

***Operación Triunfo*: The Evolution of Reality TV in Spain. Production, Scheduling Strategies and Audience Analyses**

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Abstract

Operación Triunfo (OT) was a Spanish talent-show launched in 2001 on TVE1, the main channel of the Public Broadcasting Service. This article synthesizes a ten-year study about the evolution of this reality game until 2011, when its eighth edition was suddenly cancelled due to poor audience results. Nevertheless, during the previous seven editions OT proved to be an effective product for its broadcasters, both public and commercial (Telecinco), even there were significant differences between how these two channels presented the contest. An examination of audience results is completed with a study of scheduling strategies and results show a quite different approach to reality TV: a shift towards a sensationalist approach did not pay off to the commercial channel's interests and the constant loss of audience lead to the premature end of the show. New talent-shows in Spain have readdressed this format successfully by privileging the artistic part over the sensationalist.

Keywords: Reality TV; Audience Studies; Scheduling Strategies; Talent Shows; Operación Triunfo/Pop Idol.

Summary: 1. Introduction, method and objectives. 2. Main features of Operación Triunfo. 2.1. Concept. 2.2. Genre. 2.3. Platforms. 2.4. Cross-media product. 3. Scheduling strategies. 3.1. Strategies related to the TV product and the broadcasting channel. 3.2. Strategies related to the competency. 4. Audience: viewers give you power, but they can also remove it. 5. Conclusions. References.

1. Introduction, method and objectives

The first reality game based on 24 hours coexistence under broadcasted surveillance can be found in 1992, when MTV launched *The Real World*, a US documentary serial. Nevertheless, the very first attempt of this TV genre is located in 1973, when the US Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) aired *An American Family*, after having experimentally registered an average family of Santa Barbara (California) during two years. Even Holmes (2014) identified seminal traces of this format in previous TV programmes, the end of the 20th century witnessed the landing of reality games at international TV schedules: *Expedition Robinson*, at the Swedish channel SVT1 in 1997; *Big Brother*, at the Dutch channel Veronica in 1999; and *Popstars*, at the second public channel in New Zealand during 1999 (Imbert, 2003; Simon, 2005). With the arrival of the 21st century this genre flooded global schedules with a diverse array of TV —confinements and the appearance of several spin-offs. It also became soon a research topic within the scholar community, focusing the debate mainly on the reception process (Hill, 2000, 2002, 2005; Lewis, 2004; Michelle, 2009) and with a critical approach to their cultural effects on the audience (Frau-Meigs, 2006).

In Spain, reality games did not show up until April 23rd, 2000, when the first edition of *Big Brother* (*Gran Hermano*, *GH*) was launched by Telecinco, a commercial station. It was presented to the audience as a sociological experiment, turning very soon into the main TV phenomenon of the season. Its unexpected audience achievement overshadowed most of the ethical criticizing raised against the program. These good results forced the reaction of the other open-air national-scope channels. Antena 3 initiates in September 15th, another product developed by the Dutch company Endemol. *El Bus* was a reality game located inside a coach travelling throughout the country. Within this context, the Spanish public channel (Televisión Española, TVE1) tried to find a way to maintain its audience leadership.

Pop Idol was released in the United Kingdom on October 5th, 2001 at ITV, only two weeks prior to the launching of *Operación Triunfo*¹ (*OT*) in Spain. Both are based on the same recipe: they are ‘hunting’ talent, they look for the best new pop singer, they use a four-member jury to evaluate the candidates; they yield the final decision about the winner to the audience; they follow a multi-platform strategy as a business model; they offer a professional career as final prize for the winner; and they have been successfully exported to other countries. The main difference between them points to their different trajectory: while *Pop Idol* was only broadcasted during two editions; *OT* arrived to eight.

In Spain, *OT* was the reply to *GH*. This new offer was based on a musical contest among sixteen young and anonymous candidates living together for four months in a specialized centre (the Academia) where they were helped by a team of experts in order to become professional singers. Their improvement was presented weekly in a live gala, where contestants demonstrated their musical and scenic evolution performing a popular song and trying to gain the audience’s

¹ Triunfo means success in English.

trust. Every week, a jury composed of four experts judged their performance and appointed four candidates to leave the game. After this first nomination, both the group of teachers and the group of candidates saved one of the four selected candidates, leading to a face-to-face election between two participants. The audience, by means of electronic and phone voting during the week after, decides who can carry on participating in the contest (Enli and Ihlebaek, 2011).

During the first editions of *OT*, the final prize was a fully-funded musical career for the three runner-ups, and also the chance to represent TVE1 at Eurovision song contest. Since the fourth edition, right after the change from the public to the commercial station, the same prize was only offered to the winner.

Gestmusic Endemol was the owner and developer of this format. After being offered to other stations, in October 22nd, 2001, TVE1 broadcasted the first gala, reaching to 2,734,000 spectators and a 22'1% of share, seven points less than *Periodistas*, a national series comfortably placed as the leader until then. Four months after, in February 11th, 2002, the final gala was followed by 12,873,000 persons, raising the average share up to the 68%: it became the highest audience of the whole previous decade, beating the traditional dominance of football matches (GECA, 2003):

'The success of *OT* overtakes all foresights and places this new TV genre on the first position of the most viewed programs. *OT* not only achieves the same but also get even better results than the launching format, *GH*, and shows that its main audience incentives go even further than the inherited ones' (Pérez and Gómez, 2003:11).²

OT suddenly turned from a TV success into a social phenomenon (Cebrián, 2003), leading successfully export this format to more than twenty countries. During the eight editions of *OT*, 136 candidates stayed at the Academia, but only one of them achieved a global success: David Bisbal. Broadcasters (TVE1 and Telecinco) found the balance positive, as they were able to join good audience results with remarkable economic profits in their business as a whole (Kelly and Boyle).

