

UTILIZING BALANCE THEORY, PARASOCIAL  
INTERACTION THEORY AND GENRE THEORY  
IN EVALUATING PRODUCT PLACEMENT  
EFFECTS ON CONSUMER ATTITUDES

by

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# Abstract

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This thesis examines the effects of product placements on consumer attitudes toward the placed products, in the genre of television sitcoms. The study utilizes the integration of balance theory, parasocial interaction theory and genre theory to evaluate the “Balance Model of Sitcom Product Placement Effects” and test its applicability under the conditions set for the execution of the present research. Through the utilization of the three theories, the character-product associations existent in the conventions of contemporary sitcoms and the consumer-character relationships likely to be developed with the viewing of serialized television programs, are examined with regard to the way that their interaction influences consumer attitudes toward placed products.

As the model has its foundations on balance theory, it is suggested that the theoretical premise of attitudinal alignment can explain the interactions existing in the model’s relational system which consists of three elements; the consumer, the character and the placed product. The consumer attitude alignment process toward the character is tested as being guided by the consumer-character relation variables of consumer attitude toward character and parasocial attachment with character, and the character-product relation variables of character’s attitude valence toward, and strength of association with, the placed product.

The methodological premises set for this research involve the utilization of a contemporary sitcom as stimulus, a sample consisting of a particular target group of 128 participants who hold specific characteristics and are regular viewers of the sitcom, and an online survey research instrument for the measurement of the variables.

The findings support the predictions regarding consumers’ attitudinal alignment toward products according to characters’ attitudes toward products, with consumer parasocial attachment with character constituting the most influential factor in the process. This research supports the generalizability faculty of the balance model of placement effects, by corroborating previous findings. Moreover, this study facilitates the accretion of product placement knowledge by following the methodological underpinnings of the replication approach, and fulfils its major purpose of providing corroborated, generalized and extended propositions regarding placements’ effects in the television media context, thus offering valuable practical implications for the practice’s employment by marketers.

**Thesis Keywords:** Balance Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory, Genre Theory, product placement, survey, generalization approach.

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# Table of Contents

---

Declaration -----	ii
Abstract -----	iii
Acknowledgments -----	iv
Table of Contents -----	v
List of Tables -----	viii
List of Figures -----	ix
List of Appendices -----	x

## Chapter One: Introduction

1. Introduction -----	2
1.1 Product Placement Growth and Media Consumption -----	3
1.2 Review of Product Placement Research -----	5
1.3 Research Rationale -----	10
1.4 Research Purpose and Objectives -----	11
1.5 Research Questions -----	12
1.6 Research Methodology -----	13
1.7 Thesis Structure -----	14

## Chapter Two: Theoretical Overview and Background Research

2. Theoretical Overview and Background Research -----	17
2.1 Parasocial Interaction -----	17
2.1.1 Theoretical Perspectives Providing Insights to the Formation of Parasocial Relationships -----	20
2.1.2 Insights into the Viewer-Character Relationship -----	35
2.1.3 Stages of the Parasocial Relationship Development -----	61
2.2 Balance Theory -----	64
2.2.1 The Concepts of Consistency and Balance -----	65
2.2.2 The Principles of Heider's Balance Theory -----	66
2.2.3 Balance Theory. Application in Psychology Studies -----	73
2.2.4 Balance Theory and Communication. Application in the Media Field -----	78
2.2.5 Attitude Alignment in Close Relationships -----	92
2.3 Genre Theory -----	96
2.3.1 Theoretical Approaches to Genre -----	98

## **Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework Development**

3. Conceptual Framework Development -----	113
3.1 Investigating the Development of the Framework-----	114
3.1.1 Genre -----	117
3.1.2 Parasocial Theory-----	128
3.1.3 Balance Theory -----	133
3.2 Development of Hypotheses-----	136
3.2.1 Defining the Variables -----	137
3.2.2 Hypotheses -----	137

## **Chapter Four: Methodology**

4. Methodology -----	143
4.1 Research Design -----	143
4.1.1. Scientific Research Paradigm -----	146
4.1.2 Research Approach -----	172
4.1.3 Research Strategy -----	174
4.1.4 Time Horizons -----	176
4.1.5 Data Collection Methods -----	177
4.2 Research Design Evaluation Criteria -----	188
4.3 Data Analysis Methods-----	195
4.4 Research Ethics -----	197

## **Chapter Five: Data Analysis**

5. Data Analysis -----	202
5.1 Participants' Demographic Profile-----	202
5.2 Participants' Media Viewing Profile -----	204
5.3 Overview of Data -----	207
5.3.1 Examination of the Variables -----	207
5.3.2 Data Management -----	212
5.3.3 Variables Treatment -----	214
5.4 Model Testing -----	215
5.4.1 Hypotheses Testing-----	215
5.4.2 Examination of Hypotheses' Predictions -----	217

## **Chapter Six: Discussion and Implications**

6. Discussion and Implications -----	223
6.1 Discussion of Findings -----	223
6.1.1 Discussion of Extension Research's Findings -----	223
6.1.2 Comparison of Initial and Extension Study's Findings -----	227
6.2 Implications for Theory and Research -----	233
6.2.1 Implications for Balance Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory and the Genre in relation to Product Placement in Media Contexts -----	233
6.2.2 Product Placement Effects Implications Corroborating Previous Research-----	236

6.3 Implications for Practice -----	245
6.4 Contribution of this Research -----	250
6.5 Limitations and Future Research Directions -----	252
6.5.1 Limitations-----	252
6.5.2 Directions for Future Research-----	254
6.6 Conclusion -----	256
 APPENDICES -----	 265
BIBLIOGRAPHY -----	293

## List of Tables

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<b>Table 1.2</b> <i>Review of sample research in Product Placement</i> -----	8
<b>Table 1.7</b> <i>Thesis Structure</i> -----	14
<b>Table 2.1</b> <i>Theoretical perspectives underlying the formation of parasocial relationships</i> -----	19
<b>Table 3.2.1</b> <i>Definition and Labeling of variables</i> -----	137
<b>Table 4.1.1</b> <i>Alternative Research Paradigms and Defining Basic Beliefs</i> -----	148
<b>Table 4.1.1.1</b> <i>Comparison of Initial and Extension's Research Aspects</i> -----	169
<b>Table 4.1.2</b> <i>Approaches to Research Reasoning</i> -----	173
<b>Table 4.2</b> <i>Reliability of the measures in the Russell &amp; Stern (2006) study</i> -----	194
<b>Table 5.1</b> <i>Demographic Profile of this Research's Sample</i> -----	203
<b>Table 5.2</b> <i>Sample's Media Viewing Profile</i> -----	206
<b>Table 5.3.1</b> <i>Variables' Examination</i> -----	211
<b>Table 5.3.2</b> <i>Characters-Products Associations</i> -----	213
<b>Table 5.4.1</b> <i>Estimates for Regression Models</i> -----	217
<b>Table 5.4.2</b> <i>Results of Hypotheses Testing</i> -----	219
<b>Table 6.1.2a</b> <i>Estimates for Regression Models of Extension Study</i> -----	230
<b>Table 6.1.2b</b> <i>Estimates for Regression Models of Initial Study</i> -----	230
<b>Table 6.1.3</b> <i>Results of Hypotheses Testing by Initial and Extension Study</i> -----	232
<b>Table 6.6.2a</b> <i>Participants' Views on Placements' Contribution to the Plot. Apple iPhone</i> -----	240
<b>Table 6.6.2b</b> <i>Participants' Views on Placements' Contribution to the Plot. Ben &amp; Jerry's Ice-cream</i> -----	241
<b>Table 6.6.2c</b> <i>Participants' Views on Placements' Contribution to the Plot. Apple iPod</i> -----	242
<b>Table 6.6.2d</b> <i>Participants' Views on Placements' Contribution to the Plot. Laptop</i>	243

## List of Figures

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<b>Figure 1.1</b> <i>Product Placement Spending by Region and Medium</i> -----	3
<b>Figure 2.1.1.2</b> <i>Development of Interpersonal and Mediated Relationships</i> -----	24
<b>Figure 2.1.3</b> <i>Stages of the Parasocial Relationship Development</i> -----	61
<b>Figure 2.2.2</b> <i>Examples of balanced and unbalanced states</i> -----	68
<b>Figure 2.2.4</b> <i>The balance model of endorser effectiveness</i> -----	80
<b>Figure 3.1a</b> <i>Balance Model of Product Placement Effects</i> -----	115
<b>Figure 3.1b</b> <i>Balance Model of Product Placement Effects; the dyads' relations and underpinnings</i> -----	116
<b>Figure 3.1c</b> <i>Balance Model of Product Placement Effects; the dimensions of the character-product relation (valence of attitude toward the product and association of character with product)</i> -----	128
<b>Figure 3.1d</b> <i>Balance Model of Product Placement Effects; the dimensions of the viewer/consumer-character relation (attitude toward the character and parasocial attachment with character)</i> -----	132
<b>Figure 4.1</b> <i>The onion model of the research process</i> -----	144
<b>Figure 5.1</b> <i>Graphical Representation of Sample's Demographic Profile</i> -----	204
<b>Figure 5.2</b> <i>TV Viewing Profile</i> -----	207
<b>Figure 5.4</b> <i>The relations among the triad of elements and the variables constituting the Hypotheses testing the Balance Model of Product Placement effects</i> -----	215



## List of Appendices

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I. List of Articles utilized for the SSCI comparison criterion-----	265
II. Invitation & Screening Questionnaire for Participants' Recruitment -----	268
III. Plots of the two episodes of “The Big Bang Theory” used as stimuli-----	271
IV. Online survey questionnaire-----	272
V. Cardiff Business School Ethical Approval Form -----	284
VI. Consumption Conventions in “ <i>The Big Bang Theory</i> ” -----	289

# CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

# 1. Introduction

This research is concerned with the practice of product placement, and specifically with particular factors that may have an impact regarding the effects of product placements on consumers. Particularly, this thesis focuses on product placement strategy, as it is employed in television programs, and specifically it investigates product placements in the genre of sitcoms. Namely, this study examines the influence of product placements in television sitcoms on consumer attitudes toward the placed products, by testing a balance model of product placement effects.

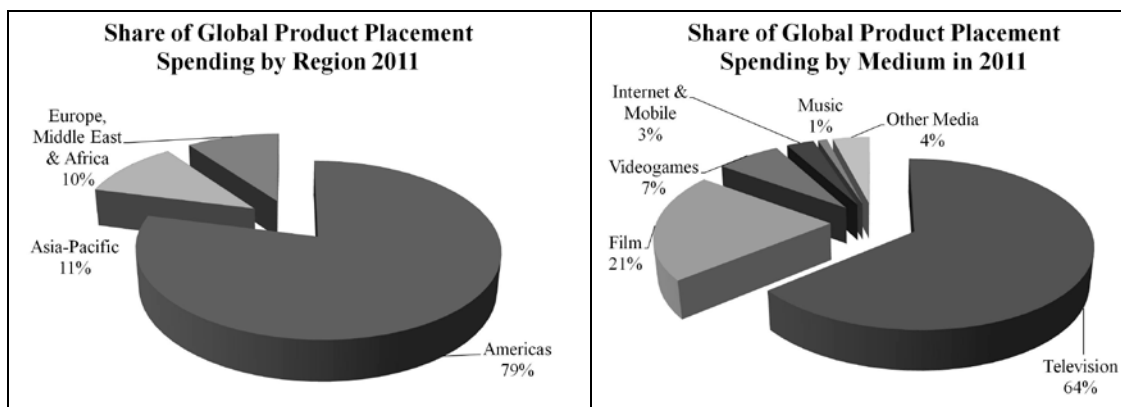
The thesis begins with the motivating reasons behind the research, along with the purposes and the objectives set for its conduct, which are presented in this chapter. As the presentation of the thesis progresses, a thorough overview of the theoretical premises that constitute the foundations of the framework under examination is provided in the second chapter of this thesis. The methodological decisions taken for conducting this study are presented in the fourth chapter, while the data gathered from the research execution are analyzed in the fifth chapter. Finally, the presentation of this thesis concludes with the discussion of the findings, as well as, the implications stemming from the present research.

This thesis begins to unfold, by the introduction of this research's background with regard to the marketing communication practice of product placement. The review suggests that product placement research, although still increasing and attracting interest, it is not evolving. Many areas regarding the practice have been researched but generalizations and theoretically sound developments are absent for this marketing communication strategy. Drawing from this brief review of relevant to the practice researched areas, the motivation behind the conduct of this research aiming to add to the product placement knowledge accretion, is reasoned. Finally, the research objectives and questions that have been set in order to fulfil this study's ultimate goal of providing evidence for the effectiveness of the practice, thus offering another building block to the edifice of product placement knowledge, are presented. This chapter concludes with a brief mention regarding the study's methodological approaches.

## 1.1 Product Placement Growth and Media Consumption

Product placement is a continuously growing marketing tactic not only in terms of quantity of embedded products and brands in various media works, but also marketing budget spending. Albeit the Great Recession, the total spending on global product placement in various media (e.g. television programs, movies, videogames, music) rose 9.8% to \$7.39 billion in 2011. In the largest product placement market, the US - where many, if not the most, media works are produced and distributed for broadcasting to other countries-, spending rose 10.2% to \$4.26 billion in 2011. The increased spending was driven, mostly, by accelerated integrations in television programs and movies (PQ Media 2012).

Television is the primary medium receiving the majority of product placements in quantity and spending. This is justified by an increase of 10.9% in 2011 to \$4.76 billion, which represented a 64.4% share of the paid placement market. The fact that paid product placement has been legally permitted in Western Europe (PQ Media 2012) and in particular in the media market of the UK in 2011 (Hackley & Hackley 2012), helped spur growth (PQ Media 2012). Due to the strong product placement increase on TV in most countries, a steady growth of global product placement was expected for 2012, climbing 11.7% to \$8.25 billion, while the US placement spending is expected to register an 11.2% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) from 2011 to 2016, according to the Global Product Placement Forecast for 2012-2016 report of PQ Media (2012). The following Figure 1.1 depicts the share of global product placement spending by region and by medium for 2011.



Source: PQ Media 2012

**Figure 1.1** *Product Placement Spending by Region and Medium*

Adding to the growth of product placements in television, the total television viewing levels in the UK have steadily risen since the 2008/09 financial crisis. Total TV viewing levels increased from an average of 3.6 hours per day in 2008 to 4 hours in 2010 and 2011 (Mintel 2013). According to the media consumption Mintel report, the reduced levels of disposable income have led consumers to the more inexpensive leisure activity of television viewing. Moreover, television broadcasters and content producers have invested significant sums since 2009 (investment in the period 2009-2011 rose by approximately 7.7%) for the improvement of the range and quality of television programs' content.

The increasing television consumption and the steady growth of global investment in the practice of product placement can justify and explain the increased focus of marketers to the practice, as they "seek alternative methods to engage with target audiences who are shifting media consumption patterns" (PQ Media 2012). Moreover two important factors have turned the focus of marketers to systematically engage in more specific and well engineered inclusions of their brands, as an integral part of the products' promotional plans; one reason being the recent legal permission of paid placements in European media. A second important factor is the shift of content producers from including non-paid placements in their works -where the product itself serves as compensation, as a prop<sup>1</sup>- to the inclusion of paid placements which allows them to seek revenue generation in order to defray costs. In fact, the past seven years, there has been observed an accelerated shift away from non-paid (aka barter arrangements) to paid product integrations according to PQ Media (2012). For these reasons, it can be assumed that marketers have gained a little more control over the decisions about the portrayal of their products in a media work. In this way, the practice of product placement has acquired an added value as a marketing strategy. The increased focus on product placement practice in marketers' decision making process can also be observed in the research priorities reports of the Marketing Science Institute<sup>2</sup>. Marketing practitioners are calling for robust and specific propositions with regard to the practice of product placement, the experiential consumption of products and new approaches to brands' positioning.

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<sup>1</sup> Meaning that products receive placements in exchange for providing free of charge use of the products by the production crew, actors, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Specifically, in several reports which cover practitioners' proposed research priorities for the years 2008 to 2014. The relevant to the practice of product placement research priorities are analyzed in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

For these reasons, it seems that research regarding the practice of product placement is a necessity for the contemporary trends observed in the media and marketing industry. Academic research has identified this necessity and has attempted to provide insights on several aspects of the practice for over a decade now. However, the evolving utilization of the practice by the media industry and the steady growth in interest and investment by marketers continues to drive motivation in conducting academic research for this, still developing, marketing practice.

## **1.2 Review of Product Placement Research**

As presented, the marketing practice of product placement, which refers to the purposeful paid or non-paid incorporation of branded products in non commercial settings such as media works, is mostly focused to the contexts of television programming and movies, which represent the biggest categories for placement expenditures by the industry (Bhatnagar & Wan 2008, Williams et al. 2011, PQ Media 2012). Following this increased interest of the industry to the specific contexts, the focus of most academic research has been toward product placement in television and movies, thus reflecting and addressing the marketers' attempts for influencing consumers' attitudes toward their brands through this practice.

Academic research has made considerable efforts to describe the impact of product placements on viewers/consumers, namely to investigate the effectiveness of product placements. In relevant literature, a number of effects of placements have been described and have been proposed as possible measures of the practice's effectiveness. The most commonly proposed and researched placement measures are brand recognition and recall (i.e. effects of placements on memory), brand attitude, purchase intention, brand choice and brand usage behaviour (Balasubramanian et al. 2006). However, product placement research has also been focused on issues of brand portrayals, modality and prominence of placements, and general attitudes toward the practice, which have also been considered as factors impacting on placements' effectiveness.

The following Table 1.2 gives a brief presentation of a sample of studies that have been conducted in researching the aforementioned areas, as they have been the focus of placement research for the last two decades.

<b>Review of Product Placement Research</b>		
<b>Major Topics in Product Placement Research</b>	<b>Relevant Studies</b> <i>Research topic</i>	<b>Main Findings</b>
Effects on memory, recall and recognition	Gupta & Lord (1998) <i>Effect of prominence and mode of product placements on recall</i>	Comparison of product placement types' recall effectiveness with each other and with advertising. The results showed that generally, prominent placements elicited higher recall than advertisements, which outperformed subtle placements. However, audio-only placements had better recall than subtle visual-only placements.
	Law & Braun (2000) <i>Effectiveness of product placement with measures of explicit and implicit memory</i>	Comparison of explicit (recognition and recall task) and implicit (effect of exposure on product choice indirectly) memory measures for their responsiveness to product placement according to its modality (prominent/subtle). Results showed an overall enhancement in product recall and recognition due to placement. Prominent placements were remembered and recalled more but no implicit effect on choice was found. Subtle (visual-only) placements were least recalled but were found to influence choice.
	D' Astous & Chartier (2000) <i>Factors affecting consumer evaluations and memory of product placements</i>	This research found that product placements that have a positive effect are: when principal actor is present and placement is positively evaluated, resulting in enhanced memory; evaluations are more positive when principal actor is present, when the placement is manifest, and when it is well integrated in the scene. Placements have negative effects when: placement is evaluated as unacceptable and is well integrated in the scene, which results in declined memory. Moreover, prominent placements enhance recognition memory but have a negative effect on recall, while manifest placements are better liked than subtle ones but are perceived as more unacceptable.
	Lehu & Bressoud (2008) <i>Effectiveness of product placement based on brand recall</i>	Brand placement effectiveness measured through spontaneous day-after recall (SDAR), according to number of placements remembered, and was based on second viewing of a movie on DVD. The findings revealed that viewers who had previously seen the movie in cinemas showed more SDAR than those watching it for the first time on DVD. In addition, liking of the movie was found to be related with better recall of placements.
Interaction effects between memory and attitudes	Russell (2002) <i>Effectiveness of product placement through investigation of modality and plot connection effects on memory and attitude</i>	The results showed that the modality of placements (visual and auditory) and the degree of their connection with the plot (i.e. degree of congruency) interact to influence attitude change. Memory was improved when modality and plot connection were incongruent but persuasion was enhanced by congruency. Congruent placements appeared more natural whereas incongruent placements were found to have adverse effects on brand attitude because they appeared unnatural and thus they were depreciated.
	Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen (2007) <i>Product placement effectiveness by investigation of different levels of placements and their effects on memory, attitudes and brand choice</i>	The study defined the different levels of visual placements, as: background, used by character and connection with the story. The results showed that brands were recognized more when used by the main character or when they were integral to the story, in comparison to products featured in the background. On a choice task, participants' attitudes toward the brand were found to have an influence on their choice, since they were observed to be more likely to choose the brand just seen in the movie in comparison to other participants who had not viewed the brand.

Review of Product Placement Research (Contd.)		
General attitudes toward product placements	Gupta & Gould (1997) <i>Consumers' perceptions and acceptability of product placements</i>	The study's findings showed that, overall, participants had positive attitudes toward product placements, but placements of ethically-charged products such as alcohol, cigarettes and guns were perceived as less acceptable than other products. In particular, participants who were frequently watching movies found ethically-charged product placements more acceptable than others. Those who valued perceived realism, tended to be more favourable toward the acceptability of product placements in general.
	D'Astous & Senguin (1999) <i>Examination of the impact of different strategies of product placement in television programs on consumer reactions</i>	The results of the study indicated that product placement effects depend on the type of television program. Negative evaluations of placements occurred for mini-series/dramas and for implicit placements in quiz/variety shows and information/services magazines. Implicit placements had more negative evaluations than any other type. Strong sponsor-program congruity led to better evaluative and ethical reactions for all programs except for mini-series/dramas. Moreover, a positive image of the sponsor was not found to result in better reactions to placements.
	Schmoll et al. (2006) <i>Baby Boomers' attitudes toward placements in multiple media</i>	The findings revealed a generally favourable attitude toward product placement in all formats (movies, television, music videos, video games, internet), regardless of media consumption. Some implications of disapproval were observed with regard to the inclusion of alcohol and cigarettes in media content aiming at children. However, Baby Boomers, in their majority, were found to be indifferent about the inclusion of products in media works.
	Eisend (2009) <i>Cross-cultural generalizability of product placements' acceptance</i>	By applying a generalizability theory approach, the authors analysed the Gupta and Gould's (1997) replication studies that had been executed by other researchers in different cultures: USA, France, Austria, Australia, China, Germany and Bulgaria. The results showed, that acceptance of placements is generalizable over different cultures as far as ethically-charged products are concerned. Cross-cultural generalizability is not supported for neutral products. However, the acceptability of ethically-charged/ controversial products was found to be indifferent (neither acceptable nor totally unacceptable) across all countries. Acceptance of neutral products' placements was found high for all countries, but highest scores were observed for US, and France, while Australia and Germany had the lowest scores.
Brand appearances in media works, and Branded entertainment	Avery & Ferraro (2000) <i>Brand appearances in television</i>	The study explored the manifest and latent aspects of brand portrayals. Content analysis results showed that the majority of portrayed brands in TV are subtly displayed. Mentioned or/and seen brands were more positively portrayed than subtle ones. Portrayal was found to be reinforced by character interaction.
	La Ferle & Edwards (2006) <i>Brand appearances in television</i>	Five categories of TV programming were examined: storied and special event programming, game and news and magazine shows, and sporting events. Content analysis showed that most placements were visual. The type of program seemed to affect the type of placement (visual, verbal, audio-visual) and its prominence. Little interaction was found between characters and brands.
	Hudson & Hudson (2006) <i>Determining branded entertainment</i>	The article presents the evolution of the product placement practice over the years, by reviewing main researched aspects of the practice. A conceptual framework for the comprehension of the various forms of the practice was presented.



Review of Product Placement Research (Contd.)		
Effects on Attitudes	Cowley & Barron (2008) <i>Effects of program liking and placement prominence on brand attitude</i>	The study investigated conditions under which placements can cause negative shifts in brand attitudes. The results showed that prominent placements have a negative impact on brand attitudes for viewers who reported high levels of program liking. Viewers with low levels of program liking were found to have a positive direction shift in brand attitude after exposure to prominent placements. Yet, this positive shift disappeared when persuasive-intent prime preceded the exposure. Subtle placements were found less likely to result in negative shifts in brand attitude.
	Homer (2009) <i>Effects of placement type and repetition on brand attitude</i>	The results revealed that brand attitudes decreased when placements were prominent and especially when product mentions were repeated. Conversely, for subtle placements brand attitudes were relatively positive and repeated exposures had little incremental impact.
Experiential consumption and impact on self-identity	DeLorme & Reid (1999) <i>Interpretation of brand placements within the audience's everyday lived experience</i>	The qualitative study employed a grounded theory approach and the findings revealed that participants were active in the movie viewing experience and actively interpreted brands embedded in movies. Interpretations of brands were found to be part of moviegoers' constructions of reality. For older moviegoers brands in movies symbolized social change from a sacred movie viewing experience to a commercial event. For younger moviegoers placed brands were associated with feelings of belonging, comfort and security. Placed brands were interpreted as part of the audience's everyday experiences, as a reflection of moviegoers' past, present and anticipated experiences.
	Nelson & McLeod (2005) <i>Product placements' relation to brand consciousness and perceived effects on self and others</i>	The results showed that commercial media consumption (movies) was related to brand consciousness. High brand conscious adolescents were found to be more aware and have more favourable attitudes toward product placements. All adolescents perceived that others would be more influenced by placements than they would be themselves. High brand conscious teens perceived the greatest effects of placements on their selves and other's buying behaviour.
	Hackley & Tiwsakul (2006) <i>The role of product placements on consumer self-concept and identity</i>	The authors identified and proposed three key areas for future research: <i>Brand representation</i> , namely they proposed examination of the way that brands, as cultural representations, can be aligned or associated with certain consumer's values and qualities. <i>Consumer Experience</i> ; the authors recommend the examination of the different interpretations that viewers might give to the same entertainment work and consequently to the placed brands. Another area of suggested investigation refers to <i>Consumer identification</i> . As brands can be used as a cultural resource which in turn can generate the formation of social identity, the different interpretations of the branded entertainment experiences can also impact on consumers' formation of self identity.
Effects on Behaviour	Morton & Friedman (2002) <i>Examination of the correlation between beliefs about product placement and reported product usage behaviour</i>	The results of the study provided evidence (though inconclusive) for supporting the correlation between general beliefs about product placement and reported usage behaviour. In particular, the study's findings supported that products' positive portrayals can contribute to decisions about the product's use whereas negative portrayals can encourage discontinued use.

Source: As per previous published research

**Table 1.2** Review of sample research in Product Placement

Albeit the extensive research regarding several aspects of product placement practice, including the aforementioned identified and described as indicators –many times labeled as measures- of placements’ effects on consumers, many researchers have acknowledged the inconclusiveness, problematic nature and inefficiency of these “measures” to actually reflect the effectiveness of the practice (e.g. Russell 2002, Bhatnagar & Wan 2008, Williams et al. 2011, Redondo 2012). Others have concluded that “inferences about placements do not converge across empirical studies” (Balasubramanian et al. 2006) and that many researched aspects of the placement practice have not been systematically examined (Bhatnagar & Wan 2008, Toomey & Francis 2013), thus possible important inferences are condemned to lack of generalizability and to unappreciation of their value by practitioners. Another problematic issue that has been observed is the fact that researchers have been mostly focused on assessing the effects of placements on memory as related to behavioural effects -namely what marketers aim for-, but there is actually no scientific and significant proof or corroborated empirical evidence that placements’ recall is correlated with behavioural effects (Law & Braun 2000, Redondo 2012). Moreover, albeit the abundance of product placement research, it is still difficult to establish robust, general conclusions about the practice’s effectiveness, mainly because much of the researches’ findings are restrained to single-shot studies with circumstantial evidence which are not further examined. Consequently, there is clouding knowledge with regard to several aspects of the practice and in particular to its effectiveness.

However, apart from these highly researched but of uncorroborated empirical results issues regarding the practice of product placement, there have been some isolated attempts of examination of alternative viewpoints referring to the knowledge inquiry of the practice’s effectiveness. When such viewpoints offer findings which can be supported by theoretically sound and tested models, then they can provide generalizable and valuable insights which could add more building blocks to the edifice of knowledge regarding product placement practice. Studies that provide examination of less researched issues of the practice, attempt to shed light to the context characteristics that may influence placement effectiveness (e.g. Stern & Russell 2004, van Reijmersal et al. 2010, Redker et al. 2013) and the interplay among media content, media figures and placed products (e.g. Russell & Stern 2006, Bhatnagar & Wan 2008, Kong & Hung 2012).

The study that can be considered as highly appreciated<sup>3</sup> by other researchers or influential in establishing an audience-character<sup>4</sup> dynamics' tradition in product placement research, is that of Russell & Stern (2006) who, based on well established theories, proposed and tested a theoretical framework which intended to highlight and examine the influence of the viewer-media character relation on viewers' attitudes toward the product. Albeit the impact of the study to many later studies and the rarity, in relevant placement literature, of theoretical underpinnings that support a research's findings, there can be observed a lack of further attempts to provide additional empirical evidence supporting the proposed framework and generalizing the results. Although the audience-character relation has been considered as carrying influential power with regard to product placement effects (e.g Yang & Roskos- Ewoldsen 2007, Bhatnagar & Wan 2008, Kong & Hung 2012), Russell & Stern's (2006) study is the only one providing theoretical support for such implication. Further attempts for the examination of the specific theoretical framework which focuses on the relation between viewer and character, could provide generalized propositions and practical instructions with regard to the audience-character dynamics and the way that they could be exploited by marketers to make them most of the product placement practice for their brands.

### **1.3 Research Rationale**

Drawing from the brief overview of previous product placement research, it can be observed that although research efforts continuously expand, acquired knowledge of the practice remains uncorroborated, unsupported by solid theories, lacking of well-confirmed empirical evidence and thus, generalizations. Generally, the practice has received mixed findings and disconnected, fragmented and isolated studies that cannot add to the accumulation of knowledge (van Reijmersdal et al. 2009).

Hence, it could be inferred, that the most important problem of product placement research is the lack of generalizations and theoretical premises which results in impotence of knowledge development and provision of practical

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<sup>3</sup> Due to high rate of citation. This issue will be further explained in Chapter 4 and in section 4.1.1.1.

<sup>4</sup> *Character* refers to the characters involved in storied media contents.

implications to marketers. And since product placement strategy -as of course marketing - is mainly an applied practice, it is expected to provide solid knowledge and specific advice to practitioners. Hence, the development of product placement knowledge is regarded of outmost importance for the grounds of this research. According to the identified and observed, by most researchers, problems and deficiencies of existing placement research, the accretion of knowledge can only be achieved through further efforts of examining, testing, cross-validating and generalizing previous research (Easley et al. 2000, Hubbard & Lindsay 2002, Uncles & Kwok 2013). For these reasons, the rationale of this research is based on the replication tradition<sup>5</sup> approach which aims at highlighting the necessity for validated knowledge and promotes the accomplishment of scientific inquiry through established generalizations.

## **1.4 Research Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose and ultimate aim of this research is to provide further empirical evidence that will add to the establishment of generalization of previous findings regarding product placement effectiveness, through examination of the influential power of the viewer-character relation in the context of television sitcoms. This research aims to examine the theoretical premises underpinning the “Balance model of sitcom product placement effects” (Russell & Stern 2006), to test the model and to extend its applicability to other contexts. By critically examining the extension of the model’s applicability to different circumstances, the generalization of Russell & Stern’s (2006) findings is also aimed to be assessed, while the confirmation of the theories underlying the model is facilitated.

In particular, the scope of this extension study is to examine the effects of product placements in television sitcoms on viewers/consumers’ attitudes toward the placed product. While there are implications in placement literature that the context of media works (with everything that it involves, e.g. characters, placements, program liking levels etc.) can have several effects on viewers, a clear understanding of the specificity of these effects has not yet been achieved. For example, previous findings

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<sup>5</sup> The replication tradition approach is analytically presented in Chapter 4.

have indicated that the way that a product is connected to the plot of a media work can be of influence to the viewers' attention and attitudes toward products (d'Astous & Seguin 1999, Russell 2002) while existence of viewers' parasocial interaction with media figures comprises another influential and explanatory factor of product placements' effects (Russell et al. 2004, Russell & Stern 2006). Since research regarding audience-characters connection is limited to these studies, and the only theoretical support for its role in placement effects on viewers has been provided by the balance model of placement effects, the goal of this study is to enrich the understanding of the way that placements function in terms of the viewer-character, character-placed product and viewer-placed product relations. Moreover, by examining these relations in new circumstances, the current study aims to provide further support of the proposed but under-researched, and thus restricted from generalization, balance model of product placement effects.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

To reach the goals and research objectives of the present study, a number of questions that refer to its knowledge inquiries have been formulated. With regard to the ultimate goal of facilitating the generalization of the balance model of placement effects, this research aims to address the following questions:

1. Does the balance model apply to other settings such as different media works, different population, different sample and different geographical setting?
2. Does the passage of time have an impact on previous findings?
3. Do different methodological procedures have an impact on the findings in comparison to the findings of the initial research?
4. Has the inclusion of more branded products as opposed to the more generic ones of the initial study's stimuli, an impact on the placement effects?

With reference to the particular objectives of the understanding and examination of product placements' effects on viewers/consumers, this research seeks to address the following questions:

1. How the inside-program character-product relation affects the viewer/consumer attitude toward the placed products?
2. How the outside-program viewer-character relation affects the viewer/consumer attitude toward the placed products?
3. How the interaction between inside-program and outside-program influences, impacts on viewers/consumers' attitudes toward the placed products?
4. Does balance theory explain the interaction between outside and inside influences-program on consumers' attitudes toward placed products?

## **1.6 Research Methodology**

The methodology of this research follows a structured methodology, close to that of Russell and Stern's (2006) research. The reason for following a close to the initial research methodology is because the current study intends to examine, compare and validate previous findings and theoretical propositions, since it aims at their generalization. Based on this rationale, the current study can be considered as a comparative study, in terms of examining and testing previous empirical results and comparing them with new evidence. Nevertheless, according to the replication approach that it follows, it can also be regarded as an extension study in terms of testing the application of the balance model of product placement effects in different circumstances and attempting to generalize it. Namely, it can be characterized as an extension research because it attempts to extend the model's applicability to new contexts.

The extension study's different circumstances which also refer to particular different methodological decisions, taken for its conduct –in comparison to the initial study- involved; a different sample from a different population -namely the sample was drawn from a UK university student population and was recruited according to specific characteristics-; a contemporary sitcom as a stimulus and its screening on a laboratory setting; and an altered questionnaire in terms of questions' sequence.

The data collection procedure involved the exposure of 128 participants to the stimulus, which was followed by the completion of an online questionnaire. The data analysis followed the same procedures as the initial study, namely a series of

regressions, in order to be aligned with the structured methodology approach that would allow comparisons of the results with those of the initial study.

## 1.7 Thesis Structure

This thesis is presented in six chapters. The structure of the thesis, as well as a brief presentation of each chapter's content, is depicted in the following Table 1.7.

<b>Structure of the Thesis</b>		
<i>Chapters</i>	<i>Chapter Title</i>	<i>Chapter Content</i>
Chapter 1	Introduction & Research Directions	Introduction of product placement previous research, identification of the problems and gaps in relevant research from which the motivation for this research stems from, presentation of research purpose, objectives and questions.
Chapter 2	Theoretical Overview and Background Research	Presentation of an overview of the theoretical foundations or the researched topic. The overview involves the theoretical premises and relevant research of the three utilized theories: Balance Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory and Genre Theory. The information stemming from each theory for utilization in the research procedure is highlighted.
Chapter 3	Conceptual Framework Development	The information extracted from Chapter 2 is utilized to define the elements of the balance model and describe the relations between them. The conceptualization of the model is presented analytically followed by the developed Hypotheses.
Chapter 4	Methodology	The chapter presents the research procedure followed, defines the philosophical and methodological orientations of the study, and provides justification for adopting a replication approach and conducting an extension research. Details about the extension research's procedure in comparison to the initial research are also included.
Chapter 5	Data Analysis	Overview of the demographic and media viewing profile of the sample, presentation of the data analysis procedures involving the preparation and examination of the variables. The model's testing was performed through testing of the Hypotheses by a series of regressions.
Chapter 6	Discussion, and Implications	This chapter summarizes the findings of the extension research, compares the results with those of the initial study, presents the study's contribution and explains the implications of the research for practice and future research.

Source: This Research

**Table 1.7** *Thesis Structure*

## **Summary of Chapter 1**

This chapter introduces the research that has been conducted with regard to the practice of product placement, in general. Product placement academic research continues to be conducted, as it follows the trend of the continuously rising interest of marketers for investment in the practice, which is evident in recent industry reports. However, academic research in product placement, although abundant, has failed to provide practitioners with robust, corroborated and valuable advice. The problematic nature of the research around this topic has been addressed by the majority of researchers. For this reason, this research justifies and focuses its purpose in attempting to address this problematic tradition. The motivation behind this research's decisions to extend a previous research lies with the aim of providing further empirical results which can facilitate generalization of the balance model of product placement effects.



# **CHAPTER TWO**

Theoretical Overview  
and Background  
Research

## **2. Theoretical Overview and Background Research**

In this chapter, an overview of the basic theoretical foundations that underlie the conceptualization of the model is presented. Moreover, this overview includes previous research that has been undertaken with regard to these theoretical foundations in the, relevant to this study, media field, but also in the areas of psychology. Taking under consideration studies in the area of psychology which have explored these theories, is of high importance for understanding the role of the human element (i.e. consumers/viewers) in the application of these theories to the model.

In the structure of this chapter, the theoretical perspective of parasocial interactions is presented first. The parasocial interaction theoretical underpinnings, the relevant extensive previous research that has been conducted, and the employment of other theories that explain parasocial interaction, provide information with regard to the relationship of the viewers/consumers and the media characters portrayed in media contexts. Next, the overview is continued with the presentation of balance theory, its foundations, its application to communication studies and its utilization in the formation of the conceptualization of the balance model of product placement effects. Lastly, genre theory is introduced in order to be utilized for the configuration of the structural attributes of the media context within which the conceptualization of the model is developed.

### **2.1 Parasocial Interaction**

Initially, the term “parasocial interaction” and its development to a theoretical construct, was introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956) in order to explore a frequently observed phenomenon that was born along with the rising popularity of the mass media in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ashe & McCutcheon 2001). Parasocial interaction is defined as the “face to face relationship between spectator and performer” (Horton & Wohl 1956). This refers to the development of a pseudorelationship between a viewer and a media figure (Moyer-Gusé 2008). Since the introduction of the concept of parasocial relationship, a growing body of literature has further developed its

theoretical underpinnings and explored its compatibility and ability to explain phenomena within other contexts in research areas such as marketing and psychology.

The most common assumption that is met in the body of literature regarding the exploration of the parasocial interaction's function is that of its similarity with real relationships in the social world (e.g. Rubin & McHugh 1987, Perse & Rubin 1989). Thus, many studies have attempted to explain parasocial relationships under the prism of social theories.

The basis of this common assumption is that people and media are equivalent communication substitutes which satisfy similar communication needs. Hence, people use the same cognitive processes when approaching communication in either interpersonal or mediated contexts (Perse & Rubin 1989).

In particular, Perse and Rubin (1989) support that parasocial interaction can be considered as “an extension of normal social cognition”. They argue that when individuals form parasocial relationships, they use similar psychological processes that are met in real social activities, specifically in terms of imagination. That is because, when individuals make a person judgement about a media figure or have ascribed person characteristics to that figure (if it is a fictional character), then the media figure is regarded as real in the individuals' social network. In such an occasion, the existence of similar psychological processes for the formation of parasocial relationships with those met in real social relationships can be identified (Giles 2002).

Subsequently, since real and parasocial interactions are thought to have similar attributes, it can be argued that individuals perceive and experience real and parasocial interactions in a very similar way. Certainly, it is not implied that all interactions share the same qualities, rather it is highlighted that different types of interactions do not bear distinguish characteristics in people's minds (Giles 2002). It also may be that individuals have an embedded human instinct to form attachments with others, regardless of the distance between them (Rubin & Perse 1987). Indeed, many researchers have identified that several attributes of parasocial interaction are very similar to those of social interaction. For that reason, they have attempted to explain the underpinnings of the formation of parasocial relationships through theoretical perspectives of interpersonal relationships (e. g. Giles 2002, Rubin & McHugh 1987, Cole & Leets 1999). In Table 2.1 the various theoretical premises that have been utilized to investigate and explain the formation and the functionality of

parasocial relationships are presented collectively, and are analyzed individually in the following sections.

<b>Theoretical Perspectives Underlying Parasocial Relationships</b>	<b>Conceptual Links with Parasocial Relationships</b>
<i>Uses and Gratifications Theory</i>	Individuals use media communications in order to satisfy a range of needs and achieve goals. According to the theory, media consumption is related to need gratification with regard to social relationships, as it can be used as substitute companionship and as an environment of depictions of the social world where substitute personal relationships with media figures can be developed. Thus, individuals' need for personal relationships can be gratified through the formation of parasocial relationships in media communication contexts.
<i>Uncertainty Reduction Theory</i>	Individuals try to reduce uncertainty in interpersonal relationships through communication, in order to extract information about the other party of the relationship. In mediated relationships such as parasocial relationships, parasocial interaction with the media figure represents the communication with the other party of the relationship. Parasocial interaction leads to increased liking of the media figure and uncertainty reduction which, in turn, lead to increased perceived relationship importance.
<i>Personal Construct Theory</i>	As individuals develop personal constructs as internal views of reality in understanding the world, viewers employ their personal constructs in forming impressions about media figures. According to the theory, individuals are likely to develop specific domain constructs about mediated communication and as such, they can develop particular constructs about television personalities, which in turn, might extend their construct system about real people, since media contexts are representations of the real world.
<i>Social Exchange Theory</i>	According to the theory relationships are developed by the utility of a personal cost-benefit analysis and the evaluation of alternatives. Parasocial relationships can be seen through the prism of cost-reward construct as being eligible for providing more flexible relationships and comprising competitive alternatives of interpersonal relationships.
<i>Attachment Theory</i>	The theory provides explanation with regard to the way that individuals form relationships according to identified attachment styles. Attachment styles and relative reflections in relationships' formations are transferable and have applications to the formation of parasocial relationships, thus confirming that parasocial relationships function similarly to real interpersonal relationships.

Source: This Research and previous publications<sup>6</sup>

**Table 2.1** *Theoretical perspectives underlying the formation of parasocial relationships*

<sup>6</sup> As referenced in the following section 2.1.1 where the theories are analyzed.

### ***2.1.1 Theoretical Perspectives Providing Insights to the Formation of Parasocial Relationships***

#### **2.1.1.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory**

One of the explorations of parasocial relationships' process has been through the application of principles of the uses and gratifications theory (e.g. Rubin & Perse 1987, Rubin & McHugh 1987, Giles 2002). Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch's (1973-1974) uses and gratifications approach is one of the most cumulative efforts to explain how individuals use communications, among other resources in their environment, in order to satisfy their needs and to achieve their goals.

Initially, the authors, made an attempt to point out the basic elements of uses and gratifications theory that are met in the relevant literature. First of all, the audience is conceived as active since a part of mass media use is goal oriented. Second, in the mass media communication process the initiative in relating needs' gratification to a particular media choice rests with the audience member. Third, the media is not the only source of need fulfilment. Mass media communication can only satisfy partially and a certain range of human needs. In the fourth element it is indicated that individual audience members have enough self-awareness of their media use, interests and motives, so as to be able to report them in specific cases. The data deriving from such reports can be used to formulate the goals of mass media use. Lastly, value judgements regarding the cultural importance of mass media communication can only be assessed by the audience.

Their uses and gratifications' research also singles out McQuail, Blumler, and Brown's (1972) four-functional interpretation of mass media communication, as adequately reflecting the typologies of needs gratification. The typology consists of the categories of *diversion* (which includes escape from the routine and everyday problems, and emotional liberation), *personal relationships* (including substitute companionship and social utility), *personal identity* (embracing personal orientation, reality exploration and value reinforcement) and *surveillance* (containing security and satisfaction of curiosity) (Katz et al. 1973-1974).

In addition, the authors enrich their overview of the mass media communication's functional interpretation with the proposition of Katz, Gurevitch,

and Haas (1973) regarding this matter. The concept of this scheme attempts to explain the variety of individual gratifications under the many aspects of the need “to be connected”. Namely, the central idea is that mass media communication is utilized by the audience in order to be connected through “instrumental, affective or integrative relations” with the self, family, friends, nation etc. (Katz et al. 1973-1974).

The implication here is that a combination of psychological dispositions, sociological issues and environmental circumstances can possibly determine the specific uses of the mass media communication by audience members. Taking for instance the need of “substitute companionship”; one can hypothesize that the media communication is utilized by individuals who seek social contact and are in some way incapable of satisfying their need for psychological or social related reasons. For example, substitute companionship might be sought through media communication by the elderly, the divorced, housewives, singles living alone etc.

Based on the above implication Katz et al. (1973-1974), structured the ways that possible social factors can manifest the generation of media related needs: 1) Social situation can generate tensions and conflicts which lead to pressure for the individuals, who in turn try to release it through mass media communication. 2) Social situation can create awareness regarding problems demanding attention and information which can be sought by individuals through mass media communication. 3) Social situation can provide impoverished real-life opportunities to fulfil specific needs. For that reason, individuals turn to mass media communication for complementary, supplementary or substitute satisfactions of those needs. 4) Social situation can highlight certain values, and individuals are directed to the consumption of congruent media materials in order to facilitate the affirmation and reinforcement of those values. 5) Social situation may offer a range of expectations of familiarity with specific media materials, which must then be monitored in order for individuals to maintain membership of valued social groupings.

Indeed, the mass media communication materials portray a wide range of social situations which appear to be more or less realistic representations of real-life situations. For example, in media contexts there are portrayals of the worlds of law enforcement, social work, working class neighborhoods, employment in business corporations and civil service departments, thus depicting realistic lifestyles in a realistic representation of the social world. Individuals who are exposed to such materials will formulate cognitive perceptions of these representations of social

activity and the performers engaged in it, according to their specific need gratification requirements. That is, some individuals are using media communication materials for purposes of escape, reality exploring gratifications, substitute companionship and values' reinforcement gratifications in depictions of the real social world (Katz et al. 1973-1974).

Thus, it is only natural for one to hypothesize that since audience members seek need gratification through mass media communication and as their involvement with media materials develops, it is highly possible to associate themselves with depictions of similar lifestyle in a media context. In the same manner, when individuals approach communication through the media it is possible to utilize the same cognitive processes of interpersonal communication. Subsequently, like in social interactions, there is a high possibility that audience members will develop parasocial relationships with individuals engaged in media materials.

#### **2.1.1.2 Uncertainty Reduction Theory**

The next interpersonal cognitive framework that is met in literature (e.g. Perse & Rubin 1989, Rubin & McHugh 1987) in order to explain the formation of parasocial interaction is that of uncertainty reduction theory (URT), originally developed by Berger & Calabrese (1975). According to the principles of the theory, individuals try to reduce uncertainty in interpersonal relationships by employing interpersonal communication. Through interpersonal communication, individuals attempt to seek information to reduce uncertainty. When uncertainty is reduced, liking increases. Thus, it is anticipated that relationships will develop as individuals' ability to predict the other's behaviour increases (Perse & Rubin 1989).

Specifically, the theory also entails three stages in the development of interpersonal relationships. In each stage there are interactional behaviours that provide indications of liking and disliking. In the *entry phase* of relationship development, the contents of the communication are usually demographic and transactional and use of behavioural norms is engaged. The degree of involvement increases as the relationships' parties move into the second stage. When the parties of the interaction begin to acquire information regarding one another's attitudes and

beliefs, the relationship has moved on the *second stage* or *personal phase*. In this phase, the parties seek indications of the other's personal values and their emotional involvement has a propensity to increase as disclosure increases. Usually, this stage is entered by individuals who have a number of entry stage interactions with the other party of the relationship. In the *final stage* or *exit phase* the parties of the interaction decide whether the relationship will continue to be developed or not (Berger & Calabrese 1975).

Information seeking, intimacy (or self-disclosure), reciprocity, similarity, liking, non verbal "affiliative expressiveness" (or warmth) and verbal communication are the key variables that govern the relationships' development according to the theory (Rubin & McHugh 1987). The aforementioned variables comprise the basis for the development of seven axioms and twenty-one theorems (Berger & Calabrese 1975).

In order to reduce uncertainty in the development of relationships with others, individuals employ passive, active and interactive strategies. For example, a passive strategy can be the observation of the target individual in different situations; an active strategy may be the information seeking about the target; and an interactive strategy can be interpersonal communication, self-disclosure and deception detection (Berger 1979).

The interactive strategy of interpersonal communication is the usually employed method that people use in order to reduce uncertainty in social relationships. As Perse and Rubin (1989) detect, in mediated relationships passive strategies of uncertainty reduction are utilized, such as watching personalities on television. In some cases, active strategies such as discussing about the TV personalities with others can be employed as well.

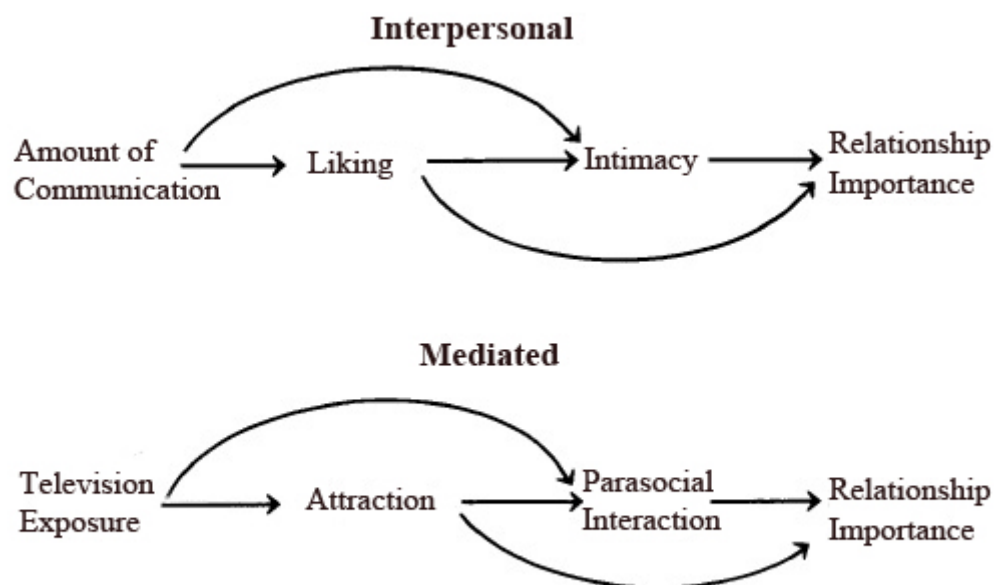
### ***Uncertainty Reduction in Parasocial Interaction***

As Perse and Rubin (1989) and Rubin and McHugh (1987) have pointed out, there are several conceptual links between parasocial interaction and uncertainty reduction theory. First of all, the basis of relationships' development is communication. According to the second and the fifth theorem of uncertainty reduction theory, the amount of communication leads to increased intimacy and liking (Berger & Calabrese 1975). Indeed, increased amounts of television viewing, offer viewers the opportunity



to observe characters interacting socially in various situations. By applying this passive strategy of observation, viewers also acquire information about the characters' behaviours and personalities, thus moving to an active strategy. Through this procedure viewers have the opportunity to get to know the characters and increase liking about them. As liking increases, intimacy increases too, while uncertainty is reduced. Increased liking and intimacy can lead viewers to increased attraction to television personalities and engagement to parasocial interaction with them (Perse & Rubin 1989).

In fact, based on Berger and Calabrese's (1975) second and fifth theorems, Rubin and McHugh (1987) applied these principles to mediated communication context and implied that "Amount of television exposure (communication) leads to increased attraction to (liking of) a media character" (Figure 2.1.1.2). Thus, the parasocial interaction is a result of both exposure and attraction.



Source: Rubin & McHugh 1987

**Figure 2.1.1.2** *Development of Interpersonal and Mediated Relationships*

From this process, relationship importance is increased in interpersonal and mediated contexts (Figure 2.1.1.2). Following the above reasoning, it seems that the

development of parasocial relationships mirrors social interaction. Communication through the medium and perceived intimacy seems to lead to liking of the mediated characters and reduction of uncertainty (Perse & Rubin 1989).

Conclusively, Rubin and McHugh's (1987), exploration of the parasocial relationship development process through the application of uncertainty reduction theory's principles, confirmed that, indeed, the process follows a path from social and task attraction to parasocial interaction, leading to a sense of relationship importance.

Their results showed that parasocial interaction was significantly related to social and task attraction toward the media figure and to perceived importance of relationship formation with the figure. Their findings also added affirmation to the assumption that interpersonal and mediated relationships seem to follow a similar procedure of development. Moreover, they found that in mediated relationship development, parasocial interaction plays an integral part. Parasocial interaction stems from attraction, and acts as a mediator of perceived relationship development importance. Thus, parasocial interaction is considered essential to the process. However, their results indicate that television exposure is not influential in parasocial interaction or attraction to the media figure, but is related to relationship importance in a simpler way, as the initializing element of the process. Thus, their study suggests that relationship development with a media figure does not depend on the duration of exposure to the medium but on the attraction toward a specific character which leads to parasocial interaction.

### **2.1.1.3 Personal Construct Theory**

Perse and Rubin (1989) and Cole and Leets (1999), in their attempt to explain the formation of parasocial interaction have applied principles of personal construct theory to their research. The theory suggests that individuals develop personal constructs as internal views of reality in order to understand the world (Kelly 1955). Their cognitive capabilities enable individuals to form impressions and act toward others in meaningful ways. Individuals become more capable in participating in interpersonal interaction by increasing the use of constructs in forming impressions of others (Perse & Rubin 1989).

Similarly, individuals employ their personal constructs to understand mediated communication. Thus, the case may be that viewers get to know media personalities by applying their interpersonal construct systems to the parasocial context.

As Perse and Rubin (1989) point out, Kelly (1955) who originally developed the theory, suggested that there is a narrow and domain specific range of use of the construct system. Namely, when an individual acquires experience in a certain domain, the domain's construct system becomes more differentiated. Subsequently, it is possible that viewers will develop a distinct construct system about television personalities. The amount of interaction incidents with domain related objects to which specific construct systems are applied, governs the development of a construct system (Burleson et al. 1981). Likewise, the development of a construct system for mediated personalities, matches the structural-developmental procedure of other construct systems (Perse & Rubin 1989). That means, that viewers are likely to develop a specific construct system about television personalities and characters and the development of that system will be dependent on the amount of exposure to the television character or personality.

The results of Perse and Rubin's study (1989) illustrated that personal construct theory can shed light in the development of parasocial relationships in the context of television soap operas. They found that indeed, viewers broadened the range of their interpersonal construct systems in order to develop impressions of television characters. Thus, a linear relation exists between construct systems about real people and those about soap opera characters. The research showed that viewers in their description of soap opera characters utilize a significant percentage of their interpersonal constructs. The authors suggested that this was justified since soap operas' contents emphasize on interpersonal relationships. Their main inference regarding the employment of personal construct theory into their study was that the specific domain object "*people*" constitutes a distinct construct domain which is permeable to embrace both interpersonal and television contexts.

#### 2.1.1.4 Social Exchange Theory

Cole and Leets (1999) suggest that social exchange theory can provide explanatory insights in the process of parasocial interaction. In the context of a parasocial interaction the association between intimacy and the parasocial relationship's perceived importance can be seen through a cost and reward assessment.

If seen from its primary foundation, as Homans (1961) defined it, social exchange is the exchange of behavioural activity between at least two individuals when interacting (Cook & Rice 2003). More specifically, the theory implies that relationships are developed by the utility of a personal cost-benefit (or reward) analysis and the evaluation of alternatives (Cook & Rice 2003).

As “costs” can be perceived the aspects of life that have negative value for an individual. For example, the effort that an individual places on a relationship and the time dedicating to that relationship can be considered as costs for the individual. On the other hand, as “benefits or rewards”, can be perceived the aspects of a relationship which have a positive value for an individual. For instance, the feeling of acceptance, support and companionship that an individual receives from a relationship can be considered as benefits and rewards (West & Turner 2007).

In the context of social exchange theory, Homans (1974 as in Emerson 1976) developed some basic propositions in order to aid the configuration of individuals' behaviours based on the costs and rewards' rationale. The first proposition which is described as the “*Success Proposition*” suggests that when an individual performs an action and is rewarded for that action, it is likely that the individual will repeat the action. Namely, behaviours that produce positive outcomes tend to be repeated. In a second proposition, the “*Stimulus Proposition*” it is implied that in the case of a past occurrence of a specific stimulus, where the individual performed an action that was rewarded, then in similar present or future stimuli occurrences, it is likely that the individual will perform the same or similar action again. That is to say, past behaviours which were the result of a particular stimulus and were rewarded, are likely to be repeated in cases where same or similar stimulus occurs again. The third proposition called “*Deprivation-Satiation Proposition*” suggests that when individuals are being rewarded often, any further unit of reward becomes less valuable for them. That means that the value of a reward diminishes if it has been

received several times by the individual. In the fourth proposition, the “*Value Proposition*”, it is implied that individuals are likely to perform an action if the reward expected is considered as valuable to them. That is, if the result of behaviour is considered as valuable to an individual, the likelihood is that this behaviour will occur. The last proposition, the “*Rationality Proposition*” assumes that when individuals choose between alternative behaviours, they will choose the one that, at that time, bears the greater probability of getting a valuable result, namely the more valuable reward for each individual (Emerson 1976).

Drawing from these propositions, one could suggest that there could be a close relation to the exploration of parasocial interaction. For instance, in relation to the “*Stimulus Proposition*” it could be viewed an individual’s behaviour of repeated viewing regarding a specific television program. When a viewer watches an episode of a soap opera or sitcom or some media program and is rewarded by immediate effects of pleasure, enjoyment and companionship it is highly likely that s/he will repeat that action when the same or similar stimulus occurs. Namely, in the occurrence of the same or similar stimulus, which in this case is the broadcasting of further episodes of a media program, the viewer will return to watch further episodes because in his/her previous exposure s/he was rewarded with pleasure, enjoyment and companionship. In a similar manner, the “*Value Proposition*” can offer an insight in the parasocial context. When viewers watch a soap opera or sitcom or any other serialization program systematically, and follow the lives of the program’s characters it is likely that they will form parasocial relationships with those characters (Horton & Wohl 1956). In the case that they consider these relationships as valuable for themselves, since they offer them not only companionship but also feelings of closeness and intimacy, they will repeat the action that provides them the expected valuable reward. That means that they will try to keep the parasocial relationships active and developing through continuous actions of television watching. An even more detailed exploration of parasocial relationships in relation to the social exchange theory can be accomplished through the theoretical propositions of Ivan Nye (1978).

According to Nye’s (1978) Choice and Exchange propositions developed for social exchange theory, in the same manner, individuals seek rewards and avoid costs in order to maximize their benefits. Accordingly, people try to get pleasure and avoid pain. In a social environment, as costs could be considered embarrassment, anxiety and high physical or mental effort, while as rewards would be regarded anything that

individuals find pleasurable. Hence, in the context of parasocial interaction and social exchange theory, a relationship with a media personality or a television character would be considered as highly rewarding and with the lowest of costs (Cole & Leets 1999).

Through a parasocial relationship with a media personality or character, an individual can acquire the reward of companionship with the low cost of spending time watching this character on television. Moreover, as Rubin et al. (1985) have pointed out, lonely people are less likely to communicate interpersonally and more likely to turn to television when experiencing loneliness. In such cases, and in relation to Nye's (1978) proposition which suggests that individuals choose alternatives that bear the fewest costs, when rewards are equal, it could be suggested that there is high likelihood for lonely people to form parasocial relationships. That may be because the effort to meet another person and develop an interpersonal relationship in exchange for companionship could be considered as an unbearable cost for a lonely person. On the other hand, a parasocial relationship with a television character offers companionship without demanding anything back from the viewer, since it is one-sided (Horton & Wohl 1956).

Additionally, in line with Nye's (1978) proposition that individuals choose alternatives that promise better long-term outcomes when immediate outcomes are equal, it can be assumed that people might prefer a relationship with a television character since it can offer them long-term outcomes of companionship and enjoyment. In that case, individuals might presume that a parasocial relationship will offer them rewards of companionship and enjoyment more often and at specific times, since the media context in which they develop their relationship is known and prescheduled. They can interact, communicate and observe the life of the television character in timely manner, at specific days of the week and in the familiar context of a soap opera, a sitcom or other television programs. If the companionship and enjoyment rewards are seen as equal immediate outcomes of a parasocial and an interpersonal relationship, the parasocial relationship can more securely offer rewards in a long-term manner. The occurrence of such rewards in a personal relationship cannot be equally expected in such a way, because the other person in the relationship might not want to continue the relationship at any time, or may not be available for personal interaction at times of loneliness or sadness where the rewards of companionship and enjoyment are most expected.

Another Nye's (1978) proposition that could be seen as applicable in a parasocial interaction context is the one suggesting that individuals are expected to choose statuses which provide the most autonomy when costs and rewards are equal. In such a situation one could imply that a parasocial relationship with a television character offers the most autonomy in comparison to an interpersonal relationship. For example, an individual has the freedom to enjoy the rewards offered by a parasocial relationship at his/her own liking and according to his/her mood at the time of interaction. In such a relationship there is no misunderstanding between the parties of the relationship if, in some occasion, the other party doesn't have the mood to interact, whereas in an interpersonal relationship such a behaviour might be considered improper and affect the relationship. Since the mood for interaction is entirely at the disposal of the viewer, it can be implied that there is a high level of autonomy in the relationship on the part of the viewer, without any costs for the relationship. Likewise, it can be suggested that the viewer has the freedom to choose a television character or personality with whom s/he will develop the parasocial relationship.

This choice can be made according to the values, characteristics and qualities that the character carries and which are possibly matching the ones of the viewer. It is their own choice to avoid forming parasocial relationships with characters and personalities who they dislike or do not approve of their values and personal characteristics, at no social cost for the viewer. Contrarily, in some cases, individuals may be forced to form interpersonal relationships with persons that they do not like or do not approve of their personal values, for various reasons of social conformity. In such occasions, the costs of an interpersonal relationship can be intolerable (effort to tolerate an interaction with someone perceived as invidious) and the rewards (conformity to socially accepted behaviour and thus being accepted by society) very little. Contrary to interpersonal relationships where the individual is not always free to choose persons of his/her liking, in parasocial relationships the freedom of choosing the other party of the relationship depends on the viewer. In such a situation, the parasocial context could be explained with the proposition of Choice and Exchange which suggests that "individuals choose friends and associates with opinions and values which agree with their own and try to avoid those who constantly disagree with them" (Nye 1978).

