



That '70s Show

An Analytical Postmortem

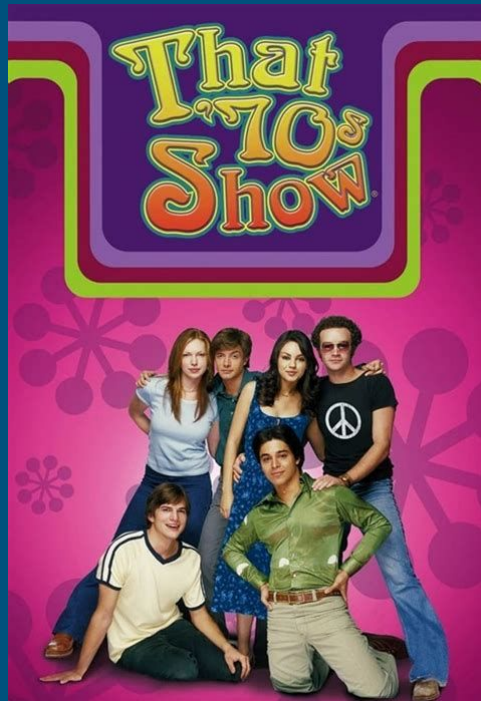


Bo Volwiler, Trang Vu, Karan Pillay, Yi-Ting Chang, Saheli Ganguly



That '70s Show

- American Sitcom about a group of teenage friends set in the '70's
 - Originally ran on Fox between 1998-2006
 - Spans 8 seasons, 200 episodes



The Departures of Grace and Kutcher

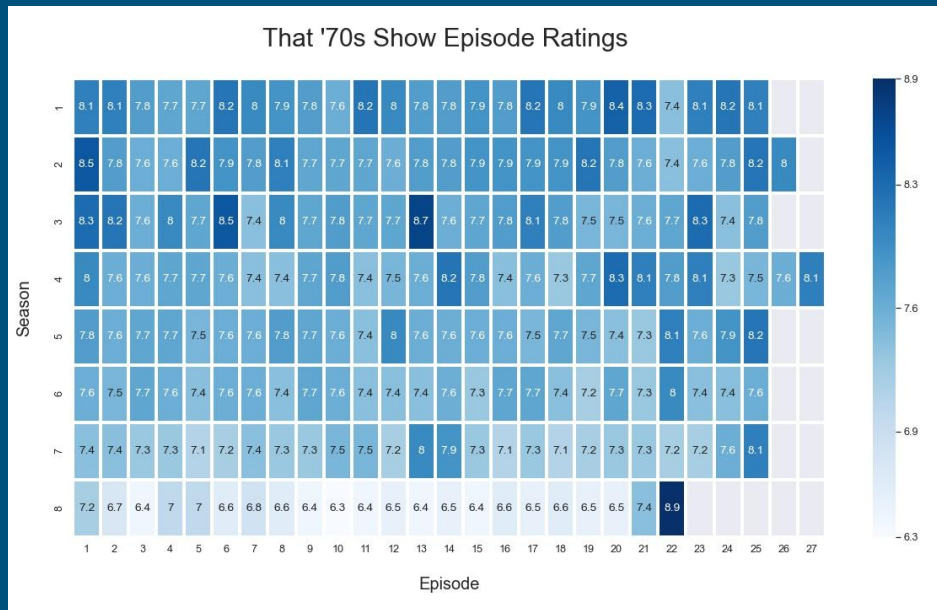
- After Season 7, two of the main characters (portrayed by Topher Grace and Ashton Kutcher) depart the show
 - They both make infrequent appearances throughout the final season
- This moment is often cited as the downfall of the show causing a decline in quality, and subsequently the cancellation of the show after the 8th season
- Does the data support this claim?

