Driving Brand Synergy: A Discourse-Historical Approach to Western Media Coverage of Lewis Hamilton's Ferrari Transfer

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Abstract: As one of the most accomplished drivers in Formula 1 history, Lewis Hamilton's decision to leave Mercedes and join Ferrari in early 2024 is not only a turning point in his personal career but also the most talked-about business event in F1 in the past decade. Based on the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) perspective, the research examines the application of the "five discursive strategies" from 91 reports on Hamilton's transfer in Western media between February 2024 and March 2025. Besides, the study employed the methodology of "four levels of contexts" to examine the ideology reflected in Western media narratives and to summarize the underlying factors — the commercialization trend of F1 and the resonance of drivers and teams' brand power. The study provides inspiration for the interdisciplinary application of DHA in sports communication research and athlete discourse analysis.

Keywords: Formula 1; Lewis Hamilton; Discourse-Historical Approach; Discursive strategies; Ideological narrative

1. Introduction

Formula 1, as one of the world's top sports events, has undergone a profound transformation from a competitive sport to a commercial one since the 21st century. After the Liberty Media Group took over the commercial operation of F1 in 2017, the sport's commercial value and media exposure have grown exponentially due to capital injection, international brand sponsorship and the rise of digital media: In 2024 season, the number of F1 viewers worldwide exceeded 2 billion, and social media interaction increased by 35 percent year-on-year [1]. As a result, optimizing drivers' media narratives has become a core part of F1's brand strategy.

Lewis Hamilton is the only Black driver in F1 history and the second seven-time world champion after Michael Schumacher. During his nearly 20-year career, he helped Mercedes win the constructors' championship for 8 consecutive seasons (2014–2021), while Mercedes' old rival, Ferrari, missed the title for 16 years (2009–2024) [2]. Therefore, Hamilton's transfer will break Mercedes' monopoly and ignite the hopes of Ferrari's revival.

Additionally, Hamilton's cross-over effects in charity and fashion have made him a convergence point of sports, philanthropy, and popular culture, and the heated discussion about his transfer reflects the strong public image tension of star athletes in the new media era.

The questions discussed in this study include (1) What discursive strategies did the Western media use to report on Hamilton's transfer? (2) What ideology does the narrative reflect? (3) What is the motivation behind it? From the perspective of DHA, the study conducts a critical analysis of the above research questions using the methodology of "five discursive strategies" and "four levels of context." Overall, the results of this study are expected to expand the application of DHA in the field of sports communication and promote the practice of the DHA research paradigm in the discourse analysis of star athletes.

2. Literature review

Sports media narrative has long been regarded as a dual coding system of "competitive heroism" and "commercial rationalism", which was also prominent in F1 [3]. The Ferrari driver Michael Schumacher created an unprecedented "red myth" by winning the driver and constructor's championship for five consecutive seasons from 2000 to 2004, while the media exaggerated Schumacher's technical authority through "legendary narratives" [4]. In 2018, Hamilton's collaboration with American clothing brand Tommy Hilfiger was also portrayed by the media as a symbol of luxury consumption [5]. While traditional sports such as ball games often present a binary narrative of "loyalty-betrayal" in athlete transfer coverage, the uniqueness of F1 lies in its strong correlation between driver skills and car performance makes transfer decisions more likely to be seen as technically rational choices [6]. For example, when Sebastian Vettel moved from Red Bull to Ferrari in 2015, the media emphasized "technical potential of the Red team" and downplayed the driver's personal emotional factors [7].

Moreover, the infiltration of implicit ideology in sports coverage cannot be ignored, and identity tags such as race and age often serve as tools for media framing. Hamilton's Black driver identity is a contradictory unity, and he is often depicted by Western media as a "pioneer in breaking racial barriers", but his call for one-knee kneeling on the track to fight against racism is often questioned by conservative media as a "political overstep" [8–9]. Similarly, media articles about older athletes often swing between "hero twilight" and "evergreen legend" strategies, such as reports on the later stages of NBA star Vince Carter's career that reflect the contradiction in the narrative of star athletes' ages [10]. However, while these literatures offer a theoretical reference for analyzing Hamilton's "race-age" identity, existing studies have not systematically discussed the narrative strategies for older drivers' transfers, nor have they touched upon the cross-influence of identity politics and commercialization.

