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The Spanish television family comedy from the opening of the market to the analogue switch off: Formats, audiences and production (1990-2010)

Abstract

Since the opening of the Spanish TV market in the 1990s, the development of fiction genres, formats and narratives has evolved notoriously, generating a universe of forms and narrations that has configured the history of Spanish TV. The family comedy, in this context, is postulated as one of the most relevant fiction subgenres of Spanish TV, thanks to its easy assimilation, the identification it generates with the audience, its formats and its dissemination strategy, which has contributed to the success of family comedy on television. This article combines quantitative data with documental reflection and discourse analysis to offer a taxonomy of the standards that have guided the configuration of family comedy in Spanish TV. The study is based on the analysis of 47 cases of family comedy, broadcast from 1990 to 2010 in mainstream TV channels, using three different perspectives: format, viewership and production aspects. The results offer relevant data about the family comedy genre that allow us to establish a specific approach to the configuration of a standard of form, reach and production.

Keywords

Audience, comedy, family, formats, producers, sitcom, television.

1. Introduction

The family comedy, popularised in the United States through the sitcom format, has evolved as a subgenre, at the same pace as drama (Mittell, 2006). The episode duration, number of episodes, and sub-formats acquired by the narratives and the time slots in which sitcom and drama series are broadcast have been changing and have evolved in response to social, cultural and production needs of the time. Changes in technology and formats revitalise the subgenre, which alters the standards and intrinsic needs of the new business and consumption logics of television (Thompson, 2007).

The transition from paleo-television to neo-television (Eco, 1986; Casetti & Odin, 1990), accompanied the development of television

programming, which was based on informative content, towards entertainment. In the Spanish case, the opening of the television market in the 1990s generated a change in the management system of television and led to a “limited increase of channels in open-to-air television, where TVE, regional and private channels compete for audience and advertisers” (Artero, Herrero & Sánchez Tabernero, 2005: 1).

At that very moment, in which programming was the key revenue channel of networks, new productions, new formats and the evolution of narrative genres invaded television, giving rise to an unprecedented development in the history of television programming in Spain. This in turn generated “the establishment of a new competition regime that caused changes in programming habits, budget allocation and the production system of fiction television” (Diego & Grandío, 2011: 846).

In this context characterised by content innovation, but also by fierce and endless competition between networks to win audiences, the family comedy, understood as a subgenre of television comedy, was postulated as a recurrent, smart and successful format for networks, gradually conquering television spaces. The key of the success of family comedy is its easy assimilation by the public (families), through a cast of stereotypical characters, that use comedy to assimilate everyday-life (and not so ordinary) narrative plots set in domestic contexts (Padilla & Requeijo, 2010; Hidalgo-Marí, 2015).

The influence of American television is reflected in Spain’s national fiction television production. As Álvarez and López (1999: 3) have pointed out: “the starting point of the massive success of fiction series in our country can be placed in 1991. After that year there is an uptrend in terms of viewership which despite some signs of exhaustion remains alive”. It was currently, after the opening of the TV market and the emergence of private networks, when fiction television in general and family comedy in particular, find a solid starting point and the necessary support to develop.

The boom in the production of Spanish fiction is an unprecedented reality that has been accentuated in the second decade of the 21st century. Networks, production companies, screenwriters and directors joined forces to face the demands of the audience, which increasingly wanted more quality fiction content. Comedy is one of the most successful and most varied genres that we can find in television (Bonaut & Grandío, 2009: 2). While the sitcom has the longest tradition in television comedy, as we will see throughout this work, the family comedy has clearly evolved, in particular since the opening of the TV market. According to Gómez-Rodríguez:

Comedy has been (...) the protagonist genre of Spanish fiction television, because, in addition to reflecting the national cinematographic and theatrical tradition, it is a format that targets a broad audience sector that enjoys narratives focused on the family, youth and the professional environment, which gives variety to the genre. It is also a kind of fiction that encompasses proposals based on kindness and escapism (white comedies), as well as more critical and realistic proposals (dramedy) (2017: 38).

