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How are women working in motorsport framed in online news coverage and media compared with men?

University of Twente

Chiara Manfré

Supervisor: Suzanne Janssen

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Abstract

Aim

This study explores how women working in motorsport are framed in online media and news coverage compared to their male counterparts. While female visibility in motorsport has increased, questions remain about whether media portrayals reflect true inclusion or reinforce gendered stereotypes.

Methods

A qualitative content analysis was conducted on 80 media items, including 50 news articles and 30 social media posts from LinkedIn and Instagram. Using a deductively developed codebook based on social role theory and role congruity theory, the analysis focused on identifying patterns in framing, narrative structures, and language use across gender lines.

Results

The findings reveal consistent gendered differences in media representation. Women were frequently positioned as exceptions rather than normalized professionals. In contrast, men were overwhelmingly associated with performance-based language and normalized authority, often without reference to their gender. Also, women were subject to questioning of legitimacy and double standards, which were absent from male-focused content. Ultimately, social media platforms showed more progressive and competence-based portrayals compared to traditional news outlets.

Conclusion

Despite growing female participation and diversity efforts in motorsport, media coverage continues to frame women through symbolic or gendered lenses. This reinforces structural inequalities and legitimacy in the sport. To achieve true inclusion, both media practitioners

and motorsport organizations must shift toward competence-driven narratives and institutional change that transform gendered expectations.

Key Words

gender equality, women in motorsport, media representation, content analysis, diversity in motorsport

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Introduction

Motorsport, a field driven by speed, innovation, and competition, has long been a prominent feature of the global sporting landscape. Historically, it has been dominated by male participants, including drivers, engineers, and team managers (Colegrove, 2022). Like many other traditionally male-dominated industries, motorsport has its roots in gendered stereotypes and social structures that have long marginalized women's participation (Colegrove, 2022). From the earliest days, women have faced both societal and institutional barriers in male-dominated fields which restricted their access to racing teams, technical roles, and media representation (Hanek & Garcia, 2022). As a result, their contributions were often overlooked or undervalued.

Over time, this exclusion has reinforced the belief that motorsport is primarily a male space, making it difficult for women not only to enter the field but also to succeed within it. These barriers are reflected in media coverage, where narratives and representations influence public perception, access to opportunities, and the perceived legitimacy of women in the sport (Finn, 2021).

In recent years, motorsport has shown a growing commitment to gender equality. The increasing visibility of women is supported by initiatives such as the W Series, a racing championship exclusively for female drivers, led by former racing driver Susie Wolff (Howe, 2022). While such initiatives aim to promote inclusion, they also raise important questions. Do separate female-only series challenge gender inequality, or do they unintentionally reinforce gender divisions in the sport? Alternatively, do they offer crucial opportunities for women to develop and showcase their skills, ultimately paving the way for progression into Formula 1 and other elite motorsport categories?

Despite these efforts, gender imbalance persists across motorsport. A 2024 report by Forbes states that women still account for less than 10% of participants globally, including

drivers, engineers, mechanics, and strategists (Women Can Challenge Men In Formula 1, Says More Than Equal, n.d.). Although gender equality has advanced in many areas of society, motorsport continues to reflect persistent inequality. Historical milestones, such as Maria Teresa de Filippis becoming the first female Formula 1 driver in the 1950s, remain the exception. Fewer than ten women have competed in Formula 1 since its beginning, a statistic that points to exclusion, rather than a lack of interest or ability (Howe, 2022). This underrepresentation reveals the need to examine not only the opportunities available to women but also how their presence is constructed in public discourse. The way women are portrayed in motorsport media has critical implications for how their competence, legitimacy, and sense of belonging are perceived (Fink, 2015). Research shows that female drivers are often framed through stereotypical narratives, focusing on their appearance, personal lives, or novelty, rather than their professional performance (Cooky, 2018).

This thesis investigates how media representations of women in motorsport differ from those of men, with a particular focus on online news and social media coverage. Are women increasingly framed as skilled professionals, or do media narratives still rely on gendered stereotypes? By answering this question, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how gender, media, and power intersect in the motorsport industry. Therefore, the research is relevant for scholars in gender studies, media and communication, and sports sociology. It also holds practical value for journalists, motorsport organizations, and advocates of diversity and inclusion by highlighting how women's roles in motorsport are framed, and how those framings shape broader perceptions and opportunities.

Theoretical Framework

The representation and portrayal of women in motorsport cannot be fully understood without examining broader social and institutional structures, and cultural perspectives, that shape gender roles in male-dominated industries. This study draws on multiple theoretical perspectives to explore how media and organizational discourse shape and reinforce gendered expectations in motorsport. Grounded in theories from gender studies, organizational sociology, and media communication, this framework explores how women's participation is framed, legitimized, or challenged in comparison with men. By analysing how stereotypes, gender role assumptions, and symbolic inclusion are presented in both journalistic and social media content, this framework enables an understanding of how gender operates across individual, institutional, and representational levels in motorsport.

