

## Entertainment formats on demand Publishing and commercial strategies through *Operación Triunfo* 2023 in Prime Video

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### Abstract

*This article explores how the growing incorporation of entertainment formats into video-on-demand (VOD) services is transforming publishing logics and commercial strategies in the streaming sector. Focusing on the twelfth edition of Operación Triunfo (OT), streamed on Prime Video between 2023 and 2024, we analyse the adaptation of this legacy format to the non-linear paradigm. The research pursues two main objectives: 1) to explain how entertainment television formats can reshape traditional content publishing logics in VOD services; and 2) to analyse their commercial strategies and integration into the business model of a major transnational company operating in this sector. Through a mixed-methods approach, including content and qualitative document analysis, the study identifies power dynamics between the production company and the streamer, as well as significant shifts in scheduling dynamics – such as shorter durations, earlier releases, and different cross-media strategies – and reveals Amazon’s diversified monetisation tactics, including product placement, brand sponsorships, and alignment with its broader corporate business lines.*

### Keywords

*Video on demand, television scheduling, entertainment formats, Operación Triunfo, Amazon Prime Video*

## Introduction

This article shows how the increasing presence of entertainment content in video-on-demand (VOD) services – such as reality-, talent- and game-shows – has introduced new publishing logics and commercial strategies in online television (Johnson, 2019). Specifically, this analysis focuses on the adaptation to a VOD service of *Operación Triunfo* (OT), an entertainment format that had always been broadcast on linear television networks. The object of study is the twelfth edition of OT, aired between 2023 and 2024 on the streaming service Prime Video, with the following two objectives: to explain how certain television formats within the entertainment genre can alter the traditional logic of publication of content in VOD services; and to analyse its commercial strategies and integration into the business model of a large transnational company that operates in this market segment.

The case of OT's transition to Prime Video offers a unique lens with which to examine the broader implications of entertainment formats adapting to streaming services. This shift is not merely a question of distribution, but of power and integration within the international media landscape. The involvement of Amazon, a dominant transnational corporation, raises important questions about how established television formats are repurposed within the strategies of global technology giants. Additionally, the research reflects on what it means for a historically linear television format to be integrated into an ecosystem where content operates under different logics of publication and monetisation. The partnership between a local production company with Amazon highlights the economic and strategic motivations of an increasingly platform-driven market. By analysing this case, with this article we shed light on how streaming services are reshaping the entertainment industry, influencing local production cultures, and, more broadly, establishing new relations of power between production companies and global distribution services.

Our case of study has its origins in 2001. The Spanish production company Gestmusic (then owned by Endemol and currently part of Banijay Entertainment) had been working in collaboration with the public-service broadcaster RTVE (Corporación de Radio y Televisión Española) to develop a new programme. The dynamics of the contest consisted of showing the learning process of a group of singers aspiring to success. The sixteen selected candidates lived together in a training centre known as “the academy”, where they were given singing, acting, and dancing lessons. The contestants were put to the test in a series of weekly galas, in which they had to show their progress in front of a professional jury responsible for nominating four of the candidates for expulsion from the programme each week. Among the four contestants nominated by the jury, one of them was saved by the academy teachers and another by their peers, so that finally, two of them had to compete for the public's vote to stay one more week in the contest. The grand final prize of OT was an economic reward, as well as to represent Spain at the Eurovision Song Contest. The double aspect of the programme – showing the life of the participants in the acad-

emy and the competition component of the galas – locates the format in a hybrid place between entertainment genres.

*OT*, with its combination of reality- and talent-show elements, following Raphael's (2009) classification of production practices in what the author called *Real-TV*, mainly depends on professional labour and traditional inputs, requiring a large high-budget production. These production techniques are combined differently in numerous formats, which can be distinguished according to how much each relies on nontraditional labour (for story development, writing, performing, and camerawork) and production inputs (such as sets, props, and costumes). Gestmusic, the company involved in the production of the show from its first season, is a relevant national player in the segment of entertainment formats, responsible for the creation of highly successful programmes since the 1990s, when it was eventually acquired by Endemol. In fact, as Ibáñez and Palacio (2006, p. 158) state, among the factors that explain the television phenomenon generated around *OT*, Gestmusic's experience in the genre was a crucial factor for the final quality of the product and its social legitimacy.

The first edition of *OT* became extremely successful in Spain, as well as a popular social phenomenon. The last of the galas was followed by almost 13 million people (GECA, 2003). Additionally, the show became a paradigmatic example of a "global format" that has circulated internationally in the form of a "bible" through different national versions (Chalaby, 2015). With minor variations and under different names, like *Star Academy*, the programme has been broadcast in dozens of countries. In Spain, *OT* has had twelve editions with varying degrees of success, moving from RTVE during the first three editions (2001-2004) to one of the two main private channels (Mediaset's Telecinco) for the next five (2005-2011). After several years of hiatus due to the low audience reached by the programme in 2011, the format returned to RTVE for three more years (2017-2020).

Today, it comes as no surprise that a new player has been chosen to host the twelfth edition of the long-established format *OT*: Amazon's transnational VOD service Prime Video. VOD libraries have tended to be the territory of fiction content – one could evoke the success of productions such as *Money Heist* (2017-2021) – but entertainment formats made a timid appearance in the Spanish VOD market segment in 2020 (Fernández-Herruzo & Pedrero-Esteban, 2023), and their presence has increased considerably since then (García Leiva et al., 2024). Additionally, *OT* is the first local content that Prime Video has broadcast live, opening up for both new publishing logics and new commercial strategies. These new dynamics have been influenced by factors such as the fact that VOD services do not have to bear the pressure of daily audience rating releases. In addition, another favourable factor is the lack of dependence on other programming items in the linear television flow.

