Female Fans in Formula 1

A Qualitative Study of Spanish Female Fans’ Behaviours, Attitudes, and Motivations towards F1 and its Consumption through Twitter

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Abstract

Sports fandoms, historically, have been categorized as a male domain, even in academic studies. Therefore, as Formula 1 has been a sport with a remarkable increase in digital engagement and women are one of their main target audiences, I study Spanish F1 female fans’ behaviours, attitudes, and motivations towards F1 and Twitter as part of their fan experience. Through nethnographic methods, where semi-structured interviews and participant observations have been central, I try to gain knowledge about individual experiences as well as the functionality of the F1 Twitter community. It is illustrated that F1 female fans cannot be considered a homogeneous group by applying a postmodern feminist approach where identities are considered to be fluid, fractured, and in constant flux, distancing from previous feminist ideals that promoted binary and determinate gender concepts. Raney’s affective, cognitive and social/behavioural sets of motivations are employed in order to contemplate F1 female fans’ motivation for consuming F1 and choosing Twitter as the social network to follow the sport. Moreover, Jenkin’s participatory culture is taken into account to analyse the F1 Twitter community. Patterns regarding becoming a fan due to Alonso's success and family ties, common interests in information and shared F1 popular knowledge are encountered. However, diverse usage of Twitter and different levels of sense of belonging to TwF1 are also displayed. Hence, I conclude that more research is needed to gain a better understanding of them because despite displaying different facets, F1 female fans are ‘authentic’ fans who should be taken into consideration by sports, media and fan studies in addition to sports organizations and fellow fans.

Keywords: Formula 1, Twitter, Spain, female fans, participatory culture, fan community, postmodern feminism
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALB</td>
<td>Alexander Albon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALO</td>
<td>Fernando Alonso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOT</td>
<td>Valtteri Bottas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g.</td>
<td><em>Exempli gratia</em> ‘for example’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F1</td>
<td>Formula1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIA</td>
<td><em>Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FP</td>
<td>Free Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAS</td>
<td>Pierre Gasly</td>
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<tr>
<td>GP</td>
<td>Grand Prix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAM</td>
<td>Lewis Hamilton</td>
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<td>LAT</td>
<td>Nicholas Latifi</td>
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<td>LEC</td>
<td>Charles Leclerc</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAG</td>
<td>Kevin Magnussen</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSC</td>
<td>Mick Schumacher</td>
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<td>NOR</td>
<td>Lando Norris</td>
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<td>OCO</td>
<td>Esteban Ocon</td>
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<tr>
<td>PER</td>
<td>Sergio Pérez</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAI</td>
<td>Kimi Räikkönen</td>
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<td>RIC</td>
<td>Daniel Ricciardo</td>
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<td>RQ</td>
<td>Research Question</td>
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<td>RUS</td>
<td>George Russell</td>
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<td>SAI</td>
<td>Carlos Sainz</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAOE</td>
<td>Small Acts of Engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>STR</td>
<td>Lance Stroll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSU</td>
<td>Yuki Tsunoda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TwF1</td>
<td>Formula 1 Twitter community</td>
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<tr>
<td>UGT</td>
<td>Use and Gratifications Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VER</td>
<td>Max Verstappen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Sebastian Vettel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YoY</td>
<td>Year-on-year</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZHO</td>
<td>Guanyu Zhou</td>
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1. INTRODUCTION
1.1. Statement of the problem

The majority of sports are suffering from a decline in viewership. Youth does not follow traditional TV as much as their parents since they consume social media more (Molnar, 2021; Silikovich, 2021; Trula, 2020; Connolly, 2017; Shoalts, 2015). As native users of the Internet, young people are used to multitasking and a large number of them do not watch a game or race from start to finish as they can watch highlights of that game afterwards on online platforms (Shoalts, 2015). To rebrand themselves, social media has been pointed out to be the tool sports have to embrace in order to reach that new audience (Witkemper, et al., 2012; Mohammadkazemi, 2015; Huang & Hsu, 2017; Şahin et al. 2020; Hussain et al., 2022). In the case of Formula 1 Racing, it seems that the new owners of the sport have understood the circumstances and turned around the situation in their favour.

In the first half of the 2010s, the sport owners did not have any type of interest in going digital nor seek a newer audience. Bernie Ecclestone – the back then CEO of the Formula One Group, which oversaw Formula One Racing and owned the sport's commercial rights – argued in 2014 that it was pointless for F1 to pursue younger fans since they did not fit the desired demographic of the sport's advertisers claiming that "I'm not interested in Twitter, Facebook, or any of this other crap. I'd rather talk to the 70-year-old man with a lot of money. So it's pointless to try to contact these youngsters since they won't buy any of the things on offer, and if marketers want to target this demographic, they should consider advertising with Disney" (Cooper, 2021).

Nevertheless, since the change of ownership of Formula One (F1) in 2017 to Liberty Media, the engagement of a younger and female audience has been a key aim of the sport’s leaders (Motorsport Network et al., 2021). In order to achieve that objective, F1’s digital management has experienced a complete renovation which seems to result in F1's high momentum in terms of interest and engagement (F1, 2022). Before Liberty Media, only large television companies had access to drivers for interviews, but now Formula 1 drivers and teams are allowed to go live, create their own content and interact with fans online. Many drivers avidly streamed on sites like Twitch and chatted with their fandom during COVID-19's forced break. There has seen a significant increase in their target audiences as a result of this (Kharitonova, 2021). For instance, in 2020, F1 achieved the biggest year-on-year (YoY) Engagement Growth of the major sports and leagues with a 99% increase in terms of engagement across digital platforms (F1, 2021). Alongside the
online growth, the 2020 and 2021 seasons have also restrained the decrease of TV rates
with a cumulative audience of 1.5bn and 1.55bn respectively around the world (F1, 2021;
F1, 2022).

Within the audience growth, it is noted that women have also gained interest in
the sport, meeting one of the new owner's aims. According to the Global Survey
conducted by Motorsport Network et al. (2021), female participation has doubled in only
4 years, as 18.3% of the overall 2021’s sample were women in contrast to 2017’s 10%. Notwithstanding, the gap between male and female fans still is substantial. Sports are
acknowledged to be a male domain. Birrell (2000) also discusses the fact that sport is a
gendered activity, in that it not only embraces boys and men with greater enthusiasm than
girls and women, but it also serves as a platform for celebrating 'masculine' qualities and
attitudes (Birrell, 2000). Therefore, gender bias and stereotypical female role expectations
prevail in sports (Newland & Hayduk, 2020). That is why Allison and Knoester (2021a,
b) claim that women are ignored, marginalized and stigmatized as sports fans, turning
sports into an unwelcoming space for women. As for motorsports, they tend to be
displayed as male sports (Scraton & Flintoff, 2013; Plaza et al., 2016), which can lead to
the stigmatization and isolation of F1 female fans. Hence, in order to attract women into
the sport, comprehend how they perceive themselves and how they connect with other
people via the prism of sport fandom, "it is critical to pay attention to women’s routine
experiences of being a sport supporter" (Toffoletti, 2019, p.33).

1.2. Aim of the study

Although professional sports are important to many female fans, the vast body of
research publications had only addressed male fans. This thesis attempts to tackle the
dearth of studies on female sports fans against the scene of a male-dominated aspect of
society, since, as Pope (2019) asserts, prior studies on sports fans have concentrated
almost purely on men ignoring the expectations and experiences of female fans or tagging
them as ‘inauthentic’ sport fans.

In this thesis, I study a sector that is thought to be mostly a male domain to
investigate the paths that women take to become fans and how they come to establish and
negotiate their place in this environment. Understanding female sports fandom is crucial
for arriving at this demographic group and maintaining it in a space that historically has
been homogeneous and not inclusive. Thus, as F1 has been a sport with a remarkable
increase in digital engagement and women are one of their main target audiences, I would like to analyse Spanish F1 female fans’ behaviours, attitudes, and motivations towards F1 and its consumption through Twitter.

In order to understand F1 female fans' behaviours and their motivations, I am taking as a starting point the Spanish fans. I will focus only on one country in order to be able to gather more narrowed and concise data in a short period of time. Moreover, Spanish interest is also growing due to Spanish driver Fernando Alonso's return to F1 and Carlos Sainz’s move to Ferrari (Yeomans, 2021). According to Kantar's Global SportScope study carried out in 2021, F1 is the 3rd most followed sport in the country where 37.8% of Spaniards say they follow Formula 1 (Bernabé, 2021). Therefore, Spain is a good market to analyse F1 fan participation because of its thriving.

Additionally, women frequently said that their sport-consuming habits are reliant on technology and that it is fundamental to their sport fandom (Newland & Hayduk, 2020). As it has been mentioned, social media is implied to be a useful tool to boost a sport and F1 has undergone a significant digital change in order to reach new audiences. Therefore, female F1 fans in the digital sphere will be analysed. For this project, Twitter has been chosen as the platform to study since it is reported to be the social media F1 viewers use more (Motorsport Network et al., 2021). Hence I am taking as a starting point the Spanish Twitter Formula 1 community or – TwF1 as it is known by the community.

Research Questions:

RQ1: What are the reasons and motivations behind female fans’ consumption of F1?
RQ2: What role do Twitter and F1 Twitter community have for a female F1 fan?

To conduct this research, firstly I introduce Formula 1 to the reader as well as a literary review in regards to the sport and fans. Afterwards, I present Fandom Theory and Use and Gratifications Theory, which are used as guides to carry out my analysis. Then, I explain how I implement the netnography research method into my analysis and which ethical issues this thesis foresees. Finally, I present the analysis that answers the research questions and my conclusion about the attained results.
2. FORMULA 1 BACKGROUND

2.1. Formula 1 overview

The Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) regards F1 as the premier form of single-seat open-wheel racing in the world (Serapiglia, 2018). The first race to use the term ‘Grand Prix’ (GP) was a 1901 race at the Circuit du Sud-Ouest through the streets of Pau. However, it was not until 1950 that the first official World Championship for Drivers took place, marking the start of modern F1 history. The Indianapolis 500 and six other tournaments in Europe initially constituted the championship. All of the European races arose from national championship competitions that had started to appear before World War II. In the maiden race in Silverstone Circuit, Great Britain, 24 drivers raced in 22 different cars from 5 different constructors (Llurba, 2017). Since then, the number of races, participating teams and drivers have annually changed.

Nowadays, a Grand Prix is 3 days long: Free Practice 1 (FP1) and 2 (FP2) on Fridays; Free Practice 3 (FP3) and Qualifying on Saturdays; and Race on Sundays. The World Constructors' Championship and the World Drivers' Championship are the two major titles that are fought for each season. A total number of 20 drivers race against each other for the World Drivers' Championship. The 20 drivers are divided into 10 teams which compete to win the World Constructors' Championship with two cars/drivers each. Although the races of the series still have their origins in Europe, they can now be found in Asia, South America, North America, the Middle East, and Oceania (Serapiglia, 2018).

