HAS THE F1 FANBASE BECOME MORE TOXIC?

POWERED BY
BUZZRADAR

THREE REPORTS BASED ON F1 SOCIAL DATA AND AI
WE'VE IDENTIFIED 3 KEY TRENDS IN THE DATA THAT WE'VE INVESTIGATED FURTHER
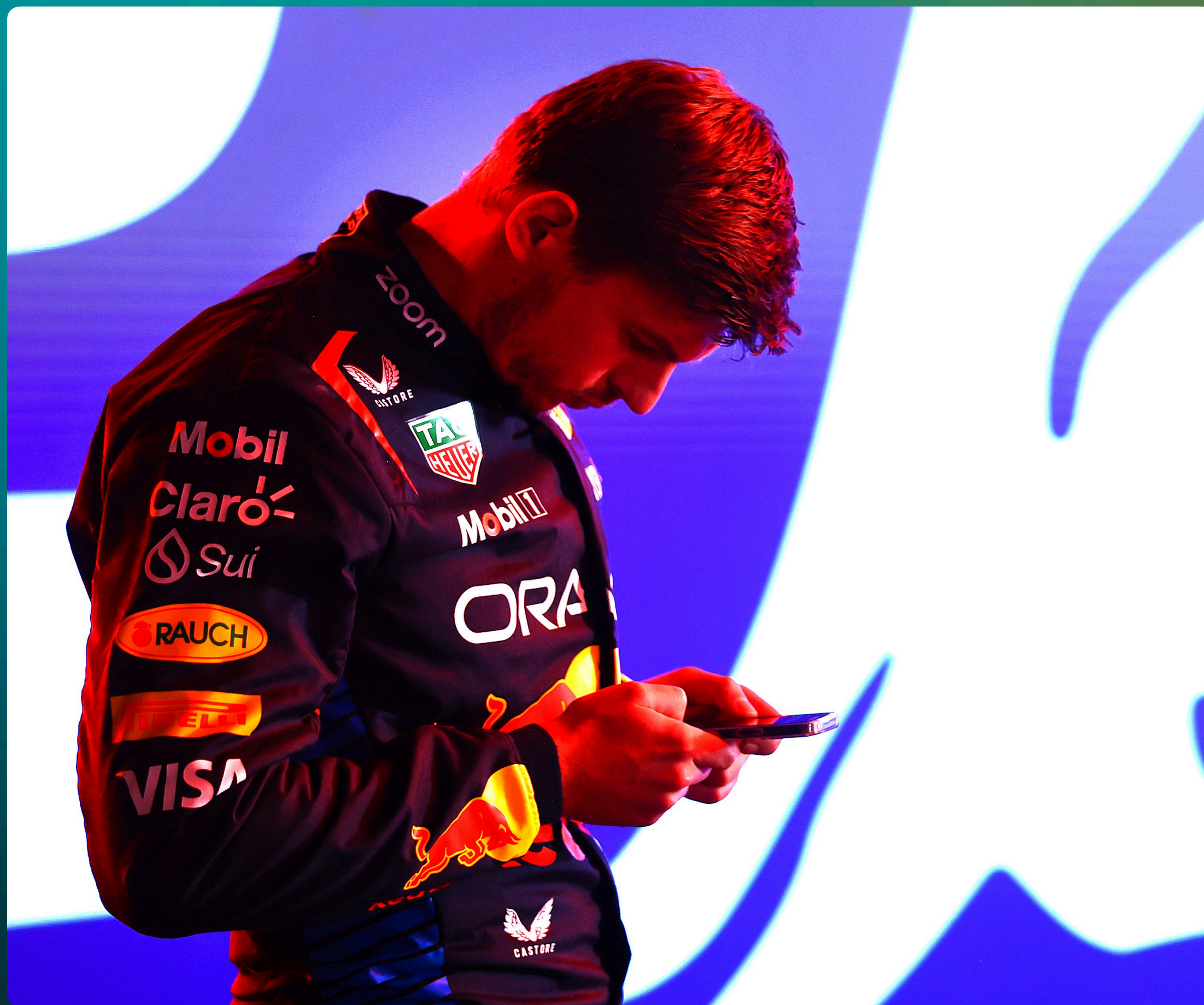
PART 3

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INTRODUCTION

Online conversation around Formula 1 has exploded since 2020, leading many to believe the sport's online discourse has become increasingly toxic. But is that actually true?

As a social intelligence company that has collected Formula 1 conversation data for over a decade, we're uniquely positioned to answer this question. Our latest analysis draws from the largest database of F1 social conversations ever assembled — over 100 million posts across 247,000 fan accounts — to understand how the sport's online community has truly evolved.

As the sport grapples with integrating its traditional fanbase with a new generation of diverse supporters who engage with F1 in fundamentally different ways, has F1's online discourse become more polarised and toxic than ever before?

Through advanced AI and expert human analysis, we've been able to examine both how the sport's online conversation has transformed, and what emerging patterns tell us about the future of toxic behaviour across F1's social media landscape.

Image Credit: @redbullracing

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EXPLORING THE DARK SIDE OF F1 FANDOM

The rapid growth in Formula 1's popularity has been accompanied by growing concerns about toxicity within the fanbase. This came to a head in 2021 with the intense championship battle between Hamilton and Verstappen — a rivalry that spilled off the track and onto social media as team and driver fandoms clashed in digital tribal warfare.

