





Active Audiences: Social Audience Participation in Television

Audiencias activas: Participación de la audiencia social en la televisión

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ABSTRACT

The combination of social networks, second screens and TV has given rise to a new relationship between viewers and their televisions, and the traditional roles in the communication paradigm have been altered irrevocably. Social television has spawned the social audience, a fragmentation of the real audience based on how they interact with social networks. This study is an attempt to analyze the factors which contribute to the success or failure of programs with a similar format in relation to their social audience. To do so, the study took as its subject three talent shows launched on the principal mainstream TV channels in Spain in September 2013. The study looked at the impact of these shows on the Twitter network, employing a control form [and developing a categorization and coding system for the analysis with the aim of collating all the data collected]. The results showed that the success of the shows was influenced by the activity in the social network accounts of the presenters and the judges. The conclusions reached in this analysis of the Spanish audience could be used as a development model for social audiences in other countries where social television is not so widespread.

RESUMEN

La combinación de redes sociales, segundas pantallas y televisión ha propiciado la aparición de una nueva relación de los espectadores con la televisión en la que los habituales roles del paradigma de la comunicación se han alterado. La televisión social ha dado pie al nacimiento de la audiencia social entendida como una fragmentación de la audiencia real en función de su interactividad en las redes sociales. Este trabajo pretende estudiar los elementos que contribuyen al éxito o fracaso de programas con un mismo formato en relación a la audiencia social. Para ello se han tomado como objeto de estudio los tres talent show que lanzaron las principales cadenas generalistas españolas en septiembre del año 2013. Se ha procedido a la observación del impacto de dichos programas en la red social Twitter empleando una ficha de elaboración propia y se ha desarrollado un sistema de categorías de análisis y códigos con el fin de recopilar toda la información recogida. Los resultados obtenidos indican que en el éxito de los programas analizados en audiencia social influye la actividad de las cuentas de los presentadores y del jurado. Las conclusiones alcanzadas tras este análisis de la experiencia española pueden servir como modelo de desarrollo de la audiencia social para otros países en los que esta no se encuentre tan extendida.

KEYWORDS | PALABRAS CLAVE

Television, audiences, social impact television, interactivity, participation, interactive television, participative communication, social media.

Televisión, audiencias, impacto social televisivo, interactividad, participación, televisión interactiva, comunicación participativa, redes sociales.

1. Introduction and state of the question

Social television has forcibly arrived in the media ecosystem as a result of the evolution imposed by the combination of social networks, second screens and television. It is yet another episode in the convergence process (Jenkins, 2008) in which traditional media are forced to adapt to this new scenario (Gillan, 2011). In the words of Scolari «there are old media species that must adapt to survive while others desperately fight for their lives» (2013).

For television, all these transformations have unleashed important changes that have affected its very nature (León, 2012). Scolari talks of hypertension (2008), a term that emphasizes interactivity; other times the word «TVmorfofosis» (Orozco, 2012) crops up, after Fidler's work in 1997. Social television is the most widely used of these expressions and is based on the interaction between the audience and the medium; the first experiences go back to the 70s (Wohn, 2013) when the theory of active audiences was developed.

We now have a liquid media ecosystem which has altered the habitual roles of the communication paradigm of emitter and receiver (Rublescki, 2011). The traditionally static audience has evolved into a species of prosumer that interacts with the TV program's guests and presenters (Rincón, 2008). This audience is liquid (Aguado & Martínez, 2012) and characterized by its permanent, universal and dynamic connection to the Net.

The social audience emerges from the fragmentation process the traditional audience undergoes within the new media ecosystem, and it is the result of segmentation based on interactivity through the social networks. Audience participation in audiovisual media has increased in the last decade due to various mechanisms (Tiscar, 2005). The novelty lies in the fact that a horizontal conversation between physically separated users is now accompanied by a vertical exchange that occurs between the traditional emitter (the TV program) and the receiver. So the interactivity process is doubled and this is highly enriching. Besides the modifications that every media species has had to undergo, they have also had to remodel their studios and metrics to accommodate the new social audience (Arrojo, 2013) that has emerged from social television.

Twitter, which is more than just the micro-blogging web it is normally called, is a social network in real time (Deller & Hallam, 2011) where most conversations revolve around television programs. In Spain, 32% of all comments in prime time are on TV programs (Tuitele, 2013), making it the European country

with the most highly-developed social audience (The Wit, 2013). The reason behind this extensive diffusion is the high percentage of mobile device ownership in Spain, which has a growth rate in tablets of 43%; and according to the Association of Mobile Marketing, 68% of people who use them are also following their social networks while watching TV.

