

# What affects perceived quality? An examination of television fiction series

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## Abstract

With the number of television series increasing almost daily and resources becoming increasingly sparse, it is more important than ever for companies to determine which series will have market success or not. This paper attempts to identify the characteristics of television fiction series that cause consumers to perceive them as being of high quality. In a nation-wide survey, we surveyed 874 television viewers about ten series from four genres to investigate which characteristics of television series predict consumers' perception of their quality. Although in most cases the coherence of the plot and the dialogues have a strong and positive effect on perceived quality, overall, we find that different genres have different predictors of perceived quality. We discuss the implications of our findings and provide recommendations for future research and practice.

## Keywords

Quality; Perceived quality; Television series; Audiovisual communication; Entertainment; Consumption; Audience research; Fiction.

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## 1. Introduction

In the last two decades, the production of television series has experienced a notable increase in both quantity and quality, driven by the emergence of streaming platforms such as *Netflix* and *Amazon Prime* (Cascajosa, 2016). This has led to greater diversification of genres and formats, with a wide range of options available and increased competition (Cetin-Erus; Erus, 2020). Each year, distributors select thousands of television series pilots and narrow the choices down to hundreds, as each broadcasting company will air, on average, about 15 new series each year (Vogel, 2001). Furthermore, the greater investment in production has allowed series to compete with film productions in terms of budget and narrative quality. Furthermore, the cost of producing each episode is substantially high for studios, and can reach \$15,00,000 (Variety, 2017). The result has been a significant expansion of the global audience and a growing internationalization of television series production.

As a consequence, viewers face an increasing plethora of entertainment items to choose from on a daily basis. For this reason, in such a challenging market it is crucial to properly understand the variables that will lead the viewer to become a follower of the series or not, so that the decision on which series to incorporate may be more of a solid choice and less of a 'gamble'.

One of the variables that the literature on the consumption of television series has identified as determinative in the decision of whether to watch a series or not is the perceived quality by the viewer. McCabe and Akass (2007) argued that viewers are more likely to watch a series again if this television product was perceived high on quality. This finding implies a direct translation to the realm of television fiction of the marketing literature premise that perceived quality constitutes a driving force in consumers' choices (Jacoby; Olson, 1985). Perceived quality influences consumer satisfaction or enjoyment, and this, in turn, affects product consumption (Yu, 2005).

For this reason, in the area of television fiction it is very important to understand which aspects of the television series lead viewers to perceive it as of high quality, since they have an impact on their decision to watch it or not and subsequently in the success of the series in terms of audience and, finally, in the survival of the companies that produce and distribute these entertainment products.

The goal of this paper is to investigate some of the characteristics of television series that might determine viewers' perception of their quality. Given the breadth of the concept of quality and the high number of attributes that could potentially impact perceived quality by the audience, and recognizing the impossibility of encompassing them all, our study identifies several of the most relevant ones and analyzes the magnitude and significance of their impact.

We conduct our empirical analysis with the information from an original survey to 874 viewers on the perceived quality of ten popular fiction series. We intend to shed light on the attributes that influence the viewers' perception of quality of television series for a wide range of genres. Our results can be very helpful for the decision-making of all the parties involved in the production and distribution of fiction series.

We start our research by discussing in the first place how quality is defined and examined in the literature on fiction series. Next we focus on the perceptions on quality of one of the participant groups in the industry: the audience. More specifically, we identify several attributes of fiction series that the audience potentially use to evaluate them in terms of their perceived quality. Then, we present the methodology used to test our hypotheses on the factors that influence the perception of quality by the television audience, and analyze the findings of our empirical analysis. Finally, we discuss the theoretical implications of the findings and offer conclusions afterwards.

## 2. Theory and hypotheses

### 2.1. Quality in television

In the literature on services marketing, the concept of quality has historically been a subject of significant debate. A distinction has traditionally been made between objective and subjective quality. Objective quality refers to measurable and verifiable superiority based on some predetermined ideal standard or standards (Zeithaml, 1988).

On the other hand, subjective quality is linked to a conceptualization of quality based on the service user. In this sense, perceived quality is defined as the consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority through the fulfillment of specific attributes (Solín; Curry, 2023).

