

## Spanish TV reception in the multiscreen era

*La recepción televisiva española  
en la era multipantalla*

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This article studies the reception of the Spanish television fiction, by combining offline analysis techniques (questionnaires and focus group) and online (analysis of comments on Internet). The offline analysis reveals the complementary and specialized nature of the devices, but the online analyses do not provide evidence about the impact of the second screen in the socialization process, nor on the construction of feminine identity.

**KEYWORDS:**reception, TV fiction, Internet, multi-screen viewing, gender.

*Este artículo estudia la recepción de la ficción televisiva española mediante una combinación de técnicas de análisis offline (cuestionarios y focus group) y online (comentarios en Internet). Los resultados del análisis offline revelan el carácter complementario y especializado de los dispositivos, aunque el análisis online no aporta evidencias sobre el impacto de las segundas pantallas en los procesos de socialización, ni sobre la construcción de identidad femenina.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** recepción, ficción televisiva, Internet, consumo multipantalla, género.

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## INTRODUCTION

The growth in the number of channels, media technologies and electronic devices in the post-analogue era has had an impact on the increasing unpredictability of television reception (Wilson, 2011). Second screens provide viewers an “augmented televisual experience” (Sandvik & Laursen, 2013) and encourage the execution of numerous “performative functions” destined to perpetuate narrative consistency, coherence and authenticity (Atkinson, 2014). However, despite abundant literature on various aspects of reception such as transmedia processes and *fandom*, little is known about important issues such as the adoption of new technologies by users. Recent studies lament the fact that a good part of the debate on television and its future focuses on industrial and technological changes “without empirically substantiating the actual adoption of the new possibilities these entail for audiences” (Dhoest & Simon, 2016, p. 177).

The referenced literature highlights that in Spain and in other countries traditional reception and face-to-face conversations elicited by the programmes coexist alongside a growing use of second screens. Reception tends to be complemented by Internet-based resources, while interactions through online chats and social networks are amplified. Studies on multiscreen reception and audience feedback reveal different forms of participation that can help guide us in our understanding of the digital audience.<sup>3</sup>

Fernández-Planells and Figueras Maz (2012) identify two complementary trends in adolescents and young people: Internet-based reception, which allows them to become part of a community of users, and conventional reception, which allows them to experience a passive pastime. However, despite the large number of social communities related to television programmes, interactions among participants tend

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<sup>3</sup> Spanish television consumption through television systems was distributed in 2016 thus: 78.7% TDT, 10.5% cable, 7% IPTV and 2.9% digital satellite. See the annual report by Barlovento Comunicación, retrieved 12 January 2016: <http://www.barloventocomunicacion.es/images/audiencias/analisis-televisivo-2016-Barlovento-actualizado.pdf>.

to be low (Lin, Sung & Chen, 2016), especially with regards to the “different or alternative uses related to practices that are creative, new or qualitatively distinct from conventional television” (Cáceres, Ruiz San Román & Brändle, 2011, p. 32).

Fazeen, Dantu and Guturu (2011) divide Twitter users into leaders, *lurkers*, disseminators and close associates, a classification similar to that proposed by Brandtzæg (2012), who classifies them as sporadic, *lurkers*, socializers, debaters and advanced. *Lurkers* make up most of the members of the community and although silent most of the time, are by no means passive (Sun, Rau & Ma, 2014). Among other positive aspects, *lurking* enables new members to familiarise themselves with the group’s *netiquette* before joining the community (Javarone, Interdonato & Tafarelli, 2016). It is, therefore, a form of participation that is compatible with the aim of maintaining and reinforcing existing relationships between a large section of users (Haythornwaite, 2001; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Boyd & Ellison, 2007), which demonstrates the complementarity between ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) and face-to-face communication (Bailliencourt, Beauvisage, Granjon & Smoreda, 2011).

This article presents an investigation on the reception of Spanish television fiction that combines an analysis of offline reception (focus groups and questionnaires) with an analysis of comments on social networks and forums dedicated to the programmes. It is based on the need to integrate the analysis of spontaneous online feedback with an analysis of multiscreen consumption in order to be able to better understand the behaviour of viewers, their interaction with the programmes and the nature of socialisation processes arising as a result of reception. The importance of television for female viewers (Buonanno, 2014; Howard-Williams & Katz, 2013)<sup>4</sup> and their greater activity on pages dedicated to television fiction compared to men (Lacalle, 2013) has therefore led us to focus on women. This study aims to answer the following questions:

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<sup>4</sup> Television consumption in Spain rose in 2016 to 247 minutes per female spectator per day compared to 219 minutes per male viewer. See the annual report by Barlovento Comunicación (2016).

