

The Negative Effect of Cartoons on Children

- An Empirical Study -

التأثير السلبي لأفلام الكرتون على الأطفال -دراسة ميدانية-

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Abstract:

The research deals with the negative effect of cartoons on children. Psychologists have proven the fact that a child mind is very fast in acquiring and imitating to anything they are exposed to. The main aim of this paper is to investigate the effect of cartoons on children between the ages of 05 to 10 years old. The data collected from the interviews show that watching cartoons has big impact on children minds and values and behaviors. Cartoons are even showing numerous acts of violence, verbal abuse, offensive language, sexual content and fantasy.

ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن التأثير السلبي لأفلام الكرتون على الأطفال ما بين 05 إلى 10 سنوات. حيث يؤكد الباحثون في مجال علم النفس على أن الطفل لديه قابلية كبيرة لاكتساب وتقليد أي شيء يتعرض له. والبيانات التي تم جمعها من خلال المقابلة أظهرت أن لمشاهدة أفلام الكرتون تأثير كبير على أذهان الأطفال وقيمهم وسلوكهم. فمعظم هذه الأفلام يعرض عدد هائل من الأفعال العنيفة والكلام غير المهذب وبلغة بذيئة، بالإضافة إلى عرض محتوى جنسي والإفراط في استخدام الخيال.

Introduction:

Cartoons, as a mean of entertainment, are the most viewed programs by children. According to Peduk (2012), children at very early age, before five, prefer to watch simplified short films, but children going to school are attached to long topical film series (p 225).

Cartoons channels are nowadays available in many languages. Arab cartoons channels depend a lot on the translated cartoons that carry different cultures and values from the Arabic culture and moral and social values. By watching those intercultural cartoons, children will be influenced in a negative way.

The children's minds have a big capacity of storing everything they experience even from exposing to TV programs. Sharmin in her article: "Role of cartoon: a brief discussion on cartoon put an impact on children", claimed that: "It is proved that with the help of cognitive ability a child can memorize any type of image." (2014, p 2) Those things do not stick only in the children memories, but they appear also in their behaviors and speeches. According to Maqsood & Amer: "children mind is quite receptive and they adapt things faster. At such innocent age, child mind is unable to differentiate between the positive and negative perspectives of things."(p 4)

Children tend to imitate what they see, in this point Peduk argued that: "during the development period, children learn best by mimicry. A child mimics the plots they observe around themselves. They mimic some people more than others" (2012, p 225).

According to Pandit & Kulkarni "Psychologists emphasize the negative effects of cartoons...kids who watch cartoons 3 - 4 hours a day are more inclined to brutality. In addition, underestimation of cognitive capacities, disparity from substances, and an increment of negative conduct may create throughout the span of time" (2012, p 8). When children are exposed to a violent or sexual or fantasy cartoons, this will affect their minds, their way of thinking and their behaviors. This happens especially with the absence of the parents' control of the child.

Cartoon heroes have a great impact on children. Kids try always to play the role of those heroes in the actual world, so violence and aggression viewed on TV will appear in the children behaviors. (Peduk, 2012, p 225). Pandit & Kulkarni pointed out that "As a child growing up he wanted to be the super heroes in the cartoons. The children are encouraged to try the same things that they saw their favorite write hero do in the cartoon" (2012, p 14).

Literature Review:

Bjorkqvist & Lagerspetz (1985) in their study: "Children's Experience of Three Types of Cartoon at Two Age Levels" investigated how children of both sexes in two age groups, some of whom had abundant aggressive fantasies, experienced three types of cartoons. In this study, it was investigated how children cognitively, ethically, and emotionally experienced three cartoons of different types. A number of issues were addressed. It seems likely that the way children experience films may be an important factor in determining the way and the extent to which their subsequent behavior is affected by these films. Three cartoons were shown to 87 children at two age levels: 5-6 years and 9 years. The children's experience was assessed in interviews. The younger children experienced the cartoons in a fragmentary manner and not as a continuous story, understood less of the cartoons, and tended to base their moral judgments of a character's behavior on whether or not they identified with that character. Six months later, the younger children remembered best those scenes that had made them the most anxious earlier. A subgroup of children with abundant aggressive fantasies had a lower level of moral reasoning than the other children, preferred violent scenes, became less anxious while watching them and tended to give illogical explanations for the behavior of the cartoon characters. The degree of anxiety provoked by a cartoon depended not on the amount of explicit violence shown but on the way the violence was presented. One cartoon, which contained no explicit violence, was considered the most frightening one due to its sound effects.