In this new scenario, TV executives strive to get closer to or even control these new audiences that have emerged from the social networks in order to preserve television's dominant role in the ecosystem. We can say that social television was born in the final phase of the evolution of the media interactivity that Rost (2011: 104) applies to news sites but which can be transferred to other media such as television. In the words of this Argentine professor «these media use the networks in a two-directional way: first they insert them into their own web pages, then they flip their own content over within these same social networks so that it can be distributed to their fans and followers».

This audience provides TV executives with numerous positive elements. Their comments on a program can be seen live and come cost-free. They inform executives about what works and what needs to be tweaked. Studies on social audiences reveal the tastes and interests of each and every social spectator, all of which is vital data for the sale of advertising space. Some studies, such as those by Nielsen (2013), have also shown that there is a correlation between the number of comments on a program and an increase in traditional audience viewing figures for a program.

Another advantage that social audiences offer relates to program duration: the conversation that arises from a television space can begin before a program is broadcasted and continue well after its end, so the program's life lasts far beyond its broadcasting time. This amounts to an audience loyalty strategy via the creation of communities that share the viewing of a particular television space.

Nevertheless, this new social audience will not replace the traditional one since the former consists only of those viewers who use social networks. The profile of this type of user in Spain includes mainly adults (44% between 40 and 55) and young people (34% between 18 and 30) (IAB, 2013). So any analysis of this audience type can provide no more than a complementary source of data, never forgetting that it is not representative of all TV consumers (Bredl, Ketzner, Hünninger & Fleischer, 2014).

Since this reality is relatively new, there is still not

much research on social audiences. In Spain, one of the countries where this new audience is most highly developed, in addition to the studies already mentioned, research has mainly focused on case analyses such as «El Barco» (Claes, Osteso & Deltell, 2013; Fernández, 2013; Sequera, 2013; Grandío & Bonaut, 2012), the Goya Spanish film awards (Congosto, Deltell, Claes & Osteso, 2013), «Isabel» (Barrientos, 2013), hashtag usage (Castelló, 2013), investigations on the new metrics (Gallego 2013a; 2013b), the quality of social audience participation (Rodríguez & Pestano, 2013), the emotional factor (Merino, 2013), the role of the program presenter (Gallardo, 2013) and comparisons between the social and traditional audiences (González & Quintas, 2013). There are contributions from the Anglo-Saxon countries, where similar trends are observed. Wohn and Na (2011) conducted the first studies on the subject. Research undertaken as part of the «Cost. Transforming audiences, transforming societies» (2010-14) initiative has also focused on this topic (Bredl, Ketzer, Hünninger & Fleischer, 2014) while others (Harrington, Highfield and Bruns, 2013) examine the influence of the social audience. Moreover, there are also specific case studies that analyse the journalistic contexts of television (Larsson, 2013) or the Eurovision song festival (Highfield, Harrington & Brun, 2013).

The objective of this work is to study the elements that determine a TV program's success or failure by analysing three talent shows that were launched on mainstream Spanish TV channels in September 2013. The choice of this format was based on the fact that this program type had scored high in social audience ratings the season before (The Wit, 2013). Emotion, which is such an important factor in the social audience phenomenon (Merino, 2013) stands out clearly in this program type because, as (Redden 2008) points out, these spaces allow greater public identification with the competitors, as part of the process of television democratization, a meritocratic representation of society (Oliva, 2012). This is fertile ground for fan groups to set up in support of a particular competitor and or to comment on the judges, and these group members actively participate in these conversations that flourish on the social networks.

2. Material and methods

The aim of this investigation is to analyze the factors involved in the success or failure of TV programs with the same format in relation to the social audience that watches them. The study starts from the premise that the format of this television space might not be a

key issue for the social audience whereas other independent variables of greater importance may influence this new audience (González & Quintas, 2013). A second objective is to make a comparative analysis of the social and the traditional audience of these programs.

We took a sample of three talent shows broadcast in prime time by the most widely watched TV channels in Spain, these being Telecinco (17.5% of ratings share), La 1 (15.7%) and Antena 3 (15.3%). These programs debuted in September 2013 at the start of the viewing season when TV channels traditionally present their strongest content.

