

# Formula for the success of humor journalism formats on television according to their professional teams

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## Abstract

Success on television can be measured according to a series of variables. In this work, a theoretical review was carried out to determine its main factors, complemented with 34 in-depth interviews with the heads of the seven longest-running journalistic humor formats on Spanish television from 1990 to 2015. Owing to their importance in terms of broadcasting and support from society, these enable an evaluation of entertainment as it is linked to information, as both a societal need and technique for escapism, thus depicting the enhanced importance of the television medium in terms of how its content, characters, and structure form part of our collective history. The conclusions have a social character in revealing what the public has consumed, and an economic character, as they decipher what works on television, using a method based on five factors: content, technical execution, awards and reviews, audience, and context. The interviewees provide the keys to the success of the audiovisual cultural industry, characterized herein using 100 categories. For television professionals, success is a utopia that is achieved only by those who combine high-quality content and excellent technical execution, for which they receive awards and strong reviews that reinforce their image with the audience, whose numbers and opinion determine, together with the context, competition, and market conditions, their time on air. Their statements reveal that differentiation, talent, the backing of the network, and creative freedom based on tenacity are fundamental features. Achieving success is a complex task, with a proven formula that does not only represent a limitation but also enables innovative contributions from other genres.

## Keywords

Success; Television; Television formats; Programs; Television success; Television production; Professionals; Audiovisual; History; Humor; In-depth interviews; Programming; Spain; Television quality.

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## 1. Introduction

Success is the purpose with which every audiovisual product is born. However, it is a difficult and unrealistic aim, with success being limited to those products that have their own style and receive good reviews as well as awards. It is generally accepted that these external responses are linked to quality as an evaluation factor and to its major results: to capture a large audience in a lasting fashion in comparison with its competitors. To achieve this, television repeats successful models with the purpose of connecting with the viewer by adopting an attractive tone that can excite the audience (Gascón-Vera, 2019, p. 157) by different means involving the key factors defined herein, since success is a multidimensional variable.

Television content can be categorized into fiction, information, and entertainment (Montero-Díaz, 2014). However, the wide diversity of channels and media also results in new developments through hybridization (Gordillo, 2009) for viewers who determine the survival of such new developments that, in turn, form part of a profit-based business strategy (Gómez-Rodríguez, 2017).

In television, failure is severely punished, according to Contreras and Palacio (2003, p. 197), as it is an industry that creates an “excessive halo” for success and that reaches “extreme limits” with failure, given that three out of four program launches per season fail to gain the confidence of their channels (García-Matilla; Arnanz, 2011, p. 99). Nevertheless, television history includes successes that have remained on air for decades and even half a century, such as *Informe semanal* (TVE, 1973 to the present), the longest-running Spanish television show, or the 47 seasons of *Saturday Night Live* (NBC, 1975 to the present).

Television maintains a relevant position in everyday life (Vázquez-Barrio; Torrecillas-Lacave; Suárez-Álvarez, 2021), thanks to the interest that its content awakens in an audience that is declining but still includes 26.5 million Spaniards who watch this powerful device for a total of almost three hours per day (Barlovento Comunicación, 2022).

Television mass media broke its own records during the Covid-19 pandemic, exhibiting a quantum leap (Montaña-Blasco; Ollé-Castellà; Lavilla-Raso, 2020) driven by an exceptional scenario of informative needs and a social demand for entertainment as a remedy to address adversity (Mayo-Torres et al., 2020). Audiences increased and content was adapted (Túñez-López; Vaz-Álvarez; Feiras-Ceide, 2020), not only in Spain (Gascón-Vera, 2021; Andueza-López; Santana-Mahmut; De-Luis-Otero, 2021) but also worldwide, with television humor being launched to serve the public.

Social, technological, political, economic, or any kind of context and conditioning factor may affect the emergence, transformation, empowerment, transfer, or disappearance of a given genre (Marta-Lazo, 2012, p. 33). Thus, results have emphasized the importance of humor through an approach to understand its history (Montero-Díaz; Paz-Rebollo, 2013) and discover what society has laughed about, providing key results that can revive programs that are on the verge of disappearing or creating new ones using formulas that, as demonstrated decades ago, are akin to success.

“ Social changes can be understood through the evolution of television formats, and the greatest doubt of creators is thus solved: what will work on television ”

## 2. Measuring formulas for television success

Some research exhibits the difficulty of elaborating common criteria (Ferrer-Ceresola, 2018) to rate quality (Medina, 2006). However, the measurable components of content, scenography, artistic and professional cast, technical quality, or the commercial component are reported in the contributions by Zabaleta-Urkiola (2005), Blanco-Mallada (2005) and his four perspectives, the decalogue of Sánchez-Taberner (2000), and the five elements for judging the quality of television programs proposed by Ojer-Goñi (2008).

Therefore, quality is the first requirement for success (Bardají; Gómez-Amigo, 2004, p. 144) in an industry where time is money, since success must be achieved from the very first broadcast. Its effective measurement thus becomes vital. Although it has been pointed out (Guerrero, 2013) that the list of factors for success is not finished, that there is no magic formula (Saló, 2003), nor is it an exact science (Silva, 2010), nor is it universal, one can identify a pattern that combines quality and success on television. This can start from the common components proposed by Thompson (1996), Verhoeven et al. (2018), and Martínez-Gallego; Gómez-Mompart; Bordería-Ortiz (2010) or the contributions of television organizations such as the *Gabinete de Estudios de la Comunicación Audiovisual* (GECA, 1995), the studies of *Prix Italia* (1985), and *The Broadcasting Research Unit* (1989), the five ingredients presented by *The Wit* observatory, or the 99 described by the television critic Terán (2019).

These form the constituent elements of programs that use them as assets in the search for success by orienting their structure or content (Videla-Rodríguez; Sanjuán-Pérez, 2006), as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Theoretical-practical indicators linked to television success

