

African Journal of
Education and Practice
(AJEP)

**Gratification Derived By Children Aged Seven to Eleven Years from
Watching Televised Animated Cartoons in Nairobi County, Kenya**

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GRATIFICATION DERIVED BY CHILDREN AGED SEVEN TO ELEVEN YEARS FROM WATCHING TELEVISED ANIMATED CARTOONS IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to establish the gratification derived by children aged seven to eleven years from watching televised animated cartoons in Nairobi County, Kenya.

Methodology: The study used descriptive survey method to collect information through casual interviews and self-administered questionnaires. The data was analyzed through straight tabulations and generated tables, graphs, and charts such as measures of central tendency such as means and modes and measures of dispersion such as the standard deviations.

Findings: The study concluded that most children watch cartoons mainly for entertainment purposes. Boys admire Ben's super-human imagination and would like to identify with him. Girls like Kim Possible because she is a young girl like them, and they are able to identify with her character, as all the other super-heroes are men. Girls like magic, power and action in cartoons such as Kim Possible. She is young and strong and can protect herself and others. They find Kim interesting because of the action and fighting scenes. The girls also like her dress code, shoes and hairstyle.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: Parents should limit screen time, including animated cartoons, movies, video games and computer time to less than two hours a day and provide alternative means of relaxation and entertainment rather than the passive leisure of watching animated cartoons. The media practitioners should also think about the impact that watching some of these animated cartoons may have, especially on special audience like children. The government is recommended to develop a legal framework for classifying animated cartoons should be developed.

Keywords: *Gratification, Televised animated cartoons, Children aged seven to eleven years.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Walt Disney, Time Warner, Viacom, Bertelsmann and News Corporation are the main producers and distributors of animated cartoons all over the world. 70% of media content consumed in the world today, ranging from magazines and books to television shows and movies, cartoons and theme parks, cable networks, recorded music labels and music publishers are produced by these companies (Messenger, 2011). The subjects of popular animated cartoons produced for child audiences by these companies are developed from popular European children's fairy tales and storybooks. Animated cartoons form part of the daily programming for almost all the television channels in the world including Kenya. Children who have access to television are captivated by television such that they spend more time watching television than they spend in any other activity (Spigel, 2013). This is because children consume television through primary involvement. This is a process in which the audience is solely concentrating on consuming the media text; they are sitting down solely to watch their favorite program on television. They watch more television than they engage in reading, going to watch movie, listening to the radio or playing with each other (Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi, 2013).

Many children have become very interested in cartoons and it has become a primary source of entertainment to them. The understanding that children have on what they watch on television may affect how they are influenced by cartoon violence. Children are more likely to focus on observable actions rather than internal causes (Lee, 2013). The reason as to why cartoons on the television are fun to see, make most kids want to watch them all day long because most children do not like being bored. That is why many young people are addicted to watching cartoons (Ogle, Graham, Lucas & Roberto, 2017).

Children can also learn many things from cartoons easily because they are funny and not dull. Most parents would want to teach a lot of things to their children as much as possible, but most of these teaching to children are boring and most children would rather prefer a creative inventions. One of the answers is a cartoon. The history of cartoons is very long, but the marriage of entertainment and education is quite short because traditionally children learned almost everything in school. The most important thing is that parents should know what kind of things make children concentrate. And be able to focus on them to drive a point of positive education in the process (Bale & Sang, 2013). Children still like watching cartoons because they are fun and kids can learn many things from cartoons easily. Cartoons are fantastical, so they could think that their dreams are coming true by cartoons. It has been many years since cartoons have become one of the important things to the children. It would be better for the educational system to invent more cartoons for kids so that their parents would let their children watch cartoons without concern (Oyero & Oyesomi, 2014).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Gratification and Reception Analysis Theory

Reception analysis embodies how consumers interpret, read, decode, produce, perceive and use media materials (Maslow, 2013). It illuminates how meanings circulate within social contexts while at the same time the theory investigates the process of interaction between unmediated messages and codes such as animated cartoons and their audience in this study; children. The main premise of this analysis is that for one to give a valid account of the reception, uses and impact, one must not only consider interpretation of the content, but also the impact on the audience. The leading originator of this work within the field of cultural studies was Stuart Hall at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, England in the early 1970's. Stuart was interested to investigate the process of media consumption within the model of "coding/decoding" in communications.

