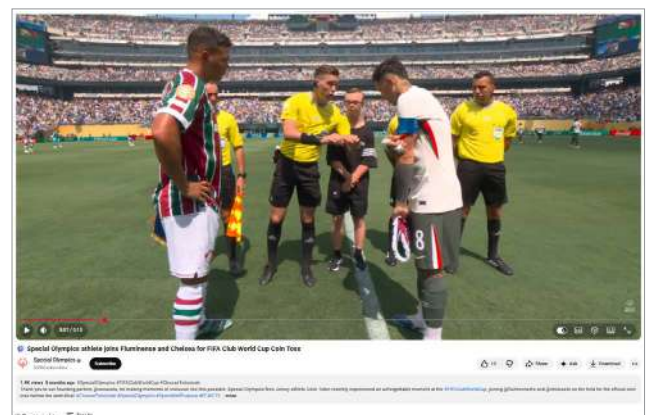
During the Club World Cup, Coca-Cola and its affiliates were featured as part of community-centered initiatives to reinforce their image as socially responsible companies. This is a tactic used to deflect scrutiny while reinforcing emotional goodwill among football fans. These activities focused on:

- Community outreach
- Youth empowerment
- Partnerships with social organizations (e.g., Special Olympics)
- Localized charitable activities

Examples included children serving as honorary coin tossers or community members featured in team activations. These initiatives allowed Coca-Cola to be perceived as a community partner invested in youth development and social causes. When brand visibility appears alongside socially positive activities, it can contribute to favorable associations among audiences and insulate the brand from criticism. Corporate social responsibility initiatives function as marketing tools that generate positive associations while doing nothing to address the harms of the company's products. Companies cultivating this image as a social good can make regulatory action more politically difficult since policymakers and communities may be more reluctant to restrict companies viewed as socially respectable.



In this post by Florida's independent Coca-Cola bottler, an 11-year-old patient at Nicklaus Children's Hospital tosses the coin at the start of a match in Miami, courtesy of Coca-Cola Florida. Source: Coke Florida via X, <https://x.com/CokeFlorida/status/1939815289363062812#3319673717>



This video posted by the Special Olympics YouTube account features Special Olympics athlete Colin Tobin taking part in the coin toss during the Fluminense and Chelsea game. The account has 1.82 million subscribers. The caption thanks Coca-Cola, a founding partner of the Special Olympics, for "making moments of inclusion like this possible." Source: Special Olympics via YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlqly-M31lo>

Section D. Youth Exposure

10. Coca-Cola was Presented in a Way that Attracts and Appeals to Children and Adolescents

Coca-Cola's brand was presented in a way that appeals to children and adolescents, including through memes, featuring children as part of its corporate social responsibility initiatives and highlighting its youth sports programs. In addition, youth are exposed to stadium signage and other branding that is widely disseminated online, as youth are typically avid football supporters and social media users.

By placing its brands within formative football memories, Coca-Cola's sweetened beverages are normalized in sports environments to which children are exposed, cultivating loyalty among young people who are not

yet aware of products' long-term health risks. As a result, restrictions that focus on child-targeted marketing miss a critical channel: sports marketing. Mexico's television marketing regulation, for example, does not restrict advertising of products with front-of-package labels during sports broadcasts as sports is considered content directed to adults since it has a higher proportion of adult audiences—despite children being highly engaged in global football whether during broadcasts or online. Children should be protected from the marketing of products that harm their health. Marketing restrictions must prohibit the marketing of brands associated with harmful products, including sweetened beverages, in all spaces where children and adolescents are exposed.

Powerade was highly visible during matches. It was presented as a hydration and performance product, linked to youth sports and athletic ambition. The brand appeared in sponsored "hydration breaks," player endorsements and repeated stadium and broadcast signage, placing the product within routine moments of play and recovery.

Beyond match footage, Powerade used meme-style content to circulate in football fan culture. The "Knockout Round Starter Pack" format copies familiar social media templates and positions the bottle as part of a shared football identity, appealing to younger audiences. Through humor and insider references, the product shifts from a drink to a cultural symbol embedded in online fan expression.



Source: Powerade via Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DLaW4bmxCTZ/>

The strategy also extended to youth development narratives. In one video, young football players from the Powerade Academy Ball Crew reflected on their experience at the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup, describing lessons in hard work and dedication. The content positioned Powerade as part of youth training and character development, reinforcing its association with grassroots football and aspiring athletes.



Source: Powerade and Powerade_us via Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DMN9bzFyDmK/>

A Call to Action!

The findings of this report point to a structural pattern rooted in an established industry playbook. While similar strategies have long been used to associate harmful products with sport and culture, including by the tobacco sector, this analysis shows how that playbook is now executed through newer marketing tactics by Big Soda. In the context of the FIFA Club World Cup, immersive fan experiences, post-match replays and other integrated forms of branding extend the reach and durability of traditional sponsorship marketing, operating largely beyond the scope of many existing regulatory frameworks. These dynamics underscore the need for policy responses that address how contemporary sports marketing operates in practice.

1. Implement and/or bolster comprehensive national marketing regulations across all environments.

Governments must urgently create and enforce marketing regulations that comprehensively address both physical and digital environments, closing loopholes that allow continued exposure of unhealthy product marketing, including sweetened beverages, to children and adolescents.

While Mexico has made significant progress with marketing regulations for products with front-of-package warning labels, critical gaps remain. Mexico's marketing policy must be expanded to cover sports, which draw in a large youth audience, streaming, which is an increasingly common way to view sports and other programs, and logos, which still create associations between brands and athletes. In addition, regulations for the digital environment must be made clearer and cover additional forms of branding beyond products with warning labels. In particular, a deeper review of influencer practices is highly warranted.