The sample consisted of the following programs:

a) «Código Emprende» (broadcast on Wednesdays on La 1)¹: this program takes six potential business people who seek financial backing for their projects. During the competition a business expert guides them and helps them to shape their ideas which are then presented to a panel of judges. The program is also sponsored by the BBVA bank.

b) «La Voz» (screened on Mondays on Telecinco)²: this is an adaptation of a Dutch TV format called «The Voice of Holland» first broadcast in 2010 and taken up a year later in the USA by NBC with great success as «The Voice». In Spain, it made its debut in 2012 and became very popular. It scored the highest ratings among social audiences worldwide between September and December 2012. The idea is to find the best singing voice in the country, as singers are put through various tests in front of a panel of judges made up of professional singers.

c) «Top Chef» (shown on Wednesdays on Antena 3)³: this is another example of the proliferation of programs framed around cooking that abound on television nowadays; it is adapted from a US format of the same name first screened in 2006, in which 15 professional chefs compete for the prize of top chef by overcoming various tests before expert judges.

The analysis period ranges from 11-09-2013 (the day of the first screening of «Código Emprende») and ends on 13-11-2013⁴. Due to the different debut dates of these programs, we analyzed how they evolved over seven episodes only, taking as a reference point «Código Emprende», which was the shortest-running program of the three and lasted seven weeks.

The lack of any unanimously recognized standard methodology for this new reality led us to draw on past research (Claes, Osteso & Deltell, 2013; Gallego, 2013a; 2013b; Congosto, Deltell, Claes & Osteso, 2013; Bredl, Ketzer, Hünninger & Fleischer, 2014). As a result, we selected a quantitative, non-experimental,

trans-sectional methodology, in other words, an observation of the impact of the three programs as registered on Twitter during a limited time period. To do so, we designed a datasheet that develops a system of categories and codes of analysis in order to compile and codify thematically all the information gathered during the two months of field work.

The datasheet's analysis categories are grouped according to the official Twitter accounts of the three key elements in this format: the program, the presenters and the panel of judges:

a) The presence and activity of the official account: date of the first tweet, number of messages sent, classification of the tweets based on content and number of hashtags.

The messages sent out from the official account have been classified according to the contribution type made (a retweet or modified tweet, a reply, video, text, links and photographs) in order to enrich the message. The use of hashtags⁵ is a determining factor when handling the account's messages and tracking program follow-up on the network. It also enables the TV network to control information on the program and to gather together all comments on the network related to the program space. It also helps the social audience to share program-related messages more easily.

b) The presence and activity of the presenters' accounts: number of messages sent, the number of program-related messages sent and the number of followers. In this case the tweets directly related to the program were separated from those that were not related.

c) The presence and activity of the judges' accounts: number of messages sent and the number of followers. As in the previous category, the tweets directly related to the space were separated from those that were not.

These categories allow us to compile data for subsequent interpretation that will reveal relevant information on the dynamics established for the program via Twitter. The accounts analysed

were: @lavoztelecinco, @TopChefA3 y @Codigo-Emprende⁶.

Categories are measured according to a timeframe that ranges from 30 minutes before the program starts to 30 minutes after it ends⁷. We have also studied the account activity between episodes to identify a potential weekly cadence.

These categories were included in the analysis datasheet that was tested beforehand on other programs by researchers in order to verify the correct register of the data and to add any modifications before the investigation began. The compiling of information was done directly from Twitter in real time to avoid register-related problems arising from other monitoring tools, which did not enable us to limit the period of analysis to the length of the program as they measure longer periods.

The data pertaining to the real audience were obtained from the Formula TV website and provided by Kantar Media. The data related to the social audience came from Tuitele, the first social audience-measuring tool developed in Spain.

