
Miscellaneous

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Exploring TV Seriality Through the Lens of Social Media: A Semi-Systematic Literature Review

Abstract

The engagement of TV active audiences is predominantly manifest on social media as part of a broad phenomenon called “Social TV.” Through a Semi-Systematic Literature Review, the aim of this paper is to outline the main research lines and gaps in social media research to study TV seriality, a macro-genre experiencing a continual increase in both production volume and global viewership. Through the *coding* method, the research lines are drawn relying on the aims, methods, platforms and time evolution of the collected publications. Results have shown the high interdisciplinarity of social media research on TV seriality and its prominent focus on the analysis of user behavior. Further investigations should include, but not be limited to, the reception of sensitive themes embedded into the storylines. Nonetheless, future research may encounter challenges owing to recent alterations in Twitter’s (now: X) policies, the predominant social medium utilized for the analysis of TV seriality.

Keywords

Social media, TV seriality, social TV, coding, literature review.

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A systemic approach to contemporary serial product. The medical drama case” [Grant Number: 2020JHRZC]].

1. Introduction

Independently of the TV product it is sparked from, audience engagement on social media is by now a consolidated habit (Doughty *et al.*, 2012; Monclús *et al.*, 2019). This phenomenon is part of a larger one that has been dubbed “Social TV,” intended as the convergence of television and social digital environments. From a consumption standpoint, researching on Social TV implies making “reflections on the so-called multi-screening fruition practices” (Carelli, 2017, p. 254, our translation): this concept *de facto* considers social media platforms as more than just a *backchannel* to TV that exposes “the conversations taking place in our once-isolated living rooms” (Proulx & Shepatin, 2012, p. 10), but as a medium on which audiences –and users at the same time– create contents *ex novo*, like memes.

Drawing from the notion of *participatory culture* (Jenkins, 1992), posting contents on social media allows audiences to build an experience of connected viewing by creating online communities in which participants feel part of a wider phenomenon (Schirra *et al.*, 2014, p. 2446). If this ancillary activity on social media once was completely spontaneous, it has gradually become also “industry-controlled” (Barra & Scaglioni, 2014, p. 112) since broadcasters have grasped its importance: user-generated contents (UGCs) allow them to acquire information about the reception of products based on the opinions shared (Cameron & Geidner, 2014) and, accordingly, to promote social live-engagement for marketing purposes (Navar-Gill, 2018).

Social media has introduced novel data sources for researching audience practices, reception analyses and promotion protocols. The availability of social media big data has particularly transformed audience and reception studies, which, originating from alternative data sources and the qualitative traditions of Communication and Media Studies, are now increasingly studied through mixed and quantitative methods (Livingstone, 2019; Schröder, 2019).

Among the existing social media, Twitter has been widely recognized as a useful digital space for the study of social discourses on television (Bredl *et al.*, 2013) because it encourages both forms of live interaction “[...] of a social media community on the same platform and at the same time” and of delayed conversations from a “community of enthusiasts” (Harrington *et al.*, 2013, p. 407).

Many studies have been dedicated to unfolding whether specific TV formats have different effects on Social TV activities (e.g., Geerts *et al.*, 2008), yet not reaching consensus (Buschow *et al.*, 2014, p. 134). Nonetheless, there is one macro-genre which is increasingly acquiring prominence pertaining to both the production and the consumption sides: TV seriality¹. On the one hand, there has been a constant increase in the production of English-language TV serial products², ranging from 210 productions released in 2009 to 599 in 2022 (Porter, 2023). On the other hand, the constant rise of subscribers to OTT platforms (3,5 billion in 2022; Ruby, 2023) and the growing pattern of binge-watching (Rubenking & Bracken, 2021) make this genre particularly relevant because it is highly consumed by viewers.

As regards the convergence between social media and television, only one survey of literature has been conducted (Segado *et al.*, 2015) which identified four research areas: social TV, fandom, second screen and promo. However, their study only covers publications up to 2013 and focuses on a single database, without delving into a specific TV macro-genre. Furthermore, considering the growing pervasiveness of social media in contemporary life, along with the recent transformations in television series production and consumption, it is of significant academic interest to investigate whether social media research on TV series has evolved and expanded over time, particularly by broadening the timeframe considered by Segado *et al.* (2015). The main aim of this paper is to fill this gap by outlining the key research lines and gaps in social media research to provide insights into TV seriality, while simultaneously proposing a rigorous

¹ In this paper, by “TV seriality” we refer to both TV series and TV serials (e.g., Innocenti & Pescatore, 2008).

² The only exception is represented by 2020, due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

approach (i.e., Semi-Systematic Literature Review) for examining the applications of digital environments in the study of television.

To address our macro-aim, we build on three Research Questions (RQs):

RQ1. What are the main aims and methods adopted in social media research to analyze TV seriality?