Our research is based on a case-study methodology, consisting in a recompilation of diverse statistical and qualitative sources regarding the audience ratings, the scheduling strategies and the business model of *Operación Triunfo* during between 2001 and 2012. Therefore, this is a descriptive and exploratory study using documental resources previously gathered by other companies and individuals and leading to a detailed chronology of a changing environment regarding the format and content of the reality game. The main objective of this article is to complete an integral approach to a long-term development and evolution of a TV product, exploring the singularities of this reality game and the differences between how public and commercial stations aired the show.

² All English translations of quotes originally written in Spanish were completed by the article's authors in order to make the reading off the full text easier to an international audience.

2. Main features of *Operación Triunfo*

Music, competitive contest and live-broadcasted coexistence were the three main ingredients of this Spanish TV product. The analogical open-air TV was only the core part of this game, as its business exploitation model expanded very fast to other signals (digital, satellite or thematic channels), to other technologies (Internet and mobile phones) and to other cultural industries (music, cinema, magazines and books, among others). It was considered as the first Spanish cross-media project (Boumans, 2004) emerging from a TV program:

‘*OT* opens a new TV business, based on creating products in order to participate afterwards in all the generated benefits. (...) Since the TV arrival, the business model kept the same, trying to sell audience to the sponsors. However, from now on everything remains more integrated and is the own TV company the one that generates and collaborates in the business, as it happens with *OT*, creating singers and receiving the profit coming from several business options: records, books, videos, T-shirts. (...) This will lead to the integration of TV companies and others coming from outside this media. Actually, the own TV has become one of the main sponsors of the TV media’ (Callejo; in Cebrián, 2003: 233).

Between 2001 and 2011, eight editions of *OT* were completed in two different stations. Even the eighth one was only on air for six galas, it is also considered as a complete edition, as it is reaffirming part of this article’s hypothesis about the decline of a certain kind of approaches to reality games. While the first three editions were aired by TVE1, the remaining five since 2005 were programmed by Telecinco, a commercial station. Although the production of the game remained always in hands of Gestmusic Endemol, the transition between operators created big differences in both the content and the way it was presented to the audience. However, it did not interfere in the nuclear aspects. Then, the following paragraphs present a detailed analysis about key aspects to understand *OT*’s format in terms of concept, genre and commercial platforms.

2.1. Concept

The launching of *OT* as a response to *GH* influenced their main features as a TV product from its very first steps: target, genre and content. This reality game is initially focused on young people, as an attempt of TVE1 to rejuvenate its audience and to attract spectators usually interested in similar TV proposals: all participants were between 16 and 35 years old. One of the strategic pillars, common to other reality games, is the identification between spectators and candidates, as the best way to keep the flow of audience’s participation alive during the whole game. Contestants’ isolation and 24/7 live broadcasting were the other key elements in the competition. The Academia was built to fulfil this requirement: a comfortable place where everything was recorded, providing the channel with enough material to elaborate reports all along the daily schedule. Talking about reality games, Imbert states:

‘It is interesting to see that, in different cultural contexts, Anglo-Saxons or Europeans, the invitation is the same: to check the social relation – even though it can be inside the realities’ landscape – and the subject itself, of his/her patience and drive to improve, even with humiliating or denigrating conditions, in all cases negative for his/her ego during some of parts of the contest’ (Imbert, 2008: 34).

This negative side of reality games raised a permanent public debate in terms of ethics, but it is also one key to understand their success, as one of its creators explained:

‘When finally *GH* was launched, we understood that this format was representing the pure concept of a new genre and that it hardly would be improved. But all genres, even more if they are brand new ones, allow expansion and evolution. What is missing in *GH*, if there is something missing? We believed that it could be desirable to establish a concrete and positive goal for this life together’ (Mainat, 2003: 65).

Actually, this positive frame was the distinguishing factor of this new reality game:

‘In *OT* the moral value of solidarity was showed by the contestants more often than the competitiveness one, highlighting positive aspects of their personalities, their drive to improve and their working effort during long days of essays and preparation. It was a clear alternative to the participants in *GH*, lacking of these values before, during and after their confinement. This difference allowed TVE to broadcast a game with a very similar structure to *GH*, but offering some values more convenient for a public service channel’ (Baget, 2003: 96).

This friendly attitude was also applied to the audience’, as they were the ones saving a candidate instead of the ones deciding who will be out, as it happens in *GH*. Another element to take in consideration is the portrayed image about life together. As there is a clear intention to reaffirm the positive aspects, TV surveillance respected the participants’ privacy, refusing to show conflictive or intimate situations between candidates. This was pointed out as an explanation of its good results:

‘The fact of having succeeded with an explicit bet on positive values, rejecting confrontation and sensationalist components, refute some apocalyptic theories that establish an unbreakable link between TV success and TV trash’ (Pérez Ornia and Gómez, 2003: 11).

As one of its producers, Mainat (2003) recognised that *OT* must have a concrete objective going further life-together. This objective was the same as its content: music. Young participants were competing for a musical career and they did their best to learn. This was clearly a positive frame for a reality game, following the style of other musical programs broadcasted by TVE1 during the 1970’s.

Actually, *OT* was a capital element to recover the public interest in Spain about the Eurovision song contest, a festival lacking of awareness for most of the Spanish audience both before the arrival and after the twilight of this game.

Unfortunately, these initial good perspectives were not kept during the evolution of the program. While TVE1 tried to respect its public service mission by means of a 'soft TV surveillance', Telecinco privileged the economic exploitation of the show, giving more room to confrontation and sensationalism. Reality TV began to steal space to the contest and the music show. This 'spectacularization' was completed with a closer control and the introduction of an intentioned narrative structure trying to keep viewers and to guarantee the social and media resonances. This hardening of the infotainment features in Telecinco's *OT* presented two phases, following a contradictory relation towards audience results: the lower audience, the harder reality TV.