In the 2022 season – the year in which this thesis is being carried out – 22 GPs are being disputed for the 2022 World Championship, with the following constructors and drivers competing in it (Table 1) (F1, n.d.).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racing Driver</th>
<th>Constructor Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lewis Hamilton</td>
<td>Mercedes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Russell</td>
<td>Mercedes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max Verstappen</td>
<td>Red Bull Racing-RBPT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergio Pérez</td>
<td>Red Bull Racing-RBPT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Leclerc</td>
<td>Ferrari</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carlos Sainz</td>
<td>Ferrari</td>
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*Nationality indicates the driver's nationality.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Constructor Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Ricciardo</td>
<td>RIC</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>McLaren-Mercedes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lando Norris</td>
<td>NOR</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>McLaren-Mercedes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernando Alonso</td>
<td>ALO</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Alpine-Renault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esteban Ocon</td>
<td>OCO</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Alpine-Renault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierre Gasly</td>
<td>GAS</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>AlphaTauri-RBPT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuki Tsunoda</td>
<td>TSU</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>AlphaTauri-RBPT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sebastian Vettel</td>
<td>VET</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>Aston Martin Aramco-Mercedes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lance Stroll</td>
<td>STR</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>Aston Martin Aramco-Mercedes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas Latifi</td>
<td>LAT</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>Williams-Mercedes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Albon</td>
<td>ALB</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>Williams-Mercedes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valtteri Bottas</td>
<td>BOT</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>Alfa Romeo-Ferrari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guanyu Zhou</td>
<td>ZHO</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Alfa Romeo-Ferrari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mick Schumacher</td>
<td>MSC</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>Haas-Ferrari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Magnussen</td>
<td>MAG</td>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>Haas-Ferrari</td>
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Note. This table gathers the name of the 20 official racing drivers of the 2022 World Championship, the abbreviation of their name used by F1, their nationality and the constructor team they belong to.

a In F1, the nationality of each driver has relevance as they race under their flag despite belonging to a team based on a different country.

2.2. Global F1 Fan Survey 2021

In October 2021, F1 released a Global Fan Survey conducted alongside with Motorsport Network and the company in charge of audience measurement, data and analysis, Nielsen. (Motorsport Network et al., 2021). The survey includes the opinions of a record 167,000 fans. The survey suggests that Formula 1 interest and engagement from a more enthusiastic, diverse and evolving fan base has increased since the last survey in 2017. Overall, the survey recorded the youngest and most diverse sample size to date with an average age of 32 years (4 years less than in 2017), female participation in the survey almost doubled to 18.3%, compared to 10% in 2017 and Student-age responses increased to 26%, up from 18% in 2017. As it has been explained how in the past, F1 has struggled to attract younger fans, and the female fan base in particular. However, this survey shows how the digital approach to F1 new direction and the funnel effect of projects like Netflix's Drive to Survive are attracting a new generation of passionate F1 fans. Thanks to the internet and social media, anyone anywhere can become a fan.

Among fans surveyed, F1's number one brand attribute is 'exciting', with other top brand attributes including 'technical', 'expensive', 'competitive' and 'entertaining'. 58% of
fans say that sport has the right balance between sport and entertainment (an increase of 39% from the 2017 survey results). This is especially felt by new entrants to the sport: 81% of those who started following F1 in the last 12 months. Twitter is also said the most used social network platform during race weekends even if Instagram is the fastest growing.

91% of F1 fans express a favourite team, and 94% a favourite driver. Max Verstappen, Lando Norris, Lewis Hamilton and Daniel Ricciardo are fan favourite drivers. McLaren, Red Bull, Ferrari and Mercedes stand out as the best F1 teams. In Spain, Ferrari ranked as the most popular team – associated with driver support (the Spaniard Carlos Sainz).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Previous research on F1 fans

Regarding F1 fans, few studies can be found. The most common instrument used to understand F1 engagement is audience statistics. TV audiences as well as social media followers and interactions are scrutinised by mass media. As for scholars, it has been studied the motivation and engagement behaviour of fans attending F1 events like race weekends by Kim et al. (2013) and Jones et al. (2019) and marketing strategies for products by Jensen et al. (2014). Sturm (2014) covers the televised coverage of the glamour and high-tech of F1 well as sponsors' commercialization. It has been also said that TV demand is related to race outcome uncertainty by Schreyer and Torgler (2016). Donahay and Rosenberger (2007) discuss the importance of fans for F1 sponsors due to their consumption behaviour.

As for F1 in Spain, Gallego and Maestro (2014) address the decadence of F1 in regard to TV audiences back in 2014. It is suggested that the transition to broadcast races on a pay channel, the lack of interest of big brands to advertise themselves in the sport, Fernando Alonso's bad results and an outdated online presence are the reasons for the decline of the sport in Spain. García-Escobar (2021) also relates the Spanish audience of F1 with Fernando Alonso's success. Similarly, García-Alonso (2016) and Rosell-Montagud (2016) conducted analyses of F1 broadcast in Spain where Alonso’s effect is also discussed. Alonso repercussion is widely discussed as F1 became popular in the country in the early 2000s when he entered the sport, reaching its peak in 2005 and 2006 when he won the World Drivers' Championship. This topic has not been examined thoroughly by academics. Hence, I have decided to consider these bachelor theses about
F1 in Spain as I found those sources fundamental in order to understand better the recent trajectory of the sport in the country.

### 3.2. Fans

#### 3.2.1. Definition

The idea that fans are among the most active, inventive, critically engaged, and socially connected consumers of popular culture and that they are at the vanguard of a new relationship with mass media was developed by Henry Jenkins' pioneering work in the early 1990s (Jenkins, 1992). Having John Fiske as a reference, Jenkins (1992) perceives fans as an active audience. Fans actively establish their control over the mass-produced texts that serve as the foundation for their social interactions as well as the source of their own cultural creations. Therefore, fans become active participants in the creation and distribution of content, moving beyond their previous role as a passive audience that only consume content.

In his first book dedicated to fan studies – *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* – Jenkins (1992) explains that the term ‘fan’ is the abbreviation of the word ‘fanatic’ which has its origins in the Latin word *fanaticus* meaning ‘devoted’. However, the connotation of the word changed through centuries towards “excessive and mistaken enthusiasm” (p.12), evoking madness. Journalists began to use the abbreviation ‘fan’ in the late 19th century to address professional sports teams’ supporters. Notwithstanding, Jenkins (1992) reports the negative connotation the word fan has had since fans have been labelled as crazy people who are fixated with facts, idols, and collectables; in other words, "as people who have little or no 'life'” (p.11). News reports regularly portray fans as psychopaths whose unfulfilled aspirations of having close connections with celebrities or unfulfilled wishes to become famous themselves, take violent and antisocial forms, building on the word's ancient associations with madness and demonic possession. However, according to Jenkins, sports fans experience a different and better status than media fans. This is due to the fact that the majority of sports fans are men that support ‘real’ events whereas media fans are believed to be mostly female that show major enthusiasm for different forms of fiction. Therefore, the power to dismiss taste does not rest entirely on class issues but also embodies gender issues.
3.2.2. Sport Fans

As this thesis contemplates F1 fans, and Jenkins himself separates sports fandom from the rest of media fans (literature, audio-visuals, music…), I will focus especially on sports fans in order to expound on this concept to understand better the examined target. Toffoletti (2019) reports that the traits, behaviours, and qualities of sport fandom are a constant subject of extensive study and controversy because there is no well-defined or widely acknowledged definition of it.

For Gantz and Lewis (2016), the activity of watching games is just a small part when it comes to sports fandom. The availability of the games and events on television draws fans to it. But fans also want to gather, learn, discuss, and produce knowledge, as well as also predict what will happen. They also want to show their joy, outrage, and despair. Therefore, they argue that sports fans are knowledgeable, check the standings, protect and support players and teams, dedicate a lot of time to following sports, and invest money by attending games, buying a player or team merchandising, and taking part in fantasy leagues.

In Watkins' (2016) report, it is also suggested the fact that "identified fans are more likely to be more knowledgeable about the team and their history, participate in discussions about the team with other fans, and purchase licensed team merchandise” (p. 202). Moreover, Watkins' also covered the social identity theory. According to the social identity theory, one socially identifies with a community when they have a sense of belonging, becoming part of the in-group making the rest of communities out-groups. Furthermore, when people socially associate themselves with a group, there is a tendency to adopt the attitudes and behaviours of the group. People who are strongly identified with a group have the disposition to embrace the thoughts and values of the group and are driven to uphold these habits in order to maintain group membership. Many people find that their love of sports extends beyond the actual game itself, where it becomes an essential part of who they are. Through their interactions with the sport and how it relates to their sense of social identity, fans add value to the sport's image. Additionally, through the use of common sport related symbols, rituals, and traditions, people develop close relationships with other sports fans making the sense of belonging stronger. In this respect, Toffoletti (2019) remarks that engaging in sport-related activities, such as watching games, reading articles about sports, participating in fantasy leagues, or purchasing team gear, is more than just a leisure activity. Instead, these activities, which are generally undertaken by individuals who identify as sports fans, are
a key component of how they view themselves in society and how they want to be perceived by others. Consumptive sport fandom becomes a sign of identification with and detachment from other supporters.

Scholars have also analysed the sport fans’ motivation for consuming sport. Eight of the most prevalent sports fan motives for male and female fans were discovered by Wann et al. (2001) in their study on sports fans. These included ‘group affiliation’ – driven by the chance to interact with others – , ‘family’ – driven by the chance to interact with family members – , ‘self-esteem’ – driven by the chance to feel better about oneself – , ‘aesthetic’ – driven by the artistic beauty of sport – , ‘eustress’ – driven by the thrill of joy and stimulation experienced during sports events – , ‘entertainment’ – driven by the perception that fandom is fun – , ‘economic’ – driven by the possible profits of sports betting – , and ‘escape’ – driven by the fact that fandom offers a distraction from other elements of people's lives.

Other researchers, such as Raney (2006), have organized and simplified the primary motivations for following mediated sports into three sets: affective, cognitive, and behavioural/social set of motivations. Media users claim that the emotional effects of watching mediated sports motivate them to do so. Those emotions tend to be linked to the victory of a favourite team or athlete. We can locate entertainment, eustress, self-esteem, and escape inside this affective set. Sports is more than just an emotional pastime. Many sports fans claim that watching the game also stimulates their minds. Learning and aesthetic motives can be found within this cognitive group. Finally, it is claimed that sports allow for more social interactions between consumers, whether they are watching at home with family and friends or in a sports bar with strangers because sports give people a chance to connect on common ground, shaping their behaviour as well. Therefore, many fans experience companionship, emotional release, group affiliation, family and economic motivations.

