Article

Between Fact and Fiction: Elizabeth II's Funeral and Its Connection to *The Crown* on X (Twitter)

Raquel Rodríguez-Díaz [1,*], Palmira Chavero [2] and Naftalí Paula-Veloz [3]

[1] Departamento de Periodismo y Comunicación Corporativa, Facultad de Ciencias de la Comunicación, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, 28942 Madrid, Spain
[2] Departamento de Estudios Internacionales y Comunicación, FLACSO Ecuador, Quito 170518, Ecuador; pchavero@flacso.edu.ec
[3] Comunicación Audiovisual y Publicidad, Facultad de Ciencias de la Comunicación, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, 28942 Madrid, Spain; naftali.paula@urjc.es
* Correspondence: raquel.rodriguez@urjc.es

Abstract: Television series enhance the social visibility of their content, as is the case with Queen Elizabeth II and The Crown. Netflix is the streaming television platform that has turned Peter Morgan's successful series (2016) into a television icon where the monarch is the main protagonist, taking us on a biographical journey that mixes the historical and the political with fiction. The main character is made to seem more humane and is brought closer to the general public, all of which leads to a transmedia narrative. This research aims to analyze the content of the messages published on Twitter during the days surrounding the Queen's State funeral in September 2022 and their connection with the series through the hashtag #TheCrown. The topics that have become trends worldwide are quantitatively analyzed, using different digital tools. The sample collected 1,489,279 tweets published during the days from the announcement of the death of Elizabeth II to the day of her funeral (from 8 to 19 September 2022). The results show nodes of connection between different players and linked communities to #TheCrown while offering the traffic generated by the hashtag with different nodes and edges.

Keywords: twitter; social media; Netflix; Elizabeth II; transmedia narrative; The Crown; #TheCrown

1. Introduction

The development of the digital sphere and the proliferation of new tools and platforms has brought with it new audiovisual consumption habits, especially among the younger members of society. Furthermore, this increase in platforms and the abundance of digital infrastructure favors nodes of connection with the past quickly and more easily [1]. One of the characteristics of this digital environment is the increase in the consumption of fictional series [2]. In these new uses and consumption, series have great relevance, modifying the relationship between fans of series and their content, as well as the way they relate to each other [3].

Among these new patterns of cultural behavior, we find that the consumption of fictional content, especially among young people, is no longer individual, but rather on the contrary, it is shared through new practices characteristic of the digital space, with multitasking and multi-screening being the most common practices [3]. In this way, the audience is taking an increasingly leading role, in such a way that consumer participation extends beyond the ability to decide what to watch and when or how to watch it [4]. In the new digital sphere, social networks become that space in which the audience can interact with all the players involved in the series: producers, corporations, citizens, journalists, other fans, etc. This paper studies the relationship between the Netflix series The Crown and its relationship with the hashtag #TheCrown, since the death of the British Queen Elizabeth II. The study shows how reality activates fiction on Twitter at certain historical moments.

2. Literature Review

One of the particularities of these new habits is consumption through multi-screen or second screens, that is, simultaneous exposure to digital content through several devices. Thus, while the audience consumes a fictional series through a video platform, they are commenting on that content on social networks, thus creating a community around specific topics, in this case, the series itself. The consumption of multiscreen or second screens, which is greater among younger users [5], shows the active role that the audience has been taking in the era of digitization—an audience that now interacts, dialogues and co-creates through the implementation of transmedia narrative [6]—in such a way that a horizontal conversation is generated between users who are physically distanced and that reaches high levels when the conversation revolves around a shared series [6]. This articulation between Twitter and television content increases the closeness between the audience and those responsible for television content, generating a channel of direct interaction with the public [7].

This is particularly significant in the case of successful series that generate a fandom phenomenon, in which fans of a series, through social networks, generate a virtual community in which they relate and exchange information. Viewers of Netflix series on social networks have a more active role and with their own characteristics, such as greater involvement in the following of the series and the empowerment to demand from the platform the use of new techniques and strategies through the networks [8]. In this way, the hybridization between social networks and television series is strengthened, feeding back into the content [9].

Second screens [10] and the integration of social networks to television productions (also called social TV) seek better engagement with the audience, generating a new concept of production and reception of television [11]. In fact, Twitter helps to maintain and increase the desire to continue talking about series between episodes and seasons [8]. In this sense, there is a simultaneous communication activity between television consumption and social networks, so that, as Buschow, Schneider and Ueberheide [12] point out, the idea of "Tweeting television" is embodied, referring to the activity that is generated on Twitter when watching a television program. Users chat in real time or in parallel to the broadcast of television programs or series, offering their comments, thus transforming social television into an active medium. The comments offered can be very varied, expressing users' feelings, comments about the program, presenters, actors, interactions with other users, etc. [13,14].

In addition to this, when it comes to viralizing content on social networks [14,15], there are many other elements to take into account, such as whether it contains useful information, unexpected acts, surprise, humor, images, videos, etc. Also, the use of the network itself, since it allows the producers of the series to have immediate feedback from the audience, so they can know the main discussions that the audience has around the series, helps to improve engagement [9].

Therefore, one way to viralize historical topics is through series on these streaming media platforms [16], in which there is an emotional involvement on the part of the audiences from a more creative perspective. Netflix is one of those television platforms that manages to generate communities on social networks where the option to share and participate is sought, taking advantage of reality and current events [17].

In addition to these new forms of consumption and the more active role that audiences take, we find an additional characteristic—the use of the so-called transmedia narrative [18]—in which the story transcends the medium to which it originally belongs and expands through other platforms, creating a new story, a transmedia one, in which reality and fiction are mixed, and which is possible thanks to the interaction that digital social networks allow [19]. The transmedia dimension interweaves media-based representations of different kinds, such as history, current events, games, etc., and builds worlds with parallel stories that are complementary and intertwined, distributed on different media platforms [20].