- Q.1: What are the different modes of integration between television and the Internet?
- Q.2: Does a specialised, medium-dependent form of consumption occur?
- Q.3: What role do secondary screens play in the process of socialisation?
- Q.4: Does online reception generate or consolidate a feeling of community?
- Q.5: Is the construction of or demand for a female identity observed in the comments analysed?

### CONVERGENCE, MULTITASKING AND MEDIA MIGRATION

The analysis of the reasons for viewers to post messages is a recurrent theme in all analyses of multitasking and media migration. Deller (2011) highlights that some spectators intersperse their online conversation with comments about their daily routines and personal circumstances, and use Twitter to encourage other users to watch the programme. Giglietto and Selva (2014) confirm the use of Twitter to express viewers' personal opinions about the programme ahead of self-reflexive, informative or emotional comments; similar results were obtained by Lacalle (2013) in the Spanish context. Research has shown that most of the messages are directed at a non-specific, imaginary audience (Marwick & boyd, 2010). However, the exchange of comments and interaction creates a pseudo-experience of "group viewing" (Wohn & Na, 2011). Thus, although viewers do not communicate directly with each other during broadcast, the use of *hashtags* and the practice of retweeting suggest that at least a section of the audience wants to be part of a wider community.

A large number of recent analyses have attempted to understand the relationships between television genres and viewers based on the theory of uses and gratifications (Barton, 2013; Brown, Jiang & Leung, 2012; Lee & Taylor, 2014; Lauricella, Douai & Zaidi, 2012; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007; Rubin, Haridakis & Eyal, 2003). A number of authors relate reception with the characteristics of the viewers (Aubrey et al., 2012), while others reflect on the use of second screens and social media (Giglietto & Selva, 2014; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Park, Kee & Valenzuela, 2009; Wohn & Na, 2011) or study the characteristics

and motivations of *multitasking* (Hwang, Kim & Jeong, 2014) and media migration (Shade, Kornfield & Oliver, 2015).

In Spain, interest in the processes of reception of digital natives has led to a notable increase in the literature on television consumption. Thus, over the last decade studies on audience behaviour, in particular that of young viewers, has focused on investigating preferences and motivations, the most common devices and reception habits.

The studies on preferences and motivations demonstrate that viewers perceive television reception as an entertaining form of leisure (Flores Ruiz & Humanes Humanes, 2014; Iglesias García & González Díaz, 2012; López Vidales, González Aldea & Medina de la Viña, 2011) that allows them to escape their daily worries (Berné Manero, García-Uceda & Orive Serrano, 2011; Lacalle, 2013 and 2015).

Despite the growth in second screens, the television set is still the preferred medium (Berné Manero, García-Uceda & Orive Serrano, 2011), which is a generalised trend both in older and younger audiences (Cáceres et al., 2011; Flores Ruiz & Humanes Humanes, 2014; González Aldea & López Vidales, 2011; López-Vidales & Gómez Rubio, 2014). Therefore, eating habits and surfing the Internet figure among the main activities carried out while watching television fiction (Berné Manero, García-Uceda & Orive Serrano, 2011), along with activity in forums and online chats, messaging, social networks or other activities conducted on second screens (Flores Ruiz & Humanes Humanes, 2014). Viewing through mobile phones, however, has yet to become widespread in Spain (González Aldea & López Vidales, 2011) and television apps are used preferably to interact with the programme being watched on the television set (Ortega, González Ispuerto & Pérez Peláez, 2015).

Finally, the incidence of individual television consumption (Berné Manero, García-Uceda & Orive Serrano, 2011) or “unit consumption” is reaffirmed (Marta-Lazo & Gabelas-Barroso, 2013), although young viewers prefer watching in company as long as it is compatible with their preferences (López-Vidales & Gómez Rubio, 2014). The home is, therefore, still perceived to be the usual place for television reception (López Vidales et al., 2011) and conversations about programmes are another of the favourite activities carried out during reception by both

adults (Medrano, Airbe & Palacios, 2010) and young viewers (Bringué & Sádaba, 2009; Lacalle, 2015).