Gender Stereotypes and Role Expectations

Gendered expectations continue to shape how individuals are perceived and portrayed in traditionally masculine environments like motorsport (Vasconcelos, 2018). These male-dominated fields are often built around norms that align with masculinity, such as aggression, risk-taking, authority, and dominance (Koenig et al., 2011). Moreover, such perceptions not only influence participation but also affect how success is framed (Finn, 2021). Women who enter male-dominated fields often face scrutiny not because of a lack of ability, but because their presence challenges long-standing gender norms (Kirk, 1982).

Social Role Theory (Harrison & Lynch, 2005) offers a foundational framework for understanding how gendered expectations become embedded in both societal structures and individual perceptions. According to this theory, societies assign roles and behavioural expectations to men and women based on traditional divisions of labour. These roles influence not only how individuals behave but also how they are evaluated by others. In male-dominated environments like motorsport, where traits such as competitiveness, assertiveness,

and technical proficiency are traditionally aligned with masculinity, women who demonstrate these characteristics often clash with prevailing gender norms (Kirk, 1982). This incongruity does not merely shape interpersonal dynamics, it plays a central role in how women are portrayed in media narratives. Media representations are not neutral, they often reflect and reinforce dominant social ideologies. In this sense, social role theory is important for this theory and relates to it because it enables a deeper analysis of the structural roots behind framing practices. It explains why women in male-dominated fields, such as motorsport, may be portrayed as outsiders or symbolic figures rather than being framed as competent and skilled professionals. By applying this theory, the research goes beyond superficial analysis and instead examines how entrenched social expectations inform journalistic and social media portrayals.

Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) extends this line of thinking by focusing specifically on the prejudice that arises when there is a mismatch between gendered expectations and the social roles individuals occupy. This is particularly important in motorsport, where women are still relatively rare in roles that demand high visibility, authority, or technical expertise. According to this theory, when women enter roles that are stereotypically male, such as driver, engineer, or team leader, they may face two kinds of prejudice: descriptive (assumptions that women are less competent) and prescriptive (criticism when women behave in ways that contradict normative femininity) (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This theory is important to the thesis as it provides a strong explanation for the recurring framing patterns, such as women being portrayed as exceptions, symbolic figures, or surprises regarding their competence. These portrayals are not random, they root deeply in underlying beliefs between gender and role expectations that the media both mirrors and influences.

Taken together, these theories help to explain why women in male-dominated fields, such as motorsport, are often viewed through a lens of exceptionality or marginalisation. Therefore, the choice to include social role theory and role congruity theory in this framework is strongly justified by the nature of the research question. This thesis investigates not just how women are represented, but why those representations take the forms they do. Both theories focus on the mechanisms through which societal norms are internalised and reproduced, making them highly suitable for analysing gendered framing in media. They allow for a critical understanding of how deeply embedded ideas about gender influence the visibility, legitimacy, and portrayal of women in a high-performance, male-dominated field like motorsport. Furthermore, these theories offer explanations which link individual media texts to broader social ideologies, helping to understand framing patterns within a larger system of gendered power relations.

Women in Male-Dominated Fields

Male-dominated fields like as engineering, finance, and technology often reward traits traditionally linked to masculinity, while challenging and questioning women more intensely (Kirk, 1982). One relevant concept here is tokenism, which describes how women in such fields may be visible but hold limited influence (Holgersson & Romani, 2020). The pressure to constantly prove themselves can create both psychological and professional barriers, reducing women to symbols of novelty rather than acknowledging their expertise (Kocanci et al., 2025).

Furthermore, women in these industries frequently lack access to mentorship, informal networks, and decision-making spaces (Vasconcelos, 2018). Their experiences are often shaped by "belonging uncertainty", a term coined by Höhne and Zander (2019) to describe the feeling of not being fully accepted or valued due to minority status. Even when organisations claim to be gender-neutral, they may still reinforce masculine norms and expectations (Kelan,

2009). This contradiction leads to "gender fatigue," where persistent inequality is dismissed due to a perceived sense of fairness or neutrality (Kelan, 2009).

Diversity and Inclusion in Motorsport

Although diversity has gained more attention in recent years, motorsport remains a rather exclusionary sporting environment. The FIA has acknowledged existing structural barriers and has expressed the need for increased inclusivity. Although, the pace of progress remains slow (Organisation – FIA Sustainability and D&I Report 2023, n.d.).

