
Miscellaneous

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COVID-19 Lockdown and Disney+ strategy on social networks on its launch during the State of alarm in Spain

Abstract

The launch of Disney+ in Spain in March 2020 coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic and a period of home confinement for many Spaniards. This study examines the advertising and engagement strategy used by Disney+ on Twitter and Instagram, analyzing 2,268 messages. The platform's social media use is similar to that of its competitors, with Twitter used for user engagement and Instagram used for content promotion. However, the study finds that the platform missed the opportunity to emphasize its unique qualities and appeal to the brand's values. Despite this, Disney+ generated significant engagement during its launch month, reflecting high levels of user anticipation. Popular original productions such as *The Mandalorian* and *Aladdin*, as well as acquired content like *The Simpsons*, indicate the brand's focus on a family or broad-spectrum target audience, in contrast to the younger and niche audiences favored by its competitors.

Keywords

Disney+ Spain, streaming, VOD, OTT, Instagram, Twitter, social networks.

1. Introduction

The audiovisual industry has increasingly turned to social networks as a key element (Lacalle Zalduendo & Castro Mariño, 2018). Not only do social networks enhance the viewing experience (Segado-Boj, Grandío & Fernández-Gómez, 2015), but they also help to increase audience engagement (Cha, 2019; Martínez-Sánchez *et al.*, 2021). Conventional television channels and Over The Top (OTT) services such as Netflix have recognized the potential of social media in attracting and retaining subscribers (Alcolea-Díaz *et al.*, 2022). These digital platforms use social networks to promote their content and engage with viewers, and this trend is expected to continue as social media continues to play a growing role in the entertainment industry.

In Spain, the penetration of video on-demand (VOD) services has steadily increased (Arrojo & Martín, 2019). Although the first over-the-top (OTT) platform to arrive, Netflix, did not do so until October 2015, the proliferation of platforms and their household penetration has since increased exponentially, opening a new stage in content consumption in the national market (Barlovento Comunicación, 2016). In that year, Movistar+, a telephone operator, emerged as the primary competitor to Netflix. A year later, the American cable

network HBO joined the streaming subscription offers at the end of November 2016, followed by Amazon Prime Video in December 2016 (Barlovento Comunicación, 2016). It was not until November 2019 that the Apple TV Plus offer was introduced, followed by Disney+ in March 2020. Although these services differ greatly, they are all united by their streaming-based offering.

In 2020, according to Barlovento Comunicación's report, over 16 million viewers watched OTT platforms, surpassing the number of viewers on traditional pay TV platforms. Netflix alone had a viewer base of 14.1 million people, primarily consisting of women and adults aged 35 to 44. In contrast, Disney+ was positioned as a family-friendly platform with content aimed at younger members of the household (Costa, 2020). Its catalog included classic Disney movies, recent releases, and series produced by the company, as well as content from Marvel, a subsidiary (Vacas-Aguilar, 2021).

While Netflix is considered the main competitor of Disney+, the latter is also perceived to have a niche audience that sets it apart from its rival. According to authors such as Neira (2020a), Disney+ appeals to geeks, fans, and families. As Vacas-Aguilar (2021) notes, Disney+ has maintained its corporate identity as a family-oriented company, even though it now offers a catalog that includes content for adults. Nevertheless, the platform still mainly targets children.

Streaming platforms, like conventional television, have their own programming strategies. Netflix, for example, adopts a non-traditional approach by allowing subscribers to binge-watch entire seasons of a series in a short period of time instead of spreading them out weekly (Castro *et al.*, 2019). In fact, Netflix heavily promotes the concept of marathon viewing and directs its energies towards informing subscribers about the content that is currently available and forthcoming.

Social networks have become a powerful tool for broadcasters to increase brand awareness and engage viewers through likes, retweets, and shares (van Es, 2015). For instance, Netflix often publishes memes related to binge-watching on its Twitter account and promotes its latest releases (Fernández-Gómez & Martín-Quevedo, 2018a). In contrast, Disney+ has adopted a more traditional approach by releasing its flagship series with weekly episodes, similar to HBO. It is important to keep in mind that these two streaming services were originally television channels before offering on-demand content. However, there are also intermediate options such as Hulu or Amazon, which offer a mix of on-demand and scheduled content. Netflix has experimented with different approaches to releasing content, such as dividing a season into two blocks released in non-consecutive months, as was done with the fourth season of *Stranger Things* in 2022.

Understanding the strategies and tactics employed by pay platforms is of special interest to the audiovisual industry. For instance, as Vázquez-Herrero *et al.* (2019) highlight, the competition from Netflix and HBO has forced traditional actors to introduce changes in the creation, production, and distribution of audiovisual content. In this regard, digital, and specifically social networks, have played a fundamental role in facilitating these changes (Ojer & Capapé, 2012; Del Pino & Aguado, 2012; Pérez-Latre & Sánchez-Taberner, 2016; Fernández-Gómez & Martín-Quevedo, 2018a).

Netflix, as the leader in the Spanish market, has been at the forefront of proposing promotional strategies on social networks (Wayne & Castro, 2020). It has adopted a storytelling approach tailored to the local market and has emphasized series produced in Spain such as *Las Chicas del Cable*, *Paquita Salas*, and *Élite*, among others (Fernández-Gómez & Martín-Quevedo, 2018b; Doñate-Ventura, 2020; Amorós & Segarra-Saavedra, 2020). Furthermore, it has segmented its audience, with a clear focus on using Instagram to reach younger viewers (Amorós-Hernández & Segarra-Saavedra, 2020).

Measuring the digital audience is a complex task, and there is no single model that can accurately capture its reach (Quintas-Froufe & González-Neira, 2021). One important indicator of success for social media channels is the level of interaction with users, which can be measured through metrics such as likes, comments, and shares (Martínez-Sánchez *et al.*, 2021). These engagement metrics can provide insights into audience commitment and loyalty (Huertas *et al.*, 2015; Segado-Boj *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, analyzing social media conversations and user-generated content can offer valuable information on audience opinions and interests, which can be leveraged for advertising strategies (Saavedra-Llamas *et al.*, 2020).

