Chapter 23
Netflix in Spain, Spain in Netflix

Mónica Barrientos-Bueno
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1839-0425
University of Seville, Spain

ABSTRACT

The arrival of Netflix in Spain represents a complete revolution in the distribution and consumption of audiovisual content. The platform has not limited its offer to what is already available in its catalogue, but has boosted the international distribution of some Spanish productions, which were already available on local channels. At the same time the platform has established alliances with relevant production companies in Spain to create new products, providing them with the imprimatur of Netflix. The two-way relationship between Netflix and Spain, to which this chapter applies an ample and up-to-date analysis, offers an interesting glimpse at the penetration and influence of one of the largest providers of video on-demand in the Spanish audiovisual panorama, which it is essential for understanding not only the sphere of Spanish television but also more broadly the European context.

INTRODUCTION

When Netflix disembarked in Spain in 2015, it did so in a country that “has been relatively late in joining the sociological revolution that the distribution of legal content on the Internet has meant” (Clares-Gavilán, Merino & Neira, 2019, p. 11-12). Notwithstanding that delay, Spain has become a benchmark for Netflix’s presence and expansion in Europe and essential because of its cultural and linguistic connections with Latin America. Netflix was the first major video on-demand (hereinafter VOD) platform to establish itself in the country, followed by HBO and Amazon Prime, among others. All of these major international over-the-top (hereinafter OTT) services are some of the pieces nowadays making up the complex puzzle of the Spanish audio-visual content industry.

In the audio-visual market, Spain’s current situation is neither anomalous nor disruptive, but a reflection of what is occurring in other countries where the television scene has undergone profound and rapid changes in a few years with respect to the traditional model, with which it had functioned for decades. The current state of affairs would be unimaginable without the growing presence of streaming media providers or the chain of transformations associated with those that have also occurred in audio-visual

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3119-8.ch023
content consumption patterns, which have not only been restricted to television in the traditional and strict sense of the word. Perhaps one of the most eloquent signs of the change in trend is the decrease in piracy, one of the most pressing problems affecting the cultural industry in Spain. According to the last two reports published by the Coalition of Content Creators and Industries (CCIC) in 2018 and 2019, the reduction in losses for the industry owing to piracy has been estimated at 6 per cent in 2017 and 3 per cent in 2018, thus representing three years of gradual decline, with a cumulative reduction of 10 per cent since 2016.

The successful establishment of several VOD services in Spain demonstrates that its citizens are willing to consume legal content and to pay competitive subscription fees for services that are, above all, user-friendly. Two years after its arrival, Netflix currently has over 1 million subscribers, representing a penetration of close to 10 per cent in Spanish households with Internet access engaging VOD services. To this should be added the platform’s alliances with the main telecommunications operators in Spain, including Movistar, Vodafone and Orange, thanks to which they have included it in their range of services.

As to other aspects, Netflix has promoted several relevant lines of action, although Spain does not figure among the counties where it offers the largest content catalogue. On the one hand, there are its original productions, starting with the film *7 años* (Roger Gual, 2016) and the series *Las chicas del cable* (*Cable Girls*, 2017-), Netflix España's first and largest production to date, bearing the aesthetic and narrative hallmark of the Spanish production company Bambú, which is known for offering romantic TV productions targeted to female audiences.

It has also opted for coproduction, such as the third season of the TV series *El ministerio del tiempo* (*The Ministry of Time*, 2015-), which has also been globally distributed with success. In addition, Netflix España has focused its efforts on the international distribution of Spanish productions previously broadcast on linear television, which it has included in the catalogues of other countries in which it operates. This is the case of *La casa de papel* (*Money Heist*, 2018-), which has been its greatest success to date. Nonetheless, it should be noted that this project was preceded by the good results obtained by other Spanish series like *Velvet* (2014-2016) and *Gran Hotel* (*Grand Hotel*, 2011-2013), available in Netflix’s Latin America catalogue since 2014.

In view of the foregoing, this chapter addresses the dual nature of the relationship between Netflix and Spain, with a comprehensive and updated analysis. It offers an interesting vision of the penetration and influence of one of the major VOD service providers in the Spanish audio-visual market, as well as being essential for gaining a deeper understanding not only of the Spanish but also European audio-visual content industries.

**BACKGROUND**

As Izquierdo-Castillo notes, “traditionally, international markets have been an important niche for the American audio-visual industry” (2015, p. 824). As American company, “Netflix functions under a commercial mandate, meaning that the company’s strategic decisions both in general and as a content producer are based on profitability” (Stiegler, 2016, p. 236), aspect that has driven it to its current position. Netflix pioneered the online distribution of audio-visual content and currently has the greatest reach: in April 2019, it already had a presence in over 190 countries and 150 million subscribers, representing a year-on-year increase of 25 per cent, according to its website. A US company founded by Reed Hastings and Marc R. Randolph in 1997, Netflix has imposed a global audio-visual model (Jenner, 2018) at