The image choices of social television audiences: The narrative of The Voice UK and La Voz (Spain) viewers on Twitter

La selección de imagenes por parte de las audiencias de televisión social: la narrativa de los espectadores de The Voice UK y La Voz (España) en Twitter

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Abstract

Content shared on social media platforms is increasingly centred on images and conversations discussing television on digital platforms are also influenced by this trend. This article examines the visual data posted by viewers while watching the 2019 edition of the Spanish and British adaptations of the international Reality Show 'The Voice'. With the sample including images posted by viewers on Twitter during the broadcast of the episodes, the production formats, the type of content, the purpose of the images and the connection between the visual data and the text in the tweet have been analysed. The results highlight three different trends: the parallel visual narrative created by viewers on Twitter through the use of digital culture, the showcasing of their private sphere and the appropriation of images from the television episodes altering the discourse presented by the broadcasters.

Keywords: Visual data, Twitter, Reality show, Social television, Social audience, Second screen.

Resumen

El contenido compartido en las redes sociales se focaliza cada vez más en las imágenes y las conversaciones sobre televisión en las plataformas digitales también se han visto influenciadas por esta tendencia. Este artículo examina los datos visuales publicados por los espectadores mientras ven la edición de 2019 de las adaptaciones española y británica del reality show internacional 'The Voice'. Con la muestra de imágenes publicadas por los espectadores en Twitter durante la emisión de los episodios, se han analizado los formatos de producción, el tipo de contenido, la finalidad de las imágenes y la conexión entre los datos visuales y el texto del tuit. Los resultados destacan tres tendencias diferentes: la narrativa visual paralela creada por los espectadores en Twitter a través del uso de la cultura digital, la exhibición de su esfera privada y la apropiación de imágenes de los episodios televisivos alterando el discurso presentado por los canales de televisión.

Palabras clave: datos visuales, Twitter, Reality show, Televisión social, Audiencia social, Segunda pantalla.

Introduction

The use of social media as a second screen platform to discuss television programmes is already an established reality in Western audiovisual markets. Social television is a way to socialize the viewing experience where audiovisual consumption is individualized and audiences are fragmented (Highfield, Harrington, & Bruns, 2013; Lotz, 2014; Halpern, Quintas-Froufe, & Fernández-Medina, 2016). Several studies have analysed the responses of viewers on different social networks, mainly Twitter, on genres such as fiction (Ji & Raney, 2015; Auverset & Billings, 2016) or political shows (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2011; Trilling, 2015). However, the genre that has been analysed in most of the studies due to its high levels of audience interaction is reality shows (Franquet, Gómez, Coromina & Guerrero, 2018; van Es, 2016).

These papers have mostly focused on the textual content posted by users and the network relationship created in the conversations of the *ad hoc* publics around a hashtag (Bruns & Burgess, 2015). Nevertheless, images are becoming increasingly important on social networks, not only on the image-oriented platforms such as Instagram, Tik Tok or Snapchat, but also on Facebook and Twitter that originally were focused primarily on text (Seo, 2014; Russmann & Svensson, 2017). In this research paper, we want to analyse the visual data (VD), including images, videos and GIFS, shared by viewers on Twitter when watching television. The study of the images published by the audience during the television broadcast aims to explore a significant part of the discourse by social communities in relation to television consumption. In this respect, the conversations about a popular programme such as the international format The Voice which has two local adaptions (Spanish and British) is an exceptional scenario when exploring the participation of audiences through the analysis of shared images on social networks.

Theoretical background

Visual data on social media

In recent years, numerous studies have focused on the convergence between television and social networks, mainly Twitter and, to a lesser extent, Facebook. These studies have analysed specific television events (Highfield, Harrington, & Bruns, 2013) or regular programmes in the schedules of the channels (Han & Lee, 2014; Rossi & Giglietto, 2016). In all cases, this social practice fuelled by digital communities (Selva, 2016) emphasizes the current connection between viewers, broadcasters and social platforms (Delgado, Navarro, Garcia-Muñoz, Lluís & Paz, 2018). In the case of Twitter, users participate in the conversation with shared platform capabilities and information architecture configuring social relationships through the tweets published (Bozdag & Smets, 2017).

