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# The behaviour of the television audience on social networks. An approach to its profile and the most talked-about programmes

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## Abstract

**Introduction.** This article analyses the profile of the television audience and its behaviour in social networks from different points of view, and across different TV formats and genres. **Method.** The study is based on a computer-assisted telephone interview applied to a sample of Spanish people over 18 years of age. A total of 1,201 interviews were conducted, with an absolute sampling error of  $\pm 2.8$  percent and a confidence level of 95.5 percent. The participating households were selected by means of a simple random sampling technique, while the selection of participants tried to assure representativeness in terms of sex, age and geographical location. **Results.** The most talked-about TV programmes in social media belong to the fictional, entertainment and sports genres, although there are differences depending on the age, sex and educational level of the TV audience. **Conclusions.** The study confirmed that there is a growing trend to talk about TV programmes on social media. However, it is necessary to carry out a detailed content analysis to better understand the audience's attitudes and the issues explored on those TV programmes that are talked about on social media.

## Keywords

Television audience; social media; journalism.

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programming. 3.2. News programmes and political talk-shows. 4. Conclusions. 5. References.

Translation by **Cruz Alberto Martínez-Arcos** (Ph.D. in Communication by the University of London)

## 1. Introduction

The television industry is going through a period of changes, and one of the most important is related to its consumption. In this sense, it is important to highlight, on the one hand, the emergence of a variety of devices that enable the mobile consumption of television (tablets, smartphones, laptops, etc.) and, on the other hand, the role of the audience, which has evolved from passive to active subjects thanks to the tools of online social networks. These new active audiences have changed the way in which they consume television. In recent years, it is common for people to watch TV while simultaneously using a second screen, which can be used to discuss collectively and in real-time the content of a specific programme through the social networks. This is known as social television. In fact, today, most of the TV shows use hashtags (which usually appear at the top left corner of the screen) to generate a parallel conversation on Twitter.

According to the sixth study on social networks carried out by the Interactive Advertising Bureau in Spain (*VI Estudio de Redes Sociales IAB*, 2015), 82% of Internet users aged 18 to 55 use social networks, which represents more than 14 million users. The most commonly used social networks include Facebook, which is still the social network par excellence (96% of Internet users have a Facebook account), followed by YouTube and Twitter with 66% and 56%, respectively. Here, it is important to note that Twitter is the social network that has experienced the largest growth in terms of users in the last year. Regarding the frequency of use, the average is 3.6 days per week: Facebook reaches the highest frequency of use (every day), followed by Twitter (4.9 days a week).

The uses people give to social media include: finding out what their contacts do (66%), watching videos (58%), sending messages (52%), and posting contents (39). Of the social networks' users, 34% use them to share messages about current or on-going events, 29% use them for professional or academic purposes, 27% for gaming and 25% to follow brands. Other common uses are meeting people, participating in competitions, talking about purchased products, creating events, getting in touch with a brand, and interacting according to location.

In relation to our object of study, it could be argued that the 'prime time' of social networks matches, in part, that of television, since social networks experience greater activity primarily in the mid-afternoon, at night and mid-morning.

### 1.1. Changes in audience habits

Just a decade ago the attitude of the audience of the mass media (press, radio and television) was practically reduced to a passive consumer of content. With the emergence of social networks and such platforms as Twitter and Facebook, the behaviours of the reader, the listener and the viewer became experiences that are shared in a digital community. In other words, the receiver has become also a sender, who produces and shares information, and reaches the media and information dissemination platforms in order to be taken into account by them.

This new audience has been given different names, including prosumer, active audience, social audience (referring to those using social networks while watching TV) (Congosto, Deltell, Claes, and Osteso, 2013: 57), creative audience (Castells, 2009: 184), multitasking audience and multiscreen audience.

Gibs, Shimmel, Kaplan and Schilling (2009) use the term *multi-screen* experiences to refer to the simultaneous interaction with the contents offered by the TV screen, tablets and/or computers. According to different studies, this type of experiences have been on the rise in recent years. For instance, ComScore (2012) indicated that in late 2011 in the United States, 17% of the population were *multiscreen* spectators. According to the estimations of Smith and Boyles (2012), in the first half of 2012, 52% of internet users used smartphones to interact while watching TV and especially to stay busy during the commercial breaks. Google, meanwhile, obtained higher proportions by the end of that same year (2012): 77% of people watched television while using another electronic device. However, the question is not whether they used various electronic devices at the same time, but whether they did so to talk about television programmes or to perform activities unrelated to what they were watching on TV.

