

Bad Bunny's Super Bowl performance generated 892.8% more social media mentions than Kid Rock's halftime show with triple the search interest

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ABSTRACT

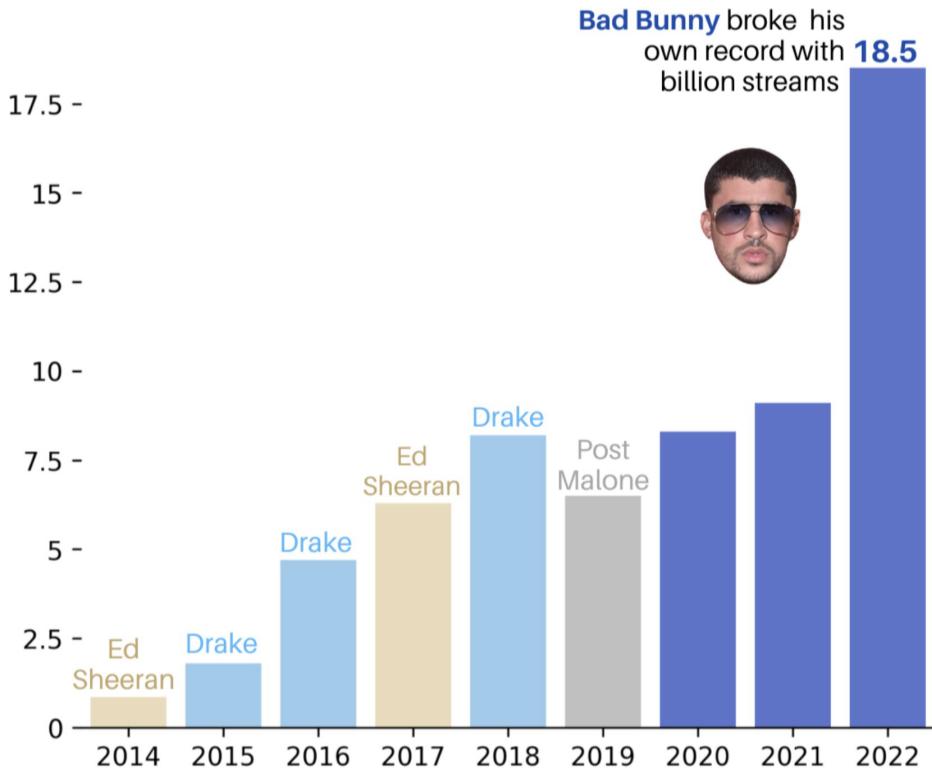
A study from Montclair State University faculty in the Joetta Di Bella and Fred C. Sautter III Center for Strategic Communication in the College of Communication and Media analyzed social media reaction to the NFL's Super Bowl halftime show featuring Bad Bunny and Turning Point USA's "All-American Halftime Show" featuring Kid Rock. Results suggest significantly higher interest online in Bad Bunny's performance. Highlights from the study include 892.8% more posts on X about Bad Bunny's halftime show performance with a 963.6% higher number of posts throughout Super Bowl Sunday. Additionally, there was triple the amount of search interest for "Bad Bunny" versus "Kid Rock" in the period studied. Results, however, also reflect the polarizing nature of social media and the increasing emphasis on negativity in online posts; sentiment analysis suggests each performer generated 2.5 times negative posts for their shows than positive posts.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

While major sporting events are often presented as mere entertainment, sports has frequently been a space where political messages are explored through a popularly consumed spectacle (Andrews, 2024; Montez de Oca, 2021; Spyropoulos, 2004). With massive national and global viewership, the Super Bowl halftime show has taken on the character of being part of that spectacle. Increasingly, academic scholarship has interrogated the ways in which the halftime show carries political weight with messages of gender, race, class, and culture enacted by performers (Fernández-Torres et al., 2022; Henderson, 2025; Ramirez & Williams, 2022).

For the Super Bowl LX of 2026, the politics of the halftime show have been constructed as a contested space. Specifically, the NFL selected Bad Bunny as the show's headlining act and his statements leading up to the game have suggested that Latino identity, a celebration of queerness, and potential resistance to U.S. government policies may be embedded in his performance. Bad Bunny was the most streamed artist on Spotify for 2025 winning the "Album of the Year" Grammy award, as well (Ruggieri, 2026). This success is consistent with the artist's popularity in previous years.

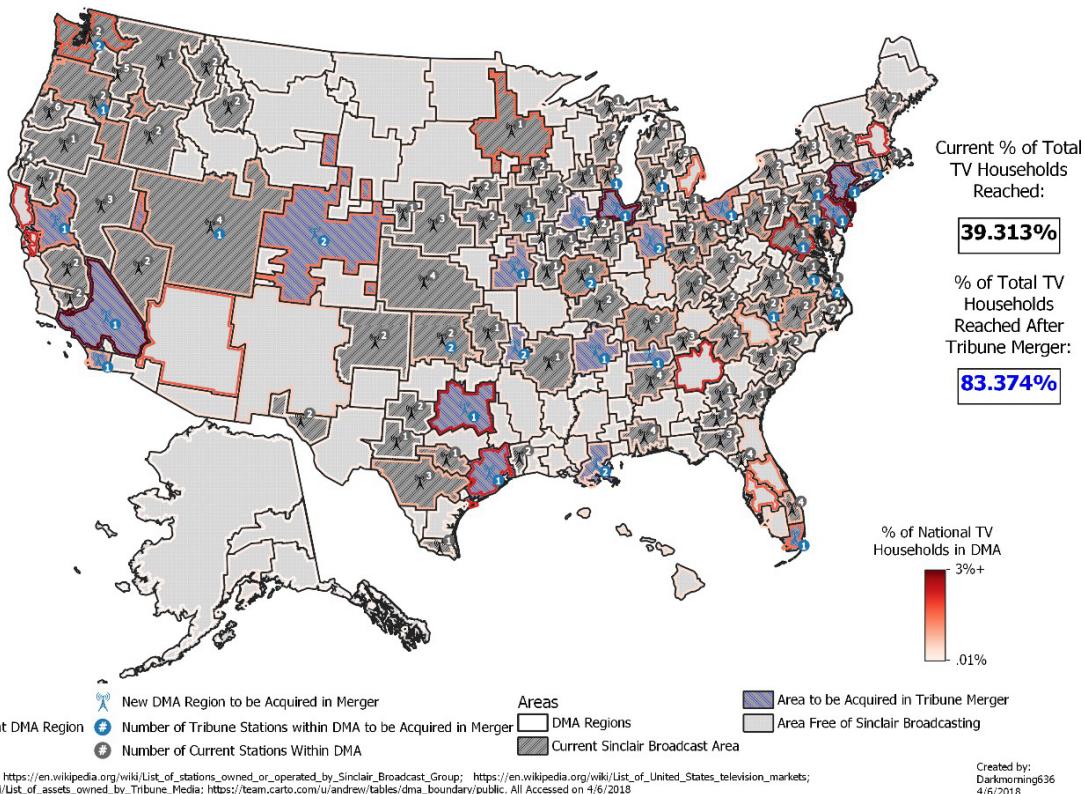
Annual streams for the top artist on Spotify (billions)