Besides the motivations for consuming sport, there are also researchers that have tried to label fans. Some academics have tried to categorise fans when studying them. For example, Giulianotti (2002) presents four distinct categories of fans: supporters, fans, followers, and flâneurs. Furthermore, two binary oppositions serve as the foundation for these four fan categories: hot–cool and traditional–consumer. Fans that strongly identify with their team, show solidarity with their community, and have a strong sense of loyalty to their club are what he refers to as participating in 'hot' sports support. In contrast to ‘cool’ fans, whose levels of attachment are deemed weaker due to the influence of
globalization like the deterritorialization of cultures, consumer capital's flows, technologically advanced systems of communication, and the fragmentation of identities, 'hot' fans are associated with a more traditional supporter type. Hence, Giulianotti views the 'cool' fan as more of a ‘follower’ or ‘flaneur’, who engages with sports through consumer and media interaction in market-centered ways.

From this type of categorizations, a gap that separates the ‘authentic’ and ‘real’ fans from the ‘fake and ‘inauthentic’ ones appears. For Giulianotti the ‘cool’ follower is distant from a traditional fan as they are regarded as less attach and more materialistic. Similarly, other scholars like King (2002) and Sandvoss (2003) also perceive consumer culture as detracting from the ‘true’ or ‘genuine’ fan experience. Gosling (2007) also reports how attendance at live sporting events is viewed favourably as a sign of a devoted or true sport supporter while watching sports on television is discounted as a form of passivity in following sports.

Braumüller (2020) focus his research on team identification as sport consumption is linked with identification theory and involvement theory. In his paper, different types of fans are reviewed in order to help organizations to adapt their marketing strategies and social media presence in regard to the type of fans that follow them. One categorization that is considered is that of spectators versus fans. Spectators, on one hand, enjoy the sport regardless of the result. Meanwhile, fans are said to be more devoted to a team and would prefer to see a win than a great performance. Therefore, the latest are more appealing to a team’s marketing proposes. According to this classification, the third level is the most devoted, dedicated and ‘loyal’ fans who spend more money on the team. The second level is formed by focused fans who exhibit a moderate attachment to their team. The first level fans are those who seek socialization and a good atmosphere regardless of the results.

Based on this, it can be concluded that there is no fixed way to understand or define a sports fan. In addition, as previously mentioned, most of the studies carried out on sports fans focus on the male fan, so the conclusions drawn from these studies and categorizations do not represent the total reality of sports fandoms. For this reason, in the next point, I will focus on the female fan who has often been ignored or labelled as an ‘inauthentic’ fan by previous scholars as this thesis aims to understand F1 female fans as legitimate fans too.
3.2.3. Female sport fans

Traditional forms of sports fandom reinforce the gendered hierarchy between female (consumer and inauthentic) and male (traditional and authentic) fans, which is a topic that resonates across the literature on sports fandom (Toffoletti, 2019). Pope (2019) identifies a number of assumptions made in academic studies, including the belief that women are less committed to sports than men, that women are less likely to be knowledgeable about sports, and that women pursue sports for inauthentic motives, such as sexual interests. These results challenge gender polarization in research, which often emphasises female fans' inauthenticity or as new consumers who are inferior to male fans who are the traditional ones.

The activities of white, male, heterosexual individuals have been established as the standard figure in many sports settings and situations, depicting the typical sport fan. Toffoletti (2019) showcases some characteristics shaped by gender frameworks that favour masculine sports support and representations. Such features are said to include expressing team loyalty and commitment through active support, such as going to games in person in contrast with passive support which consists of watching games on television or only occasionally, displaying a strong interest and authority over sports, displaying a deep understanding of sports, and prioritizing live sports over family time or other social activities. Similarly, Pope (2019) states that some of the believed characteristics an ‘authentic’ fan should fulfil are to be a longtime fan who is required to routinely attend games and who may also belong to the supported club or own stock in the team. What some previous studies did not take into account was that “individual expressions of fandom might alter over the life course in response to changes in social circumstances and how these changes are impacted by the organisation of society according to gender” (Toffoletti, 2019, p.17). For instance, women tend to adopt bigger parental responsibilities which hampered the opportunities for match attendance (Toffoletti, 2019). As a consequence, Gosling (2007) reports that women are more prone to consume sport remotely through mediated sources, which makes them more likely to be labelled as inauthentic sports fans.

When women are included in these research that take male standards to analyse fandoms, they are usually linked to social relationships. For example, Crabbe et al. (2006), who also studies different styles of football fans, include women in their research but only to argue about how football might cause relationship difficulties in regard to gender issues. Indeed, women are presented as the companion of male sport fans as it is
reported that the chance to spend time with family and friends is what attracts female sports fans (Dietz-Uhler et al. 2000; Wann et al., 2001; Clark et al., 2009). Therefore, women are depicted as collateral spectators of sports.

Toffoletti (2019) observes that depictions of women in the context of sports fandom tend to reinforce sexist beliefs and present them in degrading and unfavourable ways, mocking them for not knowing the rules of the game or sexualizing them. The literature's gender ideologies may imply that women's contributions to sport have less relevance. Women fans may be discouraged from expressing alternative viewpoints since they will likely perceive their contributions as being of lesser value. These beliefs have been encountered among the people too. For instance, Crawford and Gosling’s (2004) study shows how male fans view female fans as little more than groupies, calling them ‘puck bunnies’ which insinuates that female fans are inauthentic and more interested in the players' sexual attractiveness than the sport itself. Moreover, many questioned women's motivations, whereas men's motives are rarely queried even if they have a basic understanding and a passing interest in the sport. This is because males automatically fit the criteria for male fandom just by default by being men. (Toffoletti, 2019).

Still, there have been scholars that have tried to overcome the hegemony of sport fan literature and have focused on women in a direct way. For example, Sveinson and Hoeber’s (2015) study aims to create a hierarchy of characteristics that make women sports fans. Their main traits of female fandom include passion for the sport, wearing team colours demonstrating loyalty towards the team and setting oneself apart from non-fans or fans of other teams, and positive fanship by cheering and having fun while supporting the team. According to them, to a basic degree, one has to possess these essential features in order to be a fan. Attendance at games and knowledge of sports are secondary factors. Antunovic and Hardin’s (2012) findings suggest that female fans possess some different notions about sports in regard to men. While men’s discussions are dominated by terms of power and performance, women portray sports in an empowering and inclusive manner as a platform for women's physical and emotional growth as well as a means of developing relationships.

Other scholars have addressed many factors that lead women to become sport fans. Pope (2019) and Liston (2006) argue that the early attempts to draw women into sports are heavily influenced by male role models, predominantly fathers. Toffoletti (2019) states that many women are known as ‘in-the-blood’ supporters due to the ties
with the team that the family supports. Still, Pope (2019) also suggests that new female fans have been also attracted to sports due to a change of media coverage of sport and its well-known athletes towards a form of modern ‘soap opera’ – commonly link to female fans. As reported by Pope (2019), “television has ‘opened up’ sport for women in recent years, making it more accessible to new spectators through the media’s glitzy presentational styles and focus on ‘personalities’” (p.136). Another common driver for female fans is known to be the sexual interest in male players. Pope (2019) and Toffoletti (2019) note the fact that further research could be conducted on how heterosexually appealing male athletes may influence women's interest in sports. However, it is mentioned that contrary to common misconceptions that heterosexual female fans of men's sports may follow them because sexual interest in the athletes, this is by no means the main reason for all women to consume sport, and such statements help to weaken women's credibility as supporters.

Hence, it is spotted how women display different features of being a fan. However, it is noticeable how more research has to be done in order to understand female fans better as new interests women possess are starting to be taken into account. With this thesis, I will try to analyse and comprehend the characteristics women display going beyond the traditionally considered factors

3.2.4. Fans in the digital sphere

New technologies have also impact the fan experience making the sports media environment heavily dependent on new media technologies. Fans use new media to watch sports, talk about sporting events, build fan communities, and collect details on their preferred athletes and teams. Fans have never known so much about athletes before, whether it occurs through Twitter feeds, online forums, or blogs. Hence, the distinctions between producer, consumer, fan, and athlete have never been more intertwined (Billings & Hardin, 2016).

Sport audiences have never just been comprised around the live event. In fact, they relied heavily on print media to inform the public about athletes, teams, and other fans as well as to preview, cover, and debate sporting events in ways that did not overlap with the games occurring in real-time. Contrarily, broadcasting was able to sharpen the focus on sporting events as they unfolded, but it did so in ways that would permit even greater media coverage, via highlight shows, recaps, panels, chat shows, and many other activities. Whereas the place and space are still significant aspects of the experience of
sport, one of the attributes of this networked media sport environment is that there are now many more opportunities to ‘attend’ games and to participate in its discourses and organizational modes. As a result, what is typically thought of as the audience gains new qualities and opportunities (Hutchins & Rowe, 2013).

As per Gantz and Lewis (2016) “for those who love to follow sports, this is a great time to be a sports fan” (p.19). Sports are available anytime non-stop on an increasing number of platforms thanks to technological advancements, profitable transmission rights agreements, and receptive fans. Sports fans indeed follow games on various platforms, as their use is more motivated by their love of sports than by a commitment to a particular network or source. The use of platforms is complementary in a variety of ways. First, fans today follow sports on numerous platforms at once, spending more time than they did in the past. For instance, non-competitive differences exist in sports content across platforms since many people watch televised games but turn to internet sources seeking statistics that TV commentators are unable to provide. Second, fans may follow sports even when they are away from home thanks to mobile technological platforms. Finally, platforms for mobile and online use keep supplying sports content to fans when matches are not scheduled.

In contrast to the fact that female sports fans have little control over how they are portrayed in conventional media formats, it is asserted that new media technology empowers users to make their own content and post it to a global reach, enabling female sports fans to get around media gatekeepers and depict themselves (Toffoletti, 2019). Toffoletti (2019) argues that by providing alternative forms of fan participation, the consumption of sports through digital media allows women fans to work through structural and cultural barriers based on gender. Women can support their team without physically being at the stadium by obtaining live game notifications on their mobiles or by watching match-day transmissions from distant zones through various technologies. Still, Sainz-de-Baranda et al. (2020) claim that digital platforms like Twitter do not differ much from sport traditional media as it “continues to be a highly masculine space that does not reflect the evolution that has indeed occurred in the practice of sport” (p. 10). Because female athletes are underrepresented in the media, there are few female role models in digital media, which is the younger generation’s primary source of information.
3.2.5. Sport Twitter consumption

Gdovka and Chen (2021) state how “sport fans also turn to the four main social media platforms, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat, to receive marketing information, highlights, updates, and statistics while consuming sport contents” (p.45). The popularity of Twitter, for example, is based on its efficiency in facilitating the different types of dissemination of resources, dialogue and coordination that are of interest to communities (Jenkins et al., 2013). Therefore, Twitter is considered to be an optimum tool for archiving this kind of repercussions as the platform provides a space where spectators and organizations meet helping organizations to attract spectators, create a relationship, and keep customers (Witkemper, et al., 2012). Toffoletti (2019) also showcases how it has been proposed that Twitter can improve the experience of sports fans by enabling them to communicate with players and teams directly as well as it has given them a platform to create their identities in respect to other participants. These results imply that social media can help women to feel part of a community.