These changes can have both negative and positive effects. The ways in which new and traditional media become intertwined has not been studied in depth, and it is still unknown whether the new media decreases or increases traditional media's capacity to attract the attention of the audience. In this sense, the television industry is facing a double challenge: to maintain the audience's attention on the TV screen and to transfer this attention to social networks, where the industry must be able to create communities that discuss the content watched on the TV screen. As it is well known, the television business model in Spain is based on advertising, and this requires the attention of the audience, which with the current multi-screen offer decreases during the commercial breaks.

Thus, it seems that the new multiscreen environment represents an opportunity to get access to the most loyal segments of the market and that, therefore, TV companies and content providers should collaborate to encourage the audience to participate in the digital conversation, not only to retain the audience, but also to get to know it better, for example, by listening to the opinions the audience shares on social networks. Jarvis (2011) proposes that the media should encourage their audiences to be active in order to learn more about what their needs and desires. For Jarvis (2011), entertainment content should abandon its old ways and become a social experience, which implies, for example, that the media in general, and television in particular, must encourage the audience to join the conversation and the creation of digital communities around a TV network, a programme or a fiction series.

ComScore (2012) indicates that multiscreen consumers who access TV content through online videos are exposed to television contents for longer periods than traditional audiences. In an analysis carried out in the USA, Webster and Ksiazek (2012), quoted by Fábrega and Vega (2013), argue that the concentration of the audience's attention is due to the "Mathew effect" of the new technologies on the industry. In other words, they correlate the increase in the supply of content, with the increase in channels through which more attention can be caught. Just a few but loyal audiences are enough.

In this sense, the arguments put forward by Webster and Ksiazek (2012) are the following:

- The dramatic cost reduction allows large numbers of people to access higher quality content, leaving little space for lower quality content to capture the attention of potential viewers.

- The media consumption has a strong social component, which encourages people to react in a snowball effect in the consumption of content that others are already consuming.
- The multiplicity of offers generates a demand for recommendations about which contents are attractive, and the best rated or most watched contents will tend to receive more recommendations.

Thus, it may seem logical to think that the most popular TV programmes on air will generate more interaction among their audiences on social networks. In other words, the involvement of the audience on Twitter or Facebook would be conditioned by the quality of the TV contents and the most-watched programmes would generate more buzz on the internet. This has been the assumption of the television companies, which implement different advertising strategies to bring their audience to their websites and Facebook and Twitter pages. In any case, the television industry depends on the attention of audience, the dimension of these effects, the correct identification with the different audience segments, schedules and types of content. These have become the new challenges for the TV industry.

Another aspect in which the television industry should change is, precisely, as Gallego (2013) suggests, the way in which it interacts with brands and advertisers. This idea is based on the arguments of Álvarez Monzoncillo (2011, p.23), who believes that “although in this new scenario companies not may immediately obtain commercial benefits from these new uses and users, in the mid and long terms companies will benefit from the expansion of the audiovisual audience and the increase of its consumption potential”.

According to Gallego (2013), TV companies no longer control the attention of viewers, who now have their “own voice”. Gallego also considers that there has been a change in the power relations that existed between the television industry and the audience.

“With Twitter, for example, television gets connected, can give and receive opinions, transmit ads and contents, and receive measurable and immediate responses. For this reason, these new communication systems are based on the concepts of engagement, involvement, and bi-directional flows”. (Gallego, 2013: 2)

Nonetheless, we agree with González-Neira and Quintas-Froufe (2014), who believe that there is not always a parallelism between the most-watched TV programmes and the most-talked about TV programmes in social networks on a same day, since the success of a TV programme in the social media does not depend exclusively on its format, but on several other factors, as previously mentioned. Likewise, the profile of the viewers of a particular TV programme and the profile of the active social audience of that same programme neither tends to coincide.

As mentioned, there are few studies on the way the TV audience talks about different TV programmes on social networks. Besides the studies referenced so far, there are studies and articles that analyse the different possibilities and examine the comments made by the audience of certain TV programmes on the social networks. There are also several case studies, including “The communication strategy developed on Twitter to promote a mockumentary: Operación Palace”, written by Natalia Quintas Froufe, Ana González Neira, María Jesús Díaz González (2014); Audiencias televisivas y líderes de opinión en Twitter. Caso de estudio: El Barco (“Television audiences and opinion leaders on Twitter audiences. Case study: El Barco”), written by Luis Deltell

Escolar, Florencia Claes and José Miguel Osteso (2013); and *Twitter como herramienta de lanzamiento de las series de ficción españolas. El estreno de Velvet (Antena 3) y B&B (Telecinco)* (“Twitter as a tool to launch Spanish fiction series. The premiere of Velvet (Antena 3) and B&B (Telecinco)”), written by Belén Puebla Martínez, Flavia Gómez Franco e Silva, included in the collective work titled *Últimos estudios sobre publicidad. De las Meninas a los tuits* (“Recent studies on advertising. From Meninas to Tweets”).

