

INNOVATING TO IMPACT

dentsu

ENTERTAINMENT SPOTLIGHT

SPORTS DOCUSERIES: BROADENING FANDOMS & DEEPENING CONNECTIONS

2025 GLOBAL RESEARCH REPORT



PART OF THE DENTSU CONSUMER NAVIGATOR SERIES

ABOUT THIS STUDY

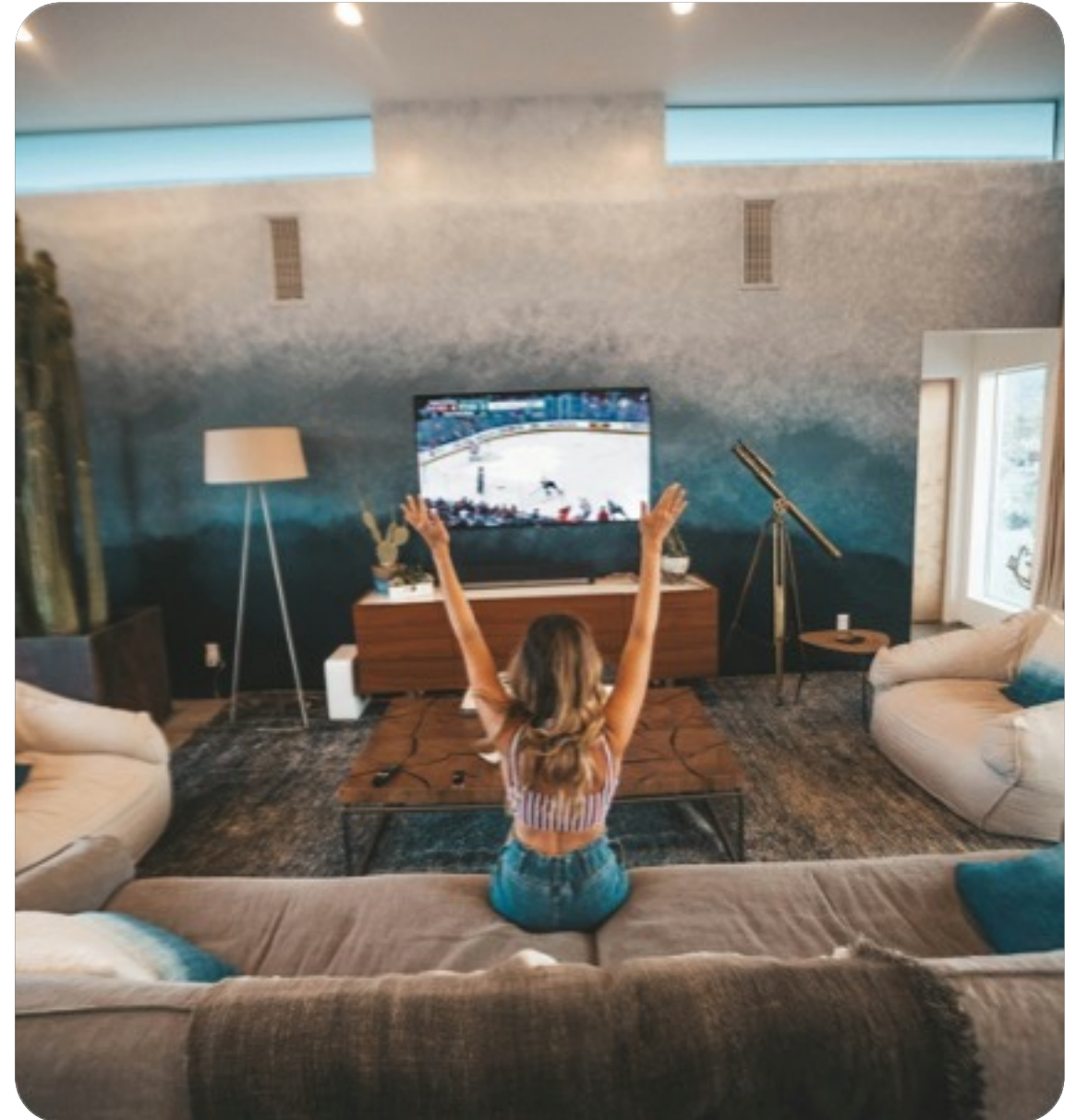
The findings presented in this global report reflect the data we collected over the course of three research efforts in the US, EMEA and APAC regions between October 2024 and March 2025. We surveyed nationally representative panels of consumers (according to the latest available census numbers for each country) using Toluna, an online research panel.

This report features data from a global panel of 8,600 consumers across 10 countries:

2,000 consumers in the UK; 1,000 consumers in the US; and 700 consumers, respectively, in China, France, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Poland, Spain, and Thailand.

These studies were conducted as part of our ongoing **Consumer Navigator series**, a global thought leadership platform to provide marketers with a view into evolving consumer sentiment around a number of topics, including the economic environment, culture, media, emerging technologies, shopping habits, and their expectations of brands.

This report is the second in our **Entertainment Spotlight** series, where we combine and analyze the findings from our Consumer Navigator studies across regions to provide marketers with global trends and nuances on how fandoms for different sports & entertainment IPs are evolving.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SPORTS DOCUSERIES ARE BREAKING THROUGH WHERE LIVE SPORTS DOESN'T

40% of consumers globally watched a sports docuseries in the last month—reaching even those less engaged with traditional sports broadcasts, especially in the U.S. and APAC. These series are capturing the attention of women, Gen Z, and emerging markets, where traditional sports viewership often lags.

VIEWERS DON'T JUST LIKE THEM—THEY PREFER THEM

Six in ten viewers globally say they prefer sports docuseries over other genres like True Crime or History. Why? Because they're simply more entertaining. This preference is strongest among men, younger audiences, and APAC viewers.

DOCUSERIES TURNS CURIOSITY INTO FANDOM

Most viewers say sports docuseries help them understand unfamiliar sports—and make them want to follow those sports more closely. These series act as a powerful entry point, turning casual interest into deeper engagement.

DOCUSERIES BUILD EMOTIONAL BONDS BETWEEN FANS AND ATHLETES

Three out of four viewers say the behind-the-scenes access in sports docuseries makes them feel more connected to the athletes. These stories go beyond the game, helping fans form personal, lasting bonds with the people behind the performance.

BEYOND THE HIGHLIGHT REEL: ATHLETES-AS-STORYTELLERS ARE THE NEW INFLUENCERS

Four in ten viewers seek out athlete-created content at least once a week, especially when it offers personal stories and behind-the-scenes glimpses into their lives. Today's fans connect more with athletes who share who they are off the field, not just what they do on it.

DOCUSERIES ARE A FULL-HOUSEHOLD ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITY

In an era of splintered media consumption, sports docuseries remain rare unifying formats. They're cross-generational, gender-inclusive, and culturally expansive—making them a powerful vehicle for brands looking to reach entire households at once.

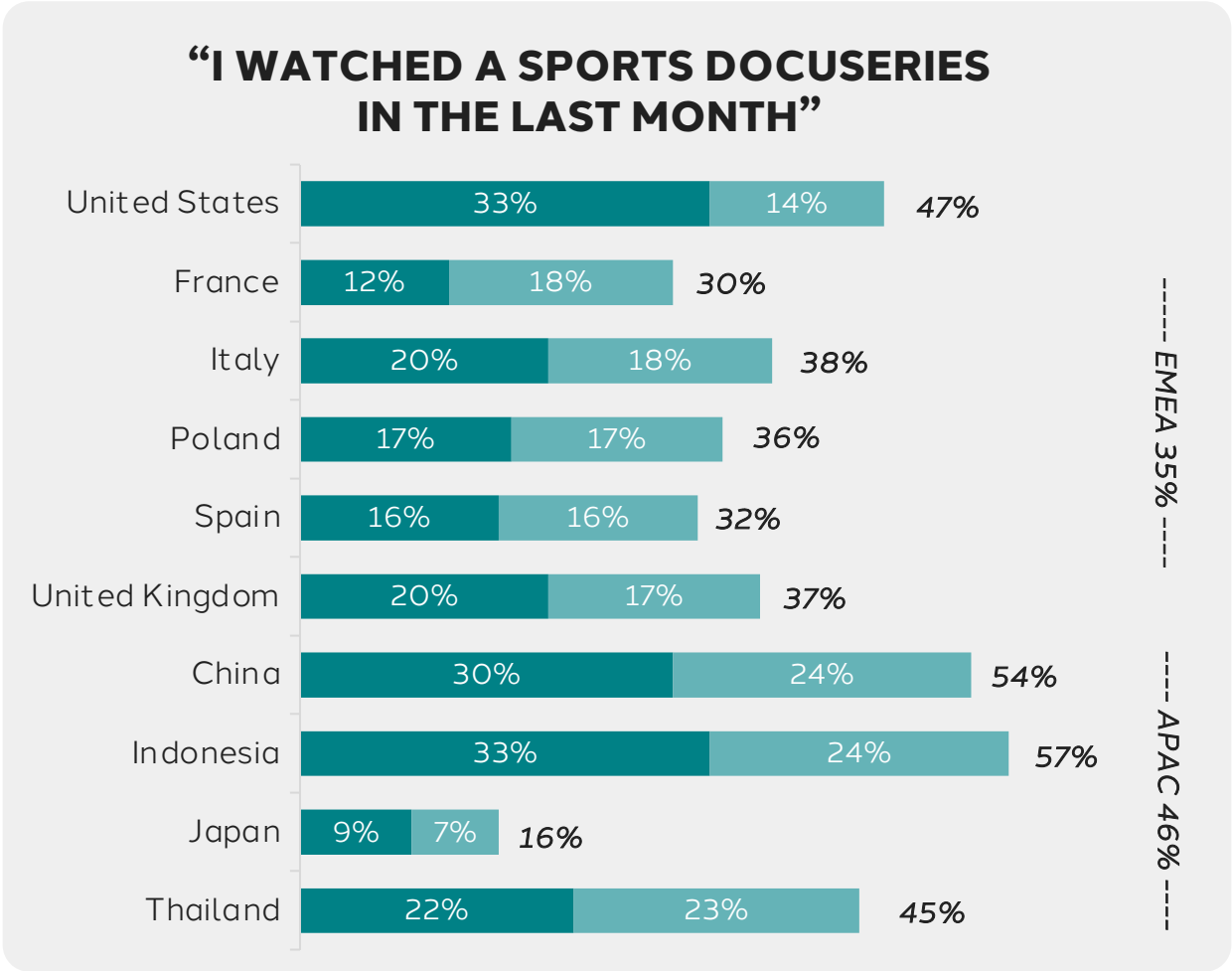
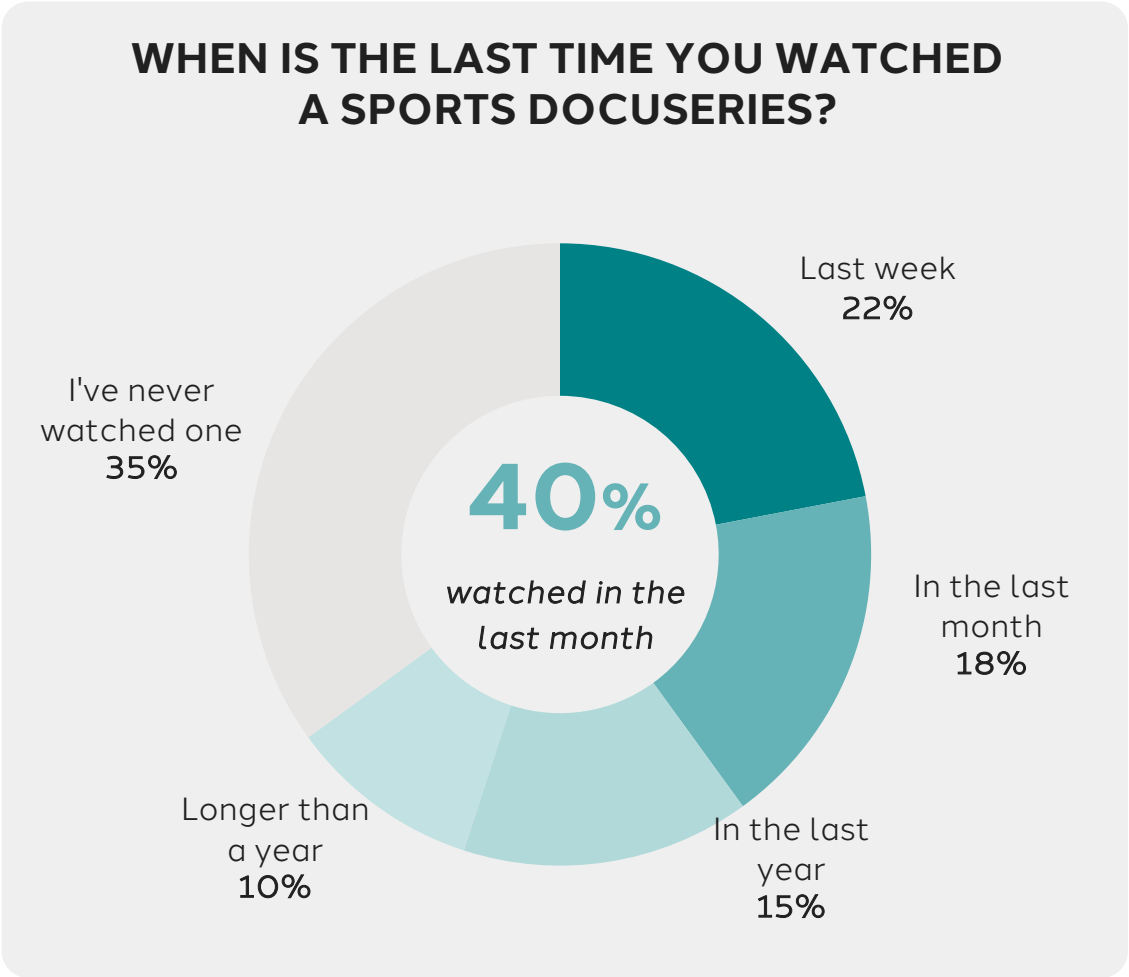