Communication mediated by second screens has revived the importance of the theory of uses and gratifications [21]. This theory proposes concepts such as interactivity, demassification, hypertextuality and asynchrony. In this sense, and according to Dias [22], despite the fact that the proliferation of smartphones and tablets is displacing television as the main content channel in contemporary society, this phenomenon is motivated by utilitarian and affective gratifications. Users and new consumers seek to be informed, but at the same time entertained, connected and participating in the discourse generated on the network through group discussions. In this context, Whiting and Williams [23] identify 10 uses and gratifications linked to the use of social networks, including social interaction, information seeking, entertainment, distraction, expression of opinions, exchange of information, and surveillance/knowledge of others. If we link this exclusively to the use of Twitter, Sandoval and Park [24] add that its use during live television events, such as games or finals of reality shows, is linked to sharing users' reactions in real time, expressing their opinions and connecting with other fans of the program, suggesting that the second screen can be a valuable tool for social interaction and for building communities around shared interests, in line with what other authors propose.

This environment is what Papacharissi [25] defines as "environmental intimacy", as users seek to continue using social networks and mobile devices to maintain connections with others while carrying out other activities, such as watching television. What is interesting about this practice is that it allows people to create a sense of connection with others despite not being physically together, creating a shared social experience.

In short, users seek to share their experiences, connect with others and search for information, but also influence it by creating content. Twitter changes the way we watch TV and also provides information about what viewers think about certain shows.

Therefore, in today's global digital culture, "content generated and consumed by users exists both within and outside commercial contexts" [26] (p. 7). This phenomenon is not foreign to the creators and producers of content platforms, who are aware of these new ways of creating and sharing content and of the greater predisposition that users (fans) have to participate in the digital conversation when the topic is a series. In the same way, a user is more likely to tweet about a program if it is trendy or controversial [12]. This causes audiovisual content distribution companies such as Netflix to develop their spreading and marketing strategies based on these new habits [27]. It is not surprising that the content that generates the most engagement on Twitter is that produced by the content distribution platform itself, in part due to the platform's great capacity to take advantage of social events to promote and activate its content [17].

Based on all these hypotheses, this work focuses on a series whose main character is a queen with a very extensive mandate who represents the history of several decades linked to the United Kingdom, along with Europe and its role in the world. Elizabeth II, who died on 8 September 2022, is the main figure of the television series *The Crown* created in 2016 by Peter Morgan and broadcast on Netflix. The series has six seasons in which the monarch's life from her marriage in 1947 is recounted from the fictional genre, with different historical flashback moments, reaching the 21st century. Coward [28] (1985) suggests that the very reality of the different events that have been happening to the Royal Family over the last decades are in themselves the object of a melodrama with the attentive gaze of the live audience. Specifically, this work starts from the premise that social networks have created a world of interactivity in which series modify consumption habits and relationships between fans.

To contextualize our object of study, it is worth remembering that on 8 September 2022, British Queen Elizabeth II died, at which time a period of national mourning opened in the United Kingdom until 19 September 2022, when the state funeral was held. By then, the series The Crown had already successfully aired four seasons and had announced the premiere of the fifth for 9 November of the same year. In fact, the production company was already recording the sixth season and out of respect for the death of the monarch, filming was paused for a week [29]. This overlap between the events and the television

management of the series aroused great interest from users, facilitating a dialogue between the series and reality. The thin line between fiction and reality was evident in this event, as the creator of the series, Peter Morgan, publicly stated that the death of the queen marked the definitive end of the series, which premiered its last season at the end of 2023. According to its creator, the decision not to continue with a seventh season was partly due to the desire to maintain the distance between fiction and reality.

This investigation analyzes to what extent the death of Elizabeth II has connections with #TheCrown linked to the famous Netflix series. In this sense, the monarchy has always had some fascination; many cultures use tales of princes and princesses where the protagonists are kings or queens. From a young age, boys and girls listen to legendary stories (true or false), internalizing many elements of the divine and human that go back to ancient periods. From other approaches, and focusing on the United Kingdom, the Crown is also considered the largest treasure in Great Britain [30], as well as a very profitable entity [31], sharing the duality of being an institution as well as a brand [32,33].

Netflix, as a streaming television platform, has made the series a large historical fiction drama production, differentiating itself from a history documentary [34]. The Crown is Netflix's most expensive series to date, as well as one of the most expensive shows in television history [35]. The major financial investment was aimed at guaranteeing the authenticity of the scenes from different aspects, including technological ones, helping to make each frame credible [36]. The construction of convincing narrative worlds around the humanization of a great character in history has generated much praise, although equally criticism related to its own historical inaccuracy or its ability to deceive audiences [37,38].

There is a debate about how society perceives the world of fiction as if it were something true where digital platforms such as Netflix innovatively manage memories and experiences. It also raises ethical concerns regarding the border between what is true and what is false [39]. These authors pose a dilemma in the fictional representation of contemporary history when the series is perceived as an authorized interpretation of the past. Regardless of whether the narratives of the past are historiographies or historical fictions [40], it does not seem that viewers share such presumptions, since as noted by [39] (p. 807) in the case of The Crown: "events or characters are accepted as credible even when they are seen as incredible, that is, the audience's enjoyment of a series leads them to intentionally avoid any critical examination of something which is unreal".

