



# **“Formula 1 in a completely different light”**

**How do fans perceive authenticity in the Netflix documentary series ‘Drive to Survive’?**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to find out how fans perceive the authenticity of the Formula 1 documentary series 'Drive to Survive'. Research has shown that documentaries are challenged from the audience with regard to draw an authentic representation of events while they seek to nevertheless be entertaining to people. Thus, the thesis tries to examine which themes fans focus on when they rate the authenticity of documentary series and how they express authenticity by investigating comments from a fan forum of Autosport.com.

With regard to the theoretical framework, it seems obvious to illuminate the concept of authenticity. Moreover, it is important to put it in context with documentary theories, fandom concepts and reception theories, since the thesis contains data of fans about the documentary series 'Drive to Survive' and focusses on its reception of authenticity, meaning how the fans perceive authenticity. To examine relevant data, Mayring's (2000) approach of a qualitative content analysis is used.

The main results of the thesis are the determination of four themes of authenticity of a documentary series, namely cinematographic manipulations, behind the scenes footage, participants and imposed judgements. But even if the same themes are generally addressed from fans, the focus of the fans on the themes of authenticity varies. Another result is that fans do not express authenticity with the same words, but the comments contain of patterns content wise related to the themes.

As a conclusion with regard to the research focus of fans' perception of authenticity the thesis shows that it is related to the individual mind. While the reception theory explains that the individual background influences interpretation of content, the concept of fandom illustrates that fans are able to give content an individual meaning which both has effects on their perception of authenticity. Therefore, it remains a challenge for documentary productions to find the balance between entertainment and authenticity.

*Keywords:* Authenticity, Documentary, Formula 1, Drive to Survive, Fandom, Reception Theory, sports

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## 1. Introduction

In March 2019, Netflix released the Formula 1 behind the scenes documentary series 'Drive to Survive'. It emerged from the idea of "going to show Formula 1 in a completely different light and introduce it to a completely different fan" (Stuart, 2020), meaning the co-production of Netflix and Formula 1 set themselves up for the challenge to introduce Formula 1 to people who were not into the sport before watching the series. At the same time the production had to keep the sport's long-time fans in mind. To tackle this challenge, the production focussed on having authentic characters for the series that they first found in Haas team principal Günther Steiner. One of the executive producers of the series, Paul Martin, reminds:

"There was just a feeling the moment we met him [Günther Steiner] that if people were willing to talk about the sport and be as honest as this guy, then actually we could end up with a pretty phenomenal show" (Stuart, 2020).

The recipe of authenticity and entertainment seems to work. Four seasons of the series have now been published, each showing the races of the last Formula 1 season and providing background insights into the drivers and the teams. The last one was just released in March 2022. The Global F1 Fan Survey 2021 reveals that the documentary series 'Drive to Survive' "has been to open the sport up to new, younger and more diverse audiences, making the sport more accessible" (Burrows, 2021: 30).

But there have been critical opinions about the series representation of authenticity as well. Probably the most famous critic is coming from the latest Formula 1 world champion himself, Max Verstappen as he says "throughout the whole season they try to pick moments and fabricate it in a way" (Reuters, 2022). Like the world's best driver, lots of fans build up their opinion about the authenticity of the series and discussed it with each other in fan forums. Documentaries always highlight the question about authenticity because of the recent development in fictional effects which makes it easier to manipulate content and harder for fans to distinguish reality from edited footage.

From a media and communication point of view, a study of authenticity is important to be able to explore the power and characteristics of editing documentary media nowadays. Film productions of documentaries do not hesitate to use fictional effects, on the one hand due to reasons of recreation, and on the other hand due to entertainment reasons. Thus, documentaries face the challenge of finding a balance between authenticity and entertainment. This is also the case of the documentary series 'Drive to Survive' which tries to

represent the sport of Formula 1 in an entertaining, but still authentic way (Stuart, 2020). To tackle this research problem, it is important to investigate what the comments in fan forums reveal about fans' perception of authenticity of the documentary series 'Drive to Survive'.

The perception of authenticity is of societal relevance since the decline in fans' ability to distinguish between fictional and real (Burgoyne, 2018: 232) can distort the reality portrayed. The "film industry is arguably one of the most impactful sectors in modern society" (Elezaj, 2019), so documentaries have the power to consciously influence the society with its content presented socially, politically, and economically. The great power potential of film productions could be used by productions in a socially problematic way. It appears worrying when employees of the film industry are aware of the possibilities to create authentic representations so that viewers can no longer distinguish them from reality, because these techniques can then also be used by productions with bad intentions for society that aim to influence people's minds. In order to assess when people perceive a representation as authentic and thus make their opinions accessible to influence, research on how fans actually perceive authenticity by using the example of the documentary series 'Drive to Survive' is socially relevant.

Taking a closer look at the perception of authenticity in the context of a Netflix documentary series is theoretically enriching in order to learn more about authenticity as a concept related to documentaries. Moreover, the study enables to assess on which aspects fans base their evaluation of authenticity and how fans articulate perceptions of authenticity in a fan forum. Therefore, my research questions of the thesis are:

*RQ: How do fans perceive authenticity in the Netflix series 'Drive to Survive'?*

*Sub question: What aspects do fans highlight when discussing the authenticity of the series?*

*Sub question: How do fans express their perception of authenticity in forum discussions?*

The three questions can be divided into one main research question and two sub-research questions. The two sub-research questions are intended to help answer the main question. While the first sub question is about what fans focus on when commenting on the

authenticity of the documentary series, the second sub question looks at how fans express themselves linguistically.

To answer these questions, this thesis uses Mayring's (2000) approach of a qualitative content analysis. The qualitative content analysis contributes to describe and analyse the comments from a fan forum of Autosport.com. Moreover, an adapted approach of Blumenberg's (1977) themes of authenticity is supportively used to structure the comments. In the end, the thesis develops an approach to determine fans' perceptions of authenticity in documentary series. Thus, it aims to clarify how aesthetics of the representation of documentaries are influential on its audience.

## **2. Background on Netflix series 'Drive to Survive' and Formula 1-Fans**

The series 'Drive to Survive' that is highlighted in this study is about the sport of Formula 1. To make the research object accessible and understandable, it is important to shortly summarize the series and its effect on Formula 1-Fans.

Overall, there are already four seasons of the series, each containing of ten episodes. The last one was just released in March 2022. While in the first season the top teams Ferrari and Mercedes did not grant permission to film, from the second season onwards all ten teams are part of the production. Every season shows the races of the last Formula 1 season and provides background insights into the drivers and the teams. This is achieved by filming at race weekends and conducting targeted interviews with individual drivers and team principals. It gives fans detailed insights into the racing process and allows them to learn more about the rivalry between the teams and between individual drivers.

The series 'Drive to Survive' is a co-production of Netflix and Formula 1. Paul Martin, one of the executive producers, admits that the documentary series has a creative approach to bring the audience closer to the sport of Formula 1. Besides the inclusion of honest characters, like the previously mentioned Günther Steiner, Martin also admits thinking about a needed entertainment factor by saying "those characters provid[e] the level of drama and conflict that you need for this series" (Stuart, 2020). This quote is interesting for this study, because it supports the upcoming question about how fans who watched the series perceive this act of balance between entertainment and still being authentic in the end. Towards Barlow (2022), an editor of Britain's GQ magazine, Martin



gives an even more concrete statement with regard to his opinion about the authenticity of the series:

“We’re not making The Kardashians here. You’re not going to tell Christian [Team Principal of RedBull] or Toto [Team Principal of Mercedes] to do something they don’t want to do, they haven’t got the time or the energy to be produced with a capital P. But it’s also not a season recap or best-of, it’s a Netflix show, and we want those characters to really pop. We do make choices. If we have to do something with the sound, to amplify something, we will. It’s about taking the audience on a journey inside the sport and really trying to get them to understand the passion and the drama that exists there and happens every day. For anyone who’s ever spent any time within the sport, it’s pretty authentic” (Martin to Barlow, 2022).

Thus, he disputed the opinion that by editing the sound to enhance the dramaturgy, the authenticity does not suffer from it. It just supports to create a representation of Formula 1 that motivates fans to develop their passion for the sport.

Placing Martin's comment about the documentary series ‘Drive to Survive’ in a social and cultural context, the series, although editing its footage, aims to create an authentic representation that is still connected to reality for the audience. Due to “the digital society’s transformations, such as blurring the distinction between reality and virtuality” (Levin & Mamlok, 2021: 1), people feel a need to connect to reality more than ever nowadays. Transformations of the digital society describe the development of our communication and computing. “The internet, the World Wide Web (WWW), and mobile communications have become an intrinsic element of today’s society and each of its members’ lives. Our everyday life experiences have been immersed in a new reality” (Levin & Mamlok, 2021: 2). This change needs to be embedded in film productions. While the society seems to perceive content “in the same sort of way we perceive things in the world (...), there’s an important sort of constructedness in film” (Fiorelli, 2016: iii). As Martin describes, ‘Drive to Survive’ tries to integrate the change of society's reality by creating an authentic series and thus acknowledged its cultural responsibility. Film productions are of cultural importance because they reflect our beliefs and values. As Netflix is the largest streaming service with over 200 million subscribers in 2022 (Statista, 2022), its provided content of series and movies, including Netflix series ‘Drive to Survive’, shape the audience. So, the research about fans perception also mirrors how fans receive the series' try of integrating the new reality and enables to realize if it is successfully embedded in the new cultural context.

With regard to the fandom of Formula 1 after the release of the Netflix series ‘Drive to Survive’ in March 2019, there was a recognisable fan development. Statistics about the Formula 1 audience revealed that “Netflix “Drive to Survive” are engaging a new generation of passionate F1 fans” (Burrows, 2021: 6), meaning an increase in the number of fans can be seen. However, the latest, world’s largest Global F1 Fan Survey from 2021 does not mention any details about the reaction of the fans themselves towards the series and their perception of its authenticity.

### **3. Literature Review**

While there is no reception study about fan’s perception of authenticity in documentary series to date, it is nevertheless important to embed the present study by looking at other relevant studies that share a similar focus. It is noticeable that there are studies that either focus on the research subject of authenticity (within documentary series), studies that have used sport fan forums as a data source or reception studies of media content. It seems obvious to do a literature review with the three different focuses, to reveal research gaps and show the contribution of the study that holds the unique combination of the study focus on authenticity, sport fan forums, documentary series and reception of media content.

#### **3.1 Authenticity (within documentary series)**

A similar research focus to the present thesis embodies Tolson’s (2001) conducted study about the documentary film ‘Geri’. The film is about Geri Halliwell, a former Spice Girl who made a documentary about her life after she left the Spice Girls in May 1998. In his study, the author explores whether Geri’s representation in the documentary film could be perceived as ‘authentic’ by the audience (Tolson, 2001: 443). While the approach seems similar to this thesis at first, this study, however, differs from the present one in that it does not consider as data the statements of the audience itself, as this study does by examining comments in a fan forum, but instead considers as data the documentary itself. Moreover, Tolson (2001) focuses only “on the way ‘authenticity’ is performed as a way of *speaking*” (Tolson, 2001: 445) by analysing how Geri presented herself within the interviews of the documentary. Thus, it does not include visual rhetoric within its analysis of authenticity. In contrast, this thesis deals with the comments of a fan forum

that deal with both the acoustic and visual impressions of the fans in connection with authenticity. By developing themes that initiate visual and acoustic authenticity, so that they can be used to measure perceptions of authenticity in other documentaries as well, this thesis would be a contribution. Furthermore, while Tolson does not give a definition about the concept of authenticity within his study, he does mention comments about Geri who notes that authenticity could be willingly produced by actors of the documentary themselves. This approach is enriching and can be pursued in this thesis.

