Living In A Sitcom

An Explanation Of The Reasons For Watching Sitcoms

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Summary

Watching television is an important part of our daily life. One format on TV that gets more and more popular is the sitcom. A sitcom is a situation comedy with a particular group of characters and based on situations that could arise in everyday life. This research explains what the reasons for the success are and why people like to watch this kind of comedy. The dependent variable is how much episodes an individual is watching during one week, because it was estimated that the more people "like" (or the more they have a reason) to watch a sitcom, the more episodes they would watch. The independent variables are motives for watching (entertainment, relaxation, habitual pass time, companionship, social interaction), the level of parasocial interaction and the level of identification with a media character. Altogether, 86 respondents participated in this study and filled in a questionnaire concerning these dependent and independent variables. The results show that especially the variable motives is a significant predictor for the amount of watched episodes during one week. The factors relaxation and social interaction are most influential. Besides that, the factor humour is a significant predictor for the amount of watched episodes. Also the factor parasocial interaction has a relationship with the amount of watched episodes.

Samenvatting

Televisie kijken is tegenwoordig een belangrijk deel van ons leven en er is één formaat dat meer en meer populair wordt, namelijk de sitcom. Een sitcom is een soort komedie met een bepaalde aantal karakters en de situaties die in een sitcom voorkomen zouden ook in de werkelijke wereld kunnen voorkomen. De huidige onderzoek verklaart waarom sitcoms zo populair zijn en waarom zo veel mensen graag een sitcom kijken. De afhankelijke variabele in dit onderzoek is hoeveel episoden de proefpersonen in één week kijken. De veronderstelling is dat hoe liever een individu een sitcom kijkt, hoe meer episoden zou hij ook kijken. De onafhankelijke variabelen zijn de motieven voor het kijken van een sitcom, het niveau van parasociale interactie en het niveau van identificatie met het televisie karakter. In het geheel waren er 86 proefpersonen in dit onderzoek en alle hebben en vragenlijst ingevuld. De resultaten laten zien dat vooral de variabele motieven een belangrijke voorspeller van de afhankelijke variabele is. Bovendien is de factor humor een heel belangrijk voorspeller van de variabele "aantal episodes die een persoon kijkt". Ook parasociale interactie staat in samenhang met de afhankelijke variabele.

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1.   **Introduction**

Television has become an important part of our daily life. According to statistics, the average American is watching more than 4 hours TV each day. Thus, in a 65-year life, the average person will have spent 9 years in front of the television. Furthermore, in America more than 99 per cent of the households have at least one TV (Herr, 2007). In the Netherlands the average person is watching less TV than in America but they are still watching more than 3 hours each day. These statistics are showing the importance of television these days. Because of that importance the film industry is working very hard to come up with new ideas, movies, shows and series to satisfy the viewers. As a result, one of the most popular formats in TV these days is the sitcom. A sitcom is a situation comedy with a particular group of characters. This format is based on situations that could arise in everyday life and one episode is usually not longer than 25-30 minutes (Stafford 2004). Today amongst the most popular sitcoms are "Two and a half men", "How I met your mother" and "The big bang theory". But why is it that sitcoms like these are so popular?

To begin with, there are some motives why people like watching sitcoms. One theory that is concerned with these motives is the Uses and gratifications theory (U & G). U & G is not concerned with the question "what does media with the viewer?" but with the question "what does the viewer with media?". Thus, the question is why people actively seek out specific media. The Uses and gratification theory assumes that viewers are not passive but take an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. Media selection is therefore goal-directed and motivated. Besides that the theory holds that viewers are responsible for choosing media to meet their own needs and desires. Thus, U & G suggests that people use the media to fulfil specific gratifications. Furthermore, this theory implies that the media compete against other information sources for viewers' gratification (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007). Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007) did research about the different motives for watching Reality TV and therefore they tested nine popular television use motives: relaxation, companionship, entertainment, social interaction, information, habit, pass time, arousal, and escape. In a questionnaire, viewers had to respond to different statements such as "I watch Reality TV shows because it amuses me", "I watch Reality TV shows because it relaxes me", "I watch Reality TV shows because I find the characters attractive". The respondents were asked, on a 5-point Likert scale, to indicate how much these reasons

were like their own reasons for viewing Reality TV (5=exactly, 1=not at all) (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007). The results in this study showed that six out of the nine factors have an interpretable influence on media use motives: entertainment, relaxation, habitual pass time, companionship, social interaction, and voyeurism. Entertainment and habitual pass time motives were the most important motives for viewers to watch Reality TV, but the other factors had also significant influence. This shows that there are many different and important motives for a viewer to seek out a special media format and this paper will answer the question if these motives are also important for watching sitcoms.