Barriers to inclusion in motorsport are not limited to individual talent. Access to sponsorships, training, and professional networks remains unequal, making success dependent on navigating systemic inequalities related to gender, race, and class (Acker, 1990). While there are initiatives such as "Dare to be Different" and "Girls on Track" which aim to improve female representation, it can be argued that they often highlight individual women without addressing or actively changing deeper structural issues. As a result, these efforts and initiatives risk portraying women as symbolic rather than transformative (Hanek & Garcia, 2022).

Women are often portrayed as exceptions or symbolic representatives rather than as fully integrated figures within the sport. This type of framing reinforces symbolic roles over professional recognition (Kocanci et al., 2025). Achieving true inclusion requires structural and cultural changes and developments. That includes revisiting evaluation criteria, addressing microaggressions, modifying language, and changing the norms that shape representation and recognition in the sport (Organisation – FIA Sustainability and D&I Report 2023, n.d.).

Power and Organisational Structures in Motorsport

Organizational power in motorsport extends beyond decision-making authority, because it shapes who belongs, whose narratives are validated, and whose careers are supported. Power is the ability to define and influence reality (Wallimann et al., 1977). In motorsport, that includes influencing what success looks like and who is considered good enough and worthy of a spot in one of the most prestigious sport environments of the world.

Access to opportunity is controlled by gatekeeping mechanisms such as sponsorships, public relations platforms, and editorial choices. Additionally, institutions like the FIA, race teams, sponsors, and media outlets also hold symbolic and material power. Their decisions shape inclusion through rules, funding, visibility, and recognition (Bäckman & Mella, n.d.). Yet, these institutions are often led by homogeneous groups, which are predominantly white, male, conservative, economically privileged, and established figures in the sport which create a feedback loop of exclusion (Acker, 1990). These institutions are often presented as neutral but are influenced by implicit bias (Hanek & Garcia, 2022). Women's underrepresentation in these predominantly male spaces is not simply a matter of numbers, but of reserved narratives and decreased legitimacy.

Media Framing and Gendered Narratives

Media does not merely report facts, it frames them. Often in ways that shape public understanding and reinforce or challenge societal norms. Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) posits that by selecting and emphasising certain elements of a story, while ignoring or not mentioning some parts, the media can influence how audiences interpret issues and people (Fink, 2015). In the context of gender, and particularly in male-dominated arenas like motorsport, these frames become instrumental in reinforcing or contesting dominant ideologies about women's place, competence, and legitimacy.

In motorsport media coverage, women are often subject to identity-oriented framing, where their gender becomes a central element of the narrative. Women often get framed as exceptions rather than the norm (Eagleman, 2015) . This type of framing frequently draws attention to gender before competence or skills, implying that their presence is noteworthy simply because they are women, not because of their professional achievements. While on one hand such framing may appear empowering on the surface, it can simultaneously reinforce the idea that women are outsiders in the sport on the other hand.

Another common frame is symbolic diversity framing, which portrays women as tokens of progress or symbols of change rather than as equal contributors. They are often shown as role models or inspiring figures for younger generations, which often tends to emphasise their representational role rather than their sporting or technical capabilities (Kocanci et al., 2025). This again supports the concept of symbolic inclusion, where individuals are visible but not fully legitimised in their roles (Kocanci et al., 2025). These portrayals reflect broader patterns of gendered exceptionalism, where women's success is framed as remarkable or surprising, and therefore differ from the normalised male standard.

Performance-based framing differs notably between genders. While men are typically described using competence-oriented language, women's achievements are often focused on the aspect of surprise or novelty (Cooky et al., 2015). These choices contribute to gendered double standards, where the identical behaviours or results are evaluated through different lenses depending on the gender.

Additionally, emotional and relational framing is also a common frame media makes use of. Media coverage may highlight aspects of personality, appearance, or private life, such as balancing family responsibilities or displaying emotional resilience (Eagleman, 2015) . While these aspects show a relatable side of female athletes, they also risk reinforcing

traditional gender roles that position women as caregivers or emotional anchors rather than competitive professionals.

From a theoretical perspective, these framing patterns resonate strongly with Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), which argues that bias arises when individuals depart from normalised gender roles. Women in motorsport, by entering a field coded as masculine, challenge traditional expectations and are therefore by nature often subject to framing that justifies their presence. At the same time, Social Role Theory (Harrison & Lynch, 2005) helps to explain how these media narratives reflect broader social norms. The ways women are portrayed mirror the limited and often contradictory roles society offers them in high-performance, male-dominated spaces.

The platform also matters. While traditional news coverage is often associated with established journalistic styles that may replicate existent biases, social media platforms, particularly those run by advocacy groups or by the athletes themselves, offer more empowering frames. Here, women are more frequently depicted in control, framed through professional achievements rather than symbolic representation, and portrayed with visual and textual content that centres expertise, leadership, and determination. These alternative framings challenge existing narratives and demonstrate the potential of digital media to reconfigure how women in motorsport are seen and perceived by the public.

