

TRANSMEDIA NARRATIVES AND SOCIAL NETWORKS: PEAKY BLINDERS´ TELEVISION FICTION

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Abstract

Digital media expanded the scenarios in which people watch television and the communication contexts where fans comment on their content. This work focuses on the conversations between Spanish speakers that take place on the Internet about the *Peaky Blinders* TV series.

We focus on analysis of the discourse generated from the series' content in social networks, where spectators converse with one another and on analysis of other, creative practices, which help to develop the transmedia narrative but are generated by the spectators themselves. This is known as fan fiction, cosplay or crossover.

We combine big data (Kitchin, 2014), to extract digital texts, and small data to analyze the construction of meanings from the perspective of discourse analysis (Gee, 2014). Big data were collected during the recent premiere of the fifth season in Spain, from 14 March to 15 June 2020 (3 months of which coincided with Covid-19 lockdown). The texts appeared on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, as well as in forums, comments, and other digital information. We dynamically defined 268 categories during the data collection stage. This study includes only those that the research team considered were more relevant, facilitating in-depth analysis of the conversations through discourse analysis.

The results discuss how participants construct narratives that we interpret from a triple model. First, digital and situated storytelling (Ryan, 2019) through reconstruction of the contents and formats of the series by fans (Lacasa, 2020). Second, digital media and the presence of multi-platforms, which have generated transmedia strategies (Kavoori et al., 2017 (Kavoori, 2017)). The study establishes the relationships between these multiple platforms and how audiences are present there. Third, digital contexts that generate conversations, creating dialogue between cultural industries and TV series followers.

Keywords: Transmedia narratives, social networks, big data, television fiction, participatory audience, fan fiction.

Introduction

This article aims to explore the existing options for broadening the narrative horizons of television fiction worlds, bearing in mind current media ecology. To do this, our approach is the analysis of the audience's role in the expansion of the transmedia universe of *Peaky Blinders* (BBC-Netflix 2013-2022) and more specifically, the nature of the creative practices exercised by the new audiences to expand the storyworld of the television series. The plot revolves around the social climbing of a well-established gangster family in Birmingham after the First World War (1914-1918). This social climbing happens thanks to the astuteness and audaciousness of the protagonist, who manages a horse racing betting shop. Produced by Jaime Aranda Borrull Productions and Tiger Aspect Productions, this fictional series was extensively broadcast transmedially over several media platforms. Whilst on air, it was the paradigm of a passionate following by its audience, who have been effusive in transferring their conversations to online spaces and reappropriating characters and plots to create contents. On the one hand we focus on analysis of the discourse generated from the series' content in social networks, where spectators converse with one another and on the other hand, on creative practices, which help to develop the transmedia narrative but are generated by the spectators themselves. This is known as fan fiction, cosplay or crossover. From combined big and small data methodology, the meaning of several selected texts was analysed (Martínez-Borda, 2021), to respond to the following research questions:

- 1) What do narratives that are present on social media and produced by the followers of the TV series reveal?
- 2) What role do social media play as a medium for dialogue between cultural industries and the fans of the television series?
- 3) How is the audience involved in the development of creative practices related to the TV series, providing it with a transmedia character produced by fan participation, through multimodal discourses?

Theoretical framework

New broadcasting strategies and creation of television fiction contents

Transmedia narrative is not a contemporary phenomenon. Profound changes suffered by the media ecology during the last quarter of the century have put this particular form of storytelling in the spotlight of the creative cultural industries. From the definition suggested by Jenkins (Jenkins, 2003), the audio-visual industry began to realise transmedia was a new formula with greater possibilities of reaching out to audiences and creating more lasting relationships with them (Barker et al, 2021).

Transmedia narratives unfold as an opportunity to form interactive relationships between cultural industries and audiences for both the integration of the different media and audience participation in the creation of content (Evans, 2012). Regarding the role of cultural industries, continuous change and innovation of technologies create the need for media to permanently adapt (Evans, 2015), particularly in television. The large number of devices giving access to content reception and consumption facilitate narrative proliferation, meaning that interesting global stories may be created for the followers of fictional worlds. Also, as these are global stories formed by different stories, the classical structure of the story changes and is different in each medium. This role of the cultural industries is combined with the presence of active audiences, who freely consume these contents and participate in the opportunities offered by the experience, in keeping with their interests (Hill, 2017). From this perspective, Ryan (Ryan, 2013) pointed out that expansion may take place in different directions, provided that new data is given to the story, making it more complex and more detailed at the same time. When a transmedia project is created, each content generated in a medium must expand the storyworld, proposing and adding new events to the story.

A transmedia narrative therefore generates narrative worlds that hold numerous stories, characters, places and time periods and it will be the audience who, from its interaction with these elements, have the opportunity to contribute to this expansion of the transmedia universe proposed by the cultural industry. This new form of storytelling has led to transmedia narratives currently being greatly accepted by the public because they feel the need to explore them and discover their secrets. Narrative immersion comes through the stories, to create complex and coherent narratives that demand great control of narration (Mitell, 2014). Also, the fact that the spectator can interact and even participate in a fictional production means that the discreet nature of the audiences is reframed and their role as users reconsidered to generate new pathways of dialogue, discussion and even content production (Stein, 2015).

Transmedia narrative responds with a new communicative strategy which not only considers traditional media and its consumption habits but also covers all types of digital platforms and practices. In this environment, social media is the key through which the media and audiences come together (Cortés-Gómez, 2016). Social media offer different opportunities of polyphony and dialogue, between the industry and the users, in keeping with the discourse established by both parties.

