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Fandom activity of the Marvel transmedia phenomenon: a comparative analysis of Peruvian digital communities during the pandemic

La actividad del fandom del fenómeno transmedia de Marvel: un análisis comparativo de las comunidades digitales peruanas en tiempos de pandemia

Abstract

The Marvel franchise is one of the most successful and prominent transmedia phenomena in the entertainment industry. Comics, series, video games and films have built a fictional world that has encouraged the consolidation of its fandom base with frequent activity in digital communities. The aim of this research is to explore changes in the activity of Marvel fandom within a context that has introduced variation in content production and dissemination, but especially in the daily lives of the franchise's fans. Thus, by using metric analysis of the activity of Peruvian digital communities, we have observed trends in behaviour, while topics that have driven fan conversations have been analysed through netnographic analysis. The findings point out that even though an increase in participation and a change in topics was expected, fan activity in digital communities tended to decrease, and the topics of conversation did not vary; in fact, current issues such as the health crisis were not discussed.

Resumen

La franquicia Marvel es uno de los fenómenos transmedia de mayor éxito y relevancia en la industria del entretenimiento. Cómics, series, videojuegos y películas han construido un mundo de ficción que ha incentivado la consolidación de un fandom con una actividad frecuente en las comunidades digitales. Esta investigación busca explorar los cambios en la actividad del fandom de Marvel en un contexto que introdujo variantes en la producción y difusión del contenido, pero sobre todo en la vida cotidiana de los fans de la franquicia. Así, a través de un análisis métrico de la actividad de las comunidades digitales peruanas, se observan las tendencias en el comportamiento, y a través de un análisis netnográfico, se exploran las temáticas que movieron la conversación de los fans. Los hallazgos permiten destacar que, aunque se esperaba un aumento en la participación y un cambio en las temáticas, la actividad de los fans en las comunidades digitales tuvo una tendencia a la disminución y las temáticas de conversación no variaron; pues no se habló de las cuestiones coyunturales como la crisis sanitaria.

Keywords
Fandom; Marvel; Facebook; YouTube; pandemic; transmedia storytelling

Palabras clave
Fandom; Marvel; Facebook; YouTube; pandemia; narrativa transmedia

1. Introduction

With the variety of content it produces for its various channels, Marvel "has managed to position itself as the preeminent expanded universe, generating an increasingly larger number of followers, more profits and consumption, as well as readings that are less antagonistic and more mainstream" (Cruz Villegas, 2017: 112). In the current ecosystem, the so-called Marvel Cinematic Universe stands out. Rather than a collection of films with continuity and unity, it embodies one of the first successful examples of transmedia storytelling (Burke, 2018).

One of the reasons for its success is that Marvel was the first superhero fiction publisher to place its characters in a coordinated universe (Wright, 2003). Moreover, the transfer of these characters to film has expanded the narrative universe and increased the audience's points of contact with the franchise. As Flanagan, Livingstone and McKenny (2016) rightly point out, the success of Marvel comics has attracted a series of corporate acquisitions and mergers over the years, concluding with its purchase by Disney.

An all-encompassing narrative (macro-story), diverse points of contact, an active and participatory audience, and a shared fictional world are the elements that distinguish a transmedia phenomenon, as is the case of Marvel. In this context, the aim of the present research is to explore the ways in which a change outside the development of the Marvel franchise, referring to the pandemic generated by Covid-19, has affected fan activity and participation. As Rodríguez Ferrándiz (2012: 66) points out, transmedia narrative content "germinates and grows while already having been seeded in multiple formats and platforms, fed by professional creators and amateur fans, who are sometimes extraordinarily active and competent".

