

How do the audience of *Gavin and Stacey* feel after they finish the series, due to their emotional attachment to the programme and characters?

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Introduction

This reports aim is to examine emotional responses the audience of *Gavin and Stacey* (2007-2010) have towards the shows narrative and characters, especially how they feel when they finish the series. Delving into topics surrounding the rise of technology, this study focusses on consumer behaviour patterns and the new television independence which has been created from streaming platforms, discussed by theorists such as Jenner (2015). While also highlighting key arguments scholars have examined around identity in television shows.

Drawing upon key arguments from Kellner (1995) and Williams (2015) regarding identity, this report explores the way the audience of *Gavin and Stacey* feel towards the shows narrative and characters. Bird (2003) suggests that the main way that fans relate to television shows is through the bond between themselves and the characters, an idea which will be heavily discussed.

Through the use of an audience study, this report investigates how the audience actually feel about the show. By creating a successful group dynamic, the focus group provided positive results which could be added to ongoing academic debates surrounding binge-watching and identity. Following research from key scholars such as Bore (2011), an audience study was most successful in analysing emotions as it allowed the thoughts of the audience to be displayed.

Literature Review

In this section, previously published work around identity and binge-watching has been analysed in order to provide different views around the subjects in question. Identity has been explored to underpin why audiences might relate to *Gavin and Stacey*, which leads onto the research surrounding binge-watching to identify if a change in technology impacts on how audiences identify with television shows.

Identity

Identities have been described by scholars as a way of providing definitions for one's place in the world, which are relatively fixed and substantial, according to Kellner (1995). He further analyses how forms of identity are fixed and therefore somewhat limiting, but the boundaries of possible and potentially new identities are "continually expanding" (Kellner, 1995: 231), thus giving scholars new concepts to explore. Kellner believes one must choose a defined identity in order to gain mutual recognition between peers, but states "the modern self is aware of the constructed nature of identity" (Kellner 1995:232) therefore meaning they can adapt their identity at will.

In regards to identity and television, Kellner discusses how commercial television producers believe the most entertaining narratives are those with "familiar and recognisable characters, plot-lines, conventions and messages" (Kellner, 1995: 235), thus showing how audiences identify with relatable television narratives, which then produces enjoyment. The idea that audiences identify with television shows has been supported years later by

Williams (2015). She believes television shows have the possibility to become a source of comfort and pleasure for their fans, who can relate their own memories to the show.

Thompson (1995) further supports this argument as he states individuals use mediated texts, such as television, to “inform and refashion the project of the self” (Thomson, 1995:233), showing how audiences are able to identify themselves with television narratives, while further shaping their own identity.

The idea that fans use television shows to understand their own lives is examined by Baym (2000). She states that audiences “make sense of their own experiences” (Baym, 2000:71), thus stating how the audience relate to television shows through their own experiences, linking back to Williams (2015) argument that audiences identify with television shows from their own memories.

Bird’s (2003) discussion around audiences agrees with Kellner, Williams and Thomson’s arguments around identity and television, where she highlights the importance of affective connections between characters and fans. She believes the main way audiences become attached to specific television shows is through the bond between themselves and the characters.

Binge-watching

Since the rise of technology, the way audiences consume television shows has dramatically changed, which has been discussed by scholars including Jenner (2017). She discusses the notion of binge-watching where she states: “binge-watching is a concept linked to automatus scheduling and time shifting technologies” (Jenner, 2017:310), showing how

technology has shaped a new viewing experience. Jenner's argument is supported by Kompare (2005) who further explores time shifting technology (recording programmes for later playback). Kompare discusses how these technologies interrupt broadcasting flows, but worries that once a recorded programme is watched, it won't be watched again. However, Jenner (2017) disagrees with this argument as she believes the rise of technology has created viewer independence. This allows viewers to choose when and what is watched, which is not achievable within scheduled television. Alter (2017) further supports this argument as he analyses the new consumer behaviour patterns, created by binge-watching technologies.