An important motive for watching a sitcom is the use of humour in these formats. Laughter and humour can be a good medicine against stress, daily problems and routines, work and other problems or worries (Geddes, 2011). Thus, it is easy and not challenging to follow a sitcom. Humour and comedy can reduce the daily stress, can be helpful for people to relax and to get away from the workaday life. The viewer can be passive and just have fun (Ruch, 1998).

When people watch sitcoms they become interconnected with the characters and they begin to feel that they are a part of the characters´ lifes. But, different as in real life, when watching TV people do not have to engage, they do not have to share and they do not have to give. In short, when watching a sitcom you are part of a social group without having to participate. This is called Parasocial Interaction which was first introduced by Horton and Wohl in 1956. They claim that "Parasocial Interaction resembles personal interaction in that one party appears to address the others directly, adjusting his action to the latter´s responses. They may experience this encounter as immediate, personal and reciprocal but these qualities are illusory and presumably not shared by the speaker. […] The social psychological processes involved in an audience´s subjective participation in the television program are not radically different from those occurring in everyday social activity" (1957, p. 580). In short, Parasocial Interaction is seen as the process by which a television viewer perceives an interpersonal relationship with a character on television. Thus, the viewer perceives a bond with the media figure and identifies himself with that character (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Besides that, those who acquire parasocial relationships have been found to think about the character beyond what is presented in the sitcom in which they are featured. For example, Cohen (2003) did research about parasocial relationships. The participants in his study said that they could predict the thoughts and feelings of those with which they had parasocial

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relationships. Cohen argues that a parasocial relationship is linked to the concept of uncertainty reduction. This concept combines the passive strategy of watching TV and the active strategy of talking about the persons at TV with other people. Cohen (2003) also found in his study that parasocial relationships share the same emotional aspects as real-world social relationships. They are mostly automatically and unconscious and viewers do not think about their reactions towards actors in TV (Heuvelman & Fennis, 2006). This would mean that anyone can develop a bond with a media character, not just persons who are socially isolated. Parasocial Interaction can be measured by the use of the PSI questionnaire developed by Schramm and Hartmann (2008), the questionnaire developed by Tsay and Bodine (2012), or a lot of other reliable measurements.

One theory related to parasocial interactions is the Social Identity theory (SIT), first introduced by Taifel and Turner in 1986. This theory proposes that "people strive to achieve or maintain a positive social identity, and that this positive identity derives largely from favorable comparisons that can be made between the ingroup and relevant outgroups" (Brown, 2000, p. 747). This means that every person will place himself in a special group or category (the ingroup). An individual is thus always a member of a special group (ingroup member). Usually a person is a member of more than one group. For example, a student can, on the one hand, be part of the category psychology student. He or she is then a group member of this category. On the other hand, the same student can be in the tennis club with different students from different study paths. He or she is then, at the same time, part of the "tennis group" and the "psychology-student group". People identify themselves with their ingroup and this is an important concept for parasocial relationships. Identification means that while viewing television the viewer gets the feeling as if he is part of the action. He understands the character and is fully absorbed. Thus, the viewer experiences the series from the inside (Cohen, 2001). It may be the case that identification with ingroup membership may influence how a person responds to mediated characters. They may look for cues from their ingroup membership to decide how they should react when presented with mediated characters from outgroup (Goar, 2007). Auter and Palmgreen (2000) stated that perhaps parasocial interaction is multidimensional. According to the authors, a TV viewer must first identify with the media character, have interest in that character, like that character´s method of solving problems and he should be able to see himself as interacting in a group with that character. Not till then it can be claimed a person is in a parasocial relationship with a media

figure. If this is true, social identity would influence parasocial interactions. Thus, social identity and identification are important and powerful mechanisms. For example, Huesmann, Lagerspetz and Eron (1984) did research about aggressive behaviour in children. They found that aggressive behaviour in children increased if they identified with aggressive characters on TV. Basil (1996) did also research about identification and studied the effects of celebrities on viewers. The results showed that if a person identified with a celebrity who was promoting health messages, the adoption of these messages increased significantly (Basil, 1996). Cohen (2001) developed a questionnaire to test the level of identification. The questionnaire consists of 10 statements referring to a specific character in a specific TV show. Respondents are asked to indicate their degree of agreement with these statements.

