

# Music video, media policies and audiovisual consumption culture in Spain at the turn of the century<sup>1</sup>

Prof. **Eduardo VIÑUELA**, Ph.D.

University of Oviedo, Spain

e-mail: [vinuelaeduardo@uniovi.es](mailto:vinuelaeduardo@uniovi.es)

**Abstract.** *Music video has always been related to the evolution of television. The possibilities of promotion for popular music through television forced the emergence of this new audiovisual genre, whose importance has been growing since the early years of cable TV in USA, especially with the first music channel, MTV. The expansion of cable and satellite TV in other countries during the eighties and nineties provoked a change in the promotion strategies of popular music, because the existence of music television channels made audiovisual products more important, and so record companies started to invest more money in music video and TV promotion. Through the last twenty-five years media corporations have planned their strategies as synergy projects that have involved different cultural markets (music, cinema, television etc.) and also as global-local (“glocal”) strategies that had to deal with the new state of distribution channels. This situation has deeply changed the music industry provoking a concentration process and a transformation in the international panorama of music.*

*Since the development of cable and satellite TV has been different in each country the reaction of music industry has had a different evolution. This article demonstrates how the arrival of satellite TV to*

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*Spain in the mid nineties has helped the expansion of the Spanish music in the international market, especially in Latin America, and has created a new culture of consumption of popular musical through the audiovisual products such as music videos, fiction TV, music programs... which have also changed the strategies of production and the ways of purchasing in the Spanish music market.*

**Keywords:** *television, music industry, glocal market*

The relationship between music, audiovisual genres and media has been a constant during the last century. Since the beginnings of Hollywood musical cinema in the late twenties, the music industry used media to design the promotion of artists such as in the case of Frank Sinatra or Gene Kelly. This link between media and music increased its relationship after the Second World War through the growing importance of a new audiovisual media in the USA: television. The introduction of television in the private, domestic space started a trend of consumption helped by an excellent economic context in the country; the music industry took advantage of this situation and began the promotion of its products in musical programmes on the NBC channel, such as *Your Hit Parade*. During the second half of the twentieth century, television continued its expansion, and so the music industry continued with the promotion of artists using this media, nevertheless, it is necessary to point out the importance of the use of video technology in television during the sixties, which made possible the appearance of an artist on a television programme without the need of his physical presence. Many artists, such as David Bowie, the Rolling Stones or Roxy Music, used this form of technology for long-distance promotions in the USA.

In spite of the numerous theories about the birth of music video as a new audiovisual genre, there is no doubt that the use of video technology in television has been an important influence. Since then, the relationship between the music industry and television has had music video as an essential issue, especially after the appearance of music television channels during the eighties. The evolution of music video is not homogeneous all over the world. The economic, political and social situation of each country determines the development of the necessary infrastructure to make of music videos a profitable product. It is the music industry which decides the investments in the production and emission of videos, but there is too much risk for the music recording companies if there is not a favourable situation for the diffusion of music videos in the audiovisual infrastructure and policy of a given country.

Television structures in Europe have to deal with the control of the different governments. From early stages to the present situation, television in Europe was conceived as a public broadcasting service, establishing a range of characteristics that made of this continent an exception in the international context, which is dominated by private televisions financed by the emission of commercials. Television in Spain

appears in 1956 under the control of Franco's dictatorship, it consisted of a public television channel, called Televisión Española (TVE). The possibilities of this medium to spread information about the achievements and the goodness of the government were used in order to establish a positive image of the political body among the population, a function that television will continue to fulfil during the political transition into democracy and beyond.

During the eighties we assisted an everlasting discussion about the advisability of putting an end to the monopoly of the public television broadcasting, but the socialist government denied the licenses for the setting up of private television in the country justifying this decision as a way of protecting the public service, that was still in a developmental process. The government permitted only the creation of regional televisions devoted to the promotion of the linguistic and cultural peculiarities of some particular areas of the country, such as Basque countries (ETB) or Catalonia (TV3). The monopoly of the Spanish public television during the whole decade contrasts with the situation in Europe, where most of the audiovisual markets were being opened to private television, and some of them (Sweden, Germany, UK etc.) to cable and satellite television.