Moreover, Spain represents a market with a high development of the VOD segment compared with other European markets, which is a powerful case for assessing the lines of action developed by transnational streamers operating almost everywhere in the

world. As Bengesser (2024) points out, this development can be seen in the penetration of services and their investment in the territory, the degree of business concentration in the market, the importance of regulation, and the level of localization of catalogues. Spain is one of the European countries where US companies have most intensified their investments (Fontaine, 2024). Furthermore, VOD services have experienced rapid growth in their reach to households and individuals: 95% of Spanish Internet users aged 16-75 accessed audiovisual content online, representing nearly 33 million individuals (IAB, 2024). The three players with the greatest reach in the territory are the companies offering Netflix, Prime Video, and Disney+ services, according to the country's main audiovisual consultancy firms (Barlovento, 2024; GECA, 2024).

As the market leader, much of the research on streaming services has tended to focus on Netflix. However, in the current scenario, competition has become more acute, which has led to the development of strategies and alliances between streamers, traditional broadcasters, and local production companies. The main contribution of this research is to analyse, in this complex context, emerging programming and commercial strategies of a well-established television format by a powerful transnational VOD service. The central argument is that the evolution and maturation of the VOD market segment is driven by issues of power and mutual exchange of interests between transnational streaming companies and local production companies, which are reflected both in commercial and content publishing strategies. The article proceeds as follows: After this introduction, the theoretical approach to the object of study is presented, paying special attention to the transformations in the television production and scheduling over the last decade. Secondly, the methodology followed in the research is explained. The main findings are presented in two closely related sections, respectively about publishing and commercial strategies for OT in Prime Video. Finally, the conclusions go back to the two main goals of the research, reflecting on the wider implications of our object of study.

## Background and theoretical approach

After more than a decade of on-demand services in our lives (with different modes of financing, such as subscription-based payment), many of the differences for content production and programming are no longer a novelty. However, we argue that the evolution and maturation of the market segment, with the consolidation of transnational US-based streamers, the entrance of advertising, and the broadcast of live content, challenges some of the assumptions of the non-linear paradigm.

Since the broadcast of the first OT on RTVE's La 1 in 2001, the world's television industries have undergone extraordinary transformations, including changes in scheduling strategies (Bruun, 2020) and in the so-called production cultures (Caldwell, 2008). In terms of scheduling, these changes have often meant that the same content is used within the on-demand environment and the linear television flow, as well as the creation

of synergies through simultaneous media channels. Additionally, scheduling decisions cannot be separated from the production side. With the extraordinary expansion of transnational streaming services like Netflix in the last decade (but also Prime Video and Disney+, among others), production practices have been influenced by the import of a US production model (Rena Idiz, 2024). In other words, global streamers have altered the production of traditional television formats in other countries, including Spain, through international standardization. Indeed, such transformations have led to a consolidation of a handful of production companies in parallel, as multiple small producers joining forces to form larger businesses have transformed “a cottage industry into a sector dominated by global TV studios” (Chalaby, 2023, p. 118).

The initial transformations towards the current situation happened in what has come to be known as the era of proliferation in television scheduling in the 2010s, a phase of intensified competition, a drastic increase in the number of channels, proliferation of platforms for television, and increased customized viewing (Ihlebaek et al., 2014). In this context, some of the traditional techniques of the scheduling kit, like junctions (coordination of programme starting times) and referrals (mentions to other programmes) persisted as powerful procedures, gaining complexity and reach. For instance, as the number of options increased, these techniques remained relevant for programmers, who have continued using tools within their reach to retain audiences from one programme to the next.

The transition towards the non-linear paradigm has not tended to put such practices at the centre of analysis for one simple reason: VOD services organize their offerings in spatial structures that are not fixed to the temporal standardization of linear television, which has led to the evolution of scheduling. One of the most discussed topics in television studies in the last decades is precisely the differences between flow and non-linear models. As stated by Williams years back:

In all developed broadcasting systems the characteristic organisation, and therefore the characteristic experience, is one of sequence or flow. This phenomenon, of planned flow, is then perhaps the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and as a cultural form (1975, p. 86).

Even if developments like home video recording started challenging this assumption (Gray, 1992), video-on-demand has been the ultimate epitome of this transition. Lotz (2017) would argue that streaming and Internet-distributed television removed television from the characteristics of the flow model. In this regard, audience-related factors became predominantly relevant in streaming programming, to the detriment of temporal and social ones (Izquierdo-Castillo & Latorre-Lázaro, 2022). Additionally, these audience-related factors in VOD services have typically been studied in the context of the programming of fiction series. However, three recent developments in this market segment need to be kept in mind.

The first development is that major transnational streaming companies, like Netflix, Prime Video, or Disney+, are not just co-producing and commissioning fiction content. In fact, recent data shows that television fiction production in Europe has reached a turning point, as the number of titles decreased by 6% across all formats (Schneeberger, 2024). Beyond the fiction macro-genre, transnational streamers have shown an increased interest in adding entertainment content into their offerings. In the first instance, these formats have been published with the prevailing trend of packaging like previous scripted content, to be consumed at once under the dynamics of binge-watching (Jenner, 2016). In Spain, the first of these productions included local adaptations of global formats like Netflix's *Beastmasters* (released in 2017), *Nailed It* (2019), and *Sing On!* (2020); as well as Prime Video's *Celebrity Bake Off* (2021) and *Last One Laughing* (2021).