<b>Content</b>  <b>Albers (1992); Saló (2003); Zabaleta (2005); Medina-Laverón (2006); Ojer (2008); Guerrero; Etayo (2015); Verhoeven et al. (2018).</b>	Simple idea. Identity as a differential value: exclusivity	<b>GECA (1995); Sánchez-Tabernero (2000); Saló (2003); Bardají; Gómez (2004); Catela (2005); Pujadas (2011); The Wit (2016).</b>
	Run time and on-air durability	<b>The Broadcasting Research Unit (1989); Thompson (1996); Sánchez-Tabernero (2000); Saló (2003); Bardají; Gómez-Amigo (2004); Medina-Laverón (2006); Gordillo (2009); Bonaut-Iriarte (2010); Terán (2019).</b>
	Social, political, and cultural current affairs. Its own, controversial, emotional, and self-referential subject matter. Realism	<b>Blumler (1991); Thompson (1996); Eastman; Ferguson (1997); Sánchez-Tabernero (2000); Medina-Laverón (2006); Lu; Lo (2007); Ojer-Goñi (2008); Ferrer-Ceresola (2018); Verhoeven et al. (2018).</b>
	Journalistic ethics and credibility	<b>Pujadas (2001); Terribas (2002); Camacho-Ordóñez (2005).</b>
	Funny and informative script, thanks to humorous contributions	<b>Martínez-Abadía (1993); GECA (1995); Lasagni; Richeri (1995); Thompson (1996); Videla-Rodríguez; Sanjuán-Pérez (2006); Tur-Viñes (2006); Lu; Lo (2007); Bonaut-Iriarte; Grandío-Pérez (2009); Martínez-Gallego; Gómez-Mompart; Bordería-Ortiz (2010); Silva (2010); Ferrer-Ceresola (2018).</b>
	A diversity of approaches and plurality of content. Innovativeness, variety, and renewal	<b>The Broadcasting Research Unit (1989); Albers (1992); Sánchez-Tabernero (2000); Gutiérrez-Gea (2000); Terribas (2002); Bardají; Gómez-Amigo (2004); Zabaleta-Urkiola (2005); Blanco-Mallada (2005); Medina-Laverón (2006); Pujadas; Oliva (2007); Pujadas (2011); Ferrer-Ceresola (2018); Verhoeven et al. (2018); Terán (2019).</b>
	Emulation of content	<b>Eastman; Ferguson (1997).</b>
	Commitment from the channel	<b>Martínez-Abadía (1993); Catela (2005); Martínez-Gallego; Gómez-Mompart; Bordería-Ortiz (2010).</b>
	Upstream and downstream programming, counterprogramming	<b>GECA (1995); Eastman; Ferguson (1997); Cortés (2001); Pujadas; Oliva (2007); Silva (2010); García-Matilla; Arnanz (2011); Pujadas (2011); Terán (2019).</b>
	Editorial and creative freedom	<b>The Broadcasting Research Unit (1989); Pujadas (2001); Catela (2005); Bonaut-Iriarte (2010).</b>
	Professionalism, talent, experience, creative and artistic work	<b>Martínez-Abadía (1993); Leggatt (1996); Thompson (1996); Eastman; Ferguson (1997); Sánchez-Tabernero (2000); Terribas (2002); Bardají; Gómez-Amigo (2004); Blanco-Mallada (2005); Camacho-Ordóñez (2005); Catela (2005); Medina-Laverón (2006); Bonaut-Iriarte (2010); Ferrer-Ceresola (2018).</b>
	Innovation	<b>The Broadcasting Research Unit (1989); Prix Italia (1985); Blumler (1991); Lasagni; Richeri (1995); Terribas (2002); Bardají; Gómez-Amigo (2004); Medina-Laverón (2006); Bonaut-Iriarte (2010); Pujadas (2011); Guerrero; Etayo (2015).</b>
	Creativity and originality	<b>Blumler (1991); Albers (1992); Sánchez-Tabernero (2000); Terribas (2002); Medina-Laverón (2006); Ferrer-Ceresola (2018).</b>
<b>Technical realization</b>  <b>Albers (1992); Martínez-Abadía (1993); GECA (1995); Medina-Laverón (2006); Tur-Viñes (2006); Ojer-Goñi (2008).</b>	Excellence and style. Technical, technological, and esthetic quality. Adequate presentation	<b>Lasagni; Richeri (1995); Sánchez-Tabernero (2000); Gutiérrez-Gea (2000); Zabaleta-Urkiola (2005); Catela (2005); Cardwell (2007); Pujadas (2011); Bonaut-Iriarte (2010); Ferrer-Ceresola (2018).</b>
	Production. Graphic and visual effects, diverse shots, and cameras	<b>Prix Italia (1985); Martínez-Abadía (1993); Saló (2003); Camacho-Ordóñez (2005); Zabaleta-Urkiola (2005); Medina-Laverón (2006); Tur-Viñes (2006); Lu; Lo (2007); Ojer-Goñi (2008).</b>
	Sound	<b>Albers (1992), Ojer-Goñi (2008)</b>
	Lighting	<b>Albers (1992); GECA (1995); Saló (2003); Medina-Laverón (2006); Tur-Viñes (2006); Ojer-Goñi (2008).</b>
	Music	<b>Lu; Lo (2007); Ojer-Goñi (2008); The Wit (2016).</b>
	Set, scenery, and costumes	<b>Albers (1992); GECA (1995); Saló (2003); Camacho-Ordóñez (2005); Tur-Viñes (2006); Ojer-Goñi (2008); Guerrero; Etayo (2015).</b>
	Production, the importance of planning	<b>Leggatt (1996); Camacho-Ordóñez (2005); Tur-Viñes (2006); Cardwell (2007); Bonaut-Iriarte; Grandío-Pérez (2009); Martínez-Gallego; Gómez-Mompart; Bordería-Ortiz (2010); Pujadas (2011); Ferrer-Ceresola (2018); Verhoeven et al. (2018).</b>
	Adequate funding and viability	<b>The Broadcasting Research Unit (1989); Prix Italia (1985); Camacho-Ordóñez (2005); Pujadas (2011); Verhoeven et al. (2018).</b>
The presenter and copresenters, with a great cast of actors and guests	<b>Albers (1992); GECA (1995), Thompson (1996); Eastman; Ferguson (1997); Saló (2003); Zabaleta-Urkiola (2005); Camacho-Ordóñez (2005); Tur-Viñes (2006); Lu; Lo (2007); Bonaut-Iriarte; Grandío-Pérez (2009); Silva (2010); Guerrero; Etayo (2015); Ferrer-Ceresola (2018).</b>	

<b>Awards and reviews</b>	Receipt of awards for their work and stimulating of reviews	<i>Prix Italia</i> (1985); <b>Thompson</b> (1996); <b>Medina-Laverón</b> (2006); <b>Ojer-Goñi</b> (2008); <b>Bonaut-Iriarte</b> (2010); <b>Pujadas</b> (2011); <b>Ferrer-Ceresola</b> (2018); <b>Verhoeven et al.</b> (2018).
<b>Audience</b>	Audience on set. Viewer involvement, satisfaction, and commercial purpose	<b>Albers</b> (1992); <b>Thompson</b> (1996); <b>Eastman</b> ; <b>Ferguson</b> (1997); <b>Saló</b> (2003); <b>Catela</b> (2005); <b>Bianculli</b> (2007); <b>Pujadas</b> ; <b>Oliva</b> (2007); <b>Martínez-Gallego</b> ; <b>Gómez-Mompart</b> ; <b>Bordería-Ortiz</b> (2010); <b>Bonaut-Iriarte</b> (2010); <b>Ferrer-Ceresola</b> (2018).
	Participation. Social networks and opinion	<b>Albers</b> (1992); <b>Medina-Laverón</b> (2006); <b>Ojer-Goñi</b> (2008); <b>García-Matilla</b> ; <b>Arnanz</b> (2011); <b>Ferrer-Ceresola</b> (2018); <b>Verhoeven et al.</b> (2018).
	High audience figures	<i>Prix Italia</i> (1985); <b>Gordillo</b> (2009); <b>Ferrer-Ceresola</b> (2018).
<b>Context</b> <b>Lasagni</b> ; <b>Richeri</b> (1995); <b>Martínez-Gallego</b> ; <b>Gómez-Mompart</b> ; <b>Bordería-Ortiz</b> (2010).	Commercial economic performance. Distribution, advertising, self-promotion	<i>Prix Italia</i> (1985); <b>Albers</b> (1992), <b>Cortés</b> (2001); <b>Pujadas</b> (2001); <b>Blanco-Mallada</b> (2005); <b>Catela</b> (2005); <b>Medina-Laverón</b> (2006); <b>Pujadas</b> ; <b>Oliva</b> (2007); <b>Verhoeven et al.</b> (2018).
	Cultural-economic environment, social value, political and legal system	<b>Catela</b> (2005); <b>Videla-Rodríguez</b> ; <b>Sanjuán-Pérez</b> (2006); <b>Martínez-Gallego</b> ; <b>Gómez-Mompart</b> ; <b>Bordería-Ortiz</b> (2010); <b>Pujadas</b> (2011); <b>Ferrer-Ceresola</b> (2018); <b>Terán</b> (2019).
	Competence	<b>Eastman</b> ; <b>Ferguson</b> (1997); <b>Cortés</b> (2001).
	Luck	<i>GECA</i> (1995); <b>Sánchez-Tabernero</b> (2000).

### 3. Methodology

Entertainment is the main *raison d'être* of television (**Antona-Jimeno**, 2017), leading to the establishment of a wide range of programming formats with overwhelming audience figures, because “to entertain properly is as necessary as to educate or inform accurately” (**Guerrero**, 2013, p. 11). According to **Medina-Laverón** (2006, p. 47), true entertainment is related to “humor, talent, and innovation.” It is easy to criticize the frivolity of television (**Catela**, 2005), but journalistic humor professionals take the social dimension of their work very seriously, as “it constitutes healthy exercise” (**Meléndez-Malavé**, 2005, p. 90).

In accordance with **Graham** (1999, p. 45), quality indicators and standards in entertainment (**Guerrero**; **Etayo**, 2015) are considered to be related to experience, and this is what promotes success, in addition to budget constraints and technical expertise. Evaluation against these objective criteria can be used to develop a product that captures the audience, according to **Diego-González**, **Etayo-Pérez**, and **Pardo** (2011), who add to a stream of research that compares the opinions of professionals involved in the production process, along with **Albers** (1992); **Lasagni** and **Richeri** (1995); **Leggatt** (1996); **Ishikawa** (1996); **Gutiérrez-Gea** (2000) or **Soto-Sanfiel**; **Villegas-Simón** and **Angulo-Brunet** (2021).

According to the aforementioned proposals, we carried out a chronological review of humor journalism programs broadcast on Spanish free-to-air generalist channels (*TVE*, *La 2*, *Antena 3*, *Telecinco*, *Cuatro*, and *La Sexta*) from 1990 to 2015. The term “humor journalism programs” was coined by **Acevedo** (1971) to emphasize formats that deal with current affairs using accurate and rigorous journalistic procedures, regardless of the time allocated, that is, whether a whole broadcast or just a section. **De-Castro-García** (2020) believes that they provide a “perfect” way of informing, making the public laugh while using high-quality information and reliable sources.

Using these premises, this term is reformulated within infotainment, a macro-genre that includes thousands of hours of broadcasting, while excluding humorous programs without any current affairs element such as bloopers, stand-up comedy, joke shows, or improvisation programs. To identify such programs, data from magazines and television programming web portals, such as *TP* or *Vertele*, were crossed against the lists of formats in the *GECA* yearbooks and the start and cancellation dates published in media such as *El País*, *El Mundo*, or *ABC*. A proprietary database was thereby created, including 105 formats that mix humor and information, as described by **Gascón-Vera** (2022). Among these, the longest-running programs were identified, as a parameter of success, thus yielding seven examples that were broadcast for five years or more:

- *Caiga quien caiga* [CQC] (*Telecinco*, 1996-2002/2005-2008; *La Sexta*, 2008; *Cuatro*, 2010).
- *Crónicas marcianas* [CM] (*Telecinco*, 1997-2005).
- *La noche con Fuentes y Cía* (*Telecinco*, 2001-2005).
- *Buenafuente* (*Antena 3*, 2005-2007; *La Sexta*, 2007-2011).
- *Sé lo que hicisteis* [SLQH] (*La Sexta*, 2006-2011).
- *El intermedio* (*La Sexta*, 2006-present).
- *El hormiguero* (*Cuatro*, 2006-2011; *Antena 3*, 2011-present).

