

## Thesis paper

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TABLOIDIZATION OF FORMULA 1'S MEDIA COMMUNICATION

*A change in Formula-1's media communication and YouTube content after  
Liberty Media's acquisition of the sport's broadcasting rights*

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# INTRODUCTION

In today's media landscape, where millions are connected to a network of information and entertainment due to digitalization, sports are becoming increasingly more popular. With 1.5 billion tuning in to watch the world cup final (FIFA, 2022) athletes are becoming modern gladiators and sports nowadays are one of the main sources of entertainment of the public. Motorsport is no exception to this. Sport enthusiasts have been fascinated by cars and bikes racing each other for more than 70 years now. Grabbing the most attention out of these races since its launch in 1950 has been Formula 1. It stood as the pinnacle of racing for 75 years, always evolving both in terms of on-track technical solutions, be it the engines or the aerodynamic solutions, and in terms of media coverage as well. Formula 1 has introduced several new broadcasting innovations, be it the live broadcasting of races, new camera technology, in-depth technical analysis, professional commentary, designated press rooms and press buildings on racing venues and most importantly in the 21st century the concept of digital media coverage. However, these improvements, especially digitalization, haven't come without criticism. Many fans blame the Formula 1 of the 2020's for going away from its professional roots and changing the tone of coverage for a more populist tabloid style. In my thesis I aim to figure out whether this statement is true or not.

In my opinion this change of style is the result of an ownership change of Formula 1's broadcasting rights. In 2017 CVC Capital (a company who previously owned Formula 1's broadcasting rights) and another company, Liberty Media, struck a deal for 4.6 billion dollars to transfer the whole of Formula 1's broadcasting rights to Liberty Media. My examination and thus the main topic of this study is that the ownership change has resulted in a digital communication which is based on tabloid-like and infotainment content. In my opinion this shift in the communication strategy can be felt in the YouTube content of Formula 1 as well. Therefore, this is going to be the main examination area of this thesis.

## Thesis question

In this paper I aim to demonstrate how the ownership change influenced the content of Formula 1's official media platforms, with a specific focus on YouTube. My analysis seeks to reveal changes in the number and content of videos following the broadcasting rights deal. It is assumed that the new digital communication strategy has led to an increase in tabloid-like and infotainment content. In this thesis I will address additional questions, such as the objectives of

the new communication strategy and its target audience. My study further examines Liberty Media's media strategy, highlights any potential issues, and ultimately explores whether F1's YouTube content has become more tabloidized since the ownership change in 2017.

## **An outlook of this paper**

Before further elaborating the topic of this paper a look into its content is needed. The first chapter, the “Introduction” which this paragraph is also part of aims to give the reader an insight into what this paper is going to be about, the assumed problems the ownership change introduced, and the thesis question is also given in this chapter.

The second chapter, so the “Literature review” aims to fortify the reader with the knowledge required to understand further parts of this paper. This means the explanation of the phrases of Digital media and marketing, YouTube, Parasocial relationships, Infotainment and Tabloid. These phenomenas are explained by the usage of outside literature. This chapter also contain a sub-paragraph titled "In the context of Formula1" which ties the explained phrases together and connects them to Formula 1.

In the third section “A look into Formula 1” a better explanation about Formula 1 as a sport is given. The ownership change is also described in more detail in this chapter.

In the “Method” section the way the thesis questions are answered gets explained. The reasons behind the chosen research method are explained. In order to answer the thesis questions three sheets consisting of data about videos uploaded to Formula 1's official YouTube channel has been created. Why and how this has been done is explained in this section.

The “Results” part is the most important section of this paper. This is where the data of the spreadsheet is analyzed. Also, some specific videos from Formula 1's YouTube channel get analyzed in terms of their content. These analyses are done to answer the thesis questions.

Lastly there is a “Summary” chapter where the thesis questions get answered. And in the “For further study” section more problems and possible solutions are discussed, which could be explored in another study but for limitations in length could not have been answered in this thesis.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The analysis of the results will be based on the concepts described in this chapter. “Digital media”, “Digital marketing” and more precisely “YouTube” will be discussed. The terms “Parasocial relationship” and “Infotainment” also need to be explained. And finally, an explanation on the term “Tabloid” will be given, as it is the main point of view of this theses paper.

### Digital media

Digital media refers to any content or communication distributed through digital devices and platforms. It encompasses text, images, videos, audio, and interactive elements, making it available for users to access content more freely and easily. But it would be a misinterpretation to say that it is only a technological advancement. It transformed the way people think about media. It is about what people do with technology in creative ways and how they transform the digital environment and are able to use its benefits for the improvement of media. (Dewdney et al., 2014)

Transformation from analog media (TV, newspapers) to digital media has several reasons. The widespread use of the internet makes it possible for companies to reach audiences who would otherwise be outside their reach, making digital media a perfect tool for increasing the popularity of a brand. (Ryan, 2021) Another reason could be the transformation of the workforce. In the digital media industry, the skills of a journalist, photographer, script writer or text editor can be used the same way as in the analog media. This has made the transformation of media outlets much easier. (Dewdney et al., 2014)

Unlike analog media, digital media is easily reproducible, scalable, and editable, enabling widespread access and dissemination through platforms like social media, and digital broadcasting. It is medium of the 21st century. It is creating a bigger public sphere than ever before, with consumers having the opportunity to instantly voice their opinion on the consumed content. (Glózer et al., 2015) This characteristic of digital media created the phrase WEB 2.0. It refers to the era of digital media in which we live in today. It means that unlike with WEB 1.0, where users only had the opportunity to retrieve information created by media outlets, now they can also be creators themselves by producing content for social media, blogs, or wikis. (O'Reilly, 2005) The basis idea of this new technology is user participation. This means that users have full control over the content, not just by creating it, but because they can voice their

opinions over it, altering the way it is created by media outlets. (Cormode et al., 2008) The user generated content can be beneficial for big media outlets and companies, as it generates awareness about their product, without the company having to do any work. This can be another reason for going online in terms of advertisements in the 2020's. While WEB 2.0 often gets criticized for the lack of regulated content, which can lead to user misinformation, it remains one of the leading factors of digital media.

## **Digital marketing**

Digital marketing refers to the use of digital channels, technologies, and platforms to promote products, services, or brands. It is important to clarify that it is not about technology, but rather about people. More and more consumers are online every day, and technology is just a way that connects companies with them. Therefore, digital transformation should refer to a change in mindset by the producer. One must become quick and nimble to keep up with the new trends and opportunities. Digital marketing is mainly about communicating with the audience online. Online marketers can use the internet to broaden their reach, or to narrow it down to a selected target audience. It is because technology allows the players of the market to send personalized ads to every customer. So, companies have to establish whether they wish to sell to their already existing customers or to broaden their reach online. (Ryan, 2021)

## **YouTube**

One of the most prominent forms of digital media are online videos. This is the third most popular use of the internet behind social media sites and messaging apps. In the world of the internet most information is being transferred in an audio-visual way, therefore these videos became part of people's everyday lives. (Glózer et al., 2015)

The biggest online media site is YouTube. It is a public platform where people can upload, share, view and interact with videos freely. Viewers can subscribe to different channels and thus receive notifications about new content. Users have other options for interaction, in liking or disliking videos or writing a comment on them.

Videos are presented on the opening screen of the site with a title and a thumbnail. A "YouTube thumbnail" is a reduced-size image that serves as a preview for a YouTube video, providing viewers with an idea of the video's content. It plays a crucial role in attracting viewers and influencing their decision in watching a video. (Lee, 2023)

These functions helped YouTube to become the largest video-sharing platform in the world. (Lang, 2007) YouTube presents itself as a neutral video sharing site and not as a content producer. The platform has lured in a wide range of users ranging from big media outlets to individuals with a great amount of creativity.