In addition to this, the series uses journalistic stories as audiovisual and documentary resources, introducing elements of reality linked to the royal family, politicians of the moment or society itself. The presence of these journalistic elements in numerous episodes, which are seen with newspaper covers, radio broadcasts and real television images of the time, mark the episodes' narrative thread [41] thereby providing credibility. One of the attractions of the series is showing the public the private conversations and feelings of members of the royal family in the face of different events, which helps to humanize the character. A different vision of the public and media acts and speeches of the members of The Crown is provided by dialogues that show their feelings and opinions behind closed doors. In this sense, one way in which The Crown is innovative is with the incorporation of the private and human approach of its protagonists that distances itself from their public lives exposed through the press. Peter Morgan points out that you have to reach the audience from an emotional perspective and imagine what people feel and think at that moment rather than where they were on a specific day.

The audiovisual history of the British royal family has been linked to sensationalism [42,43] and to the fascination that The Crown produces socially in the United Kingdom. In the same way, different authors [44,45] work on fiction and reality considering that high-quality productions are more likely to remain in collective culture as truthful references of historical models [39].

The Crown is one of those quality, documented productions, with millions of followers around the world, regardless of their ideological level and proximity to or distance from British culture, who have contributed in different ways to the series becoming a

complete success, also on social networks. This reflects how a transmedia and transcultural narrative [46] spreads on different media platforms favoring and promoting active and participatory audiences [47].

After the death of the Head of State, Twitter users activated a series of hashtags around which the digital conversation of the events arising from her death revolved. One of those hashtags was #TheCrown, coinciding with the title of the Netflix series that chronicles her life. In this way, this work proposes that the generalization of this label provided a transmedia narrative in which elements of the event that was taking place were combined with the development of the series itself, which in principle would lead to greater engagement of the messages emitted in this conversation.

The hashtag #TheCrown began to move on the day of Queen Elizabeth's death, but it was not until the next day that it became a trend on Twitter. The first messages made explicit reference to the series, its scriptwriters or the relationship of the actors with the real-life characters. Almost all of them had certain notes of humor and satire; for example, the first message that went viral was published from a user account (@Natalia_Who), at 3:40 p.m. It was a video that, under the text "the writers of The Crown today", showed various individuals running from one side to the other while, among other things, they applauded and rubbed their hands. In this relationship between the series and reality, in the first threads the followers began to propose different moments of the series in a kind of perspective compared to the reality that was being experienced in the hours after the death of its main character.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Questions

This research work aims to observe the activity on the social network Twitter (now X) between the date of the passing of Queen Elizabeth II until the day of her funeral, 8–19 September 2022. Our work moves away from the fictional series to focus on the historical fact of the loss of the monarch, who was also the main character of the series. In this context, the general research question from which we start is posed as follows: How does the digital conversation on Twitter about the death of Queen Elizabeth II develop? From this general question, the aim is not only to know which users generated the most content, but who they were, how they related to each other and what the behavioral patterns for the publications were (if any). Furthermore, it is interesting to know what presence the Netflix series #TheCrown had in the conversation on Twitter during the period analyzed. Therefore, to answer this general research question, we ask several specific questions, some of a more exploratory nature:

RQ1. What are the characteristics of the community that participates in the online conversation about The Crown?
RQ2. What types of emotions predominate in the digital conversation about the death of Elizabeth II?
RQ3. What connections occur between users of the digital community created around #TheCrown?

3.2. Sample and Data Analysis

For the development of this work, a series of digital tools are considered that facilitate the creation of a methodology to analyze a large volume of information. Taking this into account, a type of descriptive, transversal, correlational and explanatory design was selected to examine the number of publications included in the hashtag #TheCrown. This design allows us to describe the particularities of our data set, since variables such as the content of the tweets, the characteristics of the users who publish them, the number of followers and follows or connections (retweets, favorites, comments) are analyzed. It also allows us to examine whether there is a relationship between some variables and, given that we are dealing with an explanatory design, it allows us to go beyond the description of the relationships between variables and understand the elements that generate them.

Although different technological tools are used to respond to some of the IPs in this study, the methodological strategy designed is common to all of them.

Regarding the instruments used to collect the data, first of all, the Getdaytrends tool is used. The data collected are those published on Twitter between 8–19 September 2022 on the topic from the date of death to the celebration of the state funeral. This platform is used to find out which hashtags or terms were trending worldwide and which ones accumulated the greatest number of published messages. As a result, these hashtags and terms are used to filter the data download based on search topics.

T-Hoarder Kit[1] platform is used to instrument the tweets. This tool allows us to download messages systematically using search commands programmed into the application.

The graphic visualization and elaboration of the node graphs is designed in Gephi 0.10, a network analysis software that allows us to generate communities based on nodes and edges. Thanks to it, the existing relationship between user communities generated based on a common message or theme or between these communities and the most relevant users in them is observed. To finish with the visual part, Python programming code is used for sentiment analysis.

Rstudio was used for both statistical analysis and data treatment and processing. This software is designed to facilitate the processing and treatment of large volumes of data through the R programming language, thanks to a powerful combination of packages and tools optimized for data management. In the first phase, we used the dplyr and data.table packages in order to clean and process the data. To create graphs, the ggplot2 package was used, one of the most popular packages based on graph grammar that allows you to create a wide variety of data visualizations in a simple and customizable way, and the last package used was stats for the statistical analysis of the data.

In total 6,373,657 tweets were collected. Given such a high sample size that included both qualitative and quantitative data, it was necessary to develop a robust methodological design that would allow an exhaustive and significant analysis of the information collected, guaranteeing the validity and reliability of the results. The content analysis technique was used, both to organize the dataset and to know its structure and relevant information. All variables and categories were created manually based on commands in T-Hoarder Kit with the purpose of downloading only the requested data: among them, the temporality (day, date and time), author, tweet or full text published, multimedia elements present in it, number of followers and followed by the author, url of the message, device from which it was published, type of message and user who is retweeted.

