

MAGISTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Magisterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

When TV Meets the Real World. Analysis of Soap Viewing on
Perceptions about Doctors and Healthcare.

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag. phil.)

Wien, 2016 / Vienna 2016

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

A 066 841

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet: Magisterstudium Publizistik-u.Kommunikationswissenschaft

Betreut von / Supervisor:

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Statement

I hereby confirm that I have written this thesis on my own and that I have not used any other media or materials other than the ones designated as such in this paper.

This thesis was not given to any other examination authority, nor has it previously been published.

Miruna Luana Bulik

Vienna, 20.06.2016

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my parents and Tudor for their ongoing support throughout my studies. I am also grateful to my friends for their help in distributing the surveys and being supportive during this whole process.

Naturally, I am grateful to all the people who filled out the survey – I could literally not have done it without them.

Thank you to my team at work for being understanding and supporting me when needed.

A very special thanks goes to Dr. Gil de Zúñiga and Dr. Barnidge, who were always there for me, ready to answer any questions I had and guided me with their expertise throughout the work on my thesis. I highly appreciate your help and learned a lot from both of you.

Abstract

This paper explores the topic of watching TV Series showcasing doctors and focuses on the influence it has on how viewers perceive doctors in real life. A quantitative questionnaire served as method, where information on frequency of watching TV Soaps as well as ones regarding expectations of doctors to be friendly and caring, trust in doctors, experiencing shows as realistic, ratings of CPR survival rates and even correlating attractiveness with professionalism, were gathered. The study showed that there are significant relations between watching TV Series with doctors and having altered perceptions or certain expectations of doctors in real life. For instance, frequency in viewing was significantly associated with trust level in doctors, higher CPR survival rate ratings, perceiving the shows as realistic and assuming attractive doctors are more professional.

Keywords: Cultivation Theory, Third Person Effect, Medical TV Shows, Perception, Expectations, Media Influence, Frequent Viewing

Zusammenfassung

Diese Studie behandelt das Thema TV Serien mit Ärzten und konzentriert sich auf den Einfluss, den sie auf die Zuschauer üben bezüglich Ärzten in der Wirklichkeit. Ein quantitativer Fragebogen diente als Methode um die Informationen für die Studie zu erheben. Es wurden Fragen zu der Häufigkeit der Betrachtung von TV Serien mit Ärzten gestellt, sowie Fragen zu Erwartungen und Vertrauen von Ärzten in der Realität. Zusätzlich, wurden die Teilnehmer über CPR Überlebensraten gefragt und ob sie Attraktivität mit Professionalität bei Ärzten korrelieren.

Die Studie zeigte, dass es bedeutende Beziehungen zwischen regelmäßiger ärztlicher TV Serien Beobachtung und veränderte Wahrnehmungen und Erwartungen von Ärzten im wirklichen Leben gibt. Die Betrachtung Frequenz hatte eine signifikante Korrelation zu dem Vertrauensniveau zu Ärzten bzw. zu erhöhten Einschätzungen der CPR Überlebensrate. Zusätzlich, wurde eine regelmäßige Betrachtung mit der Einschätzung dass die Serien realistisch sind verbunden. Regelmäßige Zuschauer sind eher wahrscheinlich zu glauben dass attraktive Ärzte bessere Spezialisten sind.

Stichwort: Kultivierungshypothese, Dritte Person Effekt, TV Serien, Ärzte, Regelmäßig Betrachten, Wahrnehmung, Erwartungen, Medien Einfluss

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1. Introduction

“But it isn’t really good TV if everybody dies, right?”

(Dr. David Brown, Chair of the Department of Emergency

Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital)

This chapter introduces the reader to the objective of this study and serves as an approach into the theme of the paper. Additionally, the aim along with an initial look into the existing theory are presented. Finally, there will be a look into the importance of this subject and further implications it might have.

Media plays an important part in our lives and one way or another, we seem to always come in contact with it whether by watching TV, viewing Soap Operas on Netflix, navigating the Internet or simply reading a newspaper or listening to the Radio. Television has been around for decades now and even though technology has been constantly changing and developing, TV has managed to stay relevant to this day. Nowadays it can reach an audience through different shapes and forms, through television sets, computers, smartphones, tablets and many others.

In fact, the average American adult spends 11 hours each day with electronic media like for instance watching TV or listening to the radio (Petronzio, 2014).

Moreover, another statistic reveals that the average time spent watching television in the US is 5.11 hours daily (The Statistic Portal, 2015). The numbers are similar in other countries too. In 2013, people from Japan watched 265 minutes of TV each day, followed closely by Italy, Poland and Spain where people also watched more than 4 hours of TV daily (The Statistics Portal, 2013).

The following figure showcases leisure time activities on an average day, with a whopping 2.8 hours spent solely on watching TV (American Time Use Survey, 2015).

Leisure time on an average day

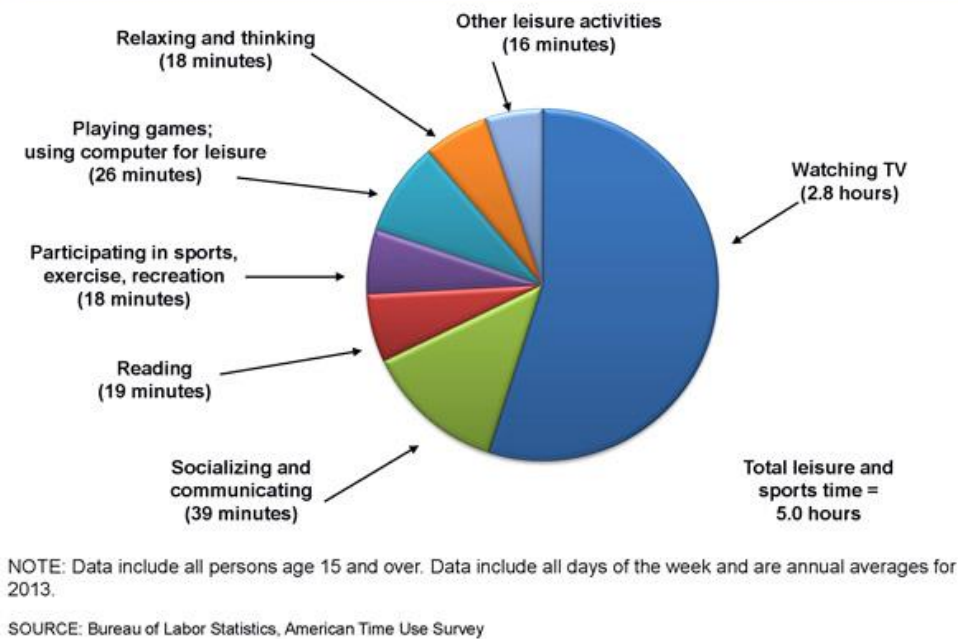


Figure 1: Leisure time on an average day

As such, the amount of time, in average, spent on watching TV is quite high and worth further attention. Some users have transitioned from a classical form of watching TV to an online approach by accessing the TV channels directly or by using Online streaming. According to a media study, TV consumption has decreased in the past years especially in teenagers, which supports the idea that the way some age groups take in their content, has changed in the last years (Lupis, 2016).

Watching TV Soaps is very popular with users of electronic media such as Netflix, a company providing on-demand Internet streaming media with a large library of movies and shows, that has reached 57,4 million subscribers worldwide (Gensler, 2015). On Netflix, the average subscriber watches around 1.5 hours of content, which can either be soaps, movies or documentaries of several genres on Netflix on a daily basis (Spangler, 2014). The streaming service has even managed to change the way TV shows and movies

are made and has “harnessed the shock waves of the broadband revolution, becoming simultaneously one of the top-performing tech companies (...) and one of the world’s fastest growing entertainment business” (Lev-Ram, n.d.). One of the most popular products provided by the streaming service are so called soap operas.

Soaps are serial dramas which often entail interpersonal situations and melodramatic characteristics. According to Wittebols, the two requirements of soap opera storytelling are a serial approach to the unfolding of the narrative and the use of strong emotionalism and moral polarization while focusing on the melodramatic relationships (Wittebols, 2004). “However unobtrusive they may appear when compared to prime time, soap operas virtually dominate the airwaves between late morning and late afternoon” (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Mayes, 1981).

