
Miscellaneous

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Television Sitcoms through the Decades: Transmedia Intertextuality in Marvel's *WandaVision*

Abstract

In the current era of cultural convergence, the audiovisual production ecosystem is defined, among other things, by the growth of streaming platforms and the rise of transmedia storytelling. In this context, *WandaVision* (Schaeffer, 2021) stands out as a TV miniseries produced for a streaming platform (Disney+) that relies on transmedia intertextuality not only to expand its narrative, but also to deepen its storyworld.

This article explores the use of different intertextual references in *WandaVision*. A qualitative methodology is applied to examine its nine episodes, focusing on two specific categories drawn from a previous study by Freire et al. (2022): (1) endogenous intertextual references, which connect characters from this miniseries with those in Marvel's comic books and the Marvel Cinematic Universe; and (2) exogenous intertextual connections to North American TV sitcoms, including their narrative, formal, and aesthetic components, as well as their production codes and standards throughout different decades (from the 1950s to the 2010s).

The findings of this analysis reveal that the historical evolution of the sitcom depicted in *WandaVision*, which mirrors the evolution of culture and society in the United States, also

serves to illustrate the character arc and transformation undergone by the series' protagonist, Wanda Maximoff. At the same time, the combination of endogenous and exogenous references in the writing process actively shapes the narrative, offering multiple interpretative layers that foster audience engagement and enrich the viewing experience. This establishes *WandaVision* as a paradigmatic case of transmedia intertextuality.

Keywords

Intertextuality, transmedia storytelling, sitcoms, television series, Marvel.

1. Introduction

In the past few decades, transmedia storytelling has become more prominent, acquiring relevance as a narrative strategy that maximizes the potentialities of communication ecosystems (Evans, 2019), in which audiences become “hunters and gatherers” of content (Jenkins, 2006) in order to enhance their personal experience with a story (and its storyworld). Within this context, storytellers design complex narrative constructions, encouraging their audiences to establish intertextual references between different texts, and providing them with new ways to interpret and to enjoy a given story (Ryan, 2013).

This phenomenon can be observed in the case of *WandaVision* (Schaeffer, 2021). As part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), this TV miniseries is integrated within the wider Marvel transmedia franchise, in which stories are disseminated across many different media, always with a high level of active audience participation (Atarama-Rojas, 2023; Freeman & Smith, 2023).

Despite being a relatively recent audiovisual product, *WandaVision* has already sparked significant interest in the academic sphere. Various authors have analyzed this miniseries not only because it marks the beginning of a new saga in the MCU, but also because it raises questions that invite examination from diverse perspectives. For instance, published research already provides a general overview of sitcom production and *WandaVision*'s metatelevisual discourse (Higuera-Ruiz, 2023). Other scholars have explored more specific topics related to the series' narrative and thematic development. These include studies reflecting on the historical evolution of the sitcom and its portrayal of societal changes in the United States (Sánchez-Asenjo, 2023), as well as analyses highlighting how *WandaVision* becomes a constant interplay of references and reinterpretations that enrich a central plot tied to the Marvel universe (López-Iglesias & Bellido-Blanco, 2023). From a narratological standpoint, the role of metalepsis in generating narrative tension and suspense has also been examined with *WandaVision* as a case study (Escoufflaire, 2022).

Other works have focused on Wanda's character in relation to the archetype of the witch, which draws from a long tradition of narrative roles and traits (Barnette, 2022). Wanda has also been analyzed as a representation of the globalization of American culture, interpreted through geopolitical and feminist lenses (Itúrrégui, 2023). Assessing the case of Wanda as a female protagonist, Jones (2022) emphasizes how the portrayal of female emotions in Marvel stories has evolved to grant them greater narrative importance.

The series has also been studied as an allegory of the dichotomy between television as a medium that may improve our well-being (by offering a form of escape) and the practice of binge-watching, which can lead to mental health deterioration (Moore et al., 2024). Similarly, the role of streaming as a critical component within Marvel's transmedia strategy has been explored, with *WandaVision* enhancing the integrity of the overall narrative world (Webster et al., 2022).

Despite the considerable scholarly output on *WandaVision* since 2022, there still remains a need to delve deeper into the intertextual relationships that the series presents. As Freire et al. (2022) suggest, intertextual references are fundamental to narrative expansion and the creation of depth in transmedia universes. This article, however, does not focus solely on the connections that *WandaVision* establishes within the MCU's transmediatic puzzle; rather, it examines the different types of references—both endogenous and exogenous, following Freire et al.'s (2022) terminology—that are present in the series.

Many of Marvel's intertextual connections are endogenous, occurring across its graphic novels, video games, TV series, and films. However, *WandaVision* is especially innovative because it also opens up a new type of exogenous intertextuality, unique within this storyworld. By using the format of the television sitcom as an integral part of its story, and as a key tool in

the development of its main character, the diegetic universe of this TV series invites audiences to establish new intertextual connections with the very concept of the family sitcom itself.

Taking all of this into account, the aim of this study is to explore the way in which intertextual references expand, deepen, and enrich the narrative discourse in *WandaVision*. In order to reach this goal, a qualitative method has been designed to examine the nine episodes of this TV miniseries, according to the two categories of intertextual connections established by Freire et al. (2022) and mentioned above: endogenous and exogenous. Since these two types might also include many different subtypes of references, the scope of this study has been narrowed to two specific instances, one in each category: Marvel characters, which arguably constitute a significant endogenous reference, and the evolution of the sitcom format as the most distinctive tool of exogenous intertextuality in *WandaVision*. Ultimately, this case study sheds light on a systemic and integral approach to transmedia intertextuality, whereby these references are not just mere, subtle nods or Easter eggs for viewers; they actually contribute to shaping the narrative, configuring the inner world of its main character and permeating all other levels of storytelling.