This research on the impact of animated cartoons considered the theory of reception analysis on the basis that the meanings of messages in the animated cartoons shown on television to children in Nairobi is coded with American and European sensibilities and wants, and produced specifically for those the values of those societies and their children audiences (Nash, 2015). When these meanings are transferred unmediated to audiences outside these cultures to Nairobi for example, it follows that this new audience will read, decode and extract new meaning from these materials with implications which are unpredictable to the sensibilities and wants of the society. What children in Nairobi will decode from a text whose authors share different cultural environments and to what application they will put the information is not a matter to be taken for granted (Tanta, Mihovilović & Sablić, 2014).

2.2 Empirical Framework

There is great disparity in the presentation of male and female characters in children's animated cartoons prevalent in the 1970s and still present in the 1990s (Napier, 2016). Do the children who view them hold the perceptions? Do children notice that boys predominate in cartoons and that characters are often stereotyped? Children in this study watched more chase-and-pratfall cartoons than any other type, but the favourite cartoon type for nearly half of the children was continuing adventure. The least favorite cartoon type was teachy-preachy. Children were more likely to be exposed to stereotypical males and non-stereotypical females in their favourite continuing adventure cartoons, and incompetent males and females in the chase-and-pratfall cartoons, which dominated their viewing (Haskell, 2016). In the Thompson and Zerbinos (2013) study, there was a strong correlation between preferring continuing adventure cartoons and reports of more stereotypically male behaviours. The correlation between continuing adventure cartoons and more stereotypically female behaviours was positive as well, but not nearly as strong (Lemish, 2013).

Nevertheless, looking at the responses from children regarding the cartoon characters, children in this study attributed more of all behaviors to silly/amusing, violent, active, stereotypically male, and task-related behaviors to boy-characters than to girl-characters. They also perceived boys to

be nearly three times as likely as girls to do silly things and four and a half times as likely as girls to engage in violent deeds. Generally, boys described “boy-characters” as violent and active and they “chase bad guys” (Su & Liang, 2014). They did not mention behaviors that implied any sort of relationship between boy and girl-characters. Girls likewise saw boy characters as engaging in violent and active roles but also recognized in boys behavior that impacted on girl characters, such as teasing and making fun of the girls. Other examples are that boys “think they are the smartest” and “try to catch girls.” This is certainly a provocative observation (Lee, 2013).

Although boys did not describe boy-characters in relationship to girls, the boys did tend to describe girl-characters in the context of their relationships to or interest in boys. This included such statements as, “(girls) ask boys out on dates,” they “follow what boys say,” they are “left out of play,” they are “not as adventurous,” they are “teased by boys,” and they “want kisses.” Boys also described girl-characters domestic role behavior or referred to the girl’s appearance (Meyer, 2016). Examples of this included they “say ‘I’m pretty’” and they “wear rings.” Girls described girl-characters as domestic, playing with dolls, dressing up, and chasing boys. Specific examples included doing “chores around the house”, “being polite” and saying “excuse me” a lot. Clearly, the majority of children in this study perceived male and female cartoon characters in stereotypical ways. In a study funded by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, (Williams, 2014) a survey of girls 9 and 10 years old, found that 40% had tried to lose weight. Fifth graders, 10-year-old girls and boys told researchers they were dissatisfied with their bodies after watching animated cartoons like Ben 10 and Kim Possible (illustration 1), and music video by Britney Spears (Mayer, 2015). Identification with cartoon stars, models or athletes for girls and boys positively correlated with body dissatisfaction. This has an effect on the body image of the children who watch them.



Illustration: 1a and 1b) Kim Possible 1c) Ben 10

Children often internalize gender role stereotypes from books, songs, television, and the movies (Avila, Thome, Cord, Valle & Araújo, 2013). Television, however, is perhaps the most influential form of media. Research on television viewing and children's socialization indicates that television has a great impact on children's lives. The children spontaneously identified 'families' of characters, with which they establish emotional bonds that differ in intensity and duration on the basis of subjective factors; namely substantial/insubstantial characters, and strong/weak narrative structure. Objective factors; the child's age, especially the stage of development reached, and the predominance of concrete versus abstract thought (Falk, 2013).

