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OTT platforms distributing media content: a threat for the free-to-air TV duopoly in Spain?

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Abstract
The arrival of over-the-top (OTT) players in Spain's media market has resulted in the importation of the successful business models of pay-TV from the United States. However, the origin, historical development and regulation of the TV market in Spain mean that its TV ecosystem is substantially different from the US market. This article aims to verify whether the powerful industry of free-to-air private TV, led by Atresmedia and Mediaset, will prevent OTT media business models from being implemented in the short term or whether, on the contrary, these convergent players will pose a threat to the traditional TV broadcasting model.

Keywords
OTT, media, business models, television, duopoly.

Resum
L'arribada d'operadors over-the-top *al mercat audiovisual espanyol ha suposat la importació de models de negoci de pagament que han obtingut bons resultats als Estats Units. No obstant això, l'origen, el desenvolupament històric i la regulació del mercat de la televisió a Espanya fan que el seu ecosistema televisiu difereixi substancialment del nord-americà. L'objectiu d'aquest article és esbrinar si la potent indústria de la televisió privada en obert, encapçalada per Atresmedia i Mediaset, impedirà la implantació a curt termini de models de negoci audiovisuals OTT o si, per contra, aquests operadors convergents suposaran una amenaça al model d'emissió televisiva tradicional.*

Paraules clau
OTT, audiovisual, models de negoci, televisió, duopoli.

1. Introduction

The media ecosystem that includes audiovisuals is currently undergoing a revolution in terms of market. Whereas the digitalisation of radio wave TV (DTT) represented a watershed in Spain's TV system, convergence between the telecom industry and the internet and the development of mobile devices have resulted in another turning point in the evolution of the so-called audiovisual services market (European Parliament 2010, Izquierdo 2014). The appearance of the internet in the (now digital) sector of audiovisual content has significantly altered how audiovisuals are distributed and consumed. As a result, TV content has fully entered the digital era, transforming access to such content and leading to consumption that is increasingly mobile, multi-directional and multi-device (via mobile phone, tablet, PC, consoles, Roku or Chromecast players, Smart TV…).

Francisco Campos Freire (2015) classified the arrival of such new technologies, processes and information management systems as "disruptive innovation" in the media ecosystem, destroying or complementing the traditional business models and value chains of the audiovisual industry by introducing new models of distribution and access and constituting a new ecology of the media ecosystem. In this respect OTT players function as "infomediaries" in audiovisual distribution (Campos-Freire 2013) and even as producers of audiovisual content, and carry out functions that were traditionally performed by conventional TV operators.

This article looks at the origins of OTT content providers, in the United States, where the penetration of digital video on demand (VoD) has historically been high: for instance, in June 2015 more than a third of American households subscribed to the provider Netflix, according to *Videonuze*. This OTT player *par excellence* in the market had over forty million subscribers at that time in the US alone. This is merely an example of the impact of new convergent models on the distribution of audiovisual content.

Tentative signs can now be seen of business models that integrate roles traditionally associated with TV broadcasting, such as production or the broadcasting of series and films, with those of online digital distribution. However, looking once again at the US market, we should ask whether Spanish OTT audiovisual players will achieve such high levels of penetration and success. The main obstacle is that Spain's public-private model of television has characteristics, resulting from its background and historical regulation, that have shaped its current form in which the hegemonic audiovisual model is free-to-air TV broadcast via radio waves.

2. Methodological aspects

The main aim of this article is to determine whether the emergence of new business models to distribute audiovisual content via the internet pose a threat to the hegemony of the free-to-air television provided by the duopoly of Atresmedia and Mediaset in Spain's public-private model. The objective is to determine, in the Spanish context, to what extent the distribution system for audiovisual services is currently undergoing a transformation of its model that may endanger the foundations on which traditional operators manage free-to-air TV or whether, on the contrary, the new over-the-top (OTT) business models will not disrupt the structure or distribution of Spanish TV in the short term.

The point of departure for this work is the hypothesis that, in Spain, OTT audiovisual business models will not affect the traditional broadcasting structure in the short term. The main reason is that the private duopoly of free-to-air TV is based on a model of audiovisual distribution and consumption that provides free access and is free of charge via TV broadcast on radio waves, which has now become digital. On the other hand, the low penetration and little public support for pay audiovisual services[1] (via satellite, cable or internet) has left the door open to piracy as a habitual way of accessing content other than free-to-air TV, both in the physical video market (DVD and Blu-Ray) and via the internet.

