Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Financial Technology and Business Analysis
DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38746

Content Marketing and Fan Engagement at Major Sporting Events: A Multiple-Case Study of Adidas, Coca-Cola, and Samsung

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Abstract. Major sporting events provide brands opportunities to interact with fans, but audience attention might not necessarily create stronger relationships with brands. Most studies focus on describing the effects of individual cases and lack a multidimensional framework for comparing brands across different event types (such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games) and industries. This essay will examine Adidas's "Family Reunion" at the 2022 FIFA world cup, Coca-Cola's "believing is Magic" at the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, and Samsung's "Open Always Wins" at the Paris 2024 Olympics. A qualitative multiple-case study uses published campaign documents and academic literature to compare the brand's objective, content, intended engagement, brand-event connections, and reported outcomes. The analysis found three approaches. Adidas builds on football identity and togetherness, Coca-Cola focuses on connecting its brand with encouragement and inclusion, and Samsung shows product usefulness within sport experiences. This comparison suggests prioritizing players' stories and fan communities in football campaigns, and diversifying athlete-related experiences and practical services. These recommendations might remain provisional due to cases differing in brand category, event, and available evidence. Managers should connect a clear brand message with voluntary participation and evaluate awareness, brand attitudes, and commercial outcomes separately.

Keywords: Content marketing, fan engagement, sports event marketing, sponsorship, qualitative multiple-case study

1. Introduction

Content marketing offers a useful view of how campaign context reflects fans' interests while also communicating a clear brand message. Hollebeek and Macky explain how relevant and valuable digital content may support consumers' engagement, trust, and brand relationships [1]. Cao and Matsuoka identify that content, athlete characteristics, and sponsor characteristics are examined in social media engagement research [2]. These studies provide a foundation for analyzing how campaign stories and messages seek to attract attention, encourage emotional connection, and invite participation.

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At the same time sponsorship also helps explain the relationship between brands and sporting events. Gwinner and Eaton examine how event images can transfer to a sponsoring brand [3]. This research brings questions about whether campaign messages create a meaningful connection between a sporting event and a sponsor. A campaign may communicate a positive message, but marketers must also consider how the message can relate to the brand's identity.

Recent studies extend this discussion. Stegmann et al. examine digital engagement practices within sport brand communities, emphasizing social interaction of the surrounding network [4]. Rai et al. review sports social media research and identify a need for stronger theoretical integration [5]. These studies support examining content, sponsorship, and community relationships together. This essay will apply these perspectives to selected campaigns across different brand categories and sporting events, and comparing their strategies and the evidence about their outcomes.

This essay will examine marketing campaigns by Adidas, Coca-Cola, and Samsung. It explores how their content strategies seek to engage fans, how these brands align themselves with major sporting events, and what lessons can be drawn from their similarities and differences. This study also aims to offer practical insights for brands and event organizers by distinguishing between campaign intentions and demonstrated audience responses.

2. Literature review and analytical framework

Content marketing involves creating and sharing materials that are valuable for audiences. This value might come from useful information, entertainment, or meaningful stories. Hollebeek and Macky explain how valuable digital content may support engagement, trust, and brand relationships [1]. Their framework helps this essay to examine what the audience might gain from campaign content.

Sports communication research further emphasizes the strategic role of content design in fan interaction. Annamalai et al. examine how the type and vividness of sports clubs' Facebook posts are related to fan engagement [6]. Shabbirhusain et al. investigate content during global sport events and report higher engagement with player-oriented than team-oriented content in their database [7]. These studies guide questions about athlete appearance, storytelling, and content formats.

Fan engagement can be examined through cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions [1]. These concern attention and, though, feelings and actions of sharing and participating. However, engagement with an athlete or a campaign does not show a strong relationship with the sponsor. Steiner et al. find that the relationship between social media engagement and purchase intention is different across platforms and sporting situations [8]. At the same time, purchase intention needs to be separated from actual purchasing.

Sponsorship research helps examine how audiences can connect a brand with an event. Cornwell et al. examine the information-processing mechanisms and context factors involved during the sponsorship-linked marketing [9]. Audiences need to notice the sponsor and interpret the relationship with the event before this relationship can contribute to their understanding of the brand. Gwinner and Eaton demonstrate that image transfer could be stronger when the brand and event share an image or a functional connection [3]. These researches provide a basis for examining shared values and product usefulness in the selected cases.

