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# How to Engage with Younger Users on Instagram: A Comparative Analysis of HBO and Netflix in the Spanish and US Markets

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## ABSTRACT

Social media have become useful tools for audiovisual promotion, especially to reach niche audiences. Twitter promotional strategies have been widely studied, yet other growing platforms such as Instagram have been less analyzed. This paper examines the Instagram promotional strategies of two pay-per-view platforms (HBO and Netflix) in two markets (the USA and Spain). A total of 731 messages, posted between May and November 2017, were analyzed to identify their formal features, objectives, and their content's emotional and cognitive elements posted on HBO and Netflix's Spanish and US accounts. The results showed acute differences between how HBO and Netflix use their Instagram accounts in the two markets (Spain and the USA). The Spanish accounts mostly provided information, while the US accounts both provided information and promoted program content. Posts from US accounts more frequently included links to social media, particularly to celebrity accounts. Spanish accounts relied more on diegetic images, whereas US accounts emphasized non-diegetic and off-set images. Netflix used humor more than HBO did, and a stronger focus on celebrities. Humor and positive tone were found to be linked to higher engagement.

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## Introduction

The audiovisual market views social media as relevant tools to increase their box office numbers (Ding, 2017) and television audiences (Gong, 2017). Hence, TV networks increasingly use social media to promote their output and to foster engagement with their audiences (Wang, 2016).

While Twitter continues to be the most popular social media platform for television marketing strategies (Segado-Boj, Grandío, & Fernández-Gómez, 2015), Instagram is becoming a relevant tool to reach new niches, such as younger audiences (Ferguson, 2016). In 2017, Instagram was the fastest growing social networking site (SNS) in Spain, with a penetration rate rising from 34% to 45% (IAB Spain and Elogia, 2017).

Instagram has a strongly visual-oriented focus; photographs and short videos are the most common content (Lee, 2015). Unlike other SNS consumers, Instagram users are mainly driven by social interaction (Blight, 2017; Phua, 2017), which explains the higher level of engagement and brand community commitment found among its users (Casaló, 2017). High levels of interaction are important, because they can encourage a word-of-mouth effect and fan community building which are strong contributors to the success of social media campaigns in the audiovisual sector (Nanda, 2018)

Despite its potential, Instagram is utilized as a campaign tool by only traditional TV media (Ferguson, 2016). Younger consumers, on the other hand, are drawn to new models of TV broadcasting such as HBO and Netflix, which have only recently entered the Spanish market (Kantar Media, 2017).

Both HBO and Netflix underscore the quality and exclusivity of their program output (Heredia Ruiz, 2017; McCabe, 2008), but each employs its unique broadcasting strategy. Netflix simultaneously releases full seasons of most of their original programming, whereas HBO follows the linear structure of the traditional TV model (Lotz, 2016).

This research focuses on Instagram strategies of Netflix and HBO, and it compares their strategies in a consolidated market such as the USA with those in a new market such as Spain. The study analyzes which message characteristics achieve better engagement on Instagram.

This study follows Goffman's (1959) theory of presentation of self to analyze how TV networks employ Instagram to project their brand image (Greer, 2017). Special attention is paid to the kind of content posted by the two networks' Instagram profiles as basic resources to manage online self-presentation (Johnson & Ranzini, 2018).

This analysis is also relevant from the practitioner's point of view, given the importance of SNSs as a channel for media distribution and promotion, especially for targeting younger audiences (Wu, 2018). The results of the analysis might help to better understand what kind of content fosters user engagement on Instagram.

Prior research (Greer, 2017) pointed that almost 30% of the content posted on Instagram by local US TV networks pursues a promotional function, a higher proportion than the 20% of promotional messages posted by the same networks on Pinterest. This same study concluded that followers engage more with news and community building posts and less with "behind-the-scenes" content. It also pointed that the Instagram approach of those stations depends on the market size where they operate. Given that this previous work has been limited to the use of Instagram by local TV stations, the present study will help practitioners and scholars to understand how bigger Pay On Demand TV platforms are using Instagram.

The presence of Netflix on Twitter has been characterized by promotional content. On this platform, humor and suspense have been found to increase user engagement (Fernández-Gómez, 2018b).

In line with this finding, the research questions are:

**RQ1.** What is the general strategy applied in the Spanish and US cultural settings of HBO and Netflix on Instagram?

- RQ1.1. Are their posts promotional, or do they have other aims?
- RQ1.2. Do their posts promote the company in general or their specific program content in particular?
- RQ1.3. Do the posts promote HBO's and Netflix's homegrown production or purchased program content?
- RQ1.4. Are TV series the main content promoted on this social network?

**RQ2.** What are the characteristics of the messages posted on Instagram in the US and Spanish cultural settings?

- RQ2.1 What kind of elements are used in posts?
- RQ2.2. Are memes used to engage the audience?
- RQ2.3 What kind of videos are posted? Do they differ from promotional ones?
- RQ2.4 What are the characteristics of the images?