Thus, the research question to be answered is the following: in what ways did the change brought about by the pandemic in the entertainment industry and in people's lives influence the activity of Marvel fans? The working hypothesis proposes that with the changes introduced by the pandemic, fandom has increased its content creation and participation, shifting from traditionally addressed topics to those that are more contemporary. This hypothesis is supported by research findings such as those of Jenkins (2010) and Hills (2002), who emphasise that fan communities often establish links that go beyond the specific fictional content that brings them together to include common interests as well. If the pandemic has been a phenomenon that has resulted in great changes, fans are expected to interact in search of dialogue and address issues related to the disruptive situation that has occurred.

To confirm or reject the hypothesis, two methodologies have been proposed. The first is a quantitative methodology of metric analysis of Marvel fandom activity in Peruvian digital communities during two observation periods of the same duration yet differentiated by the pandemic. With this methodology, trends in fan behaviour have been observed. The second methodology is a netnographic analysis of fan activity regarding those posts with the most interaction, which is a type of analysis that explores the topics that have driven conversation among Marvel fans during two different periods of time. Thus, based on the comparative analysis, changes in fandom activity have been highlighted. By using quantitative and qualitative data, this research will attempt to point out that fans not only meet and collaborate with regard to fictional content, but that after consolidating social ties, these groups behave as communities whose interaction is important for their participants.

2. Theoretical framework

In transmedia storytelling, the audience participates and collaborates in the creation of a narrative that has an expansible quality (Jenkins, 2003). These consumers are hunters and gatherers of stories who actively try to contribute to the construction of the characters and plots that make up the franchise (Scolari and Establés, 2017). Indeed, users disseminate transmedia content through different activities, many of which are carried out through the web and social networks. Thus, as pointed out by Scolari (2013: 27), "21st century prosumers are active promoters of the narratives about which they are passionate". The transmedia narrative offers a management model that strengthens the relationship between the media industry and collaborative cultures (Jenkins, 2008), as it proposes "narrative worlds (storyworlds) that encompass different media/platforms and production/consumption experiences" (Scolari and Establés, 2017: 1017). Within these new production and consumption experiences, those of the engaged audience stand out, which participates in the dissemination of the story due to the adoration generated by the content (Ganzert, 2015).

Participation fosters a high level of bonding with the narrative, which in turn encourages the search for new ways to increase the participation. Thus, involvement motivates users to embrace new technologies because "their fascination with fictional universes often inspires new types of cultural production" (Jenkins, 2008: 137). Indeed, "Today's communication enables conversation, interaction and co-creation, and is supported by tools for interacting and sharing made possible by technological development" (Tur-Viñes and Rodríguez Ferrándiz, 2014: 118). These audiences, who are involved with the narrative, also demand an enhanced offering. They are audiences "fervent for extra content not

offered in the traditional broadcast" (Herrero de la Fuente, 2018: 555). For this reason, a transmedia narrative incorporates the option of participation as a key element of its strategy so that the audience enjoys its activity and is involved in the macro-story that is developed and discovered in a collaborative process (Atarama-Rojas, Guerrero-Pérez and Gerbolini, 2020).

This engaged activity and the movement between different media is conducive to increased audience involvement (Evans, 2016). By making the viewer part of the creative process of the transmedia world, it is possible to reinforce digital communities united by a shared experience (Quintas-Froufe and González-Neira, 2014). Thus, "more than the consumption of a product, what we have is a living entertainment experience" (Rodríguez Fidalgo and Molpeceres Arnáiz, 2014: 36), which is integrated into both the individual and social enjoyment process of the audience. In this sense, social networks have now made it easier for the management of audio-visual content to be multidirectional (Alonso González and García Orta, 2017), involving audiences in both creation and dissemination.

Interactive tools that allow the audience to have links to the audio-visual content in addition to relations with other members of the audience have fostered enthusiasm to watch, create, contribute and, most of all, share the content in which they feel involved (Lacalle and Castro, 2018). Therefore, interaction and engagement are tools of participation that drive the audience to expand the reach of official narratives. Contributions made by fans come not only from their individual input, but mostly from the synergy achieved in the conversations. In this context, communities of followers behave as a collective intelligence that provides value (Lévy, 2004).