The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) proposed by Ruth Wodak in the 1990s is an important branch of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The core argument is that discourse is not only a reflection of social reality, but also a tool for constructing power relations and ideology [11]. Compared with the static perspective of traditional discourse analysis, DHA emphasizes diachronic research and advocates revealing the historical, political, and cultural motivations behind discourse through "five discursive strategies" and "four levels of contexts." The application of DHA has expanded from political discourse in media to corporate advertising and multimodal text on social media, but its practice in sports communication studies is still in the exploratory stage [12–13].

Wang et al. studied the application of DHA in the image building and narrative strategy of players in NBA television broadcasts, conducted quantitative analysis of video framing, camera movement, subtitles, etc. using SPSS tools, and explored the evolution of ideology in combination with historical cases, summarizing the heroic

narrative and dream-chasing culture in NBA broadcasts [14]. However, the study's corpus was limited to the broadcasting of 5 games in the 2017 season, resulting in an insufficient sample size, and the research subjects did not go beyond the traditional star players. Jenkel's study combines DHA with gender theory, delving into how patriarchy restricts women's participation in sports through power structures [15]. The interdisciplinary analytical framework offers a fresh perspective on the image of female athletes throughout sports history. However, the study focused on the coverage of the female community in English football in the early 20th century, and its universality was limited by the project and era.

In conclusion, the research aims to construct a three-dimensional analytical framework of "identity-age-business" to reveal how F1 media narratives reconcile drivers' personal branding with the commercialization needs of the event through "five discursive strategies", and to use "four levels of contexts" to relate textual features to the macro context of F1's globalization and capitalization. Ultimately, the study provides a new theoretical lens for understanding the power operation mechanism of the media in noble sports such as motorsport.

3. Theoretical framework

In recent years, related research on DHA has been further combined with corpus technology to explore multimodal discourses such as social media texts and corporate identity narratives. In addition, the application of cross-media intertextual comparison enriches the interpretation of the relationship between discourse and society [16]. In practice, DHA mainly employs the methodology of "five discursive strategies" and "four levels of contexts" for multi-dimensional analysis to overcome the static limitations of traditional discourse studies (**Tables 1** and **2**).

Table 1. "Five discursive strategies" of DHA

Nomination strategy	Construct social actor identities through classification and reference (e.g., pronouns, proper nouns)
Prediction strategy	Endow social actors with positive or negative characteristics (e.g., adjectives, verbs, modal verbs)
Argumentation strategy	Rationalize the argument through the topic
Perspectivization strategy	Convey a specific perspective through direct or indirect quotes, reporting verbs
Intensification or mitigation strategy	Strengthen or weaken the force of the speech through adverbs, modal verbs, etc.

Table 2. "Four levels of contexts" of DHA

Immediate linguistic and textual environment	Lexical and sentence structure analysis within the text
Intertextuality and interdiscursivity	The connection between texts and discourses
Externality	Factors outside of language, specific contexts
Social, political, and historical macro context	The social attitudes towards the subject of study, historical significance, etc.

The author suggests that the advantages of DHA can be fully demonstrated in the course of this study. Its critical perspective can expose the ideology implied in Western media discourse, and the diachronic dimension can link the development of F1 globalization and commercialization with the interaction of driver image construction. Besides, the interdisciplinary nature of the research is the focus of integrating linguistic text analysis and sociological power criticism, which provides a systematic framework for decoding the social and cultural motivations behind media discourse.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research design

This study employs the CDA method of qualitative research from the perspective of DHA and conducts a comparative analysis of discursive strategies and ideologies presented in the collected corpus texts to answer the three research questions presented in the introduction.

4.2. Data collection

Given that the working language of F1 is English, reports in English media can enhance the empirical nature of the corpus. Therefore, the author selected four media outlets as data sources for this study: Sky Sports, ESPN, The Guardian, and The New York Times. Sky Sports and ESPN are professional sports media and the official partners of F1 in Britain and America. As leading comprehensive newspapers, The Guardian and The New York Times boast substantial circulations and readership numbers, exerting significant influence among Western audiences.

The corpus texts collected in this study are all from online articles published by the four media outlets. Firstly, the author uses the advanced search of Google News and limits the time range from February 1st, 2024 (Hamilton announced his transfer to Ferrari) to March 31st, 2025 (up to the 2025 Chinese Grand Prix). Secondly, type "Lewis Hamilton to Ferrari" in the search box and perform four sets of searches with the "site" operator to obtain all relevant texts from the four media websites, respectively. Thirdly, the LexisNexis will be used for a second collection of data. The time range, search criteria, and media sources will remain consistent with the previous settings to ensure the completeness of the corpus. Finally, finish the corpus collection after eliminating invalid texts like duplicate articles, reprinted articles, and grade announcements.