Since its launch, YouTube has become a big part of the media business. (Burgess, 2009) Relatively early in its life cycle, YouTube has become a distributor of existing media businesses and became a new site of media power. But its rise wasn't without critique. Several issues rose up regarding news values. YouTube was framed as a chaotic and unregulated site, or just as a big player of digital economy, and not as a news distributor. It was also criticized for being an unserious platform for the youth. But as YouTube has evolved so did its public perception. (Burgess, 2009)

## **Parasocial relationship**

The term parasocial relationships refer to the connection between the consumer and the media personality in social media. In the case of a parasocial relationship audiences develop one-sided, seemingly face-to-face relationships with media figures, experiencing an illusion of intimacy and personal connection. (Horton et al, 1956) If an individual is engaged in such a relationship, he or she becomes more emotionally connected to the media personality. (Lim et al, 2020). Parasocial relationships are created using techniques such as direct address, informal conversation styles, and behind-the-scenes. These techniques create a believable sense of intimacy between the performer and the audience. An emotionally connected individual has a bigger chance of becoming a fan or follower of the media personality. (Horton et al, 1956) Because of their intense amount of digital and social media use members of the younger generation are most likely to be affected by parasocial relationships. In the case of Formula 1 being in a parasocial relationship means following a driver almost religiously. These fanatics follow a driver based on his personality presented in the media and not based on his on-track performance. But the more fans a driver has the more fans Formula 1 has. Therefore, parasocial relationships are one of the biggest driving factors of the emphasis being placed on social and digital media communication by Liberty Media. (Närvänen et al, 2020)

## **Infotainment**

The phrase of infotainment is also important to explain. In the 21st century a constant interweaving of content can be examined between channels and genres, blurring the line between informational and entertaining content. An example of this is the frequent use of music, fast editing, and a built drama in news stories. The programming had become shaped by hybridization and fluidity, creating the phrase of infotainment. Programs that blur the line between information and entertainment-oriented content are recognized as infotainment content. (Baym, 2008) The phrase emerged in the U.S. of the 1980's (Thussu, 2007). It can be best understood as a phenomenon of border-crossing between the seriousness of news programs and the lightheartedness of entertainment shows. The rise of the internet has hugely contributed to the popularization of infotainment content. (Baym, 2008) With the usage of this media style, because of its attention catching presentation information has potential to reach people who otherwise would pay little to no interest towards serious content. It widens the discourse in several political and socially important topics. (Thussu, 2007) However, infotainment comes with several dangers. The biggest one being the blurring of fiction and information. It is capable of degrading public information and transforming rational arguments into emotional ones. (Baym, 2008)

## **Tabloid**

The word tabloid refers to a type of mass-market media format characterized by its focus on sensationalized, human-interest, or entertainment-driven content. (Császai, 2003) It presents stylistic and content changes to traditional media, that many believe has led to its decline. The main goal of tabloid media is to get high readership/viewership by publishing interesting news, using a catchy style to grab the attention of more consumers. (Briggs et al, 2009) With the appearance of new media spaces, for example, digital and online media, the meaning of tabloid has also changed. Throughout history however, tabloid works always remained appealing to the public and kept a sensational tone. (Zelizer, 2009)

Tabloids often employ simplified language, dramatic headlines and visual illustrations to maximize audience reach and engagement. Their tone is honest and easy to understand. Tabloid works try to convince the audience on an emotional rather than on an intellectual level. Therefore, it is written in a populist manner. (Császai, 2003)

The topic of tabloid lies in-between public and private sphere. (Császi, 2003) Most tabloid works are about the topics of celebrity news, or sensational human stories. They tend to dive into personal matters more frequently, presenting events and people of interest in a more down-to-earth, simpler manner. However, tabloid works couldn't be defined only by their content. They may cover the topics of professional journalism but with a lighter tone and in a briefer length. They may contain news, entertainment, or sports. (Zelizer, 2009)

From the word tabloid comes the term *tabloidization*. *It is a term used to describe a move towards a more populist style from professional journalism.* In the words of Colin Sparks, who in 2003 already criticized the phenomena of tabloidization it means that “the high standards of yesterday are being undermined by sensationalism, prurience, triviality, malice, and plain, simple credulity.” (Sparks, 2003) One of the key attributes of tabloidization is the change in the length of the media content. Instead of longer, complex, analytical style products of tabloid media shift into shorter, punchier sentences, primarily in a narrative, rather than analytical mode. (Zelizer, 2009)

Tabloids are criticized for the trivialization of news. They are also being looked down upon because the celebrity stories force out serious content from the media. But easier understandable news stories, that do better in capturing audience attention, doesn't necessarily mean the decline of media. They can make the distribution of information more effective by emphasizing the personal sides of their content. And they can also lead to a better-informed public. The personal side of a news story attracts audiences more, who would otherwise reject topics discussed in a serious manner because they deem it boring. (Zelizer, 2009) To validate tabloids, it is important to realize that consumers not only look for information within the media, but for entertainment as well. This is the hole that the tabloid wishes to fill. (Császi, 2003)

According to Császi tabloid media can also be viewed as rite instead of information transmission. This means it is not used to educate the public but to create a topic or an event that connects people together. According to this theory three types of tabloid media can be examined; “competitions”, “conquers”, and “coronations”. (Császi, 2002) To the topic of this thesis “competitions” is the important category. These are media events (elections, sport events) where heroic figures compete according to a set of rules. During this process, audiences are participating in emotional and moral evaluation together. The agreeing or denying of the moral messages of a story can put a certain member of the audience into a group with like-minded

people, which strengthens the sense of community. This means people often turn to tabloid media to strengthen their feeling of belonging. (Boldog, 2025)

The TV and digital media also have tabloid content in the form of talk shows, realities, or TV game shows. The spread of the internet has led to the spread of the tabloid style. At the dawn of this technology the internet promised a more democratic media landscape. But what happened was that tabloids became even more popular by grabbing headlines with their sensational titles and style. This trend and the fact that celebrity or human-interest stories are cheaper to manufacture has made online media outlets shift towards tabloids more. But it cannot be overlooked that digital tabloids attracted more people into several topics. For example, politics, movies, music, and sport. Or in the case of this study, Formula 1. This has led to a boost in the popularity of these topics and to an always ongoing open discussion happening on the internet, that is based upon the knowledge and information provided by tabloid media. (Zelizer, 2009)

Internet tabloids have different methods of attention generation than the ones in the press or TV. The first is their title. The word clickbait can be associated with digital tabloids. These are provocative, or promising titles aimed at increasing the number of clicks on an online piece of media. The information behind these titles is not always based. Most often than not they are exaggerated and the topic they are suggesting could not be found in the product they are headlining. (Beleslin et al, 2017) Online tabloids also use images, graphics, bold text, and sensational content. (Xiangyi, 2023)

Most people get their news through social media. This means that if a news outlet does not maintain a presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or YouTube, it could potentially miss out on a significant portion of the audience. (Mills, 2012) Social media has changed the way producers interact with the audience. The populist contents shared on these sites share key characteristics with tabloids. This includes fantasies, humor, parody and references, unfinished content, mystery, timely controversies and rumors that are common knowledge between the consumers. This is done to keep the audience always engaged and therefore the media outlet always popular. Tabloidized social media news includes exclusive information that increases shared experience, the explosion of human interest, the privilege of empathy over abstraction, funny or parodic features, rumor and conflict. (Xiangyi, 2023)

Sports and athletes are involved in tabloidization too. Athletes would like to be presented professionally and therefore try to avoid their private life getting published. From the

partnership of sports and media, however, both parties can benefit. (Nicholson et al., 2015) But the emergence of globalization and consumer society have changed this flourishing relationship. (Nicholson et al., 2015) In the age of the internet being in the public eye isn't always a sign of great sporting achievements. The emergence of tabloidization has changed the focus from the athlete's performance to their private life and persona. (Kovacs et al., 2019)