Instagram's technological and social features (Phua, 2017) are conducive to certain post characteristics. Therefore, special attention is given to social features, such as personalization or emotional expression, as explained in the Methods section. In this sense, following Chen (2015), we expect the social aspect of Instagram to be linked to a high occurrence of personalization features (see Table 1).

Special attention is paid to macro memes images – objects “appropriated, re-coded, and slotted back into the internet infrastructures they came from” (Nooney, 2014, p. 249) and strongly linked to digital communities. We hypothesized this kind of content to be fairly common in the analyzed platforms. We also took “faces” into account as they have proven to be a popular feature on Instagram, at least in posts related to fashion marketing (Manikonda, Venkatesan, Kambhampati, & Li, 2015).

**RQ3.** How do the posts foster engagement? What kind of emotional and cognitive elements do they feature?

Previous literature identifies several features related to content virality on social media (see Al-Rawi, 2017). Emotional and cognitive elements appear to relate to user engagement in the scenario and context under study.

**Table 1.** Coding variables and categories.

Research Question	Category	Variables	Notes
RQ1	Post objectives	1. Informing; 2. Greeting; 3. Polling; 4. Promoting merchandising; 5.Promoting the platform; 6. Promoting specific content; 7. Encouraging participation: 8.Game, 9. Contest	Adapted from Fernández-Gómez (2018a)
	Post subject	1.Audiovisual Platform (HBO or Netflix); 2. Specific	Messages were classified according to the product origin (produced by the TV company itself or acquired from third parties).
	Message orientation	1. Instrumental: 1.1. Ask for opinion; 1.2. Ask for suggestion; 1.3 Ask for information; 1.4.Gives opinion, 1.5.Gives suggestion; 1.6. Gives information, 2. Positive socioemotional: 2.1.Shows solidarity; 2.2. Shows tension release; 2.3.Agree; 3. Negative socioemotional: 3.1. Disagree, 3.2. Shows tension; 3.3 Shows antagonism.	Adapted from Lin (2011)
RQ2	Formal features	1. Links to other social media; 2. Links to the platform's website; 3. Links to other websites; 4. Hashtags; 5. Emoticons.	Adapted from Fernández-Gómez & Díaz-Campo (2014); Auverset (2016).
	Personalization	1. Use of first, second or third person.; 2. Use of imperative verbs.	Adapted from: Lin (2011)
	Images	1. Diegetic (such as frames from the content); 2. Realistic (simulate reality); 3. Derivative art; 4. Extradiegetic (actors offset); 4.1. The actor; 4.2. The actor in character; 5. Memes; 6. Face/Forefront	
	Videos	1. Teasers; 2. Trailers; Promotions; 3. Extended content; 4. Making-of. 5.1. Diegetic narrator; 5.2. Non-diegetic narrator.	Adapted from Segado-Boj (2013), Percheron (1980).
RQ3.	Virality	1. Positive tone; 2. Negative tone; 3. Unexpectedness/odd/surprising; 4. Elite people; 5. Entertainment; 6. Social significance/magnitude; 6. Humor; 7. Human interest; 8. Sexuality; 9. Animals; 10. Children; 11. Usefulness; 12. Conflict/violence. 13. Sadness; 14. Anger; 15. Anxiety; 16. Fear.	Adapted from Al-Rawi (2017). As a post could include two or more of these features, we did not consider them as exclusive variables.
RQ4.	Engagement	(1) Number of likes; 2. Number of comments	

**RQ4.** What resources do the posts that achieve the highest engagement use, and what objectives do they achieve?

Last, we identify the characteristics and goals of the posts that achieved the highest engagement.

Engagement was measured by the number of “likes” for each post, which ranged from 0 to 555,252. “Shares” were not taken into account, as Instagram

does not focus on redistributing content (Larsson, 2017). Instead, “likes” were used as the main measure to understand the attitudes of the Instagram audience (Sumner, Ruge-Jones, & Alcorn, 2018). Furthermore, “likes” are a significant performance index; they can be taken as a sign of TV viewer’s behaviors, as happens with moviegoers’ (Ding, 2017). Comments for each post, which ranged from 0 to 35,100, were also considered.

## Methods

The messages posted by HBO and Netflix on their Spanish and US Instagram accounts over a 6-month period (May 16, 2017 to November 16, 2017,  $n = 731$ ) were manually collected. This sample was coded according to the variables and categories displayed in Table 1.

Two of the study’s authors coded the sample. Both are Spanish native speakers and fluent in English. This allowed them to address cultural and language differences among the samples. Inter-coder agreement was calculated through a Cohen’s Kappa test applied to each category to a random 10% sample ( $n = 80$ ) of messages. Ratios ranged between “very good” (82.45 in “information” as the objective of the message) and “fair” (26.54 in the “entertainment” category). The only values where no consensus was reached were: trailer (−78), teaser (1.67), usefulness (−4.15), animals (1), social magnitude (1.5), negative tone (1), and positive tone (6.29). Given the absence of consensus, these categories were left out of the results.