BROADENING THE FANDOM



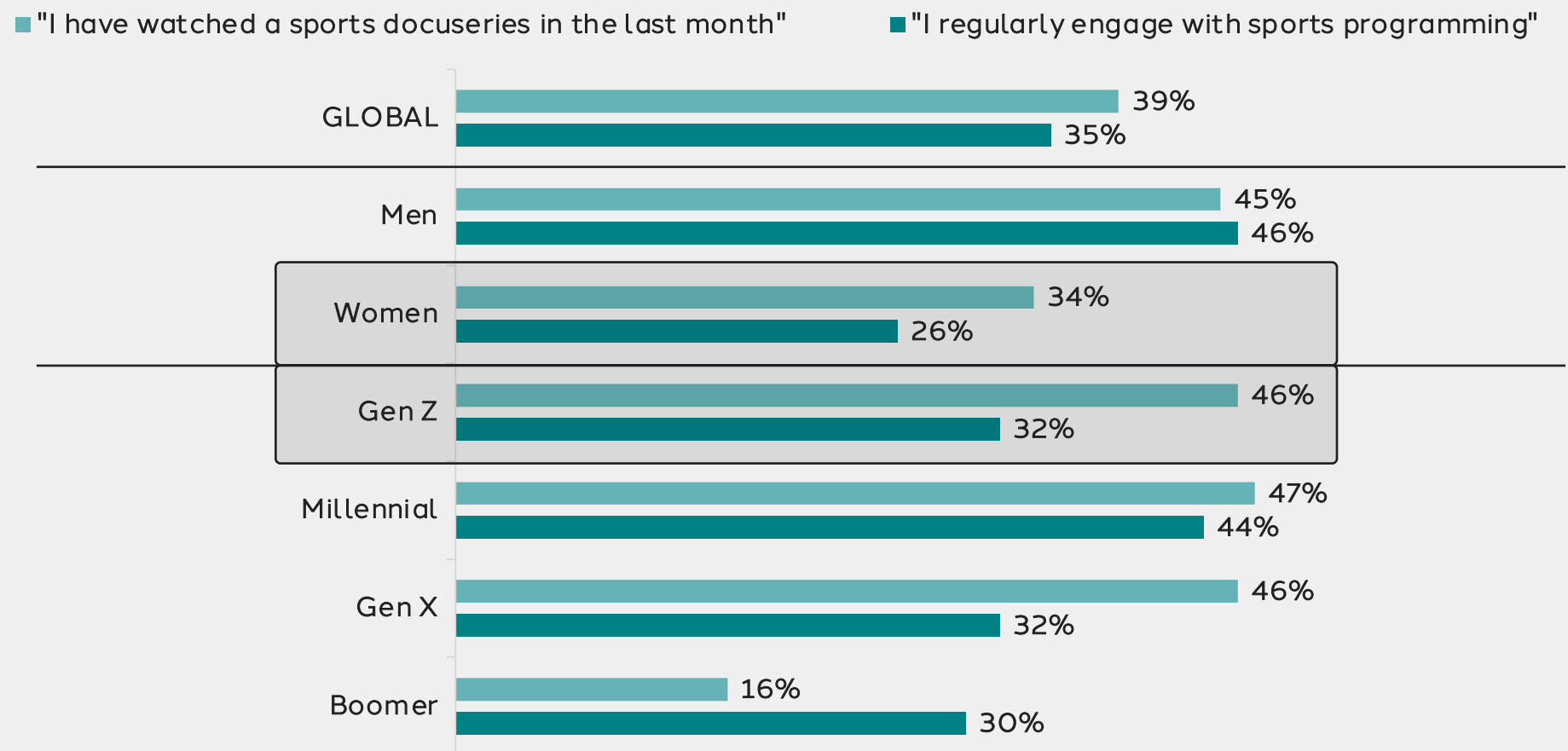
SPORTS DOCUSERIES REACH MOST GLOBAL HOUSEHOLDS

4 in 10 global consumers have watched one in the last month. They are particularly popular in the US and APAC, where almost half have tuned in to watch one in the last month, and slightly less in EMEA.



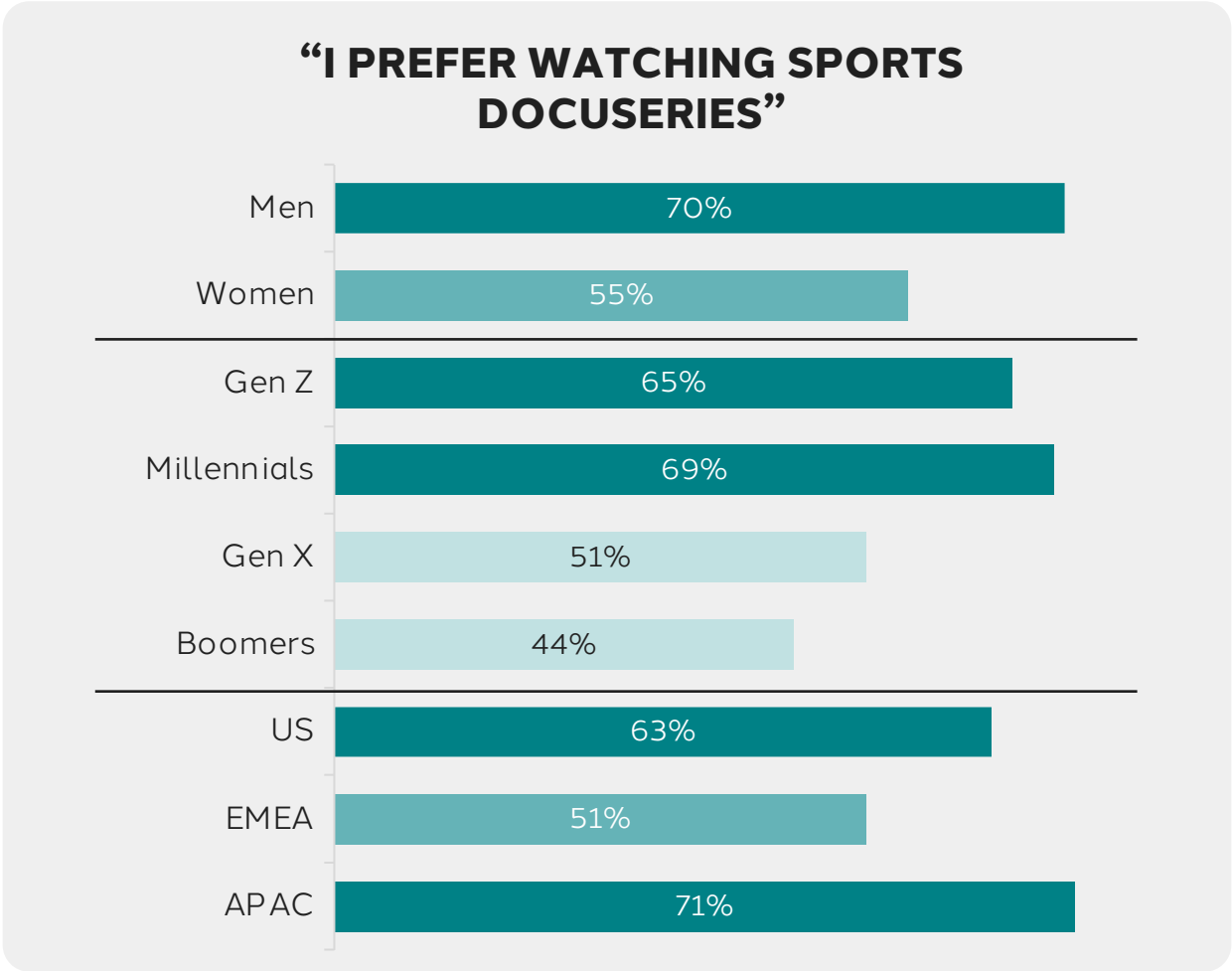
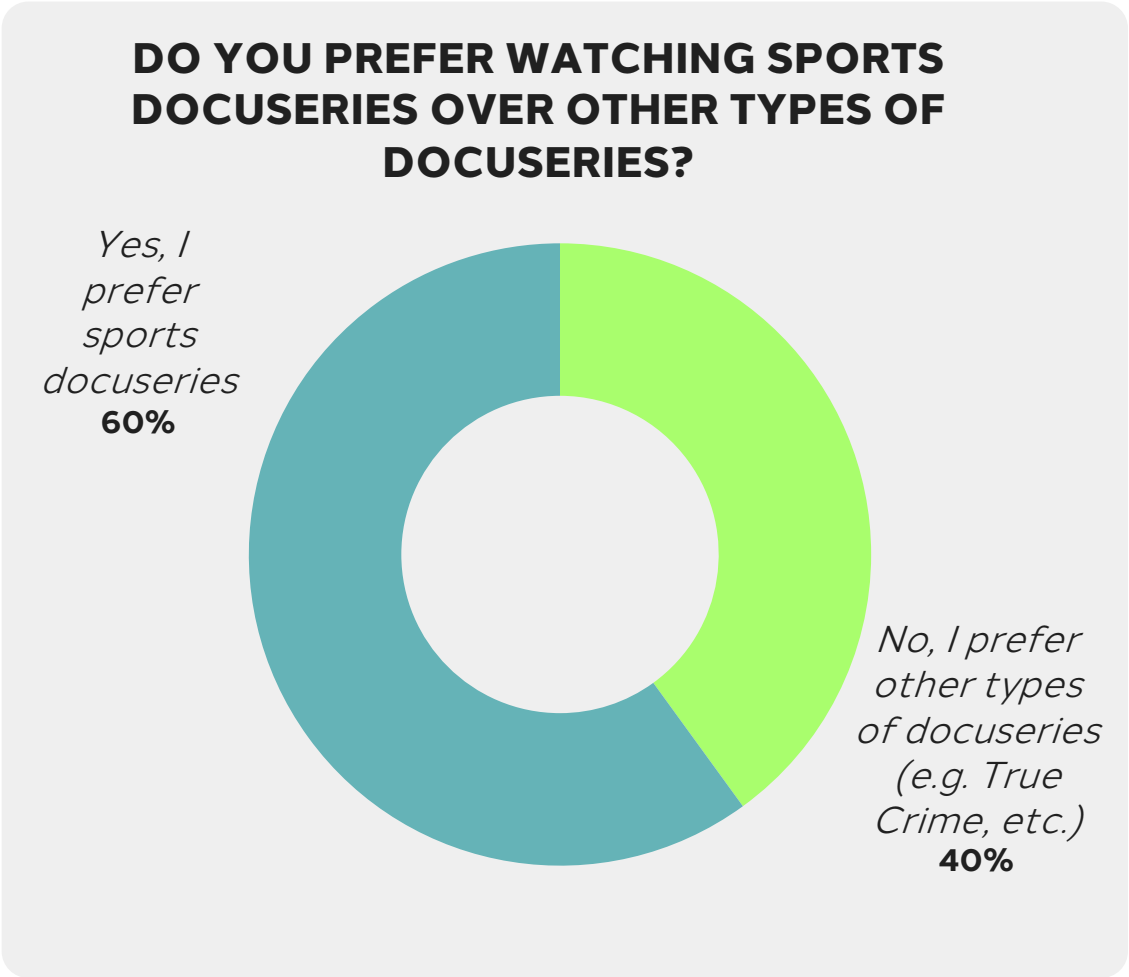
SPORTS DOCUSERIES CAPTURE THE ATTENTION OF AUDIENCES THAT ARE LESS ENGAGED WITH TRADITIONAL SPORTS PROGRAMMING

While Women and Gen Z are less likely to have watched a sports docuseries in the last month, the share of those who have across these cohorts is considerably larger than the share of those who report engaging with traditional sports programming regularly.



