

Examining Trans-media/-national Networks

“Twelve statements on quality”

Elisabeth Morney, *Aalto University, Helsinki, Finland*

This paper discusses whether there are common characteristics of quality not only in transnational TV dramas but also across genres. When a new television program is planned, the question of quality is a main subject of interest. More than ever there is a need for quality in audiovisual programs since the audience chooses what to see and when to watch.

As a part of an evaluation process, creators of television programs are naturally thinking of the outcome wondering what could have been done differently or if the product could have been done in a better way. Without criteria the discussion of quality will be filled with bias.

In my research I have conducted in-depth interviews with professionals and academics in the field of television in Finland and US, and individuals in leading positions at the *Emmy*, *Peabody* and *Golden Globe Awards*. Based on my interviews and professional experience in the field, I have identified *twelve statements of criteria for quality* in television. They are as follows:

- professionalism / excellence
- identification / relevance
- fascination
- originality
- variation
- authenticity / credibility
- touching the emotions
- number of viewers
- effort
- desire to revisit
- impact on viewer / society
- consistency of quality in production

The perspective of quality differs depending on point of view. A commercial network considers popularity as quality while a public broadcast network doesn't put the same emphasis in this. In a commercial aspect, high number of viewers matter, because popularity leads to increased profit. Number of viewers also matters for Public Service Television but is not considered quality, per se, because sometimes the target audience is small since Public Service Television also serves minorities and small groups. In this case success is measured by reaching a high percent of the targeted audience. Thus quality as an original product made with skill and effort is not the same as having a vast audience.

The expressions of criteria may vary dependent on the genres. For example, the expression identification used in drama will be translated into relevance when referring to news. Authenticity in drama refers to the character being true to the world shown on screen. In factual programs this translates to credibility.

With some exceptions professionalism is a cornerstone for quality. Excellence is a criteria many juries are looking for and this comes from knowing the craft.

Identification and fascination go together. If there is no identification, the audience doesn't connect with the program and without fascination the program gets boring. Poor variation may have the same effect. Variation in a news flow can be unique content or an original perspective.

What matters the most is that the content stays with the viewer longer than the viewing, in other words, making an impact. On the other hand, to be able to catch the audience's attention, production value matters. The definition of production value is not clear and could be the subject of further studies.

Touching the emotions is a criterion of quality, but there is a fine line between when there is quality and when there is not. Sensationalism touches the emotions and usually attracts viewers. Rarely is this considered quality. An emotion that is constructive and enriches a person's life is considered to be quality. That doesn't necessarily mean the reaction of the receiver is positive, but that the program gives something constructive to the receiver.

Further research is to be conducted on the difference between popularity and quality. In creative artefacts like audiovisual programs, popularity (often referred to as success) is not the same as quality. Popularity can be achieved without quality and quality can be achieved without success. If popularity and quality are achieved simultaneously there will be a greater impact. In creative theories there is creativity with a small "c" and creativity with a big "C" depending on the impact

the artefact has on the individual and on the society. A definition of creativity mainly embraced by scholars is that creativity is something original and appropriate. Appropriate refers to relevance. The more original and appropriate the artefact is the more impact the creative artefact has.

Each criterion in this study can be seen as transnational regardless of distribution platform and genre, thus offering a unique tool for professionals striving towards multifaceted quality in TV programs. However, an exact definition of quality in television is difficult to state since a creative work is uniquely interpreted. Still, these twelve criteria, may be helpful for program makers as well as for those evaluating audiovisual programs.