

11

VENEZUELA: FICTION ON HOLD

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Introduction

During 2020, the paralysis and recession of the television sector in Venezuela continued. No new fictions were produced by any open signal television (TV) channel. Spaces dedicated to fiction contents were occupied by imported productions or by reruns, such as the

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Venezuelan *telenovela* (soap opera) *La Viuda Joven*, originally released in 2011 by Venevisión with high audience levels. The only local production premiere that continued on the TV screen was the teen musical series *Carolay*, produced in 2019 by BGCreativos in the city of Maracaibo and broadcast by Venevisión. Some independent production companies developed and released contents on social platforms (YouTube), on international television networks or on streaming services. The latter is the case of the web series *Almas en Pena*, produced by RCTV International and by José Simón Escalona, who also was one of the scriptwriters along with Martin Hahn. Given the reduction of TV program offering in open signal and cable television, the number of users of Video on Demand (VOD) services increased, and Netflix showed one of the highest penetration rates, despite the severe limited access to internet in Venezuela.

1. The context of audiovisual services in Venezuela in 2020

The television offer in Venezuela during 2020 was made up, predominantly, by open signal channels belonging to the public sector, contrasting with the television landscape from a decade ago, when the television channels from the private sector prevailed, in quantity and scope.

Open signal television was positioned as the main entertainment option in the context of the quarantine, decreed in March 13, due to the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic to the country. This turned out to be the cheapest alternative and the most easily accessible for people, given the drastic reduction of subscription TV (cable TV) offer, originated by the cessation of operations in Venezuela of the cable TV market leader company: the transnational DirecTV.

1.1 Open television in Venezuela

Chart 1. National open television channels and networks in Venezuela

Private broadcast / channel (9)	Public broadcast / channel (13)
Canal I	123 TV
Globovisión	ALBA TV
La Tele Tuya (TLT)	ANTV - Fundación Audiovisual Nacional de Televisión –
Meridiano Televisión	Ávila TV
Telegen	ConCiencia TV
TV Familia	Corazón Llanero
Vale TV	Colombeia. La televisora educativa de Venezuela
Venevisión	Pdvsa TV
Vepaco TV	Tele Sur - La Nueva Televisión del Sur C.A.
	Tves - Fundación Televisora Venezolana Social
	TV FANB
	Vive TV - Visión Venezuela
	VTV - Compañía Anónima Venezolana de Televisión
TOTAL CHAINS = 0	
TOTAL CHANNELS = 22	

Source: *Obitel Venezuela*

In 2020, no concessions were granted for new TV stations at the national level, in consequence, the open TV offer remained the same. There are 22 channels, of which 13 form part of the public sector offer and nine belong to the private sector. This situation reflects the policy orientation of Nicolás Maduro administration, as

well as his predecessor, Hugo Chávez, consisting in increasing the size of the government communication machine, in order to achieve a longer range and to impose the ideological and political messages of his project.

The government influence can also be seen in organizational structure of the media. For instance, Winston Vallenilla, who was the president of the state television channel, Tves, from 2014 to 2020, left the post to run as a National Assembly candidate, representing the government party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), and he was replaced by his wife, the actress Marlene de Andrade, appointed by president Nicolás Maduro.

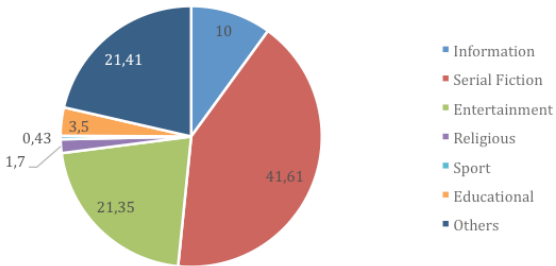
Graph 1. TV share and rating by channel

Chart 1 could not be made because of the lack of available information. The company Nielsen Venezuela, which was the only dedicated to register the TV share and rating in open signal, announced, in July 2020, its decision of shutting down operations in Venezuela, owing to:

problems importing *people meters* with new technology, cancellation of contracts by clients, lack of cash flow to cover payroll costs, continuing basic services disruptions (power, internet, etc.) and, recently, constraints placed upon 40% of our panel to have access to the TV signal (Producto, 2020, s/p).

Graph 2. Television genres and hours broadcasted by TV programming.

Genre broadcast	%
Information	10
Serial Fiction	41,61
Entertainment	21,35
Religious	1,7
Sport	0,43
Educational	3,5
Others	21,41
TOTAL	100,00



Source: *Obitel Venezuela*

Charts 2 shows that serial fiction (mainly represented by *telenovelas* and series) accounts for a substantial proportion of TV programming, reaching the top spot. The second place was reached by programs dedicated to entertainment, notable among them were magazines and talk shows; and the third place went to news programs. Data were obtained from the total analysis of two weeks of programming lineup from two of the most popular Venezuelan open TV signal channels, Venevisión and Televen. It is important to note that during those

two weeks, no exclusively political programs were registered, this issue was covered as part of the news programs.

1.1 Pay TV and VOD platforms in Venezuela

The main Venezuelan TV subscription companies that led the market in May 2020 were DirecTV, Cantv Televisión Satelital, Inter, Movistar TV and NetUno (Graterol, 2020). According to the National Commission for Telecommunications (Conatel), 236 operators provide pay TV services in Venezuela. Most of them serve regionally. In accordance with official data, there are 4.347.090 pay TV subscribers at the national level (Conatel, 2020, p. 13). DirecTV, company that used to control the largest share of the market (48,01%), gathered 2.086.844 subscribers. This company ended operations in Venezuela on May 19, 2020, after the US multinational company AT&T (owner of DirecTV) informed that it could not comply with the Venezuelan State requirements consisting in including the private channel Globovisión and the state channel Pdvsa TV as part of its TV offer, without violating the sanctions imposed by the US government to the Venezuelan government headed by Nicolás Maduro. Both TV channels had been sanctioned by the US Department of State and, therefore, no companies or enterprises that have US capital can maintain business relationship with them. This cessation of operations left an information and entertainment vacuum in the pay TV subscribers in Venezuela. It also impacted national TV channels, as Vale TV, that depended on Direct TV to broadcast their programs to the regions. In October, when the company's shares and equipment were sold, Simple TV was created.