In this regard, the content shared on social media platforms is increasingly centred on images. The volume of VD has greatly expanded in society as a consequence of the increase in the speed of digital communications (Knoblauch, Baer, Laurier, Petschke & Schnettler, 2008; Philipps, 2012). The images selected by these communities have become a fundamental element in social media participation. They affect the shared messages on social networks (Brantner, Lobinger & Wetzstein, 2011) not only for the complementary function that it may have in relation to the text (Russmann & Svensson, 2017), but also for the story created by the audiences through the visual discourse.

The digitalization of VD and the popularization of their use on social media platforms has produced "a range of new image genres such as the selfie, photobomb, and duckface" (Thelwall, Goriunova, Vis, Faulkner, Burns, Aulich, Mas-Bleda, Stuart & D'Orazio, 2015: 2577). Furthermore, one of the digital visual genres most deserving of analysis is the meme, especially when considering the importance they have acquired in popular culture (Davison, 2012; Meso-Ayerdi, Mendiguren-Galdospín, & Pérez-Dasilva, 2017; Fernández-Gómez & Martín-Quevedo, 2018). The value of memes lies precisely in the reinterpretation and viralisation of content on the Internet by multiple profiles (Shifman, 2014). This type of content has become prominent in the exchange of jokes and humour, an essential aspect in many online cultures (Ensmenger, 2010; Goriunova, 2014). Some studies emphasize the use of content by digital communities that are already part of the digital popular culture (Guadagno, Muscanell, & Pollio, 2013), as is the case of some memes independently of the topic discussed. Therefore, the reinterpretation can be done through different methods such as altering part of the image but also by posting additional text in the tweet, for example.

Most studies analysing the images shared on Twitter have focused on social protests (Seo, 2014; Bosch & Mutsvairo, 2017), politics (Quevedo Redondo, Portalés-Oliva, & Berrocal Gonzalo, 2016; Ruiz del Olmo & Bustos Díaz, 2016), and crisis, highlighting the key role of images on the circulation of visual content during emergencies (Bruns & Hanusch, 2017). However, despite television content being a central part of Twitter conversations, little is known about how social television audiences use VD to comment on a programme that they are watching and the connection between the images and that programme or their private consumption. A small number of studies, mostly centred on serialised fiction, have focused on this aspect of the interactivity of television viewers on social media (Rendell, 2019). In this paper, the knowledge of these practices focusing on Reality TV is hoped to be expanded.

Television and social media images

The high levels of competition in the audiovisual and entertainment local and transnational markets have forced traditional broadcasters expand ways of engaging with users to encourage them to watch live television. Currently, social media is used to build communities of fans (Ebanks et al., 2019), assess the level of success and even influence the evolution of a programme by user comments (Cameron & Geidner, 2014). Reality TV is one of the genres where these strategies have been used the most to encourage audiences to watch the program at time of broadcast due to the 'liveness' (Stewart, 2020). Second screens, the use of secondary devices when watching television (Gross et al., 2008) and the comments of viewers on social media have become essential to the development and interest in this type of show (L'Hoiry, 2019) and the creation of communities around them.

Within social media, Twitter which is the focus of this paper, has become the 'backchannel' of television (Diakopoulos & Shamma, 2010; Highfield et al., 2013; Larsson, 2013) due to its dynamics allowing synchronic conversations that satisfy the needs of broadcasters and viewers (Highfield et al., 2013), being the main platform of social television. This method of socializing allows viewers to share their viewing experience where audiovisual consumption is individualized and audiences are fragmented (Highfield et al., 2013; Lotz, 2014; Halpern, Quintas-Froufe, & Fernández-Medina, 2016).