This article will first define the mixed public and private model of television in Spain, compared with the US model that is the origin and benchmark for the OTT business models reproduced subsequently in Europe. We will review the beginnings and development of pay OTT players for the distribution of audiovisual content and the most relevant business models in this sector, both in the US and also in Spain, ending with an overall appraisal of the models that, taking into account the context and development of Spain's TV market, will help to determine the future of these platforms in such a market.

The methodology used for this study consists of identifying and analysing the main OTT audiovisual distribution models as well as their key players, both in the US and in Spain. We have based our study on a review of the documentation, which provides a general framework for an economic analysis of media companies in the era of convergence. In this respect, our references have been the latest works by authors such as Gillan (2010) and Albarran (2010) in the US context; and others such as García-Santamaría (2013) (2014), Artero (2008) and Campos-Freire (2015) in the case of Spain.

For the specific study of the US market, we have used the regular reports published by *VideoNuze IQ*, the publication specialising in the online video industry in the US. This publication analyses the different players in the OTT video market, their development and the dominant business models in this market which are, in general terms, those which Spain has imported. Our study of the US online video system has been completed with specialised reports drawn up by analytical organisations, mostly privately owned, such as BGC Perspectives, Analysis Mason, PwC and DigiWorld.

In the Spanish case, in order to identify the OTT players present in the market we have used the portal TVISO,[2] an online video aggregator that compares and combines streamed content offered by the distributors present in Spain. This has been our point of departure for determining the OTT players in the Spanish market; however, subsequently we also studied the content provided by each player via their websites. We have also used the annual report produced by the European Audiovisual Observatory (2015) on the state of the sector at a European level and in each member state, as well as other specific reports by local public and private organisations, such as CNMC, AIMC and the Observatori de la Producció Audiovisual. Lastly, we also consulted reports and articles in publications and portals specialising in the audiovisual sector, such as *Noticias de la Comunicación*, *PR Noticias* and the website *TDT1*.

3. Two divergent TV systems: current implications of the development of the Spanish audiovisual model

The Spanish audiovisual model reflects a Mediterranean-type or "polarised pluralist" system (Hallin & Mancini, 2008) which, regarding audiovisuals, is the result of the late introduction of the classic model of public service in Europe, which then transformed into a hybrid between the public and commercial model. The development of the mixed public-private model of TV in Spain is largely conditioned by its background and historical evolution and by public policies that have affected the market's development to date. In this respect, the Spanish TV system has a number of defining features that set it apart from the US system and which might currently impede the arrival and stabilisation of pay business models implemented in the US by the major OTT players. Some of the most important particular features of Spain's TV model are as follows:

- **Late industrialisation and democratisation have delayed the development of communication companies.** Modern industrialisation didn't start until the second half of the 20th century. Consequently, the media as independent companies, unrelated to political powers, didn't develop until the last quarter of the century, after Franco's death.

- **The public and state origin of TV.** At first the TV model was associated with state power, moreover under a political dictatorship. Franco's government concentrated and centralised public TV broadcasting from its beginning in 1956. The content and management of early television in Spain were therefore monopolised, politicised and subject to the will of the government with zero public or private alternatives throughout the country (Bustamante 2013).

- **Little development of transmission systems such as cable or satellite.** The governmental origin of TV also limited support for these distribution systems which, however, did enjoy high rates of penetration in other European countries (such as Germany and Belgium) and in America in general. Consequently, cable and satellite have remained relegated to the pay model and public administrations have not encouraged or subsidised their development, unlike radio wave TV, analogue and digital (García Castillejo 2012).

- **Little penetration of pay TV.** As a consequence of the previous point, there is an imbalance between the penetration of television based on direct pay models and free-to-air TV broadcast via radio waves. In 2013 the degree of penetration of pay services in Spain was below 25% compared with the obligatory 98% of free-to-air DTT (OEA 2015a).

- **Economic crisis and limited purchasing power of households**. The perception of pay TV services as non-essential has increased since 2008 when the economic recession started to hit Spanish households and spending on leisure and entertainment was no longer a priority.