The aim of this article is to identify the standards that have characterised the development of the family comedy subgenre of television fiction, according to the formats that have characterised its development, to provide a valid taxonomy of the traits and features that have contributed to its consolidation. In addition, this information is related to viewership and production aspects to provide an overview of the creation and success of the family comedy subgenre.

2. Approaching the family comedy subgenre

The study of the sitcom, from the perspective of format and classification, has been recurrent in the United States (Hawkinson, 2004; Mills, 2005; Gray, 2008) and more recently

also in Spain (Bonauto & Grandío, 2009; Grandío & Diego, 2009; Padilla & Requeijo, 2010; Hidalgo-Marí, 2015). As Galán and Herrero have pointed out, its characteristics and rapid acceptance by the audience:

Meant great benefits for advertisers and the representation of issues close to the public, mainly comedies and stories with similar doses of drama and humour, which emanated a strong sense of community and were set mainly in the neighbouring context and the family environment (2011: 27–28).

American sitcoms were characterised by their 24-minute-long (Toledano & Verde, 2007: 110) self-contained episodes (Gordillo 1999: 24), set in contexts and scenarios that were familiar to the audience (Padilla & Requeijo, 2010: 199, citing Bertrand, 1992: 110).

The family comedy can be defined as a narrative that develops easily understandable and everyday-life conflicts that viewers of all socio-demographic profiles can feel identified with (López, 2008: 26). Its structure is based around conflicts between characters and the situations that cause them (López, 2008: 15). They present stories that speak of the society of the time and are intended to reflect the reality that sustains them, despite being framed in a fictional genre (Padilla & Requeijo, 2010).

Medina *et al.* (2009) identify the domestic context or environment as the main stage of the narrative in family series. This has been confirmed in subsequent studies that relate the role assimilated by women in Spanish fiction, within the family environment (Lacalle & Hidalgo, 2016; Lacalle & Gómez, 2016). For their part, Herrero and Diego (2009) add that since the audience of these fiction shows are members of a family, these stories must develop in the family context in which its members are the protagonists. Either way, the production of comedies:

Aims to reach a wide audience that encompasses from children to grandparents, i.e. aims to get the whole family to watch the series. It seeks to generate certain affinity and empathy between fictional characters and viewers, and that is why fiction dramas tend to be associated with today's reality as much as possible (Marcos, 2013: 39).

As pointed out by Grandío and Diego (2009: 88), comedy sketch-based shows and series were abundant in Spanish television, although comedy emerged from the combination of the American sitcom, theatrical comic sketches and film comedy, which had been recurrent in programming since the beginnings of Spanish television. The adaptation that the family comedy made of the patterns established by the sitcom resides primarily in the episode duration (García de Castro, 2002: 121), although, as we will see below, the broadcast in the primetime slot, fundamentally, and the hard work of the producers specialised in this subgenre contributed to the creation of a specific standard around the Spanish family comedy.

2.1. Family comedy in Spain: origins

While in the 1960s and 1970s the production of family comedies in the United States was booming, Spanish television bet on other types of fiction, and was dominated by theatre adaptations (*Estudio 1*, 1965–1985), literary adaptations (*Curro Jiménez*, 1976–1978; *Cañas y barro*, 1978; *La barraca*, 1979 and *Los pazos de Ulloa*, 1985) and regional stories (*El último café*, 1970–1972 and *Suspiros de España*, 1974–1975).

Comedy fiction revolved around the shows directed by Jaime de Armiñan (*Galería de maridos*, 1959; *Galería de esposas*, 1960; and *Chicas en la ciudad*, 1961), which initially moved away from the family comedy subgenre, despite it narrated everyday-life stories and

relations between characters and contexts. These primitive comedies followed the standard of 25-minute-long episodes that characterised the American sitcom.