The fact that broadcasts are produced in real time has been and continues to be an important feature of many entertainment formats (Ji, 2019). From dynamics such as televoting to comments on social media, live distribution facilitates real-time interaction of the viewer with the content. Likewise, entertainment formats enhance the revival of what Scannell (2002) refers to as a television event in *Big Brother*. Precisely, the second development worth mentioning is the progressive entrance of live-streaming distribution in VOD services. Netflix opened the door to live content in 2023 with Chris Rock's stand-up comedy special *Selective Outrage*, and it has continued experimenting with it since. In 2024, Netflix streamed the boxing fight *Jake Paul vs. Mike Tyson*, which averaged 108 million viewers (Roth, 2024). Likewise, Amazon acquired the exhibition rights of sports events, and Prime Video's *Thursday Night Football* broke some of the company's records (Amazon, 2024b). This success prompted Amazon to further address challenges related to low latency and video quality in live sports streaming (Fletcher, 2024).

Last but not least, the third key development is the arrival and extended presence of advertising in VOD services. The three major transnational players – Netflix, Prime Video, and Disney+ – have added the option of cheaper subscription plans with advertising. This has meant new ways of commodification for content. The process of transformation of things valued for their use into marketable products valued for what they can bring in exchange has been one of the traditional points of entrance to the field of political economy of communication (Mosco, 2009). Some of the most powerful VOD companies have not only added content-integrated advertising, of which our subject of study is a clear example, but they have also introduced commercial breaks before and during the reproduction of content in the streaming services. Amazon announced an expansion on the number of advertisements on Prime Video in 2025 after a successful rollout of ad-supported content, which, according to the company, saw minimal subscriber losses and exceeded expectations (Thomas, 2024).

The landscape fostered by the presence of streaming services, with the aforementioned transformations, has sparked interest among academics investigating the production cultures of the content that becomes part of its catalogues. In Spain, this kind

of research has focused on the activities of production companies that have worked for VOD services, like Netflix or the local service Movistar+ (provided by the telecommunications company Telefónica). Some examples examine the operations of local production companies in serialized fiction (Cascajosa, 2021; Castro & Cascajosa, 2020) as well as cinematic productions (Gómez Pérez et al., 2022; Meir, 2024), studying patterns of continuity and change in audiovisual production in the last decade.

As we argued at the beginning of this section, the evolution and maturation of VOD challenges some of the assumptions of the non-linear paradigm. Beyond fiction production, the edition of *OT* that constitutes our object of study integrates most of the recent transformations of the VOD market segment. It should be noted that this is not the first research surrounding the production culture and scheduling strategies for the format in Spain. Caffarel-Rodríguez and Oliva Gordillo (2024) study *OT 2023* in Prime Video, with a specific focus on audience reception and social media use, highlighting how the programme has embraced social media to foster community around contestants, encouraging audience engagement and a sense of involvement. In addition, the research presented in the following pages aligns with previous work by Monclús and Vicente-Mariño (2017), who present the evolution of the production and scheduling of the programme until 2011, analysing the circumstances that led to the constant loss of audience after the unprecedented achievement of the first edition. *OT 2023*, broadcast for the first time on a streaming service with renewed success, requires new analyses to understand production and scheduling in an evolving non-linear paradigm.

## Method

The approach of this study integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the production and commercial strategies behind an entertainment format as part of Prime Video's offering. By employing a mixed-methods framework, we combine quantitative content analysis with qualitative document analysis to understand the intricate dynamics between production practices and distribution strategies in a streaming context. This dual approach enables a comprehensive examination of measurable broadcast characteristics alongside contextual insights derived from industry materials.

For the quantitative component, we began data collection with the programme's release in November 2023. We systematically documented key parameters for each weekly gala within the format, including start time, duration, number and duration of commercial breaks, and the presence of product placements or other internal advertising. Additionally, we recorded any notable content features that illuminate the commercial and programming strategies distinguishing *OT 2023* as a production adapted for streaming. To contextualise these findings, we conducted the same quantitative analysis on previous editions of the format.

To complement this quantitative research, we conducted a qualitative document analysis to enrich our findings and provide contextual depth. As Lee and Zoellner (2019) note, direct access to informants working in cultural production has been a persistent barrier for researchers. Nieborg et al. (2020) explain that this limitation has been exacerbated in the context of digital platforms. Amazon, a dominant player both in the streaming market and the platform economy, exemplifies this dynamic, as it maintains strict control over access to its employees and collaborators.

To navigate these constraints, we have approached their activities using other means of entry at our disposal. This analysis approached documents in a broad sense, encompassing different types of texts and interpreting them in order to elicit meaning, enhance understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). Materials reviewed included corporate press releases, articles from specialized media, and transcripts of executive presentations at two major television industry events: Conecta Fiction & Entertainment and Iberseries Platino Industria, held in Toledo and Madrid in June and October 2024, respectively. These events offered valuable glimpses into the strategic objectives and production rationale underlying the programme.

Documents were reviewed contextually, recognizing, for instance, that materials produced for press or industry audiences serve different purposes from articles in specialised media. Triangulating these diverse sources ensures reliability and focuses on two key objectives: 1) identifying how the characteristics of this entertainment format have altered the publishing strategies of a streaming service, and vice versa; and 2) analysing the commercial strategies and integration of the format into the business model of a large transnational company.

To present the results of our research, this section is divided into two subsections. The first focuses on the *publishing strategies* for OT 2023 content, as well as the similarities and differences with previous editions of the format in Spain. The second subsection analyzes the *commercial strategies*, considering aspects such as advertising insertions and the exploitation of the programme on other business lines of Amazon.

