

**BROADCASTING PLURALISM IN MALTA  
TEN YEARS LATER  
A Qualitative Perspective**

**MARIKA FSADNI B.A. (Hons.), M.B.A. (Brunel)**

**A report on Qualitative Research undertaken for**

**The Broadcasting Authority, Malta**

**Examining the effects of broadcasting pluralism on programme  
content, broadcasting standards and the public broadcaster.**



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## **Message from the Chairman**

As part of a three-year plan to assess the effects of broadcasting on various sectors of Maltese society, the Broadcasting Authority has so far commissioned three qualitative surveys about the effect that a particular aspect or aspects of broadcasting might have on a specific sector of society.

Dr Joe Grixti M.A. (Oxon.), Ph.D. (Bristol) carried out the first qualitative research dealing with the effects of television and radio programmes on the attitudes or behaviour of young people aged 14 and under. This research has already been published by the Authority in April 2000.

The Authority is now publishing its second qualitative research which explores in depth the development and effects of pluralism in television and radio broadcasting undertaken by Ms Marika Fsadni of Messrs M. Fsadni and Associates, Marketing and HR Development Consultants.

The substantive issues explored by Ms Fsadni include the following:

- how pluralism has affected the broadcasting scenario with regard to diversity of programme content, broadcasting standards and immediacy of news coverage and reporting;
- how it has affected the monopoly previously enjoyed by the public broadcasting services and what impacts has pluralism had on the public broadcasting sector;
- how broadcasting revenue has been divided amongst the various stations and whether cut-throat competition in this sector has resulted in better programming standards or in a lowering of standards;
- assessment of the impact of cable television vis-à-vis terrestrial television;
- assessment of the level of training of broadcasters.

As part of her task in conducting research on the development and effects of pluralism in television and radio broadcasting, Ms Fsadni, *inter alia*, drew up a literature review contained in the Bibliography section of her research, held 500 one-to-one interviews where the respondent quota sample was drawn up to represent a cross-section of Malta's entire population based on the following segmentation variables: age, gender, home town and occupation level and, furthermore, conducted personal interviews with the chairpersons /

## ***Message from the Chairman***

chief executive officers of all licensed television and radio stations. Thereby, a comparative analysis of the perceptions / behaviour of the Maltese population with the management of these stations was conducted. Finally, eight focus group sessions were held with respondents which were selected to represent a cross-section of the Maltese population aged 16 years and over, with each focus group session representing a specific age group. The object of this population representation was to delve deeper into the qualitative televisioner / radio-listener behavioural patterns of each age / gender market segment.

As evidenced from this publication, Ms Fsadni, who possesses a B.A. (Hons.) degree in Business Management from the University of Malta and a Master's degree in Business Administration from Henley Management College, Brunel University, has carried out an in-depth study on broadcasting pluralism in Malta. She has, in a methodic way presented her findings in this publication and has, in sum concluded that, notwithstanding the teething troubles of the beginning, pluralism in broadcasting has come to stay. There is no doubt that these last twelve years have resulted in a different broadcasting landscape than that to which we were accustomed. Notably amongst those factors highlighted in the study are the development of independent production houses which have generated more jobs in the audio-visual sector, people in general have become increasingly confident on camera and more diversity in programme content has been achieved. On the minus side of things, and these should be addressed in greater depth, pluralism in broadcasting is perpetuating the bipartisan divide in Maltese society even in the broadcasting media especially in phone-in programmes on the political stations which seem to be more aimed at fomenting the political divide rather than as serving as a means of expressing one's thoughts in a language which is appropriate to broadcasting.

The Authority, which is very much involved in the regulation of broadcasting, welcomes the main findings of this study and will strive to address them in the future.

Chief Justice Emeritus Dr Joseph Said Pullicino B.A. (Hons.), LL.D.  
Chairman

26<sup>th</sup> March 2003

**To My Family  
For All Their Encouragement and Support**



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**CHAPTER ONE**

***BROADCASTING PLURALISM IN MALTA  
- THE EARLY YEARS***

***“ ... In broadcasting there are risks at every corner, and it should really be a question of being sensible. I think that we are at a point where we are handing out the tools for our society to mature further. I think society will mature further ... People will realize that the medium has to be used sensibly and with a level of maturity. The viewer will also have to be sensible ...”***

***Dr Michael Frendo,  
Former Minister responsible for the Broadcasting Sector***

***1.1 The Advent of Broadcasting Pluralism - White Paper Issued***

In September 1990, a White Paper proposing radical reforms in the local broadcasting sector was issued, which was reported to have had a notably “lack of reaction from people” [The Sunday Times, 7 October 1990, “*A Revolution in the Way of Expression*”].

Dr Michael Frendo, then Parliamentary Secretary whose Secretariat was directly responsible for the new broadcasting system, claimed in an interview with the said newspaper that “this lack of reaction” was not surprising but disappointing in the light of the many complaints which the then current state of affairs had given rise to. Dr Frendo stated that:

***“ ... The White Paper is a radical change, and we would like to be in a position to manage that change. So we are suggesting that the radio scene is opened up almost***



completely, perhaps even more than some other European states, and that cable television is introduced. Cable television has certain advantages, one of these being that it can be interactive. So we said let's go for cable first, and allow the private stations first on cable TV. We are not at any point excluding that there will come a time when the government will say: What we've done for radio, we can now do for television. I think it is only fair that, once we are trying out cable television, we should give it a bit of breathing space. That is all we're saying ..."

The Sunday Times correspondent commentated whether this may be perceived by people that Government is not keeping to its ***commitment to pluralism***, when no private stations are licensed outside cable TV, and hence giving protection to cable TV.

Dr Frendo explained this by calling it a cautious approach:

"... An approach that is intended to focus our energies – at this particular point in time – on upgrading our public television service. But I would hasten to add that it is not dogmatic, and that the general trend of the White Paper is to liberalise all the sectors. The point is "should you do it in stages?" Our choice, for television, was to do it in stages ...

We are a small country, and we should use most of our resources – I would say all of our resources at this stage – to reach the facelift that public television needs and deserves ..."

As regards '***public broadcasting***', the Paper proposed that the *Public Broadcasting Services Ltd [PBS]* be set up to supersede the then existing *Xandir Malta* and PBS was expected to be leaders in providing

quality television to the Maltese public in terms of programming, news and analysis. In this same interview, Dr Frendo added:

“ ... I think that public broadcasting has a very particular function. It has to be more educational, and it must have more of a cultural input than other stations. It would be unrealistic to put that pressure on private stations. It would be useful, and in their interest, for private stations to carry such programmes, but you cannot impose that. Public television can do those things which may not necessarily make commercial sense, but which are necessary for the development of broadcasting, education, and culture in this country. So funding will have to come from Government, but there will also be funding from advertising. Its independence will depend on the structure of the organization, and also – most of all, I would say – on the individuals who are going to work there ...

We intend to produce a high quality public broadcasting service. We are calling it Public Broadcasting Service as a question of choice. It will not be a ‘state’ broadcasting service; the difference is not only semantic. It will bring our public broadcasting in line with that of most European states ...

The present state of affairs at *Xandir Malta* is untenable, which is why we are suggesting the White Paper. Although there has been a clear improvement since 1987, we have not reached the levels of quality which this country needs and deserves. I think that the structure of the place, the limitations, the fact that it forms part of Telemalta, all condition the people there to some extent. It has certainly conditioned broadcasting. We need to break out of this mould and create a new scenario. We have to create a public broadcasting service that has professionalism as its

main motto. We have to create a fresh, open situation where people are provocative, are journalists. Malta television has lost its lustre ...”

As regards **the new role of the Broadcasting Authority**, Dr Frendo commented:

“ ... In my view it would be more appropriate to create a stronger structure underneath the Board, because that is really the area where the Broadcasting Authority needs strengthening. Those are the people who will be dealing with issues as they arise on a day-to-day basis. We need people who are of excellence in broadcasting, i.e. professionals ...”

In the same interview, the Sunday Times correspondent also asked on whether the stations could be outrightly owned by the political parties and if so what stance would the Broadcasting Authority be taking. As regards ***the possibility of constant political indoctrination***, Dr Frendo commented:

“ ... We are not excluding anybody from owning a station, and that includes the political parties. The White Paper looks at this issue and says that the Broadcasting Authority has got a Constitutional provision that it must enforce. This is the question of impartiality. The complete liberalization of broadcasting, in particular radio, should in itself meet this question of impartiality. I think – and this is my own personal opinion – that the political parties would be ill advised to set up a station which is geared to indoctrination. A station which is simply a medium for indoctrination would reflect the nature of the party which wants to be in government. I think that parties should give an image of how they will govern, of how they want to continue to

govern, by having stations that are credible. I think it presents a challenge to the political parties ...”

Looking at this possible eventuality from a televiewer/radio-listener’s perspective, the newspaper correspondent asked what ***protection or ‘safeguard’*** will there be against having televised versions of the political parties’ newspapers. Dr Frendo remarked that people will realize that TV and radio will have to be used sensibly and with a certain level of maturity:

“ ... In broadcasting there are risks at every corner, and it should really be a question of being sensible. I think that we are at a point where we are handing out the tools for our society to mature further. I think society will mature further. I am very positive about this. People will realize that the medium has to be used sensibly and with a level of maturity. The viewer will also have to be sensible. The fact that there is an immediate choice of stations is in itself a contribution towards education. When you can switch easily from one station to another, it is easy to make comparisons, unlike the situation where some people stick to one newspaper only ...”

From a broadcaster’s perspective, Dr Frendo claimed that whether the people setting up the stations are nationalists or labourites, is not the issue. He argued that:

“ ... The point is not whether they are Nationalists or Labour, but whether they are professionals. That is what interests us, and that is the mentality we have to instill. We have to make the quality leap. The people who think in terms of ‘Nationalist’ and ‘Labour’ are not in a position to assist in the achievement of a quality leap in broadcasting in this country. We should have professionals with their

own private opinions, and who still are professional enough to present a fair picture ...”

As regards *the availability and training of broadcasters*, the Sunday Times correspondent commented that one of *Xandir Malta*’s biggest problems was that people were trained on the job, so if they learnt badly they remained convinced that the bad way was the right way. Given this situation, the correspondent enquired on Dr Frendo’s views on what training opportunities were to be available for people in the industry and also on whether there was enough supply of people to work in this industry. Dr Frendo answered:

“ ... We are developing a Training Institute, but it needs to be given more and more potential. We need to have training courses. I would like to see more young people in television, people who come out of University and say “I am going to be a journalist; I’m going into broadcasting.” Young people should see this White Paper as a great opportunity for them. The legislation will only be a framework. It must be the young people of this country who make it work. I emphasise young people, because what we now have in broadcasting is either people who have been there for many years, or people who have only just come in. There have been a few training programmes, with people sent on attachment overseas. We even had people who went under their own steam, which says a lot for them. This will be an ongoing process, and it will be up to everybody involved to make it work. I expect that at the beginning there will be a big rush and nobody will know what is to happen in the market until it settles. But we should not be afraid of this, because really it is a revolution in the way of expression. It is really a very positive thing...

The Training Institute for the Media should be given a place of importance and we are looking at this possibility

even as we come towards the new year. We have also discussed the possibility of training through attachment to, for instance, *RAI*. We have already discussed the situation with the Head of Training at the *BBC* who was in Malta some time ago, and who should be coming back here very soon. I discussed the possibility also in Holland. Some people can be trained by going through a course. Others will be better trained through attachment to a particular station, because they might already have the basics. A major part of the whole exercise will be the possibility of overseas training. As regards the Training Institute, we are at the stage of getting the right premises together and getting the proper funding for the facilities. The Institute will have to be developed on a very professional level with proper staffing. There are people who have shown an interest in doing this and I think the Institute will develop into a major school in this country...”

On the issue of ***the long-term financial sustainability of television and radio stations***, the reporter commented that the Maltese industry turned over Lm4 million annually, 29 per cent of which goes to television and 2.5 per cent to radio and enquired on how would all the new television and radio stations be expected to survive, given that many advertising companies already commented [at the time] that ‘we are heavily overmilking the same cow’. Dr Frendo warned:

“...This is an important consideration for anybody who is putting an application to start a station. The White Paper is formulating a framework. It is up to the private entrepreneurs to do their homework properly. They know how much advertising revenue they can expect. Having said that, broadcasting itself is an industry. And broadcasting itself may be able to push that advertising figure further up, because it will stimulate more competition, new interest. Broadcasting grows with the

growth of the economy. A vibrant, active economy will channel some of that money into broadcasting. I think we will be creating a new economic sector for this country ...”

As regards the *introduction of cable television* in Malta, the reporter asked what would happen once the fifteen-year exclusive licence given to the selected cable television operator expires. Dr Frendo replied:

“ ... Well, the monopoly of the cable operator is not ensured. So the 15-year licence allows the operator to have a stretch to recover investment and obviously to make money. When the exclusive period is over – depending always on the government of the time, and on the technology, and on the market structure – then it will be completely open. There may be other cable operators. The other licence may be renewed. It is really an open question ...”

Aptly entitled: “*A Revolution in the Way of Expression*”, this Sunday Times interview article published over ten years ago, highlighted a number of significant issues which were about to revolutionize Malta’s entire broadcasting sector for the next decade and up to the present day!

Some ten years after the White Paper proposing these broadcasting reforms was issued, the Author asks: Do we all agree with the introduction of pluralism in radio and television broadcasting in Malta? Have we succeeded in “making a quality leap” in programme content and broadcasting standards? Are accuracy, immediacy and impartiality always maintained in news coverage and reporting? To what extent, if at all, has the broadcasting sector in Malta become too institutionalized and politicized? Is there a level playing field for television and radio stations? Do we have enough trained professionals in the field? Has cable television affected terrestrial television? Has the public broadcasting sector “set standards for the

industry”)? What about advertising revenue? Has Malta’s aggregate ‘advertising cake’ grown enough over these years to ensure the financial sustainability of local television and radio stations? And how do we envisage the future of local television and radio broadcasting?

These are some essential pertinent questions which one asks when assessing the development and effects of the introduction of pluralism in the local television and radio broadcasting sector. These questions will, in fact, be determining the whole scope of this qualitative research project.

## ***1.2 Qualitative Research Objectives - The Development and Effects of Pluralism in TV and Radio Broadcasting in Malta***

In the light of the forgoing section, this Research Project attempts to achieve a good understanding of the perceptions, opinions, influences and attitudes of local radio listeners and television viewers on the development and effects of pluralism in radio and television broadcasting in Malta. More specifically, the Author aims at exploring seven major research areas/issues, namely:

- A. How has pluralism affected the broadcasting scenario with regard to:
  - a. diversity of programme content,
  - b. broadcasting standards, and
  - c. immediacy of news coverage and reporting.
- B. How has pluralism in broadcasting affected the monopoly previously enjoyed by the public broadcasting services and what impact has pluralism had on the public broadcasting sector?
- C. How has broadcasting revenue been divided amongst the various stations and whether cutthroat competition in this



sector has resulted in better programming standards or in a lowering of standards.

- D. To assess the impact of cable television vis-à-vis terrestrial television.
- E. To assess the level of training of broadcasters.
- F. The role of the Broadcasting Authority as perceived by the general public.
- G. The future of the broadcasting sector in Malta.

However, before proceeding with exploring these issues in today's reality, the Author deems it opportune to draw up a qualitative account, from both a radio-listener/televviewer's and broadcaster's perspective, of the main developments which have characterized Malta's radio and television broadcasting sector from the introduction of pluralism to the present day.

### ***1.3 Broadcasting Pluralism in Malta - The Early Years***

***“ ... Properly used, the media could be a powerful instrument for edifying change. Badly handled, the media could be a harmful factor ...”***

***Mr J.G. Vassallo,  
Newspaper Columnist***

#### ***1.3.1 Institutionalised and Politicised Broadcasting***

***“ ... Our position was made very clear at the time of the parliamentary debate. The Authority is convinced that impartiality should be present in each and every station, and the Government has since acknowledged***

*this. We will permit a slant in the station's editorial policy, perhaps related to the positioning of news items in order of importance. But we will never tolerate their outright rejection ..."*

*Mr Antoine J. Ellul,  
Former Chief Executive, Broadcasting Authority*

On the publication of the White Paper outlining the proposed broadcasting reforms, Il-Ġens [28 September 1990, "*X'Qalulna dwar il-White Paper tax-Xandir*"] interviewed Mr Joe [Peppi] Azzopardi, then still a front-liner of Alternattiva Demokratika [AD], now director of production house *Where's Everybody?* and presenter of *Xarabank*, who stated that:

"... The AD were still assessing the contents of the Paper, however the party had already taken a stand that the proposed broadcasting pluralism should not end up becoming a monopolistic broadcast of ideas and information of those who either have political, economic or religious clout ..."

Rev. Fr. Joe Borg, then editor of Il-Ġens, agreed with Mr Azzopardi. In fact, in his article entitled "*La Imparzzjali u Lanqas Bilancjat?*" [Il-Ġens, 5 October 1990], Rev. Fr. Borg wrote:

"... Naturally, my observation may raise a number of issues and difficulties. However, the most important, in my opinion, is that broadcasting pluralism may end up primarily meeting the needs of the rich and/or powerful. This is a serious objection ..."

In a preceding article entitled "*Lejn Qabza Kwalitattiva fix-Xandir*", on the same paper [28 September 1990], Rev. Fr. Borg describes the White Paper as "a challenge" and claims that one should have a

confident and optimistic outlook on the proposed future. He argued that:

“ ... Every challenge brings with it some degree of anxiety and uncertainty ... however a challenge also denotes confidence and optimism. And the challenge which the White Paper presents us with is no exception. The financial difficulties of setting up and successfully manage a radio station are many. Even addressing the human resource element is also difficult ... However, this discussion should be taken on with optimism and confidence in a positive future and not with apprehension ...”

By March 1991, the government of the day offered temporary radio licences to the Nationalist Party, the Labour Party and the Church – three organizations which it had named as the island’s “national institutions”. The government was heavily criticized for issuing these temporary licences where the Bill comprising the broadcasting reforms, although finalized, had not as yet been passed by parliament. The General Elections were then approaching and the government of the day had taken this decision so as to maintain its electoral commitment of introducing broadcasting pluralism in Malta. However, an obvious question which inevitably ensued this development was ‘Why issue temporary licences to these “national institutions” and not to others?’

In an interview article aptly entitled “*What Makes an Institution National?*” in The Sunday Times [17 March 1991], Dr Michael Frendo, was actually asked this question. He answered:

“ ... We looked at the three institutions that clearly qualified. They certainly have a broad case of representation. This is what we are talking about really; the three institutions which have the broadest base of representation in the country. I do not think there is any

doubt that the Nationalist Party, the Labour Party and the Church are broadly based. They represent society to a large extent. They have wide-level representation. That was the deciding criterion ...”

In this same article, the issue of how ‘balance and impartiality’ were going to be regulated by the Broadcasting Authority was also raised. The Bill, which then had become an Act, did not specify the regulation in each radio and television station *per se*. The Sunday Times enquired “If the Nationalist station plays its own tune all the time, and the Labour Party plays theirs, will this be construed as balance in broadcasting?”. To this, Dr Frendo replied:

“ ... I think it would be very unwise for any one of those stations to take that sort of attitude. If a station does not have credibility, I hope it does not have listeners. I do not think that a station – in the normal run of things – should take on that attitude. The Broadcasting Act says that it is up to the Broadcasting Authority to make this judgment in the end. The Authority should look at the whole broadcasting scene and decide whether those criteria are satisfied or not. It can take any measures it wants to, if it thinks they are not satisfied; interfere in programming, give directives. We must not look on these stations as if they will operate in a vacuum. They will operate in a very tight legal framework ...

The Broadcasting Authority, before this act, had the simple obligation of presenting a financial report. Now it will also have to present, every year the results of independent audience research. This act obliges the Broadcasting Authority to monitor public opinion. I think it should have that function ...”

The ‘balance and impartiality’ issues were also addressed in Ms Daphne Caruana Galizia’s article “*The New Radio*”, [The Sunday Times, 1 September 1991]. The journalist claimed that the Constitution of Malta requiring the Broadcasting Authority to ensure that the principles of balance and impartiality be observed “in such sound and television broadcasting services as may be provided in Malta”, may be interpreted to apply to “the programme output of each and every broadcasting service operating locally”. Ms Caruana Galizia reported Mr Antoine J. Ellul, Chief Executive of the Authority, to have said:

“ ... Our position was made very clear at the time of the parliamentary debate. The Authority is convinced that impartiality should be present in each and every station, and the government has since acknowledged this. We will permit a slant in the station’s editorial policy, perhaps related to the positioning of news items in order of importance. But we will never tolerate their outright rejection.”

The Authority’s recently released annual report says “The Authority believes that the purpose of the new broadcasting structure should be to create opportunities for new services, and to provide new outlets for expression and communication and to originate platforms for particular interest groups or lobbies.”

The Authority is now insisting on its interpretation of the exigencies of impartiality, and has made it known that it wants fair coverage of political and industrial controversy, and of matters relating to current public policy. “Impartiality”, says the Authority, “must be preserved” ...”

Monitoring and keeping track of ten radio stations presented the Authority with a major problem, claimed Mr Ellul, in that:

“ ... Our work will increase tenfold. We have to keep an eye on all ten stations. We must try to devise a reasonable plan which will keep us informed of all that is going on. We want to keep pace with developments.” With the new situation, wholesale monitoring will be impossible. Most of the stations will be on air for 24 hours. Mr Ellul said that the only solution is to have sporadic monitoring. “We will also be reacting to complaints.” What action will be taken against the guilty? “There is a range of sanctions, which includes a formal reprimand, a financial penalty or, in the last resort, the shortening of the licence period or the outright revocation of the right to broadcast ...”

In the same article, Ms Caruana Galizia asked for the views of the then private commercial radio applicant Mr Joe Grima of *Radio One Live* on the pre-allocation of these radio licences to the three national institutions. He was reported to have been “outraged by this pre-allocation of licences”. He argued that:

“ ... This has been too much of a head start for The Group. Are they afraid of the private stations, or what? Apart from that, I think the future looks bright. There will be competition. Various people will get the chance to say what they think, and that’s good ...”

### ***1.3.2 ‘Balance and Impartiality’ on Television Broadcasting***

What about television pluralism and the issues of ‘balance and impartiality of political and industrial controversy’? In the advent of pluralism in Maltese television, Mr J.G. Vassallo, in his article “*Broadcasting: Quantity vs Quality*” which appeared on The Times in 19 June 1993 referred to the real problems and implications of allocating new television broadcasting licences, i.e. he asked whether it is wise to have two main political parties running their own TV and radio stations in such a small country like Malta? This and other

pertinent questions were raised in The Times editorial of 27 February 1993, which held that the then prevailing situation called for some “serious thinking”. The editorial asserted that:

“ ... The real issue goes beyond that over the availability of channels and other associated matters. In such a small country as Malta, is it wise to have two main parties running their own TV and radio stations? Is this likely to increase or reduce political polarisation in Malta? What would be the direct impact of this development on society?

Maybe, a way out of the quandary would be for the Broadcasting Authority, or the government, to set up a television station which would be run by all the eligible political forces sharing airtime in terms of agreed criteria, leaving the remaining channels for genuine independent competitors ...”

On 8 August 1993, The Malta Independent carried a news item entitled “*TV, Radio Monitors Pledge Commitment to Quality*” indicating the new Broadcasting Authority board’s [set up that month] determination to address three main issues: a. allocating TV licences; b. amending the Broadcasting Act according to the Constitution [where broadcasting was concerned] and c. most importantly, to ensure that radio stations stick to their “promise of performance”. Mr Antoine J. Ellul, the Authority’s Chief Executive was reported to have said:

“ ... The prime objective of the Broadcasting Authority in the prevailing climate is to maintain acceptable standards in broadcasting rather than interfere in what is being transmitted, unless a licensee is flagrantly out of tune ... Mr Ellul feels radios ought to conduct a soul-searching exercise ...”

The Authority's outgoing board member, Dr Austin Sammut, warned:

“ ... The competition among radio stations has started to bite. They are now increasingly beginning to look like hungry dogs tearing at each other's necks. There is even competition for frequencies. The honeymoon is definitely over ...”

Moreover, the editorial of *The Malta Independent* [7 November 1993] entitled “*Acceptable Fare*” addressed the so-called “unresolved timebomb” of the apparent conflict between the Constitution and the Broadcasting Act on the issue of ‘balance and impartiality of political and industrial controversy’. It also indicated what the Broadcasting Authority “should be doing”:

“ ... The new chairman of the Broadcasting Authority, Dr Joe Pirotta, made it clear in a press interview that he is aware of its conflict. He said that the Authority is bound by the Constitution - the Authority is bound to ensure that all opinions should have equal access to the media and should be allocated equal time when it comes to airing views and policies ...

One would think that the Authority should also interest itself in ensuring that broadcasters, licensed by the Authority, should be fair and impartial in the presentation of news. Surely, the Authority ought to make sure that news should be separated from opinion, and that news bulletins report the facts with objectivity. The Authority should have the authority to bring offenders to order - if need be to the extent of allocating the limited broadcasting wave-lengths to the interests that are capable of serving listeners and viewers with acceptable fare ...”



### **1.3.3 Programming Content and Broadcasting Standards**

***“ ... The law states specifically that the considerations must be commercial viability, programme quality and technical aspects ...”***

***Mr Antoine J. Ellul,  
Former Chief Executive, Broadcasting Authority***

In her article “*The New Radio*”, [The Sunday Times, 1 September 1991], Ms Daphne Caruana Galizia argues that the “national institutions”:

*“ ... Radio Super One [MLP], Radio 101 [PN] and Radio RTK [the Church] have a head start on the private commercial stations, which have not yet been granted a licence nor allocated a frequency. Their licences were issued before the enactment of the broadcasting laws ...”*

Hence, these three national institutional radio stations were in a position to begin broadcasts in September 1991, while five applications from the private commercial sector were received and were still being processed by the Broadcasting Authority. These private stations comprised *Island Sound* [Frank Salt and Jon Rosser], *Radio K...* [Ian De Cesare and Kevin De Cesare], *Radju MAS* [the Social Action Movement], *Radio One Live* [Joe Grima and Godfrey Grima], and *Smash Radio* [Joe Baldacchino].

As to how the Broadcasting Authority evaluates each application received, Ms Caruana Galizia quoted Mr Antoine J. Ellul, [Chief Executive of the Authority] to have said:

*“ ... The law states specifically that the considerations must be commercial viability, programme quality and technical aspects. We are examining each application on that basis and a decision will be taken only then. A decision is*

expected to be taken sometime before the middle of November ...”

As regards stations maintaining good broadcasting standards, Mr Ellul was also reported to have said:

“ ... I hope that the future will hold out certain benefits. Stations might let standards sink while competing for audiences. The competitive element will hopefully upgrade standards, but then of course, this has to be tempered with control. That said, the future of broadcasting in Malta might be in better shape ...”

On 5 March 1992, a year after the three temporary licences were offered to the “three national institutions”, Mr Joe Grima in his article “*Prevailing Situation Threatening Pluralism in Broadcasting*” [The Times, 5 March 1992] claimed that:

“ ... He had no qualms over contending that neither the political parties nor the Catholic Church in Malta should have been offered a licence a year ago. That, he argues, was a mistake. For many years, Malta had had nothing but state broadcasts. A country with only state transmission was not democratic enough, Mr Grima said. To have free, democratic expression, citizens could be afforded the opportunity to voice their opinion for and against what went on in the country without interference. The liberisation of the media was an expression of democracy. The Broadcasting Law had been a good basis for pluralism. In time, the law could be refined through the experience acquired ...

So far, Mr Grima argued, it could not be said that the level of broadcasting, aspired for by the law, had been reached. One positive result was an amelioration of the output by the

state media, on both television and radio. On their part, the party radios did not compare with it. The new stations had only increased the amount of records played on the air. This is one thing the law had not been interested in, Mr Grima observed. The party radios had not contributed towards improving the level of broadcasting. There were some attempts which succeeded, such as in news presentation on *Radio 101*. But while the form may have changed, the substance had not ...”

He also argued that:

“ ... The government should reconsider the role played by its stations, the parties’ and the Church’s radio and not permit them to compete commercially with private stations, Mr Grima said. For Mr Grima, pluralism should emerge from the confrontation between state and private radio stations. Anything in between should go. Stations owned by political parties, the Church or the state should have alternative forms of income.

As things stood today, Mr Grima warned, the much wished for pluralism in broadcasting was in danger. Stations with intentions other than commercial viability [such as political or religious] could survive. The price would be private radio stations without which, Mr Grima held, the experiment in pluralism would have failed. The PN, the MLP and the Church were the first to be offered the licence – and with special conditions at that. The situation should have been reversed, making it harder for such institutions to have their own stations ...”

Since the inception of broadcasting pluralism in Malta and all through the years up to the present day, the Broadcasting Authority had made and taken several measures to improve the quality standards of

programme content and broadcasting standards of radio and television broadcasting.

In January 1993, the Authority issued “*Guidelines on Current Affairs Programming on all Broadcasting Media.*” This code was drawn up in terms of Section 20(1)(b) of the Broadcasting Act, 1991. The Code stated that broadcasters have to be impartial in the services they transmit, but the Broadcasting Authority will allow some slanting “within an overall programme framework of balance and impartiality”.

These Guidelines also stipulated that broadcasting licensees must not only observe the constitutional requirements of balance and impartiality, but they “shall also not let the licensee’s or any particular persons’ or bodies’ views predominate in the programming of the station. The broadcasting services “must generally reflect and respect the values of the society in which they operate ... (and) seek to widen the knowledge of the audience”. They must be objective, which “implies unbiased reporting, uncoloured by the sentiments and inclinations or subjective views of the broadcaster”. Impartiality “implies being fair and just in reporting and presenting the facts without favouring any particular interest or interests involved”.

On current affairs, the code says the right of the public to information “extends beyond that provided in news bulletins”. To be properly understood “news developments and matters of concern to the public must be placed in a context”. This is achieved by current affairs programming delving in depth into the background of events, helping listeners to understand and assess their significance. “There is a primary obligation to be fair to all interests involved in the issues which are dealt with in broadcast programmes,” the code says. In seeking to establish balance in current affairs programming, it is accepted that all significant view-points should be represented in an equitable manner.

Unfortunately, some broadcasters perceived these newly-drawn up guidelines as a step backwards towards restrictions formerly imposed by the law. The Times [1 May 1993, “*Broadcasters consider new Guidelines a Step Backwards*”], reported that during the official launch of the Code, the broadcasters present argued that:

“ ... From state monopoly in the broadcasting sector, liberalization was introduced but the Authority seemed to be imposing restrictions, going back to the starting point. All broadcasters agreed with a point made by several of those present that the Authority should take action against broadcasters breaking the rules “even if it meant closing down a station” – though they were not referring to the new code in particular ...”

The editorial of The Times, [27 July 1993, “*Broadcasting Without End?*”] cautioned against the low quality standards attained by the local radio stations. The editorial commented:

“ ... Radio listeners are today overloaded with quantity and under-supplied with quality. The latter is always one for shedding, even before the going gets tough. The private-station providers of either one commodity or the other are at the mercy of the market. The market, if it operates as it should, must soon enter its merciless stage. Who will be its victims when Madame Guillotine screams for blood? ...

This fear must be the guiding darkness behind every decision being taken by private owners in their scramble for an audience rating that will justify advertisers placing their money where the listeners are. Where are the listeners? Can they be attracted away from the station that has become a favourite? Little wonder that surveys are searched inside out to discover formulae that seem to be doing all right for some. At the very forefront of such

frantic activity, station owners must pose this dreadful question - and answer it: how can they put their programmes together in such a way as to wean listeners away from what has, by now become a Pavlovian tendency to switch to X or Y or Z regardless of quality? There are those who have decided that anything goes if they are to remain in the broadcasting league ...”

In his article “*Whining on Air*”, [The Sunday Times, 19 December 1993, “*Wide Angle*” column] Mr Lino Spiteri describes his perception of the state of affairs of radio pluralism in Malta at the time:

“ ... Tune in these days to any one of the radio stations which make up our wireless broadcasting plurality, and as likely as not you have someone sweet-selling seasonal wares into your consumerist ears. Which to a considerable degree is no different from, and not infrequently better than, finding some coloured politician or political activist hard-selling his party’s line to your overflowing mind ...

The available FM bands were rapidly occupied by a strong quantitative spectrum which, in reality, splits roughly into three categories, with each category criss-crossing across the type-grid. The two major political parties offered, surprise surprise, blatant or at best unsubtle political journalism. Mother Church [via her impressive Media Centre] offered all her children all that is fit for them to listen to, plus some straight prayers and a little politics in crude or subliminal form. The private stations offered music. And more music. The odd – at times quite odd – interview. And a smatter of news, occasionally unashamedly culled from the printed press without the least attempt to rehash or at least reheat it. Let alone to credit the source ...”

In turn, Mr Peter Paul Sammut also put forth his views and perceptions of the local radio broadcasting scenario as at the start of 1994. In his article “*Making Ripples on the Airwaves*”, which appeared on The Malta Independent’s *Gallerija* [30 January 1994], he claimed:

“ ... It is nearly three years since the Nationalist Party’s station *Radio 101* slipped onto the local FM band. And almost two years since the first of the privately owned stations began broadcasting. Time enough to assess the current state of ‘air’ play since pluralisation first polygamised our airwaves. So with all these additional voices coming at us from our transistors. are we better informed, more tolerant (or less so)? Are we more broad minded? Some cynics might contend that the ‘bumper to bumper’ congestion of our FM band merely means that these days we have the choice of tuning into Mr Blobby on no fewer than nine FM stations ...

So how are the patients faring? The medical metaphor is intentional. In some cases I fear that not even major, and possibly already unwise, surgical intervention will save some of the patients. Indeed some are already exhibiting signs of terminal decline. It’s a vicious circle. If the programmes are dross and the broadcasters puerile then no one listens ...”

Just over a month later [5 March 1994] , The Times’ editorial “*It’s in the Air*” describes how a licence was being given to the Malta Labour Party to operate *Super One TV*:

“ ... Malta now has two local television stations, *Public Broadcasting Services Ltd.* [PBS] and *Super One TV*, and two on the way [what is being called a private, independent station and the Broadcasting Authority’s Community Channel]. In addition, radio stations are run by the two

major political parties and the Church [one each] and by another five private owners. Add to sight and sound the news, comments and opinions of five Sunday newspapers, three dailies, a couple of weeklies and a range of magazines and you have some idea of what is keeping air-waves clogged, a number of printing presses busy and publishing companies in the black ...

The resulting cacophony is called pluralism. It is a far cry from the times when state television, also in the field, greeted Malta with the words *Bongu Malta Soċjalista* after a stolen election victory in December 1981, and made a mockery of the Broadcasting Authority's role of constitutionally appointed watchdog ..."

In both its Annual Reports of 1993 and 1994, which were issued on May 1994 and April 1995 respectively, the Broadcasting Authority expressed its concern on the lowering of programming standards of local radio stations, and to a lesser degree, but still worrying, of television stations.

In its 1993 Annual Report, as reported on The Times [11 May 1994 "*Broadcasting Authority not prepared to Tolerate Lowering of Standards*"], the Authority held that:

"... The time has come when attitudes should change and new priorities established," the Authority said. "For both public and private broadcasters, the primary emphasis must be placed on programming and priority must be given to the development of more varied, more balanced and better fare by all stations concerned."

The Authority said it expects *PBS* to take the lead. "Too much time has already been lost in hiving off the old *Xandir Malta* set-up from Telemalta Corporation and in



establishing *PBS* as an entity with its own staff and resources. There was little, if any, development of long-term programme plans; the programmes for the following week or the following month had to be produced or brought to fill the current schedules”, the Authority said ...”

The Authority was sterner with the private radio stations and pointed out that:

“ ... The licences awarded to them included a promise of programme performance voluntarily drawn up by the broadcasters at the application stage. The Authority hopes that licence-winning promises will not be quickly forgotten, for these are the fundamentals of an agreement which a company must observe,” it warned.

“Having recognised the vitality shown by private radio stations, it must be said that in several cases, radio has become a mere machine for playing popular music with interruptions to carry advertising. The Authority invites radio licensees to consider the promise of performance on the basis of which licences had been issued. The Authority is not prepared to accept any departure from these programme promises, neither will it tolerate any lowering of standards or decrease in variety of programming”, the report said ...”

The Authority also emphasized the point that:

“ ... In its efforts to maintain and improve programme standards, it was well aware that good broadcasting did not come into being by prohibitions or restrictions. Good quality programming was, above all, achieved by the broadcasters themselves. The standards they aimed at

should, in the long run, dictate the quality of service to which the Maltese audience was entitled ...”

A year later, while introducing the Authority’s 1994 Annual Report, Dr Joseph M Pirotta was reported [The Times, 28 April 1995, “*Authority Concerned at Fall of Radio Programme Standards*”] to have, once more, expressed the Authority’s concern at the fall of programming standards of several private radio stations and hoped that the Authority would be able to explore possible ways of remedying the situation and reversing the trend.

“ ... Introducing the Authority’s annual report, 1994, Dr Joseph M. Pirotta said the intensely competitive broadcasting field had resulted in considerable pressure being made on the financial resources of the private stations. In their struggle for survival, some stations had shed employees, resorting to the use of untrained personnel and vied with each other in pandering exclusively to what they perceived as mass tastes. The Authority is preoccupied by this state of affairs and is assessing the financial and economic climate in which national broadcasting is operating ...

The Authority believed that only through proper training could professional levels be attained. Last March it organized a short intensive training course for broadcast journalists in collaboration with the Strickland Foundation, and preliminary plans have been made for the setting up of an Academy for Broadcasters, which will start functioning this year ...”

With regards to programme standards of the private radio stations, the Authority said that:

“ ... Overall programme scheduling was cautious and predictable, with the output of several stations being heavily dominated by music. There was very little evidence of innovative programming even in one-off events. The improvement in quality on radio services as a whole was to be found in discussion programmes and chat shows, which opened up a whole new spectrum in which, through phone-ins, the audience could participate. Unbridled competition for advertising revenue adversely affected the majority of broadcasting licensees and the general characteristic of station policy became “safety first” ...

The Authority said it was its policy to regard the promise of performance made by the radio stations as a framework for measuring diversity rather than a straitjacket. Overall, however, despite the Authority’s repeated warnings, programmes dropped from original schedules were not replaced by others of a similar nature but by music, which became the predominant ingredient ...”

As regards *PBS Ltd.*’s station, *TVM*, the Authority said that:

“ ... The quality of local programmes could be substantially improved, particularly in those areas which did not depend on a large budget or elaborate resources. There was an urgent need for new ideas to inspire new programmes, together with a pool of competent scriptwriters and new programme presenters. *TVM* programme schedules submitted to the Authority, without any form of prior consultation, hardly ever showed any change or innovative programming ...”

The Authority also emphasized the need for local drama and also referred to children’s programmes, saying they needed a ‘facelift’. It emphasized that:

“ ... Maltese television must not become a mere agency for transmitting foreign programmes, however excellent they may be. Even a small population of a third of a million has something of its own to say, and broadcasting is an instrument by which it is given the opportunity to express itself,” the Authority said ...”

In order to meet its promise of exploring the possible ways of remedying this adverse situation of unacceptable programming standards, the Authority made several attempts to assist local television and radio stations. As indicated earlier, the Broadcasting Authority issued the first programming code relating to current affairs which provided guidance on freedom of expression, balance, impartiality and staff responsibility. Another programming code for news broadcasts was issued in December 1994 which comprised guidelines for new broadcasts in the areas of news value, accuracy, telephone interviews, news sources, impartiality, and false and misleading news, amongst others. The Authority also issued other programming codes in subsequent years.

Moreover, the Authority undertook other measures in order to boost the local stations' programming standards. In November 1994, it launched a new competition for television and radio stations and production teams to compete for six prestigious 'Broadcasting Authority Programme Awards' [six awards each for television and radio]. These awards are still being awarded annually up to the present day.

Notwithstanding these developments, some media critics still criticized the quality of local television and radio media broadcasting. In his article “*Quality? Or More of the Same*” [The Malta Independent, 5 January 1997], Mr Gorg Mallia, lecturer in communication studies at the University of Malta, asked whether “television was going the same way as radio, which was mostly peopled by amateurs”. He wrote:

“ ... We’ll soon reach a point,” cracked a friend recently, “when we will each have our own, individual private television station.” Indeed, what with Joe Grima possibly getting his much hankered-for licence, and the Nationalist Party (PN) well on the way to setting up its own station, with *Smash*, *Channel 12* and *Education 22* on cable and *Super One* everywhere [and I don’t mean with the potential of an Outside Broadcasting Unit, either], *TVM* is certainly having a run for its money. The *per capita* ratio of stations on this tiny rock seems to be reaching a ridiculous level. Will the television situation go the same way as the radio did? Some years back, pluralism on the air waves sprouted radio stations that were peopled in most cases with amateurs tripping over words heard, repeated but hardly understood, airing programmes a ten year old illiterate could do better, and climbing over each other for advertising revenue ...

Quantity often precludes quality. We’ve got quite a few good, creative people who know the medium. The contexts, in which they have worked, preconceived by historically wrought or partisanly crafted circumstances have, to date, not fostered talents. One hopes things will change ...”

#### ***1.3.4 The Right to Freedom of Expression on Broadcast Media***

***“ ... We are witnessing the birth of public opinion as a party in its own right, and all the political parties will now have to come to terms with it ...”***

***Professor Oliver Friggieri,  
University Lecturer***

On 22 March 1991, on *In-Nazzjon Taghna* [*“Il-Pluralizmu fix-Xandir ma Jifridx”*] Archbishop Ġuzeppi Mercieca asserted that he believes

that every individual should be given the right to freedom of expression. He argued:

“ ... Broadcasting pluralism which is honest and sincere does not create discord among/between individuals. Broadcasting pluralism should be the right of every individual and it allows the latter to express his opinion as this, in turn, is beneficial for the whole Maltese society ...”

Some months after radio pluralism was introduced in Malta, during the inauguration of Melita Cable’s relay station in Madliena, Prime Minister Eddie Fenech Adami commented that [The Sunday Times, 5 July 1992, “*Prime Minister Hails Cable TV as a Major Step in Broadcasting Revolution*”]:

“ ... Pluralism in radio has already shown itself to be a major success since it has given a voice to ordinary men and women participating directly in radio programmes and in forming national opinion. To date, the experience of pluralism has brought the politician and the voter, the decision-maker and the public, closer together. With pluralism in broadcasting, democracy has been strengthened ...”

In his article “*The Social Impact of The Broadcasting Media*”, [The Malta Independent, 11 December 1994], Mr J.G. Vassallo observed how Maltese viewers and listeners now have easy and frequent access to the media and mentions the possibilities of further developments in the ‘social’ side of broadcast media. He argues:

“ ... The advent of pluralism has changed the topography of the local broadcasting scene. There is no longer a local broadcasting monopoly in control of two or three radio stations and a television station. Maltese radio and TV audiences can now pick and choose among eleven radio

services and three television services, all locally licensed. They have cable television facilities as well as access to a considerable number of terrestrial Italian stations. In many ways, this is an embarrassment of riches. What is more, Maltese viewers and listeners now have easy and frequent access to the media and participate in lively discussions and other chat shows. The possibilities of further developments are there ...

Professor Oliver Friggieri observes that the citizen “began to raise his head from beneath the rubble of past centuries and hopes to be considered as someone rather than as a prop or something”. He was quick to add that “if this be so, we are witnessing the birth of public opinion as a party in its own right, and all the political parties will now have to come to terms with it”. Apart from the fact that opinions are being freely expressed at all times on the media, the print media have been opened for autocriticism and for the investigation of new themes which were considered unsuitable for public discussion in the past. Professor Friggieri observed that no one seems to be surprised by all this change. One only wonders why it took so long for all this to come to pass ...

Properly used, the media could be a powerful instrument for edifying change. Badly handled, the media could be a harmful factor. As educational media, they could stimulate the search for truth through discussion programmes and focus public attention on issues that need serious analysis. If well prepared and competently led, such programmes could involve citizen participation and help people learn how to stand up and argue, and make up their minds in the light of acquired convictions. It is altogether another matter, when similar programmes end up by emitting more heat than light ...”

Mr Antoine J. Ellul, then the Chief Executive of the Broadcasting Authority in his article “*The Maltese Broadcasting Situation*” [The Times, 29 October 1998], defines the Broadcasting Authority’s role vis-à-vis the issue of public expression of opinions on the local broadcasting media.

“ ... It is true that the media have the power to lead, form, educate or even distort public discourse, and it is such power that the regulator has the duty to monitor and, when required, check. But the media are also a reflection of how society and its different leaders in other sectors think and behave. The broadcasting regulator has neither the obligation, right nor the wish to control freedom of expression, except to see that such freedom is not abused for ulterior, unethical or immoral ends. Public expression of opinions, when it reflects the level of actual public perception, is legitimate, and if the level of public debate is low, one should not automatically blame the media for it ...

The vigilance and directives of the Broadcasting Authority therefore have the objectives of ensuring that the correct balance between the exercise of freedom of expression and the observance of public decency is obtained, and to stem abuse so that the media do not contribute to the problem which is not necessarily created by them ...”



**1.3.5 Availability and Training of Broadcasters**

***“ ... They [Maltese journalists] carry out low-skilled daily jobs. They behave mostly as human tape recorders bringing the news and views of their sources to their readers and audience ... As a result, the Maltese media often tend to be just notice boards displaying court reports, financial statements, medical information, and so on ...”***

***Mr Evarist Bartolo,  
Shadow Minister***

As already indicated in **SECTION 1.1** above, the mention of the setting up of an Institute for the Media was made by Dr Michael Frendo in September 1990. In another article appearing on The Sunday Times some six months later, [17 March 1991, “*What makes an Institution National*”], Dr Frendo was asked to elaborate further on what happened to plans for the setting up of the Institute for the Media. Dr Frendo answered:

***“ ... The Institute for the Media is still there. We are still planning to develop that project and have specific funds under the last Budget, amounting to something like Lm25,000. That sum is only for operation and not for structural alterations. We have made some changes to the Bighi building where the institute is to be housed, and are currently finishing the second floor. Once that is ready, it can start to operate ...”***

Mr Evarist Bartolo in his article “*What Future for Party Radio Stations?*” [The Malta Business Weekly, May 1995] observed that the “dominant local political culture and the islands’ economic constraints work to delay the development of journalism as a profession in its own

right”. He then asked, “Are the Maltese journalists condemned to remain in their plight for a long time to come?”

“ ... Local politics and the media are already going through a painful transformation. To a large extent all Maltese journalism – party and non - the continuation of politics by other means. The dominant local political culture and the islands’ economic constraints work to delay the development of journalism as a profession in its own right. Partisanship has diminished the genuine news story. There are cases when even the murderer and his victim are probed about their political beliefs before any slant is given to the story. Both camps in the political arena are accused of having destroyed serious news gathering. Genuine stories are rejected because they may not suit actual political exigencies. Perhaps this judgment is too harsh and severe but there are definitely cases where it is appropriate. The alternative to a less black-and-white hot and cold approach to national issues in our party media is not a grayish tepid soup. Every radio is a distinct ‘language’ in its own right ...

On the whole all the media in Malta still form part of what Lucian W. Pye calls “traditional communication processes” defined by him as being “so closely wedded to social and political processes that the very act of receiving and transmitting messages called for some display of agreement and acceptance. Hence in traditional systems the essential structure of the communications process encouraged the expectation that all communications tended to reflect a partisan view, and that there could be no neutral or non-partisan point of view for judging, evaluating and discussing political events ...

The emergence of professionalised communicators is thus related to the development of an objective, analytical, and non partisan view of politics.” But Jeremy Tunstall points out “all these ‘neutral’ news values and modes of operation reflect American political values. However, outside the United States these political values may be more or less alien. For example, the values imply a degree of journalists’ independence from politicians and media controllers that may conflict with local mass communication institutions ...

Are Maltese journalists condemned to remain in their plight for a long time to come? Lucian W. Pye writes that a society with a small economy finds it impossible to support a full community of professional communicators. According to him journalists can only hope to become professional when they work in a country which has a modern communications process. Pye argues that only through the rise of the commercial press can journalists become professional because now, free from party or government control, they can have “an objective, analytic and non-partisan view of politics ...

The lack of trained personnel is the biggest problem radio stations have to face. The pool of available trained personnel was small and the quality was on the whole quite poor. The new entrants are mostly taught on the job which is definitely not the proper way to improve the quality. Just to take news reporting as an example. The new radio reporters, most of them part-timers, have had no formal training to find a news point and organize and write news stories in a way which makes them interesting, fresh and clear. As the radio stations have mostly a few part-time reporters it is very difficult to organize their training. Radio

stations cannot afford to employ the number of staff needed to make them run on professional lines ...”

Moreover, he commented that on the whole, Maltese journalists play a very subordinate role:

“ ... They [Maltese journalists] carry out low-skilled daily jobs. They behave mostly as human tape recorders bringing the news and views of their sources to their readers and audience. Journalists complain that they do not have enough elbow room to develop their professional skills. They are ill-equipped to carry out their work. Al Hester points out “Journalists, especially those working most of the time with government officials, will be flooded with abstract information, frequently told in complicated ways. Sometimes economists, educators, doctors and politicians use phrases which they understand but which ordinary people don’t. It is the reporter’s job to interpret this ‘inside language’ so that ordinary people know what it means ...

As a result, the Maltese media often tend to be just notice boards displaying court reports, financial statements, medical information, and so on. Maltese journalists need to be educated in all these areas as their on-the-job training has not prepared them to come to grips with the serious and complex issues facing Malta’s development. The quality of the media does not depend entirely of the quality of the journalists working within them. It is definitely important to educate Maltese journalists but it is not enough. Other changes are necessary in the local political culture, press laws, working conditions, management policies, national flow of information ... if the Maltese media are to develop beyond their present stage ...”

***1.3.6 The Public Broadcasting Sector***

***“ ... PBS are simply offering a diary of events. An Auntie Sosa Special that is always the same ...”***

***Mr Lino Spiteri,  
Newspaper Columnist***

As regards ‘public broadcasting services’, the Broadcasting Act 1991 stipulated that:

- [16]. The public broadcasting services will have a special role in the structure of broadcasting in the Maltese islands. They will be expected to provide high quality programming across the full range of public tastes and interests; the public services have a particular duty to provide programming of an educational and cultural nature. They must concentrate on the high educational and cultural nature. They must concentrate on the high educational levels and the continued training of personnel and must adopt internationally practiced contemporary methods of production of its programmes and news bulletins ...
- [17]. The State’s monopoly of broadcasting in Malta will be ended.
- [18]. Malta’s public broadcasting media will now include:
  - a. *Public Broadcasting Services Ltd.*, with its television channel and two radio services;
  - b. The cable system’s community and educational channels.
- [19]. The public broadcasting media have the particular responsibility of providing news and current affairs programming which respect the Constitutional requisites of adequate impartiality, and which shall also be in line with journalistic principles aimed at ensuring a comprehensive and accurate information service in the interests of a democratic and pluralistic society. They should be leaders in providing quality television to the Maltese public with regard to

programming, news and analysis and should be able to interpret the guidelines issued by the Authority in respect of news and current affairs not as rigid straitjacketing but as a flexible tool in the hands of creative journalists ...

By virtue of this Act, *Public Broadcasting Services Ltd.* [*PBS*] was, in fact, set up on 27 September 1991 and the sole shareholder was to be the Malta Government [and *Malta Government Investments Ltd.*]. [Dept of Information, Malta Govt, Press Release, 28 September 1991].

In March 1992, one year after the temporary radio licences were offered to the ‘three national institutions’, Mr Joe Grima, a former Labour minister and a media man by profession and director of *Radio One Live*, which was due to go on air on April 1992, did not mince his words when he criticized the role of *PBS*. On 5 March 1992, he was reported [The Times, “*Prevailing Situation Threatening Pluralism in Broadcasting*”] to have said:

“ ... On the Public Broadcasting Services, Mr Grima said that other countries had already developed this form of service and Malta would do well to copy what had been done successfully in other countries, such as in the US. The *PBS* was not set up to commercially compete with other stations – as was the case in Malta. Neither was it there to beat other stations or to produce the same programmes as they did ...

Mr Grima identified the role of the *PBS* as follows. It should transmit those cultural and informative programmes which, through their own nature, failed to obtain the interest of sponsors. In the US, public service stations were financed by various institutions such as banks and foundations. Not so in Malta where the *PBS* competed with private radios, enjoyed the edge of having the TV media carrying advertising for it and also did not carry enough

cultural programmes to be called a public broadcasting service. In other countries, public service stations were small organizations and certainly not of *Xandir Malta*'s proportion when compared with other private stations ...”

From the early years, *PBS* was already being perceived by many that it was not meeting the expectations, as stipulated in the Broadcasting Act of 1991, of “being leaders in providing quality television to the Maltese public with regard to programming, news and analysis”. In the editorial of *In-Nazzjon Taghna* of 15 June 1993 [*“Era ta’ Xandir Hieles”*], the following was commented on *PBS’ TVM*:

“ ... In our opinion, there is one sector that still needs to pull up its socks and take the lead in the broadcasting sector. And this is *TVM*!! We still think there is still a very unprofessional attitude here void of initiatives and new ideas. The station gives you the impression that the attitude, approach and technology adopted are those of ten to fifteen years ago, and the quality standards of the station’s programming are very poor ... There is definitely the need for more commitment from government in this sector. The Maltese people have waited long enough and serious measures must now be taken. We have to act fast ...”

In another newspaper editorial, this time of *The Malta Independent*, [7 November 1993, *“Acceptable Fare”*], the *PBS* was once more criticised for not meeting its “leap in quality broadcasting” objective. The editorial read:

“ ... The emergence of *Public Broadcasting Services Ltd.* [*PBS*] in September 1991 took place in an atmosphere of great expectations. *PBS* was going to have a charter of its own. It was to be a guarantor of impeccable public broadcasting and, above all, of a leap in quality

broadcasting, coinciding with the advent of pluralism. Since that time, there has been a flurry of activity that generated far more heat than light. Publicly-financed public service broadcasting is a serious business. It calls for clear policies and a sense of direction that comes from a singleness of purpose that seems to be lacking ...

Whatever the outer trimmings, *PBS* is substantially running the same service previously provided by Xandir Malta. It has not yet put its stamp on the broadcast operation and there is not real evidence that a new order has arrived. The long-awaited charter is nowhere to be seen. *PBS* has yet to fill its top operational posts. It is miles away from providing the separate radio news section to compete against commercial stations ...

Allowing for the possibility that the *PBS* ship will be ship-shape in due course, the broadcasting sector seems to be as messy as ever having struck more than one reef during the past stormy years. Some of the trouble was avoidable and still is ...”

Some seven years after the setting up of *PBS*, the latter’s programming and broadcasting standards, particularly those of its news bulletins, seemed to still leave much to be desired. In his article “*Auntie Sosa’s Special*”, [The Times, 17 August 1998], Mr Lino Spiteri argued that *PBS* news bulletins are meant to cover ... well, news! He asserted that:

“ ... We are probably the only country in the world where the [main] political parties each have radio and TV stations, putting out the party message incessantly. The electoral campaign has drawn maximum-plus effort, spread over night and day, from them. That is their reason for being ...



The unacceptable position, in these circumstances, is that the *PBS* stations should also pack their news bulletin with the blessed campaign. The political leaders, assured of saturation coverage by their own journalists and stations, should be after the occasional sound-byte on the non-party stations, if the latter bother or have the resources for even partial tagging along. Instead, from *PBS*, they get, not sound-byte but resounding full coverage. A *PBS* news bulletin follows a stolid model. The election campaign continued today [that's news]. The PM went there and did and said that. The PM went elsewhere and did and said that. The Opposition leader went there and said that. The Opposition leader went elsewhere and said the other. And so on. And on ...

That is what the party and the political leaders get, to their great gratification. What the viewer receives is anything but news. *PBS* are simply offering a diary of events. An Auntie Sosa Special that is always the same. In the era of pluralistic broadcasting, the state media offer breath-taking conformism making them indistinguishable [though not in a blatantly partisan sense] from the party stations. Rather than make the politicians perspire for a reasonable mention in the daily bulletin, they slavishly wait on them to fill as much space as the politicians can cram into. What can *PBS* do? They are state owned. And so – no bearing about the transmitting tower, now – they are within the realm of the political lot running the country, including state enterprise. If it is not one side, it is the other, and musical chairs will eventually be played. It will be an astonishingly brave *PBS* to decide to cut back on campaign coverage. Yet, if it makes it clear it will only broadcast real news in its bulletins, and not tedious repetition, not endless regurgitation, if it concentrates more extensive election coverage into a fast-moving once-daily 20-minute slot [call

it ASSED – Auntie Sosa’s Special Electoral Diary], wouldn’t that make more journalistic sense? ...

It would. It would also help democratic choice since it will focus reporting on what is new [as in news, remember?]. But, it is not on. Not unless the Broadcasting Authority moves from its stolid, staid role towards a position that recognizes the realities. First reality: let the party stations party on [subject to basic ethics] – that is what they are there for. Second reality: *PBS* are not reporting news. The BA should instruct them to do so. That is what licence- and tax-payers, as well as advertisers, plough money into *PBS* for. Third reality: the political parties are using the *PBS* stations to stuff the mind with electioneering pap. That is not what democracy is all about ...”

### ***1.3.7 The Televiewer’s and Radio-listener’s Perspective***

In March 1991, the Broadcasting Authority published its very first independent audience survey in order to ascertain both the state of listenership and viewership as well as to gauge public reactions to the programme provided by the broadcasting services. At the time of this survey, there were four radio stations in operation, namely: *Radio Malta 1*, *Radio Malta 2*, *Super One* and *Radio 101*.

A year later, in the Authority’s second audience survey, new audience behavioural trends were already being noted. As noted on *The Times* of 13 March 1992, [*“Study Indicates Radios as Primary News Sources”*], it was noted that:

“ ... In general, the survey showed that the Maltese were not unhappy with their radio stations. This did not mean that they did not recognise their existing limitations, the Authority said. Complaints on the lack of variety, too much

unnecessary verbosity and excessive partisanship suggested a shift in the Maltese listening culture that was gradually moving away from the non-sophisticated way of looking at things, to one which expected a more professional and a more articulate approach in the management of services provided for the public, including radio stations ...”

With the introduction of radio and then television pluralism in Malta, did the audiences know what were the role and functions of the Broadcasting Authority? Apparently not! So much so that in April 1994, the Authority had decided to hold an information campaign in the form of thirty-second spots on what it does. This was decided upon after a survey it conducted among local viewers and radio-listeners showed that many were in the dark on what its functions are. In fact, The Times of 28 April 1994, reported that:

“ ... Yet a recent survey found that 16.3 per cent of respondents did not know anything about the Authority’s functions, 35.6 per cent incorrectly stated that the Authority’s duties include the management of *PBS* and 39 per cent believed that the Authority is responsible for the preparation of news ...

A sizeable portion of respondents correctly identified the Authority’s main roles as being the preservation of due impartiality in matters of public controversy; the encouragement and maintenance of a satisfactory level of broadcasting, the licensing of commercial radio and television services and programme production of a selective nature ...”

Moreover, a survey of public attitudes towards the different sectors of broadcasting, conducted by the Broadcasting Authority in 1996, indicated that 46% of the respondents had no interest at all in political broadcasts, while 13% always tuned in to such broadcasts and 38% did

so occasionally. The remaining 3% did not reply. [The Times, 1 May 1996, “46% Show No Interest in Political Broadcasts”].

### ***1.3.8 Broadcasting Revenue and Advertising Standards***

***“ ... It has become amply clear that the tyranny of space and the size of the Malta market cannot sustain an unlimited field of competitors even if they all establish a legitimate niche. High standards and profitability cannot co-inhabit in this situation ...”***

***Mr. J.G. Vassallo,  
Newspaper Columnist***

Interviewed by Il-Ġens on 28 September 1990, [“*X’Qalulna Dwar il-White Paper Tax-Xandir*”], Mr Joe Brockdorff, managing director of *BPC International* said that he agreed with pluralism in broadcasting, however he also noted that one has to also examine how the new television and radio stations were going to obtain their revenues. As at 1990, Malta’s aggregate advertising spend stood at around Lm4 million, 60% of which goes on the print media, 5% on other printed publications, 3.5% for outdoor advertising and 29% and 2.5% for television and radio advertising, respectively. He argued that similar to other countries, the advertising spend increases in proportion to the nation’s gross national product [GNP]. In Malta, in 1990, this stood at 0.7% which is similar to that of other European countries like Greece and Portugal. As it was forecast that this advertising spend was not going to increase substantially in the near future, one had to assess how these new stations were going to finance themselves in order to operate on a sustainable commercial basis.

In September 1991, where five private commercial radio “hopefuls” had submitted an application to obtain a radio broadcasting licence and were waiting for this to be processed by the Broadcasting Authority, Ms Daphne Caruana Galizia interviewed these five applicants and, amongst other issues, enquired on their views on their respective

‘would-be’ private station’s long-term commercial viability. The following media spokespersons were reported to have said:

Mr Jimmy Magro, secretary general of the Malta Labour Party and a director of *Super One Radio*, claimed:

“ ... We are looking at the issue from a professional and not political, point of view. The station is ready to accept both sponsorship and declared donations. We need to fund the station at the beginning, but that does not mean that it will not be run on commercial lines.” Initial investment in *Super One* was Lm60,000 ... There is an annual Lm120,000 for running the station ...”

Mr Victor Formosa, on behalf of *Radio 101* and who then ran the station, said:

“It looks obvious that we will make a loss in the first year. This is a complete new venture. Radio was never really in the forefront of advertising. We are ready for a loss... But the earlier we go into the black the better. This is strictly a commercial station ...”

Mr Frank Salt, then the prime mover of *Island Sound Radio*, commented:

“ ... We have our own advertising studio. We intend to first make the ad, then sell it, through a parallel organization called *Island Sound Radio Sales*. We must earn Lm150,000 a year just to break even. One or two people are going to try to do this on a shoestring, but it won’t work ...”

Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg, on behalf of *RTK*, claimed:

“ ... Those who think they will cover their costs are optimistic. One or two of the commercial stations will fold during the first year ... I have no illusions. The Church will guarantee its finances for the first five years by a share issue to be made this month: ‘A’ shares will be held by the bishops, ‘B’ shares by church groups ... This is an adventure. We have to wait and see. In front of God and in history’s eyes, we can’t be seen to have missed this chance ...”

Mr Ian DeCesare, on behalf of *Radio K*, which then became *Bay Radio*, stated:

“ ... We intend to cover our costs through advertising, but there has to be a new approach to sales. A couple of stations will no doubt fall by the wayside. This will be the survival of the fittest ...”

Mr Joe Grima, of *Radio One Live*, claimed:

“ ... We are prepared to make a loss in the first year. Right now, Lm4 million are spent on advertising in Malta each year. Radio only gets a Lm300,000 slice. This means that advertisers are saying: book us in newspapers and on television, then throw something into radio. I don’t think the market will support all ten stations. But it will support those that are innovative. With some of the other stations, it looks like it’s going to be more of the same. This is the opening up of the airwaves and I hope things will be different ...”

On the other hand, in March 1992, Mr Joe Grima, managing director of the would-be *Radio One Live* [which was due to go on the air the

following month], was reported in The Times [5 March 1992, “*Prevailing Situation Threatening Pluralism in Broadcasting*”] to have said:

“ ... It was not realistic, he contends, to say that the “cake” of radio advertising was valued at less than Lm300,000. The state radio had never tried to increase radio advertising while the party radios had only managed to nibble what Mr Grima estimated as some 30 per cent of the state radio’s adverts ...

This “cake” would increase once advertisers realized that there were good, popular programmes on the air which enjoyed good listenership ...”

The Times editorial of 10 June 1993, [“*Authority and Broadcasting*”], referred to the then forthcoming pluralism in Maltese television. The editorial questions how the contenders applying for a TV station licence will be able to raise the required funds. The editorial claimed:

“ ... Whether other contenders will make a bid is very doubtful; only the two political parties and the Church can possibly rustle up the funds necessary to survive this ball-game; and even these will find the experience a sobering one. Watch out for accusations and counter accusations as to how one, or the other will procure the necessary pennies ...”

The editorial also questioned whether the would-be licensed television stations would have a tough challenge in front of them to convince potential advertising sponsors:

“ ... Advertisers will need a great deal of convincing before they buy time. They may even demand the introduction of audience ratings - and they should - before they part with a

single penny in exchange for product promotion. Surveys, prone as they are to mishaps and other euphemisms, will just not be good enough in an environment where everybody and his dog will be in hot pursuit of advertising revenue ...”

Commenting on the one-day conference on “*The Effects of Pluralism in Broadcasting*”, organized by the Broadcasting Authority on 11 June 1993, Mr J.G. Vassallo, in his article “*Broadcasting: Quantity vs Quality*” on The Times [19 June 1993], argued that the tyranny of the space and size of the Maltese market cannot sustain an unlimited field of competitors. He wrote:

“ ... By the end of last year, the local radio broadcasting scene was overcrowded with the active presence of two Radio Malta stations, seven other private stations on FM, and with Cable Television competing with the Malta Television. As far as radio was concerned, total facilities were extravagant and the competition merciless. Today, broadcasters are talking about a financial hemorrhage, confusion and about associated problems ...

To some, pluralism has come to mean nothing but disco music. In their search for their means of existence, some stations are losing their identity and unregulated competition is showing signs that standards of broadcasting are being debased in some sectors. It has become amply clear that the tyranny of space and the size of the Malta market cannot sustain an unlimited field of competitors even if they all establish a legitimate niche. High standards and profitability cannot co-inhabit in this situation ...”

Moreover, Mr Lino Spiteri in his article “*Whining on Air*” [The Sunday Times, 19 December 1993], observed that the throat-slashing price competition in advertising rates of the local radio stations led to



what he called “pocket-felt whining on the air and in the press”. He added:

“ ... While the advertising budget did expand beyond the dreams of radio promoters, the sheer number of them on the air called up some throat-slashing price competition which rapidly summoned gurgling protests. The finance persons totting up the balances had to point out to their bosses, political, clerical or private, that costs were running ahead faster than funds were flowing in. Even, in some cases, before providing for depreciation ...

All of which for a time led to pocket-felt whining on the air and in the Press. One could regularly encounter dyed-in-the-philosophy free-marketeers bleating exquisite argument that their competitors were being too aggressive. With grim honesty they revealed a definition of competition as understood – and widely practiced – in Malta. Competition is mouthable so long as suppliers do not have to eat any resulting cut in prices and profits. The whining grew so high-pitched that it betrayed such a lack of enterprising spirit among our composers and lyricists that none attempted a local version of the *The Beggar’s Opera* ...

The predictable, but apparently unthought of, financial squeeze led to a further wave of developments on the air. One split into ‘Doing’ and ‘Thinking’. The ‘Do-ers’ moved to plug the haemorrhage. Spending in the radio foliage to bring in aping Tarzans of the air, became less lush. Out came various razor-sharp merciless machetes. Some incipiently popular voices were heard no more. Discussion, confrontation and interview programmes rose a little more than marginally. For the simple reason that those invited in, at times in the wee hours, are handsomely paid with the currency of the play-back of their own voice ... The

‘Think-ers’ reaction to the squeeze has been a determined attack on the logic which, in a moment of blind abandon, fathered plurality. This is based on the proposition that there are too many radios for healthy comfort. And that all this is leading to too much competition to the state-owned media ...”

### ***1.3.9 The Role of the Broadcasting Authority***

***“ ... Nor does the Authority limit itself to monitoring, coaxing, warning and sanctioning ...”***

***Mr Antoine J. Ellul,  
Former Chief Executive, Broadcasting Authority***

The Broadcasting Authority is forty years old today! It came into being by virtue of Ordinance XX of 1961, which came into force on 29 September 1961. Apart from the provisions which enabled the Authority to produce and prescribe programmes on its contractors’ services, the Authority’s main function under the Ordinance was that of a supervisory and regulatory body charged with the task of safeguarding general broadcasting standards on behalf of the public.

On the issue of the White Paper outlining the proposed broadcasting reforms, the Authority also expressed its views. While welcoming the advent of pluralism and liberalization in broadcasting, the Authority sounded a note of caution in so far as the observance of certain constitutional requirements were concerned. In The Times of 10 November 1990, [*“Broadcasting Authority’s Reaction to White Paper on Broadcasting”*] it was reported to have said:

“ ... Constitutional obligations on impartiality and fair apportionment of facilities are binding on “... such sound and television broadcasting services as may be provided in Malta ...”. The provision of reliable, accurate and impartial

news services should only be entrusted to professional organisations adequately equipped and financed ...”

The Authority also noted that:

“ ... With the setting up of numerous services anticipated, monitoring can only be selective; and a position in which the Authority reacts to complaints after broadcast rather than seeks to anticipate and prevent them, seems likely to be the only practical one in the circumstances ...”

In the advent of pluralism in Maltese television, The Times editorial of 10 June 1993 entitled “*Authority and Broadcasting*” [subtitled “*No Teeth; Have Teeth, Will Bite*”] emphasized the increasing importance of the Authority’s ‘watchdog’ role on the local radio and television stations:

“ ... Unless the latter meticulously carries out its watchdog role, asserts its authority when the watching calls for such assertion and unless it sits down heavily on any offending licensee when said licensee is offensive in his operations, the Authority should fold up ...

In its 1992 report, the Broadcasting Authority made the fearful admission that it twice called for police action to be taken against an errant licensee and both times that action was not forthcoming. The watchdog has not teeth. In fact, the situation is worse than toothlessness; more an inability to use the right molars on the right quarters. Radio, and presumably television licences are issued by the Broadcasting Authority under certain conditions, which licensees sign. These know what is expected of them. It is clearly laid down what a licensee can and cannot do. His obligations to comply with directions issued by the Authority are spelt out in detail ...”

