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Research on Spanish fiction television series. A critical review study (1998-2020)

La investigación sobre series de televisión españolas de ficción. Un estudio de revisión crítica (1998-2020)

Abstract

This review paper assesses academic articles published about Spanish fictional television series in scientific journals indexed in multidisciplinary databases: Web of Science (WoS), Scopus and Dialnet between 1998 and 2020. A combined quantitative and qualitative method of analysis based on the SALSA Framework was used, in order to build a systematic bibliographic review. The results showed that the most common studies were those about the representation proposed in the fictional series about certain groups or social settings. Other approaches referred to the development of television fiction genres, adaptations, as well as to audiences and how audiences had received the series. Innovative research pointed to the emerging themes of transmediality, participatory audiences, hybrid studies that explained the content from production and authorship, and feminist works. Among the gaps noted were approaches that addressed the audiovisual language and the aesthetics of television fiction as research opportunities.

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo de revisión es ofrecer una valoración de los estudios sobre series televisivas españolas de ficción. La unidad de análisis son los artículos académicos publicados en revistas científicas indexadas en las bases de datos multidisciplinares: Web of Science (WoS), Scopus, y Dialnet, entre 1998 y 2020. Para ello se utiliza una metodología mixta, cuantitativa y cualitativa, basada en el Framework SALSA, con el propósito de construir una revisión bibliográfica de tipo sistematizada. Los resultados muestran que el estudio más habitual es el de la representación que se propone en las series de ficción de determinados grupos o escenarios sociales. Otros acercamientos se refieren al desarrollo de los géneros de ficción televisiva, a las adaptaciones, así como a las audiencias y la recepción de los públicos. Como temas emergentes surgen investigaciones que apuntan a la transmedialidad, las audiencias participativas, los estudios híbridos que explican el contenido desde la producción y la autoría y los trabajos de corte feminista. Entre los vacíos se señalan como oportunidades de investigación enfoques que aborden el lenguaje audiovisual y las estéticas de la ficción televisiva.

Keywords

Television series; Spain; Academic research; Critical review; television; TV; television fiction.

Palabras clave

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1. Introduction

A television series is understood as being an audio-visual work broadcast by a television channel or VOD platform that is released in successive episodes which are usually related to one another (at least) by subject. The narrative may unfold in formats that range from 2 episodes (as in the case of some miniseries) to several seasons.

There is a consensus for placing the new era for television series at the turn of the 21st century. This was the period when some American titles including *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007), *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015) and *The Wire* (HBO, 2002-2008) were released, and became reference models that led to the revitalisation of the genre. Series began to build stories with unconventional themes which used complex, non-linear narrative structures that appealed to diverse audiences. Regardless of their narrative genre, their plots and characters were developed based on reality. Series were therefore fertile grounds to raise topical issues for debate that traversed and alluded to identities, collective imaginations, representations and social discourses.

The genre was creatively and culturally revitalised during that period. Since then series have been prominently featured and their content has been legitimised in all spheres of society (Muñoz, 2016), to the extent that they have become one of the most important contemporary cultural products (Cascajosa, 2015).

The renewed vigour of series was driven by technological and digital factors. New devices were added to television sets for viewing. Tablets, mobile phones and computers multiplied the screens that made it possible to connect to VOD platforms, pay television channels and traditional channels. The Internet facilitated access to international and minority works outside standard market channels through simple downloads (both legal and illegal). Social networks, websites and forums also contributed to this process. This resulted in series becoming widespread and consolidating changes in consumption and in audience interactivity, which took the form of transmedia and fan phenomena (Jenkins, 2006).

Platforms, pay TV channels and free-to-air televisions competed for the public's favour and provided endless hours of television entertainment where series played a capital role for viewers turned subscribers. This competition exponentially multiplied the production of series, enhanced their quality and fragmented the audience.

The Spanish market followed suit. Domestic production of television fiction became established at the turn of the century, with a gradual increase in premieres and more diversified genres, formats and contents that reflected the maturity and versatility of the system (Lacalle and Sánchez, 2019).

The NOTA (New on the Air) report from TV research firm *Glance,* published by *Variety,* analysed the production of more than 50 key countries for the television sector (Glance, 2019), including Spain, and showed that 4,600 television fiction series were released in 2019. This number of new launches gives an idea of the current magnitude of this phenomenon. A cultural media work in full swing that targets all kinds of audiences and achieves high consumption rates.

Studies of fiction series as a line of research about television have increased in number and importance over time. This has been mainly because contemporary television fiction has won the favour of the audience and specialist critics, who recognise these productions' contributions to entertainment and their narrative and artistic quality. In addition, television series have played a leading role in changing the television industry and are considered a key part of the new forms of reception, display and consumption.

Some reviews have been conducted regarding papers on Communication (Caffarel, Ortega and Gaitán, 2018; Goyanes, Rodríguez and Rosique, 2018; Fernández-Quijada and Masip, 2013), advertising segments and television programming (Navarro and Martín, 2013; Moreno-Delgado, Repiso and Montero, 2019) published in scientific journals in Spain, but to date no research have been carried out on papers concerning Spanish television series. The main contribution of this review lies in showing the multiple perspectives that have been used to approach television series as an object of study, as well as mapping out the academic production, the methodologies used and the research opportunities in the field.

2. Methodology

This critical review analyses research on Spanish fictional television series. A broad and detailed state-of-the-art review is provided to determine the current status of knowledge and the latest trends in research on the subject. Specifically, the following research questions are addressed on the latest trends in television fiction (Hart, 2008): What are the key theories and concepts, the major issues, the debates and problems

addressed, the methodologies, the structure of knowledge and the gaps and opportunities in research on Spanish fiction television series?