This panorama was not appropriate for commercial television, and so it did not favour the investment of record companies in audiovisual products in Spain. The fact that TVE was a public service meant that it programmed broadcasts of general interest, paying special attention to information, sports and cultural events. Consequently, popular music appeared very rarely in television and only as part of programmes for young people, for instance *Tocata* or *Rockopop*. Music in these programmes appeared most of the time as live or play-back performances and music videos were frequently ignored, so the recording companies did not invest much money in their production during the eighties.

In spite of music videos not being shown in television during these years, it is important to point out the effort of some Spanish artists in making videos. Some of them, such as Radio Futura or Tino Casal, two of the most important artists in the early times of music video in Spain, used music-video-making as a sign of modernity, and tried to include postmodern narratives and exuberant performances in order to reinforce their image as stars. However, those interested in their international promotion (Mecano, Hombres G, La Unión etc.) were the ones who had a stronger production of music videos. The higher development of the audiovisual systems in Europe and America and the expansion of music channels, such as MTV, made the production of high quality videos necessary to promote Spanish artists in the foreign markets. In fact, only a few Spanish artists reached the international markets during the eighties.

Finally, in 1990 private televisions are allowed to start their activities in Spain. After some attempts during the eighties, in 1987 the Spanish Court passes a law that allows the establishment of three private television channels: Antena 3, Tele 5 and Canal +.

The effects of this new audiovisual situation in music industry were expected to be notorious, not only because the television broadcasting arena is amplified and there are more opportunities for the broadcast of music on television, but also because private channels are more commercially oriented and they allow many more advertisements. Due to the commercial character of music videos they were not shown constantly in TVE, because they were seen as a cultural product and therefore they did not have to pay any fee to be played in music programmes; the broadcast of videos in a private channel is just a question of money, because there is no control of the business management by the governmental policies. Nevertheless, in spite of the increasing presence of popular music on television and the mounting investments in music videos the expected revolution did not take place. The difficult situation of the new channels and their financial losses made them schedule programmes produced by themselves, and design a schedule based on general interests, mainly entertainment. In the early nineties there is also a lack of tradition in the collaboration between music industry and television channels, a situation that is solved nowadays.

However, the economic circumstances in the music industry were very good in the early nineties; the consolidation of the CD, the favourable evolution of record sales and the concentration process started during the eighties, that left 90 per cent of the market under the control of five companies (EMI-Virgin, Warner, Sony, Universal y BMG), improved the investments in the international promotion of some Spanish artists, such as Héroes del Silencio or Duncan Dhu, and it also helped the gamble on the production of music videos as a valid way of promotion.

Changes in the audiovisual production will not be visible until the mid nineties, so the first five years of the decade can be seen as a period of transition, from the national musical market promotion to the international one, from public service broadcasting to cable and satellite television, and also as a phase in which the music industry is being consolidated and is testing new forms of promoting its products.

Since the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Spanish cultural industry lives in a continuous instability. The delayed evolution of the infrastructures and commercial strategies proceeded to a thorough development of the audiovisual system and media policies which set up an era dominated by the synergy between media and the design of collective business strategies that involved different industrial sectors in the promotion of connected products. Even if the relationship between music and media, as we said before, has been constant since the appearance of cinema, it is during the nineties, due to the evolution of communications and the consolidation of the global market, that we can talk about synergy as a reality and as an strategy that has been planned by the industrial sector and which goes further than the simple link among different products such as a film, its soundtrack and the ensuing merchandising. It is rather the way in which a company is organized as a whole, the manner it diversifies the production dealing with different markets, because, as Robert Burnett says “as audiences become fragmented (i.e. smaller) the idea is to move the creative material across as many outlets as possible to justify the production” (Burnett 1996: 22).

Synergy and the “global market” amplified the possibilities for the promotion of popular music, and this specially improved the audiovisual production in countries where there was a backward television system, such as in Spain. If during the eighties, the discussion about television concerned the admission of private channels, during the nineties the main argument regarded the set up of cable and satellite television.

The establishment of cable television was progressive and did not have a severe impact in population. The main companies in charge of the introduction of cable television in Spain were created in 1992, but the monopoly of cable communication by the company Telefónica and the costs for the correct operation of this system made of cable television in Spain a complex arrangement. Thus, when satellite television appeared some years later, cable TV continued its expansion, even if most of the clients of the cable system took only the telephone option without the television service.

