

## Latino Television in the United States and Latin America: Addressing Networks, Dynamics, and Alliances

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The presence of Latino TV in the United States has been increasing during the first decades of the millennium. Many alliances and new players are emerging in this market. This article contributes to the discussion of the Latino media by addressing the dynamics and complexity of this changing U.S. media subsystem; in fact, I propose a characterization of the Latino media as a subsystem of the U.S. communication system. The research (a) analyzes the main ownership links and networks between the major U.S. media players with their Latino TV counterparts; (b) draws a map of the Latino TV subsystem with a concentric analysis and establishes the production and consumption particularities of the subsystem; (c) identifies the interaction of Latino TV companies with their partners in Latin America; and (d) establishes that the core of Latino national broadcasting networks can be divided into two levels according to their audiovisual industrial strategies and financial support.

*Keywords: Latin America, Latino media, television, political economy of communication, media systems, global flows*

The U.S. communication system is one of the most complex communication systems in the world (Lennet, Clark, Glayser, Meinrath, & Napoli, 2011). Since the beginning of the 21st century, Latino TV has helped to transform the U.S. communication system. In fact, for the first time in U.S. TV history, there is some balance, in terms of the number of channels, between commercial national Spanish-language broadcasting networks and commercial national English-language broadcasting networks.<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing this article, the five national English-language broadcasting networks are CBS, NBC, ABC, Fox, and the CW, and the national Spanish-language commercial broadcasting networks are Univisión, Telemundo, Unimás, Azteca (formerly Azteca America), MundoMax (formerly MundoFox) LATV, and Estrella TV. It

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Date submitted: 2015-03-15

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Ben Birkinbine, Janet Wasko, and the anonymous reviewers for their careful review of this article and their feedback. This research was funded by CONACYT and the Fulbright Research Program to develop this article during a sabbatical research visit at the University of Oregon (2013–2014).

<sup>2</sup> It is important to emphasize that the Spanish-language networks do not have the same size and scope of the English-language networks in terms of affiliates, percentage of households, and sales of commercial time. Univision is the only network that could compare or compete in terms of ratings and audiences to English-language networks.

must be understood that no Latin American TV system (e.g., Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, etc.) has the same number of television networks as Latino audiences have in the U.S. At the same time, Latino audiences watch both Spanish-language and English-language networks (Nielsen, 2012); thus, these audiences have a potentially wide bicultural commercial TV appeal.

Significant growth of Latino TV has occurred since the beginning of the millennium, and, as other researchers have noted, this development can be explained mainly because the Latino population, and its purchasing power, is increasing more rapidly than any other ethnic group (Castañeda, 2008; Dávila & Rivero, 2014; Sinclair, 2003). At the same time, the Latino population in the United States has been an important TV submarket since the 1980s (Piñón & Rojas, 2011; Wilkinson, 2009). In other words, Latino audiences have recently been identified as a profitable commodity, particularly in the TV market.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, the advertising and media industries have adopted approaches to target Latino audiences that explore the new configuration of these audiences as bilingual and more sophisticated (Advertising Age, 2015; Nielsen, 2012). At the same time, during the last 20 years, the Latino population has been attracting more attention both in commercial and political terms as the largest minority in the United States (Barreto, 2007; Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011; Lopez, Krogstad, Patten, & González-Barrera, 2014; Negrón-Montaner, 2014).

Also reflecting an interest in Latino audiences are the various approaches that the big U.S. global communication conglomerates are taking in the Latino TV market. This interest is not new, but this article maintains that the big players are increasing their interest on different fronts. For example, Disney/ABC, in alliance with Univision, launched an English-language cable network named Fusion at the end of 2013. This channel tried to attract the young Latino population—that is, millennials—who are proficient in English and are mainly second- or third-generation Latino. With this joint venture, these partners are exploring the new paths that could develop these “sophisticated” Latino audiences; at the same time, the corporations want to attract other English-speaking audiences that are culturally related to *Latinidad* (Dávila, 2012). This alliance is an interesting experiment because it alludes to young bicultural audiences that are growing in the context of multiscreens and mobile communication consumption. The content of this cable network is unusual compared to its bilingual and/or bicultural competitors—such as Mun2, recently renamed NBCUniverso (Comcast/NBCUniversal), along with Tr3s (Viacom) and Fuse (formerly NuvoTV) (Chavez, 2015; Puente; 2014)—because it is in English only and is oriented toward featured news, pop culture, documentaries, entertainment, soccer, and political satire. However, like the other Latino networks, Mexican figures stand out in the lineup of its prime-time presenters and news anchors. Examples include the renowned Latino journalist Jorge Ramos and the “Chilango”—originally from Mexico City- commentator Leon Krauze, son of the influential Mexican liberal intellectual Enrique Krauze. Another interesting aspect of this new venture is that it was promoted on the different platforms and in the different programs of the two partners, especially by ABC and Univision. Fusion is just one new entry that illustrates how Latino identity and audiences have been perceived by these big media companies and how these companies think their audiences could be addressed in the future.

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<sup>3</sup> According to Comcast (2013), there were 14.7 million U.S. Hispanic households at the end of 2013.