An example is the families identified by the children in Disney cartoons. These cartoons influence strong, stable bonds because the strong, stable characterization of the characters and the universal appeal of the stories allow identification with and imaginative development on typically human themes and feelings. This family of characters, more than any of the others, 'covers' the needs of the various age groups, providing entertainment and promoting children's psychological growth. There is a strong degree of spontaneous association between cartoon characters and product categories. This association appears to be conveyed by the functional and real characteristics of the characters. It can therefore be assumed that product brands consistent with the properties attributed to a character have an equal opportunity of exploiting the bond with that character: by using it as endorser in commercials for the brand, by working towards making it the brand's 'icon'. However, in view of the findings that emerged about the different types of emotional relationships established by children with cartoon characters, the choice of character must be considered with care so that in general, the brand is not associated with characters that have a very short life cycle (Ogle, Graham, Lucas & Roberto, 2017).

Based on the literature, the study, therefore, sought:

- i. To establish the reasons why children like watching animated cartoons.
- ii. To establish the focus group-reason for liking the animated cartoons.
- iii. To establish the reasons for liking best cartoon character.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive survey method to collect information through casual interviews and self-administered questionnaires. The research used the non-probability design and employed judgmental sampling to select a sample of 426 children (224 boys and 202 girls) aged 7 to 11 years old from the six selected primary schools in Nairobi. The study used structured questionnaires with closed and open ended questions to collect primary data. A pilot study was used to test the validity and reliability of the research instrument using Cronbach's alpha on a selected sample of twenty-five students in the age bracket of 7-11 years from Nairobi Primary School. The collected data was edited, cleaned, coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS version 11.0. The data was analyzed through straight tabulations and generated tables, graphs, and charts such

as measures of central tendency such as means and modes and measures of dispersion such as the standard deviations.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Reasons Why Children Like Watching Animated Cartoons

One of the objectives of this study was to explore the gratifications that children seek from watching animated cartoons on television. The study found several reasons from the children under study why they watch cartoons. The reasons given were; cartoons are funny 45.3%, cartoons are enjoyable (12.4%), cartoons are good (10.8%) and cartoons are interesting (9.4%). All these categories fall under entertainment. Other reasons given were; to pass time (7.5%), to relax (6.1%) and to seek knowledge and information (5.4%). It can therefore be deduced that most children watch cartoons mainly for entertainment purposes. In discussing the uses and gratification theory, there are three key orientations that audiences take towards the broadcast media; entertainment, the diversion orientation and to seek knowledge and information.

4.2 Focus group-Reason for Liking the Animated Cartoons

The children from the focus groups gave the following reasons why they liked animated cartoon programs:

- i. Fighting
- ii. Saving the world
- iii. Saving people from danger
- iv. Caring for others
- v. Entertainment
- vi. Girls say they like magic, power and action in cartoons such as Kim Possible

This focus group in particular liked the character Ben 10 because:

- i. The action from the watch stuck on his wrist that gives him super-powers and the aliens.
- ii. He cares about the world and shows this by saving people
- iii. They like the accompanying actions and violence
- iv. They like to sing along with the music
- v. They identify with his character.
- vi. His super-human imagination
- vii. Their fascination with the unknown

The research sought to explore the existence of any relationship between gender and the cartoons the respondents preferred. The findings (Table below) indicate that there are some instances when the gender dictates the kind of cartoons those respondents preferred. Girls rated “Kim Possible” as their best cartoon. This could be due to the fact that this cartoon is about a girl named “Kim” who is out to fight evil and save the world. The fact that it shows a female heroine could

be behind its popularity. It shows “female power” and depicts girls as hardworking and community conscious people. It is therefore no wonder that it is popular amongst the girls than among the boys.