Social media is the main driving factor of this change. Apart from traditional media appearances sportsmen are in constant focus of the public eye via these sites. They have to be engaged in a two-way communication with their followers, having to respond and adopt to their opinion. For many of them this is something they were not trained to do, therefore can feel like a burden. They aren't just sportsmen anymore. They are entertainers, public figures, leaders and faces of marketing campaigns. (Billings, et al., 2015)

Sportsmen themselves also voice their concerns on tabloidization as they feel it to be an intrusion into their private life, or a journalistic style that that twists their words or presents them in an unserious tone. On the other hand, some sportsmen feel like this media presence can benefit them, providing a living even after their retirement from sports. (Kovacs et al., 2019)

In today's tabloidized media landscape athletes could be viewed as media products being sold based on their sporting achievements and personal life. They must keep up with trends and try to manage several media sites. (Kovacs, et al., 2019) This is especially true to the world of Formula 1, as Stefano Domenicali the head of Liberty Media's Formula One Group has stated that the key aspect to attract viewers is to put the drivers into the spotlight. (Safronov et al, 2021)

## **In the context of Formula 1**

Summarizing all the topics above, sport and therefore Formula 1 content nowadays is produced and consumed for and across multiple digital platforms. Formula 1 has adopted a so-called dual-platform method merging TV and internet-based content. Therefore, highlights and up-to-date news became an important asset for the racing series, as these can be distributed online. Platforms like YouTube, Twitter and Instagram are now central to how Formula 1 news spread. Social networking sites have transformed the relationship between fans and drivers, offering unprecedented access and direct communication. These interactions can build loyalty and strengthen fan communities but can lead to parasocial relationships between drivers and the audience.

The value of Formula 1 media nowadays resides in attractive unscripted drama, and the demand for up-to-the-moment coverage by fans. The sport relies on storytelling that spans across multiple platforms to build narratives and engage audiences. For the media team of Formula 1 create documentaries, highlight reels, and behind-the-scenes footage to deepen fan connections.

The increasing speed of news dissemination, driven by platforms like Twitter, forces outlets to work faster, often prioritizing immediacy over depth or accuracy. This leads to the rise of tabloid-style content, where sensationalism, personal stories, and scandals often overshadow substantive sports reporting. Coverage frequently shifts from on-track performance to off-field controversies, such as relationships, lifestyle choices, or legal troubles. Stories about doping, infidelity, or team conflicts garner significant attention, catering to a celebrity-obsessed audience. We can comfortably say that tabloidization affects the professional identity of Formula 1 media, which can be criticized for prioritizing sensational content over serious reporting. This blurring of styles is particularly evident in talk shows and social media, where humor, controversy, and emotional storytelling are emphasized over factual reporting. Tabloidization aligns with changing audience preferences, as younger fans gravitate toward short, engaging, and sensational content. Social media platforms also amplify tabloid-style content by encouraging viral sharing of sensational news. (Hutchins et al, 2012)

## **A LOOK INTO FORMULA 1**

For better understanding of the subject an overview of Formula 1 needs to be given.

Formula 1 is an open wheel car racing series. Ten teams and twenty drivers compete during a season. Each team has two cars and two drivers and the opportunity to design its own car based on the sporting regulations for each season. Each season consists of approximately 20 race weekends a year. A race weekend is a three-day spectacle changing its location around the globe every weekend. There are three types of on-track action during a race weekend. Three free practices, allowing the drivers to practice driving and finetune their cars together with their team. A qualifying, which determines the starting order of the race based on the time run by each car. And a race on Sunday, which has all twenty cars racing together around on the track. The distance is allocated in number of laps and finishing order is based on the order in which cars cross the finish line. After each race points are given to the top ten finishing drivers. From these points a world championship is calculated for drivers and constructors. The constructors

world championship is for the ten competing teams. They add a certain team's two drivers' points together which then becomes the team's score. (Shields et al., 2020)

## **Transfer of ownership**

As mentioned in the introduction in January 2017 a deal has been made between two large American media groups, namely CVC Capital Partners and Liberty Media to transfer 100% of Formula 1's broadcasting rights. Liberty Media made the purchase for 4.6 billion dollars. This deal is a milestone in Formula1 history because it affected various fields of the sport, including the social media content. This was not only a media transfer but meant a whole new direction for Formula 1. This shift was essential, as CVC's tenure was criticized for focusing on financial returns at the expense of the sport's broader engagement with fans.

Under CVC, Formula 1's audience had diminished, with global viewership reportedly declining from 600 million to 400 million since 2008. CVC head, Bernie Ecclestone's well-known distaste for social media and the internet – primarily because he failed to see how they can be satisfactorily monetized – has allowed F1 to become irrelevant to the younger generation. In an interview done by AUTOSPORT when he was asked about the importance of the new generation Ecclestone said the following: "I don't know why people want to get to the so-called 'young generation'. Why do they want to do that? Is it to sell them something? Most of these kids haven't got any money. I'm not interested in tweets, Facebook and whatever this nonsense is. I'd rather get to the 70-year-old guy who's got plenty of cash." (Ecclestone, 2014) Mr. Ecclestone still wanted to make revenue from TV and media rights, as well as from deals made with promoters, responsible for certain race venues. This philosophy and the fact that Formula 1 in the 2010's was dominated by two team and driver pairings (by Sebastian Vettel, German driver for Red Bull Racing Formula One Team, and by Lewis Hamilton, British driver for Mercedes AMG Petronas Formula One Team) made the results predictable and lead to the decline in viewership.

Chase Carey, the head of Liberty Media's Formula One Group at the time of the acquisition, has stated that a new generation of fans can be reached with the use of social media. (Barlow, 2016) The new owner's goal was to transfer the sport into an entertainment brand. The experts at Liberty media examined months of data and found out that the viewers want to experience the sport more closely and know more about it. (GPBlog, 2022) In the 2010's only 14 percent of F1 viewers were under the age of 25. So, Formula 1 obviously needed a new media communication strategy. Content on digital media platforms like Instagram, Twitter and

YouTube started to appear more frequently. A younger audience became the target for Formula 1's media department. They also put emphasis on diversifying the gender dispersion of the sport's audience, with the aim of attracting a bigger female audience. (Safronov et al., 2021) Geographical diversification was also needed. Formula 1 is a European based sport, with more than half of the fan base coming from Europe. This means that the American and the Asian market have potential to grow towards. Out of these two regions Liberty Media puts a heavy emphasis on the United States. The country has millions of residences therefore millions of sports fans out of which only 14% claims that they are interested in motorsports. (Richter, 2022)

After Liberty Media took over Formula 1, they created a special digital department in 2018 with the sole purpose of fan recruitment. Their approach shifted from the already existing audience, to realizing that different kinds of content should be catered to different audiences and generations, as F1 fans are a heterogenic group, and the objective should be to increase the fanbase. A new studio was built in London and a stream of catered content flow via their digital media sites was created. Formula 1 has started several forms of content to supply different audiences. Some examples are the "Grill the Grid" a quiz show featuring the drivers, the "F1 Unlocked" series where drivers document their race weekends, or more engineering-related content such as "Tech Tuesday" which provide a detailed technical analysis of the sport. (Youssef, 2023)

Looking at the last 7 years, we could say that Liberty Media succeeded in achieving its goals, with Formula 1 having the largest number of followers under the age of 25 out of any major sport franchise. "The average viewer age in 2022 was four years younger than in 2016, and it's predominantly the younger generation that engages with social media, a focal point of the Formula One Group." (Fletcher, 2024) More female viewers are part of the Formula 1 community now. A survey about the sport's wellbeing run by Motorsport Network was filled out by twice as many women in 2021, then in 2017. According to the same survey 58% of those who took it say that Formula 1 has the right balance of sport and entertainment. To achieve this was a goal of Liberty Media. This opinion is especially common among the newcomer fans of the sport. With three races held there and a 27% increase in the number of fans in the country, the goal to make Formula 1 popular in the United States is also coming to realization. (Safronov et al., 2021)

# METHOD

## Research approach

This study will be conducted on the basis of deductive reasoning within the context of quantitative and qualitative research framework. This methodology is best to use when data and content is being studied, and the goal is to prove or deny the truth of an observation made previously to the research. In the case of this research the observation was that with the shift on Formula 1's media strategy came the tabloidization of its content.

