

Narrative practices in web-based serial fictions. A look at production in four South American countries

*Prácticas narrativas en las
ficciones seriadas para la web.
Una mirada a la producción de
cuatro países en Sudamérica*

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This paper explores the commonalities and differences of the narrative of web-based series in relation to television practices. By analyzing the most notable productions in the four most prolific countries in South America, this paper reviews the characteristics of an increasingly dynamic format in a region that is on its way to completing the transition to digital terrestrial television.

KEYWORDS: Web series, narrative structure, audiovisual production, script, fiction.

Se exploran las convergencias y divergencias de la narrativa de las series web en relación con las prácticas televisivas. A partir del análisis de las producciones más destacadas de los cuatro países más prolíficos de Sudamérica, el texto reseña las características de un formato cada vez más dinámico en una región que va camino a completar la transición hacia la televisión digital terrestre.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Series web, estructura narrativa, producción audiovisual, guion, ficción.

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INTRODUCTION

The digital paradigm unleashed a whirlwind of content and new forms of consumption that have forced the entertainment industry to reset itself. Films, for example, insist on articulating hyperbole and immersive effects so as to not lose step. Streaming and binge-watching, among other practices, have forced television to resort to the Internet to preserve its social and media stock. Books have to learn to live with e-books and screens like the Kindle, while music ended up moving to smartphones and platforms like iVoox. So, it is worth asking how much the ancient art of storytelling has changed in digital forums.

If bits transformed audiovisual production, it was due to the cost. Not only are their processes cheaper, but as they continue to develop, their technical and imaginative possibilities increase. We are facing technology with rapid processes that are easy to maneuver (to store, record, copy, distribute, etc.) and tremendously accessible, which has not only led to a substantial increase in independent productions (La Ferla, 2009) but also provided filmmakers with greater leeway in the face of large capital, which forced them to adhere to rigid prescriptions and instructions. As Tubau (2011) describes:

The digital world offers opportunities not only to work outside traditional producers but also to write with different structures from those required for film or television series (p. 109).

More and more creators and consumers migrate to the web, enticed by production costs and the advantages of interation offered by its 2.0 protocol, which is very different from the unidirectional model of traditional media. This, in addition to entailing “the added value of interacting with all the informative and promotional elements that revolve around the consumption of fictional materials” (Hernández, 2011, p. 95), has made it clear that viewers behave more and more like users.

The old parameters for stories, consumer spaces, programming time slots, schedules, premieres, commercial breaks, and all of its conventional rigidity and schematism are reinvented in light of a

culture of convergence that, as Jenkins (2008) notes, reveals a new relationship between technology, industry and the audience that alters both producers' logic and consumers' dynamics to process content. In this sense, web series are emerging as the flagship product of digital fiction, not only because their short duration and ease of viewing offer an effective response to users' interests and demands (García Pujadas, 2011), but also because they are seen as a dynamic arena of measures where new narrative forms are tested.

In the following pages, we will focus on a group of web series originating from the South American environment to see how their stories are similar to or different from uses in film and television, their immediate models. Exploring this dynamic using the four countries with the highest production in the region is a specific approach, because although South America is in full transition toward the analog switch-off –without technological, financial, or institutional frameworks– it continues to enthusiastically produce web fiction, perhaps exploring its own limits and possibilities.

BACKGROUND AND GENERAL CONCEPTS

Web series are one of the many audiovisual formats that inhabit the Internet. They are among the most popular, along with video blogs (vlogs), where a host discusses different topics from a personal perspective, video sketches, in which lightness is used to recreate scenes from daily life, or video tutorials, which use a how-to instructional format for different tasks or skills.

Following the definition proposed by Lloret Romero and Canet Centellas (2008), web series are fictional works produced and designed for the Internet that present specific rhetorical resources to develop the narrative in order to capture and keep the viewer's attention episode after episode. In a way, they can be termed as similar to well-known fiction series on television.

In addition to the label "web series", there are other very popular terms that usually refer to the same concept: "webisodes" and "webshows". However, we find them to be too broad and less precise to describe the format that we want to review. In the first one, there

are also special episodes derived from television programs, many lacking continuity or being unrelated to each other, which appear as an exploration or expansion of the basic narrative universe, as was the case with the *Lost* and *Dexter* webisodes. And in the second, in addition to fiction, there are also other shows that rely on a host's performance (a magician doing tricks with pedestrians) or a particular dynamic (such as destroying objects with a hydraulic press). Christian (2010) explains: "People call web series (singular and plural) different things... Variations of several words have been used: online scripted content, original web programs, webisode series, etc." (paragraph 5).

