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Politics in Fictional Entertainment: An Empirical Classification of Movies and TV Series

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This article presents conceptual considerations on the classification of TV series and movies according to their political references and introduces an empirical approach for measuring the constituent features. We argue that political representations in fiction vary along two dimensions: political intensity and degree of realism. These dimensions encompass four indicators relating to characters, places, themes, and time. The indicators were coded for a sample of 98 TV series and 114 movies. Cluster analyses showed four clusters of TV series and six clusters of movies. Nonpolitical fiction, thrillers, and fantasy were central types in both TV series and movies. Movies, however, stand out through a greater diversity and a focus on the past that is reflected in three additional types. Based on the identification of different types of movies and TV series, three directions for theory building are suggested.

Keywords: fictional entertainment, TV series, movies, classification, political intensity, degree of realism

As the lines between information and entertainment become increasingly blurred, scholarly attention is not only directed to entertainment features in information programs but extends to information in entertainment programs. The latter especially regards the pictures of reality that are constructed in the respective programs. Attention is directed to both the identification of such pictures and the assessment of their possible effects. The media's presentation of the *political domain* in entertainment programs deserves special attention, because these programs reach a much wider audience than news shows or other public affairs programs. Young media users in particular tend to avoid information programs and rely on entertainment programs for keeping up with current events in politics (e.g., Williams & Delli Carpini, 2011). Entertainment in general, and fictional entertainment in particular, is considered to facilitate the adoption of mediated messages due to transportation (Green & Brock, 2002) and lack of elaborative processing (Petty, Briñol, & Priester, 2009). Plenty of empirical evidence demonstrates the impact of fictional entertainment on political perceptions and attitudes, but it does not comprise a discernible strand of research because it is scattered across widely different studies (e.g., Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1982, 1984; Holbert et al., 2003; Holbrook & Hill, 2005; Morgan, 1986; Mutz & Nir, 2010; Pfau, Moy, & Szabo, 2001).

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Studies of the political dimension of fictional content have mostly dealt with selected genres, individual TV series, and films (e.g., Corner & Richardson, 2008; Hamburger, 2000; Holbert et al., 2005; Rollins & O'Connor, 2003). Few studies have analyzed a large body of fictional material. Whereas film scholars have demonstrated how the changing paradigms of U.S.-politics are reflected in selected movies (Christensen & Haas, 2005; Gianos, 1998; Giglio, 2005; Miles-Bolam & Bolam, 2011), media and communication studies have focused on the particular features of politics in TV fiction. The large-scale studies found a predominantly negative picture of politics in TV fiction (Lichter, Lichter, & Amundson, 2000; Van Zoonen & Wring, 2012).

One of the main challenges in the analysis of politics in fictional entertainment is the heterogeneity of the field. Compared to news, fictional entertainment is much more diverse. There are fantasy films and historical dramas, genuinely political plots, and romantic comedies or thrillers with no political reference at all. Given the diversity of plots and settings, it is not surprising that research on the representation of politics in fiction has not yet identified general structures, patterns, and routines of the field. This article aims to fill this gap by systematically analyzing a broad range of fiction and identifying internal structures within the heterogeneous field of fictional entertainment. The objective is pursued through conceptual considerations and subsequent empirical implementation. On the conceptual level, it advances existing typologies of the interface between politics and entertainment by adding degree of realism as a new dimension to complement the commonly used political intensity. In an empirical perspective, the article breaks new ground by both presenting an operationalization of indicators that enables the measurement of political intensity and degree of realism in fictional entertainment and identifying different types of fiction along those dimensions.

Typologies have become less popular in communication studies as most phenomena in communication already have been described and classified. As in other mature research areas, scholars have advanced to theory building and empirical validation. Yet this does not hold for research on politics in entertainment. Although the mediated representation of social phenomena has long captured researchers' interest, the realm of politics and entertainment is still largely uncharted territory. Fundamental analyses structuring this field are thus needed to enable subsequent theorizing. Future approaches may then focus on the specific political content in entertainment programs, the characteristics of the audience members attracted, and their impact on individuals' political beliefs and attitudes.

Typologies of Politics in Audiovisual Media Content

As entertainment has penetrated many types of political programs and other information formats, scholars have begun to develop typologies to structure the broad and heterogeneous field. There is general agreement that a one-dimensional differentiation between politics on the one hand and entertainment on the other hand is no longer appropriate. To better capture the complexity of the hybrid phenomena, two-dimensional typologies have been put forward (Christensen & Haas, 2005; Holbert, 2005; Kleinen-von Königsłow, 2013; Schwer & Brosius, 2008).

The typology by Schwer and Brosius (2008; see also Friedrich, 2011) encompasses all types of TV programs portraying politics. It draws on the dimensions political intensity and degree of entertainment orientation versus information orientation. The authors illustrate their typology using nested circles: Starting from the center and moving to the outer circles, the degree of explicit political intensity decreases while the audience's expectations gradually shift from information to entertainment (Schwer & Brosius, 2008). Genuine information programs are in the core of the model, entertaining information programs represent the second circle, and nonfictional entertainment programs are located in the third circle. The fourth and outermost circle contains fictional entertainment. Positioned most distant from genuine information programs, fictional entertainment offers the lowest degree of political intensity and the highest degree of entertainment.

The model also considers the degree of realism. It parallels political intensity and thus also decreases from the core circle to the outer circles. In this model, realism in political representations can take three forms (Friedrich 2011): (1) Real political actors or events can serve as the subject of the plot (e.g., political jokes in late-night comedy) or (2) as the background of nonpolitical plots (e.g., the Vietnam War in *Forrest Gump*). Finally, (3) fictitious political actors, decisions, and events can be the subject of the plot (e.g., *The West Wing* or *24*). Introducing different degrees of realism in political content creates an important differentiation in the analysis of political communication in entertainment programs—especially with regard to potential effects on audience cognitions and attitudes. However, the relation between realism (fictitious vs. real) and political intensity (as subject vs. as background of the plot) as described by Friedrich (2011) is not sufficiently clear and needs further elaboration and theoretical reflection.

Kleinen-von Königslöw's (2013) typology ties in with the political intensity and entertainment versus information orientation used by Schwer and Brosius (2008), but it disregards realism. The different types of programs are presented in a two-by-two matrix. Examples are provided to elucidate the characteristics of the types (see Figure 1). Contrary to Schwer and Brosius (2008), the typology allows for high degrees of political intensity for fiction. It distinguishes between three types of fictional TV programs: fictional everyday life productions with low degrees of political intensity, fictional social satire with medium degrees of political intensity, and political fiction with high degrees of political intensity. As indicated by the distribution of types of programs in the matrix, political intensity is conceptualized as a continuum.