Sharing the initial news that he had been selected, Bad Bunny let fans know in his native Spanish adding that “...if you didn’t understand what I just said, you have four months to learn” (Mesa, 2026). While Puerto Rico is an American territory, the tone and themes of the show have been constructed as antithetical to authentic “Americanness” in some segments.

As such, the national political organization Turning Point USA is presenting an alternative/protest show to the Bad Bunny performance occurring at the Super Bowl venue. The headline act for the event Turning Point has branded the “All-American Halftime Show” was Kid Rock with the event airing on a variety of streaming platforms and broadcast live by Sinclair stations reaching potentially 80% of U.S. households (Graves, 2026).

Reach of Sinclair Broadcast Group Television Stations



Kid Rock's previous successes have been prodigious. His blend of rap, rock, and country have sold over 27 million albums in the U.S. and with sold out shows in large arenas and festivals (*Detroit Historical Society*, 2026). Cumulatively, the two halftime shows, and their headlining artists have constructed this year's event(s) as a spectacle of contested authentic "Authentic" identity that merits scrutiny.

Social media represents a space where cultural and political values are contested (Madraki et al., 2025; Makrehchi, 2016). With that in mind, the number of posts, tone, and broad reaction in social media posts about each headlining artist (Bad Bunny and Kid Rock) offers a unique opportunity to explore online reactions to a specific context and a specific event. It would appear to be a space in which competing constructions of authentic "American" identity

can be observed and, as such, this study will seek to answer the following two exploratory questions:

RQ1: How did the volume of social media activity about Bad Bunny's Super Bowl LX compare with the social media activity around the alternative half halftime event headlined by Kid Rock?

RQ2: What were the themes, emotions, and sentiments associated with Bad Bunny and Kid Rock in the social media space related to their halftime show performances?

RESEARCH METHOD AND EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS

To answer these questions, multiple social media analytics programs were utilized. Initially, researchers employed an analytics tool to derive social intelligence regarding consumer insights, influencer marketing, competitor analysis, reputation monitoring, and benchmark studies across multiple social media platforms. Essentially, *Brandwatch* was utilized as a social listening tool to understand the sentiment, perceptions, trends, and reactions of social media users' conversations pertaining to Bad Bunny and Kid Rock in relation to their halftime show performances. Data was collected to show activity in the days leading up to, during, and immediately after the event.

Additionally, this study also employed a term frequency analysis utilizing the Tweet Binder analytics platform. Tweet Binder is especially effective for term frequency investigations as it can identify the number of times and in the total number of posts a specific topic, hashtag, or keyword is used over a period of time, with the total views of the term and the most-seen posts using the term identified along with shares and likes of that content (Metrics, 2020; *Social Media Management with Tweet Binder*, 2019). This is particularly useful for measuring post volume on a theme on the X platform (Abrego, 2022) which remains a significant space of cultural, political,

and news content (Nguyen, 2011). Beyond frequency, the posts receiving the most “likes,” “views,” and “reposts” were also identified to offer context on the main conversation drivers associated with posts discussing Bad Bunny and Kid Rock’s performances (*Metrics*, 2020; *Social Media Management with Tweet Binder*, 2019).

Supplementing this analysis, search activity for “Bad Bunny” and “Kid Rock” was also evaluated through a Google Trends analysis. A key feature of Google Trends analysis is that it allows for identification of items of interest for internet users (Nghiem et al., 2016). These analyses are “normalized to the highest volume of searches for that term over the time period being studied. This index ranges from 0 to 100, with 100 recorded on the date that saw the highest relative search volume activity for that term” (Arora et al., 2019, p. 338). Search interest in a specific topic has reliably forecast social media posts and actions related to that topic (McCarthy, 2010).

RESULTS

The Super Bowl halftime show has historically been a platform for both entertainment and political expression. Bad Bunny's performance, which included themes of love and unity, was juxtaposed against the conservative backlash represented by Turning Point USA's alternative and conservative show. This year's event has highlighted the cultural rift in America, with many viewers choosing sides based on their political beliefs. The contrasting receptions of both shows underscore the ongoing debate about identity and representation in American culture.

Turning Point USA's "All-American Halftime Show," featuring Kid Rock and other country artists, was positioned as a counter to Bad Bunny's performance during the Super Bowl. The event aimed to celebrate traditional American values, focusing on themes of faith, family, and patriotism. Although framed as a celebration of 'faith, family, and freedom, Kid Rock's