Comedy was well received by audiences and shows based on this genre soon multiplied. *Confidencias* (1963–1965) and *Tiempo y hora* (1965–1967)¹, which had 25-minute-long episodes and were broadcast in the afternoon, narrated the everyday-life stories of Spaniards in the 1960s with a costumbrist tone. However, the family comedy subgenre began as such with the premiere of *La casa de los Martínez*² (1966–1970), a fictional series that, with certain traits of the magazine genre, chronicled the adventures of a family that was visited by artists and well-known people who participated in musical performances. Through 45-minute-long episodes, this comedy laid the foundations for subsequent family comedies, especially in relation to episode duration.

In the early 1970s, family comedy had found its niche in television. Drama and historical fiction continued to have a major role in the offer of public television, but soon after there was a proliferation of comedies like *Los maniáticos* (1970), which chronicled the adventures of an extended family; *Remite: Maribel* (1970), in which a young lady is taken as an assistant into a well-off family, and *El último café* (1970–1972), about a group of neighbours and friends who get together in the local bar. All of them had a duration of 40 to 50 minutes per episode and, although some comedies had a shorter duration, the Spanish family comedy began to be recognised for its duration.

In the 1980s, the patterns established in earlier decades were followed despite the family comedy was not the point of reference in Spanish television production. While historical narratives and literary adaptations continued to achieve success, there was a proliferation of primetime shows centred on the police and professional contexts (*Anillos de oro*, 1983, and *Turno de oficio*, 1986), with episodes lasting around 50 minutes. The family comedy became consolidated through fictional shows such as *Cosas de dos* (TVE1, 1984), *Juntas, pero no revueltas* (TVE1, 1986) and *Media naranja* (TVE1, 1986), all primetime shows with episodes lasting more than 45 minutes.

The birth of regional channels was a great boost, as they provided shows like *Carme i David, cuina, menjador i llit* (TV3, 1984) and *L'avi Bernat* (Canal 33, 1989) which, despite having a similar duration to the American sitcom (around 25 minutes), set the bases of the narrative through stories in which the domestic context and family relationships were the protagonists.

The milestone that went beyond the consolidation of the Spanish family comedy in the 1980s was the broadcast of *Verano Azul* (TVE1, 1981)³. This family comedy, which chronicled the adventures of a group of children and adolescents and their families during the summer holidays, had hour-long episodes and was broadcast on Sundays in the afternoon. For Antonio Mercero, this show is the first Spanish family comedy in Spanish television (García de Castro, 2003: 4).

While the family comedy was germinating with its own patterns and style, it was not until 1990s when the subgenre lived its golden years. With the end of television monopoly and the entrance of private networks to the TV market, the family comedy subgenre became recognised as a successful product that conquered the television panorama as it was able to

¹ *Tiempo y hora* was an extension of *Confidencias*, due to its success. Directed by Jaime de Armiñan, both comedies strongly criticised the bourgeois society and the socio-political situation of the time.

² *La casa de los Martínez* was initially named *Nosotros y ellos*, but this name was dropped after the first episodes, which had a duration of 20 minutes but were soon extended to 45. The success of this comedy was such that in 1971 Agustín Navarro directed a film with the same name and characters.

³ This family comedy, directed by Antonio Mercero, was one of the cases of great audience successes of the network, even though at that moment there were no specific studies to estimate viewership. Its revivals and exporting to Latin American countries contributed to the consolidation of this comedy as one of the networks' flagship productions.

reach a very varied audience that sought fictional entertainment (Diego & Pardo, 2008: 47). This was confirmed by the first family comedies broadcast at this time, like *Farmacia de guardia* (Antena3, 1991), which was a pioneer in the consolidation of the format and inspired many other shows that continued to consolidate the family comedy.

3. Objectives and methods

This article aims to offer an approach to the formal standards that have characterised the development of the Spanish family comedy, from the end of the television monopoly (1990) to the analogue switch off in 2010, which multiplied the offer of channels, shows and products.

This work presented in this article, which is part of a wider project that examines all the fictional genres and formats broadcast from 1990 to 2010 in mainstream networks, is based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis and classification of all national fictional productions. In this case, we selected those shows that fall under the family comedy genre, which encompasses all those fictional shows that use comedy to present situations centred on families, neighbouring communities or other social groups that generate communities that are like the ones included in the concept of family.