This also raises concern for marketing exposure in a globalized world. Marketing in one country frequently spills over borders through social media sharing and cross-platform amplification. Effective protection requires cross-border cooperation to ensure national marketing restrictions are upheld, platform-level accountability to

ensure social media companies regulate digital exposure in accordance with the national environment, and a global framework for coordination.

Legislation must:

- a. Expand definitions of child-targeted marketing to instead account for all marketing to which children are exposed, not just content explicitly targeted at them (e.g., including sports broadcasts).
- b. Extend existing food and beverage marketing restrictions to digital environments, including social media, streaming platforms, influencer marketing, corporate social responsibility campaigns and brand advertising. Regulations should also explicitly cover brand-only and logo-based promotions and establish accountability mechanisms for digital advertising.
- c. Apply marketing restrictions to transnational sports and digital media ecosystems by requiring sports governing bodies, broadcasters and digital platforms to comply with the policy wherever content is produced, distributed or viewed.
- d. Broaden marketing restrictions to regulate brand and influencer marketing, as well as corporate social responsibility campaigns, by unhealthy commodity industries.



2. Apply marketing restrictions to transnational and digital sports ecosystems.

Global sports governing bodies—including FIFA—must immediately prohibit sponsorships by companies that produce products harmful to health, including sweetened beverages. Just as FIFA banned tobacco sponsorships in 1986 due to health concerns, it must now extend these protections to other health-harming products. Other international, regional and national sports organizations must adopt similar bans for local leagues and teams.

Regulations must:

- a. Ban all forms of sponsorship by sweetened beverage and other unhealthy product industries, including title sponsorships, official partnerships and event-level sponsorships at FIFA tournaments and other international sporting events.
- b. Prohibit in-stadium advertising for sweetened beverages and other unhealthy products, including physical signage, digital perimeter boards, virtual replacement advertising and branded fan zones or experiential activations.
- c. Restrict all forms of brand presence—extending to any brand family that includes sweetened beverages, ultra-processed products and other unhealthy products—including products, logos, sponsored content, influencer partnerships, and incidental exposure embedded in broadcasts and digital content.
- d. Address the broadcast-to-digital pipeline by recognizing that in-stadium advertising and broadcast content are designed to be amplified online, creating repeated exposure far beyond the original audience.
- e. Apply across all platforms simultaneously, including television, streaming services, social media, mobile applications and emerging digital channels.
- f. Protect sports as high-youth-exposure contexts regardless of official content classification.

3. Expose "sportswashing" and build public demand for change.

Governments, public health organizations and civil society must strengthen monitoring, counter-marketing and public awareness campaigns to expose how companies like Coca-Cola use sports sponsorships and corporate social responsibility initiatives to obscure health risks and undermine protective policies.

To achieve this:

- a. Conduct and disseminate further research documenting the scale, strategies and impacts of unhealthy product marketing, including sweetened beverage marketing, in sports.
- b. Develop public education campaigns that help parents, educators and young people recognize "sportswashing."
- c. Expose corporate social responsibility as marketing by demonstrating how initiatives like youth programs, charitable partnerships and community outreach function primarily as tools to generate positive associations and make regulatory action politically difficult.
- d. Amplify the voices of health professionals and athletes who oppose unhealthy product sponsorships in sports, creating counter-narratives to corporate messaging.

Conclusion:

The Playbook is Exposed. Now, We Must Act.

Posts featuring Coca-Cola's branding during the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup illustrate how sports sponsorship now operates as a coordinated, multi-channel strategy that leverages international tournaments, emotional storytelling, broadcast amplification and youth-oriented narratives—tactics that mirror Big Tobacco's historic playbook but are magnified by the reach of digital marketing. Also, unlike tobacco, sweetened beverage marketing in sports remains largely unregulated.

Across the tournament, Coca-Cola's branding was integrated into emotionally charged match moments and broadcast coverage, extending visibility beyond traditional advertising formats. Digital recirculation of broadcast content amplified this exposure well beyond live matches. Digital media—especially posts resharing broadcast moments—enabled the massive online reach of Coca-Cola's brand and products (3.6 billion impressions across 795 posts in three countries). These patterns highlight the central role of brand-level and incidental marketing, the power of digital amplification and the potential exposure of children and adolescents within sports contexts often regulated as adult-oriented content.

Cross-country differences provide additional context for interpreting these patterns. Mexico operates within a comparatively stricter and longer-standing regulatory environment for the marketing of unhealthy commodities, including tobacco, alcohol and foods high in nutrients of concern. While this analysis is descriptive rather than causal, the lower levels of observed marketing activity in Mexico are consistent with prior evidence suggesting

that clearer and more established regulatory requirements may shape corporate behavior, including compliance with existing rules and, in some cases, anticipatory moderation in response to potential regulatory scrutiny. (42-44)

Taken together, these observations underscore how regulatory context may interact with platform dynamics and sponsorship strategies to influence marketing visibility. Drawing on experience from tobacco control, the findings suggest that comprehensive approaches to regulating sweetened beverage marketing in sports—covering sponsorships, in-venue branding, influencer partnerships, athlete endorsements and youth-oriented activities—warrant consideration. The analysis also highlights the importance of addressing both physical and digital environments simultaneously, given the increasingly blurred boundaries between broadcast, social media and sports-related content, and the resulting exposure of children and adolescents even where content is not explicitly targeted at them.

As corporations are expected to invest more in markets where certain sports tournaments and activities are more popular, further study is warranted regarding compliance with existing regulatory frameworks and the use of the full range of digital tools by sweetened beverage companies and other health-harming industries.

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Canary is a real-time media monitoring and reporting service that harnesses AI tools and expert analysis to identify trends in marketing of harmful products, such as tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy food and beverages, and informs regulatory action. For more information on our methodology, visit our website.

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