During the first edition of the reality game in Telecinco (2005), the recipe to make profitable *OT* in terms of audience was focused on showing concrete aspects of their coexistence, highlighting those more attractive (both positive and negative) and shifting from the editorial line established by TVE1. Afterwards, this trend became more acute, showing controversies between candidates, leisure situations instead of working hours, and private moments of personal relations... The commercial station tried to establish a wider scope of contents within the game, privileging affective relations in order to provide the rest of infotainment programs included on the channel's schedule with fruitful topics for discussion. A clear proof can be found in the seventh edition where the selection of performing couples in galas was influenced by sentimental relations inside the Academia. There was a deliberate creation of expectation surrounding sentimental affairs, turned into a good source for both the reality game and its complementary programs.

During the second season of *OT* in Telecinco, the harder TV surveillance already consolidated during the previous edition was completed with a polemic character acting as a member of the jury performing a controversial role. Risto Mejide, an advertising professional, faced the interpretation of a character also present in other international talent-shows. First, he showed a critical position towards candidates' performances, going sometimes further and noting personal aspects about their appearances or attitudes. As soon as the audience shares declined, his presence increased and his opinion strengthened the criticism, becoming the main character of the program. His well-scripted conflictive appearances and comments were focused not only on the contestants but also on the whole structure of the show, including the anchorman, teachers and his colleagues in the jury. Actually, his performances were strategically included to be aired exactly at the end of the prime time's program of the audience leader, reaching audience peaks that double the average results of the gala. These were also some of the narrative techniques included during the last editions of *OT*, trying to reinforce the negative sides of a genre giving clear signals of exhaustion.

2.2. Genre

The available scientific literature does not offer a unique classification for this kind of formats. Labels like ‘talent shows’, ‘overcoming contents’ or ‘reality shows’ are circulating in Communication journals and books. We will follow the Euromonitor classification³ (Prado and Delgado, 2010) to place all these contents inside the Infotainment macro-genre and considering reality games as a TV genre itself.

OT was the result of mixing three macro-genres: Infotainment, as there was a clear presence of reality TV; Game, as all participants were competing for a prize; and Show, as its development was mainly based on musical galas. But the packaging and scheduling of the format was not that easy, as it was divided in two presentations: first, the main program was a big weekly musical gala (150-170 minutes); and second, a daily magazine summarizing candidates’ activities at the Academia (25-30 minutes) was backing the main one up. Running parallel to the audience and media success, the original idea began its commercial exploitation creating diverse programs. As Figure 1 shows, around 20 different programs arose from *OT*’s initial root.

One can identify up to three different levels of relation between these spin-off programs and the inaugural TV product. First, there are formats completing the main gala, presented as a key part in all editions: daily summaries, spaces immediately following the gala, chat, and thematic channels following 24 hours everything happening inside the Academia. Second, one can find all those programs derived from several editions but without any relation with the evolution of the reality game, like special galas in Christmas or in the summertime, devoted to the professional evolution of former contestants, or the numerous galas broadcasted by the public channel to select Eurovision representatives: all of them are big galas. Finally, on the third level there are programs sharing the original idea of *OT*, but focused on other targets: we labelled them as spin-offs, like *Euro-júnior* (children as contestants) or *Hijos de Babel* (immigrants as contestants), also broadcasted by the national PBS but without the same luck as the original one.

The wide amount of derived programs is a clear proof of the strength of this format in the Spanish grids. Their good ratings foster an intensive strategy of exploitation while the main show is still on air, flooding their schedule with related content and establishing a discursive monopoly within almost the whole TV daily schedule. This process may pay off during at the short term, but it did not work at medium or long terms, as it leads to an audience’s saturation, due to the excessive load of Reality TV, as it is based in different interpretative codes as the content oriented towards musical performance.

³ Euromonitor is a permanent TV observatory in Europe created by a group of researchers in 1989 with the support of the Research Service of Italian Television (RAI) along with the Research Service of Spanish State Television (RTVE) and later by other public and private TV channels, producers and regulatory authorities. The Programming Euromonitor’s protocol is a consolidated typology that has been used by this television observatory during the last 25 years, distinguishing three different levels (macro-genre, genre and micro-genre).

Figure 1. TV Programs related to Operación Triunfo (2001-2011)

Original program			
Title	Brief Content Definition	Frequency	Type of Broadcasting
Operación Triunfo	Main program. Musical gala with performances, evaluation and nomination. Length: 150-170 minutes.	Weekly	Analogical; Open air; National Scope; TVE1 and Tele5
Complementary programs			
OT: Resumen OT: La Academia	Summary of 25-45 minutes about daily life of students in the Academia.	Daily	Analogical; Open air; National Scope; TVE1 and Tele5
OT: La Academia OT: El Chat	Immediately after the galas, the participants answer questions sent by the audience	Weekly	Analogical; Open air; National Scope; TVE1 and Tele5
Magazine OT	Magazine summarizing daily news, showing unreleased images, exclusive interviews, live connections... Length: 90 minutes	Daily	Digital Terrestrial; Analogical; Open air; National Scope; Tele5 and La Siete
Canal OT La Academia en Directo	Specific thematic channels in a digital platform and Digital Terrestrial program offering live coverage of the content. 24 hours of emission, with live and recorded material.	Daily	Thematic channel Paid Satellite and Open Digital Terrestrial; Tele5 and La Siete
Derived programs			
OT: El Casting OT: Pruebas de ingreso	Selection process of contenders	Punctual	Analogical; Open air; National Scope; TVE1 and Tele5
OT: Eurovision	Musical gala to choose Spanish singer at Eurovision contest. Length: 150 minutes	Weekly	Analogical; Open air; National Scope; Only TVE1
Triunfomanía Generación OT	Musical gala reporting the evolution of participants after the contest. Length: 110-150 minutes	Weekly	Analogical; Open air; National Scope; Only TVE1
Summer Galas Special: Winners	Music gala to honour the three OT winners	Punctual	Analogical; Open air; National Scope; Only TVE1
Special Galas (Christmas, Disney...)	Thematic music gala Length: 100-150 minutes	Punctual	Analogical; Open air; National Scope; TVE1 and Tele5
Spin off			
Eurojúnior	OT, without confinement and with participants younger than 15 years old. The winner represents Spain in Eurovision junior.	Weekly	Analogical; Open air; National Scope; Only TVE1
Hijos de Babel	OT with restricted participation for immigrants. Individual competition completed with a charity project.	Weekly	Analogical; Open air; National Scope; Only TVE1

Source: Authors' Own Elaboration.