4.3. Data analysis

This study qualitatively analyzed the collected data based on the DHA proposed by Vodak and introduced AntConc to meet the corpus coding requirements in the actual operation of DHA. The author encoded the texts using the "media-time" format and generated four groups of classified data, which were imported into AntConc for corpus construction.

In addition, the KWIC and File View tools provided by AntConc significantly enhanced the efficiency of the analysis. By entering keywords such as "Hamilton" and "Ferrari", not only can relevant texts be rapidly retrieved, but also their co-occurrence within specific contexts can be systematically examined. Subsequently, this study will conduct a critical analysis of the materials under the guidance of "five discursive strategies" and "four levels of contexts" methodology to explore the discursive strategy choices and ideological narratives within them, and summarize the underlying motivations. Overall, the dual search approach adopted in data collection and the DHA research paradigm employed in discussion can ensure reliability, accuracy, and consistency in the analysis process.

5. Results and analysis

5.1. Discursive strategy choices by Western media

5.1.1. Nomination strategy

Nomination strategy is the use of language to refer to social actors, phenomena, events, and processes. This section focuses on the use of indicative words in the corpus text and the choice of athlete referencers.

In an interview this week with Time Magazine, (1) "The seven-time world champion — the only Black driver in the history of the sport — dismissed criticism the move has generated from the likes of former F1 boss Bernie

Ecclestone" (February 28, 2025, ESPN) [17].

It can be seen from the report excerpted in Example (1) that ESPN first used "the seven-time world champion" for reference, emphasizing Hamilton's outstanding achievements in F1; the reporter then inserted "the only Black driver" to indicate Hamilton's ethnicity, highlighting his unique identity among the active drivers. This progressive nomination strategy was used to compare Hamilton to the former F1 president Bernie Ecclestone, who is an old white man. Bernie was pessimistic about Hamilton's decision to move to Ferrari, and Hamilton refuted his criticism. In other words, the nomination strategy used in example (1) emphasizes Hamilton's irreplaceable position in F1 in support of his resistance to racist remarks.

(2) "Don't ever compare me to anybody else... I'm the first and only Black driver that's ever been in this sport... I'm built different... I've been through a lot... I've had my own journey," he said... "You can't compare me to another 40-year-old, past or present, Formula One driver in history... Because they are nothing like me... I'm hungry, driven, don't have a wife and kids... I'm focused on one thing, and that's winning... That's my No.1 priority." (February 27, 2025, The Guardian) [18].

Example (2) from The Guardian's exclusive interview with Hamilton, in which he describes himself as "the first and only Black driver", expressing his identification with his unique identity. In response to the decline in form among older drivers, Hamilton considers himself different from other "40-year-old" drivers, and the consecutive use of the first-person pronoun "I" in the context emphasizes Hamilton's emotions towards his identity as a Black driver and explains his confidence in competitiveness. In a word, the personal pronouns employed in Example (2) portray Hamilton's image as a "tough Black veteran", and such a nomination strategy also reflects the reporter's recognition of that image.

5.1.2. Prediction strategy

Prediction strategy refers to the use of verbs, adjectives, and modal verbs to express positive or negative emotional tendencies in writing, thereby shaping social actors into the corresponding images.

(3) "He retains the unshakeable belief that he still has what it takes to win a record-breaking eighth world championship, even at 40 — attempting to achieve that with Ferrari, F1's most legendary team with an unparalleled legacy, ramps up the anticipation." (March 12, 2025, New York Times) [19].

The prediction strategy in Example (3) relies on the verb "achieve," which gives Hamilton a positive and active quality. The word literally means "to reach a goal through effort, technique, or courage", and thus portrays an aggressive image of Hamilton. Besides, the phrases "unshakeable belief" and "even at 40" that the reporter used before convey Hamilton's unwavering and tenacious attitude towards the challenge of age.

(4) "This is a breathtaking and exhilarating deal... Having signed a new deal with Mercedes in August last year, and after years of repeatedly denying rumours of a move to Ferrari, the 39-year-old has declared his intent to finish his career with the most famous, most storied and most successful team in F1 history." (February 2, 2024, The Guardian) [20].

