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Self-identity disclosure in TV Fandom. Analysing the comments posted by Spanish female fans and community managers

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Abstract

[EN] **Introduction.** Digital age brings to television fiction viewers a variety of spaces where they can disclose their self-identity and emotions generated by the texts consumed. **Methodology.** This article analyses 7,849 comments posted by female fans and community managers on 122 sites (forums and social networks) dedicated to the Spanish TV fiction. The 22,301 items generated from the comments analysed explore the emotions aroused by television fiction, such as joy, enthusiasm, sadness, anger, disappointment and nostalgia. **Conclusions and discussion.** The research confirms the potential of TV fiction to encourage self-reflection on the self-identity of fans. It also identifies forums as the platforms that encourage deeper debates about TV series, despite the popularity of social networks such as Facebook or Twitter. Finally, community managers' comments, which focus on the promotion of TV programmes, disregard the strengthening of the feeling of collective identity.

Keywords

[EN] social audience; television fiction; identity; fans; Spain.

Contents

[EN] 1. Introduction. 1.1. Social Audience & Self-identity disclosure. 2. Method. 3. Results. 3.1. Light & Emotional identity. 3.2. Mobilisation. 3.3. Collective identity. 4. Discussion. 4.1. Limitations and future research. 5. Notes. 6. References

Translated by PhD **Charlotte Rose**
(Rose Translations, UK)

1. Introduction

The impact of social media on the consumption of TV content has popularized the concept of social audience, which refers to the online participatory culture stimulated by TV texts, mostly on social networks. The so-called social TV has extended the *water-cooler television* and has encouraged the communication between fans—who may be geographically scattered and/or chronologically separated—, characters and producers (Giglietto and Selva, 2014), whilst contributing “to the creation and manifestation of the [fans’] self” through the comments posted (D’heer and Courtois, 2016: 13).

As part of a larger project on the construction of female identity in television and the Internet, this article explores how broadcast TV fiction galvanizes its fans to disclose their social identity (boyd, 2002) on the Internet, and how official community managers mediate in this process. Particularly, the work is focused on comments posted by female fans, a social group historically underrepresented in the studies of fan culture (Coppa, 2006).

This study proposes a methodology, which combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore a specific type of textual-enunciative productivity (Hills, 2013), that is, the comments posted by female fans. Following Hills’ (2013) exploration of Fiske’s productivity taxonomy (1992) in the digital era, these posts can be understood as the result of the following process: fans transform their “interior semiotic productivity into a socially-shared enunciative productivity that’s bound with a particular moment of broadcast, and immediately switch that into the textual productivity of ‘narrowcast’ (if not actually broadcast) digital mediation” (Hills, 2013: 136). Specifically, the work dissects 7,849 comments posted by female fans and community managers on 122 neutre-generated sites (forums and social networks) dedicated to the Spanish TV fiction premiered in 2012-2013. The paper represents one of the first works that thoroughly examine the social audience generated by scripted TV fiction made in Spain. In addition, this work echoes the call of feminist media studies to explore online resources from the perspective of genres and formats that do not specifically target women (Van Zoonen, 2011).

1.1. Social Audience & Self-Identity Disclosure

In the current media environment, computer-mediated communication (CMC) allows individuals to construct and deconstruct their identity (Turkle, 1997), a versatility previously highlighted in the offline realm through concepts such as the ‘chameleonic’ identity (Gergen, 1991) and ‘protean’ identity (Lifton, 1993) of the human being. In the context of television, fans model their self-identity through the hermeneutic process to which media products are subjected but also through the interaction with other fans. Even though communication through social networks is mostly integrated with the non-dialogic and non-informational *phatic culture* (Miller, 2008: 388), some fans elaborate and socialize their interpretations of programmes establishing links with the rest of the community, which may even be more fascinating than the text itself (Jenkins, 1992b).