In 2008, Spanish families with children or teenagers were the main subscribers of pay TV, but by 2018, they were no longer a target audience for the new offers (Medina *et al.*, 2019). However, the entrance of Disney+ has brought a change to the market. During the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, with school closures, Disney+ gained popularity among families, and by April, the company had already surpassed 60–90 million subscribers worldwide by 2024 (Neira, 2020b). Streaming is now a well-established habit in the Spanish market, and factors such as the 2020 pandemic have further boosted the momentum of the entertainment brand (Vacas-Aguilar, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent confinement led to a significant shift in media consumption, as society came to a standstill with school closures, canceled sporting events, and the implementation of teleworking. In times of social crisis, people tend to consume more media not only to fulfill their information needs but also for entertainment (Formoso, 2022; Gil-Torres *et al.*, 2020). Streaming platforms were the main beneficiaries of this trend, experiencing considerable growth during this period (Ortega & Santos, 2020; Montaña *et al.*, 2020). In fact, April 2020 saw the highest audiovisual consumption rate (Barlovento Comunicación, 2020b), and Netflix emerged as the most popular SVoD service during this time (Fernández-Gómez, Martín-Quevedo & Feijoo, 2022).

In brief, Disney+ entered the Spanish market at a much more advanced stage than its competitors, such as Netflix, HBO, or Amazon Prime Video. It is worth exploring how Disney+ has utilized social media channels already leveraged by its rivals (Martín-Quevedo, Fernández-Gómez & Segado-Boj, 2019; Martínez-Sánchez *et al.*, 2021; Fernández-Gómez & Martín-Quevedo, 2018b) and the level of engagement it has achieved, particularly in a market where video-on-demand has become the preferred mode of access for younger audiences (Vacas-Aguilar, 2021; González-Neira *et al.*, 2020).

2. Objectives and methodology

This study examines Disney+'s social media strategy during its launch in Spain, which coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the nationwide lockdown, followed by a gradual transition to the "new normal." Specifically, we analyzed all the Twitter and Instagram posts from February 17, which was the first day of content publication on both platforms, to June 21, 2020, which marked the end of the first state of alarm and the confinement period in Spain. The analysis covered a total of 2,042 Twitter posts and 226 Instagram posts.

The objective of this research is to analyze how Disney+ utilized social networks to promote the Disney brand and its new platform in the Spanish market, which is currently experiencing growth. Of particular interest is how Disney+ managed its launch in Spain under the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, which confined the population and resulted in increased viewership for streaming platforms. The period between the announcement of Disney+'s activity and the actual start of its operations was affected by the pandemic, making it important to understand how the platform adapted its strategy during this period.

The circumstances surrounding Disney+'s launch in Spain during the COVID-19 pandemic not only generated heightened expectations but also led to an exceptional surge in viewership for streaming platforms, as mentioned earlier. Moreover, the changing pandemic conditions and the varying degrees of freedom of movement experienced by Spaniards, from strict home confinement to gradual deconfinement, make it compelling to examine how Disney+ adapted its social media strategy to manage an audience that was grappling with heightened anxiety and uncertainty amidst a sudden increase in free time. The platform's initial objective of increasing brand awareness and generating interest was eventually replaced by the need to present an attractive catalog as the novelty of the platform faded over time. Therefore, the following questions will be answered:

RQ1. What was Disney+'s overall strategy upon its launch in Spain? How did it evolve over time?

RQ1.1. What were the specific objectives of Disney+'s social media posts and did they change over the course of the launch period?

RQ1.2. Did the promotional posts focus on the company in general or on specific content? If so, which ones?

RQ2. What strategy did Disney+ use to generate engagement on social media platforms? Were there any differences in their approach between platforms? Was Disney+ able to sustain public interest beyond the initial launch phase?

RQ2.1. How well did Disney+ generate engagement on Twitter and Instagram, and how did it evolve over time in the two platforms?

RQ2.2. What are the key characteristics of the most popular Twitter posts, (in terms of likes, shares, and replies), and how do these characteristics impact engagement metrics and user behavior?

RQ2.3. What were the key characteristics of the most popular content (in terms of likes, comments, and views) posted on Instagram?

Furthermore, by analyzing the content and audience of Disney+'s two most active social media accounts, Twitter and Instagram, it is possible to identify differences in the company's approach and the target demographics for each platform. This analysis can also shed light on whether Disney+ adopted a distinct social media strategy compared to its competitors. References to support this analysis include Fernández-Gómez and Martín-Quevedo (2018a), Doñate-Ventura (2020), Amorós Hernández and Segarra-Saavedra, and Ortega and Santos (2020). These were the two most active accounts that the company utilized for marketing and engagement purposes.

To facilitate quantitative data collection, a validated data collection tool previously used in studies on social networks and television (Martín-Quevedo, Fernández-Gómez & Segado-Boj, 2021; Martín-Quevedo, Fernández-Gómez & Segado-Boj, 2019; Fernández-Gómez & Martín-Quevedo, 2018a; Fernández-Gómez & Martín-Quevedo, 2018b) was adapted for the analysis of the two networks. The data collection tool was tailored to the specific objectives of this study.

The following categories for analysis were developed to guide the content analysis process:

- **Identification of Formal Publication Characteristics:** This category includes features of the social media post that can help identify it, such as the link, text accompanying the post, or lack of text (in the case of video or image publications). Additionally, the date of publication, including the day, month, and year, is also considered. This category was adapted from previous studies on social media and television by Fernández-Gómez and Martín-Quevedo (2018a) and Fernández-Gómez and Martín-Quevedo (2018b).

- **Disney Platform Content Analysis:** this research category refers to the analysis of various media content available on the Disney platform, including titles such as movies, series, docuseries, and other forms of content. The focus of the research may include aspects related to the Disney brand or the characteristics of the platform itself.

Categorization of the purposes of messages on social media: This research category involves the categorization of different types of messages that are disseminated through social media platforms (adapted from Martín-Quevedo, Fernández-Gómez and Segado-Boj, 2019, and Fernández-Gómez & Martín-Quevedo, 2018a). The categories include messages that aim to inform followers about the brand's services, invite them to participate in closed surveys, provide information or promotion about products derived from the brand's audiovisual content, invite them to participate in games or contests, promote the brand or the on-demand content service, promote specific content such as a series, movie or documentary, stimulate participation in informal or unregulated debates, take a position on values, attitudes or events, give suggestions for consumption guidelines, and other types of messages.