Moreover, the editorial also observed that the Broadcasting Authority “has teeth” and “will bite”:

“ ... Contrary to perceptions that seem to perpetuate themselves because they are not challenged, however, the Broadcasting Authority is not powerless. It can, if its conditions are breached or directions ignored, impose sanctions of the wayward; it can slap on a “financial penalty” not exceeding “Lm5000”; a reduction of the licence period “not exceeding two years” is also within its powers. It can even, as a last resort and in certain circumstances, revoke a licence. In short, it has the necessary powers to take action of the most deliberate kind ...

Broadcasting in Malta may have developed too swiftly over the past 12 months for its own, and our, good. In a way, the explosion that has taken place has not allowed nearly enough time for that necessary maturation process so vital to its future. And yet, it is abundantly clear that if we are to have seriously conducted broadcasting on these islands, answerable and accountable, the broadcaster who acts against the spirit of the Constitution by striking irresponsible attitudes or by adopting the habits of reckless imprudence must surely be made to discover that such strutting is not worth the candle ...”

Should the role of the Broadcasting Authority be that of a ‘planning authority’, a ‘catalyst’ or that of a ‘watchdog’? In an interview-article in *The Malta Independent*, Dr Austin Sammut [24 October 1993, “*Revolutions in Public Broadcasting*”] asked Dr Michael Frendo, then Minister responsible for the broadcasting sector, what should the Broadcasting Authority’s direction be. Dr Frendo explained how the Authority’s role had evolved since the start of broadcasting pluralism in Malta.

“ ... When we drafted the new Broadcasting Act we also looked at the functions of the Broadcasting Authority, but thought it unwise at a time of change to also tackle the Authority’s functions. We wanted to have an institution which represents continuity and which would work within its increased powers. I do not think that the time has come for the functions of the Broadcasting Authority to change. However, it must interpret its constitutional role in the light of the new circumstances in broadcasting ...

Personally, I think that the Broadcasting Authority must be much more of a monitoring institution than an institution which does things itself. It should act more as a catalyst than as a replacement. It should allow enough space for both private and public broadcasting to grow ...”

In his feature article, “*The Maltese Broadcasting Situation*”, [The Times, 29 October 1998], Mr Antoine J. Ellul, as chief executive of the Broadcasting Authority, defined what the role of the Authority should be in the face of “sudden and variegated expression of broadcasting services”. He argued that the Authority did not limit itself to simply “monitoring, coaxing, warning and sanctioning”.

“ ... The sudden and variegated expression of broadcasting services extended beyond precedent the duties of the Broadcasting Authority both quantitatively and qualitatively. For practical reasons, as well as reasons of principle, this situation necessarily called for a high degree of self-regulation on the part of the stations – in practical terms, intensive and minute regulation of the large number of operators would require an inordinate expansion of the Authority’s resources, while as a matter of principle, excessive regulation would weaken the purpose of liberalising the airwaves ...

The Authority has therefore endeavoured to impress the responsibility of self-regulation upon all operators, and much work is done continuously to guide them in this direction. What is visible to the public is the degree of failure on the part of the operators to live up to their responsibilities, but not the degree of success with which the slowly emerging culture of self-regulation has forestalled a potentially chaotic situation ...

As the Authority expands its own experience and as it aims to build up a partnership, rather than pursue confrontation with broadcasting operators, the Authority is aware that much has still to be achieved to stabilise a situation that has no precedent either locally or abroad. Nor does the Authority limit itself to monitoring, coaxing, warning and sanctioning. Conscious of the complexity of the national broadcasting landscape, it constantly recruits the advice of experts, locally and abroad on the various aspects of broadcasting and commissions scientific research, conducts consultations with the diverse actors, and generally takes concrete and positive initiatives to improve standards and methods ...

Pluralism has been introduced by actors other than the Broadcasting Authority, and such actors continue to be actively involved in its operation as part of their overall objectives. Attainment of the desired level of maturity will see pluralism fulfill its intended aims and promises, but it is inevitably a slower process that requires and reflects the contribution of all sectors, political and otherwise, in society. Revolution can be instantaneous. Evolution, by its very nature, requires time ...”

### ***1.3.10 Introducing Cable Television in Malta***

On 3 July 1992, Prime Minister Eddie Fenech Adami inaugurated Melita Cable Television's relay station in Madliena, where he was reported to have said [The Sunday Times, 5 July 1992]:

“ ... Cable Television was a major step towards achieving the government's objective in broadcasting. It was another landmark in its consistent policy of liberalising all means of communication, he said. “With cable television, we are making a quality leap which is both technological and cultural. We are entering an information world that as yet, has only been available to us in small doses”. The government, Dr Fenech Adami added, was looking forward to the setting up, within this system, of both a community channel operated by or for the Broadcasting Authority and an educational channel operated in conjunction with the Education Department ...

The Prime Minister said that provision is also made in the broadcasting plan for new private channels within the cable system to be made available for allocation by the Broadcasting Authority. He added that the inauguration of Melita Cable furthered the revolution in broadcasting taking place in Malta ...”

### ***1.3.11 Conclusion***

In this Chapter, the Author attempted to present an overview of the main milestones characterizing the television and radio broadcasting sector in Malta over this past decade as perceived by the radio listener/televviewer, broadcaster, advertiser, media critic and politician. We now turn our attention to assess the broadcasting sector as it stands today and its effects as perceived by all of these ‘players’ in the field. However, the Author would first like to give a brief outline of the research methodology adopted to conduct this qualitative research project.



**CHAPTER TWO****RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This Chapter incorporates detailed specifications of the research analysis framework adopted [and its suitability] to conduct this qualitative research project. It gives details of the sampling plan adopted and of the characteristics of the survey respondents interviewed.

**2.1 Research Analysis Framework**

The research analysis framework, which had a timeframe of three months running from February-April 2001, comprised a four-tier research methodology, namely:

**2.1.1 Secondary Data Sources**

An extensive secondary research exercise was conducted to obtain as much qualitative material as possible over the ten-year period of broadcasting pluralism in Malta. This secondary data largely contained local print media, publications, government press releases and Internet websites comprising the views, perceptions and comments of audiences, broadcasters, programme producers, politicians and media critics over these last ten years.

**2.1.2 Primary Data Sources**

A mix of primary research techniques was adopted, namely ‘one-to-one personal interviews’ and ‘focus group sessions’:

❑ ***Personal One-to-One Interviews***

Personal one-to-one interviews of a 60-90 minutes duration were conducted. A structured questionnaire was used in these interviews to ensure that they are conducted effectively and to standardize their evaluation.

❑ ***Focus Group Sessions***

Focus group sessions were also conducted. Each session consisted of a gathering of six to eight persons, specifically selected to represent an appropriate 'cross-section' of the varying demographic and lifestyle characteristics pertaining to Maltese citizens. The Author assumed the role of 'moderator' for all the sessions conducted.

### ***2.1.3 Underlying Rationale for the Mix of Research Techniques Used***

Given the qualitative nature of the research project, the object of selecting 'personal one-to-one interviews' with the use of a purposely drawn-up structured questionnaire, and 'focus-groups' was three-fold:

- ❑ To research the opinions of the interviewees.  
i.e. To discover their perceptions, attitudes and beliefs on the effects of pluralism in radio and television broadcasting.
- ❑ To interpret actions and opinions of the interviewees.  
i.e. To establish their motivations, behaviour and actions [the 'why?'] behind these perceptions and beliefs.
- ❑ To allow the researcher to 'probe' during the interview/focus group session and ensure that the respondent has understood the questions being asked. Moreover, these research techniques enabled the researcher to ask more questions, where deemed necessary and also record any additional observations about the respondent, such as body language, facial expressions, etc.

## ***2.2 Respondent Profile***

In order to obtain a more comprehensive and qualitative perspective on the subject, the Author opted to research the views and perception of both the ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ side of the Maltese television and radio broadcasting sector. To this end, the respondent profile of this research project comprised:

- a. TV and radio broadcasters
- b. Programme production houses
- c. Marketing communications [advertising] agencies
- d. Educators in communication studies
- e. Individuals involved in cable television and interactive television broadcast media
- f. Maltese viewers and radio-listeners.

### ***2.2.1 The ‘Supply’ Side***

The Author conducted in-depth personal interviews of around 60-90 minutes each with the following individuals:

#### ***i. Chairpersons of local Radio and TV Stations***

The Author interviewed all the Chairpersons of the radio and TV stations officially licensed to transmit nationwide [as at April 2001]. **TABLE 2.1** below gives details of the interviews conducted. The Author notes that ‘community radio services’ were not included in the survey.

**TABLE 2.1****CHAIRPERSONS OF LOCAL TV AND RADIO STATIONS**

<i><b>Person Interviewed</b></i>	<i><b>Designation</b></i>	<i><b>Name of TV [&amp; Radio] Station</b></i>	<i><b>Date of Interview 2001</b></i>
Joe Baldacchino	Chairperson	Smash TV [& Smash Radio]	23.03
Michael Falzon	Info Serv Dir	NET TV [& Radio 101]	14.03
Alfred Mifsud	Chairperson	Super One TV [& Super One Radio]	22.03
Claudette Pace	Station Mger	Max Plus TV	27.03
Anthony Tabone	Chairperson	TVM & Channel 12 [Radio Malta & FM Bronja]	27.03
Charles Xuereb	Director	Education 22	18.04
<i><b>Person Interviewed</b></i>	<i><b>Designation</b></i>	<i><b>Name of Radio Station</b></i>	<i><b>Date of Interview 2001</b></i>
Kevin De Cesare	Chairperson	Bay Radio	22.03
Mannie Spiteri	Chairperson	RTK	23.03
John Mallia	Chairperson	Capital Radio	05.04
Colin Tabone	Chairperson	Island Sound Radio	09.04
Paul Portelli	Chairperson	Calypso Radio	10.04
Roger Ellul	Chairperson	Radju tal-Università	24.04
Micallef			
Fortunato Mizzi [Mgr.]	Chairperson	Radio MAS	30.04

*ii. Programme Production Houses*

In-depth personal interviews were also conducted with three of Malta's leading programme production houses, namely:

**TABLE 2.2****PROGRAMME PRODUCTION HOUSES**

<i>Person Interviewed</i>	<i>Designation</i>	<i>Name of Production House</i>	<i>Date of Interview 2001</i>
Peppi Azzopardi	Director	Where's Everybody?	30.04
Herman Bonaci	Director	Herman Bonaci Productions	03.05
Marika Mizzi	Director	Image 2000 Ltd	04.05

*iii. Marketing Communications Agencies*

In order to research the perspective of the 'advertiser', the Author also thought it opportune to obtain the views and perceptions of three of Malta's leading marketing communications agencies, namely:

**TABLE 2.3****LEADING MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS COMPANIES IN MALTA**

<i>Person Interviewed</i>	<i>Designation</i>	<i>Name of Marketing Communications Agency</i>	<i>Date of Interview 2001</i>
Chris Bianco	Managing Director	JP Advertising & Marketing Ltd	02.04
Joseph Brockdorff	Chairperson	BPC International Ltd	02.04
George Mifsud	Chairperson	MPS Marketing Communications Ltd	04.04

*iv. Communications Educators and Individuals involved in the Broadcast Media Sector*

Personal interviews were also held with the following individuals who all have vast experience in the broadcast media sector.

**TABLE 2.4**

**COMMUNICATIONS EDUCATORS & INDIVIDUALS  
INVOLVED IN THE BROADCAST MEDIA SECTOR**

<i>Person Interviewed</i>	<i>Designation</i>	<i>Name of Company/ Organisation</i>	<i>Date of Interview 2001</i>
Joseph Borg [Rev. Fr.]	Lecturer/Consultant	University of Malta, Dept of Comms. and Consultant to Minister	02.04
Frank Leiter	CEO, Director	Melita Cable p.l.c.	05.04
Saviour Chircop [Rev. Prof.]	Director	University of Malta, Centre for Communication Technology	06.04
Andreas Forsthuber	Managing Director	Malta Satellite Broadcasting Centre	10.04

**2.2.2 The ‘Demand’ Side**

The research methodology adopted to research the ‘demand’ side of the television and radio broadcasting sector comprised a two-tier approach:

*ii. Focus Group Sessions*

Eight focus group sessions were conducted to obtain a sound understanding of the views and perceptions of Malta’s ‘viewer’ and ‘radio-listener’ on the research objectives of the project. In total, 52 respondents of varying demographic and lifestyle

characteristics attended these sessions which were moderated by the Author herself. **TABLE 2.5** gives details of the focus group sessions held. Each session took between 90-120 minutes and was audiotaped.

**TABLE 2.5*****FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS***

<b><i>Participant Profile</i></b>	<b><i>No of participants Attending Session</i></b>	<b><i>Date of Session 2001</i></b>
Males, females - 18 – 30 yrs	6	23.03
Males females - 18 – 30 yrs	6	28.03
Males - 31 – 45 yrs	6	30.03
Females - 31 – 45 yrs	7	12.03
Males - 46 – 60 yrs	6	02.04
Females - 46 – 60 yrs	6	15.03
Males, females - 61+ yrs	8	04.04
Males, females - 61+ yrs	7	05.04

***iii. Personal One-To-One Interviews***

In-depth personal interviews were conducted with 500 respondents from all over Malta and Gozo within a timeframe of two months, February-March 2001. Each interview took sixty minutes to complete. The sample structure was drawn up on the basis of demographic features of resident population in Malta [and Gozo] based on the 1995 Census population. All respondents are aged 18 and over and are all Maltese nationals. A more detailed profile of the ‘sample unit’, i.e. the survey respondents, is comprised in **SECTION 2.4** below.

**2.3 The Sampling Plan**

The sample frame of 500 respondents ensures an exact representation of the whole Maltese and Gozitan population, of 18 years and over, at a 94.2% accuracy at a 99% confidence interval.

Moreover, a stratified non-probability sampling procedure was applied. An appropriate representation of the population was ensured by stratifying the quota sample by objective and known population characteristics, namely: [a] age, [b] gender and [c] home town, based on the 1995 Official Census of Population [Central Office of Statistics, Malta, 1995]. The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents were also taken into consideration to ensure an appropriate representation of this variable.

**2.3.1 The Audience Survey Questionnaire**

The Questionnaire used to conduct the one-to-one personal interviews with the 500 ‘televviewer/radio-listener’ respondents was pretested on a small group of people before the commencement of the actual survey.

**A. Questionnaire Structure**

With regard to ‘questionnaire structure’ this comprised an appropriate mix of ‘closed-ended questions and ‘free-response’ [open-ended] questions to gather the qualitative information required. The open-ended questions were used primarily to gather the opinions and views of the respondents and to measure the intensity of their ‘perceptions’.

A number of ‘intensity’ questions were also asked which were structured in a special form of multiple-choice question. This type of question was used to measure the intensity of the respondents’ views/opinions hence provide answers that cover a range of five degrees of ‘feeling’ about a statement ranging from ‘strong approval/very favourable’ to ‘strong disapproval/very unfavourable’ towards the research area under consideration. A [1] to [5] rating scale was thus used where [1] signified a very bad/very negative/very low



rating scale while a [5] rating represented a very good/very positive/very high rating assessment. Analysis of these scaled responses was based on respective means. The 'mean' refers to the sum total of measures observed divided by the number of observations. Also, the standard deviation was also calculated so as to depict the measure of spread between responses. Small values for this measure of dispersion indicate that the data is compact, while high values indicating wide spread of responses.

### ***B. Questionnaire Contents***

With regard to its 'contents', the Questionnaire contained the following:

#### **❑ A survey respondent profile**

This comprised 'background' questions which were used to obtain demographic information and characteristics of the group being studied, such as age, gender, home town, marital status, current employment, etc.

#### **❑ Sets of questions on specific research areas, namely:**

- i. Radio Listening and TV Watching Behavioural Patterns
- ii. Perceptions of Effects of Broadcasting Pluralism [Radio and TV]
- iii. Maltese TV: Programme Content
- iv. : News Coverage and Reporting
- v. : Broadcasting Standards
- vi. : Advertising Standards
- vii. Impact of Cable: TV on Terrestrial TV
- viii. Maltese Radio: Programme Content
- ix. : News Coverage and Reporting
- x. : Broadcasting Standards
- xi. : Advertising Standards
- xii. Public Broadcasting Services vs Private Commercial Radio and TV Stations
- xiii. The Role of the Broadcasting Authority
- xiv. The Future of the Radio and TV Broadcasting Sector in Malta.

A sample of the ‘Audience Survey Questionnaire’ may be found in **APPENDIX A**.

## 2.4 The ‘Televviewer/Radio-Listener’ Respondent Profile

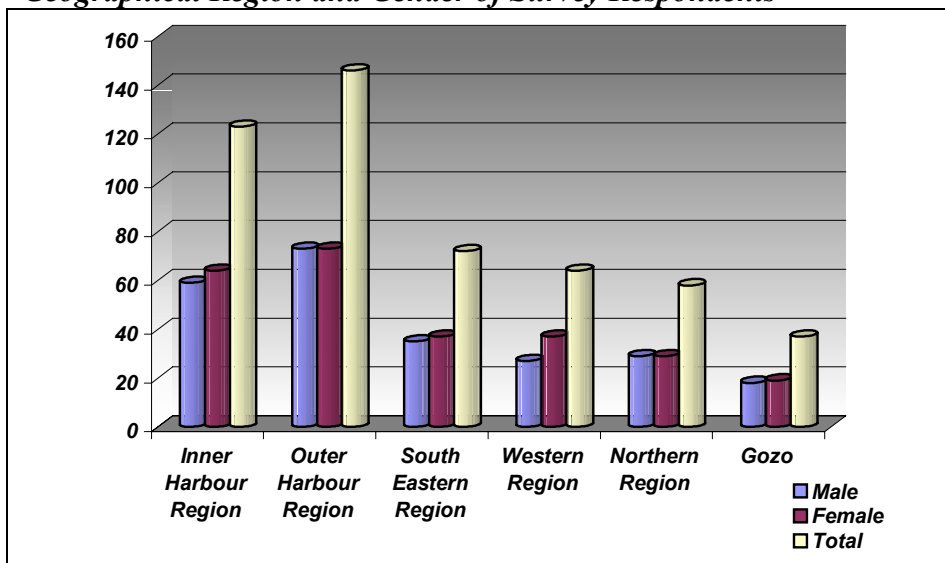
The sample unit was drawn up to ensure an exact representation of the Maltese population [including Gozo], of 18 years and over, in terms of age, gender and home town.

### 2.4.1 Home Town and Gender

**DIAGRAM 2.1** below depicts the gender distribution of the 500 survey respondents over Malta’s geographical regions. The respondents interviewed hailed from the various towns and villages comprised in these geographical regions to ensure appropriate representation. The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents were also taken into consideration.

#### DIAGRAM 2.1

#### *Geographical Region and Gender of Survey Respondents*

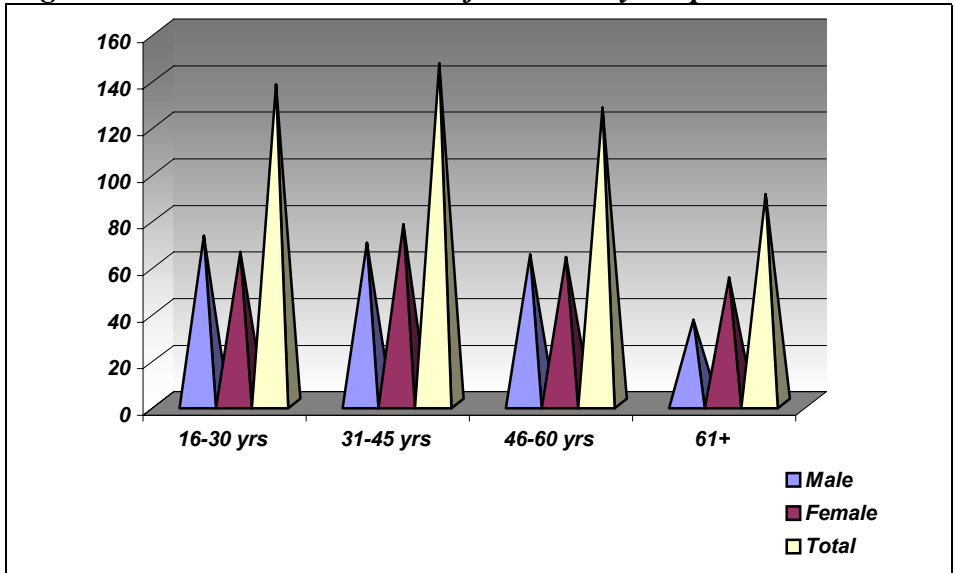


### 2.4.2 Age and Gender

**DIAGRAM 2.2** depicts a break-down of the survey respondents' 'age' and 'gender' characteristics.

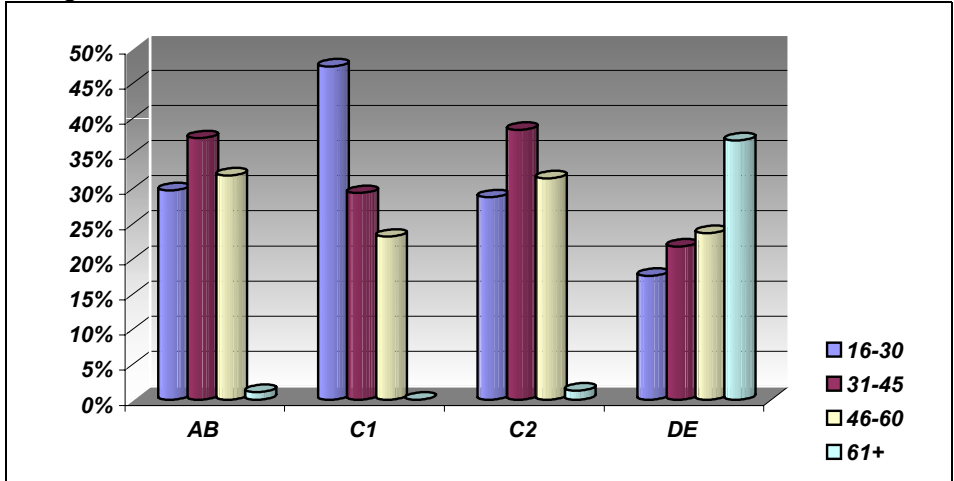
**DIAGRAM 2.2**

*Age and Gender Characteristics of The Survey Respondents*



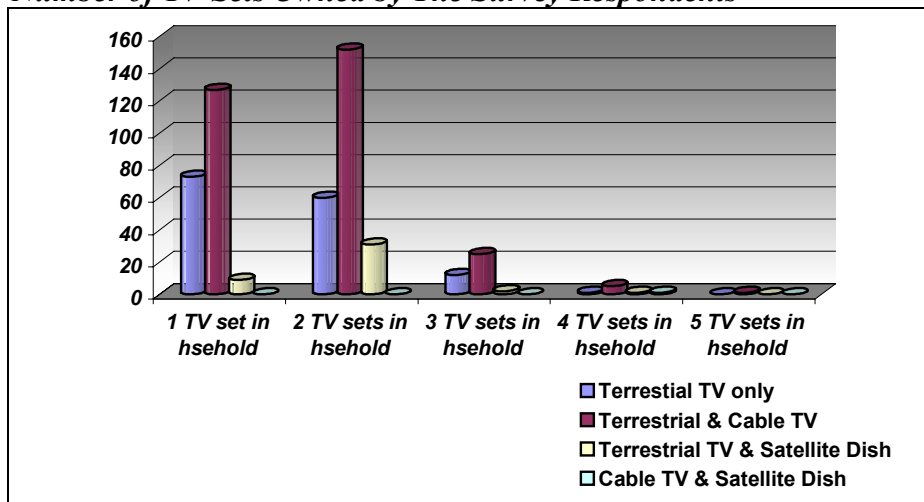
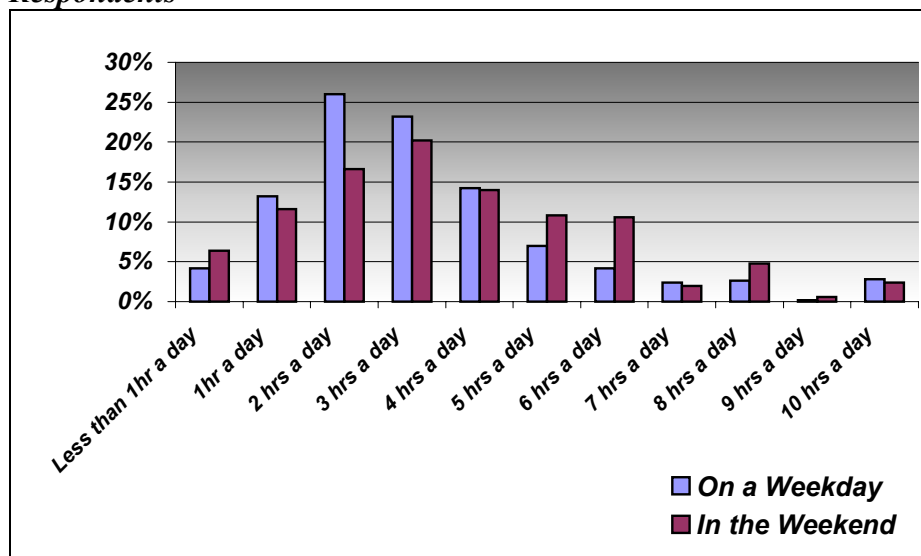
### 2.4.3 Socio-economic Characteristics

**DIAGRAM 2.3** depicts the survey respondents' 'socio-economic' characteristics by age group. [Socio-economic groups: 'AB': professionals and managers; 'C1': white-collar workers; 'C2': skilled workers and 'DE': unskilled workers and pensioners].

**DIAGRAM 2.3*****Socio-Economic Characteristics [by Age Group] of The Survey Respondents*****2.4.4 TV Watching and Radio Listening Behavioural Patterns**

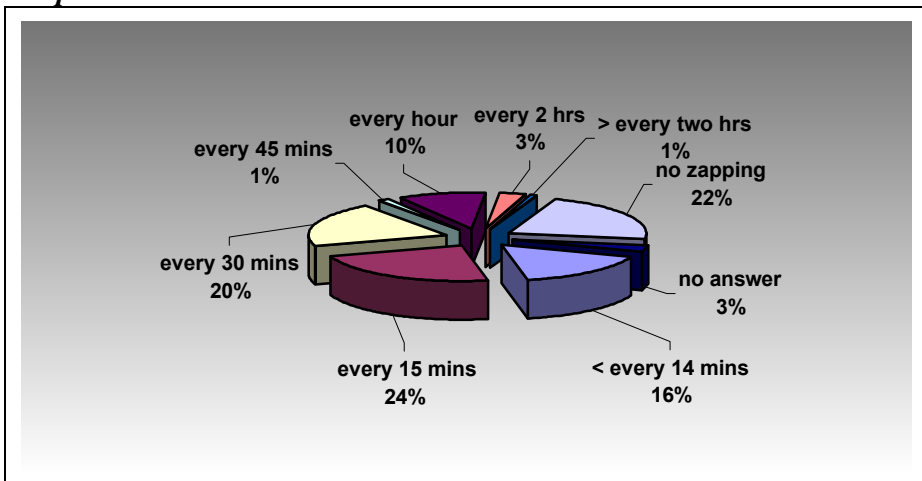
The following illustrations draw up detailed profiles of the respondent population's TV watching and radio listening behavioural patterns in terms of:

- A. Number of TV sets owned
- B. Hours of TV watched/radio listened to during the week and in the weekend
- C. 'TV-station zapping' behavioural patterns
- D. Whether respondent watches TV/listens to radio alone or in company.

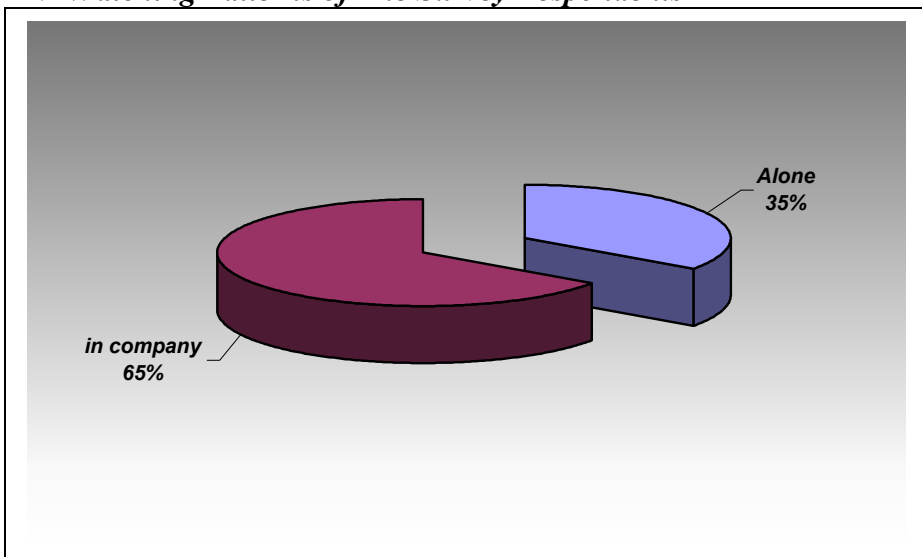
**DIAGRAM 2.4*****Number of TV Sets Owned by The Survey Respondents*****DIAGRAM 2.5*****Hours of TV Watched During the Week and Weekend by The Survey Respondents***

**DIAGRAM 2.6**

***‘TV-Station Zapping’ Behavioural Patterns of The Survey Respondents***

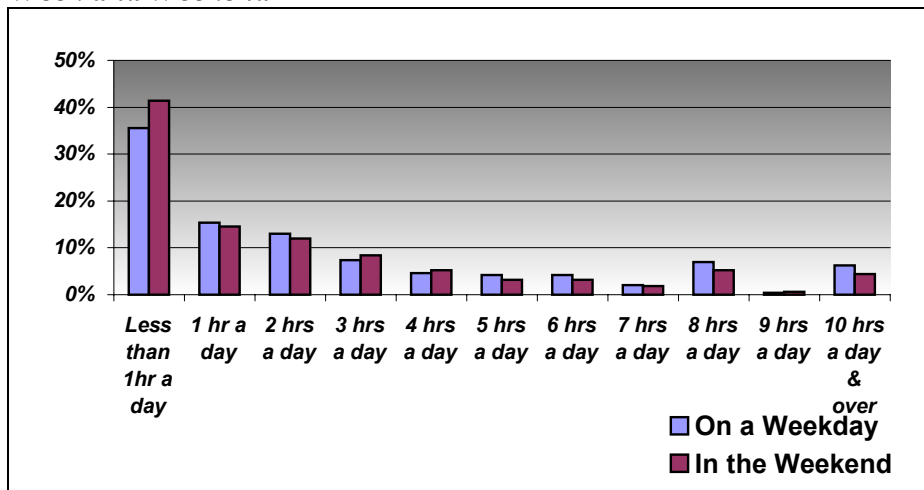
**DIAGRAM 2.7**

***TV-Watching Patterns of The Survey Respondents***

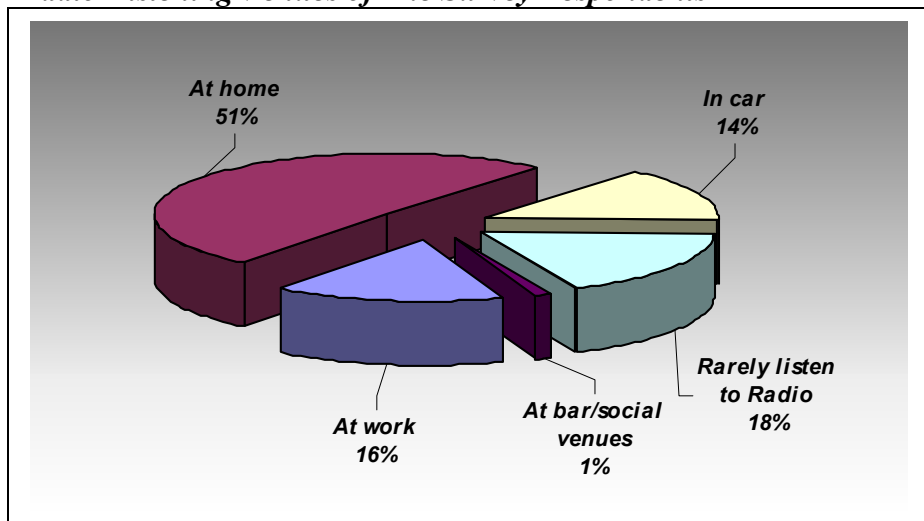


**DIAGRAM 2.8**

*Hours of Radio Listened to by The Survey Respondents During the Week and Weekend*

**DIAGRAM 2.9**

*Radio-Listening Venues of The Survey Respondents*



***CHAPTER THREE***

***PLURALISM IN BROADCASTING –  
THE PERCEPTIONS OF TODAY***

***“ ... With pluralism in broadcasting in Malta, the two major political parties in Malta ended up having their own Radio and TV stations, and this seems to have given the Maltese radio-listener and televiewer the wrong impression of what ‘broadcasting pluralism’ really is. In Malta, ‘broadcasting pluralism’ implies and means that the political parties have their own stations. And this is definitely not the real meaning of broadcasting pluralism ...”***

***Mr Michael Falzon,  
Information Services Manager, MediaLink Ltd***

***3.1 Broadcasting Pluralism in Malta – Some Research Findings***

What development and effects of pluralism in broadcasting has Malta witnessed over this past decade? Where there any significant changes in radio and TV broadcasting in Malta? At the advent of this pluralism, some ten years ago, did we predict any of the development and changes which are taking place now? Did we make any predictions, speculations, etc. then, which are actually materializing now? In Chapter One, many questions were asked but few were answered. In this Chapter, the Author will be identifying some of the more salient qualitative aspects of the development and effects which broadcasting pluralism brought about in Malta as perceived by the listener/viewer, broadcaster and critic.



### **3.2 Broadcasting Pluralism in Malta – Do We All Agree?**

“Do you agree with the introduction of broadcasting pluralism in Malta?” The Author asked this question to the 500-count survey respondents and a staggering 96.4% indicated that they fully agree with the introduction of broadcasting pluralism in Malta, while a mere 2.4% disagreed and 1.2% did not comment or did not have an opinion.

The respondents were also asked to indicate the advantages/benefits and disadvantages, which in their opinion, were brought about with the introduction of pluralism in local radio and television broadcasting. **TABLE 3.1** below illustrates the main advantages and disadvantages that the respondents perceive broadcasting pluralism has brought about in Malta. The main advantages indicated may be categorized in terms of ‘programming and broadcasting standards’ and ‘programme content’ where audiences indicated that they are now enjoying a much wider choice and variety of programmes and also improved programming standards as a result of competition between stations. Also noted are the positive increase in the number of Maltese productions on local television and improved programming standards of these same Maltese productions and improved broadcasting standards of news bulletins.

What about the negative aspect on the broadcasting sector which this pluralism may have brought with it, if at all? A few respondents [1.4%] noted that there is ‘more confusion’ for radio listeners/telev viewers and that too many good programmes are being broadcast at the same time, normally at prime-time. The notion of ‘too much politics’ was also commented upon. This perception featured strongly all throughout the survey as one will observe very shortly.

**TABLE 3.1**  
**ADVANTAGES/BENEFITS BROUGHT ABOUT WITH**  
**THE INTRODUCTION OF PLURALISM IN**  
**RADIO LISTENING AND TV VIEWING IN MALTA**

<b>Survey Respondent's View/Comment [multiple answers were given]</b>	<b>No of Responses</b>	<b>% Response</b>
<b>ADVANTAGES</b>		
<b>In Programming and Broadcasting Standards</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> More choice/better variety	410	62.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Improved programming standards	43	6.5
<input type="checkbox"/> Improved programming standards due to competition	18	2.7
<input type="checkbox"/> More ideas	14	2.1
<input type="checkbox"/> More information	12	1.8
<input type="checkbox"/> More professionalism	11	1.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Freedom of broadcasting	11	1.6
<input type="checkbox"/> No brainwashing from one side/ different opinions	10	1.5
<input type="checkbox"/> Better quality	9	1.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Improved competition	8	1.2
<input type="checkbox"/> No monopoly	8	1.2
<input type="checkbox"/> More employment	6	0.9
<input type="checkbox"/> Longer air time	3	0.5
<input type="checkbox"/> More presenters	3	0.5
<input type="checkbox"/> Programmes to suit all ages	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> More variety of viewers	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> More and better Maltese productions	28	4.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Improved news broadcasting standards	11	1.5
<input type="checkbox"/> Better foreign productions	9	1.4
<input type="checkbox"/> More educational programmes	7	1.1
<input type="checkbox"/> More live transmissions	7	1.1
<input type="checkbox"/> Better sports programmes and live match transmissions	3	0.5
<input type="checkbox"/> More advertising	2	0.3
	<b>635</b>	<b>96.0</b>

<b>DISADVANTAGES</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> More confusion for viewers/radio listeners	9	1.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many good programmes broadcast at the same time	4	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Too much politics	4	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> In principle, pluralism is good but it has reduced stations to an inferior quality	3	0.5
<input type="checkbox"/> Voice/opinion of the people should be given more opportunity to be expressed	3	0.5
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many adverts	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Lower family values	1	0.2
	<hr/> 25	<hr/> 4.0
	<hr/> 660	<hr/> 100.0

These survey findings were further substantiated by the respondents attending the focus group sessions. One may note some interesting comments and observations made by these respondents. In one focus group session attended by male and female respondents aged 18-30 years, the following discussion was noted.

John:

We seem to take pluralism in radio broadcasting very much for granted. We seem to forget what had happened some years ago to people who tried to broadcast from Sicily.

Patrick:

Nowadays, when you think of 'radio' you do not think of 'one radio station' only, but of many.

Audrey:

I always remember having a choice of radio stations. I do not remember Malta having only one radio station.

Also noted was the wide range of programmes to choose from and the ‘new challenges’ brought about with the introduction of pluralism in broadcasting.

Josianne [36 yrs]:

I do not have a lot of time to watch TV and hence when I decide to watch TV, thanks to pluralism I have a much wider variety of stations and hence programmes to choose from.

Another focus group respondent claimed:

Charles [45 yrs]:

Once a balanced discussion is maintained, broadcasting pluralism challenges and enriches your mind but may still confuse those who are not able to form their own opinion. Nowadays, youths have become very capable of discussing and analysing a subject before they form an opinion and do not form an opinion just because their father thinks that way.

On the other hand, the major downside of the introduction of pluralism in broadcasting noted in the various focus group sessions was the overwhelming concentration of ‘political content’ and ‘political bias’ on the local television and radio stations. These are perceived as a ‘total propaganda machine’ as one respondent put it.

John:

When broadcasting pluralism was introduced in Malta, it was a complete joke! I remember just before pluralism in broadcasting was introduced, Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici had written an article in The Times in 1990, where he showed a sunflower, as a caricature, which on each petal there was written “I accept pluralism, I do not accept pluralism, I accept pluralism, I do not accept pluralism, etc. etc.” Even

though broadcasting pluralism was meant to be a positive thing for society, the Malta Labour Party did not seem prepared to accept it immediately, and even the Nationalist Party had had different stands on it in the beginning. I really liked this caricature, that is why I remember it ten years later ... broadcasting pluralism was all a joke from the two political parties in saying yes and no, no and yes, etc. ...

Patrick:

TV and Radio broadcasting is a total propaganda machine. Whoever controls the ‘media’ in a country, controls everything.

And:

Ryan [28 yrs]:

Before a political national event, e.g. general elections, local council elections, etc., these stations can do a lot of damage in that they try to brainwash their audiences. I do not think audiences in Malta are open-minded enough to be able to distinguish between what is ‘real’ news and what are ‘half-truths’ and say “I think on this issue the party is lying or is overdoing it”. They support that party because they are being brainwashed by that party.

Also, in another focus group session attended by male respondents aged 45-60 years:

John:

Pluralism, pluralism ... why are we calling it ‘Pluralism’? This is not really pluralism! There is no pluralism in broadcasting because *NET TV* and *Radio 101* obviously side with the Nationalist Party, *Super One* with the Labourites and the state station *PBS* depends on which

party is in government. Why should the Maltese citizen be treated like this? Do you think the Maltese citizen is becoming more mature? What bothers me most in Malta is the type of pluralism we have so far. Is it really 'pluralism'? Even in 10 years' time, it will still remain the same ...

Charles:

So far it is not pluralism but speak to youths and university students and you can already see the difference between them and the older generation ...

Philip:

In my opinion, at the start of pluralism, the two political radio stations used to try to indoctrinate their party-loyal followers. However, throughout the years they realized that this was strengthening the opposing views of their listeners and hence decided to widen their political scope. Nowadays, when I am listening to the radio station of the political party I do not side with, in some of their discussion programmes and talk shows, they actually comment positively on the political party I side with, and when this happens it is more likely that I will start listening also to their views. Both parties have realized this and they both are now including comments, still on a very low key, which are not as annoying to the listeners with opposing political views. And this is happening on both TV and Radio stations.

John:

Radio stations seem to be more partisan than TV stations. They can never be neutral, the bias will always be there as they both have been commissioned to operate by the political parties themselves.

Philip:

But today's pluralism is already offering an alternative to the younger generation who is not interested in politics, e.g. *Bay Radio*, *Smash*, *Max Plus*, etc. There are a lot. So, the audience shares of political programmes are shrinking a lot. I see from my own children, they only want to listen to neutral stations like *Bay Radio*. And this is happening because the way the two political stations are being presented do not appeal to all audiences.

John:

When the subject being discussed on a discussion programme or talk show concerns politics, I just cannot stand it and will not watch it.

Philip:

The people who really make unsubstantiated statements are the politicians in Malta. For example, they say "We are doing this in the interest of the people." If this is the case, then give me an example, substantiate it!! And when they are cornered they do not like it.

John:

I cannot stand political discussions because what the stations try to do is manipulate the televiewer. And it is not just the political stations which broadcast political programmes, even *PBS* does it. TV is full of political programmes and discussion programmes. There is so much of it even on the news that I cannot stand watching TV anymore. We have become too politically-minded. And particularly the three news bulletins – they are simply making fun of you as a televiewer, and then you realize that you have wasted so much time, on just watching not one but three news bulletins!

Philip:

However, I think that broadcasting pluralism has been the first step towards teaching us how to discuss politics in a more mature manner. Also, for the first time in Malta, we are now experiencing substantial swings of voters in the general elections.

### ***3.3 The Broadcaster's Perspective***

***“ ... Politics has killed broadcasting pluralism in Malta! ‘Pluralism’ in Malta is only on paper. It is an insult to people’s intelligence ...”***

***Mr John Mallia,  
Chairman, Capital Radio***

The broadcasters interviewed did not show much concern to the question of whether or not broadcasting pluralism ‘should’ have been introduced in Malta as much as to the ‘how’ pluralism was actually introduced. The major reservations of local broadcasters to the manner in which broadcasting pluralism was introduced in Malta comprise the following.

#### ***3.3.1 Institutionalised and Politicised Broadcasting***

Maybe, the strongest reservation observed by the people in the industry concerned the over-politicising and the institutionalising of television radio broadcasting over the last decade.

Rev. Prof. Saviour Chircop, Director of the Centre of Communication Technology [CCT] at the University of Malta, claimed that:

***“ ... In principle I agree with broadcasting pluralism, but the question I ask is, do we really have broadcasting***



pluralism in Malta? I think we have overcome some very important hurdles in terms of accepting that our society has different views and opinions; yes, this hurdle has been overcome. However, the real issue is “What do we mean by ‘pluralism’?” If by ‘pluralism’ we mean having multiple formats, we have then developed a genre of media activity which is basically very similar. For example, whether it is party A, B or C, these are still institutionalised entities ...”

This sentiment was also expressed by Mr Peppi Azzopardi, director of production house, *Where’s Everybody?* and presenter of ‘*Xarabank*’. He asserted that:

“ ... I agree with pluralism in broadcasting and it is because of this that I say that there is no pluralism in broadcasting in Malta because it is a simply a joke! However, at the start of broadcasting pluralism in Malta, the Broadcasting Authority had predicted what was going to happen and had warned the political parties of their actions. In fact, what it had warned them of, did actually materialize ... Why is it that there is no ‘real’ broadcasting pluralism in Malta? In reality, what we have is two major political parties who are totally dominating the broadcasting sector through their respective television and radio stations ...”

Mr George Mifsud, managing director of one of Malta’s leading marketing communications agencies, *MPS Marketing Communications Ltd.*, also noted the highly politicized nature of local television and radio broadcasting:

“ ... Unfortunately, like everything else in Malta, broadcasting pluralism has become too politicised, so broadcasting pluralism in Malta became synonymous with ‘political development’ which should be two separate things. On the other hand, up to a certain extent, broadcasting

pluralism in Malta came about as a result of local politics - where some ten years ago the two parties wanted their own stations ...

So, as a result of this, broadcasting pluralism for the Maltese audiences means that the Nationalist Party has its own station and the Labour Party has its own station. Another issue to be noted is that when this development was taking place, local manpower and talent required were not available ...”

Ms Claudette Pace, station manager of *Max Plus TV*, was also very assertive in her views:

“ ... What I strongly object to with regards to broadcasting pluralism in Malta is that both major political parties have a TV and Radio station. These parties have ruined a very strong independent form of power. They have both ruined it. Claudette, as a politically-independent broadcaster, asks, “What was my choice as a broadcaster when I was with *PBS*?” It was either to remain at *PBS* and wait for the lengthy bureaucratic procedures of a government entity, or go with *Super One TV* or *NET TV*. We had approached *Smash TV* for us to join forces but we were both on a totally different wavelength in terms of quality standards. It is very unfortunate because we could have joined forces and the outcome could have been stronger than what *Smash TV* and *Max Plus TV* are now as separate TV stations. I strongly believe this! ...”

Mr Kevin DeCesare, Chairman of *Bay Radio* claimed:

“ ... I do not agree with political parties having their own TV and radio stations because this goes against every commercial sense. It is obvious that they have an

advantage over the other stations. And they are using their dominant position because they are political parties, they collect money and hence are not playing on a level-playing field. The political aspect is also influencing the survey results ...”

Mr John Mallia, Chairman of *Capital Radio*, whose licence was issued to political party Alternattiva Demokratika [AD], affirmed:

“ ... With the manner in which broadcasting pluralism was introduced in Malta, the idea of retaining a degree of unbiased and ‘balance’ means that the radio listener/televisioner has first to listen to one station and then to another to be able to obtain a true and fair view of what is happening and then one has also to listen to *PBS* – and all this simply does not make sense. At *Capital Radio*, we give AD airtime but we give it its relative due. As regards political news items, if we feel that there is a news item which is more important than an AD event, we will give the former more importance and prominence. AD is not going for the ‘blindfolded’ and ‘party-faithful’ radio-listener but we target the individual who tries to view things and events intelligently. If I were to go ‘all out’ to promote AD, at all costs, then I would be defeating AD’s purpose and goal ...

Politics has killed broadcasting pluralism in Malta! Pluralism in Malta is only on paper. It is an insult to people’s intelligence. If I want to hear a news item why do I need to listen to two stations to be able to have some form of what has really happened. Even the basic facts of the news broadcast by the stations do not tally!! ...

This strong political slant is evident in both the radio and television sectors. Both political radio stations have gone all out in terms of political slant while the TV stations seem

to be offering a more ‘sugared’ approach. For example, a viewer may be watching a non-political independent programme, and half-way through there comes an advert to attend a political mass meeting of the party ...”

Mr Mannie Spiteri, Chairman of *RTK Radio*, asserts that one of the major shortcomings of broadcasting pluralism in Malta is that:

“ ... It has created a high degree of partisan politics. There is now the opportunity to publicly get at people and even hurt other individuals. This was not the case before. This can be termed as ‘arrogant abuse’ ...”

While, Ms Marika Mizzi, director of another independent, up-and-coming programme production house, *Image 2000 Ltd.* and producer of *‘Fenomeni’*, claims:

“ ... I fully agree with broadcasting pluralism because it offers audiences choice and also programmes of quality. Up to ten years ago, the only option for Maltese productions on television was *Xandir Malta*. From a production company’s point of view, there was no risk as the station had an assured audience, however, nowadays it has to compete with other Maltese productions at the same time on the other TV stations. But, on the other hand, pluralism does challenge companies like ours to produce better and more appealing programmes for the viewers ... Our company is very young and it was only some 18 months ago that we invested in equipment and production studios. We would like our company to remain politically independent, to operate freelance and be run as a commercial entity. Also, what we find of utmost importance is that we have a great passion for and believe in the field we are engaged in ...”

However, Ms Mizzi feels that as a production producer and actress, she has fallen victim of the partisan political scene without even wanting to:

“ ... What is unfortunate in Malta is that once your programme appears on a political station, you are immediately labeled as a follower of that party. When we used to have a soap opera series on *Super One TV*, sometimes I was approached by the ‘man in the street’ telling me “Ara tas-*Super One*” or “Ara tal-Labour” and not as Marika Mizzi who runs an independent production company. Now that we have produced a series for *NET TV*, it was reported on the local print media that we had quarreled with *Super One TV*. The case was that from an independent commercial entity’s perspective, *NET TV* had offered us a more interesting business package ...

I believe that at present, the televiewer is still party-loyal. Sometimes, I get comments like “We watch your programme on TV, you know. But what have you done to us? Have you left us?” from ‘labourite’ televiewers. This is also influencing audience surveys. My dream is to have a partisan-politically-free televiewer who will choose what to watch solely on the basis of programme content. Why cannot we really take advantage of the wider variety of programmes which broadcasting pluralism should have brought about. But my dream is still a far cry ...

In terms of radio, one finds that there are still very ardent party-loyal radio listeners who listen only to their political station. But the younger generation seem to be less politically-minded and seem to have heard enough on politics ...”

These broadcasters' perceptions clearly show that 'partisan politics' has had a significant influence on broadcasting pluralism in Malta. But what do the chairpersons of the two political television and radio stations say to all this? Do they share the same sentiments of the other broadcasters? In their opinion, there is a lot of 'partisan politics' on local television and radio.

Mr Michael Falzon, information services director of *MediaLink Ltd.*, the company responsible for the party's broadcasting media, stated that he has always been a great believer of broadcasting pluralism and was, in fact, one of the pioneers in introducing it in Malta. However, he also affirms that one of the downsides of this pluralism in Malta is the fact that:

“ ... With pluralism in broadcasting in Malta, the two major political parties in Malta ended up having their own TV and Radio stations, and this seems to have given the Maltese televiewer and radio-listener the wrong impression of what 'broadcasting pluralism' really is. In Malta, 'broadcasting pluralism' implies and means that the political parties have their own stations. And this is definitely not the real meaning of broadcasting pluralism ...”

Mr Alfred Mifsud, Chairperson of *Super One TV* and *Super One Radio*, said:

“ ... In principle, I agree with broadcasting pluralism but in a small country like Malta, broadcasting pluralism ended up in the hands of the political parties. Given Malta's political situation, there was no alternative for broadcasting pluralism but to end up becoming 'increasingly political' ...”

It is rather unfortunate that this 'partisan politics' situation, although still perceived by all as a major limitation to 'healthy' pluralism, is still

a salient characteristic of today's broadcasting scene, as Mr Peppi Azzopardi affirms:

“ ... The two parties have their own political agenda and all they do is proclaim these agendas. For example, recently, *Super One TV* cancelled its usual programme schedule to broadcast a fund-raising activity for “Svizzera fil-Mediterran”. One can thus see how the television medium is actually being used in Malta. There is thus no pluralism in Malta, but dictatorship from the two political parties ...”

In the light of the above observations, the obvious question one asks is: But is ‘partisan politics’ on local radio and television broadcasting here to stay? If both the audience and the broadcaster perceive it as a major downside of broadcasting pluralism, will it still continue to feature to the same extent in future? We will be addressing this issue in some more detail later on in this paper.

### ***3.3.2 Freedom of Expression – Use or Misuse?***

***“ ... Pluralism brought about a new phenomenon in Malta, in that, it created a whole new genre of programmes, i.e.: discussion programmes and talk shows, like ‘Televixin’, ‘Xarabank’, etc. which in itself is a brilliant marketing concept and that it is now allowing the televiewer to voice his opinion and share his grievances and it is also challenging the broadcaster ...”***

***Mr George Mifsud,  
Chairman, MPS Communications***

On a more positive note, the introduction of pluralism in broadcasting has brought about some very healthy developments in the local television and radio scene. One such development pertains to the new

challenges posed on the broadcaster to improve his/her station's programming and broadcasting standards.

Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg, lecturer in communication studies at the University of Malta, consultant on broadcast media issues to the Minister, *PBS* consultant and ex-Chairman of *RTK Radio*, asserts that pluralism in broadcasting has created a 'phone-in' culture amongst viewers and radio-listeners in Malta.

“ ... Broadcasting Pluralism in Malta has given rise to the development of 'phone-in' programmes. Informal educational programmes such as Susan Mulvaney's programme on *RTK Radio* adapt themselves well to technology and hence have introduced the concept of 'phone-in' programmes in Malta. My question is whether these 'phone-in' programmes are actually moving towards a more of a 'phone-in' culture in Malta. That is, whether this newly-developed 'phone-in' culture is actually contributing towards the moving away from a society where institutions are of utmost importance to a society where 'the man in the street' can challenge these institutions. In 'phone-in' programmes the caller calls in, challenges the presenter, he actually becomes a broadcaster himself. This development may be emanating now from broadcast media but can also lend itself to other areas where the individual starts asking questions etc. ... Some argue that many 'phone-in' callers do not talk much sense, but we all know that there are also a lot of incompetent people in authority ...”

Mr George Mifsud, chairman of *MPS*, agrees and holds that:

“ ... Broadcasting pluralism brought about a sense of maturity in both the 'audience' and the 'broadcaster', in the television as well as the radio sector. Pluralism brought about a new phenomenon in Malta, in that it created a



whole new genre of programmes, i.e. discussion programmes and talk shows, like ‘*Televixin*’, ‘*Xarabank*’, etc. which in itself is a brilliant marketing concept and that it is now allowing the viewer to voice his opinion and share his grievances and it is also challenging the broadcaster ...”

On the other hand, some broadcasters did comment that pluralism in broadcasting has given rise to some misuse and abuse of the right to freedom of expression on the local broadcasting media. Professor Roger Ellul Micallef, chairman of *University Broadcasting Services Limited*, claims that:

“ ... I fully agree with broadcasting pluralism. Like everything else, it has its good points and its bad points. It allows the general public to hear all the various views, however, it is unfortunate that sometimes this pluralism is being abused of and misused to broadcast views and opinions which are unfounded or contain half-truths and are used to attack specific individuals ...”

Mr Mannie Spiteri also further asserts that:

“ ... Broadcasting pluralism means that you have given up full control and distributed it to many. This may be perceived as though you have given a false impression to every individual that he has the opportunity to freely express his opinion and that he has now become an expert in everything. This is more so in the fields of politics, moral principles, etc. He may feel that now he has become more knowledgeable than those individuals who have studied the subject for many years and who are the real experts. This is a downside of broadcasting pluralism in Malta ...”

***3.3.3 Long-Term Commercial Viability of Television and Radio Stations***

***“ ... After the first five years we were still at break-even, and this not even costing the time my brother and I dedicated to the station ...”***

***Mr Kevin DeCesare,  
Chairman, Bay Radio***

Some broadcasters expressed their concern on the manner and criteria adopted by the Broadcasting Authority when issuing television and radio licences to organizations/individuals.

Mr Joseph Brockdorff, chairman of *BPC International Ltd*, a leading marketing communications agency in Malta, questions the commercial sustainability of the many television and radio stations operating in Malta. From his perspective as a consumer, he claims that broadcasting pluralism has offered him a wider variety of programmes to choose from, but as a professional in the advertising field, he argues:

“ ... From the point of view of an advertiser, [i.e. that commercial company which wants to promote its product], its choice of broadcast media on which to advertise has increased substantially, but it does not mean that the company’s advertising budgets have increased at the same rate at which the media have increased. This is what went wrong with pluralism in Malta. To give a simple example, this is like having more shops to buy from but the money is being divided between all the shops and the consumer still has the same spending power. Advertising expenditure of commercial companies is increasing but as a result of another reason. Advertising expenditure behaves according to increases in a country’s GDP and not according to the broadcast media available ...

Having a variety of stations to choose from, the advertiser can make an educated choice on which stations to advertise on. Taking the same example of before, by having more shops, a consumer can be selective and make more intelligent purchases which meet his needs and hence makes the optimal use of his money's worth ...

Unfortunately, before setting up shop, none of the local radio and television stations conducted a proper feasibility study, so they did not approach things professionally. Taking the same example, if I am free to open a shop, does it mean that I should open the shop? Does it mean that someone has to find for me the sales revenue for my shop? If I really want to open a shop: (a) I have to first see whether I want to look at it as a commercial entity or otherwise; (b) I need to conduct a feasible study to see that it is commercially feasible and (c) that I will try to find a 'niche' for my shop and I will not attempt to sell my products to everybody as not everyone is going to buy from my shop. The local stations seem to expect to be assisted or that some other alternative to generating revenue, other than from advertising sponsors, be found ..."

Rev. Prof. Saviour Chircop questions the criteria used to issuing radio and television broadcasting licences to private organizations. He claims that:

"... For a radio station to operate properly, it requires around Lm100,000 a year. If the Broadcasting Authority receives an application from an individual who claims that he will run the station on Lm45,000, and I were the Authority, I would question whether I should give that individual the licence. The fact that individuals still obtain a licence irrespective of such shortcomings, it means that the criteria used to issue licences are different ...

If we have arrived at a stage where everything is of acceptable quality, this means that we are adopting the worst form of pluralism. And this is actually being done by many of the stations. If one had to assess the various local stations, one would find that there are many programmes which are produced without a script. This is definitely not an indication of professionalism. We have developed a system which is barely viable. Why? Because it is subsidized by institutional interests and it is made possible because many of its contributors are either not paid or not paid well ...”

Mr Kevin DeCesare, chairman of *Bay Radio*, an independent and non-politically affiliated station, states:

“ ... I agree with pluralism. However everyone thinks that a radio station is a licence to print money. In fact, only a few stations are profitable, one or two, at the most. *Bay Radio* is doing very good sales, probably the highest sales per radio station in Malta and achieving a six-figure profit, but it has taken me nine years to achieve this. After the first five years I was still at break-even, and this not even costing the time my brother and I dedicated to the station ...

The first shortcoming of pluralism in Malta is that there are not enough broadcasters to support the high number of stations. Everyone becomes a DJ, everyone becomes a broadcaster, with no training, and hence there is a lack of professionalism. Secondly, the island’s aggregate advertising revenue is not large enough. The stations are not doing well; they are trying to cut down on their costs and hence their standards are going down. Also, finding quality broadcasters is not easy ...

Increased competition as a result of broadcasting pluralism has lowered the quality of broadcasting standards in Malta. We are very proud of the quality sound of our radio station. The investment we have made in the sound processing equipment renders the quality of sound of our station superior to any other station. Our radio station cost us a quarter of a million pounds, some three, four times more expensive than the other radio stations. The sound of our music is very good. We also have a very good sales team. But this took time ...

The worst thing that a radio station can do is to change direction. Some radio stations reason “If we are not doing well then let’s change direction.” This means that they either did not get the right direction in the first place or they have not waited long enough. We had to wait for five years to become profitable. I would really like some stations to close down because this is the only way that standards can go up ...”

### ***3.3.4 The Development of Independent Programme Production Houses***

***“ ... What motivates me to develop a production is to create something new. Every production is a very risky venture, particularly with drama, as one has to produce, at least, a thirteen-episode drama series. It can easily be a failure. From the very onset, the producer assumes full responsibility and I have always gone for productions which I believed in from day one ...”***

***Mr Herman Bonaci,  
Director, Herman Bonaci Productions***

One significant development which broadcasting pluralism did contribute to is the setting up of a number of independent programme

production houses which, to date, amount to some fourteen companies. Three of these production houses were asked to comment on whether the introduction of pluralism in broadcasting in Malta contributed towards their development ... or otherwise.

Ms Marika Mizzi expresses her views as director of an independent production house:

“ ... Having our own production company made us more independent in deciding what productions to invest in and what to produce. For example, ‘*Fenomeni*’ was a whole new genre of production for Malta. As a production company, we always strive to venture into different types of productions ...”

Mr Herman Bonaci, director of *Herman Bonaci Productions* and producer of ‘*Simpatiči*’ and ‘*Kollox Ma’ Kollox*’, also agrees with broadcasting pluralism in that it has increased competition both among television stations and also among independent production houses:

“ ... It is very healthy to have competition. Ten years ago, before broadcasting pluralism came about, I had already approached *Xandir Malta*, which was the only TV station at the time with a ‘soap opera’ proposal like ‘*Ipokriti*’, but it was turned down. There was no competition at the time as the station was a monopoly. When you approached them with some challenging and daring projects, they used to turn them down immediately ...

Before the Broadcasting Act of 1991, ‘farming-out’ of programme productions was not an option. Although, we all know that there was always a demand for Maltese drama in Malta since the 1970s such as ‘*F’Baħar Wieħed*’, ‘*Il-Madonna Tač-Ċoqqa*’, ‘*Wenzu u Roži*’, etc., we did not see any Maltese drama productions on TV for a good ten to

fifteen years. So, many drama companies like ours opted for theatrical productions but this has its own limitations; in Malta, the theatre audience consists of a mere 1000 to 3000 people, not more. So if one produces a production which does not appeal to a wider audience, the production would not be commercially feasible. However, if it is a good production for TV, like what we tried to do with '*Ipokriti*' five years ago, we captured the whole Maltese population. It was the first Maltese 'soap opera' ever produced ...

In fact, we had not approached *PBS* with another project for many years as we thought it was useless. But when Mr Albert Marshall came back from Australia and had started working with *PBS* at the time, he had heard of the Bonaci brothers, and had approached us to produce something for *PBS*. We had already proposed the project to *PBS* many years before but they were not interested. Albert Marshall had a lot of faith in Maltese talent and proposed a 'farming-out' agreement. The 'farming-out' concept opened a whole new market, even in advertising. I personally think production companies like ours are making miracles in Malta, particularly with our very low budgets ...

For a company like ours to finance a project like '*Simpatiči*', which costs many thousands of pounds, one needs to venture into other related fields, so we also went into advertising. The object of our company is to always produce something new to our audiences however there is always the financial risk aspect which also has to be taken into consideration. So, sometimes if you have a good product you try and make the most of it. However, every production has a finite lifecycle. A producer must watch a lot of foreign television and look for new ideas. But he also needs to adapt them to the Maltese context. What motivates me to develop a production is to create something new.

Every production is a very risky venture, particularly with drama, as one has to produce, at least, a thirteen-episode drama series. It can easily be a failure. From the very onset, the producer assumes full responsibility and I have always gone for productions which I believed in from day one. If I do not have full faith in the project, I would stop everything there and then. So far, this policy has always worked for me. Maybe it is a matter of vision ...”

Mr Peppi Azzopardi, holds that broadcasting pluralism did bring about competition among stations however he does not feel that the setting up of his production house was a direct consequence of this pluralism:

“ ... I do not think that the setting up of our company is a direct consequence of pluralism. It is more because we were able to produce programmes that communicate with people. I am sure that if ‘*Xarabank*’ did not manage to achieve the high viewership it gets, *PBS* would have done away with the production a very long time ago. If there were no pluralism, i.e. there was only one state station, there would have been more competition between production houses to attain that primetime to broadcast their programme. However, pluralism ensures that if a programme like ‘*Xarabank*’ had to leave *PBS*, it could easily move to another station and take with it all the advertising revenue it generates for the station, its popularity, etc. However, so far, we have never had any interference from *PBS* as to which guest to bring and not to bring, what to discuss, etc. ...”

Mr George Mifsud of *MPS*, who also runs a production house called *The Picture Box*, which produces programmes like ‘*Meander*’ and ‘*Xhieda*’, states that:



“ ... We sell the programme '*Xhieda*' to *PBS* and to *Media Centre* and '*Meander*' to *PBS*. We have been in this business for these last twenty years, obviously now we are investing more into this business venture because broadcasting pluralism has opened new opportunities in this sector. Instead of having just one station, there are other TV stations to sell your products to ...”

### ***3.4 The Qualities of a 'Good' Television/Radio Station***

With some ten odd years of radio and television broadcasting pluralism, radio listeners and viewers seem to have become very discerning and have developed very high expectations. Very probably, this may be the result of increased competition brought about by this same pluralism. The Author asked the survey respondents to indicate the assessment criteria they would use to evaluate whether a television or radio station is a 'good station' or otherwise. **TABLE 3.2** below depicts the respondents' perceptions of what are the main ingredients which render a TV or radio station a 'very good station'. Multiple answers were given.

**TABLE 3.2**

**ASSESSMENT CRITERIA CHARACTERISING  
A 'VERY GOOD' TV OR RADIO STATION**

<b>Survey Respondent's View/Comment [multiple answers were given]</b>	<b>No of Responses</b>	<b>% Response</b>
<b>PROGRAMMING &amp; BROADCASTING STANDARDS:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Good programme content	86	11.1
<input type="checkbox"/> Variety of programmes and shows	72	9.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Good programming standards and professionalism	54	7.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Good presenters/commentators	24	3.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Not too many commercials	15	2.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Be truthful	11	1.5
<input type="checkbox"/> Good reception	5	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Originality and professionalism	5	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Entertaining	5	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Simple language used [for 'ordinary man in the street']	5	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Presentation of set and announcers/broadcasters	3	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-spoonfed productions	2	0.3
	<b>287</b>	<b>37.0</b>
<b>PROGRAMME CONTENT:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Good informative and educational programmes	98	13.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Good music programmes	62	8.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Good Maltese talk shows/documentaries	61	8.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Good news coverage	49	6.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Good TV/Radio discussion programmes	46	6.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Good modern films	36	4.7
<input type="checkbox"/> Good Maltese productions	27	3.5
<input type="checkbox"/> Good sports programmes/live matches	24	3.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Maltese drama productions	18	2.3
<input type="checkbox"/> More and better comedies	16	2.1
<input type="checkbox"/> No politics and no politically biased news	14	1.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Real-life non-fiction problems	7	0.9

<input type="checkbox"/> Good soap operas	5	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Current affairs	4	0.5
<input type="checkbox"/> Live transmissions	3	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Local feast coverage	2	0.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Old music	2	0.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Gossip news	2	0.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Good prizes	2	0.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Women's programmes	2	0.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Classical Music	1	0.1
<input type="checkbox"/> Religious programmes	1	0.1
<input type="checkbox"/> Good comedies	1	0.1
<input type="checkbox"/> More horse-racing programmes	1	0.1
<input type="checkbox"/> Good DJs	1	0.1
	<hr/> 485	<hr/> 63.0
	<hr/> 772	<hr/> 100.0

Clearly, from a programming and broadcasting standards' perspective, the survey respondents indicated that a 'good' station is best characterized by one which contains 'good programme content' [11.1%], broadcasts a 'variety of programmes and shows' [9.3%] and one which maintains 'good programming standards and professionalism' [7%]. From a more 'programme content' perspective, the respondents expect to be presented with 'good informative and educational programmes' [13%], 'good talk-shows' [8%], 'discussion programmes' [6%], 'good news coverage' [6.3%] and 'good modern films' [4.7%]. As for 'radio', the respondents expect 'good music programmes' [8%].

### **Do local broadcasters agree with these assessment criteria?**

When the Author asked Mr Anthony Tabone, chairman of *PBS Ltd.*, to indicate what makes a station 'a good station', the latter stated:

“ ... A 'good' station is one which offers its audience programmes they like and keeps them informed. In my

opinion, the educational aspect should always be integrated, i.e. if you are entertaining you can still educate. To educate you do not need to produce a programme on science, etc. ...”

Mr Mannie Spiteri agrees. In his opinion, the two essential qualities of a ‘good’ station are:

“ ... Firstly, to inform and educate the radio listener/televviewer and also inform the latter on how and from where to achieve the information requested. Secondly, it should also entertain the audience without inducing the audience to greater nonchalance, i.e. where before I did not say certain things, now I start saying them. The station has to assume the responsibility of maintaining a certain degree of decency and good taste in what is being said and broadcast ...”

And for Mr Kevin DeCesare, a ‘good’ radio station is one which has:

“ ... good quality of sound and presentation, i.e. how a DJ comes in, mixes the music, etc. On radio, a DJ should never talk over the vocals of a song. And this, many radio stations simply do not honour ...”

### ***3.5 Conclusion***

The object of this Chapter was only to ‘whet the reader’s appetite’ on some of the salient developments which broadcasting pluralism brought about in Malta as perceived by the Maltese listener/viewer and broadcaster. In the forthcoming Chapters the Author will be conducting a more in-depth qualitative analysis of these significant developments and ... of many more.

**CHAPTER FOUR****PROGRAMMING STANDARDS**

*“ ... Not every popular programme is a ‘quality’ programme, but a ‘quality’ programme cannot not be a popular programme ...”*

*Mr Peppi Azzopardi,  
Director, Where’s Everybody?*

**4.1 Introduction**

In his article “*The Marshall Revolution: Year Two*”, which appeared on the 4 April 1999 issue of *The Sunday Times*, expressing his views on an audience survey the Broadcasting Authority had conducted at the time, Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg observed “the silent revolution which was taking place in the television viewing patterns of the Maltese”. On this development he noted that:

“ ... The Maltese are now spending more time watching Maltese stations than foreign ones. The revolution that started in 1998 continued with increased strength in 1999. This has just been confirmed by the audience survey prepared by the Broadcasting Authority ... Up till and including 1997 the reverse was true. Time spent watching Maltese stations was less – considerably less – than the time spent watching foreign ones ...

The fact that the Maltese are now watching Maltese stations more than foreign ones is a very important industrial, cultural and social development. On the industrial front one notes that the increase in local productions, which are

the major crowd-pullers, is only possible as a result of the process of ‘farming out’ programmes that was embarked on in recent years. A look at the first most popular television programmes in Malta shows that all of them are broadcast by *TVM* and that three of them are ‘farmed out’. These are ‘*Ipokriti*’ [first place with an average audience of 129,000], ‘*Xhieda*’ [third place with an average audience of 73,000] and ‘*Ġejna Koppji*’ [fourth place with an average audience of 64,000] ...