Although Annex I presents other noteworthy formats with less time on air, these seven represent a significant sample that indicates that this type of program is ephemeral, although there are also successful cases with only one program per season (Annex II), in accordance with the three assumptions supported in the programming studies by **González-Aguilar** (2020), **Béjar-Cortés** and **Pérez-Rufi** (2020), and **Puebla-Martínez** (2013). More specifically, priority

“A desire to improve the world can also be achieved from the set of a television program”

was given to the pilot or last program of the season, as well as its highest audience figures or a special program. As a final resource, availability was considered, given that the main limitation was the availability of broadcasts, for which the archives of *Mediaset* and *Globomedia* were accessed.

For the content analysis, nine categories were used, including the following data: season, date, channel, structure, humorous resources, content and production, aspects of creation, participation, and advertising elements. These result in a total of 50 variables based on the abovementioned indicators. Nearly 200 hours were watched to determine the structure and establish the targets of the interviews among those working in the productive, creative, and executing processes (Pérez-Pereiro, 2007).

A methodological triangulation was applied to guarantee the reliability of the study by applying different techniques and complementing several points of view (Puebla-Martínez, 2013) for such a dynamic object of analysis (Fernández-Jiménez, 2018). A strategic selection of experts (Chicharro, 2003) was carried out to explore the characteristics of their work routines (Giddens, 1995), to achieve a global perspective through which to infer the importance of their experience.

Table 2. List of professionals interviewed

	<b>CQC</b>	<b>Crónicas marcianas</b>	<b>La noche</b>	<b>Buenafuente</b>	<b>SLQH</b>	<b>El intermedio</b>	<b>El hormiguero</b>
<b>Presenter</b>	El Gran Wyoming (José Miguel Monzón)	Xavier Sardà	Manel Fuentes	Andreu Buenafuente*	Ángel Martín Patricia Conde*	El Gran Wyoming+ Sandra Sabatés	Pablo Motos*
<b>Executive Producer/ Director</b>	Eduardo Arroyo		José Miguel Contreras	Joan Grau	Juan Andrés García Roperó	Carmen Aguilera	Jorge Salvador
<b>Script Manager</b>	Cristina López	Xavier Vidal	Amando Cabrero			Óscar Arenas	Sergio Sarria
<b>Editorial Manager</b>	Belén Fernández		Camino Hontecillas	Marcos Mas	Samantha González	Antonio Arráez	
<b>Production Manager</b>	Miguel Turón	Albert Grau	Víctor Martín	David Felani	María Eugenia Rodríguez	Marián García	Kike Perdigones
<b>Director</b>	Fernando García	Alex Miñana	Oriol Bosh	David Guillén	Cristina Escudero*	Diego Santos	Alex Miñana+

Note: The interviews were carried out from 2020 to 2022. Three requests were rejected\*, being supplemented by the other interviewees. +These two professionals answered twice, as they worked in two formats.

The questions that were asked (Table 3) were also based on the measurement of academic success, with the aim of finding synergies, identifying significant differences, and confirming the indicators, according to the professional profile of some of the interviewees with a leading role in the history of television entertainment (Aguilera-García, 2022). Owing to their recognized career, meeting these professionals was difficult but was achieved satisfactorily through different forms of coverage, with the purpose of facilitating access to each team, according to their needs.

The in-depth interviews with the team from *El intermedio* were carried out on its set, as well as with colleagues from previous formats; interviews were also carried out at the *Movistar+* headquarters with the directors of *Caiga quien caiga* and *Sé lo que hicisteis*, and at the production company of *El hormiguero*. Meanwhile, the experiences of *Crónicas marcianas*, *La noche*, and *Buenafuente* were completed via telephone and video call, always lasting more than 30 min and reaching 60 min on seven occasions.

The 34 transcripts were then coded by using the *Atlas.Ti 8* analysis tool with the matrix shown in Figure 1, which in turn interrelates Tables 1 and 3, according to the five main factors of the theoretical study that were addressed through the questions above.

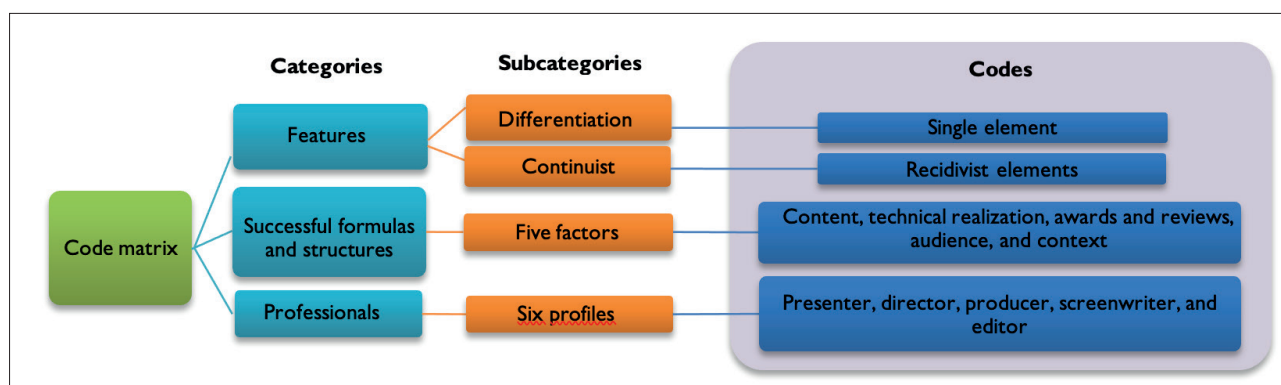


Figure 1. The coding method used in the evaluation of the in-depth interviews

Table 3. Questions asked in the interviews according to professional profiles

<p><b>Presenter:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you consider to be the main aspects of programs that mix information and humor?</li> <li>2. What would you highlight about the use of information in humor programs? What is the most difficult thing to deal with under the umbrella of humor?</li> <li><b>3. What ingredients do you think a successful program should have?</b></li> <li>4. What can be the determining factors for the failure of a format on television?</li> <li>5. What is the ideal number of sections and <u>copresenters</u>?</li> <li>6. Which professional profiles are essential for a successful format?</li> <li>7. Do you think that changes are necessary between seasons and/or within the same season?</li> <li>8. Among all the <u>humorous resources</u>, which are the most important for you?</li> <li>9. Which <u>elements of production</u> are noteworthy in this type of format?</li> <li>10. What is the best formula for live or recorded broadcasts?</li> <li>11. What is your favorite scenography?</li> <li>12. Would you highlight any <u>award</u> received and/or any <u>review</u> you have received?</li> </ol>	<p><b>Director/executive producer</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What genre do you think the format belongs to?</li> <li>2. What are the key aspects of your program?</li> <li>3. What other formats are <u>in direct competition</u>, and what differentiates them?</li> <li>4. In your opinion, what are the characteristics of humor journalism?</li> <li>5. What are the ingredients of a successful program, and what aspects help to make it successful?</li> <li>6. How would you specify the target audience of the format? Has it undergone changes?</li> <li>7. What are the main adaptations and the reasons for them?</li> <li>8. Successes and failures of content: what has worked best and worst?</li> <li>9. What are the reasons for changing, eliminating, or creating new <u>sections</u>?</li> <li>10. What are the main reasons for choosing a contributor?</li> <li>11. What are the usual topics in the program's rundown? Has the program created its own topics?</li> <li>12. What aspects of the <u>production</u> are characteristic, and what elements should the scenography have to be more attractive?</li> <li>13. Would you highlight any <u>award</u> received and any <u>review</u>?</li> </ol>
<p><b>Head of script:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the keys that differentiate the format? What are the characteristics of the <u>script</u>?</li> <li><b>2. What are the resources that enable success?</b></li> <li>3. Which elements have been incorporated from other programs?</li> <li>4. Does the <u>length</u> of the format vary? How has that been achieved?</li> <li>5. What resources made the program entertaining?</li> <li>6. What makes it entertaining?</li> <li>7. What are the most difficult types of <u>content</u> to script?</li> <li>8. What jokes or elements do you use to dynamize the <u>script</u>?</li> <li>9. What resources do you use to build <u>audience</u> loyalty?</li> <li>10. What are the identifying <u>humorous resources</u>?</li> <li>11. Is the <u>script</u> literal, or is there room for improvisation?</li> <li>12. How are the <u>sections</u> woven together?</li> <li>13. How many times is the <u>script</u> rewritten?</li> </ol>	<p><b>Editor in charge:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the main characteristics of the information that is treated with humor?</li> <li>2. What is the degree of importance of the <u>information</u> in the format?</li> <li>3. How would you define the <u>main topic</u> covered in the program?</li> <li>4. What has been the most complicated topic to deal with?</li> <li><b>5. What are the difficulties in achieving success?</b></li> <li>6. How has the editorial process evolved?</li> <li>7. How is the documentation process carried out?</li> <li>8. Are there any <u>format-specific issues</u>?</li> <li>9. How is the length of each topic determined?</li> <li>10. Do <u>current events</u> change the <u>script</u> once it is closed?</li> <li>11. What <u>audiovisual resources</u> are most commonly used?</li> <li>12. Does the <u>audience</u> determine the topics?</li> </ol>
<p><b>Production director:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is the type of production and its characteristics?</li> <li>2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of producing a comedy format in a production company outside the <u>network</u>?</li> <li><b>3. What elements would you highlight in the production that help the programs to be successful?</b></li> <li>4. What are the differences between the <u>production</u> and others?</li> <li>5. How is the team organized?</li> <li>6. What is your daily workflow like?</li> <li>7. What is the number of workers needed, and what tasks are essential for a successful format?</li> <li>8. How have the guests varied on the program?</li> <li>9. What are the exterior locations of the program? Which trips stand out?</li> <li>10. What distinguishes the <u>style</u> of the program?</li> <li>11. Can we estimate the <u>budget</u>? If not, is it appropriate?</li> <li>12. What is the <u>commercial potential</u> of the program?</li> <li>13. How is audience <u>participation managed</u>?</li> </ol>	<p><b>Director:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What aspects differentiate the <u>direction</u> of the format?</li> <li>2. How are the <u>direction</u> aspects decided?</li> <li><b>3. What resources help the success and recognition of the format?</b></li> <li>4. What have been the changes and evolution of the scenography?</li> <li>5. How would you describe the scenography? What identifies it?</li> <li>6. How was the scenery designed? Which props and objects are most commonly used?</li> <li>7. What are the main characteristics of the lighting of the program compared with others?</li> <li>8. Which camera shots are used most often?</li> <li>9. How many and which type of cameras are used?</li> <li>10. What is the <u>feature</u> that makes the format recognizable?</li> <li>11. What identifies the graphics used?</li> <li>12. What is the musical setting, tuning, music, etc.?</li> <li>13. How many people are in the <u>audience</u>? Is the audience important for the development of the format?</li> </ol>