Television consumption leads the viewers to feel that they belong to an ‘imagined’ (Anderson, 1983) or ‘interpretative’ community (Lindloff, 1998), which catalyses interaction with others (Madill and Goldmeier, 2003: 28). Communicating their impressions of a program, sharing and seeking information about it, achieving feelings of co-viewing, and being exposed to others fans’ opinions are some of the tasks executed by fans of TV programs (Han and Lee, 2014) which may increase

audience's pleasure and offers the fans the chance to develop social relationships with other fans (Vassallo, 2012) [1]. The revelation of personal information has an effect on the formation of social relationships, transforming "weak ties", established in casual contacts, into "strong ties" (Haythornthwaite, 2005), typical of the relationships between friends, and also fans of a particular cultural product. This behaviour allows us to define the social debate on television fiction as part of a strategy of the construction of social identity included in the so-called 'fourth privacy interface', through which individuals regulate 'what those around [them] know or assume about [them]' (Vaidhyanathan, 2008: online).

In line with studies on fandom pre Web 2.0 (e.g. Baym, 2000; Bielby *et al.*, 1999; Bury, 2005; Jenkins, 1995), more recent investigations explore fans' reactions in forums and social networks. However, despite the interest elicited by users' feedback, 'few [studies] investigate how consumer use of social media networks function as a platform to conduct the same type of entertainment-enriching practices' (Wood and Baughman, 2012: 333). Thus, many of the studies carried out in this field are limited to the exploration of comments on a particular fiction in only a single social media platform (Booth, 2008; Vassallo, 2012; Wood and Baughman, 2012), forums (Knaggs, 2011; Williams, 2010, 2015), blogs (Hadas, 2013) or fansites (Webb *et al.*, 2012). Due to the lack of in-depth studies exploring the social audience generated by Spanish TV fiction programmes in the incipient years of the convergence of the Internet and TV in Spain, this paper aims to offer a very first overview of this phenomenon. To attain this goal, comments posted on different types of platforms (i.e. social networks and forums) have been aggregated.

This article considers that television fiction consumption plays a decisive role in the construction of fans' self-narratives and emotional wellbeing (Harrington *et al.*, 2011: 580). Fans' comments show an array of reactions ranging from '*emotional inoculation* against existential anxieties' (Giddens, 1991: 39) to the threat experienced by fan self-identity when unexpected or inconsistent endings truncate the expectations that have been generated (Williams, 2015: 15). Moreover, the creation of strong fandom is a 'tremendous potential for media producers' (Hadas, 2013: 331) and is used to promote and consolidate a programme's reputation through positive feedback.

The social audience analysed in this article is comprised of female fans who show their involvement in the text and proclaim their right to the interpretation, evaluation and appropriation of media products (Jenkins, 1992b). In the light of the above, this study posits the following research questions focused on Spanish TV fiction:

- RQ1. What types of personal information do female fans share with other fans online?
- RQ2. What kinds of emotions do fans recall and decide to disclose online?
- RQ3. Does female fans' online participation reflect a strong feeling of collective identity?

2. Method

The research analyses the comments posted by female fans and community managers on Facebook, Twitter and the most active forums of 53 dramas and 19 comedies broadcast over the period 2012 to 2013. Usernames and message content were considered verbal cues to identify internet users' gender (Spottswood *et al.*, 2013) along with photographs, avatars and other linguistic indicators used to distinguish the masculine from the feminine in Spanish, Catalan, Galician and Basque [2].

Consequently, the study only assumes that the signers of the comments adopt a female public persona to interact with the users' community, regardless of whether or not they are biologically female.

The study employs a hybrid system to analyse the discussion that combines computational and manual procedures. The qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti was employed to facilitate the coding and to reduce the margin of error inherent in manual coding. The manual part of the analysis is justified in terms of both meaning and signifier and also because the concise nature of much of the online commentary requires both a contextual and co-textual analysis (Casetti and Di Chio, 1999).

The interest in analysing the opinion generated regarding the last episode of the season (day β), known as a 'significant event' (Barkhuus and Brown, 2009: 13; Larsen, 2010:158), added to the difficulty, or even impossibility, of accessing older data from Big Data sources such as Facebook and Twitter, which have poor storage and data search functions (Boyd and Crawford, 2012), has led us to focus our investigation on the day after the broadcast of the final episode or season of a series (day $\beta+1$). The sample is comprised of 7,849 units of analysis from 122 platforms: 18 Facebook pages; 67 Twitter accounts and 37 forums associated with 72 first-run domestic fiction programmes aired in Spain from 2012 to 2013 in broadcast channels.