Being subjected to soap operas or sitcoms on a daily or weekly basis might lead to the forming of certain perceptions and opinions about the content which is shown. Moreover, according to certain scholars the most vulnerable to the genre’s message are viewers who frequently and ritualistically select soap operas as an undemanding activity (Carveth & Alexander, 1985). This belief extends to many topics as TV Series can entail not only types of careers such as doctors, psychologists, detectives and others, but also show human interaction and relationships of friendship and romance. The latter was approached in several different studies that showed how heavier viewing of romantically themed shows are associated with higher or unrealistic expectations about marriage or romantic relationships (Osborn, 2012) (Segrin & Nabi, 2002) (Holmes, 2009).

Similar associations could occur regarding different jobs or careers such as ones in healthcare. In fact, perceiving medical shows showcasing doctors as credible was

positively associated with the perception that real-world doctors are courageous (Quick, 2009).

There are many genre types of Soap Operas and Sitcoms and some of them focus on characters working in different professions such as detectives, psychiatrists, lawyers, doctors and many others. While some show more realistic portrayals of reality, others present a different reality to the viewers. As such, it has been considered that viewers are often influenced through watching a lot of soaps and they start assessing the presented professions and content differently.

According to Osborn, "We live in a society that perpetually immerses itself in media images from both TV and the Web, but most people have no sense of the ways those images are impacting them" (Osborn, 2012). This thesis aims to shed light on how being subjected to shows portraying doctors can impact viewers and their perception on doctors and healthcare.

There is a large number of viewers exposed to medical TV Series and there are few papers focusing on said subject exactly. Therefore, this paper aims to be a valuable addition in revealing how exposure to medical narratives can influence viewers.

In fact, the study focuses on TV Series showcasing doctors and how viewers who watch these shows frequently are influenced by them.

Topics such as expectations and trust in doctors, perceiving the shows and characters as realistic and others are approached through this study and answered in the chapter portraying the results. Lastly, the study should provide a clearer picture of how the amount of watching TV Series showcasing doctors influences the viewers' perception on real life doctors and healthcare.

2. Literature Review and Research Model

2.1. Impact of Soap Operas

Scholars have been researching soap operas and their influence on viewers and have found several effects to strengthen the idea that viewers experience change in perception when being subjected to such shows. This involves many age groups and even in campus life, viewing soap operas was established as an aspect involving both female, male, undergraduate and graduate students (Lemish, 1985).

However, the construction of realness in soap operas is very much discussed due to the effects it might have. One researcher argued that within a specific series, viewers would lose track of the reality and faced confusion between what was real and what was fiction, consequently having their perception of reality deeply altered (Üçer, 2013). This could become quite an issue for viewers if it interferes with their ability to perceive reality. This study will also show whether there is a relation between the amount of watching TV Series with a specific theme and perceiving the show as realistic.

Moreover, Segrin & Nabi and Holmes & Johnson have studied TV Series viewing and how it can alter perceptions or expectations and found that exposure creates dysfunctional beliefs about romantic relationships (Segrin & Nabi, 2002) (Holmes, 2009). This would indicate that being subjected to TV Series on a regular basis creates unrealistic expectations in viewers in relation to relationships.

However, not only the depiction of relationships in TV Series is responsible for influencing the viewers' opinions and perceptions on a certain topic.

In a thesis published in 1984, after doing a study on sex role stereotyping of nurses and physicians on prime-time TV, the authors concluded that "action is needed to improve the quality of nurse portrayals by making them more congruent with the real world of work in health care" (Kalisch & Kalisch, 1984). They showed that television nurses were 99% female and physicians were 95% male which was not a reflection of reality and often yielded an image of professional nurses being subservient to male physicians (Kalisch & Kalisch, 1984).

Furthermore, a study argued that a television series in the 1970s stimulated popular demand for paramedic services during its period and influenced the state law to allow such services to exist showing how great of an influence TV series can have (Bergman, 2012).

In fact, scholars have also studied the diversity of body types in network television programming. Their content analysis reveals that females are portrayed in a smaller range of body size than men. Moreover, heavier body types are less likely to be in romantic situations, wear revealing clothes while television body types are generally thinner than the real population (S. E. White, N.J. Beown, S.L. Ginsburg, 1999). They showed how important their results were as such portrayals can influence women in many ways from body image issues to self-evaluation problems and as well as other people's social judgements.

A survey in the UK examined audience reactions toward a drama series about psychiatry. Interestingly enough, the majority agreed that the drama was good entertainment and

gave a realistic portrayal of the field of psychiatry. However, those who had a close association with a mentally ill person did not find the characterizations as credible (Sancho-Aldridge & Gunter, 1994).

Whether this applies for healthcare would be an interesting addition to the current research status. Moreover, the discussion with emphasis on the role of entertainment programs in cultivating patient's predispositions about medical doctors is one definitely worth having (Quick, 2009). This is especially important since some medical soap operas managed attracted millions of viewers throughout their years on air and there has been a continuing attraction towards medical soap operas.

According to a study looking into audience's interest for health problems as well as human relations, it was revealed that "even if these medical productions are fictions, it has been seen a slight influence towards the public receptivity to situations, ideas and behavior which can be easily applicable also in real life (Branea & Guguianu, 2013).

2.2. Perception about Doctors and Healthcare

A study conducted with TV Drama viewers showed that 67% of regular daytime drama viewers reported learning something new about a health issue or disease from a TV show in the past six months (Novelli, 2005). Their findings suggested that these shows have a health education function as they provide information about disease and injury.

"Audiences benefit from new health knowledge, positive attitudes about healthy lifestyle

habits and behaviour change that contributes to a healthier and safer life” (Novelli, 2005).

According to a study on television as a health educator, many health organizations believe it is a top priority to be able to communicate effectively with the public and invest many efforts in achieving this (Rideout, 2008). The study actually focused on a rare opportunity of placing a health storyline in the show *Grey’s Anatomy*, one of the highest rated shows on television with an audience of around 20 million viewers. Their results showed that “Viewer’s knowledge about mother-to-child HIV transmission rates rose substantially after the *Grey’s Anatomy* episode aired, and the new information was still retained by many *Grey’s* viewers six weeks later” (Rideout, 2008).

Another study conducted an extensive content analysis to identify important ideas about nutrition and healthy eating. They concluded that “the number of scenes showing health workers eating and/or drinking indicated that medical series can be an important channel for education on nutrition and healthy eating (Padilla-Castillo, 2012). According to them, medical doctors are an ideal channel of educating in certain topics even on television.

In addition, a group of researchers suggested that medical television programs could offer students fictional representations of their chosen careers as doctors and considered implications for teaching strategies (Weaver & Wilson, 2011). They concluded that “medical programs offer considerable currency and relevance with students and may be useful in teacher strategies that engage students in ethical lessons about practising medicine (Weaver & Wilson, 2011).

Other scholars, who also reviewed pedagogical aspects of TV and movies in medical education concluded that it is challenging to foster humanistic, compassionate and person-centred orientations in medical care and education but a potentially effective

approach would be the use of TV and movies as educational tools (Law, Kwong, Friesen, Veinot, & Ng, 2015).

Bearing in mind the positive aspects mentioned before, one should consider the dangers exposed to the public's perception in regards to the slip from medical ethics shown on TV shows. "This may cause at one point an increase in the disbelief related to the doctors capacity to prioritize medical act in disadvantage of love and friendship relationships in the working environment – the hospital (Branea & Guguianu, 2013).

Moreover, it's not only ethical slips or overly friendly doctors on the series that can influence the perception of the public, but also the methods that are shown on such shows. Beside the human interactions, a large part of medical TV soaps are also the cases itself which range from simple to complex and sometimes even show innovative approaches that might have only be used for a few times in medicine.

As such, an interesting question arises: What happens when some methods are portrayed as more effective than they are in reality? Can this lead to a misunderstanding of the likelihood of a patient surviving certain situations and treatments? Could this affect the way people decide when it comes to medical treatments or procedures?

To approach an answer to these questions, a theoretical framework will be presented to facilitate understanding the mechanisms that lie beneath the issue at hand, the viewing of medical TV shows and its influence on viewers' perceptions. After the following subchapters showcasing several theories related to this study, the derived hypotheses will follow. The uses and gratifications theory, the cultivation theory, the third person effect as well as other relevant models connected to this study will be presented in relation to the topic of the thesis.

2.2.1. Uses and Gratifications Theory

Several studies have shown that people who watch many shows about the medical field are more likely to believe certain things about healthcare. Some experts are stating that TV shows might not portray a very realistic image of the profession they centre on.

“Admittedly these medical shows provide a skewed image of the healthcare system at best” (Beck, 2014).