The concept of perceived quality is also prone to confusion with other related concepts such as satisfaction. However, there are relevant differences between them, as noted by Oliver (1993). Satisfaction may result from a large number of causes, and is not necessarily the direct result of perceived quality, being largely the result of many non-quality-related factors, such as needs, whereas quality has only a few, specific, antecedents (Yu *et al.*, 2005). In fact, perceived quality does not even require experience, whereas satisfaction involves the consump-

“ One of the variables that the literature on the consumption of television series has identified as determinative in the decision of whether to watch a series or not is the perceived quality by the viewer ”

tion of the service. Similar arguments can be provided to support the existence of differences between the concepts of perceived quality and taste or preference (Steenkamp, 1986).

The television industry has not been immune to this issue, and for a long time, there have been countless discussions about defining quality in this field. In this context, it is essential to highlight the pioneering work of Thompson (1997) and Ishikawa (1996), who studied the application of the concept of quality in television, focusing on the program level in the former case and the channel level in the latter, emphasizing issues such as formality and diversity, respectively.

As in other industries, quality has been recognized as crucial for the various parties involved in creating television series (Lavie; Dhoest, 2015). Similar to other products and services, an exact measure of quality is challenging to pinpoint, and television has no set standards (Turner, 2001; Logan, 2016).

In the television domain, the dichotomy between quality as subjective and quality as objective is also evident (Artero *et al.*, 2010), where commercial and artistic logics collaborate in the decision-making process (Roberts, 2010). Diego *et al.* (2011) emphasize in their study on three Spanish series the discrepancies between the objective and subjective views of quality, highlighting the difficulty in measuring the concept.

From the objective approach, it is emphasized that creators and critics can determine which series are worthy of the quality label by identifying them as works of art (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). In this line, Hilmes and Jacobs (2003) argue that quality television should have a large and diverse cast, complex dramatic narratives, and a cinematic aesthetic. For others, quality television needs to show commercial and aesthetic innovation, social engagement, and be produced by a “genius” creator (Lavie, 2015).

From the subjective perspective, one could argue initially, since the purpose of the television series for the consumer is to entertain, that quality can be measured in the extent that people are entertained (Bayo-Moriones *et al.*, 2018). However, entertainment is different to quality. As explained above, the satisfaction of a viewer with a series is not only influenced by perceived quality but also by his needs, among other factors. In fact, word of mouth critiques may be also important in the overall perceived quality of a series but not in the entertainment and satisfaction they generate (Basuroy *et al.*, 2006).

## 2.2. Factors affecting the perceived quality of television series

In this section, a series of factors associated with television series that can affect the quality perceived by viewers are identified. Specifically, four groups of factors are examined: the characters and actors; plot coherence, complexity and originality; dialogues and immorality. Next, we elaborate the hypotheses about how and in what direction each of these factors impact perceived quality.

### 2.2.1. Characters and actors

The characters of a television series are among the most important factors when an audience is evaluating the series (Cohen, 1999; Dunleavy, 2017; Hayat, 2022; Hoffner; Cantor, 1991; Vorderer; Knobloch, 2002). This happens because character believability—which refers to how much the viewer can believe in the realistic nature of the character—has a major role in how much the audience is transported into the story (Green; Brock, 2000). That is, the degree to which he or she feels is there into the movie or television show.

The character’s idiosyncrasies, appearance, and physical movements, as well his or her motivations and decisions can affect the overall believability of the character (Thomas; Johnson, 1995). Characters whose actions match their goals are much more believable than those who do not (Graesser *et al.*, 1994). For example, a believable character would be one who maintained the same goal orientation throughout the entire program. Therefore, a villain who tried to destroy the hero throughout the entire narrative would be believable because his intentions and actions remained the same, as did his morals. Adversely, if the villain, in the middle of the program, wanted to throw the hero a surprise party out of the goodness of his heart, he would be much less believable to the audience. This capacity to predict the character’s motivations and actions can cause the illusion of the audience member “knowing” the character (Green; Brock, 2000).

Overall, if the character believability is high, the audience will be more transported into the movie or television show, allowing them to be more engrossed with the story and engaged with the characters. This in turn, may affect positively the perceived quality of the series, as people evaluate better movies or television series that relate the viewer more easily to the storyline and characters, and has the capacity to transport him into the narrative worlds (Bermejo, 2010; Green; Brock, 2000). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H1: Character believability will have a positive relationship with the perceived quality of a television series.