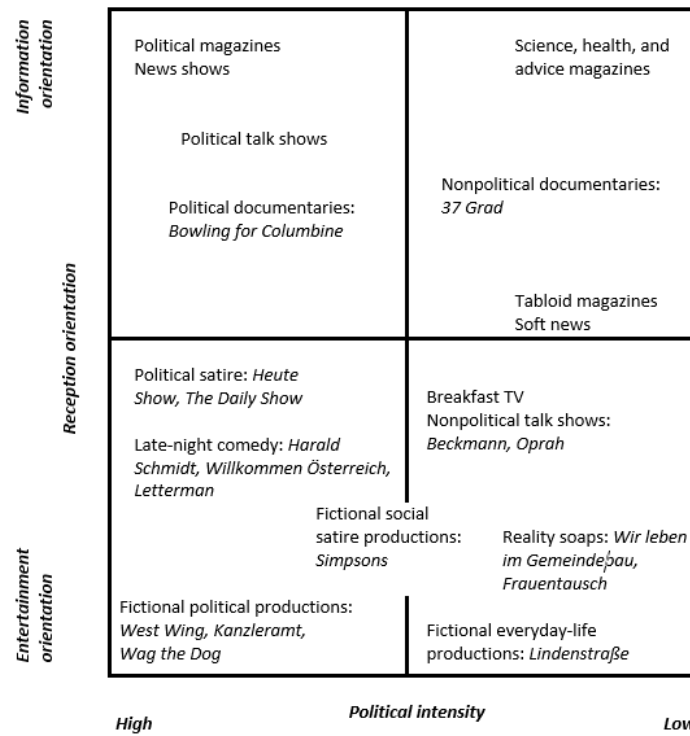


Figure 1. Matrix for the analysis of political communication presented as information and as entertainment (Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2013, p. 41).

Both typologies draw on work by Holbert (2005), who introduced the dimensions political intensity and reception orientation to organize the field of *entertaining* TV content. Holbert contrasted political as primary versus political as secondary and explicit versus implicit and constructed a three-by-three matrix with these axes (see Figure 2). The distribution of entertaining TV content within the matrix shows fictional entertainment programs in three out of the nine cells: Fictional political dramas (e.g., *The West Wing*), satirical situation comedies (e.g., *The Simpsons*), and lifeworld content. The last type includes either sociopolitical messages or “brief snippets of political satire” (Holbert, 2005, p. 444). The specific position of the three fictional types in the matrix indicates that the audience may expect political messages even in fictional programs (political as primary), whereas these programs do not reach the highest degree of political intensity (explicit). Merely *nonfictional* entertainment is located in the cells representing explicit political content.

<i>Political as Primary</i>			
	Ent. Talk Show Interviews w/ Politicians	Fictional Political Dramas	Traditional Satire
<i>Explicit</i>	Soft News	Political Docudramas	Satirical Situation Comedies
	Entertainment Television Events	Reality-Based Programming/ Documentaries	Lifeworld Content
<i>Political as Secondary</i>			
			<i>Implicit</i>

Figure 2. A typology for the study of entertainment TV and politics (Holbert, 2005, p. 445).

Christensen and Haas (2005) consider an even narrower segment of entertainment. Their typology is restricted to fiction and only examines American films. It builds on political content and political intent as relevant dimensions (Christensen & Haas 2005). Political content refers to films' depictions of political institutions, processes, and actors. Political intent, in contrast, refers to films' political or ideological messages beyond the political reality portrayed in the films. The authors distinguish between four types of films. Films with high degrees of both political content and intent are classified as pure political movies (e.g., *The Candidate*). Films with high degrees of political content and low degrees of political intent are referred to as politically reflective movies (e.g., *Independence Day*). Films with low degrees of political content and high degrees of political intent are labeled auteur political movies (e.g., *The Godfather*), and films with low degrees of both political content and intent are classified as socially reflective movies (e.g., *Pretty Woman*).

By developing relevant dimensions and illustrating the positions of individual movies or TV series on these dimensions, the four typologies have substantially deepened our understanding of the heterogeneity of programs between politics and entertainment. Notwithstanding the differences in the programs and films considered in these typologies, there are striking similarities. Most of the typologies share the two-dimensional architecture relating political intensity to the reception mode of the audience. Only Christensen and Haas (2005) suggest a different typology. Instead of the reception mode, which does not show any variance in the exposure to fictional entertainment, they use political intent to complement political content. This means that their typology concentrates on characteristics of the films under study rather than on the characteristics of the audience during the reception. Unlike other typologies, it therefore allows for a content-analytical approach. Yet it does not suffice as a basis for

content analysis, because there are no comprehensive definitions of the dimensions to guide a reliable empirical classification of programs. Like all other typologies, it relies on examples instead. Moreover, political intent is a rather diffuse category that can hardly be separated from political content. It has to be *inferred from* the content rather than *measured in* the content. Strictly speaking, intent cannot be coded without interviewing the producers. Consequently, political intent does not qualify as a dimension for the typology developed in this article.

This article ties in with previous typologies and seeks to reveal the internal structure underlying the body of fictional programs empirically. Necessary to this end is an empirical classification of fictional entertainment regarding the representation of politics. Identifying types of fictional productions via empirical analysis requires a classification scheme that is based on characteristics strictly related to content and suited to organize the heterogeneous field of fictional entertainment. Answering the question about the internal structure of the body of fictional programs first requires deriving the relevant dimensions and indicators. In a second step, the fictional material has to be analyzed along the indicators. Finally, the empirical patterns within the abundance of fictional entertainment must be identified.

Method

Measures: Dimensions and Indicators of the Typology

To classify fictional programs according to the representation of politics, we suggest a typology based on political intensity and degree of realism. Political intensity has already proved meaningful in previous typologies. In contrast, degree of realism has been addressed only by Christensen and Haas (2005). Political intensity indicates the extent to which a fictional plot or setting resembles reality. Several studies point to an effect of the degree of realism on perceptions and attitudes (e.g., Busselle & Bilandzic, 2012; Holbert, Shah, & Kwak, 2004). We therefore assume that realistic plots or settings are more likely to affect the audience's perception of reality than plots or settings that are purely fictitious. Regarding possible effects of the exposure to fiction on the audience's perception of political reality, the degree of realism in fictional entertainment can therefore be considered an important feature.

