

# QUALITY IN TELEVISION BROADCASTING

THE TELEVIEWERS' PERSPECTIVE

PROF MARILYN CLARK

DR JOANNA SPITERI



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MALTA  
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Quality in Television Broadcasting  
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## FOREWORD

Quality always implies a certain amount of subjectivity and although we hear and read comments about the quality of television programmes in Malta, we rarely stop and think what is behind these comments. The Broadcasting Authority has, over the years, carried out and commissioned a substantial amount of research with a view to ensuring that the quality of television broadcasting in Malta meets the standards which the viewer justly expects.

In today's ever changing media landscape it is even more important to get a clear understanding of what the viewer means when quality of local television programmes is being commented upon. One hardly needs to highlight the fact that the Maltese viewer today has a vast choice of programmes through different platforms at his/her disposal and watching locally produced programmes is definitely a matter of choice and not an imposition. Whilst it is a known fact that audience figures clearly indicate that a very high percentage of the Maltese population do watch local television, the viewer's expectations are also high and it is up to the programme producers to ensure that these expectations are met, if we wish to maintain the long term sustainability of Maltese television.

The Broadcasting Authority is required by the Broadcasting Act to carry out audience research to ascertain the state of public opinion concerning programmes included in the broadcasting services in Malta. It is with this aim in mind that the Broadcasting Authority thought it fit to commission this qualitative research, the results of which are contained in this report. Prof Marilyn Clark from the University of Malta and Dr Joanna Spiteri from the Broadcasting Authority took up this challenge and worked hard to bring out from participants in the focus groups they conducted the real viewers' perspective of quality. The participants taking part were chosen through a multi-stage selection process to reflect the widest possible cross-section of the Maltese population.

"Quality content" is defined differently not only across different jurisdictions but also amongst viewers within the same country. Quality content is acknowledged as important for a democratic society and has to be delivered not only by state-funded public broadcasters but also by commercial stations whose main source of income is advertising and sponsorship. Changes in consumption are putting pressure, and will

continue to do so, on all of these. It becomes even more important to ensure that these programme providers will remain incentivised to provide “quality” content irrespective of who offers them and how the station is funded. The issue of discoverability of quality content in an era of digital abundance is a critical challenge. It would be a grave mistake if we equate quality with numbers. Quality content is not always reflected only in high audience figures.

Fragmentation of resources and of audiences is not exactly conducive to quality content production on a small scale, when at the same time the viewer has an abundant choice of programmes coming from large scale producers with a much higher level of funding.

Whilst keeping in mind, the realities of our market, it is felt that local producers should keep on moving in their quest of producing quality content. Rather than resigning themselves to the fact that local funding is limited and this consequently impedes them from going for high-end quality productions they should carefully analyse what the viewer is saying and through their entrepreneurial skills produce content which they might even attempt to exploit further beyond our shores.

The Authority hopes that the results of this quality research would provide producers and television station managements that much needed information from the viewers’ point of view. The report seeks to elicit as much feedback as possible from the participants on what they expect from local programming.

Viewers clearly want choice. They have a variety of options available through multiple platforms including video-on demand facilities. All studies conducted both in Malta and overseas, however, clearly show that viewers still consider linear television as one of the primary options and therefore television has a bright future, only if producers and station owners ensure that they provide the viewer with quality content.

**Anthony J. Tabone**

*Chairman Broadcasting Authority - Malta*

# CONTENTS

<b>1. Conceptual Framework and Review of the Literature</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Why Quality?	7
1.2 What is Quality?	8
1.3 Types of Quality	9
1.4 Quality Indicators	12
1.5 The Role of the Broadcasting Authority	13
1.6 Quality TV	16
1.7 A Changing Media Landscape	16
<b>2. Methodology</b>	<b>19</b>
2.1 Aims and Objectives	19
2.2 Research Agenda	19
2.3 Research Design	19
2.4 Focus Group Sampling Design	19
2.5 Data Analytic Strategy	20
2.6 Ethical Considerations	20
2.7 Procedure	20
<b>3. Data Analysis</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1 Television Viewing Habits	21
3.2 What is Quality?	23
3.2.1 Technical Standards of Production	25
3.2.1.1 Sound, Camera Work, Direction and Editing	25
3.2.1.2 Professional Presenters and Actors	26
3.2.1.3 Innovation and Creativity	29
3.2.1.4 Commentary	31
3.3 Consumer Quality and the Market	31
3.4 Ritual and Communion	33
3.5 Active Citizenship, Truth and Fairness	35

3.6 Quality as Diversity	38
3.7 Advertising	41
<b>4. Conclusions</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>5. Recommendations</b>	<b>47</b>
5.1 Recommendations for Monitoring and Research	47
5.2 Recommendations for Regulation	47
5.3 Recommendations for Policy	48
<b>6. References</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>7. Appendices</b>	<b>53</b>

# 1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

## 1.1 Why Quality?

‘The modern broadcasting environment is characterized by the apparent irony of an explosion in the number of channels available to listeners and viewers and yet a general decline in the quality, and even diversity, of programme content.’  
Endorsement by Toby Mendel, UNESCO (2005)

The question of quality has consistently found itself on the agenda of a number of interest groups thinking about television, and constitutes an important area of cultural argument and contestation (Mulgan, 1990). Judgements are inescapable in society, and, while quality has come to mean different things to different interest groups, according to Mulgan, ‘it remains important to try to establish criteria, aesthetic or otherwise, for judging television’ (1990, p.6). Television is able to reach large audiences with most effect because it reflects the routines of people’s everyday lives. In order to retain ‘good’ television, critics and audiences must continue to engage with the concept of quality (Mulgan, 1990). This project contributes something to that end.

Television is an important contributor to the global society that we inhabit today. Although the way people watch television content has changed, broadcasting continues to have an important role to play in contributing to the fabric of Maltese society. While TV broadcasting has a number of purposes, the following may be identified as particularly important:

- informing the Maltese public’s construction and interpretation of the world primarily through the dissemination of news, general information and a critical engagement with current events and ideas;
- encouraging informal learning through fostering interest, knowledge and education in the arts, science, history and other topics;
- reflecting Maltese cultural identities;
- representing diversity and alternative viewpoints;
- as a means of entertainment.



## 1.2 What is Quality?

The ability of TV to capture what is happening ‘out there’ is contingent on ‘quality’. TV broadcasting has extreme potential for both personal and social transformation. Quality, however, will always be a hotly-contested idea, subject to negotiation and change. According to Mulgan (1990, p.5) it is ‘the one issue in broadcasting that resists, more than any other, a definitive and rational answer’. However, very often, both in policy debates and in the literature, the notion of quality is taken for granted, reflecting the difficulty of giving a unique definition (Brevini, 2010). The slipperiness of ‘quality’ has long been recognized and debated by media and literary theorists. There have been considerable differences in their positions, these mainly hinging on the perceived legitimacy or otherwise of making value judgements. So, for example, Brundson (1990) has argued that one must take into account the ‘historical and cultural privilege with which aesthetic judgement is encrusted’ (p.89). Another literary theorist, Eagleton, claims that quality is ‘whatever is valued by certain people in specific situations according to particular criteria and in the light of given purposes’ (as cited in Mulgan, 1990, p.48). These theorists have clearly been influenced by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1992) who emphasized the social aspects of hierarchies of tastes. On the other hand, Hoggart, the chair of the British Broadcasting Research Unit (BRU) in 1989 states categorically that:

Though each programme will have to be judged in the first place by criteria peculiar to itself, these criteria are neither self-contained nor self-sufficient. Any kind of programme may be trivial, banal, patronizing, tendentious, phony, dishonest, evasive; such value judgements are not to be eroded by appeals to the demands of particular types of programmes and to the assumed tastes of the intended audience. (Broadcasting Research Unit, 1989, p.1)

The BRU, in a pamphlet published in 1989 entitled *Quality in Television*, considered a number of aspects of broadcasting. The element ‘Quality in broadcasting as a whole’ claimed that broadcasting should ‘enhance rather than diminish the total life of the community in which broadcasting takes place’ (p.5).

AN ATTEMPT TO DEVELOP QUALITY INDICATORS NECESSITATES  
RECOGNITION OF THE VARIOUS POTENTIAL WAYS IN WHICH  
QUALITY IS CONCEPTUALIZED BY THE PUBLIC

While quality indicators are easy to conceptualize in, for example, the manufacturing or services industries, the issue is a complex one in broadcasting, making the development of a 'strategy for quality' a difficult enterprise. Murrioni and Irvine (1997) warn that a view of quality that comes only from the industry, an 'insider and elitist view' (p.2), is potentially dangerous. Therefore, an attempt to develop quality indicators necessitates recognition of the various potential ways in which quality is conceptualized by the public. Such indicators will help producers to be able to provide a good TV production, and regulators to monitor it. This is a complex challenge, particularly because there are no consolidated rational ways with which to quantify and measure quality (UNESCO, 2012).

Having identified a felt need, UNESCO commissioned the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA) to issue 'Editorial Guidelines' for broadcasters. The publication set out the basic editorial principles. These include, amongst others: honesty and disclosing all essential facts in news and current affairs reporting; respect for the rights of listeners to hear a variety of views; presenting all sides of a question. The Geneva-based Media and Society Foundation, with support from Hosono Bunka Foundation (Japan), UNESCO, Office Fédéral de la Communication (OFCOM) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), has undertaken a number of audits of PSBs. Based on best practices in the world in relation to the broadcasting industry, the audit identified the following key indicators:

- satisfaction of viewers-listeners
- quality and accuracy of information
- quality and diversity of other types of programming
- innovation and creativity
- independence and transparency of management
- promotion and respect for ethical rules
- representation of national minorities
- universal access
- social relevance

(UNESCO, 2005)

### 1.3 Types of Quality

Mulgan (1990, pp.7-8) wrote that: 'The richness and ambiguities (of the term 'quality') should be seen as a virtue, not as a problem. A desirable broadcasting system will support a range of different and often contradictory qualities.'