2.3. Platforms

OT was simultaneously broadcasted through three platforms: TV, Internet and mobile phones.

First, TV implementation was addressed via analogical signal (TVE1 and Telecinco), digital terrestrial free-to-air technology with national scope (Telecinco 2 and La Siete), and also via satellite digital TV (TVE Internacional and Canal Satélite Digital). We can summarize the broadcasting strategy as follows:

—*Analogical Terrestrial TV*. During the public service period, *OT* was included in the two public channels. The main one in terms of audience and resources (TVE1) broadcasted every week the main gala, while the second one (La2) traditionally focused on cultural minorities, was devoted to daily summaries. Moreover, TVE1 repeated the gala during the weekend and it was also the scenery of other related programs. After being transferred to Telecinco, both gala and summaries were aired in the only available channel for this company.

—*Digital Satellite TV*. TVE used their satellite international channel, via Hispasat and Astra, to show *OT*'s galas and subsequent chats to the whole world in an open-air model, although TVE Internacional is also part of diverse paid cable packages. Three months after the beginning of the first edition, and as a consequence of the unexpected good ratings, Gestmusic Endemol agreed with Sogecable (PRISA) to launch an *OT* Channel within their paid digital platform, Canal Satélite Digital. This 24/7 channel was fully produced by Gestmusic and kept broadcasting even after the first edition finished.

—*Digital Terrestrial TV*. Since the beginning of the sixth edition in April 2008, Telecinco fully devoted one of its thematic channels to offer *OT: La Academia en directo*, a program showing daily life at the Academia, trying to replace the 24 hour channel in Canal Satélite Digital. Telecinco 2, later re-launched as La Siete, completed the live coverage with a magazine (*OT: La Academia*) and the re-diffusion of every weekly gala. The two exclusive *OT* products at the available digital terrestrial offer took 42.7% of the overall programming time broadcasted by this channel during the 2009 edition: more than ten hours of *OT* complementary programs every day.

Second, Internet played a remarkable role in *OT* programming strategies. It was considered as the ideal platform to engage young people, its main target:

‘Internet has turned into a communication platform between the program and the audience. It is communication in a full sense, as the users become also main characters in the channel to talk, greet, ask the contestants and converse by means of chats and discussions about the program in the forum and, to conclude, to organize the information as a network’ (Cebrián, 2003:153).

OT managers relied first on externalization and they choose Portalmix as the official site, although the corporate sites of TVE and Gestmusic were also provid-

ing information. The period in Telecinco lead, once again, to another model: the official web in Portalmix was completed by an own Telecinco's website, creating two official but complementary sites. The goal was to create two different points of information: while Portalmix was more focused on aspects related to users and fandom, Telecinco was offering updated information and downloads of the content. This initial distribution should lead to a convergence with the users getting the higher information and participation possible.

The available services to the audience on the official sites were on the one hand, free services and apps related to content (exclusive or broadcasted videos, updated news, karaoke, podcast...); and on the other hand, paid content such as access to TV live feed or music downloads. The call for participation was mainly focused on blogs, forums, surveys or uploading audiovisual content.

And third, since 2001 mobile phone was the main platform for the audience's participation. By text messages or phone calls, viewers were supposed to decide the future of the participants within this reality game. They could either save candidates from leaving Academia or express who their favourite one was. After being filtered by the program's organization, viewers can also decide part of the content to be developed during the subsequent program, *El Chat*, interacting with all participants, teachers or expressing their opinions. So, Internet and mobile phone were the two main available channels for participation. Regardless the public or private funding of the channel, this reality game sent frequent messages about the interconnection between platforms, building up synergies and feedback (Meier, 2003).

2.4. Cross-media product

OT was much more than a TV product: it was a cross-media product opening new windows for conventional TV (Boumans, 2004; Callejo, in Cebrián, 2003). However, this final outcome was unexpected by its own producers. Actually, it was the result of a progressive evolution running parallel to the increasing success and the social resonance of the program (Cebrián, 2003). The true responsible of this business project was Gestmusic Endemol, as TVE paid initially 7.2 million euros for the produced program.

OT conquered other fields than TV: music industry, live concerts, tours and records of the participants; editorial industry, with an official magazine and diverse books; and even the cinema industry, with an official movie. Besides that, diverse merchandising was released, and a music company was created to promote the professional career of former participants. However, since the beginning of the format, both Gestmusic and the broadcasting channels, TVE and Telecinco, have been reluctant to declare the economic revenue obtained by this cross-media project.

This experience opened and paved the way for multi-platform strategies expanded in a growing cross-media environment, as it was the context back in 2001. The different platforms involved in the scheme were playing a key role within the program, as all of them were interconnected and constantly bringing reciprocal benefits. Furthermore, their own evolution was determined and deter-

mining the whole commercial strategy because they are opening new appealing windows for reaching new targets. Even for the audience, this multiplatform strategy was potentially positive, as the available options to follow the action and to get involved were all the time at their free disposal. On the other hand, one should not forget the ideological implications of this kind of intrusive commercial strategy, demanding a permanent attention and involvement in a product fully devoted to entertainment.