## Publishing strategies

OT 2023, like its previous editions, has diversified its content programming across various spaces within the same format (due to its hybrid nature, some of these contents are more related with the reality component, whereas others are connected with the competition elements). The most relevant, as is common in large formats such as *Survivor* or *Big Brother*, is the gala. This segment is where key competition-related decisions are made: Performances take place, the weekly eliminated contestant is announced, the public's favourite is revealed, and the nominees at risk of leaving the programme the following week are determined. Therefore, decisions about the gala's duration and its starting time are of particular importance to ensure the format's success.

Regarding the first of these aspects (i.e., the gala's duration), a significant reduction is observed compared to the previous eleven editions, as shown in Figure 1.

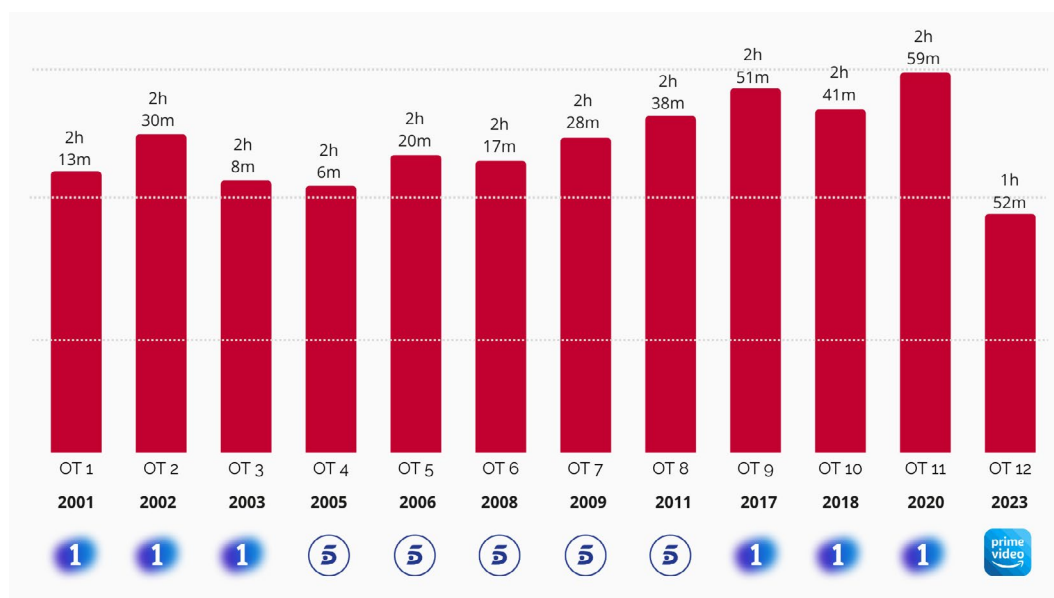


Figure 1. Average duration of the galas (OT, 2001-2023).

Source: Own elaboration.

Specifically, the galas average 1 hour and 52 minutes in duration, making OT 2023 the only edition where this segment lasts less than 2 hours. This reduction breaks the trend of the last three editions, which presented the longest gala durations. In fact, the average duration difference between the penultimate and the latest editions exceeds one hour. In other words, the average runtime of the gala dropped from 2 hours and 59 minutes (OT 2020) to 1 hour and 52 minutes (OT 2023). After reviewing the galas, it is evident that this time reduction mainly results from less time being devoted to interviews and weekly video summaries about the contestants' life at the academy. This change brings greater dynamism to the programme, prioritizing content related to the competition (talent show aspects). Consequently, most of the reality-show component is shifted to other spaces, such as the post-gala or the daily *OT al día* episodes.

It is also relevant to cross-reference this data with the starting times of the galas in recent editions, particularly the three that did not include the typical commercial breaks of traditional television. In other words, the data from OT 2023 is compared with that of the editions aired between 2017 and 2020 on La 1 (RTVE), as these did not include traditional commercial breaks due to the ban on advertising for the public broadcaster since 2009. This analysis allows us to determine the average ending time, as shown in Figure 2.

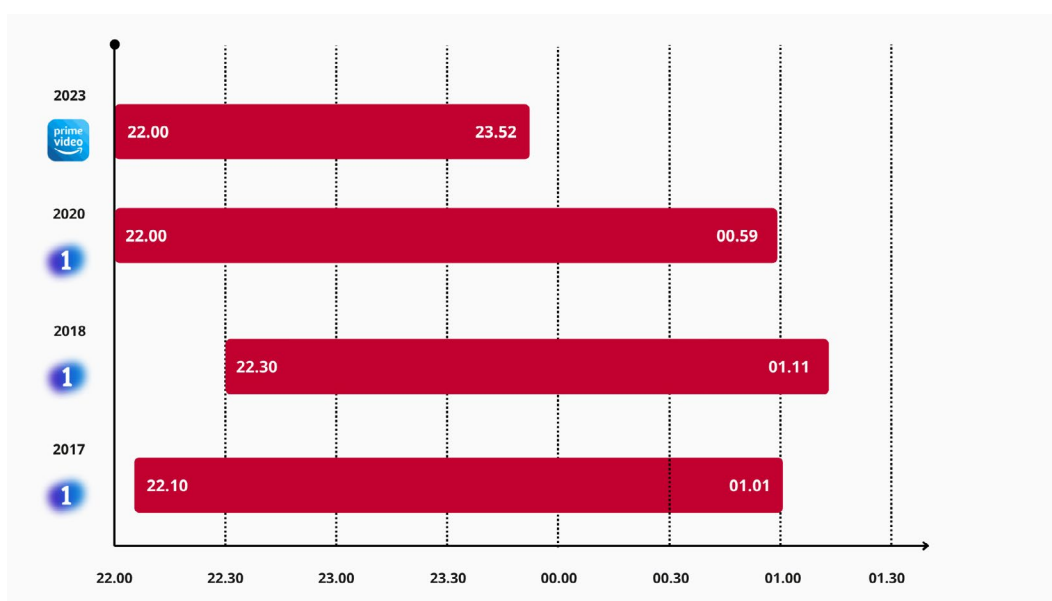


Figure 2. Average starting and ending times of the galas (OT, 2017-2023).

