



QUIGLEY-SIMPSON

Media Landscape & the Power of Cultural Moments

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CONFIDENTIAL CONTENT

Part 1: Cultural Moments in the U.S. Media Landscape

Rarer. Pricier. Longer-lasting.

In a fragmented media market, cultural moments have become one of the few places where large audiences still gather at the same time, around the same thing, with the same emotional charge. Live sports tentpoles, award shows, halftime performances, holidays and breakout pop-culture events now carry disproportionate weight in media plans because they combine mass reach with heightened attention and shared conversation. Yet the way these moments create value for brands has changed. The moment no longer begins at kickoff or ends at the final whistle, and the brands that benefit most are rarely the ones that simply buy the most exposure.^{[1][2][3]}

Five forces reshaping cultural moments

- Live moments are the last reliable mass-reach environments, and they are priced accordingly. Sports alone is projected to account for 31.8% of U.S. TV ad spending in 2026, and marquee inventory routinely sells out early.^[1]
- The moment is bigger than the event. Music, fashion, creators, identity and community now surround the competition itself, and for many viewers the cultural layer is the main attraction.^{[4][10]}
- Moments now unfold across weeks and screens. Attention builds before the event, peaks across broadcast, streaming, social and second screens, and continues in clips, podcasts and conversation afterward.^{[1][2][5]}
- Algorithms increasingly decide which moments travel. Feeds, recommendation engines and AI agents now shape how far creative spreads and how long its equity lasts.^[5]
- Exposure is no longer a reliable proxy for value. Crowded sponsor environments, creative sameness and exposure-based metrics mean many brands pay for visibility they never convert into memory or meaning.^{[3][6][8]}

Quigley-Simpson view

Cultural moments should be planned as campaigns with a beginning, a peak and a long tail, not as single media placements. The brands that win will earn a credible role in the moment, create work that is unmistakably theirs, and extend it across the channels where the conversation actually happens. The objective is not simply to be seen during the moment. It is to be remembered because of it.^{[2][5][8]}

01 | Cultural moments are the last mass gatherings

Scale is concentrating, not disappearing

While audiences have fragmented across platforms, the largest live moments are setting records. The 2024 Super Bowl drew a total U.S. audience of 123.7 million viewers, the largest for a single-network telecast in U.S. history. The 2026 FIFA World Cup final averaged a record 66.4 million viewers across networks and platforms, and the 2026 NBA Finals averaged 19.1 million viewers across Games 1 through 3, up 114% versus the prior year.^{[1][2]}

31.8%

Share of 2026 U.S. TV ad spending going to sports^[1]

123.7M

U.S. viewers of the 2024 Super Bowl, a single-network record^[2]

66.4M

Average U.S. viewers of the 2026 FIFA World Cup final^[1]

Those audiences are increasingly scarce, which makes them increasingly valuable. Live events let marketers build immediate national scale and baseline brand equity in a way few other environments can. Investment is following: brand sponsorships of major NFL, NHL, NBA, MLB and MLS teams reached \$7.6 billion in 2024, a 12% increase year over year.^{[1][11]}

Demand is outstripping supply

Premium moments now behave like a seller's market. Disney sold out its 2026 NBA Finals ad inventory ahead of Game 2, locking in 88 brands, and Super Bowl spots reportedly cost more than \$8 million. Late buyers pay premiums or miss marquee moments entirely, while blowouts, upsets and early exits can change audience composition mid-campaign.^{[1][4]}



Implication for marketers

- Build a cultural moments calendar well in advance, so priority moments are secured before inventory tightens.^[1]
- Treat premium moments as reach and equity investments, and judge them against long-term brand outcomes, not CPM alone.^{[1][2]}
- Prepare creative and media for multiple outcomes, so the plan can flex the moment a game or event turns.^[1]

02 | The moment is bigger than the event

Audiences gather for the culture as much as the competition

Major events have become cultural gatherings where sport, music, fashion, identity and community collide. Among Americans with a favorite part of the 2026 Super Bowl broadcast, 34% chose the halftime show, compared with 44% who chose the game itself and 18% who chose the commercials. Among women, the halftime show was the favorite at 46%.^{[4][10]}



