

Project Proposal

I would like to explore the impact of TV shows on our society and the political landscape. One of the ways I wish to consider the impact of TV shows is to see how it affects the number of children each year that are named with names or titles of characters from TV shows in the United States. This includes already existing names as well as new names/titles originally created by the show that either see huge increase (for popular characters) or decrease (for villainous characters). It is an assumption on my part that a character's personality will affect whether the name increases or decreases, but I'm willing to be proven wrong. While this may seem minor, it isn't. The increase or decrease in names can indicate a greater acceptability or disapproval of subject matters, actions and individual groups the TV show portrays. I can access the names and their respective number of children from the database of the Social Security Administration which keeps a record of this for each year. I will select up to five characters from five TV shows based on a currently undecided parameter, and measure before and after.

The impact of a TV show on the political landscape can be measured from increase or decrease in political address of a subject brought up by the TV show. This includes speeches given on the matter by important political figures like the President, introduction of legislation in state and federal level, and online activity (increase in search terms in search engines, tweets from government officials as well as use of and participation in hashtags). The online activity is significant as it signals increased awareness among the public. I may need to physically collect the number of speeches and legislation through searching the internet. Google provides a very handy tool, Google Trends, to see the use of search terms. Lastly, I aim to use API provided by Twitter to see increase or decrease in tweets from verified accounts that begin with certain strings (@sen[Name] for senators or @POTUS[number] for President) containing keywords before and after the airing of a certain episode.

I may also include the changing perception of different groups (for example, atheists) and the impact of TV shows on that. The polling done by various reputable sites will be my primary source of information in that case.

I became interested in this after reading some articles and viewing some TV clips that asserted that TV shows might have done a great deal in acclimating the public to gay rights, leading to greater acceptance and equality. I wish to see if this holds up as well as if it is true in other cases.