Source: Own elaboration.

The results reveal that the average ending time for the latest edition's galas (on Prime Video) is before midnight. In contrast, galas broadcast on public television reached or exceeded 1:00 a.m. This reflects the interest of traditional television networks in extending prime-time formats into late-night slots, thereby increasing audience share as fewer viewers remain tuned into television. However, this data is not systematically published for VOD services, unlike the reports by Kantar Media for free-to-air television in Spain. Therefore, VOD services face far less pressure from audience metrics. This lack of transparency offers a competitive advantage to streaming services.

Another notable advantage is the greater punctuality of gala starting times on Prime Video, as they are not constrained by a linear programming flow. In other words, the production of OT 2023 did not have to wait for the preceding programme to finish, as was the case in previous editions. A particularly striking example is OT 2018, where galas were scheduled to start at 10:30 p.m. but were consistently delayed due to the late conclusion of programmes aired during the Spanish<sup>1</sup> access prime-time slot on La 1, such as the talk show *Hora Punta*. These delays sparked criticism from both viewers and the production team at Gestmusic. For instance, during the premiere of the 2018 edition, Noemí Galera (Gestmusic's casting director and head of the academy) remarked live, past 1:00 a.m.: "What surprises me most is that it's 1:10 in the morning and there are still people here. This is not a normal time [...] Couldn't we start a little earlier?" (Carro, 2018).<sup>2</sup>

In every season of OT, a live post-gala programme called *Operación Triunfo: El Chat* was broadcast directly from the academy. In the early seasons, this slot became a key interactive space where contestants had the opportunity to receive audience feedback,

answer questions, and showcase their spontaneity, thereby establishing a direct connection with viewers. However, in the latest season, this format was replaced by *La Posgala*, a programme broadcast immediately after the main gala. This new segment, hosted by streamer María Isabel “Masi” Rodríguez, offers an in-depth analysis of the gala, interviews with eliminated contestants, and exclusive content. This marks the first time OT features an additional programmatic space held on set with a live audience, enhancing the overall experience for viewers. Furthermore, it incorporates all the reality show content that had been shortened, as we explained before, in the gala to prioritize musical performances and competition dynamics.

The third space of OT 2023 offered live through Prime Video is *OT al Día*, a daily programme that provided viewers with a comprehensive overview of the contestants’ journey inside the academy. This television programme highlighted key moments from the day, including rehearsals, personal reflections, and interactions between the contestants, offering insight into their progress and challenges. *OT al Día* acted as a bridge between the 24-hour live-streaming content on YouTube and the main weekly gala. It kept audiences engaged by showcasing the contestants’ personal growth and preparation for performances while adding a structured narrative to the ongoing reality show, blending entertainment with behind-the-scenes access.

Beyond the live content offered through the Prime Video service, it is important to highlight the 24-hour channel. During the early seasons of OT (2001-2011), it was a subscription-based channel available to Canal Satélite Digital subscribers. In addition to live broadcasts from the academy, it offered exclusive content such as interviews. However, starting in 2017, the format introduced live-streaming on YouTube, adapting to new, cross-platform ways of consuming television content. This approach, therefore, is not new to the 2023 edition but has been consistently maintained. Such is the significance of the 24-hour channel that a specific daily programming schedule for the YouTube channel is shared on various social media platforms, like X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram.

Finally, the OT offering on Prime Video was completed with three types of content that were added to the catalogue in line with the logic of the VOD segment for on-demand consumption. In fact, one of these was released prior to the show’s premiere (the auditions), another was added during the course of the programme (the performances), and the last one was uploaded afterward (a documentary about the concert tour).

The *castings* of OT 2023 were one of the key pre-launch components included in Prime Video’s catalogue. These episodes showcased the audition process, following the journey of aspiring contestants as they vied for a spot in the academy. The casting episodes adhered to the traditional logic of VOD services, offering on-demand accessibility and catering to audience preferences for serialized content. By doing so, Prime Video capitalized on the inherent emotional appeal and drama of the audition process, which not only set the stage for the main competition but also engaged viewers early on by allowing them to form connections with contestants before the official start of the programme.

Amazon initially added the gala performances from *OT* exclusively to Prime Video, marking a significant shift from previous editions of the show. In earlier seasons, full performances were uploaded to YouTube, allowing fans free and easy access. However, this year, only a one-minute snippet of each performance was made available on YouTube, with the full versions restricted to Prime Video subscribers. This decision sparked considerable backlash from fans, who demanded unrestricted access to the performances. In response to the criticism, the producers eventually decided to upload all the performances in full on YouTube, ensuring they were freely available to the public.