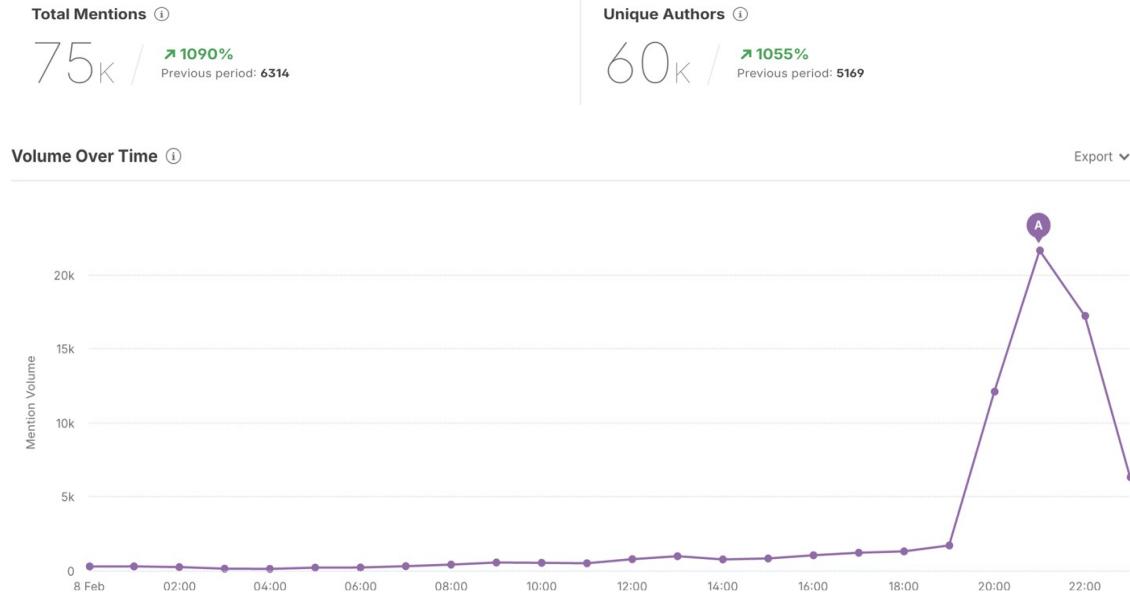
performance was criticized for its perceived lack of authenticity and production quality, with many viewers noting issues such as lip-syncing during Kid Rock's performance.

The show drew attention for its political undertones, as it was seen as a response to the perceived 'wokeness' of the official halftime show. The alternative show aimed to appeal to conservative values. This rivalry sparked discussions about the nature of American identity and the role of entertainment in reflecting societal values. The contrasting receptions of both events reveal how deeply divided public opinion is regarding issues of race, culture, and politics in the U.S.

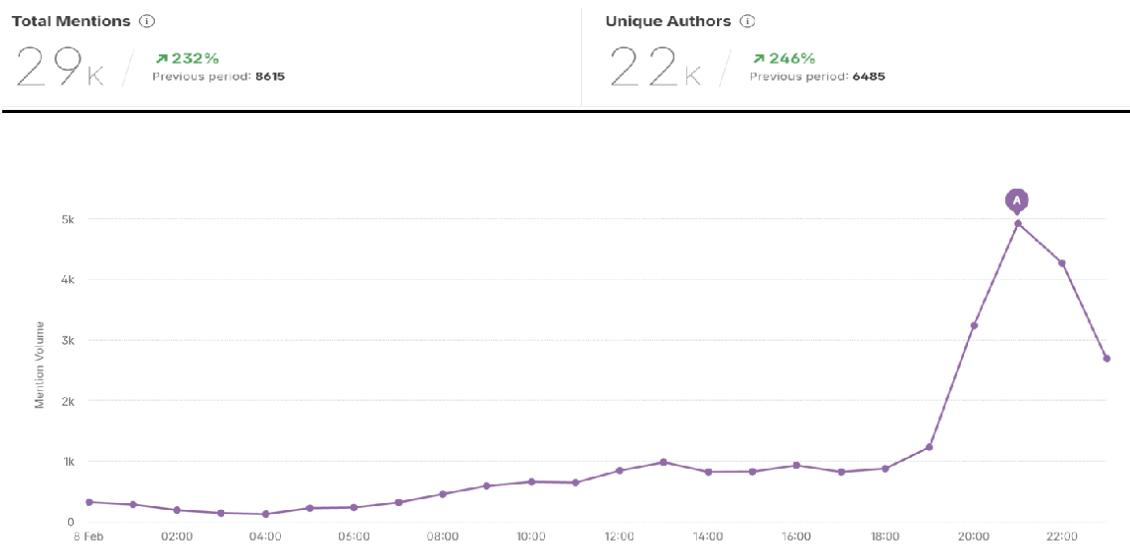
RQ1: How did the volume of social media activity about Bad Bunny's Super Bowl LX compare with the social media activity around the alternative half halftime event headlined by Kid Rock?

On the singular day of the Super Bowl, February 8, 2026, there were 75k mentions on social media regarding Bad Bunny and his halftime show performance. In comparison, 29k social media mentions discussed Kid Rock's alternative performance. Brandwatch captured a sample of the entire data set. It was surprising that Bad Bunny's social media mentions only outnumbered Kid Rock's social media discussions by 2.5 times as the viewership of both events differ by more than 120 million views. The following highlights themes of social media mentions regarding each artist's performances during the Super Bowl halftime show times.