Note: To differentiate them, elements related to the indicators of academic success are underlined, while direct questions on resources for success are highlighted in bold.

This process favors internal validity by using a single analysis instrument, while the external validity of the study was based on the credibility of the experts and their demonstrated success.

#### 4. Results: keys to the success of humor journalistic formats

This method was used to challenge the factors for success and expand them by applying the 100 categories resulting from the coding. These results are quantified in Figure 2, where first value reflects the number of mentions in the interviews, while the second describes their interrelation with other indicators.

This was then linked by the professionals to the news resources and the main topics related to the main theme and current affairs. These, together with the script, the relationship between programs, and the scenography, emerge as the

most important features of success. They would thus be the most representative, followed by the guests, the characteristics of humor journalism, the organization of the team, and the support from the network. On the other hand, the least frequently mentioned features were the programming, the number of sections, and the contributors, as well as the humorous resources themselves, subdivided into different formulas such as irony or imitation and grouped in terms of originality and staging, resulting in structural changes that are intertwined with the budget.



Figure 2. The 100 categories defined after the coding of the in-depth interviews for the success analysis

The common factors of the seven analyses are based on two popular channels: *Telecinco* and *La Sexta*, while *Antena 3* and *Cuatro* created *Buenafuente* and *El hormiguero*, which (together with the three readaptations of *Caiga quien caiga*) demonstrate how humor journalistic hits can switch channels while retaining their audience. To achieve this, an initial effort is required from the channel to “polish” the format, as suggested by *CQC*’s scriptwriter, Cristina López, and emphasized by its director, Eduardo Arroyo, who recounts how “the channel put up with a fourth change of Sunday noon programming.”

This finding is also confirmed by the commitment of Paolo Vasile, CEO of *Mediaset España*, to *La noche con Fuentes y Cía*, as well as by the fact that *El hormiguero* (*Cuatro*) and *El intermedio* and *SLQH* (*La Sexta*) debuted at the same time as their channels. In this regard, the director of *SLQH*, Juan Andrés García Roperó, emphasized the time to “mature” and being fortunate enough to keep on trying until it became a daily program, as happened with the latter three projects. Therefore, success can result in the expansion of the program, although one should not forget the risks. In this regard, the producer of *SLQH*, María Eugenia Rodríguez, considers breaks to be necessary.

Successful formats change the rules of programming; for example, *El hormiguero* forces programming schedules to adapt to its end time, which Jorge Salvador, its executive producer, considers to be “a compliment.” Pre-prime-time and late night are the favorite slots for successful launches, including important examples such as *The Late Show with David Letterman* (*CBS*, 1993-2015), Johnny Carson’s interviews, or John Oliver and Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show* (*Comedy Central*, 1996-present).

In terms of their origin, *CQC* is the only example of an adaptation from Argentina, but adaptation of radio programs is common, including *El hormiguero* from *M80*’s version of *No somos nadie* and *Crónicas marcianas* from *La ventana* on the *SER* network. “It was hard for us to find the formula. We came from radio, and everything was new”, said Xavier Sardà, director and producer of *CM*, about their adaptation to the television genre.

The origins of the examples are interrelated. *La noche* continues the project of *El club de la comedia*, from which Pablo Motos, as script coordinator, created *El hormiguero*, using the set and team of *Crónicas* and its production company *Gestmusic*, which (together with *Globomedia* and *El Terrat*, now *Mediapro*) manage them.

In terms of agenda setting, the topics covered exhibit a high informative content that alters its running content. Manel Fuentes, interviewed as a presenter of *La noche* as well as a member of *Crónicas*, recalls that the assassination of Ernest Lluch made the program “stand out” as a result of its journalistic skill. Likewise, *La noche* was redefined as an “absolutely serious” program by present debates on the Iraq war with all political parties, as confirmed by its executive producer and director, José Miguel Contreras. Here, they achieved their highest audience figures, as with the *Crónicas* special on the 11-M terrorist attack, one of the most complicated issues to deal with according to the newsrooms. “Current events run you over; it doesn’t matter what you have written because what happens is the most important thing”, reveals the head of *SLQH* and member of *CQC*, Samantha González, about the crash of Spanair flight 5022.

Likewise, Belén Fernández, part of the editorial staff of *CQC*, advocates that the journalistic tone of such programs should be supported by management. In her opinion, “the script load was huge” but “without the writers who provide the information, the scriptwriter is nobody.” She is thus in favor of a partnership in which the journalist ensures that “the information is correct” while the script “rounds it off” as also reinforced by Carmen Aguilera, director of *El intermedio*.

In this sense, the managers emphasize their contacts with traditional sources, agencies, press offices, and media, from *Interviú* to the *Yellow Pages*, in contrast to the digital media and social networks that have now become “a source of

information”, according to Camino Hontecillas from the editorial office of *La noche*. According to Joan Grau, deputy director of *Buenafuente*, the development of humor journalism enables a wide range of tones, expanded by Ángel Martín, presenter of *SLQH*, to include humorous, ironic, or parodic, while González, from *CQC*, links them to current affairs. “Without current affairs, *Crónicas* would not have existed”, says Xavier Vidal, editor of *CM*, presenting the examples of the debates on euthanasia or corruption and the differential content on reality television and sex.

Successful humor journalistic programs combine two or more political, social, or television issues, from which they delve into conflicts such as the economic crisis, political corruption, the war in Iraq, the independence of Catalonia, or ETA

“Perhaps one of the keys was that we did not have a rigid schedule of topics. Each morning, we decided what the program would be that night; there were no constraints or molds. We included debates, humor, current affairs, interviews, esotericism, or sports, in the best combination we thought the audience would like”. (Xavier Sardà)