Moving on from this example, it is important to provide an overview of the links between the major media players in the U.S. TV system and their Latino subsystem to establish the framework that shapes Latino TV. This is important for understanding the analytical starting points of entry as well as the interactions and business networks that exist between the major players in the U.S. media/TV system and those in the Latino media/TV system—and, therefore, for understanding the Latino TV subsystem of the U.S. media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This article also tracks the links, agreements, and networks that Latino TV players have with their Latin American counterparts to establish some of the regional audiovisual industrial dynamics and particularities.

### **Convergence of Corporate Ownership, Global and Regional Networks of Multimedia, and Counterflows**

Before presenting the case study, it is important to establish some theoretical concepts to understand how this article conceives of the major processes that are involved with Latino and Latin American TV companies in the context of global capitalism. First, media communications on a global scale experience high levels of ownership concentration and consolidation (Noam, 2016). This situation can be explained by two interconnected main drivers: the marketization of communications (Murdock & Wasko, 2007) and the process of convergence. The convergence of corporate ownership, as Murdock (2000) argues, is characterized mainly by the driver of maximization.

Maximize [*sic*] is the key aspect of convergence, since it is the emerging mega corporations that span content and distribution and combine established and emerging media under the same administrative umbrella, who are setting the pace for digitalization and writing the rules for the emerging communication marketplace. (p. 38)

At the same time, and on another level of analysis, after identifying the dynamics of the structure and general logic in which media companies are framed, it is important to focus on how media companies are organized, including their new forms of organization, alliances, production, and distribution in a digital context. In that respect, studies support the findings of Arsenault and Castells (2008), who have identified four major interrelated trends in relation to the global media network:

(1) Media ownership is increasingly concentrated. (2) At the same time, media conglomerates are now able to deliver a diversity of products over one platform as well as one product over diversity of platforms. (3) This fluid movement of communication products across platforms encourages the customization and segmentation of audiences in order to maximize advertising revenues. And finally, the success of these strategies is determined by (4) the ability of internal media networks to achieve optimal economies of synergy that take advantage of the changing communications environment. (p. 711)

The third element that this article proposes as a major driver for this research is audiovisual counterflows. Some scholars have established that there are counterflows from the global South to the global North (Sinclair, 1999; Straubhaar, 2007). Telenovelas are a clear example of this thinking because they have their own circuit, which is mainly South–North or South–South (Thussu, 2007). In the particular

case of Latino TV, the balance is favorable to Latin American powerhouses—that is, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, and Venezuela—and their respective hegemonic media corporations (Vassallo de Lopes & Orozco, 2014). In that respect, this article presents these counterflows carefully in two aspects: First, the most popular telenovelas broadcast by Latino TV, Televisa productions, have been characterized as hegemonic mainstream commercial content with stereotypical stories (Sinclair, 1999), and, as Hesmondhalgh (2013) suggests, “the corporations that dominate Latin America television certainly do not provide a model of emancipatory cultural production” (p. 284). Second, these counterflows have the specificity that the telenovelas are broadcast in a sort of secondary market in the United States. This means that the major TV broadcasters in the United States—“the big five”—do not broadcast this content, so these counterflows follow the logic of diasporic/ethnic cultural markets rather than the national U.S. audiences. Thus, these flows must be understood as a minor transfer of audiovisual contents from South to North.

Finally, the proposed fourth conceptual driver is the idea of the Latino media as a subsystem of the U.S. media system and the interactions of these two systems. Therefore, it is important to define how this media subsystem is understood. The research follows the proposal of Hallin and Mancini (2004), which identifies four main dimensions that characterize a (national) media system: (1) development and logics of the media industries and markets, (2) political parallelism, (3) journalism professionalism, and (4) the role of the state. According to these dimensions, this article suggests the hypothesis that the Latino media is a subsystem of the U.S. media system, because the former has some different developments and logics related to its markets, particularly in the sociocultural specificities and ethnolinguistic character of these media industries and their audiences. However, at a deeper level, the dimension of the role of the state works under the same normative coordinates. In my view, these two dimensions are the strongest articulation of the dynamics between the U.S. media system and the Latino TV subsystem. However, this article focuses mainly on the first dimension and takes the other three into account as part of the totality of the media system.

The dimensions of political parallelism and journalism professionalism provide an opportunity to construct the idea of the subsystem. For example, the Latino media has a different historical progression in relation to political parallelism and journalism professionalism of the U.S. media system. This does not mean that Latino media journalism is less professional. The point here is that it has another historical progression because it emerged within the social constraints and necessities of the Latino population during the second half of the 20th century (Wilkinson, 2009). This situation can help us understand some of the particularities and differences of the Latino media subsystem in sociocultural and political terms.

### **Latino TV or Hispanic TV?**

To clarify, this article will focus on Latino TV instead of Spanish or Hispanic language television in the United States, because the former is summarized better by the idea of a diverse bicultural population that uses Spanish and English languages and/or an imagined diverse ethnic group (Dávila, 2012). Although the Mexican American and Mexican population represent by far the majority of this group at 64.6%, many other cultural roots—such as Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Cubans, Colombians, and Peruvians—contribute to the idea and identity of *Latinidad* (Dávila, 2012). At the same time, it will help to narrow the scope of this article by focusing only on Latino TV players and Latino/a-oriented programming

(Dávila & Rivero, 2014), which means national broadcasting TV networks and national cable channels that are based in the United States whose main concern are the Latino audiences. These channels could be broadcast in Spanish and/or English. Under that logic, and for the aim of this article, it is proposed that we understand these channels, from a concentric circle analysis, as the core of the Latino TV subsystem.<sup>4</sup> This is, in turn, interrelated with semiperipheral and peripheral offerings of cable channels in Spanish language that are produced outside the United States and refer to different national audiences that are localized around Latin America and in the United States.

