

The effects of F1 drivers on fan engagement

Ricardo Xavier Souto Ferreira da Silva

Mestrado em Gestão

Orientadores:

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‘If you no longer go for a gap that exists, you’re no longer a racing driver.’

- Ayrton Senna

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I hope to make you all as proud as I am to have you in my life.

Resumo

A Fórmula 1 (F1) teve uma subida meteórica em popularidade nos últimos anos. O mesmo pode ser dito sobre os *influencers* como técnica de marketing. Contudo não existe uma resposta concreta que diga por que razão este aumento em espetadores aconteceu. O presente estudo analisa até que ponto é que os pilotos influenciam os níveis de relacionamento dos fãs devido à sua presença nas redes sociais, encarnando assim o papel de *influencers* para a marca F1. Este tópico é relevante pois explora a eficácia dos *influencers* no contexto desportivo, que é um contexto pouco estudado no mundo de *influencers* comparado ao setor da moda e beleza. Foi realizado um questionário a 439 fãs de F1 com o intuito de medir os níveis de perceção de autenticidade, ligação, e participação ativa em páginas de redes sociais. Foi efetuada uma análise de regressão para testar as hipóteses propostas. Os resultados sugerem que a ligação e a autenticidade impactam positivamente o relacionamento dos fãs, mas não existe impacto da participação ativa em páginas. Estes resultados validam a importância da autenticidade e ligação para os *influencers*, e abre a porta para futuros estudos sobre *influencers* como ferramenta de marketing.

Palavras-chave: Autenticidade, ligação, *influencers*, Fórmula 1, redes sociais

JEL: M37, M39

Abstract

Formula 1 (F1) has had a meteoric ascension in popularity in the past few years. The same can be said about influencers as a marketing tool. However, there is no clear answer as to why F1 has increased its viewership considerably. This study analyses to what extent drivers play a role in contributing to the engagement of fans through their presence on social media, essentially becoming influencers for the F1 brand. The current study is relevant as it explores the effectiveness of influencer marketing in the sports context, which is a context that has not been as explored as more common industries such as fashion and beauty. A questionnaire was used to measure the levels of perceived authenticity, attachment, and active page participation from 439 F1 fans. A regression analysis was done to test the hypotheses. The results suggest that attachment and authenticity positively impact fan engagement, but active page participation does not, which also show that the F1 drivers have an impact on the engagement of fans through their presence on social media. The findings validate the importance of authenticity and attachment for influencers and open a path for further research directions within the world of influencers, which are briefly discussed.

Keywords: Authenticity; attachment, influencers, Formula 1, social media

JEL: M37, M39

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
1. Literature Review	5
1.1. Authenticity	5
1.2. Celebrity Endorsements & Influencers	6
1.3. Brand Awareness.....	9
1.4. Brand love	11
2. Methodology	17
2.1. Hypothesis development and conceptual map	17
2.2. Quantitative Analysis	19
2.3. Data Analysis	20
3. Results and Discussion.....	25
Conclusions	27
Sources	31
Bibliography.....	33

List of Tables

Table 1.1 – Summary of concepts and different definitions by authors.....	13
Table 1.2 – Summary literary review.....	14
Table 2.1 – Summary of hypothesis developed.....	17
Table 2.2 – Summary of objectives and questions.....	19
Table 2.3 – Summary of variables.....	20
Table 2.4 – Sample profile.....	21
Table 2.5 – Construct reliability and validity.....	22
Table 2.6 – Discriminant validity.....	23
Table 2.7 – Structural results.....	23
Table 3.1 – Summary of tested hypotheses	25

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 – Aacker’s Brand Equity Model.....	10
Figure 2.1 – A conceptual model for the study.....	18

List of Acronyms

Active brand-like page participation – ABPP

Average variance extracted – AVE

Business to business – B2B

Business to consumer – B2C

Consumer-brand relationships – CBR

Consumer packaged goods – CPG

Composite reliability – CR

Corporate social responsibility – CSR

Formula 1 – F1

Intelligent virtual assistants – IVA

Social networking sites – SNS

Word of mouth – WOM

Introduction

Influencers have become an integral part of many brands' marketing strategies. Companies have discovered that marketing through influencers guarantees authenticity when marketing certain brands, allowing consumers to feel that the influencer in question believes that the product is worth buying (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). This type of marketing can be seen as an evolution from celebrity endorsements, where high-profile individuals, such as actors, musicians, or athletes, endorse particular brands. However, this marketing tactic is often associated with traditional media outlets such as print ads, billboards, and TV (Knoll & Matthes, 2017).

The latter tactic is widespread within the sports universe. Athletes are often used to endorse specific sportswear to promote the performance or prestige of the product. Due to their immense popularity and the rising importance of social media presence, many athletes shifted their focus from traditional types of endorsements to influencing their followers through their Instagram accounts, leading them to be considered celebrity influencers since their fame was not achieved through their online presence. (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). The same can be applied to Formula 1 drivers, who are high-performance athletes in a specific sport and have amassed a large following through their online presence.

Motor enthusiasts often consider Formula 1 (F1) the pinnacle of motorsports; this is due to the sheer speed of the cars, the talent needed to drive such a car, or the glamour surrounding the lifestyle of an F1 driver. Names like Michael Schumacher, Ayrton Senna, and Alain Prost are still regarded today as some of the most significant drivers of all time due to the accolades won by their prowess behind the wheel.

However, despite the fans' respect for these former drivers, the audience numbers in F1 have dropped significantly over the years. The numbers declined steadily from 527 million TV viewers in 2010 to 352.3 million in 2017, nearly 33% of the previous figure (Statista, 2021). In an interview with Autosport in 2014, ex-F1 supremo Bernie Ecclestone expressed his opinion on social media by saying that F1, under his management, would not waste money on modernising its communication channels. Ecclestone considered it was not worthwhile to chase after a younger audience when the cash inflow that F1 received mostly came from middle-aged adults and that brands that sponsor the events and the teams do not match nor stimulate interest within a younger audience (Noble, 2014).

Only in 2018, one year after the acquisition of the Formula 1 Group by Liberty Media, audience numbers increased, reaching 490.2 million people (Statista, 2021). At the beginning of the 2018 season that F1 invested in a heavier social media presence. A quick look at F1's

official Instagram page (@f1) shows a more significant focus on making the followers aware of what was happening around the paddock, even in pre-season training and testing. This would not be possible without the help of the drivers themselves, who provided the F1 page with videos of their preparations for the upcoming season. This behind-the-scenes peek at something that did not exist during previous seasons, especially before the existence of social media. Before, F1 drivers were often shrouded in mystery, and little was known about what was happening, both from a strategic and a technical standpoint.