Parasocial Interaction and Social Identity theory are not the only processes going on by watching sitcoms. There is more than just identification with actors. One more theory is the Inter Contact Theory, or the Contact Hypothesis, first introduced by Allport in 1954. This theory states that if one person is spending more time with another person whose background is different from one´s own, the the level of prejudice one has towards the individual and other members of that same out-group can significantly decrease (Gaertner, 1996). This means, the more often someone is in contact with a person that is different than oneself, the more sympathy one develops for the different person. Furthermore, it is estimated that if one makes a connection with that different person that has a dissimilar background from their own, it is possible that they would no longer focus on those things that separate them, but on their similarities (Papa, Singhal, Law, Pant, Sood, Rogers & Shefner-Rogers, 2000). Today people often get in contact with people from another culture, educational background or social group through the television. In summary, through sitcoms viewers not only identify with figures which are similar to themselves but they also sympathise and identify with figures which are different. One example of this process is the figure Sheldon in the sitcom "The big bang theory". Sheldon is a highly skilled theoretical physicist but he lacks social skills, is highly arrogant, and lacks an understanding of irony, sarcasm and empathy. In short, normally he would be very dislikable for most people. But, in fact, he is not. Instead he is the most favourite character for most viewers and the more someone watches the sitcom the more he or she will love this character. This would be true even if most people cannot identify with this character at all.

The present study concentrates only on people who do watch a sitcom. Thus, there is no research about how many people are watching sitcoms in average but about people who are watching sitcoms and about the amount of episodes they are watching. The dependent variable is thus the average amount of episodes an individual is watching in a week. The independent variables are the motives for watching sitcoms like stress reduction, use of humour, social interaction, companionship, and entertainment. Parasocial interaction and identification are also independent variables and seen as a predictor for watching a sitcom. Given the results provided by the empirical studies in the literature review and the research questions, the following five hypotheses will be asserted.

Motives, parasocial interaction and identification are expected to be predictors for watching sitcoms. Thus, people watch sitcoms for stress reduction, to have a good laugh, because they identify with the characters, etc. This leads to the assumption that to satisfy these needs people watch frequently episodes of sitcoms. It is expected that:

> *H1:* *Individuals watching sitcoms are watching more than three episodes during a week.*

Already existing studies about motives for watching a special TV programme found out that the most prominent motives are entertainment, relaxation, habitual pass time, companionship, social interaction and voyeurism (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007). Voyeurism is in this case not expected to be a significant motive for watching a sitcom (in contrast for watching a movie where voyeurism is an important factor).

> *H2:* *Motives for watching a sitcom are entertainment, relaxation, habitual pass time, companionship and social interaction.*

Motives are reasons why individuals choose a particular TV programme. It is therefore expected that this factor is not only a predictor for choosing a sitcom but also for the amount of episodes an individual is watching during a week. Based on this the third hypothesis assumes:

> *H3:* *The higher the score on the sub-questionnaire for motives, the higher the amount of episodes an individual is watching during one week.*

Parasocial interaction is a phenomenon where the viewer experiences a sort interpersonal relationship with the media character (Perse & Rubin, 1989). This is a condition that makes the viewer feel comfortable and this in turn leads to the desire to watch the media character as most often as possible. Thus, it is expected that:

> *H4:*   *The higher the level of parasocial interaction, the higher the amount of episodes an individual is watching during one week.*

Identification with the media character is, as well as parascocial interaction, also a state in which the viewer feels comfortable. Therefore it is expected that identification is a predictor for the amount of watched episodes during a week. Based on this the last hypothesis assumes:

> *H5:*   *The higher the level of identification with the favourite character, the higher the amount of episodes an individual is watching during one week.*

2. Method

2.1. Respondents

At the beginning 92 respondents started the questionnaire. Six of them did not finish the questionnaire and they were therefore not taken into account when analysing the results. Thus, a total of 86 respondents participated in this research. For the purposes of this study, only respondents who already watched at least one sitcom were allowed to participate.

58,1% of the participants in the study were female (n = 50) and 41,9% were male (n = 36). The age ranged from 16 to 42 with an average of M = 22,59; SD = 5.10. The respondents were different in their nationalities with 52,3% being German (n = 45), 41,9% being Dutch (n = 36), 3,5% being Chinese (n = 3) and 2,3% being American (n = 2). Besides that the participants varied also in theirs occupation. 80,2% were students (n = 69), 10,5% were going to school (n = 9), 7,0% were having a full time job (n = 6) and 2,3% were unemployed (n = 2). At the moment of the questionnaire 94,2% of the respondents were currently watching at least one sitcom.

2.2. Procedure

The participants filled in a questionnaire which consisted of four sub-questionnaires to assess (1) demographics and how many episodes participants are watching during one week, (2) what the motives are for watching, (3) the level of parasocial interaction and (4) identification with one´s favourite character. To guarantee a high internal consistency for the items in the sub-questionnaires the questions were adopted from already existing surveys. These existing questionnaires measured motives for watching reality TV (Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2007), Parasocial interaction (Tsay and Bodine, 2012) and identification with special characters in TV shows (Cohen, 2001). Because these studies were similar to the current research most questions could easily be adopted.