The threats received by Nicholas Latifi following his infamous championship-influencing crash at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix highlighted how polarising race incidents can spark online abuse, with fans targeting drivers, teams and race officials.

Four-time world champion Max Verstappen has called for social media platforms to develop better systems to curb abuse, and Williams's Carlos Sainz has gone on record to urge established media outlets to help combat online toxicity through more balanced reporting.

This tribal toxicity is exacerbated by a perceived split between 'traditional' fans and newcomers to the sport, which has created additional tension, particularly around how F1 should be enjoyed and discussed. Dipping into social media can certainly feel very negative and combative.

But is this perceived increase in toxicity supported by the data?
Is F1 conversation actually more toxic than it used to be?

Image Credit: @McLarenF1

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WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "TOXIC"?
THE 7 TRAITS WE USED TO DEFINE F1 TOXICITY

— DISCRIMINATION
A pattern of prejudicial behaviour and commentary targeting individuals based on their identity rather than their F1-related views. **Examples:** *"Why is she even talking about F1? Just stick to gossiping about celebrities." "There's a reason there's no famous gay drivers. It's a sport for real men."*

— TARGETED HARASSMENT
An organised pattern of hostile actions directed at specific individuals within the F1 community or fandom, with attempts to intimidate or force targets to withdraw from F1-related discussions. **Examples:** *"Everyone, report this account! They keep chatting shit about Lando." "Let's ratio this post so they know to keep their mouth shut in the future."*

— GENERAL NEGATIVITY
Persistent pessimistic commentary toward F1, often characterised by automatic opposition to change. **Examples**: *"F1 is dead. It's barely even a sport now.", "F1 is unwatchable and boring, and every rule change makes it worse. I'm done."*

— TRIBAL HOSTILITY
A pattern of aggressive online behaviour stemming from team or driver allegiances, characterised by intense hostility towards opposing fan groups. **Examples:** *"Americans don't understand F1.", "Hamilton fans are deluded.", "DTS fangirls aren't real fans."*

— REACTIVE AGGRESSION
A pattern of hostile behaviour in response to a post about a driver, team, or decision, often marked by disproportionate reactions to comments or posts. **Examples**: *"Are you blind or just stupid? He got lucky, had DRS every lap, and still barely finished ahead of his overrated teammate." "Typical biased fanboy nonsense."*

— GATEKEEPING
Conversation aimed at restricting participation in F1 discourse, characterised by the dismissal of new fans and their perspectives under the guise of preserving traditional values. **Examples:** *"You can't love F1 if you've never heard of Senna.", "You can't call yourself a fan if you don't even know why there's a minimum tyre pressure rule."*

— MALICIOUS NARRATIVES
Discourse that amplifies controversial racing incidents and decisions, characterised by the deliberate spread of inflammatory theories and disproportionate emotional responses to stewards' decisions. **Examples:** *"The FIA is clearly rigging the championship to make sure Max wins.", "Officials always look the other way when it's Ferrari cheating."*

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TL;DR – WHAT WE LEARNED
TOXICITY HAS INCREASED BUT POSITIVE CONVERSATION HAS INCREASED FAR MORE

ONLINE CONVERSATION HAS DOUBLED SINCE 2016… AND MOST OF IT IS POSITIVE.

In 2024, less than a quarter of social media posts about F1 met our definition for "toxic." For every negative post or comment, there were two positive ones.

POSITIVE CONVERSATION HAS INCREASED FAR MORE THAN NEGATIVE CONVERSATION.

Positive conversation around F1 has nearly doubled since 2016, from 23% to around 40%.
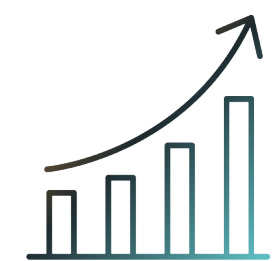
HOWEVER, THERE *IS* MORE TOXIC CONVERSATION THAN THERE USED TO BE.

In 2016, only 8% of comments were negative. By 2024, that had risen to 20%. The biggest rise has been since 2021, when it leapt from 11% to 20%.

THE SUBJECTS THAT PROMPT THE MOST TOXIC POSTS ARE:

- Racing controversies
- Team and driver rivalries
- Racing rules and the FIA
- Gatekeeping from long-time fans

TOXIC CONVERSATION IS LIKELY TO INCREASE IN THE NEXT 18 MONTHS.

Our AI pattern recognition detects a sharp rise in toxic discourse driven by passionate regional fan bases, notably from Argentina. With Franco Colapinto's potential F1 return and global expansion, F1 risks unprecedented online hostility by 2025/26 unless action is taken.

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HOW HAS ONLINE CONVERSATION CHANGED OVER TIME?
THE DATA SHOWS A SPIKE IN PASSIONATE POSTING — BUT WHY?

MORE CONVERSATIONS AND MORE PASSION

The F1 fan base has become larger, more engaged, more impassioned, and more opinionated.