## **2. Objectives, hypotheses and methods**

The objective of this research study is to examine the behaviour of the TV audience on social networks in relation to different television genres (news programmes, entertainment shows, sports transmissions, political debates, fiction series, etc.). In particular, the study aims to identify the kinds of programmes that generate more comments on social networks and to outline the profile of their audience.

To this end, we will describe the main habits of the social audience towards information and entertainment TV programmes, highlighting the differences between different audience groups in terms of sex, age and education-level.

### **2.1. Hypotheses**

This study is based on the hypotheses that approximately a quarter of Spaniards share comments about TV programmes on social networks; and that sports and entertainment programmes tend to attract more comments than information/news programmes. The final hypothesis is that there are considerable differences depending on the TV genre in question and the sex, age and above all, education level of the audience.

### **2.2. Methodological strategy**

The first stage of the study involved a review of the existing academic literature on active audiences and their behaviour on social networks towards different television formats/genres. The second stage involved the conduction of computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) during the first half of July 2014.

### **2.3. Population and sample**

The target population of the survey is the Spanish population over 18 years of age. A total of 1,201 interviews were conducted, following a simple random sampling technique. The results were analysed according to age, sex and education level. The poll had a confidence level of 95.5% and a margin of error of  $\pm 2.9$ .

In terms of gender, 49.5% of the respondents were men and the remaining 50.5% were women. In terms of age, 21.6% were over 65 years of age; 13.1% were 55 to 64 years old; 18.9% were 45 to 54 years old; 21.6% were 35 to 44 years old; 16.8% were 25 to 34 years old; and 8% were 18 to 24 years old. By level of study, 27.8% of the respondents had completed secondary school education, high school education or equivalent, while 23% had basic education; and only 13.7% had completed some level of higher education (Bachelor's, Master's or doctoral degree). Only 19.9% of the

respondents stated they had primary school education and only 2.4% did not have any formal education at all.

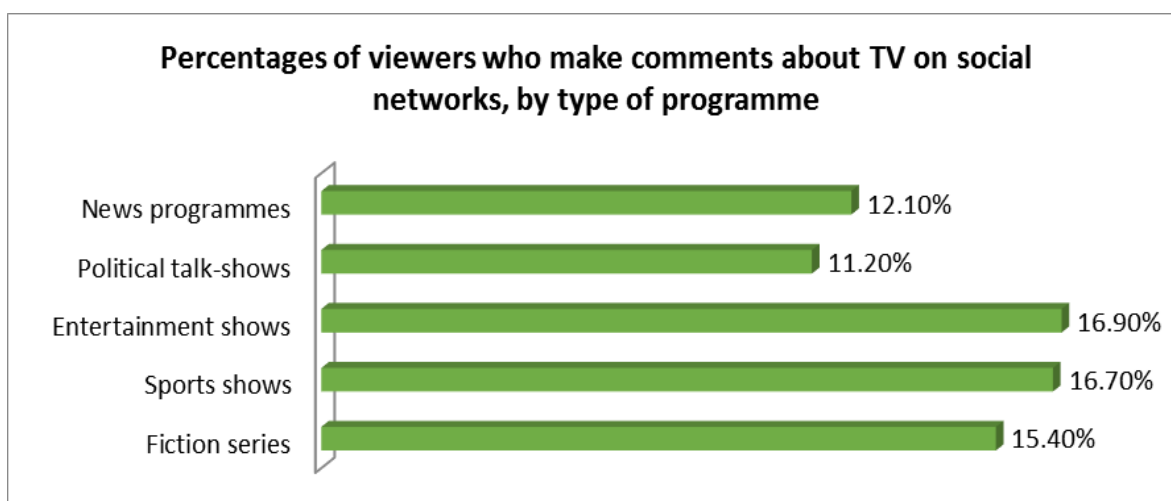
### 3. Results. Profile of the social audience in Spain across TV genres

#### 3.1. Entertainment, sports and fiction programming

In 2014, according to data from Kantar Media, the average time dedicated to television consumption was 239 minutes per person per day, which once again is the third largest figure registered in Spain (246 minutes in 2012, 244 minutes in 2013 and 239 minutes in 2011). Across all networks, the most common genre was fiction, followed by news and entertainment. Within the entertainment genre, the most prevalent programme type in Spanish television are magazine shows and comedy. Within the fiction genre, the most common formats were series and films. With regards to the television audience, women and people over 45 years of age are those who dedicate more time to this medium.