- **Accompanying resources:** the resources accompanying the text have been adapted from Martín-Quevedo, Fernández-Gómez and Segado-Boj, 2019; Fernández-Gómez and Martín-Quevedo, 2018a; and Fernández-Gómez and Martín-Quevedo, 2018b. These resources include a range of multimedia content, such as links to social networks, mentions of individuals or organizations, web links to external sources, hashtags relevant to the topic, emoticons or emojis to express emotions or reactions, memes in GIF format for humorous or relatable content, Twitter reproductions for sharing content on that platform, images to illustrate concepts or data, videos to provide additional information or context and other forms of multimedia content that support the research.
- **Engagement metrics:** Engagement with the publication have been adapted from Martín-Quevedo, Fernández-Gómez and Segado-Boj, 2019, and from Fernández-Gómez and Martín-Quevedo, 2018b and included: number of likes (total number of likes or reactions received by the publication on social media or other platforms), number of comments (the total number of comments or replies left by readers on the publication), number of shares or reproductions (the total number of times the publication has been shared or reposted on social media or other platforms), number of retweets (in the case of Twitter) and total number of times the publication has been retweeted on Twitter.

This study builds upon the research conducted by Martínez-Sánchez et al. (2021), who performed a comparative analysis of the main social media platforms for a period of 30 days during the initial lockdown in Spain. Their research primarily focused on quantitative indicators, including the number of posts published and engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares.

3. Results

3.1. *The launch of Disney+ and general context of the first few months*

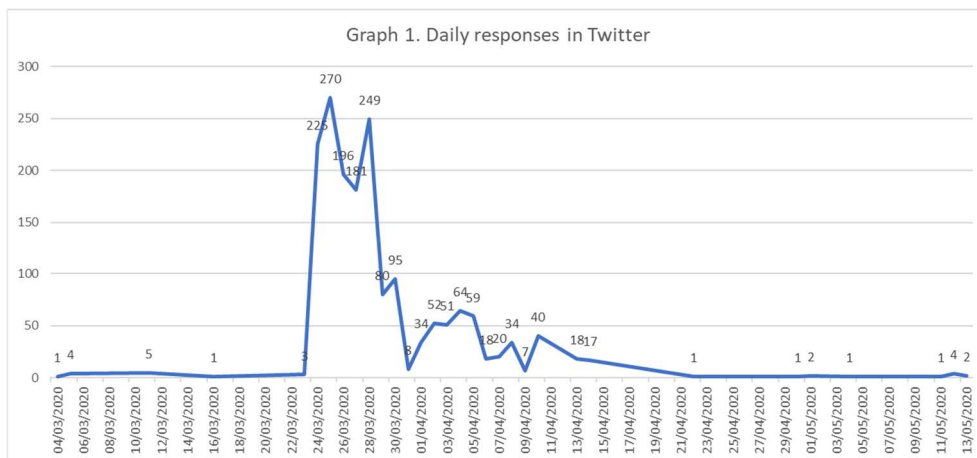
During the studied period, the platform posted 2,042 messages on Twitter and 226 on Instagram, indicating uneven attention to each network. However, this finding should be interpreted in light of the types of messages posted on each platform, which reflects the varying roles that Disney+ assigned to each network (refer to Table 1).

Table 1. Type of messages by month						
	Twitter					Instagram
	Originals	Thread	Responses	Retweets	Total Twitter	Total Instagram
February 2020	12	23	0	0	35	12
March 2020	54	10	1.318	12	1.394	53
April 2020	64	21	416	6	507	59
May 2020	62	0	10	7	79	74
June 2020	25	0	0	0	25	28
Total	217	54	1.744	25	2.040	226

Source: Own elaboration.

Out of the 2,042 Twitter messages posted during the studied period, 1,744 (85.3%) were responses to users, while only 261 consisted of original messages and threads. This number is similar to the 226 posts published on Instagram. It is worth noting that Disney+ primarily used replies to inform users, particularly about the inclusion or exclusion of specific content, as well as to address technical queries, as discussed in detail below.

The data shows that 75.6% of the responses were received in March, the month in which Disney+ began its broadcasts. Specifically, 1,121 responses, accounting for 64%, were received on the day the broadcasts began, March 24, 2020, and in the following days, up to March 28 (see Graph 1). The surge in responses was attributed to a compatibility issue between the app and SMART-TVs, as the app initially only worked on Samsung devices from 2016 or later. This caused frustration among users who had already paid for a subscription and were unaware of this limitation.



Source: Own elaboration.

Disney+ maintained a consistent level of posts on both Instagram and Twitter throughout the study period, with a slight decrease in June. This could be due to the relaxation of pandemic restrictions and people spending less time at home. However, it is important to note that the month of June was not analyzed in its entirety, with data only collected up to the 21st, making it challenging to draw definitive conclusions.

3.1.1. Disney's communication objectives and goals

In addition to the number of posts, analyzing Disney+'s strategy requires understanding the intended purpose behind these posts. On Twitter, almost all messages (95.1%) aimed to provide useful information, either solely or in combination with other purposes, such as promoting content and alerting users to premiere dates or newly published episodes. This information was provided in the form of responses that included technical guidance or links to web documents that helped solve app-related problems (refer to Table 2 for details).

	Objetivo del mensaje (Twitter)						
	Provide information	Survey	Promote Disney	Promote specific contents	Estimate participation	Offer an opinion	Make a suggestion
February 2020	35	0	34	17	0	0	0
March 2020	1.362	1	77	218	4	0	22
April 2020	465	0	91	98	6	0	22
May 2020	58	0	62	63	7	4	5
June 2020	21	0	21	22	1	1	1
Total	1.941	1	285	418	18	5	50

Source: Own elaboration.

Disney’s promotional messages regarding both specific content and the platform itself were a consistent element in their communication strategy, particularly in the original messages and threads. Out of 298 messages, the platform was promoted in 272 (91.3%) while content promotion was featured in 251 tweets (84.2%). This is a logical strategy for a product that is new to the market, and it was especially active in March. With the platform’s launch, the primary goal was to highlight the most powerful content, as will be discussed below.

On the other hand, Instagram was primarily used for promotion rather than providing information, with only 158 of the 226 messages (69.9%) intended to provide useful information (see Table 3). Like on Twitter, promoting both the platform and its content was a common objective, with 191 messages (84.5%) dedicated to promoting the platform and 178 tweets (78.8%) promoting content. However, many messages served both objectives by promoting premieres or future additions to the catalog while emphasizing that they were “only available on Disney+.”