Currently, in Venezuela is not possible to determine which pay TV programs are the most watched, because there is not any measurement company.

Venezuela has three national private channels that are only broadcast by pay TV: Venepius that belongs to Cisneros Organization, and it is the international signal of Venezuelan TV network Venevisión, which has three feeds: one for Venezuela, another for the United States and a third one for Latin America and Europe; IVC Network that belongs to Ole Communications and broadcast a general entertainment TV program; and Sun Channel that is a thematic channel and broadcast a variety program dedicated to world tourism.

Chart 2. Venezuelan pay TV Networks

Pay TV Chains in 2020
1) Ve Plus (entertainment), 2) IVC Network (entertainment), 3) Sun Channel (tourism)

Source: Obitel Venezuela

Even though VOD service in Venezuela has not grown steadily as in other countries, during 2020 an increase in the consumption of this platform was experimented due to, among other things, the Covid-19 pandemic and the closing of DirecTV. Thus, Netflix became the most demanded service. In March 2020, eight of the top ten most watched productions belonged to Netflix, including *Narcos* (2015), *The Witcher* (2019), *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018), and *La Casa de Papel* (2017). Additionally, Venezuelan people had access to other VOD services, such as HBO Go, Amazon Prime Video, Vivo

Play and RCTV (through its app. for tablets, smartphones, and PC) (Plataformas, 2020).

Chart 3. VOD services in Venezuela

Main VOD platforms active in 2020	Total
Netflix, Prime Video (Amazon), HBO Go (Warner Media), VIVO Play, RCTV (Grupo IBC), TNT Go, Paramount Channel Play	7

Source: Obitel Venezuela

1.3 Independent TV fiction production companies

Venezuela has several audiovisual production companies focused on developing made to order fiction for other countries. A good example of this is the serial fiction *Almas en Pena*, produced by RCTV International in 2020, whose first season has 13 episodes. As previously mentioned, it has been created by Martin Hahn and José Simón Escalona, and it narrates, in a creative and updated manner, horror stories from Latin America legends. This series is available on VOD platforms such as Amazon Prime Video and others. On its part, Quimera Producciones was producing the *telenovela Intriga tras Cámaras* in 2020, but the shooting had to be interrupted because of the pandemic, and it could not be broadcast that year as planned. Oduver Cubillán, through VePlus, exported to the United States the teen series *Carolay*, coproduced with BGCreativos. Other small production companies

made some serial fictions but on YouTube platform, among them we can mention: NeneFilms with the productions *A Pesar de Todo* and *Amor sin Tapabocas*; Flavio Andrés Lloreda Brojanigo with his teen series *Magicland*; Show Men Production Records with the teen mini-series *En el Salón*; Weapon Klath Film with the action series *Dealers*; and Benjamín Cohen with the second season of *¡Qué Clase de Amor!*, a micro web series (three chapters), whose first season was made in 2009 for the open signal channel Venevisión.

1.4 Funding sources of the audiovisual sector

The pandemic and the economic recession affecting Venezuela reduced the funding options for audiovisual productions. In September 2020, the Conatel announced the permanent receipt of audiovisual projects made by Independent National Producers and aimed at highlighting social values (Adrianza, 2020). The opening of this permanent receipt proved to be value as an idea to promote new contents in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, there was no public information about the reception of this call, and neither was known the list of financed projects and the amounts allocated.

Additionally, a group of Venezuelan women filmmakers, based in different part of the world, created the Women Filmmakers Association of Venezuela Jeva in order to develop joint ideas to look for funding, as well as strategies to produce their audiovisual works.

Open signal TV channels included short messages related to Covid-19 prevention measures in their offer. Those lasted between 30 seconds and one minute, and were recorded from presenters, actors and journalists' houses.

1.5. Communication policies

The cessation of operations of the TV subscription company DirecTV impacted the propaganda machine of Nicolás Maduro's government, made up of a TV network financed by public funds, since most of the TV channels from this network did not have national coverage, and their signals could be received all around the country only through DirecTV.

The Supreme Court of Justice ordered the company to reestablish immediately its signal, and based on this argument the Conatel took possession of its equipment and facilities. Additionally, it designated an *ad hoc* board, chaired by the general director of this commission, Jorge Eliéser Márquez. Some senior executives from DirecTV were imprisoned for several months. The TV signal remained off air until October 2020, when it was partially restored, after the business group Scale Capital announced the acquisition of the shares and turned DirecTV into Simple TV.

Considering this television blackout as well as many years of stalemate, Nicolás Maduro's government reactivated, as an urgent measure, the project for Digital Terrestrial Television including 19 channels: four private TV stations (TLT, Meridiano Televisión, Venevisión and Televen); 13 channels financed by public funds (Venezolana de Televisión, Telesur, Tves, Corazón Llanero, 123 TV, Conciencia, Ávila TV, Vive TV, Alba TV, Colombeia, ANTV, TV FANB and Pdvsa TV); and two international channels belonging to the public sector of countries ideologically aligned with Nicolás Maduro administration (Russia Today from Russia and CGTn from China) (Conatel, 2020, p. 1). Furthermore, two programs: *Universidad en Casa* and *Cada Casa, Una Escuela*, mainly broadcast by public channels, were reactivated as a teaching resource to reinforce the system of distance education based on technologies, imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

During 2020, the Technical Norm for the Administration, Assignment, Monitoring, and Control of Resources from the Conatel Fund for Social Responsibility was reformed, establishing new criteria for the funding of audiovisual production projects and research projects, with resources coming from taxes paid by telecommunication operators. The main changes included were: the creation of a technical committee to evaluate and review the projects to be funded, the reduction of the evaluation time to 21 days, the support for the promotion and monitoring work for the projects receiving funding and the offer of training activities for audiovisual producers.