The cultural significance of this development is more important. Many writers in several countries are justifiably worried that the dominance of the television scene by American productions is leading to a process of cultural synchronization. These writers note that a society survives and prospers only if it succeeds to build its own cultural system which is best adapted to its environment. This leads to a process of cultural autonomy ...

Maltese viewers shift from mainly watching foreign stations to mainly watching local stations is *prima facie* a positive development which should be studied further. Such study should take into consideration the foreign content on local stations. The same study should also analyse in some depth the content of local productions which are now taking the place of foreign ones ... Even before the results of these studies are known [if they are ever made] I feel justified to submit two final comments. [Author: only one of which is being reproduced in this context]. The development of the past two years proves once more that the Maltese love Maltese productions and that they are ready to change their viewing patterns if and when they are offered programmes which they like. It seems that the still prevailing mentality in the field of manufacture that “if it’s Maltese, it’s no good” has a good challenger in the field of media productions ...”

However, viewer Angelo Micallef does not seem to agree with Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg's observations. In fact, on 5 November 2000, Mr Micallef wrote the following letter to The Malta Independent editor:

“ ... Recently all television channels launched their new schedules, which as usual I was shocked to see. The majority of programmes on *PBS*, *Super One TV* and *NET TV* were all local productions. In my opinion, every season things get worse and worse. When a station is asked why it has so many local productions it answers that is what the people choose. Of course, that is what people choose, no person wants to see a cheap or old production so they naturally choose local programmes ...

We are only concentrating on our small little world. All we care about is Malta; we don't care about the rest of the world. I have to thank Melita Cable for at least giving us a glimpse at the rest of the globe. All the films on *PBS* are old or repeats and to watch a good film one has to tune in to foreign stations. If it were not for *Discovery Channel* we would know nothing about modern scientific discoveries, international history or plain information about other countries. I like the idea of Maltese discussion shows, however, these Maltese varieties should be decreased and we should forget acting. It is very rare to find a good Maltese series such as ‘*Sisters*’ [*NET TV*]. In my opinion, the last greatest Maltese production [not a discussion show] was ‘*Delitti Maltni*’ and I hope we see it again on TV. Series such as ‘*Ipokriti*’, ‘*One Star Hotel*’ and ‘*San Valentino*’ are what I call junk television ...”

The Author asks: Are Maltese viewers still ‘shifting from Maltese stations to foreign ones’ today, as was the case in the past? How do Maltese viewers perceive the ‘content of local stations’ today? Do the ‘Maltese still love Maltese productions’? Are they ‘ready to change their viewing patterns if and when they are offered programmes which

they like'? Do 'things get worse and worse with every season'? Are 'we concentrating too much on our small little world'? Does the 'if it's Maltese, it's no good' mentality prevail in the field of local media productions today? These are some of the qualitative aspects which will be discussed in this Chapter. The Author will focus on the programming standards, [diversity and level of programme content] attained by the local radio and television broadcasting sector today as perceived by the Maltese televiwer and radio-listener. To obtain these views and perceptions, the Author addressed this research area in terms of the following qualitative aspects.

### **Maltese Radio and TV Stations**

- Level of quality standards of broadcasting and programming reached
- Level of diversity/variety/mix of programme content
- Mix between Maltese productions and foreign productions [applicable to TV stations only]
- Level of quality of foreign productions: movies, documentaries, sit coms, etc. [applicable to TV stations only]
- Level of quality of 'adult theme' foreign productions/documentaries [violence, sex, horror, etc.]
- Image/role of 'the family' portrayed on Maltese TV stations
- Image/role of 'the male' portrayed on Maltese TV stations
- Image/role of 'the female' portrayed on Maltese TV stations
- Level of quality of Maltese productions [in terms of programme concept, originality, etc.] of:
  - ❑ Children's programmes
  - ❑ Cultural programmes [arts and literature]
  - ❑ Current affairs/documentaries
  - ❑ Discussion programmes/talk shows
  - ❑ Health programmes
  - ❑ Maltese TV/radio drama productions/series
  - ❑ Music programmes
  - ❑ News/weather forecasts
  - ❑ Religious programmes
  - ❑ Political programmes/broadcasts



- ❑ Sports programmes
- ❑ Variety shows/phone-in programmes/quiz shows
- ❑ Women's programmes

## **4.2 Television Stations: Programming Standards**

**TABLE 4.1** below depicts how broadcasting pluralism, as perceived by televisioner respondents, has affected the diversity and level of quality of programme content on Maltese television stations. The 500 survey respondents were asked to rate these qualitative issues from a [1] to [5] rating scale, where [1] signified a 'very low/negative' assessment and [5] represented a 'very high/positive' score. An average of 95.6% of the respondents answered all questions, while a total of 22 respondents did not answer the questions or did not have an opinion on this research area.

The average score for the overall replies on this research area was always greater than the average rating score of 3, implying that the respondents all perceive the effect of pluralism in broadcasting on the diversity and level of quality of programme on Maltese TV stations as positive. The highest positive scores were registered on how the image/role of 'the family', 'the male' and 'the female' are portrayed on Maltese TV stations. Although also positive, mean scores assessing the effect of broadcasting pluralism on the level of quality of 'adult theme foreign productions' and of 'foreign productions' registered the highest spread of responses.

**TABLE 4.1**  
**RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE EFFECT OF**  
**BROADCASTING PLURALISM ON THE DIVERSITY AND**  
**LEVEL OF QUALITY OF PROGRAMME CONTENT**  
**BROADCAST ON MALTESE TV STATIONS**

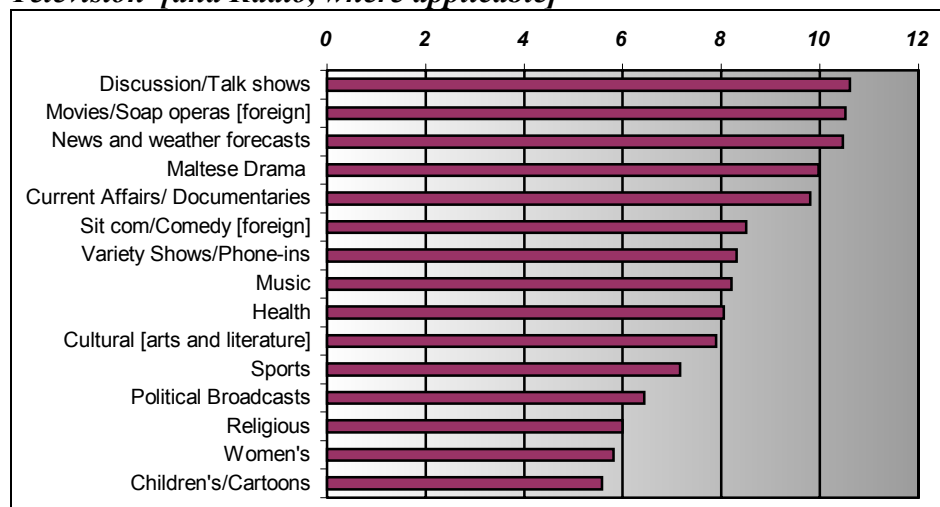
Research area	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max	% of Total Pop
Level of quality of broadcasting and programming reached by Maltese TV stations	3.63	0.99	1	5	98.6
Level of diversity/variety of programme content	3.59	1.04	1	5	97.6
Mix between Maltese productions and foreign productions	3.43	1.18	1	5	96.6
Level of quality of foreign productions [movies/ documentaries, sit coms, etc.]	3.51	1.30	1	5	95.2
Level of quality of 'adult theme' foreign productions [violence, sex, horror, etc.]	3.47	1.44	1	5	91.6
Image/role of 'the family' portrayed on TV stations	3.91	0.99	1	5	95.6
Image/role of 'the male' portrayed on TV stations	3.77	1.04	1	5	95.2
Image/role of 'the female' portrayed on TV stations	3.81	1.08	1	5	94.6

The survey respondents were also asked to indicate what type of programmes they prefer watching on TV [or listening on the radio, where applicable]. They were asked to rank the ‘programme types’ from 1 to 15 in order of preference, where rank ‘1’ indicated their most favourite and rank ‘15’ indicated their least preferred programme type.

**DIAGRAM 4.1** below illustrates the whole range of ‘programme types’ and it clearly shows that the respondents’ preferred ‘programme types’ are ‘discussion programmes/talk shows’, ‘foreign soap operas and movies’ and ‘news bulletins’ which attained a relative mean rating of 10.6, 10.5 and 10.4 respectively. These were followed by ‘Maltese drama’ and ‘current affairs/documentary programmes’ which received a relative mean rating of 9.9 and 9.8 respectively. The least preferred ‘programme types’ are ‘children’s programmes’ [relative mean rating stood at 5.5 which was expected, given that the survey respondents were 18 years and over]; ‘women’s programmes’ and ‘religious programmes’ which attained a relative mean rating of 5.8 and 5.8 respectively. Worthy of mention is the relatively low mean rating attained by ‘political broadcasts/programmes’ which stood at 6.4.

#### DIAGRAM 4.1

*Survey Respondents’ Preferred ‘Programme Type’ watched on Local Television [and Radio, where applicable]*



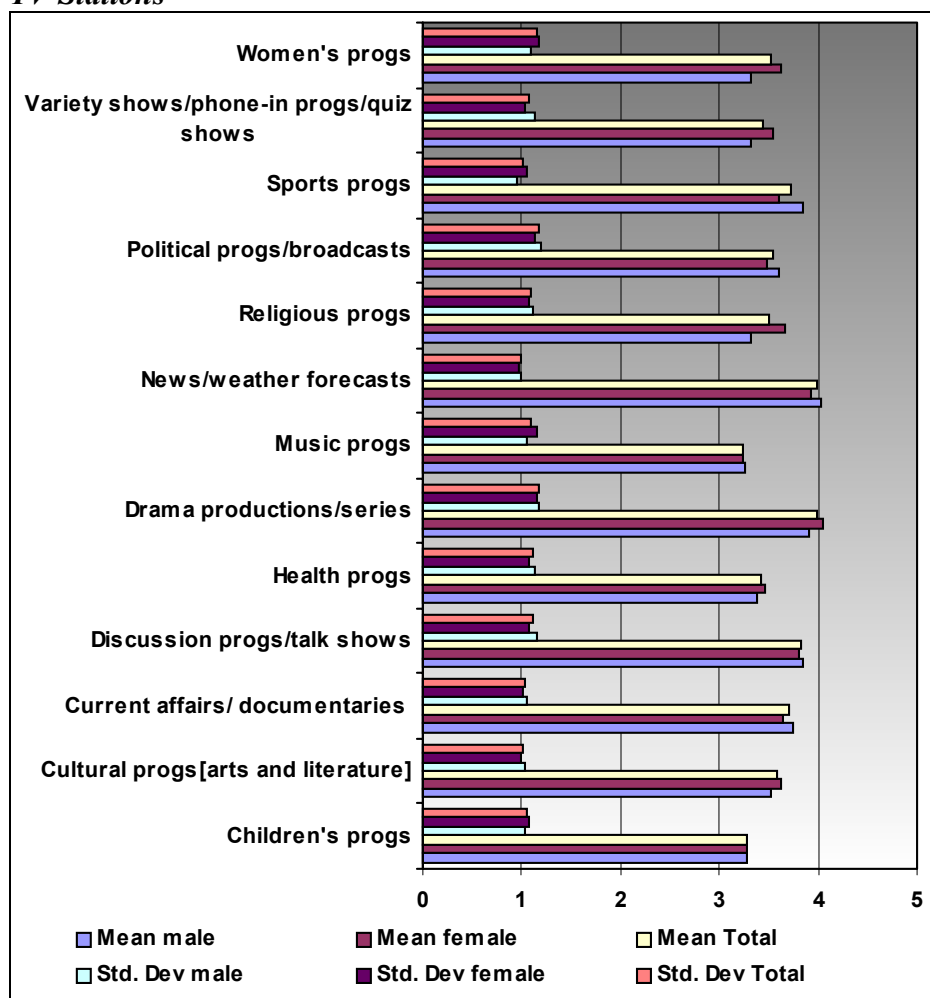
### **4.3 Television Stations: Maltese Productions**

The ‘televviewer’ respondent was also asked to comment on the effect of broadcasting pluralism on the level of quality of Maltese productions, in terms of programme concept, originality, programme content, etc. On average, 85% of the respondents answered all questions, while the rest either did not have an opinion or did not answer. The two most answered questions referred to the assessment of the level of quality of ‘news/weather forecasts’ [at 97.4% of the total respondents] and ‘discussion programmes/talk shows’ [at 96.2%]. The least answered question referred to the level of quality of ‘children’s programmes’, [at 70.8% of total respondents]. **DIAGRAM 4.2** below illustrates the televiewers’ ratings of the whole range of Maltese productions broadcast on Maltese TV stations. A [1] to [5] rating scale was used where [1] signified a ‘very low’ assessment and [5] represented a ‘very high’ score.

**DIAGRAM 4.2** clearly illustrates that the effect of broadcasting pluralism on the level of quality of these various Maltese productions was positive. All research areas scored a mean 3.25 and over, where the highest mean scores registered refer to the level of quality of ‘drama productions/series’ [3.98], ‘news/weather forecasts’ [3.98], ‘discussion programmes/talk shows’ [3.82] and ‘sports programmes’ [3.73]. Assessing the mean responses by gender, the female population rated the level of quality of ‘drama productions/series’ at a mean score of 4.05, while the male population rated the level of quality of ‘news/weather forecasts’ at a mean score of 4.03. The highest spread between responses [of both genders] was registered in the level of ‘political programmes/broadcasts’ and ‘women’s programmes’ [SD: 1.16].

**DIAGRAM 4.2**

*Respondents' Perceptions on the Effect of Broadcasting Pluralism on the Level of Quality of Maltese Productions Broadcast on Maltese TV Stations*



Moreover, the survey respondents were asked to comment on how, in their opinion, pluralism has affected Maltese TV broadcasting [terrestrial and Maltese Cable TV Stations] in terms of 'programme content'. **TABLE 4.2** below depicts the respondents' comments, both

favourable and unfavourable. An interesting observation is that although, in general, audiences feel that the programme standards, quality, content and variety have improved, they feel that the overall ‘programme content’ standard is still low and that there is still room for improvement.

**TABLE 4.2**

***RESPONDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS ON HOW THE  
INTRODUCTION OF BROADCASTING PLURALISM IN MALTA  
HAS AFFECTED MALTESE TV BROADCASTING  
[TERRESTRIAL AND MALTESE CABLE TV STATIONS] IN  
TERMS OF ‘PROGRAMME CONTENT’***

<b>Survey Respondent’s View/Comment</b>	<b>No of Responses</b>	<b>% of Total Qualitative Response</b>
<b>Favourable Comments:</b>		
❑ Programming standards have improved however the standard is still very low	22	7.3
❑ Good in general	17	5.7
❑ Better variety of programmes	12	4.0
❑ Better local programmes	11	3.6
❑ Much better level of quality of Maltese productions	7	2.3
❑ Recently there was a great improvement in foreign programmes	5	1.7
❑ More Maltese drama	5	1.7
❑ Still room for improvement	3	1.0
❑ Average viewing compared to foreign stations	3	1.0
❑ Good sports coverage but not enough	1	0.3
❑ ‘ <i>Simpatiči</i> ’ and ‘ <i>Undercover</i> ’ are very realistic	1	0.3
❑ More female hosts/presenters required	1	0.3
❑ Improvement due to competition	1	0.3
	<b>89</b>	<b>29.5</b>

<b>Unfavourable Comments:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many low-quality foreign and local productions	18	6.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Never watch Maltese programmes	16	5.3
<input type="checkbox"/> More Maltese programmes needed	15	5.0
<input type="checkbox"/> More health programmes needed	14	4.7
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many programme repetitions	14	4.7
<input type="checkbox"/> Good programmes should not be at the same time	13	4.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Low quality local programmes	12	4.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Too much politics	12	4.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor talk shows/news/productions	10	3.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Total lack or poor quality of drug education	10	3.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Not enough cultural programmes	9	3.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Bad timings of discussion progs/talk shows	9	3.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Incompetent presenters/chairpersons/guests	9	3.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Good mix but nothing original/stations copying each other	6	2.0
<input type="checkbox"/> To improve on health and women's programmes	5	1.7
<input type="checkbox"/> No modern foreign movies	5	1.7
<input type="checkbox"/> Most local productions are being copied from foreign stations	4	1.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Low quality of cartoon programmes	3	1.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many foreign productions	3	1.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Low quality of documentaries	3	1.0
<input type="checkbox"/> More soap operas on local stations	3	1.0
<input type="checkbox"/> More children's programmes needed	3	1.0
<input type="checkbox"/> More live transmission required	2	0.7
<input type="checkbox"/> More classical music needed	2	0.7
<input type="checkbox"/> More foreign productions needed	2	0.7
<input type="checkbox"/> Outdated films and programmes	2	0.7
<input type="checkbox"/> Religious programmes used to 'corner' people	1	0.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Maltese presenters should be more elegantly dressed	1	0.3
<input type="checkbox"/> The image of the 'woman' is exploited on adverts	1	0.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Too much sports	1	0.3

<input type="checkbox"/> More serious discussion programmes on adult themes	1	0.3
<input type="checkbox"/> More quality phone-in discussion programmes needed	1	0.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Not enough good comedies	1	0.3
	<u>211</u>	<u>70.5</u>
	<u>300</u>	<u>100.0</u>

#### **4.4 Radio Stations: Programming Standards**

**TABLE 4.3** below illustrates how the ‘radio listener’ respondent rated the impact of broadcasting pluralism on the diversity and level of quality of programme content on Maltese radio stations. Contrary to the high response rate registered for the ‘programme content’ on television stations, this research area on Radio Stations only registered an average total response of 69.5%. This shows that, on average, 153 [30.6%] of the 500 respondents either do not listen to radio or did not have an opinion on this research area. Once again, the [1] to [5] rating scale was used, where [1] signified a ‘very low/negative’ assessment and [5] represented a ‘very high/positive’ score.

**TABLE 4.3** indicates that all responses attained a mean score of 3.10 and over. Also, the highest mean score [3.82] and lowest dispersion spread [0.88] were registered when the respondents were asked on their perceptions on the effect of broadcasting pluralism on the level of quality of broadcasting and programming standards reached by Maltese radio stations. This shows that the respondents within the population who are regular Maltese radio-listeners have experienced a marked improvement in the quality of radio broadcasting and programming however what these positive responses do not indicate are the views/opinions of the remaining 30.6% non-radio-listeners of the survey population. Do these individuals not listen to Maltese radio as a result of their lifestyle and entertainment behavioural patterns [i.e. do not like or have no time to listen to radio] or do they not listen to Maltese radio because they do not feel it lives up to their expectations?



**TABLE 4.3**

***RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE EFFECT OF  
BROADCASTING PLURALISM ON THE DIVERSITY AND  
LEVEL OF QUALITY OF PROGRAMME CONTENT  
BROADCAST ON MALTESE RADIO STATIONS***

<b>Research area</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Dev</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>% of Total Pop</b>
Level of quality of broadcasting and programming reached by Maltese Radio stations	3.82	0.88	1	5	76.6
Level of diversity/variety of programme content	3.79	0.90	1	5	73.8
Level of quality of 'adult theme' discussion programmes	3.10	1.18	1	5	66.2
Image of 'the family' portrayed on radio stations	3.60	0.99	1	5	67.6
Image of 'the male' portrayed on radio stations	3.56	0.92	1	5	66.6
Image of 'the female' portrayed on radio stations	3.54	0.99	1	5	66.0

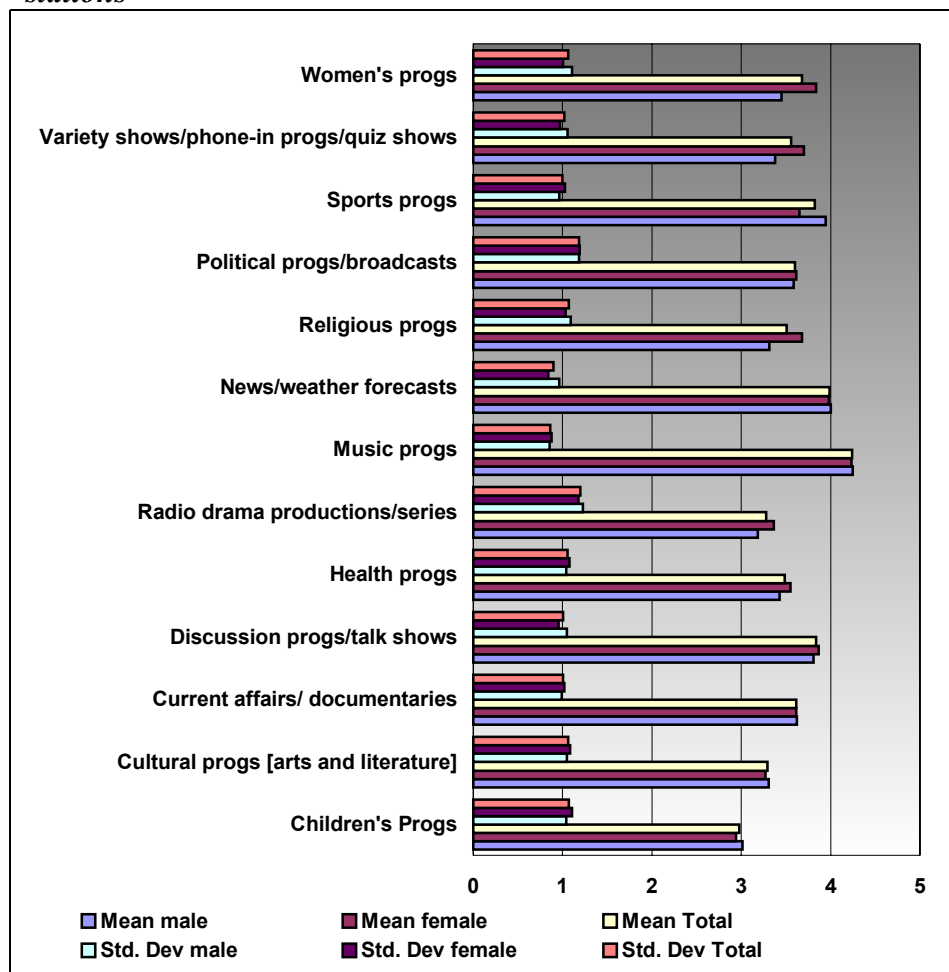
#### 4.5 Radio Stations: Productions by Programme Type

The survey respondents were asked to assess the effect of broadcasting pluralism on the level of quality of productions [by programme type] broadcast on Maltese radio stations, in terms of programme concept, originality, programme content, etc. [*vide* **DIAGRAM 4.3**]. A mere average 57.5% of the respondent population answered these questions. Notwithstanding this, the overall perception of the respondent population of the effect of broadcasting pluralism on the level of quality of programmes on Maltese radio was very positive. The mean ratings for all questions were 3.28 and over [apart from the ‘children’s programmes’ which registered a mean 2.98; this is largely attributed to the fact that the ‘target audience’ of these programmes was not included in the survey population].

The two questions with the highest response rate were those assessing the level of quality of ‘music programmes’ and ‘news/weather forecasts’ which stood at 74% and 72.2% respectively. Maybe one may deduce here that ‘radio’ is predominantly perceived as a ‘juke box’ and a ‘news update’ mass medium. Moreover, this was reflected in the mean scores registered in both questions. As noted in **DIAGRAM 4.3** below, the positive effect of the broadcasting pluralism on the level of quality of ‘music programmes’ and ‘news/weather forecasts’ on Maltese radio as perceived by the survey respondents is evident from the high mean scores of 4.24 and 3.99 respectively registered. This positive response is also confirmed from the low measures of dispersion registered in these two questions: i.e. 0.86 for ‘music programmes’ and 0.90 for ‘news/weather forecasts’. Once again, the [1] to [5] rating scale was used, where [1] signified a ‘very low’ assessment and [5] represented a ‘very high’ score.

**DIAGRAM 4.3**

*Respondents' Perceptions on the Effect of Broadcasting Pluralism on the Level of Quality of Programmes Broadcast on Maltese Radio stations*



**TABLE 4.4** below encompasses comments/views of some respondents on the effect of pluralism on the programme content of Maltese radio stations. These also indicated the respondents' views on the improved quality standards and better variety of 'music programmes' of local radio stations which totaled 76.3%.

**TABLE 4.4**

**RESPONDENTS' ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THE EFFECT  
OF BROADCASTING PLURALISM ON  
PROGRAMME CONTENT OF MALTESE RADIO STATIONS**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Qualitative Response
<b>Favourable Comments</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Better choice and variety of music programmes and better quality standards	52	51.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Good in general	8	7.9
<input type="checkbox"/> Much better news and talk shows	5	5.0
<input type="checkbox"/> In a positive way but still room for improvement	5	5.0
<input type="checkbox"/> In a positive way due to competition	2	2.0
<input type="checkbox"/> RTK is very interesting	1	0.9
<input type="checkbox"/> High appreciation of Radio Malta	1	0.9
<input type="checkbox"/> Religious programmes are favourites	1	0.9
<input type="checkbox"/> Interesting discussions on radio	1	0.9
<input type="checkbox"/> Radio is better than TV	1	0.9
<input type="checkbox"/> More open-minded than before	1	0.9
	<b>78</b>	<b>76.3</b>
<b>Unfavourable Comments</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Need to improve	6	5.9
<input type="checkbox"/> Phone-ins should be of better standard	6	5.9
<input type="checkbox"/> Do not listen to radio	6	5.9
<input type="checkbox"/> Only listen to radio in car	5	5.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Too negative [unqualified]	1	1.0
	<b>24</b>	<b>23.7</b>
	<b>102</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**4.6 Programming Standards - More Qualitative Views**

*“ ... I think Maltese TV is not monotonous anymore. We have a long way to go, but very slowly it is improving. It is not like in the past, where they had a small camera and started filming. Nowadays, the script, the props, etc. are all improving a lot ...”*

*Mark,  
Focus Group Respondent*

These survey findings were further validated during the focus group sessions attended by viewers and radio-listeners and at the in-depth interviews conducted with broadcasters. The following comprise the salient and most interesting research findings on the level of programming standards attained by local television and radio.

**4.6.1 Maltese Productions: Programming Standards**

The diversity in opinion on the level of quality of programme content of Maltese productions such as teleseries, drama, sitcoms, etc. observed in the survey was further confirmed by the focus group respondents. Some interesting comments in this respect were noted.

In one focus group session attended by male and female respondents aged 18-30 years old:

Patrick:

We used to watch ‘*Ipokriti*’ when it first started, but then we did not like the second series.

Neil:

It is aimed more at older people.

Audrey:

In my case, first I did not watch it, then people started talking about it and I started watching '*Simpatiči*' but I would only watch it if I am at home. I don't mind missing an episode. I also like '*Villa Sunset*'.

Patrick:

People seem to also like '*Fenomeni*'. It is very good and original.

John:

The quality of Maltese productions have improved a lot.

Mark:

'*Undercover*' is not a comedy, but you still end up laughing, that is the problem.

Patrick:

Sometimes, it contains jokes which are really stale.

John:

You end up laughing at them and not with them.

Mark:

But Eileen Montesin has managed to hit a good number of social aspects of Maltese society. She is very creative. I think Maltese TV is not monotonous anymore. We have a long way to go, but very slowly it is improving. It is not like in the past, where they had a small camera and started filming. Nowadays, the script, the props, etc. are all improving a lot.

Patrick:

I think with broadcasting pluralism, Maltese TV has really improved in all aspects. I remember there was a very good

family-oriented teleserial ‘*Issa Naraw*’, similar to ‘*Simpatiči*’, which was very good but they stopped it.

Mark:

Yes, I remember it. It was a very short series.

In another focus group attended by female respondents aged 31-46 years old:

Josianne:

TVM’s programme ‘*Mis-Sitta Sat-Tmienja*’ presented by Claire Aguis clearly shows that they are filling in airtime. She is a great presenter but the questions she asks are there to fill in time up to the 8 p.m. news bulletin.

Anna:

Maltese drama on TV seems to be appealing to the lower social classes and is reflecting their opinion. There are other social classes in Malta who want Maltese drama and their needs are not presently being satisfied.

Josianne:

I don’t watch Maltese drama because if I watch it, I always find myself criticizing the production and saying, “They could have done this or they should have done that”, so I don’t watch it.

Some other respondents’ views:

Ryan [28 yrs]:

I think as it is now, there are enough local productions. For example, on a Monday evening, I can simply not switch on the TV. There is nothing on which interests me. Because the Maltese productions broadcast on Monday are definitely not appealing to me.

Mary [69 yrs]:

I first watch *NET News*, listen to their headlines and then go to *PBS*' news bulletin. Then I watch the primetime programme, depending on what is being shown. For example, on a Wednesday, there is nothing which appeals to me and hence I switch off the television and read a book instead.

#### 4.6.1.1 *The Broadcaster's Perspective*

Clearly, on hearing these views, one observes the target market and product positioning strategies being adopted by the local TV stations. Mr Michael Falzon of *NET TV* remarks:

“ ... We know that ‘Wednesday’ is definitely not a good day for television due to the broadcasting of live transmission of football matches by foreign stations. Hence, on a Wednesday we normally broadcast foreign comedies like ‘*Friends*’, ‘*Fraser*’, ‘*Ally McBeal*’, etc., which we know have a very good viewership with young audiences. Then right after, we broadcast ‘*Night Life*’ again targeting young people ...”

Mr Alfred Mifsud also affirmed that the concept of ‘niche marketing’ is essential for a station to succeed:

“ ... It is our Station’s policy to retain our profile ... As chairman of *Super One TV*, I would not accept to spend money on ‘foreign productions’. Our focus is on ‘local productions’. In terms of foreign productions, we only invest in one daily sit com, and one production for the ‘youth’ audience. The main reason is cost, however our reasoning is that foreign productions may be viewed on other stations and on Melita Cable. I would not opt to enter into other stations’ niche market segments. For example,



we would never opt for transmitting ‘*Formula Uno*’ on *Super One TV*. As regards transmitting football matches on TV, I would consider obtaining the rights only if Maltese teams are playing ...”

Moreover, Mr Mifsud argues that one cannot compare the quality standards of Maltese productions with foreign ones. He claims that:

“ ... It is really annoying to hear critics criticizing Maltese productions and comparing them with foreign ones. The comparison has to be made on a ‘like-with-like’ basis taking into consideration the size of Malta and that of foreign countries. Malta can never compete with larger countries particularly when the latter have a much wider audience and more resources than we have. Even though televiewers do compare, they still like Maltese productions. They also appreciate that although as a nation we can never reach the same standards as other countries, they still prefer Maltese productions as they can relate to the various scenarios/situations represented in these productions. One makes up for the other. Moreover, some critics do not appreciate that there is a commercial element which we have to respect. For example, in summer, it is impossible for our Station to retain the same amount of programme content and strong programming schedule we have in winter. This is definitely not sustainable due to the fall in viewership in summer ...”

Ms Claudette Pace also agrees that Maltese productions may not have reached international standards yet, however she asserts that the Maltese broadcasting sector has one very distinct advantage over foreign stations in that:

“ ... I watch a lot of satellite and cable TV and certain stations are very good with very innovative ways of doing things, producing game shows, doing up sets, etc. However,

the Maltese broadcasting sector has one very distinct advantage over foreign stations and that is that there are no Maltese-speaking productions on these stations and the Maltese audiences still want Maltese productions ...”

Mr Michael Falzon observes that broadcasting pluralism has acted as a catalyst towards the enhancement of quality standards of Maltese productions:

“ ... As a result of this broadcasting pluralism, there is a lot of competition among TV stations in Malta, and this is very healthy. I am sure that this competition has led to a marked increase and improvement in the development of Maltese productions. I would reckon that nowadays we are producing certain Maltese productions which if it were not for this competition, we would not have them. And it is also evident that there seem to be an increasing trend among televiewers to prefer Maltese productions to foreign ones. This means that broadcasting pluralism and competition have acted as a catalyst to improve the standards of Maltese productions. Competition also makes you fight for viewership ...”

Ms Claudette Pace confirms:

“ ... The Maltese productions sector has become very challenging. For example in local drama, there is a constant attempt to finding new things to do. For example, ‘*Ipokriti*’ was a landmark which revived Maltese drama. I think that it was a very very expensive venture. Then there was ‘*Simpatiči*’, also to a lesser degree, ‘*One-Star Hotel*’, and ‘*Tgħid Giet Hekk ... Hux!*’ With ‘*Ipokriti*’, the pioneers were the Bonaci brothers and now we are seeing off-shoots of this. Notwithstanding this, I do not think that ‘*Ipokriti*’ was of very good quality. In my opinion, I think the better

quality programmes, locally and internationally, have very very low financial backing ...”

#### **4.6.2 Maltese Productions: Gender Issues and Family Values**

*“ ... I was almost illiterate when I left school. However, thanks to my husband who encourages me and to these types of programmes on TV and radio, I found that these have helped me a lot in my personal and educational development ...”*

*Vivienne,  
Focus Group Respondent*

Some interesting developments on ‘gender issues’ and ‘family values’, which have, very probably, emanated as a consequence of broadcasting pluralism, were also observed in the focus group sessions. During a focus group session conducted with housewives, aged 46-60 years old, the following discussion took place.

Angela:

With regards to the role of the woman, on *Max Plus TV*, Claudette Pace gives a lot of importance to the role of ‘the woman’ in Maltese society.

Mary:

It is true. In fact, Claudette really tries to emphasise the importance of the role of the woman. Even Claudette herself is already a good example of this.

Vivienne:

I did not have the opportunity to receive any formal education when I was young. I had to leave school at the age of thirteen because I come from a very large family. I was almost illiterate when I left school. However, thanks to my husband who encourages me and to these types of

programmes on radio and TV, I found that these have helped me a lot in my personal and educational development. Before I was incapable of analyzing a situation. Now I feel more competent to do so.

Mary:

In fact, Radio and TV do educate and inform audiences.

Angela:

Particularly women's programmes on both Radio and TV, but more so on radio. For us housewives, this is very educational.

Ms Claudette Pace admits that she has learnt a lot from her own mistakes as a presenter. She insists that a presenter should always be sensitive to his/her audience's views particularly in the areas of family values, gender issues, moral issues, etc. In her interview, she recalled some incidents which occurred during her programme '*Sellili*' which have rendered her inevitably more aware of and 'sensitive to' such issues:

“ ... There are some sensitive issues one has to be very careful with. For example, one typical subject which I am currently tackling in our section '*Ir-Rokna Tal-Hajja*' is 'infertility'. I admit that I have a habit of greeting phone-in callers to my programme by saying, "Hello, tell me something about yourself?" The phone-in caller answers, "I am married." I then automatically ask, "Do you have children?" And if she can't have children? I have just realized today that that is a very inappropriate question for me to ask as I am assuming that she does have children. I should probably change the question to "And how is your family?"

During a recent discussion on '*Sellili*', I said, "Adoption for couples who cannot have children." A phone-in caller

called me and asked me, “And couples with children? Why can’t these also adopt children?” Phone-in callers make you very conscious, very alert and you have to be very careful of what you say and do. The audience does challenge you as a presenter in this respect. When these sensitive issues are being discussed on my programme, I let the speaker state his/her opinion, but as a presenter, I do not normally take a stand on it but when I do, I emphasise that it is my own personal opinion and that as a presenter, I have no right to judge people ...”

As regards ‘family values’, in another focus group session attended by youths aged 18-30 years old, the following was discussed:

Patrick:

There is a very good programme on *TVM* called ‘*Nies Ta’ Veru*’ which has some very good family values.

John:

‘*Nies ta’ Veru*’ is actually one of my favourite programmes. The presenter Dr Joe Chetcuti, is very good, talented, versatile, plays the violin during the programme, etc. and the programme is what people want to watch, but the idea of the programme was copied from foreign stations.

Patrick:

It is very similar to Raffaella Carra’s programme on *RAI*. On ‘*Nies ta’ Veru*’, in a recent episode, it discussed the case of a Nigerian working in Malta who had not seen his mother for a long time and the producers actually brought her over to Malta.

The Author asks:

Why do you all like this programme?

Patrick:

Because it is based on real-life situations. There was an episode on a guy who had died in a car accident, another on a Down's Syndrome child.

John/Audrey:

'*Nies ta' Veru*' also 'made news' on the newspaper because even the newspaper carries a write-up on the topic to be discussed during that week's episode.

Also, very significant was an observation made by a 28-year old participant who claimed that broadcasting pluralism has rendered local television more 'sensitive' to 'family and social issues' however it did have a rather negative impact on the TV-watching behavioural patterns of the family as 'a unit'.

Ryan:

I think that with the introduction of pluralism in radio and television broadcasting, we are being taught more on how to be more tolerant and open-minded with regards to certain social problems, for example, how to deal with children with problems. The local stations are giving a lot of information on 'family values' issues which are very educational and informative. On the other hand, what I find is that with pluralism, every member of the family seems to have his own programme to watch and hence the family do not watch TV as 'a family unit' anymore. My family is a typical example: I watch TV in my room, my brother watches TV in his room, while my parents watch theirs in their room and we do not use the living room any more.

Fleur:

It's true. We have two TV sets at home. If I don't like what the rest of the family is watching I go and watch mine upstairs.

Vicky:

We are only two people at home and we also do this.

Ryan:

I got used to watching TV alone so much that, be it lunch-time, dinner or supper, I end up also eating alone in front of the TV and not with the rest of the family. I agree that the family should have dinner together but once you get used to doing things in a certain way, it is very difficult to change.

#### **4.6.3 Programme Loyalty vs Station Loyalty**

*“ ... Viewers do not want ‘TV stations’ but ‘programmes’ ...”*

*Mr Alfred Mifsud,  
Chairman, Super One TV*

In **SECTIONS 3.2** and **3.3.1** above, we discussed a somewhat ‘negative’ aspect which many respondents referred to as a ‘major downside’ of broadcasting pluralism in Malta in that television and radio have become too politicised and institutionalised in nature. The Author ventured into analyzing this qualitative research area more closely and attempted to research what implications this ‘major downside’ of broadcasting pluralism has had on the Maltese listener/viewer to date. Has broadcasting pluralism rendered the listener/viewer more station-loyal, as each station aims to achieve, or has it made him/her more programme-loyal? Some interesting perceptions follow.

Mr Alfred Mifsud is convinced that:

*“ ... Viewers do not want ‘TV stations’ but ‘programmes’. They switch from station to station. People watch programmes. TV Stations cannot compete with ‘brand’ but with ‘the product’ being offered ...”*

Mr Michael Falzon also agrees that viewers are becoming increasingly more programme-loyal as a direct consequence of pluralism in broadcasting:

“ ... Broadcasting pluralism has a substantial impact on the scheduling of programmes of the Station. When we are drawing up the schedule, we have to always keep in mind what the other stations are doing. As you know, on a Friday evening we schedule ‘*Kurrenti*’ discussion programme. In my opinion, it is one of the best and most ethical/religious discussion programme there is at the moment and we know that we have a very good viewership. We also know that on a Friday evening, *PBS* broadcasts ‘*Xarabank*’. Some may perceive ‘*Xarabank*’ as ‘junk television’; it is very popular with the ‘ordinary man in the street’ as it gives him the chance to express his views. A typical issue our management committee discusses, when drawing up the programming schedule is, say, whether *NET TV* should retain the broadcasting of ‘*Kurrenti*’ on a Friday or move it to another day. If it is moved, would its viewership increase? Possibly yes, but then would ‘*Xarabank*’s viewership increase even more? These are the type of discussions which go on at our management committees regarding the setting up of our programme scheduling. Our decisions on the development of our programme scheduling are very much influenced by what our competitors are doing ...”

Moreover, another very interesting observation was made by Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg in that rather than considering the effects on programming standards of local stations *per se*, in his opinion, the greatest impact broadcasting pluralism has had, and which is most evident, is on the manner Maltese society and culture have changed over this past decade. He claims that the way broadcasting pluralism has evolved in Malta reflects the way the Maltese society is actually structured. Radio pluralism was introduced in Malta from the very beginning, i.e.



some ten years ago, while TV pluralism has been around for some seven years. Rev. Fr. Borg observes some distinct differences in the way broadcasting pluralism has affected these two broadcasting sectors over this period:

“ ... The political radio stations' listeners are more party-loyal and hence a more station-loyal audience than TV audiences; and the political radios are more partisan political than television. While on TV, the audience is more programme-loyal. In fact, the more popular programmes are non-political ...”

Mr Michael Falzon is also very much aware of this development in local televiewing and radio-listening behavioural patterns and said that his station is continually striving to meet its televiewers' needs:

“ ... In Radio and TV, we have to retain a balancing act between the type of programmes our audiences want and programmes of political content. Broadly speaking, the papers are the most partisan, followed by radio, and then TV. The reason for this is that all these media are very different from each other. We are aware that a televiewer who watches TV in his living room would not want to watch solely political programmes but wants variety. In fact, on our existing programming schedule, apart from the daily news bulletin, we have a number of current affairs and discussion programmes, like ‘*Televixin*’, ‘*Monitor*’, and ‘*Magħkom*’ which deal with a variety of issues, not necessarily political. In fact, I would not accept that a discussion programme like ‘*Televixin*’ be focused solely on political issues. Our management committee approves every season's programming schedule and we make sure that we strike this balance ...”

Mr John Mallia agrees that televiewers are more programme-loyal than radio-listeners, however, he claims that it is very unfortunate that

‘partisan politics’ is still very much engrained in our local culture and this is also reflected in our televiewing and radio-listening behavioural patterns:

“ ... From my own personal experience, I know nationalist televiewers who watch ‘*Simpatiči*’ and I know many labourites who watch programmes on *NET TV*. There is a lot of ‘cross-party’ entertainment. On the other hand, when it comes to the watching of news of the ‘other party’ station, televiewers watch it to see what the ‘other party’ is saying, i.e. televiewers do take more of a negative perspective ...”

Mr Mallia also observed the same reaction from the broadcaster’s end:

“ ... Programme content in terms of quantity and quality has improved as a result of broadcasting pluralism but this improvement is still very marginal. However, what happens in Malta is that if there is a ‘major issue’ being discussed at a particular moment in time in Malta, everything else goes haywire. For example, during the ‘La Salle’ incident or the General Elections, every TV and radio station would focus on the issue in question, giving its own views about it and everything else stops. When the issue phases out, we then all go back to addressing the problems/issues of the ‘ordinary man in the street’. Also, with regards to discussion programmes, the radio stations have more of a stronger political slant [too extreme, in fact], than those of TV stations. Political radio stations end up having a preachy monologue by the presenter, like Manuel Cuschieri and some others. Whatever they say becomes ‘dogma’. From our surveys, we find that these are mostly heard by the party-loyal listeners ...”

Mr Mallia’s statement was further affirmed by Mr Chris Bianco of *JPA* in that:

“ ... Due to the moving of programmes from one station to another, I think that nowadays the audience follow the programme and the presenter rather than the TV station *per se*. As an advertising agency, we note that audiences are more programme-loyal or presenter-loyal rather than station-loyal and this affects the way we allocate our clients’ advertising spend. For example, if say, ‘*Xarabank*’ had to be broadcast on *Super One TV*, audiences would switch over to *Super One TV*; if the programme then moves to *NET TV*, its audiences would still follow. Audiences become station-loyal only before some general elections ...”

Mr Joseph Brockdorff of *BPC International* said:

“ ... My clients do not care whether a station is political or not. They perceive Radio and TV stations as a service they can use. A professional marketer has a message he wants to convey to his target audience and wants to deliver it in the most cost-effective way. To do this, he has to work out the cost per exposure per person and this will determine on which programme and on which station he should be investing his advertising expenditure ...”

Mr George Mifsud of *MPS* also affirms:

“ ... In the beginning of pluralism, our clients used to want to advertise on both political stations so as to be perceived neutral by consumers, now this is not done anymore. Nowadays, commercial companies allocate their advertising spend 100% by programme and not by station and also according to which market segment they want to target. Hence, broadcasting pluralism has helped our industry to be more focused and target specific market segments ...”

We have already noted earlier on that the survey findings clearly show that the Maltese televiewer is moving away from ‘partisan politics’ and is opting more for programme-loyal TV-watching behavioural patterns. An interesting focus group discussion [by female respondents aged 46-60 years old] on this subject follows, which although it does support these survey findings, it does make one wonder whether the Maltese citizen will ever become a politically-independent televiewer. Please note in particular, Carmen’s [a 59-year old housewife] views on the subject.

Mary:

I really wish that politics do not feature in discussion programmes any more. We have to become more truthful because the Maltese citizen is not a fool. Why is it that the political stations are so biased? They have to keep in mind that the audiences are not fools. It is useless for the political stations to try to change the audience’s views.

Vivienne:

I think that the political stations should become more honest and truthful. For example, yesterday I was very pleased to see Joe Saliba of the Nationalist party on *Super One TV*; when he was asked to comment on the Local Councils elections’ results, he was honest enough to say the he was not expecting such an outcome. Be honest! Be sincere! I did not expect him to agree with the Labour party but at least he was honest enough to say the truth and was not trying to fool the audience and beat around the bush. People are not fools!!

Jane:

It is a real pity that political stations are so politically biased. It is true that both stations are owned by the political parties but it is ridiculous to hear on both political stations that their respective party has won the local councils elections.

Angela:

In every local election which takes place in Malta, every party seems to win.

Mary:

This is because the political stations are not honest with the audiences and these are not gullible anymore!

Vivienne:

We used to buy a political newspaper before and my husband told me, “That’s it! We will not buy any political newspapers anymore because they are always harping on the same things. We will buy The Times of Malta and that’s it!”

Carmen:

I have my political views and although I really like Maltese drama, if the play is broadcast on the political station I do not support, I just cannot watch it. I really try to watch ‘*Simpatiči*’ for example, but I simply can’t watch it on that station, even if I know that ‘*Simpatiči*’ is a very good Maltese production and that it does not contain any political content.

Mary:

‘*Simpatiči*’ is a very, very good production and it is also very educational and addresses some very important values and facts of life. It focuses on the Maltese way of life.

Angela:

Even though I do not support the Labour party, I still watch ‘*Simpatiči*’. It is a very good production.

Jane:

Even I watch it too.

Angela:

But, Carmen, I think you are very wrong to do that. My own son, after watching ‘*Simpatiči*’ decided to go to Brazil to do social work because on ‘*Simpatiči*’ they showed the importance of doing voluntary work abroad. ‘*Simpatiči*’ is very educational and it deals with the Maltese way of life.

Mary:

Also, the fact that the grandmother lives with the family and there is the bachelor who also lives with them too; this is portraying a typical Maltese extended family of the past.

Carmen:

I know this and I know that ‘*Simpatiči*’ is good and not political, but I cannot watch any of the station’s programmes. For example, for ‘*Villa Sunset*’ which is broadcast on *TVM*, it is a completely different thing. In this case, I stay at home on purpose to watch the play.

#### **4.6.4 What Makes a Programme a ‘Quality Programme’?**

***“ ... Competition, generally speaking, is increasing quality standards. If your audience is not a station-loyal audience and you are not offering them a ‘quality’ programme, then they will change ...”***

***Anthony Tabone,  
Chairman, PBS***

Our discussion has so far focused on the level of programming standards of local television and radio stations in general. However, the Author would now like to zoom in on the perceptions of both the Maltese audience and broadcasters with regards to the qualitative significance of ‘quality programme content’. The Author asks: What makes ‘a programme’ a ‘quality programme’? Some interesting qualitative comments follow.

Commencing from a broadcaster's perspective, we quote Mr Anthony Tabone, who stated that:

“ ... Competition, generally speaking, is increasing quality standards. If your audience is not a station-loyal audience and you are not offering them a ‘quality’ programme, then they will change ... In my opinion, a ‘quality’ programme, from the viewer’s perspective, is one which satisfies his needs. However, we tend to underestimate the viewer sometimes. For example, certain people do not perceive ‘*Simpatiči*’ a ‘quality programme’, however it has a very high viewership and I do not agree that it is not a quality programme. For a programme which manages to maintain such a strong viewership for such a long time cannot not be a quality programme. Another example is ‘*Xarabank*’; some do not perceive it as a quality programme, however I can assure you that there is a lot of work, research and manpower invested in that programme. I think ‘*Xarabank*’ is a ‘quality’ programme ...”

Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg questions whether the concept of ‘quality’ can really be defined. He argues:

“ ... The concept of 'quality' is very debatable. Does one define it from a 'technical' perspective, from a ‘viewership’ perspective, from a ‘social class’ perspective? This is because you can easily find a programme whose technical production is poor but whose contents comprise many positive values. Does ‘quality’ mean 'more education' or 'more entertainment'? In my opinion, ‘quality’ cannot be defined ...

However, a new market trend in TV viewership is that the most popular programmes, and this is also observed abroad, are those which have four main characteristics, namely, they are produced locally, are ‘people-centred’, ‘open-text’

and humorous/entertaining. These are the four qualities which viewers look for in a programme and which are now, seven years after TV pluralism commenced in Malta, characterising local TV broadcasting ...

If we take an example, like *'Simpatici'*, it has a strong viewership, has very good values but technically, in my opinion, has some shortcomings. But for a production to be a 'quality' programme, it does not necessarily mean that it should possess all the qualities we have just mentioned. Also, being 'popular' does not necessarily mean being a 'quality' programme. Definitely not!! But I respect the fact that some 130,000 viewers every week decide to watch the programme. Are all these viewers stupid viewers?  
...

I have some reservations when the term 'quality' is defined from a more elitistic perspective. Some think that 'a quality' programme is one which educates ..."

Mr George Mifsud also agrees that in Malta, we view 'quality' from a more elitistic perspective:

" ... Is a programme like *'Meander'* a 'quality' programme? We actually produce *'Meander'* ourselves and, in my opinion, it is also a 'quality' programme. However, in Malta, we have this misconception that a 'quality' programme should always be intellectual and this is what is wrong. 'Quality' is 'quality'! There are obviously various degrees of 'quality', but it is all quality. In my opinion, a 'quality' programme is one which is not vulgar and one which allows the viewer to broaden his mind and one which educates. And that is quality! A programme like *'Xarabank'* is progressive and hence is a quality programme. If you have a viewer of basic or low intelligence watching a programme, if he manages to learn



or broaden his mind from that programme then this renders it a 'quality' programme ...”

For Mr Paul Portelli of *Radio Calypso 102*, the qualities of a 'good' programme are:

“ ... To meet the needs of the target audience. The programme should always be educational and informative in nature ...”

While Mgr. Fortunato Mizzi, Chairman of *Radju MAS*, held that a 'quality' programme is one which comprises the following qualities:

“ ... It has to be truthful, beautiful and good. These are three important and fundamental criteria and may be applied to any type of programme, be it an entertainment programme, discussion programme, etc. Sometimes in Malta, we seem to try to appeal to all our audiences and this may not always be good ...”

Mr John Mallia also expressed his views:

“ ... A 'quality' discussion programme is one which is very fast-moving in terms of the development of the subject matter in question. There is a tendency in Malta that for one to develop an idea, he needs to make a whole monologue! On the other hand, I can develop an idea or an issue by using snippets, short interviews, conducting a vox-pop, thus presenting the various opinions in the shortest time possible and also, to have the courage to speak openly on certain issues, even politics. What I cannot stand is that when on discussion programmes broadcast on the political stations, there is normally a representative of the other party on the panel and at the same time, there is a televoting question asking for the viewers' views, with the obvious result of having the viewers' vote backing up the

political station's view on the issue in question. There is always an obvious bias on the part of the party-loyal viewer!!! ...”

For Chris Bianco, a ‘quality programme’ is one which:

“ ... Manages to attract the type of audience it is targeting but one which does not use foul language and one which does not play on the emotions of the viewer ...”

This was strongly affirmed by Mr Charles Xuereb, Director of TV station *Education 22*, who said that:

“ ... A ‘quality programme’ is one which contains ‘good quality’ in terms of programme content and technical standards. Hence, it is one which does not insult the intelligence of its audiences. I cannot tolerate a TV programme on art, culture or a discussion programme to be produced when one has an incompetent cameraman, an incompetent and unqualified presenter and possibly one who even insults the people in the studio or the viewers themselves ...

Moreover, a ‘quality programme’ is one which deals with a subject that contributes towards the common good of the country. To give a typical example, I sympathize with prisoners a lot, but I do not deem it appropriate that the viewer is made to feel guilty if he does not sympathize or does not assist prisoners; after all their past actions and crimes may have offended the Maltese society. One has to assist them and sympathize with them but one should not give them the centre stage week after week because they end up being idolized too much! I have a lot of respect towards Rev. Fr. Mark Montebello for his efforts and I am sure he is doing a lot of good work with prisoners. Most probably, he does what he does as a result of his

indignation and anger at society because he is all the time being condemned for doing a good thing, but I still think he is overdoing it on the media ... And this also applies to other groups and individuals ...

Also, as regards discussion programmes, I do not think a 'quality' discussion programme is one which exploits the misery or mishaps of individuals. For example, widows or gay people, etc. are brought on the discussion programme to be put 'on show', possibly ridiculed by some people from the studio audience, and hence, are being exploited a 100% for the programme's popularity mileage and advertising revenue. If the object is to really assist these people, then it is better to opt for sending these individuals to some professional counselor. The individual being exploited might be passing through a very bad time, too weak and too confused to decide on whether or not he should appear on the programme; he might be desperately seeking assistance ... There are a number of discussion programmes on local TV which are actually doing this in many of their episodes ..."

The Author argued that it might be also possible that the individual has decided to appear on the programme in order to help others who are passing from his same ordeal. When asked to comment on this, Mr Xuereb replied:

" ... To assist others, the individual may still be exploited by the programme itself. If the person were a relative of mine, I would not want him or her to go on air. I am totally against the exploitation of the misery of an individual by the programme producer for the latter to make money. I wish that such programmes be less sensational and that these individuals' privacy be protected. Everyone knows that 'sensationalism' sells and hence one has to adopt a number of criteria which should control it ..."

When asked whether he considers ‘*Xarabank*’ to be a ‘quality’ programme, he answered:

“ ... I think that ‘*Xarabank*’ is being produced by responsible people, who normally produce programmes of good technical standards. From a journalistic perspective, it is very good, but sometimes the programme, for the sake of commercial mileage, does not use enough discretion for the protection of the interests and misery of certain individuals. Also, there are times where certain subjects/issues discussed are not of much importance at the expense of other issues which are more important ...”

What are the audience’s views and perceptions on what renders a programme ‘a quality programme’? This issue was addressed at the focus group sessions where some interesting observations were noted. Many times the discussion fell [without any prompting from the Author who moderated these sessions] on whether the discussion programme ‘*Xarabank*’, [which is broadcast on Friday evening (prime-time) on *TVM*] is actually a ‘quality programme’ or otherwise.

In one focus group session:

Anna [36 yrs]:

I feel that the media has an important role to play, that of educating people. This is not being done, especially in a ‘*Xarabank*’ discussion. I do not think that they are offering a service to society. They are actually rendering a disservice to society. It seems that the people who are not informed on the subject, the ‘ordinary man in the street’ is being given the chance to speak whilst there is no good balance of professional people present. The louder one is and the more he talks, the more importance is given to his opinion. When we were young we were taught that ‘empty vessels make most sound’. People go home with no

conclusion after the programme. Since individuals have been given the freedom of speech and say what they want, there seems to be no protection for the viewer.

The Author asks:

But is it essential that a talk show or discussion programme reaches a conclusion?

Anna:

Even if a conclusion is not reached, the viewer should be given the possibility to watch a balanced discussion so that he may give proper weighting to the various views and opinions presented on the talk show.

In another focus group [male respondents aged 46-60 years old]:

Charles:

I like to watch programmes where I can learn about the ideas of others about certain subjects. I like discussion programmes in general but programmes like, I will mention a specific one, 'Xarabank', I cannot stand it.

John:

Not even I.

Charles:

It is an insult to the viewer.

John:

The guests don't seem to be prepared. I find the programme pointless. Even when the subject in question really interests me; if the person talking is not making sense, it really bothers me. It becomes very insulting to me as a viewer. And people shouting from one end to the other, people standing up, interrupting each other rudely, etc. With regards to the presenter, one moment he is

interviewing a person, the next he is cutting him short and not letting him finish his argument. It seems that the presenter wants the person to say what he wants him to say.

Philip:

In the beginning, I used to think very much the same. But now I find the programme 'very sensitive' to certain issues in that it does not try to target the informed viewer but rather the 'ordinary man in the street'. And *'Xarabank'* is illustrating how the latter feels about these issues. For example, regarding the 'La Salle' issue, one can make an economic study about it but the whole underlying issue of 'La Salle' was public opinion, and this came out very well on *'Xarabank'*. In fact, one has to consider 'public opinion' before 'economic opinion'. Also, even though the programme sometimes seems futile however, I find that many views of the people in the studio who speak are very genuine. I like the presenter in that if he is talking to the Prime Minister or anybody else he does not mind interrupting him and this, I find, is helping to break through the 'idolatry' mentality we used to have towards politicians, ministers, general secretaries, etc.

Charles:

However, sometimes I ask myself, the people who participate in *'Xarabank'* to discuss a serious issue like the 'La Salle' incident, do they take time to think about or reflect about the issue seriously before coming over to express their views, or do they come just because they are asked to or because there is free transport? I am not referring to the people on the panel but to the audience in the studio. I feel that *'Xarabank'* is creating more polemics than it is solving.

Philip:

What I like about the presenter is that he challenges his guests. For example, if a guest speaker says, “The local councils will introduce new taxes”, the presenter immediately intervenes and asks, “Mention them to me, one by one”. So the guests and other speakers have to substantiate all their statements.

The Author also asked for the broadcasters’ views on whether they think ‘*Xarabank*’ is a ‘quality programme’. Here are some of their views.

Mr John Mallia replied:

“ ... ‘*Xarabank*’ can be constructively criticized on various aspects, however I think it is a very good variety programme. In my opinion, Peppi Azzopardi’s best skill is in ‘leading’ the discussion. There were episodes of ‘*Xarabank*’, however, which went literally out of hand, but on the whole, it is very good ...”

Ms Claudette Pace argues that:

“ ... ‘*Xarabank*’ started off as a ‘quality’ programme but now it is overdone; it has been running for too long and the subject matter has been exhausted. Other copies of it are worse. For example, ‘*Televixin*’ and ‘*Babel*’. These have taken too much of a political slant ...”

Mr Chris Bianco views ‘*Xarabank*’ as a ‘good quality’ programme, but has some reservations about it:

“ ... I think ‘*Xarabank*’ is a ‘quality’ programme, however, I have some reservations on certain statements made. For example, sometimes, they claim that “From research carried out, the following research findings were found”. I ask,

“Who has conducted the research and how was it conducted?” Even the televoting survey is also very misleading. I don’t believe that its findings are representative of the Maltese population but some viewers are, unfortunately, gullible enough to believe them. This is something which bothers me. I am not against televoting *per se*, my reservations lie more on the fact that the televoting results and findings are made to appear as representing the views of the Maltese population, where really and truly, these results are only representative of phone-in callers. This worries me a lot because ‘*Xarabank*’ has a ‘lot of power’ and such televoting findings may be misleading to and misinterpreted by the viewer. But on the whole, ‘*Xarabank*’ is very professionally done and very well structured. However, I still feel that it has ‘too much’ power on the viewer ...”

While Mr George Mifsud argues that ‘*Xarabank*’ is definitely a ‘good quality’ programme:

“ ... Definitely yes! Even if the subject matter discussed is sometimes very generic and basic in nature and the participation and comments of certain participants may sometimes be rather crude. Notwithstanding this, I still think it is a quality programme because what ‘*Xarabank*’ managed to achieve is to encourage the private individual to express his views on TV. As a nation, we suffer a lot from ‘omertà’, believe me, I know what I am saying! We suffer from ‘omertà’ on everything. We are scared to criticize the ministers, Government, the Church, etc. If I am a businessman, I have to be careful what I say in public. While on ‘*Xarabank*’, the people who participate, whether right or wrong, whether intelligent or stupid, voice their opinions and express their views in front of a TV camera and this is very qualitative. It is also educating others to speak up too ...”



Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg admits that:

“ ... In the beginning I was very critical of ‘*Xarabank*’, now I think that ‘*Xarabank*’ is a ‘quality’ programme because it is a Maltese production, people-centred, open-text and is very entertaining. It also makes good use of TV camera-shooting techniques and generally has very good content. The fact that it is open-text also makes it a more quality programme as it is backed up with a lot of research from beginning to end ...”

Why was Rev. Fr. Borg “critical of ‘*Xarabank*’ in the beginning”? The Author wishes to refer to the latter’s article entitled ‘*The Idiot Culture, Divorce and Xarabank*’ [The Sunday Times, 21 December 1997] which, very probably, addressed the ‘reservations’ which Rev. Fr. Borg referred to in his interview. Rev. Fr. Borg might not be of the same opinion today, however, his reservations then are still very valid today and they describe very well the perceptions of some of the focus group respondents and broadcasters indicated above.

In his 1997 article, Rev. Fr. Borg referred to ‘*Xarabank*’ as ‘junk television’ and he used this term “not in a pejorative way but in its technical sense”. Moreover, his major reservations noted in this article on ‘*Xarabank*’ were that the discussion programme was turning out to be “another entertaining show at the expense of an important subject, like divorce”. In his article, he also described in detail the manner in which ‘*Xarabank*’ had discussed the sensitive issue of ‘divorce’ in one of the series’ 1997 episodes. In Rev. Fr. Borg’s own words:

“ ... A series of one-liners, clapping, booing, singing, humour, competitions, emotive appeals, telephone calls, drama and, sometimes, confusion reigns supreme. This is the usual fare of junk television. The term is not used here in a pejorative way but in its technical sense, i.e. the name of a particular genre of TV programmes. This American invention is described by some as a welcome innovation but

by others as a monstrosity. In my opinion it is of the first category when in respect to its parameters it discusses light subjects but can become the latter when it wades into deeper waters ...

In the interest of the god Mammon all television genres are sacrificed or glorified according to the whims of the potentate called Nielsen ratings. All programmes, including news, current affairs, discussion, educational and religious programmes have to be first and foremost entertaining. If they happen to be also informative, factual and educational then that is considered a bonus ...

'*Xarabank*' is junk television at its best and consequently is a very entertaining programme. This is, after all, the essence of all junk television. The team driving '*Xarabank*' under the able direction of Joe Azzopardi managed to do what no one before them did on the local television scene. They created a programme with a large audience in studio and the greatest audience ever outside the studio. This is no mean feat to achieve week after week. They utilized to perfection the qualities of the genre without falling into some of its worse extremes and marketed their product in a thoroughly professional way. There is a lot of creativity, hard work and inspiration in the programme – positive qualities which stand out more due to the fact they are very often lacking in local television. I feel it is a pity that such creativity is not used to produce a different genre. I, for one, prefer to see these qualities used to produce an updated version of '*Ahn'ahna Jew M'ahniex*' or '*Bir-Rispett Kollu*'. On the other hand, the size of the audience is ample proof that I belong to a tiny minority, a position I have grown accustomed to and comfortable with ...

[Referring to one '*Xarabank*' episode dealing with 'Divorce'] This programme turned out to be another

entertaining show at the expense of an important subject, divorce ...

The producers of ‘*Xarabank*’, in my opinion, do not choose the subjects, they choose and treat them the way they do because they have some hidden anti-Church agenda. Their original sin was that they chose a genre which is the incarnation of the belief that TV is essentially a medium which is there to provide superficial entertainment of the populist kind. Entertainment, in this perspective, is the ultimate value. Those who share this perspective consider the entertainment component as the strength of the programme; those who do not share it consider this as the structural defect of such a genre ...

As is amply clear from the above, I consider this a negative development. Alas, I think that the more television is dominated by commercial interests, the more this trend becomes irreversible. One could retort that my reaction is an elitist, conservative or romantic one. Perhaps it is a bit of all three though I think that the basis of my dislike is different. I think that the reduction of everything to entertainment is a very dangerous cultural development. Neil Postman is correct to say that this process will succeed in doing nothing better but amuse ourselves to death ...”

Mr Peppi Azzopardi, in his counter-article “*Just Junk in Xarabank*” [The Sunday Times, 28 December 1997], indicated what ‘*Xarabank*’ aimed at achieving. He stated that:

“ ... While we realize the social fact that people want to be entertained, ‘*Xarabank*’ tries hard to meet a social commitment in that entertainment. The idea behind the programme is to create space for the discussion of hidden issues which are sidelined by the comfortable majority ...

*'Xarabank'* does not try to give false impressions. The programme raises arguments without the pretence of reaching definite conclusions and ready-made solutions. *'Xarabank'* simply tries to create the need for discussion and the appetite for further knowledge.

If the programme is more entertaining than informative, how can Rev. Fr. Borg, as a media expert, explain that in the days following the programme, people on the radio, at the grocer, at work, in the band clubs and in newspapers continue to discuss the issues mentioned during the programme? How can he explain that even priests during their Sunday sermon talk about the opinions expressed in *'Xarabank'*? How is it that we continue to receive loads of letters and telephone calls all week? How come the discussion continues on the Internet? To top it all, why did Rev. Fr. Borg dedicate half his article to discuss the content of a programme that was supposed to encourage "applause but not reflection"? ...

According to Rev. Fr. Borg, it is only by chance that *'Xarabank'* happens to inform, educate and be factual. "It is considered a bonus," he told us. Facts speak for themselves. It was no bonus but the social commitment of the programme that took *'Xarabank'* into the substandard homes and helped to raise awareness about the number of people living in abysmal conditions. It was *'Xarabank'* that exposed the discrimination against Arabs that goes on in some Paceville discos. We went there with a hidden camera without considering the commercial effects of such a decision ..."

The Author was interested to learn Mr Peppi Azzopardi's views today, some four years after he wrote the article quoted above. In her interview with him, the Author asked Mr Azzopardi for his views on what constitutes a 'quality programme'. Mr Peppi Azzopardi still maintained the same beliefs and convictions noted in his 1997 article, adding:

“ ... Not every popular programme is a ‘quality’ programme, but a ‘quality’ programme cannot not be a popular programme. For example, ‘*Jerry Springer’s Show*’ is a popular programme but it is definitely not a quality programme. For me, it is totally obscene!! But I would not say that it should not be broadcast. I think the audience should be educated and informed on how to choose what programmes to watch and listen to ...

A ‘quality’ programme is one which stimulates the audience even after the programme is broadcast, i.e. that the programme has a ‘continuation’ effect on its audience, before and after the programme is broadcast. A programme which a televiewer forgets once it ends, I do not consider a ‘good’ programme. A programme to which a televiewer has a ‘strong’ feeling towards, whether positive and negative, and a programme which challenges his convictions and makes him ask questions, is a ‘good’ programme. ‘*Xarabank*’ is successful largely because programmes of its genre do not exist in the local broadcasting sector ...”

Also, Mr Azzopardi explains the *raison d’être* of his company and the prior object of his discussion programme ‘*Xarabank*’:

“ ... The *raison d’être* of our company ‘*Where’s Everybody?*’ is not to educate but to use the television medium to ‘entertain’ and ‘communicate’ with our audience. I am convinced that the prior aim of television nowadays is ‘almost’ simply to ‘entertain’. However, by this ‘entertainment’ function, one also ends up informing the public too ...

On a Friday evening, after working for a whole week, would the televiewer want to be ‘taught’ by Peppi Azzopardi? Also, who am I to ‘teach’ or ‘educate’ the

audience. At the end of the day, the televiewer simply wants to be ‘entertained’ and at the same time also be ‘informed’ ... On the other hand, one cannot try to inform or educate without being capable of ‘communicating’ and ‘entertaining’. For example, in ‘*Xarabank*’, we try to put in some fifteen to twenty adverts for free, to inform our audience of any cultural events taking place and books being published, etc. The idea is to try to create an effective way of piggybacking the ‘information’ element on the ‘entertainment’ variable ...”

#### **4.6.5 Maltese Drama - ‘Good Taste’ Programming?**

***“ ... I think we have been discussing the programme more than I actually spent watching it!!! The programme really bothered me. And to be honest with you, I felt embarrassed on behalf of the televiewers who actually watched it ...”***

***May,  
Focus Group Respondent***

In one of the focus group sessions attended by televiewers aged 61 and over, some very interesting qualitative observations were made on whether Maltese drama productions constitute ‘good taste’ programming. Although rather long, the discussion is being reproduced in its entirety so as to illustrate with more clarity and emphasis the respondents’ views expressed in this focus group session.

May:

In the evening, my husband and I look for Maltese productions and Maltese drama in particular.

Roger:

Except for last Monday’s drama production ... ‘*Il-Mandraġġara*’!!!

May:

My goodness, how vulgar that was; how awful it was.

Roger:

Extremely vulgar.

May:

The production consisted of vulgar and foul language continuously. Yes, I know that this type of Maltese society does exist, as somebody I know told me. She told me that the scenes depicted on this production are very realistic, people shouting and arguing with each other from their balconies, using foul language and they seem to do this up to this very day.

The Author asks:

Do you think the director tried to depict a picture of a segment of Maltese society which really exists?

May/Roger together [very assertively]:

Yes, but what for? Why get the worst part of society on TV?

Roger:

This is not really depicting the Maltese society ...

May:

It is only a very small part of Maltese society who do these things and who talk that way.

The Author asks:

But do they exist in your opinion?

May:

Yes, they do.

The Author asks:

Maybe, as ‘*Villa Sunset*’ and ‘*Simpatici*’, to mention just two examples, are depicting one or two segments of society, in this production another segment of Maltese society is being depicted.

May:

I did not watch it as I only watched two minutes of it and had to change channel. I just could not stand it!!! It was not that I was scandalized but rather I did not like it at all. I felt almost embarrassed on behalf of the actors and actresses themselves with the thought that there were so many televiewers watching the play at that very moment.

Lina:

There could also have been children watching the production as nowadays, many children are still watching TV at 8.30pm.

The Author asks:

So you think it was not for children viewing?

May:

No!! In fact, it did indicate an AO-rating, however not only was it not good for children, it was not even good for adults!!

Roger:

What bothered me most is that they identified the most negative element of Maltese society and they broadcast it on TV for us all to watch!!

