

IMPACT OF TELEVISION CARTOON CHANNELS ON CHILDREN IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on impact of Cartoon channels on Television viewing children. Children not only watch these cartoons with interest and enthusiasm, but even try to imitate these characters. Consequently, the impact of cartoon channels on children is immense. Some research has shown that children spend more time on watching cartoons and acquiring much information not only about the type of cartoon characters, but are also familiar with their dress, actions and name of almost all major cartoon characters. Other studies suggest that watching violent cartoon shows has tremendously increased the aggressive behavior among the children, especially boys. More researches have shown that children easily learn variety of things by watching educational cartoon films. Their imagination and creativity gets enhanced. Even infants and toddlers start learning different words and their meanings. Parents have a responsibility to know what kind of cartoons their children watch. Broadcasters need to be careful while creating content for children whereas marketing companies, who have a secure market, too ought to demonstrate their responsibility.

Keywords: Cartoon; television channels; children; India; imagination; creativity; aggressive behavior; broadcasters; marketing companies and psychological research.

INTRODUCTION

A cartoon is any of the several forms of art, with varied meanings that evolved from time to time. Being main source of entertainment, cartoons are on air round the clock. Over the years, children have been watching cartoons and gradually developing interest in them. Often they watch cartoons with keen interest and attention and start developing proximity towards them.

The entertainment space for the children has evolved over the years. Channels like Cartoon

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Network, Fox Kids, Animax, Hungama TV and others were set-up to grab the attention of children and provide them a platform for fun and pleasure. Cartoon Network started broadcast in the country in 1995 and Disney Channel in 2004.

Cartoons appeal children. Research has shown that children begin watching cartoons on Television at an early age of six months and by two or three years, the children become excited and enthusiastic about these animated shows. (Jain, 2011)

Extent of interest of cartoon among the children is not only confined to the actions and characters of the cartoons, but even the dresses used by the cartoon characters appeal them. Children even remember the names of almost all the major cartoon characters and that fascinates them.

The interest and enthusiasm of the children towards the cartoon shows provides an opportunity for advertisers and marketers to reach out to the parents and grab the market. The contemporary situation in the world stands witness to this. Huge rush of customers can be witnessed on almost every store for the children.

Popularity of cartoons and animation genre can be gauged from the fact that it accounted for 85 percent of Television Viewership Ratings in 2011. Children's programming comprised 12 percent of the market and feature films two percent of the total TVR in the same year. (Nath, 2014)

Interest to watch cartoon shows has increased among the children. Gone are the days when they had to watch cartoons on Television screens, today the same is available at their fingertips. Content of the animated shows, over the years, has drastically changed. The same is bound to have its impact on the development of the children. It has become a problem because too many children are watching too much cartoons and the shows that they are watching (even if they are cartoons) have become violent and addictive. (Jain, 2011)

Studies have shown that watching animated shows has subtle but consistent impact on the growth of children. Both positive and adverse impact of the animated shows on the children has been reported and the stress has been laid that such shows should be children-friendly.

Watching too much cartoon on Television is more likely to have mental, psychological and emotional problems and even the physical injuries on eye. But at the same time most of the cartoons today are educative like Noggin and Nick Jr. host an array of shows that are intended to teach the toddlers important lessons in life. (Pandit & Kulkarni, 2012)

DEFINITION OF CARTOON

The term "cartoon" originated in the middle-ages. It was referred to humorous illustration in magazines and newspapers in the 19th century whereas in the early 20th century, it referred to comic strips and animated films. (Pandit & Kulkarni, 2012)

It has originated from the Italian word "*Cartons*" and the Dutch word "*Karton*". It is a full size drawing made on strong paper as a study or model painting, stained glass or tapes ting. (Pandit & Kulkarni, 2012)

Though it is form of two dimensional illustrated visual arts, but the specific definition of cartoon has changed over the time. Modern usage refers to a spicily non-realistic drawing or painting intended for satire or humour. Walt Disney created the first sound cartoon, the first all-color cartoon and the first animated feature length motion picture. (Pandit & Kulkarni, 2012)

With the popularity of cartoons among the children, plethora of channels airing cartoons came to the fore. *Felix the Cat*, the first ever cartoon icon, started its journey in 1920s. Within the next decade, Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse and Pluto were the cartoon characters introduced by Disney Brothers' Cartoon Studios. (Hassan & Daniyal, 2013)

CARTOON NETWORK: A BRIEF BACKGROUND

Turner Broadcasting System (TBS), one of the world's leading media companies, first launched the Cartoon Network in the United States in October 1992. Over the next few years, it was launched in Europe, Latin America and Asia Pacific regions. Soon it gained wide popularity across the world. It came to India in 1995 and gained popularity, especially in the major metros of the country.