SOCIAL MEDIA HAS CHANGED

Across the decade of data we looked at, there have been several changes to the social media landscape. The rise of TikTok, influencers, and the transformation of Twitter to X have impacted how people use social media generally.
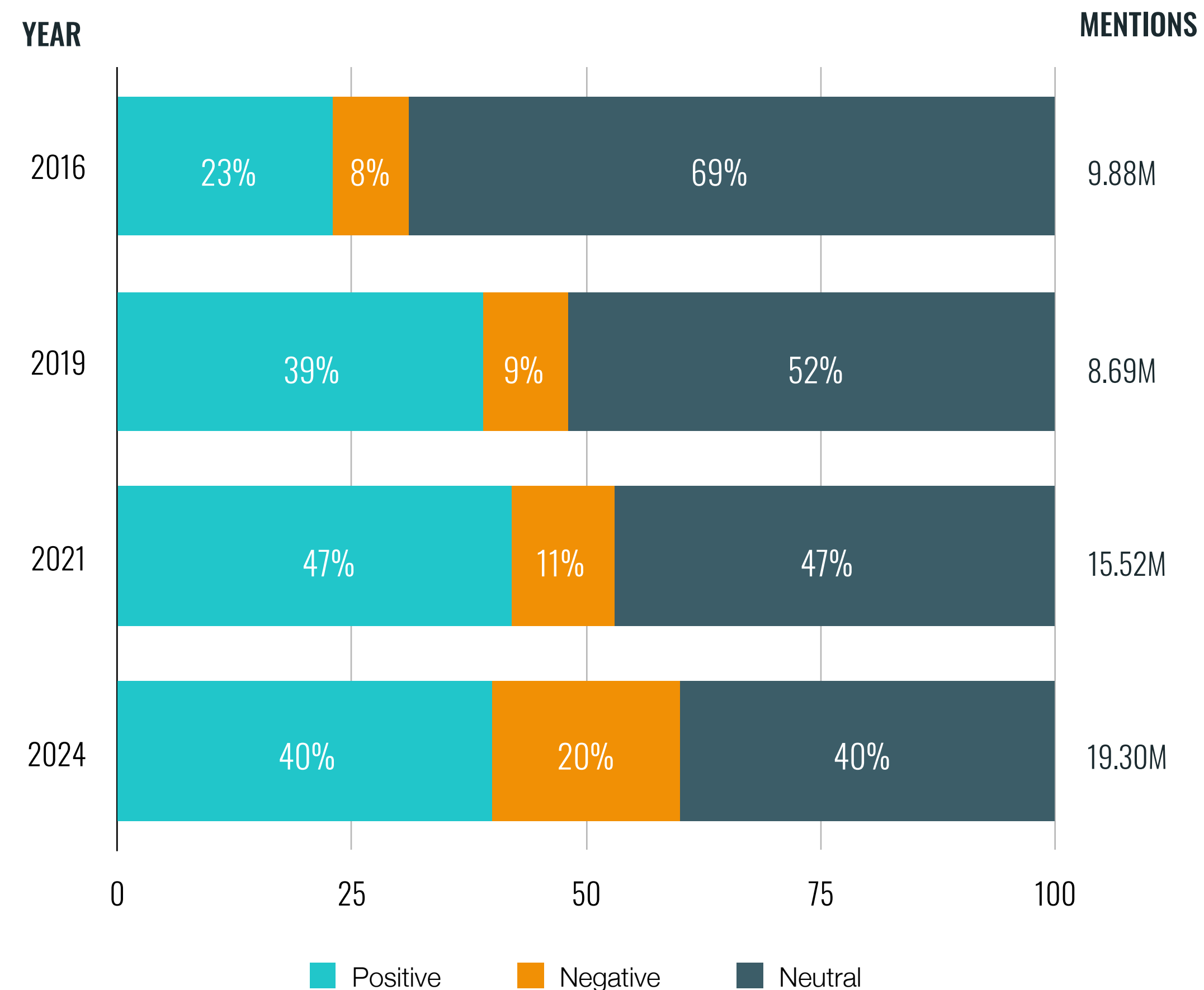
CHANGES IN DEMOGRAPHICS

We know from our earlier research that the F1 fanbase has become younger and more geographically varied, bringing in demographics more comfortable with using social media to express their opinions.

A MORE TRIBAL AND POLARISED FANDOM

The popularity of *Drive To Survive* and fan culture that surrounds it has resulted in a portion of fans engaging more emotionally with teams and individual drivers. The emotive behaviour of the 'new' fans prompts a negative response from some 'traditional' fans.

2024's TOXIC SPIKE

Negative conversation doubled in 2024 — partly, this is down to comments in the first half of the season complaining that races were "boring" due to Max Verstappen's continued dominance.

YEAR

MENTIONS

YEAR	Positive	Negative	Neutral	MENTIONS
2016	23%	8%	69%	9.88M
2019	39%	9%	52%	8.69M
2021	47%	11%	47%	15.52M
2024	40%	20%	40%	19.30M