Audience participation in fiction can offer multiple benefits to both the audience and transmedia producers. In fact, the creators and managers of a fiction project receive direct feedback from the audience through their comments on social networks, making it possible for them to respond to the concerns of their viewers. On the other hand, participation allows audio-visual content to endure over time, as the interactions and products contributed by the audience can be brought forward or postponed according to the broadcasting schedule of the content (Atarama-Rojas and Requena, 2018). As Evans (2019) rightly points out, the engagement that audiences develop is not limited to one medium. Instead, it is adapted to the various ways in which that content is experienced.

Thus, interaction and collaboration also act as new gateways to the narrative, which becomes timeless. "These narrative worlds can continue to be active, or in other words, they can continue to expand with new texts, even long after the canon has been concluded" (Scolari, 2016: 178). Conversations, re-readings, and content contributed by fans in their communities increase the life of the product, as these activities invite revisits to the original, official content. In this sense, it can be affirmed that in transmedia storytelling, the contribution of fans is essential in expanding and generating greater interest in products (Jenkins, Ford and Green, 2015). Finally, encouraging audience participation works as a strategy of loyalty by fostering the creation of communities of supporters who enjoy sharing experiences with other fans (Quintas-Froufe and González-Neira, 2014).

It is important that fans create content analogous to standard products, yet it is equally important that this content is shared and encourages social interaction among fans. Arrojo (2015) highlights the importance of technological innovations that facilitate active participation as one of the cornerstones of digital community development. In this research, we will explore the way in which the interaction of Marvel fans has developed in order to recognise whether a change has taken place in their behaviour as a result of the unprecedented context alteration brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. In the following section, the research methodology and specific material upon which the analysis is based are described in detail.

3. Methodology

For the identification and delimitation of fan activity, three criteria were established: (i) The study was delimited to the social networks Facebook and YouTube. (ii) Next, using keywords and hashtags (#), we searched for accounts that produced content linked to Marvel. (iii) Finally, the search was filtered by authorship, and only those accounts whose administrator (or one of their administrators) was Peruvian were selected.

Regarding the first criterion, Facebook and YouTube were selected as they are the two most widely used social networks in the entire world (We are social and Hootsuite, 2020). In Peru, the monthly traffic on Facebook was 270,700,000 visits with an average of 14 minutes per visit; while YouTube received 252,400,000 visits with an average of 34 minutes per visit (We are social and Hootsuite, 2020). Both social networks are the leaders in length of time per visit among all the rankings of the most heavily visited websites in Peru. Thus, considering the digital ecosystem of the Peruvian audience, these two social networks are the most prominent.

After delimiting the research to the social networks Facebook and YouTube, the time frame demarcation of the study was carried out. Considering the fact that there was a turning point in the development of the social conversations on 16 March 2020 (the day when the quarantine began in Peru), two periods of analysis were defined that would later allow for a comparative study to be carried out in order to examine both the trends as well as changes in the behaviour of the fandom. The first period of analysis was from 30 June 2019 to 15 March 2020, and the second period ran from 16 March 2020 to 30 November 2020. Therefore, this time frame included two periods of 259 days each for observation, in which the first period corresponds to the control groups and the second period to the study groups (as the latter is where the effects of the pandemic were experienced).

After mapping and identifying the pages that met the first conditions of being on both Facebook and YouTube, the following additional conditions were established: (i) the page had to have been active before January 2018 (to ensure continuity and consistency); and (ii) the page had to publish Marvel-related material as one of its main sources of content. The accounts that met the conditions were ranked according to the number of Facebook followers and YouTube subscribers in order to make the final selection of five accounts with the largest communities on each of the social networks. Table 1 below shows the sample of accounts selected for Facebook and YouTube.