The T-Hoarder Kit (message download) and Rstudio (data processing and automated coding) tools were used for automated content analysis and are common for analysis of large data samples [48,49]. In the first phase, the categories were designed manually as already indicated (date, author, tweet,...). In a second phase, the T-Hoarder Kit was used to download the data based on the selected categories using a series of commands already programmed into the application. Finally, the automated coding of the categories was carried out in Rstudio, using libraries that facilitated the treatment and analysis of the data through their grouping, creation of tables, graphs and different statistics linked to the design of the research.

4. Results

Firstly, the messages were downloaded using both the hashtags and the topics or terms that were trending during the study period. Since the publications were collected worldwide, the messages were not filtered by language, as we find that the majority of the messages were published in English and Spanish. Another language that also stood out in the number of publications was Hindi, probably due to the relationship between both countries and the colonial past that unites them [50].

Figure 1 represents all the trends used in the search for publications. To find out about them, we used Getdaytrends as explained in the methodological section. The tool allows us

to identify the daily evolution of trends worldwide and, in a second moment of the study, search and download the messages.
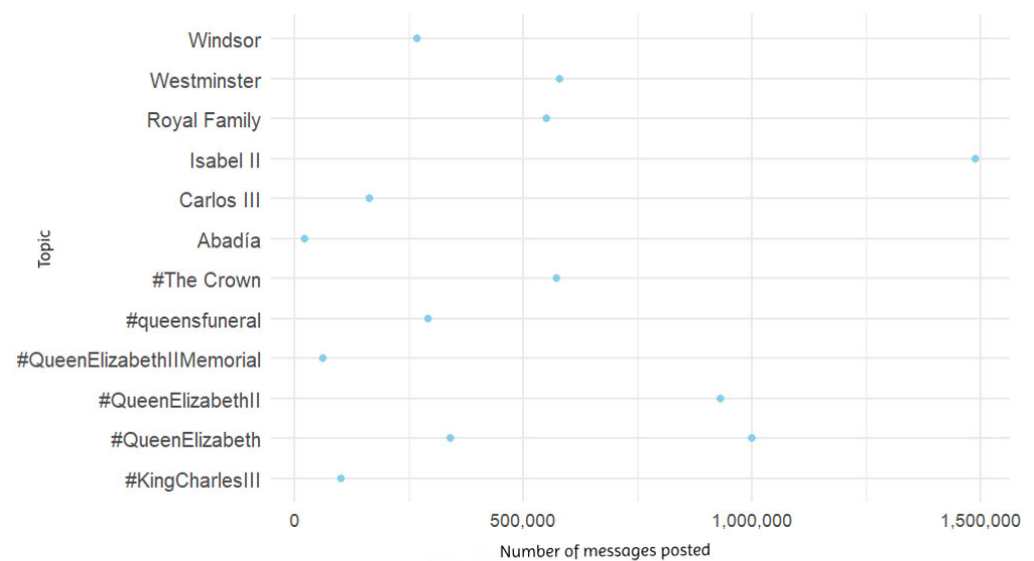
Source: Author´s own material *(2024)*

Figure 1. Total number of publications.

The term Elizabeth II (Isabel II in Spanish) is the most used by users with a total of 1,489,279 published messages. The hashtags #QueenElizabeth and #QueenElizabethII are the ones that accumulated the greatest number of messages, and #TheCrown occupies the third most used hashtag in the media discourse on Twitter after the death of the Queen. An event of this historical significance arouses the interest of the entire international press. Fiction goes beyond the screens and becomes part of an informative milestone, helping to understand the importance of Twitter in citizen participation, where citizens decide which publications occupy more or less activity on the social network [51], as well as the way in which transmedia narratives are constructed.

Of the total messages published (6,373,657 tweets), #TheCrown accounts for 572,379 publications. This large number of tweets allows us to know the relevance of the series in the discourse generated by users.

Series have replaced a large part of television viewing thanks to the rise of platforms such as Netflix. In this context, Twitter has become an important social network, used as a tool for user participation and activism, influencing the fate of television series, but also shaping the relationship between audiences, producers, chains and users of the social network [52].

In monitoring the activity of #TheCrown, a decreasing trend can be seen over time, since the number of publications also decreases. In this sense, Carr [53] explains that in the face of such relevant social issues, the abundance of content on social networks causes, in some cases, users to become oversaturated with so much information. When a topic is being discussed excessively, users may lose interest due to the feeling that they have already seen, read, and discussed enough about that topic. This is what we know as content saturation theory. Other studies point to a similar line by indicating that Twitter's audience does not maintain activity throughout the time that the television broadcast lasts, but is more interested in certain specific moments of the content broadcast [54]. However, it is observed that in recent days, around 68,000 messages have been published only with #TheCrown, so we can consider that although it decreases significantly, the publication frequency remains high.

In our case study, in the days after the Queen's death (8 September 2022) The Crown increased the number of views by 800% in the United Kingdom. In France, it multiplied by

three, and worldwide, it was multiplied by four, according to Whip Media's TV and movie tracking app [55]. Additionally, The Crown occupied the tenth position of the 25 most viewed series on Netflix in 2022 [56].