0   25   50   75   100

■ Positive   ■ Negative   ■ Neutral

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THE MAJOR CAUSES OF TOXICITY IN F1 CONVERSATION
BASED ON NUMBER OF CONVERSATIONS THAT MENTION TOXIC PHRASES AND KEYWORDS
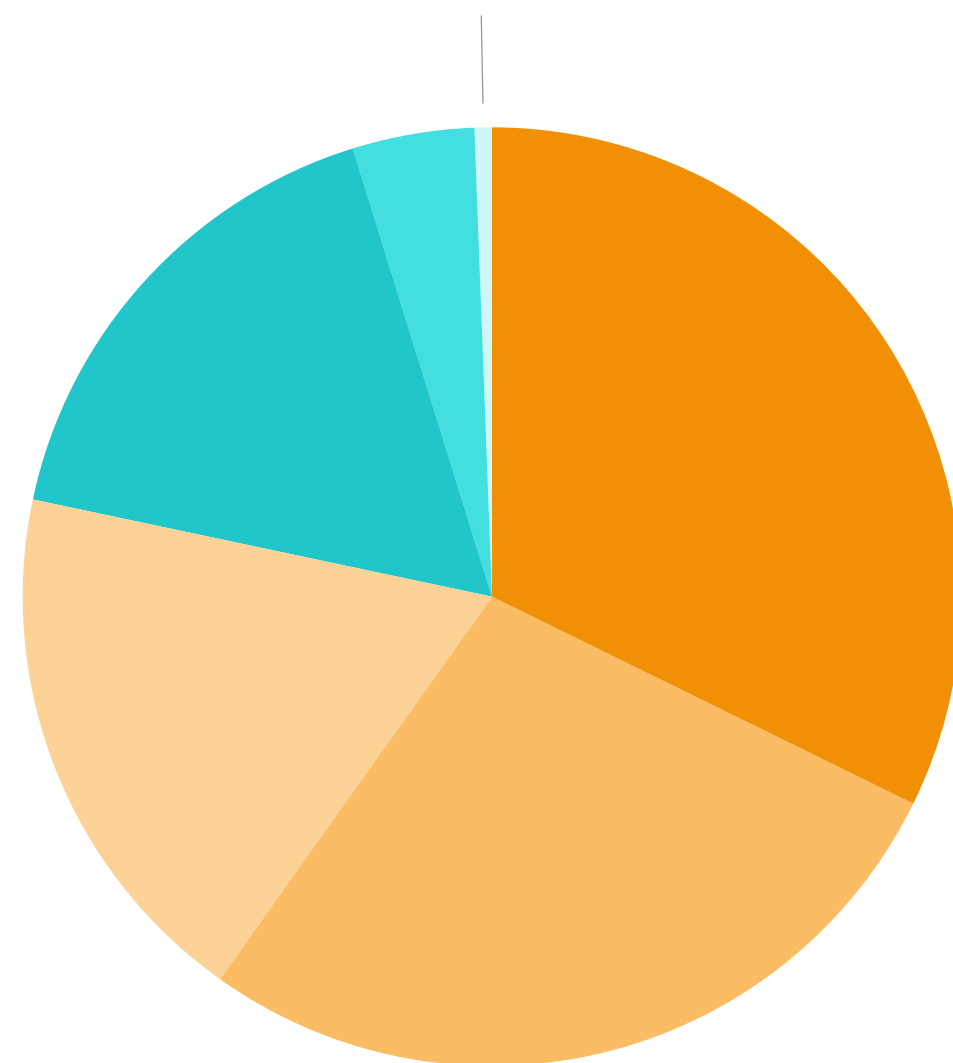
- Team & Driver Rivalries
- Controversial Race Incidents
- Accusations of Bias
- Rule & Technical Regulation Changes
- Nationalistic Sentiment
- Enviromential Concerns

COMMON THEMES

RIVALRY

The rivalry between teams and drivers is a consistent driver of toxic commentary. The persistence of these topics suggests they are deeply ingrained in fan discourse.

CONTROVERSIAL RACE INCIDENTS

Controversial race incidents account for more than a quarter of toxicity. For example, across 2023, the focus shifted frequently in response to current events, such as specific race incidents or management decisions. That same year, we saw a spike in toxic comments during the Qatar Grand Prix related to driver well-being.

RESPONSE TO MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENTS

Significant F1 news stories, such as team name changes or new race locations, can temporarily trigger spikes in toxicity. Additionally, perceived issues with stewarding decisions see short spikes in negativity.