To clarify, the semiperipheral Latino channels are those such as cable channels that could have a simulcast Spanish version and are produced in the United States and, in some cases, combine their productions with other Latin American countries, which means that they have some direct links with Latinos/as, but, at the same time, their contents seek wider audiences among Latin American pay TV platforms and audiences. Examples include cable networks such as CNN Español, Fox Life, Nat Geo Mundo, Discovery en Español, Bein ñ, Pasiones, Comedy Central, and some premium cable channels such as HBO Latino.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the peripheral channels are best characterized as the international signals of national TV channels, such as Televisión Española Internacional, Antena 3, Caracol TV Internacional, TVGlobo, Once TV Internacional México, TV Chile, and Ecuavisa.

In short, the core Latino channels have the following main characteristics: (a) They are based in the United States and have national coverage as broadcaster TV networks or cable networks; (b) their content—news, entertainment, sports, or fiction—is focused on the Latino audiences and may be broadcast in Spanish, English, or both; and (c) they capture the majority of Latino audiences, and they are the most popular among the different Latino packages in the pay TV outlets (Advertising Age, 2015).

It is important to note that this article understands the tensions between the cultural diversity of Latinidad and their everyday lives in the United States versus the market logic of the Latino TV market dynamics (Chávez, 2015; Dávila, 2012). In fact, this article works with the hypothesis that the Latino broadcasters TV and cable networks sail with the banner of Latino diversity but, in the end, that such discourse is constrained by the media market logic of packaging audiences as commodities to advertisers (Smythe, 1981).

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<sup>4</sup> The concentric circle analysis provides a framework for understanding different types of relationships that exist within, between, and across circles that are characterized as core, semiperiphery, and periphery. This metaphor follows the idea of Immanuel Wallerstein's world system theory, but particularly in media studies, it follows Hesmondhalgh's (2013) application of this idea in his cultural industries characterization. The concentric circle analysis explains how the system works, and it should be analyzed in relational terms—that is, the interrelations among the core, the semiperiphery, and the periphery are part of the system and should be established as a totality.

<sup>5</sup> It has to be considered that these channels have different ways of delivery in the pay-TV systems and thus they have different business models. But the specific detail that this article highlights is the audiences that they want to reach as priorities and the industrial geographical base of the company.

### **The Big Five and Latino TV in the U.S. Communication System**

Before analyzing the alliances and interactions between the main U.S. media players and the Latino TV players, it is important to describe briefly the legal particularities of broadcasting and cable in the U.S. media system that help to explain the regulatory framework and to establish some boundaries in terms of possible takeovers, alliances, and fusions.

The core Latino TV channels—Univisión, Unimás, Telemundo, Azteca, MundoMax, LATV, and, Estrella TV—work with media regulatory ownership rules that are framed by the Broadcast Ownership Rules (see Federal Communications Commission, 2014), including: (a) restrictions on foreign ownership of broadcast stations—the foreign ownership of the U.S. broadcast outlets is between a 20% and 25% stake in any such outlets; (b) limitations on national broadcast television station ownership—at the time of writing this article, no company can own television stations that, in combination, have a national potential audience reach exceeding 39% of the population; and (c) limits on local broadcast television station ownership—a company can own only one television station in a market, with some exceptions. If there are at least eight other stations in the market (the so-called eight voices test), a single company can own two television stations as long as one of the stations is not among the four highest-ranked stations in the market. These rules represent just a small piece of the complicated and specific legal frames of the U.S. media system. These rules provide important clues for understanding the limits and considerations that must to be taken into account for the big media players such as CBS, ABC, or Time Warner if they want to buy a Latino broadcasting network. It is not an easy task to deal with ownership structures in the U.S. media system.

Cable channel rules are less complicated and open the door to foreign companies to provide their content outlets. This is the situation of most cable channels that we consider in the semiperiphery and periphery of Latino TV.

The U.S. communications system has been undergoing a process of economic concentration and consolidation since the mid-1990s (Noam, 2016). In this structure, it is possible to identify five dominant U.S. players that, according to different annual reports, are considered to be in the top 10 of global media companies (ZenithOptimedia, 2014). The top global media giants are Comcast/NBCUniversal; Disney/ABC; News Corp/Fox; National Amusements, which controls Viacom and CBS; and Time Warner Inc. These companies make up an important amount of the U.S. audiovisual content and, at the same time, control the historic U.S. audiovisual catalogs. In addition, they are in different communications subsectors of the global hegemonic companies in terms of flows, assets, and incomes (Birkinbine, Gomez, & Wasko, 2016).