Results were subjected to Mann–Whitney U-tests to find significant differences (equal to or below 0.05) between the resources used in Instagram posts and the achieved engagement measured by comment and “likes.” This test only examined features which appeared in at least 10% of the messages. Results refer to the sum of all messages, regardless of which account posted them (see Tables 15 and 16).

## Results

**RQ1. What is the general strategy applied** in the Spanish and US cultural settings of HBO and Netflix on Instagram?

HBO and Netflix employ distinctive strategies on Instagram. The first level of analysis showed that HBO America and HBO Spain pursued a more active strategy (see Table 2).

RQ1.1 and RQ1.2 results revealed similarities. First, HBO America, Netflix America, and Netflix Spain accounts used a significant number of their posts (more than a third) to promote their program content. On the other hand, HBO Spain focused more on information (see Table 3).

**Table 2.** Number of Instagram posts published by the analyzed accounts.

HBO America	159
HBO Spain	410
Netflix America	68
Netflix Spain	94
Total	731

**Table 3.** Instagram posts by objective.

		Provide information	Survey	Merchandising	Contest	Promote brand	Promote content	Push engagement	Opine	Suggest
HBO America	n	58	0	0	0	41	116	3	13	0
	%	36.48%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	25.79%	72.96%	2.52%	8.18%	0.00%
HBO Spain	n	340	2	11	7	24	413	56	64	145
	%	82.93%	0.19%	2.68%	1.71%	5.85%	98.29%	13.66%	15.61%	35.37%
Netflix America	n	23	0	0	0	7	70	3	3	0
	%	33.82%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10.29%	89.71%	4.41%	4.41%	0.00%
Netflix Spain	n	39	1	0	0	16	77	0	0	1
	%	41.49%	1.06%	0.00%	0.00%	17.02%	81.91%	0.00%	0.00%	1.06%
Total	n	460	3	11	7	88	676	62	80	146
	%	62.93%	0.41%	1.50%	0.96%	12.03%	92.48%	8.48%	10.94%	19.97%
Average		115	0,75	2,75	1,75	22	169	15,5	20	36,5
Standard Deviation		150,68	0,96	5,50	3,50	14,45	163,92	27,04	29,86	72,33

Note: A post may have more than one objective.

**Table 4.** Program contents promoted.

		Self-produced content	Purchased
HBO America	n	103	19
	%	84.4%	15.6%
HBO Spain	n	240	108
	%	69%	31%
Netflix America	n	57	4
	%	93.4%	6.6%
Netflix Spain	n	77	1
	%	98.7%	1.3%
Total	n	477	132
	%	78.3%	11.7%
Average	n	119,25	33
Standard Deviation		82,67	56,3

Other strategies (See Table 4) appeared as mostly marginally significant. Thus, the main drive was promotion, followed by information, while encouragement of audience participation seemed less of a concern.

In the case of Netflix, especially Netflix Spain, promotion of homegrown program content (RQ.1.3) made up most of the content, with an average presence of 86.5%.

As shown in Table 5, the most promoted program content is TV series (RQ1.4). For both countries, each platform focused most of its efforts on their “flagship” series (*Game of Thrones* for HBO, and *Stranger Things* for

**Table 5.** Most promoted program content.

HBO America		HBO Spain		Netflix America		Netflix Spain	
<i>Game of Thrones</i>	16	<i>Game of Thrones</i>	102	<i>Stranger Things</i>	22	<i>Stranger Things</i>	16
<i>Larry David</i>	12	<i>The Deuce</i>	24	<i>Sense8</i>	4	<i>Narcos</i>	8
<i>Insecure</i>	12	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	18	<i>Okja</i>	4	<i>Cable Girls</i>	6
<i>The Deuce</i>	11	<i>The Exorcist</i>	11	<i>Bright</i>	3	<i>The Defenders</i>	5
<i>Big Little Lies</i>	5	<i>Lucifer</i>	11	<i>Arrested Development</i>	2	<i>13 Reasons Why</i>	5

Netflix). In contrast, aside from *The Deuce*, no other coincidences were observed between the US accounts and their Spanish counterparts. This may point to a specialized promotion of the catalog available in each country and the audience tastes, revealing the Spanish accounts' high degree of adaptability and independence.

## RQ2. What are the characteristics of the messages posted on Instagram in the US and Spanish cultural settings?

Strategies varied among platforms and countries in terms of the elements used in posts (RQ2.1) (see Table 6). Netflix adopted a more coherent strategy between its two Instagram accounts in its use of images and videos: the US account utilized more videos, whereas the Spanish account stressed images – although the difference was minor. However, differences in the use of videos or images were more noticeable between the two HBO platforms, with more than a 20-point difference in score between the accounts. A reason for this result might be HBO Spain's use of videos in English, which require more work and effort for subtitling. Finally, other formal features were virtually absent.