RQ2. Which social media are most frequently utilized to investigate TV seriality?

RQ3. How has social media research on TV seriality evolved over time?

This study intends to act as a reference point for Humanities and Social Sciences scholars who are dedicated to explore one specific area of social media research pertaining to TV seriality and/or who are interested in unfolding the multifold and interdisciplinary applications of this field in the complex contemporary mediascape.

2. Research Design and Method

Among the three approaches to literature review that Snyder (2019) identifies, i.e., systematic, semi-systematic and integrative, the Semi-Systematic Literature Review (SSLR) approach has been chosen to address the aim of this paper, which is particularly appropriate when dealing with broad research questions and areas. Indeed, the SSLR is “[...] designed for topics that have been [...] studied by various groups of researchers within diverse disciplines” and is useful to detect “themes, theoretical perspectives, or common issues” (Snyder, 2019, pp. 334-335) regarding the investigated subject matter. The interdisciplinary examination of the convergence between social media and TV seriality hinders the formulation of research hypotheses and the conduction of a meta-analysis of the collected literature, typical instead of the systematic literature review approach.

2.1. Search Strategy and Conduction of Research

Two collection strategies have been implemented to collect the publications. The first consists in querying three databases for search terms (see Table 1): Google Scholar, Scopus and Semantic Scholar. Publications are always searched for three terms that are the result of the combination of three independent lists of keywords, related respectively to social media, TV seriality and the major uses and applications of social media with respect to TV serial products. An example of a string of search terms is: *Facebook AND TV drama AND comments*.

Table 1. Search terms.

| Social-media-related keywords | TV-seriality-related keywords | Use-related keywords |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Facebook | TV drama | Comments |
| Instagram | TV fiction | Reception |
| Pinterest | TV serial | Social discourses |
| Reddit | TV series | |
| Social media | TV soap opera | |
| Social networks | TV telenovela | |
| TikTok | | |
| Tumblr | | |
| Twitter | | |

Source: Own elaboration.

The second complementary collection strategy adopted is the *snowball sampling* (Goodman, 1961), which consists in checking out and eventually collecting the bibliographical references of the publications that are yielded from the database-based search, once they are assessed to be in line with the prespecified research purposes.

Three Inclusion Criteria (IC) are established:

IC1. Object: publications which empirically investigate TV seriality using the following media: Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Reddit, TikTok, Tumblr and Twitter.

IC2. Language: publications whose title and/or abstract is in English. Moreover, the text of the publication needs to be written in English, French, Italian or Spanish.

IC3. Type of publication: journal articles, conference proceedings, book chapters and books.

If the upper limit with regard to the year of publication is the time of undertaking the collection, i.e., June 2023, no restriction is adopted as for the beginning of the timespan selected.

The title, and eventually the abstract, are scanned out to establish whether the publications are coherent with our research aims. The number of publications found amounts to 191. The application of the IC to the dataset has led to the exclusion of 38 publications and to a final dataset size of 153 items.

2.2. Method

The analysis of the collected literature is aimed at identifying the main areas pursued by social media research to provide insights into TV seriality. This evaluation is executed through the application of the *coding* method, which is a process that “[...] indexes or maps data to provide an overview of disparate data that allows the researcher to make sense of them in relation to their research questions” (Elliot, 2018, p. 2851).

To identify the aims and methods of the publications (RQ₁), we have relied on the *emergent coding*, which involves “[...] coding with no prespecified codes, and let the data suggest initial codes” (Punch, 2014, p. 174). To answer RQ₂ and RQ₃, the social media on which the analyses were undertaken and the year of publications were respectively utilized as codes. Research lines and gaps are illustrated by converging results from the three RQs and by closely reading the publications in the dataset.

3. Results

3.1. Aims and Methods Adopted in Social Media Research for the Analysis of TV Seriality

To answer RQ₁, in this paragraph we report, first, the emergent codes for the aims and methods observed in social media research to investigate TV seriality and, second, the quantitative findings resulting from coding. While undertaking the analysis, we have observed that some publications present more than one aim or method: accordingly, they are coded and visualized (Figures 1-2) as a combination of two or more individual codes.