According to the founder and spokesperson of the US group Viewers for Quality Television, 'A quality show is something we anticipate ... [it] focuses more on

relationships ... [and] explores character, it enlightens, challenges, involves and confronts the viewer; it provokes thought ...' (Swanson, 2000, p.20). Quality is not a static concept but changes according to certain social and ethical values and visions of society (Murrone and Irvine, 1997; Mulgan, 1990). Murrone and Irvine (1997) identify five meanings of quality when referring to television, and these emanate from five different views. Different stakeholders in the television industry have their own ideas about what constitutes quality:

- a. The consumer view, according to which, 'quality' may be defined by 'consumption'. Quality programmes are those that command a large audience share. 'If viewers switch on in millions, it must be good' (p.3).
- b. The producer view, which sees quality as deriving from innovative production. The producer's role is that of proposing innovative and imaginative programmes. Producer quality results in the winning of awards rather than increased audience share.
- c. The manager view, which sees quality as 'a good return on investment'.
- d. The curator view, which defends 'prestige productions and indigenous language programming'. From this perspective, quality should be sought in television much like it is sought in a museum or an art gallery. It champions the national cultural heritage.
- e. The regulator view, which 'seems close to producer choice: praise goes to the channel that appears to interpret viewers' demand in the most innovative, artistic and effective way' (Murrone and Irvine, 1997, pp.2-3).

Mulgan (1990), in his famous essay *Television's Holy Grail: Seven Types of Quality*, discusses audiences and quality, and commences by highlighting what quality is not. Quality, he stresses, should not be equated with social class, and is not that which 'people of quality enjoy' (1990, p.6). While maintaining that it is appropriate to ask people what they think about quality, quality is not the same as enjoyment, as people often criticize those same programmes they claim to enjoy. So, for example, while soaps are often considered to be of poor quality, they are very much enjoyed by all types of audiences. Mulgan offered a broad outline of the contexts within which 'quality' can be assessed and identified seven types of quality in broadcasting, each with underlying assumptions about the nature of television, the nature of the people who watch it, and the nature of the society it exists in.

### 1. Producer quality and professionalism

This type of quality concerns itself primarily with technical issues, such as lighting and sound, the writing and direction of the production, the type of acting, etc. Clearly

different types of programmes/genres will emphasize different aspects of producer quality with acting, for example, being less an issue than camera work in documentaries.

## 2. Consumer quality and the market – viewers' preferences and market demand

This view constructs quality as that which is preferred by the viewing public and, consequently, the need to satisfy audiences is seen as important. Such a view runs against the grain of elitist arguments for quality. This is a relativistic view of quality, epitomized in the saying 'De gustibus non est disputandum'.

## 3. The aesthetics of the medium

While the above two types of quality have focused on the producer and on the consumer, this type of quality sees it as dictated by the medium, and emphasizes how that medium is able to impart subject matter that is appealing, beautiful and aesthetically pleasing. Again, this is specific to genre.

## 4. Television as ritual and communion

Good television is television that allows people to share their experiences and feel a sense of community with mankind. Television can be extremely powerful because it is situated in the mundaneness of our everyday life.

## 5. Television and the person

Television is 'quality television' when it allows people the opportunity to be informed and, consequently, allows them to participate as active citizens in their communities. Television is most effective when it addresses universal themes or archetypes.

## 6. The televisual ecology

This type of quality has to do with truth-telling and fairness. According to Mulgan (1990, p.26) 'television, like all media, must play its part in sustaining truth and bearing witness'. So, for example, news programmes are a forum where the people may call their 'rulers' to account.

## 7. Its contribution to diversity

This view highlights that a broadcasting system of high quality is one that offers a wide range of programmes and that reflects the diversity present in a society.

There has also been a fair amount of debate as to whether to prioritise assessments of professionals over those of audiences (Brevini, 2008; Ishikawa, 1996). It is clear that ratings should not be used as a measure of quality as this often smacks of a neo-liberal

agenda and may be used to justify low-budget productions under the guise of 'that's what people want'. On the other hand, some studies have shown that the viewer's view can be complex and that audience preferences and viewership are distinct (Leggatt, 1996). Mulgan (1990) has highlighted how people often are able to criticize the quality of the programmes they enjoy. Wober (cf. Leggatt, 1996a, pp.75-80) asked 3,000 viewers which programmes had quality. Informative programmes received the highest score, followed by drama and light entertainment. 27% of the sample, when asked to describe 'quality television', replied that it should be 'entertaining' and 'enjoyable'. References to 'informative' and 'educational' only came in second with 12%.

#### 1.4 Quality Indicators

Identifying quality indicators has been identified as a difficult task but one which a number of research initiatives have attempted to tackle. In the local context, in 2006, Ernst & Young Limited submitted a report to the Media Desk, within the EU Affairs Directorate of the Ministry for Tourism and Culture, which consisted in the analysis of focus group discussions which dealt with quality programming. The unpublished report lists a number of themes which participants mentioned as being essential for good quality programming. The emergent themes were as follows:

- A quality programme was deemed to be one that has interesting topics, consequently keeping the viewers engaged. Interesting topics were those seen to be relevant to the person's life. This indicator is a very subjective one, contingent on a person's needs, motivations, lifestyle and context. In this regard, advertising and telesshopping were rated as being of very poor quality.
- A quality programme was described in this research as one that is informative and educational and able to contribute to both formal and informal learning.
- A good programme is fair and balanced. This was an important element of quality identified in political programmes and news programmes.
- A quality programme is one that makes good use of humour and wit.
- A quality programme is realistic and depicts issues that are faced by people in everyday life.
- A quality programme has sound values. Clearly, what constitutes good value is contested and socially and culturally constructed, highlighting the difficulty of using this as a quality indicator.

- A quality programme has a good script. This may be identified with Mulgan's quality element of producer quality and professionalism which would include good acting in dramas or good camera and sound work in documentaries.
- A quality programme was seen as one that has a good presenter. This however only applies to programmes which are hosted, and is not a very useful indicator. It may be subsumed under the quality above having to do with an element of professionalism.
- A quality programme has good camera work, light and sound. Again, this may be subsumed as belonging to the element of producer quality and professionalism.
- A good quality programme should not have any advertisements and should not be 'stretched out'.
- A good quality programme respects people.
- A good quality programme is original.
- A good quality programme has an informed panel.

(Ernst & Young, 2006, pp.6-21)

Differences in perceptions of what constitutes television quality are influenced by the professional background, the subjective interests, and the particular characteristics of who is doing the defining. Directors of TV channels may be interested primarily in profits and impact, while the different professionals working in the sector will have their own notions of TV programme quality, with technical staff prioritizing issues like camera work and sound, and scriptwriters privileging plot and similar issues. Audiences are more likely to define quality as being dependent on the genre (Mulgan, 1990).

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

The Broadcasting Authority, an entity established by the Constitution of Malta, regulates the broadcasting content and formulates regulations to protect the consumer. As a regulator, the Broadcasting Authority has a twofold function: a Constitutional function and a Legal function. The constitutional function set out in Article 119 of the Constitution demands that due impartiality is preserved in matters of political or industrial controversy, and broadcasting facilities and time are fairly apportioned between persons belonging to different political parties. Its legal function is set out

in the Broadcasting Act and consists of licensing of radio and television, regulation of programme content, enforcing the provisions of the law, carrying out research and developing broadcasting standards. With this in mind, the Broadcasting Authority seeks for quality in local broadcasting and from time to time develops guidelines aimed at broadcasters to enhance good quality broadcasting. Owing to a continuous changing scenario in the media industry, quality in broadcasting is a great challenge to monitor and attain. The Broadcasting Authority's role is overarching the local broadcasting content. The main remit of the Broadcasting Authority is to see that due impartiality and balance in broadcasting are achieved. Another regular task is to regulate advertising, sponsorship and teleshopping in programming, and to monitor so as to ensure that programmes abide by the regulations as found in the Broadcasting Act and the Third Schedule. The Authority plays an important role in the protection of minors from harmful broadcasting content through the Broadcasting Code for the Protection of Minors and the Requirements as to Standards and Practice applicable to family viewing and listening. It follows a list of other Requirements, which are legally binding, as to Standards and Practice in order to regulate programming content on the broadcasting media. Amongst these requirements are standards applicable to the participation of vulnerable people in media programmes, the coverage of tragedies in broadcasting, standards applicable to the portrayal of disability in the media, and standards and practice on the promotion of racial equality. A relatively recent task for the Authority is to regulate the correct use of the Maltese Language and thus the Authority has adopted a Broadcasting Code on the Correct Use of the Maltese Language in the broadcasting media. In view of this Code, broadcasters are asked to safeguard the Maltese language and ensure that the Maltese language is well and clearly spoken, and properly used as to diction, semantics, syntax and content. The correct use of the Maltese language is another asset for quality in programming, and the Authority worked on amending the Code on the Correct Use of the Maltese Language which would pave the way so that such requirements would become more enforceable. Only recently, following an increase in cookery programmes and cookery slots in the local broadcasting industry, the Broadcasting Authority approved requirements on hygiene standards and food safety in cookery programmes.

While regulation of programme content is regulated through European and Maltese law, quality programming is more difficult to regulate, but Broadcasting Authority Malta is also keen to see that local broadcasting offers good quality programmes. Quality programming is the result of a number of criteria, amongst others, impartiality, programming targeting the right audience, and the correct use of language in programmes. Along the years, the Authority has been in the business of developing

standards for broadcasting stations, and over the years it has published a number of guidelines to assist broadcasting stations to better the quality of their programming. It has approved a number of guidelines, amongst which, guidelines as to gender portrayal in the broadcasting media and guidelines for good quality sports programmes. Other guidelines which have been initiated by the Broadcasting Authority are audiovisual programme content created for children, advertising of financial services and products, reporting of news, and the production of programmes on the commission of offences, their investigation and court proceedings. It has also issued a list of technical words in IT terminology translated into Maltese.

The Authority is entrusted by law to carry out research of a quantitative and qualitative nature. Apart from the regular audience survey, the Authority feels obliged to investigate the customers' needs while being in tandem with the stations' obligations. The Authority also published several publications, amongst others, to assess the effects of broadcasting on various sectors of Maltese society. Qualitative research was commissioned by the Authority along the years to evaluate the effects that violence, sex and advertising had on the attitudes or the behaviour of young people under the age of 14. The Authority conducted research on the effect of broadcasting pluralism on programme content, broadcasting standards and the public broadcaster. Another study examined local and global media influences on Maltese youth culture. The Broadcasting Authority also participates with other entities to conduct further research which would help to enhance a good quality broadcasting service to viewers. Recently, the Authority participated in a research study initiated by the Department of Health which analysed food advertising to children on Maltese television in 2014. This perhaps would lead to implement clear regulations regarding the advertising of HFSS foods around programming that is popular with children. The Broadcasting Authority sets the necessary standards to ensure that there is a significant improvement in quality in Maltese broadcasting. A recent input of the Broadcasting Authority in enhancing a leap in quality and a better service to the viewers, and thus consumers, was switching from the analogue terrestrial television to digital broadcasting and giving the right for free-to-air local stations. This switch-over led to an enhanced service for the consumer, which included an electronic programme guide (EPG) and interactive services. While keeping the role of a regulator, the Authority has the challenging task to set up standards and strive to help local stations achieve quality in broadcasting.