Regarding RQ2.3, a common strategy, albeit with minor differences, was noted in all four accounts: each platform focuses its efforts on promotional content (see Table 7).

**Table 6.** Elements used in the posts.

		Link to Social Media	Link to platform's web	Link to other web	Hashtag	Emoticons	Memes	Image	Video
HBO America	n	78	0	1	151	9	0	81	79
	%	49.06%	0.00%	0.63%	94.97%	5.66%	0.00%	50.94%	49.69%
HBO Spain	n	3	2	2	395	20	6	309	99
	%	0.73%	0.49%	0.49%	97.07%	4.88%	1.46%	73.17%	24.15%
Netflix America	n	32	0	1	16	13	3	52	15
	%	47.06%	0.00%	1.47%	23.53%	19.12%	4.41%	76.47%	22.06%
Netflix Spain	n	18	0	0	74	7	0	60	33
	%	19.15%	0.00%	0.00%	78.72%	7.45%	0.00%	63.83%	35.11%
Total	n	131	2	4	636	49	9	502	226
	%	17,92%	0,27%	0,55%	87%	6,70%	1,23%	68,67%	30,92%
Average		32,75	0,5	1	159	12,25	2,25	125,5	56,5
Standard Deviation		52,14	1,10	1,52	257,61	17,17	3,91	199,22	83,02



**Table 7.** Characteristics used in the posts.

		Sneak peek	Trailer	Promo	Extra content	Making off	Other	Diegetic narrator	Non-Diegetic narrator
HBO America	<b>n</b>	7	7	42	1	14	9	9	15
	<b>%</b>	8.86%	8.86%	53.16%	1.27%	17.72%	11.39%	7.59%	18.99%
HBO Spain	<b>n</b>	6	29	56	2	2	7	47	8
	<b>%</b>	6.06%	29.29%	56.57%	2.02%	2.02%	7.07%	47.47%	8.08%
Netflix America	<b>n</b>	1	0	11	0	0	3	0	1
	<b>%</b>	6.67%	0.00%	73.33%	0.00%	0.00%	20.00%	0.00%	6.67%
Netflix Spain	<b>n</b>	4	6	21	1	0	2	3	14
	<b>%</b>	12.12%	18.18%	63.64%	3.03%	0.00%	6.06%	9.09%	42.42%
Total	<b>n</b>	18	42	130	4	16	21	59	38
	<b>%</b>	7.96%	18.58%	57.52%	1.77%	7.08%	9.29%	24.78%	16.81%
Average		4,5	10,5	32,5	1	4	5,25	14,75	9,5
Standard Deviation		2,65	12,71	20,31	0,82	6,73	3,30	21,82	6,45

Netflix America tended to announce its program content with little advance notice as they used few or no sneak peeks or trailers, while Netflix Spain aimed for a more balanced strategy. These differences between Netflix America and Netflix Spain were also observed in the case of HBO. Moreover, compared to all four accounts, HBO America made much more use of “making-of” videos – perhaps because it has easier access to behind-the-scenes footage from its original productions.

A diversity of strategies was adopted for images (RQ2.4), with Netflix showing a slightly more consistent approach (see Table 8).

On the other hand, HBO Spain and America appears to have adopted different strategies in their use of both videos and images. HBO Spain relied more on diegetic images, which supports the idea that HBO America has better access to non-diegetic material than its Spanish counterpart. Nevertheless, both platforms used a similar technical approach; most of the images tended to feature the characters, especially those on HBO Spain, while less than a quarter featured the actors.

**Table 8.** Characteristics of the images.

		Diegetic	Realistic	Derivative art	Non-Diegetic	Other	Actor	Character	Face/ Forefront
HBO America	<b>n</b>	34	15	9	19	2	21	40	1
	<b>%</b>	41.98%	18.52%	11.11%	23.46%	2.47%	25.93%	49.38%	1.23%
HBO Spain	<b>n</b>	235	8	24	7	10	8	247	198
	<b>%</b>	78.33%	2.67%	8.00%	2.33%	3.33%	2.67%	82.33%	66.00%
Netflix America	<b>n</b>	12	4	13	11	15	13	26	2
	<b>%</b>	23.08%	7.69%	25.00%	21.15%	28.85%	25.00%	50.00%	3.85%
Netflix Spain	<b>n</b>	26	2	19	9	2	11	39	0
	<b>%</b>	43.33%	3.33%	31.67%	15.00%	3.33%	18.33%	65.00%	0.00%
Total	<b>n</b>	307	29	65	46	29	53	352	201
	<b>%</b>	62.27%	5.88%	13.18%	9.33%	5.88%	10.75%	71.40%	40.77%
Average		76,75	7,25	16,25	11,5	7,25	13,25	88	50,25
Standard Deviation		105,89	5,74	6,60	5,26	6,40	5,56	106,19	98,50

### RQ3. How do the posts foster engagement? What kind of emotional and cognitive elements do they feature?

Few differences were observed among HBO America, Netflix America, and Netflix Spain in terms of the tone of the messages. All three leaned toward a positive tone with ample humor, especially the Netflix accounts (see Table 9). Positive tone and humor generated significantly more engagement (see Tables 15 and 16).