Nowadays, F1 provides videos for YouTube and Instagram with content such as highlights and recaps for each race weekend's sessions, and tech talks about new upgrades that teams bring in for races and entertaining videos with the drivers from the grid. Parallel to this, F1 also releases videos on the top 10 moments of ex-drivers, which gives viewers a sense of nostalgia, which in turn increases their engagement with the brand (Annamalai, Yoshida, Varshney, Pathak & Venugopal, 2021). Before the start of the 2019 season, the first season of the Netflix docuseries Formula 1: Drive to Survive was released. This featured interviews with drivers about specific moments throughout the 2018 season and delved deeper into the happenings of the paddock, whether it be rivalries between constructors, drivers, or teammates, which was met with great praise.

Research problem

This change of direction in F1's marketing strategy has successfully reversed the trend of decreasing audience numbers. The problem is that there is no obvious factor to which to attribute this success. In the current literature, few studies evaluate influencers' impact on engagement with brands (Torres, Augusto & Matos, 2019). Therefore, it is noteworthy to study this topic, especially considering F1's previous aversion to social media and exploring their journey thus far.

Research main questions

Given the context of F1's history, the question that this study aims to answer is the following: To what extent does the presence in social media from the F1 drivers impact fan engagement?

Research questions and objectives

Through the main questions that were defined, the subsequent questions were then formulated:

RQ1: To what extent does authenticity impact fan engagement?

RQ2: To what extent does attachment impact fan engagement?

RQ3: To what extent does active page participation impact fan engagement?

With these research questions, the following objectives were set for this current study:

RO1: Analyse the relationship between authenticity and fan engagement

RO2: Analyse the relationship between attachment and fan engagement

RO3: Analyse the relationship between active page participation and fan engagement

Thesis structure

First, a literary review will be presented to contextualise the academic research thus far and the conceptual model used for the study. The study's methodology will be introduced, followed by the results, discussion, and conclusions.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Authenticity

Authenticity has been the subject of many studies in recent years, specifically from a marketing perspective. According to Gilmore and Pine (2007, p. 5), "authenticity has overtaken quality as the prevailing purchasing criterion, just as quality overtook cost, and as cost overtook availability." As such, marketing departments must pay special attention to their perceived authenticity, as nowadays, consumers are more worried about companies being who they say they are and selling what they say they are selling (Gilmore & Pine, 2007).

Frequently, authenticity is paired with the concept of uniqueness, distancing a specific product or service from the rest of the competition. In a study on whether brand authenticity impacts the building of brand love within the luxury hotel setting (Manthiou, Kang, Hyun & Fu, 2018), authenticity was shown to positively influence brand love, as well as other concepts such as lifestyle congruence and impression with memory. In other words, authentic experiences are more likely to be remembered by consumers and therefore generate love for a brand (Manthiou et al., 2018). However, it was found that uniqueness plays a minor role in the relationship between authenticity, memorability, and brand love, which can be seen as somewhat contrary to the popular belief that something unique is more memorable (Manthiou et al., 2018).

Authenticity can be explored from many perspectives, such as a vital construct in any industry, a product or service or a B2B or B2C context. In another study conducted by Moehl and Friedman (2022), the authors investigated how consumers judge companies' corporate social responsibility (CSR) 's authenticity using Kelley's attribution theory which has 3 components: distinctiveness (whether someone behaves in the same way across similar events), consensus (whether others behave the same way in similar events), and consistency (whether something behaves in the same way over time) (Mohel & Friedman, 2022). Whether these components are high or low, it is then determined whether the behaviour is internally driven or externally induced.

As such, the authors applied this theory in order to determine whether companies that are internally driven in their CSR practices are perceived as more authentic compared to companies that are externally driven (Mohel & Friedman, 2022). In essence, the authors want to determine if companies are engaging in CSR because they believe it is the right thing to do and is aligned with their values, or because they view CSR as 'standard practice', and therefore deploy less effort in their actions.

The results showed that companies with low distinctiveness, consensus, and high consistency were deemed more substantive causality, meaning that the participants found these companies to be more authentic (Moehl & Friedman, 2022). However, these companies were also deemed to have more symbolic causality than the control group, which was described as having no CSR actions. The authors believe that this unexpected result might come down to cultural bias, in that in a specific culture, people feel more sceptical towards companies and their CSR activities (Moehl & Friedman, 2022).

Another study was developed for the fashion industry in India, where authors Das, Jebarajakirthy, and Sivapalan (2022) explored the effects of brand authenticity on the relationship between luxury consumption values (functional, symbolic, experiential, and zero-moment-of-truth) and masstige fashion purchase intentions using the SOR (stimulus, organism, response) model. The results showed that brand authenticity's quality and sincerity dimensions positively affected the relationship between consumption values and masstige fashion purchase intentions (Das et al., 2022). However, heritage, the other dimension of brand authenticity, was found not to influence functional and symbolic values in a significant way, which shows how authenticity is not a one-way street when it comes to targeting specific groups (Das et al., 2022). This relates to the study conducted by Manthiou et al. (2018), as it also pertains to middle-class consumers who want to elevate their experiences by seeking experiences and products that are not perceived as ordinary and day-to-day.

In another study related to the tourism industry, conducted by Ferreira, Loureiro, Ashfaq and Pereira (2022), the effects of authenticity and attachment as drivers of engagement in tourist-virtual assistant communications are explored. The importance of this study is highlighted by the growth of intelligent virtual assistants (IVAs) and their advancing capabilities, not only in the tourism industry but also in other contexts. The study concluded that both attachment and authenticity positively influence tourist-IVA engagement, which increases the probability of future usage (Ferreira et al., 2022). This shows how authenticity can lead to a more positive perception of brands.

1.2. Celebrity Endorsements & Influencers

Although somewhat similar, celebrity endorsements and influencing concepts are not interchangeable. There has been a recent 'migration' of celebrities to different social networks, but they cannot be considered influencers. Influencers strictly refer to those who have achieved their fame solely through online activity (Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget, 2020).