Data Description and Clarification

- IMDB raw data accessed through IMDBPy and BeautifulSoup tools including:
 - Season and episode ratings
 - Sitcom series lengths,
 - Sitcom episodes ratings throughout seasons
 - Rating of shows that run N seasons (1 - 10 seasons)
 - Genres of top 30 viewed shows from 1998 - 2005

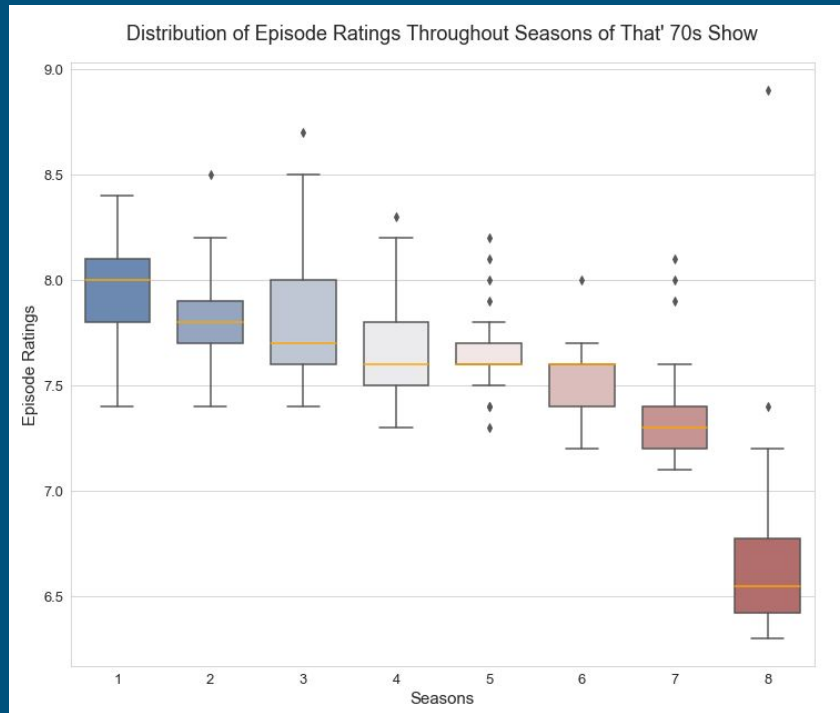
Are the departures really the cause?

- The heatmap shows that ratings of the show gently decline before the departure of Topher and Kutcher
- Season 8 is the least liked season
- Most liked episode is the series finale



Are the departures really the cause?

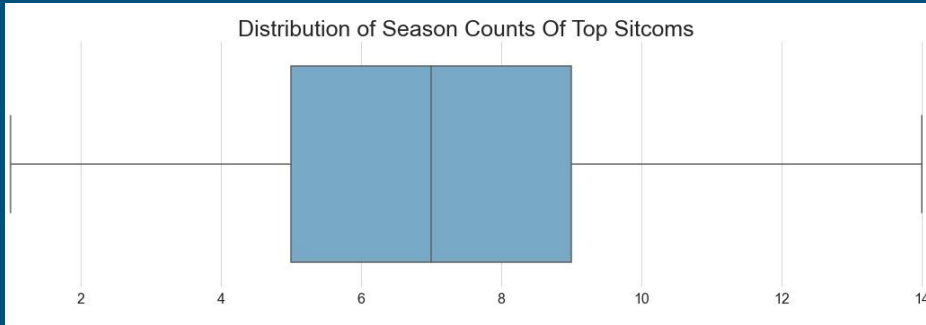
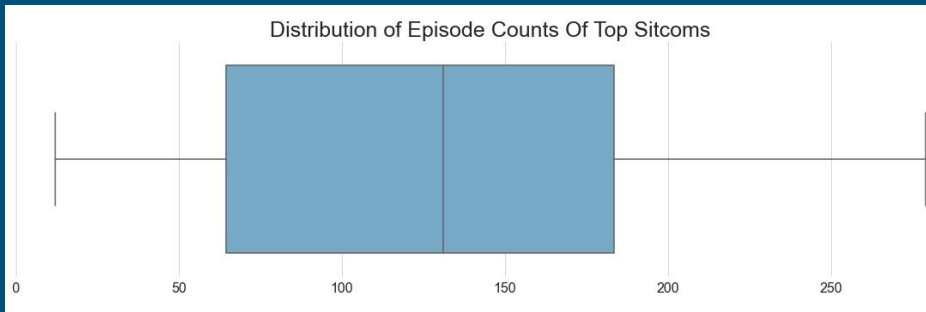
- The boxplot chart of season ratings further reveals this trend in a linear fashion
- Still, we see a significant drop between season 7 and season 8
- If we see a downward trend before the departures of these actors, there must be other factors involved in the show's cancellation