Kirsh (2006) in his manuscript: "Cartoon violence and aggression in youth" reviewed the literature concerning the effects of animated violence on aggressive behavior in youth. It began with an overview of the research on children's and adolescents' perceptions of violence in cartoons. Next, the effects of cartoon violence on aggressive behavior across development are reviewed. In each section, the importance of the presence (or absence) of comedic elements in animated violence is addressed. Moreover, throughout the review, the potential influence of development is considered. Finally, a potential mechanism for reducing the negative influence of cartoon violence on youth is considered.

Gökçe Arslan (2010) in their paper: "The effect of cartoon movies on children's gender development" analyzed the cartoons in which complicated gender role models are presented critically and propose some solutions to this problem. Many TV programs reflecting the daily experiences of people includes gender discrimination which is a social problem. Gender discrimination is not a problem which is solely seen in

children's programs. It is seen that females are being represented weaker compared to males in terms of many aspects in TV programs viewed by adults. In this study, cartoons among the TV programs for children had been handled. Under their innocent appearance, cartoons, including many wrong messages, had been observed as transferring gender stereotypes. Especially in cartoons before 1980, female characters had been shown at lower status in terms of profession than males. Male characters were more in number and used to appear more frequently on screen. Males were prioritized. Children at tender ages are exposed to unequal representations of gender. Although there is little improvement in representation of female characters, it cannot be claimed that this problem is completely solved. Gender discrimination in cartoons is ominous since it is inevitable for children, who are not aware of the difference between reality and fiction, to internalize stereotypes related to gender roles in cartoons. Many negative images reflected on screen are in fact inputs from the real life. Female characters' representation in active positions in work life can provide reduction of misrepresentations. Producers' careful approach to this subject can also help children make right choices in the future.

Sudha (2011) in her paper "factors influencing the change in behavior of children on viewing cartoon programs" analyzed the factors influencing the children to see cartoon programs, the effect of cartoon programs and the behavioral changes among the sample respondents. The factors, respondents age, gender, siblings, standard, board, medium and time spent for watching television have a significant relationship with the change in their behavior on viewing cartoons.

Pandit and Kulkarni (2012) in their study "Children Are Trapped in the Illusion of Cartoon Channel" examined how children become more and more violent, aggressive and addictive to cartoons. They are totally under the illusion of the cartoon.

Ergun (2012) in his article "the influence of violent TV cartoons watched by school children in turkey" demonstrated the gender-specific impact of violence-oriented television cartoons on children. The study was conducted on a total of 300 students chosen by a simple, random method applying a stratified weight in each school. As result, a significant gender difference was noted between students' favorite cartoon shows, the type of influence those shows exerted, and the ways in which students imitated the behaviors of the cartoon characters.

pedük (2012) in his article "A Study on Characteristics of Parents' TV viewing and children's opinions on the cartoons they

watched” examined the characteristics of parents’ TV viewing and children’s opinions on the cartoons they watched. The data collected using face to face interviewing method through a questionnaire. It was found that parent thought that they were affected by the cartoons that their children had been viewing for a long time. The study shows that parental TV viewing duration is between 2 and 3 hours, children watch TV with their family and half of them zap to determine the program to be watched, their decisions are taken into consideration through their family’s requests, whatever is to be watched sometimes was not decided beforehand, the channel was switched after the commercial or the program viewed finished, parents’ first preference was prime news, 67% of parents had no idea about TV viewing, it should be the broadcasting company to inform primarily, documentaries make the top of the list by 57 % followed by cartoons, domestic – foreign TV series, documentaries, news and sports programs are the ones that were allowed to watch apart from children’s programs.

Related to the cartoons that children watch, majority of parents could name a film and they also think that scenes of violence, killing, fighting, guns and harmful behaviors should be presented in a way that won’t physically harm the child and cartoons that are appropriate to watch are the ones that have educational, instructional, entertaining features developing imagination and creativity. Parents also stated that the child’s cartoons viewing duration was 2 hours at the most. Related to parents’ views on the effects of cartoons on their children they reported that 68% were sometimes affected and this effect helped them develop their imagination. It can be said that parents and children’s TV viewing duration are consistent and the most viewed cartoons include influence them and they can question as to what way this influence can be.

Nair and Thomas (2012) in their study: “A Thematic study on the cause and effects of Television Violence on Children” analyzed whether the exposure to television violence leads to real-life violent behavior among children. They spent time watching cartoons, horror movies and TV shows. Parents too don’t have any control on their off-springs. In order to do their household work and to control their children, they switch on the TV and allow their children to watch. As time passes by, they become addicted to it and start recognizing the characters. They feel that whatever is portrayed on TV is real and they start imitating those characters. Some theorists feel that watching violent movies alone will not make them violent, but stopping them from watching TV can also make them violent out of frustration. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is

a considerable amount of violence on television and that this violence on the small screen may translate into changes in attitudes, values, or behavior on the part of both younger and older viewers.