### **2.1.1.5 Attachment Theory**

Based on the assumption that parasocial relationships function in the same way as interpersonal relationships in terms of attachment behaviours, Cole and Leets (1999) investigated attachment theory, as an alternative interpersonal theory in order to understand the manner in which audience members develop parasocial relationships with television personalities. Indeed, there is ground to believe that attachment theory can be applied to various non-intimate and non-romantic relationship contexts (Cole & Leets 1999). Attachment can be characterized as “a generalized orientation toward others”. Differences in attachment styles in social interaction patterns can be evident not only with close friends but also across all social life (Tidwell et al. 1996).

Attachment theory has its foundations in the work of Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980 as in Hazan & Shaver 1987) who explored attachment, separation and loss as the processes by which affectional ties are forged and broken. Bowlby’s work had the purpose of description and explanation of the way infants become emotionally attached to their caregivers and emotionally distressed in situations of separation with them. Despite the fact that his work was focused on infants, he held the belief that “attachment behaviour [characterizes] human beings from the cradle to the grave” (Bowlby 1979).

Bowlby (1973 as in Hazan & Shaver 1987) developed three propositions which can summarize the basic elements of attachment theory. The first proposition supports that an individual is less prone to feelings of intense or chronic fear when s/he is confident that the attachment figure will be available to him/her according to his/her desire, in comparison to individuals who do not hold such confidence. The second proposition involves the period of said confidence development. It suggests that the confidence of attachment figures’ availability, or absence of it, is developed slowly during the years of immaturity (infancy, childhood and adolescence). The expectations developed during those years have a propensity to persist relatively unchanged throughout the rest of the individual’s life. The third proposition is about the role of actual experience. That is, the various expectations of availability, accessibility and responsiveness of attachment figures which are developed during the individuals’ immature years, are tolerably accurate reflections of their actual experiences.



Apparently, the functions and dynamics of the behavioural system of attachment are supposed to remain relatively the same across the individual's lifetime (Hazan & Shaver 1994). Thus, it could be implied that individuals utilize the same basic capacities of emotion and action in a variety of situations and settings where there is need for attachment (Konner 1982 as in Hazan & Shaver 1994).

Thus, the implication of attachment theory is that the beliefs and feelings about the self, and the development of the individual's self-esteem are determined by the responsiveness to individual needs for comfort and security which are provided by the caregiving environment (Cassidy 1988 as in Hazan & Shaver 1994). Subsequently, these settled systems of the self govern the feelings and behaviours of the individual in close relationships (Hazan & Shaver 1994).

Ainsworth et al. (1978) identified three major patterns of attachment observed in infant-caregiver interactions based on caregiver responsiveness and relative infant behaviour. As *Secure*, is characterized the behaviour of securely attached infants in terms of proximity, comfort and responsiveness of the caregiver. *Anxious/Ambivalent* is the behaviour of infants who are anxious, angry and preoccupied with the caregiver due to caregiver's inconsistent unavailability or unresponsiveness to the infant's signals. *Anxious/Avoidant* is characterized the behaviour of anxious, distressed by separation and avoiding contact with caregiver infants, caused by the caregiver's rebuffed or deflected behaviour toward their infant's plead for comfort and close bodily contact (Hazan & Shaver 1994).

Based on these patterns, Hazan and Shaver (1987) proposed three styles of attachment in relation to adult attachment in romantic relationships which can also be applied to adult attachment in other social interaction settings. The authors initially state that the essential objective in all attachment behaviour is to reach a state of felt security. And thus, the styles of attachment are categorized according to this central notion. The *Avoidant* type is characterized by discomfort with closeness (Tidwell et al. 1996). It is assumed that avoidant attachment is resulting from consistent unresponsiveness. In order to maintain felt security, individuals avoid intimate social contact and compensate themselves by engaging in nonsocial activities. Avoidance is manifested by fear of intimacy and a predisposition to keep distances in close relationships (Hazan & Shaver 1994). Distrustful views of relationships and relatively high levels of relationship dissolution characterize the avoidant type of attachment (Hazan & Shaver 1987).

The *Anxious/ Ambivalent* (or *preoccupied*) type is characterized by desire for, as well as preoccupation with, heightened closeness (Tidwell et al. 1996). It is implied that anxious/ambivalent attachment stems from a lack of confidence in the reliability of others to be responsive. In the case of anxious/ambivalent attachment, individuals attempt to achieve felt security through devotion of enormous mental energy and behavioural effort, in order to keep others close by and engaged. This kind of attachment behaviour is manifested in expressions of distress and anger (Hazan & Shaver 1994). It is also characterized by diminishing exploratory activity toward the figure of attachment, preoccupation with attachment's responsiveness (Hazan & Shaver 1994) and higher rate of relationship dissolution (Hazan & Shaver 1987). Lastly, the *Secure* type is characterized by comfort with closeness and trustworthiness toward others (Tidwell et al. 1996). It is assumed that secure attachment is a result of confidence in others' responsiveness. In case of secure attachment individuals have trust in and are able to reach intimacy with others. Secure attachment behaviours are also characterized by longer relationship endurance (Hazan & Shaver 1987).

And although Hazan and Shaver's (1987, 1994) extension of attachment theory to romantic relationships implies that individuals replace caregiving attachment figures with friends and romantic partners, some of the elements of the mental predispositions toward attachment are possible to be altered in various manners. Namely, the characteristics of the attachment styles mentioned above might not pervade all social relationships in the same manner or hold the same vigor in all interactions. That is because behaviour in close relationships is interactive and interdependent. Thus, the effects resulting from a style of attachment might be moderated by the nature of each relationship (Tidwell et al. 1996). It can also be implied that attachment styles can in essence serve as dispositional variables which can influence behaviour in various social settings (Tidwell et al. 1996).

Subsequently, attachment styles may hold a primary role in the way people experience close relationships and interact with others. In summary, secure individuals are positively predisposed regarding their expectations of relational interactions and outcomes. Individuals who hold an anxious/ambivalent attachment style are more likely to engage in an extreme range of behaviours due to their insecurity, fear of loneliness, desire for heightened closeness and dissatisfaction from others' unresponsiveness to their needs. Avoidant individuals, due to their lack of

trustworthiness toward others, might employ behaviours which will keep others at a distance (Cole & Leets 1999).

Through this spectrum, Cole and Leets (1999), attempted to investigate if attachment styles are related to the formation of parasocial relationships. Their results supported that individuals' motivation in forming a parasocial relationship with their favourite television personality was related to attachment styles. In particular, the individuals who are the most likely to develop a parasocial relationship with a favourite TV figure were those with an Anxious/Ambivalent attachment style. The high possibility for such behaviour may be explained by their extreme desire for intimacy, even if this desire is satisfied through a television character or personality. Additionally, Anxious/Ambivalent individuals might turn to parasocial relationships because television characters are relatively stable in their behaviour, thus partially satisfying their need for responsiveness.

On the other hand, the least likely to form parasocial relationships were individuals holding an Avoidant style of attachment. This might be due to the fact that these individuals are disinclined to develop actual relationships. Thus, it could be implied that their avoidance to reach intimacy and their predisposition to keep distances in relationships, is transferable to imaginary relationships as well (Cole & Leets 1999). On the contrary, one would expect that avoidant individuals would be the most likely to form parasocial relationships due to the fact that they are compensating themselves by engaging in non-social activities (Hazan & Shaver 1994). From avoidant individuals' view, it would seem that a parasocial relationship has all the safe conditions for a secure, distant and self-controlled reflection of an intimacy bond. Apparently, the characteristics dictating the avoidant attachment style are so dynamically woven into the mental model, that also govern the behaviour in other relationship settings.

Individuals with a secure style of attachment were found to engage moderately in parasocial interaction. However, secure individuals who hold some level of distrust for others were more likely to form stronger bonds with television characters. There is the possibility that television characters hold a part as an offset to relational partners in times of experiencing distrust in real relationships (Cole & Leets 1999). Indeed, there is support that secure people resort to others in times of need (Florian et al. 1995).

Thus, the results of Cole and Leets (1999) might indicate that the formation of parasocial relationships can be employed as a strategic behaviour in order to manage feelings of distrust and lack of intimacy. Namely, it is possible, that even individuals who do not have issues of insecurity and generally find other people to be trustworthy, to turn to predictable and steady television characters for comfort when they are encountering difficulties in their life. Interestingly, such kind of behaviour would be rationally expected with greater probability by individuals who have an avoidant attachment style instead of those with a secure style. Still as mentioned above, avoidant individuals do not turn to such behaviours. Probably this occurs due to the fact that avoidant individuals are predisposed to all expressions of relational interaction by staying away from every intimate interaction and by not trusting anyone or anything, even if this is with regard to an imaginary television figure. The results of this research suggested that parasocial relationships can act as a substitute of intimacy bonds for individuals with anxious/ambivalent attachment style and for secure individuals in cases where they are encountering trustworthiness challenges with others.

Moreover, Cole and Leets's (1999) study contributed to the notion that attachment styles have applications in other social settings of relationships. More importantly though, their results imply that the formation of parasocial relationships with television personalities and characters, can be directly influenced by attachment styles as well, thus making an important contribution to the theoretical underpinnings that explain parasocial interaction.

### ***2.1.2 Insights into the Viewer-Character Relationship***

#### **2.1.2.1 Explaining the Viewer-Character Relationship. The Perspective of Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism is one of the theoretical approaches that have been employed in order to explain the relation between the viewer and media figures. In the media context, this approach is explored in relation to television as a process of social

interaction (Newton & Buck 1985). The central proposition of symbolic interactionism (originating from George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley) (Blumer 1986) is that individuals construct self concepts through interaction with significant others. According to Blumer (1986), symbolic interactionism is based on three premises. Firstly, “human beings act toward things on the basis of meanings that the things have for them”, and with “things” it is implied everything that individuals may observe in their environment; physical objects, other individuals such as friends and relatives, behaviours of others and situations that they meet in their everyday life. The second premise is that “the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows”. The last premise is that “these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters”.

The application of symbolic interactionism approach to the media context, and in particular television, is based on the assumption that television may act, for some individuals, as a type of significant other. And that assumption can be indeed justified by Blumer’s (1986) first premise where the action of an individual toward a thing is based on the meaning that the thing has for him/her. Blumer (1986) supports that even physical objects might have a meaning for someone because the meanings those things have for individuals are “central in their own right”. Namely, physical or social objects have not any predetermined meaning of their own; meaning is constructed and established through an interpretation, definition and interaction process (Raid & Frazer 1979). Possibly, this notion might be transferred to the media context. Individuals might assign meaning to media as social objects and that is because the media can be considered as part of individuals’ social world.

A major part of this social world includes all those beings that are known to the individual through the media, and constitute an “artificial social world” as described by Caughey (1978). Thus, individuals come to know and get familiar with a number of actors, politicians, musicians, authors and other celebrities (Caughey 1978). Although individuals may not have real face-to-face interactions with those media figures, they do have the opportunity to have “artificial interactions” with them. According to Caughey (1978), such media relations may exhibit high levels of strength and sometimes they can be very important in an individual’s social world. In this sense, then, those relationships may possibly play an important role in individuals’ self concepts. For example, in some forms of participation in these

“artificial social relations”, individuals may adopt a projected, through the medium, role, and though they may keep some aspects of their real self they can acquire some attributes that they do not possess (Caughey 1978).

More specifically, in the case where the artificial relations have developed to a stage where television is considered by viewers as a significant other, they develop, maintain and revise their self concepts, through a form of parasocial interaction process (Newton & Buck 1985). In this way, television can serve as an alternative source of significant other through which viewers may take the role of salient television figures and adjust their behaviour to conform to the imaginary evaluations of the specific media figures. When television is perceived as a significant other, it also may serve as the ground for training, in order to acquire the ability of role taking through a process of “vicariously” role taking television interaction (Ellis et al. 1983).

In the symbolic interactionism theory, the concept of the “looking-glass-self” process is central to the understanding of human interaction and the development of the self (Ellis et al.1983). This term, refers to the formation of an individual’s self concept based on the understanding of the way others perceive him/her. This conceptualization has three components; “the imagination of our appearance to the other person, the imagination of his judgement of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification” (Cooley 1978). That means, that individuals construct their self concept based on their ideas of how others may see them and how they think that others judge them. Thus, the assembling of self concept is emerging from the process of social interaction in which others are defining an individual to himself/herself (Blumer 1986). In order for this to happen the individual has to see himself/herself from the outside. This is achieved by “placing himself/herself in the position of others and viewing himself/herself from that position” (Blumer 1986). This process is defined as role taking.

Through role taking individuals place themselves in a position where they can address or approach themselves through the eyes of others (Blumer 1986). Namely, by taking roles of others, individuals stimulate in themselves the same appraisal of their own appearance of self that they imagine would be appreciated in those others (Ellis et al. 1983). By taking the role of others, individuals look for ascertainment of the intention or direction of the acts of others. In this way, individuals shape and align their own actions based on their interpretation of the acts of others (Blumer 1962).

All those hypothesized others, whose individuals take their roles through a looking-glass-self process and who act as significant others, do not have to be physically present (Ellis et al. 1983). They can be others, who individuals have never met, or even figures that do not “physically” exist in the real world, such as fictional characters in media contexts.

Based on that notion, Ellis, Streeter and Engelbrecht (1983) and Newton and Buck (1985) as well, have investigated significant others that are presented through media contexts. Apart from the fact that fictional characters are created by producers in a way that they carry human qualities and behaviours, viewers also become familiar with some of them through exposure to the television programs. In this way, from the perspective of symbolic interactionism as discussed above, viewers come to a stage where they can assume the characters’ evaluations of their behaviour. Then, viewers can take the role of the significant other (a specific media character), since they can “evaluate their own behaviour from the perceived and imaginary perspective of the media characters” (Ellis et al. 1983). Ellis et al. (1983) support that individuals can take the roles of several different media figures, such as those presented by radio, magazines and films, but they assume that the role taking is mostly likely to occur with the media figures that have a lively presence, most probably on a daily basis in individuals everyday lives, through the medium of television. That is because, in comparison to other mediums, media figures in television are presented in more “complete” manner due to their visual representation, which makes them more direct. Moreover, due to the fact that exposure to media figures in television can be more frequent and also in a repetitive manner, viewers can achieve greater levels of intimacy with television figures (Ellis et al. 1983). Specifically, some media contexts such as soap operas, serials and sitcoms may be broadcasted daily or weekly for many years in viewers’ homes. That element of successive exposure to the same television personalities increases the probability of role taking.

Furthermore, the fact that television contents, fictional characters and their behaviours are carefully engineered to portray representations of everyday life, may not only persuade viewers to consider television as a mirror of reality (Solomon & Englis 1994) but may also motivate them to role taking. Due to the realism portrayed in television, the similarities and differences between the artificial and the social world are blurred. And although it is known that artificial social interaction is similar to actual social interaction, and “in many ways resembles social interaction in

ordinary primary groups” (Horton & Wohl 1956), the specific similarities and differences between the two are not very clear (Caughey 1978).

An individual’s departure from an actual situation towards the artificial social world is possible through his/her connection to the experience through the cognitive process, employed to decode media messages, or through the creation and consumption of his/her own imaginary constructions (Caughey 1978). In order to understand, evaluate and interpret any media message, individuals have to utilize the available cues so as to identify social settings, roles and personality types, and also, they need to be able to evaluate each media figure’s intended place in the situation. Sometimes, individuals relate to an artificial experience through psychologically adopting an artificial social role, either passively, as an outside observer, or more actively by getting involved in artificial relationships through some kind of pseudo-participation such as parasocial interaction with a media figure. However, there are cases where individuals get involved in artificial social relations through role taking (Caughey 1978).

And television offers a wide range of different characters from which a viewer can select for role taking. All of these television figures can be considered as potential significant others but viewers are probably selecting the specific figures which have a meaning for them, or carry some specific characteristics that make them more significant compared to others (Ellis et al. 1983). According to Ellis et al. (1983), individuals select those characters that possess characteristics as perceived salience, power and affect, more than other characters. As a unique element of this significant other selection process, the authors consider the concept of parasocial interaction. This is because through parasocial interaction, viewers create an illusion of an artificial intimacy with specific characters and they perceive those characters as intimate figures or even pseudo-friends. Then, television figures become significant for viewers and they are considered to act as “confirming intimate others” in an artificially affective and intimate parasocial relationship, and in this way they are “identified as significant others for role taking purposes” (Ellis et al. 1983).

In symbolic interactionism, role taking, can be considered as a process of adaptation of an individual’s behaviour to that of others with whom s/he is socially involved (Stryker 1957). As mentioned before, role-taking entails the assumption that an individual is able to predict the responses (namely, attitudes and behaviours) of others as defined by some social situations. The role-taking conception implies that



the individual who predicts the behaviour of the significant other, and this other, are involved in an ongoing social situation. Accordingly, the predictions are generated with regard to “responses meaningfully related to that social situation” (Stryker 1957). Then, in the view of the fact that an individual’s behaviour may be influenced from the shared meanings or the interpretations of socially derived meanings from that social situation, the importance of role-taking process lies with the motivation to adjust to these meanings (Ellis et al. 1983).

Ellis et al. (1983) drawing from the above principles of symbolic interactionism, suggested that “viewers may evaluate their attitudes and actions from the perspective of TV others”. Thus, it can be assumed that television viewing may have several implications for adoption of social roles -which in turn may have an influence on self-identity-, self esteem, presentation of self and types of social interaction. Hence, television role taking might have implications for multiple aspects of viewers’ lives. Ellis et al. (1983) also support that taking the roles of television characters may affect individuals’ behaviours in viewing and non-viewing contexts, contrary to parasocial interaction occurrence which is thought to manifest during times of exposure to characters. According to that notion, role taking of significant others can be utilized in situations outside the viewing context too, which is thought to be a significant extension of the rationale of parasocial interaction. A role taking behaviour can possibly be transferred to another context when individuals are encountering similar situations as their significant television other.

Another aspect of role taking in the context of television is that of “vicarious role taking” as conceptualized by Ellis et al. (1983). The authors adopted this term in order to address the element of symbolic interactionism asserting that individuals acquire the ability to take roles by practicing through interaction with close others. They assume that since a role taking behaviour by a viewer cannot be evaluated during the artificial interaction offered by television, as they cannot get feedback, they embrace a “vicarious role taking”. With this term they describe a mechanism during which viewers can observe the interaction of others, and “take the role of one significant other from the perspective of a second significant other”, thus taking the role of both. In this way, viewers can obtain feedback about the accuracy of their role taking through observation. Thus, “the application of vicarious role taking to television viewing involves the viewers’ taking the role of one TV other’s evaluation of the behaviour of another television character, and vice versa” (Ellis et al. 1983). In

particular, viewers' have the opportunity to examine and evaluate their significant TV others' interaction with other characters in every chance of a daily or weekly broadcasting. Through this successive observation, viewers can become very skilled in predicting the way that their significant character's behaviour will be evaluated by other characters, thus acquiring feedback about their chosen role taking behaviour. Hence, vicarious role taking makes television a ground for practice that facilitates the development of accurate social role taking as a social skill. Role taking as a social skill, can be then applied to other real social situations and indirectly enhance individuals' social relationships (Ellis et al. 1983).

The concept of symbolic interactionism has been employed in the literature to explore various perspectives. For example, Caughey (1978) explored how artificial social relationships with television and media figures could be explained and evaluated through the spectrum of symbolic interactionism principles, including role taking. Raid & Frazer (1979) proposed that symbolic interactionism could provide a more integral understanding of the relationship between children and television. Corder-Bolz (1980) examined how television can be considered as a socialization agent for children and how it can influence children's social behaviour by providing social information such as ideas, beliefs and values. Gutman (1973) studied the relation of women's television patterns and their self concepts and ideal self concepts. Newton and Buck (1985), in their cross cultural study, explored television as a significant other through perceived closeness with television, TV exposure, perceived relation between television and the self, and other descriptors of the self. Their results showed that viewers' relationship with television was more closely related to aspects of the self concept (e.g. if they perceived themselves, happy, satisfied, competent etc.) rather to the amount of television viewing. Thus they implied that the closeness of viewers and television could be a better indicator of television as a significant other than simple exposure. Moreover, they found that the image of self that is shaped through television is different for the sexes, but this is justified by the gender stereotypes promoted through television contents. Most importantly, their findings suggest that the image of ideal others that television facilitates to construct, seems to be very similar across cultures.

According to the aforementioned relevant literature, it seems that the symbolic interactionism perspective can be compatible to the exploration of the prosocial functions of television (Ellis et al. 1983), to the explanation of the possible effects of

television on viewers' self concepts and behaviours, and may also work in concord with the concept of parasocial interaction.

#### **2.1.2.2 Explaining the Viewer-Character Relationship. The Concept of Identification**

Identification is another concept that has been utilized in literature in order to aid conceptualizations and describe the relationships between viewer and television characters. Identification is described by Cohen (1999) as the desire of the viewer to become united with television characters, namely, to be in their shoes. Through identification, viewers are able to share the standpoint of a character, to "see" through the character's eyes, and thus to experience the context of the story directly. From a more analytical point of view, *Identification* can be considered as a process through which "individuals consciously or unconsciously seek to reinforce and expand their identities" (von Feilitzen & Linne 1975). In particular, individuals consciously or unconsciously recognize themselves in, or wish to be, another individual in order to become engaged with that individual and vicariously take part in his/her actions, feelings and thoughts. Von Feilitzen and Linne (1975) also support that in following the identification process individuals may develop greater inspiration for actions, feelings and thoughts of their own. Moreover, the authors imply that if identification is seen as a reinforcement and development of self identity process, it may occur in different environments, in a variety of settings and also in relationships.

Identification is distinguished in *similarity identification* and *wishful identification* (von Feilitzen & Linne 1975). As it is evident from the previous description of identification, individuals recognize themselves in another individual or wish to be another individual. In similarity identification individuals share some common characteristics, beliefs, ideas thoughts or perspectives with the figure of identification and thus recognize themselves in them. In wishful identification individuals desire to be like their figure of identification, thus to imitate the other individual in general or in some specific sense.

Cohen (2001) attempted to develop a definition of identification which would be focused on media characters as the figures of audience's identification. In his

view, identification with media figures has multiple facets. First, identification can be considered as the determinant of the audience's position toward the media context. This position is the starting point from which the audience member forms his/her perception of the characters and incidents, and from which his/her emotional and cognitive attitude toward the characters develops. Next, identification should also be seen as an experience. Cohen (2001) describes this experience as a state of a process where an individual embraces the aspirations and the identity of a media character. Vicarious experience is a function of identification that can take various forms. For example, viewers can experience things which they cannot experience in reality, they can try on alternative identities (such being a doctor, a lawyer, a police officer etc.) and they can embrace the aspirations, feelings or behaviours of their figure of identification. Vicarious experience may result in overt behaviour (such as dressing up exactly as the figure of identification and imitate his/her moves and behaviours) or may stay in a purely imaginative state. Whatever the result of vicarious experience may be, it can be implied that through identification with characters, individuals can potentially expand their emotional horizons and social perceptions.

Identification can also be defined as an imaginative process activated by the response to characters presented in media contexts. During exposure to a media context, individuals identify with characters by imagining themselves as being in the place of the characters. At that point, individuals replace their personal identity and their role as viewers with the identity and role of the character. In cases of intense identification, individuals may even stop being aware of their role as viewers and temporarily (during exposure) embrace the perspective of the character with whom they identify. Hence, it can be implied that identification can be ephemeral since it is mainly dependent on the exposure to the media context, and also that it can vary in intensity, given that the individual may experience different levels of identification when woven in the media imaginary (Cohen 2001).

Regarding the suitability of identification as a concept in the general media environment, the most appropriate context is that of the narrative as Cohen (2001) states. That means that identification is most possible to be met in the reactions of individuals toward fictional characters in narrative texts. Namely, he believes that there is greater likelihood of a viewer to identify with a fictional character in comparison to other television personalities such as newscasters, athletes and cartoon characters. He does not imply that identification is not possible with such figures, but

that it is less likely and would be manifested in a different manner. Thus, he supports that the concept of identification is best fitted in describing the psychological response toward fictional characters in comedy and drama.

Cohen (2001) also makes a distinction between identification and attitudes and emotions toward characters, which have been utilized as indicators of identification. He conceptualizes identification as the sharing of the character's perspective and not as the development of feelings and sympathies about the character. He perceives identification as "feeling with the character, rather than about the character". Taking on a paradigm from Oatley (1999), who made a distinction between readers who read as spectators (i.e. just read what happens to others) and those who identify with characters and experience the narrative from the characters' perspective, Cohen, (2001) explained the difference between identification and spectatorship. The difference between identification and spectatorship can be found in the psychological distance that the reader maintains in relation to the narrative. In this sense, in spectatorship, individuals simply observe the narrative from a distance while in identification referential reception is increased and the distance necessary for ideological and critical receptions of the narrative decreases (Fiske 1987). Clarification of a number of attributes of identification can be achieved if identification is seen as the adoption of the identity and perspective of the character. Cohen (2001) explains that identification is more appropriately defined as a process where the loss of self-awareness increases, while this loss is temporarily replaced with heightened emotional and cognitive associations with characters. He considers descriptions of identification as an attitude, emotion or perception, inaccurate.

Identification in media contexts is different than the purely psychological theory of identification, where the concept expands to sociological notions of identifying with social groups, parents, and leaders. Identification in media is more accurately defined as the response of individuals to media features, specific narrative contexts and figures that have the intention to provoke identification. In the media context, fictional characters are constructed in a specific manner in order for audience members to identify with them. Thus, identification can be seen as a response to communication by others (i.e. the media context), and it is characterized by the internalization of a point of view (i.e. the character's), instead of the projection of an individual's identity onto someone or something else.

## Identification and Imitation

According to Oatley (1994), the origins of the theory of identification in fictional contexts, derive from Aristotle's concept *mimesis*. He conceptualizes the term *mimesis* as something closer to the concept of simulation in computers. He believes that Aristotle's notion of a play was not an imitation but rather a simulation of human actions. In that notion, actions that are portrayed from actors in a theatrical play are simulations of real life actions which run in the minds of audiences as a computer runs a simulation. Accordingly, human minds have this potentiality for simulation and in this manner they are making models of the world. Narrative contexts work by guiding the simulation process. The aim of this simulation is the identification with the narrative's characters. The process of simulation is that the audience member runs the actions of the character on his/her own planning processes, employing the character's aspirations and experiencing emotions, as these plans are altered in the narrative's progress (Oatley 1994). Hence, a narrative simulation models human agents (i.e. actors impersonating characters), their attributes and their interactions with others in the story world. The simulation works if the audience members achieve to get the whole concept to run in their minds; namely, to imagine the story's world and the narrative as real and become absorbed in it (Oatley 1999). If the simulation works and the audience members get absorbed by the narrative, then the possibility is that they are going to identify with particular characters. Since the characters' aspirations and behaviours are imitations of the real world and audience members are engaging in them, the transfer of these aspirations and behaviours in the world outside of the narrative is also likely to happen. Hence, audience members might imitate behaviours modelled in narrative contexts due to their identification with characters who act as model figures (Cohen 2001).

In particular, imitation is a behaviour concept which is related to social learning theory (Bandura 1986) and illustrates the adoption of behaviours or the change in behaviours based on the observation of a model. According to this theory, an individual's identification with a model figure determines the likelihood of the individual to endorse a modelled behaviour. Specifically, in the case where individuals perceive themselves as similar to their model of identification, they are more likely to adopt the behaviour modeled by that figure. The implication behind the theory is that the basis of identification process stands on the individuals'

perception that the model figure is similar to themselves (Bandura 1986). Moreover, the intensity of identification with a figure model is related to the level of engagement to a modelled behaviour. Namely, the more an individual identifies with a media character, the more likely is to adopt and imitate the character's model behaviour (Basil 1996). Thus, social learning theory can be considered as a proposition which implies that individuals' behaviour can be mediated by the degree of identification with a model figure (Basil 1996).

### ***The process of identification in the media context***

The process of identification can be primarily provoked, as aforementioned, by the carefully produced features of a character that leads the audience member to adopt the character's perspective. The adoption of the character's perspective can initially derive from the mere liking of a specific character (Cohen 1999), and/or the recognition of similarities between the audience member and the character. These procedures can form a psychological merging (Oatley 1999) or an attachment with the character and the possibility is that individuals will incorporate within themselves the aspirations of the character in the narrative. As individuals empathize with the character, they embrace the character's identity as well. As the sequence of events unfolds within the program, audience members simulate the feelings and thoughts of the character. Through this process the individuals identify with the character of the media context and may reach a cognitive and emotional state where they are not aware of themselves as audience members but rather imagine being the character they identify with (Cohen 2001).

### ***Link between identification and media effects***

Since identification is a way through which individuals construct their own imagined identities, it can be considered as a possible element of socialization. Thus identification can be utilized by others (e.g. media producers) as a way of social influence. Through identification, fictional characters can persuade the audience members, since it is a process of sharing the same perspective. The introduction of new perspectives and the invitation of the audience members to identify with them may also result in attitude change. For example, identification with characters might

be utilized in order to persuade viewers via a health message regarding an attitude change toward an unhealthy behaviour (Moyer-Gusé 2008).

Moreover, in the context of narrative persuasion the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo 1984) has been employed in order to explain the effects of identification with characters on persuasive messages. According to the elaboration likelihood model, identification with characters increases absorption and reduces counter arguing (Moyer-Gusé 2008). In this way, viewers' acceptance of the values and beliefs in the media context increases which in turn, increases the elaboration of messages and thus the messages' persuasiveness (Cohen 2001).

Identification may also initiate modelling and imitation. Through identification, individuals may seek for role models in the media (von Feilitzen & Linne 1975). If, for example, through the acquisition of the character's perspective a viewer also identifies with the values and behaviours of the character, there is likelihood that the viewer will imitate in some way those values and behaviours. Additionally, Cohen (2001) drawing from Wied et al.'s (1994) implication that enjoyment of a film is linked with the degree of empathetic distress felt for a character, assumes that identification may have an impact on message persuasiveness. That is because empathy is part of identification. Thus, he assumes that strong identification with a character may generate greater enjoyment of the media context and in turn, greater impact of relative persuasive messages. Subsequently, identification may produce greater enjoyment, involvement and strong emotional responses, which in turn may facilitate intense persuasive and imitative media effects on audience members.

### ***Comparison of identification and parasocial interaction***

Identification of an audience member with a fictional television figure has its foundation on psychological attachment (Cohen 1999, Cole & Leets 1999). While identification may lead to imagining being the figure of identification (Cohen 2001, von Feilitzen & Linne 1975), parasocial interaction leads to the development of a relationship with the character (Horton & Wohl 1956). Identification involves the vicarious experience of the sequence of events that take place in the media context, namely the audience member experiences the narrative as if s/he was the character. On the other hand, in parasocial interaction, audience members preserve at least some



social distance and maintain self-awareness of their identity in order to interact with the character (Horton & Wohl 1956, Cohen 2001). In identification, extreme absorption in the narrative is a prerequisite in order for audience members to achieve an intense emotional experience. Then again, in the parasocial context audience members experience their relationship with a character in a manner that they would experience a relationship with a friend, and frequency of exposure to the character's program is required (Horton & Wohl 1956).

### **2.1.2.3 Influential Factors of the Viewer-Character Relationship**

One of the most important elements of audience involvement with the media context is the relationship of the audience with the television characters. The importance of audience relationship with characters lies with the notion that viewers' relations with characters mediate the effects of media contexts on the audience (Cohen 1999). In a media context, characters may serve as role models (Bandura 1986, von Feilitzen & Linne 1975, Hoffner 1996), as a companionship alternative (Katz et al. 1973-1974) or as pseudofriendships (Moyer-Gusé 2008). In a media narrative, the characters are the main vehicles for influencing audiences (Rose & Alley 1985).

In a given media context, audience members may assign different levels of importance to different characters. Thus, it is only natural that audience members will be involved more with some of the characters and less with others. Then, different levels of involvement will produce a variety of perspectives and interpretations of the television program (drama or comedy etc.) which in turn will lead to varying audience effects (Cohen 1999). Hence, it can be implied that some specific television characters are expected to have more significant impact on viewers than other characters in the same or different media program.

Usually, the more significant characters are those who engender more intense affect and for that reason they are more memorable as well. The factors that make a character to be more significant for audiences than others are related to the characteristics of the character as they have been produced by the producers but also to certain aspects of the audience. In particular, previous research suggests three collective types of factors that are able to explain viewers' perceptions about

television characters. These are typified in character related factors, textual factors and viewer related factors (Cohen 1999).

## **I. Character Related Factors**

Viewers usually appraise television characters in the same manner they evaluate others in their social networks. Namely, they observe personality traits of the characters and generate impressions and expectations of their behaviours. Several important elements are taken into consideration in character development by producers. The characters' attributions usually met in television programs are; physical appearance, speech patterns, non-verbal expressions, emotional reactions and behaviours. Accordingly, the information communicated through the television program regarding the characters, is designed specifically to produce a specific impression to the audience (Hoffner & Buchanan 2005). Moreover, viewers' choice and interpretation of characters is technologically determined (Cohen 2001) since the director's techniques, the camera angles and the editing process of the media program are carefully utilized to influence viewers (Hoffner & Buchanan 2005).

### ***Character Attributes***

Some of the most common attributes or personal characteristics of characters are intelligence, success, attractiveness, humor, violence and admiration of other characters. These character attributes have been shown to play an important role in the development of impressions of others (Cohen 1999, Hoffner 1996, Hoffner & Buchanan 2005).

*Intelligence.* The apprehension that a person or a character is intelligent influences the formation of impressions regarding that person or character (Hoffner & Buchanan 2005). Intelligence is a personal trait and can be related with a number of other positive characteristics about a person or a character, such as problem solving skills, social competence and achievement. Nevertheless, this does not automatically mean that a not very much smart character is not likeable (Hoffner & Buchanan 2005). An example of the intelligence as an important character's attribution is the result of Hoffner's (1996) research, who found that perceived intelligence was a predictor of children's wishful identification and parasocial interaction with male characters in

particular. Moreover, in the case of young adults, male characters that were perceived as intelligent generated identification for men, and likewise women identified with female characters that they perceived as intelligent (Hoffner & Buchanan 2005).

*Success.* As success is characterized the achievement of a desired objective, or aim, or reward by the television character and is usually the result of the characters' actions or behaviours. Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) state that in several studies (e.g. Bandurra, Ross & Ross 1963, Liss, Reinhardt & Fredriksen 1983<sup>7</sup>) perceived success of a character was a factor for imitation or identification by children. Success as a character's attribute was found to be a predictor of wishful identification for both female and male young adults according to the results of Hoffner and Buchanan's (2005) research.

*Attractiveness.* Attractiveness is a factor that characterizes the influence of a character to the audience regarding the character's physical appearance. Physical attractiveness is considered as a significant dimension in relating to television characters. According to Hoffner (1996) physical appearance was found to have a relation to wishful identification and parasocial interaction, especially for girls. Actually, the results of her research showed that attractiveness was the sole predictor of girls' wishful identification and parasocial interaction with female characters. Attractiveness of a female character was also a factor for identification regarding female young adults (Hoffner & Buchanan 2005). However, Turner (1993) found that the appearance variable, namely physical attractiveness, was not strongly correlated with parasocial interaction and thus assumed that the "looks" of a television character might not be that important for the development of parasocial relationships. Similarly, Rubin and McHugh (1987) came to the conclusion that viewers might be inclined to be more interested in television personalities who are considered as attractive for their "social or work" attribute than for their physical attractiveness.

*Humor.* Humor is actually a personality trait that viewers expect to find in friends and partners. Thus, humor as a character's attribution leads to consider the character appealing and in turn, it is also possible to increase the likability of a character (Hoffner and Buchanan 2005). In particular, Hoffner (1996) found that humor was associated with more wishful identification for girls.

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<sup>7</sup> As in Hoffner and Buchanan (2005)

*Violence.* Violence as a character's attribution may be seen on the part of viewers, as a way of solving conflicts and generally behaving aggressively (Hoffner & Buchanan 2005). Regarding the attribute of violence, past research has shown that characters' social behaviour such as a violent or helpful behaviour, was not a predictor of wishful identification, when other attributes were accounted for. However, while violence was not considered as particularly attractive, it did not decrease a character's appeal as a role model or a pseudofriend (Hoffner 1996). Indeed, in the case of young adults, men identified with male characters whom they perceived as violent (Hoffner & Buchanan 2005).

*Admiration by Other Characters.* Characters are not evaluated by viewers only according to their personality traits and attributions but also through a character's interactions with other characters in the same media context. Thus, the feedback, support or rejection from other characters may have an impact on viewers' perception about a character or their aspiration to be like them. The admiration, respect and liking that characters receive from other characters of the same program, serve as a cue with regard to how valuable or appealing characters, or their behaviour, are considered by viewers (Hoffner & Buchanan 2005). In particular, when the characters receive positive regard from others, it might be interpreted as a form of reinforcement by viewers and thus serve as an influence on their aspiration to model characters' behaviours (Bandura 1986). Specifically, Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) came to the conclusion that perceived admiration is associated with higher levels of wishful identification apart from the case where men were rating male characters.

### ***Star Status***

Some of the attributes assigned to characters are more closely related to the actors that impersonate those characters. For example, the physical attractiveness of a character is mainly an attribute of the actor. Likewise, speech and non-verbal expressions for a character can be cultivated according to the plans of the producers that develop the character, but are mostly dependent on the qualities and the characteristics of the actor. For that reason, as Cohen (1999) implies, the viewers of a television program relate concurrently to both actors and the characters they impersonate. In that manner, it is expected that characters that are impersonated by famous actors, stand a greater possibility to draw attention and generate intense emotional responses. Hence,

the reactions of viewers toward characters impersonated by celebrities might be dependent on some degree, to the actor's star status. Indeed, Cohen (1999) in his research of teenage viewers found that star status was a significant predictor of attributing attractiveness to a character. Therefore, he implied that star status might be an important factor in how teenagers react to television characters.

### ***Role Factors***

Television characters perform their roles based on the carefully designed scripts by the producers (Cohen 1999). Thus, the behaviours of characters are designed in such a way that they represent specific qualities and characteristics, which in turn construct the plot. In some cases for example, the general attractiveness (and not specifically the physical attractiveness) of a character depends on the qualities that s/he has created in the media context. Hence, when viewers respond to characters, they are actually responding to a very specific set of meanings. In fact, viewers react to a set of symbolic properties created for the characters by the media content, and also by the actors who impersonate the characters (McCracken 1989). The way that viewers understand and perceive the characters' roles, as well as the set of meanings that these roles represent, has its foundation on their own criteria for understanding people and previous real social experiences. Thus, it can be implied that the responses to characters are determined, as aforementioned, by characters' attributes and by viewers' perceptions regarding their role in the plot (Cohen 1999).

## **II. Viewer Related Factors**

Cohen (1999) suggests that the preference of a character in a media context is not solely influenced and determined by the characters' attributes, status and role but also by audiences that actively choose which character to attend and prefer.

According to Livingstone (1992), the audience is not perceived as a passive recipient, but rather as an active interpreter of television context and contents. More importantly, it is assumed that audience members carry their own experiences and knowledge when it comes to interpreting television contents. Since viewers are equipped with their own personal interpretive resources for making sense of people in

the social world, they employ the same cognitive constructs for interpreting the characters of television programs (Livingstone 1992).

Moreover, the individual characteristics of an audience member are important in determining character preferences. Viewers' age, sex and social situation are factors that influence characters' preferences too (von Feilitzen & Linne 1975). For example, children identify more often with other children in children's programs and in particular, of their own age (von Feilitzen & Linne 1975). Regarding sex, children have been found to prefer same-sex characters and, that is more common for boys (Hoffner 1996) and similarly, young adults have been found to identify more strongly with characters of the same gender (Hoffner & Buchanan 2005). Social and cultural background might also have an influence of the interpretive capabilities of viewers regarding characters and the media content. For example, in an analysis of the soap opera *Dallas* (Katz & Liebes 1986) it was found that viewers of different social and cultural background produced differing interpretations of the same content. Hence, it might be possible that the characters in the same content to be interpreted according to each viewer's predisposed social and cultural characteristics, thus concluding to different characters' preferences for different viewers.

### **III. Textual Related Factors**

The reactions of audience members toward a character are also determined by the combination of specific media context and content (i.e. text) and the character types that are promoted through those texts. Thus, it can be suggested that different media texts promote different responses for audience members (Cohen 2001).

In audience reception theories, television programs are regarded as texts and viewers as readers. In that regard, texts are dynamic, meanings are context dependent and readings may be divergent. This means that television programs are "virtual" in character (Iser 1980 as in Livingstone 1991), the interpretation of meanings is based on the specific context of the program and that different audience members might assign divergent interpretations to that context. For this reason, there cannot be a direct link between the meanings built in the text and the entailed effects of those meanings on audience members. That might be because, viewers make their own decisions about the programs they watch, programs may be designed to target

different audiences and also because the same “virtual” text might carry different meanings to different viewers (Livingstone 1991).

The genre of television programs is an important issue in reception theory. That is because, genre can be considered as a “code of behaviour” between the audience and the producers of a television program (Dubrow 1982). Viewers are able to make distinctions among different genres, are knowledgeable about their different conventions and they have specific expectations from each genre. Thus, audiences’ genre knowledge underlies the way they interpret television programs. Based on their genre knowledge, audience members establish their general approach to the program and generally determine the types of inferential interpretations they will draw regarding the program’s content.

Out of the main genres presented in television, two have been the focus of audience reception analysis; news programs and soap operas (or cluster related genres). In these genres, the types of characters that are expected to be met are specific. In the news programs, television personalities such as newscasters are expected for the genre, while in the soap opera genre, there are numerous characters with no single hero. Soap operas have multiple narratives and promote a variety of perspectives through their various characters (Livingstone 1991). Consequently, a divergence of interpretations of the contents’ meanings and preferences of different characters characterizes the genre. And since soap operas represent several aspects of everyday life (Livingstone 1988), the genre promotes an alternative reality to which the audience is transported. For that reason, identification with, liking of and sympathy for central characters in a narrative also determine the interpretive standpoints that viewers take (Livingstone 1991). Indeed, Cohen (2001) suggests that narrative genres, such as soap operas and other cluster related genres such as comedy and drama, promote greater levels of identification with characters than non-narrative television programs such as news programs. Although it is not impossible to identify with television personalities such as newscasters, the narrative genres are much more likely to cultivate viewers’ identification and formation of parasocial relationships with characters, due to the fact that through their imitation of real life situations, they promote an alternative social context where the viewer can indulge in fantasy, imagination and involvement in the narrative content (Cohen 2001).

In summary, different genres can be considered as denoting specific media context and viewer relationships. Thus, genre and the characteristic media contexts

than constitute it, can be regarded as one of the determining factors of audience involvement (Katz 1988). And “audience involvement” refers to the inclusion of all the various experiences (e.g. identification, parasocial relationships) and roles taken by viewers in relation to the context, which ultimately mediate television effects (Livingstone 1991).

#### **2.1.2.4 Viewer Interaction with Characters**

In relevant literature of parasocial interaction, one can meet a variety of concepts which more or less have been employed in order to explain the viewer – character interaction, taking under consideration the variety of possible relationships which might also differ in valence and strength. Apart from parasocial interaction and identification, which are concepts that have drawn the highest levels of attention for the understanding of viewer–character relationship, there are other concepts related to how viewers interact with fictional characters. Some of these concepts are also met in literature as factors explicating some aspects of more significant or broader concepts which explain the viewer–character relationship. These concepts are met in literature (e.g. Cohen 1999, Moyer-Gusé 2008) as separate constructs that might also explain media effects on audiences, and refer to *Liking or Affinity* and *Similarity or Homophily*;

*Liking or Affinity.* These constructs include all occasions where an audience member demonstrates positive evaluations of a television character (Moyer-Gusé 2008, Giles 2002, Cohen 2001). Liking or Affinity can also refer to social attraction. The notion underlying these constructs is that audience members maintain a distance from the character and do not get absorbed in the narrative. Namely, audience members are aware of their role as spectators of the media content and are able to form critical judgements regarding the characters and their behaviours (Moyer-Gusé 2008). Liking or affinity might be appropriate constructs in explaining the relation between characters and viewers when the latter encounter the first for the first time, or when there is no long term exposure to the specific television program of the character. Thus, these constructs display liking of a character without the viewer’s identification with the character or the formation of a parasocial relationship. However, affinity



might be perceived as an indicator for identification or for the formation of parasocial relationship, since it involves a positive evaluation of the character (Moyer-Gusé 2008). Moreover, affinity has been employed as a complementary measure to parasocial interaction in past research (Giles 2002). In particular, Rubin et al. (1985) found that parasocial interaction follows from affinity with the persona or program. In addition, Giles (2002) suggests that affinity can be better utilized to explain the viewer's relation with fictional and fantasy characters, in cases where parasocial interaction as a construct seems too strong for a description of the relation.

*Similarity or Homophily.* Commonly, the degree to which a viewer perceives that s/he is similar to a television character has been typified, by the relevant literature, as perceived similarity. Viewers' perceived similarity with a character can refer to demographic variables, physical attributes, beliefs or values. Similarity denotes a cognitive assessment of the commonalities that a viewer recognizes between himself / herself and a television character (Moyer-Gusé 2008).

Similarly to the concept of affinity, similarity entails that the viewer maintains his/her own perspective and also a critical stance toward the character. Thus, in order to compare or make judgements about a character regarding the similarity with himself/herself, the viewer has to activate his/her own psychological schemas and also be self aware of his/her role as an audience member (Cohen 2001). Although similarity has been related to identification (Cohen 2001, Basil 1996), it has also been considered as a distinct concept.

Homophily is a concept which contains the notion of interaction. That means that homophily entails the idea that it can be an antecedent to communication. In that sense, homophily can describe the degree to which interacting individuals, hold similar beliefs, social status and the like, and can be objective or subjective. Like perceived similarity, it is subjective with regard to an individual's perception of how similar s/he is to the target character (Eyal & Rubin 2003).

Interestingly, McCroskey, Richmond and Daly (1975) recognized four homophily dimensions and categorized them according to the similarities between two individuals, in "Attitude", "Background", "Value/Morality" and "Appearance" homophily. In particular, the "Attitude" homophily dimension entails notions of thought and behaviour similarity, the "Background" dimension involves social class, economic situation and status similarity factors, the "Value/Morality" dimension comprises of morals, sexual attitudes, values and behaviour toward others' similarity

elements. Lastly, the “Appearance” dimension engages notions of looks, size, appearance, and resemblance similarity. Moreover, attitude and behaviour homophily are thought to be important elements in interpersonal and mass-mediated relationships (Eyal & Rubin 2003). Homophily is also thought to be a predictor of a viewer’s exposure to media information (Hutchinson 1982). Additionally, greater degrees of homophily have been linked to greater identification with characters (Eyal & Rubin 2003). Turner (1993) suggested that homophily can be considered as a basic element which can lead to interpersonal attraction and more frequent and effective interpersonal communication, which in turn leads to relationship development. In fact, in his research he found that “Attitude” homophily was a strong predictor of parasocial relationship.

### **Characteristics of media figures**

Apart from the above mentioned concepts that aid the explanation of the viewer-character relations, there are some other commonly met issues in literature regarding media figures. Drawing from past literature, Giles (2002) identified two main characteristics of different types of media figure and implied that they may determine the nature of parasocial relationship which can be developed beyond the immediate exposure to the media figure. He supports that parasocial relationships can be developed with many different types of media figures regardless of the apparent interaction between viewer and figure in any given encounter. He also identified some other important issues regarding the users of the media contexts and the media figures which can be considered as important features for the formation and development of user-character parasocial relationships. The three important issues according to Giles (2002) are “Authenticity/ Realism”, “Representation across Different Media Outlets” and “User Contexts”.

“*Authenticity/Realism*” refers to the perceived realism that is necessary to exist in the perception of the audience regarding a media figure, and sometimes, the media context as well. In order for viewers to be able to make character or personality judgements, the figure must promote a credible persona with plausible real-like characteristics, in a sense, to be authentic in whatever it is supposed to promote. In that sense, the realism that a figure or the media content communicates to the viewer is one of the basic elements for development of the viewer-figure relationship.

Indeed, perceived realism has been found to predict parasocial interaction with television newscasters (Rubin et al. 1985). Regarding perceived realism of media content, Rubin and Perse (1987) found that perceived realism of soap operas correlated with parasocial interaction, suggesting that parasocial involvement portrays attention to realistically perceived media content during the viewing experience. Additionally, Rubin (1981) identified positive relationships between perceived content realism and salience of television viewing motivations.

Moreover, regarding specifically the genre of soap operas, Livingstone's (1988) findings suggest that viewers consider soap opera as highly realistic because they recognized situations similar to theirs, they felt that they learnt from the resolutions of problems and became involved with the characters. In this study, an important element of realism was that soap operas were considered to parallel the lives of the viewers, and thus similarities were apparent and appreciated. Apparently, television programs project a sense of realism which can be considered as a functional alternative to interpersonal communication (Turner 1993).

*Representation across Different Media Outlets.* Giles (2002) noted that one neglected quality of media figures is "the continuity of their representation across different media outlets". This implication remarks that media figures may appear on different media contents and contexts such as different television programs, magazines or advertisements. For example, an actor/actress impersonating a character in a television program might -inevitably or deliberately- transfer his/her character's identity in an advertisement. Thus, meanings ascribed to that actor/actress might derive from knowledge collected from some other appearances (Reeves 1987). Another possibility is that a famous actor/actress might transfer his/her star status into the character that s/he is impersonating. In that case, it is possible that a viewer will simultaneously relate to both the character and the actor (Cohen 1999). Hence, it can be implied that through repetitive appearances, experiences and intertextual layering, a relationship between the viewer and the actor-character might be assigned with greater meaning and dimension in due course (Alperstein 1991). In fact, Alperstein (1991) noted that viewers express familiarity with fictional characters who appear in commercials and found that the appearance of celebrities in commercials serves as a mediator for maintaining the relationship between viewer and celebrity (and possibly the character they impersonate) current and alive.

Another aspect fitting in this category of program/media figure representation across different outlets is the possible repetition of television programs through video/DVD/digital recordings. Giles (2002) assumes that the recording of television programs and repetitive viewing of them -and thus exposure to specific media figures- may increase the visual aspects of parasocial interaction with a character, which in turn might lead to the formation of parasocial relationship between the viewer and that character.

*User Contexts.* Usually, in relevant literature regarding parasocial interaction the media user is considered to be a solitary figure; a television viewer who is consciously or unconsciously using mass media communication as a behaviour of alternative social interaction and communication. However, previous research of Rubin et al. (1985) on parasocial interaction has failed to prove strong connections of parasocial relationship development with psychological and social deficiencies in order to satisfy the social need for interaction. Of course this result might be due to the fact that the television program utilized in that research was a news program and the media personas were newscasters. Nevertheless, Rubin et al. (1985) found significant associations between loneliness and the use of communication alternatives. Lonely individuals were found to hold less likelihood in communicating interpersonally and they were more likely to turn to television when they experienced loneliness.

Previous research has also explored other predictors of television viewing motivation which can also reinforce the formation of parasocial relationships. The motivation for television viewing has also been assigned to the need for entertainment, relaxation, pass-time (e.g. Conway & Rubin 1991), and escapism (e.g. Livingstone 1988). But as Giles (2002) supports, the emphasis in previous research has been exclusively on individual responses to media figures. He suggests that if research regarding parasocial interaction could also be explored through co-viewing of media programs, then knowledge about the formation of parasocial relationships might be extended significantly. He implies that there is a possibility that watching a television program with someone else might reinforce initial responses to media figures, which might in turn develop or strengthen a parasocial relationship.

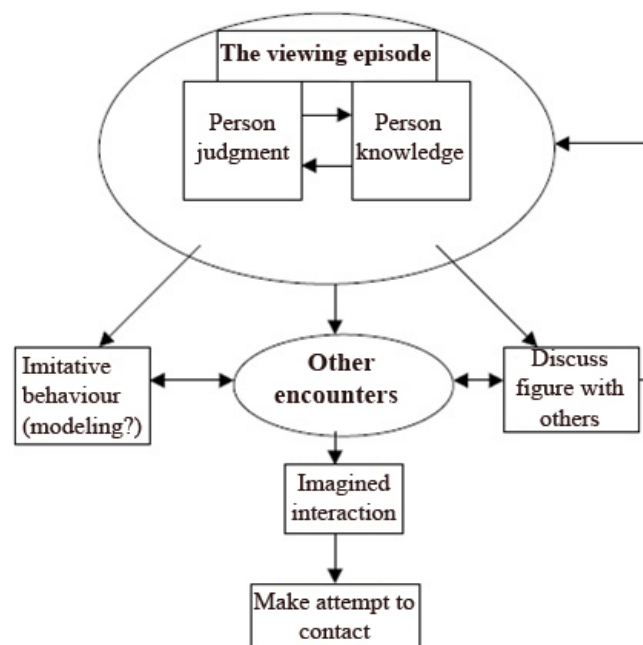
Indeed, television viewing is not always an activity performed by a single individual. Sometimes, the experience of watching television is a social activity performed with friends, family, or acquaintances (Fisher & Dubé 2005). In occasions of a shared viewing activity, an individual's attitudes, evaluations or judgements

toward the media content and media figures might be influenced by the other member of the co-viewing (Lin & McDonald 2007). Hence, watching a television program with others constitutes a social context which can possibly generate effects among audience members. These intra-audience effects derive from the reactions that viewers have toward the media program and which are observed and/or communicated to their co-viewers (Coker et al. 2013). Intra-audience effects can be explained via social impact (Latané 1981) and social facilitation (Zajonc 1965).

Social impact is identified when an individual experiences alterations in “physiological states and subjective feelings, motives and emotions, cognitions and beliefs, values and behaviour” due to the “real, implied or imagined presence or actions” of another individual (Latané 1981). An individual’s presence may also enhance behaviour of another individual via social facilitation (Coker et al. 2013), since the presence of others can enhance the release of dominant responses (Zajonc 1965). In the case of television viewing with others, it has been implied that positive emotional responses to a humorous stimulus are socially facilitated (Lin & McDonald 2007). Another reason that may possibly reinforce responses to media contents or figures is the fact that the information or opinions received from a friend might be perceived as more convincing, if the friend’s opinions are trusted and valued (Brown & Reingen 1987). Thus, it can be assumed that the viewing experience of an individual might be affected by the nature of the relationship with the co-viewer (Coker et al. 2013). For example, if a viewer is watching his/her favourite television program with a friend, and the friend is making ridicule comments regarding the program or the characters, then the viewer might feel embarrassed for liking the program and change his/her opinion for the specific program. In another case, where two friends are watching i.e. a sitcom together, and the comedic situations bring laughter to both of them simultaneously, it might mean that they have a mutual agreement on pursuing an enjoyable experience. In this way, the co-viewing and possibly the interaction (by sharing comments for the program or the characters) between friends who share a pleasurable experience is expected to make the experience more enriching (Coker et al. 2013). Then, the possibility of facilitating more responses toward the program and the characters may even reinforce the formation of a parasocial relationship with a character.

### 2.1.3 Stages of the Parasocial Relationship Development

Drawing from previous literature and his identification of the aforementioned typified issues, Giles (2002) made an effort to present the possible processes that exist in the development of parasocial relationships. In particular, he aimed to identify the processes through which a contact with a media figure may lead to the development of a parasocial relationship. The development of this conceptualization is based on the notion that the nature of the media figure will partly determine the nature of the parasocial relationship. The next consideration is about the effects of successive exposure to the media figure in the same medium and across several media as well. Successive exposures refer to the repetitive viewing of the media figure in the serialized episodes of a television program, such as soap operas, sitcoms etc. The encounter of the media figure in other media entails the viewing of the celebrity impersonating the character in other programs such as the appearance of the figure on other television talk shows, advertisements, magazines etc. Another consideration of Giles' model is the role of co-viewers and how they can influence the formation of a parasocial relationship. The process begins with the exposure to a single television episode, as depicted in Figure 2.1.3.



Source: Giles 2002

**Figure 2.1.3** *Stages of the Parasocial Relationship Development*

At the point of the first exposure, the cognitive activity is initialized by the judgement about the characters portrayed in that episode based on the knowledge of those figures. In that initial stage, physical knowledge may lead to physical attraction which in turn may lead to a positive perception about the media figure. Those first impressions about the character emerge from the attributions that the character carries such as physical appearance, realism of the character and observed similarity of the character's behaviour or attitudes with those of the viewer. This cognitive activity then, may lead to the positive judgement or even the liking (or affinity) of the character.

Apparently, during the first exposure to the media content, where the first encounter with the media figure takes place, a number of behavioural outcomes are likely to be produced. One of the outcomes might be the mere liking of the character but with no further interaction between the viewer and the media figure. In another case, the viewer, judging from the specific attributes of the character, might identify with hem/her. In the possible occurrence of identification with a character and through a single or repetitive encounters with the same character (e.g. through successive episodes of the program), an imitative or modelled behaviour might be followed by the viewer. This path is illustrated in the flowchart by the box on the left and the one-way arrow. In the event of further media encounters, the identification might lead to the formation of a parasocial relationship with the media figure, which is represented by the box "Imagine Interaction". Due to the reason that parasocial relationships are formed through several exposures to the medium (Horton & Wohl 1956), this path is marked by one-way arrow.

Giles (2002) supports, that an important link in the model is the role of others (e.g. friends or co-viewers). He implies that they can have an effect on the parasocial interaction development process in two ways. In the first case they might influence the development of the relationship itself by transferring knowledge about the character to their friend. For example, they might reveal some information about the celebrity who impersonates the character, which they have acquired from other media sources (e.g. some gossip from a magazine), and influence their friend's previously held opinion in a negative way. This might affect the viewer's future encounters with the character. Along this line of thought, a negative opinion from a friend about a favourite character with whom the viewer might experience a parasocial relationship, may color the viewer's perceptions in the next encounter with the character (i.e. in the

viewing of the following episode). That is even more possible if the viewer appreciates and values the opinions of the friend. Of course, on the other hand, the discussion with a friend about the content of the media program and the characters may enhance the formation of a parasocial relationship. For example, if the friend who is highly appreciated by the viewer expresses liking to a specific character, then the viewer may pay more attention to that character and identify with him/her because of perceived shared interest with his friend.

The other way that others may influence the development of parasocial interaction is during co-viewing and that is why the arrow for the “Discuss figures with others” box is bi-directional. Through the exchange of comments during an episode viewing, the character judgements might be continually updated according to the situations taking place on that episode and the relative behaviours of the characters. This may lead to the enhancement of the liking, identification with, and the subsequent development of parasocial relationship with a specific character.

Giles (2002) has also included in his model the case where the parasocial relationship is so strong, that the viewer might consider to make contact with the media figure. At that stage there might exist a period of an imagined interaction of the viewer with the figure in order to weigh the benefits and costs for attempting to approach the real person impersonating the figure. Giles (2002) assumes that such a behaviour is not usual and goes beyond the parasocial relationship’s known effects, but on the other hand, it is not uncommon for viewers to move their parasocial relationship forward by joining fan clubs of the character (usually created by the producers of the programs) or the actor/actress impersonating the character, in order to maintain some kind of contact with the character apart from the encounters through television broadcasting.

The above model, as it is conceptualized by Giles (2002), depicts the possible stages through which a single exposure to a television media content and media figure may lead to the development of a parasocial relationship with the specific figure. Apart from that, Giles (2002) has taken into account other factors that may influence the process of the relationship’s development which had never been considered in relevant literature, such as the role of co-viewers. Moreover, the conceptualization is presented as an extension of normal social activity by taking into account common and different qualities of social and parasocial encounters, building on the suggestion



of Horton and Wohl (1956) that parasocial relationships are systemically similar to social relationships.

## **2.2 Balance Theory**

Drawing from the analysis of theories related to the exploration of parasocial interaction and in consistency with their terms and principles, it can be implied that in many cases the relation of a viewer with a specific television character can be characterized and theoretically treated as a close relationship. As juxtaposed earlier, the relationships between individuals and media figures have been confirmed to be very similar to interpersonal and/or social relationships, and more often than not, can be understood through the same theoretical underpinnings. In that sense, it can be implied, that like interpersonal relationships, relationships between viewer and media figure involve complex processes, involving a series of interactions –real or imagined–, which may affect the relationship development. Since the viewer-media figure relationships are usually one-sided, then from the perspective of the viewer, a number of feelings, attributions, conflict, desires, hopes and disappointments are involved during the course of interactions. The viewer might reflect on what has occurred during an interaction, compared it with what s/he wants to occur and imagine what might occur in the following encounters with the media figure. In that case, a relationship can be considered “not as a fixed entity but as a dynamic flux” (Hinde 1995).

While relationships between viewers and media figures function in a similar way to other interpersonal relationships, the communication in these relationships is different in some aspects. The communication in parasocial relationships is mediated by television. There, the flow of communication is predominantly unidirectional. Nevertheless, mediated interaction generates a specific social situation where viewers are related to a certain communication and symbolic exchange process and may form special bonds with media figures (Isolatus 1988).

### ***2.2.1 The Concepts of Consistency and Balance***

In most types of interaction, it is assumed that communication among the parties involved, functions by facilitating two or more individuals to sustain simultaneous direction toward one another and toward other objects of communication. Every communication activity involves a transmission of information from the source to a recipient, which consists of distinct stimuli (Newcomb 1953). According to Feather (1964), psychological studies support that individuals tend to evaluate communication with regard to how consistent it is with their relevant attitudes. It is assumed that consistency of a communication message with an individual's attitudes regarding that matter, leads to a highly likelihood of acceptance of that communication message.

The concept of consistency in humans is a specific case of a concept of universal consistency, and it has been investigated through systematic theories and research. The main area in the theoretical development regarding the concept of consistency is attitude change. The rationale is that individuals try to appear consistent to themselves by adjusting or changing their behaviour and attitudes in order to comply with a given situation that causes inconsistency to them. That is because inconsistency is assumed to be an uncomfortable state that generates pressure and requires elimination or reduction. Generally, the notion that beliefs, attitudes and behaviours tend to organize themselves in meaningful and sensible ways, is common to the concepts of balance, congruity and dissonance<sup>8</sup> (Zajonc 1960). According to Zajonc (1960), these concepts all assume that inconsistency is a "psychologically uncomfortable state but differ in the generality of application". For example, he states that the concept of congruity is the most restrictive with regard to the problems rising from the "effects of information about objects and events on the attitudes toward the source of information", while the concept of cognitive dissonance is the most general because "it considers consistency among any cognitions". However, the concept of balance stands somewhere in the middle, because it specifically considers attitudes toward people and objects in relation to one another (Zajonc 1960).

In communication and interaction relevant literature (e.g. Newcomb 1953, Broxton 1963, Feather 1964, Davis & Rusbult 2001), the tendency for consistency between evaluation of communication and attitude is very often explained or explored

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<sup>8</sup> The concept of balance refers to Heider (1946), the concept of congruence to Osgood and Tannebaum (1955) and dissonance to Festinger (1955).

by Heider's (1946) balance theory. Structural or social balance is considered to be a fundamental social process which can explain and describe the structure of individuals' social affective relations toward one another. Namely, it can be utilized to explain how the feelings, attitudes and beliefs that individuals hold toward each other, promote the formation of stable or balanced social relations (Hummon & Dorein 2003).