Superbowl halftime show – Bad Bunny



Turning Point USA - Kid Rock

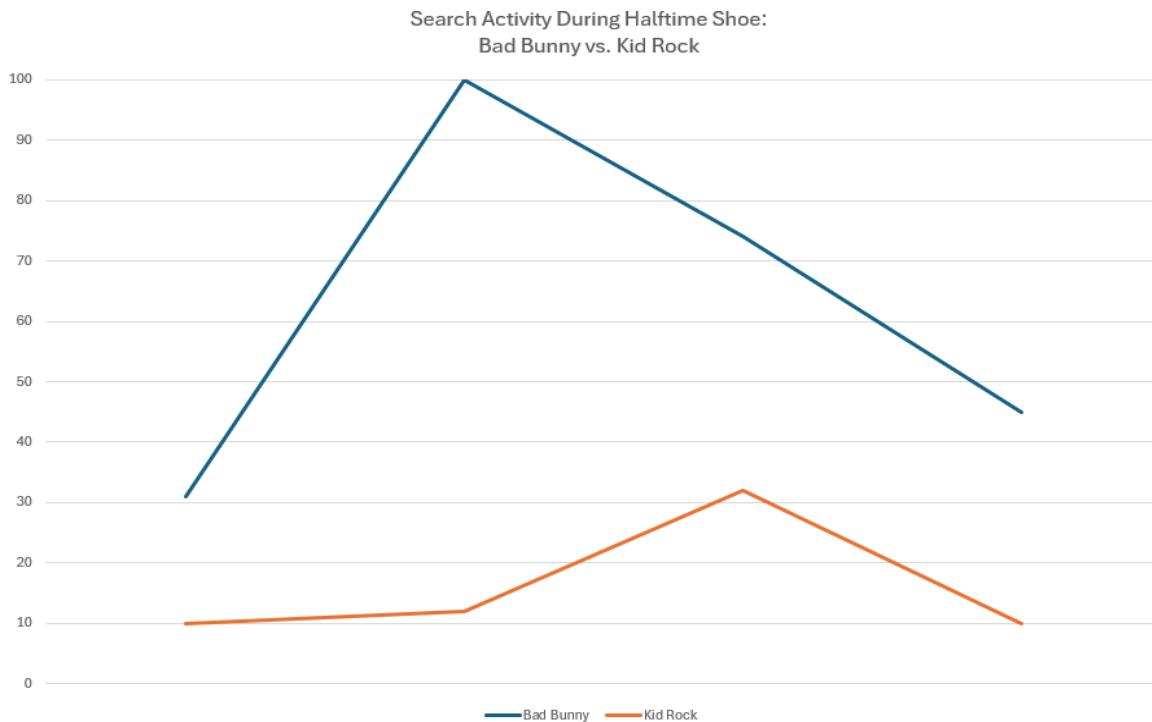


Viewership Contrast

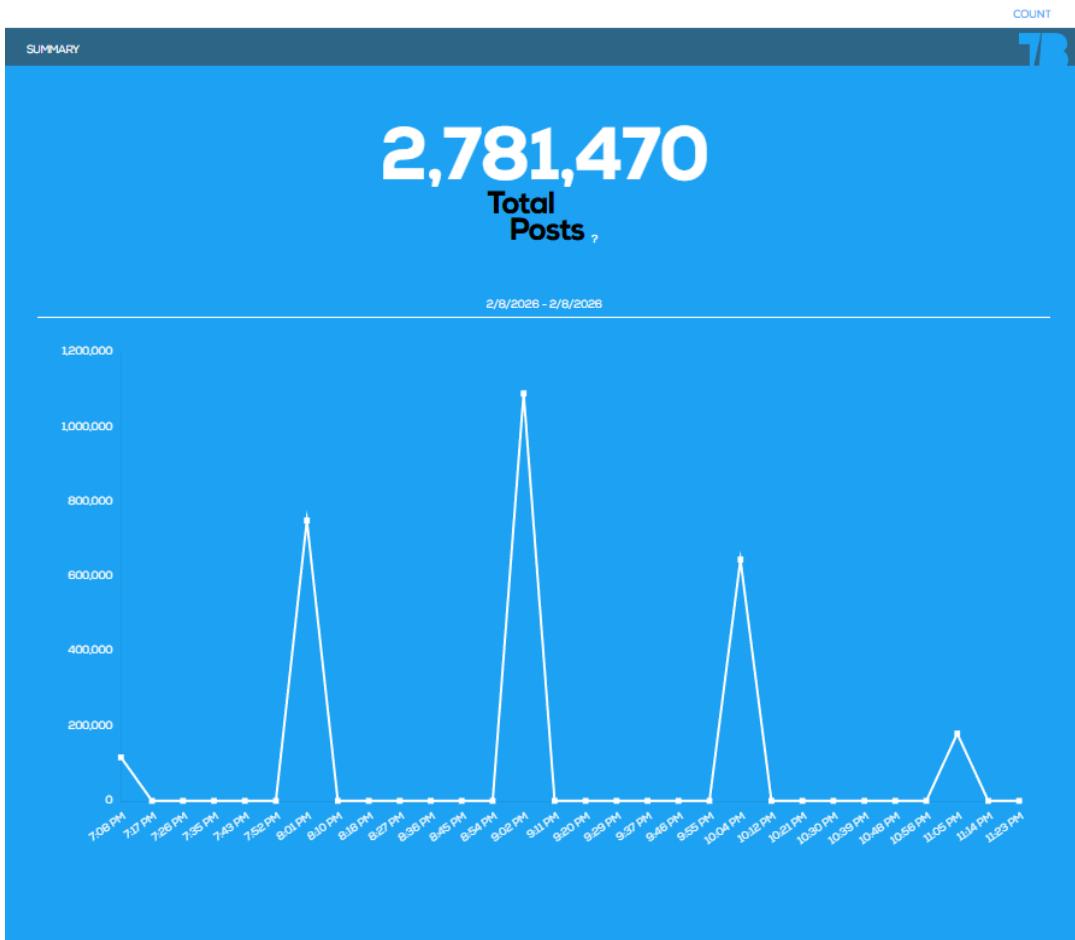
Bad Bunny's Super Bowl halftime show sparked significant attention, showcasing a vibrant performance that included surprise appearances from Lady Gaga and Ricky Martin alongside star-studded cameo appearances in the dancing crowd including Cardi B, Jessica Alba and many more. This halftime performance drew an estimated 127 million viewers, highlighting the artist's global appeal and perhaps cultural significance of his performance, which celebrated Latino heritage. In contrast, the alternative halftime show hosted by Turning Point USA, featuring Kid Rock, attracted around 5-6 million viewers. The difference in audience engagement is indicative just via the viewership.

Online Searches and X Activity: 2026 Halftime Shows

Online searches during the halftime shows of both headliners disproportionately showed greater interest in Bad Bunny with a peak in activity three times greater than that of Kid Rock.