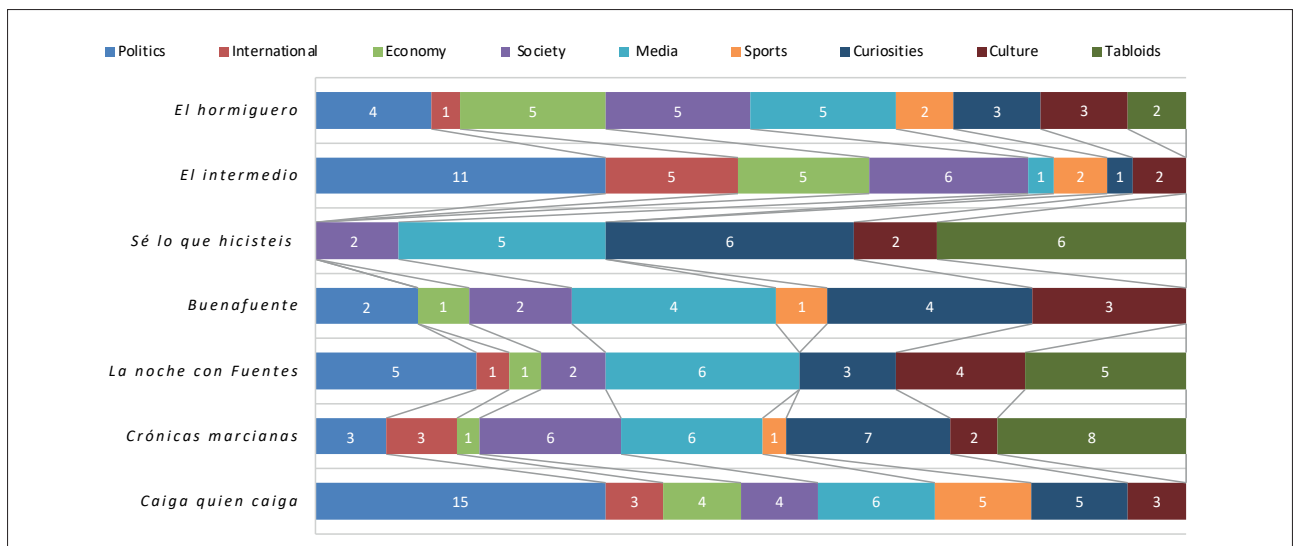
As part of this miscellany, the politics of *CQC* were added to sports, society, and according to its director, Fernando García, ending with “the most expected”, the international report. For Arroyo, this content “no longer exists” as it requires larger budgets, although he also points out the reports by *El intermedio* on refugees, health, or historical memory, which have become “signs of identity” from which to defend human, social, and civil rights, according to its director. These are the same informative keys that a newspaper or television news program covers, according to its editor-in-chief, Antonio Arráez. Marcos Mas, scriptwriter at *Buenafuente*, states that any news item can provoke laughter by using humor that identifies with the audience and deals with something that matters, as shown in Graph 1.

“We tried to make sure that all content was combative, because the basis of humor is the defense of the weak”, says Contreras, also noting that they included anecdotes, just like *Buenafuente*, and that they added social stories in *El hormiguero* and *SLQH*, where they denounced the bad practices of gossip magazines. Current affairs share coverage with topics such as the monarchy in *Crónicas*, the Church, and refugees in *El intermedio*, and social events such as the wedding of the daughter of the then prime minister, José María Aznar, who was the target of humor in all formats, always departing from the news as presented by the bellwether media for a particular synergy.

“The program became news”, noted the head of *SLQH*’s editorial staff, while Arroyo explains how they could ask questions “more brazenly.” According to Sardà, this capacity to generate media interest, in the case of *Crónicas*, was owing to “the tenacity of the editors to pursue the most elusive characters” who said and did things that “they would not do on any other set” and that began to nourish the network.

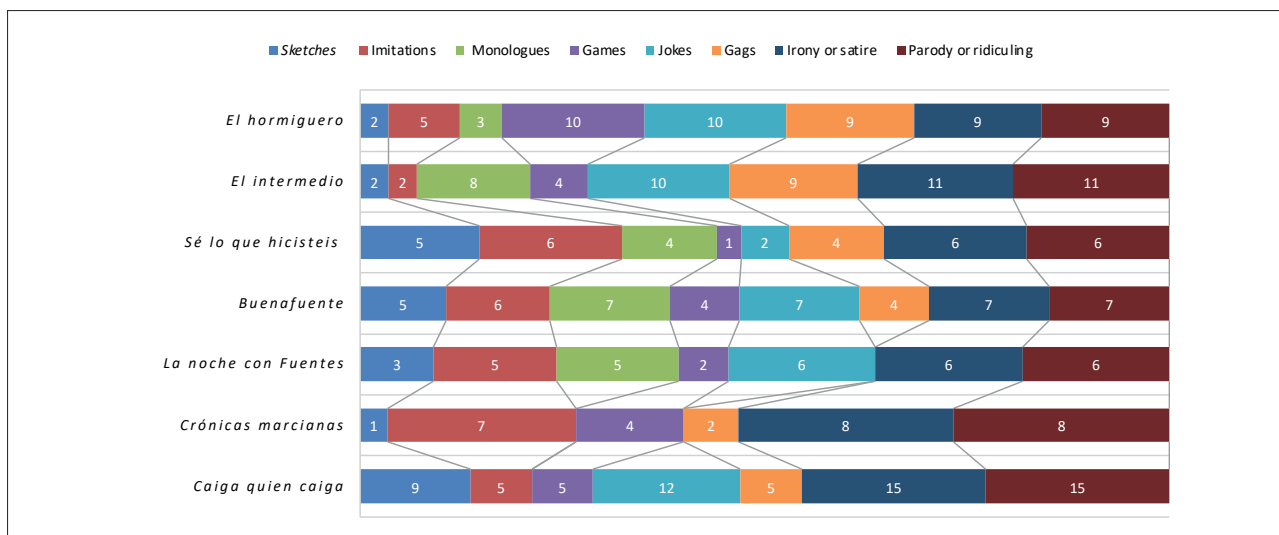
The production director of *Buenafuente*, David Felani, reveals how celebrities asked to be invited, and Contreras recalled that, on *La noche*, “very significant celebrities” attended “in a natural way”, including three types: the powerful, the good, and the interesting, according to its production director, Víctor Martín. A preliminary meeting was held with them to generate a story of interest from a script that corresponded “to one of their most emotive periods”, as described by Amando Cabrero. The same idea is supported by Óscar Arenas, scriptwriter of *SLQH*, when he reported that they wrote ten pages.

The most recent contributors are the most faithful to their script, playing with the element of surprise on *Buenafuente*, according to Joan Grau, which is usually rehearsed, being divergent in *SLQH*, on which it is never fixed. Turning this defect into a virtue, “Patricia Conde found jokes by reading them from the teleprompter”, according to García Roperero, who stated that “they showed their seams”, that is, that the format was live.



Graph 1. Preeminence of the themes in the viewings





Graph 2. Distribution of humorous resources for each broadcast

These formats typically use techniques such as irony and parody, more commonly than games, jokes, or monologs.

For production director Miguel Turón, *CQC*'s humor was marked by the three comedians around the table: Wyoming, with "his authenticity", Juanjo de la Iglesia as "the serious counterweight", and Javier Martín with a "wackier" profile. They performed parodies and sketches based on advertising or films, according to the director. "Everything was scripted, and everything worked", recalled its director, who retained the section on journalistic ethics, while he considered Wyoming's editorial line to correspond to the current "look." An opening monolog, rankings, or the first science of Pablo Motos were part of the structure of *La noche*, according to Hontecillas, along with promotional sketches, as in *CQC*.

*Crónicas*' humor was created from a rich universe of characters brought to life by Boris Izaguirre, Mariano Mariano, Javier Cárdenas, or Juan Carlos Ortega. "More than imitations, we did parodies with El Neng or Rodolfo Chikilicuatre", said Grau of *Buenafuente*, who identifies for his easy-to-digest, clean humor from the monolog, his main tool.

For Arenas, the characters, despite being very complicated to create because of the great potential for errors, favor running gags as in *SLQH* and its recurring sketches. This started with clones and, later they were not able to use images from *Telecinco*, as a production on the set, just like *El intermedio*, which is recorded next door. However, from his script, Sergio Sarria, details that easy jokes are not enough for them; rather, "there has to be reflection", and so, the newspaper library and the section *El pico de la mesa* work "better", as well as *Los vídeos manipulados*, which are considered to be "a discovery" by Wyoming. The fresh and recurring humorous works in *El hormiguero*, where Latre imitates as in *Crónicas* and whose music is also a transposition, as well as the stand-up comedy of *La noche*, are also pointed out by Sergio González, the coordinator of scripts and writing.

Therefore, these are overlapping ingredients that achieve a similar aim. As stated by Contreras, they have been "always" been addressing "the same audience" comprising the segment of middle-aged people with an "urban mentality in favor of social justice", thereby attracting attention from the commercial world, and that has grown throughout their development on television, concludes Salvador. To achieve such loyalty, López describes the bond between the collaborators in *CQC* as "key", "having very different profiles that cover the whole spectrum of the audience." This idea also emerges from the personality of each of the reporters, such as Tonino or Pablo Carbonell, who Arroyo states is the most versatile and reveals that he was requested by Wyoming, who continues to drive *El intermedio*, as well as Manuel Fuentes in *La noche* and in *CQC*, which later included Frank Blanco, both of whom are participants in *CM*. Likewise, Silvia Abril only includes Sabatés and Conde as females in some slots created ad hoc on the basis of the personality of some presenters adored by the public.

"Sardà never gave up the fight. In one episode, he called George Bush a 'son of a bitch' (...). The people who watched us wanted sincerity, like saying things the way we really thought they were. When he spoke, he gave his opinion; he tried to be fair, but he did not hide and gave the program an incomparable rage and strength". (Xavier Vidal)

For the presenters Sardà, Fuentes, and Martín, it is important to be direct; Buenafuente, Motos, and Sardà are their directors and achieved the role of opinion leaders, in tune with a large team of collaborators who provide originality and spectacle since "a program is a score that they must play", says Sardà. Likewise, Contreras highlights the daring role developed by Enrique Sanfrancisco,

“Becoming the driver of programming has proven to be a formula for success. *La noche* and *El hormiguero* bring together the star system, not only Spanish, and create star moments through the guests, who are indispensable figures in humor journalism”

Eva Hache, Quequé, or Ángel Martín using the same formula as in *Buenafuente*, whereby Mas points out that they enrich these formats, although this approach results in the complication of creating new ideas each season, says Salvador.