3. Scheduling strategies

Since the launching of reality games in Spain during the 1999-2000 season, this genre did not stop increasing and evolving. All general-programming channels of national scope incorporated them into their schedules, with Telecinco as the most successful one. This station efficiently displayed several scheduling strategies (Ihlebeak, Syvertsen, and Ytreberg (2014) around realities and achieved very good audience results (Monclús & Vicente, 2009). At the beginning of the 21st century, Prado considered reality games as a «lethal weapon to conquer audiences», both in the US and European markets:

‘The relevance of reality game is indisputable, as its presence on prime time at both sides of the Atlantic Ocean testifies. But its innovation should also be measured in terms of the revolution caused in the scheduling techniques and all its derived phenomena’ (Prado, 2003: 184).

Prado distinguished five scheduling strategies applied to reality games, four of them related to the TV product and the broadcasting channel, and another one focused on the competency between channels. OT has followed some of these strategies to gather its dominant position, as we identified in the following paragraphs.

3.1. Strategies related to the TV product and the broadcasting channel

—*Spattering effect*. Following Prado, OT’s success allowed both TVE1 and Telecinco to increase their audience in other day slots:

‘It mainly become visible by establishing a weekly appointment with reality game and, around this, a diverse array of other appointments are created with alternative frequency, format and duration, distributed all along different time strips. This process achieves a high impact and it also uses the created sequence to build a centripetal inertia towards the main program.’ (Prado, 2003: 184).

Daily summaries, the chat following the main gala or the daily magazine in 2009 were clear examples of this technique. Both public and private operators did not hesitate to use other resources of their own companies, such as thematic or second channels, to put it into practice. Dividing the product in diverse pro-

grams, stations increase the audience's loyalty in different week and day strips, both in a horizontal and vertical way (Sampedro, 2002). It is remarkable how Telecinco used during the 2004-2005 season the daily summary between 21:15 and 22:00 from Monday to Friday as a lead-in strategy to the main prime time program. They were using *OT*'s summary as a bridge, creating two consequences: first, attraction a lot of viewers interested in the daily evolution of the contest; and second, damaging their newscasts' rivals broadcasted simultaneously as they were losing part of their audience in the transition to prime time (Monclús & Vicente, 2008).

—*Synergic effect.* Telecinco extremely over-exploited reality games, not only generating related programs⁴ but also flooding the rest of its schedule with related content, mainly magazines and talk shows as we mentioned before. But the success of *OT* arrived also to other TV schedules and media, like radio or press:

'... the inner synergic effect consists of the introduction of summarizing micro-spaces about the reality game inside existing programs of the same channel or of the participation of some of the main characters produced by the reality game as guests in other channel's programs. And the outer synergic effect can be found when other channels include participation of those characters related to any reality game as guests or when those programs include fragments of the own reality game to be commented, criticized or satirized' (Prado, 2003:184).

—*Intensive exploitation effect.* Prado (2003) considers that there is an intensive exploitation of a program when a channel schedules more than one appointment per week or includes more than one episode per day. Neither TVE nor Telecinco broadcasted more than one gala a day, but they did broadcast sometimes extraordinary galas in the same week, like in punctual occasions or when the program changed its broadcasting day of the week. The clearer case can be found during the fifth edition, when Telecinco linked the two last galas in two consecutive days.

—*Specialization effect.* *OT* channel is a good example, as it is a 'monographic channel launched only because of the reality game, but following the past and current experiences of the participants. This option allows the channel to survive after the end of the reality game itself' (Prado, 2003:184), as it happened after the first edition. In fact, Telecinco shifted its strategy towards an exclusive monographic channel broadcasted in its own digital terrestrial platform. This channel offered *OT* content during 42.7% of the time during working days.

Besides these strategies, *OT* displayed another kind of narrative strategies to attract and drag audience during the whole season. The sequence was fixed by the contest itself: nomination process, weekly expulsion, climax moments, placing of advertising blocks or presenting different phases before, during and after the game have contributed to the good results. While TVE1 used Eurovision

⁴ TVE also included a 10-15 minutes daily summary during its morning magazine, including participation of the candidates' relatives (Cebrián, 2003). Telecinco extended this effect to more programs, like its morning magazine (*El programa de Ana Rosa*), and diverse talk shows (*Crónicas Marcianas*, *Aquí hay tomate*, *Sálvame* or *La Noria*).

song contest as *OT*'s next episode, Telecinco followed the participants' evolution outside the Academia, but during less time and with worse results. Once again a remarkable difference between the content, the objectives and the approach to the game was visible between the public and the commercial station: while TVE1 tried to keep the focus on musical performances, Telecinco gave priority to parallel content more related to the social life and relations of the contestants.

3.2. Strategies related to the competency

Some open air channels of national scope competing for the audience followed *OT*'s footpaths. As a consequence, Spanish viewers met several former participants in other channels and programs, as they were turned into celebrities. These efforts were reserved to prime time, refusing any kind of counter-programming during the strips where the daily summaries or other derived formats were placed. Our analyses were restricted to the strategies and ratings of those programs competing face-to-face with main *OT* galas.

Contending *OT* was not an easy task because of several factors: first, the live musical gala lasted between 150 and 170 minutes and, immediately after its end the chat with the participants began at the Academia. These two combined facts forced the rest of the channels to schedule up to four different programs to cover the full time slot occupied by the reality game.

During the first three editions in TVE, the two main rivals, Telecinco and Antena 3, relied on fiction. While Antena 3 broadcasted big US film productions, Telecinco trusted on TV series, first national production (*Periodistas*) and afterwards imported from the US industry (*CSI*). This channel linked two episodes of this series with a controversial but profitable late night show (*Crónicas marcianas*).