A maximum of 50 comments (Nw_p^i) were collected from each platform. In those cases where limited web space meant that there was not the required number of posts, the sample was supplemented with older posts until the necessary number had been reached. 81.5% ($N=6,397$) of the comments gathered were posted by female fans, while 18.5% ($N=1,452$) were posted by moderators. In sum, the total number of comments (N) can be simply calculated using the equation given below.

Equation 1:

$$N = \sum_{\substack{1 \leq i \leq 72 \\ P \in \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Facebook,} \\ \text{Twitter,} \\ \text{Forums} \end{array} \right\}}} Nw_p^i + Na_p^i$$

In the above, Nw_p^i and Na_p^i are the number of comments gathered from the web platform P for the i^{th} TV series posted by female internet users and administrators, respectively, where $Nw_p^i \leq 50$. This selection was carried out manually by the investigators involved since web crawler tools and data mining programs (e.g. R programming language), which are available in data analysis packages adapted to different social networks, offered an imprecise approach in terms of identifying internet users' gender.

The analysis coding was refined following an initial pilot study of comments carried out by two independent coders. It was completed by 15 researchers in Communication covering the four languages in Spain: Spanish, Catalan, Basque and Galician. All the investigators had received training in accurate coding, including training in the use of Atlas.ti. Once the classification of the comments (*tagging*) had been concluded and the units of analysis had been filtered by code, the interpretive process then took place. The codebook ($N=39$) was divided into six sections:

Table 1. Codebook for the analysis of the posts

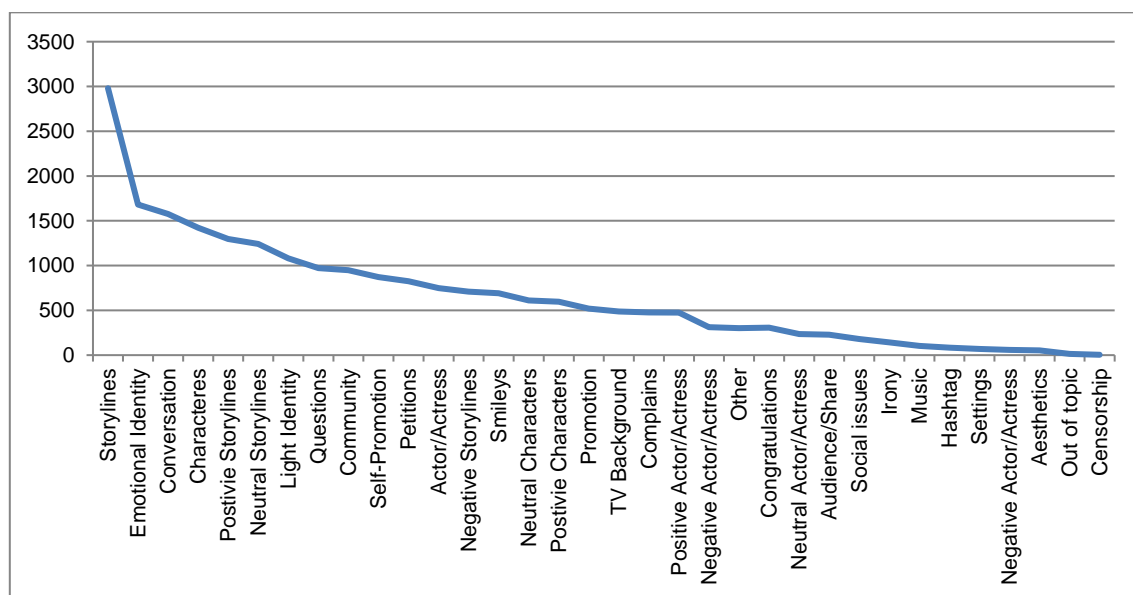
Category	Code	
Descriptive codes		
Authoship	#community-manager, #internet-user	
Web resource	#facebook, #forum, #twitter,	
Narrative world		
Storytelling Level	#storylines	##positive-storylines, ##negative-storylines, ##neutral-storylines, #congratulations
	#characters	##positive-characters, ##negative-characters, ##neutral-characters, #aesthetics
	#actor/actress	##positive-actor/actress, ##negative-actor/actress, ##neutral-actor/actress
	#settings	
Commodity Level	#music, #self-promotion, #promotion, #audience-share	
Expression of self-identity		
Self-reflection	#light-identity, #emotional-identity	
Expressive Signs	#smileys	
Mobilisation	#petitions, #complains	
Expression of collective identity		
Community	#community, #irony	
Interaction	#conversation, #question	
Social issues		
Social issues	#social-issues	
Other		
Miscellany	#out-of-topic, #TV-background-, #retweet, #censorship, #hashtag	

To guarantee fans' privacy, quoted material presented in the results does not include any references to the fans' nicknames. The content has also been translated from Spanish, Catalan, Galician or Basque into English.