Wheaton & Beal (2003) conducted a study about the impact of consuming alternative sport's subcultural media. They studied athletes who practice the sports portrayed in magazines to learn about the impact on their sporting identity, because media is significant for the authentication of popular cultural practices. With regard to my thesis, the authors' definition of 'authenticity' is to be observed. They consider images in magazines as authentic when they are "centred on action photos of people 'doing it' and their associated lifestyles and social worlds" (Wheaton & Beal, 2003: 155), meaning only images where people are actively doing sports or activities that are related to the lifestyle of athletes. Moreover "authentic was based on assumptions of maleness and whiteness" (Wheaton & Beal, 2003: 155) which limits the term to external characteristics of people. "Inauthentic images included those that portrayed equipment simply as commodities, or brands that could not demonstrate long-term commitment to the sports and lifestyles, or were targeting outsiders/beginners" (Wheaton & Beal, 2003: 155). With regard to this thesis, Wheaton's & Beal's (2003) definition about the authenticity of an image could be transferred to my thesis and documentary series, meaning a documentary series would unlikely to be perceived as authentic when it does not show means that relate to the topic presented in the documentary. Therefore, their study contributes with an approach of defining authenticity within my thesis.

Within the scientific journal 'Communication Today', Radošinská (2018) published a study that thematizes 'sportainment' which "is a term that refers to the processes of merging sports and entertainment within the media sphere" (Radošinská, 2018: 21). Nowadays, sports become more often a subject of films, because it is entertaining for people. Therefore, Radošinská (2018) examines the use of 'sportainment'. Moreover, her "text addresses the ways various sports and athletes are portrayed in American mainstream films" (Radošinská, 2018: 21). She notes that audiences feel particularly entertained when the ideas of authentic success are fulfilled in film (Radošinská, 2018: 34). However, she

does not point out in detail how to define an authentic representation of success. Since this thesis focuses on the authenticity of the sports documentary series 'Drive to Survive', an assessment of the entertainment series in terms of authenticity is required. Thus, this thesis contributes the ability to determine whether the media production under consideration is authentic despite entertainment by giving detailed instructions on how to evaluate authenticity of a documentary series.

Malitsky (2014), a scholar from the Department of Communication and Culture of the Indiana University, conducted a study about contemporary sports documentaries. Among other aspects, it mainly claims that "sports in the contemporary age, articulated through documentary film and video, always entails thinking about media itself" (Malitsky, 2014: 205). In the context of media, the study takes a closer look at the American television documentary producer ESPN, in particular ESPN's 30 for 30 series. Overall, it is noted that there is no investigation of the authenticity of sports documentaries. Nevertheless, relevant to this thesis is the author's conclusion that the fusion of documentaries and sports "urges viewers to understand sport through its mediation" (Malitsky, 2014: 213). Compared to this thesis, this thesis also deals with the understanding of sports through a documentary but with the additional focus on an authentic portrayal of Formula 1 sport in the documentary series 'Drive to Survive'.

Another study that focuses on the authenticity of documentaries, like this thesis does, is a study from Ellis (2021). He examines how documentaries distinguish themselves from fictional movies and notices a change in the approaches typically used for documentaries. "Where once observational filming was seen as the bedrock of authenticity, newer approaches have developed a growing emphasis on the assessment of the 'documentation' of past events" (Ellis, 2021: 140). Nowadays it is more common to "gather and interrogate footage and other visual information from very diverse sources" (Ellis, 2021: 140). Concerning the thesis, Ellis (2021) study shares the same approach of questioning the perception of authenticity within documentaries. But while the author concludes that "to be perceived as 'documentary' such films have to inscribe into themselves the markers of their authenticity as records of past encounters" (Ellis, 2021: 149) and thus just refers to the visual footage having an influence on the perception of authenticity, this thesis discussed how fans make their perception dependent on more themes than just this one. Nevertheless, Ellis (2021) study provides initial evidence for my thesis on when a documentary series might be perceived as authentic.

### 3.2 Sport Fan Forums

Focussing on studies that use sport fan forums as a data base, Stravos et al. (2014) study focuses on two research objects. On the one hand, the authors identify motives through which social media enables a connection between the fans and sports teams, and on the other hand they examine how these motives could be used to strengthen relationship marketing. While the second part is not relevant for this thesis, the first aspect of using forums to gain information about fans' opinions is a valuable approach. While Stravos et al. (2014) use forums on social media to find out about how fans construct a connection to sports teams on social media (Stravos et al., 2014: 455), this thesis aims to use forums to examine how fans construct authenticity in online forum discussions. Nevertheless, the authors prove with their study, that forums are rich in information about fans' opinions and therefore provide a good basis to study fans' perceptions of authenticity in the series 'Drive to Survive'.

Sayan & Aksan (2020) studied fan forums, but instead of Formula 1 fans they focused on football fans. In detail, the authors examined if people on fan forums who do not attend games in the stadium are able to have the same experience by reproducing it online (Sayan & Aksan, 2020: 373). While this thesis and Sayan's & Aksan's (2020) study do have in common that they both investigate fan forums to answer their research question, their study is not about how the fans perceive authenticity, but about how fans are able to produce an authentic atmosphere by themselves online. Therefore, this study has a different research focus and thus provides new insights into the significance of fan forums.

Pegoraro's (2013) study "provides insight into how fans, teams, athletes, and other stakeholders interact and engage in fandom in the digital world" (Pegoraro, 2013: 248). This focus stems from her observation of the change in fandom, which is expressed by the fact that more and more fans are consuming sport online. While this thesis is not interested in elaborating the digital shift within fandom, Pegoraro's approach of sports fans, specifically her concept of fandom is interesting since this thesis' research object 'authenticity' is defined by fans through their comments in fan forums. Furthermore, the engagement of fans commenting on forums to discuss their opinions about the documentary series 'Drive to Survive' embodies an interaction with the digital word. Pegoraro (2013) only

considers the interaction of fans through tweets, texts, blogs, and Facebook, which opens another research gap with regard to fan engagement through fan forum communication.

Within a communication journal that emphasises sport communication, Joe J. Phua (2010) published his research on sports fans. The author aimed to find out “whether media use has an effect on fan identification and self-esteem and, if so, which among the four types of media has the most significant effect” (Phua, 2010: 191). By media use, Phua (2010) includes, among others, the use of fan forums. Within his study fan forums are interesting to look at because he notes that sports fans use them to live out their affiliations with sports teams (Phua, 2010: 192). This thesis builds on Phua’s (2010) approach by examining fan forum-comments of fans that are connected through the same passion, the sport of Formula 1. The thesis contributes to Phua’s (2010) study by revealing that fans could nevertheless perceive the authenticity of a documentary series differently, although the fans share the admiration for the same sport.

### **3.3 Reception of media content**

The position of the thesis within the media and communication field lays on the focus of the research on the perception of fans, which classifies this thesis as a reception study. Like this thesis, Lin’s study (2013) also deals with the perceived impact of a documentary by the audience. Although the focus of the documentary is on environmental issues and does not focus on the viewer’s perception of authenticity, it provides findings about how the audience perceives the message of the documentary and how it influenced actions of the audience related to environmental issues afterwards (Lin, 2013: 708). Regarding my thesis, Lin’s (2013) study contributes a justification that people’s mind and their action can be influenced by the content of a documentary which supports the previous assumption within the introduction that documentaries are powerful means of societal relevance and suggests the need of further research on how documentaries manage to influence viewer’s perceptions.

Another reception study that examines the perception of the audience is conducted by Briandana & Azmawati (2020). The authors focus on millennials and study their interpretation of gender meaning in film productions, specifically YouTube content. For the reception analysis Briandana & Azmawati (2020) use Hall’s Encoding/ Decoding model (Briandana & Azmawati, 2020: 58). Concerning my thesis, the study gives me an

indication of using Hall's approach of a reception theory within my theoretical framework to analyse fans' perception of authenticity.

Molyneaux et al. (2008) also examine the reception of media content in terms of film productions on YouTube, focussing on Vlogs. Among other things, they examine the comments of the viewers of the vlogs on YouTube to gain insights into their perceptions. By analysing how the audience uses YouTube the authors note "gender differences in both vlog creation and YouTube use" (Molyneaux et al., 2008: 2). While this thesis also makes use of comments but in a fan forum to gain some findings about the viewers perception of authenticity in 'Drive to Survive', it will be interesting to figure out whether patterns can be recognised among the fans' perceptions in the end. Since the profiles within a fan forum consist of pseudonyms, gender differences will not be recognizable. Instead, this thesis is more likely to aim for finding patterns on how fans define their perception of authenticity while commenting about the series 'Drive to Survive'.

### **3.4 Value to my thesis**

Overall, the aforementioned studies bring added value to my thesis in that relevant, enriching aspects of them can be taken up in the analysis. First of all, they show that sports documentaries like 'Drive to Survive' are increasingly used to introduce the audience to the sport. The research problem of my work, whether documentaries can manage the balancing act between being authentic and entertaining while presenting a sport, can be based on this aspect. Moreover, they prevent first initial approaches on how to define and examine authenticity and thus give indicators when to rate something as authentic. They also delivered approaches for the concept of fandom and reassured me that fan forums are an enriching data source to examine fans perceptions. Lastly, they embed this thesis as a reception study within the field of media and communication and suggest Hall's (1973) Encoding/ Decoding model for the theoretical framework.

## **4. Theoretical framework**

Since the research focus of this study is authenticity, it is fundamental to embed this term within a theoretical framework. In addition, it should be put in relation to theories or concepts about documentary, fandom and reception. Documentary theories are explained, because this study deals with the documentary series 'Drive to Survive' and thus elements

of the theories may be embedded in the fan comments. The concept of fandom needs attention because it explains theoretically how fans are not only consumers but producers who are able to define the authenticity of the documentary series through their comments. Lastly, a definition of the reception theory will help in understanding how fans received the content of the documentary series, which is helpful in understanding why they perceived it as authentic or inauthentic.

#### **4.1 Documentary Theory**

Grierson (1971) is considered to be the first to use the term ‘documentation’ scientifically within a review from Grierson about Robert Flaherty’s *Moana*. “Later he defined it as ‘the creative treatment of actuality’” (Grierson & Hardy, 1971: 13) and thus coined it in the 1930s. Other scholars like Corner (1996) ascribe long-lasting significance to Grierson's approach and used it to develop their own documentary theories.