Political intensity is indicated by four variables: political issues, sociopolitical issues, political characters, and state officials. Political issues regard institutional politics, such as politics, policies, and polity; sociopolitical issues deal with societal problems such as poverty and crime under the condition that the general character of a particular event or fact becomes clear and political intervention is addressed. Political characters are incumbents and other professional politicians. State officials include people dealing with law and order, such as police officers and prosecutors. Every variable ranges from 0 to 3 depending on its centrality in a TV series or film. This allows for a fine-grained assessment of political intensity in a TV series or movie; it also captures whether politics is addressed only in single episodes or whether it pervades the series. Regarding political and sociopolitical issues, 0 stands for no political or sociopolitical issues, 1 stands for a low degree of centrality, 2 represents a medium degree of centrality, and 3 indicates a high degree of centrality of political or sociopolitical issues. The same logic applies to the coding of political characters and state officials. High numbers indicate high degrees of centrality regarding these actors in the plot. Thus, 0 stands for the absence of political characters, state officials respectively, 1

indicates that these types of actors represent marginal roles (background actors), 2 indicates that they play minor roles, and 3 indicates that they are the main characters in the plot.

Degree of realism represents the second dimension in the typology and is also indicated through four variables: realism in terms of events, in terms of characters, in terms of time, and in terms of places. Again, every indicator was coded on a scale ranging from 0 to 3: 0 stands for no realism at all, 1 stands for a low degree of realism, 2 represents a medium degree of realism, and 3 indicates a high degree of realism. Realism in terms of events regards the degree to which the plot refers to real-life events such as historical references or bank holidays (e.g., Halloween, Christmas). Realism of characters captures whether real actors or institutions are addressed in the plot. For politicians and state officials, we coded whether real characters played no role (0), a marginal role (1), a minor role (2), or a major role (3) in the TV series or movie. Realism in terms of time refers to the particular time period in which a plot takes place. It measures the time between the year of production and the year in which the fictional plot takes place. The longer the time, the lower the score for this indicator: 0 was coded for plots located in periods deviating by more than 50 years from the production year, plots located in periods not overtly deviating from the production year were coded 3. Realism of places captures whether places are clearly identifiable. The highest score marks plots that take place at particular locations on Earth, and plots that take place in completely fictitious locations (such as Middle Earth in *The Lord of the Rings*) received the lowest score.

Sampling and Coding

To classify fictional TV entertainment using the typology presented above, separate samples of TV series and movies were drawn. The samples are based on ranking lists from the International Movie Database (IMDb). We decided not to use box office figures and ratings, because the ratings for TV series are available only for individual countries and for individual episodes, so one would need to add up the countries and average the numbers over the episodes. Further, movies and TV series are increasingly watched on DVD, so even box office figures and TV ratings do not provide reliable data on the number of viewers. The use of the IMDb-ranking lists ensures that we include TV series and movies that are both internationally known and popular. For the selection of movies, we used the list of the "top 250 movies as voted by our users."¹ This list includes all movies with at least 25,000 user votes ranked with no less than 8 of 10 points. All fictional movies released in 1990 or later were considered, which resulted in a sample of 114 movies. The sample of TV series is based on the IMDb list of the "most voted TV series with at least 5,000 votes."² As with the selection of the movies, all fictional TV series that had their first episode broadcast in 1990 or later and reached an average of at least 8 out of 10 points were included in the sample. This sampling procedure resulted in 98 TV series. Most of the TV series and movies included in our samples are U.S. productions (see Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix).

¹ See <http://www.imdb.com/chart/top>. Our reference date was February 18, 2013.

² See

http://www.imdb.com/search/title?num_votes=5000,&porn=0&sort=num_votes&title_type=tv_series.

Our reference date was February 18, 2013.

The coding followed a content-analytical procedure applied when processing large numbers of cases. For practical considerations and research efficiency, the coders did not watch the entire TV series and movies; rather, they read summaries in en.wikipedia.org and www.imdb.com to code the fictional material. In light of the usually very detailed descriptions and the broad indicators, this proved to be a suitable and valid procedure. The coders underwent a reliability test including 10% of the material (11 movies and 10 TV series), which showed sufficient consensus. For realism, the coefficient was 0.87 (according to Holsti); for political intensity, it was 0.76.³

Data Analysis

There are two fundamentally different ways to identify types of fictional TV entertainment based on a quantitative content analysis. In the graphic approach, the identification of different types follows the pattern that becomes visible when entering the cases into a two-by-two matrix. We applied this approach in an earlier stage of this research with a sample of TV programs and movies aired in Germany (Nitsch & Eilders, 2014). The two dimensions of the matrix served as axes of a two-dimensional graph where the individual cases were entered according to their positions on the dimensions. These positions reflect the value of an index constructed of the individual indicators. Types in this perspective are dense lumps of cases with similar features regarding realism and political intensity. This approach is easy to understand and vivid but results in a loss of information because the indicators are reduced to two dimensions.

The second approach is based on more detailed information, because it considers the individual indicators rather than the positions on the two dimensions. In this approach, the different types are identified via cluster analyses. The output of this procedure is a number of clusters that are internally homogeneous but most different from one another. The clusters are described by the average scores of the indicators across the clusters. For the purposes of this article, we applied two exploratory hierarchical cluster analyses (Ward procedure) to detect different types of movies and TV series. With four indicators for political intensity and four indicators for degree of realism, the analysis was based on a total of eight variables. TV series and movies were considered in separate analyses to avoid a blurring of the clusters through possible systematic differences between the two formats of fictional entertainment.

Results

Classification of TV series

The analysis of the TV series ($N = 98$) suggested a solution with four clusters. The largest cluster includes about half of the series ($n = 48$) under study (see Figure 3; also see Tables A1 and A3 in the Appendix). This cluster is referred to as nonpolitical TV series. Compared to the other three clusters, it scores very low on each of the political references indicators. Only sociopolitical issues show a medium

³ Realism reached coefficients of 1.0 (realism in terms of time), 0.90 (realism in terms of places), 0.86 (realism in terms of events), and 0.71 (realism in terms of characters). The coefficients of the individual indicators regarding political intensity were 0.86 (political issues), 0.71 (sociopolitical issues), 0.76 (state officials), and 0.71 (political characters).

score. Although series in this cluster hardly evoke genuinely political issues and do not address political actors or state officials, a few sociopolitical problems are nevertheless presented. The TV series in this cluster are very heterogeneous regarding their themes. They touch on problems that might affect the lifeworld of the fictional characters such as unemployment, drug addiction, homosexuality, death, and health issues. The social problems addressed in *House, M.D.*, *Sons of Anarchy*, and *Six Feet Under* are typical for these references. Regarding the realism indicators, the TV series score high in terms of time and place and low in terms of events and characters. This indicates that the plots are developed to take place in the present and in clearly identifiable locations (e.g., Los Angeles in *Six Feet Under*), while they relate little to real events or characters.