Hassan and Daniyal (2013) in their paper: “Cartoon Network and its Impact on Behavior of School Going Children: A Case Study of Bahawalpur, Pakistan” aimed to trace the impact on the behavior of the children after watching cartoon programs. Cartoon network is one of the most favorite cartoon channels for children. As cartoon network is 24 hours channel, so children spend most of their leisure time in front of it. It not only attracts the children through its contents but also inculcates some positive and negative habits in them. One of the main factors which influence the children while watching cartoons is violence. Violence is a vital part of most of the cartoon programs. Children are induced and attracted by violent content by broadcasters. The study design is survey research and non-parametric statistics is used for data analysis. This study explores the impact of violence presented in cartoons on children behavior. They not only imitate their favorite cartoon characters but even force their parents to buy the same costumes or accessories as displayed by different cartoon characters. This study also depicts this fact that the behavior of the children in class is influenced by watching different cartoon programs.

Devadas and Ravi (2013) in their article: “Cultural Impact of Television on Urban Youth - An Empirical Study”, made an effort to trace cultural implications of television on urban youth empirically in the Indian state of Karnataka. This is an empirical study on cultural impact of Television on urban youth in Karnataka. The main purpose of this study is to gain an insight as how youth make use of Television, one of the most indispensable mass media and how they adapt their culture according to their TV viewing habits.

The data analysis depicts that television has profound influence on its viewers especially on younger generations. Both young male viewers and young female viewers are susceptible to cultural impact amounting from television. This study supports the argument that men and women generally differ in their reaction to television programs. Differences in the priorities of watching various kinds of programs were found between male and female viewers. Study shows that both male and female differ in their preference for programs. Females are more inclined towards certain programs like serials, cookery shows, health, environment and science and technology. Whereas male liked certain programs like news, sports, travel, Documentaries, Quiz, etc. in an earlier

study conducted in U.K by Morley(1998) found an association between viewers gender and types of programs preferred by them. Men favored factual programs and sports and women preferred fictional, romance and local news in that order. In another study conducted in Nigeria, Horning(1993) found that men ranked news, sports and music in that order whereas women ranked news in the first position by soap operas and music. A study conducted in Hyderabad by Vijayalakshmi (2005) found that Male are more inclined towards news, sports, and educational programs where as females preferred serials, music and feature films.

The study reveals that television has an impact on cultural norms of the youth. The youth are influenced by fashion of Television characters and various cultural events like Valentine's Day, Mother's day, Akshya Tritiya etc. Also there is no significant difference between young male and female viewers, in accepting cultural norms from television. Both male and female viewers are equally susceptible to cultural implications from television

Ravi and Devadas (2013) in their article: " social impact of television on urban youth in Karnataka-an empirical study", made an effort to trace social impact of television on urban youth empirically in the Indian state of Karnataka. this study also made an effort to compare the impact of television between nuclear and joint family viewers. the study results accentuate the fact that the real impact of television on its viewers depends on its reach and accessibility, socio-economic status of the viewers and the time spent on viewing.

Baya and Mberia (2014) in their article "The Impact of Television Viewing in Influencing Adolescents Sexual Behaviour" examined the impact of television viewing in shaping adolescents sexual behavior. The paper found that sexual content in the television has a 'profound real-life effect'. This is because Sexual initiation is an important social and health issue and that portrayals of sex on entertainment Television (TV) in Kenya may contribute to precocious adolescent sex. Television viewing can either reinforce norms or offer insights into alternative ways of thinking. The paper sought to investigate TV influence on the sexual behavior of adolescents by addressing the following three fundamental concerns, (1) how television influences sexual behavior of adolescents, (2) the extent to which TV viewing may determine the sexual behavior of adolescents, and (3) the potential dangers associated with exposure to sexual content on TV. The paper found that adolescents often seek sexual information from television content rather than their parents or other adults by being attracted to programs with sexual content. The paper

concluded by focusing on the urgent need to address television influence on adolescents sexual behavior by providing them with critical interpretation and communication skills in multimedia environments.