Another factor that renders vague conceptual distinctions has to do with the consumer platform. The most emblematic case is *House of Cards* (2013-2015), the Netflix flagship series, which was produced to be viewed and downloaded by its subscribers over the Internet. So far so good. The controversy arises when the opening credits appear: "Created for television by Beau Willimon". Is it a television series or a web series? Does this detail really matter? Yes, a lot, to the degree that it deals with different media and a different audience that, in addition to individuals, demand a different service. So, we must reaffirm that regardless of the device used, web series are productions designed for digital networks.

It is probable that this concept began to take shape with the Internet itself. *QuantumLink Serial*, developed by the American writer Tracy Reed, is considered the first project of this type. Although it lacks audio and video, it is a fictional, episodic, and online work that was available to subscribers of America Online through chat rooms, e-mail, and traditional narrative. The project was developed between 1988 and 1989, and its success served as the foundation for *The Post* (1995-1997), a series by Scott Zakarin that recounted the adventures of a group of friends who lived in a house in southern California. To add to *QuantumLink Serial's* resources, Zakarin used online journals (what we would later know as blogs), images, and short videos related to the narration and some correspondence exchanges.

However, only at the end of the 1990's is it possible to establish predecessors that account not only for the audience's acceptance but also a continuous production process that begins to shape its characteristics.

Behind the Music that Sucks (1998-2002) on VH1, a series of sketches about celebrities from the world of music that parodied the show *Behind the Music* (1997-2017), is an obligatory reference because, even in 1998, several key characteristics of the format can be found, from the duration and frequency (three minutes, once a week) to the logistics of storage and dissemination, which in pre-YouTube days, was done using the website Heavy.com.

Since 2000, series such as *Happy Tree Friends* (2000), *Potter Puppet Pals* (2003), *Red vs Blue* (2003), and *Dead End Days* (2003) go on to establish a format distinguished by parody, humor, youth culture and thematic and expressive freedom. *Lonely-girl15* (2006), for example, deals with love, family problems, and the dark arts within the concept of what today we would call a “mockumentary” (fiction portrayed as reality); *The Guild* (2007) revolves around role-playing video games; *Le Visiteur du Futur* (2009) brings the adventures of time travel from television to the Internet; *Princesa Rota* (2012) harshly recreates the world of child prostitution. The variety is bold and surprising.

Some authors attribute the rise of this format to providing novel content that predominant channels do not develop (Jost, 2013), but considering the success, originality, risk, and the thematic and expressive diversity of many TV series produced by HBO, AMC, BBC, or Netflix –among other entertainers in what is known as the golden age of television fiction (Mittel, 2013)– we prefer to point out that its acceptance and development are due to the youthful approach taken in contemporary conflicts. As Alvarez Monzonillo (2011) describes, young and independent filmmakers are largely the ones who pilot these projects, taking advantage of the different free platforms that exist, such as YouTube, Vimeo, Daily Motion or Megavideo, as well as different companies and professionals that take an interest in this format specifically to reach a particularly young audience.

On the South American Shore

The shortage of articles, metrics, and specific approaches means that we face an almost unexplored subject in the region. However, referencing the indirect data that can be tracked in various annual directories from the Ibero-American Observatory of Television

Fiction (OBITEL, for its Spanish acronym), by mid-2017, the number of web-based fictions with direct or indirect participation from television companies had grown around 25% compared to 2013.³ If we add to this figure the many independent productions that do not appear in any record, it is likely that, in general terms, the number has doubled since then.

In Europe and the United States, web series have stopped being a movement to become part of the industry –there are competitions, festivals, media coverage, even a star system that shares figures with television while launching its own talent–. In South America, however, besides exceptions that have attracted interest outside the Internet, these fictions are influenced by a tone associated with entrepreneurship and amateur entertainment. Although there are technological barriers linked to connectivity, for example, it is also true that open television and cable are still the first option for daily consumption of fiction (Vasallo de Lopes & Orozco, 2017, p. 59).