Fandom is horizontal

The modern fan moves fluidly between sports, music, fashion, gaming and creator content. Ninety percent of sports fans engage with sports content beyond the games themselves. Among Gen Z, 93% engage with sports on social media, 86% play sports video games and 77% watch sports documentaries, and 94% say they cannot imagine watching sports without their phones nearby.^{[1][3]}

This changes what it means to show up. Fans experience moments through Twitch streams, YouTube commentary, group chats and culturally fluent creators they already trust. Brands that try to interrupt that experience end up competing with it. Brands that add to it become part of it.^[10]

Smaller communities can carry outsized relevance

Not every moment requires a mass-reach buy. Brands are increasingly reaching defined fan communities directly through athletes, creators and niche platforms. Just Eat partnered with a soccer messaging app to reach 12,000 superfans at a fraction of the cost of its larger sponsorships, while 818 Tequila entered NASCAR through a single-athlete partnership. The shift, in one practitioner's words, is from "paying for eyeballs" to "paying for involvement."^[11]

Implication for marketers

- Map the full cultural footprint of a moment, including music, creators, communities and fashion, not just the broadcast.^{[4][10]}
- Budget distinct second-screen and short-form assets rather than repurposing the broadcast spot.^[1]
- Use creators and niche communities to reach high-affinity audiences that mass buys miss.^{[10][11]}

03 | Moments now have a before, a during and a long after

The live window is only one part of the moment

Cultural moments no longer happen in a single broadcast window. Among Gen Z, 15% saw Super Bowl ads before the game, 37% during the live broadcast and 29% afterward on social, meaning post-game viewing nearly rivals the live audience. Sports podcast listening spikes 358% in the days following big competitions, and 78% of millennials and 70% of Gen Z are most likely to use a second screen during the World Cup.^{[1][4]}





Early, extended and connected campaigns outperform

Super Bowl advertising effectiveness and recall improve when brands launch in the less competitive month of January, particularly with full-length executions rather than teasers alone, and extending airtime beyond game day makes more of the investment. For Super Bowl advertisers, YouTube views rose an average of 114% and online brand conversation 79%, far outpacing offline conversation (18%) and search (15%).^[2]

The long tail carries commercial value as well. Brands long associated with Super Bowl advertising see sales rise before the game and throughout the following year, with further gains around other sporting events.^[2]

Implication for marketers

- Plan every major moment in three phases: build anticipation, own the peak and extend the conversation.^{[2][5]}
- Buy the post-moment window, including podcasts, social video and highlights, where attention continues after the broadcast ends.^[1]
- Sync linear reach with programmatic CTV and first-party data to reach high-intent households across screens.^[1]

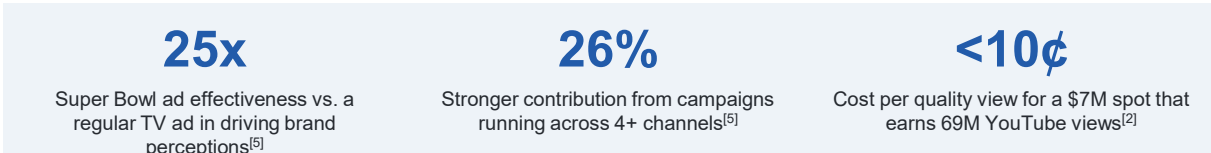
04 | Algorithms and AI now shape how far a moment travels

Creative must work for people and for machines

Brand equity is increasingly shaped inside automated environments: social feeds, recommendation engines, search results, retail media and conversational AI agents. These systems do not simply distribute content; they interpret it and decide what audiences see next. A single Super Bowl ad has proven 25 times more effective than a regular TV ad at driving brand perceptions, largely because of culturally resonant creative. In algorithm-driven environments, however, only the clearest branding, most resonant human truths and most emotionally engaging stories are amplified.^[5]

Integration multiplies impact

Campaigns executed across four or more channels deliver a 26% stronger overall contribution than those using three or fewer. Hellmann's "When Harry Met Sally" extended its Super Bowl spot into TikTok collaborations, retail integrations and influencer partnerships, while Oreo's Post Malone collaboration combined teaser drops, social storefronts, commerce tie-ins and creator amplification well beyond the initial flight.^[5]