The strongest links, until the end of 2015, between a big U.S. conglomerate and Latino TV are Telemundo and its cable network NBCUniverso—formerly Mun2—which are both owned by Comcast/NBCUniversal. Since 2012 that Comcast has owned NBCUniversal, the situation of Telemundo, historically the second largest Latino TV network, was reinforced, in terms of financial muscle and content, by the position of Comcast as a dominant cable provider. In addition, it is important to note that Telemundo is the Latino network that produces the most hours of content in-house—mainly telenovelas and series in its studios in Miami and Latin America (Piñón & Rojas, 2011). In fact, it is clear that for many

years Telemundo's strategy has been to compete, in an open field, with the Latin American powerhouses of telenovelas in the global audiovisual markets (for in-depth Telemundo strategies, see Piñón, 2014). However, the reinforcement with Comcast ownership is not an automatic guarantee of success in industrial audiovisual results. Recall that Sony owned Telemundo from 1998 to 2001 and could not break the Univision leadership.

The second largest example of relations between the Big Five and Latino TV used to be the network of Fox International Channels: the 21st Century Fox subsidiary novel network named MundoFox that, despite its growth in terms of affiliates, audiences, and advertisers since it was launched in August 2012, Fox International nevertheless decided to sell its stake in July 2015. MundoFox was a joint venture between Fox's international channels and the Colombian Radio Nacional (RCN) TV. This partnership offered MundoFox<sup>6</sup> the catalog of one of the most important audiovisual powerhouses in Latin America with RCN (Piñón, 2014). After Fox International sold its stake, the broadcasting network in the United States was renamed MundoMax and is now totally owned by the Colombian RCN Television Group (Steinberg, 2015). MundoMax will try to continue to present some kind of contrast to its competitors—mainly Univision, Azteca, LATV, and Estrella TV—in terms of challenging the dominant Mexican content with more Colombian-centered content. However, the lineup of its TV shows and telenovelas has a significant presence of Mexican actors and anchors.

Fox International Channels maintains an important presence in the Latino TV market with its cable channels in Spanish. It is important to recall that Fox Deportes was the first of its type during the mid-1990s in the United States and appeared at the end of the decade in Latin America. 21st Century Fox has other cable channels geared toward Latino audiences that are distributed in the U.S. and Latin American pay TV systems, including Fox Life and Nat Geo Mundo.

The assets of Disney/ABC in the Latino market have long ties with Disney activities and Disney channels (Wasko, 2002), but in terms of Latino TV, the conglomerate has undergone an important development, particularly with ESPN Deportes. In fact, ESPN Deportes is the only Disney Latino network that appears on the list of Spanish-language cable TV prime-time program leaders of 2014 (Advertising Age, 2015). This cable channel was launched in 2004, and since then it has grown in both the United States and across Latin America, reproducing the successful formats of ESPN with local/regional touches and flavors. As already mentioned, the latest attempt of Disney/ABC related to the Latino market was the cable channel Fusion, a joint venture with Univision.

Time Warner Inc. has two important cable channels oriented toward Latino audiences. The first is CNN en Español, which was launched in March 1997. This U.S. cable news channel has not had any direct competition in the United States since its origin, but lately in Latin America, the Venezuelan Telesur, Colombian NTN24, and Televisa Forotv have attempted to compete with the Turner Broadcasting news channel. Because of this presence and continuity with Latino audiences and CNN's strong links with Latin

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<sup>6</sup> The MundoFox brand and name continues under Fox International Channels ownership, and its signal is distributed across Latin America in pay TV platforms.

America, the research highlights this company channel. Second, the entertainment and premium cable channel HBO Latino could be considered Latino/a-oriented content, because, since it began in 2000, it has coproduced original series in Spanish and Portuguese with independent producers in different Latin American countries. However, most of its programming is a simulcast of the English primary HBO channel, and it is conceived both for Latino and Latin American audiences. At the same time, HBO Latino provides another important example of collaboration and coproduction and how a premium pay TV channel is addressed to Latinos/as. The other Time Warner cable channel that is starting to coproduce original series in Spanish is TNT Latin America.

Last but not least, National Amusements has participated in the Latino cable TV market through Viacom with the cable channel Tr3s—its former name being MTV en Español. The channel is targeted toward young bilingual Latinos/as and non-Latinos/as ages 12 to 34, and it was relaunched in July 2010 (Chavez, 2015). Its content includes lifestyle series, customized music video playlists, music and artists, and news documentaries strongly related to Latino/a culture, and it provides English-subtitled programming in Spanish imported from its MTV channels in Spain and Latin America. It may be surprising to learn that the other company of National Amusements, CBS Corporation, has not attempted any kind of project related to Latino TV. Nevertheless, some of its live broadcast events, such as NFL football games and NCAA basketball and football games on CBS and CBS Sports, offer Spanish audio in second audio program (SAP).

Comcast/ Universal	Disney/ABC	Fox International	Time Warner	National Amusements/ Viacom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telemundo</li> <li>• NBCUniverso</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESPN Deportes</li> <li>• Disney Channel Latino</li> <li>• Fusion (50% Univision)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fox Deportes</li> <li>• FoxLife</li> <li>• Nat Geo Mundo</li> <li>• MundoFox</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CNN Español</li> <li>• TNT series</li> <li>• HBO Latino (Premium)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tr3s</li> </ul>

**Figure 1. The most representative Latino TV networks and cable channels in relation to the Big Five conglomerates in United States, current as of January 2016. (Telemundo is the only TV broadcasting network in this figure; the rest are cable channels.)**

As is shown in Figure 1, the major players of the U.S. media conglomerates have different strategies and assets related to Latino TV. Thus, the links between the core of the U.S. media system and some of the core of the Latino TV subsystem can be observed in ownership terms. In addition, the Latino TV advertising market is growing every year. According to Advertising Age (2009, 2015), the Latino TV market grew consistently from \$4.3 billion in 2009 to \$7.2 billion in 2014. The Spanish-language TV spending grew by about 10% each year, compared to a 2.4% growth rate for U.S. TV media overall during the same years. The significant growth of the Latino TV market is still a minor stake of the total U.S. TV



market (\$63.8 billion), but it absorbed about 9% of that market in 2012 (Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2012).