According to the survey conducted for this study, 14.6% of the respondents use social networks to discuss, debate or comment on television programmes, regardless of their genre or format.

In terms of differences across types of programmes, the formats that have the greatest impacts and are, therefore, the most talked-about in social networks are the entertainment programmes: 16.9% of the respondents talk about these types of programmes on social networks. The second most talk-about programmes are sports programmes (16.7%) and fiction programming (series and films) with 15.4%. The last positions are occupied by information programming, such as news programmes and political talk-shows, with only 12.1% and 11.2%, respectively, of interactive viewers. These data are consistent with the results obtained by González-Neira and Quintas-Froufe (2014), who pointed out that the formats with the largest social audience (on Twitter) are fiction series, reality shows, football matches, talent shows and national fiction series.



Source: Authors' own creation based on the survey carried out for the research project P-11-SEJ-8073.

To illustrate these data we will take as a reference the results obtained by Kantar Twitter TV Ratings, which was developed by Kantar Media to measure the social audience of television in this network.

Thus, among the most tweeted programmes from 1 to 7 June 2015, the first position is occupied by a sports programme: a UEFA Champions League football match, with 196.8K unique authors. The following positions are occupied by entertainment programmes: Antena 3 TV's *Al Rincón de Pensar*, with 29.2K, and Telecinco's *La Voz* ("The voice"), with 24.7K.

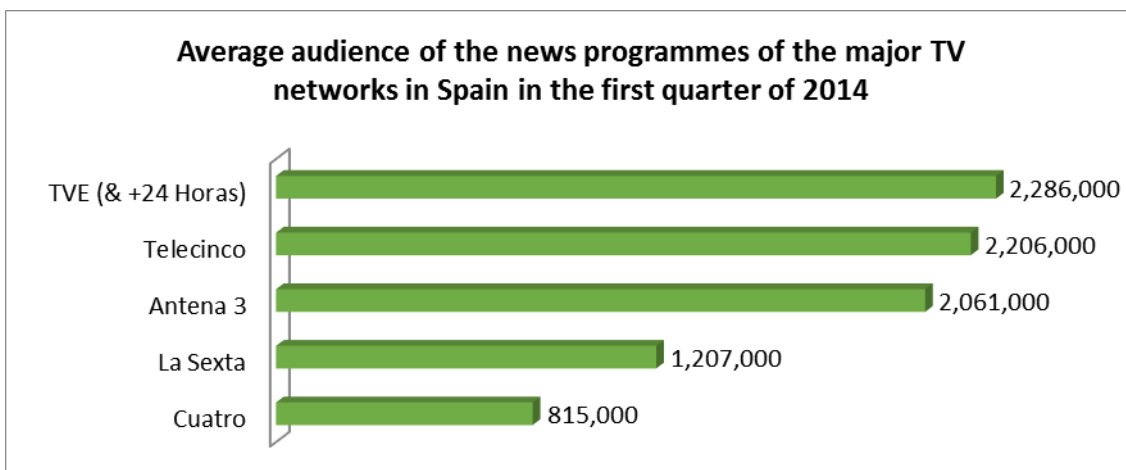
If we examine the profile of the social audience in terms of sex, age and education level by type of programme we can see that in the case of entertainment programmes, 21.2% of the surveyed males admitted sharing comments about this kind of format, while only 12.8 of the surveyed women stated so. In terms of the age of the users who share information on social networks, 61.5% of them are 18 to 24 years old and 37.6% are 25 to 34 years old. Respondents with high and medium education levels (23.6% and 18.5%, respectively) are the groups that share the most information about these types of programmes, while only 6% of the respondents with basic education level made comments about entertainment programmes on social networks.

Similar data were obtained about sports programming, since 16.7% of the respondents admitted sharing messages about this types of programmes. Here it is important to note that major sporting events, such as football matches involving the Spanish national team or a Champions League final, generally become the most talked-about programmes on social networks, which is a reflection of what happens with the digital audience. In terms of the sex of the social audience that makes comments about sports programmes, the vast majority are males, while only a minority are females: 26% vs. 7.9%, respectively. In terms of age, almost 90% of this sector of the audience are between 18 and 34 years of age. One fourth of this group have higher education, while only 5.7% have basic education. However, the results are quite different in relation to news programmes and political talk-shows, although within the average figures.