The new media ecosystem: social media as participation spaces

As previously mentioned, transmedia narratives are conceived as a phenomenon closely linked to forms of narration. Their key element will no longer be restricted to the story alone as the audience will oversee their expansion (Fast, 2017; Ryan, 2001, 2019).

In this context, it becomes apparent that the new media have provided users with tools that expand their ability for expression and creation. Henry Jenkins and his collaborators define

this new social reality as *participative culture*, where citizens stop being mere consumers and recipients of messages and become creators and issuers of content directed at multiple audiences and using multiple transmedia formats.

A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices. In a participatory culture, members also believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, members care about others' opinions of what they have created (Jenkins et al. 2009, p. 24-25).

Understanding the concept of participative culture as social change leads to a set of media challenges. From this idea, Henry Jenkins (2006) focuses on the convergence of multiple media and technological supports offered by new channels of communication and the audience.

By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want. Convergence is a word that manages to describe technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes depending on who's speaking and what they think they are talking about. (Jenkins, 2016, p. 167-177)

The world of media convergence is centred on the use of several communication channels to attract consumers from many different platforms, based on the audience's desire to determine and probe into their interests. In essence, this convergence is characterised by uniting supports and integrating services. From this premise, we may understand the change

in paradigm experienced by television channels with the new forms of fiction content consumption through mobile devices and social media as new information channels that complement the fiction contents. The combination of new and old media as common sources of information and content creation thus takes place (Bengtsson, 2018).

This socio-cultural, participative and convergent context offers a new field of action to television and its need to connect with spectators beyond the big screen. Introducing digital spaces related to a television context changes it into an environment where fiction contents and users interact. The audience is actively collaborative and different narratives are exchanged (Montoya, 2021).

Here social media has become the medium par excellence in encouraging this participation (Atarama-Rojas, 2020), transforming the relationships between the different actors and proposing a new transmedia ecosystem where the key is audience participation. These platforms have developed their own discourses and contents, providing a space for co-existence where creators and spectators converge (Vázquez-Herrero, 2019).

In social media, the contents become participative in both distribution and in diffusion and creation. Young people particularly have the ability to appropriate these contents using new languages and community organisations from common discourses. Specifically, fan communities demand the highest possible consumption experience ((Lacasa, 2020). Mere content viewing is not enough, they wish to develop interactivity based on virtual, social and collective media practices. Therefore, multidirectional consumption led by media convergence (Jenkins, 2006), enables the audience to feel a greater immersion in contents.

In essence, television uses social media as virtual scenarios where the audience is invited to play an active role and they become the producers of new contents (Jenkins, 2013). They

experience specific environments where dialogue develops in a virtual space (Ryan, 2017) and the creation of narratives is based on the use of many different languages, shared knowledge and multiple discourses between individuals and fictional characters.

New audiences and creative practices: fanfic, cosplay and crossover

These days the audience is involved in different acts of consumption, such as viewing audio-visual contents, access and intervention in digital settings and even acceptance of the role as protagonist in certain fictional worlds, which leads to an increasingly greater blurring of the division between spectators and creators, and also the possibility of sharing that experience (Schlütz, 2021).

A large number of fans avidly watch all the seasons of their favourite television series, with close links to their content. From this experience some decide to use social media, establishing dialogue with other fans, characters or with the cultural industry itself. However, others decide to go one step further and participate in writing new contents as a continuation of those created by the industry, but which they endow with a specific significance or with feelings. These contents may be fan fiction, cosplay or crossover.

Already in 2006 authors such as Bruns and Dinehart, referred to this double role of the audience with concepts such as *produsage* or *producer* and VUP (*viewer-user-player*). This is in fact an audience who can migrate between platforms, who is creative and participative when consuming and creating new contents. It describes everyday actions of the digital society. These audiences are the ones that are attracted by the creation of contents which encourage them to participate through different media (Selvadurai, 2021). This curiosity encourages them to consume transmedia narratives where they find the space to interact with the content, whilst enjoying the opportunity to be able to create and contribute to the

expansion of the universe (Ryan, 2013). Thus, the audiences who already began to interact through social media, as previously expressed, experience greater immersion, and therefore generate virtual worlds aimed at creation and participation (Sayán Casquino, 2020). These interfaces do not just continuously facilitate dialogue, but lead to the creation of multiple parallel creation practices to those created by the cultural industry which are usually shared in the same social media platforms.

Interactions between the transmedia universe and these creative practices may result in a huge expansion of transmedia contents in addition to an audience which maintains itself, interacts, shares, and creates (Gray, 2017). With this, we may reach a point where the users establish different levels of consumption, participation and creation of original texts for that narrative. Depending on the degree of involvement, these creators will produce different contributions in keeping with different levels: from passively consuming contents of fiction to creating new texts which provide depth to the narrative universe.

However, the creative practice of these audiences goes much further than the phenomenon of transmedia narratives. For this reason, it is pertinent to specifically speak of *transmedia* contents generated by its users to describe those contents which contribute to the narrative expansion of both fictional and also non-fictional stories (Koistinen, 2021; Hovious, 2021). With this context in mind, we will focus on three key concepts:

- *Fan fiction* is essentially a type of narrative expansion. However, just as transmedia narrative presents a dual movement of expansion and compression in its internal logic, we cannot ignore the fact that even fanworks that appear expansive like the fics, have some individual traits of textual contraction (Miranda-Galbe, 2021). The fanfiction web par excellence is www.fanfiction.net¹.
- *Cosplay*: an activity which consists in dressing up and acting in the same way as characters from comics, cartoons and videogames would often do (McMullin, 2021). Fans can therefore make their identification with a certain community visible through clothes and accessories used in their daily life, haircuts, merchandising, or cosplay of their favourite characters.
- *Crossover*: may be conceived as another manifestation of the culture understood as remix (Geraghty, 2018), i.e. the infinite art of hybridizing cultural objects, making way for new types of creative mixes. However, like the actual concept of transmedia narrative, crossover falls within the same semantic field where other related terms are to be found, such as mashup or remix. We define them as a transmedia format in which characters, scenes, discourses, and styles combine from two or more narrative worlds. There is also a subgenre of fan fiction, consisting of two types: the intramedia crossovers that combine characters or situations from the same origin from the same media, and intermedia crossovers that combine characters or situations originating from other media.