Cartoon Network has been watched in more than 80 million homes in the United States of America and in 145 countries across the world, since August 2002. Its 68 percent audience belongs to the children within the age-group two to 17 and the remaining 32 percent belongs to the age-group of above 18 and adults. The children from six to 11 years form the core-group of the audience of the channel. (Hassan & Daniyal, 2013)

In March 1998, the Cartoon Network launched CartoonNetwork.com, a website offering cartoons on the net. According to Nielsen Net Ratings, CartoonNetwork.com stood as one of the world's top 10 websites during March 1998. The Network had huge advertising and promotional agreements with the leading companies; Reebok, Disney, McDonald's and Nintendo. (ICM)

CARTOON CHANNELS IN INDIA: EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT

Before the advent of Satellite channels in the country, Doordarshan used to telecast cartoon and the animated shows for the audience. *Jungle Book*, *DuckTales*, *Chip and Dale* and others were among the popular cartoon shows. Till 1995, Doordarshan was the only channel that telecast the cartoon shows.

Cartoon Network started broadcast in the country on May 1, 1995. Initially, it operated from 5:30 AM to 5:30 PM (and later up to 9 PM), with Turner Classic Movies (formerly Turner Network Television) taking up the remainder of the daily schedule. (Indianetzone.com, 2014)

On July 1, 2001 Cartoon Network India became a separate 24-hour channel, with exclusive local feeds for India, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. In 2004 a separate feed of the channel was started for Pakistan and Bangladesh. Initially, the channel was a relay version of Cartoon Network India, which is not the case now. The channel primarily airs animated shows in the country in four different languages; English, Hindi, Tamil and Telugu. The channel has aired a

number of popular animated shows. (Indianetzone.com, 2014)

With passing time, number of entertainment programmes for the children have gone up. Hungama TV, the only local kids' Hindi entertainment channel has been in high demand across the country, since its inception and has now reached the second position in kids channel genre. Animax India has also gained lot of popularity among the children in India. A Japanese anime broadcasting television channel, Animax began its operations across India and the rest of South Asia from April 5, 2004. (Nath, 2014)

According to TV viewership data shared by TAM Media Research, only 15 percent of all children viewing Television watch kids' channels and the remaining 85 percent watch General Entertainment Channels. (Nath, 2014). School age particularly from six to 11 years are considered a very crucial period wherein the ability of children to understand the things is faster than adults.

EFFECT OF TELEVISION CARTOON CHANNELS ON CHILDREN

Watching cartoons has become popular among the children. But the content of the animated shows has a subtle, but consistent effect on them. The effect has both positive as well as adverse impact on children. Studies have found change in the behaviour of the children after they watch violent cartoon shows. Some research has also found that educative cartoon shows enhances imagination and creativity among the children. Language plays an important role. When children watch cartoons in an easy and comprehensible language, they not only enjoy it but get involved and the same reflects in their behaviour.

In one study, preschool children were observed both before and after watching television; some watched cartoons that had many aggressive and violent acts; others watched shows that didn't have any kind of violence. Children who watched the violent shows were more likely to strike out at playmates, argue, disobey authority and were less willing to wait for things than those children who watched non-violent programmes. (Mahsud, Rawan, & Normn, 2009)

Watching cartoons affects the physical and psychological activities of the children. The channel is responsible for barren playgrounds, sloppy attitude towards studies and lack of healthy activities. Cartoon watching affects the attitude and behavior of kids, their liking and disliking and behaving with other children. It also has a strong effect on their language and way of dressing and eating. (Mahsud, Rawan, & Normn, 2009)

Studies further show that violent cartoon shows are mindlessly absorbed by the children and they start acting like cartoon characters. Programmes based on violent temper, mood and passion ultimately sow the seeds of violence in the developing minds of children and as they grow, they resort to it as the quickest way to settle a dispute.

Even many psychologists agree that the more violence viewed, the more accepting children are of violence, the more it desensitizes them and the more likely they are to become violent. (Mahsud, Rawan, & Normn, 2009)

Children who watch too much cartoons on Television are more likely to have mental and

emotional problems, along with brain and eye injuries. From the time children start school to the time they graduate they are averaged to spend around 13,000 hours in a school. When it is compared to the time children spend watching Television, it comes out to nearly 18,000 hours (from the time school is started to the time of graduation). This comparison is an outrage because of the amount of Television that is watched by a child will have an effect on their brain, emotions and their sense to feel pain. (Choma *et al.*, 2004)

A U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher, in a 2000 report on adolescent violence, states that more aggressive behavior in a young child's life is caused by frequently watched entertainment that incorporates violence in it. This led American Psychological Association to pass a resolution in February 1985, informing broadcasters and the public about the dangers violence on Television has on the children.