Satellite television appeared in 1997, as part of the introduction of digital television in Spain. From the incept of the Satellite operators (Vía Digital and Canal Satélite Digital) the number of customers is continuously rising, reaching 2.5 million customers in 2002, and expecting to reach three million clients by the end of 2005<sup>2</sup>. This data make satellite television the strongest system in Spain to popularize thematic TV.

Cable and Satellite television made the multi-channel structure possible and allowed the division of contents in several thematic channels. This event is probably of the outmost importance for the evolution of music video in Spain during the nineties, because it will imply the introduction of some music video channels; some of them have been broadcasting in the international context for several years, such as VH1 (1986) or MTV Europe (1987), but we also assist at the creation of new music television channels specialized in the Spanish market, for example Sol Música (1997) or 40 TV (1998). The new circumstances of television infrastructure in Spain provoked the specialization of commercial spots in the different thematic channels, making it easier for a company to connect with its target; what is more, the specialization of publicity amplifies the concept of synergy and facilitates even further the link between music and other products (food, clothes, sports etc.).

The profile of the subscriber to digital television could not be better for the companies that belong to the cultural industries. According to a market research, most of the subscribers (72.3 %) are under forty-five, 85.8 % belong to the upper or middle-classes, 87.6 % have higher education and 50.3 % live in the cities of Madrid or Barcelona<sup>3</sup>. This profile is also that of the common consumer of cultural industry products, and at the same time, those are the characteristics of the frequent buyer of popular music records. Thus, taking these data into consideration, it is easy to understand the importance and the increasing investments in audiovisual products

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2 Source. <http://www.tvdi.net> (consulted: 24/07/2010).

3 Source: Annual reports of Sociedad General de Autores y Editores (SGAE).

related to the music industry, such as the music video. As Andrew Goodwin states, most of thematic television channels are created and supported by industries in order to sell their products, for example children channels to sell toys or music television channels to sell music (Goodwin 1992: 169).

This is one of the reasons that account for the spectacular rise of the Spanish musical market during the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and also for the increasing number, quality and significance of music videos in the music industry. Nevertheless, there are some influential issues that go beyond the creation of an audiovisual infrastructure for the diffusion of popular music. All of these subjects are linked and deal with the optimal situation in those industries related with the audiovisual sector.

First of all, it is necessary to point out the economic growth of the Spanish economy in the last decades and the rise of public spending. After the Olympic Games and the World Fair of 1992, Spain consolidated its position in the international stage and became one of the emerging economies in the western world; this situation propitiated the incoming of international investments in infrastructures and industry, which generated the formation of a strong middle class. In 1996 the conservative party wins the elections and starts a liberal policy based on the massive privatization of the state-owned companies. The economic activity in those days caused an exorbitant increase of wealth in the country that provided the means for the creation of huge enterprises able to participate in different sectors of the market, such as Telefónica Media, which took part in the set up of cable communications, audiovisual aids and internet services, something impossible to be afforded economically by a state-owned company.

The circumstances around audiovisual aids underwent a deep change with the new government policy, which allowed for the link with the cultural industry companies in charge of the production of contents for the media. This situation and the strengthening of record companies made the design of bigger promotions for the artists possible.

As an effect of this context record sales in Spain suffered a spectacular rise during these years; thus, in 1996 the total record sales in Spain was 421.2 million units, getting to 678.9 million in 2000, only four years later<sup>4</sup>. There is an influential factor in the increase of record sales, which is the percentage of record consumers in their thirties. Historically, this group of population has not been a habitual consumer of records, but the social and economic changes transformed the profile of these people, and nowadays they are seen as young adults interested in cultural industry products. What is more, these young adults have money to spend and don't want to waste their time looking for the cheapest prices. Thus, people in their thirties have become one of the main targets for record companies, especially in the new edition of music in CD catalogues.