- **Multiplication, fragmentation and concentration of free-to-air content.** After the digital switchover of TV, audiences now enjoy a much more diverse and fragmented consumption of free-to-air television (Izquierdo 2014). However, although more specialised supply has brought about a revolution compared with the previous model which was based on large generalist channels, the origin of more than half the free-to-air channels corresponds to the two major audiovisual corporations, Atresmedia and Mediaset.

- **Internet and the culture of free content.** The internet has encouraged a scenario in which users can access almost all the audiovisual content available in the world merely by owning a device and being able to connect to a network. In Spain, given the relative lack of business models providing affordable access to this content, viewers have tended to resort to piracy; a habitual tendency for Spanish consumers in the digital era, as can be deduced by the proliferation of P2P sites for the illegal consumption of content online.

For its part, the TV distribution model in the United States, eminently private and with a high penetration of pay services, has traditionally applied video on demand (VoD) business models, either through cable, satellite or the internet (imported by Europe later on); or with physical video club services that have managed to adapt their business to the mobile digital environment, as is the case of Netflix. On the other hand, the characteristics of Spain's broadcasting and consumption model, where users have access to a large amount of free content, means that the conditions for OTT players to enter the audiovisual market and develop vary between the two countries in question.

4. Over-the-top digital video distributors: the online video business imported from the US

Over-the-top players are those "metaservices" (Campos-Freire 2013) that have the necessary infrastructure to disseminate content generally generated by third parties via the internet and towards fixed and mobile devices of all kinds: smartphones, tablets, digital video players, Smart TV and conventional computers. The advantage of these free transmission providers is that they use the data networks of national telecom operators to transmit all kinds of information and content globally. The business opportunities within this kind of service are therefore highly attractive as they do not need or possess the network infrastructure nor generate the content transmitted via this infrastructure. There is a wide range of such operators: from messaging services (Whatsapp, Line and Messenger), voice services (Skype and Viber) and platforms distributing audiovisual content, which we are looking at here.

These information transporters emerged strongly in the traditional market of audiovisual distribution in the United States and have gone on to expand with considerable success, first in Europe and then in the rest of the world. The reasons for this expansion are evident. On the one hand the universalisation of broadband internet connection networks, especially mobile, and their optimisation via the high speeds provided by 4G. As a cause and a consequence of this, the development of devices capable of reproducing streamed content has transferred traditional fixed and static VoD services (and even "physical" video clubs) to many different kinds of mobile receivers. Digitalisation, both of audiovisual content and its dissemination, has also multiplied, diversified and fragmented the supply of audiovisual content and access to this. As a result, users of the new convergent audiovisual ecosystem enjoy the added value of being able to "choose" compared with the traditional concept of lineal TV. In the new consumption environment, what's important is the programme, clip or video or audiovisual content of whatever type, in contrast with the concept of a continual channel. Consumers, more active than ever, look for, choose and access content in a selective and fragmented way. Consequently, suppliers increasingly try to offer them a unique experience when consuming this audiovisual content, for which they need to provide added value by increasing the technical and formal quality of the content, the possibility for multi-screen access, personalisation of the supply and a varied catalogue that is constantly evolving at an affordable price.

In 2015, in the United States, seven out of every ten internet users accessed online videos via OTT providers[3]. Given such a figure, the main interest of operators, both traditional and recent arrivals to the market, is to determine the best way to monetise these new trends in audiovisual consumption. However, when we look at the dominant business models of these operators in the US, the first thing we see is that they're supported by traditional pay television or video club models, reproduced in the new digital environments. There are three main models of business for distributing digital video via OTT, based on the classifications made by authors such as García-Santamaría (2014) and Izquierdo (2012):