The production director of *CQC* explains that the networks “rarely” create, produce, and broadcast this type of program. Meanwhile, from *La noche*, Víctor Martín, states that his creative process “does not fit well with the formulas of a large network.” Although the producer of *El intermedio* and the deputy director of *Buenafuente* do not have a common opinion on the details, they report a greater agility by offering “absolute value”, in terms of both technical means that guarantee they “have all the materials to recreate what the scriptwriters create”, in the words of Rodríguez, as well as the specificity of current affairs humor, as supported by the producers of *Buenafuente* and *Crónicas*.

“There was never any financial limit; everything was available at once, from animals to cars”, confirmed this producer. Felani confirms this in *Buenafuente*, where “they didn’t say no to anything” and that Kike Perdigones, producer of *El hormiguero*, joined his approach of spending as little as possible: “It sounds impossible, but that’s what the production is based on.”

This task requires a symbiosis between departments. Grau summarizes that “the best team” must be chosen based on talent, while Perdigones nails it when referring to “making television history” and maintaining this intensity after the success of the program. To achieve this objective, they work on the basis of the requirement to make the best possible program each night, a challenge shared by Aguilera and Sardà when evaluating their personal satisfaction over the years.

On-screen broadcasting of these programs ended owing to different circumstances. Cabrero recalled that *La noche*, despite having “a dream audience”, suffered a “disastrous” budget reduction that, according to Contreras, made them lose creative capacity. *Buenafuente* suffered the same situation, going from a prime-time budget on *Antena 3* to having “considerably less than half”, lamented Grau. In the case of *CQC*, its director confirmed that the audience was not the real reason for its cancellation, since they reached the agreed share of 20%; rather, he points at a change of model and *Mediaset’s* shareholding. However, the drop was a determining factor in *SLQH* and *Crónicas*.

Innovation in humorous programs has been proposed using different resources, such as sound effects, editing of cut reports with jumps, graphics, and vertiginous production with very fast camera movements combined with a live band.

Set design is another interesting aspect to keep the audience engaged, although for Arroyo it was “secondary” and reminiscent of an industrial design, a clandestine garage, or a space station. In addition, the whole team wore black suits, white shirts, and the glasses that identify *Caiga Argentino*, as indicated by the production team. His counterpart, Albert Grau, recalled that *Crónicas* also applied uniforms for its “Martians” and that the wardrobe was “fundamental” for the imitations.

“The set was groundbreaking, it was different”, recalls director Alex Miñana, who recounts the entrance to the pyramid and its “walkable” table, which they reached with autonomous cameras. The night was marked by the stage of the Teatro Alcázar, where the audience experienced “a direct and unique resource”, as did the guest, said Contreras. This was “a point in favor, as with Letterman in New York”, according to Fuentes, who also had difficulties that Bosh solved with a stage that went into the box seats, a system of mirrors to give depth, and locating the band in the amphitheater. All this was combined with the pioneering use of smoke and high-contrast lighting for an underground look, adds the director. The audience experience is also added in these formats.

For the audience “Andreu was a star”, says Felani at *El Terrat*, while his director, Guillén, admits to becoming ashamed of the scenography over time, a sign of “everything that was learned and improved.” He also stresses the importance of the props and his “fetish elements”: the red curtain and his commitment to live music. Regarding *SLQH*, its set grew until becoming a sitcom-like bar by episode 1,001, the last before its cancellation. García Ropero quantified that, in an hour, they could broadcast 40 videos, a number that could be 100 in *El intermedio* using a method perfected by its director Diego Santos, who details that they had limited scenographic changes directed toward “calm” and with lighting from above.

Successful filmmakers agree that content takes precedence over esthetic as a priority. “You think about what is happening and how to convey it to the viewer”, adds Miñana. For Oriol Bosh, the approach at *Globomedia* tries to make the production work in service of the script, which should not be distorted, according to David Guillén, from *Buenafuente*. In terms of videos, in *El hormiguero*, González points out that they organize the sections with “an emotional roller coaster of emotions” as a guideline, always with surplus content programmed in case it is needed. As in *Crónicas*, both have an extra half hour available, and the order is determined live by the production team. “Sardà had a graphic tablet and would warn of changes in the order of the videos”, recalls Miñana, along with the statistic that they had 100 videos a day but only used 20-25% of them.

To understand the external factors influencing success, it is necessary to point out that *CQC* received awards from the *Academy of Television*, *Ondas*, and *TP* in the entertainment and best program categories, as also confirmed in the cu-

“Sardà highlights the complicity of humor and the need to share cultural references, for example, with the imitations of George Bush and José María Aznar that Carlos Latre used to do”

urrent sample, but not in the script category, which *El intermedio* did receive. “These programs are always seen as a poor brother and they are at a similar level”, considers Arroyo, who together with the rest of the people in charge, is grateful for these prizes, which for *Crónicas* and *El hormiguero* have become international. However, Contreras emphasizes that these correspond to trends, as does Sardà, who believes that, when the reviews fade away, “all that remains is the trace of the work done with the utmost honesty and the maximum tenacity to entertain people at home.”

Regarding public success, López concludes that “the audiences achieved by *CQC* have not been seen again”, which he attributes to its great characteristics and how “the effort and the enthusiasm of its team” was reflected in “the affection that it generated.” According to Contreras and Fuentes, *La noche* was the late-night program that has worked best in history, receiving a high audience share, with the exception of *SLQH*, which maintained an average of 8%. “We knew we had support; the presenters had a fan club, people sent emails... when there is feedback, it’s a good sign”, says the head of the newsroom of this latter program.

This success was owing to the fact that they had a “very high participation thanks to very well-trained people”, recalled Fernández, adding that they received many letters, faxes, SMSs, and emails. These formulas are now “obsolete”, according to Víctor Martín, which Albert Grau also mentions and links to the fact that *Crónicas* forged a successful brand for merchandising discs and DVDs. The same occurred with *CQC*, which became a bellwether for *Globomedia* and profitability for *Telecinco*. “We achieve a perfect symbiosis, because we create a novel product and receive a few minutes from a celebrity to which we would not have access”, says Perdigones, giving both qualitative and quantitative importance to the audience.

Regarding the time slot, “not having competition was a marvel (...) it simulated a live show while all the channels were broadcasting TV movies.” This is how López referred to the fact that *CQC* was programmed in a “convenient” time slot thanks to highly differentiated products such as motorsports. *La noche* also did not compete with other late-night programs, since it was a weekly program, so it was an advantage to have its own slot. In contrast, a daily program “must fight a different battle every day”, said Jorge Salvador, who contrasts his experience with the strong competition they have had among themselves: “The audiences mattered to us to a certain extent; if nobody sees you, you’re out of a job. But we didn’t dream of beating Sardà, although we overtook him quite soon”, clarified Joan Grau, while Sardà himself emphasized the importance of daily work: “You can’t waste a single minute of screen time.” To this end, he is committed to captivating the viewer with a differentiated format based on “novelty, uniqueness, and surprise through talent and excellence.”

From these anecdotes, one can also deduce that the success of such programs depends on “chance”, which is related to being created with the support of the network, being able to create content freely, or having the public present during each recording.

## 5. The formula of the TV hit makers

“*CQC* was very modern and made a great contribution. It even included politicians, who participated in something that was happening in spite of them. They were “gentlemen” who did not mix with the people. This is a response to a very low-intensity democracy”. (El Gran Wyoming)

The key to *CQC*’s success, according to its director, Edu Arroyo, was that “it presented the figure of the reporter as never before: tongue-in-cheek but with weighty questions and content.” He also stated that it was “very original” because of the “black suit and the glasses.” They even managed to deliver them to the then King of Spain, Juan Carlos I, which, according to its production director, Miguel Turón, was “his greatest success”, as it became like “a model.” It “dealt with politics in a fun and familiar way”, a trademark that “avoided their being standardized”, even nowadays, and according to its head of script, Cristina López, they were different in the sense that they were “very scathing.” Along the same line, its head of writing, Belén Fernández, emphasizes the triumph in “being the first to deal with the current events rigorously from a different point of view”, using a humorous-satirical tone emphasized by its director, who achieves “a vertiginous realization”, using quickfire shots.

“It is very difficult to identify the elements required for success, but they include freshness, having a good creative team with talent, and a sense of humor through a sense of freedom and an appropriate editorial line defined by the executive producer”. (Albert Grau)

From the newsroom, Xavier Vidal focuses on technical quality: “We had to present a flawless television product; ethically, everyone had a say, but it could not be technically flawed.” This idea was added to the fact that it had to be interesting: “The guests had to be present, the debates had to be passionate, and the topics had to have a social scope.”