For their part, fiction programming (whether series or films) is the third most talked-about TV genre on social networks, with 15.4%. By sex, males comment about these programmes more than females: 19.6% vs. 11.6%. In terms of age, 54.1% of this social audience group are 18-34 years old; and 31.6% are 25-34 years old. As it occurs with other types of programmes, as the age of the audience increases the interaction on social media decreases: respondents aged 35 to 54 represent 20.2% of the audience while respondents over 55 years of age only represent 9.9% of the audience. If we look at the respondents' education level, 20% of the social audience of fiction TV programmes have a high education level, followed by those with high school studies (17%), and a small group of with basic education (6.7%).

### **3.2. News programmes and political talk-shows**

In the first quarter of 2014, according to the figures offered by Barlovento Comunicación based on data from Kantar Media, the news programmes of TVE, Telecinco, Antena 3, Cuatro and La Sexta reached altogether approximately an average audience of 8,575,000 viewers, in their afternoon and night Monday to Sunday editions. The news programmes of the major television networks in Spain occupied 13.9% of the screen time in the case of TVE; 14.1% in Telecinco; 13.4% in Antena 3; 9.6% in La Sexta; and 6.6% in Cuatro, as shown in the following figure.

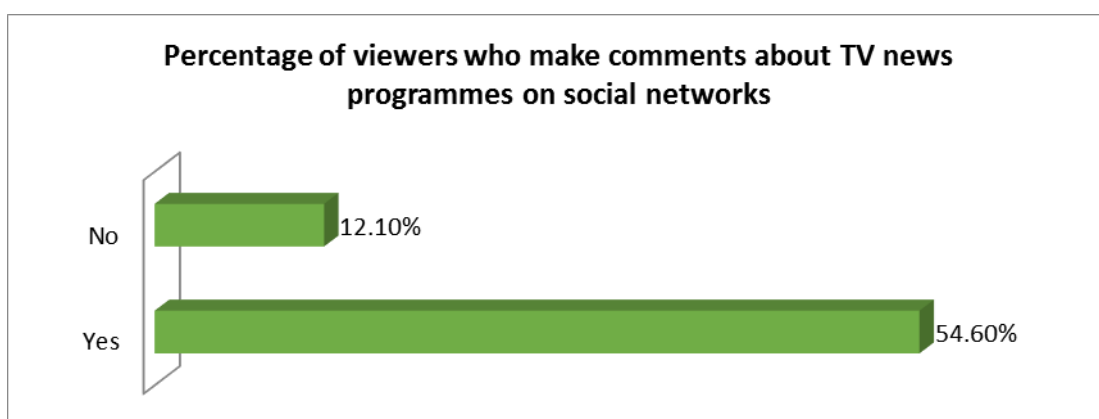


Source: Authors' own creation based on data provided by Barlovento Comunicación on Kantar Media. Data retrieved on 19 April 2015 from <http://www.formulatv.com/noticias/35549/informativos-telecinco-lider-servicios-informativos-cadenas-enero/>

According to data from the aforementioned survey, 77.5% of Spanish people watch the news on television virtually every day, while only 14.8 do so three or four days a week, and 5.9% only one or two days.

However, according to the Spanish Sociological Research Centre study, in October 2014, 21.3% of Spanish people used social networks to find and/or receive information on some areas of interest (politics, environment, culture, etc.). However, these percentages fall significantly when it comes to people using social networks to make comments about TV news programmes.

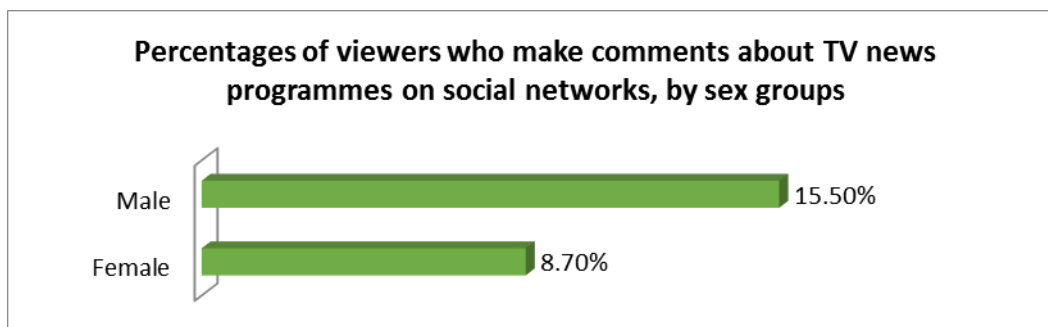
In this case, only 12.1% of the respondents stated that they make comments about TV news programmes on social networks, while 54.6% says they do not do this.