Failure to complete the protocols leading to the analog switch-off, scheduled to take place between 2019 and 2023, would explain the lack of interest by advertisers and business agents to establish a monetization model that could encourage production and competition of web-based fiction (Bernardo, 2015). However, there are also no tests of this nature on the various digital platforms of television channels, which do not seem interested in the opportunity to offer content designed for mobile devices or second screens.

On the other hand, it should be noted that production centers in the region have always been sporadic due to the political and economic events in each country. Peru was at the head of soap opera production during the 1960's. In the 1980's, Venezuela was the most serious competitor to Mexico's industry (Vivas, 2001/2008, p. 219). Starting in the 1990's, Chile consolidated its own production model, which did

³ Until the 2017 annual directory, OBITEL did not keep a record of web-based fictions. However, in their comments and assessments, such as individual data or references on the fly, there are some figures that we have tracked since 2013 to arrive at this calculation. See the OBITEL annual directories (Vasallo de Lopes & Orozco, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017).

not reach expressive audience levels. Later, Argentina would become a pivotal producer following the arrival of important international individuals, encouraged by the success of Colombian soap operas (Vasallo de Lopes & Orozco, 2016, p. 71). As can be seen, with the exception of Brazil, which we have not included in our analysis because it is a unique case, we are looking at countries with weak audiovisual industries.

These difficult conditions are exacerbated in the jurisdiction of “independent” production –if the term is appropriate, since there are no real *majors* or empires in broadcasting– which has encouraged migration to the digital environment. Therefore, we could say that the entire dynamic referring to fictions and content for the Internet in this region is more linked to the fragility of the system, rather than the dragging of any digital standard. This would also be the reason for the short lifespan of many productions, since in several cases they are accepted as practical substitutes for what was once the short film: the introductory tool to make new talent known and to open a path in the market.

Among the most striking experiences that have contributed to the format’s popularity, we highlight *EnchufeTV*, an Ecuadorian series of sketches that broke into Latin America television through Comedy Central; *Según Roxi* and *La loca de Mierda*, two Argentinian classics that managed to achieve moving from vlogs to narratives for the small screen; Venezuela’s *Maleficio*, engaged in the cinematic treatment of its story; and *La Isla Presidencial*, an animated political satire similar to *South Park*. We must also highlight *La Vida es Como*, the Colombian web series that pioneered involving theater; *Aj Zombie*, the Peruvian production that took a comedic and costumbrismo approach to the living dead; and *Gringolandia*, the Chilean series that became Netflix’s Latin American investment for this format.

METHODOLOGY

To explore the extent to which the narrative of web-based series is transformed in relation to its television and film models, we chose a qualitative methodology to analyze its different components and then compare them with the traditional literature referring to script writing.

In this sense, the theoretical framework is interdisciplinary: partly film theory, to account for the nature of the audiovisual story and appeal to narratology, dramatic writing manuals, and structural analysis to address the role of its narrative.

Three analysis matrices were developed to review a) the structure of the story, b) the dramatic development of the characters, and c) genre and format markers (frequency, duration, etc.). Regarding the first point, the foundations of classic Aristotelian design constitute the basis of our approach, since, as happened with literature first, the audiovisual story of mass media has been built on its approaches to achieve a clear and effective story form. As Lawson (1976/2003) points out:

[It involves] foundations that allow us to construct a story that guides the audience to focus on a protagonist who fights in pursuit of a desire or objective, facing antagonistic forces through continuous time, within a coherent and causally related fictitious reality, until reaching an end of absolute and irreversible change (p. 46).

In light of these ideas, the contributions of the semiologist Claudé Bremond (1974) and the pragmatist Robert McKee (2002/2008) were aimed at identifying an initial state that is transformed from a spiral of actions and situations that improve or degrade the protagonists, until the cycle closes in the form of a new state, which is the result of everything lived.

Other contributions derived from emblematic works such as Olrik's (1992), which allow for separating specific mechanics, like the beginning and end, or the repetition of events, and of Vogler (1992), whose standardization of the mythical structure proposed by Joseph Campbell –the so-called *hero's journey*– during the last 40 years, has been the industry's benchmark for creating arcs in which a character “is overcome by circumstances and must fight in an unfavorable context” (p. 34).

With regard to genres and formats, we start with the distinction made by Buonanno (2002) between a series and a serial, and then, following Genette's theory (1977/1988), we review the operation of

the invariants or their possible transformations. Although series deal with “the same character who lives different stories in each installment” and serials “present characters living a story through several episodes” (Buonanno, 2002, p. 54), both become institutionalized starting from components that are not only repeated but are transformed in each historical moment.

