

## Do Family Television Series Travel Well? A Spanish Case: *Médico de Familia*

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### Abstract

In this article, we study the economic foundations of television series as audiovisual products, and from there, the case of the Spanish dramedy *Médico de Familia* and its Latin American commercialization. The starting point is the consideration of television series as entertainment audiovisual products. Fiction series belong to the category of audiovisual products, and thus comprise cultural products that draw on the potential afforded by the art of communication. Moreover, these series are entertainment products. The features which define them as both audiovisual and entertainment products enable the development of adaptations and direct sales on a speculative and practical basis. The study focuses on family series, which are defined as such regarding its content and audience. Special attention is paid to the main characteristics that make television series travel beyond local frontiers, especially to regions with cultural and language similarities.

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### **Introduction**

In recent years, nationally-produced fiction series have been the most successful product in the Spanish television listings; many of these series have also been exported to other countries. The economic bases of these series as audiovisual products are analyzed in detail in this article; the case of *Médico de Familia* and its commercialization, especially in the Latin American market, is addressed in this context.

Fiction series belong to the category of audiovisual products, and thus comprise cultural products that draw on the potential afforded by the art of communication. Moreover, these series are entertainment products. The features which define them as both audiovisual and entertainment products enable the development of adaptations and direct sales on a speculative and practical basis.

With regard to the analysis of *Médico de Familia*, the literature review is carried out from the perspective of family-centered series. Television series in general are not explored; although some more general considerations may be made, the argument focuses on those series described as family-centered because of their content and their target audience(s). Particular attention is paid to those characteristics which ensure that family-centered series are attractive products for sale outside Spain, through adaptation to the needs of local markets.

The issues addressed in the first section of this article are applied to *Médico de Familia* as a case-study. In the second section, distinctive aspects (such as ‘dramedy’) are discussed, rounding out the more general conclusions drawn in the first section. The mode of analysis is a review of the literature on the economics of television and television series, followed by a case-study. In this latter stage, a review of the relevant literature is combined with original empirical research, primarily based on personal interviews and internal documentation.

### **Television series as entertainment audiovisual products**

#### **The definition of family series from the television economics perspective**

In order to create the necessary framework to study television series, a broader definition of television product is required. Therefore, the television entertainment product may be defined as a unit of audiovisual content that proceeds from ideas, responds to the intention of creating an entertainment effect on the viewer, and so holds his/her attention in a pleasant activity of a discursive nature which distracts from work tasks; as a television product it responds to a particular logic and fits into the grid of a social form or time-slot appropriate to the achievement of its objective. This schema enables the analysis of the family-centered fiction series as a television entertainment product carried out below. In line with the literature on fiction products on television, two main aspects are focused on: the type of content and the relationship established with the audience.

As a starting point, that this type of product is aimed at family members, and moreover, that the stories take place in a domestic, family context, should be emphasized. There are other audiovisual products that share these characteristics to a certain extent, specifically *soap operas* and *TV serials*: the former, because of their domestic content in a family setting; the latter, due to their serial character and the resulting relationship with the viewers. A significant aspect of family series that should be mentioned is that they are broadcast in *prime time* on open-access television. Thus, the comments on their similarity to *soap operas* draw on the fact that they are *prime time* products, in contrast to the *daytime soaps*, which have lower production costs and are designed for an almost wholly female audience (Cantor, 1979).

*Prime time soap operas* have specific economic features which ensure they are very profitable. In this regard, they are said to be perfect television, a real *commodity* in the television industry (Hobson, 2003). The main reasons are their capacity to reach and hold high audience figures, to produce press coverage and loyal viewers, and the resulting appeal to advertising income (Wittebols, 2004). The extent to which family-centered series share these characteristics is now discussed.

As regards the family content, *soap operas* have undergone an interesting process of evolution, bringing them closer in line with the object of the present study. In the last twenty years this genre has developed in an attempt to become more attractive to a wider public, not only to women. As Geraghty has stated, in the 80's *soap operas* began to interest men, teenagers and children, and the idea of a product created solely for women was set aside. Male characters were included in the storyline in order to attract this sector of the public, and at the same time teenagers and children were given more important roles in the series (Geraghty, 1991, 167).

Family-centered fiction series include the two points mentioned above in relation to *soap operas*: the series target the whole family and include the whole family in their storylines. The term *family-centered series* connotes a combination of family content and family viewing. The action occurs within an everyday domestic context, and this is precisely why they are presented as products that are especially suitable for the whole family. As Kilborn states:

what further reinforces the feeling that one is witnessing scenes of everyday life is the fact that the majority of issues or problems broached in the course of the narrative have to do with personal or domestic matters, especially those relating to family or group relationships (Kilborn, 1992, 38).