Nevertheless, some writers of soap operas put a lot of effort into making sure their shows are as realistic as possible, however, this is not always one of the main goals in television shows. Seeing that medical TV shows can have an educational purpose to them, it is interesting to consider what audiences do with these shows.

The interest in the gratifications that media provide their viewers dates to the beginning of empirical mass communication research (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). This theory focuses on what people do with media than the other way around.

There are several needs and gratifications such as cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative and tension free needs (Ruggiero, 2000). This suggests that there are approaches where the public is centric and has its own needs from certain media types, as is the case for soap operas. However, when fulfilling said needs, they might not focus on how real the content is and for some, it is not even an issue.

Although television medical TV shows have been popular for a long time while delivering health- and medical-related information to audiences, there were few studies to focus on the audience’s view (Lee & Taylor, 2014).

According to McQuail TV series fulfil a general informative function, a social cohesion one and an educational one, as such validating the theory of uses and gratification (McQuail, 1993). Knowing the motives viewers have for watching specific programmes is necessary to understand in order to know how to deliver information in an effective way. However, this study does not focus on motives of the users, but on the way users are influenced. Nevertheless, uses and gratifications is an interesting perspective to see how audiences use the TV shows to fulfil their needs.

A few scholars have explored the motives for and consequences of viewing medical dramas from the uses and gratifications point of view. “Although viewers' primary motive for viewing medical drama was not to gather health information, only health information motive, among all motives, directly predicted use of health information from medical dramas” (Lee & Taylor, 2014). This indicated that only being interested in health information predicted a use of health information from medical dramas. “Viewers' entertainment-related motives toward medical drama viewing indirectly and positively predicted use of information in the dramas via involvement with those dramas, and indirectly and negatively via attention to the story in those dramas” (Lee & Taylor, 2014).

Another study, interestingly enough, focused on a specific sample of viewers – medical doctors and students of the Medicine Faculty in Romania. Their results showed that “Professionalism, team-values and human-values are the most frequent elements of the TV series script that are most appreciated by Romanian doctors and students of the Faculty of Medicine” (Marinescu V. , 2014). Naturally, these uses might differ in respondents who have less to do with Medicine and would be an interesting perspective to study closer.

While some scholars have argued that the uses and gratifications approach might not be as rigorous nowadays, Ruggiero argues just the opposite. He asserts “that the emergence of computer-mediated communication has revived the significance of uses and gratifications (Ruggiero, 2000).

Another study examined “how prior expectations and activity before, during and after exposure contribute to perceived satisfaction with a favourite television program (Perse & Rubin, Audience Activity and Satisfaction With Favorite Television Soap Opera, 1988). Their study supported the uses and gratifications theory that audience members are active participants and that their activity has many dimensions. Viewing motives such as watching in order to seek exciting entertainment and escapist relaxation, resulted to be predictors of satisfaction (Perse & Rubin, Audience Activity and Satisfaction With Favorite Television Soap Opera, 1988). However, people who only watched serials to pass the time had a negative association with satisfaction level.

2.2.2. The Cultivation Theory

Though some viewers might be very capable to separate television from reality, the cultivation theory suggests otherwise. It was developed by Professor George Garbner in the 1960s when for a project, he studied how watching TV influences viewer’s ideas of what everyday world is like. He argues “that watching a great deal of television will be associated with a tendency to hold specific and distinct conceptions of reality, conceptions that are congruent with the most consistent and pervasive images and values of the medium” (Morgan & Shanahan, 1999).

In fact, the cultivation theory states that TV is responsible for shaping viewers’ conception of social reality. Basically cultivation theorists argue that “television has long-

term effects that are small, gradual and indirect but cumulative and significant” (Davis, 2011). Cultivation theory has been important when it comes to exploring behavioural effects of watching television for many years (Hammermeister, Brock, Winterstein, & Page, 2005).

Moreover, a study focusing on the cultivation analysis of the effects of South Korean TV dramas on Vietnamese women’s marital intentions, explained the link between consumption of the dramas and the emergent phenomenon of transnational marriages involving Vietnamese women and South Korean men (Vu & Lee, 2013).

Shrum investigated the relationship of television viewing with attitude strength and extremity and its implications for the cultivation effect. The analysis indicated that “heavy viewers showed significantly more distrust and a greater likelihood that they would experience marital problems than did light viewers “ (Shrum, 1999). The results indicated that television could serve as a way to strengthen or reinforce attitudes consistent with the television message (Shrum, 1999).

A group of scholars focused on entertainment education in a media saturated environment and examined the impact of single and multiple exposures to breast cancer storylines on two popular medical dramas, ER and Grey’s Anatomy (Hether, Huang, Beck, Murphy, & Walente, 2008). Their results showed that even though the individual storylines did not have a great impact on viewers’ knowledge, attitudes nor behaviours related to breast cancer, a combined exposure was most effective at changing outcomes (Hether, Huang, Beck, Murphy, & Walente, 2008).

The way doctors have been portrayed in TV Soaps has also changed throughout the years. While in medical shows from the 50s and 60s they were shown as noble, infallible, nowadays in shows like Grey's Anatomy and House they are presented as flawed humans (Beck, 2014). In addition, a study from 2003 showed that "Increased exposure to prime-time fiction programs featuring physicians as main characters was associated with perceiving doctors as more uncaring, cold, unfriendly, nervous, tense and anxious" (Chory-Assad & Tamborini, 2003). According Dr. Alexandra Chabrierie, because of some characters like Dr. House, doctors are expected to know everything, when in fact, a diagnosis in real life can take a whole team of doctors to solve (Beck, 2014).

When it comes to bioethics and professionalism, doctors are represented as very unclear or denaturalised in some series. Authors have analysed the bioethical and professionalism content of one season of Grey's Anatomy and House M.D. and their results "indicate that these programmes are rife with powerful portrayals of bioethical issues and egregious deviations from the norms of professionalism and contain exemplary depictions of professionalism to a much lesser degree" (Czarny, Faden, & Sugarman, 2010). To be more exact, only 43% of cases involving patient consent were handled correctly.

On the other hand, a study has shown that heavy viewers of Grey's Anatomy perceive the program to be credible, which was associated with the perception that real-world doctors are courageous. "A positive association emerged between perceptions that doctors are courageous and patient satisfaction" (Quick, 2009).

Another study focusing on television exposure and the public's perceptions of physicians indicated "negative relationships between exposure to prime-time doctor shows and perceptions" (Chory-Assad & Tamborini, 2003). This suggests that exposure to medical shows could lead to more negative feelings and attitude towards physicians.

A content analysis focusing on the depiction of illness and related matters in two popular primetime network medical dramas in the US, showed that both shows displayed a wide range of illnesses and diseases with cancer being one the most present ones on the shows (Ye & Ward, 2010). Interestingly enough, they showed that equal numbers of men and women patient characters were present on the shows and Caucasians and African Americans were the most portrayed races while the elderly were underrepresented (Ye & Ward, 2010).

2.2.2.1. Mean World Syndrome

The term “Mean World Syndrome” was also coined by Dr. George Gerbner as part of the Cultivation Theory. Along with other scholars, they have found that “long-term exposure to television, in which frequent violence is virtually inescapable, tends to cultivate the image of a relatively mean and dangerous world” (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2008). This concept focuses on heavy viewers as they are the ones considered more likely to be influenced by the way the world is framed on television (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2008).

In addition, a study looking into the public perception of crime prevalence, newspaper readership and mean world attitudes, showed that beliefs about crime prevalence were independent of official crime rates, personal experience of victimization and partly socio-demographic categories (O'Connell & Whelan, 1996). However, the strongest predictors of crime prevalence estimates were sex, age and newspaper readership (O'Connell & Whelan, 1996).

Nevertheless, television is not to blame for making viewers less trusting. One scholar studying social capital, television and the mean world showed that not television makes people more trusting, but optimism for the future (Uslaner, 1998).

Heath & Petraitis argue that TV viewing does not affect perceptions of crime in the immediate environment of respondents but “may affect perceptions of crime in more distant settings” (Heath & Petraitis, 1987). This would mean that heavy viewers might not see their immediate surrounding as more dangerous but would believe this of areas further away.

The significant of all of this lies in the fact that television might encourage some ideas that aggressiveness or violence is normal. “Because television depicts the world as worse than it is (at least for white suburbanites), we become fearful and anxious—and more willing to depend on authorities, strong measures, gated communities, and other proto-police-state accoutrements” (Stossel, 1997).