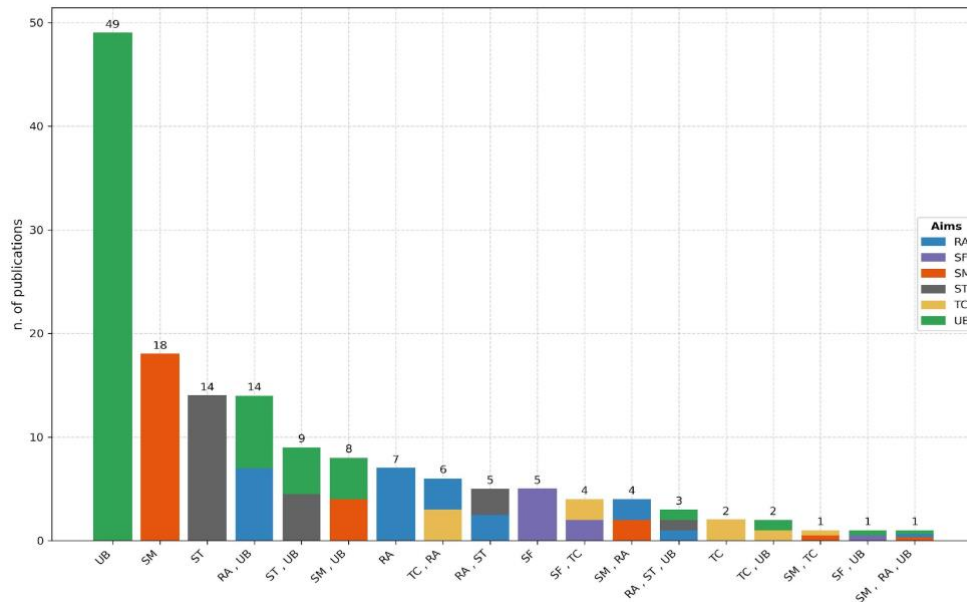
Considering the aims pursued in the analyses, six emergent codes have been identified, which can be described based on the research question(s) they address, namely:

1. *Reception Analysis (RA)*:
What do users³ post on social media in relation to TV seriality and, more specifically, what do they like or dislike about TV serial products? How much do they post on it?
2. *Specific Theme (ST)*:
What do users post on social media on a specific theme, isolated from TV serial products? How much do they post on it?
3. *User Behavior (UB)*:
How and why do users use social media in relation to TV seriality?
4. *Success Forecasting (SF)*:
How UGCs are used to predict the success of TV serial products?
5. *Tool Creation (TC)*:
Can UGCs produced in relation to TV seriality be a source to create, fine-tune or compare tools?
6. *Social media Marketing (SM)*:
How are social media used to promote TV seriality?

³ In this contribution, we use “user” as an umbrella term to refer also to audiences and fans (e.g., García-Avilés & Hernández, 2012; Bioni, 2018).

Figure 1 illustrates the results of the application of these six codes to the dataset: most items have analyzed the behavior of users in relation to TV seriality, i.e., 49 (32.0%). Of all classified publications, 95 (62.1%) focus on a single objective, while 58 (37.9%) address multiple aims.

Figure 1. Distribution of publications over aims.



Source: Own elaboration.

Turning to the methods adopted in the 153 publications of the dataset, fourteen emergent codes have been detected. Due to occasional omissions of explicit methodological descriptions by the authors, we attributed methods to the publications based on a close reading of the analyses. The methods were then grouped by methodological approach⁴. The identified codes are:

1. Qualitative methods:
 - 1.1. *Observation (OBS)*⁵
 - 1.2. *Qualitative Content Analysis (CA)*⁶
 - 1.3. *Interview (INT)*
2. Quantitative methods:
 - 2.1. *Sentiment Analysis (SA)*
 - 2.2. *Topic Modeling (TM)*
 - 2.3. *Natural Language Processing methods other than Sentiment Analysis and Topic Modeling (NLP₂)*⁷
 - 2.4. *Machine Learning methods other than Natural Language Processing (ML₂)*⁸
 - 2.5. *Quantitative Content Analysis (QCA)*
 - 2.6. *Quantitative analysis of Social networks' Analytics (QSA)*

⁴ In order to delineate the methodological approaches, we strictly rely on the definitions provided by Creswell (2014, pp. 2-4).

⁵ Within this method, we include those publications that adopt either an ethnographic or netnographic approach of observation or participant observation (e.g., Bourdaa, 2018) or that use a close reading or close analysis of the data (e.g., Willard, 2017).

⁶ The publications coded as CA make explicit the adoption of this method. Some scholars (e.g., DeGroot & Leith, 2018) dubbed their method as “thematic analysis” based on the definition given by Braun and Clarke (2006) among others. Although differences between content analysis and thematic analysis have been thoroughly identified (Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2013), for the purposes of this paper, it is not necessary to discriminate them.