The posting of images on Twitter by social television audiences is a key factor when studying the popular culture of digital communities (Davison, 2012; Vickery, 2014) and the online socialization of television

consumption. While there are other social networks that are image-oriented, Twitter is considered to be the backchannel of television (Olof Larsson, 2013; Giglietto & Selva, 2014). Real-time conversations allow viewers to use this platform while watching linear television. This activity has promoted a change in the behaviour of audiences, feeding the concept of prosumers (Toffler, 1980; Jenkins, 2006; García-Galera & Valdivia, 2014) and enhancing the increasingly active role of audiovisual consumption (Franquet et al., 2018).

The reality show is one of the television genres most favourable to the use of second screens in socialising the viewing experience (Ducheneaut, Moore, Oehlberg, Thornton, & Nickel, 2008; Ytreberg, 2009; Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2010; Segado, Grandío, & Fernández-Gómez, 2015) since they are governed by structures of conflict, hierarchy, judgement and exclusion (Bratich, 2011). In addition, they encourage viewers to participate during the episodes. van Es describes the North American adaptation of the 'The Voice' format in its first editions "as the pinnacle of social TV" (2016, p. 109) and considers that it differs from other talent shows, such as American Idol or The X Factor, because of the central role of social media participation in the programme. Despite the diminishing role of active participation by viewers during the seasons, the characteristics of the genre, this specific format and its multiple local adaptations in different markets, makes this show ideal for the evaluation of the use of VD by viewers on Twitter.

Previous studies have already noted on the interest of The Voice for the study of social television due to their methods of promoting the linear programme on social media and blending of social media platforms with the use of official hashtags, the presence of users messages on screen or the posting of tweets by the broadcaster, the profile of the programme and other people related to the talent show such as the host, the judges or the contestants (Ellis, 2014; Franquet, et al., 2018; van Es, 2016; Yao, 2017).

In this context, the main objective of our research is to analyse how viewers use the features of Twitter and digital culture to comment on popular television reality shows with VD. We have raised the following research questions:

- RQ1: What type of VD, including images, videos and GIFS, do the social television audience decide to publish on Twitter while viewing the broadcast programme?

- RQ2: What are the purposes of the VD posted by the social audience on Twitter in relation to the television content while watching the program?

- RQ3: What role does VD play with respect to the textual content of the tweet that accompanies them?

Sample and Methods

The results presented in this article are part of the larger research project (CSO2015-65350-R) "Social Networks and European General-Interest Television (EU-5): Screen Uses and Network Activity of Audiences", funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (MINECO + FEDER) and carried out by a team of researchers from the consolidated research group GRISS (Grup de Recerca en Imatge, So i Síntesi / Image, Sound and Synthesis Research Group, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) (ref. 2017SGR672). This research focuses on the use of social media by traditional broadcasters to increase the engagement of viewers with live television, focusing on general strategies (Monclús et al., 2019) and specific television genres such as serialised fiction (Navarro et al., 2021) or television news (Delgado et al., 2018).

This paper focuses on the talent shows genre since is one of the television genres most related to social television (Franquet et al., 2018). The television programmes analysed are the 2019 editions of the Spanish and British adaptations of the international music reality show 'The Voice', originally broadcast in the Netherlands in 2010 and distributed internationally by Talpa Media Holding and Endemol Shine Group. This format has been adapted to more than 60 countries with a generally high level of success.

In this article, we are going to focus on the local adaptations for the United Kingdom and Spain. These countries represent two of the main European television markets with a high level of local productions (EAO, 2021). In addition, they have been two of the main international markets where social television has had the most success since the beginning of social media (The Wit, 2013). The format is currently aired on a commercial general-interest channel in both television markets. In 2019, Spain aired the sixth season on Antena 3 (the first one on this channel) and the UK aired the eighth on ITV (the third season on this channel). Despite the diminishing role of active participation through social media by viewers granted by the format during the seasons, the backchannel conversations on social media, mainly Twitter, are still important (van Es, 2016). The two episodes selected for each television market are from the first part of the season, episodes called "blind auditions" where the viewers meet the contestants for the first time and, therefore, do not have previous knowledge of them. In this stage, the coaches (celebrity musicians that have the role of judges and mentors at the same time) have their backs to the potential contestants and they only turn around if they want that voice on their team. This allows them to base their decisions strictly on the voice of the person auditioning, a significant aspect that is praised for its promise of diversity (Ellis, 2014).