One of the roles of the Broadcasting Authority is that of facilitating and promoting the debate on quality. If one abides by the opinion that what people see on television affects them in a number of ways, then this belief has implications for everyone. Quality is



never a static quality since it depends on both individual and cultural values, and it shapes and is shaped by the environment in which we live. The Broadcasting Authority supervises all local broadcasting stations and ensures their compliance with the law and that parties respect licence obligations. With regards to political or industrial matters, as well as matters of public policy, it ensures that stations remain impartial. It also has the role of ensuring that persons who belong to different political parties have access to equal broadcasting facilities. The Broadcasting Authority's remit includes ensuring that broadcasts offer wide-ranging and all-inclusive programming to appeal to various interests. In this way it ensures 'quality' programming.

### 1.6 Quality TV

The term 'quality TV' should not be confused with quality in programming. Quality television (or quality TV) is a term used by television scholars and critics, as well as broadcasting advocacy groups, to describe a genre or style of television programming that, they argue, is of higher quality due to its subject matter, style, or content. Thompson' claims that 'quality television' programmes include '... a quality pedigree, a large ensemble cast, a series memory, creation of a new genre through recombination of older ones, self-consciousness, and pronounced tendencies toward the controversial and the realistic' (1996, p.34). According to Thompson (1996), quality TV is best defined by what it is not. It is not 'regular' TV. *Twin Peaks*, often taken as characteristic of quality TV, was universally praised by critics for being 'unlike anything we'd ever seen on television'.

### 1.7 A changing media landscape

'The hybridization of TV and the Internet (broadcast + broadband) and the wide diffusion of personal (touch) screen devices (smartphone, tablet) have deeply changed the experience of watching audiovisual (TV) content. Labels like 'post-network era', 'post-broadcast era', 'matrix medium 3' or 'new television' proclaim the end of (the traditional form of) television and anticipate multiple transformations leading to a new era, namely 'the phase that comes after TV' (Marinelli, 2014, p.1)

Television content is now considered to be independent of the medium with which it is delivered as well as the devices whereby it is displayed. According to Marinelli, we are now observing the development of the so-called 'connected television'.

In the past, television viewers were referred to as the 'audience' or the 'target group'. This supposes a transmission model of communication, from the source to a passive target.

Television viewers today take a more active role, refusing to wait for what television has to offer. TV viewers today are more likely to seek out the television programmes they desire, whether by surfing a number of channels on their TV set or by downloading or streaming material from the internet. According to a number of media scholars (Boswijk et al., 2005; Rutten, Leurdijk & Frissen, 2005; Ulicchio, 2004), technology has changed people's relationship to the media and has empowered them. This has implications for the provision of quality programming in that viewers today are able to exert much more control over what they watch and can actively seek out what they consider to be 'quality programming'. According to the Nielsen Cross-Platform Report of March 2014, 'for all that's changing in our media fragmented reality, viewers continue to demand and consume quality content for entertainment, information and connection at the rate of close to 60 hours per week' (p.21). The emergence in the mid-1990s of digital technologies and the Internet had a profound impact on the existing media ecologies and their respective relations (Fuller 2005; Goddard & Parikka, 2011). Television is radically changing before our eyes.

Differences in the perceptions of what constitutes television quality are influenced by the professional background, the subjective interest, and the particular characteristics of who is doing the defining. Since the Broadcasting Authority's role is to safeguard the interests of consumers, this research takes a consumer view on quality.

Television is a medium in transition. Instead of obediently waiting for a programme to be delivered to them, audiences today actively search for what they deem to be quality programming. The transition in TV has seen a tectonic shift. Syvertsen (2003) proposes that TV has shifted from network to multi-channel environment, while Gripsrud (2004) discusses how it has evolved from broadcasting to narrowcasting. Ellis (2000) emphasizes the move from scarcity to plenty, while Katz and Scannell (2009) highlight the shift from a collectivist to an individualist medium. The shifts from analogue to digital (Jenkins, 2006) and also from nationally-oriented to globalized (Curtin, 2004) have been seen to be important developments. From the consumer's perspective, the shift from programmers' flow to on-demand viewing and metadata protocols (Uricchio, 2004) is highly significant.



## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Aims and Objectives**

Quality cannot be conceptualized as a universal value. The aim of this research is to identify the main areas of definition of the notion of quality in television broadcasting amongst the Maltese viewing public. This research project will bring together views on quality from the Maltese public adopting a consumer view of quality. It will attempt to document how the Maltese public define 'quality' in relation to television broadcasting, what types of quality they identify, the criteria they utilize when doing this and, consequently, their evaluations of the quality of local television broadcasting.

### **2.2 Research Agenda**

This qualitative study has a number of research objectives:

- a. to document how the Maltese public defines 'quality' in television broadcasting;
- b. to document what types of 'quality' are identified by the Maltese public and how these are prioritized;
- c. to explore the Maltese public's evaluations of the 'quality' of local television broadcasting;
- d. to document their expectations from local television broadcasting in terms of 'quality' in relation to different forms of programming;
- e. to investigate why some Maltese viewers would opt to watch foreign programming instead of local programming.

### **2.3 Research Design**

Taking the format of a moderated focus group discussion, this study follows a researcher-defined discussion focus guide (Appendix A). This study will adopt a qualitative approach in order to analyze the reception of television programmes amongst varied audiences in relation to how television programming achieves quality.

### **2.4 Focus group sampling design**

Important considerations have been made in view of the constitution of the groups. Two categories of people were eligible for participation in the study:

1. viewers who regularly watch mostly local channels;
2. viewers who regularly watch mostly foreign channels.

This constitutes a multiple-category design.

The term 'regularly' is defined as watching television at least three to four times weekly for a number of hours adding up to 8 hours per week. Six focus groups with both categories present were held. Each group comprised 8 participants for a total of 48 participants across the six groups. The groups were of mixed gender but varying according to age: young adults in the 18 to 30 age group; adults in the 31 to 60 age group; and older adults in the 61 plus age group. The groups were composed of people from a number of socio-economic strata defined by occupation. The International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), an International Labour Organization (ILO) classification structure for organizing information on labour and jobs, was utilized.

### **2.5 Data Analytic Strategy**

The focus groups were audio-recorded and the transcribed material subjected to rigorous open, axial and core coding, following Strauss and Corbin (1990). Through the use of the Constant Comparative Method, conceptual categories were identified. A summary table of the emergent conceptual categories may be found in Appendix B.

### **2.6 Ethical considerations**

Ethical clearance was sought and granted from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) (Appendix C). Recruitment was through an opt-in method and an information sheet/recruitment letter was sent to potential participants. Prior to commencement of the focus group, all participants signed a consent form.

### **2.7 Procedure**

Following ethical clearance from the University of Malta Research Ethics Committee (UREC), the project was announced by the Broadcasting Authority on the social networking site, Facebook, and interested parties were sent a recruitment letter and a consent form via email. The focus groups were held in the last week of June and the first week of July at the premises of the Broadcasting Authority. A copy of the focus group guide may be found in Appendix A. The focus groups were conducted in Maltese but the participants were allowed to speak in the language of their choice. The focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed for ease of analysis. The transcribed material was analyzed using the Constant Comparative Method (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

### 3. DATA ANALYSIS

#### 3.1 Television Viewing Habits

While in the past people would watch TV content through the television set at the time when programmes were aired, with the proliferation of the Internet and non-linear services in most households, the viewer is much less passive and actively manages what to view and when to view it. This places the control of the television viewing experience squarely in the hands of the viewer, enabling him/her to select from a huge amount of possible content and making the question of quality even more salient. In the current study, the focus group participants manifested a spectrum of TV viewing habits: from traditional viewing habits to use of on-demand and interactive services, as well as downloading material to be viewed at any time chosen by the viewer.

Older participants in the study tended towards more traditional viewing habits, mostly watching TV on the TV set and at the time the programmes are aired. Younger participants were more likely, but not exclusively, to stream or download content from the Internet or opt for on-demand services. This was mainly motivated by busy lifestyles and a wish to be more in control of what one watches.

I like to be in control of what I do. I am not the type to switch on the TV and watch whatever is on. Well, it happens from time to time, but most often I choose because I download material and put it on a USB and see it that way. (Male)

A main motivator to download material online is that one can avoid advertising.

I am more likely to use the Internet and to stream because I like to look for material myself. I won't just wait for a programme, especially because of adverts, which make me anxious ... I like to use the interactive, and nowadays mainly use that because in that way I skip the adverts. (Male)

A MAIN MOTIVATOR TO DOWNLOAD MATERIAL ONLINE  
IS THAT ONE CAN AVOID ADVERTISING |

Interactive TV is more popular with viewers who lead a busy lifestyle due to work and family commitments. While they still view TV content on a TV screen, they opt for an interactive service to skip advertising and to view the programme in their own leisure time and not at a time the scheduling imposes upon the viewer.

Personally I feel that the interactive system was a godsend for my lifestyle because if my preferred programme is on at a time when it is not possible for me to view it because my kids would be watching something else, it is much easier to go back to my favourite programme and watch it at my leisure. Also, this way I found a solution for adverts. The majority of adverts are tedious so it would be possible for me to fast-forward the advertising batches ... (Female)

Streaming and downloading are becoming more popular because they save viewers from waiting for the selected programme.

When I don't manage to see them, I stream them on the laptop and see them on the laptop. (Male)

Lately I watched a foreign series, and my kids, to make sure that I see it, downloaded it so I can see it one at a time and I won't have to wait. (Female)

Viewing habits are seasonal, with wintertime providing more opportunity to engage in television viewing.

First of all, in summer these programmes (cooking programmes, teledramas) ... they all kind of stop. There are only repetitions. (Male)

A number of participants claim to have lost interest in local television broadcasting and watch mainly foreign station programming.

Honestly, I watch five minutes and get a breakdown. Either ten minutes adverts or the ten minutes you watch – a disastrous script, the actors! (Male)

A NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS CLAIM TO HAVE LOST INTEREST  
IN LOCAL TELEVISION BROADCASTING AND WATCH  
MAINLY FOREIGN STATION PROGRAMMING.