Table 1: Cross tabulation of gender against best cartoon

Cartoon Program Children Like Best	Gender			Total
	Male	Female	Missing Data	
None		2		2
Ben 10	103	24		127
Atomic Betty	1	4		5
Megas XLR	4	1		5
Papyrus	13	14		27
Codenme: Kids Next Door	3	3		6
The Power puff Girls	2	26		28
Fantastic Four	2	5		7
Scooby Doo	5	4		9
Tom and Jerry	5	4		9
Kim Possible	5	73		78
American Dragon	26	9		35
Superman	14	5		19
The Justice League	4	1		5
Lunatics	5	5		10
Legion of Superheroes	12	1		13
Spongebob Square pants	5	2		7
Other	14	14		28
Missing Data	1	4	1	6
Total	224	201	1	426

More boys than girls on the other hand indicated their preference for “Ben 10”, “American Dragon” and “Legion of Superheroes”.



Illustration 2a: *Ben 10* and **2b:** *American Dragon*

American Dragon is about “Jake Long”, a young boy who frequently turns into a dragon in order to fight crimes and injustices. The fact that boys prefer “Ben 10” and “American Dragon” (illustration 2) is not surprising as the cartoons have ordinary boys as their protagonists who perform heroic deeds with the use of superpowers. The feeling is mutual about “Scooby Doo” among the boys and girls maybe because it has both male and female characters taking up serious roles in fighting crime and resolving mysteries. Each of the characters in this cartoon, be they male or female take up key roles in whatever it is that needs to be resolved. This could mean that children prefer cartoons that enhance their gender and portray them in a good light and as responsible people in society.



Illustration 3: *Kim Possible, the Girls’ Role Model*

Girls like Kim Possible because:

- i. She is a girl character identification and all the other super powers are men
- ii. Symbol of identification; she is young and strong and can protect herself
- iii. Girls feel that if they had those powers they would protect themselves and the people around them.
- iv. Find her interesting because of the actions and fighting.

- v. She has strength to save others.
- vi. They feel it is fun to be strong and be able to fight well.
- vii. The theme music appeals to them.
- viii. They like her dress code, shoes and hair style



Illustration 4: *Kim Possible*

During the focus group discussions some of the boys admitted that they do not like the “tumbo cut” and “short skirts and shorts” worn by Kim Possible. They feel it is indecent. Some of the girls say that the dressing is indecent and you can only dress like that at home. While some feel it is fashionable. They felt the cartoons are educative like Kim Possible going to different countries. Asked if they would like cartoons based on Bible stories or African folk tales, the girls admitted that they would like to see animated cartoons based on the Bible and African folk tales. Bible cartoons came only on Saturday mornings on Family TV and some of them are usually at church.



5a



5b

Illustration 5a and 5b: *Ben Ten with Different Aliens*

Ben Tennyson (illustration 5a) is ten years old. He discovers a mysterious device; he gains the power to change into ten different alien heroes, each with uniquely awesome powers (illustration 5b). With such abilities at his disposal, Ben realizes a greater responsibility to help others and stop evildoers, but that doesn't mean he's above a little mischief now and then. Ben has the magic watch that is stuck on his wrist.

4.3 Reasons for Liking Best Cartoon Character

The two key reasons that emerged for liking the best cartoon characters are: "The cartoon character is funny" (28.6%) and "The cartoon character has superpowers" (25.6%). This gives further credence to the underlying theme for watching cartoons which emerged as because cartoons are "action-packed". It appears that children prefer characters that are funny as they entertain them and characters that have superpowers, which are used to fight evil and save the world. Like Ben 10 and Kim Possible