Unless the Latino TV market gains new players and experiences constant growth in a competitive field, Univision Communications will remain the dominant player, because it holds 60% of the audience share of broadcasting television through its TV networks Univision and Unimás (Piñón, Flores & Cornejo, 2015, p. 314). At the time of writing this article, Univision Communications does not have an ownership tie with any Big Five player, but in the context of concentration and consolidations of the U.S. communication system, it may not surprise anyone that in the near future, one of the Big Five or a telecom company will push for or secure a takeover of Univision Communications.<sup>7</sup> This situation is not an easy task and, indeed it is not new, because, as established at the beginning of this article, U.S. cross-ownership media rules make it difficult for a big player to take over Univision.

Before mapping the interactions between Latino TV companies and their counterparts in Latin America, it is important to identify the pay TV carriers that provide Latino outlets across the United States. At the end of 2013, 85% of all TV households had a pay TV service in the United States, which was provided by three platforms: cable (55%), direct-broadcast satellite (34%), and telecom TV (11%) (National Cable and Telecommunication Association, 2014). In each platform, it is possible to identify two dominant players: cable services are dominated by Comcast and Time Warner Cable, which control more than 40% of the cable market share and the 40 most important U.S. cable markets (Crawford, 2013). In the case of direct-broadcast satellite, DirecTV (59%) and Dish (41%) control 100% of the market. Finally, the IPTV (Internet Protocol Television) dominant providers are Verizon Fios and AT&T U-verse (National Cable and Telecommunications Association, 2014). Every pay TV company offers specials packages of Latino channels, and they have important advertising campaigns in the main Latino TV networks such as Univision, Telemundo, Unimás, Azteca, and MundoMax (Advertising Age, 2015).

### Mapping Latino TV

This analysis has presented an overview of the important Latino links with the U.S. Big Five media conglomerates, and now it will be helpful to map out the core of the Latino TV subsystem according to the coordinates that have been discussed. It is important to recall that Piñón and Rojas (2011) performed a similar exercise. However, this map narrows and updates the core of Latino TV, because the TV market logic and dynamics in the United States continue to have new entries, changes, and drops.

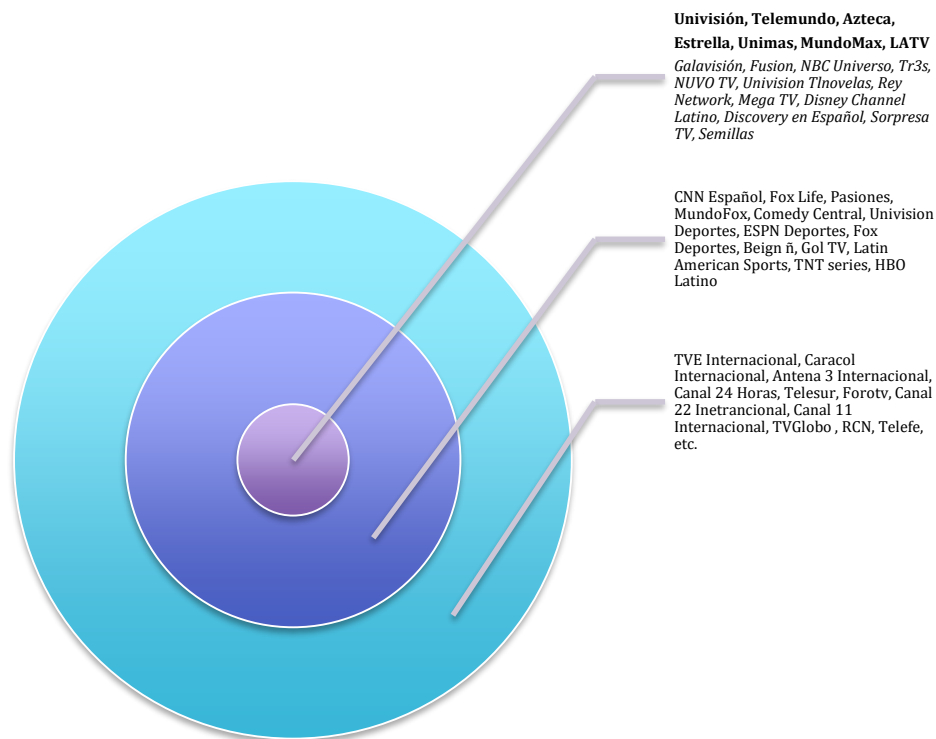
The core broadcasting TV networks and cable networks of Latino TV are shown in Figure 2. Those channels are the most popular and make up the advertising revenues of the Latino TV market in the United States (Advertising Age, 2015). The seven channels in bold type in the inner circle are considered the nucleus of the core of the Latino audiovisual channels, because they are mainly oriented to those audiences. The cable networks in italics are part of the core for the same reason, even though there are differences between them in terms of ratings, scope, and genres. In the second circle, the semiperiphery,

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<sup>7</sup> During the summer of 2014, CBS and Time Warner Inc. recognized public interest in buying Univision Communications and held conversations with the Latino TV leader. The potential Univision sale has been estimated at roughly \$20 billion (Ramachandran & Hagey, 2014).

are those channels that also address Latin American audiences as their main target. Finally, in the periphery of Latino TV are the signals totally produced outside the United States in Latin American countries and in Spain.