In detail, John Corner’s (1996) documentary theory is called ‘five central elements of documentary’ and tells that documentaries feature Observation, Mise en Scene, Interviews, Dramatization and Exposition. Concerning the first element of Observation, it contains parts of the documentary, where the filmmaker does not intervene at all and is like a fly-on-the-wall that just observes the situation. The element Mise en Scene describes the framework of the documentary. Having a certain setting by, among other things, lighting, positioning of objects, characters, helps to communicate a message or specific ambience to the audience. Thirdly, Corner (1996) mentions the element of Interviews as part of a documentary. Fourthly, the element of Dramatization “has become a standard element in the popularisation of documentary journalism, and has been controversially prominent in the shift towards merging ‘actuality’ with ‘entertainment’” (Corner, 1996: 32). This means that it is common in documentaries today to integrate elements of entertainment alongside objective observations of current events. Lastly, Corner (1996) mentions the element of Exposition which contains the filmmaker making the audience repeatedly aware of the topic of the documentary by mentioning it several times.

Nichols (2017) documentary theory classifies documentaries. Within the theory the author names six different modes of documentary which are all characterised differently. The Poetic Mode defines documentaries with a subjective interpretation of the subject. The filmmaker thus integrates artistic expressions into the documentary which creates a



distorted picture of reality. The Expository Mode describes documentaries that mainly rely on their acoustic expression in the documentary by talking directly to the audience through for example using the 'voice-of-God'. It is often used for historical documentaries because it used to deliver content objectively. The Reflexive Mode defines documentaries as "a construct or representation" (Nichols, 2017: 125). While these documentaries make the viewer aware that they are intended to be a representation by making the editing and influence on the footage obvious, they also convince the viewer of the authenticity or truthfulness of the representation itself. The Observational Mode classifies documentaries that unobtrusively film the subjects under consideration and do not intervene in the documented events. This creates an unbiased situation between documentary and viewer. The Participatory Mode includes documentaries that show interactions between the filmmaker and the shown subject which makes the viewers a part of it and creates an intimate, interactive atmosphere (Nichols, 2017: 120-138). Nichols (2017) sixth and last defined mode of a documentary is called Performative Mode. "Performative documentary underscores the complexity of our knowledge of the world by emphasizing its subjective and affective dimensions" (Nichols, 2017: 149). This means that it is used to make the story of a particular group of people, often a minority, heard by letting them telling it, which has an emotional and social impact on the audience while watching it.

Renov's (2012) documentary theory names four tendencies of documentary. The first one, to record, reveal, or preserve, is according to the author "perhaps the most elemental of documentary functions" (Renov, 2012: 25). It consists of the aim to create an image of reality for posterity. It is a snapshot that reflects reality. Important is to have in mind, that the created image of reality will not fit to the actual reality for forever because of development. For example, the places that are the subject of a documentary sometimes no longer exist after a few years. With regard to the second tendency, to persuade or promote, Renov (2012) refers to Grierson's approach that "Persuasion is the dominant trope for nonfiction films" (Renov, 2012: 29). This means, that documentaries can be used for propaganda or simply for influencing people's thoughts by showing interviews, suggestive images and/or statistical information. Therefore, they are often related to one specific historical occasion. Renov's (2012) third classified tendency to analyse or interrogate implies the call to the documentary producer "to challenge and activate audiences" (Renov, 2012: 32). By drawing the audience's attention to the fact that, for example, the sound has not been synchronised to the image but stands out, the audience must actively engage

with this stylistic choice. According to Renov (2012), “artwork should encourage inquiry” (Renov, 2012: 31). The fourth and final tendency to express “is the aesthetic function that has consistently been undervalued within the nonfiction domain” (Renov, 2012: 32), meaning that the representation of reality in documentary film is usually an objective image without artificial deceptions, which, according to Renov (2012), should not necessarily be the case. Creative interpretations and documentaries should not exclude each other (Renov, 2012: 35).

The three aforementioned documentary theories contribute to the analysis of the thesis. In the analytical discussion, reference can be made to the theories if the fan comments articulate elements of them. Corner’s theory (1996) is supposed to theoretically explain on which of the five elements of documentary the fans focus on in their comments while they discuss about the perception of authenticity within the documentary series ‘Drive to Survive’. Nichols (2017) documentary theory of the six modes of documentary theoretically explains what documentary mode fans connect the documentary series ‘Drive to Survive’ to in their comments. Moreover, the interpretations of the series by the fans written down in the fan comments will mirror tendencies of Renov’s (2012) documentary theory. Thus, the examination of fan comments reveals how fans perceive the tendencies while talking about authenticity.

## **4.2 Authenticity**

The term ‘authenticity’ comes from the late Latin ‘authenticus’, which means “original, genuine, authentic” (WordSense, n.d.). Therefore, the term authenticity is used in the context of verifications to describe genuine facts or reality. There are a few approaches of a concept of authenticity but they are mainly put in relation to historical documentaries (Russo, 2021; Arthur: 1993; Nichols: 1991). However, many well-known scholars who study documentaries discuss intensely whether documentaries depict reality and whether this is equivalent to assuming that they contain the truth (Corner, 1996; Renov, 2012; Grierson & Hardy, 1971). So, while they do not explicitly name it concept of authenticity, they nevertheless address the concept. Therefore, the discussion of the representation of reality in documentaries represents a starting point for the discussion of a concept of authenticity.

This approach is to be found in Grierson's (1971) previously mentioned definition of documentary film "as 'the creative treatment of reality'" (Grierson & Hardy, 1971: 13). It shows that he considers a documentary as a way of representing reality with artistic influence. It is not a mere reproduction of circumstances, but an interpretation of reality. He saw documentaries as a way to influence people's perception of the world around us. However, this does not per se rule out the possibility that a documentary is not authentic, despite its creative freedom of interpretation. As Blumenberg (1977) mentions, the reality portrayed in a documentary can never be completely objective (Blumenberg, 1977: 19) and authenticity does not request pure objectivity. Nevertheless, there is a "supposed conflict between truth and beauty" (Renov, 2012: 11) when documentaries creatively interpret reality. Corner (1996) also recognizes the "problematic duality in documentary work – its character as both artifice and as evidence" (Corner, 1996: 2).

Renov (2012) agrees with Grierson (1971) that documentaries naturally contain fictional elements through the filmmaker's interpretations. Therefore, the classification of documentaries as 'non-fiction films' is misleading, as it incorrectly assumes that documentaries depict total truth. Instead, Renov (2012) states that "the two domains inhabit one another" (Renov, 2012: 3), meaning that non-fiction films in the form of documentaries can be separated from fictional films, but can still contain fictional elements. Referring back to the authentic aspect, a documentary film may well be influenced by integrating too many fictional elements, which result in the representation ending up being completely removed from reality and inauthentic. However, through Corner's (1996) definition that documentaries "reflect and report on the 'the real' through the use of recorded images and sounds of actuality" (Corner, 1996: 2), it becomes clear that, despite using fictional elements, they are an attempt to depict reality as it really is and thus try to depict authenticity. Although Hattendorf (1999) states that they cannot show absolute reality and therefore cannot be equated with truth (Hattendorf, 1999: 44), documentaries can still be authentic.

This is confirmed by Hattendorf (1999) noting that authenticity depends on how credible the cinematic strategies appear to the viewer at the moment of reception (Hattendorf, 1999: 67). If viewers are convinced by the credibility of the documentary film, they will rate it as authentic. If not, they will most probably not continue to watch it. While a documentary is not able to picture the absolute reality, as shortly mentioned before, a documentary is an attempt to approach it with its depiction while remaining authentic. Van

Leeuwen (2001) also defines authenticity as “the true essence of something” (Van Leeuwen, 2001: 393), which means freedom in the way of depicting the object of documentation. In the end, the audience decides if the depicted is perceived as authentic. Being authentic does not mean that the documentary needs evidence to get rated as authentic, but it has to gain the believe and trust of the audience to do so.

In order to be able to determine the authenticity of a documentary film on the basis of themes, this study takes a closer look at Blumenberg's (1977) approach. He states that “authenticity may be desirable as a critical criterion for films that purport to show “truth”” (Blumenberg, 1977: 19). His developed theoretical framework consists of six listed points that “can form film criteria for judging the authenticity of a documentary film” (Blumenberg, 1977: 20). First of all, the choice of subject that is influenced by the filmmaker’s thoughts about what the society wants to see. Secondly, the choice of presenting actions – the focus of the camera filming the subject might seem not spontaneous but artificial to the viewers and “hence give a false feeling of authenticity” (Blumenberg, 1977: 20). Thirdly, authenticity is guaranteed by the public showing of private events. Nevertheless, Blumenberg (1977) points out that producers should refrain if these private insights are ethically questionable. The fourth theme is related to “means of editing, sound, selective focus, and other similar cinematographic manipulations” (Blumenberg, 1977: 20) that tackles authenticity by making it hard for viewers to signify the actual event and make it looks less authentic in the end. Fifth, the author mentions by imposed judgement the producer “influences interpretation and forms a film which can be more polemic than authentic” (Blumenberg, 1977: 20). The viewer is thus influenced and biased by the filmmaker's ideas and cannot form his or her own opinion, which can ultimately work to the disadvantage of the filmmaker. Lastly, Blumenberg states that documentaries that are specifically presented to people while having certain expectations about their reaction on it, for example playing the documentary series ‘Drive to Survive’ to people who are already Formula 1 fans so that acceptance is expected, are already not authentic at all.

With regard to the inclusion of authenticity as a concept within my analysis later on, I follow the approaches of Grierson (1971), Renov (2012) and Corner (1996) that the attempted depiction of reality may contain proportionate fictional elements without affecting the authenticity of the documentary. As long as, according to Van Leeuwen (2001), it reflects the essentials in the content, it can be evaluated as authentic. In order to be able to distinguish and rate comments where fans articulate the perceived authenticity of the

documentary series 'Drive to Survive', a coding agenda (Table 1) records the definitions of different levels of authenticity as part of chapter 5.2 Codebook. Moreover, aspects that have been highlighted by fans within their comments in relation to authenticity were considered while developing themes of authenticity. Blumenberg's (1977) proposed themes have provided a first important starting point. A detailed description of my adaptations to Blumenberg's (1977) themes of authenticity can be found in chapter 6. Analysis and Findings.

### **4.3 Fandom**

In order to theoretically explain the power of the fans as producers to individually define the authenticity of the documentary series through their comments, it is appropriate to illuminate the concept of fandom. Since there are lots of different approaches when it comes to fandom concepts, it firstly is important to clearly define who the fandom in this thesis includes as an associated fan. Baym (2007) finds a good resolution in characterizing fandom as a term that “involves a collective of people organized socially around their shared appreciation of a pop culture object or objects” (Baym, 2007)<sup>1</sup>. A pop culture object describes objects that are part of the culture of people. “Sports and television are arguably two of the most widely consumed examples of popular culture” (Delaney, 2007: 6). Transferring this definition to this thesis, all people who appreciate Formula 1 and gather in a fan forum to discuss the Netflix documentary series ‘Drive to survive’ as an object of pop culture are defined as fans.