Applying the criterions established to classify the family comedy subgenre, we selected 46 cases of study, which were analysed and classified, according to the following variables:

- TV Format: Refers to the classification of the family comedies according to the basic distinctions: series, serial, sketch shows, TV movies, etc.).
- Episode duration: It is measured and compared to the American format because it is considered one of the most innovative contributions of the Spanish family comedy.
- Time slot: Refers to the different time slots in which the show is broadcast (day time, midday, afternoon, access prime time and prime time) to assess the relationship between this variable and audience success.
- Time on air: The number of episodes is taken as an indicator of success.
- Adaptation: This variable is considered to know whether the show is a cinematic or theatrical adaptation or an original idea.
- Viewership: this variable is collected for the 13 shows with an audience share over 20% and it is correlated with other variables.
- Production: The study of this variable allows us to know whether there is specialisation around sitcom and establishes the existence of specific styles or production canons by the production companies.

The results presented, based on the qualitative and quantitative analyses, seek to establish a panoramic view of the standard construction of the family comedy in Spain, in a taxonomic and chronological way, attending to the aforementioned categories of analysis.

4. Results

4.1. Genres and formats in Spanish family comedy

The analysis of the configuration and forms of the family comedy in Spanish television offers relevant data regarding the categorisation of programmes, formats, and styles. Regarding outstanding findings about the format of family comedies, the analysis indicates

that of the sample of 46 family comedies, 84.8% (or 39) were series⁴, 13.4% (6 shows) were comedy sketch shows, and only one case corresponded to the serial format: *Vecinos* (Antena3, 1994)⁵.

The first family comedies broadcast in Spain, after the end of the television monopoly and the incorporation of private networks, bet on a short episodes, of 30 to 45 minutes (for example, *Farmacia de guardia* and *Vecinos*, both produced by Antena 3; *Villarosaura*, of TVE1, and *Casa para dos*, of Tele5), and were faithful to that formula, following the North American standard that had set this trend in family comedy. However, as fiction consolidated in Spanish television, family comedies started to gradually increase the length of their episodes. Thus, *Aquí hay negocio* (TVE1) and *Por fin solos* (Antena3), both premiered in 1995, bet on 50-minute-long episodes. This gradual increase in the duration of the episodes of family comedies became consolidated with the premiere, in 1996, of *Médico de Familia* (Tele5), whose episodes averaged 65 minutes in duration. Gradually, family comedies bet on 45-minute-long episodes (*Carmen y Familia*, TVE1, and *La casa de los líos*, Antena3, both premiered in 1996). In the late 1990s, series with 60-minute long episodes became the norm, as evidenced by shows such as *Tío Willy* (TVE1, 1998), *Ellas son así* (Tele5, 1999) and *Famosos y familia* (TVE1, 1999).

With the arrival of the new century, the Spanish television comedy subgenre experienced a moment of unprecedented splendour. It was in the early 2000 when the family genre, stimulated by the successes achieved on the small screen, broke definitely with the episode duration standards of the 1990s, inherited from American fiction, and offered viewers the longest family comedies in the history of Spanish television. Thus, fictions of great success such as *Los Serrano* (Tele5, 2003) and *Casi Perfectos* (Antena3, 2004) had 70-minute-long episodes, whereas the episodes of sitcoms premiered after *7 vidas* (Tele5, 1999–2006), such as its spin-off *Aída* (Tele5, 2005), lasted 60 minutes. *Mis adorables vecinos* (Antena3, 2004) and *La que se avecina* (Tele5, 2007) had 80-minute-long episodes. In the last years of the first decade of the 21st century, fictional shows maintained their long duration per episode, as shown by *Mesa para cinco* (La Sexta, 2006) and *La familia Mata* (Antena3, 2008), whose episodes were 70 minutes long.