The way viewers are consuming television has been discussed in more depth by Flayelle et al. (2018). They believe a "dramatic change has happened in the way viewers consume TV series" (Flayelle et al. 2018:26), down to the remarkable arrival of online streaming. Their argument highlights how audiences have the opportunities to consume television in their own way, supporting Jenner's theory of technologies creating viewer independence. Flayelle et al. also discuss how audiences primarily watch television as it "satisfies the need for entertainment" (Flayelle et al. 2018:32). Relating back to Williams' (2015) and Baym's (2000) studies that suggest viewers find entertainment through television shows they identify too. Likewise, Greenberg (1982) argues that the involvement viewers have with television shows is framed by their emotional responses from events happening in the show, and events happening in real life.

Highlighting both Greenberg's (1982) and Williams' (2015) argument that viewers identify and relate events in television show to their own real life events, issues surrounding binge-

watching and the relation to audiences identifying with the shows has been discussed by Jenner (2017). She worries that rising binge-watching technologies, such as television on demand, has “removed some material that might particularly appeal to fans” (Jenner, 2015:316), meaning viewers may not be able to identify with television shows.

Methodology

The method undertaken to conduct this research was an audience study using focus groups. This method was applied to fully underpin the emotional attachment the audience of *Gavin and Stacey* have towards the show and characters. As McLafferty (2004) discusses, focus groups should highlight attention towards consumers rather than professionals as she believes “the consumer being regarded as the expert” (McLafferty, 2004:188), confirming the best method for this research was to address the audience directly, as they are the experts. This strategy has also been applied by Jhally and Lewis (1992) in their audience study on *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992). From their research they believe an informal conversation, generated from a focus group setting, allows freedom for the conversation to flow without interruption from the interviewer; again approving justification for using focus groups to conduct this research.

Bore (2011) examines the use of focus groups in relation to studying audience’s engagement with comedy television. Within her study she discusses how she choose participants for her focus groups. Bore decided to use small groups made up of friends, colleagues and family members as she felt this would help discussions flow, an idea supported by Kitzinger (1994). She highlights the importance of participants already

knowing each other where she states that “friends and colleagues could relate each other’s comments to actual incidents in their shared daily lives” (Kitzinger 1994: 105), meaning using participants of the same social circle will give an additional advantage to the results down to the participants already being comfortable with each other. Bore later proves this theory through her analysis, suggesting participants who were most cautious in their responses were those in groups who had never met before. She believes this was down to participants needing to “establish norms and boundaries for appropriate tastes and behaviour” (Bore, 2011: 19), leading to less honest discussions.

Using this knowledge, a careful selection process of participants was applied in order to collect the most accurate data for the set question. Fans of *Gavin and Stacey* were selected to undertake this research as they would have the largest emotional responses to the show and characters, therefore providing the best data. As suggested by Kitzinger (1994), the participants were selected from the same friendship group to try and guide a natural flow to conversation. This however meant the participants used were all around the same age, 19-25 year olds, causing some limitations to the research as emotional responses regarding age could not be explored. Taking the time limitations and Traynor’s (2015) study into account, which suggests the ideal number of participants for a focus group is between five and six, this study uses six contributors. Traynor believes less contributors will lead to a conversation which is “difficult to establish” (Traynor, 2015:45), justifying the use of six participants in this study. These participants were also split half male and half female, in order to gain an understanding of emotional attachment to *Gavin and Stacey* from both gender perspectives.

In preparation for the focus group, the questions were organised in advance before the participants arrived. This was applied from Kruger and Casey's (2008) study which implies planning and preparation leads to the most successful focus groups. Upon the arrival of participants, they were shown memorable clips of *Gavin and Stacey* to generate their emotional attachment to the show. After this, the questions began which allowed a discussion to form between participants. This process was recorded, as suggested by Bore (2011) to eliminate any limitations surrounding forgetting what participants talked about.

Another limitation to using focus groups, especially those within the same social circle is that conversations often went off on a bit of a tangent, meaning some results may not have been useful for the study. This could have been avoided if one-to-one interviews were used, but as Traynor (2015) discusses, the use of group research will explore experiences and views which are less likely to be discussed using one-to-one interviews.