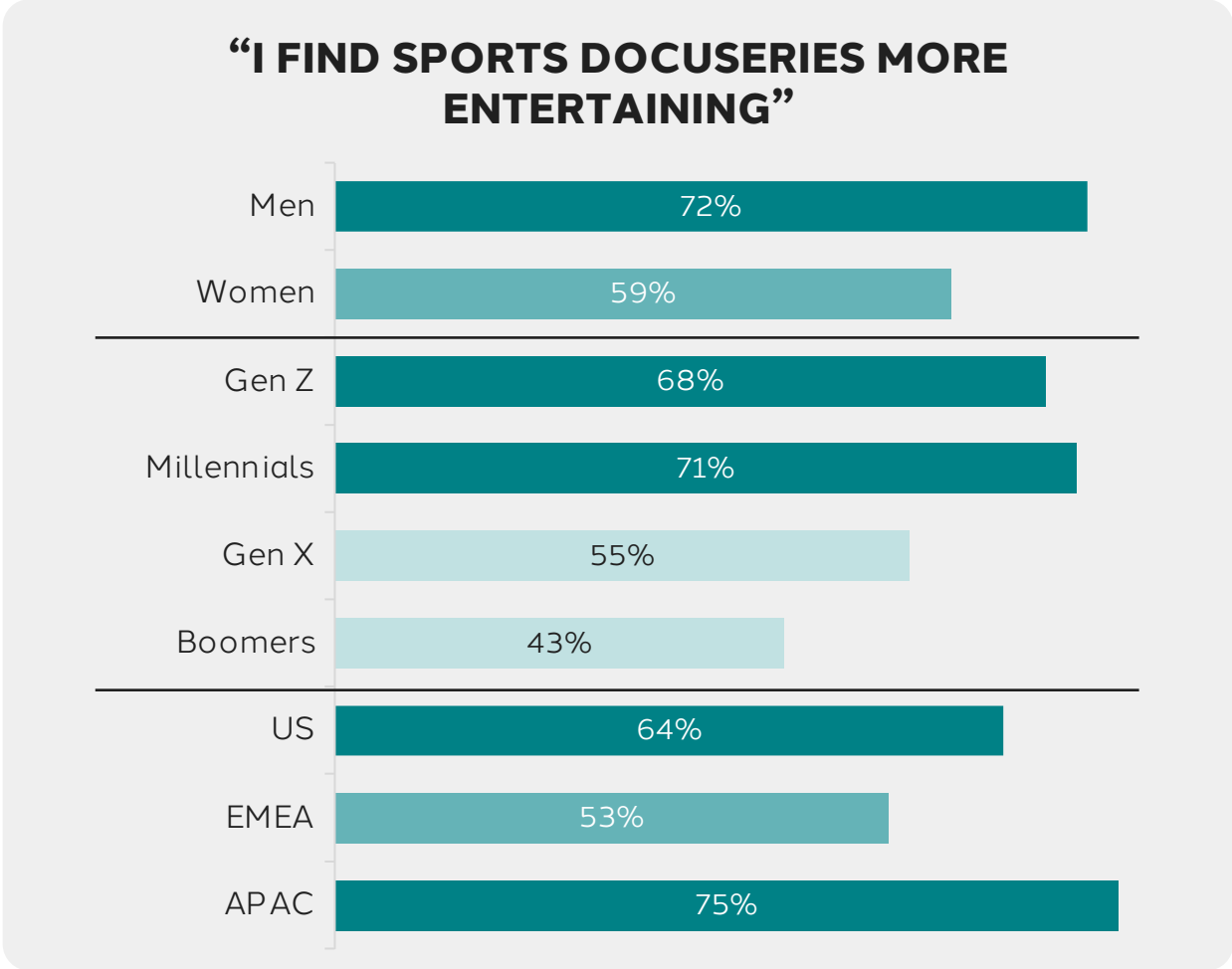
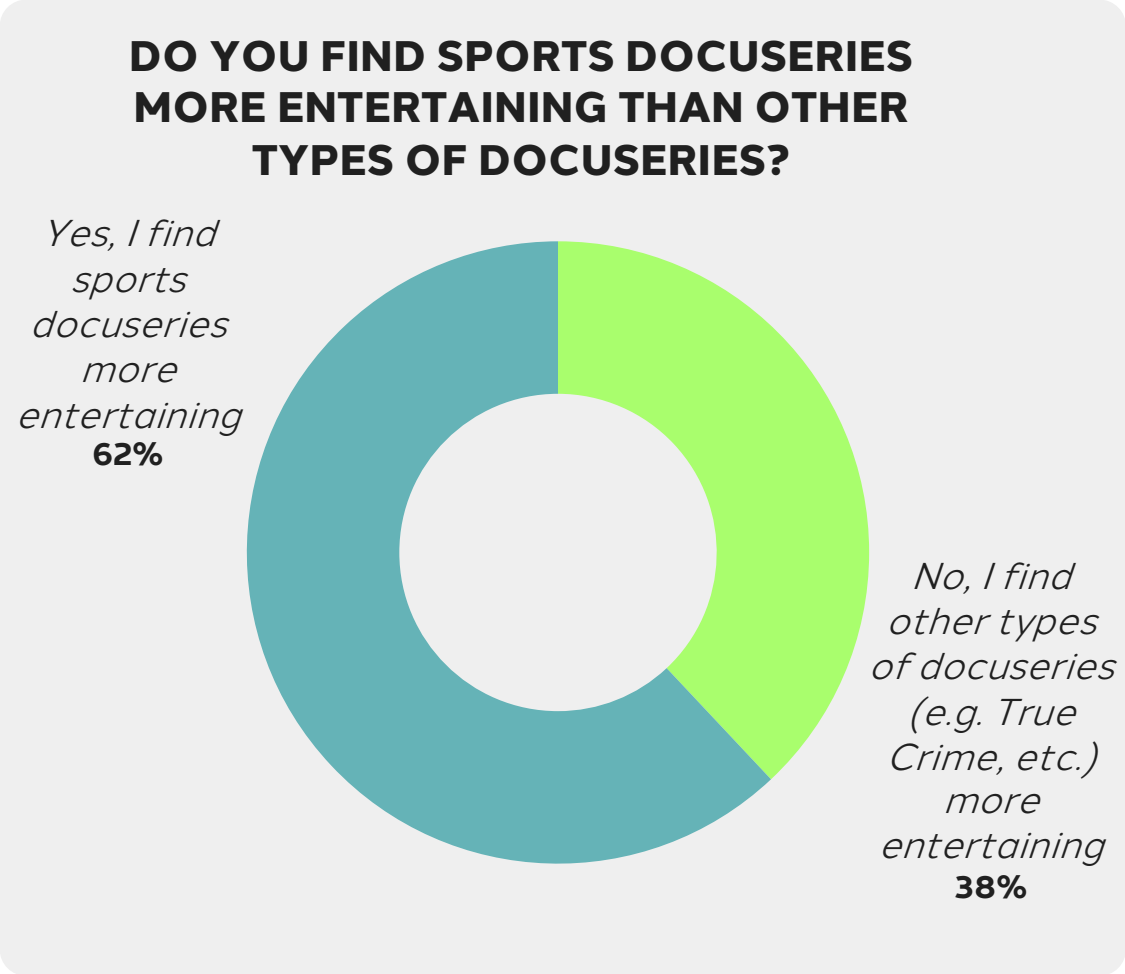
MOST GLOBAL VIEWERS PREFER SPORTS DOCUSERIES TO OTHER TYPES OF DOCUSERIES

This preference is particularly pronounced among Men, younger consumers, and APAC respondents.



SPORTS DOCUSERIES ARE PREFERRED BECAUSE THEY ARE FOUND TO BE MORE ENTERTAINING

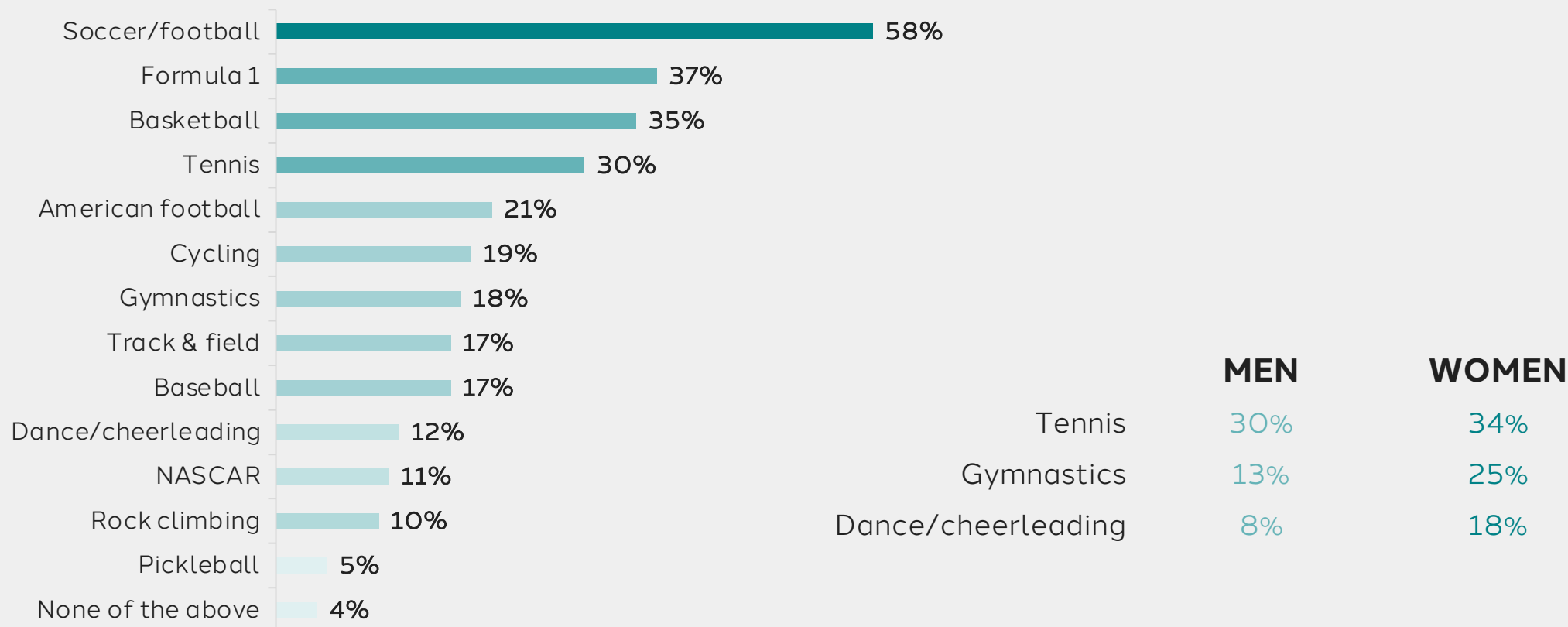
This sentiment is particularly evident across Men, younger consumers, and viewers based in APAC.



FOOTBALL (SOCCER) DOCUSERIES ARE THE MOST WATCHED ON A GLOBAL SCALE, FOLLOWED BY FORMULA 1, BASKETBALL AND TENNIS

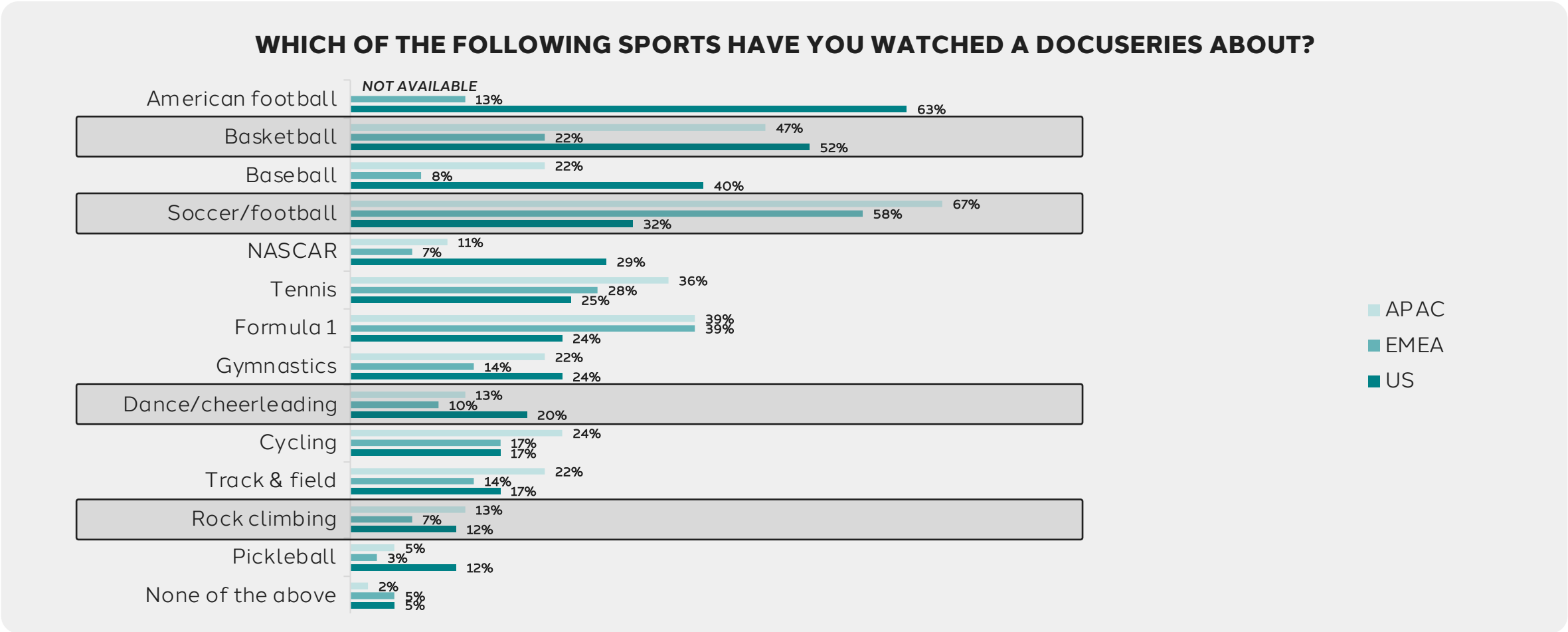
While women are less likely, on average, to have watched docuseries, they take the lead when it comes to having watched docuseries about Tennis, Gymnastics and Dance.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SPORTS HAVE YOU WATCHED A DOCUSERIES ABOUT?



FOOTBALL (SOCCER) AND BASKETBALL DOCUSERIES ARE EVEN MORE POPULAR IN APAC THAN THEY ARE IN EMEA

U.S. viewers are particularly fond of Dance and Rock-climbing docuseries compared to audiences in other regions.



IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS

EXPAND REACH BEYOND TRADITIONAL SPORTS FANS

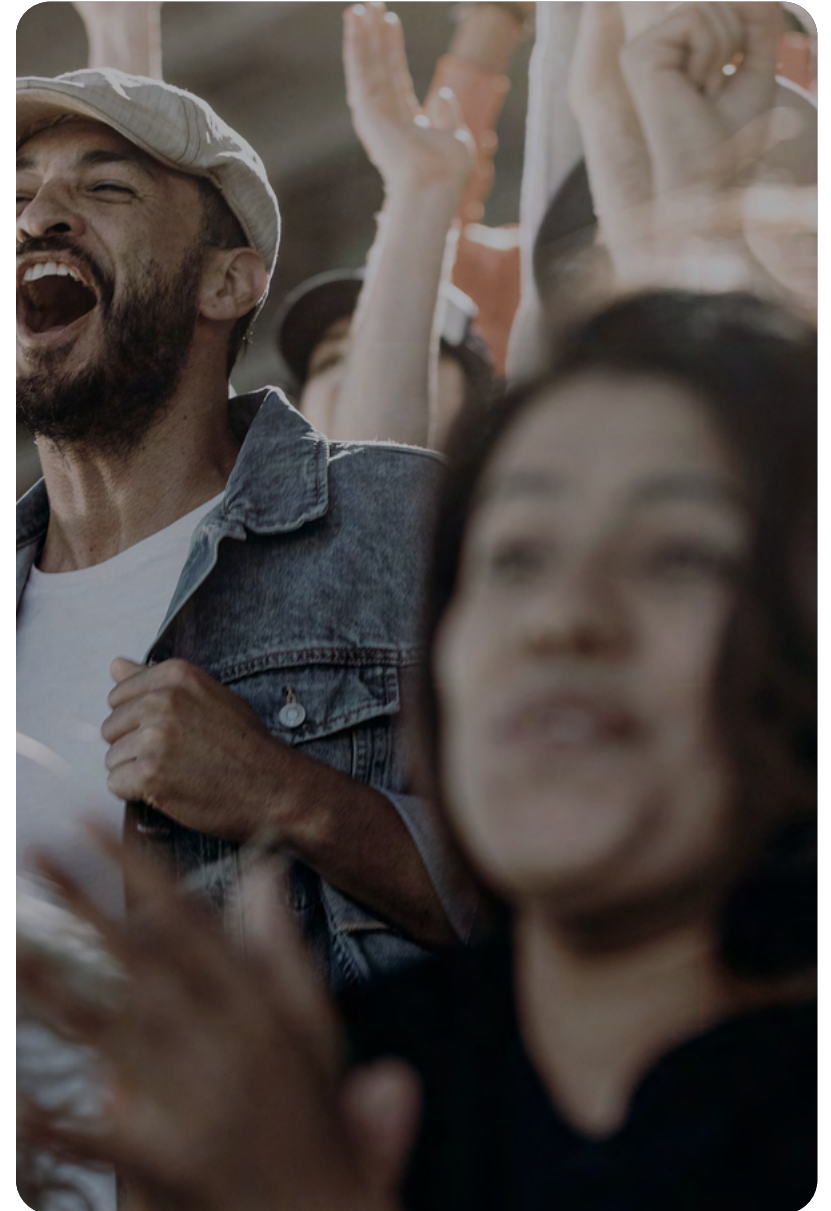
Sports docuseries capture attention from audiences who aren't regular live sports viewers—especially women, Gen Z, and casual fans. For brands, this is a new gateway to reach beyond traditional sports fans and connect with culture-focused consumers who engage with sports emotionally, not competitively.

UNIFY AUDIENCES IN A POLARIZED MEDIA WORLD

In a media and content landscape defined by fragmentation and polarization, sports docuseries offer a rare unifying force, bringing together viewers across generations, genders, and interests. They create shared cultural moments that cut through the noise—giving brands a powerful platform for storytelling that resonates broadly and deeply.

WIN BY MATCHING THE RIGHT IP TO THE RIGHT AUDIENCE MINDSET

Preferences for docuseries focused on different sports vary across both regions, as well as across audience cohorts. An understanding of target audiences' preferences can guide brands as they seek to invest in IP partnerships that are more relevant to them, based on geographical footprint, target demographics, and the unique selling propositions of core products and services.



CASE STUDY: THE CULTURE OF WINNING

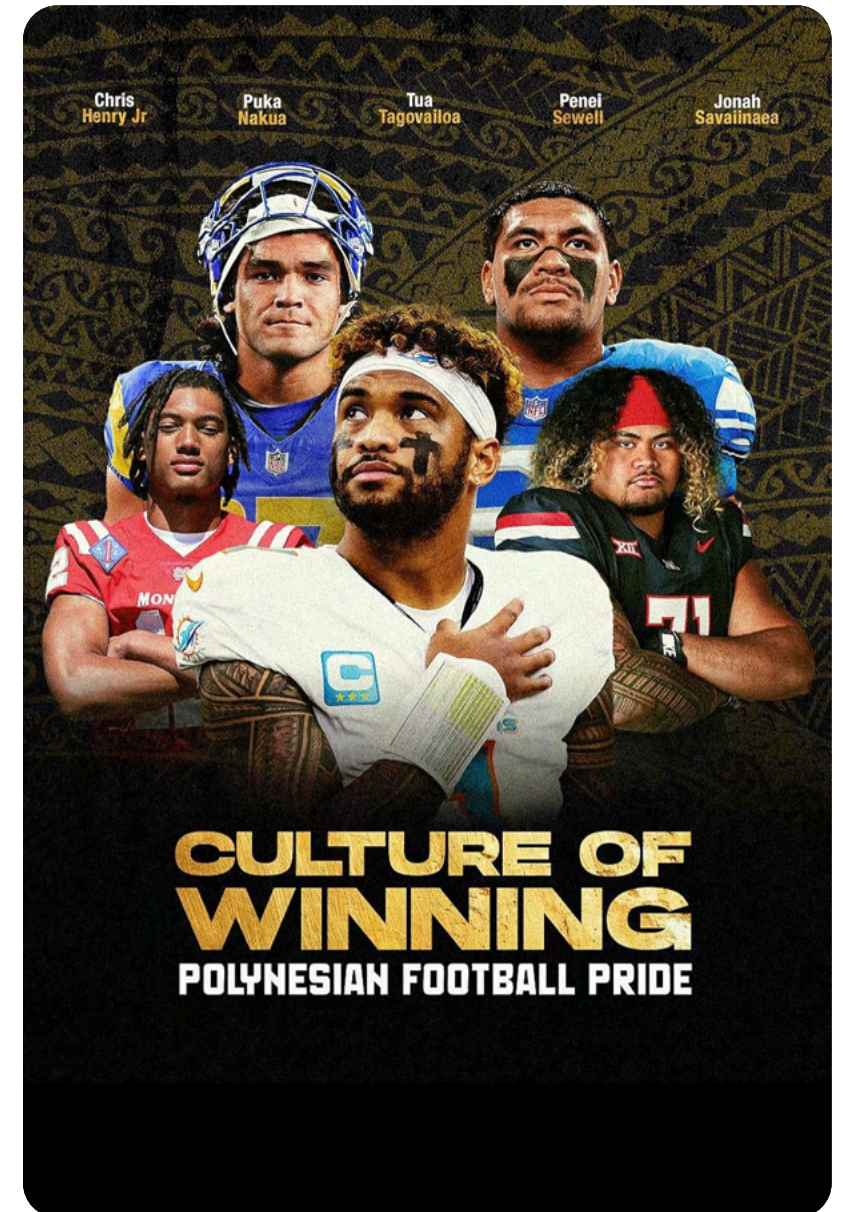
An inspiring film spotlighting the dominance of Polynesian athletes in the sport of American football, produced by and featuring Miami Dolphins quarterback and pro-bowler Tua Tagovailoa, *CULTURE OF WINNING: POLYNESIAN FOOTBALL PRIDE*, is a Fox Sports Films documentary that dives deep into the pillars of Polynesian culture — faith, family, hard work and mentorship — and explores why these cornerstones drive unrivaled success on the field and create positive impact in their communities.

The film is presented and sponsored by Gillette and co-produced by GOAT Farm Media, P&G Studios, a division of Procter & Gamble, dentsu entertainment and SMAC Entertainment.

With a notable number of Polynesian players reaching the NFL, they have been All-Pros, All-Rookies, Super Bowl Champions, Pro Bowlers, and Hall-of-Famers. Beginning with Hawaii State Champions, moving to elite college football powerhouses, and into Super Bowl-winning NFL teams, *CULTURE OF WINNING: POLYNESIAN FOOTBALL PRIDE* features standout players sharing their personal stories firsthand, direct, and unfiltered.

In addition to serving as the presenting sponsor of the film, Gillette provided a grant to the athletic program at Oahu-based high school, Kahuku, ensuring an exceptional generation of young athletes has the equipment, facilities and coaching tools they need to succeed.

Cathy Boxall, Global Head of Entertainment, dentsu said, “Dentsu entertainment is all about connecting culture to commerce for brands, and when you fuse that with the community-binding power of sport, you can create something truly special. While sport is universal and brings people together across continents and languages, some places exhibit such a dominance and obsession within a certain sport that it creates a fascinating connectivity that just has to be retold. With this documentary, we zero in on the Polynesian culture, but we hope to expand on the series and explore other similar phenomena around the globe.”

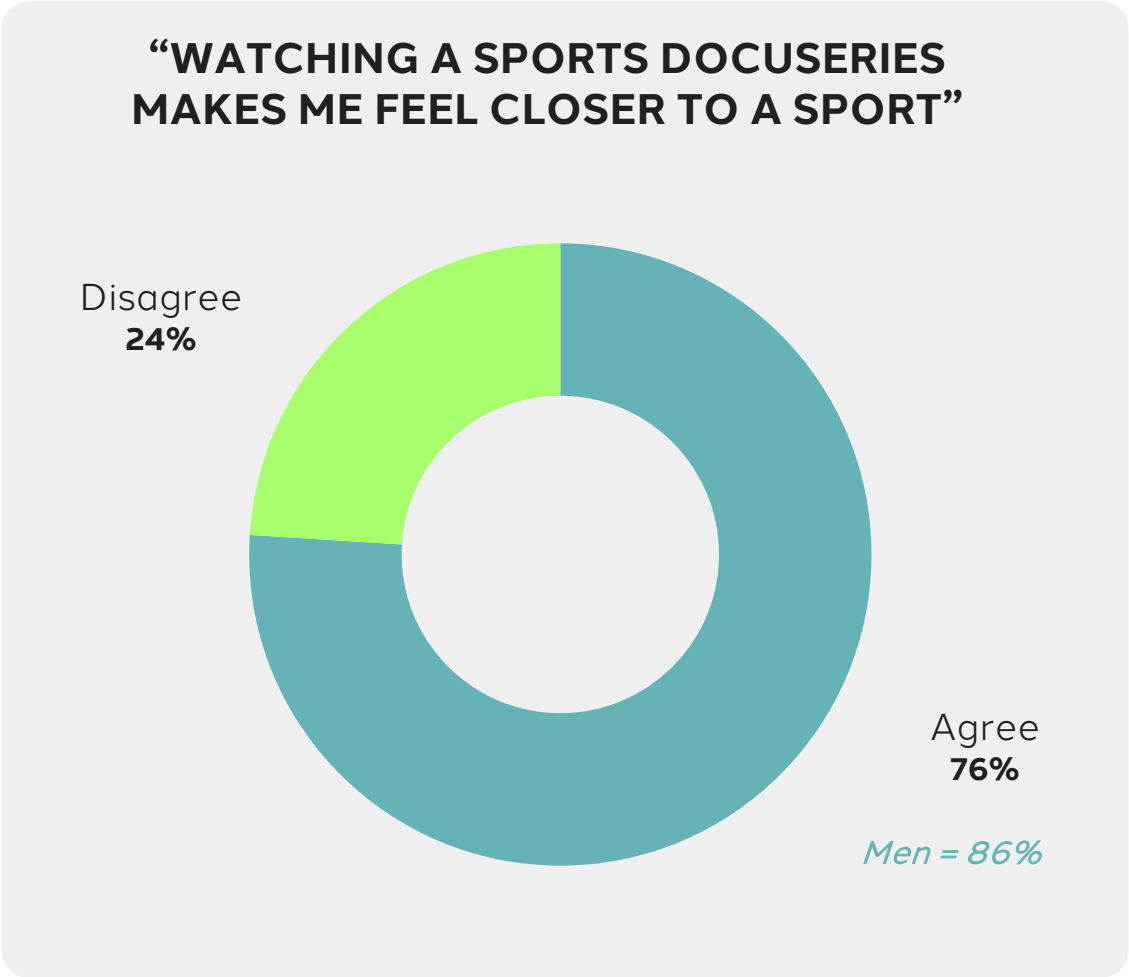
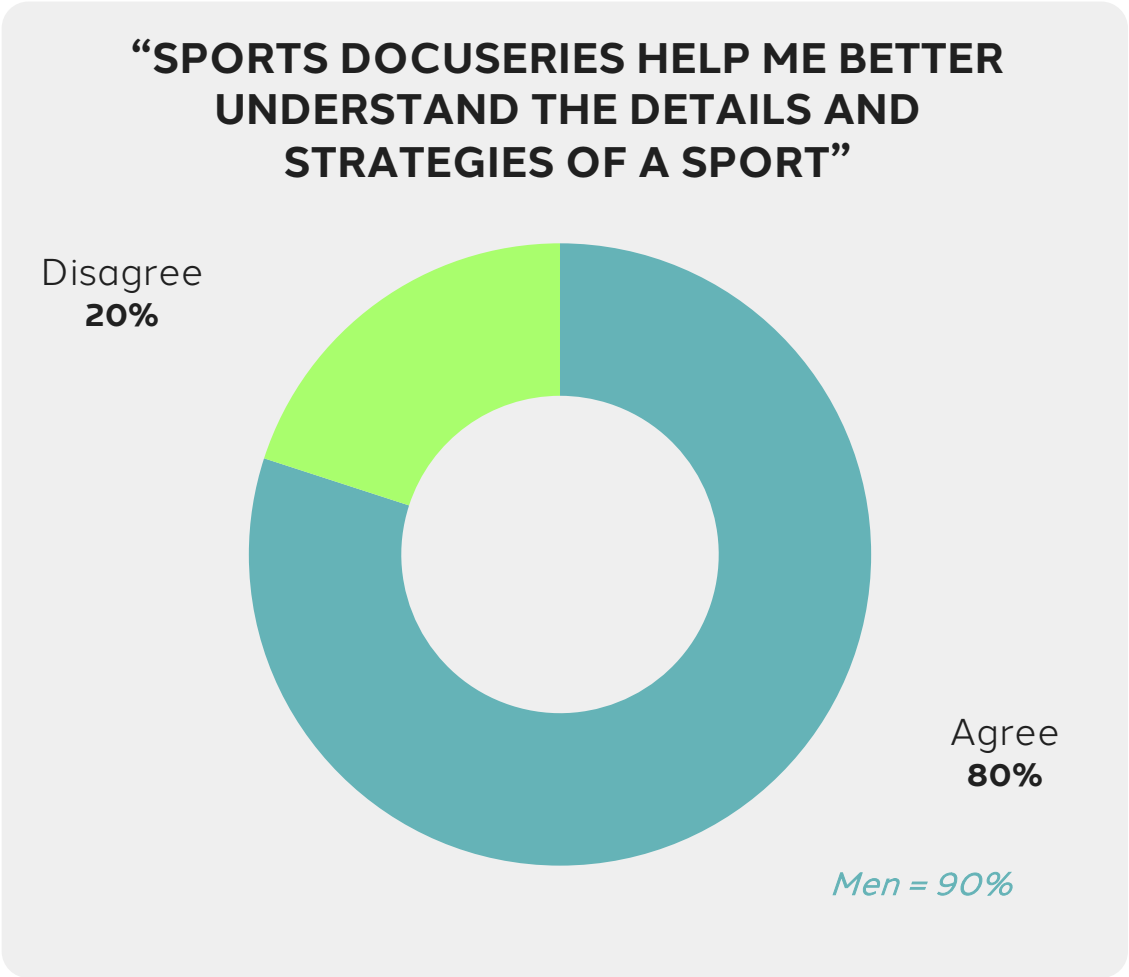