Comedy sketch shows, characterised by their short duration, fresh style and easy humour, turned out to be very functional for networks to fill in time slots like the access prime time. Even though TV comedy sketch shows are brief formats, of 10 to 15 minutes, the last years of the first decade of the new century saw the premiere of comedy sketch shows with episodes lasting between 20 and 30 minutes, like *Impares* (Antena3, 2008) and *Padres* (Antena3, 2009), which had episodes of 25 and 20 minutes, respectively. These longer comedy sketch shows ended the trend in the duration of the episodes of this type of format, which used to be around 10 minutes (like the 4-minute-long episodes of *Ácaros* [Cuatro, 2006] and *Apaga la Luz*, a comedy sketch show co-produced by TVE1 and Iberdrola to raise awareness about the efficient use of energy). The longest family comedy sketch show has been *Escenas de Matrimonio* (Tele5, 2007), whose episodes exceeded the 30-minute mark⁶.

Spanish family comedies did not stand out for their longevity, given that 56.6% of them (26 shows) were on air less than a year, 19.6% (9 shows) between one and two years, and 15.2% (7 shows) between two and four years, although this latter group presents significant

⁴ Despite the series format is the star when it comes to configuring the family comedy on the small screen, we cannot ignore the fact that serials have been postulated as recurrent formats on the television screen, although most of them are presented in a dramatic narrative context.

⁵ The TVE1 dramedy show *Cuentame cómo pasó* (2001–), one of the most relevant series in the representation of family issues, is also included in this group.

⁶ In any case, the comedy sketch show, a pioneer in the Spanish family comedy, already reflected this trend, since *De parte de quien* (La2, 1993) was positioned in the daily programming of La2 with a duration of 25 minutes.

differences. *Farmacia de guardia* (Antena3, 1991–1995) and *Médico de Familia* (Tele5, 1995–1999) were on air for about 50 months. Afterwards, shows premiered in 2000 remained in the comedy slots of Spanish television. *Aída* (Tele5, 2005–2014) became the longest comedy (already out of production) Spanish television show, with more than nine years on air, followed by *Los Serrano* (Tele5, 2003–2008), with 63 months and more than five years on air. Finally, *La que se avecina* (Tele5, 2007 –) has been on air for more than ten years.

Of the sample of family comedies, 10.9% (or 5 cases) are film adaptations, such as *Carmen y familia* (TVE1, 1996), adaptation of *La estanquera de Vallecas*⁷, and *Todos los hombres sois iguales* (Tele5, 1996), an adaptation of the homonymous film⁸. There are also adaptations of American fictional shows, like *Matrimonio con hijos* (Cuatro, 2006)⁹ and *Mesa para cinco*¹⁰ (La Sexta, 2006).

4.2. Audience of the Spanish family comedy

The family comedy is postulated as a comedy subgenre which, in the analysed period, achieved very satisfactory viewership rates. Of the sample of 46 shows, 13 (28.2%) cases exceeded the 20% share. However, 44 shows (96.9%) were broadcast in prime time, the time slot that is usually allocated for family programming, where this type of comedy fits perfectly.

Table 1. Ranking of family comedies by average viewership¹¹.

| Name | Channel | Production company | Number of episodes | Premiere | Viewers in thousands | Share |
|------------------------|---------|--------------------|--------------------|------------|----------------------|-------|
| Médico de Familia | Tele5 | Globomedia | 119 | 12/09/1995 | 7.515.000 | 43.6 |
| Farmacia de Guardia | Antena3 | Antena3 | 169 | 19/09/1991 | 6.500.000 | 48.5 |
| Aquí No Hay Quien Viva | Antena3 | Miramón Mendi | 91 | 07/09/2003 | 5.837.000 | 33 |
| La que se avecina | Tele5 | Alba Adriática | 42 | 22/04/2007 | 5.444.000 | 31.1 |
| Cuéntame cómo paso | TVE1 | Ganga Producc. | 210 | 13/09/2001 | 5.243.666 | 30.5 |
| Ana y los 7 | TVE1 | Star Line | 91 | 18/03/2002 | 5.342.000 | 29.7 |
| Los Serrano | Tele5 | Globomedia | 147 | 22/04/2003 | 4.934.000 | 28.5 |
| Menudo es mi padre | Antena3 | Globomedia | 60 | 15/04/1995 | 4.500.000 | 26.1 |
| La Casa de los Líos | Antena3 | Cartel Producc. | 127 | 15/09/1996 | 4.026.000 | 25.8 |
| Aida | Tele5 | Globomedia | 110 | 16/01/2005 | 4.581.136 | 25.5 |
| Mis Adorables Vecinos | Antena3 | Globomedia | 62 | 11/04/2004 | 3.733.000 | 23.1 |
| Casi Perfectos | Antena3 | Globomedia | 19 | 29/01/2004 | 3.678.947 | 22.5 |