Medical TV shows, although some fairly accurate in their depictions, still contain unrealistically survival rates even after certain procedures such as cardio pulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Studies coding two leading medical dramas showed that CPR was depicted with a survival rate of 69.6% (Portanova, Irvine, Yi, & Enguidanos, 2015) while a real life survival rate is around 10% (American Heart Association Statistics Committee and Stroke Statistics Subcommittee, 2013).

Could medical TV shows be responsible of causing a sort of *positive world syndrome*, letting viewers believe that some techniques are far safer than they really are? How about the opposite, would viewers subjected to different diseases, surgeries, treatments and other healthcare procedures on a regular basis, start fearing for their health and develop a *mean world syndrome*?

This would definitely be an interesting addition to an empirical study.

2.2.3. The Third Person Effect

The theories above looked into what motives viewers have to subject themselves to medical narratives and their gratifications, as well as what effects frequent viewing may lead to. However, some viewers would argue that they are not affected by media messages but that other viewers are more likely to be the ones affected.

This is known as the third person effect and states that “people will tend to overestimate the influence that mass communications have on the attitudes and behaviour of others” (Davison, 1983). Individuals who are part of a group that is exposed to persuasive communication, will expect the communication to be more effective on others than on themselves (Davison, 1983). Nevertheless, the third person effect does not appear in all circumstances and for all people (Perloff, 1993). Research suggests it is more likely to appear when the message contains recommendations that are not seen as personally beneficial and when it is perceived that the source has a negative bias (Perloff, 1993).

In addition, the third person effect hypothesis has another interesting aspect to it. “The behavioural component suggests that people’s expectations of media impact on others leads them to take action, perhaps because they want to thwart the predicted effects” (Bryant & Zillmann, 2008).

A study focusing on television and attitudes toward mental health issues showed that viewers who watch TV news are less likely to support living next to a mentally ill person. They also tested for the third person effect and found that “viewers believe television

portrayals of mental illness affect other more than themselves” (Diefenbach & West, 2007).

2.2.3.1. The Influence of Presumed Influence

The indirect effects model is derived from the third-person hypothesis but describes an additional range of phenomena while proposing that people perceive some effect of a message on others and then react to that perception (Gunther & Storey, 2003).

This model was tested with data from a maternal health campaign in Nepal, featuring a serial radio drama for clinic health workers. Nevertheless, the analysis showed that many women also listened to the serial. ”The program had no direct positive influence on this population, but we found a significant indirect influence on their attitudes and reported behaviours when mediated by their perceptions of impact on the target population of clinic health workers.” (Gunther & Storey, 2003). Basically, the program had an indirect effect on many people in the general population and not only the one it was tailored to.

2.3. Hypotheses

Resulting from the theories and models presented in the chapter before and combined with personal interest in the topic, a total of six hypotheses were developed which are presented in this subchapter.

Based on the cultivation theory, viewers that are subjected on a regular basis to medical TV shows with friendly and caring doctors could birth this expectation in the viewers of doctors in real life. Do these portrayals help the patient-doctor relationship or do they harm it? Patients go into doctors’ offices with different expectations and their

roots are difficult to assess. A group discussion done with community people found that most of them expect good treatment (70.60%), greetings from doctors, good history taking, attentiveness, referral, partnership and confidentiality among others (Absar & Rahman, 2008).

A further article wants to draw attention toward the evolution of television doctors. “First portrayed as caring but infallible supermen with smouldering good looks and impeccable bedside manners, today’s TV doctors seem to have regressed. If they’re good looking, they’re arrogant. If they’re competent, they have a god complex. If they are well mannered, they are weak” (Tapper, 2010). They question how the representations of doctors influence the viewing public and their preferences as well as attitudes toward doctors and medicine. If portrayals are becoming less flattering, how will the public perception change (Tapper, 2010)?

Same goes for positive portrayals – what happens if doctors are showcased as extremely friendly, caring, funny and going out of their way to help a patient?

As such, the question arises whether the amount of time people spend watching soaps portraying doctors, correlates with the expectation level of doctors to be friendly and caring (**H1**).

Often viewers can get very involved in a certain soap opera and create parasocial relationships to characters on the shows. For example, a study revealed that “similar to social relationships, parasocial relationships with favourite soap opera characters were based, to some extent, on reduction of uncertainty and the ability to predict accurately the feelings and attitudes of the persona” (Perse & Rubin, Attribution in Social and Parasocial Relationships, 1989).

One study shows that public trust in physicians has decreased in the US due to the medical profession and its leaders (Blendon, Benson, & Hero, 2014).

Trust plays an important role in any relationship but is especially central in a patient-doctors one (Pearson & Raeke, 2000). Many treatments do not work because people do not follow the regime prescribed by their doctors and trusting ones doctors means a higher change to follow ones treatment plan, share important information and go for check-ups (Dillner, 2014).

As such, the question arises whether trust levels towards doctors in real life could be affected by watching medical soaps on a regular basis. Does the amount of watching such soaps correlate with the level of trust patients have towards doctors? (**H2**).

When asked directly whether one is influenced by media messages, one would tend to disagree with this. However, it is very likely that people agree that others are influenced by such messages (Connors, 2005). [The third person effect](#) states “that people judge the media to exert greater persuasive influence on other people than on themselves” (Paul, Salwen, & Dupagne, 2000).

Though some studies show that the third-person effect does not emerge in all circumstances and for all people but when individuals perceive a certain issue to be of importance to them (Perloff, 1993).

As such, it would be interesting to see whether respondents would be more likely to agree that other frequent viewers of TV Series showcasing doctors, would be more inclined to trust doctors than they themselves would (**H3**).

A further study aiming to understand the relationship between medical drama watching and viewer perception related to health showed that heavy viewers of such soaps tend to underestimate the gravity of chronic illnesses (such as cancer or cardiovascular disease) and undermine the importance of dealing with these issues (Chung, 2014). However, heavier viewers of medical dramas tend to have a more fatalistic perspective about cancer (Chung, 2014).

Moreover, some scholars have shown that some procedures are not presented in a realistic manner on medical soap operas. For example, Dr. Casarett and his colleagues from the University of Pennsylvania studied how comas are represented in medical soap operas and during 10 years of research, analysed more than 60 shows (Casarett, Fishman, MachMoran, Pickard, & Asch, 2005). They showed that comas lasted a median of 13 days and 89% of the patients experiences a full recovery. They concluded that the portrayal of coma in soap operas is overly optimistic and that although the programmes are presented as fiction, they possibly contribute to unrealistic expectations of recoveries (Casarett, Fishman, MachMoran, Pickard, & Asch, 2005).

Another procedure which is often seen in medical shows is cardiopulmonary resuscitation also known as CPR. This is a first aid technique which entails chest compressions and rescue breaths that ought to keep blood and oxygen circulating through the body (American Heart Association, 2011).

Scholars have researched how CPR is presented in different medical soap operas and concluded that survival rates for those specific shows, were significantly higher than the most realistic survival rates in medical literature. They stated that the portrayal of CPR on television may give the viewers an unrealistic impression of the procedures chances for success. “Physicians discussing the use of CPR with patients and families should be

aware of the images of CPR depicted on television and the misperceptions these images may foster” (Diem, Lantos, & Tulsky, 1996). Patients who underwent CPR on two popular shows, had a long term survival after CPR of 50% which is “four times that of patients in the real world” (Aubusson, 2015). This could potentially raise unrealistic expectations in the technique and would possibly make it hard to understand why it was unsuccessful.

Consequently, this study hypothesises that heavier viewers of soaps with doctors are more likely to have an unrealistic idea about a CPR Survival Rate (**H4**).

This could also be an interesting addition to the term Mean World Syndrome also coined by George Gerbner. The term was in close connection with the cultivation theory stated above and refers to the fact that high frequency viewers are more susceptible to the messages and perceive them as more real.

Therefore, their belief that the world is a far worse and dangerous place can be referred to as the Mean World Syndrome. One can look at the issue from the other way around. Does seeing only highly successful interventions on medical soap operas create a sort of Positive World Syndrome? This would mean seeing the world more positive and good than it actually is.

Going back to the cultivation theory, part of the aim of this paper is to find out whether the frequency of viewing TV Soap Opera’s depicting doctors and healthcare influence viewer’s opinion on the medical system.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to find out whether the shows are helpful in creating a realistic image of the healthcare system. Does a heavy viewing of such soaps, make viewers perceive the show or the doctors as realistic (**H5**)? This would mean that the

more frequent a show is watched, the more likely it is rated as close to reality. Would being subjected to the shows more often, result in rating them as realistic depictions of the medical system?