This first stage of the show is the one that usually has the highest audience share (according to audience data from BARB and Kantar Media), likely due to its distinctiveness from other music talent shows. Focusing on the VD shared on Twitter during these episodes is convenient because of the high level of interest of audiences in knowing who the coaches will choose and how the voices match the personalities and presence of the people auditioning.

Table 1: Sample description.

	Episodes	Total tweets	Original tweets	Visual data items
La Voz	Season 6, Blind auditions 4 and 6	11.707	6.625	738
The Voice UK	Season 8, Blind auditions 3 and 4	8.491	5.162	487
Total		20.198	11.787	1.225

Source: Own elaboration

To create a dataset with the VD items, all tweets containing the hashtag created by each programme (#LaVozAudiciones4 and #LaVozAudiciones6 in the case of Spain and #TheVoiceUK in the UK) were captured using the software DMI-TCAT created by the Digital Methods Initiative (Borra & Rieder, 2014). Using these hashtags, a considerable number of tweets were captured generating *ad hoc* publics and, therefore, a common conversation (Bruns & Burgess, 2015). Tweets were captured during the synchronous

time of the linear broadcast. Since the main objective is to find the practices of audiences when posting VD, the images considered are only from the original posts, not retweets. As can be seen in Table 1, the total sample of captured VD was 1225 items.

A quantitative content analysis of the data shared on Twitter has been made using VD as the primary unit of analysis. The resulting data base has been analysed using descriptive statistics with the open-source software R. In the first part of the analysis, Twitter users were divided into seven typologies: (1) Social audience, viewers watching or commenting on the programme; (2) Jury, coaches in the terminology of the format, (3) Contestant, singers that are participating in that season of the talent show; (4) Company, companies not related to the programme or the television channel that are posting about the episode; (5) Media outlet, the different media companies using the sample's hashtags; (6) Programme's producer, the production company in charge of the programme in each television market; and (7) Programme's official account, the profile created on social media exclusively for the programme in each television market. The tweets posted by members of the social audience were further analysed later.

Firstly, the visual data were classified according to their production format (picture, GIF or video) (Seo, 2014). Secondly, their content typology was coded into four different categories formulated from the theoretical knowledge of VD on social media and the television format type that included Programme screenshots, Memes, Viewer's private sphere and Information about the programme or its participants. In this study, the VD classified under Memes include the reinterpretation of viral content but also the use of an already popular image used in a different context through the use of text (Guadagno, Muscanell, & Pollio, 2013). Thirdly, the purpose of the images was classified into Emotion, Enthusiasm, Humour, Descriptive/Informative, Rejection and Surprise (Fidel, 1997; Chung & Yoon, 2013). Finally, the connection between the VD and the text of the tweet was analysed taking into account three options:

- Complementary: the text makes reference to the image but does not need the VD to understand the meaning.

- Dependent: The text and the VD are part of the same sentence; they do not have their own meaning.

- Independent: there is no direct relation between text and VD while the purpose may be the same.

Results

During the time the programmes are aired in both markets, the vast majority of the VD related to the reality show 'The Voice' is posted by profiles from the social audience (Table 2). This draws attention to the significance of the conversations generated by viewers through the images, videos and GIFs posted. Another important type of profile are the official accounts of the programmes, showcasing the importance broadcasters put in the stimulation of conversation on social media (Navarro et al., 2021). In addition, the producer of the Spanish adaptation of the format also actively participates in the conversation with a similar amount of VD to the programme's profile. In contrast, the jury (coaches) in the UK, which are four musical celebrities, are more involved than the ones in Spain. Moreover, it is interesting to see companies with no apparent relationship to the programme also post VD, a trend not extended into the Spanish market.

Table 2: Visual data by type of user.