A mixed methodology was used that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. It followed the four steps of the SALSA Framework (Grant and Booth, 2009; Codina, 2018), namely: Search, Appraisal, Synthesis and Analysis. The units of analysis were papers on Spanish television series published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, both because they are the preferred form of research and because, when they are subject to peer blind review, they are considered to be the most reliable means of conveying the progress of a discipline (in this case, Communication). Three repositories were selected that are deemed to be scientific multidisciplinary databases. They are: *Web of Science* and *Scopus* in the international sphere; and *Dialnet Plus* in the Spanish sphere (Codina, 2018). Therefore, the study's primary data consisted of selected academic articles, written in Spanish or English, in which Spanish television series was the object of study. Their aggregation and consequent interpretation were the method of analysis (Codina, 2018).

The search was carried out between 28 and 30 April 2020, using a system based on the keywords: Television Series; Television Fiction; Television; and Spain. They were used in various combinations. The resulting number of papers was refined by a number of exclusions: repeated titles in the repositories, documentary television series, other television fiction formats (such as soap operas and *TV Movies*) and series produced outside Spanish borders. Regarding the appropriateness of including papers where the object of the study was shared (for example, one that analysed the content of a series and also that of a soap opera), it was decided to include all the articles that partially dealt with Spanish television series, despite the fact that they could also discuss other shared research objects such as television formats, soap operas, web-based series or foreign productions. The papers published outside of open access were obtained through *Sci-hub*, a repository founded by Alexandra Elbakyan. The result of the net sample yielded 141 articles spanning 22 years, from the first search paper that was published in 1998 to the last one dated 2020.

The Appraisal phase involved a systematic approach to obtaining quality and reliable content on which to base the analysis. The 5 criteria applied by Dixon-Woods (2006), and a lax application of the IMRaD structure (Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion) were used to ensure that the papers in the final document bank retained their quality. Other equivalent structures were also considered appropriate in 22 cases.

An analysis sheet was then designed and completed to generate a systematic study for each of the papers in the document bank. The sheets were coded using an Excel-Access database and included the following items: *Full reference*, *Author(s)*, *Research centre*, *Keywords*, *Abstract*, *Objective*, *Aim*, *Methodology*, *Research type*, *Results*, *Study type*, *Main contributions* and *Comments and assessment*. These codes and items were thus adapted to become the analytical framework of the document bank (Codina, 2018: 56-57). The type of study was classified according to three areas, based on whether the research approach pointed to production (creative processes), content (the series as text), and the audience (reception, audiences, etc.). Hybrid papers, which alluded to various approaches, were organised in line with the main objective stated in the article.

Qualitative, quantitative and mixed types of research were considered.

Qualitative refers to the scientific method of observation that collects data without numerical measurement to discover research questions in the interpretation process. The investigative action moves dynamically between facts and interpretation. It is a rather 'circular' process, and the sequence is not always the same, but changes in each study (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2010: 7).

The quantitative method involves a set of processes. It is sequential and probative in order to be as objective as possible. The order is rigorous, but some phases are often redefined. The starting point is a problem that is narrowed down and delimited. Hypotheses are presented, variables are determined, and a plan is developed to test them (design). The variables of a certain context are measured. The measurements obtained are analysed - usually through a mathematical method - and the conclusions are established and structured based on the hypotheses (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2010: 46).

Mixed research methods systematically integrate quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study in order to obtain a more comprehensive 'picture' of the phenomenon. These are put together in such a way that the quantitative and qualitative approaches retain their original structures and procedures ('pure forms of mixed methods'). Alternatively, adapted, altered, or synthesised methods occur to conduct research and deal with research costs ('modified form of mixed methods') (Chen, 2006).

This mixed methods tool was used to carry out a content analysis of the sample texts. The objective was to produce a systematic classification of the material, organised by categories, and quantify it based on statistically treated numerical data. Subsequently, a critical analysis was conducted about academic

research on television series published in *Wos*, *Scopus* and *Dialnet*. The aim of the Synthesis phase was to produce an output resulting from juxtaposing the component parts, in which the data would be described and interpreted in order to provide answers to the research questions formulated above.

The analysis showed that: (a) there is an increasing number of academic publications on Spanish fictional television series; (b) that this production is distributed among different research groups in Spanish public universities; (c) that the methodologies that have proliferated tend to be either mixed or qualitative; (d) that research prioritises content over audience or production; and (e) that the most recurrent themes are those referred to objects and social settings.

3. Results. Research on Spanish television series

3.1. Map of publications, research centres, synergies

Academic research on Spanish fictional series has been increasing since the onset of this century (*Figure 1*) and has steadily built up its presence in Communication journals, while also filtering into publications from other disciplines. This fluctuation may be related to the increase in the production and formats of television series and to their widespread consumption since VOD platforms became established in the market.

**Figure 1. Annual number of papers published (1998-2010)**
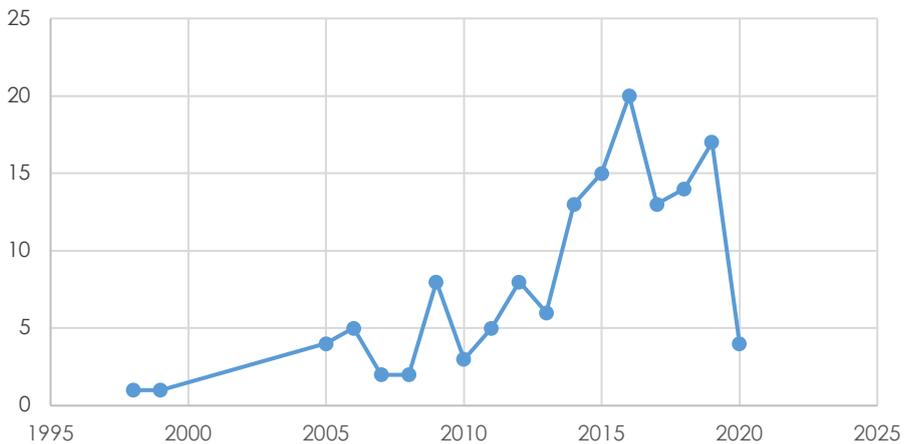
Source: Developed by the author.