2. Intertextuality in transmedia storytelling

To study the relationships established between different works, the most widespread approach within contemporary academia is intertextuality. As Hutcheon (1989, p. 349) notes, this concept is frequently used to define any type of relationship between different texts, from parody to allusion. However, from a more abstract and comprehensive perspective, “the notion of intertextuality emphasizes that to read is to place a work in a discursive space, relating it to other texts and to the codes of that space, and writing itself is a similar activity” (Culler, 1976, p. 1382). Intertextuality, therefore, is inherent in the processes of creation and reception of any text.

Although this concept initially emerged in the field of literary criticism, it has been extrapolated to other fields and cultural industries, such as cinema and television. In fact, despite intertextuality’s origins in literary criticism, Cascajosa points out that “one of the main reasons for the wide diffusion of this term was its ability to adapt to any realm of cultural production” (2006, p. 3).

This notion was initially coined by Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s (Hutcheon, 1989). In her studies of Russian author Mikhail Bakhtin, Kristeva focused on his ideas about the coexistence and dialogue of multiple voices within the same text, which lead her to state the following: “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (1986, p. 37). In a similar vein, Culler points out that intertextuality prompts us “to think of a text as a dialogue with other texts” (1976, p. 1383).

Later, other authors expanded the theories related to this term within the literary field, making it clear that its study is complex and not without challenges. As Agger points out, “the concept of intertextuality appears to be infinitely expandable” (1999, p. 19), and analyzing something abstract and inherently unattainable makes it difficult to develop an all-encompassing study of this phenomenon. For this reason, various theorists have attempted to narrow the concept down by developing subdivisions or typologies, in order to ensure a more practical and rigorous application (Agger, 1999). For instance, Genette (1997) delved into this topic in his work *Palimpsests*, where he proposed a classification of five categories¹ and introduced the term “transtextuality”, a broader concept referring to “the textual transcendence of the text, (...) all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts” (1997, p. 1).

¹ According to Genette, there are five different types of transtextual relationships: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality and architextuality (1997, pp. 1-7).

Many authors have continued to reflect on intertextuality beyond literary texts, offering more specific typologies and conceptual approaches in the field of media studies as well. Given that the case study analyzed in this article is a fictional series belonging to a transmedia narrative universe, where a series of graphic novels have been adapted to various audiovisual media, four proposals stand out as particularly relevant to *WandaVision*: those by John Fiske (1987), Robert Stam (2005), Will Brooker (2012), and Marsha Kinder (1991).

First, it is important to note that within the television medium, Fiske (1987) distinguishes between horizontal intertextuality and vertical intertextuality. According to this author, horizontal intertextuality occurs between primary texts, that is, between programs within the television medium itself (and thus refers to issues such as television genres, characters, or other content-related aspects). Vertical intertextuality, on the other hand, takes place between these primary texts and other types of texts that explicitly refer to a program or television series. These texts can be secondary (linked to the network or other media where a program or series is discussed) or tertiary (produced by the viewers themselves).

Another proponent of intertextuality, especially in its application to the field of film adaptations, is Robert Stam, who understands adaptations as complex narratives that “are caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation and transmutation, with no clear point of origin” (2005, p. 31).

Third, the concept of “intertextual matrix”, which Will Brooker (2012) uses in his analysis of multiple Batman adaptations, is also worth mentioning. With this expression, Brooker highlights the complex web of interconnections that is established when the story of a single character is retold repeatedly across different media. In this “intertextual matrix”, each new interpretation and retelling of Batman also draws from previous iterations of the character.

Finally, Marsha Kinder, one of the first authors to introduce the term “transmedia” into academic debate, coined the concept of “transmedia intertextuality” (1991) to describe a very specific phenomenon: the development of narratives across multiple media platforms, aimed particularly at young audiences (such as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*). As Scolari points out, the dynamics described by Kinder generate “different levels of interactions” (2019, p. 73) with the various texts that make up the narrative.

Transmedia intertextuality also requires the recognition of intermediality, where media are not understood as autonomous or isolated constructs, but as a set of complex, ongoing, and fluctuating agents (Scolari, 2023). Intermedial relationships can be considered from different dimensions, such as the discursive, material and institutional (Scolari, 2023). Although intertextuality is generally more closely associated with its discursive dimension, Scolari's approach highlights that, ultimately, an intermedial discourse is also connected to the material platforms and institutional dynamics of the media ecosystem. Hence, in a context of convergence, in which this intermediality is amplified, transmedia storytelling emerges as a content creation strategy that leverages the strengths of different media, along with audience participation, to enrich the consumption experience (Atarama-Rojas, 2023).

Jenkins first coined (2003) and later consolidated (2006) the notion of “transmedia storytelling” as a key concept for studying the creation and dissemination of content across multiple media. Aligned with this idea, Gambarato highlights that transmedia storytelling “is not about offering the same content in different media platforms, but it is [about] the worldbuilding experience, unfolding content and generating the possibilities for the story to evolve” (2013, p. 81).

Moreover, the creation of the worldbuilding experience involves the active participation of the audience, who may contribute to the storytelling process by creating content that expands the narrative. As noted by Guerrero-Pico and Scolari (2016), user-generated content (UGC) is a key element of transmedia storytelling, as it enhances both the enjoyment and understanding of the franchise for a considerable segment of its audience. In summary, transmedia storytelling

generates a dialogue between stories, with various touchpoints and points of entry, a participatory audience, and a fictional storyworld that fosters deep emotional connections (Atarama-Rojas & Feijoo, 2023).

In his analysis of the use and evolution of this term, Scolari (2019) emphasizes its presence in both academic and professional fields. He suggests that the continued use of this concept will enrich academic reflection, enabling interdisciplinary dialogue across different areas of knowledge. The contributions of Jenkins (2003, 2006) and Scolari (2013, 2019) have established transmedia storytelling as a fundamental axis for describing these phenomena, and the concept is undoubtedly pertinent to discussions focused on the Marvel narrative universe. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the term transmedia intertextuality suggested by Kinder (1991) still remains relevant, particularly since it highlights the intertextual dimension of transmedia narratives. In fact, these two concepts (transmedia storytelling and transmedia intertextuality) are not in opposition and can therefore coexist; they merely place the emphasis on a different aspect of the transmedia phenomenon.