3. Results

The 7,849 comments making up the analysis sample generated 22,301 items [3] and take the form of a *long tail* (Anderson, 2006). The resulting shape has a 'big head' in which most of the references to the programmes are concentrated, and a 'long tail' made up of miscellaneous subjects such as audience data, the programme's soundtrack, and negative comments about the actors, just to name a few.

Figure 1. The long tail of the social audience discussion.



The study explores the social construction of female fans that emerges from their interactive experiences with other internauts. Therefore, comments relating to the following variables were included: *self-reference* (light identity, emotional identity); *mobilisation* (petitions and complaints); *community feeling* (community and irony) and *interaction* (conversations and questions). The use of emoticons was also analysed.

Self-references

3.1. Light & Emotional identity

35.2% (N=2,762) of the comments include female fans’ self-references, which can be classified under *light* identity or *emotional* identity, depending on the degree of intimacy revealed. Light identity is comprised of trivial personal data female fans share online, while the emotional identity comprises the emotions generated by the plot. Emoticons, present in 8.8% (N=692) of the comments, are used mainly by female fans (91.9%, N=636) and minimally by community managers (8.1%, N=56). Their use strengthens the ideas and feelings expressed while allowing space restrictions imposed by certain social networks to be overcome. Thus, Twitter includes 53.2% (N=368) of the comments with emoticons, which is a much higher percentage than Facebook (15.9%, N=110) or forums (30.9%, N=214).

Light identity. The references to light identity represent 13.8% (N=1,081) of the sample. 99.4% (N=1,075) of the comments in this group were written by female fans and include references to their viewing habits and interactions with new technologies (e.g. “I will see #elsecretodepuenteviejo. I was looking forward to watching this episode on the TV set instead of seeing it on the cell phone hehe”, *El Secreto de Puente Viejo*, Antena3). Online viewing allowed them to watch missed episodes,

synchronize their viewing with televised episodes and immerse themselves in unlimited viewing through which they analyse the programmes (e.g. “I was that tired that I went out like a light!!! It does not matter. I will watch it today on Antena3 website”, *Vive Cantando*, Antena3). TV fiction also helps fans to structure their daily routines (e.g. “#ByeByeGranHotel. I have not reconciled myself yet with the idea that I won’t be able to watch anything on TV, absolutely nothing! That day was dedicated to Gran Hotel...”, *Gran Hotel*, Antena3), with smileys being used by some of the female users to show that they welcomed this.

Emotional identity. The comments in this group make up 21.4% (N=1,681) of the sample, 92.9% (N=1,561) of which include emotions expressed by fans while 7.1% (N=120) were posted by the community managers. Comments on dramas accounted for the majority of the emotions (78.9%; N=1,326), with 21.1% (N=355) accounting for comments on comedy, which is a tendency corroborated by the number of emoticons used in the former (76.3%; N=528) compared to the latter (23.7%; N=164). Emotional identity is built around four binomial axes that define the emotional attitude taken on watching: love-hate, happiness-sadness, self-control-exasperation and closeness-detachment.

Love/Hate. Some female fans demonstrate their passionate connection with either the programmes or the characters (e.g. “And to turn myself on... a lot... I look at him... and I lose myself in his way of looking... in his smile... in his back... in his abs...”, *Águila Roja*, La1). Occasionally, the externalised passions can blur the boundaries between reality and fiction, leading some female fans to express their love for the characters, which is sometimes extrapolated to the actors. Bad or unfaithful characters are rejected by the female fans, although good but ill-defined characters also arouse negative or at least contentious sentiments.

Happiness/Sadness. The end of a season or programme provokes different emotions in female fans, who celebrate the development of the plot and characters, show their impatience for the start of the new season (e.g. “What an episode! What a shame, #mondaysOfIsabel are over! I am dying for the third seasons’ arrival! *Isabel*, La1) or display their sadness (e.g. “The end of the programme has affected me a lot. I will miss it. It used to provide me with two great hours of entertainment and curiosity”, *Gran Reserva. El Origen*, La1). The community managers’ commentary sustains these types of emotions, generating excitement before the start of the new season, maintaining intrigue and tension during airing and encouraging subsequent reflection.