Mary:

If I were involved in it, I would have definitely advised them to scrap it!!



The Author asks:

But we all seem to agree that this type of Maltese society does exist, no?

Roger:

It does exist but it is too ‘violent’ to be broadcast on TV. ‘Violent’ in the sense that it is depicting a very negative scenario, which although real is still a very small part of Maltese society and even nowadays, thank God, “il-Mandraġġ” has been eliminated from Maltese society.

May:

I think we have been discussing the programme more than I actually spent watching it!!! The programme really bothered me. And to be honest with you, I felt embarrassed on behalf of the viewers who actually watched it.

Lina:

My daughter-in-law had to go out and left her twelve-year old and fourteen-year old daughters at home who are normally allowed to watch Maltese productions. The following day we met up at our women’s club and obviously our discussion fell on ‘*Il-Mandraġġara*’. Everyone said that they found it disgusting. My sister-in-law panicked when she heard this and said, “O God, I left my children at home to watch it yesterday!!”

Roger:

In fact, we normally recommend our sixteen-year old grandchildren, who are twins, and who are more English-speaking, to watch more Maltese drama/productions to learn the Maltese language. And that is what we said, thank God, they did not watch it!! They normally watch ‘*Villa Sunset*’ which they like a lot. This is because all its episodes are good and ‘true to life’.

The Author asks:

Do you watch '*Simpatiči*' just to mention another Maltese production? Is it 'true to life'?

All the participants together:

Oh yes, I really like it.

Roger and May:

Oh yes, '*Simpatiči*' is also very 'true to life'.

The Author asks:

But is it possible that '*Il-Mandraġġara*' is also 'true to life' but not pertaining to 'your' segment of society?

Mary:

But how big is this segment of society which they are depicting? They only exist in 'one corner' of society!! If they still exist!!!

May:

They still exist!!! [the other participants agreed]. Yesterday, I was talking to my maid and we were discussing how awful the production was. She confirmed that this type of society still exists and one of her relatives lives in such a town in Malta and the type of scenes depicted in this drama production, i.e. arguing with neighbours across the street from balconies, using foul language, etc., still exist. These people simply get used to these things and they become part of them.

Roger:

But it is still going back some fifty years ago. And Gużè Chetcuti, the author of the novel, must have written it some twenty, twenty-five years ago. Chetcuti wrote the novel and someone else produced it for TV. [Tone of voice

implied that ‘*il-Mandraġġara*’ was not written for TV broadcast].

The Author asks:

What about the play ‘*Il-Pesta 1813*’ on *Super One TV*?

Roger and May:

We started watching it but we found it rather boring after a while.

The Author asks:

Wasn’t this play depicting real scenarios of the past too?

Roger:

Yes, but that is historical.

Mary:

Why does ‘*Il-Mandraġġara*’ need to be so very very vulgar? By doing this, it is not depicting the quality of life. Yes, I did watch some episodes of ‘*Il-Pesta*’ and yes, it does go back in time, however, I never heard any foul language being used. I only watched two minutes of ‘*Il-Mandraġġara*’ and in these two minutes, she said two very vulgar words, and that was it, I had to change channel.

Roger:

Also, the negative impact is that, you said you heard these words and repeated them, I also heard these words and repeated them and this goes on and on.

Do viewers want to watch ‘true-to-life’ drama productions? Do they want to know more about segments of society other than their own? Can they accept to see the harsh reality of life on TV? Are they ‘mature’ enough an audience to watch controversial and ‘shocking’

scenes on TV? The Author endeavoured to enquire the broadcasters' views on what 'good taste programming' is all about.

Rev. Prof. Saviour Chircop questions to what degree should one show the harsh reality of life on television. His opinion is that viewers should become 'more mature' in this respect; however if the programme producer's sole aim is to simply 'shock' his audiences, then this is not acceptable. He also proceeds with expressing his views on what constitutes 'good taste' programming:

“ ... The *'Il-Mandragġara'* type of productions is not a new phenomenon for the local TV broadcasting scene. Some years back, the drama production *'Il-Madonna taċ-Ċoqqa'* had created havoc because of some controversial scenes, but if we had to watch the same production today, it would not have the same impact on today's viewers ...

With regard to what productions to broadcast, a degree of 'respect' and 'good taste' should always be retained, however we cannot arrive to such an extreme where we would not allow Michelangelo to sculpture a naked figure. But there is always a question which one has to ask: To what degree does it remain 'art', if at all? So with regards to TV productions, one has to also ask, "Is this art? Is this a true reflection of Maltese society?" ...

One has to also consider to what extent can one show the harsh reality of life? As a general rule, I say, let us become more mature viewers, but on the other hand, if I am producing a programme simply to shock my audiences, then it is not acceptable. But if I am doing it to show the reality of life, then it is all right ...

This problem does not only occur in Malta. Three years ago, there was a very good documentary on 'The homeless in New York' which was broadcast on American television.

Many viewers complained formally to the State of New York. The State of New York complained formally to the producers because they did not want that side of New York to be shown. The documentary dealt with the current situation of the homeless which is very crude and harsh. And this type of discussion is very much a dynamic part of the media ...”

The notion of ‘good taste programming and decency’ in local broadcasting was already addressed by the Broadcasting Authority in the early years of broadcasting pluralism. In a press release [No: 38/93] issued on 21 July 1993, the Authority showed its concern that some programmes broadcast on certain stations [in this case the Authority was referring to certain radio services] were not of the “required standard” where “good taste and decency” were concerned. Reports were actually brought to the Authority’s attention which indicated that “people were offended, some of them deeply, by the use of language which was not suitable for the broadcasting media”. The press release also indicated that:

“ ... The Authority is not prepared to tolerate programming of this nature where proper broadcasting levels are not maintained and in carrying out its obligations towards the public, the Authority has already taken action where indicated and will continue to monitor the situation ...”

Going back to our discussion on the ‘*Il-Mandraggħara*’, Mr Charles Xuereb qualifies this teledrama as a period piece of literary realism and hence should be viewed as such. He adds that:

“ ... With regards to ‘*Il-Mandraggħara*’, if before the programme starts, an interview with the author is broadcast where it is indicated that this is a period piece of literary realism and that the author is very famous for the realism of his novels, then I would accept the foul language and loud scenes. As long as there is ‘this shield’ accompanying it.

However, I would not tolerate rude scenes and language for the sake of popularity. Knowing that the author is Guzè Chetcuti, and knowing that he did not write the novel for television but wrote it as a novel some years back, I consider the production a 'period piece'. However, the director who adapted the novel for television had to remain faithful to the original text of the novel. It is true that the latter did exploit the production's popularity and this type of language does attract a certain type of television audience, however I would not tolerate a similar production with foul language and scenes to be produced with the sole interest of targeting this same type of viewer to gain popularity. I would consider such a producer as very irresponsible. On the other hand, I feel that the televiewer should be responsible enough to view this production for what it is, a 'period piece of literary realism'. Also as responsible televiewers, they had an option not to watch the production ..."

On the other hand, Mr George Mifsud argues:

"... It is not a matter of foul language used but more the subject in question. What does one learn from relating and depicting scenes of that segment of Maltese society? That is not quality programming. Are we enhancing our culture by depicting it on TV? Such a production does not contribute anything to the televiewer. What benefits can a subject like that offer to the televiewer? ... If, on the other hand, *'Il-Mandraggara'* becomes the subject matter of a discussion programme where people are informed about it and that, maybe, someone in authority does something about it, then yes, it becomes quality programming ..."

It is also interesting to hear the views of the three programme producers interviewed:

Ms Marika Mizzi asserts:

“ ... I do not agree with ‘sensationalism’ in productions. If I had to get an ‘adult scene’ in a production, I would do it if there is a valid reason for doing it. The use of ‘foul language’ on TV also renders the production too ‘sensational’ in my opinion. We, as a company, would not go for such ‘sensational’ productions. We try to target all members of the family. However, with regard to productions like ‘*Il-Mandraġġara*’, this is depicting reality. The foul language, the street fights etc. used to occur in ‘*Il-Mandraġġ*’. So, are we scared to face reality? ...”

In one of the episodes of our series on animals, ‘*Madwar L-Annimali*’, we had broadcast a feature on how chickens are bred and slaughtered in reality. We had a whole influx of telephone complaints the next morning criticizing us for broadcasting it. And this is because we had shown the ‘sad’ reality of how these birds are killed ...”

Mr Herman Bonaci stated:

“ ... I think that ‘*Il-Mandraġġara*’ was a very good production but I am not sure whether it was produced to reach all segments of the market. You always find some segments of the market criticizing such productions. I think it was produced in very ‘good taste’. I also believe in the saying which states ‘*la verita offende*’ [the truth offends] and I believe that such a production, which is depicting a realistic Maltese scenario, should be broadcast. However, my reservations lie more on whether such a production should have been broadcast at primetime. In my opinion, primetime, which comprises the 19:00-22:00 hrs timeband, only productions acceptable for the various segments of the public should be broadcast. This is also the case with prime-time programming on Italian TV ...”

Mr Peppi Azzopardi agrees in that:

“ ... ‘*Il-Mandraggara*’ was one of the best Maltese productions in terms of script, filming, editing, etc. I cannot understand how one can depict a real-life Maltese scenario and not depict also the type of expression and language used in real-life. I believe that when one is trying to depict such a local scenario which does exist in reality, one cannot not use the language used by that segment of society it is depicting. As long as the language used is there for a purpose ...”

#### **4.6.6 Maltese Productions: ‘Farmed out’ Programming**

***“ ... By law, BBC farms out 60% of their programmes, but one cannot confuse programming’ with ‘advertising’. In Malta, we have ‘mashed’ them together...”***

***Mr Joe Brockdorff,  
Chairman, BPC International***

By virtue of the Broadcasting Act 1991, broadcasting pluralism introduced a whole new concept of programme production in that it became possible for television and radio stations to ‘farm out’ the production of programmes broadcast on their station. The Broadcasting Act 1991 stipulates that:

“ ... ‘Farming out’ of any of its [*PBS*] production and other services to outside studios, producers or companies on an *ad hoc* or other contractual basis should therefore also be considered as long as these strict standard levels ...”

Ten years later, the notion of ‘farming out’ is being applied by most, if not all, local television stations. The Author ventured into obtaining a qualitative view of what were the perceived impacts and consequences



of introducing this ‘farming out’ concept in local television programming. Have programming standards of local TV improved or diminished as a result of this ‘farming out’ policy? Should a TV station farm out its ‘airtime’ or should it farm out its programming production but yet retain the rights on selling its advertising airtime.

The Author obtained the following views from a viewer’s perspective:

Eileen [36 yrs]:

Some programmes are bought by the stations to fill up airtime and consequently the level of programmes is very low. Sometimes they are filled with rubbish. For example, in ‘*Kollox Ma’ Kollox*’ on *Super One TV*, they have people who do not know how to cook in the studio trying to cook as fast as they can, to catch up with the chef and who, in turn, is already cooking very fast. There is a lot of confusion in the studio. The final presentation of the dish is good but the way they do it just puts you off wanting to try the recipe.

With regards to ‘farming out’ policies being adopted by Maltese TV stations, Mr Joe Brockdorff holds that the Stations are confusing ‘programming’ with ‘advertising’. He argues:

“ ... By law, *BBC* farms out 60% of their programmes, but one cannot confuse ‘programming’ with ‘advertising’. In Malta, we have ‘mashed’ them together. Initially, *PBS* used to do this but is now keeping ‘programming’ and ‘advertising’ separate. The other stations are still doing it. One has to distinguish between what is ‘programming’, which is the obligation of the station, and what is ‘advertising’, they are two separate variables. This is why the TV advertising rates went down, because of this bartering system, where stations barter programmes for

advertising space, everyone started undercutting advertising rates ...

In the long run, this works against the TV broadcasting sector itself. For example, if I am a manufacturer and I need 'raw material', which in this case, is 'programming' and then I end up with a finished product which is advertising space, I cannot give the advertising space to the supplier of raw material. By doing so, he would be taking 'command' of the programme himself. If the supplier [advertiser] takes hold of too much of the Station's product, the Station will end up with nothing. It is the responsibility of a TV station to produce programmes or to purchase them at the most competitive price. Farming out 'airtime' goes against the spirit of broadcast media ..."

Mr Anthony Tabone asserts that:

"... The 'farming-out' of programmes has helped the local stations to produce good quality programmes which would not have been possible to produce due to the stations' lack of funds available for investment. Today some 60-70% of the programmes broadcast are locally produced and if one had to produce these in the in-house studios currently available and the timings available, it would be physically impossible to produce this same amount of local productions retaining the existing studio production capacity. Hence, the farming-out of programme production has definitely assisted in this regard ...

As regards the quality of farmed-out programmes, it does not depend on whether one farms out or not but on what programming standards the station decides to accept. Many a time we have stopped the broadcasting of a programme which we thought was of unacceptable quality standards ...

However, one has to distinguish between a station ‘farming out’ the production of a programme to an independent production house and purchasing that programme, and the ‘farming-out’ of the entire airtime to the production house. I do not agree with the latter and I had stopped this system within *PBS*. I do not agree with the selling of airtime because then the principal consideration of the individual in this case would be to generate advertising revenue from this programme. And this would be done at the expense of quality programme content and the programme would end up becoming a continuous advertising commercial programme ...

As regards ‘*Xarabank*’, we purchase the programme from production house *Where’s Everybody?* for a sum of money but the advertising revenue generated from it is taken by *PBS*. The amount of advertising accompanying it meets the 12-minutes regulation set by the Broadcasting Authority...”

One recalls here the financial difficulties faced by *PBS* in 1999 as a result of its ‘farming-out of airtime’ policy adopted by the Station at the time. In the 14 February 1999 edition of ‘*Il-Mument*’, a news item read ‘*Inkwiet Għall-PBS Minhabba R-Reklami*’:

“ ... The ‘farming-out of airtime’ policy has left some significant adverse effects on *PBS* ... A recent internal report of *PBS* indicates some serious worries over the lack of funds the Station is generating from commercial adverts. This report showed how local advertising agencies have substantially reduced their advertising spend which used to be invested on *PBS*. Although there are those who are putting the blame on broadcasting pluralism which commenced in 1992, the real reason is the ‘farming-out of airtime’ policy which *PBS* has been adopting since 1996 ...”

Mr Charles Xuereb agrees with Mr Tabone in that:

“ ... I agree more with the purchasing of programmes policy rather than the selling of airtime. The latter may be advantageous and *PBS* used to do it up to about three years ago, but it had created a financial disaster for *PBS*, which ended up with the station having heavy debts. Apart from the financial aspect, what happened was that when the production house stopped working for *PBS* and moved to another station, *PBS* lost not only the programme but all its advertisers because these ‘moved’ with the programme as well. Also, this system created a ‘programme quality’ problem, because now the advertising agent became responsible for the quality of the programme. The agent was after the money, and he was not qualified enough to offer good broadcasting standards. As a result, the station ended up carrying the less qualitative kind of programming standards. It is very unfortunate that the other TV stations are still opting for the ‘farming out of airtime’ policy and the programming standards of some productions are very low ...

Now, one can see that *PBS* has stopped this ‘farming-out of airtime’ policy and is opting for the other option, i.e. that of purchasing programmes from independent production houses. One can already see that *PBS* is, slowly but firmly, making progress of containing its losses and by giving good quality programmes ...

This ‘farming out of airtime’ policy is still being adopted by the two political TV stations and one cannot not comment on the low programming standards some of these productions have. Some of these productions actually insult your intelligence ...”

What does Mr Alfred Mifsud have to say to this? He argues:

“ ... We normally work with a nucleus of people/production houses, who, by and large, are working with us on a permanent and almost exclusive basis. On one end, these broadcasters/presenters/hosts have become very popular with our audiences and they become very much in demand; on the other, we are faced with the risk of losing them to other stations. When this happens we may easily lose a good percentage of your audiences. As I mentioned earlier, people watch programmes not stations. We try to establish a good working relationship with these individuals/ production houses and we try to offer them air-time with every programming schedule change. Their livelihood does depend on it, for example, Alfred Zammit and Eileen Montesin; if we do not offer them something we will lose them to other stations ...

As regards the ‘farming-out’ policy of the station, *Super One TV* adopts various business relationships with its suppliers which may range from co-producing the production with the independent producer to actually farming out the entire ‘air-time’ to the company. When the Station ‘farms out’ the air-time, it strives to develop and nurture a good working relationship with the independent producers. Continuous feedback is also given. A case in point is Eileen Montesin. In spite of the fact that her programme ‘*Undercover*’ is in its third series, it is still becoming increasingly popular. However, I must add that Eileen is a person who takes on advice. Initially, her programme was full of adverts within the text which was not acceptable for us, particularly for Albert Marshal. From a ‘sit com’, Eileen’s programme evolved into an ‘action film’ which is a new genre in the Maltese productions sector ...”

What do the independent production houses have to say on the stations' 'farming-out' policies?

Mr George Mifsud, producer of '*Meander*' and '*Xhieda*', said:

“ ... As regards selling a programme to stations, we cannot opt for buying the air-time from the station and sell the advertising space ourselves as we are predominantly an advertising agency. We would have a conflict of interest between the selling of air-time and consulting our clients on which programmes to allocate their advertising expenditure on ...”

Mr Peppi Azzopardi, producer of '*Xarabank*', argues:

“ ... In terms of farming-out, I do not agree that discussion programmes should be allowed to buy airtime because this could easily give rise to a conflict of interest between the subject matter being discussed and its advertising sponsors. As regard other types of programmes, there I would agree ...

Our company is a commercial entity and we need to survive, however, we try not to let the commercial aspect compromise our principles and possibly create conflicts of interest. For example, I have refused many invitations to appear on particular advertising commercials, as I do not think it would be appropriate ...”

Ms Marika Mizzi, producer of '*Fenomeni*', said:

“ ... One of the major problems for a production company, when it comes to buying airtime, is to decide on the day of the week and time of broadcast. One has to consider competition. What 'farming-out' policies we opt for really

depends on our negotiations with the TV station in question but we normally go for purchasing airtime, which involves a lot of hard work. It may be more profitable at the end of the day, however, selling a programme series to a station is less risky as you know your revenue from the very onset but in the long run it may not pay as much ...

There is a perception that production houses like ours make a lot of money. There are many production companies being set up now and in my opinion, within the next five years, we will be experiencing the 'survival of the fittest' between companies and only those which 'mean business' and invest a lot of energy and hard work will survive. Although ours is a commercial entity, what we feel is of utmost importance is that the whole team has a great passion for and believes in the field we are engaged in. I always say that "This is our business and this is also our passion" ..."

Mr Herman Bonaci, producer of '*Simpatiči*', said:

"... *PBS*' new policy is to purchase the productions from companies like ours while *NET TV*, *Super One TV* and *Smash TV* sell the station's airtime. The latter option introduces you to the advertising field and if one works hard at it, it does render more profits ..."

When asked on the possibility of conflicts of interests arising between the subject being discussed and the advertising sponsors, when a discussion programme producer is given 'airtime', Mr Bonaci argued:

"... It very much depends on how professional and responsible the producer of that programme is. Also, the production companies have all been given the Broadcasting Authority rules and regulations to abide by. Admittedly, you cannot go directly against the interest of any of your

major sponsors, however, as a presenter, your job is also to educate the public. If you end up producing a boring programme, your audience shares will go down and you end up losing your advertising sponsors too ...”

#### **4.6.7 Discussion Programmes/Talk Shows: Freedom of Expression**

*“ ... Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers ...”*

*Article 10 of First Schedule to the  
European Convention Act 1987  
[Act No XIV of 1987 incorporating Article 10 of the  
1948 European Convention for the Protection of  
Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms]*

Maybe, one very evident consequence of pluralism in broadcasting is the increase in the number of talk shows and discussion programmes with audience participation on both television and radio. Do Maltese audiences like watching and listening to talk shows and discussion programmes? Do they like participating in them? How do they perceive the evolution of this type of ‘open-text’ programmes? Do they offer any positive added-value to the Maltese citizen?

As indicated in **DIAGRAM 4.1** above, the survey respondents rated ‘discussion programmes’ as the ‘programme type’ they prefer watching most on television and listening to on radio. In this Section, the Author further attempts to qualitatively research the respondents’ views on the quality standards of programme content, subject matter, balance and impartiality, structure, presentation, etc. of ‘discussion programmes’ broadcast on local television and radio. This discussion brought out some very contrasting views and perceptions.



#### **4.6.7.1 The Value of Discussion**

How do audiences perceive the value of ‘discussion’ on the broadcast media? The following are some observed findings.

In a focus group session attended by female respondents aged 31-46 years:

Laura:

‘Hot’ issues are mentioned and repeated so many times on discussion programmes, talk shows, the news, etc. There is far too much coverage on the same events, for example, the ‘La Salle’ incident. This is simply brainwashing the audience!!

Anna:

This is definitely brainwashing. For example, the GWU’s strike on the ‘La Salle’. It could have very well been the case that if, at the time of the incident, one asked a drydocks worker why he was striking, most probably he would not have been in a position to answer. He would answer that he was following the Union’s instructions and that’s it. Isn’t this brainwashing? And what value are these discussions to the Maltese society, to have eight hours a day discussions on the same ‘hot issue’?

Eileen:

Why do I have to watch a discussion on TV on the same issue I heard at the office, on the newspaper, on the news? Also, these discussion programmes are creating a lot of arguments and animosity among viewers. For example, I know for a fact that during certain discussions on ‘Xarabank’, family members watching TV take sides and these are creating a lot of arguments among them.

Laura:

I was watching a discussion programme on *Super One TV*, which was presented by Josette Grech on the subject of 'after-life'. It is true that no one knows what will happen to us in the after-life, however you cannot imagine the type of opinions which came out on the programme by the guests present. You would simply not believe it. It hurts to watch such programmes. Also, it is very dangerous and very damaging to the viewer who is not capable of weighing what is being said. Also, there is the fear and tendency that the viewer might, after watching the programme, say, "You know what they are saying ..." and quotes someone who would have simply expressed his opinion on the programme.

Josianne:

Also, I may give another example: If the issue of, say, 'abortion' is being discussed on a talk show, and the viewer is being presented with four reasons in favour of abortion and two against, the viewer will not be getting a good representation and a balanced weighting of the effects of abortion, to be able to form his own opinion.

Laura:

I think they are all exploiting the media.

Stephanie:

I like watching talk shows and discussion programmes, however on foreign stations only. I do not like the Maltese talk shows/discussion programmes as I cannot stand listening to their lies. I prefer to switch off the TV immediately and go to bed or read a book instead.

Eileen:

It also appears that Maltese talk shows and discussion programmes tend to allow the individual who talks loudest

to talk the most, while the guest speakers are not given enough time to express their views and emphasise their point.

This focus group prompted some interesting qualitative issues on the ‘value of discussion’ which makes one question whether the ‘ordinary man in the street’ should be allowed the right to freedom of expression on broadcast media and whether the televiwer/radio-listener should, in turn, have the right for some ‘protection’.

#### **4.6.7.2     *The Right to Freedom of Expression vs The Right for ‘Protection’***

*“ ... I really feel this when it comes to discussion programmes. For people my age, who have been taught one way, and now hear other views being expressed, would not know what is right or wrong anymore. I get so confused ...”*

*Jane,  
Focus Group Respondent*

Mr Michael Falzon is an ardent believer of ‘freedom of expression’. He holds that the right to freedom of expression on broadcast media is a fundamental right of every individual:

“ ... I believe that freedom of expression is a fundamental right of every human being. The only restriction to this freedom is the freedom of another individual, i.e. there is no room for untruths and mud-slinging on another individual. However, every individual has the fundamental right to express his views on any medium. Because, if one restricts an individual from airing his views and hence restricts the radio listener/televiwer from hearing it, one is automatically creating an authority which is deciding what the ‘truth’ is. And this is much more damaging ...

On the other hand, if the radio listener/televviewer is incapable of assessing the competence of an individual talking or expressing his views on the media, would this justify the restriction of the right to freedom of expression on a mass medium of an individual? Notwithstanding this, I am very much aware that this problem exists in Malta and that it is a very old and deep-rooted problem which boils down to ‘not teaching the illiterate to read’ ...”

Mr Chris Bianco said:

“ ... I fully agree with freedom of expression. However what I feel is that the televviewers and radio-listeners take what is being said on television as ‘gospel-truth’. If someone, it could be anyone, makes a statement on TV, then this statement becomes gospel-truth. Many people may be gullible and end up believing everything that is being said and expressed on Radio and TV. Also, there are times when certain discussion programmes or talk shows are very ‘rough’ in their choice of words, sometimes they are very rude and this really bothers me ...

As regards ‘protecting the viewer’, it is a whole learning process. Admittedly, it is a slow one but these people will eventually have to learn how to evaluate the information which is being given to them. Even the younger generations are already capable of forming their own ideas and opinions ...”

Mr Mannie Spiteri asserts:

“ ... I feel that every individual should have freedom of expression in broadcasting as long as the views expressed are informed views and not unfounded. The individual has to have ‘reference points’. On the other hand, there are still individuals in our society who want to have someone telling

them what is right and wrong. They do not want to use their own minds/intelligence to decide for themselves. They simply want to be told what to do ...

In this respect, what we at *RTK* strive to do is to inform and give enough information to our listeners for them to decide for themselves and not for us to decide for them. Possibly, this was also partially due to the fact that, in the past, the Church used to impose on people what to do, which was not correct ...”

*RTK* seemed to have had a very clear direction in this regard from the very start of their station’s transmission back in 1992. Rev. Fr. Joe Borg, then chairman of *RTK* was asked [by James Calvert and Paul Fearn in *The Times* of 5 September 1992], whether *RTK*, as a ‘Church Station’ would be prevented from tackling religiously sensitive issues. Rev. Fr. Borg asserted:

“ ... Absolutely not. We have tackled adultery, homosexuality and pre-marital sex. We won’t avoid any topic. Naturally we have our own perspective on the issues, but anything of interest to the people is of interest to the Church. We are answerable to the seven directors, five of whom are elected by the shareholders, not the Archbishop ...”

In the light of the above observations, the Author deems it opportune to present a very interesting discussion which took place at one of the focus group sessions attended by females, who, in their majority were housewives, and aged between 46-60 years old:

Vivienne:

I really like discussion programmes, like ‘*L-Avukat Tax-Xitan*’ on *Max Plus TV*, which I really liked a lot. However what irritates me is that discussion programmes never reach a conclusion and never provide you with an answer.

Jane:

I agree with this and I really feel this when it comes to discussion programmes. For people my age, who have been taught one way, and now hear other views being expressed, would not know what is right or wrong anymore. I get so confused.

All other 5 participants agreed.

Mary:

I fully agree with pluralism because we are being given a choice of programmes and you also get to know other people's views.

Angela:

But sometimes all these opinions confuse us.

Carmen:

Yes, they do confuse you a lot. Jane is right, because in our time when it came to religious issues we were taught one way, and what we hear today, it feels like what we were taught then does not hold water anymore. So, are we now expected to think like today's younger generation? Everything is being aimed at youths and there is nothing for us.

All other 5 participants backed her argument.

Angela:

How can you change an opinion about something when you have been taught that way for over forty years?

Vivienne:

If for a very long time you had been taught that that particular thing is a sin, and nowadays they tell you it is not ...

The Author asks:

However, if an individual who is not an expert on the subject had to express his/her opinion on TV and claims that nowadays that thing is not a sin anymore, what impact would this have on you?

Carmen:

It would definitely make me question it.

Angela:

I don't think it would affect me but if a priest had to say it, then yes it would confuse me.

The Author asks:

Do you agree that the 'ordinary man in the street' should be given the right to freedom of expression on broadcast media?

Carmen:

I think if I hear their views it would cause some confusion in my mind but it depends on the subject matter in question and also whether there is a professional presenter leading the discussion.

Mary:

I think in every discussion programme, apart from the 'ordinary man in the street' expressing his views, there should always be a professional or expert on the subject matter on the panel. If the subject is religious, there should be a religious person, who can lead the discussion well and give direction. Without such a professional person present in the discussion, a conclusion of what is right or wrong can never be drawn.

Vivienne:

Like '*Xarabank*', I really like the programme but the presenter, Peppi Azzopardi cuts short the individual he is interviewing and he never reaches a conclusion.

All other 5 participants agreed.

Carmen:

He doesn't even give enough time for the professionals or experts on the panel to express their views on the subject matter.

Mary:

Last week's episode was on 'alcohol'. He was interviewing a person who was relating that she was an alcoholic and he cut her short. And as a televiewer, I wanted to know what she was saying but he did not even let her finish what she had to say.

Jane:

It may also be that he has many people to interview.

Mary:

And that is why he never reaches a conclusion.

All participants together:

Sometimes, I say to myself, it is better not to watch the programme.

Carmen:

Because of Rev. Fr. Renè Camilleri in the programme '*Profili*', I just could not keep on watching the series as he was always criticizing the Archbishop. Even his stand in favour of contraceptives, when the Pope himself is against them. So should we abide by what he [Rev. Fr. Renè] says?



If he wants, he can start his own religion like those priests and cardinals who had opposed the Pope. Even Rev. Fr. Mark Montebello does the same. So I simply cannot listen to these people.

Angela:

Rev. Fr. Montebello is confusing us a lot.

All other 5 participants agreed.

The Author asks:

Why does this bother you so much?

Mary:

It is because they are priests and you would not expect them to come up with such arguments against the Church's teachings.

Jane:

You simply don't expect priests to talk that way.

Angela:

Also, because they belong to one religion. If they belonged to another denomination, then it would have been a different issue all together.

Carmen:

These priests are doing a lot of harm.

Mary:

If you hear a priest saying that, that particular thing is good, and I was taught by another priest that that thing is wrong, I feel very confused. Whom am I going to believe from them both? They are both priests, they both belong to the same Church? It is not that I do not agree with one or the other,

but I get confused on what are the Church's teachings on the subject.

Carmen:

And as viewers, we are getting confused.

Jane:

They are misleading us.

Angela:

I am more worried for the younger generation than us.

Regarding this observed scenario, Rev. Prof. Saviour Chircop explains:

“ ... The Church did wrong in the past in not allowing or encouraging healthy discussion on various subjects and used to issue statements instead. But one always finds this type of radio listeners or viewers [referring to the focus group respondents]. Even in politics, one finds audiences who view an issue either black or white and cannot view the 90% grey area which exists between these two extremes. But because of these segments, do I restrain the rest of the audiences from the right to freedom of expression? I will definitely have to be respectful towards these people but I would have to also consider other segments of society, for example, the younger generation ...”

It may be opportune at this stage to refer to the Pastoral Letter “*Nagħżlu T-Tajjeb Mill-Ħażin*” which Archbishop Ġuseppi Mercieca had issued in March 1993. Although some eight years have passed since then, its contents are still very relevant today. ‘*Il-Ġens*’ of 5 March 1993 [“*Il-Pastorali tar-Randan u L-Pluraliżmu fix-Xandir – Bejn Sfida u Konfużjoni*”], asked the Archbishop whether this Pastoral Letter had any underlying negative connotations on the opinions [then] being expressed on the local radio stations and whether the Church expected to hear only opinions which conformed with the Church’s

teachings. The Archbishop was reported to have said that the Pastoral Letter proposed some positive suggestions and recommendations on how one can choose between what is right and wrong so as to strengthen his Christian identity. As regards the opinions being expressed on the local media, the Archbishop said that:

“ ... The Maltese have to live their faith and Christian values. Malta of today is very different from that of forty years ago; things have changed a lot and will keep on changing. These changes are caused by the fact that we are living in a world of diversity where Maltese people now have different religious beliefs, not just Christianity. There are Maltese people with very different opinions. As long as one is aware of these differences in opinion, it is a very good thing. ‘Pluralism’ *per se*, is not wrong, ‘abuse’ is wrong ... Abuse is when individuals who claim to be Catholic, express themselves differently on broadcast and print media and interpret the Word of God differently from what is taught by the Church ...”

Moreover, in another focus group session attended by male and female respondents aged 61+ years, the following discussion took place:

Roger:

On moral and other sensitive issues, such as divorce, abortion, women priests, etc., I would not give the same importance to the opinion expressed by a ‘private’ individual as much as I would give to the informed opinion of a priest or a professional on the subject. However, I would still want to hear the individual’s views because these people could be expressing their personal views based on their real life personal experiences.

Mary:

I feel that the person who is most knowledgeable on the subject, say divorce, is the one who has actually passed through a personal bad experience himself!!

Tony:

Unfortunately, there are many priests who attack the Archbishop or the Pope. This not only bothers me but worries me a lot. He was not there on behalf of the Church and we know who we are referring to [referring to Rev. Fr. Mark Montebello on '*Xarabank*']. He was not there on behalf of the Church but was expressing his own personal views. But in his position as a priest, and not as a 'private individual', he cannot do this.

And yet another focus group respondent claimed:

Charles [46 yrs]:

I wish to see the local stations become a bit more balanced and open in discussing certain issues and also to respect their viewers by offering them a more balanced discussion and to allow the viewers to reach their own conclusions. This is not being done today. For example, at work we were discussing a particular issue regarding the recent local councils elections. My colleague made a statement and claimed that it was a fact because a prominent presenter on TV said so. I immediately retaliated and told him, "How do you know that, if he said so, then it is a fact?" The fact that someone else imposes on me what to think and do, really bothers me.

So should the right to freedom of expression on the media be granted to an individual at the expense of the rights of another individual? The Author asked for the broadcasters' opinion on how can the viewers'/radio-listeners' rights be 'protected' ... if at all.

Mr John Mallia holds:

“ ... As regards ‘protecting’ the radio-listener/televviewer, I think the latter should be protected - not in a ‘protective’ sense but in a more ‘proactive’ manner. A lot of the responsibility falls on the presenter conducting the interview. A presenter can protect his viewer and listener proactively by retaining a good balance of ideas presented on a particular issue. And this should not take place solely on one programme but on the Station’s airtime in general ...”

Mr Alfred Mifsud states:

“ ... I fully agree with freedom of expression, however the person has to be responsible for his actions. He has to be held responsible for what he is saying. I feel that as long as one discloses his identity, does not exaggerate in his comments and is not offensive, any opinion should be allowed to be expressed. Instead of editing, I think a Station should consider more the appropriate scheduling of certain ‘adult theme’ programmes. For example, a discussion on abortion should not be broadcast before 2045 hrs where younger audiences are still watching TV. A case in point was the series ‘*Rosa*’ which was broadcast on Saturday evening on *Super One TV*. It was very liberal in its discussions, not just verbal but also in visual form. We had decided to schedule it at a late hour. The station has to assume some scheduling responsibility ... freedom of expression may not be achieved without a certain degree of responsibility ...”

While Mr Michael Falzon asserts that the onus should always fall on the Station as to whom to engage as a presenter. He says:

“ ... If the Station decides to engage a charlatan or quack, then it is the Station’s responsibility to deal with any

eventual adverse consequences. However, if the broadcaster airs the views of an ‘ordinary man in the street’ and presents it as the opinion of an expert, then this is not right and is very unethical. Here, one is misleading the radio listener/televviewer ...”

Ms Claudette Pace remarks that as a presenter, one has to be very very careful. Freedom of expression is a ‘liberty’ which one has to control:

“ ... I know that this is a contradiction but in my opinion, any individual should be given the right to freedom of expression on broadcast media. However as a presenter, I have to make sure that I attain a balance of opinions on the subject matter in question. As a presenter, I do not tolerate intolerance and sweeping statements made by guests or phone-in callers. Sometimes we get phone-in callers criticizing companies for their bad products or inadequate after-sales service. One may claim that if these were given inadequate service, they should be allowed to mention the complaint however I do not allow them to do damage to the company in question by mentioning the name of the company ...”

Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg argues that the broadcaster’s responsibility of ‘proactive protection’ should not only limit itself to the safeguarding of the interests of the radio-listener/televviewer but should also be extended to ‘protect’ the rights of any private individual. He relates his own personal experience:

“ ... For a long time we have fought for the media to have more freedom of expression in what they say and write but nowadays we have to fight to protect the ‘private’ citizen. Taking my own personal experience as an example, because of the amount of talk there was on me, I ended up taking people to court on libel charges. I have won them all so far but no one would know whether one has won the

case or not. Nowadays, the media is such a powerful tool that if it wants to ruin the reputation of a 'private' individual it can do it very easily and there is no legal measure that can defend that individual effectively. If you take a station to court, by the time a court ruling is made, some five years down the line, the reputation of the individual would have already been ruined, as by that time no one would remember or be interested in the case any more ...

Hence, nowadays, we have to move towards a society where the balance of the media is counter-balanced by effective measures to protect the 'private' individual's interests. Unfortunately, to date, the law of libel claims that as long as the reported fact is correct, an opinion on it is never a libel. An opinion is considered a libel only if the reported fact is not correct ...

I fully agree with freedom of expression, but I do not agree with 'the freedom of throwing rubbish around'. Because of the intrinsic 'social' nature of broadcasting media, the broadcaster has to be sensitive to the interests of all sectors of society. For example, *BBC* claims that there are certain sensitive or controversial issues, like 'homosexuality', which although are nowadays accepted by many sectors of society, they should only be broadcast after 9.00pm. Also, that certain scenes should sometimes not even be broadcast as there are still certain audiences who may find such scenes offensive. The broadcaster should be held fully responsible of what is being broadcast and in what context it is being broadcast ..."

In its 1998's Annual Report, the Broadcasting Authority expressed its concern on certain phone-in programmes, more particularly those on radio, in that "they were often degenerating into vehicles for the propagation of intolerance, prejudice and extremes of partisanship that

accentuate national divisions and strengthen polarization”. This concern may have led the Authority, in February 2000, to issue a document entitled “*Guidelines on Phone-in Programmes broadcast on Radio and Television Stations*”. It is worth noting the Authority’s explicit warning to whoever contravenes such guidelines. Extracts of these guidelines relevant to our discussion are worth noting.

“ ... The Broadcasting Authority is aware of the fact that phone-in programmes provide the public at large with a means to air their views and, in this context, it can be said that the broadcasting media serve a democratic purpose by enabling the public to express their opinions on diverse matters. Therefore, these types of programmes are important in a democratic society as they give fuller effect to the due exercise of freedom of expression as envisaged by Section 11(1)(a) of the Broadcasting Act, 1991 ...

On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that each right implies that certain duties are imposed on the same persons exercising that right. Whilst where political expression is involved a wider latitude for dissenting opinions should be permitted, even if such opinions, as the European Court of Human Rights has held, offend, shock and disturb, there are indeed certain cases where freedom of expression has to be restrained. Within this context, Section 13(2)(a) of the Broadcasting Act, 1991 provides that it is the duty of the Broadcasting Authority to satisfy that, so far as possible, the programmes broadcast by persons providing sound or television broadcasting services in Malta contain nothing which offends against religious sentiment, good taste or decency or is likely to incite to crime or to lead to disorder or to be offensive to public feeling. Due to the fact that certain phone-in programmes are broadcast live and are not recorded, a broadcasting station should ensure that listeners and viewers who phone in during such programmes and who are put on air do not contravene any provision of any



law, nor do they use language which offends good taste and decency ...

Offensive, vulgar, rude and obscene language as well as insulting and offensive language or language which incites or is defamatory or injurious, or which in any way contributes to the degeneration of a particular programme should be avoided not only by listeners and viewers but also by the presenters themselves. If a listener or a viewer hurls offensive language onto the presenter, the latter should never reply back using the same type of language ... The Broadcasting Authority warns all broadcasting stations that a contravention of these Guidelines will entail the programme which has contravened these guidelines to be put off air for one or more days ...”

Although he totally agrees with freedom of expression, Mr Paul Portelli of *Calypso Radio*, argues that he does not agree with allowing someone who bears a grudge against someone else to attack the latter by phoning the station and express his views. Mr Portelli states:

“ ... You cannot allow every individual who phones in to go on air particularly if this individual wants to criticize or insult someone else. I agree that a professional or expert on a given subject should be allowed to express his views however, a ‘private’ individual who is not conversant with the subject in question or simply wants to air his views, can easily go out of line and be potentially harmful to others. This is more so when one is discussing ‘hot’ issues such as abortion, capital punishment, divorce, etc. It is the responsibility of the presenter to check the phone-in caller if the latter goes out of line. It is the policy of our station not to entertain these types of phone-in calls ...

I fully agree with talk shows where the audience has the opportunity to participate but the presenter has to be very

careful when one ‘goes beyond the limit’ which is to be determined by the presenter himself. In my opinion, ‘*Xarabank*’ does go ‘beyond the limit’ sometimes. Also, when certain issues are discussed, for example, prostitution, an individual can easily go ‘beyond the limit’ even in the manner he expresses himself, that is, by using vulgar language ...”

Mr Colin Tabone, chairman of *Island Sound Radio*, also agrees that:

“ ... An individual should be given the right to freedom of expression on any subject however he has to be capable of expressing it without being disrespectful and rude to the radio-listener/televviewer. There are various ways of saying and discussing certain issues, particularly sensitive issues, without being so crude and explicit. I believe that the Station should monitor that certain standards are maintained ...”

Professor Roger Ellul Micallef fully agrees with the right for freedom of expression in broadcasting as long as:

“ ... [a]. it is not harmful to an individual’s reputation and [b]. it is based on real facts and not on suppositions. Every individual, even if he is not a professional, has a contribution to make and as long as the individual does not overstep the limits of his own competence, every individual has the right to hold and express an opinion on any subject as long as he says that it is an opinion and not present it as a fact because then we would be dealing with the individual’s ‘competence’ and not his ‘opinion’ ...”

What about the televviewer/radio-listener’s views on the right to freedom of expression on the media? Some audience’s perceptions follow.

Charles:

I agree with the right to freedom of expression in a discussion programme as long as a balance is kept when views are being expressed. Also, I don't think that guests on the panel will end up agreeing with each other on the subject discussed. The object of discussion programmes is to try to change the opinions of third parties.

Philip:

I don't agree with this. One hears what he wants to hear. If I, as a televiewer, am biased against the opinion of a 'Joe Borg', whatever Joe Borg says, I would interpret it as "Well, that is Joe Borg's opinion only". On the other hand, if I, as a televiewer, support another speaker, I would agree with whatever the latter says. In fact, I believe that a discussion programme does not influence the televiewer at all, and this is because most times televiewers would have already formed an opinion, rightly or wrongly. A televiewer simply filters the information, so as to reinforce his opinion. If out of twenty speakers only one voices the televiewer's opinion, then the televiewer would say, "You see, this speaker agrees with me" and ignores the other nineteen guests who oppose his opinion. Also, I feel that a broadcaster has no right to withhold information from the televiewer or radio-listener, as long as that information is not injurious to someone else ...

But what worries me most is that in those countries where there was a lot of repression, for example, communist countries, these had initially started by taking upon themselves the decision of what the 'private' individual should watch, hear and see, etc. In fact, in Nazi and communist countries, dictators used media as a propaganda machine. Once the authorities of a country manage to 'control the people' through such a powerful 'propaganda machine' like the media, then they can infiltrate and control

all the other aspects of society, for example, what to wear, how to act, what to do, etc.

In another focus group:

Roger:

I fully agree with freedom of expression but I cannot tolerate someone discussing a very sensitive or difficult subject, like say, 'psychology', which he is totally unknowledgeable in. One has all the right to discuss it at the local greengrocer's, but not for the whole of Malta to hear!!!

Yet in another one:

The Author asks:

Should a private individual have the right to freedom of expression on radio and TV?

Laura and Anna [very assertively]:

For whose good? For whose good?

The Author replies:

Possibly, because freedom of expression is an individual's fundamental right?

Anna:

Then such an individual should go and express his views at the grocer's or go on one of Malta's many roundabouts and express his views there ... or go to London's Hyde Park Corner ...

And in another:

The Author asks:

Do you agree with the right to freedom of expression being broadcast on radio and TV?

Lina:

Why not? As long as only the professors, doctors, lawyers, etc., express their views on TV, I think we would not have a say in life!! However, I think that freedom of expression on radio and TV did increase a lot as a result of pluralism in broadcasting.

May:

However, I still think that there is a good number of people who are not capable of expressing their opinion, but yet have the guts to talk on air without knowing what they are talking about.

The Author asks:

Is it because you do not agree with their opinion or because they are not capable of expressing themselves well?

May:

Because they are not capable of expressing their views well, although everyone should be entitled to express his opinion on radio and TV. The worst are phone-in callers. Sometimes you ask yourself, 'Does this person know what he is talking about?' I feel that anyone who expresses his views on radio and TV, should be 100% sure of what he is talking about.

The Author:

But it may only be his opinion.

May:

If it is an opinion, why should you impose it on someone else? Certain people speak too personal? They express

exactly what they are feeling. Sometimes, they do not realize what they are saying. They should first consider, “What I am about to say, is it just for me or for the whole of Malta to hear?”

Mary:

I agree that everyone should voice his views, not just professionals. We, the people know what is affecting us and what is really bothering us.

Mr George Mifsud states that he agrees with freedom of expression as long as one remains within the parameters of decency. He believes that:

“ ... The ‘ordinary man in the street’ should be given the right to freedom of expression because his personal experience or grievance may be the same as a thousand other viewers. Until recently, we only used to hear the views and opinions of institutions, government, church, etc. and of professionals, magistrates, lawyers, experts and never the views and opinions of the ‘ordinary man’ ...”

Mr Herman Bonaci argues that for a ‘talk show’ type of programme, the subject matter to be discussed needs to be of a ‘controversial’ nature.

“ ... The audience in itself is ‘controversial’ and likes ‘controversy’. You have to be controversial to make your audience discuss your programme the day after. And this is very important for the programme to remain popular. Why do you think that ‘*Xarabank*’ remained the top ‘talk show’ programme for so long? Joe Azzopardi, who is a very good friend of mine does induce ‘controversy’ in his talk show, although he does not admit this. For example, follow-up on letters on newspapers, etc. The presenter has to have the

capability of monitoring the audience's views and opinions.  
He is there on behalf of his audience ...”

Mr Peppi Azzopardi, presenter of ‘*Xarabank*’, expressed his opinion on whether a ‘private’ individual should be given the right to freedom of expression on the broadcast media. He explained that the ‘*Xarabank*’ experience has taught him much in his effort to attain the right balance between granting the right to freedom of expression to an individual on his show and, at the same time, ‘proactively protecting’ the rights of his viewers.

“ ... Nowadays, television is presenting a whole new challenge to the viewer in that, certain issues are nowadays not only being discussed by professionals who tend to use technical jargon which no one understands, but are also being discussed and tackled from a more tangible and humane perspective by way of real-life experiences. For example, where before we used to only hear a professional discussing the issue of ‘divorce’, we now have the ‘divorced’ woman actually telling us her own personal experience. We do not just hear ‘about her’ but we have now started to hear her own personal experience from her directly. Television has now become not “my opinion on ...” but “I know what it feels like because I have experienced it” ...

As regards freedom of expression, as long as an individual is not breaking any laws or regulations or is not trying to instigate and provoke hatred, violence, etc., then there should be nothing to refrain that individual from expressing his opinion on the broadcast media. Although, in principle, it would be better to broadcast ‘informed’ opinions, one cannot check individuals from expressing their views, subject to the two conditions indicated above, as this would be infringing on their fundamental right to freedom of expression ...

Our ‘*Xarabank*’ experience has taught us three important principles on this issue:

1. Apart from inviting the general public to attend and be present in our studios, we also invite specific individuals who have ‘informed’ knowledge on the subject. This provides a more balanced discussion.
2. Also, we try to send some research findings to the people who will be attending. Admittedly, the research would have been conducted by our team and may be somewhat biased but no research is ever fully objective and independent.
3. And what we learnt from the very unpleasant experiences we had in the initial episodes of ‘*Xarabank*’ is that we try to instill in our studio audience that if an individual does not talk sense, it is he who will stand to lose and not the televiewer. Here, up to a certain extent, we are almost trying to safeguard the interests of the individual himself rather than those of the televiewer.

In the initial stages of ‘*Xarabank*’, we tried to be as democratic as possible and we used ‘to open our doors’ to all who wished to attend and only ask some four or five people to form part of the panel. Then, the audiences themselves realized that this had to change ...”



#### **4.6.7.3     *Right to Freedom of Expression on ‘One-to-One Interview’ Discussion Programmes***

Rev. Prof. Saviour Chircop agrees with the right to the freedom of expression on the broadcast media as long as the various opinions on the subject are represented. However, he asserts that:

“ ... I definitely do not agree with conducting one-to-one interviews with individuals who have extreme beliefs in controversial subjects like racism, to give one example. In my opinion, to give airtime to such individuals and glorify their views, I believe that the TV Station would be doing a disservice to the televiewer for not presenting a balanced discussion on the subject. By doing this, the Station would be [in fact, this has already happened on local TV] glorifying extreme beliefs in our society. Is this the type of message we want to convey to our audiences? If we really want to do this, we will start doing what had happened in America: I will murder Kennedy to make a name for myself. Is this what the local broadcast media wants to achieve? ...”

John Mallia admits that this is a very grey area. Even for him, a subject which came to mind was ‘racism’. He asks:

“ ... Should a station give airtime to someone promoting his views in favour of ‘racism’? On one hand, he has the right to freedom of expression but on the other, he would literally be promoting the concept of ‘racism’ to the radio-listener/televiewer. Personally, I would give him airtime but he would definitely not be the only guest on the panel. Also, just because one presenter has tackled the subject on one station, it does not mean that all presenters and stations have to do it too. At the end of it all, the individual becomes a ‘celebrity’ for expressing his controversial views on racism ...”

What about the views of the viewer on 'one-to-one interview' discussion programmes on local television? One viewer noted:

Irene:

In the case of one-to-one interviews such as '*Virtwali*', it is important to get someone knowledgeable on the subject because it is from these people that we learn.

In another focus group, the following discussion took place [respondents aged 61 and over]:

Lina:

Recently, Lou Bondi, in '*Virtwali*', had a guest speaker who was simply a 'car parker' but who spoke really well. At first, we thought Lou Bondi's programme was lowering its standards. Because initially Lou Bondi brought Maltese celebrities on his programme like a Maltese female singer, then he got the ex-president of Malta, but this individual [referring to the car parker] was really worth listening to.

Mary:

But would we have known this if Lou Bondi had not invited him on his programme?

Silvia:

In my opinion, there are many individuals prepared to share their views and what they know with the viewers, however, why should Lou Bondi invite a person, whoever she may be, to disclose her private life to all the viewers? [referring to the female singer who was Lou Bondi's guest speaker on '*Virtwali*']. Her private life does not interest me in the least.

Roger:

There you had the right to change station!!

Silvia:

That is exactly what I did.

#### 4.6.7.4 The Development of a 'Phone-In' Culture

*“ ... There is a particular radio programme on Super One Radio which tries to ‘incite and excite’ the listener with a lot of phone-in calls ... And also, it is amazing how his listeners seem to be all very keen to listen to the programme. They seem to be letting out all their frustrations on air ... I agree with freedom of expression but to use such high levels of incitement and excitement, one would be abusing of one’s audiences. I definitely do not agree with this ...”*

*Tony,  
Focus Group Respondent*

In **SECTION 3.3.2** above, we referred to Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg’s observation that the introduction of broadcasting pluralism in Malta has brought about “a phone-in culture” which “is contributing towards the moving away from a society where institutions are of utmost importance to a society and where ‘the ordinary man in the street’ can challenge these institutions”. Rev. Fr. Borg also observed that “phone-in programmes allow the radio-listener to participate in the discussion, express his opinion how and when he wants, is also given the chance to challenge the presenter and he actually becomes a broadcaster himself. From a broadcaster’s perspective, ‘phone-in’ programmes also allow radio stations to produce programmes at a much lower cost ...”

The Author cannot not refer to Rev. Fr. Borg’s article “*More than a ‘Prosit Tal-Programm’ Syndrome*”, [The Sunday Times, 8 August 1999], which describes in some detail this simple but revolutionary ‘phone-in’ culture which seems to have taken strong root in the local radio and television broadcasting scene.

“ ... In the phone-in format, the communicative process involves a combination of a private channel [telephone] with a public channel [radio]. The phone-in format is therefore an extension of person-to-person interaction carried to the public by ‘broadcasting’. The phone-in is a major development in broadcasting since for the first time the listener becomes an intermittent broadcaster who has an opportunity to influence the radio text by making an actual contribution to it ...

This presence eventually develops into a kind of partnership with the presenter-producer, which eventually turns several programmes into ‘listener-centred’ and in several cases ‘listener-controlled’. The basic idea that underpins the format is simple but revolutionary. Bridson [1971] thinks its revolutionary aspect partly explains the late introduction on the format. He writes that the idea that the ordinary citizen should have anything vital to contribute to broadcasting was an idea slow to gain acceptance. He thinks that the idea that the ordinary citizen should actually use broadcasting to express his/her opinions in unvarnished words was regarded as almost the end of all good social order. While the manifest functions of the phone-in are organization-centred [e.g. cheaper to produce] the latent functions are listener-centred [e.g. more listener participation] ...

Evans [1977] writes that on the political level this form of ‘participation’ opens up new possibilities, giving listeners for the first time some chance to challenge the power of the media men and interested parties to impose their view of events on the community at large. Thanks to this format, common people and experts, casual callers and professional broadcasters, the lowly and the powerful have instant access to the medium. The “prosität-programm” accolade that characterizes so many calls is not just a vain

compliment but an act of gratitude for this newly acquired power ...”

The Author endeavoured to explore Rev. Fr. Borg’s observation with both broadcasters and radio listeners/telev viewers.

Mr Chris Bianco comments on the positive contribution on ‘phone-ins’ in discussion programmes. He makes specific reference to the discussion programme, ‘*Kurrenti*’ of *NET TV*:

“ ... One of my favourite programmes is ‘*Kurrenti*’ on *NET TV*. The programme manages to bring out some very important issues and is very much to the point and I find that the phone-ins also contribute to the programme by coming up with certain important aspects which the producers themselves may not have thought of before ...”

Mannie Spiteri illustrates how through these ‘phone-ins’, his radio station is developing a positive interaction with its listeners:

“ ... *RTK* focuses on a wide range of social and cultural issues, for example, health, interpersonal communications, parenthood, parental skills etc. We try to give our listeners the possibility of expressing themselves by way of ‘phone-ins’ on our discussion programmes, and we have also developed a system of following up on our audiences’ comments, complaints, views and try to offer some solutions and recommendations. We aim at also offering a ‘service’ to our audience and this we do by simultaneously nurturing Christian values for our audiences ...”

Do audiences like ‘phone-in’ programmes? The following discussions took place at some of the focus group sessions.

[Female respondents aged 31-46 years]:

Laura:

Yes I did participate in a TV phone-in competition once because I knew the answer. But the lines are practically always engaged.

Irene:

Yes, I do participate to express my views for televoting questions, particularly if I feel strongly about something.

Anna:

I do not agree with such a high price of the phone call. It is a real rip-off!! I did participate once on a radio because I could not stand the fact that no one knew the answer so I called on the radio station [name of station mentioned], won a prize and the prize never came.

Laura:

People who do phone-ins are idiots. I suggest that phone-ins are screened before they go on air. But then again, it would be rather unfair. The presenter should advise the audience that if they do not know the answer, they should not call. These people are blocking all the telephone lines.

Anna:

Particularly those callers who phone in and ask for the presenters to help them.

Laura:

And sometimes you want to participate and cannot participate because all the lines are engaged!! It is very irritating.

In another focus group [respondents aged 61 and over]:

Jane:

Some 'phone-in' programmes have become really ridiculous. Certain things they say on the radio, are really embarrassing sometimes even for the radio-listener himself. Also, certain radio programmes, like the morning programmes, seem to have become more of a club than anything else. It is always the same people who call in. My husband and I, in fact, immediately recognize who the caller is and we start guessing their names and the phone-in callers always end up sending their regards and dedicating songs to each other, very much like a 'club'!

Vivienne:

When the phone-in callers do not talk sense, it is very irritating for the listener.

What about the responsibility of the presenter in 'phone-in' programmes? Can or should he/she express his/her opinion? Some respondents' views follow.

In a focus group session attended by respondents aged 61 and over:

Roger:

I think that the role of the presenter is very important and he has a lot of responsibility. He should not be biased, he should let the guests express their opinions and keep the discussion balanced. He should also try not to let the discussion go out of subject.

May:

A presenter should be diplomatic when it comes to changing the subject and should never cut the caller or guest short.

Tony:

There is a particular radio programme on *Super One Radio* which tries to ‘incite and excite’ the listener with a lot of phone-in calls. What the presenter does is that whenever there is a ‘hot’ issue going on in Malta, he seems to be the first one to get a lot of information about it and tries to ‘incite and excite’ the listener. And also, it is amazing how his listeners seem to be all very keen to listen to the programme. They seem to be letting out all their frustrations on air. I totally disagree with this type of programme. I agree with freedom of expression but to use such high levels of incitement and excitement, one would be abusing of his audiences. I definitely don’t agree with this.

Roger:

Before people used to go to the Confessional to get rid of their frustrations, nowadays they seem to use the radio. And I do not agree that they do it for all Malta to hear!!

Silvia:

I still feel that we should be more tolerant with these people and to try and understand them. Some people do not have anyone to speak to.

Mary:

But by doing so, they would not be talking to anyone except simply hearing their own voice!!! If someone is lonely and needs to confide in someone, he should go to a friend and not use the radio!!

All the participants:

These individuals lower the quality standards of the programme.



The Author asks:

How can one maintain the quality standards of his programme then and yet allow the right to freedom of expression?

Silvia:

The presenter may try to speak to the phone-in callers before actually going on air to, at least, get the gist of what the caller is about to say. This will ensure that the programme's airtime is not taken all up by them. I have never phoned a radio station and hence, they will not be taking 'my' airtime. Many a time, you hear a phone-in caller say, "The line is always engaged. It is very difficult to get through to your station".

Mary:

Also, is there a way that a station can monitor the calls and identify from before who the 'regular' callers are so as to give a chance to the new callers to call in?

In the above discussion, respondent 'Tony' was referring to presenter Manuel Cuschieri, who, some two years ago, was already warned by the Broadcasting Authority to 'tone down' his programme '*Tajjeb Li Tkun Taf*'. The Times of 13 August 1999 had reported that the Authority warned the presenter to tackle the subject being discussed in a "more prudent and more civil manner". The report read:

"... Despite the fact that the Authority had issued a circular that it was not prepared to tolerate phone-in programmes that spread accusations, allegations and malicious rumours, the standard of '*Tajjeb Li Tkun Taf*' had not improved. Instead, programme presenter Manwel Cuschieri had adopted a style that encouraged anger among listeners when the topic being discussed could have been presented in a more prudent and civil way, the Authority said ...

In its statement, the Authority said that from information given by the radio's representative it appeared that the station had attempted to persuade Mr Cuschieri to conform to the Authority's instructions. Unless the station abided by its regulations and substantially improved the direction of the programme within two months, it would have to fine *Super One Radio*. The Authority had decided to give the station a second chance because it felt that its main interest was to have better and more effective broadcasting ..."

In another focus group attended by female respondents aged 46-60 years, the following discussion took place:

Carmen:

What I can't stand is when a presenter cuts the phone-in caller short. This happens both on radio and television; even the very good presenters do it. I also cannot stand when they have guests in the studio and the presenters themselves are continuously butting in.

Vivienne:

Recently, there was one female TV presenter and someone phoned in to remark that she was being too abrupt with her viewers calling in and that she should give them a chance to express their opinions and not cut them short.

Mary:

There is also another female radio presenter who also likes butting in a lot. When the phone-in caller addresses a question to her guest speaker, the guest speaker answers and she, very impatiently, repeats to the phone-in caller what the guest speaker would have said, where it would be very clear that the caller would have already understood what the guest speaker would have said. However, in spite of this shortcoming, I think this female presenter is very good.

Jane:

On the other hand, sometimes the presenter might need to check the phone-in caller if the latter would be about to say something which should not be said on air, for example, mentioning some brand name.

Mary:

And as regards radio, I listen to *RTK*. Firstly because it is religious and also because *RTK*'s morning programme is very good.

Carmen:

I also listen to *RTK* but I was very annoyed recently in a discussion programme on *RTK*. There were phone-in callers who criticized priests and the Church and the presenter, who is a priest himself, let them speak without stopping them.

Mary:

But no, the other female presenter does stop these call-ins.

Carmen:

But he is not the only presenter who does this. There is another presenter on *RTK* who also does not stop phone-in callers criticizing the Church. The presenter simply lets the caller speak. I cannot accept this from a radio station owned by the Church and hence I opt for *Radju Marija* instead.

The Author asked for the broadcasters' views on whether a presenter should express his/her opinion or otherwise. Station manager and presenter Claudette Pace replied that:

“... One of the most challenging things for a presenter is when you have an opinion but you actually act as if you are contrary to this opinion. Or else you express your view and your next

view is the complete opposite. At this stage, your viewers will say: ‘Is she in favour or against?’ And I think this is the best technique to use. At the end of the day, what is the function of the presenter particularly when he is leading an educational or informative programme? It is to challenge minds and not to form opinions for his audience ...”

Mr John Mallia refers to Larry King, *CNN*’s leading talk show presenter in that:

“ ... Whether a presenter should express his/her views or not, I really admire Larry King, the presenter of ‘*Larry King Live*’ on *CNN*. When he interviews his guest on the show, he can be very hard in his criticism but at the same time, if a phone-in caller asks an unfair question or passes an unfair comment, he would go ‘all out’ to protect his guest. At the end of the day, what is the function or role of a presenter? He is actually there to represent the televiewer or radio-listener. Hence, the presenter should ask the questions which his viewers/listeners would ask, whether these are negative or positive! ...”

Some of the focus group respondents criticized Mr Peppi Azzopardi for not giving the same amount of airtime to all his guests present in his programme. He seems to discriminate between them depending on whether he agrees with them or not. When the Author asked for his opinion on this criticism, he replied:

“ ... I am aware of this perception but whenever I challenge someone on this aspect, no one has ever given me one specific example when this has actually happened. Also, I think that it is every presenter’s responsibility to his televiewer to inform the latter of his stand and opinion on the subject matter in question. If I agree with the issue in question, say, “the introduction of the local warden system in Malta”, I will state that I agree but as a presenter, I will

also indicate the areas within the local warden system I do not agree with. I can never retain a neutral stand on my programme as I am not neutral and I do not want to be neutral. I think it is my responsibility and it is also an obligation I owe to my viewers. Giving some examples, presenters, Larry King on *CNN* and Kilroy on *BBC*, both voice their opinions on the subject being discussed ...”

On the other hand, Mr Herman Bonaci argues:

“ ... In my opinion, the presenter of a talk show should not express his opinion. I have always believed it is what the people think which is important and not what you as a presenter believe. The audience is not interested in the presenter’s views ...”

#### **4.6.8    *Maltese Productions – Too many Repeats?***

Do viewers appreciate having the possibility of watching repeats of Maltese productions [teledrama, talkshows, discussion programmes, etc.] broadcast at prime-time bands? Are there too many programme repeats to fill up available low-peak airtime? Does this render a service or disservice to the viewer?

Some respondents appreciate having repeats of programmes broadcast at different times. In a focus group session attended by female respondents aged 46-60 years old, the following discussion took place.

Carmen:

My favorite programmes are religious programmes, however, I do watch other programmes too.

Jane:

What I cannot stand is that there are so many good Maltese productions on Monday and they are all broadcast at the same time. Why do they do this, particularly when the

Maltese viewer is so keen on Maltese drama. They are all broadcast at the same time!

Angela:

Even in the afternoon, there is Gloria Mizzi's programme and Claudette Pace's programme which go on air at the same time. My husband is always telling me, "How long are you going to keep on changing channels?"

Jane:

Even on Friday, there is 'Xarabank' on TVM and 'Kurrenti' on NET TV at the same time. What we do is, when the advert commercials come, we immediately switch to the other station. It is also good that there are repetitions of the programmes in the weekend.

Angela:

That is why we have two TV sets. My husband watches the sports in the sitting room and I watch my programmes in the kitchen.

Mary:

Even at home, that is what we do. He watches the sports downstairs and I watch mine upstairs.

And in other focus group session:

Roger [74 yrs]:

I really like Maltese productions. If it is 'Undercover', I watch it, if it is 'Simpatiči', I watch it, if it is 'Villa Sunset', I watch it. And if they are being broadcast together I will watch one and record the other on the VCR. Another example is 'Xarabank' and 'Kurrenti' on Friday evening. I prefer watching Maltese productions to foreign programmes.

Some other viewers do not appreciate having programme repeats:

Josianne [36 yrs]:

There are too many programme repeats and too many Maltese productions of low-quality standards. There should be a better mix of foreign and local productions. I also like watching a programme called '*Hames Minuti*' on *PBS* which focuses on Maltese history, culture, etc. I think they should broadcast two of these programmes daily.

Anna [36 yrs]:

This is what *PBS* should have repeats of and not of '*Xarabank*'!!

**CHAPTER FIVE****BROADCASTING STANDARDS**

*“ ... It ranges from very good, good, to very bad and awful, both in terms of language fluency in English and Maltese and broadcasting standards ...”*

*Professor Roger Ellul Micallef,  
Chairman, University Broadcasting Services Ltd.*

**5.1 Introduction**

In the foregoing Chapter, the role and responsibility of the discussion programme presenter and talk show host were discussed. One recalls Mr Michael Falzon's statement that “if the station decides to engage a ‘charlatan’ or ‘quack’ as presenter/host, then it is the station's responsibility to deal with any eventual adverse consequences which might arise”. In this Chapter, the effects of broadcasting pluralism on the broadcasting standards of public and private commercial radio and television stations in Malta will be researched more closely. Other very important aspects like the availability and training of broadcasters, programme presenters and hosts, the quality of news coverage and reporting which also contribute towards determining the quality standards of TV and radio stations will also be assessed. Moreover, whether the public broadcasting sector in Malta has succeeded in making the much awaited ‘quality leap in broadcasting’ will be analysed. Whether or not the introduction of cable television has had an effect on terrestrial television will also be researched.

The research commences by first addressing the broadcasting standards attained by local television and radio stations and how they are perceived by the Maltese radio-listener/televviewer and also by the



broadcaster him/herself. To conduct this research, the Author addressed the following qualitative research areas:

### **Maltese Radio and TV Stations**

- Level of competence/professionalism of programme announcers
- Level of competence/professionalism of presenters and hosts [of discussion programmes, talk shows, quiz shows, etc.]
- Level of language fluency of broadcasters [Maltese or English – where relevant]
- Mix of broadcasters, presenters, hosts, etc.
- Training given to broadcasters, presenters, hosts, etc. [assessing the interviewee's opinion whether these receive adequate training before going on air].

## **5.2 Broadcasting Standards – Audience Survey Findings**

This section comprises the research findings of the survey conducted with the 500 audience respondents.

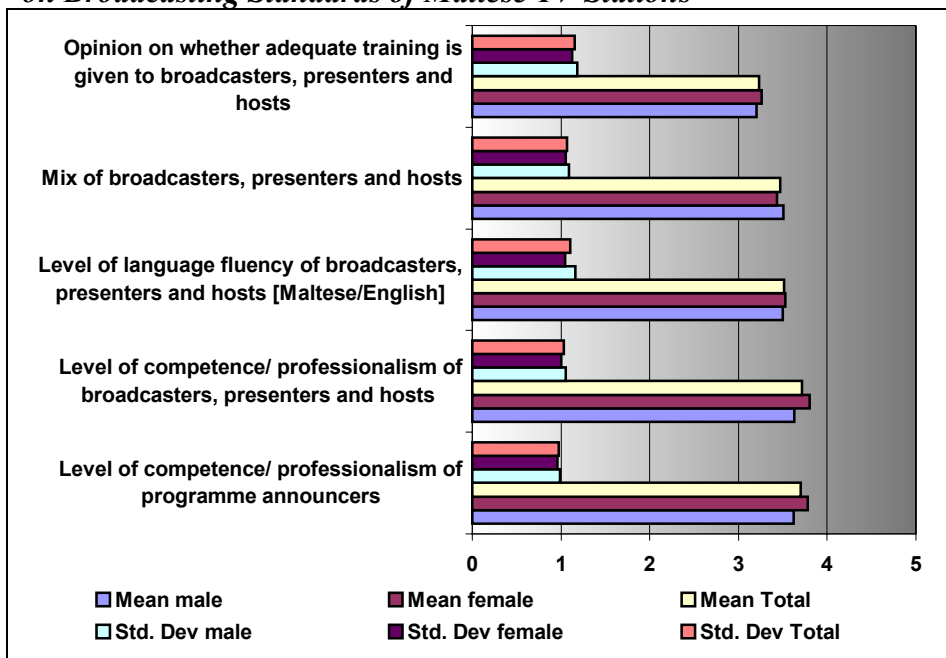
### **5.2.1 Maltese TV Stations: Broadcasting Standards**

An overall average of 98.5% of the total survey respondents answered all the questions. As illustrated in **DIAGRAM 5.1** below, all questions scored a positive mean response of 3.23 and over. This means that the respondents do perceive that the Maltese TV stations' broadcasting standards have improved as a direct result of the introduction of broadcasting pluralism in Malta. The highest mean scores obtained were those assessing the level of competence and professionalism of 'presenters and hosts' and of 'programme announcers', which attained a mean rating score of 3.72 and 3.70, respectively. The low dispersion between responses for the former one stood at 0.98.

Also noted is the comparatively low score [although still positive] of the respondents' perception of whether the Stations are giving adequate training to their broadcasters, presenters, hosts, etc. before the latter go 'on air' addressing a nationwide TV audience. The mean rating for this question stood at a comparatively low 3.23 with a comparatively high dispersion of 1.15. Once again, the [1] to [5] rating scale was used, where [1] signified a 'very low/negative' assessment and [5] represented a 'very high/positive' score.

### DIAGRAM 5.1

#### *Respondents' Perceptions on the Effect of Broadcasting Pluralism on Broadcasting Standards of Maltese TV Stations*



**TABLE 5.1** below also incorporates the respondents' additional comments. Clearly, one notices that a good 44% of those respondents answering this 'open' question commented on the lack of training local TV presenters/broadcasters seem to receive before going on air. 14% of the respondents commented on the need for new faces and new talent.