Moreover, the above-mentioned serial format benefits from the family content, which provides a stable setting for the continuing changes in storylines and characters (Geraghty, 1991, 60). Thanks to their everyday subject matter and episodic structure the series strengthen the relationship between the viewer and the audiovisual text, and the audience feels deeply involved. As Geraghty says in reference to *soap operas*:

This close relationship between soaps and their audiences, the intimate knowledge regular viewers have of the programmes and their identification with particular characters is still a source of puzzled dismay to those who do not watch soap operas (Geraghty, 1991, 9).

Audience commitment and involvement is strengthened by the presence of elements which give a high degree of localism. Besides, following the series is part of the routine of many people at the same time of day in the same geographical area. In line with this reasoning, the series may be regarded as the ultimate television ritual experience which defines a cultural community (Franco, 2001, 453).

In addition, although family-centered series reflect local subject matter, global aspects are also present, particularly in *prime time* fiction (Dunleavy, 2005, 371). In this regard, the influence of the American industry on the shaping of local production should be underlined. However, some recent examples, such as the Italian series *Vivere*, owe their success to their strengthening of the Italian view of the traditional family, rather than to global stereotypes.

The sense of community and the preservation of family integrity are shown to be powerful sources of programme pleasure and primary elements of the viewers' cultural identity. This proves the efficacy of *Vivere's* formula which, while assimilating the community soap model, further stresses the role of family as a structure providing nurture, support and cohesion to the whole group. If the soap's moral condemnation of 'atypical' or extramarital relationships is appreciated, it is because it provides a relief from the emotional consequences of real life, where marriages are increasingly unstable. (Giomi, 2005, 479).

### **The relationship with the audience and the commercial exploitation of the product**

The discursive character of entertainment, which attracts rather than distracts attention, is the immediate reason for the stability of the relationship with the audience. Maintaining this relationship successfully – an achievement which is almost always reflected in audience ratings – has enabled these products to remain on air for longer than might have been foreseen originally. The content favors the stability of this relationship, as the dramatic tension is based on domestic, intimate elements. In the case of Spanish series, the comic component prompts other forms of enjoyment. In a way, the humor loaded with localisms, which is typical of the ‘dramedy’, can be seen as an important attraction for male viewers. This is also true of the involvement of well-known actors in the series.

Every work of entertainment fiction has a sub-text that invites viewers to relate what they see to their own lives. It is not so much that the products influence the decision-making and the thinking of the viewers; rather, the constant references to the real world make the series more familiar (Luhman, 2000, 61). The entertainment product is not complete, but grows in the relationship it establishes with the audience, and, in this sense, local and domestic fictions prolong the relationship through references to the everyday life of the viewer. As Ross and Nightingale state, the audience believes the stories are significant when they relate them to their own lives or those of their friends and acquaintances (Ross & Nightingale, 2003, 130). Their family, domestic character underwrites the plausibility of what happens. By placing the fiction in a real world, the possibilities of what happens there are closer to what can happen in my world; and this plausibility opens up the possibility of other similar worlds.

To return once more to the idea of the open-ended product, the series are prolonged not only in reference to the real world of the individual, but also in the relationships with other followers, and the possibility of getting more information on the series from TV magazines and, above all, from the Internet. The distinction between viewers and fans arises here, although talking about the series with other people, even members of one’s own family, may be considered part of normal consumption:

While all of us, simply by virtue of being members of audiences, work with the texts we read, watch and listen to, in order to produce meaning and pleasure, fans often take this engagement a step further. (Ross & Nightingale, 2003, 136)

Following the television schedule and new technological developments, loyal audiences have contributed to the distribution of traditional consumption to other platforms, either individually or collectively. However, the fact that this consumption spread implies a previous enjoyment of the traditional schedule, where the product has held the audience’s attention, bringing it together every week at *prime time*, should be underscored. In a sense, the question at issue here is based on the experience of sharing a successful program broadcast on a general-interest open-access channel:

Certain events, like sports, happen in real time, not on a consumer’s on-demand whim. Likewise, Internet video proponents who love the community aspect of the Web forget there is that same shared community experience for fans of *O.C.* or *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* or *Desperate Housewives* the night those shows air. Viewers watch at the same time, react to the show in real time, and even send cell-phone text messages to each other (or to the show) in real time. They talk about what they saw the next day at work. (Stump, 2006)

Family-centered fiction series, due to their intimate, family content, create a special relationship with reality, with an undertone of comedy that enables all the members of the

family audience to follow it. This relationship frequently means significant viewer involvement and extends consumption to other platforms or media.