Since celebrities have been around for much longer than influencers, there is extensive literature on celebrity endorsements compared to influencers (Knoll & Matthes, 2016). However, there has been a significant number of publications in the past few years on influencers due to their growth as a marketing strategy for brands that want to increase their market share, especially among a younger audience, due to the increasing amount of time people spend online (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

A meta-analysis by Knoll and Matthes (2016) showed that, on average, celebrity endorsements do not affect brand awareness but affect consumers' attitudes toward the object endorsed. Also, it was found that implicit endorsements perform better than explicit endorsements, which ties in with the concept of authenticity, as consumers prefer to be persuaded by celebrities that appear to merely be conveying their personal experience rather than convincing them to buy a product explicitly (Knoll & Matthes, 2016). This is in line with a study conducted by Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016) on celebrities in social media, where empirical evidence showed that authenticity positively influences followers' emotional attachment and purchase likelihood.

The concept of authenticity within influencers and celebrity endorsements is further explored by Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Guidry Moulard (2020), where the authors sought to create a framework of 4 different paths to authenticity from a study conducted by interviewing influencers and performing content analysis on posts where influencers were partnering with brands. From this study, they concluded that influencers use two different strategies when it comes to authenticity: emotional authenticity, where they choose to represent products that they indeed use and like, and whose brands are in line with their values; and transparent authenticity, where influencers provide a truthful experience and explain to their followers that they were asked to talk about a specific product (Audrezet et al., 2020).

From this initial finding, the authors then developed a framework where they base the levels of authenticity on the two strategies mentioned previously: absolute authenticity (high passion and transparency), fairy tale authenticity (high passion, low transparency), disembodied authenticity (high transparency and low passion), and fake authenticity (common passion and transparency). In addition, the authors also add that influencers must be careful of the partnerships they agree to, as some might not allow the influencers to work within their guidelines, therefore putting their authenticity at risk (Audrezet et al., 2020).

Considering the importance of authenticity, influencers have the upper hand in perceived authenticity, especially when the influencer's follower count is between 10,000 and 100,000 followers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). As mentioned, influencers can

convey a more authentic message to their followers depending on the strategy adopted. Influences need to keep this in mind as the more authentically the message is conveyed, the more likely it is for the consumer to be convinced to purchase a specific product or service, as Knolls and Matthes (2016) suggest in their meta-analysis where they measure the performance of implicit and explicit endorsements.

However, De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) found that having more followers led to more positive attitudes towards the influencer, particularly in popularity, thus establishing opinion leadership. In another study by Tafesse and Wood (2021), however, a higher number of followers led to less engagement. This is due to the similarities consumers begin to draw from celebrities and tie them to influencers as their follower count gets too high. On the other hand, a higher number of followers (people/pages that the influencers follow) leads to more engagement because consumers see this as an admittance of humility and that the influencers, like the consumers, also get inspired by other people. In other words, there is empirical evidence that consumers are attracted to the human element of influencers because they can identify and engage with them in a manner that cannot be achieved with celebrities.

Another way of measuring authenticity, besides what consists of the celebrity or influencer's message, is exploring the brand extension of said person and whether the product/service will be successful. In a study conducted by Osorio, Centeno, Cambra-Fierro and del Castillo (2022), the relationship between brand extension fit and authenticity and product valuation in celebrity-branded products is explored, along with the effect of idol attachment as a moderator. Brand extension fit is when the product in question fits with the celebrity's image (e.g., an ex-golf player selling golf clubs).

The results showed that fit, authenticity and idol attachment positively influenced product valuation in hedonic (e.g., perfumes) and functional products (e.g., protein powder) (Osorio et al., 2022). However, the fit seemed to be the best predictor of product valuation for functional products compared to authenticity. Also, authenticity was shown not to be able to overcome a lack of fit when it comes to brand extensions, which was otherwise proven in previous studies. As for idol attachment as a driver of product valuation, it performed better than fit with hedonic products, but it was outperformed by both fit and attachment with functional products. The relationship with idol attachment as a moderator was positive, with functional products for both fit and attachment. However, with hedonic products, the effects were only significant with authenticity (Osorio et al., 2022). This study allows celebrities to choose better how to extend their brands in products or services.

Besides authenticity, trustworthiness is also an element explored in the available literature, further adding to the connection with consumers influencers promote in contrast with celebrities. Schouten et al. (2020) conducted a study comparing celebrity and influencer endorsements which produced empirical evidence that showed that influencers are viewed as more trustworthy than celebrities, and consumers identify more with influencers than celebrities. However, the endorsement's effectiveness depends on whether the endorsed product can enhance feelings of similarity and identification with the consumer.

Similarly, a study conducted by Torres, Augusto, and Matos (2019) showed that influencers were found to be most effective when there is a congruent fit between the influencer and the brand, as well as when the influencer has a high level of attractiveness (likability and familiarity), specifically in the "fashion and beauty" and "entertainment and video game" categories. This effectiveness positively influences the consumers' attitude towards the endorsement, indirectly affecting brand attitude and purchase intentions. Additionally, Ibáñez-Sánchez, Flavián, Casaló, and Belanche (2021) studied the effect of renowned brands on an influencer's message effectiveness and reputation and concluded that consumers' attitude towards the message was more favourable when the influencer endorses a renowned brand compared to when they endorse a non-renowned brand. Collaborating with renowned brands also increases the influencer's credibility amongst their audience, which ties in with the concept of trustworthiness explored earlier.

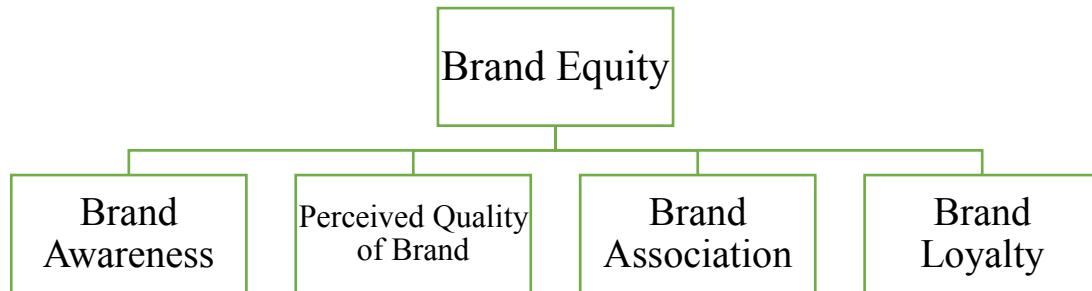
1.3. Brand Awareness

Unlike influencers, brand awareness is a topic that has extensive literature available. The literature used for this study is predominantly focused on young consumers and the perception of brand awareness and its effects in social media and online contexts. The definition of brand awareness is "how consumers associate the brand with the particular product that they aim to own" (Sasmita & Mohd Suki, 2015, p.278).