Henry Jenkins (2006), who plays a significant role in defining the concept of fandom, specified his definition by noting that fans are not just consumers of the media that deals with their appreciated object. The audience also takes part of the media production and thus plays a big role in media (Jenkins, 2006: 259f.). Media production includes, among others, the activities of commenting in fan forums and of interpreting the content of documentary series. In this way, fans create their own meanings and spread them by sharing them online with others. Jenkins (2012) names the group of audiences taking a media product and remaking or reworking it to create their own meaning ‘textual poachers’ (Jenkins, 2012: 3).

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<sup>1</sup> Document does not have any page numbers.

It is recognizable that fandom builds up on emotions towards the shared appreciation of an object of popular culture or objects. In this context, Jenkins (2006) appropriately notes that

“Fandom, after all, is born of a balance between fascination and frustration: if media content didn’t fascinate us, there would be no desire to engage with it; but if it didn’t frustrate us on some level, there would be no drive to rewrite or remake it” (Jenkins, 2006: 258).

Referring to this quote, fandoms thrive from discussions between fans that include positive but also negative feelings towards fandom-related content. Regardless of whether fans exchange positive or negative opinions, the discussion only increases the fandom. Fiske (2002) aptly summarises, “Fan texts, then, have to be ‘producerly’, in that they have to be open, to contain gaps, irresolutions, contradictions, which both allow and invite fan productivity” (Fiske, 2002: 42), meaning media produced texts that address a fandom should rather contain of flaws, so fans have access to them and are able to criticize and discuss about them.

Fiske (2002) even says that texts that are of interest from a fandom actually need to be “activated by their fans, who by such activity produce their own popular cultural capital” (Fiske, 2002: 42). Since the author builds his fandom theory upon Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, he distinguishes the ‘dominant cultural economy’, that includes cultural goods like media produced content, from the ‘shadow cultural economy’, that comprises fans produced content. In detail, the ‘shadow cultural economy’ describes that “Fans create a fan culture with its own systems of production and distribution” (Fiske, 2002: 30). Therefore, Fiske (2002) agrees with Jenkins (2006) that fans are producers and not only consumers. But according to Fiske (2002) fans are even more than that, they are active participants (Fiske, 2002: 40). Fandom is a powerful movement since fans have the power to “choose to make some of their commodities into popular culture” (Fiske, 2002: 48). With fandoms giving goods a new meaning by their interpretation, they make these objects part of the popular culture.

In relation to the thesis, the concept of fandom presented will contribute to the analysis by providing a theoretically explain different perceptions of authenticity articulated in the fan comments. According to Fiske (2002) and Jenkins (2006) fans are not only consumers but also producers and thus able to interpret and give new meanings to series. Based on

these meanings, fans define their individual perception of authenticity of the series 'Drive to Survive'.

#### **4.4 Reception Theory**

The roots of the reception theory lie with Hans Robert Jauss (1970). In 1970, he published his influential position paper on reception study, called 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory'. In this, the author notes that no approach "recognizes the true role of the reader to whom the literary work is primarily addressed" (Jauss & Benzinger, 1970: 8). Thus, Jauss calls for a focus on the reader and how the audience receipt the content of a text, rather than just focussing on the author or text.

The reception theory also finds support from cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1973) within his essay 'Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse'. He developed the encoding/decoding model of communication which implies a textual analysis about how a text is produced, but also how it is interpreted from readers. According to Hall, encoded texts define texts with several messages made by the producers, the authors, which have to be decoded by the audience, the readers (Hall, 1973: 9). Thus, he sees "the production of the message at one end [, this is where the encoding takes place,] to audience perception and 'use' at the other [, this is where the decoding takes place]." (Hall, 1973: 1).

The authors' model of communication describes that the audience, meaning the readers, do not simply accept a text while reading it. Instead, the interpretation of its meanings depends on "the degrees of symmetry/ a-symmetry between the position of encoder-producer and that of the decoder-receiver" (Hall, 1973: 4). This means that producer (author) needs the same mindset as the receiver (reader) to manage that the interpretation of meaning of the text will be the same in the end. Because of individual, cultural backgrounds and life experiences of each person, some receivers will either agree, slightly agree or disagree with the message they interpret from the text. Hall identifies these three positions of the audience while decoding an encoded message from the producer dominant or hegemonic position, negotiated position, and oppositional position (Hall, 1973: 16-18).

The reception theory cannot just be applied on a text and its message, but also on the documentary series 'Drive to Survive' and its message. Since the intended opinion of the documentary series or of individual scenes by the producer cannot be understood with certainty but can only be assumed, the encoded message stays unclear. Therefore, it is not

possible in this work to distinguish between the individual positions of the decoding. Instead, the thesis focuses on the fact that the audience could interpret the producer's message differently, based on their individual background. Because of that, the audience, which in this thesis is embodied by the fans, have an important role to play because they mainly have the power to give the documentary series 'Drive to Survive' or scenes of the series a certain meaning by interpret them based on their individual context. Thus, the reception theory helps to understand that the perception of authenticity of the documentary series depends on the individual background of the fans, which could explain discussions in the fan forum between fans who do not share the same opinion about their perception of authenticity.

## **5. Methodology**

For my research, I decided to use the method of a qualitative content analysis, a text interpretation method (Kohlbacher, 2006), that is used for "cultural and contextual description and interpretation of social phenomena" (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019)<sup>2</sup>. A qualitative content analysis aims to gather selected material which will be categorized and discussed in relation to theories and concepts, to finally interpret the meaning of the material. "The object of (qualitative) content analysis can be all sort of recorded communication" (Mayring, 2000) which then includes the documented communication in a fan forum. Relevant data will be organized within developed categories and further interpreted through coding schemes which enables researchers to consider the whole content of the text under study (Kracauer: 1952-1953: 638). The research approach is inductive as "research questions guide data gathering and analysis" (White & Marsh, 2006: 35). However, it is possible that new research questions or important topics are getting recognized while working with the collected data.

A disadvantage of the qualitative content analysis is that it is not capable of having the whole text as the subject of examination because it focuses with developed categories on particular sentences out of context. It is therefore not appropriate to answer open research questions, because categories that draw focus on specific aspects would be a limitation (Kohlbacher, 2006). Furthermore, the research method "can be time-consuming" (Allen, 2017: 239). However, there are also advantages of the qualitative content analysis since

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<sup>2</sup> Document does not have any page numbers.



it is a comprehensible and reliable research method due to its structured process to examine data. Moreover, it is helpful in figuring out pattern in data (Morgan, 1993: 119). Regarding my thesis, the advantages of using a qualitative analysis outweigh the disadvantages. The research question is asking to filter the fan comments specifically for the research object of authenticity, so it is not an open question, hence no limitation is imposed. It is rather that the research questions guide the process of data gathering and analysis but still enable the researcher to consider all data from the fan forum. Taken all data into account contributes to develop a representative answer to the research questions. Another enhancing limitation was to only consider a fixed period of time in the sample to avoid that the research method is too time-consuming and still feasible (see chapter 5.3). The research process to examine data was throughout structured and thus transparent which was helpful in order to find detailed answers to all research questions. Since the qualitative content analysis is able to figure out patterns, the method is best suited to answer the two sub questions. While the first sub question asks about aspects of authenticity that are repeatedly referred to by fans, the second one also asks to find pattern within the expression of fans about authenticity. Both observations will deliver a final answer to the research question in the end.

For my thesis I focussed on Mayring's (2000) approach of a qualitative content analysis because he follows the unique idea "to preserve the advantages of quantitative content analysis as developed within communication science and to transfer and further develop them to qualitative-interpretative steps of analysis" (Mayring, 2000)<sup>3</sup>. Thanks to the step by step analysis that follows rules of procedure, he developed a transparent and comprehensible way of analysing material. In order to answer my research questions, Mayring's (2000) approach of a qualitative content analysis is suited best because it provides a structured way to develop a codebook (Chapter 5.2) that supports to filter data in a transparent way, which is significantly helpful with the numerous fan comments that this study considers.

After giving an overview of Mayring's approach of a qualitative content analysis (Chapter 5.1), Mayring's approach of how to develop a coding agenda will be explained and the coding agenda of this thesis will be presented (Chapter 5.2). Afterwards, the selection of the sample as data material is explained and justified (Chapter 5.3). Following, it is

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<sup>3</sup> Document does not have any page numbers.

determined to which research paradigm the study adheres to (Chapter 5.4). Lastly, limitations (Chapter 5.5) and ethical considerations (Chapter 5.6) are mentioned.

### **5.1 Qualitative content analysis**

Mayring (1991) distinguishes between three different types of qualitative content analysis, namely summarised content analysis, explicit content analysis and structural content analysis (Author's own translation; Mayring, 1991: 211 f.). The last analysis mentioned should be given special attention in this thesis, as it is the one used. The reason for this is that the structural content analysis aims to filter out certain aspects from the material. As previously mentioned, the certain aspect this thesis focuses on are comments on the authenticity of the documentary series. With previously defined ordering categories, it is possible to make a cross-section of the material or to assess the material according to certain categories. Overall, Mayring (1991) summarizes the idea of a structural content analysis by saying:

“The basic idea is then that through the precise formulation of definitions, typical text passages ("anchor examples") and coding rules, a coding guide is created which decisively specifies the structuring work” (Mayring, 1991: 212).

Following his approach, a coding agenda (Table 1) is developed in the next chapter 5.2 Codebook, which makes it possible to filter the comments from a fan forum according the category of authenticity. Furthermore, a classification according to the coding agenda is possible within the analysis, since the agenda defines different degrees of authenticity.

### **5.2 Codebook**

To develop a codebook out of gathered data for this thesis, Mayring (2000) suggests the inductive development of categories and deductive application of categories as the central procedures of a qualitative content analysis.

The procedures of inductive category development support to develop categories of the analysis in a comprehensible way by working closely with the collected data. This means that starting from research questions and theoretical background, a category of definition is determined which defines the focus of the text considered (Figure 1). According to this principle “the material is worked through and categories are tentative and step by step

deduced. With-in a feedback loop those categories are revised, eventually reduced to main categories and checked in respect to their reliability” (Mayring, 2000)<sup>4</sup>.

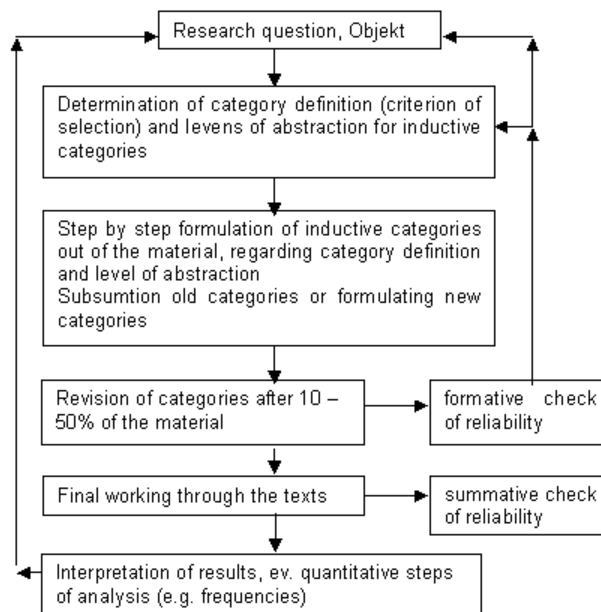


Figure 1: Step model of inductive category development (Mayring, 2000).