Digital and mobile connectivity infrastructure

The Covid-19 pandemic brought with it social isolation and this resulted in a change of entertainment consumption practices. By having to pass more time than usual at home, people found on different screens (TV, smartphones, tablets, Smart TV, PC) an ideal space for fulfilling their entertainment and education needs. Hence, according to data from Havas Media Group, to stay at home enjoying series and films (79%) and take various courses (26%) were some of the most recurrent activities during lockdown (Tendencias Digitales, 2020). Therefore, internet became the best ally to perform at home most of the activities that people used to carry out in other spaces:

Shows and events now take place through streaming, occasionally with simultaneous audiences, using different platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. And initiatives to offer professional services, advice and counselling, free of charge or not, through internet, to deal with the in-

ability to access their clients and public are increasingly taking place as well (Tendencias Digitales, 2020. s/p).

In the specific case of Venezuela, that has one of the world's slowest connections, the number of internet users increased to 20,50 million in 2020. This means, sometimes, the use of two or three connections by the same user. Additionally, 23,21 million of cell phones connected to the web and 12 million of active social media users were counted, representing an increase of almost 9% compared to the previous year. Another important finding is the use of mobile devices by 81% of internet users to access social media (Shum, 2020). The growth in phone users contrasts with the number of Venezuelans who have migrated and have stopped using their phone lines. Indeed, during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, around 194.128 people left Venezuela, additional to those 5.642.960 that have already left the country since 2015 (Centro de Derechos Humanos UCAB, 2020).

Thus, during the lockdown in Venezuela, as said by the telephone company Telefónica Movistar, "data consumption has been massive, during the first five days the use of Netflix doubled and the use of social networks such as Twitter or WhatsApp increased by 40%" (El Universal, 2020 s/p). These data are consistent with those provided by We Are Social, which states that access to web contents through cell phone was 25%, representing an increase of 20% compared to the previous year; 73% of the total access to the web was done using a laptop or PC, but it experimented a drop of 4,4% compared to 2019; access through laptop totalized 3% showing a decrease of 21%, while other devices stayed at 0,05% as previously. Screens became the center for entertainment; therefore, it comes as no surprise that the use of platforms *Over the Top* (OTT) and VOD increased. The growth in internet connection, through mobile telephony, resulted from the decline of the quality of home internet provided by operators, such as the State com-

pany CANTV, whose internet service, called ABA, completely stopped working in several homes.

2. Analysis of the Year: Venezuelan and Ibero-American fiction premiere on open TV

Table 1. Fictions exhibited in 2020 (national, imported, premieres, reruns and co-productions)

<p>NACIONAL UNRELEASED TITLES – 1</p> <p>Venevisión – 1</p> <p>1. <i>Carolay</i> (Serie)</p> <p>CO-PRODUCTIONS – 0</p> <p>OBITEL IMPORTED UNRELEASED TITLES – 11</p> <p>Venevisión – 3</p> <p>1. <i>Así en el Barrio Como en el Cielo</i> (Telenovela – Mexico)</p> <p>2. <i>Un Bandido Honrado</i> (Series – Colombia)</p> <p>3. <i>Siempre Tuya Acapulco</i> (Telenovela - Mexico)</p> <p>Televen – 8</p> <p>4. <i>Lo Imperdonable</i> (Telenovela - Mexico)</p> <p>5. <i>Mujeres al Limite</i> (Series - Colombia)</p> <p>6. <i>Diomedes</i> (Serie - Colombia)</p> <p>7. <i>Bolívar</i> (Telenovela - Colombia)</p> <p>8. <i>Contigo Aprendi- La Nocturna</i> (Telenovela - Colombia)</p> <p>9. <i>Tarde lo Conocí</i> (Serie - Colombia)</p> <p>10. <i>Heidy, Bienvenida al Show</i> (Series - Argentina)</p> <p>11. <i>El Hijo del Cacique</i> (Telenovela - Colombia)</p> <p>NO OBITEL IMPORTED UNRELEASED TITLES– 6</p> <p>Televen – 3</p> <p>1. <i>Cumbres Borrascosas</i> (Miniseries - Italia)</p> <p>2. <i>Apuéstale a la Vida</i> (Series - Rumania)</p> <p>3. <i>Brusko: Una Mujer Desconocida</i> (Telenovela - Greece)</p> <p>Tves – 2</p> <p>4. <i>Ertugrul</i> (Series - Turkey)</p> <p>6. <i>Hechizada</i> (Series - United States)</p> <p>Vale Tv – 1</p> <p>5. <i>Las Horas de mi Vida</i> (Series - Japan)</p>
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RERUNS– 36

Venevisión – 21

1. *Natalia del Mar* (Telenovela - Venezuela)
2. *Harina de Otro Costal* (Telenovela - Venezuela)
3. *Vecinos* (Telenovela - Colombia)
4. *La Mujer Perfecta* (Telenovela - Venezuela)
5. *¿Que Clase de Amor!* (Series - Venezuela)
6. *Aunque Mal Paguen* (Telenovela - Venezuela)
7. *Mujercitas* (Telenovela – Venezuela)
8. *Acorralada* (Telenovela United States)
9. *Guerra de Mujeres* (Telenovela – Venezuela)
10. *La Rosa de Guadalupe* (One-off episode – Mexico)
11. *La Vida Entera* (Telenovela – Venezuela)
12. *Cosita Linda* (Telenovela – Venezuela)
13. *Amor Secreto* (Telenovela – Venezuela)
14. *La Viuda Joven* (Telenovela – Venezuela)
15. *Amor Urbano* (Miniseries – Venezuela)
16. *Mi Niña Amada* (Miniseries - Venezuela)
17. *El Amor Viene con Todo* (Telenovela USA)
18. *A Todo Corazón* (Series - Venezuela)
19. *Corazones Extremos* (Series - Venezuela)
20. *Robando Corazones* (Series - Venezuela)
21. *Cartas al Corazón* (One-off episode - Venezuela)