About the Body of Study

We selected the 10 most prominent web series in each of the four countries with the highest production in the region: Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Peru. Their titles not only appear first in search engines, but they generate cross-references in forums and comments from users as well. Neither the number of views nor “likes” were determining factors when choosing them, as they are not indicators that are linked to notions of quality or acceptance, as Fondevila Gascón explains (2017, p. 24). On the other hand, the impact reflected in the number of followers, recognition from critics, as well as discussions about them in news portals or specialized podcasts were essential.

In all cases, series were required to have at least one complete season, with the objective of observing the arrangement and repercussion of the dramatic elements. None of the selected web series derive from or expand on pre-existing narratives. And for those that migrated to television or film, we only focus on their web stage. Along with the thematic variety, efforts were made to gather projects managed by producers with a career in the audiovisual industry as well as amateurs. Along the same lines, to cover the widest possible spectrum, no distinction was made between “independent” series and those that had some kind of sponsorship, partnership, or financial support (Table 1).

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Format Markers

From the basic data that appear in the data sheet, we make an initial observation: the logic of serialization corresponds to television practices, insofar as they organize the narrative material from a progression of episodes grouped in seasons, that is, in narrative blocks arranged

according to a theme or argument (Salo, 2009, p. 32). However, unlike television, where the open-signal chains run fixed seasons of 22 to 24 episodes, and cable channels between 13 and 15, web seasons are highly variable, and can consist of only 4 episodes or up to 24. The time between seasons is also irregular. While television plans annual batches, short breaks occur on the web that make it possible to find two or even three seasons per year. For example, *Depto 301* and *Entre Panas* issued two seasons in 2014 and 2015, respectively, while *Los Cinéfilos* launched its second, third and fourth seasons in 2014.

The frequency of releasing episodes is weekly, following the consumption logic of television serial viewing.

On the other hand, there is a relationship between the duration of episodes and their genre. Web series with shorter episodes (between 3 and 6 minutes) are organized through means of more classic comedy, while those that last up to 15 minutes do so by virtue of a treatment that moves away from comedy or combines other genres.

Two cases do not fit into this pattern. *Adulto Contemporáneo* released 80 episodes between July, 2013 and October, 2016 with no seasons indicated. The entity responsible for its production, Dirty Kitchen, is a producer of digital content that has expanded to other countries in the region, and this series is its flagship promotion. On the other hand, *Daemonium* produced five episodes between December, 2011 and May, 2016, with irregular durations: 13, 23, 40, 22, and 52 minutes. It is a science fiction project whose continuation has been controlled by its means of financing and crowdfunding, encouraged in its narrative by a spirit more similar to film than television. In fact, its creators define it as an episodic science fiction movie.

Taking the analyzed productions as reference, we can point out that the more complex stories are in their execution, the greater is the break that occurs between seasons. At the same time, the support of an established producer or firm can guarantee a continuous flow of narrative, as also happens with *Los Cinéfilos*, which has more than 60 episodes and is developed by the advertising and digital content producer Señor Z.

Except for the Chilean show *Víctimas*, which is broadcast through Instagram, all use YouTube as a dissemination platform.

TABLE 1
ANALYZED WEB SERIES. DATA SHEET

Country	Name	Episodes	Seasons	Producers
Argentina	<i>Tiempo Libre</i>	19	1	Marciano Films, Gazz Productions and UN3TV
	<i>Daemonium</i>	5	1	Hydracorp
	<i>Psicosomática</i>	10	1	Sambayón Films, Macaco Films and UN3TV
	<i>Un Año sin Nosotros</i>	23	1	Calm Films and UN3TV
	<i>Segun Roxi</i>	27	1	La maldita
	<i>La Niña Elefante</i>	8	1	Hexagon/Buenos Aires Biennial Young Art
	<i>Policompañeros Motorizados</i>	21	1	Tangram Films
	<i>Estilo Esther</i>	14	2	Macaco Films, UBA and Buenos Aires Biennial Young Art
	<i>Un Año sin Televisión</i>	8	1	Tangram Films
	<i>Famoso</i>	18	2	Grandes Exitos and Isat Channel
Colombia	<i>Dejá Vu</i>	12	1	Short Now
	<i>Susana y Elvira</i>	25	3	Mimosa Productions
	<i>Entre Panas</i>	38	5	64A Films
	<i>La Ranga</i>	37	1	Casarosa TV
	<i>Del Otro Lado</i>	12	1	Indiana Films
	<i>En Alquiler</i>	6	1	Mocca Films
	<i>Adulto Contemporáneo</i>	80	1	Dirty Kitchen
	<i>Diario de una Consentida</i>	37	2	Dirty Kitchen