While the specific use of “transmedia intertextuality” initially referred to a phenomenon centered on mass media and their interconnections as part of a commercial supersystem (Kinder, 1991), the emergence and democratization of digital communication and social networks informed the organic evolution of this concept, which expanded its scope to encompass emerging media and, particularly, user-generated content. As Guerrero-Pico and Scolari (2016) point out, hybridization and intertextuality necessarily demand readjusting the theoretical frameworks of disciplines that analyze new forms of storytelling and new types of texts, among which user-created products stand out.

Thus, contemporary research has used the notion of transmedia intertextuality to emphasize how prior knowledge of other touchpoints, as well as fan opinions, have a clear effect on the way in which users perceive new content (Enverga, 2021). This concept has also been applied to organic discursive dynamics related to cultural franchises, underscoring that intertextuality nourishes and empowers these discourses by providing the opportunity to observe, identify, and interact with various media manifestations of the same phenomenon (Wen, 2024).

This study, therefore, posits that the relationship between intertextuality and intermediality materializes as transmedia intertextuality, which entails a creative writing strategy with the aim of fostering a proactive audience experience. This generates a relational dynamic, one that transcends internal narrative references within the diegesis and involves transmedia intertextuality in the construction of meaning. That intertextual dynamic is precisely what will be explored in this analysis of *WandaVision*.

3. *WandaVision* and the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU)

Marvel was founded in 1939 as a company dedicated to comic book writing, originally under the name Timely Comics (Sweeney, 2013). Over the course of its 85 years of life, Marvel has expanded its content across four main platforms within its ecosystem: comics, television series, films, and video games. Each medium has explored, with varying degrees of depth, a catalog of more than 8000 characters that have appeared across numerous stories, told in different formats (Atarama-Rojas, 2023).

In 2008, the film *Iron Man* was released, marking the beginning of the MCU. This audiovisual project arrived at Marvel following a period of economic crisis and the sale of rights to some of its iconic characters. *Iron Man* (2008) was a box office success and ushered in a new era that would be driven and managed by Disney's commercial expertise and resources, after Disney acquired Marvel in 2009.

The first MCU saga, *The Infinity Saga*, consists of three phases and twenty-two films. Throughout these stories, a group of characters, many of whom had been previously introduced, became solidified, reaching a global audience through this cinematic experience and generating

a fandom that helped to expand the reach and visibility of the phenomenon, particularly through digital activity (Atarama-Rojas & Feijoo, 2023).

The last film of *The Infinity Saga*, *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), concluded the main plot of this transmedia macro-story, which spanned eleven years. In addition to its twenty-two main films, the saga was enhanced by content from comics, television, and video games. As this successful era drew to a close, Marvel announced the development of a fourth phase of its MCU, with a significant focus on television projects, including *WandaVision* (Schaeffer, 2021), *The Falcon and The Winter Soldier* (Spellman, 2021), and *Loki* (Waldron, 2021–2023), all of which were produced for Disney's streaming platform.

Therefore, in January 2021, the release of *WandaVision* marked the beginning of this new phase in the MCU (Higueras-Ruiz, 2023). The miniseries explores the story of Wanda Maximoff, a character with extraordinary magical powers over both mind and matter, capable of creation and destruction. Over the course of *WandaVision*'s nine episodes, viewers discover that Wanda has created a microcosm in a small town called Westview, where she longs to live an ideal, happy life with her husband Vision and, in later episodes, with their two sons. Wanda and Vision's story is initially presented in black-and-white, with all the formal traits of a 1950s sitcom, which is actually being broadcasted within the narrative universe of this series. However, certain things don't quite add up and, as various incidents disrupt Wanda's seemingly idyllic reality, her life shifts forward in time, with the show adapting to the aesthetics of sitcoms from later decades.

The plot of *WandaVision* is framed within the events narrated in *The Infinity Saga* of the MCU, but it also opens new possibilities for the empowerment of Wanda Maximoff, a character who had already undergone significant growth in the comics. Thus, *WandaVision* presents itself as a transmedia project from the outset and, although it has a complete narrative arc in its own right, the series takes on deeper levels of meaning if viewers are familiar with the comics and the MCU's first saga. Beyond this, it is also worth highlighting *WandaVision*'s connection to the future of Marvel's audiovisual projects². The series not only delves into Wanda's storyline; it also introduces the character of the Scarlet Witch, who emerges as one of the most powerful heroines in the Marvel universe and one of the key figures in the events that will unfold in Phase Four of this storyworld (Barnette, 2022). Furthermore, as a transmedia phenomenon, the series lays down the seeds of several subplots related to different points of convergence that could pave the way for the introduction of new characters (Jenkins, 2006), such as the X-Men.

WandaVision's connection to the MCU is built through various narrative relationships, which draw from a clear intertextual matrix within the Marvel phenomenon. However, what sets this TV series apart from previous transmedia initiatives is the creative decision to use the family sitcom as a narrative device, which invites audiences to establish a myriad of new intertextual connections beyond the world of Marvel. Furthermore, if previous knowledge of the Marvel universe can offer a deeper level of understanding and enjoyment for the audience, then previous knowledge of the sitcom format and its history may also open up new avenues of interpretation for the viewers of *WandaVision*.