Loyal female fans of long-running programmes usually highlight the emotional connection established with the series over the years (e.g. “My mother and I have never missed an episode, not even a single one. [With the end of the TV series], we feel like ‘orphans’ now”, *Bandolera*, Antena3). Generally, female internauts use emoticons associated with positive feelings (:) ^^) to show how funny the comedies were. By contrast, female users demonstrate their sadness when faced with the imminent end of the series they follow, negative audience figures or their disagreement with the development of the plots or characters. Dramatic scenes provoke sadness and anguish in the female fans, while romantic situations arouse emotions that range between joy and sadness. The plots’ authenticity can lead female users to form emotional links with them, especially in historical dramas, where nostalgia can be extremely attractive. In these cases, dysphoric emoticons (:(: (: _ () add to the sense of sorrow.

Self-control/Exasperation. Sad endings are not usually well received, although there are comments that welcome them. Many female fans express their anger at inconclusive storylines or when a series

suddenly finishes due to poor audience figures. Some comments severely question the reasons behind the ending (e.g. “It is sad that [*Amar en tiempos revueltos*] ends, despite being a great programme. I’m sure that all its fans think in the same way as me. I do not believe that audience ratings are the reason why the programme is over. This has happened because of the fascist Government, which has no interest in it”, *Amar en tiempos revueltos*, La1). As in previous axes, female fans use emoticons to reinforce their criticisms (¬¬ or U_U) (e.g. “...do not forget Leo’s brother, Lucas-Hugo’s friends! Screenwriters have forgotten him! ¬¬”, *Los protegidos*, Antena3).

Closeness/Detachment. Many comments express female fans’ empathy with the characters, who they ‘welcome’ into their families and whose misfortunes they sympathise with as if they were mishaps of people in their family/social circles (e.g. “I feel that I will miss my family, the Bandoleros”, *Bandolera*, Antena3). Some female fans see the characters as inspirational or motivational (e.g. “I guess and wish that we will watch the Polseres again. I need Lleo to keep myself fighting. He is a great example for me to be followed. He gives me strength”, *Polseres Vermelles*, TV3). Generally, the plot’s emotional realism is considered a positive factor of the programme (e.g. “The ending was sad, but it was really great because it depicted the reality of our ancestors. I liked it a lot, and I almost cried”, *Libro de Familia*, TVG).

Comments posted by the community managers that refer to the emotions caused by the series are mainly retweets of female fans messages and are designed to forge a positive opinion of the programme from an external and objective position. Community managers also aim to generate expectation (e.g. “So nervous, so nervous! We have a great episode tonight, with tears, tension, love and a lot of questions to be resolved. If you are with us, you will see one of those episodes that make H-I-S-T-O-R-Y”, *Cuéntame cómo pasó*, La1).

3.2. Mobilisation

Exasperation leads some of the female users to propose various actions to the community through social media. The comments, which are usually perlocutionary in nature, make up 10.5% (N=825) of the comments analysed. They reveal the most nonconformist side of the female fans, who react against what they perceive as attacks on their viewing pleasure. 74.5% (N=615) of the comments in this group were posted by female fans, with 25.5% (N=210) being posted by community managers. 6.1% (N=477) of comments include complains related mainly to the broadcasting schedule or commercial breaks.

Petitions for a new season or attempts to mobilise the community when faced with the premature end to the series as a result of poor audience figures are the most frequent practical actions launched by female users. For example, the creation of the Facebook page ‘For a more dignified ending to “Hospital Central”’ was prompted by the television death of the main character in the long-running hospital soap opera. The desire to launch group actions justifies the use of the plural form and the imperative, although these types of comments varied according to the geographical location they were posted from. Thus, forums tend to be more reflexive, with more dialogue than social networks, a characteristic that brings together a more committed audience. Spontaneous relief predominates on Facebook, while Twitter messages are more demanding and direct.