ARGUMENTS AROUND THE DIRECTION OF F1

Changes in race formats and a perception of a more commercial focus underpin much of the criticism we've observed.
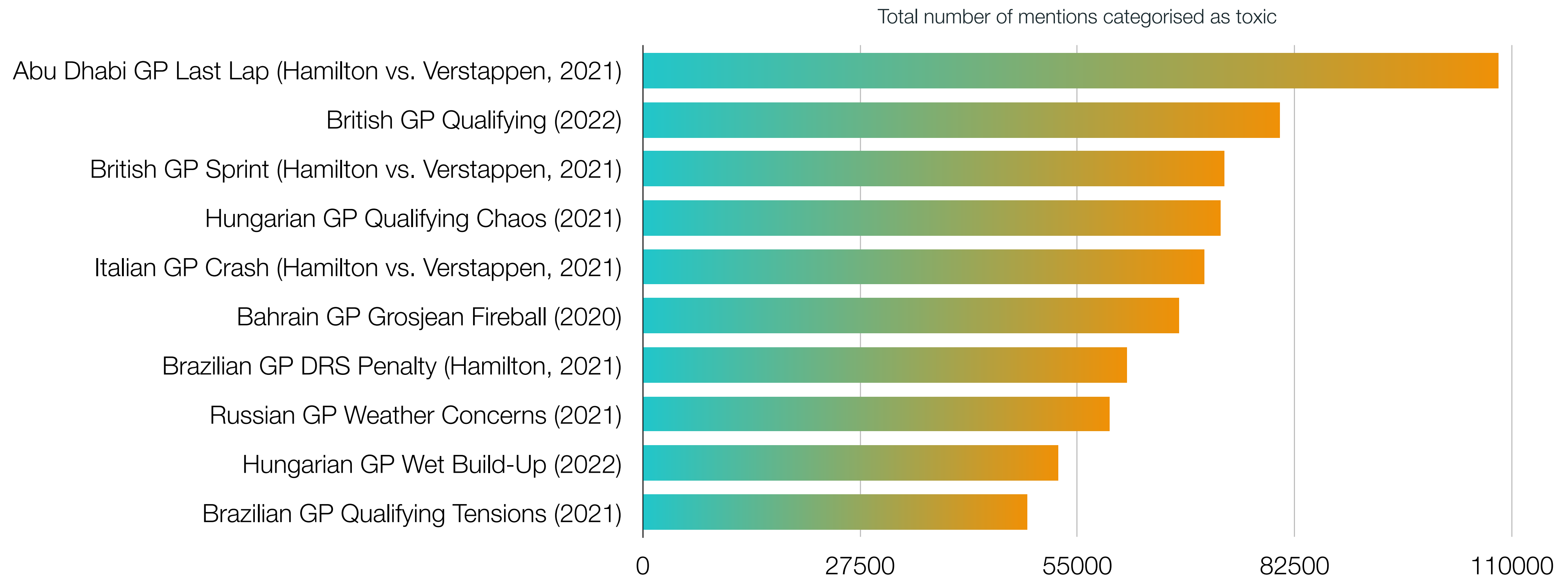
ACCUSATIONS OF BIAS

Accusations of national bias were inflamed particularly by the ending of the 2021 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. This is a constant underlying theme that influences discussions, especially in the context of driver favouritism and race incidents.

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TOP 10 EVENTS THAT DROVE TOXIC CONVERSATIONS IN F1
ABU DHABI 2021 IS THE HIGH WATERMARK FOR EVENTS THAT DRIVE TOXIC MENTIONS

The explosive 2020–21 championship battle continues to cast a long shadow over Formula 1's online discourse, with the controversial Abu Dhabi finale remaining the single largest catalyst for heated debates. While recent seasons have generated their own flashpoints, none have quite matched the intensity of the 2021 title showdown in terms of driving social media engagement and polarising fan reactions. The data suggests this watershed moment fundamentally shifted how fans engage in online debates about racing incidents and championship battles.
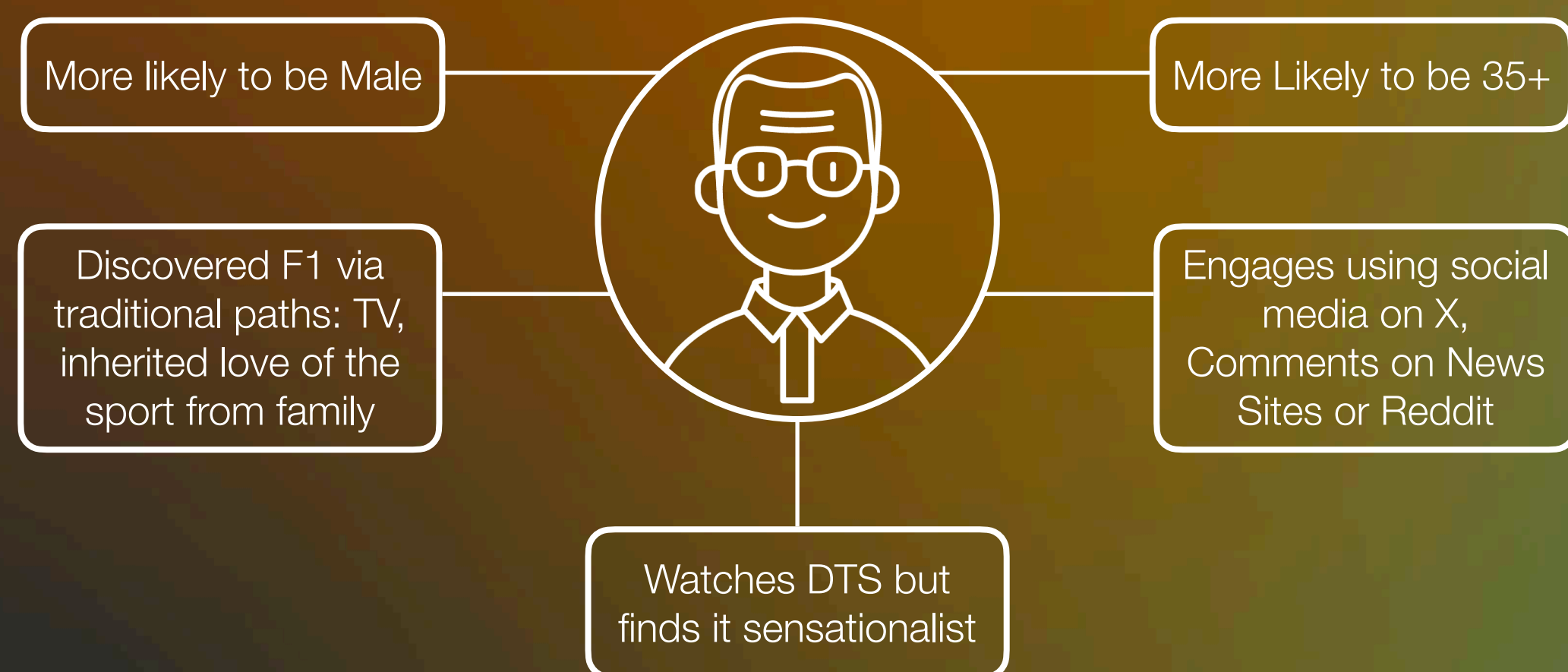
Total number of mentions categorised as toxic