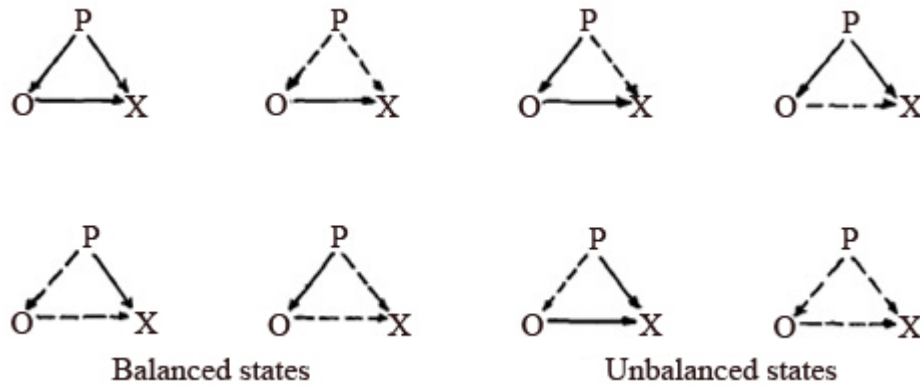
### ***2.2.2 The Principles of Heider's Balance Theory***

In particular, Heider's (1946) balance theory was the first effort to formalize the psychological state of consistency as a concept. The theory concerns how individuals are cognitively experiencing relations with individuals and some impersonal entities. According to Zajonc (1960), Heider's interest was for consistencies found in the way individuals viewed their relations with other individuals and the environment. Specifically, in balance theory, all situations consist of entities and the relations linking those entities. These entities refer to individuals or objects which can be physical objects or intangible entities such as ideas, situations, events etc. The relations refer to sentiment or unit relations. A sentiment relation is a relation of liking, while a unit relation is a relation of possession, similarity, cause, proximity and belongingness (Heider 1946, Fillenbaum 1968). Heider's notion of relation may be positive or negative and degrees of liking or similarity or the like cannot be represented (Zajonc 1960). A situation of relations is considered balanced, when the relations' signs are in agreement. The state of balance depends on the notion that all parts of the relations must have the same dynamic character. They have to be all negative or all positive or the different dynamic character entities have to be separated from each other (Heider 1946). Namely, when the product of relations' signs is positive the situation is balanced. Subsequently, in the case where the product of the relations' signs is negative, the situation is imbalanced. Situations of imbalanced states are considered to produce stress and tension, thus generating forces of balance restoration (Zajonc 1960). Explicitly, attempts are made to reduce the stress and tension by changing the signs of one or more relations or by replacing one of the entities or objects, in order for a balanced state to be obtained.

Specifically, Heider (1946) conceptualized balance theory by assuming that the attitudes toward individuals and the formation of causal relations can influence each other. By that, he meant that an attitude toward an event or a situation may have an effect on the attitude toward the individual who caused that event. He then posits that in the case where the attitude toward the event and the attitude toward the individual are similar in some way, then the event will be attributed to the specific individual and a balanced configuration of relations will be created.

In particular, drawing from the above assumed configuration, he assigned specific “symbols” for the definition of all the parts, entities, objects and relations which were utilized almost unchanged in relevant literature and in posterior extensions of the theory (e.g. Jordan 1953, Taylor 1967, Sampson & Insko 1964, Cartwright & Harary 1956). To describe a balanced or imbalanced configuration he had to distinguish the comprising parts. In his analysis, there are two persons labeled  $p$  and  $o$  with  $p$  being the focus of analysis and  $o$  another person, and an impersonal entity named  $x$ . Heider’s aim was to discover the way the relations among  $p$ ,  $o$  and  $x$  are structured in  $p$ ’s cognitive system, and if repeated and systematic tendencies existed regarding the way these relations were experienced. He also made a distinction between two types of relations. As mentioned before, the distinction is between sentiment relations which refer to attitudes, liking, or evaluating and are labeled as  $L$  when representing a positive relation, and as  $\sim L$  when representing a negative relation, and unit relations which refer to cognitive unit formations (Cartwright & Harary 1956) such as similarity, proximity, possession, belonging and the like, and are labeled as  $U$  when referring to positive relations and as  $\sim U$  for negative relations (Heider 1946, Zajonc 1960).

In his analysis, Heider (1946) posits that attitude defines the positive or negative relation of a person  $p$ , to another person  $o$ , or to an impersonal entity  $x$ . For example, regarding sentiment relations, a balanced state is obtained when at the same time “ $p$  likes  $o$  ( $p L o$ ),  $p$  likes  $x$  ( $p L x$ ) and  $o$  likes  $x$  ( $o L x$ ), or when  $p$  likes  $o$  ( $p L o$ ),  $p$  dislikes  $x$  ( $p \sim L x$ ), and  $o$  dislikes  $x$  ( $o \sim L x$ ), or when  $p$  dislikes  $o$  ( $p \sim L o$ ),  $p$  likes  $x$  ( $p L x$ ), and  $o$  dislikes  $x$  ( $o \sim L x$ )” (Zajonc 1960), as depicted in Figure 2.2.2.



Source: Zajonc 1960

**Figure 2.2.2** Examples of balanced and unbalanced states. Solid lines symbolize positive relations and discontinuous lines symbolize negative relations.

In the case of unit relations,  $p U x$  can denote  $p$  owns  $x$  (referring to cognitive formation of possession), or  $p U o$  can mean  $p$  is familiar with, is used to or knows well  $o$  (referring to proximity). In Heider's (1946) balanced state example,  $(p L x) + (p U x)$  can denote that  $p$  likes the things he made ( $x$ ) and  $p$  wants to own the things he likes ( $x$ ), or  $p$  values what he is familiar with ( $x$ ). In another example, Heider (1946) explains a balanced state which rises from negative relations;  $(p \sim L o) + (p \sim U o)$  can denote that  $p$  dislikes  $o$  and  $p$  is uncomfortable if he has to live with people he doesn't like ( $o$ ).

At this point it should be noted that Heider (1946) states that  $p U o$  is a symmetrical relation, so that  $p U o$  also implies  $o U p$ . That means that they both are parts of a unit, and this is true for  $p$  and  $o$  in the same manner, although their roles in the unit might be different, for example in the case where  $U$  would denote a causal relation. On the other hand,  $p L o$  is a non-symmetrical relation, because it does not automatically imply that  $o L p$ . For example,  $p$  might like  $o$  but that doesn't mean that  $o$  likes  $p$ .

Although  $p L o$  is a non-symmetrical relation logically, there might be a psychological tendency to become symmetrical. For example if  $L$  is equivalent to  $U$ , then there is a case of psychological transitivity of the  $L$  relation. A relation  $R$  is considered transitive if  $a R b$  and  $b R c$  imply  $a R c$ . That means that  $p$  tends to like  $x$  if  $p L o$  and  $o L x$  is valid at the same time. Heider (1946) explains this rationale with the following example; when  $(p L o) + (p L x) + (o U x)$ , then  $(p L o) + (p L x) + (o L$

$x$ ) can also represent a balanced state if  $L$  is treated as equivalent to  $U$ . These relations can be interpreted as;  $p$  likes what his friend  $o$  likes and  $p$  likes people with the same attitudes, or more analytically,  $p$  likes  $o$  and also  $p$  likes optimism in his/her life ( $x$ ) and  $o$  owns the quality of optimism ( $x$ ) as a person, then  $p$  will like  $o$  because  $p$  holds the same attitudes with  $o$ . As mentioned above, Heider (1946) states that logically,  $L$  is not transitive but there is a psychological inclination to make it transitive when insinuations between  $U$  relations do not interfere with transitivity. Thus, he implies that the relation  $U$  can also be considered, in this manner, as psychologically transitive. For instance,  $(p U o) + (o U x)$  may imply that  $p U x$ . That could mean that since  $p$  owns  $o$  (e.g.  $o$  is  $p$ 's son) and  $o$  carries an aggressive behaviour ( $x$ ), then “ $p$  will feel responsible for what people belonging to him do” (Heider 1946).

The main implication in Heider's theory is that individuals have a tendency to achieve balance in their relations towards others and other entities. His underlying implication is that up to a great degree, interpersonal behaviour and social perception can be determined or co-determined through simple cognitive configurations (Heider 1946).

### **2.2.2.1 A Communication Approach to Balance Theory**

In fact, Heider's theory is the fundamental theory of the balance concept and the simplest of all related balance theories (Fillenbaum 1968). Indeed, many researchers and theorists were based on Heider's theory in order to extend it, apply it to more complicated situations or to utilize it to explore other or more specific areas of behavioural research (e.g. Newcomb 1953, Cartwright & Harary 1956, Jordan 1953 and others).

One of the most utilized relevant balance theories, also known as theory of systems of orientation is that of Newcomb's (1953). He applied the basic principles of Heider's balance theory on examining interaction as communicative acts. Based on this rationale, Newcomb (1953) assumed that the purpose of communication between “two or more individuals is to enable them to maintain simultaneous orientation (or co-orientation) toward one another as communicators and toward

objects of communication". He posits that every communicator sends information comprising of some discriminative stimulus, to another communicator. He indicates that the term "orientation" can be used as an equivalent of "attitude" which refers to both cathectic (similar to Heider's sentiment relations) and cognitive tendencies. He also states that simultaneous orientation or co-orientation represents the assumption that "A's orientation toward B and toward X are interdependent". Consequently, A-B-X is considered as a constituting system, where specific definable relations between A and B, A and X and B and X are considered interdependent. He begins his proposition with the simplest communicative act where one individual A transmits information to another individual B about something X, which is symbolized as AtoBreX (A to B regarding X). For some purposes the system A-B-X, may be considered as a "phenomenal" one in the psychological field of A or B while for some other purposes as an "objective" system which includes all possible relations as elicited from observations of A and B's behaviour. Newcomb (1953) also presumes that a certain state of the system is obtained when a certain instance of AtoBreX occurs, and also that as a result of this occurrence, the system is subjected to some changes.

Newcomb (1953) assumes that there might be some predictable relations between specific properties of any group of A and B and certain variables of the communicative behaviour in that group. He posits that the structural properties of a group, when considered as independent variables, can generate problems or provide solutions to other communication problems. In reverse, many group properties can be products of the group's communicative acts. Drawing from these propositions, Newcomb (1953) identified and defined in three types, the distinctive group properties which are considered as conditions for, or as the result of a specific kind and frequency's communicative act. In particular, each of the three types of properties is hypothesized to be related to the probability of occurrence of a certain kind of communicative act.

Newcomb (1953) identifies as the first property, the "Homogeneity of orientation" toward specific objects which could be roughly interpreted as perceived homogeneity of attitudes. Specifically, while applied to behaviour, it is not necessary to be regarded as "similarity of action" pertaining to all members of the group, but as solely demand or expectation. For instance, in a system, the group members expect that each member will have his/her own distinct role and not that all members will

share the exact same orientation. In his description of this property, Newcomb also notes that communication can be more broadly defined, than as merely a verbal activity. Information between communicators may also be transmitted with non-verbal means, intentionally or unintentionally. That means, that a communicator's general behaviour regarding an object may also inform the other communicator about his/her orientation to it without specific verbal messages. Then it can be assumed, that the level of orientation homogeneity, in a given group, regarding specific objects can be presumably related to all the communication variables with regard to those objects. Thus, it can be implied that homogeneity is not "an invariable function of any single index of communication", but rather that it can vary in reference to the dynamics of the A-B-X system. Although there might be other, out of the group, determinants of orientation homogeneity, Newcomb regards this group property as a result of the conditions and consequences of communicative acts.

The second identified property is "Homogeneity of perceived consensus" which means "homogeneity of judgements of homogeneity of orientation". This property, basically typifies the substantial degree of both perceived and objective homogeneity of orientation that is presupposed in most communication acts. That is because, solely the use of language, gestures and other means of transmitting information, presupposes the condition of consensus among members of the group regarding the message transmitted through the use of symbols. Homogeneity of orientation and of perceived consensus, do not have an invariant relationship either. Judgements of homogeneity can be of any level of accuracy. Thus, any level of homogeneity of perceived consensus, which represents any level of accuracy, is assumed to be a result of prior communicative acts and also a determinant of following acts.

The last property is the "Attraction among members". This property refers to the fact that, relationships of some degree of positive attraction are characterized by group continuity under conditions of minimal constrain, or sometimes, even under conditions of significant constrain. Newcomb assumes that this can be explained by the notion that positive orientation or liking might be enhanced by frequency of interaction. However, he proposes that from the view of the system's (A-B-X) dynamics, interpersonal attraction may vary according to the degree to which the expectations of co-orientation are reached by communicative acts.



According to Newcomb (1953), these three properties are not the only ones that can be found in a system and they are not solely the result of intra-group communication. Some properties may also be transferred into the system from the personal characteristics of the members of the group.

#### **2.2.2.2 Comparison of Heider's Balance Theory and Newcomb's Theory of Systems of Orientation**

Newcomb's theory is similar to Heider's with regard to three aspects. Firstly, the objects or entities are analogous to those introduced by Heider. Heider (1946) specifies three entities, the focal person *p*, another person *o* and an impersonal object *x*, and accordingly, Newcomb's (1953) system, consists of three elements, A and B which refer to two communicators and X which refers to some object of communication. A second similarity regards the types of relations existing in their systems which determine if the system is balanced or imbalanced. Specifically, their basic systems regard the relation of a focal individual (*p* or A) to another individual (*o* or B) which can refer to liking or attraction and the relation of either individuals toward the impersonal object (*x* or X) which can refer to attitudes, as a broader term. Lastly, they both consider a tendency toward obtaining balance in the system of relationships through changes applied on the elements consisting the system (segregation of *x*, or alteration of the relation's sign), for the avoidance of unpleasantness and to release stress and tension generated by an imbalanced state (Taylor 1967).

However, as Taylor (1967) notes, Heider's and Newcomb's theories have two important differences. In Heider's theory, the sentiment type of relations includes the concept of liking and attitude as a given relation element, while in Newcomb's theory the concept of perceived orientation or relation is also introduced. Thus, in Newcomb's conceptualization, it is taken under consideration the focal individual's perception of the other individual's liking for him/her and the focal individual's perception of the other's attitude toward X. Thus, while Heider (1946) considers liking and attitude (and the like) as a given, Newcomb (1953) also includes the variables of perceived liking and perceived attitude of the other communicator, apart

from definite terms of liking, focal individual's attitude and the other's actual attitude toward X. The second difference refers to the introduction of communication as a central element in the system by Newcomb (1953). While Heider conceptualizes the relations system in a broader manner, Newcomb considers communication as a crucial element of the relational system. Specifically, in Newcomb's theory the basic proposition is that balance will develop as a result of communication and that imbalance will generate communication. In his theory, it is assumed that through communication the focal individual develops perceptions regarding the other individual's attitude.

Two more observations could be also noted regarding the two balance theories. Although Newcomb (1953) is not making clear distinctions regarding the types of relations as Heider (1946) does, between sentiment relations and cognitive unit relations, he yet refers to cathectic and cognitive tendencies as being included to what it could be interpreted under the term orientation or attitude. Thus, it could be implied that there is also some kind of distinction regarding the aspects influencing relations in Newcomb's theory. Moreover, Newcomb's theory includes the proposition that there may also be existent degrees of valence regarding the variables (e.g. degree of homogeneity) and that a specific degree of a variable may determine the balance of the relationship. On the contrary, in Heider's (1946) theory there is no mention of variation regarding the variables' valence (e.g. there is either liking or disliking).

### ***2.2.3 Balance Theory. Application in Psychology Studies***

Balance theory is not only a general theory, but also constitutes a framework for the conduct of empirical research. Previous research has attempted to examine theoretical mechanisms of balance in various systems but also to extend the understanding of how these mechanisms function (Hummon & Doreian 2003).

Moreover, being a general theory, the principles of balance theory are found to have application in various contents in sociology and social psychology. The central proposition of Heider's (1946) conceptualization and Newcomb's (1953) extension

and verification of it, that individuals tend to prefer balance instead of imbalance in interpersonal relations, has found support in several studies.

Particularly, Horowitz et al. (1951) investigated how individuals' responses in a group situation were influenced when dealing with a group. Indeed, their results of the *p-o-x* unit implied that individuals are frequently influenced by the other individual in group discussion. They found that when an individual likes another individual s/he is more inclined to express similarity of an opinion regarding some issue between himself/herself and the other person. This was less true when s/he disliked that individual. Judging from their data, they infer that psychological harmony prevails at the expense of objectivity. That may be because liking someone might be a benefit for both the other individual (*o*) and for the individual (*p*) himself/herself. The other person is benefited by the liking of others with whatever this implies, and the focal individual is benefited with psychological harmony while tension and stress are avoided. However, the authors imply that influence regarding the *p-o-x* unit is not often overt, although it occurs frequently. Their results point toward the notion that all individuals who comprise "*p*'s phenomenal awareness are potential influences on *p*'s behaviour". Moreover, it is evident that this kind of influence can occur in many aspects of a group's life. That is because verbal and non-verbal behaviour of another group member (for groups of more than two members which the researchers symbolize as *q*) in response to the other person's (*o*) act, that *p* is aware of, can also influence *p*'s behaviour toward *o*. Another important implication of Horowitz et al.'s (1951) research is that every group member attempts to evaluate the group's attitude toward himself/herself, and also to establish his/her position in the group. The authors assume that individuals who are mainly positive toward other group members are likely to take advantage of their position in the group, since they suppose that they will be favoured by the other members. That is because, in their research they found that many statements made in the group were accepted due to the "high positive value of the source", and not for their true value, their cleverness or their rationality. Thus, their results indicated that "value, cleverness or worth themselves are largely a function of who makes the statements and to whom they are made".

Another research confirming the validity and the value of balance theory in understanding human interaction was that of Fillenbaum (1968). The purpose of this study was to determine if the differentiations of entities and of relations made by

Heider (1946) are necessary, and also to investigate the generalization quality of the theory by examining whether the preference for a balance state applies to different classes of subjects. For that reason, Fillenbaum (1968) examined seven different groups of subjects; male students, female students, patients with tuberculosis, attendants of a mental hospital, mental patients who were separated in three groups; those who stayed a long time hospitalized, those who stayed a short time and those who were about to be discharged. The results of this study showed that preference for a balanced state was apparent in all groups. However, a preference for balance manifested more under supposed fictitious conditions, rather than under actual conditions.

More importantly the study confirmed that the categorization and discrimination of entities and relations into types, made by Heider is necessary. That confirming conclusion was drawn from the fact that in examination of situations where both types of entities or both types of relations were evident, lesser preference for balance was found in comparison to situations where one type of entity or relation was present. Moreover, the study found that preference for balance had a stronger relation to the complexity of a situation -namely the presence of various different entities and relations-, rather to the particular type of entity or relation present.

Additionally, regarding the different classes of subjects examined, students were found to hold the strongest preference for balance. Out of the groups of normal persons<sup>9</sup>, tuberculosis patients demonstrated the least preference for balance. The group of mental patients who were about to be discharged, showed almost similar preference for balance with that of the normal groups. Newly admitted mental patients staying hospitalized for a short time showed less preference for balance, but those staying for a long time showed the least preference for balance. Based on this evidence, Fillenbaum (1968) assumed that institutionalization may possibly have an effect on preference for balance. Obviously, the results of this study imply that preference for balance can be diminished under conditions of institutionalization.

In the study of Taylor (1967) the formulations of Heider and Newcomb were utilized in order for attitudinal and liking changes during discussion between two individuals to be examined. The researcher examined four experimental conditions; two of them were created so as to be considered as balanced and the other two as

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<sup>9</sup> Fillenbaum (1968) made a distinction between normal subjects (students, attendants and tuberculosis patients) and mental patients.

imbalanced. The first condition examined a balanced state where, the focal individual  $p$  liked and agreed with the other individual  $o$  at the beginning of a conversation regarding an issue, while as a second balanced state was considered a situation where the focal individual  $p$  disliked and disagreed with the other individual  $o$ . The third condition was considered as imbalanced, referred to a situation where the focal person  $p$  liked and disagreed with the other individual  $o$ , while the fourth condition, also considered as imbalanced, described a situation where the focal individual  $p$  disliked and agreed with the other  $o$ .

Taylor (1967) hypothesized that under conditions of imbalance in a commencing conversation, all the dependant variables of the system tend to change during the conversation in order for balance to be obtained. The dependant variables of the system included the focal individual's attitude toward the conversation topic, the focal individual's perception of the other individual's attitude toward the topic – namely perceived attitude-, the focal individual's degree of liking of the other individual, and also the focal individual's perception of the other individual's degree of liking -namely perceived liking- for him/her. These variables are assumed to be altered more toward a balanced state under conditions of imbalance at the beginning of a conversation than under conditions of initial balance. This research's hypothesis was confirmed when alterations in attitude and perceived attitude were compared to alterations regarding liking, but it was found not to be true when alterations in attitude and perceived attitude were compared to alterations in perceived liking. Thus, from the results of this study, it can be suggested that not all combinations of configurations of variables can maximize balance, but that maximization of balance among all variables may be achieved only when liking and perceived liking are simultaneously of a negative or of a positive sign.

Sampson and Insko (1964) conducted an experiment in order to test some specific implications of the balance or cognitive consistency model of behaviour. Drawing from the notion that individuals can be characterized as having a tendency to maintain consistency, congruence or balance (Zajonc 1960) among their cognitions, the authors wanted to examine the application of the principles of balance and consistency model regarding an ambiguous judgemental situation. The focus of their research was on the implication of the tendency for cognitive consistency, regarding an individual's structuring of an ambiguous judgemental situation, in response to the structuring offered by another individual. Apart from achieving to confirm the

application of the balance or cognitive consistency model of interpersonal behaviour to their research assumptions, they also concluded in certain implications for the social influence and conformity aspects of behaviour. In particular, they found that in spite of the fact that the other individual (*o*) refrained from evident attempts to influence the focal individual (*p*), the occurrence of a situation where *p* accepted or rejected the structuring of a situation offered by the other person (*o*) could exist. The findings suggest that acceptance or rejection of that structuring is related to the relationship between the focal and the other person, as well as to the degree of fitness of the other individual's (*o*) structuring with the pre-existing structuring that the focal individual (*p*) holds. The authors assumed that due to the fact that a great extend of an individual's interpersonal life includes these less direct and often disguised forms of social influence, where the individual becomes aware of the structuring of another individual regarding a certain situation, their findings might be considered as offering a broader scope of interpersonal behaviour faculties. Moreover, it should be noted that the effects the authors found are regarded as "applicable with increasing intensity under conditions of high ego involvement" regarding the focal individual (*p*). Namely, the effects were true when the issue was important for the focal individual (*p*). In case where the issue is less involving, it is assumed that *p* would be expected to experience less tension for the imbalance, and thus there would be less likelihood of altering his/her judgements. Therefore, Sampson and Insko (1964) imply that similarity with a disliked person regarding an unimportant issue would generate minimal stress and pressure to change, in comparison to the similarity regarding an important issue.

Another study based on balance theory was conducted by Broxton (1963). Specifically, the purpose of this study was the exploration of interpersonal attraction factors in relation to roommate satisfaction among college female students. Based on Heider's and Newcomb's theories, Broxton (1963) posited that reciprocal attraction can be analyzed by means of objective similarity or perceived similarity of attitudes. In particular, for the purpose of the study, the focus was based on the notion that individuals are attracted to others whom they perceive to agree with their perception of favourable and unfavourable traits within themselves. It could be implied then, that individuals feel psychologically comfortable to consider that they are understood by another individual who is receptive to their attractive and unattractive qualities and still values a friendly bond with them. According to the principles of balance theory

the author assumed that personality similarity and attitudinal similarity as well, can contribute to congeniality. Indeed, the findings of the research confirmed both the hypotheses that interpersonal attraction among roommates could vary with regard to attitudinal similarity relevant to the self and also that interpersonal attraction of freshmen roommates had a more direct relation to perceived similarity than objective similarity.

#### ***2.2.4 Balance Theory and Communication. Application in the Media Field***

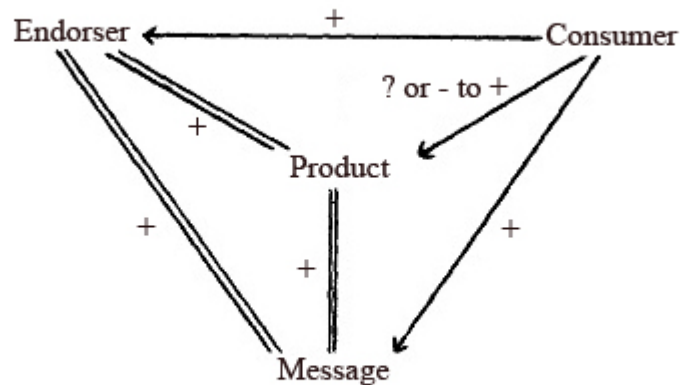
As aforementioned, a system  $p-o-x$  can also describe a communication structure (e.g. as Newcomb's 1953 systems). In this type of structure, as elements can be considered the source, the communication, the message and the receiver, and the relations among these elements can be regarded as unit and attitudinal relations. In terms of the principles of balance theory, it can be assumed that when a communication regarding some topic is in accordance with an individual's attitude toward the specific topic, there is greater likelihood for the communication message to be accepted than rejected. In this system, the underlying notion is that individuals have a tendency to generate evaluations of communications in a way consistent with their relevant attitudes. Apart from the implications regarding the evaluation of communication according to the individual's attitudes in a structural balance system, there also exist implications regarding reciprocal attitudes between the source of communication and the receiver. These implications can be reflected in judgements regarding the credibility of the source (Feather 1964). In this manner, a balance model could be utilized in order to explain the impact of a specific source on the attitudes of the receiver regarding an issue (Mowen 1980). Namely, to explain how the presence of a certain source can influence the way a receiver evaluates his/her attitudes regarding the message transmitted by this source in a communication system. For example, the source might carry particular qualities or be assigned with some sense of credibility or expertise about the issue. Such a case might be met in communication systems in advertising contexts or other brand related mass media contents.

In fact, Mowen (1980) has attempted to explore a balance model and its function in the context of advertising, and more specifically has focused on the special implications that endorsers may have as the sources of message transmission in a communication system. Specifically, Mowen (1980) employed the principles of balance theory in an attempt to explore how endorsers can influence consumer perceptions. His “balance model of endorser effectiveness” is a variation of the general system *p-o-x*. Namely, if the communication situation and its aspects are seen as a system, then the endorser depicted as *E*, transmits a message of information to the receiver, who is also the consumer represented as *C*, regarding a product portrayed as *P*, and all these elements constitute the communication system *C-E-P*. In this system, the cognitive links between consumer (*C*) and endorser (*E*), and between consumer (*C*) and product (*P*), are considered as sentiment relations following Heider’s (1946) specification. Like in the general Heiderian system, sentiment relations denote an affective attitudinal evaluation such as liking or disliking and are of positive or negative sign. Accordingly, the relation between the endorser (*E*) and the product (*P*) refers to a unit relation and denotes that these two elements are associated in some way or are thought to belong together, and this relation can be of a positive or negative sign. According to the general theory, this system is balanced when the product of the signs is of positive value, and imbalanced in the case where the product is of negative value.

Mowen (1980) conceptualized the endorser model based on an extension of balance theory proposed by Feather (1964). Feather (1964) added another element in the general triad. He presented a more extended communication structure, which included a source (*S*), a receiver (*R*), a communication (*C*) and an issue (*I*). This system denotes that a source is transmitting a communication about an issue to a receiver. The notion behind this system is that the source, apart from sending a communication, also takes some position on the issue. To explain the difference with a simple triadic system he gives as an example a situation where a therapist gives his interpretation of a particular symptom to the patient or a lawyer presents an argument about the innocence of his client to a juryman.

Mowen (1980) then, based on Feather’s (1964) extended communication structure, presented his endorser model as consisting of four elements, the source-endorser (*E*), the receiver-consumer (*C*), the issue-product (*P*) and the communication-message (*M*). This system is illustrated in Figure 2.2.4.





Source: Mowen 1980

**Figure 2.2.4** *The balance model of endorser effectiveness*

Through this extended system, and by using signed-digraph analysis it is expected that predictions about the effects of the balancing forces can be made. As Mowen (1980) explains, in this signed-digraph analysis the elements are organized in semicycles. He further explains that a semicycle is characterized by the set points through which a path can be traced by setting an element as the starting point and returning to the exact element avoiding the passage through any element more than one time. For example, in the system above (Figure 2.2.4), he illustrates four semicycles; 1) E-C-P-M-E, 2) E-P-M-E, 3) E-P-C-E and 4) C-P-M-C. In order for balance to be obtained in this system, each semicycle must be balanced. The author then assumes that all relations linked to C are considered as sentiment relations (represented by arrows) and portray C's evaluation of a cognitive entity, E, P or M. This assumption is grounded on the fact that the model concerns the evaluation of the endorser, the message and the product. Another assumption is that all relations which are not linked to C are considered as unit relations (represented by double solid lines) and reflect C's perception of whether or not a unit relation is present between the entities. This assumption is based on the notion that when the consumer is evaluating a relation between cognitive elements that s/he is not involved with, s/he process

information in a more simple way. Mowen (1980) believes that in such a case, consumers are expected to process information globally and to contemplate whether relations or associations exist between the endorser and the message, between the message and the product, and between the endorser and the product, and they will not attempt to make estimations regarding affect between these entities.

With regard to the advertising context, where this system is supposed to exist, Mowen (1980) considers that the most central relationship is that between the consumer and the product. This is because the ultimate purpose of any advertisement is to increase consumers' liking for the product. The author implies that this purpose can be fulfilled when in the advertising communication strong positive links are drawn among the remaining elements. Thus, it can be assumed that in order to facilitate balance when such strong positive links exist, consumers' perception of the product will become more propitious. Accordingly, to resolve imbalance the weakest link between elements is expected to be the one that will change.

Next, the special characteristics of the elements and the relations in the endorser balance model in order to be utilized for the increase of consumer liking toward the product are described. Firstly, the focus is turned to the characteristics of sentiment relations within the model, which link the consumer with the endorser, the message and the product. Mowen (1980) posits that the cognitive consistency forces can be affected by the nature of the endorser and the message and thus, the focus should be turned to the factors that can influence consumer perceptions of the endorser and the message.

#### **2.2.4.1 The Sentiment Relations of the Endorser Balance Model**

##### **The consumer-endorser relation**

Regarding the consumer-endorser relation, Mowen (1980) groups the source characteristics pertinent to sentiment relations in four categories; the similarity between endorser and consumer, the gratification of the consumer's self-evaluative need by the endorser, the endorser's physical attractiveness and lastly, the relevance of the sentiment relation.

*The similarity between endorser and consumer* can be classified in two categories; attitudinal similarity and membership similarity. The first denotes the degree of consumer's perceived similarity of his/her beliefs and attitudes with those of the endorser. Based on the findings of Byrne et al. (1966) who found that "attraction is significantly influenced by proportion of similar attitudes", Mowen (1980) implies that the greater the degree of consumer's perceived attitude similarity with the endorser, the greater the degree of the effect of the endorser's communication will be present. As membership-group similarity is characterized the degree of consumer's perceived similarity with the endorser with regard to social class. Namely, membership similarity refers to how a consumer sees the endorser as representative of his/her own social class attributes. At this point the author notes that although attitudinal similarity is thought to have a more significant influence with regard to attraction in comparison to membership similarity, according to Simons et al. (1970), group membership similarities can be more strong determinants of attraction compared to equivalent dissimilarities.

*The gratification of the consumer's self-evaluative need by the endorser* is drawn upon the principles of Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory. According to Festinger (1954), individuals have a tendency to evaluate their opinions and abilities and Mowen (1980) believes that this notion is relevant to the sentiment relation between the endorser and the consumer. That can be because, in accordance to social comparison theory, in absence of objective non-social means, individuals tend to evaluate their opinions and abilities through comparison with the opinions and abilities of others. Although it might not be easy to acquire objective information regarding the correctness of one's opinions, it is easier to acquire objective information regarding the degree of ability an individual holds when performing a specific task. Moreover, individuals choose as "comparison others" those who are thought to be close to their own opinions and/or abilities in order to make subjective evaluations (Feather 1964). Then, those "comparison others" who satisfy individuals' self-evaluative need can become secondary reinforcers, and possibly, as a result, their perceived attractiveness can be enhanced through their association with this gratification of the self-evaluative need.

Mowen (1980) finds a twofold purpose for the application of social comparison theory to the concept of endorser effectiveness. First, he supports that in cases where products have attributes which are difficult to verify objectively,

endorsers are expected to be most effective. He finds the utilization of endorsers most suitable to promote hidden attributes such as prestige or quality. Second, in cases where the product can satisfy some self-evaluative need, endorsers are, again, expected to be most effective. In particular, when consumers seek for confirmation about their quality consciousness or their ownership of special characteristics (e.g. innovativeness, sexuality, frugality etc.), an endorser can more effectively satisfy a self-evaluative need, and in so doing, s/he enhances his/her attractiveness.

*The endorser's physical attractiveness* can be a factor of pervasive impact regarding the perceptions of an individual. Based on psychological literature, Mowen (1980) posits that physically attractive individuals can be perceived as having better personalities and as being more popular. Thus, it can be supported that an enhanced attraction provoked by a physically attractive individual can directly be transformed into stronger sentiment relations. Hence, the author assumes that, all else being equal, the higher the physical attractiveness of the endorser, the stronger the sentiment relation will be perceived by the consumer.

*The relevance of the sentiment relation*, as conceptualized by Mowen (1980) means that the influencing factors of a sentiment relation should at least support or be neutral regarding to the unit relation between the endorser and the consumer. That can be supported by the proposition of Simons et al. (1970) who implied that an attitude alteration toward the position promoted by the source relies on the perceived similarity or dissimilarity with regard to relevance or irrelevance, attitudinal or group membership similarity. They also proposed that relevant attitudinal similarities are expected to positively affect attitude change. Namely, perceived similarity should be rationally relevant to the particular communication in order for the endorser to be effective. Thus, Mowen (1980) posits that the relevance of the sentiment relation to unit relation is important not only with regard to the influence toward attitude change, but also to the utilization of appropriate endorsers who can satisfy self-evaluative needs.

### **The consumer-message relation**

Taking the assumption of Feather (1964), who implies that the attitude of the source or the receiver can be mirrored in the way that s/he makes evaluations about the

communication, Mowen (1980) supports that the consumer makes evaluations about the message with regard to the degree that s/he agrees or disagrees, accepts or rejects, or is convinced or not convinced by it. According to Mowen's (1980) description, the message is defined by all the elements of the communication independently of the nature and the characteristics of the sender. With regard to this notion, it can be implied that this definition includes the channel of communication and the actual content of the message. The way a message is communicated by means of presentation, clarity or ambiguousness can determine the affective or sentiment reactions. Another factor that can determine the affective reaction to a message is the presentation of product attributes which are considered as important by the consumer. Moreover, the message perception is expected to be influenced by the order the arguments are presented and the degree of conclusions which are drawn.

Most importantly, consumers' reactions to the message can also be influenced by balance forces. When a unit relation exists between the endorser and the message and the consumer likes the endorser, the message is expected to be evaluated in a positive manner. However, in case where there is a predetermined negative perception toward the product by the consumer and a message is strongly associated with the product, it is expected that the consumer will most likely reject the message (Mowen 1980).

#### **2.2.4.2 The Unit Relations of the Endorser Balance Model**

According to Mowen (1980), in a balance model, it can only be assumed how unit relations are comprehended by the focal person. In the case of the endorser balance model for example, it is assumed that the consumer can only make inferences regarding the unit relations between the endorser and the message, the message and the product, and the endorser and the product. In the conceptualization of balance theory there is not much clarity about the nature of this inferential process. However, Heider (1958) posits that individuals are comprehending relations through common-sense psychology. In everyday life, individuals form opinions about other individuals and about social situations. In this way, other individuals' actions are interpreted and predictions can be made with regard to their actions under specific circumstances.

Although these notions are not always formulated, they often function adequately, thus achieving a sufficient description of the subject matter with the potential of making predictions. In this way, individuals are provided with the principles with which they can construct their picture of the social environment and with which their reactions to this environment are guided.

Another factor that may influence the cognitive configuration of unit relations is the consumers' evaluations regarding the causality of the endorser's actions. Mowen (1980) supports that through attribution theory, the factors which have an influence on the perception of action causality can be specified. Predictions about the circumstances under which consumers perceive the presence of endorser-product, endorser-message and message-product unit relations can also be made through attribution theory. The unit relations between endorser and message, endorser-product and message-product of the endorser effectiveness balance model are presented next.

### **The endorser-message unit relation**

Firstly, in this balance system, it is assumed that the consumer makes evaluations regarding the degree of association between the endorser and the product. Most possibly, the first evaluation that a consumer performs in this process of evaluations is about the reasons behind the endorser's presentation of the message. The consumer estimates the extent to which the endorser's action is due to a true belief of the message's veracity or due to other external incentives. Namely, the consumer evaluates the causality of the endorser's action to communicate the specific message.

According to Eagly and Chaiken (1975), attributing a position to external reality instead to a specific characteristic of the communicator of the message, or to an aspect of his/her situation is expected to increase persuasiveness of the message. Thus, it can be assumed that messages are expected to be more persuasive with regard to the degree that they support unanticipated positions.

Mowen (1980) supports that Kelley's (1971) "discounting" and "augmenting" principles are applicable to the above expectancy assumption. The "discounting principle" refers to the case where the role of a certain cause in producing a certain result is discounted when other reasonable facilitating causes also exist. Namely,

when a certain effect can be explained by a cause, this cause has a decreasing significance if other rational causes which can also explain the same effect, are present. The “augmenting principle” refers to the case where the role of a certain cause in producing a certain result is augmented when reasonable inhibitory causes exist. More simply, that means that a greater importance is attached to a possible cause that produces a specific effect, when inhibitory causes exist. According to Mowen (1980), these principles can jointly function in order to explain causal attributions and can also be applied to explain the relation between endorser and message. He explains that a close positive unit relation can be developed in case where the endorser is thought to act in an unexpected manner, namely, in a way which is not in accordance to the situational pressures of the environment. In such a case, the “augmentation principle” is expected to be utilized, and consumers will perceive that the endorser truly believes the message s/he is communicating, and that his/her action is not based on external incentives such as payment from advertisers. For example, when a communication message is transmitted by ordinary people, such as advertising testimonials from people on the street -who act as the endorsers of a product- can be perceived as more believable sources of information by consumers, because they might think that they are not paid as famous actors would, if they endorsed a product. In such cases, consumers have little reason to discount the endorsers’ messages and this can result to a strong perceived relation between the endorser and the message.

The evaluation of the relation between endorser and message can also be based on the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of the endorser, namely if the endorser is perceived by consumers as being well informed and trustworthy with regard to the issue of the message (Feather 1964). In case where consumers perceive that there are other reasons behind the endorser’s communication of the message, they tend to discount the message and consider it as untrustworthy. Moreover, an endorser’s perceived trustworthiness or credibility might be the result of consumers’ previous experiences with the endorser. That means that in cases where previous messages from the endorser have been perceived as credible, consumers are expected to be more prone in perceiving the current message as credible too (Mowen 1980).

## **The endorser-product relation**

According to the endorser effectiveness balance model conceptualization, there are two factors which are expected to influence the endorser-product relation. The first factor refers to the assumption that consumers seek to understand if the endorser relates himself/herself to the product due to the product's positive characteristics or due to the fact that s/he wants to relate himself/herself to any product. It should be noted though, that in order for the consumer to make such judgements, a prerequisite is to have several previous experiences of the endorser's advocacies. The second factor refers to the consumers' perceptions regarding the endorser's expertise about the product. According to Feather (1964), judgements of credibility and certain information about the attitudes of the source toward an issue (in this case toward a product) within a balance model, allow predictions of the attitudes of source toward the communication and the issue. Thus, when an endorser is thought to possess expertise or be well informed toward a product, and also shows volition to associate himself/herself with this product, it is expected that the relation between endorser and product will be strengthened.

*The attributional perspective.* Mowen (1980) considers the above mentioned first influential factor of the endorser-product relation from an attributional perspective. Namely, consumers are expected to determine the cause of the endorser's volition for association with a product. Through the perspective of balance theory, if consumers perceive the endorser's association with a product to be a result of other incentives and not the characteristics of the product, or if their previous experiences with the endorser makes them believe that s/he is prone to associate himself/herself with any product, then the unit relation between the endorser and the current product will be weak.

Based on Kelley's (1967) criteria of attributions, distinctiveness, consistency and consensus, Mowen (1980) identifies how they can be utilized by consumers in order to make judgements for the endorser-product relation and consequently to understand if the endorser's act is based on true belief to the product or on other reasons. In particular, when the endorser is observed to have a unique relation with a specific product and no others, then the act of endorsement is characterized for its distinctiveness. Thus, it is likely that consumers will perceive that the cause of the



endorser's association with the specific product might be due to the positive characteristics of the product. Hence, it can be assumed that distinctiveness can result to a strong endorser-product unit relation. In fact, in a later experimental study of Mowen and Brown (1981), the results showed that with regard to the criterion of distinctiveness, only the effects of distinctiveness information as derived from attribution theory were supported. Namely, when the endorser was uniquely associated with only one product, the product was viewed more favourably and generally consumers had more positive responses to the promotional message. However, the results for distinctiveness with regard to balance theory failed to support the analysis of relations. For example, product perceptions were hypothesized to change as a result of a highly positive endorser who is forming a unit relation with the product. Then, high distinctiveness information would be expected to influence consumers' perceptions of the unit relation between endorser and product and consumer's perceptions of the product as well. Nevertheless, their findings showed that those perceptions were not influenced in the same way by distinctiveness's variations as were variables gauging product's perceptions.

Regarding consistency, Mowen (1980) considers it as the existence of the relation between endorser and product over time and modality. That is, if the endorser's association with the product occurs many times, over different media and in different situations, then this association will be perceived as consistent, and the greater the consistency, the stronger the unit relation will be perceived.

Lastly, consensus is considered by the author as the extent to which other individuals have the same perceptions for the product as the endorser. In this way, it is more believable that the endorser is associated with the specific product due to its positive characteristics and not due to other reasons. Then, if the perception of consensus exists, the unit relation between endorser and product is perceived as strong (Mowen 1980).

*The perceived expertise of the endorser about the product.* The second factor which is expected to influence the perception of the endorser-product unit relation is the degree of expertise the endorser holds with regard to the product. That is because an expert source of information is expected to generate more persuasive attitudes toward the product (Mowen 1980). For example, an athlete can be considered as an expert with regard to a product such as athletic shoes. In case where the athlete would become an endorser promoting a specific brand of athletic shoes, the association

between him/her and the product is expected to make a communication message more persuasive. From the perspective of the balance model, an attitude change to obtain balance may result from the cognitive restructuring generated from the consumers' positive affect toward the endorser and the endorser's strong association with the product due to his/her expertise. Thus, when there is a strong relation between the consumer and the endorser and the endorser and the product, the third relation between consumer and product is expected to become more positive due to the functioning of balance forces. Thus, it can be assumed that in a promotional communication message, the endorser's expertise is expected to augment consumer's perception of the unit relation between the endorser and the product. Mowen (1980) also notes that in the balance model a distinction exists between the concepts of expertise and trustworthiness which can be considered as dimensions of the bigger concept of credibility. For example, the fact that an endorser is an expert on some issue does not directly mean that the message s/he is communicating is trustworthy. However, the balance model can provide a way of explaining the effects of the two dimensions of source credibility. He states, that perceptions of trustworthiness are considered to be formed in the endorser-message relation, while perceptions of expertise are thought to occur in the endorser-product relation.

### **The message-product relation**

In Mowen's (1980) balance model, it is assumed that consumers establish the existence of a unit relation between the message and the product, through the examination of the extent to which the message is related to or associated with the product. Consumers thus establish this relation by implicitly comparing their knowledge about the product with the product information presented in the communication of the endorser. If consumers perceive that the endorsement matches their previous knowledge about the product, then the unit relation between message and the product is formed.

The prior knowledge of the product is one of the aspects through which consumers can make judgements about the matching of a product to the endorsement. According to Bloom (1977), consumers can also make judgements regarding a product based on their expectations of the product. Thus, the concept which is built

up around the product based either on previous knowledge or expectations of the product, should match the actual product. Namely, the concept of the product should be clearly communicated and the actual product should reinforce the concept.

If the concept of the product which is presented through the message is liked by the consumers -namely if the consumer-message relation is positive- and it is perceived as suitable for the nature and the characteristics of the product, then it is expected that the endorsement message will be effective.

#### **2.2.4.3 Evaluation of the Endorser Balance Model**

Mowen's (1980) endorser effectiveness balance model, can predict that consumers' liking for a product can be augmented if positive cognitive relations are established among the elements of endorser, message, product and consumer of the system. By applying the principles of balance theory to the context of endorsement communication and investigating the factors which can influence the cognitive relations in that system, Mowen contributed to the support of the balance model's generalizability and its application on other areas apart from social and psychology studies. This variation of the balance model to the marketing context of endorsement might be also suitable to explain other marketing related areas.

In fact, it could be implied that through this balance model variation, elements and relations are explored in more detail in a specific marketing communication context where attitude change, in order to obtain balance, might be a little more complicated in comparison to a general interaction context. That is because in marketing communication, consumers who are the receivers of the message might be more resistant to accept it due to the fact that they are more suspicious of the message's promotional intentions.

It could also be assumed that this variation of the balance model can provide the possibility of a promising application of the balance theory's principles to the consumer behaviour context of product placement in movies and television programs. The principles of balance theory might be employed to explain the way a communication message, aimed to be delivered to consumers through the practice of product placement, can evoke attitude change toward the product. In a product

placement context, a message delivered through the medium of cinema or television, and the relative elements around it, could be also considered as a system. In terms of a structural balance model, this system's elements and its relations could be seen as very similar to the endorsement effectiveness balance model. In this case, as the focal person-receiver-consumer could be considered the viewer, as the other person-sender-endorser could be considered a media figure, and the object could refer to the placed product.

As it can be observed in various media contexts, the media figures can act as communicators, in disguise, of promotional messages and of specific products. In such cases, viewers/consumers are expected to make evaluations of products and the relevant communication message through a more complicated system of opinion and attitude formation and change.

Moreover, in media contexts, especially in movies and television programs, the tactic of product placement might involve more than one communication message regarding different products. In a movie or in an episode of a television program, there can be observed a simultaneous exposure to more than one product. Thus, it could be expected that the attention and the evaluations toward more than one stimulus or message might require more complicated cognitive systems to be stimulated in order for viewers to elaborate the messages. Accordingly, the results of these elaborations can be more difficult to be predicted and to have the desired affect according to the promotional intentions of marketing practitioners.

For example, Levin et al. (1996) supported that when different brands are presented together, in a combination of positive, neutral and negative brand names, there is a possibility to predict the outcomes of these combinations through balance theory, since it regards the direction of attitude change. This variation of combinations may lead to different evaluations of the different brands but may also influence the resulting overall evaluation. Indeed, according to balance theory, judgements of communication are expected to be based on balancing the impressions of each element in the system and the impression of each individual element (e.g. each placed brand) is expected to be adjusted to fit the evaluation of the entire system. However, in a product placement communication context, especially in the case where more than one product co-exist, the magnitude of each placed product, the way it is presented, and the media figure that it is associated with, might have very

different, and more difficult to predict effects with regard to obtaining balance in such a complicated system.

### ***2.2.5 Attitude Alignment in Close Relationships***

Drawing from Newcomb's (1953) propositions that "it is an almost constant human necessity to orient oneself toward objects in the environment and also toward persons associated with those same objects", one could imply that orientations in terms of attitudes toward objects, and attraction toward individuals and objects associated with those individuals (Davis & Rusbult 2001) are an inevitable, conscious or unconscious tendency of individuals in all concepts and contexts of interaction in the social world.

As analyzed earlier in this chapter, an individual's interaction with a media figure which can generate the development of a parasocial relationship between the viewer and the media figure is one of the numerous interactions present in an individual's environment and social world. Moreover, parasocial interactions and real interpersonal interactions have been found to be very similar, they are perceived and experienced by individuals in a similar way, and may not carry distinguished characteristics in individuals' minds (Giles 2002). Additionally, Horton & Wohl (1956) who first conceptualized the concept of parasocial interaction have suggested that parasocial relationships and social relationships are systemically similar. Therefore, it could be assumed that balance theory principles, and consequently the theoretical underpinnings of attitude alignment and change, can be considered as having the faculty to explore the way that parasocial interactions function.

As parasocial relationships are formed through an ongoing process of successive exposure to media figures, and subsequently, interaction with them, it can be assumed that they could be treated as close relationships. As such, it can be suggested that the concept of attitude alignment which refers to interacting individuals, can explain the possibility of individuals' attitude change in order to achieve greater attitudinal congruence (Davis & Rusbult 2001) in the parasocial relationship context. Namely, it can be implied that in cases where in a parasocial relationship, individuals may experience discomfort if they discover that their attitudes are not consistent with those of their attached media figure, they will be

inclined to bring their attitudes in closer alignment with those of the media figure, in order to achieve congruence.

The rationality of this assumption could be also justified by the fact that previous studies have revealed that individuals are more inclined to align their attitudes toward others' whom they like (Sampson & Insko 1964, Chaiken & Eagly 1983). And as discussed earlier, parasocial relationships' formation is characterized by the concepts of similarity and liking. That means that viewers tend to form parasocial relationships with media figures that they like and perceive to be similar to them in various aspects<sup>10</sup>. Thus, a parasocial relationship can be regarded as a system in which individuals are inclined to keep in balance, according to the principles of balance theory.

In such a system, the viewer could be considered as the focal person  $p$ , the media figure as the other person  $o$  and an attitude object (e.g. placed product) as  $x$ . In a balanced state, if  $p$  likes  $o$ ,  $p$  is expected to feel comfortable when  $p$  and  $o$  have similar attitudes with regard to  $x$ . On the contrary, if  $p$  likes  $o$ , but they hold different attitudes about  $x$ , then  $p$  is expected to feel uncomfortable and the system will be imbalanced. As already discussed, imbalanced states can produce tension, negative affect and psychological arousal (Jordan 1953, Taylor 1967). According to Davis and Rusbult (2001), in interaction situations, there are several properties which can increase the degree of tension experienced in an imbalanced state. Increased tension because of imbalance can be the result of the increases of any of the following properties; attraction to the other individual  $o$ , importance of the attitude object  $x$ , extent of commitment to own attitude, and relevance of the attitude object  $x$  to the relationship (Newcomb 1959). Namely, as already mentioned, the strength of the relations among the elements of the system enhances the imbalanced provoked tension when dissimilarities are ascertained with regard to the attitude object.

When discomfort is experienced in a relationship due to attitudinal dissimilarities, it is expected that individuals attempt to obtain balance through the principle of least effort. Namely, individuals are expected to reduce discomfort through the least psychologically effortful mechanism (Davis & Rusbult 2001). Thus, regarding the properties mentioned above, individuals will attempt to align their attitudes toward the other person with regard to strength of relationship, importance of

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<sup>10</sup> For details please refer to the parasocial interaction section of this chapter 2.1.

the attitude object to the focal individual and to the other person, and relevance of the issue to the situation. For example, an individual  $p$  is expected to alter his/her attitude toward an issue  $x$ , more easily if  $x$  is not very important for him/her but is perceived as important for the other person  $o$  that  $p$  likes. In strong relationships between  $p$  and  $o$ , attitude change is also more probable in order to achieve balance. For example, if  $p$  wants to be liked by  $o$ , or  $p$  admires  $o$ , or wants to be similar to  $o$  then  $p$  is expected to be more inclined to change the attitude toward  $x$  if  $p$  perceives that the cost of changing the attitude is less than experiencing imbalance in his/her relationship with  $o$ .

Sometimes, individuals may also spontaneously or even unconsciously align their attitudes according to those of others just because they wish to become more similar to those others (Davis & Rusbult 2001) or to fit in a referent other group. Moreover, change or adjustment of attitudes regarding an issue  $x$  in the direction promoted by others, might be also the result of lack of information regarding the issue  $x$ . When a liked, admired or loved  $o$  offers an attitude direction regarding  $x$  that  $p$  has no knowledge of or no strong feelings to, it is expected that  $p$  will align his/her attitudes with those of  $o$ , when little competitiveness toward another direction is present. That is because, contact with the other, might offer new information about an issue and also demonstrate how to be very much like members of one's own group (Katz 1960). As Newcomb (1959) posits, "socialized human individuals are as rewarding to each other ...as communicators, suppliers of new information and as confirmers or correctors" of previous held attitudes.

However, individuals are expected to be less inclined to alter attitudes that perceive as central to their personal identity (Davis & Rusbult 2001). The centrality of an attitude denotes the role of the attitude as an integral part of an individual's value system which is strongly related to the self concept. Thus, when an attitude is tightly linked to a value system which is related to the individual's conception of the self, the procedures of change are more complex (Katz 1960).

As previously mentioned, in the case of parasocial relationships, the media figure can be considered by viewers as a referent other, as someone with whom they might identify and inclined to be similar to, or imitate. In these terms thus, it is possible that attitude change might be induced by the stereotyped influences promoted by the media figure or by the identification with the other which points to an emotional tie between the viewer and the media figure symbols. According to Katz

(1960), this can mean that individuals incorporate the other's values as an expression of their own inner convictions. This identification and incorporation of the other's values may also result from an insecure individual's attachment to the strength of the other, to compensate for his/her own weakness. Moreover, attitude change might be evoked from the role of the media figure as a referent other. Katz (1960) implies that in such a case there might be less emotional attachment and that individuals may turn to certain others (referent others) for their standards of judgement. In that sense, the referent other functions as an aid which supplies cognitive structure for the individuals' uncertainties or lack of knowledge.

According to Katz (1960), generalizations of the several principles that individuals utilize to organize their own groupings of attitudes, can be made. These principles that individuals utilize can be considered as "the objective similarities of the referents of the attitudes, their own experiences with these referents, their own needs and their own ideas of causation and of the nature of proper relationships". However, he believes that generalizations regarding attitude change are more difficult to be drawn. That may be because, the organization of attitudes and values in the personality, taken as a whole, can be very differentiated. There are many dimensions in this organization that can allow individuals to absorb and adjust to change without major modification of their attitudes. A second reason might be the fact that generalization of attitudes progresses along lines of the individuals' own psychological groupings rather than lines of conventional sociological groupings. Thus, in order for generalizations to be made, it might be better to be focused on individuals' own patterns of beliefs and values (Katz 1960).

In the context of parasocial relationships attitude alignment toward the attitudes of the attached media figure can be considered as governed by the same or similar properties and functions as those of close interpersonal relationships. Thus, based on the existing balance theory and attitude alignment literature, it could be expected that parasocial relationships may function as interpersonal relationships with regard to cognitive consistency achievement.



## 2.3 Genre Theory

Genre theory is part of literary theory and since classical times its principal task is the classification of literature into specific types. Since their creation, literary works have been categorized as belonging to variously defined general types, such as poetry, prose and drama which includes comedy and tragedy as further sub-categories (Chandler 1997). In mass media studies, genre is considered to be a cultural practice which denotes the attempt of structuring some order into the wide range of media works that circulate in modern culture for the convenience of producers and audiences (Fiske 1987). For that reason, mass media studies have incorporated genre theory and have also adjusted the norms of the theory according to the particular elements which compose and characterize the media industry. Whilst the use of genre theory in media studies is the same as it is for literary studies, namely it is utilized to classify the works of media to specific types, contemporary media genres have a tendency to be related more to specific forms than to universal forms, such as those of comedy and tragedy (Chandler 1997). Namely, in media studies and the media industry there can be observed countless genres, sub-genres and hybrid genres (genres that share attributes of two or more genres). In media studies, the classification and hierarchical taxonomy is not always a neutral and objective procedure. Making definite distinctions between one genre and another might be a difficult task, since in media works, genres often overlap or present a mixture of genres. Some genres can be easily recognizable almost intuitively by most people in modern society, due to the fact that they are familiar with them, but it might be difficult to be accurately defined (Chandler 1997). Some specific features can be considered as characteristics of a genre but may not be unique to it. However, the relative prominence, combination and functionality of these features can be distinctive to a genre (Neale 1980).

Conventionally, the tendency is to define genres based on the notion that they represent particular conventions of content -in terms of themes or settings-, and of form -in terms of structure and style- which are shared by the texts which are considered as belonging to them. However, such definitions of genres based on textual properties might be problematic. For example, some films might seem to be in alignment with one specific genre in terms of content, but with another genre in terms

of form (Chandler 1997). This problem might lie in the fact that genres in mass media have traditionally been conceived of and studied as textual systems like in literary studies, without acknowledging the role of the media industries in creating and describing genres (Mittel 2004) and the role of the audience that may govern the popular taste for specific genres at given times (Fiske 1987). Particularly in the media studies and the media industry, the understanding of works of art generically, establishes their value in their common qualities, because these shared conventions, apart from forming connections with other texts in the genre, they also form connections between the text and the audiences, between the text and producers and between producers and audiences. Thus, the generic conventions of media works are so important due to the fact that they comprise the principle way of understanding and constructing the relationship among the producers, the text and the audience (Fiske 1987).

The conventions shared between different media works are the structural elements of genre which are shared between producers and audiences. These conventions represent the “ideological concerns of the time in which they are popular” and are essential for the pleasure that audiences require from a genre at the time (Fiske 1987). Conventions can be ideological and social, and sometimes they have been mistakenly considered as a “formula” that characterizes the genre. However, a formula is considered by Fiske (1987) as “an industrial and economic translation of conventions” which is necessary in order for efficient popular culture products to be created, and it should not be appraised by aesthetic criteria.

In media studies, the definition, classification and understanding of genres, has often raised theoretical disagreements among theorists. The weight assigned to different criteria of media works in order to define, classify and understand genres has offered several theoretical perspectives of genre theory in the mass media. These approaches to genre theory in mass media studies, can be considered as denoting not only the complexity of the industry and its countless works, but also the fact that the media industry is always evolving, because it follows or guides the constant changes of popular culture.

### ***2.3.1 Theoretical Approaches to Genre***

In relevant literature of media studies (mostly film and television studies), one can observe the processes through which genre theory has been treated by theorists in order to follow the development and evolvement of media works in the industry through the years (e.g. following the works of Feuer 1987, Fiske 1987, Neal 1990, Neale & Krutnik 1990, Altman 1984, Mittel 2001, 2004). For example, it can be observed that genre theory in media studies begun with traditional textual approaches, having their foundations on literary genre analysis. Expectedly, through the years, theorists developed further approaches in order to take into consideration the exploration of contemporary elements of the media industry, the relevant questions that emerged through their study and the particular spectrums that different mediums such as cinema and television needed to be seen through. For instance, Mittel (2001) posits that formal and aesthetic approaches to texts or structuralist theories of generic meanings can be regarded as outdated to some extent and also impede the development of genre theory which applies specifically to the medium of television. For that reason, Mittel (2001), attempted to re-examine the assumptions of traditional approaches to genre in the light of contemporary theoretical paradigms with the aim to construct a cultural approach to genre theory with regard to the medium of television.

#### **2.3.1.1. Traditional Approaches to Genre**

Traditional approaches to genre analysis have considered genres as components of the text (Mittel 2001) and have been studied in terms of textual systems (Mittel 2004). Usually, in relevant literature, approaches of genre theory are labeled according to their main features or the type of activity through which the genre analysis is performed (Altman 1984). Due to that reason and the several theoretical orientations existing, one can observe many different labels of approaches which sometimes overlap or even refer to the same type of analysis. However, most theorists are acknowledging the basic assumptions of the most utilized traditions in genre analysis

and more or less they all employ these assumptions to develop their own theoretical concerns.

One of these traditions considers *issues of definition*, in the sense that it seeks to identify the main elements which a genre comprises of, through the examination of texts with the aim to define the formal systems that represent the essence of that specific genre. A second traditional approach considers *issues of interpretation*, and involves the exploration of textual meanings of genres and their positioning within broader social contexts. Within this traditional approach several theoretical orientations have evolved, such as ritual, ideological, structuralist and cultural orientations. Another approach considers *issues of history*, in the sense that it focuses on the evolutionary dynamics of genres (Mittel 2001). This approach centers its attention on following a chronicle of the development, deployment and even disappearance of the characteristic structure of which a particular genre comprises of (Altman 1984).

Another set of approaches that has been suggested for the construction of categories of genres is that of Feuer (1987 as in Fiske 1987). The *aesthetic* strategy considers certain textual characteristics of media works according to which genres can be categorized, and can be regarded as similar to the aforementioned first traditional approach. The second classification method is labeled as *ritual* strategy and takes into consideration the elements of the media industry and the audience, in the sense that it regards genre as a conventional repetitive exchange of cultural concerns and values between the industry and the audience. Through this exchange, shared cultural concerns are found in generic conventions and according to these, genres can be located within their social context. The third approach which Fiske (1987) criticizes as problematic is labeled *ideological* and considers the definitions that genres are given in order to lead audiences to advertisers and to “structure the dominant ideology into their conventions”. It can be assumed that in this way, genre can be seen as a means of social control with the aim to reproduce a dominant ideology. Through this perspective it is implied that the genre places the audience in a certain position to construct specific ideologies and values (Feuer 1992 as in Chandler 1997). Namely, this notion suggests that viewers’ meanings of media works can be “influenced by the genres they are fitted into” (Fiske 1987).

The *aesthetic* method and any similar method of genre categorization which focuses on the textual assumption, has received criticism from media theorists in the

sense that it is the least productive strategy. Fiske (1987) considers the difficulty with purely textual genre definitions to be the fact that there is a tendency to attach specific characteristics within genre confines in such a way, that it seldom fits any specific instance.

Mittel's (2001) criticism regarding the textual assumption accepts the fact that genres indeed can categorize texts, but his opposition is that there is a critical difference between the conception of genre as a category of text and the treatment of the genre as a component of the text. He supports that most studies of the genre withhold this distinction and implies that the members of any certain category cannot create, define or compose the category itself. A category connects distinct elements under a label for cultural convenience. But even though the members of a certain category might all hold some immanent attributes that link them together, there could be nothing intrinsic about the category itself (Mittel 2001). For example, a genre seen textually might be defined by a provisional set of characteristics, but can also be modified each time a new example is produced. Any media work may bear the central characteristics of its assigned genre but it is high likely that it will include some other characteristics from another genre. Thus, each new example might shift the genre's confines and create different definitions. In this way, an intergeneric set of connections among conventions might emerge, involving various points of convergence that may form the foci, but not the confines of the genre when defined textually (Fiske 1987). That means that although the main characteristics might not change, the category does, because the category itself emerges from the connections that group the elements together and the cultural context within which it operates (Mittel 2001).