Country	Name	Episodes	Seasons	Producers
	<i>La vida es Como</i>	6	1	Teatro Libre
	<i>Son de Tijeras</i>	22	2	Tsuga V Productions
Peru	<i>Los Cinéfilos</i>	64	6	Señor Z
	<i>Hummus of Barranco</i>	4	1	La Pepa
	<i>Dos es Mucho</i>	5	1	La Faena Films
	<i>Making of: Historias de Rodeaje</i>	8	1	Pontifical Catholic University of Peru
	<i>El After</i>	5	1	Dixit Media
	<i>Internet Drama</i>	6	1	La Pepa
	<i>Aj Zombies</i>	13	1	La Pepa
	<i>El 202</i>	10	1	Wallaz Productions
	<i>Es lo que Hay</i>	15	1	Camila Ampuero
	<i>Los Covacs</i>	21	2	Iumentum & Sonambulos
Chile	<i>Gringolandia</i>	16	3	Contento
	<i>Confirmar Amistad</i>	25	2	Endemol and Mayo Agency Advertising
	<i>Depto 301</i>	38	3	Mayo Agency Advertising
	<i>Hermanos</i>	4	1	F Productions & Inviabile Films
	<i>Víctimas</i>	10	1	Felipe Morales and Violeta Marín
	<i>Apps</i>	10	1	Buho Films
	<i>Los Jetas</i>	24	2	HDR and Invercine Productions
	<i>Personas Cetáceas</i>	22	4	Marmota Studio
	<i>Psicóticas Inseguras</i>	6	1	Pajareza Films
	<i>Sobremesa</i>	8	1	Flow Media & Entertainment

Source: Created by the authors.

Genre Markers

“Comedy”, “situational comedy”, and “romantic comedy” are the labels most used by the series analyzed to define themselves when their stories are developed, primarily in a humorous way. However, we know that in the era of hybridization, genres are not expressed in a pure state and reveal, to a greater or lesser extent, some type of combination (Gordillo, 2009). Therefore, we also find the label “dramedy” to indicate stories that combine humor with other, less relaxed treatments of certain topics. For example: *Un Año sin Nosotros* tells the story of a couple that decides to separate to see if their relationship has a future, while *Psicóticas Inseguras* narrates the search for affirmation and two young university students’ need to fit in.

Almost all of these comedies are linked to the classic television direction of sitcoms, where humor sparks from social and interpersonal relationships built by opposition (success/failure, skeptic/romantic), or taking it to the extreme, some circumstance where the character goes from bad to worse (Seger, 2000, p. 47). Thus, it makes sense to note that the broad theme that can be traced, which is the lowest common denominator, is that of coexistence: four friends accidentally destroy the television set and seek to overcome boredom; Beatriz must learn to live with Guille, an Argentine who tries to make a living in Peru; a group of friends meets every Thursday to drink Poker beer and talk about life. These web sitcoms are usually called *shortcoms*.

Another set of series consists of proposals related to science fiction, fantasy, and crime. Among the most representative are *Déja Vu*, which narrates the consequences of knowing the future and wanting to avoid it; *Daemonium*, a cyberpunk fiction with supernatural elements; and *Apps*, in which a grandfather receives a tablet with magical powers as a gift. Finally, we find a handful of series anchored in social drama or touches of surrealism, such as the Chilean *Víctimas* or the Colombian *La Vida es Como*, respectively.

Genette (1977/1988, p. 51) explained that genres express the set of invariable features that define a text, but also the tension that occurs with respect to change and that translates into processes such as hybridization. In this sense, the aforementioned productions do not show tensions of change, rather they reproduce the elements of a genre

system coming from television, deeply rooted in the imaginations of creators and receivers, even in their hybrid manifestations.