Notwithstanding that a number of participants are still avid viewers of local broadcasting and pinpoint some local productions with positive comments, a relatively good number of participants preferred watching foreign station programmes for various reasons. Viewers tend to watch a number of documentaries on foreign stations because these are 'well researched' and very informative. Some prefer to watch foreign discussion programmes as the local discussion programmes are perceived to be 'arrogant, and guests who are discussing the issue are not tolerant' (Male). News on foreign stations are preferred over news on local channels as the former are not 'monotonous'; foreign news broadcasts are 'entertaining' because newscasters make comments which are directly connected to the unfolding story, showing that the newscaster knows the subject well. On the other hand, local news is seen to be 'stiff'. (Male) Some participants simply opt out of watching local programming, claiming they 'are not interested' in local productions and prefer watching foreign drama series. In foreign productions there are 'good-looking actors, nice locations, nice clothes, obviously a good story, and stuff that keeps you hanging until the next week'. (Female) Another reason for participants choosing foreign station productions is that local drama is repetitive and 'dragging', while in foreign drama 'you don't know what's going to happen next'. Participants who watch foreign series argue that local and foreign drama cannot be compared. 'When you compare them (local productions) to foreign productions they have a long way to go.' (Male)

These issues are further developed below.

### **3.2 What is quality?**

Focus group participants were asked to discuss what they understood by the term 'quality programming' and to think about ways they might identify TV programmes as examples of either 'good' quality or 'bad' quality television. They were guided to explore this notion in relation to local programming and foreign programming and to draw comparisons between the two. This facilitated the emergence of a number of conceptual categories. Focus group participants found it difficult to explain what they understood by 'quality' and had very ambivalent attitudes toward the concept. The analysis documents a number of divergent and at times contradictory elements. The average viewer appears to have become more discerning, and the need for producers and stations alike to produce good quality programmes stems from an increase in competition in the broadcasting media industry.

I don't think that quality has been reduced. I think we have become more aware of what constitutes quality. (Male)



The increase in the number of local and foreign stations and the accessibility of different media platforms give rise to heightened expectations in viewership.

Today we know how to make choices ... In the last twenty years, we don't have just one Maltese station and two Italian stations to choose from. (Male)

In accordance with the literature on the subject, there did not emerge any absolute answer to what constitutes 'quality', and its subjective element was emphasized, epitomized by one participant's comment: 'Depends on what you understand by quality.' (Female) The subjective element rang through most of the focus group discussions:

When you enjoy a programme, it is good quality for you. But if, perhaps, I like this programme and think it is of good quality, perhaps for another person it is not of good quality and annoys him. I think it depends on individual opinion. (Female)

Participants did however attempt to provide some definitions. For some, quality is 'originality and creativity', 'information and educational', 'entertaining' and leaves one satisfied, 'a programme which keeps you hooked on the story', 'perhaps the need to narrate it to your friends the next day', 'truth and impartiality', and 'programming which reflects reality'. For many, and across different genres, quality was equated with keeping the viewer engaged:

Quality leaves you satisfied after watching that programme; a programme that has substance; that is interesting; you stop to watch it; you leave everything and remain watching it. (Female)

These definitions were inevitably linked to genre, highlighting that every genre will be evaluated by a different dimension of the 'quality' construct. A quality programme is one that 'gives you what you are looking for', that does what its genre sets out to do.

If it is humorous, then it has to make the viewers laugh. If it is not humorous, then it has to inform. (Female)

THERE DID NOT EMERGE ANY ABSOLUTE ANSWER  
TO WHAT CONSTITUTES 'QUALITY',  
AND ITS SUBJECTIVE ELEMENT WAS EMPHASIZED

## IMPROVEMENT NEEDED IN LOCAL TECHNICAL STANDARDS AND MORE ATTENTION TO DETAIL IS A MUST FOR LOCAL PRODUCTIONS

### 3.2.1 Technical Standards of Production

A salient theme to emerge in the focus group discussions was that quality may be equated with technical standards of production such as effective lighting and sound, good camera work, professional acting, script, music and direction. When discussing technical standards, it immediately becomes evident that one cannot compare different genres in terms of the same technical standards, although some generalisations are attempted below. Mulgan (1990, p.9) writes: ‘So, although there is no way of comparing a soap opera and a documentary, we can judge each by reference to the grammar and traditions of its form.’

#### 3.2.1.1 Sound, Camera Work, Direction and Editing

While local technical standards are deemed to have improved radically over the last few years, focus group participants believe there is still plenty of room for improvement when compared to foreign productions. Talking about sound and a news broadcast, one participant states:

Oh, come on, we are in the year 2015. Yesterday, Joseph Muscat was giving us a report from Brussels about Greece, and it kept getting stuck. I have never seen such things happen on Italian TV. (Male).

The lack of good camera work, as well as TV direction, when these fail to follow what is being explained during the programme, detract from quality in local programming.

We would be watching a programme, let’s say a cookery programme, and the chef starts to ‘plate’ the food, but the plate is not captured on screen; something else is pictured. That irks me because I would be following the recipe to follow all the steps. (Female)

The use of music in the production was also considered to be important:

Excitement increases, but very often the music will not be relevant to the scene depicted. So it gives the impression that you are watching the same scene over and over again. (Female)

One element which attracts the viewers' attention and has an impact on quality programming is the studio set or other props used in different genres of programmes. Some sets 'are a sore sight', though some viewers admitted that sets designed by professional designers have increased lately in local productions. Viewers were eager to see high-standard sets as those used in foreign productions: 'The sets, props, colour scheme – horrible'. (Male)

Several reasons were given for the lack of such technical standards in local productions. The lack of attention to detail, when compared to international productions, was one element mentioned by the viewers.

Now my benchmark is American TV, English TV. I feel that Maltese TV, when compared to foreign TV, has less attention to detail. For example even on ... often you see some wire from a camera on the floor. But if you are watching 'The Weakest Link', everything is perfect. (Male)

Limited budgets, when compared to foreign productions, were also seen to impact on the technical standard achieved:

Maltese series, although having improved considerably: there is still room for improvement. But we must consider budget issues as well. (Male)

Despite this, participants admit that quality in local drama has increased:

The present drama has perfect quality. (Male)

### **3.2.1.2 Professional Presenters and Actors**

The presentation (through the presenter or through the presentation of the content) was viewed as crucial to quality. The presenter impacts on the quality of the programme through the way he/she asks questions and moderates the discussion and the amount of research done.

The person presenting the programme must be prepared. More often than not, I feel that the person leading the programme is not prepared enough. (Male)

Participants highlighted how the presenter needs to be skilled at phrasing questions while showing that extensive research on the subject has been conducted. Making reference to a particular presenter he had in mind, a participant stated:

He is a presenter with a good attitude, challenging. I like him. When a presenter knows the subject, shows how well he is prepared and tries to entrap the person he has in front of him. (Male)

Participants discussed how presenters of discussion programmes should be able to exercise control over the guests during the discussion because lack of control impacts negatively on the quality of the programme. Such programmes lead to arrogant and intolerant discussions, which impinge on quality. Certain programmes are turned into an 'arena'.

The data indicates that a good presenter is conceived as one who speaks clearly, knows how to explain when necessary, and makes good use of the Maltese language. Physical appearance, well-mannered behaviour and good presence also contribute to the quality of the programme. A presenter should 'keep good contact with the televiewers', has 'presence', and addresses the programme to the viewers rather than 'speaking to the cameraman'. (Female) Focus group participants discussed how the panel and the lists of guests affect the viewers' perception of quality. The panel and the guests invited during a programme are a source of knowledge and should be well informed on the subject.

The quality of a news broadcast was seen to be contingent on the professionalism of the anchor and, more specifically, on how fluent and how well prepared she or he is. Local presenters were seen to be sporting inappropriate diction – which detracts from the quality of the broadcast.

The person reading the news ... I noted that some of them do not even know how to pronounce common words or places and do not rehearse what they will say. Recently something happened in Nice and whoever wrote the news left it 'Nice' and the newscaster kept saying Nice (in English) and that puts me completely off. And I have a different issue: I think that the broadcasters on the local stations have a diction problem.

When compared to international broadcasts, local newscasters were seen by group members to be monotonous. Their body language and the lack of creativity lead to less quality when compared to international broadcasts. While local news is 'lifeless', international news is 'entertaining'.

I don't watch it everyday (local news) but when I do, I find it very monotonous ... The way it is presented. I don't know, it's lifeless. It does nothing for me ... When I watch Sky News, it is entertaining ... They make comments; this shows that there is

much preparation ... So they aren't just saying what happened. There is research on the subject and they make interventions of their own accord. The local news is very stiff.

An important element of producer quality that emerged in the focus group discussions was the lack of professionalism of those involved in the production of local programmes. A number of possible contingencies were seen to be contributing to this phenomenon, most notably the lack of training as well as the lack of talent to be found on an island of only half a million people, meaning that the same people appear on local TV programmes:

Often, on local TV you see the same people. It is rare to see new faces presenting a programme. Most often it is the same people who present the programmes. (Female)

Lack of professionalism might be a result of the fact that people involved in local media productions are primarily part-timers with other full-time occupations.

They are amateurs, so to speak; they may have some training but I don't imagine it's their full-time job. I see this for example when the news is on. A presenter on Sky News is different to a presenter on TVM ... My impression is that many of the people who appear on Maltese TV have another job, meaning they are not professionals in the area. (Male)

The issue of nepotism and favouritism granted to relatives was another salient theme to emerge that impacts negatively on the quality of broadcasting production. The issue of nepotism in film-making and broadcasting has been attributed to a number of international actors, for example Hollywood's Coppola family includes many distinguished film-makers and actors. The careers of Sofia Coppola, Nicolas Cage, and Jason Schwartzman have been attributed to aid by director Francis Ford Coppola, who cast his daughter Sofia in *The Godfather Part III*. Cage changed his last name in order to distance himself from such charges. Locally, this was seen to happen far more often than is warranted. While speaking positively of well-known Maltese actors, and welcoming newcomers, viewers do distinguish between an actor who acts naturally and another actor who is placed in the scene due to his familial relations.

LACK OF PROFESSIONALISM, LACK OF TRAINING,  
LACK OF TALENT AND LACK OF CREATIVITY  
IMPACT NEGATIVELY ON THE QUALITY OF BROADCASTING

So, personally speaking, while the plot may be good, as has been mentioned, sometimes the acting is funny because just because you are related to someone does not make you a good actor. (Female)

Despite this, some participants emphasized the professional acting attributed to some of the actors on local drama series.