	Objetivo del mensaje (Instagram)							
	Provide information	Survey	Promote Disney	Promote specific contents	Estimate participation	Offer an opinion	Make a suggestion	Other
February 2020	12	0	12	10	0	0	0	0
March 2020	47	1	51	41	3	1	3	12
April 2020	30	0	42	41	5	0	3	2
May 2020	45	0	58	58	3	3	1	1
June 2020	24	0	28	28	2	0	1	1
Total	158	1	191	178	13	4	8	16

Source: Own elaboration.

However, there are other objectives present in the Meta network that, while not quantitatively significant, provide differences in the approaches applied in each network. One such objective is the messages dedicated to offering opinionated content, which analyze not only the promotion of content, but also the best episodes, characters’ motivations, and so on. This is exemplified by a series of five videos made by a Disney content specialist on YouTube, Andrea Compton, which were shared on the official Disney+ profile between May 24 and 29. These videos featured Compton and a guest analyzing various aspects of Disney+ content which she recalls from her teenage years and which were then available, namely Raven, Zack y Cody, Hannah Montana.

It’s also worth mentioning the effective use of Instagram’s own interface, which enabled easy uploading of videos. This feature was utilized for a daily countdown until the platform’s official launch. The countdown featured videos of actors from some of the network’s most popular series, primarily *The Mandalorian*.

3.1.2. “Only on Disney+”: promoting the catalog to enhance the platform

As observed on both Twitter and Instagram, the platform and its content were promoted in a relatively balanced manner. Additionally, it was common for both platforms to feature the same message as most of the promoted content was exclusive to Disney+ and a key aspect that the profiles on both networks highlighted as a strength of the Disney+ catalog.

On Twitter, a total of 329 posts were dedicated to promoting 95 different productions. However, 61.1% of these posts (58 in total) were only mentioned once, often to announce the addition of a production to the Disney+ catalog. For example, the original *Star Wars* trilogy was highlighted, encouraging viewers to rewatch the films in anticipation of the latest addition to the saga, *Star Wars: Rise of Skywalker*.

Table 4 reveals that out of the top ten most promoted contents on Twitter, seven were produced by Disney or one of its subsidiary companies (such as Marvel Studios). Two of the promoted contents were produced by Twentieth Century Fox, which is now part of the Disney conglomerate group but was an independent company when *Avatar* was made. The final promoted content category includes those produced by external companies on behalf of Disney, such as *Cinderella* (released as *Disney Cinderella*).

Title	Type	Main producer	Keywords in IMDb	Mentions
<i>A.N.T. Farm</i>	Series	Disney Channel	Comedy, drama, family	57
<i>Aladdin (Live Action)</i>	Film	Walt Disney Pictures	Adventure, comedy, family	38
<i>Zenimation</i>	Series	Walt Disney Animation Studios	Animation, short, family	25
<i>Ant-Man and the Wasp</i>	Film	Marvel Studios	Action, adventure, comedy	22
<i>Artemis Fowl</i>	Film	Walt Disney Pictures	Adventure, family, fantasy	9
<i>Avatar</i>	Film	Twentieth Century Fox	Action, adventure, fantasy	9
<i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs</i>	Film	Walt Disney Productions	Animation, adventure, family	8
<i>Disney's Fairy Tale Weddings</i>	Series (reality)	Legacy Productions	Reality-TV	7
<i>The Peanuts Movie</i>	Film	Twentieth Century Fox Animation	Animation, adventure, comedy	7
<i>Cinderella</i>	Film	Allison Shearmur Productions	Adventure, drama, family	6

Source: Own elaboration.

On Instagram, a similar pattern was observed with the most mentioned content, as eight out of ten were produced by Disney or one of its subsidiaries (such as ABC Signature). The remaining two products were commissioned by Disney: *Clouds* (released as *Disney Clouds*) and *Disney's Fairy Tale Weddings*, a reality show which is not typically associated with the Disney brand (see Table 5). Disney leveraged the strength of its own products on social media to create a catalog of exclusive content that primarily targeted children and young audiences. Nearly all the contents that were promoted were classified as adventure, comedy, or family, often overlapping multiple categories, with the exceptions of the reality show *Dream Weddings* and the biopic *Clouds*. This trend continued until the incorporation of more adult-oriented content from other production companies under the Star label in February 2021.

Title	Type	Main producer	Keywords in IMDb	Mentions
<i>A.N.T. Farm</i>	Series	Disney Channel	Comedy, drama, family	19
<i>Aladdin (Live Action)</i>	Film	Walt Disney Pictures	Adventure, comedy, family	14
<i>Zenimation</i>	Series	Walt Disney Animation Studios	Animation, short, family	9
<i>Ant-Man and the Wasp</i>	Film	Marvel Studios	Action, adventure, comedy	8
<i>Artemis Fowl</i>	Film	Walt Disney Pictures	Adventure, family, fantasy	7
<i>Disney's Fairy Tale Weddings</i>	Series (reality)	Legacy Productions	Reality-TV	7
<i>The Peanuts Movie</i>	Film	Twentieth Century Fox Animation	Animation, adventure, comedy	5
<i>Clouds</i>	Film	Warner Bros	Biography, drama, music	5
<i>Prop Culture</i>	Series	ABC Signature	Documentary, short, adventure	4
<i>Timmy Failure: Mistakes Were Made</i>	Film	Walt Disney Pictures	Adventure, comedy, drama	4

Source: Own elaboration.

Disney’s promotional strategy prioritized movies over TV series. Out of the ten most frequently mentioned products on Twitter and Instagram, seven and six, respectively, were films. This approach contrasts with the promotional strategies employed by other platforms, such as Netflix and HBO (Martín-Quevedo, Fernández-Gómez & Segado-Boj, 2021).

3. 2. *Disney+ strategies to reach its audience and build community*

3.2.1. From initial expectation to normalization: Disney+ engagement in figures

Despite posting more messages on Twitter than on Instagram and primarily using Twitter to respond to users’ messages, Disney+ achieved better engagement data on Instagram (see Table 6). The Instagram profile received 145.9% more comments and 244.9% more likes in absolute terms than the Twitter profile, and also had a significantly higher average per message engagement rate. However, it should be noted that Twitter responses typically only received one or two likes, which were typically from the user who received the response.