The American Academic of Pediatrics and American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry observe that Television influences the behavior of children as group as one year old. Children who frequently watch shows in which violence is depicted are likely to imitate the same.

Cartoon shows depicting violence hamper the overall growth and development of children. Psychological research observes that children, who watch violence on Television, become less sensitive to pain and sufferings of others and they don't fear violence nor are they bothered by violence, in general. Such children are more likely to become aggressive and use harmful actions towards others. (Choma *et al.*, 2004)

Pertinently, a study released by *The New England Journal of Medicine* in July 2004 found that most children who suffered seizures from December 1997 episode of Japanese cartoon, *Pocket Monsters* (later renamed "Pokémon" for international distribution) had epilepsy or some other underlying condition that would have caused development of seizures, regardless of whether or not they saw that programme. The cartoon-episode drew worldwide attention after multiple cases of children suffering seizures, after watching the episode, were reported.

Cartoons don't have only negative impact on the children. They are the central focus of many children wherein parents manipulatively use cartoons to help keep the children occupied, while parents are busy with their office schedules or household chores. Many parents also express satisfaction with the educational benefits of Television.

They easily learn variety of things by watching educational cartoon films and their imagination and creativity gets enhanced. Cartoons also have a tremendous impact in improving the cognitive aspects among the young children. Infants and toddlers also start learning different words and their meanings. (Jain, 2011)

Thus, it can be said that watching cartoons isn't always wrong, but what matters is watching it for prolonged duration and without the guidance of parents. A healthy environment is important for the overall growth and development of children. Watching cartoons can entertain them and help them in developing certain skills but what matters is the kind of cartoons that the children watch. Besides, broadcasters, too, have a responsibility to develop the content of the cartoon shows with utmost care and caution.

VISUAL SUBLIMINAL MESSAGING

Subliminal messaging is known both in advertising and programming, since the time Television and radio came to the fore. It is being done with the children's programmes as well. American Heritage Dictionary describes the subliminal messaging as "*Below the threshold of conscious perception; inadequate to produce conscious awareness but able to evoke a response.*"

It means advertisers and programmers are slipping in messages that you act upon and don't even realize that you are doing it. (Choma C., 2004)

MARKETING PRACTICES

The moment a child sees an item that they want, they will make their parents to purchase it and the parents usually leave no stone unturned to fulfill the wish of their children. Marketers are fully aware of this and they try every step to tap this trend.

Nancy Shalek, President of Shalek Agency, describes advertising as making people feel that without this product, they are a loser. In an effort to grab maximum share in the market, cartoon companies not only advertise their products in between the Television shows in the form of commercials, but they have designed goods say from toothpaste to school bags to lunch boxes to clothes to toys.

The children, after seeing these objects, want to have them. They often purchase these items under the influence of cartoon shows as they want to have their favourite characters with them. Marketing companies very well know how to cash such opportunities.

Nearly two billion dollars is roughly spent on advertising to young consumers in America alone. Nearly 30 billion dollars are racked in annually from children four to 12 years of age and the numbers get even higher with age. Animation industry in India is also blooming and many local and multinational companies have immense opportunities in this sector. Estimated to have been approximately Rs 11 billion in 2006, it is expected to grow at a rate of 22 percent to reach Rs 54 billion by the end of 2014. (Nelson, 2004)

Emerging as one of the largest viewership segment in the country after general entertainment channel sector, the cartoon shows have tremendous potential to earn the revenue. Advertising revenue generated by the children's genre shows a rise from Rs 2 billion in 2010 to Rs 2.4 billion in 2011. (Nath, 2014)

Cartoon Network Enterprises, the licensing and merchandising division for Cartoon Network and Pogo, too has reflected the growth of the industry. Not only are its products available in over 5300 retail counters across the country, but their profits grew by 70 percent in 2011. In April 2012, Disney entered a licensing agreement with the IPL franchise Mumbai Indians to launch co-branded merchandise products that are targeted at the under-14 kids segment. (Nath, 2014)

On the other hand, returns on investment for shows on the channels for children, is not proportional to the viewership. While this genre garners six percent share of the total viewership in Television industry in India, it only generates 1.6 percent of its total revenues. This can be

attributed to the fact that advertisers in non-children categories have not traditionally focused on this segment. (Nath, 2014)

Now, watching entertainment shows has become much easier. Over the past decade or so, there has been manifold growth in the access of children to computers and internet within their respective homes or in schools or in cyber cafes. This too has thrown a big challenge not only for the parents and teachers, but broadcasters and marketers as well.