This concentric characterization is not static but, rather, must be understood as a dynamic process; it could happen that one of the channels and its content could transition or be relocated to different parts of the cycles proposed. For example, Fox Deportes and MundoFox started as core Latino channels, but over time, and with the aim to reach more audiences according to company strategies, those channels relocated to attract Latin American audiences as well, and thus moved from the nucleus to the boundaries of the Latino TV semiperiphery.



**Figure 2. Latino core, semiperiphery, and periphery TV networks and cable channels in the United States, 2015. Compiled by the author with data from Guide to U.S. Hispanic Channels. Eleventh Annual Hispanic television summit 2013 and research references. .**

### **Interactions Between Latino TV and Latin American TV Players**

It must be stressed that the dominant Latin American media players that interact with the Latino TV players concentrate their own national markets. These concentrated structures are clear in the cases of Televisa and TV Azteca in Mexico (Huerta-Wong & Gómez, 2013), RCN and Caracol in Colombia (Rincon,

2013), Venevisión in Venezuela (Bisbal, 2005), and Globo in Brazil (Sinclair & Straubhaar, 2013). It may not be surprising that Latino TV companies have the strongest alliances, joint ventures, and license agreements with these historical hegemonic media companies.

Another important point of these interconnections is the case of Mexico and Colombia, because they have bilateral free trade agreements with the United States. This is significant because it gives free entrance to their audiovisual products and better conditions to conduct business between companies—for example, in the case of joint ventures and license agreements. In other words, Colombia and Mexico have an important economic integration in terms of the logic and dynamic of global capitalism with the United States. However, the main reason for the partnerships is because Mexico and Colombia are audiovisual powerhouses, particularly in the production of telenovelas and teleseries. In addition, during the last decade, Mexico City, Bogota, and Miami have been developing important nodes for a Spanish-language TV production content network (Piñón, 2014).

As Latino TV studies have established, telenovelas are the most watched or most popular programs among Latinos/as (Sinclair, 1999). In other words, the telenovela is the prime-time asset for the Latino networks. At the same time, the second most profitable content for these networks is soccer. Globally, sports events are very popular and attract large audiences, particularly when global and national events take place, such as the Olympics and FIFA World Cup tournaments or the finals of a national or regional favorite professional sport.

Latino broadcasting television networks and cable networks try to secure the Spanish-language rights for the FIFA World Cup qualifiers and tournament. For example, during the last World Cup in Brazil, Univision dominated in several of the largest cities in the United States—Los Angeles, Miami, New York, and Houston—and attracted an average of 9.2 million total viewers for the final match, making it Univision's most-watched World Cup final ever. Throughout the tournament, Univision reached 80.9 million total viewers, up 65% from the 49.1 million it reached for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa ("Keeping the Fever," 2014). However, the most-watched game during that tournament for Univision was the World Cup round-of-16 match between Mexico and the Netherlands on June 29, 2014, which averaged 10.4 million total viewers, according to Nielsen, becoming the most-watched telecast in U.S. Spanish-language TV history (Mahler, 2014).

These situations provide an opportunity to elaborate on how genres operate in the Latino TV network lineups. In fact, this is a key element that distinguishes the Latino TV subsystem from the U.S. TV system. Other important TV genres—such as news, documentaries, reality shows, and talk shows as well as variety and educational programming—are part of the totality of the logics and dynamics of the Latino TV lineups. However, according to the ratings, telenovelas and soccer are the two most profitable genres. Neither of these genres are included in the prime-time scheduling of the U.S. big five networks' or mainstream TV cable channels' lineups. This is why this research isolates such facts: to describe a specific difference of Latino TV to avoid the discussion becoming simplistic. At the same time, it is a strategy to focus the discussion on the logics and dynamics of Latino TV as an analytical starting point.

The relations between Latino TV and Latin American TV companies must be understood at different levels and in the context of their industrial and economic specificities. The first level identifies the alliances in terms of direct ownership or a joint venture agreement. In the first case, the companies have some percentage of direct capital investment in the company; in the second case, the partners exercise control over the enterprise and consequently share revenues, expenses, and assets. At this level, there are just three Latin American companies: Televisa, TV Azteca, and RCN.

The second stage deals with the license program agreements and technical assistance agreements. These contracts have some degree of exclusivity from medium to long term and, at the same, can be characterized as strategic. The third level explores the programs' rights agreements, coproduction agreements, and distribution agreements. These agreements are punctual and can be signed for just one program or for a medium term; in other words, these agreements are ephemeral and flexible in terms of alliances and ties.