The continuous use of adjectives is an effective way to implement the prediction strategy. The adjectives "breathtaking" and "exhilarating" at the beginning of Example (4) describe the significance of Hamilton's transfer to Ferrari and set the emotional tone for the report. The three superlative adjectives at the end, "most famous", "most storied", and "most successful" form a parallelism, and stress again Hamilton's move to Ferrari was an unprecedented collaboration in F1 history with extraordinary significance. The reporter uses a progressive prediction strategy to push the reader's positive emotions to a climax step by step.

5.1.3. Argumentation strategy

Argumentation strategy is often seen when the writer discusses a certain topic and explains a certain point in the course of writing, thereby leading readers to believe in the rationality of the writer's perspective.

(5) "The difficulty of his debut will not take the sheen off a move that has revitalized the seven-time world champion." (March 18, 2025, New York Times) [21].

The 2025 Australian Grand Prix was Hamilton's first race in Ferrari, the circuit conditions were extremely harsh due to the bad weather. Hamilton finished in tenth place after the race and failed to achieve his initial goal. The noun "difficulty" in Example (5) indicates the fact that Hamilton's Ferrari debut was not going well, which contrasts with the sentiment conveyed later: despite the difficulties and not-so-optimistic results of Hamilton's first race with Ferrari, this did not dampen his enthusiasm for seeking victory as the seven-time world champion. The reporter uses an argumentation strategy to illustrate that Hamilton's loss in his first race at Ferrari does not mean that he cannot accomplish his ambition of winning the championship, nor does it destroy the confidence of the seven-time world champion.

(6) "The seven-time world champion is joining a team that can boast a record 243 wins from 1,076 grands prix. Given that his personal tally is 103 wins from 332 starts, also a record, Hamilton is unlikely to be overawed by the statistics." (February 3, 2024, The Guardian) [22].

Example (6) lists the four numbers "243", "1076", "103", and "332" respectively to quantify the achievements of Ferrari and Hamilton in F1, conveying The Guardian's view that Ferrari's signing of Hamilton was a powerful alliance. The numbers make the argumentation strategy more accurate, scientific, and specific, allowing readers to fully understand the historical status of Ferrari and Hamilton in F1, and thereby enhancing the persuasiveness of their collaboration.

5.1.4. Perspectivization strategy

Perspectivization strategy typically employs specific perspectives and language markers such as reporting verbs, direct or indirect quotations, to reproduce the positions of social participants and allowing readers to understand from different perspectives.

(7) "However, speaking in Las Vegas on Wednesday, Hamilton revealed that in the moment he was genuinely ready to call time on his 12-year spell with Mercedes." (November 21, 2024, Sky Sports) [23].

Hamilton admitted before the Las Vegas Grand Prix that he seriously considered ending his partnership with Mercedes with only three races left in the 2024 season. This is because the car was difficult to drive in rainy conditions during the last Brazilian Grand Prix, leaving Hamilton in only tenth place in the end, a torment that has become one of the reasons for his intention to leave the team early. In Example (7), Hamilton's remarks were related indirectly through the reporting verb "reveal", and this perspectivization strategy suggested that his opinion had a secret nature, as well as a potential conflict between Hamilton and Mercedes towards the end of his contract.

(8) "I already knew from the outside how passionate the Ferrari family is, from everyone in the team to the tifosi," Hamilton said. "To now witness it firsthand as a Ferrari driver has been awe-inspiring. That passion runs through their veins and you can't help but be energized by it." (January 25, 2025, New York Times) [24].

Hamilton made his first test drive of Ferrari's F1 car in January 2025, and spoke about his true feelings as a Ferrari driver after the test drive, saying that the enthusiasm of the Ferrari family influences everyone in the team all the time. The reporter used a direct quote led by "said" to describe Hamilton's remarks, reflecting his respect for the Ferrari's culture and his sense of belonging as one of the members. Example (8) illustrates the application

of direct quotes in the perspectivization strategy, which builds an emotional connection between the reader and Hamilton while enhancing the authenticity and presence of the discourse.

5.1.5. Intensification or mitigation strategy

Intensification or mitigation strategy refers to the discursive strategy of using adverbs, modal verbs, etc., to modify the speech in order to increase or decrease the reader's attention.

(9) "If he were to succeed, he would not only become the first eight-time champion in the sport's history, but also the only driver other than five-time champion Juan Manuel Fangio to win titles with three different teams." (February 1, 2024, ESPN) [25].