With regard to my research questions and my theoretical background, there is a recognizable focus on authenticity in documentary series. Therefore, while conducting data in form of comments from a fan forum, I focussed on comments which allow conclusions to be drawn about the perception of fans’ authenticity in the documentary series ‘Drive to Survive’. After filtering the fan comments the first time for statements about authenticity, I looked again at the data collected. I noticed that the comments fall into three different categories in terms of authenticity that represent a certain degree of authenticity, namely authentic, slightly authentic, and inauthentic. Definitions then had to be developed for these three categories in order to be able to assign the collected data to a category in a systematic and uniform manner. The degree of authenticity in the sense of ‘authentic’ bases its definition on the previously mentioned concept of authenticity. According to that, fans perceive the impact of themes related to authenticity as an appropriate representation of reality that is not affected by fictional elements as long as the essence of the content is reflected (Grierson, 1971; Renov, 2012; Corner, 1996; Van Leeuwen, 2001). The definitions of the two other degrees of documentary, ‘slightly authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’, have been newly developed. Since they are both based on the definition of the first degree of authenticity, they both also refer to the aspect of the representation of

<sup>4</sup> Document does not have any page numbers.

reality and the essence of content. An adequate representation of reality and a representation of the essential content decreases with each degree of authenticity.

The analytical degrees of authenticity developed through the process of the inductive category development, which build on the research question and the theoretical background of the thesis, now serve as the basis for the deductive category application process. This deals specifically with the text, that is, the material examined in the thesis. “The qualitative step of analysis consists in a methodological controlled assignment of the category to a passage of text” (Mayring, 2000)<sup>5</sup>. In detail this means that the text is assigned to the appropriate, developed categories that are recorded in the codebook (Figure 2).

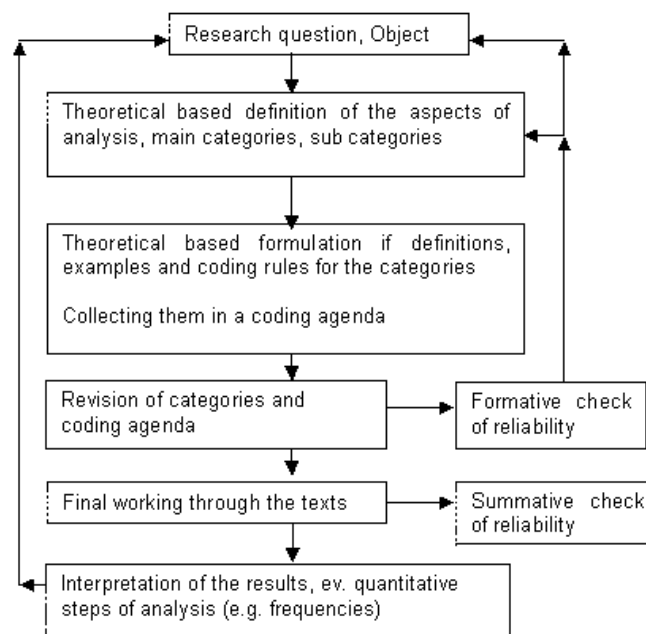


Figure 2: Step model of deductive category application (Mayring, 2000).

Therefore, following Mayring’s (2000) approach, I started to assign the comments to the different degrees of authenticity. In order to follow the same scheme, I recorded coding rules so that the assignment remained consistent. As Mayring (2000) states, the coding rules determine exactly under what circumstances a text passage can be coded with a category. Finally, the deductive category application led me to the coding agenda (Table 1) which includes three different categories related to the degree of authenticity, their definition, examples and coding rules. The coding agenda contributes to the analysis of this thesis since it enables a rating of the comments level of authenticity in a consistent and comprehensible way.

<sup>5</sup> Document does not have any page numbers.

Degree of authenticity	Definition	Examples	Coding Rules
<b>D1: Authentic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fans perceive the impact of themes related to authenticity as an appropriate representation of reality that is not affected by fictional elements as long as the essence of the content is reflected.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“I liked it a lot. I don't care about added commentary or other stuff like that, what I'm interested is the personalities you don't get to see when following an F1 weekend. The straight ruthlessness of Steiner, the cold communication between Horner and Abiteboul... This is much more interesting than anything I've heard in the official press sections for 20+ years.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All themes mentioned in one comment are described as supportive for the series.</li> <li>The amount of themes mentioned does not matter.</li> </ul>
<b>D2: Slightly authentic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fans perceive the impact of themes related to authenticity as an acceptable representation of reality. However, the essence of the content is not reflected fully realistically anymore.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Yeah been watching it too. Pretty good. The only bit I didn't like was that Aussie overdub commentary in the first episode. Some good behind the scenes footage in this series which is cool. I cracked up when Cyril was having a dig at Horner at Spa after Dan signed. Funny stuff. 😄”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall, the themes mentioned in one comment are describe as still supportive for the series. Nevertheless, some weaknesses are revealed that do not draw a realistic representation.</li> <li>The amount of themes mentioned does not matter.</li> </ul>
<b>D3: Inauthentic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fans perceive the impact of themes related to authenticity as a poor representation of reality. The essence of the content is not reflected anymore.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Boring and fake. Without Ferrari and Merc this wasn't ever going to be any good, was it really?”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All themes mentioned in one comment are described as burdensome for a depiction of reality in the series.</li> <li>The amount of themes mentioned does not matter.</li> </ul>

Table 1: Coding agenda.

To summarize the data gathering process, it consists of two parts, namely Mayrings's (2000) inductive category development, that is followed by the deductive category application. Following Mayrings's (2000) inductive category development I examined data by searching for comments in the fan forum that are related to the research object of authenticity. After I filtered comments for the first time, I looked at them again to identify categories into which they can be divided. I distinguish three different degrees of authenticity, namely authentic, slightly authentic and inauthentic, that I developed definitions for. Following Mayring's (2000) deductive category application, I looked again at the data collected and assigned the comments to the three defined degrees of authenticity. Finally, I was able to fully develop my coding agenda by providing examples for each degree of authenticity and developed coding rules. The coding agenda developed within the data gathering process aims to be a foundation of the analysis.

### **5.3 Sample**

I chose the fan forum called "F1 Netflix documentary: Drive to Survive" on Autosport.com as the object of my study because, besides Motorsport.com and Motor1.com, Autosport.com is part of Motorsport Network which is known as "the world's biggest motorsport and automotive media network" (Motorsport Network, 2017). It can be assumed that the platform is well known around Formula 1 fans and the use of the forum to discuss about the Formula 1 documentary series is obvious. Moreover, the used forum that entails comments and discussions about the Netflix documentary series 'Drive to Survive' is freely accessible for everybody which gave me, as the researcher, access to all the comments and allowed me to include them in the thesis as a research subject. Therefore, the fan forum from a well-known automotive media network website that consists of comments about the Netflix series 'Drive to Survive' is of great interest for a qualitative content analysis that examines fans' perception of authenticity.

At first, I decided to investigate the fans' perception of authenticity of the series within the framework of the social media comments on the Formula 1 account on Twitter. Since the essential aspect of communication on Twitter is text, it seemed like an enriching source of comments for a qualitative content analysis. However, it turned out to be difficult to filter the comments so that they firstly refer to the documentary series and secondly make a statement about the authenticity of the series. Since I am focussing especially on

the fans' perception, I changed my mind and decided to focus on fan forums. By its very nature, it is solely about the subjective perception of the fans. Furthermore, it was possible to filter the comments in the forum. Since there are several different topics in Formula 1 that fans want to comment about, for example the last race or the new technical regulations, Autosport.com users are able to open up different forums, each dealing with a different category. Through a search function I was able to find the forum that only consists of comments about the Netflix series 'Drive to Survive' called "F1 Netflix documentary: Drive to Survive" (Autosport Forum, 2019). It entails 1803 comments in total (state 02.05.2022), starting with a link to the You Tube video of the first official trailer of the series. It was posted on 20.02.2019, so slightly before the upcoming release of the first season on 08.03.2019. Thus, there have been interactions in the fan forum before the actual release of the series, where fans discussed about the trailer, their first impressions and their expectations.

This thesis investigated comments of the chosen fan forum on Autosport.com within a timeframe of the day of the first comment until one month after the release of the first season (20.02.2019 – 08.04.2019) due to feasibility. According to Mayring's (2000) approach of a qualitative content analysis, I further limited the amount of comments by only considering the ones that I interpreted as being related to the authenticity of the series according to the coding agenda (Table 1). In detail, I looked closely at 431 comments from which I interpreted 150 as relatable to authenticity. The filtered 150 comments that constitute my data for this thesis have been documented so that they can be accessed again at any time if necessary.

#### **5.4 Research Paradigm**

The focus of this thesis lays on the perception of the research participants, meaning the fans themselves. Since it is about how they perceive authenticity of the documentary series 'Drive to Survive', fans are an essential part of the thesis. They basically provide the answer for the research question. Therefore, this thesis adhered to the interpretative paradigm, because the paradigm sees people in the research as participants or even co-researchers. Following the interpretative paradigm's ontological assumption of idealism and the epistemological assumption of constructivism, "Social reality is considered not to have an independent existence from either social actors or researchers" (Blakie &

Priest, 2017: 41). So, the interpretative paradigm suggests what gives the physical world meaning is the mutual understanding between people when they engage with the physical world. This thesis illuminates the mutual understanding between fans with regard to the perception of authenticity of the research series 'Drive to Survive'.

Blakie & Priest (2017) describe as the purpose of an interpretative paradigm "to develop typified descriptions and interpretation-based understanding of everyday concepts and meanings" (Blakie & Priest, 2017: 38). To implement this, qualitative research methods are common. This also applies to this thesis, in that it uses Mayring's (2000) approach of a qualitative content analysis. With its help, this thesis aims to develop an understanding of the concept of authenticity.

### **5.5 Limitations**

While the thesis aims to present a transparent, comprehensible study with enriching findings about fans' perception of authenticity of documentary series, it nevertheless faces some limitations. A first challenge is not being biased as a researcher, since I am a Formula 1 fan myself and watched the documentary series 'Drive to Survive' myself. While I stick closely to the collected data and base my findings on fan forum comments, I avoid adding my own opinion.

Concerning the conducted data in form of fan comments from a fan forum, the choice of the comments being considered and examined relies on the subjective choice of the researcher. Since it has to be decided which comments are related to authenticity, decisions have to be made. Thanks to the coding agenda (Table 1), the decision as to which comments address authenticity and can thus be assigned to a degree of authenticity is comprehensible on the basis of the agenda and transparent for the reader. Furthermore, the analysis (chapter 6.) classifies the comments to different themes that are addressed by fans when they talk about authenticity. However, people who do not have much or any knowledge about Formula 1 may struggle with understanding the content of the used fan comments, since some of them thematize specific teams or mention names of drivers, team principals or commentators that they are not familiar with. Therefore, when comparing the interpretation of the researcher with that of others, they may vary by not recognizing the same theme. Moreover, due to feasibility, I was not able to include all



comments of the fan forum chosen and had to set a timeframe on which comments I will focus on, which limits the scope of the study.