DEEPENING CONNECTIONS



SPORTS DOCUSERIES FURTHER AUDIENCES’ KNOWLEDGE OF SPORTS, AS WELL AS THEIR EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN THEM

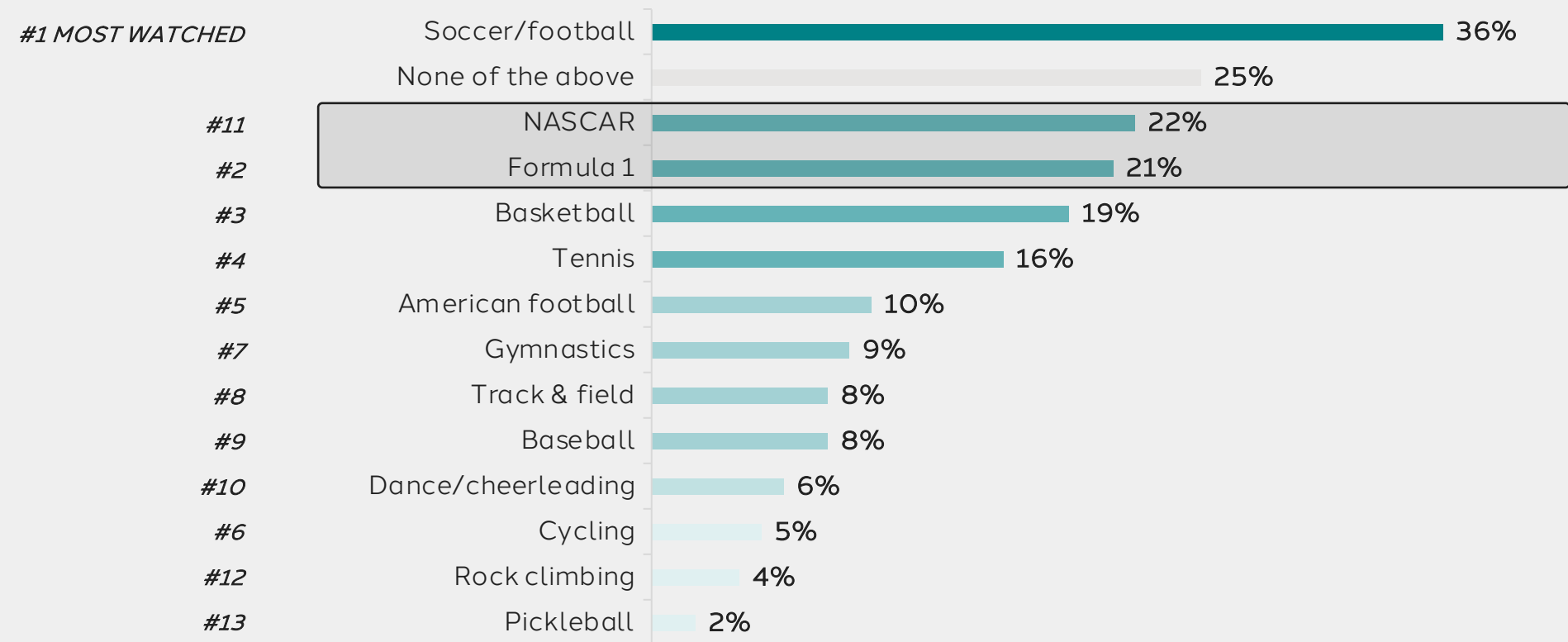
Men are particularly likely to feel this way.



SPORTS DOCUSERIES ARE PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE IN DEEPENING AUDIENCES' INTEREST IN MOTOR SPORTS SUCH AS FORMULA 1 AND NASCAR

Sports docuseries are also incredibly effective in deepening audiences' engagement in soccer/football, despite this already being the most popular sport discipline globally.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SPORTS DID YOU START FOLLOWING MORE CLOSELY AS A RESULT OF WATCHING A DOCUSERIES ABOUT IT?



THE DOCUSERIES EFFECT: MOTORSPORTS EDITION

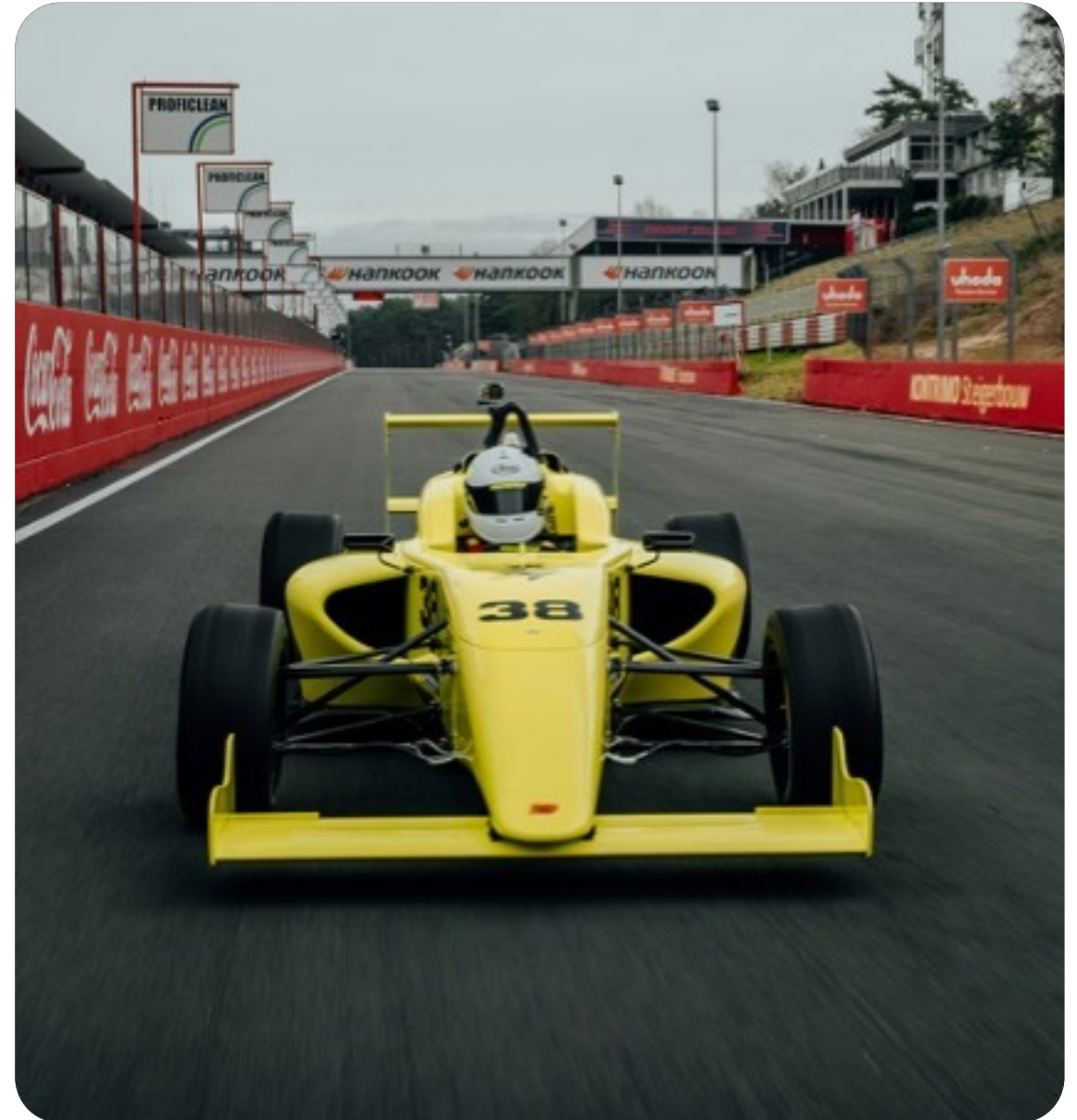
As fandom continues to diversify across platforms and passions, sports-focused docuseries are emerging as powerful catalysts for growth, inviting new audiences and deepening engagement among existing fans. This is proving particularly effective in the case of docuseries set in the world of motorsports.

Developed by dentsu agency MKTG, the FanSpeed research series sets out to map the evolving landscape of fan interest and awareness. A recent installment of the series, focused on motorsports fandom, offers key insights into how Netflix original docuseries *Formula 1: Drive to Survive* and *NASCAR: Full Speed* are shaping modern fandom were unearthed.

Key findings:

- **Emotional Bonding:** Both series humanize drivers, Full Speed achieves a 52% interest lift, Drive to Survive nearly doubles that impact.
- **Educational Vehicle:** Drive to Survive doesn't only entertain, it serves as an introduction to the sport, especially for new/casual fans, fueling the cultural buzz and word-of-mouth outbreak.

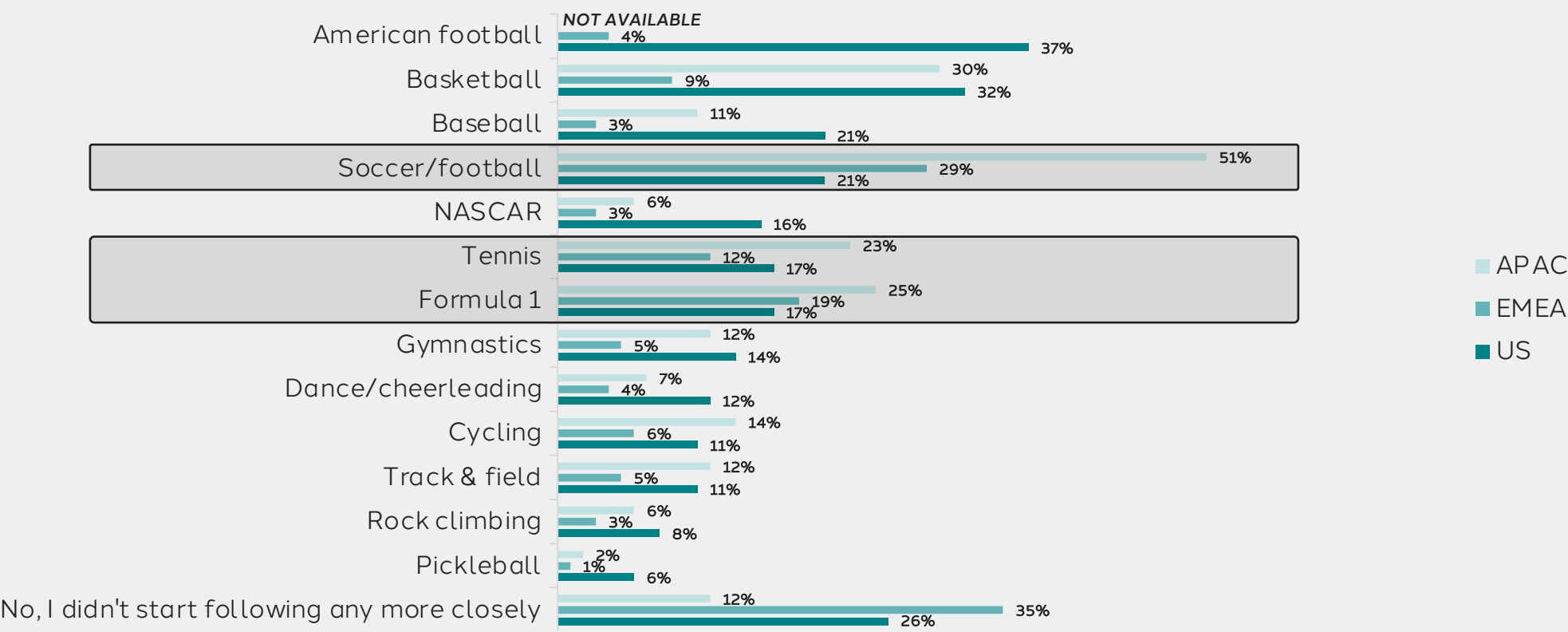
[LEARN MORE](#)



SPORTS DOCUSERIES HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE IN DEEPENING ENGAGEMENT WITH FOOTBALL (SOCCER), TENNIS, AND FORMULA 1 IN APAC