The intangible nature of audiovisual products reinforces their status as public goods, and thus the possibility of making maximum profit from a product which is not worn out by consumption. On this point, the exhibition strategies on various platforms, which have been applied successfully to cinema products, could also be applied to family-centered fiction series to a certain extent. These strategies allow profits to be maximized through differentiation of prices and time-slots when the same product is offered and broadcast to wide-ranging audiences in general (Herrero, 2007, 15). However, consumption may be repeated or spread in the case of series, and knowledge of the product increased in different media or platforms for the same audiences. Finally, family content, which speaks about universal realities, and the possibility of maintaining audience ratings in the long term, make family-centered series very attractive as products for sale in culturally related markets.

### **The case of *Médico de familia* and its adaptation**

#### **The consolidation of ‘dramedy’ in Spain**

In this section, the genre of *Médico de familia* is examined as a distinctive feature which contributes to a refined understanding of this product, prompting a number of further considerations in relation to its adaptation and sale overseas. *Médico de familia* is defined as a ‘dramedy’ – that is, a series which combines elements of melodrama and comedy, with an episode running-time above the 40-45 minute standard of American drama series. José María Villagrasa (1995) sets out the basic features of the American ‘dramedy’:

‘Dramedy’ – a compound term, from drama and comedy – is one of the hybrid formats which has come closest to deferring to the parameters of tele-comedy (without being wholly absorbed by it): half-hour episodes, combining humorous situations and action sequences. One of the precursors of this narrative structure was *Get Smart*, produced by NBC in the 1960’s. (...) [It] may be regarded as a derivation of the drama series, rather than of tele-comedy: located in stable settings, the action of the story-line is not transferred to other locations (Villagrasa, 1995, 95).

As has already been outlined in the opening section, the combination of comic and dramatic elements prompts enjoyment, on the one hand, and the sense of catharsis that creates a loyal audience following, on the other. In so far as it is dramatic, the ‘dramedy’ is similar to a soap opera; the dramatic nature of serialized productions is an especially significant characteristic of such products. They are designed to have a long on-air lifespan, with open-ended episodes – that is, a format that falls somewhere between series, in which a story is brought to a close at the end of each episode, and serials, in which the story runs on indefinitely beyond the end of each episode (Creeber, 2001, 442).

A significant variation has occurred in terms of the ‘dramedy’ episode running-time in the genre’s adaptation to the Spanish context: episodes are always longer than 30 minutes; indeed, the average duration of an episode in a Spanish ‘dramedy’ is 70 minutes. *Médico de familia* was the first program in this genre in Spain, combining comic elements with more melodramatic storylines about personal relationships or problems arising in professional or social contexts.

García de Castro (2002) describes the genre or format of *Médico de familia* as follows:

On the narrative plane [*Médico de familia*] inaugurated a series format which draws on the formal aspects of different genres in traditional television fiction-making, such as the sitcom, the day-time soap opera or the soap opera in general. The figure of the ‘star’ character at the center of each episode’s plot and the use of comic gags are borrowed from the sitcom, while the versatility of different lines of action developing over the course of each episode is taken from the soap opera (García de Castro, 2002, 174).

Daniel Écija (2003), an executive producer and director on *Médico de familia*, pointed out that episode running-time requirements prompted the emergence of this Spanish genre:

While ‘dramedy’ (...) is an innovation, there was really no alternative to its production: 45 minutes of pure drama may be possible, but 65 minutes is very difficult, and one way or another we spiced it with comedy. We too have invented a genre (Saló, 2003, 220).

Like all fiction genres in the last decade, drama series have developed in terms of both narrative structure and production costs in order to a significant percentage of the available audience in a market that has become more and more competitive. This process of improvement is reflected, for example, in the increasing of number of scenes shot outside (off-set) and in more action sequences; the final seasons of *Médico de familia* are illustrative in this regard. Production values have unquestionably improved, and although the budget may be higher and the shooting schedule complicated, they bring an added attraction for viewers.