*OT: La gira*, which documented the tour following the competition, was also made available on Prime Video, extending the show's narrative beyond the televised competition. This content leveraged VOD's flexibility by allowing fans to relive concert highlights and behind-the-scenes moments at their convenience. The inclusion of *OT: La gira* catered to dedicated followers of the show, offering exclusive insights and extending the life cycle of the format. This strategy exemplifies how traditional television elements, such as post-season tours, can be adapted for on-demand platforms, providing supplementary content to retain audience engagement long after the season finale.

All these contents offered through different platforms allow us to glimpse cross-media dynamics in *OT 2023*. Programming strategies typical of linear television are implemented on Prime Video (gala, post-gala, and *OT al día*). Similarly, there is a cross-platform dialogue between the VOD service and the 24-hour channel on YouTube. At the same time, certain content is added to Prime Video's catalogue following the usual logic of adding on-demand content to catalogues (castings, performances, and concert tours). Lastly, a new platform has been incorporated into the weekly programming to conduct interviews with eliminated contestants: Twitch.

The evolution of *OT* demonstrates how the show has successfully adapted to changing media consumption habits while maintaining its core structure. By integrating traditional television strategies with VOD flexibility and expanding its presence across multiple platforms, *OT 2023* has reinforced its cross-media appeal. The reduced gala duration and redistribution of content across Prime Video, YouTube, and Twitch illustrate an effort to optimize engagement. This approach not only aligns with contemporary viewing preferences but also highlights how entertainment formats can thrive in an increasingly digital, on-demand landscape. However, this extensive cross-media deployment is not possible without being tied to economic gains generated through commercial strategies. This is what we will explore in the next section of this study.

## Commercial strategies

Of all the business lines within Amazon's conglomerate, six stand out as evident examples of leveraging the format to achieve monetization. These are presented, along with a brief description of the activities undertaken in each channel, in Figure 3.

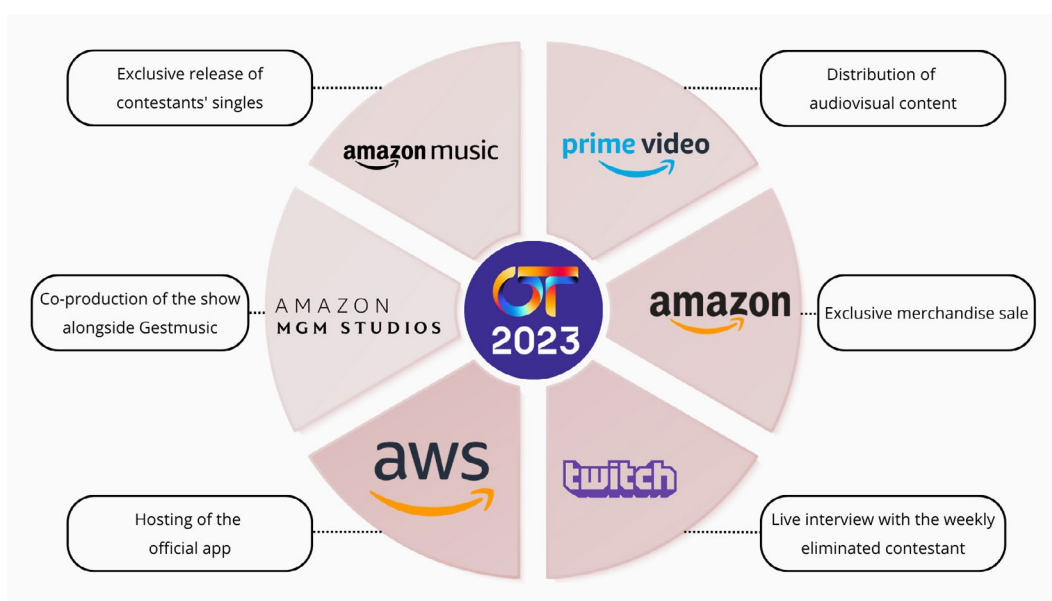


Figure 3. Amazon's business lines in OT 2023.

Source: Own elaboration.

Starting with the most straightforward, the production of OT 2023, primarily carried out by Gestmusic, involved Amazon MGM Studios, Amazon's in-house production company since 2022, following its acquisition of Metro Goldwyn Mayer Studios for \$8.5 billion (Maas, 2022). Similarly, the exclusive channel for showcasing the primary content (galas, post-galas, and *OT al día*) has been Prime Video. Additionally, Twitch, also owned by Amazon, served as the platform for hosting the weekly interviews with eliminated contestants, as previously explained.

Beyond the audiovisual product itself, three additional Amazon business lines have benefited from exploiting this entertainment format. These are inherently tied to strategies designed to engage fans of the show.

The first is Amazon Music, a service where contestants' debut songs were exclusively pre-released. Specifically, the first three tracks were made available exclusively on Friday, January 26, while other platforms did not have access until February 2, a week later (Palao, 2024). This exclusivity extended to the rest of the contestants' songs, requiring devoted fans to subscribe to Amazon Music to access their favourite singles before others.

In relation to this, one of the most significant tools for fostering engagement is the OT mobile app, developed by Amazon Web Services. Through the app, fans could stay updated on the competition, vote for their favourite contestant of the week, and decide which nominee should leave the academy. In previous editions, the app was powered by Microsoft Azure, specifically since 2017. On rare occasions, the app experienced failures when large numbers of votes were submitted simultaneously. For instance, during the OT 2018 semifinal, fans were unable to vote due to server issues caused by the overwhelming

number of votes (Prats, 2018). However, in the latest edition, the app functioned seamlessly, even surpassing historical voting records. This milestone occurred during *OT 2023*'s tenth gala, where 8.6 million votes were cast, breaking the previous record of 3.6 million votes in 2018 (ReasonWhy.es, 2024).