TABLE 5.1

**RESPONDENTS' ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THE EFFECT  
OF BROADCASTING PLURALISM ON BROADCASTING  
STANDARDS ON MALTESE TV STATIONS**

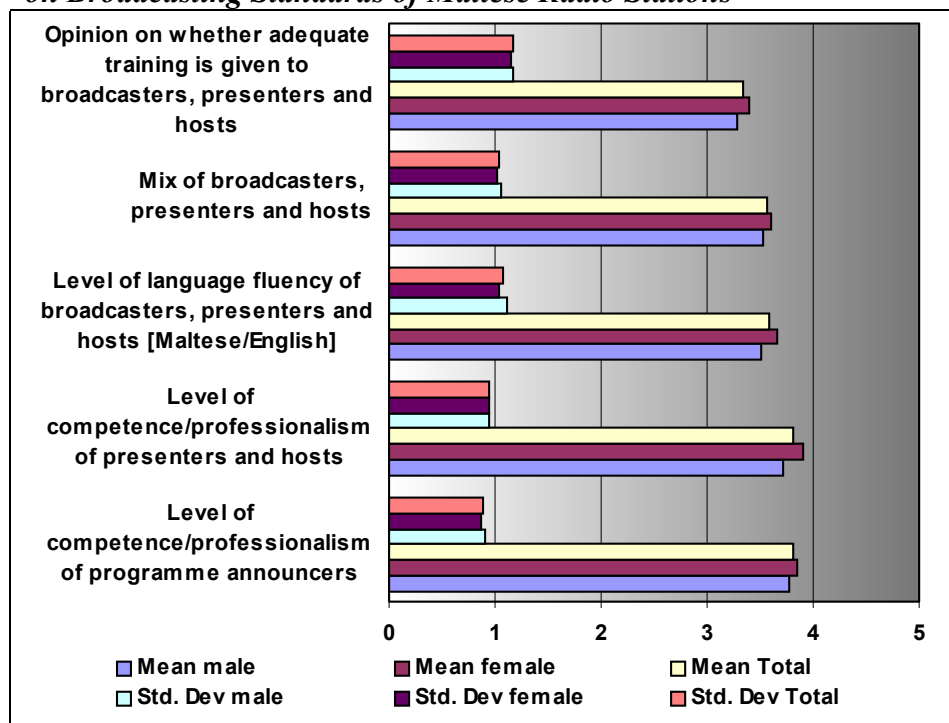
Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Qualitative Response
<b>Favourable Comments:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Better standards for presenters now	10	6.1
<input type="checkbox"/> A good mixture of presenters	2	1.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Very professional	1	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Average quality but working at improving standards	3	1.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Started bad and settled in time	1	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Certain programmes on <i>PBS</i> are good	1	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Lou Bondi is the best	1	0.6
	<b>19</b>	<b>11.5</b>
<b>Unfavourable Comments:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Some presenters/broadcasters are definitely not trained	41	25.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Presenters need training	31	18.9
<input type="checkbox"/> New faces needed	17	10.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Low level of fluency in Maltese language	13	7.9
<input type="checkbox"/> Of average standard compared to foreign productions/stations	11	6.7
<input type="checkbox"/> Low level of fluency in English language	10	6.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Nothing like foreign stations	7	4.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Low level of language fluency and mixed usage of English and Maltese	6	3.7
<input type="checkbox"/> More room for new talent	3	1.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Too old-fashioned	2	1.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Not a good mixture	2	1.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Sports/football commentators are not good/ should be more impartial	2	1.2

	$\overline{145}$	$\overline{88.5}$
	$\overline{164}$	$\overline{100.0}$

### **5.2.2 Maltese Radio Stations: Broadcasting Standards**

A relatively low 76.1% of the total respondent population answered this question when compared to the high total response rate attained for TV stations. The mean scores obtained are all positive which again confirms that the broadcasting standards of Maltese radio stations have improved with the introduction of broadcasting pluralism in Malta. The mean responses attained compare well with those attained for TV stations. In fact, the highest positive mean scores were attained on assessing the level of competence and professionalism of ‘programme announcers’ and ‘presenters and hosts’ which stood at 3.82 and 3.81 respectively. Also, these two questions registered the lowest dispersion among responses rate, which stood at 0.89 and 0.95 respectively.

Conversely, although still positive, the comparatively lowest mean response concerned the respondents’ perception on the level of training given to these broadcasters, presenters and hosts by the Maltese radio stations. Once more, a comparatively highest spread among responses rate was also registered here, at 1.16. **DIAGRAM 5.2** below depicts these comparative statistical analyses. For this assessment, a [1] to [5] rating scale was used, where [1] signified a ‘very low/negative’ assessment and [5] represented a ‘very high/positive’ score.

**DIAGRAM 5.2*****Respondents' Perceptions on the Effect of Broadcasting Pluralism on Broadcasting Standards of Maltese Radio Stations***

**TABLE 5.2** below encompasses some additional comments made by the respondents which clearly show that it is generally perceived that broadcasting pluralism did have a positive impact on the level of professionalism of radio presenters.

TABLE 5.2

**RESPONDENTS' ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THE EFFECT  
OF BROADCASTING PLURALISM ON BROADCASTING  
STANDARDS ON MALTESE RADIO STATIONS**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Qualitative Response
<b>Favourable Comments:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Higher level of professionalism of presenters attained	29	48.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Competition improved broadcasting standards	2	3.4
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Capital</i> and <i>Bay Radio</i> better than others	2	3.4
<input type="checkbox"/> A good mixture of male/female presenters	2	3.3
	<b>35</b>	<b>58.4</b>
<b>Unfavourable Comments:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Do not listen to much radio	11	18.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Presenters need to do a better job	5	8.3
<input type="checkbox"/> A better mixture of male/female presenters needed	3	5.0
<input type="checkbox"/> No training or experience	3	5.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Always the same voices	3	5.0
	<b>25</b>	<b>41.6</b>
	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**5.3 Broadcasting Standards – More Qualitative Views**

These survey findings were further substantiated in the focus group sessions. The overall improvement in broadcasting standards was observed by three focus group respondents, who remarked:

Laura [38 yrs]:

Broadcasting standards have improved a lot. For example, presenters and broadcasters now have sponsored clothes, better and professionally-styled hair styles, etc. However one wonders whether this was as a direct consequence of pluralism and competition or as improvements expected over a ten-year period.

John [23 yrs]:

One very good thing which pluralism in radio broadcasting has brought about is that one can tune in on the radio station which most suits his mood during the day. Radio presenters, like the morning programmes, for example, Martin Sapiano, John Bundy, Simon Lumston, etc. have all developed a unique personality for each radio station and one can tune in on the programme he prefers on that particular day depending on whether he wants something light, something funny, etc.

Mark [25 yrs]:

I watch a lot of Maltese TV. The broadcasting standards in general have improved a lot. There is a course at University in Communications too. Many University students are working at the various television and radio stations.

Other viewers/radio-listeners seemed to have mixed feelings on the broadcasting standards attained by local television. In a focus group attended by respondents aged 18-30 years:

Patrick:

*NET TV* has very good broadcasting standards.

John:

I am afraid *TVM*'s broadcasters and presenters are all very old.

Neil:

*NET TV*'s broadcasters are very good, but those of *Super One TV* are very crude.

Patrick:

Very rude sometimes. One look at the studio is enough.

Neil:

Even certain Maltese words they use are very rude, for example, "mar jipporga" is not a word to use on TV.

Patrick:

I don't think I ever saw a programme in a studio on *Smash TV* yet.

Ryan:

Even dress-sense is important. For example, *NET TV* presenters and broadcasters seem to be sponsored by very good boutiques or else they know how to carry themselves much better than the other stations. Their attire is neither too loud, too fancy or old-fashioned.

And on broadcasting standards attained by local radio:

Eileen:

Some DJs talk too much; they speak over a song whilst it is being played in order to make a dedication.



Anna:

It is better to hear a dedication than to hear a DJ actually singing with the song on air.

Laura:

Some presenters talk to the radio-listeners as if they were idiots. They are insulting me as a radio-listener when they do this.

#### **5.4 Availability and Training of Broadcasters, Programme Presenters and Hosts**

***“ ... An individual with a ‘pretty face’ does not make him or her a good broadcaster ...”***

***Mr Anthony Tabone,  
Chairman, PBS***

Mr George Mifsud makes the following observation:

***“ ... I do not see any disadvantages of pluralism in broadcasting, however, there is one major shortcoming which came about as a result of pluralism and that is that no one was prepared for it, both in terms of availability of broadcasters and talent potential. Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who are now engaged in broadcasting, who were never trained and who are not competent in this field ...”***

To what extent may one say that broadcasting pluralism in Malta had taken everyone by surprise and that no one was prepared for it? What about the availability of competent broadcasters, programme presenters and hosts; are there enough competent broadcasters to meet the needs of local television and radio? If not, how are ‘new’ recruits being trained, if at all? We first asked the viewers/radio-listeners for their views in this regard.

Female respondents aged 31-46 yrs:

Laura:

Broadcasting pluralism has created the airtime for those who wanted to go into broadcasting; now they have committed themselves to this and have to fill it up!! The time was too short to actually have enough time for training of people and preparation to fill up this airtime!!

Steffie:

A training centre should have been created first before opening the stations. Does Government have an academy for broadcasters? There definitely should be one!!

Josianne:

It is also up to the Broadcasting Authority to set certain standards and provide adequate schools!! The Broadcasting Authority should see who is being engaged and the type of training they are being given.

Anna:

As a type of 'watchdog'.

Laura:

The Authority should ask, "Is that broadcaster or presenter up to standard? Has he reached the required standard? If not, then no, the time is not ripe yet!"

Josianne:

But for the Authority to be able to do this, it must provide adequate training centres.

Laura:

However, these presenters and broadcasters are learning from their own experience. If they make a blunder on TV at the start of their career, they can ruin their career for

ever. It would be detrimental not just for the viewer/listener but also for the presenter himself. And it is not fair on him too. It is not fair that just because a presenter has a ‘pretty face’, has dress-sense and attracts women, he is thrown on primetime TV to present a programme!!

Laura:

Also, the language leaves much to be desired. Even on the best station, *Bay Radio*, the broadcasters make linguistic mistakes in English! Is anyone aware of this problem yet?!

In another focus group discussion [respondents aged 18-30 years]:

Patrick:

Not all the presenters have not been trained.

John:

I find it so funny the way certain presenters pronounce certain words however I don’t think they all need training. I think they need to have at least, a good level of general knowledge on everything than be trained. For example, Andrea of “*Bugz @ NET*” on *NET TV* does not seem to have been trained but she is very natural on TV.

Patrick:

I agree.

The Author asks:

Should broadcasters be trained or is natural talent enough?

Patrick:

It depends what programme they are going to present. If it is a journalistic programme, then yes, they should be trained.

Mark:

At all levels, there are skills which can be trained.

Other focus group respondents' views [male respondents aged 46-60 years]:

Charles:

What broadcasting pluralism has brought about, is that where before there was a nucleus of people working on one station, now one finds that these people have dispersed to the various stations. Unfortunately, these people took with them their old mentality and their old ways of doing things to the other stations and what we have now is, instead of having one station with a group of people, we have many stations with the same group of people.

John:

But on the other hand, it could also be that these same people were controlled and 'dominated' when they were with *PBS* and could not express their views and opinions back then.

Charles:

I think we will really take advantage of the benefits of pluralism in broadcasting in the next few years when the older ones would have retired and we will have new broadcasters instead.

John:

I agree. I think that Maltese programmes and Maltese drama productions always end up having the same broadcasters, same presenters, same actors. It is true that Malta is small but is it possible that there is no new blood with potential available?

Charles:

But, these established presenters and actors do appeal to a lot of viewers.

Philip:

It is almost a blessing in disguise that practically all the stations are bankrupt because one of the cheapest programmes a station can produce is “discussion programmes” and that is why there are so many discussion programmes on TV and radio. In fact, programmes which require a lot of research or filming are very few these days. I think that *‘Xarabank’* is an exception as they seem to do a lot of research and it is not a low-budget programme. The others, with just one look at the set and studio, one notices that they are all very low-budget.

The Author also sounded the broadcasters’ views on the subject. Is it difficult to find competent broadcasters? And if yes, what type of training can stations offer would-be and novice broadcasters?

Ms Claudette Pace claims that the selection criteria used to select programme presenters and hosts are not right. She relates her own experience:

“ ... I would say that the good presenters in Malta are very few. The selection criteria are not right. I had started out purely by chance. I was selected as a presenter for my qualities as an actress. I was on TV as an actress in costume on behalf of the Community Chest Fund one Christmas. We had a technical problem and I managed to ‘blab’ on until it was fixed. So, it was obvious for Albert Marshall and Silvana Cristina, *PBS* personnel at the time, that I could fill up airtime. I was then given a lunch-time programme but no one did lunch-time programmes at the time. We could not even sell the programme to advertising sponsors in the beginning. No one would buy it. I was selected as a

presenter but I was not trained by them. I had come with 'my own baggage'. I had my own amount of studying, a university degree, etc. ...

Some local presenters were chosen just because they sold advertising space. And this has happened across the board with all the local TV stations. This bothers me a lot and I have to be careful not to let it happen even here at *Max Plus TV*. Unfortunately, nowadays, many programmes are being dominated by the advertising side and most times, other stations accuse us of this. It is simply advertising and teleshopping left, right and centre. Where is the programme content, the challenge, the research that one should be doing ... A lot of programmes on Maltese stations are breaking advertising regulations ...

As regards training of broadcasters, I had always dreamt that all the different TV stations would work together to train people ..."

Some respondent televiewers [female, aged 46-60 years], commented favourably on Ms Pace's competence as programme presenter:

Carmen:

'*Sellili*' is a very good programme. Claudette is a very good TV presenter.

Mary:

I really like '*Sellili*' because she gets some very good speakers on interesting subjects like, drug addiction, battered wives, etc. For those televiewers who are not knowledgeable on certain issues, the programme is very educational.

Jane:

It's true. She gets some very professional people on her programme. And her approach towards her guest speakers and her audience is excellent.

Vivienne:

She is the best Maltese presenter there is at the moment.

All 6 participants agreed.

From a broadcaster's viewpoint, Mr Anthony Tabone asserts that there is a lack of supply of good broadcasters and presenters and also that some broadcasters should not be in broadcasting in the first place. He added that:

“ ... An individual with a ‘pretty face’ does not make him or her a good broadcaster. Also, many broadcasters are not being trained. Many of our people, on engagement were sent to *BBC* for training. This is not done anymore as it is too risky and costly for the station nowadays, particularly when one knows that after sponsoring an individual for a two-year training programme, and keeping him under contract for another odd year, he then decides to move to another station. This is a deterrent for stations to train people. Before we used to send people to train at *BBC*, nowadays this function has been taken up by the Malta University's Centre for Communication Studies, which is an independent training entity. Since I have become *PBS* Chairman, we have not recruited any new presenters, however if I had to recruit someone I would look for the qualities a broadcaster or presenter should have, namely, voice projection, pleasant personality, not necessarily a beauty but one who can create empathy with the viewer, a good level of education and good diction. These qualities are very difficult to find in one individual ...”

Mr Michael Falzon claims that with the introduction of pluralism in broadcasting, a new pool of talent and potential was discovered. However as regards competence and professionalism, he observed that:

“ ... One still finds some ‘good people’ and ‘not so good people’ across the board on all local stations. As regards the supply of potential broadcasters and presenters, one has to train them. The University of Malta, through the Centre for Communication Studies, has really helped the broadcast media in terms of producing good people. However the station has still to train people at all levels ...

As regards on-the-job training and training budget, when the Station was set up [I was not involved at the time], formal training by a foreign trainer was given to the staff some three/four years ago, however, unfortunately, this training was not followed up. The problem is a question of budget, but we do feel that now it is high time for us to invest in more training of staff. As regards recruitment of broadcasters and presenters for TV, one should look for personality and appearance and for Radio, the voice projection is important ...”

Mr Colin Tabone insists that the level of broadcasting standards can only be sustained if the number of radio stations given a licence to broadcast is controlled. This control does not go against broadcasting pluralism but ensures that good quality broadcasting standards are sustained. He argues that:

“ ... Everyone can buy a domestic radio equipment and go on air and yet still compete for advertising revenue with the other radio stations [which invest very heavily in equipment] and their advertising rates would be set on the basis of their low costs ...



Also, there is a great shortage of good broadcasters, presenters and DJs in Malta. It is a big problem for us. There are some good people who are obtaining a degree in Communications from the University of Malta, which is very encouraging however it looks as if these graduates expect very good salaries from day one and certain radio stations cannot afford them. Also, in the beginning, they have to show their capabilities in broadcasting ...

As regards training we have a person responsible for training people on the job. DJs are trained for a month or two before they go on air and when on air they are also being coached. But to train a new broadcaster or presenter with no previous experience takes more than a month ...”

Mr John Mallia remarks that it is not easy to find the right people. There is a lot of talent potential in Malta but it is not being fostered and nurtured well. He says:

“ ... In our case, once every two months, we conduct a brainstorming session with all our broadcasters, presenters, etc. to discuss issues and conduct some cross-fertilisation of ideas. But we know that this is not enough. It is also very difficult to find the right people with all the right qualities. The University’s Communications Department is producing good people however it is so difficult to find someone who, say, knows how to read the news well ...”

Mr Joe Baldacchino of *Smash TV & Radio* argues:

“ ... Who trains broadcasters nowadays? We receive some four to five demo tapes a week from individuals who want to be engaged as DJs with our station. If we see talent potential, we try to coach the individual on the job. There is no broadcasting school in Malta. We have tried engaging communications university students but the programme

seems to be focusing too much on theory and not on the practical side ...”

Mr Charles Xuereb says that the training of broadcasters and technical personnel in Malta is practically nonexistent. He says:

“ ... From my own experience as a station manager of a very small station, I had a number of university students coming on training assignments with our station. We find that they were very strong in theory but had very little field practice. So much so that there was a time where a large number of communications students were spending their work-phase period working in a number of public service departments and in hospital, which had nothing to do with communications or broadcast media. It might be that they were scared that they would be influenced by unprofessional working habits of the local broadcast media scene. But by doing this they were running the risk of becoming isolated into thinking that they were doing the ideal activity in broadcasting ...

I believe that the University should make it a point that students use local stations. I have not seen this being done yet and I feel it is a real shortcoming. It is only now that *PBS* seems to be engaging students. Our station did engage students but these had found it very hard to get used to the work because they lacked field experience. Nowadays, they seem to have improved; they have their own studio and seem to have advanced a lot ...”

Mr Mannie Spiteri views both the benefits and shortcomings which broadcasting pluralism brought on local stations’ broadcasting standards and training opportunities:

“ ... Broadcasting pluralism has resulted into a positive increase in talent potential and has opened up many

opportunities. Many individuals have been attracted to this industry and have pursued further studies in this specialization. However, due to the increase in stations, the talent is being dispersed among the many stations. Broadcasting pluralism has already given rise to ‘cut-throat’ competition. From the station’s perspective, you end up engaging people who are only ‘half-baked’ because you need the people to do the job. On one end, you are creating job opportunities, while on the other, you are employing people who are still ‘half-baked’ ...

As a direct consequence of broadcasting pluralism, the University of Malta developed the communication studies degree. But, today, there are a good number of graduates who have been exposed to the study of broadcasting media. We always had good personnel working here, possibly also due to the fact that the ex-chairman of *RTK*, Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg, was the person who developed media education in Malta. We do employ students on a part-time basis and we do experience high labour turnover in this respect but we want to form part of this on-the-job training system. We know that the student may work with us for a year or two on a part-time basis and then move on to do other things ...

However, one must note that individuals, even graduates without any work experience, need to be seasoned well. Hence, what happens is that you find people good for writing news but not good for conducting interviews or broadcasting news. Hence, to find an individual with good writing skills, who has the gift of synthesis and the gift of correct presentation, knows how to conduct research, has the right approach to dealing with people and knows how to read well is very, very difficult. So, when we find one with such qualities, the station does its utmost to either keep him or headhunt him from somewhere else. It is very difficult to find good broadcasters/presenters. It is highly difficult to

find a good all-rounder. When one listens to radio or watches TV, one realizes that the degree of broadcasters and presenters moving from one station to the other is much less now ...

Also, broadcasting pluralism in Malta has given rise to more schools of modelling, schools of make-up, drama schools and has also, most importantly, managed to offer school children the opportunity to go on air and gain experience which, in itself, acts as a guarantee for the future. In future, competition in broadcasting will definitely increase, however an individual will then have more opportunity to specialize in a particular sector in broadcasting ...”

Mr Alfred Mifsud states that *Super One TV* does not engage announcers however as regards broadcasters, presenters and hosts, the Station’s policy is to farm out Maltese productions, apart from the news bulletins and current affairs programmes. He added that:

“ ... The station does not have the required resources to produce these in-house, so we either opt for a co-production or we ‘farm out’ completely to a number of independent production houses. However, *Super One TV* also adopts a policy aimed at encouraging new individuals with a talent for media. The 1730-1930 hours timeband is normally farmed out to individuals who show talent potential but are new to the Station’s audience. During this timeband we aim at transmitting ‘special interest programmes’ and here we aim at giving airtime to new individuals and to diversify the subject matter of the programmes. We then ensure that these presenters are given constructive criticism and feedback from the Station ...”

The Author also interviewed Mr Andreas F. Forsthuber, managing director of the *Malta Satellite Broadcasting Centre* which is a TV

production company which has set up shop in Malta earlier this year. Mr Forsthuber explained that they selected Malta as a broadcasting base because of the potential of skilled manpower and the natural aptitude of the Maltese worker. Mr Forsthuber remarks:

“ ... We have no intention of tapping Malta as a market but the intention obviously is to use Malta as a base and broadcast from Malta. There are some important advantages, one of which is that in Malta there is a very good potential of skilled manpower and natural aptitude, however, due to the specialized nature of the business, the people would obviously have to be trained. Also, geographically, Malta is very well positioned with regards to international satellites ...”

With regard to local broadcasters' language proficiency, earlier this year, the Broadcasting Authority's Advisory Committee on 'Quality and Ethics in Broadcasting' issued a consultative document on the use of the Maltese language in the broadcasting media. The report identified some of the major problems which the Authority feels are contributing towards the deterioration of the Maltese language. Some language problems cited in the report are: violation or bad use of language in semantics, morphology and grammar and syntax; bad use of idioms and literal translation of foreign idioms and of foreign sentences and structure; mixture of Maltese and English, numbers read in English instead of in Maltese, wrong pronunciation and intonation, amongst others.

Although she describes the document as “certainly phraseworthy”, journalist Josanne Cassar, in her article “*Regulating Language: How Possible?*” [The Malta Independent on Sunday, 29 April 2001] asks how the Authority intends going to ‘regulate’ the way in which Maltese is spoken on the airwaves. Ms Cassar makes some suggestions:

“ ... The most obvious remedy which comes to mind, of course, is to ensure that whoever is allowed in front of a TV camera or a radio microphone has good verbal communication skills in the first place. A few of the problems cited in the document would require a basic well-rounded educational background, and this does not necessarily mean a university degree. Rather, people who speak [and write] Maltese properly in the first place should be actively head-hunted by all our broadcasting media so that the groundwork would already be there. A true love of the language should be a must. As for those who are already in broadcasting, perhaps an obligatory training course in Maltese as a spoken language would not be amiss ...”

The Author also embarked on sounding the views of the tertiary educators of communications studies in Malta on the availability of competent broadcasters, their training opportunities and the broadcasting talent potential in Malta.

Professor Roger Ellul Micallef, rector of the University of Malta and chairman of *‘Ir-Radju Tal-Università’*, states:

“ ... There is still a strong need for training of broadcasters and presenters in Malta. One has to keep in mind that the CCT [Centre for Communication Technology] at the University of Malta has only been set up recently. In my opinion, there is much room for improvement until we achieve a homogenously good standard of journalism in Malta. We have some good journalists but also some who are not up to standard yet. Our journalists have to become as good as the best journalists in the UK, Germany, etc. are ...”

Rev. Prof. Saviour Chircop, the director of the Centre for Communication Technology at the University of Malta, analyses the

‘training opportunities’ aspect from a tertiary educator’s perspective. He also comments on the lack of interesting career opportunity prospects which the local radio and TV broadcasting media is currently offering the communications graduand:

“ ... Broadcasting pluralism has been with us for some ten years now and the broadcasting industry has undergone major upheaval and consequently, the market is still taking shape. When one is training people for the industry, one has to keep in mind that the student still needs to gain hands-on experience. Also, for technical personnel, natural aptitude apart from training is also essential. One has to also keep in mind that the world of media is very difficult. We had initially started a student-placement system with the local newspapers, which we had to stop because the students were coming back telling us, “We do not want to touch journalism!” We had to stop this project for two years and then started afresh. Unfortunately, the conditions of work were not at all good. It is now thanks to the competition in the print media that the conditions of employment have improved considerably ...

Until recently, it was very hard for University students to join *PBS* because it was a ‘closed shop’ and they were considered a ‘threat’ for the existing personnel just because these were ‘university graduates’ but the situation has improved a lot now. When *NET TV* commenced its operations, they recruited seven communications graduates; even *Super One TV* have recruited graduates and students of our programme. This shows that there have been ‘in-roads’. Overseas training is also very expensive. To give an example, a five-day basic training programme for broadcasters offered by *BBC*, costs Stg.2,600 for tuition only ...

If our department had to open an evening course, I am sure we would not cope with the demand for such a course. However given the limited human resources I have at the moment, which are already stretched to the limit during the day, I would be risking having ‘burnt-out’ lecturers within two years’ time. At present, our department has 400 students and I am still working with seven full-timers, two quasi-full timers and sixteen part-timers. If I have more human resources, I would definitely offer more. Also, it is very difficult to find good trainers and lecturers in Malta. Unfortunately, there are certain individuals in Malta who just because they have done a good job in this field, they assume that they can teach the subject. Unfortunately, these people also try to exert a lot of political pressure to be able to lecture with our department. I am not talking of an occasional ‘guest speaker’ but of regular trainers. There are very few academically qualified people to do the job ...

As regards our rapport with the people in the industry, this is very good and they do approach us for students and graduates who show potential. We have also organized a formal encounter for them to meet directly with our students. However, one has also to see what the graduates’ aspirations are. Some students tell you from the very onset, “I do not want to be involved in politics!” ...”

As early as 1990, when broadcasting pluralism was still ‘in the making’, Dr Michael Frendo, then Parliamentary Secretary for the broadcasting sector, had already spoken of the setting-up of a training institute for the media [*vide* **SECTION 1.1**]. Was this institute ever set up? On 10 April 2000, Ms Ariadne Massa of The Times spoke to Dr Kevin Aquilina, Chief Executive of the Broadcasting Authority, regarding this issue [The Times, 10 April 2000, “*Funds Sought to Set Up Broadcasting Academy*”]. It appears that “funds are currently being sought to set up the much awaited Broadcasting Academy”:



“... The long mooted idea of a Broadcasting Academy may finally materialize within the next “year or two”, recently appointed Broadcasting Authority Chief Executive Kevin Aquilina said. The concept of an academy has been germinating for several years and when the Authority entered its new premises in Mile End Road, Hamrun in 1995 it had built its own equipped studio. But this studio has remained empty because the Authority lacked the necessary finances, Dr Aquilina said in an interview ...

“The academy would focus on providing short intensive courses that concentrate on the practical side of broadcasting, such as learning to use a camera and understanding libel law,” he said. The emphasis of the courses, which would be taught by local and foreign experts, would be on practice rather than theory. “Bringing people over will increase the costs. We are searching for funds so as not to depend solely on the Government. We have made a submission to UNESCO for funds and are awaiting an answer.” Dr Aquilina stressed the need for ongoing training, especially in broadcasting where technology was changing at a rapid pace ...”

### **5.5 Gender Issues in Broadcasting**

An interesting observation addressing the issue of ‘gender’ on the local broadcasting scene was made by a focus group attended by males and females respondents aged 18-30 years:

Fleur:

The fact that *Bay Radio* does not have any female DJs really really bothers me. I would really like to see more female DJs.

Ryan:

As I am not used to hearing female DJs, I think I would find it very strange to hear female DJs, as I think a DJ should have a 'deep' male voice. There are foreign stations who use female DJs.

Vicky:

I agree with Fleur that there are no female DJs in Malta, however, once they start, we would definitely get used to the idea.

Fleur:

Also, what bothers me on TV is that you always find a 'male' presenter and his 'female' assistant to simply show off her body.

Vicky:

But this is more evident on the Italian stations.

Fleur:

But even on Maltese stations; if there is a male and female presenting a programme on Maltese TV, the male is the main presenter leading the discussion and the female is there to assist only.

Vicky:

That is true but I don't think that the female assistant presenter in Malta is being exploited as a 'sex object'. But yes, she does have a secondary role in presenting.

Fleur:

There is no programme in Malta which is presented by a female with a male assistant presenter having a secondary role.

Ryan:

But you also don't find this on foreign stations.

Although the current lack of local female radio and TV presenters may not be worrying in Malta, it does make one wonder: What will the future be like?

Ms Claudette Pace comments:

“ ... In advertising, as a result of the lack of supply in quantity of quality presenters, I do tend to see a bit of stupid-looking [male and female] presenters, i.e. with a pretty face but with absolutely dumb content. This is being introduced in Malta too. Possibly, not yet at the same extent as on Italian TV, however Italian TV is considered to be one of the most sexist. However one must also add that quality TV tends to be extremely sexist ...”

## **5.6 News Coverage and Reporting**

***“ ... ‘News’ is about ‘what is new’ so after saying it ten times, is it still new? After saying it 100 times over, is it still new? ...”***

***Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg,  
University Lecturer***

We now focus our discussion on the broadcasting standards of ‘news coverage and reporting’ of local television and radio. Has the introduction of broadcasting pluralism improved the immediacy and accuracy of news coverage on local TV and radio stations? How factual and objective is news coverage nowadays? What about the competence and professionalism of news anchorpersons and newscasters and ... their supply? Have these been affected with the introduction of broadcasting pluralism in Malta? The Author embarked

on compiling qualitative information on this research area, specifically researching the following qualitative aspects.

### **Maltese Radio and TV Stations**

- Type of news coverage [‘real’ news, ‘sensational’ news, ‘gossip’ news, etc.]
- Immediacy and accuracy of news coverage
- Factual and objective news coverage
- Level of quality of news coverage and reporting by journalists [i.e. write-up feature, filming, editing, etc.]
- Level of competence and professionalism of news anchorpersons and newscasters
- Level of broadcasting standards of ‘weather forecasts’ [graphical illustrations, presentation, etc.].

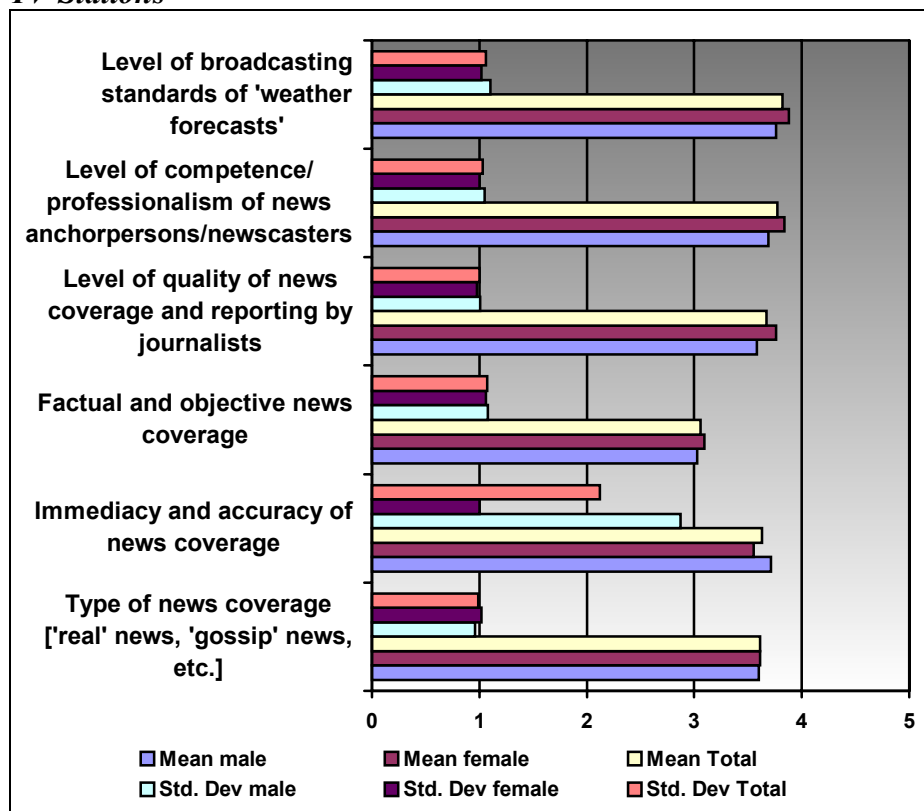
#### ***5.6.1 Maltese TV Stations: News Coverage and Reporting***

**DIAGRAM 5.3** below illustrates that the mean response to these questions was very positive [all over 3.61 except for one] and which reflect the views and opinions of a good 98% of the audience survey population. The remaining 10 respondents either did not answer the question or did not have an opinion on this research area. The highest mean rating score registered, standing at 3.82, referred to the level of broadcasting standards of ‘weather forecasts’. This question did not refer to the weather forecast content and its reliability, [which is supplied by the local government metrological office] but to the production, presentation and graphical illustration of this vital information to the viewers. Also worth mentioning is the high positive mean response of 3.77 on the local TV stations’ improved level of ‘competence and professionalism of news anchorpersons and newscasters’. As regards the degree of immediacy and accuracy of news coverage on local TV stations, this also registered a good 3.63 mean rating, however its spread of responses stood at 2.12. Once more, a [1] to [5] rating scale was used, where [1] signified a ‘very

low/negative' assessment and [5] represented a 'very high/positive' score.

### DIAGRAM 5.3

*Respondents' Perceptions on the Effect of Broadcasting Pluralism on the Level of Quality of News Coverage and Reporting of Maltese TV Stations*



The respondents were also asked to forward their views on this research area. **TABLE 5.3** encompasses their comments. 32% of the interviewers who answered this question felt that news coverage and reporting standards have improved, while 68% passed unfavourable comments. A good 43.7% considered local news coverage to be too politically biased and that it contains too much political content.

**TABLE 5.3**  
**RESPONDENTS' ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THE EFFECT**  
**OF BROADCASTING PLURALISM ON THE LEVEL OF**  
**QUALITY OF NEWS COVERAGE AND**  
**REPORTING ON MALTESE TV STATIONS**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Qualitative Response
<b>Favourable Comments:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Better news and reporting	16	9.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Improved local news standards	14	8.2
<input type="checkbox"/> News very informative	11	6.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Good but there is still room for improvement	5	2.8
<input type="checkbox"/> May/may not be a result of pluralism	3	1.7
<input type="checkbox"/> Better coverage and accuracy	3	1.7
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>NET TV</i> for news is preferred	2	1.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Up to date	1	0.6
	<b>55</b>	<b>32.0</b>
<b>Unfavourable Comments:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Too much political bias	55	32.5
<input type="checkbox"/> Too much political content	17	10.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Needs to improve much more	9	5.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Bad news report	8	4.7
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't listen to Maltese News	8	4.7
<input type="checkbox"/> Presenters should be more professional	4	2.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Different versions of same news item on each channel	4	2.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many commercials	3	1.8
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>PBS</i> is objective – <i>NET TV</i> and <i>Super One TV</i> are biased	2	1.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Weather info is always wrong	1	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Not much film footage	1	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Too much repetition	1	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many adverts during news	1	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>SMASH TV News</i> - low broadcasting and programming levels	1	0.6
	<b>115</b>	<b>68.0</b>
	<b>170</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### ***5.6.2 Maltese Radio Stations: News Coverage and Reporting***

**DIAGRAM 5.4** below illustrates that a very positive response was also registered on the level of quality of news coverage and reporting attained on local radio stations. 74.7% of the total survey population answered all the questions, and all the responses reached a mean rating of 3.66, except for the question on the ‘factual and objective nature of news coverage’ which stood at 3.32 [still a good mean rating]. Worth mentioning are the good mean ratings given to the level of broadcasting standards attained by the ‘weather forecasts’ productions [at 3.77], the level of competence and professionalism of ‘anchorpersons/newscasters’ and the ‘type of news coverage’ [both at 3.71]. Once more, a [1] to [5] rating scale was used, where [1] signified a ‘very low/negative’ assessment and [5] represented a ‘very high/positive’ score.

Very few respondents [67] of the 500 interviewed forwarded additional comments in this issue. [*vide* **TABLE 5.4** below]. Worth noting however is that 24% of these respondents do find that local radio news coverage is too politically biased and that it contains too much political content, similar to research findings pertaining to local TV.

**DIAGRAM 5.4**

*Respondents' Perceptions on the Effect of Broadcasting Pluralism on the Level of Quality of News Coverage and Reporting of Maltese Radio Stations*

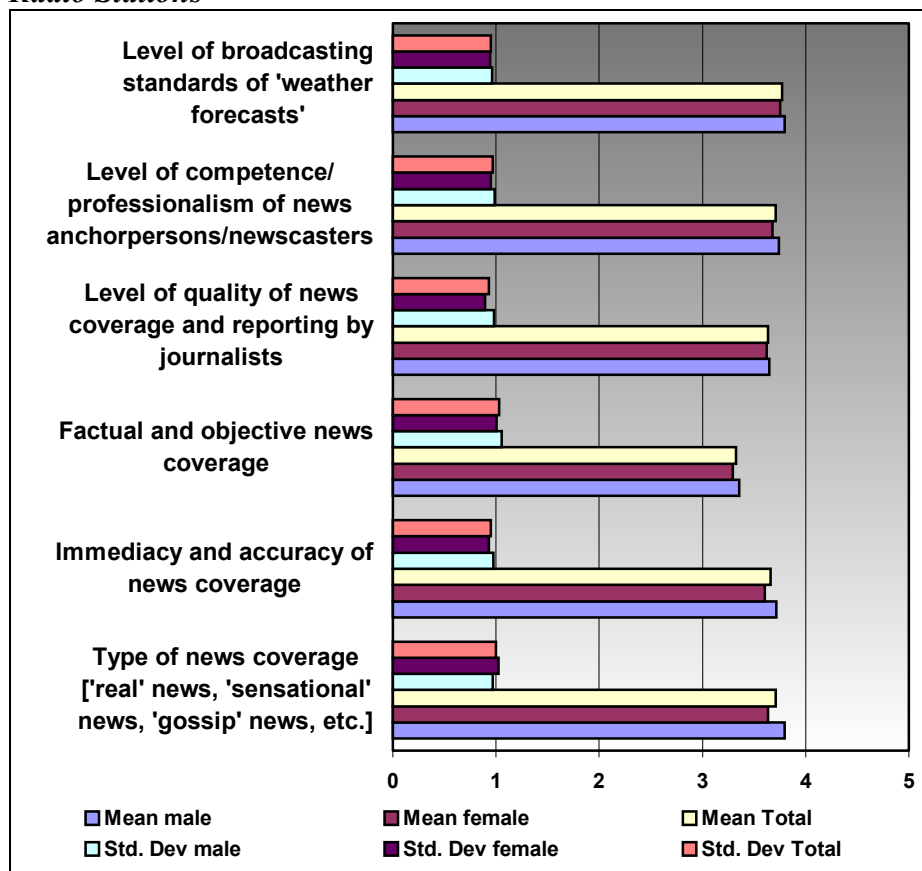




TABLE 5.4

**RESPONDENTS' ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THE EFFECT  
OF BROADCASTING PLURALISM ON THE LEVEL OF  
QUALITY OF NEWS COVERAGE AND REPORTING ON  
MALTESE RADIO STATIONS**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Qualitative Response
<b>Favourable Comments:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Better news coverage	12	18.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Radio news is better than TV news	9	13.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Much better due to competition	2	3.0
	<hr/> 23	<hr/> 34.3
<b>Unfavourable Comments:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Too much politics and too politically biased	16	23.9
<input type="checkbox"/> News standards vary greatly between stations	9	13.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Do not listen to weather forecasts	9	13.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't hear much local news	5	7.5
<input type="checkbox"/> Very skimpy coverage of news	2	3.0
<input type="checkbox"/> TV news is better	2	3.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Local news should be kept separate from foreign news	1	1.5
	<hr/> 44	<hr/> 65.7
	<hr/> 67	<hr/> 100.0

**5.7 News Coverage and Reporting - More Qualitative Views**

***“ ... I think that the best news bulletin, although not perfect, is PBS news. As for the news bulletins of the political stations, these are a joke! ...”***

***Michael,  
Focus Group Respondent***

**5.7.1 Political Bias and Political Content in News Coverage**

The survey respondents' views were further supported by those of the focus group respondents. Even here, the more prevalent comments addressed the 'political bias' and 'political content' of local TV and radio news. Some interesting observations follow.

In a session attended by male respondents aged 31-46 years old:

Michael:

I think that the best news bulletin, although not perfect, is *PBS news*. As for the news bulletins of the political stations, these are a 'joke'! I cannot stand hearing *Super One News* say that everything in Malta is going haywire and *NET News* say that all is doing well. I simply do not watch the political stations' news bulletins. *PBS News* is probably the best.

Gino:

It is true. I try to watch all three news bulletins at 7.30pm, 7.45pm, and 8.00pm, but at times you do not realize that they are referring to the same news item. They all give it a totally different perspective. It is up to the viewer or radio-listener to come to his own conclusion of the truth. After watching the three news bulletins, I will have to arrive to the conclusion of the truth myself.

Joe:

In terms of news, I would really wish to see that in future, news would be less politicised, more objective and more accurate. I find that in Malta, 'news' is very much an integral part of society. The majority of the Maltese population listen to the news on a daily basis. The fact that the majority watch the 7.30pm, 7.45pm and 8.00pm news bulletins shows that this is very much an intrinsic part of society, news is in our blood!

Martin:

As regards the accuracy of news items, not only those political, all three stations have to pull up their socks. For example say, a murder has taken place, one station says that the victim was thirty years old, another station says he was thirty-five years old and another says he was forty years old.

Other respondents commented:

Roger [74 years]:

When it comes to News, I try to watch them on *Super One TV* first at 7.30pm, then on *NET News* at 7.45pm and what is very important for me is to watch the 8 o'clock news bulletin on *PBS*. I think it is the best. It incorporates everything and it is the least biased. I try to watch the whole *PBS* news bulletin. The other two I know are biased and I take them with 'a pinch of salt'.

Charles [45 yrs]:

I cannot stand how the stations report a news item. For example say, there is a car accident: one station would simply report the fact, another station would claim "there is so much wealth in the country that people are buying many, many cars and hence the accident" and a third station would

claim “Maltese roads are so bad that they were the cause of the car accident”. I simply cannot take it!

In another session [female respondents aged 31-46 years old]:

Laura:

It is very sad really to listen to news with such political bias [referring to *Radio 101* and *Super One Radio News*]. You start wondering whether they are talking about the same country. It is very sad.

Josianne:

Too much importance is being given to politics and the members of parliament – of both sides!! And for me this is not news!!

Irene:

Also, how many times do we have to hear on the local councils, again and again? A very long story... What about international news? Do we only have to hear what is happening in Israel or that a big earthquake has taken place? What about other important international news?

Anna:

There is not enough international news on local stations. Also, the little ‘international news’ content there is, leaves much to be desired. Sometimes, they even use the ‘*CNN*’ and ‘*RAI*’ logos without even bothering to cover them up!

Steffie:

Well, if you do not like local news, you can easily change to a foreign station to watch real news.

Irene:

But if I am Maltese and want to know more about the world in my own language why should I be deprived of it?

Laura:

The only time a Maltese journalist goes abroad to cover a news item is when a member of parliament goes on an official visit somewhere.

In yet another focus group [respondents aged 18-30 years]:

John:

It is fun watching the local news these days.

Audrey:

Because each station gives its own interpretation and version of the news.

John:

But the least exciting is *TVM news*, invariably so! *NET TV* gives the news a really nice look, *Super One TV* gives the news a really bad look while *TVM* simply reports!

All participants agreed.

Patrick:

*NET* are too preoccupied with the quality of picture and the broadcasters' professionalism. *Super One TV* does not really care about these things as their news bulletin targets more the less sophisticated sector of the population.

John:

With regards to news on the radio, if I listen to *Super One News* in the morning, I know that it will put me in a bad mood as their pessimistic outlook starts me off on a bad note. They are doing their job after all, however to start criticizing the Government from so very early in the morning ends up putting me in a bad mood.

These qualitative findings are very much in keeping with quantitative audience surveys conducted over these last two years. In fact, according to a survey conducted by *Telepage* on behalf of *PBS* in October 2000, the findings showed that the 8.00pm news on *PBS' TVM* is the most popular news bulletin in Malta. According to this survey, [reported on *The Sunday Times* of 26 November 2000]:

“ ... Almost half the population watch more than one news bulletin broadcast by Maltese stations but less than one fifth of viewers watch news bulletins only on political stations ...”

The newspaper also reported that:

“ ... Several studies conducted for the Broadcasting Authority also showed that *TVM's* 8.00pm news bulletin is the most popular news bulletin. These results show that the Maltese are becoming less dependent on political party media and looking for answers themselves from different sources. In fact those who watch the news only on a political station make just 18.5% of the total. Most of the rest follow events as portrayed on two or more stations. The study shows that one-third of the Maltese watch the news provided by *TVM*, *NET* and *Super One* ...”

Moreover, another audience survey conducted by the Broadcasting Authority in March 2001 [*The Sunday Times*, 6 May 2001] found that:

“ ... The news broadcast by *TVM* is considered by 160,000 viewers as the most objective and impartial news broadcast. Less than half that number hold the same opinion of the news on *Super One's*. This is significant in the sense that there are many people who have high regard of *TVM's* news bulletins though they do not consider *TVM* to be their preferred station. On the contrary, more than a third of those who prefer *Super One* and *NET* do not consider the

bulletin of their preferred station to be the most objective and impartial ...”

### **5.7.2 Competence of Local Newscasters and Journalists**

Other observations expressed by the various focus group respondents addressed the competence of local radio and TV newscasters and journalists.

One respondent remarked:

Philip [46 years]:

Journalists and newscasters do not strike me as very professional particularly when they make so many stupid mistakes even when reading the news. Even the language they use; it is a complete disaster.

In a focus group session attended by females aged 30-46 years old:

Steffie:

The standards are lower now as there are so many stations. Now they are not using the best of the best anymore and the stations are accepting everyone.

Laura:

The professional journalists have been too long on TV. They should not be on TV anymore. I am fed up of seeing the same old faces on *TVM* year after year. Then with a new journalist, you need to be patient, wait until he gains experience, makes mistakes, and gains confidence ... By the time they are experienced, we would have gotten sick of them.

Anna:

It is very obvious that the new journalists are not being trained. When a journalist stammers in front of a camera, it is obvious that he has not been trained.

Laura:

The new newscasters are definitely not being trained. Also, the old professional journalists should not move out but focus more on training the new ones.

In another focus group session [female respondents aged 46-60 years]:

Carmen:

As regards news broadcasters, there are some very good ones and some very bad ones. I think the use of the Maltese language is also very bad. Also, the pronunciation is very bad. Sometimes I even get confused as to how the word should actually be pronounced. I start asking myself “How should this word be said or how should it be pronounced?”

Mary:

I think they really need a lot of more training.

Jane:

I think that Anna Bonanno is a very good and professional newscaster.

Carmen:

But then, it is high time that *TVM* change their newscasters. Also, newscasters should become more presentable, have more dress-sense and also smile more.

Mary:

Very much like the Italian newscasters. They are so good, so confident and smile when broadcasting news.



Angela:

But it could also be that newscasters in Malta are very tense as they are closely monitored on what they say and how they say it.

In another focus group session [male and female respondents aged 18-30 years old]:

John:

But even the way *TVM* reports the news, they are ...

Neil :

Still very boring ... so boring!!

John:

When I was young I remember watching the same newscasters *TVM* still have now.

The Author asks:

John, how old are you?

John:

23 years old. *TVM*'s people are very, very good; they have won many journalistic awards but it does not mean that they can remain there forever. It is high time that they are promoted to do something else but should not broadcast news anymore.

Patrick:

They should act at 'trainers'.

John:

Recently, Lou Bondi had Simone Cini as his guest in '*Virtwali*'. I don't know how to explain it but Simone Cini has a way of delivering news. A bit sexist in my opinion as viewers concentrate more on her than on the news, but

at least she delivered something more than just reporting the news. At *TVM*, they just give you the news and that's it!

Neil:

What irritates me most is that the most important news are given a second priority at *TVM*. First they focus on what the Prime Minister or Minister said and then they go to the 'real' news, for example, a tragedy where three people died ...

Patrick:

It's true. Even the type of news which *TVM* reports, it is always what one minister said, what the other minister said, etc.

John:

You can actually make a daily pattern. First, what the Prime Minister said, then what the Leader of the Opposition said, then the real news start.

Audrey:

I like hearing *Bay Radio*'s news as they are short and to the point; just five minutes.

John:

But there is no news content whatsoever in them. It is like reading the newspaper.

Audrey:

But they are enough for me. I know what the main news of the day are and that is it.

What about the quantity of ‘news content’ on local radio and TV? Do we have too much news coverage these days? Some female respondents, aged 46-60 years, remarked:

Carmen:

What I cannot stand is that there is too much news on the radio and TV stations these days.

Mary:

I simply can’t stand watching the news anymore. Too much news!

Carmen:

They are always the same and too frequent. At every hour, you end up listening to the same news.

Angela:

That is why I only watch the news on *TVM*. I think it is the best news bulletin.

Mary:

It is ‘first class’ because when you compare it with the other stations, politics does not feature that much. The other two stations do report the news item but they interpret it differently from each other. As a televiewer or radio-listener, do I not have the right to be informed of a news item the way it has actually occurred?

Carmen:

I think radio is worse than TV. There is too much news and they end up reporting the same news of the evening before. It simply does not make sense.

Mary:

It may also be that Malta is too small a country and there may not be much news to report so they end up repeating a lot of the news.

Angela:

Maybe, it would be more worthwhile to report only the flash news rather than the whole news bulletin every time. It is much better to hear flash news.

Another respondent claimed:

Irene:

Also, sometimes you are watching a foreign film on *PBS* and all of a sudden, the film is stopped for some latest news on say, the local councils. I am simply not interested in them!! It would have ruined the programme for me. They do this just to make sure that they manage to broadcast the news item before any other station does.

### **5.7.3 The Broadcaster's Perspective**

***“ ... There seems to be a trend that these university graduates are going more for the glamorous side of communications, such as PR, advertising, etc. There is still a short supply of journalists. You simply don't find any good journalists on the market ...”***

***Mr Anthony Tabone,  
Chairman, PBS***

The Author enquired on the local broadcasters' views on this issue. Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg did not mince his words when expressing his opinion on the competence of local radio and TV journalists:

“ ... The worst broadcasters we have are in the news reporting section in terms of lack of professionalism. Our news bulletins and news items are too long. ‘News’ is about ‘what is new’ so after saying it ten times, is it still new? After saying it 100 times over, is it still new? Particularly when it comes to political coverage. And in the choice of news coverage, we focus more on the interests of the institutions rather than on those of the private individual. One may present the same type of news coverage on the institutions themselves in a more intelligent manner ...

An individual does not become a journalist by reading a university degree. Forget it! However a university graduate, who has obtained a communications degree does have a headstart. What a non-graduate takes 3 years to learn, the university graduate would learn in six months ... Also, for those individuals who cannot enroll on a full-time programme, the Department of Communications together with the Tumas Fenech Foundation, and the Press Club, are discussing the possibility of developing an evening training programme in journalism at a diploma level. Also at present, one has to note that there are not many training programmes available in journalism ...”

As regards news coverage on local broadcasting media, Mr Kevin DeCesare observed:

“ ... The news coverage in Malta is a joke! *NET* and *Super One* have their hands tied due to their political agenda; *NET* was more independent but now has become too political, very similar to *Super One*, possibly worse. *RTK* is too religious, and when it comes down to giving ‘real’ news, there is *PBS*, which is owned by the government of the day and hence certain news items are left out. Really and truly, one is left with some small radio stations which cannot afford to give full new coverage and so we opt for giving only ‘token’ news.

And this is not ‘real’ news. Our surveys show that most of our audiences listen to our ‘token’ news ...”

As regards the immediacy of news coverage, Mr Mannie Spiteri states that this aspect of local news has improved but also notes some shortcomings in accuracy:

“ ... Immediacy of news coverage has increased. Before pluralism, the televiewer used to have to wait for the 8.00 o’clock news to have a proper full coverage of events. There was news coverage on the radio, however it was not given due importance. Nowadays, the Maltese citizen gives much more importance to radio than before when it comes to news, because while he is at work or at play, the individual is automatically listening to the radio ...

On the other hand, there is also a downside to this. To be the first to report a news item, the stations many a time, do not verify the news item well before it is broadcast. The station would not be abiding with an important principle of news reporting. The station is risking and abusing the system, and this may give rise to news items being reported which may not be accurate. There are certain perils, which have increased due to pluralism in broadcasting ...”

Ms Claudette Pace thinks that news coverage and reporting by local stations have improved but:

“ ... Although I find it an absolute disgrace that I have to hear the complete opposite opinion of what is happening in this country, as it seems that the sun never shines or that it shines all the time, and there is nothing in between in this country, I still feel that the broadcasting standards have improved. I cannot deny that *NET News* have set standards in news coverage and reporting. And I think that *NET TV* has spent most of its budget on news. From a technical

transmission point of view, *NET TV* is superior to everyone else. It is a pity because *NET TV* could have been a very good quality station had it not been political ...

With regards to training of journalists and newscasters, I feel that the level of competence in English or Maltese is not up to standard. The filming of the reportage is often better than the reporting of the news item itself. *PBS* seem to have improved their news broadcasting and reporting standards. However, once again, even here, just because *NET News* use two anchorpersons, *PBS* now have two anchorpersons as well. Maybe that was not the solution to the problem and I do not think it is working well as, in my opinion, it looks like an exact copy of *NET News*. I would have gone for better quality of news items, search for better material, etc. However, I think that *PBS* still has the best journalists and reporters compared to all other stations, because they have a very good pool of journalists. Unfortunately, these are conditioned by the rules and conditions which a state station has to abide by. Unfortunately, this is conditioning its news content ...”

Mr Anthony Tabone observes that as *PBS* has a very serious obligation to its audiences, especially in the Maltese context, it has to aim at giving an unbiased view of what is happening. He adds:

“ ... News reporting nowadays has become very immediate however accuracy is not an issue of pluralism but more of the agenda of the station in question. I view ‘accuracy’ in terms of the political bias which a station might have as a result of its political agenda ...

As regards the training of journalists, the Communications Department of the University of Malta is producing good graduates however these still need on-the-job training. Also, there seems to be a trend that these graduates are

going more for the glamorous side of communications, such as PR, advertising, etc. There is still a short supply of journalists. You simply don't find any good journalists on the market. In terms of training, we offer on-the-job training ...”

The Author felt it opportune to also ask the chairpersons of the media organisations of the two main political parties to forward their views on whether they agree that there is too much political bias and political content contained in their respective stations' news bulletins.

Mr Alfred Mifsud remarked that as his station is fully owned by a political party:

“ ... This station's news coverage cannot not comprise a certain degree of 'political flavour'. As much as possible, one tries not to irritate the televiewer however there is always a political slant. Given the political situation in Malta, one tries to reach a balance ... although the slant is always there. As regards the training of our journalists and reporters, given the limited resources of the station, one can never train his people enough. What we do is, we engage very young individuals, normally, university students reading a degree in Communications. We then give them on-the-job training and coach them accordingly. As regards formal training, we don't do enough but we do conduct some. One problem is that news coverage is a 24-hour operation hence we opt more for in-house training and discussions. Also, what we find very effective is our 'continuous criticism' operation where we engage an 'experienced journalist' [who is not a member of the team] who monitors our news coverage and reporting performance on a daily basis. This individual then meets up with our team the following day and gives feedback. Recently, we have also started working with an organisation which is offering us their services with regards



to the proper use of the Maltese language. Notwithstanding this, we know that this is not enough ...”

From his end, Mr Michael Falzon comments:

“ ... I think that as from this year, we have an extremely good presentation of news. As regards accuracy we are also very good and as regards objectivity, we try to put across the truth as we see it. But in our news coverage, although there is a political slant towards our party’s views, we try to do away with blatant partisanship. In fact, so as to retain a distinction between ‘news coverage’ and ‘comments’, we have introduced the ‘current affairs’ programme’ entitled ‘*Magħkom*’, which we keep very separate from the news coverage. In this programme, there are times where we may be somewhat partisan and may give opinions, while when reporting news, unless we are reporting the opinion of the Prime Minister [which is not our opinion *per se*] we try to limit ourselves to reporting the facts. As regards the competence and professionalism of journalists and newscasters/anchorpersons, we still encounter problems to find the best people for the job ...”

### **5.8 Broadcasting Standards of The Public Broadcasting Sector**

***“ ... I think that PBS is still of better quality than the private stations in terms of programme content and broadcasting standards. They still have the best people who cannot leave now as they would lose their pension ...”***

***Charles,  
Focus Group Respondent***

Undoubtedly, with the introduction of pluralism in broadcasting, one expects to witness an impact on the public broadcasting sector, which

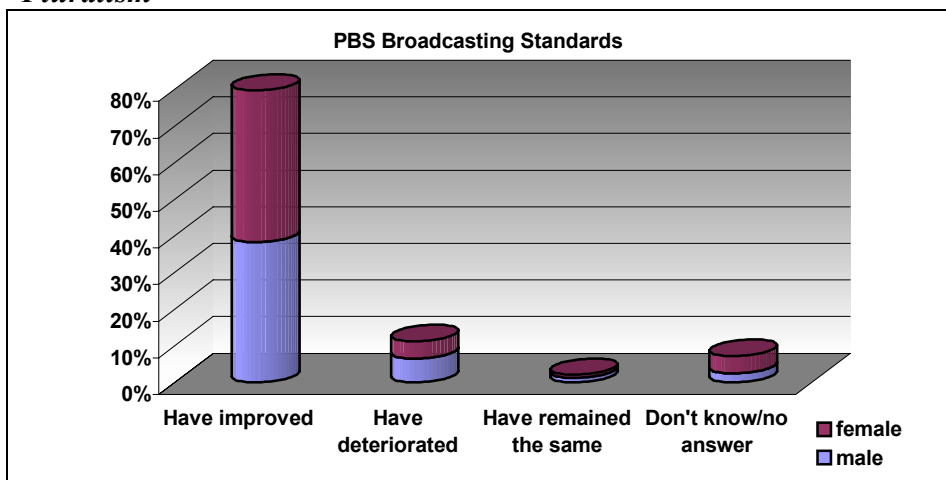
up to some ten years ago enjoyed a monopolistic position in both television and radio broadcasting. The Author sought the perceptions and opinions of both viewers and radio-listeners on how, in their opinion, the public broadcasting sector was affected with the introduction of broadcasting pluralism in Malta.

When asked to comment on whether the level of broadcasting standards/quality of the public broadcasting sector [*PBS – TVM and Radio Malta*] improved or deteriorated with the introduction of pluralism in radio and TV broadcasting, 79.6% of the survey respondents claimed that they feel *PBS* has definitely improved its broadcasting standards, while only 11.2% claimed its standards have deteriorated. 2% claimed that the level of quality remained the same and 7.2% gave no answer or did not have an opinion [*vide DIAGRAM 5.5*].

### 5.8.1 *PBS' Broadcasting Standards*

#### **DIAGRAM 5.5**

***Respondents' Perceptions on the Level of Broadcasting Standards/Quality of PBS with the Introduction of Broadcasting Pluralism***



**TABLE 5.5** details the audience's perceived reasons for their answers indicated in **DIAGRAM 5.5** above. 21% of the total survey population indicated that *PBS*' programming and broadcasting standards have improved. 12.4% thought there was an improvement in the variety of programmes offered by the station. 3.8% indicated that nowadays there are better Maltese productions on *PBS*. Another 3.8% commented that the station broadcasting standards did increase but that they have still a long way to go.

**TABLE 5.5**

**RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE REASONS WHY THE LEVEL OF BROADCASTING STANDARDS/QUALITY OF PBS HAVE IMPROVED OR DETERIORATED WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF BROADCASTING PLURALISM**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Population
<b>Improved because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Better programming and broadcasting standards	105	21.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Better choice and variety of programmes	62	12.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Better Maltese productions	19	3.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Improved a little but there is a long way to go	19	3.8
<input type="checkbox"/> More ideas in general	16	3.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Improved due to competition	14	2.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Better studio sets and graphic designs	12	2.4
<input type="checkbox"/> More informative programmes	9	1.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Better news/good foreign news	9	1.8
<input type="checkbox"/> More professional	8	1.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Smarter appearance of broadcasters	6	1.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Better sports programmes	4	0.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Less politically biased	3	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> More live transmissions	3	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Not enough Maltese productions on <i>PBS</i> , but the few existing ones are good	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Better children's programmes	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Longer airtime	1	0.2

<input type="checkbox"/> More open-minded	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many local productions and repetitions	1	0.2
	<b>295</b>	<b>59.0</b>
<b>Deteriorated because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of good broadcasters and good programmes	13	2.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Unable to keep up with foreign competition	5	1.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of programme variety	5	1.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Some of the better professional presenters left <i>PBS</i> and joined other stations	4	0.8
<input type="checkbox"/> No good programmes	4	0.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Lost viewers	4	0.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Bad management and unprofessional	4	0.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many programme repetitions	3	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Less foreign productions	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Very conservative	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> No improvement	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Too much local competition	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> No announcers	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Poorly-dressed presenters	1	0.2
	<b>48</b>	<b>9.6</b>
<b>Other:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> No answer	138	27.6
<input type="checkbox"/> No change	19	3.8
	<b>157</b>	<b>31.4</b>
	<b>500</b>	<b>100.0</b>

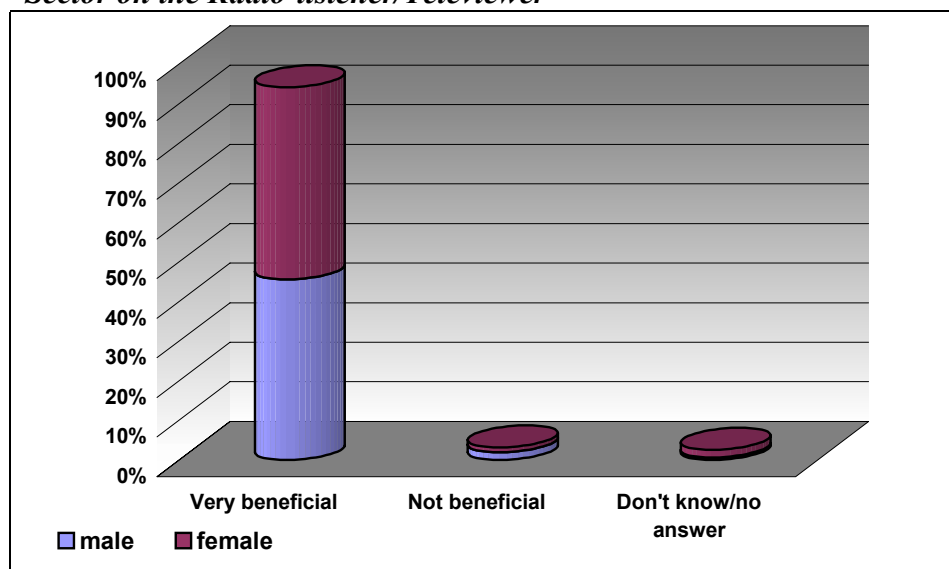
### 5.8.2 Is Competition in TV and Radio Broadcasting Beneficial?

The survey population was also asked whether they perceive the increased competition in Malta's television and radio broadcasting sector as beneficial to [a] the viewer/radio-listener and [b] to the

local public and private commercial television and radio stations. A staggering 94.2% of the respondents claimed that increased competition is definitely beneficial to the viewer/listener, while 3.2% claimed that it is not and 2.6% did not have an opinion or did not answer [vide **DIAGRAM 5.6**].

### **DIAGRAM 5.6**

*The Effect of Increased Competition in Radio and TV Broadcasting Sector on the Radio-listener/Televviewer*



**TABLE 5.6** below encompasses reasons for the respondents' answers in **DIAGRAM 5.6** above. Once again, a good 46.4% and 14.6% of the survey population indicated that increased competition translates itself into a much wider variety of programmes for the viewer/listener as well as better programming standards.

TABLE 5.6

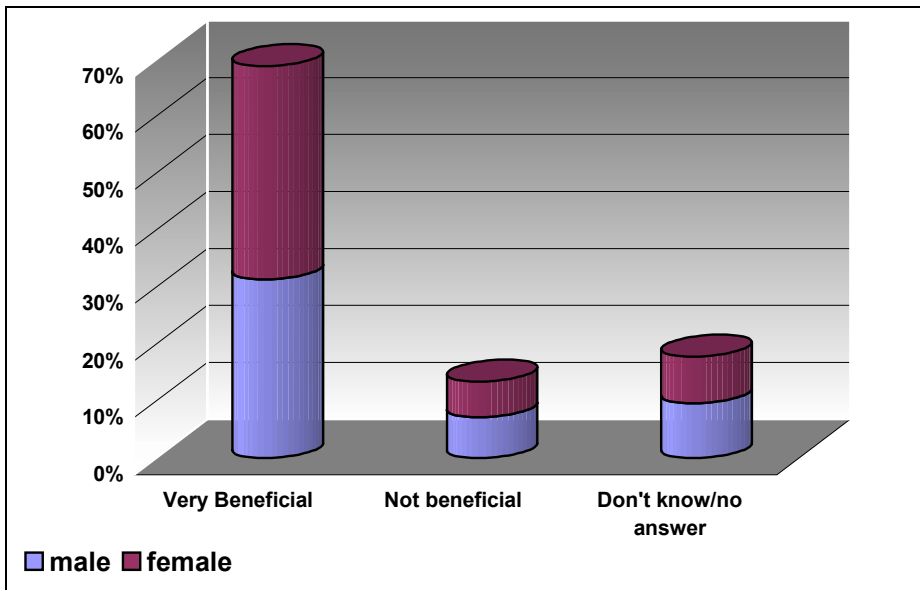
**RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE REASONS WHY  
INCREASED COMPETITION IN THE TV AND RADIO  
BROADCASTING SECTOR IS BENEFICIAL OR NOT TO THE  
TELEVIEWER/RADIO-LISTENER**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Population
<b>Beneficial because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> More choice/better variety	232	46.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Better programming standards	73	14.6
<input type="checkbox"/> More information/possibility to learn more	12	2.4
<input type="checkbox"/> More freedom of expression	7	1.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Quality productions: news coverage and discussion	6	1.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Competition means more creativity	5	1.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Better quality productions	3	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> More live transmissions	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, if standard is improved and maintained	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Stations are now transmitting live football matches	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> More Maltese productions	1	0.2
	<b>344</b>	<b>68.8</b>
<b>Not beneficial because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> With too many stations, quality levels can go down	6	1.2
<input type="checkbox"/> We have too many already	1	0.2
	<b>7</b>	<b>1.4</b>
<b>Other:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> No answer	<b>149</b>	<b>29.8</b>
	<b>500</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Can increased competition prove also beneficial to the television/radio station? 68.8% of the respondents claimed that they think it is beneficial, while 13.4% thought it was not. 17.8% did not have an opinion or did not answer the question. [*vide* **DIAGRAM 5.7**].

### **DIAGRAM 5.7**

***The Effect of Increased Competition in Radio and TV Broadcasting Sector on the Local Public and Private Commercial Radio and TV Stations***



When asked to indicate why they perceive competition as beneficial, some 40% of the survey population indicated that competition motivates television and radio stations to improve their broadcasting standards and to produce a wider variety of better programmes. 11.4% indicated that competition was required to do away with the monopolistic broadcasting sector and that this is more beneficial in the long run [*vide* **TABLE 5.7**].

TABLE 5.7

**RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE REASONS WHY  
INCREASED COMPETITION IN THE [TV AND RADIO]  
BROADCASTING SECTOR IS BENEFICIAL OR NOT TO THE  
TV AND RADIO STATIONS**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Population
<b>Beneficial because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Were motivated to improve standards through increased competition	170	34.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Lost their monopolistic power which is positive in long-term	57	11.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Must produce a better variety/more original programmes	27	5.4
<input type="checkbox"/> More education and job opportunities	14	2.8
<input type="checkbox"/> More professional	3	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase in popularity	3	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Better profits, expand horizons	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> More room to be creative	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, if standards are maintained	1	0.2
	<b>279</b>	<b>55.8</b>
<b>Not beneficial because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Have to invest much more/improvement in standards means higher costs	17	3.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Lost monopolistic power	12	2.4
<input type="checkbox"/> More difficult to win over viewers/radio-listeners	6	1.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Have to compete for adverts	4	0.8
<input type="checkbox"/> PBS had to improve programming standards	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Have to increase commercials	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Lost viewers	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> No improvement	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Too much competition from foreign stations	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Less profits	1	0.2



	<u>48</u>	<u>9.6</u>
<b>Other:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> No answer	150	30.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know	23	4.6
	<u>173</u>	<u>34.6</u>
	<u>500</u>	<u>100.0</u>

### **5.8.3    ‘Radio Malta 2’ - Should It Have Closed Down?**

In 2000, *PBS* decided to close down one of their radio stations, *Radio Malta 2*. The Author asked the respondents whether they agreed with this decision and whether it affected them at all. An overwhelming 56% of the respondents did not reply to this question because they either did not realize that this Station had actually closed down or did not give an answer. A further 4.8% claimed that it made no difference to them while 23% claimed that they agreed with its closure. A mere 16.2% of the respondents expressed their disagreement with this decision. **TABLE 5.8** encompasses the reasons backing up the respondents' opinions.