There was one woman crying and she was crying for real because she was expecting a baby from a certain Juan. And I said, how professional she is, this actress. Were she to go abroad she would be really successful. (Female)

The final comment, however, betrays a common concern, emergent in the focus group data: that local actors lack the opportunities for success in the Maltese context.

### **3.2.1.3 Innovation and Creativity**

While every genre will dictate its own kind of aesthetic values (Mulgan, 1990, p.9), there are some values that may be considered across genres. Innovation and creativity were seen as hallmarks of quality. It is the producer's role to propose innovative and imaginative programmes.

In my opinion, quality means that there is a certain element of surprise, not always the same linear script. (Male)

Participants equated quality with innovation and creativity, but felt that this was at times lacking. An emergent theme is that the programme schedule on local television was seen to be lacking in innovation. One participant states: 'The schedule needs to be changed'. The focus group participants also discussed how there are far too many magazine/talk shows in the afternoon. This lack of variety in the scheduling of afternoon programmes detracted from their quality, leading to repetition of ideas, guests and presenters over weeks and months and from one schedule to another.

True, today we don't pay! Before, we paid a TV licence, so perhaps because we don't pay, all we get are discussions. (Male)

Programme schedules are dominated by studio-based talk shows. Participants highlighted how this was probably motivated by the low cost of such productions.

Talk, talk, talk. All you need to do is gather a couple of people and have a discussion. Like what we are doing here. If someone were filming us, we would have a programme! (Male)

Notwithstanding the fact that the media is reachable through other platforms, including cinema, a good number of participants suggested more foreign film productions in the scheduling. They referred to past times and the Friday movie, something which they felt to be missing from today's TV schedules, because it was an ideal slot for entertainment and leisure after a week's work.

Drama productions were seen to reach standards of excellence by the focus group participants. This is in line with the 2008 Ernst & Young study. The data indicates that audience enthusiasm for local drama is high and that, perhaps contrary to myth, these are also popular with males. Local drama series, although generally positively evaluated by the focus group members, were seen to be somewhat predictable with a consistently depressive tone.

With regards to drama I have friends who watch (local drama production) and I can tell them what is going to happen. (Female)

Local drama have an overdose of depressive element. (Male)

In the current study, storylines were seen to be stretched unreasonably, contributing to a lack of originality. The repeated storyline after the first series of drama works against quality.

It happens with all of them [drama], they start well and then they drag. When the story is supposed to go to the end they stretch it out for one more year and go onto the past. So, they are on the right path, they are promising you everything and then ... oops ... And that's where quality suffers. (Female)

Sometimes, the stretching of the storyline leads to repetitive scenes and actions during the same drama series. 'More of the same: separation, tragedies.' (Female) This was the most significant element which, according to the viewers, leads to low quality of this genre. Good quality programming seeks to renew and not to repeat the same formula. It explores and takes risks, and surprises the audience.

DRAMA PRODUCTIONS WERE SEEN TO REACH STANDARDS  
OF EXCELLENCE BUT WERE SEEN TO BE SOMEWHAT PREDICTABLE  
WITH A CONSISTENT DEPRESSIVE TONE

Repetition was also considered to be rife in discussion programmes with the same themes constantly revisited.

Often, from year to year, the topics are the same. For example, some time during the year we have programmes on drugs, people who were ill, some politician who argued with his party ... always the same. (Male)

Some focus group participants expressed the desire for more public service announcements. These were featured more extensively in the past, and it seems viewers are in favour of such content since such programming is educational and of high quality.

#### **3.2.1.4 Commentary**

In all of the focus groups there was mention of the poor local commentary during football matches and the consequent preference to viewing the said match on foreign stations, especially Italian stations. The focus group data indicates that poor commentary was due to the poor use of the Maltese language and commentaries which do not follow what is being shown.

Well, football matches ... the commentary! I often turn down the sound, to be honest, especially on TVM. (Male)

So, for example: 'He passes the ball to his team-mate.' – He is hardly going to pass it to his opponent!... (laughing). The Italian commentators participate in the game. They are very excited. But these are full-time presenters ... in Malta we don't have professional commentators. (Male)

### **3.3 Consumer Quality and the Market**

'The tension between "quality" and "popularity" has been central to debates about television drama and the alleged "dumbing down" of television more generally.' (Casey et al, 2008, p.90)

Quality may be defined by consumption and audience volume. 'If viewers switch on in millions, it must be good' (Murrone and Irvine, 1997, p.3). With the exponential increase in quantity of TV content, the need to satisfy an audience has become much more important. Programme reach has therefore become a very important criterion for assessing the quality of a production. Focus group participants were prompted to



A COMMON THEME WAS THE RECOGNITION THAT IF A PROGRAMME HAS A SIGNIFICANT REACH, THEN IT MUST BE CATERING FOR SOMETHING... QUALITY IS, THEREFORE, WHAT PEOPLE PREFER

address this significant issue by being asked to comment on the statement: 'Quality' may be understood as 'what most people like to watch' – What is your opinion on this?

An exploration of the participants' viewing habits has already documented how many of the focus group participants feel that the technological changes have allowed them to become more agentic in their TV habits and allows them to exercise more choice. Back in 1990, Mulgan had already anticipated how 'pay-per-view, pay channels, interactivity, and the various technologies ranging from addressable converters to video-on-demand allow the viewer much greater choice and control' (p.10). Programme reach, therefore, has become a very important criterion for assessing the quality of a production.

A common theme was the recognition that if a programme has a significant reach, then it must be catering for something. This interpretation of quality argues that 'the only useful notion of quality is that which identifies it with the preferences of viewers. The most popular programme is, for all intents and purposes, the best' (Mulgan, 1990, p.11). A common theme in the focus groups was the recognition that if a programme has a significant reach, then it must be catering for something. Quality is, therefore, what people prefer.

In my opinion, quality is what satisfies the majority. Now, to relate this to the programme we mentioned earlier ... I think one cannot ignore the audience that likes this sort of programming. If broadcasting manages to reach all types of groups in society, that contributes to quality. (Male)

Although it is assumed, by some, that quality favours large audiences on television, in truth the values attached to this public and common art form attract varied criteria that very often change according to whoever is assessing it.

The opposite theme emerged more consistently, namely, that just because a programme is popular does not mean that it is good. This reflects a more elitist view of quality.

Not all audiences are equally critical. They choose a channel or see whatever there is to see because they have their own biases. (Female)

THE OPPOSITE THEME EMERGED MORE CONSISTENTLY, NAMELY, THAT JUST BECAUSE A PROGRAMME IS POPULAR DOES NOT MEAN THAT IT IS GOOD. THIS REFLECTS A MORE ELITIST VIEW OF QUALITY

I don't like discussions of a certain level on Maltese stations. I think they are too populist. (Male)

Popular programmes were viewed as being financially viable and consequently economically rather than aesthetically or standard-driven.

I think it's a question of finance; they buy the airtime, and all that interests them is that they have a high audience. (Male)

Generally, an elitist view dominated.

I don't think that quality should satisfy the majority because it can fall into mediocrity. (Female)

I think there should be a distinction between quality and popularity. It is not necessarily the case that if a programme is popular it is of high quality. (Male)

Mulgan (1990, p.5) warns that an elitist view on quality may be used to 'legitimise and disguise the narrow tastes and prejudices of a small, metropolitan, cultural elite'. Hughes & Vines (1989) in their book *Deregulation and the Future of Commercial Television* claim that the argument on quality is flawed if one equates quality and social class. According to Mulgan (1990, p.6), quality should not imply 'that which people of quality enjoy'.

### **3.4 Ritual and Communion**

An important concept recurrent in the data is the idea that good quality TV is TV that allows the fostering of a sense of community through the sharing of experiences common to mankind. This was highlighted as an important element of quality by Mulgan (1990), and instances of this idea were emergent in the focus groups. Thus, the following quote illustrates how good quality TV has the ability to emotionally arouse the viewer. This understanding of quality emphasises how 'communication is bound up with sharing, fellowship and participation' (Mulgan, 1990, p.19). This aspect of communication as creating shared meanings was also emphasized by Scannel (1988) and resonates strongly in the data collected in this study.

## GOOD QUALITY TV IS TV THAT ALLOWS THE FOSTERING OF A SENSE OF COMMUNITY THROUGH THE SHARING OF EXPERIENCES

I think that Maltese TV is really interesting, especially in these last few years when drama programmes have taken on a more mature stance ... I really like intrigue and emotional and social problems. (Male)

The acting needs to put you in the atmosphere, that you feel the emotions at the time. I like to watch romantic productions and I often cry and get very involved. This shows that it's a job well done. (Female)

Some dramatic productions were not considered to be of good quality mainly due to poor acting, and sometimes this leads viewers to choose foreign drama series instead, because 'You can relate and understand more. If they are feeling sad and the acting is good, you sort of feel sad as well.' (Female) Males were as likely to express this opinion as much as females. Good acting that keeps the viewer hooked is considered to be the most important element for the quality of the series.

Although the actors were not well known, the acting was believable and I really got involved in the story. The acting kept me watching it. (Female)

Local drama programmes were positively viewed as documenting real-life issues.

It's really good, not just foreign drama, come on!... So, for example, this drama is just like real life. (Female)

Thompson has stressed that quality TV aspires towards realism (Thompson, 1996, p.1). Dramas and soap operas were viewed as good quality if they were able to document the problems faced by people in everyday life and presented a resolution to those same issues. This is also an important element of news programmes and television programmes, both fictional and factual, which commonly give the audience a central hero or other figure with whom to identify (Casey et al, 2008, p.227). Good quality television is programming that can 'bring the world into our homes' (Casey et al, 2008, p.228).

Reflecting real life, for example, victims of a broken home ... People are attracted to that, issues related to personal life experiences ... She likes to write with a social conscience. She always includes somebody who is gay or disabled ... (Male)

While discussion programmes often deal with issues of significant concern to audiences and continue to be popular among the Maltese viewing public, the focus group participants reported that such programmes sensationalize and consequently trivialize human suffering, thus detracting from their quality. Participants worried that vulnerable members of the Maltese public are not sufficiently protected.