In general, community managers’ comments are notifications accompanied by a brief summary of the plots under development and are aimed at encouraging fans to watch the next episode and to participate

and join the fan community. These interactive tools allow channels to maintain the audience's enthusiasm while at the same time promote programmes' cross-media expansion. Twitter is the channels' tool of choice when sending out practical messages; it is used three times as much as Facebook. Similarly, Twitter is the most popular platform amongst actresses, who usually use their personal accounts to invite their followers to watch the programme. The actresses also stimulate these types of comments through relating their personal experiences of shooting or their thoughts, placing themselves therefore between the producer and the audience.

3.3. Collective identity

When fans share their viewing experience with other fans, the Internet is allowing them step beyond the borders of their homes, thus helping to spread the programme's narrative pleasure. This environment fosters a feeling of community that is strengthened by common causes, dialogue and the posting of self-reference comments. Nevertheless, only 20.1% (N=1,576) of the comments analysed form a part of a conversation and only 12.4% (N=972) ask the community a question. 14.5% (N=141) of the questions and 2.5% (N=40) of the comments that reflect direct interaction with other users were posted by the community manager. In general, the questions posted by female users are about the storyline, while comments that form part of a conversation are usually answers to technical problems of watching online or include thanks for the help received by fans or the work done by the actors.

Social networks allow large numbers of people to become interlocutors, although the dialogues are rarely long or complex. By contrast, the architecture of forums favours the construction of more extensive conversations thanks to a thematic organisation that makes it easy for longer exchanges between female users. At the same time, the systematic participation in forums creates ties that convert these resources into a suitable setting to better articulate discussions in which members use nicknames and terms such as 'girls'. Among the numerous issues addressed (speculations about the programme's progression, complaints about the broadcasting schedule and commercial breaks etc.), the comments that stand out are those that discuss the plot's influence on relationship building, which occurs mainly in forums and that can transcend the virtual world's limits. (e.g. "Thanks to *Amar en tiempos revueltos*, we met and we created these wonderful friendships", *Amar en tiempos revueltos*, La1; "We will be in touch through other media... and the next step will be meeting face-to-face. I am looking forward to it...", *Bandolera*, Antena3). The use of the first person plural by the community managers and the creation of concepts regarding fiction fans demonstrate the channels' interest in followers' communities. Some female users accept the concepts put forward by the officials, while others create their own epithets (e.g. *Vico's Girls*, in reference to the actress Patricia Vico).

Territoriality and irony similarly play a role in the construction of communities and female fans' expression of identity (e.g. "The last episode of #Arrayan will be out today. From now on, 2 thousand Andalusian women will go out to get some fresh air at that time, even in January", *Arrayán*, CanalSur). Certain series put themselves forward as the symbol of the Spanish region in which they are set (e.g. "#Arrayan. Every good Andalusian knows the meaning of this word", *Arrayán*, CanalSur). The coding and decoding of the ironic comments, which only make up 1.8% (N=142) of the posts, presupposes the existence of a shared background which allows the series' narrative universe to be extrapolated beyond the screen. Moreover, it allows the series to be used as an instrument of reflection and social criticism on questions such as, for example, political corruption, unemployment and the emigration of young people (e.g. "Look, young people who emigrate to Germany, like nowadays!!", *Amar en tiempos revueltos*, La1). The ironic comments are also used to complain about the plot's lack of reality,

for example, through the constant product placement of Coca Cola in the series *El Barco* (Antena3) (e.g. “Let’s make a bet! Who will die? Who will get married? But, above all... How many Cokes will appear in the finale?”, *El Barco*, Antena3).

Finally, the use of emoticons, which appear throughout the social audience’s discussion, also demonstrates the feeling of community fostered by the Internet. Female users use them to thank the other community members for their contributions and as show of courtesy in interactions with others of the community (e.g. “There is nothing you have to thank me for :)”, *El Tiempo entre Costuras*, Antena3).

4. Discussion

Female fans reflect on their television experiences through this form of textual productivity, contributing thus to the construction of their digital personality. The *extimacy*, or exteriorised inner on the Internet, is formed from that information, chosen by the female fans themselves, that favours their digital ‘social identity’ (boyd, 2002).

Fans’ self-disclosure can acquire certain relevance in the construction and development of social relationships, too. The multiplication of communication channels, which Caroline Haythornthwaite (2005) terms ‘media multiplexity’, leads to strong ties being maintained between fans, who remain connected through other webpages (Vassallo, 2012). This style of complementary interaction is seen in, for instance, the organisation of get-togethers, as illustrated by the results. In this regard, the Internet prolongs the viewing experience, strengthens the integration of television into female fans’ daily lives and strengthens community ties created around TV series.

