Influence of Violent Cartoon Film on Children in Aba Metropolis

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to investigate the influence of violent cartoon films on children in Aba metropolis. Cultivation theory was used as the theoretical framework. The study adopted a survey research method. Using Wimmer and Dominick sample size calculator for sample size determination, 384 respondents were sampled from the total population of 1,081,466. The questionnaire served as the instrument of the study. The multistage sampling technique was adopted. The study's findings showed that an average of $52^{\%}$ of children is largely exposed to violent scenes in cartoons. Findings further revealed that an average of 72% of children who watch violent cartoons to a large extent are influenced by it. Based on the findings, it was recommended that parents take in:; cognizance that excessive exposure could lead to aggressive behaviour; hence, the need to control their children's exposure level

Keywords: Children, violence, cartoon, television, Aba

Introduction

Cartoons are undoubtedly a part of cinema history from the time the foremost motion pictures were made in the late 1800s Cartoons are popular entertainment for children; currently, many TV channels broadcast different cartoons for children non-stop. Cartoons are often described as making movies by filming a sequence of slightly varying drawings or models to capture the viewers' interest, who are mostly children.

Nigeria's future, its poverty, strength, and weakness depend on the case with which we build our children's character and habit, Childhood is the most crucial period during which a child's behaviour is often molded. Children learn and develop skills *by* interacting, observing, and experiencing the globe around them. Rideout et al. (2010) noted that children had increased che

number of times they spend consuming cartoons and media by an hour and seventeen minutes daily. Nowadays, children's physical activities are limited by excessive watching of television. Watching cartoons is the children's favourite hobby. They choose to watch cartoons rather than engage in physical activities in their leisure time.

Children's brain at early ages always seek new experiences that is why what is delivered in cartoon gets toddlers glues to their seat while watching cartoons like PJ Mask, Batman, Spiderman, Scooby-do, Avarar, Green Lantern can make children more aggressive and jealous. The impact of a violent cartoon is more on boys since they like to watch the actions and imbibe the behaviou portrayed (Shakil, 2017). Meyrowitz, cited in Buonamo (2008, p.19), says television "escorts children across the world before they have permission to cross the streets." This underscores the role that television plays in the life of a child. Cartoons are very entertaining, and cartoons also allow children to learn many things and expand their imagination. Shakil (2017) noted that most children begin watching cartoons on television at the early age of nine months, and by the age of two or three, they become enthusiastic viewers.

Many of us grew up watching "Tom and Jeery" and the "Mickey and the road race" shows. These cartoons, too, had violent scenes but not blood spluttering or chopping or destruction; their violence was comic compared to scenes of the "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" or "X-men," Superman, etc. which are platforms non-comic violence and thus impacts children in a very negative way given in the so-presumed comical way, any exposure to violence can have many adverse psychological effects on a child. Ideally, a child's world should be devoid of any trace of unrest (Hassan & Daniyal, 2013).

Violence in cartoons is an integral part of cartoon content. The frequency of violence in cartoons is more than in live-action dramas or comedies (Syed & Sarfraz, 2016]. Cartoon characters jump, dive, and fall from very great heights and land without being harmed, for instance, Lion King, Scooby-Do, Looney toons, Wylie Coyote seems to fall off a cliff or just have one of his inventions fail and cause a massive explosion. However, they manage to gather his teeth, dust him off and get up and attempt to catch the roadrunner. This seems funny until a child thinks it is all right to imitate these needs (Hassan & Daniyal, 2013). Therefore, the study seeks to investigate the influence of violent cartoon film on children in Aba metropolis.

Statement of the Problem

In today's society, the internet and television prevalence is essential and cannot be overemphasized. While at the very beginning of the 1980s, there were TVs only in a limited number of homes, now we can say that there bare computers and internet connections available in nearly every house. In Abia State, Aba, precisely, children have developed the habit of bullying their weaker peers. Most times, this habit seems to be a result of exposure to violent cartoons and programmes on television. Television is a popular medium that over 90% of children are keen on watching. Thus, television has a high tendency to impact either positive or negative ideology.