In these shows/reality shows, sensationalism prevails: people who are vulnerable, people with a terminal illness or who have a problem with drugs. And, in a sense, they are used. (Female)

### 3.5 Active Citizenship, Truth and Fairness

'Facts, when facts they are, must be treated with care, accessibly offered, placed in context, obtained with sensitivity and sensibility; and the manner of presentation must be honest, truthful and plain.' (Broadcasting Research Unit, 1989, p.10)

Television, like all media, must play its part in sustaining truth and bearing witness. Focus group data indicates that factual programmes, such as news, must strive towards standards of impartiality. According to Casey et al (2008) television news productions provide us with information about concerns in the world and about issues of which we would otherwise not be immediately aware. News programmes are often considered to be central to television stations. While many audiences today may access their news content on a variety of media, television news programmes certainly continue to be of significant cultural and political relevance. While focus group participants access online news portals to get news facts, viewing the news on television remains a popular activity. News programmes, as contrasted to fictional productions, must be guided by the standard of impartiality and accuracy. Many participants felt that this was not always the case especially with regards to the political TV programmes that are seen to be inherently biased and to have an obvious agenda.

FOCUS GROUP DATA INDICATES THAT FACTUAL PROGRAMMES,  
SUCH AS NEWS, MUST STRIVE TOWARDS STANDARDS OF IMPARTIALITY |

I only watch the headlines on Maltese TV because they are too biased; it's one thing watching RAI, and another watching a station owned by Berlusconi. You must be careful what you take in. (Male)

Given that different programmes present very different versions of reality, it is hard to determine which is the truth.

If you watch the news, one headline tells you tourism is down, and the other says tourism is on the rise. Both could be saying the truth but it's the opposite. (Male)

News programmes on the political stations were considered, in general, to be biased and unreliable, and this detracts from their quality. In order to provide a closer approximation to the truth, the participants reported relying on TVM, the public broadcaster.

The Labour station (ONE) reports what the Labour Party wants to say. The Nationalist Party station (NET) reports what they want to say, but TVM should not be the middle ground but rather should report the truth. (Male)

The news on the political stations is completely biased. So, if you switch on to NET everything the government is doing is bad, and if you switch onto ONE then everything is good. This bias continues to contribute to political malaise. Bias obviously detracts from professionalism and quality. So, I try to watch the national station even though at times it is also biased – subtler. (Male)

When asked directly what makes a news programme a 'programme of quality', the answer was consistently a 'balanced perspective' and 'truth'.

The truth! If you watch One and Net, they say the opposite of each other. Or they interpret a statement in a political way. And then, if you watch TVM, although they take a midway stance, sometimes they are also biased one way or the other. (Male)

NEWS PROGRAMMES ON THE POLITICAL STATIONS WERE CONSIDERED, IN GENERAL, TO BE BIASED AND UNRELIABLE, AND THIS DETRACTS FROM THEIR QUALITY. IN ORDER TO PROVIDE A CLOSER APPROXIMATION TO THE TRUTH, THE PARTICIPANTS REPORTED RELYING ON TVM, THE PUBLIC BROADCASTER

Participants emphasized how facts should be discussed with care and placed in context. In discussion programmes, opinions should be placed carefully, and space for a variety of opinions should be provided allowing viewers to reach their own conclusions in a balanced manner. There is always the risk that opinions may be presented as fact and jeopardise the truth.

Balance means listening to all the viewpoints. The more viewpoints, the better. (Female)

While it was somewhat expected from the participants that the political stations would present a biased view of events in news and discussion programmes, it was strongly expected that TVM, the public broadcasting station, would present an unbiased, impartial view of events. Unfortunately, this was not always deemed to be the case and this resulted in a lower quality of programming on TVM.

The focus group data indicates that participants feel that current affairs programmes are of good quality if they allow honest and impartial presentation of facts. Guests should be given the space to speak openly and at length, allowing them to formulate a coherent argument. Current affairs programmes need to resist having their agenda set for them by those in positions of power.

Quality was often equated with learning and the imparting of information that allows the person to develop as a human being and citizen. While technical standards were deemed to be very important, as a measure of quality, the content of TV programming in terms of the information it imparts was considered to be equally valuable.

An important element of quality in broadcasting is that it informs the viewer so that he/she may better him/herself; one must learn something from TV. I think this is an important element. (Female)

Good quality TV is seen to educate and to inform, and provides the audience with the best possible information and encourages members of society to take an active role in their communities. In order to do this it must be creative and enabling, and be responsive to a wide variety of interests and tastes. Programmes of good quality are extensively researched.

A good documentary is one that is well researched ... Today, I watched a programme which did not have good photography, but the research was so good that you tend to forget the rest. (Male)

Participants recognized that TV is not always educational, but there was general consensus that it should aspire to be so:

If I am to watch TV, I must learn something from it. (Male)

Television is not always a learning experience. There are some films you watch them simply because they are entertaining. But time should be given to educational material. For example, I am in agreement with the slots of Xummiemu ... Everybody knew Xummiemu – Keep Malta Clean. (Male)

So, for example, when you watch a programme on Discovery, you learn something. This, for me, is the meaning of quality. (Male)

Some participants referred to PSAs (Public Service Announcements) as being a form of information and education, and such content enhances the quality of broadcasting. They mentioned a number of informative announcements and pointed out that these are not so common nowadays and urged stations to invest in such production spots.

The focus group data indicates that television's true quality is its ability to offer widespread access, especially to people who might not have other avenues for accessing information. Quality television was seen to provide the opportunity to participants to keep up-to-date with Maltese societal issues and be active citizens. Quality in programming means being informed:

I cannot read the paper, so I follow the news so that if I meet somebody and they strike a conversation, I won't look like an idiot. I can reply or give my opinion. (Male)

I like to watch Maltese TV because it keeps me informed and up-to-date. (Female)

A good number of participants claimed that they watch local television when there is an important story unfolding.

### **3.6 Quality as Diversity**

A dominant theme to emerge in the focus group discussions is that a broadcasting system of high quality is one that offers a wide variety of programmes that appeal to a highly diverse audience.

There should be something for everyone. This is very important. (Female)

A BROADCASTING SYSTEM OF HIGH QUALITY  
IS ONE THAT OFFERS A WIDE VARIETY OF PROGRAMMES  
THAT APPEAL TO A HIGHLY DIVERSE AUDIENCE

Malta is increasingly becoming a multicultural society, and quality broadcasting needs to reflect this. According to Mulgan (1990, p.27) 'there are many who would argue for diversity for its own sake as essential in a decentered world of multiple truths'.

A good quality programme portrays the complexity and diversity of social life and not just one perspective. (Female)

Discussion programmes were singled out as specifically lacking this diversity because the same personalities always appeared on them, and so there was a lack of varied opinions and viewpoints.

Discussion programmes should feature different individuals so that you can view different opinions. Otherwise, it's a limited viewpoint. (Male)

Another common theme to emerge was the inadequate representation of minorities in local programming. The highly significant role of the media in contributing to the construction of groups in society was recognized during the focus groups. An emergent theme in the focus group data was the lack of representation of different religions and this was seen to detract from the quality of local programming.

I don't like the issue of religion on TV. TV is viewed by a diverse group of people and you therefore cannot cater solely for Christian people. (Male)

Today, we are becoming a multicultural society and there is more freedom in religious thought and so we need more neutrality in terms of TV programming. (Male)

THE INADEQUATE REPRESENTATION OF MINORITIES  
IN LOCAL PROGRAMMING AND THE LACK OF REPRESENTATION  
OF DIFFERENT RELIGIONS WERE SEEN TO DETRACT  
FROM THE QUALITY OF LOCAL PROGRAMMING



Another emerging theme that throws light on the issue of quality as diversity in relation to local programming is that it might not be accessible to all, for example, the deaf.

A missing element in local broadcasting is the use of sign language. I am aware that in political debates there is often sign language. But there is a great lacuna in this regard. I know that the deaf community is interested. I am aware that on TVM2 the news is signed. But the sort of programmes we are discussing here are not accessible to the deaf. So there is a lack of quality for a proportion of our society. (Male)

It should be acknowledged, however, that a number of local productions feature persons with a disability and that local programming is becoming increasingly aware of diversity in Maltese society. In a recent study by Debattista (2015), interviewed participants highlighted the importance of disability awareness in the media. A number of participants in Debattista's study highlighted the use of various forms of media in order to raise disability awareness. One participant mentioned that creative television programmes could promote the sexuality of persons with disability. She also added that there is nothing wrong with the revelation of one's impairment on the media, particularly visual media such as movies. The same participant also cautioned that care must be taken in order to avoid perpetuating negative representations of disability.

The focus group data reveals that the lack of diversity also extends to sports programmes. Participants pointed out that the most common and frequent sports coverage focuses on a number of football teams, and that it is mostly male football that is featured on local television stations.

They don't cover all types of sports. It is always football. (Female)

I agree with (female participant) when she mentioned sports reporting where they report on football and that's it. It's like other athletes do not exist. Or else, some athletes may have gone abroad and done really well, and yet you only hear about it a month later ... I believe the wider the coverage, the better. (Male)

According to Casey et al (2008) the development of sport and various media forms have had an intimately interwoven relationship. The development of global dedicated sports channels is evidence to the importance of sports for television. It is during the viewing of sporting events like the World Cup that peak television audiences are achieved. There are two main perspectives on the impact of sports broadcasting on viewers. Functionalists argue for a positive role of the mass media in that it informs the

## THE LACK OF QUALITY IN SPORTS PROGRAMMING IS DUE TO THE LACK OF EXPOSURE IN GENDER BALANCE IN SPORTS

public about sporting events, contributes to integrating sports within different social groups, and offers an escape from reality through excitement. On the other hand, Marxist theorists emphasise the negative aspect of the commercialization of sport and the ability of media trans-nationals to influence people's experience of sports (Casey et al, 2008). This influences which types of sports are able to flourish because of their coverage on TV. An example of this is the global interest in football, cricket in Britain, and American football in the USA. This means that other sports are unable to garner as much popularity and remain at grassroots level.

Television's potential to contribute to the construction of narratives about societal issues and social groups has been emphasized consistently in media studies. The following comment by a disabled participant highlights how the media has the potential to impact on issues of disability and sports but has failed to do so locally:

I used to dance, but it was never televised. I know who is professional at this, and does wheelchair dancing. He makes a positive name for Malta wherever he goes, and yet in Malta no one knows about him. It's not fair! (Male)

The lack of quality in sports programming is due to the lack of exposure in gender balance in sports.

A few years back the women's football team went to the Olympics and did really well. And yet, hardly anyone knew about it. (Female)

### 3.7 Advertising

Because most forms of media generate revenue from advertising, there are now few spaces free of advertising. The issue of advertising emerged in each and every focus group and generally there was a negative attitude towards most advertising with the consequent advertising-avoiding behavior. 'TV advertising-avoiding behavior(s)' refers to all actions by television viewers to reduce their exposure to the content of television advertisements (El-Adly, 2010). Respondents generally had negative attitudes towards adverts, claiming that these detracted from their viewing pleasure.