4. *WandaVision* and the sitcom

Before delving into this topic, it seems essential to clarify that *WandaVision* is not a sitcom *per se*. It is a hybridized format that combines traits from family sitcoms, mystery/suspense and the conventions of superhero narratives, in different degrees, throughout the miniseries. Although the first three episodes work as actual episodes of a sitcom titled *WandaVision* (from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, respectively,) starting with the fourth episode onwards a new main storyline is introduced. One that takes place outside this televised series, which had initially been presented

² The events narrated in *WandaVision* are in fact essential to the development of two key MCU projects that were released afterwards. In Phase Four, the Scarlet Witch reappears in the film *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* (2022). Then, in Phase Five, the story presented in the miniseries *Agatha All Along* (2024) is directly connected to *WandaVision*'s plot and characters (specifically, Agatha Harkness and Billy Maximoff).

as “a show within a show”. However, as Escoufflaire (2022) points out, these two different narrative universes –the *WandaVision* series set in Westview, and what is actually happening outside of Westview– are in fact taking place within the same diegetic plane. In episodes 5, 6 and 7 these two main storylines are combined, while in episodes 8 and 9 the show fully embraces its nature as a superhero story. In spite of this, the sitcom is not just a mere ingredient in *WandaVision*'s hybridized formula. What makes this TV series especially innovative is the fact that the sitcom format has different narrative purposes within the story, becoming integral to both the series' structure and the development of Wanda's character.

The sitcom (or situation comedy) is a quintessential cornerstone of television in the United States (Grandío & Bonaut, 2010), which has “mirrored and guided” (Sánchez-Asenjo, 2023, p. 62) the evolution of American society, with its values and its aspirations, throughout the decades. Sitcoms explore the mundane day-to-day lives and conflicts of a recurring group of characters, in a specific situation or setting, from a comedic perspective. Different types of sitcoms allow viewers to look into the lives of family members (family sitcoms), coworkers (workplace sitcoms), groups of friends who become a “found family”, or even people who meet at the same bar every day, “where everybody knows your name” [i.e. *Cheers* (1982-1993)]. This study has specifically focused on family sitcoms, since they are the most relevant for the analysis of *WandaVision* (although it must be noted that other types of sitcoms are occasionally referenced throughout the miniseries as well).

Like other TV formats, situation comedies initially originated on the radio waves (Butler, 2020, pp. 58-63). The first television sitcoms were broadcasted in the 1940s, but it was the appearance of *I Love Lucy* (1951-1957) that established a set of production standards, formal traits and narrative codes for the sitcom (Butler, 2020; Higuera-Ruiz, 2023), which were subsequently consolidated throughout the twentieth century. However, at the turn of the new millenia sitcom storytelling changed considerably (Bonaut & Grandío, 2009), mostly moving away from the multi-camera production models which “fit into a fairly rigid narrative framework” (Butler, 2020, p. 24), and leaving behind what used to be defining sitcom staples, such as the laugh track. That being said, some exceptions must be noted, since successful shows like *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-2014) or *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-2019), which maintained the traditional sitcom model, coexisted with this new, more prominent wave of sitcoms. Along with this, certain long-established narrative elements, like the paradigmatic two-act structure (with a cold open and then a tag at the end of the episode), still tend to prevail in contemporary network sitcoms, albeit with more flexibility.

In any case, as Bonaut and Grandío have argued (2009), the new wave of situation comedies can be identified by certain practices and standards that have redefined the concept of the sitcom itself. Some of these new patterns include the prevalence of single camera shows (as opposed to the traditional multi-camera production scheme); an increased number of scenes recorded on location (instead of on TV sets); the exploration of more controversial and complex topics; the development of more overarching plots; the tendency towards genre hybridization; and the fact that screenwriters tend to draw upon subtext, silence, and the absurd to generate comedy, much more than they did in the past.

This evolution of the sitcom can certainly be tracked throughout the different episodes of *WandaVision*. Everything in the apparent “show within a show” follows the aesthetic and narrative conventions of family sitcoms from different decades. In fact, as shown in **Figure 1** below, each episode presents a distinctive set of opening credits, inspired by iconic sitcoms, which establish the formal traits of a specific decade. These traits will permeate all narrative layers and components of their respective episodes, including the fictional TV ads broadcasted during the fake commercial breaks.

Figure 1. *WandaVision* title credits through the decades



Source: *WandaVision* (Schaeffer, 2021), episodes 1-3; 5-7. © Disney, Marvel.

The evolution of sitcoms through the decades is intertwined with the evolution of Wanda as a character. In this regard, the general belief that sitcom characters don't change, or that they exhibit "little development" (Sánchez-Asenjo, 2023, p. 63) is widely extended, yet it has already been challenged (García Avis, 2016, pp. 345-349), and should be approached with nuance. Due to the serial nature of the medium, TV characters –in any genre– usually experience a more subtle and progressive development, while retaining the defining traits that make them recognisable for viewers week after week (García Avis, 2016). Characters in the same sitcom can also display different degrees of transformation – such is the case, for example, of Rachel and Phoebe in *Friends* (1994-2004). Some sitcom characters may even experience a significant character arc, especially in long-running series; these arcs, however, differ from the ones established in film storytelling, generally progressing at a more gradual pace. In the words of Blum, TV character arcs "are the planned evolution of the characters and relationships in a series" (1995, p. 86). In the sitcom/superhero hybrid narrative that is *WandaVision*, it is undeniable that Wanda undergoes a profound transformation, which stems from her internal dramatic conflict, and therefore this should also be examined.

5. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is predominantly qualitative, based on a textual analysis of the nine episodes of *WandaVision* (including the opening title credits and the post-credit scenes). In the course of the research, a decision was made to exclude the fictional advertisements embedded in episodes 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7, due to their singularity. Even though these TV spots also present intertextual connections, it was deemed worthwhile to postpone their study in order to conduct a more detailed and specific analysis at a later stage, focusing solely on the narrative purposes of these advertisements. It should also be noted that the current analysis centers on the nine aired episodes, leaving a potential study of the scripts for future research. Nonetheless, given that three of *WandaVision*'s scripts (episodes 1, 6, and 8) were also consulted during the research process, the information presented on the cover pages of these documents has been deemed relevant, as it provides an explicit reference to sitcoms and the visual style employed in each episode.

To examine the elements mentioned above, two distinct categories of analysis have been established. As stated in the theoretical framework on intertextuality, a truly comprehensive study of this concept is realistically unattainable, since any text is potentially connected with a myriad of other texts and discursive codes, in many different ways. Being aware of the complex

nature of the concept, it has been narrowed down to two concrete categories for its application to *WandaVision*, so that some specific conclusions can be drawn from this case.

