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When Algorithms Shape Desire and Entertainment Sells

Formula 1 in the Driver's Seat

OMD x Optimum Sports

Updated: October 17th, 2025

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Formula 1 Is One of the Fastest Growing Sports in the U.S.

F1's Transformation: From Fringe to Mainstream

[Formula 1 has undergone one of the most significant cultural and commercial transformations in modern sport](#). For decades, it was viewed in the United States as an elite, European spectacle, admired from afar but largely ignored at home.

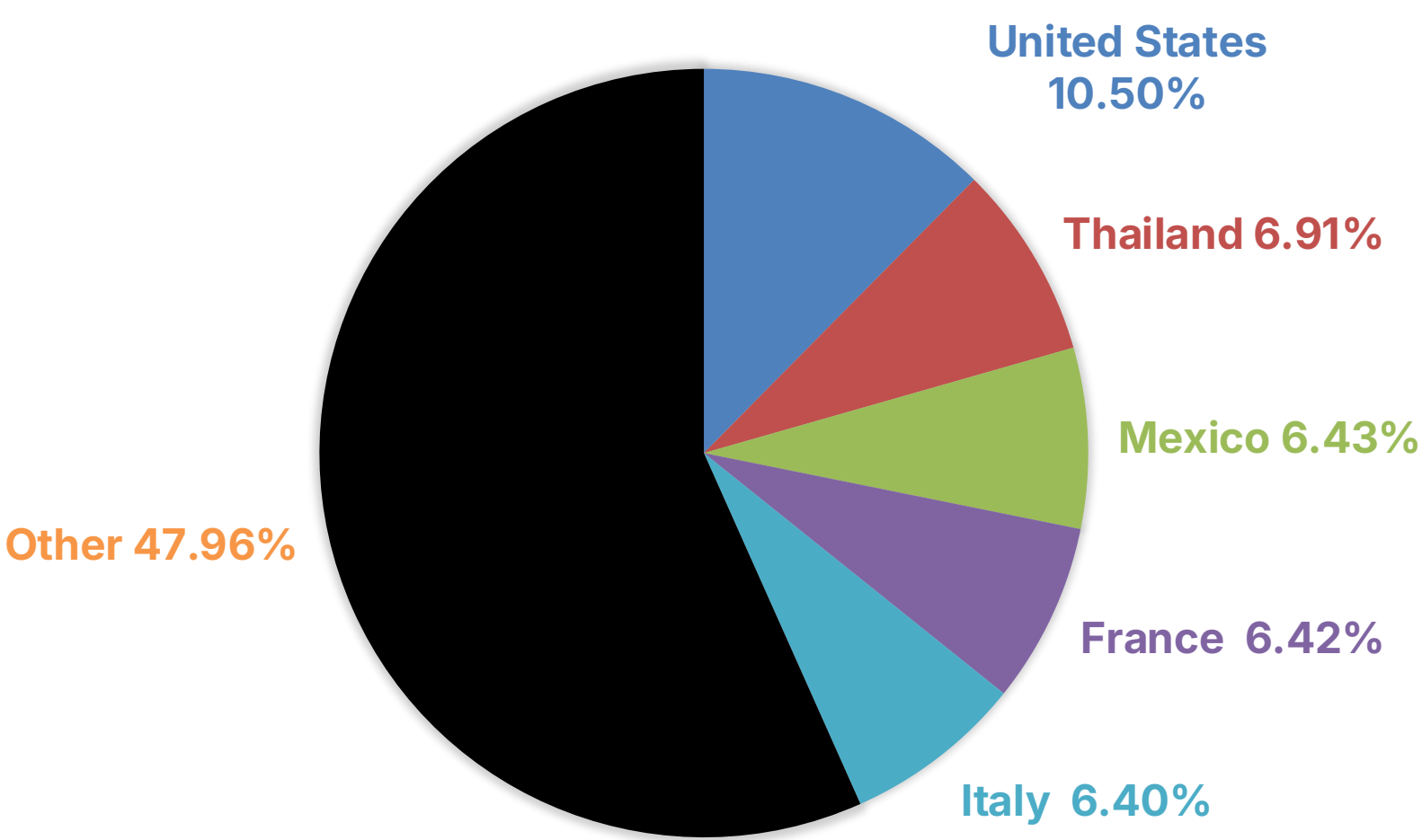
Complex rules, poor scheduling, and limited distribution left American audiences disengaged, while advertisers found little justification for investment. [That changed after Liberty Media's acquisition of Formula 1 in 2017](#).

A deliberate modernization of broadcast and distribution, [anchored by ESPN partnerships](#) and the creation of the [F1TV direct-to-consumer platform](#), was matched with innovative storytelling. [Netflix's Drive to Survive became a cultural inflection point](#), turning the grid into a stage for human drama and character-driven narratives. This shift was amplified by the expansion of marquee U.S. races in Miami (2022) and Las Vegas (2023), and it will accelerate further in 2026 with the addition of the U.S.-based Cadillac F1 team.