This study can be seen as a longitudinal research. Longitudinal research is a type of research that follows how a situation has changed over time (Bryman et al, 2011). By observing Formula 1 through a longitudinal scope relevant data of Formula 1's past and present media can be obtained and used towards answering the research questions of this paper.

## Data collection

Public YouTube uploads of Formula 1's official channel will be analyzed in order to answer the thesis questions. I will compare the type and the content of the videos from the era of Ecclestone, and the era of Liberty Media. A database of the videos was built, focusing only on the videos regarding Formula 1, discarding the ones about the feeder series Formula 2, Formula 3, or the Formula Academy. In order to show the changes, a sample of the videos from 2017 (the last year of the "old" communication strategy and old ownership), a sample of 2021 (A year at the middle of the transition) and a sample of the videos from 2023 (a year with the changes fully in effect) was created. These three databases contain roughly 2000 videos combined. This means about 700 videos each year. The sheets contain the following information about the videos. A link to the video, for easy accessibility. Their style of content, for easier categorization and counting. (This has been done manually by me with a method that will be discussed in the next chapter.) Their title, as it is sometimes the proof itself for tabloidization. The date of uploading. And the number of interactions based on views, likes and comments, to show viewer engagement. I also counted the averages of views, comments and likes for every category. I calculated the dispersion of each category in percentages towards the total number videos in that year.

## Methodology of the analysis

The methodology of the quantitative analysis will be the examination of these sheets. This part of the research will show the change in the total number of videos, the dispersion throughout the categories and the change in viewership and the number of interactions.

The content on the YouTube channel has been examined and based on the main assumptions of the “Literature review” section, three categories have been created. Then all the videos in the sheets (from before and after the ownership change) have been categorized into one of the three categories. The categories and the basis of the categorization were the following:

- Tabloid-like content: These videos prioritize sensationalism and emotional appeal. They often focus on controversies, rivalries, or personal drama rather than substantive analysis. The tone is exaggerated, with content designed to provoke strong emotional reactions or curiosity. They can also have a more casual, but still personal topic, which is presented in a lighthearted tone. Technical details and factual depth are often sidelined in favor of storytelling that emphasizes entertainment value.
  - Characteristics: Sensational titles, emotional language, over-dramatic or humorous tone, focus on controversies, minimal technical analysis.
  - Example: F1 Drivers as Babies! | Grill The Grid 2023 | Episode 5 (Presents the drivers in an unserious manner. Topic unrelated to racing.)
- Professional content: Professional content emphasizes objectivity, depth, and accuracy, targeting an audience interested in technical and analytical content. The tone is serious. The topics of these videos are race analysis, data-driven commentary, and detailed discussions on performance, strategy, and regulations. Visuals and language maintain a polished and neutral style, appealing to viewers seeking serious, in-depth coverage. Since the takeover of Liberty Media, these analyses are made with elements of infotainment media. They are catered towards the new target audience with being more engaging in presentation all the while remaining informative and professional in terms of information. Therefore, videos with minimal elements of infotainment were put into this category.
  - Characteristics: Objective tone, analytical focus, minimal dramatization
  - Example: The Rules on Flexible Wings Explained | Tech Talk | Crypto.com (A technical analysis that is done in a serious, professional journalistic manner. The topics remain focused on racing.)

- Mixed content: This category blends elements of both tabloid and professional styles, appealing to a broader audience. It can be best described with the phrase of infotainment. While incorporating emotional hooks or engaging storytelling to attract viewers, the content retains a foundation of analytical or factual insights. Mixed videos often balance entertainment with education, presenting races, events, car design, strategy, regulations, controversies or rivalries alongside data or expert commentary in an easy-to-understand fashion. The tone is dynamic, fluctuating between excitement and professionalism to maintain interest without compromising credibility.
  - Characteristics: A blend of professional insights with emotional hooks.
  - Example: Extended Highlights | 2023 Dutch Grand Prix (The topic of this video is heavily connected to racing. The video is informative; however, it presents its content with elements of tabloidization. Making it an example of the mixed category.)

The videos were also categorized based on the time of uploading. A year in Formula 1 can be divided into five parts. They are as follows.

- Pre-season:
  - From the 1. of January to the first race of the season (Usually in mid-March)
  - Car launches are happening in this period. (Every team has the opportunity to showcase its car during a press event). Pre-season tests take place during this time. (2\*3 days of testing, happening on the same track with all the teams present. The teams can test their cars and drivers can practice freely without the limitations of session length given in the number of laps. This is usually a non-televised event). This period hosts a lot of personal changes, with drivers and other team members switching teams.
- First half of the season:
  - From the first race of the season in mid-March to the summer break, usually happening in August
  - About ten races are done in this period.
- Mid-season break:
  - Happens in August
  - There is no track action. A month-long break in the middle of the season, separating it into two almost equal parts. Teams and drivers are not allowed to work during this period. Free leave is obligatory.

- Second half of the season:
  - From the end of the summer break in late August, September until the season finale in early to mid-December
  - About ten races are done in this period
- Post-season:
  - From late/mid-December until the end of the year.
  - Post-season tests can happen during this period. (A test for next year's rookie drivers and for drivers switching teams.) Driver and team member transfers can happen during this time.

After the “Quantitative” a “Qualitative research” will be used to give a better understanding of the change of content through the years. Certain videos will be closely examined. Their title, length, tone and content will be analyzed, highlighting examples for tabloidize/professional/mixed type of content.

Steps of the analysis will be as follows:

- Defining goals of qualitative analysis: What evidence demonstrates a shift toward a tabloid tone in Formula 1 YouTube videos, and how does this influence audience engagement?
  - Analyzing the title: sensational language, clickbait phrases, and emotional triggers
  - Analyzing the thumbnail: visual elements that suggest sensationalism
  - Analyzing the length: shorter, more fast-paced videos for engagement
  - Analyzing stylistic elements:
    - Subtexts, pictures, illustrations, graphs, intercuts (radio messages, music etc.), narration, visual effects, number of cuts, length of the scenes

These steps are the general outline to the content analysis.

## Limitations

During the analysis there is a factor that can alter the results. The upload of the videos can be dated multiple years back altering the viewership numbers, number of likes and comments from the time of uploading. This means that these numbers don't represent the popularity of the content at the time of uploading but rather show how it has aged over time. This error can affect the result by not showing the true opinion of the public at the time of uploading. This problem

is seen as impossible to avoid due to the nature YouTube presents viewership numbers to the users.

When conducting a content analysis reliability is a great importance. From the same sample multiple people should be able to categorize content with the same result. (Weber, 1990) The understanding of the “Literature review” provides an in-depth knowledge on how to interpret the content in a consistent way throughout the content analysis. The categorization of the video samples should be done by outside sources, based on the knowledge provided in the “Literature review” section. (Lai et al, 2015) This would increase the creditability of the research. (Stemler, 2000) However, due to the number of videos (approximately 700 videos per year) this could not have been done.

## RESULTS

In this section the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis will be provided.