Example (9) is the prediction of Hamilton's future career made by ESPN on the day he announced his transfer to Ferrari, and the adverb "only" emphasizes the unique achievements Hamilton might make. This is the intensification strategy employed by the reporter, which drew readers' attention to Hamilton's transfer, raised their expectations of his joining Ferrari, and reinforced the positive significance of the event.

(10) "After the loss of several big-name engineers in recent years, Mercedes attempted to strengthen its position in January... In theory, such commitments should have installed extra hope in Hamilton, so it is slightly surprising, or perhaps telling, that he still signed his post-2024 future away to Ferrari before Mercedes had turned a wheel this year." (February 1, 2024, ESPN) [25].

Example (10) points out that Hamilton's transfer to Ferrari really surprised Mercedes, but the modification of the adverbs "slightly" and "perhaps" emphasizes that the degree of surprise is not intense and quickly turns into a self-evident fact, which reflects the mitigation strategy adopted by ESPN. Although Mercedes was eager to make a comeback after the resignation of several well-known engineers in succession, this was not enough to shake Hamilton's determination to move to Ferrari. In other words, the personnel changes at Mercedes have set the stage for Hamilton's departure from the team, which is quite understandable.

5.2. The ideology in Western media's narratives

The previous analysis explores the first research question in the context of "five discursive strategies", namely the discursive strategy choices of Western media in reporting on Hamilton's transfer. This section is dedicated to addressing the second and third research questions, using the methodology of "four levels of contexts" to discuss the ideology and underlying motivations in Western media narratives.

5.2.1. Defending Hamilton's form in his advanced age transfer

F1 is one of the most physically demanding sports, with drivers having an average heart rate of around 160 beats per minute during the race and having to stay focused for about 90 minutes. In addition, drivers' necks have to withstand the huge pull of lateral acceleration during high-speed cornering, as well as the high temperatures from the cockpit and fireproof suits. Age is a key indicator of drivers' physical condition, which can directly affect their competitive state. Although F1 does not limit drivers' maximum age to compete, the peak years of their career are generally between 20 and 40 years old [26]. Drivers over 40 will face a decline in form due to a decrease in physical fitness.

(11) "Ferrari's newest recruit Lewis Hamilton has looked to allay any fears about his age ahead of the 2025 Formula 1 season, insisting he will 'never be an old man'." (February 27, 2025, ESPN) [27].

Hamilton will be exactly 40 when he officially joins Ferrari, and the issue of his age naturally draws the

attention of Western media. Example (11) shows that in the immediate linguistic and textual environment, Western media have straightforwardly expressed Hamilton's attitude towards his efforts to allay public concerns about his age. At the end of the passage, the quote "never be an old man" originates from Hamilton himself, further conveying a positive message to readers about his strong and enduring form.

(12) "Hamilton has often spoken of Tom Brady being an inspiration for him, and the Brit has somewhat followed in the footsteps of the legendary NFL quarterback by making a late-career change. After 20 years with the New England Patriots, during which he led the franchise to six Super Bowl victories, a then 42-year-old Brady took his talents to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers." (March 20, 2024, Sky Sports) [28].

Example (12) presents the Western media's view on Hamilton's age under intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Hamilton stated that Tom Brady is the role model he aspires to emulate. Brady facilitated the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' victory in the Super Bowl within just one season of joining the team, demonstrating that seasoned athletes can continue to make significant contributions even after transferring to new teams later in their careers. Sky Sports compared the two legends and noted that Brady's announcement of the move at "42-year-old" was actually based on the view that an advanced age move is not enough to affect Hamilton's title race.

5.2.2. Emphasizing the commercial nature of Hamilton's partnership with Ferrari

As a seven-time world champion, Hamilton no longer needs to prove his standing in the drivers' transfer market. However, as a world-class public figure, Hamilton's value in fashion and philanthropy is not to be underestimated: for instance, he donated £20 million in 2021 to establish the Mission 44 Foundation to support minority education and employment, especially in racing, to create opportunities for the Black community [29].

In the 75-year history of F1, Ferrari has been the most famous, most participated, and most accomplished team, almost becoming the spiritual totem of the sport [22]. Meanwhile, as a globally renowned car brand and luxury, Ferrari naturally has a place in the international fashion world. As a result, the commercial nature of Hamilton's partnership with Ferrari have become one of the focal points for Western media coverage.