In this case, the creation of contents is considered a collective fact compared with the traditional conception of the televised one-directional process, opening up the possibility for feedback between tele spectators and channels and thereby enabling construction of transmedia universes. Content is now no longer only created by the industry, the audience also participates as well as watching it and sharing it, downloading and remixing, which leads to the principle of “branch out or die” (Jenkins, Ford y Green, 2013). This judgment is understood from the viewpoint that the audience does not only reject these creative strategies but also requests and is grateful for the opportunity offered by being able to participate in the creative and expansive process. Their role has changed, and the creative audience is grateful for the use and possibility offered by different media.

1 <https://www.fanfiction.net/search/?keywords=Peaky+Blinders&ready=1&type=story>

Methodology

This research analyses the construction of digital stories relating to the television series *Peaky Blinders* which was broadcast on Internet from the premiere of the fifth season in Spain, during times of Covid. Combined analysis supported in big data has been used, complemented with a qualitative focus carried out from a discourse analysis perspective.

The series was selected from a questionnaire which was completed through a Google form, responded to by 110 young people aged between 18 and 23 who were university students at the University of Alcalá, in Spain. The questionnaire was distributed by email in January and February 2020. The idea was to understand which series the young people were interested in and the reasons why. There was a huge difference between answers, but results showed that *Peaky Blinders* was one of the most highly viewed international series. Other series mentioned were "Money Heist", "Elite" and "Sex education".

Peaky Blinders: A transmedia phenomenon

The *Peaky Blinders* series is an example of a highly developed storyworld. It is a universe beyond a world of fiction and possesses resources and concepts that belong to the interactive narrative of Gameworlds, which are highly useful for boosting participation from new audiences in the serialisation of televised fiction.

The content that refers to this transmedia universe of the television series *Peaky Blinders* (2013, UK, BBC) comprises five seasons, the fifth being first broadcast on 22nd September 2019 and the sixth about to be released. The plot revolves around the social climbing of a well-established gangster family in Birmingham after the First World War (1914-1918). This social climbing happens, thanks to the astuteness and audaciousness of the protagonist who manages a horse racing betting shop. The members of the gang are renowned for sewing razor blades into their typical caps of Irish origin. They use the caps as weapons in fights and successfully beat their opponents in this way. The series deals with different adventures and conflicts between this gang and the police².

Regarding the elements which form part of this transmedia universe, on the one hand, we can differentiate between contents which have been generated by the cultural industry, i.e. the television series, videogame³, official website <https://peakyblinders.tv>, profiles on social media such as Instagram and Twitter, and the official book. As mentioned, a part of the story is narrated in each one of them or a narrative element is developed, making the universe expand through the different media. On the other hand, the contents created by the audience, from their experience in the universe give meaning and feelings to these creative practices. In this case we refer to fan portals⁴ or marketing campaigns, such as those created by the BBC for the public⁵, for example.

² Source Wikipedia.

³ This is a game of strategy in real time where we play Tom Shelby and control the actions of our companions, carrying out all the pillaging actions of the Peaky 'motherfucking' Blinders. At plot level, it would be a prequel to the events taking place during the first season. <https://youtu.be/t0p8Eg9ShRc>

⁴ <https://peaky-blinders.fandom.com/https://fueraadeseries.com/donde-nos-quedamos-enpeaky-blinders-b324ff360660/>

⁵ The BBC presented a campaign in the United Kingdom to promote the fifth season of "Peaky Blinders", parts of the OOH media and strategy for digital media and social networks, created by the fans. The channel and its inhouse agency BBC Creative, invited fans to create a poster, inspired by one of the series characters. <http://www.latinspots.com/sp/tendencias/detalle/51904/bbc-creacampaa-con-el-pblico-para-el-es-treno-de-peaky-blinders>

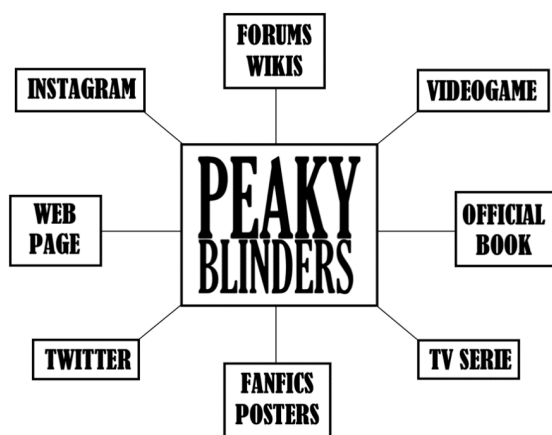


Fig. 1 Transmedia universe "Peaky Blinders".

As we can see, the transmedia universe of the Peaky Blinders series evolved from the expansion in content creation which, on the one hand was made by the cultural industry appointed directly to create it and on the other, the cultural industry working jointly with audience participation through the design of different transmedia strategies, such as the marketing campaign of the posters or the social media profiles so that the fans conversed with the protagonists. And finally, the content which contributed to this expansion, and which was created by the fans' own initiative through their creations either shared on social media or on web sites.