When moment-driven creative travels, it also changes the economics. The most-shared Super Bowl ads reach more than 60 million organic views, and adding that earned reach to the broadcast audience can bring cost per impression below four cents.^[2]

Implication for marketers

- Build machine-readable brand codes: consistent distinctive assets, clear product differentiation and content that AI systems can easily interpret and validate.^[5]
- Design creative to be clipped, shared and remixed, not just aired.^{[2][5]}
- Coordinate one idea across four or more channels so every touchpoint reinforces the same brand signal.^[5]

05 | Exposure is not the same as memory

Crowded moments create confusion

The more valuable a moment becomes, the more crowded it gets. Coca-Cola was the only sponsor of the 2024 Summer Olympics to achieve double-digit unprompted awareness of its relationship with the Games; the average was just over 4%. Nike, which was not an official partner, achieved higher awareness than many official sponsors through its athlete affiliations and spend.^[3]



Sponsor confusion also persists long after an event. When a brand takes over a sponsorship, recall of the new sponsor averages 20% at the time of the event, while recall of the previous sponsor sits at 23%. Six months later, recall of the new sponsor falls to 12% while mistaken recall of the old sponsor rises to 40%.^[8]



Creative ambition does not always translate

Ads created for major sports events score as more distinctive than average, yet many fail to convert that distinctiveness into meaning. Olympic ads are especially weak at reinforcing what a brand stands for, and FIFA World Cup ads also fall below the global average. The average 2025 Super Bowl ad scored 6.2 out of 10 on DAVID's Creative Effectiveness Score, the lowest since 2020.^{[2][6]}

Measurement has not kept pace

Exposure remains the dominant sponsorship KPI, even as more than two-thirds of marketers say their biggest challenge is demonstrating sponsorship's value against other marketing spend.^{[3][8]}

What this means for marketers now

- Treat cultural moments as campaigns, not placements. Plan the build, the peak and the long tail together.^{[2][5]}
- Secure priority moments early, and hold flexible budget for moments that emerge in real time.^[1]
- Design for the cultural layer, including the music, creators, communities and conversation around the event.^{[4][10]}
- Make the brand unmistakable to people and machines alike.^[5]
- Measure meaning and memory, not exposure alone.^[8]

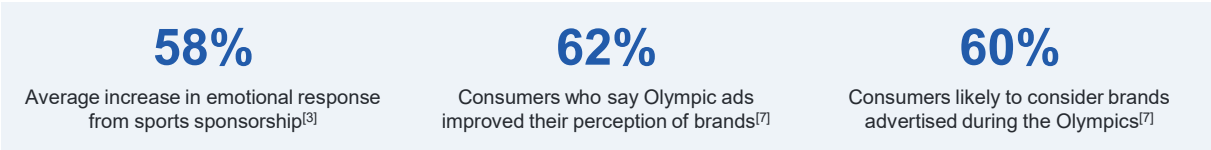


Part 2: The Cultural Moments Playbook

Moments reward brands that earn their place

The evidence points to a consistent conclusion: cultural moments create disproportionate value when brands participate rather than interrupt. Sports sponsorship can drive stronger growth than traditional brand-led advertising, averaging a 58% increase in emotional response, because well-activated partnerships elicit more intense feelings of happiness among fans and wider audiences. Olympic brand campaigns in 2024 achieved record long-term brand-building potential and a 39% increase in emotional intensity compared with the TV norm.^[3]

Audiences notice and reward the effort. Sixty-two percent of consumers say Olympic ads improved their perception of the brands advertised, rising to 72% among 18- to 34-year-olds, and 60% say they are likely to consider purchasing from brands they saw advertised during the Games. Sports sponsorships are also more trusted than TV ads or social posts, creating reciprocity: consumers choose brands that support what matters to them.^{[7][8]}



Quigley-Simpson perspective

The question is not whether to show up for cultural moments. Sitting out removes a brand from conversations its customers are already having. The question is how to show up: with a credible reason to be there, creative that belongs to both the moment and the brand, and a plan that turns a few hours of attention into months of value.^{[8][10]}