It should also be pointed out that this research focuses on endogenous factors and does not take into account exogenous factors (those not linked directly to the program account on Twitter)⁸ that could be directly related to the success or failure of the program in terms of social impact. Such categories include the TV channels' attempts to raise the profile of the program on other social networks, the transmedia strategy, and the level of support in-house in relation to the dissemination of the program (a magazine, a website, blog, etc.) or the synergies set up as a result of program feedback. Another consideration that was discar-

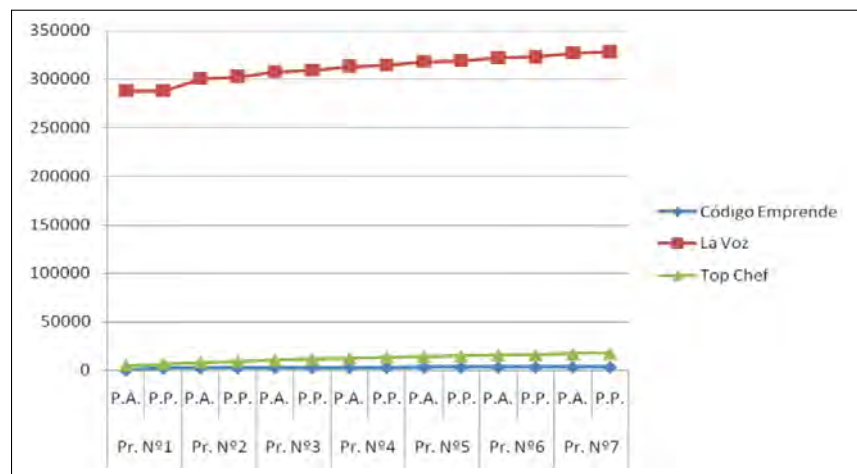


Chart 1. The evolution of the number of followers from the previous period (P.A.) to the posterior period (P.P.) for each program's official account.

ded is the program's screening time and the analysis of the competition from programs on other channels as determining but exogenous factors.

3. Analysis and results

The field work yielded the following results based on the triple classification established in the previous section:

3.1. Official account

As Chart 1 shows, there is a considerable difference between the number of followers of «La Voz» and those of «Código Emprende» and «Top Chef». In addition, «La Voz» has the advantage of bringing with it followers of the program from the previous edition while the other two start from a far lower base.

In the course of the seven programs under analysis the trend was for the number of followers of «La Voz» and «Top Chef» to continue to increase over the seven weeks. With far fewer followers, the evolution in the number of «Código Emprende» fans is hardly noticeable, from the beginning to the end of its run it only picked up an extra 1,179 followers.

Chart 2 reveals differences between the activity and the content of the tweets of the program accounts. «Código Emprende» is the talent show that generates most retweets, modified tweets and replies. By contrast, references to links to the program's website are much more prominent in «Top Chef» and «La Voz» since these websites act as complementary material containers, thus the video content does not exist in these programs unlike on «Código Emprende». Also «La Voz» stands out for being the show that includes the most photos of the program as it develops.

Another noteworthy fact is that «Código Emprende» published the most number of tweets per program (4) over the seven weeks although it has the fewest followers of the three (See Chart 1). By contrast, «La Voz» sends out the fewest number of messages per program (1) despite having the biggest number of followers.

In terms of hashtags, «La Voz» promotes an average of nine (the most preeminent being the one that appears on the screen during the program) on each program while «Código Emprende» and «Top Chef» use only one. «La Voz» and «Top Chef» both insert

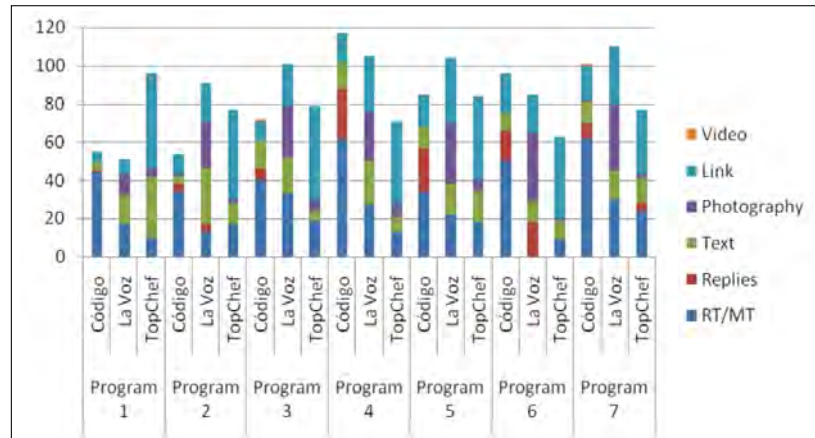


Chart 2. Content of the tweets published by the official accounts of the programs during the period analyzed.

the main hashtag among the trending topics while «Código Emprende» does so only on one occasion.

In order to detect whether there was a relation between the social and real audiences, we carried out a comparative analysis based on the number of real and social viewers for each program (table 1).