Lastly, a limitation of the study is that people tend to write negative feedback rather than positive feedback (Vaish et al., 2008: 383). This means when people have something positive to say they rather keep it to themselves than sharing it. This could also be the case with regard to the shared comments on the examined fan forum and thus create a distorted image of the fans' actual perception of the authenticity of the series, which is not comprehensible. This needs to be considered when drawing conclusions in the end.

## **5.6 Ethical considerations**

It could be ethical questionable that I used the comments of fans from a fan forum without their explicit permission. However, the fan forum used is openly accessible to everyone. It is not even required to have an account at Autosport.com to read the comments, just when you want to write a comment yourself. Since users agreed on Autosport.com terms of use, they “agree that that [their] use of the Autosport.com website shall be at [their] sole risk” (Autosport Forum, n.d.) and that they “should use [their] best judgement and exercise caution where appropriate” (Autosport Forum, n.d.). This means, fans are responsible if they choose to share their opinions in comments on the Autosport.com fan forum. Thus, it be assumed that users should be aware that other visitors to the fan forum could also read their comments. Therefore, the public sharing of comments by fans in the openly accessible fan forum from Autosport.com is interpreted as permission for the content of the comments to be examined as part of a thesis.

Nevertheless, it is my duty as a researcher to make sure that the identity of the fans remains anonymous. As confirmed in the terms of use, as a researcher I “agree not to collect or harvest any personally identifiable information, including account names, from the Autosport.com Website” (Autosport, n.d.). Thus, I decided to not use any screenshots of the comments, since readers would have access to the (nick-)names of the fans and, in some cases, their profile picture which would enable them to identify the actual person behind the profile. For the same reason, I also decided to not record the exact date and time of when a comment was written, because then people would be able to trace them back by simply entering the fan forum used.

## 6. Analysis and Findings

My analysis is intended to reveal the answers to the sub-research questions as well as my research question in the end. For this purpose, a previously described qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2000) is carried out, which filtered 150 fan comments that are related to authenticity. While collecting data in form of the fan comments, it is recognizable that the comments of the fans related to authenticity deal with similar topics. Therefore, the comments have been organized into four different themes. To select these themes, Blumenberg's (1977) approach, which was previously mentioned within chapter 4.2 Authenticity, gave an initial indication. However, he suggests six different themes that are common themes when discussing about the authenticity of a documentary film (Blumenberg, 1977: 20), but I only mentioned three of them and created one theme on my own. From the four developed themes, Blumenberg (1977) suggested cinematographic manipulations (among others means of editing, sound, selective focus), imposed judgement of production that influences audiences' interpretation, and behind the scenes footage that share private events as themes of authenticity in the documentary series. I added a new theme of authenticity, namely participants of the series. In order to create a transparent overview of which themes have been focused on most by fans, the number of comments on the four respective themes is listed in descending order: imposed judgements 76 comments, cinematographic manipulations 61 comments, participants of the series 61 comments, and behind the scenes footage 36 comments. It should be noted that some comments mention not only one theme, but several which explains why the sum is not the 150 comments considered, but more.

With regard to my first sub-research question about what aspects fans highlight when discussing authenticity of the documentary series 'Drive to Survive', 61 out of 150 considered fan comments discuss about the editing of the series, especially the sound of cars and crashes, and the commentary. Since Blumenberg (1977) notes that with lots of cinematographic manipulations it could be difficult for the viewer to access authenticity (Blumenberg, 1977: 20), I figured it is a relevant theme with regard to the fan comments input discussing about the influence of the editing on the authenticity of the documentary series.

Moreover, by reading through the fan forum comments related to authenticity I noted that fans exchanged their opinions about the shown content of the documentary series while focussing mainly on two topics. On the one hand, they thematize in only 36 comments the theme of behind the scenes footage, that reveals private moments of the drivers or

team principals to the public. According to Blumenberg (1977), its integration is a way of producers to create authenticity (Blumenberg, 1977: 20). Since ‘Drive to Survive’ is teased as a behind the scenes documentary series and comments discuss the inclusion of private moments, the focus on the theme of behind the scenes footage will contribute to findings about fans’ perception of authenticity.

On the other hand, since the two top teams Ferrari and Mercedes are not part of the first season, 61 fans comment about the influence of their absence on the series. While Formula 1’s former managing director decided consciously against a focussed documentation about only one team (Stuart, 2020), it is interesting to examine the fans’ comments to see if the denial of filming permission of the two top teams Ferrari and Mercedes in season one affects fans’ perception of authenticity. Fans clearly express their opinions on whether the other teams can compensate for the absence of the top teams and still authentically reflect the sport of Formula One, which is why I developed the theme of participants of the series for the analysis.

Lastly, the fan forum consists of 76 fan comments that discuss about the representation of the sport as well as of the drivers and the teams in comparison to reality and rate the work of the production team of the documentary series. Blumenberg (1977) notes that “any filming and / or editing manipulation influences interpretation” (Blumenberg, 1977: 20). Since some users communicate clearly in their comments that they followed the Formula 1 season, they compare the events of reality with their representation in the series and rate its authenticity. Therefore, the theme of imposed judgement to rate authenticity seems to be relevant for this thesis.

Overall, fan comments that include one or several aspects of the four defined themes are considered and examined to gain further findings about fans’ perception of authenticity in the documentary series. In detail, the four themes will be discussed in depth in relation to the coding scheme (Table 1) and the empirical material. Since there are 150 comments in total that are related to authenticity, I chose to focus the analysis on illustrative examples. The rating of the comments according to their degree of authenticity authentic, slightly authentic, and inauthentic, strictly follows the coding agenda (Table 1) outlined in chapter 5.2. This makes the interpretation comprehensible and transparent for the reader.

## 6.1 Cinematographic manipulations

As previously mentioned, cinematographic manipulations in terms of sound and editing is a theme of authenticity, since an overload of it could make it difficult for the audience to access authenticity. With regard to the documentary series ‘Drive to Survive’, the sound of the cars, crashes and commentaries are a beloved discussion topic in the fan forum, since 61 fans discussed about the theme. Fan1 comments:

“Loved it. Only the sound effects were a bit too much...” (Autosport Forum, 2019)

While he overall likes the series, he points out its sound and criticises it. He does not explain why the sound effects in particular do bother him, but it could be interpreted that to him the overuse of editing has a negative impact on the authenticity of the series. The assumption could be taken as far as to interpret that Fan1 is referring to Corner's (1996) elements of documentary, more specifically the element of dramatization, which describes the integration of drama for entertainment alongside objective footage. Editing sound effects in the documentary series ‘Drive to Survive’ are most probably supposed to increase the drama of crashes or the excitement at the start of a race. However, according to Fan1 the element of dramatization was overused and therefore not authentic anymore. Another, Fan2, contradicts his opinion and answers to the previous comment more specifically:

“Actually I think the sound department is very good, the audio post production, mastering as well. The video post, and the color correction, finishing is really top notch too.” (Autosport Forum, 2019)

Fan2 does not just focus on the sound, but also praise the editing of the film footage. With mentioning the sound department, it becomes obvious that Fan2 is aware about the subsequent processing of the material. Thus, he acknowledges Nichols (2017) Poetic Mode of a documentary, that describes documentaries where filmmakers integrate artistic expressions, hence the sound and the images in ‘Drive to Survive’, that create a distorted picture of reality. Nevertheless, the editing does not seem to touch the perception of authenticity of Fan2 since he only speaks positively about it and does not mention negative consequence for the documentary series. Fan2’s comment could also be interpreted as classifying the documentary series according to Nichols (2017) Reflexive Mode that defines documentaries as “a construct or representation” (Nichols, 2017: 125). The audience of these documentaries are supposed to recognize edits and influence on the footage but are still able to believe in its authenticity and truthfulness. This is obviously the case, but

although Fan2 recognises that the documentary series does not portray the absolute reality and instead even compliments its fictional elements, his comment shows that according to the coding agenda (Table 1) it is to classify as ‘authentic’. The answer provoked Fan1 to react by saying:

“Define good? It was just so obviously fake/edited. I dont mind a little touching up, but this was too much for me.” (Autosport Forum, 2019)

With now being more concrete that the editing of the sound seems “fake/edited”, he also reveals that he noticed the cinematographic manipulations. This could imply Renov’s (2012) tendency to analyse or interrogate, meaning that the documentary producer willingly makes the editing obvious, “to challenge and activate audiences” (Renov, 2012: 32). By drawing the audience's attention to the fact that the sound has not been synchronised to the image but stands out, the audience must actively engage with this stylistic choice. This could have been the producer’s purpose which worked with regard to Fan1 & Fan2 actively discussing about it in the fan forum. Nevertheless, as Fan2 highlights the over-doing of sound editing he states that the documentary series is no longer authentic to him according to the coding agenda (Table 1). Another, Fan3, recognized the cinematographic manipulations like all other fans mentioned before. He seems to be less bothered about it by commenting:

“Those are true. The V8 sound is inaccurate, but the sound design and edit teams were given creative license - you can hear that in the crash and pass-bys, etc.” (Autosport Forum, 2019)

With regard to his critic about the V8 sound, which is the sound of a Formula 1 car engine that was used from 2006 to 2013, it is interesting to look at the approach of Wheaton and Beal’s (2003) study that was previously mentioned in the literature review. The authors note, images that do not picture means that are related to the topic the campaign focusses on are inauthentic. Transferring this approach to this thesis which deals with a documentary series and is thus related to moving visuals and acoustical footage instead of images, Fan3 does not perceive the sound of the engine as authentic if the engine noise is not from the Formula 1 car pictured. Nevertheless, he assuages the inauthentic sound of the engine by assuming that the production team had creative freedom in terms of sound and editing and thus sees the documentation as at least ‘slightly authentic’ according to the coding agenda (Table 1). By mentioning the “creative license” Fan3 picks up Renov’s (2012) tendency to express where the author suggests that creative interpretations and

documentaries should not exclude each other (Renov, 2012: 35). He interprets the used aesthetic functions as being supposed to underpin the representation of Formula 1.

With regard to the second sub question, fans express their perception of authenticity concerning the theme of cinematographic manipulation by relating the shown content in terms of visual and acoustical footage to reality. It seems like they do not totally reject editing, but an overdoing of editing so that the essence is not reflected anymore is connected with inauthenticity.