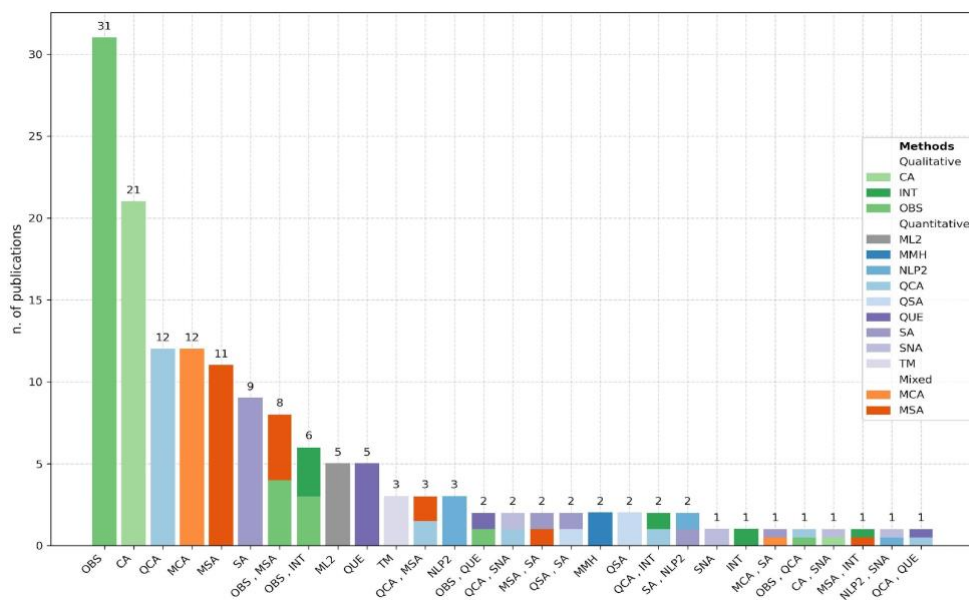
⁷ Examples include Text Similarity and Named Entity Recognition.

⁸ Examples include Back-Propagation, K-means and Predictive models.

- 2.7. *Social Network Analysis (SNA)*
- 2.8. *Mathematic Model for Hit phenomena (MMH)*
- 2.9. *Questionnaire or survey (QUE)*
- 3. Mixed methods: here, we include those publications that used qualitative and quantitative methods in combination, altogether with two stand-alone methods, namely:
 - 3.1. *Mixed-method analysis of Social networks' Analytics (MSA)*⁹
 - 3.2. *Mixed-method Content Analysis (MCA)*¹⁰

The results of the coding process for method are reported in Figure 2. The most employed method is observation (31 items, 20.3%) and the most adopted methodological approach is qualitative (59 items, 38.6%), followed by quantitative (49 items, 32.0%) and mixed (45 items, 29.4%)¹¹. Among these studies, 118 use a single method (77.1%), whereas 35 use more than one (22.9%).

Figure 2. Distribution of publications over methods.



Source: Own elaboration.

3.2. Social Media Employed for the Analysis of TV Seriality

Figure 3 provides insights into the social media platforms most commonly employed for exploring TV seriality, to answer RQ2. Twitter (now “X”) has resulted to be the most used social medium (109 items, 87 times used alone and 22 in combination with others social media) while TikTok the least employed one (1 study).

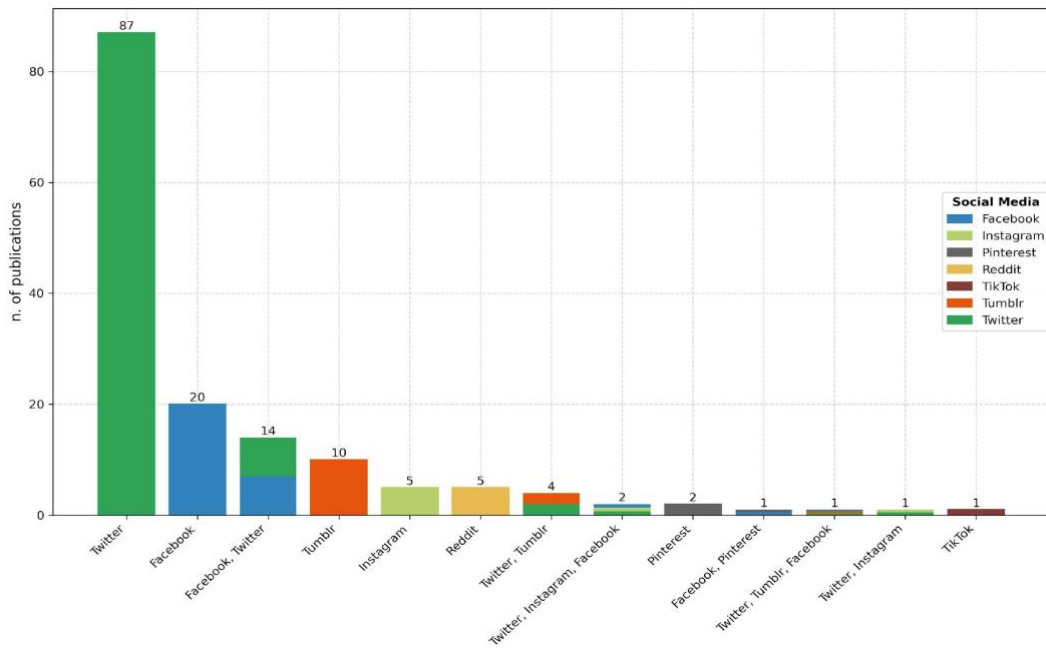
A chi-square test shows that there is a statistically significant association between social media and the methodological approach employed in the publication ($\chi^2(24) = 44.20, p = 0.0072$), suggesting that the specific platform shapes the choice of the research methods. If we draw attention to the methodological approaches adopted by the studies conducted on Twitter, we notice that the quantitative approach prevails (43 items, 39.4%), followed by mixed (35 items, 32.1%) and qualitative (31 items, 28.4%) ones.