Likewise, actors play a potential role in the perceived quality of the series. After all, acting is an art and one that not all actors can do well. We know that character believability has a lot to do with transportation (Green; Brock, 2000). Yet, if the actor cannot “get into character,” how can the character transport the audience?

Similar to other products and services, an exact measure of quality is challenging to pinpoint, and television has no set standards

In all professions, there are people who perform better and worse on their jobs, with all the consequences it might have to the quality of the product or service elaborated by the organization to which they belong to. Nonetheless, in the entertainment industry the role of actors for the product is even more critical. More specifically, **Faulkner and Anderson (1987)** found star actors to be bigger contributors to film performance than the directors. As a consequence, movies with stars are more likely to create high revenues (**De Vany; Walls, 1999**), and extend the box office time (**Hadida, 2003**).

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While these findings dealt mostly with movies, we believe they can apply to television series as well, because they also have their own stars. Therefore, since actors play a pivotal role in the quality of the series, we hypothesize the following:

H2: The performance of the actors will have a positive relationship with the perceived quality of a television series.

### 2.2.2. Plot coherence, complexity, and originality

The plot, which can be defined as the story of a movie or television series, constitutes an additional key determinant of the quality and success of an entertainment product (**Albert, 1998; Kindem, 1982; Linton; Petrovich, 1988; Pérez-Morán, 2021**). Not surprisingly, Aristotle already recognized the importance of the plot long time ago. Additionally, he called plot structure “mythos” and identified it as a crucial ingredient in a story (**Franzosi, 1998**).

The building blocks of a plot are made of characters, events, and the causal and temporal relationships between them (**Rimmon-Kenan, 1998**). If the series of events surrounding a character are unconnected or loosely related, the believability of the characters and the story is likely to suffer in the eyes of the viewer. Therefore, the story should have a “natural form of thought” for the audience to evaluate it positively (**Schank; Abelson, 1995**). In that line, we typically call narrative to a coherent “sequence of events that have a continuant subject and constitute the whole” (**Prince, 1987**). That is, the several events that constitute a plot should be interconnected in a logical way and share some common aspects in order for the story to be called a narrative.

A narrative is necessary for the plot to come to life, and stands as an important instrument to allow the viewer understand what is happening in the story (**Grasser et al., 1994; Gerrig, 1993; Trabasso; Sperry, 1985**). In other words, a narrative, whether in the form of text or screen, helps the audience to follow the plot. Furthermore, good narratives are more likely to be perceived as powerful and to affect stronger the viewer’s judgement of the quality of television series and movies (**Bussell; Greenburg, 2000**).

When the narrative and the characters align correctly, the plot will be more cohesive. This in turn, will allow the audience not only to make sense of what is happening and infer the intentionality of the characters, but even to predict what may happen next. In other words, a coherent plot allows the viewer to become an active participant in the storyline and be more absorbed in the movie. For this reason, we hypothesize the coherence of the plot to increase the viewer’s perception of quality regarding a television series.

H3: The coherence of the plot will have a positive relationship with the overall perceived quality of the television series.

In addition to the plot coherence, the complexity of the plot might also influence the perceived quality of a television series by a given audience, as we will explain next. Plot complexity in television indicates a more intricate and involving narrative within the program. A series with a complex narrative is one that pushes the audience to take some level of mental effort in order to anticipate what may happen next, and how characters and plot are intertwined across several ideas. Furthermore, complexity in television can be a distinct narrative mode (**Bordwell, 1989**).

A trend in “rewatchability” of complex narratives has been growing considerably. Specifically, a significant number of viewers is seeking to watch the series episodes once again (**Mittell, 2006**). Rewatchability allows the viewer to understand better the complex narrative, and consequently, have a better opinion of the entertainment product. This is much like an art collector who wants to admire a certain piece of art again and again. Then, one could argue that plot complexity is a mark of quality that has a similar effect for some audience member of television series. The audience focusing on quality seeks out a form of television which is seen as more literate, stylistically complex, and psychologically deep than ordinary television fare (**Feuer et al., 1984**).