## **6.2 Behind the scenes footage**

The Netflix series 'Drive to Survive' is labelled as a behind the scenes documentary series and thus includes behind the scenes footage that grant insights into private events of the drivers or team principals. The more surprising that the theme was only raised by 36 fans in the comments related to authenticity. Nevertheless, untouched material that reflects what is happening could trigger fans to perceive the presented scenes as authentic. Fan4 comments enthusiastically:

“The real juice is between the alpha males behind the scenes, not on the race track where we all know the results anyways. More of that please !” (Autosport Forum, 2019)

He is obviously excited about the insights given by the documentary series, since it gives him added knowledge about the drivers and team principals of Formula 1, that he had no access to before. This picks up Renov's (2012) tendency to reveal from his documentary theory by exposing new facts to the fans. Fan4 does not question the represented reality of the footage which shows that he evaluates the footage showing the essential content and thus rates it as 'authentic' in the sense of the coding agenda (Table 1). Another, Fan5, totally disagrees with his opinion on the behind the scenes footage and explains it in a long, detailed comment:

“4 episodes in. I really wanted to enjoy it, but I'm struggling. My main gripe is that it simply doesn't feel organic, at all. This isn't a "fly-on-the-wall" documentary, it doesn't follow the drama as it happens. There's no exclusive access, it's all very contrived. Every scene with a driver, engineer, team owner etc, they know they are being recorded. (...) Any access that is granted is so very clearly guarded and manufactured. That's before going in to the myriad of continuity and editing errors. It's ridiculous. The production is terrible. The fake commentary, fake engine noise, fake cheering, incorrect subtitles, etc. It's so inauthentic. The whole thing.” (Autosport Forum, 2019)

By summarizing his comment in the end with saying that the whole series is inauthentic, the position of Fan5 towards the integration of the behind the scenes footage is clear. He starts to justify the classification of the series as inauthentic by pointing out that “This isn’t a “fly-on-the-wall” documentary”. Through this comment Fan5 is pointing out one of Corner’s (1996) elements of documentary, namely Observation. This element contains parts of the documentary, where the filmmaker does not intervene at all and just observes the situation. Nichols (2017) has a similar approach in his documentary theory as he developed the Observational Mode that classifies documentaries that unobtrusively film the subjects under consideration and do not intervene in the documented events. However, Fan5 is convinced that the documentary series pictures “contrived”, “very clearly guarded and manufactured” footage. He thus accuses the film production of influencing the film material which touches the theme of imposed judgements. The production imposes judgements of the audience by selling staged situations as authentic, according to Fan5. In the end of his comment, Fan5 shortly mentions the authenticity theme of cinematographic manipulations by criticising edited sound elements of the documentary series to support his opinion of inauthenticity. Another Fan6 supports this opinion as well by saying:

“They also had microphones on, I think so anyway. I did enjoy that side of the story but am left wondering how much of it was contrived.” (Autosport Forum, 2019)

In his comment, he picks up on the fact that the actors in the documentary series ‘Drive to Survive’ are aware that they are being recorded, since the participants have microphones on, and thus questions the authenticity of the behind the scenes footage as well. Referring to Tolson’s (2001) study from the literature review, the author sheds a light on Geri’s documentation where she stages her own documentary to create her public image. He mentions a statement of her saying “the trick is to ‘come across as a normal person’ then there must be just enough performance of ‘being ordinary’ to give the script an apparently authored credibility and to make the presentation seem ‘authentic’” (Tolson, 2001: 455). So, Geri basically reveals that an authentic picture could be willingly produced by the actors of the documentary. With the drivers and teams knowing about the documentary filming, it is indeed questionable how much of their acting is natural and Fan5 & Fan6 obviously note that by saying they are not sure “how much of it was contrived”. Other fans don't seem to be aware of the fact that the participants integrated in ‘Drive to Survive’ could act cautiously instead of naturally within behind the scenes footage. Another option could be that these fans might think that the participants knowing

about being recorded has no effect on authenticity. The reason for this assumption is Fan7 who happily comments:

“So interesting to lift the lid on rivalries like this as well as Perez [Driver] vs Ocon [Driver]. Really brought the Mid field to life. Love the comments between Horner [Team Principal, Red Bull] and the Renault team boss.” (Autosport Forum, 2019)

He fully enjoys the revealed rivalries between drivers as well as between team principals, does not question the reality of the scenes and therefore seems to classify the footage as ‘authentic’ according to the coding agenda (Table 1).

Overall, fans perception of authenticity with regard to the theme of behind the scenes footage fully relies on the suspicion and interpretation of the fans themselves. When fans assume the behind the scenes footage accurately represents reality and only contains of observative material, they express a perception of authenticity.

### **6.3 Participants of the series**

Season one of ‘Drive to Survive’ is outstanding to the following seasons, since the two top teams of the Formula 1 season 2018, Ferrari and Mercedes, did not grant permission to film and hence did not participate in it. Therefore, the focus of the first season of the sport documentary relies on the mid-field teams of Formula 1. Fans in the fan forum comment about the theme by discussing the lack of the top teams within 61 comments, which could have an impact on their perception of authenticity of the documentary series.

One Fan8 is obviously affected by the missing participation of Ferrari and Mercedes and comments:

“If this season [answers to a previous comment that refers to the planned second season of the series ‘Drive to Survive’] Ferrari and Mercedes does not participate, I doubt anyone will bother to follow this next round.” (Autosport Forum, 2019)

Fan8 assumes, that the lack of footage from Ferrari and Mercedes implies a missing audience if there will be a continuation of the documentary series. Thus, Fan8 acknowledges Nichols (2017) Participatory Mode of a documentary that includes documentaries that show interactions between the filmmaker and the shown subject. The mode manages to make the viewers part of the documentary. Since there is no participation of Ferrari and Mercedes, an intimate and interactive atmosphere between the viewers, meaning the fans, and the two top teams are missing. Because of not picturing a realistic image of the



Formula 1 teams, according to the coding agenda (Table 1) Fan8 rates the documentary series ‘Drive to Survive’ as ‘inauthentic’. However, not all fans seem to agree with this comment. By making a generalised statement and inferring from his opinion to the opinion of others, tensions are created among fans. Another, Fan9, answers:

“Well, the first season proved that they(Merc Fer) [Mercedes and Ferrari] aren't needed. NEWS-FLASH - 'HALF THE WORLD LIKES SOMETHING AND THE OTHER HALF DOESN'T' What a fvckin surprise !!” (Autosport Forum, 2019)

Answering in caps and using swear words (“fvcking”) mirrors the created, upcoming frictions. Fan9 strongly expresses his disagreement and does not connect the missing participation of the top teams with the success of the series. For him, quite the opposite is the case by saying that they are not needed and thus rates the series as ‘authentic’ in the sense of the coding agenda (Table 1). Nevertheless, Fan9 reflects that fans naturally do not have the same opinion. With regard to Hall’s (1973) reception theory, it explains that fans have an individual background and their perception is based on it. Fans preference different teams which could explain why they have different opinions about if the two top teams are needed in the documentary series to create an authentic portrayal about Formula 1 or not. Referring back to the comments, the charged answer made the first, Fan8, comment again:

“Yea, but my question is for how long? netflix knows they need to sustain this. And the only way is to get in the top teams. I mean, would i wanna turn on next season and see grosjean [Romain Grosjean, Driver Haas] crashing all over the place, Gunther [Günther Steiner, Team Principal Haas] cussing once in 4 words, and Magnusses [Kevin Magnussen, Driver Haas] 'I am prepared to die BS'? I rather watch a documentary on Ferrari vs Mercedes. Or the rise of Charles LEC [Charles Leclerc, Driver Ferrari].” (Autosport Forum, 2019)

It once again reflects his doubts of the success of another upcoming season when the two top teams will continue to not be a part of it. I interpret the meaning of his sentence “netflix knows they need to sustain this” by saying that a continuation of the current content is not enough. Netflix needs to support the footage by integrating Ferrari and Mercedes to keep the interest of the fans. Following this interpretation would imply that Fan8 interprets the documentary series ‘Drive to Survive’ as containing Renov’s (2012) tendency to promote or to persuade the audience of the series to follow the sport of Formula 1. Referring back to the literature review, the studies of Radošinská (2018) and Malitsky (2014) note that documentaries about sports are popular means of bringing a sport closer to the spectators. A sport documentary like ‘Drive to Survive’ “urges viewers to

understand sport through its mediation” (Malitsky, 2014: 213). However, the process of creating an authentic representation of Formula 1 without integrating the two top teams in its representation could be problematic. Fan10 who joins the heated discussion calms these concerns:

“I thought the lack of those teams was going to be a problem, but I actually kind of liked it. I feel like the regular coverage gives us a pretty good picture of those two teams (though the behind-the-scenes would be neat), so actually just focusing on the rest of the series actually kind of gives some more light to stories that not everyone would see.” (Autosport Forum, 2019)

Fan10 sees the lack of Ferrari’s and Mercedes’ attendance as a chance to focus on the mid-field teams. So Fan10 has no worries about Formula 1 not being properly represented without the participation of the top teams. This suggests that Fan10 attributes Corner’s (1996) element of Exposition to the documentary series. The integration of the element describes that viewers are aware of the subject matter of Formula 1 in the documentary series through multiple repetition of it. Nevertheless, he integrates the theme of behind the scenes footage and argues that the integration of the two top teams would still be enriching. Thus, he rates the documentary series already as ‘slightly authentic’ according to the coding agenda (Table 1), since nothing wrong is portrayed but the content is not reflected fully realistically. A participation of Ferrari and Mercedes would draw a full picture of Formula 1’s reality and thus add up authenticity, with even more behind the scenes footage.

Fans express their perception of authenticity about the theme of participants of the series by placing the participants in an overall picture of the topic presented. The main question is whether the absence of the participants harms the overall picture of Formula 1 and is no longer authentic without them. Through the answer, the fans individually express their perception of authenticity based on their personal opinion.

#### **6.4 Imposed judgements**

The theme of imposed judgement focuses on the greatest number of comments related to the documentary series’ authenticity, namely 76, written by people who were already Formula 1 fans before they watched the documentary series ‘Drive to Survive’. Since they have followed the season shown in the series in reality, they are likely to have a comparison to the content presented in the documentary series. They can use their

knowledge to uncover untrue representations and then decide whether the series can still be perceived as authentic. According to the followed concept of authenticity, Van Leeuwen (2001) notes that content can be evaluated as authentic, as long as it reflects the essentials in it (Van Leeuwen, 2001: 393).

Looking at the conducted data, Fan11 thematized the representation of the Austrian Gran Prix within the series by saying:

“The part about the Austrian GP was just unreal, first they made it look like Dan [Daniel Ricciardo, Driver] lost the race by coming out of the pits just behind Hamilton [Lewis Hamilton, Driver], than highlighting him having a DNF [Did Not Finish] because of mechanical problems, whilst not mentioning his team mate [Max Verstappen, Driver and teammate of Daniel Ricciardo] was always in front of him and won the race. The Austrian GP wasn’t about Ricciardo.” (Autosport Forum, 2019)

As Ellis (2021) notes in his study mentioned earlier in the literature review, the film text must not be considered alone but should always be embedded in the institutional and historical context (Ellis, 2021: 148), which is what Fan11 does within his comment. Based on his background knowledge, he exposes the untrue portrayal of events. In his opinion, the documentary series makes it look like the Austrian Gran Prix was about Daniel Ricciardo’s loss instead of Max Verstappen’s win. In contradiction to that, Fan12 finds an explanation and justifies the representation of the production by answering to the previous mentioned comment:

“I reckon this is down to one reason: Ricciardo gave them access, including in Australia, at home in Monaco, with his parents, with his manager while negotiations were underway. I’m guessing Verstappen (and his entourage) might not have been so accommodating to the series producers, particularly given the pressure Max was under at the time.” (Autosport Forum, 2019)

While Fan11 clearly disagrees with Fan12 saying “the Austrian GP was just unreal”, Fan12 supports his comment by integrating another theme of authenticity within the counterargument, namely the theme of behind the scenes footage, to justify the productions decisions. In his opinion, the documentary series did not show anything unreal, the production just decided to shift the focus on Ricciardo’s loss which could influence the judgement of fans watching the series without knowing the real course of events. According to the coding agenda (Table 1), Fan11 classifies the documentary series ‘Drive to Survive’ as ‘inauthentic’, while its answer from Fan12 perceives it as ‘slightly authentic’, given the circumstances that the production had limited access to driver Max Verstappen.