### Quantitative analysis

In this section the results of the quantitative analysis will be provided. The key numbers can be seen in table one. The most popular video from each category and each year is presented in the table. This is done to visualize the changes throughout the years and categories.

|             | Tabloid-like content |                  |                     | Professional videos |                  |                     | Mixed videos     |                  |                     |
|-------------|----------------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|
|             | Average of views     | Average of likes | Average of comments | Average of views    | Average of likes | Average of comments | Average of views | Average of likes | Average of comments |
| <b>2017</b> | 1,065,575            | 15,189           | 653                 | 1,142,676           | 13,447           | 764                 | 234,205          | 4,450            | 457                 |
| <b>2021</b> | 1,364,696            | 41,136           | 1,708               | 1,699,405           | 35,908           | 1,993               | 897,503          | 22,507           | 1,346               |
| <b>2023</b> | 770,658              | 23,548           | 824                 | 1,204,408           | 24,224           | 1,083               | 547,767          | 12,604           | 743                 |

*1. Table: Main results of the "Quantitative analysis" Source: Own research*

The number of videos changed as follows. In the year 2017 there are a total of 566 videos, discarding the ones about lower categories of racing than Formula 1. From here on a growth can be seen. In 2021 there are 721 videos, while in 2023 there are 663 videos. A spike in the total number of videos can be seen in 2021. This is due to the intensity of that season. The 2021 world championship title race was close from the start of the season to the finish. A lot of action happened both on and off-track. Overtakes, collisions, driver signings, retirements, etc. These

events needed to be covered on YouTube, because it is one of the primary communication platforms of Formula 1. That is the reason behind the extensive number of videos in 2021.

The dispersion of video types throughout the years stays almost the same. From 2017 to 2023 “Tabloid-like” videos take up 25% of all videos. 15% of the total videos are “Mixed” in terms of their category. While the remaining 60% is taken up by “Professional” videos. In terms of dispersion, it cannot be stated that the YouTube content of Formula 1 became more tabloidized.

What I noticed is that there is a large amount of coverage of the same event or action. For example, 13 videos about Max Verstappen (Dutch racing driver, Red bull racing) winning the 2021 drivers world title were posted. However, this is a major event in Formula 1 history, but smaller ones like pole positions, fastest laps, race wins, podium celebrations and radio messages are covered numerous times. (There are three to five videos about the same topic.) It can be viewed as an unnecessary amount of content. These videos could be part of the race, or qualifying highlight. (Videos summarizing the events of on track actions) These spam-like videos however can’t be listed under the tabloid category, nor because of their content (They aren’t about personal stories, quiz shows, viral content, etc.) nor because of their execution (They don’t contain fast cuts, overexaggerated images, graphs, or subtext. They are done in professional style.) With this amount of content, it can happen that technical videos, analyses done in professional style become hard to notice. This phenomenon can make the content of Formula 1’s official YouTube channel seem more tabloid like.

According to my examination the YouTube channel of Formula 1 works on a format-like basis. This means that the editors of the channel have a template which gives the basis for covering each race weekend. This template looks as follows; there is a pre-weekend “What to expect video” and a press conference coverage on Thursday. Free practice coverages on Friday. Qualifying highlights, drivers’ reaction to qualifying and technical analysis of the fastest lap on Saturday. The race highlights and driver reactions on Sunday, followed by a series of top 10 videos, compiling the best overtakes, radio messages, onboards, etc. of the weekend. Sometimes a few tabloid videos are added to this template. Formula 1 used this method in 2017 too, even before the ownership change. However, since the takeover of Liberty Media this template became stricter and the number of videos within rose within it. This enforces the feeling of over-extensive coverage mentioned in the previous paragraph.

An examination made on the timely dispersion of videos needs to be mentioned here as well. Most of the videos are uploaded during the first and second half of the season. This is because all the on-track action happens during these periods. (Except pre- and post- season tests). For example, in 2021, 585 out of 721 videos were uploaded during these periods. Most of the “Tabloid-like” videos however are uploaded during the mid-season break and the post-season. These videos are usually quiz shows with questions both about non-racing related matters and about Formula 1 facts. They are likely to be part of the series “Grill the grid”, a quiz show featuring the drivers of the grid. The tabloid videos can also be animated videos about the events of the season, or funny moments/meme compilations. These videos are aimed at covering the gap of the mid-season break with content, when there is no track action which can be presented.

It is also interesting to note that there is a growth in the number of “Tabloid-like” videos around the time of a Grand Prix (The name of a Formula 1 race weekend.) held in the United States. The leadership of Formula 1 has stated that they want to make the sport more popular in the United States. A sign of this is the three American Grand Prixes on the calendar and the 49% growth in the number of viewers from the United States from 2018 to 2019. But there is still room for improvement. (Yeomans, 2021) A tool for making Formula 1 more popular in the United States. are these tabloid videos. Since they cover personal matters of the drivers, or funny exercises done by them, they can be attractive to non-Formula 1 fans as well. They have the potential to convey American viewers to watch the races held in their country during the weekend. That is why multiple “Tabloid-like” videos are uploaded around an American Grand Prix. A great example of this is the 2023 Las Vegas Grand Prix, when four videos with clear tabloid-like characteristics were uploaded around that race weekend. (Namely: Drawmula 1: Pass It On! F1 Drivers Drawing Challenge Part 2, True Or False With Our 2023 F1 Drivers!, Most Likely To... Las Vegas Edition!, Charles And Carlos On Racing And Partying In Vegas!)

The active parts of the season, so the first and second half also have “Tabloid-like” videos. Best team radio moments can be viewed as such. These are videos compiling the funniest, most heated and angry, or most joyful radio messages exchanged between driver and team during on-track action. These communications could be viewed as technical content, and be put into the “Professional” category, because teams discuss race strategies or give information and instruction to the drivers during this period. However, the YouTube videos covering team radio communications don’t focus on the technical, rather on the human side of these exchanges. They cover emotional outbursts of the drivers, or funny communications between driver and team. Therefore, these videos are listed into the “Tabloid-like” category. There is a dedicated

series for these videos, titled “Best team radio”. It is presented after every race, increasing the number of tabloid videos.

In the amount of viewer interaction, we can see the improved emphasis put onto digital media content by Liberty Media and the increased popularity of Formula 1’s content on YouTube. While in the year 2017 the average viewership of a video is 1 01 6114, by the year 2021 it rose to 1 501 088 this means a 50% growth rate, while the number of videos only rose with 30%. “Tabloid-like” videos’ public reception can be examined looking at the numbers regarding viewer interaction. For example, in the year 2023 the average number of likes on a “Tabloid-like” video is almost the same as the number of likes on a “Professional” type content. 23 548 for “Tabloid” and 24 224 for “Professional”. While their percentage for the total number of videos was 25 and 60. In 2021 “Tabloid-like” videos are averaging 41 136 like while “Professional” contents have an average of 35 908. And this is happening with “Tabloid-like” videos reaching the amount 199, while “Professional” videos are reaching the number of 426. These are very important numbers because as discussed in the Literature review section the audience has the opportunity to voice their opinion about the content of digital media via likes and comments. They show the growing interest of viewers toward “Tabloid-like” content. A huge growth in the popularity of the “Mixed” category needs to be noted here, since this is a very important number in the reflection of Liberty Media’s success. As mentioned in the “Data collection” chapter these videos incorporate the most infotainment elements out of any video type. And the fact that the average viewership of these videos doubled from 2017 to 2023 shows that how effective this media style is in attracting new fans towards Formula 1.

## **Qualitative Analysis**

In this section, the content of the videos will be studied. Examples of each category, featuring key characteristics of “Tabloid-like”, “Professional” and “Mixed content” will be examined. Samples will be taken from both the year 2017 and 2023 to show the evolution of videos with the ownership change.

It is important to note that not necessarily the most popular video of each category will be presented in this section, but the ones best showcasing the characteristics of the given category. The analyzed vide was decided based on the “Literature review” section.

## *General characteristics of 2017 videos*

With 566 videos in 2017 Bernie Ecclestone's distaste for digital media is hard to project. However, this minimal effort put into the content uploaded to digital media platforms showcases CVC Capital's approach. The minimal endeavor can be examined via the following common characteristics of almost all 2017 videos. The title is straight forward, no click-bait. The thumbnail is a scene from the video (sometimes unrelated to its main topic). The videos are minimalistic in length. 5 minutes long on average. This number, however, is boosted by the longer, more eventful highlights and the occasional "Tabloid-like" videos. Most of the videos are two-three minutes long. They hardly contain any voice over. They are narrated via text. The editing is minimalistic, along with the sounds and visual effects.