To dig deeper, we have to zoom out...

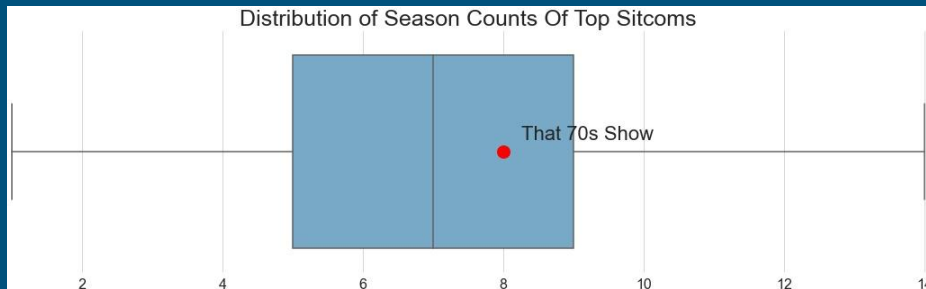
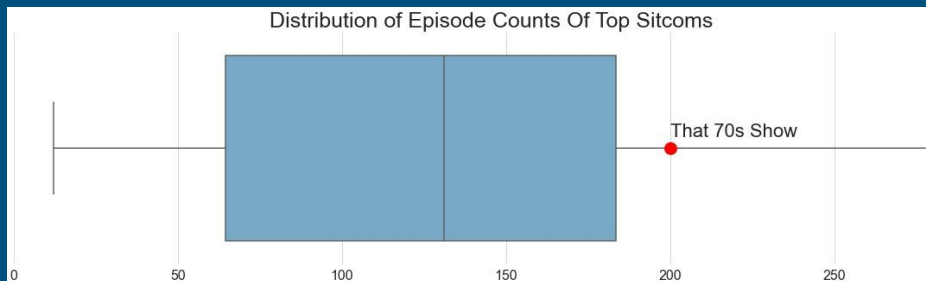
- Nothing about the show itself is eluding to any reasons why the show may have been cancelled
- We have to look at the show within the context of other shows