The arrival of *OT* in Telecinco occurred within a more convulse landscape in Spain, as during the 2005-06 season two new channels (Cuatro and La Sexta) began their free-to-air emissions through all the country. Under these new circumstances, fictional series, national or imported from the US, were selected to challenge *OT*. The audience leadership was so solid that the battle between the remaining channels was oriented towards keeping the second place in the ranking.

Another remarkable aspect is the change of galas' day of emission. Regardless the decision of placing the final gala in a different day, the whole trajectory of the reality game in Telecinco was much more instable. During the last three editions, it was moved throughout the week many different times, sometimes as a result of programming decisions of the channel, but sometimes also because of the unsatisfactory audience results, as we will show in the next paragraph.

This case of study proves that the ownership and funding of the TV station determined the kind of scheduling strategies of Spanish channels during the eight editions of the reality game. While the PBS privileged the creation of derived programs and spin-offs, mainly focused on the musical aspects of the show, the commercial station relied on the production of content linked with reality TV feeding its own schedule and filling other already consolidated programs in with controversial content, reinforcing the presence of infotainment trends (Dafonte, 2011; Oliva and Pérez, 2011).

Figure 2. Reality games in the Top 50 Audience programs per season (2001-2006)

SEASON 2001-2002 (OT's 1st Edition)									
RK	Num.	Chan.	Day	Begin	PROGRAM	Min.	Rating	Viewers	Share
1	8	TVE1	M,Tu,W	22:27	OT (Special shows)	120	19,4	7.160.000	47,5
2	16	TVE1	M	22:06	OT	171	17,3	6.783.000	44,2
4	14	T5	Th	21:59	GH	141	13,1	5.159.000	32,7
9	5	TVE1	Tu	22:05	Triunfomanía	138	10,9	4.268.000	28,1
18	15	T5	Su	21:34	Supervivientes	126	8,2	3.222.000	21
21	61	T5	M to F	21:31	GH (daily summary)	35	8,1	3.201.000	23,6
22	12	T5	Su	22:45	GH (weekly summary)	81	8	3.161.000	22,1
25	100	La2	M to F	21:40	OT (daily summary)	27	8	3.153.000	19,3
28	3	TVE1	M	23:30	Triunfomanía	115	7,9	3.118.000	31,7
SEASON 2002-2003 (OT's 2nd Edition)									
3	15	TVE1	M	22:08	OT	152	14,2	5.599.000	36,8
4	4	TVE1	M	22:05	OT (Special shows)	151	13	5.124.000	32
7	17	T5	Th	21:50	GH	151	11,9	4.663.000	29,5
10	27	T5	M to Th	22:04	Hotel Glam	127	10,2	4.029.000	25,7
15	5	A3	Su	21:45	La isla de los famosos	43	9,3	3.647.000	21,3
17	12	T5	Su	21:21	GH: Debate	153	8,5	3.333.000	21,6
36	12	A3	Tu to Th	22:45	La isla de los famosos	150	6,7	2.633.000	21,3
38	5	T5	Th	21:45	Popstars	166	6,6	2.577.000	19,8
39	8	TVE1	Tu	22:34	Generación OT	100	6,5	2.572.000	17,4
48	6	A3	Mo to Fr	22:01	La isla de los famosos	24	6,3	2.480.000	14
SEASON 2003-2004 (OT's 3rd Edition)									
11	18	T5	Tu, Su	21:50	GH	151	10,9	4.283.000	27,3
13	11	T5	Tu, Th, Su	22:06	GH VIP	137	10,4	4.229.000	26,7
14	13	T5	Tu, Th	22:01	La casa de tu vida	143	9,8	4.002.000	26
22	3	TVE1	M	22:03	Eurojúnior	129	9,1	3.579.000	24,9
24	13	TVE1	M, Su	22:05	Operación Triunfo	158	8,8	3.459.000	23,3
31	15	T5	Su	22:16	GH: Debate	134	8,2	3.243.000	22,4
37	5	TVE1	Tu, W	22:06	OT (Special shows)	139	7,4	2.991.000	19,1
SEASON 2004-2005 (OT's 4th Edition)									
11	3	TVE1	M	22:01	¡Mira quién baila!	136	11,1	4.576.000	28,3
12	19	T5	Th	21:55	GH	153	11,1	4.539.000	29,3
16	12	T5	Th	21:59	La casa de tu vida	158	9,5	3.932.000	26,9
17	12	T5	Th	21:56	GH VIP	164	9,5	3.932.000	25,6
50	13	T5	Mo to Fr	21:53	OT: Casting	41	6,5	2.687.000	23,5

SEASON 2005-2006 (OT's 5th Edition)									
2	7	T5	Th	22:06	OT	162	13,1	5.423.000	37,8
10	17	T5	Th	22:03	GH	172	10,1	4.175.000	27,8
11	40	TVE1	Mo	22:02	¡Mira quién baila!	150	10	4.154.000	25,7
21	9	T5	Tu	22:18	Supervivientes	158	8	3.319.000	23,3
41	16	T5	Mo to Fr	21:24	OT (daily summary)	44	6,8	2.790.000	22,3
47	7	T5	Th	22:05	Esta cocina es un infierno	169	6,4	2.648.000	18,9

In bold: OT programs. No publicly available data after 2005-06 season.

Source: Authors' own elaboration using GECA data.

