

Article

# The Fine Line between Person and Persona in the Spanish Reality Television Show *La isla de las tentaciones*: Audience Engagement on Instagram

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**Abstract:** The hybridization of television genres has led to numerous non-fiction television shows that base much of their success on audience engagement through social networks. This study analyses a specific case, that of *La isla de las tentaciones* (*Temptation Island*), to identify interpretive frames in reality shows and their interrelationships with audience involvement on Instagram. Based on a corpus of 8409 comments posted on Instagram by the followers of the program's actor profiles, the article analyzes the lines between reality and fiction in this non-fiction television show about relationships and infidelity, and, in particular, how online "haters" play a performative role. The show's participants who were unfaithful are insulted and receive numerous negative value judgments. The "coding and counting" method, drawn from Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis, is used for the coding. Results show that viewers barely allude to this show as fiction, do not differentiate between the actors and their characters, and empathize strongly with the stories they view. The study shows the need for media education, both for those who make the media and those who view it. The goal is not to detract from entertainment value, but to improve critical skills and to recover the educational function of media.

**Keywords:** post-television; reality TV; media framing; Instagram; Instagrammers; media literacy; transmedia; entertainment



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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Television Genre Crossing

Media education and communications science scholarships align on at least three principles: the media construct reality, audiences negotiate meaning in media, and media events have implications for both individuals and societies. These principles have often been stated by media education and communications experts dealing with both traditional mass media [1,2], and emerging and social media [3,4].

The media create the reality they bring to us in an effort to fulfil their purpose, as stated by John Reith, first General Manager of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC): "To inform, educate, and entertain." Lord Reith, who worked for the BBC from 1922 to 1938, uttered these verbs in order of priority. Media evolution, however, has altered this order, placing entertainment first [5,6].

Almost a century after the invention of television, and already in the heart of the digital age, professionals and experts are still wondering what television is for and whether "distillation about informing, educating, and entertaining will do as well today as ever it did." Some experts consider that, in order not to succumb to the crisis of relevance that television faces, given the digital tsunami of the Internet, to television's functions of informing, entertaining, and educating, a fourth one should be added: that of surprising, because "in all areas of television, audiences hunger for surprise" [7].

In any case, and irrespective of the hierarchy of cultural functions in television, entertainment continues to eclipse television's educational and informational potentials [8].

When entertainment is the main purpose of television, fictional dramas prevail, and audiences view the flights of fancy with little regard to verisimilitude. Fiction can serve educational ends, but documentaries are far more viable as pedagogical texts as they are intended to more accurately reflect reality. Given that their prevailing function is to inform, documentaries are intended to cleave to facts as faithfully and objectively as possible. The educational objectives of these productions, in principle, preclude the manipulation or non-realistic depiction of the phenomena under study with the inclusion of "learning facilitators" such as graphics, animations, or schemes. Modifications that should, rather than calling into question the credibility of the content, reinforce its credibility, because "viewers must trust that the program is an authentic representation of the world and an accurate source of knowledge in order to learn from it" [8] (p. 249).

The average person has, at the minimum, an elementary media literacy—the result of lifelong, continuous consumption of media, which enables them to distinguish between films, documentaries, and news shows, and to ascribe them to different genres and associate them to various levels of credibility [9,10]. Whereas fictional films and TV series are commonly assumed to be orchestrated through performance and editing, the reflection of reality in news shows tends to be perceived, not as construction, but rather as a truthful representation.

However, it is often quite difficult to distinguish between media genres or the functions of television products, as genres and formats are being redefined all the time in response to the creation and distribution to new media products [11–13]. Given an ongoing crisscrossing of genres, it would be absurd to think that information/education and entertainment are discrete functions operating independently on television [8].

Recycling and cross-genre are the major trends in current television discourse [14]. Reality television shows like *La isla de las tentaciones* illustrate a transparent merger, or hybridization, of reality and fiction.