Viewers rate media programs based on cognitive and affective factors (**Raney, 2003**). Since narrative complexity offers viewers a “cognitive workout” that enables them to use problem-solving in order to follow the program (**Johnson, 2005**), then the plot complexity of a series could lead to an overall higher perceived quality. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H4: The complexity of the plot will have a positive relationship with the perceived quality of the series.

Over time, the repeated consumption of a product lead consumers to experience satiation and decrease their willingness to have more of it. Though this applies to the majority of products, it is particularly true in the entertainment industry. After all, who could watch the same television series for decades? Because of that, satiation makes television viewers

hungry for something new (Barroso *et al.*, 2016). That is, there is an understandable need for original programming among the general television audience, as highlighted by Medina (2006) in his review of the quality of audiovisual content. In fact, if there were not such a need, companies like *HBO* would not thrive with such success. *HBO* has been characterized by the use of uncommon narrative innovations in commercial fiction that have given it a hallmark of originality and quality (Cascajosa, 2006).

“ A coherent plot allows the viewer to become an active participant in the storyline and be more absorbed in the movie ”

More specifically, what would lead people who have access to free television series to pay money to watch some particular series? It is simple: the need for something new or original. Actually, according with Shattuc (2005) originality constitutes one of the TV's attractions for entertainment consumers.

On his analysis of the introduction of new television programs, Kennedy (2002) found that new programs characterized by originality outperform those introductions which merely imitate previous formats and stories. Not surprisingly, original programs hold a certain prestige within the television industry (Mittell, 2006), and furthermore, typically signal a product of quality. In fact, originality is one of the key components in deciding whether a television show is a form of art or not (Shattuc, 2005). Consequently, since originality plays a role among entertainment accolades, we hypothesize that:

H5: The originality of the series will have a positive relationship with the perceived quality of the series.

### 2.2.3. Dialogues

When judging the overall quality of the characters and the television series as a whole, it is important to consider the dialogue. More precisely, it is necessary to assess how much the dialogue expresses the inner intentions of each character and how faithfully represents him or her. Ideally, the dialogue should be coherent with the character's personality and reflect how his or her goals are expressed (Graesser *et al.*, 1994). In fact, the dialogue constitutes an integral part of characterization, and furthermore, allows to portrait the character's relations with the other participants in the story (Bubel, 2006; Mandala, 2007; Richardson, 2010). Not surprisingly, the way in which the characters speak to one another, and even self-speak, is a critical part of the narrative. In sum, the Merriam Webster (2004) definition on quality in dialogue claims that it should effectively communicate what the characters are thinking about and how they are interacting with each other.

Additionally, the dialogue of the characters should match the genre of the program. For instance, a sitcom's language should differ from a science fiction's language (Mandala, 2010). Each particular series' characters should have their own specific language that culturally sets the series apart from others (Bednarek, 2012). For example, *Friends* uses a different language than *House* as one is a sitcom and the other is a medical drama (Quaglio, 2009). Another example can be found in *Ally McBeal*. The verbal humor in this television series is essential to its characterization (Bubel, 2006). The more colloquial the language in the series is, the more believable the character and series as a whole will be (Quaglio, 2009). All in all, since the dialogue plays an important role in the coherence of the plot and the believability of the characters, we hypothesize that:

H6: Good dialogues will have a positive relationship with the overall perceived quality of the television series.

### 2.2.4. Immorality

Immoral actions displayed in television series may influence the audience's perception of quality (Hoffner; Cantor, 1991). In fact, this issue has been considered in proposals for the development of quality indices for television programs, including fiction (Mir *et al.*, 2008). In addition to that, the moral nature of the characters can also affect the perceived quality of the program. For instance, the Affective Disposition Theory (Zillmann, 2000) states that viewers make moral judgements about the characters and this affect their opinion on the story. More precisely, when "good" things happen to "good" characters and "bad" things happen to "bad" characters, a better judgment is made by the viewer (Raney; Bryant, 2002; Weber *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, a character whose actions are morally ambiguous (Krakowiak; Oliver, 2012), or untrue to his moral attributes, may be considered a lower quality character, and consequently, affect negatively the perceived quality of the television series overall. However, it is also pertinent to recognize that some series considered as paradigms of television quality by critics introduce characters with immoral behavior with whom the viewer ends up identifying, which is narratively commendable. In this sense, Smith (2011) suggests that allegiance could give rise to feelings of sympathy towards this kind of characters.