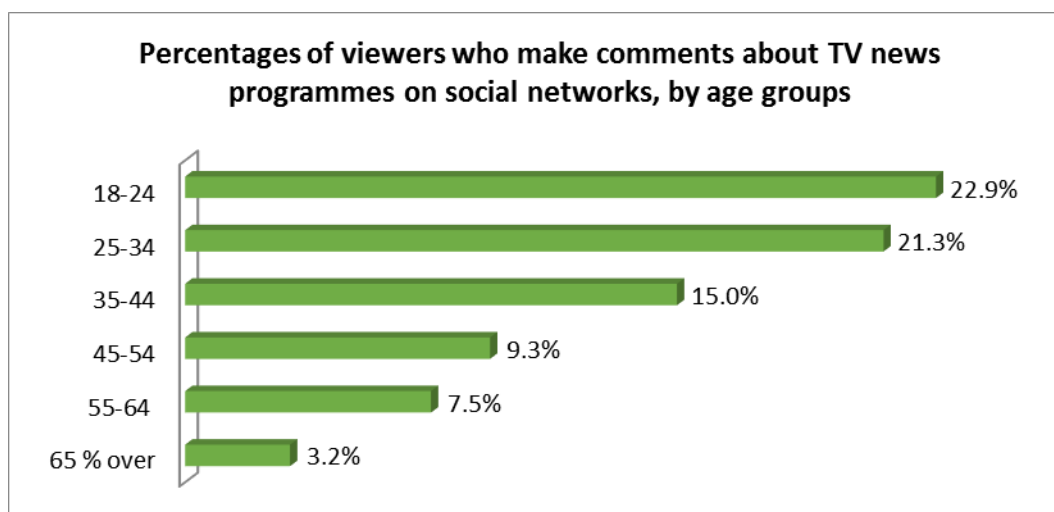
Source: Authors' own creation based on the survey carried out for the research project P-11-SEJ-8073.

In terms of gender differences, male viewers share comments about news programmes on social networks more than female viewers: 15.5% vs. 8.7%, respectively.





Source: Authors' own creation based on the survey carried out for the research project P-11-SEJ-8073.

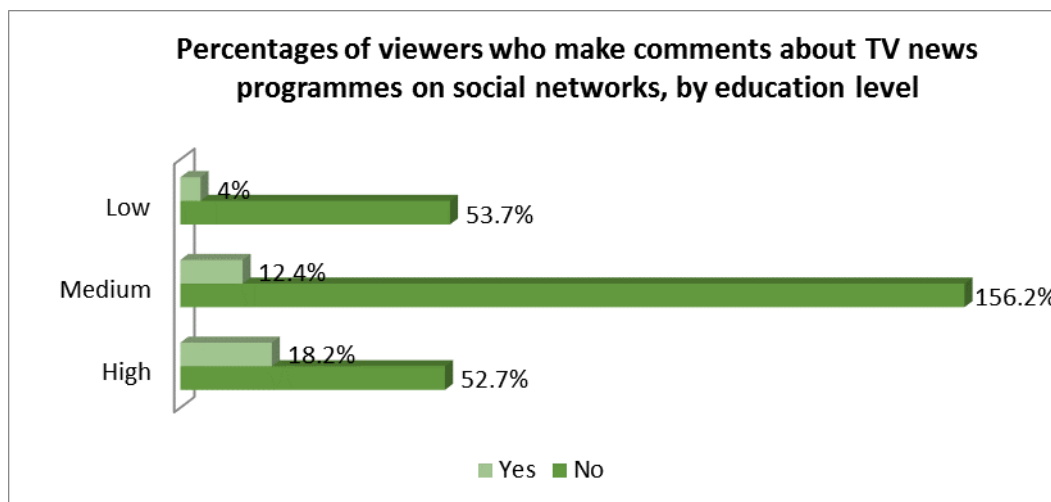


Source: Authors' own creation based on the survey carried out for the research project P-11-SEJ-8073.

In terms of differences across age groups, more than half of respondents who shared messages about news programmes, 59.2% to be precise, belong to the 18 to 44 age group. Of them, the 18-24 and 25-34 age groups are the most active, with 22.9% and 21.3%, respectively. As the age of the audience increases the percentage of the audience that participates and makes comments about this type of TV programming in social networks decreases. Thus, in the 45-65 age group only 16.8% made comments about news programmes on social networks.