⁹ By MSA, we mean that specific social networks’ features (e.g., followers, reposts, replies, comments, hashtags) are studied not only from a quantitative viewpoint, but are also used as a base for qualitative analyses.

¹⁰ In this paper, we follow the definitions provided by Breakwell *et al.* (2020, p. 287) for qualitative and quantitative content analysis and consider mixed-method content analysis as a combination of both.

¹¹ The count related to the mixed approach includes both the two stand-alone mixed methods and combinations of methods resulting in this approach.

Figure 3. Count of social media utilized in the analysis.



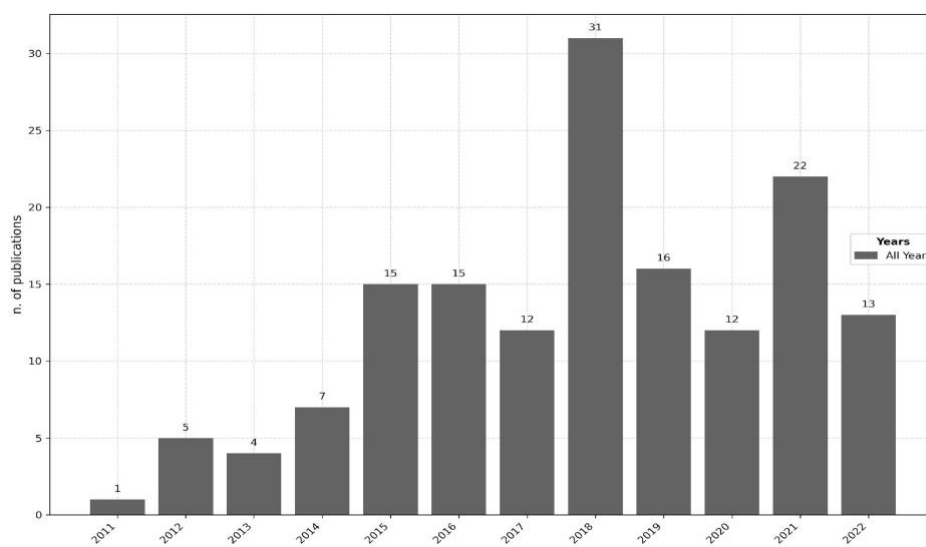
Source: Own elaboration.

3.3. Time Evolution of Social Media Research for the Analysis of TV Seriality

To address RQ3, Figure 4 displays the number of research items produced by year, covering the period from 2011 to 2022. The first 4 years contemplated (2011–2014) present a low number of publications, ranging from 1 in 2011 to 7 in 2014, before reaching a peak of 31 items in 2018. Despite fluctuations, a linear regression analysis indicates an overall increase in research production over the years (*slope coefficient* = 1.5067, *p* = 0.0198).

The dataset of the coded publications is available at <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.28287932.v1>

Figure 4. Publication count per year.



Source: Own elaboration.

3.4. Research Lines and Gaps in Social Media Research for the Analysis of TV Seriality

In delineating the main research lines and gaps of the field, we adopt the aims identified above as a starting point¹². The difficulty in conducting meta-analyses (mentioned in paragraph 2) applies especially to RA, ST and UB research lines, due to the diverse methodologies used. Additionally, RA and ST face issues with generalizability due to multiple case studies, while UB publications vary in theoretical frameworks (e.g., Fan Studies, Audience Studies, Communication and Technology), hindering comparisons.

In illustrating the research lines and gaps, we report the related bibliographical references in the text if they apply only to 1 or 2 publications. Conversely, if the research line or gap is comprised of more than 2 studies, only the most exemplificative one is cited, due to space reasons.

Reception Analysis

A total of 41 publications are coded as RA. The predominant methodological approach employed to analyze reception is quantitative (17 items), preceding qualitative (14) and mixed (10).

Reception Analysis can be broken down into two research lines. The first one, which pivots around what users post on social media in relation to TV seriality, has been prevalently attempted by adopting observation (8 items). The second one, which hinges on the volume of posting, has been mainly pursued via the mathematic model for hit phenomena (2 items) and the quantitative or mixed analysis of analytics (2 items). The objectives of both research lines are weaved in some studies, which make a large use of sentiment analysis (9 items) to focus on both the nature and the quantity of the contents (e.g., Pugsee *et al.*, 2021).