The comments analysed also show that TV fiction helps fans to structure their daily routines, one of the traditional functions of television (Fiske, 1987). It also encourages them to show their fidelity to it. Nevertheless, the information that humanizes female fans the most is that relating to emotional identity.

The 22,301 items generated from the 7,849 comments analysed —an average of three items per message— reveal that the emotions aroused by television fiction (joy, enthusiasm, sadness, anger, disappointment, nostalgia, etc.), coexist in a single comment with, for instance, observations on plots and character or references to the real world. The use of emoticons, frequently associated with comments that express female users’ moods, reinforces ideas and emotions. Emoticons also illustrate the feeling of community fostered by the Internet and the desire of female fans to contribute to the construction of a friendly social space.

Female fans ‘re-narrate their fan self-identity’ (Williams, 2015: 79) through a highly repetitive discussion that combines information from their superficial identity and their emotional identity. Comments about the end of a series reflect the drama’s own paradox by arousing both positive and negative emotions while expressing the feelings of what it is to miss television when a series ends and the difficulty ‘in finding a replacement fan object’ (Williams, 2015: 99).

Through their messages, female users inform the community of the pleasure they get out of watching. Although the exploration of parasocial relationships is out of the scope of this paper, the positive comments about the characters constitute indicators of the parasocial interaction created, which is

expressed through emotions such as nostalgia and desire, or sentiments such as familiarity and possession. These indicators suggest that the imaginary relations female fans have with characters go through psychological processes similar to those of relationships established in the real world; they activate thoughts and feelings of affection and are capable of satisfying certain emotional needs. On the other hand, some of the comments confirm the tendency of female fiction viewers to transfer traits of the characters to the actors that play them (Fiske, 1987).

The cultural proximity of the themes addressed by Spanish fiction strengthens the emotional ties female fans have with the programme, while stories set in the past evoke nostalgia in older fans. In this regard, literature suggests that we remember more easily “those facts from our past that fit a narrative, while we tend to neglect others that do not *appear* to play a causal role in that narrative” (Taleb, 2007: 70). Results demonstrate that some of the female fans see similarities between the fiction and their own lives (Baym, 2000: 71), while others are inspired by the stories to deal with certain sensitive social issues.

Emotions also stimulated action, as shown in practical comments that channel female fans’ complaints and express their collective identity beyond the habitual first person plural, confirming the voluntary, temporal and tactical nature of these types of associations (Jenkins, 2006). Nevertheless, the predominance of positive emotions suggests that comments posted on the 122 platforms analysed were written by female fans who are more committed to the fictions.

Some of the female fans build affectionate bonds with the characters and take advantage of the Internet to analyse the TV fiction and lambast the breaking of the narrative pact. Nevertheless, the ending of a series increases the risk of conflict between female fans and the storyline, which is magnified when the endings have not been ‘carefully orchestrated’ (Williams, 2015: 80). In these cases, female fans rally to demand a ‘dignified’ ending and sometimes even suggest one.

Despite the social nature of the individual and the social desirability that television watching awakens, the fragmentation of the conversations analysed confirms the validity of the *phatic communication*. It suggests that the Internet represents a space for instant relief, or even a shop window displaying the self rather than a true forum for debate or the strengthening of personal relationships. The limited involvement of the community managers, who keep direct interaction with the viewers to a minimum, and basically assume the role of the programme’s online reputation management, might contribute to this shallow type of communication. On the whole, community managers’ actions, which are aimed at encouraging viewer loyalty, can be classified into three groups: a) to encourage comments to be posted on their own platforms, mainly on their microsite, b) to arouse emotions such as excitement or intrigue; and c) to provide feedback to and encourage positive discussions about the programmes.

Indeed, community managers do not participate in resolving fans’ complains which ‘could serve as an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to improving service quality and customer satisfaction’ (Okazaki *et al.*, 2015: 431). Retweeting posts where fans disclose positive emotions not only contributes to the image the community managers try to vend, but also gives them the opportunity to encourage loyalty. However, the minimal interaction between the community managers and female fans serves as an indicator of the superficiality of some strategies that, if defined adequately, could ‘bring their audiences back to the TV set’ (Wood and Baughman, 2012: 329), which is also one of the purposes of developing companion apps synchronized with the live broadcast. Forums, whose architecture seems to favour the construction of more complex conversations than social media, are the

exception to this generalised tendency of fragmented comments (Williams, 2015), which reflects certain solipsism of female fans.