Televen – 15

22. *Tu Voz Estéreo* (Series - Colombia)
23. *Mis Tres Hermanas* (Telenovela Venezuela)
24. *Mi Corazón Es Tuyo* (Telenovela - Mexico)
25. *La Reina del Flow* (Telenovela - Colombia)
26. *Chica Vampiro* (Series - Colombia)
27. *Nora* (Telenovela -Venezuela)
28. *Nacer Contigo* (Telenovela - Venezuela)
29. *Guayoyo Express* (Telenovela - Venezuela)
30. *El Gato Tuerto* (Telenovela - Venezuela)
31. *Juana la Virgen* (Telenovela - Venezuela)
32. *Soy Luna* (Series - Argentina / Mexico)
33. *Cuando me Enamoro* (Telenovela - Mexico)
34. *Dulce Amargo* (Telenovela - Venezuela)
35. *Fuerza de Rescate* (Series – United States)
36. *El Chavo del 8* (Series - Mexico)

TOTAL OF NATIONAL UNRELEASED TITLES: 1

TOTAL OF OBITEL UNRELEASED TITLES: 11

TOTAL OF UNRELEASED TITLES (NATIONAL AND OBITEL): 12

Source: Obitel Venezuela

In 2020, the musical series *Carolay* continued by the open signal channel Venevisión and it was the only national premiere. However, 11 imported shows, headed by Colombian productions (*Un Bandido Honrado*, *Mujeres al Límite*, *Diómedes*, *Bolívar*, *Contigo Aprendí*, *La Nocturna*, *Tarde lo Conocí*, *El Hijo del Cacique*, *Tu Voz Estéreo*, *Vecinos* and *Chica Vampiro*), followed by three Mexican productions (*Así en el Barrio Como en el Cielo*, *Siempre Tuya Acapulco* and *Lo Imperdonable*) and one from Argentina (*Heidy Bienvenida al Show*) were showed, mostly by Televen. Shows from Rumania (*Apuéstale a la Vida*) and from Greece (*Brusko: Una Mujer desconocida*) were broadcast by Televen and TVes, respectively. The Italian mini-series *Cumbres Borrascosas*, the Turkish series *Ertugrul* and the Japanese *Las Horas de mi Vida* were also broadcast by the open signal TV.

National reruns, especially *telenovelas* and series, led the national TV offer due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Venezuelan *telenovelas* offered the audiences the opportunity to recall actors and times from de past; this was the case of *Guayoyo Express*, a *telenovela* that reflects the lives of Venezuelan families in the village and in the city, and, as a comedy, has been broadcast year after year by Televen.

Table 2. The Fiction Premiere: countries of origin

Country	Titles	%	Chapters/ Episodes	%	Hours	%
NATIONAL (total)	1	8,3	4	0,2	3:00:00	0,4
OBITEL COUNTRIES (total)	11	91,7	2261	99,8	690:50:00	99,6
Argentina	1	8,3	46	2	69:00:00	10,0
Brazil	0	0	0	0	0:00:00	0
Chile	0	0	0	0	0:00:00	0
Colombia	7	58,4	597	26,3	448:45:00	64,7
Ecuador	0	0	0	0	0:00:00	0
Spain	0	0	0	0	0:00:00	0
EE. UU. (Hispanic production)	0	0	0	0	1:00:00	0
Mexico	3	25	196	8,6	147:40:00	21,3
Peru	0	0	0	0	0:00:00	0
Portugal	0	0	0	0	0:00:00	0
Uruguay	0	0	0	0	0:00:00	0
Venezuela	1	8,3	4	0,2	3:00:00	0,4
CO-PRODUCTIONS (total)	0	0	0	0	0:00:00	0
Venezuelan Co-productions	0	0	0	0	0:00:00	0
Obitel countries Co-productions	0	0	0	0	0:00:00	0
GRAND TOTAL	12	100,0	2265	100	693:50:00	100,0

Source: Obitel Venezuela

The main TV fiction providers are: Colombia with 597 chapters broadcast; Mexico with 196 chapters; and, finally, Argentine with 46. When the total number of chapters (2261) broadcast by Obitel member countries are compared with those transmitted by Venezuela (4), it is evident that Venezuelan national production has progressively declined for several years, affecting the entertainment sector.

Table 3. Venezuelan and Ibero-American fiction formats

Formats	National						Ibero-Americans					
	Titles	%	C/E	%	H	%	Titles	%	C/E	%	H	%
<i>Telenovelas</i>	0	0,0	0	0,0	0:00:00	0,0	6	54,5	392	46,7	295:20:00	44,4
Series	1	0,0	4	0,0	3:00:00	100,0	5	45,5	447	53,3	370:15:00	55,6
Miniseries	0	0,0	0	0,0	0:00:00	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0:00:00	0,0
Telefilm	0	0,0	0	0,0	0:00:00	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0:00:00	0,0
One-off episode	0	0,0	0	0,0	0:00:00	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0:00:00	0,0
Docudrame	0	0,0	0	0,0	0:00:00	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0:00:00	0,0
Others (soap opera, etc.)	0	0,0	0	0,0	0:00:00	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0:00:00	0,0
Total	1	100,0	4	100,0	3:00:00	100,0	11	100,0	839	0,0	665:35:00	100,0

Fuente: *Obitel Venezuela*

Series was the format with the most hours of national and Ibero-American fiction transmission, totalizing 447 episodes from Ibero-American countries and four from Venezuela. However, the *telenovelas* remained, as it did in 2019, the most widespread format because it obtained the greater number of titles broadcast and, in consequences, was the favorite in Venezuelan TV.

Table 4. The ten top titles for open TV

	Titles	Channel	Origin country of the original idea or script	Format/genre	No. of cap/ep (in 2020)	Time slot	Rating	Share
1	<i>Juana La Virgen</i>	Televen	Venezuela	<i>Telenovela</i>	123	Afternoon	No data	No data
2	<i>Guerra de Mujeres</i>	Venevisión	Venezuela	<i>Telenovela</i>	141	Afternoon	No data	No data
3	<i>A todo Corazón</i>	Venevisión	Venezuela	Series	72	Afternoon	No data	No data
4	<i>Mis Tres Hermanas</i>	Televen	Venezuela	<i>Telenovela</i>	176	Afternoon	No data	No data
5	<i>La Mujer Perfecta</i>	Venevisión	Venezuela	<i>Telenovela</i>	23	Prime time	No data	No data
6	<i>Bolívar</i>	Televen	Colombia	<i>Telenovela</i>	79	Prime time	No data	No data
7	<i>Mujercitas</i>	Venevisión	Venezuela	<i>Telenovela</i>	93	Afternoon	No data	No data
8	<i>Chica Vampiro</i>	Colombia	Colombia	Series	110	Afternoon	No data	No data
9	<i>Qué Clase de Amor!</i>	Venevisión	Venezuela	Series	18	Afternoon	No data	No data
10	<i>Aunque Mal Paguen</i>	Venevisión	Venezuela	<i>Telenovela</i>	172	Prime time	No data	No data
Total of productions: 10				Foreign scripts: 2				
100%				0%				

Since, as it was previously mentioned, the only audience measurement company in Venezuela ended its operation, it was not possible to obtain information about: rating, share, gender, socioeconomic level and age ranges.