Results and Findings

During the focus group, the participants engaged in useful conversation which flowed well, thanks to using Kitzinger's (1994) method of having participants who already knew each other. The best responses will now be analysed to help underpin how the audience feel about the series, and if they have emotional attachments to the show and characters.

“How many times have you watched the series, Gavin and Stacey?”

This first question was asked to explore Kompare’s (2005) theory that once a recorded television show is watched, it won’t be watched again. From the participant’s responses, it is clear that all of them have watched the series *Gavin and Stacey* numerous times:

“I couldn’t even count”

Rosie and Eleanor

[Everyone laughs]

“I couldn’t even give an estimated guess I’ve watched it so many times.”

Rosie

“I have embarrassingly watched the whole series well over 20/30 times.”

Alex

The other three participants also stated they had watched the show several times too, therefore disproving Kompare’s theory as fans of *Gavin and Stacey* have watched, and continue to watch the show despite having already seen it. This then lead onto the next question.

“If you have watched the series multiple times, why do you think this is?”

“The series is so funny and relatable. The ordinary nature of the characters makes it easy to watch at any time.”

Alex

“Everyone can relate to it, like I think everyone’s family has got characters like it...”

Eleanor

“... and friendship groups as well.”

Rachel

“It’s just funny, it makes me laugh every time and gives me a warm family feeling which I love.”

Jack

After the participants admitted they had watched the series several times, it was of interest to find out why. From these participant responses, it is clear they thoroughly enjoy the show leading them to watch it over and over again. Again, these responses disagree with Jenner's (2017) theory that binge-watching shows takes away audiences involvement and connection to the show, as it is clear the fans still love it despite watching it over and over. Their responses also prove Flayelle et al. (2018) idea that audiences watch television to "satisfy the need for entertainment" (Flayelle et al. 2018:32) as they find the show enjoyable and are therefore still being entertained, despite watching it so many times.

To explore Jenner's (2017) and Kompare's (1994) studies surrounding binge-watching and the rise of technologies having the power to adapt and change viewer's consumer behaviour, the next question was asked to explore how the participants watched the show.

"How do you watch it? On streaming sites or on scheduled television?"

"I watch it on both..."

Rosie

"... yeah if it's on normal the telly then I'll put it on, if I'm choosing to watch it I'll use Netflix."

Eleanor

"Me too, sometimes it's on TV so I'll always put it on, if not Netflix."

Elliot

"Before Netflix I had the boxset on DVD which was more sentimental as I was making an effort to watch it. On Netflix its usually just on in the background playing one episode to the next."

Alex

From the rise of technology, it is evident that audiences are able to watch television as and when they please, as suggest by Jenner (2017). The other participants, Jack and Rachel also

said they use Netflix to watch the show, proving that the rise of technology has adapted the way audiences consume television, as stated by Flayelle et al: “a dramatic change has happened in the way viewers consume TV” (Flayelle et al. 2018:26). However, due to the love of *Gavin and Stacey*, the participants state that they still watch it on scheduled television if it is on, but they can’t always guarantee this. Therefore, like Jenner says in her study, audiences can organise viewing time around “personal schedules or mood” (Jenner,2017:311), leading to more independent and enjoyable viewing experiences.

During Jenner’s (2017) study, she worries that moving away from traditional DVD’s will remove material that appeals to fans. Even though Alex responded saying he found watching the series on DVD was more sentimental, he still now watches the series on Netflix, thus disproving Jenner’s theory as he still finds watching the series on new technologies enjoyable.

The next set of questions were asked to underpin and study if the participants felt they could identify with any of the characters or events in the show, based on Williams’ (2015) and Baym’s (2000) research into fans often identifying with television shows.

“Do you think she shows narrative and characters are relatable and do you identify with any of them?”

“I find a lot of the events relatable as well as Gavin. His relationship with his parents and girlfriend is a lot like myself.”

Alex

“Me too, I somewhat identify with Gavin and Stacey as I am in a long distance relationship myself.”