Since the 1990s, the media have presented information as spectacle to increase audience share [15,16]. The term "infotainment," coined in the 1980s, elevated so-called "soft news" from more serious, rigorous "hard" news. The need to dramatize news as a show or spectacle does not contribute to the objective presentation of facts but rather to the construction of "emotional narratives to frame reality according to ideology and prejudice" [17] (p. 20).

In the age of post-truth, media, genre, and format convergence has changed the communicational scenario, leading to a patchwork of multimedia texts and contexts where information, entertainment, and education are intertwined functions [18]. Given the declining importance of truth as a journalistic value in many media and in social media, we have the perfect breeding ground for reality television shows. Television is not a channel for messages but rather a medium constructing and creating reality as a mirror of the subject [19] in a context of hyperreality. *La isla de las tentaciones*, the television show analyzed in this paper, is a fine example of how this works.

### 1.2. Reality Television and Social Media

Against the current backdrop of cross-genre media flow, reality television is a category that encompasses a wide range of television shows about ordinary people and real-life events. Sometimes referred to as popular factual television, it straddles both documentary and drama, and purports to entertain and inform. The term "reality television" was first used in 1984 for the British crime show *Crimewatch*. The category includes a wide range of formats and characteristics: documentaries, talent-search shows, game shows, competition-based shows, talk shows, social experiments, sports shows, and sometimes even dramas and soap operas. In sum, they are various subgenres of infotainment [20,21].

Reality television is one of the defining genres of the twenty-first century—a genre that has changed not only television but every other area of the media as well [22]. Television's

claim to how it represents reality has changed: “From the reproduction of reality, we have moved to the simulation of reality and the realistic presentation of the world, to how television can create worlds while showing the process of the invention of reality as well” [23] (p. 247). Reality TV shows have been listed within the hyper-genre of docudrama, associated with neotelevision, that has entertainment as its main purpose, and whose success is based on three fundamental elements: isolation from the outside world, competition, and interactivity [24].

Reality television plays a prominent role in socio-political contexts and contemporary popular culture. Reality television is a “situated phenomenon,” a phenomenon that cannot be understood unless it is connected to audiences. Participants in reality television are a mix of ordinary people who want their 15 minutes of fame and celebrities in search of greater visibility or ways to explore other areas in show business.

Although participants are chosen on the basis of their potential to enhance a show, if the show is not powerful enough to engage the audience, the producers may stage situations or coach participants to behave in certain ways. In *La isla de las tentaciones*, “reality” is an assemblage of the videos shown to both audience and contestants, the use of music and sound effects, and the hostess’s performance.

Richard Cowles, Director of Entertainment at ITV Studios, known for his work on the British reality television program *Love Island*, admits that situations are manipulated on the show and points out that there is a big distinction between programs like *Love Island* and observational documentaries that follow people in real environments. Cowles describes his show with the phrase “accelerated reality”: *Love Island* controls the pace of stories, accelerating or slowing them down, and producers talk to participants off camera about how to engage the audience [25].

In *La isla de las tentaciones*, audience engagement is achieved through an attractive mix of the three Ts in the narrative: temptation, treason, and transgression [26]. We could add, as in *Love Island*, trap as the fourth T in the staging of the show, as participants are in fact trapped on an island paradise.

This spiced-up reality show on TV overlaps with, and depends on, the analogous reality and artifice of online participatory culture; social media unites the show and its contestants with a participatory, active audience. Where television technically fails to produce interactivity, mobile devices succeed; they are used as a second screen by reality television, whose shows are designed for multi-platform engagement. “The Web is creating a global television audience cohort, and not only has it offered new possibilities, such as time-shifting and downloading, but it has also changed global viewing routine, creating a great impact on social and individual habits of television watching worldwide” [27] (p. 70).

Social engagement has been a defining characteristic of reality TV since its inception. These programs are among the five most popular genres in the context of social engagement: reality shows, drama, game/talk shows, sitcoms, and animated comedies [28].

The need for audience involvement and identification with the characters has always existed in reality shows and has been studied in various ways, such as interviews, focus groups, and viewing sessions [29], and it is now that, with the data surplus of social media, both the participation of viewers and the possibilities for research are increasing.