The 141 articles were published in 69 journals, more in Spanish publications (60%) than in journals from other countries (40%). *Revista Latina* was the Spanish journal with the highest number of publications (8), followed by *Index.Comunicación* (8). The publications (6) in *El Profesional de la Información*, *Zer*, *Comunicar*, *Communication & Society* and *Área Abierta* (5) also stood out quantitatively. Journals from other countries included *Cuadernos.info* and *Palabras Clave* (5), which published the largest number of papers, followed by *Comunicación y Sociedad*, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* (4), *Feminist Media Studies* and *Hispania* (3). As shown in *Figure 2*, most of these publications were within the Communications field (33), although the transdisciplinary nature of the research object could also be seen in the inclusion of papers in journals belonging to the fields of Cultural Studies (11), Social Sciences (6), History (4), Visuality (3), Gender Studies (3) and Literature (2). The inclusion of Spanish fiction television series as an object of study in specialised publications in health (3), music (1) and geography (1) was also striking.

Regarding the authorship of these articles, the research centres with the largest research output were Spanish universities (121), as might be expected, specifically public ones (101). Production from Spanish private universities (10) accounted for 7% of general output (*Figure 2*).

Figure 2. Number of articles published by Spanish public and private universities and by non-Spanish universities
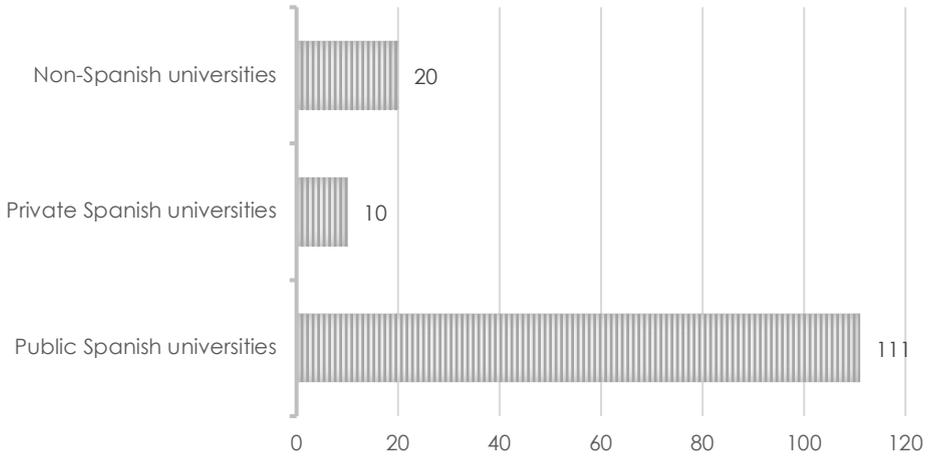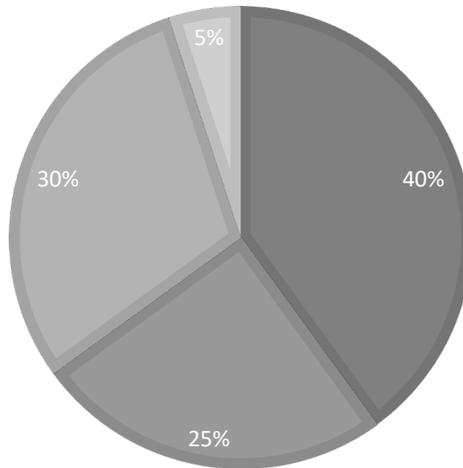

Source: Developed by the author

The public universities that had produced the most papers were in Madrid and Barcelona. For calculation purposes, only the affiliation of the main author that appears in the paper was considered. The Complutense University in Madrid was the research centre with the largest number of authors who published papers on the subject (18), followed by the Autonomous University of Barcelona (16) and the Carlos III University of Madrid (11). Outside of Madrid and Barcelona, the research teams of the University of Salamanca (9), Alicante (9), and Navarre (8) were the most active. Other significant academic research universities on Spanish television series were located at the Juan Carlos I University in Madrid (7), Seville (5), Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona) (5) and Burgos (4). Papers published by non-Spanish institutions (20) were mostly authored by researchers from the United States, Latin America and Europe, in this order *(Figure 3)*.

**Figure 3. Affiliations of non-Spanish authors**

Source: Developed by the author.

There was collaboration between centres and research groups. Some work synergies were identified, with co-authorship of papers and different organisational affiliations. It was found that the UAB has relationships with Spanish public universities (Málaga, Alicante, UPF); Spanish private universities (UNIR); and international research centres and universities (Madeira, Canada, Colombia). A number of connections were found between public and private universities in Madrid (URJC and UCM; UCJC and URJC; UCM and UC3); in Catalonia (Ramón Llull and UPF); Castile-Leon (UBU and UVa); Galicia (Compostela and Coruña) and the University of Navarre with Universities in Murcia. Some14% of the articles found in this study were authored by researchers who belonged to more than one research centre.

3.2. The object of research Typologies, themes and approaches

The object of research was approached from different angles. Three types of studies were identified: content-based, audience-based and production-based (*Figure 4*).

Figure 4. Number of articles published by type of study
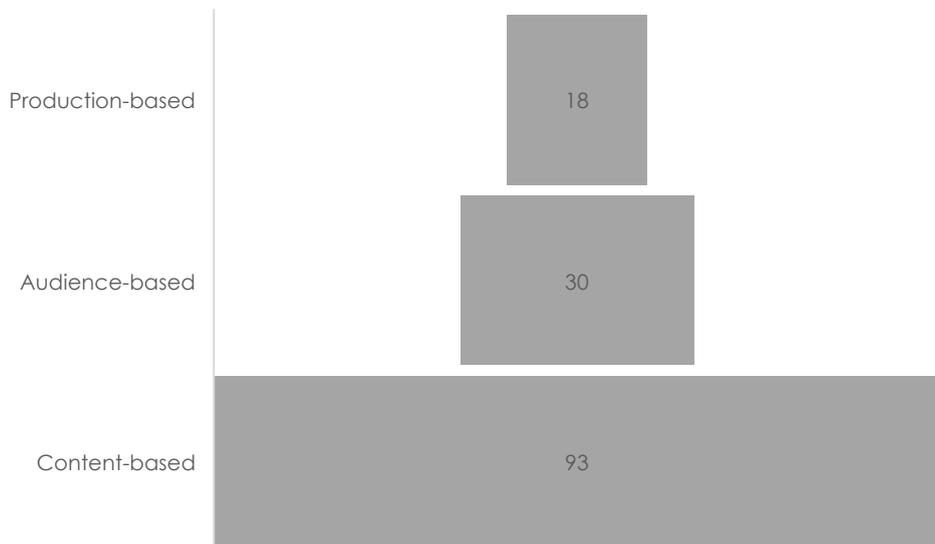
Source: Developed by the author.