**TABLE 5.8****RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON WHETHER THEY AGREE WITH THE CLOSURE OF RADIO MALTA 2**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Population
<b>I agree because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> No one listens to the AM band anymore	14	2.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Better alternative stations available	13	2.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many stations - can use resources elsewhere	9	1.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many repetitions	8	1.6
<input type="checkbox"/> One PBS radio Station is enough	7	1.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Not interesting enough	5	1.0
<input type="checkbox"/> It was boring and old-fashioned	5	1.0
<input type="checkbox"/> It had substandard broadcasting	4	0.8
<input type="checkbox"/> It was too political	3	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> There was no need for it any longer	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Good programmes were moved to other radio stations	1	0.2
	<b>71</b>	<b>14.2</b>
<b>I disagree because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> It still had something to offer	25	5.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Missed listening to foreign correspondents	17	3.4
<input type="checkbox"/> People miss it	13	2.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Now there is less variety	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Very interesting programmes	1	0.2
	<b>58</b>	<b>11.6</b>
<b>Other:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> No answer	183	36.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/no opinion	110	22.0
<input type="checkbox"/> I did not know it closed	43	8.6
<input type="checkbox"/> No difference/don't care	35	7.0
	<b>371</b>	<b>74.2</b>
	<b>500</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**5.9 Public Broadcasting Sector vs Private Commercial Radio and TV Stations**

To further assess the general public's perceptions on how they rate the level of quality of public broadcasting when compared with local private commercial television and radio stations, the Author attempted to obtain the survey respondents' views and opinions on the following qualitative aspects:

**1. Broadcasting and Programming Standards**

- Level of quality of broadcasting and programming standards
- Level of diversity/variety/mix of programme content
- Mix between Maltese productions and foreign productions
- Level of quality of discussion programmes and talk shows
- Level of quality of variety shows/phone-in programmes/quiz shows
- Level of quality of foreign productions [movies/documentaries]
- Level of quality of 'adult theme' foreign productions [violence, sex, horror, etc.]
- Image/role of 'the family', 'the male' and 'the female' portrayed
- Mix of broadcasters, programme presenters, hosts, etc.
- Level of competence and professionalism of presenters and hosts [discussion programmes, talk shows, quiz shows, etc.]
- Level of competence and professionalism of programme announcers.

**2. News coverage and Reporting Standards**

- Level of quality of news coverage and reporting [type of news, immediacy, accuracy, objectivity]
- Level of competence and professionalism of newscasters and journalists
- Level of broadcasting standards of 'weather forecasts' [production of contents, graphics].

**3. Advertising Standards**

- Level of quality of advertising commercials/promotions [concept, production]
- Level of quality of tele/radioshopping programmes [concept, production]
- Duration mix between programmes and advertising commercials/promotions
- Level of quality of promotional competitions and prizes offered.

**5.9.1 PBS vs Private Commercial Radio and TV Stations: Broadcasting and Programming Standards**

**TABLE 5.9** illustrates that an average 94.7% of the respondents answered all the questions comprised under this research area. Compared to those of private commercial TV and radio stations, the survey respondents rated *PBS*’ level of broadcasting and programming standards as ‘good’ [mean score rating stood at 3.45] and also expressed their positive views on the level of quality of discussion programmes and talk shows offered by *PBS*.

The level of competence and professionalism of *PBS* ‘presenters, hosts and programme announcers’ also rated very well, both scoring a mean rating of 3.47. What is very evident is the perceived low quality of *PBS*’ provision of ‘foreign productions’ and ‘adult theme foreign productions’ which registered a low 2.99 and 3.10 mean score ratings respectively. Once more, a [1] to [5] rating scale was used, where [1] signified a ‘very low/negative’ assessment and [5] represented a ‘very high/positive’ score.

**TABLE 5.9**

**RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE LEVEL OF QUALITY OF BROADCASTING AND PROGRAMMING STANDARDS OF PBS [RADIO AND TV] STATIONS COMPARED WITH PRIVATE COMMERCIAL RADIO AND TV STATIONS**

<b>Research area</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>% of Total Pop</b>
Level of quality of broadcasting and programming standards	3.45	0.95	1	5	97.0
Level of diversity/variety/ mix of programme content	3.26	0.99	1	5	96.0
Mix between Maltese productions and foreign productions	3.17	1.02	1	5	95.4
Level of quality of discussion programmes and talk shows	3.74	0.94	1	5	96.0
Level of quality of variety shows/phone-in progs/quiz shows	3.25	0.94	1	5	91.0
Level of quality of foreign productions [movies/programmes]	2.99	1.15	1	5	93.6
Level of quality of 'adult theme' foreign productions [violence, sex, horror, etc]	3.10	1.16	1	5	90.6
Mix of broadcasters, presenters, hosts, etc.	3.18	1.05	1	5	96.4

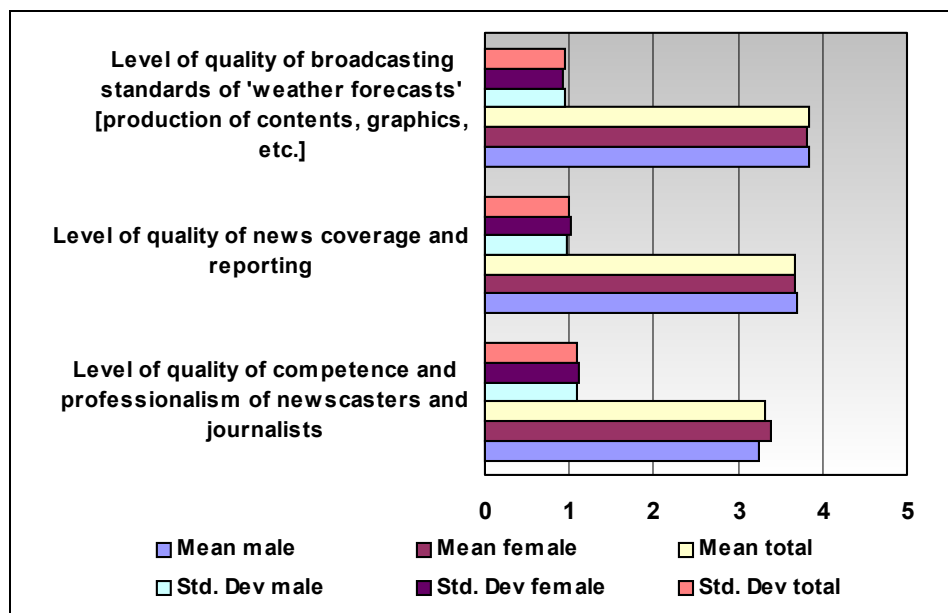
Level of competence/ professionalism of presenters and hosts [discussion programmes, chat shows, quiz shows].	3.47	0.99	1	5	96.0
Level of competence and professionalism of programme announcers.	3.47	0.97	1	5	95.6
Image/role of ‘the family, ‘the male’ and ‘the female’ portrayed	3.54	0.93	1	5	93.0

### 5.9.2 *PBS vs Private Commercial Radio and TV Stations: News Coverage and Reporting Standards*

An average of 95.8% of respondents answered all the questions pertaining to this research area. **DIAGRAM 5.8** below illustrates that in ‘news coverage and reporting’, *PBS* has maintained good quality standards when compared to those of private commercial television and radio stations and attained a mean score of 3.68. *PBS*’ newscasters/journalists are also perceived as competent and professional [mean score rated 3.32] and the ‘weather forecasts’ production was also rated good at 3.83. Once again, a [1] to [5] rating scale was used, where [1] signified a ‘very low/negative’ assessment and [5] represented a ‘very high/positive’ score.

**DIAGRAM 5.8**

***Respondents' Perceptions on the Level of Quality of News Coverage and Reporting Standards of PBS [Radio and TV] Stations compared with Private Commercial TV and Radio Stations***

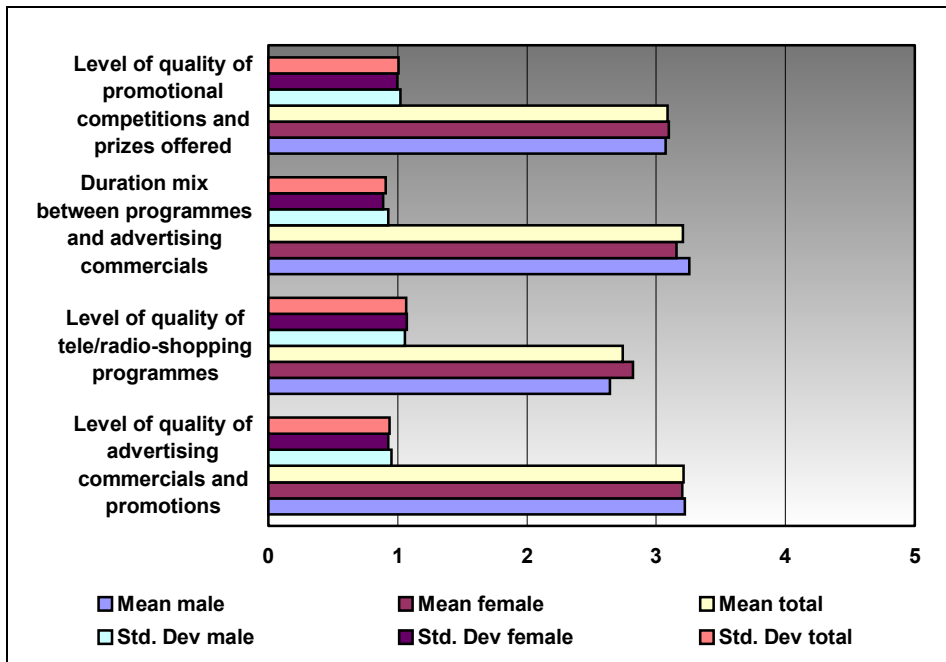


### ***5.9.3 PBS vs Private Commercial Radio and TV Stations: Advertising Standards***

Overall, the survey respondents assessed *PBS*' advertising standards as 'fair' as all four research areas obtained a mean score rating of 3.09 and over except for the level of quality of tele/radioshopping programmes which obtained a low 2.74. In the next Chapter [*vide* **SECTIONS 6.2 and 6.4**], the viewers/listeners' perceptions of tele/radioshopping programmes on the local stations will be assessed more closely. Once again in the following **DIAGRAM 5.9**, a [1] to [5] rating scale was used, where [1] signified a 'very low/negative' assessment and [5] represented a 'very high/positive' score.

**DIAGRAM 5.9**

*Respondents' Perceptions of the Level of Quality of Advertising Standards of PBS [Radio and TV] Stations compared with Private Commercial Radio and TV Stations*



**TABLE 5.10** below encompasses some respondents' additional comments on this research area. 61.7% of these respondents perceive *PBS'* broadcasting and programming standards as being of better quality than those of private commercial media broadcasting.



TABLE 5.10

**RESPONDENTS' ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THE  
LEVEL OF QUALITY OF BROADCASTING AND  
PROGRAMMING STANDARDS OF PBS [RADIO AND TV]  
STATIONS COMPARED WITH PRIVATE COMMERCIAL  
RADIO AND TV STATIONS**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Qualitative Response
<b>Favourable Comments:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> PBS are the best/much better than other stations	18	30.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Retained same standard	7	11.7
<input type="checkbox"/> 'Xarabank' and 'Lou Bondi' are very good	6	10.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Everything is good	3	5.0
<input type="checkbox"/> More Maltese productions	2	3.3
<input type="checkbox"/> PBS is better since there are fewer adverts between programmes	1	1.7
	<b>37</b>	<b>61.7</b>
<b>Unfavourable Comments:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor quality of local news	4	6.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Too old-fashioned	4	6.6
<input type="checkbox"/> PBS still needs to improve compared with other local stations	4	6.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Good but <i>Super One TV</i> is of better quality	3	5.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Not enough Maltese programmes	3	5.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor quality of local programmes	1	1.7
<input type="checkbox"/> PBS are too politically biased but have same programming standards as other stations	1	1.7
<input type="checkbox"/> Maltese stations copy foreign ones ... it is a disgrace	1	1.7
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many adverts	1	1.7
<input type="checkbox"/> Could broadcast more foreign programmes	1	1.7

	$\begin{array}{r} \overline{23} \\ \overline{60} \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} \overline{38.3} \\ \overline{100.0} \end{array}$
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### **5.10 Public Broadcasting Sector vs Private Commercial Radio and TV Stations: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis**

In the foregoing chapters, much has already been commented on the level of quality of the broadcasting and programming standards of local TV and radio. In this Section, the discussion will focus more on the views of the focus group respondents and of the broadcasters themselves on the comparative quality standards attained by the public and private commercial broadcasting sectors as a direct consequence of broadcasting pluralism in Malta. The discussion will also be venturing into assessing more closely the interested parties' perceptions and views on the impact of cable television on terrestrial television.

The findings of the 500-count audience survey were further affirmed by the focus group respondents in that the latter also perceive *PBS*' broadcasting and programming standards as being superior to private commercial broadcasting, however, in some aspects, *PBS* seems to have started losing out.

In one focus group session [male respondents, aged 46-60 years]:

Charles:

I think that *PBS* is still of better quality than the private stations in terms of programme content and broadcasting standards. They still have the best people who cannot leave now as they would lose their pension.

John:

*PBS* have very good people and very competent in their job but are not very presentable, even their dress-sense is also

very old-fashioned. I think it is essential for a television broadcaster and presenter to be presentable.

Philip:

I think *PBS* has still better standards compared to the private stations in terms of plays, cultural programmes, etc. As regards discussion programmes, I think they are all of the same standard, however over all, the broadcasting standards of Maltese stations are still very low. There are shortcomings in filming, in the production scripts and broadcasters/presenters are not fluent enough in the language used.

In another session:

Gino [40 yrs]:

I think *PBS* is the best station there is and it will always remain such because it is owned by the party in government and will always remain funded by government.

Martin [38 yrs]:

It may also be possible that *PBS* will not remain terrestrial but will be using the cable system.

In another session [respondents aged 18-30 years]:

Patrick:

But not all programmes on *PBS* are not good, because, for example ‘*Xarabank*’ is a very good production.

Neil:

But only ‘*Xarabank*’ is good, the rest are ... It is always the same, female presenters presenting flower arrangements. How long do we have to see people doing flower arrangements, year after year, it is always the same.

Patrick:

For example, on *Max Plus*, I don't watch 'Sellili' but I know that my mother and my mother-in-law watch it in the afternoon. They like it. They first used to watch it on *PBS* but now they switched to *Max Plus*.

John:

Also, I think that the scheduling of the programmes on *TVM* is not good. Like in the evening, when the whole family is watching TV, one would not want to watch horse-racing with a lot of horses running around a course track. Why not show it at 11.00pm at night?

All participants:

It's true.

Patrick:

At primetime, you need something more appealing to the audience.

Audrey:

Last week, I was watching the programme 'Trend' on *TVM* at around midnight and I thought, "Why broadcast such a programme, which I think is good, at such a late hour?" I find 'Trend' a very interesting programme.

Patrick:

But we cannot be too negative on *PBS* as there were many productions which were very good but which have now moved to other stations. For example, 'Bongu Sinjura Borg', which moved to *NET TV*, and 'Sellili' which moved to *Max Plus*. They all started from *TVM*.

John:

But *PBS* is copying other stations a lot. For example, with regards to news, just because *NET TV* have two

newscasters, now *TVM* have two newscasters. First, we had one measure of old-fashioned people, now we have two. I am not criticizing their journalistic competence, because as I have already said, they won a lot of awards, but now, *TVM* needs something fresh, something new.

Patrick:

Also, many of the presenters of the private stations started out at *PBS*.

The Author asks:

But why do you think they left *PBS*?

Neil:

For a better pay, I am sure.

Patrick:

To be able to express themselves better and also they might have been offered a better package.

John:

I like it when they actually move from one station to the next. I think Antonella worked on all stations.

Ryan:

Before broadcasting pluralism, *PBS* was much better, it used to get better programmes. I think now it has lost out to the private stations.

### 5.10.1 The Broadcaster's Perspective

*“ ... I am probably a product of pluralism as when I was working with PBS as a presenter, I think it was more of ‘Listen, our competitors are coming up with something new so we need to get something different – a new face’ ...”*

*Ms Claudette Pace,  
Station Manager, Max Plus TV*

What are the broadcasters' views on the broadcasting and programming standards of today's public broadcasting sector? In their opinion, have they improved since the start of pluralism in this sector? How do they compare with those of the private sector? The Author sought the broadcaster's view on this qualitative issue.

Mr Michael Falzon has no doubt that the broadcasting standards of *PBS* have improved as a direct consequence of pluralism and competition, however, he observed that:

*“ ... Unfortunately, PBS is still encountering problems characterized by a state organization. If we had to produce what PBS produces and broadcasts, we, at NET, would definitely spend much less money and use much less manpower. But this is a problem which all state entities face ...*

One cannot say that all *PBS* productions are better than those of private commercial stations and vice versa. This is a matter of taste, but speaking objectively in terms of 'quality', I believe that there is a bit of both [good and low-quality productions]. I think that *Radio Malta 2* was closed down due to economic reasons, however I really like listening to *Radio Bronja* myself. It offers a good mix of classical music ...”

Mr Mannie Spiteri, who has been involved in the local broadcasting scene for a long time, observed some interesting developments at *PBS* brought about by pluralism in this sector:

“ ... *PBS* has a very big problem: it is owned by the state and it cannot improve substantially if it remains so. On the other hand, a taxpayer has the right to have a public station. Like in other countries, whenever there is the influence of the political policy of the government of the day, it is very difficult to change things ...

However, broadcasting pluralism led to two substantial developments within *PBS*:

a. Before the station used to produce all its productions in-house, hence the load of production per employee was very heavy. Nowadays, many productions are being sub-contracted and *PBS* standards have definitely increased. Taking one example: the reporting and presentation of news has become very immediate, more detailed and more frequent. However, having said that, I don't think that the actual level of quality of the news, *per se*, has improved.

b. Secondly, today, there are greater opportunities in broadcasting and there are more programmes that cater for the different tastes of the various audiences. This is because the principle of 'public broadcasting' has changed. Before the concept was that of giving people what they want but I will also give them what I think they should get. I have been in public broadcasting for a long time and this is the principle I had been used to before, i.e. that a public broadcaster should assume the responsibility of what values to give to its audience.

For example, if one thought that the people should learn French, it is not the people who asked for it, but it was

given to them and one would make sure to ‘ram it down their throat’. This is not so anymore. The public sector is moving towards the new school of thought which says, “If I produce a programme which does not appeal to my audience, why should I produce it?” However, in my opinion, I think in this respect, we have now gone overboard. Nowadays, the policy is “to give only what people want” ...

Before there were two gauges – a) popularity and b) a sense of appreciation. The sense of appreciation has disappeared. I think that private stations are competing with *PBS* and each other on the basis of “popularity” only i.e., what do my viewers/listeners want to watch/listen to. And we are gauging how good a station is on the grounds of shares and popularity and not on ‘quality’ standards. I am not saying that this is not good but the quality standards have gone down a lot. Stations are now gauging quality standards on the basis of “how much I can sell”. The private stations are thus doing their utmost to attract attention so as to steal audience shares from *PBS* at whatever cost ...”

Mr John Mallia believes that *PBS* has improved thanks to the increased competition. He says:

“ ... Broadcasting pluralism did instill an element of pride at *PBS* which motivated it to improve. For example, I have seen a remarkable improvement in *PBS*’ 8.00pm news bulletin. Overall, *PBS* has higher standards but *PBS* should be more politically independent ...”

Ms Claudette Pace admits that:

I am probably a product of pluralism as when I was working with *PBS* as a presenter, I think it was more of ‘Listen, our competitors are coming up with something new



so we need to get something different – a new face’. One must add though that *PBS* have the best cameras, technically heavy duty and of very good quality. Unfortunately, there are some good people at *PBS* who have been doing the same thing, day in day out, for far too long and obviously have no challenge or motivation to improve. While *Super One TV* seems to be running with too many ‘party volunteers’. *NET TV* at the onset, had invested heavily in training, also in technical aspects ...”

Mr Colin Tabone says that *PBS*’ broadcasting standards have improved and also notes that:

“ ... *PBS* has been the source of training of most good presenters and broadcasters. And the most professional are those who started at *PBS*, even though the requirements have now changed and even though the ‘older’ presenters have become very boring now. However, *PBS* was the source of training of the presenters, who were given training by *BBC*. At the time, *PBS* had the means, and obviously, it enjoyed a monopolistic position and hence did not have much competition ...

*PBS* should set standards! In my opinion, *PBS* should ‘cost the time’ they allocate to satisfy their social mission obligations, the rest is all commercial. But the additional revenue they have over the other stations should more than compensate for this ‘social mission’ cost, in my opinion. However, we all know that *PBS* has a history of being highly politicized and for that reason carries a budget different from the private stations. Some time or another, this has to stop, there is no excuse anymore ...”

On the other hand, Mr Kevin DeCesare and Mr Alfred Mifsud are doubtful on whether the broadcasting standards of *PBS* has improved at all over this past decade. Mr DeCesare argues:

“ ... Really and truly, these guys have not improved one bit. They are allowed to have three or four stations and hence have an advantage over me. I applied for a second radio station, a ‘talk’ station, but my application was denied. I can have one radio station, one TV station, one newspaper, but not two radio stations. There is no comparison between the public broadcasting sector and the private commercial one. *Radju Malta* has very good listenership but most of its audience are older people, the *ex-Rediffusion* listeners, for example, people who stay at home, older women, etc. ...”

Mr Alfred Mifsud asserts:

“ ... *PBS* is still encountering difficulties to reform itself. In my opinion, *PBS* has one very strong programme, which is not produced by the station itself but is ‘farmed out’ ...”

Moreover, Mr Joe Baldacchino argues that:

“ ... *PBS* is going against every international broadcasting regulation as it is competing directly with private stations and it is subsidized by public funding ...”

Rev. Prof. Saviour Chircop warns that:

“ ... Unfortunately, there is no solution to the economic situation of broadcasting pluralism in Malta. The only options available are to take very drastic measures, be it the Broadcasting Authority, government or whoever. This is what we said in our report but we did not receive any constructive feedback on it. But I claim that the fact that everything is going to remain as it is, shows that there is an implicit agreement not to change the present situation ...”

By “This is what we had said in our report but did not receive any constructive feedback on it,” Rev. Prof. Chircop was referring to the

study, which his department [The Centre for Communication Technology (CCT) at the University of Malta] was commissioned by Government to undertake in 1999. The object of the exercise was to explore the possible options for redefining the role of Malta's public broadcasting, which comprised workshop sessions, a one-day conference, one-to-one sessions and a submission of a final report and recommendations [DOI Malta, Press release No. 22 issued on 9 January 1999].

The report drawn up and made public in December 1999, recommended that:

“ ... Government should take responsibility for the consequences of past political decisions ... And reduce its employees by half, within a period of 12 to 18 months ... Anything less drastic would mean retaining staff levels in a gangrenous state which threatens to kill or cripple the organization ...”

On becoming chairman of *PBS* in January 2000, Mr Anthony Tabone, in an interview with *The Malta Independent* [21 November 2000, “*Winds of Change at PBS*”], was reported to have made reference to this report:

“ ... He [Mr Tabone] referred to a report recently drawn up by Dr Joe Cannataci and Rev. Prof. Saviour Chircop which included recommendations for *PBS* and said the Government had not yet made its decision on this. ‘The report was positive on the other level but its feasibility can only be assessed by those directly involved in the day-to-day running of the company’, he remarked. The report was, however, not to be dismissed since it would be a basis for decision taken by the board, he said, adding that a one-day ad hoc meeting would be held specifically to discuss the report ...”

However on 17 September 2000, The Sunday Times [*“PBS Board Ignores Report Recommendations”*] reported that:

“ ... The board of the Public Broadcasting Services has chosen to ignore the recommendations of a government-commissioned report to shed half its workforce, choosing instead to reform the organization ... Speaking yesterday during a press conference on restructuring within *PBS*, Dr Louis Galea said the shedding of employees would only be considered as “a last resort, after every other possibility would have been exhausted” ... Dr Galea said though the board’s decision differed from that of the CCT, the two entities agreed it would be “suicidal if nothing was done. We feel that it is urgent to take action”. The Board had scrutinized the CCT report and last April passed a document stating its position to Dr Galea. It felt that the necessary change would be carried out through reforms and highlighted a number of initiatives and changes that should be implemented ...”

On 26 September 2001, a year later, The Times reported that in a news conference [on the performance of education and culture], Education Minister Dr Louis Galea who is also responsible for the broadcasting sector, addressed the problem once again. The Minister was reported to have said that the Public Broadcasting Services would have to be declared bankrupt and closed down if it did not undergo major restructuring. He said that the process to restructure *PBS* started that week with a meeting between the General Workers’ Union, the company’s board of directors and the chairman of the task force which had recently drew up a report on the company. He claimed that Government believed there should be a full debate about the recommendations made by the task force before reaching agreement on a restructuring programme, however he also

warned against burying one's head in the sand, as such an attitude would only lead to bankruptcy ...”

The Author asks: Has “the process to restructure *PBS*” ‘really’ started now or is “everything going to remain as it is?” This has still to be seen.

Worthy of mention is the observation made by Rev. Prof. Chircop during one of the workshops held in 1999 [which formed part of the ‘Redefining of the role of public broadcasting’ exercise which he was commissioned to carry out] that the fact that public broadcasting may run the risk of being squeezed out of the broadcasting scene. On this workshop, The Times reported [13 January 1999]:

“ ... Rev. Prof. Chircop, head of the Communications Department at the University, said other stations planned to produce their own programmes based on *PBS*’ popular shows and would make inroads into *PBS*’ share of advertising revenue. However, *PBS* Corporate Executive Charles Flores questioned how this could be possible when over the past two years ‘advertisers had been queuing up to place their adverts with *PBS*’ ...

Rev. Prof. Chircop said a business entity might find it made more sense to share out its advertising budget with the two political television stations to appear to be supporting both parties. That would impinge on *PBS*’ advertising revenue. With less revenue, production might become leaner, less interesting and less appealing to advertisers. The squeezing out will lead to ‘death by slow motion’ as had happened elsewhere through the impact of market forces ...”

The Author asks: With the launch of *Super One TV*’s new ‘*Xalamita*’ being broadcast on Friday evenings during Autumn’01, will *PBS*’ ‘*Xarabank*’ audience shares remain as those of previous years? We will have to wait and see.

### 5.11 The Impact of Cable Television on Terrestrial Television

*An overwhelming 85.8% of the survey respondents agreed with the introduction of cable television in Malta largely because it offers them a wider variety of foreign stations and programmes and also a better television reception.*

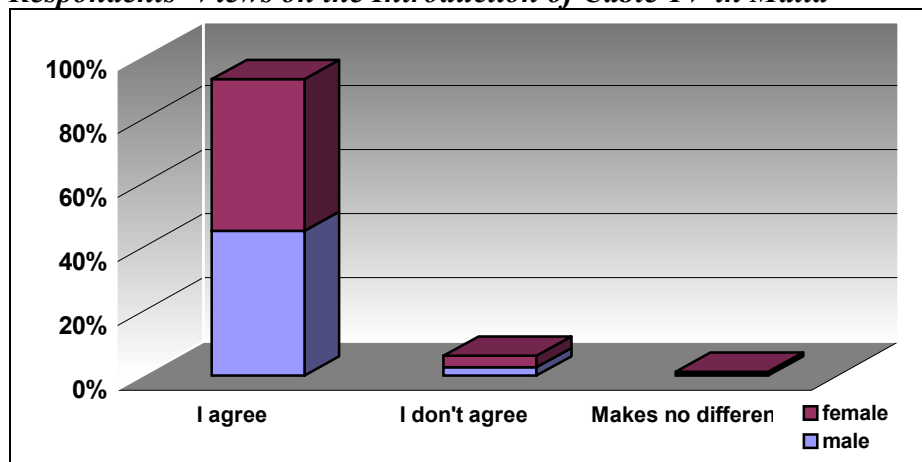
#### *Audience Survey Findings*

Cable television was introduced in Malta in 1991 when an exclusive licence was then granted to *Melita Cable p.l.c.* for a period of fifteen years. Did cable television have an impact on terrestrial television in Malta over the last ten years? The Author researched the views and perceptions of local viewers on this issue.

The 500-survey respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed with the introduction of cable television in Malta. 92.6% of the respondents agreed, while 6.6% expressed their disapproval. 1.2% said that it made no difference to them. **DIAGRAM 5.10** illustrates these results.

#### **DIAGRAM 5.10**

##### ***Respondents' Views on the Introduction of Cable TV in Malta***



**TABLE 5.11** details the reasons behind these preferences. An overwhelming 85.8% of the survey respondents agreed with the introduction of cable television in Malta because it offers them a wider variety of foreign stations and programmes and also a better television reception.

**TABLE 5.11**

**RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON THE INTRODUCTION OF  
CABLE TELEVISION IN MALTA**

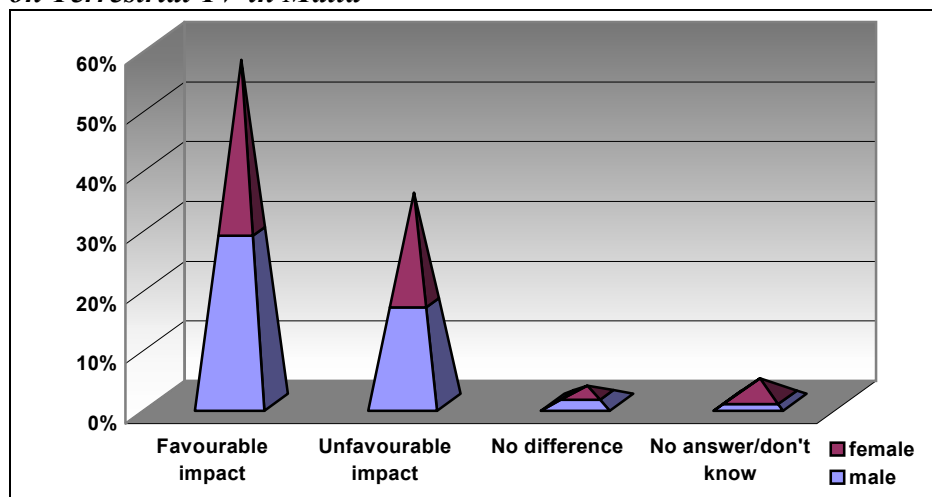
Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Population
<b>I agree with the introduction of Cable TV in Malta because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> More choice of foreign stations and programmes	296	59.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Better reception	116	23.2
<input type="checkbox"/> More variety/informative programmes	17	3.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Improved quality of programmes	7	1.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Sports channel	6	1.2
<input type="checkbox"/> No aerials on roof	3	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Foreign programmes preferred	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> More choice but expensive	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Alternative TV	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Exposure to foreign languages	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Only way of seeing TV	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Pluralism and variety	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> More educational programmes	1	0.2
	<b>455</b>	<b>91.0</b>
<b>I do not agree because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Terrestrial TV lost viewers	18	3.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Prices should be reduced/too expensive	8	1.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Negative effect [not qualified]	5	1.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Our local stations are good enough	3	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> The Satellite Dish should have been promoted in the first place	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Cable have no competition	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Satellite is more advanced	1	0.2

<input type="checkbox"/> It introduced the need of satellite	1	0.2
	<u>39</u>	<u>7.8</u>
No answer	6	1.2
	<u>500</u>	<u>100.0</u>

The respondents were also asked to comment on what impact, if at all, has cable television had on terrestrial television over this past decade. 57.2% of the respondents indicated that the impact was very favourable while 35% thought it was unfavourable. 2.8% indicated that the impact was negligible and 5% did not have an opinion or did not answer the question. [*vide* **DIAGRAM 5.11**].

### DIAGRAM 5.11

*Respondents' Views on the Impact of the Introduction of Cable TV on Terrestrial TV in Malta*



When asked to qualify their preferences, 33.6% of survey respondents said they perceive cable television's impact on terrestrial television as favourable because as a result of increased competition, the latter is now offering the viewer a wider variety of quality programmes and



better programming standards. 12.2% of the respondents find that by subscribing to cable television, they obtained a better television reception [*vide* **TABLE 5.12** below].

**TABLE 5.12**

**RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON THE IMPACT OF THE  
INTRODUCTION OF CABLE TV ON TERRESTRIAL TV  
IN MALTA**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Population
<b>Favourable Impact because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Better reception/Some people receive it better over cable	61	12.2
<input type="checkbox"/> More competition hence more choice - local and foreign	59	11.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Better quality programmes	41	8.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Better programming standards	36	7.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Terrestrial television had to improve to compete	15	3.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Choice of better programmes	12	2.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Motivated higher standards	5	1.0
<input type="checkbox"/> No more aerals	4	0.8
<input type="checkbox"/> More informative	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Pioneer for alternative television	1	0.2
	<b>235</b>	<b>47.0</b>
<b>Unfavourable Impact because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Lost its viewers	48	9.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Cable took over/Cable wiped it out	29	5.8
<input type="checkbox"/> People prefer cable	27	5.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Soon not many new subscribers will be left	21	4.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Lost its monopoly	7	1.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Cable is too expensive	6	1.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Cable competes with local stations	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Cable disrupts direct football game on terrestrial TV	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Lower access to certain programmes	1	0.2

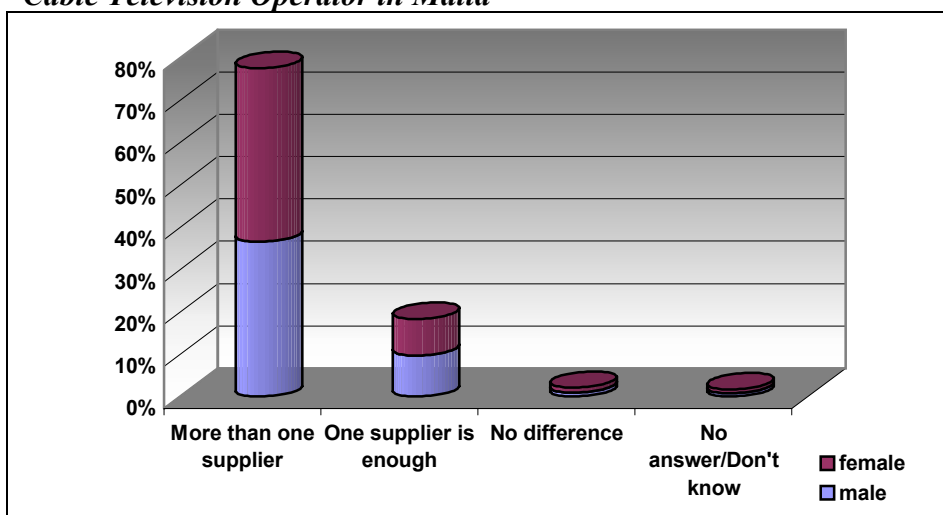
	143	28.6
No answer/No reason indicated	122	24.4
	500	100.0

### 5.11.1 Should There Be More Than One Cable TV Operator?

Until recently, *Melita Cable p.l.c.* had an exclusive licence to operate cable television in Malta. The survey respondents were asked whether they felt there should be more than one cable television operator in Malta. 77.6% of the respondents thought that there should be more than one operator while 18.4% claimed that one operator is enough. 2.2% said that it made no difference to them while 1.8% did not have an opinion or did not answer.

#### DIAGRAM 5.12

*Respondents' Views on Whether There Should Be More Than One Cable Television Operator in Malta*



**TABLE 5.13** encompasses the reasons backing up the survey respondents' views. The main reasons cited in favour of having more than one cable TV operator were that it would offer viewers a better cable television service and a better choice of stations [21%] and also better rates [27.2%] and packages [3.6%].

**TABLE 5.13**  
**RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON WHETHER THERE SHOULD BE MORE THAN ONE CABLE TV OPERATOR IN MALTA**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Population
<b>Yes, there should be more than one operator because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Better rates	136	27.2
<input type="checkbox"/> More competition resulting in better service/choice	105	21.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Less power to a monopoly	49	9.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Better packages	18	3.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Freedom of choice	5	1.0
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Melita Cable's</i> service is not good	4	0.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Better reception	4	0.8
	<b>321</b>	<b>64.2</b>
<b>No, there should not, because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many TV stations already available	38	7.6
<input type="checkbox"/> More investment should be made on the satellite dish	16	3.2
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Melita Cable</i> has good service	10	2.0
<input type="checkbox"/> One is enough, Malta is too small	4	0.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Too expensive	4	0.8
<input type="checkbox"/> No effect	4	0.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Decrease in popularity in future	3	0.6
	<b>79</b>	<b>15.8</b>
<b>No answer/No reason indicated</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>20.0</b>
	<b>500</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### 5.11.2 Impact of Satellite Dish Ownership on Terrestrial Television

A number of respondents noted that they have already invested in a 'satellite dish'. When asked to comment on what impact has satellite dish ownership made on terrestrial television in Malta, a good 43.2% of the survey respondents claimed that the impact has been negative, less than 1% said the impact is positive while 56% of the respondents claimed that they did not have an opinion and that they think that 'the dish' had a stronger negative impact on cable television than on terrestrial television. [vide **TABLE 5.14** below].

**TABLE 5.14**

**RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON THE IMPACT OF  
SATELLITE DISH OWNERSHIP ON TERRESTRIAL  
TELEVISION IN MALTA**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Population
<b>Satellite Dish Ownership made a Positive Impact on Terrestrial TV because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Maltese TV will improve	3	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Satellite dish is useless - it does not always work	1	0.2
	<hr/> 4	<hr/> 0.8
<b>It made a Negative Impact because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> More competition/more station choice for televiewer	80	16.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Will take over	46	9.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Lost viewers	39	7.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Negative impact [unqualified]	13	2.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Satellite dish is superior putting terrestrial television at a disadvantage	10	2.0
<input type="checkbox"/> When it becomes cheaper, there will be greater impact	7	1.4
<input type="checkbox"/> It adds to the negative impact done to it by Cable TV	7	1.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Watching foreign channels and not the Maltese	7	1.4

<input type="checkbox"/> Same as cable	5	1.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Terrestrial channels not received on satellite	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Not much effect in Gozo, maybe more in Malta	1	0.2
	<hr/> 216	<hr/> 43.2
<b>No impact/Other:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> No answer	127	25.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know	94	18.8
<input type="checkbox"/> No effect/Not much effect	33	6.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Satellite Dish affected Cable TV and not Terrestrial TV	19	3.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Negative impact on cable users	7	1.4
	<hr/> 280	<hr/> 56
	<hr/> 500	<hr/> 100.0

### 5.11.3 Impact of Cable TV on Terrestrial TV - More Qualitative Views

*“ ... I am willing to subscribe to cable TV on condition that I don't have hanging wires and boxes on the façade of my house. I cannot stand them and this is the sole reason why I don't have and will not subscribe to Cable! ...”*

*Vivienne,  
Focus Group Respondent*

The audience survey findings were further confirmed by the focus group respondents in that better rates and better packages ought to be offered by *Melita Cable p.l.c.* The negative impact of satellite

television on cable television was also noted. Observations by these respondents follow.

Focus group respondents aged 31-46 years:

Michael:

Cable TV has replaced terrestrial TV, practically everyone, even those who simply want a better reception subscribe to it.

Martin:

In my opinion, terrestrial TV has died a natural death due to cable TV, while nowadays due to satellite, cable TV is also dying a natural death. I can't stand cable TV wires and boxes; they are a real eyesore.

Joe:

As mobile phones are replacing normal telephone, satellite television will replace cable TV.

Michael:

I think cable TV will eventually also die a natural death as *Rediffusion* did in the past.

In another focus group [males aged 46-60 years]:

John:

I think cable TV is too expensive. If I had to choose between cable TV and purchasing a satellite dish, I would go for the latter. All my friends say that in the long run it is cheaper to have a satellite dish.

Philip:

I think *Melita Cable* will have to start offering a better package and better rates or else it will lose many more subscribers to satellite TV.

John:

If there are other cable TV operators competing against *Melita Cable*, the cable TV service in Malta would definitely improve.

In another focus group session [males aged 18-30 years]:

Patrick:

To get a satellite dish you need a permit from the Planning Authority which involves a lot of bureaucracy. I think in future it will take over. If they remove the yearly licence and the PA permit and its price is reduced, it would sell much more. In my opinion, Government is doing this to protect *Melita Cable* and that's it – which is not fair at all!!!

John:

I prefer to see satellite dishes than to see all these wires on the Maltese roads. They are a real eyesore.

Patrick:

My brother-in-law has a satellite dish and he gets a whole variety of TV stations. Some are very good stations.

Neil:

Cable affected the children. Nowadays, children do not watch Italian TV anymore and do not know how to speak the language. I learned the Italian Language from watching Italian television. Nowadays, children are only watching *Cartoon Network*.

Patrick:

I think cable TV is very good but I do not agree with the fees they are charging. Many of the stations they are getting are free and we are paying for a service which should be free. E.g. *BBC*, *UK Living*, *Euro News*. I am prepared to pay but not that much.

Neil:

The worst thing is when you are watching *Discovery* or *National Geographic* and all of a sudden say, at 2.00pm the station stops. Apparently, this happens because they would not have paid the rights.

Patrick:

Also, I would want to watch a particular station, and a caption card comes up indicating “closed up to 9.00pm”.

Mark:

On the other hand, cable TV also made a positive impact in Malta, except for the loads of wires and cable boxes which are an eyesore. Because of cable TV, *TVM* has really improved. It improved a great deal. I watch a lot of Maltese TV.

Other respondents [males, aged 18-30 years] claimed:

Ryan:

I do not think there will be another cable TV operator in Malta as people are going more for the satellite dish and in the long run, it is turning out to be cheaper.

Pierre:

I don't think that demand for cable TV will increase more than it is now and hence a new cable TV operator would not be interested to invest in the Maltese market.



Ryan:

But I think the future will focus more on interactive television.

Another respondent commented:

Vivienne [52 years]:

I am willing to subscribe to cable TV on condition that I don't have hanging wires and boxes on the façade of my house. I cannot stand them and this is the sole reason why I don't have and will not subscribe to Cable!

And what are the broadcasters' views on the impact of cable television on terrestrial television? Some broadcasters' perceptions follow.

Mr Alfred Mifsud expresses his views. He says that the effect of cable television is that:

“ ... Nowadays, more viewers can receive terrestrial TV and others have better reception. As regards satellite, this is increasing, however our Station has increased its market share and hence it does not seem to be taking any of our audiences ...”

Mr Michael Falzon claims:

“ ... Cable TV offers the viewer more choice. I have Cable at home, however I am not interested in having 700 channels to choose from. The odd 40-50 channels I receive are more than enough. In principle, I agree that there should be more than one cable TV supplier in Malta, however in practice, no ...”

Mr John Mallia claims:

“ ... I wish to believe that Cable tries to bring channels which are more informative, more educational. For example, I for one, really like *Discovery Channel* ...”

Mr Kevin Decesare claims:

“ ... I have both Cable TV and satellite. As a customer, I think it is a good thing, for better choice, however when they start offering ‘video on demand’, they will start hurting my cinemas ...”

While Mr Anthony Tabone says that the impact of cable television on terrestrial television is very strong. He adds that:

“ ... Unfortunately, cable TV operators have the possibility of venturing into other communications sectors while TV stations cannot. For example, if *Max Media* were not sustained by *Melita Cable*, it would not exist. They claim that they are two separate entities but there is ample evidence to show that *Max Plus* is sustained by *Melita Cable* ...”

The Author also asked for *Melita Cable p.l.c.*’s views on the subject. The Author interviewed Mr Frank Leiter, the company’s Chief Executive, whose views were also noted on The Sunday Times [29 July 2001] in news item “*Prevalent Satellite Piracy Draws Ire of Melita Cable*”. Mr Leiter stated that:

“ ... Satellite piracy is breaking up the market and harming competition. Satellite signals are intended for distribution to cable or other programme distributors; several are restricted to a specific region. Satellite piracy essentially involves the continuous theft of those signals for distribution to satellite dish owners for a nominal charge ...

Satellite dish owners make up 15 per cent of the market, which amounts to between 15,000 to 20,000 dishes. *Melita Cable* estimates that a significant number are using pirate cards. The abuse is so widespread that even some hotels and bars have satellite dishes openly picking up signals through pirate cards ... *Melita Cable* is concerned that a significant number of satellite dish owners receiving free products are unaware that they are infringing copyright laws. Distributors overseas are well aware of the outrageous situation in Malta and some refuse to have anything to do with the country ... Copyright owners will get better at rescrambling their codes and satellite dish owners currently receiving stolen programming might lose their investment in the long run ...

Since its inception in 1991, *Melita Cable* has invested over Lm30 million in its network and allocates 30 per cent of its annual revenue to programme costs. *Melita Cable* has a national cable licence, and until recently we had a monopoly. That puts us high on the government agenda and in the public eye, which means we have to do everything correctly ... However, the increase in satellite dish ownership has far from deflated *Melita Cable's* sales. Both sectors' growth is attributed to the fact that satellite dishes serve only one TV set and most satellite dish owners keep their cable subscription. This year has been one of *Melita Cable's* strongest years and it now boasts over 87,000 subscribers, giving Malta one of the highest cable penetration rates in the European market. *Melita Cable* now hopes to close in on the 90,000 mark by the end of the year and increase its products ..."

**CHAPTER SIX****BROADCASTING REVENUE AND  
ADVERTISING STANDARDS**

*“ ... As a direct consequence of pluralism, the commercial entities increased their advertising spend because both the Radio and TV stations in Malta, over these last ten years, have created new audiences which these companies can target ...”*

*Mr George Mifsud,  
Chairman, MPS Communications*

**6.1 Introduction**

In 1990, Malta's aggregate advertising spend stood at Lm4 million, out of which 60% went on print media, 5% on other printed publications, 3.5% on outdoor advertising and 29% and 2.5% went into radio and television respectively. Where does the advertising spend stand today, ten years later? Has this 'advertising cake' grown and if so, has it grown enough to sustain the growing number of local television and radio stations? In this Chapter, the size of today's broadcasting revenue will be assessed and a qualitative assessment of the local stations' viability will be conducted. But first, the discussion will focus on assessing the quality standards of these stations' advertising commercials and promotions.

The Author endeavoured to assess the 500-count survey population's views on whether the increased number of local TV and radio stations operating in Malta has affected the level of quality of advertising standards. To obtain these views, this research area was broken down into the following qualitative aspects.

## **Maltese Radio and TV Stations**

- Level of quality of advertising commercials and promotions produced locally [concept, production, etc.]
- Level of quality of tele/radioshopping programmes [concept, production, etc.]
- Duration mix between radio/TV programmes and advertising commercials/promotions
- Level of quality of promotional competitions [concept, originality, etc.]
- Level of quality of competition and lottery prizes
- Image/role of ‘the family’ portrayed on adverts/promotions
- Image/role of ‘the male’ portrayed on adverts/promotions
- Image/role of ‘the female’ portrayed on adverts/promotions.

### **6.2 Maltese TV Stations: Advertising Standards**

**TABLE 6.1**

**RESPONDENTS’ VIEWS ON THE EFFECT OF BROADCASTING PLURALISM ON THE QUALITY STANDARDS OF ADVERTISING COMMERCIALS BROADCAST ON MALTESE TV STATIONS**

<b>Research area</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>% of Total Population</b>
Level of quality of advertising commercials and promotions produced locally [concept, production]	3.34	1.14	1	5	93.2
Level of quality of teleshopping programmes [concept, production, etc.]	2.85	1.21	1	5	81.0
Duration mix between TV programmes and advertising commercials/promotions	2.89	1.12	1	5	91.4

Level of quality of promotional competitions [concept, originality, etc.]	3.05	1.12	1	5	90.8
Level of quality of competition and lottery prizes	3.03	1.20	1	5	91.6
Image/role of ‘the family’ portrayed on adverts/promotions	3.60	0.97	1	5	89.8
Image/role of ‘the male’ portrayed on adverts/promotions	3.43	1.02	1	5	89.8
Image/role of ‘the female’ portrayed on adverts/promotions	3.47	1.08	1	5	90.2

**TABLE 6.1** above illustrates the survey respondents’ views on the level of quality of advertising standards in Malta. A [1] to [5] rating scale was used, where [1] signified a ‘very low/negative’ assessment and [5] represented a ‘very high/positive’ score. The lowest rating scores concerned the level of quality of teleshopping programmes in terms of concept development, production, etc., which stood at 2.85. Also rated ‘average’ was the duration mix between TV programmes and advertising commercials/promotions. Although most TV stations do remain within the commercial airtime per programme allowance stipulated by the law, many viewers still find this advertising airtime excessive and very annoying. Also rated at 3.05 and 3.03 respectively, were the level of quality of ‘promotional competitions’ and of ‘competition and lottery prizes’ which seem to leave much to be desired on certain TV stations. Furthermore, the image and role of the ‘family’, ‘male’ and ‘female’ were perceived by the survey respondents, as being portrayed positively on local adverts/promotions.

When asked to comment generally on the quality of advertising commercials shown on television, there was a split in opinion [*vide* **TABLE 6.2** below]. Some 34.7% of the respondents who commented, claimed that the quality of advertising commercials and competition prizes had improved while 32.7% disagreed. Also noted was the respondents' annoyance for the large number of advertising commercials during programmes [20.8% of respondents].

**TABLE 6.2**

**RESPONDENTS' ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON  
THE EFFECT OF BROADCASTING PLURALISM ON  
THE LEVEL OF QUALITY OF ADVERTISING COMMERCIALS  
BROADCAST ON MALTESE TV STATIONS**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Qualitative Response
<b>Favourable Comments:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Good quality/improvement in commercials/ competitions	34	23.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Adverts are better nowadays	7	4.8
<input type="checkbox"/> High standard	6	4.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Good prizes on 'Xarabank'	3	2.1
<input type="checkbox"/> Improved but still primitive compared to foreign adverts	2	1.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Improved due to competition	1	0.7
	<b>53</b>	<b>36.8</b>
<b>Unfavourable Comments:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor quality of locally-produced adverts and competitions/prizes	45	31.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Length of time is boring and loses interest	12	8.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many commercials and too long	11	7.6
<input type="checkbox"/> No comment	7	4.9
<input type="checkbox"/> I hate adverts	5	3.5
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many adverts	5	3.5
<input type="checkbox"/> Prizes should improve, e.g. Maltacom		

Discount Bill	2	1.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercials before and after and not during programmes	2	1.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercials should not be boring	1	0.7
<input type="checkbox"/> Adverts should only be in Maltese	1	0.7
	<u>91</u>	<u>63.2</u>
	<u>144</u>	<u>100.0</u>

### 6.3 Audiences' 'Phone-in' Participation on Television

The survey respondents were also asked on whether they have ever participated in any of the following interactive television participation:

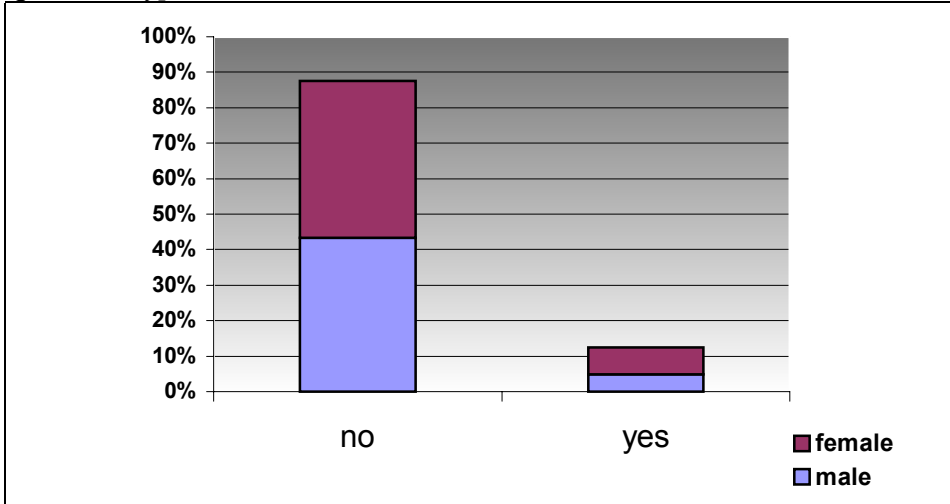
- a. A TV Phone-in Competition [to win prizes only]
- b. A Televoting Question Survey [to air views/opinions and win prizes]
- c. A Phone-in TV Discussion Programme [to air views only with no prize]
- d. Other types of phone-in participations on TV stations.

The affirmative response for all four types of participation was very poor. For TV phone-in competition participation, only 12.4% [male: 4.8%; female: 7.6%] of the 500 survey respondents said that they participated in these competitions, the majority of these participated on *TVM* and *Super One TV* [Vide **DIAGRAMS 6.1** and **6.2**].

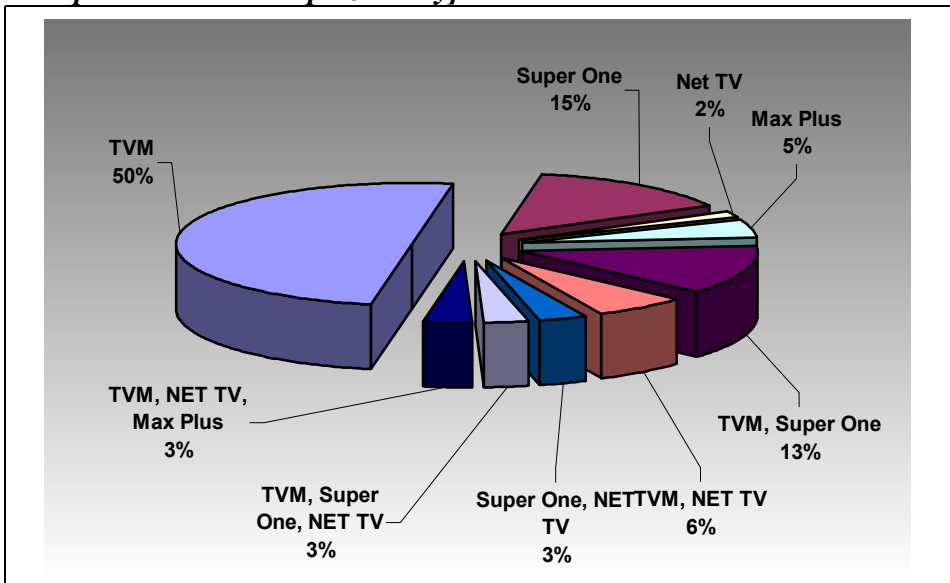


**DIAGRAM 6.1**

*Telev viewers' Participation in TV Phone-in Competition [To win prizes only]*

**DIAGRAM 6.2**

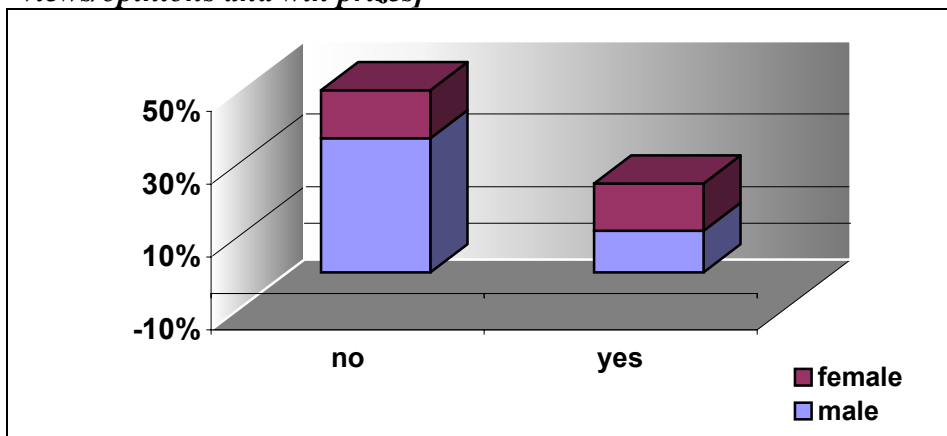
*Name of TV Stations Telev viewers Participated Upon [Phone-in competitions – to win prizes only]*



**DIAGRAMS 6.3** and **6.4** below illustrate that the ‘televoting’ participation seems to be the most popular among televiewers. 24.6% [male: 11.4%; female: 13.0%] of respondents have participated at least once and the most popular TV stations, in this respect, proved, once again, to be *TVM* and *Super One TV*.

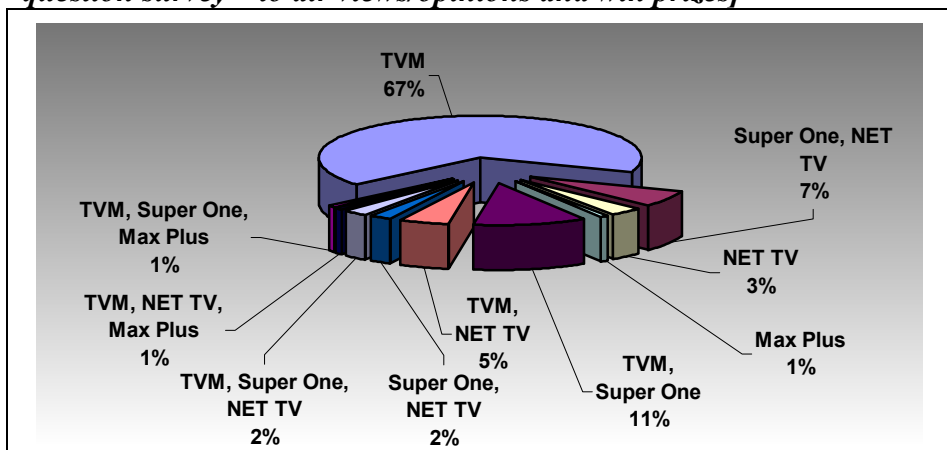
**DIAGRAM 6.3**

*Televiewers’ Participation in Televoting Question Survey [To air views/opinions and win prizes]*



**DIAGRAM 6.4**

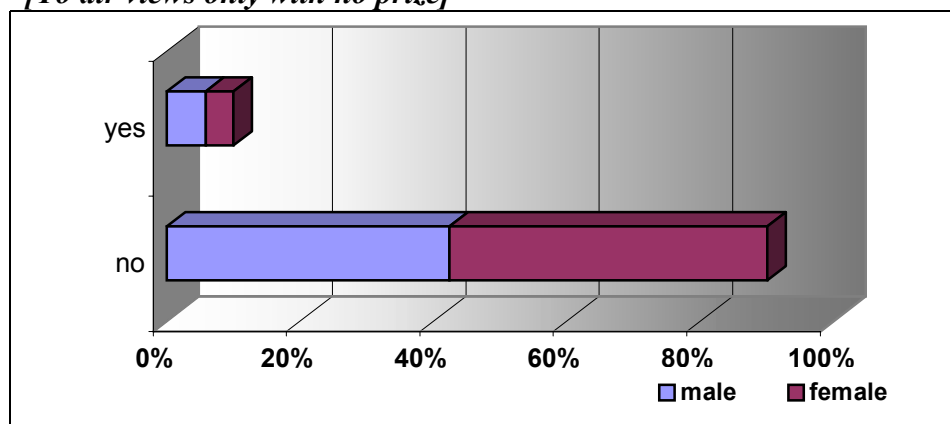
*Name of TV Stations Televiewers Participated Upon [Televoting question survey – to air views/opinions and win prizes]*



**DIAGRAMS 6.5** and **6.6** below also depict the low participation registered in phone-in TV discussion programmes which stood at a low 9.6%. In this case, contrary to the other participations, male participation was higher [male: 5.8%; female: 3.8%]. Once more, the most popular TV stations were *TVM* and *Super One TV*.

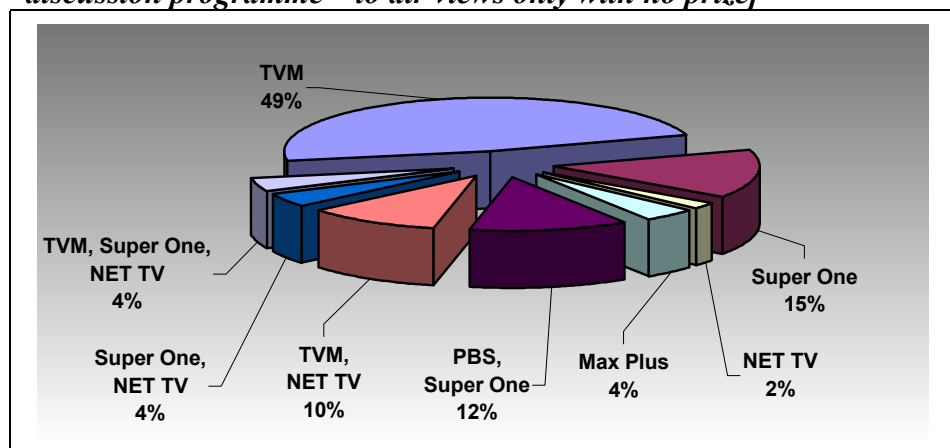
**DIAGRAM 6.5**

*Televiewers' Participation in Phone-in TV Discussion Programme [To air views only with no prize]*

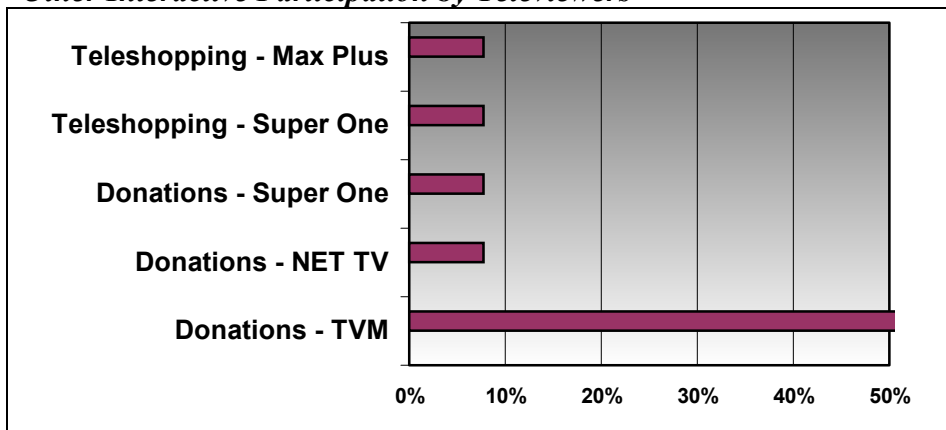


**DIAGRAM 6.6**

*Name of TV Stations Televiewers Participated Upon [Phone-in TV discussion programme – to air views only with no prize]*



Other participations by viewers comprised the giving of donations and of teleshopping accounting for a mere 2.6% of the survey population and the most popular TV station was *TVM* [vide **DIAGRAM 6.7** below].

**DIAGRAM 6.7****Other Interactive Participation by Viewers****6.4 Maltese Radio Stations: Advertising Standards****TABLE 6.3**

**RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON THE EFFECT OF BROADCASTING PLURALISM ON THE LEVEL OF QUALITY OF ADVERTISING STANDARDS BROADCAST ON MALTESE RADIO STATIONS**

Research area	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	% of Total Pop
Level of quality of advertising commercials and promotions produced locally [concept, production, etc.]	3.33	0.97	1	5	72.6

Level of quality of radio-shopping programmes [concept, production, etc.]	3.06	1.47	1	5	55.6
Duration mix between radio programmes and advertising commercials/promotions	3.27	0.94	1	5	72.2
Level of quality of promotional competitions [concept, originality, etc.]	3.14	1.02	1	5	69.2
Level of quality of competition and lottery prizes	2.95	1.17	1	5	69.6
Image/role of 'the family' portrayed on adverts/promotions	3.51	0.97	1	5	68.0
Image/role of 'the male' portrayed on adverts/promotions	3.44	0.91	1	5	66.4
Image/role of 'the female' portrayed on adverts/promotions	3.39	1.01	1	5	66.6

**TABLE 6.3** depicts the radio-listeners' views on advertising standards which proved to be very similar to those of the TV-station scenario. Once more, a [1] to [5] rating scale was used, where [1] signified a 'very low/negative' assessment and [5] represented a 'very high/positive' score. The lowest mean ratings were scored by the level of quality of 'competition and lottery prizes' offered by local radio stations [at 2.95], 'radio-shopping programmes' [at 3.06] and 'promotion competitions' [at 3.14].

As regards the respondents' additional comments [*vide* **TABLE 6.4** below], once again there is almost an equal split among opinions on the quality standards attained by local radio. 45% of the respondents

perceive advertising standards to have improved, while 55% do not agree.

**TABLE 6.4**

**RESPONDENTS' ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON  
THE EFFECT OF BROADCASTING PLURALISM ON  
THE LEVEL OF QUALITY OF ADVERTISING COMMERCIALS  
BROADCAST ON MALTESE RADIO STATIONS**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Qualitative Response
<b>Favourable Comments:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Better quality commercials	15	30.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Much better level of production of adverts	4	8.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Competition is evident	2	4.1
<input type="checkbox"/> Better prizes for children	1	2.1
	<b>22</b>	<b>45.0</b>
<b>Unfavourable Comments:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> No comparison with foreign adverts in terms of standards	10	20.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Some adverts are ridiculous and stupid	6	12.3
<input type="checkbox"/> Local advert programmes are sub-standard	4	8.2
<input type="checkbox"/> More truth in commercials is required	3	6.1
<input type="checkbox"/> Radio adverts are still very primitive and out-dated	1	2.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Prizes still need to improve	1	2.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Repetitive and too many adverts	1	2.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many long advert breaks	1	2.0
	<b>27</b>	<b>55.0</b>
	<b>49</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**6.5 Audiences' 'Phone-in' Participation on Radio**

As regards the audiences' 'phone-in' participation on radio, the survey respondents were also asked to comment on whether they have ever participated in any of the following:

- a. **A Radio Phone-in Competition [to win prizes only]**
- b. **A Radio-voting Question Survey [to air views/opinions and win prizes]**
- c. **A Phone-in Radio Discussion Programme [to air views only with no prize].**

**TABLE 6.5** below illustrates the very low participation of radio-listeners in phone-in programmes. The very low percentage response is evident in all three participations, the highest being 'phone-ins' in radio discussion programmes. **TABLE 6.6** depicts the radio stations which the radio-listeners participated in.

**TABLE 6.5**  
**RADIO-LISTENERS' PARTICIPATION IN INTERACTIVE**  
**'PHONE-INS'**

Respondents	Participation in:		
	Radio phone-in competition [to win prizes only]	Radio-voting question survey [to air views and opinions and win prizes]	Phone-in radio discussion programme [to air views only with no prize]
	% of total survey population		
Male	2.0	1.0	5.0
Female	2.6	1.4	3.8
Total	4.6	2.4	8.8

TABLE 6.6

**RADIO STATIONS PARTICIPATED ON**

	Participation in:		
Radio Station	Radio phone-in competition [to win prizes only]	Radio-voting question survey [to air views and opinions and win prizes]	Phone-in radio discussion programme [to air views only with no prize]
	% of total survey population		
Bay Radio	0.8	0.0	1.2
Calypso 102	0.2	0.0	0.0
Capital Radio	0.4	0.2	0.2
Island Sound	0.4	0.0	0.0
Radio 101	0.8	0.2	1.2
Radio Malta	1.2	1.0	2.2
Radju MAS	0.0	0.0	0.4
Radju tal-Univ	0.2	0.2	0.0
RTK	0.4	0.4	1.6
Super One	0.2	0.4	2.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>8.8</b>

**6.6 Advertising Standards - More Qualitative Views**

*“ ... I prefer not to watch teleshopping as they are taking it for granted that we are a bunch of idiots! I find it very insulting ...”*

*Laura,  
Focus Group Respondent*

When addressing the quality standards of advertising commercials and competitions of local television and radio with the focus group respondents, the discussions did take a rather negative turn, which, further substantiate the survey findings.



**6.6.1 *Quality Standards of Advertising Commercials, Competition Prizes and Teleshopping Programmes***

Many of the focus group respondents interviewed view the quality standards of local television and radio's advertising commercials, competition prizes and tele/radioshopping programmes as being unacceptable. These are some of their comments.

In a focus group session attended by female respondents aged 31-46 years:

Steffie:

Compared to foreign stations, local adverts leave much to be desired.

Anna:

I always have my remote control in hand; the moment I see an advert, I simply change channel.

Josianne:

Also, teleshopping is of a very very low standard.

Laura:

I prefer not to watch teleshopping as they are taking it for granted that we are a bunch of idiots! I find it very insulting.

Eileen:

*TVM's* competition programmes are there just to fill in time. These are catering for the uneducated segments of society and the more educated viewers will not dare listen to idiots trying to answer them. This is also definitely pushing away the more educated people to phone in.

Laura:

*Super One*'s adverts during '*Simpatiči*' are of very low quality; they are too short and too frequent. The voice-overs are normally done by the '*Simpatiči*' actors themselves! They seem to be trying to squash in as many adverts as possible to make as much money as possible.

Anna:

I find certain competition prizes so ridiculous: "A Lm10 voucher from a leading furniture manufacturer" [company name mentioned], where the televiewer can only buy a door knob with that amount of money. I was so taken aback when I heard it.

At another session:

John [58 yrs]:

The majority of the adverts are mostly photo captions, very static, very boring and when you compare them with the adverts on the Italian stations, our standards are still very, very, low.

Charles [45 yrs]:

But how many commercial companies in Malta can afford to produce professional adverts and buy advertising space on TV? I don't think certain companies can afford these and can only opt for offering Lm10 vouchers to their audiences as a commercial advert.

In another focus group attended by respondents aged 18-30 years:

Mark:

Maltese adverts are a complete disaster.

Patrick:

We have still a very long way to go.

Mark:

I really like *Go Mobile* adverts.

Patrick:

But how many *Go Mobile* companies do we have in Malta?

Mark:

I will not mention the name of the station, but many a time the competition caption falls and you hear the presenter or someone in the background saying, "Put it up, Joe, put it up."

Patrick:

What I cannot stand is why they dub an Italian advert in Maltese and the dubbing is definitely not done well.

Mark:

I think teleshopping is a farce in Malta, but the worst is "Toni" who sells watches on *Smash TV*. It's like he is on the 'Monti'.

Neil:

Even the ones selling furniture are not at all professional.