The possibility of participation through social networks immediately led the most optimistic to identify it with the democratization of cyberspace and to consider it as a first step towards citizen participation in real life, something that has been questioned in recent research [30].

The great proliferation of social networks, which some have come to consider an “epidemic or disease that has infected the Internet” [31] (p. 89), is not without risks, and it has occurred so rapidly that behavior has outpaced regulatory frameworks as users “allow their rights to be infringed upon for the approval to access sites like Facebook and Instagram”.

Participation in networks tends to be dominated by emotion over reason, and many users prefer not to dwell on the consequences of their Internet activity. The average user

of the networks knows very little about how the algorithms governing them work. In the case of Instagram, which we use here, its owners share few details about the platform's algorithmic architecture or how it works. "Algorithms function behind the scenes with many users unaware of their presence, and they play an important role in structuring our online experiences." Instagram algorithms "reinforce offline hierarchies of social privilege with "winners" being those with greater access to social, cultural, political, and economic resources. If the population of influencers does, indeed, represent a privileged few, their influence on social media culture—and culture more generally as it bleeds into "real" life—may perpetuate existing hegemonic ideologies and values" [32] (p. 909).

In both social networks and television, the audience becomes part of a "big data" set, and participation is encouraged for commercial reasons, not for the empowerment of citizens or even for the quality of the audience experience. The aim is to increase audience share in order to attract advertisers and sell merchandise [33]. Contestants become influencers who endorse products and brands after the show. In the latest edition of *Love Island* in the UK (2018), the fashion retailer *Missguided* went one step further in product placement strategy and paid the producers to place their clothes in the contestants' wardrobes. According to company sources, for the eight weeks when the show was on the air, sales rose by 40 percent as compared to the eight weeks before the show. This guerilla marketing strategy breaks through to an audience that is increasingly jaded by sponsored content on social media or advertisements on television [34].

Ultimately, the partnership between reality television and social media, and the consumption of them both, have increased with the growth in popularity of both, fueled by their complementary nature when it comes to audience engagement and the ability to influence audience behavior in virtual environments [35,36].

*La isla de las tentaciones* was chosen for analysis because of a particularly active audience on social media—our analysis focuses on audience comments on Instagram—and because this program blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction. We analyzed to what extent viewers see the behavior of contestants as natural and spontaneous or as scripted, following the producers' instructions, irrespective of contestants' ideas, opinions, or desires. Finally, we studied whether viewers see contestants as persons or as personae, and whether this distinction affects their comments and criticisms in social media.

Instagram was chosen because of its centrality as an important social networking platform for teenagers. Visual storytelling has become a favored way of communication for modern youths [37]. Instagram is one part of a transmedia universe created by *La isla de las tentaciones*, in which viewers are encouraged to take part. Social media audience activity "reflects a kind of viewer behavior characterized by universal and dynamic access to content online and by active, dynamic, and universal participation that can even influence the narrative of the content itself, feeding off a vertical exchange with the broadcaster/producer/distributor and a horizontal exchange with other followers with the same interests" [38] (p. 1). Thus, the interactivity generated by the contestants in their own social networks has led viewers to become de facto content producers.

We hypothesized that the way in which reality is presented in *La isla de las tentaciones* encourages interpretation frames that:

- Contribute to the further blurring of the boundaries between reality and fiction;
- Encourage haters and the amplification of extreme views, thus amplifying hate speech.

## 2. Objectives

By studying social media messages, our research aimed to analyze audience perceptions of contestants in the Spanish reality television show *La isla de las tentaciones*, highlighting viewers' emotional engagement, grounded in the apparent difficulty to distinguish between reality and fiction, and between participants (persons) and characters (personae). We have set aside the analysis of the emotional responses from a psychological point of view, which would be beyond the scope of our research, and rather attempt to unpack it as a socio-cultural phenomenon.