Brand community theory will add a social perspective. Muñiz and O'Guinn describe brand communities by shared identity, rituals, traditions, and responsibility toward members [10]. These ideas help examine campaigns that show athletes and fans belonging to the same group. On the other hand, Algesheimer et al. show that community identification could encourage engagement while

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pressure gain could create resistance [11]. A campaign might invite belonging without necessarily creating a lasting community.

With regard to these perspectives, this essay will examine six areas in each case, which are marketing objectives, content strategies, intended fan engagement, brand-event connections, reported outcomes, and evidence limitations. Each case is examined separately before the comparison of similarities and differences is discussed.

3. Case analysis

This paper adopts a quantitative multiple-case study design, drawing on publicly published documents and archival evidence. Case study methodology is particularly well-suited for examining how real-world operational activities unfold within their natural contexts [12]. Each case consists of a named campaign and its related event activities. These cases were selected due to they concern major international sporting events, provide publicly accessible campaign information, and represent different brand categories and marketing approaches. The evidence includes company announcements, agency accounts, company event reports, and external consumer-research reports. Documents are compared using identical analytic questions, with attention to who produced the source and what evidence supports.

3.1. Adidas: "Family Reunion" 2022 FIFA World Cup

The "Family Reunion" campaign brought football personalities together within a light-hearted narrative. In terms of adidas' campaign objectives, it sought to celebrate the joy of football and strengthen emotional bonds with audiences [13]. One of adidas' marketing challenges was to align athletes' interests with those of the brand.

Jack Morton recorded related activities, including two title-sponsor activations in Doha and Dubai, 22 displays across four different countries, and an Equal Play billboard to support women's football [14]. These activities created additional settings for the audience so that they could encounter the campaign.

Brand community theory provides a useful explanation. The reunion story shows recognizable athletes as members of a shared group, which invites fans to identify with the football community [10]. The advertisement might feel less intrusive when viewers recognize familiar relationships and common enjoyment rather than only a sales message. However, the advertisement is an explanation, not a measured outcome. The sources do not demonstrate increased advertising resistance or the creation of a lasting brand community. Jack Morton found that 37% of the conversation was shared compared to other sponsor brands [14]. The agency's measurement clearly indicates this trend.

3.2. Coca-Cola: "Believing is Magic" 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup

Coca-Cola demonstrates "Believing is Magic" around optimism, shared enjoyment, and support for women's football. Its launch announcement shows advertising, player stories, and fan experiences [15]. These plans linked the brand with the social and emotional experience related to the tournament.

An activity transformed negative comments about women's football into positive messages shown on football pitches. AKQA explains air-printing technology produced the installations and a film appeared on Coca-Cola's social media before the final [16]. The activity gives the campaign a clear meaning of challenging criticism by highlighting their progress.

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From a content-marketing view point, this message could offer emotional value to audiences who support women's football [1]. The sponsorship connection depends heavily on shared meanings. Encouragement and celebration provide links between the tournament and Coca-Cola with an image-based interpretation of sponsorship [3]. However, audiences would still need to recognize Coca-Cola's contribution for making relationships with brands.

The reviewed sources recognize intentions, installations, and distribution but do not provide a comparable measure of changes in brand attitudes and purchasing. Therefore, the case could only illustrate how a sponsor can construct an event-related message but not establish that the message would improve consumers' attitudes and sales.

3.3. Samsung: "Open Always Wins" Paris Olympic 2024

Samsung's "Open Always Wins" connects openness with sporting experiences and mobile technology. Samsung's post-event report describes activities during the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games [17].

These activities gave the product an important role. Phones helped in capturing moments of celebration, and pop-up experiences allowed visitors to encounter the technology directly. This can be explained as a functional connection between the brand and event. The product contributes to an activity that audiences can easily understand [3]. However, a visible product does not establish a stronger brand preference or purchase intention by itself.