Generally, this consumption model is referred to by the term *fandom* or fan culture (Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2017) This is by no means a uniform model, since the relationships established between these agents can vary depending on the story narrative, production possibilities offered, etc. In this article to provide a response to the research questions raised we focus on analysis of the content generated by the fans in both participation of strategies marked by the cultural industry to converse in social networks and in the new audiences'

own creations shared as digital texts during the lockdown in Spain and which have contributed to the transmedia expansion of the Peaky Blinders universe.

Data collection and analysis tools

This study *combines analysis* supported by big data (Woo, 2020), complemented by others supported by discourse analysis (Martínez-Borda, 2021). Big data enables the creation of the fan context, whilst qualitative analysis shows what the meaning of that context is for the fans.

To obtain *big data* an analysis process was used, supported by the *Sentisis Analytic* software⁶. The analysis systems which support the *big data* focus use artificial intelligence and expert systems software to view the areas of conversations, understood as mentions associated with a certain product, and in this case the series. (Kitchin, 2014; Lacasa et al, 2020; Lacasa, de la Fuente & Méndez, 2020). For this study, searches used two rules: 1) Terms to monitor, connected with the Peaky Blinders series (for example, title or characters). 2) Filter terms, which provide the relevance sought (for example, in relation to the term "moment", others like "moments, instant, instants, now"). In this study the external patterns obtained were related to the presence of non-excluding categories progressively defined and organised into themes. 268 categories were defined dynamically and during the three months of the data collection process. They were progressively filtered as we will now explain; in this study only those which the research team considered relevant in responding to the marked objectives were accepted:

- Context which will be defined by the series, linked to coronavirus and lockdown: the time of day the series was watched and whether it was viewed alone or in company.
- Form and content as elements of the narrative directly linked to the series content: characters, actors, originality, series, season, and video.

6 <https://www.sentisis.com>

Regarding the analysis processes, the information seeps progressively through circular analysis in which these processes interact. First, information is channelled from the terms used in the indications. These channellings are relevant for answering the research questions (Kitchin, 2014). Second, a set of core, semantic themes, or conceptual units are defined that arise from the terms most frequently mentioned through a process of content analysis conducted by theoretical assumptions related to the research objectives. Third, the categories are grouped into these nuclei. This is dynamic since they can vary and adjust whilst the flow of the conversation lasts (Panda et al., 2018). To define the system, the presence of certain terms, such as the theoretical model on which the work is based, will be considered. Fourth, each of the mentions can be analysed from the perspective of discourse analysis, contextualising it in the flow of specific conversations to define the meaning that the speaker seems to attribute to it (Gee, 2014; Jones et al., 2015). These processes interact circularly over the course of input and data collection. These processes have conditioned the way this study presents data sources, analyses, and results. Finally, it should be noted that several transcripts exemplify the thematic nuclei of the analysis. The researchers were responsible for selecting these and not others, considering them as relevant examples of the category. Discourse analysts (Gee, 2014) point out the limitation that not all transcripts could be analysed in-depth. However, the software allows access to the original text at any time and its in-depth review, as necessary. It was up to the researcher to choose the examples to consider. The researcher's decision was based on the extent to which the transcript represented the category exemplified.

Qualitative analysis is supported by discourse analysis which sought to unearth the meaning, using the NVivo12 software. Two thousand and twenty-nine mentions relating to the series were downloaded, from which 1,756 were selected (eliminating retweets). Texts from social media were considered separately (Twitter, YouTube and Facebook) and other digital texts (forums, comments, news). The same categories which

had been relevant were included, in keeping with the study objectives, as nodes in the NVIVO technology. This focus has led to obtaining examples which are included so as to expand the big data analysis. Gee (2014) proposes several tasks for discourse analysis, with the analyst's view aimed at three different directions: a) signs and their relationships, b) practices which occur around the texts, c) expressing one's own identity or that of others, associated with the series content.

The data: texts produced by the fans on social media and digital media

The digital texts produced by fans of the TV series *Peaky Blinders* on social media and other digital texts in Spanish were examined. The period related to the recent premiere of the fifth season in Spain and occurred during times of Covid. A total of 1,756 mentions were made about the series produced by 1,377 users. The sources which generated these data were: Twitter with 1,471 (84%) mentions and other media with 282 (16%) mentions that included texts from forums, blogs and online news.

Results and discussion

Results from the data enabled us to respond to the three questions driving this research. Firstly we analyse the texts produced by the followers of the series on social networks and other digital media. Secondly, we show what role was played by social media as a medium of dialogue between the cultural industries and the fans of the series. Finally, we see how the audience is involved in the construction of narratives, to contribute to the expansion of the transmedia universe of the series.

What do the texts produced by followers of the series on social media and other digital media reveal?

The context of the users' narratives is defined and linked to the Covid-19 lockdown situation experienced in Spain at

that time, that coincided with the premiere of the fifth season. Thirty-three per cent of the mentions appearing in the texts produced by the users refer exclusively to issues linked to the Peaky Blinders series whilst the remaining mentions were linked to categories defined as: Coronavirus, form and content or context.

With regard to the coronavirus category, 23% link the series with quarantine and lockdown, because this was the situation the fans were experiencing and this is reflected in the stories they tell, as shown in the following examples.

Transcript 1 *The series during lockdown: terms and hashtag*

1.1. Lex! @LexRuiz07 (3:06 AM · May 8, 2020)
 One of the most intelligent decisions I have taken during this lockdown has been to watch 1 chapter

per day of Peaky Blinders and not finish the whole lot in 3 days. What a great series, aw!