«La Voz», with an audience share of between 20.2% and 25.2%, is one of the most popular programs in its time slot, and led the rankings for the program with the biggest social audience every day during the period under analysis.

«Top Chef» attracted fewer social watchers than «La Voz» but consolidated its position in the rankings. One interesting factor is that both the traditional and real audience tuned in the day the program was premiered in numbers but diminished on the days that followed as they tended to lose interest, as observed in the data in table 1.

«Código Emprende» attracted far fewer viewers than the other two with an inconsistent audience flow; when the final program ended, its viewing share had reached its lowest point during the seven weeks of broadcasting.

3.2. The presenters' accounts

The study only analyzed two of the three personal accounts of these program presenters, Jesús Vázquez of «La Voz» and «Código Emprende's» Juan Ramón Lucas since «Top Chef» presenter Chicote was on the panel of judges of that program. The main difference is that Vázquez is more active during the week than when the program is broadcasted (except in the first three programs) while Lucas tweets more actively during screening as a way to stimulate conversations on the Net (except in the fifth program).

The results show that Lucas loses followers during broadcasting on four of the days analyzed but recovers them during the week.

Table 1: Number of viewers (in thousands), audience share (percentage) and number of social viewers (in thousands except for C.E.) of the three programs analyzed (C.E.: «Código Emprende»; L.V.: «La Voz» & T.C.: «Top Chef»)

| | Pr. 1 | | Pr. 2 | | Pr. 3 | | Pr. 4 | | Pr. 5 | | Pr. 6 | | Pr. 7 | |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|
| | V/Sh | Vi/Sh | V/Sh | Vi/Sh | V/Sh | Vi/Sh | V/Sh | Vi/Sh | V/Sh | Vi/Sh | V/Sh | Vi/Sh | V/Sh | Vi/Sh |
| C.E. | 613 4.5% | 304 | 266 4% | 166 | 370 5.2% | 215 | 260 3.1% | 240 | 260 3.1% | 292 | 370 5.2% | 603 | 260 3.1% | 962 |
| L.V. | 3.438 23.3% | 163 | 3.560 24.6% | 107 | 3.816 25.2% | 82 | 3.722 24.6% | 70 | 3.764 24.5% | 59 | 3.591 20.2% | 59 | 3.597 24.8% | 94 |
| T.C. | 3.030 17.7% | 18 | 2.480 15.7% | 11 | 2.343 13.7% | 9 | 2.273 13.7% | 10 | 2.303 14.6% | 7 | 2.597 15.8% | 8 | 2.573 14.7% | 7 |

3.3. The judges' accounts

We examined the accounts of the panel of judges of these three programs, nine in total, none of whom had had official account on the program⁹.

As Chart 3 shows, the two judges of «La Voz» (David Bisbal and Antonio Orozco) and one on «Top Chef» (Chicote) are the most active tweeters with a level of activity that is continuous and which increases as their respective programs develop. Chicote's tweeting activity increased during program screening and throughout the seven episodes analyzed.

By contrast, the jury on «Código Emprende» registered little network activity. There were two judges who were fairly inactive and this trend hardly changed throughout the seven weeks analyzed.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Starting from the premise that the program format is not the only factor that determines the development of a TV space among the social audience, we have studied those factors that are endogenous to Twitter that can affect a program's success or failure. «La Voz» gets the biggest share of the social audience. The results show that it has the most fans and registers the biggest increase in followers during the period. Likewise its presenter and two of its judges are among the three most active tweeters. However, there is no direct relation between the activity recorded on the program's own Twitter account and its success in the ratings. «Código Emprende» sent out the most tweets during a broadcast but had the least success among the social audience.

Our second objective was to compare these program's real audience to the social audience, and «La Voz» scores highest on both counts. There is also a parallel between the results for each program in both audience types. Yet the results do not allow us to establish a causality relationship between both audiences, nor do they show any possible correlations. Future studies should continue with this line of investigation.

Social networks provide a useful tool for TV channels as a forum to listen to and evaluate viewers' opi-

nions on their programs. However, any strategy designed to make the most of this phenomenon must include enriching this communication by a variety of tweet types. These can be retweets or modified tweets that acknowledge the value of messages that occur beyond the official program accounts, the broadening of the conversation between viewer and the program and encouraging loyalty to the retweeted accounts. This is an example of the prosumer nature of the new social network-related audiences. Yet too many tweets of this type can point to a lack of originality in the program's own account, as in the case of «Código Emprende».