Source: Authors' own creation

In this sense, the family comedy that has been best positioned over the 20 years of analysis is *Farmacia de guardia* (Antena3, 1991–1995), with an average share of 48.5% for its 169 episodes. *Médico de familia* (Tele5, 1995–1999), with 119 broadcast episodes, achieved an

⁷ *La estanquera de Vallecas* is a 1987 Spanish film directed by Eloy de la Iglesia, based on the homonymous play by José Luis Alonso de Santo.

⁸ *Todos los hombres sois iguales* is a Spanish film directed by Manuel Gómez Pereira and released in 1994, two years before the television adaptation was made.

⁹ Adaptation of the American series *Married... with Children* (FOX, 1987–1997).

¹⁰ Globomedia's adaptation of the American series *Party of five* (FOX, 1994–2000).

¹¹ The ranking has been generated based on the average viewership (in thousands) of those comedies whose audience share exceeded 20%.

average share of 43.7%, although its audience in absolute terms (7,515,000 viewers) is higher than that of *Farmacia de guardia*, which reached 6,500,000 viewers. This difference between viewership and share is justified by the progress of television programming and the growth in national productions in the last decade of the 20th century. Thus, we must not forget that *Farmacia de guardia* has less competition because it was a pioneering show, while only four years later *Médico de familia* competed on air with other family comedies such as, for example, *Tres hijos para mí solo* (Antena3, 1995–1996). In any case, the series of Emilio Aragón set the model of family comedy on primetime mainstream television and became a referent of the subgenre, in terms of narrative and audience.

Although *Farmacia de guardia* and *Médico de familia* stood out in audience ratings in the 1990s, other shows also stood out in 2000. *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (TVE1, 2001–2009), with 210 episodes broadcast in the analysed period¹², achieved an average share of 30.6%, followed by *Ana y Los 7* (TVE1, 2002–2005), with an average share of 29.7% (91 episodes), *Los Serrano* (2003–2008 Tele5) with a 28.5% share (147 episodes) and *Menudo es mi padre* (Antena3, 1995–1998), with a 26.1% share and 127 broadcast episodes.

Worth mentioning are the neighbours-centred family comedies, which occupied the first places in audience ratings, regardless of the number of episodes. *Aquí no hay quien viva* (Antena3, 2003–2006) confirmed the success of stories about neighbouring communities, with an average share of 33% for its 91 episodes¹³. Antena3 continued betting on these successful stories and premiered *Mis adorables vecinos* (2004–2006), whose 62 episodes obtained an average share of 23.1%.

In parallel to the success of the neighbours-centred stories in Antena 3, Tele5 premiered the spin-off *7 vidas Aida* (Tele5, 2005–2009), whose 110 episodes reached an average share of 25.4%, showing that neighbours-centred stories attracted success and audiences to the family comedy. Moreover, it is necessary to highlight that Tele5, after several negotiations with the producers of *Aquí no hay quien viva* (Miramom Mendi), produced *La que se avecina* (Tele5, 2007–), which cast actors from its precursor and was based on a similar narrative. *La que se avecina* reached an average share of 31.1% with the 42 episodes broadcast up to 2010 (this show is still on air on Tele5) and confirmed the dominance of neighbours-centred series in primetime Spanish television.