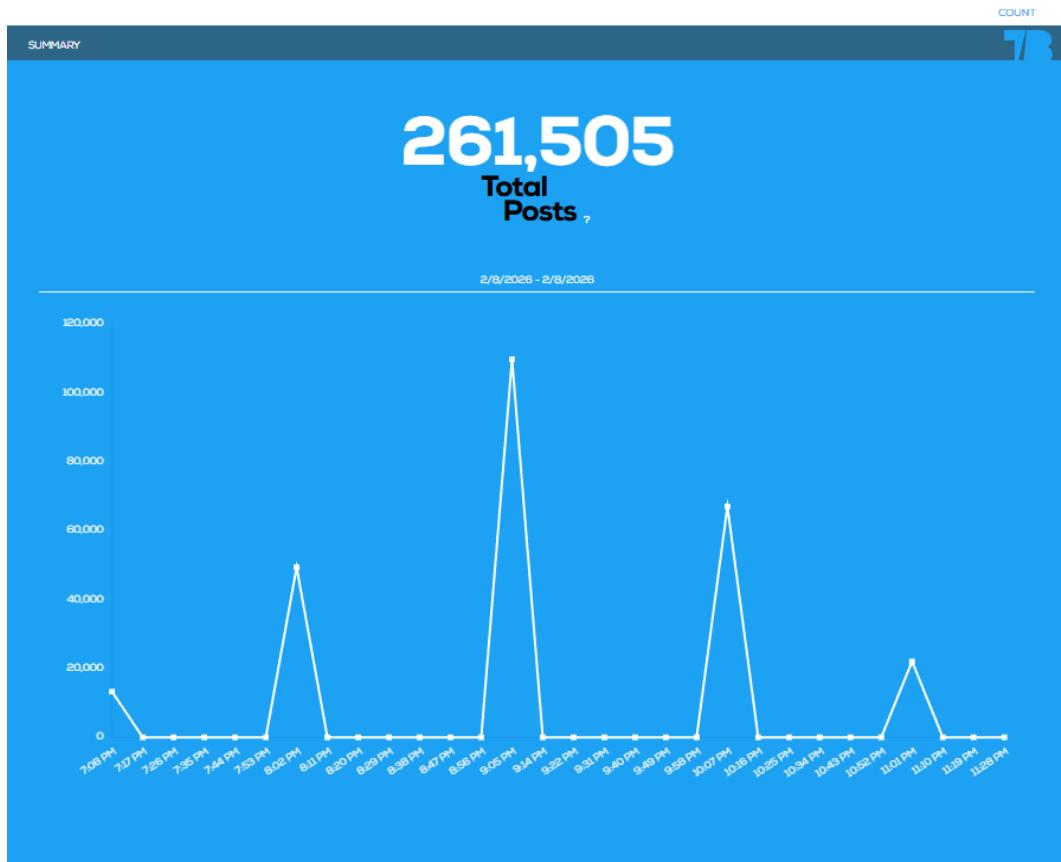
This represents a 212.5% gap in searches, with activity on X showing even more dramatic distinctions. Analysis of X activity during and around the game accounted for 2,781,470 total posts on the platform mentioning Bad Bunny. Post activity about Bad Bunny peaked during his performance generating over one million mentions.



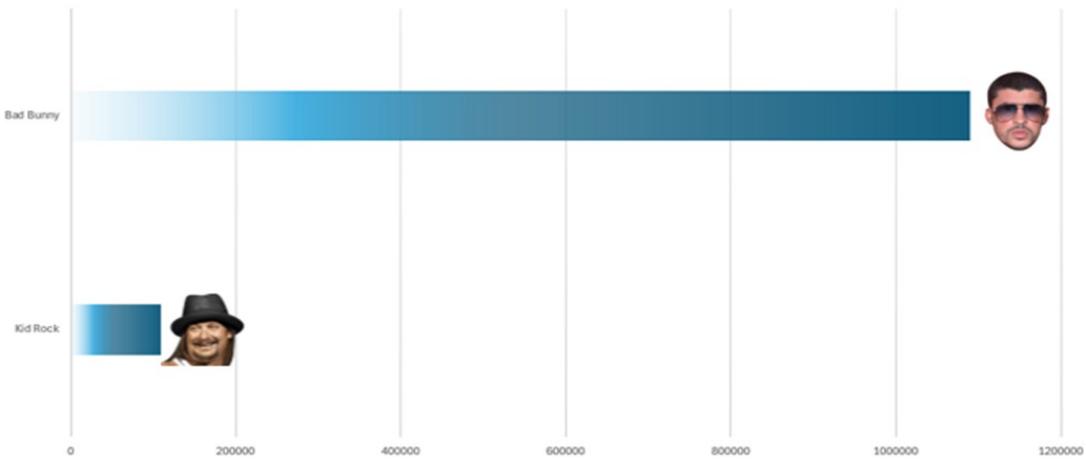
In contrast, posts on X about Kid Rock accounted for only 261,505 during the period of the game.

Peak post numbers at the time of his performance crested 109,779.

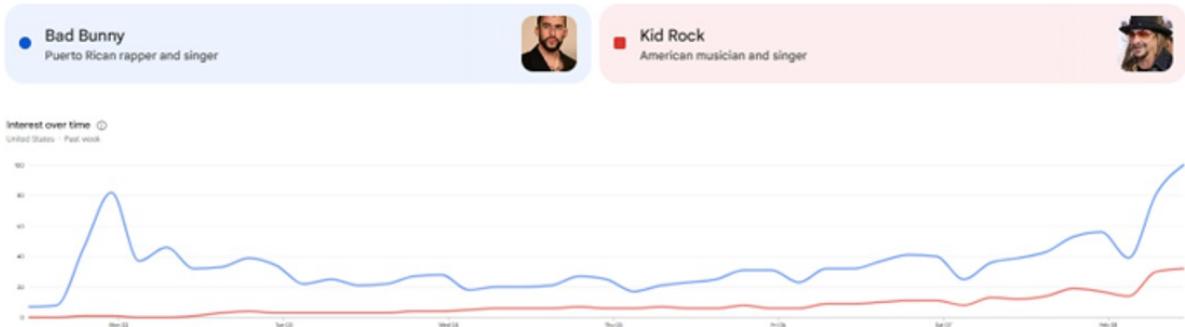
Overall, the gap in interest between the two performers on X was 963.639% in favor of Bad Bunny in the period of their respective shows. The gap in peak posting activity during the shows favored the Puerto Rican star by 892.845%.