The typology that has been applied is based on two types of intertextual references: endogenous and exogenous. This terminology is borrowed from a study conducted by Freire et al. (2022), which demonstrated the efficacy of intertextual references in expanding and deepening the narrative universe of a transmedia story. Since *WandaVision* belongs to the wider transmedia storyworld of the MCU, this typology seems particularly suitable to conduct this analysis.

As Freire et al. explain (2022, p. 18), endogenous references are those directly related to the MCU. On the other hand, exogenous references are those external to the MCU, and thus their function is not to expand the transmedia narrative but to provide complexity and depth to the story, “making the narrative more accessible to different types of audiences” (2022, p. 21). Within this second category, Freire et al. highlight other dimensions of popular culture, particularly cinematic references and allusions to video games. At this point, it should be noted that, although those authors do not include philosophical and mythological references within this second category in their study, such intertextual connections are also external cultural components to the MCU, and should thus be considered exogenous references, just as the present study does with the sitcom format.

In applying these two categories to the case of *WandaVision*, the analysis has followed the design outlined in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Design of the qualitative analysis

Variable	Category	Elements of qualitative analysis
Endogenous Intertextuality	Characters	1. MCU films 2. Marvel comics
Exogenous Intertextuality	Sitcoms	1. Narrative components 2. Formal and aesthetic components 3. Production codes and standards specific to sitcoms throughout their history

Source: Authors' table.

Firstly, the study of endogenous references has focused on the various MCU characters that appear in *WandaVision*, in order to better understand the development of the narrative logic within this transmedia universe. Therefore, the connections established between the characters featured in the series and two specific types of endogenous references have been analyzed: MCU films and Marvel comics.

Secondly, the exogenous references that shape the narrative of *WandaVision* are of many different kinds (ranging from cinematic to mythological). However, considering that the aim of this article is to understand the narrative functions that the sitcom plays within the series, the study of exogenous references has focused on those related to this television format.

6. Analysis and Discussion

As a preliminary framework to contextualize this analysis, **Table 2** gathers *WandaVision*'s main intertextual references, both endogenous (Marvel characters) and exogenous (US family sitcoms).

Table 2. Summary of the referenced characters and sitcoms

Episode Title ³	Endogenous References Key Marvel Characters ⁴	Exogenous References US Family Sitcoms
1 <i>Filmed Before a Live Studio Audience</i>	Wanda Vision Agnes	<i>I love Lucy</i> (CBS, 1951–1957) <i>The Dick Van Dyke Show</i> (CBS, 1961–1966)
2 <i>Don't Touch That Dial</i>	Wanda Vision Agnes Geraldine (Monica Rambeau)	<i>BeWitched</i> (ABC, 1964–1972) <i>I Dream of Jeannie</i> (NBC, 1965–1970)
3 <i>Now in Color</i>	Wanda Vision Agnes Geraldine (Monica Rambeau)	<i>The Brady Bunch</i> (ABC, 1969–1974) <i>Good Times</i> (CBS, 1974–1979) <i>The Mary Tyler Moore Show</i> (CBS, 1970–1977)
4 <i>We Interrupt this Program</i>	Monica Rambeau (Geraldine) Jimmy Woo Darcy Lewis Wanda Vision	N/A
5 <i>On a Very Special Episode...</i>	Wanda Vision Agnes Billy and Tommy Pietro	<i>Full House</i> (ABC, 1987–1995) <i>Family Ties</i> (NBC, 1982–1989) <i>Growing Pains</i> (ABC, 1985–1992) <i>Roseanne</i> (ABC, 1988–1997)
6 <i>All-New Halloween Spooktacular!</i>	Wanda (costume: Scarlet Witch) Vision (costume: Vision) Agnes (costume: a witch) Billy (costume: Wiccan) Tommy (costume: Speed) Pietro (costume: Quicksilver)	<i>Malcolm in the Middle</i> (FOX, 2000–2006)
7 <i>Breaking the Fourth Wall</i>	Wanda Vision Agnes (Agatha Harkness) Billy and Tommy Pietro Darcy Lewis Monica Rambeau (Geraldine)	<i>Modern Family</i> (ABC, 2009–2020) <i>The Office</i> (USA) (NBC, 2005–2013) <i>Happy Endings</i> (ABC, 2011–2013; 2020)
8 <i>Previously On</i>	Agatha Harkness Wanda Billy and Tommy Vision White Vision	N/A
9 <i>The Series Finale</i>	Agatha Harkness White Vision Vision Wanda (Scarlet Witch) Billy and Tommy Monica Rambeau	N/A

Source: Authors' table (collated from Disney+ website; Schaeffer, 2021; Higuera-Ruiz, 2023)

³ It should be noted that all episode titles illustrate the metatelevisual discourse and self-referential nature of this series, as Escoufflaire points out (2022, pp. 6–7).

⁴ The characters analyzed in the upcoming discussion are highlighted in bold.

To explain the results more concisely, the analysis of these nine episodes has been grouped into four distinct blocks:

- Episodes 1, 2, and 3, which are presented as episodes of a sitcom titled *WandaVision*.
- Episode 4, which resituates this sitcom within the wider context of the MCU.
- Episodes 5, 6, and 7, which combine the storylines of Wanda's sitcom and the world outside of Westview.
- Episodes 8 and 9, which explain the main role of the sitcom format within this series and then return to the dramatic conventions of the superhero genre.

Lastly, although the endogenous and exogenous references have been analyzed separately, their interpretation will now be discussed in a joint manner, as both types of intertextuality interact organically and cohesively throughout the series.