A synthesis of the primary production standards applied in Spanish dram series is presented in the following table:

**Table 1: Production standards for Spanish drama series (‘dramedies’)**

<i>Duration</i>	70-95 minutes.
<i>Support</i>	Video (Betacam)
<i>No. of episodes per season</i>	13
<i>No. of episodes produced annually</i>	26
<i>Programming (serialization)</i>	Weekly
<i>Locations</i>	70%-80% on set and 20%-30% on location
<i>Sets</i>	Between 5 and 10 permanent sets and one multifunctional set per episode
<i>Characters</i>	Cast-based series

Source: Original to this study

*Médico de familia* involved the first attempt to standardize the series production process in Spain. In addition to the elements outlined in the table above, the series enabled the consolidation of different operational approaches in professional practice, which were implemented thereafter in other drama series – not only in those produced by Globomedia, but also in series produced by professionals who had worked in that company and went on to work in other firms. The following approaches may be highlighted:

1. The drafting of a set text (the Spanish word used in this regard is a “biblia”, literally a “bible”), governing the development of the series’ creative and production aspects.
2. The standard episode running-time was set at about 60 minutes. Subsequently, some series episodes were to run for as long as 90 minutes.
3. The script was structured in three acts, punctuated by two commercial breaks, with corresponding narrative ‘twists’. As episode running-time increased, the number of commercial breaks reached three or four.
4. A team of nine scriptwriters, specialized in television production and well-versed in the narrative conventions of American series, was brought together and

coordinated. They worked in groups of three, supervised by a coordinator who reported to one of the executive producers.

5. The program titles and credits appeared at the end of the episode.
6. Pretests were carried out – that is, some episodes of the series were screened for test audiences before broadcast (with the agreement of the television channel). Such audience testing is common for the opening episodes of a new season.

During its years of transmission, the growth of Globomedia, the production company, was stimulated by *Médico de familia*; it was eventually to become main producer of television fiction products in Spain (Bardají, 2003). The series was a milestone in the history of such home-grown fiction products; it also marked a decisive moment in Tele 5's commitment to broadcasting fiction programs.

### ***Médico de familia*: development and production**

The inspiration for *Médico de familia* arose from a joint project between the Globomedia production company and the Audiovisual Communication Studies Committee (Spanish acronym: GECA, Gabinete de Estudios de la Comunicación Audiovisual). The production company wanted to develop a series starring the award-winning actor Emilio Aragón and sought GECA's advice.

The plot of the series centered on the life of Dr. Ignacio Martín, a widower who had to provide for his three children and his father. The series aimed to satisfy all the family and all the potential audience in a primetime time-slot; hence, there were characters in the series representative of all ages: children, teenagers, adults and the elderly. Thus, no matter what their age, every member of the viewing public could have his/her favorite character and identify with the events in that character's 'life' (GECA, 1996, 6).

The two organizations involved in the creation of the series were agreed on a starting-point: the need to set aside the cinema production model, in which all the episodes are shot before the series is broadcast. *Médico de familia* did not have a closed or predetermined ending. This design approach was adopted to ensure that its contents were closely tied to contemporaneous reality. As a result, the product was more true-to-life and fresh; glitches in the script, production and acting that arose during the filming of the opening episodes could be corrected. In other words, the aim was to develop a 'long running' series. Globomedia and GECA adapted the production system followed in American series because they regarded it as the most effective means to achieve their ends (Mardones, 2001, interview).

The first point of agreement in the preproduction was the decision to carry out a study of the operational process followed in American and Spanish series broadcast on national channels. This study disclosed the structure(s) of successful series, the interweaving of storylines and the sequencing of different elements in order to hold the audience's attention (GECA, 1996, 6).

The set text (Spanish: "biblia") for the series was sent out to a number of different channels, which rejected it. Tele 5 decided to green-light the production of thirteen episodes. A joint production plan was set up between the TV channel and the production company, in which the two parties took responsibility for different aspects of production. The entire budget for the series was financed by the TV channel. Tele 5 provided the set, the technical teams and other technical staff. Globomedia and GECA were responsible for contracting and managing the artistic personnel (actors, scriptwriters and directors).

The first episode of *Médico de familia* was broadcast on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1995 at 21:20. (From the second episode onwards, however, it was broadcast on Tuesdays at 21:40). The series was on air for five years, until 21<sup>st</sup> December 1999. In total, 119 episodes were broadcast – 9 seasons of 13 episodes.