Moreover, Mittel (2001) supports that many different components can be found in texts but only some of them are chosen to be defined as generic properties. Likewise, when a media work possesses characteristics from more than one genre, its ascription to one genre or another involves the decision of which characteristics are considered as most important (Fiske 1987).

This observed, from theorists, diversity of trait, implies that there might be nothing definite directing the way which texts could be generically classified. Sometimes, a text might shift to another genre as the perceived importance of certain characteristics which positioned it to a specific genre might be altered according to the shift of cultural contexts. Then, if the same text can be categorized under different

genres, it can be assumed that media works' generic definitions might be problematic if the analysis is based only on textual assumptions (Mittel 2001). Fiske (1987) suggests that other factors, such as the influence from cultural practices of the industry and the audiences, might be more influential than textual characteristics in the process of determining genres. Mittel (2001) also agrees with the notion that genres are composed by the audiences and industry's cultural practices and thus implies that genres are not intrinsic to texts. And although genres are categories of texts, solely texts cannot determine or produce their own categorization. Thus, he proposes that a more productive approach to genre could be through the conception of genres as discursive practices.

### **2.3.1.2 Genres as Discursive Practices**

Based on Foucault's conceptualization for discursive formations, Mittel (2001) suggests that by considering genres as a property and function of discourse, the examination of the ways that various forms of communication function in order to constitute definitions and meanings of genres, can be more productive than a solely textual analysis.

In any case, discourse refers to a system of representation that has been evolved socially in order to produce and circulate a coherent set of meanings regarding a topic area. This set of meanings represents the interests of the part of society within which the discourse originates, and which aims to ideologically establish these meanings into common sense. Thus, discourse is a social act which can promote a dominant ideology, and for that reason, can also be referred to as a discursive practice. An account of discourse involves a topic area, a social origin and an ideological basis. The media industries often institutionalize discourses, meaning that they are structured by a socially developed set of conventions which are accepted by the industry and consumers (Fiske 1987).

In that sense, discursive formations can also refer to historically and culturally specific systems of thought and can be considered as conceptual categories which function toward defining cultural experiences within larger systems. Thus, Mittel

(2001) suggests that genre analysis seems to fit perfectly into the account of this practice, if the aim is to explain the way a category can become culturally salient.

In examination of generic discourses, the analysis focuses on the contextualized generic practices which are circulated around and through texts. In such an analysis the generic expectations of the audiences must be taken under consideration (Mittel 2001). Namely, to identify which generically verisimilitudinous ingredients constitute audiences' pleasure and thus attract them to view media works of a specific genre (Neal 1990). Into account must also be taken the media industry's generic expectations. These media industry's expectations involve the identification of the generic ingredients of media works which are perceived as popular by the industry, the way that mass-product popular genres are understood within an economic context, and of course the implications this understanding has on media works (Neal 1990). Explicitly, in a discursive analysis the terms and definitions that circulate around any particular instance of genre and the way that specific cultural concepts are connected to specific genres, are examined (Mittel 2001).

Mittel (2001) suggests that discursive practices can be classified in three basic types with regard to the way they work in order to constitute genres; *definition*, where in a media work the identification of a popularly attributed characteristic to a specific genre denotes the possibility for the specific media work to be ascribed to that genre (e.g. the instance where a viewer identifies a laugh track and assigns the program to the genre of sitcom), *interpretation*, where meaning is assigned to a specific media work and denotes the possibility that this media work can be classified in a genre where relevant meanings are identified (e.g. the instance where a media work is interpreted as reflecting and reinforcing the status quo and is assigned to the genre of sitcom due to previous experiences that such meanings can be identified in sitcoms) and *evaluation*, where media works can be evaluated based on non-specific tastes of the audience or the critics of the time (e.g. sitcoms are more entertaining than soap operas).

The employment of these discursive practices in analyzing genres can be better comprehended by the explanation of the verisimilitude concept as conceived by Neal (1990), which can be considered as denoting the conception of public opinion or common knowledge that most individuals develop in the modern world.

In Neal's (1990) conception, genres are also composed by specific systems of expectations and assumptions that viewers hold, and through which they interact with

media works during the viewing process. These systems provide viewers with a means of recognition and understanding, which help them to render media works and their included elements, by making media works intelligible and thus explicable. For example, if during the viewing of a media work, a character starts singing, the viewer will assume that the media work is a musical, namely a specific kind of work in which otherwise unmotivated singing would not be expected, and s/he will expect that more singing is likely to occur, since musicals follow a certain pattern.

Thus, such systems of expectations and assumptions require knowledge of various systems of plausibility, motivation, justification and belief, which Neal (1990) considers as regimes of verisimilitude. For Neal (1990), verisimilitude involves notions of propriety, namely what is appropriate and thus probable. Verisimilitude regimes vary according to genre (e.g. singing in a musical is considered appropriate and thus expected and intelligible, while singing in a thriller is not).

Hence, these regimes involve rules, norms and laws. For a media work to be considered as having generic verisimilitude it must conform to the rules of the genre (e.g. a musical has to have singing). But there is also another verisimilitude that refers to the relation between the discourse and what individuals believe as being true. Neal (1990) regards this relation as a broader social or cultural verisimilitude. In this case, this relation is established between the media works and a “scattered discourse” which simultaneously belongs to each individual and to all individuals of a society without one person being able to claim ownership (Neal 1990).

Scattered discourse is not only produced by culture, but also, in modern societies, by the society and whatever powers exist within it (e.g. political). A discourse is, at all times, stemming from a socially identifiable point and is serving “the interests of the groups around that point by making sense of their real”, which appears as common sense (Fiske 1987).

In that manner, generic regimes of verisimilitude can be considered as public, as widely known, as public opinion, as common sense. The media industry also responds to this social or cultural verisimilitude that emerges from public opinion. The recurring nature of genre production and consumption shows that the audiences’ reception of previous experiences with specific genres plays an important role for the industry. Successful genres can be considered as those which the audience marks out through its collective response. Thus, the media industry’s genre decisions (for productions) can be considered as a response to collective cultural expression



(Williams as in Neal 1990). From this perspective, genre may then act, as an agreed code that connects producers and audiences (Fiske 1987).

Through this collective explanation, it seems that the discursive approach can provide a more collective framework of genre analysis. Rather than examining texts as restricted and stable objects of analysis, “texts are viewed as sites of discursive practices” (Mittel 2001). In this way, media texts still function as important sites of generic discourses but they are examined on the same level and in conjunction with other sites such as the media industry’s practices and the audiences’ expectations.

In a discursive approach the focus is turned to the breadth of discursive enunciations emerging around any given instance, through the outlining of all possible articulations of genre and their positioning within larger contexts.

These articulations of genre can be found in a wide range of sources such as reviews, audience practices, production manuals, advertisements and of course, the texts (Mittel 2001), namely from all possible sites where generic characteristics can be identified (Neale 1990). By connecting all these discourses, large-scale patterns of generic definitions, meanings and hierarchies can emerge. And although discontinuities and diversifications among definitions and meanings might also emerge, generic discourses lead toward larger regularities that offer stability and coherence in the genre’s formation. In the analysis of generic discourses the aim is the exploration of the true and plausible ways in which genres are “culturally defined, interpreted and evaluated” and not the generation of conclusive and “official” definitions of genre (Mittel 2001).

Moreover, through a discursive approach a genre can be examined by a diachronic and historic perspective (Mittel 2001). The sources from which the articulations of genre are identified, such as reviews, advertisements, production manuals and all industrial and journalistic enunciations that record generic discourses, constitute critical evidence for the comprehension of the industry’s and the audiences’ generic conceptions of the present. In addition, they also provide all the available evidence for the historical studying of the array of genres in circulation, or of the ways in which individual media works have been generically perceived at any instance in the course of time. Hence, through genre history the array of genres and the perceptions of genres can be comprehended according to their changes or their stability through time (Neal 1990). Moreover, the collection of instances of generic discourses in historically particular moments and the examination of the resulting

large scale patterns can reflect the way genres are formed and evolve through time, thus resulting in valid objects of reference (Mittel 2001).

Inevitably, genre history must be viewed as a fluid and dynamic process and not as a teleological account of textual rise and fall, since genre discourses stem from a number of different sources. Thus, instead of focusing solely on assumptions regarding definitions and interpretations, the stressing of questions of cultural process, could provide more productive results when analyzing media genres (Mittel 2001).

### **2.3.1.3 Genre as Process**

Neal (1990) has also argued that genres can be better understood as processes. He supports that these processes might be dominated by repetition, but differentiation, variation and change also manifest in them. His view of the process-like nature of genre is an interaction among three levels; “the level of expectation, the level of generic corpus, and the level of the rules or norms” that govern the first two levels. In this process, each new genre media work comprises an addition to an existent generic corpus and entails a selection from the range of the available generic elements. In this procedure some elements are getting included while others are excluded. Additionally, each new entry may extend the range of elements, by the addition of a new one or by the transgression of one of the existing elements. In this manner, the elements and conventions of a genre are always in a dynamic motion and the generic corpus is being expanded (Neal 1990).

Previous experiences of the media works within a generic corpus comprise the foundations of generic expectation. In the same manner, prior knowledge of generic articulations sourced out from industrial or journalistic sources (reviews, advertisements etc.) produces generic images which also provoke generic expectations. When the generic corpus and image expand and change due to the appearance of new media works and their accompanying industrial and journalistic enunciations, the expectations expand and change as well. With each new media work and any new generic element that might be presented, viewers are going to evaluate and rearrange their knowledge about the generic elements that they are familiar with for that particular genre. In this way, they are expected to alter their

expectations regarding the range of generic images they might anticipate with the next media work. And ultimately, with this continuous and recurring process, the norms and rules that govern the generic corpus and generic expectations can be changed, transformed or extended.

For that reason, genres are of a process-like, fluid and dynamic nature as both Mittel (2001) and Neal (1990) have argued, and for that reason it is so difficult to exhaustively group the characteristic elements of individual genres in order to define and interpret them accurately. And although individual genres may be a part of a generic regime, they also change, develop and present variations because they borrow elements from one another and sometimes overlap with one another. In this way hybrid genres are also emerging such as, for example, psychological drama, dramatic comedy etc. Besides, many of the perceived as pure and stable genres in the media world, have initially evolved by the combination of generic elements of previously distinct genres. For example, the emergence of the genre of “musical” is rooted back to operetta, which in turn emerged from the combination of elements of opera buffa, German Singspiel and British ballad opera. Operetta then evolved by the replacement of some of its original features with elements of burlesque and revue and then, in the American stage, these features were displaced until the genre’s image was formed to what is broadly known today as musical (Traubner 1989 as in Neal 1990).

Thus, as Neal (1990) supports, it is important to “historicizing” generic definitions and the confines “of any single generic corpus and of any specific generic regime” as well. In this way, the provision of elaborate definitions might be possible provided that they are historically relative and hence historically specific. The process-like nature of genres aids the “historicizing” of generic enunciations from all possible sources, and enhances the possibility for providing more definite images of genres. Genres and genre regimes might bear boundaries and specific frameworks and this may be the reason that hybrid genres are recognized as hybrid (namely for what they are -combinations of elements from distinct genres) and not as specific genres at a specific time. However, through the process of “historicizing”, at some point in time, a hybrid genre might become a distinct genre in its own right, as in the case of the musical genre (mentioned above). Therefore, solely the process-like nature of genres indicates that a genre text always reworks, extents, or transforms generic norms (Neal 1990).

The notion of discursive analysis of genre has been taken into consideration from theorists who were more turned to the structuralist textual approach for genre analysis. This may imply that genre analysis in the media context might have been steadily developing its own rigid theoretical approach which is focused on the particular features, contents, and social and cultural attributes. For example, Altman (1984) who is examining genre analysis from a structuralist textual tradition is also concerned with the pragmatic aspects of genre such as the aforementioned of the discursive analysis.

#### **2.3.1.4 The Syntactic – Semantic Approach to Genre**

Altman (1984) observes that in most approaches to genre analysis there are arguments regarding the limits of a generic corpus, and as a result there is resistance towards an inclusive list (of characteristics) and an exclusive canon regarding genre. He finds that a theory, which does not dismiss any widely held positions, is necessary in order to explain the conditions underlying genres' existence, thus preparing the way for a critical methodology which includes and transpires genres' inherent contradictions. The commonality that he finds in theories of genre is that they are labeled with regard to a particular theory's most prominent features or the type of activity to which it allocates its attention. In view of that, he focuses on genre theories considered with a semiotics tradition, which distinguish between semantic and syntactic approaches, and thus are labeled correspondingly.

He notes that in semantic-syntactic approaches there is a general agreement with regard to the borders separating semantic from syntactic views. Accordingly, a distinction can be made between generic definitions which refer to a collection of "common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, location, sets and the like", thus compiling the semantic elements which structure the genre, and definitions which highlight the particular "constitutive relationships between undesignated and variable placeholders". These relationships constitute the fundamental syntax of the genre. Hence, the semantic approach highlights the building blocks of the genre, while the syntactic approach stresses the structures into which they are arranged. Altman (1984) notes, that there are divergent qualities related to these two approaches. The

semantic approach carries little explanatory power, but is applicable to a variety of media works. On the contrary, the syntactic approach has the ability to isolate the particular meaning-bearing structure of a genre, but lacks broad applicability. Therefore, Altman (1984) supports that the two categories of generic analysis are complementary, that they can be combined and that some of the questions arising in genre study can be answered only when they are employed in combination.

Thus, he proposes a semantic-syntactic approach to genre analysis. He explains, that each corpus responds to a different approach with regard to generic analysis and definition. Semantic definitions portray a large genre of semantically similar texts, whereas syntactic definitions focus on explaining the genre by highlighting a limited range of texts that outline specific syntactic relationships.

In analyzing genre, not all media works of a perceived genre are related to their genre in the same way or to the same extent. However, when employing a semantic-syntactic approach to genre, it is possible to study a media work in a critical way by accepting the different levels of genericity that might be present. Additionally, the semantic-syntactic approach allows an accurate description of the various inter-generic connections that might exist in a media work. That is because, there are numerous media works which combine the syntax of one genre with the semantic elements of another. And as discussed earlier, this is sometimes the result of an evolving genre, which may experience change with regard to its semantic elements or syntactic structure.

With regard to the fluid nature of genres, Altman (1984) hypothesizes that genres might arise either by the development of a relatively stable set of semantic givens through syntactic experimentation into a consistent and enduring syntax, or when an already existent syntax embraces a new set of semantic elements. In the first case, the duality of the generic corpus can be justified by the fact that a genre's characteristic formation can be identified before the stabilization of a syntactic pattern. In such cases, the way a set of semantic givens develops into a consistent and durable syntax represents the history of the genre and at the same time specifies the structures on which genre theory is dependent on.

The distinction that Altman (1984) proposes between the semantic and the syntactic can be considered as correspondent to the primary (linguistic-like) elements that compose all texts, and the secondary aspects of texts which refer to the textual meanings created by virtue of the syntactic ties which are established between

primary elements. This distinction is appraised by Altman (1984) as essential because it portrays the way a meaning of one kind contributes to the meaning of another, and finally it establishes it. Just like individual texts can set up new meanings for familiar terms by submitting well known semantic elements to a syntactic which is re-determined, in the same way generic meaning becomes into existence through the repetitive employment of substantially the same syntactic strategies. Namely, although each individual text carries its own syntax, a *generic* syntax is developed only when the same syntactic patterns of individual texts appear several times. For example, the most successful genres which appear enduringly in the media field are those that have established a coherent syntax, such as the musical or the western, while those which are depending only on recurring semantic elements but never establish a stable syntax, are the ones which have failed to develop a clear generic identity and have often disappeared quite quickly, such as the reporter or the catastrophe (Altman 1984).

In a nutshell, Altman (1984) suggests that when the multiple connections between semantics and syntax are taken under consideration in genre analysis, then a new continuity which relates media work analysis, genre theory and genre history is established. Moreover, the relationship between the semantic and the syntactic supports the notion that genres are constituted by the multiple influences between the media industry and the audiences. Every time a semantic genre develops to a syntactic one, it is due to the fact that a common ground has been found through a period of accommodation, during which the audiences' expectations and preferences are fitted into the media industry's priorities and activities (and the opposite). Thus, a successful genre owns its success not only to its reflection of the audiences' preferences or of the dominant ideology that the media industry aims to promote, but to its competence to perform both functions at the same time.

In conclusion, one could imply, that genre theory in the media studies might have its foundation on textual traditions of analysis, which still seems to comprise the starting point of any genre study, but has evolved and has established the notion that genres should be studied in a more spherical approach which involves the employment of cultural processes (stemming from the media industry and the audiences) as well. Apart from focusing on genres as categories of sets of distinct similarities which are either found in industrial practices, or in theoretical practices of media studies (e.g. ideal genre clusters created by scholars), the way genres are

operating and constituted in everyday life (Mittel 2001), should be also been taken into consideration<sup>11</sup>. It seems that, more or less, in contemporary media studies regarding genre analysis, the commonly prevailing idea is that genres should be treated as cultural categories. These categories should be constantly re-examined with regard to their given definitions, interpretations and evaluations that compose these categories in viewers' everyday experiences with the media. In this way, a clearer and more comprehensive understanding can be achieved, regarding the way genres function in shaping viewers' media experiences, the way media operate in shaping viewers' social realities, and the way generic categories can be utilized to support the study of media texts (Mittel 2001).

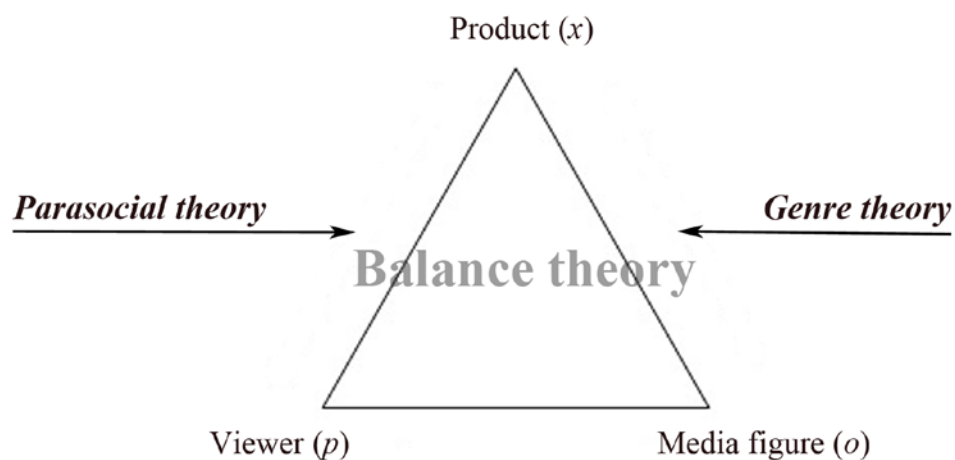
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<sup>11</sup> For example, in what way does an extremely popular television program like *Friends* and its great response from audiences all over the world, has induced its assigned genre?

## Summary of Chapter 2

The theoretical overview presented in this chapter included the three theories on which the conceptualization of this study's model is built on, as will be presented in the next chapter. The fundamental theoretical premises, on which the conceptualization of the model is based on, derive from the principles of balance theory. The conceptualization of the model involves the integration of the principles of parasocial interaction as they have been constructed from previous research. Genre theory provides the structural attributes which constitute the context within which the application of the model will be examined.

As thoroughly presented in this chapter, through parasocial theory the relationship between the viewer and the character is examined. Parasocial theory can be employed to explain viewers' tendency to be attached with characters of media contexts and develop relationships with them. As presented, there are many theoretical concepts which can explain and shed light to the viewers' psychological inclinations and the processes whereby attitudes and relationships are developing between viewers and media figures. From the examination of balance theory, the tendency of individuals to maintain balance in their relationships is confirmed by previous studies in various fields. The underlying processes which are usually utilized for the maintenance of balance in a relationship were also examined. Attitude alignment is one of the processes which are facilitated in preserving balance in important for the individual relationships. Genre theory provides the foundations for the understanding not only of the context of this study but also of the way that contexts can shape viewers' experiences and social realities within which they develop parasocial relationships with media figures, and in turn, the way that these relationships can be influenced by specific media contexts. By the integration of the three theories, the conceptualization and development of the balance model of sitcom product placement effects is presented analytically in the next chapter, where balance theory provides the foundation of the model's structure, and parasocial and genre theory provide information with regard to the entities and elements constituting the model as depicted below:



Source: This Research



# **CHAPTER THREE**

Conceptual Framework  
Development

### **3. Conceptual Framework Development**

As the purpose of this research is to investigate the way that product placements can affect consumers' attitudes toward products in the specific media context of sitcoms, the potential relations among viewers/consumers, products and sitcom characters with regard to the attributes of sitcoms are going to be examined in this chapter, in order for the descriptive and explanatory framework of product placement effects to be tested.

Looking back at the findings of previous literature, it can be observed that the way a product is connected to the plot of the media work within which the placement is embedded, comprises a source of influence regarding viewers' attention to the placed products and their attitudes toward them (e.g. d' Astous & Seguin 1999, Russell 2002). In addition, as another source of influence of the media context and its attributes, has been regarded the degree of intensity of the relationships that viewers develop with media characters (e.g. Russell et al. 2004). Specifically, parasocial interaction is a firm established concept that has been researched with regard to the way that viewers develop attachment to characters, and has been employed as an explanatory factor for viewer-character relations (e.g. Perse & Rubin 1989, Alperstein 1991, Cole & Leets 1999, Moyer-Gusé 2008 and others).

Nevertheless, the way that product placements function in the specific media context of sitcoms -where products are considered to be a part of the genre's systemic structure (Leis et al. 1986)- in relation to the procedure through which they can affect viewers' attitudes toward the placed products hasn't been fully uncluttered. There is also narrow examination of the characters' relations to products within the media context, only a limited number of researches with regard to viewers' relations to the placed products out of the media context, and even more limited studies regarding the specific media context's genre.

### **3.1 Investigating the Development of the Framework**

In order to investigate and reach a deeper understanding of the way that product placements function within the particular context of sitcoms with its unique attributes, the relations between characters and products and between viewers and products, are necessary to be investigated. The expectation of an enriched understanding of product placements' functionality and effects on consumers through the particular media context of sitcoms, stems from the fact that sitcoms is a *sui generis* field for stimulating distinctive feelings and relations on the part of viewers with regard to the consumption of the communication message.

The most important element in sitcoms is constituted by the characters, on whom the whole comedic situation is based (Butsch 2005). Consequently, the placed products which also comprise an integral part of the genre's systemic culture (Stern & Russell 2004) are directly related to the sitcom's characters and situations. Apparently, since the genre's attributes and conventions can facilitate the arousal of particular feelings and relations between viewers and characters, the related to characters products are placed in the sitcom context with the ultimate aim to stimulate the development of some kind of influential relation with the viewers as well.

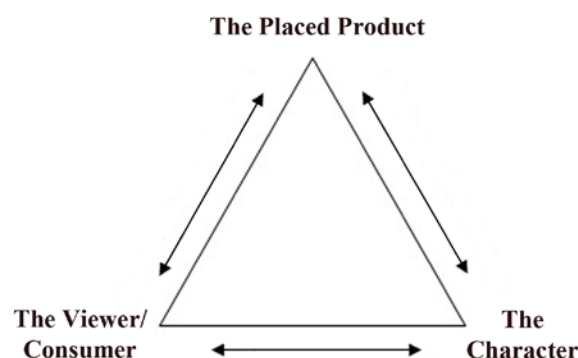
Based on the fact that specific relations between characters and viewers and characters and products exist in sitcoms, the investigation of the way that products' placement functions within the specific context, could be performed through the examination of the characters, since they represent the connecting link between the sitcom's audience and the placed products. In this way, it could be assumed that sitcom characters play an important role in the consumption of the specific media context.

Hence, it could be implied that there is a three stage process that could be followed to examine the influential and connectedness functionality of sitcom characters. In the first stage of the process, the character-product relation within the sitcom's context could be investigated; in the second stage, the viewer/consumer-character relation that might exist outside of the sitcom context could be probed; whereas in the third stage, the interaction between the aforementioned relations could be examined with regard to the way that it generates impact on the viewer/consumer-product relation. Thus, the interest of this investigation will be focused on the way

that the character-placed product relation and the consumer/viewer-character relation can have an effect on viewer/consumer-placed product relation, namely, if the first two relations can influence consumer attitudes toward the placed products.

To examine these relations and their potential influences on consumer/viewer attitudes, an interdisciplinary approach will be employed, drawing from genre theory, parasocial interaction principles, and balance theory. The rationale for including genre theory in this approach is that it can offer a comprehensive infrastructure from which the media context can be explored, in order to provide essential information regarding characters and products in the sitcom genre, but it can also support the analysis of the genre's conventions, which direct the role of product placements in the specific media context. Drawing from the principles of the parasocial interaction concept, a deeper understanding of the relations between viewers and characters of sitcoms will be provided. And lastly, balance theory will be utilized in order to shape the structural system of the triadic relationship among characters, viewers and placed products and to provide an insight about its functionality. Namely, balance theory provides the structure of the framework, which aims to explain and examine this triadic relationship, and based on which, the “Balance Model of Sitcom Product Placement Effects” is founded.

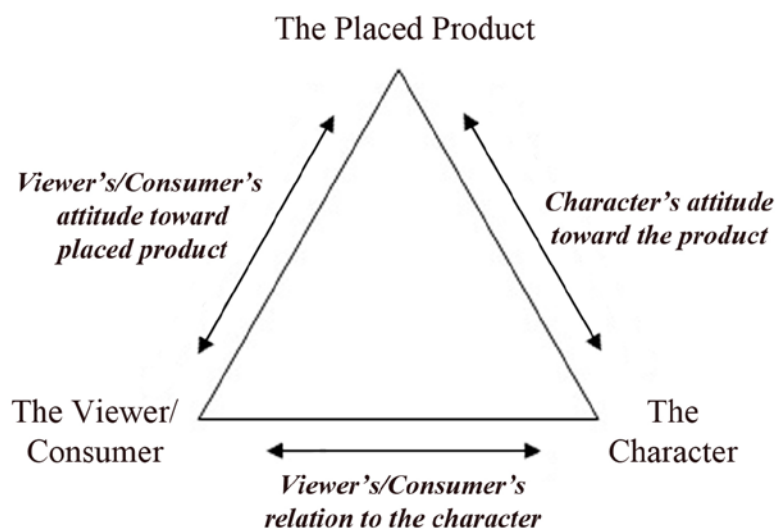
The conceptualized framework, as depicted in Figure 3.1a aims to portray a balanced system composed of the elements of the triadic relationship, namely the character, the product and the viewer/consumer.



Source: Adapted from Russell & Stern (2006)

**Figure 3.1a** *Balance Model of Product Placement Effects*

As already mentioned, previous research has drawn on the conclusions that viewers/consumers' attitudes toward placed products can be influenced by the way a placed product is connected to the plot, the program's conventions, the characters (d'Astous & Seguin 1999, Russell 2002), and by the relationships that viewers develop with the media characters (Russell et. al 2004). These relevant to product placement indications and the information which will be drafted from the theoretical perspectives that underlie the framework will enable the configuration of predictions regarding the attitudinal effects of the viewer/consumer- product relation. That is, the information extracted from genre theory and the principles of parasocial interaction will offer rigid foundation with regard to the character-product and viewer/consumer-character relation that will allow predictions of the viewers/consumers' attitudes toward the placed products in the particular context. Figure 3.1b presents the underpinnings necessary to be examined (i.e. attitudes and relations) in the framework, as there are theoretical implications of their pervasiveness to the character-product and viewer/consumer-character dyads, thus facilitating the predictions for the viewer/consumer-product dyad.



Source: Adapted from Russell & Stern (2006)

**Figure 3.1b** *Balance Model of Product Placement Effects; the dyads' relations and underpinnings*

Next, the theoretical foundations that support the development and examination of the model are going to be investigated through the detailed exploration of genre theory, parasocial interaction theory and balance theory, which will provide the necessary information of the triadic relationship's elements, which in turn will allow specific predictions for the model's testing.

### ***3.1.1 Genre***

An inference deriving from the theoretical overview of genre theory is that genres can function in ways that shape viewers' media experiences, and through different genres, the media can operate in ways that shape viewers' social realities. Regarding films and television programs, genres usually embody specific values and ideological assumptions. Moreover, a general model underlying contemporary media theory is "a triangular relationship between the text, its producers and its interpreters". Thus, a genre could be perceived as a shared code between the producers and the interpreters (i.e. the audience) of texts included in it (Chandler 1997). For example, in media studies, and industrial and journalistic generic articulations (i.e. reviews, TV program guides, advertisements, posters etc.) as well, films and television programs are routinely classified in commonly accepted generic labels such as "thrillers", "dramas", "westerns", "talk shows", "sitcoms", "soap operas" and many others.

The genre can also be considered as a practical apparatus that consistently and efficiently aids mass media industry to produce media works according to the expectations of its customers (the audience). The genre can also offer individual media users the advantage of planning their choices (McQuail 1987). This means that since genres enable the creation and maintenance of a loyal audience which is used to watching programs within a genre, producers are able to predict viewers' expectations. Additionally, advertisers, sponsors and product placement companies are offered a standardized setting in which they can plan their product's "involvement" and they also have the advantage of targeting the audience of their interest. That is because, usually, different genres make available different audiences to be identified and catered to (Gledhill 1985). Indeed, as Glick & Levy (1962) support, program preferences differ according to age, sex, social class, family role and

personal needs of viewers. Thus, for the mass media and the marketing related professionals, genre is part of the procedure of targeting different market sectors (Chandler 1997).

Apart from that, genre allows the mass production of standardized entertainment programs to be developed in a formulaic mode and send to their audience the specific meanings that they are expecting. That is because these entertainment formulas also methodize the interpretations of meanings in order to make sure that audiences are influenced by the genres that their programs fit into (Fiske 1987). Standardization also has as a result high profits for producers, since they can exploit genre conventions (Abercrombie 1996), and ease of meaning reception by audiences as well (Fiske 1987). This is due to the fact that since the cycle of production of similar works is constantly continuing, audiences are coming to a point where they possess genre knowledge after a constant exposure to the specific genre for a long time. Thus, generic regimes can be considered as almost “widely known”, since generic knowledge can be assumed to have become a form of cultural knowledge (Neale 1990).

### **3.1.1.1 Exploring the Genre. Providing the Framework’s Context**

An exploration through genre theory will not only provide the foundations from which the media vehicle and its context will be examined but will also outline the elements that rule the inclusion of placed products in a particular type of vehicle (Stern & Russell 2004). Specification of the genre starts with the identification of a content’s basic characteristics in order to determine its type. This research focuses on sitcoms (situation comedy television series) –a particularly genre bound program (Fiske 1987)- which are patterned by a unique structure of “plot, character, theme, and consumption” (Stern 1992).

### **The Conventions of Sitcoms**

Sitcoms are of a genre which employs a particular array of elements that highlight and promote humour and their scope is to make comicalness more powerful, in order to

satisfy the amusement expectations which viewers hold for such programs. These particular sitcom conventions uniquely distinguish sitcoms from other programs and it is exactly this comedic impetus of the genre that primarily motivates such conventions (Mills 2009). Due to the specific genre's conventions, sitcoms can be considered as forms of realistic comedy where the social world -as it is apprehended by the viewer- is depicted in an easily understood manner (Stern & Russell 2004).

A traditional definition of the genre, considers sitcoms as half-hour series, including episodes which involve recurrent characters within the same setting. Each episode is finite, in the sense that the situations happening in each episode are generally resolved and explained during or at the end of the episode (Minzt 1985) in order for a new episode to take place the following week. The situation usually starts with a problem or a threat which posits a disruption to the unity of the characters' group, within which they bond to ultimately resolve the problem through an "activity of communalization" which reaffirms the stability of the group and the situation (Neale & Krutnik 1990). The events that have happened or the situations presented in the narrative of previous episodes, are almost always reconciled in order not to destroy or complicate the way the situation is grounded for the next episode. However, even though each episode is usually representing a discrete unit, a narrative progression across the sequence of the sitcom's episodes is essential. In this way, the recurrent characters show evidence of progression and development by means of learning from their previous experiences, thus promoting the sitcom's dramatic realism (Eaton 1978). Moreover, the characters gain knowledge by reconciling the situations with which they are confronted in each episode. The recurring nature of the orderliness of the premise experiencing stress or threat of change and the restoration of the normality is the most important feature of sitcoms. And this trait of "happy endings" is one of the characteristics of comedy. In addition, sitcoms are usually filmed before live audience with their laughter being recorded, thus making the audience from home to become aware that they are watching a performance (Minzt 1985). Most of the times, the direction and shooting style also promote that kind of feeling.

Thus, there can be observed three aspects that broadly define the genre of sitcom. There is the *setting* aspect which refers to recurring scenery and characters, the *narrative* aspect referring to the repeated nature of the sitcom's situation stories and lastly, the sitcom's *aesthetic* aspect with regard to the artificiality (e.g. the laugh



tracks) of this media work's text (Mills 2009). However, not all contemporary sitcoms acknowledge an audience or make use of a laugh track and this illustrates the evolving nature of the genre.

As sitcoms aim to present a realistic view of the social world, the two basic situations which have been used continually in the history of the genre, as the setting of action, are "home" and "work". This may be, not only because the producers focus on presenting a believable reality to the audience, whose principal ideological concerns are assumed to be centered around issues of home/family or/and of work, but also due to the fact that these recurring situations offer a ready material for the continuous repetitiveness of characters and themes, thus providing an economic and fit to budget use of stock sets (Eaton 1978).

The depiction of the domestic situation (i.e. "home" setting) might be seen as having important ideological and cultural implications. In most of the cases, in sitcoms the "home" is equated with the family (Mills 2009). And although sometimes the kinds of family which are presented can be very traditional such as a nuclear family (Mills 2009), in contemporary sitcoms there is the depiction of another kind of family, referring to friends, neighbors, co-workers, singles and unmarried couples living together (Stern & Russell 2004). These kinds of "families" are utilized as a stable setting and a part of the "situation" in situation comedy and are also being established as an index of the "inside/outside" sitcom's structure (Eaton 1978).

The "inside/outside" structure of a sitcom refers to a rather rigid dichotomy operating across the characters, stock sets, outside and studio footage levels, which is necessary to establish the "situation". Namely, the "inside/outside" dichotomy structures the situation by employing events from the outside which are allowed to enter the "situation", with the aim to provide the narrative development from episode to episode. However, these events –referring also to the allowance of guest characters- are treated in such a way that the situation's basic parameters remain substantially stable and unaffected by their entry, in order for the situation to be maintained and continued in the next episode. In sitcoms, the "family" or "home" is regarded as a stable situation, firm enough to support the faculty of repetition and of dealing with the onslaughts of the outside in an characteristic and identifiable way (Eaton 1978).

The "work" situation places characters, events and the narrative in a workplace. The situation is structured around the stability of character and

problematic referring to patterns of e.g. doctors who treat patients, staff working in stores who serve clients, with clearly defined confines between those working and those being served. The first are satisfying the situation's demands for stability, while the latter serve as the entries that create the events for the narrative's progression. The "workplace" situation may also reflect class differences through the treatment of different hierarchical ranks (e.g. manager, supervisor, secretary etc.) of the characters in the unfolding of the episode's action. Some situation comedies employ strictly the setting of workplace situation (e.g. *The Office* BBC2/1 2001-2003; NBC 2005-2013) and all the action progresses in the confines of "the work" with a limited reference to the personal or outside lives of the characters. However, other sitcoms integrate features of the home/work dichotomy (such as *Friends* NBC 1994-2004, *The Big Bang Theory* CBS 2007-present) while others mingle the elements of this dichotomy, such as those which deal with the "small family firm" and place emphasis from one situation to the other (Eaton 1978).

Sitcoms can also be considered as employing a unique shooting style. This unique shooting style can be regarded as developed according to the genre's theatrical roots and with the aim to capture the performance like style, in a way suitable for television. Based on cinematographer's Karl Freund style, three cameras are used to capture a two-character scene, with one camera covering a wide, establishing shot, whereas the other two cameras are capturing mid-shots of each character. These shots allow the fast editing between the two characters in any interaction scene and also provide simultaneous weight to characters' reaction shots and conversation/interaction shots. The reaction shots were considered by Freund as important to comedy, because by watching the astonished reaction of a character emerging from the behaviour of another character provokes the audience to interpret such behaviour as abnormal and thus comic. Hence, in addition of a shot of a comic behaviour which begets a laugh from the viewers, a subsequent reaction shot to that behaviour would attract another laugh. In this way, the same comedic scene or the same joke would create two laughs. Such a shooting style places viewers in a position where they make more sense of the action and the jokes. The shooting style of sitcoms also involves point-of-view shots which bring the viewer in the same position as the character, namely the shot shows what the character sees at that point of the scene and thus the comedic element is augmented (Mills 2009).

Another characteristic element of sitcoms is consumption. Integrated in the sitcom's setting or the flow of the plot, acts of consumption that feature products or services, operate as central elements in characterization (Stern & Russell 2004). Placed products play an integral role in sitcoms in order to form a naturalistic setting that seems familiar to the viewer. Products are used as props that enable the natural and socially recognizable (Hirschman et al. 1998) flow of the scenario, acting as reflections of reality of a social world in which consumption occurs (Solomon & Englis 1994). In consequence, the genre is pervaded by consumption scenarios which incorporate products that serve as significant objects for the plot and the characters of the sitcom (Russell & Stern 2006).

Since the genre is dependent on meticulously written scenarios depicting social culture of the "dominant ideology of the time" (Fiske 1987), it is only natural that the interaction of placed products and the characters will provide information about them (Russell & Stern 2006). This means, that in character-product interactions, products, not only act as "psychocultural" cues when viewers create meanings about characters (Sherry 1995), but also that characters send messages about consumption (Fiske 1987). Texts such as television programs that present physical products as having symbolic content have created a certain meaning for products by their "present and historic use in consumer culture" (Hirschman et al. 1998). That means, that though products as material entities do not bear any meaning, they are 'transformed into signifiers' (Hirschman et al. 1998) of common cultural practices. More specifically, ordinary consumers are watching and interpreting commercial and television programs' messages by drawing on the discursive knowledge which they have engrossed since childhood. In this way, as consumers watch television they overlay the representations of products portrayed in television with the cultural conventions that they recognize in programming genres. In consequence, consumers are adopting a "culturally common interpretive lens" (Hirschman et al. 1998) as they watch television programs over a long time.

The serialization of sitcoms also facilitates the flourishing of viewer-character relationships. As viewers are watching a sitcom over time, they become familiar or even identify with stereotypical characters, who usually behave predictably and can also act as referent others. As characters exist in a setting which ought to be a reflection of reality, they inevitably interact with products, thus transmitting consumption messages to viewers (Fiske 1987). Thus, it could be supported that

genre theory can enlighten the relationships between character and products, which are incorporated in the particular conventions of sitcoms and are specific to a media vehicle (Russell & Stern 2006).

## **Characters**

The requirement for continuity and the stability of characters and situation from episode to episode, is attained and generated by the fact that the characters are in a way stuck together. For example, in the domestic situation, neighbours or members of family are characters that provoke inevitable interaction with other characters and through those interactions the comedic element works its way to structure the situation in each episode. In the work situation paradigm, the co-workers, or the bosses are not always people that the character would choose to interact with but their unavoidable interaction within the workplace raises the comedic impetus of the situation. Thus, it seems that the formal requisites of sitcoms “provide the existential circle from which the characters cannot escape” (Eaton 1978). In other cases, the continuity and stability necessities are accomplished through groups of characters who represent a lifestyle community such as friends or roommates, linked together by shared values of friendship, emotional interdependency or loyalty (Russell & Stern 2006).

The fictional characters embedded in sitcoms are as previously mentioned, stereotypical. The characteristics for stereotyping are biological sex, profession, social class, sexual orientation, language use and interactive style (Stern & Russell 2004). There are comedic types which can be lechers/scoundrels, fools, liars, innocents and other typical characters who are traceable from the beginning of the genre until today (Butsch 2005, Russell & Stern 2006). They can be members of a nuclear family, or quite often in contemporary sitcoms, groups of friends who act as a surrogate family, single parents’ households, gay partners and unmarried singles living together, which depict the cultural changes in the nuclear family composition in today’s social world (Stern & Russell 2004). Hence, since these stereotypes are already embedded in the larger culture, they are useful for their familiarity. Over time, these stereotypes become merged into character types that reappear and acquire a unique importance in the culture as stock characters that assemble particular cultural tales. Stereotyped characters signify a common code between audiences and sitcom

writers which the latter can utilize to achieve the progression of plot without requirements for too much explanation (Butsch 2005).

Moreover, the kinds of characters that are created for sitcoms are personifications of more normal and everyday people than those of cinema for example, and the building of the personas is based exactly on their averageness. This ordinary presentation of sitcom characters is what audiences like because they represent people “just like them” (Mills 2009). Thus, these characters are usually seen by the audience as friends, counselors, comforters and models. But unlike their counterparts in the real social world, they have the asset of being standardized according to the appropriate formulaic shape which is given by the producers. Hence, characters behave in an ordinarily predictable manner and their patterns of action remain fixed. That means that their adherents do not encounter any unpleasant surprises (Horton & Wohl 1956).

Above all, the regular appearance of characters through small episodes of everyday life builds a history of acquaintance with the audience. An intimacy with the viewer is achieved by the regular observation and interpretation of characters, their behaviour and their patterns of action regarding a variety of situations (Horton & Wohl 1956). Moreover, between characters and viewers a “joking relationship” develops in sitcoms. This special relationship means that viewers, who watch a sitcom regularly and come to know the characters, can find particular things funny, which others, outside of such a relationship, cannot. Specifically, such “in-jokes” usually rely more on exactly those specific workings of the long-term relationship’s dynamic, rather than on the particulars of the joke that is presented at any instance. Namely, sometimes, finding things funny depends on some aspects which are not restrained to the actual comic moment alone, and in this way, humour may be considered “as a communicative act whose context is vital to its success” (Mills 2009).

Through these intimacy development aspects, the viewer is convinced that s/he comes to know the character more closely and profoundly than any other and that s/he understands and appreciates the characters’ values and feelings (Horton & Wohl 1956). The regular recurrence of characters also enhances the perception that they “live” in similar to the viewers’ time scales. Characters are believed or perceived to have a past, a present and a future that seem as if exceeding their textual existence and this makes viewers more inclined “to relate to them in terms of familiarity”,

identification (Fiske 1987) and parasocial interaction. However, even though viewers might feel (at the time of exposure to the sitcom episode) that they are involved in a face to face exchange of feelings of intimacy rather than a passive observation, there really is only unilateral connection with the character, namely an illusion of intimacy. That is because the relationship between the character and a viewer is ineluctably one-sided. A strategy for achieving an illusion of intimacy is employed by the programs' producers by creating an atmosphere of casualness. This is achieved by the characters' attempts to imitate the gestures, conversational style and the setting of a familiar face-to-face gathering. A lot of small-talk, which is commonly featured in sitcoms, gives the impression of a close and familiar connection of the character with the invisible viewer (Horton & Wohl 1956).

Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for actors/actresses who impersonate sitcom characters to blur the lines of division between their real life and the sitcom. For example, a tactic is to "treat their supporting cast as a group of close intimates" (Horton & Wohl 1956). The cast is addressed by their first names or nicknames and sometimes adopts stylized character traits, in order to emphasize intimacy. As a consequence, the viewer can form a collective historical opinion of "the kinds of people they really are" and becomes to believe that s/he is an extension of the actors-characters "fellowship" (Horton & Wohl 1956).

## **Products**

As aforementioned, a unique element of sitcoms' structure is consumption. Placed products featured in sitcom episodes enhance the realism of the setting but also serve as significant objects for the unfolding of the story. Since the settings of contemporary sitcoms are supposed to communicate representations of everyday life and viewers perceive them as a mirror of reality, a certain degree of verisimilitude should be achieved by the producers. This means that the setting, characters and props must be convincing reflections of social reality for the audience to be drifted into the "world" depicted on the screen (Solomon & Englis 1994). The employment of recognizable and familiar branded products from viewers, which are also part of their everyday lifestyle, aids the development of naturalistic settings on screen that they recognize as real. Indeed, as surroundings, scenery and background of sitcoms appear in television, can influence consumers' perception of reality and the worlds

presented may act as “agents of consumer socialization” (Solomon & Greenberg 1993).

Apart from creating naturalistic settings for sitcoms, products and consumption actions by the characters, reinforce characters’ traits and sometimes build their persona (Russell 2002). That is because characters are not just personifications of individuals but are also representations of ideology, or as Fiske (1987) posits “embodiments of ideological values”. Thus, according to the persona that is created by producers and the products which are meant to be placed in the sitcom’s context, the interactions between characters and products are “engineered” in ways that correspond to the ideological values of the character.

Hence, it could be implied that consumer products placed in sitcoms can also be considered as “psychological things which are symbolic of personal attributes and goals of social patterns and strivings” (Levy 1959). Products that carry symbolic meanings may be used in order to develop characterizations which aid the unfolding of the story and to depict details of plot and characters (Holbrook & Grayson 1986). Moreover, characters in the fantasy narratives of sitcoms deal with make-believe crises and choices which, symbolically and in customized form, match the crises and choices that real consumers face and have to resolve in their everyday lives. Such decisions, more or less important, characterize self-identity. By making choices between symbolic or clearly materialistic modes of consumption, consumers define themselves not only as consumers but as individuals too. Sitcoms as cultural narratives serve as projective functions for consumers. When viewers are watching sitcoms they can see themselves, allegorically, as the characters on television (Hirschman 1988).

Thus, television programming and especially the genre of sitcom, can be regarded as a fertile ground where social meaning is attached to and communicated by products (Hirschman 1988) and for that reason, it can also be characterized as a vehicle of the ideology of consumption (Baudrillard 1968 as in Hirschman 1988).

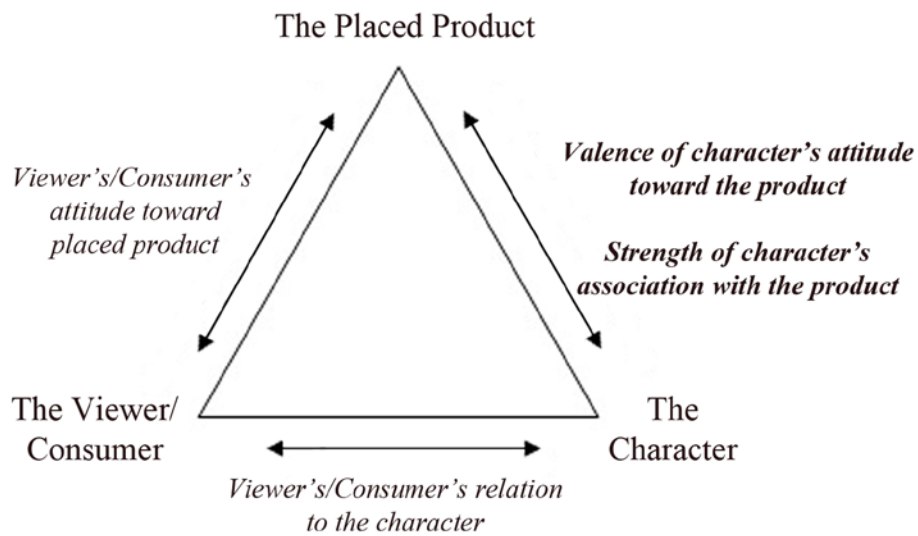
### **3.1.1.2 Extracting Information for Structuring the Framework from Genre Theory; specifying the variables of the character-product relation**

Through the exploration of genre theory the particular conventions of the sitcom genre are highlighted and the specific to the genre relation between characters and products is revealed. The familiar stereotyped characters who usually represent ordinary everyday people, just like the viewers of such television programs, and their acts of consumption portrayed through light and pleasurable scenarios, can be considered as providing a very fertile ground for products' communication messages.

With regard to the structuring of the framework and specifically to the character-product relation it will be taken into consideration the fact that the attitudes of characters toward the placed products may exhibit variations. That is because, depending on the episodes' storytelling, the interaction of characters with products varies. Characters' attitudes toward products can vary in valence and association strength. Regarding valence, characters may display negative or positive attitudes. Concerning character-product associations, they may vary in intensity. Specifically, the association of a character with a placed product may vary in strength, from weak to strong. That means, that products which are placed in the background of the setting for realism purposes, usually have weak association with the character since they are not an integral part of the plot. However, the setting of the sitcom's environment with appropriate props that intent to portray a realistically represented everyday life can influence the extent to which viewers can identify with the characters or imitate their depicted lifestyle (Solomon & Greenberg 1993). On the other hand, placed products that enhance aspects of the character's development (Holbrook & Grayson 1986) or are used to express the character's personal values (Hirschman 1988) convey strong product-character associations. In cases of strong product-character associations, the product provides important information about the characters' cultural ideologies and thus their identity (Hirschman 1988), personality, lifestyle and also their role in the story (DeLorme & Reid 1999).

These dimensions of the character-product relation, namely valence and association intensity are portrayed in Figure 3.1c, and are integrated in the framework to characterize the character-product dyad.





Source: Adapted from Russell & Stern (2006)

**Figure 3.1c** *Balance Model of Product Placement Effects; the dimensions of the character-product relation (valence of attitude toward the product and association of character with product)*

### 3.1.2 Parasocial Theory

The illusion of intimacy between sitcom characters and the audience could be considered as one of the important characteristics of the genre. The circumstances where the audience meets the character are considered similar to those met in primary groups. These circumstances are sociability, friendliness and close contact and they all provide acceptance and easy participation in enjoyable social interaction in primary groups (Horton & Wohl 1956). That is, the character is thought to be in the circle of the viewers' peers and an intimate face-to-face relationship with the character develops. Such a relationship where fictional characters are conceived as real so that viewers are able to become attached to them was remarked and characterized firstly by Horton & Wohl (1956) as a parasocial relationship.

### **3.1.2.1 Exploring the Viewer/Consumer- Character relation**

In a parasocial relationship, viewers are not just passive spectators of the program but also participate actively as if they were in a real life relationship with the characters. Namely, viewers can empathize with characters' feelings, troubles and even develop propositions of problem solving for the character in a corresponding episode situation. For example, it is possible for a viewer who watches a sitcom episode for the first time, to simply develop attitudes toward the characters which can portray the overall attitudes of the characters as designed by the producers. Nevertheless, when viewers are watching a sitcom regularly, it is high likely that they become actively bonded with the characters, follow their stories and care about their fictional lives, experience vicariously everything that the character does and feels (Maccoby & Wilson 1957) and ultimately interact with them parasocially, as if they were real (Russell & Stern 2006).

The process of developing familiarity and intimacy bonds with fictional characters that ultimately leads to the development of parasocial relationships between characters and viewers has been commonly supported in literature, as resembling the procedure of developing real social relationships (e. g. Rubin & McHugh 1987, Perse & Rubin 1989). This implication rests on the fact that viewers, in forming parasocial relationships utilize similar psychological processes to those used in real social relationships' development (Perse & Rubin 1989). And as in real social relationships, within which communication and interaction are possible to increase understanding of and familiarity with the other party, similarly, this process can be met in the development of a parasocial relationship.

Of course, the relationship between the character and the viewer is one-sided and there is no possibility for mutual development. For that reason, the responsibility of creating a believable simulation of intimacy relies completely on the actors and the characters they impersonate, the sitcom and the producers (Horton & Wohl 1956). Yet, for any interaction between the two parties to even exist, and for communication to be achieved, one of them must accept and adapt to the other party's perceptions. Thus, sitcoms' characters have to be constructed by the producers following common and widely accepted cultural patterns. The conventions ruling the actions of the characters and the values communicated must be accepted by the audience as

credible. In this way, the viewer can sympathize with the characters when they are facing difficulties, forgive their mistakes, accept their wisdom and their advice and more importantly, buy the products they are using or indirectly recommend. However, for viewers to accept their part of the parasocial role there must be a degree of compatibility of the sitcom's implicated norms and values with their normal self. Nevertheless, there is always the possibility that a viewer will not accept the sitcom's conventions and watch an episode with detached curiosity thus rejecting to play her/his role in the parasocial relationship. Such a stance of course, can be taken by the one-time viewer. Long-term viewers almost inevitably accept the gambit offered by the program and engage in vicarious participation in the parasocial relationship (Horton & Wohl 1956).

Due to their serialization attribute, and the fact that some sitcoms are aired regularly for many years (e.g. *Friends* 1994-2004, *Frasier* 1993-2004) the particular genre presents a fertile ground for the development of parasocial relationships (Russell et al. 2004) since viewers may watch a sitcom for many years, and thus connecting with and coming to know the characters through a long-term relationship. In such cases, it is only logical for one to assume that some viewers may form stronger parasocial relationships with characters, than other viewers. It is possible then, that viewers may identify with some characters (Cohen 2001, Russell et al. 2004, Moyer-Gusé 2008) and also view them as referent others and role models (von Feilitzen & Linne 1975, Ellis et al. 1983). As referent others and role models, characters can act as behavioural models that transfer meaning to consumer goods and subsequently, to the life of the viewer/consumer (McCracken 1989). As viewers relate more profoundly to a media program and its characters (Russell et al. 2004), then the normative and informational influences that they receive and the resultant behavioural modelling effects become stronger (Nord & Peter 1980). Such referential influences can occur through parasocial interactions with characters (Russell et al. 2004) and thus, the degree of parasocial attachment of a viewer with a character can be related to the degree of influence that a character has on the viewer as a referent other or a behavioural model. Indeed, highly connected to the program viewers can even model personal consumption with regard to television characters' product use (Russell & Puto 1999).

### **3.1.2.2 Extracting Information for Structuring the Framework from Parasocial Theory; specifying the variables of the viewer/consumer-character relation**

Drawing from parasocial theory and the relevant extensive literature since its first conceptualization (from Horton & Wohl 1956), explanation can be assigned to the viewer/consumer-character relation met in television programming. Through the exploration of parasocial theory related studies, one can find answers with regard to viewers' proclivity to become attached to fictional television characters, but can also come across numerous implications that this phenomenon has in relation to the media consumption. The prerequisites for a viewer to become attached to a character are highlighted and also the processes through which viewers form parasocial relationships with characters are collectively identified through the examination of previous research.

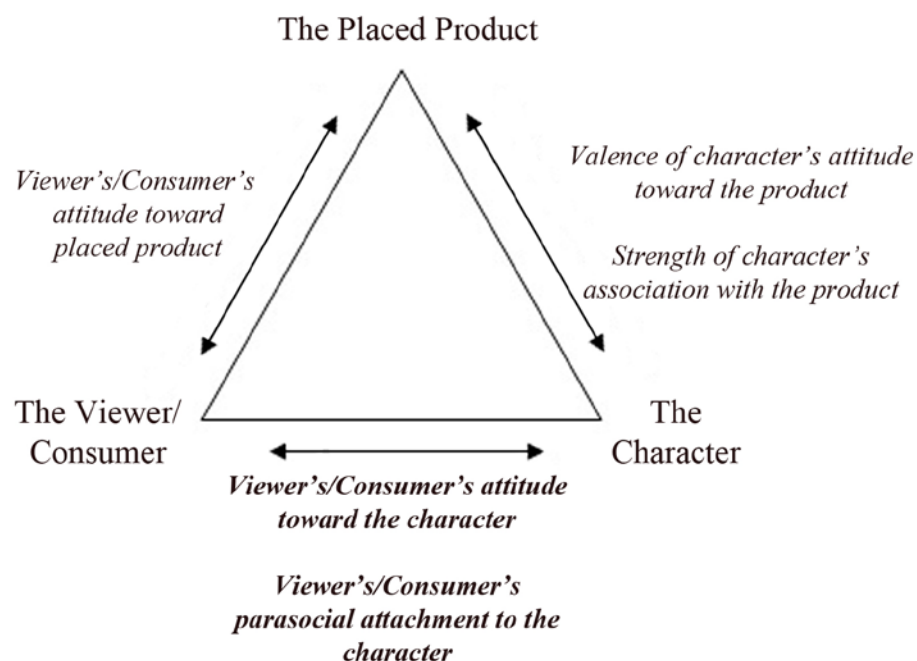
This research aims to establish the formation of parasocial relationships in the particular genre of sitcom and the role of characters on viewers' attitudes toward the products associated with those characters. Moreover, through the examination of the viewer/consumer-character dyad, it will be attempted to update the knowledge about the processes through which attitudes are shaped and relationships develop between viewers and characters in the media context of a contemporary sitcom.

Taking into consideration the fact that long-term viewing of the media program is essential for the development of viewers' parasocial relationships with characters and that one time or few times only viewing may just lead to the formation of -producer intended- flat, circumstantial attitudes toward a character, it is necessary to make a distinction between the attitude and attachment constructs. Such a distinction is also useful, in order to separate the characters embedded in the media program. That is because some characters might inflict stronger feelings to a viewer, while other characters might stimulate weaker feelings. Similarly, some viewers might feel more with regard to some specific characters, while other viewers might feel less for those characters and more for some others.

Stressing the difference between the attitude and attachment constructs is also essential for the formation of the framework. Thus, for this research, the attitude construct refers to a viewer's disposition toward a character varying from positive to

negative, whereas the attachment construct refers to the feelings of closeness or distance that a viewer holds for a character. Namely, attachment can highlight the strength of the viewer/consumer-character relationship, and can also delineate the degree to which a viewer sees the character as a referent other. Attachment to someone, viewed as a different construct from attitude toward someone, is highlighted in the psychology, social and interpersonal relations research field, and usually is related to constructs such as proximity and similarity (e.g. Heider 1946, Hazan & Shaver 1994, Tidwell et al. 1996).

Following this distinction with regard to the viewer/consumer-character relation, the two dimensions which are incorporated in the framework are attitude, which can vary from positive to negative, and parasocial attachment which denotes the existence of a viewer's parasocial relationship with a character. These two dimensions that characterize the viewer/consumer-character dyad are depicted in Figure 3.1d.



Source: Adapted from Russell & Stern (2006)

**Figure 3.1d** Balance Model of Product Placement Effects; the dimensions of the viewer/consumer-character relation (attitude toward the character and parasocial attachment with character)

### ***3.1.3 Balance Theory***

Through the exploration of genre theory and parasocial theory literature, the main relations between characters and products, and viewers/consumers and characters were defined and their potential particular characteristics were highlighted. Balance theory is utilized for the construction of the framework and structuring of these relations on it, as portrayed in Figure 3.1d.

As extensively explored in the theoretical overview chapter<sup>12</sup>, balance theory mainly posits that “cognitions tend to be organized in a harmonious manner” (Davis & Rusbult 2001). More specifically, with regard to Heider’s (1946) original articulation of the theory, it can explain individuals’ tendency for balance or congruity in their relationships. Extensions of balance theory have been conceptualized with regard to interaction as a communicative act (Newcomb 1953) and to communication of advertising messages (Mowen 1980). According to Newcomb’s (1953) extension of the theory, in a communication act between two or more individuals, the purpose of communication is to facilitate the maintenance of simultaneous orientation toward one another and toward objects of communication. Mowen’s (1980) balance theory extension to the media field, posits that individuals have a tendency to produce evaluations of communications in a manner consistent with their pertinent attitudes. In this manner, he employs the principles of balance theory to explore and to explain the way that the acceptance and evaluation of a communication message regarding a product is related to the presence of a particular communicator of the message, specifically, an endorser.

Drawing from the social psychology field and moving on to a communication and a media communication field, it seems that the principles of balance theory can be employed to explain the link of a set of elements and the relative attitudes carried by the elements toward one another. Thus, since parasocial relationships have been perceived and studied as being very similar to real social interpersonal relationships, it can be implied that they can be treated and examined under the same theoretical principles. In this study, balance theory could be utilized in order to explain the relations between the elements of a person  $p$  who is the viewer/consumer and another person  $o$  who is the sitcom character, their attitudes toward an impersonal object  $x$

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<sup>12</sup> Chapter 2, Section 2.2

which can refer to a placed product, and the way these attitudes are aligned according to *p* and *o*'s relation, for balance to be reached or maintained in their relationship.

If the relation among the viewer/consumer, the character and the placed product is seen as a communicative act with regard to Newcomb's (1953) extension of the theory, it can be implied that the communicator *A* (the character) is communicating toward another person *B* (the viewer/consumer) his stance toward an impersonal object *X* (the placed product). Then, through the act of communication (which can be any reference to the placed product, any association of the character with the product that is related to the flow of the narrative in a sitcom episode) a simultaneous orientation is strived to be achieved toward one another (*A* and *B*) and toward the object of communication *X*.

With regard to Mowen's (1980) endorser balance model, the relation between the character and the viewer/consumer can be viewed as an endorser-consumer relation. In this case, the source-endorser *E* refers to the character who is associated with a placed product *P*, that transmits a communication message *M* about the placed product *P* to the receiver-consumer *C*, namely, to the viewer. Thus, the act of communicating a message about a product through an act of product placement in the context of a sitcom can be regarded as a marketing communication. Then, through the endorser balance model it could be assumed that a consumer's liking of a placed product could be increased, if positive cognitive relations can be found among the elements of endorser/character, message, product and viewer/consumer system. For example, in the existence of a viewer's parasocial relationship with a character, where the viewer likes, loves, admires or views the character as a referent other, or values the character as a credible source of information, the viewer might align his/her attitudes of the placed product associated with the character, with the character's attitude toward the placed product, in order to maintain or reach psychological balance. For instance, the viewer might get to like more the placed product just because it is associated with the character, might start to like the product due to his/her attachment with the character even if s/he didn't like it before, or even might get to appreciate or re-evaluate the product because s/he values the opinion of the character.

Looking at the relations and the elements of this research then, it can be implied that the principles of balance theory carry the particular faculty to structure and explain the framework from all possible angles that the system of character-

viewer-placed product can be viewed. Thus, balance theory will be adapted to this research's context, concept and elements to allow for the explanation of the interactive effects of the character's relation to placed products and the viewer/consumer's relation to the character on viewer/consumer's attitudes toward the placed products.

Thus, to adapt the balance model for this study, the elements of this system have to be specified as: the *viewer/consumer* referring to the focal person, the *fictional character* referring to the other person and the *product* associated with the character as the impersonal object<sup>13</sup>. Hence, according to balance theory and its extensions, it is expected that *viewers/consumers* will be inclined to align their feelings and attitudes toward the product with the character's attitude toward the product in order to reach, achieve or maintain psychological or cognitive balance. Hence, the attitude alignment process will be related to and depended on the viewer/consumer-character relation and will be influenced by the character-product relation.