The Lifespan Of Sitcoms



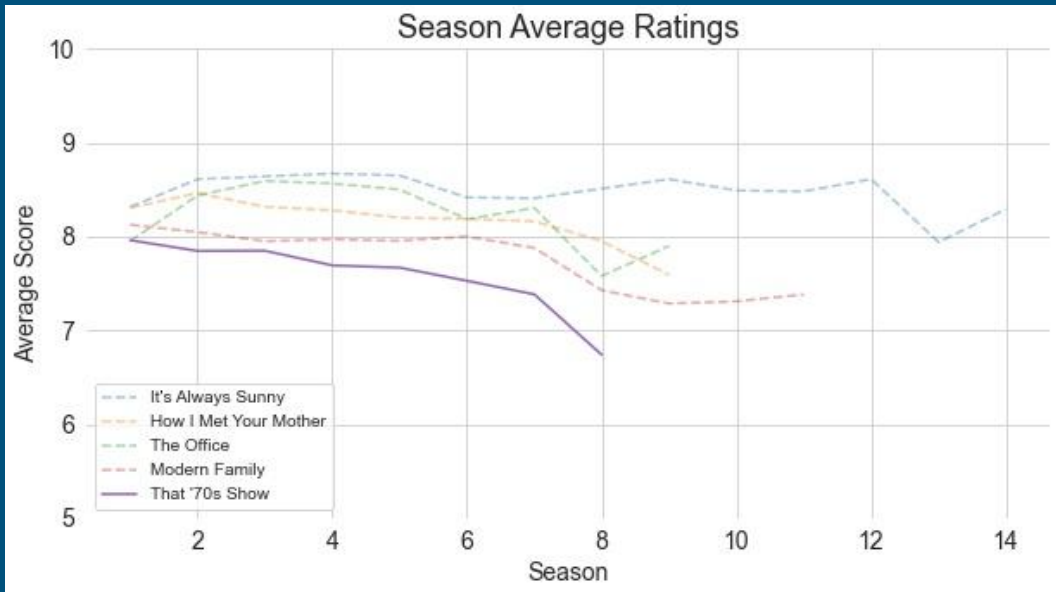
- Of the top 50 Sitcoms (according to IMDB),
 - Most run for between 75-175 episodes
 - Most run for between 5 and 9 seasons.

The Lifespan Of Sitcoms



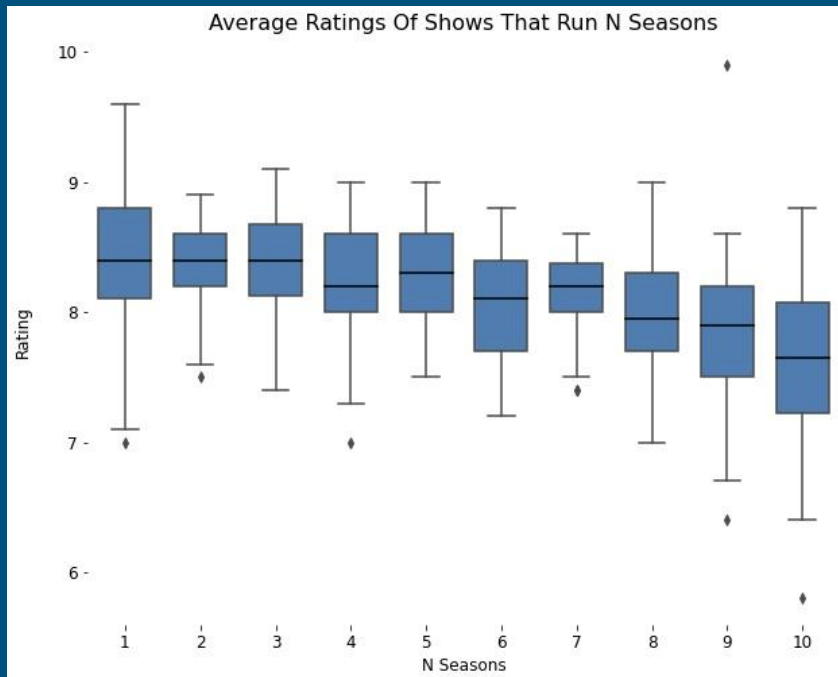
- Of the top 50 Sitcoms (according to IMDB),
 - Most run for between 75-175 episodes
 - Most run for between 5 and 9 seasons.
- That '70s Show ran for
 - 8 Seasons
 - 200 episodes
- From a lifespan perspective, That '70s Show was already an aging entity