The questionnaire was developed with *thesistools.com,* a website where students can create an online survey for free. With this programme participants can fill in the questionnaire and the results are generated automatically in Excel form. To disperse the questionnaire the link to *thesistools.com* was send via Facebook and email to friends and students from the University of Twente. Besides that the link was also published on different sitcom fan-sites. To motivate people to participate there was a short introduction text with the reason for the

study, the content and the promise that the questionnaire is fully anonymous and would not take longer than 15 minutes.

2.3. Measures

The questionnaire provides data that can be statistically measured. Thus, the collected data are quantitative and are processed and analysed with the statistic computer programme SPSS.

2.3.1 Demographics

To assess demographics, participants were asked to answer questions regarding their age, gender, nationality and occupation.

2.3.2 Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study is how much episodes of a sitcom the participants are watching during one week. To measure this the question "How many episodes of a sitcom are you currently watching during a week?" was asked in the first sub-questionnaire. The participants could answer with (1) I am not watching every week, (2) 1-2 episodes, (3) 3-4 episodes, (4) 5-6 episodes, (5) 7-8 episodes, or (6) more than eight episodes. If the participant answered that he is watching more than eight episodes of a sitcom in one week he was requested to name the average amount of episodes he is watching. Besides that it was also asked how many different sitcoms the participant was currently watching, how many different sitcoms the participant watched until then, and how many episodes the respondent is watching in a day. The items showed an acceptable internal consistency with $\alpha = 0{,}77$.

2.3.3 Independent Variables

Motives

The questionnaire contained 22 questions about the motives for watching sitcoms. Six possible motives are tested in this process, namely entertainment, relaxation, habitual pass time, companionship, social interaction, and voyeurism. In the questionnaire the respondents had to rate different statements on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The higher the score on a statement the more is the respondent in agreement with the statement. Thus in this case, the higher the score the more is the statement a motive for

watching sitcoms. Examples of the items are "I am watching a sitcom because it is funny", " I am watching a sitcom because it is good for stress reduction", or " I am watching a sitcom because I can talk about it with my friends". These questions were adopted from Papacharissi´s and Mendelson´s (2007) research about the motives for watching reality TV and the Cronbach´s alpha was therefore quite high, $\alpha = 0,84$.

Parasocial Interaction

In the sub-questionnaire about the level of parasocial interaction were at first two open questions namely "What is the name of the sitcom you watch most frequently" and "What is the name of your most favourite character". This was necessary to make sure that the participants were thinking about a special character while answering the questions. Then the level of parasocial interaction was again measured with a 5-point Likert scale (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). This sub-questionnaire consisted of 31 statements such as "I use advice that I learn from my favourite media personality" or " I see my favourite character as a close friend". The higher the score the higher the level of parasocial interaction. The items showed again a very high internal consistency with $\alpha = 0, 95$.

Identification

Identification is the measure to what extent the respondent identify with their most favourite character. This questionnaire consisted of 13 questions on a 5-point Likert scale (Cohen, 2001). The higher the score the higher the level of identification with the favourite character. The items showed a high Cronbach´s alpha with $\alpha = 0,92$. An example of a statement in this sub-questionnaire is "I think I have a good understanding of character X".

3.   Results

Different analyses are used to test the hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that i*ndividuals watching sitcoms are watching more than three episodes during a week.* Table 1 shows that the average individual is watching about four episodes of a sitcom during one week (M = 3,81; SD = 1,77) if he is watching a sitcom at all. Furthermore the results are showing that 20 out of the 86 respondents are watching more than eight episodes during one week, namely about 19 episodes (M = 19,05; SD = 5,34).

Table 1: *Mean scores of the dependent variables*

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
How many episodes of a sitcom are you currently watching during a week?	86	3,81	1,77
If you are watching more than 8 episodes of a sitcom during a week how many are you watching on average?	20	19,05	5,34
How many episodes of a sitcom are you currently watching in a day?	86	2,66	1,50
How many different sitcoms did you watch until now?	86	5,05	1,19
How many different sitcoms are you currently watching?	86	3,10	1,55
Valid N (listwise)	86		

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Table 2 shows the maximum reachable scores, the mean scores and standard deviations of the three independent variables. The results are showing that the mean scores are not very high neither for motives (M = 77,64; SD = 9,43), parasocial interaction (M = 79,51; SD = 16,96) nor identification (M = 39,74; SD = 8,28).