Interestingly, there exist studies that have isolated the reception of TV serial products within a defined category of audience, such as Black audiences (e.g., Chatman, 2017) and women, either Black (Harris & Colman, 2018), Spanish (Lacalle & Castro, 2018), queer (Anselmo, 2018) or old (Jerslev, 2018). Nevertheless, these analyses are still limited in quantity and disregard the reception of TV serial products among alternative specific audiences, such as young adults, religious communities and people with disabilities, among others.

Specific Theme

31 studies have investigated specific themes by means of social media, both exclusively and in association with other objectives, using a qualitative (18 items), mixed (8 items) or quantitative approach (5 items).

The method employed is directly linked to whether the publication examines the subject matter or quantifies the posts around a theme: as for the first, we observe the predominance of qualitative content analysis (12 items), whereas for the second the prevalence of quantitative content analysis (4 items).

Regardless of the method used, it is worthwhile to notice that most of these works focus on sensitive issues and how their representation in serialized fiction is perceived, such as: Gender issues (e.g., Burgess & Matamoros-Fernández, 2016), morality (Ames, 2018; Ji & Raney, 2014), health (e.g., Kaufman *et al.*, 2021), suicide (e.g., DeGroot & Leith, 2018), LGBTQI+ issues (e.g., Boisvert, 2020) and Black issues (Arcy & Johnson, 2018; Williams & Gonlin, 2017). Nonetheless, the themes addressed in the analyses are not limited to societal themes but include also topics strictly related to TV serial products, such as the performance of an actor (Gerzic, 2018) or a character's death (Taylor, 2018). While it holds true that sensitive themes are explored within this research line, there remains need for more comprehensive analyses of the already-addressed topics and, more importantly, for an expansion of the range of themes, primarily grounded on the significance of representation in the media¹³.

¹² Contrarily to the previous paragraph on descriptive statistics, the publications that envisage more than one aim are considered as many times as the number of the aims sought. Hence, if one study analyzes both the reception and the specific theme of a product, it is repeated twice.

¹³ See Lacey (2018).

User Behavior

The analyses on the behavior of users of both social media and TV seriality (88 items) have been carried out through a qualitative (40 items), mixed (33 items) or quantitative (15 items) approach. Two minor research lines have been detected: users' practices and users' viewing habits.

Relying on Fan Studies and Audience Studies, many publications have explored the practices and activities of the users such as the analysis of fandoms (Tralli, 2012; Wood & Baughman, 2012), fans' communication (e.g., Martínez-Borda *et al.* 2021) and their *engagement*, observing how it varies across different platforms (Martínez-Sala *et al.*, 2021; Navío-Navarro, 2021) and over time (Rocchi, 2022), and how and why viewers engage with TV serial products (Antelmi *et al.*, 2018; Burkhalter & Wood, 2019). The constitution of *fanacs*, i.e. "spectators' activities that do not involve the creation of a derivative work" (Tralli, 2018, p. 197, our translation) is highly investigated, dwelling on campaigns (e.g., Guerrero-Pico, 2017), fans' interaction with characters (e.g., Kyewski *et al.*, 2018), role-playing (Jeewa & Wade, 2015), ships (e.g., Borges & Sigiliano, 2022), cancel culture (Anderson-Lopez *et al.*, 2021) and fans' re-appropriation and reworking of fashion (Andò, 2015; Mascio, 2017). The writing and sharing of *fanworks* on social media have also been tackled, thoroughly examining *fanfictions* on one side (e.g., Martínez-Borda *et al.*, 2022) and artefacts, mashups and images on the other side (e.g., Williams, 2018). The communities and spaces built by users represent a prominent center of attention (e.g., Lacalle Zalduendo & Simelio, 2017), followed by the establishment of a fan's identity inside the digital community of fandom (e.g., Adams, 2022) and by the preservation of a secret status (Gerrard, 2017).

Several authors have focused on users' viewing habits and on the implications of second screen and digital habits (e.g., Unkel & Kumpel, 2020), and more specifically on the phenomena of connected viewing (Pires de Sá, 2018; Pittman & Tefertiller, 2015), live-tweeting (Negrete & McManus, 2021; Schirra *et al.*, 2014) and binge-watching (Bury, 2021; Lowe *et al.*, 2020). Researchers have also explored viewing reactions to spoilers (Castellano *et al.*, 2017; Putri & Adani, 2021) or to the progress of the TV serial product (Minami *et al.*, 2018) and created networks of users based on their activities (Sato *et al.*, 2018). Secondary-data-based studies have been directed at shedding light on the practice of live-tweeting (McPherson, 2012; Schirra *et al.*, 2014), time preferences of fruition (Unkel & Kumpel, 2020) and viewers' perceptions influenced by social networks (Sanchez Castillo & Galán, 2016).