“ The dialogue constitutes an integral part of characterization, and furthermore, allows to portrait the character's relations with the other participants in the story ”

When morality salience is high, viewers consider the storyline and the characters more emotionally involving, as they hope for a good outcome for good characters and a bad outcome for bad characters. Because of this ability to achieve a higher level of involvement of the viewers (Raney, 2003; Vorderer; Hartman, 2009; Zillmann; Bryant, 1986), the presence of immoral actions or characters might negatively affect the perceived quality of the series. Then, we hypothesize that:

H7: Observed immorality in a television series will have a negative relationship with the perceived quality in series.

### 3. Materials and methods

Data were collected in a nationwide survey conducted in Spain. A quantitative approach was chosen for information gathering because it allows greater precision in measuring relevant concepts. Additionally, this approach enables the collection and use of information from a larger number of viewers, enhancing the possibility of generalizing the obtained results. For these reasons, this methodology is common in studies on perceived quality in various domains (Bayo-Moriones *et al.*, 2018).

The sample (N = 1000; 52% female) was formed with people over the age of 14, based on gender, age, and region of residence quotas to guarantee representativeness of the Spanish population. The age range was selected considering the audience potentially knowledgeable about the studied series. Expanding the range to viewers under 14 years old would have required data collection efforts that could have been fruitless since that age group is clearly outside the target audience for the analyzed series. Only the 874 participants who completed the survey were included in the analysis. The survey was administered by telephone using CATI.

Respondents reported their agreement with several items on an 11-point scale varying from 0 (not at all) to 10 (totally), plus their age and gender. These items were defined to reflect both the evaluation of the quality of television series by the audience and the different factors that we hypothesized as its predictors. Specifically, the evaluation of the quality of the fiction series was measured from three items.

Factors hypothesized to impact on it, that is, believability of the characters, performance of the actors, coherence of the plot, complexity of the plot, originality, goodness of the dialogues and immorality, were measured similarly. Table 1 displays all the variables in the empirical analysis, as well as their Cronbach's alphas, means, standard deviations, and the wording of the items that make up each of the variables. These wordings have been developed from the conceptualization of the factors included in the theoretical section. More specifically, the selection of items was initially made based on a review of empirical literature on the subject. Given that for a significant portion of the variables, no previously used measures were found, these measures were developed by the research team, aiming for the parsimony of the measure and ensuring its validity and reliability

Table 1. Variables: Cronbach's alpha, mean, SD, and items

Factor	Cronbach's alpha	Mean	SD	Item's question
Quality	0.95	7.31	1.98	It is very well done
				It is a series of quality
				It is an excellent series
Believability of the characters	0.75	7.06	1.96	The characters are very believable to me
				The characters are very interesting
Performance of the actors	0.94	7.76	1.70	The actors play their role well
				The actors fit their characters very well
Coherence of the plot	0.81	6.89	1.97	The stories are very well built
				The plot is so good that it engages quickly
Complexity of the plot	0.68	4.30	2.11	The episodes are hard to follow
				The stories are complicated to understand
				Within each chapter, different situations occur
Originality	0.76	6.35	1.95	It is very different from other series
				It is a very original series
				The series is not repetitive
Dialogues	0.91	6.43	2.05	The conversations of the characters are very interesting
				The dialogues are very intelligent
				The dialogues are well done
Immorality	0.80	3.96	2.47	In the series unpleasant things occur
				Violent content exists
				Immoral content exists

Our sample was divided in ten subsamples of equal size, and each subsample was asked about a different television series. Half of these ten series were of Spanish production, our audience of analysis, and the other half American, as USA has a historically long and significant dominance of the cultural production in the Western societies (Waterman; Jayakar, 2000). The series were selected according to several criteria. First, they had to be popular within the Spanish general public audience, so there would be sufficient knowledge of them for respondents to provide meaningful responses. Secondly, in line with one of the objectives of the study, the selected series had to represent different genres. Finally, to

the extent possible, efforts were made to include series that had also been subject to analysis in academic literature. For example, “Lost” has been analyzed by **Cascajosa** (2005) as part of the second golden age of North American television, and “Física y Química” has been examined by **Masanet, Medina y Ferrés** (2012) from a gender representation and diversity approach. Several of the Spanish series included are mentioned in the research review on Spanish television fiction conducted by **Mateos-Pérez** (2021).