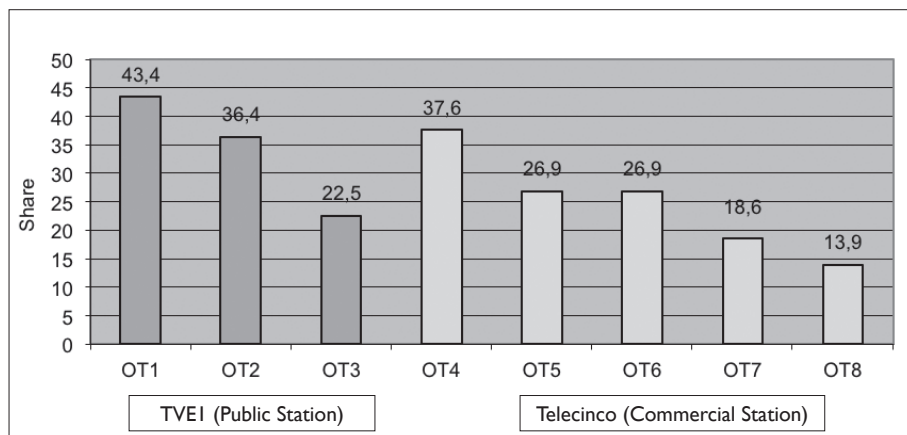
4. Audience: viewers give you power, but they can also remove it

Since 2000, Spanish viewers have showed their support to reality games. From 1999 to 2006, 47 reality games were included between the top 50 audience results of these seasons, giving solid proofs about their suitability to compete against fiction, newscasts and football, the traditional leaders in Spain (Monclús and Vicente, 2009). Figure 2 below shows the key position of *OT* in this ranking.

Although the success of *OT* was not immediate and it took four galas to arrive to the first position, the final balance of the first edition returned excellent audience results, placing four of their programs between the preferences of the Spanish viewers. The two most viewed programs of the full season were *OT*, as the special galas and the week galas are considered different programs by the audience measurement company. As a clear consequence of this reality game's energy, the second public channel (La2) achieved its best audience result since its launching in 1965, as daily summaries congregated more than 3 million of spectators, reaching to a 19.3% of share, 11.7 points above its average annual result (GECA, 2003). Moreover, if we take into account the co-occurring good results of other reality games, we can conclude that '...reality game gives tasty profits to the general share of its broadcasters following the right recipe, turning this genre into the killer option for a lot of channels looking for a portion of the business, both in Europe and in the US.' (Prado, 2003:184)

During its first edition, *OT* broke another audience record: the final gala held in February 11th, 2002 was the most viewed program in Spain for the previous ten years, reaching a 68% share with 12.8 million of spectators. Furthermore, Eurovision recovered results from three decades ago, when 12.7 million of spectators (80.4%) followed the song contest during three hours (GECA, 2003), fulfilling the TVE's intention of renewing its image in Spain (Cebrián, 2003: 22). Even having punctually achieved some good results, the second edition cannot be compared to the first one. The weekly gala lost an average of 1.2 million of spectators, and the special galas, doubled this loss (GECA, 2004), but the second public channel kept taking benefit from the derived programs. The last edition broadcasted by TVE1 showed clear signals of fatigue, losing more than two millions of spectators. This time, the second channel suffered the same fate only retaining an average share of 6.1%.

Figure 3. Average share evolution of OT (2001-2009).



ED	SEASON	STATION	VIEWERS	SHARE (%)	FINAL SHOW
OT 1	2001-2002	TVE1	6.947.000	43,4	12.873.000 (68%)
OT 2	2002-2003	TVE1	5.584.000	36,4	7.764.000 (47,9%)
OT 3	2003	TVE1	3.412.000	22,5	3.914.000 (28,4%)
OT 4	2005	Telecinco	4.847.000	37,6	6.745.000 (41,6%)
OT 5	2006-2007	Telecinco	4.312.000	26,9	4.833.000 (28,8%)
OT 6	2008	Telecinco	3.830.000	26,9	4.282.000 (34,4%)
OT 7	2009	Telecinco	2.509.000	18,6	2.268.000 (19%)
OT 8	2011	Telecinco	2.282.000	13,9	2.576.000 (14,7%)

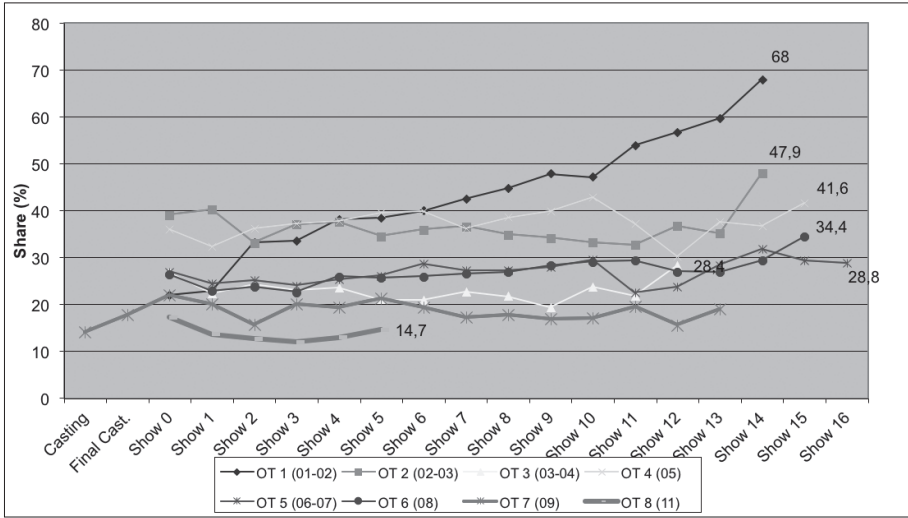
In June 30th 2005, Telecinco released the fourth edition, broadcasted for the first time in a commercial channel until October 13th. Consequently, this edition's results appear in the rankings of both 2004-05 and 2005-06 seasons. Telecinco re-addressed the game privileging infotainment over music show and achieved an average audience of 5,423,000 viewers, two million spectators and 14% of share more than the previous edition in TVE1. The launching of *OT* in Telecinco coincided with the first time ever that a commercial channel took away the first position in the audience rating to TVE1.

Figure 3 shows *OT*'s re-launching after being moved to Telecinco, but it also gives clear evidence that the success achieved by the first and second editions cannot be compared to the following ones.