The second cluster is referred to as a thriller cluster, because it includes a large share of criminal drama and detective stories ($n = 26$). Because of the law-enforcement personnel dominating the plot (e.g., detectives, prison guards, and lawyers), the series score particularly high on state officials. Sociopolitical issues receive a great deal of attention, which can be attributed to issues associated with crime narratives. Crime, violence, poverty, and inequality are central issues addressed in the series. Examples are *Law and Order*, *Twin Peaks*, and *Prison Break*. The degree of realism of the TV series in this cluster follows the same pattern as the TV series in the first cluster: High scores on time and place indicators contrast with low scores on realism of events and characters. The plots are set in the present at a particular location, but the events and characters are fictitious.

The third cluster is labeled fantasy, because it is characterized by a very low degree of realism ($n = 9$). Compared to the other clusters, all realism indicators show the lowest scores. *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and *Futurama* are prominent examples that illustrate this point. *Futurama*, for example, is set in the 31st century in the fictitious city New New York. The plot revolves around Philip F. Fry, who works for a futuristic delivery company that transports packages throughout the universe. Characters and events in *Futurama* are completely fictitious. The TV series in this cluster show moderate degrees of political intensity. The score for sociopolitical issues represents an exception: It is the second highest among all four clusters. With regard to the TV series in this cluster, it may be assumed that the problems are related to societal structures, religious issues, wars, and injustice.

The last cluster is labeled political fiction ($n = 15$). It includes the series *The West Wing*, *Boardwalk Empire*, and *The Wire*. The average scores indicate not only a reflection of sociopolitical issues and state officials but considerable attention to institutional politics in terms of issues and characters; thus, the TV series in this cluster score very high on all the political indicators. This can best be illustrated with the U.S. series *The West Wing*: The main characters are the fictional Democratic president Jed Bartlet and his political staff. The episodes show the inner life in the White House and explicitly address political issues such as international crises, election campaigns, and legislative processes. The series in this cluster also score high on the degree of realism. Whereas the thriller and nonpolitical TV series clusters show high degrees of realism only for time and place, this cluster contains realistic references on all indicators. It relates to times slightly in the past and to clearly identifiable places, but, above all, it relates to real events and—even more so—to real characters.

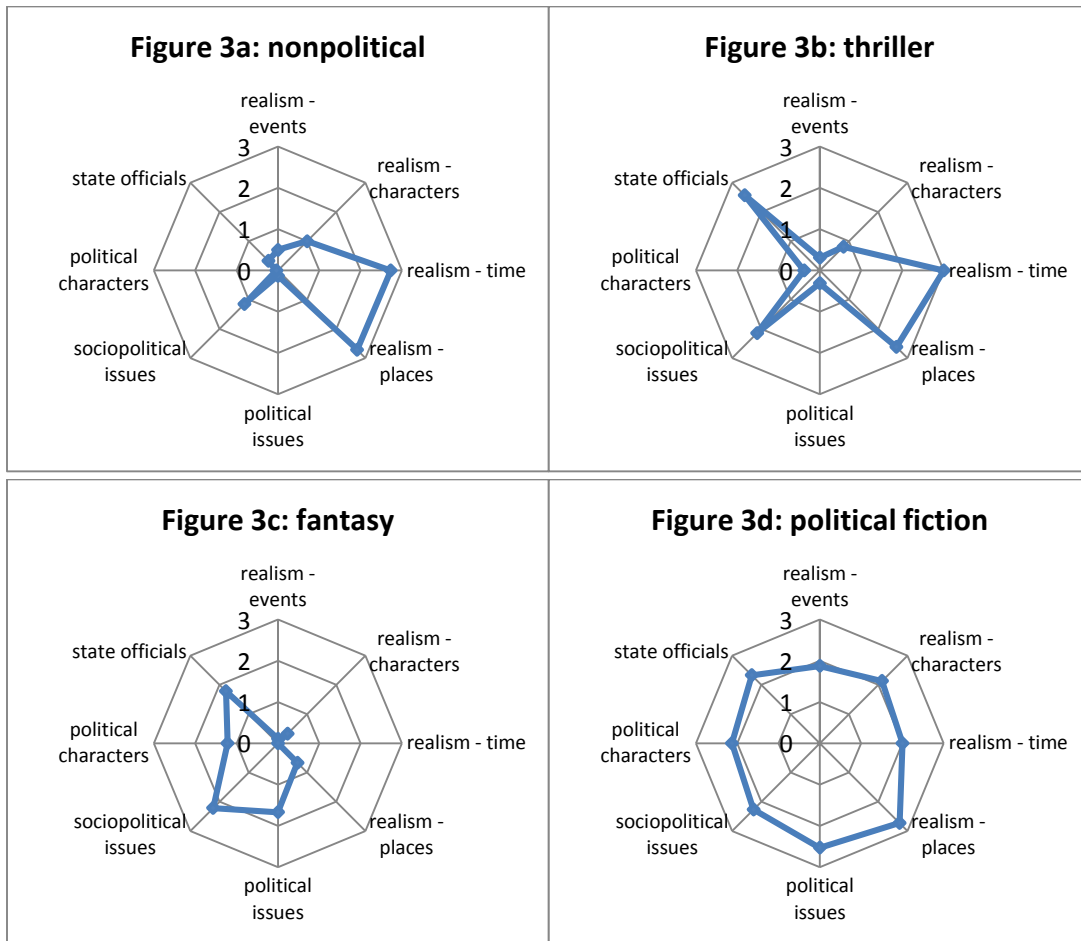


Figure 3. Cluster profiles for TV series.

Classification of Movies

The 114 movies considered in this analysis were also grouped into clusters (see Figure 4; also see Tables A2 and A4 in the Appendix). Regarding movies, six clusters were detected. Three of the six clusters were similar to the first three clusters identified for TV series. The first cluster included 37 movies and is referred to as nonpolitical movies because it shows very low scores for all political indicators except for sociopolitical issues, which received a moderate score. Regarding the realism indicators, the picture is divided: While the movies show a high degree of realism for time and place, they score low on events and characters. This indicates that the plots are developed to take place in the present and at clearly identifiable locations, but they do not relate to real events or characters. Instead, these aspects of reality are completely fictitious. This pattern of low degrees of politics and a divided picture in terms of realism parallels the nonpolitical TV series cluster. Similar to the nonpolitical TV series cluster, this movie cluster

deals with completely fictitious and nonpolitical characters, but the plot is staged in the present and at an identifiable location (e.g., *American Beauty*, *Good Will Hunting*, and *Finding Nemo*).

The second cluster parallels the thriller cluster detected for TV series. It includes 24 movies and portrays state officials and sociopolitical issues more than political actors and political issues and is paired with the divided picture in terms of the level of realism. Examples for this thriller cluster are *The Silence of the Lambs*, *The Bourne Ultimatum*, and *Seven*. *The Silence of the Lambs*, for example, features FBI-trainee Clarice Starling, who tries to convict a serial killer with the help of Hannibal Lector, an imprisoned cannibal. The movie is set in clearly identifiable cities in the United States and shows no deviations between the time of production and the time the fictional plot takes place. The plot and the characters, however, show little reference to real-life characters and events.