The genre classification of the fiction series was extracted from *FilmAffinity*, a movie recommendations website widely respected in Spain. As a result the series are classified into four aggregate genres: comedy, drama, adventure, and thriller (see Table 2).

Table 2. Genres analyzed and their respective television series

Genre	Television series	Country of origin	Valid respondents (by television series)	Valid respondents (by genre)
Comedy	<i>Aída</i>	Spain	89	252
	<i>Friends</i>	USA	90	
	<i>Desperate Housewives</i>	USA	73	
Drama	<i>Cuéntame</i>	Spain	92	275
	<i>Física o Química</i>	Spain	86	
	<i>House</i>	USA	97	
Adventure	<i>Águila Roja</i>	Spain	79	162
	<i>Lost</i>	USA	83	
Thriller	<i>El Internado</i>	Spain	90	185
	<i>CSI</i>	USA	95	

#### 4. Results

To test our hypotheses about which factors predict the perception of quality of television series, we estimated an ordinary least squares model for each of the four genres analyzed, as different genres might have different factors influencing its perceived quality. All models were controlled by the respondents’ age (in intervals of 10 years) and gender (0 = male, 1 = female), and had dummies representing each television series.

Table 3. Results: Predictors of perceived quality of television series by genres

	Model 1 Comedy	Model 2 Drama	Model 3 Adventure	Model 4 Thriller
Believability of the characters	.06 (.07)	.26*** (.07)	.26* (.10)	.36*** (.10)
Performance of the actors	.20** (.06)	.05 (.07)	.20* (.10)	.17 (.11)
Coherence of the plot	.37*** (.06)	.26*** (.06)	.27** (.09)	.13 (.08)
Complexity of the plot	-.14** (.05)	-.08† (.04)	-.11* (.05)	-.13** (.05)
Originality	.07 (.05)	.02 (.05)	-.03 (.06)	.10 (.06)
Dialogues	.24*** (.05)	.35*** (.06)	.30** (.08)	.10 (.08)
Immorality	-.04 (.04)	-.00 (.04)	-.04 (.04)	-.01 (.05)
Age	.03 (.04)	.03 (.05)	-.07 (.05)	-.05 (.05)
Gender (f = 1)	.44** (.15)	.35* (.16)	-.18 (.18)	.34† (.19)
Dummy for the second television series of the model's genre	.27 (.18)	-.17 (.23)	-.07 (.22)	.29 (.20)
Dummy for the third television series of the model's genre	.08 (.20)	.27 (.22)	. (.22)	. (.20)
Constant	1.25** (.40)	.75 (.49)	1.40* (.56)	1.82** (.55)
n	252	275	162	185
F	45.48***	47.44***	31.86***	23.99***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.66	.65	.66	.56

Notes: Regression coefficients are unstandardized. Standard errors in parentheses. †  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

All results are displayed in Table 3. As we can observe, different television series genres have different predictors of perceived quality. For instance, in the comedy genre, the two main predictors of perceived quality are the “coherence of the plot” and “dialogues”. That is, a coherent plot and good dialogues increase viewers’ quality perception of comedy series in a highly significant way. Additionally, the “performance of the actors” and the “complexity of plot”, also significantly affect perceived quality, though with less power. Furthermore, this latter factor has a negative influence. That is, complex plots harm the perceived quality of comic television series. Finally, three factors do not significantly affect perceived quality of the comedy television series: “believability of the characters”, “originality”, and “immorality”.

Regarding drama, we find a similitude with comedy series regarding the two most important predictors: “coherence of the plot” and “dialogues”. Furthermore, “believability of the characters” also emerges as a very strong factor of perceived quality in the drama genre. “complexity of the plot” remains as a negative influence on perceived quality though its significance is only marginal for drama series. Finally, “performance of the actors”, “originality” and “immorality” do not predict perceived quality for the drama series in a significant way.

In the genre adventure, we find a larger number of factors significantly influencing perceived quality of the series. Specifically, “coherence of the plot” and “dialogues” remain as the most important predictors, followed by “believability of the characters”, “performance of the actors”, and “complexity of the plot”. Once again, a complex plot has a negative influence on quality. Additionally, “originality” and “immorality” do not affect the perceived quality of television series of the adventure genre.