06 | Choose the moment and define what winning means

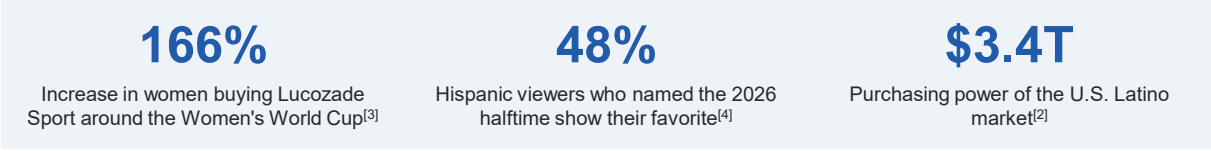
Fit matters more than size

Not every moment suits every brand, and not every brand needs the biggest stage. The most effective Super Bowl advertisers had a specific reason to be in the game, clear objectives and a clear view of what winning looked like. Brands that define winning according to their own priorities, messages and audiences can succeed even at smaller scale and without best-in-class buzz.^[2]

Identify the moments that matter to the target audience first, then determine where the brand fits and who it can partner with. A credible story linking the brand to the moment is essential.^[3]

Under-served audiences create advantage

Some of the strongest opportunities sit where brand investment lags audience interest. More than two-thirds of FIFA Women's World Cup fans find brands more attractive when they participate in sponsorship, and Lucozade Sport's #ThreeLionesses campaign increased brand penetration by 8% and drove a 166% increase in women buying the brand. Cultural audiences matter too: 48% of Hispanic viewers named Bad Bunny's 2026 halftime show their favorite of the past five years, and the U.S. Latino market represents \$3.4 trillion in purchasing power.^{[2][3][4]}



You do not need the spot to own the moment

Brands can win without in-game advertising. Fiat Chrysler used a seed-versus-harvest approach, testing and refining digital messages before scaling the winners to network TV. Marriott turned a Super Bowl sweepstakes into a citywide scavenger hunt, and e.l.f. Cosmetics, advertising on the Peacock stream rather than the broadcast, ranked among the top 10 brands for consideration gains, with a 13.8-point increase among men.^{[2][4]}



Implication for marketers

- Start with the brand's reason to belong, then choose the moment, not the reverse.^{[2][3]}
- Define success before investing, with KPIs tied to business goals.^[2]
- Look beyond the biggest tentpoles to under-served audiences, fan communities and streaming adjacencies.^{[3][4][11]}

07 | Make creative that belongs to the moment and the brand

Commit to the event, not halfway

Event-typical ads, which visually evoke the event rather than the product category, outperform conventional product-focused ads. Event-typical ads earned a brand choice share of nearly 71%, compared with less than 54% for other ad types. In a live social campaign during Wimbledon, they generated 1.29 to 1.51 times greater odds of a click, reducing campaign costs by 33% to 63%.^[9]

The advantage holds even when exposure lasts under two seconds, which makes it especially relevant for social, display and out-of-home. Counterintuitively, dual-typical ads that mix product and event cues never perform best. The effect also extends beyond sports to recurring cultural moments such as Christmas and Halloween.^[9]



Pair the moment's emotion with the brand's meaning

Humor is the default currency of the Super Bowl: 76% of Super Bowl ads leverage humor, three times the rate of Olympic ads. The strongest work layers humor with other emotions so the ad still works if the joke does not land. Uber Eats combined humor with excitement and nostalgia to reach 80.4% brand recall, while the NFL's "Born to Play" achieved 83.5% recall with a heartwarming story instead. In 2026, Budweiser's Clydesdale story and Lay's family-farm story earned the two highest Advertiser Impact Scores.^{[2][4][6]}

Consistency compounds

Emotion only pays off when people link it to the right brand. Budweiser's Clydesdales have appeared in more than 45 Super Bowl ads, and across six years of testing, six of the 10 Super Bowl ads with the highest commercial potential and brand recall featured consistent, recurring elements. The best event creative keeps the brand at the center, as Louis Vuitton did by crafting the trunks for the Paris 2024 Olympic medals.^{[2][6]}