Other shows have reached more than 20% of average share, although they have been on air for a shorter time. The good reception of family comedy by viewers of mainstream fiction television has been confirmed by series such as *Menudo es mi padre* (Antena3, 1996–2000) with 25.8% average share in its 127 episodes; *Casi perfectos* (Antena3, 2004–2005) with a 22.6% audience share in its 19 episodes and *Ala...Dina* (TVE1, 2000–2002) with 20.9% audience share in its 63 episodes.

4.3. Production of Spanish family comedies

The sample of family comedies have features in common in terms of producers and production companies. In the 46 shows that make up the sample, there are 10 cases (21.8%) produced by the same broadcasting television network. Thus, TVE has produced 15.2% (7 cases) of the sample of comedy family, followed by Tele 5 and Antena3, each of which is responsible for the production of 4.3% of the sample (2 cases each).

There is no correlation between the in-house productions and the most successful family comedies. Public television, for its part, produced fiction series such as *Carmen y*

¹² It is important to remember that *Cuéntame cómo pasó* was still on air at the time of writing this article.

¹³ A few years earlier, Antena3 had already bet on narratives focused on neighbouring communities in the bosom of the family comedies, with the broadcast of *Vecinos* (1994), although this comedy show was withdrawn from air before the broadcast of its 19 episodes due to low ratings.

Familia (TVE1, 1996–1997), *De parte de quién* (TVE2, 1993–1994) and *Villarosaura* (TVE1, 1994), which barely exceed a 10% share. Private networks neither reach large audience shares with their own productions, as confirmed by series such as *Casa para dos* (Tele5, 1995), *Ellas son así* (Tele5, 1999) and *A medias* (Antena3, 2002). The paradigmatic case that relates in-house productions with audience success is *Farmacia de guardia* (Antena3, 1991–1995), whose 169 episodes reached an average audience share of more than 40%.

We can see that the in-house production of television series was a trend in the 1990s, which coincided with the last decade of the 20th century and the first years of the end of the television monopoly in Spain. However, private producers quickly came into the scene and sought alliances with television broadcasters by offering them already-produced series. Thus, the most important production company in the family comedy subgenre is *Globomedia*¹⁴, which is responsible for the production of 9 shows of the sample (19.6%), including *Médico de Familia* (Tele5, 1995–1999), *Javier ya no vive solo* (Tele5, 2002–2003), *Los Serrano* (Tele5, 2003–2008), *Aída* (Tele5, 2005–2014) and others produced for Antena 3, like *Mis adorables vecinos* (2004–2006) and *Casi Perfectos* (2004–2005).

Although *Globomedia* is the most important producer of family comedy shows, there are other Spanish companies that have produced successful shows in this subgenre. For example, *Alba Adriática*¹⁵, is responsible for successful fictional shows like *Escenas de matrimonio* (2007–2010) and *La que se avecina* (2007–), both broadcast by Tele5 and with relevant average audience shares, 18% and 31.1%, respectively. *Miramón Mendi*¹⁶, which is part of the aforementioned conglomerate, has been responsible for successful family comedies such as *Aquí no hay quien viva* (Antena3, 2003–2006), with an audience share around 33%. *A tortas con la vida* (Antena3, 2005–2006), on the other hand, obtained an average share of 17.2% during its only season.

*Cartel Producciones Audiovisuales*¹⁷ is another production company that gained notoriety in the family comedy, as it is responsible for *La casa de los líos* (Antena3, 1996–2000), which reached an average audience share of 28.8%, and *Abierto 24 horas* (Antena3, 2000–2001), with an average share of 17.2%.

*Starline*¹⁸ is also responsible for two family comedies: *Ana y los 7* (TVE1, 2002–2005), with an average share of 29.7%, and *A las once en casa* (TVE1, 1998–1999) with an average share of 19%.