Nevertheless, the research team created an online questionnaire to evaluate the top ten titles on open TV. It had five questions: age, gender, list of premieres broadcast by open TV, list of national reruns and list of international reruns. The instrument was made on Typeform platform and sent, using the messaging service WhatsApp,

to different groups throughout the country. The first target group consisted of 50 people from popular parishes of Caracas, El Valle, and Sucre, who in turn resent the questionnaire to other people interested.

A total of 43 people responded the questionnaire, 26 of whom were female, 16 males and one decided not to answer. The age range was between 28 and 70. Regarding the titles, *Juana la Virgen* was chosen as the first on the ten tops (48,5%), while *Aunque Mal Paguen* was considered the last of this group (32,3%). Even though, surveyed people claimed to have seen the *telenovelas*, the assessment was not positive; in some cases, they considered them averages or poor. The top ten production according with this informal study were: *Juana La Virgen*, *Guerra de Mujeres*, *A todo Corazón*, *Mis Tres Hermanas*, *La Mujer Perfecta*, *Bolívar*, *Mujercitas*, *Chica Vampiro*, *¡Qué Clase de Amor!* and, *Aunque Mal Paguen*.

Unlike previous years, just one of the 11 international premieres was part of the top ten (*Bolívar*), since an average of 60% and 80% of people said they have not seen the premieres on the list.

3. Monitoring VOD 2020

During the Covid-19 pandemic, much of the entertainment sector (cinemas, theaters, concerts, others) was paralyzed, causing an audience migration to device screens used at home. Despite the daily economic, social and political problems, Venezuelans took advantages of the circumstances to step, more cheerfully, into the VOD platforms world, especially focusing on virtuality and streaming services.

3.1 VOD platform market

Both, the pandemic and the end of DirecTV operation opened new options for TV entertainment. Several companies offering different VOD platform packages emerged in this context, being Netflix and Amazon Prime Video the most popular among Venezuelans. This finding is coherent with the international trend, as according to an Axios study carried out in the second quarter of 2020, Netflix leads the rank with 192.9 million of subscribers, closely followed by Amazon with 150 million (Quinteros, 2020). Although it is important to note that in Venezuela, unlike other countries, the consumption of VOD platforms shows some difficulties, such as: the slowest internet connection and insufficient financial resources to spend in entertainment².

The end of operation of DirecTV prevented subscribers to enjoy VOD services provided by DirecTV Play and OnDirecTV, such as HBO Go, TNT Go o Paramount Channel Play. Users also could access those platforms directly through their *apps* by using DirecTV code access, but they also lost that opportunity. Some national channels looked for alternatives, so their audiences could enjoy their contents. IVC Networks opened a YouTube channel and a Facebook account through which it broadcast regular programs (El Informador, 2020). The news channel Telesur also opened a WhatsApp account to stay in touch with its audience.

Regarding the VOD platforms made in Venezuela, Vivo Plays remains the most well-known; but even though its TV offer includes

2 “To pay Netflix is a luxury that all Venezuelans can afford. A basic plan, which is the cheapest of the three plans offered by this platform, cost three dollars per month. This sum corresponds to 1.140.000 *bolívars*, which is equivalent to three minimum wages. The situation is even more dramatic when the price of the premium plan, nine dollars, is compared; in this case it is equivalent to eight and half minimum wages. (Castillo, 2020, s.p).

life TV signals from Venezuelan channels (TV Venezuela and IVC Network) and from international channels (WB TV, E! Entertainment, Universal TV, History, A&E, Studio Universal, Sony Channel, SYFY, RCN, Antena 3, and others), its own production is still mainly informative. The serial fiction productions broadcast by this platform come mostly from Colombia and the United States. Nevertheless, it is complicated to enjoy those productions in Venezuela since Vivo Play signal was blocked by the Conatel in April 2017; the only way to have access to it is using a VPN service.

Another important DOV platform is RCTV. It belongs to IBC Enterprise and can be visualized through smartphones, tablets and PC. Its TV offer consist in old *telenovelas*, produced and broadcast by the TV channel RCTV when it was still on air, and some new documentary productions, such as *RCTV En Memoria*, a documentary made in 2020 that tells the story of this channel through its emblematic productions. The news can also be seen every day on this *app*, as well as some other contents.

3.2 VOD analysis in 2020: national and Ibero-American fiction premiere

Even though, Venezuela experienced an increase in the consumption of VDO services, national productions are rarely. Some open signal channels made available to their audiences, through VOD platforms, old fiction productions, in particular *telenovelas*. For instance, the VOD platform *Póngalo Novela Club*, belonging to IBC Enterprise (owner of renowned channel RCTV), that can be seen through services as VIX, mainly offered Latin America *telenovelas*, most of them old Venezuelan productions. The same was true for the already mentioned *app*, RCTV.