The studies that focused on the content of the series (93) were the most common and numerous. The most frequent content involved approaching series by considering them entertainment texts intended for a mass audience. These texts were analysed to explore how certain groups and/or social settings are represented in fiction. The object of a particular representative series or set of series was used to observe this phenomenon, For example, by identifying the most viewed or premiered in a given period, or those broadcast by generalist or regional television channels, and resorting to an intentional selection based on the subject to be analysed, such as historical fictional series, comedies, police dramas, etc.

The studies that explored social representations accounted for the largest number of papers (38). An issue that was often discussed was the representation of gender in television fiction (25). Papers focused in greater numbers on women's representation, alone or in combination with other complementary dimensions such as motherhood, feminism and historical representation (Hidalgo-Marí and Palomares, 2020; Bonavitta and González de Garay, 2019; Chicharro, 2018; Hidalgo -Marí, 2017; Lacalle, 2016; Anderson, 2016; Coronado and Galán, 2015; Tous, Meso and Simelio, 2013; Ortega and Simelio, 2012; Galán, 2007). The female gender was also analysed as a whole or in comparison with the male gender (De Caso, González de Garay and Marcos, 2020; González de Garay, Marcos and Portillo, 2019; Galán, 2006; García, Fedele and Gómez, 2012); there were also a small number of examples that exclusively addressed men (Pichel, Gómez and Medina, 2019). In recent years, some innovative studies have been produced that described the representation of other gender identities (González de Garay, Marcos and Sánchez, 2019; Martins and Ferré, 2015; Calvo and Escudero, 2009).

The representation of the immigrant population as a social group was also studied in several papers (6). This was a characteristic of series broadcast in two periods: 2002-2003 (Ruiz, Obradors, Pujadas, Ferrés and Pérez, 2011; Ruiz, Ferrés, Obradors, Pujadas and Pérez, 2006); and 2014-2017 (Marcos and González de Garay, 2019; Romero, de Casas and Maraver, 2018); as well as specifically in the series *Aída* (Biscarrat and Meléndez, 2014; González de Garay and Alfeo, 2012); *El Comisario* and *Hospital Central* (Galán, 2006).

Other social representations that were found to be research topics were: adolescents (Guarinos, 2009; Crespo, 2005); family models in dramatic series and comedies from 1990 to 2010, in new series from 2013-2014 and in *Hospital Central* (Hidalgo-Marí, Tous and Morales, 2019; Lacalle, 2016; Martins, 2015; Chicharro, 2009); the elderly (Mancebo and Ramos, 2015; López and Cuenca, 2005); functional diversity, in series released in 2016-2018 (Palenzuela, Marcos and González de Garay, 2019); and the working class in *Aída* (Pao, 2014) combining it with the one shown in the soap opera *Una palabra tuya*, by Elvira Lindo. Another social scenario studied referred to the area of health. Papers were identified that dealt with diseases in Spanish medical fiction from 2000 to 2012 (González de Garay, Frutos and Del Arco, 2016); health problems of female characters (Lacalle and Gómez, 2019); and covert tobacco advertising in a set of Spanish series broadcast in 2008 and 2009 (Rey, Valdivieso and Erija, 2012).

These series were intended to feature social groups that tend to be hidden from view. Most of these studies had similar findings: they concluded that the representation of women was limited, patriarchal and conservative, although some new female models had started to appear that constructed a more equitable reality away from the cliché; that young characters were built through stereotypes; that both the elderly and functional diversity were underrepresented; and that ethnic minorities, in addition to being exceptional, were often associated with negative behaviours when they were featured in a series.

Historical representation was also addressed (22) in the academic literature on series. These types of papers were aimed to provide overviews of the notion of historical fiction (Rueda and Coronado, 2016; Rueda, 2009; Smith, 2006); of the concept of nation (Chicharro, 2012); and the representation of symbolic historical periods in the history of Spain (Pacheco, 2009), such as the period of Isabel I (Salvador, 2016); Francoism (Rueda and Coronado, 2010) and the transition to democracy (Bremard, 2015; Rueda, 2011). Institutions such as the monarchy (Rueda, 2011) and the army (Chicharro and Gómez, 2014) were also discussed; as well as important historical figures such as Franco (Guerra, 2015; Coronado, 2015), Picasso (Smith, 2018) and Ramón y Cajal (Collado and Carrillo, 2016). Other texts were interrelated with the latter and revolved around concepts such as the collective memory and nostalgia (Santana, 2015; Corbalán, 2009); the creation of historical imaginations in *Cuéntame* (Pousa, 2015; Rey, 2014); and a comparison with series that belonged to the genre of historical fiction from other countries, such as Chile (Castillo, Simelio and Ruiz, 2012). The sample even included a methodological proposal for the analysis of historical series (Rodríguez, 2016), validated using the example of *La Señora*.

The papers on historical representation pointed to the sociocultural interpretation of television as a space for the production and social amplification of historical meanings. In other words, they presented television as a great popularising agent, and series as an extraordinary vehicle for the narration of history and past times. However, historical accuracy inevitably fell by the wayside due to their being commercial entertainment products that viewed - and adapted - the past from the perspective of the present.