1. **Subscription Video on Demand (SVoD).** This is based on the regular payment of a fixed fee (monthly or annually) entitling users to access a catalogue of audiovisual products (series, films, documentaries, TV programmes) consumed via streaming. In the US market, SVoD leaders are Netflix and Hulu (an online audiovisual content aggregator resulting from a joint venture between the networks ABC, CW, Fox and NBC). Both offer an extensive, personalised catalogue that has a large number of titles to which subscribers have unlimited access from $7.99 a month. Also of note for this model is the online video club service by the giant Amazon, called Amazon Video, which, although offering its collection via pay-per-view, also has an annual subscription of $99 which, in addition to other premium services on Amazon, also includes a flat rate for viewing a large part of its permanent catalogue. As an example of the high penetration enjoyed by these providers in the United States, in 2015 95% of OTT video consumers subscribed to Netflix, Amazon Video or Hulu, while the remaining 5% were shared among the other 98 SVOD services (including the OTT versions of major TV networks, such as HBO Now, CBS All Access and Sling TV).[4]

2. **Pay-per-view.** This consists of a one-off payment to access individual content, such as a film or episode, either by streaming (temporary renting) or downloading permanently to a device (purchase). This is the typical model of the "online video club" (also important in the music industry, with iTunes at its head). In addition to the pay-per-view version of Amazon Video, in the US market there is also the platform Vudu (owned by the powerful retailer Walmart), which offers an online catalogue with films and series, both new and classic, of diverse quality and with prices ranging from $0.99 and $6.99 for rental and between $3.99 and $24.99 for purchases.

3. **Free model (based on advertising or AVoD)**. Just like the traditional free-to-air TV model, users can see content free of charge but, in exchange, they also have to see a range of advertising, which may be inserted within the video itself and/or in the interface of the app. Revenue from this advertising goes to the producer of the content, as with traditional free-to-air TV and cinemas. The free version of Hulu is important in this area, as well as portals emerging with Web 2.0 such as YouTube and Vimeo which are now offered in an app.

As we have already mentioned, hybrid models are much more frequent than pure models and the majority of OTT players therefore attempt to combine business formulas including subscription, pay-per-view and download and, to a lesser extent, free access to content. The aim is for audiovisual content to reach a diverse audience which now has the power to choose what, how, when and where they consume and are no longer interested in accessing static, lineal TV content but in specific pieces of audiovisual entertainment, without fixed times or places of access (Campos-Freire 2015).

In this new model personalised, heterogeneous audiences have total control over the content they consume. The success of one model or another will therefore depend on providing, firstly, an extensive, varied catalogue, even niche content. But it also depends on enhancing the range of titles with added value services that generate more interest both in the product itself (high definition video, subtitles and versions in the original language, premieres, exclusive content, etc.) and also in the surrounding environment (personalisation of content, complete multimedia entertainment packages, identification with the brand or social interaction).

5. Over-the-top operators in Spain: the main business models and the content they offer

In Europe, access to VoD content via OTT platforms accounted for 60% of all access in 2013 according to the European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO 2015). In spite of this, the EAO itself notes that there are different levels of maturity for OTT services in the member states of the European Union. In 2013 45% of the revenue from VoD consumption throughout Europe came from the United Kingdom alone. The Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway) also recorded a high penetration of these digital video services, accounting for 28.4% of total VoD consumption in Europe.

According to AIMC (2016), in Spain the consumption of TV content online has grown substantially, following the global trend. One out of four citizens stated that, in 2015, they accessed TV services via the internet every day; more than half did so every week. Although the majority of those surveyed preferred a laptop, access to audiovisual content via mobile apps exceeded 43% of the total consumption. Moreover, one of four consumers accessed daily via apps. However, the majority (73%) used free TV network apps.

In the Spanish market there are currently six major operators, some digital natives and others resulting from traditional TV companies, which distribute VoD via pay OTT models. Here it's important to note that, although the state broadcaster RTVE also provides online OTT video services, this study has not analysed these as all the content distributed is free and financed entirely by the state (there is no advertising either). Below we describe the main characteristics of each private operator and their internet business model.

- **NETFLIX.** This successful US distributor arrived in Spain in October 2015 with a similar business model to its original version (the same one this Californian company has implemented in all 190 countries where it operates): a monthly subscription with a fixed fee that ranges between €7.99 for access via a single device to €12.99 for simultaneous viewing on up to four connected devices. This means that the same subscriber account can be shared by up to four people at any time. Netflix España also has, at present, a distribution agreement with Vodafone through which it sells its VoD services together with voice, mobile and internet services, based on a multiple play model.