Table 6. Ibero-America and national fiction screened on VOD systems in 2020

NATIONAL TITLES PREMIERE	IBERO-AMERICAN TITLES PREMIERE	CO-PRODUCTIONS
<p>Amazon Prime Video – 1 1. <i>Almas en Pena</i> (serie)</p>	<p>Netflix – 34 1. <i>Onisciente</i> (series - Brazil) 2. <i>Casi Feliz</i> (series - Argentina) 3. <i>Valeria</i> (series - Spain) 4. <i>Chichipatos</i> (series - Colombia) 5. <i>Control Z</i> (series - Mexico) 6. <i>Perdida</i> (series - Spain) 7. <i>Reality Z</i> (series - Brazil) 8. <i>Historia de un Crimen: La Búsqueda</i> (series - Mexico) 9. <i>Boca a Boca</i> (series - Brazil) 10. <i>El Robo del Siglo</i> (miniseries - Colombia) 11. <i>La Venganza de Analía</i> (series - Colombia) 12. <i>La Valla</i> (series - Spain) 13. <i>100 Días para Enamorarnos</i> (series - USA) 14. <i>Bom Dia, Verónica</i> (series - Brazil) 15. <i>Alguien Tiene que Morir</i> (series - Mexico) 16. <i>Los Favoritos de Midas</i> (miniseries - Spain) 17. <i>El Desorden que Dejas</i> (series - Spain) 18. <i>Oscuro Deseo</i> (series - Mexico) 19. <i>Desenfrenadas</i> (series - Mexico) 20. <i>Puerta 7</i> (miniseries - Argentina) 21. <i>La Fiscal de Hierro</i> (series - Mexico) 22. <i>Amar y Vivir</i> (series – Colombia)</p>	<p>Netflix – 1 1. <i>Selena: La Serie</i> (series -Mexico and USA)</p>

NATIONAL TITLES PREMIERE	IBERO-AMERICAN TITLES PREMIERE	CO-PRODUCTIONS
	<p>Amazon Prime Video – N° Ibero-American titles</p> <p>23. <i>Caronte</i> (series - Spain) 24. <i>De Brutus, Nada</i> (series - Mexico) 25. <i>El Cid</i> (series - Spain) 26. <i>El Presidente</i> (miniseries - Chile) 27. <i>El Candidato</i> (series - Mexico) 28. <i>Súbete a Mi Moto</i> (series - Mexico) 29. <i>Cómo Sobrevivir Soltero</i> (series - Mexico) 30. <i>La Jauría</i> (series - Chile) 31. <i>La Bandida</i> (series - Mexico)</p> <p>HBO Go – N° Ibero-American titles</p> <p>32. <i>Hard</i> (series - Brazil) 33. <i>Dime Quién Soy</i> (miniseries - Spain) 34. <i>Todxs Nos</i> (series - Brazil)</p>	
Total: 1	Total: 34	Total: 1
GRAND TOTAL: 36		

Source: *Obitel Venezuela*

Almas en Pena, from the producer of audiovisual content RCTV International, was the only Venezuelan production screened in 2020 through different VOD platforms. It is about 12 legends of supernatural beings that serve as a starting to call the attention of ten influencers, who are desperately trying to increase their followers. Each story tells a frightening experience that happens to ordinary people nowadays. However, the experience transcended and claimed the lives of the influencers, originating one of the oddest police case.

Almas en Pena can be enjoyed in Latin America (Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panamá, Paraguay, Perú, Uruguay and Venezuela) through Amazon Prime Video and in Mexico through Tubi TV, a streaming service acquired by Fox Corporation.

Another important fact that needed to be mentioned is the participation of the Venezuelan Diego Velasco as director of the episode *A Celebration of the Human Life Cycle* from the series *Social Distance* (2020), produced by Netflix. Even though this is not a national show, it allows to appreciate how the Venezuelan talent continues to work, leaving a stamp on international productions.

Table 7. Fiction premiere on VOD in 2020 by country of origin

Country	Titles	%
NATIONAL (total)	1	2,8
OBITEL COUNTRIES (total)	34	94,4
Argentina	2	5,5
Brazil	6	16,7
Chile	2	5,5
Colombia	4	11,1
SPAIN	8	22,2
UNITED STATES (Hispanic productions)	1	2,8
Mexico	11	30,6
Peru	0	
Portugal	0	
Uruguay	0	
Venezuela *	1	2,8
CO-PRODUCTIONS (total)	1	2,8
Venezuelan Co-productions **	0	
OBITEL countries Co-productions	1	2,8
GRAND TOTAL	36	100

Source: *Obitel Venezuela*

Contrary to the low participation of Venezuela in VOD platforms, Latin America, in general, and especially Obitel member countries launched in 2020 an important amount of fiction series on renowned platforms, like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and HBO Go. As can be seen in table 7, Mexico is the Ibero-American country with the greater number of productions showed on VOD during 2020, 11 productions (30,6%), followed by Spain with eight productions (22, 2%).

Among Ibero-American productions launched in 2020 on VOD platforms, the most widely consumed series in Venezuela were *100 Días para Enamorarnos* (United States) and *Amar y Vivir* (Colombia), both showed in Netflix (FlixPatrol, 2020). It is important to highlight that series released before 2020 were also seen by Venezuelans, for instance: *Pablo Escobar* (Colombia, 2012), *Yo Soy Betty, la Fea* (Colombia, 1999) and *Bolívar, Una Lucha Admirable* (Colombia, 2019).

4. Fiction and audience's participation in digital environment

In 2020, Venezuelan audiences' participation in digital environment increased compared to previous years. All this happened in the context of a higher connectivity, mainly motivated by the Covid 19 pandemic and the aggressive campaign “#QuédateEnCasa”, driven by TV channels, both in open signal and social networks. Even though the collapse of the electric service (especially necessary for internet connections) deepened during the year, the demand of fixed and mobile broadband services augmented as well as the speed connection. This plus the fact that DirecTV pulled out the country

motivated national channels to reinvent strategies to reach audiences through digital platforms.

That is how Televen started to broadcast its live signal 24 hours a day through its web site³, in spite of the transmission problems due to Venezuela poor connection. It is important to mention that comments from users were not allowed in this platform. Other relevant attempts to have a presence on social media network during the pandemic were performed by Vale TV and the state channel Ávila TV. The former promoted and massified its religious and educative TV contents on its Instagram account, @valetvcanal5; and the latter standardized the posts on its Instagram account, @avilatvsuena, by adding exclusive designs to the front page or default view of its publications, which consist of fragments of documentaries and programs broadcast on TV. For both channels, the Instagram activities during the 2019 were essentially limited to the publication of informative images or ephemeris. These efforts to have a greater presence on social networks were not accompanied with the chance of giving the audiences spaces to participate; users' comments were absent.