In a study conducted in Malaysia (Sasmita & Mohd Suki, 2015), the authors concluded that brand awareness positively affects brand equity among young consumers. The model used for the study is based on Aaker's model from 1991, where brand equity is explained to have four drivers: brand awareness, perceived quality of a brand, brand association, and brand loyalty.

Figure 1.1

Aaker's Brand Equity model



Note. Model adapted from Sasmita and Mohd Suki (2015)

However, this was tested in a different context, considering the study's participants are members of the digital generation. Additionally, these effects on brand equity created by brand awareness drive the need for young consumers to buy a specific product (Sasmita & Mohd Suki, 2015). In other words, their decision depends on whether they recognise a particular brand or not, further enhancing the importance of brand awareness. Meanwhile, a study conducted in Spain by Molinillo, Japutra, Nguyen and Chen (2017) aimed to study the effect of brand personality on brand awareness, trust and loyalty by exploring whether a trustworthy brand or an active brand would positively affect each construct. This study was conducted due to the rising interest in Consumer-Brand Relationships (CBR). They concluded that an active brand has higher awareness than a trustworthy brand. However, being overly active can negatively affect brand trust and loyalty (Molinillo et al., 2017), meaning that brands must find the right balance between being active and responsible for achieving desirable levels of awareness, trust, and loyalty.

Regarding the rising interest in CBR and the neglect of brand awareness as an aspect of brand equity, Romaniuk, Wight, and Faulkner (2017) produced a study where brand awareness was studied over time and in different countries to see its interaction with market shares. The authors concluded that global brand managers should avoid adopting a 'one-size fits all' approach as different markets with different levels of maturity and market share sizes have different needs in terms of levels of brand awareness (Romaniuk et al., 2017).

Additionally, Langaro, Rita, and Fátima Salgueiro (2018) studied brand awareness in a social media context, evaluating the impact of users' participation on brand awareness and brand attitude. The results showed that Active Brand-like Page Participation (ABPP), which is any activity related to contributing and creating content, positively impacts brand awareness, thus enforcing the importance of social media in the modern market. However, ABPP has an

insignificant direct impact on brand attitude, and with brand awareness as a mediator of the relationship between ABPP and brand attitude, the relationship is more significant and positive.

1.4. Brand love

Brand love is a concept that has also gained popularity in recent years. As mentioned previously, with the rise of CBR (Molinillo et al., 2017), brands now look to create stronger bonds with consumers, leading them to love the brand and behave a certain way.

Theoretically, brand love is derived from emotional attachment toward brands, which was introduced as a topic of study at the beginning of the 2000s. Thomson, MacInnis and Park (2005) were among the first authors to discuss emotional attachment to brands and empirically differentiate it from other concepts, such as satisfaction and brand attitude. The conclusions signalled that attachment is a more robust connection that impacts the consumer's behaviour, as it encourages brand loyalty, willingness to pay a price premium, and positive word of mouth (WOM). This connection also leads to separation distress when the brand is no longer available and goes beyond immediate feelings after consumption. Their work was derived from Bowlby's attachment theory of 1979 and concluded that emotional attachment to brands is derived from 3 first-order factors: affection, passion, and connection (Thomson et al., 2005).

In another study, Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, and Iacobucci (2010) propose a different approach to brand attachment. Although both articles (Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005) suggest that attachment is directly linked to the self, the study conducted by Park et al. (2010) concluded that attachment goes beyond emotions and that attachment is better explained when derived from two concepts, brand-self connection and brand prominence, that capture the emotions that accompany attachment. The authors conclude that brand attachment differs from brand attitude strength in several ways: brand attachment has emotional and self-implications that have a more significant impact on consumer behaviour, whose strength is related to the bond between the brand and the self-developing over time.

As brand love became a more central concept within the literature, Palazon, Delgado-Ballester and Sicilia (2018) studied the impact of brand pages, particularly on Facebook, on brand love. Their research signalled that as brand pages influence consumers' trust, sense of community, purchase decisions, WOM behaviour and loyalty towards the brand, brand love is also fostered through the consumer's desire to expand within the two dimensions of identity: the individual level, which is developed through interactions with the brand (self-brand connection), and the group level, which is developed through interactions with other consumers who love the brand (sense of brand community) (Palazon et al., 2018).

Another study conducted by Schmid and Huber (2019) sought to analyse brand love over time. Although previous studies only looked at brand love through a snapshot view, others have emphasised the importance of time for developing brand love (Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005). The general assumption is that love often follows an inverse U-shape pattern, starting low at the exploration phase, growing through the expansion phase, culminating at a peak in the maturity phase, before slowly declining towards the end of the relationship. However, this study suggests that not all brand love subdimensions follow this pattern. The authors state that although the findings support the transferability of interpersonal love theories to customer-brand relationships, unexpected patterns arose in the study conducted (Schmid and Huber, 2018). The authors also concluded that no significant differences existed between the values of brand love collected for hedonic or utilitarian brands.

Palasuk, Koles, and Hasan (2019) developed a framework for brand love, as they believe that brand love as a concept is scarcely developed as it is too similar to other concepts, such as brand liking, brand passion, or brand attachment. They mention that most authors consider interpersonal love theory similar enough to explain consumer-brand relationships suitably. However, the authors of this article consider that brand love is driven more by rational choices and benefits and that the brand itself cannot effectively love the consumer back, likening it to a parasocial relationship (Palasuk et al., 2019). They also mention that many authors conclude that the lines between brand love and brand attachment are blurred, making it difficult to decipher what differentiates the two concepts.

They conclude by proposing a framework that consists of 3 typologies of different brand love paths: Love Marriage, where consumers love the brand immediately from first contact; Experience-based Relationship, where consumers start by liking the brand and then develop those feelings towards love; and Arranged Marriage, where consumers start by feeling neutral towards the brand, and over time, they begin to love the brand (Palasuk et al., 2019). They also develop the following definition for brand love: "an intensive emotional connection characterised by intimacy, passion, and commitment, which may emerge at the initial consumer-brand encounter, but may also develop over time, based on delightful experiences and/or shared history" (Palasuk et al., 2019, p.116).