As defined by its presenter and director, Xavier Sardà, success relied on creating, in an honest fashion, “a different, fresh and original product (...) as if you only did one episode in your life, and even more so because it is a night program, because people want to enjoy themselves at the end of the day.” Therefore, he warns that even the thorniest issues must be addressed on televi-

Regarding their viability, for the head of production of *SLQH*, they received a great budgetary commitment before the crisis, through a very high level of production

sion, in which regard the director Alex Miñana emphasizes the importance of music together with a production that prioritizes showing what is happening over esthetics. This is a recipe for success that he also used in *El hormiguero* and that he complements with the use of autonomous cameras, well-lit areas, simple shots, and large amounts of videos and graphics.

“To achieve success, you have to handle relatively simple elements, but the mix is not easy (...). The key to success in TV language and communication is to achieve personality through an interesting point of view”. (José Miguel Contreras)

Successful results correspond to a strong idea developed from a constant relation between professionals and production companies linked to the success of humor journalism and with experience from other media in the audiovisual field

The executive producer of *La noche con Fuentes* moves away from the obsession with the audience, as well as from the other extreme: a program with great deepness but that neglects the audience. In addition, he favors the involvement of an author in a “very curious” format, combining the needs of the team with personal concerns and political situations.

The context is key to launch a product in which “success has to be quantitatively sufficient, good enough for the decision-maker to continue believing from growing audience ratings, but also qualitatively, because it has to satisfy the requirements I learned at the Faculty of Journalism.” This is the conclusion of the presenter Manel Fuentes, who, defining the ingredients, emphasizes “good guests, humor, and current affairs”, while, to be a valid presenter, he considers that “you have to be aligned, have content, and know how to channel it.” He also underlines the characteristics of daily live broadcasting, as it allows one “to follow a story and tighten the screws.”

The script director, Amando Cabrero, considered the formula for success to be due to great previous work. The editor, Camino Hontecillas, related this to the “magnificent professionals” in the artistic team, who “without good content, do not succeed.” Along these lines, its director, Oriol Bosh, emphasized the importance of imagination to create what “we see on screen.” Meanwhile, he noted that only 20% of program launches were successful and emphasized that, if he knew the formula for success, “he would be a multimillionaire.” The deputy director of *Buenafuente*, Joan Grau, noted that the answer was the same as “always”, believing that, for a program to work, three aspects must come together: “A clear concept that should be respected up to its ultimate consequences, the best team, and an adequate budget to carry it out.” All this should be complemented with creative freedom so that “the network does not restrict its execution” and “a good leader.” The production director, David Felani, also insists on the importance of decision-making.

“For Andreu, nothing is beyond the pale: live music, having the best comic actors, surprising the audience”, he asserts while quoting the example of the live broadcasting of the destruction of *El Neng de Castefo's* car in a crusher. He thus elevates the production beyond “a mere mechanism”, instead making it a piece of great engagement, along with direction and production, without neglecting the question of “being inclusive with the public”, thanks to a wide variety of collaborators, as a guarantee of success for the editor Marcos Mas.

This was a creative and technical evolution in the early stage of *Antena 3* that, for the director, David Guillén, “has been the greatest of *El Terrat* and Andreu”, who emphasizes the ability of this professional to discover “outstanding” characters and “impressive” scriptwriters. This intertwines with *Sé lo que hicisteis*, whose scriptwriter Óscar Arenas highlights the “great chemistry” that arose on set through the ongoing television partnership between Ángel and Patricia. “This is not easy to find, and it was very important”, emphasized its main manager, Juan Andrés García Roper, and he extended this quality to the rest of the characters, providing another reason for the success of the freshness of the script, the videos, and the stability of the audience in “a very difficult format.” This idea was shared by Samantha González on the basis of the large volume of work on the visuals, its immediacy, and the great demands emanating from production.

“Under an analysis, a study of the technical elements that a program should have to work, there are very few; that is, mathematics does not work here (...) *SLQH* could not have worked if we had recorded 12 episodes at once, since it was live and you were with the contributors in real time”. (Ángel Martín).

“The casting is vital and the tone is much more important than it may seem, but there were other ingredients: the chemistry, the script, the direction...” These are the essential points that, despite his statements, the presenter includes in the bonds of friendship that created the format and how this made a difference in terms of the familiar language that was not forced but “really existed.” Similarly, for *El Gran Wyoming*, there are no elements of success: “If there was a formula, everyone would do it.” He suggests that successful programs are a surprise, a mystery. “It is impossible to know before starting; nobody would have said that would last ten years, but it would not have lasted three months if it had not started at the same time as a network”, he says about *El intermedio*. Thus, although he renounces planning, he connects his results with the support from the network.

Regarding structure, a valuable point for its presenter, Sandra Sabatés, is that they use humor to convey a message. She also reveals that it is “very complicated” to perform her twofold job: to mix rigor, objectivity, truth, and jokes in 50 minutes a day. At the same time, from the newsroom, Antonio Arráez suggests that the defining elements are his way of interpreting the information, which is “very pure”, and the irony that, as determined by the head of script, Sergio Sarria, migrates from jokes to reflection. This involves working with news that expires quickly, as noted by the producer, Marian

García. Also, its director emphasizes its informative level, the talent of the scriptwriters, and the presenter, while its producer balances freedom of execution with its rapport with the general public.

Finally, the executive producer of *El hormiguero*, Jorge Salvador, distances himself from a formula per se, although he admits that there is a “trial and error process”, after which, if it works, they move on. “You have to find a balance of ideas that works for a wide variety of people and ages”, highlights this creator. To achieve this, as his script coordinator, Sergio González, continues, they never use the same structure. He also distances himself from a key to success and affirms that they face each broadcast as a very demanding challenge, “without rejoicing in past successes” although still aware that it is a “top” program that has been recorded in the *BBC* studios, according to its producer.

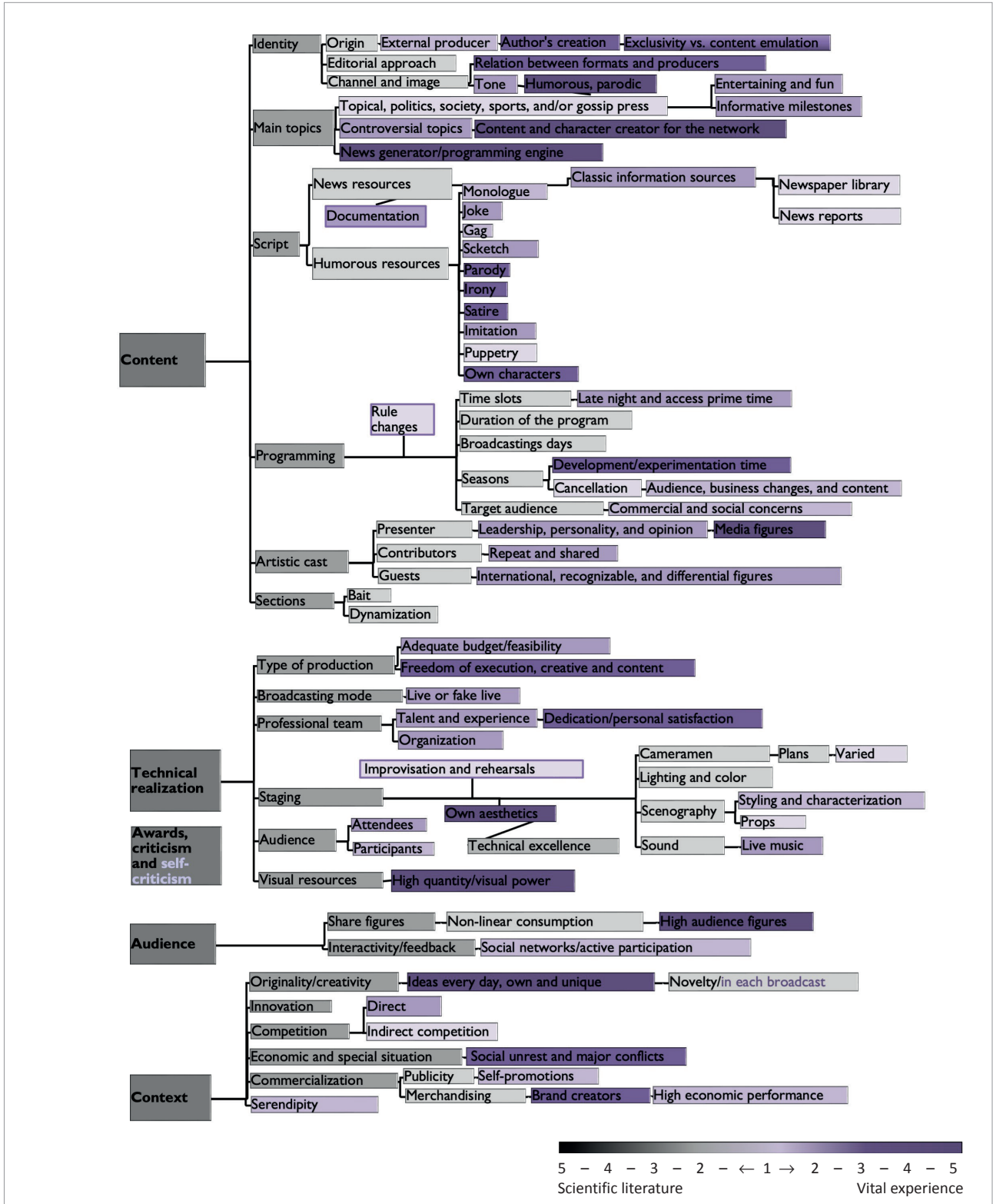


Figure 3. Decisive factors for measuring television success

On the basis of all these particularities, thanks to the correspondence between the categories of analysis and the interview questions, an analytical construction was created to combine academic components with the opinions resulting from the experience of television professionals, generating a set of ingredients that can be extrapolated. However, to generalize this to other situations, their specific characteristics must be considered.