	La Voz	The Voice UK
Audience	86,99%	74,54%
Programme profile	5,56%	7,80%
Programme producer	4,88%	
Jury	1,36%	4,11%
Contestant	0,13%	0,21%
Company	0,13%	8,62%
Media Outlet	0,95%	4,72%

Source: Own elaboration

Focusing only on the VD posted by the viewers, which is the centre of this research, the most common form of VD posted are GIFs with more than half of the items in both countries (Spain, 61.99%; UK, 51.24%), followed by pictures (32.09%; 39.12%) and, to a lesser extent, videos (3.89%; 6.89%). It also needs to be considered that in both cases, around 2% of the images were marked as spam since they were not related to the television programme, and therefore there will not be considered for the results of the analysis.

Table 3: Type of content posted by viewers

	La Voz	The Voice UK
Memes	58,82%	50,71%
Programme screenshot	29,90%	22,66%
Viewer consumption	0,95%	11,90%
Information about the programme	4,29%	6,80%
Social media conversations	2,86%	0,85%
Others	3,18%	7,08%

Source: Own elaboration

Answering RQ1, the type of content most shared through VD is memes highlighting the omnipresence of digital popular culture on social networks independently of the topic discussed by the users, as can be seen in Table 3. Memes present in the sample are content already chaining in the digital popular culture mostly altering their meaning through the text of the tweet or, to a lesser extent, related to the moment when the tweet is posted during the linear broadcast. The second most common typology found on Twitter are the images of the programme that is being aired. However, as will be discussed later, in most cases programme images are posted with a reinterpretation of its meaning by the social audience.

Figure 1: Examples of a Private Sphere picture of the viewers posted on Twitter while watching The Voice UK.

As a result of the analysis, two type of content showcasing the private sphere of the viewers have been found: Images of viewers watching television and private social media conversations. In the case of British audiences, VD showing the viewers watching the programme within their private sphere is a significant highlight. This is usually in the form of images. The most common picture portrays the legs of the viewer publishing the tweet with a beverage in their living room and the television screen in the background (Figure 1). In Spain, the private sphere of the viewers is mostly portrayed by images of private social media conversations and no pictures of viewers watching the programme have been found. Finally, in both cases visual information about the programme and its participants are less frequent.

Table 4: Intentionality of the images posted by the viewes by type of Visual Data.

	Emotion	Enthusiasm	Humour	Descriptive	Rejection	Surprise
La Voz	**23,85%**	**19,24%**	**24,48%**	**16,06%**	**12,40%**	**3,97%**
Memes	18,92%	21,62%	32,16%	1,08%	20,27%	5,95%
P. screenshot	36,71%	21,28%	14,89%	25%	1,06%	1,06%
Viewer consumption	16,67%		16,67%	66,69%		
Info. programme	14,81%	3,70%	11,11%	66,67%	3,70%	
SM conversation				100%		
Others	30%		15%	50%		5,00%
La Voz	15,30%	24,65%	23,51%	18,70%	14,16%	3,68%
Memes	5,59%	31,29%	27,37%	2,23%	26,82%	6,70%
P. screenshot	41,25%	16,25%	25%	16,25%		1,25%
Viewer consumption	19,05%	21,43%	7,14%	52,38%		
Info. programme	8,33%	29,17%	33,33%	19,17%		
SM conversation				100%		
Others	4%	8%	12%	68,00%	8,00%	

Source: Own elaboration

In general, the main purpose of the use of VD is humour followed by showing enthusiasm and emotion (RQ2). However, there are significant differences between the types of VD while they are less variances between markets, since the results are very similar in the posts related to The Voice UK and La Voz España (Table 4). While the two most common types of VD posted by viewers, memes and screenshots of the programme, are used to express enthusiasm and humour, viewers exclusively use memes that are already popular to express rejection and surprise, as can be seen in the first two images of Figure 2. Alternatively, the images of the programme tend to show more emotions or to be informative, like the examples showcased in the two last images of Figure 3.

Figure 2: Memes showing humour and enthusiasm.

Figure 3: Images of the programme showing emotions and being informative.

However, while the use of screenshots of the programme is very common there is not a correlation when expressing emotion between the moment commented on in the text and the image showcased. That is to say, the use of images aired by the programme are used to comment on other parts of the episode creating a parallel visual narrative. Additionally, the images of the private sphere of viewers (television consumption and social media conversations) and information about the programme are more informative. In this case, the results found are very similar across the two social audience conversations. This reinforces the transnational layer of digital culture, well expanded in the use of social media (Navarro & Monclús, 2021).