### *A "Professional" video from 2017*

It is important to note that even though there are a lot of "Professional" videos in 2017, it is hard to find a video that could be viewed as a technical analysis.

Title: F1 Steering Wheel: Romain Grosjean's Guide

The video is a guide showcasing one of the most important and technically advanced parts of a Formula 1 racing car, the steering wheel. It has a straightforward, no click-bait title, along with a thumbnail that is illustrative of the videos topic, but is just a scene from the video. The thumbnail can be seen in picture one.



1. Picture: Thumbnail of the video "F1 Steering Wheel: Romain Grosjean's Guide" Source: Formula 1's official YouTube channel

The video is short, only less than two minutes. Therefore, it doesn't go too much into detail about the topic. Unlike other videos from this year, it is narrated. It is voiced by Romain Grosjean who is a professional Formula 1 driver. This helps with the creditability of the video. The video features illustrative cut-ins of on-track action, which are helpful in understanding the topic. There are even different effects in these sections, directing the viewers' attention towards the topic in question. An example of the effects can be seen in picture two. The second part of the video features an even bigger illustration, a blueprint of a steering wheel, further helping with the understanding of the narration



2. Picture: An illustrative element of the video "F1 Steering Wheel: Romain Grosjean's Guide" Source: Formula 1's official YouTube channel

### *General characteristics of 2023 "Professional" videos*

The same format, so the technical analyzes have been reinforced by Liberty Media. With the bigger emphasis being placed on digital media and the growing interest towards Formula 1 these videos needed to be catered to a more diverse audience. This has been achieved with the incorporation of infotainment elements. The videos managed to become appealing to new followers of Formula 1, all the while staying relevant to long-standing fans of the sport as well due to their topic. The videos became longer, they go more into detail about their topic. The narration and the illustrations have a more explanatory nature.

Specific emphasis has been placed on technical videos. A separate series has been created, titled "Tech Talk" explaining and showcasing technical elements of Formula 1.

### *A “Professional” video from 2023*

Title: The Rules On Flexible Wings Explained | Tech Talk | Crypto.com

The video has a straightforward no click-bait title. The thumbnail has changed radically since 2017. All the videos on the Formula 1 YouTube channel from the ownership change in 2018 onwards had the same design elements in terms of their thumbnail. There is always a picture connected to the topic of the video. The Formula 1 logo is always present with some lines surrounding it for better aesthetic. The main point of the video is always summarized in a few words on the thumbnail using the same font for every video. Using thumbnails like this is a very good way to help the audience identify the videos produced by the official Formula 1 YouTube account, as their design is very consistent and recognizable. The example for the thumbnail can be seen in picture three.



3. Picture: Thumbnail of the video "The Rules On Flexible Wings Explained | Tech Talk | Crypto.com" Source: Formula 1's official YouTube channel

Changes to the quality of the video can be seen just by looking at the setting. Liberty Media has dedicated a studio to these technical analyses, providing better tools for transmitting information. The narration has changed too. Technical videos are now narrated by experts rather than the drivers. This can decrease the credibility and the appeal of the video but increases the quality of it. Technical experts are more “trained” in appearing in the media and has the ability to give better explanations about the topic in question.

The professional nature of the video is present throughout its editing. The less impulsive longer cuts help the narrator, Sam Collins, by giving him time to explain elements of the topic. The

setting features a big tv, on which figures can be presented to help the explanation. There are shots of on-track action edited into the video, exemplifying the talked about topic. The video also brings examples outside the world of Formula 1, like the wings of an airplane to illustrate its topic further. Sam Collins presents physical objects (for example a life-sized rear wing of a Formula 1 car) to present what he is talking about. An example for the presentation and the videos outlook can be seen in picture four. These methods are perfect for making the video entertaining for all members of the fan group, all the while explaining its chosen topic perfectly to every member of the audience. This exemplifies why Liberty Media is opting for more infotainment style videos and how they are executed.



4. Picture: A look into the video "The Rules On Flexible Wings Explained | Tech Talk | Crypto.com" Source: Formula 1's official YouTube channel

### *Explanation to the "Mixed" category*

Mixed category consists of videos which are hard to categorize. Throughout the examination of the sheets mainly two kinds of videos have been listed under this category. One of the two were the "Driver reaction videos". These are uploaded after a qualifying session or a race and present the drivers' reaction to their performances in these sessions. These videos only consist of talking heads, so one on one interviews with the drivers. They could be under the "Professional" category; however, these interviews are not always given willingly due to the frustrated state a driver can be in after an on-track session; therefore, an obligatory nature can be felt while listening to them. This is why these videos are sometimes failed to match the criteria of the "Professional" style. Athletes are not always honest in these reactions, due to the secrecy of technical information and strategy, and because they must be politically correct and "media friendly" in these reactions regardless of their emotions evoked by the previous session. Therefore, the honesty and the relevance of these interviews is questionable. They are about

topics of “Professional” media (Technical analysis of the session by the drivers). But they have “Tabloid-like” characteristics as well with the drivers being in focus as a media personality. Therefore, they are placed into the “Mixed” category.

Another typical video type in the “Mixed” category are the ones connected to a specific race venue. They are uploaded around the time of the grand prix which they are connected to. For example, a video titled “Five Great Battles at the Austrian Grand Prix” was posted two days before the 2023 Austrian Grand Prix. These videos are done in the style of highlights therefore could be viewed as a “Professional” content. But their presence is clearly justified by the promotion of the upcoming race weekend. Apart from this they are irrelevant to the media coverage of the season. Therefore the “Mixed” categorization

For the sake of showcasing the stylistic changes in this category, two videos about the same topic from each year have been chosen.

### *A “Mixed” video from 2017*

Title: The History of The Austrian Grand Prix | Last-Lap Dramas

The title could be misleading for multiple reasons. The first part “The History of The Austrian Grand Prix” promises a historical overlook of the Austrian Grand Prix. However, this doesn’t happen in this video. It is done in a highlighted style, presenting overtakes from previous years. The viewer can also presume that a video is part of a series, presenting the history of this grand prix in multiple videos, or there is a similar video about multiple circuits. However, neither is the case. From the second part of the “Last-Lap Dramas” it is clear that the video aims to compile the most exciting final laps from the previous years’ Austrian Grand Prixes.

The thumbnail is connected to the topic to some extent. Two cars crashing into each other are present on it, but it is not clear that the venue is Austria. It is almost certainly a thumbnail suggested by the YouTube algorithm, that presents the best scenes of the video automatically as a possible thumbnail. The thumbnail can be seen in picture five.



5. Picture: Thumbnail of the video; *The History Of The Austrian Grand Prix | Last-Lap Dramas* Source: Formula 1's official YouTube channel

The video is only 1 minute 44 seconds long, which makes the accurate presentation of multiple dramatic past events difficult. It can signal the lack of effort by CVC Capital and be a sign of tabloidization, because based on the length there might be no intention to accurate coverage.

Considering its stylistic elements, the video is a great example of the mixed category. The topic of it is the historical coverage of previous on-track events, which is a “Professional” topic. It puts emphasis on the history of the sport, as well as on the performances of drivers. However, the time of uploading and the stylistic instruments of it could put this video in the “Tabloid-like” category. The video starts out very suddenly, showing the first “last lap crash” without an introduction or explanation. The video doesn’t explain the events in detail afterwards either. Nor is there a replay from another camera angle or onboard. The editor always immediately cuts away for the next historic moment, which are neither explained. The narration, which is done in a written form, via subtexts is shallow. It does not provide background information about why the scenes which we see on screen happened the way they did. The subtexts only cover when the events happened, who they happened to and the basic nature of them. The video also has tense music to it, with the aim of reinforcing the dramatic nature of the on-track events.

### *A “Mixed” video from 2023*

Title: Five Great Battles at the Austrian Grand Prix

The title clearly represents what the video is going to be about. On-track events from the history of the Austrian Grand Prix will be presented. It uses simple and straight forward language and there are no overexaggerated buzzwords in it. The title is not click-bait.