To achieve this objective, we identified the comments that allude to the show as a scripted and edited construct, thus revealing a certain interpretation frame. We also analyzed the reactions of contestants to gauge how the scenes selected for broadcasting lead the audience to vent their anger and intolerance.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Selection of Case Study

*La isla de las tentaciones* is the Spanish version of the Dutch original *Blind Vertrouwen* (“Blind Faith”) and was broadcast in the United States as *Temptation Island*. The format of the show is relatively simple: five couples test their fidelity by separating and living with other potential partners who will do everything possible to seduce them. “The program format revolves around a relationship test, where each partner receives the attention of the ‘tempters’ and ‘temptresses’ for two weeks” [39] (p. 135).

*La isla de las tentaciones* has the distinction in Spain as the non-sports show with the largest audience share in the 14-year history of the free-to-air television channel Cuatro. The first season aired in Spain between 9 January and 13 February 2020; a second series premiered on 23 September of the same year, and a third one has just begun in January 2021. For our analysis, we focused on the Season 1 finale, aired on 13 February 2020 and watched by 3,618,000 viewers (30 percent audience share)—the most-watched episode of the season. Remarkably, the audience share for the 13–24 age range was 51.3 percent [40]. The show was much talked about across the country, to the extent that “¡Estefanía!aaaa!”—one of the contestants crying the name of his partner while running on the beach—was turned into memes in both virtual and physical environments among youths. The many parodies of the scene demonstrate one of the keys to the success of this kind of show: content going viral through audience response. Something similar happened with the Italian version of the show, when the contestant called *Ciro* cried “*Vieni Federica*” in a matching scene.

Social media offer the ideal environment for content to go viral, as transmedia navigators complete their viewing experience here by researching the lives of contestants on their accounts. Thus, the production strategy is to expand the franchise into as many platforms as possible in order to reach new audiences and offer more content to engaged viewers. Often, the private lives of contestants are deliberately disclosed in social media as a way to supplement the show’s material. This helps build audience engagement and shows advertisers that the program has a loyal, active, emotionally attached audience [41].

The material analyzed in this paper is comprised of the Instagram accounts of the show’s contestants, where we searched for audience responses to the events in the finale. On the whole, nine accounts were analyzed, as one of the contestants had to disable his account after being harassed.

Although the show’s memes went viral in social media and instant messaging platforms, criss-crossing the public sphere, we chose to analyze the personal accounts of the contestants, as it is here that the relationship between reality and fiction—the object of our study—becomes more evident.

Table 1 shows the accounts analyzed, last accessed on 1 June 2020.

All contestants’ Instagram accounts were verified, an accountability mechanism which assures the authentic presence of a notable public figure or celebrity. As shown by the dates of their first posts, they all had Instagram accounts before the show, posting photos of day-to-day activities with their partners, family, and friends. Because some of them were celebrities before appearing on the show, they already had hundreds of thousands of followers.

**Table 1.** Instagram accounts of the contestants.

| Contestant                  | Followers | Average Likes per Post | Average Comments per Post | Date of First Post |
|-----------------------------|-----------|------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Adelina<br>@adelina.seres   | 353,301   | 54,475                 | 359                       | 09/14/2018         |
| José<br>@josechof           | 333,783   | 19,653                 | 233                       | 01/24/2017         |
| Fiama<br>@fiarf             | 404,057   | 40,503                 | 1650                      | 01/11/2016         |
| Álex<br>@alexbueno22        | 532,064   | 46,408                 | 473                       | 07/17/2019         |
| Andrea<br>@anddreagb        | 250,912   | 23,698                 | 982                       | 02/18/2016         |
| Ismael<br>@ismaelnicolass   | 391,666   | 27,835                 | 415                       | 11/22/2017         |
| Susana<br>@susana_bicho90   | 932,669   | 70,036                 | 5423                      | 04/11/2014         |
| Gonzalo<br>@gonzalomontota9 | 532,772   | 46,905                 | 453                       | 11/07/2015         |
| Fani<br>@fanicarbaj         | 392,209   | 32,234                 | 670                       | 08/02/2017         |

Source: Our own elaboration.