Many homes in Aba can proudly boast of TV sets in their houses, and it seems most children devote a reasonable amount of time watching TV than reading their books, which can affect their

way of thinking and behaviour. Based on their exposure to these cartoons, violent cartoons' tendencies to influence the children will likely be high and if not controlled, will affect them drastically. Hence the study seeks to investigate the influence of violent cartoon film on children in Aba metropolis.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives were to:

1. Determine the extent of exposure of children in Aba, Abia State, to violent scenes in cartoons.
2.   Ascertain the influence of these violent cartoons on children in Aba, Abia State

Literature Review

Cartoons as a means of entertainment are the most viewed programmes by children According to Peduk (2012), "children at a very early age, before five, prefer to water simplified short films, but children going to school are attached to long topical film series" (p.225). The children's minds have an immense capacity to store everything they experience, even from exposure to TV programmes. Sultana (2014) claimed that it had been proven that with the help of cognitive ability, a child could memorize type of image. Those things do not stick only in the children's memories, but they also appear in their behaviours and speeches.

According to Pandit and Kulkami (2012), "psychologists emphasize the negative effects of cartoons on kids who watch cartoons 3-4 hours a day are more inclined to brutality" (p.8). When children are exposed to a violent of sexual or fantasy cartoon, it will affect their minds, their way of thinking, and their behaviours. This happens mostly with the absence of the parent's control (Peduk, 2012).

According to Habib and Soliman (2015), children's mind is exceptionally receptive and adapt to things faster. At such an innocent age, a child's mind cannot differentiate between the positive and the negative perspective of things". Children tend to imitate that they see. Because of this, Peduk (2012) argued that during the development period, children learn best by mimicry. A child mimics all most everything they observe around themselves.

Cartoon heroes have a significant impact on children, kids always try to play those heroes in the actual world, so violence and aggression viewed on TV will appear in the children's behaviours (Peduk, 2012). Commenting on this, Pandit and Kulkarni (2013) assert that "As a child growing up, they wanted to be the superheroes in the cartoons. The children are encouraged to try the same thing they saw their favourite hero do in the cartoon.

Cartoon Network is one of the most favourite cartoon channels for children. As cartoon -network is a 24 hours channel, so children spend a lot of their free time in front of it. Exposure to this channel not only attracts the children to the *TVs* contents but also instills some positive and negative habits (Hassan & Daniyal, 2013).

According to Pandit and Kulkarni (2012), psychologists emphasize the harmful effects of cartoons on kids who watch cartoons 3-4 hours a day are more inclined to brutality. The major problem with cartoon violence is that it causes dissentization whenever a child becomes

accustomed to seeing these acts. As a result, the violent act stops being terrible and starts to be seen as a regular part of everyday life. Today's children are exposed to violence every time, be it in the home, on the streets, on the television, in the newspaper, or the movies. This is a kind of malady of the modern world; unfortunately, children are generally engrossed by television cartoons, some of which carry disturbing humor and violent actions and messages (Shakil, 2017). There is a strong impact of violent cartoon movies on children which can be seen on their lifestyle, dressing, aggressive, violent behaviour and language, and children are generally influenced by cartoon characters in day-to-day life in more than one way (Rais et al., 2016). Shanthipinya and Prabha (2017) studied perception towards children viewing cartoon channels and observed that television had become a member of every family. Most children are eagerly watching cartoon programmes on television, and that children have an unwavering interest in cartoon programmes. Their finding further showed the rural children's positive and negative attitudes towards various aspects of cartoon programmes. Syed and Sarfra,z (2016) carried out a study on the impact of cartoon viewing on the school going kids, and it was revealed that cartoon is not the reflection of real-life and in contrast, it is an imaginary life which can affect the school going kids in many dimensions it was further revealed that there are the psychological impacts of the cartoons on children.