- **YOMVI.** Movistar's streaming service comes from Yomvi of Canal+, before it was taken over by this subsidiary of Telefónica. Its business model is similar to Netflix: a fixed monthly fee that varies depending on the package of channels taken out, allowing subscribers to access 54 channels live and a large catalogue of content on demand. The main change in the service after becoming part of Movistar+ is the system for marketing Yomvi, which is now included as a complement to the pay-TV packages (which can be combined for a monthly price of between €20 and €30 each one) and in the multiple play packages (Fusión+) at a cost of €65 a month.

- **WUAKI.** This OTT player is Spanish in origin although it was taken over by the Japanese Rakuten in 2012. It was the first operator to combine a flat rate with one-off purchases of content via an economic transaction. Most of its titles are available in its *Selection* catalogue after paying a monthly fee of €6.99. This service is also complemented by the possibility of obtaining specific films and series, either rented or purchased (downloaded to the device). The main advantage of this model is that it multiplies its target as you don't have to be a subscriber to enjoy the pay-per-view service, at a price ranging between €1.99 and €11.99 (rental and purchase). The telecom operator Orange also offers subscription to *Wuaki Selection* as a complement to its internet pay-TV (IPTV) for an additional €4.99 per month.

- **FILMIN.** This is based on the online video club transactional model. It resulted from ten independent Spanish film producers getting together to take advantage of the rise of Web 2.0 to distribute their films via the internet. Filmin currently combines the transactional model with the subscription model. On the one hand it offers titles from its catalogue for rent for between €1.95 and €3.95 per film; on the other it has a premium version in which, for €8 a month, subscribers can access most of the catalogue apart from specific titles classed as *premier.* These films can only be acquired via *premier* vouchers, only available to *Premium+* users who pay a larger fee (€15 a month with three *premier* vouchers). Filmin also rewards subscribers who take out long-term subscriptions (up to one year) with a proportional reduction in their monthly fee and free *premier* vouchers.

- **ATRESPLAYER.** This is the streaming service offered by Atresmedia, one of the two private audiovisual groups that dominate traditional television. Given its presence and dominance in DTT, for this player offering VoD is more a complement to its main business, which is free-to-air television. Its streaming is based on a combination of the three models described: subscription, transaction and free of charge. Most of its content can be accessed by anyone as it is also available on DTT. However, other added value services are added to this "totally free of charge" model, such as some premium content, higher quality (HD), language and subtitle options and the ability to personalise the service, among others. To access these, users just need to register on the platform; but if they want to get rid of all advertising seen online they have to pay a monthly fee of €2.69. The free or flat rate options are complemented with an online video club services for renting or buying films for between €0.99 and €15.99.

- **MITELE.** The other large pillar in the duopoly of free-to-air private TV, Mediaset, offers this streaming service via the internet and OTT. The business model on which *Mitele* is based differs the most from the rest described in this section. This platform transmits the same content as its DTT channels via the internet and apps and it could be said that Mediaset merely "uploads" its programmes and series onto Mitele to make them available via online demand. Its only pay content comes from a very limited catalogue of films, mostly co-produced by Mediaset, which users can buy by paying a fixed one-off price of €1.45.

As can be seen in table 1, most of the OTT distribution models use subscription, especially those whose business is solely on the internet (Wuaki and Filmin) or that come from other pay television or video club systems (Netflix and Yomvi). TV operators offer most of their online catalogue free of charge, simply uploading what they broadcast on the traditional TV system but on-demand, complementing their usual content with other exclusive content via pay models to attract and increase the loyalty of users who could potentially take out other OTT services.

Table 1. OTT video business models in Spain

Player	Model de negoci	Preu mínim	Oferta		
			Pel·lícules	Sèries	Programes
NETFLIX	Subscription	From €7.99€/month	1,031	225	5
YOMVI	Subscription	€20/month	1,128	297	245
WUAKI	Subscription	€6.99€/month	731	-	-
	PPV	€1.99-€11.99	3,805	60	-
FILMIN	Subscription	€8 or €15€/month	7,931	152	-
	PPV	€1.95-€3.95	7,931	152	-
ATRESPLAYER	Subscription	€2.65€/month	269	(72)	18
	PPV	€0.99-€15.99	2,581	47	-
	Free		-	72	78
MITELE	PPV	€1.45	35	-	-
	Free		-	52	168

Source: Author, based on data from the operators and TVISO portal.