However, it is important to highlight the interaction registered between Televen official Instagram account, @televentv, and its followers. The use of flyers and promotional videos to invite the audience to watch the TV production encouraged notoriously the users' participation. The most common comments were about technical improvements of the TV signal in some part of Venezuela, as well as critics and supports to the channel for its TV offer. A Televen viewer commented on a post about the program *Mi Corazón Es Tuyo*, on June 25th: "Good morning, the signal cannot be seen here in Valencia (with crying emo-

3 <http://www.televen.com/>

jis)”⁴. On that same publication, another viewer commented: “Just old and rerun TV programs”. The answer to this, from the official TV account, was: “We would love to read your comments (TV emoji). Happy night! (Hug emoji)”. This pattern was replicated on Instagram publications about fiction titles and on Twitter as well. Venevisión official account on Instagram, @Venevisión, just made two publications about fiction titles during the year. The state channel Tves proceeded in the same manner on all its social networks accounts.

Finally, it is also worth noting the audience participation on web sites and social networks accounts to access, on informal basis and with different levels of reliability, Netflix, VOD service that became very popular in 2020 as a source of fiction titles. In Venezuela there are many social networks accounts dedicated to sell different screens from a same Netflix account and, in some cases, they even sell the same screen to different users. This is detected by the platform and, in consequences, it prevents the access. These accounts and screens have prices ranging between three and eight dollars, depending on the number of screens, and are paid in *bolívaes*, according to the rate of the day.

5. Highlights of the year

The negative impact of Venezuela’s economic on audiovisual content production, especially on fiction series, was exacerbated during 2020 by the Covid-19 pandemic. National TV channels intensified the broadcast of reruns, especially Venezuelan ones, because they represent a lower cost option.

The Venezuelan government, through its communication and cultural institutions, started the pre-production process of the

4 <https://www.instagram.com/p/CB3Z14Gjw6b/?igshid=m9me9jqp33y>

miniseries, made up of nine episodes, *Carabobo, Camino de Libertad*, that seeks to commemorate the battle of Carabobo. This is a production from Villa del Cine, sponsored by the office of the Presidency. The internationalization of Venezuelan fiction is probably one of the best success of 2020: the horror series *Almas en Pena* and teen series *Carolay*.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Nicolás Maduro Moros, in one of his public speech, recommended to watch the series *Bolívar* (2019) in Netflix, ignoring the fact that 50% of Venezuelan population does not have a quality internet service. Years before, regarding this series he had claimed: “TV channels belonging to the Colombian oligarchy launched a series about *Bolívar*...how many lies, defamations and trash will be showed in that miniseries”⁵.

Finally, albeit *Obitel* interest is generally focused on the production of contents that circulates through commercial cinema circuits, in Venezuelan context it is essential to take into consideration the serial fiction distributed through alternative circuits relevant to the audiences. Indeed, we found some series that started as daily episodes from youtubers based on humor, parody, caricaturing, camera jokes and dancing to promote their products and social networks. These episodes work as starting points to attract public attention. Also, plots about crimes in slums are shown, and in some cases, they are made by communitarian productions.

An example of the cases mentioned above is Flavio Andrés Lloreda Brojanigo, a *youtuber* known as Yolo, who owns a YouTube

5 On Video: Maduro regrets: he apologized for his previous critics to Bolívar <https://www.semana.com/cultura/articulo/nicolas-maduro-se-disculpo-por-sus-criticas-a-la-serie-bolivar-una-lucha-admirabl/626114/>

channel with 10,4 M subscribers. One of his first project was called *Yolo Aventuras*. The first episode, called *Llegamos a la Casa de Momo* and broadcast in 2019, has amassed 11.753.291 views on YouTube. This channel promotes the Instagram and Tik Tok accounts of the protagonists, as well as two YouTube channels and two video game channels (*Cracks*: https://youtu.be/R_Z6hT_pvoY; *Titanes*: <https://youtu.be/Pc7d-sAsiDc>). Unfortunately, the electricity crisis affecting Venezuela forced the team to migrate to Colombia. There, they released a four episodes series called *Magicland* on November 19, 2020. The story centers on the environmental care. The first episode was free of charges, but the following could just be enjoyed by paying between one and four dollars.

Other production that must be mentioned for the number of episodes made and exhibited through YouTube is the teen series *En el Salón*, produced by Show Men Production Records - AKTV Tu Canal. It is a very low-quality product that reproduces stereotypes and topics from other teen series. The first season was shown in 2020 and had ten episodes that lasted between 50 and 60 minutes.

During November 2020, Nene Films Producer Company from Cumaná, state of Sucre, showed the third-season finale episode of the series *A Pesar de Todo*, consisting in thirteen episodes with an average duration 30 and 40 minutes.

From Caracas, Jackson Gutiérrez gave, using the guerrilla filmmaking technique, a workshop which resulted in a miniseries called *Azotes de Barrio*. The first episode was broadcast in July 2, 2020 and episode 35 on April 24, 2021, demonstrating a big production capacity that some big networks have not reached yet.

6. Theme of the Year

This chapter will be approached considering different edges: the content production (fiction, serial fiction and no-fiction), the bi-securitary measures proposed by the State bodies to control the filming and the exhibition strategies. Regarding the content production, those related to crime stories remained on the top. In November the police series *Dealers* was released on YouTube, consisting in a first season two episodes, and a third one at the beginning of 2021. It is a series with a high level of production: technical resources, film editing, special effects, music and the use of special equipment (for instance, drones, helicopters and guns) that creates an aesthetic proposal consistent with the action thriller genre. Unfortunately, it lacks a solid script, a rigorous actor' direction and an audiovisual grammar proposal that allows the spectator to connect with the contents, which could easily have been used as a space for denouncing. However, the filmmakers believe they have made a reflection and have given a positive message that differentiates it from advocacy of crime.