Understanding these framing mechanisms is an important part for this thesis, as frames do not only reflect but also shape the realities of gender in motorsport. The way the media constructs narratives about women impacts public perception, legitimacy, and even opportunities for sponsorship and advancement. Therefore, media framing is not a neutral act of communication, but a reproduction of power that can either uphold or disrupt existing gender hierarchies in elite sports such as Formula 1.

Methods

Research design

This study employs a qualitative content analysis to explore how gender and diversity are constructed and represented in motorsport media. It examines the differences between the framing of men and women and investigates the meanings, assumptions, and power relations embedded in these representations. Rooted in interpretivist epistemology, this research aims to uncover the social and discursive mechanisms that shape public understanding of women's roles in motorsport.

By interpreting how discourses about women in motorsport are constructed, legitimized, and challenged through language and narrative, the study compares these portrayals with those of men in the same field. This approach offers insight into how inclusion is represented and enacted across various communicative spaces and how narrative and framing vary depending on the gender of the subject.

Corpus and Data Collection

The corpus analysed in this study consists of 80 media items, including 50 news articles and 30 social media posts that have been analysed between April and June 2025. The items were selected to their relevance to gender representation in motorsport and research question. Furthermore, the mix of online news article and social media posts enables a comprehensive insight and understanding of how women are portrayed compared to men and furthermore, it could also show differences in framing and discussed topics. The idea is to understand the general framing of women compared to men in motorsport and not just the framing of articles or content who specifically support women.

Social media content was collected from Instagram and LinkedIn due to their popularity in the motorsport community. Instagram, as a visual and engagement-driven

platform, is widely used by motorsport professionals and fans, offering access to discourse in comment sections and posts. LinkedIn was included for its focus on employed professionals in the industry, offering insight into gendered career narratives and industry perspectives.

Data has been collected using a combination of purposive and theoretical sampling. articles and media items were selected based on their relevance to the research question and aspects outlined in the theoretical framework. For media content and news articles, a time frame of the last five years (2020–2025) was chosen to capture recent developments, including the increasing visibility of women in motorsport and the rise of gender-focused initiatives.

A preliminary keyword search was conducted using the search function of the depicted broadcast channels BBC Sport, ESPN, SkyF1, Motorsport.com and Autosport for news articles. To find content on Instagram I used the accounts of F1, F1 academy, Women in Motorsport, and the accounts F1, F1 academy, and females in motorsport on LinkedIn. While looking for articles and content I used the terms "women in motorsport", "men in motorsport", "women in F1", "men in F1", "FIA diversity", "gender equality in racing", and "gender equality motorsport". Content was included if it contained substantial interaction, was from the past five years, from accounts with a minimum of 80k followers, and written in English. The same criteria have been applied to news article only with the addition of a minimal length of 300 words and a maximum of 2000 words per article.

Table 1

Articles per outlet

Outlet	Articles
BBC	10
ESPN	10

SkyF1	10
Motorsport.com	10
Autosport	10

Table 1.2

Media per platform

Platform	Articles
LinkedIn	15
Instagram	15

Coding Scheme Development

A codebook has been developed based on the theoretical framework, particularly drawing from Role Congruity Theory. Codes have been created to capture thematic elements such as "Traits," "Empowerment," and "diversity discourse". Furthermore, there will be codes to recognize representational patterns like "tokenism," "exceptionalism," "masculinized language," and "gendered framing". Ultimately, there will be codes focused on gender comparison "gendered double standards," "Gender neutrality," "Hypermasculine framing," and "normalization of authority".

Table 2

Coding scheme

Code	Description	Example

Traits	Mentioning or framing of people as confident, authoritative, etc.	"Calm under pressure…"
Empowerment / Community	Framing that highlights inspiration, motivation, or empowerment of others	"Inspires others",
Diversity Discourse	Reference to diversity, equity, or inclusion in motorsport	"committed to inclusion"
Tokenism	Surface-level representation without meaningful inclusion or power	"Represents change"
Exceptionalism	Framing as an exception or the "first" in the field	"First person to…"
Masculinized language	Use of language aligning people's success with male traits or comparison	"Keeps up with the guys"
Gendered framing	Emphasis on appearance, family, emotion, or gender contrast	"balancing family life"

Undermining	Implicit or explicit questioning of competence or legitimacy	"Surprisingly competent"
Gender double standards	The criteria or tone used differs based on gender	Men praised for traits women are criticized for
Gender neutrality	No mention of gender; role-focused framing	Useful when men's roles are normalized
Hypermasculine framing	Framing through strength, aggression, dominance	"Dominated the track"
Normalization of authority	Position is portrayed as natural or default	"Unusual for a woman to lead…"

Results

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative content analysis of 80 media items, consisting of 50 online news articles and 30 social media posts from Instagram and LinkedIn. The analysis aimed to examine how women and men working in motorsport are framed in media texts, with attention to narrative themes, language choices, and identity-based framing strategies.