In order to understand better the Twitter sports fans’ consumer behaviours, Witkemper et al. (2012) study their motivations and constraints for sport online consumption. They note 4 motivations: Information, Pass-Time, Fanship and Entertainment. According to their analysis, consumers' motives for using Twitter are based on their desires for information and entertainment, implying that social media allows sport businesses to get early opportunities to communicate with their customers. Similarly, Yoon et al. (2014) analyse the different motivations females and males have on sport Twitter consumption. The results show that women value more entertainment and pass-time factors in regard to motivations than men.

Williams et al. (2014) examine the value of tweets for fans. It is showcased that different levels of activity happen between fans and those known as ‘lurkers’ – users who visit an online community but rarely participate in it creating content – have to be considered too by sport organizations as they are of significant value since they are a considerable group. For instance, in Williams et al. (2014) study, lurkers were 64% of Twitter users.

Twitter will be examined for my project as a useful method for engaging with mediated sports. Following Williams et al.’s (2014) argument about the significant value lurkers bear, I contend that many studies have excluded some users who are less noticeable due to their activity on Twitter. Therefore, I will contemplate them as part of a fandom community as I consider their presence valuable too.
4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As a theoretical framework for the study, I will adopt a postmodern feminist perspective implementing Butler’s notion of gender. Moreover, in order to understand F1 female fans, I will address Jenkins’s fan theory and participation culture insights. Uses and Gratifications theory and Raney affective, cognitive, and behavioural/social set of motivations will be presented too to examine the F1 female fandom on Twitter.

4.1. Fan theory and Participatory culture

According to Jenkins (1992), fans are active audiences of a media text that do not only consume since they are active “producers and manipulators of meanings” too (p.23). Fan culture involves at least five different characteristics: “its relationship to a particular mode of reception; its role in encouraging viewer activism; its function as an interpretive community; its particular traditions of cultural production; its status as an alternative social community” (p.2).

Fandom, or fan culture, serves as a form of social interaction where communities that serve as a getaway from the mainstream society by providing an alternative reality with principles that are potentially more humanitarian and democratic are created. Jenkins (1992) presents values embedded in these communities like collectivism, loyalty and a sense of belonging. Those communities serve as a common place in which fans’ own creative and critical contributions are acknowledged appropriately.

It is displayed the fact that there are different types of fans and not all of them behave in the same manner. However, despite focusing on media fans, Jenkins (1992) notes that sports fans are mainly men who have experienced a better status than other types of predominantly female fans. In fact, Busse (2018) argues that male fan objects like sports are widely accepted, whereas women's interests are frequently criticized. Moreover, when women engage in the same activity as men, their actions are interpreted differently.

In fandoms, elements of participatory culture can be found. Jenkins in Participatory Culture in a Networked Era: A Conversation on Youth, Learning, Commerce, and Politics (2016) states that participatory culture consists of a culture:

1. With relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement
2. With strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations with others
3. With some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices
4. Where members believe that their contributions matter
5. Where members feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created).

(Jenkins et al., 2016, p.7)

Moreover, new media technologies are allowing standard consumers to store, comment, adapt, and reuse media information in new forms, resulting in the growth of participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2006). It is also worth mentioning the Small Acts of Engagement (SAOE) as part of participatory culture. According to Picone et al. (2019), Small Acts of Engagement are productive practices that involve little investment and are purposefully more casual than the practices of audiences related to produsage and convergence culture. Examples of SAOE include liking, sharing, and commenting.

In Spreadable Media, Jenkins et al. (2013) suggest that content goes from being distributed to being circulated, which implies a movement towards a more participatory model of culture that considers the public not only as consumers of preconstructed messages but as people who are shaping, sharing, reframing and remixing media content in a way that was perhaps previously unimaginable. And they do so not as isolated individuals but within larger communities and networks, which allow them to spread content beyond their immediate geographic proximity. Therefore, it is claimed that “if it doesn’t spread, it’s dead” (Jenkins et al., 2013, p.293).

On the internet, a wide range of communication technologies have emerged to support informal and immediate distribution, such as Twitter. Fan communities are the first to embrace the practices of spreading. The circulation of media content in participatory culture can satisfy different interests: some cultural (such as the promotion of a certain genre or artist), some personal (such as strengthening friendships between friends), some political (such as criticizing the construction of genders and sexuality in the mass media) and some economic (such as those that meet the immediate needs of ordinary people, as well as those that meet the needs of media companies). Jenkins et al. (2013) do not argue if fans are somehow fighting consumer capitalism and its intellectual property regimes through these procedures and practices, as many of these unauthorized activities can indirectly benefit companies and brands. Instead, it is suggested that fans possess great power – whether it is intentional or not, as they may discover new markets,
create new meanings, renew vanished franchises, support independent creators and localize global content that has never been commercially distributed in a local market before, or disrupt/reshape activities of contemporary culture. In some cases, those consequences are the direct objective of participatory culture; in others, they are collateral results. Companies that order the public to stay away from their brand intellectual property choose to sidestep these procedures, many of which could create and prolong media text value.

I decided to focus on Jenkins’ participatory culture and spreadable media concepts because I consider them one of the reasons for the recent Formula 1 Engagement Growth. Moreover, focusing on TwF1 community and women's place in it, I find participatory culture as a guiding principle to conduct my analysis, taking into account that participatory culture can be manifested in different ways, from creating original content to taking part with small acts of engagement.

4.2. Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

According to Hilvert-Bruce et al. (2018), “UGT provides a framework for understanding consumer choices and roles in media engagement as behaviours” (p.59). Uses and gratifications is a paradigm used in media and communication field that enables the evaluation and understanding of consumer motivations for media usage (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018). This theory considers the audience as actively involved in the choosing of the media platform they consume in sync with their motivations. The categorizations of motivations have been changing depending on the scholars and the subjects that are being studied.

As specified by Blumler and Katz (1974) novel idea, people who consume media do so to satisfy a need, which could be one of use or gratification. In other words, audiences pick and use a media for one of the four following media Uses and Gratifications:

- Diversion or Entertainment: to take one's mind off of daily struggles and chores (escapism).
- Personal Relationships: As a replacement for genuine emotional and interpersonal engagement.
- Personal identity: Association with fictional characters in books and television shows, people often pick up attitudes and beliefs from the media.
- Surveillance: To satiate their desire for information
Nevertheless, I would like to consider Raney's (2006) affective, cognitive, and behavioural/social set of motivations to develop my analysis as it has been developed within the sports studies field. Raney (2006) describes the behaviour known as selective exposure. “Individuals tend to intentionally choose media content that is presumed to be, by and large, consistent with their existing attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts” (Raney, 2006, p.339). The term ‘selective exposure’ is used to refer to the practice of exposing oneself solely to media content that is compatible with the popular culture and that the viewer will likely find enjoyable. He asserts that viewers of mediated sports acknowledge being driven by emotional, cognitive, and behavioural or social needs. Still, in terms of the subcategories he applies – entertainment, eustress, self-stem, scape, learning, aesthetic, companionship, emotional release, group affiliation, family and economic motivations –, I will not focus solely on them. This is because I might encounter some other characteristics inside those 3 bigger groups that have not been considered by Raney. As I am going to explain next, there could be features that female fans showcase that some of the previous studies have not reflected on.

By contemplating their motivations for consuming F1 and the reasons for choosing Twitter as one of the mediums to follow the sport, I aim to understand better F1 female fans.

4.3. Postmodern feminism: conception of gender

I will be adopting a feminist framework to evaluate the effect of gender on sports fandom. It is fundamental to distinguish between sex and gender while using feminist ideals. Gender and sex are not synonymous and should not be used interchangeably. The term ‘sex’ refers to the biological differences between males and females. Meanwhile, ‘gender’ is a feature of identity that develops over time which is culturally built, shaping an individual’s self-perception, attitudes, and assumptions toward people of both sexes. With the distinction preserved, we can no longer assign women's values or social duties to biological necessity, nor can we reasonably reference a natural or unnatural gendered conduct (Butler, 1986).

The idea that gender is learned rather than intrinsic is a popular one in feminism. Gender theorist Judith Butler coined the term ‘gender performativity’ in her book Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity (1990). Gender, according to Butler, is continually formed by our appearance, speech, and actions. Gender is a representation of
masculine and feminine where ‘feminine’ is a mere reflection of a masculine construction. The duties and expectations ascribed to each gender by dominant society standards influence what it means to be a woman or a man. Moreover, being performative means that taking a role will have an impact on the individual’s life and society.

Still, based upon Simone de Beauvoir’s thoughts, Butler's (1986) conception of gender is both, a site of deeply ingrained cultural meanings and a creativity form.

Gender must be understood as a modality of taking on or realizing possibilities, a process of interpreting the body, giving it cultural form. In other words, to be a woman is to become a woman; it is not a matter of acquiescing to a fixed ontological status, in which case one could be born a woman, but, rather, an active process of appropriating, interpreting, and reinterpreting received cultural possibilities.

(Butler, 1986, p.36)

In order to become a gender, a cultural condition must be accepted as well as one must be created. Becoming a gender is a spontaneous yet deliberate act of perceiving a cultural reality replete with rules, restrictions, and standards. The decision to live or wear one's body in a particular manner indicates a society of already defined corporeal styles. The act of selecting a gender involves organizing existing gender norms in a new way. Gender is a covert endeavour to rewrite one's heritage on its own terms. Based on Butler (1986), this is a work that we have been attempting to complete for a while now, rather than one that is prescribed for us to undertake.

Therefore, taking into consideration Butler's views of gender as something that despite taking existing norms, becoming a gender is also something unique each individual works on, I will be exploring gender from the point of view of a postmodern feminist. Gender, according to postmodern feminists, is not a universal fact. Individual distinctions and experiences are minimized when gender is viewed as a binary that dictates a person's experience. Postmodern feminism supports a reconsideration of the expectations imposed upon women based on masculine ideals of how women should look or behave. Postmodern feminists argue that research should focus on the discursive and social processes that assign the status of truth to certain types of knowledge, as inspired by Michel Foucault's ideas on knowledge and power. The second tenet of postmodern feminism entails that identities are fluid, fractured, and in constant flux, distancing from
previous feminist ideals that promoted binary and determinate gender concepts (Krijnen, 2017).