Event	
Abu Dhabi GP Last Lap (Hamilton vs. Verstappen, 2021)	
British GP Qualifying (2022)	
British GP Sprint (Hamilton vs. Verstappen, 2021)	
Hungarian GP Qualifying Chaos (2021)	
Italian GP Crash (Hamilton vs. Verstappen, 2021)	
Bahrain GP Grosjean Fireball (2020)	
Brazilian GP DRS Penalty (Hamilton, 2021)	
Russian GP Weather Concerns (2021)	
Hungarian GP Wet Build-Up (2022)	
Brazilian GP Qualifying Tensions (2021)	

0   27500   55000   82500   110000

Based Number of conversations that mention toxic phrases and keywords 2016-2024

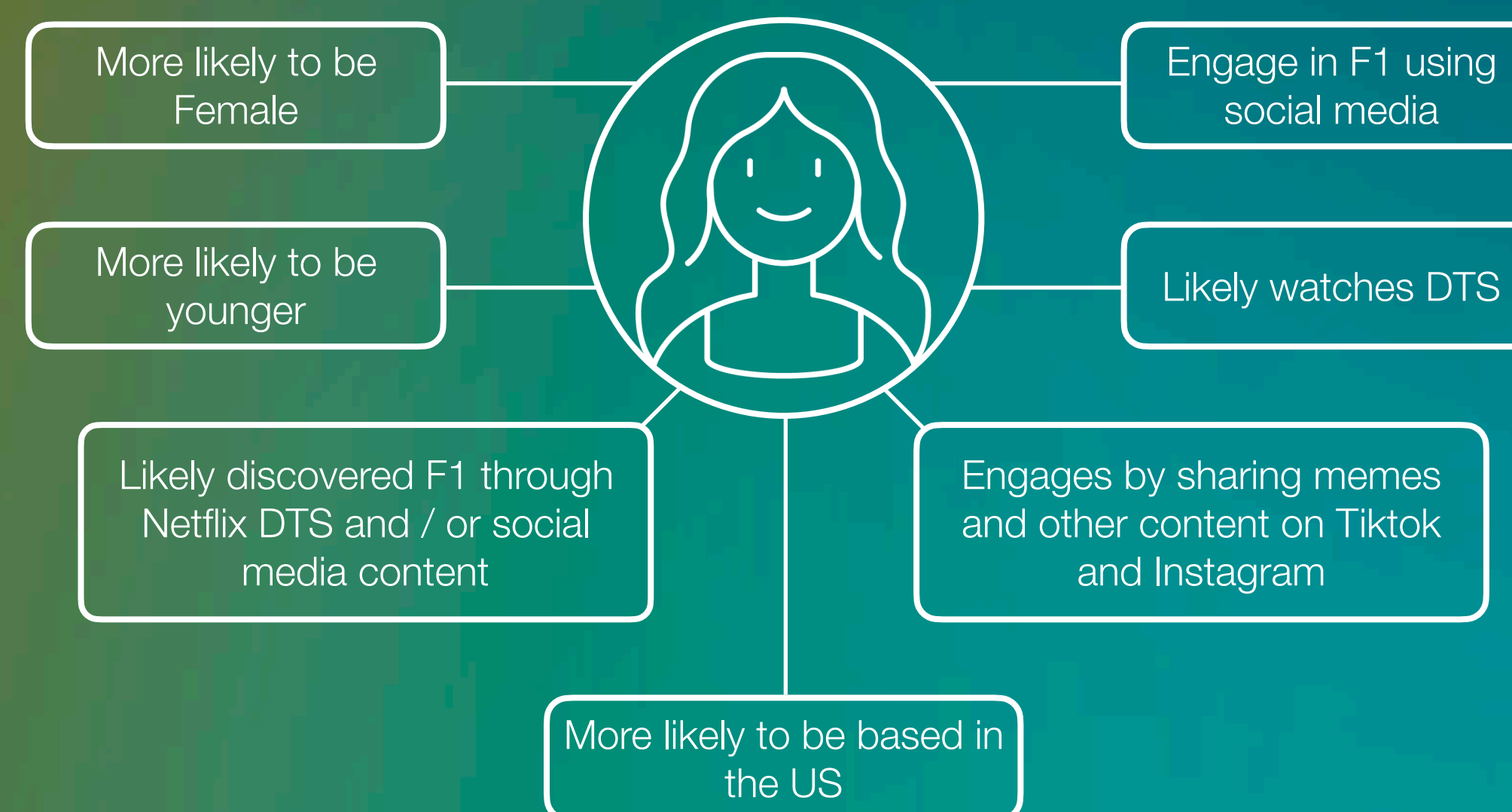BUZZRADAR

POLARISATION DUE TO SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS
INCREASE IN WOMEN AND YOUNGER PEOPLE ENGAGING WITH F1 HAS CHANGED F1 CULTURE

The incoming demographic has created friction as "traditional" fans, resistant to change, see the sport they love becoming unfamiliar or discussed in ways they find alienating. This creates a pushback which contributes to the negative atmosphere online. Many use phrases like "Typical Drive to Survive fan" as a dismissive shorthand for a new generation of F1 viewers, whose enthusiasm takes a different form from older types of engagement.