Conclusions

Having compared the Spanish and US OTT business models and described the evolution of the TV system in Spain in the new media ecosystem, the main trend observed is the importation of the VoD business models present in the US market. However, the Spanish audiovisual market, traditionally dominated by free-to-air commercial television, has a number of particular features due to its history which lead us to believe that the implementation and stabilisation of these over-the-top audiovisual distribution models will be more sustained and long-term in Spain.

Since 2005 the public communication policies carried out by Spanish governments of different political leanings (Zallo, 2010), the advertising crisis and the internationalisation of the market have resulted in the concentration of TV operators, with Atresmedia and Mediaset controlling 54% of the content supplied free-to-air and 85% of the advertising revenue in 2015, according to Kantar Media. In addition to the power held by this duopoly in free-to-air television (Artero 2008; Izquierdo 2014) is the limited promotion and low penetration of pay TV in Spain which is, given its late start, somewhat smaller than its European peers and, logically, than pay TV in the United States (García Castillejo 2012). For this reason OTT platforms distributing audiovisuals face high barriers of entry when introducing their digital business models in a concentrated market based on lineal television and historically influenced by a "free culture" encouraged by the model of free-to-air television.[5]

Six online distribution platforms stand out in Spain's OTT market, most of them Spanish in origin. However, two of these audiovisual services via streaming, *Mitele* and *Atresplayer*, are managed by two large DTT corporations; and another, *Yomvi*, by a telecom operator that has absolute leadership in pay TV. Although these players realise the need to converge on the internet, they come from the traditional television broadcasting structure and are aware that most of their audience still lies in lineal television. That's why OTT services are merely a complement to their core business, conventional television, with high penetration and fully established business models.

Specifically, Atresmedia and Mediaset maintain and perpetuate the free commercial model, accumulating audiences on their different niche channels and, between both of them, have most of the advertising on DTT. Consequently, as claimed by the manager of Atresmedia, Maurizio Carlotti, at the CAC Fòrum de la Comunicació early in 2015, the main interest of these two large corporations is to focus on maintaining their dominance of the free-to-air commercial model in spite of their involvement in new distribution models based on convergence. *Atresplayer* and *Mitele* therefore wish to safeguard their duopoly against the potentially disruptive effect of over-the-top business models. To maintain their supremacy in the audiovisual panorama and perpetuate the current structure of the television system, these two large operators need powerful applications that offer similar content and models to the new platforms to provide users with the usual content but in line with their new consumption habits.

Probably, albeit in the long term, innovation in this model will come from services whose business is based 100% on the internet. *Netflix* is a case in point, an expanding platform that has internationalised its supply via a strategy combining a powerful catalogue of series and films available at a low price and with a high degree of personalisation. However, in Spain *Netflix* may come up against some competition, not so much from independent platforms with an online origin such as *Wuaki* or *Filmin* but from the pay services offered by *Movistar+* (which include *Yomvi*), which holds the rights to a lot of series and sports events as well as agreements with the US majors so as not to miss out on the internet audiovisual business and avoid being merely a "dumb pipe" for over-the-top distribution.

Notes

1. Between 2010 and 2013, the European Commission carried out research into the promotion of DTT in Spain. It believed the government had promoted only DTT, creating an unfair situation for operators of other pay platforms.
2. <https://es.tviso.com/comparador-oferta-streaming-online>
3. *Seven in 10 US Internet Users Watch OTT Video*, a <http://

www.emarketer.com/Article/Seven-10-US-Internet-Users-Watch-OTT-Video/1013061> [Consulted: 02/04/2016].

4. *Research: Subscriptions to OTT Services Aside From Netflix, Amazon and Hulu Remain Minimal*. <http://iq.videonuze.com/article/research-subscriptions-to-ott-services-aside-from-netflix-amazon-and-hulu-remain-minimal> [Consultaed 02/04/2016].

5. Up to 2010, not only private free-to-air TV channels based their business model on advertising; the state public operator, RTVE, had mixed funding with part of its revenue coming from sales of advertising space (combined with public subsidies), unlike the situation with other European public TV models, such as the United Kingdom, where citizens pay a direct fee to access public TV content.

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