(13) "Hamilton and Ferrari knew what they were getting with one another, sharing a commercial and cultural relevance that only enhanced their respective standings. They knew the first pictures of him, posed outside Enzo Ferrari's farmhouse, would go viral. Even those with the most basic F1 knowledge would know what Hamilton racing for Ferrari means for the sport." (March 12, 2025, New York Times) [19].

Example (13) is Hamilton's first day at Ferrari's headquarters. The first photo he took outside the farmhouse of the team founder, Enzo Ferrari, quickly went viral online, marking the official start of their collaboration. "Posed outside" and "go viral" reflect the externality in Western media narratives under specific circumstances, while "commercial relevance" expresses Western media's focus on the commercial nature of the transfer. It is believed that even the general public, who may not be familiar with F1, can grasp the commercial significance of this collaboration.

(14) "Hamilton after two winless seasons, made his decision to leave even before the team had finished bolting his 2024 car together. In George Russell, Hamilton's current teammate who also signed a contract until 2025, Mercedes always had something of a succession plan in place, but replacing the commercial appeal of a name known around the world, such as Hamilton's, is a seemingly impossible task." (February 1, 2024, ESPN) [25].

Because of a major change in F1 technical rules, the cars of Mercedes no longer have the dominance as in previous seasons. Hamilton failed to win a single race during the 2022–23 season, which was a direct reason for his decision to leave Mercedes. Example (14) discusses Hamilton's transfer in a macro historical context, pointing

out that Mercedes had a plan to select Hamilton's successor, but it was delayed because Hamilton's "commercial appeal" could bring considerable sponsorship and prestige to the team, which reflects the reporter's recognition of Hamilton's commercial value.

In summary, when Western media reported Hamilton's transfer to Ferrari, they were most concerned about his age and the impact of their partnership on global business operations. The Western media's perspective is to affirm Hamilton's plan of "transferring at an advanced age for seeking world champion", while also praising this transfer as a model of commercial cooperation, which forms the ideological tone of the narrative. However, the underlying motivation is that F1 has faced multiple challenges, including accelerated commercialization, updated technical rules, drivers' generational changes, and expansion of audience, forcing it to maintain its competitiveness in the commercial sports market by rebranding star drivers and teams. Hamilton's personal brand value and Ferrari's brand effects are the two trump cards for F1 in terms of commerce, and their partnership undoubtedly injected strong impetus into enhancing F1's influence in international commercial sports.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study reveal a mutual relationship between media discursive strategies, ideological narratives, and the commercial imperatives of Lewis Hamilton's transfer to Ferrari. As for "five discursive strategies", the nomination and predication strategies consistently emphasize his dual identity as "Black" and "veteran" that framing his career move as a historic convergence of sporting ambition and commercial synergy, which expands its scope to motorsport's context where technological prowess and team legacy are integral to personal branding. Additionally, the argumentation strategy employing statistical comparisons (Example 6) reveals how Western media created a persuasive framework for unprecedented career moves.

By "four levels of contexts", Western media's defensive narratives around Hamilton's age (Example 11–12) mirror broader societal debates about athlete longevity in high-intensity sports, but introduce an intertextuality dimension to Tom Brady. This comparative framing in F1's context, where the technology often overwhelms individual athleticism, challenges the traditional reference of age-related performance decline in sports media studies. The ideological emphasis on commercial collaboration (Examples 13–14) exposes F1's direction by contextualizing the transfer within macro commercialization trends. Therefore, Western media's narratives position Hamilton-Ferrari as a symbiotic brand alliance rather than mere sporting cooperation. This reflects "media capital" accumulation, where athlete narratives become vehicles for expanding sport's market reach into luxury and lifestyle sectors [30].

The study establishes that Western media narratives surrounding Hamilton's transfer function as both a reflection and driver of F1's commercial evolution. Through the comprehensive application of five discursive strategies and four levels of context, Western media reconciles Hamilton's Black attributes and veteran identity with his marketability, positioning the transfer as a milestone in sports-business convergence. The findings confirm that the coverage of F1 increasingly serves dual purposes: maintaining the legitimacy of drivers' participation through narratives of achievements while advancing commercial objectives through calculated brand publicity.

Future research could extend the application of DHA's paradigm to analyze media narratives surrounding the younger drivers' brand-building strategies or examine how non-Western media interpret Hamilton's transfer within local motorsport markets. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking post-transfer brand valuation changes could quantify discourse's commercial impacts, further bridging critical discourse analysis with sports marketing analytics.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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