Using a deductively developed coding scheme grounded in Framing Theory and Role Congruity Theory, the items were analysed to identify patterns of representation. The section is organized into two subsections: first, results from traditional media (articles) and secondly, results from social media (posts), followed by a comparison and general findings.

Representation in News Articles

News articles, particularly from mainstream outlets like the BBC, SkyF1, and ESPN, frequently framed women using themes of empowerment, diversity discourse, and exceptionalism. For instance, an article from BBC included: "This is not tokenism… we need to increase the pipeline" (Article A3), which emphasizes inclusion and mentorship narratives. Such framing aligns with diversity discourse codes and positions women as symbols of institutional change.

Simultaneously, female representation was also marked by codes of exceptionalism and tokenism. A BBC article framed a female participant as "the first to lead this type of track day" (Article A1), underscoring the narrative of being 'firsts' rather than normalizing their presence. Some other articles revealed undermining tones, such as one headline stating: "My boyfriend said I am no engineer material" (Article A5), reflecting implicit doubt not just from the media, but from people women are in a close relation with. In contrast, male-focused articles were coded for traits such as competence, authority, and physical dominance. Masculinized and hypermasculine language was common, for example: "dominated the track with machine-like precision" (Article A1). Articles about men rarely referenced gender and instead emphasized performance and assumed legitimacy, in line with the 'Normalization of Authority' code.

Representation in Social Media Posts

Social media content, particularly from accounts such as F1 Academy, Females in Motorsport, and Women in Motorsport on Instagram and LinkedIn, displayed a more progressive framing of women. Posts often included motivational and community-oriented messages. For example, one Instagram post read: "Mentoring the next generation of fearless drivers" (Post IG11), while another emphasized: "She leads with calmness and confidence under pressure" (Post IG2). These media posts reflect both empowerment and leadership codes (Vasconcelos, 2018).

Notably, social media posts about women rarely included undermining, tokenism, or gendered double standard codes. The framing was intentional, affirmative, and inspirational.

Meanwhile, male-focused posts emphasized performance and success, such as: "He just keeps winning with an unstoppable focus" (Post IG18), again reflecting traits and masculine norms.

Comparison Between Platforms

Among the 50 analysed articles, traditional news media outlets BBC Sport, SkyF1, ESPN, Motorsport.com, and Autosport showed varying degrees of gendered framing compared to new media. Articles about women from BBC, for instance, included both "empowerment" and "diversity discourse" codes, but also contained subtle instances of "undermining" and "tokenism". The overall tone was supportive yet often focused on narratives that marked women as exceptions. Articles about men were typically coded for "traits", "hypermasculine framing", and "normalization of authority". Masculinized language was common, and the men's competence was rarely questioned or contextualized in terms of gender.

The 30 social media posts analysed displayed a more progressive and intentional framing of women in motorsport. Posts from F1 Academy, Females in Motorsport, and Women in Motorsport on Instagram and LinkedIn consistently used codes such as "empowerment" and "diversity discourse". Importantly, no instances of "undermining", "tokenism", or "gendered double standards" were found in these posts. Male-focused posts on social media continued to reinforce traditional sports values, emphasizing personal achievement and technical skill, without reference to broader identity-based narratives. While more neutral than news articles in tone, they still lacked diversity-oriented framing.