Patrick:

However, teleshopping programmes are not only a disaster in Malta because if you look at the Sicilian stations, they are also very bad.

The Author asks:

But do you think televiewers purchase directly from these teleshopping programmes?

Mark:

I think they do. Even if they don't, they, at least, get used to the brand and the product.

Patrick:

Also, time is becoming so scarce nowadays, that yes, some viewers would end up buying the product.

Neil:

But some of them are all gimmicks. They seem to work on TV, but when you try them, they simply don't work.

Mark:

I cannot stand 'televoting' competitions; the subject or questions asked are so ridiculous.

Neil:

Also, stupid questions like "Do you like carnival: yes or no?" The political stations are making a feast out of these televoting surveys.

The Author asks:

Has anyone of you participated in a televoting question?

John:

I did.

Patrick:

Only for the '*Malta Song Festival*'.

John:

There are times where the amount of adverts during a programme completely distorts it. For example, in a programme like '*Nies Ta' Veru*' which addresses a sensitive subject, you get a whole load of adverts which ruin the programme.

Patrick:

However, I think adverts on the radio are very effective, particularly when the advert is short, to the point, and repeated many times.

Noel:

Like, '*Fortress Insurance, 242412*', I know the telephone number by heart.

Patrick:

This is exactly the same example I was going to give.

Audrey:

It really bothers me.

Patrick:

But the most important thing is that you remember the advert.

Other respondents claimed:

Ryan [28 years]:

As regards teleshopping, I only know the guys on *Smash TV*, 'Toni' and I forgot the other presenter's name. Sometimes I watch it for, what, three minutes and I say to myself, "But am I seeing well?" They are very blunt, aggressive and they seem to be saying, "I am trying to sell here. It is not for your own good but I am just trying to sell a product!" It is very, very unprofessional. But I know that to make a motion advert, it is very expensive. Also, I think that the locally produced motion adverts are not professional enough. The advert message is not creative enough.

Martin [38 yrs]:

I agree with adverts on TV as it is their only source of income, however I cannot stand that a programme of a one-

hour duration takes, say, two hours because of adverts. I simply switch stations when there are adverts. Also, advertising standards have lowered as a result of pluralism. Before pluralism, the adverts were produced by professional advertising agencies only, nowadays, everyone is producing them. So, even the actual advert itself, nowadays, is not being produced professionally anymore.

Mary [56 yrs]:

Adverts on Maltese TV are too frequent and too boring. I simply change channels when the adverts are on, particularly during Maltese plays like '*Simpatiči*'.

### **6.6.2 Gender Issues and Family Values on Local Advertising Commercials**

Another interesting observation which arose in three different focus group sessions referred to the so-called 'stereo-typing' of the roles of family-members within the family. The following are some of the respondents' views.

Anna [36 yrs]:

In the last few years, adverts on local television seem to be coming out of the stereo-typed family roles, where the mother is wearing an apron, the father is washing the car and the daughter is doing the bed. Sexual discrimination is much less evident now.

Laura [38 yrs]:

I think there is still sexual discrimination! There is an advert for a brand of table oil, where the woman is at home, cooking lots of good food [advertising the brand of table oil] and the husband comes home from work, tastes the food, finds it good-tasting and then kisses her.

And:

Mark [25 yrs]:

All the adverts on 'kitchens' in Malta are hopeless! There is not even one which I like from them all. I can't stand them when they get a couple going into the showroom, they sign the contract and end up in bed together.

Patrick [27 yrs]:

I agree. These adverts are too pushy.

Some other respondents' views:

Vivienne [52 yrs]

I cannot stand it when adverts use the 'female' body as a sexual object on adverts.

Mary [56 yrs]:

I remember the havoc which had arisen when the *SEDQA* advert was shown on TV, where the guy falls onto the car. I remember people phoning in to comment.

Angela [59 yrs]:

This shows that nowadays the Maltese people know how to take a stand when they don't like something.

**6.7 Broadcasting Revenue and Advertising Standards - The Broadcaster's Perspective**

*“ ... To be able to attract advertising sponsors, a station has to have a ‘good’ product offer; ‘good’ in terms of ‘attracting a strong viewer/listener audience’. It is hence of utmost importance for a station to be able to develop such product offer to be able to appeal to its audience ...”*

*Mr Mannie Spiteri,  
Chairman, RTK Radio*

We now turn our attention to the broadcaster's views on the quality standards of advertising commercials on the local broadcasting media. The viewers and listeners may comment on the unacceptable low quality standards of advertising commercials, they may comment on the high volume of commercials between programmes, however one has to also assess the ‘other side of the coin’ and ask: Has the introduction of broadcasting pluralism affected the broadcasting revenue of television and radio? Since 1990, [when Malta's aggregate advertising spend stood at Lm4 million], a considerable number of television and radio stations have set up shop, but has this aggregate ‘advertising cake’ grown proportionately, if at all? The broadcasters' perspective on these issues follow.

Mr Mannie Spiteri emphasizes the importance for the station to find the source of revenue which comes largely from advertising. He argues:

*“ ... To be able to attract advertising sponsors, a station has to have a ‘good’ product offer; ‘good’ in terms of ‘attracting a strong viewer/listener audience’. It is hence of utmost importance for a station to be able to develop such product offer to be able to appeal to its audience. The aggregate advertising cake has grown. From our end, our advertising revenue has increased, however it may also*



have been the result of us setting up an in-house sales team. In the past, the sales function was sub-contracted ...”

Mr Paul Portelli asserts that offering ‘a good product’ to one’s advertising sponsors is imperative:

“ ... These last seven years of radio were not easy. We worked hard but we did not grumble. Throughout this time we have managed to produce a good product, we have managed to convince our clients [advertising sponsors] that our product is good, they are happy and now the commercials are working. Our aim is to make our clients happy by offering them a good product. Our sales are growing, but obviously it can always be better ...”

Mr Joe Baldacchino describes his marketing strategy which allows his television and radio stations to survive in Malta’s highly competitive broadcast media sector:

“ ... We believe that from a commercial aspect, every commercial entity should have a say in terms of advertising, hence we try to be affordable by every commercial entity. Not everyone can afford *PBS*. Our marketing policy is to get a little money from a lot of people than to get a lot of money from a few people. And a little money is affordable by a lot of people. The advertising revenue is not growing in proportion with the supply of radio and TV stations in Malta. To set up a Radio and TV station, the initial investment is very high. We broke even in radio after four years of operation, but then we invested in our TV station operation and it is now that our company [incorporating both Radio and TV stations] has started to make a marginal profit ...”

Mr Kevin DeCesare asserts:

“ ... The advertising revenue ‘cake’ has grown bigger, I wouldn’t know by how much, however I know that we are selling twice what we sold in the first three years. But I don’t think that the cake is getting that big, I think we are stealing advertising revenue from somebody else. There seems to be a shift ...”

Mr Alfred Mifsud claims that the commercial aspect for a private commercial TV station has to be respected in that:

“ ... A public TV station may have certain conditions to abide by, however, for it to be left to compete ‘across the board’ for advertising revenue, this is not normal. Normally, a public TV station, which is being subsidized by public funds, has a high onus on it to produce programmes of better quality and may not necessarily be commercially viable. Also, probably it would have some limitations and restrictions to the extent to which it may compete with private commercial TV stations for the advertising revenue. In Malta, these conditions do not exist and the public station competes with us ‘across the board’ and yet the commercial limitations for us are still prevailing. Having said this, within these commercial limitations, we do our utmost to succeed ...”

Moreover, Mr Mifsud remarks that the cut-throat competition that exists in the television and radio broadcasting sector in Malta is adversely affecting broadcasting standards. He claims that:

“ ... The lowering of standards are resultant of the unhappy situation where, for certain programmes, one has to accept a high degree of commercials. It is not possible to have such a rigid ‘rule across the board’ which restricts you to a specified time limit of commercial advertising. It may be

acceptable during peak airtimes, but not all the time. During the afternoon timeband, where audiences are smaller and where you do not have enough 'commercial strength', I would expect to have certain leeway to attain the required advertising revenue ...

For example, there are times when we develop programmes which are quality programmes of 'cultural content' and yet we know that they will not generate enough advertising revenue. Normally these programmes are 'sandwiched' between other programmes which are more commercially viable. One such programme, which for me is a 'real treasure' is *'Fuq Għajnejk'*, which is a documentary of old Maltese trades and traditions. This programme is actually scheduled after *'Simpatici'*, which is our Station's 'top show'. The idea is to 'piggyback' this cultural programme on *'Simpatici'* which is a crowd-puller and hence an advertising revenue generator. Also, it is hoped that *'Simpatici'* would also leave some 'trailing effects' where the same audience would also watch *'Fuq Għajnejk'* ..."

When asked to comment on whether he agrees that too many advertising commercials between programmes may induce the televisioner/radio-listener to change station, Mr Mifsud asserts:

"... The market does balance itself and regularize itself automatically. I think that once the country has accepted to introduce pluralism in broadcasting, it has to also accept that certain rules and regulations are done away with. The broadcasting conditions drawn up by the Broadcasting Authority for a liberalized market are focusing more on the 'state' station which is being partially financed by public funds while, a station like mine has to rely entirely on advertising revenue and that a private commercial station should have a higher degree of leeway with regards to selling advertising airtime. On the other hand, if my station

gives out too much airtime for advertising, I will lose my audiences ... the market will take care of itself! ... If you lose your audience, you will automatically lose your advertising sponsors too ...”

Mr Michael Falzon comments on the challenge faced by his party’s television and radio stations in that:

“ ... At the moment we are trying to play an impossible game, that is, to increase the number of hours of broadcasting and to reduce our costs. In the last two years, we have managed to venture on a cost-cutting exercise and also managed to increase our advertising revenue. Obviously, this does not mean that we are not facing financial problems ...

As regards advertising commercials, we do produce some commercials in-house and some are out-sourced. As regards competition prizes, standards are normally good. However, when we receive complaints from our viewers/radio-listeners for not being treated fairly by our sponsors, [for example, they were not given the competition prize promised], it is the policy of our stations to take action immediately. We cannot compromise the credibility of our stations ...

I would not know the size of the local advertising market in Malta, however, as our revenue did go up in these last two/three years, it must have either grown or we must be taking a bigger slice of the market. I think it is a bit of both. We have engaged a sales and marketing manager to draw up effective action plans to reach our advertising targets ...”

With regards to *PBS* being a state station and hence obtaining revenue other than from advertising sponsors, Mr Anthony Tabone asserts:

“ ... The only revenue which *PBS* gets, apart from advertising sponsors, is from the TV licences paid by viewers [a revenue of Lm15.00 per licence], however one has to keep in mind that *PBS* has to abide by certain public service obligations which other stations do not. If I did not have these obligations, I would close down *Radju Bronja* immediately. Also, if I did not have these obligations for the older radio-listeners who can only listen to radio broadcasts on the medium-wave band, I would close down this station too. None of the private stations opted to broadcast on this waveband. Also, the criteria adopted for the selection of programmes on our stations would be different ...

Moreover, if *PBS* were not a state station, I would make people redundant and work with half its personnel. And I cannot do anything about it, at least for the time being. If you look at the number of persons working with the other stations, one can easily calculate the number of people you need to operate the station. If *NET TV* and *Super One TV* complain that *PBS* obtains revenue from TV licences, *PBS* cannot work with ‘volunteers’ as these stations do. Also, *PBS* cannot do any fund-raising activities as these political stations do. At present, we need new technical equipment but we need to assess from where we can obtain the funds required for this equipment. The revenue obtained from the TV licences does not even cover *PBS* employees’ salaries ...”

Moreover, as regards the size of Malta's aggregate 'advertising cake', Mr Tabone adds:

" ... Malta's aggregate advertising cake has increased. From when *PBS* were the sole broadcasters to now, our advertising revenue has obviously decreased. However, over these last four to five years, our revenue has been constantly increasing. In the beginning of pluralism, the advertising sponsors advertised on all broadcast media, then they started to become more selective. However, nowadays, one finds that the opportunity for the small advertiser to advertise has increased due to the lower advertising rates being offered by radio stations ..."

## **6.8 Broadcasting Revenue and Advertising Standards - The Advertiser's Perspective**

***" ... Broadcasting pluralism has given these small commercial companies the possibility to advertise, which was too expensive for them to do in the past ..."***

***Mr Joe Brockdorff,  
Chairman, BPC International***

The Author also asked the advertising professionals' view on the size of Malta's aggregate revenue 'cake' and also asked them to comment on the quality standards of local advertising commercials/promotions.

### **6.8.1 Advertising Standards**

With regards to the advertising standards of local radio and television, Mr Chris Bianco of *JPA* observes:

"... From our perspective as an advertising agency, it bothers me to see that airtime is being sold to programme production houses who, in turn, sell the station's advertising

space directly resulting in very low standards of advertising or commercial material which is currently being produced. I think there should be some control to retain good advertising standards. For example, ‘*Kalamita*’ on *Super One TV*, is one of the best programmes of the station, which is also watched by many nationalists, but the level of quality of the adverts is very low ...

From experience, we know that to produce a decent advert for TV costs around Lm400-500 and many a time the stations produce the advert for the commercial company for free. And, this is being reflected in the quality of the advert. Some adverts are actually a complete disaster ...”

On the other hand, Mr Joe Brockdorff of *BPC International*, remarks that in terms of advertising sponsors:

“ ... Broadcasting pluralism has given these small commercial companies the possibility to advertise, which was too expensive for them to do in the past. As an advertising agency, we do not handle such accounts, and yes, I don't like seeing poor quality adverts on radio and TV, which are, in the long run tarnishing the industry. However, in all fairness, why shouldn't a small commercial entity be given the opportunity to advertise thus giving it the chance to grow ...

Advertising industry benchmarks claim that a company should not spend more than 12% of its total advertising spend on producing an advert. If one compares the budgets available for advert production in Malta with foreign companies, then, yes, the standards of the adverts are good as the cost of producing them is much, much cheaper than what these international companies spend in producing their adverts ...”

When asked to comment on the low-budget captions and advertisements [as indicated by the respondent radio-listeners/telev viewers] which appear on local radio and television, Mr Brockdorff commented:

“ ... If that is what the advertisers can afford, why not? This may be the only way that a small boutique or supermarket can advertise on radio and TV, so this is giving the small companies the chance to advertise as well. If as a result of the small advertising campaigns they are investing in now, they manage to grow, they will afford to invest in more high-quality adverts tomorrow ...”

From his end, Rev. Prof. Saviour Chircop does not express his concern on the quality standards of adverts *per se* but more on the potential adverse implications on broadcasting pluralism which may arise with television stations accepting ‘barter’ agreements with advertising sponsors:

“ ... BBC stipulates on its charter that it does not accept ‘barter’ agreements, i.e., where advertising space is paid in ‘kind’ and not ‘in cash’, but this is not the case in Malta. In Malta, practically all the production studio sets, props, presenters’ attire, etc. are all ‘barter’ sponsors. And this has become an integral part of pluralism in Malta. To reverse the track now would be impossible. Now, we have to accept our own death warrant. I ask, “If ‘bartering’ has become an acceptable element in broadcasting pluralism, should it be accepted by our Maltese society?” The whole object of broadcasting pluralism, which should really mean giving people the opportunity to express their views, is not taking place. This means that the companies who can sponsor most will be the less criticized on the media. Is this what broadcasting pluralism is all about? This ‘bartering’ system is not only strengthening this whole network but is also institutionalizing it even more ...”



Another peril of ‘barter’ deals is when such barter agreements are not appropriately recorded, controlled or accounted for by the television station. Mr JG Borg Bartolo in his article “*PBS: Crisis or Catastrophe?*” [The Malta Independent, 5 April 1999], addresses the issue of how *PBS* ‘scientifically’ records and accounts for these barter agreements:

“ ... Barter may be costing the station [*PBS*] rather dearly. Whether this is the result of mismanagement, abuse, or otherwise, is irrelevant as far as the final cost of production is concerned. The fact remains that it is only appropriate for costs to be identified with the respective programmes. Can one really say, for example, that a half-page advert in a newspaper did not cost the station anything, because it may have been exchanged for, say, airtime? Likewise, can one say that donations/sponsorships, in kind, like TV sets, airline tickets, equipment [of whatever sort], etc. given to the station for distribution to viewers in the form of prizes, or to whoever and for whatever reason, and say, the borrowing of wearing apparel worn by presenters, are no-cost items for the station? Definitely not. Not so long as *PBS* is giving credits/promotions in return ...

All these items are actually costing *PBS* the potential earnings of the sale of its airtime for publicity, as per its advertising tariff chart. Technically speaking, even promoting its own programmes on the station’s airtime has a cost which should be charged to the particular production. For the sake of accuracy in the preparation of the true and proper cost of programmes, such items must all be included. It would be interesting to know how these barter deals are being recorded, controlled and actually accounted for ...”

### **6.8.2 Size of Market**

Has the actual size of the advertising market grown since the start of broadcasting pluralism in Malta? In 1990, the advertising market stood at Lm4 million and now....

According to Mr Joe Brockdorff:

“ ... The aggregate advertising revenue in broadcast media today stands at Lm12 million including radio, TV and print media. At *BPC*, we are continuously monitoring the changes in the aggregate advertising expenditure and throughout the years, we have found that it has always retained the same percentage of Malta's gross domestic product [GDP], and we found that changes in the aggregate advertising revenue are directly related to changes in Malta's GDP.

In these last five years, 'advertising' has not only changed where 'radio and TV' broadcast media are concerned but also in that other new advertising media have become important. For example, outdoor advertising, poster and advertising on buses, etc. are also competing for advertising revenue. To date, Internet is not considered as a major advertising medium in Malta ...”

Mr George Mifsud of *MPS* also agrees that:

“ ... The aggregate advertising revenue 'cake' of the whole industry in Malta, namely that of radio, TV and print media stands at around Lm10 - Lm12 million today. There is cut-throat competition between stations, however, this has, in turn, motivated stations to compete with the other stations and as a consequence, broadcasting and programming standards of local radio and TV stations have increased a lot ...”

*NTC Publications Ltd.*, which publishes the official adspend [advertising expenditure] of all the countries in the world, indicated that in 1998 [the most recent official figure available], Malta's aggregate adspend [comprising newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, cinema and outdoor advertising] amounted to US\$23.2 million [Lm9 million] which is equivalent to 0.66% of Malta's GDP. This ranked Malta as the 36<sup>th</sup> country from all the other countries in the world with the highest 'total advertising expenditure per capita', which stood at US\$62.6 per capita. In the same year, the highest total advertising expenditure per capita was, as expected, the USA with US\$415.9 per capita, while those of Italy, Spain and Cyprus stood at US\$113.4 [ranked 27<sup>th</sup>], US\$122.7 [ranked 26<sup>th</sup>] and US\$136.8 [ranked 24<sup>th</sup>], respectively.

**TABLE 6.7** below illustrates the distribution of adspend in Malta from 1990 [pre-pluralism] up to 1998 [last official figure available]. The Table also illustrates the media share of newspaper, magazine, radio, TV, cinema and outdoor advertising, as a percentage of Malta's total advertising expenditure.

**TABLE 6.7**  
**MALTA'S DISTRIBUTION OF ADSPEND – 1990-1998 MEDIA SHARE, PER CENT OF TOTAL ADVERTISING EXPENDITURE**

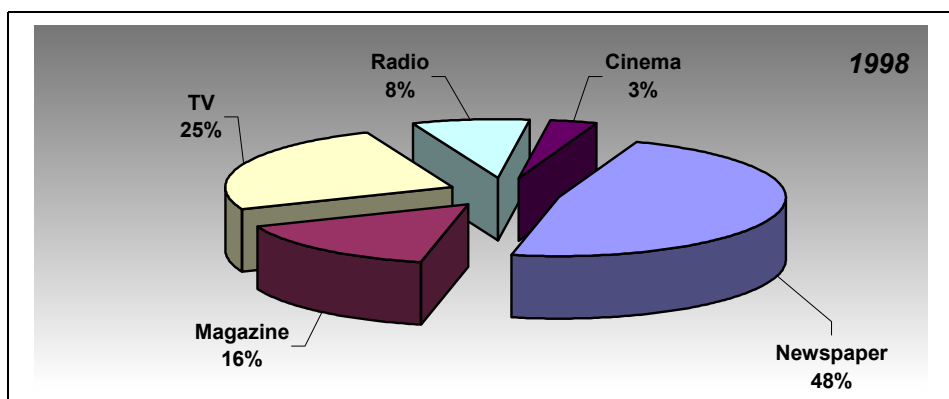
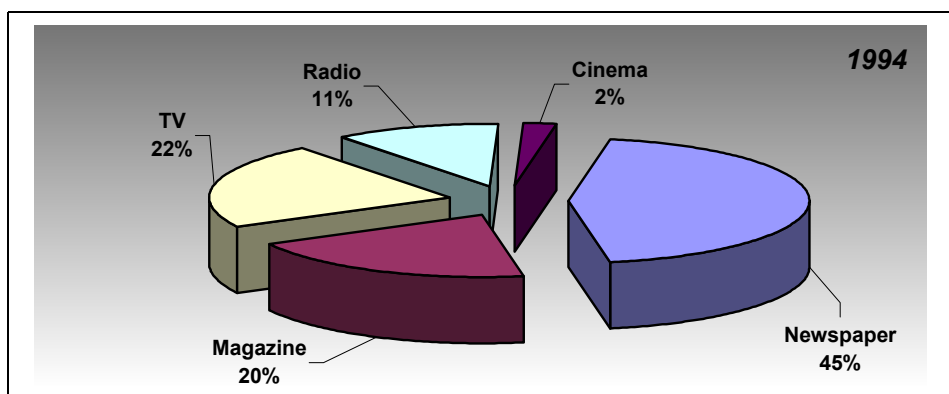
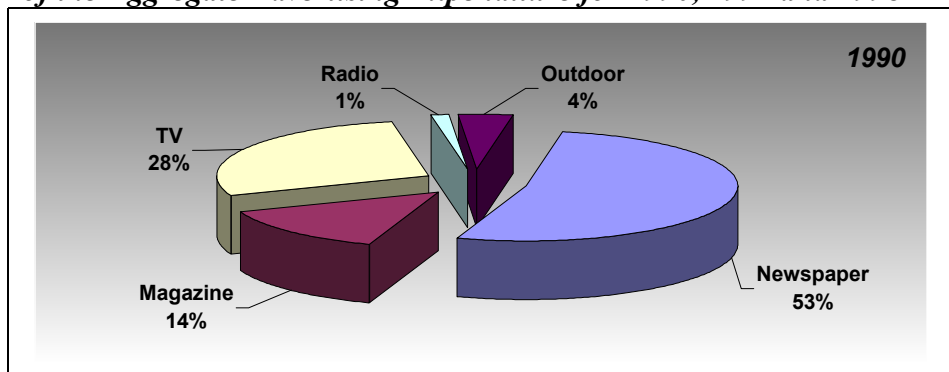
<i>YEAR</i>	<i>Total %</i>	<i>News-paper %</i>	<i>Magazine %</i>	<i>TV %</i>	<i>Radio %</i>	<i>Cinema %</i>	<i>Outdoor %</i>
1990	100	52.4	14.0	28.0	1.4	n/a	4.2
1991	100	48.7	20.3	25.9	5.1	n/a	n/a
1992	100	47.3	20.6	19.9	12.2	n/a	n/a
1993	100	45.9	20.0	21.2	11.7	1.2	n/a
1994	100	44.4	20.0	22.2	11.2	2.2	n/a
1995	100	45.5	20.8	24.8	5.9	3.0	n/a
1996	100	50.0	15.8	26.3	5.3	2.6	n/a
1997	100	48.2	16.0	24.1	8.0	3.7	n/a
1998	100	47.8	15.6	25.0	8.3	3.3	n/a

Source: NTC Publications Ltd., *The Advertising Statistics Yearbook* 2000, p.p.156-157

**DIAGRAM 6.8** below illustrates the comparative analysis of Malta's distribution of adspend and the individual media share of total advertising expenditure for the three years: 1990 [pre-radio/TV pluralism], 1994 [pre-television pluralism] and 1998 [most recent official figure available]. Television's % share of the country's adspend stood at 28% [pre-radio/TV pluralism], was reduced to 22.2% in 1994 and increased again to 25% in 1998, while radio's share stood at 1.4% in 1990, shot up to 11.2% in 1994 [just before the introduction of TV pluralism] and shrunk again to 8.3% in 1998.

**DIAGRAM 6.8**

*Malta's Distribution of Adspend and the Individual Medium Share of the Aggregate Advertising Expenditure for 1990, 1994 and 1998*



**TABLE 6.8** below illustrates Malta's aggregate adspend by medium during the 1990-1998 period. Malta's aggregate adspend doubled over an eight-year period. As expected, the print media dominate companies' advertising expenditure throughout the whole period.

**TABLE 6.8****MALTA'S TOTAL ADSPEND BY MEDIA IN 1990-1998**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Adspend Lm mill</i>	<i>News- paper Lm mill</i>	<i>Maga- zine Lm mill</i>	<i>TV Lm mill</i>	<i>Radio Lm mill</i>	<i>Cinema Lm mill</i>	<i>Outdoor Lm Mill</i>
<b>1990</b>	4.6	2.4	0.6	1.3	0.1	n/a	0.2
<b>1991</b>	4.9	2.4	1.0	1.3	0.3	n/a	n/a
<b>1992</b>	6.5	3.1	1.3	1.3	0.8	n/a	n/a
<b>1993</b>	8.5	3.9	1.7	1.8	1.0	0.1	n/a
<b>1994</b>	9.0	4.0	1.8	2.0	1.0	0.2	n/a
<b>1995</b>	10.1	4.6	2.1	2.5	0.6	0.3	n/a
<b>1996</b>	9.5	4.8	1.5	2.5	0.5	0.3	n/a
<b>1997</b>	9.4	4.5	1.5	2.3	0.8	0.4	n/a
<b>1998</b>	9.0	4.3	1.4	2.3	0.8	0.3	n/a

Source: NTC Publications Ltd., *The Advertising Statistics Yearbook 2000*, p.p. 156-157

As regards new trends in the market, Mr Mifsud observes that broadcasting pluralism brought about two very important developments in the advertising sector:

“ ... Firstly, I can assure you that, at no point in time over these past ten years since pluralism was introduced did the new TV and radio stations take any of the advertising revenue of *PBS*' TV station and of print media. In fact, the advertising revenue of print media actually increased over the years. This is because pluralism in broadcasting has increased the choice of programmes and we, as an advertising agency, have a wider range of programmes to which we can allocate our clients' advertising expenditure. *PBS* has always had around Lm1.4 million annually in

advertising revenue, it has always retained that figure and has actually increased it. *NET TV* and *Super One TV* stations are making around an annual Lm500,000 and Lm700,000 respectively in advertising revenue and *Super One Radio* and *Radio 101* are each making around Lm200,000 annually. However, *PBS Radju Malta*'s advertising revenue did decrease substantially to around Lm60,000 annually; before it used to make some Lm300,000 annually. So, broadcasting pluralism has actually increased the broadcasting media and the advertising revenue. And our clients, [commercial entities] over the last 10 years, did not reallocate the spend from *PBS' TVM* to the other Stations, but actually increased their advertising expenditure ...

Secondly, the second phenomenon brought about by pluralism in broadcasting is that our clients have increased their advertising spend and allocated it to the various stations to target more people. As a direct consequence of pluralism, the commercial entities increased their advertising spend because both the Radio and TV stations in Malta, over these last ten years, have created new audiences which these companies can target. Each station and each programme has its own audience and companies cannot not target them ...”

Mr Chris Bianco from his end, also confirms these developments:

“ ... I think that the aggregate advertising revenue generated by radio in general has decreased due to commercial companies moving their advertising spend to TV. On the other hand, the advertising revenue of TV has actually been created rather than reallocated from other broadcast media such as radio and print media. In the beginning of pluralism, radio was doing well in generating advertising revenue, however when competition from TV

increased, advertising rates fell from, what was initially being sold at Lm5 a minute to Lm1.00 a minute. On the other hand, TV's advertising revenue is always on the increase. From experience I can say that our clients allocate two-thirds of their advertising spend on *TVM* and the remaining one-third between *NET TV* and *Super One TV*, but this also seems to be changing, from research which is currently being conducted. I think there is potential for aggregate advertising revenue to increase in Malta ...”



**CHAPTER SEVEN*****BROADCASTING PLURALISM IN MALTA –  
THE FUTURE***

*“ ... In the beginning I had said that local Radio and TV stations would not survive and that they would close down ... but ten years later they are still there ... ”*

*Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg,  
University Lecturer*

**7.1 Introduction**

Broadcasting pluralism has been around for this past decade. The qualitative findings of this research project clearly indicate that Malta's radio and television broadcasting sector has gone through some significant changes, developments and difficulties during this period. The Author will now turn to conducting a qualitative analysis of the future of the broadcasting sector in Malta. How do Maltese audiences perceive the future of this sector in Malta? What about the future of the public broadcasting sector, cable television and terrestrial television? What about the role of the Broadcasting Authority in all of this? ... Some interesting research findings follow.

**7.2 TV and Radio Broadcasting In Malta: The Next Five to Ten Years**

The 500-count audience survey respondents were asked to comment on how they perceive the future of radio and TV broadcasting pluralism in Malta in the next five to ten years. **TABLE 7.1** shows that 54.4% of the total respondent population claimed that the future looks positive primarily because it will keep on improving as a result of the increase in competition [18%], some others claim it is positive due to better

programming standards [13.6%] while 8.8% think so because the number of foreign and local stations will increase. Only 6% think that the future of broadcasting pluralism looks negative and that it will not survive. 39.6% of the respondents did not have an opinion or perceive no significant developments.

**TABLE 7.1**

**RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON THE FUTURE OF  
RADIO AND TV BROADCASTING PLURALISM  
IN MALTA IN THE NEXT 5 - 10 YEARS**

<b>Survey Respondent's View/Comment</b>	<b>No of Responses</b>	<b>% of Total Population</b>
<b>Future looks positive because:</b>		
❑ Will improve due to competition	90	18.0
❑ Better programming standards	68	13.6
❑ Hopefully it will improve, but I have my doubts	29	5.8
❑ Number of foreign and local stations will increase	25	5.0
❑ Will be stronger/still be popular	25	5.0
❑ More foreign channels	10	2.0
❑ More pluralism/more liberalised/more local stations	9	1.8
❑ There will be rapid changes	8	1.6
❑ Better programming standards but there will still be political bias	2	0.4
❑ Political stations will be stronger	1	0.2
❑ Alternative television viewing will be cheaper	1	0.2
❑ There is a lot of potential in broadcasting but money and politics will hinder progress	1	0.2
❑ More young people should receive overseas training for better broadcasting standards	1	0.2
❑ Televiewers will have to own more than one TV set to watch variety	1	0.2
❑ Programmes will be all Maltese	1	0.2
	<b>272</b>	<b>54.4</b>

<b>Future looks negative because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Will not survive	12	2.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Will be worse, if any	7	1.4
<input type="checkbox"/> No improvement	4	0.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Needs to improve drastically	3	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Less radio stations	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Internet will take over	2	0.4
	<b>30</b>	<b>6.0</b>
<b>Other:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> No answer	107	21.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know	62	12.4
<input type="checkbox"/> No Change	17	3.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficult to say	8	1.6
<input type="checkbox"/> No comment	4	0.8
	<b>198</b>	<b>39.6</b>
	<b>500</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The survey respondents were also asked for their views on the impact of the local broadcasting sector, should Malta become a member of the European Union. 20.8% perceive a positive impact, a mere 3.4% expect a negative impact while a significant 75.8% either do not have an opinion or think that Malta's entry into the EU will not affect the country's broadcasting sector [*vide* **TABLE 7.2**].

**TABLE 7.2**

**RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON THE IMPACT  
OF RADIO AND TV BROADCASTING SECTOR IN MALTA,  
IF MALTA ENTERS THE EU**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Qualitative Response
<b>The Impact will be positive:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Will have a positive effect	44	8.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Will improve/will have to improve	20	4.0
<input type="checkbox"/> More foreign productions	18	3.6
<input type="checkbox"/> No effect, but if affected, it will be positive	12	2.4
<input type="checkbox"/> More progress and competition	9	1.8
<input type="checkbox"/> It will be more liberalized	1	0.2
	<b>104</b>	<b>20.8</b>
<b>The Impact will be Negative:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Will have a negative effect on the stations	17	3.4
<b>Other:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know	146	29.2
<input type="checkbox"/> No answer	128	25.6
<input type="checkbox"/> No effect	94	18.8
<input type="checkbox"/> No comment	10	2.0
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>RAI</i> will come to Malta	1	0.2
	<b>379</b>	<b>75.8</b>
	<b>500</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### 7.3 The Future of The Public Broadcasting Sector in Malta

What about the future of public broadcasting sector in Malta? 36.4% of the survey respondents claim that the future of public broadcasting looks positive and that its role will remain important however, it will still need to improve its broadcasting and programming standards. 13.4% feel that the sector's future looks bleak due to its existing mismanagement and the increasing competition from the private stations, while 50.2% did not have an opinion or perceive no future changes in this sector [vide TABLE 7.3].

**TABLE 7.3**

**RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON THE FUTURE OF  
PUBLIC BROADCASTING SERVICES [RADIO AND TV]  
IN MALTA**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Population
<b>Future looks positive because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Will improve/will keep on improving	90	18.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Will still be important but will have to improve standards	43	8.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Will be more important	28	5.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Will be more professional	10	2.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Some degree of control is needed	9	1.8
<input type="checkbox"/> PBS will improve if it remains politically neutral	2	0.4
	<b>182</b>	<b>36.4</b>
<b>Future looks negative because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Will close down/will get worse	21	4.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Will need better management/organisation to compete	17	3.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Should/will be privatised	7	1.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Will need to improve standards due to local competition	6	1.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Will lose viewers/radio-listeners	5	1.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Will face more competition from more Maltese stations	4	0.8

<input type="checkbox"/> There will be no Maltese stations	3	0.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Will lose its government subsidy/Will PBS licences still to be paid?	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Will need younger faces and newer ideas	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Will face financial problems	1	0.2
	<hr/> 67	<hr/> 13.4
<b>No change/Other:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> No answer	124	24.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know	77	15.4
<input type="checkbox"/> No change/will remain the same	44	8.8
<input type="checkbox"/> No comment	6	1.2
	<hr/> 251	<hr/> 50.2
	<hr/> 500	<hr/> 100.0

#### **7.4 The Future of Broadcasting Pluralism in Malta – More Qualitative Views**

***“ ... Because of Maltese pride I do not think any station will close down. It will be difficult for them to survive but they will not close down ...”***

***Mr Paul Portelli,  
Chairman, Calypso Radio***

##### **7.4.1 Survival of the Fittest**

When asked how they perceive the future of the radio and television broadcasting sector in Malta, some focus group respondents commented:

Philip [46 yrs]:

I think that in the next five to ten years, the broadcasting industry would stabilize itself. Only a few TV and Radio stations will remain, the 'survival of the fittest' and the remaining ones will actually upgrade and improve their broadcasting standards. Also, Maltese society will become more politically independent and mature and hence will have more discerning demands which will, in turn, challenge the stations. Today, we already have globalization and if the local stations are not in a position to meet the local demands, the audience will bypass them all together and go for international TV station-viewing.

In one focus group session:

Mary [56 yrs]:

I augur that we will continue progressing in Radio and TV broadcasting and not regress as we were doing before.

Carmen [59 yrs]:

And let us also hope that if there is a change in government, we will not end up with armed soldiers in front of the television stations as we had before. It felt like we were in Russia.

Angela [59 yrs]:

That is why the country felt the need of pluralism in broadcasting because the state station was never neutral.

As regards the future of the public broadcasting sector, one focus group respondent claimed:

Patrick [27 yrs]:

If *PBS* could sub-contract all of its programmes to private companies and retain only the production of its news bulletins, I think it would do very well.

***7.4.2 The Broadcaster's Perspective***

From a broadcaster's perspective, some interesting observations were made on the future of the local radio and TV broadcasting sector in Malta.

Mr Michael Falzon claims that there is no turning back. He says that pluralism is here to stay:

“ ... This does not mean that there wouldn't be closure of Radio and/or TV stations on the way. Everything in life has a life-cycle, what goes up must come down, but broadcasting pluralism is here to stay. Whether the market can sustain further pluralism, in theory, there is no limit, in practice, there is. In practice, the overriding limiting parameter is the 'advertising revenue' potential. It is true that the political stations may seek funds from other sources, the state station may obtain more funds from taxpayers but at the end of the day, even these funds are limited. However, I think that broadcasting pluralism at its present level is sustainable ...

Also, I think there should always be a place for public broadcasting in Malta. The problem lies more in how to deal with and 'shake off' the work-ethic problem within it. *PBS*' current chairman is trying to address this problem ...”

On Malta's entry into the EU, Mr Falzon notes:

“ ... There will be a minimal impact, however there is an EU directive which addresses the country of origin of the programmes being broadcast. The directive, largely pioneered by the French, seems to limit the airtime of programmes of non-European origin so as to safeguard the European programme production and broadcast media entertainment industry against America's 'Hollywood



machine'. In fact, *EuroNews* is Europe's answer to America's *CNN*, even though, in reality, it does not work that way ..."

As regards the future of broadcasting pluralism in Malta, Mr Mannie Spiteri states that:

"... I think that in the long run, one will experience the 'survival of the fittest' among stations. Even in the beginning, there were many reservations on how many stations would actually survive and I think that all stations try to find their respective market niches and try their utmost to meet the needs of their audiences. Once a station identifies that market niche, it will be ensuring its own survival ..."

As the English saying goes, "You cut your suit according to your cloth," the stations will also have to fine-tune their operations and embark on cost-cutting exercises in order to be able to meet their market segments' needs and survive. To date, practically all the stations have survived. I think we have arrived at a stage where, now that we have become more selective: (a) we have to enhance the opportunities available within the broadcasting sector to allow the people to appreciate the artistic talent in broadcasting and programme production, and (b) to reduce the rat-race towards which station has the highest audience shares. We have become too Americanised in this respect, even though this is also happening in the rest of Europe ..."

Broadcasters Colin Tabone, John Mallia and Joe Baldacchino believe that the market is already over-saturated. Mr Tabone notes:

"... Saturation point in broadcasting pluralism has already been reached. On the other hand, if the 'excess' stations are the ones contributing towards the highering of standards,

then they must remain there. If this excess and saturation ‘kills’ the wrong radios, then the resultant effect would be very negative ...”

Mr John Mallia states:

“ ... It all depends on the financial strength of the broadcasting sector. The broadcasting sector in Malta, as it stands today, is already highly saturated ...”

Mr Joe Baldacchino identifies some differences between ‘radio’ and ‘television’ pluralism:

“ ... As regards radio, the market has settled down now, the stations which are making money will keep on making money and the loss-making ones will remain making losses. The ‘radio’ sector cannot increase further. As for the television sector, we are all fighting for the same advertising revenue and the broadcasting sector in Malta is influenced too much by the two major parties through their stations ...”

Mr Alfred Mifsud argues that for broadcasting pluralism to succeed, it should be allowed to operate in a more liberalized manner:

“ ... The future of broadcasting pluralism in Malta seems healthy, however, for it to be commercially sustainable, certain conditions currently imposed on private stations have to be removed. We have to allow broadcasting pluralism to operate by allowing private stations to compete fairly and operate in a more liberalized manner. To date, all TV stations are running at a loss: *PBS* is being subsidized by the state, the political stations are being subsidized by their respective parties, the independent ones are either losing money or are operating on a shoe-string budget while *Max Plus TV* seems to have the backing of *Melita Cable*.

This cannot continue indefinitely. What looks positive is that the stations are creating 'new audiences' which, in turn, offer new opportunities. What annoys me is when the Broadcasting Authority monitors certain minor operational issues, although I do appreciate that there should be regulations and some degree of monitoring and control ..."

Both Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg and Professor Roger Ellul Micallef admit that they would have never imagined broadcasting pluralism in Malta would succeed in sustaining itself for these last ten years.

Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg:

"... In the beginning I had said that the television and radio stations would not survive and that they would close down but ... ten years later they are still there. Also, I feel that the viewer is continually becoming more discerning, more selective and knows how to make his choices ...

In the short term, the radio stations owned by the institutions, i.e. the two political stations and the Church radio, will become even more institutionalized while TV stations will become less and less except in times of crisis, for example, during general elections, a general referendum, etc. but these will always have a definite timespan and things will go back to normal again once the time of crisis passes ..."

Professor Roger Ellul Micallef:

"... I am surprised how this tiny island with a microscopic population manages to sustain so many radio stations and TV stations. I have been surprised that so many have managed to survive. Even though they may be making a loss, they are still there. With regards to their future, I am

trained in science and I base my things on facts, so I will not express my opinion ...”

Mr Paul Portelli is convinced that Maltese pride will not allow any of the stations to close down:

“ ... Because of Maltese pride I do not think any station will close down. It will be difficult for them to survive but they will not close down. However, I do not agree that the Broadcasting Authority should offer new licences for new stations to open. What we have to date is enough ...”

Mr Kevin DeCesare said that he would like to see a ‘shake-down’ in the broadcasting sector:

“ ... As regards the future of broadcasting pluralism in Malta, I would like to see a shake-down. As regards ‘radio’, I would like to see the weak being phased out, and once these are phased out, the strong ones will start picking up audience shares, their advertising rates will go up and the salaries they will offer and their broadcasting standards will also go up. Even with TV stations, there are too many TV stations for these to remain sustainable. I see from the cinema industry in Malta, this has already become saturated and now every cinema supplier is not doing so well ...”

As regards the public broadcasting sector, Mr DeCesare proposes that:

“ ... The state station should be privatized. *PBS* is not offering the customer any community service. It is just competing with the other private commercial radio and TV stations, head to head. And it is fighting for survival and it survives because Government throws in two million pounds to keep it going ...”

Mr Anthony Tabone believes that the local stations will be filtered:

“ ... In the next five to ten years, the local stations will be filtered. The political TV stations, whatever happens will definitely not close down, the national station will probably remain and but it can never be privatized. The future for broadcasting pluralism in Malta will be healthy in the sense that it will be more competitive. Nowadays, everyone has access to cable and satellite. Taking an extreme example, if *TVM* or any other station had to close down today, it would not create as much havoc as it would have some ten years ago when there was only one TV station. Undoubtedly, if *TVM* at the time stopped broadcasting for one day, there would have been a nationwide crisis ...”

Advertiser George Mifsud claims that the local radio and TV stations ‘sold themselves short’ from the very onset, which will undoubtedly have repercussions on their future sustainability:

“ ... From the Radio and TV stations' perspective, as a commercial entity, I believe that all the radio stations have shot themselves in the foot - they sold themselves short. In the beginning, they were new to the industry, they had high advertising rates, competition then started coming in and started to lower their rates. How can a radio station sell advertising space at 80 cents a minute? They hence, damaged themselves and the whole industry. So they ended up becoming radio stations packed with a whole load of adverts which does not generate enough revenue. This has, in turn, adversely affected the level of programming ...

So, as regards the future of Radio and TV stations in Malta, I think we will have to trim up. There is not enough advertising funds to sustain all these stations. It is true that the advertising revenue cake did increase but the stations, particularly the two political stations, underestimated how much it would cost them to financially sustain the running of their stations because, if, say, a TV station is generating some Lm500,000

[annually] in advertising revenue, and by and large, it is costing some Lm700,000 annually to run, it will be very difficult to sustain. I agree with broadcasting pluralism, but the way it was introduced in Malta was done in a very amateurish manner. However, on the other hand, I don't think the parties will ever close down their stations ..."

Rev. Prof. Saviour Chircop is concerned with the economic situation of broadcasting pluralism in Malta. As was already indicated in **SECTION 5.10.1**, he believes that there is no solution to the economic situation of broadcasting pluralism in Malta. He argues that the only options available are for very drastic measures to be taken, be it by the Broadcasting Authority, Government or whoever. He also observes:

" ... *Max Plus TV* has made a very wise decision, economically. I am still trying to monitor what will happen in future. If the Broadcasting Authority issues a TV or radio station licence to an individual/organization whose forecasts clearly show that the venture would not be economically viable, this seems to imply that the Authority is agreeing with the system ..."

On the other hand, Mgr. Fortunato Mizzi argues:

" ... Why shouldn't anyone be allowed to set up a radio station? Anyone who submits an application should conduct his own feasibility studies before applying and the onus should rest on the applicant. There should not be any limitations or conditions imposed, except in terms of misuse and abuse of a station [radio and TV]. However, if one restricts freedom of expression because of lack of financial and other resources required to run a radio station, then this means that there is no freedom of expression. Every individual should be responsible and mature enough; whoever applies for a station and does not have adequate resources, it is he who will be the loser in the long run ..."

### **7.4.3    *The Future of Independent Programme Production Houses***

***“ ... We will keep on striving to produce good quality programmes and to be wise enough to stop a production before it is stopped by our viewers ... ”***

***Mr Peppi Azzopardi,  
Director, Where's Everybody?***

The Author also researched the views of the independent production houses as to how they perceive their future and the future of broadcasting pluralism in Malta.

Mr Peppi Azzopardi stated:

“ ... We will keep on striving to produce good quality programmes and to be wise enough to stop a production before it is stopped by our viewers. However, it is also very important to keep in mind that we are in this business because we believe in it and we like it. If one does this job solely for commercial reasons, it is definitely not worth it. Admittedly, it does give you a lot of satisfaction, popularity and fame ...

As regards the future of production companies in Malta, I would reckon that in twenty years' time, *PBS* would only consist of a couple of offices and more production co-operatives would be set up and this will also be extended to the production of 'news reporting' too, hence, 'news co-operatives'. This would undoubtedly give rise to competition also in the 'news reporting' sector and *PBS* would then have the option of buying only those 'news' items which are of interest to its viewers/radio-listeners ...

I also think that there will come a time where the commercial aspect will make a breakthrough over the political aspect in terms of programme content in Malta.

Those political programmes which will not succeed to ‘communicate and hence entertain’ their audience may have to eventually give way to other non-political programmes [which can communicate better with the audience] and which can, in turn, generate more advertising revenue for the station ...

As regards the future of broadcasting pluralism, I think it can only get better and not worse. The younger generation segments of the Maltese population seem to be more discerning and know how to choose, and hence, impose on the local stations to ‘either improve or close down’. I envisage that within the next fifteen years, *NET TV* and *Super One TV* stations will retain their political orientation but would be passed on to third parties, and they will start operating with a more ‘commercial’ perspective, that is, the commercial aspect would supersede the ‘political’ influence vis-à-vis the stations’ priority broadcasting objectives ...”

Both producers Marika Mizzi and Herman Bonaci believe that:

Marika Mizzi:

“ ... The future of TV will definitely increase the farming-out of more airtime ...”

Herman Bonaci:

“ ... The stations have to farm-out more programmes and engage more production companies like us who are prepared to buy the airtime and sell the advertising space with the production ...”

As regards the future of production companies, Mr Bonaci argues:



“ ... I think it is essential for a production company to move with the times and with the tastes of its target audience. We have to offer ‘good’ TV retaining in mind the three main ingredients of TV productions, namely, good entertainment, quality and meeting audiences’ tastes ...

When I finish a production, I ask myself, “Now what? I am on top and how can I retain that position and achieve a bit more.” One has to work very hard. The secret is to retain a good rapport with your audience to obtain feedback. I think as a production company, we are contributing a lot towards TV broadcasting in Malta as we are investing time in broadcasting and hence, in the general public. As long as the general public still wants our productions, we will keep on producing. The televiewer will be the judge of that ...”

Advertiser Chris Bianco also confirms that:

“ ... I think that the future needs more programme production houses to produce more Maltese productions. Also, I find that our clients, that is, the commercial entities are becoming increasingly discerning on how they allocate their advertising spend. They want to see audience surveys, they want to see figures, they want comparative statistics before they allocate their advertising spend. They want to know what is happening ...”

#### ***7.4.4 Should The Church have Its Own TV Station?***

An issue brought up by some focus group respondents referred to whether the Church should have its own TV station. Some respondents’ observations follow.

Female respondents aged 31-46 yrs:

Laura:

I think that the Church should have its own TV station, however it should not do as the other TV stations did – getting airtime and simply filling it up!! The church should always give its opinion but having a particular priest expressing his own views and not the Church’s teachings can have a negative effect on the televiewer. For example, like Rev. Fr. Mark Montebello’s contribution on ‘*Xarabank*’; these people tend to get carried away with their own personal views, but their position as ‘priests’ carries a lot of responsibility because they are representing the Church. This is very harmful because if such people voice their opinion, the televiewer will interpret it as the Church’s opinion. In actual fact, it would be Rev. Fr. Mark’s opinion and not the Church’s.

Anna:

What should be quoted are the Church’s teachings and its standing on the various issues discussed.

Laura:

It should not voice its political opinion as it tends to do sometimes.

Josianne:

I would like the Church to have its own TV station as once everyone is voicing his opinion, I really wish that the televiewer would have the opportunity to hear the Church’s opinion too. And if all the stations are discussing a ‘hot’ issue, I wish to hear the Archbishop’s view as the Head of the Church about it and also the Church’s teachings. Now whether I agree or not with what he says, is a different matter all together.

Anna:

That is why it is good for the Church to have a TV station so that its teachings are conveyed to the televiewer.

Irene:

On the other hand, the Church cannot engage broadcasters who are narrow-minded and be too dogmatic in their approach because here you are dealing with mature audiences who can think for themselves! The Church should engage professional and knowledgeable broadcasters.

Also, in another focus group:

Charles [45 yrs]:

I fully agree with the Church having its own TV station, however I fear that nowadays we are already arguing politically, we cannot afford to start arguing religiously too!

John [58 yrs]:

I am a practising Catholic and I would be pleased to see the Church having its own TV station.

Different views were contained in a letter entitled “*A Church-owned TV Station*,” sent to the Editor of The Malta Independent [4 March 2001] written by Mr Joseph Schembri:

“ ... I do not believe the Church needs a TV station, and even if it did, the project would not be feasible. There are many reasons for this. The Church has absolutely no problem in getting access to broadcast time on the national, private or political party media. If the Church feels that it needs TV to get its message across, it can work on a strategy of using spaces provided by the already existing TV stations. In any case, this will make its message more

credible, because the audience would know that the Church does not own the TV station ...

The other TV stations all have interest in giving space to the Church. This is already happening in at least one party station and the national station. The Church can increase its presence [or maybe make it more effective], but with the current media choice [even just locally], I do not envisage a church TV to be a popular media diet. I believe that quality insertions in the already-established stations would be more effective ...

Maybe it is good to mention '*Kurrenti*' which in my opinion is a good television programme, that presents arguments people can associate with, and includes a measure of Church teaching while at the same time following the conventions of television. Even if the Church needed to have its voice heard and seen on TV, it would probably not afford it. Whenever we think of a project, it is always good to ask, "Who will be paying for it?" In this case, the answer would probably be the commercial advertisers. The problem is that Church TV will be eating from the same cake that about five TV stations, some eight radio stations and at least five newspapers are already eating from. A television station incurs very high costs [if it wants to compete in quality], and I do not believe that the commercial community can pump money into yet another medium ..."

On 18 February 2001, The Malta Independent on Sunday reported that Mgr. Charles Vella, founder of the Cana Movement, expressed his intentions of joining forces with the religious and business communities to set up a national television station in Malta. He stated:

" ... I know various priests, laymen and especially broadcasters who are very much interested in the idea, just

as I found some who were opposed. I am going ahead with my plan and I had the occasion also last November to speak about the project with Government. I am now aiming to involve foreign and local business people. However I think the Church should not miss out on such an opportunity ...

I don't think that this is something unrealistic because just as two political parties found the money for their own stations, why should not the Church, with all its human and financial resources, not find the means? Our slogan at San Raffaele is: Everything is possible for him who believes ..."

However, the said paper also reported that Curia spokesman Charles Buttigieg indicated that the Church has no intention of opening a television station.

On 4 March 2001, the same paper also carried another news item [*"Gozitan Priests Want To Open Religious TV Station"*] sounding the views of two Gozitan priests who are also keen on "spreading their message on the airwaves by opening a regional religious television station." This would help them to reach out to more people while keeping up with the signs of the times:

" ... A number of Gozitan priests keen to spread their message on the air waves are promoting their idea to open a regional religious television station. The priests believe such a station would help them reach out to more people while keeping up with the signs of the times. Rev. Fr. Effie Masini of Rabat, Gozo – one of the priests supporting the idea to open a television station – told *The Malta Independent* on Sunday that their idea was to start broadcasting on a regional level. "We would like to get a licence to broadcast on a regional level, in the same way we operate our community radio stations with the help of volunteers ... "

Qala parish priest Rev. Fr. Karm Refalo is also interested in setting up a television station but he said his plans were at a very early stage and it would be premature to divulge them. “We believe that in today’s world the media is the Church’s pulpit,” Rev. Fr. Masini said. Conscious of the financial burdens such a venture would bring with it, Rev. Fr. Masini said he knows lots of volunteers who would dedicate most of their time for the project. “Finances are always a problem but where there is a will there is a way. Our community radio stations are run by volunteers all year round. On the other hand, a station such as *RTK* can never make ends meet because of all its expenses ...”

#### ***7.4.4.1 The Broadcaster’s Perspective***

The Author attempted to also sound the views of some broadcasters on whether the Church in Malta should also have its own TV station.

Mr John Mallia claims:

“ ... Yes I do agree but if it does open a TV station it should not simply report say, what the Archbishop does and what the Church is doing, but to present a wider ‘spiritual’ view to the televiewer ...”

Mr Paul Portelli says:

“ ... Why not? If other entities have their own TV station, why shouldn’t the Church have one too. If the Church feels it should have its own TV station, I don’t see why it should not ...”

Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg has some very clear views on the subject. He argues that if the Church decides to have its own station, it will have to

decide on whether it wants to open a ‘general’ station or a ‘dogmatic’ station:

“ ... If it decides to open a ‘dogmatic’ station, it can broadcast foreign religious programmes and can produce one or two Maltese religious programmes. However, who would watch such a station? Its viewership would be very low. If it decides to go for a ‘general’ station, this means it would have to compete with all the other national stations, e.g. *TVM*, *NET TV*, *Super One TV*, *Smash TV*, *Max Plus TV* etc. Now, I ask, is this option desirable and is it also possible to achieve in terms of financial and other resources? More importantly, one has to establish whether it is desirable in the first place. When the Church’s *RTK* radio station was set up, only 60% of the Maltese population listened to radio, hence there was still untapped radio listenership potential. Televiewership potential nowadays is nil as it is already saturated, currently standing at 98%. Hence a new TV station would need to steal the viewers of other stations ...

In my opinion, the Church should set up its own production house and try to sell productions to the already existing TV stations. In this case, it should attempt to develop productions which would target more needs and interests of the televiewer and which also meet its broadcasting needs and objectives. Although the existing ‘*Stejjer*’ of Rev. Fr. Colin and ‘*Kurrenti*’ of Rev. Fr. Charles Tabone are good, they are not enough. The Church should produce programmes or drama-series similar to ‘*Simpatici*’. That is, to produce a production based on the ‘Maltese family’ and to convey its Christian message and values through such programmes. Television is a very ‘democratic’ broadcast medium and is also a ‘mass’ medium. Programmes which do very well on TV are those which have ‘open-text’ and hence the Church should go for these type of productions. Moreover, if ‘the family’ is one of the Church’s salient

concerns, good fundamental values of the family are also acceptable and appealing to many individuals other than Christians. And this is where the Church should focus its resources on ...”

Mr Anthony Tabone, Mr Mannie Spiteri, Mr Peppi Azzopardi and to a lesser extent Ms Claudette Pace, seem to agree with Rev. Fr. Borg’s proposal in that:

Mr Anthony Tabone:

“ ... I do not agree with the Church having its own TV Station because I believe that it should use the existing TV and Radio broadcasting media. There are religious programmes on all the local TV stations. I think it should try to have more say in such programmes. In my opinion, the Church should not target those audiences who already listen to *RTK* or to ardent church-goers but to other audiences who it is not presently succeeding in tapping with its existing broadcasting and other communications media. So, if the Church also wishes to widen its target audience it may be more opportune to convey a Christian message via these various broadcasting media ...”

Mr Mannie Spiteri:

“ ... I believe that if the Church has a message to convey to its people, it should use all the communication means available to it to do so. Whether it would be practical and feasible for the Church to open its TV station is another matter. However, in principle, I think that the Church should have a television service of some sort because if the best means of communication is to “show” visually, then why shouldn’t it do it? But to be able to strike a balance between practicality and actuality, it is a matter to be discussed further ...”



Mr Peppi Azzopardi:

“ ... The Church should be allowed to have its own TV station, however, in my opinion, it would be more appropriate for the Church to use the existing TV stations and invest its finance and human resources into developing programmes on these stations. In this way, the Church would be using an existing station, will be targeting an already existing audience and it would only need to produce a programme which might not necessarily be more ‘religious’ but that it conveys a more Christian message ...”

Ms Claudette Pace:

“ ... I still have some mixed feelings about it. We had a religious programme called ‘*L-Avukat tax-Xitan*’ but we also try to include an amount of religious content in our other programmes. For example, during Lent we have a section within ‘*Sellili*’ called ‘*Hsibijiet Spiritwali*’ ...

Personally, I think that there is so much competition among stations, and so much party politics within them, I would think that it would be better if members of the Church would be spread out among the existing TV Stations. I do not think that Rev. Fr. Colin Apap and Rev. Fr. Charles Tabone are doing harm to each other by appearing on the two political TV stations. I also monitor the style of religious programmes currently being produced by local TV stations. They seem to be taking a more ‘human’ approach and trying not to ‘stir anything’. PBS’ ‘*Xhieda*’ is quite a challenging programme. With our ‘*L-Avukat tax-Xitan*’ we tried to create lots of discussion and we also tried to always have on our panel someone in favour and someone against ...”

Some focus group respondents [aged between 18 –30 years] did not seem to agree with this proposal:

John:

I cannot understand how the national station allocates hours of airtime to religious programmes and, more often than not, at primetime when they are supposed to be a 'neutral station'. I would accept them on *RTK*, as it is the Church's radio station, but on the other radio and TV stations, I don't think it is appropriate. It does not bother me but maybe there are a thousand people in Malta who are not Catholics or Christians and who do not like watching these programmes on national TV. Are these neutral stations or not?

Patrick:

I really liked '*L-Avukat tax-Xitan*' on *Max Plus TV*. The programme was based on religious concepts but the presenter seemed to question our religion in a very positive way.

John:

'*Kurrenti*' is a really good religious programme from a 'religious perspective' but the priest always reaches his own conclusion whatever they say, whatever they do. It is not like saying, "Look, let's hope we will agree but if we don't, let's agree that we may disagree." The bottom-line is always "we have been taught this, this is what we have to do and this is what we have to be." And it is also on Friday evening, primetime.

Neil:

However, there were times, where he did get people of other religions, for example, Muslims, not to convince them but to show the viewers that these people are also human beings like us. And the message conveyed was very good.

Patrick:

I agree. It is a very good message.

Audrey:

I don't like watching religious programmes.

The Author asks:

Do you agree that the Church should have its own TV station?

Patrick:

Why not?

All other participants:

Yes of course.

### **7.5 The Role of The Broadcasting Authority**

*“ ... I don't think that there is such a big 'control' issue to consider here. We introduced pluralism and the market forces of supply and demand should apply so I don't see why the stations should be controlled ...”*

*Michael,  
Focus Group Respondent*

Over the last decade much has been said and written on the role of the Broadcasting Authority. Radio and TV broadcasting services in Malta fall under the supervision and control of the Broadcasting Authority. It regulates these broadcasting services to safeguard general broadcasting standards on behalf of the general public. Given the important role assumed by the Authority in the face of all the changes and developments brought about by pluralism in this sector, the Author

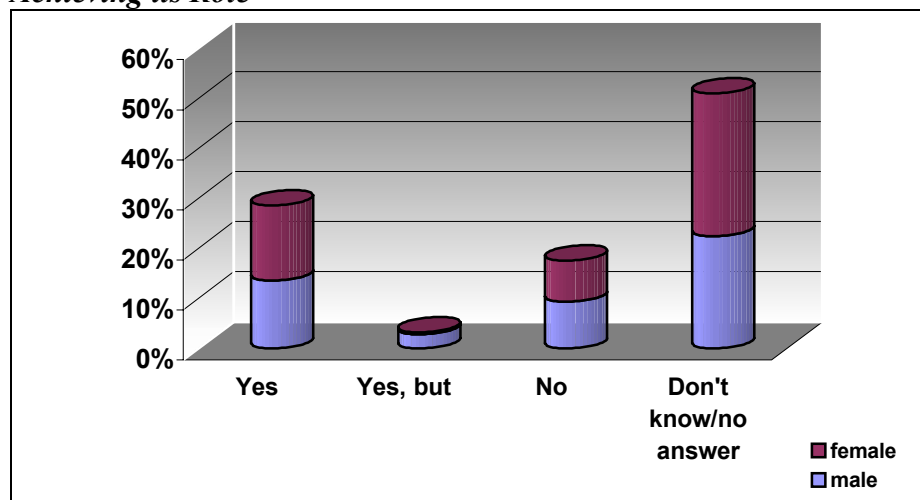
assessed the views and perceptions of the audience survey respondents on whether the Authority is actually succeeding in achieving its role.

28.6% of the respondents claimed that the Authority is achieving its role while a 2.8% gave a conditional yes. 17.6% asserted a definite no while a significant 51% claimed that they did not know or did not give an answer [*vide* **DIAGRAM 7.1** below].

**TABLE 7.4** below encompasses the reasons qualifying the respondents' response indicated in **DIAGRAM 7.1** below. 7.6% and 6.8% of the respondents who claim that the Authority is achieving its role, say this because they think that the Authority is succeeding in maintaining balance and impartiality and because broadcasting standards have improved, respectively. Some 2.8% gave a conditional yes due to its seemingly political bias while 15% feel that it is not achieving its role, predominantly because of its apparent political bias when making decisions. A good 66.6% did not give reasons to qualify their opinion on this issue.

### **DIAGRAM 7.1**

*Respondents' Perceptions on Whether the Broadcasting Authority is Achieving its Role*



**TABLE 7.4**

**RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON WHETHER THE  
BROADCASTING AUTHORITY IS ACHIEVING ITS ROLE**

Survey Respondent's View/Comment	No of Responses	% of Total Population
<b>Yes, the Broadcasting Authority is Achieving its Role because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Balance is kept	38	7.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Broadcasting standards have improved	34	6.8
<input type="checkbox"/> Safeguards the various viewers/ radio-listeners	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Fining political stations	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Does not allow false information to be broadcast	2	0.4
	<b>78</b>	<b>15.6</b>
<b>Yes, but:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Can improve especially with regards to political bias	13	2.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Programme standards are good but it should stop political propaganda	1	0.2
	<b>14</b>	<b>2.8</b>
<b>No, because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> It is politically biased	21	4.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Stations still broadcast what they like/full of lies	16	3.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Some stations/programmes have very low standards	12	2.4
<input type="checkbox"/> No balance is retained	10	2.0
<input type="checkbox"/> False information is allowed to be broadcast	6	1.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Should be more tolerant and more modern	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> All good programmes and news are broadcast at the same time	2	0.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Should close certain stations but it is afraid to take action against them	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Foul language is allowed to be used on local stations	1	0.2

<input type="checkbox"/> Still old-fashioned and prudish when it comes to sex films	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Because there is so much to cover	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> It only serves as mediator between political parties	1	0.2
<input type="checkbox"/> It only supervises PN interests	1	0.2
	<b>75</b>	<b>15.0</b>
<b>Other:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know	157	31.4
<input type="checkbox"/> No answer	123	24.6
<input type="checkbox"/> No comment	53	10.6
	<b>333</b>	<b>66.6</b>
	<b>500</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### ***7.5.1 The Role of The Broadcasting Authority - More Qualitative Views***

The fact that the audience is not at all conversant with what role the Broadcasting Authority should be fulfilling was also affirmed by the focus group respondents.

Martin [40 yrs]:

I am not quite sure what the exact role of the Broadcasting Authority is, however as regards politics, it is being a very good 'watchdog' but as regards broadcasting standards and advertising standards, it is not doing anything. I am not clear on what type of legal powers the Authority has. What action and what extent of action can the Authority take if a station goes out of line? Can it enforce the law, use diplomacy?

Joe [39 yrs]:

I know that the Broadcasting Authority has legal powers but it also depends on the human resources it has available for it to be able to execute its powers!

Michael [38 yrs]:

I don't think that there is such a big 'control' issue to consider here. We introduced pluralism and the market forces of supply and demand should apply so I don't see why the stations should be controlled.

The Broadcasting Authority seems to be perceived by some respondents as assuming too much the role of a 'watchdog' on the local TV and radio stations rather than anything else.

In a focus group session attended by females aged 31-46 yrs:

Irene:

It is not achieving its role. It needs to upgrade standards and stop political bias.

Josianne:

In my opinion, I think that the role of the Broadcasting Authority is only to monitor the amount of airtime of the two political parties on *PBS*. It always issues the same comments.

Anna:

It seems to be only there to oversee how many minutes of airtime the two parties are being given on *PBS* – treating them like babies!!

And in another session attended by male respondents aged 46-60 yrs:

Charles:

The Broadcasting Authority is not attaining its role because it is adapting itself to the situation of the day.

Philip:

I agree.

Charles:

When a small issue arises, the Broadcasting Authority blows it out of proportion while when there is a 'real' issue in question, it does not take action. Although there should be a code of ethics, I don't think it is abiding by it.

In a focus group session attended by male and female respondents aged 18-30 yrs:

Mark:

The Broadcasting Authority monitors what is said on the Maltese stations and tries to avoid discrimination.

Patrick:

And censors.

John:

I would like to ask a question? When the Labour Party sent the pictures of Jennifer Lopez and Ricky Martin to its households, is it true that the Broadcasting Authority issued a statement saying that stations cannot play any of these singers' songs during the local elections? If this is the case, I think the Authority should pack up and leave. Even in '*Ipokriti*' when the Authority issued that statement on the drug addict, I don't think the Authority should tell us what to see or not see. It is there to set and maintain standards.



Patrick:

If during the programme the viewer is advised whether it is for adult viewing or not by means of a little ‘adult-viewing certification rating’ at the corner, I think that should be good enough.

John:

And it [the rating] should remain there all throughout the film, like on *Smash TV*. Also, the schedule of such adult-viewing programmes should also be at the right time – late evening or after 9.00pm.

Mark:

My mother is a teacher. A circular was sent to all the parents not to allow their children to watch ‘*Ipokriti*’ and its repeats on Sunday afternoon because the children were using their language and were imitating them. The role is to protect the Maltese private individual. I think it also takes a lot into consideration the Maltese culture, so in certain areas it also protects the actual TV station itself – that is why laws are actually drawn up, to protect both the viewer and the station itself.

Patrick:

I don’t think that the Authority should take a stand, for example, not to produce a programme in favour of divorce.

The Author comments:

But the Broadcasting Authority does not produce any programmes itself.

Patrick:

But if there is a programme on a local station and a guest is invited to speak in favour of divorce, the station has the right to let him speak. I do not agree that the Authority

should censor any of the parts of the discussion unless the guest is causing harm to another individual.

John:

And he should not be censored. For example, when Wenzu Mintoff was on Lou Bondi's programme, some parts of the programme were censored.

Mark:

But if someone says something against someone else who is not present in the studio, there you have to censor or else the latter would not be protected.

Patrick:

This I agree with.

### **7.5.2 The Role of The Broadcasting Authority – The Broadcaster's Perspective**

***“ ... Yes, the Broadcasting Authority is a watchdog, however, its leash many a time, is in the hands of the two political parties ... ”***

***Mr Peppi Azzopardi,  
Director, Where's Everybody?***

What do the broadcasters think? Is the Broadcasting Authority achieving its role? Should its role be solely that of acting as a 'watchdog' on the local stations? Here are some views.

Ms Claudette Pace has some very clear views and speaks in the Authority's defence:

“ ... The Broadcasting Authority is there, it has a role to play and many a time it is treated with great disrespect. I think that once the Authority is there and there are rules to

abide by, then I cannot go against the law. With regards to advertising, thank God there is the Authority to monitor the stations. I do not consider the Authority a watchdog. It is currently introducing more gender awareness in broadcasting and as I have attended a number of workshops in gender awareness, our station has become more sensitive to such issues. A case in point is an advert which is currently being broadcast on all the local stations and which is not in line with the Authority's gender awareness policy because it is depicting the figure of the woman related to food in a way which is absolutely illogical. In an ideal situation, we should not be saying these things, however I do not think that as a country we are mature enough ..."

Mr John Mallia feels that the Broadcasting Authority is becoming increasingly pro-active but has some reservations:

"... With time, the Broadcasting Authority is becoming pro-active. Even the fact, that you [referring to the Author] have been engaged by the Authority to conduct this qualitative research, it is already a very good sign. But when one looks at the way the Authority is set up, in my opinion, it is a mortal sin. The way the Authority is appointed, in itself, is actually very politicized. It is really a representative of the two main political parties but there are hundreds of other interest groups who should also be represented, and I do not say this because the AD [Alternativa Demokratika] is not represented on the Authority's Board. As things stand today, say, if the country has a general election, notwithstanding the Authority's mission of safeguarding the radio-listener/televviewer's broadcasting interests and that it advises all stations to retain impartiality and present factual news, etc., in actual fact, does this really happen? One ends up having the radio-listener/televviewer listening to biased

commentaries on the news bulletins and not ‘factual news’ ...”

When asked whether he perceives the Broadcasting Authority as a ‘watchdog’ on local stations, Mr Mallia argued:

“ ... The Broadcasting Authority should be a ‘watchdog’, as a result of the local broadcasting scenario being so politicized in Malta. I think we have created a ‘monster’. With respect to news, the non-political radio and TV stations have a better chance of making an impact than the political stations [only in this case]. Nowadays, the Authority has taken ‘impartiality’ to mean ‘radio-listeners/telev viewers should watch the news of one political station [which is biased], then watch the news of another political station [which is also biased] and then form an opinion.’ This, for me, is not appropriate ...”