Links to websites, so frequently promoted in tweets from «La Voz» and «Top Chef», enable TV channels to pursue a transmedia strategy by using the web, as a result they scoop up more information on the program and can even monitor the social audience. Likewise, the audiovisual content attached to the tweets cannot be ignored because of the impact that funny or unusual images of the program can have on the social networks. «Código Emprende» was the least active in this field, and the failure of this program and «Top Chef» to promote their hashtags prevented them from structuring the conversations that emerged after the broadcasts.

In order to raise their presence among the social audience, all the program's resources must be directed towards the social networks, and so the presence and activity of the presenters and judges become determining factors in increasing program impact. These efforts must not be limited to the time when the program is being screened. All the programs analyzed were pre-recorded while account activity happened in real time, so a time lapse occurs that could affect the social impact of these programs. The social audience breaks down the time barrier and demands a continuous presence that goes beyond the broadcast time slot. Just as in the official account, the presenters are also active outside the program slot and continue tweeting between programs. In this way, conversations are kept up for several days, thus feeding active

audience expectations.

Also noteworthy is the synergy of forces provided by the presenters and judges through their private accounts. Followers who comment on the program increase the resonance and impact of the program, even among those who do not watch it. These programs also offer a showcase for these celebrities whose own number of followers can increase as a result of appearing on this TV space.

The analysis of the Spanish experience can serve as a social audience development model for other countries where this audience type is not so prominent. The analysis of the factors linked to the programs' official accounts, and those of the presenters and judges should also be accompanied by a study of other categories such as the accounts of the competitors, of the broadcasting channel and producer, the synergies established between different programs of the same channel as well as the transmedia strategies.

Notes

¹ «Código Emprende» (70 minutes) made its premier appearance on 11-09-2013, on a Wednesday in prime time, but its time slot was changed during the seven weeks of the analysis (11, 18 and 25 September; 2, 9, 16 and 23 October 2013).

² The episodes of «La Voz» (180 minutes) analyzed were shown on: 16, 23 and 30 September; 7, 14, 21 and 28 October 2013.

³ «Top Chef» (120 minutes) was screened on: 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30 October; 6 and 13 November 2013.

⁴ Repeats of these programs were excluded from this study.

⁵ According to a Twitter estimate, the insertion of a hashtag on screen generally increases tweeting activity by between 2 and 10 times; screening the name of the Twitter account user raises the number of responses by between 2 and 8 times (Twitter is the second screen, 2013).

⁶ The official account of «Código Emprende» was directed to BBVA (@bbvaempresa), so in this case we have analyzed both.

⁷ This timeframe is the same one used by «Tuitele» to analyze the social audience.

⁸ No analysis was carried out of other accounts that might have influenced social impact, such as those of the producers, the broadcasting channels or the competitors.

⁹ One member of the panel of judges of «Código Emprende», María Benjumea, had no Twitter account.

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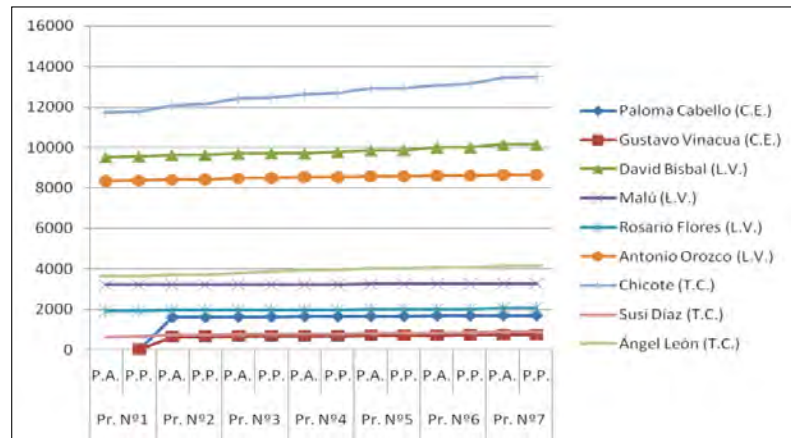


Chart 3. Activity (number of tweets) of the judges of the three programs analyzed (C.E.: «Código Emprende»; L.V.: «La Voz» & T.C.: «Top Chef»).

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