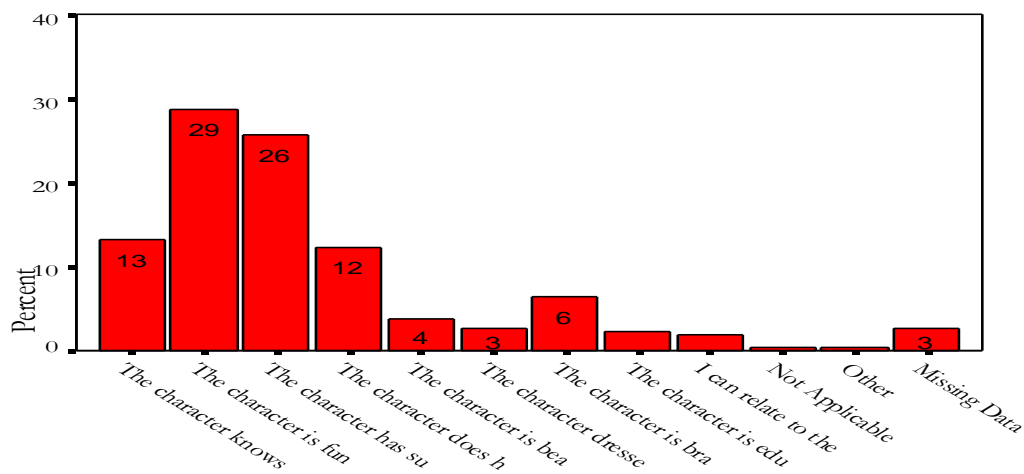


Figure 1: Reasons for Liking the Best Cartoon Character

Other reasons for liking the best cartoon character are "The character knows how to fight" (13%) which further emphasizes the respondents' love of action. "The character does heroic deeds" (12%) and "The character is brave" (6%), which all point to the preference of characters and cartoons that have some inclination to action and heroics.

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

There are the reasons and views held by children in relation to how they rate their popular animated cartoons as "good" or "bad" from what they see and why. The two most popular cartoon programs have as their main characters Ben and Kim who possess "super-powers" that enable to them to

fight evil and “save the world”. These cartoons are preferred for various reasons but key among them is that they are action-packed, with fights and the idea of saving the world and saving people from danger. They are considered funny, enjoyable, entertaining, and interesting by the children. These characteristics all fall under the theme of entertainment and/or amusement.

The reasons given by children for watching animated cartoons were; cartoons are funny, cartoons are enjoyable cartoons are good and cartoons are interesting. All these categories fall under entertainment. Other reasons given were; to pass time, to relax and to seek knowledge and information. It can therefore be deduced that most children watch cartoons mainly for entertainment purposes. The characters of Ben and Kim perform “heroic deeds” and are portrayed as brave. This gives indication to the preference of cartoons programs and cartoon characters that have some inclination to action and heroism. The character Ben cares about the world and shows this by saving people. Male respondents liked the both the actions and violence depicted by the program and they are fascinated by the unknown world of the program. They admire Ben’s super-human imagination and would like to identify with him. The fact that boys prefer “Ben 10” and “American Dragon” is not surprising as the cartoons have ordinary boys as their protagonists who perform heroic deeds with the use of superpowers.

Girls like Kim possible because she is a young girl like them, and they are able to identify with her character, as all the other super-heroes are men. Girls like magic, power and action in cartoons such as Kim Possible. She is young and strong and can protect herself and others. Girls feel that if they had those powers they would protect themselves and the people around them. They feel it is fun to be strong and be able to fight well. They find Kim interesting because of the action and fighting scenes. The girls also like her dress code, shoes and hairstyle.

5.2 Conclusions

Based on the study, the study concluded that some of the reasons children cited for watching animated cartoons were entertainment and to pass time, peer pressure, socialization, competition, mystery, bravery and heroism; to relax and to seek knowledge and information since they learn from them. The study concluded that there were equally bad things that children saw in the cartoons that they constantly watched. Some examples are violence, bad morals, “bad manners”, like kissing and sex. Animated cartoons have an impact on the children in respect to viewer ship patterns, the views they hold about animated cartoons and how they rate them; acquired language, dressing and sexuality, violence and role types.

5.3 Recommendations

Parents should limit screen time, including animated cartoons, movies, video games and computer time to less than two hours a day. Parents should provide alternative means of relaxation and entertainment rather than the passive leisure of watching animated cartoons, for example go for a walk or a bike ride, stamp collecting, painting, star gazing, learning to play a musical instrument or read together. Listen to music, talk, play a game and enjoy each other’s company. Parents should try to engage children in more interactive and family activities. They should watch the animated

cartoons their children watch or preview them, use it as an opportunity to discuss inappropriate material or unacceptable behavior or lifestyle. This will be an important determinant of the amount and types of animated cartoons children watch. This can also help prepare children to make decisions on their own, whether about what they watch or how to make smart choices about sex, dressing, and language drinking, smoking and using drugs. Parents should pass along family values, not values children absorb from animated cartoons. The media practitioners should also not think solely of cost saving initiative that they employ when purchasing and airing programmes, they should also think about the impact that watching some of these animated cartoons may have, especially on special audience like children. The government is recommended to develop a legal framework for classifying animated cartoons should be developed.

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