Half of the kids are computer users and they have helped in the growth of internet usage to 18 percent, as quoted by Cartoon Network New Generations Research.

Broadcasters and marketers owe a corporate responsibility towards the society. They need to be extra careful while designing and creating the content for children's channels, particularly the language and style. This can be an effective and efficient medium to inculcate proper education and skills among the children. If used, negatively it can bring lot of devastation and misguidance for the forthcoming generations.

Parents often object to loud content and aggressive language in children's entertainment shows. 48 percent of parents exercise control over the programmes their children watch, says the 2011 Cartoon Network New Generations Research. Furthermore, channels need to broadcast content that engages children as well as their parents, since 66 percent of parents watch Television together with their children. (Nath, 2014)

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

Children in the contemporary society, have wide choice of entertainment programmes and viewership opportunities. Over the last many years, cartoon shows have created a significant position in their lives. They not only remember the names of these animated shows, but want to have these characters to be with them, always and everywhere. Such is the influence of these shows that they get deeply attracted by various objects resembling the cartoon characters, particularly the merchandize goods.

Cartoon shows have assumed an important place in their lives. The moment they get remote control of the Television in their hands, they straightway jump to the cartoon channel. Now the things have become even easier; they can watch their favourite cartoons by just a click. Internet services have not only made it easier and cheaper but it lacks parental supervision, which worsens the situation.

Cartoon, in particular, grab the attention of the children and they watch it keenly and minutely. They prefer watching cartoons to doing any physical activity. Usually, they should have been spending their time in the playgrounds playing games and enjoying nature. But barren playgrounds provide a clue that children are too much occupied with their imaginary world of cartoons. This hampers even their social interactions within the society, which is vital for the overall development of the children. Animated content captures the attention of children by building an imaginary world for them. Children develop proximity and attachment with these cartoon shows and try to adopt the way their cartoon characters think, play, behave and react.

Various researches in the field suggest that cartoon shows definitely have their impact on the lives of children. There are researches, which prove that watching cartoons for longer duration of time has a potential to affect their eye-sights. Some studies bring forth the fact that after watching violence and aggression in the animated shows, children started behaving accordingly. There have also been researches that have attributed sluggish and lethargic attitude of the children towards their life, their behaviour towards others, their way of expressing their likes and dislikes and their attitude towards life to watching cartoons.

Some studies even say that the more accepting the children are to violence the less sensitive they are to pain. They even try to imitate the cartoon characters thinking they can step in their shoes and live accordingly. There is also the brighter side of the coin. Few researches have been quoted wherein it has been found that watching educative cartoon shows enhances imagination and creativity among the children and those who don't watch violence in these shows don't react the way the children who watch violence do.

Keeping in view the influence the cartoon shows have on the young minds of the children throw the market open for the advertisers and marketers. They are fully aware of the fact that children can make their parents to shop. As such they have designed their products, accordingly, keeping in consonance with the interests, tastes and preferences of the children.

In short, animated programmes and cartoons play a vital role in determining the market for various local and multinational companies, manufacturing toys, clothes and other accessories for the children. Cartoons act as a source of advertisement for them. Children prefer to purchase their items like lunch box, clothes, tooth paste, toys and others, resembling their favourite cartoon characters. As such it becomes mandatory for the broadcasters to play their part. Not only they have to act with responsibility, but they have to exhibit the same, while creating content for the cartoon shows.

Children get so occupied with the shows that they fail to understand the difference between the "real" and the "imaginary" or maybe they are too young to understand the same. The shows ought to be children-friendly. Besides, the content providers ought to assuage the fears of parents regarding loud content and the aggressive language depicted in the cartoon shows for children.

Though the cartoon shows have immense potential to lead to earn huge returns in the form of merchandize goods that resemble these characters, but the marketers and advertisers too need to exhibit their corporate responsibility. Apart from designing the products to make parents to spend for their children, they need to devise strategies to see that the product enhances the ability of children to express, interact and at the same time deliver for the good.

Parents have a bigger responsibility and they cannot be absolved from it. They should spend time with their children and participate in their activities. They should know what their children are watching. Besides, sports activities need to be included in the daily schedule of the children. Instead of empty playgrounds, these should be lively with the activities of children.

There has to be a positive association among all the players involved in the game. Apart from earning billions of dollars a year, there has to be a vision for healthy future generation. Physical development of the body is equally important as the mental development.

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