## METHODS

An increasing number of studies aim to respond to the need to integrate investigations into both *offline* and *online* reception (Livingstone, 2004) through a combination of reception analysis methods (focus groups, interviews, questionnaires, etc.) and virtual ethnography (Dirksen, Huizing & Smit, 2010; Hine, 2015) aimed at transcending the division between quantitative and qualitative perspectives (Mathieu et al., 2016). With this in mind, the methodology used in this study combines group discussions and questionnaires with the analysis of feedback in social networks and forums dedicated to Spanish television fiction.

### *Method of analysis of offline reception*

The analysis of *offline* reception included 14 group discussions conducted between November 2013 and February 2014 and an individual, anonymous questionnaire aimed at contextualising the qualitative analysis of the interactions and verifying the reliability of the responses through a comparison with the interventions in the group discussion. The sample was made up of 124 women from 12 Spanish autonomous regions. Each group discussion included between 8 and 12 participants grouped into the following age bands: 10-14 years old (N=18), 15-17 years old (N=12), 18-21 years old (N=21), 22-29 years old (N=20), 30-45 years old (N=6), 46-65 years old (N=8) and over 65 years old (N=19). The convenience of recreating the natural setting of daily communications in the least contrived manner possible led us to carry out each group discussion with people who already knew each other (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996).

The responses to the questionnaires, which were based on a socio-semiotic analysis guide and coded using SPSS, enabled us to contextualise the results of the group discussions. The guide, also used in the semi-structured group interviews, was divided into three main areas aimed at exploring: 1) the various modes of reception; 2) the offline conversations; and 3) the online conversations raised by

the programmes, whose results, once processed, provided us with an adequate context to study online reception.

### *Method of analysis of online reception*

The study of online reception used a hybrid method to analyse the comments that combined manual selection with a content analysis carried out using the software Atlas.ti. The manual aspect of the analysis was justified both in terms of meaning and signifier, and also because the brevity of many of the comments often requires both a contextual and textual analysis (Casetti & Di Chio, 1999[1998]).

The significance of the last episode (Barkhuus & Brown, 2009) led us to centre the study on the day after the programme's conclusion. The sample consisted of 7,849 analysis units from 157 platforms (49 Facebook pages, 71 Twitter accounts and 37 forums) linked to 73 domestic fiction programmes and active on the Internet in 2014. A maximum of 50 comments per platform were collected signed by female names (own or common names) that, although not guaranteeing the true sexual identity of those who signed them, demonstrate a constructed feminine identity, which is often corroborated by the messages' morphological agreements. The codebook (N=39) was structured into 6 sections: 1) descriptive data; 2) feeling of community; 3) narrative world; 4) extimacy; 5) social issues; 6) other issues.

## RESULTS

### *Results of the analysis of offline reception*

The television set, which can number up to three in some households, is the preferred device (91.1%; N= 113). However, although 8.9% (N=11) always choose online reception, incompatibility between broadcasting schedules and daily routines increased online reception in 49.2% (N=61) of the female interviewees between the ages of 10 and 45. Preadolescent girls aged 10 to 14 (61.1%; N=11) and 15-17 year-old adolescent girls (75.0%; N=9) tended to watch television along with the rest of the family, whereas solitary viewing mainly occurred among 22 to 29 year-old women (45.0%; N=9), 46 to 65 year-old women (44.4%; N=8) and women over 65 (84.2%; N=16).

68.5% (N=85) of interviewed women carry out other tasks while watching the programmes, the most predominant of which are interactions with other people (21.8%; N=27). Only 6.5% (N=8) converse via the Internet, although 31.5% (N=39) use a mobile phone, 27.4% (N=34) use a computer and 7.3% (N=9) use a tablet while they watch television fiction.

30.6% (N=38), mainly girls aged 10 to 14 years (66.7%; N=12) and adolescent girls between the ages of 15 and 17 (75.0%; N=9), search for information about the programme on the Internet. Participation in social networks or forums dedicated to the programmes is low (11.3%; N=14) and occurs mainly among female adolescents aged 15 to 17 years old. The principal *online* activity is that of following the accounts of the programmes or the actors on social networks in search of information, while only 16.1% (N=20) shared contents on the platforms in which they participate. The mobile phone is the device most used for interventions on forums or social networks (15.3%; N=19), followed by the computer (11.3%; N=14) and the tablet (2.4%; N=3).