Table 1. Facebook and YouTube accounts selected

Social network	Account name	Date created
Facebook	Fandom Comix	10 July 2015
	Marvel Dark Avengers Perú	15 May 2017
	Marvel Perú	9 November 2017
	Marvel Assemble Perú	25 February 2016
	Marvel *Fans por siempre*	20 September 2016
YouTube	Heyner Studio	31 August 2010
	Fandom Comix	26 March 2016
	Entretenews	22 May 2015
	YouGambit	8 July 2012
	Amazing Comic X	5 January 2016

Source: prepared by the authors.

The metric analysis was performed using the Fanpage Karma software (2020), which enables the creation of statistical indicators inherent to the dynamics of social networks in order to identify trends and levels of participation among the communities generated in an account over a set period of time. For the metric analysis, four observation groups were created (two groups for each social network) where the data presented in Table 2 was found.

Table 2. Observation groups and the number of publications

Social network	Account name	Publications
Facebook	Control group: pre-pandemic phase	2,595 posts
	Study group: pandemic phase	2,566 posts
YouTube	Control group: pre-pandemic phase	385 publications
	Study group: pandemic phase	502 publications

Source: prepared by the authors.

Finally, for the netnographic analysis, the 10 most relevant publications in each observation group were selected according to the following criteria:

- Metric criteria or, specifically, the engagement index: on Facebook, the number of likes, comments, and shares of posts; and on YouTube, the number of likes, comments and plays

per video. In order to make a final ranking of the publications, priority was given to the number of comments.

- Viability criterion: Each of the selected publications was manually reviewed in order to eliminate those that had been removed for copyright infringement, thus delimiting the sample to the Marvel-related publications that could be observed by the researchers.

After applying the detailed criteria, the 50 most relevant comments from each of the selected publications were analysed. Thus, 500 comments were analysed for each observation group in order to explore the topics developed in the conversations. To select the 50 most relevant comments for each publication, each social network's own algorithm was used in order to rank the comments according to the number of reactions and second comments they received. The observation of the comments was carried out by following the question related to the topics addressed by the fans in their interactions. Afterward, trends and paradigmatic cases of certain practices were recorded manually in order to evaluate these as a whole, contrasting the fandom activity in the control and study groups. The results obtained after applying the methodology are detailed below.

4. Results and analysis of empirical research

The research results have been organised according to each of the methodologies.

Firstly, the results of the metric analysis to explore the behaviour of Marvel fans are presented, followed by the findings of the qualitative approach using netnographic analysis. In each case, the results are segmented by social network.

4.1. Results of the metric analysis of the fandom's publications: Facebook

Regarding the general data of the five accounts selected for analysis, it is interesting to point out that in all cases the name of the page clearly highlights the topic area in which they are developed, as they appeal to the Marvel franchise or, in one particular case, to the broader field of comics. Table 3 presents the metric analysis of the accounts for each of the periods of analysis.

Table 3. Metric analysis of Facebook accounts during the analysis periods.

Account	Fans	Number of posts	Number of likes	Number of comments
Data from the pre-pandemic phase (30 June 2019 to 15 March 2020)				
Fandom Comix	72,358	1,363	634,374	52,420
Marvel *Fans Por Siempre*	133,734	123	25,019	2,293
Marvel Assemble Perú	12,555	613	8,462	2,231
Marvel Dark Avengers Perú	18,057	337	10,644	5,896
Marvel Perú	73,651	158	16,604	3,547
Data from the pandemic phase (16 March 2020 to 30 November 2020)				
Fandom Comix	92,996	1,068	695,049	39,018
Marvel *Fans Por Siempre*	132,619	204	31,242	2,263
Marvel Assemble Perú	12,483	798	10,287	1,870
Marvel Dark Avengers Perú	17,929	195	3,308	596
Marvel Perú	73,319	304	6,537	2,882

Source: prepared by the authors based on data obtained from Fanpage Karma software (2020)

Considering the level of content specialisation of each of the pages, it is not surprising that Fandom Comix, the page with the most general orientation (with content related to the world of comics), has the highest results in terms of number of posts, comments and likes. By contrast, Marvel *Fans Por Siempre* is the page with the highest number of fans; this may be due precisely to its specificity, which makes it possible to reach the page quickly and recognise that the content published there is of interest to a person who wants to know more about Marvel. Another important feature is that all the selected pages have continuous activity. This means that these pages contributed new content frequently during the two observation periods.