The discordant note was observed yet again in HBO Spain, which used a comparatively less positive tone (8.5% of the posts), employing more entertainment and action content. HBO America used entertainment content in its messages only once, although to a lesser extent. This could be a consequence of the content of the series in its catalog, especially its flagship, *Game of Thrones*, which is a drama series abounding in action, revelations, and plot twists. Messages with entertainment content demonstrated the worst results in terms of engagement (see Tables 15 and 16).

The Netflix series *Stranger Things* also used entertainment and action content, although the main characters are kids and the series strongly emphasizes humor and '80s nostalgia. Indeed, children appeared much more frequently in Netflix posts, in both Netflix Spain and America. Also, Netflix Spain drew more on action than Netflix America (14.9%) which was on a par with HBO America. This was most evident in Netflix's promotion of *Stranger Things* and its "horror" plots, leading to a dichotomy in the promotional approach of this series, which combined characteristics usually found in youth series with elements typical of horror or drama series.

**Table 9.** Emotional and cognitive elements in the posts.

	HBO America		HBO Spain		Netflix United States		Netflix Spain		Total		Average	Standard Deviation
	n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
	Positive	122	76.73%	35	8.54%	50	73.53%	65	69.15%	272		
Negative	6	3.77%	8	1.95%	1	1.47%	0	0.00%	15	2,05%	3,75	3,86
Unexpected or surprising	20	12.58%	87	21.22%	10	14.71%	8	8.51%	125	17,10%	31,25	37,54
Celebrities	30	18.87%	56	13.66%	8	11.76%	9	9.57%	103	14,10%	25,75	22,57
Entertainment	36	22.64%	210	51.22%	4	5.88%	3	3.19%	253	34,61%	63,25	99,03
Social relevance	30	18.87%	15	3.66%	4	5.88%	1	1.06%	50	6,84%	12,5	13,13
Humor	55	22.64%	25	6.10%	36	52.94%	36	38.30%	152	20,79%	38	12,46
Human interest	37	18.87%	1	0.24%	4	5.88%	9	9.57%	51	6,98%	12,75	16,50
Sexuality	7	4.40%	13	3.17%	1	1.47%	1	1.06%	22	3,01%	5,5	5,74
Animals	2	1.26%	1	0.24%	3	4.41%	0	0.00%	6	0,82%	1,5	1,29
Children	3	1.89%	0	0.00%	10	14.71%	9	9.57%	22	3,01%	5,5	4,80
Useful	34	21.38%	8	1.95%	7	10.29%	27	28.72%	76	10,40%	19	13,59
Conflict	11	6.92%	52	12.68%	2	2.94%	14	14.89%	79	10,81	19,75	22,10
Sadness	9	5.66%	1	0.24%	2	2.94%	2	2.13%	14	1,91%	3,5	3,70
Anger	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0,00%	0	0,00
Anxiety	5	3.14%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	11	11.70%	16	2,19%	4	5,23
Fear	0	0.00%	19	4.63%	3	4.41%	3	3.19%	25	3,42%	6,25	8,62

#### **RQ4. What resources do the posts that achieve the highest engagement use, and what objectives do they achieve?**

The most popular messages on each account highlighted the flagship series. In HBO America, the four posts yielding the most “likes” were on *Game of Thrones*, followed by *Gunpowder* (see [Table 10](#)). It should be noted that only the most used resources appear in each table for practicality.

Similar findings were observed for HBO Spain, where three of the most “liked” posts were about *Game of Thrones*. The other two, however, were about HBO’s two homegrown series, *Preacher* and *The Secret Life of Couples* (see [Table 11](#)). This finding was even more evident for Netflix: Netflix America’s five most popular posts were about *Stranger Things*; and on Netflix Spain, these accounted for four of the five most popular posts, with the first exclusively dedicated to brand promotion (see [Tables 12](#) and [13](#)).

Another key difference was the level of success. Although HBO accounts, especially HBO Spain, were much more active on Instagram than Netflix, they did not achieve the same engagement levels (See [Table 14](#)).

It is noteworthy that the resources used in the most popular posts differed, even between the accounts of the same platform. HBO America drew quite heavily on social media resources, including links to official profiles of the series and their actors (four of the five posts), as well as hashtags (all posts). All posts featured an image, albeit with a balanced mix of subjects: diegetic (2 images), derivative art (1) and non-diegetic (2). The same occurred when showing actors (2) or actors in character (3) (see [Table 8](#)).

Furthermore, HBO Spain focused all its efforts on promoting its program content in all five posts and providing information (four posts) of premieres, new episodes, and events. As in the case of HBO America, all posts included at least one hashtag, but there was a greater balance in the combination of images (three posts) and trailers (two posts). Additionally, most of the posts sought to entertain the users (four posts) (see [Table 11](#)).