Characters, Development, and Treatment

With a few exceptions, the protagonists are young people between 25 and 35 years old. There is a balance between male and female characters, and the same is expressed in stories of very masculine topics and others where feminine sensitivity is the main driving force of the events.

The comedies star flat characters, without layers or big changes, similar to cartoons as a result of the extreme modulation of their attributes. In this type of humor, the characters rarely achieve their goals, and if they succeed, it is to maintain their initial state. Thus, the stories are able to follow one another like comic loops that do not allow for the development of transformative dramatic arcs.

The dramatic arcs form the vital pulse of the characters because they account for the development of their point of view. Through what happens to them and how they prevail or succumb, their idea of the world changes showing the complexities of the human soul (McKee, 2008, p. 33). Consequently, we can point out that, as occurs in many short television comedies, web comedies that were analyzed do not stop to narrate their characters' transformation, but they show them in similar situations, always unchanging, everlasting (García Martínez, 2012). As happens in *El 202*, whose protagonists go through obstacles and dilemmas of coexistence that are shown in different ways in the episodes, but they do not change, they are always the same.

Characters with a little more depth appear in stories related to adventure, couple's dramas, or the crisis of aging, but the result is not very different. In many cases, the desire to achieve effective episode endings seems to win out over character development, since elements such as surprise, tension, or cliffhangers are arranged for viewers to see at the end of episodes, without ensuring these same effects for the protagonists, which could result in mobilizing reactions.

In general terms, the most significant observation regarding the characters is how the web series manage to account for their inner

worlds, often in the form of fantasies, outbursts, or meta-fictional digressions, resorting to intertextual parody, that is, to the discursive insertion of dialogues, scenery, or sequences of other texts in the course of the narrative. In this regard, Stam (1992) notes:

The demarcations between text and context, history and interpretation, writing and reading become blurry or reverted. The limit of the two dimensions –the book’s page, the canvas, or the television screen– is transferred to bring the external realities closer to the work itself (p. 174).

Although this practice is not new and has been revitalized in the field of television, it is the way in which they manifest themselves, appealing to resources and practices typical of the Internet, such as adding sounds or images taken from movies or television programs, newspaper clippings, etc., unaware of copyrights. Thus, it is common to find signs and tributes to *Pulp Fiction*, *Trainspotting*, *Requiem for a Dream*, *Wayne’s World*, *Star Wars*, *Notting Hill*, or *Back to the Future*. There is also room for talk shows and even videogames like *Mortal Kombat*.

On the other hand, it is necessary to note the social influence and the almost costumbrist treatment of the characters, especially in comedies. Although coexistence appears as a fundamental theme, turmoil and criticism also take place, which is why they portray youthful habits and vices as well as social flaws. These include social climbing and pitfalls in the work environment, businesses destined for failure because of their managers’ idiosyncrasies, buffoon politicians, sexual adventures and fantasies related to soccer, videogames, or drugs –all with a carefree and youthful tone, reinforced by an audiovisual language of moving cameras, warm lighting, and little contrast–.

Seriality, Plots and Structure

All the analyzed web series are put into one of the two known serialization models: the autoconclusive narrative (commonly called a series, with closed and unrelated episodes) and the continuous or serial narrative (both structured from a typological duality around time: cyclical or linear, repetitive or developmental) (Buonanno, 2007, pp. 53-54).

The vast majority of stories are constructed according to the autoconclusive pattern, that is, from a fixed outline governed by the repetition of a situation or context with recurring protagonists “around whom secondary characters change, precisely in order to give the impression that the story is different from the one that precedes it” (Eco, 1983, p. 24). On the contrary, there are few productions employing the linear and cumulative serial model, structured by a variable number of interdependent episodes that occupy a precise place in the narrative and that constitute a narrative whole.

While television sitcoms link characters’ actions to a story plot, shortcoms prefer the vaudeville, variety show way, building up vignettes or sketches that are variations of the same theme to form episodes. *Entre Panas*, for example, despite its freshness and good rhythm, presents different situations throughout its episodes, different conflicts that are impossible to connect to a clear purpose, as the issues fluctuate and make the series seem to wander at times.

The outline for this type of comedy could be described in the following way: a) prologue that presents the situation; b) development of sketch 1, sketch 2 (sometimes 3); and c) a dispensable epilogue that closes the story.