The third movie cluster contains 12 films reflecting a profile similar to the fantasy cluster for TV series. The movies in this cluster show a low level of realism on all four realism indicators (see the above-mentioned example of the TV series *Futurama*). With regard to political intensity, however, the movies score lower than the TV series in the fantasy cluster on all indicators except for political characters. *Star Trek*, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and *The Beauty and the Beast* are typical examples for this cluster.

Three more clusters regard plots set in the past. They concern movies on past wars and conflicts ($n = 24$), movies on the explicitly political past ($n = 6$), and movies on the nonpolitical past ($n = 11$). Movies in the past wars and conflicts cluster have high levels of sociopolitical issues rather than political issues, and state officials rather than political actors dominate the picture. Political issues, however, show moderate scores, which points to the manifest political dimension of war. Realism is very low regarding time (with the stories mostly taking place 50 years or more before the movie was filmed). Realism scores are high regarding the fictionalized events and very high regarding the plot location. *Saving Private Ryan*, *In the Name of the Father*, and *Life Is Beautiful* are good examples to illustrate these characteristics. While *Saving Private Ryan* and *Life Is Beautiful* are set during World War II, the drama *In the Name of the Father* takes place at the height of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. It is based on the true story of the four people who were wrongly convicted for the IRA's Guildford pub bombings and was filmed in original places such as Kilmainham Jail in Dublin.

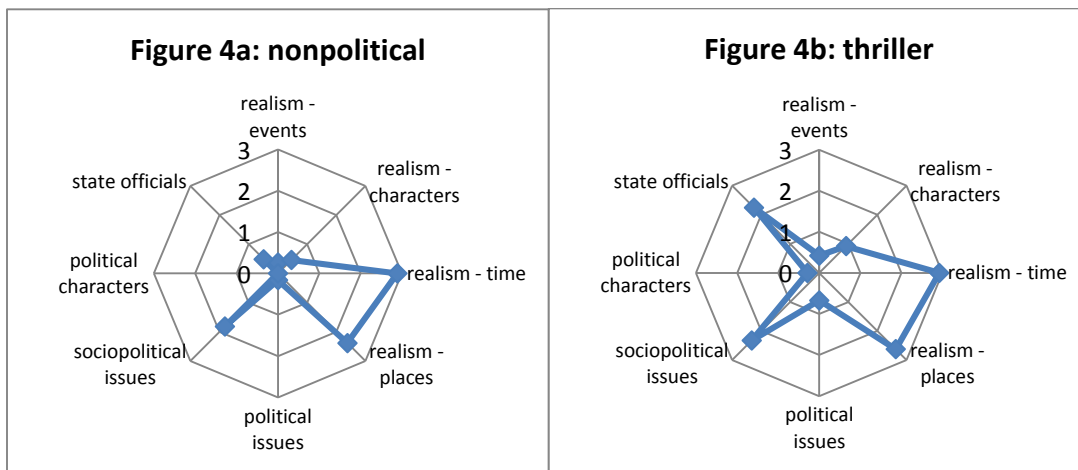
The movies in the political past cluster are characterized by low degrees of sociopolitical issues and high degrees of political issues. Accordingly, the share of genuinely political actors outweighs the share of state officials. The plots tend to be located in the past, and the movies in this cluster show strong references to real events and characters. Examples for this cluster are *Braveheart*, which portrays 13th-century Scottish warrior William Wallace; the historical drama *Gladiator*, with the fictionalization of Roman Emperor Commodus; and *The King's Speech*, which tells the life story of British King George VI.

Finally, movies in the nonpolitical past cluster contain almost no political references in the plots. Even sociopolitical issues are dealt with only rarely. Although the cluster scores very low on all four indicators of political intensity, the degree of realism is moderate. Compared to the other two clusters characterized by a setting in the past, the plots of movies in this cluster are mainly located in the more recent past. They show references to real events and characters and are set in real places. Typical

examples are *Amélie*, *3 Idiots*, and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*. The latter is a biographical drama about French journalist Bauby. It shows Bauby's life after suffering a severe stroke that completely paralyzed him and left him in a state where his only way to communicate was through blinking his left eye.

As indicated by the parallelism between three clusters of TV series and movies, the two different formats of fictional TV entertainment show considerable similarities. Both samples include nonpolitical plots, thrillers, and fantasy with nonpolitical productions accounting for the main share. However, two differences between TV series and movies stand out. Only TV series show a political fiction cluster. The respective series deal with political issues and political characters, which is most clearly embodied in *The West Wing*. A possible equivalent to the political fiction cluster of the TV series would be fictional presidential films (e.g., Miles-Bolam & Bolam, 2011)—although they often focus on the president in his private role rather than in his daily political work (e.g., *Airforce One*, *Dave*, *The American President*, *Mars Attacks*). However, these movies did not receive sufficient scores in the IMDb and are thus not included in our sample.

Further differences between movies and TV series relate to the dominance of the past in movies. Even though many movies feature political references, the plots are mostly located in the past, often decades before the time of the production. This characteristic is revealed in two clusters. The respective movies divide into the clusters past wars and conflicts and political past. References to the past are also found in nonpolitical plots, and the nonpolitical past cluster illustrates this type of movies. There are no parallels to these clusters in TV series.



