

Modern U.S. Sitcom: Crisis of the Genre and Prospects of Evolution

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The current state of TV production is considered to be “high-quality” by many TV studies researchers (McCabe 2007: 1). However, the analysis is usually focused on drama shows (Nelson 2013), and comedy series are being disregarded. Nevertheless, we can see a definite progression in technical (Mills 2009: 136), aesthetic (Mills 2009: 127), and contextual (Savorelli 2010: 14) production of U.S. situation comedies over the last 15 years. The aim of our research is to understand current tendencies in the transformation of the sitcom, and whether it should be considered an evolution of the genre or its “death”. Our project combines analysis of the classic sitcom format found in *Friends* (1994-2004, Crane D. and Kauffman M.) and *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-, Lorre C.) with the modern definition of the genre as exemplified by *Arrested Development* (2003-2006, 2014, Hurwitz M.) and *Modern Family* (2009-, Lloyd C. and Levitan S.). The paper will try to explore the ways in which modern sitcoms rethink the classical definition of the genre while focusing on technical and narrative complexities as well as the introduction of new trends in the sitcom production. The research will be based on the quantitative analysis of the presented examples. We are interested in analyzing the structure of the sitcom episode, whether new shows have more scenes and more shots per scene, and how the number of characters and storylines has changed. Our main goal is to collect data on instances of narrative complexities, such as manipulation of fabula and syuzhet (i.e. flashbacks, flashforwards), the presence of narrator and breaking of the 4th wall, cases of remediation and others. This will allow us to gather more precise and in-depth data on the current state of the sitcom genre. We hypothesize that we will be able to elicit the popular trends in the modern sitcom that eventually could become the new norm in tv production.

References

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