When looking at successful American television shows, especially Soap Operas, one cannot ignore that the characters are portrayed by very attractive actors. This is the case for many types of soaps as it is for the ones showcasing doctors like the ones in Grey's Anatomy, House M.D. or many others.

Many scholars have studied the effects of attractiveness on perception about several topics. Wang & Bowen have examined whether high physician attractiveness negatively affects patient perceptions and willingness to disclose and whether the effect of attractiveness interacts with the physician-patient sex combination (Wang & Bowen, 2014). Their results showed that very attractive physicians led to decreases in patient trust, satisfaction and willingness to disclose especially when it came to female physicians.

Soap Operas however, present physicians who while are considered attractive, are also very competent physicians. In a study, perceptions of attractiveness of same and opposite gender doctors were rated and revealed gender differences in perceptions. For female respondents rating males, perceptions of authority and attractiveness were closely related (Brase & Richmind, 2004).

Therefore, the question arises whether viewers who watch medical soaps on a regular basis are inclined to believe that an attractive physician is more likely to be a better one **(H6)?**

3. Method

This chapter reveals the empirical part of this study by presenting the data collection, measures and the way the analysis was performed. This includes a detailed portrayal of how respondents were gathered, how the measures were prepared for analysis and the statistical calculations of the quantitative survey.

3.1. Data Collection

The data for this study was retrieved by conducting a standardized quantitative survey. This was done using an online survey administered through UmfrageOnline, a web survey software to which the author has a free University subscription account.

The questionnaire was distributed Online using Social Media, by postings on several pages and groups mainly consisting of fans of medical TV Series (such as Grey's Anatomy or M.D. House) thus insuring participation from people who also watch the shows in question.

The survey was also posted on other social media channels such as Reddit, Twitter and in Forums of several websites. Moreover, respondents were also gathered through an email list of the University of Vienna addressed to students who are interested in filling out surveys. A form of snowball sampling was used which entailed that individuals were asked to name a number of different individuals who were asked to name more individuals and so on (Goldman, 1961). As such, one could get a more diverse range of answers and effectively use the network of the respondents to gain more responses for the survey at hand.

Around 130 of the total participants, were gathered through Amazon Mechanical Turk, a marketplace with a selection of tasks to complete in exchange for a reward. In order to encourage participation for the survey, respondents had the chance to enter their e-mail address at the end of the survey and sign up for a randomized prize draw with the opportunity to win 3x10EUR Amazon Gift Cards.

The questionnaire was open for a period of 2 months and reached a number of 963 respondents. Out of those, 186 cases were deleted for incomplete or invalid data, leaving a total of 777 surveys that were used for the analysis.

3.2. Measures

In order to test the proposed hypotheses in this study, the analyses included three groups of independent variables combined into one, six dependant variables and control variables.

Watching of medical TV Series. The independent variable present in all Hypotheses was related to Watching, with the aim of finding out how much people actually watch TV Series showcasing doctors?

This information was gathered through several questions in the survey, inquiring about time spent watching shows, number of shows/episode watched and the frequency in watching them. Six items were used to assess the extent to which respondents are exposed to medical TV Series.

Respondents reported “how many days per week” and “how many hours per day” they watched medical TV Soaps. They also reported “how many series they watch” as well as

“where and how often” (e.g., TV, Netflix, Online Streaming). As such, these were the variables used for further analysis:

- Days/Week
- Hours/Day
- Frequency (How often and where)
- Nr. of shows
- Nr. of episodes

All these were then grouped into new variables, resulting in three main groups:

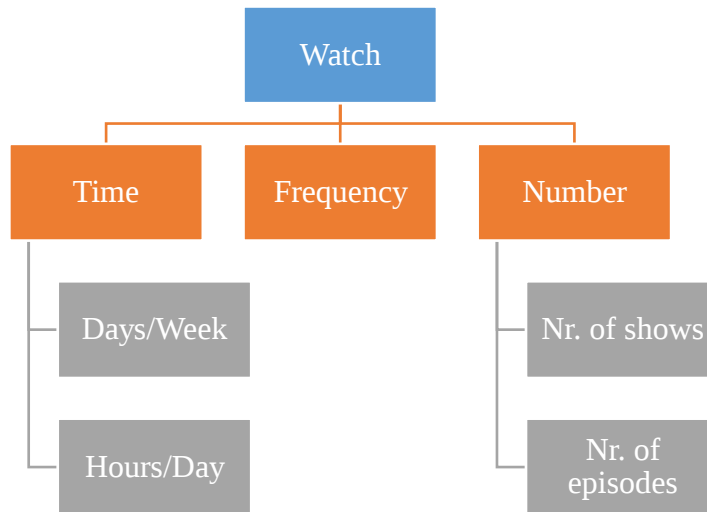
The variables Days/Week and Hours/Day were multiplied to create the new variable Time (Cronbach’s Alpha = .65; M=2.48; SD=3.93).

For the variable Frequency, the means of all the sources of watching TV Series was calculated (M=2.27; SD=1.64). Then, the variables Nr. of shows and Nr. of episodes were multiplied, resulting in the new variable Number (Cronbach’s Alpha=.70; M=1.84; SD=2.94).

Zsquares were then calculated for all three variables and a reliability test showed Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.74. The mean of the three variables was calculated and resulted in the final variable Watch (M=.00, SD=.81).

The following figure shows the way the variables were combined to result in the final one:

Figure 2 Independent Variable Construction



Expectation of doctors being friendly and caring. Three items were used to assess the expectation level, respondents have of doctors in real life to be friendly and caring.

Respondents were asked to rate (1-7) whether they expect “the doctor to be friendly” or “to act caring. Using a scale from 0-100, respondents were again asked to rate whether they expect “doctors to act friendly and caring towards their patients”. Standardized variables were created for the ones needed for the analysis (Z scores) and Cronbach’s Alpha was tested for the three items (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.77). The mean of the three variables were added together and formed the new variable Expectations (M = .00, SD = .83).

Level of trust patients have towards doctors. In order to assess the level of trust respondents have towards doctors in real life, a total of five items were used. Respondents were asked to rate on a scale from 0 to 100 “how much they trust doctors”. Furthermore, respondents were asked to rate several statements regarding trust in doctors on a scale

from 1 to 7 (incl. “I can’t say”) such as “When a doctor says something to me, I believe him” or “I trust that the doctor is being honest to me” among others. Standardized variables were created for the five variables and they were checked for reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.79). The items were then combined and resulted in the new variable, Trust ($M = .00$, $SD = .74$).

Level of trust viewers think other viewers have towards doctors. Five items were used to assess the level of trust respondents thought other viewers have towards doctors. They were asked to rate on a scale from 0 to 100 how much they thought people watching medical TV Series trust doctors. In addition, they were asked to rate four statements regarding trust others viewers have toward doctors. Z-score variables were created from the existing variables and were tested for reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha = .77). The mean of all the variables was combined to result in the final variable, **Trust Others** ($M = -.00$, $SD = .72$).

Ratings of CPR Survival Rates on TV and in real life. Respondents were asked to rate the CPR Survival Rate on medical TV shows and in real life on a scale from 0 to 100. Standardized variables were created for both variables. Even though the hypotheses states that frequent viewing will lead to higher CPR survival rates approximations, both rates will be compared and discussed in the following chapters.

Perceiving the shows as realistic. To assess how realistic viewers perceived medical TV shows they had to rate eleven different statements on a scale from 1 to 7. Firstly, they were asked how close they thought series showcasing doctors reflect reality for several

criteria: healthcare system in the country they are filmed in, doctors, nurses, romantic relationships, doctor patient relationship, cases, surgeries. Then they were asked whether they agreed that “All doctors try to go the extra mile for their patients”, “Doctors will bend the rules if necessary for their patients”, “Doctors and patients can become friends”, “A doctors can diagnose and treat most of the conditions linked to their specialty”. Standardized variables were created for all variables and they were checked for reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha = .87). The means of the items were combined and resulted in a new variable, Realism ($M = .00$, $SD = .67$).

Assumption that attractive doctors are better professionals. Four items were used to assess whether respondents believe that attractive doctors are more likely to be better at their job. They were asked to rate four statements on a scale from 1 to 7 (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) such as “Attractive doctors are better at their job”, “I avoid attractive doctors because I fear they are not good professionals”, “Better looking doctors are more competent and intelligent” and “Better looking doctors ear more than other doctors”. Standardized variables were created and checked for reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha = .82).