### 3.2. Sampling and Fieldwork

The posts analyzed were those related to the show's finale, between 11 and 14 February 2020 (Table 2). In all cases, the posts showed photographs of the account's owner and some textual reference to the moment of the emission. These were fixed posts because they allow users to write comments visible to all. The photos and texts refer to this episode, in some cases inviting users to share their views as well.

**Table 2.** Posts analysed.

| Contestant | Date of Post     | Number of Likes | Number of Comments |
|------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Adelina    | 12 February 2020 | 214,918         | 8070               |
| José       | 12 February 2020 | 186,138         | 6850               |
| Fiama      | 13 February 2020 | 51,039          | 1222               |
| Álex       | 12 February 2020 | 58,188          | 409                |
| Andrea     | 11 February 2020 | 21,321          | 2217               |
| Ismael     | 11 February 2020 | 76,178          | 3850               |
| Susana     | 13 February 2020 | 119,710         | 1425               |
| Gonzalo    | 12 February 2020 | 198,986         | 7624               |
| Fani       | 14 February 2020 | 45,986          | 1966               |

Source: Our own elaboration.

The unit of analysis was 1000 followers' comments per post, except for one post, which had only 409 comments. To retrieve the comments, the Export Comments tool (<https://exportcomments.com/>) was used, which allows automatic export of all available comments.

The starting point was descriptive in nature: to measure the presence of certain categories in followers' comments, combining content analysis and discourse analysis. The coding-and-counting method was used, as employed by computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) [42,43] and replicated in numerous studies of virtual environments [44–46]. "The basic methodological orientation of CMDA is language-focused content analysis. This maybe purely qualitative—observations of discourse phenomena in a sample of text may be made, illustrated, and discussed—or quantitative—phenomena may be coded and counted, and summaries of their relative frequencies produced" [42] (p. 343).

The computer program Atlas.ti was used for data analysis, focusing on data coding, value counts for each variable, and then in-depth qualitative analysis of the posts under study.

Thus, the study combines quantitative methods, focusing on the count of the values set for each variable, and qualitative methods aimed at a deeper understanding of the posts for a critical and constructive perspective.

A total of 8409 posts were analyzed and inductively classified into three big categories. In an effort to minimize subjective bias, the classification was performed three times, and the more controversial posts were carefully examined. In addition, the categories were summarized in a factsheet and reviewed against content posted in connection with previous episodes of the show.

The three big categories of posts were the following:

- A Comments that made implicit or explicit reference to the show as a construct, mentioning the show's characteristics, success, editing, performance, and so on.
- B Comments that hinged on some confusion between the show's personae and the contestants as persons. This type of comments could be:
  - Positive, as in "You're the best!"
  - Negative, as in "What nerve! You suck!"
- C Comments that bore no relevance to the study.

#### 4. Results

The posts selected for this study make an intentional sample that cannot be extrapolated to make generalizations for the population as a whole. The study, however, helps understand audience reception of reality television shows in general.

The focus of analysis is on the socio-discursive relations that emerge in viewers' creation and use of messages from the perspective of media education.

Table 3 shows the results of the systematic application of the coding method to the 8409 posts collected:

Table 3. Statistical analysis of posts.