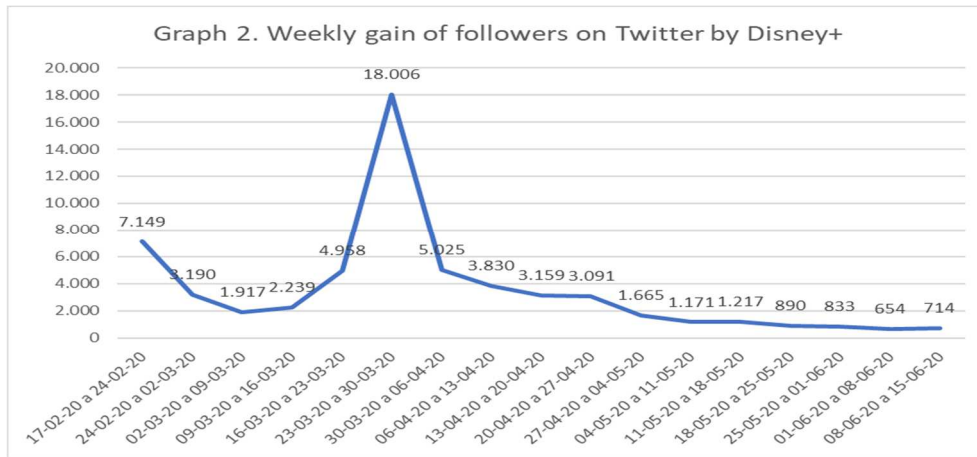
Table 6. Monthly engagement on Instagram and Twitter							
	Twitter				Instagram		
	Comments	Retweets	Likes	Views	Likes	Comments	Views
February 2020	855	3.842	13.124	1.178.000	22.962	1.257	253.739
March 2020	6.818	12.977	64.564	5.358.200	95.453	12.469	1.013.898
April 2020	2.240	7.144	42.725	4.423.700	182.824	7.786	985.029
May 2020	1.447	8.994	34.510	533.600	206.937	5.297	1.815.626
June 2020	531	1.866	10.942	3.421.500	63.833	2.436	1.453.042
Total	11.891	34.823	165.865	14.915.000	572.009	29.245	5.521.334

Source: Own elaboration.

In contrast, videos posted on Twitter received significantly more views, consistently outperforming Instagram except for the month of May. Despite the fact that the content posted on both platforms is often the same or very similar, viewing figures indicate a clear difference in consumption habits among users. For instance, the most viewed post on Twitter, which promoted the film *Artemis Fowl* and garnered 2,700,000 views (<https://twitter.com/DisneyPlusES/status/1271343981213782019>), received much more modest results when posted on Instagram on the same day (187,790 views; <https://www.instagram.com/p/CBU9sUXjjGU/>), despite the series being targeted towards a young audience that is more prevalent on the latter platform. According to IAB Spain (2021), 93% of Instagram users in the 16-24 age group use the platform, compared to 78% on Twitter.

While a five-month sample may seem brief for analyzing engagement trends, the months under study were critical for Disney+ as they represented the platform’s introduction into a new market and its effort to build a community. As such, the endeavor to engage with followers was particularly significant given that Disney+ had already experienced a plateau in follower growth following an initial surge (see Graph 2).

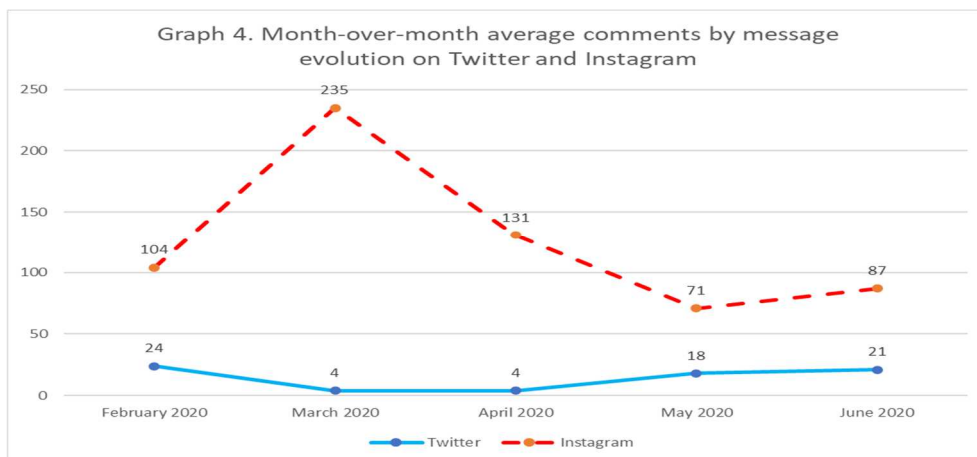
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Source: Own elaboration from data of Socialblade.com.

Examining the engagement metrics sheds light on the behavior of the Disney+ community. Both on Twitter and Instagram, there is a generally positive trend in the number of likes and comments, albeit with a greater increase in likes than active participation in the form of comments. Notably, on Twitter, a higher number of followers does not necessarily correspond to a higher number of likes per message, but rather, engagement increases over time as the account continues to produce content (see Graph 3).

However, when considering the number of comments, the trend is less favorable (see Graph 4). While Instagram messages initially saw a high level of participation, this began to decrease over time. On Twitter, the trend is positive, but the average number of comments per message only saw a slight increase, even when accounting for the large number of messages launched in late March and early April due to technical issues during the start of the broadcasts. As such, although Disney+ was successful in gaining attention, it did not yet have a community that actively generated conversations. It's worth noting that this less-than-optimal trend in May and June occurred as mobility limitations were gradually lifted, allowing many people, particularly young people, to resume some outdoor activities.



Own elaboration from data of Socialblade.com.

3.2.2. The most popular messages on Twitter: from expectation to reality

The messages with better engagement results generally reflect the content trends that Disney+ emphasized the most, although each indicator allows us to observe important nuances. In this sense, the tweets that received the most “likes” (see Table 7 in the appendix), the basic engagement indicator, were announcements of exclusive content from the platform, such as the movie *Aladdin* (2019), a short film featuring *The Simpsons* characters, and a promo reminding users of the imminent arrival of the platform, which included a short video of Brie Larson as her character, Captain Marvel, from the movie of the same name. In all three cases, the content was family-friendly and aligned with the platform’s desired image when announcing its content, as noted. In fact, *Aladdin* was one of the most promoted contents. Additionally, the three tweets had similar formal characteristics, including the use of hashtags and audiovisual content (two with images and the aforementioned video).