As the variables of the character-product relation and the viewer/consumer-character relation were specified in the previous two sections<sup>14</sup>, the framework incorporates the concept of attitude valence and association strength between the elements and objects of the system. Although in the original Heiderian conceptualization of balance theory (1946) the concepts of liking and attitude were considered as given relation elements, Newcomb (1953) is regarded as the first who considered the inclusion of variables such as perceived liking and perceived attitude. More importantly to this research, he also introduced the proposition that degrees of valence regarding the variables could also be existent in a system. In the relevant studies to balance theory that followed, the concepts of degree of valence and association strength were incorporated and ever since, they are regularly utilized to make predictions of attitude alignment and change (e.g. Heider 1958, Osgood & Tannenbaum 1955, Davis & Rusbult 2001). In terms of the constructs that can be met in balance theories, attitude valence refers to the degree of positive or negative evaluation of an individual or an object by another individual (Russell & Stern 2006), while association is a relation between pairs of concepts, with the strength of association representing the potential potency of the one concept to activate the other (Greenwald et al. 2002). In other words, association strength refers to the degree that

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<sup>13</sup> Specification as per Heider's (1946) elements

<sup>14</sup> Please see sections 3.1.1.2 and 3.1.2.2 of this chapter



a connection or relation between two individuals or an individual and an object is strong.

Thus, in a system, the attitude valence and the association strength of a relation are expected to direct an individual's attempt to align his/her attitudes with regard to those of another individual, in order to reach, achieve or maintain cognitive or psychological balance. For example, an individual is expected to align his/her attitudes toward those of another individual with whom s/he has a strong relation, if the attitude object is central or important for the other individual (Davis & Rusbult 2001). Similarly, in the context of this research, and taking under consideration the fact that the character's relation with a product can vary along the dimensions of attitude valence (from negative to positive) and association (from weak to strong), the viewer/consumer's attitude alignment toward a placed product, will be dependent on the valence of the character's attitude toward the product and of the viewer/consumer-character relation and their respective degree of strength as well.

### 3.2 Development of Hypotheses

As explained in the previous section, the development of the framework is based on the rationale of balance theory's principles, and as such, the elements, the objects and the relations between them are depicted in a triangular schema that represents a system of balance, as first conceptualized by Heider (1946) and represented by Newcomb (1953)<sup>15</sup>. This hypothesized system of balance consists of the entities *viewer/consumer* and *fictional character* and the object *placed product*. The relations between the entities and the object, as well as their valence and association strength determine the balance in this system<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Please see Figure 2.2 of Chapter 2

<sup>16</sup> As depicted in Figure 3.1d of this chapter.

### ***3.2.1 Defining the Variables***

Prior to the development of the hypotheses it is necessary to define the variables which represent the linkages between the elements of the system. Namely, it is needed to set the viewer/consumer variables, attitude and parasocial attachment, and the character-product variables, attitude valence and association strength.

According to balance theory, viewers/consumers' attitudes toward the placed products will be a function of the above four variables. Specifically, viewers/consumers are expected to align their attitude toward the product in line with the attitude toward the character and their parasocial attachment with the character, and according to the valence of the character's attitude toward the placed product and the strength of the character's association with the placed product. For convenience of presentation the above variables will be represented as in Table 3.2.1:

<b>Definition of variables</b>	<b>Labeling of variables</b>
Consumer attitude toward the product	ConsAttProd
Consumer attitude toward the character	ConsAttChar
Consumer's parasocial attachment with the character	ConsParaChar
Character's attitude toward the product	CharAttProd
Character's association with the product	CharAssocProd

Source: This Research as adapted from Russell & Stern (2006)

**Table 3.2.1** *Definition and Labeling of variables.*

### ***3.2.2 Hypotheses***

According to balance theory and its extensions, based on which the framework is structured, it is asserted that individuals have a tendency to prefer balanced attitudinal structures. Thus, deriving from that notion, it can also be implied that the principles of the theory will allow predictions with regard to the evaluation of placed products which are associated with characters in the context of sitcoms.

In accordance to the theory, in the proposed system of consumer-character-product, balance will exist if all three relations among the system's elements (i.e.

character-product, consumer-character, and consumer-product) are positive or if two relations are negative and one positive, namely when the product of the relations' signs is positive.

In cases where viewers are exposed to product placements during the viewing of their preferred sitcom, their tendency to establish attitudinal balance entails that their evaluation of the placed product will depend upon the dimensions of their relationship with the character in terms of attitude and attachment and the dimensions of the relation between the character and the placed product, in terms of attitude and association.

Specifically, following from balance theory and focusing on the consumer-character relation, it could be hypothesized that if the character's attitude toward the product is positive, namely if  $CharAttProd > 0$ , it is expected that a balanced attitudinal state could occur where the consumer's attitude toward the product ( $ConsAttProd$ ) will be positively related to the consumer's attitude toward the character ( $ConsAttChar$ ) and the consumer's parasocial attachment with the character ( $ConsParaChar$ ). Inversely, if the character's attitude toward the product is negative, i.e.  $CharAttProd < 0$ , a balanced state is expected to occur where the consumer's attitude toward the product ( $ConsAttProd$ ) will be negatively related to the consumer's attitude toward the character ( $ConsAttChar$ ) and the consumer's parasocial attachment with the character ( $ConsParaChar$ ). Thus, two Hypotheses have been developed with regard to the consumer-character relation:

**H1a:** If  $CharAttProd > 0$ ,  $ConsAttProd$  is positively related to  $ConsAttChar$  and  $ConsParaChar$ .

**H1b:** If  $CharAttProd < 0$ ,  $ConsAttProd$  is negatively related to  $ConsAttChar$  and  $ConsParaChar$ .

Next, focusing on the character-product relation, it is necessary to take under consideration the notion that in this type of relation there are variations in attitude valence and association strength, as discussed earlier. Attitude alignment literature posits that individuals tend to change their attitudes toward those of individuals' with whom they experience a close relationship, or an ongoing relationship, or who are perceived as referent others, or who they like and feel similar to, depending on the

centrality and importance of the issue or the object for the other individual, and the strength of the relationship (Newcomb 1959, Davis & Rusbult 2001). Thus, drawing from the conjecture of Davis and Rusbult's (2001) findings, which showed that stronger relations lead to greater need for attitudinal balance and thus greater alignment, it can be inferred that the strength of association has an effect on the need for attitude alignment. Hence, it can be hypothesized that the strength of association of the character-product relation will affect the relationship between the consumer's attitude toward the product and the character variables. Namely, the strength of the variable CharAssocProd is expected to moderate the relationship between ConsAttProd and the character variables ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar. Hence, the Hypothesis developed with regard to the character-product relation is:

**H2:** The effects of ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar on ConsAttProd are moderated by CharAssocProd.

Following from the above implication related to attitude alignment literature, that stronger relations lead to greater need for attitudinal alignment, it is necessary to examine the role of the consumer-character variables, namely attitude and parasocial attachment, with regard to the consumer's evaluation of the product.

As it has been previously discussed<sup>17</sup>, as viewers follow a specific sitcom and engage in parasocial interaction with its characters, they become attached to them, and the first can consider the latter as friends, counselors (Horton & Wohl 1956) as referent others, role models (von Feilitzen & Linne 1975, Ellis et al. 1983) and behavioural models (McCracken 1989). The more viewers relate to characters who are perceived as referent others (Russell et al. 2004), the more they are receptive of normative and informational influences (Churchill & Moschis 1979) which lead to strong behavioural modelling effects (Nord & Peter 1980). Attitude alignment research has indicated that the stronger the relationship of individuals (Davis & Rusbult 2001) or the greater the attraction between individuals (Newcomb 1959), the more imperative is the need and greater is the possibility for individuals to align their attitudes toward those of the other individual in order to reduce stress and maintain balance in the relationship. Accordingly, with regard to this research, it could be

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<sup>17</sup> In current chapter's section 3.1.2 and in Chapter 2

implied that when viewers experience a strong parasocial attachment with a character they will be more influenced by the feelings that this relationship generates in the expense of any other influential variable, thus having a tendency to modify their attitudes toward those of the character in order to maintain balance in their relationship. Namely, it could be expected that a viewer's parasocial relationship with a character, apart from superseding in effect other influential factors such as attitude toward the character, also denotes greater attitudinal alignment toward the character's attitudes. That means that the consumer's attitude toward the product is expected to be aligned with the respective character's attitude toward the product. Hence, it could be hypothesized that parasocial attachment (ConsParaChar) can be a better predictor of attitudinal balance and therefore of the consumer's attitude toward the product (ConsAttProd), than the general consumer attitude toward the character (ConsAttChar). Then, the Hypothesis developed regarding the consumer-character variables is:

**H3:** ConsParaChar will have a stronger effect on ConsAttProd in comparison to ConsAttChar.

The developed Hypotheses which follow closely the structure of the Hypotheses of Russell and Stern (2006)<sup>18</sup>, specify the connections between the consumer-character variables, attitude and parasocial attachment, and the character-product variables, attitude valence and association strength and make predictions with regard to the consumer attitude toward the product. By testing these hypotheses, it is expected that the way the variables function to shape consumer attitudes toward the placed product will be revealed, and thus, answers with regard to the operation of product placements on consumers' attitudes can be provided.

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<sup>18</sup> The reasons for following the structure of Russell & Stern's (2006) Hypotheses are going to be revealed in Chapter 4 in sections 4.1.1.1 and 4.1.2 and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6, in section 6.1.2.

### **Summary of Chapter 3**

The exploration of the theoretical underpinnings and the findings of previous research regarding genre theory, parasocial theory and balance theory, resulted in the extraction of important information, based on which the framework of this research was structured and the Hypotheses were developed.

Specifically, through genre theory, the elements which construct the framework were specified and their attributes were identified in order to provide the essential knowledge for their employment in the framework and for the specification of the relations among them. The specification of the genre and its particular attributes can be regarded as the link among viewers, the media context with its characters, and product placements.

Moreover, through this exploration it was highlighted the way that the sitcom genre can be regarded not solely as an entertainment media program but also as a platform of cultural traits and marketing communication practices. More importantly, the examination of sitcoms revealed that they can be an extremely multifaceted context which simultaneously can offer entertainment, pleasure and companionship. Sitcoms can also communicate consumption messages in a unique way and constitute a fertile ground for the generation and development of parasocial relationships. Parasocial relationships can be considered as a marketing tool itself, with various potentials, from making a sitcom successful, and thus attractive to marketing sponsors, to providing huge profits for producers, and also effortlessly selling products as symbols of culture. In this way, the sitcom genre can also be regarded as a very interesting context for consumer behaviour research.

The formation of relationships between viewers and sitcom characters is a well established phenomenon in media studies and through examination of the principles that relevant research has brought to the surface, parasocial theory provided the essential characteristics of parasocial relationships, and insights about the way they can possibly function in influencing viewers' attitudes or way of thinking with regard to consumption. Previous research has shown that strong relationships can modify an individual's attitudes towards alignment with the attitudes of the other person in the relationship. And since there is strong support that parasocial relationships can be treated as social interpersonal relationships and can also function in a similar way, it is assumed that attitude alignment will also work in similar ways with regard to the product placements in the proposed model.

Balance theory was utilized for the identification of the framework's construction, and with the scope of providing explanations regarding the way that the elements and the relations among them, can possibly function to predict product placements' effectiveness in the specific media context.

By employing this interdisciplinary approach and combining the three theories' principles through which the elements and relations in the framework were examined, four hypotheses which will test the framework were developed. It is expected that by testing the Hypotheses the way that the consumer-character and the character-product variables function will be uncovered, thus providing answers with regard to the way that they affect consumer attitudes toward the product. Namely, Hypotheses testing is expected to fulfil the purpose of examining product placements' effects in the particular context and circumstances of this research.

# **CHAPTER FOUR**

## Methodology

## **4. Methodology**

Any attempt to conduct research follows a research process which is shaped and guided by a research design encompassing a more or less definite research paradigm, and a choice of research methods. With regard to a research's purpose and the way a researcher views the social phenomena (Wahyuni 2012) and aims to gain knowledge about them, the choices taken, formulate a “research package” (Boyd 1990) utilized for the research execution.

The choices taken for the research execution should be driven by the research questions and the expectations of research outcomes that best fit the aim of the knowledge inquiry. Based on this notion, this chapter will outline the methodological orientations which are considered most appropriate to address the research questions of this study<sup>19</sup> and through which the knowledge inquiry aim is expected to be reached. Through the sections of this chapter, the “methodological framework” (Creswell 2003) or “research package” that this study is employing will be presented including the scientific research paradigm, the research strategy, the utilized research methods, and the data collection procedures.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide insights with regard to the way that this study is executed in order to ultimately achieve the knowledge aim set, referring to the generalization of the product placement effects' model. Moreover, it serves as a bridge between the conceptual model presented in the previous chapter with the relevant hypotheses, and the research outcomes that will be presented in the following chapters.

### **4.1 Research Design**

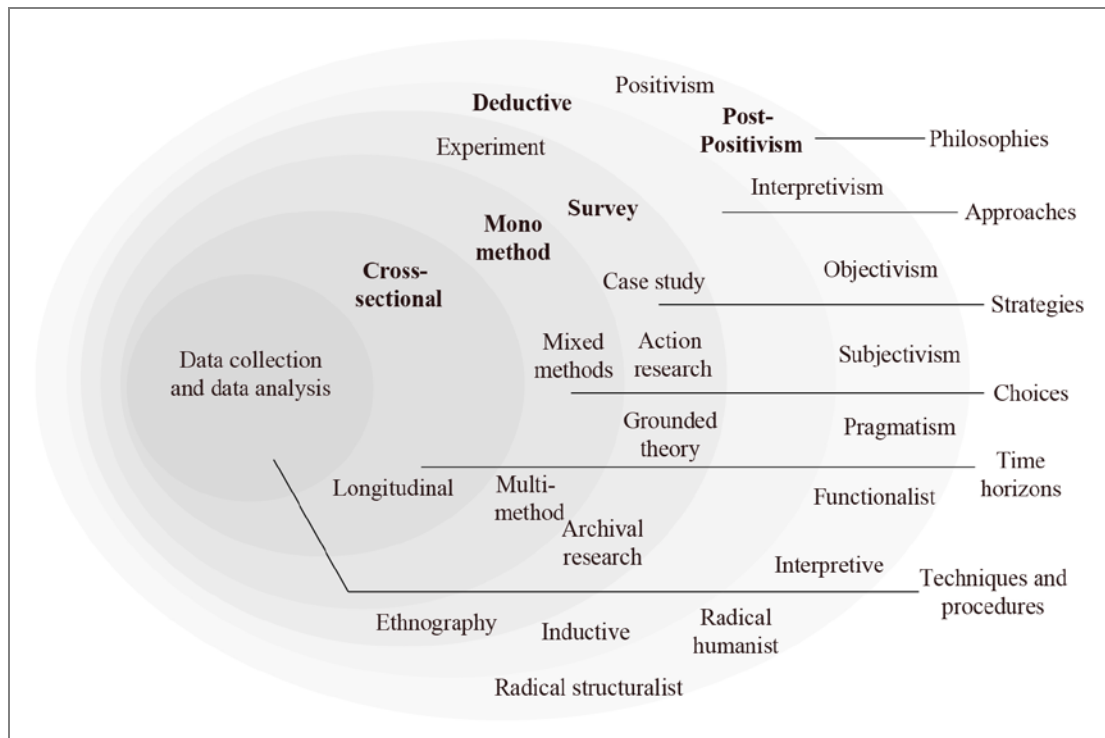
The research design refers to an overall plan in which the conceptual research problem is related with “the relevant and practicable empirical research” (Ghauri & Crønhaug 2005). Specifically, a research design provides a framework for collecting

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<sup>19</sup> Please refer to Chapter 1, section 1.5.



and analyzing data (Bryman & Bell 2007). However, it should be noted that it is not just an execution plan for conducting research, but also a configuration of decisions regarding research, thus ensuring that the evidence obtained enable answers to the knowledge inquiry as unambiguously as possible. To obtain the relevant evidence, it is necessary that decisions are taken with regard to the type of evidence needed for providing answers to the research questions, testing a theory, or explaining a phenomenon (De Vaus 2001). Namely, in configuring a research design, the appropriate methodological decisions should be taken with regard to the requirements of the research questions that will fulfil the aim of the knowledge inquiry. Hence, the choice of the research design is a reflection of decisions which highlight the importance assigned to a particular range of dimensions of the research process (Bryman & Bell 2007). The dimensions of the research process, along which the relevant methodological decisions that are expected to be taken by the researcher, can be represented according to Saunders et al.'s (2012) “research process onion” model as depicted in the following Figure 4.1.



Source: Adapted from Saunders et al. 2012

**Figure 4.1** *The onion model of the research process.*

The model represents the research process with all the issues that underlie the data collection methods' decision. Namely, it shows the process through which the researcher makes decisions about methodological issues in order to take the appropriate decision regarding the type of data necessary to provide answers for the research questions. Each layer of the onion model represents a particular part of the process for which a decision must be taken. The layers are interdependent and all together form the research design. As it is depicted in the figure, the layers represent the issues of research philosophy, research approach, research strategy, methodological choices, time horizons and data collection techniques and procedures (Saunders et al. 2012). In order to take the appropriate decision for the final steps of the research execution, namely the decision of the employed data collection and analysis method that best fits the requirements of the research questions, the "onion" must be peeled off layer by layer from the outside to reach the centre of the process. Following this process from the outside to the inside, the respective to the "layers" (i.e. methodological issues) decisions taken for this study are going to be presented next.

Regarding the research design of this study, the decisions taken for each step of the process are highlighted in Figure 4.1. Specifically, regarding this study's research philosophy, a post-positivistic stance pervades the attitude toward the knowledge inquiry, whereas a deductive approach was employed in terms of the research approach; a decision driven from the purpose of the study, since it tests a model that integrates three theories which are examined in relation to the model's application<sup>20</sup>. With reference to the research strategy and the methods' choices, a survey corresponding to a mono-method choice –namely using a single data collection technique- was required to serve this study's execution. Lastly, with regard to the central layers of the onion, time horizons and techniques and procedures of data collection, this research can be characterized as cross-sectional while it was executed by collecting data through an online-questionnaire. The choices that the objectives and purpose of this research required to be followed along with the research process will be explained in the following sections.

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<sup>20</sup> As presented in Chapter 1, section 1.4.

#### ***4.1.1. Scientific Research Paradigm***

The scientific research paradigm or else the research philosophy, refers and directly “relates to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge” (Saunders et al. 2012). The values and viewpoints that a researcher embraces through a philosophical paradigm have an important impact to the research pursued and the way that knowledge is pursued through research (Dyer 2003 as in Saunders et al. 2012). Moreover, the purpose of the research, which can be an equivalent of the bigger knowledge inquiry, leads to the development of research questions from which various assumptions emerge at every stage of the research process. Justification of the choices and utilization of a specific methodology “is something that reaches into the assumptions about reality” that each researcher inevitably transfers into the research project. Making assumptions and taking decisions in the research process is influenced from the understanding of the researcher regarding the nature of human knowledge, the aspects that it involves, and its ascribed status (Crotty 1998). Namely, relative assumptions and decisions in the research process are shaped according to the nature of reality through which the researcher perceives the phenomena; they way that s/he views the world.

Hence, the research philosophy adopted can be considered as the stance from which a researcher views the world and its phenomena, takes on a theoretical perspective through which s/he sees the research project and makes practical choices for the research execution (Saunders et al. 2012). In particular, the scientific research paradigm refers to the nature of reality as it is perceived by the researcher and the way that knowledge about reality can be achieved. More simply, it can be considered as a set of beliefs regarding how the world is perceived, which serve as a thinking framework guiding the research process (Guba & Lincoln 1994, Wahyuni 2012).

In academia, there are multiple diverse competing paradigms (Hammersley 2012) which all aim to organize the confused and contradictory world of common sense (Foxall 1995). As Guba & Lincoln (1994) support, the beliefs of a paradigm are accepted simply on faith, because “there is no way of establishing their ultimate truthfulness”. For this reason, many philosophical debates (Guba & Lincoln 1994) and many attempts to develop new advanced paradigms that address reality from some different angle, can be observed in academic cycles. However, it could be

implied that there are some major research paradigms from which all the other diverse paradigms stem from. As distinguished by Guba & Lincoln (1994), these are positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism. Research paradigms are differentiated and defined as separate perspectives by their ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions.

The *ontological assumptions* are concerned with the nature of reality. The ontology of each paradigm raises scientific inquiries with regard to the way that the world operates, how things really are and what is there that can be known about it. The *epistemological assumptions* refer to the nature and origin of knowledge and what constitutes acceptable knowledge. Epistemology defines the relationship between the researcher and the pursuit of the kind of reality that derives from the ontology. Namely, the epistemological assumptions derive from and are dictated by the ontology of the paradigm (Guba & Lincoln 1994, Saunders et al. 2012). The *methodology* is concerned with the rationale of the selection of appropriate methods or techniques that are utilized to pursue the perceived reality of the paradigm inquiry. The methodology is once again constrained by the decisions taken with regard to the ontological and epistemological inquiries of the research (Guba & Lincoln 1994). The following Table 4.1.1 epitomizes the ontological, epistemological and methodological stances of some of the major scientific research paradigms.

<b>Research Paradigms</b>				
<b>Basic Beliefs</b>	<i>Positivism</i>	<i>Post-Positivism</i>	<i>Critical Theory</i>	<i>Constructivism</i>
<i>Ontology:</i> the position on the nature of reality	Naïve Realism; external real reality which is apprehendable.	Critical Realism; real reality but probabilistically and never perfectly apprehendable.	Historical realism; virtual reality constructed by social and historical values.	Relativism; local and specific constructed and apprehendable realities.
<i>Epistemology:</i> nature, origin and acceptability of knowledge	Dualist/ objectivist; observable phenomena that provide credible true findings.	Modified dualist/ objectivist; observable phenomena that can provide probably true findings always subject to criticism and falsification.	Transactional/ subjectivist; subjective meanings and social phenomena that provide subjective findings.	Transactional/ subjectivist; interaction between object and researcher that provides created findings.
<i>Methodology:</i> the model of appropriate methods in the research process	Experimental/ manipulative; verification of hypotheses, employment of quantitative methods.	Experimental/ manipulative; falsification of hypotheses, employment of quantitative and possibly qualitative methods.	Dialogic/ dialectical; employment of qualitative methods.	Hermeneutical/ dialectical; interpretation of varying constructions through hermeneutical techniques, employment of qualitative methods.

Source: Guba & Lincoln 1994, Wahyuni 2012

**Table 4.1.1** *Alternative Research Paradigms and Defining Basic Beliefs*

As it is evident from the discussion above, the decisions taken with regard to the ontological orientation directly inform the epistemological position of a research study, thus constructing the context within which the research will be conducted. In turn, the methodological stance of a research project depends on the orientation of the previous decisions and provides the model of techniques which are appropriate for the research execution.

In trail with this process which starts by making choices from the ontological level and concludes to providing particular suggestions of action at the methodological level, the orientation of this study is going to be presented next. Of course for every research, the choices made during this process are guided by and

based on the knowledge claim or inquiry of what it is aimed to be learned and how it will be learned.

Following these considerations, the *ontological orientation* of this study is that reality is believed to exist but it is only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehensible due to the inevitably flawed human intellectual mechanisms and the intractable nature of phenomena (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Especially for research in consumer behaviour, taking under consideration that human intellectual mechanisms can be flawed, is of particular importance since human behaviour can only be comprehensible to a limited extent and only with regard to the social actors' internal life, constituted by personal beliefs, understandings, and internalized social rules (Foxall 1995). Hence, research characterized by such beliefs is attempting to understand the common reality within a system where many people operate independently (Perry et. al 1998). Thus, claims about reality should be subjected to the widest possible critical examination in order to facilitate the closest possible, but never perfect, apprehension of reality (Guba & Lincoln 1994).

Namely, the ontology of this research is oriented towards a critical realism stance. A critical realism position also acknowledges the differences between the world and specific perceptions of it and the prominent importance of that world. This means that critical realism considers the existence of an objective reality, although in order to achieve a clearer picture of it, several perceptions of that reality to be combined is required (Perry et al. 1998). A critical realism position also recognizes that "knowledge of reality is a result of social conditioning", and that reality cannot be comprehended independently of the social actors which are inevitably involved in the process of acquiring knowledge (Dobson 2002).

Therefore, with regard to the purpose of this study, the goals set to fulfil the knowledge inquiry and the marketing context of consumer behaviour within which this study rests, the presented ontological assumptions seem to fit more closely to the paradigm of post-positivism. As fitting to this scientific research paradigm, the inquiry aim of this study is explanation of the product placement effectiveness through the conceptual framework of the balance model which ultimately is enabling the prediction of phenomena and relations (Guba & Lincoln 1994). The post-positivism paradigm focuses on knowledge accumulation by accretion. Namely, this study attempts to add to the "edifice of knowledge" through generalizations, attempts to establish linkages among variables, and true statements that are able to serve to an

explanation of a situation concerning the relations of interest. However, post-positivism accepts the fact that an absolute objective reality can be captured only imperfectly and probabilistically (Guba & Lincoln 1994, Creswell 2003, Wahyuni 2012). As discussed, the position taken with regard to the ontology of this research guides the epistemology and methodology. Thus, the philosophical paradigm plays an important role to the research not only as a defined statement of position, but as conditional and closely related to the outcomes and practice of research. Hence, the philosophical position supports a coherency in research, in that it views philosophical beliefs concerning “the nature of the world under study as an integral and important part of the research process” (Dobson 2002).

Deriving from the orientation of the ontology, *the epistemology* of this study adopts the epistemological assumptions of the post-positivistic perspective. With regard to the nature of the relationships between the researcher or “the would be knower” and the researched object, post-positivism takes on a modified dualist/objectivist epistemology. Such an epistemological position assumes that the researcher and the researched object are independent units and that the object is studied by the researcher without influencing it or being influenced by it. Namely, the researcher studies the researched object at a distance, detached and in a non-interactive position, but values can be suspended in order to understand, thus to reach a true objectivity. However, post-positivism adopts a modified version of the dualist/objectivist stance, since it is accepted that perfect objectivity is not possible to be obtained, especially in contexts where human behaviour is studied, as in the consumer behaviour context of this research. Yet, the objectivity goal remains as a “regulatory ideal” through assigning emphasis on critical traditions and objective criteria such as fit with prior knowledge, academic community review and replicated findings that are deemed as probably true, but constantly subject to falsification (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, Smith et al. 2012). The position of this study also adopts the post-positivist belief that knowledge is not grounded on ironbound stable foundations that cannot be challenged, rather it is conjectural. There are grounds and warrants for asserting scientific beliefs but they are not always indubitable. The warrants for accepting these beliefs are always subjected to withdrawal in the light of further research (Phillips & Burbules 2000).

According to the epistemological orientation of post-positivism, this research examines the effectiveness of product placements based on preexisting knowledge of

theories that have been found to provide explanation of the relationships among elements in the balance model, yet it does not take this knowledge for granted, rather investigates it in light of new research. Objectivity is also attempted to be achieved by challenging previous findings in view of further research outcomes. Therefore, this research is re-investigating the existing reality to approach a more “generalized”, as possible, reality that will accrue the “edifice of knowledge” of product placement effects (Guba & Lincoln 1994).

The ontology and epistemology of the post-positivistic paradigm guide the decisions with regard to the methodology. Namely, the methodology that a research must adopt in order to investigate the knowledge inquiry should be decided according to the guidance emerging from the ontological and epistemological set of beliefs. For post-positivism the methodological orientation is toward a modified experimental/manipulative approach in order to fit the objectivity requirement of the epistemological beliefs. Post-positivistic methodology aims at investigating the knowledge inquiry in more natural settings, by collecting more situational information and by reintroducing discovery as an element of inquiry. In some aspect, as Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest, the post-positivist paradigm is open to the employment of qualitative methods as well, as a technique that can assist in the determination of meaning and purposes that people attribute to their actions. However, due to the cross-validating and generalization purpose of this research, the methodological orientation rests on more objective investigation techniques, not because it rejects the value of “critical multiplism”, provided by the utilization of triangulation approaches, but because the nature of this research dictates the utilization of a specific course of action in attempting to fulfil the knowledge inquiry’s requirements.

Thus, this research’s *methodological orientation* endeavors to fit the ontological and epistemological commitments by approaching reality and adding to previous knowledge through a hypothetical-deductive approach, with the aim to provide more robust definitions of viewer-character-product relations and their effects on viewers’ attitudes toward placed products. The provision of further evidence on previous findings and theoretical propositions, could add to the formation of generalizations, which can in turn be used more efficiently for prediction of hypotheses and control of variables. This study also attempts to follow the quality criteria of the post-positivistic paradigm which dictate isomorphism of findings with reality, internal and external validity -to the assessed extent possible when studying



consumer behaviour phenomena in an imperfect world-, reliability, and objectivity (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Although this study takes on a technical approach toward conducting research through quantitative methods, there were technical elements in the research methods which lean toward a qualitative orientation<sup>21</sup>. However, their purpose was not to be analyzed as part of the main analysis procedure or to produce outcomes that would be a central component of this study's findings, but rather to provide some insights in a supplementary manner to the findings of the quantitative techniques. Thus, the explanatory orientation of the research is allowed to be subserved by techniques not strictly quantitative, which might provide an added confidence to the findings or an added value to the implications that will stem from the research outcomes.

#### **4.1.1.1 Reaching the Knowledge Inquiry through Research Design**

Drawing from the philosophical orientation of the post-positivism paradigm which is positioned toward knowledge accumulation through a process of accretion, each fact, placed at its appropriate niche, serves as a building block that adds to the “edifice of knowledge”. As the paradigm posits, when these facts can be characterized as owning the faculty to take the form of generalizations, then these generalizations can be utilized confidently for efficient predictions (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Namely, when the results of multiple research in the appropriate niche, have offered robust outcomes that can be considered as facts, then they can be regarded as general statements that are true in that appropriate niche.

As evidence that is established through a single research is regarded as always imperfect and fallible (Creswell 2003), the post-positivistic paradigm allows the consideration that no single research can conclude to conclusive and perfect outcomes. Moreover, post-positivism stresses the importance of objective criteria that warrant the quality of research, such as external validity, reliability and objectivity. These criteria can be assessed in order for the research quality to be achieved, through comparing a research's outcomes with prior knowledge, providing the requirements for review by the academic community and utilizing replication of previous research,

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<sup>21</sup> These qualitative elements of this research will be discussed later on in this chapter, while the value of the information that they provided to the research outcomes is discussed in Chapter 6, section 6.2.2

since they all act as regulatory practices for reaching the objectivity ideal. Thus, knowledge deriving from a single research can always be challengeable by the new knowledge introduced with each new research (Phillips & Burbules 2000). Moreover, to reach the goal of approaching reality and truth, as closely as possible, and thus be acceptable by the academic and the practitioners' community, valid generalizations are necessary.

This research positioned within the post-positivism paradigm and adopting its beliefs with regard to knowledge accumulation, attempts to add to the marketing knowledge in the context of product placements. This accretion of knowledge is to be achieved by following a research process that aims to provide the ground for the establishment of true and valid, as possible, outcomes, in order to initiate a strategy of generalizations for research regarding the practice of product placement.

## **I. Rationale for Research Design Decisions**

As many researchers have observed (e.g. Hubbard & Armstrong 1994, Raman 1994, Easley et al. 2000, Hunter 2001) especially in marketing, there is a large amount of research but it does not correspond to empirical generalizations (Hubbard & Lindsay 2002). Namely, although great in number, empirical research in marketing is to a limited extent generalizable, and consequently there is little real knowledge of marketing phenomena. Thus, marketing knowledge can be considered as meager, ill defined and unappreciated (Leone & Schultz 1980). As marketing is a very much applied discipline, it should be expected that the relevant to the field developed knowledge would assist to the practical marketing field. Yet, the “cult of the isolated study” (Nelder 1986), namely the unquestionable acceptance of “one-off” uncorroborated studies, however statistically significant their results or no matter the degree of sophistication of their analysis, lead to an accretion of fragmented and isolated results which are considered of little practical use by practitioners. As such, academic research is seen as irrelevant, thus resulting to a division between academicians and practitioners.

Evidence of this academic-practitioner division and the unappreciation of academic research by the marketing discipline can be observed in facts from various sources. For instance, in terms of publishing sources, an observable fact could be that the Journal of Marketing albeit starting as an academic/practitioner journal,

transformed to an entirely aimed to academics journal in the late 1970s. Another fact could refer to the American Marketing Association's creation of the Marketing Management Journal in 1992, with the aim of targeting practitioners (Hubbard & Lindsay 2002). Apart from these plain facts, and with regard to an academic "peer review"-like source, Hubbard and Lindsay (2002) conducted some Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) analyses regarding nine marketing journals (from 1989 to 2000)<sup>22</sup> in order to determine whether marketing academics themselves valued research published in their field. These analyses, - although acknowledging the lack of official, acceptable annualized<sup>23</sup> average of citation rate-, showed that despite the perceived emphasis that is placed on original marketing research publications, many of these perceived original works are not viewed as particularly useful or important by academics, at least as indicated by citations. Thus, it seems that much marketing research, not only is perceived as not particularly useful by practitioners, but also it does not attract the interest of academics as well. Following these considerations, a movement has risen toward actual and valid knowledge development through emphasizing the need for empirical generalizations (e.g. Barwise 1995, Bass & Wind 1995, Easley et al. 2000, Uncles & Wright 2004, Wright & Kearns 1998, Singh et. al 2003, Ball & Sawyer 2013, Hubbard & Armstrong 1994, Evanschitzky & Armstrong 2013, Uncles & Kwok 2013).

This movement supports that generalizations should be a major part of marketing knowledge (Leone & Schultz 1980), and that more intellectual resources should be devoted to active search of empirical generalizations, than allocating all efforts on continuing but not always appreciated development of theories (Hubbard & Lindsay 2002). That is because single-shot research that provides theory developments suffers from the lack of cross-validation and refinement, practices that would actually produce valuable knowledge (Easley et al. 2000). Researchers use probability as an epistemological manoeuvre in order to justify their degree of belief toward a theory, due to the fact that a theory "can never be established with absolute certainty by purely logical arguments" (Raman 1994). That is, however successful a

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<sup>22</sup> European Journal of Marketing (EJM), the British Market Research Society's International Journal of Market Research (IJMR), Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (JAMS), Journal of Advertising Research (JAR), Journal of Consumer Research (JCR), Journal of Marketing (JM), Journal of Marketing Research (JMR), Journal of Retailing (JR), and Marketing Science (MS).

<sup>23</sup> Annualized average citation rate refers to how often an article in a journal was cited by others in a year.

piece of research might be, it cannot conclusively settle an issue. Rather, “it just makes some theoretical proposition to some degree more likely” (Cohen 1990). Thus, to ensure the validity and reliability of research (Singh et al. 2003), to discover empirical generalizations among phenomena of interest (Hubbard & Lindsay 2002), to establish important findings (Easley et al. 2000), to provide research with important and interesting practical implications (Uncles & Kwok 2013) and for actual, real knowledge to be developed, it is of outmost importance to embrace a tradition of research which will provide evidence of generalization through the conduct of replication research.

The call for a replication tradition in social science research has been the object of discussion for many years. Campbell and Stanley (1963) stated that “continuous, multiple experimentation is more typical science than once-and-for-all definite experiments”. Epstein (1980) also stated that “there is no more fundamental requirement in science than that the replicability of findings to be established”. Since then and up until today (e.g. Uncles & Kwok 2013, Ball & Sawyer 2013, Evanschitzky & Armstrong 2013) the role of research replication in the accomplishment of scientific inquiry is still stressed as a necessity for the conduct of “good science” (Easley et al. 2000).

Thus, if the purpose of science is to produce universal truths, in the degree possible in an imperfect world, immanent to this purpose is the mission of adequate theory development and refinement, where the criterion of reproducibility should be inseparably intertwined (Easley et al. 2000). Particularly in the marketing field, where generalizations are of outmost importance for the development of usable practices for the marketing industry (Hubbard & Lindsay 2002), and where universal generalizations are even more difficult to be established due to the fact that unpredictable human behaviour is involved, it is even more necessary to reach a sufficient and accurate knowledge state of laws of behaviour through replication research (Leone & Schultz 1980).

The ontological orientation toward critical realism that this research adopts, directly supports the necessity of replication research, not only as the sole way of facilitating generalizations, through which a closer step to apprehending the existing reality is achieved, but also as a means of the “widest possible critical examination”, in order for claims about reality to be more confidently supported (Guba & Lincoln 1994). The critical examination of the critical realism ontology involves a scientific

method that can provide a paradigm-dependent paradigm-modification strategy. Namely, a strategy for modifying, amending or confirming theories and methods in the light of further research provides more confident and accepted theories that can be considered as relevantly approximately true. If a body of accepted theories is relevantly approximately true, then this strategic methodology facilitates the production of a successive dialectical improvement of knowledge and methodology itself (Boyd 1990).

Critical realism's assumption that reality can be apprehended only imperfectly and probabilistically (Guba & Lincoln 1994) also conveys to its belief of the approximate truth of existing theories. That is, critical realism is positioned toward the notion that judgements of theoretical plausibility are evidential. That means that the degree of confirmation that a theory receives is perceived to be determined by evidential support from a number of successful predictions (or evidentially favourable observations), from "suitable controls for those possible artifactual influences" in the relevant experiments or observational settings, and other evidential factors. Thus, for critical realism, a proposed theory can be considered as confirmed or to a greater degree true, or closer in projecting the existing reality as possible, if it is plausible in the light of previously confirmed theories; and this plausibility is regarded as evidence for its approximate truth (Boyd 1990). Hence, for acceptance or rejection of theoretical propositions, critical examination of their plausibility and projectability is of central importance for critical realism. Subjecting theories to testing of their predictions and replicating these tests, thus examining the theories' plausibility with regard to different conditions, is a way to rigidly confirm, modify, improve or replace existing and newly proposed theories (Wright & Kearns 1998).

By testing empirical propositions, existing theories or proposed theories, which produce a positive result, a scientific generalization or a scientific finding, can be supported as having been achieved. If a negative result is produced through testing, then the findings of research can be characterized as a historical fact (Leone & Schultz 1980). Therefore, a generalization is falsifiable or testable in the case where it is extended beyond the original data it was generated from, or when a generalization can be derived from a constructed explanatory theory which has testable consequences beyond the original data (Simons 1968 as in Leone & Schultz 1980). The extension of findings to other data sets, the application of different methods to test a proposition, or the examination and test of theoretical propositions to different

situations, can lead to the much needed and called for generality of marketing theory. Marketing theory development that can provide confidence about its plausibility and generalizability as a means of interpreting the laws and facts of consumer behaviour is dependent on the accumulation of marketing knowledge. But as discussed earlier, knowledge that is actually valuable for the evolvement of marketing as a science can only be developed through the empirical generalization of marketing theories, for which the key is the adoption of a replication tradition (Leone & Schultz 1980).

Moreover, a replication tradition can be considered as addressing the ontological requirements of critical realism with regard to apprehending reality and reaching to as truthful conclusions as possible, through maintaining an objectivity stance in the pursuit of relevant knowledge. Thus, through replication research the objectivity claim of the post-positivism's epistemological orientation can be obtained more confidently and more justified. Therefore, replication aids to the solution of problems and to the addressing of ambiguities raised by one-off studies, such as subjectivity and uncertainty, which consequently impede the development of knowledge. That is because by conducting replication research, further samples that are utilized can reduce the problem of sampling error (Wright & Kearns 1998, Wells 2001, Hunter 2001, Hubbard & Lindsay 2002), different data collection procedures can overcome the possibility of any "bias arising from any one particular data collection" procedure (Wright & Kearns 1998), different spatial dimensions (place) and/or temporal dimensions (time) can reduce the effects of confounding influences (Wright & Kearns 1998, Easley et al. 2000, Hubbard & Lindsay 2002, Uncles & Kwok 2013) and also, additional different researchers can reduce the influence of subjectivity, bias and error. In this way, replication research not only provides an effective method that can examine the robustness of results, but also supports and stimulates the development of generalizations by investigating whether initial findings hold under different conditions (Wright & Kearns 1998).

## **II. Approaches to Replication Research**

For the accretion of valuable knowledge through achieving the ultimate ideal of generalization by conducting replication research, a variety of different replication approaches have been provided by relevant literature. While generally in science, a replication could refer to seeking for observable regularities, as in the case of

experiments for example, where the effect should be the same under identical conditions when executed by another researcher, in the social sciences, replication refers to less strict definitions. In the replication literature, in the field of social sciences and marketing as well, there exist multiple different definitions and categorized types of replication. However, the most commonly identified types of replication in literature are four.

The *direct* or *strict* (Raman 1994) or *Type 0* (Easley et al. 2000) replication refers to the identical replication, in terms of the experimental ideal that is met in the physical sciences. However, especially in the social sciences and marketing, this type of replication is difficult to be executed because of uncontrolled extraneous factors which can potentially interact with a variety of components in an experimental setting. Particularly, research that involves human subjects can never be duplicated (Raman 1994, Easley et al. 2000).

The second type of replication is the *systematic* or *partial* (Raman 1994) or *Type I* (Easley et al. 2000) or *close* (Ball & Sawyer 2013) or *statistical* (Hunter 2001) replication where some aspects of the original situation are varied with the aim to resolve uncertainties or obtain new information. All the different labels assigned by different authors for this type of replication, refer, more or less, to the most closely associated definition with the term replication. Yet, in their descriptions of the characteristics of this type of replication, there can be observed some differences with regard to the aspects of the original situation that vary in the replication. For example, in the definition of *Type I* it is stated that it is a faithful duplication of a previous study and usually refers to studies executed for the generalizability of findings from a single country or culture to others (Easley et al. 2000), whereas, a *statistical* or *close* replication refers to a strict as possible duplication by employing the same variables, settings, measurement instruments, analytical procedures but with another sample drawn from the same population, in order to reduce sampling error to a level that allows for correct conclusions to be drawn (Hubbard & Armstrong 1994, Hunter 2001, Ball & Sawyer 2013).

Another type of replication is *Type II* (Easley et al. 2000) or *differentiated* (Wright & Kearns 1998, Ball & Sawyer 2013, Uncles & Kwok 2013) or *sequential* (Raman 1994) replication referring to the most commonly met replications which generally test the same phenomena with the same procedures in multiple contexts, and their main purpose is to examine the generalizability of theories, concepts,

propositions and findings in different conditions (Wright & Kearns 1998, Easley et al. 2000, Uncles & Kwok 2013). Of course, these types that broadly refer to the same category are defined with some variation across literature. For instance, the *differentiated* replication can refer to research that may vary in several aspects from the original, such as employing variations in conceptual (e.g. changes in the variables or exclusion of variables which are part of the theory), and methodological (e.g. employment of different measures and variations in chosen populations) domains of the original research (Wright & Kearns 1998, Ball & Sawyer 2013, Uncles & Kwok 2013). A *sequential* replication is not strictly defined with regard to variations and refers to the replication of a study by a different researcher using the same or different stimuli at a different point in time and with another sample. Moreover, it can be implied that sequential replications are regarded as more preferable and useful for publication, due to the fact that they provide “more information on the scope or boundary of the original study’s outcomes”, as stated by the editor of the Journal of Consumer Research (Monroe 1992). Generally, sequential and differentiated replications are considered more preferable if the aim is the advancement of knowledge regarding a specific knowledge inquiry because their employed variations test the limits of theories and identify the conditions that a theory systematically fails, thus providing direction for further development and research, which is a prerequisite for progress (Wright & Kearns 1998). Another form of replication that could be hesitatingly included in this category is the *simultaneous* replication referring to the investigation of an effect across different scenarios (Raman 1994) which is usually executed by the same researcher (Monroe 1992).

The last classification of replications that is identified in relevant literature is *Type III* (Easley et al. 2000) or *conceptual* (Raman 1994, Tsang & Kwan 1999) or *replication with extension* (Hubbard & Armstrong 1994) and generally refers to replications which are a deliberate modification replication of a previous research (Easley et al. 2000), and this “intentionality” feature is the reason that can be considered as differentiating these replications from some of the above types of classification. Again, there are several details which shape the different definitions of this classification of replications, but they all share the same basic characteristic of this type which is the maintenance of the conceptual framework of the original study (Raman 1994). In Raman’s (1994) definition of the *conceptual* replication it is stated that the previous study’s conceptual framework is retained but different procedures



and independent variables are employed, while Tsang and Kwan (1999) specify the *conceptual extension* replication as a research based on the same theory as the original study that draws a sample from the same population but employs different procedures in terms of measurement instruments, approach of structuring the relationships among constructs and methods of data analysis. Hubbard and Armstrong (1994) define the *replication with extension* as a duplication of a previous study without altering the conceptual relationships involved in the initial framework, but instead testing them by applying changes in some aspects of the original design. These changes can refer to modifying the manipulated or measure variables, but not both, adding one or more variables and analyzing their impact on the framework, repeating the research with other samples from a different population or/and in different geographical settings, examining if the passage of time has an impact on the framework with regard to the original findings, and employing different procedures. Other authors have described and defined several types of replication research but they are more or less identifications of the same sets of characteristics shared by the above definitions, labeled with a different name. For this reason the most commonly met and clearly defined types of replications were mentioned and classified here in these major categories.

### **III. Research Approach for the Product Placement Effectiveness Accretion of Knowledge**

Taking under consideration the generalization purpose of this research, the necessity and the demands for the development of marketing knowledge -as explicitly mentioned in the previous sections- and the ontological orientation of the post-positivistic paradigm toward addressing the knowledge inquiry regarding product placement effects, the present research employs a replication approach in order to test the conceptualization of the balance model of product placement effects, in a variety of different circumstances.

By the employment of a replication approach, this study aims to test previously employed theoretical premises, for their applicability in different contexts and their faculty of predicting product placement effects in different situations, in order to provide new, and up to date evidence for the model's generalization. The generalizability purpose of the current research is to be achieved, and the specific to

the understanding of product placement effects objectives are to be addressed, by the employment of a replication approach to the research of Russell and Stern (2006), who originally conceptualized the product placement effects' balance model. This approach can allow, not only the comparison of the initial findings with up to date and extended results, but also the corroboration of the employed theories which can facilitate the confirmation of applicability, and thus the generalization the model.

In particular, this research can be characterized as employing a sequential research design, since a different researcher, using different stimuli, different sample, in a different geographical setting -with regard to the spatial dimension (place)-, and at a different point in time -regarding the temporal dimension-, is examining the same phenomenon, namely product placement effectiveness. However, it could also be considered as fitting to the characteristics of a conceptual or a replication with extension research design, because the theoretical framework was retained but the sampling, location, time, research execution procedures in the data gathering process and some aspects of the survey instrument were different<sup>24</sup> with regard to the initial research. Moreover, it could also be regarded as a comparative study since it facilitates various comparisons with the initial study, not only between findings but between methodological procedures as well.

Specifically, following the knowledge advancement requirement for the generalization of empirical research in marketing, and especially with regard to the phenomenon of product placement effectiveness, the employed research design aims at the product placement knowledge development through the attempt of examining the generalization of the descriptive and explanatory conceptual framework which has never before been investigated further since its introduction by Russell and Stern (2006). Research with regard to product placement, in particular, has been characterized by "single-shot" research, despite that fact that it has been the focus of numerous studies for several years now. The lack of generalizations regarding research that investigates the effectiveness of product placement is more than evident in relevant literature<sup>25</sup>. Moreover, Russell and Stern's (2006) is one of the few studies that examines product placement effectiveness based on existing theories deriving from psychology, mass media and literary criticism disciplines. It is also one of the

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<sup>24</sup> The different aspects employed in this research in comparison to the replicated initial research are analyzed later on in this section, in sub-section IV. Research Extension Characteristics

<sup>25</sup> Please see Chapter 1 for the impediment of knowledge advancement in this field.

few studies which identifies and attempts to measure predictive variables that can be considered as related to the effects that product placements might have on consumers.

Evanschitzky and Armstrong (2013) support the notion that replication of an initial study is a sign of the importance of the original study. Namely, replication not only is a key issue in making a research important since it may corroborate its findings, increase its value and add to the generalization of its theoretical underpinnings, but also it is a sign that a study is worth replicating and a way of judging a research's value. Of course, before replicating a study its worth-replicating value should be investigated. While acknowledging that the criterion of importance is subjective, a guideline as to which marketing works can be considered as important can be decided according to indicative criteria such as the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) and the (MSI) Marketing Science Institute's priority listing of topics of research (Hubbard & Armstrong 1994).

The SSCI can be utilized as a criterion for a study's importance by providing an indication of how valuable a study has been regarded by other studies through citation. Although there is no official average citation rate that can indicate a study's importance (Hubbard & Lindsay 2002) many researchers use this criterion to denote the meaningfulness or significance of a study in comparison to others (i.e. a greater number of citations might indicate the importance of a study if compared to others of relevant topic with a smaller number citations, and in relation to study's date of publication). The MSI priority listing can also be utilized as a criterion of a study's importance. If the research topic or the knowledge inquiry of a research fits with the MSI listings' of useful and required for the knowledge advancement of specific research areas -as identified by the marketing community-, then a study can be considered important and useful because it addresses contemporary issues that have been raised by the marketing community as necessary for research.

### **Examination of the research's importance by the criterion of MSI Reports**

In particular, with regard to the criterion of the contemporary research topics as identified by the MSI, the reports of 2006-2008, 2008-2010, 2010-2012 and 2012-

2014<sup>26</sup> were utilized for the identification of important issues in marketing, in the context of marketing communications and consumer behaviour.

Specifically, in the MSI 2006-2008 report, an important issue that was considered as needing research, referred to “Communications that create emotional connection” with brands. With regard to this issue requiring research, the conceptualization and the exploration of product placements as a communication strategy is shaping its own special field in the marketing discipline and it is commonly called entertainment marketing. Research in the area of entertainment marketing (e.g. Hackley & Tiwsakul 2006, Hudson & Hudson 2006) investigates consumers’ engagement with brands in the context of mediated entertainment (e.g. through television programs, movies etc.). Russell and Stern’s (2006) study can be regarded as directly addressing this issue since, it investigates the way that a viewer’s parasocial attachment with a media character can have an effect on the viewers’ feelings toward a product. Namely it investigates product placement as a communication strategy that may connect viewers and products emotionally. However, due to Russell and Stern’s (2006) research design their stimuli did not involve an adequate number of branded product placements, rather it contained more generic products, a fact that might have affected the measurement of variables and consequently the assessment of product placement effects, as they too state in their limitations. To address these possible limitations of the initial research, the current study utilizes stimuli with the inclusion of a greater number of branded products, thus adding to the investigation of product placements’ effects with regard to the creation of emotional connections between viewers and branded products.

The MSI 2008-2010 report requests the continuation of knowledge development regarding innovative strategies and new approaches for market segmentation and positioning of brands. As it has been discussed in earlier chapters<sup>27</sup> television programs are usually designed to target different audiences (Livingstone 1991) and according to this audience segmentation the decisions with regard to the particular brands that are placed in different programs are determined. Thus, the communication strategy of product placement, especially in television programs (in

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<sup>26</sup>The four MSI reports covering the years from 2006 to 2014 are considered as contemporary with regard to this research’s overall duration as well as with Russell & Stern’s (2006) study publication date.

<sup>27</sup>Please refer to Chapters 1 and 2

comparison to movies for example), provides specific insights and guidelines with reference to a brand's positioning according to its intended target audience.

The MSI 2010-2012 addresses the research necessity for marketing communications through which a more powerful conceptualization of a topic, with generalizable implications extending beyond a single brand and/or product, can operate in order to influence consumer perception and preferences towards brands and products. Moreover, it calls for research which can indicate the way that different forms of advertising, such as product placement, may vary in impact according to different contexts. Another issue raised as needing further research, refers to the shifting role of brands as promoting more than functional and emotional benefits. The implication is that brands also act as facilitators of communicating personal and social values such as self-identity and lifestyle. Lastly, this report highlights the fact that nowadays, multiple touch-points exist between consumers and brands, which generate more firm consumer-brand relationships that can be complex and diverse. With regard to this issue, the MSI stresses the need for research about the way that firms should approach product placements in specific contexts. Taking for instance the first research requirement from this MSI report, Russell and Stern's (2006) study can be considered as addressing the need for a powerful conceptualization of a topic (i.e. product placement effectiveness) that can generate generalizations beyond a single brand and product (multiple products involved in stimuli and attitudes toward them are measured by the survey instruments) in order to provide explanation of the way that consumers' perceptions and preferences can be influenced. Specifically, their study provides the solely conceptualized model based on existing rigid theories that can be met in product placement literature, thus offering for the first time a specific model that can be further examined (in terms of multiple contexts and multiple stimuli-involved brands and products) in order to develop and establish generalizations that would allow practitioners to actually implement communication strategies that have been found to influence consumers' perceptions and preferences toward brands. Drawing from the conceptualization of the balance model of the initial study, this extension research addresses the MSI's requirement for generalizations thus attempting to provide an added value to the framework and examine its application to other brands and products. Russell and Stern's, as well as this extension study, can be regarded as addressing the second MSI report's research inquiry of examining the variation in impact of different forms of advertising –in this

case in the form of product placements- in different contexts. Both studies can offer a building block to the edifice of knowledge regarding different forms of advertising in multiple contexts, as they focus on examining and attempt to establish generalizations with reference to the effects that product placement (as a form of advertising) in sitcoms (as a context) may have on consumer's attitudes toward the placed products (as an impact).

With reference to the third requirement for research, regarding the shifting role of brands as facilitators of communicating one's lifestyle and personal identity values, it has been thoroughly discussed in previous chapters <sup>28</sup> that products and brands in the sitcom context are most likely to be appointed to this shifting role, as they are "promoted" by media characters with whom viewers' form parasocial relationships. The impact of these relationships on viewers' lives as regards to their consumer characteristics can be important, as brands associated with their attached characters (who also act as referent others and role models) can act as the connecting glue between the consumer and the product. Thus, both the original and this extension study, by the examination of the relations among viewers/consumers, characters and placed brands under the spectrum of parasocial interaction theory, provide a very specific insight as to the way that brands and products can take on the role of promoters of identity and lifestyle values. This very specific, complex and emotional relationship which can be build between viewers/consumers and brands under the facilitation of parasocial relationships in the context of sitcoms, can be considered as a very important dimension of the product placement strategy. Namely, product placement in sitcoms can take a very special form, as a strategy that builds a unique touch-point between consumers and brands which in turn, can be extended to the development of special firm relationships between them. Hence, both the initial and present study provide a unique insight with reference to the last research requirement of the 2010-2012 MSI report that can be of practical use to marketers who aim at strategies able to build firm relationships between their brands and a targeted audience of consumers. Specifically, the practical advice that both studies could provide to practitioners is that an orientation toward product placements in specific media contexts such as sitcoms, can offer the potentials and a fertile ground for the development of relationships between brands and consumers.

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<sup>28</sup>Please see Chapters 2 and 3

The most recent MSI report covering the research priorities for the years 2012-2014 calls for research on experience with products. The report focuses on the notion that in the contemporary marketing field an interest has been raised with regard to the fact that “people buy experiences, not products”. Thus, practitioners call for research which can identify “what accounts for experiences that are *remembered, interesting, repeated* and *valued*” and which practice can offer experiences that will create brand value and can make a difference with consumers. Both studies can provide insights regarding to what can account as an experience that is interesting, can be remembered, repeated and valued, by suggesting the creation of product and brand experiences through embedding product placements in the context of sitcoms. That is because, according to placement literature, a “transformational” concept that expresses the power of product placements in contexts where consumers experience imaginative engagements with favourite TV programs and characters, can explain such experiences (Russell 1998). This concept implies that product placements can transform the experience of using or consuming a placed product to match that watched in the TV program (Hackley & Tiwsakul 2006). Thus, the engagement of consumers with the consumption experiences of their attached characters can transfer meanings of the possible experience that the consumption of a brand can offer to the consumer, by imaginatively experiencing it through their parasocial relationship with the sitcom’s characters.

Brands and products, as it is mentioned in this MSI report and in literature (e.g. Levy 1959, Elliot 1994, Bulmer & Buchanan-Oliver 2004, Hackley & Tiwsakul 2006), are bought and consumed not only for their functionality but also for the lifestyles, stories, experiences and emotions that they convey (Bulmer & Buchanan-Oliver 2004) and as symbolisms of personal attitudes, goals, social patterns and strivings (Levy 1959). Products and brands are also considered as carrying a symbolic content that functions as a form of social communication (Elliot 1994). All these potential meanings that brands carry, can be observed consciously or unconsciously by viewers through the interaction of characters and placed products and brands. And the unique form of relationships between viewers and characters, which a successful sitcom can facilitate, accommodates the systematic and entertaining experiential consumption of the placed brands by the viewers/consumers, through their favourite characters. The distinctive advantage that the strategy of product placement in sitcoms can offer to the development of the experiential aspect

of brands, is that this kind of experiential consumption can be *interesting* since the audience is attached to the TV program and its characters, as well as, to almost everything that characters are associated with; it can be *valued* since it is “lived” through the characters with whom viewers are attached, thus making it more difficult to be rejected as a form of advertising; and it can be *repeated* due to the successive nature of sitcoms in the form of episodes.

Through the examination of the research priorities, as set by the MSI, an indication as to which research topics are considered as interesting and important by practitioners of the marketing field, and valuable for the application of practices in the market can be identified. Yet, as the MSI 2010-2012 points out, the need for further research lies with the fact that specific conceptualizations, which are made powerful by generalizations and thus valuable for the advancement of knowledge, are necessary for marketers. Thus, according to the criterion of the MSI’s research priorities listing and through the above discussion, reason has been given as to why the initial study of Russell and Stern (2006) can be characterized as important for further research by this extension study, and why the establishment of its generalization faculty can be considered as valuable.

### **Examination of research’s importance by the criterion of SSCI**

As previously discussed in this section, although subjective, the utilization of SSCI as a criterion of indicating a research’s importance and its worthiness for replication is common in the academia (Hubbard & Armstrong 1994, Hubbard & Lindsay 2002). Specifically, according to SSCI, Russell and Stern’s (2006) study has been cited forty-one times since its publication date. Taking under consideration the publication date<sup>29</sup>, the rate of the initial study’s citation is estimated to an average of 5.85 per year. By an examination of other studies regarding product placement in years 2006 and 2007 (in all relevant journals and all databases) only two (out of ten) product placement studies had been cited more than forty-one times (i.e. one had forty-three citations and the other forty-eight), and all others were cited less than twenty-six

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<sup>29</sup> The estimation of years since the publication, regards the full years from the publication date (i.e. 2007- 2012) and the addition of one more year to account for the approximately six months left from the publication date (Spring 2006) till the end of that year and the approximately six months after the beginning of this year (2013) that the research could be cited by another study and be available to a database by the time that this thesis would be completed.



times<sup>30</sup>. Although the comparisons are subjective, the refining criterion with regard to time (focusing on a two year period when objectively the comparison could take into account only the publication year of the article of interest) can only make the judgement stricter. Thus, it could be implied that a 5.85 rate of yearly citation could be considered as high enough to denote the importance and appreciation of Russell and Stern's (2006) research from other studies. Moreover, such a rate could imply the meaningfulness of the initial study and its worth-replicating value.

Hence, the examination and consideration taken regarding the criteria of assessing a study's importance, imply that the initial research not only is valued and appreciated by other studies (as judged through citation), thus making it worth for replication, with the aim to establish its generalizability, but also the study's topic addresses several aspects of the marketing community's requirements for further research. For these reasons, it can be supported that an extension of the initial study will examine the results and the framework's generalizability, it will address the current issues dictating further research -since many of the aspects match the research priorities set by the marketers-, and will also bring the conceptualization of the initial study to test, in a contemporary light.

#### **IV. Research Extension Characteristics**

After examining the reasons for employing a sequential or research with extension replication approach in this research, and having established, as appropriately as possible, the initial study's importance and its worth-replicating value for the accretion of knowledge, it is necessary to highlight the aspects of this research which are differentiated from Russell and Stern's (2006) study. The maintained and different features of the current extension's study in comparison to the initial study are presented in the following Table 4.1.1.1 and are analyzed next.

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<sup>30</sup> See appendix I for the SSCI list of the articles used for the comparison

<b>Research Features</b>	<b>Initial Study</b>	<b>Extension Study</b>
<i>Conceptual Framework</i>	Balance Model of Sitcom Product Placement Effects	Balance Model of Sitcom Product Placement Effects
<i>Sample</i>	Drawn from U.S. national population	Drawn from a U.K. university population
<i>Research Execution</i>	Live broadcasted in television stimulus involving different series	Laboratory screened stimulus of two different episodes of the same sitcom
<i>Research Instrument</i>	Online questionnaire completed at participants' location	Online questionnaire with different sequence of questions completed in a computer laboratory
<i>Data Analysis and Model Testing</i>	Correlation Coefficients and Regression analyses	Correlation Coefficients and Regression analyses

Source: This Research

**Table 4.1.1.1** *Comparison of Initial and Extension's Research Aspects*

#### *Conceptual Framework*

Conceptually, the extension research maintained the original framework. The hypotheses and the variables were also retained as originally, because the aim of the extension research is to attempt to establish generalizations and the maintenance of the original variables and hypotheses was judged as the most accurate and objective – as possible- way of examining the framework. Keeping the same variables was also judged as necessary in order to enable as accurate as possible comparisons between the results of the original and the extension research.

#### *Sample*

The extension research employed different recruitment procedures and a different sample. The original study recruitment was executed in three waves through e-mail and screened participants according to their television viewing habits. Respondents who were regular viewers of at least one TV series and who were able to watch one episode live were selected. Recruitment was done on a U.S. national base (Russell & Stern 2006). The extension study recruitment procedure was executed on a two-wave base. An announcement that involved a screening questionnaire was aired online twice and included specific questions with regard to the particular sitcom that was the

stimulus to be used. The participants who were able to complete successfully the screening questionnaire were given access to further details as to the procedure of participation, while those that failed to answer the required questions were excluded from any further information<sup>31</sup>. The screening procedure aimed at recruiting participants who were as regular as possible viewers of the particular sitcom. Recruitment was done on a university based population in the UK<sup>32</sup>. Hence, the sample of the extension research was different and was also drawn from a different population.

### *Research Execution*

The original study's research execution procedure involved an online survey that participants had to complete later at the same night after having watched an episode of a selected series that was normally broadcasted live on TV at a specific time and day. However, the procedure of the extension research required that the participants would participate on a session of their convenience in a two week period, where one episode in a selection of two stimuli episodes of their regularly watched sitcom was screened. In the same location, after having watched the episode, participants were required to log-on to a personal computer and complete the online survey. Thus, the research execution procedure was different from that of the original study with regard to the way that participants were exposed to the stimulus and the way that they completed the online questionnaire.

### *Research Instrument*

The questions of the research instrument were maintained as exactly the same as possible to those of the original instrument. The measurements can be regarded as being exactly the same, as long as the information of the original study's instrument was accurately presented in the publication. However, the sequence of the sets of questions and measures was altered in the extension study. Specifically, Russell and Stern's (2006) questionnaire involved three parts. The first part included measures with regard to participants' attitudes toward the series and the intensity of their

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<sup>31</sup> Details about the sampling procedures will be discussed in section 4.1.5.1 of this chapter.