95.2% (N=118) discussed the programmes they watched with others, mainly with friends (76.6%; N=95), although 94.4% (N=117) of the women tended to talk about programmes in their face-to-face interactions.

### *Results of the analysis of online reception*

32.0% of the comments (N=2,497) were of a self-reflective nature, i.e. they included references to sentiments, viewing habits and other personal issues, and female internauts' intimate experiences. 43.3% (N=1,081) of these messages referred to female users' *light* identity (viewing habits, daily routines, and other personal information). Female viewers often indicated the programme they were watching (LaJuradito!: "Watching #Amaresparasiempre. For grandmas :):)", *Amar es para siempre*, Antena3),<sup>5</sup> while others mentioned their mode

<sup>5</sup> *Amar es para siempre* is set in the 1970s and broadcast on Antena3 since 2013. The audience of the series consists mainly of adult women, which explains the irony ("For grandmas") in the female user's comment. It is a spin-off of *Amar en tiempos revueltos*. Websites dedicated to the latter se-

of reception (Yolanda Arroyo: “Pity! Watched this from beginning, nearly always on Internet”, *Amar en tiempos revueltos*, La1).<sup>6</sup> Female users utilised the Internet to catch up on missed episodes (Fanny De Souza: “I was so tired I felt burnt out!!! Never mind, I’ll watch it on no the antena tres website”, *Vive cantando*, Antena3).<sup>7</sup>

Some female internauts mentioned how they fit the programmes into their daily routines, especially the last episodes (Ana Meseguer Ferreres: “I was really moved by the last in the series. I’m going to miss it. They were two great hours of entertainment and intrigue that helped me escape on La Siesta”, *Gran reserva, el origen*, La1). The messages also alluded to the interference of reception on the female spectators’ lives (Ana Lucia Uribe Villada: “I DON’T LIKE TWO EPISODES IN A ROW, AND AT HALF 11 I’M READY TO DROP”, *Aída*, Tele5). Reception was repeatedly associated with dining hours (Carolina Moreno García: “I can’t believe it’s ending... so sad, what am I going to watch at dinner time for the rest of my life? Such a shame, nooooooooooooo”, *Arrayán*, CanalSur).

Only 20.1% (N=1 576 comments) of the comments formed part of a conversation. In the first group of these conversations, which were of an extra-diegetic character, issues related to the programming, such as schedule, the announcement of a new season, doubts about a sudden ending or speculations about the continuity of the programme, were discussed. The second group of conversations concerned the plots and characters.

10.5% (N=825) of the analysed comments were of a performative character, i.e. they aimed to promote an action, such as a mobilisation to prevent the cancellation of a programme. They were generally associated with a positive appreciation of the plots and characters,

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ries, broadcast on La1 between 2005-2012, still registered notable activity at the time at which the analysis sample was collected in 2014, due probably to the continual references made by the female viewers of *Amar es para siempre*.

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Vive cantando* is a drama comedy broadcast by Antena 3 between 2012-2013.

which converted the social networks and forums dedicated to the programmes into ideal spaces to put forward alternative endings or to propose the possible continuation of curtailed stories (anfrjaun: “it should carry on anyway because they have to tell us how for example Sofia took on a new girl at the bakery (Amelia Camba) who fell in love with Vicente and “consoled him” when Sofía took no notice of him”, *Gran reserva, el origen*, La1).<sup>8</sup> There are also frequent simulated conversations with popular characters (adoroagonzalo: “Aura, you’re right, the Master can’t be better looking, *Águila Roja*, La1),<sup>9</sup> which is another manifestation of the generalised sentiment of an “interpretative community” (Sandvoss, 2011, p. 69), whose importance is evident in the transmedia processes (Dhoest & Simon, 2016).

## DISCUSSION

Despite the steady increase in the consumption of fiction through the Internet, this study reveals that the television set continues to be the female interviewees’ preferred device, although there is a trend towards the simultaneous use of second screens, in particular the mobile phone. It reveals, therefore, the complementarity between devices, which increases the watching of television fiction as a result of the greater ubiquity of reception and the possibility of interacting with a large number of users in order to comment on the programmes.

Faced with the optimism of some academics (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins & Deuze, 2008), the results of the *offline* analysis reveal that transmedia extensions of fiction to the Internet are minor compared to the programme itself (Evans, 2008). Thus, the activity of the female interviewees focuses on the search for information, while all those actions that imply production and creation by the audience itself are still in the minority. In the same vein, the contrast between the extensive

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<sup>8</sup> *Gran reserva, el origen* (2013) is a series about a family of winemakers from La Rioja, along the lines of traditional soap operas but combined with police elements.