The second hypothesis is saying that *motives for watching a sitcom are entertainment, relaxation, habitual pass time, companionship and social interaction.* Table 2 shows that even if the overall mean score for motives is not quite high, particular factors of this variable are. Especially the scores of entertainment (M = 34,26; SD = 3,96) and relaxation (M = 18,09; SD

= 2,99) are very high. Furthermore the score of social interaction is relatively high (M = 8,85; SD = 2,85). The factors habitual pass time (M = 9,88; SD = 3,18), companionship (M = 3,79; SD = 1,37) and voyeurism (M = 2,77; SD = 0,94) are showing a relatively low mean.

According to the literature it is expected that humour is one main factor for watching sitcoms. The questionnaire contains three questions about that factor. The results in table 2 are showing that the score for humour is quite high (M = 13,83; SD = 0,72). Besides that, a linear regression analysis was conducted and the results are showing that humour is a significant predictor for the amount of watched episodes during one week, $F(3,82) = 3,57$; $p < 0,05$.

Table 2: *Mean scores of the independent variables*

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Maximum Reachable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Motives	86	110	77,64	9,43
Entertainment	86	40	34,26	3,96
Relaxation	86	20	18,09	2,99
Habitual pass time	86	20	9,88	3,18
Companionship	86	10	3,79	1,37
Social interaction	86	15	8,85	2,85
Voyeurism	86	5	2,77	0,94
Humour	86	15	13,83	0,72
Parasocial Interaction	86	155	79,51	16,96
Identification	86	65	39,74	8,28
Valid N (listwise)	86			

The third hypothesis supposes that t*he higher the score on the sub-questionnaire for motives, the higher the amount of episodes an individual is watching during one week.* A linear regression analysis confirmed these results. Altogether the six motives are a significant predictor for the amount of watched episodes during one week, $F(6,79) = 8,21$; $p < 0,0005$. Taken together the factor motive is explaining 32,2% of the variance in the data, $R^2 = 0,32$. However, a closer look shows that only relaxation, $T(179) = 2,48$; $p < 0,05$, and social interaction, $T(179) = 3,60$; $p < 0,05$ have a significant linear relationship with the amount of

episodes an individual is watching during one week. Entertainment, habitual pass time, companionship and voyeurism are not significant predictors for the amount of episodes, p > 0,05.

A linear regression analysis was conducted to test the causality between the three independent variables, namely motives, parasocial interaction and identification, and the amount of watched episodes during one week. Table 3 shows that there is a significant linear relationship between at least one of the factors and the amount of watched episodes, $F(3,82) = 15,49; p < 0,0005$. A closer look on the outcomes in the linear regression analysis leads to the result that only the factor motives is a significant predictor for the amount of watched episodes during one week, $p < 0,0005$. Table 3 shows that parasocial interaction is not a significant predictor but a relationship between this variable and the amount of watched episodes during one week is nevertheless recognized, $p < 0,10$. The level of identification is not significant, $p > 0,10$.

Table 3: *P-values of the independent variables in a general linear regression analysis*

Coefficients

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	-4,86	1,33		-3,65	0,000
Motives	0,09	0,12	0,48	4,85	0,000
Parasocial interaction	0,03	0,01	0,24	1,79	0,077
Identification	-0,01	0,03	-0,03	-0,25	0,807

a. Dependent Variable: amount of episodes during one week

The fourth hypothesis assumes that t*he higher the level of parasocial interaction, the higher the amount of episodes an individual is watching during one week.* Table 3 shows that parasocial interaction shows a tendency towards significance as a predictor for the amount of watched sitcoms during a week, $p < 0,10$. Parasocial interaction explained 17,9% of the variance in the data, $R^2 = 0,18$. Table 4 shows that the higher the mean score for parasocial interaction, the higher the amount of episodes an individual is watching during one week.

The last hypothesis is saying that t*he higher the level of identification with the favourite character, the higher the amount of episodes an individual is watching during one week.* Table 4 shows that the higher the mean score for identification, the higher the amount of episodes during one week. But, table 3 shows that even if there is a relationship between the two variables, this relationship is not significant, $p > 0,05$. 10,1% of the variance in the data can be explained with the factor identification, $R^2 = 0,10$.

Table 4: *Relationship between parasocial interaction and amount of episodes watched in one week*

Descriptive Statistics

Amount of episodes during 1 week	N	parasocial interaction			identification		
		Maximum Reachable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Maximum Reachable	Mean	Standard Deviation
0	11	155	69,45	15,76	65	35,18	8,77
1-2	15	155	69,80	12,54	65	38,00	8,28
3-4	13	155	78,62	14,47	65	39,08	8,85
5-6	6	155	85,83	28,94	65	38,83	8,98
7-8	22	155	80,18	7,00	65	39,55	4,79
More than 8	19	155	90,84	19,44	65	44,74	9,16

4.   Conclusion and Discussion

The goal of this research was to investigate the reasons for watching sitcoms. Several hypotheses were established and now, based on the results, the hypotheses can be evaluated and discussed.