From the posts that comprised the final selection for the research, the following information was obtained: likes, reactions, comments, shares, and second comments. From this data, ratios were generated that allowed us to compare the overall results in order to observe trends in the behaviour of Marvel fans on Facebook. Table 4 provides details of the indicators that were selected for the purpose of analysing the behaviour of the fandom.

Table 4. Metric analysis of posts on Facebook.

Indicator	Control group	Study group	Variation (%)
Likes (avg.)	267.97	288.22	*7.56*
Reactions (avg.)	499.20	445.07	*-10.84*
Comments (avg.)	25.59	18.06	*-29.42*
Shares (avg.)	125.17	102.72	*-17.94*
Second comments (avg.)	12.66	4.88	*-61.46*
Comments / Interactions (avg.)	0.129	0.112	*-13.08*
Shares / Reactions (avg.)	0.112	0.102	-9.36
Second comments / Total comments (avg.)	0.182	0.133	*-26.37*

Source: prepared by the authors

From the analysis of the data, it can be inferred that there was a general downward trend in Marvel fan activity. The decrease in comments is especially relevant, as the average rate of this type of activity declined from 25.59 to 18.06, or in other words, it decreased by 29.42%. In the same vein, the average number of secondary comments (or second comments) decreased by 61.46%, which reveals the fact that horizontal interaction, one of the characteristic practices of fandom, had declined in importance in the digital ecosystem developed on Facebook.

Of equal interest is the decrease in the ratios that allow for observation of the relationship between various activities. This decrease confirms that activities that require a higher level of commitment and attachment to the content have decreased the most. It is especially relevant to see how the average ratio of secondary comments to comments decreased by a total of 26.37%, which confirms that fans interacted less with each other.

The only exception to the declining trend was the increase in Likes, with 7.56%. This datum can be explained by the fact that Likes are the least engaging interaction with a post. As such, many of the community members who would normally engage in other types of activities (reacting, commenting, sharing) switched to simply clicking on Like.

4.2 Results of the metric analysis of fandom's publications: YouTube

The YouTube channels selected for this research were Amazing Comic X, Entretenews, Fandom Comix, Heyner Studio and YouGambit. Each of these channels has developed a community that actively participates in the videos through the interaction allowed by this social network: views, likes, and comments. In addition, these accounts have shown that their activity was consistent during the research period. Regarding general information on the selected channels, it is important to note that in

none of the cases is the word Marvel used in the name, although in two of them, comic-related subject matter is highlighted.

Along these lines, it should be remembered that the YouTube search algorithm gives preference to videos rather than channel names; thus, it is usual to search for content that is of interest, and only if a certain affinity to a collection of content is detected does one begin to follow the channel. For this reason, it is clear that the selected channels stand out for having coherent content in which one of their main lines is the Marvel universe (a key word that does appear in several titles of the videos shared by each channel). Table 5 below presents a metric approach to these channels in the two periods of analysis.

Table 5. Metric analysis of the YouTube accounts during the analysis periods

Account	Fans	Number of publications	Number of views	Number of likes	Number of comments
Data from the pre-pandemic phase (30 June 2019 to 15 March 2020)					
Amazing Comic X	72,900	45	337,591	21,270	2,069
Entretenews	10,000	12	7,714	205	24
Fandom Comix	267,000	87	7,063,400	202,802	13,293
Heyner Studio	368,000	190	6,490,803	425,955	25,487
YouGambit	597,000	62	7,065,904	402,368	30,648
Data from the pandemic phase (16 March 2020 to 30 November 2020)					
Amazing Comic X	74,700	57	178,393	14,619	1,799
Entretenews	10,000	19	1,903	111	16
Fandom Comix	307,000	164	5,212,879	269,438	27,031
Heyner Studio	389,000	195	3,667,766	279,111	21,571
YouGambit	654,000	79	5,928,346	420,990	37,813