Televisa has direct ownership participation in Univision Communications, which is controlled by the investment holding company Broadcasting Media Partners. According to the Univision annual report, Televisa has 8% of the company (Univision, 2013), but in recent years, according to the companies, after signing the last program license agreement until 2030, Televisa reports that, "in case of conversion of the debentures held by Televisa and any necessary approval of the FCC, Televisa would hold close to 38% of the equity capital of BMP on a fully diluted, as converted basis" (Televisa, 2014). Consequently, Televisa could potentially have a third of Univision. At the same time, the two companies have technical assistance agreements, which clearly reinforce their partnership (Univision, 2013).

Certainly, Televisa and Univision have historic alliances in the Latino TV system (Wilkinson, 2009), which have been reinforced since 2012 after their last program license agreement. Univision has access to the content of Televisa and the rights to distribute the cable signals of the Mexican powerhouse in the United States. This is central, because if we review the top 10 most-watched programs in Spanish-language television and cable, 90% of them are Televisa productions (mainly telenovelas), at least in the last five years (Advertising, 2012, 2015). In fact, it could be established that historically the majority of Latino audiences have been built under the Televisa products by the hegemony of Univision distribution, the dominant player in the Latino TV market since the mid-1980s.

The constant migration of Mexicans to the United States since the 1980s (Stoney & Batalova, 2016) is another explanation for the success of Univision during that time, because Mexicans immigrants had been audiences for Televisa content—primarily telenovelas and soccer—and thus Univision content might have worked as cultural continuity in terms of audiovisual cultural consumption (Gómez, Miller, & Dorcé, 2014).

It is important to remember that the Univision Communications television segment has two national broadcasting TV networks—Univision and Unimás—and five national cable channels—Galavision, Univision Tlnovelas, Univision Deportes, Univision Deportes 2, Fusion, and El Rey Network. All of these channels, except Fusion and El Rey, have a significant presence of Televisa content.

In the segment of sports events, Univision Deportes Network channels are fueled by an exclusive content partnership with Televisa and its branch Televisa Deportes Network. Univision Deportes Network’s soccer lineup includes the Mexican National Soccer Team and 10 teams of the Mexican national soccer league (Liga MX). Univision Deportes Network, according to Nielsen reports, is the leader in Spanish-language cable sports networks in prime time and total days since 2013 (“The Numbers,” 2014). This aspect is significant, because there is clear competition in Latino sports channels for audiences, advertising, and obtaining affiliate fees from the pay TV providers (Advertising Age, 2015).

Telemundo has recently signed several coproduction agreements with key Latin American players. As shown in Figure 3, it is clear that this activity aims to increase the company’s capacity of production and distribution of content with the idea to compete not just in the Latino and Latin American TV market but globally in the niche of telenovelas. Telemundo has a distribution agreement with Televisa so that some Telemundo productions will be broadcast in Mexico by Televisa’s third network, Channel 9 Gala TV. This is important in terms of business dynamics and flows, because they can operate more like partners and business networks than competitors according to the market.

Another aspect to note is that Telemundo has secured the home television rights of two Mexican soccer league teams, León and Pachuca, since 2013 and 2014, respectively. This is important because these agreements broke the control of Televisa and TV Azteca of Mexican soccer league TV rights for the first time. In that regard, it is important to recall that Telemundo rights for FIFA tournaments began in 2015 and run through 2022. This includes the 2015 and 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup, the 2018 and 2022 Men’s World Cup, and other FIFA events.

Univisión	Telemundo	Azteca	MundoMax
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Broadcasting Media Partners (92%) (US)</b></li> <li>• <b>Televisa (8%) (MX)</b></li> <li>• Televisa program license agreement and technical assistance agreement (MX)</li> <li>• Venevision program license agreement (VEN)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cadena 3 (MX) and Televen (VEN) distribution agreement</li> <li>• Argos (MX) coproduction agreement</li> <li>• Caracol (COL) coproduction agreement</li> <li>• Globa (BRA) coproduction agreement</li> <li>• Televisa (MX) distribution agreement in MX</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>TV Azteca 100% (MX)</b></li> <li>• Globo (BRA) rights agreement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>RCN 100% (COL)</b></li> <li>• Adicta films (MX) rights agreements</li> <li>• Globo (BRA) rights agreements</li> <li>• Televisa (MX) distribution agreement in MX</li> <li>• Sony Mexico (JPN)</li> <li>• Sony Colombia (JPN) coproduction agreement</li> </ul>

**Figure 3. Examples of different business alliances between Latina/o TV and Latin American audiovisual companies from 2013 to 2015. Compiled by the author with data from the companies.**

Azteca in the United States and MundoMax, have similar business models in that most of the programs are part of the catalog and programming of a Latin American partner. However, at Azteca, this scheme is excessive because almost 90% of its programming came from TV Azteca productions based in Mexico City, its headquarters. Azteca has few productions or original content in the United States; only its regional and national news programs could be identified as original productions from its main facilities in Glendale, California. However, it is important to remember that from 2008 to 2013, Azteca had news anchors based in Azteca's Mexico City studios.

The reasons for this strategy are twofold: It generates low operative expenses and investment for Azteca, and it aims for brand differentiation by showing the "Mexican-ness" as its principal asset in front of the other Latino TV players. At the same time, according to this business model, it could be characterized as a low-cost TV network.

The other important Azteca asset is the broadcast of at least two soccer games of the Mexican soccer league during the weekend from Friday to Sunday. This situation guarantees the network some prime-time audiences.