<sup>9</sup> *Águila Roja* (2009-2016) is a series of adventures set in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, starring an avenger who fights against tyranny and injustice.

number of analysed comments aimed at an “unspecified imaginary audience” (Marwick & boyd, 2010) and the low percentage of messages that form part of a conversation, suggest that the activities on social media networks point more to viewers disseminating their information about the programme than connecting with the rest of the audience. A finding that is corroborated by other researchers (Lin, Sung & Chen, 2016) who question the socialising potential of Web 2.0, at least in the field of transmedia relations between television and the Internet. On the other hand, although a small number of comments directed at promoting an action (principally mobilisation to prevent the cancellation of a programme) were identified, these types of demands do not represent the politicised, activist character of *cult fandom* (Lopez, 2011).

Complementary to the virtual interactions, the *offline* analysis demonstrates that face-to-face debate continues to be a very common practice. Despite the increasingly individual consumption of television fiction in Spain, this study shows that most of the female interviewees discuss programmes with others, although with notable age-determined differences. Therefore, although it is certain that individual consumption is accentuated from the age of 22 onwards, television consumption by preadolescents and adolescents occurs mainly along with the rest of the family (López-Vidales & Gómez Rubio, 2014), which favours discussion not only as a migratory or post-episode activity but also during reception and highlights that family reception cannot be classified in any way as obsolete.

In short, it seems that “we are witnessing an increasingly individual, and at the same time social, consumption of television” (González Neira & Quintas Froufe, 2014, p. 106). On the one hand, the increase in second screens and the trend towards increasingly individual consumption has reduced the conversation that arises from shared reception, although it has led to an increase in virtual contact. At the same time, the broadcast of most Spanish-produced fiction at prime time fosters family reception. In this regard, the potential that Bandura (1986, p. 55) attributes to the television set could be extrapolated to multiscreen reception, since it allows users “to transcend the bounds of their immediate social life”.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis carried out here reveals aspects of media reception both in terms of technological objects and symbolic messages, as pointed out by Livingstone (2004) in reference to Silverstone (1994). Hence the dual aspect of today's television viewer: consumer-spectator and/or producer-consumer (*prosumer*). This study highlights the integration between the television set, which is still the preferred device for watching Spanish television fiction, and more modern devices (Q.1) and reveals the increasing specialisation of television consumption in terms of the medium (Q.2). Similarly, it provides evidence of the integrating role of knowledge (in this case on Spanish television fiction) associated with multiscreen reception, since a large part of the activity registered on devices connected to the Internet involves searching for complementary information.

In general terms, the results support the role of second screens in socialisation processes (Q.3), evidenced in the numerous references to the superficial intimacy and generalised cordiality of the interactions. Nevertheless, there are a number of reservations regarding the low level of active reception in the consolidation of a feeling of community, raised in the fourth question, probably due to the large number of *lurkers* and the assimilation of the computer by some users with passive entertainment, as occurs with television (Ling & Thrane, 2002). Nor are there any relevant indications that point to the construction/claim of a female identity (Q.5) beyond the frequent specification of gender.

The combination of methods used has enabled us to confirm the consistency between the responses to the questionnaire and the expressions of the participants in the discussion groups, on the one hand, and the content of the comments analysed on the other. Moreover, the *offline* analysis has provided us with an appropriate context to explore the interventions on webpages dedicated to the programmes. It is, therefore, an innovative approach, in that it does not focus on cult fans (*cult fandom*), whose limitations could represent the starting point for future developments. Firstly, a greater number of studies, in the terms proposed, would be required in order to understand both the use of new technologies by the audience and their impact on the

processes of socialisation and social identity construction, magnified perhaps by optimism that characterises much of the research on Web 2.0. Secondly, the inability to determine the age of the authors of spontaneous comments would require the incorporation of techniques such as *online* questionnaires or the intervention of researchers in the forums dedicated to the programmes. Nevertheless, faced with the anonymity provided by the Internet and the illusion of spontaneity generated by the interventions, we should not lose sight of the fact that, faced with the empirical subject of *offline* reception –constructed as a spectator by the analyst–, the imagined subject of *online* reception is, above all, a cultural object that is the product of a much more radical self-representation.

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