🔥 #PeakyBlinders

Likes 0/ Retweets0

<https://twitter.com/LexRuiz07/status/1258563784647548928>

1.2. Diary of an ordinary girl. @anonymousj-drr(1:13 PM, Jun 8, 2020)

You can change what you do but you cannot change what you want. #thomasshelby #peakyblinders #netflix #2020memes #covid #coronavirus #reflexivestatemnts #statemnts #quotes #lockdown #quarantine #tiktokchallenge #texts #text #admiration #Happy Wednesday #reflexion #overcoming

Likes 0/ Retweets0

<https://twitter.com/anonymousj-drr/status/1280822381792067587>

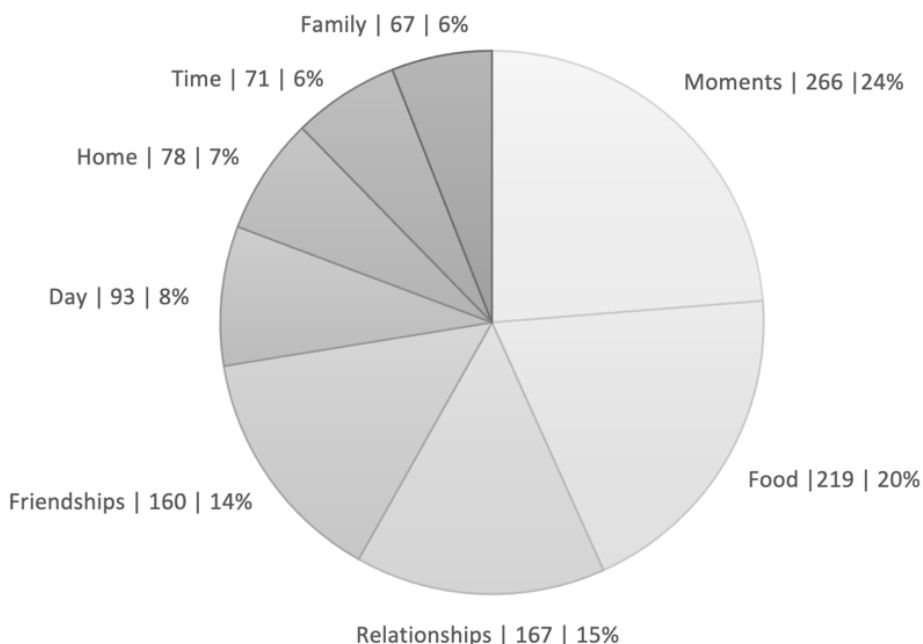


Fig 2 Frequencies and percentages of mentions referring to context.

As we can see in the different examples, the audience reveals how the lockdown situation in which they see themselves immersed has led them to take refuge in television series, giving rise to a huge discovery in *Peaky Blinders*. Its spectators specify how this television content has helped them to bear their situation whilst having to control their behaviour so as not to watch it all in one sitting. This is a very well-entrenched habit of new audiences - watching the chosen television fiction contents non-stop.

Eighteen percent of the mentions relating to the series refer to the actual viewing situations, who they watch it with, when... themes such as the family, friends, the home or the time of day are the most common.

If we look at the data, the category presented with the most emphasis is the one referring to specific moments with 266 mentions, which accounts for 24% of the mentions referring to the context in which these narratives were constructed. Another of the categories present in these texts has 219 mentions corresponding to 20%, which are related to lunch or aperitif time.

Transcript 2 The series and the context: the time of day.
Roberto Collazo Rojo. @rdcollazorajo (12:51 PM. Mar 15, 2020)
 That's it..... vermouth time #I'mstayingathome
 #franziskaner #peakyblinders
 #coronavirusespaña #coronavirus #covid_19
 #netflix #takeitcalmly #respect
 #sentidiño <https://instagram.com/p/B9wN-V2t1QG/?igshid=19dg0efanlc7>

Likes 0/ Retweets0

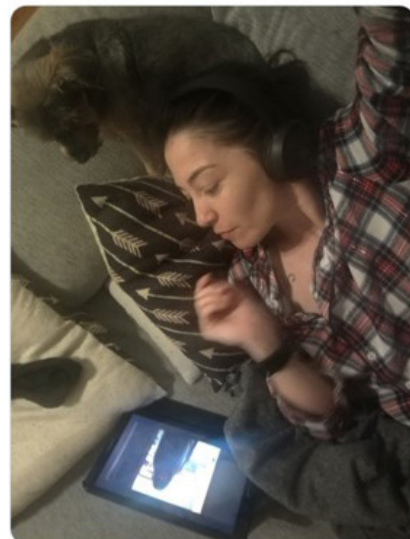
<https://twitter.com/rdcollazorajo/status/1239157269599629312>

If we look at the hashtags that accompany this mention, we see that the audience establishes a link between watching the series and the time of day: "vermouth time" #yomequedoencasa; #franziskaner (beer) and #peakyblinders. What the audiences do whilst watching the series is relevant. As a regular and pleasurable practice, mealtimes help to organise life during the pandemic to a certain extent (Werron, & Ringel, 2020).

Finally, we would emphasize those that mention relationships and friendships, that account for 237 mentions corresponding to 29%. Another dimension to define the context is who it is watched with: *close or distant social relationships* which are combined in this case, or which are specified depending on the friendships and need to seek company. As can be seen in the image and the accompanying text, pets also serve as series- watching companions.

Transcript 3 The series and the context: social relationships

COCO @CocoEstadoPuro · 13 mar. 2020
 Nuestra serie favorita #PeakyBlinders #Netflix #together
 #estadodealarma #Covid_19



🗨️ 🔄 ❤️ 4 📌

Coco. @CocoEstadoPuro (10:21 PM. Mar 13, 2020)
 Our favourite series #PeakyBlinders #Netflix #together #lockdown #Covid_19

Likes 4/ Retweets 0

<https://twitter.com/CocoEstadoPuro/status/1238575876163371009>

Finally, another of the series categories relates to themes directly linked to content and form. Twenty-six per-cent focuses on the category of form and content defined by actors; characters; originality; seasons, and video. These are dealt with in the next section from analysis of the dialogue between the industries and the fans.