Netflix America also made extensive use of images (four posts) and focused on promoting its program content (five posts), although its’ most popular post was the only one to incorporate a video to announce the upcoming second season of *Stranger Things*. The four other most popular posts were humorous (three posts) and positive (four posts). Three of them featured children, while the other two showed Steve, a teenage character who plays a key role in the children-centered plot (see [Table 12](#)).

The focus on humor (four posts) and positive tone (three posts) also prevailed on Netflix Spain, although children were mentioned only in one post. However, images and derivative art (3) were featured in all the posts. Finally, it is worth noting that although four of the most popular posts were dedicated to promoting the program content, the most popular post

**Table 10.** Posts with more likes (HBO US).

Text	Date	Likes	Comments	Link to Social Media	Hashtag	Picture	Diegetic	Derived art	Non-diegetic	Other Actor	Character
When worlds collide. Regram @emilia_clarke #HBO	07/08/2017	101025	570	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
After #SolarEclipse2017, the night is dark and full of terrors (unless you're with the cast of @gameofthrones). Regram @leavecaitcealone	22/08/2017	87645	314	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
Knocking on winter's door. #HBO@gameofthrones #Tonight	21/08/2017	71956	506	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1
Starks always stick together. #HBO#NationalSisterDay @gameofthrones@sophiet @maisie_williams	07/08/2017	70169	418	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
#Gunpowder, a three-part thriller starring Kit Harington, premieres December 18 at 10PM on #HBO.	31/10/2017	52176	677	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1

**Table 11.** Posts with more likes (HBO Spain).

Text	Date	Likes	Comments	Provide information	Promote content	Hashtag	Picture	Trailer	Entertainment
A new episode of #GameofThrones: the game is up on #HBOEspaña	09/28/2017	1,257	8	1	1	1	1	0	1
Tulip, Cassidy and Jesse continue looking for God. New episodes #Preacher every Tuesday on #HBOEspaña	07/11/2017	1,184	0	1	1	1	0	1	0
Experience the #GameofthronesExpo in Barcelona and come to the Seven Kingdoms. #JuegodeTronos #GameofThrones #ValarMorghulis Hiding a secret? Follow #LaVidaSecretadelasParejas on #HBOEspaña	10/27/2017	1,054	44	1	1	1	1	0	1
Spoiler alert: Phrase from episode 7 x 01 of Game of Thrones: #Dragonstone The new episodes of #GameofThrones begin every Saturday, in the small hours from Sunday to Monday from 3am. From then on, available to watch whenever you want on #HBOEspaña	10/11/2017	1,042	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
	07/20/2017	1,034	19	1	1	1	1	0	1

**Table 12.** Posts with more likes (Netflix US).

Text	Date	Likes	Comments	Promote platform	Promote content	Hashtag	Picture	Derivative art	Character	Positive	Humor
"Every single day of my life?"	05/26/2017	40,508	1414	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Maybe he's not good with the girls, but as a babysitter... as a babysitter, he's an ace.	11/14/2017	39,637	297	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
#StrangerThings2 via @uncle_jezzy	11/07/2017	38,765	427	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
There's storm coming on Friday. #StrangerThings2	10/23/2017	25,864	744	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1
@bojackhorseman wanted to be in #Strangerthings2. But he stayed backstage.	11/12/2017	25,660	131	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

**Table 13.** Posts with more likes (Netflix Spain).

Text	Date	Likes	Comments	Promote platform	Promote content	Hashtag	Picture	Derivated art	Character	Positive	Humor
"¿Todos los días de mi vida?"	26/05/2017	40508	1414	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Los estilismos de los 80 eran otra historia. Hasta para Eleven. #StrangerThings2	14/11/2017	39637	297	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Quizá no le vaya muy bien con las chicas, pero como canguro... como canguro es un crack. #StrangerThings2 via @uncle_jezzy	07/11/2017	38765	427	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
Este viernes se acerca tormenta. #StrangerThings2 @bojackhorseman quería haber aparecido en #Strangerthings2. Pero se quedó en el backstage.	23/10/2017	25864	744	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1
¿Truco o trato? #StrangerThings2	12/11/2017	25660	131	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Un mes para el reencuentro. #StrangerThings2	31/10/2017	24343	126	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
Llegó la hora de volver al Upside Down. #StrangerThings2 ya disponible.	27/09/2017	23261	638	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
Tu casa, tus normas. Nada volverá a ser normal. #StrangerThings2 llega el 27 de octubre.	27/10/2017	18700	394	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0
	07/09/2017	18224	423	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
	11/07/2017	18200	878	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0

**Table 14.** Average likes and comments.

	Average likes	Average comments	Average likes (Top 5 posts)	Average comments (Top 5 posts)
HBO America	9,531	102	76,594	497
Netflix America	106,155	2,957	474,754	5,359
HBO Spain	241	9	1,114	71
Netflix Spain	8,963	208	34,087	603