A third, Fan13, joined the discussion and agrees with the approach of the previous mentioned, Fan12, by stating:

“Aye, Max's comeback would've given them a great story and I doubt they didn't use it because of bias but rather because Jos [Max Verstappen's father] and co [I assume Max management team] said no. It'd also be interesting to know how much content was green lit post season.” (Autosport Forum, 2019)

Fan13 interprets the series as an authentic representation by using the material the production team had access to which mirrors the tendency to record, reveal, or preserve of Renov's (2012) documentary theory. The tendency describes the documentary's aim to create an image of reality for posterity. While the two latest comments of Fan12 & Fan13 see the tendency to record by classifying the scene as a snapshot that reflects reality, Fan11 strongly disagrees. However, this lastly mentioned comment from Fan13 questions the amount of approved content of the whole season which could indicate that Fan13 also doubts a completely authentic reflection of the events, which is why his perception is to be classified as 'slightly authentic' (Table 1).

A fourth and last answer in that discussion reflects the opinion of Fan14 who supports the starting comment from Fan11 by saying the audience is influenced by the production's decisions about how to present the scenes.

“If only the documentary was based around following the drama as it happens, rather than deciding for the viewer what they should see. The reason the first episode HAAS meltdown was so interesting is because it was totally unscripted and original. There are so many unfolding stories they could have covered, but either they chose not to (ignorance or stupidity...), or already had an episode structure pre-planned.” (Autosport Forum, 2019)

Fan14's opinion is that the content is scripted while there would have been enough good, dramatic stories around. By accusing the series of scripting, Fan14's comment refers to Nichols (2017) Poetic Mode that defines documentaries with a subjective interpretation of the subject. The filmmaker thus integrates artistic expressions into the documentary which creates a distorted picture of reality. Related to this comment, Fan14 defines the including of drama as an unnecessary artistic expression. With the fan mentioning drama within the documentary series, Fan14 highlights one of Corner's (1996) five central elements, namely the element of Dramatization. As previously mentioned within the theoretical framework, it describes the integration of elements of entertainment alongside objective observations. While the comment reflects the opinion of Fan14 that the staging of

drama is not needed since there is already enough drama in real life in Formula 1, Fan14 thereby simultaneously confirms that the documentary series 'Drive to Survive' used the element of Dramatization. Corner's (1996) element of Dramatization does not necessarily exclude the perception of authenticity. But as Fan14 points out his assumption of the series being pre-planned and scripted, he obviously perceives the documentary series 'Drive to Survive' as 'inauthentic' in sense of the coding agenda (Table 1).

The presented contradictions of the fan comments that mirror different opinions about the representation of the Austrian Gran Prix could be seen as a result of fandom. Fiske (2002) and Jenkins (2006) both explained, that fans are not only consumers of content like the series 'Drive to Survive', but also producers that are able to give, in this case, the scenes about the Austrian Gran Prix of the documentary series a new meaning. Where, on the one hand, the Gran Prix is given the meaning by fans of wanting to dismiss Verstappen's victory as unimportant, on the other hand, fans give the representation the meaning of making Ricciardo's reasons for later changing teams visible to the public. Depending on the meaning given by the fans, the series is perceived as authentic or inauthentic.

Finally, related to the theme of imposed judgements fans express their perception of authenticity by comparing their knowledge of reality not simply with the footage, but with their individual interpretation of the footage. Based on the conformity, fans perceive it as authentic or not.

## **7. Conclusion and Discussion**

This thesis examined how fans of Formula 1 perceived the authenticity of the documentary series 'Drive to Survive' by investigating comments from the Autosport.com fan forum. To draw a comprehensible conclusion, the analysis was distinguished in answering two sub questions, namely the question about what aspects fans highlight when discussing authenticity of the documentary series 'Drive to Survive', and the question about how fans articulate authenticity of the documentary series in the fan forum.

The first sub question can be answered clearly, since fans focus on four different relevant themes while speaking about the authenticity of the documentary series 'Drive to Survive', namely cinematographic manipulations, participants of the series, imposed judgement, and behind the scenes footage. However, while some fans just focus on one theme when commenting about the documentary series' authenticity, others include several

themes in their assessment. This also becomes clear when one compares the number of comments that address the four themes. The theme of behind the scenes footage has 36 mentions in comments, far fewer than the other three themes. Cinematographic manipulations and participants of the series have the same number of mentions with 61, while the theme of imposed judgements has the most with 76 mentions by fans. As stated in the coding rules in the coding agenda (Table 1), this does not affect the determination of the perception of authenticity of the documentary series. Nevertheless, it shows that not all fans comment to the same extent on the same themes, but focus individually on the themes they personally perceive in terms of authenticity. In detail, it shows that many fans seem to have noticed the theme of imposed judgements in the documentary series 'Drive to Survive' in connection with their perceived authenticity of the series. In contrast, the theme of behind the scenes footage does not seem to be too prominent in the fans' perception of the authenticity of the documentary series. In total, the uneven distribution of mentions proves a varying focus of the fans on the themes of authenticity, even if the same themes are generally addressed.

By answering the second sub question it noticeable that while fans do not use the same words to express different opinions about the perception of authenticity of the series, the answers distinguished in the four aforementioned themes of authenticity contain of patterns. A similar opinion was present while fans discussed their perceptions of authenticity within the theme of cinematographic manipulation. The majority of fans is not totally against visual and acoustic editing with regard to the documentary series 'Drive to Survive'. Nevertheless, the fans pick up the followed concept of authenticity that the documentary series still needs to reflect the essentials in its content (Van Leeuwen, 2001: 393). Concerning the themes of behind the scenes footage and imposed judgements it can be summed up that fans compare their knowledge about the shown events with the representation in the documentary series. Based on the differences, fans draw a conclusion about authenticity. The truer the representation or the more conformity with their individual interpretation, the more authentic the documentary series gets rated by fans. With regard to the theme of participants, fans articulate their perception of authenticity of the documentary series when the lack of participant does not influence the overall picture of their personal idea of Formula 1. While some fans even enjoyed the absence of teams because it gives Formula 1 a new focus on the mid-field, it does not draw a true picture of Formula 1 to a new fan since the top teams are missing. Nevertheless, it could still be perceived

as (slightly) authentic since it does not picture anything false, just incomplete. In the end, it depends on the individual judgement of each fan.

Finally drawing a conclusion on how fans perceive authenticity in the series 'Drive to Survive' it can be stated that four themes are common for fans to focus on when they discuss about it. Thus, the documentary series' authenticity is embodied through its editing, its participants, its behind the scenes footage and the impact of the productions' imposed judgement. However, fans do not always have the same opinion about the different themes of authenticity of the documentary series. Within the fan forum, similar comments about themes have been found while at the same time other fans would have tense discussions and contradictions.

Overall, the examination of the fan comments of the fan forum illustrate that fans base their perception of authenticity of the documentary series 'Drive to Survive' on their own opinion that relies on their individual background. The personal background is defined by personal experience and knowledge which results to different outcomes what fans perceive as authentic or not. This finding is supported by the reception theory from Hall (1973) who also suggests that people's interpretation of content is connected to their background. Another reason for the different perception of authenticity delivers the concept of fandom by Fiske (2002) and Jenkins (2006), since fans give the content of the documentary series an individual meaning on which they produce their own opinion about authenticity. So, to perceive authenticity similarly, fans would need the same individual background on which they base their interpretations which would lead to giving content the same meaning. Since this is highly unlikely to happen, fans perceiving authenticity differently seems obvious and logic.

With regard to media and communication studies, it remains a challenge for documentaries to find the balance between entertainment and authenticity. According to the followed concept of authenticity within this thesis, the representation of reality could contain of fictional elements for entertaining reasons without having an effect on the authenticity of the documentary series (Grierson, 1971; Renov, 2012; Corner, 1996) but the essence of the content must still be recognizable for the audience (Van Leuwen, 2001: 393). Nevertheless, the findings of the thesis suggest that it will always remain having some fans rating a documentary series or parts of it as pure entertainment and not authentic anymore, while others justify the editing as creative interpretations and still rate it as

authentic. The reason for that is the individual mind, that no one is able to control. As Stuart Hall (1973) already mentioned:

“there can be no law to ensure that the receiver will take the preferred or dominant meaning of [a documentary series] in precisely the way in which it has been encoded by the producer” (Hall, 1973: 9).

Nevertheless, with regard to the four differentiated themes mentioned within the fan comments related to the documentary series’ authenticity, tendencies give at least a direction as to when fans seem more likely to perceive something as authentic in the documentary series ‘Drive to Survive’.

Regarding the larger significance of the thesis, the statement that the film industry is powerful towards society, which was mentioned related to the thesis’ societal relevance, was invalidated. Instead, the thesis proves that the society, specifically the individual itself, has a certain amount of power as well. In the end, everyone is the master of their own mind and forms an informed opinion about the presentation in a documentary based on their own backgrounds. The different perceptions of authenticity of fans related to the documentary series ‘Drive to Survive’ prove that overall, despite the difficulty of distinguishing between reality and fiction, viewers still question authenticity independently and do not allow their perception to be influenced randomly. This gives hope that although documentaries could theoretically have a disturbingly strong influence on society, ultimately it is each individual who decides what is considered authentic and therefore believed. However, as the film industry and the technologies used in it are expected to develop and will therefore further complicate the perception of what is real and what is fictitiously produced, research into fans’ perception of authenticity will continue to be relevant in the future.

Looking ahead to future studies, it would be very interesting to compare whether a change in the perception of the four themes of authenticity can be observed in the second season. If so, the researcher should investigate whether this change is related to a change in the documentary series. This means an examination whether the editing of the footage is different, whether there are other participants in the documentary series, whether the production imposes opinions on the fans about the content, or how behind the scenes footage is integrated. In turn, it would be interesting to look at whether fans perceive and compare possible changes in the second season compared to the first season of the documentary series ‘Drive to Survive’, and if so, whether it is perceived as more authentic than the



first. The comments of the Autosport.com fan forum could also be used for this further study, which contributes to the compatibility of the two studies and allows findings to be compared.

Regardless of this specific research topic, namely the Netflix documentary series 'Drive to Survive', basic findings from the study, such as the coding agenda (Table 1) that defines when something can be judged authentic, and the four themes mentioned by fans as they express their perceptions of authenticity, could be applied in other studies examining perceptions of authenticity in documentaries to determine the added value of these findings and whether they can be applied to other studies.

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