Television series have also been an object of study in content studies that contributed to the development of fictional television genres (22). After the historical genre (7, above), the most popular was comedy (6). Different articles were identified that covered certain periods, such as a series produced during Franco's regime, created by Jaime de Armiñán (Diego and Grandío, 2014); a series that were restricted to the family environment (Hidalgo-Marí, 2018); and those that studied the entire 1990-2018 period (Gómez, 2020; Gómez, 2017; Diego and Grandío, 2011). Yet another alluded to more experimental Spanish sitcoms, in tune with and influenced by new international formats, such as *Siete Vidas* and *Qué fue de Jorge Sanz* (Fernández and Aguado, 2013; Grandío and Diego, 2009). Another genre discussed in the papers reviewed was police drama (4). This included a detailed analysis of *Brigada Central* (González de Garay, 2012); of the production of police fiction and the conservative values that they represented between 1990 and 2010 (Tous, 2019); the comparison between *El Comisario* and *Policías en el corazón de la ciudad* (Smith, 2007); and the renewal of the Spanish *TV* crime drama (Cascajosa, 2018) taking into account the geopolitical evolution of the world. Finally, papers were identified that had adopted the fantasy genre, such as *El Ministerio del Tiempo* (Molina, 2017).

These studies tracked precedents, rescued trends by periods, and followed the progress of each of the genres. Series produced in English-speaking countries were a constant influence, especially on comedies and police dramas, with a quasi-parallel evolution in narrative terms. Papers also provided data typically found in these types of studies, such as the questioning of gender conventions, and other more specific

ones that articulated innovation on production strategies, new spatial treatment and the exploration of political and current issues.

There were also a few pieces of research focused on adapted series (6), such as the one that compiled the remakes produced in Spain in the 2000-2013 period (Puebla, Carrillo and Copado, 2014) and the one that compared *Life on Mars* with *La chica de ayer* (Gutiérrez and García, 2018); the article that analysed the adaptation of the novel by Blasco Ibáñez to the homonymous series *Cañas y Barro* (George, 2011); and those papers that covered adaptations of Spanish series such as *Cuéntame* (Dahl, 2017; Pousa and Fornasari, 2017) and *Gran Hotel* to Mexican soap operas (Smith, 2017).

Adapted series from foreign formats largely confirmed the success of the series in their country of origin. The adaptation to the Spanish context tended to introduce love plots and cultural traits through the deep layers of the narrative, with references to current affairs and longer episodes. Studies of exported Spanish series tended to compare the original series and its adaptation and establish formal and/or cultural similarities and differences.

Another innovative and relatively recent approach was that which treated the television series as an object from which interesting transmedia content could be produced (25). This included analyses of the first trans and crossmedia narratives of a group of series premiered on generalist channels: TVE, Antena 3 and Tele 5 (Ivars and Zaragoza, 2018; Formoso, 2015; Alonso, 2015; Mayor, 2014; Piñeiro and Costa, 2013); and, in particular, of *El Ministerio del Tiempo* (Scolari and Establés, 2017); *Víctor Ros* (Source, Cortés and Martínez, 2016); *Águila Roja* and *Isabel* (Franquet and Villa, 2014). Web series have been studied since their release in papers that described their birth and evolution in Spain, combining it with the analysis of cases that ended up being released on general television: *Qué vida más triste* (Diego and Herrero, 2010) and *Si fueras tú* (Vázquez, González and Quintas, 2019).

The contents generated around fictional programmes were narrative contributions that sought to expand the story through the use of other media but were fundamentally intended to attract the attention of the viewer. In other words, the purpose of these multiplatform content was promotional; it was used to retain audiences and sometimes stimulate the active participation of the public through the production of their own content.

A different approach to series was the one that considered them products of the audio-visual industry to be quantified and qualified (11). A set of television series was used in these papers that sometimes also included other television fiction formats such as soap operas and TV movies, which were broadcast for long periods of time, considering the date of their release. This type of research classified television series to obtain general data about them and detect their audience, evolution and influence in the market, their typology, their characteristics and their new trends. The papers were divided into four periods: (1) 1956-1990: this period corresponded to the beginning of television and ended before the arrival of private television channels (Canós and Martínez, 2016; Álvarez and López, 1999); (2) 1990-2010: this period covered the beginning of the competition between television channels for viewers, and the first decade of the 21st century, when Spanish series underwent a renewal and modernisation (Marcos, 2013; García de Castro, 2008; Torrado and Castelo, 2005) ; (3) 2010-2015: this period dealt with the effects of the economic crisis on the production of series and, therefore, on its industry (García de Castro and Caffarel, 2016); and (4) 2015-2017: this period contextualised Spanish series during the arrival of different platforms and VOD services (Cascajosa, 2018) where they were re-accommodated.

A significant number of academic papers have recently been published that can be regarded to be halfway between studies of content and production (5), which referred to a single series or a small group of series, which discussed innovative contributions such as research about authorship and the creation processes. Most of these initiatives were carried out from a feminist perspective with the intention of highlighting works that had been produced, written or created by women, such as *Matar al padre* and Mar Coll (Cascajosa, 2019); *The Cable Girls* and Teresa Fernández Valdés (López y Raya, 2019); *La Señora* and *14 de abril. La República* and Virginia Yagüe (Cascajosa, 2017); and the series *Mujeres,* produced by El Deseo (Zurián, 2017). The feminist perspective provided an exploration of whether series had evolved from the social agenda in Zapatero's first term of office, which was characterised by a commitment to the rights of women. Two series produced by TVE were analysed from this viewpoint: *Mujeres* and *Con dos tacones* (Menéndez, 2014).