[The impact has been profound](#). U.S. viewership has increased by 124% since 2018. The 2024 Miami Grand Prix drew a record 3.1 million U.S. viewers, the most-watched F1 race in the country's history.

[Globally, social media followers have grown by 450% since 2018, with the U.S. now representing the largest market for online engagement](#). Perhaps most significantly, the sport's demographics have shifted dramatically: female fandom has grown by more than 400% since 2017, and nearly half of Gen Z fans now identify as women.

GLOBAL SOCIAL CHATTER ABOUT F1



What Makes Formula 1 Sponsorship Different

F1 differs from other sports sponsorship opportunities in several critical ways. Unlike the NFL, whose strength lies in domestic dominance, or NASCAR, whose identity is deeply rooted in Americana, Formula 1 is a truly global sport. [With 24 races spanning five continents](#), it serves as a cultural passport for brands seeking international visibility and prestige.

The sport is also uniquely infused with lifestyle and entertainment. [Formula 1 exists at the intersection of sport, fashion, and culture, where Louis Vuitton and Tommy Hilfiger showcase designs in the paddock, and major music artists headline race weekends](#). [Apple's F1: The Movie, which grossed over \\$624 million globally in 2025](#), demonstrated the sport's ability to move seamlessly between the racetrack and the entertainment industry.

Equally distinctive is F1's layered sponsorship ecosystem. [Brands can engage at the global level as official series partners](#), activate around specific races and destinations, or align with individual drivers whose personalities often transcend the sport itself. This flexibility means sponsorship can be scaled to ambition, but it also means that success relies on more than exposure. [Winning in F1 requires authentic participation in a culture that is both cosmopolitan and aspirational](#).

Formula 1 is not only a sport: it is also a reflection of shifting consumer values, particularly among younger audiences. Gen Z has embraced F1's internationalism, following drivers and teams across national boundaries and signaling a generational comfort with global identity that contrasts with the nationally anchored fandom of the NFL or MLB.



[The sport has also become more inclusive](#). Female audiences now represent nearly half of Gen Z's F1 fandom, a remarkable reversal for a sport long seen as the preserve of men. Brands in beauty, fashion, and lifestyle categories are beginning to take advantage of this shift. Dior and Charlotte Tilbury, for instance, have activated partnerships that tap into the growing cultural capital of women in motorsport.

Sustainability is another axis of consumer value reflected in Formula 1's evolution. [The sport has committed to achieving net-zero carbon by 2030](#), a goal that resonates strongly with younger audiences who increasingly expect both innovation and environmental responsibility. Yet this remains a space of tension, as Formula 1 must reconcile its luxury image with demands for credible progress on its climate impact.

Intersection with Women's Sports and eSports

[Formula 1's growth parallels the rise of women's sports, and the two share similar audience dynamics.](#)

Both attract young, progressive fans who value representation, inclusivity, and identity-based engagement as much as competition itself.

For brands, this alignment offers complementary pathways to connect with a generation that prioritizes authenticity and diversity.

The sport also intersects meaningfully with eSports. Through the official [F1 esports Series](#) and partnerships with Twitch streamers, Formula 1 has built bridges to gaming culture and digitally native audiences.



For many fans, engagement begins with simulation gaming or streaming content rather than live races. This overlap with motorsport enthusiasts, gamers, tech adopters, and digital communities demonstrates Formula 1's ability to operate not only as a sporting event but also as a full ecosystem of entertainment experiences.

Brand Effectiveness in Formula 1

Different sponsorship models deliver varying types of return on investment. Global partnerships provide unmatched visibility and cultural association.