<sup>32</sup> From a single university based in the UK.

relationship to the series and its characters. This part was maintained the same in the extension study. The second part required the participants' recall of up to five consumption instances that they had observed during the episode's viewing, and involved open-ended questions and measures with regard to the participants' attitudes toward the consumption events, the strength of the relationship between a product and a character related to the event, and the perceived character's attitude toward the product. In the initial study, it was stated that this set of questions and measures was repeated for each of the consumption events that the participant had recalled. Then, a third part involved open-ended questions and measures regarding the characters that the respondents had mentioned as associated with the recalled consumption events (parasocial attachment scale and attitude toward the character scale). This set of character related measurements and questions, was repeated for each of the characters listed in part two. Then, demographic data were collected.

However, this procedure was not clearly stated how it was practically imported in an online questionnaire, since respondents were listing different consumption events and different characters, and they had to report them in written form. Moreover, the way that the respondents could match the consumption event with a specific character was not clearly stated, since several sets of questions and measurements were interjected between the consumption event related measures and the character related measures. Such procedure could imply the presence of error through confusion, but there was no statement as to the way that it could be prevented. Respondents' confusion could be increased if they listed one consumption event as associated with more than one characters or if the same character was involved in more than one consumption event.

In addition, a pre-test of the questionnaire in this form that was performed in the current study's procedure and feedback received from respondents who completed this kind of online questionnaire, indicated that it was not practical for completion. Respondents reported that they were troubled in recalling the order of products-characters' association that they had listed in previous questions. They also reported that they were not sure how to proceed and that they needed to dedicate more time in the survey completion. Thus, to avoid participants' confusion and to measure the variables more accurately as participants were recalling and listing specific consumption events with specific characters, it was judged as more appropriate to alter the sequence of questions and measures of part three. This alteration involved

the setting up of the matching questions and measures of the consumption event with the involved character together, as a single set of questions. Then, this procedure was repeated for each event that participants had mentioned in a set of “event”-“associated character” form of measures<sup>33</sup>.

### *Data Analysis and Model Testing*

As thoroughly discussed, for issues of aiming toward generalization of the initial results and establishment of the framework, this extension study employed the same data analysis methods and the same methodological procedures in order to test the model in the new context. Following the data analysis methods of the initial study, the current research also examined the variables’ construct by computing correlation coefficients, whereas the model was tested by a series of regression analyses.

#### **4.1.2 Research Approach**

Following the structure of the research design approach as depicted in Figure 4.1.1 and according to the knowledge inquiry related choices and the philosophical position taken for this research, the deriving research approach characterizes the reasoning of this study in terms of the research objective. Namely, the research approach refers to the type of reasoning through which the relationship between theory and data is determined. A research approach toward reaching the aim of the research can be characterized as deductive, inductive or abductive, depending on the different inferential procedures of the priorities that a research project sets, with regard to the choice of what comes first; theory or data. The following Table 4.1.2 presents the reasoning of each research approach.

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<sup>33</sup> Details about the current study’s research instrument will be discussed in section 4.1.5.1 of this chapter under sub-section *Research Instrument*.

	<b>Deduction</b>	<b>Induction</b>	<b>Abduction</b>
<i>Rationale</i>	Deductive inference; if the premises are true, the inferred conclusion must be true too.	Inductive inference; known, given or observed premises are used to generate untested conclusions.	Abductive inference; known premises or guiding principles are used to generate testable conclusions.
<i>Generalizability</i>	Generalizing from the general to specific.	Generalizing from the specific to the general.	Generalizing from the interactions between the specific and the general.
<i>Use of data</i>	Data collection utilized for the evaluation of propositions or hypotheses stemming from existing theory.	Data collection utilized for the exploration of phenomena, identification of themes and patterns and creation of conceptual frameworks.	Data collection utilized for the exploration of phenomena, identification of themes and patterns, locating them in conceptual frameworks and testing these through subsequent data collection.
<i>Theory</i>	Theory falsification or verification.	Theory generation and construction.	Theory generation or modification; incorporation of existing theory where appropriate, for the construction of new theory or the modification of existing theory.

Source: Adapted from Saunders et al. 2012

**Table 4.1.2** *Approaches to Research Reasoning*

This extension research can be regarded as employing a deductive research approach, because it uses a previously proposed theoretical construction that is represented by a framework, and aims to test it in order to falsify or verify it. Moreover, considering the initial research's approach, a deductive reasoning is justified by the fact that the theoretical construction of the framework is developed based upon the interdisciplinary incorporation of existing theories, namely balance theory, parasocial interaction theory and genre theory. Thus, through the incorporation of these existing theories, a set of premises that are considered as true are utilized in order to test the inferred conclusion (i.e. the proposed framework) through the deducted hypotheses<sup>34</sup>. The hypotheses deriving from the theoretical propositions represent the principle of reductionism that characterizes the inferential

<sup>34</sup> As presented in Chapter 3, section 3.2.2

process of deduction. The reductionism principle means that the examination of the validity of the framework was attempted through a process where the general premises are reduced to simpler manageable units for examination. These simpler constructs that were first investigated, refer to the relations among the elements of the framework<sup>35</sup>, consisting the variables involved in the hypotheses.

The deductive approach to this research follows its purpose and its positioning to the post-positivistic paradigm, by turning its focus on the generalization of outcomes. Generalization is a distinctive characteristic of deduction, which is ensured by requiring a structured methodology that provides standards of reliability, which in turn facilitate replication (Saunders et al. 2012). Therefore, generalization is enabled when the results are consistent with the premises deriving from an existing theory, which means that the theory is corroborated -though temporarily-, thus providing one more –but not absolute- proof of its generalizability (Blaikie 2010). Generalization is also enabled, when a structured methodology is followed, thus facilitating further attempts of replication (Gill & Johnson 2010), which in turn, is a practice of generalizing.

### ***4.1.3 Research Strategy***

The nature of the research design can be characterized as exploratory, descriptive or explanatory with regard to the purpose that a research serves. Namely, it characterizes the way that the researcher asks questions with reference to the research topic. According to the nature of the research questions, an exploratory, descriptive or explanatory research is employed. In particular, exploratory research asks questions to discover what is happening and generates insights about the topic.

Descriptive research aims at obtaining an accurate profile of the topic, or the phenomenon of interest, or a situation, or persons (Saunders et al. 2012). Descriptive research is fundamental to the accumulation of knowledge because it can provide a more accurate view of a phenomenon or a situation (De Vaus 2001). Hence, descriptive research can be regarded as an extension, forerunner, originator, or part of

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<sup>35</sup> Namely, the relations between character-product, consumer-character and consumer-product which are defined by information and theoretical underpinnings stemming from parasocial and genre theory, and as conditioned by the fundamental propositions of balance theory.

explanatory research (Saunders et al. 2012). That is because, for the explanation of a phenomenon, an accurate view of its facts, elements and dimensions should be known to facilitate predictions, hypotheses development and examination of relationships. Through accurate descriptions of phenomena and situations, the fact and the dimensions of a phenomenon can be revealed and only then questions of the reasons behind the occurrence of the phenomenon can be asked. Such questions can be considered as fitting to an explanatory research which usually asks “why” questions, in order to explain what is happening (De Vaus 2001).

Thus, an explanatory research studies and aims to explain an observed phenomenon, situation or problem. Generally, explanatory research examines the relationships between variables and attempts to obtain a clearer view of the way that these variables shape the relationships identified in a phenomenon, with ultimate aim to explain the reasons behind the occurrence of this phenomenon (Saunders et al. 2012).

The nature of this research’s design can be characterized as a descripto-explanatory (Saunders et al. 2012) because both the initial and the extension study’s inquiry ideal is to enrich the knowledge, namely the understanding, of the way or the process that product placements can affect viewers/consumers’ attitudes toward placed products. Based on existing knowledge stemming from psychology, communication and genre theory studies, and indications deriving from the findings of prior studies regarding product placement, the initial research synthesizes possible evidence from these sources in order to construct and shape a clearer image of the product placement effectiveness process. This synthesis of information stemming from the interdisciplinary approach is examined in the unique context of sitcoms, due to the particular characteristics they entail, and thus considered to be influencing this process. By synthesizing the premises of existing theories and prior findings, the initial study identifies relations with the aim to investigate how they can affect the attitudes of viewers/consumers’ attitudes toward placed products. Namely, the proposed framework that is constructed, aims to explain the way the relationships in the model function with regard to product placement effectiveness. Thus, the identification of relations through utilizing existing theories and prior evidence



facilitates the attempt of explanation of the model, by allowing specific predictions of the affects that the relations have on consumers' attitudes toward placed products<sup>36</sup>.

For the verification of identified relations between elements of the proposed framework and for the investigation of their affect on the other relations of the framework, as well as for the examination of how well the balance model can explain the product placement effects on consumers, a survey research strategy is employed by this research. The survey was also the research strategy of the initial research. Thus, the decision taken for this extension research was also guided by the requirements of a structured methodology that allows the examination and testing of the initial research's validity and generalizability in a different context.

Surveys are an appropriate research strategy that allows "the collection of standardized data from a sizable population", in an economical way with regard to time and monetary cost. Moreover, it is a strategy that it is easily explained and understood by many people and enables the collection of quantitative data. Quantitative data can be analyzed by scientific statistical methods, which in turn can facilitate the identification of significance in relations among variables, and can also enable the development or testing of models. Additionally, a survey allows greater control over the research process and by the utilization of appropriate samples and statistical analyses methods, representative findings of the sample's population can possibly be generated. Besides, the survey strategy permits the efficient collection of data in cross-sectional studies, which may be restricted by issues of time, money and availability of respondents as it will be presented in the following sections (Saunders et al. 2012).

#### ***4.1.4 Time Horizons***

A research's time horizons refer to the timely manner of a study's procedure, namely the consideration of the element of time in the study of the topic of interest. In that sense, longitudinal research studies a phenomenon over a period of time, meaning that it considers time as a dimension that plays a particular role in addressing the research objectives, and facilitates the research of phenomena with regard to change and

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<sup>36</sup> As presented by the Hypotheses in Chapter 3, section 3.2.2

development. On the other hand, cross-sectional research, studies a phenomenon at a particular point in time, which might be due to practical considerations such as time restriction for the research execution (Saunders et al. 2012), or unavailability of participants. However, the study of a phenomenon in one-point in time, might also find reason to a “good enough consideration” according to the study’s objectives. That means, that the collection of data at one point in time, might be considered as more appropriate method for meeting the research’ requirements. Apart from the element of time, cross-sectional research is characterized by the employment of a survey strategy that allows the collection of quantitative data (Saunders et al. 2012), which in turn can provide the generation of statements with regard to the research topic. However, cross-sectional designs can be also characterized as being problematic regarding the direction of causal influence, in comparison to other designs (Bryman & Bell 2007).

Following a structured methodology that aims to be as closely as possible to the research processes employed by the initial research, this research extension can be characterized as of a cross-sectional design. Although the initial study collected the survey data at one point in time, specifically at one night, this extension research gathered the data over a two-week period due to the fact that a different data collection procedure was followed<sup>37</sup>. However, the dimension of time was not critical for the objectives of the study, its purpose was not oriented in studying change and development as it is for longitudinal studies, and it is not claiming to investigate causality, and thus it can be characterized as cross-sectional as the initial study.

#### ***4.1.5 Data Collection Methods***

The choice of data collection methods derives from the post-positivistic paradigm and the deductive approach toward which this research is oriented. The choice is also indissoluble connected with the nature of the studied phenomenon and the purpose of this research, which aims at the examination of generalization of the initial study, through a structured methodology, close to the original research’s process.

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<sup>37</sup> As explained in section 4.1.1.1 of this chapter.

Thus, the present research employs quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. However, this extension research also obtained further information with regard to the elements and the relations of the framework from secondary sources<sup>38</sup>. That was considered of critical importance not only due to the descriptive nature of this research but also because the initial study's acquirement of information was constrainedly limited –at least in presentation- due to the fact that it was published in an academic journal with specific requirements. Hence, with the aim to get a clearer view and a broader insight with regard to the nature of the viewer/consumer-character-placed product relations and to bring the research into a contemporary context, extensive research was performed on a secondary source base. Moreover, the fact that the framework is constructed based on the underpinnings of three different theories was regarded as needing further research to ensure that the findings and the model could be examined and explained with greater confidence. Another factor that led to the necessity of obtaining further information was the extension of the initial research in another context, which is geographically, timely and possibly culturally different in comparison to the context of Russell & Stern's research. The variation of this research's stimuli, compared to the original stimuli, can also be regarded as a factor necessary to be taken into consideration. Thus, further information was required to better understand the possible differences in results that the use of branded placed products in this stimulus might generate, when compared to the initial study where the stimuli involved, in their majority, generic placed products. That is because generic products differ from branded products, and thus, these differences might have an effect to viewers/consumers' attitudes toward the placed products, and of course, to the generalizability of the framework. Certainly, the information this study obtained through secondary sources can be considered as necessary for the comparison of the initial with the extension's study results and for the ability of attempting to explain any possible differences.

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<sup>38</sup>As presented analytically in Chapter 2 and utilized in Chapter 3.

#### 4.1.5.1 Data Collection Procedure

As mentioned previously<sup>39</sup>, the procedure of the research execution was differentiated in some aspects in comparison to the initial study. Specifically, the differences refer to the parts of participants' invitation, the participants' screening process, the participants' exposure to stimulus and the research instrument. The particular procedures followed by the current study are presented in detail next.

##### *Invitation & Screening process*

Participants were invited to participate in the study by a two-wave announcement that was released to Cardiff University's notice board, two weeks prior to the main study. A link was redirecting willing participants to an online screening questionnaire<sup>40</sup> where three, four-item multiple choice questions with regard to the location, characters' names and occupations referring to "*The Big Bang Theory*" sitcom, were required to be completed by participants. The multiple choice answers were including locations, characters' names and occupations of other TV series that were broadcasted by British television channels at that point in time. Candidate participants had to answer at least two of the three questions correctly in order for the online instrument to reveal them the appropriate information so as to allow them participation in the main study. Such information included the main study's two-week session schedule, the location and further details for their participation<sup>41</sup>. In total, 1215 candidate participants completed the screening questionnaire in both waves and 383 answered at least two questions correctly and were invited to participate in the main study. In total, ten one-hour sessions at a university's computer laboratory were arranged in a two week period for the execution of the main study.

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<sup>39</sup> Please see section 4.1.1.1 of this chapter, part: IV. Research Extension Characteristics

<sup>40</sup> The screening questionnaire was developed on the online survey web site Qualtrics provided by Cardiff University.

<sup>41</sup> A copy of the invitation and the screening questionnaire is attached to appendix II

## *Stimulus*

This research used episodes of the sitcom “*The Big Bang Theory*” after taking under consideration several issues such as viewership rating, degree of incorporated branded product placement and target audience’s age group. Episodes from this specific sitcom were judged as most appropriate to be utilized as stimuli in comparison to other contemporary sitcoms, because the sitcom was broadcasted in contemporary manner, in terms of time, with the US broadcasting and as in the US, the sitcom became very popular, almost a trend-setting cult among viewers.

Specifically, channel E4, which has the royalties for the sitcom’s UK distribution, reached its highest viewership rate for the year 2012, on November’s season six premiere<sup>42</sup> which was watched by 1.89 million viewers and an additional 420.000 on the E4+1 catchup broadcast, adding to a total of 2.31 million (Millar 2012a). Overall, since its first UK broadcast on 2008, and until 2012, the sitcom has received a number which varies between 1million and 2.31million viewers in each season (Millar 2012b), and even its repeats are viewed by more than one million viewers (Channel E4 2013). The target audience of “*The Big Bang Theory*” as defined by E4, is young adults 16-34 years old and its reach to this audience is approximately 9.4 million viewers (Channel E4 2013). The target audience of this specific sitcom fits closely to the sampling decisions of this research<sup>43</sup> and thus, this characteristic was one of the most important vantages in the decision about this study’s selection of stimulus.

Another important feature of the sitcom is that, more often than not, branded placed products are incorporated in the episodes’ scenarios. In particular, in Nielsen’s “*ten most remembered product placements for 2011*”, the “*The Big Bang Theory*” sitcom owned three out of the ten most memorable branded moments (Stampler 2011). Thus, a stimulus that integrates a number of branded product placements was judged as more efficient for the control of the stimulus effects and for comparison with the initial study. Namely, such a stimulus was thought as enabling the examination of possible different effects in terms of intensity, that branded placed products might have on consumers’ attitudes toward the product, in contrast to the

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<sup>42</sup> Coincidentally, at that time (15<sup>th</sup> of November 2012) the current research was scheduled to be executed after three weeks.

<sup>43</sup> As it will be discussed in section 4.1.5.2 of this chapter.

initial study's stimuli which involved less branded placements and more generic ones. Moreover, a stimulus with embedded brands was expected to enable participants to provide detailed insights in the open-ended questions of the online questionnaire, an issue that was not reported by the initial study.

The choice of the specific episodes that would be utilized as stimuli, was taken according to the consultation of four loyal to the sitcom's viewing critics, who discussed and selected the two episodes according to criteria of episode's humorousness, perceived plots' pleasure, number of branded product placements and degree of placements' prominence. According to these criteria, the selected episodes were containing an adequate number of branded products but of suitable prominence. Namely, the episodes included placements that were not judged as extremely prominent so as to provoke negative feelings to viewers as "covered advertisements", but they were also not deemed as subtle, so as to not be noticed at all. Moreover, the particular episodes were selected as humorous and entertaining enough so as to keep viewers attracted, of course, with probably less objective criteria, due to the limited number of critics. The decision to use two episodes was based on practical considerations of time, budget limitations and as such, to the number of participants. Due to the practicalities and the nature of the research's execution, a specific number of participants could be recruited. Thus, to obtain more data -in number and variety- regarding the consumption events and placed products, the two stimuli were screened by turns in the scheduled sessions. In this way, the collection of a greater number of data that would enrich the analysis and the results was achieved, even though participants were restricted to a certain number. The analytical plots of the two, utilized as stimuli, episodes of "*The Big Bang Theory*", are attached to appendix III.

### *Research Instrument*

The selected participants who had successfully completed the screening questionnaire attended the session of their convenience, and at first, they watched one twenty-minute episode of the sitcom that was screened on a projector. After having watched the episode, they were asked to complete the self-paced online questionnaire, on one of the laboratory's computers.

As previously mentioned<sup>44</sup>, the extension study's online questionnaire is differentiated in some aspects to the initial study's instrument. The following presentation of the online questionnaire, hosted by the survey web site Qualtrics, describes its final structure -after the pre-test's required alterations-, as it was employed in the main study.

The questionnaire was divided in three sections. The first part was concerned with collection of data regarding attitudes toward the sitcom. The measure consisted of a three-item scale of the respondents' attitude toward the sitcom, and each item was composed of a seven-point bipolar attitude toward "*The Big Bang Theory*" measure (I like it/I dislike it, Good/Bad, Unpleasant/Pleasant). The question aimed at measuring the general attitudes toward the series.

To measure the intensity of the relation between the respondent and the sitcom, the Television Connectedness scale created by Russell et al. (2004) was also included in the questionnaire. Russell, Norman and Heckler (2004) formally defined the concept of "connectedness as the level of intensity in the relationship that a viewer develops with the character and contextual setting of a program in the parasocial television environment". It should be noted that with regard to the sitcom's characters, this scale measures the intensity of relationship with the group of characters and not individual characters. The measure consisted of a 16-item, five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree/Strongly Disagree).

The second section of the questionnaire involved questions that were concerned with the viewing of the particular stimulus-episode that had been screened. Prior to the questions, an explanation was given in the form of a message with regard to the episode. The explanation read; "In the show, sometimes people are seen interacting with certain products or services (eating certain foods, drinking certain things, using certain modes of transportation travelling to certain places, shopping at certain places, consuming certain forms of entertainment, using certain types of services, etc.". Then, they were asked to recall any instances of similar consumption-related or interaction with products events in the episode they had watched, and indicate a product for the recalled event. Respondents had to type the product in a single line open-ended format answer-box and then to complete a three-item, seven-

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<sup>44</sup> Please refer to section 4.1.1.1 of this chapter, the *Research Instrument* part, under IV. Research Extension Characteristics.

point bipolar scale, regarding their attitude toward the product they typed (I like it/I dislike it, Good/Bad, Unpleasant/Pleasant). Next, three open-ended questions regarding the specific product followed. These questions were concerned with the perceptions and thoughts of respondents as to why they thought the product was there, what were their thoughts about the contribution of the product to the sitcom and with which character they thought that the product was associated more closely. Next, the strength of the, mentioned by respondents, character-product association was measured with a three-item, five-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree/Strongly Agree). The statements of the three items read; the product was strongly associated with the character, the character interacted with the product, the character expressed like for the product. Then, the perceived valence of the mentioned character's attitude toward the mentioned product was measured by a one-item four-point Likert instrument that read; the association between the character and the product was: positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative, negative.

The following questions were concerned with the respective character that the respondents had mentioned in the previous questions. The first instrument consisted of a three-item, seven-point bipolar scale that aimed to measure the respondents' attitude toward the character they had mentioned (I like him/her/ I dislike him/her, S/he is bad/ S/he is good, S/he is unpleasant/ S/he is pleasant). Next, the reduced nine-item parasocial attachment scale was included with the aim to measure the degree of respondent's parasocial attachment with the specific character that s/he had mentioned. Rubin, Perse and Powell (1985) first created the 20-item parasocial interaction scale which was then adapted by Rubin & McHugh (1987) and Perse & Rubin (1989) to a reduced ten-item scale. For this questionnaire the nine-scale adapted instrument by Russell & Stern (2006) was utilized, in order to provide the closest possible data that would allow comparisons between findings. Lastly, an open-ended question was included and asked the respondents to describe the character they had mentioned, for example, what is the character like and what does the character enjoy. The set of questions of the second section were repeated in the exact same order for four more times in order for respondents to provide answers for a total of five different consumption events or products.

The third section of the questionnaire involved questions with regard to respondents' movie and television viewing experiences and also aimed to gather demographic information. A copy of the questionnaire is attached to appendix IV.



#### 4.1.5.2 Considerations about the Sample

The decisions with regard to the sampling technique and the choice of appropriate participants for this study were taken based on specific factors required by the research purpose, the research design, as well as on considerations about practical issues. Firstly, as discussed on this chapter, one of the goals of this extension research was the examination of the initial study's generalizability regarding the results and the application of the model to other contexts.

One of the different contexts that this research set for this purpose was the use of a different sample drawn from a different population, as compared to the initial study. The decision about the aspects that the current sample was to be different to that of the initial study was taken with the aim to examine the topic with a more suitable and specific sample for the elements utilized in the study. More explicitly, this extension as well as the initial study, investigated product placement effectiveness in the specific media context of sitcoms and the theoretical interdisciplinary framework was developed based on a sitcom context, for reasons that have been thoroughly analyzed elsewhere<sup>45</sup>. Moreover, the decision of utilizing the sitcom as the context under which this research will attempt to add to the advance of knowledge for this topic was guided by two reasons; first reason being the belief that sitcoms represent one of the most effective mediums for the insertion of product placements. The second reason is that the theoretical propositions of the initial study could form a robust media and marketing theory. Such a theory could in turn provide the marketing industry with practical advice about the strategy of product placement.

This media-context related decision has thus, important implications regarding the appropriate sample that should be employed for this extension research. Since the elements which are involved in the relations<sup>46</sup> structuring the model, are very specific and directly related to the media context and hence, the stimulus, then the sample decisions are also directly related to the context. For these reasons, this research was oriented toward specifying and selecting a particular sample which would be relevant to the audience of such a media context. That is because, the relations among viewers-characters-products, are examined by this research under specific theoretical underpinnings which are based on the fact that particular relationships between the

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<sup>45</sup>Please see Chapter 2.

<sup>46</sup>Which also constitute the variables of the model.

viewer and the media program exist. Thus, it only makes sense if the sample utilized for this research was specified and selected according to potential participants' relationship with the specific sitcom which acted as a stimulus. Consequently, in the case of this research, the theoretical premises and the examination of a particular media context dictate the decisions about the sample.

Thus, this study had to specify its target population according to requirements of the examined context. As the context relates to the genre of sitcoms, the target population had to be identified in the target audience of sitcoms. As discussed earlier<sup>47</sup>, particularly the genre of sitcoms is produced in such manner, so as to be relevant to specific audiences. Because most contemporary sitcoms have transferred their focus from targeting a family audience to a more young-adult, family-free, friend-like and singles' audience (Dalton & Linder 2005), the targeted by producers audience of sitcoms should be taken under consideration when defining a potential target population from which the sample would be drawn. Most commonly, sitcoms are produced according to the media industry's aim for targeting younger people, and thus it could be inferred that the audience that watches sitcoms roughly falls in an age group of 18-49 (Downey 2003). However, each specific sitcom and distribution channel defines its target audience differently. Hence, to specify a more accurate and appropriate, as possible, target population for this research, the target age group was investigated according to "*The Big Bang Theory's*" and the E4 channel's specifications of its audience. The audience of the sitcom, as specified by the channel responsible for its distribution in the UK, is of adults of 16-34 years old (Channel E4 2013). Moreover, specifically for the UK, marketing research has shown that 16-24s are much more likely than any other demographic to watch sitcoms, and that sitcoms are one of the most popular program category for this age group<sup>48</sup>. However, cross analysis of data has shown that sitcoms and movies are the universal favourites across the consumer base and thus, these two genres are of extreme importance for promotional opportunities, i.e. such as product placements (Mintel 2010). Considering these media trends that describe the relation of the 16-34 age group with the genre of sitcom and the specification of the "*The Big Bang Theory's*" audience, the target population for this research is defined of adults of this age group, located in UK.

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<sup>47</sup> Please see Chapter 2, section 2.3 and Chapter 3 section 3.1.1

<sup>48</sup> Along with movies, news and documentaries (Mintel 2010)

Moreover, taking under consideration the practical issues raising in most PhD relevant researches, where resources and time limitations prevail, the added factor of seeking for a sample that holds specific characteristics (i.e. specific age-group and regular viewing of the specific sitcom) raised more difficulties in the quest of appropriate sample. Thus, since the environment of Cardiff University provided the availability of potential participants of the specific age group, it was considered that drawing a sample from the specific population could meet all the necessary requirements for the appropriate sample, while simultaneously, such a decision provided a practical and more economical way of subjects' recruitment and participation. This decision about sample selection, albeit taken because it was well fitted to the requirements of a sample with specific characteristics, it cannot be considered as meeting the criteria for representativeness of the entire television viewing population in the strictest sense, however, it can find additional justification in the decisions of utilized samples by other product placement's studies.

More often than not, the samples defined for product placement research are from populations of university students, not only due to reasons of convenience, but also of appropriateness. Relevant literature (e.g. Gupta & Gould 1997, Gupta & Lord 1998, Gupta et al. 2000, d' Astous & Chartier 2000, Morton & Friedman 2002, Russell 2002, Stern & Russell 2004), justifies the use of student samples as their age group and profile are representative of the target audience of movies (Gupta & Lord 1998, Morton & Friedman 2002) and television audience. In addition, young adults of 18-35 years old fit the profile of an ideal target group that watches movies frequently (Gupta et al. 2000) or has interest in cinema (d' Astous & Chartier 2000). Specifically, in relevance with the target audience of this study, young adults of 18-25 years old have been identified and used by other studies, as an appropriate sample of sitcoms' target audience because it represents part of the target population which has been reported to hold the most highly viewing rate of sitcoms (Russell 2002, Media Research Inc. 1999 as in Stern & Russell 2004).

With reference to all of the above considerations about sample decisions, the sampling procedure followed to recruit participants of specific characteristics for this study, could be characterized as non-probability judgement sampling or purposive sampling, due to the fact that the theoretical premises and the purpose of the study required participants with particular characteristics (Hair et al. 2006, Saunders et al. 2012), regarding age-group, regular viewing and connectedness with "The Big Bang

Theory” sitcom. This research takes into account the limitations and disadvantages of selecting this sampling method, as not having the faculty of being representative of the target population, and its unavailability to aid the provision of generalization of results. However, the scope of this extension research was to examine the generalizability of the initial research’s results and the application of the model to other contexts, in order to provide a building block in the advancement of product placement effectiveness knowledge, and not to produce universal truths from just one more study of this topic, since its philosophical stance is oriented towards enabling generalizations by promoting the establishment of a replication tradition. As such, one aspect of the diverse contexts that this study aimed to examine refers to the utilization of a different sample from a different population.

In Russell & Stern’s (2006) study, participants from a national sample of the U.S population were recruited. Apart from the fact that such a sampling method requires a considerable amount of resources to be spent on a research recruitment agency, the participants who constituted the sample, were viewers of different sitcoms. Of course, the study used more than one sitcom as stimuli in order to address the different viewing preferences of participants. But ultimately, the respondents assigned to the viewing of each of the four different sitcoms were of a relatively small number to be regarded as representative of the U.S. population. For example, although the study had a national sample of 261 respondents, each sitcom received a quite lower response rate; sitcom<sub>1</sub> received 76 responses, sitcom<sub>2</sub> 32, sitcom<sub>3</sub> 33 and sitcom<sub>4</sub> 123 responses<sup>49</sup>. That means, that the observations in relation to products and characters which respondents provided, would be of a small number that could not provide, with great confidence, a conclusive and representative view of the population’s attitudes, despite the use of a national sample, which is even more questionable when a sample of 261 respondents is thought to be representative of the entire USA population.

The present study, although not claiming the representativeness of the target sample, focused on the identification of the audience that sitcoms aim as a target, and of an audience that actually regularly watches sitcoms. This decision to focus on the specific audience was taken in order to facilitate the study to obtain more valuable and relevant data, since the genre of sitcom is the context under which the theoretical

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<sup>49</sup> Sitcom<sub>1</sub> refers to Everybody Loves Raymond, sitcom<sub>2</sub> refers to Frasier, sitcom<sub>3</sub> refers to Will & Grace and sitcom<sub>4</sub> refers to Friends, which had the highest response rate.

premises and the model are examined. In this way, this extension study not only provides the examination of the initial study's application to a different population – UK instead of USA- and of a different sample –sitcom defined target audience instead of national-, but also, because of the more target-oriented sample, facilitates the obtainment of more valuable and relevant data which in turn, may empower the generalization faculty of the model. Indeed, although this study's sample had to be limited to a size of 128 participants –due to resources restrictions-, provided the report of 445 products (or observations to be analyzed<sup>50</sup>) in contrast to 226 reported by participants products (or observations) which were utilized in the analysis of the initial study. This difference in the number of observations reported by participants and being usable for analysis might be assigned to the more “branded” stimuli utilized in this study, but it can also be considered as an implication that the sample size and allegiance to the statistical correctness of a sampling method, might not always offer valuable and relevant to the research inquiry, data. In some cases, the purpose of the study, as well as its particular requirements in terms of sample's appropriateness might outweigh the priorities set as universal canons of sampling for all research projects.

## **4.2 Research Design Evaluation Criteria**

This research's effort to add to the edifice of knowledge through the examination of a prior theoretical construct's generalizability to another context can only be attributed as successful by the assessment of the evaluation criteria of the research design's quality and integrity. The evaluation criteria that can establish the degree of a research design's quality, which are most commonly met in literature, are replicability, reliability and validity (Hair et al. 2006, Bryman & Bell 2007, Saunders et al. 2012).

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<sup>50</sup> The observations used in the analysis are discussed in Chapter 5, under section 5.3.2.

## **I. The Criterion of Replicability**

*Replicability* can broadly refer to reproducibility or stability of findings (Monroe 1992) through which a theoretical construct or proposition, based on robust results, can be cross-validated in order to be considered as accurate, truthful and confident in its empirical foundations. Thus, if a research aims at the progress of scientific knowledge, the production of truthful statements and the development of adequate and refined theories, the criterion of reproducibility should be inherent in the research design (Easley et al. 2000).

For achieving these aims and for a research to establish its reproducibility, the research design should define clearly and analytically the methodological process followed, thus allowing for confident comparisons of results by other studies and other researchers (Bryman & Bell 2007).

With regard to the initial study of Russell and Stern (2006), the provision of the methodological process and details of the employed measures can be considered as adequate enough to allow the replication of the study. Drawing from the methodological guidance of the initial research, it was possible to structure the research design of this extension study. The ability to build the extension study's design from the details of the initial study can, to an adequate degree, underpin the replicability quality of the initial research.

As far as this research is concerned, a structured methodology that attempted to reproduce the measures of the initial study, as closely as possible, was followed. Yet, as previously discussed, it purposely employed some differentiated procedures and methodological decisions, as allowed by the employed replication approach. However, the research design presented in this chapter, which also included the analytical and justified decisions regarding the altered procedures and aspects –in comparison to those of the initial study–, can be considered as satisfying the replicability criterion of research design, since the methodological procedures are unfolded in detail, thus allowing other studies to reproduce this extension research.

## II. The Criterion of Validity

The criterion of *validity* generally refers to the integrity of the conclusions which are deduced from a research. However, validity can be specifically concerned with the aim of reaching integrity for a number of research's aspects. Thus, this criterion can be distinguished in four commonly met types of validity; internal validity, external validity, ecological validity and measurement validity (Bryman & Bell 2007). Even though for a research to be considered as credible it is, more often than not, required that all four types of validity to be satisfied (Bryman & Bell 2007), these specifically defined criteria might not be appropriate in assessing the quality of all research projects (Saunders et al. 2012). For this reason, there have been attempts to re-evaluate and re-label the validity criteria so as to produce less strict or more fitting to multiple philosophical paradigms, quality evaluative standards (e.g. Campbell 1986, Guba & Lincoln 1989; 2005). However, the requirements set for this research fit more closely to a number of these commonly utilized validity criteria for quantitative researches and thus, they are going to be employed for evaluating this extension although they will be satisfied to a certain adequate degree that matches the critical realism approach of this study.

For instance, in its strict definition, *internal validity* has been distinguished as relating to the issue of causality, namely it examines if the research can establish causal relationships between variables (Bryman & Bell 2007, Saunders et al. 2012). However, internal validity might not be appropriately assessed in cross-sectional (Bryman & Bell 2007) and descriptive designs (Saunders et al. 2012). In particular, due to the fact that this research does not infer causation of its results it can be considered as not owning the faculty to assess the criterion of internal validity in that sense. Although both the initial as well as its extension research have identified the impact of variables on the operation of the theoretical construct, this research does not claim satisfying this criterion as per the above definition. Accordingly, the internal validity criterion defined as such, can be considered as inappropriate to assess this research's internal validity.

*Ecological validity* refers to the criterion of evaluating whether a research's findings capture the opinions, attitudes and knowledge base of the studied subjects in naturalistic settings (Cicourel 1982). Russell and Stern's (2006) study, as well as the

this extension can be regarded as satisfying the criterion of ecological validity since both studies collected real world data through utilizing real contemporary sitcoms as stimuli. That means, that the collection of data was performed by gathering data of real attitudes, opinions, feelings and knowledge, since the stimuli taken from the real world were directly associated with relevant interests of specific samples. Namely, in both cases participants were asked to express their opinions with regard to a real condition of their everyday life, a favourite sitcom which they regularly watch, and not to give opinions regarding imaginative situations or laboratory, research specific and manipulated created stimuli. Thus, this extension research can be considered as attaining ecological validity by means of gathering data regarding real life attitudes and opinions, as stimulated by a contemporary real life television sitcom with which the participants –who constitute the sample–, are connected, as loyal viewers.

*External validity* is concerned with a research findings' faculty to be generalized to other relevant settings or samples, i.e. beyond the specific research context (Bryman & Bell 2007, Saunders et al. 2012). This type of validity has been mainly related with the representativeness of samples. That is, most quantitative research -theoretically but not always in practice-, requires the cautious selection of sampling procedures in order for the sample to be representative of the population of interest. However, many researchers have focused on evaluating issues of external validity, (Wright & Kearns 1998, Wells 2001, Hunter 2001, Saunders et al. 2012, Ball & Sawyer 2013, Uncles & Kwok 2013), and all support that the generalizability of results, and thus the external validity of a study, can only be assessed through replication of the study. Namely, they imply that it is necessary to replicate a research in order to assess whether or not its results are generalizable, and thus establishing the study as externally valid. The reasons behind this belief are based on several facts that researchers have identified responsible for studies' weak external validity. Some of these external validity threats are the use of convenient set of stimuli, situations, products and respondents (Wells 2001), sampling error (Wright & Kearns 1998 Hunter 2001) and non acceptance of the possibility of variations in terms of sample effect sizes (Hunter 2001). Moreover, as Wells (2001) suggests, there should be a "priority to confront rather than evade external validity", because assessment of solely internal validity, though necessary, is not sufficient without examining external validity through the confidence that is provided by replications of results. He supports that generalizability can never be presumed and such a claim should always



be checked. Threats to external validity and its assessment by single-shot studies can be rather difficult to confront or avoid, especially in social sciences research where usually the human element is involved. As stated earlier, some researchers have attempted to relocate, redefine and re-label the concepts of the validity criteria exactly because they cannot be fitted to the nature of all research designs, and thus, they may not always be objective criteria of judgement of a study's validity.

For instance, Campbell (1986) attempted to reform the concept of external validity by introducing the possibility that a research may have the faculty to “generalize from the local without representative sampling”. In this way, separating and reconceptualizing the issues of “generalizing to other non-identical treatments” such as *construct validity of causes*, and “generalizing from the outcome measures employed to other measure of effects” such as *construct validity of effects*, external validity can be assessed in more manageable aspects as a way of reaching to a more satisfactory and pragmatic evaluation of research. Thus, external validity can be the validity with which a researcher can “generalize to other persons, settings and times”, where “such generalizations should also be made on the basis of theory”. In this sense, the validity of generalizations is also “a function of the validity of the theory involved”, as well as, a function of the “accuracy of the theory-relevant knowledge of these persons, settings [and times]” toward which the researcher wants to generalize (Campbell 1986).

Drawing from the last conceptualization of assessing external validity, this research attempts to generalize the findings of the initial research not only by replicating it, in order to examine if the proposed theoretical framework applies to “other persons, settings and times”, but also by examining the validity of the theory that supports the framework, through obtaining and providing as accurate as possible information of the theory and the “other” persons, settings and times that it wants to generalize to. The accuracy of the relevant information is attempted through the extensive literature review of the involved theories; the selection of the stimuli in terms of appropriateness and similarity to the initial stimuli; its inclusion of branded placements that will serve the purpose of the study as an extension; its representativeness as a stimulus of contemporary times; and the selection of an appropriate sampling that corresponds, as far as possible, to the target audience/consumers of sitcoms. Namely, this research attempts to assess external validity by testing the initial study's generalizability through an extension replication,

and this endeavour to generalize the findings and the theoretical framework, can be considered as an attempt of reaching external validity.

*Measurement or construct validity* refers to the examination of whether a measure that is formulated of a concept reflects “the concept that is supposed to be denoting” (Bryman & Bell 2007). Namely, it is concerned with the extent to which the measures actually measure what they intend to measure (Saunders et al. 2012). This type of validity is related to the criterion of reliability, in the sense that if a measure is unstable in measuring what it is designated to be measuring and thus becomes unreliable, then it cannot represent a valid measure of the concept intended to be measured. Hence, for a measurement to be assessed as valid, it is required to be assessed as reliable (Bryman & Bell 2007). In other words, a measure that is valid should also be reliable so that it can be confidently employed in other researches and produce consistent results (Saunders et al. 2012). Thus, the assessment of measurement validity presumes its reliability (Bryman & Bell 2007).

### **III. The Criteria of Reliability and Unidimensionality**

Assessing the quality of the measurements employed in a research’s design is related, as discussed above, to the criteria of reliability and measurement validity. In order to examine the quality of measures regarding attitudes and psychological concepts such as parasocial attachment, this study considers the psychological properties of determining how well the construct of interest is measured. The psychological properties consider the criteria of reliability and unidimensionality to evaluate measures (Borsboom 2005).

#### *Reliability*

The reliability of a measurement instrument broadly refers to the accuracy and consistency of a measure. Namely, the reliability of a measure denotes if all items measure the same, intended to be measured, construct. For example, “the reliability of a scale indicates how free is from random error”. The frequently used indicators of a measure’s reliability is the test-retest technique that indicates the stability over time,

and internal consistency, that specifies the degree to which the items constituting the measure “hang together” (Pallant 2010).

This study assessed the reliability of the measures –as employed by the initial research- by utilizing the internal consistency method, which is most commonly estimated by Cronbach’s coefficient alpha. By the utilization of this statistic method an indication of the average correlation among the scales’ items is provided. While the values of Cronbach’s alpha are sensitive to the number of items in a scale, and different levels of reliability are required according to the nature of the scale, a minimum level of 0.7 is considered as indicating satisfactory reliability of a scale (Pallant 2010). Generally, coefficients around 0.9 are considered excellent, and a coefficient of around 0.8 is regarded as very good (Kline 2005). However, for scales comprising of less than ten items, alpha values can be rather small and thus it is preferred to calculate the mean inter-item correlation for the items which ranges from 0.2 to 0.4 (Pallant 2010).

As a first evaluation of the employed measurements by Russell and Stern (2006) the Chronbach’s alphas were examined to provide a first indication of the scales’ reliability. However, the initial study as presented in the article did not provide the reliability levels of all employed scales. Thus, the scales with stated alphas’ are presented at this stage, while in absence of alpha statements, as in the case of the TV connectedness scale (Russell et al. 2004) the original alpha provided by its creators is presented, as depicted in the following Table 4.2.

Scale	Initial Study Cronbach’s alpha
Attitude toward the Sitcom	0.94
Character’s Association toward the Product	0.84
Consumer Attitude toward the Product	0.92
Consumer’s Parasocial Attachment with Character	0.89
TV Connectedness Scale	0.84

Source: Russell & Stern 2006, Russell et al. 2004

**Table 4.2** *Reliability of the measures in the Russell & Stern (2006) study.*

As presented in the table, all the measures that the initial study utilized can be considered as highly reliable since their coefficients all range from 0.84 to 0.94. Thus, this extension research is provided with an initial confident indication of the

instruments' reliability. However, the reliability of a scale can also vary according to the sample (Pallant 2010). Hence, since this research employs a different sample from a different population the instruments were re-examined in terms of reliability. Generally, the initial study's measures as employed to this extension were considered as very good to satisfactory regarding their reliability, and they will be presented in the next chapter<sup>51</sup>.

### *Unidimensionality*

Unidimensionality is defined as the existence of one construct or latent trait underlying a set of items. Namely, it refers to the issue that the items which constitute an instrument, should all measure the same construct. Unidimensionality thus assumes that for an instrument to have the faculty of measuring a variable, the variable must be unidimensional. In that sense, the items of the instrument must measure the same ability or attitude or any other construct. One of the methods usually employed for determining the unidimensionality of an instrument is factor analysis (Hattie 1985), and this method is also utilized in this research.

Hence, to assess whether the items of the employed instruments corresponded to their construct a factor analysis of the scales was performed. Generally, most of the items in most of the scales loaded correctly on their relevant construct. However, in cases where loading was 0.3 or less, the items were not regarded as part of the scale and they were eliminated. The factor analysis, the presentation of the scales' unidimensionality and the items that were eliminated will be presented in the following chapter<sup>52</sup>.

## **4.3 Data Analysis Methods**

The aim of the analysis of the current study is to identify the relationships of the predicting variables with the dependant variable, namely consumer attitude toward the

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<sup>51</sup> Please refer to Chapter 5, section 5.3, Table 5.3.1 for the scales' reliability assessment conducted by the present research.

<sup>52</sup> Please refer to Chapter 5, section 5.3, Table 5.3.1 for the scales' factor analysis performed by the present research.

product, in order to test the balance model of product placement effects. As previously noted<sup>53</sup>, the decisions regarding the methods of data analysis were determined by the replication approach that this study has adopted. Namely, this extension research followed closely the methods of data analysis of the initial research in order to have the faculty of comparing the findings of the two studies and to evaluate the extension study's findings in collation to the initial findings, thus facilitating the generalization of the balance model of product placement effects.

Analysis of the data collected from the online survey, begun with the analysis of the demographic data which provided a detailed demographic profile of the specific sample. Moreover, as this sample was selected with criteria of particular characteristics, a description of the sample's media consumption characteristics formed the participants' media viewing profile. Then, the attitude toward the sitcom measurement, the Television Connectedness instrument, as well as the variables<sup>54</sup> constituting the hypotheses<sup>55</sup>, were examined by calculation of mean, reliability check and factor analysis on their measurement scales. The following step concerned the management of the data and the treatment of variables. Due to the fact that some variables reflected variance, for example CharAttProd reflected variance in characters' attitude toward the placed products while CharAssocProd reflected variance in character-product association strength, it was necessary to prepare them in terms of dividing them to positive/negative and strong/weak respectively, before their utilization in the statistical analysis. Moreover, two variables (ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar) had to be examined in terms of distinctiveness of their different constructs through computing a correlation coefficient.

Then, the model's testing was examined through the conduct of a series of regressions of the dependant variable, consumer attitude toward the product, on the different predictor variables, consumer attitude toward the character, and consumer parasocial attachment with the character, as per the predictions of the Hypotheses<sup>56</sup>. Moderated regression was conducted for the testing of the prediction involving the variable representing the strength of character's association to the product, and

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<sup>53</sup> Please refer to section 4.1.1.1 of this chapter, under the sub-section IV. Research Extension Characteristics

<sup>54</sup> Namely, CharAttProd, CharAssocProd, ConsAttChar, ConsParaChar and ConsAttProd

<sup>55</sup> For the hypotheses please refer to Chapter 3, section 3.2.2

<sup>56</sup> **H1b:** If CharAttProd < 0, ConsAttProd is negatively related to ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar.

**H1a:** If CharAttProd > 0, ConsAttProd is positively related to ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar.

**H3:** ConsParaChar will have a stronger effect on ConsAttProd in comparison to ConsAttChar.

according to Hypothesis H2<sup>57</sup>, it was tested for its moderating role of the effects of ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar on ConsAttProd.

Regression analysis was employed as a method of data analysis because the balance model aims at estimating relationships between the dependant variable and the independent-predictor variables, thus predicting the effect of variations of the predictor variables on the consumer attitude toward the product. The regression models also have the faculty of exploring the forms of the relationships (Pallant 2010). According to the principles of balance theory, on which the model is based, the attitudinal alignment process can be examined in relation to the signs of the relations, as they determine the direction of the relation among the parts and entities of the system<sup>58</sup> (Heider 1946). Regression analysis provided information with regard to the direction of relationships, thus allowing the testing of the model according to balance theory (Pallant 2010). Although the regression models estimated the relationships between variables and the direction of these relationships, thus allowing the prediction of effects between the variables, it should be noted that the model testing was not concerned with causal relationships, albeit the faculty of balance theory and regression models to infer causality in restricted circumstances and cases.

For all the statistical calculations, that the data analysis required, the SPSS 20.0 software package was utilized, and the results of this analysis are presented analytically in the next chapter.

## 4.4 Research Ethics

As this research involved the participation of human subjects that were asked to provide their opinions, attitudes and other information about themselves, it was implied that several ethical considerations should been taken under consideration. Thus, the research followed and conformed to all the appropriate procedures that are dictated by Cardiff Business School's ethical approval committee.

Specifically, in research execution procedures (participants' recruitment and data collection procedure), the *voluntarily* participation of respondents was clearly

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<sup>57</sup> **H2:** *The effects of ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar on ConsAttProd are moderated by CharAssocProd.*

<sup>58</sup> Please refer to Chapter 2 section 2.2.2

stated, as well as their freedom to abandon the research process at any time. More importantly, the nature of the questions as well as the information regarding opinions and attitudes of participants, could be considered as neutral, since the research was not requiring any information referring to any personal or sensitive issues. Even the demographic questions requesting information of the participants themselves did not include any questions with regard to their race, nationality, or income, which might be considered as very personal information from some participants. Rather, all the questions and measurement instruments referred to general opinions about a television program that they had themselves indicated as regularly watching. Thus, with participants' stated willingness and agreed informed consent to take part in the research, they were also in advance aware of the nature and the context of the research's stimulus.

In addition, apart from participants' stated (in the screening procedure) familiarity with the specific sitcom that was utilized as stimulus, the particular episodes and the sitcom as a whole, can be considered as appropriate material for media broadcasting to an audience of the age range 16-34 which is the target audience of the sitcom, and part of the age group of this study's sample. Overall, the British Board of Film Classification<sup>59</sup> rates the episodes of "The Big Bang Theory" with a PG or PG12; namely its content is suitable for viewers above twelve years old. For these reasons, the utilized stimuli can be considered as acceptable for use in a study with consenting participants of 18 years old and above, who were also self-claimed as viewers of the specific sitcom. With reference to the stimulus and its copyrights, it should be noted that this research utilized the episodes of the sitcom in a legal manner without copyrights infringement, under the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988* (pg. 47)<sup>60</sup>, since the episodes were used for non-commercial, academic purpose of Cardiff University.

The ethical consideration with regard to *confidentiality of data* was addressed by ensuring that the data were gathered and managed in a private manner, as also stated to the participants before the questionnaire's completion. The completion of the questionnaire through a personal computer also guaranteed the confidentiality of data, as well as the *anonymity* of participants. The online survey-instrument collects

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<sup>59</sup> As defined in: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk>

<sup>60</sup> *Section 3228 Education, CHAPTER III, ACTS PERMITTED IN RELATION TO COPYRIGHT WORKS.*

the data with complete anonymity, and this was also ensured by the fact that the informed consent did not require the name of the participant, rather it required his/her agreement to the informed consent part of the questionnaire, electronically. Thus, the web-based questionnaire could not be attributable to any specific participant.

Another ethical requirement that was satisfied by this study regards the provision of any relevant information and the results of the study to participants upon request, which was also stated in the informed consent at the beginning of the web-based questionnaire.

Finally, it should be noted that the data collection procedure required participants to attend to a specific location at specific times and dedicate one hour for taking part in the research procedure, and for that reason they were compensated for their time instantly after the completion of the questionnaire. The compensation was of a ten pound value. All the above information was included in the ethical approval form which was approved by Cardiff Business School Ethical committee. A copy is attached at the appendix V.



## **Summary of Chapter 4**

This chapter presented the post-positivistic position of this research, which guided the methodological decisions taken for the research's execution. In accordance to the critical realism ontology and to the purpose of this research towards the accretion of knowledge regarding product placement effectiveness, justification of this research's approach toward a structured methodology that supported the extension replication of previous theoretical propositions, was provided and presented analytically. Following this, close to the initial research, structured methodology, the present research can be defined as a deductive, cross-sectional, survey study that employs quantitative methods, in its attempt to establish evidence of the product placement balance model's applicability and generalizability to other contexts, with ultimate aim to add to the product placement effectiveness edifice of knowledge.

# **CHAPTER FIVE**

Data Analysis

## 5. Data Analysis

This chapter is concerned with the procedures that were followed in order to analyze the quantitative data gathered from the online questionnaire. First, an overview of the participants' demographic profile will be presented, and then the results of the data analysis will be reported in order to examine the hypotheses posed in Chapter 3.

### 5.1 Participants' Demographic Profile

Overall, the sample of this study consisted of 128 participants who were identified as bearing the specific characteristic of reported and juxtaposed regular viewing of the sitcom "*The Big Bang Theory*" after the screening process. The 128 participants provided 128 usable completed online questionnaires. This high rate of usable questionnaires can be ascribed to a number of reasons such as the specificity of the chosen sample, the particular controlled data collection procedure, the structure of the research instrument, the utilization of the specific stimulus which participants, possibly, found interesting since it involved a favourite sitcom, and perhaps the compensation scheme which involved the instant compensation of each participant.

With regard to the appropriateness of a sample with specific characteristics, all participants were considered as regular viewers of the sitcom, since they could complete the online questionnaire in approximately twenty minutes, while also providing details about characters, which they couldn't have known if they watched the sitcom for the first time (this was ensured by the provision of answers to the open-ended questions). Moreover, with regard to the target age group of the sample which would represent the target audience of the sitcom as specified in the previous chapter<sup>61</sup>, 93.8 % of participants were falling in the 18-34 age group. The largest group of the sample consisted of female participants (64.1%), while the rest of participants (35.9%) were male. The highest percentage of the sample represented university students (92.1%) while the rest (7.9%) represented working participants.

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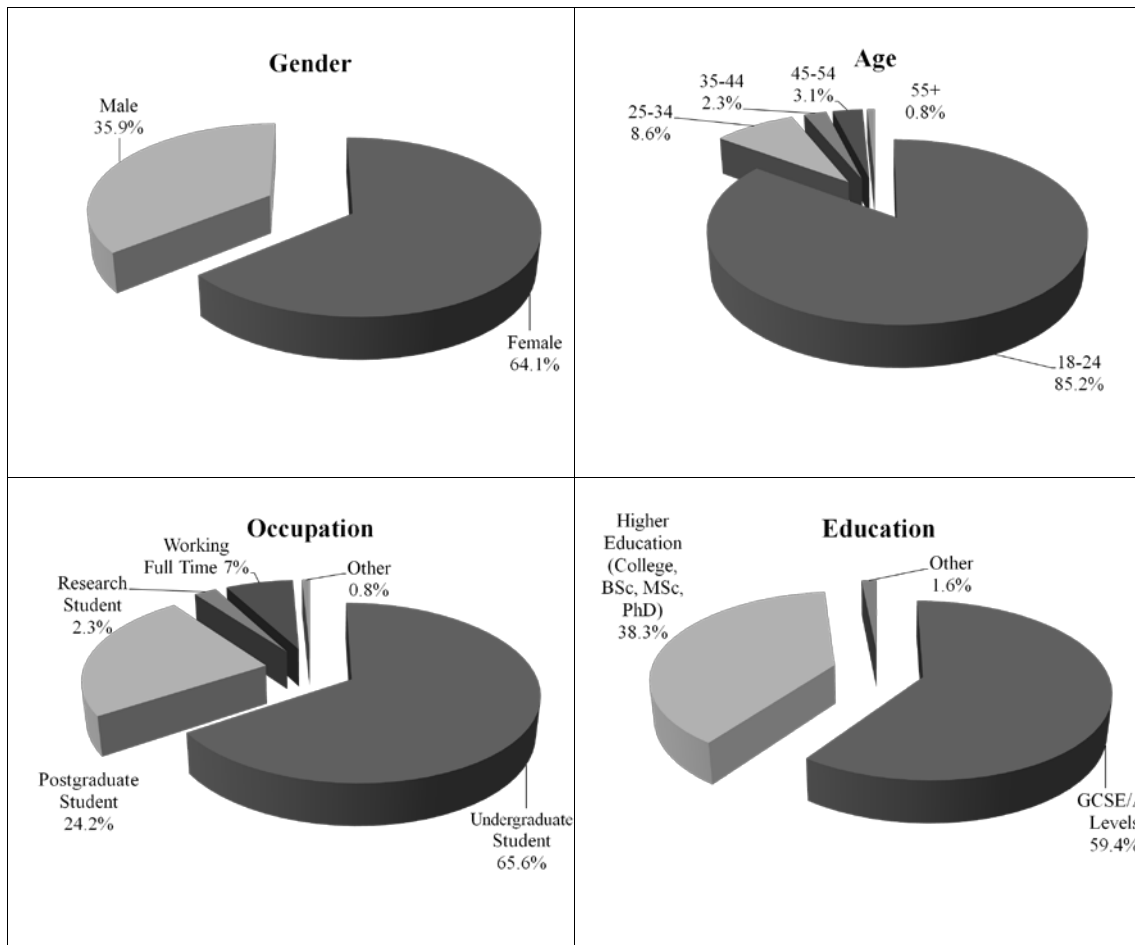
<sup>61</sup> Please refer to Chapter 4 section 4.1.5.2

With regard to the education level of participants, 59.4% had completed secondary education (specified by GCSE/A-levels), namely they were undergraduate students at the time, and 38.3% reported the completion of higher education, while the rest of participants reported other educational levels. In the following Table 5.1, the demographic profile of the sample is presented in more detail, while Figure 5.1 provides a graphical representation of the sample's profile.

Demographic Variable	Category	Research Sample (n=128)	
		Frequency	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>	Female	82	64.1
	Male	46	35.9
<i>Age</i>	18-24	109	85.2
	25-34	11	8.6
	35-44	3	2.3
	45-54	4	3.1
	55+	1	.8
<i>Occupation</i>	Undergraduate Student	84	65.6
	Postgraduate Student	31	24.2
	Research Student	3	2.3
	Working Full Time	9	7.0
	Other	1	.8
<i>Educational Level*</i>	GCSE/A-Levels	76	59.4
	Higher Education (College, BSc, MSc, PhD)	49	38.3
	Other	2	1.6

Source: This Research

**Table 5.1** *Demographic Profile of this Research's Sample*



Source: This Research

**Figure 5.1** Graphical Representation of Sample's Demographic Profile

## 5.2 Participants' Media Viewing Profile

In order to obtain additional knowledge about the characteristics of the sample, the third section of the questionnaire required information about their media viewing habits, and in particular, viewing of media works through different mediums. Different mediums refer to television, cinema, DVD and other recorded types, and internet (i.e. viewership of media works online). This kind of information shapes the viewing profile of participants and can provide justifications of the sample's appropriateness for this research. Namely, participants who have a regular contact with media works through different mediums were expected to offer valuable insights about the investigated elements of the sitcom, and potentially, they could be considered as more prone to be attached to media works and their media figures.

In particular, 95.3% of participants reported that they watch television every day, with 71.1% dedicating one-two hours per day, 19.5% devoting three-five hours in television viewing, 4.7% reporting viewership of more than five hours per day and 4.7% not watching TV. With regard to the television programs that they usually watch, 93% stated that they watch series<sup>62</sup>, 71.9% also watch films on TV, 36.7% follow news programs and 21.1% watch sports programs too, while an 11.7% of participants also watches other programs apart from those. Drawing from the information provided by participants, it can be implied, that their most common TV viewing habit is watching series, which can be regarded as one more justification of the sample's appropriateness for this research. Specifically, with reference to series, and the number of series that participants were watching at the time, on multiple mediums (i.e. TV, DVD, online), 11.7% reported watching only one TV series, 43.8% two-three different series, 21.1% four to five, and 21.9% mentioned watching more than five series.

Moreover, participants were also asked about their movie viewing habits. Participants in their majority (97.7%) reported a cinema-going habit. Regarding their cinema-going frequency, 41.4% reported going to the cinema once a month (which is regarded as a characteristic of the frequent moviegoer according to the MPAA 2012<sup>63</sup>), 14.8% two to three times a month (which characterizes a high movie-going frequency), and 21.1% of participants stated going to the movies once every two to three months. The lower percentages of cinema-going frequency are going to be reported in the following table of media viewing profile. With reference to participants' overall movie-watching habits on several mediums (i.e. TV, DVD, online), 100% of the sample, reported watching movies. In particular, 32% stated watching two to three movies per month, 28.9 % of participants reported watching four to five movies, 14.1% reported a more than five movies monthly average viewing, another 14.1% stated watching only one movie per month, while the rest 10.9% of participants watches more than ten movies per month. In the following

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<sup>62</sup> In this question of a multiple answer format, participants were asked to choose more than one answers. Moreover, the wording of the question implied that they should report what kind of *TV* programs do they usually watch, and thus there were some missing values in the first answer regarding series, which could be otherwise thought as peculiar since the research is about a kind of series. The missing values cannot be straightforwardly be interpreted as a statement of not watching series at all; most probably, because the question included the word TV, those reporting not watching TV or not watching some of the programs on TV (but through other mediums), thought that the question was not relevant to them.

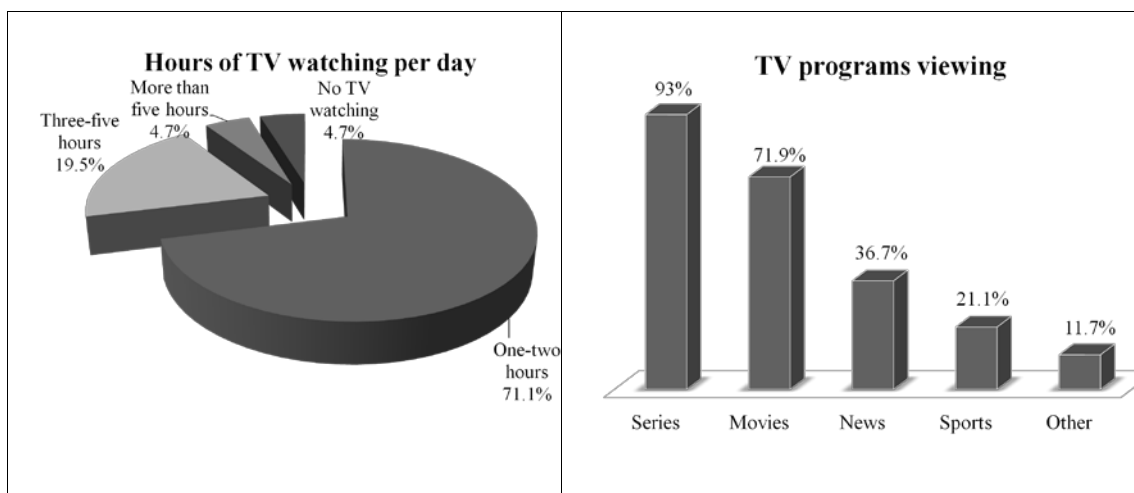
<sup>63</sup> Motion Picture Association of America

Table 5.2 the media viewing profile of the sample is presented in more detail, while Figure 5.2 presents a graphical depiction of participants' television viewing habits.

Media Viewing	Category	Research Sample (n=128)	
		Frequency	Percentage
<i>Hours of TV watching per day</i>	One-two hours	91	71.1
	Three-five hours	25	19.5
	More than five hours	6	4.7
	No TV watching	6	4.7
<i>TV programs viewing*</i>  <i>*Missing values due to multiple choice answering</i>	Series	119	93
	Movies	92	71.9
	News	47	36.7
	Sports	27	21.1
	Other	15	11.7
<i>Number of series watched regularly*</i>  <i>*2 missing values</i>	One	15	11.7
	Two-three	56	43.8
	Four-five	27	21.1
	More than five	28	21.9
<i>Number of movies watched per month</i>	One	18	14.1
	Two-three	41	32
	Four-five	37	28.9
	More than five	18	14.1
	More than ten	11	8.6
	More than twenty	3	2.3
<i>Cinema going frequency</i>	Once a week or more	3	2.3
	2-3 times a month	19	14.8
	Once a month	53	41.4
	Once every 2-3 months	27	21.1
	Once every 3-6 months	13	10.2
	Once a year	10	7.8
	Never	3	2.3

Source: This Research

**Table 5.2** *Sample's Media Viewing Profile*



Source: This Research

Note: Percentages in the TV programs viewing graph, refer to the multiple programs that participants' watch regularly. Multiple answers were allowed for this question.