The 30 social media posts displayed a more progressive and intentional framing of women in motorsport. Posts from F1 Academy, Females in Motorsport, and Women in Motorsport on Instagram and LinkedIn consistently used codes of "empowerment" or "diversity discourse". However, as these accounts are focusing on supporting women in the field it is not surprising. Importantly, no instances of Undermining or Tokenism were found in these posts.
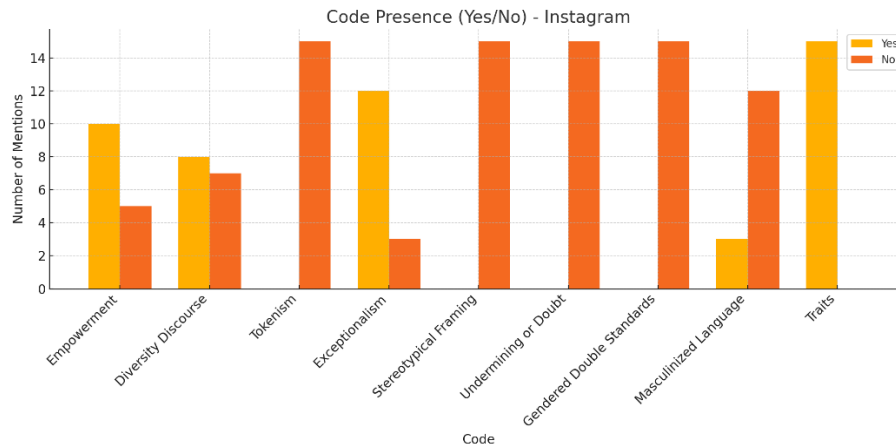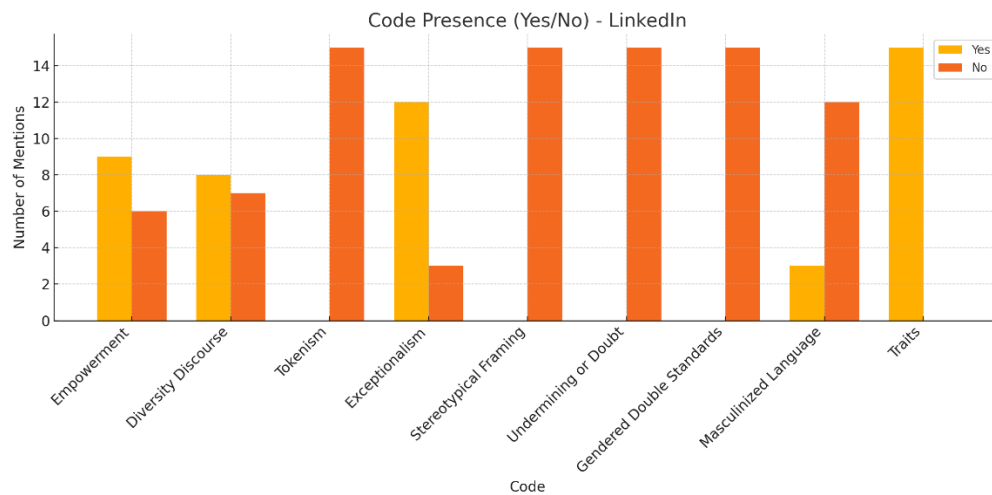
Graph 1.1

Codes in the articles

Code Presence (Yes/No) - Articles
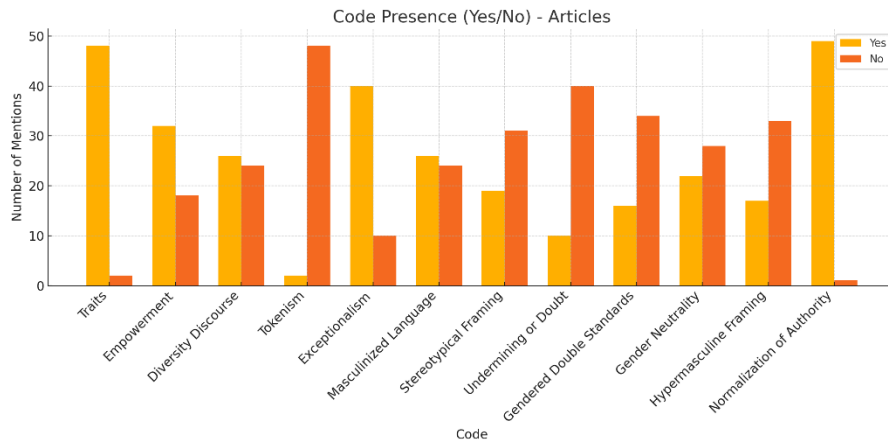
Graph 1.2

Codes in Instagram posts

Code Presence (Yes/No) - Instagram

Graph 1.3

Codes in LinkedIn posts

Code Presence (Yes/No) - LinkedIn

Gender Representation

The coding of all 80 media items revealed consistent and notable differences in how women and men in motorsport are framed. Media content focused on women was more likely to include themes of empowerment, diversity discourse, and exceptionalism. These findings point to a reappearing narrative that positions women as pioneers or symbols of broader societal progress. In contrast, male-focused content typically emphasized normalized competence, athletic traits, and performance-oriented language, without reference to framing based on the identity.

Across the entire corpus, the code "empowerment" appeared in 25 of the 27 female-focused articles and media and in only 7 of the 27 male-focused articles and media. Similarly, "diversity discourse" was present in 25 female-focused pieces and only one male-focused item. These figures underscore the strong association between women in motorsport and broader social goals of inclusion and equality. Meanwhile, men were predominantly portrayed through content coded for "traits" (talent, focus, and resilience) and "normalization of authority", reflecting assumed legitimacy and unremarkable access to positions of power.

Exceptionalism and Tokenism in representation

The code "exceptionalism" was used to identify portrayals of individuals as the first, only, or uniquely successful and was recorded in 21 articles and posts about women and in 19 about men. However, the framing was different. For women, exceptionalism was often linked to their gender, which was not the case for men in the field.