TV Shows Don't (Usually) Get Better



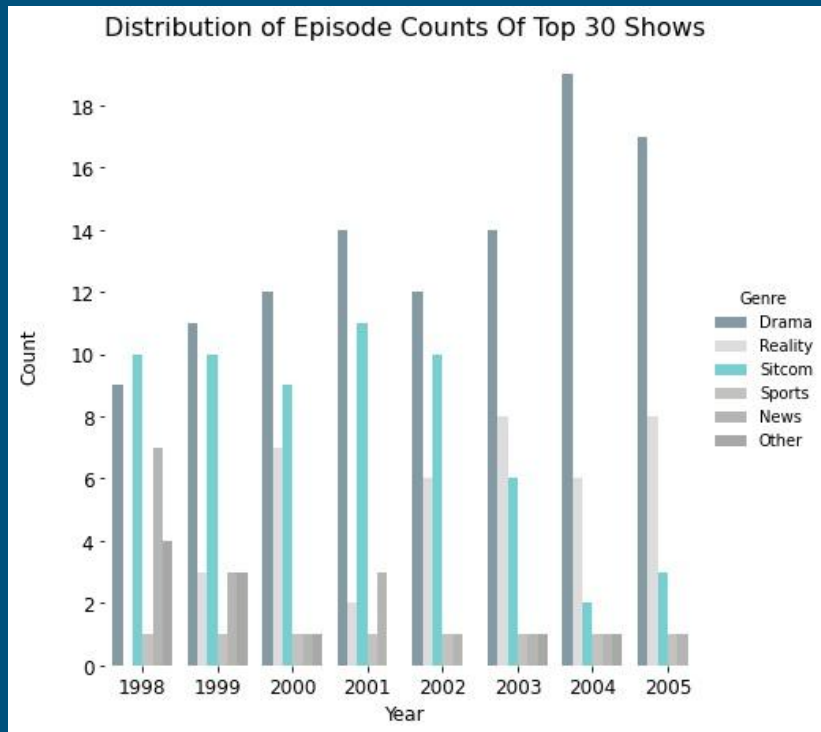
- In general, it is far more common to see a show's average ratings **decline or not change significantly** over its lifetimes

TV Shows Don't (Usually) Get Better



- Shows that run longer tend to have lower overall average episode scores than those that run shorter
- Given this information and the information from the previous slide, if That '70s Show continued, it is **unlikely** its quality would have improved.

A Shifting Market



- In the time that That '70s Show debuted to when it concluded, the demand for different genres of shows shifted
- When That '70s Show initially ran, 10 of the top 30 shows of the year were Sitcoms
- During its final season in 2005 only 3 of the top 30 shows of the year were sitcoms

The Value Proposition

- Imagine you are an executive making the renewal call. Given what we've learned, That '70s Show:
 - Has already ran for longer than most Sitcoms
 - Has viewer satisfaction that has slightly (but steadily) declined since Season 1
 - Belongs to a genre that consumers are losing interest in
- Consider again the departures of Topher Grace and Ashton Kutcher
 - The show will need to be adapted to conform to a new dynamic
 - The show will likely become more expensive, as contracts for existing characters will need to be renegotiated.

Did Kutcher and Grace Leaving Kill The Show?

- No, a changing market and declining view satisfaction ultimately killed the show.
- The departures only accelerated its demise.

Why do shows last?

- Creating a successful show is hitting a moving target
 - There is no easy answer
- Some things we noticed may help longevity:
 - Not being on a major network
 - Content
 - Schedule
 - It's Always Sunny In Philadelphia
 - Ability to be syndicated
 - Like sitcoms, these shows are also designed to reduce continuity lock out
 - Many of the longest running shows have “drop in drop out” isolated story lines
 - The Simpsons, CSI, Grey's Anatomy etc.

Works Cited

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Top-rated_United_States_television_programs_by_season
- <https://www.imdb.com/list/ls069786537/>
- https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0165598/?ref_=nv_sr_srsq_0
- <https://www.ratinggraph.com/>
- <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/StatusQuolsGod>

A Quick TV Tropes Tangent: Status Quo Is God

- Sitcoms are often written to minimize Continuity Lock-Out
 - When TV was not streaming, networks did not want to turn away new viewers with plots that you could not drop in to at any point
- This often results in very little changing from episode to episode
 - Even during more extended plotlines, things often return to the way they began
- This makes it hard for writers to “Steer The Ship” in dramatic or meaningful ways