However, beyond promotion, it can be seen that the audience better received two other messages that used more specific functionalities of social networks. In the first case, it was extended or complementary content, such as a timeline that chronologically situates two products released in the *Star Wars* franchise, *The Mandalorian* and *The Clone Wars*. This is an interesting case because it reinforces the transmedia and fragmented nature of the narratives employed by Disney in the saga. It allows exploring different temporal and spatial environments with each product, while seeking coherence and continuity between all of them, despite some stories that theoretically occur simultaneously have been narrated decades apart in real time. For example, *The Mandalorian* (2019-) occurs immediately after *Return of the Jedi* (1983). This kind of extended content helps casual viewers find their way around such a complex story.

On the other hand, the last tweet was an official communication from the platform announcing its decision not to launch in Spain earlier despite requests to do so (“we hear you”). While this was not strictly a dialogue with the audience, since it was a single message, it demonstrated that the company was responsive to its followers’ demands. Moreover, it was the only message among the most popular ones that used the element of proximity, referring to a situation specific to Spain. In contrast, the rest of the messages were quite generic and could have been used by the Disney profile of any other country.

Table 8 in the appendix shows that some of the most retweeted messages were also among those with the most likes, such as the aforementioned timeline and an announcement of the platform’s arrival the following day, accompanied by a short video featuring the *Toy Story* characters. Furthermore, the second most retweeted message (and the first of the original tweets) was the profile’s initial tweet, which encouraged users to follow the account to stay up-to-date with all the news. This demonstrates the high level of anticipation that existed for the platform, as well as the large and devoted Disney fan community that existed even a month prior to the launch.

On the other hand, another message announced the addition of the musical *Hamilton* to the catalog. It is surprising that it received such a good reception despite being hardly promoted in Spain and its subject matter, which is the story of the founding fathers of the United States. Although school plays about the founding fathers are common in the United States, it may not be as popular or have as much family roots in Spain. It would be interesting to check the geographical origin of these retweets, although this is data to which researchers do not have access.

Finally, it is worth noting that the most retweeted message did not originate from the Disney+ profile, but from another corporate account of Disney, the *Star Wars* Spain (@StarWarsSpain) account. This profile, which has been operating since 2014 and includes all content related to the *Star Wars* franchise in Spain, has a more established following. By using one of its flagship franchises and the promotional structure created since the acquisition of

Star Wars rights in 2012, Disney+ integrated the new phase of the franchise into a larger corporate strategy.

In terms of formal aspects, it is noteworthy that all messages included audiovisual content (videos in three cases and images in two), as well as hashtags. Other common social media resources, such as mentions, were used only once and referred to the Disney+ account itself, presumably as a reminder or to make it easier for users to follow with a single click.

Comments are a strong indicator of engagement. Among the most commented-on tweets (see table 9 in the appendix) were some that had already been mentioned, such as the announcement of *Aladdin* (2019) being added to the catalog and Disney's statement about not advancing the launch of the platform in Spain. Calls for user participation were particularly effective in generating engagement, as seen in two other messages with high comment counts that asked users what content they were most excited to consume. Notably, the message with the most comments utilized a common social media strategy of creating a dedicated hashtag (#YaTengoDisneyPlus, I already have Disney+), which is consistent with the platform's overall practice of heavily employing hashtags and emoticons.

It's worth noting that the announcement of the platform's opening generated a high number of comments, which reinforces the previously mentioned idea of high anticipation for the platform. However, technical difficulties experienced by many users during those initial days might have caused a cooling down of interest.

3.2.3. Did the influencer strategy on Instagram work? The response from the community

The most popular content on Instagram shared similarities with those most followed on Twitter, such as the positive response to messages announcing the premiere of *Aladdin* (2019). However, Instagram also presented unique characteristics, including the interface and modes of use of the network, as well as the audience that predominates on the platform.

In terms of content, the messages that received the most "likes" (see Table 10, in the appendix) feature juvenile or childish content with an important nostalgia factor. Interestingly, some of the contents owe their nostalgia factor to their own age, such as *Hanna Montana* (2006-2011), *The Suite Life of Zack & Cody* (2005-2008), or *The Simpsons* (1989-), or to movies such as *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) or *Hercules* (1997). Others are current content derived from older ones, such as *Aladdin* (2019), which is a remake of the 1992 animated version, or *Forky Asks a Question* (2019), a short film derived from the characters of *Toy Story* (1995). Disney+ is aware of the appeal of nostalgia and uses it as an element to attract users by grouping *Hanna Montana* and *The Suite Life of Zack & Cody* under the hashtag #SeriesMíticasEnDisneyPlus (Mythical Series On Disney Plus) and promoting "the wonderful collection of nostalgic sketches" inspired by classic films of the company. This suggests that, while the Instagram user profile is predominantly young, the most dedicated or participatory Disney+ followers are more likely to be in their 30s, registering among millennials rather than generation Z.

In terms of form, Disney+ uses the resources mentioned earlier, including hashtags and audiovisual material. However, compared to Twitter, images and image galleries predominate, with some posts featuring up to nine photographs, taking advantage of the possibilities offered by Instagram. The post with the most "likes" is also interesting as it makes use of mentions and, above all, the proximity factor. This post integrates caricatures of several Spanish YouTubers and influencers into an image of *The Simpsons*. Interestingly enough, while some are mentioned, such as elrubiuswtf or willyrex, others are clearly recognizable but not explicitly identified, such as Ibai. This is the only post with more engagement that resorts to this strategy.

Regarding the messages with the most comments (see Table 11, in the appendix), the most popular message is the same one that received the most comments on Twitter, which encouraged users to comment on the content they were most excited to see on the platform on the day of publication. It is noteworthy that the platform used the same message, as it is a screenshot of the tweet published by Disney+ itself. This practice is common on other platforms, such as Netflix (Fernández-Gómez & Martín-Quevedo, 2018a), and may suggest a certain subordination of Instagram to Twitter in the company's strategy. Disney+ did not make use of any of the specific resources of the Meta network, such as the ability to include videos or image galleries, nor did it even include its own text to accompany and differentiate the message. However, its effectiveness is evident, as it garnered almost double the number of comments compared to the second most popular message.