Khaled and Tarek (2015) studied the cartoons' effect on changing children's mental responses and behaviours. It was revealed that factors responsible for the way children think are found mostly in the environment where they grow up. These include daily events, memorable experiences, and peak feelings and that cartoons are one of the daily habits of our children; Their studies showed that an average child who has access to TV and a satellite connection at his home watches roughly 18,000 hours of television from kindergarten to high school graduation. One of the substantial factors that affect an individual's childhood and takes considerable time from the young child's schedule is a double-edged weapon; it could ruin an individual's childhood through excessive exposure to sexual and violent content.

Hassan and Daniyal (2013) studied cartoon networks and their impact on bahaviour of school-going children. This study explored the impact of violence presented in cartoons on children's behaviour. It was revealed that children exposed to cartoon networks that run cartoon programmes for 24 hours are more exposed to violent cartoons than children who watch cartoons programmes in other television programmes broadcast during primetime.

Raji et al. (2014) conducted a study on media violence and its effects on children's health and aggressive behaviour. The study she-wed that prolonged exposure to violent media programmes like video games, films, and others during childhood is associated with subsequent aggression. The study further indicated that too much engagement with television violence could create a distorted view of society and acceptability of children's behaviours in the early years. Again, children who preferred violent television shows when they were young tend to be more aggressive in the future. Children who like watching action and violent films and pad-venture games are more aggressive than children who watch educational cartoons and programmes.

Oyero and Oyesomi (2014) studied the perceived influence of television cartoons on Nigerian children's social behaviour. Findings showed that both children and parent share a similar understanding that cartoons' influence was positive. Although sorr.e schools of thought opine that cartoons could help children improve their language skills, learn creative skills, develop good morals, and keep children busy, among other benefits, some parents expressed that some influence of cartoons could be adverse.

Gokcearslana (2010), in a study on the effects of cartoon movies on children's gender development, it was seen that females are being represented weaker compared to males in terms of many aspects of TV programmes also viewed by adults. Before 1980, female characters had been portrayed in the lower profession than males. Children at an early age are exposed to unequal representations of gender through cartoons. Sudha (2011) carried out a study on the factors influencing the changes in children's behaviour in viewed cartoon programmes. It was revealed that factors such as age, gender, siblings, and time spent watching television have a significant relationship with the change in their behaviour when watching cartoons.

Habib and Soliman (2015), in their article "cartoon effects in changing children's mental response and behaviour," stated that "a child brain at early ages, always seek new experiences, that is why what is delivered in cartoon gets toddlers glued to the chairs while watching animated series. A well-written scenario, right audio, and visual effects are all the main factors that attract and retain the child's attention to the cartoon hero, and enough for his brain to begin following his path and try to imitate him in speaking, thinking, body language, and, even the way of dressing up".

Cantor (2015), in an article titled "The psychological effects of media violence on children and adolescents," that although media violence is a cause to violent behaviour in children, it is not the only cause, but instead, a contributing factor to the portrayal of negative behaviours in children. She stated that research on media violence had been often misunderstood by the general public, who trace all negative behaviours from children to cartoon programmes and films they watch. She further opined that 'most public discussion of the problem focus on criminal violence and ignore the other unhealthy outcomes that affec many more children" according to her; natural aggression, desensitization, and interpersonal hostility are contributing factors and are only stirred up and possibly increased when children encounter violence in the media.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on the cultivation theory. The cultivation theory was developed by George Gerbner of the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania in 1960 to study how heavy exposure to media content will shape viewers' concept of reality. Cultivation theory holds that television has long term effects that are small, gradual, indirect, but cumulative and significant. Thus, television is responsible for shaping or cultivating the viewer's conceptions of social reality (Gerbner et al., 2002). They further stated that the television world is not a window or reflection of the world, but a world itself.

Imported animated cartoon shows have been the most accessible and easy to understand entertainment forms available to Nigerian children on television, providing a means by which they socialize in society. Particular attention and efforts need to be invested in producing the contents for children's consumption. Television seeks to show and reinforce commonalities among children so those children who regularly watch cartoons tend to see the world in how television portrays it. The theory's relevance to this study is hinged on the fact that as children are exposed to a violent cartoon on television, they are bound to imitate what they see from their favourite cartoon characters.