**Figure 5.2** *TV Viewing Profile*

## 5.3 Overview of Data

This section is concerned with the presentation of the data analysis procedure, the examination of the measures' reliability and unidimensionality, as well as, the presentation of descriptive statics of the variables.

### 5.3.1 Examination of the Variables

In order to examine the variables, calculation of mean (SD)<sup>64</sup>, reliability check (Cronbach's alpha) and Factor Analysis were first performed on the scales which measure the different variables (i.e. ABBT, TCS, ConsAttProd, CharAssocProd, CharAttProd, ConsAttChar, ConsParaChar).

#### ABBT

The attitude toward the sitcom "*The Big Bang Theory*" (ABBT), which was measured by the three-item seven-point scale, was strongly positive (M=6.31, SD= .62) and was

<sup>64</sup> **M** represents the Mean and **SD** the Standard Deviation



very close to the means of the attitudes toward the sitcoms that were utilized as stimuli in the Russell and Stern's (2006) study ( $M_{\text{Raymond}}=6.81$ ,  $M_{\text{Frasier}}=6.73$ ,  $M_{\text{Friends}}=6.78$ ,  $M_{\text{Will \& Grace}}=6.84$ ). The reliability check of this scale had a Cronbach's alpha of  $\alpha=.849$  which is indicative of a very good reliability level (Kline 2005). The Factor Analysis performed on this scale confirmed that all three items loaded on one factor (Component Matrix: 1 Component: ABBT1 .945, ABBT2 .944, ABBT3 .769).

## TCS

The viewers' connectedness level with the sitcom (16-item 5-point television connectedness scale) had a mean of  $M=2.93$  ( $SD=1.034$ ), which did not considerably differ from the means of connectedness levels with the sitcoms of the initial study ( $M_{\text{Raymond}}=3.10$ ,  $M_{\text{Frasier}}=3.02$ ,  $M_{\text{Friends}}=3.26$ ,  $M_{\text{Will \& Grace}}=3.02$ ). The value of mean can be considered as indicating the high connectedness level of viewers with the "*The Big Bang Theory*" sitcom. The 16-item scale developed by Russell et al. (2004)<sup>65</sup>, has six components. Items 1,2,3 form the component of *Escape*<sup>66</sup>, items 4,5,6 the component of *Fashion*<sup>67</sup>, items 7,8,9 form the *Imitation*<sup>68</sup> component, items 10,11,12 formulate the component of *Modelling*<sup>69</sup>, items 13,14 the *Aspiration*<sup>70</sup> component, while the *Paraphernalia*<sup>71</sup> component is formed by items 15,16. The Factor Analysis executed for this scale, in order to check if the items load on the respective components, resulted in the extraction of only four final components. In addition, three items had to be removed because they loaded on more than one factor. Specifically, items 3, 6 and 8 were removed<sup>72</sup>. The items constituting the components of *Imitation*, *Modelling* and *Paraphernalia*, all loaded on one factor. In an additional

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<sup>65</sup> Please refer to appendix IV. Online survey questionnaire

<sup>66</sup> Items: 1. Watching "*The Big Bang Theory*" is an escape for me. 2. "*The Big Bang Theory*" helps me forget about the day's problems. 3. If I am in a bad mood, watching "*The Big Bang Theory*" puts me in a better mood.

<sup>67</sup> Items: 4. I like the clothes they wear on "*The Big Bang Theory*". 5. I like the hairstyles on "*The Big Bang Theory*". 6. I often buy clothing styles that I've seen in "*The Big Bang Theory*".

<sup>68</sup> Items: 7. I imitate the gestures and facial expressions from the characters in "*The Big Bang Theory*". 8. I find myself saying phrases from "*The Big Bang Theory*" when I interact with other people. 9. I try to speak like the characters in "*The Big Bang Theory*".

<sup>69</sup> Items: 10. I learn how to handle real life situations by watching "*The Big Bang Theory*". 11. I get ideas from "*The Big Bang Theory*" about how to interact in my own life. 12. I relate what happens in "*The Big Bang Theory*" to my own life.

<sup>70</sup> Items: 13. I would love to be an actor in "*The Big Bang Theory*". 14. I would love to meet the characters of "*The Big Bang Theory*".

<sup>71</sup> Items: 15. I have objects that relate to "*The Big Bang Theory*". 16. I read books if they are related to "*The Big Bang Theory*".

<sup>72</sup> Removed items: 3. If I am in a bad mood, watching "*The Big Bang Theory*" puts me in a better mood. 6. I often buy clothing styles that I've seen in "*The Big Bang Theory*". 8. I find myself saying phrases from "*The Big Bang Theory*" when I interact with other people.

examination of the scale it was found that the items of these components could form one component named Imitation. Thus, the instrument could be formed in four components: *Escape* with items 1 and 2, *Fashion* with items 4,5, *Imitation* consisting of items 7,9,10,11,12,15,16 and *Aspiration* formed by items 13 and 14. The reliability check of this scale had a Cronbach's alpha of  $\alpha=.855$  which is regarded as a very good reliability (Kline 2005).

### **ConsAttProd**

Consumer attitude toward the product which was measured by a three-item seven-point bipolar scale, had a mean of  $M=5.69$  ( $SD= 1.377$ ) and a Cronbach's alpha of  $\alpha=.923$ , which is considered as indicating an excellent level of reliability (Kline 2005). The Factor Analysis performed, showed that all three items loaded on one factor.

### **CharAssocProd**

Character's association with the product was measured by a three-item five-point Likert scale, which after the performed Factor Analysis resulted in a formation of two items. Item CharAssocProd3 was removed because it affected the reliability of the scale. The scale then, was constructed by the remaining CharAssocProd1 and CharAssocProd2 items, and had a Cronbach's alpha of  $\alpha=.698$  which is very close to an accepted as satisfactory, level of reliability  $\alpha=.7$  (Pallant 2010). The mean for this variable was  $3.74$  ( $SD=.882$ ).

### **ConsAttChar**

The consumer attitude toward the character, measured by a three-item seven-point bipolar scale, had a mean of  $M=6.03$  ( $SD=1.072$ ) and a Cronbach's alpha of  $\alpha=.750$  which is regarded as a satisfactory level of reliability (Pallant 2010). The Factor Analysis performed, showed that all items loaded on one component.

### **ConsParaChar**

The parasocial relationship scale indicating the level of consumer's parasocial attachment to the character that was utilized for this study was the adapted nine-item five-point Likert scale, which was also used by the initial study. The variable had a mean of  $M=3.306$  ( $SD=.726$ ). Factor Analysis showed that all items loaded on one component, and the Cronbach's alpha of  $\alpha=.838$  indicates a very good level of reliability (Kline 2005).

### **CharAttProd**

The character attitude toward the product instrument that was used to indicate the perceived valence of the character's attitude toward the product by one-item four-point scale required a special treatment because it represents a valence variable measured by a Likert scale from negative to positive. The treatment performed on this variable in order to be utilized for analysis is going to be presented in the following section 5.3.3.

The following Table 5.3.1 presents the methods of the variables' examination with regard to reliability, unidimensionality, the central tendency of the measures' scores, and scores' distribution.

Variables	Reliability check ( $\alpha$ )	Items and Factor Loading	Mean	Skewness	
				Kurtosis	
<i>ABBT</i>	.849	3 items loading on one component	6.31 (SD= .62)		
<i>TCS</i>	.855	Items 3,6,8 removed, resulting in a reformed scale with 4 components	2.93 (SD= 1.034)		
<i>ConsAttProd</i>	.923	3 items loading on one component	5.69 (SD=1.327)	-1.1	.96
<i>CharAssocProd</i>	.698	3 items, with item CharAssocProd3 removed	3.74 (SD=.88)	-.718	.68
<i>ConsAttChar</i>	.750	3 items loading on one component	6.03 (SD=1.07)	-1.1	1.1
<i>ConsParaChar</i>	.838	9 items loading on one component	3.306 (SD=.726)	-.21	-.02

Source: This Research

**Table 5.3.1** *Variables' Examination*

#### *Considerations about the normality of data*

The examination of the variables' descriptives, also provide information with regard to the distribution of scores. As such, the Skewness value provides some indication of the distribution's symmetry, while Kurtosis provides indicative information with regard to the distribution's "peakdness". In absolute normal distribution Skewness and Kurtosis have a value of 0, which is a pragmatically uncommon occurrence in social science research. Moreover, both indicators are very sensitive with large samples. Apart from Skewness and Kurtosis, inspections of histograms and normal Q-Q plots assisted the further examination of the distribution of variables' scores. As presented in Table 5.3.1, the distribution of variables' scores has negative Skewness values which indicate a clustering of scores at the high end, namely the right hand side of a graph. Kurtosis is positive for three variables (*ConsAttProd*, *CharAssocProd*, *ConsAttChar*), which indicates that the distribution of scores is relatively peaked, namely clustered in the centre of the graph, with long tails. On the other hand, the negative value of Kurtosis of *ConsParaChar* is indicative of a relatively flat distribution (Pallant 2010). Nevertheless, Skewness does not "make a

substantive difference in the analysis” and Kurtosis can result in underestimation of variance, but large samples do not run this risk (Tabachnick & Fidell 2007). Thus, from the overall observation, Skewness and Kurtosis values have been considered as acceptable for the analysis of this research’s social science data.

### ***5.3.2 Data Management***

As discussed in the methodology chapter, the decisions of the specific sample and sitcom as stimulus facilitated the obtainment of a large amount of data which are represented by the number of products mentioned by participants. These products constitute the observations that were involved in the analysis. Specifically, the 128 participants provided a large number of observed consumption events and products. Data treatment in Russell and Stern’s (2006) analysis procedure, concluded in the inclusion of the first product listed by each participant and products that were mentioned by at least 10% of the respondents, for reasons which were not clearly stated in the article. This research’s high usability of data which can be assigned to the proper completion of the questionnaire and the lack of significant number of missing values, allowed the inclusion of almost all mentioned products by participants, which in their majority, were commonly mentioned across observations under the same label<sup>73</sup>. Under this treatment, this research concluded in the utilization of 445 products, in contrast to the 226 products used by the initial research. In addition, participants of this research mentioned, on average, 3.47 products or consumption events, while the respondents of the initial study mentioned on average 2.97 products or services, despite the fact that both questionnaires were asking participants to mention the same number (i.e. up to five) of consumption related events. The products used in the analysis, as well as the specific characters that they were associated with –as listed by participants –, are depicted in Table 5.3.2.

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<sup>73</sup> Referring to participants’ listings of products under the same generic label (i.e. computer or Chinese food) or under the same brand name (i.e. Ben & Jerry’s ice-cream).

<i>Product Category</i> Products	<b>Characters associated with the product</b>					
	<b>Sheldon</b>	<b>Leonard</b>	<b>Raj</b>	<b>Howard</b>	<b>Penny</b>	<b>Amy</b>
<b><i>Technology</i></b>						
iphone and apps (i.e. intelligent personal assistant and knowledge navigator app Siri for Apple's IOS)	2		35		1	
ipod			24		42	
Dell laptop	1	5		1	3	
Other computers (e.g. Alien ware laptop, Apple computer and other generic mentions of products such as "computer".	1	7		7		
Other electronic devices (e.g. camera, video recorder, language recorder)	3					
<b><i>Food and Beverages</i></b>						
Chinese food (e.g. Chinese takeaway, Tangerine chicken, Chinese restaurant, Szechuan Palace restaurant)	77	2	2	1	1	
Ben & Jerry's ice-cream					51	
Whipped cream					17	
Chocolate					2	
Coca Cola and Diet Coke	17	10				
Cafeteria food (Mashed potato, Stuffing, Meat rice, Fried chicken, Coffee)	7	13	3	2		
Wine			7			
Subway					8	
Other (Groceries, Pretzel, Kool-Aid, Gelato)	1		1		1	2
<b><i>Internet and Games</i></b>						
Board Games	2	1	6	2		
Computer Games (e.g. Dungeons and Dragons, Grand Theft Auto, Monster War)	1	3	3	1		
Blogging					12	
eBay			5			
You Tube	9					1
<b><i>Hobbies</i></b>						
Doctor Who	4	3				
Learning Mandarin manual	6			4		
Comic Books (e.g. Comic Con)	1	2	1	2		
Other (e.g. Shooting, Magazine)		4			11	
<b><i>General</i></b>						
Flowers, Shopping Bag, Chair, Sofa, Clothing, Flags, Chemical Element curtain, Band aid	16	5			1	1

Source: This Research Note: The table includes the products listed by participants, according to their association with the specific characters. Some products were listed by participants as associated with more than one characters.

**Table 5.3.2 Characters-Products Associations**

### ***5.3.3 Variables Treatment***

This section presents the variables' treatments required for their preparation in order to be utilized for the analysis in the model testing.

#### **CharAttProd**

As stated earlier, the CharAttProd variable reflected the range of responses in characters' attitude toward the placed products, as perceived by participants. This variable was measured by a Likert scale from negative to positive, and thus the observations were divided based on the mid-scale point. The variable was divided in positive (CharAttProd=1) and negative (CharAttProd =2).

#### **CharAssocProd**

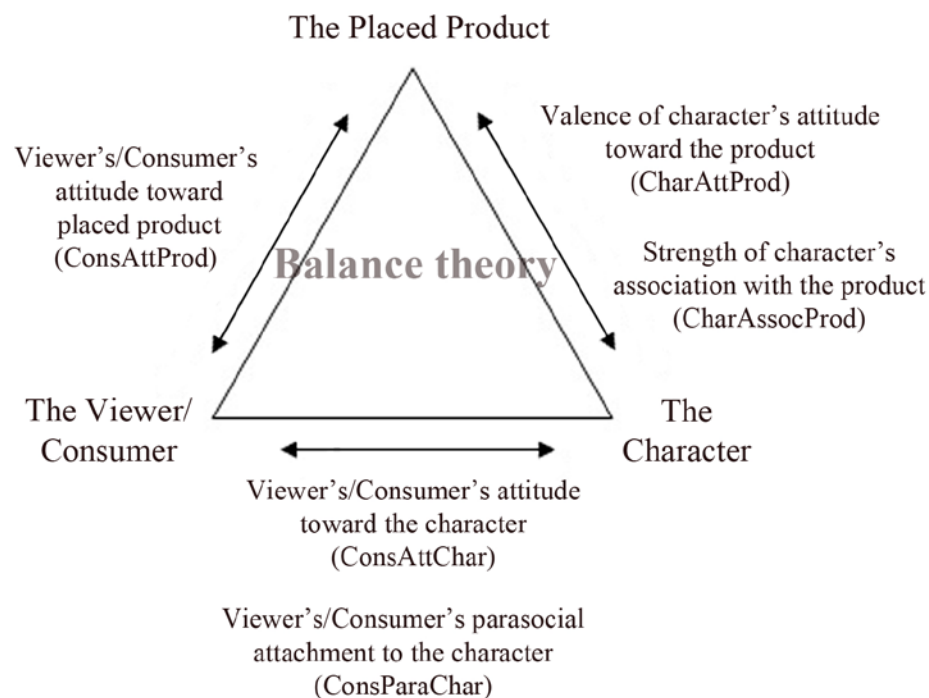
The CharAssocProd variable reflected the range in character-product association strength from 1.0 to 5.0. The observations were divided in strong or high (CharAssocProd=1) and weak or low (CharAssocProd=0) association.

#### **ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar Correlation Examination**

Albeit the variables of ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar denote different constructs, namely consumer's attitude toward the character and consumer's parasocial attachment with the character respectively, an investigation of the distinctiveness of the two different constructs was necessary. Hence, the correlation coefficient between ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar was computed and had a value of .284 ( $p<.01$ ). Thus, this value suggests that only a minor correlation between the variables exists, which implies that the two constructs are indeed distinct.

## 5.4 Model Testing

To test the model, the relations among the triad of linked elements and the predictions made for their effects on consumer attitudes according to balance theory -as presented in Figure 5.4- were examined. For this examination a structured methodology was followed by this extension research, which employed the techniques of the initial research. The data analysis for the hypotheses testing involved a series of regressions and a moderated regression. The following section presents the procedures that were followed to perform the regressions.



Source: Adapted from Russell & Stern 2006

**Figure 5.4** *The relations among the triad of elements and the variables constituting the Hypotheses testing the Balance Model of Product Placement effects*

### 5.4.1 Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses 1a and 1b predict that in a balanced state, ConsAttProd will be positively related to ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar, if the character's attitude toward the



product is positive ( $\text{CharAttProd} > 0$ ) for H1a<sup>74</sup>, and negatively related to ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar, if the character's attitude toward the product is negative ( $\text{CharAttProd} < 0$ ) for H1b<sup>75</sup>.

Hypothesis 2 predicts that the effects of ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar on ConsAttProd are moderated by CharAssocProd, which means that the strength of the character-product association moderates these effects.

A series of regressions of ConsAttProd as the dependent variable was conducted on the different predictor variables. As the hypotheses predict different effects depending on the valence of the character's attitude toward the product, and the variable CharAttProd has been divided in positive ( $\text{CharAttProd} = 1$ ) and negative ( $\text{CharAttProd} = 2$ ), the dataset was split in positive and negative characters' attitudes toward the product. A first regression including simple main effects only was performed, conducting regression of the ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar as independent variables on the dependent variable ConsAttProd.

To conduct the second regression which would include the main effects, as well as the association strength variable, the dichotomized variable CharAssocProd - in high ( $\text{CharAssocProd} = 1$ ) and low ( $\text{CharAssocProd} = 0$ ) association-, was set and utilized as a dummy variable.

To avoid multicollinearity between variables and their products, a grand mean centering was performed (where the mean was subtracted from each of the variable's scores in the data set) on the ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar variables. Thus, two new variables were created, the ConsAttCharRegress and the ConsParaCharRegress. In order to test H2, the products of two way-interaction terms and the dichotomized association strength variable were necessary to be created. As such, the two products of moderation were created, with the first one being the [ConsAttCharRegress x CharAssocProdDummy] and the second the [ConsParaCharRegress x CharAssocProdDummy]. Thus, the second, moderated regression analysis was conducted by the utilization of these created products. The regression and moderated regression results are presented in the following Table 5.4.1.

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<sup>74</sup> **H1a:** If  $\text{CharAttProd} > 0$ , ConsAttProd is positively related to ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar.

<sup>75</sup> **H1b:** If  $\text{CharAttProd} < 0$ , ConsAttProd is negatively related to ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar.

	Positive character-product associations		Negative character-product associations	
	<i>Step 1 β estimate</i>	<i>Step 2 β estimate</i>	<i>Step 1 β estimate</i>	<i>Step 2 β estimate</i>
Intercept (constant)	4.182**	5.670**	4.318**	5.212**
ConsAttChar	.050 <sub>ns</sub>	-.106 <sub>ns</sub>	.336**	.252*
ConsParaChar	.210**	.154 <sub>ns</sub>	-.218**	-.255**
ConsAttChar xCharAssocProd		.204*		.139
ConsParaChar xCharAssocProd		.045 <sub>ns</sub>		.073
R <sup>2</sup>	5.3%	6.7%	13.2%	15.2%

Source: This Research

Notes: ns= not significant, dependent variable= ConsAttProd, CharAssocProd is a dummy variable with 1 set for strong/high association and 0 for weak/low association. \*\* $p < .01$

**Table 5.4.1** *Estimates for Regression Models*

According to the results of the regressions, an examination of the predictions set by the hypotheses follows.

#### **5.4.2 Examination of Hypotheses' Predictions**

Following the presentation of results in accordance to Table 5.4.1, and focusing on Step 1 of the positive-character association, it can be observed that the sign of the ConsAttChar (.050) is positive but not significant, while ConsParaChar (.210\*\*) is of a positive sign and also significant. Observation of the signs in Step 2 of the positive-character association reveals that only ConsParaChar has a positive sign. Further, the results denote, that for positive character-product associations, parasocial attachment is related to attitude toward the placed product. Thus, there is evidence that ConsAttProd is positively related to ConsParaChar. However, there is not enough proof to support that for positive character-product associations, consumer's attitude toward the character (ConsAttChar) is related to attitude toward the product (ConsAttProd), and thus H1a is partially supported.

The results for negative character-product associations show that ConsAttChar is not of a negative sign as expected according to the prediction of H1b. However, as it can be observed, ConsAttChar is significant (.336\*\*), thus denoting to have some

effect but it is not the one predicted by H1b. Namely ConsAttChar is not negatively related to ConsAttProd in negative character-product associations.

Contrarily, in negative character-product associations, ConsParaChar is of a negative sign and also significant (-.218\*\*), which denotes that ConsParaChar is negatively related to ConsAttProd, thus fully supporting this part of H1b.

In examining the results with regard to H2<sup>76</sup> which predicted moderation by CharAssocProd on the effects of ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar on ConsAttProd, supporting evidence exist only with regard to positive character-product associations and only for the variable ConsAttChar x CharAssocProd, which is the only one substantiating significance (.204\*). Namely, CharAssocProd acts as a moderator but only regarding the effects of ConsAttChar on ConsAttProd. The evidence cannot provide proof of a moderating effect of CharAssocProd on ConsParaChar. Accordingly, H2 is partially supported.

The third Hypothesis, predicted that ConsParaChar will have a stronger effect on ConsAttProd in comparison to ConsAttChar. The results provide evidence that this prediction is standing true for most instances because the  $\beta$  estimate is of larger value for ConsParaChar than for ConsAttChar when considering their absolute values. In particular, in positive character-product associations, ConsParaChar=.210\*\* > ConsAttChar=.050ns and ConsParaChar=.154ns > ConsAttChar= -.106ns. Moreover, although there is a minor difference in the absolute values of the two variables in negative character-product associations, the prediction of ConsParaChar being superior than ConsAttChar on the effects on ConsAttProd is true in the case of Step 2 ConsParaChar=-.255\*\* > ConsAttChar= .252\*. However, the Hypothesis doesn't stand true in the case of Step 1 in negative character-product associations because ConsAttChar=.336\*\* > ConsParaChar= -.218\*\*.

#### 5.4.2.1 Results of Hypotheses Testing

In Table 5.4.2 the Hypotheses and the research's results with regard to Hypotheses' support, partial support or rejection, are presented. Moreover, the table includes the

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<sup>76</sup> **H2:** The effects of ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar on ConsAttProd are moderated by CharAssocProd.

relevant evidence that supports the Hypotheses, as well as, evidence that impedes their full support. Lack of evidence, due to which proof for full support cannot be assigned to Hypotheses, is also included in the fourth column of the table.

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Research Result</b>	<b>Evidence for support</b>	<b>Lack of evidence for support or evidence impeding full support</b>
<b>H1a:</b> <i>If CharAttProd&gt;0, ConsAttProd is positively related to ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar.</i>	Partially Supported	When CharAttProd>0, ConsAttProd is positively related to ConsParaChar.	When CharAttProd>0, ConsAttProd cannot be proved as positively related to ConsAttChar
<b>H1b:</b> <i>If CharAttProd&lt;0, ConsAttProd is negatively related to ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar.</i>	Partially Supported	When CharAttProd<0, ConsAttProd is negatively related to ConsParaChar	When CharAttProd<0, ConsAttProd cannot be proved to be negatively related to ConsAttChar.
<b>H2:</b> <i>The effects of ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar on ConsAttProd are moderated by CharAssocProd.</i>	Partially Supported	In positive character-product associations the effects of ConsAttChar on ConsAttProd are moderated by CharAssocProd.	In positive character-product associations there is no moderating effect of CharAssocProd on ConsParaChar. In negative character-product associations there is no proof of CharAssocProd moderating effects.
<b>H3:</b> <i>ConsParaChar will have a stronger effect on ConsAttProd in comparison to ConsAttChar.</i>	Partially Supported	Evidence for support on all instances of character-product associations but one.	No supporting evidence in one case: in negative character-product associations ConsAttChar has a stronger effect than ConsParaChar.

Source: This Research

**Table 5.4.2 Results of Hypotheses Testing**

Overall, the results of the Hypotheses testing reveal that parasocial attachment affects consumers' attitudes toward placed products, but effects might vary depending on the strength of the character-product association and valence of the character's attitude toward the product.

Generally, the consumer's parasocial attachment to a character seems to be the most important relation between elements of the framework and overall, it can be considered as having the greatest influence on consumers' attitude toward the placed product than any other variable. Specifically, when a character's attitude toward the placed product is positive (i.e. in positive character-product associations), consumer attitude toward the product is positively related to consumer parasocial attachment with the character. In addition, when the character's attitude toward the placed product is negative (i.e. in negative character-product associations), the consumer's attitude toward the product is negatively related to the consumer's parasocial relationship with the character. Namely, in balance theory terms, it seems that the consumer's attitude toward the product is in alignment with the character that s/he is parasocially attached to, and consequently to the character's attitude toward the product. Moreover, the importance of a consumer's parasocial relationship with a character also stems from the fact that this relation -in the majority of instances- has a stronger effect on consumer's attitude toward the product than the consumer's attitude toward the character.

The hypothesized moderating effect of character's association with the product on consumer's attitude toward the product, functions only in relation to consumer's attitude toward the character. Lack of proof of any moderating effect on consumer's attitude toward the product with regard to consumer's parasocial attachment with a character, implies that character's association with a product is of subordinate importance in influencing attitudes. Thus, once again it can be implied that overall, the parasocial relationship between a consumer and a character outweighs possible attitudinal effects of co-existing factors.

In the next chapter the findings of this research will be analytically discussed and the model's conceptualization in relevance to the findings will be presented.

## **Summary of Chapter 5**

This chapter reported the demographic profile along with the specific media viewing characteristics of the 128 participants who constituted the sample. Due to the specific media viewing profile of the sample, a high rate of usable questionnaires with infinitesimal missing responses provided 445 observations of products and consumption related events which were utilized in the data analysis. The data analysis procedure, included examination of the instruments measuring the variables in terms of reliability, unidimensionality and descriptive statistics, treatment of variables for their preparation in order to be analyzed, and testing of the Hypotheses. To test the Hypotheses, a series of regression analyses and a moderated regression were performed and their results provided evidence for partial support of the predictions. Consumers' parasocial attachment with characters was found to have a strong effect on consumers' attitude toward the placed product, and that generally, consumers' parasocial relationships with characters seem to overshadow the strength of other co-existing factors in influencing attitudes toward products. Overall, the findings support the balance model with regard to the parasocial attachment between consumers and characters, in that consumers seem to align their attitudes to the attitudes of their parasocial attachments.

# **CHAPTER SIX**

Discussion and  
Implications

## **6. Discussion and Implications**

This chapter concludes the presentation of the research. Drawing from the results of the data analysis chapter, the key findings are discussed and critically compared with the findings of Russell and Stern's (2006) study. The contribution of this extension study is also discussed in relation to its main purpose of accretion of product placement knowledge through this generalization attempt. Implications for theory refinement and research are also stressed in this chapter. Most importantly, following the approach of a replication tradition, which is orientated toward the development of valuable knowledge through examining and replicating past findings, more valuable implications for practitioners are suggested. That is because they are based on outcomes stemming from two studies examining the same topic, and thus they could be considered as more robust and well-built suggestions. This chapter concludes with a presentation of the limitations of this research and suggestions for future research in the specific research area.

### **6.1 Discussion of Findings**

The findings, as analytically presented in the data analysis chapter, can be considered not only as supporting the theoretical premises of the balance model of sitcom product placement effects, thus proving its faculty for application to differentiated circumstances, but also as providing further support and validation of the findings of the initial study. For justification of these inferences, the findings of this extension research will be discussed and then they will be cross-examined in comparison to the outcomes of Russell and Stern's (2006) study.

#### ***6.1.1 Discussion of Extension Research's Findings***

The results of this study, after testing the predictions set by the Hypotheses, revealed that the relations between character-product, consumer-character and consumer-



product as described in the balance model of product placement effects, interact with each other but in varying degrees, and in some cases not as initially predicted.

In particular, the results showed that in cases of positive character-product associations, namely when consumers perceived that the character's attitude toward the placed product was positive, the consumers' attitude toward the product was significantly and positively affected by the consumers' parasocial attachment with the character, regardless of the character-product association strength. In cases of negative character-product associations, when consumers thought that the character's attitude toward the product was negative, consumers' attitudes toward the product were affected significantly and negatively by their parasocial attachment with the character. This means that consumers' parasocial relationship with the character significantly affected consumers' attitude toward the product and that consumers aligned their attitudes toward the product according to their attachment's attitude toward the product. More explicitly, when consumers perceived that their attached character had a negative attitude toward the product, they also expressed a negative attitude toward the product, while in cases where they perceived an attached character's positive attitude toward the product, they expressed a positive attitude toward the product as well.

These findings support the theoretical premises which underlie the balance model of product placement effects, since there is evidence suggesting consumers' alignment with their attached characters. As balance theory predicts, in situations consisting of one person (here the consumer), another person (here the character) and an impersonal entity (the placed product), the person (consumer) will try to align his/her attitudes with the attitudes of the other person (character) toward the entity (placed product), in order to reach a balanced psychological state. It seems that a consumer's parasocial relationship with the character can be indeed considered as resembling a real personal relationship, which motivates the individual to be in alignment with the other person of the relationship, in order for cognitive balance to be obtained in the mind of the individual. Consequently, it can be inferred, that consumers align their attitudes toward the placed products according to the characters' attitudes toward placed products, and this procedure of alignment is guided by the consumers' parasocial relationships with the characters.

Regarding the consumer attitude toward the character the results could not provide proof of an effect on consumer attitude toward the product for positive

character-product relations. However, in cases where consumers perceived negative characters' attitudes toward the product, consumers' attitude toward the character was found to have a significant effect on consumers' attitudes toward the product but not as expected. Namely, although it was predicted that consumer attitude toward the product would be negatively related to consumer attitude toward the character in negative character-product associations, this cannot be supported by the results. The results showed a significant relation between consumer attitude toward the character and consumer attitude toward the product in negative character-product associations, but not a negative one. An explanation for this unexpected result, occurring in only one case, can only be speculated. Maybe, this one-case occurrence can be assumed as assigned to cases where consumers are not strongly parasocially attached to a character. For example, in cases where consumers were not parasocially attached to a character, their attitude to the character may have had a greater impact on their attitude toward the product. And exactly because they weren't driven by any force to align their attitudes toward the character, their attitude toward the product was not affected by the fact that the character had a negative attitude toward the product. Perhaps, their attitudes toward some specific products were formed irrespectively of the character-product association, and maybe this is the reason why their attitude toward the character was positively, instead of negatively, related to the attitude toward the product. However, as stated, this is only a speculation and any explanation assumed, cannot be supported, not only because of one-case occurring results but also because the analysis is not examining cause and effect relations. The analysis of the data only investigated existence of relations, and the signs of the relations were examined in order to support the theoretical predictions stemming from balance theory.

Overall, the assumption with regard to the moderating role of the characters' association with the product, which predicted that the effects of consumers' parasocial attachment with the character and consumers' attitude toward the character on consumers' attitude toward the product, would be moderated by the character-product association, could not be confidently supported for all cases. Namely, a moderating effect of character-product association cannot be consistently and steadily assigned to the effects of consumer attitude toward the character and consumer parasocial attachment with the character on consumer attitude toward the product. The only case that supported this assumption was for positive character-product associations, where the results showed that the effects of consumer attitude toward the character on

consumer attitude toward the product were significantly moderated by the character's association with the product. Namely, the only effect of consumer attitude toward the character on consumer attitude toward the product that was moderated by the character-product association was found for strong positive character-product associations.

Most importantly, the results provide evidence for the importance of the role of consumer parasocial attachment with characters on the effects of consumer attitudes toward placed products. Supporting evidence that consumer parasocial attachment with the character has a stronger effect on consumer attitude toward the product than consumer attitude toward the character, shows that parasocial relation between viewer/consumer and character can play an important role in the formation of consumer attitude toward placed products in the context of the sitcom. Drawing from this evidence, it could be implied that consumer-character parasocial relationships not only drive the attitude alignment process but also act as predictors of product placement effects.

Conclusively, the findings provide support for the influence of character-product relations (inside-program) and consumer-character (outside-program) relations on consumer attitudes toward placed products. Consumer-character relation (parasocial attachment) affects consumer attitudes toward the product according to the character-product associations. Consumers align their attitudes toward the placed product according to their attached character's attitudes toward the product, in a positive way for positive character-product associations and in a negative way for negative character-product associations. As such, it can also be implied, that the valence of character-product associations (i.e. from negative to positive) plays a role in the attitude alignment process, an implication that may be of important practical contribution for the portrayal of brands in conjunction with characters. Above all, the results reveal the superior importance of parasocial relationships in affecting consumer attitude toward the placed product in comparison to simple attitude toward the character. Hence, it can be inferred that parasocial attachment can be a factor of advanced predictive faculty of product placement effects than attitude toward the character.

Overall, the findings support the balance model of product placement effects and most of its integrated influences as described by Russell and Stern (2006). The role of the inferences stemming from the genre, the characters who are characterized

by their ability to become referent others for viewers and their association with intertwined to the plot product placements, are all corroborated by this study's findings. The premises of balance theory are also supported by the current findings, since consumers were found to align their attitudes toward the placed product according to their attached referent others' attitudes toward the product. Thus, balance theory can provide explanation of the way that consumers can be affected by product placements in the genre of sitcoms. Accordingly, balance theory enriches the understanding of product placement effects in media contexts with which viewers/consumers are highly connected to.

Apart from providing answers to the research questions set regarding the examination of the balance model of product placement effects, this study also aimed at providing additional evidence for the attempt to generalize the findings of the initial study. For this reason, the findings of this research project were also collated with the findings of the initial research and are discussed next.

### ***6.1.2 Comparison of Initial and Extension Study's Findings***

A collation of the findings of the extension research with the findings of the initial research, will allow addressing the research questions which were set in the introduction, regarding the facilitation of the balance model's generalization. Specifically, a comparison between the findings of the two studies might indicate, if the execution of the extension study at a different time, geographical setting, sample drawn from a different population, different contemporary sitcom, more branded placed products instead of more generic products and alterations in the research procedures and research instrument, had any impact on the findings that could be evident.

Most importantly, with reference to the aim of facilitating the generalization of the balance model of sitcom product placement effects, the findings of this study support and corroborate the balance model as proposed by Russell and Stern. There is evidence that the model applies to different circumstances<sup>77</sup>, and findings confirm the role of intra-program (genre attributes i.e. characters-placed products associations)

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<sup>77</sup> As stated, different circumstances refer to: geographical setting, time, sample, population, stimulus, data collection procedures and altered research instrument.

and extra-program (consumers' attachment with characters) influences integrated in the model. The results from the examination of these, integrated to the model, influences, also corroborate the premises of balance theory as describing and explaining the way that the interaction between these influences, directs product placement effects on consumers. Namely, the fact that the results provide evidence for consumers' attitude alignment toward the attitudes of their attached characters, supports the theoretical foundations of the model, regarding balance theory.

With reference to the specific effects of the intra-program and extra-program influences as described by the model, the findings of the extension study generally substantiate the findings of the initial research. However, as it can be observed by the regression analyses appearing in the following Tables 6.1.2a and 6.1.2b -referring to the results of the extension and initial study respectively-, some differences in the influences of particular variables are noted. For example, the initial study's results denote that in negative character-product associations ConsParaChar significantly affects ConsAttProd when character-product association is strong. That is, ConsParaChar affects ConsAttProd negatively and the effect is moderated by CharAssocProd (Russell & Stern 2006). However, in the extension study, in negative character-product associations, although ConsAttProd was also found to be negatively related to ConsParaChar, there was no moderating effect of CharAssocProd. Nevertheless, in positive character-product associations, the findings of the initial study revealed that ConsParaChar affects ConsAttProd positively regardless of the strength of association (Russell & Stern 2006) and consistent evidence was found for that prediction in the extension study as well.

The extension study showed evidence for moderation of CharAssocProd in only one case, in particular for ConsAttChar on ConsAttProd in positive character-product associations, while the findings of the initial study found moderation of CharAssocProd in negative character-product associations of the effects of ConsParaChar on ConsAttProd and of the effects of ConsAttChar on ConsAttProd, but this latter effect was not negative as expected.

Consistently with the findings of the initial study, the results of this extension research provided further evidence of the stronger effect of consumers' parasocial attachment with character on consumer attitude toward the product, in comparison to consumer attitude toward the character. However, both studies found that in some cases in negative character-product associations, ConsAttChar had a significant effect

on ConsAttProd. In the present study, the only case where ConsAttChar had a stronger effect than ConsParaChar on ConsAttProd is in negative character-product associations, while Russell and Stern's (2006) study found the only significant effect of ConsAttChar on ConsAttProd in strong negative character-product associations.

As it can be observed in Tables 6.1.2a and 6.1.2b, both studies' regression models are quite consistent in their values of the  $R^2$ . It can be implied then, that both studies are consistent in explaining the variance of the dependent variable ConsAttProd by the regression models (Pallant 2010). The fact that both studies' values of  $R^2$  are quite small can be justified by the fact that the dependant variable consumer attitude toward the product, refers to a general attitude which can be formed by numerous factors and not only by the variables integrated in the model. For example, consumer attitude toward the product, and especially for known branded products, can be shaped by influences stemming from advertising, prior exposure to the brand, prior use of the product, aspiration to own the product, intention or willingness to buy the product and many more factors. Then, the influence of the character on consumer attitude toward the product -through consumer parasocial attachment with character, or consumer attitude toward character-, can only represent a percentage of the influence of all the factors shaping consumer attitudes toward products. Hence, it can be inferred that the low values of  $R^2$  in both regression models, are associated with the partial influence of the character-related variables on shaping general consumer attitudes toward products that can be explained from these models, in relation to the overall influence that all other existing (but unknown in the two studies) factors might have on the dependant variable ConsAttProd.

Extension Study	Positive character-product associations		Negative character-product associations	
	<i>Step 1 β estimate</i>	<i>Step 2 β estimate</i>	<i>Step 1 β estimate</i>	<i>Step 2 β estimate</i>
Intercept (constant)	4.182**	5.670**	4.318**	5.212**
ConsAttChar	.050 <sub>ns</sub>	-.106 <sub>ns</sub>	.336**	.252*
ConsParaChar	.210**	.154 <sub>ns</sub>	-.218**	-.255**
ConsAttChar xCharAssocProd		.204*		.139
ConsParaChar xCharAssocProd		.045 <sub>ns</sub>		.073
R <sup>2</sup>	5.3%	6.7%	13.2%	15.2%

Source: This Research

\*\* $p > .01$

**Table 6.1.2a** *Estimates for Regression Models of Extension Study*

Initial Study	Positive character-product associations		Negative character-product associations	
	<i>Step 1 β estimate</i>	<i>Step 2 β estimate</i>	<i>Step 1 β estimate</i>	<i>Step 2 β estimate</i>
Intercept (constant)	4.428*	4.498*	3.785*	3.785*
ConsAttChar	.065 <sub>ns</sub>	-.091 <sub>ns</sub>	.231 <sub>ns</sub>	.125 <sub>ns</sub>
ConsParaChar	.311*	.566*	.067 <sub>ns</sub>	.224 <sub>ns</sub>
ConsAttChar xCharAssocProd		.203 <sub>ns</sub>		.428*
ConsParaChar xCharAssocProd		-.348 <sub>ns</sub>		-.633*
R <sup>2</sup>	5.8%	7.2%	2.9%	9.6%

Source: Russell & Stern (2006)

\* $p > .05$

**Table 6.1.2b** *Estimates for Regression Models of Initial Study*

Overall, the present study's findings corroborate the findings of the initial study, apart from some observed differences in the variables' influences, as stated before, which are also evident in the regression models as depicted in Tables 6.1.2a and 6.1.2b. The present study utilized the same structure of hypotheses as the initial study in order to test the balance model and to compare the two studies' findings as objectively as possible. The research results from both studies are collected and presented in the following Table 6.1.3. In the columns *Initial study Results* and *Extension Study Results* the findings of each study are presented in detail, while in the columns *Research Results*, the hypotheses testing results of each study are determined

as supported or not. As it can be observed, the findings of both studies partially supported all tested Hypotheses. The partial support of the hypotheses could not be considered as an inadequate support of the balance model, not only because the main effects that it was meant to describe were indeed described, but also because the structure of the Hypotheses included more than one variable examined under the same condition. Namely, the model's description of parasocial attachment between consumers and characters on influencing consumer attitudes toward the product, and the explanatory faculty of balance theory's attitude alignment process on which the model was based, were supported by both research results. However, the structure of Hypotheses (as utilized by both studies), which concurrently examined the variables ConsParaChar and ConsAttChar in the same prediction, has possibly undermined the presentation of the final results. For example, if Hypotheses 1a and 1b were developed in more parts, thus examining one variable at a time (e.g. H1a: *CharAttProd > 0 ConsAttProd is positively related to ConsAttChar* and H1b: *CharAttProd > 0 ConsAttProd is positively related to ConsParaChar* and accordingly for H1b predicting the negative relations), then the presentation of the results would be more discernible and more distinct. Nevertheless, it was necessary, for the benefit of the comparison, that this study would maintain the exact same presentation and structure of the Hypotheses as the initial research. Thus, the two studies' results presented in the following Table 6.1.3 can be easily collated.



Hypotheses	Initial Study Results (as reported by Russell & Stern, 2006)	Research results	Extension Study Results	Research results <sup>78</sup>
<b>H1a</b> <sup>79</sup> & <b>H2</b> <sup>80</sup>	When CharAttProd>0 ConsParaChar affects ConsAttProd positively, regardless of CharAssocProd strength  (ConsParaChar= .311* and .566* in table 6.1.2a)	<i>Partial Support of H1a &amp; H1b.</i>  Support only for variable ConsParaChar.  <i>Partial Support of H2.</i>	When CharAttProd>0 ConsAttProd is positively related to ConsParaChar.  When CharAttProd>0 the effects of ConsAttChar on ConsAttProd are moderated by CharAssocProd	<i>Partial Support of H1a, H1b &amp; H2</i>
<b>H1b</b> <sup>81</sup> & <b>H2</b>	When CharAttProd<0 ConsParaChar significantly affects ConsAttProd negatively if CharAssocProd is strong  (ConsParaChar xCharAssocProd= -.633* and ConsAttChar xCharAssocProd= .428* in table 6.1.2a)	Moderating effect of CharAssocProd for ConsParaChar and ConsAttChar on ConsAttProd only in case where CharAttProd<0	When CharAttProd<0 ConsAttProd is negatively related to ConsParaChar	
<b>H3</b> <sup>82</sup>	Overall, ConsParaChar was a stronger predictor of ConsAttProd than ConsAttChar.  ConsAttChar had significant effect on ConsAttProd only in the case of strong negative character-product associations  (ConsAttChar xCharAssocProd= .428* in table 6.1.2a)	<i>Partial Support of H3.</i>  ConsParaChar has stronger effect on ConsAttProd than ConsAttChar except in case of strong negative CharAssocProd	Overall, ConsParaChar was a stronger predictor of ConsAttProd than ConsAttChar  In negative character-product associations ConsAttChar has a stronger effect than ConsParaChar.	<i>Partial Support of H3.</i>

Source: Russell & Stern (2006) and this Research

**Table 6.1.3 Results of Hypotheses Testing by Initial and Extension Study**

<sup>78</sup> Please refer to Chapter 5 section 5.4.2.1 and Table 5.4.2 for details of the extension research results

<sup>79</sup> **H1a:** CharAttProd>0 ConsAttProd is positively related to ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar.

<sup>80</sup> **H2:** The effects of ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar on ConsAttProd are moderated by CharAssocProd.

<sup>81</sup> **H1b:** If CharAttProd<0, ConsAttProd is negatively related to ConsAttChar and ConsParaChar.

<sup>82</sup> **H3:** ConsParaChar will have a stronger effect on ConsAttProd in comparison to ConsAttChar.

## **6.2 Implications for Theory and Research**

The findings of this extension study corroborate the findings of the initial study and support the balance model of sitcom product placement effects and the theoretical premises of balance theory that it is based on. As such, it can be implied that this research facilitated the generalization of the balance model of placement effects and provided proof that it is applicable to different circumstances. However, the present research does not claim having achieved general and conclusive confirmation of the model's generalizability, or that it is not necessary to further examine its replicability to other contexts. However, according to the philosophical and methodological beliefs of this study, it can be claimed that a building block to the edifice of product placement knowledge was provided. Accordingly, the findings of this research can be considered as offering further knowledge to the practice's utilization by practitioners, and also to the literature of product placement effectiveness. As such, the current research can provide some implications for relevant theory and research. Moreover, the present findings can provide further support to previous research outcomes as presented next.

### ***6.2.1 Implications for Balance Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory and the Genre in relation to Product Placement in Media Contexts***

The support provided by the present research to the premises of balance theory in explaining and predicting the attitude alignment process of viewers/consumers toward sitcom characters, as described in the balance model of sitcom product placement effects, confirms balance theory's potency as a general theory which can explain and predict attitudinal alignment or change in any relationship involving thinking and feeling individuals. In particular, based on the outcomes of both the initial and extension study, it can be supported that balance theory's premises also find application in media contexts. Specifically, the predictions of balance theory about attitude alignment hold in media contexts such as sitcoms where parasocial relationships between viewers and media figures can be formed and evolve.

Moreover, drawing from the fact that viewers engage in an attitudinal alignment process toward attached media figures, it can be implied that indeed, as inferred in relevant parasocial interaction literature<sup>83</sup>, parasocial relationships can be considered as very similar to real interpersonal relationships. The successive nature of sitcoms, which facilitates a repeated and regular exposure to characters and a connection between viewers and characters, generates the progressive development of parasocial relationships. This research embraced the assumption of Russell and Stern's study (2006) that consumers involved in parasocial relationships with characters would be inclined to bring their attitudes closer to their attached others' attitudes. The fact that both studies revealed an attitudinal congruence between consumer attitudes toward products and characters' attitudes toward products implies not only the systemic similarity between parasocial and interpersonal relationships, as initially suggested by Horton and Wohl (1956), but also the fact that their functionality can be very similar too. As such, individuals who develop parasocial relationships with media figures are indeed inclined to keep psychological and cognitive balance in their relationships.

The fact that sitcoms are structurally oriented to integrate the element of consumption in their plots<sup>84</sup> -for reasons of verisimilitude, development of the personas and unfolding of the story-, and that viewers are connected with such programs and develop parasocial relationships with characters who also act as "agents of consumer socialization" (Solomon & Greenberg 1993), extends the applicability of Newcomb's (1953) proposition that individuals have the inevitable conscious or unconscious tendency to orient themselves "toward objects in the environment and also toward persons associated with those same objects". Thus, it only seems natural, as an inherent human tendency, that viewers/consumers need to be in attitudinal alignment with their referent others, since they develop parasocial relationships with them, and since these relationships can be considered as close relationships.

However, as previous research on attitude alignment in close relationships has shown, the attitude alignment process proceeds according to several properties which can increase the degree of tension experienced in an imbalanced state, and as such, the degree of an individual's tendency of reaching psychological congruence with the

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<sup>83</sup> Please refer to Chapter 2 section 2.1

<sup>84</sup> Please refer Chapter 3 section 3.1.1.1/Products

other part of the relationship (Davis & Rusbult 2001). As previously discussed<sup>85</sup> the strength of the relationship, the degree of tension experienced due to imbalance, the perceived centrality of attitudes for an individual's personal identity and the degree of perceived similarity with the other part, play a role in the attitude alignment process. For example, the implication drawn from the findings of this and the initial research is that generally, consumers align their attitudes toward the attitudes of attached characters, however, in some cases the consumer attitude toward the character has an effect on consumer attitude toward the product instead of parasocial attachment. This occurrence might find justification in the aforementioned Davis & Rusbult's (2001) propositions. Namely, such occurrences might be due to the fact that consumers pre-held stronger or completely indifferent attitudes toward some specific products that they were not affected by their parasocial attachments' influences, or that some parasocial relationships were not strong enough to thrust the alignment of their attitudes. Of course, such an inference can only be implied, as the findings cannot provide such clarification. Nevertheless, the identification of properties that increase the degree of tension of imbalanced states in parasocial relationships, or that prevent consumers from aligning their attitudes to their attached characters, can impel the further and deeper research of attitudinal alignment toward placed products in media contexts where parasocial relationships emerge.

Another important implication that stems from this research, also providing further support for propositions of previous research (e.g. Russell 2002), is that the connection or integration of placed products in the plot can be indeed an important factor underlying the process of parasocial relationships' development between viewers and characters and the attitudinal alignment process of viewers/consumers toward their attached characters and the placed products associated with them. Some of the most commonly mentioned, by participants, placed products which were involved in the two episodes of the utilized stimuli, were highly integrated in the plot<sup>86</sup>. In particular, the Apple iPhone with the application of Siri and the Apple iPod were actually part of the two episodes' scenarios, aided the unfolding of the stories and some characters were highly involved with them. Such cases, where products constitute a major thematic element in the plot (Holbrook and Grayson 1986) are

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<sup>85</sup> Please refer to Chapter 2, section 2.2.5

<sup>86</sup> Detailed description of the episodes plot can be found in appendix III

characterized as higher plot placements, and have been previously found to influence viewers' attitudes toward the placed products (Russell 1998).

Correspondingly, the current study's findings which supported attitudinal alignment toward products connected with their attached characters, can be considered as offering an additional confirmation of the proposition suggesting that the degree of plot connection can predict product placement effects (e.g. Russell 2002, Russell & Stern 2006) in terms of attitudes toward placed products. Moreover, the current findings provide a clearer view and additional information with regard to the integration of placed products in terms of valence and strength of products' association with characters, which can be of practical use by practitioners. The implication that can be considered as stemming from this research, is that indeed, highly integrated to the plot products that aid to the unfolding of the story, add to the comedic element of the plot and highlight specific characteristics of the character, can enhance the effects of the placements, if viewers are highly connected with the program, and consequently, the development of parasocial relationships is more likely to emerge. The genre of sitcoms has been proved by both studies as a "hospitable", well receiving and received, and engaging entertainment environment which already follows a formula of high levels of products' integration. Thus, it can be perceived as a media platform for opportunities of product placement strategy's evolvement, since it promotes a move from simple circumstantial product placements to a holistic practice of branded entertainment.

### ***6.2.2 Product Placement Effects Implications Corroborating Previous Research***

Aside from the direct implications of this research's findings for the theoretical premises supporting the balance model of sitcom product placement effects, several elements utilized and examined through this research, can provide implications with regard to product placement effects and attributes, thus adding to previous product placement research. This study cannot claim that these implications stem from conclusive or highly significant findings, but rather, they can be seen as provisions of additional information of the practice's attributes and observed effects occurring in

this research. However, since such inferences have been researched, identified and stated in other studies, the present implications will provide additional confirmatory insights which can be considered as strengthening previous product placement related findings.

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, one of the highly researched topics regarding product placement practice, has been the effects of placements on memory (recognition and recall of products and brands). Although many studies have attempted to connect placements' recognition and recall with product placements' effectiveness, such inferences have been considered as rather inconclusive, and problematic as placements' effectiveness indicators. However, since in some cases, the aim of marketers in including brands in media contexts, is to raise or develop brand awareness or familiarity, built a brand's image, or create a "buzz" for a new product (Russell & Belch 2005), brand recognition and recall might be regarded as a good enough effect and outcome for the objectives set in a marketing plan. After all, it is only fair to assess product placement effectiveness against the objectives set (Russell & Belch 2005). Regarding the effects of placements in reference to recognition and recall, this research can offer some implications stemming from the open-ended questions of the research instrument. In examining the answers to these questions, it could be clearly observed that the majority of participants were able to recall the branded products integrated in the two episodes' plots and recognize them with their correct brand name. It could be implied that the reason behind such a high brand recall and recognition might be assigned to the high integration level of branded placed products in the plot. As previously mentioned, a number of branded products were part of the story or were involved significantly with actions of the characters or the situations narrated by the episodes' plots. This might mean that high involvement of placements in the narrative has a positive effect on viewers with regard to the attention drawn on the products, which possibly aids their recall and recognition. Moreover, this implication drawn by this study, also corroborates previous findings referring to an increase of memory in cases of high product-plot integration and product-character involvement, as it can be found in relevant studies (e.g. d'Astous & Chartier 2000, Russell 2002, Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen 2007, van Reijmerdal et al. 2009).

The important role of parasocial relationships in aiding alignment of consumer attitude toward the placed product according to the characters' attitudes toward the

product, stemming from the findings of this study, provide justification and explanation of previous studies' findings which relate placements' effects with the character. Specifically, Wiles & Danielova's (2009) event study -which actually assessed the worth of product placements through an analysis of various media works, product placements and the changes in stock prices of firms which had employed the practice for their products-, revealed that placements' worth is actually enhanced when the placed product is associated with an established character but not when it is associated with an actor who is a major star. In fact, their findings suggested that the symbolic meaning of consumption or a product or brand is carried more by characters than by the actors' celebrity. Moreover, the findings of Avery and Ferraro (2000), who examined brand appearances on television, revealed that brand portrayals are reinforced by the characters' interaction with the brand or product.

Consequently, it can be implied that placements which are associated with characters and not the star quality of the actors impersonating the characters, can most probably be more influential than other types of placements. Moreover, the character-product association finds more ground and more justification of being an important predictor of product placement effects. But most importantly, from the current and the aforementioned studies, it is implied that since characters have the faculty to enhance placements' effects, the recurring appearance of characters in serialized media programs can provide even better results for the marketing objectives set when the placement practice is employed. For example, characters in movies, more often than not, appear on screen only once<sup>87</sup> -unless the viewer watches a movie more times, in which case his/her appearance is always the same-, with no development in the character's personality. In any case, the character's story ends with the movie (Russell 1998). However, as it has been previously thoroughly discussed, in serialized television programs, recurring characters appear frequently, appear to live in similar time scales to the viewers, promote their everyday life, build their personas over time, exceed their media existence and thus connect with the viewers, who can relate to them by means of familiarity and identification (Fiske 1987). In addition, characters carry the unique faculty of stimulating special feelings to the viewers, which in turn, engender the development of parasocial relationships, making the connection between viewer and program even stronger. Drawing from these

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<sup>87</sup> An exception could be referred to James Bond movies, where the main character has a continuous appearance with a frequency of appearance every two to three years.

inferences, an important implication for practice and for the refinement of focus of future research, could refer to the appointment of programs with recurring characters, as more fertile grounds for employing the practice of product placement.

Contrarily to the findings of the initial research which most probably due to the inclusion of mostly generic products in the stimuli, could not provide specific insights about the nature of placements, this research can provide product placements, characters and genre related implications, which stem from the open-ended questions of the survey instrument. As discussed in chapters two and three, and as it has been identified in relevant placement and genre literature (e.g. Fiske 1987, DeLorme & Reid 1999, Stern & Russell 2004, Hackley & Tiwsakul 2006), the practice of product placement is accompanied by several genre, character and product symbolism related attributes, which have been found to characterize the way that the practice is employed in media texts. Such issues and attributes refer mainly to the conventions and occurring issues that can be met in a media work. In particular, the participants of this research provided clear insights regarding the consumption convention of the sitcom and the way that they related it to the plot. Specifically, the insights of participants refer to the products' contributions to the narrative, their symbolic meaning, their assistance to the narrative's realism and to the way that they, themselves, draw meaning from the placements. Moreover, they related products as aids to character-building and communication of character's feelings to the viewer, and also as resorts of provoking the comedic effect of the "in-jokes", which are usually met in sitcoms (Mills 2009). The following Tables 6.2.2a, 6.2.2b, 6.2.2c and 6.2.2d, present the most commonly mentioned by participants, products accompanied by their own inferences about the products' contribution to the plot. According to the central premise of their statements, their interpretations have been categorized in themes, such as realism, comedic effect, aid for the story, product placement, enhancement of contemporary feel, product symbolism and highlighting the character's personality or feelings.



<b>Product: Apple iPhone</b>	
<b>Contribution to the program (in themes)</b>	<i>In participants' words</i>
<b>Realism</b>	<i>Siri is the most well known voice recognition software</i>
	<i>It has allowed the show to explore current affairs and something the audience can relate to. It has allowed the producers to explore how technology is evolving.</i>
	<i>It helped Raj with choosing his wine for meals, and for interactions with a girl, showing how wide the product can be used</i>
	<i>Because it is well known, it provides familiarity and it is something the audience can relate to, which in turn adds to the humour.</i>
<b>Comedic effect</b>	<i>It is a gateway to comedy.</i>
	<i>Comedic value through the use of Siri</i>
	<i>The main plot with Raj- comedic value of him "falling in love" with a machine</i>
	<i>It provided a comic platform for Raj.</i>
<b>Aid for the story</b>	<i>Aided the storyline</i>
	<i>In the episode watched, one of the main parts of the storyline</i>
<b>Product Placement or Advertisement</b>	<i>To advertise the iphone</i>
<b>Enhance Contemporary Feel/Product Symbolism</b>	<i>The product in this series represents the reliance of today's man on technology. How latest advances in technology has made everything so easy for life but has detached man from social interactions.</i>
	<i>Show new technology</i>
	<i>Fashion and easy to be accepted by most of different population.</i>
	<i>It's really relatable to modern life as the iPhone is such a big product and so would be more entertaining.</i>
<b>Highlight Characters' Personality or Feelings</b>	<i>Because the characters are really nerds and they love this kind of stuff.</i>
	<i>To advertise the iphone and also to link in with the characters 'geekiness'.</i>
	<i>To show the loneliness of Raj.</i>
	<i>It affirms the characters' knowledge and interest in technology</i>

Source: This Research

**Table 6.6.2a** *Participants' Views on Placements' Contribution to the Plot. Apple iPhone*

<b>Product: Ben &amp; Jerry's Ice cream</b>	
<b>Contribution to the program (in themes)</b>	<i>In participants' words</i>
<b>Realism</b>	<i>Ice-cream often is displayed as a woman's comfort food in general.</i>
	<i>Making the character more relatable to the audience</i>
	<i>Shows that the programme is realistic- its a popular product</i>
	<i>it makes a light-hearted reference to the idea that women eat ice cream when upset</i>
	<i>It made the story more realistic.</i>
<b>Comedic effect</b>	<i>For the humour of the stereotype</i>
	<i>Adds to stereotypes and humour</i>
	<i>It was funny, because all girls can relate to some degree, eating ice-cream when they are sad</i>
<b>Aid for the story</b>	<i>It added to the narrative of penny adhering to a girly stereotype</i>
	<i>Part of the storyline.</i>
	<i>To help with the scene</i>
<b>Product Placement or Advertisement</b>	<i>Product placement (mentioned twice)</i>
<b>Enhance Contemporary Feel/Product Symbolism</b>	<i>Appeals to watchers of the show who often eat ice cream when they are upset/ have an emotional trauma</i>
	<i>Familiarity - very popular brand</i>
<b>Highlight Characters' Personality or Feelings</b>	<i>The product acted as comfort food for Penny</i>
	<i>Fits with the character image of Penny as a stereotypical woman and highlights the difference between her and her friends</i>
	<i>To show how upset the character is.</i>
	<i>It helps develop the pathos the audience is meant to feel for a certain character.</i>
	<i>Show character was depressed</i>
	<i>Show that penny was upset and anxious and then eat a lot of it</i>
	<i>Penny uses this product when upset about breaking up with her boyfriend.</i>
	<i>To express Penny's anger.</i>
	<i>Added effect to storyline- shows how upset penny was</i>
	<i>Show the bad mood of Penny</i>
	<i>Highlighting a character's sadness</i>
	<i>To cheer up Penny's mood after she split up with her boyfriend.</i>
	<i>Signal that Penny is upset in a very simple way.</i>

Source: This Research

**Table 6.6.2b** *Participants' Views on Placements' Contribution to the Plot. Ben & Jerry's Ice-cream*

<b>Product: Apple iPod</b>	
<b>Contribution to the program (in themes)</b>	<i>In participants' words</i>
<b>Realism</b>	<i>Comical, so we can relate to the situation</i>
<b>Comedic effect</b>	<i>The ipod is there as a clue for the following laughing points, such as Raj picked it back and later Sheldon said Penny can go to Raj because he had an ipod</i>
	<i>Comedic effect</i>
	<i>It provided humour because Penny threw it out of the window and Raj then found it</i>
	<i>Provided for a range of ipod related humour, e.g Raj finding it on the street and deciding to sell it on the internet.</i>
	<i>It is part of the storyline and was a good stimulus for comedic entertainment and is also shown to be popular among the characters on the show.</i>
	<i>It provides a comic moment for Raj because he does not feature often in this episode.</i>
<b>Aid for the story</b>	<i>Help with the storyline, make it more dramatic</i>
	<i>To support the act</i>
	<i>It contributed as a reason for Penny to enter Leonard and Sheldon's room in order to throw the product out of the window</i>
	<i>It relates Penny with her ex-boyfriend so as to start the episode.</i>
<b>Product Placement or Advertisement</b>	<i>Leads into other product placement</i>
	<i>Advertisement</i>
	<i>To allow for advertising revenue</i>
	<i>Maybe advertising</i>
<b>Enhance Contemporary Feel/Product Symbolism</b>	<i>It is a technological product and a status symbol</i>
	<i>Lends a contemporary feel</i>
<b>Highlight Characters' Personality or Feelings</b>	<i>To make some funny scenario ,and shows the personality of penny</i>
	<i>Show the anger of penny</i>
	<i>Also it indicates Raj's loneliness.</i>
	<i>As a prop to illustrate the character's emotions</i>
	<i>She uses it as an object demonstrating her anger towards Mike.</i>
	<i>Its a valuable item which Penny threw out of the window to get back at her ex.</i>

Source: This Research

**Table 6.6.2c** *Participants' Views on Placements' Contribution to the Plot. Apple iPod*

<b>Product: Laptops (Apple, Dell and generic product mention)</b>	
<b>Contribution to the program (in themes)</b>	<i>In participants' words</i>
<b>Realism</b>	<i>It can help to show more like of our daily life. (Apple mention)</i>
	<i>Quality and the level of the series. (Apple mention)</i>
	<i>It's good to reflect the real life. (generic mention)</i>
<b>Comedic effect &amp; Aid for the story</b>	<i>To the narrative, Mike posted on a blog online (accessed through the laptop) and humour (when others tried to find the blog online) (Dell mention)</i>
	<i>Gets the flow going to the point where Leonard asks Penny out (generic mention)</i>
	<i>Facilitates the story line where Leonard asks Penny out for a date. (generic mention)</i>
<b>Product Placement or Advertisement</b>	None
<b>Enhance Contemporary Feel/Product Symbolism</b>	<i>Useful for finding blog (generic mention)</i>
	<i>A must (generic mention)</i>
	<i>It shows how important computers and the internet are to the boy characters. (Dell mention)</i>
	<i>Shows that they are using up to date kit (Dell mention)</i>
<b>Highlight Characters' Personality or Feelings</b>	<i>It allows them to show off their 'geekish' nature in a manner that the viewer can understand. (generic mention)</i>

Source: This Research

**Table 6.6.2d** *Participants' Views on Placements' Contribution to the Plot. Laptop*

As it is evident from the participants' statements of placements' contributions to the plot, integrated to the narrative products may have various roles and are interpreted in various ways by the audience. As it can be implied by these inferences of the products' role in the scenario, viewers do indeed view embedded products in ways that have been identified by previous research and by genre related literature. Products are seen by the audience as convincing reflections of social and everyday life reality (Solomon & Englis 1994), and things they can relate to. Products are also viewed as carrying meanings that aid the development of characters. They stimulate characters' reactions to crises and choices that match those of everyday people and show how characters resolve them as regular people, or else, people that viewers can relate to. Placements are also seen as adding to the realism of the situations that characters find themselves into, and as communicating a

contemporary feel of those situations to the viewers. As it can be observed, there are only a few mentions of products being characterized as intentional marketing actions, namely, product placement and advertisement. Thus, it seems that participants evaluated the placed products as carrying symbolic meanings and as means to the end of facilitating the unfolding of the story and the characters' relation to humorousness.