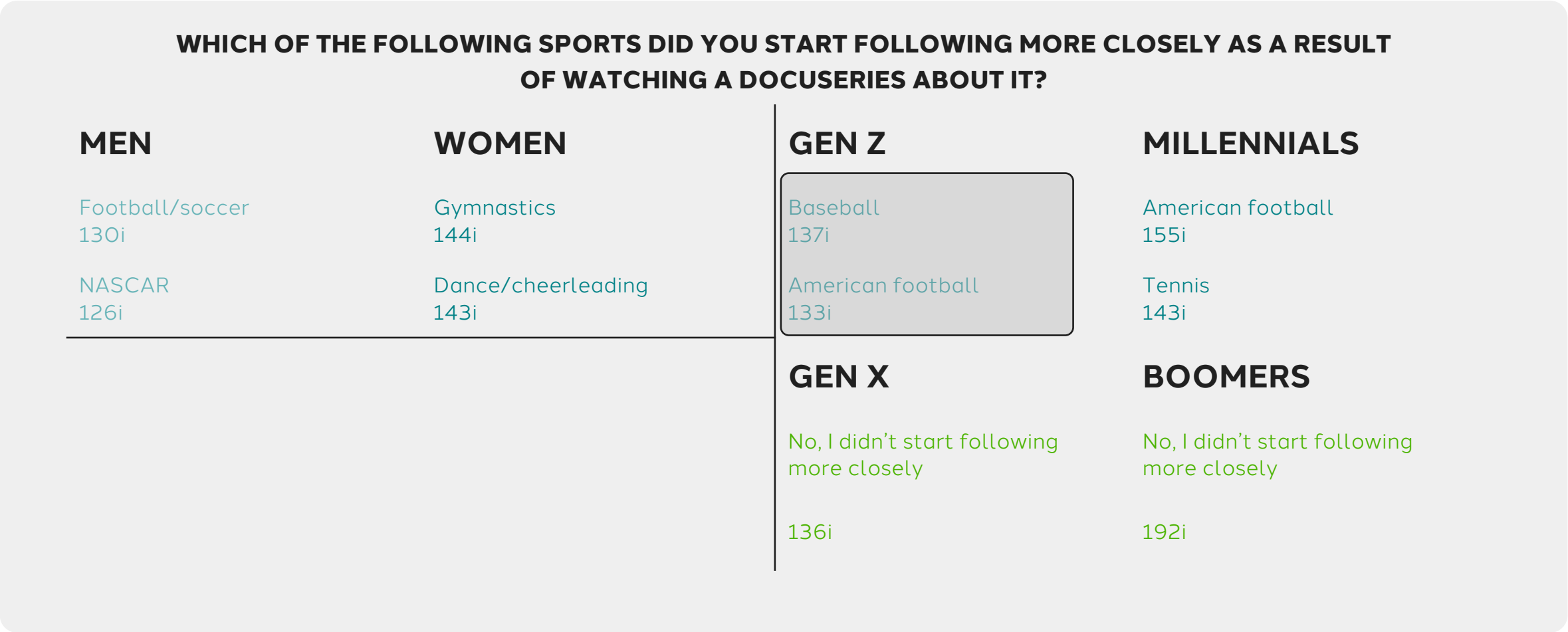
U.S. viewers have started engaging more closely with American disciplines like American football and NASCAR thanks to docuseries.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SPORTS HAVE YOU STARTED FOLLOWING MORE CLOSELY AS A RESULT OF WATCHING A DOCUSERIES ABOUT IT?



DOCUSERIES DRIVE GEN ZERS’ DISCOVERY OF AMERICAN SPORTS

On the other hand, Gen X and Boomers over-index in reporting that watching docuseries did not further their engagement with sports disciplines.



IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS

THINK BEYOND POPULARITY—INVEST IN THE FAN’S DISCOVERY JOURNEY

Docuseries are often the first point of contact for audiences exploring a new sport. At a time when consumers look to brands not just to help them *find what they want*, but to *discover what to want*, sports docuseries offer a powerful vehicle for shaping emerging passions. Instead of chasing only the most popular disciplines, brands should ask: *Which fan journeys can we help spark—and become part of from the start?* Prioritize curiosity over consensus. The goal isn’t just to show up where the fans are, but to help create new fandom in the first place.

SUPPORT THE LEARNING CURVE WITH COMPLEMENTARY CONTENT

Many viewers approach unfamiliar sports with only a partial understanding, but sports docuseries lower the barrier to entry. They spark curiosity by blending human stories with the technical layers of each discipline. Motorsports, for example, engage viewers through both personal drama and the engineering behind the scenes. This reveals a real appetite for multifaceted content. Brands can build on this by offering adjacent experiences—like explainers, behind-the-scenes access, or interactive tools—that help close the knowledge gap and deepen immersion. In doing so, they don’t just support discovery—they help turn curiosity into lasting fandom.

FORGET BORDERS – FOLLOW THE CURIOSITY

Docuseries dissolve traditional geographic and cultural boundaries around sports. Younger audiences are discovering American football in APAC, gymnastics in the U.S., and a wide range of disciplines outside their cultural defaults. Brands shouldn’t be constrained by outdated assumptions about national sports preferences. Let audience curiosity—not legacy fan maps—guide your strategy. The next wave of fandom isn’t defined by borders, but by the stories that spark interest across them.

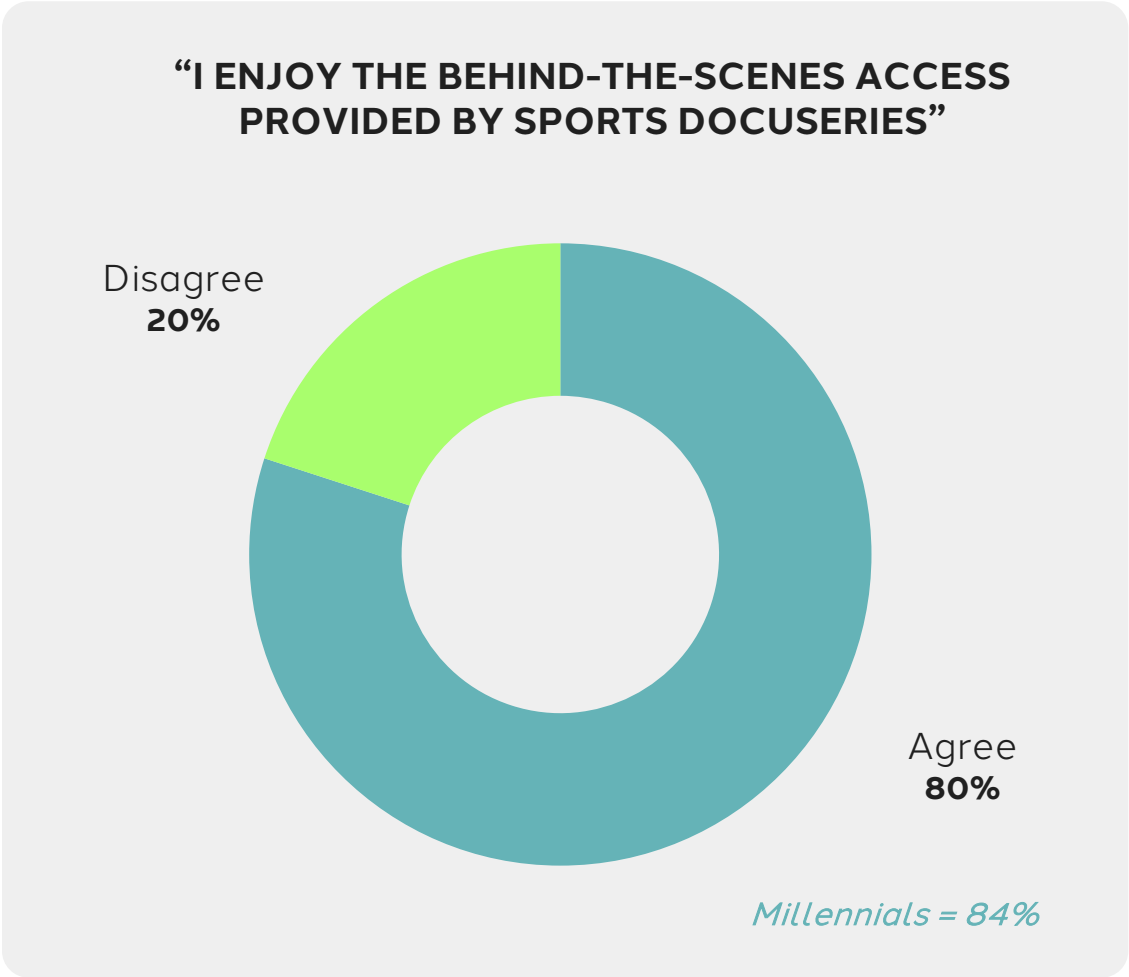
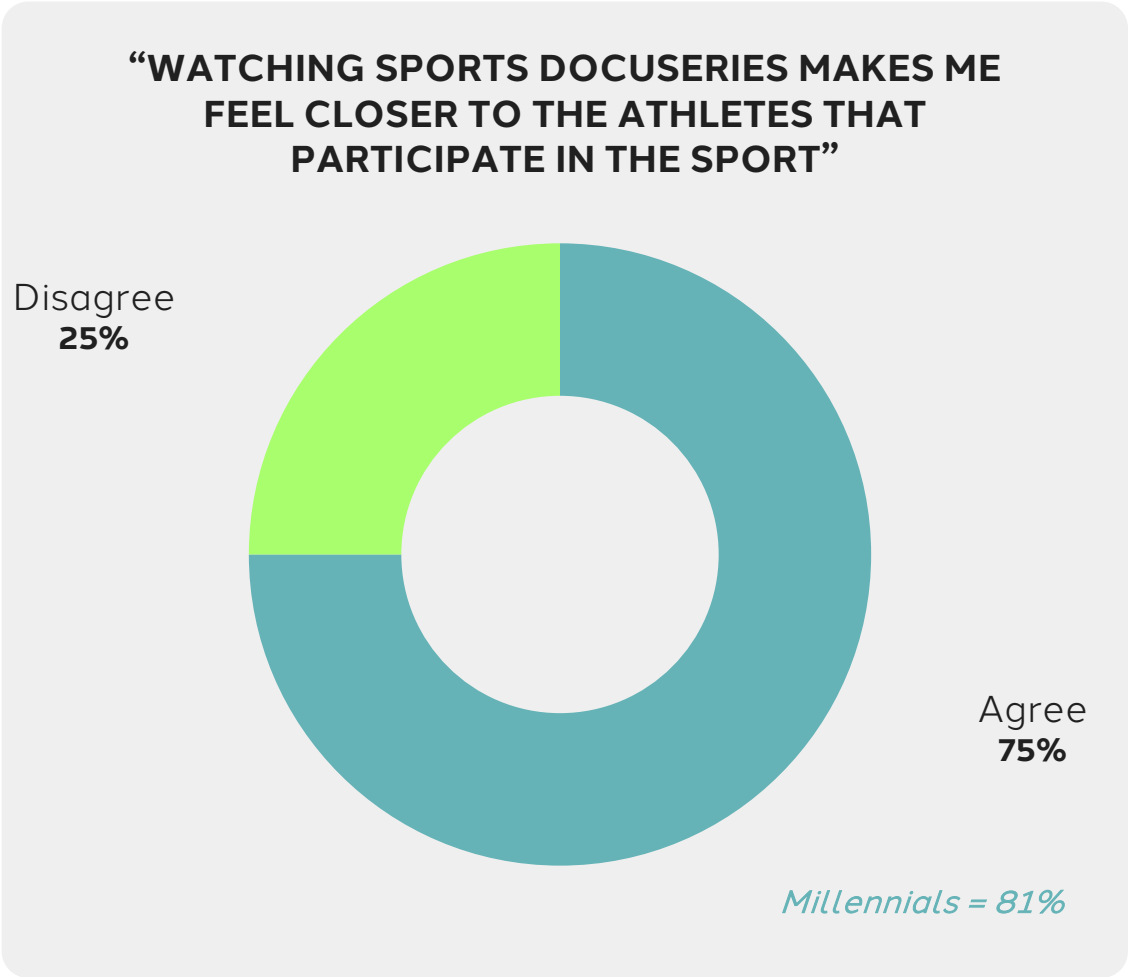