From the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the European music market tends to the consolidation of the local repertoires and to a drop in international record sales. This

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4 Source: *Libro blanco de la música*. Promusicae & Ministerio de Cultura.

tendency is still stronger in the Spanish case, where in 1995 the national repertory sold 17 million of records, whereas the international one sold 33 million; four years later, in 1999, the situation was almost balanced (26 million units sold for the national repertory and 24 million for the international), but the evolution was to continue, and in 2003 the national repertory sold 39 million units and the international records 11 million<sup>5</sup>. Despite the fast changes in the situation of the Spanish musical market, such as the one reflected in these data, the general evolution responds to a transitional period leading to the consolidation of a mature musical market. Record companies working in Spain, especially the major ones with their national branches, are not only in charge of the national distribution of those international products, but they are also constantly becoming more autonomous in their operations, and are taking in consideration the importance of the national production. The relevance of the national production in Europe can also be seen through the new expansion of MTV; the creation of national channels (MTV España, MTV Italy, MTV Germany etc.) was a strategy to get into the markets where the local repertories were getting stronger. As Keith Roe points out, the problems of MTV Europe derived from the spoken language (English) that does not take in consideration the linguistic differences throughout Europe and from the focus in the North American and English repertories, ignoring the local production of each country.

Thus, the creation of an audiovisual infrastructure and the local production policy of music were essential for the increase of the national artist record sales in Spain, reaching for the first time in history a million unit sales of a long play, i.e. *Más* (1997) by Alejandro Sanz. Nowadays, even if it is not common for a Spanish artist to sell such a number of units, it is not an exception in the general context.

There is another factor in the rise of the Spanish artist music sales that deals with the situation of the international musical panorama. Since the mid-nineties there has been a significant growing presence of Latin American artists in the charts all over the world, especially in the USA and Spain. Most of them belong to countries under direct influence of the USA, such as Puerto Rico (Ricky Martin, Marc Anthony), Cuba (Gloria Estefan), Colombia (Shakira, Juanes) or Mexico (Paulina Rubio, Maná). These artists reached important record sales in the USA singing in Spanish, and became very famous among the large Latin community that lives in the States. Taking advantage of the language coincidence these artists were also promoted in Spain and, at the same time, some Spanish artists had the opportunity to succeed in America, such as Enrique Iglesias or Alejandro Sanz. The exchanges of artists between Spain and America generate lots of benefits for the music industry and, as some Spanish music agents admitted in interviews, this situation serves to design expanding strategies: on the one hand Spain is the path for Latin American artists to get into the European

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5 Source: IPFI: *The recording industry world sales 2003*.

market, and on the other hand, Latin American countries are taken as the natural way to get into the most important market in the world, the USA.

Music video is taking an important part in this expanding process. The fact is that the three areas involved (Europe, USA and Latin America) have a highly developed audiovisual infrastructure and are immersed in a constant expansion process of thematic television. And so, these circumstances make it possible to recoup the production cost of a music video. The expansion of the Spanish language around the western world through the Latin American emigration to USA and Europe attracted the attention of record companies, which created the so called “Boom Latino” to connect different markets using the common language as a unifying factor. As a result of this process, in 2001, the main private audiovisual aid in Spain (PRISA) created a new television channel for the diffusion of Latin music, called 40 Latino. This new channel mixes Spanish and American music videos with no order and without any criteria; the only requirement is for the artists to sing in Spanish.

The relevance of music video came to light during the early years of this century. The international crisis in the music industry was blamed of the damages derived from the music piracy that took place in Spain. The piracy crisis happened in this country a few years later than in the international context, due to the general delay in the market explained before. It is in 2002 when Spanish record sales start to descend and piracy increases considerably; it is time for the expansion of a new technology that will reduce the impact of such a crisis in the music industry, it is the time for the DVD. The presence of music television channels and the increasing use of audiovisual media resulted in the creation of a culture of consumption of audiovisual products related with music. Also, the digital quality of the DVD provoked an effect similar to the appearance of the CD, increasing the sales of audiovisual products. As a matter of fact, while record sales were going down, DVD sales rose 219.8% in 2003 and 122.12% in 2004<sup>6</sup>.

The evolution of music video in Spain during the nineties achieves independence from the public television broadcasting, and therefore from governmental control. The inception of thematic television channels meant the opportunity for music industry to work with another industry free from the obligations of a public service such as the Spanish television during the eighties. These circumstances provided a suitable context for the development of music television, whose schedule is based mainly on the programming of music videos. Considering the evolution of music video in the last twenty-five years, we can conclude that music videos were seen as a luxurious product in the eighties and are seen as an essential product nowadays, so we can look upon the nineties as a transition period for the definitive establishment of this audiovisual genre in Spain.

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6 Source: Promusicae. Annual reports.

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