Concerning thriller series, our model shows a smaller number of significant predictors comparatively to the other genres. Specifically, “believability of characters” emerges as the most important factor, with a highly significant and positive impact on perceived quality, followed by “complexity of the plot”, although the impact of this latter is negative and less powerful. According with other model, the other five factors do not influence viewers’ perception of quality regarding thriller television series.

The results obtained allow for a comprehensive assessment adjusted to the degree of fulfillment of the hypotheses formulated in the theoretical part of the study. Three of them (H1, H3 and H6), those concerning the believability of characters, the coherence of the plot and dialogues, have been accepted in our empirical analysis. The results for actors are mixed. However, the remaining three hypotheses have been rejected. It must be highlighted that the results for the complexity of the plot contradict our hypothesis H4. The analyses point to a negative influence of plot complexity on perceived quality, opposing the direction of the relationship in the theoretical hypothesis.

## 5. Discussion

Consumers today are overstimulated by a plethora of television series choices on multiple networks. When evaluating the acceptance of television series by viewers, it is necessary to investigate how they perceive their quality. While quality cannot be easily measured in a series (Geraghty, 2003), and may or may not lead to the success and longevity of the series, it is an important prerequisite to consider when deciding the series costs in its production and time. With this knowledge, it is necessary to investigate which variables are important to the consumer in a television series. While quality cannot be standardized for all individuals, quality can be generalized across television series to assess perceived quality in the television series. In our study, participants evaluated seven variables (characters, actors, plot coherence and plot complexity, originality, dialogue, and immorality) we hypothesized as important to quality across ten series.

John Mepham (Mepham, 1990), a British philosopher, stated that

“Quality is, from a logical point of view, undecidable. This, however, is a virtue. Quality is decided, provisionally, by people bringing to bear their interpretations and their values.”

One can conclude, from this statement, that the consumer (in this case, the television viewer) has the ultimate say on what is quality and what is not quality television, however, we can identify the most measurable characteristics within a series. Many studies have asked participants to rate quality in television, but few, if any, have explored the factors that would influence perceived quality.

The objective of this study was to identify factors associated to perceived quality in television series. Until now, a possible formula for the perceived quality in television series has not been proposed. However, from this study we are one step closer to understanding the variables in a television series that could lead to an overall higher perceived quality rating by the viewer.

Our results show that different television series genres have different predictors of perceived quality. Although the “coherence of the plot” and “dialogues” emerged as the most important predictors for three genres –comedy, drama, and adventure, these two factors do not significantly influence perceived quality for the thriller genre. Additionally, we find that the “complexity of the plot” has a significant influence for most genres. Yet, contrary to what we hypothesized, its effect is negative. That is, complex plots hamper the viewers’ perception of quality regarding most television series’ genres. Finally, our empirical models demonstrated that “originality” and “immorality” do not significantly influence the perceived quality of the television series in any of the four genres analyzed.



In spite of these differences between genres, as can be inferred from the previous paragraph, it is possible to formulate a series of recommendations with the aim of improving the perceived quality of series in line with the objective of the study. Specifically, our work indicates that to enhance the quality perceived by viewers in a television series, it is advisable to focus efforts on developing believable characters, a coherent and straightforward plot, and crafting appropriate dialogues.

“The analyses point to a negative influence of plot complexity on perceived quality”

One possible hurdle to this research is that it does not analyze directly whether or not the perceived quality of a series will lead to its success. It does, however, define some ways in which a television series may be perceived as a quality product by the consumer. More specifically, it provides a framework for determining if a television series will be considered to be high in quality or low in quality in general.

Future studies should focus on the individual differences between gender, culture, and quality indications in television series. It would also be prudent to examine newer American series and compare and contrast more elements between American and Spanish series. In addition, effort should be directed to the analysis of the influence of aspects such as the expression of audiovisual language, the use of music or the rhythm in the editing on perceived quality by viewers. Furthermore, the application of qualitative methodologies could be complementary to our quantitative approach and serve as an instrument to confirm the consistency of our findings. Overall, this study can enlighten what aspects in television series may lead to an overall perceived quality.

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