

**To which extent Formula One's globalization induced by Liberty Media contributed to
a greater spectacularization of the sport**

by

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Executive summary

This research analyzes the extent to which Liberty Media's globalization strategy, implemented since 2017, has contributed to the spectacularization of Formula One.

Formula One has indeed undergone profound changes under its new American ownership: new management has introduced Grands Prix in strategic markets, invested heavily in digital and social media, and launched successful media initiatives such as the Netflix's docuseries *Drive to Survive*. Additionally, the influx of luxury and lifestyle sponsors has added significant dazzlement to the Circus. This study aims to assess the impact of these changes on the perception of Formula One, specifically examining whether the Championship is now viewed more as a global entertainment spectacle than as a traditional sporting competition.

A mixed-methods approach was adopted. On one hand, an online questionnaire was distributed, collecting 156 responses; on the other, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the F1 CEO, Stefano Domenicali. This design enabled the integration of quantitative data on fan opinions with qualitative insights from an internal managerial perspective.

The data show that the *Drive to Survive* media operation has broadened Formula One's fan base although it did not emerge as the primary reason for most new fans to approach the sport. The survey indicates that only around 8% of respondents began following the sport primarily because of the Netflix series. Nevertheless, both the statistical analysis and the interview evidence confirm that the series has played a key role in making Formula One more accessible, narrative, and engaging for a general audience.

Concerning the influx of luxury and lifestyle sponsorships under Liberty Media, the research found a polarizing effect. Many fans appreciate the glamorous aura, and believe that the presence of prestigious brands makes the Championship more exciting and "fashionable". However, others criticize what they perceive as excessive elitism and commercialization, feeling that it erodes Formula One's sporting authenticity. The analysis distinctly identified

these audience segments: on one side, enthusiastic spectators who embrace the spectacle and positively value the integration with the lifestyle world; on the other, *purists* attached to a more traditional view of the sport, who are skeptical of such presence.

Another key aspect of spectacularization concerns the introduction of new Grand Prix locations on the calendar. A minority of fans express indifference or regret the loss of Formula One's traditional character, indicating that a portion of the audience remains less enthusiastic about this spectacularization. Nonetheless, this does not diminish the broader recognition of the trend: approximately 75% of respondents agree that holding races in "glamorous" locations heightens the perception of Formula One as an entertainment spectacle. Moreover, over 80% of the sample noticed the post-2017 shift in the calendar's geography, with more than half considering these changes significant towards scenic and glitzy destinations. In sum, spectacularization is widely acknowledged, even by those who see it with detachment or nostalgia.

Liberty Media's globalization strategy has been essential in increasing Formula One's engagement without abandoning its sporting core. The Championship today is widely perceived, especially by new audiences, as a global media event full of glamour and narratives, as well as a sporting competition. This shift has brought benefits in terms of expanded audience and commercial appeal. However, a tension persists between entertainment and sport: a portion of historic fans fears that the emphasis on the spectacle comes at the expense of competitive integrity and tradition. The future challenge for Formula One will therefore be to balance innovation and entertainment with the preservation of the sport's authenticity, ensuring growth does not alienate the *purist* fan base. This polarization between sport and spectacle is part of a broader trend affecting other disciplines such as soccer, football, and even the Olympics, where the pursuit of global audiences and commercial success often comes into tension with the traditions and values cherished by long-standing fans. Recognizing this wider dynamic opens new avenues for comparative research across global sports entertainment.