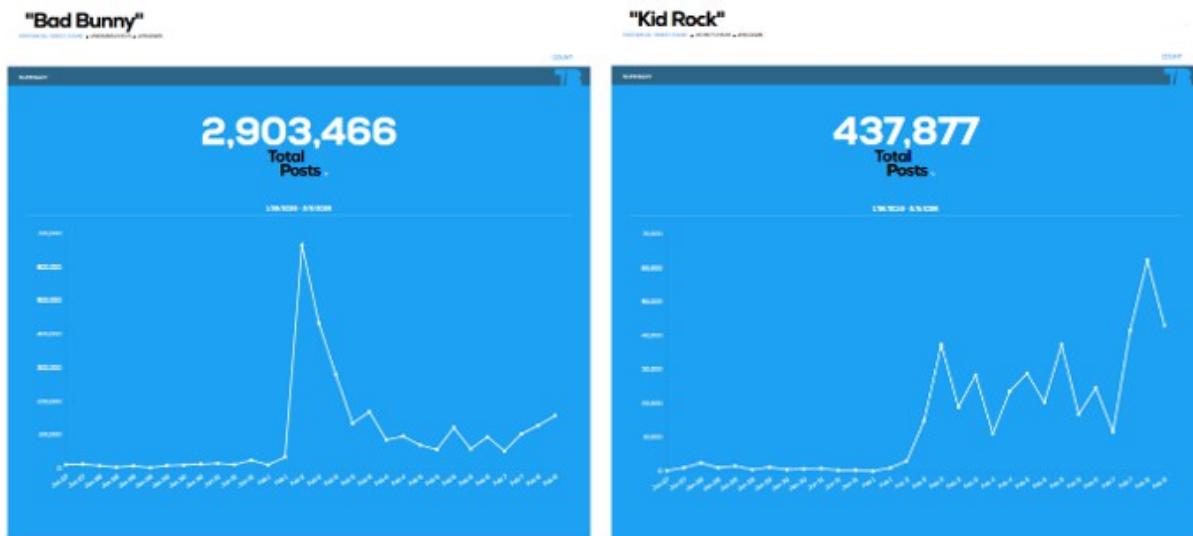
HALFTIME SHOW POSTS ON X: BAD BUNNY VS. KID ROCK

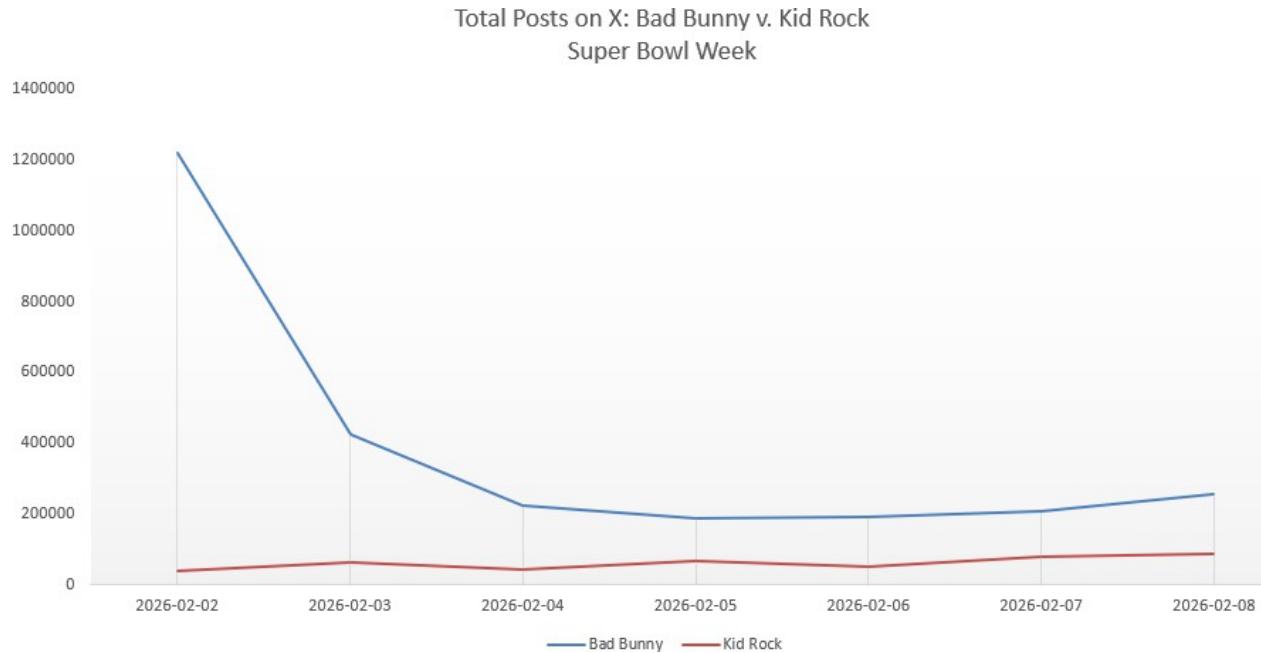


These outcomes reflected analysis in the days prior to the event. In the week leading up to the Super Bowl, a significant disparity in search activity between Bad Bunny and Kid Rock was identified. Google Trends Analysis suggests online interest for Bad Bunny was 325% higher.



Activity on X reflected a notable gap in post activity related to the two headlining acts in the week leading up to the Super Bowl. In the days prior to the event, Bad Bunny generated 563.078% posts on the platform.





Disastrous Viewership for Kid Rock's Show

The ratings for Turning Point USA's alternative halftime show featuring Kid Rock were significantly lower than those for Bad Bunny's performance, leading to a ratings disaster for the conservative organization. This contrast in viewership highlights the challenges faced by alternative programming that seeks to counter mainstream entertainment, particularly when it lacks the star power and cultural relevance of its competitors. Kid Rock's performance faced criticism for its perceived exclusionary nature, as it featured predominantly white artists and was seen as a reactionary response to Bad Bunny's diverse performance.

Social media's mixed views and disputes

The rivalry between Bad Bunny's official halftime show and Turning Point USA's alternative event has become a focal point of discussion on social media. Social media reactions to both halftime shows were polarized. Both artists' performances raised eyebrows as the Bad Bunny's performance was sung entirely in Spanish while Kid Rock seemed to have forgotten his lyrics

while lip synching. While Bad Bunny's performance was praised for its energy and cultural significance, while others criticized it for being too political or not representative of American values. It was criticized for being "un-American." Turning Point USA's alternative show, which aimed to promote traditional American values, received mixed reviews with Kid Rocks' lackluster performance.