The first hypothesis "*Individuals watching sitcoms are watching more than three episodes   during a week*" is, according to the data in this research, true. The average respondent is watching 4 episodes of a sitcom during one week. 20 out of the 86 respondents are even watching more than 8 episodes, namely 19 episodes in average during one week. But it is important to be aware that this is just a mean. There are several respondents who watch less than three episodes, or even respondents who said that they are not watching every week. So there is no general phenomenon that every person who is watching a sitcom automatically watches three or more episodes during one week. Just the average does. Thus, the assumption that people watch frequently episodes of sitcoms to satisfy particular needs is considered to be true. But what kind of needs viewers try to satisfy must still be evaluated in the following paragraphs.

Before the next hypotheses are evaluated it is discussed if the three independent variables, namely motives, parasocial interaction and identification, have an influence on the amount of watched episodes during one week. The results are showing that only the factor motives is a significant predictor for the amount of watched episodes during one week. The factor parasocial interaction showed a tendency towards significance as a predictor. Thus, the higher the score on motives or the level of parasocial interaction, the higher the amount of watched episodes. If this is really true is discussed in the next paragraphs.

The second hypothesis "*Motives for watching a sitcom are entertainment, relaxation, habitual pass time, companionship and social interaction*" is partly supported by the data in this research. The factors *entertainment* and *relaxation* are, according to the data, important factors for choosing to watch a sitcom. These two factors reached nearly the full maximum reachable points on the 5-point Likert scale. Thus, it can be said that two main reasons for people to watch a sitcom are the entertainment factor and the relaxation factor. But people also choose to watch sitcoms because of the factor *social interaction*. It seem that talking about a series with friends and family is a reason to watch. Even if *habitual pass time* and *companionship* are not the main motives for watching sitcoms they are not ineffectual. These

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two factors reached about half the maximum reachable score in the 5-point Likert scale. Thus, the U & G theory (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007) is, according to this data, true. The respondents chose sitcoms mainly for *entertainment, relaxation* and *social interaction.* They did this goal-directed and motivated and they were aware of the reasons for watching sitcoms. The results are showing that Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007) were also right regarding the motives for watching. *Entertainment, relaxation, habitual pass time, companionship, social interaction,* and also *voyeurism* are all motives for choosing to watch a sitcom, just the heigh of influence differs between these factors. *Voyeurism* was in the first place not expected to be a main factor for watching sitcoms but this factor reached about 3 out of 5 maximum reachable points. Thus, also voyeurism is a motive for watching.

Besides that, it was expected that humour is one main motive for watching sitcoms and this is supported by the data. Humour is actually a part of the factor *entertainment* but it was also analysed separately because it is such an important motive in this case. The results are showing that humour is really an important factor because it reached nearly the full maximum reachable points on the 5-point Likert scale. Thus, Geddes (2011) and Ruch (1998) were right saying that people like to watch comedy because humour can reduce the daily stress, can be helpful for people to relax and to get away from the workaday life.

The third hypothesis is saying that "*The higher the score on the sub-questionnaire for motives, the higher the amount of episodes an individual is watching during one week".* This hypothesis is also supported by the data. Altogether the six motives are a significant predictor for the amount of watched episodes during one week. The factor motive is explaining 32,2% of the variance in the data. But it is important to note that only the factors relaxation and social interaction have a significant linear relationship with the amount of episodes an individual is watching during one week. The data show that the other factors, namely entertainment, habitual pass time, companionship and voyeurism are not significant predictors for the amount of episodes. Again the factor humour was additionally tested. The results are showing that humour is a significant predictor for the amount of watched episodes. So even if the factor entertainment is no significant predictor, one part of this factor, namely humour, is. Nevertheless is to note that there is a significant relationship between the need for relaxation and the amount of watched sitcoms. Thus, the higher the stress level (and therefore a need for relaxation), the higher the need to watch an episode of a sitcom. Geddes (2011) and Ruch

(1998) were again right saying watching comedy reduces the stress level, can be helpful for people to relax and to get away from the workaday life.

"*The higher the level of parasocial interaction, the higher the amount of episodes an individual is watching during one week*" is the fourth hypothesis in this research and it is just partly supported by the data. Parasocial interaction shows a tendency towards significance as a predictor for the amount of watched sitcoms during a week. The data show that the higher the mean score for parasocial interaction, the higher the amount of episodes an individual is watching during one week. At least, this factor explains 17,9% of the variance in the data. Thus, it is true that the higher the feeling of a person to be interconnected with a media character and the feeling that he is a part of the characters´ life, the higher the desire to watch that character on TV and therefore the higher the amount of watched episodes.