The analysis carried out here confirms aspects such as the entertaining character of television viewing (Alasuutari, 1996; Rubin, 1985) or the role of television in structuring female viewers' daily routines (Fiske, 1987; Silverstone and Haddon, 1996). The main difference that emerges in the context of media convergence compared to traditional viewing is the existence of a new space for reflection on self-identity, which extends the limits of the fans' community to dimensions unthinkable before the democratisation of the Internet. Thus, female users share their reflections about themselves with individuals that do not form part of their offline social circle, who they convene when their viewing experience is in danger. The Internet prolongs, thus, the viewing experience and strengthens the integration of the programmes into female viewers' daily lives.

To sum up, the results have allowed us to respond the research questions formulated at the start. Television fiction motivates female viewers to disclose their self-identity and their emotions (such as joy, enthusiasm, sadness, anger, disappointment and nostalgia) on the Internet. Notwithstanding that sharing personal information seems to bring internet users closer, the fragmentation of female fans' discussions in social networks and forums limits the strengthening of the feeling of collective identity. Exceptionally, the characteristics of the forums –architecture, update rates, users' idiosyncrasies etc.– encourage debate that is still absent from social networks. In addition to this, dramatic turns in the narrative and unexpected changes in the programming schedule stimulate the construction of a feeling of community.

4.1. Limitations and future research

The methodology used strengthens both investigations aimed at the analysis of comments on forums and social media, a setting that allows us to understand the answers and viewers' relationships with the texts in a sincerer and naturalistic way than interviews or focus groups (Michelle, 2007). Nevertheless, choosing to respect the natural social setting (Harrington, 2014) limits the possibilities of exploring all those issues not addressed by female fans, such as the distance between female fans' 'lived' identity and their 'written' identity (Booth, 2008; Livingstone, 2004) as well as the identification of those devices used as a second screen by the viewers, since they do not allow the researcher to guide the discussion. The method could be refined in future studies related to different fields –such as e-commerce, social movements or politics– by employing other techniques used in ethnographic studies that give the investigator a more active role.

Finally, although many authors continue to maintain that small-medium samples sizes 'provide equally meaningful inference when using proper sampling, measurement, and analytical procedures' (Mahrt and Scharrow, 2013: 20), the interest of the television industry in the study of social audiences highlights the need to establish interdisciplinary collaborations between experts in communication and researchers in computational studies (e.g. those who work on machine learning), which would lead to an increase in the representation of samples without reducing the interpretation to a merely superficial processing of the gathered data (Boyd and Crawford, 2012).

This study, which forms part of a larger project on the construction of female identity in television and the Internet, only analyses the posts signed with feminine usernames (either their real names or nicknames). Further research is required in order to detect possible similarities and/or differences

between the posts signed with feminine and masculine usernames. Comparing identity-based data disclosed by TV fiction fans with that revealed by fans of other types of cultural products (e.g. music) may constitute a relevant contribution to the field. Additionally, future work should carry out an in-depth exploration of the effect the type of platform has on fans' disclosure of self-identity. Finally, the colloquial language used, characterized by closeness, spontaneity, abbreviations and spelling and syntactical mistakes, make online comments a stimulating field of study for the analysis of linguistic discussion, an area of undeniable interest that is, however, beyond the scope of this work.

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Dates:

- Start date: 1-01-2013
- End date: 31-12-2016

5. Notes

[1] AIMC Q Panel 2015 revealed that 53% of Spanish people connected to the Internet while watching TV; and 73% of those who posted comments related to the shows, did so on social networks. Available at: <http://www.aimc.es/El-53-de-la-poblacion-accede-a.html> (Accessed January 15th 2017).

[2] Feminine is usually marked in names, personal pronouns, articles, adjectives and participles of the three Latin languages spoken in Spain (Spanish, Catalan and Galician), while Basque language always uses a different word for distinguish masculine and feminine.

[3] The complexity of a discourse unit comes from the inclusion of various variables and subcategories in a single message.

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