Reference to the average ratings or audience-share for the TV channel and universal viewer figures (in millions) during the years of broadcast enable a clearer understanding of the audience figures for *Médico de familia*:

**Table 2. Average audience-share for Tele 5 (1995-2002)**

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
<i>UNIVERSAL</i>	44	43.6	48	40.3	39.8	39.8	39.8	39.8
<i>SHARE</i>	21.2	20.5	22.3	18.2	17.8	17.8	17.8	17.8

Source: Original to this study, based on GECA figures

The show's audience ratings over the course of those five years are as follows:

**Table 3: Audience ratings for *Médico de familia***

	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
<i>SHARE</i>	44	43.6	48	40.3	39.8
<i>RATING</i>	21.2	20.5	22.3	18.2	17.8
<i>VIEWERS (thousands)</i>	7,745	7,515	8,555	6,971	6,834

Source: Original to this study, based on GECA figures

In three of the five years for which it was broadcast, the series was the most popular program among viewers; moreover, it had the highest average audience numbers of any program – between seven and eight million viewers. The most popular episode, entitled *Blanca y radiante* (“White and brightly shining”) in which the protagonist married his sister-in-law, was broadcast on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1998; and had an audience share of 60%, and a rating of 28.3% (GECA, 1999, 15).

The series also appears more often than any other television program in the list of top 50 most popular broadcasts shown during that period:

**Table 4: Episodes of *Médico de familia* ranked in the top 50 most popular broadcasts**

	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
<i>BROADCASTS</i>	17	22	24	23	9

Source: Original to this study, based on GECA figures

According to Miguel Morant, an executive producer at Tele 5, one of the reasons for the extraordinary success of the program was the sense of identification the channel's target audience (between 18 and 50 years old, living in urban areas, middle-class) felt with the world created by the series (Morant, 2001, interview).

The excellent audience ratings obtained for this series prompted the further development of such series production at Tele 5. In recent years, the channel has invested in the production of high-budget, homegrown fiction products.

### **Format internationalization: adapting to the Latin-American and European markets.**

More often than not, the sale or commercialization of a series occurs following its first broadcast as a means of making a profit from the production investment through sales on the

national and international market; and, as has been referred to above, to make the most of the nature of the audiovisual product as a public good.

Spanish TV channels, which traditionally were importers of fiction, have recently begun to export their products. Production companies and channels are now selling formats invented in the Spanish ‘hothouse’ of fiction products. There are two ways to sell a series: sale of the format or idea for the series, or sales of the episodes already produced (“in the can”). Series distribution companies estimate that 20% of production costs may be recovered through international sales (Fernández, 2007).

The income from the sales of *Médico de familia* was split between the production company (30%) and Tele 5 (70%) (Medina, 2008).

The series has traveled all over the world, with the greatest success accruing from the sales of the format in Italy and Portugal. In Italy, it was sold to the Mediaset group, where the story of *doctore* Martini was followed by 10 million viewers, with an audience share of 34% (Capilla y Solé, 1999, 165); it ran for more episodes than the original Spanish version. In 1998, *Médico de familia* was sold to the private Portuguese channel SIC through the Portuguese office of GECA, the consultancy agency working in conjunction with Globomedia. The buyer was the production company Endemol. On selling the series format or idea, Globomedia authorizes the purchasing company to adapt the idea to the specificities of the new setting. The whole framework for the series is sold, including scripts, shooting documents and breakdowns, shooting schedules, work orders, set design, etc.; the package also includes a commitment to support and/or consultancy with the series producers. The executive producers usually visit the production company or channel that purchases the rights and explain how the series was produced in its country of origin. In short, by purchasing the format, the buyer acquires a license and the ‘know-how’: “a certain way of carrying out an idea that has worked in other countries” (Ecija, 2000, 48).

The adaptation of *Médico de familia* (all 119 episodes of the series) was sold in Italy and Portugal at an approximate price of €3,000 per episode. 26-episode packages were sold, and the price rose by between 5 and 10% for the sales of each package. The contract stated that the production company had a share in the re-transmission rights of the product in the purchasing country and a percentage of the merchandising (Méndez, 2007).

In addition to its success in Portugal and Italy, there were other significant international sales of the series. The produced series (‘in the can’, as professional jargon has it) has been sold to several European countries such as Finland, the Netherlands, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria; and in Spain to Paramount Comedy, Vía Digital and Factoría de Ficción (Grupo Árbol, 2001, 3).