Rachel

"I think because it's so realistic I relate to it a lot, lots of the characters have similarities to my own friends and family."
Elliot

"Yeah same, I don't identify with them myself but I know people like every one of the characters so when I watch it I think of them."
Eleanor

"Smithy reminds me of myself because he makes a massive drama over everything."
Jack

[Everyone laughs]

"Yeah Pam reminds me so much of my mum, obviously me and mum are quite dramatic..."
Rosie

[Everyone laughs]

"... the things she says are literally my mum."
Rosie

Using Kitzynger's (1994) method of participants already knowing each other worked especially well during this question. As you can see from their responses, there was often laughter after relating themselves to characters in the show, which would not have been achieved if they didn't already know each other's personalities.

As proved in the participant's responses, the realistic narrative of *Gavin and Stacey* allows the audience to identify the characters to themselves or people they know. Thus supporting William's (2015) theory surrounding audiences finding "comfort and pleasure" (Williams, 2015:22) within television narratives that remind them of their own memories. But, as you can see from Eleanor's response, some fans don't directly identify with characters therefore contradicting previous scholars work. Baym (2000) suggests that audiences use their own experiences to relate to television shows, which isn't supported by Eleanor's response. However, she does think of people she knows when watching the show down to characters

reminding her of them, therefore generating pleasure when watching, as discussed by Williams (2015). Jack also responded with how he identifies with the character Smithy, providing reasons for his enjoyment of the show based on Bird's (2003) discussion on audiences emotionally connect with television shows based on their bond with the characters.

The final question was asked to explore further into the way the participants identify with the show, while also aiming to answer the set question.

"How do you feel when you finish the series?"

"I love the ending because all the character's work everything out and you know they're all happy which makes me happy."

Jack

"I feel sad that it's over and you never get to see Gavin and Stacey's baby or find out what happened on the fishing trip... but then I know I'm going to start it all over again."

Rosie

[All nod and agree]

"Yeah, I feel like I've been on a journey with all the charters, especially because they're similar to my friends and family."

Elliot

"I think because I've watched it from such a young age I've just got attached to it and the characters, but like Rosie said I'll just end up watching it again so I don't feel sad or anything."

Alex

From these responses, it is evident that all the participants are somewhat emotionally connected to the show and characters. Drawing on Bird's (2003) analysis into audiences becoming attached to television shows, Alex and Rosie's responses stating they will soon

watch the series again once they've finished it, shows they are emotionally attached to *Gavin and Stacey*, giving reason for them to watch the series several times.

Elliot's response portraying his "journey" with the characters shows further emotional engagement with the show and characters within it. The long form narrative of the series allows viewers to follow characters' journey's therefore relating to them even more. As Jack stated, he feels "happy" because the characters are happy, showing more depth to the fans emotional attachment to the show. Thus supporting Bird's (2003) discussion where he states the bond between television characters and their fans leads to them becoming attached to television shows, justifying why these participants are so invested in the series. As Alex tells us, he has grown up watching the show which has lead him to become "attached" to the show and characters.

Conclusion

This study has successfully investigated that the audience of *Gavin and Stacey* identify with the shows narrative and characters, focussing on their emotional attachment and how this makes them feel once they finish the series; while also highlighting the way technology has changed consumer viewing patterns. From the use of a focus group, this report recognised the participant's emotional involvement to the show down to relating to the narratives, which highlighted key discussions from research prior to conducting this research.

All participants disproved Kompare's (2005) theory that due to the rise of playback technology, viewers will only have watched a programme they have recorded once, as all of

them have watched the series numerous times. Since Kompare's study, technology has risen even further, so more analysis into his work could be explored to disprove his theory further. Many key issues highlighted by theorists surrounding identity and television were proved and explored throughout this report, but there is both supporting and contradicting evidence regarding fans identifying with characters directly. This could lead onto future research delving into the reasons why fans do or do not identify with television shows. From the participant's responses, it is evident that most of them relate to many of the series events and characters, leading to their enjoyment of the show, as suggest by Williams (2015).