What is the role played by social media as a means of dialogue between cultural industries and fans of the television series?

In this context, social networks and television combine their strengths to reach the consumers who are new audiences, highly adept at these media and very capable and active on social media. They know how to develop transmedia contents. The virtual spaces create a greater connection between actual television contents, the world of fiction and user focus. They reinforce the interest on the programme they are following, and this allows them to develop their creative capacity. These are scenes where active audience participation is possible, with the spectators becoming producers of new types of discourse (Jenkins et al., 2009).

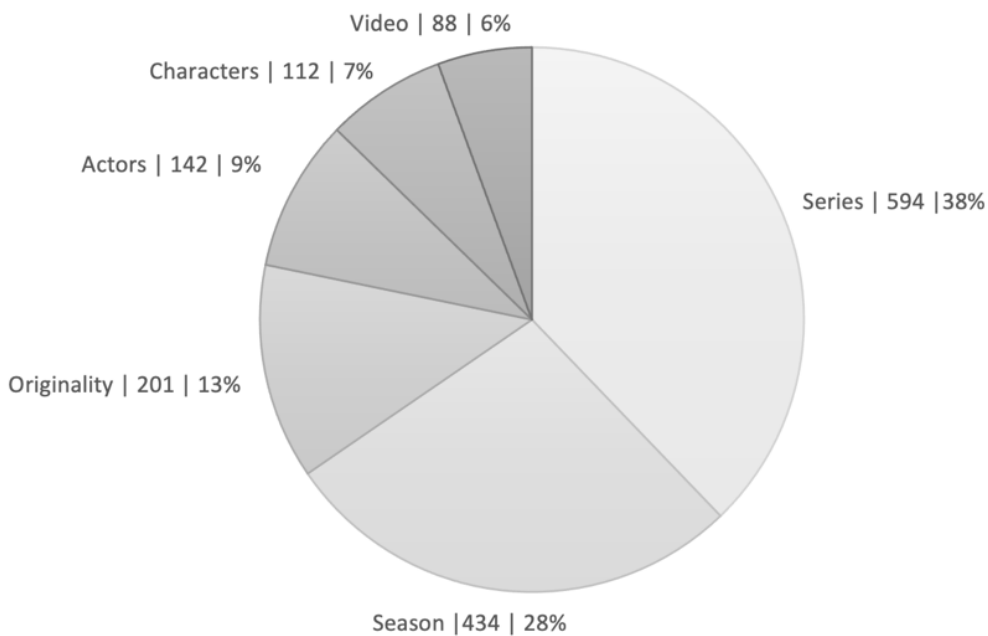


Fig.3 Issues that appear in the form and content category

In response to the second research questions, a total of 1,571 mentions were analysed relating to the category of form and content. These were commented upon and defined by issues that appear in the following figure.

If we look at the series and season themes, we can see they are the most important because audience comments always relate to them. For example, the "series" category is the weightiest (594 mentions, 38%), followed by season with 434 mentions, 28%. On occasions even both appear, reflected in the comment created by the fans to contextualise the rest of the information which is shared.

Transcript 4 The series like category

Paracetamol Facha. @Paracetamol_gr. (12:50 AM. Apr. 24, 2020)

Let me try and get a clearer picture, because with this lockdown I'm totally confused about the different series... so the Lannisters have stopped being orthodox and now make blue methamphetamine in a caravan, whilst Sigmund Freud and Ragnar attack the Bank of Spain on command of the motherfucking Peaky Blinders, is that right?

Likes 4/ Retweets 1

https://twitter.com/Paracetamol_gr/status/1253456222373711872

They warn that different series offer fictional worlds, and that the series plots are sometimes very difficult to assimilate into coherent ideas: "Let me try and get a clearer picture, because with this lockdown I'm totally confused about the different series." As suggested in the previous point, the series turned out to be the most highly chosen entertainment by the audience to pass the time during lockdown.

If we look at the following example, it shows a dialogue between several fans of the series where the good things about the series stood out, referring to different seasons and to other media, such as that proposed by the film.

Transcript 5 Dialogue between fans about categories "series" and "seasons"

5.1. *Marcela. @Enemache. (6:06 PM, Mar 29, 2020)*

👍 What a stupendous series! #PeakyBlinders and that Mae... 🗨️

Likes 23/Retweets

5.2. *Adri Rodríguez. @NanaMRod (Mar 29, 2020)*

👉 Replying to @Enemache

One of the best I have seen. There is one season and one film still to go 🗨️

Likes 1/Retweets 1

5.3. *Marcela. @Enemache (Mar 29, 2020)*

Replying to @NanaMRod

Really? We are already starting season three and I love it! It's fab series!

👉 I didn't know there was a film missing!

Oemegé! 🗨️

Likes 1/ Retweets1

5.4. *Allan Madriz C. @allanmadrizcr. (Mar 29, 2020)*

👉 It's one of my Top 3... Here's hoping the last season is just as good as the whole brilliant series up to now. 🗨️

Likes 1/ Retweets1

5.5. *Marcela. @Enemache. (Mar 29, 2020)*

Gosh, me too! It's a fantastic series! I'm mad about it, I really love it, truly!

Likes 1/ Retweets0

5.6. *Coach Beard. @DonGutti. (Mar 29, 2020)*

Replying to @Enemache

It's not fair to be as handsome as that Mae

Likes 0/ Retweets1

5.7. *Marcela. @Enemache. Mar 29, 2020*

Banal! That Mae is too much, really.