Rahman, Langner, and Temme (2021) have most recently put forth a comprehensive model through an extensive literature review and a mixed-methods approach, where they viewed brand love as its construct rather than an outcome, with its antecedents, mediators, and outcomes. Through the studies conducted, they concluded that brand love as a construct has two elements: affection and separation distress and that it has four primary outcomes: brand loyalty,

willingness to pay a price premium, WOM intentions and willingness to forgive mistakes, which is in line with previous studies (Thomson et al., 2005; Park et al., 2010). Its antecedents, meaning they must be present for brand love to manifest itself, are brand satisfaction, brand fit with the inner self, and personal experiences. However, contrary to popular belief, brand pleasure was not found to be a direct antecedent, along with the brand's functional, sensory, and communicative uniqueness. This is due to the importance of personal experiences in fostering brand love (Rahman et al., 2021). However, this uniqueness influences other drives for brand love, such as brand satisfaction and brand fit with the inner self.

Brand love is a mediator of its distal and proximal antecedents on behavioural outcomes, apart from a willingness to forgive mistakes, which was directly influenced by brand love alone. Brand loyalty is also dependent on brand love and satisfaction, with brand fit with inner self having no significant impact on any behavioural outcomes and working only as a mediator of brand love, WOM intentions and willingness to forgive mistakes. (Rahman et al., 2021). This comprehensive model allows managers to visualise better how to achieve brand love and its outcomes.

Table 1.1

Summary of concepts and different definitions by authors

Concept	Authors	Definition
Celebrity Endorsement	Atkin & Block (1983), as cited in Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget (2020)	"...transferring the positive image and characteristics of a celebrity onto a brand..." (p. 258)
Influencer	Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget (2020)	Those that have achieved their fame solely through their online activity
Authenticity	Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016)	"...a post or photo that demonstrates some aspect of the celebrity's true self." (p. 347)
	Audrazet et al. (2020)	"Authentic brands are those whose marketers appear to be in business or engaged in their craft because it is enjoyable and provides hedonic value." (p. 559)
Brand Awareness	Sasmita and Mohd Suki (2015)	"...how consumers associate the brand with the particular product that they aim to own." (p. 278)

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), as cited by Palazon, Delgado-Ballester and Sicilia (2018)	“...the degree of passionate, emotional attachment a consumer has for a brand.” (p. 3)
Brand Love	
Palusuk et al. (2016)	“...an intensive emotional connection characterised by intimacy, passion, and commitment, which may emerge at the initial consumer-brand encounter but may also develop over time, based on delightful experiences and/or shared history.” (p. 116)

Note. Own work.

Table 1.2

Summary of literary review

Author, Year	Main Topics	Main Issues/Further Research
Thomson, M., MacInnis, D. J., and Park, C. W. (2005)	Measuring the strength of consumer's emotional attachment to brands	Participants chose the brand to analyse; authors suggest using well-known brands; comparing symbolic and hedonic brands; specifying purchase situations to each dimension
Whan Park, C., MacInnis, D. J., Priester, J., Eisingerich, A. B., and Lacobucci, D. (2010)	Exploring the difference between brand attachment and brand attitude strength as brand equity drivers	Exploring the effect of these concepts in other metrics such as unit price, marketing costs, etc.; examine the boundary conditions under which prominence plays a role as a critical indicator of attachment
Gensler, S., Völckner, F., Liu-Thompkins, Y., and Wiertz, C. (2013)	Introducing a framework of social media's impact on brand management	Consider different roles of the company within social media, such as moderators, mediators or participants; study the impact of integrated storytelling on consumers' decision making
Sasmita, J., and Mohd Suki, N. (2015)	Effect of brand equity among young consumers	The sample size is narrow; the geographic region is limited
Kowalczyk, C. M., and Pounders, K. R. (2016)	Engagement between celebrities and consumers in social media	Participants chose the celebrities/social media site
De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., and Hudders, L. (2017)	Impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude	Authors suggest looking into how an influencer's "style" can affect their performance
Molinillo, S., Japutra, A., Nguyen, B., and Chen, C. S. (2017)	Effect of brand personality on brand awareness, trust, and loyalty	Authors suggest replicating the conceptual framework cross-culturally; expand the framework with other brand personality traits

Romaniuk, J., Wight, S., & Faulkner, M. (2017)	Brand awareness in a global brand management context	Small scope: one product across three countries; authors also suggest using between-subject conditions
Langaro, D., Rita, P., and de Fátima Salgueiro, M. (2018)	Impact of social media participation on brand awareness and attitude	Look at other segments other than CPG; use more SNSs other than Facebook; measure ABPP in different ways other than a questionnaire
Manthiou, A., Kang, J., Hyun, S. S., and Fu, X. X. (2018)	Impact of brand authenticity on building brand love	Only US consumers participated; authenticity was explored as a unified construct; only one moderator was used
Palazon, M., Delgado-Ballester, E., and Sicilia, M. (2019)	Analyse how brand love is built in brand pages	Test proposed model on other product categories; control length of membership on brand pages; test model on other SNSs
Palusuk, N., Koles, B., and Hasan, R. (2019)	Critical review on brand love	Explore antecedents and moderators of brand love in more detail and a more developmental perspective; conduct cross-cultural studies; use more qualitative methods
Schmid, D. A., and Huber, F. (2019)	Effect of time on brand love and its elements	Provide clarity on the conceptualisation of brand love through empirical activity; explore the changes between brand love's antecedents and outcomes over time; conduct a longitudinal study
Torres, P., Augusto, M., and Matos, M. (2019)	Effect of influencer attractiveness and congruency with the brand on consumer attitude and purchase intention	The sample size & number of categories considered are small
Audrezet, A., de Kerviler, G., and Guidry Moulard, J. (2020)	Introducing a framework for authenticity management	Explore temporal dynamics in influencers' careers; explore the role of influencer marketing in product placement;
Schouten, A. P., Janssen, L., and Verspaget, M. (2020)	Role of identification, credibility and product-endorser fit in influencer marketing	Improve the way the endorsements were presented; broaden product categories and influencer types in the study
Annamalai, B., Yoshida, M., Varshney, S., Pathak, A. A., and Venugopal, P. (2021)	Impact of content type and vividness on fan engagement in sports	Extend the study to other sports; account for social contagion; explore further the different effects of different themes of content types
Ibáñez-Sánchez, S., Flavián, M., Casaló, L. V., and Belanche, D. (2021)	Effects of renowned brands on influencer's message effectiveness and reputation	Extending the study to more brands and categories, as well as other countries
Rahman, R., Langner, T., and Temme, D. (2021)	Introducing a holistic, casual model for brand love	Use a population-representative sample in terms of socio-demographic features (all participants were students); conduct a longitudinal study, and investigate other relative variables further;
Tafesse, W., and Wood, B. P. (2021)	Role of influencer content and	The sample size is small; narrow geographic region; use different measures for content volume and influencers'

	engagement strategy on followers' engagement behaviour	domain of interest; study followers' perception of influencers' content novelty
Das, M., Jebarajakirthy, C., and Sivapalan, A. (2022)	Relationship between consumption values, authenticity and masstige purchase	The study was limited to women in India; volatility of consumer response to luxury fashion;
Ferreira, M., Loureiro, S. M. C., Ashfaq, M., and Pereira, H. (2022)	Effect of authenticity and attachment as drivers of engagement between tourist-virtual assistant communication	The questionnaire was only disseminated online; future studies should look at generational differences, as well as the impact/outcomes of tourist-IVA engagement
Moehl, S., and Friedman, B. A. (2022)	Effects of perceived authenticity on CSR judgement	The study was limited to young, white-collar workers who have internet access
Osorio, M. L., Centeno, E., Cambra-Fierro, J., and del Castillo, E. (2022)	Role of brand extension fit and authenticity in product valuation	Participants chose the celebrities in question

Note. Own work.