Although we have demonstrated the extensive coverage of this research line within social media research, there is still space for analysis. For instance, the concept of *continuous engagement*, as discussed by Carelli (2017, p. 261), suggests that user participation remains relatively stable between *live* moments and moments distant from broadcasting. However, a limited body of works has addressed the issue and a preliminary case study has revealed the opposite (Iapalucci, 2023, pp. 140-2), highlighting a gap to fill in future research.

Success Forecasting

The greater part of the literature that intends to predict the success of a TV serial product (11 items) has employed ready-made machine learning methods (9 items). In detail, the most promising trend endorses regression analysis alone or in combination with sentiment analysis to analyze the variables that influence ratings or to identify correlations between the quantity of UGCs and ratings. These analyses have proved that "Twitter TV activity did prove out as an additional signal" to forecast ratings (Molteni & De León, 2016, p. 228).

This research area is still significantly underexplored, as evidenced by the paucity of the studies conducted and the tendency to rely on similar methodologies.

Tool Creation

Tool Creation represents itself a trend in social media research, given that it is the most recent among the research lines identified (the first study was published in 2015). Furthermore, the whole research seeking this aim (16 items) has been conducted on Twitter.

Part of the tools that have been developed and tested in these publications aim to achieve a similar goal to *Success Forecasting*. Mostly based on sentiment analysis and regression models, these tools have reached high accuracy (e.g., Malik *et al.*, 2021, p. 101). Other studies have promoted or experimented new methods to establish the popularity of a TV serial product based on the UGCs, finding “[...] a strong linear relationship between rating and influencing factors,” that are emotion and polarity (Thaipisutikul & Tuarob, 2017, p. 6). Different authors have assessed the features or the saliency of scenes or have identified the highlights of a TV serial product based on live-posting, displaying the potentialities of topic modeling (Andy *et al.*, 2022; Minami *et al.*, 2018). Aimed at marketing strategies and taking sentiment analysis as a starting point, a recent promising trend has focused on the development of applications to enhance users’ selection of the TV serial product to watch based on their tastes, with the higher accuracy rate being reached by Dalkilic and Cam (2021, p. 59). Yet, there is a considerable lack of exploration in the development of tools for social media research on TV series, particularly if compared to analyses carried out on films, which have yielded significant outcomes, including the development of recommendation systems based on microblogging data (e.g., Kumar *et al.*, 2020).

Social Media Marketing

Concerning the methods used to delve into *Social Media Marketing* research (32 items in total), one can notice the high presence of the mixed analysis of social networks’ analytics (12 items).

Specifically, a research line that has drawn attention to broadcasters’ strategies can be delineated, which has brought to light their difficulty to fully exploit the potential of hashtags for promotional purposes (De Michele *et al.*, 2019; Hagy *et al.*, 2019) and the high realism of the communication promoted by accounts of fictional characters (Barrientos-Bueno, 2015; Higuera & Olmo, 2020). A further research area is represented by studies that have dived into the official accounts of TV channels or showrunners (Afdjani & Simanjuntak, 2020; Higuera-Ruiz & Alberich-Pascual, 2021) to analyze the promotion of their serial products to cater their audience. A comparison between the marketing communication strategies of different countries represents a further direction pursued in research (del Mar Grandío & Bonaut, 2012; Navarro *et al.*, 2021), highlighting Spanish and British markets and finding out that both stimulate social conversations. Another salient focus of attention (e.g., Ebanks *et al.*, 2019) is characterized by the dialogic interaction between the official accounts of a TV serial product, either a cast or a crew member or the product itself, and the audience, to boost engagement within the “ecological system” (Willard, 2017, p. 3), also by virtue of appropriation practices (e.g., Sligh & Abidin, 2022). Curiously, one can notice that there are no studies that compare marketing strategies and analyze the engagement they generate to assess which one is the most effective.

4. Discussion

The analysis has shown a high reliance of research on the examination of user behavior, possibly because of the significant transformations that social media have brought in the role of audiences. While audiences have been active long before the digitalization era (Fiske, 1987), they are now provided with accessible tools that have enhanced the distribution of their contents (Bolin, 2012, pp. 796–798), thereby generating renewed academic interest on their communication and practices. Contemporary online audience research has incorporated traditional methods like observation and content analysis (Bredl *et al.*, 2013, pp. 207–210), which could explain in turn the prevalence of the qualitative approach. However, big-data methods, introduced only recently in audience research (Livingstone, 2019, pp. 176–179) and already extensively present, could overcome more traditional ones in the near future.