*Amor sin Tapabocas*⁶ is the second production shot during the Covid-19 pandemic, produced by Nené Films Company and released on September 1, 2020. It is an 11 episodes miniseries exclusively for Instagram TV that uses the humor for social criticism. The third show is *Readaptado*⁷, a 15 episodes web series produced by Wappo Contenido Creativo and launched on September 11, 2020. This work was done using video calling chats about the experiences from the lockdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

6 Comedia en tiempos de Coronavirus - Amor sin tapa bocas Trailer Oficial https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_16TomxjYE

7 READAPTADOS: web show <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtNzPDHasbA>

The only *telenovela* shot in 2020, *Intrigas Tras Cámaras*, directed by Henry Galué and Edgar Liendo for Quimera Producciones, had to apply biosecurity measures to each actor and member of the team on the arrival to the set and during the shooting (disinfection areas and use of face masks, gloves and face shields). Kisses and hugs were suppressed in order to avoid contagion.

In the education environment, some experiences were undertaken during 2020. The Film and TV School, Ltd (Escuela de Cine y TV C.A.) produced the short film *Covid Jane Moda Viral*, while the National Film School organized IV Short Film Annual Exhibition:

These are the results of exercises and we especially value their cinematographic tale since they have been made under unique circumstances. They are testimonies, self-discovery processes -at least for the authors-. They are the outcome of the pandemic restrictions, of new rhythms and customs, that have forced us to see ourselves differently during this Covid-19 time (Boada, 2021, p. 1).

Regarding the Audiovisual University of Venezuela, the short film *Operazion 0.1*, by Andrés Rosales, stand out for the grammar used, the art direction, the effects, the makeup, the production resources and the sound track⁸. Additionally, there are documentaries made by Venezuelans living abroad that are moving in their sensitivity and simplicity. The first of them is *Los Días que Pasan*, by Antonio Savinelli that “tells the lockdown story through the eyes of Leo, a four years boy that everyday does the same thing along with his little sister Olivia”⁹. The second piece is *Solos* by Gilberto Polo Pacheco. It is a

8 <https://encuadro.uav.online/cortometrajes/operazion-0-1/>

9 <https://certamendecortossoria.org/edicion-2020/seccion-oficial-2020/329-los-dias-que-pasan.html>

story made with the opinions from 29 individuals about the realities of the lock down:

This virus came to show how vulnerable we are when we face the absence. A loneliness imposed that causes desolation in the hearts of those waiting for a return to the past, and creates uncertainty of tomorrow (Fibaco, 2020, p.1).

In other formative spaces as The Film Factory, which is a program promoted by the National Association Gran Cinema Circuit that has as fundamental objective the film creation by young filmmakers about the defense of human rights, made, in June 2020, the short film *¿Filmar en cuarentena?*, directed by Omar Mesones. The purpose is to offer “in six minutes some simple and required techniques that make it possible to meet the target consisting in completing the films ‘production’”¹⁰. Concerning the compliance of rules, a “Protocol for shooting in Venezuela during the Health Emergency caused by Covid-19” was generated and circulated in June. It has measures to be complied during preproduction, shooting and postproduction processes. The protocol will be activated during flexible weeks, when the government allows economic activities with some restrictions.

Considering the ban on public spaces during the Covid-19 epidemic, two types of initiatives emerged in Caracas: The Ceiling Cinemas and the drive-in cinemas. The formers were promoted and managed by the organization *Zonas de Descarga*¹¹: the ceiling of some houses from Petare, one of the biggest slums in Caracas, were used to make film screenings to be enjoyed by local neighbors from their homes. Later, other activities such as storybook reading, concerts, theater and

10 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsotSJAglsw>

11 Earlier experience related to *Cine móvil* or *Cine balcón* from the Gran Cinema Circuit and to the program *Cine bajo las estrellas* of the National Cinematheque Foundation.

dance performances joined the initiative (León, 2020, p.1). The latter, the drive-in cinemas, did not have success due to the high entrance fee and the low quality of service delivered.

National initiatives consisting in streaming exhibitions were consolidated during the pandemic; unfortunately, they had to move to other countries owing to technological restrictions. Low internet speed and recurrent power interruptions, as well as economic insecurity prevent *Cine Mestizo* (a platform exclusively dedicated to show Venezuelan films) to be managed from Venezuela.¹²

Other disciplines seized the opportunity to build what could be called new discursive forms, and in this process display technologies for electronic communication device and, in particular, videoconference technology played an important role. The first example is the Literary Action Group for an Organic Theater (Galto in its Spanish acronym) consisting in a permanent workshop of dramaturgy and virtual staging, and that form part of the Actors' Gym. The second one, *Residencias Paisano* (Residences Civilian), emerges as an initiative for collective creation dramaturgy aimed at working primarily on citizen coexistence issues. This initiative was supported by The Comarca Theatre, the Institute for Communications Research (ININCO) from the Central University of Venezuela (UCV) and the Global Observatory of Communication and Democracy. Both experiences were directed by Lupe Gehrenbeck.

Residencias Paisano resulted from the gathering of ten directors to create a theatrical text that was later live-streamed by chapter for several weekends. Directors, writers and actors located in different parts of the world participated in this experience, evidencing the importance of Venezuelan diaspora. Based on the idea of approaching and promoting the work of Venezuelan artists living in diaspora, the British

12 <https://cinemestizo.com/>

Council supported the creation of different plays for a festival called “Imaginary House, Digital Encounter”, promoted by *La Caja de Fósforos*, a theatre room and a creative collective. The festival consisted in reflections on the space called “house” and its connotations. It also produced six short films from the project *Ethnography of the Lockdown* that consisted in exploring, by young directors (Juan Pablo Pérez, María Ruíz, Ray González Duque, María Molina, Aitor Aguirre and Hensahis Zambrano), docufiction stories about the isolation brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic; as well as two web series streamed by *La Caja de Fósforos* online platform: *Lockdown* (15 episodes) and *Bicho Raro* (five episodes).

Unfortunately, these valuable efforts left aside a huge amount of people without access to internet due to different reasons: the poor-quality service, the selective blockade of signals and the arbitrarily suspension of the service by CANTV, one of Venezuelan state operator. Finally, it is worth to mention that one of the official TV channels, VTV, suffered a Covid-19 collective contagious event for not complying properly the required biosecurity measures.

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