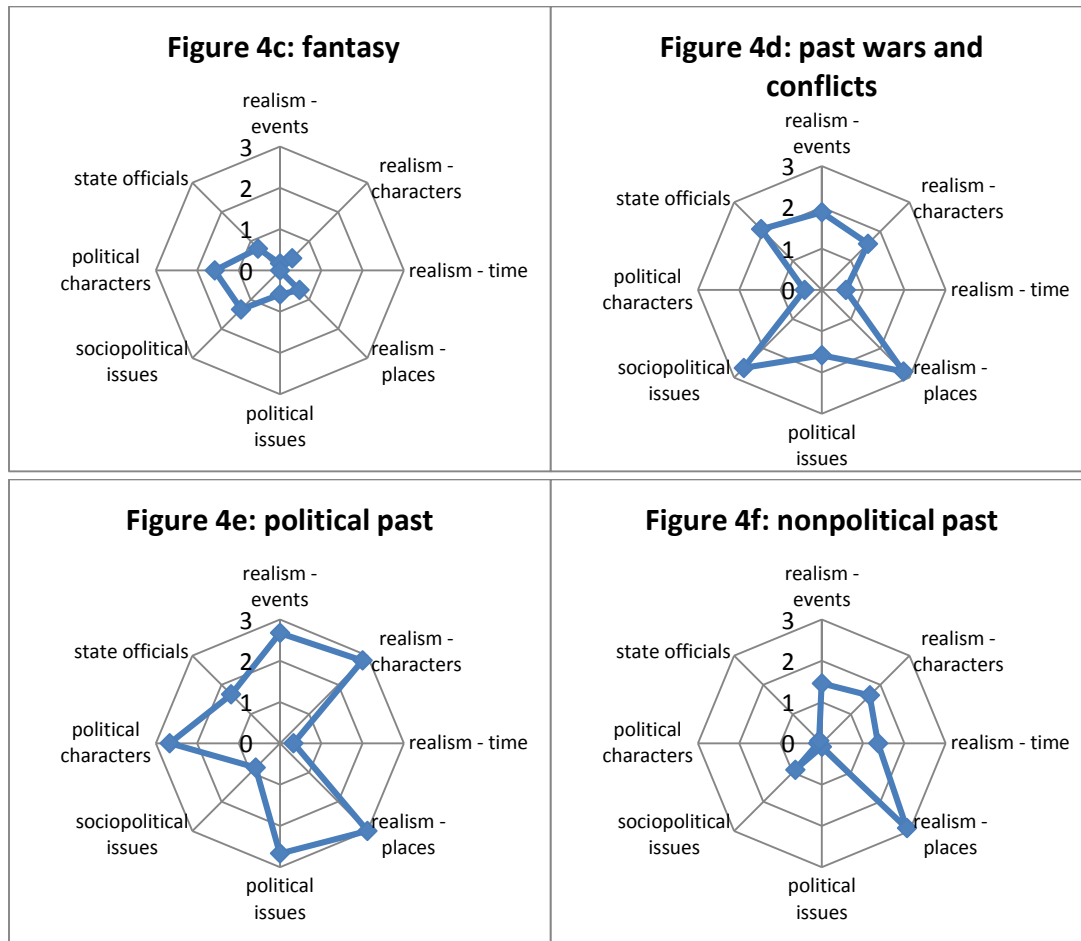


Figure 4. Cluster profiles for movies.

Summary and Discussion

This article reveals the internal structure of the heterogeneous field of fictional entertainment with regard to the portrayal of politics drawn in these productions. Cluster analyses of more than 200 fictional productions showed four types of TV series and six types of movies. The analyses were based on eight indicators for political intensity and degree of realism. The similarities between TV series and movies point to robust patterns regarding the key features that constitute political intensity and realism. Nonpolitical fiction, thrillers, and fantasy represent the crucial types of fictional entertainment, accounting for roughly three-quarters of the total sample.

The movies stand out through their focus on the past. Movies set in the past comprise three of six clusters—a pattern not seen among TV series. The high degree of heterogeneity reflected in the larger number of clusters is another feature that distinguishes movies from TV series. The findings suggest that the market for movies sustains a greater diversity than the market for TV series. It may be assumed that movies reach more diverse segments of the audience via movie theaters or DVDs, whereas TV series, notwithstanding the multiplication and diversification of TV channels, are still produced to reach the widest possible audience.

The classification presented in this article extends previous attempts to organize the diversity of fictional productions, because it is based on empirical measurement and analysis. It also advances the state of the art on the conceptual level. Although political intensity has been considered in previous typologies, degree of realism has not been used as a dimension for the classification of entertainment content. We had assumed stronger effects from fictional productions that embed the plot in a realistic setting than from depictions of politics disconnected from current reality. Yet evidence is weak considering the effects of realism in the political realm, so future research needs to test this assumption. Using degree of realism as an additional dimension for the classification of fictional entertainment brings up another question with regard to historical plots. TV series and movies about past events (e.g., World War II) score low on the realism of time indicator. This does not mean that these fictional productions do not portray a *historical* era realistically. Rather, it indicates that they do not reflect current reality and, as such, are unlikely to affect the picture of *current* politics. With regard to the three movie clusters relating to the past, the time frame should be considered to present a dimension by itself.

The generalizability of our findings might be limited, because our sample is dominated by U.S. productions. This is due to the popularity criterion that we applied to our sample of *international* TV series and movies. It reflects the fact that U.S. productions dominate the global entertainment industry. It therefore seems reasonable to generalize the results to most parts of the world. Nonetheless, it should be kept in mind that our typology is based on internationally known and widely popular TV series and movies and not on a representative sample of fictional productions in general. An analysis of a representative sample might show different distributions within the clusters and might even reveal a different set of clusters. Additional empirical material could thus contribute to a more differentiated picture. The instrument developed for the international sample can easily be applied to any other sample with large numbers of fictional productions. It would be worthwhile to investigate whether the detected patterns can be replicated for fictional entertainment from countries with more authoritarian political systems and different cultural backgrounds or for movies and series from earlier decades. Since the instrument is highly flexible, further analyses might as well consider selected indicators only. If, for instance, the research focus is on *institutional* politics, political issues and actors can be defined narrowly to exclude sociopolitical issues and state officials.

The flexibility of the instrument also makes extension possible with additional indicators. The structure of the field of fictional entertainment revealed in this analysis is a result of the indicators applied. Political intensity points to the share of political references in the productions, which constitutes a reasonable operationalization with regard to the basic features of portrayals of politics. However, the respective indicators mainly relate to issues and actors that are considered political, which restricts the

presentation of politics to the centrality of politics. Political attitudes of the main characters (e.g., approval of the political system) as well as the performance of the political system (e.g., politicians as hard-working and upright or as corrupt and power-obsessed) are not considered. These additional characteristics, however, regard the evaluative dimension of the representation of politics. They are likely to affect the audience's beliefs and attitudes such as political cynicism, evaluations of politicians, or Western democracy in general.

Future Research: From Typology to Theory

Besides applying the instrument to different samples of fictional material and introducing additional indicators, including evaluations of the depicted political systems and political actors, future research faces an even greater challenge: the step from typology to theory. Typologies structure the field and thereby help us understand new phenomena, but they are not part of theorizing. Rather, they represent the necessary foundation for theory building. The typology of fictional entertainment programs presented in this article offers three promising starting points for theory building.

First, theorizing may focus on the *content*, or, more specifically, on the internal logic of the representation of politics in fictional entertainment. To deepen our understanding of the mechanism and conditions of production in fictional entertainment, we must investigate how the political conditions of the country in which the program is developed affect the depiction of politics. Does the representation of politics reflect the political system, or does it deviate from it, and how does that differ between the types of fictional entertainment? Further, similar to explanations of news selection in journalism, it may be asked which particular features from the political domain are likely to be fed into the fictional story and who is in charge of the respective decisions. It may be assumed that the different types of movies and TV series follow different content logics. What are common features of the representation of politics in these types of movies and series, and where do they differ? This point is relevant to both of the indicators used in our typology and to the additional indicators addressing the more evaluative dimension.