Globomedia also stands out for its commitment to constumbrist comedy centred on the family structure, reflected in the production of 19.6% of the analysed shows. However, this group includes two distinct lines of argument: the production of family comedies in which the working environments acquire significance in the narrative (e.g., *Médico de familia*, *Los*

¹⁴ *Globomedia* is a Spanish television production company that has produced fictional shows, entertainment programmes, films, TV ads and other audiovisual content. It was founded in 1993 by Emilio Aragón, Luis Fernández-Vega, José Velasco, Daniel Écija and José María Irisarri, in response to the growth prospects of the first Spanish private television channels as well as the demand of for external productions by national and regional public networks.

¹⁵ *Alba Adriática* is a Spanish television company that belongs to the José Luis Moreno group. This company was created after Mediaset Spain acquired 10% of the rights of *Miramón Mendi*, another production company that belonged to the José Luis Moreno Group and is responsible for the production of the aforementioned fictional series.

¹⁶ *Miramón Mendi* is a Spanish company that produces television series and theatrical shows. Since its inception, in 1988 by José Luis Moreno, this company focused on the world of entertainment and television production. Over the years, it has produced televised events, performances and series in different Spanish networks such as TVE, Antena3 and Tele5 and various regional networks and has managed to break the foreign market with networks such as RAI.

¹⁷ *Cartel Producciones Audiovisuales* is a Spanish film and television production company founded in 1987 in Madrid. It has a long tradition in the production of feature films, documentaries and fictional series.

¹⁸ *Starline* productions was founded in 1992 and since then it has focused on film and television productions.

Serrano and *Menudo es mi padre*) and the introduction of the neighbouring contexts in the story (as in the case of *Aida*, *Mis adorables vecinos* and *Mesa para cinco*).

The thematic trend around series with neighbouring narratives and neighbouring communities reaches its zenith with family comedies produced by the José Luís Moreno Group, both *Miramón Mendi* (*Aquí no hay quien viva* and *A tortas con la vida*) and *Alba Adriática* (*La que se avecina* and *Escenas de matrimonio*).

5. Discussion and conclusions

The diachronic view of the genres and formats that have characterised Spanish family comedy allows us to affirm that it is a living, changing and evolving subgenre of fiction that developed almost at the same time that commercial television became specialised and by the hand of the maturity of the audience. The standards and patterns inherited from North American were adapted according to the needs of Spanish television and combined with new durations, time slots and formats that generated what may be called the formal evolution of the Spanish family comedy. The episode duration and years on air of fictional shows increased with the passing of the years, as the subgenre becomes consolidated as a necessary recurring element of Spanish television.

As mentioned, the episode duration of Spanish family comedies, has always been greater than their American predecessors, the sitcoms, and this has allowed the subgenre to become consolidated, with an episode duration based on narrative needs and not so much on the standard imposed by the format. As Toledano and Verde (2007: 110) point out, the standard duration of the sitcom episode is 24 minutes, while the duration of the Spanish family comedy per episode has been longer since the 1990s. García De Castro (2009) points out that this increase is caused by the need to exploit and occupy the primetime slot, which has been noted by Grandío and Pérez (2009). However, after the presentation of this work, we consider that the extension of the duration of the Spanish family comedy derives from narrative needs and previous influences (aside from the sitcom, the influences of cinema and literary and theatrical adaptations) rather than only from purely economic aspects.

Regarding the audience, it has been shown that family comedy is very well received by viewers, since the average audience share of many of the analysed shows is above 20% and only very few have an average audience share below 10%. This fact and the broadcast of the family comedy in the primetime slot (the time period with the highest audience and family audience available), has turned this subgenre into a television success, targeting the family audience.

In addition, it is important to highlight the role played by production companies in this historical and panoramic development of the domestic family comedy. While it is true that: “the Spanish television comedies do not have the high budgets enjoyed by the large American producers and networks” (Grandío & Pérez, 2009: 95), Spanish production companies have managed to create distinctive fictional programming, which has solidified the success the subgenre on television. Beyond the competitiveness that characterises the Spanish television system, the preferred narrative plots and themes of the subgenre appears to be closely linked to the “style” of the production companies, which possibly has an influence in the audience success and positioning.

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