Source: prepared by the authors based on data obtained from Fanpage Karma (2020) software

The channel with the best results in the categories of fans, views, likes, and comments was YouGambit. The only category in which it did not have the best results was in publications, where Heyner Studio was at the top. The Fandom Comix channel, which has a Facebook page of the same name, also stood out. On YouTube, Fandom Comix publishes content related to comic book stories, but also film analyses and theories about the development of these fictional universes. The channel with the least activity was Entretenews, which only published 31 videos during both periods of analysis combined.

The following information was collected from the publications that comprised the final selection of the research: views, likes, dislikes, reactions (sum of likes and dislikes), and comments. From this data, ratios were generated to compare the overall results in order to observe behavioural trends of Marvel fans in the YouTube ecosystem. In Table 6, the averages of the indicators selected for analysing the behaviour of the fans are displayed.

Table 6. Metric analysis of publications on YouTube

Indicator	Control group	Study group	Variation (%)
Views (avg.)	52,913.39	29,120.44	-44.97
Likes (avg.)	2,656.99	1,913.55	-27.98
Dislikes (avg.)	48.39	29.05	-39.97

Reactions (avg.)	2,705.38	1,942.60	*-28.19*
Comments (avg.)	180.57	171.62	*-4.95*
Comments / reactions (avg.)	0.075	0.076	*1.82*
Comments / views (avg.)	0.005	0.007	*39.68*
Reactions / views (avg.)	0.068	0.078	*14.09*

Source: prepared by the authors

Through analysis of the data, it can be inferred that there was a downward trend in the activity of Marvel fans on YouTube. This is especially noticeable in the first four categories: views, likes, dislikes, and reactions. The activity of *views* had the lowest level of commitment, which fell by 44.97%, or nearly half. This suggests a significant change in the general behaviour of the community. Along the same lines, the average number of *likes* decreased by 27.98% and the average number of *dislikes* by 39.97%. These data confirm an overall decrease in fan activity on YouTube.

However, considering the fact that *comments* only decreased by 4.95%, when looking at the averages that relate the two indicators, a slight increase can be observed. In contrast to the metric results obtained on Facebook, the findings on YouTube reveal that activities requiring more commitment from the community (comments and reactions) decreased less compared to those requiring less engagement. This demonstrates that the most committed fans remained engaged.

After analysing and comparing the data from the two periods, it can be stated that there was a downward trend in Marvel fan participation on both Facebook and YouTube. This trend is clearly evident on both social networks when it comes to activities that require only slight engagement, such as likes or viewing content. However, there is a notable contrast between the two social networks when it comes to assessing averages that relate different types of activities. These averages were included in the analysis precisely in order to differentiate nuances in the trend. It was observed that on Facebook the decrease was broad and displayed similar percentages across all activities, while on YouTube the activities requiring the lowest level of commitment decreased substantially. This could be the subject of future research, as this behaviour may be due to the type of fan that uses each social network, the nature of the content published, and the way the audience consumes such content.

4.3. Results and analysis of the netnographic study: Facebook

According to the qualitative netnographic study, the posts that generated the most interaction in both the control and study group did not follow a set pattern, neither in terms of subject matter nor format. In general, diverse content has been found, such as rumours about the films, opinions about the casts of the films, theories, and hypotheses about the development of the Marvel Universe, and comments about the characters.

Due to the nature of this research, it is interesting that in the control group, two publications that made reference to the Peruvian political reality stood out -specifically, dissolution of the Congress by the president of Perú at that time, Martín Vizcarra. Both publications took advantage of the political situation in order to develop a playful proposal where Marvel's fictional universe is associated with the activity of Peruvians.

With regard to the study group, whose period of analysis correlates with the phase when the pandemic was developing, a reference to the health and political situation in Peru was found. This publication was a meme in which one of the characters from the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) was vaccinated against Covid-19 and suffered the effects of this action in relation to his development in the fictional world.