Overall, the audience of *Gavin and Stacey* feel many different emotions after they finish the series down to their emotional investment with the show and characters. Due to the rise of technology which has led to viewers binge-watching television, the participants have watched the series numerous times. With the opportunities to continue watching the series over and over means they don't really feel sadness when they've finished the series as they know they are able to start it again. Due to the participants being able to relate to the show, they feel they have followed the characters on their journey leading to positive emotions when the series comes to an end.

Due to time and word count limitations, only one age range of participants were interviewed after following Bore's (2011) example of using participants who knew each other. Taking this into account, further research could be conducted to explore the difference in emotional connections to *Gavin and Stacey* between age ranges. An audience

who watched the show on scheduled television when it came out could be compared to audiences who can now watch it on streaming sites.

Word Count: 3495

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Appendices

Appendix A - Blank copy of consent form given to all contributors upon arrival of the focus group.

Appendix B - Transcript of selected group interview questions.

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form	 BIRMINGHAM CITY University
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I, _____ (print name) confirm that:

(initial appropriate box)

1	I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the research project information sheet dated	
2	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	
3	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	
4	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons, any data already provided will be removed and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	
5	Issues of confidentiality and anonymization have been clearly explained to me.	

6	The use of the data in research, publications and archiving has been explained to me.	
7	I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.	
8	Select only one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I would like my name used and understand what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised. I do not want my name used in this project. 	
9	I, along with the researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	

Participant		Researcher	
Name (print)		Name	
Signature		Signature	
Date		Date	

Appendix B

How many times have you watched the series, Gavin and Stacey?

Rosie and Eleanor: "I couldn't even count"

Everyone laughs

Rosie: "I couldn't' even give an estimated guess I've watched it so many times."

Alex: "I have embarrassingly watched the whole series well over 20/30 times."

Why have you watched it so many times?

Alex: "The series is so funny and relatable. The ordinary nature of the characters makes it easy to watch at any time."

Eleanor: "Everyone can relate to it, like I think everyone's family has got characters like it..."

Rachel: "... and friendship groups as well."

Jack: "It's just funny, it makes me laugh every time and gives me a warm family feeling which I love."

How do you watch it? On streaming sites or on scheduled television?

Rosie: "I watch it on both..."

Eleanor: "... yeah if it's on normal the telly then I'll put it on, if I'm choosing to watch it I'll use Netflix."

Elliot: "Me too, sometimes it's on TV so I'll always put it on, if not Netflix."

Rosie: "I've got the box set, watch on Netflix and if it's on TV I will too."

Alex: "Before Netflix I have the boxset on DVD which was more sentimental as I was making an effort to watch it. On Netflix its usually just on in the background playing one episode to the next."

Do you think she shows narrative and characters are relatable and do you identify with any of them?

Alex: "I find a lot of the events relatable as well as Gavin. His relationship with his parents and girlfriend is a lot like myself."

Rachel: "Me too, I somewhat identify with Gavin and Stacey as I am in a long distance relationship myself."

Elliot: "I think because it's so realistic I relate to it a lot, lots of the characters have similarities to my own friends and family."

Eleanor: "Yeah same, I know people like every one of the characters so when I watch it I think of them."

Jack: "Smithy reminds me of myself because he makes a massive drama over everything."

Everyone laughs

Rosie: "Yeah Pam reminds me so much of my mum, obviously me and mum are quite dramatic..."

Everyone laughs

"... the things she says are literally my mum."

How do you feel when you finish the series?

Jack: "I love the ending because all the character's work everything out and you know they're all happy which makes me happy."

Rosie: "I feel sad that it's over and you never get to see Gavin and Stacey's baby or find out what happened on the fishing trip... but then I know I'm going to start it all over again."

All nod and agree

Elliot: "Yeah, I feel like I've been on a journey with all the charters, especially because they're similar to my friends and family."

Alex: "I think because I've watched it from such a young age I've just got attached to it and the characters, but like Rosie said I'll just end up watching it again so I don't feel sad or anything."