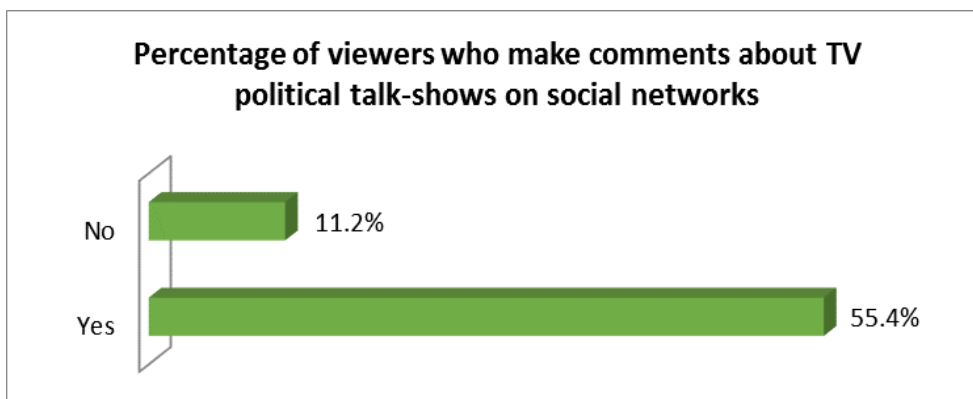
Of those who make comments about TV news programmes on social networks, most have a mid-high education level: 18.2% have higher education, 12.4% have high school education, and 4% have primary school education.

In the case of political talk shows, they are talked-about in social networks with some frequency by just 11.2% of respondents: 4.3% makes comments about these shows very or fairly often, while the comments of the remaining 6.9% are occasional. Most of respondents, 55.4%, affirm they do not make comments about this kind of contents on social networks.



Source: Authors’ own creation based on the survey carried out for the research project P-11-SEJ-8073.

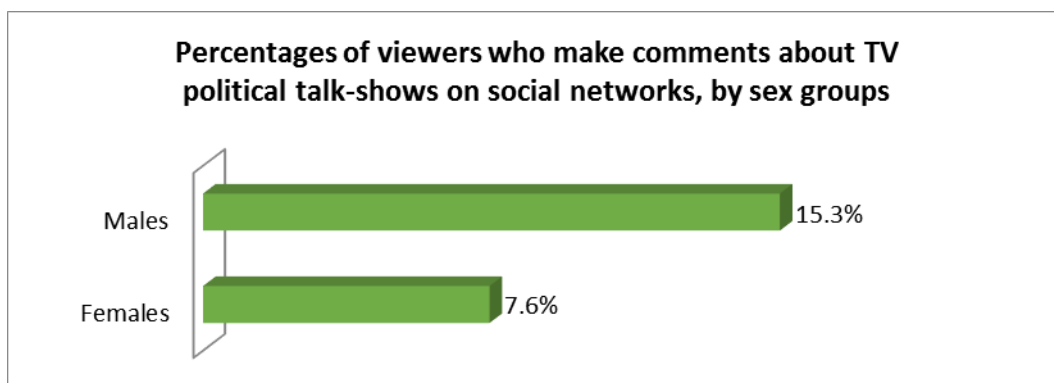
Regarding this kind of television programme it is important to mention that, following the results of Kantar Twitter TV Ratings from the aforementioned periods, the top ten most talked-about programmes on Twitter includes the political talk show *La Sexta Noche* (“The sixth night”), in the eight position, with 13.5K unique users and 61.0K tweets. It would be interesting to carry out an analysis of the content and above all the profile of the audience. It is more than likely that most of the people involved in the conversation about these TV programmes share in their profile their political stand, for or against the guests that appear in the TV political talk shows, as an army waiting to ignite social media with comments about the political debate on TV.