Regarding the topics of fan conversations, it can be affirmed that no differences were observed between the two study groups after analysing a thousand comments. In fact, in the period of the pandemic, the fans interacted by following the topics they had usually addressed. Only one comment was found in which a fan specifically points out that the shooting of a film might be delayed due to the pandemic. Beyond that, there were no conversations related to the health emergency unleashed by Covid-19.

It is striking that in the Facebook environment, the conversations reflected different levels of knowledge about the Marvel universe, depending on the amount and frequency of consumption of various points of contact. Despite this disparity in knowledge, there was no inhibiting effect on the part of those who

knew less; the fan community was vocal in expressing their doubts and interest in learning more. For example, some fans even brought their exploration of the Marvel phenomenon into their specialised area of finance, explaining how certain activities of the franchise (e.g. the selection of a director for a film) had a direct impact on the company's stock market value.

4.4. Results and analysis of the netnographic study: YouTube

The netnographic study carried out on YouTube showed that fan activity did not change during the study period, or in other words during the development of the pandemic, in terms of the topics of the posts and fan conversations. Unlike what was found on Facebook, there was a type of content on YouTube that had a higher frequency among the publications that generated the most interaction: the so-called *fandub*, a format in which a fan translates a piece of content, in this case a translation of comics into Spanish, but with an audio-visual dramatisation that adds value to the content. These products are presented as dramatised video narrations based on images from the comics. Various analyses of Marvel stories were also found.

With regard to the topics of fan conversations, it could be observed that the participants made comments that were closely linked to the content of each video; no comments linked to other topics or other points of contact in the Marvel universe itself were found. Specifically, the expression of emotion aroused by the videos and the fans' assessment of the observed quality of the content stood out. This type of conversation did not vary, both in the stage prior to the pandemic and in the phase of its development, as the fans basically made comments about the content that had been consumed, yet not once did they incorporate issues related to the health crisis generated by Covid-19.

5. Reflections and discussion

Beyond the empirical research, what is striking is that Marvel's digital community fandom decreased their participation, yet they did not change the type of conversations that took place nor the subject matter. In this sense, the hypothesis is rejected in its entirety. It was initially believed that in light of a mandatory quarantine of several months, the fandom would spend more time consuming and participating in the digital communities, both on Facebook and YouTube, yet the results of the metric analysis show that there was a clear decrease in participation and social interaction by the audience.

In fact, these digital communities, which were consolidated through common interests, objectives, and tastes (Orihuela, 2008), failed to take advantage of their bonds in order to address their experience of the pandemic. Therefore, it can be confirmed that the digital communities of Marvel fandom on Facebook and YouTube did not explore their potential to share nor exchange ideas and feelings about their life experiences, a characteristic highlighted by Alonso Mosquera and Bartolomé Muñoz (2014) when they assert that social networks respond to what human beings have always done, which is to share.

Thus, even though "social networks are the new virtual spaces where we relate to each other and construct our identity" (Orihuela, 2008: 59), they seem to operate with very specific purposes associated exclusively with the interests and tastes on which the communities themselves are built. As pointed out by Jenkins (2010), what is truly important in fan conversations are the social links created by the exchange, yet it has been observed in this research that these connections do not extend to highly relevant situational phenomena. These results are in line with the findings of Hills (2017), who points out that there is no unique, coherent, singular culture or community of fans. Instead, it would be more appropriate to speak of a network of networks in which each one specialises in diverse ways in one activity; in the case of Marvel fandom, this specialisation was also very clearly maintained at the thematic level.

Social networks are fundamental in today's media ecosystem, as they encourage connectivity, interaction, sharing, and the creation of identity of the people who participate in them, while at the same time they foster the development of instant communication and multimedia content (Atarama-Rojas and Vega-Foelsche, 2020). These benefits allow the audience to participate continuously and broaden the horizons of the conversations that take place (González-Neira and Quintas-Froufe, 2016). For this reason, it was expected that posts and comments related to the implications of the pandemic on the lives of community members would emerge in Marvel's digital communities, yet this did not occur.