For this reason, I will entail Toffoletti (2019) and Pope (2019) proposals of not narrowing down the definition of ‘fan’ as every individual exhibit different characteristics or can belong to different ‘types’ of fan at once. This approach tries to respond to many academic’s definitions of ‘authentic’ and ‘real’ sports fans, as the acts of white, male, heterosexual individuals have been regularly used as models for ‘standard’ sports fan activity, where they have become homogenized as the normative body. As a result, behaviours that deviate from the norm are rejected or overlooked (Toffoletti, 2019). Because of that, narrow definitions of sport fandom make it difficult to understand or encompass how personal expressions of fandom may change over the course of a person's life in response to variations in social contexts and how these changes are influenced by the gender-based organization of society. Furthermore, fixed definitions cannot explain how sports fan behaviour has changed in response to developments in digital network technologies. Thus, I opt to follow Antunovic and Hardin (2012) open definition of sport fan as they suggest that the word ‘fan’ can apply to anyone who is committed to a specific subject of interest, and in the domain of sports, this includes specific athletes, teams, leagues, organizations and sports.

Hence, by acknowledging that gender is just to some extent performed and that every individual identity differs – in other words, women are not and homogenous group – I base my investigation on how women themselves perceive, behave, understand and encounter the experience of being a sport fan.

5. RESEARCH METHODS

Netnography is considered to be the best method to achieve the thesis’ objectives as it is a type of participant-observation study that takes place entirely online (Kozinets, 2010). This method evolves from ethnography which constructs a depiction of a group's manner of living. Researchers using this type of method have to acknowledge the fact that the data gathered through observation and fieldnotes is usually open to personal interpretation. Despite having participant observations as the main method for data gathering, ethnography involves a variety of techniques (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). Therefore, netnography obtains ethnographic insight and depiction of a cultural or community phenomenon by using computer-mediated communications as a data source.
Netnography also embraces different methods besides participant-observation and filed notes like interviews, descriptive statistics, semiotic analysis or content analysis, among others (Kozinets, 2010). As I aim to analyse F1 female fans and their community on Twitter, netnography is believed to be the best methodology to obtain information about this group’s insights through semi-structured interviews and participant observation on Twitter.

In order to collect a broader understanding of these individuals’ motivations to consume F1 and use Twitter, 6 semi-structured interviews are held with Spanish F1 fans. According to Kozinets (2010), with interviews researchers can “bring in a detailed subjective understanding of the lived experience of online community participants” and “gain a detailed, grounded, subjective sense of an online community member’s perspective and sense of meaning” (p.47). The information taken from the interviews is combined with a participant observation on Twitter in order to have a broader and deeper understanding of what has been discussed in interviews. Moreover, this observation will provide a better look at the F1 Twitter community by experiencing its activity. From a quick look at TwF1, it can be noticed that the majority of content is created by male fans. Therefore, a selected 30 Spanish female accounts are followed in order to observe their utilization of Twitter and fieldnotes are taken collecting tweets too. Then, content analysis is applied to the collected data through interviews and participant observation in order to describe the relationship of female fans with F1 and frame patterns of their experiences as well as their consumer behaviour. Therefore, evaluating changes in women’s behaviours and ideas gathered through the interviews and Twitter observations allows me to understand their background and compare similarities and differences in women’s experiences in the F1 fandom.

An Interpretivist paradigm – associated with an abductive logic of enquiry that studies “the meanings and interpretations, the motives and intentions, that people use in their everyday lives, and which direct their behaviour” (Blaikie & Priest, 2019, p.118) – is employed in order to understand how F1 community is experienced and its meaning for its female participants. Interpretivism is related to qualitative data, which can also gather through netnographic studies and fieldnotes. As previously mentioned, researchers have not been able to agree on a single accepted definition or scale to try and quantify precisely sport fan motivations and variations. Moreover, women, most of the time, have been disregarded in academic research and they are not a homogeneous group. Therefore,
I contend that evaluating fandom's various levels and types may be done more effectively using qualitative methodologies such as interpretivism.

As I seek qualitative thick-data, non-probability sampling is applied. In this way, representative and valid material for the aim of the paper is obtained. For the participant observation on Twitter, 30 accounts of Spanish female F1 fans are selected (Table 2). Firstly, in order to select F1 fans, the profile picture, description and header have been examined to seek F1 references. The chosen accounts had to present some type of activity (e.g. likes, retweets or tweets) in the previous week of the observation. This would show that it is an active account. For knowing that the account is handled by a woman, I have double-checked the profile name, picture and description as well as the language used that could suggest the gender of the user. Finally, with the purpose of recognising the nationality of the user, the profile description, as well as recent tweets referencing cultural matters or specific Spanish words have been taken into account. For the interviews, a search for interviewees via Twitter has been executed by making an announcement in a tweet and tagging popular F1 accounts in it that could help with the diffusion of it. Of all the Spanish female fans that contacted me willing to participate in an interview, 6 women have been chosen (Table 3). I have chosen diverse profiles both for the observant participation and for the interviews in order to acquire the broadest spectrum possible of insights. In order to do so, I looked for profiles with different favourite drivers and teams, different personalities and behaviours on Twitter – from lurkers to novel content creators – or different numbers of followers and followings on Twitter as well as with non-common followed accounts to have people that are not from the same inner circles.

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<th>Twitter Following</th>
<th>Favourite Driver(s)</th>
<th>Novel Content C.</th>
<th>F1 Reference in profilec</th>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User6</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>NOR</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User7</td>
<td>4,503</td>
<td>3,401</td>
<td>NOR</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Observed Twitter accounts with information about their profile.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Aged</th>
<th>Twitter Followers</th>
<th>Twitter Following</th>
<th>Favourite Driver</th>
<th>Novel Content C.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaker1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>SAI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>RAI&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> The observed Twitter users will be addressed as User and each of them has been assigned a number from 1 to 30 randomly.

<sup>b</sup> Novel Content Creator. Speakers that create novel content about F1.

<sup>c</sup> To be selected, either the profile picture, the header or the description must contain some reference to F1. When any of these requirements is met, the box is filled with YES.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>115</th>
<th>133</th>
<th>NOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaker4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>ALO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker5(^c)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5,291</td>
<td>1,415</td>
<td>VER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker6(^c)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>ALO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. This table gathers information about the interviewees. The displayed details date 7\(^{th}\) May, 2022.

\(^a\) Each interviewee will be addressed as Speaker and each of them has been assigned a number from 1 to 6 randomly.

\(^b\) Novel Content Creator. Speakers that create novel content about F1.

\(^c\) Speaker5 and Speaker6 are User30 and User14 from Table 1 respectively.

\(^d\) Retired driver

For the Twitter data collection, the 30 Twitter accounts have been observed from Monday 6\(^{th}\) June 2022 to Monday 13\(^{th}\) June 2022. This date coincides with the 2022 Azerbaijan Grand Prix held in Baku from Friday 10\(^{th}\) June 2022 to Sunday 12\(^{nd}\) June 2022. I decided to collect data throughout the whole week in order to analyse TwF1 before, during and after the three days of GP. For gathering information, I have examined the timeline of an account which follows only the chosen 30 profiles. Twitter timelines are a list of tweets displayed in chronological order. The timeline is personal as it only shows the tweets, retweets and likes of the people you follow. During the week, I have been screenshotting and taking notes about the tweets that I have seen and about the different activities and interactions the users did, for then analysing them mainly in regards to RQ2.

As for the interviews, the 6 picked women have signed a consent paper where the aim of the thesis as well as the characteristics of the interview are explained. Moreover, on the document handed to them, it is clarified how the data collected from the interviews will be used. After having explained everything, the interviews have taken place between the 9\(^{th}\) of May 2022 and the 23\(^{rd}\) of June 2022. The meetings have been held on the web-conferencing platform Zoom and have been recorded in order to transcribe the interviews for data gathering. As semi-structured interviews, 15 fixed questions have been asked (Appendix A), which lead to different questions and deeper conversations regarding discussed topics. The questions are divided into two sections. The first one contains general questions about their introduction to F1 and their favourite things about it, which are associated with RQ1. The second part of the questions addresses Twitter, in order to gather data for RQ2.
6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Swedish Research Council argues that research ethics are not static as the standards of best practice and ethical theory evolve throughout time. A proper balance must be achieved between numerous interests and values, each of which appears to be valid, in ethically conducted research. Interests such as the pursuit of knowledge, the integrity of research subjects as well as the protection against various forms of injury or risk of harm or the ownership of research material have to be taken into account. The management of sensitive material might create concerns regarding the researcher's, study participants', and other researchers' competing interests (“Ethics in research”, 2021).

As my methodology involves participant observation – a method that the SRC associates with numerous ethical challenges –, I will follow their guidelines regarding the requirement of consent of the ‘subject of research’ as well as their identity protection in order to prevent any damage (Swedish Research Council, 2017).

In the academic field, there is no agreement among researchers about the ethicality of using publically published online content without consent (Zimmer, 2010; Townsend & Wallace, 2016; Elgesem, 2016; Markham & Buchanan, 2012). According to Markham and Buchanan (2012), the use of a case-based approach and practical judgment oriented to a specific environment is the most effective way to decide upon the ethical scope of the research.

Elgesem (2016) introduces 4 factors - retrieved from McKee and Porter - that influence the need for consent when conducting research on- and off-line: “degree of accessibility in the public sphere, sensitivity of the information, degree of interaction with the research participants and the vulnerability of the research participants” (p.15). Townsend and Wallace (2016) also report that privacy and anonymity are concepts to be considered. Therefore, consent should be asked when the data is taken from private accounts or communities or if it involves sensitive information that could cause any kind of harm, from discomfort or embarrassment to prosecution (Elgesem, 2015; Townsend & Wallace, 2016).

In my analysis, besides the data gathered from interviews with the previously signed consent of the participants, I study content from Twitter which is an open and public online platform –a platform that involves fewer ethical issues due to its nature as stated by Townsend and Wallace (2016). One reason for this is the fact that, on this platform, hashtags are used for reaching a larger public. Therefore, it could be said that
these users expect their tweets to be noticed by strangers. Moreover, in order to use Twitter, users need to accept their Privacy Policy where it is disclaimed that the content uploaded to the platform become “immediately viewable and searchable by anyone around the world” (“Twitter Privacy Policy”, 2021). Twitter Terms of Service (2021) also states that “this license authorizes us to make your Content available to the rest of the world and to let others do the same”.

Thus, as the information collected does not tackle sensitive topics since my research is related to fan preferences and behaviours, I have decided to collect and observed tweets that are published openly as they can be considered public. However, the users’ anonymity is being assured by deleting their users' names and avoiding quoting the tweet directly. Data that may have been derived from an underage or vulnerable person has been discounted too.

7. ANALYSIS

In order to carry out an analysis of F1 female fans from a postmodernist perspective, I refer to the fact that it is important to take into account that there are different types of fans. Therefore, in my analysis, I will illustrate similarities and differences between F1 female fans’ behaviours, attitudes, and motivations.