ATHLETES & STORYTELLING



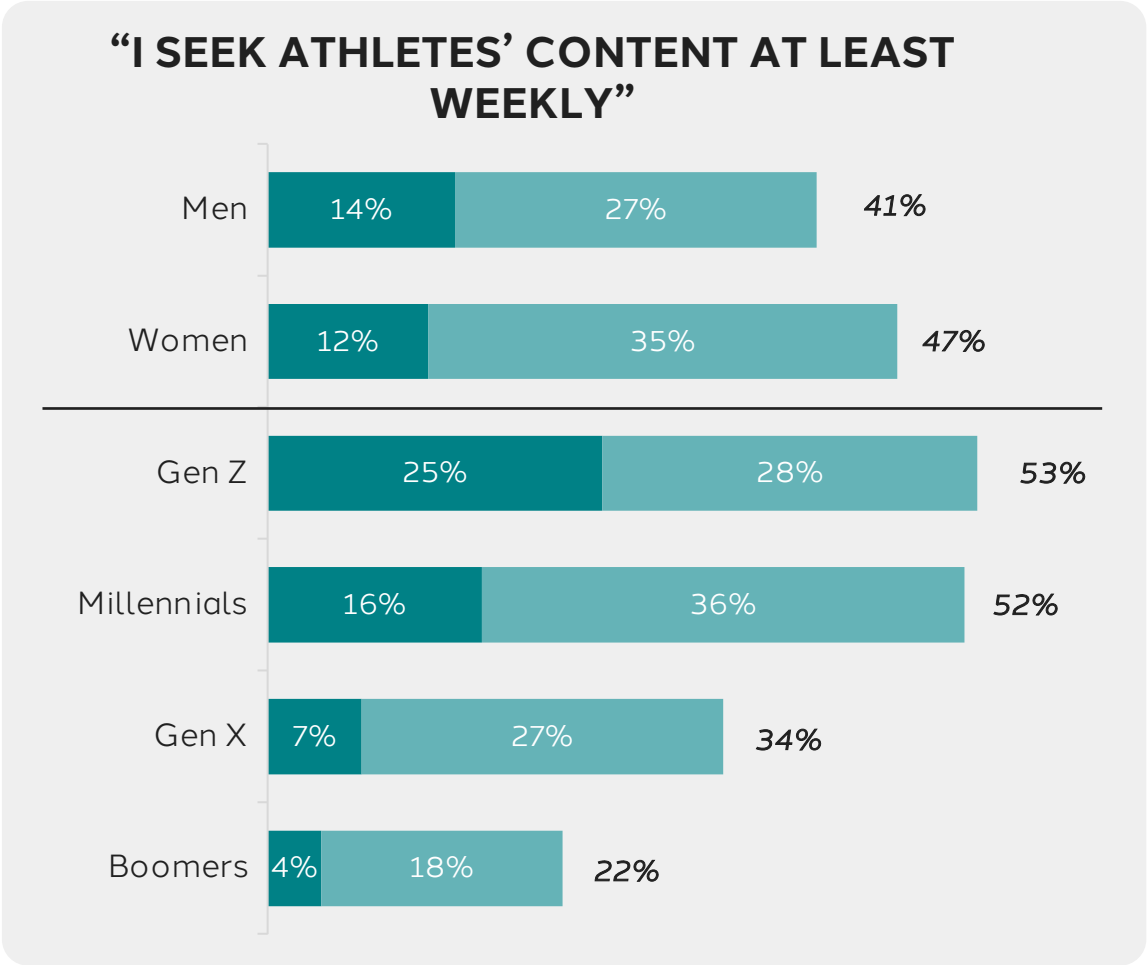
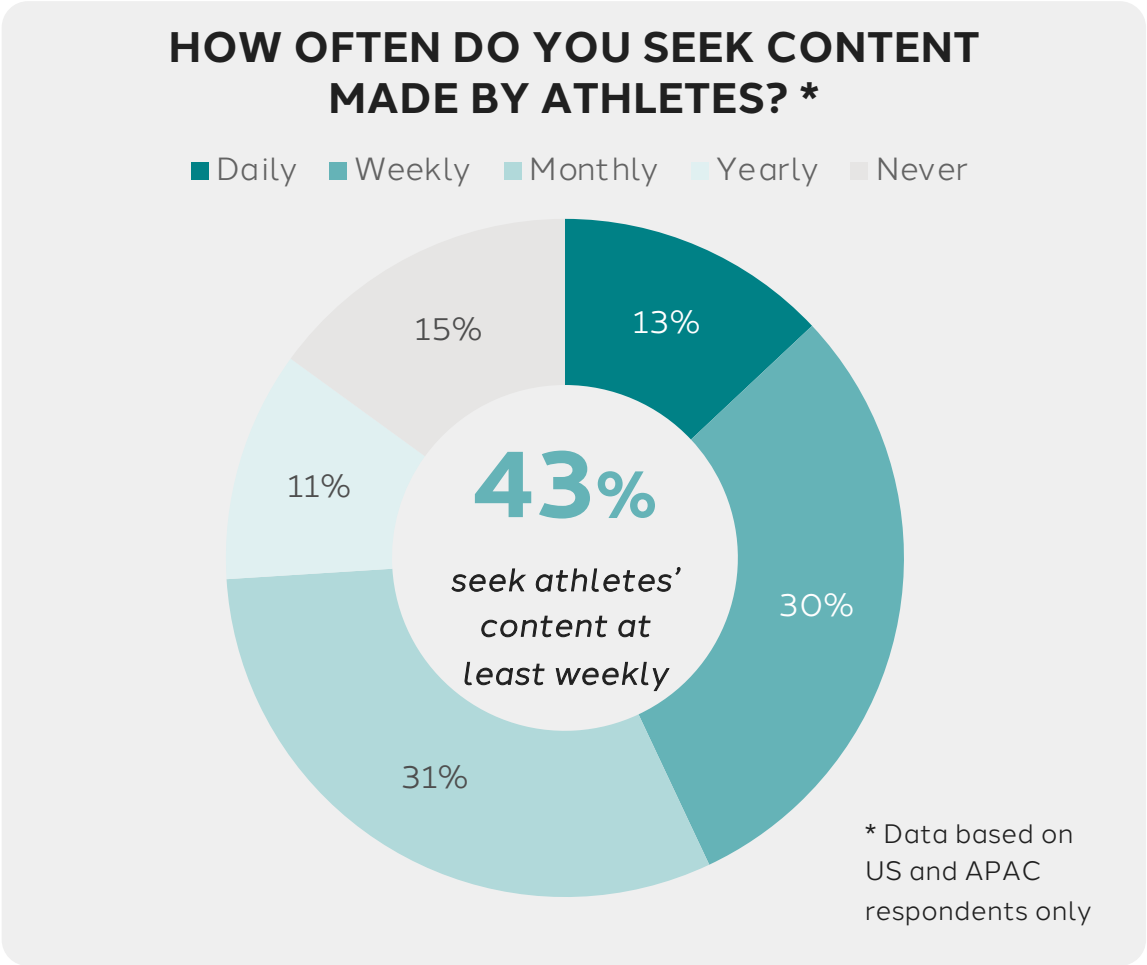
SPORTS DOCUSERIES ALLOW VIEWERS TO DEVELOP MORE INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS WITH ATHLETES AND SPORTS DISCIPLINES

Millennials are significantly fond of the closer access provided by sports docuseries.



4 IN 10 FANS SEEK ATHLETES’ CONTENT (E.G., VLOGS, SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS, ETC.) AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK

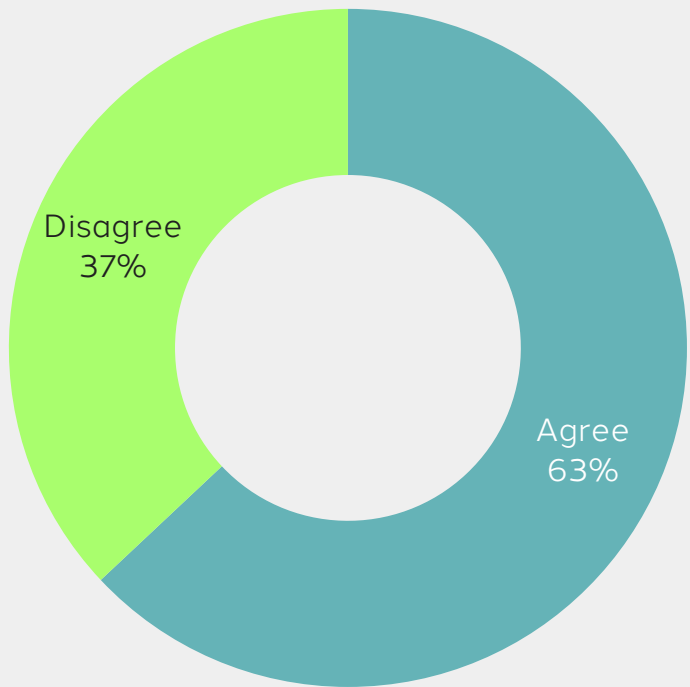
Women and Gen Zers are most likely to seek this type of content on a regular basis.



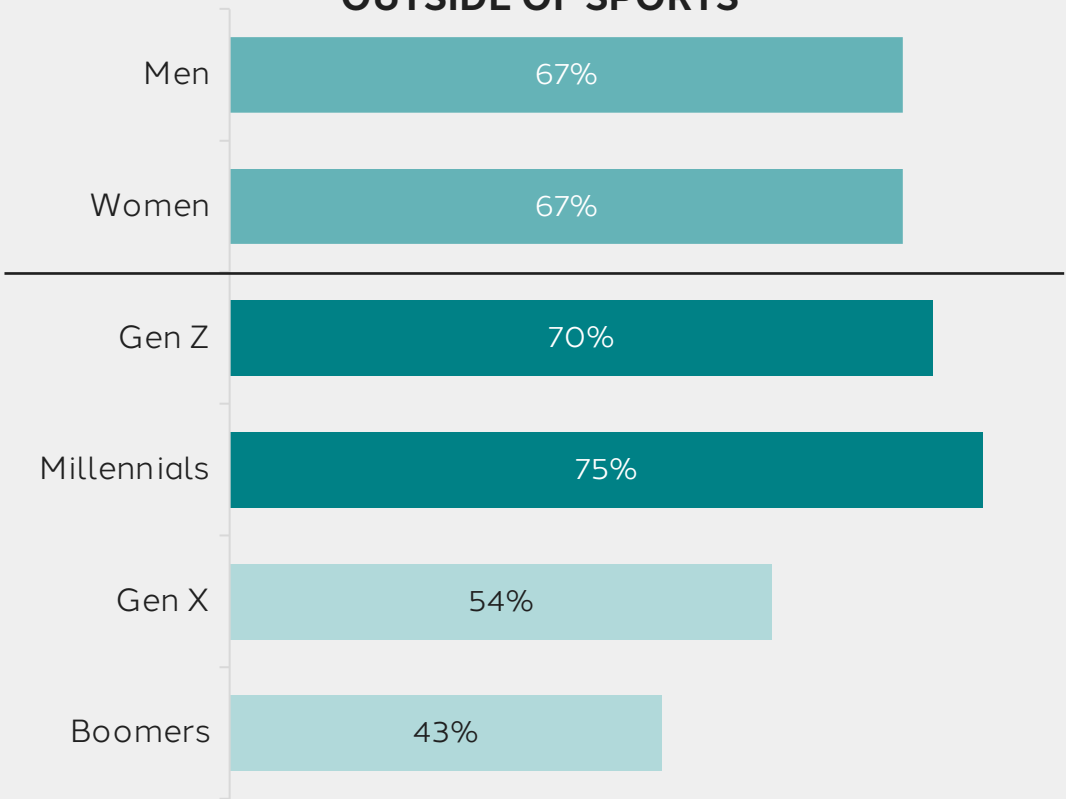
VIEWERS PREFER ENGAGING WITH ATHLETES WHO MANAGE TO TRANSCEND INTO STORYTELLERS

Gen Z and Millennials are most likely to share this sentiment.

"I PREFER FOLLOWING ATHLETES WHO SHARE THEIR PERSONAL STORIES AND EXPERIENCES OUTSIDE OF SPORTS"



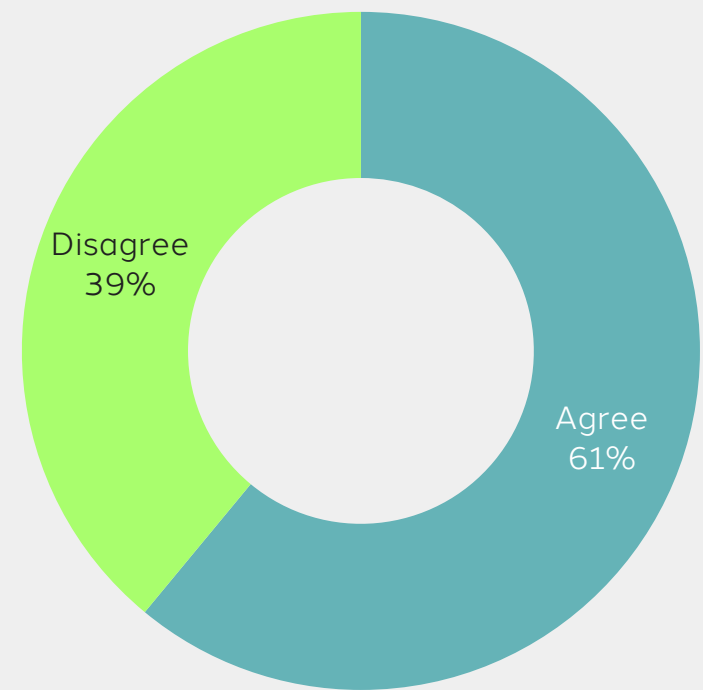
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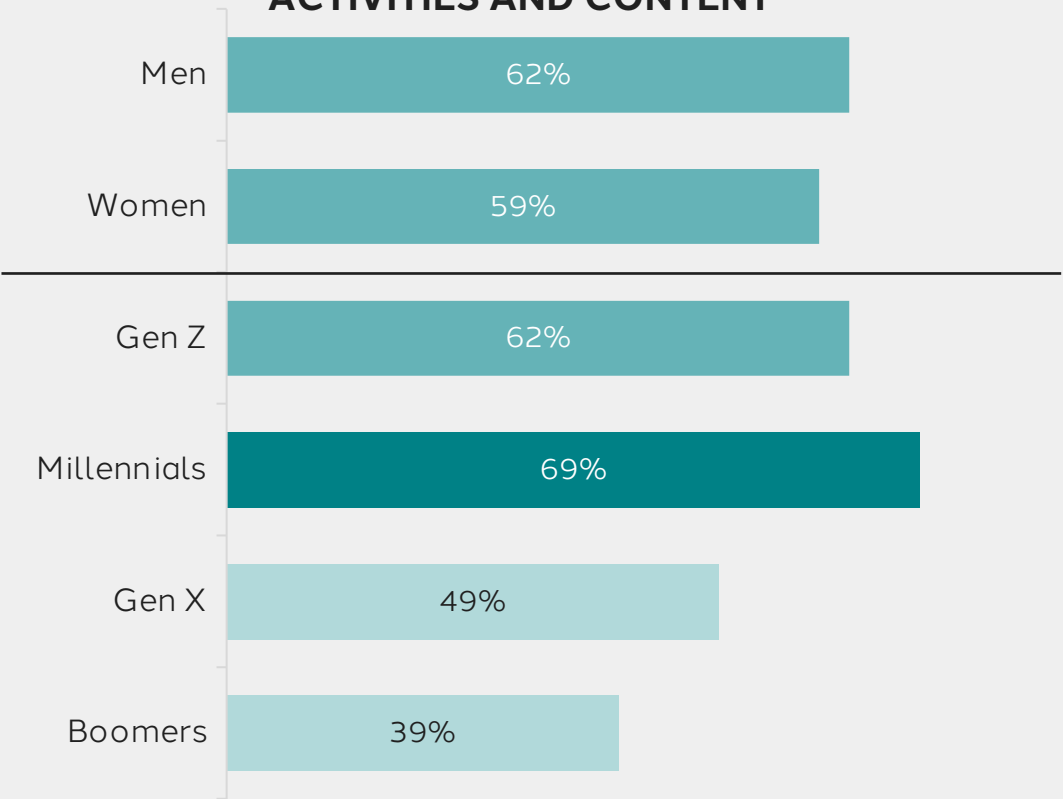
ATHLETES' PERFORMANCES ON THE FIELD DRIVE FANDOM, BUT THEIR STORIES BUILD CONNECTIONS

In particular, Millennials look at athletes' off-field activities and content as they develop personal connections with them.