Instances of "tokenism" were exclusively found in female-focused content "Just was good for pictures to have a female next to two F1 drivers" (Article A4). While not dominant, these cases suggested surface-level inclusion of women without acknowledgment of their performance or strategic capability. Articles and posts celebrated women for their symbolic presence and often with little reference to their actual contributions or performance.

Gendered Framing and Language Use

The content and news article analysis revealed several gendered narrative structures. The code "stereotypical/gendered Framing" appeared when highlighting emotional resilience, family roles, or personal style. These narratives reinforce traditional gender roles and frame female success as exceptional or emotionally charged. In contrast, "masculinized language" and "hypermasculine framing" were more prominent in male-focused articles and posts which emphasized traits traditionally associated with masculinity such as a mentioning of "killer instinct" (Article A18) and reinforcing masculine sports norms.

Undermining and Double Standards

Codes for "Undermining or Doubt" and "Gendered Double Standards" were found exclusively in content about women. While infrequent, their presence highlights subtle forms of marginalization. Examples included doubting abilities "My boyfriend said I am no engineer material" (Article A5), such undermining or doubt was not mentioned in male-focused pieces. Furthermore, these codes were notably absent in all male-focused articles and posts, pointing to an asymmetrical framing landscape in which male authority is normalized "Toto Wolff made Mercedes one of sport's greatest teams" (Article A8), while female legitimacy must be earned or defended through narrative framing.

Summary of findings

The analysis revealed a multifaceted portrayal of gender in motorsport media. Women are often framed within narratives of empowerment, diversity, and exceptionalism. On the other hand, men are framed through normalized, performance-focused language that assumes their authority and legitimacy in the field. Together, these findings address the research question by demonstrating that gendered framing in motorsport media exists across platforms, even though in varying forms.

Discussion

Main Findings

This study examined how women working in motorsport are framed in online media and news coverage compared to men. The result section already revealed persistent and systemic differences in the way gender is framed in articles and social media content. Although women have gained visibility in motorsport, they are frequently portrayed through symbolic frames and often described as pioneers, diversity figures, or inspiring exceptions. Such portrayals emphasize their gender over their competence and reinforce their perceived novelty within motorsport.

In contrast, men are overwhelmingly shown and talked about with a focus set on their actual performance, emphasizing authority, skill, and competitiveness, without reference to their gender. This supports that there is indeed a presence of normalization of authority and also hypermasculine framing, where the male presence in the sport is not questioned but rather portrayed as natural. Men in motorsport are almost never described or mentioned in the context of diversity or identity, highlighting once again the structural norm in which the success of men in the field is expected, whereas the success and the general female presence is treated as exceptional.

Moreover, the presence of codes which focus on undermining, doubt and gendered double standards, appeared exclusively in female-focused content and articles. That further shows the differences of representation between men and women. Achievements of women in motorsport are often accompanied by surprise, or commentary on personal characteristics unrelated to their professional performance and actual abilities. This framing reinforces the ideas of Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and Social Role Theory (Harrison & Lynch, 2005) which both emphasize that tension arises when women take on and operate in roles traditionally associated with masculine traits.

Additionally, media platform showed differences. More traditional outlets like BBC Sport, SkyF1, and ESPN tended to show subtle forms of symbolic inclusion and gendered framing, whereas social media platforms, especially Instagram and LinkedIn posts from less conservative and more progressive accounts like F1 Academy and Women in Motorsport, showed and supported more deliberate and competence-based portrayals. These digital platforms appear to provide a less conservative narrative space, free from many of the limiting frames found in traditional media coverage. However, their reach remains limited to niche or in-group audiences, which ultimately limits their broader cultural impact.

Practical Implications

The findings carry important implications for both media production and organizational strategy within motorsport. For journalists, there is a pressing need to critically evaluate the language and frames used when reporting on women. Even well-intentioned coverage can contribute to symbolic inclusion, where women are highlighted for their gender more than their skill. A shift toward competence-based narratives that treat women as professionals first is necessary for building legitimacy and parity in public perception.

For motorsport institutions and governing bodies such as the FIA, the results suggest that current diversity strategies, while beneficial in terms of visibility, actually risk reinforcing gendered double standards if they fail to address, and improve structural issues. Initiatives like "Girls on Track" or the "F1 Academy" must also be taken into account with changes in how women are discussed, evaluated, and represented in general, not only in news coverage and social media content. This includes revisiting sponsorship allocation, mentorship access, and public communication strategies to ensure that women are not just seen but are also heard and seen as equal professionals rather than symbolic figures.