Regarding the frequency of publication by author, Figure 2 represents the 10 most active users on Twitter. While most accounts post between 100 and 200 messages, it is notable that @_the_crown_uk posts over 600 in the analysis period. This account belongs to a blogger who joined Twitter in September 2021. In the description in his biography, he is defined as "Monarchist and not apologizing for it, don't tolerate trolls or haters, loyal to the end", followed by the flag of the United Kingdom and Scotland.
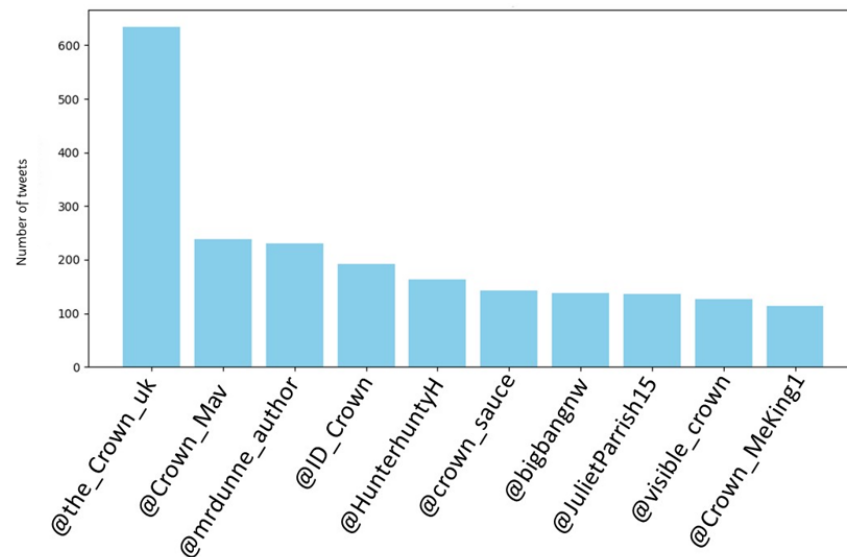
Source: Author´s own material (2024)

Figure 2. Number of tweets published by author.

Despite being an account created ad hoc to publish content related to Queen Elizabeth II, the author has continued to follow the activities and news of the British royal family. For its part, @Crown_Mav, created the day after the death, is used to publish milestones and important events in the life of Elizabeth II. @mrdunne_author and @JulietParrish15 are accounts dedicated to defending social issues and fighting racism, abuse or fascism. @ID__Crown accounts, @Crown_MeKing1 and @HunterhuntyH are users who do not have a large number of followers, but do have a considerable amount of published content, while @bigbangnw is a news and media agency located in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This is the only media account that we found within the top 10 that established themselves as content creators.

Finally, @visible_crown is owned by the interdisciplinary project "The Visible Crown", which brings together researchers in the United Kingdom and the Caribbean to study the political and cultural importance of Elizabeth II in the Caribbean. The project focuses on the study of the period from 1952 to the present, attempting to analyze the influence of the crown as an institution and of Queen Elizabeth II during decolonization, independence and calls for constitutional reform in the eight "kingdoms" of the Caribbean and the countries that chose to become republics, using Caribbean sources and perspectives to understand the continuing role of the British Crown, as well as its implications for the future.

This may explain an interesting fact that we observed in the content of the 572,379 tweets published with #TheCrown. If we look at the frequency of use of the words, we find that the most repeated are "Crown", "Queen Elizabeth" or "Elizabeth II", in addition to the emergence of certain terms in the speech of users such as colonialism, "British Crown", South Africa or Hong Kong, alluding to the follow-up of the issue by the former colonies of

the British Empire. An interesting finding that we discovered in this analysis is that the user of the official account of the British royal family (@RoyalFamily) does not appear as part of the digital conversation.

Regarding the devices used to publish the messages, it stands out that 45% of connects are from Android mobile devices, 40% from Twitter for iPhones, and 15% from users of Twitter web.

A very important characteristic within the construction of content visibility on Twitter is that a greater number of publications do not directly impact the interest of users expressed in retweets or comments. Online identity theory [57] explains this phenomenon, according to which users retweet messages that reinforce or express their identity, their ideals, interests and values. Figure 3 showing the most retweeted users and reveals that none of the authors who publish the greatest number of messages is among the most retweeted. This explains how information spread works on Twitter, since users are the ones who have the power to discriminate what they find interesting and what not, something that is not subject to the number of publications.
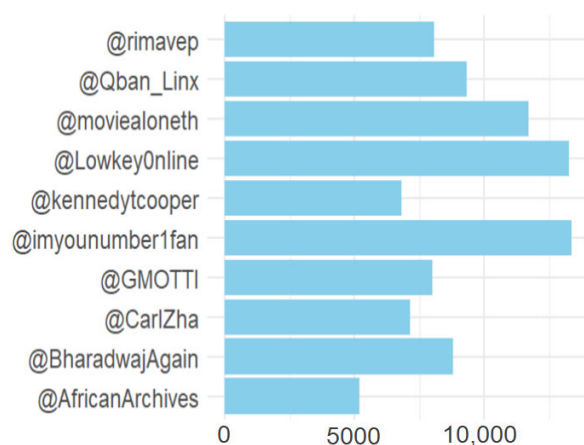
Source: Author´s own material (2024)

Figure 3. Most retweeted users.

Within these 10, @imyounumber1fan, @lowkey0nline, @moviealoneth, @qban_linx and @bharadwajagain were the users who exert the most influence on the network since, as seen in Figure 3, their content is the one that generates the most interest among users.

All of these accounts are personal; none of them are institutional accounts. The first four users are dedicated to the audiovisual world, art, music, movies and series, while @bharadwajagain defines himself in his biography as "Researcher. Enthusiast of History, Archaeology, Linguistics, Literature and Religion. Bringing Indology on Twitter".