| Contestant | Mentions of the Show | Positive     |              | Negative     |              |                     | Others      |
|------------|----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|-------------|
|            |                      | Partner      | Contestant   | Partner      | Contestant   | Targeted at Partner |             |
| Adelina    | 3<br>0.3%            | 898<br>89.8% | 62<br>6.2%   | 4<br>0.4%    | 0            | 0                   | 33<br>3.3%  |
| José       | 1<br>0.1%            | 751<br>75.1% | 164<br>16.4% | 3<br>0.3%    | 2<br>0.2%    | 0                   | 79<br>7.9%  |
| Fiana      | 2<br>0.2%            | 15<br>1.5%   | 253<br>25.3% | 8<br>0.8%    | 578<br>57.8% | 60<br>6.0%          | 84<br>8.4%  |
| Álex       | 0                    | 0            | 244<br>59.7% | 8<br>2.0%    | 45<br>11.0%  | 37<br>9.0%          | 75<br>18.3% |
| Andrea     | 7<br>0.7%            | 2<br>0.2%    | 121<br>12.1% | 0<br>0.0%    | 823<br>82.3% | 1<br>0.1%           | 46<br>4.6%  |
| Ismael     | 2<br>0.2%            | 1<br>0.1%    | 138<br>13.8% | 1<br>0.1%    | 8<br>0.8%    | 816<br>81.6%        | 34<br>3.4%  |
| Susana     | 3<br>0.3%            | 45<br>4.5%   | 790<br>79.0% | 18<br>1.8%   | 63<br>6.3%   | 28<br>2.8%          | 53<br>5.3%  |
| Gonzalo    | 16<br>1.6%           | 229<br>22.9% | 584<br>58.4% | 10<br>1.0%   | 94<br>9.4%   | 35<br>3.5%          | 32<br>3.2%  |
| Fani       | 15<br>1.5%           | 388<br>38.8% | 44<br>4.4%   | 189<br>18.9% | 334<br>33.4% | 5<br>0.5%           | 25<br>2.5%  |
| Total      | 49                   | 2329         | 2400         | 241          | 1947         | 982                 | 461         |

Source: Our own elaboration.

The data shows that there are virtually no mentions of the show as a television product or construct. The comments that make reference to fiction are very few in number, usually showing surprise or disappointment: “We had it coming. It was fun, for we went to bed without thinking too much, but we knew your affair was a fake, it was too obvious”; “What a performance you’ve all put up to become famous!”; “Oh, c’mon, this can’t be true! This is a soap opera and those are performers!”

Most followers react as though what they see in the posts is based in reality and reflects the lives of the contestants. For instance, a female contestant cheated on her partner and then posted on Instagram that they were still together. This elicited negative replies: “You’ve toyed with Spain”; “It’s your life, of course, but if you disclose everything about your personal life, then people are entitled to talk about you”; “The whole thing was a fake to make more money!” Some users did not know what to believe: “So, they’ve put on a show? Does anybody know for sure?”

All of the actors’ Instagram accounts analyzed in this study were created before the show aired. They include everyday posts about typical activities and past experiences with partners. But these same accounts were also used to posts photos or videos of the show and to interact with followers. There are many comments by viewers pointing out that, because the contestants have chosen self-disclosure, their followers can have their say about what they see: “We’re passing judgement on what we’re shown. That’s why it’s being shown”; “We judge what we see rather than what we can’t see. And your behavior leaves much to be desired, as a person and as a woman. If you don’t like it, why appear on a TV show? It’s as simple as that.” Comments that expose the show as fiction are virtually non-existent. We only identified one: “You’re a nice person, but on TV they only show the videos that make you look mean, so they have no right to judge you.”

Contestant behavior is perceived as natural and spontaneous, overlooking the fact that the setting is artificial, created for the reality television show. Positive comments focus mainly on contestants being honest—“You’re true to life. All couples have their ups and downs.”—while negative comments decry deception—“You’re phony. Your story is scripted”; “You’re not being honest. You don’t seem to be upset after the breakup.” Not being honest seems to be the type of behavior that brings about the strongest criticism from the audience.

While fidelity, reduced to the sexual dimension, is the number one quality lauded on social media, honesty and publicly confessing infidelity is the second most valued aspect of *Temptation Island* [39].

Our results square with those of previous research that “When viewers see the participants as real, they are more likely to identify with them” [47] (p. 164). Viewers often sympathize with the contestants and seem to know everything about them: “You’ve been so honest! We feel all the sympathy for you”; “You’re an example for me! I wish you all the best!” They identify with the stories shown on television, some of them writing to the contestants to share their own stories: “You should cherish what you have. I’ve been through something similar with my boyfriend and I wouldn’t change him for the world.”