**Table 15.** Comparison of number of likes (Mann–Whitney U-Test) by message feature.

Feature	Sig	Presence			Absence		
		n	avg	sd	n	avg	sd
Positive tone	0	457	5343.47	29510.89	272	26509.41	69408.705
Unexpected or surprising	0	604	12673.19	45508.161	125	15983.38	65323.875
Celebrities	0.069	626	11889.37	42948.331	103	21454.18	77847.023
Entertainment	0	476	18913.21	59684.037	253	2568.53	13048.729
Humor	0	577	7932.77	36976.539	152	33390.24	77782.93
Useful	0	653	13258.76	51912.467	76	13086.29	17126.102
Conflict	0.011	650	14281.88	51835.677	79	4674.76	19199.901
Link to social media	0	601	8082.83	36186.55	128	37458.94	84291.105
Hashtag	0	90	72933.41	119989.472	639	4833.36	14375.495
Image	0	236	26929.65	69440.175	493	4802.84	28252.7
Diegetic image	0	422	19439.73	61249.593	307	4719.74	22950.901
Faces	0	528	17973.26	57263.178	201	809.19	6370.991
Video	0.001	503	15475.23	53488.22	226	8267.63	38572.279
Promo	0.4	599	14627.02	54042.932	130	6853.41	14218.837
Showing empathy or solidarity	0	580	7636.36	29953.746	149	35056.64	88929.504
Provide information	0	278	26929.65	69440.175	451	4802.84	28252.7
Promote brand	0	641	13582.37	51984.733	88	10752.61	23711.332
Promote content	0	72	12617.15	24587.871	657	13309.12	51444.415
Opine	0	649	14651.21	52198.614	80	1798.61	4652.298
Suggest	0	583	16495.92	54804.718	146	242.49	1057.36
Self produced content	0	252	4857.88	15479.821	477	17669.48	59618.308
Purchased	0	597	15563.4	54189.449	132	2736.19	9221.275
Personalization	0.142	230	21068.73	74903.772	499	9632.7	30840.497
You	0.007	553	14727	54158.087	176	8571.01	29755.913
He/She	0.008	627	13659.32	52316.401	102	10668	25354.254
Imperative	0	624	15407.85	53128.862	105	362.19	1402.917
They	0.237	664	13488.81	51182.116	65	346.22	1750.132

promoted the brand in an amusing way by depicting a divorce proceeding, which read “motive: he/she watched a season without me.”

Trying to establish a conversation with other people or mentioning them with social network links was the most successful feature. Showing empathy or solidarity were also effective strategies (see Tables 15 and 16).

## Conclusions

HBO and Netflix pursue distinct global approaches on Instagram, adapted to some degree to the country in question. HBO tends to be more active on Instagram than Netflix, but the difference is less evident in their US accounts.



**Table 16.** Comparison of number of comments(Mann–Whitney U-Test) by message feature.

Feature	Sig	Presence			Absence		
		n	avg	sd	n	avg	sd
Positive tone	0	457	137.99	822.874	272	651.5	2497.027
Unexpected or surprising	0.041	604	330.95	1765.301	125	323.01	1151.179
Celebrities	0	626	345.79	1776.952	103	231.12	821.398
Entertainment	0	476	460.38	1978.989	253	83.51	796.082
Humor	0	577	254.07	1771.419	152	616.24	1207.678
Useful	0	653	326.69	1743.598	76	354.49	903.579
Conflict	0.064	650	357	1766.545	79	103.48	417.629
Link to social media	0	601	276.92	1748.474	128	576.88	1253.856
Hashtag	0	90	1944.5	4174.031	639	102.13	593.956
Image	0.035	236	627.07	2440.911	493	146.22	886.077
Diegetic image	0	422	403.46	1301.905	307	228.04	2080.417
Faces	0	528	445.87	1953.307	201	24.13	184.962
Video	0.018	503	384.03	1956.079	226	208.41	723.789
Promo	0.4	599	346.99	1812.643	130	249.38	775.617
Showing empathy or solidarity	0	580	233.78	1038.111	149	702.52	3068.403
Provide information	0	278	627.07	2440.911	451	146.22	886.077
Promote brand	0	641	335.87	1767.489	88	283.85	710.148
Promote content	0	72	357.42	775.514	657	326.54	1746.378
Opine	0	649	366.89	1772.019	80	27	77.523
Suggest	0	583	410.36	1865.027	146	7.07	23.537
Self produced content	0	252	153.34	554.765	477	422.7	2026.216
Purchased	0	597	379.4	1833.861	132	104.3	485.664
Personalization	0.94	230	339.61	1012.481	499	324.97	1905.746
You	0.359	553	356.39	1824.578	176	245.36	1080.093
He/She	0.036	627	348.66	1778.621	102	212.35	780.198
Imperative	0	624	381.97	1805.317	105	18.3	103.078
They	0.347	664	10707	25561.941	65	159.65	407.955

By the time HBO stepped into the Spanish market, it had to compete with consolidated operators such as Movistar+ and was 16 months behind Netflix Spain. HBO tried to promote itself in Spain through a high-intensity strategy on Instagram.