Second, theoretical approaches may focus on the *audience* of the particular types of fictional programs. Theoretical efforts should address the following questions: Does the audience follow the segmentation suggested by the content clusters, or does it spread evenly across the different types of movies and TV series? Are heavy viewers of one type of program also heavy viewers of other types of fictional productions? If the audience divides along the clusters, what characterizes the specific audiences that are attracted to the different types of TV series and movies? Are preferences for particular types of fictional programs due to sociodemographics, political interest, or political socialization? How are fictional entertainment use in general and the use of particular types of movies and series related to the use of information programs? Do individuals who watch a great deal of fiction with high levels of political intensity and realism watch news and public affairs programs as well, or is fictional entertainment their only source of political information? It is obvious that the individual patterns of fictional entertainment use imply corresponding patterns of content encountered by the users. We need to investigate the size and composition of the audiences of the different types of movies and TV series to assess the societal impact this kind of media use might have.

Finally, theorizing may focus on the *effects* dimension of the representation of politics in fictional entertainment. Given the different types of movies and TV series with their varying degrees of political intensity and realism and given the different usage of these programs in terms of frequency and preferences for different types, the effects of watching fictional entertainment are likely to vary considerably. Theorizing must consider the diversity of types and usages and assess which types of movies and TV series affect which political beliefs and attitudes under which conditions of media use. Although cultivation theory already considers fictional entertainment as a potential source of effects, approaches regarding political effects such as priming, agenda setting, and knowledge gap will need to be extended to fictional sources. So far, few studies in political communication research have considered fiction (e.g., Holbert et al., 2003; Holbrook & Hill, 2005).

The focus of this article is on the development of a typology. However, in sketching out paths from typology to theory, we hope to encourage theory building in future research activity. We believe that the subject of politics in fictional entertainment merits serious theoretical attention by scholars on media content and its producers as well as by audience and media effects research. Relating the types of movies and series detected in our analysis to theoretical considerations on content, audience, and effects can be a first step in this direction.

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Appendix

Table A1. List of TV Series.

Cluster	Title	Years	Country
Cluster 1	30 Rock	2006-	USA
	American Horror Story	2011-	USA
	Angel	1999-2004	USA
	Arrested Development	2003-2006	USA
	Batman: The Animated Series	1992-1995	USA
	Buffy the Vampire Slayer	1997-2003	USA
	Californication	2007-	USA
	Community	2009-	USA
	Curb Your Enthusiasm	2000-	USA
	Dead like Me	2003-2004	USA
	Deadwood	2004-206	USA
	Dragon Ball Z	1989-1996	JAP
	Eastbound & Down	2009-	USA
	Entourage	2004-2011	USA
	Extras	2005-2007	GBR
	Frasier	1993-2004	USA
	Freaks and Geeks	1999-2000	USA
	Friday Night Lights	2006-2011	USA
	Friends	1994-2004	USA
	House, M.D.	2004-2012	USA
	How I Met Your Mother	2005-	USA
	It's always sunny in Philadelphia	2005-	USA
	Leyla İle Mecnun	2011--	TUR
	Lost	2004-2010	USA
	Louie	2010-	USA
	Mad Men	2007-	USA
	Married with Children	1987-1997	USA
	Misfits	2009-	GBR
	Modern Family	2009-	USA
	Mr. Bean	1990-1995	GBR
	Pretty Little Liars	2010-	USA
	Revenge	2011-	USA
	Scrubs	2001-2010	USA
Seinfeld	1989-1998	USA	
Shameless	2011-	USA	
Six Feet Under	2001-2005	USA	

	Skins	2007-	GBR
	Sons of Anarchy	2008-	USA
	Spaced	1999-2001	GBR
	Suits	2011-	USA
	Supernatural	2005-	USA
	That '70s Show	1998-2006	USA
	The Big Bang Theory	2007-	USA
	The Inbetweeners	2008-2010	GBR
	The IT Crowd	2006-2010	GBR
	The Office	2001-2003	GBR
	The Vampire Diaries	2009-	USA
	True Blood	2008-	USA
Cluster 2	Archer	2009-	USA
	Arrow	2012-	USA
	Bones	2005-	USA
	Breaking Bad	2007-	USA
	Castle	2009-	USA
	Chuck	2007-2012	USA
	Criminal Minds	2005-	USA
	Death Note	2006-2007	JAP
	Dexter	2006-	USA
	Family Guy	1999-	USA
	Fringe	2008-	USA
	Justified	2010-	USA
	Law and Order: Special Victims Unit	1999-	USA
	Once upon a Time	2011-	USA
	Oz	1997-2003	USA
	Prison Break	2005-2009	USA
	Psych	2006-	USA
	Sherlock	2010-	USA
	Stargate SG-1	1997-2007	USA
	The Mentalist	2008-	USA
The Sopranos	1999-2007	USA	
The Walking Dead	2010-	USA	
The X-Files	1993-2002	USA	
Twin Peaks	1990-1991	USA	
Veronica Mars	2004-2007	USA	
White Collar	2009-	USA	
Cluster 3	Avatar: The Last Airbender	2005-2008	USA
	Battlestar Galactica	2004-2009	USA
	Cowboy Bebop	1998-1999	JAP

	Doctor Who	2005–	GBR
	Firefly	2002–2003	USA
	Futurama	1999–	USA
	Game of Thrones	2011–	USA
	Star Trek: The Next Generation	1987–1994	USA
	The Legend of Korra	2012–	USA
Cluster 4	24	2001–2010	USA
	Boardwalk Empire	2010–	USA
	Downton Abbey	2010–	GBR
	Homeland	2011–	USA
	Jericho	2006–2008	USA
	Parks and Recreation	2009–	USA
	Person of Interest	2011–	USA
	Rome	2005–2007	USA
	South Park	1997–	USA
	Spartacus: Blood and Sand	2010–2013	USA
	The Newsroom	2012–	USA
	The Simpsons	1989–	USA
	The Tudors	2007–2010	IRL
	The West Wing	1999–2006	USA
The Wire	2002–2008	USA	

Table A2. List of Movies.