@rimavep is a blogger dedicated to the world of cinema and series. Their most-replied tweet said "no but charles becoming king two months before the crown season 5 comes out to expose him and camilla and lower their popularity even more... diana's influence". The message was published on 8 September at 10:18 p.m., accompanied by an image of Princess Diana with a broad smile. The ironic combination of image and text quickly captured users' attention.

Both @kennedytcooper and @GMOTTI are also common users whose texts reach great viralization. Both have humorous tones, while @CarlZha is a presenter of a Podcast about China, history, culture and politics.

Strategically, retweets do predict user behavior, since with their use, they can show agreement, support or affinity with the author of the original tweet or with their message. In the digital age, this approach is not new, since it is the basis of the theory of social

reinforcement, which explains that people will always be influenced by social responses and expectations [58].

To continue with the analysis of users, the relationship between the number of followers and the frequency of publication is examined, in this case to understand the commitment of the author and identify effective participation strategies. To perform this association analysis, we have used Pearson's correlation analysis given the typology of our study variables.

Typically, authors with a larger number of followers and a higher posting frequency can have greater influence and engagement on the platform. For its part, analyzing how publication frequency affects the number of followers can help us identify if publishing more content is correlated with an increase in the number of followers.

After performing the correlation analysis between the number of followers and the frequency of publication, the result obtained is 0.010. Since the correlation is very low, it can be stated that the number of followers is not significantly related to the frequency of publishing content on the social network. Likewise, this correlation also points out that an author's engagement strategy on Twitter must be more complex than simply increasing the frequency of publication to gain followers, among which is monetization. As can be seen, publishing more messages does not mean that you will obtain more followers or social authority.

Regarding the content and the high volume of publications, an analysis is carried out on the tone of the publications. To do this, the technique of sentiment analysis is used, a process that helps to understand the emotional tone of the publications. Thanks to machine learning models, this technique classifies tweets as positive, negative or neutral. This allows us to evaluate both the reputation of the institution and monitor user opinion in our study context [59].

As seen in Figure 4, 54.9% (green) of the publications contain a neutral tone, while 34.5% (red) have a positive tone, and only 10.6% (blue) present a negative tone. Some examples that allow us to contemplate the categorization in each of the tones would be the following. In a negative tone, one of the most widespread messages was the one published by the satirical website Reductress with its characteristic mixture of satire and humor, in which it could be read "Cute! Queen Elizabeth's Corgis Prepare to Be Buried Alive With Her". The publication was accompanied by a photograph in which the queen could be seen with two of her already famous dogs that were talked about a lot during the study days. Another of the most prominent topics and with a more neutral profile were threads that collected part of her life and her impact on sport, politics, etc. This was the theme most used by the media, but also by anonymous users who neutrally defined her as "a political, social and emblematic figure", while others used positive adjectives and verbs to define her figure, such as: "Duty", the word that best exemplified the life of Elizabeth II".

The graph allows us to visualize the majority sentiment of the users. However, since the use of emoticons sometimes makes the accuracy of the sentiment difficult, the polarity of the sentiment is also examined. This is a measure that also indicates the nature of the sentiment expressed in the publications, but based on numbers that can range between positive and negative values. A positive value close to 1 indicates positive sentiment, while a negative value close to −1 indicates negative sentiment, and a value close to 0 indicates neutral sentiment. The average polarity in the analyzed data set is 0.08516, so we can infer that, on average, the analyzed texts are mainly neutral with a tendency towards slightly positive sentiment.

Finally, we examine community detection using *Gephi*, created based on node and edge graphs. These communities are generated from the existing relationships between them and can be created based on responses and retweets. For this analysis, retweets are selected, understanding that they predict the behavior of users since, as explained, users tend to basically retweet publications with which they have a certain degree of agreement or sympathy. In this case, *Gephi* detects 339,273 nodes and 409,989 edges. This indicates that a considerably large dataset is viewed graphically, as each node represents a Twitter

account that has posted using the study hashtag, #TheCrown. The edges represent the connections between these accounts and include retweets and responses between users.
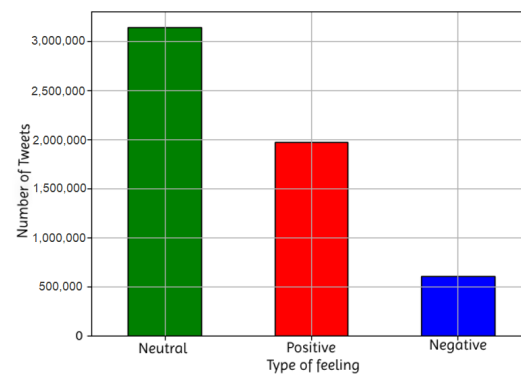
Source: Author´s own material (2024)

Figure 4. Sentiment analysis distribution.