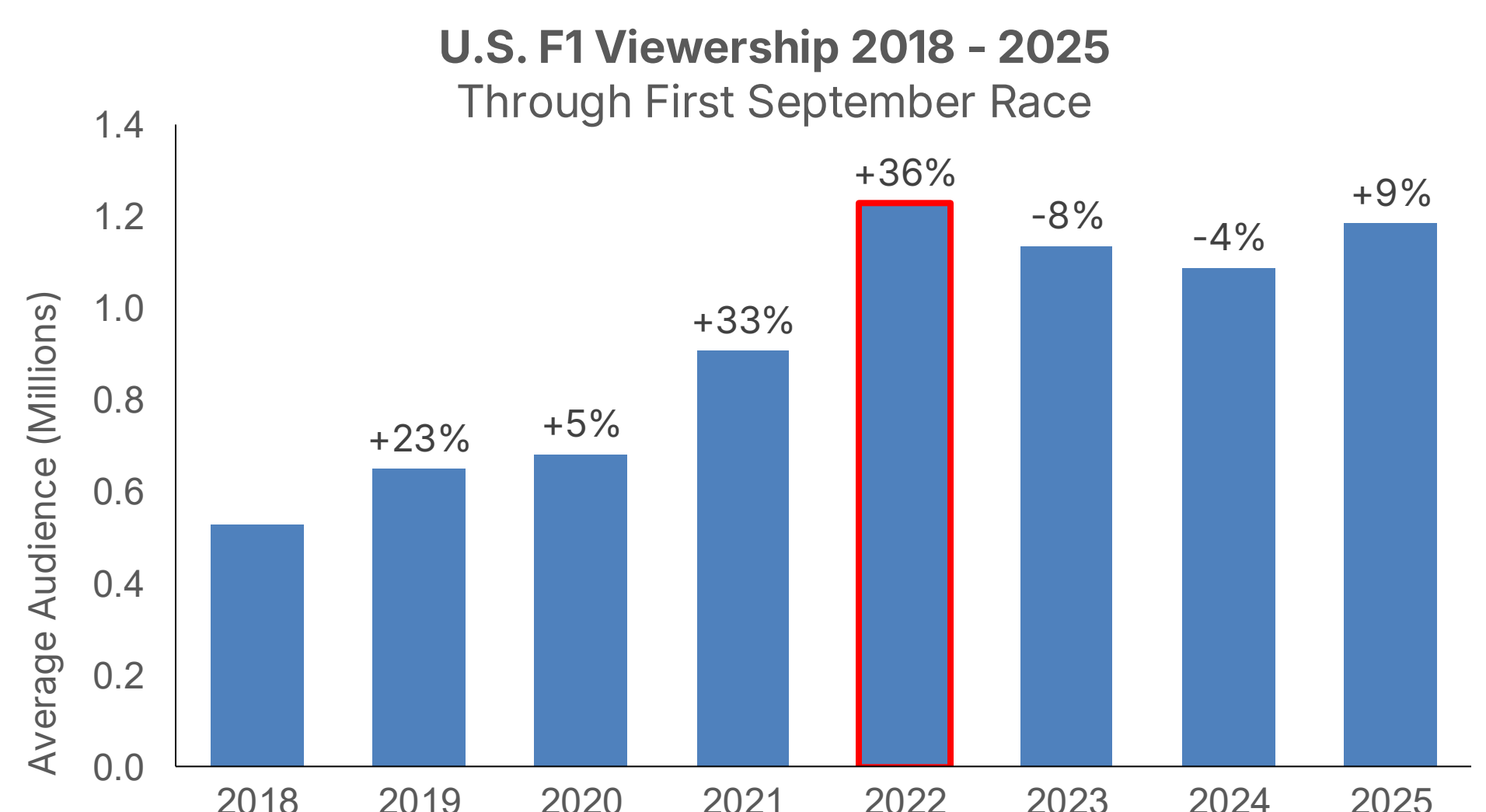
[Heineken, for example, has successfully built global equity through a long-term partnership](#) that blends responsible drinking messaging with immersive activations at races. [AWS delivers utility by embedding its technology directly into the fan experience](#), powering in-race data analytics that make the brand an inseparable part of the sport's storytelling.

Race and event activations are especially powerful for destination branding and categories tied to tourism and luxury. The Miami and Las Vegas Grands Prix, with their celebrity-packed atmospheres, create halo effects not only for sponsors but also for the host cities, which benefit from billions in economic impact.

Driver-centric endorsements work best in lifestyle and personality-driven categories. [Cash App's collaboration with Red Bull Racing](#) demonstrates how aligning with a driver and team can unlock younger, digitally native audiences through content releases, merchandise, and experiential access.

[But there are also clear patterns in failure.](#) Brands that over-index on logo visibility, without building a narrative, struggle to generate meaningful engagement. Similarly, value-oriented brands may clash with Formula 1's premium associations, undermining both sides of the partnership.

Effectiveness is measured in increasingly diverse ways. Traditional metrics such as brand recall and awareness remain important, but they are now supplemented by measures of sales lift during and after activations, cultural impact through earned media and social conversation, and new audience penetration among younger, more diverse fan groups. [For many brands, success in Formula 1 is judged less by immediate exposure and more by the ability to reach hard-to-access audiences and build cultural relevance over time.](#)



Formula 1 has evolved into more than a sport: [it is a cultural platform where competition, fashion, entertainment, and technology converge](#). Its rapid growth in the United States, global footprint, and its shifting fan demographics position it as both an opportunity and a proving ground for brands.

For OMD and our clients, the lesson is clear. Formula 1 requires more than visibility. It requires alignment with consumer values, long-term storytelling, and authentic participation in a culture that is increasingly global, inclusive, and digitally native. Brands that meet this moment with conviction will not simply sponsor Formula 1; they will use it to create what's next in the convergence of sport, culture, and commerce.



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