Critics of Bad Bunny's performance, including some conservative figures, expressed their discontent, leading to a notable boycott campaign. Conservative commentators have fueled discussions questioning whether the halftime show was indeed a celebration of inclusivity or diverse representation in mainstream media. This cultural faceoff has ignited debates on social media, with many praising Bad Bunny's inclusive message while others criticized the NFL's choice of performer. Despite this, Bad Bunny's show is projected to have significantly outperformed the Kid Rock's in terms of viewership, reflecting a broader acceptance of multiculturalism in entertainment and showcasing the divide in audience preferences and cultural values. The contrasting receptions of both shows illustrate the ongoing cultural tensions within the country.

RQ2: What were the themes, emotions, and sentiments associated with Bad Bunny and Kid Rock in the social media space related to their halftime show performances?

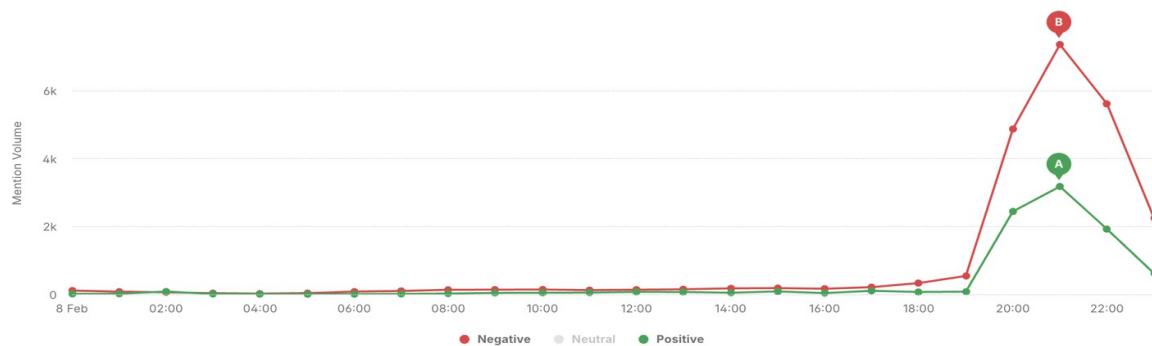
Who is "mainstream" in media?

Bad Bunny's halftime show at the Super Bowl has been described as a historic moment for Latino representation in mainstream media, featuring a performance that resonated with millions. Bad Bunny made a mark in history as he became the first solo Latin artist to headline the event. The show, which indicated a message of love and unity, was praised by fans and critics alike. Bad

Bunny's show drew a massive audience while the alternative show by Turning Point USA struggled to capture viewer interest. The alternative show was criticized for its lack of engagement and entertainment value. This juxtaposition has sparked a broader conversation about the role of cultural representation in major events like the Super Bowl and the implications of audience choices. The significant difference in viewership numbers underscores the ongoing cultural shifts within the American landscape.

Backlash against Counterprogramming

The backlash against Bad Bunny's Super Bowl halftime show stemmed from his political views and the perception among some conservative groups that his performance was un-American. Figures like Donald Trump criticized the show, calling it an affront to American values. In response, Turning Point USA organized an alternative halftime show to promote a more traditional American narrative. However, the low viewership numbers for this event suggest that the audience's appetite for such programming may be waning, as many viewers opted for Bad Bunny's inclusive message instead. The discourse surrounding these performances reflects broader societal tensions regarding identity, representation, and the role of entertainment in political expression.



The sentiments surrounding Bad Bunny's Super Bowl halftime performance was met with 2.5 times more negativity than positive sentiment. The following thematic discussions led the negative and positive sentiments:

Controversy of Bad Bunny's All Spanish Performance

The Super Bowl halftime show featuring Bad Bunny has sparked significant controversy, particularly among conservative circles. Critics, including President Trump and Turning Point USA, labeled the performance as 'un-American' due to its Spanish lyrics and cultural themes. Polls indicate a divided public opinion, with a notable portion of Americans indifferent to the controversy surrounding the artist's selection. Detractors also criticized the performance for its purely political undertones and perceived lack of traditional American values, igniting discussions about cultural identity, reflecting broader societal divides.

Backlash Against Bad Bunny's Halftime Show

The backlash against Bad Bunny's Super Bowl performance has been fueled by his outspoken criticism of U.S. immigration policies and political figures, particularly President Trump. Many conservatives have expressed outrage, claiming that his performance undermines American values. In response to Bad Bunny's halftime show, Turning Point USA organized an alternative 'All-American Halftime Show' featuring Kid Rock, which attracted around 5 million viewers. This counter-event was positioned as a patriotic response to what critics deemed a politically charged performance by Bad Bunny. However, many viewers expressed dissatisfaction with Kid Rock's show, mainly due to the quality of the performance, as Bad Bunny's performance was praised for its artistic merit and cultural significance by contrast. Despite this, polling suggests that a significant number of Americans are indifferent to the controversy, indicating a potential

disconnect between vocal critics and the general public's views on cultural representation in entertainment.

Cultural Celebration

Bad Bunny's Super Bowl halftime show was a vibrant celebration of Latin culture. The event drew significant attention, with many praising its joyful atmosphere and powerful messages of love and unity. The show not only highlighted Bad Bunny's musical talent but also served as a platform for cultural representation, making it a memorable moment for fans worldwide.