The audience was another issue discussed in papers on television series (30). These fell into four categories. (1) Those that showed the preferences of the public (6) in general (Diego and Etayo, 2013) or about one or several series in particular (Sanz, 2017; Barrientos, 2014, Pintor, Rubio and Herreros, 2012); or on a specific topic, such as the ideology reflected in the series (Cortés, 2014); affective reactions towards television series (Etayo, 2015); or the quality that the public attributed to certain series (Diego, Etayo and Pardo, 2011). (2) Another category referred specifically to the young audience (7). Audience studies have been carried out

that inquired about consumption (Galán and Del Pino, 2010); taste (Korres and Alexpuru, 2016); reception (Lacalle, 2015); and the extent to which young people identified with the role models and characters represented in the series (Chicharro, 2017; Martínez, 2009). Some articles were related to young people with respect to the sexual content covered by the series (Aran, Media and Rodrigo, 2015). (3) The third category involved research about how the public consume television series (7). Studies have been conducted on new ways of measuring the audience according to the consumption imposed by current technologies. For example, studying the delayed audience of the series (González and Fernández, 2019); their comparison with the linear audience of the public (Gallardo and Lavín, 2018); and the consumption of web television series (Aguilar, Pérez and Sánchez, 2016). (4) The final category contained new studies that delved into active audiences that worked on social networks (11): *Facebook* and *Twitter* (Castro, 2018; Fernández and Martín, 2018; Chamorro, 2018; Chamorro, 2017; Rodríguez and Hernández, 2015; Tur and Rodríguez, 2014); *Youtube* (Hidalgo-Marí and Sánchez, 2016; Rodríguez, Tur and Mora, 2016); forums and websites (Lacalle and Castro, 2016; Rodríguez, 2016; Guerrero, 2014); rural tourism based on the setting of series (López, and Del Caz, 2019) and the new relationships that are established between users, series and broadcast platforms (Lacalle and Castro, 2016). In particular, issues recently emerged that appealed to audience participation (Vázquez, González and Quintas, 2019) and fandoms (Lacalle and Castro, 2018).

A small number of studies have also been published that related to series production (18). These articles were focused on explaining the role and importance of television fiction producers (Diego, 2005), and on providing a general framework for the production of series in Spain in two periods: (1) during the change of cycle in the 1990s (Álvarez and López, 1999); and (2) during the production of television fiction broadcast by state channels between 1990 and 2017 (Lacalle and Sánchez, 2019).

As noted above, television series have also been considered an object of research in their own right. Some productions have provided profound, exhaustive analyses using different perspectives from those presented here. An obvious case was that of *Cuéntame* (16), which has been widely analysed not only as historical fiction, but also in terms of its plots, characters and narratives; memory content; social, economic and gender representations; pedagogical text; and comparatively with some of its different international adaptations (Italian, Argentinian, Portuguese, Chilean) and with other Spanish historical fiction works such as *La chica de ayer*.

3.3. Methodological grounds and research operations

The studies were categorised according to the type of applied research used. Three categories were identified: qualitative, quantitative and mixed (*Figure* 6). Qualitative methods, which follow an inductive process, were the most abundantly found in this review. They explored and described television series; sometimes contextualised them or compared them with other series, with other television fictions, with other cultural products; and others they proposed interpretations related to their objective, on some occasions supported or complemented by theoretical perspectives.

Data collection was usually flexible. While qualitative content analysis abounded, the sample used was limited to one series or a small group of series. Examples included transmedia audio-visual productions *Águila Roja*, *El barco* and *Amar en tiempos revueltos* (Piñeiro and Costa, 2013); the representation of immigrants in *El Comisario* and *Hospital Central* (Galán, 2006); an approach to the ideological aspects of *Médico de familia* (Giner, 1998); and the narrative categories in the Spanish adaptation of *Life on Mars*, *La chica de ayer* (Gutiérrez and García, 2018). This sample was varied, multiple and heterogeneous, depending on each production. Some articles considered only two episodes, such as the one that researched the imaginaries created of Argentina and Portugal in *Cuéntame* (Pousa, 2015); one paper compared two police dramas, *El Comisario* and *Policías en el corazón de la ciudad* (Smith, 2007); and others studied a greater number of shows and were extended over time, such as the article that analysed the 46 family comedies produced by and broadcast on generalist channels for 20 years (Hidalgo-María, Tous and Morales, 2019).

While this type of research largely focuses on the analysis of themes, plots and main characters, some papers addressed other variables, depending on their objectives. Qualitative content analysis was recurrent in articles that examined characters and different social representations (outlined above), as well as in those that referred to adaptations, narrative features (Vacas, 2018) or transmedial characteristics (Scolari and Establés, 2017; Source , Cortés and Martínez, 2016; Rueda and Coronado, 2016; Alonso, 2015; Mayor, 2014; etc.). This type of research usually moved from the particular to the general.

There was a growing tendency to relate research on content to the values and circumstances of production, authorship, and the - industrial, cultural and political - context at the time the production was created. Techniques used were interviews (Cascajosa, 2017; Zurián, 2017; Salvador, 2016; Diego and

Grandío, 2014, etc.), which were also used in research that dealt with production and with the industry; and discussion groups in papers that were framed within the study of reception (Sanz, 2017; Aran, Media and Rodrigo, 2015; García de Castro, 2008, etc.). A wide range of research techniques were employed, including case studies (Cascajosa, 2018), textual analysis (González de Garay, 2012) and some that put digital anthropology and ethnography techniques into play (Fuente, Cortés and Martínez, 2016) (Franquet and Villa, 2014).

In the study of television series, quantitative methodology was only used on an exceptional basis (*Figure 5*), and it was always linked to audience studies. These papers aimed to explore the audience's preferences and reactions. To do this, they used questionnaires or surveys that were later processed with statistical methods. The samples ranged from 1,000 people over 14 years of age (Diego and Etayo, 2013) interviewed by telephone using the CATI (*Computer Assisted Telephone Interview*) information collection method, where a telemarketer called respondents and recorded their answers on a computer; to 375 people between 14 and 65 years of age in a study on reactions (Etayo, 2015); to 180 communication students from the UCM and UBU surveyed (Chicharro, 2017); and to the 213 medical students who were asked about medical series and their influence (Pintor, Rubio & Herreros, 2012). As can be seen, the respondent selection method pivoted between random, stratified and convenience, while the universe of study usually included either the general population or students of specific degrees. These quantitative studies were also used to analyse messages in social networks about TV fiction during (television) year 2011-2012 and to know viewers' consumption on different screens (González and Fernández, 2019; Gallardo and Lavín, 2018).