7.1. Becoming a fan

7.1.2. First interaction with the sport

Pope’s (2019) study showcases that many female sport fans become a fan due to a male figure – fathers in their majority – introducing the sport to them (see also Liston 2006; Raney, 2006; Toffoletti, 2019). In the case of F1 female fans, most of the girls interviewed confirmed that they started watching F1 because of their parents when they were young. Speaker1, Speaker2, Speaker3 and Speaker4 agree that they started watching F1 when they were little with their fathers. In contrast, Speaker5 also refers to her mother, emphasising her part in introducing her to the sport by stating:

1 By searching the exact words of a tweet, the identity of the anonymous account could be revealed. Therefore, tweets are manifested by being translated into English or giving the general idea behind them.
“It started with my parents. Both of my parents are Formula 1 fans, both my mother and my father, and so since I was a little girl we watched races at home and that's how it started.”

(Speaker 5)

As for Speaker 6, she does not go into detail about who introduced F1 to her, but she mentions her mother as an important figure since it is with her that she usually discusses the races. So, for these women, family members were mostly responsible for fostering their interest in sports when they were kids.

As Speaker 3 claims, watching F1 was a family activity that happened Sundays during lunchtime. The years in which the interviewees place these events range from 2005 to 2007, years where the ‘boom Alonso’ happened since it was the time the Spanish driver was fighting for and winning championships, attracting much of the country to the category (García-Alonso, 2016; Rosell-Montagud, 2016). The interviewees also showcased how powerful Alonso’s phenomenon was.

“We all met in the living room, and it was not to see Formula 1, it was to see Fernando Alonso. My first memory basically of Formula 1 is not even Alonso winning his first world championship, but a fountain in Asturias and all the Alonso fans celebrating that he had won his first world championship.”

(Speaker 4)

Hence, even if the family was a key figure to draw these women into F1, Alonso’s success when they were young was also an agent that help to bring new fans to life.

Still, even if all of them have an introduction to F1 when they were young, not all of them started liking it in the same manner. For instance, Speaker 2 recognizes that she began to watch F1 with his father in order to be more time with his dad and create a bond with him as he usually worked out of home and in doing so, she ended up loving F1 as much as him. Speaker 3 says that despite not understanding much, there was something in the races that caught her attention. Speaker 6 defines her passion for F1 as love at first sight since, according to her, it is a super complete sport with strategies, competition, speed, regulations that must be taken into account and drivers' personalities. And since she is a psychologist, she has always liked to pay attention to all these details. On the other hand, Speaker 5 saw F1 as a child too but without paying much attention to it. In her
case, it was not until Verstappen arrived in Formula 1 – being already a teenager – that she did not start following F1 more seriously.

So, as it can be spotted, despite having similar ages and living in the same country with the same F1 background, different paths to becoming a fan appear. Raney’s (2016) social motivation of building a common ground with the family by enjoying F1 together and the affective motivation of Alonso’s achievements while growing up seems to have an important weight to the introduction of F1 in these women’s life. Still, as it has briefly been discussed and as I will develop more now, every woman has had a different journey towards the F1 fanship.

### 7.1.2. Sudden stop and rejoined

Gallego and Maestro's (2014) report suggests that the rights distribution in 2014 between free and paid channels for the first time had an adverse effect on the sport's viewership, which could aggravate as it would become exclusive to Movistar+ pay channel from 2016. Furthermore, they implied that Fernando Alonso's poor performances and an out-of-date internet presence were further factors contributing to the sport's downturn in Spain.

Concerning my interviewees, only Speaker2 has followed all F1 seasons since she started watching it when she was young. On the other hand, Speaker1 and Speaker4 stopped following F1 simply due to a lack of interest. The rest stopped watching or following the sport to a less degree due to the lack of accessibility of races on open channels. Speaker5 claims that she did not stop watching F1 per se. When Formula 1 moved to the paid channel, his parents decided not to contract the service, making it more difficult to follow the sport. Nevertheless, even if they could not see everything, sometimes they managed to see some Grand Prix in deferred. Speaker6 had a little cease too, especially because of the issue of the pay channel as she found it more difficult to find where to watch the races on the internet than actually watching and enjoying them. In addition, this was also influenced by the fact that it happened at the time that Alonso left F1 for a few years to compete in other categories and Hamilton's domination resulting in little competition. The most extreme case in this sense is that of Speaker3, who, due to the change from F1 to the pay channel, stopped following the sport completely.

I have also spotted the struggles the pay-channel brings on my Twitter observation as User25 and User27 complained about the fact that besides paying for DANZ, the current streaming platform that has the rights to broadcast F1 alongside Movistar+, they
do not have access to press conferences or other types of content that other broadcasters do share, which means that they have to search for streams that sometimes do not work on the internet. According to the Global F1 Fan Survey 2021, since 2017 free-to-air F1 TV has declined a 56%. Meanwhile, pay TV is the most popular platform to watch F1 but the survey specifies that it is the most used media, particularly among fans who are 35+ (Motorsport Network et al., 2021). Therefore, it could be reasoned that the current communication strategy of F1 does not go hand in hand with its goals of attracting young people since they are more likely to not consume pay TV.

During the last decade, the drop in audiences can be corroborated by the drop in interest of some of our interviewees. Speaker1, Speaker6 and Speaker3 have started again watching F1 more seriously from 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively, subscribing to DAZN streaming platform which shares the broadcasting rights with Movistar+ pay channel. Speaker3 explains that in 2021 her family subscribed to DAZN and when she saw a FP1 session, she remembered how much she used to like F1. Since then she has not missed any GP. During these years, it can be spotted how many fans have (re)join the sport. F1 in 2020 and 2021 has achieved new records in engagement growth and the cumulative TV audience has raised a bit stopping the downward trend (F1, 2021; F1, 2022).

For Speaker5, it was the arrival of Max Verstappen the responsible for making her follow F1 more seriously and considered herself a fan. In her words:

“When Max Verstappen arrived, he was an exponent of the new generation of drivers who, in the end, is also my generation of drivers because he has three years more than me. Also, this shocked me a lot because suddenly I was a 15-year-old girl when Max got into Formula 1 and he was a 17-year-old boy. So it was a strong impact for me because it was like ‘wow I feel represented’.”

(Speaker5)

This kind of fan identification is defined as the emotional attachment that fans feel to a sporting organization, team or athlete, developing a sense of connectivity with the supported subject (Murray, 2019).

As for Speaker4, although she had DAZN at home and his brother kept watching F1, the factor that brought her back was Twitter. She recounts that at the end of the 2021 season her Twitter feed was replete with tweets regarding F1 despite not following any
account dedicated to it. There were people tweeting memes related to F1 and Alonso’s meme ‘El Plan’\(^2\). The memes were so funny that she decided to start watching F1 again in order to understand them better on the last race of the 2021 season and she has not stopped since then.

Therefore, as Motorsport Network et al. (2021) indeed asserts, “One of the biggest news stories to come from the 2021 Global Fan Survey is the rise of the younger generation of F1 stars, whose appeal to the new, more diverse and social media savvy audiences is growing rapidly” (p.40). Speaker5 and Speaker4 are an example of this. Affective motives such as feeling identified with a young driver or entertainment via social media have led these women to enjoy and follow the sport more intensely.

### 7.2. Participatory culture

#### 7.2.1. Beyond the TV

As it has already been addressed, the activity of watching games is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to sports fandom. Fans also want to learn, communicate, and produce information, forecast the results or share their feelings of joy, outrage, and despair. The digital sphere provides a great space to do so (Gantz & Lewis, 2016). According to Speaker4 “a Formula 1 fan who only uses television is missing half of the sport”. In line with Jenkins et al. (2006), new media technologies are fostering the development of participatory culture by enabling everyday users to retain, comment on, alter, and reuse media material in new ways (Jenkins et al., 2006). All the interviewees are active viewers of the sport that search for more content outside the TV in order to shape their ideas and some even take that content to create their own one.

The main theme of searching F1 content outside the broadcasted race is the eagerness for more information. Interviewees have showcased different interests in the knowledge they want to acquire. Speaker1, as an engineering student, looks for Twitter accounts or YouTube videos that provide technical knowledge such as the aerodynamics of the car. Speaker4 is highly interested in news. She usually consumes news outlets after the races in order to review the race and some details she might have not noticed. And if

\(^2\) ‘El Plan’ has become a cult meme inside the Twitter F1 community. It all began with Alonso saying in a Spanish interview that we would have to wait for ‘the plan’ after the 2021 Turkish Grand Prix. No one knew what he was referring to but everyone on Twitter began to believe in the plan. Even Alonso stated later on that “It’s one of the things that social media networks have now. They started with ‘El Plan’, ‘El Plan’, ‘El Plan’ and I don’t know what ‘El Plan’ is either.” Still, the meme got so big that he even raced with ‘El Plan’ written on his car in the last race of the season (Kershaw, 2022).
there is a topic she wants to deepen more in, she looks at it on Twitter. The rest of the speakers have admitted that they consume everything they find in their way, from documentaries related to the history of Formula 1 or those like *Drive to Survive* that show a more personal side of the drivers to old races or challenges the F1 teams upload with the drivers on YouTube. Speaker4 and Speaker5 have also mentioned that they like to read books about drivers like Maria de Villota or Adrian Newey's *How To Build A Car*. Speaker2 goes beyond the sport in itself claiming that:

“I log in into Twitter every hour to see who driver has done what, with whom is he, where has he gone on vacation... I mean, I'm very gossipy in the sense. I love that.”

(Speaker2)

While all of them seek more content that would extend their knowledge and the ideas they have on the sport, Speaker2 and Speaker5 used the content they consume in order to create their own one too. The first one writes weekly Newsletters for sharing her opinion regarding a Gran Prix or some event that has happened in the F1 world. The latter one, in 2018, started writing on independent webs and in a personal blog about F1. Now, claiming that people do not read as much, she has created a podcast where she talks about F1, alongside MotoGP and English football. I have encountered other female fans that also contribute to the sport by producing content related to F1. User29 could be defined as a multi-skilled woman since not only creates videos for YouTube reviewing Grand Prixes with an ironic tone, but also creates drawings of drivers and memes. User4 also edits fancams of Ferrari drivers that then uploads to the internet. And many more tweet novel content editing photos, creating memes or games tied to F1, as it will be explored in 6.2.3.

Hence, female F1 fans are a demonstration of Jenkins's (1992) idea of fans as active “producers and manipulators of meanings” (p.23), and how new media technologies have allowed them to collect, comment, edit, and reuse content in new ways, leading to the development of participatory culture where content is not only distributed but circulated (Jenkins et al., 2006; Jenkins et al., 2013).

### 7.2.2. Twitter Community

Content circulation is so not an individual activity as it happens within larger communities and networks (Jenkins et al., 2013). Despite having mentioned different
digital platforms where fans search and post F1 content, all of the interviewees agree that Twitter is the main social network they used because it allows different types of activities. Jenkins et al. (2013) claim that Twitter's success stems from how well it enables the various forms of information sharing, communication, and coordination that are valuable to communities. Additionally, Toffoletti (2019) reports the fact that Twitter can enhance sports fans' experiences by allowing them to engage directly with players and teams as well as by providing them with a platform to forge their identities in relation to other participants. Hence, it provides a space for an alternative social community where its participants share similar tastes and values (Jenkins, 1992).