Methodology

The research design adopted in this study was the survey research design. The population of the study comprised residents in Aba, which is 1,081, 466, according to the World Population Review [2020]. The sample size for this study is 384. It was determined using Wimmer and Dominick's n.d) online sample size calculator at a 5°/c margin of error and a 95% confidence level.

The researchers adopted the multistage sampling technique. According to Obayi et al (2016), multistage requires the use of many stages in the sampling procedure. In this study, the local government areas in Aba were delineated into manageable clusters, and the final sample drawn in the following stages:

Stage 1: The researcher selected the local government in Aba, and it comprises Aba South, Aba North, Osisioma, Obingwa.

Stage 2: Out of the four local government areas in Aba, the researcher randomly selected two communities from each local government area. In Aba-South, Ariaria and Eziukwu were selected; Eziama and Osusu in Aba-North; Umuuikea and Umueze in Osisioma; while Obikabia and Umuokahia were selected in Obingwa.

Stage *3:* the researchers purposively selected 48 parents (mothers or fathers) from each of the communities on whom we administered the 384 copies of the questionnaire. Only parents who have children between the ages of 4 to 8 years and reside in Aba were sampled.

The questionnaire was adopted as the instrument for data collection. Analysis of data was done using a simple percentage and presented in a table.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The questionnaire, which serves as the data collection instrument in this study, was administered to 384 respondents in Aba metropolis. However, 15(4%) copies of the questionnaire were lost while 369 (96%) copies were returned. Data presentation and analysis were based on the 369 valid copies of the questionnaire returned from respondents.

Table 1: Response of respondent whether their children watch cartoons with violent scenes

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	300	81%
No	41	1%
Cant' say	28	8%
Total	**369**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Analysis of data from the above table revealed that 68% of respondents agreed that -.heir children watch cartoons with violent scenes. This means that children watch cartoons with violent scenes.

Table 2: Response of respondents on the age bracket of their children that watch cartoons with violent scenes

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1 – 3	87	24%
4 – 6	107	29%
7 – 9	175	47%
Total	**369**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Analysis of data revealed that 47% of respondents confirmed that children between 7-9 years watch cartoons with violent scenes. This means that 7-9 watch cartoons with violent scenes.

Table 3: Response of Respondent on how often their children watch a cartoon with violent scenes

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	205	55%
Every two days	54	15%
weekends	110	30%
Total	**369**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Analysis of data gathered above in table 3 indicates that 55% of respondents said that their children often watch cartoons with violent scenes. This means that children often watch cartoons with violent scenes.

Table 4: Response of Respondent on how long they watch it

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
30 minutes	80	22%
1 hour	70	19%
2 hours	129	35%
3 hours	90	**100%**
Total	**369**	

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Analysis gathered from the data on table \ above showed that 35% of respondents agreed that their children watch cartoons with violent scenes for a long time. This implies that children have prolonged exposure to cartoons with violent scenes.

Table 5: Response of Respondent on the time their children watch cartoons

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)

Morning	64	17%
Noon	95	26%
Evening	160	43%
Night	50	14%
Total	**369**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Analysis of data from the above table 5 revealed that 43% of respondents said that their children watch violent cartoon scenes mostly in the evening. This shows that children usually watch cartoons in the evening.

Table 6: Responses of Respondent on whether their children emulate the cartoon characters they are exposed to

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	290	79%
No	55	15%
Cant' say	24	6%
Total	**369**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The data analysis from the above table 6 showed that 79% of respondents said that their children emulate the cartoon characters they watch. The implication is that children emulate the cartoon characters they are exposed to.

Table 7: Responses of Respondent on whether their children request cartoon attire from them

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	255	69%
No	95	26%
Cant' say	19	5%
Total	**369**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The data analysis from the above table 7 revealed that 69% of respondents said that their children request cartoon attire from them. This implies that children request for cartoon attire.