6.1. Episodes 1 - 3. *WandaVision* as a Sitcom from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s

The first three episodes of *WandaVision* share a fundamental trait: they are fully presented as sitcom episodes from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, respectively, maintaining the narrative, structural and aesthetic standards that sitcoms had in those three decades. In order to achieve this, the creators of the show replicated the modes of production from each era, including filming in front of a live studio audience, with a multi-camera setting and a 4:3 aspect ratio (Higueras-Ruiz, 2023). Cinematographer Jess Hall also used vintage lenses to generate a retro feel (Hall, as cited in Zorrilla, 2021). Episodes 1 and 2 are shot in black and white, but the perfect, idyllic life that Wanda tries to portray is disrupted by different metalepsis (such as a mysterious voice coming from a radio, or a red toy helicopter) that do not fit the sitcom format nor its time period. These disruptions not only generate tension and suspense (Escoufflaire, 2022); they also force Wanda to readjust the reality she has created, which consequently propels her forward into the following decade. Because of this, the TV series evolves and moves from black and white to technicolor in episode 3 (aptly titled 'Now in Color'), where Wanda and Vision suddenly have to prepare for a new stage in life: parenthood.

As Sánchez-Asenjo (2023) has observed, the limited *mise-en-scène* and the artificiality of sitcoms in the 1950s and 1960s serve to highlight the fact that something feels forced and contrived in Wanda and Vision's life in Westview. Furthermore, even the laugh track (a staple of the traditional sitcom format) "seems to be imposing some manufactured happiness" (Sánchez-Asenjo, 2023, p. 67). The arrival of technicolor in episode 3 also brings in a new tone, with a series that now presents a slightly more complex society, combining references to the naïve escapism of *The Brady Bunch* and the revolutionary empowerment of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (Sánchez-Asenjo, 2023, p. 69).

Intertextual references to early sitcoms are therefore deeply connected to Wanda's goals and motivations, as well as to the thematic roots of this miniseries. What Wanda desires more than anything else is to live a happy life with her family. However, the fabricated world that she has created feels artificial and unnatural, and is being constantly disrupted by unknown forces. No matter how much Wanda tries to maintain the picture-perfect life of family sitcoms, the constant cracks in the narrative are making it harder and harder for her to control her reality.

In this context, which also disrupts the superhero narratives that Marvel had been presenting on screen up until this point, the introduction of key characters becomes essential for viewers to fully comprehend the story. In episode 1, Wanda and Vision are portrayed as a happy, newly married couple who have just moved into a suburban neighborhood. This depiction of the characters raises many questions, particularly when considering their previous development in the MCU. Wanda was first introduced in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015). Throughout *The Infinity Saga*, she experienced painful losses, such as the deaths of her brother Pietro and her partner Vision, who was killed in *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018). Wanda's last appearance was in *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), where she fought against the villain Thanos.

While Wanda and Vision's reappearance in *WandaVision* might seem confusing in relation to the established MCU narrative, Marvel comics had already explored a storyline in which Wanda and Vision live in the suburbs of New Jersey, trying to lead a normal life. These plots were developed in *Vision and the Scarlet Witch* (1982, 1985) and *House of M* (2005), giving comic book fans a foundation to speculate on the TV series' connections to these works. This dynamic, which fosters fan engagement and activity (Evans, 2019), is characteristic of transmedia intertextuality, where the various touchpoints are not connected in a linear fashion but are instead enriched by the user's previous knowledge of and experience with the storyworld (Wen, 2024).

Additionally, in the first three episodes, two supporting characters become especially relevant to the plot: Agnes and Geraldine. Agnes lives a seemingly ordinary suburban life and is curious about her new neighbors. At this point in the series, not much is known about Agnes, as she has no prior references in the MCU. However, comic book fans speculated about her identity based on other characters crucial to Wanda's storyline in Marvel comics (Vary, 2021). Geraldine, whom we know in the MCU as Monica Rambeau, first appeared in the film *Captain Marvel* (2019). In the comics, she made her debut in *Amazing Spider-Man Annual #16* (1982), where her origin as the new Captain Marvel is explained. This reference adds intrigue to her character, who in these early episodes is presented as a neighbor helping Wanda settle into the community. However, by the end of episode 3, it becomes clear that there is more to her character, as will be unveiled in episode 4. Thus, the dialogue between the MCU and the comics helps build intrigue and interest in the series' development, raising many questions in order to keep viewers engaged.

6.2. Episode 4: *WandaVision* as a Sitcom Created by Wanda

Episode 4 (titled "We Interrupt this Program") introduces a shift in narrative perspective, revealing that what was seen in the first three episodes is a series created by Wanda, who has taken control of the town of Westview with a hex. The external world outside of this sitcom microcosm is now shown, and the storytelling returns to the familiar style of Marvel's superhero franchise. Monica Rambeau leads the progression of this episode, placing it chronologically within the larger MCU storyline. The main plot explains how Monica arrives in Westview and highlights the role played by the S.W.O.R.D. organization in this story. Two important supporting characters are also introduced in this episode: Jimmy Woo and Darcy Lewis.

As endogenous references, both characters introduce elements from earlier stories into this narrative, bringing a greater sense of familiarity with the MCU. Jimmy Woo is an agent who previously appeared in *Ant-Man and the Wasp* (2018), and Darcy Lewis is an astrophysicist who was featured in *Thor* (2011) and *Thor: The Dark World* (2013). While Jimmy Woo has appeared in the comics, albeit with different development, Darcy Lewis is a character created exclusively for the MCU.

Exogenous references to the sitcom format are not relevant in episode 4, since it is completely set in the world outside of Westview. In spite of this, it must be noted that this episode is where the audience discovers that Darcy is an intradiegetic viewer of *WandaVision*, and therefore real viewers are now fully aware of the metatelevisual nature of this miniseries.