Love is the main subject of the show, and this is reflected in the posts. The only couple that had not broken up during the show got lots of positive comments and a high number of likes: “We’ve cried with you. Thank you so much for embodying love!”; “I’m so jealous! I’d like to live a love story like yours . . . .” On the other hand, the contestants who had been unfaithful got negative comments and fewer likes on their posts.

A gender-based analysis shows harsher judgements towards female contestants. Those who remained faithful to their partners were rewarded with positive remarks, while the two female participants who had been unfaithful were showered with disparaging remarks, often attached to catty comments on their looks (82.3 and 52.3 percent of negative comments). In general, the female contestants who cheated on their partners were the targets of the most abuse and criticism, even on their partners’ accounts.

The reputation index of the contestants—the number of likes on a post divided by the total number of followers of the account—is higher for those who remained faithful and



appeared to be more honest. The index is lower for Fiama and Álex, who did not cheat but were accused of staging a fake affair, and for Andrea and Fani, who cheated on their partners (Figure 1).

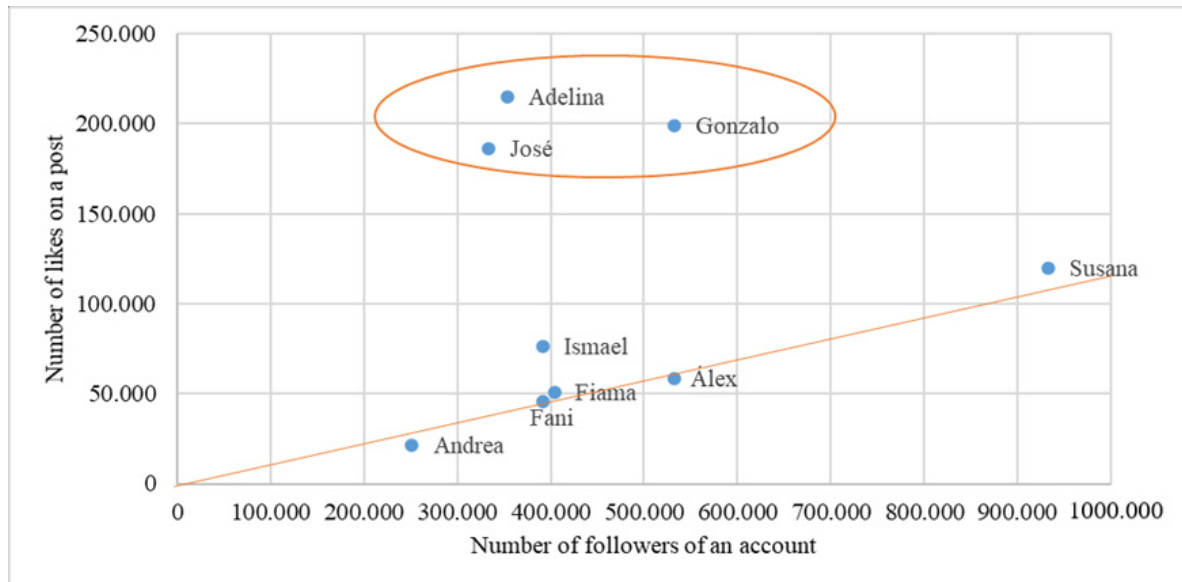


Figure 1. Reputation index of contestants.

Moreover, the stories on the show elicit hate or discriminatory comments on the contestants' profiles such as "People can be monsters. You can share your opinion about what they've done, whether you think it's right or wrong, but some of the abuse borders on the psychopathic." Abusive words hurled at contestants include "phony", "ugly", "disgusting", "slutty", and "fool." Viewers celebrate when unfaithful contestants are ridiculed by their partners, for, in the words of one viewer, "You've just shown who you are: a very mean person."

## 5. Discussion/Conclusions

Our study confirms the varied characteristics of post-television as a medium that constructs reality: blurring of genre boundaries, creation of its own kind of reality, audience integration into the communication device, medium narcissism, and deployment of "vulgar language" or common speech.