Samsung reports 293 Victory Selfies and more than 380,000 visitors visit its pop-up experiences across the Games [17]. These figures describe activity and participation. The commission reports CivicScience findings showing a six-percentage-point increase in Samsung favorability among Olympics followers between July and August 2024 [18].

These sources show different outcomes. The company report describes campaign delivery, and CivicScience reports an attitude change. However, there is no evidence linking individual campaign exposure to the observed attitude change while accounting for other influencing factors. Therefore, the improvement cannot be directly attributed to "Open Always Wins."

3.4. Cross-case discussion

These cases illustrate three ways to construct brand relevance. These three elements are sporting identity, shared values, and product usefulness. First, adidas used the idea of a football family. Second, Coca-Cola focuses on encouragement based on women's football. Third, Samsung combines technology into sporting experiences. Each approach provided audiences with a compelling reason to engage that went beyond the product message [13-17].

The value of the content and brand recognition might need to be considered together at the same time. Entertaining stories and positive messages might attract attention. However, brands' marketing value would be judged by whether audiences connect the experience with the brand [1, 3]. Adidas experienced the challenge of how to transfer attention related to athletes to the brand. Meanwhile, Coca-Cola faces a challenge that they need to make the audiences recognize its contribution to the message. Samsung needs to connect event-based product experiences with benefits that matter afterward.

However, the reported outcomes might be different. Conversation share, documented campaign delivery, visitor totals, and favorability changes answer different questions respectively [14, 16-18]. Therefore, they cannot fully determine campaign success.

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Brands' managers should figure out how audiences can remember about the brand before selecting campaign formats. For adidas' campaign, a pre-launch test could test the effectiveness of their strategy. For example, ask viewers to recall the brand, explain the story, then describe the sponsor's role. If viewers primarily recall the athlete instead of the brand, we could revise the story to clarify the brand's contribution. This is a suggestion of an evaluation approach, rather than an activity documented in the case.

Campaigns should also offer practical opportunities for participants. For instance, a football sponsor could invite fans to share their personal football memories and messages supporting women's football. The technology sponsor could organize an activity where fans use their devices to capture meaningful sporting moments. Participants could post their content on social media platforms and hashtag relevant campaigns. Furthermore, the brand could repost their contributions with permission. Sharing should remain optional, as pressure to participate may lead to resistance [11].

Resource priorities should depend on the campaign's objectives and audience. The football case suggests putting player stories, fan identity, and activities first that connected with shared match experiences. The Samsung case suggests that a multisport campaign could first diversify athlete stories and useful experiences across different sporting contexts. However, these are proposals to test. Three cases cannot establish that an event can determine the best allocation of resources alone.

Evaluations should capture behaviours that go beyond questionnaire-based responses. Managers may record activities, distinctive contributions, voluntary posts, shares, and user interactions. Furthermore, brands need to distinguish between paid contributions and voluntary participation. Attitude-related measures can assess whether participation leads to improved brand understanding. For sales-oriented objectives, purchase evidence is required alongside credible comparisons that account for other confounding influences.

Event organisers can evaluate enjoyment, accessibility, participation levels, and perceived usefulness in order to identify what value sponsored activities bring to fan experiences. It should be noted that attendance alone cannot confirm these benefits.

4. Conclusion

This qualitative multiple-case study identifies three different approaches to event-related marketing. adidas connects its brand with football identity and togetherness. Meanwhile, Coca-Cola focuses on encouragement and inclusion, and Samsung demonstrates product usefulness within sporting experiences. These approaches suggest that brands should connect valuable content with a recognizable contribution to the event. Managers could use this lesson by making sure the brand's role is providing voluntary opportunities for participation and sharing and evaluating outcomes that match campaign objectives. Football cases suggest the value in player stories and fan communities. The Samsung case highlights useful experiences in a multisport setting. Although these recommendations would need testing to prove, they are treated as proven rules. This study has limitations. It depends on company and agency sources, which may give out favorable information. The cases are chosen by the factors of different product categories, audiences, and reported measures, preventing direct performance comparisons. Future research could compare campaigns within the same event or product category. Experiments could test whether community-based stories would improve brand recognition and reduce advertising resistance. Then, longer term research could examine whether voluntary participation is followed by changes in brand preference.

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38746

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