2. Methodology

2.1. Hypothesis development and conceptual map

The F1 drivers' social media presence gives F1 fans a glimpse of who the drivers are outside the paddock. This allows for a different connection to be created between the fans and the drivers, which would otherwise not be possible. As such, the F1 drivers play the role of influencers, as through their authenticity displayed, attachment developed by the fans, and active page participation, fans are engaged towards the brand and the sport.

Table 2.1

Summary of hypotheses developed

Research Objective	Hypothesis	Literature review
RO1: Analyse the relationship between authenticity and fan engagement	H1: F1 drivers' perceived authenticity is positively associated with fan engagement	Manthiou, A., Kang, J., Hyun, S. S., and Fu, X. X. (2018), Ferreira, M., Loureiro, S. M. C., Ashfaq, M., and Pereira, H. (2022)
RO2: Analyse the relationship between attachment and fan engagement	H2: The attachment to F1 drivers is positively associated with fan engagement	Thomson, M., MacInnis, D. J., and Park, C. W. (2005), Ferreira, M., Loureiro, S. M. C., Ashfaq, M., and Pereira, H. (2022)
RO3: Analyse the relationship between active page participation and fan engagement	H3: Active page participation is positively associated with fan engagement	Gensler, S., Völckner, F., Liu-Thompkins, Y., and Wiertz, C. (2013), Langaro, D., Rita, P., and de Fátima Salgueiro, M. (2018)

Note. Own work.

Through the content posted on social media, fans can create a clearer picture of who the drivers are. Using the literature mentioned in the previous sections and placing the drivers in the role of influencers, their perceived authenticity is essential to consider whether the driver can successfully engage the fans through their content. The more authentic the driver is perceived to be, the more engagement they will have with the fans. This led to the following hypothesis:

H1: F1 drivers' perceived authenticity is positively associated with fan engagement

The same can be said about attachment. As was also covered in the literature review, attachment is a crucial component in the relationship between brands and consumers. As such,

influencers also play a role in the generation of attachment for themselves and the brand: the more attached a follower feels towards the drivers, the more engaged they will be. As such, the following is suggested:

H2: The attachment to F1 drivers is positively associated with fan engagement

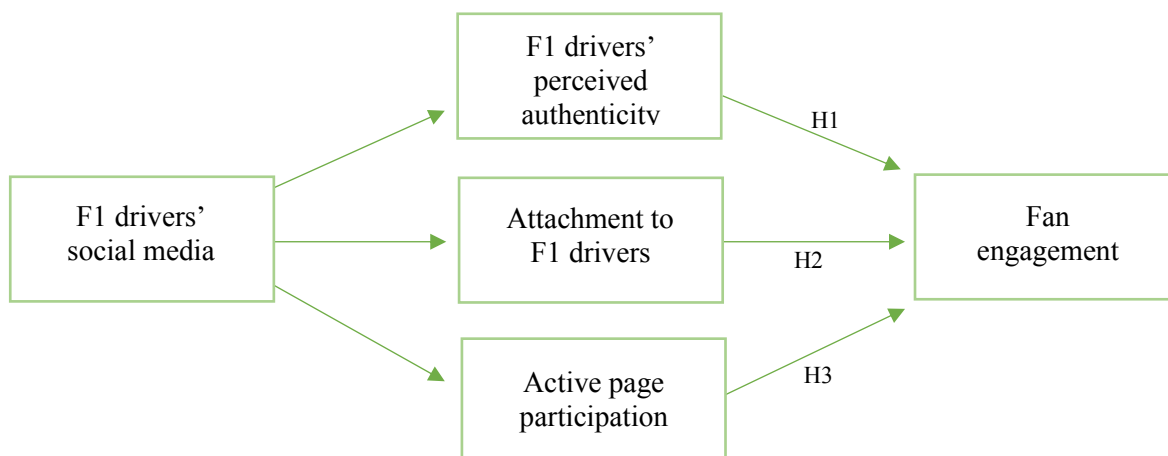
With the drivers being active on social media, people who do not watch F1 also have access to their content. The content within social media pages, which can be suggested to any user, has the potential to reach and captivate an audience that might be interested in the lifestyle of the drivers but not necessarily the sport itself. However, this can change over time, and exposure to the content posted by the driver could create interest in the sport. Therefore, the following is hypothesised:

H3: Active page participation is positively associated with fan engagement

The conceptual model can be seen in figure 3, which is based on Ferreira et al. (2022). The presence of the F1 drivers in social media implicitly allows fans to see who the drivers are, and the content posted on social media allows fans to judge their authenticity, become attached, and participate in the content that is posted. That, in turn, will lead to engagement from fans.

Figure 2.1

A conceptual model for the study



Note. Model adapted from Ferreira et al. (2022).

2.2. Quantitative Analysis

For this study, a questionnaire was used to collect qualitative data, as is most common in this type of study. The questionnaire was made using Qualtrics to ensure total confidentiality in the results obtained and allowed for similar conditions for all participants. The questionnaire was distributed along various social media platforms, including Instagram and LinkedIn, and posted on a YouTube channel's community page.

All the scales used were adapted from previous studies. Attachment, fan engagement and authenticity were based on Ferreira et al. (2022). Brand awareness was based on Langaro et al. (2018). A 7-point Likert-type scale was used for all constructs except attachment, where a 10-point scale was used (Ferreira et al., 2022).

In the questionnaire, participants were asked whether they knew what F1 was. If they did not know, the questionnaire would end. The next question would ask whether they watched F1 or not. If the participant did watch F1, they would be asked how many races they had watched in the previous 12 months. If not, they would be taken to a list of the drivers that are currently racing in F1 and asked to select which drivers they currently follow on any social media, along with the options to select whether they only followed the F1 page or if they did not follow any of the pages.