6.3. Episodes 5 - 7. *Wanda's Progressive Loss of Control, from the 1980s to the 2010s*

The opening credits of episode 5 are based on the credits from sitcoms like *Family Ties* and *Full House*, which take viewers back to the 1980s. The set that recreates the Maximoff household, as well as the conflicts presented in this episode, also evoke family sitcoms from this decade. Most of the formal traits of traditional situation comedies (such as the multi-camera production scheme, or the laugh track) pervade in this episode. The aspect ratio, however, has changed from 4:3 to 16:9. As Sánchez-Asenjo points out, the 16:9 ratio became the norm in the mid-1990s; however, its use here "seems to reflect the show's approaching modernity while

accommodating to technical needs” caused by the juxtaposition of two different storylines (2023, p. 70).

In episode 5, Wanda and Vision are the new parents of two rapidly-growing twins, Billy and Tommy, and are dealing with the life changes that parenthood entails. All of the exogenous references mentioned above reinforce the idea of Wanda trying to preserve her perfect life in a chaotic, modern world that changes too fast and escapes her control.

In the final scene of episode 5, a new character appears, surprising Wanda: her (formerly dead) brother Pietro. This endogenous reference, featuring Pietro portrayed by Evan Peters (20th Century Fox) instead of Aaron Taylor-Johnson (Marvel), opens the door to a broader discussion regarding characters whose rights had been previously sold by Marvel to other studios. Following Escoufflaire, “the arrival of Evan Peters’s Pietro to the MCU constitutes a crossing of the frontier between different cinematic universes under the Marvel brand” (2022, p. 21). This is a transfictional metalepsis integrated within the fictional metalepsis that structures the series (Escoufflaire, 2022), allowing for intertextual connections that go beyond the narrative (in this case, linked to the business and commercial dynamics between Marvel and 20th Century Fox). This invites audiences to speculate about Pietro’s true identity, enriching the series’ narrative possibilities and fostering a more proactive engagement with the MCU.

Episode 6, titled “All-New Halloween Spooktacular!”, establishes an exogenous connection with a general convention in US television programming: having special or thematic episodes, dedicated to specific holidays (in this case, Halloween). The main exogenous reference in this episode is *Malcolm in the Middle* (Boomer, 2000–2006), which places real-life viewers at the turn of the twenty-first century – and thus, at the advent of the new wave of situation comedies, as explained in the theoretical framework of this article. It is worth noting that, although some of the sitcoms alluded to in the previous episode lasted well into the 1990s, *WandaVision* does not have an episode exclusively based on 1990s sitcoms. According to Sánchez-Asenjo, “a possible explanation for skipping this decade could be the lack of idealized [family] models from which Wanda’s world could draw inspiration” (2023, p. 71).

As many sitcoms from the 2000s, *Malcolm in the Middle* is a single-camera show, shot and edited in a more dynamic way (including handheld camera sequences), with more exterior settings and without a laugh track. The fourth wall is also consistently broken. These formal traits are replicated in *WandaVision* and heighten not only the chaos that is taking over Wanda’s household, but also her escalating loss of control of Westview at large. Moreover, all of these elements are used to visually externalize her inner turmoil.

Regarding the endogenous references, and along with the destabilizing arrival of Pietro, Wanda and Vision’s mischievous twin sons become key characters in episode 6. For instance, just as Malcolm breaks the fourth wall in his show, Billy and Tommy address the audience at different times during this episode of *WandaVision*, connecting the endogenous with the exogenous. The twins are not part of previous MCU storylines but had appeared in the comics, further reinforcing the narrative link between the series and Marvel’s earlier stories, specifically *Avengers West Coast: Vision Quest*.

Additionally, the Halloween costumes featured in this episode (detailed in **Table 2**) function as endogenous references, providing a direct connection between the characters and their identities as superheroes within the Marvel universe (**Figure 2**). Notably, Wanda’s costume as Scarlet Witch stands out (although she describes it as a “Sokovian fortune teller”), bringing her established identity within the broader MCU to the foreground, while integrating this aspect into the episode’s thematic setting. In a similar vein, Agnes’s witch costume foreshadows her true nature, which viewers will discover in the next installment of the series.

Figure 2. Pietro and Wanda (left) and Tommy and Billy (right) in their Halloween costumes.

Source: *WandaVision* (Schaeffer, 2021), episode 6. © Disney, Marvel.

In episode 7, it is revealed that Agnes is, in fact, the witch Agatha Harkness, a character with no previous references in the MCU but with significant development in the comics, particularly in *The Vision and the Scarlet Witch* and *Avengers West Coast: Vision Quest*. The end of this episode raises many questions and opens up a multitude of possible narrative directions, when Agatha is presented as the main antagonist through a song, titled “Agatha All Along”. This song was written by Robert López and Kristen Anderson-López, the composers behind other successful Disney soundtracks⁵, and constitutes an endogenous reference that is also expanded in Agatha’s own MCU miniseries, *Agatha All Along* (Schaeffer, 2024), amplifying the commercial interconnections between Disney and Marvel’s intellectual properties (as is characteristic of transmedia franchises).

Exogenous references in episode 7 draw from a popular trend in the 2000s and the 2010s, when various comedies relied on the conventions of the mockumentary genre to generate humor, something that Mills describes as *comedy vérité* (2004)⁶. According to this author, when the mockumentary and sitcom formats are hybridized, humor stems mostly from the documentary traits, more than from the traditional conventions of situation comedies (Mills, 2004). This is indeed true in the case of *WandaVision*, especially in relation to the documentary “talking heads”, which are used to generate irony and comedic contrast. However, this is combined with other sources of humor that are specific to this show, such as the now constant disruptions to Wanda’s reality. Ultimately, episode 7 of *WandaVision* uses *comedy vérité* to unravel the different layers of its “televsual masquerade” (Thompson, 2007, p. 67), dismantling the last remains of Wanda’s ideal life until her sitcom bubble bursts completely.