This new, integrative proposal (Figure 3) makes it possible to measure television success in analytical studies and practical developments by means of a scale, according to its weighting. This systematizes the categories of analysis used in scientific literature with the unique factors that are behind products that achieve undisputed television success.

## 6. Conclusions

At a time of systemic crisis such as the present, the study of escapist content on television in terms of humor journalism, which is fundamental to the programmatic offering in television timetables, becomes especially relevant, as reflected in the various investigations carried out in recent years. However, no work combining the professionals' analysis with the state of affairs of all the success factors provided by the scientific literature had been carried out to enable the proposal of specific indicators.

Researchers have defined a structure for measuring success that continues to expand the experience of television humor professionals who, surprisingly, deny a formula for success, although they do point out the identifying components behind the success of seven journalistic humor formats.

The voices of those behind these programs provide additional value by proposing new aspects to the analysis of success, such as talent, the relationships between production companies, freedom of creation, and leadership. These parameters are not exclusive; rather, they are characteristics that define the formula for success as a main criterion, with differentiation being the reference characteristic that guides work on television.

Thanks to its practical transposition, the terms "failure" or "success" used by the teams was discovered to go beyond the quantitative or qualitative level, although they always start from a budget and audience figure that define the style and shape but do not solve the formula completely, because television and its formats are the creative and artistic result of a cultural industry.

### 6.1. Informative and original content of interest

Numerical values are not everything. Personal commitment, the defense of the creator, and the team's ideals are new developments in such analyses that previously only relied on the editorial line. Interesting, fresh, and original content is needed, since the public generally seeks surprise based on a clear concept that corresponds to a pioneering idea. This can be generated by an external production company at the request of a network, which must sustain the project for a reasonable time in which to test the content. Experimentation is, therefore, a maxim that is also added as a significant ingredient.

These programs learn from and adapt to the television language from the point of view of using humor as a counterpower. The irony and parodies address current societal issues and disparities at the international level, the gossip press, or sex, combined with controversial issues and newsworthy background. To this end, these platforms may or may not be structured in sections, as a discordant element that reflects the interest of the viewer, who becomes loyal to them as they can generate news. As the current experiences reveal, these programs are pioneers in establishing synergies with other products of the network. This is a strategy of proven success that is achieved through well-known guests who wish to attend these spaces relying on fame and fun.

### 6.2. Leadership and artistic excellence

Professionals in this field seek perfection based on their own performance and the professionalism that the interviewees achieve through the satisfaction of having worked on these successes. Thus, the teams condition success on the creative freedom that can bring freshness and achieve viability as a result of production ability. Successes in this area also do not neglect the quality obtained under the direction of experts in this typology that relies on a recurring cast that creates on-screen chemistry, with co-presenters intermingling with the figure of the presenter, the leader of the project whose personality positions them in current affairs, all the while seeking to relax the viewer.

The interviewees thus highlight their own use of a formula springing from an interrelation between humor that seeks to transcend the application of journalism through a strong script with wide-ranging subjects. This approach enables a technically effective television product thanks to continuous staging with a high volume of videos and graphics with music and preferably live broadcasting.

“ A successful television script relies on five factors and a hundred categories, whose motto is to provide a different product for each broadcast. This depends on when and where it happens, and with the defining premise that humor needs originality to work ”

### 6.3. A decisive audience for new creations

This theoretical approach and the producers thus achieve desirable audience shares by constructing a strong business strategy to beat the competition. This strategy is supported by awards and reviews, as understood in this context, that is, acting as the protagonist of the content and reflecting the demands of a group of loyal viewers, to whom they provide a space for reflection and entertainment at the end of their day. Successes in this area can thereby create a debate with an audience that participates, attends, and grows with the format itself.

This is a favorable result whereby television must experiment and reinvent itself based on proven formulas, while the triumphs correspond to the search for the best program possible. Thanks to the current research, this can be formulated under already proven keys that can be applied to reduce the risks of an audiovisual business. Meanwhile, the future will require a firm commitment from the protagonists of humor journalism, where intelligent laughter will emerge as a driver of television excellence.

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## 8. Annexes

### Annex I. List of humor journalism formats broadcast for more than one and up to four years from 1990 to 2015

<i>Pero... ¿esto qué es?</i>	<i>La 1</i>	1989-1991
<i>Tutti frutti</i>	<i>Telecinco</i>	1990-1992
<i>Este país necesita un repaso</i>	<i>Telecinco</i>	1993-1995
<i>Esta noche cruzamos el Mississippi</i>	<i>Telecinco</i>	1995-1997
<i>La parodia nacional</i>	<i>Antena 3</i>	1996-1999
<i>El informal</i>	<i>Telecinco</i>	1998-2002
<i>Cruz y Raya.com</i>	<i>La 1</i>	2000-2004
<i>Pecado original</i>	<i>Telecinco</i>	2002-2005
<i>CYR. Juan y José show</i>	<i>La 1</i>	2004-2007
<i>Noche Hache</i>	<i>Cuatro</i>	2005-2008
<i>Agitación + Iva</i>	<i>Telecinco</i>	2005-2007
<i>Unidad de visionado especial</i>	<i>Cuatro</i>	2006-2007
<i>Muchachada núí</i>	<i>La 2</i>	2007-2010
<i>Estas no son las noticias</i>	<i>Cuatro</i>	2008-2009
<i>La hora de José Mota</i>	<i>La 1</i>	2009-2012
<i>Tonterías las justas</i>	<i>Cuatro</i>	2010-2011
<i>Torres y Reyes</i>	<i>La 2</i>	2013
<i>Alaska y Coronas</i>	<i>La 2</i>	2014
<i>Alaska y Segura</i>	<i>La 1</i>	2015
<i>En el aire</i>	<i>La Sexta</i>	2013-2015
<i>Salvados*</i>	<i>La Sexta</i>	2008-
<i>Zapeando**</i>	<i>La Sexta</i>	2013-

\* Omitted from the analysis due to its change in reporting format

\*\*Omitted from the analysis for not completing five years before the 2015-time frame

### Annex II. Broadcasts viewed for the analysis

<b>Caiga quien caiga</b>	<b>Crónicas marcianas</b>	<b>Buenafuente</b>
05/10/1996 - <i>Telecinco</i> premiere 06/29/1997 - Last season 09/14/1997 - First season 09/13/1998 - First season 06/18/2000 - Audience 26.4% 10/01/2000 - First season 09/23/2001 - First season 12/22/2002 - Last broadcast 01/28/2005 - Second adaptation premiere 09/23/2005 - First season 10/06/2006 - First season 01/30/2008 - Last broadcast 07/16/2008 - Last season on <i>La Sexta</i> 12/22/2008 - Last broadcast 07/25/2010 - Last broadcast on <i>Cuatro</i>	09/08/1997 - Premiere 09/07/1998 - First season 09/06/1999 - First season 09/25/2000 - First season 09/17/2001 - First season 09/16/2002 - First season 03/30/2004 - Audience 40.1% 07/21/2005 - Last broadcast	01/11/2005 - Premiere on <i>Antena 3</i> 10/26/2005 - Availability 06/28/2007 - Last broadcast 09/17/2007 - Premiere on <i>La Sexta</i> 20/11/2008 - Availability 22/04/2010 - Availability 01/19/2011 - Availability
	<b>La noche con Fuentes y Cía</b>	<b>Sé lo que hicisteis</b>
	09/30/2001 - Premiere 03/30/2003 - Audience 32.3% 05/30/2004 - Availability 10/12/2004 - First season 04/03/2005 - First season 08/21/2005 - First season	03/30/2006 - Premiere 04/11/2007 - First season 10/05/2007 - 100th episode 10/16/2008 - Audience 08/31/2009 - First season 05/20/2011 - Last broadcast
<b>El intermedio</b>	<b>El hormiguero</b>	
03/30/2006 - Premiere 11/27/2006 - 500th episode 01/21/2008 - Audience 6.7% 09/08/2008 - First season 09/21/2009 - First season 09/01/2010 - First season 08/29/2011 - First season 03/12/2012 - 1,000th episode 06/26/2014 - Last season 05/26/2015 - Audience 17.6% 09/07/2015 - First season	09/24/2006 - Premiere on <i>Cuatro</i> 05/29/2008 - Last season 04/25/2009 - Audience 16.2% 02/24/2010 - 500th episode 08/26/2010 - First season 06/04/2012 - Audience 16.3% 01/23/2013 - Audience 12.5% 12/19/2013 - Audience 16.1% 09/01/2014 - First season 10/16/2015 - Audience 20.4%	