Figure 5. Number of articles by research approach

	Mixed	Qualitative	Quantitative
	60	73	8
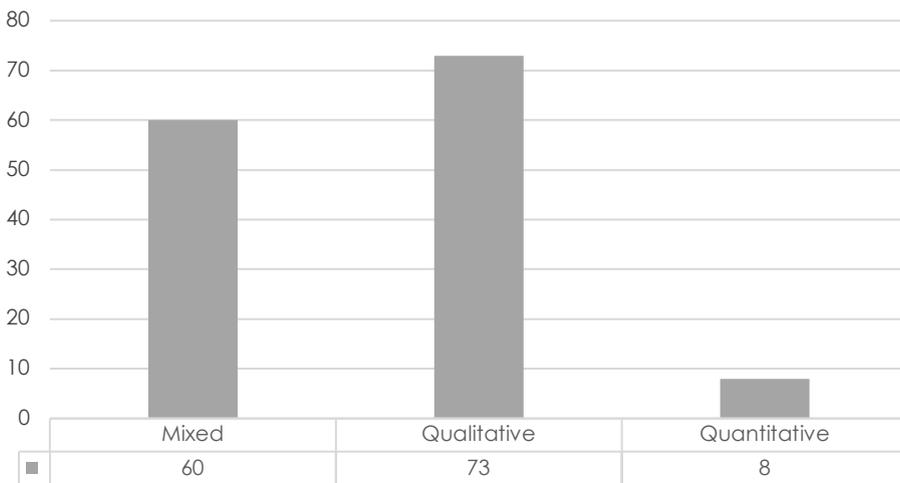
Source: Developed by the author.

The articles that extensively used the mixed method approach combined quantitative techniques with content analysis, mainly to do with characters, series and meanings. These techniques were also found in other types of analyses, such as semiotic (Lacalle, 2019), textual (Tous, 2019), gender-based (Tous, Meso and Simelio, 2013) and discourse analyses (Hidalgo-Marí, 2018). The difference with respect to qualitative articles with the same objective was that their object of research was more ambitious both temporally and quantitatively. Some samples included: some 709 female characters from 84 television fiction products released in the 2012-2013 period to observe the representation of women in the family (Lacalle and Gómez, 2016); a total of 1,237 characters in 47 television fiction series in 2016-2018, which were analysed to discover the representation of functional diversity (Palenzuela, Marcos and González de Garay); and the 2,047 cases of the presence of commercial brands found in 6 television series broadcast over 12 years with the aim of tracking brand placement as an advertising resource in national fiction at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century (Del Pino, 2006). Another difference was that this type of methodology did not apply to research on historical representation, exclusively narrative studies and those that discussed adaptations.

The mixed study methodology that used content analysis as a tool was also applied to audience and reception studies that related works to the public response channelled through messages and products that come from fandom, participatory audience, platforms and content proposed by broadcasters in the transmedia environment (Ivars and Zaragoza, 2018; Hidalgo-Marí and Sánchez, 2016; Rodríguez, Tur and Mora, 2016); and the analysis of messages from both senders and receivers through forums and social networks such as *Facebook* or *Twitter* (Fernández and Martín, 2018; Castro, 2018; Chamorro, 2018; Chamorro, 2017; Lacalle and Castro, 2016; Rodríguez, 2016; Rodríguez and Hernández, 2015; Tur and Rodríguez, 2014). Audience studies that used mixed methodologies also combined other qualitative techniques, such as surveys, in-depth interviews and focus groups (Chicharro, 2017; Korres and Elexpuru, 2016; Rodríguez, 2016; Lacalle, 2015; Cortes, 2014; Corbalán , 2009; Crespo, 2005).

Lastly, there were some articles that proposed their own individual methodologies as models for certain specific analyses. Some of these included: using forums as an instrument for analysing the reception of fictional historical series (Gómez, 2016); a methodology for the analysis of historical television fictions (Rodríguez, 2016); another for the visual analysis of fictional audio-visual products (Cortés, 2016); and a base study for the systematic analysis of the sexual content of the series (Crespo, 2005).

Finally, there was a corpus of articles that proposed interdisciplinary approaches. The prevailing approaches were Communications studies, which observed and examined television series and/or television fiction. In other words, they studied audio-visual communication linked to television as a form of mass media. Given their interdisciplinary nature, some papers could be framed within Cultural Studies, since they explored forms of production, creation of meanings and their dissemination in Spanish society. Research on television series was adapted to Cultural Studies because this made it possible to link communication to other structures, mainly sociology, history and cultural anthropology; or to other theories: social when they were broadcast within a given society, literary when sharing narratives, and cinema-based when sharing their audio-visual language. The interests of Cultural Studies tended to prioritise ideology, ethnicity, social class and gender, which were recurrent in television series. A high percentage of articles could be assigned to Gender Studies, which considers gender (particularly the female gender) as the central analytical category.

4. Discussion

Most authors of the papers analysed gave priority to research on the *message* of the series; in other words, on the content that was transmitted. However, this factor was not analysed autonomously due to its complexity and was gradually linked to one or several factors that helped to make the object of fictional series more understandable and manageable. These factors, which are typical of the communication process, were   channel (television); context (in which it takes place: industrial, economic, television, technological, social, political); transmitter (hybrid between producing television channels and other platforms, and between independent production and creator of series; and receiver (public and audiences). It can be therefore concluded that those academic research papers on series that included information on a larger number of communication functions provided a more comprehensive understanding of the object of study.

Regarding the methodology used in the research, a 'critical visual methodology' was observed, that is, a strategy aimed at analysing an audio-visual text in terms of its cultural significance, social practices and power relations in which is involved (Rose, 2001: 3). In this sense, topics were addressed that were of interest to academic research, whether or not they were portrayed as central nodes of the series narratives. In some cases, the study samples were almost insignificant in relation to the research objective. Considering only the content of one or two episodes to analyse a full series or to compare two series seems barely representative in terms of the sample. This was the case with certain articles that did not clearly specify their method of analysis or that simply omitted it.