As both stimuli episodes involved a number of placements with some of them being central to the episode's plot, the evaluations of the placements as part of the story and as elements that stimulated humorousness, realism, relevance to everyday life situations and symbolism of the viewers' contemporary real world, it could be implied that the use and consumption of the placed products matched well the nature of the sitcom, as well as, the characteristics of its audience. This implication for product placements' evaluations and their good fit with the media program could be viewed as verifying prior reported propositions of the necessity of a good match between the product and the host program, for the success of the placement (e.g. Hulin-Salkin 1989, Mitchell 1996, Shemiach 1995 as in Russell 1998). Thus, it can be implied that according to the evaluations by participants, the placements integrated in the plots of the two stimuli could be characterized as owning the faculty to be assessed as quite successful in terms of Russell's (1998) proposition. This proposition suggests that a placement which transforms the experience of using/consuming the product to match the media program in a way that this experience could not occur without the aid of the placement, is a successful placement. The success of the placement, as defined for this proposition, refers to the faculty of a well-placed product to transform the experience in a positive way, thus respecting the brand that it is promoted.

The good-fit of placements with the media program and the implications drawn from the products' evaluations of participants, can provide specific suggestions to marketers for the employment of the practice. These propositions might be now even more valuable, due to the increased control that has recently been appointed to marketers from the recent legal permissions for paid-product placements<sup>88</sup>, which facilitate the shift from barter arrangements -where less control over brand portrayals was in their hands-, to placement portrayals which are specified under contracts.

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<sup>88</sup> Please refer to Chapter 1, section 1.1.

## 6.3 Implications for Practice

As consumers have become more aware of the paid inclusion of products in media works for reasons of deliberate promotional efforts, practitioners should try to re-evaluate the methods having used so far for their products' inclusion in entertainment programs, in order to avoid provoking negativity for their brands from audiences. Marketers should be more focused to the meanings that they want to transfer to consumers through the practice and not just allowing their brands' portrayals in programs just for the sake of the exposure. That is because, such a practice might raise negative feelings for their products on part of audiences who constantly notice a reappearing brand, or the brand might even stop being noticeable at some point, due to the fact that audiences would have get used to its consistent appearance.

For example, Coca-Cola and Diet Coke are continuously, over the years, reappearing in uncountable numbers of media works in the cinema and television, so much that consumers are assured that every appearance is a promotional activity. In particular, the stimuli used in this research included some Diet Coke portrayals. Some of the participants noted and mentioned the brand in the open-ended questions of the online survey, but their statements regarding the product's contribution to the program, showed indifference, unappreciation of the product's usefulness to the sitcom (even for reasons of realism) and more often, in comparison to other placed products, they stated that the reason for Coke's inclusion was advertising, product placement and increase in producer's revenue. The fact that participants stated a good reason of the other placed products' contribution to the program (as shown in Tables 6.2.2a, 6.2.2b, 6.2.2c and 6.2.2d for some of the products), such as realism, unfolding of the story, comedic effect etc., while all the statements referring to Coca-Cola and Diet Coke clearly communicated participants' over-exposure to the brand, might imply that consumers' reactions to heavily placed products, in terms of frequency and coverage in multiple media programs and movies, are guided by the over-saturation of exposure to the brand. Ultimately, the saturation stemming from constant exposure to a specific brand might cause negative consumer reactions, which standing true or false, is not a risk worth taking for any brand manager.

Moreover, the fact that placed products which were well integrated in the storyline and well fitted to the nature of the sitcom received fair evaluations by

participants about their purpose and contribution to the program, implies that placed products which have a meaning for being included and justify their role in the program, and this role is well communicated to the audience, might be considered as successful placements. Namely, a successful product placement is the one that carries an actual meaning to the program and it is not just there for the sake of circumstantial promotion.

The findings of this research which showed attitudinal alignment of consumer attitude toward the product with the character's attitude toward the product according to the positive or negative character-product association, imply that the formation of attitudes toward placed products depends on the nature of the product's portrayal in the program. In particular, products which are positively portrayed by the character's relation to them are most likely to affect positively consumer attitudes toward the product, while portrayals which are negatively associated with the character run the risk of creating negative consumer attitudes toward the product. However, this attitudinal alignment process is most likely to be dependent on the consumer's attachment to the character. Namely, the parasocial relationships between character and consumer have a crucial role in directing consumer attitudes toward placed products.

Of course, marketers cannot surely know with which characters viewers are parasocially attached to. Nevertheless, there are ways to obtain some indications of which characters in a show are more eligible in stimulating viewers' feelings and inducing them to create attachments with their personas. Apart from observing which particular kinds of characteristics among characters and media programs, have "historically" created the most loved and favoured characters by viewers, prior research in the media field and parasocial interaction theory, and information stemming from genre theory, can constitute a fruitful combination of sources providing insights to practitioners.

The media industry has provided countless works, whose characters have created certain reactions by audiences. These reactions can be found in media periodicals, newspapers, media reports, talk-shows and also in media programs' or characters' fun clubs. The audiences' favourability of certain characters can be found in all these extra-program sources. For example, the series *Friends* (NBC 1994-2004), can be characterized as a very popular and successful media program even just taking into account facts such as the ten years of its broadcasting, the millions of

viewers over the world and the countless repetitions of the series after the broadcasting of its last season. One of the series' most dominant characters can be considered Rachel Green (impersonated by Jennifer Aniston) only by looking at the fact that the buzz of her character at the time, had even created trends in women's hairstyles and clothing fashion, which was a true phenomenon even if it cannot be found officially reported in some marketing or media report. Although one cannot claim that viewers were parasocially attached with the specific character, the trend that this character created and the women that followed her style, can only imply that she was a favourable character which, in all possibility, engendered viewers' to get parasocially attached or at least identify with her.

Moreover, trends are, and should be, a priority in marketing decisions. As such, any indication of a media character being highly favoured by viewers could imply the increased chance of becoming viewers' parasocial attachment. This implication can also be justified by relevant parasocial interaction research. As discussed in chapter two, a number of character-viewer characteristics have been found to enhance the possibility of parasocial relationships' development. For example, the perceived realism and authenticity that a character carries, the degree of liking or affinity that viewers find in a character, the degree that the viewer perceives that s/he is similar to the character and secondary characteristics such as character's humorousness, success, intelligence, attractiveness in social and not necessarily physical terms, admiration by other characters, age and gender, as well as, combinations of these characteristics, have been found to determine the reactions of viewers toward characters, but also being able to predict viewers' identification and parasocial attachment with them.

By identifying the characteristics which may make specific characters more prone to become referent others for viewers, and of course by selecting a popular media program which is, in a habitual and loyal manner watched by a specific target market, marketers can place their products in the hands of favoured by the viewers characters, in order for those products to be inevitably associated with the character. As most favoured<sup>89</sup> characters are more likely to become parasocial attachments for viewers, and viewers are more likely to align their attitudes with the attitudes of their

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<sup>89</sup> Referring to the aforementioned characteristics of liking and affinity, perceived similarity etc.



attached characters, positively associated products with those characters are most likely to constitute successful placements that will lead to positive consumer attitudes.

Although sometimes product placements have the faculty of creating a very negative buzz for the brand and the media work if they are not appropriately intertwined in the plot, on the other hand, a positive and well accepted by the audience product placement might not induce such intense effects as negative placements most probably do, and thus they cannot stand alone as a marketing communication activity. That is because, consumer attitudes toward products are collectively shaped by countless other factors, such as advertising, word of mouth, prior product use and many other which a marketer might not ever, even imagine. This was also evident by the small  $R^2$  values of both researches' regression models, as previously discussed. Thus, placements of products in media texts should complement other marketing activities. Most importantly, these complementary marketing activities should be all orchestrated toward a common purpose according to the objectives having been set for the brand. For example, if the marketer's purpose is a new product launch and its appropriate communication to the target market, then along with all other marketing activities, a product placement in a popular television program watched by the target market, which might show the product's attributes or use, would be definitely very valuable for the marketing strategy, as it would not only create a buzz around the brand but would also provide information about the new product through the medium of entertainment.

The kind of entertainment context that might provide the most opportunities for successful placements, could be considered to be television programs and especially serialized programs. That is because, drawing from the current findings as well as from previous research<sup>90</sup>, it seems that placements which can be well integrated in the plot and associated with characters, are better received by the viewers in various aspects (e.g. recall and recognition of brands, attitudinal alignment with character etc.). In particular, this study highlighted the important role of parasocial relationships as predictors of product placement effects, which is the key implication stemming from the current findings. Of course, as earlier stated, marketers could take advantage of such a factor and create more effective and successful placements. However, it should be noted that parasocial relationships are

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<sup>90</sup> e.g. from the studies of : d'Astous and Chartier 2000, Russell 2002, Yang & Roskos- Ewoldsen 2007, van Reijmerdal et al. 2009, and as discussed previously in this chapter in section 6.2.2.

much more likely to be developed through frequent and continuous viewing of serialized programs. In addition, parasocial relationships have the characteristic of endurance, thus providing marketers with unique prospects of product placement employment in a continuous or developing basis instead of circumstantial sponsorships. Moreover, the consumption convention of sitcoms is also a recurring attribute that is usually evident throughout the successive episodes of the program. For example, in the specific sitcom utilized by this research as a stimulus, there can be observed a pattern of repeated consumption events that take place in almost every episode. In the specific sitcom, these recurring consumption events are utilized as stereotyped attributes of the narrative that characterize the personas of the characters, their obsessions and habits, and accordingly their everyday life. Namely, such consumption conventions are used by producers in order to communicate to the audience the characteristics of the stereotyped characters. These recurring consumption events refer to characters' habits of playing electronic games on Playstation and Nintendo Wii, consuming specific delivery foods at specific days and visiting specific restaurants when going out<sup>91</sup>. The implication for practitioners is that such consumption conventions, which are integrated in the plots of sitcoms, constitute a unique opportunity for the strategic and continuous inclusion of their brands, in a way that they will be inevitably connected with the entertainment program and the habits of favoured characters with whom viewers may be parasocially attached to.

On the other hand, placements in movies do not carry such attributes and do not have the faculty to influencing audiences in the same manner for many reasons, with the most obvious being the fact that the development of parasocial relationships with movie characters is almost impossible to occur. For these reasons, the implication coming from this research, suggests that serialized television programs constitute the most fertile ground for product placements, and have unique attributes which can work in favor of marketers and their plans, and cannot be found in movies. The practice's employment through the television medium, the products' careful integration in the media content and their association with the characters, is not only the easiest and more efficient way for marketers to target their desirable market, but also it is the way that holds the greatest likelihood of achieving the desirable placements' effects on consumers. Certainly, these implications should be assessed,

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<sup>91</sup> The particular consumption conventions which are integrated in "*The Big Bang Theory*" can be found in appendix VI.

as appropriate or not, against the objectives set for each product in each marketing plan.

## 6.4 Contribution of this Research

The contribution of this extension research is threefold. Most importantly, it contributes to the closer attainment of the ideal of marketing knowledge development and especially of product placement knowledge which although attracting increased interest, it remains a rather cloudy area of the marketing discipline. Second, it contributes to the promotion of a research tradition that aims at establishing evidence of generalization through continuous multiple examination of marketing phenomena, rather than the “cult of the isolated study” (Nelder 1986) that impedes the significant and confident accomplishment of the scientific inquiry (Easley et al. 2000). Thirdly, it contributes to the accretion of knowledge by findings which enrich and cross-validate theory and research related issues regarding product placement effects, balance theory and parasocial interaction theory. The contributions that this research makes in the particular aforementioned areas are presented next. Specifically, this research:

1. Contributes to the generalization of previous theoretical premises and findings. By the re-examination of the balance model of product placement effects, this study offers further evidence for its theoretical establishment.
2. Adds one more case<sup>92</sup> to the application of Heiderian Balance Theory to the media communication context and proves that it can also explain parasocial relationships apart from real interpersonal relationships. It also validates balance theory and provides further proof for it being a general theory, by testing its theoretical premises in another country and another culture, namely the UK.
3. Corroborates the findings of the initial research and thus strengthens the fact the parasocial relationships constitute an influential factor of product

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<sup>92</sup> Specifically, this research represents the second case since the initial study is the first study integrating balance theory.

placements' effectiveness. Hence, it adds with increased confidence an important factor to the list of factors which can predict placement effects.

4. Extends the research of product placement which, is characterized by one-off studies, by the examination of the balance model of product placement effects in different contexts and provides evidence that the effects of parasocial relationships between viewers and characters on viewer/consumer attitudes seem to be generalizable over culture, products, consumers and time.
5. Adds to the understanding of product placement effects and sheds more light to the role of genre, character-product associations, placements and plot's connection, viewers and program's connection and viewers and characters' relationships on the formation of consumer attitudes toward placed products.
6. Provides validation and refinement<sup>93</sup> of recently developed and limitedly tested scales such as the TV Connectedness Scale<sup>94</sup> and the Parasocial Attachment Scale<sup>95</sup>, through their application and testing in a different array of consumers, TV program, characters and culture.
7. Extends the limited existing product placement research conducted with consumers in the UK, which should attract more attention due to the recent media regulations which permit paid-product placements on domestic productions.
8. Addresses the research requirements set by practitioners according to the Marketing Science Institute (MSI)<sup>96</sup> and responds to the trend of increased product placement integration in various media<sup>97</sup> (Redker et al. 2013), by providing to the edifice of product placement knowledge additional cases and conditions that placements work, thus increasing the value of the practice in the planning of marketers.

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<sup>93</sup> Specifically, the data analysis of this research provided a refined form of the TV Connectedness Scale, as presented in Chapter 5, section 5.3.1 under the title TCS.

<sup>94</sup> Developed by Russell, Norman and Heckler (2004)

<sup>95</sup> In the form adapted by Russell & Stern 2006

<sup>96</sup> As presented in Chapter 4.

<sup>97</sup> Product placement research on movies outnumbers research on television programs

## **6.5 Limitations and Future Research Directions**

As repeatedly been discussed in various chapters and sections of this thesis, the ultimate goal of this extension research was to provide additional, corroborated with the utilized theories and with the findings of the initial research, empirical evidence which would constitute further proof of the balance model of product placement effects' generalizability. However, there are certain limitations that prohibit definite and confident generalizability assertions. These limitations, as well as directions for future research that could eliminate them and also further assist the ideal goal of the model's generalization are presented below.

### **6.5.1 Limitations**

This research is devoted to the post-positivistic position which supports the pursuit of objectivity through criteria of critical assessment, corroboration with prior knowledge and critical view of even replicated findings, and also follows closely the propositions identified in the literature<sup>98</sup> which supports the replication tradition. Thus, alignment with the critical stance of these two foundations which this research is based on, cannot allow any claim of the findings' conclusiveness and full support of the balance model's generalization. This research added further evidence toward the aim of generalization, and thus it is limited to, and by this scope.

Moreover, this study's limitations can be assigned to the fact that it focused on only one genre and only one representation of this genre. Of course, this was purposely done because its aim was to replicate the findings of the initial study in the closest way possible and to establish the framework's application to the specific genre of sitcoms.

Although the selection of this study's sample was particularly focused on specific characteristics' requirements, which were justified by the research's specifications, it cannot be claimed that it was representative of the population, and for that reason only, the generalization of findings could be impeded. In addition, the sample size could be considered as limited since budgetary restrictions did not allow

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<sup>98</sup> Please refer to Chapter 4, section 4.1.1.1

the recruitment of more participants. However, due to the fact that the data analysis was executed on an observations basis, the number of cases (i.e. observations; i.e. products) available for analysis was enough for the requirements of this research, and in any case, it was greater than the number of observations analyzed in the initial research. The fact that the sample was drawn from a university population can also be considered by some researchers as a limitation of the research. Yet, in product placement research this is an extremely common phenomenon which cannot only be assigned to reasons of convenience, but also to ground justification found in unbiased and detached sources such as the MPAA, Mintel<sup>99</sup> and other providers of media related reports. In these reports, the specific age-group which refers to young people and who can be mostly found in a university population, is defined for its high movie-going frequency, higher viewing of television programs and for the highest media consumption compared to other age-groups. Most importantly, this research's sample of the specific age-group also constitutes the target market for many marketers.

Another methodological limitation that could be assigned to this research, can be regarded the fact that the screening of stimulus was performed in a laboratory environment and not in the naturalistic setting of participants' home, contrarily to the stimulus exposure procedure followed by the initial research. However, as already discussed, this was a decision taken deliberately in order to have greater control over the data collection procedure.

Overall, the focus of this research to the specific genre, the specific sample drawn from a specific population and the conduct of the research in one country, can be considered as limiting the generalization of the model across other genres, populations, cultures and countries. Nevertheless, these limitations rising from the methodological decisions taken for this research process can be confronted by further research which will add more empirical evidence for the applicability of the model to other contexts, thus facilitating its generalization.

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<sup>99</sup> Specific sample-related information from industry reports of these sources can be found in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4.

### ***6.5.2 Directions for Future Research***

The issue of generalizability which this extension research aimed to facilitate could be reached with further research of the balance model of product placement effects. Thus, the ideal of product placement knowledge development through generalization can be considered not only as a necessity stressed by practitioners due to the increased interest of investment in the practice, but also as an opportunity to confront the problem of the cult of single-shot studies regarding product placement research.

As such, future research could extend the examination of the model's applicability to other media contents where parasocial relationships and product-character associations are most likely to occur. Since parasocial relationships most commonly occur in serialized media contents, where frequent interaction between viewers and characters occurs and facilitates the development of such relationships, another genre that may carry the closest fruitful premises for the application of the framework could be considered the soap opera. As previously discussed<sup>100</sup> the genre of soap opera has a content which represents several aspects of everyday life (Livingstone 1988), thus promoting multiple alternative realities to which viewers are transported (Livingstone 1991). Such imitations of real life situations provide a fertile ground for the formation and development of parasocial relationships (Cohen 2001). Soap opera characters are strongly associated with products and play an important role in the portrayal of products or product groups as positive or negatives influences on people's lives, and also in framing the characters (Pervan & Martin 2002). Thus, examination of the model's application to soap operas should be rather interesting because it could enrich the understanding of product placement effects in a different media context where placement of products and brands may be positioned differently, carry differentiated roles in the narrative, or be interpreted differently by viewers. Moreover, the fact that episodes of soap operas are broadcasted more frequently than sitcoms (often in a daily basis) might elicit different implications with regard to parasocial relationships. Namely, viewers of soap operas may have stronger parasocial relationships with soap opera characters due to the frequency of interaction.

Hence, the nature and function of product placements in another television genre, as well as the strength of parasocial relationships may facilitate greater

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<sup>100</sup> Please refer to Chapter 2, section 2.1.2.3

understanding of specific genre-related consumer effects. For example, future research could examine the application of the balance model on soap operas like the *Eastenders*, *Hollyoaks* and *Coronation Street*, especially under the new conditions that the recent shift of restriction of paid product placement has generated, thus facilitating the featuring of paid-placements in their plots. Actually, *Coronation Street* was the first program in the UK that signed a deal with Nationwide building society in order for its cash machine to be featured in the program in 2011 (Cotter 2011), while *Hollyoaks*' production company signed a deal with Nokia in 2012, in order for the characters to use Nokia Lumia 800 and 710 smartphones in the program's storylines (Kilkelly 2012b), and also a deal with L'Oreal so that the brand's beauty products to appear on the show and especially at the village's gym (Kilkelly 2012a). In addition, this new cult of branded products' integration to popular UK soap operas should provide more insights with regard to the effects of placements on viewers, since they were used to much less brand appearances in these programs or only to appearances of fictional brands produced specifically for the consumption of their characters. It should be, thus, interesting to examine this important change in the intra-program environment in relation to viewers' reactions toward the placed products.

More importantly, the examination of the framework in soap operas, as well as in other programs which facilitate the formation and development of parasocial relationships between viewers and media figures, will enable the establishment of a formalized, consistent and generalizable product placement effectiveness model. Additionally, research in genres incorporating placements and facilitating parasocial interaction can also bring to the foreground the important role of parasocial interaction theory in the context of product placement research, and the fact that viewers' parasocial relationships with characters can be one of the most important predictors of placement effectiveness for serialized television programs.

Although the model provides support for the balance theory's proposition of consumers' attitude alignment with their attached character's attitude toward the product, a further extension of this study could investigate the subject of attitude change, which is another proposition of balance theory. Even though consumers were found to be driven by their parasocial attachment with characters and align their attitudes toward placed products according to the attitudes toward the product of their referent others, there is no knowledge of the influence of parasocial interaction in changing already owned attitudes toward products and brands. For example, if the,



before exposure to the stimulus, attitudes toward the specific placed products were known, then, a measurement of consumer attitudes after the exposure, could provide insights regarding parasocial attachment's power of changing attitudes, or inability to impose such an influence. In particular, further research which would also include the collection of pre-measures of brand/product attitudes could investigate further the faculty of parasocial relationships in changing already held brand/product attitudes, and if attitudinal congruence in consumers' parasocial relationships in such cases is important.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

This thesis was concerned with the effects of the practice of product placement on consumer attitudes toward placed products. The motivation of undertaking this research stemmed from the fact that product placement research, although abundant, is to a great degree uncorroborated, isolated, disconnected, lacking theoretical foundation, and overall, unable to offer valuable knowledge and valid practical propositions. Thus, the volition to address the problematic character of product placement research and to add to the accumulation of relevant knowledge, led to the decision of adopting a replication approach in order for this research to facilitate the generalization of previously identified but untested and uncorroborated theoretical premises and propositions. This decision was supported and justified by marketing practitioners' propositions for research on the marketing communication area that has the faculty of providing generalized, corroborated results with practical implications. The fact that Russell and Stern's (2006) proposed balance model of product placement effects was highly appreciated by other researchers in comparison to other placement research, and that it was one of the very few studies providing theoretical support for their propositions, were the factors that made that specific research worth-replicating and worth generalizing.

As such, the findings of the extension study revealed, that character-product associations and most importantly, consumers' parasocial attachment with characters can be considered as predictors of product placement effects on consumer attitudes toward placed products. Thus, the outcomes of the initial research were corroborated

and hence, the purpose of this study to add further evidence for the generalizability of the balance model of sitcom product placement effects can be considered as achieved. Certainly, it cannot be claimed that the generalizability of the model is fully confirmed, but a step at theorizing one of the very few product placement effects models has been taken. The study proved that the model has the faculty to predict and explain placements' effects in different circumstances and in particular in a UK context. Thus, it can be considered that one more building block in the edifice of knowledge regarding product placement effects has been added.

This study also promoted the necessity of academic research to turn the focus on providing robust, confirmed and corroborated true knowledge to the marketing discipline. As marketing is truly an applied discipline, it seems only natural to provide practical propositions, however, they only become valuable when they are generalized and thus theorized. The practice of product placement, although not new in the marketing research and industry, is a technique that currently attracts increased interest and investment. Moreover, it can be utilized to obtain various marketing objectives, from increasing brand awareness to actually shape consumer attitudes, and from assisting other marketing activities to introduce new products to consumers. The opportunities for the use of product placements to benefit a product or brand are various, but since consumers are continuously bombarded by marketing activities, thus becoming more aware of, and more resistant to their promotional messages, marketers have to communicate products in differentiated, more entertaining, more enjoyable and more acceptable or well received by consumers, ways. With more targeted and intellectual future research of issues around the product placement practice, practitioners could be truly benefited, and marketing academic research could become more valuable as a source of credible information and practical advice, which in turn would redefine the relationship between the marketing industry and academia, thus creating more opportunities for a collaboration benefiting both parties.

## Reflecting on the Thesis Experience

Overall, the research conducted for this thesis and the procedures followed can be considered as having several implications for future research and as creating a number of publishing opportunities.

Regarding the data collection procedures, this thesis can provide insights for future research, and implications for methodological research execution approaches. First of all, previous to the execution of this extension research thesis I had made two other attempts of researching other topics relevant to the practice of product placement, which were never concluded. One took a qualitative approach which required personal interviews from movie-goers and the other was a survey involving video excerpts of movies as stimuli (included in the research instrument) and the completion of an online questionnaire. These two attempts with regard to participants' recruitment and data gathering could be considered as unsuccessful. As many researchers might be already aware, it is really difficult to make participants get interested to take part in a study, and even more difficult to achieve the collection of usable data. The lesson learnt from the experience of these two attempts was that in employing online research instruments for surveys, where the compensation scheme entails a limited number of rewards in the form of prize draws, many people just take part for the possibility to win the prize. In this quantitative attempt it was observed that although a satisfactory number of people took part in the research, only few of them actually completed the online questionnaire, and the number of missing values was high. With the other attempt of the qualitative research which required participants to devote some time in taking part, it was simply unattainable to find participants who were not the closest of my friends. And the point is, to what extent research that uses friends, acquaintances or a module's students (participation in exchange for grades or to satisfy the module's instructor), should be acceptable and considered unbiased, ethical and valuable? On the other hand, to what extent is altruistic participation (Ashcroft 2001) a true phenomenon? Because, drawing from the experiences of this thesis's efforts to conduct research, the only approach that worked and achieved to recruit participants who satisfactorily completed the questionnaire, was the one which compensated all participants for their time. This approach also facilitated the obtainment of data with minimal missing measurements' values, a phenomenon that usually creates problems in data analysis.

However, apart from the instant compensation scheme, there might be another reason for the high degree of participants' volition to take part in this thesis' research, and for the full usability of data stemming from the questionnaires. In this thesis, 383 participants were found to be eligible to take part in the survey, after the screening procedure. And although the budgeting restrictions allowed the participation of 128 out of the 383 candidate participants on a "first come first served" basis, it should be noted that during the research execution procedure, many more than 128 participants showed up in the scheduled data collection sessions. The interest of participants was so high that in many cases it was necessary to send them away because they couldn't be seated in the computer laboratory. Some of them kept showing up in following sessions and some of them reported an honest and true interest to participate in the study because they really loved the specific sitcom, and probably they were curious to find out what the study was about. Thus, it seems that sometimes, the volition of people to participate in studies for which they have some specific interest in, could be another reason that impels participation. Namely, it could be inferred that the specifications set by this research to recruit a sample with specific characteristics, with the most important being the regular viewing of the sitcom utilized as stimulus, is one probable reason of the high interest to participate. This might mean that in order to collect valuable data for any research it is necessary to set more specific objectives regarding the characteristics of the sample. Because sample decisions should of course be based on the most scientific-complying reasons, but the factor of the most appropriate subjects for participation seems to be another important consideration that must be taken into account, not only for reasons of gathering valuable and usable data but also to diminish problems referring to unavailability, unwillingness and disinterest of subjects to participate in academic research which is usually not very compensating with regard to participants' time and effort.

The confrontation of such recruitment and participation issues, which can often be problematic in social and marketing academic research, deserves attention in terms of employed methodological procedures. Although other disciplines which use human subjects in research projects -such as medicine and other relevant disciplines<sup>101</sup>- have confronted recruitment and compensation issues with specific publications raising attention on these methodological procedures, marketing and

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<sup>101</sup> E.g. Ackerman 1989, Latterman & Merz 2001, Dresser 2001

social science disciplines do not substantially touch upon such issues. Namely, there is lack of publications on methodological topics tackling relevant research procedure issues specific to marketing and social science disciplines. And since the ethical guidelines of academic organizations for research projects are rather strict, it is of high importance for researchers to confront methodological issues such as human subjects' participation and pertinent incentives for their participation. Confronting such issues is necessary, in order for the academic community to discuss the confines between ethical considerations and conducting scientific and valuable research.

Another issue that this thesis chose to confront rather evade, is the issue of promoting and providing valuable, scientific and true knowledge to the marketing discipline. As thoroughly discussed in this thesis, the purpose set of attempting to generalize the balance model of sitcom product placement effects underlies the belief of conducting research which will be valuable to the accretion of marketing knowledge, to the corroboration of prior theoretical propositions and the validation of worth researching issues, rather than executing an one-off research of little importance and of a small contribution to marketing. Especially the practice of product placement as a marketing technique, although having received attention and being abundantly researched, is one of the marketing topics that still have not achieved to be theorized. Thus, it is only logical for one to assume that this marketing technique needs to be further researched in order for generalized theoretical foundations to be generated. For generalizations in the research area of product placement, this thesis promotes a replication approach. As juxtaposed in the methodology chapter, a replication tradition that will be followed by the marketing academic community would be the most scientific way of generalizing theoretical propositions and promising preliminary empirical findings. In particular, the replication with extension approach that was followed for conducting this research can provide many insights in methodological terms, and also, the appropriate support for inflicting the development of product placement's theoretical premises.

Moreover, this study's findings regarding the attitude alignment process in the media context, based on the effects of product placement through parasocial relationships, provide support to the theoretical extension of balance theory in a new light and context. That is because until now, the predictive ability of balance theory has been researched only in contexts of interpersonal relationships. The corroboration and extension of Russell and Stern's (2006) evidence that the present research

achieved, is the sole effort to promote the applicability and validation of the attitude alignment process in the context of parasocial relationships. Hence, with two studies providing empirical evidence as to the predictive faculty of balance theory in the context of consumer behaviour, it can be implied that a new tested context of the theory has been added to its theoretical dynamic, which enhances the characterization of balance theory as a general theory.

In view of the above considerations, it could be implied that four prospective publications could be stemming from this thesis. One could consider the methodological procedures involving participants' recruitment for academic marketing research. Such a publication would confront the aforementioned issues regarding the fine lines between compensation schemes, ethical considerations and the need of researchers to recruit more promising samples that would provide valuable data, instead of being restrained and dependent mostly to convenience samples due to budgeting and ethical restrictions set by academic institutions. This kind of article could be possibly published in "The International Journal of Market Research" which accepts methodological and viewpoint articles regarding research. In addition, the MRS Market Research Board which is behind IJMR, is constituting a new code of conduct<sup>102</sup> for undertaking research, and such an article directly comments and provides insights referring to research conduct procedures, thus being potentially interesting and relevant to the contemporary content issues of the journal.

Another publication could be concerned with promoting the methodological approach of providing generalized, corroborated, validated and true product placement knowledge to the marketing community through the replication approach. Contrary to the common belief of academic researchers that editors do not publish replication studies, there is an academic community which supports the need for replicated and thus valuable and truly scientific research, and includes journals' editors and academic organizations<sup>103</sup> as well, as mentioned in the methodological chapter of this thesis. Apart from journals that focus primarily in promoting empirical generalizations such the "The Journal of Empirical Generalizations in Marketing Science" and thus preferring studies with proven empirical generalizations, editors of highly rated journals such as "The Journal of Consumer Research" have clearly stated

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<sup>102</sup> As it can be found in: [https://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/code\\_of\\_conduct/](https://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/code_of_conduct/)

<sup>103</sup> E.g. the University of Auckland, New Zealand has an active policy of promoting replication and extension works in granting Master's and PhD theses (Hubbard & Armstrong 1994)

the acceptability for publication of replication research that advances the knowledge of consumer behaviour by validating, generalizing and extending previous results (Monroe 1992).

In addition, a publication which would regard the current study's critical re-examination of the balance model of sitcom product placement effects in an attempt to transfer the incorporated theoretical foundations of balance theory, parasocial theory and genre theory in a contemporary light and in the media context, could establish the interactions between the premises of these theories under one theoretical construct for use in product placement effectiveness research. Such an article would promote the generalizability of a firm model that has the faculty of predicting product placements' effects on consumer attitudes. For example, the characteristics of such an article could be seen as matching the appropriate nature of research contents for submission in the "Journal of Marketing"<sup>104</sup> which considers for publication articles reporting generalizable empirical findings, critically re-examining existing concepts in marketing, and integrating concepts from allied disciplines such as psychology into marketing.

Lastly, a publication which would be concerned specifically with the presentation and comparison of the current empirical evidence which corroborate and extend the findings of Russell and Stern's (2006) research, would enhance and establish the knowledge of the attitude alignment process in media contexts, where parasocial relationships have the faculty to influence consumer attitudes and accordingly, strengthen the possible effects of product placements on consumers. An article of this nature could possibly be of interest for publication in the Journal of Advertising where the initial study was published. In this way, the impact of the initial research on the accumulation of product placement knowledge could be highlighted, and its value as a product placement's theoretical constructing research would be enhanced, since its generalizability faculty will have been proven by the provision of the current study's extended empirical evidence.

Apart from the possible opportunities for publication stemming from this thesis, overall, the research execution and the synthesis of its presentation have been a unique learning experience. But most importantly, the opportunity of presenting

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<sup>104</sup> As stated in the "Appropriate Editorial Content" section of JM available at: <http://www.marketingpower.com/AboutAMA/Pages/AMA%20Publications/AMA%20Journals/Journal%20of%20Marketing/JournalofMarketingEditorialGuidelines.aspx>

owned personal beliefs with regard to academic research -most probably, not very commonly met, and deviating from the established views about the conduct of marketing research existent in most academic cycles-, was the most rewarding experience. That is because, it was an opportunity to express the honest belief that contemporary academic marketing research is so saturated by one-off studies, due to academic researchers' attempt to encounter the pressures set by academic institutions for publications, that the true value of scientific knowledge accretion has been sacrificed in the name of being published for the sake of publication and the presentation of abundant publications in evaluative institutional reports and curriculum vitas of academic staff.



# APPENDICES

## Appendices

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### **I. List of Articles utilized for the SSCI comparison criterion**

The articles are listed in the exact same format that the SSCI search presented them. The search criteria were articles of product placement in any database in any Journal published in 2006 and 2007. The first article is Russell & Stern's (2006) as presented in SSCI search.

1. Title: Consumers, characters, and products - A balance model of sitcom product placement effects

Author(s): Russell, CA; Stern, BB

Source: JOURNAL OF ADVERTISING Volume: 35 Issue: 1 Pages: 7-21 DOI: 10.2753/JOA0091-3367350101 Published: SPR 2006

Times Cited: **41** (from All Databases)

2. Title: Audience response to product placements - An integrative framework and future research agenda

Author(s): Balasubramanian, Siva K.; Karrh, James A.; Patwardhan, HemantSource: JOURNAL OF ADVERTISING Volume: 35 Issue: 3 Pages: 115-141 DOI: 10.2753/JOA0091-3367350308 Published: FAL 2006 Times

Times Cited: **48** (from All Databases)

3. Title: "Come on down" - How consumers view game shows and the products placed in them

Author(s): Gould, SJ; Gupta, PBSSource: JOURNAL OF ADVERTISING Volume: 35 Issue: 1 Pages: 65-81 DOI: 10.2753/JOA0091-3367350105 Published: SPR 2006

Times Cited: **10** (from All Databases)

4. Title: Product placement - regulators gone AWOL

Author(s): Sutherland, Max Source: INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVERTISING Volume: 25 Issue: 1 Pages: 107-110 Published: 2006

Times Cited: **3** (from All Databases)

5. Title: Are product placements effective?

Author(s): Percy, Larry Source: INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVERTISING Volume: 25 Issue: 1 Pages: 112-114 Published: 2006

Times Cited: **1** (from All Databases)

6. Title: Effects of product placement in on-line games on brand memory - A perspective of the limited-capacity model of attention

Author(s): Lee, Mira; Faber, Ronald J.

Source: JOURNAL OF ADVERTISING Volume: 36 Issue: 4 Pages: 75-90 DOI: 10.2753/JOA0091-3367360406 Published: WIN 2007

Times Cited: **43** (from All Databases)

7. Title: The effectiveness of brand placements in the movies: Levels of placements, explicit and implicit memory, and brand-choice behavior

Author(s): Yang, Moonhee; Roskos-Ewoldsen, David R.

Source: JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION Volume: 57 Issue: 3 Pages: 469-489 DOI: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2007.00353.x Published: SEP 2007

Times Cited: **25** (from All Databases)

8. Title: More than meets the eye - Investigating the hidden impact of brand placements in television magazines

Author(s): Matthes, Joerg; Schemer, Christian; Wirth, Werner  
Source: INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVERTISING Volume: 26 Issue: 4 Pages: 477-503 Published: 2007

Times Cited: **26** (from All Databases)

9. Title: Product placement - How brands appear on television

Author(s): La Ferle, Carrie; Edwards, Steven M.  
Source: JOURNAL OF ADVERTISING Volume: 35 Issue: 4 Pages: 65-86 DOI: 10.2753/JOA0091-3367350405 Published: WIN 2006

Times Cited: **18** (from All Databases)

10. Title: The hidden history of product placement

Author(s): Newell, Jay; Salmon, Charles T.; Chang, Susan  
Source: JOURNAL OF BROADCASTING & ELECTRONIC MEDIA Volume: 50 Issue: 4 Pages: 575-594 DOI: 10.1207/s15506878jobem5004\_1 Published: DEC 2006

Times Cited: **11** (from All Databases)

## **II. Invitation & Screening Questionnaire for Participants' Recruitment**

**Invitation that the candidate participants viewed after clicking on the noticeboard's tile: *Do you watch the series "The Big Bang Theory"? Participate in a Cardiff Business School study.***

**Thank you for considering to take part in the survey.**

Participating in this study, involves the completion of an on-line questionnaire regarding the series "The Big Bang Theory" and its characters.

This is a short screening questionnaire that will take approximately 2 minutes to complete.

Through this questionnaire it will be determined if your answers correspond to the conditions for participating in this study.

If the conditions are met you will be invited to participate in the study which will take 1 hour and will involve the viewing of an episode of "The Big Bang Theory" and the completion of an on line questionnaire in a lab room in the Aberconway Building. At the end of this questionnaire a number of days and time slots in a two-week period will be displayed and you can attend the one convenient to you. No prior booking is required. You will be compensated for your time with £10 instantly after the completion of the 1-hour study at the day of your attendance.

We are currently recruiting men and women aged 18 years and over who are regularly watching the series "The Big Bang Theory". Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can omit any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. All your responses will be completely anonymous and confidential.

Thank you very much for helping us with this survey!

Where is "The Big Bang Theory" supposed to take place?

- ☐ Pasadena, California
- ☐ Manhattan, New York
- ☐ Miami, Florida
- ☐ Las Vegas, Nevada

Which group of occupations below best describes the professions of "The Big Bang Theory" characters?

- ☐ Forensics expert, Detectives, Forensics investigator
- ☐ Architect, Lawyer, Banker
- ☐ Waitress, Physicist, Engineer, Astrophysicist
- ☐ Detective, Medical Examiner, Trace technician, DNA technician

Which group of names represents the names of the characters in "The Big Bang Theory"?

- ☐ Ted, Marshall, Robin, Barney and Lilly
- ☐ Raj, Howard, Sheldon, Penny and Leonard
- ☐ Julie, Nick, Sara, Greg and David
- ☐ Debra, Angel, Dexter, Masuka and Quinn

If candidate participants answered correctly two out of the three questions, they were automatically directed to a note that informed them about the procedure involved for taking part in the main study and was as followed:

*Thank you completing this short questionnaire. You have met the criteria to participate in this study. You may attend one of the sessions below:*

Thursday	6 December	09:00	F23 5 <sup>th</sup> Floor
Thursday	6 December	10:00	F23 5 <sup>th</sup> Floor
Monday	10 December	09:00	F23 5 <sup>th</sup> Floor
Monday	10 December	13:00	F23 5 <sup>th</sup> Floor
Monday	10 December	16:00	S27 3 <sup>rd</sup> Floor
Wednesday	12 December	13:00	F23 5 <sup>th</sup> Floor
Wednesday	12 December	14:00	F23 5 <sup>th</sup> Floor
Wednesday	12 December	15:00	F23 5 <sup>th</sup> Floor
Thursday	13 December	09:00	F23 5 <sup>th</sup> Floor
Thursday	13 December	10:00	F23 5 <sup>th</sup> Floor

*As per the noticeboard invitation there is no need to book a place. You can just show up at the day and time of your convenience. The sessions will take place on the Cardiff Business School at Aberconway Building: Column Drive, Cardiff CF10 3EU (please find attached a map of the campus. Aberconway Building is number 11. Each session will last approximately 1 hour and will involve the viewing of a 20 minute episode of the series and the completion of a self-paced questionnaire which take 20-30 minutes. Please try to attend on time before the viewing of the episode starts.*

*If you need any other information or instructions regarding the location please don't hesitate to contact me.*

*Regards,  
Anastasia Kavallieratou*

If candidate participants failed to answer two out of the three screening questions correctly, they were directed to this message:

*Thank you for completing this short questionnaire. Unfortunately, your answers have not met the criteria to participate in this study. Thank you very much for your time.*

### **III. Plots of the two episodes of “The Big Bang Theory” used as stimuli**

#### **Episode 17 Season 1 description:**

Episode Title: *“The Tangerine Factor”*

Penny is furious and breaks up with her boyfriend after he posted details about their sex life on his blog. Meanwhile, Sheldon asks Howard to teach him Mandarin as he's convinced the Chinese restaurant is selling "Tangerine chicken" yet is really using oranges, a cheaper citrus fruit. As Penny laments her choices in men, Leonard awkwardly asks her out. A few days pass and both Leonard and Penny are worried that this relationship could ruin their friendship. They both seek Sheldon's advice, who uses the "Schrödinger's cat" thought experiment to explain that at this time, the date has both "good" and "bad" possible outcomes, and the only way to find out is to go on the date and find which outcome it is. When Leonard arrives to pick Penny up, he mentions the "Schrödinger's cat" experiment, passionately kisses her, she concludes that "the cat is alive" and they leave for dinner. In the end, Leonard and Penny are seen going to the Chinese restaurant, but they leave before entering as they realize Sheldon, in mangled Mandarin, is fighting with the owner (James Hong).

#### **Episode 14 Season 5 description:**

Episode Title: *"The Beta Test Initiation"*

Leonard and Penny have started dating again. Penny wants to take the relationship slow. Anxious to avoid the mistakes of last time, Leonard suggests they have an Alpha test relationship: rather than getting angry with each other, they'll simply report any 'bugs' they discover and fix them. This goes poorly due to Leonard giving Penny an insultingly long list of her faults, although she remains calm about it. When he tries to patch things up by taking her target shooting, he accidentally shoots himself in the shoe, barely missing his toe. Afterwards, Penny reassures Leonard that their relationship is progressing smoothly. Meanwhile, Sheldon and Amy start a podcast series about flags. Amy makes suggestions about their telecast which Sheldon accepts out of character indicating a close bond between them. Raj gets an iPhone 4S and falls in love with its virtual assistant, Siri. He takes Siri on dates including going out for coffee and a dinner party with Howard and Bernadette which the two of them find very creepy. Kripke reveals he has the same model phone, but his speech impediment (rhotacism) leads to Siri making some humorous errors. He dreams about meeting the woman behind the voice and cannot speak to her directly.



## IV. Online survey questionnaire

### **The Big Bang Theory**

Thank you for considering taking part in the survey. Participating in this study, involves the completion of an on-line questionnaire regarding your attitudes towards the series "The Big Bang Theory" and its characters. The survey is divided in three sections. The first section concerns your attitudes towards the series. The second will involve questions relevant to the episode you have just watched and questions regarding the characters of the series. The third section concerns your background (e.g. age, gender, education and movie-TV viewing habits). The questionnaire will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. We are currently recruiting men and women aged 18 years and over. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can omit any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. All your responses will be completely anonymous and confidential. Thank you very much for helping us with this survey!

### **Consent form**

CARDIFF BUSINESS SCHOOL

RESEARCH ETHICS Consent Form

Anonymous & Confidential data

I understand that my participation in this project will involve the completion of an on-line questionnaire regarding "The Big Bang Theory" TV series which will require approximately 20-30 minutes of my time. I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. If for any reason I experience discomfort during participation in this project, I am free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with Dr John Pallister (Supervisor) (pallisterjg@cardiff.ac.uk). I understand that the information provided by me will be held anonymously and confidentially, such that only the Experimenter can trace this information back to me individually. The information will be retained for up to 2015 and will then be deleted/destroyed. I understand that I can ask for the information I provide to be deleted/destroyed at any time and, in accordance with the Data Protection Act, I can have access to the information at any time. I also understand that at the end of the study, if I request I will be provided with additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study. I consent to participate in the study conducted by Anastasia Kavallieratou (KavallieratouA1@cf.ac.uk) of Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, under the supervision of Dr John Pallister (PallisterJG@cardiff.ac.uk).

**SECTION 1** This part is about your general attitudes towards the series "The Big Bang Theory".

Instructions

Please indicate how much you like/dislike the series, how good/bad pleasant/unpleasant you think it is. For every line, tick the appropriate blank box which is closer or further apart from the word that characterizes your feelings toward the series the most.

I like it								I dislike it
Good								Bad
Unpleasant								Pleasant

Instructions

Each item of this questionnaire is a statement that a person may either agree or disagree with. For each item, indicate how much you agree or disagree with what the item says.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Watching "The Big Bang Theory" is an escape for me.					
"The Big Bang Theory" helps me forget about the day's problems.					

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
If I am in a bad mood, watching "The Big Bang Theory" puts me in a better mood.					
I like the clothes they wear on "The Big Bang Theory".					
I like the hairstyles on "The Big Bang Theory".					
I often buy clothing styles that I've seen in "The Big Bang Theory".					
I imitate the gestures and facial expressions from the characters in "The Big Bang Theory".					

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I find myself saying phrases from "The Big Bang Theory" when I interact with other people.					
I try to speak like the characters in "The Big Bang Theory".					
I learn how to handle real life situations by watching "The Big Bang Theory".					
I get ideas from "The Big Bang Theory" about how to interact in my own life.					
I relate what happens in "The Big Bang Theory" to my own life.					

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I would love to be an actor in "The Big Bang Theory".					
I would love to meet the characters of "The Big Bang Theory".					
I have objects that relate to "The Big Bang Theory" (badge, book, picture etc.).					
I read books if they are related to "The Big Bang Theory".					

**SECTION 2** This part is about the episode you have just watched.

“In the show, sometimes people are seen interacting with certain products or services (eating certain foods, drinking certain things, using certain modes of transportation traveling to certain places, shopping at certain places, consuming certain forms of entertainment, using certain types of services, etc.)”

Could you recall any instances of similar consumption-related or interaction with products events in the episode you just watched and indicate what do you think for this product for each event?

Instructions

In this part you are asked to write up to five consumption-related /interaction with products events in the episode. Indicate how much you liked the product or not, if you thought it was bad or good, unpleasant or pleasant in the following statements. Then you will be asked to indicate which character was involved with the product that you mentioned and answer some relevant questions.

A different page of questions will be presented to you for each consumption-related /interaction with products event and the respective product and character involved. If you can not recall five events (and respective products), just write those that you can, leave the rest blank and move on with the rest of the questions.

**PRODUCT 1**

Please write the first product or service and then complete the following scale.

\_\_\_\_\_

I like it								I dislike it
Good								Bad
Unpleasant								Pleasant

Why do you think the product was there?

\_\_\_\_\_

What do you think is the product's contribution to the show?

\_\_\_\_\_

Which character the product was most closely associated with and why?

---

Please indicate how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements keeping in mind the product/service that you have typed in and the character it was associated with.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The product was strongly associated with the character.					
The character interacted with the product.					
The character expressed like for the product.					

Please indicate how much positive or negative you find the association between the character and the product, keeping in mind the product/service that you have written and the character it was associated with.

	Positive	Somewhat Positive	Somewhat Negative	Negative
The association between the product and the character was:				

In this part you are asked to answer questions regarding the character you just mentioned.  
Please indicate how much you like/dislike the character, if you think she/he is good/bad and if you find her/him pleasant or unpleasant.

I like him/her								I dislike him/her
She/he is good								She/he is bad
She/he is unpleasant								She/he is pleasant

Please indicate how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the character you have mentioned.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think this character is like an old friend.					
This character makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends.					
This character seems to understand the things I want to know.					



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I find this character to be attractive.					
I would like to meet this character in person.					
I feel sorry when this character makes a mistake.					
I like to compare my ideas with what this character says.					
When I'm watching the program and this character is on, I feel as if I am part of the group					
I miss seeing this character when his/her program is not on.					

Please describe the character (what is she/he like? What does she/he enjoys? etc.)

---

*The questions included in Section 2 were repeated four more times, since participants were asked to report up to five consumption-related/interaction with product instances.*

**SECTION 3** This section is about your movie and TV watching experiences, as well as your background.

**Instructions**

Please choose one answer for each question.

On average, how often do you go to the cinema?

- ☐ Once a week or more
- ☐ 2-3 times a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Once every 2-3 months
- ☐ Once every 3-6 months
- ☐ Once a year
- ☐ Never

How many hours per day do you watch TV?

- ☐ One- two hours
- ☐ Three- five hours
- ☐ More than five hours
- ☐ I don't watch TV

What TV programmes do you usually watch? Please choose one or more answers for this question.

- ☐ Series
- ☐ Films
- ☐ News
- ☐ Sports
- ☐ Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

How many movies do you watch per month (on TV, DVD/Blu-ray, cinema)? Please choose one answer for this question.

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2-3
- ☐ 4-5
- ☐ More than 5
- ☐ More than 10
- ☐ More than 20

How many series do you currently watch on TV/DVD/on-line? Could you please type the titles?

- ☐ 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ 2-3 \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ 4-5 \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ More than 5 \_\_\_\_\_

This part is about your background.

Which age group best describes you?

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55 +

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

How would you best describe yourself? You may choose one or more answers for this question

- ☐ Undergraduate student
- ☐ Postgraduate student
- ☐ Research student
- ☐ Working full-time
- ☐ Working part-time
- ☐ Job seeker
- ☐ Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

What is your higher (completed) education level?

- ☐ GCSE/ A- Levels
- ☐ Vocational or Technical School
- ☐ Higher Education (College, BSc, MSc, PhD)
- ☐ Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

## V. Cardiff Business School Ethical Approval Form

ETHICS 2



**FULL ETHICAL APPROVAL FORM**  
(STAFF/PHD STUDENTS) or students referring  
their form for a full ethical review

(For guidance on how to complete this form, please see Learning Central – CARBS RESEARCH ETHICS)

If your research will involve patients or patient data in the NHS then you should secure approval from the NHS National Research Ethics Service. Online applications are available on <http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/applicants/>

**NB: Safety Guidelines for researchers working alone on projects – please go to this University's web link to learn about safety policies - <http://www.cf.ac.uk/osheu/index.html>**

Name of Lead Researcher : Anastasia Kavallieratou

School: Business School, Marketing & Strategy Department

Email: KavallieratouA1@cf.ac.uk

Names of other Researchers:

Email addresses of other Researchers :

Title of Project: Product Placement as a form of marketing communication

Start and Estimated End Date of Project: 3 Dec. 2012-14 Dec. 2012

Aims and Objectives of the Research Project:

The aim of this research is to examine the influence of product placements in a television serial (which currently is broadcasted on UK TV) on consumer attitudes toward the products.

Research objectives:

- To examine the relationship between a placement's role in a specific genre (TV serial) and the process whereby it affects viewer's attitudes toward the product.
- To investigate how do characters' (in the TV serial) relations to placed products and consumers' relations to the characters affect consumers' attitudes to the products.

Please indicate any sources of funding for this project:

Part of the amount for the participants' incentives will be funded from Dr Pallister's research fund (the finance office has been informed) and part by my own personal funds.

APPLICATION APPROVED  
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE  
CARDIFF BUSINESS SCHOOL  
CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

### 1. Describe the methodology to be applied in the project

The objectives of this research call for quantitative data. The collection of data will be accomplished through an experimental design. Specifically, participants will be asked to complete an online questionnaire which will involve the viewing of an episode of the TV series as stimuli. Participants who currently watch a specific TV series will be invited to attend a session in a computer room where they will watch the episode and then they will complete the online questionnaire. Four to six different sessions in a two week period will be organized for the convenience of the participants.

ETHICS 2

The online questionnaire will be developed and distributed by the Qualtrics online survey tool which is provided by the university.

Questionnaire: See attached document (1) for details.

Two different episodes of the series are going to be used for the experiment. See below for episode descriptions.

Episode 17 Season 1 description:

Episode Title: "The Tangerine Factor"

Penny is furious and breaks up with her boyfriend after he posted details about their sex life on his blog. Meanwhile, Sheldon asks Howard to teach him Mandarin as he's convinced the Chinese restaurant is selling "Tangerine chicken" yet is really using oranges, a cheaper citrus fruit. As Penny laments her choices in men, Leonard awkwardly asks her out. A few days pass and both Leonard and Penny are worried that this relationship could ruin their friendship. They both seek Sheldon's advice, who uses the "Schrödinger's cat" thought experiment to explain that at this time, the date has both "good" and "bad" possible outcomes, and the only way to find out is to go on the date and find which outcome it is. When Leonard arrives to pick Penny up, he mentions the "Schrödinger's cat" experiment, passionately kisses her, she concludes that "the cat is alive" and they leave for dinner. In the end, Leonard and Penny are seen going to the Chinese restaurant, but they leave before entering as they realize Sheldon, Howard and Raj are fighting with the owner (James Hong).

Episode 14 Season 5 description:

Episode Title: "The Beta Test Initiation"

Leonard and Penny have started dating again. Penny wants to take the relationship slow. Anxious to avoid the mistakes of last time, Leonard suggests they have an Alpha test relationship: rather than getting angry with each other, they'll simply report any 'bugs' they discover and fix them. This goes poorly due to Leonard giving Penny an insultingly long list of her faults, although she remains calm about it. When he tries to patch things up by taking her target shooting, he accidentally shoots himself in the shoe, barely missing his toe. Afterwards, Penny reassures Leonard that their relationship is progressing smoothly. Meanwhile, Sheldon and Amy start a podcast series about flags. Amy makes suggestions about their telecast which Sheldon accepts out of character indicating a close bond between them. Raj gets an iPhone 4S and falls in love with its virtual assistant, Siri. He takes Siri on dates including going out for coffee and a dinner party with Howard and Bernadette which the two of them find very creepy. Kripke reveals he has the same model phone, but his speech impediment (rhotacism) leads to Siri making some humorous errors. He dreams about meeting the woman behind the voice and cannot speak to her directly.

**PLEASE ATTACH COPIES OF QUESTIONNAIRES OR INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDES TO THIS APPLICATION**

**2. Describe the participant sample who will be contacted for this Research Project. You need to consider the number of participants, their age, gender, recruitment methods and exclusion/inclusion criteria**

The research sample will consist of participants who watch the specific TV series (The Big Bang Theory).

The sample will consist of university/college students because they are possibly the target audience of the specific TV series in terms of age.

The study is independent of age and gender.

It is expected that the sample will consist of about 60-100 participants, depending of course, on the response rate and the usability of questionnaires.

Participants are going to be recruited via an online invitation, through the university as well as by snowball recruitment (meaning that someone who will see the invitation can invite a friend who also watches the specific series).

Due to the fact that the participants will have to attend a specific time and place to take part in the study and they will be occupied for at least 1 hour, it is necessary to set a compensation scheme for their time and effort. This will be in the form of £10 vouchers (Amazon or other retailers) per respondent.

**3. Describe the method by which you intend to gain consent from participants.**

The consent of participants will be gained before the beginning of the questionnaire completion, by reading the consent statement and agreeing to participate in this study. Once they agree, they will be able to continue with the completion of the questionnaire.

The consent form will consist of the title and a brief description of the research. The procedure and the duration of participation will be stated. Confidentiality of identity and data will be assured. Statement that the participation is voluntary and that withdrawal can be done at any time of the procedure will be made. Declaration that this study has ethical approval from Cardiff Business School will be also made. It will be communicated that feedback, results and other information about the study will be available upon request at KavallieratouA1@cardiff.ac.uk and pallisterjg@cardiff.ac.uk. (See attached document (2) for consent form).

**PLEASE ATTACH A COPY OF ALL INFORMATION WHICH WILL BE GIVEN TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS (including invitation letter, briefing documents and, if appropriate, the consent form you will be using).**

**4. Please make a clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them throughout the duration of the project (please use additional sheets where necessary)**

Issues of Confidentiality: The research process will follow the Cardiff Business School Ethics Guidelines. The data will be kept confidential and will be destroyed after the year 2015. The data will be used only for academic research purposes. Participants will have the right to ask for their information to be destroyed at any time.

Issues of Anonymity: Any personal information will be treated anonymously. If participant's data are going to be published they are not going to be identifiable as theirs.

Participants will be able to withdraw from the research at any point.

Due to the fact that a TV series episode will be used as the stimuli of this experiment, copyright issues have been taken into account. The University's Copyright department has verified that I do not need to seek for further copyright licensing from the film production companies since for the purpose of my research I am allowed to use these excerpts under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 section 32<sup>58</sup> Education, CHAPTER III, ACTS PERMITTED IN RELATION TO COPYRIGHT WORKS (pg. 47) which can be retrieved from: <http://www.ipo.gov.uk/cdpact1988.pdf>. They have advised that I can use these excerpts without seeking for any further permission since the use will be for non-commercial, academic purpose which does not involve public viewing and the survey will be distributed to specific respondents.

**STUDENTS SHOULD BIND THE SIGNED AND APPROVED FORM INTO THEIR REPORT, DISSERTATION OR THESIS.**

APPLICATION APPROVED  
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE  
CARDIFF BUSINESS SCHOOL  
CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

*Please complete the following in relation to your research project:*

		Yes	No	n/a
(a)	Will you describe the main details of the research process to participants in advance, so	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	that they are informed about what to expect?			
(b)	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c)	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d)	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e)	If you are using a questionnaire, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
(f)	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(g)	Will you offer to send participants findings from the research (e.g. copies of publications arising from the research)?	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(h)	If working with children and young people please confirm that you have visited this website : Working with children and young people and Vulnerable Adults please go to weblink - <a href="http://www.cf.ac.uk/govrn/cocom/resources/2010%November%Safeguarding%20Children%20&amp;20VA's.doc">http://www.cf.ac.uk/govrn/cocom/resources/2010%November%Safeguarding%20Children%20&amp;20VA's.doc</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>		

**PLEASE NOTE:**

If you have ticked **No** to any of 5(a) to 5(g), please give an explanation on a separate sheet.

(Note: N/A = not applicable)

There is an obligation on the principal researcher/student to bring to the attention of Cardiff Business School Ethics Committee any issues with ethical implications not clearly covered by the above checklist.

Signed:

(Principal Researcher/Student)

Print Name:

Anastasia Kavallieratou

Date:

22/11/2012

**SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION (Student researchers only):** As the supervisor for this student project I confirm that I believe that all research ethical issues have been dealt with in accordance with University policy and the research ethics guidelines of the relevant professional organisation.

Signed:

Print Name:

Dr John Pallister

Date:

22/11/2012

**TWO copies of this form (and attachments) MUST BE OFFICIALLY STAMPED by Ms Lainey Clayton, Room F43, Cardiff Business School**

APPLICATION APPROVED  
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE  
CARDIFF BUSINESS SCHOOL  
CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

**STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL**

ETHICS 2



This project has been considered using agreed School procedures and is now approved.

Official stamp of approval of the School  
Research Ethics Committee:

Date:

*[Signature]*  
*[Signature]*  
4/12/2012

APPLICATION APPROVED  
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE  
CARDIFF BUSINESS SCHOOL  
CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

## VI. Consumption Conventions in “*The Big Bang Theory*”

Consumption Conventions	Occurring Occasions and placement's purpose	Character	Episodes
Eating Thai Food	Habitually every Monday	All characters	Recurring Event
Playing electronic game “Second Life”		Male characters	Recurring Event
Playing Jenga	Due to no internet connection	Male characters	Season 1 epis. 3
Playing electronic game “Halo”	“Halo” night every Wednesday	Male characters	Season 1 epis. 5, Season 2 epis. 6
Eating at the “Cheesecake Factory” (American Chain Restaurant)	Eating burgers every Thursday	All characters	Season 2 epis. 8
Playing boxing on Nintendo Wii	To sort out differences	Leonard & Raj	Season 1 epis. 11
Selling things on Ebay		Male characters	Recurring Event
Eating ice-cream/candy/Ben & Jerry's ice-cream	To show sadness of character	Penny	Season 1 epis. 17
Eating Chinese Food	Habitually every Friday	All characters	Recurring Event
Going to the comic book store and buying comics	Habitually every Wednesday	Male characters	Season 2 epis. 4
Uploading videos on YouTube		Male characters	Season 3 epis. 9
Using Facebook & Twitter		Male characters	Recurring Event

<i>Consumption Conventions Cont.</i>			
<b>Consumption Conventions</b>	<b>Occurring Occasions and placement's purpose</b>	<b>Involving Character</b>	<b>Episodes</b>
Using Skype	To communicate	Sheldon & Amy, Raj & his parents, Howard & Bernadette	Recurring Event
Watching Star Trek, Star Wars and Indiana Jones movies	Habitually	Male characters	Recurring Event
Drinking wine	On girls' night	Female characters	Season 4 epis. 8
Fishing on Wii	For boyfriend and girlfriend's dad to bond	Leonard & Penny's Dad	Season 4 epis. 9
Playing Archery on Wii	To exercise	Leonard & Sheldon	Season 4 epis. 20
Horseback riding on Wii	To "get fresh air"	Leonard	Season 5 epis. 8
Eating Pizza	Habitually every Thursday	All characters	Recurring Event
Playing bowling on Wii		All characters	Season 2 epis. 10
Playing vintage video games	Habitually every Friday	All characters	Season 2 epis. 20
Using Purell	To show character's obsession to sanitize	Sheldon	Season 5 epis. 7
Looking things up on Google, Google Earth and Wikipedia		Male characters	Recurring Event

Source: This Research

Note: As it is evident, brands such as Nintendo Wii are recurring consumption events in the specific sitcom, and multiple games that can be played on the platform are presented through the successive episodes. Thus, the placement of Nintendo Wii in the sitcom can be characterized as a brilliant paradigm of a brand's integration in the nature of the sitcom's media content, since it has a continuous presence, it is highly connected with the characters, and at the same time promotes the various features of the product.



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