Likes 23/ Retweets0

<https://twitter.com/Enemache/status/1376566546038931471>

As we can see in the example, social media stand out as places of virtual interaction where the individuals are grouped together with different common interests. We start by understanding the narratives created in this space as a product and medium for the social interactions and by considering their characteristics in keeping with the interaction circumstances. Social media is therefore transformed into communication tools that develop many discourses in keeping with the language and contents that occur from the author (cultural industry) and the audiences (followers). Another theme that stands out in these analysed mentions are the characters and authors. Comments may be observed from three viewpoints. Firstly, fans speak directly about the character. In this case about Mae, who is played by the British actress Charlotte Riley and whose beauty is outstanding.

Secondly, there are those who directly post themselves into the real world and refer directly to the actor, as an element who attracts them to watch the television series.

Transcript 6 Real world audience: The actor is the key

6.1. *Lis Sandi. @PececilloVerde. (Mar 29, 2020)*

Reply to @Enemache

A few months ago I tweeted about him, he's one of the best actors out there, he's been totally under-rated for a long time, I'm glad he keeps coming up. I haven't seen PB yet!

Likes 3/ Retweets 1

6.2. *Rita Hidalgo. @ritiscr. (Mar 30, 2020)*

Reply to @Enemache

I'm starting to watch it and I love him, in fact I didn't know what it was and it was a pleasant surprise.

Likes 0/ Retweets 0

<https://twitter.com/Enemache/status/1376566546038931471>

Finally, there is audience identification with the characters, establishing a direct link between the real world and the world of fiction. In this case a fan mentions Arthur (Paul Anderson).

He is the brother, but weaker. His personality traits - violence, uncontrollable rage, overreactions, borderline insanity - makes him a highly unstable character. In keeping with this type of character, on this occasion the fan says they feel like him because they are waiting to see if the series will end soon or not.

Transcript 7 Audience identifies with the characters

In love with a Shelby. @mellahey (Jan 18, 2020)

I can't believe my emotional stability depends on whether or not a series ends, I'm not ready for this #PeakyBlinders I'm Arthur right now.

Likes 12 / Retweets 5

<https://twitter.com/mellahey/status/1351262670599680001>

As we have been able to show through the different examples, social media makes a major contribution to the transmedia narrative universe of the television series and could be a good media to offer the audience the opportunity to create and form part of the participative culture.

How the audience is involved in creating their own contents as fans of the series: the role of fanfiction, cosplay and crossover in twitter.

The relationship between fans and the industry has always been problematic (Scott, 2019) but the presence of digital tools in the life of audiences and their change in role, has propitiated the development of a participative culture. Here the works of Henry Jenkins, Textual poachers: television fans and participatory culture (Jenkins, 2013) help to explain the role of the fans as creators of contents which contribute to the development of the transmedia universe. Fans build significances which are interlinked with forms of cultural participation and collective activities, but retain personal activity in the interpretation. These creative practices are of great interest not just because of technology as a mediating tool but also because of the multimodal discourses leading to active participation (de la Fuente, 2020).

Here we approach the data collected from a triple viewpoint linked to audience participation and creation. Firstly, focused on the cultural practices of the fans (Jenkins, 2013) associated with the texts, we find the fanfic. As seen in the example, this is a narrative expansion, referring to the story of the relationship between two of the characters in the series, Tommy and Grace.

Transcript 8 Fanfic: Narrative about relationship between Tommy and Grace

Blunniew. @purplevprof (3:06 p.m. Jun 1, 2020)
 Thank you for destroying my hope. The only way I found comfort was through fanfiction, there are some good stories about Tommy and Grace, some of them melt my heart & make me smile some make me cry. I hope there will be more fanfic stories about this couple! #PeakyBlinders

Likes 4/ Retweets 0

<https://twitter.com/purplevprof/status/1267442359622488064>

The model presented by (Duffet, 2013), in his book *Understanding fandom: an introduction to the study of media fan culture*, insists on the emotional dimension and on links with the idol. It represents a different line of thought in relation to fandom, explaining that "Its analysis can help to explain why individuals are increasingly constructing their personal identities around the media products that they enjoy" (p. 2). In the examples that follow and referring to the concept of cosplay (Burke, 2021; Mountfort, 2019), we may see how the audience identifies with their character and acts in accordance with it, as they would in different situations belonging to the real world (Fig. 4)



Fig. 4 Cosplay: Fans as characters in the real world⁷

⁷ https://twitter.com/timmyhanlon_/status/1322734712717107200
<https://twitter.com/Cwilliamperkins/status/793273485648809984>



Fig. 5 Intramedia Crossover: Portrait and comic

Relationships between the personal and social, the individual and collective worlds are evidently reigning over the fan world and from here a third model may be defined (Gray, 2017) *Fandom: Identities and communities in a mediated world*. This refers to how productions arise and acquire meanings in collective frameworks, because being a fan means participating in a community, but they cannot be distanced from personalisation. The challenge is to preserve the voices and fan experiences, contextualising them within the community framework to which they belong. Digital technology extends fan power for the individual and the community, through tools from which their productions are generated and through the way in which they are shared (García-Vega; & de la Fuente,

J., 2022). Taking this as a starting point, reference is made to the concept of crossover from different viewpoints, in the following examples. Firstly, two intramedia examples are observed, where the authors have made a portrait or comic from the television series characters without introducing any other type of elements.

After this, other examples show cases of intermedia crossover as the authors combine characteristics of the television series with others from other series and thereby create a type of remix.