Although it seems that we are dealing with a three act show, the mechanics are more closely related to Olrik’s law of repetition: “There is intensifying repetition and simple repetition, but the important point is that without repetition, the Sage cannot attain its fullest form” (cited in Gray, 1971, p. 289). Especially when it comes to building up gags verbally, Olrik’s observations about oral literature are especially appropriate. Then, we have *Los Cinéfilos*, which is illustrative: each episode creates a discussion around films in which its characters do not stop until the subject reaches an absurd paroxysm that overshadows any rhetoric.

From the above, it follows that the comic web series from our analysis develop actions where the most important thing is to describe the confusion, uncertainty, or ingenuousness in which their characters unfold, outlining the peculiarities and setbacks that they face. As if it were a matter of examining characters in particular circumstances, rather than accompanying them on this path.

On the other hand, the stories that set objectives to be achieved not only reproduce the ideals of the Aristotelian paradigm but their actions coincide with standardization guidelines such as that of Vogler (1992) and script manuals. That is, not only does the struggle occur in an unfavorable progression for the protagonist, but the behavior to observe, or the event to be foreseen at the beginning of the story, ends up taking place in the story's hero/character (Bremond, 1974, p. 87). Depending on the number of episodes that make up the narrative, the different stages leading to achieving the objective can be limited or delayed, but in all cases, in the end, its destiny and transformation will have been decided.

In addition to the plot that usually extends throughout the season, some web series mix in others that can begin, develop, and end in the same episode or conclude after two or three. For example, *En Alquiler* weaves multiple plots that are usually serialized over several episodes. It is very versatile to move from one to the other, as when, following Liz's job interview, a small parallel story with Matías is broken down.

We did not find a correspondence showing a greater number of episodes or a greater number of plots. However, it must be said that both in comedy and in drama, the addition of new narrative syntagms occurs depending on the story's needs and not to cover screen time or to test the character's charisma. In *Un Año sin Nosotros*, Ricardo and Clara experience different situations to overcome their distance, but there are also other situations linked to the overall theme, such as when Martín tries to avoid a girl obsessed with him, or when Clara is vulnerable to her yoga teacher.

The rotation and combination of plots reproduces what Innocenti and Pescatore (2011) describe as the "serialization of the series", that is, the ability to intervene in a central story (*anthology plot*) to insert "an element of temporal progression and partial narrative opening that extends over several episodes (*running plot*)" (p. 34).

Finally, all productions seem very aware of the brevity and effectiveness that the web format requires. In that sense, structurally, they tend to minimize the first act, to connect immediately with the matter of the conflict, or opt for beginnings in media res, that is, "through a dialog that accounts for a specific, not general, aspect of the

story” (Eco, 1997, p. 138), to then prorate the information required as the story progresses.

CONCLUSIONS

Beyond the short duration of their episodes, the experience of viewing web-based series follows the well-known television premises, rather than film or any other narrative form. Except *Daemonium*, which, as we mentioned, is developed with a film commitment and a momentum that does not pay attention to narrative strategies for presentation, the analyzed productions are presented as limited versions, with slight variations, of serial television productions.

Another aspect that brings them closer to the small screen is their concern for achieving conclusive episode endings. While this is always healthy, the producers’ efforts betray strategies and necessities of a television schedule in which commercials are obligatory.

The influence of comedy formats is notable. More than a coincidence in the thematic preferences and treatment by producers and viewing, the television tradition of narrating in one or two locations with autoconclusive structures seems to fit perfectly with the limited conditions in which these web comedies are developed.

Although in general, the stories of web series show no divergence in terms of the Aristotelian model and the narrative praxis of film and television, the lightness of comedy brings it closer to more flexible forms such as sketches and comedic monologues.

Based on the diversity and number of approaches, it is possible to point out that, although web series in South America are in the phase of consolidation and learning, their horizon of sophistication and innovation can be long-term, to the extent that in addition to appealing stories, they get involved with other types and dynamics of the digital environment, such as the concept of hyperlinks or possibilities of transmedia stories.

Finally, it must be said that the greatest challenge faced by creators is the need to rethink traditional rhetoric and syntax because audiovisual experiences are no longer equivalent or comparable across screens. Narrating for television, for example, involves management and distinct

entertainment from narrating for mobile phones (Guardiola, 2012), not only because of screen sizes of devices but also because of the relationship established with them, due to the type of social interaction they facilitate, and due to the value and use assigned to them.

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