“I really believe that it is a community where only Formula 1 matters, everything else doesn’t matter and all opinions are heard. Now there are a lot of young people, especially as the drivers are young, there are many of the same age as the drivers. So we are there [Twitter] just to hang out”

(Speaker3)

Likewise, Speaker2 maintains the idea of how the community has been built on the basis of young people who watched the races alone at home and had no one to discuss them with. Little by little Twitter became that space to share opinions with other people making Speaker3 realized that she is not the only one watching the sport, but that a lot of people in the same age range also watch F1 and have similar or opposite opinions to hers. Realising that there are other people with the same likings who are also eager to talk about it enables more communicative behaviours and a companionship feeling that motivates the viewers to keep coming (Raney, 2006).

Communities promote the employment of shared sporting symbols, rituals, and traditions which help people form deep bonds with other sports enthusiasts and strengthen a sense of belonging (Watkins, 2016).

“I can tell you that when I'm watching Formula 1 and I go on Twitter I feel like I'm part of something bigger. (...) You can be interacting with any person, even if it is not directly, simply by reading them, you already feel that you are communicating with that person, because that person is saying what they think and you are picking it up. So I can tell you that when I go on Twitter I feel like I'm part of something, and more when campaigns like Fernando Alonso’s ‘El Plan’ are created. When you're in the maelstrom, you
feel like you're part of it because you understand the references, the double meaning, you understand what they mean.”

(Speaker4)

During the week I observed Twitter, I found diverse instances of these kinds of popular knowledge that exists in Spanish TwF1. The first thing I encountered was some accounts tweeting “(It's) race week” in English (User3, User7, User8, User11, User14, User25, User26 and User29). This is a tradition that I spotted the two Mondays I enter Twitter for my data gathering. Before each season, it was also common to see tweets saying “Himno” in reference to the F1 theme song that plays before every session starts (User3, User7, User16, User22, User24 and User26). Popular phrases said by the Spanish TV commentators are also recurrent. “Undercut de manual”\(^3\) is posted whenever a driver does an undercut – overtake a car in the pits – during the race or “Carlos ya ganó a Leclerc”\(^4\) when Sainz is doing better than his teammate. These phrases usually appear as normal tweets or also in a meme format where they are typed in the picture of the commentators. Moreover, the jinxed theory is also recurrent during the week as people are afraid to say that their favourite driver/team is going to do well in order to not jinx it. For instance, User29 tweeted “Stopped writing that Carlos has already beaten Leclerc that you are going to jinxed him.” If there are people that do not follow F1 and see this type of tweet in their feed, it is very likely that they would not understand what they mean and why people are tweeting this. However, inside TwF1 community these tweets are kind of traditions and references that are circulating in every GP, which creates that sense of belonging Speaker4 introduces since fans in the community understand what they mean and are participants of them. These occurrences can also be argued to be what Jenkins et al. (2013) identify as Spreadable Media in participatory culture, as, it implies a community which shapes, shares, reframes and remixes media content in a way which allows them to spread popular content beyond their immediate geographic proximity.

Another illustration of the community that is created is that of fellowship and support towards the work of others. As Jenkins et al. (2006) expound, one of the principles of participatory culture and a fandom community is that of a place where strong support appears towards the creation of a community member that it is also shared with others. Speaker5 thinks that on Twitter there is a lot of mobility to fulfil personal projects. For

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\(^3\) Eng.: \textit{A handbook undercut}

\(^4\) Eng.: \textit{Carlos has already beaten Leclerc}
example, she explains that she could not have got all the listeners her podcast has if she did not have followers on Twitter and especially if she did not have the F1 community behind her as it has helped her to promote her content. In fact, in the week of the Azerbaijan Gran Prix, Speaker5/User30 used twice Twitter to promote a Twitch stream she was doing and her podcast, announcing that it is available on Amazon Music too. User29 also uses Twitter as a platform to share her YouTube videos, asking for likes and retweets to spread it (Fig.1). As it can be seen, for that particular video, 84 people liked and 13 retweeted the post. Despite the videos, User29 also draws. She posted a drawing of Alonso asking people to help her to make it arrive to Alonso, a tweet that achieved 438 likes, 95 retweets and multiple comments praising her and tagging Alonso, proving the power TwF1 can have if there is a goal in mind. Other users, such as User4, produce content for Twitter itself. She usually does fancams that are compiled in a Twitter threat. During the Azerbaijan Gran Prix, she decided to make a fancam of Sainz and Leclerc because Ferrari had a bad race and she wanted to see them happy. The video has got more than 6k views (Fig.2). Despite not all users creating their own content, the majority are involved in it as it is very common to see people retweeting others’ creations to promote them, as it is the case of User8 who retweets a threat of F1 drivers as cartoons made by another girl.

**Figure 1**
*User29 advertising her new Youtube video*

**Figure 2**
*User’s4 fancam*
As I have stated in my theoretical framework, women, like every human, are a heterogenic group with different experiences, ideas and beliefs (Toffoletti, 2019). Even if some argue that there is a community and that there is a place in it for everyone, as the previous examples showcase, Speaker6 argues that despite having a group of followers with whom she interacts, she does not feel part of the community, as she considers that there is a defined hierarchy that is hard to reach. She has the impression that it is a somewhat hermetic community regarding who interacts with whom and that she does not really like the vibe of the most famous personalities of TwF1. Therefore, she claims that she does not identify herself with them so she does not have that sense of belonging to the community. Speaker1 also believes that there is a community but she claims to not be in it just because she uses Twitter more to read and learn than to interact. Contrary to this perception, Speaker4 – having a similar activity base on Small Acts of Engagement – claims that even if she is not interacting in a direct way, she still interacts with the content people circulate by reading it and liking, making her feel part of the community.

Sport communities indeed have their hierarchies as Speaker6 mentions. Toffoletti (2019) reinforces women's inferior status in sport and the existence of gender hierarchies of male privilege even as women openly, successfully, and noticeably engage in a variety of sports at the grassroots level. When Speaker4 talked about hierarchies on TwF1, she commented that there is one, that it comes from the followers and that she thinks she is part of it. However, when describing the top layer of the hierarchy, she condemns the fact that there is little diversity in it as “most of that hierarchy and most of the people with the most followers are men. Heterosexual white men”. She then explains how there are only 2 women in that position and that when she and User28 meet/interact with people, they tend to be called “the two girls for Twitter Formula 1”, with no name, as an exotic thing. At the same time, Speaker2 also mentions these two women as the only female representatives in the TwF1 hierarchy. Speaker3 has reported not following any women, even if she thinks she knows one or two. On the other hand, Speaker4 experience is totally different as she finds the community very valance, and it surprised her how many women there were in the community, arguing that she mostly follows girls even if their accounts are small. She is an example of Raney’s selective exposure as she argues that she prefers following female accounts as she believes they are more objective and welcoming.

Consequently, the sense of belonging to a community and the perception of it is diverse depending on the individual. It seems that the upper echelons of TwF1 lack diversity which may influence the perception of belonging. But since digital media enables selective exposure, each woman selects which accounts to follow that would
make them feel part of a community regardless of the popularity they have. Hence, it can be argued that a community of F1 on Twitter exist providing an outlet to interact with other people, share original content, contribute to support others or create inside traditions and rituals. It is a place filled with F1 that fans experience in one way or another.

7.2.3. Activity on Twitter

According to Antunovic and Hardin (2012), the interactive aspect of social media, which allows people to interact through the creation and distribution of digital content, gives female sports fans the chance to create fan identities on their own terms, reshaping hegemonic ideas about what sports fan experiences and behaviours are. Social media is an effective tool for women to bypass media gatekeepers by “increasing the visibility of women fans and developing collective female sport fan identity through the processes of following other fans, retweeting and replying to their messages” (Toffoletti, 2019, p.112). Hence, despite being considered not diverse enough by some, all the interviewees have agreed that Twitter is a place they turn in to be entertain, create, get informed and read or shared others opinions about F1. And concerning the Twitter observations, I can argue that women have been able to develop their space inside TwF1 too, existing various accounts with a great support, groups of friends created through TwF1 community as well as small accounts that want to share their point of view or a personalised healthy feeds were women can feel safe and understood – bearing in mind that there are some adverse posts on occasions.

First of all, it has to be addressed the fact that not all Twitter users tweet nor participate in the same activities. The activity of many involves Picone et al.’s (2019) Small Acts of Engagement. They use Twitter to get informed, read others' opinions and as Speaker4 says “to be part of something bigger.” Speaker4 defines her activity as “I like and retweet. In fact, many times what I do is look in the Twitter search engine for words that I know will lead me to tweets that say what I think, I go directly to them and retweet them. And it's like, I'm supporting something that I think but I don't say it.” During the Azerbaijan Gran Prix week, from all the accounts I studied, User5, User6, User10, User13, User20, User21 and User23 did not tweet once but liked and retweeted many posts. In that week, User9 nor User22 were active on Twitter. From the people that tweeted, I experienced two types of feed during the week. One which consists on opinions and reactions during the Gran Prix sessions where the cars are rolling and another one out of the racing times where, besides opinions, more information, predictions and entertainment focus content surfaces.
When the cars are rolling, is when the highest concentration of content is created, especially during qualifying and the race. For instance, 19 users out of 30 tweeted at least once during the race, and another 7 liked posts. The most commented parts of the sessions tended to be the starts of them as well as incidents. For instance, in qualifying, Stroll caused a red flag stopping the session due to a crash and tweets about him filled the feed as User1 confirms (Fig. 3). Otherwise, in order to comment about a race event, a lot of memes are used. As an exemplification, when Ferrari cars suffered from reliability issues, the Twitter feed was packed with edited photos about Ferrari that represented the embarrassing situation of the team (Fig. 4). These memes are designed to lift people's spirits and provide humour to the situation, which is demonstrated by the number of likes this kind of tweets receive. This is because regular tweets with just words expressing the same kind of ideas are more unnoticed than the visual memes that suggest a humoristic view.

Figure 3
User1’s tweet showing her Twitter feed after Stroll’s accident

Figure 4
User1, User16 and User29’s tweets about Ferrari reliability

Apart from this, each account tends to support their favourite driver or team and tweet about their performances. However, I have noticed a pattern that suggests that no matter which driver each account supports, there is a patriotist feeling towards the Spanish drivers as is common to see tweets about wanting them to do well. As shown in my observations, during the race Sainz’s car stopped which resulted in User1, User3, User4,
User8, User7, User15, User16, User17, User19, User25, User28, User29 and User30 pitying him tweeting along the lines of “nooo” or “Carloooos” and sad emoji faces. This phenomenon is explained by Vicent and Kian (2016) who suggest that national identity is key because it enables people to take pride in the achievements of their fellow nationals. Likewise, the previously mentioned Alonso phenomenon in the 2000s could be explained.

