

Growing up with Television: the Impact of Television Cartoons on Children's Behavior in Anuradhapura District

**R.G.S.K. Udayangani ^a, D.A.M. Perera ^b and
H.A.B.W. Hettiarachchi ^c**

*^a Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihinthale, Sri Lanka
udayanganisnj@gmail.com*

*^b Wayamba University of Sri Lanka, Kuliyaipitiya, Sri Lanka
methsila240@yahoo.com*

*^c Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihinthale, Sri Lanka
buddhikarjt@gmail.com*

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

Children spend most of their leisure time in front of televisions, watching cartoon programs. The meaning of the “cartoon” is strong, heavy paper or pasteboard, from the Italian word “cartone” and Dutch word “karton”. A cartoonist is a visual artist who specializes in drawing cartoons. This work is often created for entertainment, political commentary or advertising. Felix the Cat was the first ever cartoon icon, which started its journey in 1920s. In the next 10 years, Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse and Pluto were introduced by Disney Cartoon Studios (Ali Hassan, 2013). Since it is the most frequent and easily accessible source of entertainment, some parents use cartoons to keep children occupied while they are busy with their work. Therefore, time which was previously spent by children on outdoor activities is now replaced with watching cartoons. Many children in Sri Lanka begin watching cartoons at an early age and by the age three or four, become enthusiastic viewers. This has become a

problem in Sri Lanka, because many children who are becoming addicted to aggressive cartoons on television have grown violent.

Many children are attracted to the content of cartoons which inculcate both positive and negative habits (Ali and Muhammad, 2013). Among others, violence features heavily in most cartoons, and children may be induced and attracted by such violent content. Hence, scholars argue that cartoons have only negative impacts on children (Kellogg, 1992; Anderson, 2003; Saturnine, 2004). Many parents are also of the view that some cartoon movies persuade children to behave antagonistically and disreputably. Alternatively, some scholars argue that cartoons have a tremendous impact in improving the cognitive aspects among school children (Alia and Roshan, 2012; Ginmann, 2003). They validate that children become more creative by watching cartoons. These contradictory versions show a research gap in this field.

Therefore, considering the importance of exploring the effects of cartoons on children's psychological development and behaviour patterns, the main objective of this study was to trace the impact of televised cartoons on the behaviour of school children in Anuradhapura district. Accordingly this research addresses the problem, "how and to what extent do cartoon films influence the behavioural pattern of school children in Anuradhapura district?"

METHODOLOGY

300 school going children of the age group 6-12 years were randomly selected from five government schools in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka as the sample of this study. Considering the sensitivity of the respondents, this study was designed as a survey, and most of the data obtained through observations. Few focus group discussions also conducted with the parents and the teachers to gather necessary information. Before starting data collection, researchers visited these schools several times and had few focus group discussions with

teachers in the primary section and with some parents. The necessary measures were also taken to minimize the influence on children's behaviour during data collection.

Different dimensions were used to measure student behaviour; students' behaviour and interactions with peers, stationary used, and the music they like. The selected children were given a few blank papers and crayons, and they were requested to draw their heroes. Further, they were given a chance to sign a song in front of other students. No instructions or guidance was provided for students; they were given maximum freedom to paint their heroes as they like. While they were painting, researchers also checked the children's possessions, such as school bags, pencil cases, lunch boxes, water bottles, cover pages of books. The main purpose of this exercise was to explore the images (i.e., of the different cartoon characters) printed on them.

The data gathered was analyzed using a non-parametric test in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 17.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Of the 300 students, most (37%) represented the age group 08 - 09 years, followed by those in the 10 - 11 age group (36%). A majority of their parents were in employed in public sector (40%) compared to private sector (21%). 29 percent were farmers.

99 %of the children accepted that they watch cartoons and 70% do so after school. The correlation coefficient (0.831, $p<.001$) reveals that most school children are imitating their favourite cartoon characters when they interact with other children. When these children were requested to entertain the peers and the audience, the majority carolled songs in cartoon films, and most of these were comparatively aggressive (.0.746, $p<.001$). They imitate the movements of different cartoon characters. A majority painted

pictures of 'Ben 10'. It was also revealed that 'Ben 10' is the most popular cartoon among school children with an average following of 28%, followed by 'Krishna' (27%), 'Weera' (25%) and Scooby doo (8%). Students prefer to watch cartoons with violence (56%), over those with educational, didactic and emotional messages (31%). Moreover, it was revealed that they force their parents to buy merchandise depicting different cartoon characters. It was observed that 86% of their possessions contained images of different cartoon characters printed on them.

Interestingly, most of these findings are consistent with the outcomes of two studies carried out by Ali and Muhammad (2013), and Alia and Roshan (2012).

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE

In the current era of powerful media, cartoon movies are the favourite television programs among school going children aged 6-12 years. Cartoons have changed drastically over the years but have lasting effects on children. This study reveals that the behaviour patterns of school children are influenced by different cartoon programs and the characters they watch. Since they have been affected by cartoons they usually watch, they like the clothes and accessories of their favourite cartoon characters. Due to their tender minds, many children try to imitate the actions performed by different characters.

Confirming the findings of Hapkiewicz and Aubrey (1971), this study produces two significant findings: (i) watching cartoons has become one of the favorite pastimes for children in Anuradhapura and cartoon watching strongly affects their attitudes and behaviour, including language and the manners of their dress and eating, (ii) cartoons and characters that contain violent behaviour have a strong impact on the behaviour of these school children. Yet, most parents are completely

unaware of the effects of cartoons on their children's psychological development, and behaviour patterns.

These findings highlight the necessity for appropriate policy measures to screen cartoon films telecast in Sri Lanka, and the way they are dubbed.

REFERENCES

- Ali Hassan, and Muhammad Daniyal, (2013), Cartoon Network and its Impact on Behavior of School Going Children: A Case Study of Bahawalpur, Pakistan, *International Journal of Management, Economics and Social Sciences*, Vol. 2(1), pp.6-11
- Alia Bibi, and Roshan Zehra, (2012), Effects of cartoons on children's psychology and behaviour patterns
- Anderson, C, A., (2003), The influence of media violence on youth, *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, December, 4 , 110
- Ginmann, M., (2003), Cartoons as information, *Journal of Information Science*, (29)1: 69-77
- Kellogg, M.A., (1992), The Toon Boom, *TV guide*, 6-8
- Saturnine, R., (2004), *The Adverse Effects of Cartoons on the Minds of our Children*, Paper presented at a Toon-agedy Conference in Estonia
- Walter G. Hapkiewicz and Aubrey H. Roden, (1971), The effect of aggressive cartons on children's interpersonal play, *Child Development*