The last hypothesis is saying that "*The higher the level of identification with the favourite character, the higher the amount of episodes an individual is watching during one week*". The data in this research show that there is no significant relationship between the level of identification and the amount of watched episodes. Identification still explains 10,1% of the variance in the data.

In summary it is to say that especially the variable *motive* is an important predictor for the amount of watched episodes of a sitcom. This variable alone is explaining 32,2% of the variance in the data. Especially the level of relaxation and social interaction can predict the amount of episodes an individual is watching. Thus, the more an individual is stressed the more episodes he needs to watch to reduce this stress level. The stress level can be especially reduced with use of humour which is a significant predictor for the amount of watched episodes. Besides, the more an individual is talking about a sitcom with family and friends, the more he will watch. Thus the social aspect is here really important for choosing a special TV programme. Also parasocial interaction is important. There is a clear tendency that the higher the level of parasocial interaction, the higher the amount of watched episodes. Thus, people who feel really interconnected with a media character have the need to watch more and more episodes.

5.   Limitation and Recommendations

The first limitation is about the participants in this research. The average respondent was a student (Dutch or German) at the age of 23 . Using this one sided group the results cannot be generalized to other age groups, nationalities or educational levels. Thus, the study is not representative for the whole population. Further research is necessary with a greater amount of participants with more differences regarding age, nationality, educational level, social background, and more.

Besides that it could be a problem that the questionnaire was set up in English but the respondents were primarily Dutch or German. Thus, it is possible that the different language led to misunderstandings of the statements in the questionnaire. The solution could be that the questionnaire is translated into different languages, so that every participant can answer in their native language.

For further research it would be interesting to study more about the reasons for choosing a special TV format. There was little research about sitcoms or even special TV series, and why they are this popular. Most research was already done about watching reality TV or TV in general. Thus, it would be interesting why particular series like "The Big Bang Theory" or "How I met your mother" are this popular and others maybe not. Besides, it would be interesting to get a closer look on the different aspects of motives. This research shows that motives are playing a major role for choosing a particular TV format, and that especially relaxation, social interaction and humour are important reasons for watching sitcoms. Now it would be interesting to see 1) if this is also true for other TV formats (and for the whole population not just Dutch or German students) and 2) why people choose a particular sitcom (why watching "How I met your mother" but not "Two and a half men"?) and 3) *why* people can relax and laugh during an episode of a sitcom. This research could be a good start for further research about TV formats and particular series.

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Appendix

Questionnaire:

Hello,

For my bachelor thesis I do research about how often people watch sitcoms and what the reasons are for watching. Thus, if you ever watched a sitcom, it would be very nice if you could answer the following questions. The questionnaire is short and will cost you 15 minutes at most. The questionnaire is completely anonymous and confidential and you can stop any time.

Thank you a lot for your participation,

Julia

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First of all I will give a short definition about the term sitcom. Wikipedia describes a sitcom as "a genre of comedy that features characters sharing the same common environment, such as a home or workplace, accompanied with jokes as part of the dialogue. […] A situation comedy television program may be recorded in front of a studio audience. The effect of a live studio audience can be imitated by the use of a laugh track". One episode is mostly not longer than 20 to 25 minutes and these episodes are usually presented in 'seasons' (13 episodes or more in the US and 5-7 episodes in the UK).

Popular examples of sitcoms are: Two and a half men, the big bang theory, how I met your mother, modern family, new girl, community, the office, friends, Idereen is gek op Jack, Neighbours, Mr. Bean and a lot more

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The questionnaire will now start so please read the questions closely and give your right answer. Have fun!

Gender	□ Female □ Male
Age	_____
Nationality	□ Dutch □ German □ Other: _____
What is your occupation?	□ I am going to school □ I am a student □ I have a full time job as _____ □ I have a part time job as _____ □ At this moment I am unemployed □ Other: _____

Are you currently watching a sitcom?	□ Yes □ No
How many different sitcoms are you currently watching?	□ 0 □ 1 □ 2 □ 3 □ 4 □ more than 4
How many different sitcoms did you watch until now?	□ 1 □ 2 □ 3 □ 4 □ 5 □ more than 5
How many episodes of a sitcom are you currently watching during a week?	□ I´m not watching every week □ 1-2 □ 3-4 □ 5-6 □ 7-8 □ More than 8
If you are watching more than 8 episodes of a sitcom during a week how many are you watching on average? (If you watch less than 8 go to question 10)	_____
How many episodes of a sitcom are you currently watching in a day?	□ I´m not watching every day □ 1 □ 2 □ 3 □ 4 □ More than 4

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The following questions are about your motives. Thus, why are you watching a sitcom?
Please read the statements and answer to what extend you agree or disagree.