Regarding the marketplace of Amazon, it features the OT Hub, a dedicated section providing programme information and access to an *OT* merchandise store. Items available include branded merchandise, such as T-shirts with iconic contestant quotes, contestants' gala outfits, and physical albums purchased by fans for contestant autographs (Reason-Why.es, 2023).

Beyond these six business lines, it is noteworthy to highlight the general integration of the Amazon conglomerate into the format. For instance, Amazon's voice assistant, Alexa, offered functionalities to inform fans about programme updates. According to company data, customers interacted with these Alexa features over 720,000 times (Neira, 2024). Another striking example occurred during the assignment of musical pieces for the first gala. The academy's director, Noemí Galera, dressed in Amazon's classic delivery uniform and carried a company delivery box to "deliver" the songs contestants would perform (Prime Video España, 2023).

Talking about the commodification of *OT 2023* implies reflecting on the exploitation of the format across multiple business lines by the US giant, which is closely linked to advertising agreements. Unlike previous editions, *OT 2023* integrates brands more extensively through sponsorships, even incorporating them into the programme's dynamics. Three specific examples illustrate this development.

The first, and perhaps the most significant, is that the most voted contestant was no longer referred to as the "weekly favourite", as was customary in the format, but instead as the "favourite nomad", in reference to a promotional campaign by the banking entity ING. In fact, during each gala, an average of nearly one minute was dedicated to explaining how this bank finances the contestants' musical education and awards €3,000 weekly to the most voted-for participant. Additionally, these moments were used to highlight the benefits of having the so-called Cuenta NoCuenta (NoAccount Account) with ING, whose target audience aligns with Generation Z (García, 2023). ING also sponsored the post-programme concert tour, which took place between April 29 and July 15. This tour, named the "Gira ING OT 2023" (ING OT 2023 Tour), featured twelve shows across ten Spanish cities (Rodríguez, 2024).

A second example focuses on the Google Pixel 8 Pro. Upon entering the academy, each contestant received a phone of this model. Contestants used the device to upload content to their official social media accounts (created ad hoc by the programme's production team) and attended masterclasses on exploring the smartphone's functionalities. However, the most striking element was that, upon being eliminated, the departing contestant was informed live during the post-show that they could keep the phone they had used in the academy. This product placement drew criticism from fans, especially during

the first elimination. Contestant Suzette was seen crying, and Noemí Galera comforted her live with the following words:

To cheer you up a little. So you can continue unleashing your creativity, which is immense, I'm gifting you this Pixel, the one you used in the academy, but also with the Pixel Buds Pro (Rubira & Pareja, 2023, 2:27).<sup>3</sup>

The third example concerns sponsorship by the insurance company Mapfre. The company provided each contestant with health insurance upon their elimination. Moreover, Mapfre served as the digital partner for the weekly segment *OT: El expulsado de la semana Q&A* (*OT: Weekly Eliminated Contestant Q&A*) (Mapfre, 2023).

In addition to these major cases, smaller-scale examples were evident on the 24-hour YouTube channel. For various needs within the academy, product placement for specific brands was utilized. For instance, in the realm of food, Alpro yogurts and Nespresso coffee capsules were promoted. Similarly, Yamaha pianos were prominently featured within the musical context.

Beyond these marketing techniques, the live galas included conventional commercial breaks on Prime Video. With an average duration of two minutes per gala, these breaks featured ads from both the aforementioned sponsors and other companies. For example, during Gala 0 on November 20, a commercial break of 2 minutes and 2 seconds included advertisements for ING, Google, Carolina Herrera, and Naturgy.

In short, *OT 2023* presents a commercial strategy based on a dual revenue-earning process. On the one hand, the format benefits from the exploitation of up to six business lines of the transnational conglomerate Amazon. On the other hand, through an extensive marketing campaign, it obtains profits via the product placement formula and the use of advertising during commercial breaks.

The commercial strategy of *OT* exemplifies a highly integrated model that aligns with Amazon's broader business interests while capitalizing on strategic brand partnerships. By leveraging multiple revenue streams – ranging from content exclusivity on Prime Video and Amazon Music to direct sponsorships embedded within the programme's narrative – the show successfully merges entertainment with corporate synergy. This dual approach, combining internal monetization through Amazon's ecosystem with external advertising agreements, underscores the evolving landscape of live entertainment formats in the streaming era. Ultimately, *OT 2023* not only reaffirms the enduring appeal of the format but also highlights how entertainment franchises can be structured as multifaceted commercial ventures.

## Conclusion

This study has addressed two primary goals: to examine how entertainment formats such as *OT* adapt to and transform the traditional publishing logic of VOD services and to

analyse the commercial strategies and integration into the business lines of a large transnational conglomerate like Amazon.