Implication for marketers

- Commit to the moment visually. Event-typical creative outperforms hybrids that hedge between product and event.^[9]
- Layer emotions and match the positive tone of the event.^{[2][6]}
- Anchor every execution in distinctive brand assets so the moment builds equity for the brand, not just the event.^{[2][5][6]}

08 | Activate across the full arc of the moment

Turn a spot into a campaign

The most effective moment campaigns use the broadcast as a launch pad rather than a finish line. CeraVe's three-week Super Bowl campaign with Michael Cera, built on influencer interviews and a dermatologist response ahead of the in-game spot, generated nine billion earned media impressions. M&M's "Spokesandies On Pause" secured 25.2 billion earned impressions, and "Uber Don't Eats" helped grow Uber Eats grocery sales 175% year over year.^[2]



Participate, don't interrupt

The brands that win look less like advertisers and more like editorial studios, supporting creators instead of scripting them and joining existing conversations instead of redirecting them. Lego's Formula 1 partnership invited fans to build and race their own cars, and Gatorade supported the organic post-win cooler dunk with purpose-built coolers, growing a signature moment without co-opting it.



Stay present between moments

Most sponsors concentrate spending around the event itself, but long-term value depends on presence during the hiatus. Off-season communications reduce sponsor confusion and signal genuine commitment. Leading practice is to budget up to two times the rights fee for multi-platform activation and to extend campaigns beyond the competition window.

Implication for marketers

- Build a digital wraparound for every major moment: tease, launch, respond and extend.
- Fund activation, not just access. Rights without activation rarely deliver their potential.
- Use creators, experiences and real-time content to let fans participate in the brand's role in the moment.

09 | Measure meaning, not just exposure

Upgrade the scorecard

Brands should measure what sponsorship and moment marketing deliver best: emotional connection, brand understanding, quality perceptions and reciprocity. Share of voice, share of engagement and word of mouth are stronger signals of success than ad-ranking polls, which are best treated as a means to earned PR.

Different routes to impact require a balanced view

Brands win cultural moments in different ways. Dove recorded the largest buzz gain of any 2026 Super Bowl advertiser (+8.9) despite a dip in ad awareness, while Bosch drove a 6.7-point increase in purchase consideration with almost no change in awareness. A single metric would have missed both successes. Because sponsor recall shifts for months after an event, measurement should also extend well beyond the event window.

Six priorities for cultural moment marketing

- Earn the right to be there. Start with a credible role in the moment and a clear definition of winning.
- Plan the full arc. Build anticipation, own the peak and extend the long tail across social, audio, CTV and search.
- Commit creatively. Event-typical, emotionally layered work outperforms creative that hedges.
- Be unmistakable. Distinctive, consistent brand assets turn borrowed attention into owned equity.
- Participate through people. Creators, athletes and communities give brands credibility the broadcast alone cannot.
- Measure memory and meaning. Track emotional connection, consideration and conversation over months, not days.

Quigley-Simpson perspective

Cultural moments remain among the most powerful assets in a fragmented media landscape, but their value has shifted from the moment of exposure to the impression that lasts. That requires brand building and demand capture to work together: earn attention when culture peaks, make it unmistakably the brand's, and convert it into consideration while the conversation is still alive. Brands that do this will not just be seen during the moment. They will be remembered for it.



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ABOUT QUIGLEY-SIMPSON:

Headquartered in Los Angeles, with an office in New York City, Quigley-Simpson is the largest WBENC-certified woman-owned advertising agency in the country and an impact-obsessed marketing partner for brands seeking measurable growth. Its fully integrated offerings span brand strategy, creative development, media planning and buying, digital performance, analytics, and AI-enabled solutions.

For 25 years, Quigley-Simpson has helped brands break through growth barriers by connecting brand building with business outcomes. As a full-solutions, full-journey agency, it transforms insights into action and action into measurable impact, delivering results that drive long-term growth and competitive advantage. Clients include industry leaders such as JPMorgan Chase and Procter & Gamble, alongside high-growth brands including Generac, Simply Business, Finance of America, and Kumon.

Quigley-Simpson's approach is rooted in a simple philosophy: be Brand-led, Demand-driven, and Impact-obsessed.



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