The thumbnail evolved similarly to that of the “Professional” videos. It has the distinguishing characteristics of the videos from the official Formula 1 channel and a topic related picture.

Its six-minute length is justified by the amount of context and explanation the video gives to each past event, explaining to the viewer the antecedents and the consequences of the events if needed. However, the video doesn’t exceed the necessary level of coverage. It doesn’t go into the drama and the public reception generated by these events. It keeps the topic on the on-track happenings.

The video is action packed and structured in a more exciting way. It features a ranking, putting the events of previous Grand Prixes in order based on how exciting they were. These numbering intercuts have a distinctive style, making it easier to identify content uploaded by the official Formula 1 YouTube channel. The execution of the video has evolved much since 2017. The first few scenes that are summing up what is going to happen in the video are great for building anticipation in the viewer. The video now features voiced narration instead of texts. It is the live commentary that featured under each event at the time its aired on TV. This further enhances tension. On the other hand, music is much more subtle, almost difficult to hear. This signals that the video doesn’t want create tension artificially, it sticks to professional racing coverage.

These types of “Mixed” videos came a long way from 2017. They could be even considered to be put into the “Professional” category, however their time of uploading permits this.

### *A “Tabloid” video from 2017*

Title: Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel and Kimi Raikkonen | F1 Grill the Grid

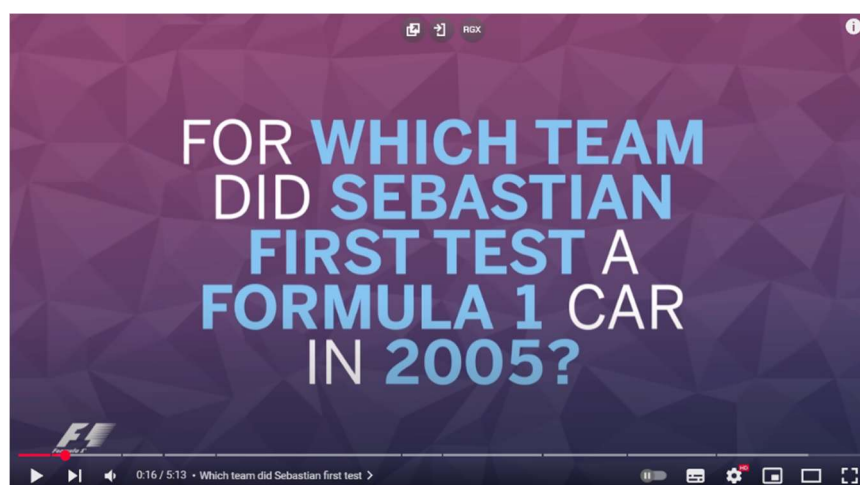
The title doesn’t have any click-bait like elements. It states who are going to be the characters of the video and what series it is part of. However, putting the emphasis on the drivers present in the video is a key sign of tabloidization, as the aim is to generate bigger viewership numbers with the help of media figures.

The thumbnail is similar to the other videos from 2017 and is an effortless outtake from the video. It doesn't give an insight into what the video is going to be about.

The relatively short five-minute length of the video signals the fact that back in 2017 these "Tabloid-like" videos were made with the intent of keeping Formula 1's YouTube channel fresh, during the dry spell of races in the summer break. It is not catered towards non- or casual Formula 1 fans as much as "Tabloid-like" videos will be in later years. Nor does it try to create memorable or memorable moments which then become common knowledge within the Formula 1 community and reinforce the rite nature of tabloid media. Nor does it put the driver as much in the spotlight as media figures as videos in later years will.

The video has no intro, nor does it explain the series "Grill the Grid" it is part of. It is a quiz show that back then featured technical, or Formula 1 related questions addressed to the drivers of the grid. Driver pairs and later drivers as individuals get points for their correct answers and from that a "Grill the Grid championship" is calculated. The questions in the 2017 video are all related to the history or technical aspects of the sport.

Based on the background (it was shot in a team's hospitality section) there was not much effort put into this type of content in 2017. There is no narrator, the person acting as a host is just a voice in the background, communicating with the drivers, but he doesn't imply any dramatic language to change the dynamic of the video. Graphically the video is limited. Visual and audio effects serve the purpose of presenting the question or the be a background noise. They are not increasing the dramatic effect. An example of the visual effects can be seen in picture six.



6. Picture: A question presented in the "Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel and Kimi Raikkonen | F1 Grill the Grid" video Source: Formula 1's official YouTube channel

Genuine excitement can be examined on the driver's faces. As mentioned in the "Literature review" section athletes prefer to be presented in the media professionally, therefore they enjoy answering questions regarding their sport.

Stylistically it is clearly a "Tabloid-like" video. It features drivers as media figures. There is no footage of any technical solution or racing action in it. It is unrelated to the events of the season. However, the historical questions asked in the video have the potential to increase the viewers' knowledge about the sport, while the video remains attractive even to casual fans with its "Tabloid-like" elements. This makes it a video done in infotainment style.

### *A "Tabloid" video from 2023*

Title: F1 Drivers as Babies! | Grill The Grid 2023 | Episode 5

In terms of title the video doesn't have much for being called click-bait. Viewers now can see that the "Grill The Grid" is a series running through the whole season, thanks to the episode number.

The thumbnail has several tabloid characteristics. The distinguishing design of Formula 1 YouTube videos' thumbnail is harder to notice in the case of this video. It features funny reactions by drivers of the grid. These are outtakes from the video. The creators are trying to raise attention towards the video by presenting the media figures of the sport, so the famous athletes of Formula 1 in a non-professional way. There is also a quote present on the video's cover. "I forgot he was a driver". Without context it may seem as a disrespectful thing to be said by professional racing driver. Thus, it raises the question within the viewer who said it and why. The thumbnail can be seen in picture seven. This method is a tabloid way of directing attention towards the video.



7. Picture Thumbnail of the video "F1 Drivers as Babies! | Grill The Grid 2023 | Episode 5" Source: Formula 1's official YouTube channel

As an intro there are several outtakes from what is coming in the video increasing viewer anticipation. There are additional funny, childish, quirky sound effects and the music throughout the video is used to enhance the comedic effect of the scenes. The narration is a voiced one. It is overdramatic, trying to increase tension within the drivers and the audience as well, with intoning phrases such as “GO, GO, GO!”. The number of texts is kept at a minimum. It is because in today’s media landscape, where shorter and more impulsive videos are becoming the trend an overwhelming amount of text can lead to the loss of viewer interest. The editing of the video is done so to make the video more impulsive and stimulating to the viewer. Cuts are common, scenes are short. These short scenes are perfect for later being reused as short format content. (YouTube Shorts, Instagram Reels, or TikTok videos) The video is swapping between the drivers and sometimes even presents more of them at the same time. The background is minimalistic, and the childhood pictures are showcased on a big scale. A general look into the video can be seen in picture eight. It puts the pictures and the drivers in the center of viewers’ attention further enhancing the tabloid effect.



8. Picture: Example of the stimulating nature of the video “F1 Drivers as Babies! | Grill The Grid 2023 | Episode 5” Source: Formula 1’s official YouTube channel

The topic of the video needs to be highlighted. With the video putting the childhood pictures and the reactions of the drivers into the focus, it is clearly trying to get to the viewer on an emotional level. This is coupled with the fact that the topic is completely unrelated to racing and the technical aspect of Formula 1 can make the sport and the athletes seem less professional and lead to the viewers being uniformed and too focused on the overdramatization of Formula 1. This video is a perfect example of the destructive tabloidization introduced by Liberty Media.