In contrast to what happened on Twitter, there are no explicit calls for participation in the other messages. Instead, some of the messages that received the most likes were the cover of *The Simpsons* with caricatures of influencers, and the announcement of *Aladdin* (2019), as well as messages announcing the imminent opening of the platform in Spain. It is important to note that the messages with the most comments, unlike those with the most likes, were all produced in March, except for one (the *Aladdin* ad). It is possible that the then-recent confinement triggered the expectation for the platform, leading to demands for it to open earlier than expected.

4. Conclusions

The research highlights the continued significance of Twitter as a component of social television. Twitter was established as the platform for providing users with answers, while Instagram was mainly utilized for content promotion. Similar to Netflix, Disney+ heavily relied on Twitter during its launch, using it as a means to communicate with its followers and to engage in dialogue, including responding to users' comments and addressing their inquiries for technical support and information, which was especially evident during the platform's initial days. Conversely, Instagram was primarily used for promoting content, a strategy that resembled that of Netflix, Disney+'s main competitor (Fernández-Gómez & Martín-Quevedo, 2018a).

However, despite the similarity in promoted content across both platforms, different strategies were employed (Wayne & Castro, 2020). Disney+ generally adopted a less complex strategy, lacking key elements used by Netflix such as humor, creating gifs and memes based on the platform's original content, and referencing internet culture and generation Z (Amorós & Segarra-Saavedra, 2020). Although influencers were used to some extent, both directly through videos for Disney and indirectly through product collaborations, as seen in *The Simpsons*, it was a limited resource and presented a fundamental shortcoming compared to the competition. Unlike Netflix, which has successfully brought together stars linked to its products (referred to as "Netflix celebrities" by (Fernández-Gómez, Feijoo & Martín-Quevedo, 2023; Neira, 2020), Disney mostly relied on more generic profiles who collaborated with the platform intermittently and then moved on to other projects. This limits the engagement generated, especially because it was not given continuity as a strategy.

In this regard, the main distinguishing factor was the platform's emphasis on subscription offers for a limited time and, above all, on its extensive catalog of content. Interestingly, the platform's promotional strategy does not heavily rely on leveraging the Disney brand and its associated values. Instead, it focuses on showcasing its distinctive productions, emphasizing their exclusivity with the label 'only on Disney+'. Undoubtedly, Disney set itself apart from its competitors by prioritizing the promotion of its own movies over its original series. This approach contrasted with that of market leader Netflix, as noted by Hidalgo-Marí *et al.* (2021). Similarly, Disney+ did not place special emphasis on classic content, perhaps because the new platform aimed to offer more than just a means of accessing

the brand's existing content, but rather a unique product with its own distinct value proposition. Like HBO, Disney+ announced the release of weekly episodes (Martín-Quevedo, Fernández-Gómez & Segado-Boj, 2019).

During the initial launch period, Disney+ heavily engaged in social media activities to inform and attract subscribers. However, as time passed and COVID-19 restrictions lifted, users' initial interest in the platform decreased, which quickly limited Disney+'s growth after the first few weeks. To maintain and grow its user base, Disney+ should continue to engage and inform its audience over time, considering the viewing habits of consumers of this type of content (Saavedra-Llamas *et al.*, 2020).

One of the main limitations of the platform during its arrival in Spain was the lack of powerful original content beyond *The Mandalorian*, as the rest of the catalog consisted of re-releases with limited appeal. This situation was resolved in the following months with the exclusive release of films and series from its main franchises, or films that were simultaneously released in theaters and on Disney+, such as *Black Widow* and *Mulan 2*.

The study is of interest because it coincided with the introduction of Disney+ in Spain during the COVID-19 confinement period. It is noteworthy that the pandemic was not explicitly mentioned in Disney+'s communication, and it did not seem to have a significant impact on its network strategy, in contrast to the leading platform. Since then, the pandemic has accelerated the trend towards digital entertainment, as shown by the fact that 32.2 million Spaniards had access to paid content in 2021, with Netflix being the market leader, followed by Prime Video, Movistar+, and HBO. Disney+ ranked fifth, behind already established OTTs in the national market but ahead of earlier platforms like Apple TV. Therefore, the study provides interesting insights into the competition between pay TV platforms and the use of social networks as a communication and advertising tool.

Given that the study was conducted during the initial months of the platform's launch, there is a need for further research to investigate the type of content promoted on each platform. This would help to identify the user profile of the platform and determine its differential element in the market, such as geeks, fans, and families, as mentioned by Neira (2020). In this initial analysis, a strategy was observed that focused on showcasing the broad audience that can be captured by the platform's launch with a mix of classic movies, new productions, and previews of upcoming content, such as Marvel. However, the lack of target audience segmentation and the limited use of nostalgia could be seen as missed opportunities for the brand.

In addition, the competition between OTTs is no longer limited to traditional television but has also extended to the film industry, as demonstrated by the recent Oscar-winning productions. As a result, there is a growing need for a more comprehensive understanding of the promotional strategies employed for in-house productions, such as Disney+ originals, Netflix originals, and so on. This would help identify the target audience, the messaging used to promote the content, and the overall marketing approach to make these productions stand out in an increasingly crowded market.

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Annex. Tables with the messages with more engagement

Table 7: Message with more likes on Twitter.

Link	Text	Date	Original	Comments	Retweets	Likes	Views	Promote Disney	Promote specific content	Hashtag	Emoticon	Image	Video	Proximity	Epic
https://twitter.com/DisneyPlusES/status/1253580944361078784	You have awoken the genie! Man genie ¡#Aladdin (2019) now available on #DisneyPlus!	24/04/2020	1	343	914	6298	0	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	0
https://twitter.com/DisneyPlusES/status/1248641896857165828	It was love at first sight! Heart with arrow ¡Bogge Simpson in "Playdate with destiny", a short film of #TheSimpson, now available on #DisneyPlus	10/04/2020	1	89	163	6066	2900000	1	1	2	1	0	1	0	0
https://twitter.com/DisneyPlusES/status/1245428575454576641	When do the story of #TheMandalorian take place? And #TheCloneWars? Use this help sheet to know, young padawan! #DisneyPlus	01/04/2020	1	181	1291	5163	0	1	1	3	0	1	0	0	0
https://twitter.com/DisneyPlusES/status/1241643276043575297	2 DAYS #DisneyPlus	22/03/2020	1	162	1100	4500	503300	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
https://twitter.com/DisneyPlusES/status/1239493476038242177	We are listening to you. We are sorry of not being able to speed up the launch of Disney+. Thank you very much for your patience. See you in 8 days Blue heart	16/03/2020	1	290	826	4400	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 8: Messages with more retweets on Twitter.