All means of the Z squares were combined to result in the variable Attractive ($M = .00$, $SD = .81$).

The following table shows an overview of the dependant variables mentioned above with their reliability test, means and standard deviations.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations and Reliability for Variables

N = 777

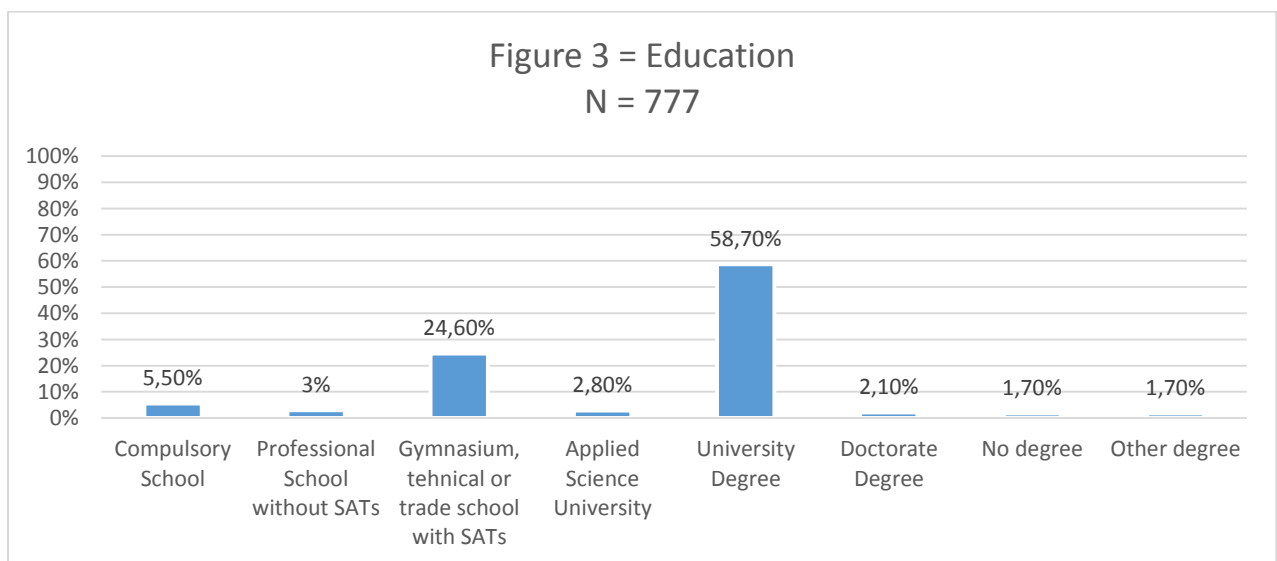
	<i>Expectation</i>	<i>Trust</i>	<i>Trust Others</i>	<i>Realistic</i>	<i>Attractiveness</i>
<i>Mean</i>	.00	.00	-.00	.00	.00
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	.83	.74	.72	.67	.81
<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	.77	.79	.77	.87	.82

CPR RL = CPR Survival Rate in Real Life

CPR TV = CPR Survival Rate on medical TV Shows

Control variables

Demographics. Respondents were asked about their age, gender, level of education and living area among others. The mean age was 28.07 years (SD=9.76; skewness=1.71) and the sample consisted in a majority of females (72.9% female; 27.1% male). Most of the respondents were living in an urban area (Urban 82.5%). Almost all of them were employed in some form (Employment 92.3%) and more than half (58.8%) had a type of University degree.



3.3. Analysis

The statistical analysis was performed with the statistics programme IBM SPSS Statistics 22.00 for Windows as well as partly using Microsoft® Excel for Windows 10.

All hypotheses were tested using a series of OLS regression analysis by minimizing the squared residuals.

Firstly, the variables Time, Frequency and Number were computed like mentioned in the chapter above and created the new variable, Watch. [The latter chapter \(Measures\)](#) offers a detailed explanation on how this was performed.

Z squares were created for all three variables (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.74) and finally they were computed in the new variable Watch.

The dependant variables were also standardized as well as tested for reliability. Some control variables were recoded to facilitate calculations.

In some cases of the data set, information was missing from some variables. However, just respondents who finished the survey were taken into account and the rest were deleted (777 out of 963). It seemed, nevertheless unnecessary to delete part of the sample as the missing values were only present in two questions of the survey. Question 7 (Please rate the following statements according to your opinion, about people who watch TV Series showcasing doctors) was answered by 776 out of 777 participants (related to H3). Furthermore, a control variable inquiring about racial or ethnic group was missing 12.48% of the answers.

Therefore, a mean substitution was done for the missing values. “Mean substitution is the procedure whereby missing values for a variable are replaced by the observed mean for that particular variable (McKnight, McKnight, Sidani, & Figueredo, 2007). Therefore, when conducting the regression analysis for each hypothesis, all missing values were substituted by the mean values of that particular variable. This had no influence on the outcome of the hypotheses, meaning that no hypothesis went from being rejected to supported due of this change.

4. Results

4.1. Introduction

The following chapter presents the outcome of the hypotheses and whether they could be supported or not along with the needed explanations of how the results were established. Each variable will be presented in more detail along with their resulting Beta and significance value. The results and their importance will then be discussed in [chapter five](#).

Out of the six proposed hypotheses, five were supported in this study. The regression analysis performed to test the proposed hypothesis, showed that a higher frequency in watching medical TV shows is not associated with an increased expectations of doctors being friendly and caring in real life (H1). This shows that even if a respondent has the expectation of doctors to be friendly and caring, this does not correlate with their amount of watching medical TV soaps.

Nevertheless, the result of H2 showed that regular viewing of TV Shows featuring doctors can be associated with a higher level of trust in doctors. The same is applicable for frequency in viewing and believing that regular viewers are more prone to trusting doctors in real life (H3 -third person effect).

Furthermore, frequency in viewing medical TV shows, was associated with ratings of CPR Survival rate in real life as well as on TV. However, it was negatively associated with CPR on TV shows but positively with CPR Survival rate in real life.

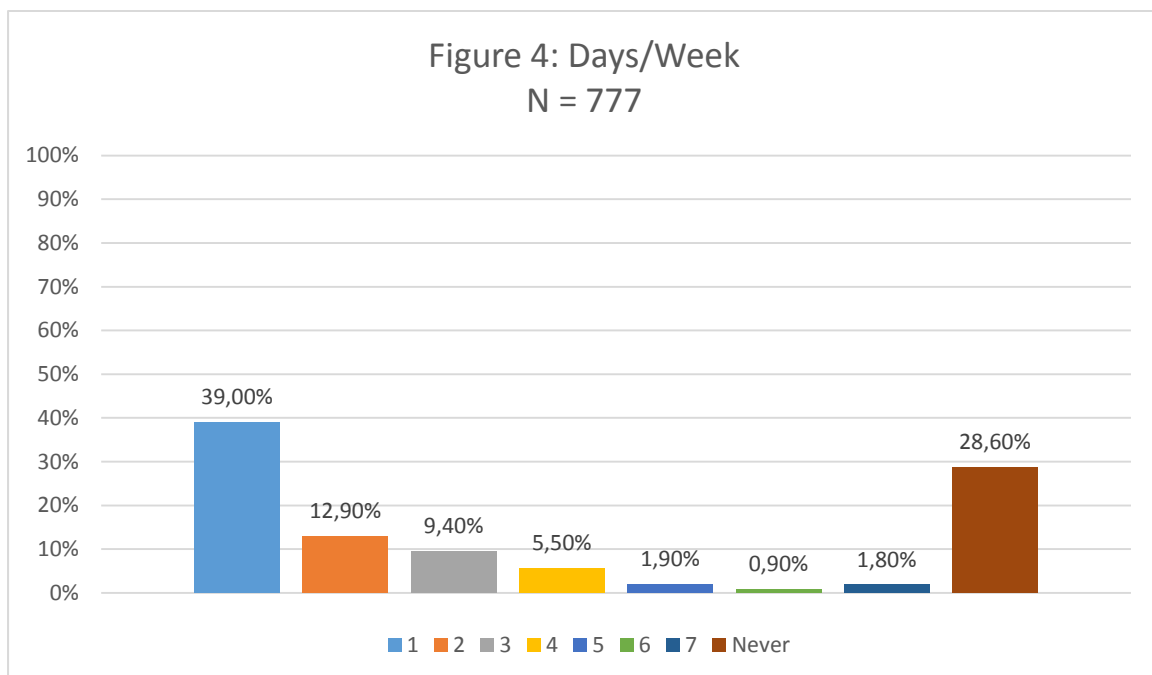
In addition, regarding medical TV shows as realistic was associated with the amount of viewing such shows (H5). The assumption that attractive doctors are better at their job was also associated with frequency in viewing medical soap operas.