TRADITIONAL FANS

- More likely to be Male
- More Likely to be 35+
- Discovered F1 via traditional paths: TV, inherited love of the sport from family
- Engages using social media on X, Comments on News Sites or Reddit
- Watches DTS but finds it sensationalist

NEW FANS

- More likely to be Female
- Engage in F1 using social media
- More likely to be younger
- Likely watches DTS
- Likely discovered F1 through Netflix DTS and / or social media content
- Engages by sharing memes and other content on Tiktok and Instagram
- More likely to be based in the US

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SO WHY DOES SOCIAL MEDIA FEEL SO TOXIC?
DESPITE WHAT THE DATA SAYS, WHY CAN F1 ONLINE CONVERSATION FEEL COMBATIVE?

ALGORITHMS PUSH DRAMA TO THE TOP OF THE TIMELINE

Outrage and negativity drive more conversation and encourage people to respond. Since posts with more engagement are shown to users first, toxic comments are often seen before neutral or positive discussions.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE HAS CHANGED

Elon Musk's X has a different vibe to pre-2022 Twitter with different moderation and verification rules and a different priority in the algorithm. This has made some fans feel emboldened to post toxic comments as there's less policing of the platform.

NEGATIVITY STICKS IN OUR MINDS

People are wired to notice and remember negative comments more than positive ones due to negativity bias. Studies show that negative posts attract more attention, reactions, and shares, reinforcing their visibility and making social media feel more hostile.

TOXICITY SPREADS FASTER THAN POSITIVITY

Research shows that negative news and divisive content travel further and faster on platforms like Facebook and X. Since people are more likely to engage with outrage, social media amplifies toxicity, making it feel more dominant than it actually is.

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PREDICTING CHANGES IN F1 DISCOURSE
OUR AI DETECTED SIGNALS OF A POSSIBLE RISE IN TOXIC F1 CONVERSATION IN 2025.

% INCREASE IN TOXIC MENTIONS AROUND THÉO POURCHAIRE DURING THE INDYCAR DETROIT GP
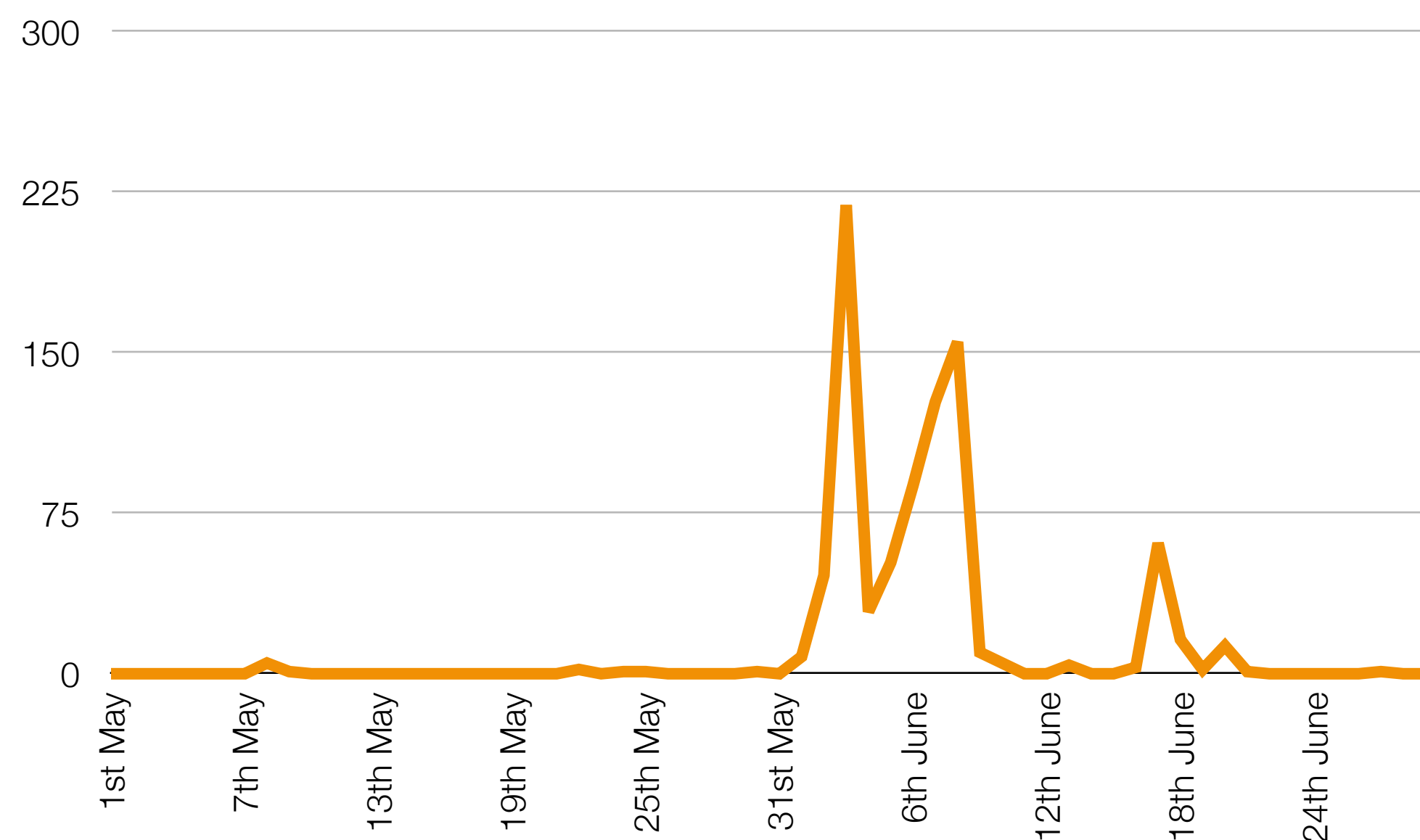
SIGNALS FROM INDYCAR