Outside the racing, the feed consists principally of information tweets. Few accounts, create new tweets with information, such as User17 reminding the GP schedules. Nevertheless, for this type of content, it is more usual to retweet it from journalist accounts. It is also typical to quote tweets containing information about timetables, rumours, events or interviews and adding a comment about it, instead of commenting below the original tweets. This is done to provide a more visible opinion. This is because quoting consists of a retweet but writing a personal tweet above the original one (Fig.5). By doing so, they are sharing information with their followers while giving their personal take on it. These kinds of opinions are not commented on by other followers unless the account doing it possesses a large number of followers.

**Figure 5**
*User7 giving her opinion by quoting*
In addition to quoting, users create opportunities that require direct interaction. User27 on a Monday evening shared the ‘Driver Opinion Bingo’, which consists of a template with boxes and several phrases with possible given perceptions of a driver (Fig.6). People leave comments with a driver’s name under to post and she has to cross out the impression she feels the given driver embodies. This kind of activity requires interaction and also serves to get to know better the individual opinions regarding a driver. After User27 uploaded the template filled in, the people who had left the driver’s name under the tweet also participated by posting their own opinions. Furthermore, User1, User7 and User8 took part in Twitter spaces where live audio conversations develop. User8 space took place on Monday the 8th and consisted of a group of girls talking about previous races and predictions for the Azerbaijan Grand Prix. User7’s spaces were held before and after the race as well as after the qualifying session on Saturday to talk about the GP. The space was created by her and another 3 male speakers participated in it. In User1’s case, she participated every evening in a space where the majority of speakers were female and events from the racing were discussed as well as gossip from the drivers’ personal life.

**Figure 6**
*User27’s Driver Opinion Bingo*
Lastly, I also encountered very aesthetic-driven tweets. For Raney (2006), aesthetics is a cognitive stimulation sports fans pursue and it is derived from the artistic beauty of sport. Many users during the whole week post or retweet photos of their favourite team’s car or drivers (Fig.7). Whereas some appreciate current photos about the car body (e.g. User7), driver’s celebrations after the race (e.g. User30) or the driver during track walks (e.g. User27), others do share photos from old races (e.g. User26) or driver’s picture outside the track (e.g. User4). It is also quite common to see tweets with drivers' picture faces as representations of current moods of the users (Fig.8).

Figure 7  
*User8 posting Vettle's photo*

Figure 8  
*User26’s Ocon’s reaction photo*

Toffoletti (2019) points out that while traditional fandom standards presuppose a heterosexual masculine identity stance, it has been observed that some female fans exhibit sexual interest in male players, which is an unusual behaviour compared to ‘authentic’ – male – fans. Despite all the interviewees having agreed that women only watch F1 for the pretty boys is an erroneous stereotype that does not make sense as drivers race with a helmet on, which disables the visibility of the driver’s appearance, some users’ activity has hinted the fact that despite not being the main reason for following F1, they encounter drivers to be handsome and attractive. For instance, when Sainz uploaded a video of him training shirtless in the gym, screen captures were posted praising his body. Another instance of this interest in drivers was found in User4’s Twitter Spaces. There were talks about which drivers would they like to be the fathers of their children and how lucky their
girlfriends were to have some of the drivers as their partners. However, I have also encountered some accounts that instead of sexualizing the drivers, showcase a maternal instinct towards them, sharing cute pictures of them and treating them as affectionate and loving boys that have to be protected. Therefore, it seems that some female fans indeed have aesthetic motivations beyond the beauty of the sport, focusing on the beauty of the athlete as well as his personality.

Thus, it can be concluded that there is a wide diversity within female Twitter usage. There are some fans that are more vocal than others, as there are users that just like, others only retweet, some write tweets and a few even take part in Twitter Spaces to speak. Still, following Raney’s (2006) categorizations of sports fan motivation, one of the main factors for following F1 and Twitter employment can be argued to be cognitive. The easiness with which informative content circulates makes Twitter a perfect outlet to acquire knowledge as information is shared constantly. Moreover, Twitter gives the opportunity to express opinions with others as well as to interact directly with people with similar beliefs and values, highlighting the social motivations fans have to be part of the F1 fan community. Affective incentives are also interlinked with TwF1 as funny memes and participatory spaces to hang out and shared one’s feelings of joy or disappointment towards the sport arise. Nonetheless, inside the picture-sharing activity which can be categorized in Raney’s (2006) cognitive sub-category of aesthetics, I have encountered different outcomes that may need a distinctive categorization, and it is that of sexual desire and maternal instincts motivation some female fans display. This situation corroborates Toffeleti (2019) and Pope (2019) suggestions on how women cannot be studied within male parameters as there are variables some female fans manifest that have not been taken into account before. Moreover, the fact that some grumbled about the stereotype of being a fan just because of the athletes physics while others announce their desire for them publicly or display a caring instinct for them, shows that each individual differs, disabling the categorization of female fans as a homogenous group.

8. CONCLUSION
This thesis explored the ways in which Spanish female F1 fans are involved in Formula 1 and take part in TwF1. I found that each woman experiences her fanship in a different way. As young Spanish fans, all the interviewee women agree on the fact that they were motivated to watch F1 in their youth by their fathers and family, a common initiation to
sport for women (Piston, 2006; Pope, 2019; Toffoletti, 2019). Then due to lack of facilities to follow it or loss of interest, many of the study women stopped watching it or lessen their degree of involvement. A little bit older, they rejoined F1 as more devoted fans due to factors such as entertainment, self-identification with a driver or eagerness for more knowledge about the sport. That is, Spanish female fans present Raney’s affective, cognitive, and behavioural/social set of motivations for engaging with mediated sports. What is more, it is also discussed how having a driver of the same nationality also helps the feeling of pride of the fan, as Vicent and Kian (2016) explained. For instance, many interviewees suggested that Alonso was key for watching F1 at home when they were young, as a national phenomenon arose around him. Hence, it could be interesting to investigate other countries’ F1 fans in order to understand and compare F1 fans' behaviours towards different drivers and their first introductions to the sport.

There is also a common trait where many suggest that in order to follow F1 not only the racing has to be watched but also Twitter. This goes in hand with Toffoletti (2019) assertion on how digital media has enabled female sport fans to facilitate fan participation. By the analysis done, it is arguable the fact that Twitter has given many women the opportunity to discuss the sport with other people exchanging opinions and also the opportunity to explore their creativity by giving them a space to share their created content, pursuing Jenkins et al. (2016) participatory culture. However, as the postmodern feminist approach claims, gender cannot be seen as a binary and determinate concept (Krijnen, 2017). In my research, Twitter activity has also displayed how women cannot be considered a homogeneous group. Antunovic and Hardin (2012) define fan as someone who is committed to a specific subject of interest. All the users observed can be considered fans of F1, as they display their liking for F1 on their Twitter Profile. However, as it has been observed on Twitter, each fan engages with the sport in their own way. Some preferred to be unnoticed and use Twitter as a platform where they can feel part of a community by understanding shared F1 references and getting informed and entertained by the content of others outside the race track. Others, on the other hand, use Twitter for spreading opinions. It does not matter the number of followers one has, it is a place to write out one’s thoughts about the sport. Still, it is true that the more followers one has, the more interaction one gets as it is easier to spread one’s opinions. However, some smaller accounts do also have a group to talk about F1 inside Twitter, as Speaker6 explains how she has some accounts with whom she always interacts. A few users even produce content beyond tweeting to be shared and enjoyed by other fellow fans.
A pattern of posting pictures can be seen too. Nevertheless, the incentives behind them differ. Some women when posting a photo, showcase tenderness towards drivers and feel an urge to protect the drivers while others feel attracted to them, aspects that have not been considered by many scholars before. Thus, female fans differ from the ‘authentic’ fan presented by many scholars as some women have behaviours that are out of the ‘norm’ of fan behaviour, as Toffeleti (2019) reinforced. Still, not all women showcase those behaviours and others even condemn them to be stereotypes of ‘fangirls’. But as my observation has revealed, there is a sector of women that do consider the physical aspect of the athletes and hence this motivation for fans has to be taken into account as well, as Pope (2019) and Toffeleti (2019) argue. Moreover, another aspect that I have encountered is the fact that some women do not focus on the sexual attractiveness of the driver, but on his personality, seeing them as an offspring they have to protect. Hence, this aspect of maternal instinct could be further investigated in future research as it is a feature out of the stereotypical authentic male fan that even feminist work on sport fans seems to not have reflected on. This has not only implications for fan engagement, sport and gender research, but for fans and society as a whole. A better understanding of female fans as a diverse group with different valid interests and behaviours could also be transformed into a more open and normalised idea of a female fan in society, where they are still a bit stigmatized, even by the own female fans.

There are certain limitations to this thesis. First, more interviewees would have been helpful for this thesis, but due to time constraints and availability issues, I was unable to conduct more interviews. Having more opinions would have helped me come to a more accurate understanding. For instance, despite having contacted some, I was not able to arrange an interview with a new fan who was not already familiar with F1 from childhood. This could have helped me comprehend how new female fans first became interested in the sport. Second, and once again due to time constraints, I was unable to use Twitter participant observation for a longer period of time in order to reflect on the users' behaviour and social engagement during other GPs with different circumstances – such as weather, starting times or final results – or during summer and winter breaks, when there is little direct content generated from the sport. Third, even though I have sought to be as self-reflective as possible, I cannot overlook the possibility that my perceptions might be slightly influenced by my fan status and previous activity on TwF1.

Nonetheless, my analysis offers some indications of how F1 female fans negotiate their place in F1 fandom, displaying their behaviours and motivation towards engaging
with the sport. Furthermore, their employment of Twitter and the TwF1 community is explored, as social media have been argued to be fundamental for female sport fandoms. By exploring this, I can reckon that despite showing different facets of being a fan, F1 female fans are ‘authentic’ fans that should be taken into account by sports, media and fan studies as well as by sports organizations and fellow fans.
References


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Appendix A. Semi-structured interviews questions

- General questions:
  Q1: Since when did you follow F1
  Q2: Could you tell me why you think you like it?
  Q3: Do you watch all the races? And the FP s and qualifying sessions?
  Q4: Do you have a favourite team or driver? Why?
  Q5: Is being a [driver/team] fan an important part of who you are?
  Q6: How much are you affected by wins/losses?
  Q7: What kind of F1 related content do you follow/consume?
  Q8: Do you have any kind of female personality on F1 you look up to? Which one?

- Twitter:
  Q9: Why do you use Twitter in relation to F1?
  Q10: Could you briefly explain your activity on Twitter? (like, tweet, retweet, create memes, comment, read…)
  Q11: What type of accounts do you follow?
  Q12: Do you feel you belong to the f1 community on Twitter?
  Q13: How would you explain the F1 Twitter community?
  Q14: Do you feel there is a hierarchy in the community? If so, how do you feel about it?
  Q15: Do you have people to talk to about F1 inside twitter? And outside?