4.2. Hypotheses

This subchapter shows a detailed explanation of the results performed to test the hypotheses and offers an insight into the significance levels of the associations that were revealed.

Watching

As mentioned in the [previous chapter](#), the variable *Watching* was captured through numerous items. Below is an example showcasing one of the items used to measure the frequency of medical TV Series watching measured in days per week that resulted from the survey:



As mentioned before, all items inquiring about frequency in viewing were combined and formed the variable *Watching* which was used for the analysis.

Expectation (H1)

Hypothesis 1 suggested that frequent TV viewing would be related to higher expectations viewers have of doctors to be friendly and caring in real life.

Regression analysis performed for H1 showed that Watching is not significantly related to higher expectations of doctors being friendly and caring ($B=.000$, n.s.) and therefore H1 is rejected.

However, the dependant variable Expectations had showed a significant correlation with gender and tested as higher in women ($B = .091$, $p < .05$). This would mean that there is a strong association between expectation levels of doctors to be friendly and caring and women. This is an interesting aspect and would be compelling to explore further.

Trust (H2)

Hypotheses 2 dealt with trust viewers have toward real life physicians.

The analysis performed showed that Watching is positively related to trust, indicating that a high amount of watching TV Series with doctors correlated with a higher level of trust viewers have towards doctors ($B = .127$, $p < .001$). As such, H2 is supported.

Furthermore, higher levels of trust showed a negative relation to females ($B = -.111$, $p < .01$) indicating a negative association between women and trust levels in doctors. This might suggest that women have a lower trust rate when it comes to doctors, however, the study cannot offer insight into causality but merely indicate an association between the two.

Trust – 3rd person effect (H3)

While in H2, respondents were asked about their trust levels in doctors, in H3 they were asked how much viewers of medical TV soaps trust their doctors in real life.

Regression analysis performed showed that Watching has a positive relation to the level of trust viewers think other viewers have toward doctors ($B = .077$, $p < .05$). This means that frequent viewing is associated to a belief that others have a higher level of trust in doctors. This could possibly indicate a 3rd person effect, as viewers think other viewers are more affected by the medical soaps. As such, Hypotheses 3 is supported.

In addition, older respondents were more likely to believe viewers of TV shows are more likely to trust doctors ($B = .108$, $p < .01$).

CPR – Real life vs. TV (H4)

Hypotheses 4 proposed another effect related to the Cultivation Theory which suggested that viewers who frequently watch medical TV soaps, where CPR survival rates are much higher than in reality, would be more likely to believe they are also as high in real life. Meaning that people who watch more TV shows featuring doctors will tend to rate the CPR survival rate as much higher.

As such, respondents were asked to rate on a scale from 0 to 100, what they thought the CPR Survival rate was on medical TV soaps and what it was in real life. Below is a table showcasing the means and standard deviations of the ratings that resulted from the survey question:

Table 2
CPR Survival Rate in Real Life and on TV
N = 777

	<i>CPR Real Life</i>	<i>CPR TV Series DR</i>
<i>Mean</i>	52.11	75
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	21.31	17.17

In order to compare the two scales and their relation to the variable watching, a test of difference in coefficients was carried out.

Watching was negatively related to CPR survival rate on TV shows, indicating that the more people watch shows, the lower they think the survival rate is on such shows ($B = -.017$, n.s.). However, watching is positively related to CPR survival rate in real life ($B = .078$, $p < .05$) indicating that frequent watchers believe the CPR survival rate in real life tends to be higher.

Watching is negatively related to CPR survival rate on TV shows, indicating that the more people watch shows, the lower they think the survival rate is on such shows ($B = -.017$, n.s.) though there was no significance to support this theory.

However, watching is positively related to CPR survival rate in real life ($B = .078$, $p < .05$) indicating that frequent watchers believe the CPR survival rate in real life tends to be higher.

Realistic (H5)

Respondents were also asked whether they would rate medical TV shows as realistic and have to assess whether doctors, the healthcare system, relationship and others were

closely represented on shows. Overall, assessing medical TV Series as realistic was positively associated with the variable watching ($B = .311, p < .001$). Therefore, H5 is supported.

Additionally, rating the shows as realistic was positively associated with age ($B = .077, p < .05$) and negatively with women ($B = -.128, p < .001$).

Attractiveness (H6)

Hypothesis 6 theorized that a frequent subjection to TV Series with doctors could be associated with the belief that attractive doctors are better professionals.

The assumption that attractive doctors are better at their job was tested in relation with watching and indicated that there is a significant relation between the two ($B = .266, p < .001$). Through the regression analysis, H6 was able to be supported.

Interestingly enough, the variable attractiveness had other significant relations to age ($B = .154, p < .001$), gender (women $B = -.126, p < .001$) and education ($B = .094, p < .005$).

5. Discussion

In both US and other countries, people spend several hours a day watching television and it still the most preferred activity for leisure time (The Statistics Portal, 2013) (American Time Use Survey, 2015). TV Soap operas have become very popular and are more and more accessed through platforms such as Netflix (Spangler, 2014). However, being subjected to soap operas or sitcoms on a regular basis can take lead to forming certain perceptions about the topic being presented.

We know that medical TV soaps can have a health education function and can improve viewer's knowledge on specific topics while serving as educating channels (Novelli, 2005) (Rideout, 2008) (Padilla-Castillo, 2012). Nevertheless, we also know through the cultivation theory that TV is responsible for shaping viewers' conception of social reality (Davis, 2011). In addition, studies have shown that the most vulnerable to the genre's message are those viewers who frequently and ritualistically select soap operas as an undemanding activity (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2008) (Carveth & Alexander, 1985).

According to several scholars, doctors are represented as unclear or denaturised in some series (Czarny, Faden, & Sugarman, 2010) (Quick, 2009). In addition, an approach to the theory of the third person effect is tried out to see, whether viewers believe other viewers are more affected by medical TV soaps than they are and would be more likely to trust doctors.

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the possible relationship between frequent exposure to medical TV Series featuring doctors and its influence on perceptions about doctors in real life.

The study reveals no significant association between watching TV series with doctors and having high expectations of doctors to be friendly and caring. Although some doctors are portrayed as over-the-top friendly and going out of their way to support some patients, this does not affect expectations viewers have of doctors being friendly and caring. However, it would be interesting to test for other types of expectations in the future.

It was found that watching medical TV Series on a regular basis correlates positively with higher levels of trust in doctors. This is a very interesting finding as it reveals the amount of influence soaps can have on the regular viewers. It implies that they are more likely to trust their doctors more which, according to research means that they have a higher chance to follow treatment plans, share information or go for check-ups (Dillner, 2014).

Findings also indicated a possible third person effect as it was shown that watching TV soaps was associated with the belief that other viewers are more likely to trust doctors. The effect was especially predominant with older respondents. This supports the theory that people tend to believe that others are more influenced by mass communications than they are (Davison, 1983).

We know from other studies that some medical procedures are not presented in a realistic manner on medical soap operas such as coma recovery or CPR (Casarett, Fishman, MachMoran, Pickard, & Asch, 2005) (Diem, Lantos, & Tulskey, 1996). Knowing from statistics committees that the CPR survival rate in real life is around 10% it was interesting to see that respondents rated it at 52.11% for real life and 75% for TV Shows. This means that even though they believe that the CPR survival rates are much higher on medical soaps, they still assessed the real life survival rate much higher than it really is. This may have serious implications in some cases, as people may find it hard to

understand why the procedure has not worked in real life when performed on a patient that they know personally. It also arises the question whether viewers are making real life-and-death choices based on the impressions they have based on the fictional storylines they have been subjected to.

In addition, the study confirmed that the more viewers watch medical TV shows, they more likely they are to consider them as realistic (Quick, 2009). Interestingly enough, the effect was higher with older respondents as they assessed the shows to be more realistic than younger ones.