This difference is also evident in the objective of the posts. The two Spanish accounts posted a higher number of informational messages than did their US counterparts, not least in the case of HBO Spain, the newest competitor in this market. On the other hand, as most of the program content that HBO and Netflix promoted was self-produced (86.4% on average), they appear to have opted to emphasize available content only, instead of focusing on other platforms features (i.e. price, usability, or compatibility with several devices), with the partial exception of Netflix which focused on the possibility of its downloadable content. Posts about self-produced content generated more engagement (see [Tables 15](#) and [16](#)). This could mean that users value Pay On Demand platforms for their exclusive content more than other features such as the size of their available catalog.

We identified some differences in how the two platforms used resources. On one hand, the US accounts more often included links to social media, especially to celebrity profiles. As English-speaking platforms in the USA,

the US accounts are more likely to receive interactions from international stars which may explain the popularity of social media links as a resource as the US accounts of HBO and Netflix have more followers than their Spanish accounts. Other kinds of resources such as memes were marginally used – perhaps because of their spontaneous nature which makes them difficult to mimic.

The use of images and videos was more coherent between the two Netflix accounts than the two HBO accounts. Yet again, this could either be the result of a deliberate strategy or the fact that HBO Spain prefers images, which require fewer resources to generate, to maintain its post-intensive strategy in promoting itself in a new market, whereas HBO America does not have the same needs. These inferences seem to be backed up by the types of images used. While the two Netflix accounts were homogenous, HBO Spain and HBO America were clearly different. HBO Spain used mainly diegetic images of its output's characters, screenshots taken from the program content itself, which is the most inexpensive way to obtain images. They appear not to be very popular which might be attributed to their unoriginality (see [Tables 15](#) and [16](#)). HBO America, however, takes a more balanced approach, with almost 25% of the images used taken on the set, pointing to more resources and easier access to the footage.

Differences were also observed in how each platform addresses its audiences. All platforms adopted a generally positive tone, yet Netflix did so more often, using humor as a main resource. This is evident in its promotions of series like *Stranger Things* in which humor, kids, and '80s nostalgia are the main themes. Yet, it also employed more dramatic resources for series like *Narcos* or *The Defenders*. Only when a series has strong social implications, such as *13 Reasons Why* or those about Nazism, humor was replaced with awareness-raising messages. These findings suggest a deliberate attempt to create a more light-hearted brand image, linked with intense and feel-good emotions.

HBO, on the other hand, appears to have adopted two different strategies with some points in common. HBO America tended to exploit its access to its stars by publishing more content about them than does any other profile. However, its two main resources are humor and entertainment – the latter considered as the most important by HBO Spain – employed to create surprise or conflict to complement its message strategy. This seems to indicate that HBO's brand image is one of the serious program contents for less juvenile viewers. Nonetheless, HBO America's more balanced catalog reflects its strategy, whereas HBO Spain more frequently promotes *Game of Thrones*, its flagship series, emphasizing its "epic" features.

These strategies are particularly apparent in the most popular posts. HBO America adopts a more balanced approach in its content; four of the most popular five posts used celebrity-related social media resources. By contrast,

most of HBO Spain's posts were related to *Game of Thrones* and used its images. Netflix adopts a simpler approach requiring fewer resources. For example, the most popular Netflix America post featured only text. Despite this, it achieved more engagement than HBO posts did.

Contrary to our expectations, despite their abundant presence, images and videos were not so popular, as explained above. Also, personalization was counter-productive in most cases, as the usage of second- and third-person pronouns, and especially imperative verbs, had a negative impact on the number of average likes and comments. On the other hand, expressing emotions in messages, especially positive ones, proves to have a strong impact, as hypothesized, and highlights the fact that less obvious promotional strategies might be more effective: using humor, relating directly with the emotions of the characters, or linking with a social cause.

### Limitations and further research

The findings presented can only be extrapolated to the Spanish and US context; thus, general application to other scenarios would be limited. Individual SNS use depends on cultural factors (Jackson & Wang, 2013), which may lead to different engagement responses in other scenarios, such as Latin America or Eastern countries.

The kind of content posted might also vary in other markets, due to business and strategic reasons. For example, the licensing arrangements available in other countries might lead Instagram accounts to promote or emphasize different types of content.

Regardless, this study was not restricted to a single country, which allowed for the identification of some common transnational trends. Further research might delve deeper into other cultural settings.

Similarly, the findings on the specific features that foster user engagement open a line of research into how individuals process promotional media messages. Experimental and qualitative approaches such as focus groups might help to better understand *why* the aforementioned features provoke users to like or comment on the content.

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