"I FEEL A PERSONAL CONNECTION TO ATHLETES BASED ON THEIR OFF-FIELD ACTIVITIES AND CONTENT"



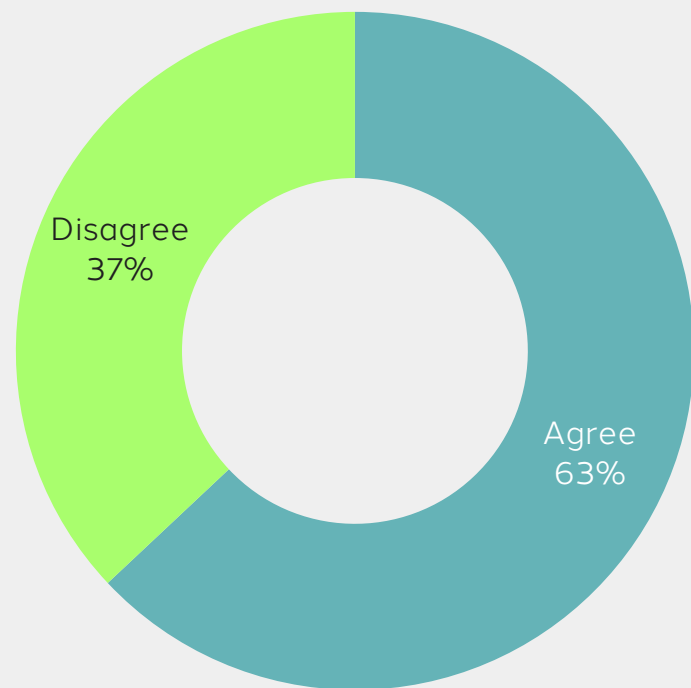
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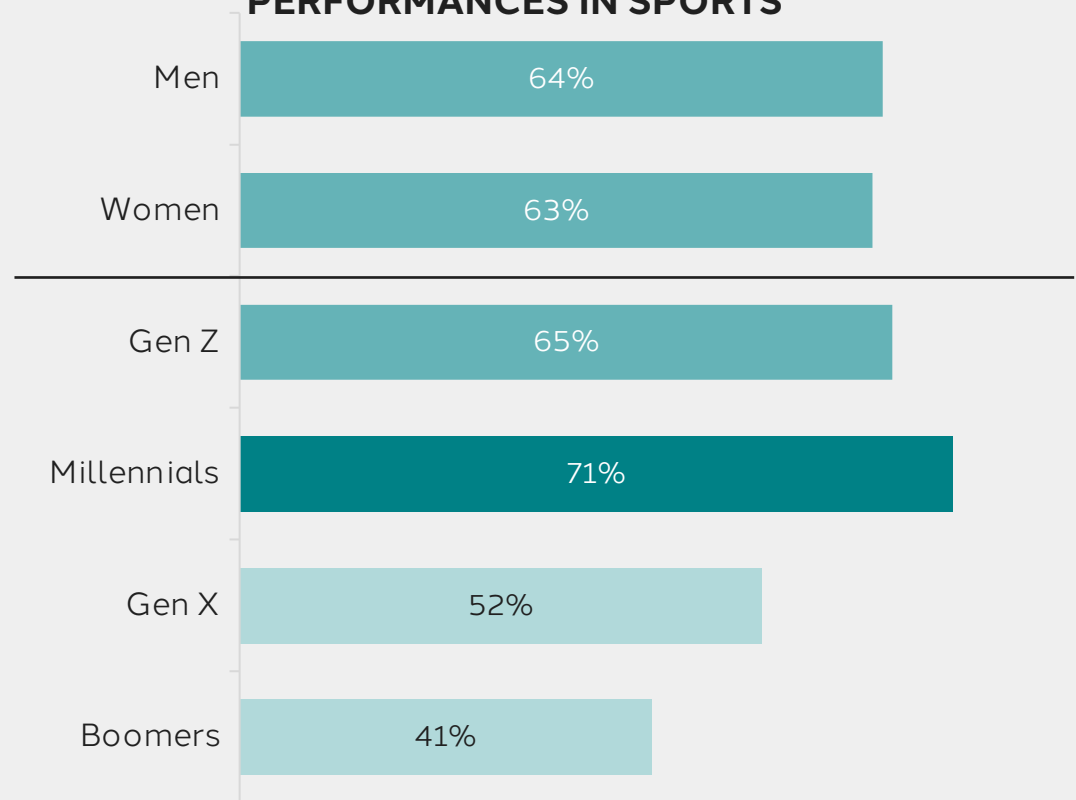
FOR MOST VIEWERS, WHAT ATHLETES DO OFF-FIELD MATTERS AS MUCH AS THEIR PERFORMANCES

Once again, Millennials over-index in agreeing.

”I CARE ABOUT THE OFF-FIELD ACTIVITIES OF ATHLETES AS MUCH AS I CARE ABOUT THEIR PERFORMANCES IN SPORTS”



”I CARE ABOUT THE OFF-FIELD ACTIVITIES OF ATHLETES AS MUCH AS I CARE ABOUT THEIR PERFORMANCES IN SPORTS”



IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS

THINK BEYOND THE SERIES – BUILD A CONTENT FLYWHEEL

Sports docuseries build emotional bonds—but the relationship doesn't end with the credits. Audiences, especially Gen Z and Millennials, actively seek out more from featured athletes on social and digital platforms. Brands should treat the docuseries as the starting point, then extend the connection through ongoing athlete-led content that deepens fan engagement with both the brand and athletes over time.

LOOK AT ATHLETES' STORYTELLING ABILITY, NOT JUST THEIR PERFORMANCE SCORES

Performance on the field is not necessarily the most pressing criterion when considering athletes as partners for your brand. Today, a new generation of athletes is emerging who are also savvy content creators - and the savviest are not always the best on the field. Every athlete has a unique stories to tell, which cater to a specific community. Ask first: which community does the brand want to engage with?

MAKE YOUR BRAND A CONNECTION POINT BETWEEN THE ATHLETE AND THE FAN

Social media has opened up a direct way for fans to interact with athletes, so thinking about sports personalities in the traditional role of spokespeople might not be the most compelling way for your brand to leverage these influencers. As fans now expect a more personal connection, brands can play a meaningful role by creating moments of interaction—through co-created content, behind-the-scenes access, or interactive formats—that bring fans closer to the athlete. In this new landscape, the brand becomes a bridge, not just a logo.



CLOSING THOUGHTS

IN A FRAGMENTED, POLARIZED WORLD, DOCUSERIES ARE A CULTURAL UNIFIER.

In a media landscape sliced by algorithms and siloed by identity, sports docuseries are one of the few formats that genuinely bring people together—across ages, genders, cultures, and continents. That’s not just rare. That’s powerful. And brands should take notice.

FROM SEARCH TO SPARK: BRANDS WIN WHEN THEY FUEL DISCOVERY.

In an age of AI-driven personalization, helping people find what they want is the baseline. The real value lies in helping them *discover* what they didn’t know they needed. Sports docuseries offer fertile ground for brands to inspire new interests, spark fandom, and shape emerging passions.

EMOTION IS THE EDGE—AND DOCUSERIES DELIVER IT AT SCALE.

As AI floods the world with clean, clever, but ultimately soulless content, emotional storytelling becomes a brand’s last true superpower. Sports docuseries work because they connect on a human level—through struggle, joy, failure, and resilience. For brands, aligning with this kind of storytelling isn’t just a good content strategy. It’s long-term brand differentiation.



HOW DENTSU CAN HELP

Active investments

Through its specialized entertainment practice, dentsu is actively involved in financing and co-producing Emmy award nominated sports documentaries and unscripted series for global platforms including HBO Max, Roku, Fox Sports and TUBI. We also have unparalleled levels of access into industry-leading sports-led entertainment talent, creators and producers including feature films, scripted series and podcasts. As a rights holder, dentsu can broker partnerships for brands looking to leverage some of the most exciting sports IP to capture the attention of audiences who are passionate about a specific discipline, team, or athletes, or who are just starting on their journey of discovery.

Unique understanding of fandoms

Combining its experience in sports sponsorships, events, and activations, with its data-driven understanding of

audiences' media consumption behaviors, dentsu can provide brands with actionable insights about fandom's viewing preferences and purchasing attitudes.

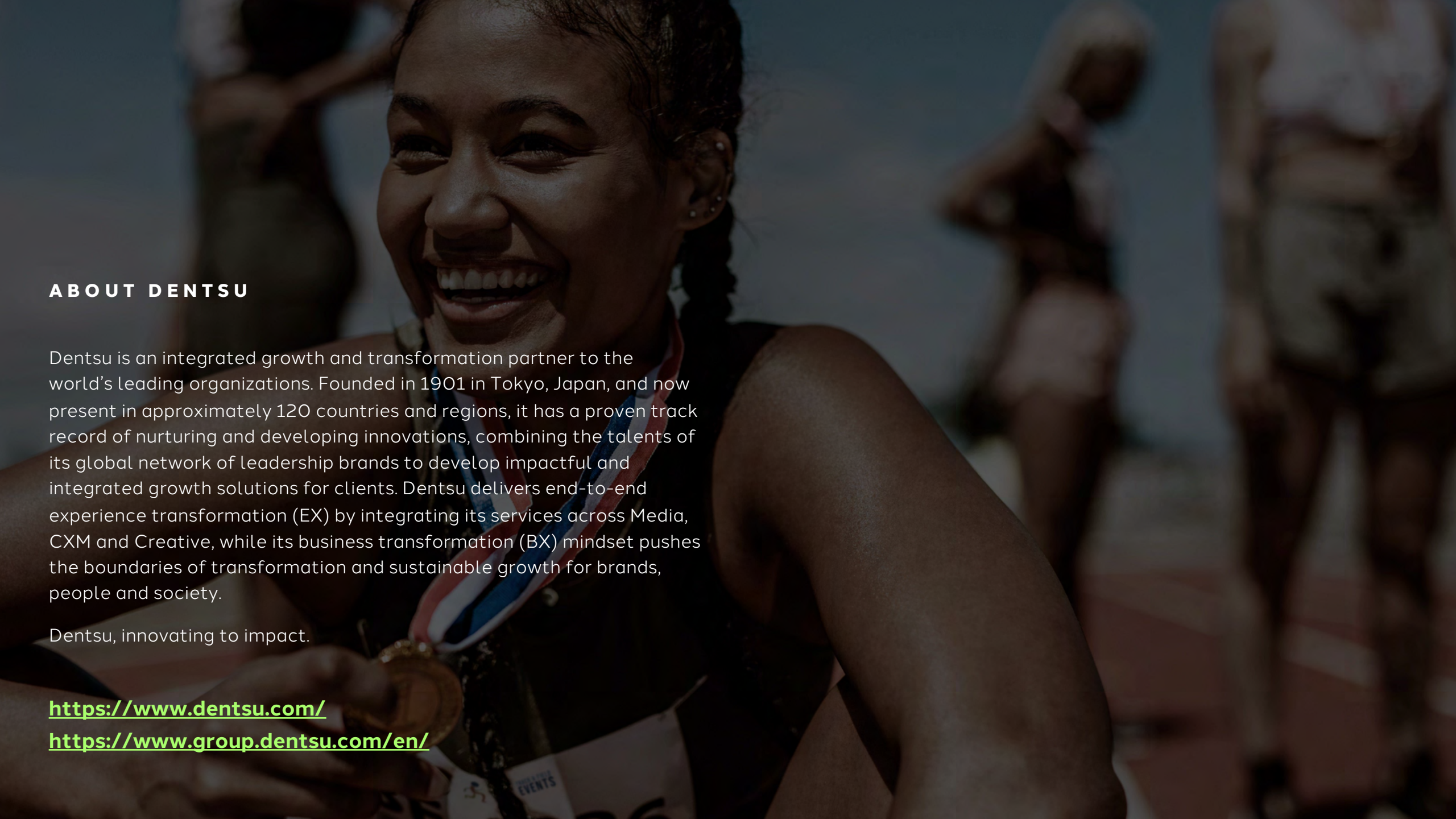
Experience with athletes' personal platforms

Through its influencer marketing capability, dentsu can guide brands looking to leverage athletes as content creators that can further their followers engagement with a brand, campaign, or product.

Support across the entire fandom-to-purchase spectrum

Bringing together insights, IP investments, creator partnerships, and full funnel brand support across campaign strategy, media planning, and customer experience transformation, dentsu can support brands with the full spectrum of capabilities needed to engage fans from inspiration all the way to purchase.



A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a woman with dark hair in a braid, smiling broadly. She is wearing a medal with a red, white, and blue ribbon around her neck. The background is out of focus, showing other people in similar attire, suggesting a sports or award ceremony setting. The overall tone is celebratory and positive.

ABOUT DENTSU

Dentsu is an integrated growth and transformation partner to the world's leading organizations. Founded in 1901 in Tokyo, Japan, and now present in approximately 120 countries and regions, it has a proven track record of nurturing and developing innovations, combining the talents of its global network of leadership brands to develop impactful and integrated growth solutions for clients. Dentsu delivers end-to-end experience transformation (EX) by integrating its services across Media, CXM and Creative, while its business transformation (BX) mindset pushes the boundaries of transformation and sustainable growth for brands, people and society.

Dentsu, innovating to impact.

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