RESPONDENTS GENERALLY HAD NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS ADVERTS, CLAIMING THAT THESE DETRACTED FROM THEIR VIEWING PLEASURE. AND CHOOSE THE INTERNET TO VIEW TV PROGRAMMING AS A VIABLE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEMS OF THE SATURATION OF TV STATIONS WITH ADVERTISING MATERIAL

Adverts tend to be repeated during the same programme, and this frustrates viewers following their favourite programme. Viewers also complained about the duration of the advertising batch. They think advertising batches are too long, and they prefer to do something else rather than continue watching the TV transmission during that time.

It contributes to a loss of flow. You will be enjoying yourself and then, all of a sudden ... (Female)

The worst thing is the adverts ... those are the worst. More adverts than script, and besides, the same ones are repeated at the beginning and the end. (Female)

Using the Internet to view TV programming content was seen as a viable solution to the problems of the saturation of TV stations with advertising material.

Adverts really bother me. That's why I like to download from the Internet. (Male)

TV advertising-avoidance behavior represents a serious problem for advertisers. Viewers also avoided adverts by using the time during which adverts appear to have a break from sitting in front of the TV.

I use the time of the adverts in order to go get some water and not miss anything. (Male)

Focus group participants recognized that advertising is an important source of revenue for commercial TV stations and believed that it is impossible to do away with them. Advertising can and should be pleasing and creative. However, advertising on local television stations was seen to be of particularly poor quality when compared to foreign advertisements.

Well, if TV must have advertisements, then at least they can be pleasing. I mean that one enjoys seeing them when they are aired. I tend to think that the adverts on TV are very monotonous; they are all the same. There are some good adverts on the Italian stations. I think that adverts can be more interesting rather than always the same. Because sometimes I come across an advert and I think, 'Wow, this is good,' and I appreciate it ... (Male)

I often find myself watching foreign adverts ... they have a short storyline, they may be funny and well filmed. (Female)

Pop-ups, accompanied by the alert, were found to be annoying and inappropriate, particularly if the content of the pop-up jars with the content of the TV programme. So, for example, a pop-up advertising a cruise liner holiday was construed as misplaced in a discussion/reality show at the moment that a guest was disclosing a personally significant event.

On ... once, somebody had died and they were crying on TV, and then they showed an advert for cruises at that very moment! (Male)

Participants also criticized the size of the pop-up which may take up half the screen.

Teleshopping programmes were also considered to be of particularly low quality.

Teleshopping? Oh, my goodness! It is too much, it's sickening. (Female)

This teleshopping! Quarter of an hour, four times in the afternoon! (Female)

Adverts may be of good quality and some local adverts were seen to fit the bill.

Recently I saw a BOV advert I really liked. (Male)

Sometimes adverts have a Maltese flavour, and that I really like! (Female)

POP-UPS, ACCOMPANIED BY THE ALERT, WERE FOUND  
TO BE ANNOYING AND INAPPROPRIATE, PARTICULARLY IF THE CONTENT  
OF THE POP-UP JARS WITH THE CONTENT OF THE TV PROGRAMME



## 4. CONCLUSIONS

Focus group participants manifest a spectrum of TV viewing habits with older participants tending towards more traditional viewing habits, mostly watching TV on the TV set and at the time the programmes are aired. Younger participants are more likely to stream or download content from the Internet. Viewing habits are seasonal, with wintertime providing more opportunity to engage in television viewing and the summer period lacking creativity with repeated content.

In accordance with the literature on the subject, there did not emerge any absolute answer to what constitutes quality, and its subjective element was emphasized. With the increase in programming available to the average viewer, the question of quality becomes even more salient. Quality programming is one that entertains, has substance, and leaves one satisfied and engaged. A quality programme is one that does what its genre sets out to do.

Quality may be equated with technical standards of production, such as effective lighting and sound, good camera work, professional acting, script and direction. These elements make for creative and innovative productions. Local technical standards are deemed to have improved radically. Limited budgets, however, when compared with foreign productions, were seen to impact on the technical standard achieved. In a discussion programme or current affairs programme the presenter is crucial, and the quality of the news broadcast was seen to be contingent on the professionalism of the anchor and the scripting of the news reports. Lack of professionalism might be a result of the fact that people involved in local media productions are primarily part-timers with other full-time occupations, and lack training. The programme schedule on local television was seen to be lacking in innovation. Programme schedules are dominated by studio-based talk shows, and in dramatic productions storylines were seen to be stretched exponentially, contributing to a lack of originality. Programmes and drama tend to be repeated from one schedule to another.

Quality may be defined by consumption and audience volume. Two contradictory elements emerged. Quality is what people prefer: if a programme has a significant reach, then it must be catering for something. On the other hand, participants discussed how just because a programme is popular does not necessarily mean that it is good. Generally, an elitist view dominated.

Good quality TV is TV that allows the fostering of a sense of community through the sharing of common experiences and has the ability to emotionally arouse. Local drama programmes were positively viewed as documenting real-life issues.

Quality was equated with learning and information, thus fostering citizenship. While technical standards were deemed to be very important as a measure of quality, the content of TV programming in terms of the information it imparts was considered to be equally valuable. Programmes of good quality are extensively researched. Participants recognized that TV is not always educational but there was general consensus that it should aspire to be so. Television's true quality is its ability to offer widespread access, especially to people who might not have other avenues for accessing information. Television, like all media, must play its part in sustaining truth and bearing witness. In general, news programmes on the political stations were considered to be biased, and, in order to provide a closer approximation to the truth, the participants reported relying on TVM, the public broadcaster. Impartiality and fairness were deemed to be two important criteria for quality in current affairs programmes. These would lead to truth in news content, a criterion which is highly sought by the viewer.

A broadcasting system of high quality is one that offers a wide variety of programmes that appeal to a highly diverse audience. Quality is detracted when there is inadequate representation of minorities in local programming. The lack of quality in sports programming is mainly due to poor commentary and lack of preparation by the sports commentator. But the lack of gender balance and lack of exposure of other types of sports, even if 'minority sports', all lead to lack of quality.

Respondents generally had negative attitudes towards adverts, claiming that these detracted from their viewing pleasure. Advertising can, and should, be pleasing. Pop-ups, accompanied by the alert, were found to be annoying and inappropriate, and jar with the content of the TV programme. Teleshopping programmes were also considered to be of particularly low quality because of the way these are presented and since there is no substance in their content.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of recommendations are clearly emergent from the focus group data and are put forward in this section:

### 5.1 Recommendations for monitoring and research

The study recommends that the Broadcasting Authority undertakes the following actions:

1. continues to prioritise the monitoring of the TV viewing habits of the Maltese population;
2. continues to periodically monitor quality standards in local broadcasting through both quantitative and qualitative research;
3. commissions studies on particular issues related to quality standards – the findings indicate that some areas are of particular concern and require immediate further investigation:
  - the gender dimension of broadcasting;
  - the issue of diversity;
  - the possible abuse of vulnerable groups;
  - an exploration on attitudes towards advertising;
  - sports coverage.

### 5.2 Recommendations for regulation

The study recommends that:

(a) production houses and television stations undertake the following actions:

1. ensure that technical standards of production are adequately addressed, guaranteeing:
  - effective lighting and sound;
  - good camera work;
  - professional acting;
  - professional script writing;
  - professional direction.
2. ensure that programmes aired are innovative and creative.
3. ensure that discussion programmes are conducted in a proper manner, allowing the exploration of diverse points of view.



4. ensure that programmes are well researched and impart correct information contributing to the continuing informal education of the Maltese.
- (b) The Broadcasting Authority undertakes the following actions:
  5. ensures that local broadcasting services consist of public, private and community broadcasts that offer varied and comprehensive programming to cater for all interests and tastes;
  6. ensures that scheduling caters for diverse tastes;
  7. ensures that news broadcasts are balanced, objective and impartial;
  8. ensures the proper use of the Maltese language on TV;
  9. ensures that advertising is conducted in accordance with the law;
  10. ensures an adequate amount of Public Service Announcements on TVM.

### **5.3 Recommendations for Policy**

The study recommends that the Broadcasting Authority undertakes the following actions:

1. encourages authorities to place the training of media professionals firmly on the country's agenda through the development of specialized higher educational programmes;
2. supports production houses and TV stations in their contribution to fostering active citizenship in the population.

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## 7. APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Focus Group Guide (English Version)

#### Part 1: Welcome

Introduce moderator and assistant.

Our topic is 'Quality in Television Broadcasting'.

The results will be used for the writing of a report for the Broadcasting Authority.

You were selected because we require a group that is diverse, people from different walks of life, and with different viewing habits.

Ground rules:

- No right or wrong answers, only differing points of view.
- We are audio tape-recording, one person speaking at a time.
- We are on a first-name basis. Say your name before you speak so the transcriber can make reference to your opinion.
- You do not need to agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as others share their views.
- We ask that you turn off your phones. If you cannot, and if you must respond to a call, please do so as quietly as possible and rejoin us as quickly as you can.

My role as moderator will be to guide the discussion.

#### Part 2: Exploring Quality

1. Opening question – how would you describe your television viewing habits?  
You may watch TV on TV stations as the programmes are aired, or else you may stream or download content using the internet.
2. The term 'quality' is often used to evaluate television broadcasting. What does the term 'quality programming' mean to you?

3. Think about the ways you might identify TV programmes as examples of either 'good' (quality) or 'bad' (quality) television.

We will do this in relation to local programming and foreign programming, perhaps drawing comparisons between the two.

Prompt: You might think of quality in terms of, for example, technical standards of production; quality in terms of viewer preferences; or quality in terms of provision of information, etc.

Prompt if not addressed spontaneously:

- a. 'Quality' may be understood as the technical standards of a television programme. Is it important or not? How do you rate Maltese television in terms of technical standards?
- b. 'Quality' may be understood as 'what most people like to watch' – What is your opinion on this?
- c. 'Quality' may be understood as what is visually appealing, beautiful and artistic – How important is this to you, and why, or why not? How do you rate local programming in terms of this element?
- d. 'Quality' may be understood as allowing the sharing of experiences common to mankind, e.g. Tista' Tkun Int or reality shows. Is this an important element? How does this element of quality apply to local programming?
- e. 'Quality' may be understood as providing people with the opportunity to be informed. What can you say about this in relation to local programming?
- f. Quality has to do with telling the truth and with fairness. What can you say about this in relation to local programming?
- g. Quality is defined as being able to portray the diversity in society – What is your opinion on this in relation to local television?
4. What do you think has happened to the quality of local television programmes over the last five years or so? Quantity vs quality?