In *La isla de las tentaciones*, the audience plays an important role in the construction of reality, not by constraining the content offered by the producers on the show, but by creating content through participation in social media. Our study shows that the participation of prosumers, which was the object of previous research, contributes to the construction of reality by means of framing and priming [48].

How the media construct reality on the basis of facts in order to inform [49], entertain [50], or both [51] continues to be a relevant subject to communication researchers. Regardless of the approach, the aim remains to engage the audience and to develop television products that appeal to advertisers. In the age of immersive media, the participatory "truths" revealed by social media adherents to *La isla de las tentaciones* bring us full circle back to the uses and gratifications theory [52] to explain, but not account for, the creation of media products meant to satisfy the audience's basic needs: relaxation, entertainment, escapism, and relating to others.

While audiences appear drawn to publicly displaying judgment on the ethical standards in the relationship choices of others, condemning some and exalting others, there is also a repressed desire to just revel in the tawdriness of it all. "Although reality television

viewing is generally about status, specific shows may appeal to different psychological needs. Temptation Island, for example, portrays infidelity, which may appeal to people who value expedience (low honor) more than morality" [53] (p. 373). The outcomes of the discussion are fodder for media education, contesting the portrayals of sexist stereotypes, abuse, and even hate speech.

Reality TV, in general, is a site where the social meaning of gender and sexuality today is revealed [54]. In fact, "to say that Reality TV is rife with gender stereotypes is a bit like shooting fish in a barrel" [55] (p. 16). We have been able to verify in this study that it is unfaithful women, and not so much men, who receive the greatest number of insults and disqualifying comments. A sexual double standard is assumed, reproducing the sexual stereotype that men are driven by sex, are independent sexually, and are unable to say no to sex. On the other hand, women are judged on their sexual attractiveness as well as their ability to have a successful relationship [56].

It would be absurd to think that the most popular television formats among youths could or should be banned on account of their negative influence [57]. The guilty pleasure of trash television is not to be combatted with censorship, but rather with more education, teaching audiences how to analyze and critique—and to enjoy—these kinds of products.

There are apparent risks associated with playing fast and loose with verisimilitude in television genres. While in news programming the clash between regarding audiences as profit centers versus the right of citizens to access truthful information as public service generates more clearly demarcated ethical boundaries, in reality television products like *La isla de las tentaciones* it is easier to overlook the negative side effects of the wide gap between fiction and reality.

The lack of critical commentary on Instagram about *La isla de las tentaciones* as a construct, and the seeming inability by participants to distinguish between reality and fiction on television, demonstrates the need for critical media education to develop people's analytical skills [58,59]. Further research is also needed to understand how ethical standards in media production could be enhanced through media education and how we could develop more media programming that is informative, educational, and entertaining.

Our study shows that the framing of reality in *La isla de las tentaciones* contributes to the blurring of the boundaries between reality and fiction, to the detriment of truth as a value in media ethics. Further, social media interaction by engaged audiences opens the terrain for the overrunning of pre-established norms and codes, resulting at worst in fanbullying, a "harmful relationship in social media between a celebrity and their fans in the television industry" [60] (p. 211). The inability to distinguish between reality and fiction and the unreasonable involvement of the audience in social media enable the passage from cyber-stalking to real life harassment. This may have been a contributing factor in the suicide earlier this year of Caroline Flack, the host of UK's *Love Island*.

The posts analyzed in this study demonstrate that Instagram followers give value to honesty and are quick to condemn phoniness in contestants. These fan comments would suggest that truth matters and that authenticity is a highly valued personal characteristic, but the setting is in a grey zone where the person and the persona of the actor overlap. It appears that verisimilitude in reality television shows is not really considered important, but casting judgment on others is. Paraphrasing William Randolph Hearst, perhaps audiences do not want to let reality spoil a good catharsis.

Further research is needed to understand how media education for communication professionals can help recover truth from the realm of lost values in journalism [61] and how media education for ordinary people can contribute to restore the functions of information and education in the media, without compromising entertainment.

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