In Figure 5, several different communities are observed in the network, well defined and with few links between them; the largest are the green, blue and pink ones. The users with the greatest importance in the network are those with the largest nodes and, given that the graph is created based on the relationships of the retweets, it is again observed how @imyounumber1fan, @lowkey0nline, @moviealoneth, @qban_linx and @bharadwajagain are not only the users who exert the most influence on the network, but also the ones who mobilize the most content. This means that, as seen graphically, they were placed almost in the center or at the top of the discourse, thus energizing the relationships between users based on their publications.
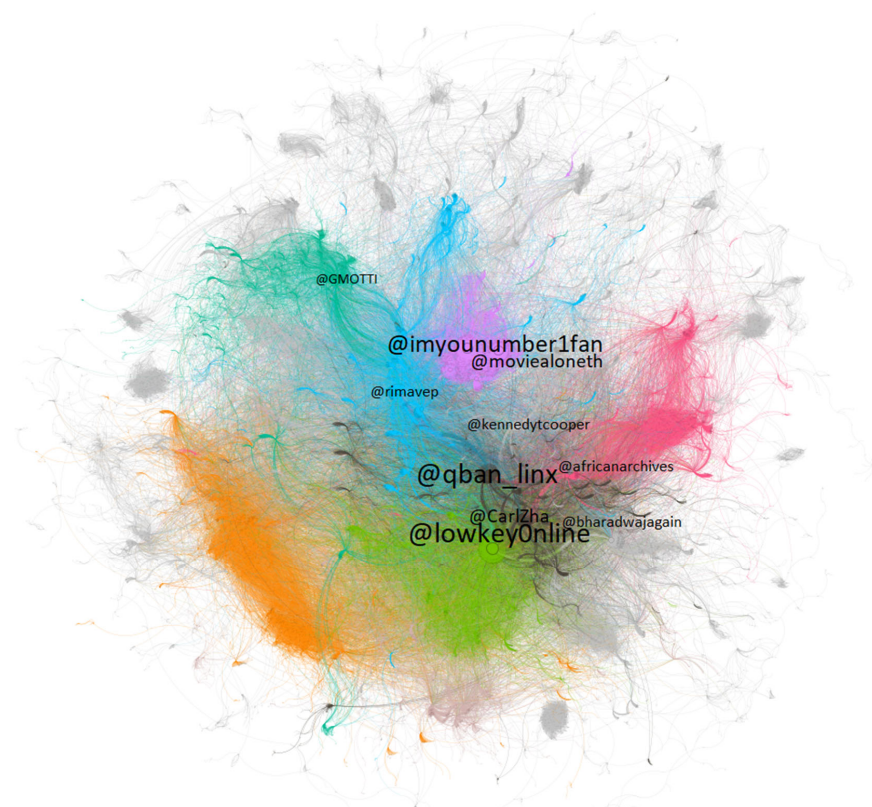
Source: Author´s own material (2024)

Figure 5. Relationships based on retweets.

As a general rule, the nodes in the center of the graph are more and better connected than the nodes in the periphery; this explains why these nodes are more important for the general structure of the network, since they ultimately mobilize almost all of the #TheCrown traffic during the days studied. Their messages are the ones that aroused the greatest interest in users and, given the number of messages collected, this does not only serve to show how media power structures are broken on Twitter, since conventional users are capable of introducing new topics of discussion. In this sense, it also illustrates that fiction is capable of generating conversations beyond the screens. The way in which viewers consume fiction series has changed considerably thanks to social networks. Now, they can interact with the different narrative elements of the plot, build discourses and establish their own universes. However, given the importance that this new means of communication has acquired in recent years, especially on Twitter, platforms such as Netflix constantly work on these issues as part of their strategy [60].

Using the K-Core filter—a subnetwork in which all nodes have the same number of relationships—Figure 6 shows the subnetwork made up of those nodes that contain at least five relationships with other nodes. This serves to observe the work of these users in the dissemination of the published content, since it greatly simplifies the structure of the graph.
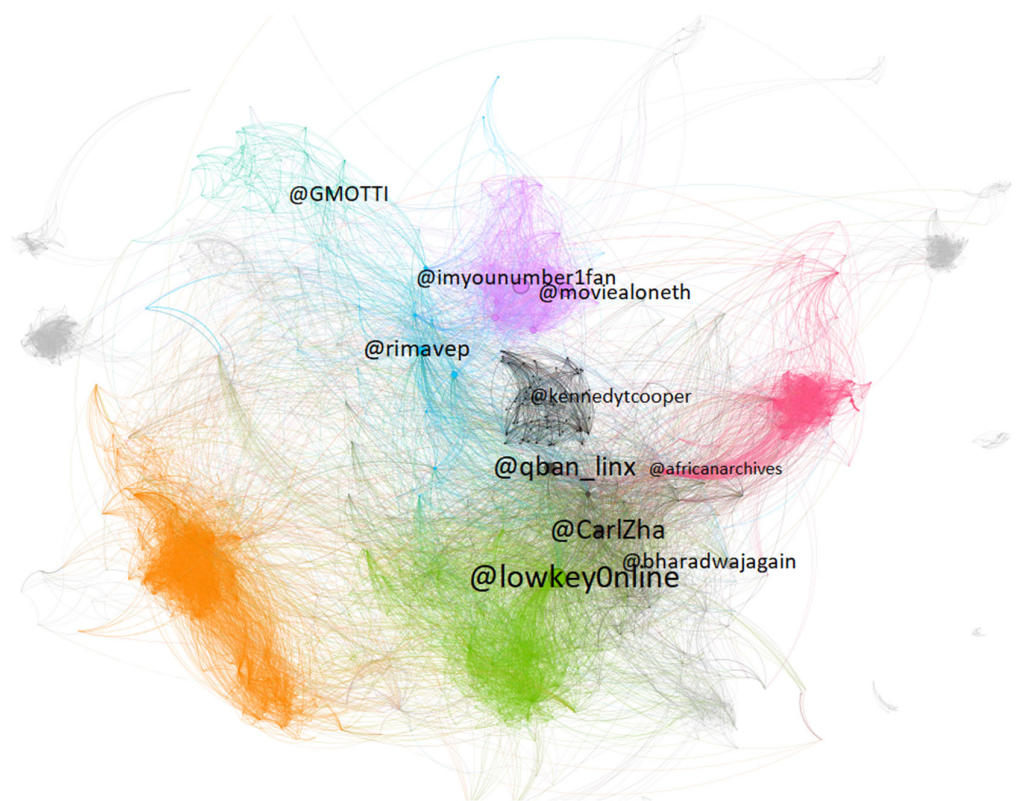

Source: Author's own material (2024)

Figure 6. Relationships with five degrees of separation.