If the participant said they followed any page, they would be requested to register their participation in the drivers' and F1's social media pages. This included how often they liked, commented, and shared content from the drivers or the F1 page.

Table 2.2

Summary of objectives and questions

Research Objective	Questions	Scale	Variable
RO1: Analyse the relationship between authenticity and fan engagement	See Table 7	Likert (1-7)	Independent
RO2: Analyse the relationship between attachment and fan engagement		Likert (1-10)	Independent
RO3: Analyse the relationship between active page participation and fan engagement		Likert (1-7)	Independent

Note. Own work.

Table 2.3*Summary of variables*

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables
Authenticity	
Attachment	Fan engagement
Active Page Participation	

Note. Own work.

The next phase of the questionnaire had the participants evaluate their attachment towards the drivers, the authenticity they perceive from the drivers, and their engagement towards F1 through the items found in table 7. Participants were asked to fill in their demographic information in the last phase.

For the data analysis, IBM SPSS version 26 was used for the data analysis, along with Microsoft Excel for complementary calculations. The first step in this analysis was to check for reliability and validity using Cronbach's alpha, which checks the reliability of the scales used to measure each construct. The values for Composite Reliability (CR) validate the extent to which the constructs represented relate to a latent variable and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). This step was conducted following a factor analysis, with a four-factor solution considered. The minimum values considered were 0.7 for Cronbach's alpha and CR, and 0.5 for AVE.

The following step was checking for discriminant validity within the data. For this step, two criteria were used: the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criterion. For the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of the AVE for each construct must be more significant than the correlation between the constructs. For the HTMT criterion, the maximum value considered was 0.85.

For the final step of the analysis, a regression analysis with a bootstrap of 5000 samples was used to measure the direct effects, identified through the unstandardised coefficients, and correspond to the direct paths between a given construct in the model.

2.3. Data Analysis

In total, 656 responses were recorded in October 2022. Out of those responses, 439 were considered valid. The sample mainly consisted of male participants (86.8%). More than half of

the participants were between 18 and 24 (66.5%). 41.7% of the participants have a Bachelor's degree or equivalent, making it the largest group in the educational level demographic. Table 6 shows the sample profile in more detail.

For the reliability of the scales, Cronbach's alpha was computed. For 3 of the constructs, the value was above 0.7, which can be considered valid. However, for active page participation, the value was 0.505, meaning that the scale does not have the desirable reliability. As for the validity, a factor analysis with a four-factor solution was conducted to test for CR and AVE. All constructs were found to be within the accepted boundaries for CR, which was above 0.7. However, for AVE, active page participation did not reach the minimum level of 0.5, while the other 3 constructs did. Table 7 shows the values for each construct, as well as each item loading used for the calculations.

For the discriminant validity, two criteria were used: the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criterion. The conditions for both criteria were met, meaning that the constructs can be considered unrelated. The detailed results of the calculations are shown in Table 8.

Table 2.4

Sample profile

Sociodemographic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	48	10.9
Male	381	86.8
Non-binary/third gender	3	0.7
Prefer not to say	7	1.6
<i>Age</i>		
18-24	292	66.5
25-34	105	23.9
35-44	29	6.6
45-54	9	2.1
55-64	3	0.7
+65	1	0.2
<i>Educational Level</i>		
Did not finish High School	7	1.6
High School	165	37.6
Bachelor's degree or equivalent	183	41.7
Master's Degree	63	14.4
Doctoral Degree	7	1.6
Other	14	3.2

Note. Own work.

Table 2.5*Construct reliability and validity.*

Construct	Item	Item Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Active Page Participation		-	0.505	0.708	0.448
	I click 'like' on the content published by F1 and its drivers	0.712			
	I comment on the content published by F1 and its drivers	0.592			
	I share with my friends the content published by F1 and its drivers	0.698			
Attachment			0.868	0.847	0.586
	To what extent is the F1 driver(s) part of you and who you are?	0.657			
	To what extent do you feel personally connected to F1 driver(s)?	0.644			
	To what extent are your thoughts and feelings toward the F1 driver(s) often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own?	0.867			
	To what extent do your thoughts and feelings toward the F1 driver(s) come to you naturally and instantly?	0.864			
Authenticity		-	0.725	0.798	0.502
	The F1 driver(s) possesses a clear personality which guides their behaviour online	0.549			
	The F1 driver(s) knows exactly what they stand for and does not promise anything which contradicts their essence and character	0.78			
	Considering their personality, the F1 driver(s) does not pretend to be someone else	0.772			
	Considering their personality, the F1 driver(s) does not favour their target group, moreover, it shows self-esteem	0.708			
Fan Engagement		-	0.855	0.870	0.691
	The experience with the F1 driver(s) has motivated me to find out more about F1 as a sport	0.82			
	This experience with the F1 driver(s) has motivated me to find out more about F1 history and past drivers	0.848			
	This experience with the F1 driver(s) has motivated me to find out more about F1 as a brand	0.826			

Note. Own work. Calculations were done through SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

Table 9 summarises the regression analysis results, which will also be detailed in this paragraph. The results indicate that the authenticity perceived by followers is positively associated with fan engagement ($B = 0.388, p < 0.001$), meaning that H1 is supported. H2 proposed that the attachment followers develop for the drivers through social media content is positively associated with fan engagement. The results ($B = 0.264, p < 0.001$) show that H2 is also supported. For active page participation, however, the results were not considered valid. As mentioned previously, this item failed to achieve the minimum values for Cronbach's alpha and AVE. The results ($B = 0.066, p > 0.001$) also indicate insignificant values.

Table 2.6

Discriminant Validity

Fornell-Larcker Criterion	Authenticity	Active Page Participation	Attachment	Fan Engagement
Authenticity	0.708			
Active Page Participation	0.217	0.766		
Attachment	0.332	0.476	0.766	
Fan Engagement	0.344	0.271	0.466	0.831
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Criterion	Authenticity	Active Page Participation	Attachment	Fan Engagement
Authenticity				
Active Page Participation	0.358			
Attachment	0.423	0.708		
Fan Engagement	0.443	0.390	0.540	

Note. Own work. Both criteria were met in the analysis.