Mr Anthony Tabone feels that its regulating powers have transformed the Broadcasting Authority into a ‘monster’:

“ ... A ‘regulating’ function is always necessary, however the power which the Broadcasting Authority has been given, goes beyond the EU directives. This has transformed the Authority into ‘a monster’. I don’t think the Authority itself wished to have such controlling power. I think its role should be more of a ‘regulating’ function, for example, setting regulations for advertising contents during children’s programmes, monitoring that stations remain within the set 12-minute advertising content per hour, etc. It should assess whether there is still room for more TV and radio stations in the market, etc. ...”

While Mr Kevin DeCesare calls it a ‘dinosaur’:

“ ... The Broadcasting Authority is a dinosaur. I also think that Government should not even have *PBS*, I think that it should be privatized. As a customer, what do they give me? Every Government which goes into power always has its own station, via *PBS*. It can manipulate very easily. And as an owner of a radio station, I think it is unfair competition and unethical. I expect a political slant from the political stations but not from *PBS*; they omit certain news items completely. They dare not mention certain news items or else they get a transfer ...”

Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg feels that in spite of it being so powerful, the Broadcasting Authority is very prudent in using such powers ... and tends to discriminate when it does:

“ ... In my opinion, the Broadcasting Authority, in spite of being very powerful, is very prudent in using such powers. On the other hand, there were times where the Authority used these “powers” against the weaker entities and did not use them with the stronger entities. The Broadcasting Authority does discriminate unjustly at times ...”

Mgr. Fortunato Mizzi agrees with Rev. Fr. Joseph Borg and metaphorically describes it as ‘a set of teeth’:

“ ... I describe the Broadcasting Authority as ‘a set of teeth’. Some describe the Authority as an entity without teeth but I say it does have teeth, but more so, it has ‘dentures’. This means that it can put on its ‘dentures’ and remove them whenever it deems fit. This does not mean that the Authority does not have the power to take action but that it decides to take or not take action depending on the issue in question. Notwithstanding this, I am fully convinced that the underlying motives and intentions are good, but the way the Authority is set up, renders it an

entity ‘without teeth but with dentures’. At times it uses its ‘teeth’, at other times it does not ...”

On the other hand, Professor Roger Ellul Micallef compares the Authority to ‘a piece of bone-china’:

“ ... The Broadcasting Authority has a very important role to play, like having a piece of ‘bone china’ in your hand. If you do not hold it firmly enough, you will drop it and it will break. If you hold it too tightly it will also break. So the amount of pressure that you should exert in holding it, should be done wisely ...”

When asked whether he perceives the Authority as a ‘watchdog’ on local stations, Professor Ellul Micallef replied:

“ ... Perhaps it should have more of a bite to make sure that abuse does not occur. Or if it occurs, it is immediately checked. By ‘abuse’, I refer to the way ‘use’ may be distorted by one individual who has a hidden agenda and takes advantage over other people by manipulating the medium. And we see this happening all the time locally and abroad ...”

Mr Peppi Azzopardi calls the Broadcasting Authority a ‘watchdog’ owned by different owners:

“ ... Yes, the Authority is a watchdog, however its leash many a time, is in the hands of the two political parties ...”

And Rev. Prof. Saviour Chircop argues that:

“ ... The role of the Broadcasting Authority by definition, i.e. the way it is constituted, protects the interests of the institutions and not of the general public ...”

Mr Michael Falzon argues that the Authority did not evolve in line with the changes and developments brought about by pluralism in the sector:

“ ... I think that the Authority did not change its mentality in line with pluralism. Before, its role was more political in nature. With the introduction of broadcasting pluralism, one would argue that the resultant competition, stations should balance each other out. However, we [*NET TV* and *Radio 101*] feel that when the Authority needs to address or investigate an issue with *Super One TV*, it ends up investigating us too, to prove its impartiality. And this seems to be going into ridiculous proportions ...”

While Mr Mannie Spiteri asserts:

“ ... I do not see eye to eye with the Broadcasting Authority. The Authority is an empire builder and it is not doing what it should be doing. The Authority was set up to safeguard the broadcasting standards in Malta and to ensure that this is done and not to allow events to occur and take action some two years later. This means that the Authority is not meeting its role ...”

Mr Herman Bonaci does not think that the Broadcasting Authority is achieving its role of safeguarding the radio-listener/televviewer's rights and interests because:

“ ... Its main role should be to safeguard the radio-listener/televviewer's rights and interests. However, at present, the Authority is more concerned with monitoring that advertising airtime rules are abided by and to issue fines. It engaged some ten people to do this monitoring. But is the Authority concerned with the quality of programming standards on the local stations? In my opinion, it should do so and also produce reports assessing

the quality of the programmes of the station/s in question. I think that the audiences' complaints should be forwarded to it, to safeguard their interests. I think that the Authority should revise its current role/function as soon as possible. As regards abiding with the stipulated advertising regulations, if the stations go overboard with excessive advertising, in the end it would backfire on them as they would lose their audiences to other stations ..."

Mr Charles Xuereb also agrees that the Authority is more concerned with monitoring advertising airtime and issuing fines. He calls these the Authority's 'fund-raising activities':

"... I do not believe that the role of the Broadcasting Authority should be to monitor what is being said on one station or the other and to issue penalty fines. This for me is simply 'fund-raising' for the Authority ..."

Both Mr Chris Bianco and Mr Colin Tabone propose that the Broadcasting Authority should widen its scope and role to that of an 'educator':

Mr Bianco:

"... In my opinion, I think that the Authority is only limiting itself to simply monitoring how many minutes are being taken up by advertising commercials and also to monitor the airtime being taken up by political broadcasts on the state station. I think it would be more beneficial if it also widens its scope to assisting advertising agencies by way of seminars, etc. And, at the end of the day, we are all here to learn ..."



Mr Tabone:

“ ... I view the Broadcasting Authority’s role as a guide, a mentor and an educator rather than that of a ‘regulator’. I would expect the Authority to conduct periodic workshops, training programmes, lectures etc. on various subject matters, particularly in ‘management in broadcasting’ so that it sets the broadcasting standards required. And there are some good qualified people who can do it. The Authority should also define what it expects from radio and TV stations in terms of standards ...”

## **7.6 The Future of Cable Television in Malta**

***“ ... It is a challenge for us to get as many products as we can in enough different combinations to appeal to as many customers as possible ...”***

***Mr Frank Leiter,  
Chief Executive, Melita Cable p.l.c.***

**TABLE 7.5** illustrates the survey respondents’ views on the future of cable television in Malta. 40% of respondents perceive cable television’s future as positive. There will be more competition and hence more cable television providers, better packages and better prices. 24.4% see cable television’s future as negative mostly because, in their opinion, the ‘satellite dish’ will take over. 35.2% do not have an opinion on this issue.

**TABLE 7.5**

***RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON THE  
FUTURE OF CABLE TV IN MALTA***

<b>Survey Respondent's View/Comment</b>	<b>No of Responses</b>	<b>% of Total Population</b>
<b>Future looks positive because:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> More providers, better packages and better prices	97	19.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Will still be strong	40	8.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Good future [unqualified]	30	6.0
<input type="checkbox"/> More competition but a better choice	21	4.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Will still be strong in Malta but not a monopoly	13	2.6
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Melita Cable</i> will remain very strong in Gozo	1	0.2
	<b>202</b>	<b>40.4</b>
<b>Future looks negative:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> The satellite dish will take over	58	11.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Tougher and more competitive future	47	9.4
<input type="checkbox"/> Reduce rates to compete with satellite/must be less expensive	8	1.6
<input type="checkbox"/> Will close down/will die out	6	1.2
<input type="checkbox"/> Replaced by new technology	3	0.6
	<b>122</b>	<b>24.4</b>
<b>No change/Other:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> No answer	105	21.0
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know	66	13.2
<input type="checkbox"/> No change	5	1.0
	<b>176</b>	<b>35.2</b>
	<b>500</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As regards the future of cable television in Malta, Mr Frank Leiter, chief executive of *Melita Cable plc.*, stated that:

“ ... *Melita Cable* plans to go digital in Autumn of next year, when it should be able to offer subscribers more products, including pay-per-view films. There will be several more satellite channels that subscribers will be able to buy individually or in groups. It is a challenge for us to get as many products as we can in enough different combinations to appeal to as many customers as possible ...”

On 12 July 2001, *The Times* reported that *Melita Cable* will be expanding into an interactive digital hub and will be investing some Lm45 – Lm50 million spread over the next five years.

In July 1999, a new development in the television broadcasting sector took everyone by storm. The main actor in this case was *Max Media*, then one of Malta's leading television programme production houses run by Ms Claudette Pace. On 5 July 1999, *The Times* reported that *Max Media* was likely to pull out of *PBS* after proposals for a new programme made in March of that year were rejected. *Max Media* had by then churned out a number of television programmes for *PBS* over a span of three years, namely, ‘*Ġejna Koppi*’ and ‘*Inservik*’. The news item read:

“ ... Ms Pace explained that *Max Media* in March proposed to start producing a daily entertainment programme from 6.00pm until the news bulletin at 8.00pm. Apparently the proposal was ‘verbally’ welcomed by the management at the time. Three months later, on June 6, *Max Media* received an acknowledgement of the proposal, but no views as to whether it had been accepted or not. Last week, *PBS* acting Chief Executive, Andrew Psaila informed Ms Pace that the proposal had not been accepted and asked for a fresh one. “We panicked. One simply cannot draw up

proposals for a programme in weeks, unless one wants to do a shoddy job”, says Ms Pace. “In the last couple of years, we have given *PBS* ample revenue, and I am sorry to say they have abused our goodwill ...”

The paper also asked for *PBS*’ reaction to this decision:

“ ... Asked why there had been such a long delay in forwarding a reply to *Max Media*, Mr Tony Mallia [then *PBS*’ Deputy Chairman], replied, “For some reason I am not aware of, in the last few months communication between the former management and *Max Media* had stopped. I wish the relationship is not over. Anybody who is good and leaves *PBS* is a loss”, he said. Mr Mallia said *PBS* was still leaving its doors open for *Max Media*, even if the company decided to start a new programme in January and not October ...”

This new development in the television broadcasting sector was not taken too kindly by the other players in the sector. In fact, in *The Malta Independent* of 27 August 1999 [*“Television Stations Hold Summit Against Common Enemy”*] reported that:

“ ... It took the threat of a danger to their livelihood to force the terrestrial television stations to come together. This afternoon, representatives from all the terrestrial stations, that is *PBS*, *Smash TV*, *Super One TV* and *NET TV*, will be meeting for the first time together. The normally competitive, if not downright antagonistic stations [in the case of the two political ones] do not normally mix, except on social occasions. This however, is being seen by them all as a matter of life and death: if private individuals are allowed to get a cable channel for themselves, it is almost as if all the Broadcasting Act regulations and licences for operators of television stations will be bypassed, they say ...”

On 5 November 1999, the Broadcasting Authority granted an eight-year licence to *Max Media Entertainment*, which although broadcasting on a cable television channel, it would still be subject to the conditions applicable to terrestrial television station licencees. The Author also spoke to Ms Claudette Pace, station manager of *Max Plus TV*, regarding her station's business relationship with *Melita Cable*. Ms Pace claims that this relationship is growing stronger:

“ ... In the next five to ten years I hope a station like ours will be stronger. I always claim that there would not have been scope for a station like *Max Plus* to be created if broadcasting pluralism in Malta wasn't so inadequate. I feel strongly on this and said it publicly many times. There was simply no other option for us. With the arrangement we have with *Melita*, we are not spending as much money as other stations are, not in terms of broadcasting licences but in terms of technical transmission. We use the infrastructure of *Melita Cable* but people think that we are run and owned by *Melita Cable* which is not the case. We are not financially backed up by *Melita Cable* but we simply use their infrastructure. And the same services which were offered to us, were also offered to other stations but the other stations refused to take them so as not to be 'controlled' by *Melita Cable* ...”

When asked to qualify this 'control' which *Melita Cable* imposes on cable TV stations, Ms Pace indicated that:

“ ... The control is minimal. I do not go to Cannes personally to purchase foreign films because I know that they are going. I tell them what I need and they buy it. They buy it within their own package for the *Movie Channel*, etc. So I get my foreign programmes cheap. But in terms of programme content and broadcasting, *Melita Cable* does not impose any controls as long as we abide by the Broadcasting Authority rules. This is why I have no

objections with the Authority's rules because we are continuously 'using this rule'. Even with the two programmes which we are about to farm out now, the first thing we look at is to abide with the Authority's rules. To maintain the standards, if it is a pre-recorded programme, I would have to see it before, while the live transmission I would have to monitor ..."

### ***7.7 Interactive Television - The Future of TV Broadcasting?***

***" ... Interactive TV will revolutionize television-viewing in Malta ..."***

***Mr George Mifsud  
Chairman, MPS Marketing Communications Ltd.***

An interesting remark observed at three focus group sessions was the mention of 'interactive television'. What is 'interactive television'? What are its benefits and its perils? Some respondents' observations follow.

In one focus group session [respondents aged 18-30 years]:

The Author asks:

Should there be more than one cable TV operator?

John:

Yes, isn't it obvious?

Patrick:

Why not? Also, recently Maltacom announced that they will be offering an interactive television service through the telephone. I don't know how yet.

The Author asks:

Are you referring to Pay TV? Do you like it?

Mark:

I like it a lot. It is already being offered abroad.

Patrick:

I like it too. It is similar to hiring a video but more conveniently done. I would not mind paying as the service is personalized.

In another focus group session [respondents aged 31-46 years]:

Michael:

Technological advancement is so fast these days that everything seems to become obsolete very fast. Most probably, TV and Internet will be integrated. As they stand today, one can surf the net whenever he wishes while the viewer can only watch a programme only at the time it is broadcast. Hence, TV is facing fierce competition from the Internet. What TV has to do is not to compete with Internet but join forces with it and it will become one new technological source of broadcast media. One example would be that a viewer can watch a programme which he selects at a time which is most convenient for him.

Martin:

There will come a time where instead of a TV station setting a 'menu' of programmes for the viewer, the viewer himself will draw up a 'menu' of programmes for himself. The viewer will be able to programme his own set of programmes he wants to watch.

Joe:

Also, I heard that in some countries, the viewer can watch six programmes on TV at one go as the television screen may be divided into six sections and the viewer can decide to see them all at once or decide to opt for the

programme he wants to watch and hence will enlarge that section to the size of the whole screen.

In another session [respondents aged 18-30 years]:

Vicky:

I agree with technological advancement, but I am really worried on whether we will still have respect for the people around us. It is always very evident even with children, instead of playing with other children, for example, on bicycles, football, etc., the child seems to prefer to play on the computer, Internet, ‘Playstation’, etc.

Ryan:

I see from my own experience. I love ‘Playstation’. The guys of my clique get together to play ‘Playstation’ and leave our girlfriends alone. The girls get really angry with this. But it can be very addictive and interactive TV may also become addictive.

Vicky:

I already see it with ‘chatting’ on the Internet. People seem to prefer staying in to chat than to go out these days. Interpersonal communication is already lacking.

### **7.7.1 Interactive Television - The Broadcaster’s Perspective**

***“ ... As a viewer, I will watch the programme I want to watch, at the time I want to watch it and if I want, I can watch it 25 times over ... ”***

***Mr Andreas F Forsthuber,  
Managing Director, MSBC***

Mr Michael Falzon agrees that ‘interactive television’ is the future of broadcasting, however he also observes that nowadays, TV-watching is becoming more of a ‘solitary past-time’:



“ ... In the next five to ten years, I do not think we would have a lot more of local TV and radio stations but we will have more of ‘video on demand’ via cable, ‘video on demand’ via telephone lines, and more competition fighting for the radio-listener/televviewer’s leisure time in general. This ‘pay-TV/video on demand’ trend will undoubtedly leave less space for the television station, in its traditional sense. As regards ‘interactive television’, it will take off eventually. In the long run, the Internet, TV, telephone and other communications media will integrate so much that we would not be able to say which is what anymore ...

We have already arrived at a stage in Malta where practically every family member has a TV set of his own, where there is a TV set in the kitchen, living room and bedroom, which in turn, gives a wider scope to the industry. Although this may not be nationwide yet, it is still a new phenomenon where ‘every person has a TV set and not every family [of three/four members]’. This implies that at any one time, you may have three/four people in the house watching four sets and watching four different programmes. TV-watching has become more of a solitary action nowadays ...”

Mgr. Fortunato Mizzi is of the opinion that the Internet will determine the future of broadcasting:

“ ... The Internet will definitely be one of the major factors which will determine the future of broadcasting. One cannot keep the Internet, radio stations, TV stations and other communications media separate. They will all be integrated. I think that the radio-listeners and televviewers are already becoming more mature, more responsible and more discerning. And by time, the more we mature the more will we be able to make the right choice as to what to watch, listen and read. Also, the broadcaster will be faced

with more challenging situations which require more responsibility from his end ...”

Mr Charles Xuereb envisages that:

“ ... Technology will overcome everything else. Once interactive television is introduced in Malta, all the local TV stations, *Maltacom*, *Melita Cable* will be interested in interactive TV. Hence we will be having a ‘work station at home’ where television will be only one of these interactive services and the popularity television currently enjoys today will definitely subside ...”

According to the *Malta Satellite Broadcasting Centre [MSBC]*, which was founded in Malta earlier this year and which is involved in the provision of ‘interactive television-viewing,’ [web site: <http://www.msbc.tv> - 3 April 2001]:

“ ... The present decade is clearly defined as a time of revolution in the television and communications industry. Digital and interactive television is geared to completely change the way people will use their television set and other communication and entertainment tools. The iTV industry is predicted to be the Number One emerging market with an incredible growth potential ...”

In fact, *MSBC* is currently involved in the development of a number of projects to produce and distribute entertaining, user-oriented and commercially feasible television content with the potential for present and future interactivity. The Author spoke with Mr Andreas F Forsthuber, managing director of *MSBC*. Mr Forsthuber has some clear ideas on the concept of ‘interactive television’ and the potential benefits it may bring to the viewer:

“ ... Interactive TV, in my opinion is the merge between the Internet which, at present, not everyone is using and

normal TV, which both Internet users and TV viewers will start using. As it stands today, full service TV, like the Maltese *TVM*, and Italian *RAI*, *Canale 5*, *Rete 4*, etc. offer its viewers a mix of information, entertainment, sports, news, education, etc. Very soon, TV will become more segmented and focused in terms of ‘entertainment’ as it will offer entertainment on demand. A televiewer will not watch a movie when the programme on say, *TVM*, actually allows him. As a televiewer, I will watch the programme I want to watch, at the time I want to watch it and if I want, I can watch it 25 times over. So, the TV channels, as such, will offer only news, sports news and discussion programmes ...”

When asked whether the televiewer will be able to participate in a live discussion programme, via interactive television, Mr Forsthuber affirmed:

“ ... One of the major applications, which I think will pick up from the very start is exactly this. A televiewer can start interacting directly in the discussion programme by way of e-mail messages which ‘pop-up’ directly on screen. In America, televiewers normally have their TV set sitting on top of the computer screen in the same room and they can interact in the discussion programme immediately. In Europe, our computer is in the study and our TV is in the sitting room or bedroom, so the kind of interactivity which exists in the States, in Europe does not work. So, say, a televiewer is watching ‘*Xarabank*’ and wants to send an e-mail now, he would have to go to the study to send it. But, very shortly, by way of a small device, one can connect his keyboard to the TV set, but eventually there is also the potential that the televiewer may interact in the discussion by ‘voice’, i.e. by using a microphone. Of course, one can already interact by telephone, but it would be much easier to interact using a microphone ...

Europe is more technologically advanced than the States. 60% of the world's households who are today already using hardware, which, in theory, are able to interactive with TV, are Europeans, and the core market for interactive TV is the U.K. The number of digital TV households in UK that receive Pay TV packages has reached five million and the other markets are following very, very quickly and the market potential is increasing rapidly. There are 'digital TV receiver' devices which are currently being commercialized by manufacturers, which can be used for cable TV and satellite and which allow the televiewer to record up to 40 movies. This device also has on board a DVD player and it has two slots for the use of 'smart' cards, one for transmission access and one for the credit card. This means that the televiewer can also make payment transaction through this device. So, what this device will offer the televiewer is that, in the future, the broadcaster will not broadcast movies but will inform the televiewer that there is a whole range of movies on the server. The televiewer can download these movies. If the televiewer wants to watch a particular movie, he would have to pay for the movie he selects, say Lm1.00, and then pays via his credit card account ...

Another application would be that of offering the televiewer the possibility of booking a ticket for a holiday aboard and also pay by credit card via this device. Also, if the teleshopper wants to purchase that teleshopping offer, he can do so by paying through the system directly via credit card, without the need of using the telephone, without the need of going into the study to send an e-mail, etc. Once on the market, this device may be available for as little as \$450 ..."

***CHAPTER EIGHT***

***BROADCASTING PLURALISM IN MALTA -  
MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS***

In the light of the forgoing qualitative research and print media review, some interesting conclusions and observations may be drawn which characterize the major developments and effects of pluralism in television and radio broadcasting in Malta as perceived by the viewer/radio-listener and the broadcaster. These conclusions and observations may serve as a platform on which further in-depth qualitative research may be conducted on the subject.

***8.1 Broadcasting Pluralism – Some Developments***

***Wider Variety of Programmes and Improved Programming***

There is a consensus [96.4%] among viewers/radio-listeners on the advantages and benefits which were attained by the introduction of broadcasting pluralism in Malta. The main advantages of broadcasting pluralism as perceived by viewers/radio-listeners include ‘a much wider choice and variety of programmes’ and ‘improved programming standards as a result of competition among stations’. Also noted were the ‘positive increase in the number of and improved programming standards’ of Maltese productions on local television and ‘improved broadcasting standards of news bulletins’.

***Development of Independent Programme Production Houses***

One significant development which broadcasting pluralism contributed to is the setting up of a number of independent programme production houses, which, to date, amount to fourteen companies. These production houses believe that the secret of their success was largely due to their ability to ‘communicate effectively with their audience’, their risk-bearing attitude of venturing into new genres of productions

and their sheer love for drama, programme production and television. However, they claim that, although the market is already highly competitive, once a production manages to achieve a high viewership, broadcasting pluralism does contribute towards such production attaining higher negotiating power with the television station in that if it decides to leave the station, it can move to other stations, taking along with it the advertising revenue and the viewership it would have nurtured since its inception.

***Characteristics of a ‘Good’ Television/Radio Station***

A ‘good’ television or radio station is characterized by one which contains ‘good programme content’, broadcasts a ‘variety of programmes and shows’ and one which maintains ‘good programming standards and professionalism’. From a more ‘programme content’ perspective, televiewers/radio-listeners perceive a ‘good’ station as one which contains ‘good informative and educational programmes’, ‘good discussion programmes and talk shows’, ‘good news coverage’ and ‘good modern movies’. As for radio, audiences expect ‘good music content’.

***8.2 Institutionalised and Politicised Broadcasting***

The major reservations observed addressed more the methodology adopted [the ‘how’] television and radio broadcasting pluralism was introduced in Malta rather than whether it should have been introduced.

One major downside of broadcasting pluralism observed by both the viewer/listener and broadcaster and which emanates from the manner in which this pluralism was introduced is the overwhelming concentration of ‘political content’ and ‘political bias’ on local television and radio stations. Local stations in Malta are perceived as ‘political propaganda machines’ which ‘brainwash and manipulate their audiences’. This observation was made from the very inception of broadcasting pluralism when temporary licences were issued to three

‘national institutions’, two of which were Malta’s major political parties. Some respondents went as far as to note that there is no ‘real’ broadcasting pluralism in Malta because of this shortcoming.

In turn, this development gave rise to an unfortunate consequence in that, for many viewers and radio-listeners, broadcasting pluralism is perceived as being synonymous with political development and that broadcasting pluralism actually means the two major parties having their own television and radio stations.

### ***News Contents and Reporting***

Moreover, another adverse consequence of this development refers to the ‘content’ and ‘structure’ of news bulletins broadcast on local television and radio stations in that viewers/radio-listeners feel that news bulletins have become too politically biased and that they contain too much political content at the expense of not giving adequate coverage on ‘real’ non-political local and international events and happenings. So as to obtain a ‘true and fair’ view of news items and events, viewers/radio-listeners seem to be compelled to watch or listen to all news bulletins, i.e. those of the two major political stations and that of *TVM* and many a time, they feel they are being given inaccurate facts and ‘half-truths’.

### ***Independent Programme Production Houses***

From a production house’s perspective, buying airtime on or selling a production to a political television station, also renders an independent production house ‘political’. Viewers seem to assume that ‘farmed out’ programme productions, even if they do not contain any political content, are produced by politically-affiliated production houses and that these should work exclusively with one political station. However, this perception seems to be changing gradually.

### ***Viewers’ Programme-loyalty vs Station-loyalty***

As a direct consequence of pluralism in broadcasting, the viewer has become more programme-loyal than station-loyal. ‘People now

watch programmes and not TV stations'. In certain instances, television audiences have also become 'presenter-loyal' in that if a programme-presenter or talk show host moves to another station, his/her audiences switch station as well. Although this seems to be the prevailing trend, when Malta is addressing a major political issue, e.g. general elections, local council elections, the 'La Salle' incident, etc., both the broadcaster's programming schedule and viewer's TV-watching behavioural trends 'go haywire' which render the latter more 'station-loyal' until the issue is resolved or phased out. Moreover, local 'partisan politics' seems to be still 'very much engrained in our local culture' and this is still reflected in the televiewing patterns of some viewers, largely among the older-generation ones.

On the other hand, radio-listening behavioural patterns seem to be characterized by, on one end, a station-loyal radio audience, which is largely made up of ardent political party-loyals, who listen only to their preferred political station and on the other, a radio audience who opt to listen to the more 'neutral' non-politically affiliated stations. The majority of the latter type are the younger generation radio-listeners.

The two political parties' stations are aware of these prevailing televiewing and radio-listening behavioural patterns and both claim to be trying to retain 'a balancing act between the type of programmes their audiences want and programmes of political content' on their respective television stations. On the other hand, they admit that the 'programme content' of their radio stations is more targeted at the party-loyal radio-listener. Although there is nothing illegitimate with this policy, some respondents did comment that these stations should try to 'tone down' some of their partisan-political phone-in programmes which seem to aim to simply 'incite and excite' the listener.



### ***Allocating The Advertising Spend***

Nowadays, advertisers [commercial companies] seem to be allocating their advertising spend a hundred percent by programme and not by station. In the early years of broadcasting pluralism they strived to retain a politically impartial stand but nowadays ‘politics’ does not feature in their adspend allocation decision process. ‘Advertisers calculate the cost of exposure per person which, in turn, determines the manner in which they allocate their advertising expenditure’.

## ***8.3 Programming Standards***

### ***Television***

Local viewers perceive the effect of broadcasting pluralism on the level of quality of programme content broadcast on Maltese TV stations as positive. The ‘programme types’ they like watching most on television [or listening to on the radio, where applicable] include [in order of preference]: ‘discussion programmes/talk shows’, ‘foreign movies/soap operas’, ‘news/weather forecasts’, ‘Maltese drama’ and ‘current affairs/documentaries’.

Also, viewers feel that the level of quality of Maltese productions in terms of programming standards, quality, content and variety has improved; however, the overall ‘programme content’ standards reached are still rather low and there is considerable room for improvement. The improved quality standards were more evident in the production of ‘drama productions/series’, ‘news/weather forecasts’ and ‘discussion programmes/talk shows’ and ‘sports programmes’.

### ***Radio***

Although the ‘radio-listening’ respondents claimed to have observed a marked improvement in the quality of local radio broadcasting and programming, a significant 30% of the survey respondents indicated that they do not listen to radio.

Local radio seems to be predominantly perceived more as a ‘juke box’ and a ‘news update’ mass medium. In fact, radio-listeners have witnessed a very positive improvement in the quality standards of both ‘music programmes’ and ‘news/weather forecasts’ on local radio as a direct consequence of broadcasting pluralism.

***Main Ingredients of a ‘Quality Programme’***

There seems to be a consensus among viewers and broadcasters in what constitutes a ‘quality programme’. In terms of ‘programme content’, a ‘quality programme’ is one which manages to entertain, inform and educate and challenge the viewer; it is one which is ‘people-centred’ by addressing predominantly [directly or indirectly] ‘the family’ and other related social issues. It is also well-researched, fast-moving in terms of subject matter development and does not use ‘vulgar’ or foul language.

Moreover, in the case of a ‘quality’ discussion programme, the following ingredients also apply: it should be ‘open-text’, hosts good guest speakers to effectively represent the various views on the subject matter thus ensuring a balanced discussion; has a ‘continuation’ effect on its audience after it is broadcast and does not contain any ‘sensational’ stunts with the sole aim of increasing viewership ratings. Also, when televoting surveys are conducted, the survey results should be interpreted and communicated appropriately to its audience. In all of this, a ‘quality programme’ is one which ‘respects the viewer’.

Broadcasters commented that the ‘elitist’ perspective of the past, that a ‘quality programme’ is one which offers the viewer solely ‘intellectual’ and educational content is not applicable today.

***‘Good Taste’ Programming in Maltese Drama***

Viewers seem to appreciate ‘true-to-life’ Maltese drama. ‘Maltese drama’ placed third in terms of the viewers’ preferred ‘programme type’ ranking. However, ‘good taste’ programming in local teledrama seems to be perceived differently by viewers hailing from different

socio-economic backgrounds. Although viewers seem to enjoy ‘family-centred’ Maltese drama, they do not seem to be willing to see the ‘harsh reality of life’ on local television. Some broadcasters did solicit that audiences ought to become responsible and more capable of assessing the production ‘for what it really is’.

On the other hand, it was also commented that the broadcaster’s aim should not be to ‘shock’ the viewer with foul language and controversial and sensational scenes simply to increase viewership ratings. A degree of ‘respect, good taste and decency’ should always be maintained. Moreover, the broadcaster should also assume certain responsibilities when scheduling such programmes/series.

### ***‘Farmed Out’ Programming***

Although there is a consensus among broadcasters, programme producers and advertisers on the advantages to be attained from ‘farmed out’ programming, there seems to be conflicting ideas among them as to the manner in which programmes are to be ‘farmed out’ to independent production houses. Advertisers argue that ‘programming’ and ‘advertising and bartering’ are two separate issues and should be treated as such. Consequently, television stations should not sell ‘airtime’ but purchase ‘productions’ instead. On the other hand, production houses claim that producing a thirteen-episode production is a very expensive venture and needs sound financial backing. From a broadcaster’s perspective there seems to be divergent opinions on the subject as television stations are opting for different business arrangements with their production suppliers. From a viewer’s perspective, although the latter may not be fully conversant with the manner [who and how] in which these productions are being produced, viewers did observe distinct heterogeneous levels of quality programming standards among Maltese productions.

### ***Broadcasters’ Commitment to Improve Programming Schedules***

Broadcasting pluralism seems to have acted as a catalyst for local television station broadcasters to improve their programming schedules

and programming standards. The increased competition resulting from this pluralism is offering the televiewer a wide variety of programmes to choose from and is, in turn, continuously posing new challenges on the broadcaster to improve his/her station's programme scheduling and programme content standards. 'Competition makes you fight for viewership'.

### ***TV-Watching Behavioural Patterns***

What may be deemed as a rather negative impact of broadcasting pluralism is that TV-watching behavioural patterns of the family as 'a unit' seem to be changing. Every member of the family now seems to want to watch his/her own programme and hence ends up watching it alone on his/her own TV set. Consequently, the ownership of a second or even third TV set in one household seems to be on the increase and TV-watching has become more of a 'solitary past-time' than a 'family affair'.

## ***8.4 Enhanced Interactive Participation of Televiewer/ Radio-listener***

One major development of broadcasting pluralism is the creation of a whole new genre of discussion programmes and talk shows which, as indicated earlier, were rated as the 'preferred programme type' by the survey respondents. This new genre of programmes has, in turn, given rise to some new developments.

### ***Development of a 'Phone-in' Culture***

The development of a 'phone-in' culture in the local broadcasting sector was observed by both the viewer/listener and broadcaster. This new phone-in culture is 'contributing towards the moving away from a society where institutions are of utmost importance to a society where the ordinary man in the street is given more opportunity to express his opinions and more importantly, challenge the broadcaster'. With this enhanced interactive participation, the televiewer/radio-listener has

now become an ‘intermittent broadcaster’ who is actually influencing the radio or television ‘text’ by making an actual contribution to it.

Although, in theory, the radio-listener respondents perceive ‘phone-ins’ as a positive development, they feel that phone-in callers seem to have ‘become more of a club’ than anything else. The same callers seem to call in on practically all the programmes on all stations. Also, they feel that the quality and contribution of these ‘phone-ins’ are still very low which, in turn, are lowering the quality standards of these discussion programmes.

### ***Informative and Educational Content***

Some viewers and radio-listeners commented on the contribution of local Maltese discussion/phone-in programmes towards the promotion and awareness of ‘gender’ issues and ‘family values’. Many of these programmes are perceived by viewers/radio-listeners as highly educational and informative, hence contributing greatly to the latter’s personal development. Local media broadcasting seems to be becoming increasingly ‘sensitive’ to family values and other social issues.

### ***‘Real-Life’ Personal Experience and Grievance***

Another salient observation made is that discussion programmes and talk shows on local television and radio are giving the ‘ordinary man in the street’ the opportunity of sharing his personal experience and grievance on air which may be the same as those of viewers and radio-listeners. On today’s broadcast media, the viewer/radio-listener is not only watching and listening to social, moral and other issues being discussed by institutions, government, experts, professionals, etc, but he/she is being presented with a more tangible and humane perspective to these issues via ‘first-hand’, ‘real-life’ personal experiences and grievances of ‘private’ individuals who have suffered hardships, injustices, etc., hence rendering such programmes more ‘real’ and ‘people-centred’.

On the other hand, some respondents feel that such ‘people-centred’ discussion programmes and talk shows tend to capitalize on the misery and mishaps of ‘private’ individuals to increase their popularity mileage and advertising revenue.

### ***Misuse of The Right To Freedom of Expression***

On the other hand, what was also observed is the potential abuse and misuse of the televiewer/radio-listener of this inherently powerful interactive medium and newly-acquired liberty which allows him/her to ‘freely express’ his/her opinion without giving due consideration to whether he/she is stating half-truths, unfounded facts or mud-slinging specific individuals. In this context, an interesting observation was made, not only with regard to the need to ‘protect’ the private individual ‘being attacked’ but also with regard to the need for ‘protecting’ the viewer/listener him/herself. Moreover, the older-generation televiewers/radio-listeners commented that nowadays they are finding it difficult to distinguish between what constitutes a ‘layman’s opinion’, an ‘informed/expert opinion’ and a ‘founded fact’ when watching/listening to a discussion programme/talk show.

This new genre of programming has imposed new responsibilities not only on the presenter or host of the programme *per se* but also on the television or radio station itself. In order to ‘proactively protect’ its viewers/listeners, the station has to assume full responsibility of its broadcasters’ behaviour and competence of conducting balanced and ‘good taste’ discussion programmes/talk shows and also of the appropriate scheduling of such programmes.

## **8.5 Broadcasting Standards**

### ***Television***

Televiewers feel that the local television stations’ broadcasting standards have improved as a direct result of the introduction of broadcasting pluralism in Malta. The highest scores obtained were those assessing the level of competence and professionalism of

‘presenters and hosts’ and ‘programme announcers’ while the lowest scores were obtained when the viewers were asked whether stations give adequate training to their broadcasters, presenters, hosts, etc. before the latter go ‘on air’ addressing a nationwide television audience.

### ***Radio***

With regards to ‘radio’, the mean responses attained compare well with those of television. The highest positive mean scores were attained when assessing the level of competence and professionalism of ‘programme presenters, hosts and announcers’ while the lowest score was attained when assessing the level of training given to these broadcasters.

### ***Availability and Training of Broadcasters***

Local broadcasters commented on the lack of supply of competent broadcasters and presenters on the local market. Some observed that the selection criteria adopted by some stations is not right. An individual with a ‘pretty face’ or one who sells advertising space does not automatically make him/her a competent broadcaster. Due to this lack of supply and the increase in the number of local television and radio stations, local talent is being dispersed among these stations. This has compelled stations to engage people whom they know were still ‘half-baked’ however they did not have any other alternative as they needed the ‘people to do the job’. This has resulted in local television and radio stations engaging individuals as broadcasters ‘who were never trained and who are not competent in this field’.

Also, practically all local stations admit that adequate training is not given to their broadcasters and when training is given, it normally takes the form of ‘on-the-job training’. The reason for this lack of training investment is fourfold: a. stations do not have sufficient funds to invest in training; b. many stations engage part-time broadcasters; c. stations are hesitant to sponsor individuals to undergo long-term intensive training programmes as nowadays individuals easily move to

other stations once their contract of employment expires or they are head-hunted by other stations. The latter reason has become a major deterrent for stations to invest in training; and d. television stations ‘farm out’ much of their productions/airtime to independent production houses and hence their training activity is focused only on their news room personnel and current affairs broadcasters.

### ***Training Opportunities for Broadcasters***

The University of Malta via its Centre for Communication Technology [CCT] offers formal tertiary education in communications studies however it does acknowledge the fact that although a student can obtain a good theoretical knowledge and background in the subject, he/she requires sound ‘on-the-job’ training and ‘hands-on’ experience before he/she becomes a good broadcaster. Moreover, a ‘natural aptitude’ and flair apart from training is also essential to succeed in media broadcasting. Tertiary education ‘offers an individual a headstart on others in that what non-graduates normally take three years to learn, a university graduate would take six months’. Moreover, all local television and radio stations do acknowledge that the University’s CCT is producing good graduates with talent potential however they still require ‘hands-on’ experience. They claim that a formal degree in communications alone does not render an individual a competent broadcaster.

## ***8.6 News Coverage and Reporting***

### ***Television***

Telev viewers feel that broadcasting pluralism had a positive effect on the level of broadcasting standards of news coverage and reporting of local television stations. They have observed improved levels of ‘competence and professionalism of newscasters and journalists’ and the broadcasting standards of the ‘graphical illustrations’ of weather forecasts have also improved. A relatively low score was given when assessing the ‘factual and objective’ nature of news coverage of news bulletins on local television. In fact, many telev viewers claim that local



news coverage has become too politically biased and that it contains too much political content.

### ***Radio***

Similar qualitative research findings were observed on local radio's news coverage and reporting standards. The effect of broadcasting pluralism on radio news coverage was also deemed positive however low ratings were given on the 'factual and objective' nature of this news coverage. Radio-listeners also commented that local radio news coverage is too politically biased and that it contains too much political content.

### ***Competence of Newscasters and Journalists***

As seen in the case of broadcasters, local television and radio stations encounter the same problems when recruiting competent newscasters and journalists due to their short supply. In fact, some stations feel that the problem is intensified here. 'The worst broadcasters, in terms of lack of professionalism, are in the news reporting section.' With regards to their training, at present, there are very few training programmes available in journalism. Moreover, it appears that university graduates seem to be opting for the more 'glamorous side' of communications such as PR, advertising, etc. It also appears that the career opportunities being offered by local television and radio stations are not meeting university graduates' career aspirations and expectations, particularly due to these stations' political slants in their news reporting.

The viewers and radio-listeners' perceptions were affirmed by the broadcasters in that news coverage and reporting contains political bias and too much political content thus rendering these news bulletins too long. They seem to report the same news items again and again, particularly when it comes to political events coverage and seem to focus more on the 'interests of the institutions' rather than those of the private individual; all this at the expense of producing little coverage on 'real' local and international events and happenings.

**8.7 Broadcasting and Programming Standards of The Public Broadcasting Sector**

***TVM and Radju Malta***

The majority [79.6%] of viewers/radio-listeners observed a significant improvement in the level of broadcasting standards of the public broadcasting sector [*PBS – TVM and Radju Malta*]. This improvement was mainly due to these public stations' better programming and their wide variety of programmes being broadcast thus offering their audience a wider choice.

Broadcasters also noted significant improvements in *PBS*' programming and broadcasting standards. In spite of the organizational and financial problems it is currently encountering it is now offering more programmes that cater for the different tastes of its target audiences. As a 'public broadcaster' it has moved away from its previous 'I will produce what I think is best for my audiences' position to one where it asks 'What do my audiences want?' and this transition came about as a direct consequence of competition as one broadcaster put it, "Our [*PBS*'] competitors are coming up with something new so we need to get something different ...". Broadcasters also commented that although its standards did improve, given that *PBS* is a state organization which obtains its funds from government and from advertising commercials, they do feel that here *PBS* is not playing on a level playing field, as its advantageous position well exceeds the costs of its 'basic public station obligations'.

***PBS vs Private Commercial TV and Radio Stations***

**□ *Broadcasting and Programming Standards***

Viewers/radio-listeners consider *PBS* to have achieved better quality standards in terms of programme content and broadcasting standards, when compared to private commercial television and radio stations. They also expressed their positive views on the level of quality of discussion programmes and talk shows offered by *PBS*.

Telev viewers also observed that there were many good productions on *PBS* which have now moved to other stations. What telev viewers perceive of low quality are *PBS*' 'foreign productions' [movies/programmes] and 'adult theme foreign productions' when compared to those of private television stations.

□ ***News Coverage and Reporting Standards***

With regards to news coverage and reporting standards, *PBS* is perceived by telev viewers/radio-listeners to have managed to retain good quality standards when compared to those of private commercial stations. In fact, *PBS*' news bulletin is perceived as the best news production in terms of factual and objective content although in terms of presentation and technical standards, *NET News* seems to be perceived as the most advanced.

As regards the competence of newscasters and reporters, *PBS*' news room seems to be perceived by telev viewers/radio-listeners as the most professional and experienced. However, many did comment that *PBS*' newscasters are not very presentable, lack much dress-sense and tend to be too old-fashioned. Fresh blood and new faces are definitely required at *PBS*.

□ ***Advertising Standards***

Telev viewers/radio-listeners perceive *PBS*' advertising standards as 'good' when compared to those of private commercial stations except for the level of quality of tele/radio-shopping programmes which received low ratings.

**8.8 Cable Television vs Terrestrial Television**

The majority [92.6%] of telev viewers agreed with the introduction of cable television in Malta largely because it offers them a wider choice of foreign stations and programmes and a better television reception. 57.2% of local telev viewers viewed the impact of the introduction of cable television on terrestrial television as favourable because due to

increased competition, the latter is now offering its viewers a wider variety of quality programmes and it also had to improve its programming standards. Also, viewers obtained a better television reception via cable. 35% of viewers feel that the impact was negative largely because terrestrial television lost audiences to cable television.

77.6% of viewers feel that there should be more than one cable television operator as this would offer them a better cable television service, a wider choice of stations and programmes and better rates and packages.

Viewers claimed that satellite dish ownership not only had a negative impact on terrestrial television but also on cable television. One viewer commented that ‘cable television will eventually also die a natural death as *Rediffusion* did in the past’.

## **8.9 Broadcasting Revenue and Advertising Standards**

### ***Size of Market***

In 1990, the aggregate advertising market, which incorporates broadcast and print media, stood at Lm4 million. Today, ten years later, the market is worth around Lm12 million. According to the last NTC official figures in 1998, the market stood at Lm9 million which means that over an eight-year period [1990-1998] Malta’s aggregate adspend had doubled. In 1998, Malta ranked 36<sup>th</sup> among the countries in the world in terms of the highest total advertising expenditure per capita, which stood at US\$62.6.

### ***Advertising Standards***

#### **□ *The Viewer/Radio-listener’s Perspective***

Contrary to the other research areas, viewers’ perceptions on the effect of broadcasting pluralism on the level of quality of advertising standards of local television stations rated comparatively low. The

lowest rating scores addressed the level of quality of teleshopping programmes in terms of concept development and production. Also rated low was the duration mix between television programmes and advertising commercials. Televiewers find the duration of advertising airtime on television as excessive and very annoying. Also rated average were the levels of quality attained by ‘promotional competitions’ and ‘competition and lottery prizes’ which seem to leave much to be desired on certain television stations.

The radio-listeners’ perceptions on advertising standards proved to be very similar to those of the television stations’ scenario. Once again the radio-listeners’ lowest mean ratings addressed the levels of quality attained by ‘competition and lottery prizes’ offered by local radio stations, ‘radio-shopping programmes’ and ‘promotion competitions’.

□ ***Televiewers/Radio-listeners’ Phone-ins Participation***

Televiewers were asked whether they have ever participated [at least once] in any of the following interactive television participation, namely: TV phone-in competitions, televoting question surveys, phone-in TV discussion programmes and other types of phone-in participations [donations and teleshopping] on television stations. The affirmative response for all four types of participations was very poor and stood at: 12.4%, 24.6%, 9.6% and 2.6% respectively. The stations televiewers participated on most frequently, included *TVM* and *Super One TV*.

Once again, very low participation of radio-listeners in phone-in participation was noted. The very low percentage response was very evident in all three types of interactive participations, namely: phone-in competitions, radio-voting question surveys and phone-in radio discussion programmes, where only 4%, 2.4% and 6.8% respectively of radio-listeners participated in interactive phone-ins at least once. The radio stations which listeners participated on most include *Radju Malta*, *Super One Radio* and *RTK*.

❑ ***The Advertiser's Perspective***

Marketing communications [advertising] agencies question the long-term commercial sustainability of many television and radio stations operating in Malta. From an advertiser's [commercial company] viewpoint, its choice of broadcast media on which to advertise has increased substantially. In fact, broadcasting pluralism has given the smaller commercial companies the possibility of advertising on television and radio which was too expensive for them to do in the past. However, this does not mean that these companies' advertising budgets have increased at the same rate at which the number of local broadcast stations has increased. Local television and radio stations seem to have 'sold themselves short' by significantly lowering their advertising rates which have and are still threatening their long-term commercial sustainability.

Two other interesting developments in this area are that: a. over the ten-year period, the new private commercial television and radio stations did not take any of *PBS' TVM* advertising revenue, that is, commercial entities did not reallocate their adspend from *PBS' TVM* to the new stations but have actually increased their advertising expenditure; and b. as broadcasting pluralism increased the choice of stations and programmes, new audiences were created which commercial companies can now target more effectively. This means that commercial companies now have a wider range of programmes they can allocate their adspend on.

❑ ***The Broadcaster's Perspective***

It appears that it is only now, ten years after broadcasting pluralism was introduced, that local television and radio stations seem to be breaking even. Some stations however are still loss-making. 'Running a radio station is not a licence to print money' as one broadcaster commented. Local stations are also trying 'to play an impossible game, that of increasing the number of broadcasting hours and at the same time reducing their costs. The broadcasting sector has become a highly competitive sector and operating a station requires a high

capital investment, a lot of hard work, a good and dedicated broadcasting and technical team, a good sales team and above all, a station should be able to offer ‘a good product offer’ both to its advertisers and its audiences.

### **8.10 The Future of Broadcasting Pluralism in Malta**

#### ***The Next Five to Ten years***

Some 54% of viewers/radio-listeners think that the future of the local broadcasting sector looks positive primarily because it will keep on improving as a direct consequence of increasing competition and due to better programming standards. Only 6% forecast a ‘negative’ and bleak future. The remaining balance did not have an opinion.

When asked for their views on the impact of local broadcasting sector, should Malta become a member of the European Union [EU], 20.8% forecast a positive impact and 3.4% expect a negative impact however a significant 75.8% either do not have an opinion or think that Malta’s entry in the EU would not affect the country’s broadcasting sector.

#### ***The Future of The Public Broadcasting Sector***

##### **□ *The Viewer/Radio-Listener’s Perspective***

With regards to the future of the public broadcasting sector in Malta, 36.4% of viewers/radio-listeners claim that its future looks positive and that *PBS*’ role will remain important in the local broadcasting sector however it will still need to improve its broadcasting and programming standards. On the other hand, 13.4% feel that this sector’s future looks bleak. 50.2% did not have an opinion or perceive no future changes in the sector.

##### **□ *The Broadcaster’s Perspective***

Some broadcasters commented on how such a ‘tiny island with a microscopic population has managed to sustain so many television and radio stations for so long’. They feel that ‘broadcasting pluralism is

here to stay and that there is no turning back'. However, in the next five to ten years, one will experience a 'shakedown' in the local broadcasting sector where stations will 'be filtered' and will be compelled to 'trim up' resulting in the 'survival of the fittest'. There is not enough advertising funds to sustain all the local television and radio stations even though the 'advertising revenue cake' has increased.

### ***The Future of Independent Production Houses***

Production houses claim that local television will definitely increase its 'farming out' of productions/airtime. However even in this sector, production houses are already experiencing cut-throat competition which will also lead to the 'survival of the fittest'. The 'fittest' will be those production houses which succeed in 'moving with the times', 'communicate effectively with their audiences and obtain their feedback' and 'meet their tastes' by 'offering quality entertainment'.

### ***Should The Church Have Its Own TV Station?***

There were some mixed feelings on whether the Church should open its own television station, however there seems to be a consensus among viewers and broadcasters that the Church should have more of a presence on broadcast media either by opening its own television station or by using the existing stations' airtime. By opting for the latter option, it would be 'targeting new audiences who it is not currently tapping with its existing communication media'.

Moreover, some viewers feel that should the Church increase its presence on the television broadcast media, it should ensure that it broadcasts its teachings and 'formal' standing on the issues being discussed and not of 'individual priests' or religious people who 'express their own personal views' which may not be congruent with the Church's teachings.



***The Role of the Broadcasting Authority***

28.6% of viewers/radio-listeners claimed that the Broadcasting Authority is achieving its role particularly because it is succeeding in maintaining adequate balance and impartiality and because broadcasting standards have improved. 2.8% gave a conditional yes due to its seemingly political bias while 15% feel that the Authority is not achieving its role predominantly because of its apparent political bias when making decisions. A significant and worrying 51% claimed that they did not know what the role of the Authority is or did not have an opinion.

Some audiences claimed that the Authority is assuming too much the role of a ‘watchdog’ for stations to abide by its balance and impartiality rules while it is not doing anything actively towards enhancing local broadcasting, programming and advertising standards.

□ ***The Broadcaster’s Perspective***

Broadcasters have metaphorically described the Authority as a ‘watchdog’, a ‘dinosaur’, a ‘monster’, a ‘fund-raiser’ and a ‘set of teeth/dentures’. Some broadcasters do feel that the Authority is achieving its role in that it is becoming increasingly pro-active with regards to conducting qualitative and quantitative research, introducing more gender awareness in broadcasting, etc.. However, the majority of broadcasters wish to see the Authority’s role and scope augmented to that of a ‘guide, a ‘mentor’ and ‘educator’ and to focus more on ‘safeguarding the viewer/radio-listener’s rights and interests’ rather than limiting its role [as it is presently doing] to simply monitoring advertising airtime, issuing fines and retaining balance and impartiality which is making it take certain measures that are ‘going to ridiculous proportions’.

***The Future of Cable Television***

40% of viewing audiences perceive cable television’s future as positive in that there will be more competition which will, in turn, offer them a wider choice of better packages and better prices. 24.4%

see its future as negative primarily because they feel that satellite will take over and 35.2% did not have an opinion on the issue.

***Interactive Television – The Future of Television-viewing***

Although they are aware that ‘interactive television’ [iTV] will revolutionise television-viewing in Malta, few viewers know the real benefits to be derived from it. Broadcasters also perceive that iTV will ‘completely change the way individuals will use their television set and other communication and entertainment tools’. 60% of the world’s households, who are today already using hardware, which in theory, is able to interact with television, are Europeans and the core market for iTV is UK.

One major advantage of iTV to viewers is that they can select a programme they want to watch and they can watch it for twenty times or more if they so wish. In terms of programme content, television stations will only offer viewers news bulletins, sports news and discussion programmes. Viewers will have one ‘work station at home’ where ‘television will only be one of the many interactive services offered to the private individual and the popularity television currently enjoys today will definitely subside’.



## AUDIENCE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Name of Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### 1. RESPONDENT PROFILE

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Male/Female: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Age bracket: 16-30: _____	Marital Status: Single	: _____
31-45: _____	Married [no children]	: _____
46-60: _____	Widow/er	: _____
61+ : _____	Separated/Divorced	: _____
	No children	: _____
	With children [Qty]	: _____

Occupation : \_\_\_\_\_ Full-time: \_\_\_\_\_ Part-time: \_\_\_\_\_

Student: Indicate level: \_\_\_\_\_

Housewife : \_\_\_\_\_

Pensioner : \_\_\_\_\_

Number of persons in household : \_\_\_\_\_

In your household, do you have:

Number of TV sets	: _____ qty
Terrestrial TV only	: _____
Cable TV. If yes, which package?	: _____
A satellite dish	: _____
Other	: _____

[Note: If the respondent does not have a TV at home, close interview]

**2. TV WATCHING AND RADIO LISTENING BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS**

On average, how many hours of TV do you watch every day during the week? \_\_\_\_\_ hrs

On average, how many hours of TV do you watch every day in the weekend? \_\_\_\_\_ hrs

Do you normally watch TV alone or in company [family or friends]? Alone \_\_\_\_\_ In Comp \_\_\_\_\_

On average, how many hours of Radio do you listen to every day during the week? \_\_\_\_\_ hrs

On average, how many hours of Radio do you listen to every day in the weekend? \_\_\_\_\_ hrs

Do you listen to the radio mostly at work or at home? At work \_\_\_\_\_ At Home \_\_\_\_\_

How often do you switch channels when watching TV? Every \_\_\_\_\_ mins Every \_\_\_\_\_ hrs

How often do you switch channels when listening to the radio? Every \_\_\_\_\_ mins Every \_\_\_\_\_ hrs

When you claim that a TV Station or a Radio Station is 'very good' [tajjeb hafna], on what criteria would you base your statement? [Mention at least 3 criteria]

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_ 5. \_\_\_\_\_ 6. \_\_\_\_\_

Rate the following programmes [TV & Radio] in order of preference:

[1 being your most favourite and 15 being your least favourite]

**Rating**

Children's programmes/Cartoons	_____
Cultural programmes [arts & literature]	_____
Current affairs/documentaries	_____
Discussion programmes/Talk shows	_____
Movies/TV series/soap operas [foreign]	_____
Health programmes	_____
Maltese drama productions/Series	_____
Music programmes	_____
News/Weather Forecasts	_____
Religious programmes	_____
Political broadcasts/programmes	_____
Situation Comedies/Comedies [foreign]	_____
Sports programmes	_____
Variety shows/Phone-in Programmes/Quiz Shows	_____
Women's programmes	_____

**3. PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTS OF BROADCASTING PLURALISM [TV AND RADIO]**

As you are aware, 10 years ago [with the enactment of the Broadcasting Act of 1991], broadcasting licences were given to new TV and Radio Stations. Do you agree with the introduction of pluralism in TV and Radio broadcasting? [i.e. that there are more Maltese TV stations and Radio Stations you watch/listen to].

**If yes,** Why? In your opinion, what advantages/benefits did this pluralism bring in TV viewing and Radio listening? [Mention at least 3 advantages/benefits]

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**If No,** Why? What disadvantages did this pluralism bring? [Mention at least 3 disadvantages]

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## 4.1 MALTESE TV - PROGRAMME CONTENT

In your opinion, keeping in mind **Maltese TV stations only** [view list], how has the pluralism in TV broadcasting affected the following:

Level of quality standards of broadcasting & programming reached	very low				very high
	1	2	3	4	5
Level of diversity/variety/mix of programme content	very low				very high
	1	2	3	4	5
Mix between Maltese productions & foreign productions	very low				very high
	1	2	3	4	5
Level of quality of foreign productions [movies/documentaries]	very low				very high
	1	2	3	4	5
Level of quality of 'adult theme' foreign productions [violence, sex, horror, etc.]	very low				very high
	1	2	3	4	5
Image/role of 'the family' portrayed on Maltese TV stations	very low				very high
	1	2	3	4	5
Image/role of 'the male' portrayed on Maltese TV stations	very low				very high
	1	2	3	4	5
Image/role of 'the female' portrayed on Maltese TV stations	very low				very high
	1	2	3	4	5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Level of quality of Maltese productions:  
[in terms of programme concept, originality, etc.]

very low      very high

Children's programmes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Cultural programmes [arts & literature]	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Current affairs/Documentaries	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Discussion programmes/Talk shows	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Health programmes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Maltese drama productions/Series	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Music programmes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
News/Weather Forecasts	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Religious programmes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Political programmes/broadcasts	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Sports programmes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Variety shows/Phone-in Programmes/Quiz Shows	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Women's programmes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

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## 4.2 MALTESE TV - NEWS COVERAGE AND REPORTING

In your opinion, keeping in mind **Maltese TV stations only** [view list], how has the pluralism in TV broadcasting affected the following:

Type of news coverage [‘real’ news, ‘sensational’ news, ‘gossip’ news, etc.]	Very bad				very good
	1	2	3	4	5

Immediacy and accuracy of news coverage	Very bad				very good
	1	2	3	4	5

Factual and objective news coverage	Very low				very high
	1	2	3	4	5

Level of quality of news coverage and reporting by journalists [i.e. write-up feature, filming, editing, etc.]	Very low				very high
	1	2	3	4	5

Level of competence/professionalism of news anchorpersons/newscasters	Very low				very high
	1	2	3	4	5

Level of broadcasting standards of ‘weather forecasts’ [production of contents, graphics, etc.]	Very low				very high
	1	2	3	4	5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

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## 4.3 MALTESE TV - BROADCASTING STANDARDS

In your opinion, keeping in mind **Maltese TV stations only** [view list], how has the pluralism in TV broadcasting affected the following:

Level of competence/professionalism of programme announcers	Very low	very high
	1 2 3 4 5	
Level of competence/professionalism of presenters and hosts [discussion programmes, talk shows, quiz shows, etc.]	Very low	very high
	1 2 3 4 5	
Level of language fluency of broadcasters [Maltese or English – where relevant]	Very low	very high
	1 2 3 4 5	
Mix of broadcasters, presenters, talk show hosts, etc.	Very bad	very good
	1 2 3 4 5	
Training given to broadcasters, presenters, hosts, etc. [interviewee's opinion on whether these receive adequate training]	Very low	very high
	1 2 3 4 5	

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

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## 4.4 MALTESE TV - ADVERTISING STANDARDS

In your opinion, keeping in mind **Maltese TV stations only** [view list], how has the pluralism in TV broadcasting affected the following:

Level of quality of advertising commercials/promotions [concept, production]	very low      very high 1   2   3   4   5
Level of quality of teleshopping programmes [concept, production]	very low      very high 1   2   3   4   5
Duration mix between TV progs & advertising commercials/proms	very bad      very good 1   2   3   4   5
Level of quality of promotional competitions [concept, originality]	very low      very high 1   2   3   4   5
Level of quality of competition and lottery prizes	very low      very high 1   2   3   4   5
Image/role of 'the family' portrayed on adverts/promotions	very negative      very positive 1   2   3   4   5
Image/role of 'the male' portrayed on adverts/promotions	very negative      very positive 1   2   3   4   5
Image/role of 'the female' portrayed on adverts/promotions	very negative      very positive 1   2   3   4   5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

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To date, have you ever participated in:

- a. A TV phone-in competition [to win prize only]:

No: \_\_\_\_\_ If Yes, mention TV station/s: \_\_\_\_\_

- b. A televoting question survey [to air your views/opinion and win prize]:

No: \_\_\_\_\_ If Yes, mention TV station/s: \_\_\_\_\_

- c. A phone-in TV discussion programme [to air your views only with no prize]:

No: \_\_\_\_\_ If Yes, mention TV station/s: \_\_\_\_\_

- d. Other: \_\_\_\_\_ Mention TV station/s: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **5. IMPACT OF CABLE TV ON TERRESTRIAL TV**

Do you agree with the introduction of Cable TV in Malta? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

In your opinion, since its introduction in 1991, what impact has Cable TV made on Terrestrial TV [all Maltese TV stations except for Max Plus TV Station]? Favourable or adverse? In what ways?

**If Favourable**, in what ways? \_\_\_\_\_

**If Unfavourable**, in what ways? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think there should be more than one Cable TV service provider in Malta?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

In your opinion, what impact has the 'Satellite Dish' made on Terrestrial TV in Malta?

\_\_\_\_\_

## 6.1 MALTESE RADIO - PROGRAMME CONTENT

In your opinion, keeping in mind **Maltese Radio stations only** [view list], how has the pluralism in Radio broadcasting affected the following

Level of quality standards of broadcasting & programming reached

very low      very high  
1 2 3 4 5

Level of diversity/variety/mix of programme content

very low      very high  
1 2 3 4 5

Level of quality of 'adult theme' discussion programmes  
[sex, horror, etc.]

very low      very high  
1 2 3 4 5

Image/role of 'the family' portrayed on Maltese Radio stations

very negative      very positive  
1 2 3 4 5

Image/role of 'the male' portrayed on Maltese Radio stations

very negative      very positive  
1 2 3 4 5

Image/role of 'the female' portrayed on Maltese Radio stations

very negative      very positive  
1 2 3 4 5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

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Level of quality of Maltese Radio productions:  
[in terms of programme concept, originality, etc.]

very low      very high

Children's programmes	1	2	3	4	5
Cultural programmes [arts & literature]	1	2	3	4	5
Current affairs/Documentaries	1	2	3	4	5
Discussion programmes/Talk shows	1	2	3	4	5
Health programmes	1	2	3	4	5
Maltese radio drama productions/Series	1	2	3	4	5
Music programmes	1	2	3	4	5
News/Weather forecasts	1	2	3	4	5
Religious programmes	1	2	3	4	5
Political programmes/broadcasts	1	2	3	4	5
Sports programmes	1	2	3	4	5
Variety shows/Phone-in Programmes/Quiz Shows	1	2	3	4	5
Women's programmes	1	2	3	4	5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

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## 6.2 MALTESE RADIO - NEWS COVERAGE AND REPORTING

In your opinion, keeping in mind **Maltese Radio stations only** [view list], how has the pluralism in Radio broadcasting affected the following:

Type of news coverage ['real' news, 'sensational' news, 'gossip' news, etc.]	Very bad    very good
	1   2   3   4   5

Immediacy and accuracy of news coverage	Very bad    very good
	1   2   3   4   5

Level of factual and objective news coverage	Very low    very high
	1   2   3   4   5

Level of quality of news coverage and reporting by journalists [i.e. write-up feature, editing, etc.]	Very low    very high
	1   2   3   4   5

Level of competence/professionalism of news anchorpersons/newscasters	Very low    very high
	1   2   3   4   5

Level of broadcasting standards of 'weather forecasts' [production text]	Very low    very high
	1   2   3   4   5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

**6.3 RADIO - BROADCASTING STANDARDS**

In your opinion, keeping in mind **Maltese Radio stations only** [view list], how has the pluralism in Radio broadcasting affected the following:

Level of competence/professionalism of programme announcers

Very low      very high  
1   2   3   4   5

Level of competence/professionalism of presenters and hosts  
[discussion programmes, chat shows, quiz shows, etc.]

Very low      very high  
1   2   3   4   5

Level of language fluency of broadcasters  
[Maltese or English – where relevant]

Very low      very high  
1   2   3   4   5

Level of mix of broadcasters, presenters, talk show hosts, etc.

Very low      very high  
1   2   3   4   5

Training given to broadcasters, presenters, comperes, etc.  
[interviewee's opinion on whether these receive adequate training]

Very low      very high  
1   2   3   4   5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## 6.4 MALTESE RADIO - ADVERTISING STANDARDS

In your opinion, keeping in mind **Maltese Radio stations only** [view list], how has the pluralism in Radio broadcasting affected the following:

Level of quality of advertising commercials/promotions [concept, production]	Very low      very high 1   2   3   4   5
Level of quality of radioshopping programmes [concept, production]	Very low      very high 1   2   3   4   5
Duration mix bet. Radio progs & advertising commercials/proms.	Very low      very high 1   2   3   4   5
Level of quality of promotional competitions [concept, originality]	Very low      very high 1   2   3   4   5
Level of quality of competition and lottery prizes	Very low      very high 1   2   3   4   5
Image/role of 'the family' portrayed on adverts/promotions	very negative      very positive 1   2   3   4   5
Image/role of 'the male' portrayed on adverts/promotions	very negative      very positive 1   2   3   4   5
Image/role of 'the female' portrayed on adverts/promotions	very negative      very positive 1   2   3   4   5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

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To date, have you ever participated in:

- a. A radio phone-in competition [to win prize only]:

No: \_\_\_\_\_ If Yes, mention Radio station/s: \_\_\_\_\_

- b. A radiovoting question survey [to air your views/opinion and win prize]:

No: \_\_\_\_\_ If Yes, mention Radio station/s: \_\_\_\_\_

- c. A phone-in radio discussion programme [to air your views only with no prize]:

No: \_\_\_\_\_ If Yes, mention Radio station/s: \_\_\_\_\_

- d. Other: \_\_\_\_\_ Mention Radio station/s: \_\_\_\_\_

**7. PUBLIC BROADCASTING SERVICES VS PRIVATE COMMERCIAL TV AND RADIO STATIONS**

In your opinion, has the level of broadcasting standards/quality of PBS [TVM and Radio Malta] improved or diminished with the introduction [i.e. as a direct consequence of competition] of pluralism in TV and radio broadcasting?

If 'Improved', In what way? \_\_\_\_\_

If 'Diminished', in what way? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you agree with the closure of Radio Malta 2 Station?

If yes \_\_\_\_\_, If No \_\_\_\_\_, Why? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you rate the level of quality of PBS [TVM and Radio Malta] as compared to the private Maltese TV and Radio stations in terms of:

Level of quality standards of broadcasting and programming	very low	very high
	1 2 3 4 5	

Level of diversity/variety/mix of programme content	very bad	very good
	1 2 3 4 5	

Mix between Maltese productions and foreign productions	very bad	very good
	1 2 3 4 5	

Level of quality of foreign productions [movies/documentaries]	very low	very high
	1 2 3 4 5	

Level of quality of 'adult theme' foreign productions [violence, sex, horror, etc.]	very low	very high
	1 2 3 4 5	

Image/role of 'the family, the 'male' & the 'female' portrayed	very negative	very positive
	1 2 3 4 5	

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Level of quality of Maltese productions  
[in terms of programme concept, originality, etc.]

very low      very high  
☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Level of quality of news coverage and reporting  
[type of news, immediacy, accuracy, objectivity]

very low      very high  
☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Level of competence/professionalism of news  
anchorpersons/newscasters

very low      very high  
☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Level of broadcasting standards of weather forecasts  
[production of contents, graphics, etc.]

very low      very high  
☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Level of discussion programmes and talk shows

very low      very high  
☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Level of quality of variety shows/phone-in progs/quiz shows

very low      very high  
☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Level of competence/professionalism of programme announcers

very low      very high  
☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Level of competence/professionalism of presenters and comperes  
[discussion programmes, talk shows, quiz shows, etc.]

very low      very high  
☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Mix of mix of broadcasters, presenters, talk show hosts, etc.

very low      very high  
☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Level of quality of advertising commercials/promotions  
[concept, production]

Very low    very high  
1   2   3   4   5

Level of quality of tele/radioshopping programmes  
[concept, production]

Very low    very high  
1   2   3   4   5

Duration mix between progs and advertising commercials/proms.

Very bad    very good  
1   2   3   4   5

Level of quality of promotional competitions and prizes offered

Very low    very high  
1   2   3   4   5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you think that increased competition in the TV & Radio Broadcasting Sector is beneficial:

a. To the Televiewer/Radio listener:

**If Yes,** Why: \_\_\_\_\_

**If No,** Why: \_\_\_\_\_

b. to the Broadcasting TV and Radio stations:

**If Yes,** Why: \_\_\_\_\_

**If No,** Why: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **8. BROADCASTING AUTHORITY'S ROLE**

Radio and TV broadcasting services in Malta fall under the supervision and control of the Broadcasting Authority. It regulates these broadcasting services to safeguard general broadcasting standards on behalf of the general public.

In your opinion, is the Broadcasting Authority achieving this role?

If yes, how: \_\_\_\_\_

If No, why do you think so? \_\_\_\_\_

I don't know: \_\_\_\_\_

**9. THE FUTURE OF TV AND RADIO BROADCASTING PLURALISM IN MALTA**

In the next 5 to 10 years, how do you think the TV and Radio broadcasting sector will be like in Malta?

---

What about the future of Cable TV in Malta?

---

What about the future of the Public Broadcasting Services [TV and Radio] in Malta?

---

If Malta enters in the EU, do you think this would have an impact on the TV and Radio broadcasting sector in Malta?

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**10. OTHER COMMENTS**

Are there any comments you would like to add?

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**TELEVISION AND RADIO STATIONS  
AS AT FEBRUARY 2001**

***Maltese Terrestrial TV Stations, Cable TV Stations and  
Maltese Radio Stations with nationwide transmission***

***TV - Maltese Stations***

TVM - PBS

Channel 12 - PBS

Super One TV

Net TV

Smash TV

Education 22 [Ministry of Education]

Max Plus TV [cable TV station]

***Maltese Radio Stations***

**[nationwide transmission]**

Malta Radio - PBS

FM Bronja - PBS

Super One Radio

RTK

Radio 101

Bay Radio

Island Sound Radio

Radio MAS

Capital Radio

Radio Calypso

Smash Radio

Radju Tal-Universita'

***TV - Melita Cable Stations***

Discovery Channel

Living

MTV Music TV

Sports Channel

Eurosport

CNN

BBC Prime

BBC World

Movie Channel

TV Guide

Animal Planet

Euronews

Sky News

Weather & Info

Nickelodeon

Cartoon Network

National Geographic

SAT 2000/EWTN

Reality TV

Muzzik

TVE Inter'l/Paramount Comedy Channel

TCM Classic Movies

Trouble/Bravo

TMC 1 & 2

CBMC

Travel Channel

RTL/Deutsche Welle

Fox Kids/TVE

Hallmark Ent

Fashion TV

Biography Channel

Granada UKTV

Bloomberg TV/MBC

Antenna Sicilia

VH - 1

Italia 7

TV5 Europe

TVE Teletna

Rete Sicilia

Telepiu Bianco

Telepiu Nero





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