Among the social media platforms utilized, Twitter has received the most academic attention, corroborating previous research (Bredl *et al.*, 2013; Harrington, 2019). Focusing on the association between social media and methodological approaches, if platforms like Tumblr have been privileged for qualitative analyses –consistently with previous studies (Kanai *et al.*, 2020),

Twitter has been mainly adopted for quantitative or mixed research, likely because “it has a simple data model and a straightforward data access API” (Antonakaki *et al.*, 2021, p. 1) and, consequently, “is easy to obtain –or scrape” (Boyd & Crawford, 2012, p. 668). However, scholars should bear in mind the limited quality and representativeness of the data: Twitter data not only fails to represent the whole population, yet not even the one of all Twitter users, as users may have many accounts, several accounts are bots and API does not scrape private tweets, among other factors (Boyd & Crawford, 2012, pp. 668–670). Despite these data constraints and the need for caution in generalizing results, Twitter remains a valuable data source. However, its primacy may soon be challenged by the changes it has undergone since its acquisition from Elon Musk on 27 October 2022, which have culminated into a new name, “X.” These modifications are causing researchers to leave the platform (Valero, 2023), to face restraints in their research (Klepper, 2023) or to be deprived of advantageous free tools like Twitter API (Calma, 2023).

Regarding the timespan of the publications, our study has shown that they spread from 2011 to 2022. Despite many platforms had been launched years before 2011 (Facebook in 2004, Reddit in 2005, Twitter in 2006, Tumblr in 2007), the publication of the first collected study in 2011 can be explained on the account that academics interested in Social TV started to narrow down their attention from general digital platforms to social media only in 2010 (Lorente-Cano, 2011, pp. 56–58). This finding indicates that the capability of social media research to analyze TV seriality has begun to be fully explored only in recent times and it is likely to increase.

The focus on the six detected research lines has highlighted how specific methods are applied within each line, revealing both the most explored and underexplored sub-areas in social media research on TV seriality. This differentiation underscores where the research has developed robust insights, such as in *User Behavior* and *Reception Analysis*, while also pointing to gaps in research goals and platform variety that future studies could address.

5. Conclusions and Directions for Future Research

This paper has explored the key research lines in the analysis of social media to provide knowledge about TV seriality by means of a SSLR, diving into the main aims and methods adopted, preferred social media platforms and time evolution of the research. This contribution has added considerable knowledge with respect to Segado *et al.* (2015)’s literature review expanding the detected areas as regards both their framing and number and highlighting the extensive interdisciplinary nature that can arise in the study of television seriality through social media.

Relying particularly on the educational and pedagogical intents that TV can have (e.g., Asbeek *et al.*, 2015; Parsemain, 2019), we suggest that future studies should explore more extensively the reception of TV serial products and specific sensitive themes. More in detail, having been shown that social media can be employed to investigate the reception of a product from specific communities, we believe that this research line, only drafted so far, could be particularly remarkable in combination with the analysis of a specific sensitive theme isolated from the narrative. Elaborating on Chatman (2017)’s study, illustrating how Black communities have reacted to the representation of Olivia Pope, the Black woman protagonist of *Scandal* (ABC, 2012–2018), can offer suggestions, both in terms of unfolding a more general representation of a Black character on screen and, accordingly, on the satisfaction of the audience towards the product. For this reason and to move beyond the centrality of Twitter, future research should identify and analyze traditional and emerging social media spaces such as Facebook groups or Reddit communities as specific groups of users (e.g., Black communities). Laying on netnographic concepts for the purpose of unraveling the sociocultural practices under investigation, big-data methods like sentiment analysis could well serve this purpose (e.g., Dalkilic & Cam, 2021; Pugsee *et al.*, 2021), despite their many constraints (Boyd & Crawford, 2012).

If more investigations on themes from circumscribed communities may have high implications for academics in the fields of Humanities and Social Sciences, industry could profit from further exploration of the research lines of *Social Media Marketing* and *Tool Creation*. As for the

first, we have seen that broadcasters still find hard to profit from the advertising role of social networks (Hagy *et al.*, 2019; De Michele *et al.*, 2019): a direction to pursue may be to qualitatively or content analyze the communication strategies promoted by broadcasters drawing from the guidelines identified by De Michele *et al.* (2019, p. 3293) and, accordingly, to study the resulting social buzz from the analytics. As for the second, we have proved, based on the year of the first publication (2015), that studies developing tools embody a recent trend in social media research, that is certainly designed to grow further, stimulating an even more interdisciplinary approach stemming from Humanities and Social Sciences to the study of this object.

The current study presents some limitations. First, considering the data collection stage, the publication dataset might not be exhaustive: further research could include more search terms, databases, languages and eventually new social digital platforms to provide more comprehensive and updated overviews of the field. Second, from a methodological standpoint, as highlighted in paragraph 3.4, we were not able to perform a meta-analysis when illustrating the research lines. This limitation arises due to the diverse approaches and methodologies employed in the studies –as we have demonstrated– and to the frequent adoption by academia of case studies on specific or interrelated TV serial products. Despite its limitations, this paper contributes valuable insights by identifying key research gaps that can inform both academic and industry pursuits and by offering a preliminary systematization of a complex and evolving field, while also laying groundwork for future interdisciplinary collaborations.

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