The case of MundoMax is different in that it produces original content, especially TV shows, and other series. It also purchases shows from other Latin American audiovisual producers such as Adicta Films, Sony Mexico, Sony Colombia, and Globo. It also bought a popular Turkish series named *Sultan*. In the category of sports events, MundoMax does not show any interest in competing at the moment. After the end of Fox International Channels' participation in this network, it may not be surprising if in-house production and purchases decrease and become more dependent on the RCN catalog content. In fact, after the change, RCN decided to cancel its news division.

The question that arises here is why Fox International Channels sold its participation in MundoFox. There is not an official answer by the company. But from the view of this research, one possible answer is that in the short term, the global media giant did not have enough growth in the Latino broadcasting market to continue competing against the two Latino champions Univision and Telemundo, even though it is evident that the company had the financial muscle to continue injecting investments and distributing catalog content. Thus, this example confirms that the size and scale of the company is not enough to compete in particular markets—in this case, in the Latino market and its subsystem.

Following these guidelines, LATV network has established, since 2012, an important alliance with the Mexican MVS Television as a content supplier, because MVS Communications owns radio stations, pay TV channels, and Dish-México. This Mexican company provides some rights and licenses agreements of these shows to LATV: *Tu Casa TV*, *Lucha Libre*, *El último pitazo*, *Locas por el Fútbol*, and *Roomies*. These programs are broadcast in Mexico by the pay TV channel 52MX. With this alliance, LATV clearly follows the strategy of the majority of Latino TV networks to offer a significant amount of Mexican content to attract Mexican American audiences. At the same time, this strategy aims to keep expenses low, because it is cheaper to buy this kind of content rather than produce original material in-house. LATV is the only over-the-air TV network that combines English and Spanish language in its programming.

The other core Latino TV network, Estrella TV, is disadvantaged when compared to its competitors, because it does not have any direct support or alliance with a Latin American player. Actually, little institutional and organizational information about this network is available. Estrella TV is a division of Liberman Broadcasting. The investment management firm Oaktree Capital owns 26% of Liberman Broadcasting. Oaktree is also the largest shareholder of the *Los Angeles Times*. In terms of its content, Estrella TV, which began to operate as a national broadcasting network in 2011 but started as a local TV station in 2009, has its headquarters in Burbank, California, and follows the Mexican-ness formula of other competitors, but with the particularity that its in-house content and programs exploit controversial issues and the popular Mexican slang, *albúres*, as well as some kinds of popular comedy that were trendy in the Mexican movies of the 1980s. Surprisingly, Estrella TV did not produce or broadcast telenovelas until 2015; rather, its programming is based on talk shows, reality shows, sketch comedy, news magazines, *Lucha Libre*, soccer, and sensationalist news. In some ways, this strategy has been successful for the network, because it has been growing constantly in terms of audiences, affiliates, and advertising. To consolidate those results, Estrella signed a multiyear deal with Cisneros Media Distributors—formerly Venevision International—to rerun some successful Venevision telenovelas and Cisneros Media Distributors has the worldwide distribution rights of the Estrella content library. In addition, Estrella's production does not generate big expenses. In that respect, it is possible to identify Estrella TV, LATV, and Azteca as low-cost networks.

A question that emerges after this analysis concerns the relationship between producing versus acquiring programming. It is clear that this trend is not only an economic decision but a cultural-linguistic one. However, this research takes into account that the different dynamics and strategies of the Latino players differ from one another in order to obtain a successful content.

After this overview of the core of the Latino TV networks, it is clear that the Latino TV market is a significant emergent market in the U.S. communication system and could be characterized as a subsystem because it has its own particularities and dynamics at different levels. These include the production and consumption of specific TV genres, the construction of a Latinidad identity, the use of two languages (with Spanish being dominant), and close articulation with Latin American producers and companies.

### **Final Remarks**

This article has established that the Latino TV market is a dynamic and important subsystem of the U.S. communication system and that it reflects in some way the concentration and consolidation of the totality of the hegemonic media corporations in the United States and Latin America. However, at the same time, some Latino, Latin American companies, and independent audiovisual producers have been taking advantage of the emergent, Latino TV subsystem through the integration of Latino and Latin American audiovisual markets as regional multimedia networks.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from this article is that the nucleus of the core Latino TV companies can be characterized at two levels. First, in the case of the dominant companies, Univision and Telemundo, the latter has a major financial and distribution backup with Comcast, and the former still has the best numbers in terms of audiences and advertising. Nevertheless, it is possible that in the near future

Univision will need a new owner or partner to counterbalance its principal competitor if it wants to push for the exclusive rights of important events such as the FIFA World Cup and other global or regional events.

On the second level are Azteca, MundoMax, LATV, and Estrella TV. These companies, in terms of their corporate ownership, alliances, and business models, are characterized as low-cost TV networks. Regardless, they are growing and surviving in the competitive Latino TV market. In the near future, it may not be surprising to see one of these companies disappear. However, in the meantime, some Mexican anchors and Latin American independent producers are taking advantage of the possibilities that these low-cost networks are offering to circulate their audiovisual content.

In relation to the audiovisual flows and counterflows, the dynamic Latino TV is driving South-North flows and integrating more of the Latino and Latin American audiovisual markets. However, it is clear that these audiovisual flows are the consequence of a transnational and global market that has been shaped by the marketization of communications and corporate ownership convergence in the Americas.

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