The findings demonstrate an important influence that medical TV shows have on the viewers' which the fact that frequent viewers are more likely to belief that attractive doctors are better professionals. We know that the TV physicians are more than often portrayed by young and good looking actors and are usually incredibly talented in their specialty. The results show that the viewers are indeed influenced by the portrayals. Does this play a role in their choice of doctors in real life or even more, could it interfere with the trust levels they have in doctors?

6. Limitations and Future Research

The present study offers an insight into how viewing medical TV Soaps on a regular basis can impact viewers' perceptions, expectations and opinions about real-world doctors.

Although this thesis answers many questions, it also raises several ones.

Future research could investigate the role of other characters in medical dramas such as nurses or other staff members and examine their portrayals as well as the impact the portrayals have on regular viewers.

For further research, it would be better to have a more heterogeneous group of respondents. The generalizability of the results has limits because of the ways used to recruit the respondents. Many of the people who participated in the survey were students and a lot were women. It would have been great to have a more diverse sample.

Moreover, a larger sample of very regular watchers of medical TV Soaps could have improved the validity of the results.

Furthermore, this study did not inquire about what series viewers actually watched, but only if they watched medical TV soaps and how much. It would be an interesting approach to also inquire about the specific series that are being watched and identifying the differences between them. There might be some compelling differences between sitcoms, dramas and TV shows.

Also, it would be practical to think about excluding people that have had a lot of contact with hospitals and in general with the healthcare system. They might be differently influenced than people who have less knowledge about these topics.

Naturally, the cultivation theory applied to further genres would definitely bring some interesting additions to future research.

It would be captivating to find out how different genres of shows, focused on other career types such as detectives, lawyers or psychologists influence the viewers' perspectives on those fields. How about the influence it might have on high school students who are looking into what careers to choose for their future? It would be an interesting addition to see how far their impressions of these careers are contoured by the TV shows.

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8. Appendix

Questionnaire

Introduction Page

Master Thesis - When TV meets the real world



Dear respondent,

My name is Miruna Bulik and I am currently doing my Masters in Journalism and Communication Studies at the University of Vienna. As part of my master thesis, I am conducting a survey related to viewing of TV shows showcasing doctors and healthcare.

Your experience and opinion are highly valuable and I would be very grateful if you would spare a couple of minutes to take part in this survey. There are no right or wrong answers. All the information provided by you will be managed under strict confidentiality. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with the questions, you can stop the survey but this is very unlikely to happen.

Thank you very much for your cooperation and assistance in this research!

Questions

Please rate the following statements: *

	1= strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7=strongly agree	I don't know
When I go to a check-up, I expect the doctor to be friendly.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When I go to a check-up, I expect the doctor to act caring towards me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When I go to a check-up, I expect the doctor to have a good sense of humour.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please rate the following statement:

I expect doctors to act friendly and caring towards their patients. * 

disagree agree

Page 2

How much do you trust doctors on a scale from 0 to 100? * 

distrust trust

Please rate the following statements: *

(Please choose a value from 0 to 100)

	1 = strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 = strongly agree	I don't know / I can't say
When a doctor says something to me, I believe him.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I trust that the doctor is being honest to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have never been disappointed by a doctor.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I always do what the doctor says.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Page 3

How much do you think people watching TV Series showcasing doctors actually trust doctors? *

(Please choose a value from 0 to 100)

distrust trust

Please rate the following statements according to your opinion, about people who watch TV Series showcasing doctors:

	1 = strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 = completely agree
When a doctor says something to them, they believe the doctor	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
They trust doctors are being honest to them.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
They have never been disappointed by a doctor.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
They always do what the doctor says.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please rate the following statements according to your opinion, about people who watch TV Series showcasing doctors:

	1 = strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 = completely agree
People who watch shows with doctors, trust doctors more.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
People who watch shows with doctors, tend to believe doctors more than people who don't watch such shows.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
People who watch shows with doctors, are influenced by how doctors are portrayed.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Page 4

Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is a lifesaving technique useful in many emergencies, including heart attack or near drowning, in which someone's breathing or heartbeat has stopped. It is performed with chest compressions and rescue breaths that keep blood and oxygen circulating in the body.

What do you think the CPR Survival Rate is in real life?

(How many people who were performed CPR on actually survive after the procedure?) * 

0% 100%

What do you think the CPR Survival Rate is on TV Series showcasing doctors?

(How many people who were performed CPR on actually survive after the procedure?) *

0% 100%

How close do you think series showcasing doctors reflect reality on the following criteria? *

	1 = very unreal	2	3	4	5	6	7 = very real	I don't know / I can't say
Healthcare system in the country they are filmed in	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Doctors	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Nurses	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Romantic Relationships	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Doctor- Patient Relationship	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cases	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Surgeries	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please rate the following statements: *

	1= strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 = strongly agree	I don't know / I can't say
All doctors try to go the extra mile for their patients.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Doctors will bend the rules if necessary for their patients.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Doctors and patients can become friends.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A doctor can diagnose and treat most of the conditions linked to their specialty.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please rate the following statements: *

	1= strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 = strongly agree	I don't know
Attractive doctors are usually better at their job	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I avoid attractive doctors because I fear they are not good professionals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Better looking doctors are more competent and intelligent	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Better looking doctors earn more than other doctors	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Frequency of Usage

How many days per week do you watch TV Series showcasing doctors? *

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ Never

For how long do you watch TV Series showcasing doctors daily? *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ less than 1 hour
- ☐ 1-2 hours
- ☐ 3-4 hours
- ☐ 5-6 hours
- ☐ 7-8
- ☐ 8+

How many TV Series showcasing doctors do you watch? *

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7+

Where and how often do you watch TV Series showcasing doctors? *

	1 = not at all often	2	3	4	5	6	7 = Extremely often	I don't use it at all
TV	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Netflix/Amazon Prime	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Online Streaming	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Download	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Around how many episodes of TV Series showcasing doctors do you watch in one sitting? (Please enter a number) *

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1-2
- ☐ 3-4
- ☐ 5-6
- ☐ 6+

Often viewers engage in watching multiple episodes of a television programme in rapid succession, typically by means of DVDs or digital streaming. This is referred to as binge-watching.

How often do you engage in binge-watching TV Series showcasing doctors? *

the practice of watching multiple episodes of a television programme in rapid succession, typically by means of DVDs or digital streaming.

"people who watch television online say they regularly indulge in binge watching"

extremely rarely extremely often

With whom do you normally watch TV Series showcasing doctors? *

- ☐ Alone
- ☐ Friend
- ☐ Family
- ☐ CoWorker
- ☐ Significant Other
- ☐ I don't watch TV Series showcasing doctors

How much do you engage in the following activities after watching an episode of TV Series showcasing doctors? *

	1 extremely rarely	2	3	4	5	6	7 = extremely often	I don't know
Read about the episode Online	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Discuss the episode with other people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Watch an episode again right away	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Comment about the episode on Social Media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Think about what happened in the episode during the following days	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Page 7

16. What is your gender? *

- ☐ male
- ☐ female
- ☐ I prefer not to say

17. How old are you? *

18. What is your nationality? *

- ☐ Austrian
- ☐ German
- ☐ Serbian
- ☐ Turkish
- ☐ Croatian
- ☐ Slovenian
- ☐ Hungarian
- ☐ Czech
- ☐ Romanian
- ☐ Other:

To which racial or ethnic group(s) do you most identify?

- ☐ African-American (non-Hispanic)
- ☐ Asian/Pacific Islanders
- ☐ Caucasian (non-Hispanic)
- ☐ Latino or Hispanic
- ☐ Native American or Aleut
- ☐ Other:

19. Do you live in an urban or rural place? *

- ☐ Urban
- ☐ Rural
- ☐ I prefer not to say

20. What is your current employment status? *

You can choose more than one if that's the case.

- ☐ White Collar Employee (aust.: Angestellter)
- ☐ Blue Collar Employee (aust.: Arbeiter)
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Homemaker/Stay-at-home Parent
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Unable to work
- ☐ Other:

21. What is your highest education status? *

- ☐ Compulsory School
- ☐ Professional school (without Matura)
- ☐ Gymnasium, technical or trade school with Matura (AHS/BHS)
- ☐ Applied Science University (Fachhochschule)
- ☐ University Degree (Bachelor, Magister/Master, Diplom etc.)
- ☐ Doctorate Degree
- ☐ No degree
- ☐ Other:

Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Page 10

Please enter your email address if you want to enter a draw for a 10\$ Amazon Giftcard:

» Umleitung auf Schlusseite von Umfrage Online ([ändern](#))