8 <https://twitter.com/RedLegacyVol2/status/1421229025096306699>
<https://twitter.com/Julicarrerahot1/status/1368240270555443200>

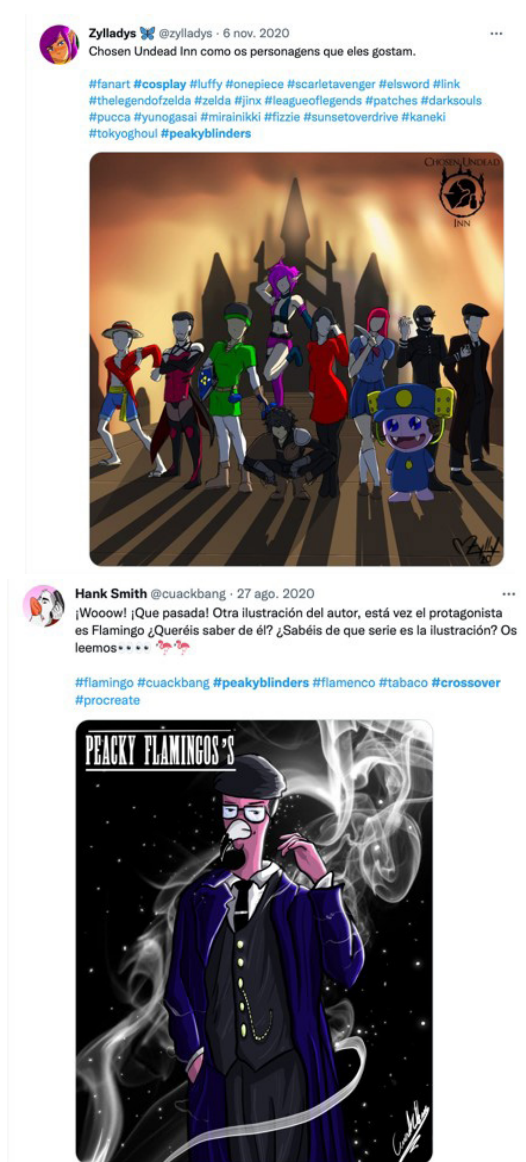


Fig. 6 Intermedia Crossover: Characters from other series become peaky blinders⁹

To sum up, we may observe how the active role of audiences combined with technological characteristics and usage is an important strategy today for developing transmedia universes jointly between the industry and the fans, thereby breaking up that distance which existed years ago where the whole narrative development process was the responsibility of the cultural industry as the single author of content.

Conclusions

As has been shown, interaction with digital technology is transforming social relationships, not just for audiences but also for the industry-fan binomial. To finish, we will review the research questions that we initially posed in order to draw some conclusions.

What do narratives that are present on social media and produced by the followers of the TV series reveal? The context in which the users' narratives were produced is defined and linked to the Covid-19 lockdown situation experienced in Spain at that time that coincides with the premiere of the fifth season. The audience reveals how the lockdown situation in which they see themselves immersed has led them to take refuge in television series, giving rise to a huge discovery in Peaky Blinders. Its spectators specify how this television content has helped them to bear their situation whilst having to control their behaviour so as not to watch it all in one sitting. The mentions relating to the series refer to the actual viewing situations, who they watch it with, when... themes such as the family, friends, the home or the time of day are the most common.

What role does social media play as a medium for dialogue between cultural industries and the fans of the television series? At present, the contents of television fiction are characterised by user participation which wishes to form part of the

9 <https://twitter.com/zylladys/status/1324805597578076170>
<https://twitter.com/cuackbang/status/1298988717084827649>https://twitter.com/Dade_Freeman/status/533563061538680832

experiences lived through the screen and to share it and extend it. From this perspective the convergence between television series and social networks arises, that opens doors to a new audience within a participative culture (Brinker, 2021).

In this context, social networks are presented as a new means of union between television contents and audiences, thus allowing for the development of transmedia universes. Through message exchanges between participative fans they contribute to the construction of meanings within the framework of a popular culture now supported by platform connectivity. This potential with its dual interaction: creator audiences/television-social network creates the establishment of a new communication channel based on what social networks offer in generating a context where the audience feels they are part of the narrative and content of television fiction. Giving the audience a voice through social media means that it can create new contents from the original idea, leading the way to effective and enriching collaboration for all the agents involved.

How is the audience involved in the development of creative practices related to the TV series, providing it with a transmedia character produced by fan participation, through multimodal discourses? The findings from this article give us an idea of why this binomial works at the moment and what transmedia strategies need to be followed by the creators of television fiction content in order to maintain that relationship. Firstly, the industry viewpoint on fans has been transformed. The passive audience has become empowered. Secondly, social media has become one of the most highly chosen media for audiences to converse through and even directly communicate with the creators through (Livingstone, 2019). This leads to the question of what role fans truly occupy, as the makers of knowledge shared with the industries. And finally, it is recognised that the fans are directing the development of narratives towards a point never believed possible by not just attributing meaning to what they see, but also to undertaking totally intermedia creative practices that help to develop televised transmedia universes. In sum, audience participation

on social media emphasizes participative culture, related to shared goals.

The creative and innovative dimension of participating in these "affinity spaces" should also be highlighted since they are created by people who share common interests and strengths. In the case of television fiction, the industry will be the creators of the virtual spaces forged from its fiction contents and spectators will find new information there, complemented by that broadcast on TV. At the same time, they will be given the opportunity to actively participate in dialoguing on their experience or in creating new contents arising from collective intelligence. Construction of the meaning in these contexts is both an individual and a social process, enabling the storyworld to expand.

Finally, analysis of these contents enables audiences' creative practices to link up to the concept of a multiplatform society, where fans are presented with cultural models, associated with cultural industries, that they want to be part of through their experience and creations.

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