As can be seen in Figure 6, there are connections generated by these five users, but Figure 2 has a structure very similar to that of Figure 1, which shows its role in the spread and distribution of content.

Finally, despite the large number of messages published, about 60% of the total publications are retweets and replies. This confirms that the original content is widely shared and discussed by users using #TheCrown. The topic triggers a special interest in the audience, who manage to connect with that 40% of original content until it becomes a full coverage of a historic event in which, as has been proven, fiction becomes part of the informative reality, thus creating a transmedia narrative.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

With the death of British Queen Elizabeth II, the series The Crown increased its audience in the days surrounding her funeral [61], while a whole protocol linked to the Crown and the corporate heritage that represents the British monarchy was activated [31,62]. In this work, we set out to discover how the digital conversation about the death of Elizabeth II developed and how that conversation was articulated with the series The Crown (broadcast by Netflix) through the use of the hashtag #TheCrown, which accumulated more than half a million tweets, thus becoming one of the most relevant hashtags during the period studied. The research reflects how the very current situation linked to the death of its main protagonist managed to make the #TheCrown a trending topic during those days. So, reality not only surpasses fiction but, in this study, activates it through #TheCrown, and its followers make it a trending topic. The research shows how the television series gains prominence on Twitter from real-life events. Likewise, the results allow us to identify how these dynamics between Twitter and reality offer spaces for direct interaction with the audience [7].

Regarding the first question, about the characteristics of the community that participates in the conversation, we found that the most active profiles are accounts created ad hoc that define themselves as followers of the monarchy or users related to culture. This accounts for the activity of users on the networks, but also for the possible intervention of Netflix and its environment to strengthen the conversation linked to The Crown. Although the Netflix platform does not appear directly among the users who mobilize the conversation, it can be observed that the users who lead and structure the publications are users related to the cultural environment (movies, series, art, music, etc.), which suggests the participation of this sector in the networks as part of the strategy to achieve greater engagement in digital content. In this same sense, it stands out that neither the media (only one Argentinian media account appears) nor the official account of the British royal family are present in this conversation. Therefore, it is observed how users can move a large amount of information by themselves without the presence of a traditional mediator, in accordance with what other studies establish on active audiences and those with greater participation in social networks [8]. Elaborating on this, the activity of users on social networks offers new relationships with television series, favoring different relationships between networks, producers and audiences [52]. In this sense, it is very common to activate conversations on social networks as second screens; an example of this is the use of Twitter in the political arena during electoral debates [63,64].

The second research question referred to the types of emotions present in the object of study. In this sense, it is observed that the neutral tone predominates, although the sentiment tends to be more positive, with a polarity of 0.085.

Perhaps the result of these feelings is justified by a possibly expected natural event (death of an elderly queen), unlike other studies linked to a negative perception of feelings about the environment published on Twitter about a documentary series [9]. However, it may also be due to the fact that news-related tweets tend to have a more serious and less emotional tone [12]. These findings, regardless of the sense of tone, reinforce previous works that focus on the possibility that social networks allow users not only to interact with each other, but also to express their emotions and perceptions of the series [13,14,24]. At the same time, it gives the audience a more active and participatory role [8].

Taking into account the types of relations that occur in the digital conversation (third research question), more than half of the content (60%) is made up of retweets and responses, which indicates that the original content is 40% of the conversation and goes viral easily. Therefore, of all the digital conversation generated around this topic, original content does not make up half of the publications, which suggests that social networks work more to amplify certain content than to generate new content, which ultimately has an impact on the quality and depth of public debate.

Finally, this research explores the possibility that the death of Queen Elizabeth II activated the creation of a transmedia narrative on social networks, in such a way that users

of the networks and fans of the Netflix series are creating a discourse in which the barrier between what is happening due to the death of the queen and the conversation about the expectation of the premiere of the new season of The Crown is broken. The producers of the series are no strangers to this connection between reality and fiction, nor are professionals from the world of culture, who are—as this study shows—some of the most active users in the digital conversation.

In this sense, it is observed how, in the case of the death of Elizabeth II and the Netflix series The Crown, a transmedia narrative is created on Twitter (now X) with others from fiction. In this way, it is also observed how the users who participate in the conversation (fans of the series and/or the Royal Family) take center stage and acquire a more active role in front of the different screens [6,51]. These results are consistent with the literature that proposes the emergence of new forms of production and consumption of television content, crossed with second screens [10,11]. Future studies could delve in this direction, solving questions related to knowing how a transmedia narrative is constructed, where different approaches linked to content and interactions published on social networks are incorporated that, in addition to incorporating text, are complemented with all kinds of images offered by users, along with various categorizations of the linked comments, for example, the characters of the series, from different perspectives.

The research shows how Twitter is a powerful electronic communication tool for transmedia narratives [39] while reflecting the cultural use made of digital platforms in today's society [65,66]. The traditional word of mouth has given way to the so-called "e-WOM" (electronic word of mouth), so not only do users who did not have a voice before now have one, but also those voices are capable of influencing the film market by promoting exchanges and conversation between users [67].

Streaming platforms initiate or form part of the conversations on social networks that citizens activate, in such a way that the platforms echo the topics proposed by citizens and thus modify the relationships between the different players who have a presence in the digital public sphere. These dynamics also favor "second lives" or journeys for digital television through social networks where the idea of tweeting television [12] can be complemented with current situations or events that serve as a starting point to activate television content in parallel [68].

Note

1. Created and facilitated by Professor Mariluz Congosto from the Carlos III University of Madrid.

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