Oyero and Oyesom (2014) in their paper: "Perceived Influence of Television Cartoons on Nigerian Children's Social Behavior" examined the influence of cartoons on Nigerian children's social behavior from the perspective of the parents and the children. Survey design was adopted. Data were collected from 100 pupils and 50 parents through questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussion. Percentages and chi Square were used for data analysis. The findings show that both children and parents share similar understanding on the influence of cartoons on children as being positive. While cartoons are said to help children's spoken English, learning inventions and good morals, as well as keep children busy among other benefits, some parents expressed that some influence of cartoons could be negative and therefore some regulations required in mitigating those negative aspects of cartoons. It is recommended that parents should make a conscious effort to monitor the cartoons that their children watching to ensure that it is appropriate to their age.

Yousaf and Shehzad and Hassan (2015) in their study: "Effects of Cartoon Network on the Behavior of School Going Children (A Case Study of Gujrat City)" aimed to highlight the psychological behavior of the children's of Pakistan after watching TV Commercials on Pakistani channels. Their study covered the detailed area of the selected research which was covering the contents of Cartoons; in this research they selected the children's of Gujrat City as sample. In this study media effects cultivation theory applied and survey method used for data collection. The study concluded that cartoon series especially Ben Ten influence the children behavior as well as their language.

Methodology:

This research was a descriptive study, and it was conducted in three primary schools in Oum El Bouaghi, Algeria. A 04 question instrument was used for data collection, using face – to – face interviews with pupils aged from 05 to 10 years old.

The sample size for the study was 120 respondents, and in order to remove any ambiguity they were entertained one by one so that they might not confuse and can easily respond to questions.

The main questions are:

1. What are your preferred cartoon channels?
2. What are your best cartoons?

3. What do you like in those cartoons? Why?
4. Talk about your preferred heroes. If you were in place of those heroes, what would you do?

Discussion and Analysis:

The purpose of this study was to investigate the negative effect of cartoons on young children, especially on their way of thinking, behaviors, and social values. The analysis of the children respondents showed that 75 % of them consider MBC3 as preferred channel, 20 % prefer to watch CN in Arabic, and 05% prefer Space Toon. The children were asked to mention the cartoon program that they watched the most, they answered that the most viewed and the best cartoons are: Tom and Jerry, Ben 10, Spider Man, Sponge Bob Square pants, Gumball, the cyborg soldiers... Most of these cartoons are exclusively shown on MBC3 and CN in Arabic. All these cartoons are foreign and therefore the content would be foreign based which means that the culture of the western world is portrayed very strongly in these cartoons.

The information gathered from the interviews was grouped under the following headings:

1. Violence:

Much of the violence that occurs in the children's answers falls under the umbrella of "physical violence" and with the use of weapons; such as killing, fighting, fire, explosion, pushing, kidnapping... They are influenced by cartoons such as: "the cyborg soldiers", "fruity robot", "Spiderman", "ninja turtles", "the Sara Jane adventure", "Ben 10"...

2. Verbal abuse and offensive language:

The children used in their answers many words that reflect verbal abuse and offensive language such as stupid, idiot, mad, loser, donkey, go to hell... this was clearly appeared in almost all cartoons.

3. Magic and fantasy:

This was represented by supernatural powers and imaginary world such as ghosts, robots, aliens, monsters... Children made a link between those abnormal phenomena and the following cartoons and programs: "Sabrina", "a kind of magic", "tricky TV", "wizards of Waverly place", "YU-GI"...

4. Sexual content:

This includes falling in love with someone; it is always the main character. In addition to the show of the underwear and the inappropriate

clothing to the Arabic culture and to the children age; as in “Totally spies!” and “Sponge bob square pants”...

5. Trick and deception:

most of children admire the tricks made by the heroes, especially when watching “Kid VS kat”, “jimmy two- shoes”, “duck doogers”...

Conclusion:

This study showed that children were influenced negatively by foreign cartoons. These foreign cartoons have content that differ from Arabic culture and values. The lack of Arabic production of cartoons is one of the major reasons why the children are negatively influenced by the foreign cartoons.

Cartoons have a great influence on children. The negative effects of cartoons and programs watched by children are numerous, and do not reflect what really happens in everyday life. Cartoons are even showing numerous acts of violence and most of this violence is done by the "heroes". Most of cartoons show violence towards others. The children see the good guys doing these things and think it's appropriate. Sexual innuendo is also present in cartoons; with the exposure to sexual content children will be sexually active earlier.

According to these results, children should watch cartoons under families' control. Cartoons should be analyzed. So parents should be careful to keep their children away from those that are full of violence, Verbal abuse and sexual content and fantasy. Parents should observe their children when watching cartoons and then ask them questions about what they have just viewed and how they feel about what they have just seen. This will help determine if the children have been affected by what they watched negatively or positively.

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