Table 2.7

Structural Results

Path	Beta (B)	Standard Error	<i>t</i> Statistics	<i>p</i> values	Confidence Intervals	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Authenticity → Fan Engagement	0.388	0.087	5.007	0.000	0.217	0.557
Attachment → Fan Engagement	0.264	0.047	6.590	0.000	0.170	0.353
Active page participation → Fan Engagement	0.066	0.077	0.903	0.391	-0.086	0.216

Note. Own work.

3. Results and Discussion

Following the analysis of the data, the questions set out at the beginning of this study can now be answered. First, the research questions will be answered, with the main question being ultimately answered.

Given the results of the regression analysis done with the data collected by the questionnaire, 2 out of the 3 hypotheses (H1 and H2) were found to be supported. H3 was not supported for lack of significance, as well as validity in the scale. As such, RQ1 and RQ2 can be answered in the following manner: given the results of this study, both authenticity and attachment positively affected fan engagement. RQ3, however, must be answered in the following manner: given the results of this study, there is no evidence that active page participation affects fan engagement.

As for the main question of this study, the presence of F1 drivers, who serve as influencers for the F1 brand, has an impact on fan engagement. As this study shows, their followers were able to perceive levels of authenticity from the F1 drivers, as well as form attachments towards them. This then was shown to have an impact on their engagement towards the F1 brand and the sport.

This study helps solidify the importance of authenticity and attachment in the world of influencers. Within the literature, these two constructs can be seen as important pillars for becoming a successful influencer. However, other studies mostly focus on specific industries such as fashion and beauty, which is the main domain for influencers in the current market. This study contributes to the literature by analysing the impact of influencers in the sports context.

Table 3.1

Summary of tested hypotheses

Hypothesis	Validated or not
H1: F1 drivers' perceived authenticity is positively associated with fan engagement	Validated
H2: The attachment to F1 drivers is positively associated with fan engagement	Validated
H3: Active page participation is positively associated with fan engagement	Not validated

Note. Own work.

From this point, other questions can be asked that also contribute to this topic, such as which sports are more reliant on their respective athletes to act as influencers in order to gain new fans, or which sportsperson is most responsible for bringing in new fans to their respective sport, and what are the characteristics that are responsible for this attraction.

As influencers are a growing marketing tool, it is important to explore the different markets in which they are inserted and analyse potential differences in what gets the most engagement from followers. The conclusions that are drawn from studying influencers in the fashion and beauty industry might not be the same for influencers inserted within the games and entertainment industry or lifestyle and health.

Conclusions

Overall discussion

In today's marketing environment, influencers have rapidly risen in popularity as an effective tool through which brands can reach a younger audience, primarily through non-traditional media such as social networks. This allows companies to safely bet on other means of attracting potential customers outside the main media outlets.

F1 drivers' presence in social media impacts fan engagement in a positive manner, as was shown in the results. As such, it can also be said that the F1 drivers act as influencers for the F1 brand, as through the authenticity they display and the attachment that their followers have for them, they are able to generate engagement towards the sport and the brand that is F1.

As for the research questions, the extent to which authenticity and attachment impact fan engagement is slight yet significant. These constructs both positively impact the engagement of the fans, unlike active page participation, whose impact could not be validated in this study.

Theoretical implications

Influencers can create strong bonds with their followers in a way that companies cannot achieve through traditional media outlets. As the literature suggests, influencers carry considerable advantages compared to celebrity endorsements, as they are considered more relatable and approachable. In this case, the drivers find themselves in a hybrid of the two, and people that do not watch F1 might not be considered celebrities due to F1 being a niche sport. Assuming that the drivers play the role of influencers for the F1 brand, this study helps solidify that through the authenticity they portray through their content and the attachment that the followers develop for the drivers, fan engagement increases through the presence in social media.

This study helps extend the knowledge of influencers and social media presence in different contexts, such as sports. In this context, followers might not follow certain people because they have similar tastes or lifestyles, but because they are part of a sport or team that they love, they want to feel closer to those for whom they cheer.

However, the role of active page participation was unsupported, both due to its lack of reliability and validity and a lack of significance in the results. This might suggest that people do not need to participate and interact with the content but are content with just seeing what the drivers are doing. Alternatively, the way active brand participation was measured was potentially skewed, as most participants admitted to interaction, such as liking, but rarely commented or shared the content.

Managerial implications

As for managerial implications, this study offers a positive outlook on using influencers and social media. As mentioned, F1 was in a delicate situation after years of refusing to modernise its communication channels, which can be seen in the increase in the number of TV views once Liberty Media took over F1 and decided to invest heavily in the content published on the internet (Statista, 2021). As such, F1 can be seen as a success story and proof that even if the methods might not match what the company stands for and values, change can sometimes revitalise a company.

It also serves as a reminder to companies that do not embrace the advances that technology has allowed. These might start to fall behind compared to their competition. F1 is a prime example compared to other sports that have fully embraced the power of social media, such as football, basketball, and American football. Although they are considerably more popular sports than F1, whose target audience was not as narrow, they were able to capitalise with big names such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Tom Brady, and LeBron James leading the charge towards modernisation of their marketing channels and being their champions in attracting new audiences towards their respective sports.

Since F1 has only 20 drivers competing at once, fewer athletes than in other sports, it is easier to create a following around each driver. Therefore, by utilising them as influencers to spread the word about the sport, the followers themselves may feel more connected to the sport. This can be seen as an opportunity for other sports that might not have as many athletes competing at once, as they, too, can use social media to spread their brand to otherwise neglected audiences.

Limitations and future research

This study successfully contributed to the existing literature regarding influencers and their role as a marketing tool, specifically in a sports context. However, like all studies, there are associated limitations and potential for future research.

For further research, it would be interesting to compare the engagement of fans depending on the number of years they have been watching the sport and see if influencers impact fans that did not have access to social media and more modern media outlets. As this study focused on younger fans, it would be valuable to extend and examine the impact on older fans. The same can be said about fans who might not watch the sport but still follow the drivers, and to what extent would they be inclined to start watching F1 due to the driver's presence online.

Another potential avenue for further research could be the focus on the impact of active page participation. As this study failed to achieve a valid scale for this construct, it could be noteworthy to explore its impact further, given how it is a vital way to interact with the content posted online.

As for limitations, one limitation was the fact that the questionnaire was done online, therefore potentially eliminating several different demographics. As mentioned previously, this study focused on younger fans, but the lack of responses from older fans can lead to results being relevant for younger people and not for the population as a whole.

Another limitation was the lack of specificity in the social network where participants follow the drivers. Future studies can further explore the impact of the presence of social media in specific social networks such as Instagram or Twitter and compare the impact of each of the networks.

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