Table 8: Responses of Respondent, if their children exhibit violent behaviour as a result of their exposure to violent cartoons

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	260	70%
No	80	22%
Cant' say	29	8%
Total	**369**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Analysis of data from the above table 8 revealed that 70% of respondents said that their children exhibit violent behaviour due to their exposure to violent cartoon scenes. This implies that children who watch violent cartoon scenes exhibit violent behaviour.

Table 9: Responses of Respondent on whether their children exhibit rude behaviours when cartoons are turned off

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	240	65%
No	102	28%
Cant' say	27	7%
Total	**369**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Analysis of data from the above table 9 showed that 65% of respondents indicated that their children behave rudely when cartoons are turned off. The finding suggests that the children have a strong attachment and affinity with the cartoon characters and enjoy watching them.

Table 10: Responses of Respondent on whether their children mimic these violent cartoon characters in their sleep

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	275	75%
No	70	19%
Cant' say	24	6%
Total	**369**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Analysis of data from the above table 10 revealed that 75% of respondents said that their children mimic these violent cartoon characters in their sleep. This implies that children who watch violent characters mimic them in their sleep.

Table 11: Responses of Respondent on whether they exhibit violent behaviour when they play with their mates

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	280	76%
No	76	21%
Cant' say	13	3%
Total	**369**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Analysis of data from the above table 11 showed that 76% of respondents indicate: that their children exhibit violent behaviour when they play with their mate. This means that children exhibit violent behaviour when they play with their mate.

Discussion of Findings

Analysis of data gathered from this study revealed that an average of 52% of children is highly exposed to violent scenes in cartoons. The findings showed that children watch these cartoons daily and spend about two (2) hours watching cartoons that contains violent scenes, mostly during the evening time. Oyero and Oyesomi's (2014) research supported the current study's findings. They observed that children are exposed to television cartoons daily. Also, supporting the findings of this study, Habib and Soliman (2015) confirmed that cartoon is a double edge sword or weapon and that it could ruin child through excessive exposure. The viewership of violent cartoon scenes creates more chances of violence among children. This further lends credence to the cultivation theory's postulations that the more the children are exposed to violent cartoons, the violent attitude they will cultivate and demonstrate. In other words, long term exposure to media content will shape viewers' concept of reality.

Analysis of findings shows that such exposures, to a large extent, influence the majority (72%) of the children who watch a violent cartoons in the following ways: emulating the cartoon characters they watch; exhibit a preference for cartoon characters' attires; exhibit violent behaviour when denied access to cartoons or while playing with their mates, and mimicking these violent cartoon characters in their sleep. Supporting the findings of this study Raji et al, 2014) in their study found out that, substantially, children imitate what they see, view, hear, or watch on the mass media. They went further to state that children lea n how to be aggressive in new ways by watching aggression in the broadcast media. Corroborating this finding is also Hassan and Daniyal's (2013) study, which found that violent cartoons attract children's negative habits as they are exposed to it. However, Cantor (2015) argued that children's negative behaviour might not necessarily be attributed to their exposure to violent cartoon programmes, but from interpersonal hostility, natural aggression, desensitization, etc. The cultivation theory supports the findings to a great extent.

Conclusion

Generally, cartoons tend to be humorous; no wonder children can be glued to their seats, watching it for hours for maximum satisfaction from it. Although the cartoons may be humorous, they could be equally harmful to children's wellbeing, especially heavy violent content. From the findings of this study, children are largely exposed to violent cartoon scenes and are influenced by such exposures, to the extent they tend to imitate the cartoon characters, thereby exhibiting violent acts or antisocial behaviours. It is safe to conclude, therefore, that children are the product of the society and the violent tendencies they exhibit as a result of their exposure to violent cartoons could be transferred to the society if not immediately, but at a later stage in life, and by extension, constitute a nuisance in the society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, we proffer tin following recommendations:

1. Given that 52% of the children experience heavy exposure to violent cartoons daily, parents need to take in o cognizance that excessive exposure could lead to aggressive behaviour; hence they need to regulate their children's exposure level.

2. Considering that violent cartoons influence 72% of children, parents should watch their children closely to checkmate their behaviour, and be reprimanded or corrected whenever they act defiantly.

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