Our AI detected social media patterns in IndyCar's online discourse that could predict future F1 conversation, particularly around the impact of new demographics in fandom. Agustín Canapino brought a passionate Argentine fanbase to IndyCar in 2023. The way this new fanbase interacted with the existing community shows us how fan dynamics can spiral — toxic conversation spiked throughout the 2023 and 2024 seasons. Both Callum Illott and Théo Pourchaire received threats from Canapino fans following race incidents. When Pourchaire's incident at the Detroit Grand Prix occurred, negative sentiment towards him spiked 224% above normal levels. However there was also a significant volume of conversation from regional fans accusing media outlets of discrimination towards Canapino fans. All of this led to significant increases in toxic conversation.

HOW NEW FANBASES CAN SPIKE TOXIC COMMENTS:
- Social platforms have recently relaxed moderation
- Algorithms amplify controversial content
- Different regional and demographic fandoms can trigger cultural clashes
- F1's global reach magnifies potential impact

WHY THIS MATTERS

These patterns suggest F1 could potentially see a significant shift in its social media landscape in 2025 and 2026, particularly as the sport expands into new regions with passionate sporting cultures. The risk isn't from drivers themselves but from the sheer scale and intensity of their fanbase.

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PREDICTING CHANGES IN F1 DISCOURSE
NEW DRIVERS BRINGING NEW FANBASES COULD CHANGE THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

Image Credit: @FranColapinto

Our analysis predicts these patterns could be amplified significantly if Franco Colapinto enters F1 full-time in either 2025 or 2026. As well as a huge increase in online conversation coming from Argentina, any on-track incidents involving Colapinto could trigger waves of social media attacks similar to those seen in IndyCar which could have a significant impact on levels of online toxicity. Through no fault of his own, Colapinto could introduce a new, more intense element to the F1 fan community.

We've already seen early warning signs. An analysis of the discourse surrounding Colapinto's six races in 2024 reveals spikes in toxic conversations, while discussions about him potentially replacing Jack Doohan in the Alpine race seat have generated waves of coordinated social media attacks from Argentinian fans.

Using existing social media trends and engagement patterns, our predictive modelling suggests F1 could experience a 10–30% increase in toxic fan interactions over the next 36 months. This evolving landscape presents a real challenge for stakeholders across F1, calling for proactive strategies from teams, drivers, and governing bodies.

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DOWNLOAD THEM HERE...

PART 1 : HAVE WE REACHED PEAK F1?

PART 2 : DOES F1 NEED DRIVE TO SURVIVE?

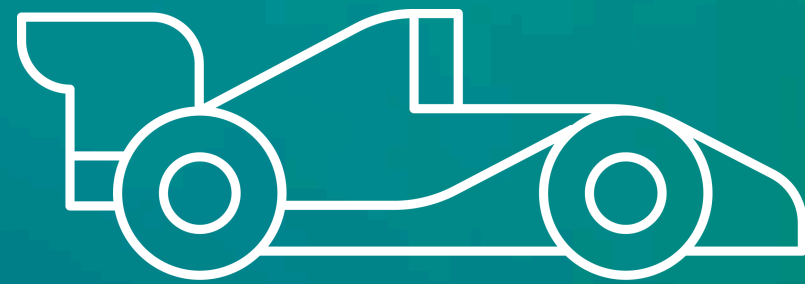Image Credit: @redbullracing

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DATA-DRIVEN AUDIENCE INTELLIGENCE FOR MOTORSPORT
HELPING TEAMS AND SPONSORS CREATE DEEPER FAN CONNECTIONS AND DRIVE ENGAGEMENT

Did you know, as well as working for life sciences and tech clients, we now have a team dedicated to motorsport?

FOR TEAMS

Transform casual viewers into passionate fans through deep audience intelligence and data-driven content strategy:

- Understand your fanbase demographics and behaviours
- Create content that resonates with different fan segments
- Track fan sentiment and engagement in real-time

FOR SPONSORS

Transform sponsorship investments into lasting brand value through deep audience intelligence and strategic partnership insight:

- Measure and optimise sponsorship performance
- Identify perfect partnership opportunities
- Track competitor sponsorship effectiveness

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FEBRUARY 2025