However, of all possible markets, the significance of Latin America for the sale of Spanish fiction products or series should be emphasized. There are two main reasons for this: a similarity of culture and the use of Spanish as a *lingua franca*. This means that both storylines and character types are easily recognized and understood by viewers in Latin-American countries. The common language means there is no need to dub, adapt or rewrite dialogue. The episodes of the series have been sold to Mexico, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Venezuela and Chile. The Globomedia production company has broken into this market, where, as a result of the extraordinarily successful audience results for *Médico de familia*, it has exported many of its more recent productions: *Compañeros* (Antena 3, 1998) to Colombia and Costa Rica; *Casi perfectos* (Antena 3, 2004) to Uruguay; and *Los Serrano* (Tele 5, 2003) to Uruguay, Chile and Mexico.

Another reason for the increase in sales to the Latin American market generally is that the genre of ‘dramedy’, which originated in Spain as a dramatic narrative with comic elements, has had a significant influence on the timeline of stories running over several episodes, in contrast to the seriality typical of soap operas. In *Médico de familia*, this timeline encompasses the main storyline as a whole; the personal and romantic upheavals in the main

character's life unfold in the purest of serial styles. A widower who finally marries his sister-in-law corresponds in every aspect to the style of a soap opera plot, with the exception that in this case the protagonist is a man, not a woman.

The sales of the series on the Latin American market was due to the efforts made by Tele 5 and Globomedia who shared the profits of the operation, approximately 30% for the production company and the remaining 70% for Tele 5 (Medina, 2008). The Latin American channels are usually sold two-year licenses, allowing for four broadcasts of the episodes purchased. The total income amounts to a profit of almost one million euros.

**Chart 5: Income generated in Latin American through the sale of broadcast rights for *Médico de familia*.**

(euros in thousands)

	Income
COSTA RICA	€33,600
MEXICO	€523,500
VENEZUELA	€42,600
URUGUAY	€76,000
ARGENTINA	€42,200
CHILE	€42,200
BOLIVIA	€42,200
PARAGUAY	€42,200
TOTAL	€844,500

Source: Original to this study, based on Globomedia figures

Commercial relations between Spanish and Latin American companies are better than ever. In recent times, one of the most successful trends in Spanish fiction comprises adapted versions of Latin American soap operas and series (Diego, 2008). The TV channels have revitalized the genre of Monday-to-Friday serials during *day-time* (afternoon) and *primetime* time-slots. Between July 2006 (when it was first broadcast) and September 2008, the Spanish version of *Yo soy Bea*, made by Grundy for the Tele 5 afternoon slot, ran for almost 400 episodes, with an audience share of over 30% (sometimes rising to over 40%).

The production and distribution sectors for Spanish series appear to be preparing for the current economic crisis. Some companies, such as Globomedia, have adopted the strategy of sharing and merging resources with major companies in Latin American countries; it has recently signed an agreement with Televisa for the distribution of Latin American formats in Spain. The first adaptation is of the Argentine series *B&B Bella y bestia* (Televisa, 2008). These joint ventures may offer Spanish production companies new opportunities at a time when, due to globalization, the Internet, etc., series are being watched more than ever all over the world.

## Conclusions

On the basis of these reflections on the economics of family-centered fiction series and the analysis of *Médico de Familia*, a number of conclusions on the sales of this series, which may later be applied to the international sale of family-centered series in general, may be drawn. Firstly, their family content and the fact that they are designed for a family audience contribute to the international scope of the series. As has been seen, a domestic and family background has universal appeal, and so travels well in other cultural arenas.

However, the genre of 'dramedy' may pose a challenge to the export of the series. The comic elements draw on local references and peculiarities that may not be easily understood in other cultural contexts.

Adaptation allows for the use of pre-existing stories with universal content, and preempts the problems posed by any localism; this approach was taken in the versions for the Italian and Portuguese markets. Besides, adaptation makes the most of two important qualities in *Médico de Familia*, one technical, the other related to content. On the one hand, the production process was standardized in this series. On the other, the choice of an open-ended format, linking the content to current events, enables a closer connection between program and audience and may make for a more loyal following.

On the issue of direct sales to the many countries in Latin America, 'dramedy' facilitates integration in other national markets. The serial structure evokes genres like the soap opera, with which the Latin American viewing public are already very familiar. Besides, the fact that there is no need to either dub or re-write brings considerable savings on production costs.

Whatever may be the case, the opportunities and risks in direct sales or adaptation emerge in relation to the success of different aspects of the original series: a loyal audience following due to the program-viewer relationship that is established (and reflected in audience share and ratings figures); an on air 'life' of several seasons; the maximum exploitation of all age groups in the family as target audience; and finally, excellent results from the channel's programming strategy.

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