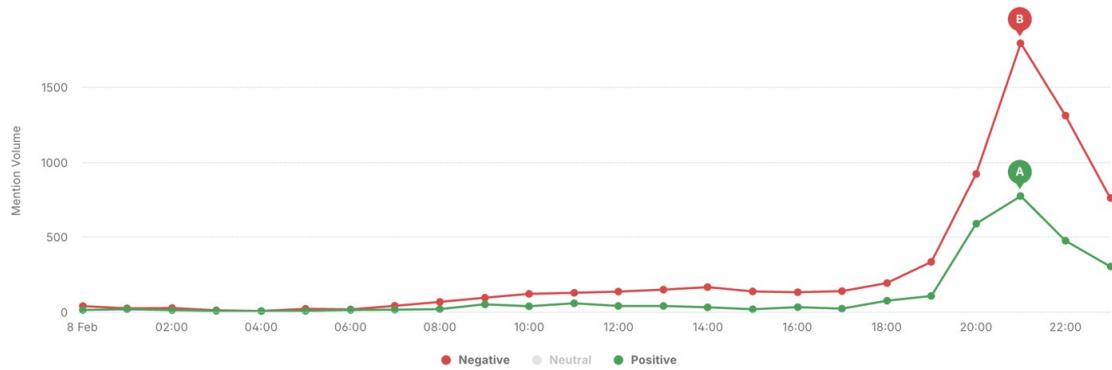
Positive Reception

Many viewers expressed their admiration for Bad Bunny's halftime show, calling it one of the best in Super Bowl history. The performance was noted for its high energy, creative set design, and the incorporation of Puerto Rican pride. Fans highlighted the emotional impact of the show, with some stating it felt like a Broadway celebration. The show concluded with a powerful message displayed on the big screen, emphasizing that love conquers hate. This resonated with many viewers who appreciated the positive and inclusive themes presented during the performance. The event was celebrated as a significant moment for representation in sports, showcasing the importance of diversity and cultural pride in mainstream entertainment.

Criticism of Kid Rock's Performance

Critics of Kid Rock's performance at the Turning Point USA halftime show highlighted issues such as lip-syncing and a lack of energy compared to Bad Bunny's vibrant display. Social media reactions ranged from ridicule to support, with some praising the patriotic themes while others dismissed it as a poorly executed event. The juxtaposition of the two shows reflects broader societal divides, with the alternative show being criticized for its political motivations and

perceived lack of authenticity. This dynamic illustrates the ongoing cultural battles within American entertainment.



The sentiments surrounding Kid Rock's conservative alternative performance on Turning Point USA was met with 2.5 times more negativity than positive sentiment. The following thematic discussions led the negative and positive sentiments:

Criticism of Kid Rock's Performance

Kid Rock's performance at the Turning Point USA's 'All-American Halftime Show' has drawn heavy criticism, particularly regarding his vocal authenticity. Many viewers noted discrepancies between his lip movements and the audio, leading to widespread ridicule on social media. Despite the event being marketed as a patriotic alternative to Bad Bunny's performance, it failed to resonate with a broader audience, drawing only a fraction of the viewership compared to the official halftime show. This has raised questions about the effectiveness of such counter-programming efforts in appealing to conservative audiences.

Kid Rock's Controversial Lyrics Resurface

The controversy surrounding Kid Rock's lyrics, particularly those referencing underage themes, has resurfaced amid his performance at the Turning Point USA halftime show. Critics have pointed

out the problematic nature of his past lyrics, which have drawn accusations of promoting inappropriate behavior. This has led to heightened scrutiny of his role in the conservative event, as well as discussions about the implications of featuring such artists in a politically charged context. The juxtaposition of Kid Rock's past with the current cultural climate raises questions about accountability and the messages conveyed through entertainment.

Turning Point's Patriotic Alternative

Turning Point USA's All-American Halftime Show, featuring Kid Rock, aimed to provide a patriotic alternative to the NFL's Super Bowl performance by Bad Bunny. The event drew significant viewership, with reports of over 5 million tuning in on platforms like YouTube and Rumble. Kid Rock's performance included a mix of country music and conservative messaging, appealing to fans who felt alienated by the mainstream NFL show. Bad Bunny's set celebrated unity and the immigrant spirit, while Kid Rock leaned into conservative themes, bringing along artists like Brantley Gilbert.

Backlash Against Bad Bunny

The backlash against Bad Bunny's Super Bowl halftime show, which was performed entirely in Spanish, prompted a significant response from conservative circles. Many supporters of Turning Point USA expressed outrage over Bad Bunny's performance. However, polls indicated a split in viewer preferences, with a slight majority favoring Bad Bunny's show.

DISCUSSION

Results indicate that social media activity greatly favored Bad Bunny in terms of public interest surrounding the respective halftime shows. Although social media activity and online searches cannot be equated with traditional measures of audience size, prior research (Arora et al., 2019; McCarthy, 2010) suggests that they reliably capture patterns of public attention and interest. Public attention, thus, manifests as a cultural power, a form of social currency, in today's crowded media

spaces (Heitmayer, 2025). The magnitude of difference in social media volume and search interest for Bad Bunny's halftime show far surpassed audience size alone, demonstrating that digital attention amplifies cultural relevance beyond passive media consumption. Additionally, while both performances generated more negative than positive sentiment, the structure of polarization was not symmetrical. Specially, even negative content on social media still serves as an amplification function (Zhang et al., 2018). Bad Bunny's performance attracted widespread engagement across supporters, critics, fans, and observers, whereas Kid Rock's alternative show generated a much narrower, ideologically concentrated conversation. In this case, polarization represented more as uneven contestation, where one cultural product significantly shaped the symbolic arena despite criticism.

It is worth noting that Turning Point USA's alternative halftime show illustrates the limits of reactionary counterprogramming. Despite high political salience and extensive promotional framing, the alternative, competing event struggled to generate comparable attention, visibility, or sustained engagement from social media users. This finding suggests that cultural relevance cannot be manufactured solely through opposition. Rather, it must be grounded in broader cultural resonance, celebrity influence/capital, and cross-demographic appeal.

This study demonstrates that the Super Bowl halftime serves as a symbolic battleground where entertainment, politics, media, and identity intersect. Instead of functioning as a neutral sports spectacle, this prominent sports event in the U.S. operates as a site of cultural negotiation where competing narratives of authenticity, nationalism, and inclusion were actively constructed, debated, and re-negotiated through audience engagement. Our study thus extends prior work on sports as political spectacle (e.g., Andrews, 2016) by empirically illuminating how these social

struggles (e.g., who defines “American” identity, cultural legitimacy vs. political backlash, mainstream visibility, etc.) unfold in real time on social media.

From a strategic communication perspective, for institutions such as NFL, media broadcasters, and sports sponsors, the results suggest that cultural risk does not necessarily translate into engagement debacle. In contrast, performances that reflect demographic evolvement and cultural inclusiveness may generate much broader attention, even amidst controversies, than ideologically narrow alternatives. Therefore, our study provides support to reframe risks as potentially strategic rather than purely reputational.

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