Link	Text	Date	Original	Retweet	Comments	Retweets	Likes	Views	Inform	Promote Disney	Promote specific content	Mention	Hashtag	Emoticon	Image	Video	Entertainment	Useful
https://twitter.com/DisneyPlusES/status/122820045291302	"We had each other. That's how we won". From our galaxy to yours, may the Force be with you! #StarWarsDay	04/03/2020	0	1	40	1908	3613	125200	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	0
https://twitter.com/DisneyPlusES/status/1222391693807939	Hello! Hand waving We are already here, and we come with lots of energy. Prepare the confetti and the fireworks, it will be only a few weeks until the launch in Spain. Follow @DisneyPlusES to be up to date of all news about #DisneyPlus.	17/02/2020	1	0	207	1400	3800	214500	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0
https://twitter.com/DisneyPlusES/status/122013288332481840	Surprise! The original Broadway production of #Hamilton, live from the stage of the Richard Rodgers Theatre, will be on exclusive in #DisneyPlus from 3rd July. Let the show begin! #Hamilton	12/03/2020	1	0	158	1328	3900	0	1	1	1	0	3	0	1	0	1	0
https://twitter.com/DisneyPlusES/status/12052545626641	When do the story of #TheMandalorian take place? And #TheCloneWars? Use this help sheet to know, young padawan! #DisneyPlus	01/04/2020	1	0	181	1291	5163	0	1	1	1	0	3	0	1	0	1	1
https://twitter.com/DisneyPlusES/status/1242036698427219789	TOMORROW #DisneyPlus	23/03/2020	1	0	188	1200	4100	273000	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 9: Messages with more comments on Twitter.

Text	Date	Original	Comments	Retweets	Likes	Views	Inform	Promote Disney	Promote specific content	Estimulate participation	Make suggestions	Hashtag	Emoticon	Image	Video	Surprise or unexpected	Entertainment	Proximity
What is the first thing you are going to watch in Disney+? Tell us using the hashtag #AlreadyHaveDisneyPlus! Here, we are going to start with #LadyAndTheTramp, followed by a good plate of spaghetti	24/03/2020	1	842	135	1300	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	1
The waiting is over. #DisneyPlus IS NOW LIVE streamer	24/03/2020	1	625	757	2700	207400	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0
You have awoken the genie! Man genie ¡#Aladdin (2019) now available on #DisneyPlus!	24/04/2020	1	343	914	6298	0	1	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	0	1	1	0
What are you going to see tonight? Tell us! Here are some of your recommendations, all #DisneyPlus original films and series hand pointing down	27/03/2020	1	328	39	526	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
We are listening to you. We are sorry of not being able to speed up the launch of Disney+. Thank you very much for your patience. See you in 8 days Blue heart	16/03/2020	1	290	826	4400	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0

Source: Own elaboration.

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Table 10: Messages with more likes on Instagram.

Link	No text	Text	Date	Comments	Lines	Inform	Promote Disney	Promote specific content	Mention	Hashtag	Emoticon	Image	Video	Other	Surprise or unexpected	Celebrities	Entertainment	Humor	Proximity	Useful		
https://www.instagram.com/p/BeC9MP6lma4/	1	The Simpsons have arrived to #DisneyPlus in Europe, and they bring some friends... Touch to discover who they are!	27/03/2020	609	28900	1	1	1	1	3	3	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	
https://www.instagram.com/p/BeY3b80aW/	1	You have awoken the genie! Men genie! #Addn now available on #DisneyPlus!	24/04/2020	1187	19437	1	1	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
https://www.instagram.com/p/Be1ck3xGpxt/	1	We answer all the great questions of life. More or less! #ForkyAskAQuestion arrives on 24th March, only on #DisneyPlus.	13/03/2020	234	16300	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
https://www.instagram.com/p/BeAp0u8n0t1/	1	It is unbelievable that these photos are more than ten years old! #MyHistoricalSeriesOnDisneyPlus #HistoricalSeries #TheSuiteLifeOf ZackAnd Cody #DisneyPlus	26/05/2020	58	13203	0	1	1	1	0	4	2	4	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
https://www.instagram.com/p/BeAHqz2deahW/	1	Slide to see these wonderful collection of nostalgic sketches by @SimpsonART and tell us in comments which is your favorite. #BT #DisneyPlus	14/05/2020	98	13150	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	9	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 11: Messages with more comments on Instagram.

Link	No text	Text	Date	Comments	Likes	Views	Inform	Promote Disney	Promote specific content	Estimulate participation	Make suggestions	Mention	Hashtag	Emoticon	Image	Video	Capture from Twitter	Celebrities	Humor	Proximity	Animals	
https://www.instagram.com/p/BeAG6AvofT7/	1	You have awoken the genie! Men genie! #Addn now available on #DisneyPlus!	24/03/2020	210	5819	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
https://www.instagram.com/p/BeY3b80aW/	1	You have awoken the genie! Men genie! #Addn now available on #DisneyPlus!	24/04/2020	1187	19437	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
https://www.instagram.com/p/Be1ck3xGpxt/	1	THIS IS THE BIG DAY! #DisneyPlus is now live! #	24/03/2020	774	0	56700	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
https://www.instagram.com/p/Be1ck3xGpxt/	1	All is ready for the 24th March! #DisneyPlus	11/03/2020	652	5328	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0
https://www.instagram.com/p/BeC9MP6lma4/	1	The Simpsons have arrived to #DisneyPlus in Europe, and they bring some friends... Touch to discover who they are! #TheSimpsons now available on #DisneyPlus	27/03/2020	609	28900	0	1	1	1	0	0	3	3	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0

Source: Own elaboration.