6.4. Episodes 8 and 9. Transmedia Intertextuality as a key to understanding the Story within the Marvel Canon

Once the identity of Agatha Harkness is revealed and Wanda has to face her antagonist, episodes 8 and 9 leave all the sitcom storytelling traits behind. According to Sánchez-Asenjo, “the sitcom conventions start being dismantled at the same time as Wanda’s illusion vanishes. (...) Her fantasy based on harmony is completely wrecked. Consequently, the sitcom genre no longer

⁵ The Lopezes, as they are generally known, composed the music for Disney films such as *Frozen* (2013) and *Coco* (2017), both of which led them to win an Oscar for Best Original Song (for “Let It Go” in *Frozen* and “Remember Me” in *Coco*.) Furthermore, the Lopezes also wrote “The Ballad of the Witches’ Road,” a song that plays a central role in Agatha’s own miniseries, *Agatha All Along* (2024).

⁶ Mills coined this term to describe series like *The Office* (Gervais and Merchant, 2001–2003), which employ a discourse and aesthetic style based on cinema vérité. Although *The Office* was not the first mockumentary comedy on television, its cultural relevance and its subsequent US remake (*The Office*, Daniels, 2005–2013) have had a significant impact on situation comedies in the United States, with others (such as *Modern Family*) replicating their style (García Avis, 2016). Even years later, their influence is still present in series like *Abbott Elementary* (Brunson, 2021–).

makes sense” (2023, p. 72). That being so, the last two episodes fully embrace the superhero nature of this story, presenting it with the “Marvel Cinematic” style, as noted on the front page of the shooting script for episode 8 (Donney, 2020). And yet this episode holds the key to understanding the significance of the sitcom format in *WandaVision*. Under the title of “Previously On”, the narrative resorts to flashbacks to explain why Wanda has created a sitcom reality for herself.

Wanda was born in the fictional country of Sokovia, where she lived with her parents and her brother Pietro, and classic American sitcoms were a staple of her childhood. They bring her comfort and happiness, and there is nothing she would like more than to have an idyllic family life as the ones portrayed in the sitcoms she used to watch with her family. In the MCU timeline, right before Wanda and Vision move to Westview, Wanda's life has been struck by tragedy multiple times, and she has been unable to overcome the loss of her loved ones. Because of this, after Vision's death, Wanda finds refuge in the perfect world of Westview, where she can have a family and finally be happy.

The evolution of sitcoms through the decades mirrors Wanda's transformation arc in this miniseries. In a way, the sitcom format is ingrained in Wanda's DNA. Family sitcoms portray her deepest wants and, at the same, are the engine of her motivation as a character. Yet the increasing “glitches” in her *WandaVision* hex will make Wanda realize that there is something wrong with this perfect sitcom world that she has created for herself, and that what she really needs to do is confront her grief once and for all.

Furthermore, in addition to this revelation, episode 8 introduces a new character. White Vision is not part of the MCU, but he has played a significant role in *Avengers West Coast: Vision Quest*, thus establishing connections with the character's background in the comics. However, in this series he takes on a different narrative role, creating a play of discontinuities (López-Iglesias & Bellido-Blanco, 2023) that is made possible by the creative opportunities of transmedia intertextuality (Enverga, 2021).

This leads to the series' finale, where the sitcom format is completely abandoned in favor of a more traditional superhero narrative, culminating in a confrontation between the protagonist (Wanda) and the antagonist (Agatha). In this episode, other endogenous references are also woven in. For instance, Wanda's character arc reaches its climax when she faces her grief and finally embraces her identity as Scarlet Witch. This is something that bolsters her potential connection to the MCU's new saga, particularly to the Doctor Strange universe. Additionally, the narrative opens the door for the broader development of Agatha Harkness, who (as has already been stated) now has her own TV series within the MCU, *Agatha All Along*. Thus, beyond the diegesis of *WandaVision*, the conclusion to Wanda's story serves as a gateway to future franchise projects, a strategy that encourages audience engagement and speculation about future narrative directions (Atarama-Rojas & Feijoo, 2023).

7. Conclusions

In *WandaVision*, intertextuality goes beyond mere mentions or nods to viewers; it actually contributes to the construction of a discourse with numerous ramifications and narrative implications. Many intertextual references are consciously disseminated by the creators of this miniseries, connecting, at various levels of depth, its endogenous and exogenous dimensions. This encourages audiences to actively immerse themselves in the viewing experience, unraveling the various semantic layers that have been strategically embedded throughout the story. Although *WandaVision* can certainly be enjoyed and understood on its own as a miniseries, this creative approach enables viewers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of both the MCU and the significance of the sitcom format, which is used to depict the evolution of North American sociocultural values and Wanda's transformational arc conjointly.

Because of this, it could be argued that the proactive implementation of transmedia intertextuality is a screenwriting resource that can enhance stories set within transmedia universes, inviting audiences to grasp the interconnectedness of all intertextual references as a cohesive whole. Furthermore, it must be noted that intertextual links may also take place beyond the narrative features of the storyworld. For instance, the appearance of Evan Peters's Pietro, or the creation of *Agatha All Along* (both the song and the miniseries), also point to business dynamics related to Marvel and Disney.

WandaVision brought forward an innovative approach to television storytelling, placing transmedia intertextuality and a metatelevisual discourse at the core of the show. The sitcom format is deeply integrated in the narrative, not only because it is the engine that moves the plot along, but also because it mirrors the protagonist's psychological and emotional state, becoming essential to her development as a character. Wanda uses sitcoms to create an alternate world that helps her escape her reality, choosing this format because it evokes the happiest memories of her childhood. Furthermore, the idyllic lives of the families portrayed in sitcoms represent Wanda's deepest, yet unattainable, yearning. Ultimately, sitcoms are a window into Wanda's inner world and her struggle to face the grief of loss. Because, above all, this is a story about coping with the loss of the people we love.

Thus, transmedia intertextuality serves as a powerful tool not only to enrich the expandable world of the MCU, but also to delve into complex themes such as loss and identity. By weaving together the exogenous conventions of sitcoms from various decades with the established, endogenous superhero narrative, the miniseries creates a multi-layered journey for its audience. In this way, *WandaVision* demonstrates television's potential to challenge and engage viewers, offering them a way to explore fundamental human experiences within an intertextual network that deepens their connection to the story and to the themes it conveys.

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