Cluster	Title	Year	Country
Cluster 1	12 Monkeys	1995	USA
	American Beauty	1999	USA
	American History X	1998	USA
	Amores Perros	2000	MEX
	Black Swan	2010	USA
	Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind	2004	USA
	Fight Club	1999	USA
	Finding Nemo	2003	USA
	Good Will Hunting	1997	USA
	Gran Torino	2008	USA
	Groundhog Day	1993	USA
	Jurassic Park	1993	USA
	Kill Bill Vol. 1	2003	USA
	Life of Pi	2012	USA
	Lock, Stock & Two Smoking Barrels	1998	GBR

	Matrix	1999	USA
	Memento	2000	USA
	Million Dollar Baby	2004	USA
	Monsters, Inc.	2001	USA
	Oldboy	2003	KOR
	Pulp Fiction	1994	USA
	Ratatouille	2007	USA
	Requiem for a Dream	2000	USA
	Snatch	2000	GBR
	Spirited Away	2001	JAP
	Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring	2003	KOR
	Taare Zameen Par	2007	IND
	The Avengers	2012	USA
	The Perks of Being a Wallflower	2012	USA
	The Sixth Sense	1999	USA
	The Truman Show	1998	USA
	The Wrestler	2008	USA
	Toy Story	1995	USA
	Toy Story 3	2010	USA
	Trainspotting	1996	GBR
	Up	2009	USA
	Warrior	2011	USA
Cluster 2	A Separation	2011	IRN
	Batman Begins	2005	USA
	Departed	2006	USA
	District 9	2009	USA
	Fargo	1996	USA
	Harry Potter & the Deathly Hollows	2011	GBR
	Heat	1995	USA
	Incendies	2010	CAN
	Inception	2010	USA
	Internal Affairs	2002	HKG
	La Haine	1995	FRA
	Léon - The Professional	1994	FRA
	Mystic River	2003	USA
	Reservoir Dogs	1992	USA
	Seven	1995	USA
	Slumdog Millionaire	2008	GBR
	Terminator 2 - Judgment Day	1991	USA
	The Bourne Ultimatum	2007	USA
	The Dark Knight	2008	USA

	The Dark Knight Rises	2012	USA
	The Lion King	1994	USA
	The Secret in Their Eyes	2009	ARG
	The Silence of the Lambs	1991	USA
	The Usual Suspects	1995	USA
Cluster 3	How to Train Your Dragon	2010	USA
	Howl's Moving Castle	2004	USA
	Pan's Labyrinth	2006	ESP
	Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl	2003	USA
	Princess Mononoke	1997	JAP
	Star Trek	2009	USA
	The Beauty and the Beast	1991	USA
	The Hobbit - An Unexpected Journey	2012	USA
	The Lord of the Rings - The Fellowship of the Ring	2001	USA
	The Lord of the Rings - The Return of the King	2002	USA
	The Lord of the Rings - The Two Towers	2003	USA
	Wall E	2008	USA
Cluster 4	Casino	1995	USA
	City of God	2002	BRA
	Django Unchained	2012	USA
	Forrest Gump	1994	USA
	Goodfellas	1990	USA
	Hotel Ruanda	2004	USA
	In the Name of the Father	1993	USA
	Inglorious Basterds	2008	USA
	Ip Man	2008	CHN
	L.A. Confidential	1997	USA
	Life Is Beautiful	1997	ITA
	Memories of Murder	2003	KOR
	No Country for Old Men	2007	USA
	Saving Private Ryan	1998	USA
	Schindler's List	1993	USA
	Shutter Island	2010	USA
	Sin City	2005	USA
	The Green Mile	1999	USA
	The Help	2011	USA
	The Pianist	2002	FRA
	The Shawshank Redemption	1994	USA
	There Will Be Blood	2007	USA
Unforgiven	1992	USA	
V for Vendetta	2006	USA	

Cluster 5	A Beautiful Mind	2001	USA
	Braveheart	1995	USA
	Downfall	2004	GER
	Gladiator	2000	USA
	The King's Speech	2010	GBR
	The Lives of Others	2006	GER
Cluster 6	3 Idiots	2009	IND
	Amélie	2001	FRA
	Big Fish	2003	USA
	Donnie Darko	2001	USA
	Into the Wild	2007	USA
	Mary & Max	2009	AUS
	Prestige	2006	USA
	The Artist	2011	FRA
	The Big Lebowski	1998	USA
	The Diving Bell and the Butterfly	2007	FRA
	The Intouchables	2011	FRA

Table A3. Indicators TV Series.

			Realism				Political Intensity			
			Events	Characters	Time	Place	Political Issues	Socio-Pol. Issues	Political Characters	State Officials
1	Nonpolitical (n = 48)	Mean (SD)	0.50 (0.62)	1.00 (1.01)	2.73 (0.77)	2.71 (0.46)	0.13 (0.33)	1.15 (0.99)	0.04 (0.20)	0.33 (0.52)
2	Thriller (n = 26)	Mean (SD)	0.31 (0.47)	0.81 (0.63)	3.00 (0.00)	2.62 (0.57)	0.31 (0.47)	2.15 (0.61)	0.38 (0.57)	2.58 (0.50)
3	Fantasy (n = 9)	Mean (SD)	0.11 (0.33)	0.33 (0.50)	0.00 (0.00)	0.67 (0.50)	1.67 (0.71)	2.22 (0.44)	1.22 (0.97)	1.78 (0.67)
4	Political Fiction (n = 15)	Mean (SD)	1.87 (0.83)	2.13 (0.74)	2.00 (1.46)	2.73 (0.46)	2.53 (0.52)	2.27 (0.70)	2.13 (0.74)	2.33 (0.72)

Table A4 Indicators Movies.

			Realism				Political Intensity			
			Events	Characters	Time	Place	Political Issues	Socio-Pol. Issues	Political Characters	State Officials
1	Nonpolitical (n = 37)	Mean (SD)	0.27 (0.51)	0.46 (0.51)	2.89 (0.39)	2.38 (0.79)	0.16 (0.37)	1.81 (0.91)	0.00 (0.00)	0.49 (0.61)
2	Thriller (n = 24)	Mean (SD)	0.42 (0.58)	0.92 (0.72)	2.92 (0.28)	2.63 (0.58)	0.67 (0.70)	2.33 (0.48)	0.29 (0.69)	2.25 (0.79)
3	Fantasy (n = 12)	Mean (SD)	0.17 (0.39)	0.42 (0.67)	0.00 (0.00)	0.67 (0.78)	0.58 (0.52)	1.33 (0.78)	1.58 (0.90)	0.75 (0.62)
4	Past wars & conflicts (n = 24)	Mean (SD)	1.88 (0.17)	1.58 (1.02)	0.58 (0.58)	2.79 (0.42)	1.58 (0.83)	2.67 (0.48)	0.42 (0.72)	2.08 (0.97)
5	Political Past (n = 6)	Mean (SD)	2.67 (0.52)	2.83 (0.41)	0.33 (0.52)	3.00 (0.00)	2.67 (0.52)	0.83 (0.75)	2.67 (0.52)	1.67 (1.37)
6	Nonpolitical Past (n = 11)	Mean (SD)	1.45 (1.04)	1.64 (1.03)	1.36 (0.92)	2.91 (0.30)	.09 (0.30)	0.91 (0.70)	0.09 (0.30)	0.09 (0.30)