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
I am watching a sitcom (because)...	□	□	□	□	□
… it's enjoyable.	□	□	□	□	□
… it´s funny.	□	□	□	□	□
… it entertains me.	□	□	□	□	□
… it amuses me.	□	□	□	□	□
… it is exciting.	□	□	□	□	□
… I can have a good laugh.	□	□	□	□	□
… I like to watch.	□	□	□	□	□

… it´s thrilling.	□	□	□	□	□
… it relaxes me.	□	□	□	□	□
… it is good for stress reduction.	□	□	□	□	□
… it is a pleasant rest.	□	□	□	□	□
… that way I can forget about school, university, work, problems etc.	□	□	□	□	□
… I have nothing better to do.	□	□	□	□	□
… it passes the time away, particularly when I´m bored.	□	□	□	□	□
… Just because it is on.	□	□	□	□	□
… it's a habit, just something that I do.	□	□	□	□	□
… I don´t feel alone any more.	□	□	□	□	□
… if there is no one else to talk with.	□	□	□	□	□
… then I can be together with my family or friends.	□	□	□	□	□
… it is something that I can do together with my friends.	□	□	□	□	□
… I can talk about it with my friends.	□	□	□	□	□
… I find the characters attractive.	□	□	□	□	□

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The following questions are about your favourite character in a sitcom. So please take a moment to think about the sitcoms you watch and select your most favourite character. If you have more than one favourite character select the one you saw last. While answering the questions please keep this person at the back of your mind.

What is the name of the sitcom you watch most frequently?					
What is the name of your most favourite character?					
	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
I feel good when I turn to my favourite media personality for advice.	□	□	□	□	□
I use advice that I learn from my favourite media	□	□	□	□	□

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personality.					
I am happy turning to my favourite character for guidance.	□	□	□	□	□
I am comfortable learning from my favourite character.	□	□	□	□	□
I look up to my favourite character.	□	□	□	□	□
My favourite character teaches me important lessons.	□	□	□	□	□
I seek guidance from my favourite media personality.	□	□	□	□	□
I treat my favourite media personality as a role model.	□	□	□	□	□
I would be happy to meet my favourite character in person.	□	□	□	□	□
If I saw my favourite character on the streets, I would talk to him or her.	□	□	□	□	□
I would be comfortable with my favourite character if we met in person.	□	□	□	□	□
If given the opportunity, I would contact my favourite character.	□	□	□	□	□
When I am not watching my favourite character on TV, I seek information about him/her.	□	□	□	□	□
I have an intimate connection with my favourite media personality.	□	□	□	□	□
I see my favourite character as a close friend.	□	□	□	□	□
I am familiar with the habits of my favourite character.	□	□	□	□	□
My favourite character makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends.	□	□	□	□	□
I have a good understanding of my favourite media personality.	□	□	□	□	□
I am motivated to share my ideas with my favourite media character.	□	□	□	□	□
I respect my favourite media personality.	□	□	□	□	□
If my favourite character appeared on another	□	□	□	□	□

television program, I would watch that program.					
I think about what it would be like to meet my favourite character in person.	□	□	□	□	□
Meeting my favourite media character does not matter to me.	□	□	□	□	□
When I am not watching my favourite character on TV, I discuss about my favourite media character with others.	□	□	□	□	□
I see my favourite media personality or character as a natural, down-to-earth person.	□	□	□	□	□
I find my favourite media character to be attractive.	□	□	□	□	□
When I am watching my favourite media personality on TV, I do other activities while watching my favourite character.	□	□	□	□	□
When I am watching my favourite media personality on TV, I give my favourite character my full attention when they are "on".	□	□	□	□	□
I often think about thinks that my favourite character is saying or doing.	□	□	□	□	□
I am curious about what is happening to my favourite character in the next episode.	□	□	□	□	□
If my favourite character is sad I feel also sad.	□	□	□	□	□

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The last questions are again about your favourite character. So please keep this person still at the back of your mind.

	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	
While viewing program X, I feel as if I am part of the action.	□	□	□	□	□
While viewing program x, I forget myself and I am fully absorbed.	□	□	□	□	□
I am able to understand the events in the program in a manner similar to that in which character X understands them.	□	□	□	□	□

I think I have a good understanding of character X.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I tend to understand the reasons why character X does what he or she does.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
While viewing the show I could feel the emotions character X portrayed.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
During viewing, I feel I could really get inside character X's head.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My favourite character reminds me of myself.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have the same qualities as my favourite character.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I seem to have the same beliefs or attitudes as my favourite character.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
At key moments in the show, I feel I know exactly what character X is going through.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
While viewing the program, I want character X to succeed in achieving his or her goals.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When character X succeeds I feel joy, but when he or she fails, I am said.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