- 
5. Let us move to examine different types of programming on local television and your perceptions of whether they are 'quality' programmes:
    - News coverage
    - Sports coverage
    - Arts, history and science programmes
    - Film
    - Entertainment – chat shows, reality TV, etc.
    - Advertising.
  6. What are your views on the regulation of broadcasting?
  7. Closing question: Of all the things we have talked about, what is most important to you?



## **Gwida għad-diskussjoni fi grupp (Verżjoni Maltija)**

### **Parti 1: Merħba**

Introduci lill-moderatur u lill-assistent.

Is-suġġett tagħna hu: 'Il-Kwalità fix-Xandir'.

Ir-riżultati se jintużaw biex jinkiteb rapport għall-Awtorità tax-Xandir.

Inti ġejt magħżul għaliex nixtiequ li l-grupp tad-diskussjoni jkun magħmul minn nies differenti li ġejjin minn oqsma differenti tal-ħajja u li għandhom abitudnijiet differenti relatati mat-televizjoni.

Regoli bażiċi:

- M'hemmx risposti li huma meqjusa tajbin jew ħziena. Ir-risposti huma bbażati fuq opinjonijiet differenti.
- Qegħdin nirrekordjaw, persuna wahda titkellem f'hin wiehed.
- Nindirizzaw lil xulxin b'isimna. Għid x'jismek qabel titkellem, sabiex min ikun qed jagħmel it-traskrizzjoni jkun jista' jirreferi għall-opinjoni tiegħek.
- Mhux neċessarjament taqbel ma' dak li jgħidu l-oħrajn, iżda għandek tismagħhom b'rispett waqt li qed jaqsmu l-opinjonijiet tagħhom.
- Nitolbukom titfu t-telefowns ċellulari jew il-pagers tagħkom. Jekk ma tistgħux, u jekk ikollkom twieġbu t-telefonata, jekk joghġobkom aghmlu dan bil-kwiet kemm jista' jkun u erġghu ngħaqdu magħna mill-iktar fis possibli.

Ir-rwol tiegħi bħala moderatriċi hu li niggwida d-diskussjoni.

### **Parti 2 – Nesploraw il-kwalità**

1. Mistoqsija tal-bidu: Kif tiddeskrivi l-abitudnijiet tiegħek rigward it-televizjoni? Perezempju, forsi tara l-programmi fuq l-istazzjonijiet tat-televizjoni jew inkella tnizzel il-programmi, perezempju xi serje minn fuq l-internet.
2. Il-kelma 'kwalità' hija ħafna drabi użata biex issir evalwazzjoni dwar ix-xandir televiżiv. X'tifhem bi 'programmi ta' kwalità'?

3. Aħseb dwar x'inhu program ta' kwalità tajba jew programm ta' kwalità hazina. Ħa nagħmlu dan b'referenza għall-programmi lokali u daww barranin, billi forsi nagħmlu paragun bejniethom it-tnejn.

Għajjnuna: Perezempju, tista' taħseb dwar kwalità f'terminu ta' standards tekniċi tal-produzzjoni, kwalità f'terminu ta' dak li jippreferu t-tele spettaturi, kwalità f'inkwantu kemm tinghata informazzjoni, eċċ.

Għajjnuna jekk ma jindirizzawx il-mistoqsija b'mod spontanju:

- a. Il-'kwalità' tista' tigi mifhuma f'termini ta' standards tekniċi ta' programm televiżiv. Tqisu jew ma tqisux importanti dan? Kif tqis it-televiżjoni Malti rigward standards tekniċi?
  - b. Il-'kwalità' tista' tigi mifhuma bħala dak li jippreferu t-tele spettaturi, fis-sens li programm ta' kwalità huwa programm li jigi segwit minn ħafna nies. X'inhil-opinjoni tiegħek dwar dan?
  - c. Il-'kwalità' tista' tigi mifhuma bħala dik li tappella viżwalment, li hija sabiħa u artistika – Kemm hu importanti dan għalik, u għaliex, jew inkella għaliex le? Kif tqis il-programmi lokali rigward dan l-element?
  - d. Il-'kwalità' tista' tigi mifhuma bħala mezz kif l-esperjenzi komuni tal-umanità jinqasmo fost in-nies, perezempju, *Tista' Tkun Int* jew *reality shows*. Hu aspett importanti dan? Kif japplika dan l-aspett ta' kwalità fuq il-programmi lokali?
  - e. Il-'kwalità' tista' tigi mifhuma bħala dik li tipprovdi lin-nies l-opportunità li jkunu infurmati. X'tista' tghid dwar dan rigward programmi lokali?
  - f. Il-'kwalità' għandha tikkonċerna ruhha li tinghad il-verità u li tkun *fair*. X'tista' tghid dwar dan fuq il-programmi lokali?
  - g. Il-'kwalità' hija definita bħala mezz li juri d-diversità fis-soċjetà. – X'inhil-opinjoni tiegħek dwar dan fuq il-programmi televiżivi lokali?
4. Taħseb li kien hemm tibdiliet jew żviluppi fir-rigward ta' kwalità ta' programmi televiżivi lokali matul dawn l-aħħar ħames snin jew iktar?

5. Issa ngħaddu biex neżaminaw tipi differenti ta' programmi fuq it-televiżjoni lokali u l-perċezzjonijiet tagħkom dwar jekk humiex programmi ta' kwalità:
  - L-aħbarijiet
  - Sports
  - Arti, storja u programmi ta' xjenza
  - Films
  - Divertiment – *chat shows, reality TV*, eċċ.
  - Riklami.
6. X'inhi l-opinjoni tiegħek dwar ir-regolamentazzjoni tax-xandir?
7. Mistoqsija tal-gheluq: Mill-affarijiet kollha li tkellimna fuqhom, liema hi l-iktar importanti għalik?

## Appendix B: Summary of Data Analysis (Coding)

Category	Subcategory	Theme	Subtheme
1. Television viewing habits	1.1 A medium in transition	1.1.1 Younger vs older viewers	1.1.1.2 Traditional viewing habits
	1.2 Seasonal		1.1.1.2 Streaming / downloading / on demand / interactive
	1.3 Local vs international viewing		
2. Exploring quality			
	2.1 Technical standards	2.1.1 Sound	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improved radically, but still poor in comparison to international programming</li> <li>lack of attention to detail</li> <li>limited budgets</li> <li>poor news presenters</li> <li>lack of professionalism</li> <li>part-time work</li> <li>lack of training</li> <li>small country – lack of talent</li> <li>nepotism</li> <li>the same actors in a large number of programmes</li> <li>professional acting in drama</li> <li>programme schedules are dominated by studio-based talk shows.</li> <li>drama productions were seen to reach standards of excellence by the focus group participants</li> <li>storylines were seen to be stretched unreasonably</li> <li>same themes constantly revisited</li> </ul>
		2.1.2 Camera Work	
		2.1.3 Direction	
		2.1.4 Editing	
		2.1.5 Professional Presenters and Actors	
		2.1.6 Innovation and Creativity	
		2.1.7. Commentary	

	2.2 Consumer quality and the market	<p>2.2.1 If people like it, it must be good</p> <p>2.2.2 Elitist view</p> <p>2.2.3 Consumption and audience volume</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• popular programmes financially viable and economically driven</li> <li>• mediocrity vs majority</li> <li>• distinction between popularity and quality</li> <li>• quality is what satisfies the majority satisfies all different groups in society</li> </ul>
	2.3 Ritual and communion	<p>2.3.1 Fostering a sense of community</p> <p>2.3.2 Sharing of experiences common to mankind</p> <p>2.3.3 The ability to emotionally arouse the viewer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reflects real-life experiences</li> <li>• realism</li> <li>• trivializes human suffering – negative aspect</li> <li>• good quality programming allows families to come together</li> </ul>

	2.4 Active Citizenship, Truth and Fairness	<p>2.4.1 Impartiality</p> <p>2.4.2 News programmes biased</p> <p>2.4.3 Facts should be discussed with care and placed in context</p> <p>2.4.4 Learning</p> <p>2.4.5 Develop as a human being and citizen</p> <p>2.4.6 Widespread access</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• information: to keep up-to-date with Maltese societal issues – active citizenship (relevant to all genres)</li> <li>• good quality TV should be educational</li> <li>• for those who cannot access information elsewhere, TV is an important source of information</li> <li>• documentaries – learning</li> <li>• news programmes on the political stations are biased.</li> <li>• public broadcaster relied on to give the truth</li> <li>• bias may be overt or covert</li> <li>• Maltese culture and society</li> </ul>
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	2.5 Diversity	<p>2.5.1 Wide variety of programmes</p> <p>2.5.2 Appeal to a highly diverse audience</p> <p>2.5.3 Inadequate representation of minorities</p> <p>2.5.4 Lack of representation of different religions</p> <p>2.5.5 Not accessible to all</p> <p>2.5.6 Gender imbalance</p>	<p>lack of representation in terms of the discussion programmes – always the same faces</p> <p>not many programmes use signing for the deaf population</p> <p>too much emphasis on religion – programmes should reflect diversity – multiculturalism should be present caters for the majority</p> <p>neutrality</p> <p>reflects what is happening in society</p>
3 Definitions of quality			<p>elitist view vs subjectivity</p> <p>quality depends on the genre</p> <p>quality is what satisfies the majority</p> <p>quality is a programme that you watch again</p> <p>distinction between popularity and quality</p> <p>entertaining</p> <p>subjective</p> <p>satisfaction / substance / interesting / engaging</p>
4. Advertising	4.1 Detract from their viewing pleasure	<p>4.1.2 Pop-ups</p> <p>4.1.3 Teleshopping</p>	<p>use of internet as solution</p> <p>some good quality ads</p>

**Appendix C*****To be completed by Faculty Research Ethics Committee***

We have examined the above proposal and advise

**Acceptance**

**Refusal**

**Conditional acceptance**

For the following reason/s:

Signature

Date

***To be completed by University Research Ethics Committee***

We have examined the above proposal and grant

**Acceptance**

**Refusal**

**Conditional acceptance**

For the following reason/s:

Signature

Date

U. Lu  
Acting Chair, UREC

12/5/2015