The most common issue analysed was the social representations conveyed in television series. These mainly discussed gender representations, but also referred to other social groups such as immigrants, family, the elderly, and other settings, such as historical ones and those concerning health. Together they accounted for more than a third of the published research. A certain level of repetition was observed, with fairly similar conclusions across the board. It is not surprising that the most repeated themes proposed were articulated in parallel to the most watched and longest-lived television series, either in groups or individually, as demonstrated by the *Cuéntame* phenomenon. *El Ministerio del Tiempo* then took over in terms of representing and reviewing Spanish recent history and society in Spain through the characters and certain historical milestones of the past but bringing present-day awareness to them. It is as if the research were articulated considering the character of television as a hegemonic media institution in Spain, which is capable of mediating experiences and has the potential to propose a widespread visualisation of

recognition and cohesion factors (Buonanno, 2006: 99-105). These seem to be key foundations for justifying doing research into television series: an intention to monitor the representation inscribed in the story issued by a 'social super-narrator' of historical meanings (Rueda, 2009) and to discuss television as a medium that has been an ideal instrument for tracking social discourse and collective imagination around different issues that generate or have generated ideological frictions (Lauzen, Dozier and Horan, 2008, among others). The latter is particularly true of fictional television series, which transmit roles and behaviours that are easily reproducible by any viewer (González de Garay, Marco and Sánchez, 2019). In this regard, the lack of studies on reception seems to suggest that series have an infallible capacity to influence all strata of the public without considering the polysemy of the audio-visual or other factors; for example, that the public constantly receive multiple messages through other channels (family, school or work environment, other media, etc.) and it has not been proven which messages they assimilate and why.

While a few years ago television was the privileged medium for observing social discourse and the current collective imagination, in recent times other media such as social networks and VOD platforms have also been regarded just as useful. These have revolutionised the forms of consumption, creation and production of fictional television series in Spain. Proof of this is provided by a contingent of innovative studies that have reviewed transmedia architecture based on television fiction and have dealt with the narrative expansion of television productions to other media; the latest promotion processes based on the creation of complementary content to the series by the televisions that broadcast them, through web pages and forums, and so on. This has resulted in audience studies going beyond the stage of pure numerical quantification of viewers, to generate new ways of measuring the audience that quantifies, but also qualifies these new niche audiences. The key point now is not how many people watch the series, but to collect data to find out who they are and what they like. These papers, in addition to providing their views, pay attention to fan communities and to the products they create from the viewing and monitoring of a television series. These are questions that substantially expand the content of television fiction.

5. Conclusions

When reviewing the scientific production on Spanish television series, it was striking to note the paucity of papers that analysed the language used in them. That is, studies on their audio-visual image or their aesthetics. Only two articles were identified in the review that formally and stylistically analysed the narrative potential of audio-visual language as a central issue. An exception was the methodological proposal for analysing the visual style of television series (Cortés, 2016), based on the theory of cinematographic practice. Another unique piece of research looked at the use of diegetic music as a narrative element in the series *Cuéntame* (García, 2020). However, as television series have become widespread as cultural products in recent times, it would be useful to have methodological proposals that incorporate image and sound in the analysis of series in order to achieve a more comprehensive exploration when analysing their language. A specific methodology on television fiction in its own right; whereas these television products share audio-visual elements with cinema, they have a particular and inherent style. This methodology should pay attention to the characteristics and peculiarities that distinguish - and separate - series from other audio-visual products such as cinema and should point to a process that assesses the quality of a fictional television production.

The study of production also raised some limitations. Articles were identified that analysed production but failed to clearly reveal the methodology that explained how they had obtained their information, or to use systematised samples. The papers that analysed the production of Spanish fictional television broadcast by Spanish state channels in the 1990-2017 cycle (Lacalle and Sánchez, 2019) organised the disperse information on the subject by explicitly using mixed methodology, with a vast database that made up a sample of 490 television fictions. In addition to series and mini-series, it included soap operas, *TV movies* and *sketch* programmes. However, further research is necessary that points to forms of creative work; discusses and provides data on authorship; describes the relationships with the broadcasting channels during the process; explains the writing and production of series; and is expanded in order to bring production and content closer to each other, thereby explaining the complex processes of series creation on the route that starts from the original idea and ends with the release of the final product. It is not the first time that the conditions of production and creation alter and constrain the result of the work.

Research on VOD platforms and on the public seemed equally innovative, prolific and appropriate, especially those papers that provided data on new forms of consumption and viewer figures. Some papers identified audiences that had been active participants in the narrative extension of a series, even becoming involuntary co-operators of market studies presented as television series, as *Netflix* did with *Bandesnatch* (Del Campo, 2019). While these platforms have revitalised the production of series in the short

term, it is unknown whether they might be somehow detrimental to the creation and production system in the future.

Fictional narratives were only sporadically or superficially analysed, by observing plots and characters but subjecting these analyses to the vector theme of the research, such as the representation of women, for example. The longest-term pieces of research (those that seek to provide taxonomies, typologies and trends) provided general clues about the narratives of series in different periods (García de Castro, 2008) or about those belonging to the same genre (Tous, 2019). Articles were identified which also focused on the narratives when investigating the adaptation processes of series. Except for the piece of research that developed the concept of spectator narrative applied to the case of *Águila Roja* (Vacas, 2018), no papers proposed narrative analysis as a methodology to further its key aspects: narrator, time and space. It would also be relevant to conduct a narrative analysis of Spanish television series as a subject of study in order to recognise in them themes, characters, genres and narrative structures that determine the degree of difference or similarity between Spanish series and those from other areas, with an emphasis on American, European and Latin American productions. The addition and interpretation of national stories may offer an idiosyncrasy, a worldview, a particular view of the world. Or else, it might reveal a rising trend towards cultural homogenisation, in a fully transnational and increasingly globalised industry.

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