Table 5: Relationship of visual data posted by the viewers with the text of the tweet.

	Complementary	Dependent	Independent
La Voz	33,55%	27,66%	38,79%
Memes	13,78%	31,62%	54,59%
P. screenshot	67,55%	17,02%	15,43%
Viewer consumption	50%		50%
Info. programme	59,26%	40,74%	
SM conversation			100%
Others	40%	45%	15%
La Voz	29,71%	24,57%	45,72%
Memes	13,41%	21,23%	65,36%
P. screenshot	53,75%	23,75%	22,50%
Viewer consumption	54,76%	30,95%	14,29%
Info. programme	29,17%	25%	45,83%
SM conversation			100%
Others	28%	40%	32%

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding RQ3, the results show that there is also a difference between the use of memes and screenshots of the programme in relation to the text in the tweets (Table 5). Memes are most frequently used independently of the other objects. That is to say, viewer in both markets use digital culture to add to their textual information to express an emotion, not to highlight the content. In contrast, the images of the programme are mostly used as complementary information of what is expressed or commented on by the

text. However, viewers commonly take images and alter their references to complement tweets with images not connected to the narrative moment of the primary text (Figure 4), as previously highlighted. Finally, it is interesting to highlight the presence of VD dependent on the text in both markets and types of images. These cases of connected VD imply a high narrative role by viewers and a primary role of images when sharing comments.

Figure 4: Examples of images of the programme posted which are not connected to the narrative moment of the show.

Conclusions

This paper has analysed the visual data (VD), including images, videos and GIFs by television viewers on Twitter when watching Reality TV. Sharing practices are relevant to discover social contexts (Schreiber, 2017) and are key in understanding the current forms of television consumption. Focusing on VD, the results contribute to expand the knowledge of the use of visual meanings in digital contexts and how they relate to linear television. 'The Voice', a Reality TV programme with extensive use of social media, has shown itself to be a pertinent case of study due to the emotions that viewers feel when watching the episodes, as already had been established by previous studies (Ellis, 2014; Franquet et al., 2018; van Es, 2016; Yao, 2017).

The analysis of the visual data shared by viewers on Twitter while watching a reality show evidences three different social uses of images to discuss television. Firstly, images are mainly introduced for a humorous purpose by the digital communities. Memes are the ultimate expression of this through the publication of VD present in digital popular culture that are already trending on social media (Guadagno, Muscanell, & Pollio, 2013). In addition, the images captured from the same episode of the programme, with GIFs, pictures and videos, are also used to create a humorous discourse. These latter images are also appropriated to create a parallel emotive narrative, which has also been found in the use of visual data when posting while watching serialised fiction (Rendell, 2019).

Showing and sharing the private life of the social audience at the time of synchronous television viewing is the second social use of the images. Photographing the private sphere at the moment of television consumption underlines the importance acquired by the daily context of the viewer, as well as the role of viewers as creators, especially in the United Kingdom. The images posted by online communities allow us to characterize their experience with the television medium. The private life of users is published, while confirming a "trajectory where imaging everyday life becomes an integral part of our identity construction,

communication and sustenance of relationships today" (Ibrahim, 2015, p. 43).

The third social use of the images places the social audience in the role of an editor of the programme that they are consuming. It is a widespread trend to use images from the programme currently being broadcast to comment on scenes in the show, altering the narrative structure of the programme, another trend used with serialised fiction to portray affection for different characters (Rendell, 2019).

To conclude, the social uses of images show the different representations of popular culture made by the users of social networks while they publish on a second screen. The analysis of visual data on Twitter during the synchronous broadcast of a leading audience programme, such as The Voice, highlights the importance of the images generated by the audience as an audiovisual narrative parallel to the linear programme. For this reason elements of digital popular culture, the representation of the private sphere and the appropriation of the programme images by the audience helps them reinterpret and appropriate television content.

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