Ultimately, the findings highlight the immense potential of social media platforms. Motorsport teams and sponsors can use these platforms not simply for their outreach but rather as a tool to shape new narratives and ideally one where inclusion is built around performance and value, rather than symbolic status or exceptionality. Because at the end, the sport is incredibly performance oriented and so should be the portrayal of people working in the field.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the time frame and scope of the study were constrained due to the limitations which happen naturally with a bachelor thesis like such. This affected the size of the corpus and limited opportunities for interviews or audience analysis. Second, the sample was restricted to English-language media, primarily from Western sources. As a result, the findings may not fully capture the global discourse on gender in motorsport, especially in regions where cultural dynamics differ from the western world. Lastly, while qualitative coding allows for rich and nuanced insights, it is never entirely free of subjectivity. Even with systematic methods and procedures in place, the interpretation of themes and framing can potentially be influenced by me. Finally, the study focuses primarily on professional, institutional, and media-produced content. The discourse among the fan community has not been directly taken into account. While articles and content have not just been picked on language, length and date of publishing, the amount of interaction has also been taken into account and helped to find articles and content that seemed to be getting discussed in the community. However, comments, forums, or independent blogs, were not part of the analysis, although such spaces significantly hold the power to influence public perception while also mirroring it.

Future Research

This thesis opens several pathways for future academic investigations. A longer study could track how gender representation in motorsport media evolves over time, particularly in response to structural changes or cultural shifts. For instance, do new diversity initiatives translate into normalized, competence-based narratives, or do women still remain framed as novelties and exceptions in motorsport? Furthermore, one could also keep it broader and focus not specifically on motorsport but generally fields where men seem to be normalized and investigate the framing and development over time.

Additionally, future research could broaden the scope by including other forms of media such as YouTube content, podcast interviews, race commentary, or behind-the-scenes documentaries like "Drive to Survive" which focuses on F1, or " F1: The Academy" which follows the women series. These media forms often reach wider audiences and may contribute to shaping gender perceptions in different ways than news articles or social media posts on Instagram and LinkedIn. Moreover, incorporating audience perception studies could offer deeper insights into how these gendered framings are understood, internalized, or contested by motorsport fans. Such research would help clarify whether symbolic inclusion genuinely empowers or whether it reinforces exclusion. Finally, intersectional perspectives are crucial moving forward. While this study focused on gender, future work could and should investigate how gender intersects with race, class, sexuality, and nationality to shape media representation in motorsport. Understanding these layered identities would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of inclusion and exclusion in what remains one of the most exclusive domains in the global sporting environment.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine how women working in motorsport are framed in online news coverage and media compared to men. Using a qualitative content analysis of 80 media items across traditional media and social media platforms, the study revealed clear and persistent gendered differences in representation. While women have gained visibility in motorsport, their portrayal is still often filtered through symbolic frames of diversity, empowerment, and exceptionalism, which highlights them as novelties rather than normalized and equal professionals. In contrast, men are more frequently portrayed through competence-based narratives which rarely address their gender, reinforcing the initial belief that men and the roles they naturally take on are normalized in the field of motorsport. The theoretical lens provided by Social Role Theory and Role Congruity Theory highlighted how societal expectations and gender norms are reproduced through media and framing. This framing landscape supports and validates these theories, which argue that misalignment between gender and role expectations can lead to prejudice and biased representation. In the data, women were often subject to gendered double standards, undermining language, and framing that emphasized their emotional or personal attributes over their professional skills. Even when they were portrayed positively, their success was frequently linked to their gender rather than their talents or qualities. On the other hand, men benefitted from normalized authority, which results in them rarely needing to prove their legitimacy or face public questioning and examinations based on their identity or yet alone gender. Importantly, through the study a notable difference between traditional media and social media platforms has been found. While traditional news outlets often reproduced symbolic or gendered framings, Instagram and LinkedIn accounts focused on inclusion and showed a more competence-based and empowering portrayal of women. However, these more inclusive narratives have limited reach and influence in broader cultural discourse compared to traditional media outlets. Ultimately, the findings underscore the ongoing need to challenge and change the

representational norms in motorsport media. Inclusion must go beyond visibility, it requires reframing how competence, authority, and legitimacy are constructed across gender. By exposing the nuances and details of gendered framing, this thesis contributes to the growing body of research aimed at dismantling structural bias and opening space for equal narratives in male-dominated industries like motorsport.

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Appendix

Date	Database/Journal	Search String	Total Hits
2025-06-19	Sage Open	Women AND Male AND fields	1074
2025-05-07	Sage Open	Women AND Male AND dominated AND fields	517
2025-06-22	Elsevier	Framing AND media	4025
2025-05-07	Elsevier	Role AND congruity AND theory AND gender	142
2025-06-15	Elsevier	Women AND in AND male AND fields	591
2025-06-28	Elsevier	Women AND motorsport	11
2025-06-08	Elsevier	Social AND role AND theory	37907
2025-06-19	Elsevier	Tokenism AND sport	7
2025-05-07	Google Scholar	Women AND motorsport	9210