## SUMMARY

It is difficult to compare the new and the old type of media content of Formula 1 because before 2018 no complex digital media strategy existed. Back then the YouTube channel of Formula 1 served as an archive compiling highlights of on-track action from the year. It was viewed by the Ecclestone leadership as a necessary method for at least trying to keep up with the modernization of sport media. Ever since their takeover Liberty Media has tried to grow Formula 1's audience and make the sport a more popular, lucrative and sustainable business. This means building a younger fanbase who will follow the sport for years to come. They also worked on diversifying the audience in terms of gender and domestication, with a big emphasis on the American market. These were the reasons behind the shift in the digital communication style.

To answer the main question of this thesis (Has Formula 1's YouTube communication become more tabloidized since Liberty Media's takeover in 2017?) the results of both the "Quantitative" and "Qualitative" analyzes need to be studied.

In terms of the quantity, it is difficult to talk about clear tabloidization. According to my research no change in the dispersion of videos can be seen. The amount of "Tabloid-like", "Professional", and "Mixed" content is the same since 2017. What I noticed is that there has been a growth in the total number of videos since the takeover. This huge amount of content can make the official Formula 1 YouTube channel feel overwhelming therefore make some videos seem more "Tabloid-like" than they are. The format-based coverage of the race weekends, which is mentioned in the "Quantitative analyzes" can reinforce this feeling. It makes videos containing important or interesting information difficult to notice. This adds to the feeling of tabloidization. Based on these arguments it can be said that Liberty Media's communication approach resulted in a quantity over quality approach.

Apart from their amount, the upload date of videos is also worth noting. As I mentioned before in the study most of the "Tabloid-like" videos are uploaded during the off-season breaks or around the time of an American Grand Prix. This is done to keep the audience entertained even when there is no racing. Or to attract extra attention from the American target audience.

The audience's reception also needs to be studied in order to answer the thesis question. As I have noticed during the research the popularity of "Tabloid-like" videos is increasing from year to year all the while their percentage towards the total number of videos stays the same. This signals that the majority of the audience has a great interest and a positive reaction towards "Tabloid-like" content. This is a positive feedback to Liberty Media's digital media strategy.

In terms of numbers the infotainment type content is becoming more and more popular as well. The interest towards "Mixed" videos doubled since Liberty Media's takeover. This signals that this type of media is perfect for attracting new fans, providing them with important technical and historical information, all the while staying relevant to long-standing fans of the sport. Based on this examination an answer to the thesis question could be that Formula 1's YouTube content isn't getting tabloidized but more influenced by infotainment content.

According to my "Qualitative analyzes" the following examinations can be made. It cannot be taken away from Liberty Media that they have improved the overall quality of Formula 1's digital communication massively, especially that of technical analyses. And according to my research, this can be credited to the introduction of the infotainment type of content. This style is not only present in the "Mixed" category, but there are elements of it in the "Professional" type of content as well. These videos are done in a way that communicates important technical or historic information entertainingly and more importantly engagingly even to new fans of Formula 1. Looking at the roughly 700 videos each year I compiled within my sheets a rise in this media style can be seen. This is because infotainment videos are the perfect tools for reaching Liberty Media's goals.

Looking at the videos in the "Tabloid-like" category we can see that the "Grill the Grid" videos "suffered" the biggest and are the biggest sign and effect of Formula 1's content becoming more tabloidized. As I pointed out in the "Qualitative analyzes", before the change of ownership in 2017 "Grill the Grid" or any other tabloid video had the intention to communicate some knowledge about the sport. With them CVC Capital, the old owner tried to increase fan awareness or present a sport in a unique/attractive way. After the takeover of Liberty Media, some of Formula 1's digital media content became influenced by internet trends and started to focus on evoking reaction from the audience instead of transmitting knowledge to them.

The reason behind this shift is the phenomena of parasocial relationships and the usage of tabloid media as a rite. Following up on what I wrote in the "Literature review" and in the "Qualitative analyzes" Liberty Media uses "Tabloid-like" content to present the racers in a way

that they are more relatable to fans. Therefore, followers of Formula 1 feel more connected to their favorite driver and are likely to watch more races these athletes compete in or spend money on tickets/merchandising. This is the strategic usage of parasocial relationships. And with Formula 1 giving away personal information about the drivers in the digital media it tries to enforce the rite-like aspect of tabloid media. This means that by providing the audience with content that feels exclusive to them Liberty Media creates a sense of community among fans which keeps them following the sport for longer. All of this increases the revenue and popularity of Formula 1.

The new owner Liberty Media introduced digital marketing to the world of Formula 1, and they operated with the standards of tabloid and infotainment media from the starts. This was done to appeal to a new target audience who can only be reached using digital platforms and these styles of media. Summing it all up, the answer to the thesis question is *yes*, the content on Formula 1's official YouTube channel has become more tabloid like since the ownership change in 2017.

What is even more present is the rise infotainment videos. This is present both in the "Mixed" and "Professional" category. It is a perfect tool for Liberty Media to reach its goal of enhancing the sport's popularity and create an informed audience at the same time. While the tabloidization of content since Liberty Media's takeover is clear the final answer to the thesis question is that Formula 1's YouTube content became more influenced by infotainment content since 2017.

## **For further study**

It is not unreasonable to say that Liberty Media looks at Formula 1 only as an entertainment business. Their aim is to lure in as many new, young, diverse and American fans as possible. Before the ownership change Bernie Ecclestone had a conservative European-centric view of Formula 1. Up until 2017, the sport was considered to be very prestigious and glamorous. Mr. Ecclestone was upholding the sport's historical and conservative values. In my and in many fans' opinion, however, the newly formed media communication strategy is leading to Formula 1 losing its identity. This means sacrificing some of the sport's prestige and European anchored roots in favor of an extreme push for social media, younger generations (Larkham, 2018) and crucially a focus shift towards drama and show rather than actual racing and traditions (Andreff et al, 2009). With that Formula 1, which was based on decades of racing culture and traditions, lost its identity.

In the eyes of the new leadership the target, so to increase the popularity of Formula 1 has been achieved. But I feel like the problem is that for Liberty Media having a more diverse but uninformed fanbase, members which nurture an unhealthy parasocial relationship with certain drivers is a success. It is not only the sport that is in danger but the perception of those who are in the forefront of it as well. Drivers are becoming key figures of the tabloidized media strategy. Liberty Media is using the phenomena of parasocial relationships to increase the drivers' and thus Formula 1's popularity. Racers aren't always presented as professional athletes but are becoming media figures.

The shift in the media communication style and the new composition of Formula 1's audience can lead to older and loyal fans being frustrated. Their point of view can be that the brand identity of the once prestigious sport has diminished. (Sylt, 2019) They can feel as though their need for accurate and professional coverage of the sport is being neglected in favor of tabloid content. They can also feel misrepresented as the word "Formula 1 fan", because of the diversification of the audience and parasocial relationships, has the connotation of a less informed fan with a bigger interest in sensational or personal stories than actual Formula 1 racing.

Formula 1's leadership should recognize that even though the audience became more diverse, the core of it, the European viewers with a conservative view on Formula 1 and its values are still present. Content should be tailored in a way that it remains enjoyable to this core as well.

I think these issues and the opinions of both new and old fans is worth studying. This along with the possible solutions to enhance the viewer experience of all fans and the perception of Formula 1 both as a media product and as a sport are worth conducting a further study for in the future.

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## NYILATKOZAT

Alulírott POGONKI MÁRTON büntetőjogi felelősségem tudatában nyilatkozom, hogy a szakdolgozatomban foglalt tények és adatok a valóságnak megfelelnek, és az abban leírtak a saját, önálló munkám eredményei.

A szakdolgozatban felhasznált adatokat a szerzői jogvédelem figyelembevételével alkalmaztam.

Ezen szakdolgozat semmilyen része nem került felhasználásra korábban oktatási intézmény más képzésén diplomaszerzés során.

Tudomásul veszem, hogy a szakdolgozatomat az intézmény plágiumellenőrzésnek veti alá.

Budapest, 20<sup>25</sup> év <sup>4</sup>..... hónap <sup>7</sup>..... nap

PM

hallgató aláírása