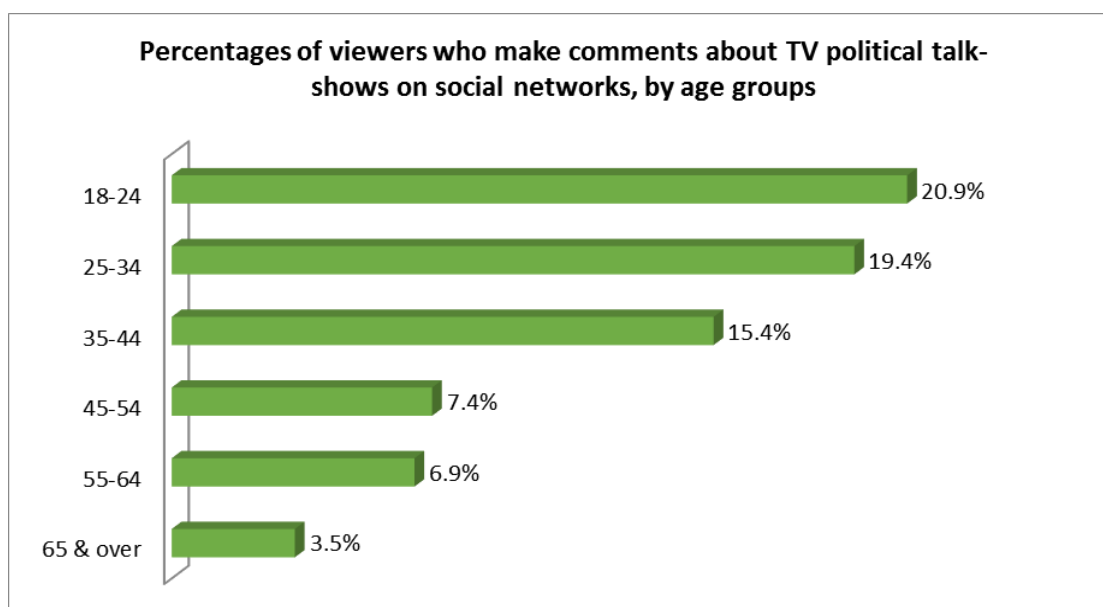
Source: Authors’ own creation based on the survey carried out for the research project P-11-SEJ-8073.

In terms of gender differences, men comment more about political talk-shows than women do (15.3% vs. 7.6%). In terms of the distribution of respondents who comment about political talk-shows across age groups, more than half, 55.7%, belong to the 18-44 year group and the remaining 44.3% belong to the over-45 age group. Only 3.5% of this sector of the audience are over 65 years of age. Regarding the differences in terms of participation across age groups, the most participating age

group is the 18-24 with a 20.9%, followed by the 24-34 age group with 19.4% and the 35-44 age group with just 15%.



Source: Authors' own creation based on the survey carried out for the research project P-11-SEJ-8073.



Source: Authors' own creation based on the survey carried out for the research project P-11-SEJ-8073.

By education level, of those who make comments about TV news programmes on social networks, 17.3% have higher education; 4.4% have basic education or no education at all, and 11.4 has high school education.

#### 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, it could be argued that given the size of the audience of certain Spanish TV programmes, currently only few people talk about these programmes on social networks.

In terms of popularity by types of programmes, viewers prefer entertainment shows (16.9%), sports programmes (16.7%), fiction series (15.4%), news programmes (12.10) and, lastly, political talk-shows (11.2%) programmes. The study confirmed, therefore, the hypothesis that sports and entertainment programmes usually generate more comments than news programmes. With regards to our initial hypothesis that there are noticeable differences in the profile of the viewer according to the television format, and the viewer's sex, age, and above all, level of studies, the results of the study did confirm it. The social audience exhibits a fairly homogeneous profile regardless of the type of television programme they talk about. Thus, the most common profile of the social audience would be that of a man, aged 18 to 34 years, with a mid to high level of studies. This profile is similar to that of the users of social networks in general. Thus, this profile is different to the profile of the television audience by type of programme. In addition, just as there is not always parallelism between the most watched TV programmes and the most talked-about TV programmes in social media (González-Neira and Quintas-Froufe, 2014), there is no parallelism between the profile of the TV audience and the profile of the social audience.

For the moment, and despite the crisis of political credibility affecting Spain and the audience's growing demand for political information, political talk-shows and news programmes are not one of the most talked-about genres on Twitter or Facebook. However, programmes about politics, especially those shown on Saturday night (*La Sexta Noche*, for example), receive each week many comments, which would be interesting to analyse in more detail. In this sense, it is recommended to analyse in depth the content of the most talked-about TV political programmes and the profile of the users who participate in the conversation on the social networks, taking into account the audience's interest in politics, degree of involvement in politics, among other characteristics, in order to identify the profile of the followers of TV programmes that tend to share messages on Twitter and Facebook.

With regards to the TV networks, and therefore, their different programmes, they are currently going through a trial and error phase to define and improve their strategies in social networks. Thus, TV networks face different challenges: to capture the audience's attention and to encourage them to participate in the digital conversation, in the creation of communities, and especially in the establishment of relations with brands and advertisers.

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