As indicated above, in addition to allowing the exchange of audio-visual content, social networks are platforms that enable fiction enthusiasts to meet and access a network of contacts through which an online community can be formed (Merino Arribas, 2013), and with whom different kinds of issues can be addressed, not only those linked to the fiction that originally forged the relationship between the people. As Jenkins (2010) emphasises, the interaction that arises from fan activity transcends mere interest in content and generates interpersonal relationships. With this in mind, exploring the needs and

gratifications expected by the audience in today's converged environment is important (Habes, 2019). Despite the circumstances of the global health crisis, Marvel fandom did not change their outlook of what they expected from their participation in digital communities. Accordingly, this could be an area of development in which the content might be able to encourage social activity involving dialogue, conversation, and discussion in order to help consolidate small communities, not only in relation to such content, but also with regard to the needs and gratifications of the diverse contexts experienced by the audience.

In the case of the Peruvian digital communities, Marvel's transmedia narrative, which encouraged the development of a fan community and the creation of User Generated Content, does not seem to have transferred neither a broader sense of belonging nor social ties to this audience, which could be used to discuss the pandemic issue. Although it is not the ideal channel or the most appropriate environment for delving into solutions or offering advice about the health emergency, this research postulates that these digital communities could be spaces in which people might express their emotions, as highlighted by Serrano-Puche (2017), and discuss some of the key issues of the situation. In fact, digital communities in other scenarios have behaved with collective intelligence that has provided creative solutions to issues or problems in society (Rodríguez and Lévy, 2014).

In this regard, Jenkins (2008) argues that fan communities can behave with conjoined intelligence in order to address issues that pertain to the lives of the participants:

> Collective intelligence can be seen as an alternative source of media power. We are learning to use that power through our everyday interactions within the culture of convergence. At this very moment, we are employing this collective power primarily through our recreational lives, but soon we will deploy these skills for more "serious" purposes (Jenkins, 2008: 15).

Along these lines, it is incumbent upon us to continue addressing the behaviour of digital communities that emerge in connection with media and entertainment content in order to observe the variables that lead some groups to address issues that go beyond the specific interest that brought them together, while others develop their interaction only in relation to the fictional content that unites them. This will be one of the most relevant issues in understanding the operations of the current media ecosystem and audience participation through the new media and innovative channels that have been developed. As pointed out by Cortés-Gómez, Martínez-Borda, and De la Fuente Prieto (2016), participative tools have been blurring the boundaries between the real and virtual worlds, causing these worlds to coexist in the same space: the social realm. The virtual social space offers many opportunities at the level of community development for addressing relevant issues in people's daily lives.

6. Conclusions

According to this study, we can conclude that even though Marvel fans spent more time at home with access to the internet, in addition to experiencing underlying concern about the pandemic, their activity on Facebook and YouTube decreased. Moreover, they failed to take advantage of the bonds developed in the digital environment to discuss the issue of the health crisis. This finding allows us to consider that the characteristics of fandom based on in-person, face-to-face relationships, as in the case of the communities studied by Jenkins (2010) and Hills (2002), are different from those of the digital fandom. Although digital communities can function with collective intelligence for issues related to social life (Rodriguez and Lévy, 2014), it seems that the variables that drive this behaviour need to be further explored.

7. Specific contributions of each author

Contributions	Author
Research design	Francisco Arbaiza; Tomás Atarama-Rojas
Documentary search	Tomás Atarama-Rojas; Ricardo Atarama-Rojas
Data collection	Ricardo Atarama-Rojas
Critical data analysis and interpretation	Francisco Arbaiza; Tomás Atarama-Rojas; Ricardo Atarama-Rojas
Review and approval of versions	Francisco Arbaiza; Tomás Atarama-Rojas

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