Regarding the first goal, our findings reveal that the adaptation of *OT* to Prime Video demonstrates significant shifts in the non-linear paradigm. The live broadcasting of *OT* marked a departure from the typical binge-watchable, pre-packaged content prevalent on streaming services (Jenner, 2016). Live galas, *La Posgala* and *OT al día*, combined with the 24-hour channel on YouTube and the interviews via Twitch, exemplify a publishing logic where content crosses different channels and platforms to create a synergy and capture audiences through different means. Moreover, we must reflect on the advantages offered by the VOD ecosystem compared with traditional television and, consequently, the disadvantaged position of traditional broadcasters. A clear example is how the pressure to achieve high daily share ratings, a defining factor for linear television, is absent in the VOD segment. This allows streaming services to shorten the duration of prime-time content and reduces the risk of mid-season cancellation, as was the case with *OT 2011* on Telecinco. For instance, Monclús and Vicente-Mariño (2017) stated that competition among traditional players and scheduling coincidences in prime time like football as some of the causes for its abrupt ending. When it seemed that temporal factors and consumption habits were not decisive in programming content for streaming service catalogues (Izquierdo-Castillo & Latorre-Lázaro, 2022), it has become evident that live content on these platforms necessitates a programming approach akin to that used in the linear paradigm. Furthermore, the generation of television events (Scannell, 2002) makes live watching even more important for the viewer, as he or she will only be able to participate in the social conversation, both immediately and in the days that follow. As Gray pointed out, when talking about fictional serials, an important part of the pleasure of television is “to gossip about it the following day” (1992, p. 214).

Concerning the second goal, *OT 2023* exemplifies how a legacy entertainment format integrates seamlessly into Amazon’s broader business ecosystem. By utilizing multiple business lines – Prime Video, Amazon MGM Studios, Amazon Music, the marketplace of Amazon, Amazon Global Services, and Twitch – the format achieves a solid monetization strategy. For instance, the exclusive pre-release of contestant songs on Amazon Music highlights the platform’s focus on fostering consumer loyalty. Furthermore, the strategic use of product placement and brand sponsorships, such as ING’s “favourite nomad” campaign and Google Pixel promotions, demonstrates a voracious commodification of the content. However, we must acknowledge that this method of incorporating advertising disguised as apparent naturalness is not new to the format. It was already employed in the 24-hour YouTube channel in previous editions, such as those that marked the final stage on La 1 of RTVE. What does represent a significant novelty, however, is the blatant introduction of sponsorships into the very dynamics of the competition, which follows the power dynamics that prevail in an ecosystem governed by global media giants (Birkinbine et al., 2016).

Precisely, the power concentrated in these major companies enables a global entertainment format like *OT* to leverage its vast corporate structure. As stated by the Vice President of Local Original Content at Prime Video in a press release:

The program has marked a turning point in the global history of Prime Video, delighting millions of customers not only with daily live content but also by offering music through Amazon Music, products via the OT Store, and voice functionalities with Alexa – something only a company like Amazon can achieve (Amazon, 2024a).

However, one might wonder what would happen if the format's main production company, Gestmusic, were not part of another major international conglomerate like Banijay, which owns more than 130 labels in 23 territories. In parallel to the growing power of transnational streaming services such as Prime Video or Netflix in the last decade, the production of entertainment formats has experienced increasing concentration. In this regard, Gestmusic is one of the leading entertainment content production companies in Spain, with other major formats such as *Your Face Sounds Familiar*. Additionally, it holds the intellectual property rights to *OT*. The production company's know-how and ownership of this valuable asset foster a mutually beneficial relationship between the Spanish company and Amazon.

This case study underscores the transformative potential of VOD services in redefining publishing and commercial strategies for entertainment formats. *OT 2023* serves as a compelling example of how traditional television dynamics are reimagined for digital audiences while reinforcing the profitability of integrated corporate ecosystems. Similarly, a global entertainment format like the one under discussion enhances the potential for commodification of the audiovisual product. This is driven by the wide array of additional elements designed to boost audience engagement (Ji, 2019): from branded merchandise to an app allowing viewers to make decisions within the show, not to mention the official concert tour.

Finally, *OT 2023* serves as a compelling example of how legacy television formats are reimagined for digital audiences, aligning with the business interests of global streaming services while maintaining their core structure and audience appeal. The case also underscores the growing power dynamics between transnational technology giants and local production companies, raising questions about content ownership, creative autonomy, and economic dependencies in the streaming industry.

Thus, this study offers a new perspective on the *OT* format, building upon previous research that has examined other aspects of it, such as programming strategies in linear television (Monclús & Vicente-Mariño, 2017) or the use of social media to enhance audience engagement (Caffarel-Rodríguez & Oliva Gordillo, 2024). Future research could further explore how these programming and monetization strategies influence audience reception and the long-term sustainability of entertainment formats on VOD services, as well as on social media use as an inherent part of the programme's dynamics. Addition-

ally, as streaming services continue to integrate live broadcasting, advertising, and cross-media content strategies, it remains crucial to assess how these developments shape the broader landscape of digital entertainment. The evolution of VOD increasingly mirrors traditional television structures, suggesting that, despite technological advancements, the fundamental principles of content scheduling, audience engagement, and commercial integration remain as relevant as ever.

Precisely, recovering the distinction between different phases in the history of television programming, the evolution of VOD in the last ten years replicates some of the dynamics characteristic of periods of monopoly, competition, and proliferation (Ihlebaek et al., 2014). If VOD started out as a territory essentially dominated by Netflix, the arrival of players such as technology companies or film studios accentuated competition in the market. Today, such a transformation has become even more imperative, with the emergence of advertising and live streaming. It may seem that global entertainment formats are the spearhead of this process. The “new” television looks more and more like the “old” television.

## Notes

1. As Prado et al. (2020) point out, the prime-time slot in Spain starts later than in other European countries such as the United Kingdom, France, or Germany.
2. Original text in Spanish: “Esto no es un horario normal [...] ¿No podríamos empezar un poquito antes?”
3. Original quote in Spanish: “Para que estés un poquito más contenta. Para que continúes dando rienda suelta a tu creatividad, que es mucha. Te voy a regalar este Pixel, que es el que tenías en la academia, pero además con los Pixel Buds Pro”.

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