These data also inform about the notorious failure of the last edition, proving that the shift towards infotainment did not pay off to the commercial station. It should also be remarked that in the last edition, *OT* competed against top level football matches and even against other reality shows within its own broadcasting company.

The progress during weekly galas also brings some interesting evidence about how the Spanish audience behaved towards *OT*, as Figure 4 synthesises. Only during the first and longest edition, the path described a sustainable increasing trajectory, so it

Figure 4. Average share evolution of OT galas (2001-2011)



	OT 1	OT 2	OT 3	OT 4	OT 5	OT 6	OT 7	OT 8
Show 0	2.734.000	5.648.000	3.835.000	4.841.000	4.171.000	3.784.000	3.197.000	2.778.000
Show 1	2.780.000	5.812.000	3.147.000	4.116.000	3.718.000	3.131.000	2.792.000	2.180.000
Show 2	4.905.000	5.633.000	3.577.000	4.321.000	3.762.000	3.773.000	2.265.000	2.287.000
Show 3	5.112.000	5.163.000	3.459.000	4.443.000	3.379.000	3.582.000	2.900.000	1.961.000
Show 4	5.857.000	5.434.000	3.359.000	4.543.000	4.149.000	3.794.000	2.500.000	1.939.000
Show 5	6.006.000	5.291.000	3.218.000	4.230.000	4.339.000	3.863.000	2.923.000	
Show 6	6.471.000	5.443.000	3.493.000	4.334.000	4.523.000	3.922.000	2.917.000	
Show 7	6.767.000	5.485.000	3.569.000	4.036.000	4.722.000	4.074.000	2.526.000	
Show 8	6.943.000	5.267.000	3.394.000	4.400.000	4.492.000	4.137.000	2.057.000	
Show 9	7.756.000	5.370.000	3.105.000	5.089.000	4.693.000	4.220.000	2.206.000	
Show 10	7.578.000	5.168.000	3.501.000	5.573.000	4.827.000	4.061.000	2.199.500	
Show 11	8.888.000	5.168.000	3.394.000	5.086.000	3.700.000	3.918.000	2.360.000	
Show 12	9.528.000	5.481.000		4.572.000	4.018.000	3.605.000	1.894.000	
Show 13	10.017.000	5.625.000		5.609.000	4.435.000	3.475.000		
Show 14				5.424.000	4.782.000	3.753.000		
Show 15					4.692.000			
Final Show	12.873.000	7.764.000	3.914.000	6.745.000	4.833.000	4.284.000	2.268.000	2.576.000
DIF. Previous edition		-5.109.000	-3.850.000	2.831.000	-1.912.000	-549.000	-2.016.000	308.000

Source: Authors' elaboration with TNS data, retrieved from www.laguiaTV.com and www.vertele.com.

is to say that all galas joined more viewers than the previous one. On the contrary, all following seven editions showed irregular results, as a consequence of the progressive decrease of expectation after the initial discovery of the format.

The evolution of the *OT*'s audience data returns that this reality game suffered difficult moments both in 2009 and 2011. Comparing the result of the last 2009 gala with the one of the first edition, we can see how *OT* lost 82'4% of its audience, although it should be remarked that the TV landscape was less competitive in 2002. These figures kept the same path in the very last edition of the game, leading to the *OT*'s removal from the schedules.

5. Conclusions

The key of the initial success of *OT* relied on its innovative way of mixing up music show, contest and reality TV with a cocktail of positive values claiming for the young people and appealing to the myth of TV joining families once again on their living rooms. *OT* was a program that pursued the audience's identification and stimulated its active participation, arriving in its first edition to become a social phenomenon. This unpredictable level was mainly achieved as a consequence of the project's conception. As a TV reality game, *OT* overlaps the conventional schedule of the analogical stations trying to expand its content not only through the digital signal but also through Internet and mobile phones. This convergent divergence of platforms contributed to the participation of the audience, perceiving themselves as a decisive factor in the contest's development. The excellent answer of the Spanish audience caused the opening of new business options going further the traditional TV industry. Music, cinema and specialized magazines also got benefits from a program that became much more than a multimedia product, turning into a true brand image (Cebrián, 2003; Ytreberg, 2009).

The detailed planning of the TV product, establishing a balanced distribution between the core program and all the derived formats was a common feature in almost all reality games broadcasted in Spain, or at least in all the successful ones. This trend was initiated by Telecinco with *GH* and it was followed after by the rest of stations (TVE1, Antena 3 and Cuatro). However, *OT* reached a higher level of over-exploitation, even sharpened after being moved to Telecinco. This change of broadcaster affected the editorial line of the reality game. The commercial station increased the infotainment quota, following strategies successfully displayed in other realities. This spectacularization of the emotions caused the loss of some of the positive values presented at the beginning of the program. Instead of that innocent and naive landscape, commercializing competition, passions or polemics arrived at the core of the show.

Audience results brought an unprecedented achievement during the first edition, unrepeatable for all the subsequent editions showing a constant loss of audience. Nevertheless, after six editions this reality game proved to be a solid genre attracting numerous viewers, although the audience displayed an irregular behaviour as weeks and galas went by. The last edition returned the worse scenario ever faced by this format in terms of audience, as those times leading the prime time were really far away. Among the possible explanations, one can find the grow-

ing competition within the Spanish TV landscape, the coincidence with other powerful content like football or the audience's fatigue towards reality games. However, the answer of the Spanish audience in the last edition invites to think about a shift on the viewers' interests, as a result of a kind of reality games' crisis. These exhaustion signals after eight consecutive years in the TV schedules were clear calls for attention to both producers and broadcasters. The end of *OT* forced the TV industry to rethink the role attributed to reality TV and the consequence was the launching of new games where the attention was readdressed, once again, to the artistic performance of the contestants.

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